Complete Works of
LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

DELPHI CLASSICS

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

(1832-1888)

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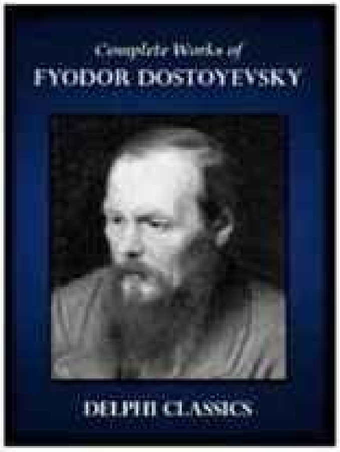
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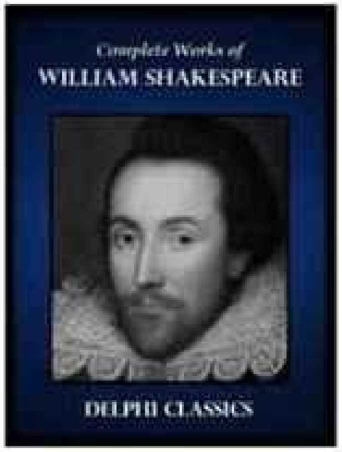
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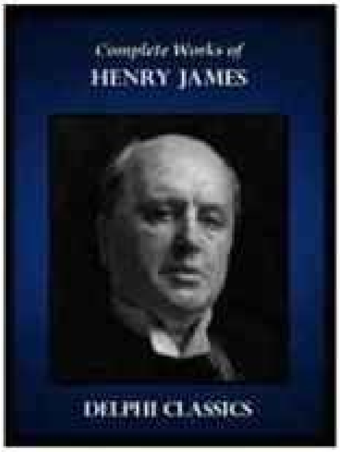
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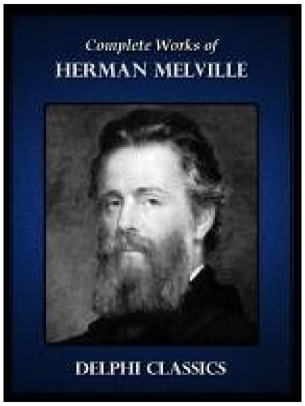

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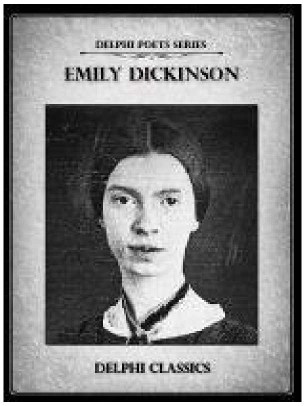

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The Novels

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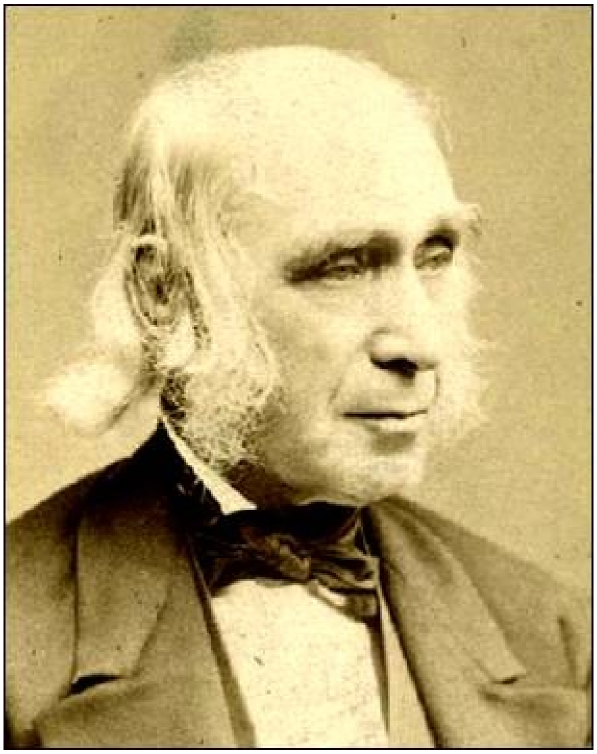
MOODS

This is Alcott’s first full-length novel, which was published in 1864, four years before the best-selling *Little Women*. The novel unconventionally presents a “little woman,” a true-hearted abolitionist spinster, and a fallen Cuban beauty, their lives intersecting in Alcott’s first major depiction of the “woman problem.” Sylvia Yule, the heroine of Moods, is a passionate tomboy who yearns for adventure. The novel opens as she embarks on a river camping trip with her brother and his two friends, both of whom fall in love with her.



Amos Bronson Alcott – the writer’s devoted father

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Moods
by
Louisa M. Alcott.

CHAPTER I.

IN A YEAR.

The room fronted the west, but a black cloud, barred with red, robbed the hour of twilight's tranquil charm. Shadows haunted it, lurking in corners like spies set there to watch the man who stood among them mute and motionless as if himself a shadow. His eye turned often to the window with a glance both vigilant and eager, yet saw nothing but a tropical luxuriance of foliage scarcely stirred by the sultry air heavy with odors that seemed to oppress not refresh. He listened with the same intentness, yet heard only the clamor of voices, the tramp of feet, the chime of bells, the varied turmoil of a city when night is defrauded of its peace by being turned to day. He watched and waited for something; presently it came. A viewless visitant, welcomed by longing soul and body as the man, with extended arms and parted lips received the voiceless greeting of the breeze that came winging its way across the broad Atlantic, full of healthful cheer for a home-sick heart. Far out he leaned; held back the thick-leaved boughs already rustling with a grateful stir, chid the shrill bird beating its flame-colored breast against its prison bars, and drank deep draughts of the blessed wind that seemed to cool the fever of his blood and give him back the vigor he had lost.

A sudden light shone out behind him filling the room with a glow that left no shadow in it. But he did not see the change, nor hear the step that broke the hush, nor turn to meet the woman who stood waiting for a lover's welcome. An indefinable air of sumptuous life surrounded her, and made the brilliant room a fitting frame for the figure standing there with warm-hued muslins blowing in the wind. A figure full of the affluent beauty of womanhood in its prime, bearing unmistakable marks of the polished pupil of the world in the grace that flowed through every motion, the art which taught each feature to play its part with the ease of second nature and made dress the foil to loveliness. The face was delicate and dark as a fine bronze, a low forehead set in shadowy waves of hair, eyes full of slumberous fire, and a passionate yet haughty mouth that seemed shaped alike for caresses and commands.

A moment she watched the man before her, while over her countenance passed rapid variations of pride, resentment, and tenderness. Then with a stealthy step, an assured smile, she went to him and touched his hand, saying, in a voice inured to that language which seems made for lovers’ lips —

“Only a month betrothed, and yet so cold and gloomy, Adam!”

With a slight recoil, a glance of soft detestation veiled and yet visible, Warwick answered like a satiric echo —

“Only a month betrothed, and yet so fond and jealous, Ottila!”

Unchilled by the action, undaunted by the look, the white arm took him captive, the beautiful face drew nearer, and the persuasive voice asked wistfully —

“Was it of me you thought when you turned with that longing in your eye?”

“No.”

“Was it of a fairer or a dearer friend than I?”

“Yes.”

The black brows contracted ominously, the mouth grew hard, the eyes glittered, the arm became a closer bond, the entreaty a command.

“Let me know the name, Adam.”

“Self-respect.”

She laughed low to herself, and the mobile features softened to their former tenderness as she looked up into that other face so full of an accusing significance which she would not understand.

“I have waited two long hours; have you no kinder greeting, love?”

“I have no truer one. Ottila, if a man has done unwittingly a weak, unwise, or wicked act, what should he do when he discovers it?”

“Repent and mend his ways; need I tell you that?”

“I have repented; will you help me mend my ways?”

“Confess, dear sinner; I will shrive you and grant absolution for the past, whatever it may be.”

“How much would you do for love of me?”

“Anything for you, Adam.”

“Then give me back my liberty.”

He rose erect and stretched his hands to her with a gesture of entreaty, an expression of intense desire. Ottila fell back as if the forceful words and action swept her from him. The smile died on her lips, a foreboding fear looked out at her eyes, and she asked incredulously —

“Do you mean it?”

“Yes; now, entirely, and forever!”

If he had lifted his strong arm and struck her, it would not have daunted with such pale dismay. An instant she stood like one who saw a chasm widening before her, which she had no power to cross. Then as if disappointment was a thing impossible and unknown, she seized the imploring hands in a grasp that turned them white with its passionate pressure as she cried —

“No, I will not! I have waited for your love so long I cannot give it up; you shall not take it from me!”

But as if the words had made the deed irrevocable, Warwick put her away, speaking with the stern accent of one who fears a traitor in himself.

“I cannot take from you what you never had. Stand there and hear me. No; I will have no blandishments to keep me from my purpose, no soft words to silence the hard ones I mean to speak, no more illusions to hide us from each other and ourselves.”

“Adam, you are cruel.”

“Better seem cruel than be treacherous; better wound your pride now than your heart hereafter, when too late you discover that I married you without confidence, respect, or love. For once in your life you shall hear the truth as plain as words can make it. You shall see me at my best as at my worst; you shall know what I have learned to find in you; shall look back into the life behind us, forward into the life before us, and if there be any candor in you I will wring from you an acknowledgment that you have led me into an unrighteous compact. Unrighteous, because you have deceived me in yourself, appealed to the baser, not the nobler instincts in me, and on such a foundation there can be no abiding happiness.”

“Go on, I will hear you.” And conscious that she could not control the will now thoroughly aroused, Ottila bent before it as if meekly ready to hear all things for love’s sake.

A disdainful smile passed over Warwick’s face, as with an eye that fixed and held her own, he rapidly went on, never pausing to choose smooth phrases or soften facts, but seeming to find a relish in the utterance of bitter truths after the honeyed falsehood he had listened to so long. Yet through all the harshness glowed the courage of an upright soul, the fervor of a generous heart.

“I know little of such things and care less; but I think few lovers pass through a scene such as this is to be, because few have known lives like ours, or one such as we. You a woman stronger for good or ill than those about you, I a man untamed by any law but that of my own will. Strength is royal, we both possess it; as kings and queens drop their titles in their closets, let us drop all disguises and see each other as God sees us. This compact must be broken; let me show you why. Three months ago I came here to take the chill of an Arctic winter out of blood and brain. I have done so and am the worse for it. In melting frost I have kindled fire; a fire that will burn all virtue out of me unless I quench it at once. I mean to do so, because I will not keep the ten commandments before men’s eyes and break them every hour in my heart.”

He paused a moment, as if hotter words rose to his lips than generosity would let him utter, and when he spoke again there was more reproach than anger in his voice.

“Ottila, till I knew you I loved no woman but my mother; I wooed no wife, bought no mistress, desired no friend, but led a life austere as any monk’s, asking only freedom and my work. Could you not let me keep my independence? Were there not men enough who would find no degradation in a spiritual slavery like this? Would nothing but my subjection satisfy your unconquerable appetite for power?”

“Did I seek you, Adam?”

“Yes! Not openly, I grant, your art was too fine for that; you shunned me that I might seek you to ask why. In interviews that seemed to come by chance, you tried every wile a woman owns, and they are many. You wooed me as such as you alone can woo the hearts they know are hardest to be won. You made your society a refreshment in this climate of the passions; you hid your real self and feigned that for which I felt most honor. You entertained my beliefs with largest hospitality; encouraged my ambitions with a sympathy so genial that I thought it genuine; professed my scorn for shammery, and seemed an earnest woman, eager to find the true, to do the right; a fit wife for any man who desired a helpmate, not a toy. It showed much strength of wit and will to conceive and execute the design. It proved your knowledge of the virtues you could counterfeit so well, else I never should have been where I am now.”

“Your commendation is deserved, though so ungently given, Adam.”

“There will be no more of it. If I am ungentle, it is because I despise deceit, and you possess a guile that has given me my first taste of self-contempt, and the draught is bitter. Hear me out; for this reminiscence is my justification; you must listen to the one and accept the other. You seemed all this, but under the honest friendliness you showed lurked the purpose you have since avowed, to conquer most entirely the man who denied your right to rule by the supremacy of beauty or of sex alone. You saw the unsuspected fascination that detained me here when my better self said ‘Go.’ You allured my eye with loveliness, my ear with music; piqued curiosity, pampered pride, and subdued will by flatteries subtly administered. Beginning afar off, you let all influences do their work till the moment came for the effective stroke. Then you made a crowning sacrifice of maiden modesty and owned you loved me.”

Shame burned red on Ottila’s dark cheek, and ire flamed up in her eyes, as the untamable spirit of the woman answered against her will —

“It was not made in vain; for, rebellious as you are, it subdued you, and with your own weapon, the bare truth.”

He had said truly, “You shall see me at my best as at worst.” She did, for putting pride underneath his feet he showed her a brave sincerity, which she could admire but never imitate, and in owning a defeat achieved a victory.

“You think I shall deny this. I do not, but acknowledge to the uttermost that, in spite of all resistance, I was conquered by a woman. If it affords you satisfaction to hear this, to know that it is hard to say, harder still to feel, take the ungenerous delight; I give it to you as an alms. But remember that if I have failed, no less have you. For in that stormy heart of yours there is no sentiment more powerful than that you feel for me, and through it you will receive the retribution you have brought upon yourself. You were elated with success, and forgot too soon the character you had so well supported. You thought love blinded me, but there was no love; and during this month I have learned to know you as you are. A woman of strong passions and weak principles; hungry for power and intent on pleasure; accomplished in deceit and reckless in trampling on the nobler instincts of a gifted but neglected nature. Ottila, I have no faith in you, feel no respect for the passion you inspire, own no allegiance to the dominion you assert.”

“You cannot throw it off; it is too late.”

It was a rash defiance; she saw that as it passed her lips, and would have given much to have recalled it. The stern gravity of Warwick’s face flashed into a stern indignation. His eye shone like steel, but his voice dropped lower and his hand closed like a vice as he said, with the air of one who cannot conceal but can control sudden wrath at a taunt to which past weakness gives a double sting —

“It never is too late. If the priest stood ready, and I had sworn to marry you within the hour, I would break the oath, and God would pardon it, for no man has a right to embrace temptation and damn himself by a life-long lie. You choose to make it a hard battle for me; you are neither an honest friend nor a generous foe. No matter, I have fallen into an ambuscade and must cut my way out as I can, and as I will, for there is enough of this Devil’s work in the world without our adding to it.”

“You cannot escape with honor, Adam.”

“I cannot remain with honor. Do not try me too hardly, Ottila. I am not patient, but I do desire to be just. I confess my weakness; will not that satisfy you? Blazon your wrong as you esteem it; ask sympathy of those who see not as I see; reproach, defy, lament. I will bear it all, will make any other sacrifice as an atonement, but I will ‘hold fast mine integrity’ and obey a higher law than your world recognizes, both for your sake and my own.”

She watched him as he spoke, and to herself confessed a slavery more absolute than any he had known, for with a pang she felt that she had indeed fallen into the snare she spread for him, and in this man, who dared to own his weakness and her power, she had found a master. Was it too late to keep him? She knew that soft appeals were vain, tears like water on a rock, and with the skill that had subdued him once she endeavored to retrieve her blunder by an equanimity which had more effect than prayers or protestations. Warwick had read her well, had shown her herself stripped of all disguises, and left her no defence but tardy candor. She had the wisdom to see this, the wit to use it and restore the shadow of the power whose substance she had lost. Leaving her beauty to its silent work, she fixed on him eyes whose lustre was quenched in unshed tears, and said with an earnest, humble voice —

"I, too, desire to be just. I will not reproach, defy, or lament, but leave my fate to you. I am all you say, yet in your judgment remember mercy, and believe that at twenty-five there is still hope for the noble but neglected nature, still time to repair the faults of birth, education, and orphanhood. You say, I have a daring will, a love of conquest. Can I not will to overcome myself and do it? Can I not learn to be the woman I have seemed? Love has worked greater miracles, may it not work this? I have longed to be a truer creature than I am; have seen my wasted gifts, felt my capacity for better things, and looked for help from many sources, but never found it till you came. Do you wonder that I tried to make it mine? Adam, you are a self-elected missionary to the world's afflicted; you can look beyond external poverty and see the indigence of souls. I am a pauper in your eyes; stretch out your hand and save me from myself."

Straight through the one vulnerable point in the man's pride went this appeal to the man's pity. Indignation could not turn it aside, contempt blunt its edge, or wounded feeling lessen its force; and yet it failed: for in Adam Warwick justice was stronger than mercy, reason than impulse, head than heart. Experience was a teacher whom he trusted; he had weighed this woman and found her wanting; truth was not in her; the patient endeavor, the hard-won success so possible to many was hardly so to her, and a union between them could bring no lasting good to either. He knew this; had decided it in a calmer hour than the present, and by that decision he would now abide proof against all attacks from without or from within. More gently, but as inflexibly as before, he said —

"I do put out my hand and offer you the same bitter draught of self-contempt that proved a tonic to my own weak will. I can help, pity, and forgive you heartily, but I dare not marry you. The tie that binds us is a passion of the senses, not a love of the soul. You lack the moral sentiment that makes all gifts and graces subservient to the virtues that render womanhood a thing to honor as well as love. I can relinquish youth, beauty, worldly advantages, but I must reverence above all others the woman whom I marry, and feel an affection that elevates me by quickening all that is noblest and manliest in me. With you I should be either a tyrant or a slave. I will be neither, but go solitary all my life rather than rashly mortgage the freedom kept inviolate so long, or let the impulse of an hour mar the worth of coming years."

Bent and broken by the unanswerable accusations of what seemed a conscience in human shape, Ottila had sunk down before him with an abandonment as native to her as the indomitable will which still refused to relinquish hope even in despair.

"Go," she said, "I am not worthy of salvation. Yet it is hard, very hard, to lose the one motive strong enough to save me, the one sincere affection of my life."

Warwick had expected a tempestuous outbreak at his decision; this entire submission touched him, for in the last words of her brief lament he detected the accent of truth, and longed to answer it. He paused, searching for the just thing to be done. Ottila, with hidden face, watched while she wept, and waited hopefully for the relenting sign. In silence the two, a modern Samson and Delilah, waged the old war that has gone on ever since the strong locks were shorn and the temple fell; a war which fills the world with unmated pairs and the long train of evils arising from marriages made from impulse, and not principle. As usual, the most generous was worsted. The silence pleaded well for Ottila, and when Warwick spoke it was to say impetuously —

"You are right! It is hard that when two err one alone should suffer. I should have been wise enough to see the danger, brave enough to fly from it. I was not, and I owe you some reparation for the pain my folly brings you. I offer you the best, because the hardest, sacrifice that I can make. You say love can work miracles, and that yours is the sincerest affection of your life; prove it. In three months you conquered me; can you conquer yourself in twelve?"

"Try me!"

"I will. Nature takes a year for her harvests; I give you the same for yours. If you will devote one half the energy and care to this work that you devoted to that other, — will earnestly endeavor to cherish all that is womanly and noble in yourself, and through desire for another's respect earn your own, — I, too, will try to make myself a fitter mate for any woman, and keep our troth unbroken for a year. Can I do more?"

"I dared not ask so much! I have not deserved it, but I will. Only love me, Adam, and let me save myself through you."

Flushed and trembling with delight she rose, sure the trial was safely passed, but found that for herself a new one had begun. Warwick offered his hand.

"Farewell, then."

"Going? Surely you will stay and help me through my long probation?"

"No; if your desire has any worth you can work it out alone. We should be hindrances to one another, and the labor be ill done.”

“Where will you go? Not far, Adam.”

“Straight to the North. This luxurious life enervates me; the pestilence of slavery lurks in the air and infects me; I must build myself up anew and find again the man I was.”

“When must you go? Not soon.”

“At once.”

“I shall hear from you?”

“Not till I come.”

“But I shall need encouragement, shall grow hungry for a word, a thought from you. A year is very long to wait and work alone.”

Eloquently she pleaded with voice and eyes and tender lips, but Warwick did not yield.

“If the test be tried at all it must be fairly tried. We must stand entirely apart and see what saving virtue lies in self-denial and self-help.”

“You will forget me, Adam. Some woman with a calmer heart than mine will teach you to love as you desire to love, and when my work is done it will be all in vain.”

“Never in vain if it be well done, for such labor is its own reward. Have no fear; one such lesson will last a lifetime. Do your part heartily, and I will keep my pledge until the year is out.”

“And then, what then?”

“If I see in you the progress both should desire, if this tie bears the test of time and absence, and we find any basis for an abiding union, then, Ottila, I will marry you.”

“But if meanwhile that colder, calmer woman comes to you, what then?”

“Then I will not marry you.”

“Ah, your promise is a man’s vow, made only to be broken. I have no faith in you.”

“I think you may have. There will be no time for more folly; I must repair the loss of many wasted days, — nay, not wasted if I have learned this lesson well. Rest secure; it is impossible that I should love.”

“You believed that three months ago and yet you are a lover now.”

Ottila smiled an exultant smile, and Warwick acknowledged his proven fallibility by a haughty flush and a frank amendment.

“Let it stand, then, that if I love again I am to wait in silence till the year is out and you absolve me from my pledge. Does that satisfy you?”

“It must. But you will come, whatever changes may befall you? Promise me this.”

“I promise it.”

“Going so soon? Oh, wait a little!”

“When a duty is to be done, do it at once; delay is dangerous. Good night.”

“Give me some remembrance of you. I have nothing, for you are not a generous lover.”

“Generous in deeds, Ottila. I have given you a year’s liberty, a dear gift from one who values it more than life. Now I add this.”

He drew her to him, kissed the red mouth and looked down upon her with a glance that made his man’s face as pitiful as any woman’s as he let her lean there happy in the hope given at such cost. For a moment nothing stirred in the room but the soft whisper of the wind. For a moment Warwick’s austere life looked hard to him, love seemed sweet, submission possible; for in all the world this was the only woman who clung to him, and it was beautiful to cherish and be cherished after years of solitude. A long sigh of desire and regret broke from him, and at the sound a stealthy smile touched Ottila’s lips as she whispered, with a velvet cheek against his own —

“Love, you will stay?”

“I will not stay!”

And like one who cries out sharply within himself, “Get thee behind me!” he broke away.

“Adam, come back to me! Come back!”

He looked over his shoulder, saw the fair woman in the heart of the warm glow, heard her cry of love and longing, knew the life of luxurious ease that waited for him, but steadily went out into the night, only answering —

“In a year.”

CHAPTER II.

WHIMS.

"Come, Sylvia, it is nine o'clock! Little slug-a-bed, don't you mean to get up to-day?" said Miss Yule, bustling into her sister's room with the wide-awake appearance of one to whom sleep was a necessary evil, to be endured and gotten over as soon as possible.

"No, why should I?" And Sylvia turned her face away from the flood of light that poured into the room as Prue put aside the curtains and flung up the window.

"Why should you? What a question, unless you are ill; I was afraid you would suffer for that long row yesterday, and my predictions seldom fail."

"I am not suffering from any cause whatever, and your prediction does fail this time; I am only tired of everybody and everything, and see nothing worth getting up for; so I shall just stay here till I do. Please put the curtain down and leave me in peace."

Prue had dropped her voice to the foreboding tone so irritating to nervous persons whether sick or well, and Sylvia laid her arm across her eyes with an impatient gesture as she spoke sharply.

"Nothing worth getting up for," cried Prue, like an aggravating echo. "Why, child, there are a hundred pleasant things to do if you would only think so. Now don't be dismal and mope away this lovely day. Get up and try my plan; have a good breakfast, read the papers, and then work in your garden before it grows too warm; that is wholesome exercise and you've neglected it sadly of late."

"I don't wish any breakfast; I hate newspapers, they are so full of lies; I'm tired of the garden, for nothing goes right this year; and I detest taking exercise merely because it's wholesome. No, I'll not get up for that."

"Then stay in the house and draw, read, or practise. Sit with Mark in the studio; give Miss Hemming directions about your summer things, or go into town about your bonnet. There is a matinée, try that; or make calls, for you owe fifty at least. Now I'm sure there's employment enough and amusement enough for any reasonable person."

Prue looked triumphant, but Sylvia was not a "reasonable person," and went on in her former despondingly petulant strain.

"I'm tired of drawing; my head is a jumble of other people's ideas already, and

Herr Pedalsturm has put the piano out of tune. Mark always makes a model of me if I go to him, and I don't like to see my eyes, arms, or hair in all his pictures. Miss Hemming's gossip is worse than fussing over new things that I don't need. Bonnets are my torment, and matinées are wearisome, for people whisper and flirt till the music is spoiled. Making calls is the worst of all; for what pleasure or profit is there in running from place to place to tell the same polite fibs over and over again, and listen to scandal that makes you pity or despise your neighbors. I shall not get up for any of these things."

Prue leaned on the bedpost meditating with an anxious face till a forlorn hope appeared which caused her to exclaim —

"Mark and I are going to see Geoffrey Moor, this morning, just home from Switzerland, where his poor sister died, you know. You really ought to come with us and welcome him, for though you can hardly remember him, he's been so long away, still, as one of the family, it is a proper compliment on your part. The drive will do you good, Geoffrey will be glad to see you, it is a lovely old place, and as you never saw the inside of the house you cannot complain that you are tired of that yet."

"Yes I can, for it will never seem as it has done, and I can no longer go where I please now that a master's presence spoils its freedom and solitude for me. I don't know him, and don't care to, though his name is so familiar. New people always disappoint me, especially if I've heard them praised ever since I was born. I shall not get up for any Geoffrey Moor, so that bait fails."

Sylvia smiled involuntarily at her sister's defeat, but Prue fell back upon her last resource in times like this. With a determined gesture she plunged her hand into an abysmal pocket, and from a miscellaneous collection of treasures selected a tiny vial, presenting it to Sylvia with a half pleading, half authoritative look and tone.

"I'll leave you in peace if you'll only take a dose of chamomilla. It is so soothing, that instead of tiring yourself with all manner of fancies, you'll drop into a quiet sleep, and by noon be ready to get up like a civilized being. Do take it, dear; just four sugar-plums, and I'm satisfied."

Sylvia received the bottle with a docile expression; but the next minute it flew out of the window, to be shivered on the walk below, while she said, laughing like a wilful creature as she was —

"I have taken it in the only way I ever shall, and the sparrows can try its soothing effects with me; so be satisfied."

"Very well. I shall send for Dr. Baum, for I'm convinced that you are going to be ill. I shall say no more, but act as I think proper, because it's like talking to the wind to reason with you in one of these perverse fits."

As Prue turned away, Sylvia frowned and called after her —

“Spare yourself the trouble, for Dr. Baum will follow the chamomilla, if you bring him here. What does he know about health, a fat German, looking lager beer and talking sauer-kraut? Bring me *bona fide* sugar-plums and I’ll take them; but arsenic, mercury, and nightshade are not to my taste.”

“Would you feel insulted if I ask whether your breakfast is to be sent up, or kept waiting till you choose to come down?”

Prue looked rigidly calm, but Sylvia knew that she felt hurt, and with one of the sudden impulses which ruled her the frown melted to a smile, as drawing her sister down she kissed her in her most loving manner.

“Dear old soul, I’ll be good by-and-by, but now I’m tired and cross, so let me keep out of every one’s way and drowse myself into a cheerier frame of mind. I want nothing but solitude, a draught of water, and a kiss.”

Prue was mollified at once, and after stirring fussily about for several minutes gave her sister all she asked, and departed to the myriad small cares that made her happiness. As the door closed, Sylvia sighed a long sigh of relief, and folding her arms under her head drifted away into the land of dreams, where ennui is unknown.

All the long summer morning she lay wrapt in sleeping and waking dreams, forgetful of the world about her, till her brother played the Wedding March upon her door on his way to lunch. The desire to avenge the sudden downfall of a lovely castle in the air roused Sylvia, and sent her down to skirmish with Mark. Before she could say a word, however, Prue began to talk in a steady stream, for the good soul had a habit of jumbling news, gossip, private opinions and public affairs into a colloquial hodge-podge, that was often as trying to the intellects as the risibles of her hearers.

“Sylvia, we had a charming call, and Geoffrey sent his love to you. I asked him over to dinner, and we shall dine at six, because then my father can be with us. I shall have to go to town first, for there are a dozen things suffering for attention. You can’t wear a round hat and lawn jackets without a particle of set all summer. I want some things for dinner, — and the carpet must be got. What a lovely one Geoffrey had in the library! Then I must see if poor Mrs. Beck has had her leg comfortably off, find out if Freddy Lennox is dead, and order home the mosquito nettings. Now don’t read all the afternoon, and be ready to receive any one who may come if I should get belated.”

The necessity of disposing of a suspended mouthful produced a lull, and Sylvia seized the moment to ask in a careless way, intended to bring her brother out upon his favorite topic, —

“How did you find your saint, Mark?”

"The same sunshiny soul as ever, though he has had enough to make him old and grave before his time. He is just what we need in our neighborhood, and particularly in our house, for we are a dismal set at times, and he will do us all a world of good."

"What will become of me, with a pious, prosy, perfect creature eternally haunting the house and exhorting me on the error of my ways!" cried Sylvia.

"Don't disturb yourself; he is not likely to take much notice of you; and it is not for an indolent, freakish midge to scoff at a man whom she does not know, and couldn't appreciate if she did," was Mark's lofty reply.

"I rather liked the appearance of the saint, however," said Sylvia, with an expression of naughty malice, as she began her lunch.

"Why, where did you see him!" exclaimed her brother.

"I went over there yesterday to take a farewell run in the neglected garden before he came. I knew he was expected, but not that he was here; and when I saw the house open, I slipped in and peeped wherever I liked. You are right, Prue; it is a lovely old place."

"Now I know you did something dreadfully unladylike and improper. Put me out of suspense, I beg of you."

Prue's distressful face and Mark's surprise produced an inspiring effect upon Sylvia, who continued, with an air of demure satisfaction —

"I strolled about, enjoying myself, till I got into the library, and there I rummaged, for it was a charming place, and I was happy as only those are who love books, and feel their influence in the silence of a room whose finest ornaments they are."

"I hope Moor came in and found you trespassing."

"No, I went out and caught him playing. When I'd stayed as long as I dared, and borrowed a very interesting old book —

"Sylvia! did you really take one without asking?" cried Prue, looking almost as much alarmed as if she had stolen the spoons.

"Yes; why not? I can apologize prettily, and it will open the way for more. I intend to browse over that library for the next six months."

"But it was such a liberty, — so rude, so — - dear, dear; and he as fond and careful of his books as if they were his children! Well, I wash my hands of it, and am prepared for anything now!"

Mark enjoyed Sylvia's pranks too much to reprove, so he only laughed while one sister lamented and the other placidly went on —

"When I had put the book nicely in my pocket, Prue, I walked into the garden. But before I'd picked a single flower, I heard little Tilly laugh behind the hedge and some strange voice talking to her. So I hopped upon a roller to see, and nearly tumbled off again; for there was a man lying on the grass, with the gardener’s children rioting over him. Will was picking his pockets, and Tilly eating strawberries out of his hat, often thrusting one into the mouth of her long neighbor, who always smiled when the little hand came fumbling at his lips. You ought to have seen the pretty picture, Mark.”

“Did he see the interesting picture on your side of the wall?”

“No, I was just thinking what friendly eyes he had, listening to his pleasant talk with the little folks, and watching how they nestled to him as if he were a girl, when Tilly looked up and cried, ‘I see Silver!’ So I ran away, expecting to have them all come racing after. But no one appeared, and I only heard a laugh instead of the ‘stop thief’ that I deserved.”

“If I had time I should convince you of the impropriety of such wild actions; as I haven’t, I can only implore you never to do so again on Geoffrey’s premises,” said Prue, rising as the carriage drove round.

“I can safely promise that,” answered Sylvia, with a dismal shake of the head, as she leaned listlessly from the window till her brother and sister were gone.

At the appointed time Moor entered Mr. Yule’s hospitably open door; but no one came to meet him, and the house was as silent as if nothing human inhabited it. He divined the cause of this, having met Prue and Mark going downward some hours before, and saying to himself, “The boat is late,” he disturbed no one, but strolled into the drawing-rooms and looked about him. Being one of those who seldom find time heavy on their hands, he amused himself with observing what changes had been made during his absence. His journey round the apartments was not a long one, for, coming to an open window, he paused with an expression of mingled wonder and amusement.

A pile of cushions, pulled from chair and sofa, lay before the long window, looking very like a newly deserted nest. A warm-hued picture lifted from the wall stood in a streak of sunshine; a half-cleared leaf of fruit lay on a taboret, and beside it, with a red stain on its title-page, appeared the stolen book. At sight of this Moor frowned, caught up his desecrated darling and put it in his pocket. But as he took another glance at the various indications of what had evidently been a solitary revel very much after his own heart, he relented, laid back the book, and, putting aside the curtain floating in the wind, looked out into the garden, attracted thither by the sound of a spade.

A lad was at work near by, and wondering what new inmate the house had gained, the neglected guest waited to catch a glimpse of the unknown face. A slender boy, in a foreign-looking blouse of grey linen; a white collar lay over a ribbon at the throat, stout half boots covered a trim pair of feet, and a broad-brimmed hat flapped low on the forehead. Whistling softly he dug with active gestures; and, having made the necessary cavity, set a shrub, filled up the hole, trod it down scientifically, and then fell back to survey the success of his labors. But something was amiss, something had been forgotten, for suddenly up came the shrub, and seizing a wheelbarrow that stood near by, away rattled the boy round the corner out of sight. Moor smiled at his impetuosity, and awaited his return with interest, suspecting from appearances that this was some *protégé* of Mark's employed as a model as well as gardener's boy.

Presently up the path came the lad, with head down and steady pace, trundling a barrow full of richer earth, surmounted by a watering-pot. Never stopping for breath he fell to work again, enlarged the hole, flung in the loam, poured in the water, reset the shrub, and when the last stamp and pat were given performed a little dance of triumph about it, at the close of which he pulled off his hat and began to fan his heated face. The action caused the observer to start and look again, thinking, as he recognized the energetic worker with a smile, "What a changeful thing it is! haunting one's premises unseen, and stealing one's books unsuspected; dreaming one half the day and masquerading the other half. What will happen next? Let us see but not be seen, lest the boy turn shy and run away before the pretty play is done!"

Holding the curtain between the window and himself, Moor peeped through the semi-transparent screen, enjoying the little episode immensely. Sylvia fanned and rested a few minutes, then went up and down among the flowers, often pausing to break a dead leaf, to brush away some harmful insect, or lift some struggling plant into the light; moving among them as if akin to them, and cognizant of their sweet wants. If she had seemed strong-armed and sturdy as a boy before, now she was tender fingered as a woman, and went humming here and there like any happy-hearted bee.

"Curious child!" thought Moor, watching the sunshine glitter on her uncovered head, and listening to the air she left half sung. "I've a great desire to step out and see how she will receive me. Not like any other girl, I fancy."

But, before he could execute his design, the roll of a carriage was heard in the avenue, and pausing an instant, with head erect like a startled doe, Sylvia turned and vanished, dropping flowers as she ran. Mr. Yule, accompanied by his son and daughter, came hurrying in with greetings, explanations, and apologies, and in a moment the house was full of a pleasant stir. Steps went up and down, voices echoed through the rooms, savory odors burst forth from below, and doors swung in the wind, as if the spell was broken and the sleeping palace had wakened with a word.

Prue made a hasty toilet and harassed the cook to the verge of spontaneous combustion, while Mark and his father devoted themselves to their guest. Just as dinner was announced Sylvia came in, as calm and cool as if wheelbarrows were myths and linen suits unknown. Moor was welcomed with a quiet hand-shake, a grave salutation, and a look that seemed to say, "Wait a little, I take no friends on trust."

All through dinner, though she sat as silent as a well-bred child, she looked and listened with an expression of keen intelligence that children do not wear, and sometimes smiled to herself, as if she saw or heard something that pleased and interested her. When they rose from table she followed Prue up stairs, quite forgetting the disarray in which the drawing-room was left. The gentlemen took possession before either sister returned, and Mark's annoyance found vent in a philippic against oddities in general and Sylvia in particular; but his father and friend sat in the cushionless chairs, and pronounced the scene amusingly novel. Prue appeared in the midst of the laugh, and having discovered other delinquencies above, her patience was exhausted, and her regrets found no check in the presence of so old a friend as Moor.

"Something must be done about that child, father, for she is getting entirely beyond my control. If I attempt to make her study she writes poetry instead of her exercises, draws caricatures instead of sketching properly, and bewilders her music teacher by asking questions about Beethoven and Mendelssohn, as if they were personal friends of his. If I beg her to take exercise, she rides like an Amazon all over the Island, grubs in the garden as if for her living, or goes paddling about the bay till I'm distracted lest the tide should carry her out to sea. She is so wanting in moderation she gets ill, and when I give her proper medicines she flings them out of the window, and threatens to send that worthy, Dr. Baum, after them. Yet she must need something to set her right, for she is either overflowing with unnatural spirits or melancholy enough to break one's heart."

"What have you done with the little black sheep of my flock, — not banished her, I hope?" said Mr. Yule, placidly, ignoring all complaints.

"She is in the garden, attending to some of her disagreeable pets, I fancy. If you are going out there to smoke, please send her in, Mark; I want her."

As Mr. Yule was evidently yearning for his after-dinner nap, and Mark for his cigar, Moor followed his friend, and they stepped through the window into the garden, now lovely with the fading glow of summer sunset.

"You must know that this peculiar little sister of mine clings to some of her childish beliefs and pleasures in spite of Prue's preaching and my raillery," began Mark, after a refreshing whiff or two. "She is overflowing with love and good will, but being too shy or too proud to offer it to her fellow-creatures, she expends it upon the necessitous inhabitants of earth, air, and water with the most charming philanthropy. Her dependants are neither beautiful nor very interesting, nor is she sentimentally enamored of them; but the more ugly and desolate the creature, the more devoted is she. Look at her now; most young ladies would have hysterics over any one of those pets of hers."

Moor looked, and thought the group a very pretty one, though a plump toad sat at Sylvia's feet, a roly-poly caterpillar was walking up her sleeve, a blind bird chirped on her shoulder, bees buzzed harmlessly about her head, as if they mistook her for a flower, and in her hand a little field mouse was breathing its short life away. Any tender-hearted girl might have stood thus surrounded by helpless things that pity had endeared, but few would have regarded them with an expression like that which Sylvia wore. Figure, posture, and employment were so childlike in their innocent unconsciousness, that the contrast was all the more strongly marked between them and the sweet thoughtfulness that made her face singularly attractive with the charm of dawning womanhood. Moor spoke before Mark could dispose of his smoke.

"This is a great improvement upon the boudoir full of lap-dogs, worsted-work and novels, Miss Sylvia. May I ask if you feel no repugnance to some of your patients; or is your charity strong enough to beautify them all?"

"I dislike many people, but few animals, because however ugly I pity them, and whatever I pity I am sure to love. It may be silly, but I think it does me good; and till I am wise enough to help my fellow-beings, I try to do my duty to these humbler sufferers, and find them both grateful and affectionate."

There was something very winning in the girl's manner as she spoke, touching the little creature in her hand almost as tenderly as if it had been a child. It showed the newcomer another phase of this many-sided character; and while Sylvia related the histories of her pets at his request, he was enjoying that finer history which every ingenuous soul writes on its owner's countenance for gifted eyes to read and love. As she paused, the little mouse lay stark and still in her gentle hand; and though they smiled at themselves, both young men felt like boys again as they helped her scoop a grave among the pansies, owning the beauty of compassion, though she showed it to them in such a simple shape.

Then Mark delivered his message, and Sylvia went away to receive Prue's lecture, with outward meekness, but such an absent mind that the words of wisdom went by her like the wind.

"Now come and take our twilight stroll, while Mark keeps Mr. Moor in the studio and Prue prepares another exhortation," said Sylvia, as her father woke, and taking his arm, they paced along the wide piazza that encircled the whole house.

"Will father do me a little favor?"

"That is all he lives for, dear."

"Then his life is a very successful one;" and the girl folded her other hand over that already on his arm. Mr. Yule shook his head with a regretful sigh, but asked benignly —

"What shall I do for my little daughter?"

"Forbid Mark to execute a plot with which he threatens me. He says he will bring every gentleman he knows (and that is a great many) to the house, and make it so agreeable that they will keep coming; for he insists that I need amusement, and nothing will be so entertaining as a lover or two. Please tell him not to, for I don't want any lovers yet."

"Why not?" asked her father, much amused at her twilight confidences.

"I'm afraid. Love is so cruel to some people, I feel as if it would be to me, for I am always in extremes, and continually going wrong while trying to go right. Love bewilders the wisest, and it would make me quite blind or mad, I know; therefore I'd rather have nothing to do with it, for a long, long while."

"Then Mark shall be forbidden to bring a single specimen. I very much prefer to keep you as you are. And yet you may be happier to do as others do; try it, if you like, my dear."

"But I can't do as others do; I've tried, and failed. Last winter, when Prue made me go about, though people probably thought me a stupid little thing, moping in corners, I was enjoying myself in my own way, and making discoveries that have been very useful ever since. I know I'm whimsical, and hard to please, and have no doubt the fault was in myself, but I was disappointed in nearly every one I met, though I went into what Prue calls 'our best society.' The girls seemed all made on the same pattern; they all said, did, thought, and wore about the same things, and knowing one was as good as knowing a dozen. Jessie Hope was the only one I cared much for, and she is so pretty, she seems made to be looked at and loved."

"How did you find the young gentlemen, Sylvia?"

"Still worse; for, though lively enough among themselves they never found it worth their while to offer us any conversation but such as was very like the champagne and ice-cream they brought us, — sparkling, sweet, and unsubstantial. Almost all of them wore the superior air they put on before women, an air that says as plainly as words, 'I may ask you and I may not.' Now that is very exasperating to those who care no more for them than so many grasshoppers, and I often longed to take the conceit out of them by telling some of the criticisms passed upon them by the amiable young ladies who looked as if waiting to say meekly, 'Yes, thank you.'"

"Don't excite yourself, my dear; it is all very lamentable and laughable, but we must submit till the world learns better. There are often excellent young persons among the ‘grasshoppers,’ and if you cared to look you might find a pleasant friend here and there,” said Mr. Yule, leaning a little toward his son’s view of the matter.

“No, I cannot even do that without being laughed at; for no sooner do I mention the word friendship than people nod wisely and look as if they said, ‘Oh, yes, every one knows what that sort of thing amounts to.’ I should like a friend, father; some one beyond home, because he would be newer; a man (old or young, I don’t care which), because men go where they like, see things with their own eyes, and have more to tell if they choose. I want a person simple, wise, and entertaining; and I think I should make a very grateful friend if such an one was kind enough to like me.”

“I think you would, and perhaps if you try to be more like others you will find friends as they do, and so be happy, Sylvia.”

“I cannot be like others, and their friendships would not satisfy me. I don’t try to be odd; I long to be quiet and satisfied, but I cannot; and when I do what Prue calls wild things, it is not because I am thoughtless or idle, but because I am trying to be good and happy. The old ways fail, so I attempt new ones, hoping they will succeed; but they don’t, and I still go looking and longing for happiness, yet always failing to find it, till sometimes I think I am a born disappointment.”

“Perhaps love would bring the happiness, my dear?”

“I’m afraid not; but, however that may be, I shall never go running about for a lover as half my mates do. When the true one comes I shall know him, love him at once, and cling to him forever, no matter what may happen. Till then I want a friend, and I will find one if I can. Don’t you believe there may be real and simple friendships between men and women without falling into this everlasting sea of love?”

Mr. Yule was laughing quietly under cover of the darkness, but composed himself to answer gravely —

“Yes, for some of the most beautiful and famous friendships have been such, and I see no reason why there may not be again. Look about, Sylvia, make yourself happy; and, whether you find friend or lover, remember there is always the old Papa glad to do his best for you in both capacities.”

Sylvia’s hand crept to her father’s shoulder, and her voice was full of daughterly affection, as she said —

“I’ll have no lover but ‘the old Papa’ for a long while yet. But I will look about, and if I am fortunate enough to find and good enough to keep the person I want, I shall be very happy; for, father, I really think I need a friend.”

Here Mark called his sister in to sing to them, a demand that would have been refused but for a promise to Prue to behave her best as an atonement for past pranks. Stepping in she sat down and gave Moor another surprise, as from her slender throat there came a voice whose power and pathos made a tragedy of the simple ballad she was singing.

“Why did you choose that plaintive thing, all about love, despair, and death? It quite breaks one’s heart to hear it,” said Prue, pausing in a mental estimate of her morning’s shopping.

“It came into my head, and so I sung it. Now I’ll try another, for I am bound to please you — if I can.” And she broke out again with an airy melody as jubilant as if a lark had mistaken moonlight for the dawn and soared skyward, singing as it went. So blithe and beautiful were both voice and song they caused a sigh of pleasure, a sensation of keen delight in the listener, and seemed to gift the singer with an unsuspected charm. As she ended Sylvia turned about, and seeing the satisfaction of their guest in his face, prevented him from expressing it in words by saying, in her frank way —

“Never mind the compliments. I know my voice is good, for that you may thank nature; that it is well trained, for that praise Herr Pedalsturm; and that you have heard it at all, you owe to my desire to atone for certain trespasses of yesterday and to-day, because I seldom sing before strangers.”

“Allow me to offer my hearty thanks to Nature, Pedalsturm, and Penitence, and also to hope that in time I may be regarded, not as a stranger, but a neighbor and a friend.”

Something in the gentle emphasis of the last word struck pleasantly on the girl’s ear, and seemed to answer an unspoken longing. She looked up at him with a searching glance, appeared to find some ‘assurance given by looks,’ and as a smile broke over her face she offered her hand as if obeying a sudden impulse, and said, half to him, half to herself —

“I think I have found the friend already.”

CHAPTER III.

AFLOAT.

Sylvia sat sewing in the sunshine with an expression on her face half mirthful, half melancholy, as she looked backward to the girlhood just ended, and forward to the womanhood just beginning, for on that midsummer day, she was eighteen. Voices roused her from her reverie, and, looking up, she saw her brother approaching with two friends, their neighbor Geoffrey Moor and his guest Adam Warwick. Her first impulse was to throw down her work and run to meet them, her second to remember her new dignity and sit still, awaiting them with well-bred composure, quite unconscious that the white figure among the vines added a picturesque finish to the quiet summer scene.

They came up warm and merry, with a brisk row across the bay, and Sylvia met them with a countenance that gave a heartier welcome than her words, as she greeted the neighbor cordially, the stranger courteously, and began to gather up her work when they seated themselves in the bamboo chairs scattered about the wide piazza.

"You need not disturb yourself," said Mark, "we are only making this a way-station, *en route* for the studio. Can you tell me where my knapsack is to be found? after one of Prue's stowages, nothing short of a divining-rod will discover it, I'm afraid."

"I know where it is. Are you going away again so soon, Mark?"

"Only a two days' trip up the river with these mates of mine. No, Sylvia, it can't be done."

"I did not say anything."

"Not in words, but you looked a whole volley of 'Can't I goes?' and I answered it. No girl but you would dream of such a thing; you hate picnics, and as this will be a long and rough one, don't you see how absurd it would be for you to try it?"

"I don't quite see it, Mark, for this would not be an ordinary picnic; it would be like a little romance to me, and I had rather have it than any birthday present you could give me. We used to have such happy times together before we were grown up, I don't like to be so separated now. But if it is not best, I'm sorry that I even looked a wish."

Sylvia tried to keep both disappointment and desire out of her voice as she spoke, though a most intense longing had taken possession of her when she heard of a projected pleasure so entirely after her own heart. But there was an unconscious reproach in her last words, a mute appeal in the wistful eyes that looked across the glittering bay to the green hills beyond. Now, Mark was both fond and proud of the young sister, who, while he was studying art abroad, had studied nature at home, till the wayward but winning child had bloomed into a most attractive girl. He remembered her devotion to him, his late neglect of her, and longed to make atonement. With elevated eyebrows and inquiring glances, he turned from one friend to another. Moor nodded and smiled, Warwick nodded, and sighed privately, and having taken the sense of the meeting by a new style of vote, Mark suddenly announced —

“You can go if you like, Sylvia.”

“What!” cried his sister, starting up with a characteristic impetuosity that sent her basket tumbling down the steps, and crowned her dozing cat with Prue’s nightcap frills. “Do you mean it, Mark? Wouldn’t it spoil your pleasure, Mr. Moor? Shouldn’t I be a trouble, Mr. Warwick? Tell me frankly, for if I can go I shall be happier than I can express.”

The gentlemen smiled at her eagerness, but as they saw the altered face she turned toward them, each felt already repaid for any loss of freedom they might experience hereafter, and gave unanimous consent. Upon receipt of which Sylvia felt inclined to dance about the three and bless them audibly, but restrained herself, and beamed upon them in a state of wordless gratitude pleasant to behold. Having given a rash consent, Mark now thought best to offer a few obstacles to enhance its value and try his sister’s mettle.

“Don’t ascend into the air like a young balloon, child, but hear the conditions upon which you go, for if you fail to work three miracles it is all over with you. Firstly, the consent of the higher powers, for father will dread all sorts of dangers — you are such a freakish creature, — and Prue will be scandalized because trips like this are not the fashion for young ladies.”

“Consider that point settled and go on to the next,” said Sylvia, who, having ruled the house ever since she was born, had no fears of success with either father or sister.

“Secondly, you must do yourself up in as compact a parcel as possible; for though you little women are very ornamental on land, you are not very convenient for transportation by water. Cambric gowns and French slippers are highly appropriate and agreeable at the present moment, but must be sacrificed to the stern necessities of the case. You must make a dowdy of yourself in some usefully short, scant, dingy costume, which will try the nerves of all beholders, and triumphantly prove that women were never meant for such excursions."

"Wait five minutes and I'll triumphantly prove to the contrary," answered Sylvia, as she ran into the house.

Her five minutes was sufficiently elastic to cover fifteen, for she was ravaging her wardrobe to effect her purpose and convince her brother, whose artistic tastes she consulted, with a skill that did her good service in the end. Rapidly assuming a gray gown, with a jaunty jacket of the same, she kilted the skirt over one of green, the pedestrian length of which displayed boots of uncompromising thickness. Over her shoulder, by a broad ribbon, she slung a prettily wrought pouch, and ornamented her hat pilgrim-wise with a cockle shell. Then taking her brother's alpen-stock she crept down, and standing in the door-way presented a little figure all in gray and green, like the earth she was going to wander over, and a face that blushed and smiled and shone as she asked demurely —

"Please, Mark, am I picturesque and convenient enough to go?"

He wheeled about and stared approvingly, forgetting cause in effect till Warwick began to laugh like a merry bass viol, and Moor joined him, saying —

"Come, Mark, own that you are conquered, and let us turn our commonplace voyage into a pleasure pilgrimage, with a lively lady to keep us knights and gentlemen wherever we are."

"I say no more; only remember, Sylvia, if you get burnt, drowned, or blown away, I'm not responsible for the damage, and shall have the satisfaction of saying, 'There, I told you so.'"

"That satisfaction may be mine when I come home quite safe and well," replied Sylvia, serenely. "Now for the last condition."

Warwick looked with interest from the sister to the brother; for, being a solitary man, domestic scenes and relations possessed the charm of novelty to him.

"Thirdly, you are not to carry a boat-load of luggage, cloaks, pillows, silver forks, or a dozen napkins, but are to fare as we fare, sleeping in hammocks, barns, or on the bare ground, without shrieking at bats or bewailing the want of mosquito netting; eating when, where, and what is most convenient, and facing all kinds of weather regardless of complexion, dishevelment, and fatigue. If you can promise all this, be here loaded and ready to go off at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

After which cheerful picture of the joys to come, Mark marched away to his studio, taking his friends with him.

Sylvia worked the three miracles, and at half past five, A. M. was discovered sitting on the piazza, with her hammock rolled into a twine sausage at her feet, her hat firmly tied on, her scrip packed, and her staff in her hand. "Waiting till called for," she said, as her brother passed her, late and yawning as usual. As the clock struck six the carriage drove round, and Moor and Warwick came up the avenue in nautical array. Then arose a delightful clamor of voices, slamming of doors, hurrying of feet and frequent peals of laughter; for every one was in holiday spirits, and the morning seemed made for pleasuring.

Mr. Yule regarded the voyagers with an aspect as benign as the summer sky overhead; Prue ran to and fro pouring forth a stream of counsels, warnings, and predictions; men and maids gathered on the lawn or hung out of upper windows; and even old Hecate, the cat, was seen chasing imaginary rats and mice in the grass till her yellow eyes glared with excitement. "All in," was announced at last, and as the carriage rolled away its occupants looked at one another with faces of blithe satisfaction that their pilgrimage was so auspiciously begun.

A mile or more up the river the large, newly-painted boat awaited them. The embarkation was a speedy one, for the cargo was soon stowed in lockers and under seats, Sylvia forwarded to her place in the bow; Mark, as commander of the craft, took the helm; Moor and Warwick, as crew, sat waiting orders; and Hugh, the coachman, stood ready to push off at word of command. Presently it came, a strong hand sent them rustling through the flags, down dropped the uplifted oars, and with a farewell cheer from a group upon the shore the Kelpie glided out into the stream.

Sylvia, too full of genuine content to talk, sat listening to the musical dip of well-pulled oars, watching the green banks on either side, dabbling her hands in the eddies as they rippled by, and singing to the wind, as cheerful and serene as the river that gave her back a smiling image of herself. What her companions talked of she neither heard nor cared to know, for she was looking at the great picture-book that always lies ready for the turning of the youngest or the oldest hands; was receiving the welcome of the playmates she best loved, and was silently yielding herself to the power which works all wonders with its benignant magic. Hour after hour she journeyed along that fluent road. Under bridges where early fishers lifted up their lines to let them through; past gardens tilled by unskilful townsmen who harvested an hour of strength to pay the daily tax the city levied on them; past honeymoon cottages where young wives walked with young husbands in the dew, or great houses shut against the morning. Lovers came floating down the stream with masterless rudder and trailing oars. College race-boats shot by with modern Greek choruses in full blast and the frankest criticisms from their scientific crews. Fathers went rowing to and fro with argosies of pretty children, who gave them gay good morrows. Sometimes they met fanciful nutshells manned by merry girls, who made for shore at sight of them with most erratic movements and novel commands included in their Art of

Navigation. Now and then some poet or philosopher went musing by, fishing for facts or fictions, where other men catch pickerel or perch.

All manner of sights and sounds greeted Sylvia, and she felt as if she were watching a Panorama painted in water colors by an artist who had breathed into his work the breath of life and given each figure power to play its part. Never had human faces looked so lovely to her eye, for morning beautified the plainest with its ruddy kiss; never had human voices sounded so musical to her ear, for daily cares had not yet brought discord to the instruments tuned by sleep and touched by sunshine into pleasant sound; never had the whole race seemed so near and dear to her, for she was unconsciously pledging all she met in that genuine Elixir Vitæ which sets the coldest blood aglow and makes the whole world kin; never had she felt so truly her happiest self, for of all the costlier pleasures she had known not one had been so congenial as this, as she rippled farther and farther up the stream and seemed to float into a world whose airs brought only health and peace. Her comrades wisely left her to her thoughts, a smiling Silence for their figure-head, and none among them but found the day fairer and felt himself fitter to enjoy it for the innocent companionship of maidenhood and a happy heart.

At noon they dropped anchor under a wide-spreading oak that stood on the river's edge, a green tent for wanderers like themselves; there they ate their first meal spread among white clovers, with a pair of squirrels staring at them as curiously as human spectators ever watched royalty at dinner, while several meek cows courteously left their guests the shade and went away to dine at a side-table spread in the sun. They spent an hour or two talking or drowsing luxuriously on the grass; then the springing up of a fresh breeze roused them all, and weighing anchor they set sail for another port.

Now Sylvia saw new pictures, for, leaving all traces of the city behind them, they went swiftly countryward. Sometimes by hayfields, each an idyl in itself, with white-sleeved mowers all arow; the pleasant sound of whetted scythes; great loads rumbling up lanes, with brown-faced children shouting atop; rosy girls raising fragrant winrows or bringing water for thirsty sweethearts leaning on their rakes. Often they saw ancient farm-houses with mossy roofs, and long well-sweeps suggestive of fresh draughts, and the drip of brimming pitchers; orchards and cornfields rustling on either hand, and grandmotherly caps at the narrow windows, or stout matrons tending babies in the doorway as they watched smaller selves playing keep house under the "laylocks" by the wall. Villages, like white flocks, slept on the hillsides; martinbox schoolhouses appeared here and there, astir with busy voices, alive with wistful eyes; and more than once they came upon little mermen bathing, who dived with sudden splashes, like a squad of turtles tumbling off a sunny rock.

Then they went floating under vernal arches, where a murmurous rustle seemed to whisper, “Stay!” along shadowless sweeps, where the blue turned to gold and dazzled with its unsteady shimmer; passed islands so full of birds they seemed green cages floating in the sun, or doubled capes that opened long vistas of light and shade, through which they sailed into the pleasant land where summer reigned supreme. To Sylvia it seemed as if the inhabitants of these solitudes had flocked down to the shore to greet her as she came. Fleets of lilies unfurled their sails on either hand, and cardinal flowers waved their scarlet flags among the green. The sagittaria lifted its blue spears from arrowy leaves; wild roses smiled at her with blooming faces; meadow lilies rang their flame-colored bells; and clematis and ivy hung garlands everywhere, as if hers were a floral progress, and each came to do her honor.

Her neighbors kept up a flow of conversation as steady as the river’s, and Sylvia listened now. Insensibly the changeful scenes before them recalled others, and in the friendly atmosphere that surrounded them these reminiscences found free expression. Each of the three had been fortunate in seeing much of foreign life; each had seen a different phase of it, and all were young enough to be still enthusiastic, accomplished enough to serve up their recollections with taste and skill, and give Sylvia glimpses of the world through spectacles sufficiently rose-colored to lend it the warmth which even Truth allows to her sister Romance.

The wind served them till sunset, then the sail was lowered and the rowers took to their oars. Sylvia demanded her turn, and wrestled with one big oar while Warwick sat behind and did the work. Having blistered her hands and given herself as fine a color as any on her brother’s palette, she professed herself satisfied, and went back to her seat to watch the evening-red transfigure earth and sky, making the river and its banks a more royal pageant than splendor-loving Elizabeth ever saw along the Thames.

Anxious to reach a certain point, they rowed on into the twilight, growing stiller and stiller as the deepening hush seemed to hint that Nature was at her prayers. Slowly the Kelpie floated along the shadowy way, and as the shores grew dim, the river dark with leaning hemlocks or an overhanging cliff, Sylvia felt as if she were making the last voyage across that fathomless stream where a pale boatman plies and many go lamenting.

The long silence was broken first by Moor’s voice, saying —

“Adam, sing.”

If the influences of the hour had calmed Mark, touched Sylvia, and made Moor long for music, they had also softened Warwick. Leaning on his oar he lent the music of a mellow voice to the words of a German Volkslied, and launched a fleet of echoes such as any tuneful vintager might have sent floating down the Rhine. Sylvia was no weeper, but as she listened, all the day’s happiness which had been pent up in her heart found vent in sudden tears, that streamed down noiseless and refreshing as a warm south rain. Why they came she could not tell, for neither song nor singer possessed the power to win so rare a tribute, and at another time, she would have restrained all visible expression of this indefinable yet sweet emotion. Mark and Moor had joined in the burden of the song, and when that was done took up another; but Sylvia only sat and let her tears flow while they would, singing at heart, though her eyes were full and her cheeks wet faster than the wind could kiss them dry.

After frequent peerings and tackings here and there, Mark at last discovered the haven he desired, and with much rattling of oars, clanking of chains, and splashing of impetuous boots, a landing was effected, and Sylvia found herself standing on a green bank with her hammock in her arms and much wonderment in her mind whether the nocturnal experiences in store for her would prove as agreeable as the daylight ones had been. Mark and Moor unloaded the boat and prospected for an eligible sleeping-place. Warwick, being an old campaigner, set about building a fire, and the girl began her sylvan housekeeping. The scene rapidly brightened into light and color as the blaze sprang up, showing the little kettle slung gipsywise on forked sticks, and the supper prettily set forth in a leafy table-service on a smooth, flat stone. Soon four pairs of wet feet surrounded the fire; an agreeable oblivion of *meum* and *tuum* concerning plates, knives, and cups did away with etiquette, and every one was in a comfortable state of weariness, which rendered the thought of bed so pleasant that they deferred their enjoyment of the reality, as children keep the best bite till the last.

“What are you thinking of here all by yourself?” asked Mark, coming to lounge on his sister’s plaid, which she had spread somewhat apart from the others, and where she sat watching the group before her with a dreamy aspect.

“I was watching your two friends. See what a fine study they make with the red flicker of the fire on their faces and the background of dark pines behind them.”

They did make a fine study, for both were goodly men yet utterly unlike, one being of the heroic type, the other of the poetic. Warwick was a head taller than his tall friend, broad-shouldered, strong-limbed, and bronzed by wind and weather. A massive head, covered with rings of ruddy brown hair, gray eyes, that seemed to pierce through all disguises, an eminent nose, and a beard like one of Mark’s stout saints. Power, intellect, and courage were stamped on face and figure, making him the manliest man that Sylvia had ever seen. He leaned against the stone, yet nothing could have been less reposeful than his attitude, for the native unrest of the man asserted itself in spite of weariness or any soothing influence of time or place. Moor was much slighter, and betrayed in every gesture the unconscious grace of the gentleman born. A most attractive face, with its broad brow, serene eyes, and the cordial smile about the mouth. A sweet, strong nature, one would say, which, having used life well had learned the secret of a true success. Inward tranquillity seemed his, and it was plain to see that no wave of sound, no wandering breath, no glimpse of color, no hint of night or nature was without its charm and its significance for him.

"Tell me about that man, Mark. I have heard you speak of him since you came home, but supposing he was some blowzy artist, I never cared to ask about him. Now I've seen him, I want to know more," said Sylvia, as her brother laid himself down after an approving glance at the group opposite.

"I met him in Munich, when I first went abroad, and since then we have often come upon each other in our wanderings. He never writes, but goes and comes intent upon his own affairs; yet one never can forget him, and is always glad to feel the grip of his hand again, it seems to put such life and courage into one."

"Is he good?" asked Sylvia, womanlike, beginning with the morals.

"Violently virtuous. He is a masterful soul, bent on living out his beliefs and aspirations at any cost. Much given to denunciation of wrong-doing everywhere, and eager to execute justice upon all offenders high or low. Yet he possesses great nobility of character, great audacity of mind, and leads a life of the sternest integrity."

"Is he rich?"

"In his own eyes, because he makes his wants so few."

"Is he married?"

"No; he has no family, and not many friends, for he says what he means in the bluntest English, and few stand the test his sincerity applies."

"What does he do in the world?"

"Studies it, as we do books; dives into everything, analyzes character, and builds up his own with materials which will last. If that's not genius it's something better."

"Then he will do much good and be famous, won't he?"

"Great good to many, but never will be famous, I fear. He is too fierce an iconoclast to suit the old party, too individual a reformer to join the new, and being born a century too soon must bide his time, or play out his part before stage and audience are ready for him."

"Is he learned?"

"Very, in uncommon sorts of wisdom; left college after a year of it, because it could not give him what he wanted, and taking the world for his university, life for his tutor, says he shall not graduate till his term ends with days."

"I know I shall like him very much."

"I hope so, for my sake. He is a grand man in the rough, and an excellent tonic for those who have courage to try him."

Sylvia was silent, thinking over all she had just heard and finding much to interest her in it, because, to her imaginative and enthusiastic nature, there was something irresistibly attractive in the strong, solitary, self-reliant man. Mark watched her for a moment, then asked with lazy curiosity —

"How do you like this other friend of mine?"

"He went away when I was such a child that since he came back I've had to begin again; but if I like him at the end of another month as much as I do now, I shall try to make your friend my friend, because I need such an one very much."

Mark laughed at the innocent frankness of his sister's speech but took it as she meant it, and answered soberly —

"Better leave Platonics till you're forty. Though Moor is twelve years older than yourself he is a young man still, and you are grown a very captivating little woman."

Sylvia looked both scornful and indignant.

"You need have no fears. There is such a thing as true and simple friendship between men and women, and if I can find no one of my own sex who can give me the help and happiness I want, why may I not look for it anywhere and accept it in whatever shape it comes?"

"You may, my dear, and I'll lend a hand with all my heart, but you must be willing to take the consequences in whatever shape *they* come," said Mark, not ill pleased with the prospect his fancy conjured up.

"I will," replied Sylvia loftily, and fate took her at her word.

Presently some one suggested bed, and the proposition was unanimously accepted.

"Where are you going to hang me?" asked Sylvia, as she laid hold of her hammock and looked about her with nearly as much interest as if her suspension was to be of the perpendicular order.

"You are not to be swung up in a tree to-night but laid like a ghost, and requested not to walk till morning. There is an unused barn close by, so we shall have a roof over us for one night longer," answered Mark, playing chamberlain while the others remained to quench the fire and secure the larder.

An early moon lighted Sylvia to bed, and when shown her half the barn, which, as she was a Marine, was very properly the bay, Mark explained, she scouted the idea of being nervous or timid in such rude quarters, made herself a cosy nest and bade her brother a merry good night.

More weary than she would confess, Sylvia fell asleep at once, despite the novelty of her situation and the noises that fill a summer night with fitful rustlings and tones. How long she slept she did not know, but woke suddenly and sat erect with that curious thrill which sometimes startles one out of deepest slumber, and is often the forerunner of some dread or danger. She felt this hot tingle through blood and nerves, and stared about her thinking of fire. But everything was dark and still, and after waiting a few moments she decided that her nest had been too warm, for her temples throbbed and her cheeks were feverish with the close air of the barn half filled with new-made hay.

Creeping up a fragrant slope she spread her plaid again and lay down where a cool breath flowed through wide chinks in the wall. Sleep was slowly returning when the rustle of footsteps scared it quite away and set her heart beating fast, for they came toward the new couch she had chosen. Holding her breath she listened. The quiet tread drew nearer and nearer till it paused within a yard of her, then some one seemed to throw themselves down, sigh heavily a few times and grow still as if falling asleep.

"It is Mark," thought Sylvia, and whispered his name, but no one answered, and from the other corner of the barn she heard her brother muttering in his sleep. Who was it, then? Mark had said there were no cattle near, she was sure neither of her comrades had left their bivouac, for there was her brother talking as usual in his dreams; some one seemed restless and turned often with decided motion, that was Warwick, she thought, while the quietest sleeper of the three betrayed his presence by laughing once with the low-toned merriment she recognized as Moor's. These discoveries left her a prey to visions of grimy strollers, maudlin farm-servants, and infectious emigrants in dismal array. A strong desire to cry out possessed her for a moment, but was checked; for with all her sensitiveness Sylvia had much common sense, and that spirit which hates to be conquered even by a natural fear. She remembered her scornful repudiation of the charge of timidity, and the endless jokes she would have to undergo if her mysterious neighbor should prove some harmless wanderer or an imaginary terror of her own, so she held her peace, thinking valiantly as the drops gathered on her forehead, and every sense grew painfully alert —

"I'll not call if my hair turns gray with fright, and I find myself an idiot to-morrow. I told them to try me, and I won't be found wanting at the first alarm. I'll be still, if the thing does not touch me till dawn, when I shall know how to act at once, and so save myself from ridicule at the cost of a wakeful night."

Holding fast to this resolve Sylvia lay motionless; listening to the cricket's chirp without, and taking uncomfortable notes of the state of things within, for the new comer stirred heavily, sighed long and deeply, and seemed to wake often, like one too sad or weary to rest. She would have been wise to have screamed her scream and had the rout over, for she tormented herself with the ingenuity of a lively fancy, and suffered more from her own terrors than at the discovery of a dozen vampires. Every tale of *diablerie* she had ever heard came most inopportunely to haunt her now, and though she felt their folly she could not free herself from their dominion. She wondered till she could wonder no longer what the morning would show her. She tried to calculate in how many springs she could reach and fly over the low partition which separated her from her sleeping body-guard. She wished with all her heart that she had stayed in her nest which was nearer the door, and watched for dawn with eyes that ached to see the light.

In the midst of these distressful sensations the far-off crow of some vigilant chanticleer assured her that the short summer night was wearing away and relief was at hand. This comfortable conviction had so good an effect that she lapsed into what seemed a moment's oblivion, but was in fact an hour's restless sleep, for when her eyes unclosed again the first red streaks were visible in the east, and a dim light found its way into the barn through the great door which had been left ajar for air. An instant Sylvia lay collecting herself, then rose on her arm, looked resolutely behind her, stared with round eyes a moment, and dropped down again, laughing with a merriment, which coming on the heels of her long alarm was rather hysterical. All she saw was a little soft-eyed Alderney, which lifted its stag-like head, and regarded her with a confiding aspect that won her pardon for its innocent offence.

Through the relief of both mind and body which she experienced in no small degree, the first thought that came was a thankful "what a mercy I didn't call Mark, for I should never have heard the last of this;" and having fought her fears alone she enjoyed her success alone, and girl-like resolved to say nothing of her first night's adventures. Gathering herself up she crept nearer and caressed her late terror, which stretched its neck toward her with a comfortable sound, and munched her shawl like a cosset lamb. But before this new friendship was many minutes old, Sylvia's heavy lids fell together, her head dropped lower and lower, her hand lay still on the dappled neck, and with a long sigh of weariness she dropped back upon the hay, leaving little Alderney to watch over her much more tranquilly than she had watched over it.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH FLOOD AND FIELD AND FIRE.

Very early were they afloat again, and as they glided up the stream Sylvia watched the earth's awakening, seeing in it what her own should be. The sun was not yet visible above the hills, but the sky was ready for his coming, with the soft flush of color dawn gives only to her royal lover. Birds were chanting matins as if all the jubilance of their short lives must be poured out at once. Flowers stirred and brightened like children after sleep. A balmy wind came whispering from the wood, bringing the aroma of pines, the cool breath of damp nooks, the healthful kiss that leaves a glow behind. Light mists floated down the river like departing visions that had haunted it by night, and every ripple breaking on the shore seemed to sing a musical good morrow.

Sylvia could not conceal the weariness her long vigil left behind; and after betraying herself by a drowsy lurch that nearly took her overboard, she made herself comfortable, and slept till the grating of the keel on a pebbly shore woke her to find a new harbor reached under the lee of a cliff, whose deep shadow was very grateful after the glare of noon upon the water.

"How do you intend to dispose of yourself this afternoon, Adam?" asked Mark, when dinner was over and his sister busy feeding the birds.

"In this way," answered Warwick, producing a book and settling himself in a commodious cranny of the rock.

"Moor and I want to climb the cliff and sketch the view; but it is too rough a road for Sylvia. Would you mind mounting guard for an hour or two? Read away, and leave her to amuse herself; only pray don't let her get into any mischief by way of enjoying her liberty, for she fears nothing and is fond of experiments."

"I'll do my best," replied Warwick, with an air of resignation.

Having slung the hammock and seen Sylvia safely into it, the climbers departed, leaving her to enjoy the luxury of motion. For half an hour she swung idly, looking up into the green pavilion overhead, where many insect families were busy with their small joys and cares, or out over the still landscape basking in the warmth of a cloudless afternoon. Then she opened a book Mark had brought for his own amusement, and began to read as intently as her companion, who leaned against the boulder slowly turning his pages, with leafy shadows flickering over his uncovered head and touching it with alternate sun and shade. The book proved interesting, and Sylvia was rapidly skimming into the heart of the story, when an unguarded motion caused her swing to slope perilously to one side, and in saving herself she lost her book. This produced a predicament, for being helped into a hammock and getting out alone are two very different things. She eyed the distance from her nest to the ground, and fancied it had been made unusually great to keep her stationary. She held fast with one hand and stretched downward with the other, but the book insolently flirted its leaves just out of reach. She took a survey of Warwick; he had not perceived her plight, and she felt an unwonted reluctance to call for help, because he did not look like one used to come and go at a woman's bidding. After several fruitless essays she decided to hazard an ungraceful descent; and, gathering herself up, was about to launch boldly out, when Warwick cried, "Stop!" in a tone that nearly produced the catastrophe he wished to avert. Sylvia subsided, and coming up he lifted the book, glanced at the title, then keenly at the reader.

"Do you like this?"

"So far very much."

"Are you allowed to read what you choose?"

"Yes, sir. That is Mark's choice, however; I brought no book."

"I advise you to skim it into the river; it is not a book for you."

Sylvia caught a glimpse of the one he had been reading himself, and impelled by a sudden impulse to see what would come of it, she answered with a look as keen as his own —

"You disapprove of my book; would you recommend yours?"

"In this case, yes; for in one you will find much falsehood in purple and fine linen, in the other some truth in fig-leaves. Take your choice."

He offered both; but Sylvia took refuge in civility.

"I thank you, I'll have neither; but if you will please steady the hammock, I will try to find some more harmless amusement for myself."

He obeyed with one of the humorous expressions which often passed over his face. Sylvia descended as gracefully as circumstances permitted, and went roving up and down the cliffs. Warwick resumed his seat and the "barbaric yawp," but seemed to find Truth in demi-toilet less interesting than Youth in a gray gown and round hat, for which his taste is to be commended. The girl had small scope for amusement, and when she had gathered moss for pillows, laid out a white fungus to dry for a future pin-cushion, harvested penny-royal in little sheaves tied with grass-blades, watched a battle between black ants and red, and learned the landscape by heart; she was at the end of her resources, and leaning on a stone surveyed earth and sky with a somewhat despondent air.

"You would like something to do, I think."

"Yes, sir; for being rather new to this sort of life, I have not yet learned how to dispose of my time."

"I see that, and having deprived you of one employment will try to replace it by another."

Warwick rose, and going to the single birch that glimmered among the pines like a delicate spirit of the wood, he presently returned with strips of silvery bark.

"You were wishing for baskets to hold your spoils, yesterday; shall we make some now?" he asked.

"How stupid in me not to think of that! Yes, thank you, I should like it very much;" and producing her housewife, Sylvia fell to work with a brightening face.

Warwick sat a little below her on the rock, shaping his basket in perfect silence. This did not suit Sylvia, for feeling lively and loquacious she wanted conversation to occupy her thoughts as pleasantly as the birch rolls were occupying her hands, and there sat a person who, she was sure, could do it perfectly if he chose. She reconnoitered with covert glances, made sundry overtures, and sent out envoys in the shape of scissors, needles, and thread. But no answering glance met hers; her remarks received the briefest replies, and her offers of assistance were declined with an absent "No, thank you." Then she grew indignant at this seeming neglect, and thought, as she sat frowning over her work, behind his back —

"He treats me like a child, — very well, then, I'll behave like one, and beset him with questions till he is driven to speak; for he can talk, he ought to talk, he shall talk."

"Mr. Warwick, do you like children?" she began, with a determined aspect.

"Better than men or women."

"Do you enjoy amusing them?"

"Exceedingly, when in the humor."

"Are you in the humor now?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then why don't you amuse me?"

"Because you are not a child."

"I fancied you thought me one."

"If I had, I probably should have put you on my knee, and told you fairy tales, or cut dolls for you out of this bark, instead of sitting respectfully silent and making a basket for your stores."

There was a curious smile about Warwick's mouth as he spoke, and Sylvia was rather abashed by her first exploit. But there was a pleasure in the daring, and choosing another topic she tried again.

"Mark was telling me last night about the great college you had chosen; I thought it must be a very original and interesting way to educate one's self, and wanted very much to know what you had been studying lately. May I ask you now?"

"Men and women," was the brief answer.

"Have you got your lesson, sir?"

"A part of it very thoroughly, I believe."

"Would you think me rude if I asked which part?"

"The latter."

"And what conclusions do you arrive at concerning this branch of the subject?" asked Sylvia, smiling and interested.

"That it is both dangerous and unsatisfactory."

He spoke so gravely, looked so stern, that Sylvia obeyed a warning instinct and sat silent till she had completed a canoe-shaped basket, the useful size of which produced a sudden longing to fill it. Her eye had already spied a knoll across the river covered with vines, and so suggestive of berries that she now found it impossible to resist the desire for an exploring trip in that direction. The boat was too large for her to manage alone, but an enterprising spirit had taken possession of her, and having made one voyage of discovery with small success she resolved to try again, hoping a second in another direction might prove more fruitful.

"Is your basket done, sir?" she asked.

"Yes; will you have it?"

"Why, you have made it as an Indian would, using grass instead of thread. It is much more complete than mine, for the green stitches ornament the white bark, but the black ones disfigure it. I should know a man made your basket and a woman mine."

"Because one is ugly and strong, the other graceful but unable to stand alone?" asked Warwick, rising, with a gesture that sent the silvery shreds flying away on the wind.

"One holds as much as the other, however; and I fancy the woman would fill hers soonest if she had the wherewithal to do it. Do you know there are berries on that hillside opposite?"

"I see vines, but consider fruit doubtful, for boys and birds are thicker than blackberries."

"I've a firm conviction that they have left some for us; and as Mark says you like frankness, I think I shall venture to ask you to row me over and help me fill the baskets on the other side.”

Sylvia looked up at him with a merry mixture of doubt and daring in her face, and offered him his hat.

“Very good, I will,” said Warwick, leading the way to the boat with an alacrity which proved how much pleasanter to him was action than repose.

There was no dry landing-place just opposite, and as he rowed higher, Adam fixed his eyes on Sylvia with a look peculiar to himself, a gaze more keen than soft, which seemed to search one through and through with its rapid discernment. He saw a face full of contradictions, — youthful, maidenly, and intelligent, yet touched with the unconscious melancholy which is born of disappointment and desire. The mouth was sweet and tender as a woman’s should be, the brow spirited and thoughtful; but the eyes were by turns eager, absent, or sad, and there was much pride in the carriage of the small head with its hair of wavy gold gathered into a green snood, whence little tendrils kept breaking loose to dance upon her forehead, or hang about her neck. A most significant but not a beautiful face, because of its want of harmony. The dark eyes, among their fair surroundings, disturbed the sight as a discord in music jars upon the ear; even when the lips smiled the sombre shadow of black lashes seemed to fill them with a gloom that was never wholly lost. The voice, too, which should have been a girlish treble, was full and low as a matured woman’s, with now and then a silvery ring to it, as if another and a blither creature spoke.

Sylvia could not be offended by the grave penetration of this glance, though an uncomfortable consciousness that she was being analyzed and tested made her meet it with a look intended to be dignified, but which was also somewhat defiant, and more than one smile passed over Warwick’s countenance as he watched her. The moment the boat glided with a soft swish among the rushes that fringed the shore, she sprang up the bank, and leaving a basket behind her by way of hint, hurried to the sandy knoll, where, to her great satisfaction, she found the vines heavy with berries. As Warwick joined her she held up a shining cluster, saying with a touch of exultation in her voice —

“My faith is rewarded; taste and believe.”

He accepted them with a nod, and said pleasantly —

“As my prophecy has failed, let us see if yours will be fulfilled.”

“I accept the challenge.” And down upon her knees went Sylvia among the vines, regardless of stains, rents, or wounded hands.

Warwick strolled away to leave her “claim” free, and silence fell between them; for one was too busy with thorns, the other with thoughts, to break the summer stillness. Sylvia worked with as much energy as if a silver cup was to be the reward of success. The sun shone fervently and the wind was cut off by the hill, drops gathered on her forehead and her cheeks glowed; but she only pushed off her hat, thrust back her hair, and moved on to a richer spot. Vines caught at her by sleeve and skirt as if to dishearten the determined plunderer, but on she went with a wrench and a rip, an impatient “Ah!” and a hasty glance at damaged fabrics and fingers. Lively crickets flew up in swarms about her, surly wasps disputed her right to the fruit, and drunken bees blundered against her as they met zigzagging homeward much the worse for blackberry wine. She never heeded any of them, though at another time she would gladly have made friends with all, but found compensation for her discomforts in the busy twitter of sand swallows perched on the mullein-tops, the soft flight of yellow butterflies, and the rapidity with which the little canoe received its freight of “Ethiop sweets.” As the last handful went in she sprung up crying “Done!” with a suddenness that broke up the Long Parliament and sent its members skimming away as if a second “Noll” had appeared among them. “Done!” came back Warwick’s answer like a deep echo from below, and hurrying down to meet him she displayed her success, saying archly —

“I am glad we both won, though to be perfectly candid I think mine is decidedly the fullest.” But as she swung up her birch pannier the handle broke, and down went basket, berries and all, into the long grass rustling at her feet.

Warwick could not restrain a laugh at the blank dismay that fell upon the exultation of Sylvia’s face, and for a moment she was both piqued and petulant. Hot, tired, disappointed, and, hardest of all, laughed at, it was one of those times that try girls’ souls. But she was too old to cry, too proud to complain, too well-bred to resent, so the little gust passed over unseen, she thought, and joining in the merriment she said, as she knelt down beside the wreck —

“This is a practical illustration of the old proverb, and I deserve it for my boasting. Next time I’ll try to combine strength and beauty in my work.”

To wise people character is betrayed by trifles. Warwick stopped laughing, and something about the girlish figure in the grass, regathering with wounded hands the little harvest lately lost, seemed to touch him. His face softened suddenly as he collected several broad leaves, spread them on the grass, and sitting down by Sylvia, looked under her hat-brim with a glance of mingled penitence and friendliness.

“Now, young philosopher, pile up your berries in that green platter while I repair the basket. Bear this in mind when you work in bark: make your handle the way of the grain, and choose a strip both smooth and broad.”

Then drawing out his knife he fell to work, and while he tied green withes, as if the task were father to the thought, he told her something of a sojourn among the Indians, of whom he had learned much concerning their woodcraft, arts, and superstitions; lengthening the legend till the little canoe was ready for another launch. With her fancy full of war-trails and wampum, Sylvia followed to the river-side, and as they floated back dabbled her stained fingers in the water, comforting their smart with its cool flow till they swept by the landing-place, when she asked, wonderingly —

“Where are we going now? Have I been so troublesome that I must be taken home?”

“We are going to get a third course to follow the berries, unless you are afraid to trust yourself to me.”

“Indeed, I’m not; take me where you like, sir.”

Something in her frank tone, her confiding look, seemed to please Warwick; he sat a moment looking into the brown depths of the water, and let the boat drift, with no sound but the musical drip of drops from the oars.

“You are going upon a rock, sir.”

“I did that three months ago.”

He spoke as if to himself, his face darkened, and he shook the hair off his forehead with an impatient gesture. A swift stroke averted the shock, and the boat shot down the stream, leaving a track of foam behind it as Warwick rowed with the energy of one bent on outstripping some importunate remembrance or dogging care. Sylvia marvelled greatly at the change which came upon him, but held fast with flying hair and lips apart to catch the spray, enjoying the breezy flight along a path tessellated with broad bars of blue and gold. The race ended as abruptly as it began, and Warwick seemed the winner, for when they touched the coast of a floating lily-island, the cloud was gone. As he shipped his oars he turned, saying, with very much the look and manner of a pleasant boy —

“You were asleep when we passed this morning; but I know you like lilies, so let us go a fishing.”

“That I do!” cried Sylvia, capturing a great white flower with a clutch that nearly took her overboard. Warwick drew her back and did the gathering himself.

“Enough, sir, quite enough. Here are plenty to trim our table and ourselves with; leave the rest for other voyagers who may come this way.”

As Warwick offered her the dripping nosegay he looked at the white hand scored with scarlet lines.

“Poor hand! let the lilies comfort it. You are a true woman, Miss Sylvia, for though your palm is purple there’s not a stain upon your lips, and you have neither worked nor suffered for yourself it seems.”

“I don’t deserve that compliment, because I was only intent on outdoing you if possible; so you are mistaken again you see."

"Not entirely, I think. Some faces are so true an index of character that one cannot be mistaken. If you doubt this look down into the river, and such an one will inevitably smile back at you."

Pleased, yet somewhat abashed, Sylvia busied herself in knotting up the long brown stems and tinging her nose with yellow pollen as she inhaled the bitter-sweet breath of the lilies. But when Warwick turned to resume the oars, she said —

"Let us float out as we floated in. It is so still and lovely here I like to stay and enjoy it, for we may never see just such a scene again."

He obeyed, and both sat silent, watching the meadows that lay green and low along the shore, feeding their eyes with the beauty of the landscape, till its peaceful spirit seemed to pass into their own, and lend a subtle charm to that hour, which henceforth was to stand apart, serene and happy, in their memories forever. A still August day, with a shimmer in the air that veiled the distant hills with the mellow haze, no artist ever truly caught. Midsummer warmth and ripeness brooded in the verdure of field and forest. Wafts of fragrance went wandering by from new-mown meadows and gardens full of bloom. All the sky wore its serenest blue, and up the river came frolic winds, ruffling the lily leaves until they showed their purple linings, sweeping shadowy ripples through the long grass, and lifting the locks from Sylvia's forehead with a grateful touch, as she sat softly swaying with the swaying of the boat. Slowly they drifted out into the current, slowly Warwick cleft the water with reluctant stroke, and slowly Sylvia's mind woke from its trance of dreamy delight, as with a gesture of assent she said —

"Yes, I am ready now. That was a happy little moment, and I am glad to have lived it, for such times return to refresh me when many a more stirring one is quite forgotten." A moment after she added, eagerly, as a new object of interest appeared: "Mr. Warwick, I see smoke. I know there is a wood on fire; I want to see it; please land again."

He glanced over his shoulder at the black cloud trailing away before the wind, saw Sylvia's desire in her face, and silently complied; for being a keen student of character, he was willing to prolong an interview that gave him glimpses of a nature in which the woman and the child were curiously blended.

"I love fire, and that must be a grand one, if we could only see it well. This bank is not high enough; let us go nearer and enjoy it," said Sylvia, finding that an orchard and a knoll or two intercepted the view of the burning wood.

"It is too far."

"Not at all. I am no helpless, fine lady. I can walk, run, and climb like any boy; so you need have no fears for me. I may never see such a sight again, and you know you'd go if you were alone. Please come, Mr. Warwick."

"I promised Mark to take care of you, and for the very reason that you love fire, I'd rather not take you into that furnace, lest you never come out again. Let us go back immediately."

The decision of his tone ruffled Sylvia, and she turned wilful at once, saying in a tone as decided as his own —

"No; I wish to see it. I am always allowed to do what I wish, so I shall go;" with which mutinous remark she walked straight away towards the burning wood.

Warwick looked after her, indulging a momentary desire to carry her back to the boat, like a naughty child. But the resolute aspect of the figure going on before him, convinced him that the attempt would be a failure, and with an amused expression he leisurely followed her.

Sylvia had not walked five minutes before she was satisfied that it *was* too far; but having rebelled, she would not own herself in the wrong, and being perverse, insisted upon carrying her point, though she walked all night. On she went over walls, under rails, across brooks, along the furrows of more than one ploughed field, and in among the rustling corn, that turned its broad leaves to the sun, always in advance of her companion, who followed with exemplary submission, but also with a satirical smile, that spurred her on as no other demonstration could have done. Six o'clock sounded from the church behind the hill; still the wood seemed to recede as she pursued, still close behind her came the steady footfalls, with no sound of weariness in them, and still Sylvia kept on, till, breathless, but successful, she reached the object of her search.

Keeping to the windward of the smoke, she gained a rocky spot still warm and blackened by the late passage of the flames, and pausing there, forgot her own pranks in watching those which the fire played before her eyes. Many acres were burning, the air was full of the rush and roar of the victorious element, the crash of trees that fell before it, and the shouts of men who fought it unavailingly.

"Ah, this is grand! I wish Mark and Mr. Moor were here. Aren't you glad you came, sir?"

Sylvia glanced up at her companion, as he stood regarding the scene with the intent, alert expression one often sees in a fine hound when he scents danger in the air. But Warwick did not answer, for as she spoke a long, sharp cry of human suffering rose above the tumult, terribly distinct and full of ominous suggestion.

"Someone was killed when that tree fell! Stay here till I come back;" and Adam strode away into the wood as if his place were where the peril lay.

For ten minutes Sylvia waited, pale and anxious; then her patience gave out, and saying to herself, “I can go where he does, and women are always more helpful than men at such times,” she followed in the direction whence came the fitful sound of voices. The ground was hot underneath her feet, red eyes winked at her from the blackened sod, and fiery tongues darted up here and there, as if the flames were lurking still, ready for another outbreak. Intent upon her charitable errand, and excited by the novel scene, she pushed recklessly on, leaping charred logs, skirting still burning stumps, and peering eagerly into the dun veil that wavered to and fro. The appearance of an impassable ditch obliged her to halt, and pausing to take breath, she became aware that she had lost her way. The echo of voices had ceased, a red glare was deepening in front, and clouds of smoke enveloped her in a stifling atmosphere. A sense of bewilderment crept over her; she knew not where she was; and after a rapid flight in what she believed a safe direction had been cut short by the fall of a blazing tree before her, she stood still, taking counsel with herself. Darkness and danger seemed to encompass her, fire flickered on every side, and suffocating vapors shrouded earth and sky. A bare rock suggested one hope of safety, and muffling her head in her skirt, she lay down faint and blind, with a dull pain in her temples, and a fear at her heart fast deepening into terror, as her breath grew painful and her head began to swim.

“This is the last of the pleasant voyage! Oh, why does no one think of me?”

As the regret rose, a cry of suffering and entreaty broke from her. She had not called for help till now, thinking herself too remote, her voice too feeble to overpower the din about her. But some one had thought of her, for as the cry left her lips steps came crashing through the wood, a pair of strong arms caught her up, and before she could collect her scattered senses she was set down beyond all danger on the green bank of a little pool.

“Well, salamander, have you had fire enough?” asked Warwick, as he dashed a handful of water in her face with such energetic goodwill that it took her breath away.

“Yes, oh yes, — and of water, too! Please stop, and let me get my breath!” gasped Sylvia, warding off a second baptism and staring dizzily about her.

“Why did you quit the place where I left you?” was the next question, somewhat sternly put.

“I wanted to know what had happened.”

“So you walked into a bonfire to satisfy your curiosity, though you had been told to keep out of it? You’d never make a Casabianca.”

“I hope not, for of all silly children, that boy was the silliest, and he deserved to be blown up for his want of common sense,” cried the girl, petulantly.

“Obedience is an old-fashioned virtue, which you would do well to cultivate along with your common sense, young lady.”

Sylvia changed the subject, for Warwick stood regarding her with an irate expression that was somewhat alarming. Fanning herself with the wet hat, she asked abruptly —

“Was the man hurt, sir?”

“Yes.”

“Very much?”

“Yes.”

“Can I not do something for him? He is very far from any house, and I have some experience in wounds.”

“He is past all help, above all want now.”

“Dead, Mr. Warwick?”

“Quite dead.”

Sylvia sat down as suddenly as she had risen, and covered her face with a shiver, remembering that her own wilfulness had tempted a like fate, and she too, might now have been ‘past help, above all want.’ Warwick went down to the pool to bathe his hot face and blackened hands; as he returned Sylvia met him with a submissive —

“I will go back now if you are ready, sir.”

If the way had seemed long in coming it was doubly so in returning, for neither pride nor perversity sustained her now, and every step cost an effort. “I can rest in the boat,” was her sustaining thought; great therefore was her dismay when on reaching the river no boat was to be seen.

“Why, Mr. Warwick, where is it?”

“A long way down the river by this time, probably. Believing that we landed only for a moment, I did not fasten it, and the tide has carried it away.”

“But what shall we do?”

“One of two things, — spend the night here, or go round by the bridge.”

“Is it far?”

“Some three or four miles, I think.”

“Is there no shorter way? no boat or carriage to be had?”

“If you care to wait, I can look for our runaway, or get a wagon from the town.”

“It is growing late and you would be gone a long time, I suppose?”

“Probably.”

“Which had we better do?”

“I should not venture to advise. Suit yourself, I will obey orders.”

“If you were alone what would you do?”

“Swim across.”

Sylvia looked disturbed, Warwick impenetrable, the river wide, the road long, and the cliffs the most inaccessible of places. An impressive pause ensued, then she said frankly —

"It is my own fault and I'll take the consequences. I choose the bridge and leave you the river. If I don't appear till dawn, tell Mark I sent him a good night," and girding up her energies she walked bravely off with much external composure and internal chagrin.

As before, Warwick followed in silence. For a time she kept in advance, then allowed him to gain upon her, and presently fell behind, plodding doggedly on through thick and thin, vainly trying to conceal the hunger and fatigue that were fast robbing her of both strength and spirits. Adam watched her with a masculine sense of the justice of the retribution which his wilful comrade had brought upon herself. But as he saw the elasticity leave her steps, the color fade from her cheeks, the resolute mouth relax, and the wistful eyes dim once or twice with tears of weariness and vexation, pity got the better of pique, and he relented. His steady tramp came to a halt, and stopping by a wayside spring, he pointed to a mossy stone, saying with no hint of superior powers —

"We are tired, let us rest."

Sylvia dropped down at once, and for a few minutes neither spoke, for the air was full of sounds more pertinent to the summer night than human voices. From the copse behind them, came the coo of wood-pigeons, from the grass at their feet the plaintive chirp of crickets; a busy breeze whispered through the willow, the little spring dripped musically from the rock, and across the meadows came the sweet chime of a bell. Twilight was creeping over forest, hill, and stream, and seemed to drop refreshment and repose upon all weariness of soul and body, more grateful to Sylvia, than the welcome seat and leafy cup of water Warwick brought her from the spring.

The appearance of a thirsty sparrow gave her thoughts a pleasant turn, for, sitting motionless, she watched the little creature trip down to the pool, drink and bathe, then flying to a willow spray, dress its feathers, dry its wings, and sit chirping softly as if it sang its evening hymn. Warwick saw her interest, and searching in his pocket, found the relics of a biscuit, strewed a few bits upon the ground before him, and began a low, sweet whistle, which rose gradually to a varied strain, alluring, spirited, and clear as any bird voice of the wood. Little sparrow ceased his twitter, listened with outstretched neck and eager eye, hopping restlessly from twig to twig, until he hung just over the musician's head, agitated with a small flutter of surprise, delight, and doubt. Gathering a crumb or two into his hand, Warwick held it toward the bird, while softer, sweeter, and more urgent rose the invitation, and nearer and nearer drew the winged guest, fascinated by the spell.

Suddenly a belated blackbird lit upon the wall, surveyed the group and burst into a jubilant song, that for a moment drowned his rival's notes. Then, as if claiming the reward, he fluttered to the grass, ate his fill, took a sip from the mossy basin by the way, and flew singing over the river, leaving a trail of music behind him. There was a dash and daring about this which fired little sparrow with emulation. His last fear seemed conquered, and he flew confidingly to Warwick's palm, pecking the crumbs with grateful chirps and friendly glances from its quick, bright eye. It was a pretty picture for the girl to see; the man, an image of power, in his hand the feathered atom, that, with unerring instinct, divined and trusted the superior nature which had not yet lost its passport to the world of innocent delights that Nature gives to those who love her best. Involuntarily Sylvia clapped her hands, and, startled by the sudden sound, little sparrow skimmed away.

"Thank you for the pleasantest sight I've seen for many a day. How did you learn this gentle art, Mr. Warwick?"

"I was a solitary boy, and found my only playmates in the woods and fields. I learned their worth, they saw my need, and when I asked their friendship, gave it freely. Now we should go; you are very tired, let me help you."

He held his hand to her, and she put her own into it with a confidence as instinctive as the bird's. Then, hand in hand they crossed the bridge and struck into the wilderness again; climbing slopes still warm and odorous, passing through dells full of chilly damps, along meadows spangled with fire-flies, and haunted by sonorous frogs; over rocks crisp with pale mosses, and between dark firs, where shadows brooded, and melancholy breezes rocked themselves to sleep. Speaking seldom, yet feeling no consciousness of silence, no sense of restraint, for they no longer seemed like strangers to one another, and this spontaneous friendliness lent an indefinable charm to the dusky walk. Warwick found satisfaction in the knowledge of her innocent faith in him, the touch of the little hand he held, the sight of the quiet figure at his side. Sylvia felt that it was pleasant to be the object of his care, fancied that they would learn to know each other better in three days of this free life than in as many months at home, and rejoiced over the discovery of unsuspected traits in him, like the soft lining of the chestnut burr, to which she had compared him more than once that afternoon. So, mutually and unconsciously yielding to the influence of the hour and the mood it brought them, they walked through the twilight in that eloquent silence which often proves more persuasive than the most fluent speech.

The welcome blaze of their own fire gladdened them at length, and when the last step was taken, Sylvia sat down with an inward conviction she never could get up again. Warwick told their mishap in the fewest possible words, while Mark, in a spasm of brotherly solicitude, goaded the fire to a roar that his sister's feet might be dried, administered a cordial as a preventive against cold, and prescribed her hammock the instant supper was done. She went away with him, but a moment after she came to Warwick with a box of Prue's ointment and a soft handkerchief stripped into bandages.

"What now?" he asked.

"I wish to dress your burns, sir."

"They will do well enough with a little water; go you and rest."

"Mr. Warwick, you know you ate your supper with your left hand, and put both behind you when you saw me looking at them. Please let me make them easier; they were burnt for me, and I shall get no sleep till I have had my way."

There was a curious mixture of command and entreaty in her manner, and before their owner had time to refuse or comply, the scorched hands were taken possession of, the red blisters covered with a cool bandage, and the frown of pain smoothed out of Warwick's forehead by the prospect of relief. As she tied the last knot, Sylvia glanced up with a look that mutely asked pardon for past waywardness, and expressed gratitude for past help; then, as if her heart were set at rest, she was gone before her patient could return his thanks.

She did not reappear, Mark went to send a lad after the lost boat, and the two friends were left alone; Warwick watching the blaze, Moor watching him, till, with a nod toward a pair of diminutive boots that stood turning out their toes before the fire, Adam said —

"The wearer of those defiant-looking articles is the most capricious piece of humanity it was ever my fortune to see. You have no idea of the life she has led me since you left."

"I can imagine it."

"She is as freakish, and wears as many shapes as Puck; a gnat, a will-o'-the-wisp, a Sister of Charity, a meek-faced child; and one does not know in which guise she pleases most. Hard the task of him who has and tries to hold her."

"Hard yet happy; for a word will tame the high spirit, a look touch the warm heart, a kind act be repaid with one still kinder. She is a woman to be studied well, taught tenderly, and, being won, cherished with an affection that knows no shadow of a change."

Moor spoke low, and on his face the fire-light seemed to shed a ruddier glow than it had done before. Warwick eyed him keenly for a moment, then said, with his usual abruptness —

"Geoffrey, you should marry."

"Set me the example by mortgaging your own heart, Adam."

“I have.”

“I thought so. Tell me the romance.”

“It is the old story — a handsome woman, a foolish man; a few weeks of doubt, a few of happiness; then the two stand apart to view the leap before they take it; after that, peace or purgatory, as they choose well or ill.”

“When is the probation over, Adam?”

“In June, God willing.”

The hope of deliverance gave to Warwick’s tone the fervor of desire, and led his friend to believe in the existence of a passion deep and strong as the heart he knew so well. No further confessions disturbed his satisfaction, for Warwick scorned complaint; pity he would not receive, sympathy was powerless to undo the past, time alone would mend it, and to time he looked for help. He rose presently as if bedward bound, but paused behind Moor, turned his face upward, and said, bending on it a look given to this friend alone —

“If my confidence were a good gift, you should have it. But my experience must not mar your faith in womankind. Keep it as chivalrous as ever, and may God send you the mate whom you deserve. Geoffrey, good night.”

“Good night, Adam.”

And with a hand-shake more expressive of affection than many a tenderer demonstration, they parted — Warwick to watch the stars for hours, and Moor to muse beside the fire till the little boots were dry.

CHAPTER V.

A GOLDEN WEDDING.

Hitherto they had been a most decorous crew, but the next morning something in the air seemed to cause a general overflow of spirits, and they went up the river like a party of children on a merry-making. Sylvia decorated herself with garlands till she looked like a mermaid; Mark, as skipper, issued his orders with the true Marblehead twang; Moor kept up a fire of pun-provoking raillery; Warwick sung like a jovial giant; while the Kelpie danced over the water as if inspired with the universal gayety, and the very ripples seemed to laugh as they hurried by.

“Mark, there is a boat coming up behind us with three gentlemen in it, who evidently intend to pass us with a great display of skill. Of course you won’t let it,” said Sylvia, welcoming the prospect of a race.

Her brother looked over his shoulder, took a critical survey, and nodded approvingly.

“They are worth a lesson, and shall have it. Easy, now, till they pass; then hard all, and give them a specimen of high art.”

A sudden lull ensued on board the Kelpie while the blue shirts approached, caught, and passed with a great display of science, as Sylvia had prophesied, and as good an imitation of the demeanor of experienced watermen as could be assumed by a trio of studious youths not yet out of their teens. As the foam of their wake broke against the other boat’s side, Mark hailed them —

“Good morning, gentlemen! We’ll wait for you above there, at the bend.”

“All serene,” returned the rival helmsman, with a bow in honor of Sylvia, while the other two caused a perceptible increase in the speed of the “Juanita,” whose sentimental name was not at all in keeping with its rakish appearance.

“Short-sighted infants, to waste their wind in that style; but they pull well for their years,” observed Mark, paternally, as he waited till the others had gained sufficient advantage to make the race a more equal one. “Now, then!” he whispered a moment after; and, as if suddenly endowed with life, the Kelpie shot away with the smooth speed given by strength and skill. Sylvia watched both boats, yearning to take an oar herself, yet full of admiration for the well-trained rowers, whose swift strokes set the river in a foam and made the moment one of pleasure and excitement. The blue shirts did their best against competitors who had rowed in many crafts and many waters. They kept the advantage till near the bend, then Mark's crew lent their reserved strength to a final effort, and bending to their oars with a will, gained steadily, till, with a triumphant stroke, they swept far ahead, and with oars at rest waited in magnanimous silence till the Juanita came up, gracefully confessing her defeat by a good-humored cheer from her panting crew.

For a moment the two boats floated side by side, while the young men interchanged compliments and jokes, for a river is a highway where all travellers may salute each other, and college boys are "Hail fellow! well met" with all the world.

Sylvia sat watching the lads, and one among them struck her fancy. The helmsman who had bowed to her was slight and swarthy, with Southern eyes, vivacious manners, and a singularly melodious voice. A Spaniard, she thought, and pleased herself with this picturesque figure till a traitorous smile about the young man's mouth betrayed that he was not unconscious of her regard. She colored as she met the glance of mingled mirth and admiration that he gave her, and hastily began to pull off the weedy decorations which she had forgotten. But she paused presently, for she heard a surprised voice exclaim —

"Why, Warwick! is that you or your ghost?"

Looking up Sylvia saw Adam lift the hat he had pulled over his brows, and take a slender brown hand extended over the boat-side with something like reluctance, as he answered the question in Spanish. A short conversation ensued, in which the dark stranger seemed to ask innumerable questions, Warwick to give curt replies, and the names Gabriel and Ottila to occur with familiar frequency. Sylvia knew nothing of the language, but received an impression that Warwick was not overjoyed at the meeting; that the youth was both pleased and perplexed by finding him there; and that neither parted with much regret as the distance slowly widened between the boats, and with a farewell salute parted company, each taking a different branch of the river, which divided just there.

For the first time Warwick allowed Mark to take his place at the oar, and sat looking into the clear depths below as if some scene lay there which other eyes could not discover.

"Who was the olive-colored party with the fine eyes and foreign accent?" asked Mark, lazily rowing.

"Gabriel André."

"Is he an Italian?"

"No; a Cuban."

"I forgot you had tried that mixture of Spain and Alabama. How was it?"

“As such climates always are to me, — intoxicating to-day, enervating to-morrow.”

“How long were you there?”

“Three months.”

“I feel tropically inclined, so tell us about it.”

“There is nothing to tell.”

“I’ll prove that by a catechism. Where did you stay?”

“In Havana.”

“Of course, but with whom?”

“Gabriel André.”

“The father of the saffron youth?”

“Yes.”

“Of whom did the family consist?”

“Four persons.”

“Mark, leave Mr. Warwick alone.”

“As long as he answers I shall question. Name the four persons, Adam.”

“Gabriel, sen., Dolores his wife, Gabriel, jun., Catalina, his sister.”

“Ah! now we progress. Was señorita Catalina as comely as her brother?”

“More so.”

“You adored her, of course?”

“I loved her.”

“Great heavens! what discoveries we make. He likes it, I know by the satirical glimmer in his eye; therefore I continue. She adored you, of course?”

“She loved me.”

“You will return and marry her?”

“No.”

“Your depravity appalls me.”

“Did I volunteer its discovery?”

“I demand it now. You left this girl believing that you adored her?”

“She knew I was fond of her.”

“The parting was tender?”

“On her part.”

“Iceberg! She wept in your arms?”

“And gave me an orange.”

“You cherished it, of course?”

“I ate it immediately.”

“What want of sentiment! You promised to return?”

“Yes.”

“But will never keep the promise?”

"I never break one."

"Yet will not marry her?"

"By no means."

"Ask how old the lady was, Mark?"

"Age, Warwick?"

"Seven."

Mark caught a crab of the largest size at this reply, and remained where he fell, among the ruins of the castle in Spain, which he had erected with the scanty materials vouchsafed to him, while Warwick went back to his meditations.

A drop of rain roused Sylvia from the contemplation of an imaginary portrait of the little Cuban girl, and looking skyward she saw that the frolicsome wind had prepared a practical joke for them in the shape of a thunder-shower. A consultation was held, and it was decided to row on till a house appeared, in which they would take refuge till the storm was over. On they went, but the rain was in greater haste than they, and a summary drenching was effected before the toot of a dinner-horn guided them to shelter. Landing they marched over the fields, a moist and mirthful company, toward a red farm-house standing under venerable elms, with a patriarchal air which promised hospitable treatment and good cheer. A promise speedily fulfilled by the lively old woman, who appeared with an energetic "Shoo!" for the speckled hens congregated in the porch, and a hearty welcome for the weather-beaten strangers.

"Sakes alive!" she exclaimed; "you be in a mess, ain't you? Come right in and make yourselves to home. Abel, take the men folks up chamber, and fit 'em out with anything dry you kin lay hands on. Phebe, see to this poor little creeter, and bring her down lookin' less like a drownded kitten. Nat, clear up your wittlin's, so's't they kin toast their feet when they come down; and, Cinthy, don't dish up dinner jest yet."

These directions were given with such vigorous illustration, and the old face shone with such friendly zeal, that the four submitted at once, sure that the kind soul was pleasing herself in serving them, and finding something very attractive in the place, the people, and their own position. Abel, a staid farmer of forty, obeyed his mother's order regarding the "men folks;" and Phebe, a buxom girl of sixteen, led Sylvia to her own room, eagerly offering her best.

As she dried and redressed herself Sylvia made sundry discoveries, which added to the romance and the enjoyment of the adventure. A smart gown lay on the bed in the low chamber, also various decorations upon chair and table, suggesting that some festival was afloat; and a few questions elicited the facts. Grandpa had seven sons and three daughters, all living, all married, and all blessed with flocks of children. Grandpa's birthday was always celebrated by a family gathering; but to-day, being the fiftieth anniversary of his wedding, the various households had resolved to keep it with unusual pomp; and all were coming for a supper, a dance, and a “sing” at the end. Upon receipt of which intelligence Sylvia proposed an immediate departure; but the grandmother and daughter cried out at this, pointed to the still falling rain, the lowering sky, the wet heap on the floor, and insisted on the strangers all remaining to enjoy the festival, and give an added interest by their presence.

Half promising what she wholly desired, Sylvia put on Phebe’s second best blue gingham gown for the preservation of which she added a white apron, and completing the whole with a pair of capacious shoes, went down to find her party and reveal the state of affairs. They were bestowed in the prim, best parlor, and greeted her with a peal of laughter, for all were *en costume*. Abel was a stout man, and his garments hung upon Moor with a melancholy air; Mark had disdained them, and with an eye to effect laid hands on an old uniform, in which he looked like a volunteer of 1812; while Warwick’s superior height placed Abel’s wardrobe out of the question; and grandpa, taller than any of his seven goodly sons, supplied him with a sober suit, — roomy, square-flapped, and venerable, — which became him, and with his beard produced the curious effect of a youthful patriarch. To Sylvia’s relief it was unanimously decided to remain, trusting to their own penetration to discover the most agreeable method of returning the favor; and regarding the adventure as a welcome change, after two days’ solitude, all went out to dinner prepared to enact their parts with spirit.

The meal being despatched, Mark and Warwick went to help Abel with some out-door arrangements; and begging grandma to consider him one of her own boys, Moor tied on an apron and fell to work with Sylvia, laying the long table which was to receive the coming stores. True breeding is often as soon felt by the uncultivated as by the cultivated; and the zeal with which the strangers threw themselves into the business of the hour won the family, and placed them all in friendly relations at once. The old lady let them do what they would, admiring everything, and declaring over and over again that her new assistants “beat her boys and girls to nothin’ with their tastiness and smartness.” Sylvia trimmed the table with common flowers till it was an inviting sight before a viand appeared upon it, and hung green boughs about the room, with candles here and there to lend a festal light. Moor trundled a great cheese in from the dairy, brought milk-pans without mishap, disposed dishes, and caused Nat to cleave to him by the administration of surreptitious titbits and jocular suggestions; while Phebe tumbled about in every one’s way, quite wild with excitement; and grandma stood in her pantry like a culinary general, swaying a big knife for a baton, as she issued orders and marshalled her forces, the busiest and merriest of them all.

When the last touch was given, Moor discarded his apron and went to join Mark. Sylvia presided over Phebe’s toilet, and then sat herself down to support Nat through the trying half hour before, as he expressed it, “the party came in.” The twelve years’ boy was a cripple, one of those household blessings which, in the guise of an affliction, keep many hearts tenderly united by a common love and pity. A cheerful creature, always chirping like a cricket on the hearth as he sat carving or turning bits of wood into useful or ornamental shapes for such as cared to buy them of him, and hoarding up the proceeds like a little miser for one more helpless than himself.

“What are these, Nat?” asked Sylvia, with the interest that always won small people, because their quick instincts felt that it was sincere.

“Them are spoons — ’postle spoons, they call ‘em. You see I’ve got a cousin what reads a sight, and one day he says to me, ‘Nat, in a book I see somethin’ about a set of spoons with a ‘postle’s head on each of ‘em; you make some and they’ll sell, I bet.’ So I got gramper’s Bible, found the picters of the ‘postles, and worked and worked till I got the faces good; and now it’s fun, for they do sell, and I’m savin’ up a lot. It ain’t for me, you know, but mother, ‘cause she’s wuss’n I be.”

“Is she sick, Nat?”

“Oh, ain’t she! Why she hasn’t stood up this nine year. We was smashed in a wagon that tipped over when I was three years old. It done somethin’ to my legs, but it broke her back, and made her no use, only jest to pet me, and keep us all kind of stiddy, you know. Ain’t you seen her? Don’t you want to?”

“Would she like it?”

“She admires to see folks, and asked about you at dinner; so I guess you’d better go see her. Look ahere, you like them spoons, and I’m agoin’ to give you one; I’d give you all on ‘em if they wasn’t promised. I can make one more in time, so you jest take your pick, ‘cause I like you, and want you not to forgit me.”

Sylvia chose Saint John, because it resembled Moor, she thought; bespoke and paid for a whole set, and privately resolved to send tools and rare woods to the little artist that he might serve his mother in his own pretty way. Then Nat took up his crutches and hopped nimbly before her to the room, where a plain, serene-faced woman lay knitting, with her best cap on, her clean handkerchief and large green fan laid out upon the coverlet. This was evidently the best room of the house; and as Sylvia sat talking to the invalid her eye discovered many traces of that refinement which comes through the affections. Nothing seemed too good for “daughter Patience;” birds, books, flowers, and pictures were plentiful here though visible nowhere else. Two easy-chairs beside the bed showed where the old folks oftenest sat; Abel's home corner was there by the antique desk covered with farmers' literature and samples of seeds; Phebe's work-basket stood in the window; Nat's lathe in the sunniest corner; and from the speckless carpet to the canary's clear water-glass all was exquisitely neat, for love and labor were the handmaids who served the helpless woman and asked no wages but her comfort.

Sylvia amused her new friends mightily, for finding that neither mother nor son had any complaints to make, any sympathy to ask, she exerted herself to give them what both needed, and kept them laughing by a lively recital of her voyage and its mishaps.

"Ain't she prime, mother?" was Nat's candid commentary when the story ended, and he emerged red and shiny from the pillows where he had burrowed with boyish explosions of delight.

"She's very kind, dear, to amuse two stay-at-home folks like you and me, who seldom see what's going on outside four walls. You have a merry heart, miss, and I hope will keep it all your days, for it's a blessed thing to own."

"I think you have something better, a contented one," said Sylvia, as the woman regarded her with no sign of envy or regret.

"I ought to have; nine years on a body's back can teach a sight of things that are wuth knowin'. I've learnt patience pretty well I guess, and contentedness ain't fur away, for though it sometimes seems ruther long to look forward to, perhaps nine more years layin' here, I jest remember it might have been wuss, and if I don't do much now there's all eternity to come."

Something in the woman's manner struck Sylvia as she watched her softly beating some tune on the sheet with her quiet eyes turned toward the light. Many sermons had been less eloquent to the girl than the look, the tone, the cheerful resignation of that plain face. She stooped and kissed it, saying gently —

"I shall remember this."

"Hooray! There they be; I hear Ben!"

And away clattered Nat to be immediately absorbed into the embraces of a swarm of relatives who now began to arrive in a steady stream. Old and young, large and small, rich and poor, with overflowing hands or trifles humbly given, all were received alike, all hugged by grandpa, kissed by grandma, shaken half breathless by Uncle Abel, welcomed by Aunt Patience, and danced round by Phebe and Nat till the house seemed a great hive of hilarious and affectionate bees. At first the strangers stood apart, but Phebe spread their story with such complimentary additions of her own that the family circle opened wide and took them in at once.

Sylvia was enraptured with the wilderness of babies, and leaving the others to their own devices followed the matrons to "Patience's room," and gave herself up to the pleasant tyranny of the small potentates, who swarmed over her as she sat on the floor, tugging at her hair, exploring her eyes, covering her with moist kisses, and keeping up a babble of little voices more delightful to her than the discourse of the flattered mammas who benignly surveyed her admiration and their offspring's prowess.

The young people went to romp in the barn; the men, armed with umbrellas, turned out *en masse* to inspect the farm and stock, and compare notes over pig pens and garden gates. But Sylvia lingered where she was, enjoying a scene which filled her with a tender pain and pleasure, for each baby was laid on grandma's knee, its small virtues, vices, ailments, and accomplishments rehearsed, its beauties examined, its strength tested, and the verdict of the family oracle pronounced upon it as it was cradled, kissed, and blessed on the kind old heart which had room for every care and joy of those who called her mother. It was a sight the girl never forgot, because just then she was ready to receive it. Her best lessons did not come from books, and she learned one then as she saw the fairest success of a woman's life while watching this happy grandmother with fresh faces framing her withered one, daughterly voices chorusing good wishes, and the harvest of half a century of wedded life beautifully garnered in her arms.

The fragrance of coffee and recollections of Cynthia's joyful aberrations at such periods caused a breaking up of the maternal conclave. The babies were borne away to simmer between blankets until called for. The women unpacked baskets, brooded over teapots, and kept up an harmonious clack as the table was spread with pyramids of cake, regiments of pies, quagmires of jelly, snow-banks of bread, and gold mines of butter; every possible article of food, from baked beans to wedding cake, finding a place on that sacrificial altar.

Fearing to be in the way, Sylvia departed to the barn, where she found her party in a chaotic Babel; for the offshoots had been as fruitful as the parent tree, and some four dozen young immortals were in full riot. The bashful roosting with the hens on remote lofts and beams; the bold flirting or playing in the full light of day; the boys whooping, the girls screaming, all effervescing as if their spirits had reached the explosive point and must find vent in noise. Mark was in his element, introducing all manner of new games, the liveliest of the old and keeping the revel at its height; for rosy, bright-eyed girls were plenty, and the ancient uniform universally approved. Warwick had a flock of lads about him absorbed in the marvels he was producing with knife, stick, and string; and Moor a rival flock of little lasses breathless with interest in the tales he told. One on each knee, two at each side, four in a row on the hay at his feet, and the boldest of all with an arm about his neck and a curly head upon his shoulder, for Uncle

Abel’s clothes seemed to invest the wearer with a passport to their confidence at once. Sylvia joined this group and partook of a quiet entertainment with as childlike a relish as any of them, while the merry tumult went on about her.

The toot of the horn sent the whole barnful streaming into the house like a flock of hungry chickens, where, by some process known only to the mothers of large families, every one was wedged close about the table, and the feast began. This was none of your stand-up, wafery, bread and butter teas, but a thorough-going, sit-down supper, and all settled themselves with a smiling satisfaction, prophetic of great powers and an equal willingness to employ them. A detachment of half-grown girls was drawn up behind grandma, as waiters; Sylvia insisted on being one of them, and proved herself a neat-handed Phillis, though for a time slightly bewildered by the gastronomic performances she beheld. Babies ate pickles, small boys sequestered pie with a velocity that made her wink, women swam in the tea, and the men, metaphorically speaking, swept over the table like a swarm of locusts, while the host and hostess beamed upon one another and their robust descendants with an honest pride, which was beautiful to see.

“That Mr. Wackett ain’t eat scursely nothin’, he jest sets lookin’ round kinder ‘mazed like. Do go and make him fall to on somethin’, or I shan’t take a mite of comfort in my vittles,” said grandma, as the girl came with an empty cup.

“He is enjoying it with all his heart and eyes, ma’am, for we don’t see such fine spectacles every day. I’ll take him something that he likes and make him eat it.”

“Sakes alive! be you to be Mis’ Wackett? I’d no idee of it, you look so young.”

“Nor I; we are only friends, ma’am.”

“Oh!” and the monosyllable was immensely expressive, as the old lady confided a knowing nod to the teapot, into whose depths she was just then peering. Sylvia walked away wondering why persons were always thinking and saying such things.

As she paused behind Warwick’s chair with a glass of cream and a round of brown bread, he looked up at her with his blandest expression, though a touch of something like regret was in his voice.

“This is a sight worth living eighty hard years to see, and I envy that old couple as I never envied any one before. To rear ten virtuous children, put ten useful men and women into the world, and give them health and courage to work out their own salvation as these honest souls will do, is a better job done for the Lord, than winning a battle, or ruling a State. Here is all honor to them. Drink it with me.”

He put the glass to her lips, drank what she left, and rising, placed her in his seat with the decisive air which few resisted.

"You take no thought for yourself and are doing too much; sit here a little, and let me take a few steps where you have taken many."

He served her, and standing at her back, bent now and then to speak, still with that softened look upon the face so seldom stirred by the gentler emotions that lay far down in that deep heart of his; for never had he felt so solitary.

All things must have an end, even a family feast, and by the time the last boy's buttons peremptorily announced, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther,' all professed themselves satisfied, and a general uprising took place. The surplus population were herded in parlor and chambers, while a few energetic hands cleared away, and with much clattering of dishes and wafting of towels, left grandma's spandy clean premises as immaculate as ever. It was dark when all was done, so the kitchen was cleared, the candles lighted, Patience's door set open, and little Nat established in an impromptu orchestra, composed of a table and a chair, whence the first squeak of his fiddle proclaimed that the ball had begun.

Everybody danced; the babies stacked on Patience's bed, or penned behind chairs, sprawled and pranced in unsteady mimicry of their elders. Ungainly farmers, stiff with labor, recalled their early days and tramped briskly as they swung their wives about with a kindly pressure of the hard hands that had worked so long together. Little pairs toddled gravely through the figures, or frisked promiscuously in a grand conglomeration of arms and legs. Gallant cousins kissed pretty cousins at exciting periods, and were not rebuked. Mark wrought several of these incipient lovers to a pitch of despair, by his devotion to the comeliest damsels, and the skill with which he executed unheard-of evolutions before their admiring eyes; Moor led out the poorest and the plainest with a respect that caused their homely faces to shine, and their scant skirts to be forgotten. Warwick skimmed his five years partner through the air in a way that rendered her speechless with delight; and Sylvia danced as she never danced before. With sticky-fingered boys, sleepy with repletion, but bound to last it out; with rough-faced men who paid her paternal compliments; with smart youths who turned sheepish with that white lady's hand in their big brown ones, and one ambitious lad who confided to her his burning desire to work a sawmill, and marry a girl with black eyes and yellow hair. While, perched aloft, Nat bowed away till his pale face glowed, till all hearts warmed, all feet beat responsive to the good old tunes which have put so much health into human bodies, and so much happiness into human souls.

At the stroke of nine the last dance came. All down the long kitchen stretched two breathless rows; grandpa and grandma at the top, the youngest pair of grandchildren at the bottom, and all between fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins, while such of the babies as were still extant, bobbed with unabated vigor, as Nat struck up the Virginia Reel, and the sturdy old couple led off as gallantly as the young one who came tearing up to meet them. Away they went, grandpa's white hair flying in the wind, grandma's impressive cap awry with excitement, as they ambled down the middle, and finished with a kiss when their tuneful journey was done, amid immense applause from those who regarded this as the crowning event of the day.

When all had had their turn, and twirled till they were dizzy, a short lull took place, with refreshments for such as still possessed the power of enjoying them. Then Phebe appeared with an armful of books, and all settled themselves for the family "sing."

Sylvia had heard much fine music, but never any that touched her like this, for, though often discordant, it was hearty, with that under-current of feeling which adds sweetness to the rudest lay, and is often more attractive than the most florid ornament or faultless execution. Every one sang as every one had danced, with all their might; shrill children, soft-voiced girls, lullaby-singing mothers, gruff boys, and strong-lunged men; the old pair quavered, and still a few indefatigable babies crowed behind their little coops. Songs, ballads, comic airs, popular melodies, and hymns, came in rapid succession. And when they ended with that song which should be classed with sacred music for association's sake, and standing hand in hand about the room with the golden bride and bridegroom in their midst, sang "Home," Sylvia leaned against her brother with dim eyes and a heart too full to sing.

Still standing thus when the last note had soared up and died, the old man folded his hands and began to pray. It was an old-fashioned prayer, such as the girl had never heard from the Bishop's lips; ungrammatical, inelegant, and long. A quiet talk with God, manly in its straightforward confession of short-comings, childlike in its appeal for guidance, fervent in its gratitude for all good gifts, and the crowning one of loving children. As if close intercourse had made the two familiar, this human father turned to the Divine, as these sons and daughters turned to him, as free to ask, as confident of a reply, as all afflictions, blessings, cares, and crosses, were laid down before him, and the work of eighty years submitted to his hand. There were no sounds in the room but the one voice often tremulous with emotion and with age, the coo of some dreaming baby, or the low sob of some mother whose arms were empty, as the old man stood there, rugged and white atop as the granite hills, with the old wife at his side, a circle of sons and daughters girdling them round, and in all hearts the thought that as the former wedding had been made for time, this golden one at eighty must be for eternity.

While Sylvia looked and listened a sense of genuine devotion stole over her; the beauty and the worth of prayer grew clear to her through the earnest speech of that unlettered man, and for the first time she fully felt the nearness and the dearness of the Universal Father, whom she had been taught to fear, yet longed to love.

“Now, my children, you must go before the little folks are tuckered out,” said Grandpa, heartily. “Mother and me can’t say enough toe thank you for the presents you have fetched us, the dutiful wishes you have give us, the pride and comfort you have allers ben toe us. I ain’t no hand at speeches, so I shan’t make none, but jest say ef any ‘fliction falls on any on you, remember mother’s here toe help you bear it; ef any worldly loss comes toe you, remember father’s house is yourn while it stans, and so the Lord bless and keep us all.”

“Three cheers for gramper and grammer!” roared a six-foot scion as a safety valve for sundry unmasculine emotions, and three rousing hurras made the rafters ring, struck terror to the heart of the oldest inhabitant of the rat-haunted garret, and summarily woke all the babies.

Then the good-byes began, the flurry of wrong baskets, pails and bundles in wrong places; the sorting out of small folk too sleepy to know or care what became of them; the maternal cluckings, and paternal shouts for Kitty, Cy, Ben, Bill, or Mary Ann; the piling into vehicles with much ramping of indignant horses unused to such late hours; the last farewells, the roll of wheels, as one by one the happy loads departed, and peace fell upon the household for another year.

“I declare for’t, I never had sech an out an out good time sense I was born intoe the world. Ab’ram, you are fit to drop, and so be I; now let’s set and talk it over along of Patience fore we go toe bed.”

The old couple got into their chairs, and as they sat there side by side, remembering that she had given no gift, Sylvia crept behind them, and lending the magic of her voice to the simple air, sang the fittest song for time and place — ”John Anderson my Jo.” It was too much for grandma, the old heart overflowed, and reckless of the cherished cap she laid her head on her “John’s” shoulder, exclaiming through her tears —

“That’s the cap sheaf of the hull, and I can’t bear no more to-night. Ab’ram, lend me your hankchif, for I dunno where mine is, and my face is all of a drip.”

Before the red bandana had gently performed its work in grandpa’s hand, Sylvia beckoned her party from the room, and showing them the clear moonlight night which followed the storm, suggested that they should both save appearances and enjoy a novel pleasure by floating homeward instead of sleeping. The tide against which they had pulled in coming up would sweep them rapidly along, and make it easy to retrace in a few hours the way they had loitered over for three days.

The pleasant excitement of the evening had not yet subsided, and all applauded the plan as a fit finale to their voyage. The old lady strongly objected, but the young people overruled her, and being re-equipped in their damaged garments they bade the friendly family a grateful adieu, left their more solid thanks under Nat’s pillow, and re-embarked upon their shining road.

All night Sylvia lay under the canopy of boughs her brother made to shield her from the dew, listening to the soft sounds about her, the twitter of a restless bird, the bleat of some belated lamb, the ripple of a brook babbling like a baby in its sleep. All night she watched the changing shores, silvery green or dark with slumberous shadow, and followed the moon in its tranquil journey through the sky. When it set, she drew her cloak about her, and, pillowing her head upon her arm, exchanged the waking for a sleeping dream.

A thick mist encompassed her when she awoke. Above the sun shone dimly, below rose and fell the billows of the sea, before her sounded the city’s fitful hum, and far behind her lay the green wilderness where she had lived and learned so much. Slowly the fog lifted, the sun came dazzling down upon the sea, and out into the open bay they sailed with the pennon streaming in the morning wind. But still with backward glance the girl watched the misty wall that rose between her and the charmed river, and still with yearning heart confessed how sweet that brief experience had been, for though she had not yet discovered it, like

“The fairy Lady of Shalott,
She had left the web and left the loom,
Had seen the water lilies bloom,
Had seen the helmet and the plume,
And had looked down to Camelot.”

CHAPTER VI.

WHY SYLVIA WAS HAPPY.

“I never did understand you, Sylvia; and this last month you have been a perfect enigma to me.”

With rocking-chair in full action, suspended needle and thoughtful expression, Miss Yule had watched her sister for ten minutes as she sat with her work at her feet, her hands folded on her lap, and her eyes dreamily fixed on vacancy.

“I always was to myself, Prue, and am more so than ever now,” answered Sylvia, waking out of her reverie with a smile that proved it had been a pleasant one.

“There must be some reason for this great change in you. Come, tell me, dear.”

With a motherly gesture Miss Yule drew the girl to her knee, brushed back the bright hair, and looked into the face so freely turned to hers. Through all the years they had been together, the elder sister had never seen before the expression which the younger’s face now wore. A vague expectancy sat in her eyes, some nameless content sweetened her smile, a beautiful repose replaced the varying enthusiasm, listlessness, and melancholy that used to haunt her countenance and make it such a study. Miss Yule could not read the secret of the change, yet felt its novel charm; Sylvia could not explain it, though penetrated by its power; and for a moment the sisters looked into each other’s faces, wondering why each seemed altered. Then Prue, who never wasted much time in speculations of any kind, shook her head, and repeated —

“I don’t understand it, but it must be right, because you are so improved in every way. Ever since that wild trip up the river you have been growing quiet, lovable, and cheerful, and I really begin to hope that you will become like other people.”

“I only know that I am happy, Prue. Why it is so I cannot tell; but now I seldom have the old dissatisfied and restless feeling. Everything looks pleasant to me, every one seems kind, and life begins to be both sweet and earnest. It is only one of my moods, I suppose; but I am grateful for it, and pray that it may last.”

So earnestly she spoke, so cheerfully she smiled, that Miss Yule blessed the mood and echoed Sylvia's wish, exclaiming in the next breath, with a sudden inspiration —

"My, dear, I've got it! You are growing up."

"I think I am. You tried to make a woman of me at sixteen, but it was impossible until the right time came. That wild trip up the river, as you call it, did more for me than I can ever tell, and when I seemed most like a child I was learning to be a woman."

"Well, my dear, go on as you've begun, and I shall be more than satisfied. What merry-making is on foot to-night? Mark and these friends of his keep you in constant motion with their riding, rowing, and rambling excursions, and if it did not agree with you so excellently, I really should like a little quiet after a month of bustle."

"They are only coming up as usual, and that reminds me that I must go and dress."

"There is another new change, Sylvia. You never used to care what you wore or how you looked, no matter how much time and trouble I expended on you and your wardrobe. Now you do care, and it does my heart good to see you always charmingly dressed, and looking your prettiest," said Miss Yule, with the satisfaction of a woman who heartily believed in costume as well as all the other elegances and proprieties of fashionable life.

"Am I ever that, Prue?" asked Sylvia, pausing on the threshold with a shy yet wistful glance.

"Ever what, dear?"

"Pretty?"

"Always so to me; and now I think every one finds you very attractive because you try to please, and seem to succeed delightfully."

Sylvia had never asked that question before, had never seemed to know or care, and could not have chosen a more auspicious moment for her frank inquiry than the present. The answer seemed to satisfy her, and smiling at some blithe anticipation of her own, she went away to make a lampless toilet in the dusk, which proved how slight a hold the feminine passion for making one's self pretty had yet taken upon her.

The September moon was up and shining clearly over garden, lawn, and sea, when the sound of voices called her down. At the stair-foot she paused with a disappointed air, for only one hat lay on the hall table, and a glance showed her only one guest with Mark and Prue. She strolled irresolutely through the breezy hall, looked out at either open door, sung a little to herself, but broke off in the middle of a line, and, as if following a sudden impulse, went out into the mellow moonlight, forgetful of uncovered head or dewy damage to the white hem of her gown. Half way down the avenue she paused before a shady nook, and looked in. The evergreens that enclosed it made the seat doubly dark to eyes inured to the outer light, and seeing a familiar seeming figure sitting with its head upon its hand, Sylvia leaned in, saying, with a daughterly caress —

“Why, what is my romantic father doing here?”

The sense of touch was quicker than that of sight, and with an exclamation of surprise she had drawn back before Warwick replied —

“It is not the old man, but the young one, who is romancing here.”

“I beg your pardon! We have been waiting for you; what thought is so charming that you forgot us all?”

Sylvia was a little startled, else she would scarcely have asked so plain a question. But Warwick often asked much blunter ones, always told the naked truth without prevarication or delay, and straightway answered —

“The thought of the woman whom I hope to make my wife.”

Sylvia stood silent for a moment as if intent on fastening in her hair the delicate spray of hop-bells just gathered from the vine that formed a leafy frame for the graceful picture which she made standing, with uplifted arms, behind the arch. When she spoke it was to say, as she moved on toward the house —

“It is too beautiful a night to stay in doors, but Prue is waiting for me, and Mark wants to plan with you about our ride to-morrow. Shall we go together?”

She beckoned, and he came out of the shadow showing her an expression which she had never seen before. His face was flushed, his eye unquiet, his manner eager yet restrained. She had seen him intellectually excited many times; never emotionally till now. Something wayward, yet warm, in this new mood attracted her, because so like her own. But with a tact as native as her sympathy she showed no sign of this, except in the attentive look she fixed upon him as the moonlight bathed him in its splendor. He met the glance, seemed to interpret it aright, but did not answer its unconscious inquiry; for pausing, he asked abruptly —

“Should a rash promise be considered binding when it threatens to destroy one’s peace?”

Sylvia pondered an instant before she answered slowly —

“If the promise was freely given, no sin committed in its keeping, and no peace troubled but one’s own, I should say yes.”

Still pausing, he looked down at her with that unquiet glance as she looked up with her steady one, and with the same anxiety he asked —

“Would you keep such a promise inviolate, even though it might cost you the sacrifice of something dearer to you than your life?”

She thought again, and again looked up, answering with the sincerity that he had taught her —

"It might be unwise, but if the sacrifice was not one of principle or something that I ought to love more than life, I think I should keep the promise as religiously as an Indian keeps a vow of vengeance."

As she spoke, some recollection seemed to strike Warwick like a sudden stab. The flush died out of his face, the fire from his eyes, and an almost grim composure fell upon him as he said low to himself, with a forward step as if eager to leave some pain behind him —

"It is better so; for his sake I will leave all to time."

Sylvia saw his lips move, but caught no sound till he said with a gravity that was almost gloom —

"I think you would; therefore, beware how you bind yourself with such verbal bonds. Let us go in."

They went; Warwick to the drawing-room, but Sylvia ran up stairs for the Berlin wools, which in spite of heat and the sure staining of fingers were to be wound that night according to contract, for she kept a small promise as sacredly as she would have done a greater one.

"What have you been doing to give yourself such an uplifted expression, Sylvia?" said Mark, as she came in.

"Feasting my eyes on lovely colors. Does not that look like a folded rainbow?" she answered, laying her brilliant burden on the table where Warwick sat examining a broken reel, and Prue was absorbed in getting a carriage blanket under way.

"Come, Sylvia, I shall soon be ready for the first shade," she said, clashing her formidable needles. "Is that past mending, Mr. Warwick?"

"Yes, without better tools than a knife, two pins, and a bodkin."

"Then you must put the skeins on a chair, Sylvia. Try not to tangle them, and spread your handkerchief in your lap, for that maroon color will stain sadly. Now don't speak to me, for I must count my stitches."

Sylvia began to wind the wools with a swift dexterity as natural to her hands as certain little graces of gesture which made their motions pleasant to watch. Warwick never rummaged work-baskets, gossipped, or paid compliments for want of something to do. If no little task appeared for them, he kept his hands out of mischief, and if nothing occurred to make words agreeable or necessary, he proved that he understood the art of silence, and sat with those vigilant eyes of his fixed upon whatever object attracted them. Just then the object was a bright band slipping round the chair-back, with a rapidity that soon produced a snarl, but no help till patient fingers had smoothed and wound it up. Then, with the look of one who says to himself, "I will!" he turned, planted himself squarely before Sylvia, and held out his hands.

“Here is a reel that will neither tangle nor break your skeins, will you use it?”

“Yes, thank you, and in return I’ll wind your color first.”

“Which is my color?”

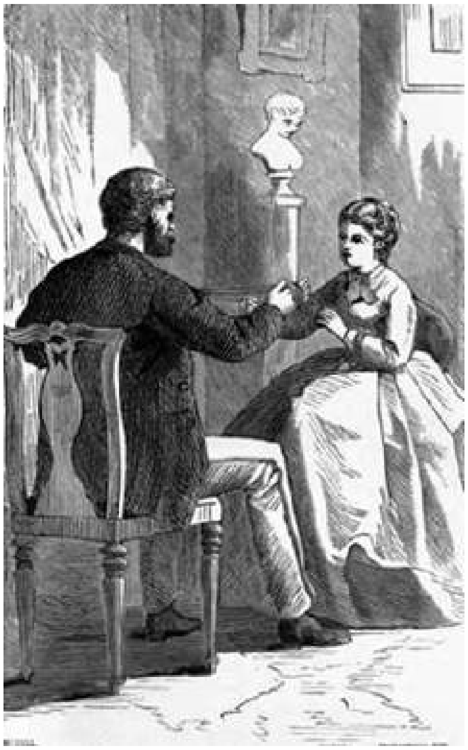
“This fine scarlet, strong, enduring, and martial, like yourself.”

“You are right.”

“I thought so; Mr. Moor prefers blue, and I violet.”

“Blue and red make violet,” called Mark from his corner, catching the word “color,” though busy with a sketch for a certain fair Jessie Hope.

Moor was with Mr. Yule in his study, Prue mentally wrapped in her blanket, and when Sylvia was drawn into an artistic controversy with her brother, Warwick fell into deep thought.



With the pride of a proud man once deceived, he had barred his heart against womankind, resolving that no second defeat should oppress him with that distrust of self and others, which is harder for a generous nature to bear, than the pain of its own wound. He had yet to learn that the shadow of love suggests its light, and that they who have been cheated of the food, without which none can truly live, long for it with redoubled hunger. Of late he had been discovering this, for a craving, stronger than his own strong will, possessed him. He tried to disbelieve and silence it; attacked it with reason, starved it with neglect, and chilled it with contempt. But when he fancied it was dead, the longing rose again, and with a clamorous cry, undid his work. For the first time, this free spirit felt the master's hand, confessed a need its own power could not supply, and saw that no man can live alone on even the highest aspirations without suffering for the vital warmth of the affections. A month ago he would have disdained the hope that now was so dear to him. But imperceptibly the influences of domestic life had tamed and won him. Solitude looked barren, vagrancy had lost its charm; his life seemed cold and bare, for, though devoted to noble aims, it was wanting in the social sacrifices, cares, and joys, that foster charity, and sweeten character. An impetuous desire to enjoy the rich experience which did so much for others, came over him to-night as it had often done while sharing the delights of this home, where he had made so long a pause. But with the desire came a memory that restrained him better than his promise. He saw what others had not yet discovered, and obeying the code of honor which governs a true gentleman, loved his friend better than himself and held his peace.

The last skein came, and as she wound it, Sylvia's glance involuntarily rose from the strong hands to the face above them, and lingered there, for the penetrating gaze was averted, and an unwonted mildness inspired confidence as its usual expression of power commanded respect. His silence troubled her, and with curious yet respectful scrutiny, she studied his face as she had never done before. She found it full of a noble gravity and kindliness; candor and courage spoke in the lines of the mouth, benevolence and intellect in the broad arch of the forehead, ardor and energy in the fire of the eye, and on every lineament the stamp of that genuine manhood, which no art can counterfeit. Intent upon discovering the secret of the mastery he exerted over all who approached him, Sylvia had quite forgotten herself, when suddenly Warwick's eyes were fixed full upon her own. What spell lay in them she could not tell, for human eye had never shed such sudden summer over her. Admiration was not in it, for it did not agitate; nor audacity, for it did not abash; but something that thrilled warm through blood and nerves, that filled her with a glad submission to some power, absolute yet tender, and caused her to turn her innocent face freely to his gaze, letting him read therein a sentiment for which she had not yet found a name.

It lasted but a moment; yet in that moment, each saw the other's heart, and each turned a new page in the romance of their lives. Sylvia's eyes fell first, but no blush followed, no sign of anger or perplexity, only a thoughtful silence, which continued till the last violet thread dropped from his hands, and she said almost regretfully —

"This is the end."

"Yes, this is the end."

As he echoed the words Warwick rose suddenly and went to talk with Mark, whose sketch was done. Sylvia sat a moment as if quite forgetful where she was, so absorbing was some thought or emotion. Presently she seemed to glow and kindle with an inward fire; over face and forehead rushed an impetuous color, her eyes shone, and her lips trembled with the fluttering of her breath. Then a panic appeared to seize her, for, stealing noiselessly away, she hurried to her room, and covering up her face as if to hide it even from herself, whispered to that full heart of hers, with quick coming tears that belied the words —

"Now I know why I am happy!"

How long she lay there weeping and smiling in the moonlight she never knew. Her sister's call broke in upon the first love dream she had ever woven for herself, and she went down to bid the friends good night. The hall was only lighted by the moon, and in the dimness of the shadow where she stood, no one saw traces of that midsummer shower on her cheeks, or detected the soft trouble in her eye, but for the first time Moor felt her hand tremble in his own and welcomed the propitious omen.

Being an old-fashioned gentleman, Mr. Yule preserved in his family the pleasant custom of hand-shaking, which gives such heartiness to the morning and evening greetings of a household. Moor liked and adopted it; Warwick had never done so, but that night he gave a hand to Prue and Mark with his most cordial expression, and Sylvia felt both her own taken in a warm lingering grasp, although he only said "good by!" Then they went; but while the three paused at the door held by the beauty of the night, back to them on the wings of the wind came Warwick's voice singing the song that Sylvia loved. All down the avenue, and far along the winding road they traced his progress, till the strain died in the distance leaving only the echo of the song to link them to the singer.

When evening came again Sylvia waited on the lawn to have the meeting over in the dark, for love made her very shy. But Moor came alone, and his first words were,

"Comfort me, Sylvia, Adam is gone. He went as unexpectedly as he came, and when I woke this morning a note lay at my door, but my friend was not there."

She murmured some stereotyped regret, but there was a sharp pain at her heart till there came to her the remembrance of Warwick's question, uttered on the spot where she was standing. Some solace she must have, and clinging to this one thought hopefully within herself —

"He has made some promise, has gone to get released from it, and will come back to say what he looked last night. He is so true I will believe in him and wait."

She did wait, but week after week went by and Warwick did not come.

CHAPTER VII.

DULL BUT NECESSARY.

Whoever cares only for incident and action in a book had better skip this chapter and read on; but those who take an interest in the delineation of character will find the key to Sylvia’s here.

John Yule might have been a poet, painter, or philanthropist, for Heaven had endowed him with fine gifts; he was a prosperous merchant with no ambition but to leave a fortune to his children and live down the memory of a bitter past. On the threshold of his life he stumbled and fell; for as he paused there, waiting for the first step to appear, Providence tested and found him wanting. On one side, Poverty offered the aspiring youth her meagre hand; but he was not wise enough to see the virtues hidden under her hard aspect, nor brave enough to learn the stern yet salutary lessons which labor, necessity, and patience teach, giving to those who serve and suffer the true success. On the other hand Opulence allured him with her many baits, and, silencing the voice of conscience, he yielded to temptation and wrecked his nobler self.

A loveless marriage was the price he paid for his ambition; not a costly one, he thought, till time taught him that whosoever mars the integrity of his own soul by transgressing the great laws of life, even by so much as a hair’s breadth, entails upon himself and heirs the inevitable retribution which proves their worth and keeps them sacred. The tie that bound and burdened the unhappy twain, worn thin by constant friction, snapped at last, and in the solemn pause death made in his busy life, there rose before him those two ghosts who sooner or later haunt us all, saying with reproachful voices, — ”This I might have been,” and “This I am.” Then he saw the failure of his life. At fifty he found himself poorer than when he made his momentous choice; for the years that had given him wealth, position, children, had also taken from him youth, self-respect, and many a gift whose worth was magnified by loss. He endeavored to repair the fault so tardily acknowledged, but found it impossible to cancel it when remorse, embittered effort, and age left him powerless to redeem the rich inheritance squandered in his prime.

If ever man received punishment for a self-inflicted wrong it was John Yule. A punishment as subtle as the sin; for in the children growing up about him every relinquished hope, neglected gift, lost aspiration, seemed to live again; yet on each and all was set the direful stamp of imperfection, which made them visible illustrations of the great law broken in his youth.

In Prudence, as she grew to womanhood, he saw his own practical tact and talent, nothing more. She seemed the living representative of the years spent in strife for profit, power, and place; the petty cares that fret the soul, the mercenary schemes that waste a life, the worldly formalities, frivolities, and fears, that so belittle character. All these he saw in this daughter's shape; and with pathetic patience bore the daily trial of an over active, over anxious, affectionate but most prosaic child.

In Mark he saw his ardor for the beautiful, his love of the poetic, his reverence for genius, virtue, heroism. But here too the subtle blight had fallen. This son, though strong in purpose was feeble in performance; for some hidden spring of power was wanting, and the shadow of that earlier defeat chilled in his nature the energy which is the first attribute of all success. Mark loved poetry, and "wrote in numbers for the numbers came;" but, whether tragic, tender, or devout, in each attempt there was enough of the divine fire to warm them into life, yet not enough to gift them with the fervor that can make a line immortal, and every song was a sweet lament for the loftier lays that might have been. He loved art and gave himself to it; but though studying all forms of beauty he never reached its soul, and every effort tantalized him with fresh glimpses of the fair ideal which he could not reach. He loved the true, but high thoughts seldom blossomed into noble deeds; for when the hour came the man was never ready, and disappointment was his daily portion. A sad fate for the son, a far sadder one for the father who had bequeathed it to him from the irrecoverable past.

In Sylvia he saw, mysteriously blended, the two natures that had given her life, although she was born when the gulf between regretful husband and sad wife was widest. As if indignant Nature rebelled against the outrage done her holiest ties, adverse temperaments gifted the child with the good and ill of each. From her father she received pride, intellect, and will; from her mother passion, imagination, and the fateful melancholy of a woman defrauded of her dearest hope. These conflicting temperaments, with all their aspirations, attributes, and inconsistencies, were woven into a nature fair and faulty; ambitious, yet not self-reliant; sensitive, yet not keen-sighted. These two masters ruled soul and body, warring against each other, making Sylvia an enigma to herself and her life a train of moods.

A wise and tender mother would have divined her nameless needs, answered her vague desires, and through the medium of the most omnipotent affection given to humanity, have made her what she might have been. But Sylvia had never known mother-love, for her life came through death; and the only legacy bequeathed her was a slight hold upon existence, a ceaseless craving for affection, and the shadow of a tragedy that wrung from the pale lips, that grew cold against her baby cheek, the cry, “Free at last, thank God for that!”

Prudence could not fill the empty place, though the good-hearted housewife did her best. Neither sister understood the other, and each tormented the other through her very love. Prue unconsciously exasperated Sylvia, Sylvia unconsciously shocked Prue, and they hitched along together each trying to do well and each taking diametrically opposite measures to effect her purpose. Mark briefly but truly described them when he said, “Sylvia trims the house with flowers, but Prudence dogs her with a dust-pan.”

Mr. Yule was now a studious, melancholy man, who, having said one fatal “No” to himself, made it the satisfaction of his life to say a never varying “Yes” to his children. But though he left no wish of theirs ungratified, he seemed to have forfeited his power to draw and hold them to himself. He was more like an unobtrusive guest than a master in his house. His children loved, but never clung to him, because unseen, yet impassible, rose the barrier of an instinctive protest against the wrong done their dead mother, unconscious on their part but terribly significant to him.

Mark had been years away; and though the brother and sister were tenderly attached, sex, tastes, and pursuits kept them too far apart, and Sylvia was solitary even in this social seeming home. Dissatisfied with herself, she endeavored to make her life what it should be with the energy of an ardent, aspiring nature; and through all experiences, sweet or bitter, all varying moods, successes and defeats, a sincere desire for happiness the best and highest, was the little rushlight of her soul that never wavered or went out.

She never had known friendship in its truest sense, for next to love it is the most abused of words. She had called many “friend,” but was still ignorant of that sentiment, cooler than passion, warmer than respect, more just and generous than either, which recognizes a kindred spirit in another, and claiming its right, keeps it sacred by the wise reserve that is to friendship what the purple bloom is to the grape, a charm which once destroyed can never be restored. Love she had desired, yet dreaded, knowing her own passionate nature, and when it came to her, making that brief holiday the fateful point of her life, she gave herself to it wholly. Before that time she had rejoiced over a more tranquil pleasure, and believed that she had found her friend in the neighbor who after long absence had returned to his old place.

Nature had done much for Geoffrey Moor, but the wise mother also gave him those teachers to whose hard lessons she often leaves her dearest children. Five years spent in the service of a sister, who, through the sharp discipline of pain was fitting her meek soul for heaven, had given him an experience such as few young men receive. This fraternal devotion proved a blessing in disguise; it preserved him from any profanation of his youth, and the companionship of the helpless creature whom he loved had proved an ever present stimulant to all that was best and sweetest in the man. A single duty faithfully performed had set the seal of integrity upon his character, and given him grace to see at thirty the rich compensation he had received for the ambitions silently sacrificed at twenty-five. When his long vigil was over he looked into the world to find his place again. But the old desires were dead, the old allurements had lost their charm, and while he waited for time to show him what good work he should espouse, no longing was so strong as that for a home, where he might bless and be blessed in writing that immortal poem a virtuous and happy life.

Sylvia soon felt the power and beauty of this nature, and remembering how well he had ministered to a physical affliction, often looked into the face whose serenity was a perpetual rebuke, longing to ask him to help and heal the mental ills that perplexed and burdened her. Moor soon divined the real isolation of the girl, read the language of her wistful eyes, felt that he could serve her, and invited confidence by the cordial alacrity with which he met her least advance.

But while he served he learned to love her, for Sylvia, humble in her own conceit, and guarded by the secret passion that possessed her, freely showed the regard she felt, with no thought of misapprehension, no fear of consequences. Unconscious that such impulsive demonstration made her only more attractive, that every manifestation of her frank esteem was cherished in her friend’s heart of hearts, and that through her he was enjoying the blossom time of life. So peacefully and pleasantly the summer ripened into autumn and Sylvia’s interest into an enduring friendship.

CHAPTER VIII.

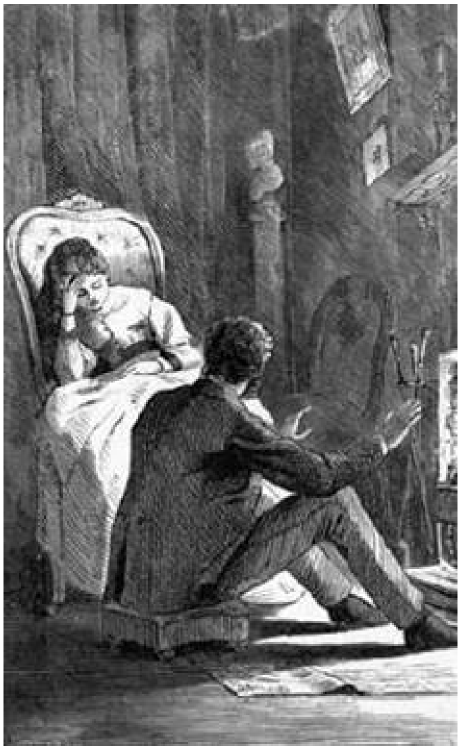
NO.

Drawn curtains shut out the frosty night, the first fire of the season burned upon the hearth, and basking in its glow sat Sylvia, letting her thoughts wander where they would. As books most freely open at pages oftenest read, the romance of her summer life seldom failed to unclose at passages where Warwick's name appeared. Pleasant as were many hours of that time, none seemed so full of beauty as those passed with him, and sweetest of them all the twilight journey hand in hand. It now returned to her so freshly that she seemed to hear again the evening sounds, to feel the warm, fern-scented wind blow over her, to see the strong hand offered helpfully, and with an impulse past control she stretched her own to that visionary Warwick as the longing of her heart found vent in an eager

"Come!"

"I am here."

A voice replied, a hand pressed hers, and springing up she saw, not Adam, but Moor, standing beside her with a beaming face. Concealing the thrill of joy, the pang of pain he had brought her, she greeted him cordially, and reseating herself, instinctively tried to turn the current of her thoughts.



"I am glad you came, for I have built castles in the air long enough, and you will give me more substantial entertainment, as you always do."

The broken dream had left tokens of its presence in the unwonted warmth of Sylvia's manner; Moor felt it, and for a moment did not answer. Much of her former shyness had crept over her of late; she sometimes shunned him, was less free in conversation, less frank in demonstration, and once or twice had colored deeply as she caught his eye upon her. These betrayals of Warwick's image in her thoughts seemed to Moor the happy omens he had waited eagerly to see, and each day his hope grew more assured. He had watched her unseen while she was busied with her mental pastime, and as he looked his heart had grown unspeakably tender, for never had her power over him been so fully felt, and never had he so longed to claim her in the name of his exceeding love. A pleasant peace reigned through the house, the girl sat waiting at his side, the moment looked auspicious, the desire grew irresistible, and he yielded to it.

"You are thinking of something new and pleasant to tell me, I hope, — something in keeping with this quiet place and hour," said Sylvia, glancing up at him with the traitorous softness still in her eyes.

"Yes, and hoping you would like it."

"Then I have never heard it before?"

"Never from me."

"Go on, please; I am ready."

She folded her hands together on her knee, turned her face attentively to his, and unwittingly composed herself to listen to the sweet story so often told, and yet so hard to tell. Moor meant to woo her very gently, for he believed that love was new to her. He had planned many graceful illustrations for his tale, and rounded many smoothly-flowing sentences in which to unfold it. But the emotions are not well bred, and when the moment came nature conquered art. No demonstration seemed beautiful enough to grace the betrayal of his passion, no language eloquent enough to tell it, no power strong enough to hold in check the impulse that mastered him. He went to her, knelt down upon the cushion at her feet, and lifting to her a face flushed and fervent with the ardor of a man's first love, said impetuously —

"Sylvia, read it here!"

There was no need for her to look; act, touch, and tone told the story better than the most impassioned speech. The supplication of his attitude, the eager beating of his heart, the tender pressure of his hand, dispelled her blindness in the drawing of a breath, and showed her what she had done. Now neglected warnings, selfish forgetfulness, and the knowledge of an unconscious but irremediable wrong frightened and bewildered her; she hid her face and shrunk back trembling with remorse and shame. Moor, seeing in her agitation only maiden happiness or hesitancy, accepted and enjoyed a blissful moment while he waited her reply. It was so long in coming that he gently tried to draw her hands away and look into her face, whispering like one scarcely doubtful of assent —

"You love me, Sylvia?"

"No."

Only half audible was the reluctant answer, yet he heard it, smiled at what he fancied a shy falsehood, and said tenderly —

"Will you let me love you, dear?"

"No."

Fainter than before was the one word, but it reached and startled him. Hurriedly he asked —

"Am I nothing to you but a friend?"

"No."

With a quick gesture he put down her hands and looked at her. Grief, regret, and pity, filled her face with trouble, but no love was there. He saw, yet would not believe the truth, felt that the sweet certainty of love had gone, yet could not relinquish the fond hope.

"Sylvia, do you understand me?"

"I do, I do! but I cannot say what you would have me, and I must tell the truth, although it breaks my heart. Geoffrey, I do not love you."

"Can I not teach you?" he pleaded eagerly.

"I have no desire to learn."

Softly she spoke, remorseful she looked, but the words wounded like a blow. All the glad assurance died, the passionate glow faded, the caress, half tender, half timid, fell away, and nothing of the happy lover remained in face or figure. He rose slowly as if the heavy disappointment oppressed both soul and body. He fixed on her a glance of mingled incredulity, reproach, and pain, and said, like one bent on ending suspense at once —

"Did you not see that I loved you? Can you have been trifling with me? Sylvia, I thought you too simple and sincere for heartless coquetry."

"I am! You shall not suspect me of that, though I deserve all other reproaches. I have been very selfish, very blind. I should have remembered that in your great kindness you might like me too well for your own peace. I should have believed Mark, and been less candid in my expressions of esteem. But I wanted a friend so much; I found all I could ask in you; I thought my youth, my faults, my follies, would make it impossible for you to see in me anything but a wayward girl, who frankly showed her regard, and was proud of yours. It was one of my sad mistakes; I see it now; and now it is too late for anything but penitence. Forgive me if you can; I've taken all the pleasure, and left you all the pain."

Sylvia spoke in a paroxysm of remorseful sorrow. Moor listened with a sinking heart, and when she dropped her face into her hands again, unable to endure the pale expectancy of his, he turned away, saying with an accent of quiet despair —

"Then I have worked and waited all this summer to see my harvest fail at last. Oh, Sylvia, I so loved, so trusted you."

He leaned his arm on the low chimney piece, laid down his head upon it and stood silent, trying to forgive.

It is always a hard moment for any woman, when it demands her bravest sincerity to look into a countenance of eager love, and change it to one of bitter disappointment by the utterance of a monosyllable. To Sylvia it was doubly hard, for now her blindness seemed as incredible as cruel; her past frankness unjustifiable; her pleasure selfish; her refusal the blackest ingratitude, and her dream of friendship forever marred. In the brief pause that fell, every little service he had rendered her, rose freshly in her memory; every hour of real content and genuine worth that he had given her, seemed to come back and reproach her; every look, accent, action, of both happy past and sad present seemed to plead for him. Her conscience cried out against her, her heart overflowed with penitence and pity. She looked at him, longing to say something, do something that should prove her repentance, and assure him of the affection which she felt. As she looked, two great tears fell glittering to the hearth, and lay there such eloquent reproaches, that, had Sylvia's heart been hard and cold as the marble where they shone, it would have melted then. She could not bear it, she went to him, took in both her own the rejected hand that hung at his side, and feeling that no act could too tenderly express her sorrow, lifted it to her lips and softly kissed it.

An instant she was permitted to lay her cheek against it as a penitent child mutely imploring pardon might have done. Then it broke from her hold, and gathering her to himself, Moor looked up exclaiming with renewed hope, unaltered longing —

"You do care for me, then? You give yourself to me in spite of that hard No? Ah, Sylvia, you are capricious even in your love."

She could not answer, for if that first No had been hard to utter, this was impossible. It seemed like turning the knife in the wound, to disappoint the hope that had gathered strength from despair, and she could only lay her head down on his breast, weeping the saddest tears she had ever shed. Still happy in his new delusion, Moor softly stroked the shining hair, smiling so tenderly, so delightedly, that it was well for her she did not see the smile, the words were enough.

"Dear Sylvia, I have tried so hard to make you love me, how could you help it?"

The reason sprung to her lips, but maiden pride and shame withheld it. What could she tell except that she had cherished a passion, based only on a look. She had deceived herself in her belief that Moor was but a friend, might she not also have deceived herself in believing Warwick was a lover? She could not own this secret, its betrayal could not alter her reply, nor heal Moor's wound, but the thought of Warwick strengthened her. It always did, as surely as the influence of his friend always soothed her, for one was an embodiment of power, the other of tenderness.

"Geoffrey, let me be true to you and to myself," she said, so earnestly that it gave weight to her broken words. "I cannot be your wife, but I can be your dear friend forever. Try to believe this, — make my task easier by giving up your hope, — and oh, be sure that while I live I cannot do enough to show my sorrow for the great wrong I have done you."

"Must it be so? I find it very hard to accept the truth and give up the hope that has made my happiness so long. Let me keep it, Sylvia; let me wait and work again. I have a firm belief that you *will* love me yet, because I cleave to you with heart and soul, long for you continually, and think you the one woman of the world."

“Ah, if it were only possible!” she sighed.

“Let me make it so! In truth, I think I should not labor long. You are so young, dear, you have not learned to know your own heart yet. It was not pity nor penitence alone that brought you here to comfort me. Was it, Sylvia?”

“Yes. Had it been love, could I stand as I am now and not show it?”

She looked up at him, showed him that though her cheeks were wet there was no rosy dawn of passion there; though her eyes were as full of affection as of grief, there was no shy avoidance of his own, no dropping of the lids, lest they should tell too much; and though his arm encircled her, she did not cling to him as loving women cling when they lean on the strength which, touched by love, can both cherish and sustain. That look convinced him better than a flood of words. A long sigh broke from his lips, and, turning from her the eyes that had so wistfully searched and found not, they went wandering drearily hither and thither as if seeking the hope whose loss made life seem desolate. Sylvia saw it, groaned within herself, but still held fast to the hard truth, and tried to make it kinder.

“Geoffrey, I once heard you say to Mark, ‘Friendship is the best college character can graduate from. Believe in it, seek for it, and when it comes keep it as sacredly as love.’ All my life I have wanted a friend, have looked for one, and when he came I welcomed him. May I not keep him, and preserve the friendship dear and sacred still, although I cannot offer love?”

Softly, seriously, she spoke, but the words sounded cold to him; friendship seemed so poor now, love so rich, he could not leave the blessed sunshine which transfigured the whole earth and sit down in the little circle of a kindly fire without keen regret.

“I should say yes, I will try to do it if nothing easier remains to me. Sylvia, for five years I have longed and waited for a home. Duty forbade it then, because poor Marion had only me to make her sad life happy, and my mother left her to my charge. Now the duty is ended, the old house very empty, my heart very hungry for affection. You are all in all to me, and I find it so difficult to relinquish my dream that I must be importunate. I have spoken too soon, you have had no time to think, to look into yourself and question your own heart. Go, now, recall what I have said, remember that I will wait for you patiently, and when I leave, an hour hence, come down and give me my last answer.”

Sylvia was about to speak, but the sound of an approaching step brought over her the shyness she had not felt before, and without a word she darted from the room. Then romance also fled, for Prue came bustling in, and Moor was called to talk of influenzas, while his thoughts were full of love.

Alone in her chamber Sylvia searched herself. She pictured the life that would be hers with Moor. The old house so full of something better than its opulence, an atmosphere of genial tranquillity which made it home-like to whoever crossed its threshold. Herself the daily companion and dear wife of the master who diffused such sunshine there; whose serenity soothed her restlessness; whose affection would be as enduring as his patience; whose character she so truly honored. She felt that no woman need ask a happier home, a truer or more tender lover. But when she looked into herself she found the cordial, unimpassioned sentiment he first inspired still unchanged, and her heart answered —

“This is friendship.”

She thought of Warwick, and the other home that might be hers. Fancy painted in glowing colors the stirring life, the novelty, excitement, and ever new delight such wanderings would have for her. The joy of being always with him; the proud consciousness that she was nearest and dearest to such a man; the certainty that she might share the knowledge of his past, might enjoy his present, help to shape his future. There was no time to look into her heart, for up sprung its warm blood to her cheek, its hope to her eye, its longing to her lips, its answer glad and ready —

“Ah, this is love!”

The clock struck ten, and after lingering a little Sylvia went down. Slowly, because her errand was a hard one; thoughtfully, because she knew not where nor how she could best deliver it. No need to look for him or linger for his coming; he was already there. Alone in the hall, absently smoothing a little silken shawl she often wore, and waiting with a melancholy patience that smote her to the heart. He went to meet her, took both her hands in his, and looked into her face so tenderly, so wistfully! —

“Sylvia, is it good night or good by?”

Her eyes filled, her hands trembled, her color paled, but she answered steadily —

“Forgive me; it is good by.”

CHAPTER IX.

HOLLY.

“Another gift for you, Sylvia. I don’t know the writing, but it smells like flowers,” said Mark, as a smiling maid brought in a package on Christmas morning.

Sylvia tore off the wrapper, lifted a cover, and exclaimed with pleasure, though it was the simplest present she had received that day. Only an osier basket, graceful in design and shape, lined with moss, and filled with holly sprays, the scarlet berries glowing beautifully among the polished green. No note, no card, no hint of its donor anywhere appeared, for none of them recognized the boldly written address. Presently a thought came to Sylvia; in a moment the mystery seemed to grow delightfully clear, and she said to herself with a glow of joy, “This is so like Adam I know he sent it.”

“I must say it is the most peculiar present I ever saw, and it is my belief that the boy who brought it stole whatever article of value it contained, for it was very carelessly done up. No person in their senses would send a few sprigs of common holly to a young lady in this odd way,” said Prue, poking here and there in hopes of finding some clue.

“It is not common, but very beautiful; we seldom see any so large and green, and full of berries. Nor is it odd, but very kind, because from the worn look of the wrapper I know it has been sent a long way to please me. Look at the little ferns in the moss, and smell the sweet moist odor that seems to take us into summer woods in spite of a snowstorm. Ah, he knew what I should like.”

“Who knew?” asked Mark, quickly.

“You must guess.” And fearing that she had betrayed herself, Sylvia hurried across the room to put the holly in water.

“Ah, ha, I see,” said Mark, laughing.

“Who is it?” asked Prue, looking mystified.

“Geoffrey,” whispered Mr. Yule, with an air of satisfaction.

Then all three looked at one another, all three nodded sagely, and all three glanced at the small person bending over the table with cheeks almost as rosy as the berries in her hand.

Every one knows what a Christmas party is when a general friendliness pervades the air, and good wishes fly about like *confetti* during Carnival. To such an one went Sylvia and Mark that night, the brother looking unusually blithe and debonair, because the beloved Jessie had promised to be there if certain aunts and uncles would go away in time; the sister in a costume as pretty as appropriate, for snow and holly made her a perfect Yule. Sylvia loved dancing, and knew "wall flowers" only by sight; therefore she was busy; her lover's gift shone greenly in bosom, hair, and fleecy skirts; therefore she was beautiful, and the thought that Adam had not forgotten her lay warm at her heart; therefore she was supremely happy. Mark was devoted, but disappointed, for Jessie did not come, and having doomed the detaining aunts and uncles to a most unblessed fate, he sought consolation among less fair damsels.

"Now go and enjoy yourself. I shall dance no more round dances, for I'd rather not with any one but you, and you have been a martyr long enough."

Mark roamed away, and finding a cool corner Sylvia watched the animated scene before her till her wandering glance was arrested by the sight of a new comer, and her mind busied with trying to recollect where she had seen him. The slender figure, swarthy face, and vivacious eyes all seemed familiar, but she could find no name for their possessor till he caught her eye, when he half bowed and wholly smiled. Then she remembered, and while still recalling that brief interview one of their young hosts appeared with the stranger, and Gabriel André was duly presented.

"I could hardly expect to be remembered, and am much flattered, I assure you. Did you suffer from the shower that day, Miss Yule?"

The speech was nothing, but the foreign accent gave a softness to the words, and the southern grace of manner gave an air of romance to the handsome youth. Sylvia was in the mood to be pleased with everybody, everything, and was unusually gracious as they merrily pursued the subject suggested by his question. Presently he asked —

"Is Warwick with you now?"

"He was not staying with us, but with his friend, Mr. Moor."

"He was the gentleman who pulled so well that day?"

"Yes."

"Is Warwick with him still?"

"Oh, no, he went away three months ago."

"I wonder where!"

"So do I!"

The wish had been impulsively expressed, and was as impulsively echoed. Young André smiled, and liked Miss Yule the better for forgetting that somewhat lofty air of hers.

"You have no conjecture, then? I wish to find him, much, very much, but cannot put myself upon his trail. He is so what you call peculiar that he writes no letters, leaves no address, and roves here and there like a born gitano."

"Have you ill news for him?"

"I have the best a man could desire; but fear that while I look for him he has gone to make a disappointment for himself. You are a friend, I think?"

"I am."

"Then you know much of him, his life, his ways?"

"Yes, both from himself and Mr. Moor."

"Then you know of his betrothal to my cousin, doubtless, and I may speak of it, because if you will be so kind you may perhaps help us to find him."

"I did not know — perhaps he did not wish it — " began Sylvia, folding one hand tightly in the other, with a quick breath and a momentary sensation as if some one had struck her in the face.

"He thinks so little of us I shall not regard his wish just now. If you will permit me I would say a word for my cousin's sake, as I know you will be interested for her, and I do not feel myself strange with you."

Sylvia bowed, and standing before her with an air half mannish, half boyish, Gabriel went on in the low, rapid tone peculiar to him.

"See, then, my cousin was betrothed in May. A month after Adam cries out that he loves too much for his peace, that he has no freedom of his heart or mind, that he must go away and take his breath before he is made a happy slave forever. Ottila told me this. She implored him to stay; but no, he vows he will not come again till they marry, in the next June. He thinks it a weakness to adore a woman. Impertinente! I have no patience for him."

Gabriel spoke indignantly, and pressed his foot into the carpet with a scornful look. But Sylvia took no heed of his petulance, she only kept her eyes fixed upon him with an intentness which he mistook for interest. The eyes were fine, the interest was flattering, and though quite aware that he was both taking a liberty and committing a breach of confidence, the impulsive young gentleman chose to finish what he had begun, and trust that no harm would follow.

"He has been gone now more than half a year, but has sent no letter, no message, nothing to show that he still lives. Ottila waits, she writes, she grows too anxious to endure, she comes to look for him. I help her, but we do not find him yet, and meantime I amuse her. My friends are kind, and we enjoy much as we look about us for this truant Adam."

If Sylvia could have doubted the unexpected revelation, this last trait was so like Warwick it convinced her at once. Though the belief to which she had clung so long was suddenly swept from under her, she floated silently with no outward sign of shipwreck as her hope went down. Pride was her shield, and crowding back all other emotions she kept herself unnaturally calm behind it till she was alone. If Gabriel had been watching her he would only have discovered that she was a paler blonde than he had thought her; that her address was more coldly charming than before; and that her eye no longer met his, but rested steadily on the folded fan she held. He was not watching her, however, but glancing frequently over her head at something at the far end of the rooms which a crowd of assiduous gentlemen concealed. His eye wandered, but his thoughts did not; for still intent on the purpose that seemed to have brought him to her, he said, as if reluctant to be importunate, yet resolved to satisfy himself —

"Pardon me that I so poorly entertain you, and let me ask one other question in Ottila's name. This Moor, would he not give us some clue to Adam's haunts?"

"He is absent, and will be till spring, I think. Where I do not know, else I could write for you. Did Mr. Warwick promise to return in June?"

"Yes."

"Then, if he lives, he will come. Your cousin must wait; it will not be in vain."

"It shall not!"

The young man's voice was stern, and a passionate glitter made his black eyes fierce. Then the former suavity returned, and with his most gallant air he said —

"You are kind, Miss Yule; I thank you, and put away this so troublesome affair. May I have the honor?"

If he had proposed to waltz over a precipice Sylvia felt as if she could have accepted, provided there was time to ask a question or two before the crash came. A moment afterward Mark was surprised to see her floating round the room on the arm of "the olive-colored party," whom he recognized at once. His surprise soon changed to pleasure, for his beauty-loving eye as well as his brotherly pride was gratified as the whirling couples subsided and the young pair went circling slowly by, giving to the graceful pastime the enchantment few have skill to lend it, and making it a spectacle of life-enjoying youth to be remembered by the lookers on.

"Thank you! I have not enjoyed such a waltz since I left Cuba. It is the rudest of rude things to say, but to you I may confide it, because you dance like a Spaniard. The ladies here seem to me as cold as their own snow, and they make dancing a duty, not a pleasure. They should see Ottila; she is all grace and fire. I could kill myself dancing with her. Adam used to say it was like wine to watch her."

"I wish she was here to give us a lesson."

"She is, but will not dance to-night."

"Here!" cried Sylvia, stopping abruptly.

"Why not? Elyott is mad for her, and gave me no peace till I brought her. She is behind that wall of men; shall I make a passage for you? She will be glad to talk with you of Adam, and I to show you the handsomest woman in Habana."

"Let us wait a little; I should be afraid to talk before so many. She is very beautiful, then."

"You will laugh and call me extravagant, as others do, if I say what I think; so I will let you judge for yourself. See, your brother stands on tiptoe to peep at her. Now he goes in, and there he will stay. You do not like that, perhaps. But Ottila cannot help her beauty, nor the power she has of making all men love her. I wish she could!"

"She is gifted and accomplished, as well as lovely?" asked Sylvia, glancing at her companion's gloomy face.

"She is everything a woman should be, and I could shoot Adam for his cruel neglect."

Gabriel's dark face kindled as he spoke, and Sylvia drearily wished he would remember how ill-bred it was to tire her with complaints of her friend, and raptures over his cousin. He seemed to perceive this, turned a little haughty at her silence, and when he spoke was all the stranger again.

"This is a contra danza; shall we give the snow-ladies another lesson? First, may I do myself the pleasure of getting you an ice?"

"A glass of water, please; I am cool enough without more ice."

He seated her and went upon his errand. She was cool now; weary-footed, sick at heart, and yearning to be alone. But in these days women do not tear their hair and make scenes, though their hearts may ache and burn with the same sharp suffering as of old. Till her brother came she knew she must bear it, and make no sign. She did bear it, drank the water with a smile, danced the dance with spirit, and bore up bravely till Mark appeared. She was alone just then, and his first words were —

"Have you seen her?"

"No; take me where I can, and tell me what you know of her."

"Nothing, but that she is André's cousin, and he adores her, as boys always do a charming woman who is kind to them. Affect to be admiring these flowers, and look without her knowing it, or she will frown at you like an insulted princess, as she did at me."

Sylvia looked, saw the handsomest woman in Havana, and hated her immediately. It was but natural, for Sylvia was a very human girl, and Ottila one whom no woman would love, however much she might admire.

Hers was that type of character which every age has reproduced, varying externally with climates and conditions, but materially the same from fabled

Circe down to Lola Montes, or some less famous syren whose subjects are not kings. The same passions that in ancient days broke out in heaven-defying crimes; the same power of beauty, intellect, or subtlety; the same untamable spirit and lack of moral sentiment are the attributes of all; latent or alert as the noble or ignoble nature may predominate. Most of us can recall some glimpse of such specimens of Nature's work in a daring mood. Many of our own drawing-rooms have held illustrations of the nobler type, and modern men and women have quailed before royal eyes whose possessors ruled all spirits but their own. Born in Athens, and endowed with a finer intellect, Ottila might have been an Aspasia; or cast in that great tragedy the French Revolution, have played a brave part and died heroically like Roland and Corday. But set down in uneventful times, the courage, wit, and passion that might have served high ends dwindled to their baser counterparts, and made her what she was, — a fair allurement to the eyes of men, a born rival to the peace of women, a rudderless nature absolute as fate.

Sylvia possessed no knowledge that could analyze for her the sentiment which repelled, even while it attracted her toward Warwick's betrothed. That he loved her she did not doubt, because she felt that even his pride would yield to the potent fascination of this woman. As Sylvia looked, her feminine eye took in every gift of face and figure, every grace of attitude or gesture, every daintiness of costume, and found no visible flaw in Ottila, from her haughty head to her handsome foot. Yet when her scrutiny ended, the girl felt a sense of disappointment, and no envy mingled with her admiration.

As she stood, forgetting to assume interest in the camellias before her, she saw Gabriel join his cousin, saw her pause and look up at him with an anxious question. He answered it, glancing toward that part of the room where she was standing. Ottila's gaze was fixed upon her instantly; a rapid, but keen survey followed, and then the lustrous eyes turned away with such supreme indifference, that Sylvia's blood tingled as if she had received an insult.

"Mark, I am going home," she said, abruptly.

"Very well, I'm ready."

When safe in her own room Sylvia's first act was to take off the holly wreath, for her head throbbed with a heavy pain that forbade hope of sleep that night. Looking at the little chaplet so happily made, she saw that all the berries had fallen, and nothing but the barbed leaves remained. A sudden gesture crushed it in both her hands, and standing so, she gathered many a scattered memory to confirm that night's discovery.

Warwick had said, with such a tender accent in his voice, "I thought of the woman I would make my wife." That was Ottila. He had asked so anxiously, "If one should keep a promise when it disturbed one’s peace?” That was because he repented of his hasty vow to absent himself till June. It was not love she saw in his eyes the night they parted, but pity. He read her secret before that compassionate glance revealed it to herself, and he had gone away to spare her further folly. She had deceived herself, had blindly cherished a baseless hope, and this was the end. Even for the nameless gift she found a reason, with a woman’s skill, in self-torture. Moor had met Adam, had told his disappointment, and still pitying her Warwick had sent the pretty greeting to console her for the loss of both friend and lover.

This thought seemed to sting her into sudden passion. As if longing to destroy every trace of her delusion, she tore away the holly wreaths and flung them in the fire; took down the bow and arrow Warwick had made her from above the *étagère*, where she had arranged the spoils of her happy voyage, snapped them across her knee and sent them after the holly; followed by the birch canoe, and every pebble, moss, shell, or bunch of headed grass he had given her then. The osier basket was not spared, the box went next, and even the wrapper was on its way to immolation, when, as she rent it apart, with a stern pleasure in the sacrifice it was going to complete, from some close fold of the paper hitherto undisturbed a card dropped at her feet.

She caught it up and read in handwriting almost as familiar as her own: “To Sylvia, — A merry Christmas and best wishes from her friend, Geoffrey Moor.” The word “friend” was underscored, as if he desired to assure her that he still cherished the only tie permitted him, and sent the green token to lighten her regret that she could give no more.

Warm over Sylvia’s sore heart rushed the tender thought and longing, as her tears began to flow. “He cares for me! he remembered me! I wish he would come back and comfort me!”

CHAPTER X.

YES.

It is easy to say, “I will forget,” but perhaps the hardest task given us is to lock up a natural yearning of the heart, and turn a deaf ear to its plaint, for captive and jailer must inhabit the same small cell. Sylvia was proud, with that pride which is both sensitive and courageous, which can not only suffer but wring strength from suffering. While she struggled with a grief and shame that aged her with their pain, she asked no help, made no complaint; but when the forbidden passion stretched its arms to her, she thrust it back and turned to pleasure for oblivion.

Those who knew her best were troubled and surprised by the craving for excitement which now took possession of her, the avidity with which she gratified it, regardless of time, health, and money. All day she hurried here and there, driving, shopping, sight-seeing, or entertaining guests at home. Night brought no cessation of her dissipation, for when balls, masquerades, and concerts failed, there still remained the theatre. This soon became both a refuge and a solace, for believing it to be less harmful than other excitements, her father indulged her new whim. But, had she known it, this was the most dangerous pastime she could have chosen. Calling for no exertion of her own, it left her free to passively receive a stimulant to her unhappy love in watching its mimic semblance through all phases of tragic suffering and sorrow, for she would see no comedies, and Shakespeare’s tragedies became her study.

This lasted for a time, then the reaction came. A black melancholy fell upon her, and energy deserted soul and body. She found it a weariness to get up in the morning and weariness to lie down at night. She no longer cared even to seem cheerful, owned that she was spiritless, hoped she should be ill, and did not care if she died to-morrow. When this dark mood seemed about to become chronic she began to mend, for youth is wonderfully recuperative, and the deepest wounds soon heal even against the sufferer’s will. A quiet apathy replaced the gloom, and she let the tide drift her where it would, hoping nothing, expecting nothing, asking nothing but that she need not suffer any more.

She lived fast; all processes with her were rapid; and the secret experience of that winter taught her many things. She believed it had only taught her to forget, for now the outcast love lay very still, and no longer beat despairingly against the door of her heart, demanding to be taken in from the cold. She fancied that neglect had killed it, and that its grave was green with many tears. Alas for Sylvia! how could she know that it had only sobbed itself to sleep, and would wake beautiful and strong at the first sound of its master's voice.

Mark became eventful. In his fitful fashion he had painted a picture of the Golden Wedding, from sketches taken at the time. Moor had suggested and bespoken it, that the young artist might have a motive for finishing it, because, though he excelled in scenes of that description, he thought them beneath him, and tempted by more ambitious designs, neglected his true branch of the art. In April it was finished, and at his father's request Mark reluctantly sent it with his Clytemnestra to the annual exhibition. One morning at breakfast Mr. Yule suddenly laughed out behind his paper, and with a face of unmixed satisfaction passed it to his son, pointing to a long critique upon the Exhibition. Mark prepared himself to receive with becoming modesty the praises lavished upon his great work, but was stricken with amazement to find Clytemnestra disposed of in a single sentence, and the Golden Wedding lauded in a long enthusiastic paragraph.

"What the deuce does the man mean!" he ejaculated, staring at his father.

"He means that the work which warms the heart is greater than that which freezes the blood, I suspect. Moor knew what you could do and has made you do it, sure that if you worked for fame unconsciously you should achieve it. This is a success that I can appreciate, and I congratulate you heartily, my son."

"Thank you, sir. But upon my word I don't understand it, and if this wasn't written by the best Art critic in the country I should feel inclined to say the writer was a fool. Why that little thing was a daub compared to the other."

He got no farther in his protest against this unexpected freak of fortune, for Sylvia seized the paper and read the paragraph aloud with such happy emphasis amid Prue's outcries and his father's applause, that Mark began to feel that he really had done something praiseworthy, and that the "daub" was not so despicable after all.

"I'm going to look at it from this new point of sight," was his sole comment as he went away.

Three hours afterward he appeared to Sylvia as she sat sewing alone, and startled her with the mysterious announcement.

"I've done it!"

"Done what? Have you burnt poor Clytemnestra?"

"Hang Clytemnestra! I'll begin at the beginning and prepare you for the grand finale. I went to the Exhibition, and stared at Father Blake and his family for an hour. Decided that wasn't bad, though I still admire the other more. Then people began to come and crowd up, so that I slipped away for I couldn't stand the compliments. Dahlmann, Scott, and all the rest of my tribe were there, and, as true as my name is Mark Yule, every man of them ignored the Greek party and congratulated me upon the success of that confounded Golden Wedding."

"My dearest boy, I am so proud! so glad! What is the matter? Have you been bitten by a tarantula?"

She might well ask, for Mark was dancing all over the carpet in a most extraordinary style, and only stopped long enough to throw a little case into Sylvia's lap, asking as a whole faceful of smiles broke loose —

"What does that mean?"

She opened it, and a suspicious circlet of diamonds appeared, at sight of which she clapped her hands, and cried out —

"You're going to ask Jessie to wear it!"

"I have! I have!" sung Mark, dancing more wildly than ever. Sylvia chased him into a corner and held him there, almost as much excited as he, while she demanded a full explanation, which he gave her, laughing like a boy, and blushing like a girl.

"You have no business to ask, but of course I'm dying to tell you. I went from that Painter's Purgatory as we call it, to Mr. Hope's, and asked for Miss Jessie. My angel came down; I told her of my success, and she smiled as never a woman did before; I added that I'd only waited to make myself more worthy of her, by showing that I had talent, as well as love and money to offer her, and she began to cry, whereat I took her in my arms and ascended straight into heaven."

"Please be sober, Mark, and tell me all about it. Was she glad? Did she say she would? And is everything as we would have it?"

"It is all perfect, divine, and rapturous, to the last degree. Jessie has liked me ever since she was born, she thinks; adores you and Prue for sisters; yearns to call my parent father; allowed me to say and do whatever I liked; and gave me a ravishing kiss just there. Sacred spot; I shall get a mate to it when I put this on her blessed little finger. Try it for me, I want it to be right, and your hands are of a size. That fits grandly. When shall I see a joyful sweetheart doing this on his own behalf, Sylvia?"

"Never!"

She shook off the ring as if it burned her, watching it roll glittering away, with a somewhat tragical expression. Then she calmed herself, and sitting down to her work, enjoyed Mark's raptures for an hour.

The distant city bells were ringing nine that night as a man paused before Mr. Yule's house, and attentively scrutinized each window. Many were alight, but on the drawn curtain of one a woman’s shadow came and went. He watched it a moment, passed up the steps, and noiselessly went in. The hall was bright and solitary; from above came the sound of voices, from a room to the right, the stir of papers and the scratch of a pen, from one on the left, a steady rustle as of silk, swept slowly to and fro. To the threshold of this door the man stepped and looked in.

Sylvia was just turning in her walk, and as she came musing down the room, Moor saw her well. With some women dress has no relation to states of mind; with Sylvia it was often an indication of the mental garb she wore. Moor remembered this trait, and saw in both countenance and costume the change that had befallen her in his long absence. Her face was neither gay nor melancholy, but serious and coldly quiet, as if some inward twilight reigned. Her dress, a soft, sad grey, with no decoration but a knot of snowdrops in her bosom. On these pale flowers her eyes were fixed, and as she walked with folded arms and drooping head, she sang low to herself —

‘Upon the convent roof, the snows
Lie sparkling to the moon;
My breath to heaven like incense goes,
May my soul follow soon.
Lord, make my spirit pure and clear,
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snowdrop of the year,
That in my bosom lies.’

“Sylvia!”

Very gentle was the call, but she started as if it had been a shout, looked an instant while light and color flashed into her face, then ran to him exclaiming joyfully —

“Oh, Geoffrey! I am glad! I am glad!”

There could be but one answer to such a welcome, and Sylvia received it as she stood there, not weeping now, but smiling with the sincerest satisfaction, the happiest surprise. Moor shared both emotions, feeling as a man might feel when, parched with thirst, he stretches out his hand for a drop of rain, and receives a brimming cup of water. He drank a deep draught gratefully, then, fearing that it might be as suddenly withdrawn, asked anxiously —

“Sylvia, are we friends or lovers?”

“Anything, if you will only stay.”

She looked up as she spoke, and her face betrayed that a conflict between desire and doubt was going on within her. Impulse had sent her there, and now it was so sweet to know herself beloved, she found it hard to go away. Her brother's happiness had touched her heart, roused the old craving for affection, and brought a strong desire to fill the aching void her lost love had left with this recovered one. Sylvia had not learned to reason yet, she could only feel, because, owing to the unequal development of her divided nature, the heart grew faster than the intellect. Instinct was her surest guide, and when she followed it unblinded by a passion, unthwarted by a mood, she prospered. But now she was so blinded and so thwarted, and now her great temptation came. Ambition, man's idol, had tempted the father; love, woman's god, tempted the daughter; and, as if the father's atonement was to be wrought out through his dearest child the daughter also made the fatal false step of her life.

"Then you *have* learned to love me, Sylvia?"

"No, the old feeling has not changed except to grow more remorseful, more eager to prove its truth. Once you asked me if I did not wish to love you; then I did not, now I sincerely do. If you still want me with my many faults, and will teach me in your gentle way to be all I should to you, I will gladly learn, because I never needed love as I do now. Geoffrey, shall I stay or go?"

"Stay, Sylvia. Ah, thank God for this!"

If she had ever hoped that Moor would forget her for his own sake, she now saw how vain such hope would have been, and was both touched and troubled by the knowledge of her supremacy which that hour gave her. She was as much the calmer as friendship is than love, and was the first to speak again, still standing there content although her words expressed a doubt.

"Are you very sure you want me? Are you not tired of the thorn that has fretted you so long? Remember, I am so young, so ignorant, and unfitted for a wife. Can I give you real happiness? make home what you would have it? and never see in your face regret that some wiser, better woman was not in my place?"

"I am sure of myself, and satisfied with you, as you are no wiser, no better, nothing but my Sylvia."

"It is very sweet to hear you say that with such a look. I do not deserve it but I will. Is the pain I once gave you gone now, Geoffrey?"

"Gone forever."

"Then I am satisfied, and will begin my life anew by trying to learn well the lesson my kind master is to teach me."

When Moor went that night Sylvia followed him, and as they stood together this happy moment seemed to recall that other sad one, for taking her hands again he asked, smiling now —

“Dear, is it good night or good by?”
“It is good by and come to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XI.

WOOING.

Nothing could have been more unlike than the two pairs of lovers who from April to August haunted Mr. Yule's house. One pair was of the popular order, for Mark was tenderly tyrannical, Jessie adoringly submissive, and at all hours of the day they were to be seen making tableaux of themselves. The other pair were of the peculiar order, undemonstrative and unsentimental, but quite as happy. Moor knew his power, but used it generously, asking little while giving much. Sylvia as yet found nothing to regret, for so gently was she taught, the lesson could not seem hard, and when her affection remained unchanged in kind, although it deepened in degree, she said within herself —

"That strong and sudden passion was not true love, but an unwise, unhappy delusion of my own. I should be glad that it is gone, because I know I am not fit to be Warwick's wife. This quiet feeling which Geoffrey inspires must be a safer love for me, and I should be grateful that in making his happiness I may yet find my own."

She tried heartily to forget herself in others, unconscious that there are times when the duty we owe ourselves is greater than that we owe to them. In the atmosphere of cheerfulness that now surrounded her she could not but be cheerful, and soon it would have been difficult to find a more harmonious household than this. One little cloud alone remained to mar the general sunshine. Mark was in a frenzy to be married, but had set his heart on a double wedding, and Sylvia would not fix the time, always pleading —

"Let me be quite sure of myself before I take this step, and do not wait."

Matters stood thus till Mark, having prepared his honeymoon cottage, as a relief to his impatience, found it so irresistible that he announced his marriage for the first of August, and declared no human power should change his purpose. Sylvia promised to think of it, but gave no decided answer, for though she would hardly own it to herself she longed to remain free till June was past. It came and went without a sign, and July began before the longing died a sudden death, and she consented to be married.

Mark and Jessie came in from the city one warm morning and found Sylvia sitting idly in the hall. She left her preparations all to Prue, who revelled in such things, and applied herself diligently to her lesson as if afraid she might not learn it as she should. Half way up stairs Mark turned and said, laughing —

"Sylvia, I saw Searle to-day, — one of the fellows whom we met on the river last summer, — and he began to tell me something about André and the splendid cousin, who is married and gone abroad it seems. I did not hear much, for Jessie was waiting; but you remember the handsome Cubans we saw at Christmas, don't you?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I thought you'd like to know that the lad had gone home to Cleopatra's wedding, so you cannot have him to dance at yours. Have you forgotten how you waltzed that night?"

"No, I've not forgotten."

Mark went off to consult Prue, and Jessie began to display her purchases before eyes that only saw a blur of shapes and colors, and expatiate upon their beauties to ears that only heard the words — "The splendid cousin is married and gone abroad."

"I should enjoy these pretty things a thousand times more if you would please us all by being married when we are," sighed Jessie, looking at her pearls.

"I will."

"What, really? Sylvia, you are a perfect darling! Mark! Prue! she says she will!"

Away flew Jessie to proclaim the glad tidings, and Sylvia, with a curious expression of relief, regret, and resolve, repeated to herself that decided —

"I will."

Every one took care that Miss Caprice should not have time to change her mind. The whole house was soon in a bustle, for Prue ruled supreme. Mr. Yule fled from the din of women's tongues, the bridegrooms were kept on a very short allowance of bride, and Sylvia and Jessie were almost invisible, for milliners and mantua-makers swarmed about them till they felt like animated pin-cushions. The last evening came at length, and Sylvia was just planning an escape into the garden when Prue, whose tongue wagged as rapidly as her hands worked, exclaimed —

"How can you stand staring out of window when there is so much to do? Here are all these trunks to pack, Maria in her bed with every tooth in a frightful state of inflammation, and that capable Jane What's-her-name gone off while I was putting a chamomile poultice on her face. If you are tired sit down and try on all your shoes, for though Mr. Peggit has your measure, those absurd clerks seem to think it a compliment to send children's sizes to grown women. I'm sure my rubbers were a perfect insult."

Sylvia sat down, tugged on one boot and fell into a reverie with the other in her hand, while Prue clacked on like a wordmill in full operation.

"How I'm ever to get all these gowns into that trunk passes my comprehension. There's a tray for each, of course; but a ball dress is such a fractious thing. I could shake that Antoinette Roche for disappointing you at the last minute; and what you are to do for a maid, I don't know. You'll have so much dressing to do you will be quite worn out; and I want you to look your best on all occasions, for you will meet everybody. This collar won't wear well; Clara hasn't a particle of judgment, though her taste is sweet. These hose, now, are a good, firm article; I chose them myself. Do be sure you get all your things from the wash. At those great hotels there's a deal of pilfering, and you are so careless."

Here Sylvia came out of her reverie with a sigh that was almost a groan.

"Don't they fit? I knew they wouldn't!" said Prue, with an air of triumph.

"The boots suit me, but the hotels do not; and if it was not ungrateful, after all your trouble, I should like to make a bonfire of this roomful of haberdashery, and walk quietly away to my new home by the light of it."

As if the bare idea of such an awful proceeding robbed her of all strength, Miss Yule sat suddenly down in the trunk by which she was standing. Fortunately it was nearly full, but her appearance was decidedly ludicrous as she sat with the collar in one uplifted hand, the hose in the other, and the ball dress laid over her lap like a fainting lady; while she said, with imploring solemnity, which changed abruptly from the pathetic to the comic at the end of her speech —

"Sylvia, if I ever cherished a wish in this world of disappointment, it is that your wedding shall have nothing peculiar about it, because every friend and relation you've got expects it. Do let me have the comfort of knowing that every one was surprised and pleased; for if the expression was elegant (which it isn't, and only suggested by my trials with those dressmakers), I should say I was on pins and needles till it's all over. Bless me! and so I am, for here are three on the floor and one in my shoe." Prue paused to extract the appropriate figure of speech which she had chosen, and Sylvia said —

"If we have everything else as you wish it, would you mind if we didn't go the journey?"

"Of course I should. Every one goes a wedding trip, it's part of the ceremony; and if two carriages and two bridal pairs don't leave here to-morrow, I shall feel as if all my trouble had been thrown away."

"I'll go, Prue, I'll go; and you shall be satisfied. But I thought we might go from here in style, and then slip off on some quieter trip. I am so tired I dread the idea of frolicking for a whole month, as Mark and Jessie mean to do.”

It was Prue’s turn to groan now, and she did so dismally. But Sylvia had never asked a favor in vain, and this was not the moment to refuse to her anything, so worldly pride yielded to sisterly affection, and Prue said with resignation, as she fell to work more vigorously than ever, because she had wasted five good minutes —

“Do as you like, dear, you shall not be crossed on your last day at home. Ask Geoffrey, and if you are happy I’m satisfied.”

Before Sylvia could thank her sister there came a tap and a voice asking —

“Might I come in?”

“If you can get in,” answered Prue, as, reversing her plan in her hurry, she whisked the collar into a piecebag and the hose into a bandbox.

Moor paused on the threshold in a masculine maze, that one small person could need so much drapery.

“May I borrow Sylvia for a little while? A breath of air will do her good, and I want her bright and blooming for to-morrow, else young Mrs. Yule will outshine young Mrs. Moor.”

“What a thoughtful creature you are, Geoffrey. Take her and welcome, only pray put on a shawl, Sylvia, and don’t stay out late, for a bride with a cold in her head is the saddest of spectacles.”

Glad to be released Sylvia went away, and, dropping the shawl as soon as she was out of Prue’s sight, paced up and down the garden walks upon her lover’s arm. Having heard her wish and given a hearty assent Moor asked —

“Where shall we go? Tell me what you would like best and you shall have it. You will not let me give you many gifts, but this pleasure you will accept from me I know.”

“You give me yourself, that is more than I deserve. But I should like to have you take me to the place you like best. Don’t tell me beforehand, let it be a surprise.”

“I will, it is already settled, and I know you will like it. Is there no other wish to be granted, no doubt to be set at rest, or regret withheld that I should know? Tell me, Sylvia, for if ever there should be confidence between us it is now.”

As he spoke the desire to tell him of her love for Adam rose within her, but with the desire came a thought that modified the form in which impulse prompted her to make confession. Moor was both sensitive and proud, would not the knowledge of the fact mar for him the friendship that was so much to both? From Warwick he would never learn it, from her he should have only a half confidence, and so love both friend and wife with an untroubled heart. Few of us can always control the rebellious nature that so often betrays and then reproaches, few always weigh the moment and the act that bans or blesses it, and where is the life that has not known some turning-point when a fugitive emotion has decided great issues for good or ill? Such an emotion came to Sylvia then, and another temptation, wearing the guise of generosity, urged her to another false step, for when the first is taken a second inevitably follows.

"I have no wish, no regret, nothing but the old doubt of my unstable self, and the fear that I may fail to make you happy. But I should like to tell you something. I don't know that you will care for it, or that there is any need to tell it, but when you said there should be confidence between us, I felt that I wanted you to know that I had loved some one before I loved you."

He did not see her face, he only heard her quiet voice. He had no thought of Adam, whom she had known so short a time, who was already bound; he only fancied that she spoke of some young lover who had touched her heart, and while he smiled at the nice sense of honor that prompted the innocent confession, he said, with no coldness, no curiosity in voice or face —

"No need to tell it, dear. I have no jealousy of any one who has gone before me. Rest assured of this, for if I could not share so large a heart with one who will never claim my share I should not deserve it."

"That is so like you! Now I am quite at ease."

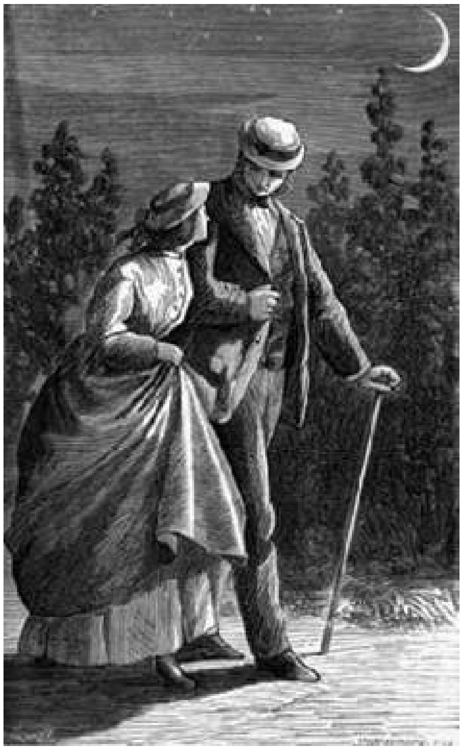
He looked down at her as she went beside him, thinking that of all the brides he had ever seen his own looked least like one.

"I always thought that you would make a very ardent lover, Sylvia. That you would be excited, gay, and brilliant at a time like this. But you are so quiet, so absorbed, and so unlike your former self that I begin to think I do not know you yet."

"You will in time. I am passionate and restless by nature, but I am also very sensitive to all influences, personal or otherwise, and were you different from your tranquil, sunshiny self, I too should change. I am quiet because I seem in a pleasant state, half-waking, half dreaming, from which I never wish to wake. I am tired of the past, contented with the present, and to you I leave the future."

"It shall be a happy one if I can make it so, and to-morrow you will give me the dear right to try."

"Yes," she said, and thinking of the solemn promises to be then made, she added, thoughtfully, "I think I love, I know I honor, I will try to obey. Can I do more?"



Well for them both if they could have known that friendship is love's twin, and the gentle sisters are too often mistaken for each other. That Sylvia was innocently deceiving both her lover and herself, by wrapping her friendship in the garb her lost love had worn, forgetting that the wanderer might return and claim its own, leaving the other to suffer for the borrowed warmth. They did not know it, and walked tranquilly together in the summer night, planning the new life as they went, and when they parted Moor pointed to a young moon hanging in the sky.

"See, Sylvia, our honeymoon has risen."

"May it be a happy one!"

"It will be, and when the anniversary of this glad night comes round it shall be shining still. God bless my little wife."

CHAPTER XII.

WEDDING.

Sylvia was awakened on her wedding morning by a curious choking sound, and starting up found Prue crying over her as if her heart were broken.

“What has happened? Is Geoffrey ill? Is all the silver stolen? Can’t the Bishop come?” she asked, wondering what calamity could move her sister to tears at such a busy time.

Prue took Sylvia in her arms, and rocking to and fro as if she were still a baby, poured forth a stream of words and tears together.

“Nothing has happened; I came to call you, and broke down because it was the last time I should do it. I’ve been awake all night, thinking of you and all you’ve been to me since I took you in my arms nineteen years ago, and said you should be mine. My little Sylvia, I’ve been neglectful of so many things, and now I see them all; I’ve fretted you with my ways, and haven’t been patient enough with yours; I’ve been selfish even about your wedding, and it won’t be as you like it; you’ll reproach me in your heart, and I shall hate myself for it when you are gone never to be my care and comfort any more. And — oh, my dear, my dear, what shall I do without you?”

This unexpected demonstration from her prosaic sister touched Sylvia more than the most sentimental lamentations from another. It brought to mind all the past devotion, the future solitude of Prue’s life, and she clung about her neck tearless but very tender.

“I never shall reproach you, never cease to love and thank you for all you’ve been to me, my dear old girl. You mustn’t grieve over me, or think I shall forget you, for you never shall be forsaken; and very soon I shall be back, almost as much your Sylvia as ever. Mark will live on one side, I shall live on the other, and we’ll be merry and cosy together. And who knows but when we are both out of your way you will learn to think of yourself and marry also.”

At this Prue began to laugh hysterically, and exclaimed, with more than her usual incoherency —

“I must tell you, it was so very odd! I didn’t mean to do so, because you children would tease me; but now I will to make you laugh, for it’s a bad omen to cry over a bride, they say. My dear, that gouty Mr. MacGregor, when I went in with some of my nice broth last week (Hugh slops so, and he's such a fidget, I took it myself), after he had eaten every drop before my eyes, wiped his mouth and asked me to marry him."

"And you would not, Prue?"

"Bless me, child, how could I? I must take care of my poor dear father, and he isn't pleasant in the least, you know, but would wear my life out in a week. I really pitied him, however, when I refused him, with a napkin round his neck, and he tapped his waistcoat with a spoon so comically, when he offered me his heart, as if it were something good to eat."

"How very funny! What made him do it, Prue?"

"He said he'd watched the preparations from his window, and got so interested in weddings that he wanted one himself, and felt drawn to me I was so sympathetic. That means a good nurse and cook, my dear. I understand these invalid gentlemen, and will be a slave to no man so fat and fussy as Mr. Mac, as my brother calls him. It's not respectful, but I like to refresh myself by saying it just now."

"Never mind the old soul, Prue, but go and have your breakfast comfortably, for there's much to be done, and no one is to dress me but your own dear self."

At this Prue relapsed into the pathetic again, and cried over her sister as if, despite the omen, brides were plants that needed much watering.

The appearance of the afflicted Maria, with her face still partially eclipsed by the chamomile comforter, and an announcement that the waiters had come and were "ordering round dreadful," caused Prue to pocket her handkerchief and descend to turn the tables in every sense of the word.

The prospect of the wedding breakfast made the usual meal a mere mockery. Every one was in a driving hurry, every one was very much excited, and nobody but Prue and the colored gentlemen brought anything to pass. Sylvia went from room to room bidding them good-by as the child who had played there so long. But each looked unfamiliar in its state and festival array, and the old house seemed to have forgotten her already. She spent an hour with her father, paid Mark a little call in the studio where he was bidding adieu to the joys of bachelorhood, and preparing himself for the jars of matrimony by a composing smoke, and then Prue claimed her.

The agonies she suffered during that long toilet are beyond the powers of language to portray, for Prue surpassed herself and was the very essence of fussiness. But Sylvia bore it patiently as a last sacrifice, because her sister was very tender-hearted still, and laughed and cried over her work till all was done, when she surveyed the effect with pensive satisfaction.

"You are very sweet, my dear, and so delightfully calm, you really do surprise me. I always thought you'd have hysterics on your wedding-day, and got my *vinaigrette* all ready. Keep your hands just as they are, with the handkerchief and bouquet, it looks very easy and rich. Dear me, what a spectacle I've made of myself! But I shall cry no more, not even during the ceremony as many do. Such displays of feeling are in very bad taste, and I shall be firm, perfectly firm, so if you hear any one sniff you'll know it isn't me. Now I must go and scramble on my dress; first, let me arrange you smoothly in a chair. There, my precious, now think of soothing things, and don't stir till Geoffrey comes for you."

Too tired to care what happened just then, Sylvia sat as she was placed, feeling like a fashion-plate of a bride, and wishing she could go to sleep. Presently the sound of steps as fleet as Mark's but lighter, waked her up, and forgetting orders, she rustled to the door with an expression which fashion-plates have not yet attained.

"Good morning, little bride."

"Good morning, bonny bridegroom."

Then they looked at one another, and both smiled. But they seemed to have changed characters, for Moor's usually tranquil face was full of pale excitement; Sylvia's usually vivacious one, full of quietude, and her eyes wore the unquestioning content of a child who accepts some friendly hand, sure that it will lead it right.

"Prue desires me to take you out into the upper hall, and when Mr. Deane beckons, we are to go down at once. The rooms are full, and Jessie is ready. Shall we go?"

"One moment: Geoffrey, are you quite happy now?"

"Supremely happy!"

"Then it shall be the first duty of my life to keep you so," and with a gesture soft yet solemn, Sylvia laid her hand in his, as if endowing him with both gift and giver. He held it fast and never let it go until it was his own.

In the upper hall they found Mark hovering about Jessie like an agitated bee, about a very full-blown flower, and Clara Deane flapping him away, lest he should damage the effect of this beautiful white rose. For ten minutes, ages they seemed, the five stood together listening to the stir below, looking at one another, till they were tired of the sight and scent of orange blossoms, and wishing that the whole affair was safely over. But the instant a portentous "Hem!" was heard, and a white glove seen to beckon from the stair foot, every one fell into a flutter. Moor turned paler still, and Sylvia felt his heart beat hard against her hand. She herself was seized with a momentary desire to run away and say "No" again; Mark looked as if nerving himself for immediate execution, and Jessie feebly whispered —

"Oh, Clara, I'm going to faint!"

"Good heavens, what shall I do with her? Mark, support her! My darling girl, smell this and bear up. For mercy sake do something, Sylvia, and don't stand there looking as if you'd been married every day for a year."

In his excitement, Mark gave his bride a little shake. Its effect was marvellous. She rallied instantly, with a reproachful glance at her crumpled veil and a decided —

"Come quick, I can go now."

Down they went, through a wilderness of summer silks, black coats, and bridal gloves. How they reached their places none of them ever knew; Mark said afterward, that the instinct of self preservation led him to the only means of extrication that circumstances allowed. The moment the Bishop opened his book, Prue took out her handkerchief and cried steadily through the entire ceremony, for dear as were the proprieties, the "children" were dearer still.

At Sylvia's desire, Mark was married first, and as she stood listening to the sonorous roll of the service falling from the Bishop's lips, she tried to feel devout and solemn, but failed to do so. She tried to keep her thoughts from wandering, but continually found herself wondering if that sob came from Prue, if her father felt it very much, and when it would be done. She tried to keep her eyes fixed timidly upon the carpet as she had been told to do, but they would rise and glance about against her will.

One of these derelictions from the path of duty, nearly produced a catastrophe. Little Tilly, the gardener's pretty child, had strayed in from among the servants peeping at a long window in the rear, and established herself near the wedding group, looking like a small ballet girl in her full white frock and wreath pushed rakishly askew on her curly pate. As she stood regarding the scene with dignified amazement, her eye met Sylvia's. In spite of the unusual costume, the baby knew her playmate, and running to her, thrust her head under the veil with a delighted "Peep a bo!" Horror seized Jessie, Mark was on the brink of a laugh, and Moor looked like one fallen from the clouds. But Sylvia drew the little marplot close to her with a warning word, and there she stayed, quietly amusing herself with "pooring" the silvery dress, smelling the flowers and staring at the Bishop.

After this, all prospered. The gloves came smoothly off, the rings went smoothly on; no one cried but Prue, no one laughed but Tilly; the brides were admired, the grooms envied; the service pronounced impressive, and when it ended, a tumult of congratulations arose.

Sylvia always had a very confused idea of what happened during the next hour. She remembered being kissed till her cheeks burned, and shaken hands with till her fingers tingled; bowing in answer to toasts, and forgetting to reply when addressed by the new name; trying to eat and drink, and discovering that everything tasted of wedding cake; finding herself up stairs hurrying on her travelling dress, then down stairs saying good by; and when her father embraced her last of all, suddenly realizing with a pang, that she was married and going away, never to be little Sylvia any more.

Prue *was* gratified to her heart’s content, for, when the two bridal carriages had vanished with handkerchiefs flying from their windows, in answer to the white whirlwind on the lawn, Mrs. Grundy, with an approving smile on her aristocratic countenance, pronounced this the most charming affair of the season.

CHAPTER XIII.

SYLVIA'S HONEYMOON.

It began with a pleasant journey. Day after day they loitered along country roads that led them through many scenes of summer beauty; pausing at old-fashioned inns and wayside farmhouses, or gipsying at noon in some green nook where their four-footed comrades dined off their tablecloth while they made merry over the less simple fare their last hostess had provided for them. When the scenery was uninteresting, as was sometimes the case, for Nature will not disturb her domestic arrangements for any bridal pair, one or the other read aloud, or both sang, while conversation was a never-failing pastime and silence had charms which they could enjoy. Sometimes they walked a mile or two, ran down a hillside, rustled through a grain field, strolled into an orchard, or feasted from fruitful hedges by the way, as care-free as the squirrels on the wall, or the jolly brown bees lunching at the sign of "The Clover-top." They made friends with sheep in meadows, cows at the brook, travellers morose or bland, farmers full of a sturdy sense that made their chat as wholesome as the mould they delved in; school children barefooted and blithe, and specimens of womankind, from the buxom housewife who took them under her motherly wing at once, to the sour, snuffy, shoe-binding spinster with "No Admittance" written all over her face.

To Moor the world was glorified with the purple light which seldom touches it but once for any of us; the journey was a wedding march, made beautiful by summer, victorious by joy; his young wife the queen of women, and himself an equal of the gods because no longer conscious of a want. Sylvia could not be otherwise than happy, for finding unbounded liberty and love her portion, she had nothing to regret, and regarded marriage as an agreeable process which had simply changed her name and given her protector, friend, and lover all in one. She was therefore her sweetest and sincerest self, miraculously docile, and charmingly gay; interested in all she saw, and quite overflowing with delight when the last days of the week betrayed the secret that her destination was the mountains.

Loving the sea so well, her few flights from home had given her only marine experiences, and the flavor of entire novelty was added to the feast her husband had provided for her. It came to her not only when she could enjoy it most, but when she needed it most, soothing the unquiet, stimulating the nobler elements which ruled her life by turns and fitting her for what lay before her. Choosing the quietest roads, Moor showed her the wonders of a region whose wild grandeur and beauty make its memory a life-long satisfaction. Day after day they followed mountain paths, studying the changes of an ever-varying landscape, watching the flush of dawn redden the granite fronts of these Titans scarred with centuries of storm, the lustre of noon brood over them until they smiled, the evening purple wrap them in its splendor, or moonlight touch them with its magic; till Sylvia, always looking up at that which filled her heart with reverence and awe, was led to look beyond, and through the medium of the friend beside her learned that human love brings us nearer to the Divine, and is the surest means to that great end.

The last week of the honeymoon came all too soon, for then they had promised to return. The crowning glory of the range was left until the last, and after a day of memorable delights Sylvia sat in the sunset feasting her eyes upon the wonders of a scene which is indescribable, for words have limits and that is apparently illimitable. Presently Moor came to her asking —

“Will you join a party to the great ice palace, and see three acres of snow in August, worn by a waterfall into a cathedral, as white if not as durable as any marble?”

“I sit so comfortably here I think I had rather not. But you must go because you like such wonders, and I shall rest till you come back.”

“Then I shall take myself off and leave you to muse over the pleasures of the day, which for a few hours has made you one of the most eminent women this side the Rocky Mountains. There is a bugle at the house here with which to make the echoes, I shall take it with me, and from time to time send up a sweet reminder that you are not to stray away and lose yourself.”

Sylvia sat for half an hour, then wearied by the immensity of the wide landscape she tried to rest her mind by examining the beauties close at hand. Strolling down the path the sight-seers had taken, she found herself in a rocky basin, scooped in the mountain side like a cup for a little pool, so clear and bright it looked a diamond set in jet. A fringe of scanty herbage had collected about its brim, russet mosses, purple heath, and delicate white flowers, like a band of tiny hill people keeping their revels by some fairy well. The spot attracted her, and remembering that she was not to stray away, she sat down beside the path to wait for her husband’s return.

In the act of bending over the pool to sprinkle the thirsty little company about it, her hand was arrested by the tramp of approaching feet, and looking up to discover who was the disturber of her retreat, she saw a man pausing at the top of the path opposite to that by which she had come. He seemed scrutinizing the solitary occupant of the dell before descending; but as she turned her face to him he flung away knapsack, hat, and staff, and then with a great start she saw no stranger, but Adam Warwick. Coming down to her so joyfully, so impetuously, she had only time to recognise him, and cry out, when she was swept up in an embrace as tender as irresistible, and lay there conscious of nothing, but that happiness like some strong swift angel had wrapt her away into the promised land so long believed in, hungered for, and despaired of, as forever lost. Soon she heard his voice, breathless, eager, but so fond it seemed another voice than his.

"My darling! did you think I should never come?"

"I thought you had forgotten me, I knew you were married. Adam, put me down."

But he only held her closer, and laughed such a happy laugh that Sylvia felt the truth before he uttered it.

"How could I marry, loving you? How could I forget you even if I had never come to tell you this? Sylvia, I know much that has passed. Geoffrey's failure gave me courage to hope for success, and that the mute betrothal made with a look so long ago had been to you all it has been to me."

"Adam, you are both right and wrong, — you do not know all, — let me tell you," — began Sylvia, as these proofs of ignorance brought her to herself with a shock of recollection and dismay. But Warwick was as absolute in his happiness as he had been in his self-denial, and took possession of her mentally as well as physically with a despotism too welcome and entire to be at once resisted.

"You shall tell me nothing till I have shown the cause of my hard-seeming silence. I must throw off that burden first, then I will listen to you until morning if you will. I have earned this moment by a year of effort, let me keep you here and enjoy it without alloy."

The old charm had lost none of its power, for absence seemed to have gifted it with redoubled potency, the confirmation of that early hope to grace it with redoubled warmth. Sylvia let him keep her, feeling that he had earned that small reward for a year's endeavor, resolving to grant all now left her to bestow, a few moments more of blissful ignorance, then to show him his loss and comfort him, sure that her husband would find no disloyalty in a compassion scarcely less deep and self-forgetful than his own would have been had he shared their secret. Only pausing to place himself upon the seat she had left, Warwick put off her hat, and turning her face to his regarded it with such unfeigned and entire content her wavering purpose was fixed by a single look. Then as he began to tell the story of the past she forgot everything but the rapid words she listened to, the countenance she watched, so beautifully changed and softened, it seemed as if she had never seen the man before, or saw him now as we sometimes see familiar figures glorified in dreams. In the fewest, kindest words Warwick told her of Ottila, the promise and the parting; then, as if the dearer theme deserved less brevity, he lingered on it as one lingers at a friend's door, enjoying in anticipation the welcome he is sure awaits him.

"The night we walked together by the river — such a wilful yet winning comrade as I had that day, and how I enjoyed it all! — that night I suspected that Geoffrey loved you, Sylvia, and was glad to think it. A month later I was sure of it, and found in that knowledge the great hardship of my life, because I loved you myself. Audacious thing! how dared you steal into my heart and take possession when I had turned my last guest out and barred the door? I thought I had done with the sentiment that had so nearly wrecked me once, but see how blind I was — the false love only made me readier for the true. You never seemed a child to me, Sylvia, because you have an old soul in a young body, and your father's trials and temptations live again in you. This first attracted me. I liked to watch, to question, to study the human enigma to which I had found a clue from its maker's lips. I liked your candor and simplicity, your courage and caprice. Even your faults found favor in my eyes; for pride, will, impetuosity were old friends of mine, and I liked to see them working in another shape. At first you were a curiosity, then an amusement, then a necessity. I wanted you, not occasionally, but constantly. You put salt and savor into life for me; for whether you spoke or were silent, were sweet or sour, friendly or cold, I was satisfied to feel your nearness, and always took away an inward content which nothing else could give me. This affection was so unlike the other that I deceived myself for a time — not long. I soon knew what had befallen me, soon felt that this sentiment was good to feel, because I forgot my turbulent and worser self and felt the nobler regenerated by the innocent companionship you gave me. I wanted you, but it was not the touch of hands or lips, the soft encounter of eyes, the tones of tenderness, I wanted most. It was that something beyond my reach, vital and vestal, invisible, yet irresistible; that something, be it heart, soul, or mind, which drew me to you by an attraction genial and genuine as itself. My Sylvia, that was love, and when it came to me I took it in, sure that whether its fruition was granted or denied I should be a manlier man for having harbored it even for an hour. Why turn your face away? Well, hide it if you will, but lean here as you did once so long ago."

She let him lay it on his shoulder, still feeling that Moor was one to look below the surface of these things and own that she did well in giving so pure a love a happy moment before its death, as she would have cherished Warwick had he laid dying.

"On that September evening, as I sat alone, I had been thinking of what might be and what must be. Had decided that I would go away for Geoffrey's sake. He was fitter than I to have you, being so gentle, and in all ways ready to possess a wife. I was so rough, such a vagrant, so full of my own purposes and plans, how could I dare to take into my keeping such a tender little creature as yourself? I thought you did not care for me; I knew any knowledge of my love would only mar his own; so it was best to go at once and leave him to the happiness he so well deserved. Just then you came to me, as if the wind had blown my desire to my arms. Such a loving touch that was! it nearly melted my resolve, it seemed hard not to take the one thing I wanted, when it came to me so opportunely. I yearned to break that idle promise, made when I was vain in my own conceit, and justly punished for its folly; but you said keep it, and I did. You could not understand my trouble, and when I sat before you so still, perhaps looking grim and cold, you did not know how I was wrestling with my unruly self. I am not truly generous, for the relinquishment of any cherished object always costs a battle, and I too often find I am worsted. For the first time I dared not meet your eyes till you dived into mine with that expression wistful and guileless, which has often made me feel as if we stood divested of our bodies, soul to soul.

"Tongue I could control, heart I could not. Up it sprung stronger than will, swifter than thought, and answered you. Sylvia, had there been one ray of self-consciousness in those steady eyes of yours, one atom of maiden shame, or fear, or trouble, I should have claimed you as my own. There was not; and though you let me read your face like an open book, you never dreamed what eloquence was in it. Innocent heart, that loved and had not learned to know it. I saw this instantly, saw that a few more such encounters would show it to you likewise, and felt more strongly than before that if ever the just deed to you, the generous one to Geoffrey were done, it should be then. For that was the one moment when your half-awakened heart could fall painlessly asleep again, if I did not disturb it, and dream on till Geoffrey woke it, to find a gentler master than I could be to it."

"It could not, Adam; you had wholly roused it, and it cried for you so long, so bitterly, oh, why did you not come to answer it before?"

"How could I till the year was over? Was I not obeying you in keeping that accursed promise? God knows I have made many blunders, but I think the most senseless was that promise; the most short-sighted, that belief. What right had I to fetter my tongue, or try to govern love? Shall I ever learn to do my own work aright, and not meddle with the Lord's? Sylvia, take this presumptuous and domineering devil out of me in time, lest I blunder as blindly after you are mine as I have before. Now let me finish before Mark comes to find us. I went away, you know, singing the farewell I dared not speak, and for nine months kept myself sane and steady with whatever my hands found to do. If ever work of mine is blessed it will be that, for into it I put the best endeavor of my life. Though I had renounced you, I kept my love; let it burn day and night, fed it with labor and with prayer, trusting that this selfish heart of mine might be recast and made a fitter receptacle for an enduring treasure. In May, far at the West, I met a woman who knew Geoffrey; had seen him lately, and learned that he had lost you. She was his cousin, I his friend, and through our mutual interest in him this confidence naturally came about. When she told me this hope blazed up, and all manner of wild fancies haunted me. Love is arrogant, and I nourished a belief that even I might succeed where Geoffrey failed. You were so young, you were not likely to be easily won by any other, if such a man had asked in vain, and a conviction gradually took possession of me that you *had* understood, *had* loved, and were yet waiting for me. A month seemed an eternity to wait, but I left myself no moment for despair, and soon turned my face to Cuba, finding renewed hope on the way. Gabriel went with me, told me how Ottila had searched for me, and failing to find me had gone back to make ready for my coming. How she had tried to be all I desired, and how unworthy I was of her. This was well, but the mention of your name was better, and much close questioning gave me the scene which he remembered, because Ottila had chidden him sharply for his disclosures to yourself. Knowing you so well, I gathered much from trifles which were nothing in Gabriel's eyes. I felt that regard for me, if nothing warmer, had prompted your interest in them; and out of the facts given me by Faith and Gabriel I built myself a home, which I have inhabited as a guest till now, when I know myself its master, and welcome its dear mistress, so my darling."

He bent to give her tender greeting, but Sylvia arrested him.

"Not yet, Adam! not yet! Go on, before it is too late to tell me as you wish."

He thought it was some maidenly scruple, and though he smiled at it he respected it, for this same coyness in the midst of all her whims had always been one of her attractions in his eye.

"Shy thing! I will tame you yet, and draw you to me as confidingly as I drew the bird to hop into my hand and eat. You must not fear me, Sylvia, else I shall grow tyrannical; for I hate fear, and like to trample on whatever dares not fill its place bravely, sure that it will receive its due as trustfully as these little mosses sit among the clouds and find a spring to feed them even in the rock. Now I will make a speedy end of this, pleasant as it is to sit here feeling myself no longer a solitary waif. I shall spare you the stormy scenes I passed through with Ottila, because I do not care to think of my Cleopatra while I hold ‘my fine spirit Ariel’ in my arms. She had done her best, but had I been still heart-free I never could have married her. She is one of those tameless natures which only God can govern; I dared not, even when I thought I loved her, for much as I love power I love truth more. I told her this, heard prayers, reproaches, threats, and denunciations; tried to leave her kindly, and then was ready for my fate with you. But I was not to have my will so easily. I had fallen into the net, and was not to leave it till the scourging had been given. So like that other wandering Christian, I cried out, submitted, and was the meeker for it. I had to wait a little before the ship sailed; I would not stay at El Labarinto, Gabriel’s home, for Ottila was there; and though the fever raged at Havana, I felt secure in my hitherto unbroken health. I returned there, and paid the penalty; for weeks of suffering taught me that I could not trifle with this body of mine, sturdy as it seemed.”

“Oh, Adam, who took care of you? Where did you lie and suffer all that time?”

“Never fret yourself concerning that; I was not neglected. A sister of the ‘Sacred Heart’ took excellent care of me, and a hospital is as good as a palace when one neither knows nor cares where he is. It went hardly with me, I believe; but being resolved to live, I fought it through. Death looked at me, had compassion, and passed by. There is a Haytien proverb which must comfort you if I am a gaunt ghost of my former self: ‘A lean freeman is better than a fat slave.’ There comes the first smile I have seen; but my next bit of news will bring a frown, I think. When I was well enough to creep out, I learned that Ottila was married. You heard the rumor, doubtless, but not the name, for Gabriel’s and mine were curiously blended in many minds by the suddenness of my disappearance and his appearance as the bridegroom. It was like her, — she had prepared for me as if sure I was to fill the place I had left, hoping that this confidence of hers would have its due effect upon me. It did try me sorely, but an experience once over is as if it had never been, as far as regret or indecision is concerned; therefore wedding gowns and imperious women failed to move me. To be left a groomless bride stung that fiery pride of hers more than many an actual shame or sin would have done. People would pity her, would see her loss, deride her wilful folly. Gabriel loved her as she desired to be loved, blindly and passionately; few knew of our later bond, many of our betrothal, why not let the world believe me the rejected party come back for a last appeal? I had avoided all whom I once knew, for I loathed the place; no one had discovered me at the hospital, she thought me gone, she boldly took the step, married the poor boy, left Cuba before I was myself again, and won herself an empty victory which I never shall disturb.”

“How strange! Yet I can believe it of her, she looked a woman who would dare do anything. Then you came back, Adam, to find me? What led you here, hoping so much and knowing so little?”

“Did you ever know me do anything in the accustomed way? Do I not always aim straight at the thing I want and pursue it by the shortest road? It fails often, and I go back to the slower surer way; but my own is always tried first, as involuntarily as I hurled myself down that slope, as if storming a fort instead of meeting my sweetheart. That is a pretty old word beloved of better men than I, so let me use it once. Among the first persons I met on landing was a friend of your father’s; he was just driving away in hot haste, but catching a glimpse of the familiar face, I bethought me that it was the season for summer travel, you might be away, and no one else would satisfy me; he might know, and time be saved. I asked one question, ‘Where are the Yules?’ He answered, as he vanished, ‘The young people are all at the mountains.’ That was enough, and congratulating myself on the forethought which would save me some hundred miles of needless delay, away I went, and for days have been searching for you every where on that side of these hills which I know so well. But no Yules had passed, and feeling sure you were on this side I came, not around, but straight over, for this seemed a royal road to my love, and here I found her waiting for me by the way. Now Sylvia, are your doubts all answered, your fears all laid, your heart at rest on mine?”

As the time drew nearer Sylvia’s task daunted her. Warwick was so confident, so glad and tender over her, it seemed like pronouncing the death doom to say those hard words, “It is too late.” While she struggled to find some expression that should tell all kindly yet entirely, Adam, seeming to read some hint of her trouble, asked, with that gentleness which now overlaid his former abruptness, and was the more alluring for the contrast —

“Have I been too arrogant a lover? too sure of happiness, too blind to my small deserts? Sylvia, have I misunderstood the greeting you have given me?”

“Yes, Adam, utterly.”

He knit his brows, his eye grew anxious, his content seemed rudely broken, but still hopefully he said —

“You mean that absence has changed you, that you do not love me as you did, and pity made you kind? Well, I receive the disappointment, but I do not relinquish my desire. What has been may be; let me try again to earn you; teach me to be humble, patient, all that I should be to make myself more dear to you. Something disturbs you, be frank with me; I have shown you all my heart, what have you to show me in return?”

“Only this.”

She freed herself entirely from his hold and held up her hand before him. He did not see the ring; he thought she gave him all he asked, and with a glow of gratitude extended both his own to take it. Then she saw that delay was worse than weak, and though she trembled she spoke out bravely ending his suspense at once.

"Adam, I do *not* love you as I did, nor can I wish or try to bring it back, because — I am married."

He sprung up as if shot through the heart, nor could a veritable bullet from her hand have daunted him with a more intense dismay than those three words. An instant's incredulity, then conviction came to him, and he met it like a man, for though his face whitened and his eye burned with an expression that wrung her heart, he demanded steadily, —

"To whom?"

This was the hardest question of all, for well she knew the name would wound the deeper for its dearness, and while it lingered pitifully upon her lips its owner answered for himself. Clear and sweet came up the music of the horn, bringing them a familiar air they all loved, and had often sung together. Warwick knew it instantly, felt the hard truth but rebelled against it, and put out his arm as if to ward it off as he exclaimed, with real anguish in countenance and voice —

"Oh, Sylvia! it is not Geoffrey?"

"Yes."

Then, as if all strength had gone out of her, she dropped down upon the mossy margin of the spring and covered up her face, feeling that the first sharpness of a pain like this was not for human eyes to witness. How many minutes passed she could not tell, the stillness of the spot remained unbroken by any sound but the whisper of the wind, and in this silence Sylvia found time to marvel at the calmness which came to her. Self had been forgotten in surprise and sympathy, and still her one thought was how to comfort Warwick. She had expected some outburst of feeling, some gust of anger or despair, but neither sigh nor sob, reproach nor regret reached her, and soon she stole an anxious glance to see how it went with him. He was standing where she left him, both hands locked together till they were white with the passionate pressure. His eyes fixed on some distant object with a regard as imploring as unseeing, and through those windows of the soul he looked out darkly, not despairingly; but as if sure that somewhere there was help for him, and he waited for it with a stern patience more terrible to watch than the most tempestuous grief. Sylvia could not bear it, and remembering that her confession had not yet been made, seized that instant for the purpose, prompted by an instinct which assured her that the knowledge of her pain would help him to bear his own.

She told him all, and ended saying —

“Now, Adam, come to me and let me try to comfort you.”

Sylvia was right; for through the sorrowful bewilderment that brought a brief eclipse of hope and courage, sympathy reached him like a friendly hand to uphold him till he found the light again. While speaking, she had seen the immobility that frightened her break up, and Warwick’s whole face flush and quiver with the rush of emotions controllable no longer. But the demonstration which followed was one she had never thought to see from him, for when she stretched her hands to him with that tender invitation, she saw the deep eyes fill and overflow. Then he threw himself down before her, and for the first time in her short life showed her that sad type of human suffering, a man weeping like a woman.

Warwick was one of those whose passions, as his virtues, were in unison with the powerful body they inhabited, and in such a crisis as the present but one of two reliefs were possible to him; either wrathful denunciation, expostulation and despair, or the abandon of a child. Against the former he had been struggling dumbly till Sylvia’s words had turned the tide, and too entirely natural to feel a touch of shame at that which is not a weakness but a strength, too wise to reject so safe an outlet for so dangerous a grief, he yielded to it, letting the merciful magic of tears quench the fire, wash the first bitterness away, and leave reproaches only writ in water. It was better so, and Sylvia acknowledged it within herself as she sat mute and motionless, softly touching the brown hair scattered on the moss, her poor consolation silenced by the pathos of the sight, while through it all rose and fell the fitful echo of the horn, in very truth “a sweet reminder not to stray away and lose herself.” An hour ago it would have been a welcome sound, for peak after peak gave back the strain, and airy voices whispered it until the faintest murmur died. But now she let it soar and sigh half heard, for audible to her alone still came its sad accompaniment of bitter human tears. To Warwick it was far more; for music, the comforter, laid her balm on his sore heart as no mortal pity could have done, and wrought the miracle which changed the friend who seemed to have robbed him of his love to an unconscious Orpheus, who subdued the savage and harmonized the man. Soon he was himself again, for to those who harbor the strong virtues with patient zeal, no lasting ill can come, no affliction can wholly crush, no temptation wholly vanquish. He rose with eyes the clearer for their stormy rain, twice a man for having dared to be a child again. Humbler and happier for the knowledge that neither vain resentment nor unjust accusation had defrauded of its dignity, the heavy hour that left him desolate but not degraded.

“I *am* comforted, Sylvia, rest assured of that. And now there is little more to say, but one thing to do. I shall not see your husband yet, and leave you to tell him what seems best, for, with the instinct of an animal, I always go away to outlive my hurts alone. But remember that I acquit you of blame, and believe that I will yet be happy in your happiness. I know if Geoffrey were here, he would let me do this, because he has suffered as I suffer now.”

Bending, he gathered her to an embrace as different from that other as despair is from delight, and while he held her there, crowding into one short minute, all the pain and passion of a year, she heard a low, but exceeding bitter cry — ”Oh, my Sylvia! it is hard to give you up.” Then with a solemn satisfaction, which assured her as it did himself, he spoke out clear and loud —

“Thank God for the merciful Hereafter, in which we may retrieve the blunders we make here.”

With that he left her, never turning till the burden so joyfully cast down had been resumed. Then, staff and hat in hand, he paused on the margin of that granite cup, to him a cup of sorrow, and looked into its depths again. Clouds were trooping eastward, but in that pause the sun glanced full on Warwick’s figure, lifting his powerful head into a flood of light, as he waved his hand to Sylvia with a gesture of courage and good cheer. The look, the act, the memories they brought her, made her heart ache with a sharper pang than pity, and filled her eyes with tears of impotent regret, as she turned her head as if to chide the blithe clamor of the horn. When she looked again, the figure and the sunshine were both gone, leaving her alone and in the shadow.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FIRESIDE FETE.

“No cousin Faith to-night. The rain has prevented her from taking this boat, and she is not likely to come later as she comes alone,” said Moor, returning from a fruitless drive to meet his expected guest one October evening.

“It always rains when I want anything very much. I seem to have a great deal of bad weather in my life,” answered Sylvia, despondingly.

“Never mind the rain; let us make sunshine for ourselves, and forget it as children do.”

“I wish I was a child again, they are always happy.”

“Let us play at being children, then. Let us sit down upon the rug, parch corn, crack nuts, roast apples, and be merry in spite of wind or weather.”

Sylvia’s face brightened, for the fancy pleased her, and she wanted something new and pleasant to divert her thoughts from herself. Glancing at her dress, which was unusually matronly in honor of the occasion, she said smiling —

“I don’t look much like a child, but I should like to try and feel like one again if I can.”

“Let us both look and feel so as much as possible. You like masquerading; go make a little girl of yourself, while I turn boy, and prepare for our merry making.”

No lad could have spoken with a blither face, for Moor had preserved much of the boy in spite of his thirty years. His cheerfulness was so infectious, that Sylvia already began to forget her gloom, and hurried away to do her part. Putting on a short, girlish gown, kept for scrambles among the rocks, she improvised a pinafore, and braided her long hair a la Morlena Kenwigs, with butterfly bows at the ends. When she went down, she found her husband in garden jacket, collar turned over a ribbon, hair in a curly tumble, and jackknife in hand, seated on the rug before a roaring fire, and a semicircle of apples, whittling and whistling like a very boy. They examined one another with mirthful commendations, and Moor began his part by saying —

“Isn’t this jolly? Now come and cuddle down here beside me, and see which will keep it up the longest.”

“What would Prue say? and who would recognize the elegant Mr. Moor in this big boy? Putting dignity and broadcloth aside makes you look about eighteen, and very charming I find you," said Sylvia, looking about twelve herself, and also very charming.

"Here is a wooden fork for you to tend the roast with, while I see to the corn laws and prepare a vegetable snowstorm. What will you have, little girl, you look as if you wanted something?"

"I was only thinking that I should have a doll to match your knife. I feel as if I should enjoy trotting a staring fright on my knee, and singing Hush-a-by. But I fancy even your magic cannot produce such a thing, — can it, my lad?"

"In exactly five minutes a lovely doll will appear, though such a thing has not been seen in my bachelor establishment for years."

With which mysterious announcement Moor ran off, blundering over the ottomans and slamming the doors as a true boy should. Sylvia pricked chestnuts, and began to forget her bosom trouble as she wondered what would appear with the impatient curiosity appropriate to the character she had assumed. Presently her husband reappeared with much breeziness of aspect, rain drops in his hair, and a squirming bundle in his arms. Triumphantly unfolding many wraps, he displayed little Tilly in her night-gown.

"There is sorcery for you, and a doll worth having; being one of the sort that can shut its eyes; it was going to bed, but its mamma relented and lends it to us for the night. I told Mrs. Dodd you wanted her, and couldn't wait, so she sent her clothes; but the room is so warm let the dear play in her pretty bed-gown."

Sylvia received her lovely plaything with enthusiasm, and Tilly felt herself suddenly transported to a baby's Paradise, where beds were unknown and fruit and freedom were her welcome portion. Merrily popped the corn, nimbly danced the nuts upon the shovel, lustily remonstrated the rosy martyrs on the hearth, and cheerfully the minutes slipped away. Sylvia sung every jubilant air she knew, Moor whistled astonishing accompaniments, and Tilly danced over the carpet with nut-shells on her toes, and tried to fill her little gown with "pitty flowers" from its garlands and bouquets. Without the wind lamented, the sky wept, and the sea thundered on the shore; but within, youth, innocence, and love held their blithe revel undisturbed.

"How are the spirits now?" asked one playmate of the other.

"Quite merry, thank you; and I should think I was little Sylvia again but for the sight of this."

She held up the hand that wore a single ornament; but the hand had grown so slender since it was first put on, that the ring would have fallen had she not caught it at her finger-tip. There was nothing of the boy in her companion's face, as he said, with an anxious look —

"If you go on thinning so fast I shall begin to fear that the little wife is not happy with her old husband. Is she, dear?"

"She would be a most ungrateful woman if she were not. I always get thin as winter comes on, but I'm so careless I'll find a guard for my ring to-morrow."

"No need to wait till then; wear this to please me, and let Marion's cipher signify that you are *mine*."

With a gravity that touched her more than the bestowal of so dear a relic, Moor unslung a signet ring from his watchguard, and with some difficulty pressed it to its place on Sylvia's finger, a most effectual keeper for that other ring whose tenure seemed so slight. She shrunk a little and glanced up at him, because his touch was more firm than tender, and his face wore a masterful expression seldom seen there; for instinct, subtler than perception, prompted both act and aspect. Then her eye fell and fixed upon the dark stone with the single letter engraved upon its tiny oval, and to her it took a double significance as her husband held it there, claiming her again, with that emphatic "Mine." She did not speak, but something in her manner caused the fold between his brows to smooth itself away as he regarded the small hand lying passively in his, and said, half playfully, half earnestly —

"Forgive me if I hurt you, but you know my wooing is not over yet; and till you love me with a perfect love I cannot feel that my wife is wholly mine."

"I am so young, you know; when I am a woman grown I can give you a woman's love; now it is a girl's, you say. Wait for me, Geoffrey, a little longer, for indeed I do my best to be all you would have me."

Something brought tears into her eyes and made her lips tremble, but in a breath the smile came back, and she added gayly —

"How can I help being grave sometimes, and getting thin, with so many housekeeping cares upon my shoulders, and such an exacting, tyrannical husband to wear upon my nerves. Don't I look like the most miserable of wives?"

She did not certainly as she shook the popper laughingly, and looked over her shoulder at him, with the bloom of fire-light on her cheeks, its cheerfulness in her eyes.

"Keep that expression for every day wear, and I am satisfied. I want no tame Griselda, but the little girl who once said she was always happy with me. Assure me of that, and, having won my Leah, I can work and wait still longer for my Rachel. Bless the baby! what has she done to herself now?"

Tilly had retired behind the sofa, after she had swarmed over every chair and couch, examined everything within her reach, on *étagère* and table, embraced the Hebe in the corner, played a fantasia on the piano, and choked herself with the stopper of the odor bottle. A doleful wail betrayed her hiding place, and she now emerged with a pair of nutcrackers, ditto of pinched fingers, and an expression of great mental and bodily distress. Her woes vanished instantaneously, however, when the feast was announced, and she performed an unsteady *pas seul* about the banquet, varied by skirmishes with her long night-gown and darts at any unguarded viand that tempted her.

No ordinary table service would suit the holders of this fireside *fête*. The corn was heaped in a bronze urn, the nuts in a graceful basket, the apples lay on a plate of curiously ancient china, and the water turned to wine through the medium of a purple flagon of Bohemian glass. The refection was spread upon the rug as on a flowery table, and all the lustres were lighted, filling the room with a festal glow. Prue would have held up her hands in dismay, like the benighted piece of excellence she was, but Mark would have enjoyed the picturesque group and sketched a mate to the Golden Wedding. For Moor, armed with the wooden fork, did the honors; Sylvia, leaning on her arm, dropped corn after corn into a baby mouth that bird-like always gaped for more; and Tilly lay luxuriously between them, warming her little feet as she ate and babbled to the flames.

The clock was on the stroke of eight, the revel at its height, when the door opened and a servant announced —

“Miss Dane and Mr. Warwick.”

An impressive pause followed, broken by a crow from Tilly, who seized this propitious moment to bury one hand in the nuts and with the other capture the big red apple which had been denied her. The sound seemed to dissipate the blank surprise that had fallen on all parties, and brought both host and hostess to their feet, the former exclaiming, heartily —

“Welcome, friends, to a modern saturnalia and the bosom of the Happy Family!”

“I fear you did not expect me so late,” said Miss Dane. “I was detained at the time fixed upon and gave it up, but Mr. Warwick came, and we set off together. Pray don’t disturb yourselves, but let us enjoy the game with you.”

“You and Adam are guests who never come too early or too late. We are playing children to-night, so just put yourselves back a dozen years and let us all be merry together. Sylvia, this our cousin, Faith here is your new kinswoman. Please love one another as little people are commanded to do.”

A short stir ensued while hands were shaken, wraps put off, and some degree of order restored to the room, then they all sat down and began to talk. With well bred oblivion of the short gown and long braids of her bashful-looking hostess, Miss Dane suggested and discussed various subjects of mutual interest, while

Sylvia tried to keep her eyes from wandering to the mirror opposite, which reflected the figures of her husband and his friend.

Warwick sat erect in the easy-chair, for he never lounged; and Moor, still supporting his character, was perched upon the arm, talking with boyish vivacity. Every sense being unwontedly alert, Sylvia found herself listening to both guests at once, and bearing her own part in one conversation so well that occasional lapses were only attributed to natural embarrassment. What she and Miss Dane said she never remembered; what the other pair talked of she never forgot. The first words she caught were her husband's.

"You see I have begun to live for myself, Adam."

"I also see that it agrees with you excellently."

"Better than with you, for you are not looking like your old self, though June made you happy, I hope?"

"If freedom is happiness it did."

"Are you still alone?"

"More so than ever."

Sylvia lost the next words, for a look showed her Moor's hand on Adam's shoulder, and that for the first time within her memory Warwick did not meet his friend's glance with one as open, but bent his eyes upon the ground, while his hand went to and fro across his lips as if to steady them. It was a gesture she remembered well, for though self-control could keep the eye clear, the voice firm, that half-hidden mouth of his sometimes rebelled and grew tremulous as a woman's. The sight and the answer set her heart beating with the thought, "Why has he come?" The repetition of a question by Miss Dane recalled her from a dangerous memory, and when that friendly lady entered upon another long sentence to relieve her young hostess, she heard Moor say —

"You have had too much solitude, Adam; I am sure of it, for no man can live long alone and not get the uncanny look you have. What have you been at?"

"Fighting the old fight with this unruly self of mine, and getting ready for another tussle with the Adversary, in whatever shape he may appear."

"And now you are come to your friend for the social solace which the haughtiest heart hungers for when most alone. You shall have it. Stay with us, Adam, and remember that whatever changes come to me my home is always yours."

"I know it, Geoffrey. I wanted to see your happiness before I go away again, and should like to stay with you a day or so if you are sure that — that she would like it."

Moor laughed and pulled a lock of the brown mane, as if to tease the lion into a display of the spirit he seemed to have lost.

"How shy you are of speaking the new name! 'She' will like it, I assure you, for she makes my friends hers. Sylvia, come here, and tell Adam he is welcome; he dares to doubt it. Come and talk over old times, while I do the same with Faith."

She went, trembling inwardly, but outwardly composed, for she took refuge in one of those commonplace acts which in such moments we gladly perform, and bless in our secret souls. She had often wondered where they would next meet, and how she should comport herself at such a trying time. She had never imagined that he would come in this way, or that a hearth-brush would save her from the betrayal of emotion. So it was, however, and an involuntary smile passed over her face as she managed to say quite naturally, while brushing the nutshells tidily out of sight —

"You know you are always welcome, Mr. Warwick. 'Adam's Room,' as we call it, is always ready, and Geoffrey was wishing for you only yesterday."

"I am sure of his satisfaction at my coming, can I be equally sure of yours. May I, ought I to stay?"

He leaned forward as he spoke, with an eager yet submissive look, that Sylvia dared not meet, and in her anxiety to preserve her self-possession, she forgot that to this listener every uttered word became a truth, because his own were always so.

"Why not, if you can bear our quiet life, for we are a Darby and Joan already, though we do not look so to-night, I acknowledge."

Men seldom understand the subterfuges women instinctively use to conceal many a natural emotion which they are not strong enough to control, not brave enough to confess. To Warwick, Sylvia seemed almost careless, her words a frivolous answer to the real meaning of his question, her smile one of tranquil welcome. Her manner wrought an instant change in him, and when he spoke again he was the Warwick of a year ago.

"I hesitated, Mrs. Moor, because I have sometimes heard young wives complain that their husbands' friends were marplots, and I have no desire to be one."

This speech, delivered with frosty gravity, made Sylvia as cool and quiet as itself. She put her ally down, looked full at Warwick, and said with a blending of dignity and cordiality which even the pinafore could not destroy —

"Please to consider yourself a specially invited guest, now and always. Never hesitate, but come and go as freely as you used to do, for nothing need be changed between us three because two of us have one home to offer you."

"Thanks; and now that the hearth is scrupulously clean may I offer you a chair?"

The old keenness was in his eye, the old firmness about the mouth, the old satirical smile on his lips as Warwick presented the seat, with an inclination that to her seemed ironical. She sat down, but when she cast about her mind for some safe and easy topic to introduce, every idea had fled; even memory and fancy turned traitors; not a lively sally could be found, not a pleasant remembrance returned to help her, and she sat dumb. Before the dreadful pause grew awkward, however, rescue came in the form of Tilly. Nothing daunted by the severe simplicity of her attire she planted herself before Warwick, and shaking her hair out of her eyes stared at him with an inquiring glance and cheeks as red as her apple. She seemed satisfied in a moment, and climbing to his knee established herself there, coolly taking possession of his watch, and examining the brown beard curiously as it parted with the white flash of teeth, when Warwick smiled his warmest smile.

“This recalls the night you fed the sparrow in your hand. Do you remember, Adam?” and Sylvia looked and spoke like her old self again.

“I seldom forget anything. But pleasant as that hour was this is more to me, for the bird flew away, the baby stays and gives me what I need.”

He wrapt the child closer in his arms, leaned his dark head on the bright one, and took the little feet into his hand with a fatherly look that caused Tilly to pat his cheek and begin an animated recital of some nursery legend, which ended in a sudden gape, reminding Sylvia that one of her guests was keeping late hours.

“What comes next?” asked Warwick.

“Now I lay me and byelow in the trib,” answered Tilly, stretching herself over his arm with a great yawn.

Warwick kissed the rosy half-open mouth and seemed loth to part with the pious baby, for he took the shawl Sylvia brought and did up the drowsy bundle himself. While so busied she stole a furtive glance at him, having looked without seeing before. Thinner and browner, but stronger than ever was the familiar face she saw, yet neither sad nor stern, for the grave gentleness which had been a fugitive expression before now seemed habitual. This, with the hand at the lips and the slow dropping of the eyes, were the only tokens of the sharp experience he had been passing through. Born for conflict and endurance, he seemed to have manfully accepted the sweet uses of adversity and grown the richer for his loss.

Those who themselves are quick to suffer, are also quick to see the marks of suffering in others; that hasty scrutiny assured Sylvia of all she had yearned to know, yet wrung her heart with a pity the deeper for its impotence. Tilly’s heavy head drooped between her bearer and the light as they left the room, but in the dusky hall a few hot tears fell on the baby’s hair, and her new nurse lingered long after the lullaby was done. When she reappeared the girlish dress was gone, and she was Madam Moor again, as her husband called her when she assumed her stately air. All smiled at the change, but he alone spoke of it.

“I win the applause, Sylvia; for I sustain my character to the end, while you give up before the curtain falls. You are not so good an actress as I thought you.”

Sylvia’s smile was sadder than her tears as she briefly answered —

“No, I find I cannot be a child again.”

CHAPTER XV.

EARLY AND LATE.

One of Sylvia’s first acts when she rose was most significant. She shook down her abundant hair, carefully arranged a part in thick curls over cheeks and forehead, gathered the rest into its usual coil, and said to herself, as she surveyed her face half hidden in the shining cloud —

“It looks very sentimental, and I hate the weakness that drives me to it, but it must be done, because my face is such a traitor. Poor Geoffrey! he said I was no actress; I am learning fast.”

Why every faculty seemed sharpened, every object assumed an unwonted interest, and that quiet hour possessed an excitement that made her own room and countenance look strange to her, she would not ask herself, as she paused on the threshold of the door to ascertain if her guests were stirring. Nothing was heard but the sound of regular footfalls on the walk before the door, and with an expression of relief she slowly went down. Moor was taking his morning walk bareheaded in the sun. Usually Sylvia ran to join him, but now she stood musing on the steps, until he saw and came to her. As he offered the flower always ready for her, he said smiling —

“Did the play last night so captivate you, that you go back to the curls, because you cannot keep the braids?”

“A sillier whim than that, even. I am afraid of those two people; and as I am so quick to show my feelings in my face, I intend to hide behind this veil if I get shy or troubled. Did you think I could be so artful?”

“Your craft amazes me. But, dearest child, you need not be afraid of Faith and Adam. Both already love you for my sake, and soon will for your own. Both are so much older, that they can easily overlook any little short-coming, in consideration of your youth. Sylvia, I want to tell you something about Adam. I never spoke of it before, because, although no promise of silence was asked or given, I knew he considered it a confidence. Now that it is all over, I know that I may tell my wife, and she will help me comfort him.”

“Tell on, Geoffrey, I hear you.”

“Well, dear, when we went gypsying long ago, on the night you and Adam lost the boat, as I sat drying your boots, and privately adoring them in spite of the mud, I made a discovery. Adam loved, was on some sort of probation, and would be married in June. He was slow to speak of it, but I understood, and last night when I went to his room with him, I asked how he had fared. Sylvia, it would have made your heart ache to have seen his face, as he said in that brief way of his — 'Geoffrey, the woman I loved is married, ask me nothing more.' I never shall; but I know, by the change I see in him, that the love was very dear, the wound very deep."

"Poor Adam! how can we help him?"

"Let him do as he likes. I will take him to his old haunts, and busy him with my affairs till he forgets his own. In the evenings we will have Prue, Mark, and Jessie over here, will surround him with social influences, and make the last hours of the day the cheerfullest; then he won't lie awake and think all night, as I suspect he has been doing of late. Sylvia, I should like to see that woman; though I could find it in my heart to hate her for her perfidy to such a man."

Sylvia's head was bent as if to inhale the sweetness of the flower she held, and all her husband saw was the bright hair blowing in the wind.

"I pity her for her loss as well as hate her. Now, let us talk of something else, or my tell-tale face will betray that we have been talking of him, when we meet Adam."

They did so, and when Warwick put up his curtain, the first sight he saw, was his friend walking with his young wife under the red-leaved maples, in the sunshine. The look Moor had spoken of, came into his eyes, darkening them with the shadow of despair. A moment it gloomed there, then passed, for Honor said reproachfully to Love — "They are happy, should not that content you?"

"It shall!" answered the master of both, as he dropped the curtain and turned away.

In pursuance of his kindly plan, Moor took Adam out for a long tramp soon after breakfast, and Sylvia and Miss Dane sat down to sew. In the absence of the greater fear, Sylvia soon forgot the lesser one, and began to feel at ease to study her new relative and covet her esteem.

Faith was past thirty, shapely and tall, with much natural dignity of carriage, and a face never beautiful, but always singularly attractive from its mild and earnest character. Looking at her, one felt assured that here was a right womanly woman, gentle, just, and true; possessed of a well-balanced mind, a self-reliant soul, and that fine gift which is so rare, the power of acting as a touchstone to all who approached, forcing them to rise or fall to their true level, unconscious of the test applied. Her presence was comfortable, her voice had motherly tones in it, her eyes a helpful look. Even the soft hue of her dress, the brown gloss of her hair, the graceful industry of her hands, had their attractive influence. Sylvia saw and felt these things with the quickness of her susceptible temperament, and found herself so warmed and won, that soon it cost her an effort to withhold anything that tried or troubled her, for Faith was a born consoler, and Sylvia's heart was full.

However gloomy her day might have been she always brightened in the evening as naturally as moths begin to flutter when candles come. On the evening of this day the friendly atmosphere about her, and the excitement of Warwick's presence so affected her, that though the gayety of girlhood was quite gone she looked as softly brilliant as some late flower that has gathered the summer to itself and gives it out again in the bloom and beauty of a single hour.

When tea was over, for heroes and heroines must eat if they are to do anything worth the paper on which their triumphs and tribulations are recorded, the women gathered about the library table, work in hand, as female tongues go easier when their fingers are occupied. Sylvia left Prue and Jessie to enjoy Faith, and while she fabricated some trifle with scarlet silk and an ivory shuttle, she listened to the conversation of the gentlemen who roved about the room till a remark of Prue's brought the party together.

"Helen Chesterfield has run away from her husband in the most disgraceful manner."

Mark and Moor drew near, Adam leaned on the chimney-piece, the workers paused, and having produced her sensation, Prue proceeded to gratify their curiosity as briefly as possible, for all knew the parties in question and all waited anxiously to hear particulars.

"She married a Frenchman old enough to be her father, but very rich. She thought she loved him, but when she got tired of her fine establishment, and the novelties of Paris, she found she did not, and was miserable. Many of her new friends had lovers, so why should not she; and presently she began to amuse herself with this Louis Gustave Isadore Theodule de Roueville — There's a name for a Christian man! Well, she began in play, grew in earnest, and when she could bear her domestic trouble no longer she just ran away, ruining herself for this life, and really I don't know but for the next also."

"Poor soul! I always thought she was a fool, but upon my word I pity her," said Mark.

"Remember she was very young, so far away from her mother, with no real friend to warn and help her, and love is so sweet. No wonder she went."

"Sylvia, how can you excuse her in that way? She should have done her duty whether she loved the old gentleman or not, and kept her troubles to herself in a proper manner. You young girls think so much of love, so little of moral obligations, decorum, and the opinions of the world, you are not fit judges of the case. Mr. Warwick agrees with me, I am sure.”

“Not in the least.”

“Do you mean to say that Helen should have left her husband?”

“Certainly, if she could not love him.”

“Do you also mean to say that she did right to run off with that Gustave Isadore Theodule creature?”

“By no means. It is worse than folly to attempt the righting of one wrong by the commission of another.”

“Then what in the world should she have done?”

“She should have honestly decided which she loved, have frankly told the husband the mistake both had made, and demanded her liberty. If the lover was worthy, have openly married him and borne the world’s censures. If not worthy, have stood alone, an honest woman in God’s eyes, whatever the blind world might have thought.”

Prue was scandalized to the last degree, for with her marriage was more a law than a gospel; a law which ordained that a pair once yoked should abide by their bargain, be it good or ill, and preserve the proprieties in public no matter how hot a hell their home might be for them and for their children.

“What a dreadful state society would be in if your ideas were adopted! People would constantly be finding out that they were mismatched, and go running about as if playing that game where every one changes places. I’d rather die at once than live to see such a state of things as that,” said the worthy spinster.

“So would I, and recommend prevention rather than a dangerous cure.”

“I really should like to hear your views, Mr. Warwick, for you quite take my breath away.”

Much to Sylvia’s surprise Adam appeared to like the subject, and placed his views at Prue’s disposal with alacrity.

“I would begin at the beginning, and teach young people that marriage is not the only aim and end of life, yet would fit them for it, as for a sacrament too high and holy to be profaned by a light word or thought. Show them how to be worthy of it and how to wait for it. Give them a law of life both cheerful and sustaining; a law that shall keep them hopeful if single, sure that here or hereafter they will find that other self and be accepted by it; happy if wedded, for their own integrity of heart will teach them to know the true god when he comes, and keep them loyal to the last.”

“That is all very excellent and charming, but what are the poor souls to do who haven’t been educated in this fine way?” asked Prue.

“Unhappy marriages are the tragedies of our day, and will be, till we learn that there are truer laws to be obeyed than those custom sanctions, other obstacles than inequalities of fortune, rank, and age. Because two persons love, it is not always safe or wise for them to marry, nor need it necessarily wreck their peace to live apart. Often what seems the best affection of our hearts does more for us by being thwarted than if granted its fulfilment and prove a failure which embitters two lives instead of sweetening one."

He paused there, but Prue wanted a clearer answer, and turned to Faith, sure that the woman would take her own view of the matter.

"Which of us is right, Miss Dane, in Helen's case?"

"I cannot venture to judge the young lady, knowing so little of her character or the influences that have surrounded her, and believing that a certain divine example is best for us to follow at such times. I agree with Mr. Warwick, but not wholly, for his summary mode of adjustment would not be quite just nor right in all cases. If both find that they do not love, the sooner they part the wiser; if one alone makes the discovery the case is sadder still, and harder for either to decide. But as I speak from observation only my opinions are of little worth."

"Of great worth, Miss Dane; for to women like yourself observation often does the work of experience, and despite your modesty I wait to hear the opinions."

Warwick spoke, and spoke urgently, for the effect of all this upon Sylvia was too absorbing a study to be relinquished yet. As he turned to her, Faith gave him an intelligent glance, and answered like one speaking with intention and to some secret but serious issue —

"You shall have them. Let us suppose that Helen was a woman possessed of a stronger character, a deeper nature; the husband a younger, nobler man; the lover truly excellent, and above even counselling the step this pair have taken. In a case like that the wife, having promised to guard another's happiness, should sincerely endeavor to do so, remembering that in making the joy of others we often find our own, and that having made so great a mistake the other should not bear all the loss. If there be a strong attachment on the husband's part, and he a man worthy of affection and respect, who has given himself confidingly, believing himself beloved by the woman he so loves, she should leave no effort unmade, no self-denial unexacted, till she has proved beyond all doubt that it is impossible to be a true wife. Then, and not till then, has she the right to dissolve the tie that has become a sin, because where no love lives inevitable suffering and sorrow enter in, falling not only upon guilty parents, but the innocent children who may be given them."

"And the lover, what of him?" asked Adam, still intent upon his purpose, for, though he looked steadily at Faith, he knew that Sylvia drove the shuttle in and out with a desperate industry that made her silence significant to him.

"I would have the lover suffer and wait; sure that, however it may fare with him, he will be the richer and the better for having known the joy and pain of love."

"Thank you." And to Mark's surprise Warwick bowed gravely, and Miss Dane resumed her work with a preoccupied air.

"Well, for a confirmed celibate, it strikes me you take a remarkable interest in matrimony," said Mark. "Or is it merely a base desire to speculate upon the tribulations of your fellow-beings, and congratulate yourself upon your escape from them?"

"Neither; I not only pity and long to alleviate them, but have a strong desire to share them, and the wish and purpose of my life for the last year has been to marry."

Outspoken as Warwick was at all times and on all subjects, there was something in this avowal that touched those present, for with the words a quick rising light and warmth illuminated his whole countenance, and the energy of his desire tuned his voice to a key which caused one heart to beat fast, one pair of eyes to fill with sudden tears. Moor could not see his friend's face, but he saw Mark's, divined the indiscreet inquiry hovering on his lips, and arrested it with a warning gesture.

A pause ensued, during which each person made some mental comment on the last speech, and to several of the group that little moment was a memorable one. Remembering the lost love Warwick had confessed to him, Moor thought with friendliest regret — "Poor Adam, he finds it impossible to forget." Reading the truth in the keen delight the instant brought her, Sylvia cried out within herself, "Oh, Geoffrey, forgive me, for I love him!" and Warwick whispered to that impetuous heart of his, "Be still, we have ventured far enough."

Prue spoke first, very much disturbed by having her prejudices and opinions opposed, and very anxious to prove herself in the right.

"Mark and Geoffrey look as if they agreed with Mr. Warwick in his — excuse me if I say, dangerous ideas; but I fancy the personal application of them would change their minds. Now, Mark, just look at it; suppose some one of Jessie's lovers should discover an affinity for her, and she for him, what would you do?"

"Shoot him or myself, or all three, and make a neat little tragedy of it."

"There is no getting a serious answer from you, and I wonder I ever try. Geoffrey, I put the case to you; if Sylvia should find she adored Julian Haize, who fell sick when she was married, you know, and should inform you of that agreeable fact some fine day, should you think it quite reasonable and right to say, 'Go, my dear, I'm very sorry, but it can't be helped.'"

The way in which Prue put the case made it impossible for her hearers not to laugh. But Sylvia held her breath while waiting for her husband’s answer. He was standing behind her chair, and spoke with the smile still on his lips, too confident to harbor even a passing fancy.

“Perhaps I ought to be generous enough to do so, but not being a Jaques, with a convenient glacier to help me out of the predicament, I am afraid I should be hard to manage. I love but few, and those few are my world; so do not try me too hardly, Sylvia.”

“I shall do my best, Geoffrey.”

She dropped her shuttle as she spoke, and stooping to pick it up, down swept the long curls over either cheek; thus, when she fell to work again, nothing of her face was visible but a glimpse of forehead, black lashes and faintly smiling mouth. Moor led the conversation to other topics, and was soon deep in an art discussion with Mark and Miss Dane, while Prue and Jessie chatted away on that safe subject, dress. But Sylvia worked silently, and Warwick still leaned there watching the busy hand as if he saw something more than a pretty contrast between the white fingers and the scarlet silk.

When the other guests had left, and Faith and himself had gone to their rooms, Warwick, bent on not passing another sleepless night full of unprofitable longings, went down again to get a book. The library was still lighted, and standing there alone he saw Sylvia, wearing an expression that startled him. Both hands pushed back and held her hair away as if she scorned concealment from herself. Her eyes seemed fixed with a despairing glance on some invisible disturber of her peace. All the light and color that made her beautiful were gone, leaving her face worn and old, and the language of both countenance and attitude was that of one suddenly confronted with some hard fact, some heavy duty, that must be accepted and performed.

This revelation lasted but a moment, Moor’s step came down the hall, the hair fell, the anguish passed, and nothing but a wan and weary face remained. But Warwick had seen it, and as he stole away unperceived he pressed his hands together, saying mournfully within himself, “I was mistaken. God help us all.”

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE TWILIGHT.

If Sylvia needed another trial to make that hard week harder, it soon came to her in the knowledge that Warwick watched her. She well knew why, and vainly endeavored to conceal from him that which she had succeeded in concealing entirely from others. But he possessed the key to her variable moods; he alone knew that now painful forethought, not caprice dictated many of her seeming whims, and ruled her simplest action. To others she appeared busy, gay, and full of interest in all about her; to him, the industry was a preventive of forbidden thoughts; the gayety a daily endeavor to forget; the interest, an anxiety concerning the looks and words of her companions, because she must guard her own.

Sylvia felt something like terror in the presence of this penetrating eye, this daring will, for the vigilance was unflagging and unobtrusive, and with all her efforts she could not read his heart as she felt her own was being read. Adam could act no part, but bent on learning the truth for the sake of all, he surmounted the dangers of the situation by no artifice, no rash indulgence, but by simply shunning solitary interviews with Sylvia as carefully as the courtesy due his hostess would allow. In walks and drives, and general conversation, he bore his part, surprising and delighting those who knew him best by the genial change which seemed to have softened his rugged nature. But the instant the family group fell apart and Moor's devotion to his cousin left Sylvia alone, Warwick was away into the wood or out upon the sea, lingering there till some meal, some appointed pleasure, or the evening lamp brought all together. Sylvia understood this, and loved him for it even while she longed to have it otherwise. But Moor reproached him for his desertion, doubly felt since the gentler acquirements made him dearer to his friend. Hating all disguises, Warwick found it hard to withhold the fact which was not his own to give, and sparing no blame to himself, answered Moor's playful complaint with a sad sincerity that freed him from all further pleadings.

"Geoffrey, I have a heavy heart which even you cannot heal. Leave it to time, and let me come and go as of old, enjoying the social hour when I may, flying to solitude when I must."

Much as Sylvia had longed to see these friends, she counted the hours of their stay, for the presence of one was a daily disquieting, because spirits would often flag, conversation fail, and an utter weariness creep over her when she could least account for or yield to it. More than once during that week she longed to lay her head on Faith's kind bosom and ask help. Deep as was her husband's love it did not possess the soothing power of a woman's sympathy, and though it cradled her as tenderly as if she had been a child, Faith's compassion would have been like motherly arms to fold and foster. But friendly as they soon became, frank as was Faith's regard for Sylvia, earnest as was Sylvia's affection for Faith, she never seemed to reach that deeper place where she desired to be. Always when she thought she had found the innermost that each of us seek for in our friend, she felt that Faith drew back, and a reserve as delicate as inflexible barred her approach with chilly gentleness. This seemed so foreign to Faith's nature that Sylvia pondered and grieved over it till the belief came to her that this woman, so truly excellent and loveworthy, did not desire to receive her confidence, and sometimes a bitter fear assailed her that Warwick was not the only reader of her secret trouble.

All things have an end, and the last day came none too soon for one dweller under that hospitable roof. Faith refused all entreaties to stay, and looked somewhat anxiously at Warwick as Moor turned from herself to him with the same urgency.

"Adam, you will stay? Promise me another week?"

"I never promise, Geoffrey."

Believing that, as no denial came, his request was granted, Moor gave his whole attention to Faith, who was to leave them in an hour.

"Sylvia, while I help our cousin to select and fasten up the books and prints she likes to take with her, will you run down into the garden and fill your prettiest basket with our finest grapes? You will like that better than fumbling with folds and string; and you know one's servants should not perform these pleasant services for one's best friends."

Glad to be away, Sylvia ran through the long grape walk to its sunniest nook, and standing outside the arch, began to lay the purple clusters in her basket. Only a moment was she there alone; Warwick's shadow, lengthened by the declining sun, soon fell black along the path. He did not see her, nor seem intent on following her; he walked slowly, hat in hand, so slowly that he was but midway down the leafy lane when Faith's voice arrested him. She was in haste, as her hurried step and almost breathless words betrayed; and losing not an instant, she cried before they met —

"Adam, you will come with me? I cannot leave you here."

“Do you doubt me, Faith?”

“No; but loving women are so weak.”

“So strong, you mean; men are weakest when they love.”

“Adam, *will* you come?”

“I will follow you; I shall speak with Geoffrey first.”

“Must you tell him so soon?”

“I must.”

Faith’s hand had been on Warwick’s arm; as he spoke the last words she bent her head upon it for an instant, then without another word turned and hurried back as rapidly as she had come, while Warwick stood where she left him, motionless as if buried in some absorbing thought.

All had passed in a moment, a moment too short, too full of intense surprise to leave Sylvia time for recollection and betrayal of her presence. Half hidden and wholly unobserved she had seen the unwonted agitation of Faith’s countenance and manner, had heard Warwick’s softly spoken answers to those eager appeals, and with a great pang had discovered that some tender confidence existed between these two of which she had never dreamed. Sudden as the discovery was its acceptance and belief; for, knowing her own weakness, Sylvia found something like relief in the hope that a new happiness for Warwick had ended all temptation, and in time perhaps all pain for herself. Impulsive as ever she leaned upon the seeming truth, and making of the fancy a fact, passed into a perfect passion of self-abnegation, thinking, in the brief pause that followed Faith’s departure —

“This is the change we see in him; this made him watch me, hoping I had forgotten, as I once said and believed. I should be glad, I will be glad, and let him see that even while I suffer I can rejoice in that which helps us both.”

Full of her generous purpose, yet half doubtful how to execute it, Sylvia stepped from the recess where she had stood, and slowly passed toward Warwick, apparently intent on settling her fruity burden as she went. At the first sound of her light step on the gravel he turned, feeling at once that she must have heard, and eager to learn what significance that short dialogue possessed for her. Only a hasty glance did she give him as she came, but it showed him flushed cheeks, excited eyes, and lips a little tremulous as they said —

“These are for Faith; will you hold the basket while I cover it with leaves?”

He took it, and as the first green covering was deftly laid, he asked, below his breath —

“Sylvia, did you hear us?”

To his unutterable amazement she looked up clearly, and all her heart was in her voice, as she answered with a fervency he could not doubt —

"Yes; and I was glad to hear, to know that a nobler woman filled the place I cannot fill. Oh, believe it, Adam; and be sure that the knowledge of your great content will lighten the terrible regret which you have seen as nothing else ever could have done."

Down fell the basket at their feet, and taking her face between his hands, Warwick bent and searched with a glance that seemed to penetrate to her heart's core. For a moment she struggled to escape, but the grasp that held her was immovable. She tried to oppose a steadfast front and baffle that perilous inspection, but quick and deep rushed the traitorous color over cheek and forehead with its mute betrayal. She tried to turn her eyes away, but those other eyes, dark and dilated with intensity of purpose, fixed her own, and the confronting countenance wore an expression which made its familiar features look awfully large and grand to her panic-stricken sight. A sense of utter helplessness fell on her, courage deserted her, pride changed to fear, defiance to despair; as the flush faded, the fugitive glance was arrested and the upturned face became a pale blank, ready to receive the answer that strong scrutiny was slowly bringing to the light, as invisible characters start out upon a page when fire passes over them. Neither spoke, but soon through all opposing barriers the magnetism of an indomitable will drew forth the truth, set free the captive passion pent so long, and wrung from those reluctant lineaments a full confession of that power which heaven has gifted with eternal youth.

The instant this assurance was his own beyond a doubt, Warwick released her, snatched up his hat, and hurrying down the path vanished in the wood. Spent as with an hour's excitement, and bewildered by emotions which she could no longer master, Sylvia lingered in the grape walk till her husband called her. Then hastily refilling her basket, she shook her hair about her face and went to bid Faith good by. Moor was to accompany her to the city, and they left early, that Faith might pause for adieux to Mark and Prudence.

"Where is Adam? Has he gone before, or been inveigled into staying?"

Moor spoke to Sylvia, but busied in fastening the basket-lid, she seemed not to hear, and Faith replied for her.

"He will take a later boat, we need not wait for him."

When Faith embraced Sylvia, all the coldness had melted from her manner, and her voice was tender as a mother's as she whispered low in her ear —

"Dear child, if ever you need any help that Geoffrey cannot give, remember cousin Faith."

For two hours Sylvia sat alone, not idle, for in the first real solitude she had enjoyed for seven days she looked deeply into herself, and putting by all disguises owned the truth, and resolved to repair the past if possible, as Faith had counselled in the case which she had now made her own. Like so many of us, Sylvia often saw her errors too late to avoid committing them, and failing to do the right thing at the right moment, kept herself forever in arrears with that creditor who must inevitably be satisfied. She had been coming to this decision all that weary week, and these quiet hours left her both resolute and resigned.

As she sat there while the early twilight began to gather, her eye often turned to Warwick's travelling bag, which Faith, having espied it ready in his chamber, had brought down and laid in the library, as a reminder of her wish. As she looked at it, Sylvia's heart yearned toward it in the fond, foolish way which women have of endowing the possessions of those they love with the attractions of sentient things, and a portion of their owner's character or claim upon themselves. It was like Warwick, simple and strong, no key, and every mark of the long use which had tested its capabilities and proved them durable. A pair of gloves lay beside it on the chair, and though she longed to touch anything of his, she resisted the temptation till, pausing near them in one of her journeys to the window, she saw a rent in the glove that lay uppermost, — that appeal was irresistible, — ”Poor Adam! there has been no one to care for him so long, and Faith does not yet know how; surely I may perform so small a service for him if he never knows how tenderly I do it?”

Standing ready to drop her work at a sound, Sylvia snatched a brief satisfaction which solaced her more than an hour of idle lamentation, and as she kissed the glove with a long, sad kiss, and put it down with eyes that dimly saw where it should be, perhaps there went as much real love and sorrow into that little act as ever glorified some greater deed. Then she went to lie in the “Refuge,” as she had named an ancient chair, with her head on its embracing arm. Not weeping, but quietly watching the flicker of the fire, which filled the room with warm duskiness, making the twilight doubly pleasant, till a sudden blaze leaped up, showing her that her watch was over and Warwick come. She had not heard him enter, but there he was close before her, his face glowing with the frosty air, his eye clear and kind, and in his aspect that nameless charm which won for him the confidence of whosoever read his countenance. Scarce knowing why, Sylvia felt reassured that all was well, and looked up with more welcome in her heart than she dared betray in words.

“Come at last! where have you been so long, Adam?”

“Round the Island I suspect, for I lost my way, and had no guide but instinct to lead me home again. I like to say that word, for though it is not home it seems so to me now. May I sit here before I go, and warm myself at your fire, Sylvia?”

Sure of his answer he established himself on the stool at her feet, stretched his hands to the grateful blaze, and went on with some inward resolution lending its power and depth to his voice.

“I had a question to settle with myself and went to find my best counsellors in the wood. Often when I am harassed by some perplexity or doubt to which I can find no wise or welcome answer, I walk myself into a belief that it will come; then it appears. I stoop to break a handsome flower, to pick up a cone, or watch some little creature happier than I, and there lies my answer, like a good luck penny, ready to my hand.”

“Faith has gone, but Geoffrey hopes to keep you for another week,” said Sylvia, ignoring the unsafe topic.

“Shall he have his wish?”

“Faith expects you to follow her.”

“And you think I ought?”

“I think you will.”

“When does the next boat leave?”

“An hour hence.”

“I’ll wait for it here. Did I wake you coming in?”

“I was not asleep; only lazy, warm, and quiet.”

“And deadly tired; — dear soul, how can it be otherwise, leading the life you lead.”

There was such compassion in his voice, such affection in his eye, such fostering kindliness in the touch of the hand he laid upon her own, that Sylvia cried within herself, — ”Oh, if Geoffrey would only come!” and hoping for that help to save her from herself, she hastily replied —

“You are mistaken, Adam, — my life is easier than I deserve, — my husband makes me very — ”

“Miserable, — the truth to me, Sylvia.”

Warwick rose as he spoke, closed the door and came back wearing an expression which caused her to start up with a gesture of entreaty —

“No no, I will not hear you! Adam, you must not speak!”

He paused opposite her, leaving a little space between them, which he did not cross through all that followed, and with that look, inflexible yet pitiful, he answered steadily —

“I *must* speak and you *will* hear me. But understand me, Sylvia, I desire and design no French sentiment nor sin like that we heard of, and what I say now I would say if Geoffrey stood between us. I have settled this point after long thought and the heartiest prayers I ever prayed; and much as I have at stake, I speak more for your sake than my own. Therefore do not entreat nor delay, but listen and let me show you the wrong you are doing yourself, your husband, and your friend.”

"Does Faith know all the past? does she desire you to do this that her happiness may be secure?" demanded Sylvia.

"Faith is no more to me, nor I to Faith, than the friendliest regard can make us. She suspected that I loved you long ago; she now believes that you love me; she pities her cousin tenderly, but will not meddle with the tangle we have made of our three lives. Forget that folly, and let me speak to you as I should. When we parted I thought that you loved Geoffrey; so did you. When I came here I was sure of it for a day; but on that second night I saw your face as you stood here alone, and then I knew what I have since assured myself of. God knows, I think my gain dearly purchased by his loss. I see your double trial; I know the tribulations in store for all of us; yet, as an honest man, I must speak out, because you ought not to delude yourself or Geoffrey another day."

"What right have you to come between us and decide my duty, Adam?" Sylvia spoke passionately, roused to resistance by his manner and the turmoil of emotions warring within her.

"The right of a sane man to save the woman he loves from destroying her own peace forever, and undermining the confidence of the friend dearest to them both. I know this is not the world's way in such matters; but I care not; because I believe one human creature has a right to speak to another in times like these as if they two stood alone. I will not command, I will appeal to you, and if you are the candid soul I think you, your own words shall prove the truth of what I say. Sylvia, do you love your husband?"

"Yes, Adam, dearly."

"More than you love me?"

"I wish I did! I wish I did!"

"Are you happy with him?"

"I was till you came; I shall be when you are gone."

"Never! It is impossible to go back to the blind tranquillity you once enjoyed. Now a single duty lies before you; delay is weak, deceit is wicked; utter sincerity alone can help us. Tell Geoffrey all; then, whether you live your life alone, or one day come to me, there is no false dealing to repent of, and looking the hard fact in the face robs it of one half its terrors. Will you do this, Sylvia?"

"No, Adam. Remember what he said that night: 'I love but few, and those few are my world,' — I am chief in that world; shall I destroy it, for my selfish pleasure? He waited for me very long, is waiting still; can I for a second time disappoint the patient heart that would find it easier to give up life than the poor possession which I am? No, I ought not, dare not do it yet."

"If you dare not speak the truth to your friend, you do not deserve him, and the name is a lie. You ask me to remember what he said that night, — I ask you to recall the look with which he begged you not to try him too hardly. Put it to yourself, — which is the kinder justice, a full confession now, or a late one hereafter, when longer subterfuge has made it harder for you to offer, bitterer for him to receive? I tell you, Sylvia, it were more merciful to murder him outright than to slowly wear away his faith, his peace, and love by a vain endeavor to perform as a duty what should be your sweetest pleasure, and what will soon become a burden heavier than you can bear."

"You do not see as I see; you cannot understand what I am to him, nor can I tell you what he is to me. It is not as if I could dislike or despise him for any unworthiness of his own; nor as if he were a lover only. Then I could do much which now is worse than impossible, for I have married him, and it is too late."

"Oh, Sylvia! why could you not have waited?"

"Why? because I am what I am, too easily led by circumstances, too entirely possessed by whatever hope, belief, or fear rules me for the hour. Give me a steadfast nature like your own and I will be as strong. I know I am weak, but I am not wilfully wicked; and when I ask you to be silent, it is because I want to save him from the pain of doubt, and try to teach myself to love him as I should. I must have time, but I can bear much and endeavor more persistently than you believe. If I forgot you once, can I not again? and should I not? I am all in all to him, while you, so strong, so self-reliant, can do without my love as you have done till now, and will soon outlive your sorrow for the loss of that which might have made us happy had I been more patient."

"Yes, I shall outlive it, else I should have little faith in myself. But I shall not forget; and if you would remain forever what you now are to me, you will so act that nothing may mar this memory, if it is to be no more. I doubt your power to forget an affection which has survived so many changes and withstood assaults such as Geoffrey must unconsciously have made upon it. But I have no right to condemn your beliefs, to order your actions, or force you to accept my code of morals if you are not ready for it. You must decide, but do not again deceive yourself, and through whatever comes hold fast to that which is better worth preserving than husband, happiness, or friend."

His words fell cold on Sylvia's ear, for with the inconsistency of a woman's heart she thought he gave her up too readily, yet honored him more truly for sacrificing both himself and her to the principle that ruled his life and made him what he was. His seeming resignation steadied her, for now he waited her decision, while before he was only bent on executing the purpose wherein he believed salvation lay. She girded up her strength, collected her thoughts, and tried to show him what she believed to be her duty.

"Let me tell you how it is with me, Adam, and be patient if I am not wise and brave like you, but far too young, too ignorant to bear such troubles well. I am not leaning on my own judgment now, but on Faith's, and though you do not love her as I hoped, you feel she is one to trust. She said the wife, in that fictitious case which was so real to us, the wife should leave no effort unmade, no self-denial unexacted, till she had fairly proved that she could not be what she had promised. Then, and then only, had she a right to undo the tie that had bound her. I must do this before I think of your love or my own, for on my marriage morning I made a vow within myself that Geoffrey's happiness should be the first duty of my life. I shall keep that vow as sacredly as I will those I made before the world, until I find that it is utterly beyond my power, then I will break all together."

"You have tried that once, and failed."

"No, I have never tried it as I shall now. At first, I did not know the truth, then I was afraid to believe, and struggled blindly to forget. Now I see clearly, I confess it, I resolve to conquer it, and I will not yield until I have done my best. You say you must respect me. Could you do so if I no longer respected myself? I should not, if I forgot all Geoffrey had borne and done for me, and could not bear and do this thing for him. I must make the effort, and make it silently; for he is very proud with all his gentleness, and would reject the seeming sacrifice though he would make one doubly hard for love of me. If I am to stay with him, it spares him the bitterest pain he could suffer; if I am to go, it gives him a few more months of happiness, and I may so prepare him that the parting will be less hard. How others would act I cannot tell, I only know that this seems right to me; and I must fight my fight alone, even if I die in doing it."

She was so earnest, yet so humble; so weak in all but the desire to do well; so young to be tormented with such fateful issues, and withal so steadfast in the grateful yet remorseful tenderness she bore her husband, that though sorely disappointed and not one whit convinced, Warwick could only submit to this woman-hearted child, and love her with redoubled love, both for what she was and what she aspired to be.

"Sylvia, what would you have me do?"

"You must go away, and for a long time, Adam; because when you are near me my will is swayed by yours, and what you desire I long to give you. Go quite away, and through Faith you may learn whether I succeed or fail. It is hard to say this, yet you know it is a truer hospitality in me to send you from my door than to detain and offer you temptation for your daily bread."

How strangely Ottila came back to him, and all the scenes he had passed through with her! — a perilous contrast just then. Yet, despite his pride in the loving little creature who put him from her that she might be worthy of him, one irrepressible lament swelled his heart and passed his lips —

“Ah, Sylvia! I thought that parting on the mountain was the hardest I could ever know, but this is harder; for now I have but to say come to me, and you would come.”

But the bitter moment had its drop of honey, whose sweetness nourished him when all else failed. Sylvia answered with a perfect confidence in that integrity which even her own longing could not bribe —

“Yes, Adam, but you will not say it, because feeling as I feel, you know I must not come to you.”

He did know it, and confessed his submission by folding fast the arms half opened for her, and standing dumb with the words trembling on his lips. It was the bravest action of a life full of real valor, for the sacrifice was not made with more than human fortitude. The man’s heart clamored for its right, patience was weary, hope despaired, and all natural instincts mutinied against the command that bound them. But no grain of virtue ever falls wasted to the ground; it drops back upon its giver a regathered strength, and cannot fail of its reward in some kindred soul’s approval, imitation, or delight. It was so then, as Sylvia went to him; for though she did not touch nor smile upon him, he felt her nearness; and the parting assured him that its power bound them closer than the happiest union. In her face there shone a look half fervent, half devout, and her voice had no falter in it now.

“You show me what I should be. All my life I have desired strength of heart and stability of soul; may I not hope to earn for myself a little of the integrity I love in you? If courage, self-denial, and self-help, make you what you are, can I have a more effectual guide? You say you shall outlive this passion; why should not I imitate your brave example, and find the consolations you shall find? Oh, Adam, let me try.”

“You shall.”

“Then go; go now, while I can say it as I should.”

“The good Lord bless and help you, Sylvia.”

She gave him both her hands, but though he only pressed them silently, that pressure nearly destroyed the victory she had won, for the strong grasp snapped the slender guard-ring Moor had given her a week ago. She heard it drop with a golden tinkle on the hearth, saw the dark oval, with its doubly significant character, roll into the ashes, and felt Warwick’s hold tighten as if he echoed the emphatic word uttered when the ineffectual gift was first bestowed. Superstition flowed in Sylvia’s blood, and was as unconquerable as the imagination which supplied its food. This omen startled her. It seemed a forewarning that endeavor would be vain, that submission was wisdom, and that the husband’s charm had lost its virtue when the stronger power claimed her. The desire to resist began to waver as the old passionate longing sprang up more eloquent than ever; she felt the rush of a coming impulse, knew that it would sweep her into Warwick's arms, there to forget her duty, to forfeit his respect. With the last effort of a sorely tried spirit she tore her hands away, fled up to the room which had never needed lock or key till now, and stifling the sound of those departing steps among the cushions of the little couch where she had wept away childish woes and dreamed girlish dreams, she struggled with the great sorrow of her too early womanhood, uttering with broken voice that petition oftenest quoted from the one prayer which expresses all our needs —

"Lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil."

CHAPTER XVII.

ASLEEP AND AWAKE.

March winds were howling round the house, the clock was striking two, the library lamp still burned, and Moor sat writing with an anxious face. Occasionally, he paused to look backward through the leaves of the book in which he wrote; sometimes he sat with suspended pen, thinking deeply; and once or twice he laid it down, to press his hand over eyes more weary than the mind that compelled them to this late service.

Returning to his work after one of these pauses, he was a little startled to see Sylvia standing on the threshold of the door. Rising hastily to ask if she were ill, he stopped half way across the room, for, with a thrill of apprehension and surprise, he saw that she was asleep. Her eyes were open, fixed and vacant, her face reposeful, her breathing regular, and every sense apparently wrapt in the profoundest unconsciousness. Fearful of awakening her too suddenly, Moor stood motionless, yet full of interest, for this was his first experience of somnambulism, and it was a strange, almost an awful sight, to witness the blind obedience of the body to the soul that ruled it.

For several minutes she remained where she first appeared. Then, as if the dream demanded action, she stooped, and seemed to take some object from a chair beside the door, held it an instant, kissed it softly and laid it down. Slowly and steadily she went across the room, avoiding all obstacles with the unerring instinct that often leads the sleepwalker through dangers that appall his waking eyes, and sat down in the great chair he had left, leaned her cheek upon its arm, and rested tranquilly for several minutes. Soon the dream disturbed her, and lifting her head, she bent forward, as if addressing or caressing some one seated at her feet. Involuntarily her husband smiled; for often when they were alone he sat there reading or talking to her, while she played with his hair, likening its brown abundance to young Milton's curling locks in the picture overhead. The smile had hardly risen when it was scared away, for Sylvia suddenly sprung up with both hands out, crying in a voice that rent the silence with its imploring energy —

"No, no, you must not speak! I will not hear you!"

Her own cry woke her. Consciousness and memory returned together, and her face whitened with a look of terror, as her bewildered eyes showed her not Warwick, but her husband. This look, so full of fear, yet so intelligent, startled Moor more than the apparition or the cry had done, for a conviction flashed into his mind that some unsuspected trouble had been burdening Sylvia, and was now finding vent against her will. Anxious to possess himself of the truth, and bent on doing so, he veiled his purpose for a time, letting his unchanged manner reassure and compose her.

"Dear child, don't look so lost and wild. You are quite safe, and have only been wandering in your sleep. Why, Mrs. Macbeth, have you murdered some one, that you go crying out in this uncanny way, frightening me as much as I seem to have frightened you?"

"I have murdered sleep. What did I do? what did I say?" she asked, trembling and shrinking as she dropped into her chair.

Hoping to quiet her, he took his place on the footstool, and told her what had passed. At first, she listened with a divided mind, for so strongly was she still impressed with the vividness of the dream, she half expected Warwick to rise like Banquo, and claim the seat that a single occupancy seemed to have made his own. An expression of intense relief replaced that of fear, when she had heard all, and she composed herself with the knowledge that her secret was still hers. For, dreary bosom-guest as it was, she had not yet resolved to end her trial.

"What set you walking, Sylvia?"

"I recollect hearing the clock strike one, and thinking I would come down to see what you were doing so late, but must have dropped off and carried out my design asleep. You see I put on wrapper and slippers as I always do, when I take nocturnal rambles awake. How pleasant the fire feels, and how cosy you look here; no wonder you like to stay and enjoy it."

She leaned forward warming her hands in unconscious imitation of Adam, on the night which she had been recalling before she slept. Moor watched her with increasing disquiet; for never had he seen her in a mood like this. She evaded his question, she averted her eyes, she half hid her face, and with a gesture that of late had grown habitual, seemed to try to hide her heart. Often had she baffled him, sometimes grieved him, but never before showed that she feared him. This wounded both his love and pride, and this fixed his resolution, to wring from her an explanation of the changes which had passed over her within those winter months, for they had been many and mysterious. As if she feared silence, Sylvia soon spoke again.

"Why are you up so late? This is not the first time I have seen your lamp burning when I woke. What are you studying so deeply?"

"My wife."

Leaning on the arm of her chair he looked up wistfully, tenderly, as if inviting confidence, sueing for affection. The words, the look, smote Sylvia to the heart, and but for the thought, "I have not tried long enough," she would have uttered the confession that leaped to her lips. Once spoken, it would be too late for secret effort or success, and this man's happiest hopes would vanish in a breath. Knowing that his nature was almost as sensitively fastidious as a woman's, she also knew that the discovery of her love for Adam, innocent as it had been, self-denying as it tried to be, would forever mar the beauty of his wedded life for Moor. No hour of it would seem sacred, no act, look, or word of hers entirely his own, nor any of the dear delights of home remain undarkened by the shadow of his friend. She could not speak yet, and turning her eyes to the fire, she asked —

"Why study me? Have you no better book?"

"None that I love to read so well or have such need to understand; because, though nearest and dearest as you are to me, I seem to know you less than any friend I have. I do not wish to wound you, dear, nor be exacting; but since we were married you have grown more shy than ever, and the act which should have drawn us tenderly together seems to have estranged us. You never talk now of yourself, or ask me to explain the working of that busy mind of yours; and lately you have sometimes shunned me, as if solitude were pleasanter than my society. Is it, Sylvia?"

"Sometimes; I always liked to be alone, you know."

She answered as truly as she could, feeling that his love demanded every confidence but the one cruel one which would destroy its peace past help.

"I knew I had a most tenacious heart, but I hoped it was not a selfish one," he sorrowfully said. "Now I see that it is, and deeply regret that my hopeful spirit, my impatient love, has brought disappointment to us both. I should have waited longer, should have been less confident of my own power to win you, and never let you waste your life in vain endeavors to be happy when I was not all to you that you expected. I should not have consented to your wish to spend the winter here so much alone with me. I should have known that such a quiet home and studious companion could not have many charms for a young girl like you. Forgive me, I will do better, and this one-sided life of ours shall be changed; for while I have been supremely content you have been miserable."

It was impossible to deny it, and with a tearless sob she laid her arm about his neck, her head on his shoulder, and mutely confessed the truth of what he said. The trouble deepened in his face, but he spoke out more cheerfully, believing that he had found the secret sorrow.

"Thank heaven, nothing is past mending, and we will yet be happy. An entire change shall be made; you shall no longer devote yourself to me, but I to you.

Will you go abroad, and forget this dismal home until its rest grows inviting, Sylvia?"

"No, Geoffrey, not yet. I will learn to make the home pleasant, I will work harder, and leave no time for ennui and discontent. I promised to make your happiness, and I can do it better here than anywhere. Let me try again."

"No, Sylvia, you work too hard already; you do everything with such vehemence you wear out your body before your will is weary, and that brings melancholy. I am very credulous, but when I see that acts belie words I cease to believe. These months assure me that you are not happy; have I found the secret thorn that frets you?"

She did not answer, for truth she could not, and falsehood she would not, give him. He rose, went walking to and fro, searching memory, heart, and conscience for any other cause, but found none, and saw only one way out of his bewilderment. He drew a chair before her, sat down, and looking at her with the masterful expression dominant in his face, asked briefly —

"Sylvia, have I been tyrannical, unjust, unkind, since you came to me?"

"Oh, Geoffrey, too generous, too just, too tender!"

"Have I claimed any rights but those you gave me, entreated or demanded any sacrifices knowingly and wilfully?"

"Never."

"Now I do claim my right to know your heart; I do entreat and demand one thing, your confidence."

Then she felt that the hour had come, and tried to prepare to meet it as she should by remembering that she had endeavored prayerfully, desperately, despairingly, to do her duty, and had failed. Warwick was right, she could not forget him. There was such vitality in the man and in the sentiment he inspired, that it endowed his memory with a power more potent than the visible presence of her husband. The knowledge of his love now undid the work that ignorance had helped patience and pride to achieve before. The more she struggled to forget, the deeper, dearer, grew the yearning that must be denied, till months of fruitless effort convinced her that it was impossible to outlive a passion more indomitable than will, or penitence, or perseverance. Now she saw the wisdom of Adam's warning, and felt that he knew both his friend's heart and her own better than herself. Now she bitterly regretted that she had not spoken out when he was there to help her, and before the least deceit had taken the dignity from sorrow. Nevertheless, though she trembled she resolved; and while Moor spoke on, she made ready to atone for past silence by a perfect loyalty to truth.

"My wife, concealment is not generosity, for the heaviest trouble shared together could not so take the sweetness from my life, the charm from home, or make me more miserable than this want of confidence. It is a double wrong, because you not only mar my peace but destroy your own by wasting health and happiness in vain endeavors to bear some grief alone. Your eye seldom meets mine now, your words are measured, your actions cautious, your innocent gayety all gone. You hide your heart from me, you hide your face; I seem to have lost the frank girl whom I loved, and found a melancholy woman, who suffers silently till her honest nature rebels, and brings her to confession in her sleep. There is no page of my life which I have not freely shown you; do I do not deserve an equal candor? Shall I not receive it?"

"Yes."

"Sylvia, what stands between us?"

"Adam Warwick."

Earnest as a prayer, brief as a command had been the question, instantaneous was the reply, as Sylvia knelt down before him, put back the veil that should never hide her from him any more, looked up into her husband's face without one shadow in her own, and steadily told all.

The revelation was too utterly unexpected, too difficult of belief to be at once accepted or understood. Moor started at the name, then leaned forward, breathless and intent, as if to seize the words before they left her lips; words that recalled incidents and acts dark and unmeaning till the spark of intelligence fired a long train of memories and enlightened him with terrible rapidity. Blinded by his own devotion, the knowledge of Adam's love and loss seemed gages of his fidelity; the thought that he loved Sylvia never had occurred to him, and seemed incredible even when her own lips told it. She had been right in fearing the effect this knowledge would have upon him. It stung his pride, wounded his heart, and forever marred his faith in love and friendship. As the truth broke over him, cold and bitter as a billow of the sea, she saw gathering in his face the still white grief and indignation of an outraged spirit, suffering with all a woman's pain, with all a man's intensity of passion. His eye grew fiery and stern, the veins rose dark upon his forehead, the lines about the mouth showed hard and grim, the whole face altered terribly. As she looked, Sylvia thanked heaven that Warwick was not there to feel the sudden atonement for an innocent offence which his friend might have exacted before this natural but unworthy temptation had passed by.

"Now I have given all my confidence though I may have broken both our hearts in doing it. I do not hope for pardon yet, but I am sure of pity, and I leave my fate in your hands. Geoffrey, what shall I do?"

"Wait for me," and putting her away, Moor left the room.

Suffering too much in mind to remember that she had a body, Sylvia remained where she was, and leaning her head upon her hands tried to recall what had passed, to nerve herself for what was to come. Her first sensation was one of unutterable relief. The long struggle was over; the haunting care was gone; there was nothing now to conceal; she might be herself again, and her spirit rose with something of its old elasticity as the heavy burden was removed. A moment she enjoyed this hard-won freedom, then the memory that the burden was not lost but laid on other shoulders, filled her with an anguish too sharp to find vent in tears, too deep to leave any hope of cure except in action. But how act? She had performed the duty so long, so vainly delayed, and when the first glow of satisfaction passed, found redoubled anxiety, regret, and pain before her. Clear and hard the truth stood there, and no power of hers could recall the words that showed it to her husband, could give them back the early blindness, or the later vicissitudes of hope and fear. In the long silence that filled the room she had time to calm her perturbation and comfort her remorse by the vague but helpful belief which seldom deserts sanguine spirits, that something, as yet unseen and unsuspected, would appear to heal the breach, to show what was to be done, and to make all happy in the end.

Where Moor went or how long he stayed Sylvia never knew, but when at length he came, her first glance showed her that pride is as much to be dreaded as passion. No gold is without alloy, and now she saw the shadow of a nature which had seemed all sunshine. She knew he was very proud, but never thought to be the cause of its saddest manifestation; one which showed her that its presence could make the silent sorrow of a just and gentle man a harder trial to sustain than the hottest anger, the bitterest reproach. Scarcely paler than when he went, there was no sign of violent emotion in his countenance. His eye shone keen and dark, an anxious fold crossed his forehead, and a melancholy gravity replaced the cheerful serenity his face once wore. Wherein the alteration lay Sylvia could not tell, but over the whole man some subtle change had passed. The sudden frost which had blighted the tenderest affection of his life seemed to have left its chill behind, robbing his manner of its cordial charm, his voice of its heartsome ring, and giving him the look of one who sternly said — ”I must suffer, but it shall be alone.”

Cold and quiet, he stood regarding her with a strange expression, as if endeavoring to realize the truth, and see in her not his wife but Warwick’s lover. Oppressed by the old fear, now augmented by a measureless regret, she could only look up at him feeling that her husband had become her judge. Yet as she looked she was conscious of a momentary wonder at the seeming transposition of character in the two so near and dear to her. Strong-hearted Warwick wept like any child, but accepted his disappointment without complaint and bore it manfully. Moor, from whom she would sooner have expected such demonstration, grew stormy first, then stern, as she once believed his friend would have done. She forgot that Moor's pain was the sharper, his wound the deeper, for the patient hope cherished so long; the knowledge that he never had been, never could be loved as he loved; the sense of wrong that could not but burn even in the meekest heart at such a late discovery, such an entire loss.

Sylvia spoke first, not audibly, but with a little gesture of supplication, a glance of sorrowful submission. He answered both, not by lamentation or reproach, but by just enough of his accustomed tenderness in touch and tone to make her tears break forth, as he placed her in the ancient chair so often occupied together, took the one opposite, and sweeping a clear space on the table between them, looked across it with the air of a man bent on seeing his way and following it at any cost.

"Now Sylvia, I can listen as I should."

"Oh, Geoffrey, what can I say?"

"Repeat all you have already told me. I only gathered one fact then, now I want the circumstances, for I find this confession difficult of belief."

Perhaps no sterner expiation could have been required of her than to sit there, face to face, eye to eye, and tell again that little history of thwarted love and fruitless endeavor. Excitement had given her courage for the first confession, now it was torture to carefully repeat what had poured freely from her lips before. But she did it, glad to prove her penitence by any test he might apply. Tears often blinded her, uncontrollable emotion often arrested her; and more than once she turned on him a beseeching look, which asked as plainly as words, "Must I go on?"

Intent on learning all, Moor was unconscious of the trial he imposed, unaware that the change in himself was the keenest reproach he could have made, and still with a persistency as gentle as inflexible, he pursued his purpose to the end. When great drops rolled down her cheeks he dried them silently; when she paused, he waited till she calmed herself; and when she spoke he listened with few interruptions but a question now and then. Occasionally a sudden flush of passionate pain swept across his face, as some phrase, implying rather than expressing Warwick's love or Sylvia's longing, escaped the narrator's lips, and when she described their parting on that very spot, his eye went from her to the hearth her words seemed to make desolate, with a glance she never could forget. But when the last question was answered, the last appeal for pardon brokenly uttered, nothing but the pale pride remained; and his voice was cold and quiet as his mien.

"Yes, it is this which has baffled and kept me groping in the dark so long, for I wholly trusted what I wholly loved."

"Alas, it was that very confidence that made my task seem so necessary and so hard. How often I longed to go to you with my great trouble as I used to do with lesser ones. But here you would suffer more than I; and having done the wrong, it was for me to pay the penalty. So like many another weak yet willing soul, I tried to keep you happy at all costs."

"One frank word before I married you would have spared us this. Could you not foresee the end and dare to speak it, Sylvia?"

"I see it now, I did not then, else I would have spoken as freely as I speak to-night. I thought I had outlived my love for Adam; it seemed kind to spare you a knowledge that would disturb your friendship, so though I told the truth, I did not tell it all. I thought temptations came from without; I could withstand such, and I did, even when it wore Adam's shape. This temptation came so suddenly, seemed so harmless, generous and just, that I yielded to it unconscious that it was one. Surely I deceived myself as cruelly as I did you, and God knows I have tried to atone for it when time taught me my fatal error."

"Poor child, it was too soon for you to play the perilous game of hearts. I should have known it, and left you to the safe and simple joys of girlhood. Forgive me that I have kept you a prisoner so long; take off the fetter I put on, and go, Sylvia."

"No, do not put me from you yet; do not think that I can hurt you so, and then be glad to leave you suffering alone. Look like your kind self if you can; talk to me as you used to; let me show you my heart and you will see how large a place you fill in it. Let me begin again, for now the secret is told there is no fear to keep out love; and I can give my whole strength to learning the lesson you have tried so patiently to teach."

"You cannot, Sylvia. We are as much divorced as if judge and jury had decided the righteous but hard separation for us. You can never be a wife to me with an unconquerable affection in your heart; I can never be your husband while the shadow of a fear remains. I will have all or nothing."

"Adam foretold this. He knew you best, and I should have followed the brave counsel he gave me long ago. Oh, if he were only here to help us now!"

The desire broke from Sylvia's lips involuntarily as she turned for strength to the strong soul that loved her. But it was like wind to smouldering fire; a pang of jealousy wrung Moor's heart, and he spoke out with a flash of the eye that startled Sylvia more than the rapid change of voice and manner.

"Hush! Say anything of yourself or me, and I can bear it, but spare me the sound of Adam's name to-night. A man's nature is not forgiving like a woman's, and the best of us harbor impulses you know nothing of. If I am to lose wife, friend, and home, for God's sake leave me my self-respect."

All the coldness and pride passed from Moor’s face as the climax of his sorrow came; with an impetuous gesture he threw his arms across the table, and laid down his head in a paroxysm of tearless suffering such as men only know.

How Sylvia longed to speak! But what consolation could the tenderest words supply? She searched for some alleviating suggestion, some happier hope; none came. Her eye turned imploringly to the pictured Fates above her as if imploring them to aid her. But they looked back at her inexorably dumb, and instinctively her thought passed beyond them to the Ruler of all fates, asking the help which never is refused. No words embodied her appeal, no sound expressed it, only a voiceless cry from the depths of a contrite spirit, owning its weakness, making known its want. She prayed for submission, but her deeper need was seen, and when she asked for patience to endure, Heaven sent her power to act, and out of this sharp trial brought her a better strength and clearer knowledge of herself than years of smoother experience could have bestowed. A sense of security, of stability, came to her as that entire reliance assured her by its all-sustaining power that she had found what she most needed to make life clear to her and duty sweet. With her face in her hands, she sat, forgetful that she was not alone, as in that brief but precious moment she felt the exceeding comfort of a childlike faith in the one Friend who, when we are deserted by all, even by ourselves, puts forth His hand and gathers us tenderly to Himself.

Her husband’s voice recalled her, and looking up she showed him such an earnest, patient countenance, it touched him like an unconscious rebuke. The first tears she had seen rose to his eyes, and all the old tenderness came back into his voice, softening the dismissal which had been more coldly begun.

“Dear, silence and rest are best for both of us to-night. We cannot treat this trouble as we should till we are calmer; then we will take counsel how soonest to end what never should have been begun. Forgive me, pray for me, and in sleep forget me for a little while.”

He held the door for her, but as she passed Sylvia lifted her face for the good night caress without which she had never left him since she became his wife. She did not speak, but her eye humbly besought this token of forgiveness; nor was it denied. Moor laid his hand upon her lips, saying, “these are Adam’s now,” and kissed her on the forehead.

Such a little thing: but it overcame Sylvia with the sorrowful certainty of the loss which had befallen both, and she crept away, feeling herself an exile from the heart and home whose happy mistress she could never be again.

Moor watched the little figure going upward, and weeping softly as it went, as if he echoed the sad “never any more,” which those tears expressed, and when it vanished with a backward look, shut himself in alone with his great sorrow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT NEXT?

Sylvia laid her head down on her pillow, believing that this night would be the longest, saddest she had ever known. But before she had time to sigh for sleep it wrapt her in its comfortable arms, and held her till day broke. Sunshine streamed across the room, and early birds piped on the budding boughs that swayed before the window. But no morning smile saluted her, no morning flower awaited her, and nothing but a little note lay on the unpressed pillow at her side.

"Sylvia, I have gone away to Faith, because this proud, resentful spirit of mine must be subdued before I meet you. I leave that behind me which will speak to you more kindly, calmly than I can now, and show you that my effort has been equal to my failure. There is nothing for me to do but submit; manfully if I must, meekly if I can; and this short exile will prepare me for the longer one to come. Take counsel with those nearer and dearer to you than myself, and secure the happiness which I have so ignorantly delayed, but cannot wilfully destroy. God be with you, and through all that is and is to come, remember that you remain beloved forever in the heart of Geoffrey Moor."

Sylvia had known many sad uprisings, but never a sadder one than this, and the hours that followed aged her more than any year had done. All day she wandered aimlessly to and fro, for the inward conflict would not let her rest. The house seemed home no longer when its presiding genius was gone, and everywhere some token of his former presence touched her with its mute reproach.

She asked no counsel of her family, for well she knew the outburst of condemnation, incredulity, and grief that would assail her there. They could not help her yet; they would only augment perplexities, weaken convictions, and distract her mind. When she was sure of herself she would tell them, endure their indignation and regret, and steadily execute the new purpose, whatever it should be.

To many it might seem an easy task to break the bond that burdened and assume the tie that blessed. But Sylvia had grown wise in self-knowledge, timorous through self-delusion; therefore the greater the freedom given her the more she hesitated to avail herself of it. The nobler each friend grew as she turned from one to the other, the more impossible seemed the decision, for generous spirit and loving heart contended for the mastery, yet neither won. She knew that Moor had put her from him never to be recalled till some miracle was wrought that should make her truly his. This renunciation showed her how much he had become to her, how entirely she had learned to lean upon him, and how great a boon such perfect love was in itself. Even the prospect of a life with Warwick brought forebodings with its hope. Reason made her listen to many doubts which hitherto passion had suppressed. Would she never tire of his unrest? Could she fill so large a heart and give it power as well as warmth? Might not the two wills clash, the ardent natures inflame one another, the stronger intellect exhaust the weaker, and disappointment come again? And as she asked these questions, conscience, the monitor whom no bribe can tempt, no threat silence, invariably answered “Yes.”

But chief among the cares that beset her was one that grew more burdensome with thought. By her own will she had put her liberty into another’s keeping; law confirmed the act, gospel sanctioned the vow, and it could only be redeemed by paying the costly price demanded of those who own that they have drawn a blank in the lottery of marriage. Public opinion is a grim ghost that daunts the bravest, and Sylvia knew that trials lay before her from which she would shrink and suffer, as only a woman sensitive and proud as she could shrink and suffer. Once apply this remedy and any tongue would have the power to wound, any eye to insult with pity or contempt, any stranger to criticise or condemn, and she would have no means of redress, no place of refuge, even in that stronghold, Adam’s heart.

All that dreary day she wrestled with these stubborn facts, but could neither mould nor modify them as she would, and evening found her spent, but not decided. Too excited for sleep, yet too weary for exertion, she turned bedward, hoping that the darkness and the silence of night would bring good counsel, if not rest.

Till now she had shunned the library as one shuns the spot where one has suffered most. But as she passed the open door the gloom that reigned within seemed typical of that which had fallen on its absent master, and following the impulse of the moment Sylvia went in to light it with the little glimmer of her lamp. Nothing had been touched, for no hand but her own preserved the order of this room, and all household duties had been neglected on that day. The old chair stood where she had left it, and over its arm was thrown the velvet coat, half dressing-gown, half blouse, that Moor liked to wear at this household trysting-place. Sylvia bent to fold it smoothly as it hung, and feeling that she must solace herself with some touch of tenderness, laid her cheek against the soft garment, whispering “Good night.” Something glittered on the cushion of the chair, and looking nearer she found a steel-clasped book, upon the cover of which lay a dead heliotrope, a little key.

It was Moor’s Diary, and now she understood that passage of the note which had been obscure before. “I leave that behind me which will speak to you more kindly, calmly, than I can now, and show you that my effort has been equal to my failure.” She had often begged to read it, threatened to pick the lock, and felt the strongest curiosity to learn what was contained in the long entries that he daily made. Her requests had always been answered with the promise of entire possession of the book when the year was out. Now he gave it, though the year was not gone, and many leaves were yet unfilled. He thought she would come to this room first, would see her morning flower laid ready for her, and, sitting in what they called their Refuge, would draw some comfort for herself, some palliation for his innocent offence, from the record so abruptly ended.

She took it, went away to her own room, unlocked the short romance of his wedded life, and found her husband’s heart laid bare before her.

It was a strange and solemn thing to look so deeply into the private experience of a fellow-being; to trace the birth and progress of purposes and passions, the motives of action, the secret aspirations, the besetting sins that made up the inner life he had been leading beside her. Moor wrote with an eloquent sincerity, because he had put himself into his book, as if feeling the need of some *confidante* he had chosen the only one that pardons egotism. Here, too, Sylvia saw her chameleon self, etched with loving care, endowed with all gifts and graces, studied with unflagging zeal, and made the idol of a life.

Often a tuneful spirit seemed to assert itself, and passing from smooth prose to smoother poetry, sonnet, song, or psalm, flowed down the page in cadences stately, sweet, or solemn, filling the reader with delight at the discovery of a gift so genuine, yet so shyly folded up within itself, unconscious that its modesty was the surest token of its worth. More than once Sylvia laid her face into the book, and added her involuntary comment on some poem or passage made pathetic by the present; and more than once paused to wonder, with exceeding wonder, why she could not give such genius and affection its reward. Had she needed any confirmation of the fact so hard to teach herself, this opening of his innermost would have given it. For while she bitterly grieved over the death-blow she had dealt his happy hope, it no longer seemed a possibility to change her stubborn heart, or lessen by a fraction the debt which she sadly felt could only be repaid in friendship’s silver, not love’s gold.

All night she lay there like some pictured Magdalene, purer but as penitent as Correggio’s Mary, with the book, the lamp, the melancholy eyes, the golden hair that painters love. All night she read, gathering courage, not consolation, from those pages, for seeing what she was not showed her what she might become; and when she turned the little key upon that story without an end, Sylvia the girl was dead, but Sylvia the woman had begun to live.

Lying in the rosy hush of dawn, there came to her a sudden memory —

“If ever you need help that Geoffrey cannot give, remember cousin Faith.”

This was the hour Faith foresaw; Moor had gone to her with his trouble, why not follow, and let this woman, wise, discreet, and gentle, show her what should come next?

The newly risen sun saw Sylvia away upon her journey to Faith’s home among the hills. She lived alone, a cheerful, busy, solitary soul, demanding little of others, yet giving freely to whomsoever asked an alms of her.

Sylvia found the gray cottage nestled in a hollow of the mountain side; a pleasant hermitage, secure and still. Mistress and maid composed the household, but none of the gloom of isolation darkened the sunshine that pervaded it; peace seemed to sit upon its threshold, content to brood beneath its eaves, and the atmosphere of home to make it beautiful.

When some momentous purpose or event absorbs us we break through fears and formalities, act out ourselves forgetful of reserve, and use the plainest phrases to express emotions which need no ornament and little aid from language. Sylvia illustrated this fact, then; for, without hesitation or embarrassment, she entered Miss Dane’s door, called no servant to announce her, but went, as if by instinct, straight to the room where Faith sat alone, and with the simplest greeting asked —

“Is Geoffrey here?”

“He was an hour ago, and will be an hour hence. I sent him out to rest, for he cannot sleep. I am glad you came to him; he has not learned to do without you yet.”

With no bustle of surprise or sympathy Faith put away her work, took off the hat and cloak, drew her guest beside her on the couch before the one deep window looking down the valley, and gently chafing the chilly hands in warm ones, said nothing more till Sylvia spoke.

“He has told you all the wrong I have done him?”

“Yes, and found a little comfort here. Do you need consolation also?”

“Can you ask? But I need something more, and no one can give it to me so well as you. I want to be set right, to hear things called by their true names, to be taken out of myself and made to see why I am always doing wrong while trying to do well.”

“Your father, sister, or brother are fitter for that task than I. Have you tried them?”

“No, and I will not. They love me, but they could not help me; for they would beg me to conceal if I cannot forget, to endure if I cannot conquer, and abide by my mistake at all costs. That is not the help I want. I desire to know the one just thing to be done, and to be made brave enough to do it, though friends lament, gossips clamor, and the heavens fall. I am in earnest now. Rate me sharply, drag out my weaknesses, shame my follies, show no mercy to my selfish hopes; and when I can no longer hide from myself put me in the way I should go, and I will follow it though my feet bleed at every step.”

She was in earnest now, terribly so, but still Faith drew back, though her compassionate face belied her hesitating words.

“Go to Adam; who wiser or more just than he?”

“I cannot. He, as well as Geoffrey, loves me too well to decide for me. You stand between them, wise as the one, gentle as the other, and you do not care for me enough to let affection hoodwink reason. Faith, you bade me come; do not cast me off, for if you shut your heart against me I know not where to go.”

Despairing she spoke, disconsolate she looked, and Faith’s reluctance vanished. The maternal aspect returned, her voice resumed its warmth, her eye its benignity, and Sylvia was reassured before a word was spoken.

“I do not cast you off, nor shut my heart against you. I only hesitated to assume such responsibility, and shrunk from the task because of compassion, not coldness. Sit here, and tell me all your trouble, Sylvia?”

“That is so kind! It seems quite natural to turn to you as if I had a claim upon you. Let me have, and if you can, love me a little, because I have no mother, and need one very much.”

“My child, you shall not need one any more.”

“I feel that, and am comforted already. Faith, if you were me, and stood where I stand, beloved by two men, either of whom any woman might be proud to call husband, putting self away, to which should you cleave?”

“To neither.”

Sylvia paled and trembled, as if the oracle she had invoked was an unanswerable voice pronouncing the inevitable. She watched Faith’s countenance a moment, groping for her meaning, failed to find it, and whispered below her breath —

“Can I know why?”

“Because your husband is, your lover *should* be your friend and nothing more. You have been hardly taught the lesson many have to learn, that friendship cannot fill love’s place, yet should be kept inviolate, and served as an austerer mistress who can make life very beautiful to such as feel her worth and deserve her delights. Adam taught me this, for though Geoffrey took you from him, he still held fast his friend, letting no disappointment sour, no envy alienate, no resentment destroy the perfect friendship years of mutual fidelity have built up between them."

"Yes!" cried Sylvia, "how I have honored Adam for that steadfastness, and how I have despised myself, because I could not be as wise and faithful in the earlier, safer sentiment I felt for Geoffrey."

"Be wise and faithful now; cease to be the wife, but remain the friend; freely give all you can with honesty, not one jot more."

"Never did man possess a truer friend than I will be to him — if he will let me. But, Faith, if I may be that to Geoffrey, may I not be something nearer and dearer to Adam? Would not you dare to hope it, were you me?"

"No, Sylvia, never."

"Why not?"

"If you were blind, a cripple, or cursed with some incurable infirmity of body, would not you hesitate to bind yourself and your affliction to another?"

"You know I should not only hesitate, but utterly refuse."

"I do know it, therefore I venture to show you why, according to my belief, you should not marry Adam. I cannot tell you as I ought, but only try to show you where to seek the explanation of my seeming harsh advice. There are diseases more subtle and dangerous than any that vex our flesh; diseases that should be as carefully cured if curable, as inexorably prevented from spreading as any malady we dread. A paralyzed will, a morbid mind, a mad temper, a tainted heart, a blind soul, are afflictions to be as much regarded as bodily infirmities. Nay, more, inasmuch as souls are of greater value than perishable flesh. Where this is religiously taught, believed, and practised, marriage becomes in truth a sacrament blessed of God; children thank parents for the gift of life; parents see in children living satisfactions and rewards, not reproaches or retributions doubly heavy to be borne, for the knowledge that where two sinned, many must inevitably suffer."

"You try to tell me gently, Faith, but I see that you consider me one of the innocent unfortunates, who have no right to marry till they be healed, perhaps never. I have dimly felt this during the past year, now I know it, and thank God that I have no child to reproach me hereafter, for bequeathing it the mental ills I have not yet outlived."

"Dear Sylvia, you are an exceptional case in all respects, because an extreme one. The ancient theology of two contending spirits in one body, is strangely exemplified in you, for each rules by turns, and each helps or hinders as moods and circumstances lead. Even in the great event of a woman's life, you were thwarted by conflicting powers; impulse and ignorance, passion and pride, hope and despair. Now you stand at the parting of the ways, looking wistfully along the pleasant one where Adam seems to beckon, while I point down the rugged one where I have walked, and though my heart aches as I do it, counsel you as I would a daughter of my own."

"I thank you, I will follow you, but my life looks very barren if I must relinquish my desire."

"Not as barren as if you possessed your desire, and found in it another misery and mistake. Could you have loved Geoffrey, it might have been safe and well with you; loving Adam, it is neither. Let me show you why. He is an exception like yourself; perhaps that explains your attraction for each other. In him the head rules, in Geoffrey the heart. The one criticises, the other loves mankind. Geoffrey is proud and private in all that lies nearest him, clings to persons, and is faithful as a woman. Adam has only the pride of an intellect which tests all things, and abides by its own insight. He clings to principles; persons are but animated facts or ideas; he seizes, searches, uses them, and when they have no more for him, drops them like the husk, whose kernel he has secured; passing on to find and study other samples without regret, but with unabated zeal. For life to him is perpetual progress, and he obeys the law of his nature as steadily as sun or sea. Is not this so?"

"All true; what more, Faith?"

"Few women, if wise, would dare to marry this man, noble and love-worthy as he is, till time has tamed and experience developed him. Even then the risk is great, for he demands and unconsciously absorbs into himself the personality of others, making large returns, but of a kind which only those as strong, sagacious, and steadfast as himself can receive and adapt to their individual uses, without being overcome and possessed. That none of us should be, except by the Spirit stronger than man, purer than woman. You feel, though you do not understand this power. You know that his presence excites, yet wearies you; that, while you love, you fear him, and even when you long to be all in all to him, you doubt your ability to make his happiness. Am I not right?"

"I must say, yes."

"Then, it is scarcely necessary for me to tell you that I think this unequal marriage would be but a brief one for you; bright at its beginning, dark at its end. With him you would exhaust yourself in passionate endeavors to follow where he led. He would not know this, you would not confess it, but too late you might both learn that you were too young, too ardent, too frail in all but the might of love, to be his wife. It is like a woodbird mating with an eagle, straining its little wings to scale the sky with him, blinding itself with gazing at the sun, striving to fill and warm the wild eyrie which becomes its home, and perishing in the stern solitude the other loves. Yet, too fond and faithful to regret the safer nest among the grass, the gentler mate it might have had, the summer life and winter flitting to the south for which it was designed."

"Faith, you frighten me; you seem to see and show me all the dim forebodings I have hidden away within myself, because I could not understand or dared not face them. How have you learned so much? How can you read me so well? and who told you these things of us all?"

"I had an unhappy girlhood in a discordant home; early cares and losses made me old in youth, and taught me to observe how others bore their burdens. Since then solitude has led me to study and reflect upon the question toward which my thoughts inevitably turned. Concerning yourself and your past Geoffrey told me much but Adam more."

"Have you seen him? Has he been here? When, Faith, when?"

Light and color flashed back into Sylvia's face, and the glad eagerness of her voice was a pleasant sound to hear after the despairing accents gone before. Faith sighed, but answered fully, carefully, while the compassion of her look deepened as she spoke.

"I saw him but a week ago, vehement and vigorous as ever. He has come hither often during the winter, has watched you unseen, and brought me news of you which made Geoffrey's disclosure scarcely a surprise. He said you bade him hear of you through me, that he preferred to come, not write, for letters were often false interpreters, but face to face one gets the real thought of one's friend by look, as well as word, and the result is satisfactory."

"That is Adam! But what more did he say? How did you advise him? I know he asked counsel of you, as we all have done."

"He did, and I gave it as frankly as to you and Geoffrey. He made me understand you, judge you leniently, see in you the virtues you have cherished despite drawbacks such as few have to struggle with. Your father made Adam his confessor during the happy month when you first knew him. I need not tell you how he received and preserved such a trust. He betrayed no confidence, but in speaking of you I saw that his knowledge of the father taught him to understand the daughter. It was well and beautifully done, and did we need anything to endear him to us this trait of character would do it, for it is a rare endowment, the power of overcoming all obstacles of pride, age, and the sad reserve self-condemnation brings us, and making confession a grateful healing."

"I know it; we tell our sorrows to such as Geoffrey, our sins to such as Adam. But, Faith, when you spoke of me, did you say to him what you have been saying to me about my unfitness to be his wife because of inequality, and my unhappy inheritance?”

“Could I do otherwise when he fixed that commanding eye of his upon me asking, ‘Is my love as wise as it is warm?’ He is one of those who force the hardest truths from us by the simple fact that they can bear it, and would do the same for us. He needed it then, for though instinct was right, — hence his anxious question, — his heart, never so entirely roused as now, made it difficult for him to judge of your relations to one another, and there my woman’s insight helped him.”

“What did he do when you told him? I see that you will yet hesitate to tell me. I think you have been preparing me to hear it. Speak out. Though my cheeks whiten and my hands tremble I can bear it, for you shall be the law by which I will abide.”

“You shall be a law to yourself, my brave Sylvia. Put your hands in mine and hold fast to the friend who loves and honors you for this. I will tell you what Adam did and said. He sat in deep thought many minutes; but with him to see is to do, and soon he turned to me with the courageous expression which in him signifies that the fight is fought, the victory won. ‘It is necessary to be just, it is not necessary to be happy. I shall never marry Sylvia, even if I may,’ — and with that paraphrase of words, whose meaning seemed to fit his need, he went away. I think he will not come again either to me — or you.”

How still the room grew as Faith’s reluctant lips uttered the last words! Sylvia sat motionless looking out into the sunny valley, with eyes that saw nothing but the image of that beloved friend leaving her perhaps forever. Well she knew that with this man to see *was* to do, and with a woeful sense of desolation falling cold upon her heart, she felt that there was nothing more to hope for but a brave submission like his own. Yet in that pause there came a feeling of relief after the first despair. The power of choice was no longer left her, and the help she needed was bestowed by one who could decide against himself, inspired by a sentiment which curbed a strong man’s love of power, and made it subject to a just man’s love of right. Great examples never lose their virtue; what Pompey was to Warwick that Warwick became to Sylvia, and in the moment of supremest sorrow she felt the fire of a noble emulation kindling within her from the spark he left behind.

“Faith, what comes next?”

“This,” and she was gathered close while Faith confessed how hard her task had been by letting tears fall fast upon the head which seemed to have found its proper resting-place, as if despite her courage and her wisdom the woman’s heart was half broken with its pity. Better than any words was the motherly embrace, the silent shower, the blessed balm of sympathy which soothed the wounds it could not heal. Leaning against each other the two hearts talked together in the silence, feeling the beauty of the tie kind Nature weaves between the hearts that should be knit. Faith often turned her lips to Sylvia's forehead, brushed back her hair with a lingering touch, and drew her nearer as if it was very pleasant to see and feel the little creature in her arms. Sylvia lay there, tearless and tranquil; thinking thoughts for which she had no words, and trying to prepare herself for the life to come, a life that now looked very desolate. Her eye still rested on the valley where the river flowed, the elms waved their budding boughs in the bland air, and the meadows wore their earliest tinge of green. But she was not conscious of these things till the sight of a solitary figure coming slowly up the hill recalled her to the present and the duties it still held for her.

"Here is Geoffrey! How wearily he walks, — how changed and old he looks, — oh, why was I born to be a curse to all who love me!"

"Hush, Sylvia, say anything but that, because it casts reproach upon your father. Your life is but just begun; make it a blessing, not a curse, as all of us have power to do; and remember that for every affliction there are two helpers, who can heal or end the heaviest we know — Time and Death. The first we may invoke and wait for; the last God alone can send when it is better not to live."

"I will try to be patient. Will you meet and tell Geoffrey what has passed? I have no strength left but for passive endurance."

Faith went; Sylvia heard the murmur of earnest conversation; then steps came rapidly along the hall, and Moor was in the room. She rose involuntarily, but for a moment neither spoke, for never had they met as now. Each regarded the other as if a year had rolled between them since they parted, and each saw in the other the changes that one day had wrought. Neither the fire of resentment nor the frost of pride now rendered Moor's face stormy or stern. Anxious and worn it was, with newly graven lines upon the forehead and melancholy curves about the mouth, but the peace of a conquered spirit touched it with a pale serenity, and some perennial hope shone in the glance he bent upon his wife. For the first time in her life Sylvia was truly beautiful, — not physically, for never had she looked more weak and wan, but spiritually, as the inward change made itself manifest in an indescribable expression of meekness and of strength. With suffering came submission, with repentance came regeneration, and the power of the woman yet to be, touched with beauty the pathos of the woman now passing through the fire.

"Faith has told you what has passed between us, and you know that my loss is a double one," she said. "Let me add that I deserve it, that I clearly see my mistakes, will amend such as I can, bear the consequences of such as are past help, try to profit by all, and make no new ones. I cannot be your wife, I ought not to be Adam's; but I may be myself, may live my life alone, and being friends with both wrong neither. This is my decision; in it I believe, by it I will abide, and if it be a just one God will not let me fail."

"I submit, Sylvia; I can still hope and wait."

So humbly he said it, so heartily he meant it, she felt that his love was as indomitable as Warwick's will, and the wish that it were right and possible to accept and reward it woke with all its old intensity. It was not possible; and though her heart grew heavier within her, Sylvia answered steadily —

"No, Geoffrey, do not hope, do not wait; forgive me and forget me. Go abroad as you proposed; travel far and stay long away. Change your life, and learn to see in me only the friend I once was and still desire to be."

"I will go, will stay till you recall me, but while you live your life alone I shall still hope and wait."

This invincible fidelity, so patient, so persistent, impressed the listener like a prophecy, disturbed her conviction, arrested the words upon her lips and softened them.

"It is not for one so unstable as myself to say, 'I shall never change.' I do not say it, though I heartily believe it, but will leave all to time. Surely I may do this; may let separation gently, gradually convince you or alter me; and as the one return which I can make for all you have given me, let this tie between us remain unbroken for a little longer. Take this poor consolation with you; it is the best that I can offer now. Mine is the knowledge that however I may thwart your life in this world, there is a beautiful eternity in which you will forget me and be happy."

She gave him comfort, but he robbed her of her own as he drew her to him, answering with a glance brighter than any smile —

"Love is immortal, dear, and even in the 'beautiful eternity' I shall still hope and wait."

* * *

How soon it was all over! the return to separate homes, the disclosures, and the storms; the preparations for the solitary voyage, the last charges and farewells.

Mark would not, and Prue could not, go to see the traveller off; the former being too angry to lend his countenance to what he termed a barbarous banishment, the latter, being half blind with crying, stayed to nurse Jessie, whose soft heart was nearly broken at what seemed to her the most direful affliction under heaven.

But Sylvia and her father followed Moor till his foot left the soil, and still lingered on the wharf to watch the steamer out of port. An uncongenial place in which to part; carriages rolled up and down, a clamor of voices filled the air, the little steamtug snorted with impatience, and the waves flowed seaward with the ebbing of the tide. But father and daughter saw only one object, heard only one sound, Moor's face as it looked down upon them from the deck, Moor's voice as he sent cheery messages to those left behind. Mr. Yule was endeavoring to reply as cheerily, and Sylvia was gazing with eyes that saw very dimly through their tears, when both were aware of an instantaneous change in the countenance they watched. Something beyond themselves seemed to arrest Moor's eye; a moment he stood intent and motionless, then flushed to the forehead with the dark glow Sylvia remembered well, waved his hand to them and vanished down the cabin stairs.

"Papa, what did he see?"

There was no need of any answer; Adam Warwick came striding through the crowd, saw them, paused with both hands out, and a questioning glance as if uncertain of his greeting. With one impulse the hands were taken; Sylvia could not speak, her father could, and did approvingly —

"Welcome, Warwick; you are come to say good by to Geoffrey?"

"Rather to you, sir; he needs none, I go with him."

"With him!" echoed both hearers.

"Ay, that I will. Did you think I would let him go away alone feeling bereaved of wife, and home, and friend?"

"We should have known you better. But, Warwick, he will shun you; he hid himself just now as you approached; he has tried to forgive, but he cannot so soon forget."

"All the more need of my helping him to do both. He cannot shun me long with no hiding-place to fly to but the sea, and I will so gently constrain him by the old-time love we bore each other, that he must relent and take me back into his heart again."

"Oh, Adam! go with him, stay with him, and bring him safely back to me when time has helped us all."

"I shall do it, God willing."

Unmindful of all else Warwick bent and took her to him as he gave the promise, seemed to put his whole heart into a single kiss and left her trembling with the stress of his farewell. She saw him cleave his way through the throng, leap the space left by the gangway just withdrawn, and vanish in search of that lost friend. Then she turned her face to her father's shoulder, conscious of nothing but the fact that Warwick had come and gone.

A cannon boomed, the crowd cheered, the last cable was flung off, and the steamer glided from her moorings with the surge of water and the waft of wind like some sea-monster eager to be out upon the ocean free again.

“Look up, Sylvia; she will soon pass from sight.”

“Are they there?”

“No.”

“Then I do not care to see. Look for me, father, and tell me when they come.”

“They will not come, dear; both have said good by, and we have seen the last of them for many a long day.”

“They will come! Adam will bring Geoffrey to show me they are friends again. I know it; you shall see it. Lift me to that block and watch the deck with me that we may see them the instant they appear.”

Up she sprung, eyes clear now, nerves steady, faith strong. Leaning forward so utterly forgetful of herself, she would have fallen into the green water tumbling there below, had not her father held her fast. How slowly the minutes seemed to pass, how rapidly the steamer seemed to glide away, how heavily the sense of loss weighed on her heart as wave after wave rolled between her and her heart’s desire.

“Come down, Sylvia, it is giving yourself useless pain to watch and wait. Come home, my child, and let us comfort one another.”

She did not hear him, for as he spoke the steamer swung slowly round to launch itself into the open bay, and with a cry that drew many eyes upon the young figure with its face of pale expectancy, Sylvia saw her hope fulfilled.

“I knew they would come! See, father, see! Geoffrey is smiling as he waves his handkerchief, and Adam’s hand is on his shoulder. Answer them! oh, answer them! I can only look.”

The old man did answer them enthusiastically, and Sylvia stretched her arms across the widening space as if to bring them back again. Side by side the friends stood now; Moor’s eye upon his wife, while from his hand the little flag of peace streamed in the wind. But Warwick’s glance was turned upon his friend, and Warwick’s hand already seemed to claim the charge he had accepted.

Standing thus they passed from sight, never to come sailing home together as the woman on the shore was praying God to let her see them come.

CHAPTER XIX.

SIX MONTHS.

The ensuing half year seemed fuller of duties and events than any Sylvia had ever known. At first she found it very hard to live her life alone; for inward solitude oppressed her, and external trials were not wanting. Only to the few who had a right to know, had the whole trouble been confided. They were discreet from family pride, if from no tenderer feeling; but the curious world outside of that small circle was full of shrewd surmises, of keen eyes for discovering domestic breaches, and shrill tongues for proclaiming them. Warwick escaped suspicion, being so little known, so seldom seen; but for the usual nine days matrons and venerable maids wagged their caps, lifted their hands, and sighed as they sipped their dish of scandal and of tea —

"Poor young man! I always said how it would be, she was so peculiar. My dear creature, haven't you heard that Mrs. Moor isn't happy with her husband, and that he has gone abroad quite broken-hearted?"

Sylvia felt this deeply, but received it as her just punishment, and bore herself so meekly that public opinion soon turned a somersault, and the murmur changed to —

"Poor young thing! what could she expect? My dear, I have it from the best authority, that Mr. Moor has made her miserable for a year, and now left her broken-hearted." After that, the gossips took up some newer tragedy, and left Mrs. Moor to mend her heart as best she could, a favor very gratefully received.

As Hester Prynne seemed to see some trace of her own sin in every bosom, by the glare of the Scarlet Letter burning on her own; so Sylvia, living in the shadow of a household grief, found herself detecting various phases of her own experience in others. She had joined that sad sisterhood called disappointed women; a larger class than many deem it to be, though there are few of us who have not seen members of it. Unhappy wives; mistaken or forsaken lovers; meek souls, who make life a long penance for the sins of others; gifted creatures kindled into fitful brilliancy by some inward fire that consumes but cannot warm. These are the women who fly to convents, write bitter books, sing songs full of heartbreak, act splendidly the passion they have lost or never won. Who smile, and try to lead brave uncomplaining lives, but whose tragic eyes betray them, whose voices, however sweet or gay, contain an undertone of hopelessness, whose faces sometimes startle one with an expression which haunts the observer long after it is gone.

Undoubtedly Sylvia would have joined the melancholy chorus, and fallen to lamenting that ever she was born, had she not possessed a purpose that took her out of herself and proved her salvation. Faith's words took root and blossomed. Intent on making her life a blessing, not a reproach to her father, she lived for him entirely. He had taken her back to him, as if the burden of her unhappy past should be upon his shoulders, the expiation of her faults come from him alone. Sylvia understood this now, and nestled to him so gladly, so confidingly, he seemed to have found again the daughter he had lost and be almost content to have her all his own.

How many roofs cover families or friends who live years together, yet never truly know each other; who love, and long and try to meet, yet fail to do so till some unexpected emotion or event performs the work. In the weeks that followed the departure of the friends, Sylvia discovered this and learned to know her father. No one was so much to her as he; no one so fully entered into her thoughts and feelings; for sympathy drew them tenderly together, and sorrow made them equals. As man and woman they talked, as father and daughter they loved; and the beautiful relation became their truest solace and support.

Miss Yule both rejoiced at and rebelled against this; was generous, yet mortally jealous; made no complaint, but grieved in private, and one fine day amazed her sister by announcing, that, being of no farther use at home, she had decided to be married. Both Mr. Yule and Sylvia had desired this event, but hardly dared to expect it in spite of sundry propitious signs and circumstances.

A certain worthy widower had haunted the house of late, evidently on matrimonial thoughts intent. A solid gentleman, both physically and financially speaking; possessed of an ill-kept house, bad servants, and nine neglected children. This prospect, however alarming to others, had great charms for Prue; nor was the Reverend Gamaliel Bliss repugnant to her, being a rubicund, bland personage, much given to fine linen, long dinners, and short sermons. His third spouse had been suddenly translated, and though the years of mourning had not yet expired, things went so hardly with Gamaliel, that he could no longer delay casting his pastoral eyes over the flock which had already given three lambs to his fold, in search of a fourth. None appeared whose meek graces were sufficiently attractive, or whose dowries were sufficiently large. Meantime the nine olive-branches grew wild, the servants revelled, the ministerial digestion suffered, the sacred shirts went buttonless, and their wearer was wellnigh distraught. At this crisis he saw Prudence, and fell into a way of seating himself before the well-endowed spinster, with a large cambric pocket-handkerchief upon his knee, a frequent tear meandering down his florid countenance, and volcanic sighs agitating his capacious waistcoat as he poured his woes into her ear. Prue had been deeply touched by these moist appeals, and was not much surprised when the reverend gentleman went ponderously down upon his knee before her in the good old-fashioned style which frequent use had endeared to him, murmuring with an appropriate quotation and a subterranean sob —

"Miss Yule, 'a good wife is a crown to her husband;' be such an one to me, unworthy as I am, and a mother to my bereaved babes, who suffer for a tender woman's care."

She merely upset her sewing-table with an appropriate start, but speedily recovered, and with a maidenly blush murmured in return —

"Dear me, how very unexpected! pray speak to papa, — oh, rise, I beg."

"Call me Gamaliel, and I obey!" gasped the stout lover, divided between rapture and doubts of his ability to perform the feat alone.

"Gamaliel," sighed Prue, surrendering her hand.

"My Prudence, blessed among women!" responded the blissful Bliss. And having saluted the fair member, allowed it to help him rise; when, after a few decorous endearments, he departed to papa, and the bride elect rushed up to Sylvia with the incoherent announcement —

"My dearest child, I have accepted him! It was such a surprise, though so touchingly done. I was positively mortified; Maria had swept the room so ill, his knees were white with lint, and I'm a very happy woman, bless you, love!"

"Sit down, and tell me all about it," cried her sister. "Don't try to sew, but cry if you like, and let me pet you, for indeed I am rejoiced."

But Prue preferred to rock violently, and boggle down a seam as the best quietus for her fluttered nerves, while she told her romance, received congratulations, and settled a few objections made by Sylvia, who tried to play the prudent matron.

"I am afraid he is too old for you, my dear."

"Just the age; a man should always be ten years older than his wife. A woman of thirty-five is in the prime of life, and if she hasn't arrived at years of discretion then, she never will. Shall I wear pearl-colored silk and a white bonnet, or just a very handsome travelling dress?"

"Whichever you like. But, Prue, isn't he rather stout, I won't say corpulent?"

"Sylvia, how can you! Because papa is a shadow, you call a fine, manly person like Gam — Mr. Bliss, corpulent. I always said I would *not* marry an invalid, (Macgregor died of apoplexy last week, I heard, at a small dinner party; fell forward with his head upon the cheese, and expired without a groan,) and where can you find a more robust and healthy man than Mr. Bliss? Not a gray hair, and gout his only complaint. So aristocratic. You know I've loads of fine old flannel, just the thing for him."

Sylvia commanded her countenance with difficulty, and went on with her maternal inquiries.

"He is a personable man, and an excellent one, I believe, yet I should rather dread the responsibility of nine small children, if I were you."

"They are my chief inducement to the match. Just think of the state those dears must be in, with only a young governess, and half a dozen giddy maids to see to them. I long to be among them, and named an early day, because measles and scarlatina are coming round again, and only Fanny, and the twins, Gus and Gam, have had either. I know all their names and ages, dispositions, and characters, and love them like a mother already. He perfectly adores them, and that is very charming in a learned man like Mr. Bliss."

"If that is your feeling it will all go well I have no doubt. But, Prue, — I don't wish to be unkind, dear, — do you quite like the idea of being the fourth Mrs. Bliss?"

"Bless me, I never thought of that! Poor man, it only shows how much he must need consolation, and proves how good a husband he must have been. No, Sylvia, I don't care a particle. I never knew those estimable ladies, and the memory of them shall not keep me from making Gamaliel happy if I can. What he goes through now is almost beyond belief. My child, just think! — the coachman drinks; the cook has tea-parties whenever she likes, and supports her brother's family out of her perquisites, as she calls her bare-faced thefts; the house maids romp with the indoor man, and have endless followers; three old maids set their caps at him, and that hussy, (I must use a strong expression,) that hussy of a governess makes love to him before the children. It is my duty to marry him; I shall do it, and put an end to this fearful state of things."

Sylvia asked but one more question —

"Now, seriously, do you love him very much? Will he make you as happy as my dear old girl should be?"

Prue dropped her work, and hiding her face on Sylvia's shoulder, answered with a plaintive sniff or two, and much real feeling —

"Yes, my dear, I do. I tried to love him, and I did not fail. I shall be happy, for I shall be busy. I am not needed here any more, and so I am glad to go away into a home of my own, feeling sure that you can fill my place; and Maria knows my ways too well to let things go amiss. Now, kiss me, and smooth my collar, for papa may call me down."

The sisters embraced and cried a little, as women usually find it necessary to do at such interesting times; then fell to planning the wedding outfit, and deciding between the "light silk and white bonnet," or the "handsome travelling suit."

Miss Yule made a great sacrifice to the proprieties by relinquishing her desire for a stately wedding, and much to Sylvia's surprise and relief, insisted that, as the family was then situated, it was best to have no stir or parade, but to be married quietly at church and slip unostentatiously out of the old life into the new. Her will was law, and as the elderly bridegroom felt that there was no time to spare, and the measles continued to go about seeking whom they might devour, Prue did not keep him waiting long. "Three weeks is very little time, and nothing will be properly done, for one must have everything new when one is married of course, and mantua-makers are but mortal women (exorbitant in their charges this season, I assure you), so be patient, Gamaliel, and spend the time in teaching my little ones to love me before I come."

"My dearest creature, I will." And well did the enamored gentleman perform his promise.

Prue kept hers so punctually that she was married with the bastings in her wedding gown and two dozen pocket-handkerchiefs still unhemmed; facts which disturbed her even during the ceremony. A quiet time throughout; and after a sober feast, a tearful farewell, Mrs. Gamaliel Bliss departed, leaving a great void behind and carrying joy to the heart of her spouse, comfort to the souls of the excited nine, destruction to the "High Life Below Stairs," and order, peace, and plenty to the realm over which she was to know a long and prosperous reign.

Hardly had the excitement of this event subsided when another occurred to keep Sylvia from melancholy and bring an added satisfaction to her lonely days. Across the sea there came to her a little book, bearing her name upon its title-page. Quaintly printed, and bound in some foreign style, plain and unassuming without, but very rich within, for there she found Warwick's Essays, and between each of these one of the poems from Moor's Diary. Far away there in Switzerland they had devised this pleasure for her, and done honor to the woman whom they both loved, by dedicating to her the first fruits of their lives. "Alpen Rosen" was its title, and none could have better suited it in Sylvia's eyes, for to her Warwick was the Alps and Moor the roses. Each had helped the other; Warwick's rugged prose gathered grace from Moor's poetry, and Moor's smoothly flowing lines acquired power from Warwick's prose. Each had given her his best, and very proud was Sylvia of the little book, over which she pored day after day, living on and in it, eagerly collecting all praises, resenting all censures, and thinking it the one perfect volume in the world.

Others felt and acknowledged its worth as well, for though fashionable libraries were not besieged by inquiries for it, and no short-lived enthusiasm welcomed it, a place was found for it on many study tables, where real work was done. Innocent girls sang the songs and loved the poet, while thoughtful women, looking deeper, honored the man. Young men received the Essays as brave protests against the evils of the times, and old men felt their faith in honor and honesty revive. The wise saw great promise in it, and the most critical could not deny its beauty and its power.

Early in autumn arrived a fresh delight; and Jessie's little daughter became peacemaker as well as idol. Mark forgave his enemies, and swore eternal friendship with all mankind the first day of his baby's life; and when his sister brought it to him he took both in his arms, making atonement for many hasty words and hard thoughts by the broken whisper —

"I have two little Sylvias now."

This wonderful being absorbed both households, from grandpapa to the deposed sovereign Tilly, whom Sylvia called her own, and kept much with her; while Prue threatened to cause a rise in the price of stationery by the daily and copious letters full of warning and advice which she sent, feeling herself a mother in Israel among her tribe of nine, now safely carried through the Red Sea of scarlatina. Happy faces made perpetual sunshine round the little Sylvia, but to none was she so dear a boon as to her young god-mother. Jessie became a trifle jealous of "old Sylvia," as she now called herself, for she almost lived in baby's nursery; hurrying over in time to assist at its morning ablutions, hovering about its crib when it slept, daily discovering beauties invisible even to its mother's eyes, and working early and late on dainty garments, rich in the embroidery which she now thanked Prue for teaching her against her will. The touch of the baby hands seemed to heal her sore heart; the sound of the baby voice, even when most unmusical, had a soothing effect upon her nerves; the tender cares its helplessness demanded absorbed her thoughts, and kept her happy in a new world whose delights she had never known till now.

From this time a restful expression replaced the patient hopelessness her face had worn before, and in the lullabys she sang the listeners caught echoes of the cheerful voice they had never thought to hear again. Gay she was not, but serene. Quiet was all she asked; and shunning society seemed happiest to sit at home with baby and its gentle mother, with Mark, now painting as if inspired, or with her father, who relinquished business and devoted himself to her. A pleasant pause seemed to have come after troublous days; a tranquil hush in which she sat waiting for what time should bring her. But as she waited the woman seemed to bloom more beautifully than the girl had done. Light and color revisited her countenance clearer and deeper than of old; fine lines ennobled features faulty in themselves; and the indescribable refinement of a deep inward life made itself manifest in look, speech, and gesture, giving promise of a gracious womanhood.

Mr. Yule augured well from this repose, and believed the dawning loveliness to be a herald of returning love. He was thinking hopeful thoughts one day as he sat writing to Moor, whose faithful correspondent he had become, when Sylvia came in with one of the few notes she sent her husband while away.

“Just in time. God bless me, child! what is it?”

Well might he exclaim, for in his daughter’s face he saw an expression which caused his hope to suddenly become a glad belief. Her lips smiled, though in her eyes there lay a shadow which he could not comprehend, and her answer did not enlighten him as she put her arm about his neck and laid her slip of paper in his hand.

“Enclose my note, and send the letter; then, father, we will talk.”

CHAPTER XX.

COME.

In a small Italian town not far from Rome, a traveller stood listening to an account of a battle lately fought near by, in which the town had suffered much, yet been forever honored in the eyes of its inhabitants, by having been the headquarters of the Hero of Italy. An inquiry of the traveller’s concerning a countryman of whom he was in search, created a sensation at the little inn, and elicited the story of the battle, one incident of which was still the all-absorbing topic with the excited villagers. This was the incident which one of the group related with the dramatic effects of a language composed almost as much of gesture as of words, and an audience as picturesque as could well be conceived.

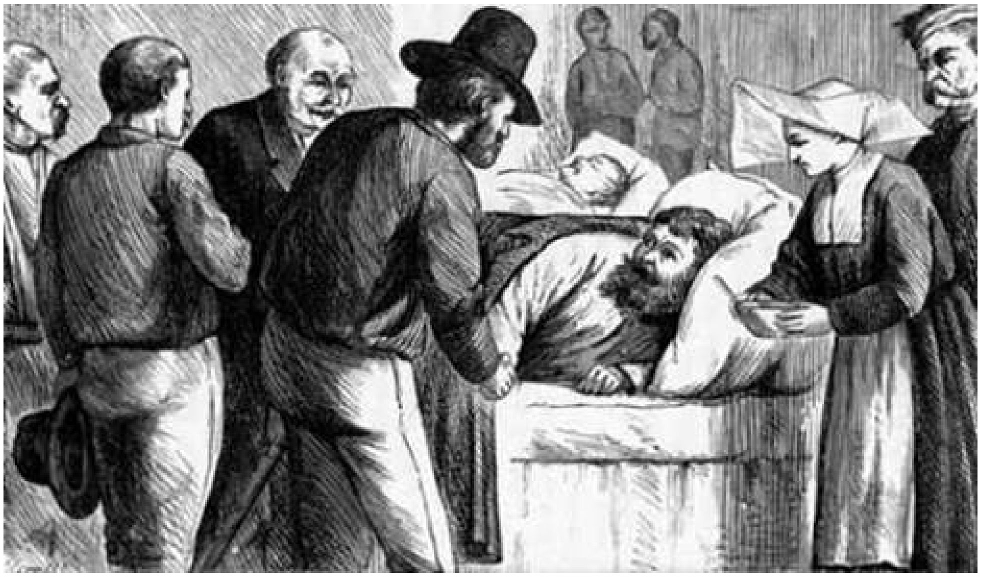
While the fight was raging on the distant plain, a troop of marauding Croats dashed into the town, whose defenders, although outnumbered, contested every inch of ground, while slowly driven back toward the convent, the despoiling of which was the object of the attack. This convent was both hospital and refuge, for there were gathered women and children, the sick, the wounded, and the old. To secure the safety of these rather than of the sacred relics, the Italians were bent on holding the town till the reinforcement for which they had sent could come up. It was a question of time, and every moment brought nearer the destruction of the helpless garrison, trembling behind the convent walls. A brutal massacre was in store for them if no help came; and remembering this the red-shirted Garibaldians fought as if they well deserved their sobriquet of “Scarlet Demons.”

Help did come, not from below, but from above. Suddenly a cannon thundered royally, and down the narrow street rushed a deathful defiance, carrying disorder and dismay to the assailants, joy and wonder to the nearly exhausted defenders. Wonder, for well they knew the gun had stood silent and unmanned since the retreat of the enemy two days before, and this unexpected answer to their prayers seemed Heaven-sent. Those below looked up as they fought, those above looked down as they feared, and midway between all saw that a single man held the gun. A stalwart figure, bareheaded, stern faced, sinewy armed, fitfully seen through clouds of smoke and flashes of fire, working with a silent energy that seemed almost superhuman to the eyes of the superstitious souls, who believed they saw and heard the convent’s patron saint proclaiming their salvation with a mighty voice.

This belief inspired the Italians, caused a panic among the Croats, and saved the town. A few rounds turned the scale, the pursued became the pursuers, and when the reinforcement arrived there was little for it to do but join in the rejoicing and salute the brave cannoneer, who proved to be no saint, but a stranger come to watch the battle, and thus opportunely lend his aid.

Enthusiastic were the demonstrations; vivas, blessings, tears, handkissing, and invocation of all the saints in the calendar, till it was discovered that the unknown gentleman had a bullet in his breast and was in need of instant help. Whereupon the women, clustering about him like bees, bore him away to the wounded ward, where the inmates rose up in their beds to welcome him, and the clamorous crowd were with difficulty persuaded to relinquish him to the priest, the surgeon, and the rest he needed. Nor was this all; the crowning glory of the event to the villagers was the coming of the Chief at nightfall, and the scene about the stranger’s bed. Here the narrator glowed with pride, the women in the group began to sob, and the men took off their caps, with black eyes glittering through their tears.

“Excellenza, he who had fought for us like a tempest, an angel of doom, lay there beside my cousin Beppo, who was past help and is now in holy Paradise — Speranza was washing the smoke and powder from him, the wound was easy — death of my soul! may he who gave it die unconfessed! See you, I am there, I watch him, the friend of Excellenza, the great still man who smiled but said no word to us. Then comes the Chief, — silenzio, till I finish! — he comes, they have told him, he stays at the bed, he looks down, the fine eye shines, he takes the hand, he says low — ’I thank you,’ — he lays his cloak, — the gray cloak we know and love so well — over the wounded breast, and so goes on. We cry out, but what does the friend? Behold! he lifts himself, he lays the cloak upon my Beppo, he says in that so broken way of his — ’Comrade, the honor is for you who gave your life for him, I give but a single hour.’ Beppo saw, heard, comprehended; thanked him with a glance, and rose up to die crying, ‘Viva Italia! Viva Garibaldi!’“



The cry was caught up by all the listeners in a whirlwind of enthusiastic loyalty, and the stranger joined in it, thrilled with an equal love and honor for the Patriot Soldier, whose name upon Italian lips means liberty.

“Where is he now, this friend of mine, so nearly lost, so happily found?”

A dozen hands pointed to the convent, a dozen brown faces lighted up, and a dozen eager voices poured out directions, messages, and benedictions in a breath. Ordering his carriage to follow presently, the traveller rapidly climbed the steep road, guided by signs he could not well mistake. The convent gate stood open, and he paused for no permission to enter, for looking through it, down the green vista of an orchard path, he saw his friend and sprang to meet him.

“Adam!”

“Geoffrey!”

“Truant that you are, to desert me for ten days, and only let me find you when you have no need of me.”

“I always need you, but am not always needed. I went away because the old restlessness came upon me in that dead city Rome. You were happy there, but I scented war, followed and found it by instinct, and have had enough of it. Look at my hands.”

He laughed as he showed them, still bruised and blackened with the hard usage they had received; nothing else but a paler shade of color from loss of blood, showed that he had passed through any suffering or danger.

“Brave hands, I honor them for all their grime. Tell me about it, Adam; show me the wound; describe the scene, I want to hear it in calm English.”

But Warwick was slow to do so being the hero of the tale, and very brief was the reply Moor got.

“I came to watch, but found work ready for me. It is not clear to me even now what I did, nor how I did it. One of my Berserker rages possessed me I fancy; my nerves and muscles seemed made of steel and gutta percha; the smell of powder intoxicated, and the sense of power was grand. The fire, the smoke, the din were all delicious, and I felt like a giant, as I wielded that great weapon, dealing many deaths with a single pair of hands.”

“The savage in you got the mastery just then; I’ve seen it, and have often wondered how you managed to control it so well. Now it has had a holiday and made a hero of you.”

“The savage is better out than in, and any man may be a hero if he will. What have you been doing since I left you poring over pictures in a mouldy palace?”

“You think to slip away from the subject, do you? and after facing death at a cannon’s breach expect me to be satisfied with an ordinary greeting? I won’t have it; I insist upon asking as many questions as I like, hearing about the wound and seeing if it is doing well. Where is it?”

Warwick showed it, a little purple spot above his heart. Moor’s face grew anxious as he looked, but cleared again as he examined it, for the ball had gone upward and the wholesome flesh was already healing fast.

“Too near, Adam, but thank God it was no nearer. A little lower and I might have looked for you in vain.”

“This heart of mine is a tough organ, bullet-proof, I dare say, though I wear no breastplate.”

“But this!” Involuntarily Moor’s eye asked the question his lips did not utter as he touched a worn and faded case hanging on the broad breast before him. Silently Warwick opened it, showing not Sylvia’s face but that of an old woman, rudely drawn in sepia; the brown tints bringing out the marked features as no softer hue could have done, and giving to each line a depth of expression that made the serious countenance singularly lifelike and attractive.

Now Moor saw where Warwick got both keen eyes and tender mouth, as well as all the gentler traits that softened his strong character; and felt that no other woman ever had or ever would hold so dear a place as the old mother whose likeness he had drawn and hung where other men wear images of mistress or of wife. With a glance as full of penitence as the other had been of disquiet, Moor laid back the little case, drew bandage and blouse over both wound and picture, and linked his arm in Warwick’s as he asked —

“Who shot you?”

“How can I tell? I knew nothing of it till that flock of women fell to kissing these dirty hands of mine; then I was conscious of a stinging pain in my shoulder, and a warm stream trickling down my side. I looked to see what was amiss, whereat the good souls set up a shriek, took possession of me, and for half an hour wept and wailed over me in a frenzy of emotion and good-will that kept me merry in spite of the surgeon's probes and the priest's prayers. The appellations showered upon me would have startled even your ears, accustomed to soft words. Were you ever called 'core of my heart,' 'sun of my soul,' or 'cup of gold'?"

"Cannonading suits your spirits excellently; I remember your telling me that you had tried and liked it. But there is to be no more of it, I have other plans for you. Before I mention them tell me of the interview with Garibaldi."

"That now is a thing to ask one about; a thing to talk of and take pride in all one's days. I was half asleep and thought myself dreaming till he spoke. A right noble face, Geoffrey — full of thought and power; the look of one born to command others because master of himself. A square strong frame; no decorations, no parade; dressed like his men, yet as much the chief as if he wore a dozen orders on his scarlet shirt."

"Where is the cloak? I want to see and touch it; surely you kept it as a relic?"

"Not I. Having seen the man, what do I care for the garment that covered him. I keep the hand shake, the 'Grazia, grazia,' for my share. Poor Beppo lies buried in the hero's cloak."

"I grudge it to him, every inch of it, for not having seen the man *I* do desire the garment. Who but you would have done it?"

Warwick smiled, knowing that his friend was well pleased with him for all his murmuring. They walked in silence till Moor abruptly asked —

"When can you travel, Adam?"

"I was coming back to you to-morrow."

"Are you sure it is safe?"

"Quite sure; ten days is enough to waste upon a scratch like this."

"Come now, I cannot wait till to-morrow."

"Very good. Can you stop till I get my hat?"

"You don't ask me why I am in such haste."

Moor's tone caused Warwick to pause and look at him. Joy, impatience, anxiety, contended with each other in his countenance; and as if unable to tell the cause himself, he put a little paper into the other's hand. Only three words were contained in it, but they caused Warwick's face to kindle with all the joy betrayed in that of his friend, none of the impatience nor anxiety.

"What can I say to show you my content? The months have seemed very long to you, but now comes the reward. The blessed little letter! so like herself; the slender slip, the delicate handwriting, the three happy words, — 'Geoffrey, come home.'"

Moor did not speak, but still looked up anxiously, inquiringly; and Warwick answered with a glance he could not doubt.

"Have no fears for me. I share the joy as heartily as I shared the sorrow; neither can separate us any more."

"Thank heaven for that! But, Adam, may I accept this good gift and be sure I am not robbing you again? You never speak of the past, how is it with you now?"

"Quite well and happy; the pain is gone, the peace remains. I would not have it otherwise. Six months have cured the selfishness of love, and left the satisfaction which nothing can change or take away."

"But Sylvia, what of her, Adam?"

"Henceforth, Sylvia and Ottila are only fair illustrations of the two extremes of love. I am glad to have known both; each has helped me, and each will be remembered while I live. But having gained the experience I can relinquish the unconscious bestowers of it, if it is not best to keep them. Believe that I do this without regret, and freely enjoy the happiness that comes to you."

"I will, but not as I once should; for though I feel that you need neither sympathy nor pity, still, I seem to take so much and leave you nothing."

"You leave me myself, better and humbler than before. In the fierce half hour I lived not long ago, I think a great and needful change was wrought in me. All lives are full of such, coming when least looked for, working out the end through unexpected means. The restless, domineering devil that haunted me was cast out then; and during the quiet time that followed a new spirit entered in and took possession."

"What is it, Adam?"

"I cannot tell, yet I welcome it. This peaceful mood may not last perhaps, but it brings me that rare moment — pity that it is so rare, and but a moment — when we seem to see temptation at our feet; when we are conscious of a willingness to leave all in God's hand, ready for whatever He may send; feeling that whether it be suffering or joy we shall see the Giver in the gift, and when He calls can answer cheerfully 'Lord here am I.'"

It *was* a rare moment, and in it Moor for the first time clearly saw the desire and design of his friend's life; saw it because it was accomplished, and for the instant Adam Warwick was what he aspired to be. A goodly man, whose stalwart body seemed a fit home for a strong soul, wise with the wisdom of a deep experience, genial with the virtues of an upright life, devout with that humble yet valiant piety which comes through hard-won victories over "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Despite the hope that warmed his heart, Moor felt poor beside him, as a new reverence warmed the old affection. His face showed it though he did not speak, and Warwick laid an arm about his shoulders as he had often done of late when they were alone, drawing him gently on again, as he said, with a touch of playfulness to set both at ease —

“Tell me your plans, ‘my cup of gold,’ and let me lend a hand toward filling you brimful of happiness. You are going home?”

“At once; you also.”

“Is it best?”

“Yes; you came for me, I stay for you, and Sylvia waits for both.”

“She says nothing of me in this short, sweet note of hers;” and Warwick smoothed it carefully in his large hand, eyeing it as if he wished there were some little word for him.

“True, but in the few letters she has written there always comes a message to you, though you never write a line; nor would you go to her now had she sent for you alone; she knew that, and sends for me, sure that you will follow.”

“Being a woman she cannot quite forgive me for loving her too well to make her miserable. Dear soul, she will never know how much it cost me, but I knew that my only safety lay in flight. Tell her so a long while hence.”

“You shall do it yourself, for you are coming home with me.”

“What to do there?”

“All you ever did; walk up and down the face of the earth, waxing in power and virtue, and coming often to us when we get fairly back into our former ways, for you are still the house friend.”

“I was wondering, as I walked here, what my next summons would be, when lo, you came. Go on, I’ll follow you; one could hardly have a better guide.”

“You are sure you are able, Adam?”

“Shall I uproot a tree or fling you over the wall to convince you, you motherly body? I am nearly whole again, and a breath of sea air will complete the cure. Let me cover my head, say farewell to the good Sisters, and I shall be glad to slip away without further demonstrations from the volcanoes below there.”

Laying one hand on the low wall, Warwick vaulted over with a backward glance at Moor, who followed to the gateway, there to wait till the adieux were over. Very brief they were, and presently Warwick reappeared, evidently touched yet ill-pleased at something, for he both smiled and frowned as he paused on the threshold as if loth to go. A little white goat came skipping from the orchard, and seeing the stranger took refuge at Warwick’s knee. The act of the creature seemed to suggest a thought to the man. Pulling off the gay handkerchief some grateful woman had knotted round his neck, he fastened it about the goat’s, having secured something in one end, then rose as if content.

“What are you doing?” called Moor, wondering at this arrangement.

“Widening the narrow entrance into heaven set apart for rich men unless they leave their substance behind, as I am trying to do. The kind creatures cannot refuse it now; so trot away to your mistress, little Nanna, and tell no tales as you go.”

As the goat went tapping up the steps a stir within announced the dreaded demonstration. Warwick did not seem to hear it; he stood looking far across the trampled plain and ruined town toward the mountains shining white against the deep Italian sky. A rapt, far-reaching look, as if he saw beyond the purple wall, and seeing forgot the present in some vision of the future.

“Come, Adam! I am waiting.”

His eye came back, the lost look passed, and cheerily he answered —

“I am ready.”

A fortnight later in that dark hour before the dawn, with a murky sky above them, a hungry sea below them, the two stood together the last to leave a sinking ship.

“Room for one more, choose quick!” shouted a hoarse voice from the boat tossing underneath, freighted to the water’s edge with trembling lives.

“Go, Geoffrey, Sylvia is waiting.”

“Not without you, Adam.”

“But you are exhausted; I can bear a rough hour better than yourself, and morning will bring help.”

“It may not. Go, I am the lesser loss.”

“What folly! I will force you to it; steady there, he is coming.”

“Push off, I am *not* coming.”

In times like that, few pause for pity or persuasion; the instinct of self-preservation rules supreme, and each is for himself, except those in whom love of another is stronger than love of life. Even while the friends generously contended the boat was swept away, and they were left alone in the deserted ship, swiftly making its last voyage downward. Spent with a day of intense excitement, and sick with hope deferred, Moor leaned on Warwick, feeling that it was adding bitterness to death to die in sight of shore. But Warwick never knew despair; passive submission was not in his power while anything remained to do or dare, and even then he did not cease to hope. It was certain death to linger there; other boats less heavily laden had put off before, and might drift across their track; wreckers waiting on the shore might hear and help; at least it were better to die bravely and not “strike sail to a fear.” About his waist still hung a fragment of the rope which had lowered more than one baby to its mother’s arms; before them the shattered taffrail rose and fell as the waves beat over it.

Wrenching a spar away he lashed Moor to it, explaining his purpose as he worked. There was only rope enough for one, and in the darkness Moor believed that Warwick had taken equal precautions for himself.

"Now Geoffrey your hand, and when the next wave ebbs let us follow it. If we are parted and you see her first tell her I remembered, and give her this."

In the black night with only Heaven to see them the men kissed tenderly as women, then hand in hand sprang out into the sea. Drenched and blinded they struggled up after the first plunge, and struck out for the shore, guided by the thunder of the surf they had listened to for twelve long hours, as it broke against the beach, and brought no help on its receding billows. Soon Warwick was the only one who struggled, for Moor's strength was gone, and he clung half conscious to the spar, tossing from wave to wave, a piteous plaything for the sea.

"I see a light! — they must take you in — hold fast, I'll save you for the little wife at home."

Moor heard but two words, "wife" and "home;" strained his dim eyes to see the light, spent his last grain of strength to reach it, and in the act lost consciousness, whispering — "She will thank you," as his head fell against Warwick's breast and lay there, heavy and still. Lifting himself above the spar, Adam lent the full power of his voice to the shout he sent ringing through the storm. He did not call in vain, a friendly wind took the cry to human ears, a relenting wave swept them within the reach of human aid, and the boat's crew, pausing involuntarily, saw a hand clutch the suspended oar, a face flash up from the black water, and heard a breathless voice issue the command —

"Take in this man! he saved you for your wives, save him for his."

One resolute will can sway a panic-stricken multitude; it did so then. The boat was rocking in the long swell of the sea; a moment and the coming wave would sweep them far apart. A woman sobbed, and as if moved by one impulse four sturdy arms clutched and drew Moor in. While loosening his friend Warwick had forgotten himself, and the spar was gone. He knew it, but the rest believed that they left the strong man a chance of life equal to their own in that overladen boat. Yet in the memories of all who caught that last glimpse of him there long remained the recollection of a dauntless face floating out into the night, a steady voice calling through the gale, "A good voyage, comrades!" as he turned away to enter port before them.

Wide was the sea and pitiless the storm, but neither could dismay the unconquerable spirit of the man who fought against the elements as bravely as if they were adversaries of mortal mould, and might be vanquished in the end. But it was not to be; soon he felt it, accepted it, turned his face upward toward the sky, where one star shone, and when Death whispered "Come!" answered as cheerily as to that other friend, “I am ready.” Then with a parting thought for the man he had saved, the woman he had loved, the promise he had kept, a great and tender heart went down into the sea.

Sometimes the Sculptor, whose workshop is the world, fuses many metals and casts a noble statue; leaves it for humanity to criticise, and when time has mellowed both beauties and blemishes, removes it to that inner studio, there to be carved in enduring marble.

Adam Warwick was such an one; with much alloy and many flaws; but beneath all defects the Master’s eye saw the grand lines that were to serve as models for the perfect man, and when the design had passed through all necessary processes, — the mould of clay, the furnace fire, the test of time, — He washed the dust away, and pronounced it ready for the marble.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUT OF THE SHADOW.

They had been together for an hour, the husband and the wife. The first excitement was now over, and Sylvia stood behind him tearless and tranquil, while Moor, looking like a man out of whom the sea had drenched both strength and spirit, leaned his weary head against her, trying to accept the great loss, enjoy the great gain which had befallen him. Hitherto all their talk had been of Warwick, and as Moor concluded the history of the months so tragically ended, for the first time he ventured to express wonder at the calmness with which his hearer received the sad story.

"How quietly you listen to words which it wrings my heart to utter. Have you wept your tears dry, or do you still cling to hope?"

"No, I feel that we shall never see him any more; but I have no desire to weep, for tears and lamentations do not belong to him. He died a beautiful, a noble death; the sea is a fitting grave for him, and it is pleasant to think of him asleep there, quiet at last."

"I cannot feel so; I find it hard to think of him as dead; he was so full of life, so fit to live."

"And therefore fit to die. Imagine him as I do, enjoying the larger life he longed for, and growing to be the strong, sweet soul whose foreshadowing we saw and loved so here."

"Sylvia, I have told you of the beautiful change which befell him in those last days, and now I see the same in you. Are you, too, about to leave me when I have just recovered you?"

"I shall stay with you all my life."

"Then Adam was less to you than you believed, and I am more?"

"Nothing is changed. Adam is all he ever was to me, you are all you ever can be; but I — "

"Then why send for me? Why say you will stay with me all your life? Sylvia, for God's sake, let there be no more delusion or deceit!"

"Never again! I will tell you; I meant to do it at once, but it is so hard — "

She turned her face away, and for a moment neither stirred. Then drawing his head to its former resting-place she touched it very tenderly, seeing how many white threads shone among the brown; and as her hand went to and fro with an inexpressibly soothing gesture, she said, in a tone whose quietude controlled his agitation like a spell —

“Long ago, in my great trouble, Faith told me that for every human effort or affliction there were two friendly helpers, Time and Death. The first has taught me more gently than I deserved; has made me humble, and given me hope that through my errors I may draw virtue from repentance. But while I have been learning the lessons time can teach, that other helper has told me to be ready for its coming. Geoffrey, I sent for you because I knew you would love to see me again before we must say the long good by.”

“Oh, Sylvia! not that; anything but that. I cannot bear it now!”

“Dear heart, be patient; lean on me, and let me help you bear it, for it is inevitable.”

“It shall not be! There must be some help, some hope. God would not be so pitiless as to take both.”

“I shall not leave you yet. He does not take me; it is I, who, by wasting life, have lost the right to live.”

“But is it so? I cannot make it true. You look so beautiful, so blooming, and the future seemed so sure. Sylvia, show it to me, if it must be.”

She only turned her face to him, only held up her transparent hand, and let him read the heavy truth. He did so, for now he saw that the beauty and the bloom were transitory as the glow of leaves that frost makes fairest as they fall, and felt the full significance of the great change which had come. He clung to her with a desperate yet despairing hold, and she could only let the first passion of his grief have way, soothing and sustaining, while her heart bled and the draught was very bitter to her lips.

“Hush, love; be quiet for a little; and when you can bear it better, I will tell you how it is with me.”

“Tell me now; let me hear everything at once. When did you know? How are you sure? Why keep it from me all this time?”

“I have only known it for a little while, but I am very sure, and I kept it from you that you might come happily home, for knowledge of it would have lengthened every mile, and made the journey one long anxiety. I could not know that Adam would go first, and so make my task doubly hard.”

“Come to me, Sylvia; let me keep you while I may. I will not be violent; I will listen patiently, and through everything remember you.”

He did remember her, so thoughtfully, so tenderly, that her little story flowed on uninterrupted by sigh or sob; and while he held his grief in check, the balm of submission comforted his sore heart. Sitting by him, sustaining and sustained, she told the history of the last six months, till just before the sending of the letter. She paused there a moment, then hurried on, gradually losing the consciousness of present emotion in the vivid memory of the past.

“You have no faith in dreams; I have; and to a dream I owe my sudden awakening to the truth. Thank and respect it, for without its warning I might have remained in ignorance of my state until it was too late to find and bring you home.”

“God bless the dream and keep the dreamer!”

“This was a strange and solemn vision; one to remember and to love for its beautiful interpretation of the prophecy that used to awe and sadden me, but never can again. I dreamed that the last day of the world had come. I stood on a shadowy house-top in a shadowy city, and all around me far as eye could reach thronged myriads of people, till the earth seemed white with human faces. All were mute and motionless, as if fixed in a trance of expectation, for none knew how the end would come. Utter silence filled the world, and across the sky a vast curtain of the blackest cloud was falling, blotting out face after face and leaving the world a blank. In that universal gloom and stillness, far above me in the heavens I saw the pale outlines of a word stretching from horizon to horizon. Letter after letter came out full and clear, till all across the sky, burning with a ruddy glory stronger than the sun, shone the great word Amen. As the last letter reached its bright perfection, a long waft of wind broke over me like a universal sigh of hope from human hearts. For far away on the horizon’s edge all saw a line of light that widened as they looked, and through that rift, between the dark earth and the darker sky, rolled in a softly flowing sea. Wave after wave came on, so wide, so cool, so still. None trembled at their approach, none shrunk from their embrace, but all turned toward that ocean with a mighty rush, all faces glowed in its splendor, and million after million vanished with longing eyes fixed on the arch of light through which the ebbing sea would float them when its work was done. I felt no fear, only the deepest awe, for I seemed such an infinitesimal atom of the countless host that I forgot myself. Nearer and nearer came the flood, till its breath blew on my cheeks, and I, too, leaned to meet it, longing to be taken. A great wave rolled up before me, and through its soft glimmer I saw a beautiful, benignant face regarding me. Then I knew that each and all had seen the same, and losing fear in love were glad to go. The joyful yearning woke me as the wave seemed to break at my feet, and ebbing leave me still alive.”

“And that is all? Only a dream, a foreboding fancy, Sylvia?”

“When I woke my hair was damp on my forehead, my breath quite still, my heart so cold I felt as if death had indeed been near me and left its chill behind.

So strong was the impression of the dream, so perfect was the similitude between the sensations I had experienced then, and more than once awake, that I felt that something was seriously wrong with me."

"You had been ill then?"

"Not consciously, not suffering any pain, but consumed with an inward fever that would not burn itself away. I used to have a touch of it in the evenings, you remember; but now it burned all day, making me look strong and rosy, yet leaving me so worn out at night that no sleep seemed to restore me. A few weak and weary hours, then the fire was rekindled and the false strength, color, spirits, returned to deceive myself, and those about me, for another day."

"Did you tell no one of this, Sylvia?"

"Not at first, because I fancied it a mental ill. I had thought so much, so deeply, it seemed but natural that I should be tired. I tried to rest myself by laying all my cares and sorrows in God's hand, and waiting patiently to be shown the end. I see it now, but for a time I could only sit and wait; and while I did so my soul grew strong but my ill-used body failed. The dream came, and in the stillness of that night I felt a strange assurance that I should see my mother soon."

"Dear, what did you do?"

"I determined to discover if I had deceived myself with a superstitious fancy, or learned a fateful fact in my own mysterious way. If it were false, no one would be made anxious by it; if true, possessing the first knowledge of it would enable me to comfort others. I went privately to town and consulted the famous physician who has grown gray in the study of disease."

"Did you go alone, Sylvia?"

"Yes, alone. I am braver than I used to be, and have learned never to feel quite alone. I found a grave, stern-looking man; I told him that I wished to know the entire truth whatever it might be, and that he need not fear to tell me because I was prepared for it. He asked many questions, thought a little, and was very slow to speak. Then I saw how it would be, but urged him to set my mind at rest. His stern old face grew very pitiful as he took my hand and answered gently — 'My child, go home and prepare to die.'"

"Good God, how cruel! Sylvia, how did you bear it?"

"At first the earth seemed to slip away from under me, and time to stand still. Then I was myself again, and could listen steadily to all he said. It was only this, — I had been born with a strong nature in a feeble frame, had lived too fast, wasted health ignorantly, and was past help."

"Could he do nothing for you?"

"Nothing but tell me how to husband my remaining strength, and make the end easy by the care that would have kept me longer had I known this sooner."

"And no one saw your danger; no one warned you of it; and I was away!"

"Father could not see it, for I looked well and tried to think I felt so. Mark and Jessie were absorbed in baby Sylvia, and Prue was gone. You might have seen and helped me, for you have the intuitions of a woman in many things, but I could not send for you then because I could not give you what you asked. Was it wrong to call you when I did, and try to make the hard fact easier to bear by telling it myself?"

"Heaven bless you for it, Sylvia. It was truly generous and kind. I never could have forgiven you had you denied me the happiness of seeing you again, and you have robbed the truth of half its bitter pain by telling it yourself."

A restful expression came into her face, and a sigh of satisfaction proved how great was the relief of feeling that for once her heart had prompted her aright. Moor let her rest a little, then asked with a look more pathetic than his words —

"What am I to you now? Where is my home to be?"

"My friend forever, no more, no less; and your home is here with us until I leave my father to your care. All this pain and separation were in vain if we have not learned that love can neither be forced nor feigned. While I endeavored to do so, God did not help me, and I went deeper and deeper into sorrow and wrong doing. When I dropped all self-delusion and desperate striving, and stood still, asking to be shown the right, then he put out his hand and through much tribulation led me to convictions that I dare not disobey. Our friendship may be a happy one if we accept and use it as we should. Let it be so, and for the little while that I remain, let us live honestly before heaven and take no thought for the world's opinion."

Adam might have owned the glance she bent upon her husband, so clear, so steadfast was it; but the earnestness was all her own, and blended with it a new strength that seemed a late compensation for lost love and waning life. Remembering the price both had paid for it, Moor gratefully accepted the costly friendship offered him, and soon acknowledged both its beauty and its worth.

"One question more; Sylvia, how long?"

It was very hard to answer, but folding the sharp fact in the gentlest fancy that appeared to her she gave him the whole truth.

"I shall not see the spring again, but it will be a pleasant time to lay me underneath the flowers."

Sylvia had not known how to live, but now she proved that she did know how to die. So beautifully were the two made one, the winning girl, the deep-hearted woman, that she seemed the same beloved Sylvia, yet Sylvia strengthened, purified, and perfected by the hard past, the solemn present. Those about her felt and owned the unconscious power, which we call the influence of character, and which is the noblest that gives sovereignty to man or woman.

So cheerfully did she speak of it, so tranquilly did she prepare to meet it, that death soon ceased to be an image of grief or fear to those about her, and became a benignant friend, who, when the mortal wearies, blesses it with a brief sleep, that it may wake immortal. She would have no sad sick-chamber, no mournful faces, no cessation of the wholesome household cares and joys, that do so much to make hearts strong and spirits happy. While strength remained, she went her round of daily duties, doing each so lovingly, that the most trivial became a delight, and taking unsuspected thought for the comfort or the pleasure of those soon to be left behind, so tenderly, that she could not seem lost to them, even when she was gone.

Faith came to her, and as her hands became too weak for anything but patient folding, every care slipped so quietly into Faith's, that few perceived how fast she was laying down the things of this world, and making ready to take up those of the world to come. Her father was her faithful shadow; bent and white-haired now, but growing young at heart in spite of sorrow, for his daughter had in truth become the blessing of his life. Mark and Jessie brought their offering of love in little Sylvia's shape, and the innocent consoler did her sweet work by making sunshine in a shady place. But Moor was all in all to Sylvia, and their friendship proved an abiding strength, for sorrow made it very tender, sincerity ennobled it, and the coming change sanctified it to them both.

April came; and on her birthday, with a grateful heart, Moor gathered the first snow-drops of the year. All day they stood beside her couch, as fragile and as pale as she, and many eyes had filled as loving fancies likened her to the slender, transparent vase, the very spirit of a shape, and the white flowers that had blossomed beautifully through the snow. When the evening lamp was lighted, she took the little posy in her hand, and lay with her eyes upon it, listening to the book Moor read, for this hour always soothed the unrest of the day. Very quiet was the pleasant room, with no sounds in it but the soft flicker of the fire, the rustle of Faith's needle, and the subdued music of the voice that patiently went reading on, long after Sylvia's eyes had closed, lest she should miss its murmur. For an hour she seemed to sleep, so motionless, so colorless, that her father, always sitting at her side, bent down at last to listen at her lips. The lips smiled, the eyes unclosed, and she looked up at him, with an expression as tender as tranquil.

"A long sleep and pleasant dreams that wake you smiling?" he asked.

"Beautiful and happy thoughts, father; let me tell you some of them. As I lay here, I fell to thinking of my life, and at first it seemed the sorrowfullest failure I had ever known. Whom had I made happy? What had I done worth the doing? Where was the humble satisfaction that should come hand in hand with death? At first I could find no answers to my questions, and though my one and twenty years do not seem long to live, I felt as if it would have been better for us all if I had died, a new-born baby in my mother's arms."

"My child, say anything but that, because it is I who have made your life a failure."

"Wait a little father, and you will see that it is a beautiful success. I *have* given happiness, *have* done something worth the doing; now I see a compensation for all seeming loss, and heartily thank God that I did not die till I had learned the true purpose of all lives. He knows that I say these things humbly, that I claim no virtue for myself, and have been a blind instrument in His hand, to illustrate truths that will endure when I am forgotten. I have helped Mark and Jessie, for, remembering me, they will feel how blest they are in truly loving one another. They will keep little Sylvia from making mistakes like mine, and the household joys and sorrows we have known together, will teach Mark to make his talent a delight to many, by letting art interpret nature."

Her brother standing behind her stooped and kissed her, saying through his tears —

"I shall remember, dear."

"I have helped Geoffrey, I believe. He lived too much in the affections, till through me he learned that none may live for love alone. Genius will be born of grief, and he will put his sorrow into song to touch and teach other hearts more gently than his own has been, so growing a nobler and a richer man for the great cross of his life."

Calm, with the calmness of a grief too deep for tears, and strong in a devout belief, Moor gave his testimony as she paused.

"I shall endeavor, and now I am as grateful for the pain as for the joy, because together they will show me how to live, and when I have learned that I shall be ready to come to you."

"I think I have served Adam. He needed gentleness as Geoffrey needed strength, and I, unworthy as I am, woke that deep heart of his and made it a fitter mate for his great soul. To us it seems as if he had left his work unfinished, but God knew best, and when he was needed for a better work he went to find it. Yet I am sure that he was worthier of eternal life for having known the discipline of love."

There was no voice to answer now, but Sylvia felt that she would receive it very soon and was content.

"Have you no lesson for your father? The old man needs it most."

She laid her thin hand tenderly on his, that if her words should bring reproach, she might seem to share it with him.

"Yes, father, this. That if the chief desire of the heart is for the right, it is possible for any human being, through all trials, temptations, and mistakes, to bring good out of evil, hope from despair, success from defeat, and come at last to know an hour as beautiful and blest as this."

Who could doubt that *she* had learned the lesson, when from the ruins of the perishable body the imperishable soul rose steadfast and serene, proving that after the long bewilderment of life and love it had attained the eternal peace.

The room grew very still, and while those about her pondered her words with natural tears, Sylvia lay looking up at a lovely picture that seemed leaning down to offer her again the happiest memory of her youth. It was a painting of the moonlight voyage down the river. Mark had given it that day, and now when the longer, sadder voyage was nearly over, she regarded it with a tender pleasure. The moon shone full on Warwick, looking out straight and strong before him with the vigilant expression native to his face; a fit helmsman to guide the boat along that rapid stream. Mark seemed pausing to watch the oars silvered by the light, and their reflections wavy with the current. Moor, seen in shadow, leaned upon his hand, as if watching Sylvia, a quiet figure, full of grace and color, couched under the green arch. On either hand the summer woods made vernal gloom, behind the cliffs rose sharply up against the blue, and all before wound a shining road, along which the boat seemed floating like a bird on slender wings between two skies.

So long she lay forgetful of herself and all about her, that Moor saw she needed rest, for the breath fluttered on her lips, the flowers had fallen one by one, and her face wore the weary yet happy look of some patient child waiting for its lullaby.

"Dear, you have talked enough; let me take you up now, lest the pleasant day be spoiled by a sleepless night."

"I am ready, yet I love to stay among you all, for in my sleep I seem to drift so far away I never quite come back. Good night, good night; I shall see you in the morning."

With a smile, a kiss for all, they saw her fold her arms about her husband's neck, and lay down her head as if she never cared to lift it up again. The little journey was both a pleasure and pain to them, for each night the way seemed longer to Sylvia, and though the burden lightened the bearer grew more heavy-hearted. It was a silent passage now, for neither spoke, except when one asked tenderly, "Are you easy, love?" and the other answered, with a breath that chilled his cheek, "Quite happy, quite content."

So, cradled on the heart that loved her best, Sylvia was gently carried to the end of her short pilgrimage, and when her husband laid her down the morning had already dawned.

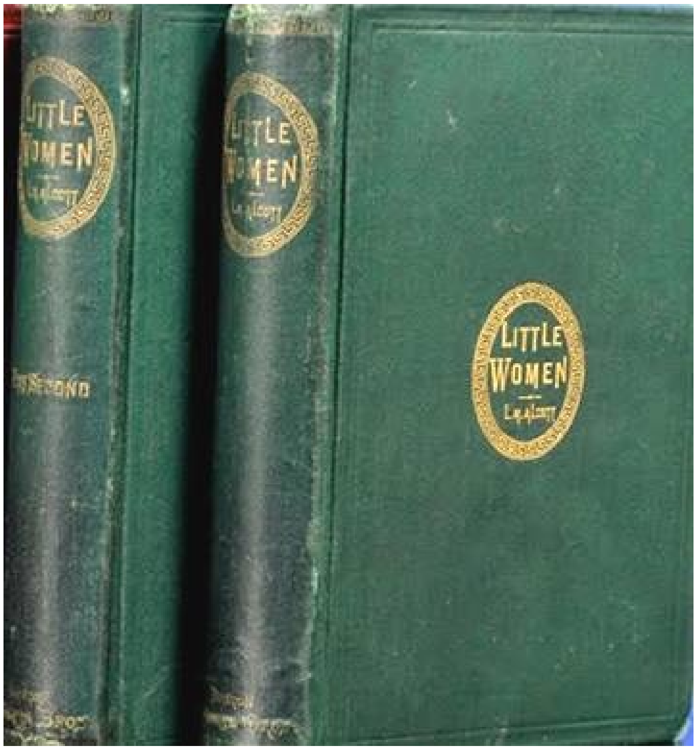
LITTLE WOMEN

OR

MEG, JO, BETH, AND AMY

Published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869, this famous novel is set in the Alcott family home of Orchard House, Concord, Massachusetts. The narrative follows the lives of four sisters – Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March – and is at times based on the author's childhood experiences with her sisters. The first volume of *Little Women* was an immediate commercial and critical success, prompting the composition of the book's second volume called *Good Wives*, which was also succesful. The publication of the book as a single volume first occurred in 1880 under the single title *Little Women*. Later there were two sequels that also featured the March sisters, *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886).

Alcott's father Bronson approached publisher Thomas Niles about a book he wanted to publish. Their talk soon turned to Louisa. Niles, an admirer of her collection *Hospital Sketches*, suggested she write a book about girls which would have widespread appeal. She was not at first interested, preferring to concentrate on her short stories. Eventually the publisher convinced her to write what would later become one of the most famous American novels ever written.


LITTLE WOMEN
L. M. ALCOTT
LITTLE WOMEN
L. M. ALCOTT
LITTLE WOMEN
L. M. ALCOTT
PART SECOND

The two volumes in their first edition state

Orchard House – where the Alcotts lived for twenty years and the real life setting of ‘Little Women’

VOLUME I
CHAPTER ONE
CHAPTER TWO
CHAPTER THREE
CHAPTER FOUR
CHAPTER FIVE
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CHAPTER SEVEN
CHAPTER EIGHT
CHAPTER NINE
CHAPTER TEN
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CHAPTER THIRTY

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE
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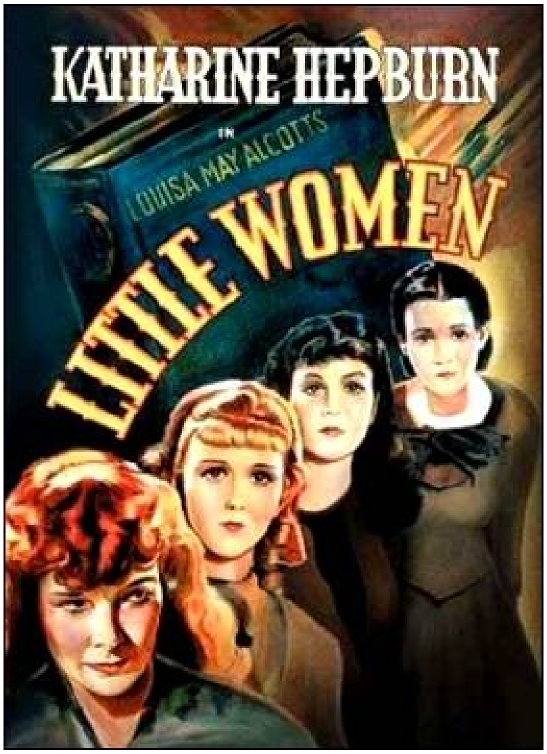
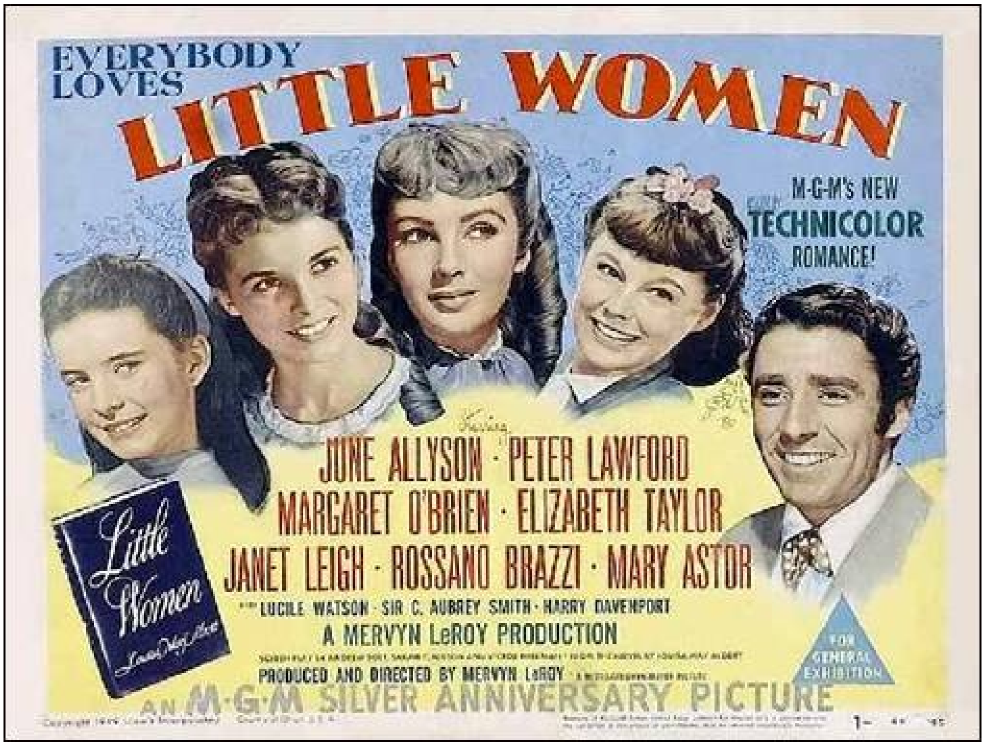
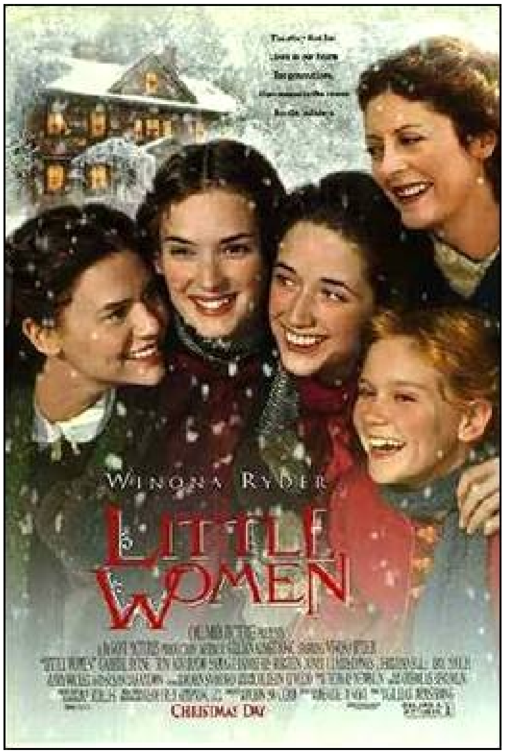

KATHARINE HEPBURN
IN
LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S
LITTLE WOMEN

The 1933 film adaptation

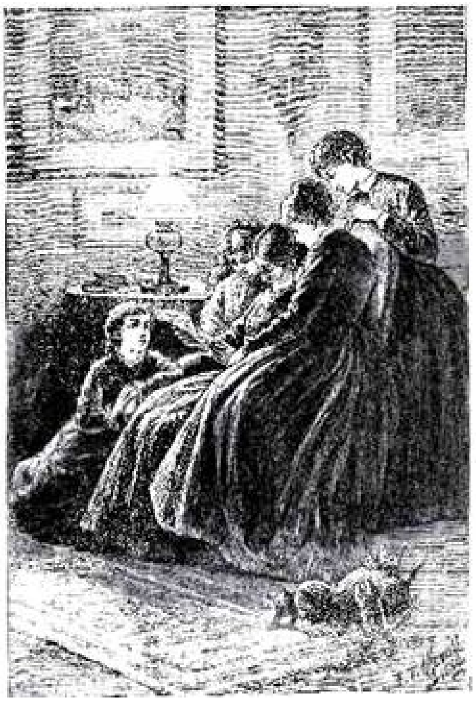


EVERYBODY LOVES
LITTLE WOMEN
M-G-M's NEW TECHNICOLOR ROMANCE!
starring
JUNE ALLYSON · PETER LAWFORD
MARGARET O'BRIEN · ELIZABETH TAYLOR
JANET LEIGH · ROSSANO BRAZZI · MARY ASTOR
with LUCILE WATSON · SIR C. AUBREY SMITH · HARRY DAVENPORT
A MERVYN LeROY PRODUCTION
PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY MERVYN LeROY
AN M-G-M SILVER ANNIVERSARY PICTURE
Little Women
FOR GENERAL EXHIBITION

The 1949 film adaptation


Winona Ryder
Little Women
Christmas Day

The 1994 film adaptation



VOLUME I

CHAPTER ONE

PLAYING PILGRIMS

“Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents,” grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

“It’s so dreadful to be poor!” sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

“I don’t think it’s fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all,” added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

“We’ve got Father and Mother, and each other,” said Beth contentedly from her corner.

The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly, “We haven’t got Father, and shall not have him for a long time.” She didn’t say “perhaps never,” but each silently added it, thinking of Father far away, where the fighting was.

Nobody spoke for a minute; then Meg said in an altered tone, “You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone; and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can’t do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I am afraid I don’t,” and Meg shook her head, as she thought regretfully of all the pretty things she wanted.

“But I don’t think the little we should spend would do any good. We’ve each got a dollar, and the army wouldn’t be much helped by our giving that. I agree not to expect anything from Mother or you, but I do want to buy *Undine and Sintran* for myself. I’ve wanted it so long,” said Jo, who was a bookworm.

“I planned to spend mine in new music,” said Beth, with a little sigh, which no one heard but the hearth brush and kettle-holder.

“I shall get a nice box of Faber’s drawing pencils; I really need them,” said Amy decidedly.

“Mother didn’t say anything about our money, and she won’t wish us to give up everything. Let’s each buy what we want, and have a little fun; I’m sure we work hard enough to earn it,” cried Jo, examining the heels of her shoes in a gentlemanly manner.

"I know I do — teaching those tiresome children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home," began Meg, in the complaining tone again.

"You don't have half such a hard time as I do," said Jo. "How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you till you're ready to fly out the window or cry?"

"It's naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross, and my hands get so stiff, I can't practice well at all." And Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that any one could hear that time.

"I don't believe any of you suffer as I do," cried Amy, "for you don't have to go to school with impertinent girls, who plague you if you don't know your lessons, and laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn't rich, and insult you when your nose isn't nice."

"If you mean libel, I'd say so, and not talk about labels, as if Papa was a pickle bottle," advised Jo, laughing.

"I know what I mean, and you needn't be statirical about it. It's proper to use good words, and improve your vocabilary," returned Amy, with dignity.

"Don't peck at one another, children. Don't you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me! How happy and good we'd be, if we had no worries!" said Meg, who could remember better times.

"You said the other day you thought we were a deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money."

"So I did, Beth. Well, I think we are. For though we do have to work, we make fun of ourselves, and are a pretty jolly set, as Jo would say."

"Jo does use such slang words!" observed Amy, with a reproving look at the long figure stretched on the rug.

Jo immediately sat up, put her hands in her pockets, and began to whistle.

"Don't, Jo. It's so boyish!"

"That's why I do it."

"I detest rude, unladylike girls!"

"I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!"

"Birds in their little nests agree," sang Beth, the peacemaker, with such a funny face that both sharp voices softened to a laugh, and the "pecking" ended for that time.

"Really, girls, you are both to be blamed," said Meg, beginning to lecture in her elder-sisterly fashion. "You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady."

"I'm not! And if turning up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm twenty," cried Jo, pulling off her net, and shaking down a chestnut mane. "I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China Aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy's games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy. And it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Papa. And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!"

And Jo shook the blue army sock till the needles rattled like castanets, and her ball bounded across the room.

"Poor Jo! It's too bad, but it can't be helped. So you must try to be contented with making your name boyish, and playing brother to us girls," said Beth, stroking the rough head with a hand that all the dish washing and dusting in the world could not make ungentle in its touch.

"As for you, Amy," continued Meg, "you are altogether too particular and prim. Your airs are funny now, but you'll grow up an affected little goose, if you don't take care. I like your nice manners and refined ways of speaking, when you don't try to be elegant. But your absurd words are as bad as Jo's slang."

"If Jo is a tomboy and Amy a goose, what am I, please?" asked Beth, ready to share the lecture.

"You're a dear, and nothing else," answered Meg warmly, and no one contradicted her, for the 'Mouse' was the pet of the family.

As young readers like to know 'how people look', we will take this moment to give them a little sketch of the four sisters, who sat knitting away in the twilight, while the December snow fell quietly without, and the fire crackled cheerfully within. It was a comfortable room, though the carpet was faded and the furniture very plain, for a good picture or two hung on the walls, books filled the recesses, chrysanthemums and Christmas roses bloomed in the windows, and a pleasant atmosphere of home peace pervaded it.

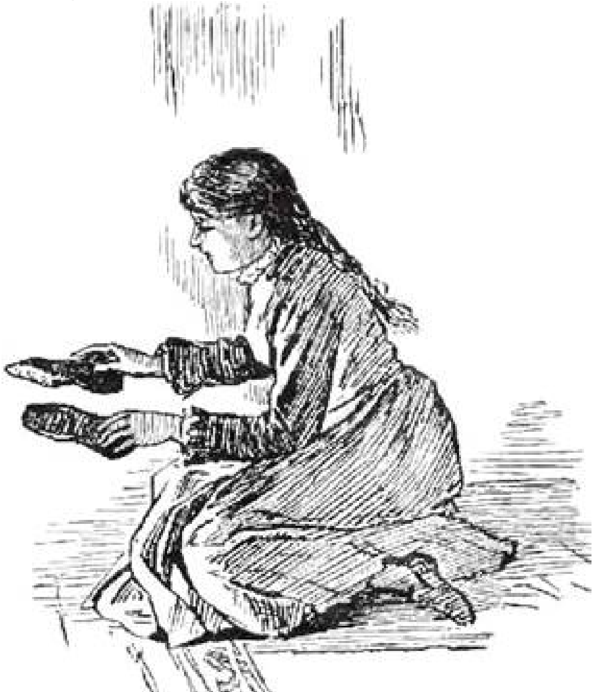
Margaret, the eldest of the four, was sixteen, and very pretty, being plump and fair, with large eyes, plenty of soft brown hair, a sweet mouth, and white hands, of which she was rather vain. Fifteen-year-old Jo was very tall, thin, and brown, and reminded one of a colt, for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs, which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp, gray eyes, which appeared to see everything, and were by turns fierce, funny, or thoughtful. Her long, thick hair was her one beauty, but it was usually bundled into a net, to be out of her way. Round shoulders had Jo, big hands and feet, a flyaway look to her clothes, and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman and didn't like it. Elizabeth, or Beth, as everyone called her, was a rosy, smooth-haired, bright-eyed girl of thirteen, with a shy manner, a timid voice, and a peaceful expression which was seldom disturbed. Her father called her ‘Little Miss Tranquility’, and the name suited her excellently, for she seemed to live in a happy world of her own, only venturing out to meet the few whom she trusted and loved. Amy, though the youngest, was a most important person, in her own opinion at least. A regular snow maiden, with blue eyes, and yellow hair curling on her shoulders, pale and slender, and always carrying herself like a young lady mindful of her manners. What the characters of the four sisters were we will leave to be found out.

The clock struck six and, having swept up the hearth, Beth put a pair of slippers down to warm. Somehow the sight of the old shoes had a good effect upon the girls, for Mother was coming, and everyone brightened to welcome her. Meg stopped lecturing, and lighted the lamp, Amy got out of the easy chair without being asked, and Jo forgot how tired she was as she sat up to hold the slippers nearer to the blaze.

“They are quite worn out. Marmee must have a new pair.”

“I thought I’d get her some with my dollar,” said Beth.

“No, I shall!” cried Amy.



“I’m the oldest,” began Meg, but Jo cut in with a decided, “I’m the man of the family now Papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers, for he told me to take special care of Mother while he was gone.”

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do,” said Beth, “let’s each get her something for

Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves."

"That's like you, dear! What will we get?" exclaimed Jo.

Everyone thought soberly for a minute, then Meg announced, as if the idea was suggested by the sight of her own pretty hands, "I shall give her a nice pair of gloves."

"Army shoes, best to be had," cried Jo.

"Some handkerchiefs, all hemmed," said Beth.

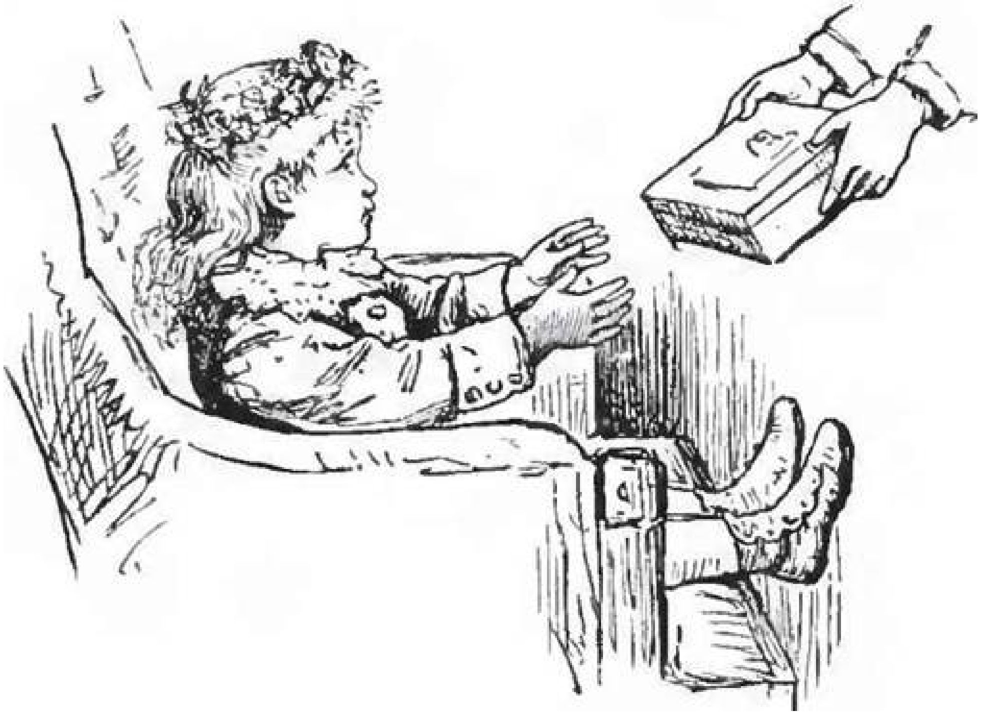
"I'll get a little bottle of cologne. She likes it, and it won't cost much, so I'll have some left to buy my pencils," added Amy.

"How will we give the things?" asked Meg.

"Put them on the table, and bring her in and see her open the bundles. Don't you remember how we used to do on our birthdays?" answered Jo.

"I used to be so frightened when it was my turn to sit in the chair with the crown on, and see you all come marching round to give the presents, with a kiss. I liked the things and the kisses, but it was dreadful to have you sit looking at me while I opened the bundles," said Beth, who was toasting her face and the bread for tea at the same time.

"Let Marmee think we are getting things for ourselves, and then surprise her. We must go shopping tomorrow afternoon, Meg. There is so much to do about the play for Christmas night," said Jo, marching up and down, with her hands behind her back, and her nose in the air.



"I don't mean to act any more after this time. I'm getting too old for such things," observed Meg, who was as much a child as ever about 'dressing-up' frolics.

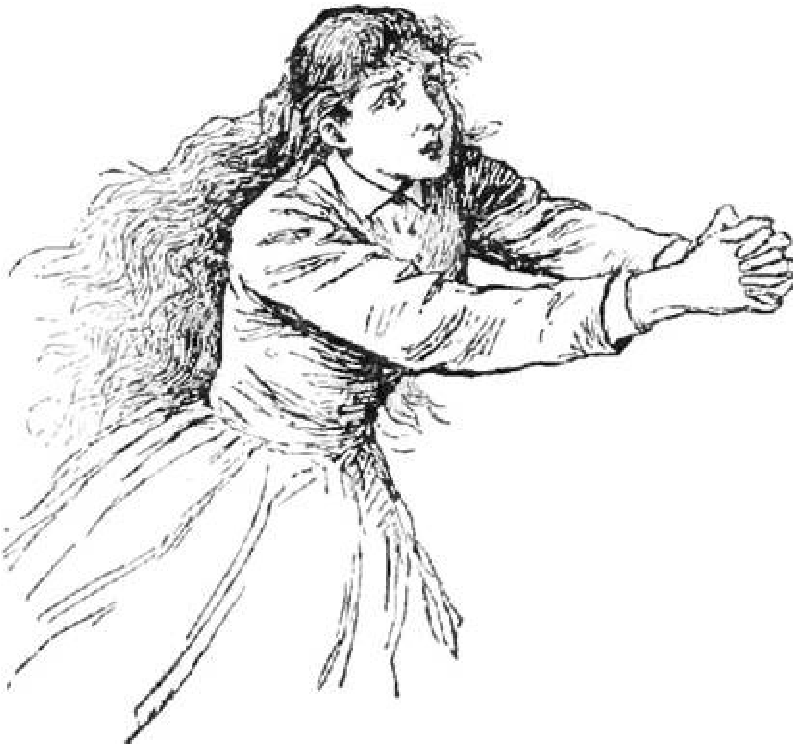
“You won’t stop, I know, as long as you can trail round in a white gown with your hair down, and wear gold-paper jewelry. You are the best actress we’ve got, and there’ll be an end of everything if you quit the boards,” said Jo. “We ought to rehearse tonight. Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene, for you are as stiff as a poker in that.”

“I can’t help it. I never saw anyone faint, and I don’t choose to make myself all black and blue, tumbling flat as you do. If I can go down easily, I’ll drop. If I can’t, I shall fall into a chair and be graceful. I don’t care if Hugo does come at me with a pistol,” returned Amy, who was not gifted with dramatic power, but was chosen because she was small enough to be borne out shrieking by the villain of the piece.

“Do it this way. Clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, ‘Roderigo! Save me! Save me!’“ and away went Jo, with a melodramatic scream which was truly thrilling.

Amy followed, but she poked her hands out stiffly before her, and jerked herself along as if she went by machinery, and her “Ow!” was more suggestive of pins being run into her than of fear and anguish. Jo gave a despairing groan, and Meg laughed outright, while Beth let her bread burn as she watched the fun with interest. “It’s no use! Do the best you can when the time comes, and if the audience laughs, don’t blame me. Come on, Meg.”

Then things went smoothly, for Don Pedro defied the world in a speech of two pages without a single break. Hagar, the witch, chanted an awful incantation over her kettleful of simmering toads, with weird effect. Roderigo rent his chains asunder manfully, and Hugo died in agonies of remorse and arsenic, with a wild, “Ha! Ha!”



“It’s the best we’ve had yet,” said Meg, as the dead villain sat up and rubbed his elbows.

“I don’t see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You’re a regular Shakespeare!” exclaimed Beth, who firmly believed that her sisters were gifted with wonderful genius in all things.

“Not quite,” replied Jo modestly. “I do think *The Witches Curse, an Operatic Tragedy* is rather a nice thing, but I’d like to try *Macbeth*, if we only had a trapdoor for Banquo. I always wanted to do the killing part. ‘Is that a dagger that I see before me?” muttered Jo, rolling her eyes and clutching at the air, as she had seen a famous tragedian do.

“No, it’s the toasting fork, with Mother’s shoe on it instead of the bread. Beth’s stage-struck!” cried Meg, and the rehearsal ended in a general burst of laughter.

“Glad to find you so merry, my girls,” said a cheery voice at the door, and actors and audience turned to welcome a tall, motherly lady with a ‘can I help you’ look about her which was truly delightful. She was not elegantly dressed, but a noble-looking woman, and the girls thought the gray cloak and unfashionable bonnet covered the most splendid mother in the world.

“Well, dearies, how have you got on today? There was so much to do, getting the boxes ready to go tomorrow, that I didn’t come home to dinner. Has anyone called, Beth? How is your cold, Meg? Jo, you look tired to death. Come and kiss me, baby.”

While making these maternal inquiries Mrs. March got her wet things off, her warm slippers on, and sitting down in the easy chair, drew Amy to her lap, preparing to enjoy the happiest hour of her busy day. The girls flew about, trying to make things comfortable, each in her own way. Meg arranged the tea table, Jo brought wood and set chairs, dropping, over-turning, and clattering everything she touched. Beth trotted to and fro between parlor kitchen, quiet and busy, while Amy gave directions to everyone, as she sat with her hands folded.

As they gathered about the table, Mrs. March said, with a particularly happy face, “I’ve got a treat for you after supper.”

A quick, bright smile went round like a streak of sunshine. Beth clapped her hands, regardless of the biscuit she held, and Jo tossed up her napkin, crying, “A letter! A letter! Three cheers for Father!”

“Yes, a nice long letter. He is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and an especial message to you girls,” said Mrs. March, patting her pocket as if she had got a treasure there.

“Hurry and get done! Don’t stop to quirk your little finger and simper over your plate, Amy,” cried Jo, choking on her tea and dropping her bread, butter side down, on the carpet in her haste to get at the treat.

Beth ate no more, but crept away to sit in her shadowy corner and brood over the delight to come, till the others were ready.

“I think it was so splendid in Father to go as chaplain when he was too old to be drafted, and not strong enough for a soldier,” said Meg warmly.

“Don’t I wish I could go as a drummer, a vivan — what’s its name? Or a nurse, so I could be near him and help him,” exclaimed Jo, with a groan.

“It must be very disagreeable to sleep in a tent, and eat all sorts of bad-tasting things, and drink out of a tin mug,” sighed Amy.

“When will he come home, Marmee?” asked Beth, with a little quiver in her voice.

“Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick. He will stay and do his work faithfully as long as he can, and we won’t ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. Now come and hear the letter.”

They all drew to the fire, Mother in the big chair with Beth at her feet, Meg and Amy perched on either arm of the chair, and Jo leaning on the back, where no one would see any sign of emotion if the letter should happen to be touching. Very few letters were written in those hard times that were not touching, especially those which fathers sent home. In this one little was said of the hardships endured, the dangers faced, or the homesickness conquered. It was a cheerful, hopeful letter, full of lively descriptions of camp life, marches, and military news, and only at the end did the writer’s heart over-flow with fatherly love and longing for the little girls at home.

“Give them all of my dear love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them by day, pray for them by night, and find my best comfort in their affection at all times. A year seems very long to wait before I see them, but remind them that while we wait we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women.” Everybody sniffed when they came to that part. Jo wasn’t ashamed of the great tear that dropped off the end of her nose, and Amy never minded the rumpling of her curls as she hid her face on her mother’s shoulder and sobbed out, “I am a selfish girl! But I’ll truly try to be better, so he mayn’t be disappointed in me by-and-by.”

“We all will,” cried Meg. “I think too much of my looks and hate to work, but won’t any more, if I can help it.”

“I’ll try and be what he loves to call me, ‘a little woman’ and not be rough and wild, but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else,” said Jo, thinking that keeping her temper at home was a much harder task than facing a rebel or two down South.

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army sock and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing the duty that lay nearest her, while she resolved in her quiet little soul to be all that Father hoped to find her when the year brought round the happy coming home.

Mrs. March broke the silence that followed Jo’s words, by saying in her cheery voice, “Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrims Progress when you were little things? Nothing delighted you more than to have me tie my piece bags on your backs for burdens, give you hats and sticks and rolls of paper, and let you travel through the house from the cellar, which was the City of Destruction, up, up, to the housetop, where you had all the lovely things you could collect to make a Celestial City.”

“What fun it was, especially going by the lions, fighting Apollyon, and passing through the valley where the hob-goblins were,” said Jo.

“I liked the place where the bundles fell off and tumbled downstairs,” said Meg.

“I don’t remember much about it, except that I was afraid of the cellar and the dark entry, and always liked the cake and milk we had up at the top. If I wasn’t too old for such things, I’d rather like to play it over again,” said Amy, who began to talk of renouncing childish things at the mature age of twelve.

“We never are too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City. Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before Father comes home.”

“Really, Mother? Where are our bundles?” asked Amy, who was a very literal young lady.

“Each of you told what your burden was just now, except Beth. I rather think she hasn’t got any,” said her mother.

“Yes, I have. Mine is dishes and dusters, and envying girls with nice pianos, and being afraid of people.”

Beth’s bundle was such a funny one that everybody wanted to laugh, but nobody did, for it would have hurt her feelings very much.

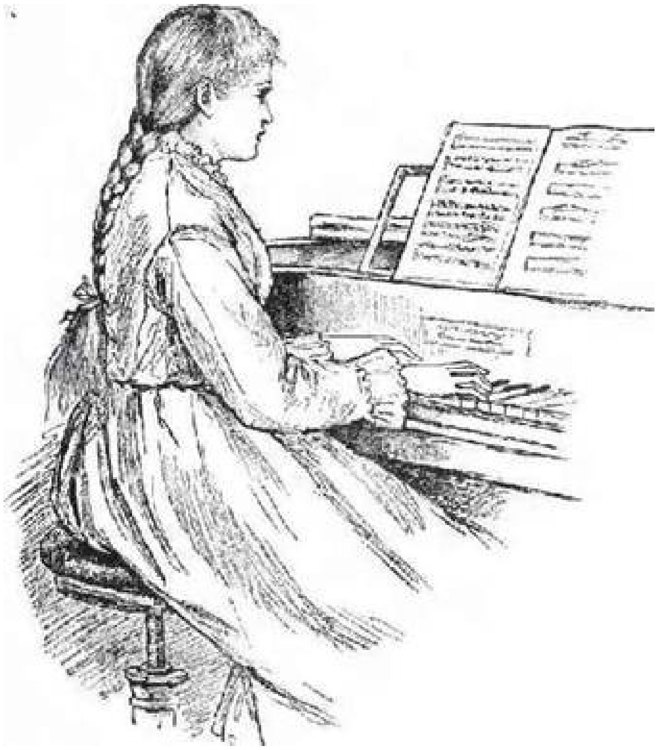
“Let us do it,” said Meg thoughtfully. “It is only another name for trying to be good, and the story may help us, for though we do want to be good, it’s hard work and we forget, and don’t do our best.”

“We were in the Slough of Despond tonight, and Mother came and pulled us out as Help did in the book. We ought to have our roll of directions, like Christian. What shall we do about that?” asked Jo, delighted with the fancy which lent a little romance to the very dull task of doing her duty.

“Look under your pillows Christmas morning, and you will find your guidebook,” replied Mrs. March.

They talked over the new plan while old Hannah cleared the table, then out came the four little work baskets, and the needles flew as the girls made sheets for Aunt March. It was uninteresting sewing, but tonight no one grumbled. They adopted Jo’s plan of dividing the long seams into four parts, and calling the quarters Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and in that way got on capitally, especially when they talked about the different countries as they stitched their way through them.

At nine they stopped work, and sang, as usual, before they went to bed. No one but Beth could get much music out of the old piano, but she had a way of softly touching the yellow keys and making a pleasant accompaniment to the simple songs they sang. Meg had a voice like a flute, and she and her mother led the little choir. Amy chirped like a cricket, and Jo wandered through the airs at her own sweet will, always coming out at the wrong place with a croak or a quaver that spoiled the most pensive tune. They had always done this from the time they could lisp...



Crinkle, crinkle, ‘ittle ‘tar,

and it had become a household custom, for the mother was a born singer. The first sound in the morning was her voice as she went about the house singing like a lark, and the last sound at night was the same cheery sound, for the girls never grew too old for that familiar lullaby.

CHAPTER TWO

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

Jo was the first to wake in the gray dawn of Christmas morning. No stockings hung at the fireplace, and for a moment she felt as much disappointed as she did long ago, when her little sock fell down because it was crammed so full of goodies. Then she remembered her mother's promise and, slipping her hand under her pillow, drew out a little crimson-covered book. She knew it very well, for it was that beautiful old story of the best life ever lived, and Jo felt that it was a true guidebook for any pilgrim going on a long journey. She woke Meg with a "Merry Christmas," and bade her see what was under her pillow. A green-covered book appeared, with the same picture inside, and a few words written by their mother, which made their one present very precious in their eyes. Presently Beth and Amy woke to rummage and find their little books also, one dove-colored, the other blue, and all sat looking at and talking about them, while the east grew rosy with the coming day.

In spite of her small vanities, Margaret had a sweet and pious nature, which unconsciously influenced her sisters, especially Jo, who loved her very tenderly, and obeyed her because her advice was so gently given.

"Girls," said Meg seriously, looking from the tumbled head beside her to the two little night-capped ones in the room beyond, "Mother wants us to read and love and mind these books, and we must begin at once. We used to be faithful about it, but since Father went away and all this war trouble unsettled us, we have neglected many things. You can do as you please, but I shall keep my book on the table here and read a little every morning as soon as I wake, for I know it will do me good and help me through the day."

Then she opened her new book and began to read. Jo put her arm round her and, leaning cheek to cheek, read also, with the quiet expression so seldom seen on her restless face.

"How good Meg is! Come, Amy, let's do as they do. I'll help you with the hard words, and they'll explain things if we don't understand," whispered Beth, very much impressed by the pretty books and her sisters' example.

"I'm glad mine is blue," said Amy. and then the rooms were very still while the pages were softly turned, and the winter sunshine crept in to touch the bright heads and serious faces with a Christmas greeting.

"Where is Mother?" asked Meg, as she and Jo ran down to thank her for their gifts, half an hour later.

"Goodness only knows. Some poor creeter came a-beggin', and your ma went straight off to see what was needed. There never was such a woman for givin' away vittles and drink, clothes and firin'," replied Hannah, who had lived with the family since Meg was born, and was considered by them all more as a friend than a servant.

"She will be back soon, I think, so fry your cakes, and have everything ready," said Meg, looking over the presents which were collected in a basket and kept under the sofa, ready to be produced at the proper time. "Why, where is Amy's bottle of cologne?" she added, as the little flask did not appear.

"She took it out a minute ago, and went off with it to put a ribbon on it, or some such notion," replied Jo, dancing about the room to take the first stiffness off the new army slippers.

"How nice my handkerchiefs look, don't they? Hannah washed and ironed them for me, and I marked them all myself," said Beth, looking proudly at the somewhat uneven letters which had cost her such labor.

"Bless the child! She's gone and put 'Mother' on them instead of 'M. March'. How funny!" cried Jo, taking one up.

"Isn't that right? I thought it was better to do it so, because Meg's initials are M.M., and I don't want anyone to use these but Marmee," said Beth, looking troubled.

“It’s all right, dear, and a very pretty idea, quite sensible too, for no one can ever mistake now. It will please her very much, I know,” said Meg, with a frown for Jo and a smile for Beth.

“There’s Mother. Hide the basket, quick!” cried Jo, as a door slammed and steps sounded in the hall.

Amy came in hastily, and looked rather abashed when she saw her sisters all waiting for her.

“Where have you been, and what are you hiding behind you?” asked Meg, surprised to see, by her hood and cloak, that lazy Amy had been out so early.

“Don’t laugh at me, Jo! I didn’t mean anyone should know till the time came. I only meant to change the little bottle for a big one, and I gave all my money to get it, and I’m truly trying not to be selfish any more.”

As she spoke, Amy showed the handsome flask which replaced the cheap one, and looked so earnest and humble in her little effort to forget herself that Meg hugged her on the spot, and Jo pronounced her ‘a trump’, while Beth ran to the window, and picked her finest rose to ornament the stately bottle.

“You see I felt ashamed of my present, after reading and talking about being good this morning, so I ran round the corner and changed it the minute I was up, and I’m so glad, for mine is the handsomest now.”

Another bang of the street door sent the basket under the sofa, and the girls to the table, eager for breakfast.

“Merry Christmas, Marmee! Many of them! Thank you for our books. We read some, and mean to every day,” they all cried in chorus.

“Merry Christmas, little daughters! I’m glad you began at once, and hope you will keep on. But I want to say one word before we sit down. Not far away from here lies a poor woman with a little newborn baby. Six children are huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there, and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering hunger and cold. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?”

They were all unusually hungry, having waited nearly an hour, and for a minute no one spoke, only a minute, for Jo exclaimed impetuously, “I’m so glad you came before we began!”

“May I go and help carry the things to the poor little children?” asked Beth eagerly.

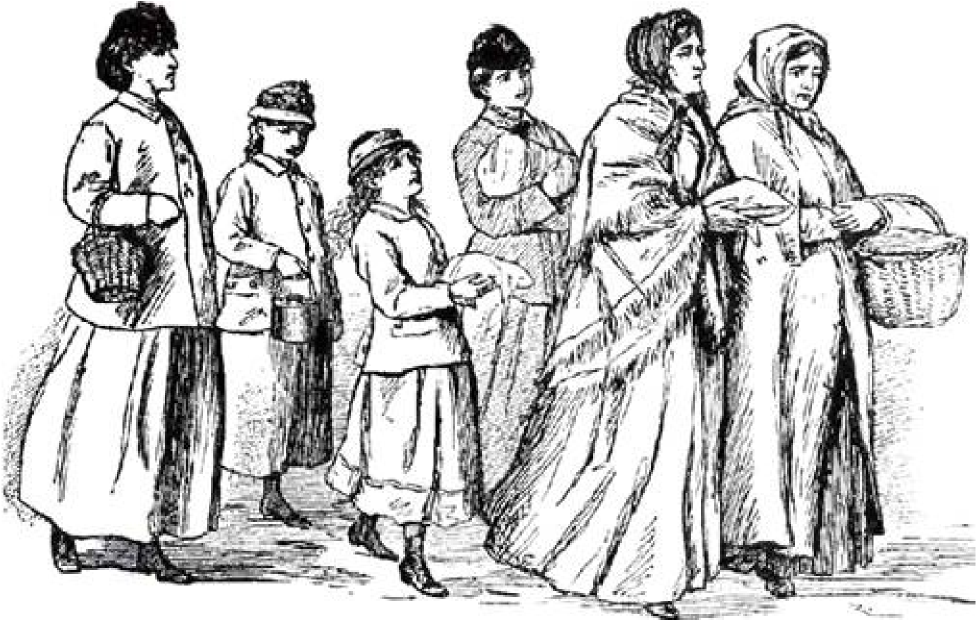
“I shall take the cream and the muffings,” added Amy, heroically giving up the article she most liked.

Meg was already covering the buckwheats, and piling the bread into one big plate.

“I thought you’d do it,” said Mrs. March, smiling as if satisfied. “You shall all go and help me, and when we come back we will have bread and milk for breakfast, and make it up at dinnertime."

They were soon ready, and the procession set out. Fortunately it was early, and they went through back streets, so few people saw them, and no one laughed at the queer party.

A poor, bare, miserable room it was, with broken windows, no fire, ragged bedclothes, a sick mother, wailing baby, and a group of pale, hungry children cuddled under one old quilt, trying to keep warm.



How the big eyes stared and the blue lips smiled as the girls went in.

"Ach, mein Gott! It is good angels come to us!" said the poor woman, crying for joy.

"Funny angels in hoods and mittens," said Jo, and set them to laughing.

In a few minutes it really did seem as if kind spirits had been at work there. Hannah, who had carried wood, made a fire, and stopped up the broken panes with old hats and her own cloak. Mrs. March gave the mother tea and gruel, and comforted her with promises of help, while she dressed the little baby as tenderly as if it had been her own. The girls meantime spread the table, set the children round the fire, and fed them like so many hungry birds, laughing, talking, and trying to understand the funny broken English.

"Das ist gut!" "Die Engel-kinder!" cried the poor things as they ate and warmed their purple hands at the comfortable blaze. The girls had never been called angel children before, and thought it very agreeable, especially Jo, who had been considered a 'Sancho' ever since she was born. That was a very happy breakfast, though they didn't get any of it. And when they went away, leaving comfort behind, I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls who gave away their breakfasts and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas morning.

“That’s loving our neighbor better than ourselves, and I like it,” said Meg, as they set out their presents while their mother was upstairs collecting clothes for the poor Hummels.

Not a very splendid show, but there was a great deal of love done up in the few little bundles, and the tall vase of red roses, white chrysanthemums, and trailing vines, which stood in the middle, gave quite an elegant air to the table.

“She’s coming! Strike up, Beth! Open the door, Amy! Three cheers for Marmee!” cried Jo, prancing about while Meg went to conduct Mother to the seat of honor.

Beth played her gayest march, Amy threw open the door, and Meg enacted escort with great dignity. Mrs. March was both surprised and touched, and smiled with her eyes full as she examined her presents and read the little notes which accompanied them. The slippers went on at once, a new handkerchief was slipped into her pocket, well scented with Amy’s cologne, the rose was fastened in her bosom, and the nice gloves were pronounced a perfect fit.

There was a good deal of laughing and kissing and explaining, in the simple, loving fashion which makes these home festivals so pleasant at the time, so sweet to remember long afterward, and then all fell to work.

The morning charities and ceremonies took so much time that the rest of the day was devoted to preparations for the evening festivities. Being still too young to go often to the theater, and not rich enough to afford any great outlay for private performances, the girls put their wits to work, and necessity being the mother of invention, made whatever they needed. Very clever were some of their productions, pasteboard guitars, antique lamps made of old-fashioned butter boats covered with silver paper, gorgeous robes of old cotton, glittering with tin spangles from a pickle factory, and armor covered with the same useful diamond shaped bits left in sheets when the lids of preserve pots were cut out. The big chamber was the scene of many innocent revels.

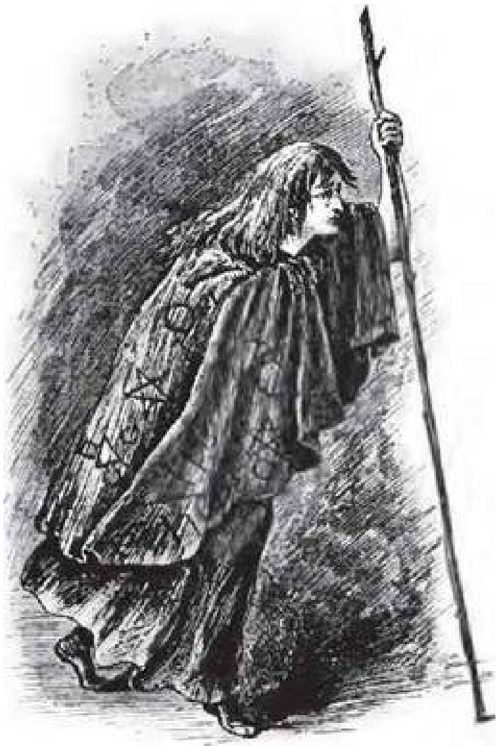
No gentleman were admitted, so Jo played male parts to her heart’s content and took immense satisfaction in a pair of russet leather boots given her by a friend, who knew a lady who knew an actor. These boots, an old foil, and a slashed doublet once used by an artist for some picture, were Jo’s chief treasures and appeared on all occasions. The smallness of the company made it necessary for the two principal actors to take several parts apiece, and they certainly deserved some credit for the hard work they did in learning three or four different parts, whisking in and out of various costumes, and managing the stage besides. It was excellent drill for their memories, a harmless amusement, and employed many hours which otherwise would have been idle, lonely, or spent in less profitable society.

On Christmas night, a dozen girls piled onto the bed which was the dress circle, and sat before the blue and yellow chintz curtains in a most flattering state of expectancy. There was a good deal of rustling and whispering behind the curtain, a trifle of lamp smoke, and an occasional giggle from Amy, who was apt to get hysterical in the excitement of the moment. Presently a bell sounded, the curtains flew apart, and the *operatic tragedy* began.

"A gloomy wood," according to the one playbill, was represented by a few shrubs in pots, green baize on the floor, and a cave in the distance. This cave was made with a clothes horse for a roof, bureaus for walls, and in it was a small furnace in full blast, with a black pot on it and an old witch bending over it. The stage was dark and the glow of the furnace had a fine effect, especially as real steam issued from the kettle when the witch took off the cover. A moment was allowed for the first thrill to subside, then Hugo, the villain, stalked in with a clanking sword at his side, a slouching hat, black beard, mysterious cloak, and the boots. After pacing to and fro in much agitation, he struck his forehead, and burst out in a wild strain, singing of his hatred for Roderigo, his love for Zara, and his pleasing resolution to kill the one and win the other. The gruff tones of Hugo's voice, with an occasional shout when his feelings overcame him, were very impressive, and the audience applauded the moment he paused for breath. Bowing with the air of one accustomed to public praise, he stole to the cavern and ordered Hagar to come forth with a commanding, "What ho, minion! I need thee!"

Out came Meg, with gray horsehair hanging about her face, a red and black robe, a staff, and cabalistic signs upon her cloak. Hugo demanded a potion to make Zara adore him, and one to destroy Roderigo. Hagar, in a fine dramatic melody, promised both, and proceeded to call up the spirit who would bring the love philter.

Hither, hither, from thy home,
Airy sprite, I bid thee come!
Born of roses, fed on dew,
Charms and potions canst thou brew?
Bring me here, with elfin speed,
The fragrant philter which I need.
Make it sweet and swift and strong,
Spirit, answer now my song!



A soft strain of music sounded, and then at the back of the cave appeared a little figure in cloudy white, with glittering wings, golden hair, and a garland of roses on its head. Waving a wand, it sang...

Hither I come,
From my airy home,
Afar in the silver moon.
Take the magic spell,
And use it well,
Or its power will vanish soon!

And dropping a small, gilded bottle at the witch's feet, the spirit vanished. Another chant from Hagar produced another apparition, not a lovely one, for with a bang an ugly black imp appeared and, having croaked a reply, tossed a dark bottle at Hugo and disappeared with a mocking laugh. Having warbled his thanks and put the potions in his boots, Hugo departed, and Hagar informed the audience that as he had killed a few of her friends in times past, she had cursed him, and intends to thwart his plans, and be revenged on him. Then the curtain fell, and the audience reposed and ate candy while discussing the merits of the play.

A good deal of hammering went on before the curtain rose again, but when it became evident what a masterpiece of stage carpentery had been got up, no one murmured at the delay. It was truly superb. A tower rose to the ceiling, halfway up appeared a window with a lamp burning in it, and behind the white curtain appeared Zara in a lovely blue and silver dress, waiting for Roderigo. He came in gorgeous array, with plumed cap, red cloak, chestnut lovelocks, a guitar, and the boots, of course. Kneeling at the foot of the tower, he sang a serenade in melting tones. Zara replied and, after a musical dialogue, consented to fly. Then came the grand effect of the play. Roderigo produced a rope ladder, with five steps to it, threw up one end, and invited Zara to descend. Timidly she crept from her lattice, put her hand on Roderigo's shoulder, and was about to leap gracefully down when "Alas! Alas for Zara!" she forgot her train. It caught in the window, the tower tottered, leaned forward, fell with a crash, and buried the unhappy lovers in the ruins.

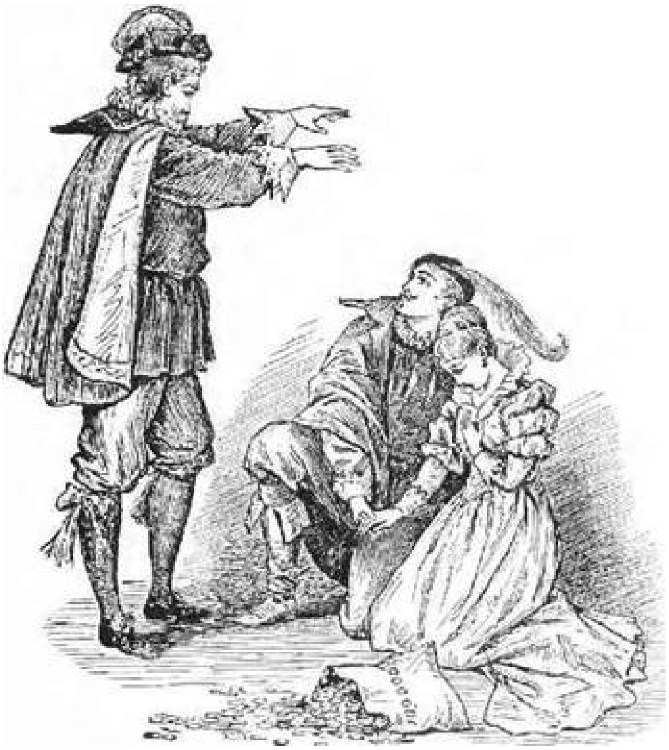
A universal shriek arose as the russet boots waved wildly from the wreck and a golden head emerged, exclaiming, “I told you so! I told you so!” With wonderful presence of mind, Don Pedro, the cruel sire, rushed in, dragged out his daughter, with a hasty aside...

“Don’t laugh! Act as if it was all right!” and, ordering Roderigo up, banished him from the kingdom with wrath and scorn. Though decidedly shaken by the fall from the tower upon him, Roderigo defied the old gentleman and refused to stir. This dauntless example fired Zara. She also defied her sire, and he ordered them both to the deepest dungeons of the castle. A stout little retainer came in with chains and led them away, looking very much frightened and evidently forgetting the speech he ought to have made.

Act third was the castle hall, and here Hagar appeared, having come to free the lovers and finish Hugo. She hears him coming and hides, sees him put the potions into two cups of wine and bid the timid little servant, “Bear them to the captives in their cells, and tell them I shall come anon.” The servant takes Hugo aside to tell him something, and Hagar changes the cups for two others which are harmless. Ferdinando, the ‘minion’, carries them away, and Hagar puts back the cup which holds the poison meant for Roderigo. Hugo, getting thirsty after a long warble, drinks it, loses his wits, and after a good deal of clutching and stamping, falls flat and dies, while Hagar informs him what she has done in a song of exquisite power and melody.

This was a truly thrilling scene, though some persons might have thought that the sudden tumbling down of a quantity of long red hair rather marred the effect of the villain’s death. He was called before the curtain, and with great propriety appeared, leading Hagar, whose singing was considered more wonderful than all the rest of the performance put together.

Act fourth displayed the despairing Roderigo on the point of stabbing himself because he has been told that Zara has deserted him. Just as the dagger is at his heart, a lovely song is sung under his window, informing him that Zara is true but in danger, and he can save her if he will. A key is thrown in, which unlocks the door, and in a spasm of rapture he tears off his chains and rushes away to find and rescue his lady love.



Act fifth opened with a stormy scene between Zara and Don Pedro. He wishes her to go into a convent, but she won't hear of it, and after a touching appeal, is about to faint when Roderigo dashes in and demands her hand. Don Pedro refuses, because he is not rich. They shout and gesticulate tremendously but cannot agree, and Rodrigo is about to bear away the exhausted Zara, when the timid servant enters with a letter and a bag from Hagar, who has mysteriously disappeared. The latter informs the party that she bequeaths untold wealth to the young pair and an awful doom to Don Pedro, if he doesn't make them happy. The bag is opened, and several quarts of tin money shower down upon the stage till it is quite glorified with the glitter. This entirely softens the stern sire. He consents without a murmur, all join in a joyful chorus, and the curtain falls upon the lovers kneeling to receive Don Pedro's blessing in attitudes of the most romantic grace.

Tumultuous applause followed but received an unexpected check, for the cot bed, on which the dress circle was built, suddenly shut up and extinguished the enthusiastic audience. Roderigo and Don Pedro flew to the rescue, and all were taken out unhurt, though many were speechless with laughter. The excitement had hardly subsided when Hannah appeared, with “Mrs. March's compliments, and would the ladies walk down to supper.”

This was a surprise even to the actors, and when they saw the table, they looked at one another in rapturous amazement. It was like Marmee to get up a little treat for them, but anything so fine as this was unheard of since the departed days of plenty. There was ice cream, actually two dishes of it, pink and white, and cake and fruit and distracting French bonbons and, in the middle of the table, four great bouquets of hot house flowers.

It quite took their breath away, and they stared first at the table and then at their mother, who looked as if she enjoyed it immensely.

“Is it fairies?” asked Amy.

“Santa Claus,” said Beth.

“Mother did it.” And Meg smiled her sweetest, in spite of her gray beard and white eyebrows.

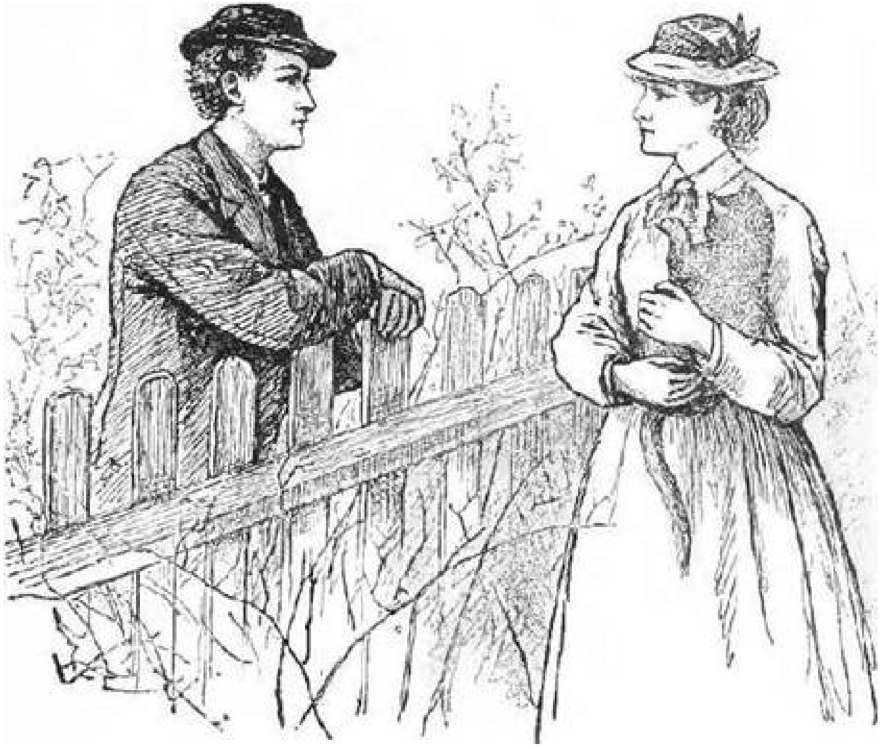
“Aunt March had a good fit and sent the supper,” cried Jo, with a sudden inspiration.

“All wrong. Old Mr. Laurence sent it,” replied Mrs. March.

“The Laurence boy’s grandfather! What in the world put such a thing into his head? We don’t know him!” exclaimed Meg.

“Hannah told one of his servants about your breakfast party. He is an odd old gentleman, but that pleased him. He knew my father years ago, and he sent me a polite note this afternoon, saying he hoped I would allow him to express his friendly feeling toward my children by sending them a few trifles in honor of the day. I could not refuse, and so you have a little feast at night to make up for the bread-and-milk breakfast.”

“That boy put it into his head, I know he did! He’s a capital fellow, and I wish we could get acquainted. He looks as if he’d like to know us but he’s bashful, and Meg is so prim she won’t let me speak to him when we pass,” said Jo, as the plates went round, and the ice began to melt out of sight, with ohs and ahs of satisfaction.



“You mean the people who live in the big house next door, don’t you?” asked one of the girls. “My mother knows old Mr. Laurence, but says he’s very proud and doesn’t like to mix with his neighbors. He keeps his grandson shut up, when he isn’t riding or walking with his tutor, and makes him study very hard. We invited him to our party, but he didn’t come. Mother says he’s very nice, though he never speaks to us girls.”

“Our cat ran away once, and he brought her back, and we talked over the fence, and were getting on capitally, all about cricket, and so on, when he saw Meg coming, and walked off. I mean to know him some day, for he needs fun, I’m sure he does,” said Jo decidedly.

“I like his manners, and he looks like a little gentleman, so I’ve no objection to your knowing him, if a proper opportunity comes. He brought the flowers himself, and I should have asked him in, if I had been sure what was going on upstairs. He looked so wistful as he went away, hearing the frolic and evidently having none of his own.”

“It’s a mercy you didn’t, Mother!” laughed Jo, looking at her boots. “But we’ll have another play sometime that he can see. Perhaps he’ll help act. Wouldn’t that be jolly?”

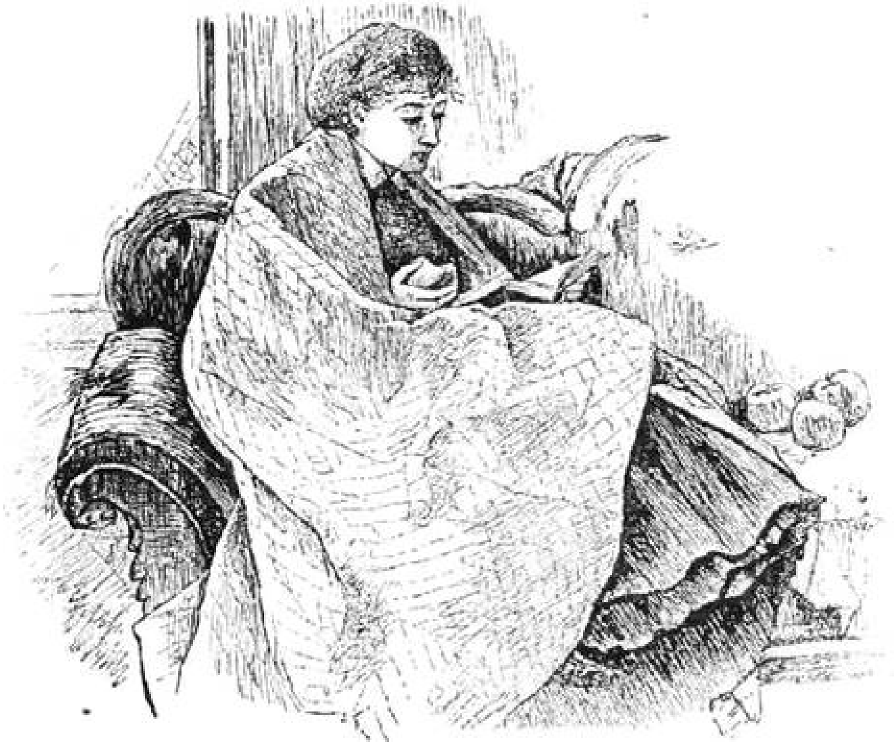
“I never had such a fine bouquet before! How pretty it is!” And Meg examined her flowers with great interest.

“They are lovely. But Beth’s roses are sweeter to me,” said Mrs. March, smelling the half-dead posy in her belt.

Beth nestled up to her, and whispered softly, “I wish I could send my bunch to Father. I’m afraid he isn’t having such a merry Christmas as we are.”

CHAPTER THREE

THE LAURENCE BOY



“Jo! Jo! Where are you?” cried Meg at the foot of the garret stairs.

“Here!” answered a husky voice from above, and, running up, Meg found her sister eating apples and crying over the Heir of Redclyffe, wrapped up in a comforter on an old three-legged sofa by the sunny window. This was Jo’s favorite refuge, and here she loved to retire with half a dozen russets and a nice book, to enjoy the quiet and the society of a pet rat who lived near by and didn’t mind her a particle. As Meg appeared, Scrabble whisked into his hole. Jo shook the tears off her cheeks and waited to hear the news.

“Such fun! Only see! A regular note of invitation from Mrs. Gardiner for tomorrow night!” cried Meg, waving the precious paper and then proceeding to read it with girlish delight.

“‘Mrs. Gardiner would be happy to see Miss March and Miss Josephine at a little dance on New Year’s Eve.’ Marmee is willing we should go, now what shall we wear?”

“What’s the use of asking that, when you know we shall wear our poplins, because we haven’t got anything else?” answered Jo with her mouth full.

“If I only had a silk!” sighed Meg. “Mother says I may when I’m eighteen perhaps, but two years is an everlasting time to wait.”

“I’m sure our pops look like silk, and they are nice enough for us. Yours is as good as new, but I forgot the burn and the tear in mine. Whatever shall I do? The burn shows badly, and I can’t take any out.”

“You must sit still all you can and keep your back out of sight. The front is all right. I shall have a new ribbon for my hair, and Marmee will lend me her little pearl pin, and my new slippers are lovely, and my gloves will do, though they aren’t as nice as I’d like.”

“Mine are spoiled with lemonade, and I can’t get any new ones, so I shall have to go without,” said Jo, who never troubled herself much about dress.

“You must have gloves, or I won’t go,” cried Meg decidedly. “Gloves are more important than anything else. You can’t dance without them, and if you don’t I should be so mortified.”

“Then I’ll stay still. I don’t care much for company dancing. It’s no fun to go sailing round. I like to fly about and cut capers.”

“You can’t ask Mother for new ones, they are so expensive, and you are so careless. She said when you spoiled the others that she shouldn’t get you any more this winter. Can’t you make them do?”

“I can hold them crumpled up in my hand, so no one will know how stained they are. That’s all I can do. No! I’ll tell you how we can manage, each wear one good one and carry a bad one. Don’t you see?”

“Your hands are bigger than mine, and you will stretch my glove dreadfully,” began Meg, whose gloves were a tender point with her.

“Then I’ll go without. I don’t care what people say!” cried Jo, taking up her book.

“You may have it, you may! Only don’t stain it, and do behave nicely. Don’t put your hands behind you, or stare, or say ‘Christopher Columbus!’ will you?”

“Don’t worry about me. I’ll be as prim as I can and not get into any scrapes, if I can help it. Now go and answer your note, and let me finish this splendid story.”

So Meg went away to ‘accept with thanks’, look over her dress, and sing blithely as she did up her one real lace frill, while Jo finished her story, her four apples, and had a game of romps with Scrabble.

On New Year’s Eve the parlor was deserted, for the two younger girls played dressing maids and the two elder were absorbed in the all-important business of ‘getting ready for the party’. Simple as the toilets were, there was a great deal of running up and down, laughing and talking, and at one time a strong smell of burned hair pervaded the house. Meg wanted a few curls about her face, and Jo undertook to pinch the papered locks with a pair of hot tongs.

“Ought they to smoke like that?” asked Beth from her perch on the bed.

“It’s the dampness drying,” replied Jo.

“What a queer smell! It’s like burned feathers,” observed Amy, smoothing her own pretty curls with a superior air.

“There, now I’ll take off the papers and you’ll see a cloud of little ringlets,” said Jo, putting down the tongs.

She did take off the papers, but no cloud of ringlets appeared, for the hair came with the papers, and the horrified hairdresser laid a row of little scorched bundles on the bureau before her victim.

“Oh, oh, oh! What have you done? I’m spoiled! I can’t go! My hair, oh, my hair!” wailed Meg, looking with despair at the uneven frizzle on her forehead.

“Just my luck! You shouldn’t have asked me to do it. I always spoil everything. I’m so sorry, but the tongs were too hot, and so I’ve made a mess,” groaned poor Jo, regarding the little black pancakes with tears of regret.

“It isn’t spoiled. Just frizzle it, and tie your ribbon so the ends come on your forehead a bit, and it will look like the last fashion. I’ve seen many girls do it so,” said Amy consolingly.

“Serves me right for trying to be fine. I wish I’d let my hair alone,” cried Meg petulantly.

“So do I, it was so smooth and pretty. But it will soon grow out again,” said Beth, coming to kiss and comfort the shorn sheep.

After various lesser mishaps, Meg was finished at last, and by the united exertions of the entire family Jo’s hair was got up and her dress on. They looked very well in their simple suits, Meg’s in silvery drab, with a blue velvet snood, lace frills, and the pearl pin. Jo in maroon, with a stiff, gentlemanly linen collar, and a white chrysanthemum or two for her only ornament. Each put on one nice light glove, and carried one soiled one, and all pronounced the effect “quite easy and fine”. Meg’s high-heeled slippers were very tight and hurt her, though she would not own it, and Jo’s nineteen hairpins all seemed stuck straight into her head, which was not exactly comfortable, but, dear me, let us be elegant or die.

“Have a good time, dearies!” said Mrs. March, as the sisters went daintily down the walk. “Don’t eat much supper, and come away at eleven when I send Hannah for you.” As the gate clashed behind them, a voice cried from a window...

“Girls, girls! Have you you both got nice pocket handkerchiefs?”

“Yes, yes, spandy nice, and Meg has cologne on hers,” cried Jo, adding with a laugh as they went on, “I do believe Marmee would ask that if we were all running away from an earthquake."

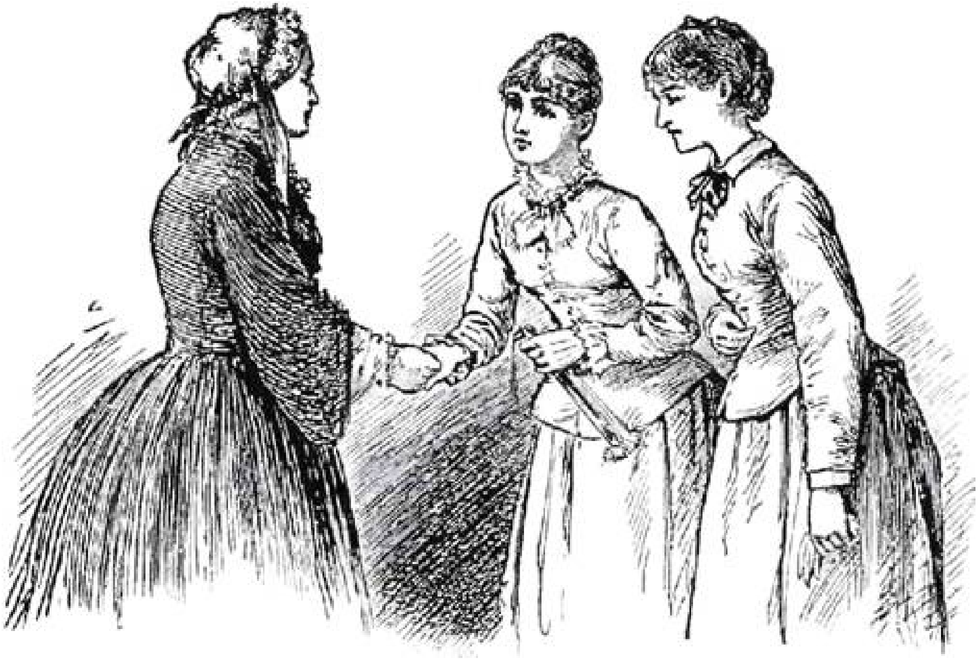
"It is one of her aristocratic tastes, and quite proper, for a real lady is always known by neat boots, gloves, and handkerchief," replied Meg, who had a good many little 'aristocratic tastes' of her own.

"Now don't forget to keep the bad breadth out of sight, Jo. Is my sash right? And does my hair look very bad?" said Meg, as she turned from the glass in Mrs. Gardiner's dressing room after a prolonged prink.

"I know I shall forget. If you see me doing anything wrong, just remind me by a wink, will you?" returned Jo, giving her collar a twitch and her head a hasty brush.

"No, winking isn't ladylike. I'll lift my eyebrows if any thing is wrong, and nod if you are all right. Now hold your shoulder straight, and take short steps, and don't shake hands if you are introduced to anyone. It isn't the thing."

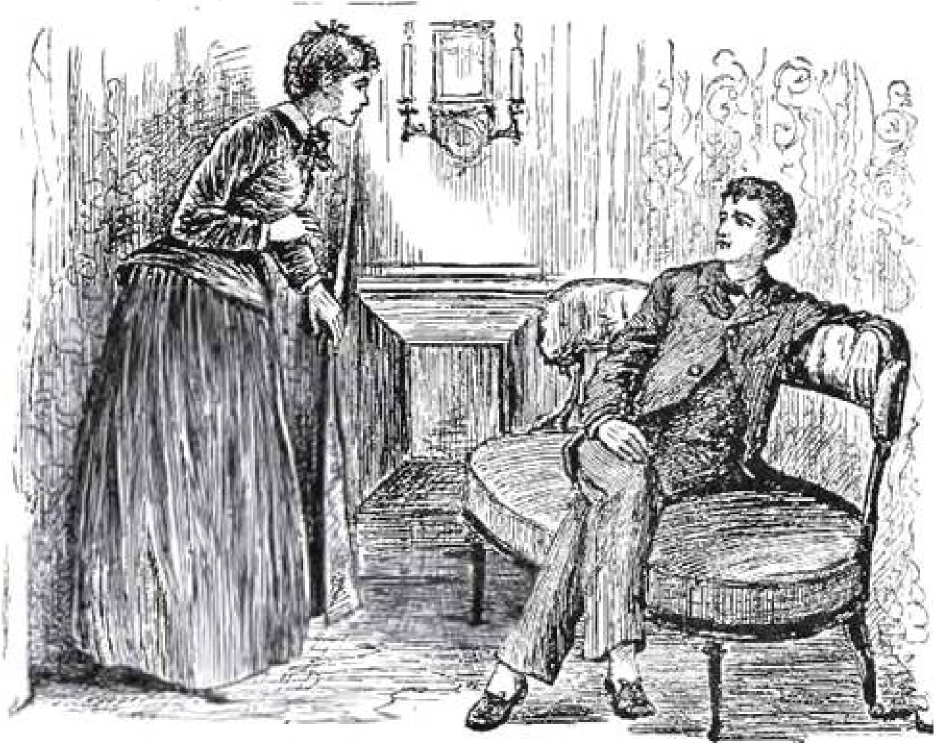
"How do you learn all the proper ways? I never can. Isn't that music gay?"



Down they went, feeling a trifle timid, for they seldom went to parties, and informal as this little gathering was, it was an event to them. Mrs. Gardiner, a stately old lady, greeted them kindly and handed them over to the eldest of her six daughters. Meg knew Sallie and was at her ease very soon, but Jo, who didn't care much for girls or girlish gossip, stood about, with her back carefully against the wall, and felt as much out of place as a colt in a flower garden. Half a dozen jovial lads were talking about skates in another part of the room, and she longed to go and join them, for skating was one of the joys of her life. She telegraphed her wish to Meg, but the eyebrows went up so alarmingly that she dared not stir. No one came to talk to her, and one by one the group dwindled away till she was left alone. She could not roam about and amuse herself, for the burned breadth would show, so she stared at people rather forlornly till the dancing began. Meg was asked at once, and the tight slippers tripped about so briskly that none would have guessed the pain their wearer suffered smilingly. Jo saw a big red headed youth approaching her corner, and fearing he meant to engage her, she slipped into a curtained recess, intending to peep and enjoy herself in peace. Unfortunately, another bashful person had chosen the same refuge, for, as the curtain fell behind her, she found herself face to face with the 'Laurence boy'.

"Dear me, I didn't know anyone was here!" stammered Jo, preparing to back out as speedily as she had bounced in.

But the boy laughed and said pleasantly, though he looked a little startled, "Don't mind me, stay if you like."



"Shan't I disturb you?"

"Not a bit. I only came here because I don't know many people and felt rather strange at first, you know."

"So did I. Don't go away, please, unless you'd rather."

The boy sat down again and looked at his pumps, till Jo said, trying to be polite and easy, "I think I've had the pleasure of seeing you before. You live near us, don't you?"

"Next door." And he looked up and laughed outright, for Jo's prim manner was rather funny when he remembered how they had chatted about cricket when he brought the cat home.

That put Jo at her ease and she laughed too, as she said, in her heartiest way, “We did have such a good time over your nice Christmas present.”

“Grandpa sent it.”

“But you put it into his head, didn’t you, now?”

“How is your cat, Miss March?” asked the boy, trying to look sober while his black eyes shone with fun.

“Nicely, thank you, Mr. Laurence. But I am not Miss March, I’m only Jo,” returned the young lady.

“I’m not Mr. Laurence, I’m only Laurie.”

“Laurie Laurence, what an odd name.”

“My first name is Theodore, but I don’t like it, for the fellows called me Dora, so I made them say Laurie instead.”

“I hate my name, too, so sentimental! I wish every one would say Jo instead of Josephine. How did you make the boys stop calling you Dora?”

“I thrashed ‘em.”

“I can’t thrash Aunt March, so I suppose I shall have to bear it.” And Jo resigned herself with a sigh.

“Don’t you like to dance, Miss Jo?” asked Laurie, looking as if he thought the name suited her.

“I like it well enough if there is plenty of room, and everyone is lively. In a place like this I’m sure to upset something, tread on people’s toes, or do something dreadful, so I keep out of mischief and let Meg sail about. Don’t you dance?”

“Sometimes. You see I’ve been abroad a good many years, and haven’t been into company enough yet to know how you do things here.”

“Abroad!” cried Jo. “Oh, tell me about it! I love dearly to hear people describe their travels.”

Laurie didn’t seem to know where to begin, but Jo’s eager questions soon set him going, and he told her how he had been at school in Vevay, where the boys never wore hats and had a fleet of boats on the lake, and for holiday fun went on walking trips about Switzerland with their teachers.

“Don’t I wish I’d been there!” cried Jo. “Did you go to Paris?”

“We spent last winter there.”

“Can you talk French?”

“We were not allowed to speak anything else at Vevay.”

“Do say some! I can read it, but can’t pronounce.”

“Quel nom a cette jeune demoiselle en les pantoufles jolis?”

“How nicely you do it! Let me see ... you said, ‘Who is the young lady in the pretty slippers’, didn’t you?”

“Oui, mademoiselle.”

“It’s my sister Margaret, and you knew it was! Do you think she is pretty?”

“Yes, she makes me think of the German girls, she looks so fresh and quiet, and dances like a lady.”

Jo quite glowed with pleasure at this boyish praise of her sister, and stored it up to repeat to Meg. Both peeped and criticized and chatted till they felt like old acquaintances. Laurie’s bashfulness soon wore off, for Jo’s gentlemanly demeanor amused and set him at his ease, and Jo was her merry self again, because her dress was forgotten and nobody lifted their eyebrows at her. She liked the ‘Laurence boy’ better than ever and took several good looks at him, so that she might describe him to the girls, for they had no brothers, very few male cousins, and boys were almost unknown creatures to them.

“Curly black hair, brown skin, big black eyes, handsome nose, fine teeth, small hands and feet, taller than I am, very polite, for a boy, and altogether jolly. Wonder how old he is?”

It was on the tip of Jo’s tongue to ask, but she checked herself in time and, with unusual tact, tried to find out in a round-about way.

“I suppose you are going to college soon? I see you pegging away at your books, no, I mean studying hard.” And Jo blushed at the dreadful ‘pegging’ which had escaped her.

Laurie smiled but didn’t seem shocked, and answered with a shrug. “Not for a year or two. I won’t go before seventeen, anyway.”

“Aren’t you but fifteen?” asked Jo, looking at the tall lad, whom she had imagined seventeen already.

“Sixteen, next month.”

“How I wish I was going to college! You don’t look as if you liked it.”

“I hate it! Nothing but grinding or skylarking. And I don’t like the way fellows do either, in this country.”

“What do you like?”

“To live in Italy, and to enjoy myself in my own way.”

Jo wanted very much to ask what his own way was, but his black brows looked rather threatening as he knit them, so she changed the subject by saying, as her foot kept time, “That’s a splendid polka! Why don’t you go and try it?”

“If you will come too,” he answered, with a gallant little bow.

“I can’t, for I told Meg I wouldn’t, because...” There Jo stopped, and looked undecided whether to tell or to laugh.

“Because, what?”

“You won’t tell?”

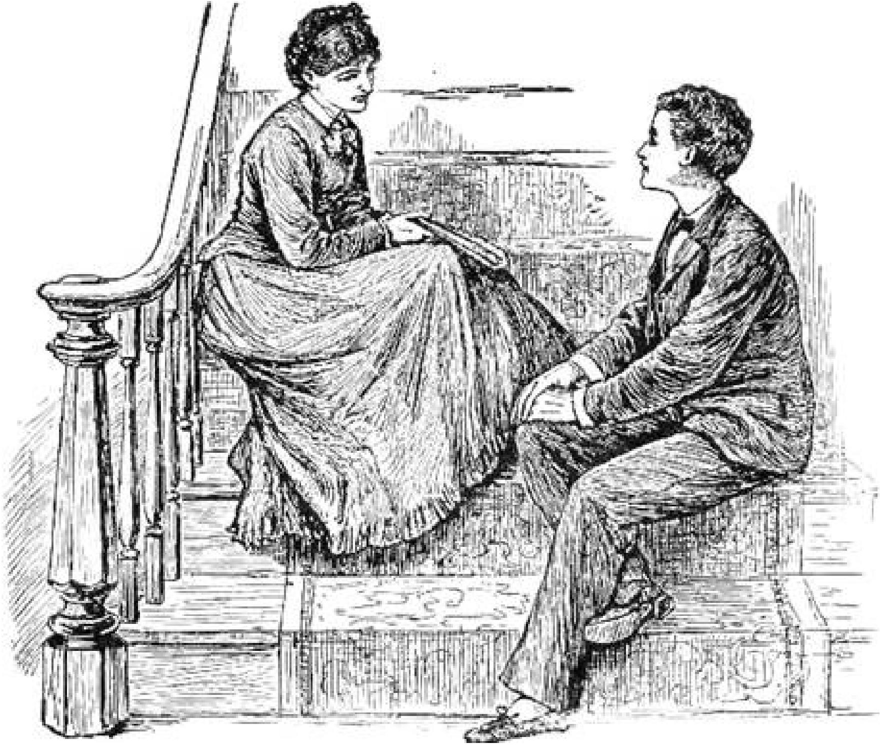
“Never!”

"Well, I have a bad trick of standing before the fire, and so I burn my frocks, and I scorched this one, and though it's nicely mended, it shows, and Meg told me to keep still so no one would see it. You may laugh, if you want to. It is funny, I know."

But Laurie didn't laugh. He only looked down a minute, and the expression of his face puzzled Jo when he said very gently, "Never mind that. I'll tell you how we can manage. There's a long hall out there, and we can dance grandly, and no one will see us. Please come."

Jo thanked him and gladly went, wishing she had two neat gloves when she saw the nice, pearl-colored ones her partner wore. The hall was empty, and they had a grand polka, for Laurie danced well, and taught her the German step, which delighted Jo, being full of swing and spring. When the music stopped, they sat down on the stairs to get their breath, and Laurie was in the midst of an account of a students' festival at Heidelberg when Meg appeared in search of her sister. She beckoned, and Jo reluctantly followed her into a side room, where she found her on a sofa, holding her foot, and looking pale.

"I've sprained my ankle. That stupid high heel turned and gave me a sad wrench. It aches so, I can hardly stand, and I don't know how I'm ever going to get home," she said, rocking to and fro in pain.



"I knew you'd hurt your feet with those silly shoes. I'm sorry. But I don't see what you can do, except get a carriage, or stay here all night," answered Jo, softly rubbing the poor ankle as she spoke.

“I can’t have a carriage without its costing ever so much. I dare say I can’t get one at all, for most people come in their own, and it’s a long way to the stable, and no one to send.”

“I’ll go.”

“No, indeed! It’s past nine, and dark as Egypt. I can’t stop here, for the house is full. Sallie has some girls staying with her. I’ll rest till Hannah comes, and then do the best I can.”

“I’ll ask Laurie. He will go,” said Jo, looking relieved as the idea occurred to her.

“Mercy, no! Don’t ask or tell anyone. Get me my rubbers, and put these slippers with our things. I can’t dance anymore, but as soon as supper is over, watch for Hannah and tell me the minute she comes.”

“They are going out to supper now. I’ll stay with you. I’d rather.”

“No, dear, run along, and bring me some coffee. I’m so tired I can’t stir.”

So Meg reclined, with rubbers well hidden, and Jo went blundering away to the dining room, which she found after going into a china closet, and opening the door of a room where old Mr. Gardiner was taking a little private refreshment. Making a dart at the table, she secured the coffee, which she immediately spilled, thereby making the front of her dress as bad as the back.

“Oh, dear, what a blunderbuss I am!” exclaimed Jo, finishing Meg’s glove by scrubbing her gown with it.

“Can I help you?” said a friendly voice. And there was Laurie, with a full cup in one hand and a plate of ice in the other.

“I was trying to get something for Meg, who is very tired, and someone shook me, and here I am in a nice state,” answered Jo, glancing dismally from the stained skirt to the coffee-colored glove.

“Too bad! I was looking for someone to give this to. May I take it to your sister?”

“Oh, thank you! I’ll show you where she is. I don’t offer to take it myself, for I should only get into another scrape if I did.”

Jo led the way, and as if used to waiting on ladies, Laurie drew up a little table, brought a second installment of coffee and ice for Jo, and was so obliging that even particular Meg pronounced him a ‘nice boy’. They had a merry time over the bonbons and mottoes, and were in the midst of a quiet game of *Buzz*, with two or three other young people who had strayed in, when Hannah appeared. Meg forgot her foot and rose so quickly that she was forced to catch hold of Jo, with an exclamation of pain.

“Hush! Don’t say anything,” she whispered, adding aloud, “It’s nothing. I turned my foot a little, that’s all,” and limped upstairs to put her things on.

Hannah scolded, Meg cried, and Jo was at her wits' end, till she decided to take things into her own hands. Slipping out, she ran down and, finding a servant, asked if he could get her a carriage. It happened to be a hired waiter who knew nothing about the neighborhood and Jo was looking round for help when Laurie, who had heard what she said, came up and offered his grandfather's carriage, which had just come for him, he said.

"It's so early! You can't mean to go yet?" began Jo, looking relieved but hesitating to accept the offer.

"I always go early, I do, truly! Please let me take you home. It's all on my way, you know, and it rains, they say."

That settled it, and telling him of Meg's mishap, Jo gratefully accepted and rushed up to bring down the rest of the party. Hannah hated rain as much as a cat does so she made no trouble, and they rolled away in the luxurious close carriage, feeling very festive and elegant. Laurie went on the box so Meg could keep her foot up, and the girls talked over their party in freedom.

"I had a capital time. Did you?" asked Jo, rumpling up her hair, and making herself comfortable.

"Yes, till I hurt myself. Sallie's friend, Annie Moffat, took a fancy to me, and asked me to come and spend a week with her when Sallie does. She is going in the spring when the opera comes, and it will be perfectly splendid, if Mother only lets me go," answered Meg, cheering up at the thought.

"I saw you dancing with the red headed man I ran away from. Was he nice?"

"Oh, very! His hair is auburn, not red, and he was very polite, and I had a delicious redowa with him."

"He looked like a grasshopper in a fit when he did the new step. Laurie and I couldn't help laughing. Did you hear us?"

"No, but it was very rude. What were you about all that time, hidden away there?"

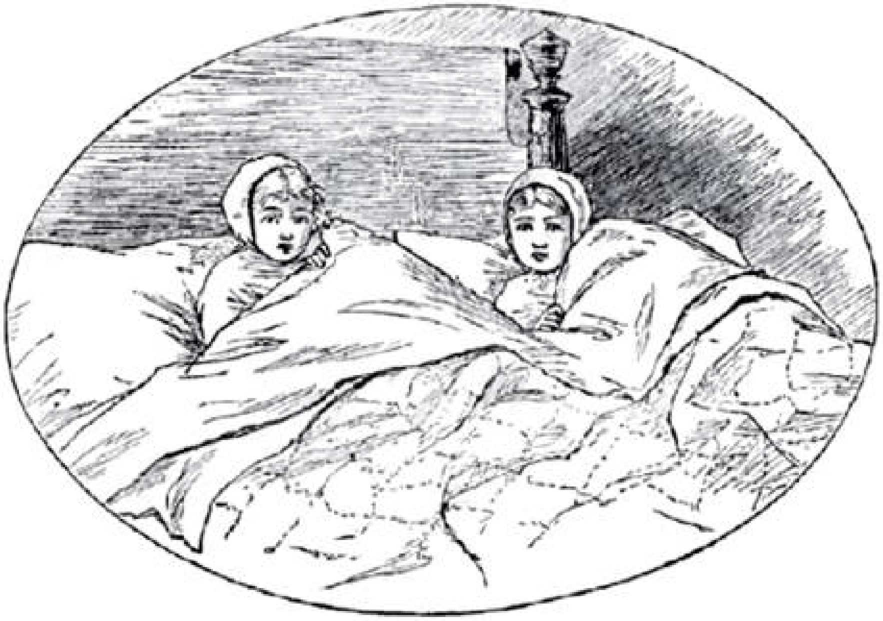
Jo told her adventures, and by the time she had finished they were at home. With many thanks, they said good night and crept in, hoping to disturb no one, but the instant their door creaked, two little nightcaps bobbed up, and two sleepy but eager voices cried out...

"Tell about the party! Tell about the party!"

With what Meg called 'a great want of manners' Jo had saved some bonbons for the little girls, and they soon subsided, after hearing the most thrilling events of the evening.

"I declare, it really seems like being a fine young lady, to come home from the party in a carriage and sit in my dressing gown with a maid to wait on me," said Meg, as Jo bound up her foot with arnica and brushed her hair.

“I don’t believe fine young ladies enjoy themselves a bit more than we do, in spite of our burned hair, old gowns, one glove apiece and tight slippers that sprain our ankles when we are silly enough to wear them.” And I think Jo was quite right.



CHAPTER FOUR

BURDENS

“Oh, dear, how hard it does seem to take up our packs and go on,” sighed Meg the morning after the party, for now the holidays were over, the week of merrymaking did not fit her for going on easily with the task she never liked.

“I wish it was Christmas or New Year’s all the time. Wouldn’t it be fun?” answered Jo, yawning dismally.

“We shouldn’t enjoy ourselves half so much as we do now. But it does seem so nice to have little suppers and bouquets, and go to parties, and drive home, and read and rest, and not work. It’s like other people, you know, and I always envy girls who do such things, I’m so fond of luxury,” said Meg, trying to decide which of two shabby gowns was the least shabby.

“Well, we can’t have it, so don’t let us grumble but shoulder our bundles and trudge along as cheerfully as Marmee does. I’m sure Aunt March is a regular Old Man of the Sea to me, but I suppose when I’ve learned to carry her without complaining, she will tumble off, or get so light that I shan’t mind her.”

This idea tickled Jo’s fancy and put her in good spirits, but Meg didn’t brighten, for her burden, consisting of four spoiled children, seemed heavier than ever. She had not heart enough even to make herself pretty as usual by putting on a blue neck ribbon and dressing her hair in the most becoming way.

“Where’s the use of looking nice, when no one sees me but those cross midgets, and no one cares whether I’m pretty or not?” she muttered, shutting her drawer with a jerk. “I shall have to toil and moil all my days, with only little bits of fun now and then, and get old and ugly and sour, because I’m poor and can’t enjoy my life as other girls do. It’s a shame!”

So Meg went down, wearing an injured look, and wasn’t at all agreeable at breakfast time. Everyone seemed rather out of sorts and inclined to croak.

Beth had a headache and lay on the sofa, trying to comfort herself with the cat and three kittens. Amy was fretting because her lessons were not learned, and she couldn’t find her rubbers. Jo would whistle and make a great racket getting ready.

Mrs. March was very busy trying to finish a letter, which must go at once, and Hannah had the grumps, for being up late didn’t suit her.

“There never was such a cross family!” cried Jo, losing her temper when she had upset an inkstand, broken both boot lacings, and sat down upon her hat.

“You’re the crossest person in it!” returned Amy, washing out the sum that was all wrong with the tears that had fallen on her slate.

“Beth, if you don’t keep these horrid cats down cellar I’ll have them drowned,” exclaimed Meg angrily as she tried to get rid of the kitten which had scrambled up her back and stuck like a burr just out of reach.

Jo laughed, Meg scolded, Beth implored, and Amy wailed because she couldn’t remember how much nine times twelve was.

“Girls, girls, do be quiet one minute! I must get this off by the early mail, and you drive me distracted with your worry,” cried Mrs. March, crossing out the third spoiled sentence in her letter.

There was a momentary lull, broken by Hannah, who stalked in, laid two hot turnovers on the table, and stalked out again. These turnovers were an institution, and the girls called them ‘muffs’, for they had no others and found the hot pies very comforting to their hands on cold mornings.

Hannah never forgot to make them, no matter how busy or grumpy she might be, for the walk was long and bleak. The poor things got no other lunch and were seldom home before two.

“Cuddle your cats and get over your headache, Bethy. Goodbye, Marmee. We are a set of rascals this morning, but we’ll come home regular angels. Now then, Meg!” And Jo tramped away, feeling that the pilgrims were not setting out as they ought to do.

They always looked back before turning the corner, for their mother was always at the window to nod and smile, and wave her hand to them. Somehow it seemed as if they couldn’t have got through the day without that, for whatever their mood might be, the last glimpse of that motherly face was sure to affect them like sunshine.

“If Marmee shook her fist instead of kissing her hand to us, it would serve us right, for more ungrateful wretches than we are were never seen,” cried Jo, taking a remorseful satisfaction in the snowy walk and bitter wind.

“Don’t use such dreadful expressions,” replied Meg from the depths of the veil in which she had shrouded herself like a nun sick of the world.

“I like good strong words that mean something,” replied Jo, catching her hat as it took a leap off her head preparatory to flying away altogether.

“Call yourself any names you like, but I am neither a rascal nor a wretch and I don’t choose to be called so.”

“You’re a blighted being, and decidedly cross today because you can’t sit in the lap of luxury all the time. Poor dear, just wait till I make my fortune, and you shall revel in carriages and ice cream and high-heeled slippers, and posies, and red-headed boys to dance with.”

“How ridiculous you are, Jo!” But Meg laughed at the nonsense and felt better in spite of herself.

“Lucky for you I am, for if I put on crushed airs and tried to be dismal, as you do, we should be in a nice state. Thank goodness, I can always find something funny to keep me up. Don’t croak any more, but come home jolly, there’s a dear.”

Jo gave her sister an encouraging pat on the shoulder as they parted for the day, each going a different way, each hugging her little warm turnover, and each trying to be cheerful in spite of wintry weather, hard work, and the unsatisfied desires of pleasure-loving youth.

When Mr. March lost his property in trying to help an unfortunate friend, the two oldest girls begged to be allowed to do something toward their own support, at least. Believing that they could not begin too early to cultivate energy, industry, and independence, their parents consented, and both fell to work with the hearty good will which in spite of all obstacles is sure to succeed at last.

Margaret found a place as nursery governess and felt rich with her small salary. As she said, she was ‘fond of luxury’, and her chief trouble was poverty. She found it harder to bear than the others because she could remember a time when home was beautiful, life full of ease and pleasure, and want of any kind unknown. She tried not to be envious or discontented, but it was very natural that the young girl should long for pretty things, gay friends, accomplishments, and a happy life. At the Kings' she daily saw all she wanted, for the children's older sisters were just out, and Meg caught frequent glimpses of dainty ball dresses and bouquets, heard lively gossip about theaters, concerts, sleighing parties, and merrymakings of all kinds, and saw money lavished on trifles which would have been so precious to her. Poor Meg seldom complained, but a sense of injustice made her feel bitter toward everyone sometimes, for she had not yet learned to know how rich she was in the blessings which alone can make life happy.

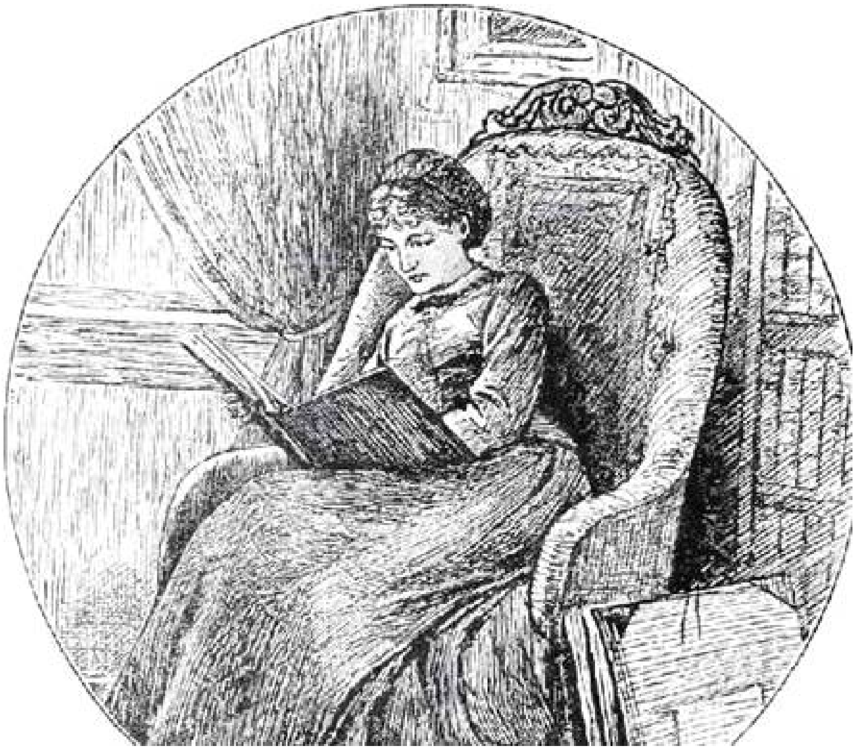
Jo happened to suit Aunt March, who was lame and needed an active person to wait upon her. The childless old lady had offered to adopt one of the girls when the troubles came, and was much offended because her offer was declined. Other friends told the Marches that they had lost all chance of being remembered in the rich old lady's will, but the unworldly Marches only said...

"We can't give up our girls for a dozen fortunes. Rich or poor, we will keep together and be happy in one another."

The old lady wouldn't speak to them for a time, but happening to meet Jo at a friend's, something in her comical face and blunt manners struck the old lady's fancy, and she proposed to take her for a companion. This did not suit Jo at all, but she accepted the place since nothing better appeared and, to every one's surprise, got on remarkably well with her irascible relative. There was an occasional tempest, and once Jo marched home, declaring she couldn't bear it longer, but Aunt March always cleared up quickly, and sent for her to come back again with such urgency that she could not refuse, for in her heart she rather liked the peppery old lady.

I suspect that the real attraction was a large library of fine books, which was left to dust and spiders since Uncle March died. Jo remembered the kind old gentleman, who used to let her build railroads and bridges with his big dictionaries, tell her stories about queer pictures in his Latin books, and buy her cards of gingerbread whenever he met her in the street. The dim, dusty room, with the busts staring down from the tall bookcases, the cozy chairs, the globes, and best of all, the wilderness of books in which she could wander where she liked, made the library a region of bliss to her.

The moment Aunt March took her nap, or was busy with company, Jo hurried to this quiet place, and curling herself up in the easy chair, devoured poetry, romance, history, travels, and pictures like a regular bookworm. But, like all happiness, it did not last long, for as sure as she had just reached the heart of the story, the sweetest verse of a song, or the most perilous adventure of her traveler, a shrill voice called, "Josy-phine! Josy-phine!" and she had to leave her paradise to wind yarn, wash the poodle, or read Belsham's Essays by the hour together.



Jo’s ambition was to do something very splendid. What it was, she had no idea as yet, but left it for time to tell her, and meanwhile, found her greatest affliction in the fact that she couldn’t read, run, and ride as much as she liked. A quick temper, sharp tongue, and restless spirit were always getting her into scrapes, and her life was a series of ups and downs, which were both comic and pathetic. But the training she received at Aunt March’s was just what she needed, and the thought that she was doing something to support herself made her happy in spite of the perpetual “Josy-phine!”

Beth was too bashful to go to school. It had been tried, but she suffered so much that it was given up, and she did her lessons at home with her father. Even when he went away, and her mother was called to devote her skill and energy to Soldiers’ Aid Societies, Beth went faithfully on by herself and did the best she could. She was a housewifely little creature, and helped Hannah keep home neat and comfortable for the workers, never thinking of any reward but to be loved. Long, quiet days she spent, not lonely nor idle, for her little world was peopled with imaginary friends, and she was by nature a busy bee. There were six dolls to be taken up and dressed every morning, for Beth was a child still and loved her pets as well as ever. Not one whole or handsome one among them, all were outcasts till Beth took them in, for when her sisters outgrew these idols, they passed to her because Amy would have nothing old or ugly. Beth cherished them all the more tenderly for that very reason, and set up a hospital for infirm dolls. No pins were ever stuck into their cotton vitals, no harsh words or blows were ever given them, no neglect ever saddened the heart of the most repulsive, but all were fed and clothed, nursed and caressed with an affection which never failed. One forlorn fragment of dollanity had belonged to Jo and, having led a tempestuous life, was left a wreck in the rag bag, from which dreary poorhouse it was rescued by Beth and taken to her refuge. Having no top to its head, she tied on a neat little cap, and as both arms and legs were gone, she hid these deficiencies by folding it in a blanket and devoting her best bed to this chronic invalid. If anyone had known the care lavished on that dolly, I think it would have touched their hearts, even while they laughed. She brought it bits of bouquets, she read to it, took it out to breathe fresh air, hidden under her coat, she sang it lullabies and never went to bed without kissing its dirty face and whispering tenderly, “I hope you’ll have a good night, my poor dear.”

Beth had her troubles as well as the others, and not being an angel but a very human little girl, she often ‘wept a little weep’ as Jo said, because she couldn’t take music lessons and have a fine piano. She loved music so dearly, tried so hard to learn, and practiced away so patiently at the jingling old instrument, that it did seem as if someone (not to hint Aunt March) ought to help her. Nobody did, however, and nobody saw Beth wipe the tears off the yellow keys, that wouldn’t keep in tune, when she was all alone. She sang like a little lark about her work, never was too tired for Marmee and the girls, and day after day said hopefully to herself, “I know I’ll get my music some time, if I’m good.”

There are many Beths in the world, shy and quiet, sitting in corners till needed, and living for others so cheerfully that no one sees the sacrifices till the little cricket on the hearth stops chirping, and the sweet, sunshiny presence vanishes, leaving silence and shadow behind.

If anybody had asked Amy what the greatest trial of her life was, she would have answered at once, “My nose.” When she was a baby, Jo had accidently dropped her into the coal hod, and Amy insisted that the fall had ruined her nose forever. It was not big nor red, like poor ‘Petrea’s’, it was only rather flat, and all the pinching in the world could not give it an aristocratic point. No one minded it but herself, and it was doing its best to grow, but Amy felt deeply the want of a Grecian nose, and drew whole sheets of handsome ones to console herself.

“Little Raphael,” as her sisters called her, had a decided talent for drawing, and was never so happy as when copying flowers, designing fairies, or illustrating stories with queer specimens of art. Her teachers complained that instead of doing her sums she covered her slate with animals, the blank pages of her atlas were used to copy maps on, and caricatures of the most ludicrous description came fluttering out of all her books at unlucky moments. She got through her lessons as well as she could, and managed to escape reprimands by being a model of deportment. She was a great favorite with her mates, being good-tempered and possessing the happy art of pleasing without effort. Her little airs and graces were much admired, so were her accomplishments, for besides her drawing, she could play twelve tunes, crochet, and read French without mispronouncing more than two-thirds of the words. She had a plaintive way of saying, “When Papa was rich we did so-and-so,” which was very touching, and her long words were considered ‘perfectly elegant’ by the girls.

Amy was in a fair way to be spoiled, for everyone petted her, and her small vanities and selfishnesses were growing nicely. One thing, however, rather quenched the vanities. She had to wear her cousin’s clothes. Now Florence’s mama hadn’t a particle of taste, and Amy suffered deeply at having to wear a red instead of a blue bonnet, unbecoming gowns, and fussy aprons that did not fit. Everything was good, well made, and little worn, but Amy’s artistic eyes were much afflicted, especially this winter, when her school dress was a dull purple with yellow dots and no trimming.

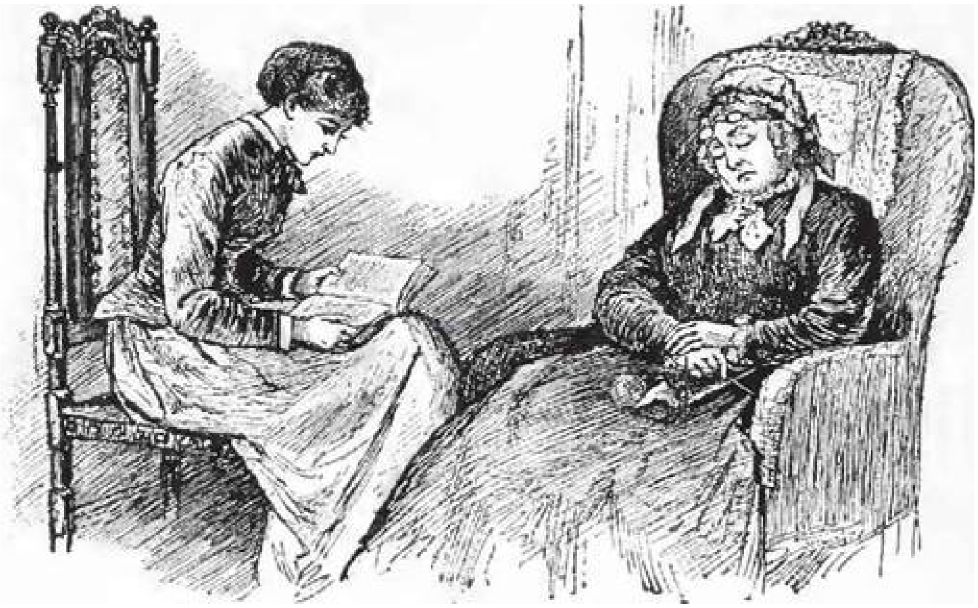
“My only comfort,” she said to Meg, with tears in her eyes, “is that Mother doesn’t take tucks in my dresses whenever I’m naughty, as Maria Parks’s mother does. My dear, it’s really dreadful, for sometimes she is so bad her frock is up to her knees, and she can’t come to school. When I think of this *deggerredation*, I feel that I can bear even my flat nose and purple gown with yellow sky-rockets on it.”

Meg was Amy’s confidant and monitor, and by some strange attraction of opposites Jo was gentle Beth’s. To Jo alone did the shy child tell her thoughts, and over her big harum-scarum sister Beth unconsciously exercised more influence than anyone in the family. The two older girls were a great deal to one another, but each took one of the younger sisters into her keeping and watched over her in her own way, ‘playing mother’ they called it, and put their sisters in the places of discarded dolls with the maternal instinct of little women.

“Has anybody got anything to tell? It’s been such a dismal day I’m really dying for some amusement,” said Meg, as they sat sewing together that evening.

“I had a queer time with Aunt today, and, as I got the best of it, I’ll tell you about it,” began Jo, who dearly loved to tell stories. “I was reading that everlasting Belsham, and droning away as I always do, for Aunt soon drops off, and then I take out some nice book, and read like fury till she wakes up. I actually made myself sleepy, and before she began to nod, I gave such a gape that she asked me what I meant by opening my mouth wide enough to take the whole book in at once.”

“I wish I could, and be done with it,” said I, trying not to be saucy.



"Then she gave me a long lecture on my sins, and told me to sit and think them over while she just 'lost' herself for a moment. She never finds herself very soon, so the minute her cap began to bob like a top-heavy dahlia, I whipped the *Vicar of Wakefield* out of my pocket, and read away, with one eye on him and one on Aunt. I'd just got to where they all tumbled into the water when I forgot and laughed out loud. Aunt woke up and, being more good-natured after her nap, told me to read a bit and show what frivolous work I preferred to the worthy and instructive Belsham. I did my very best, and she liked it, though she only said...

"'I don't understand what it's all about. Go back and begin it, child.'"

"Back I went, and made the Primroses as interesting as ever I could. Once I was wicked enough to stop in a thrilling place, and say meekly, 'I'm afraid it tires you, ma'am. Shan't I stop now?'"

"She caught up her knitting, which had dropped out of her hands, gave me a sharp look through her specs, and said, in her short way, 'Finish the chapter, and don't be impertinent, miss'."

"Did she own she liked it?" asked Meg.

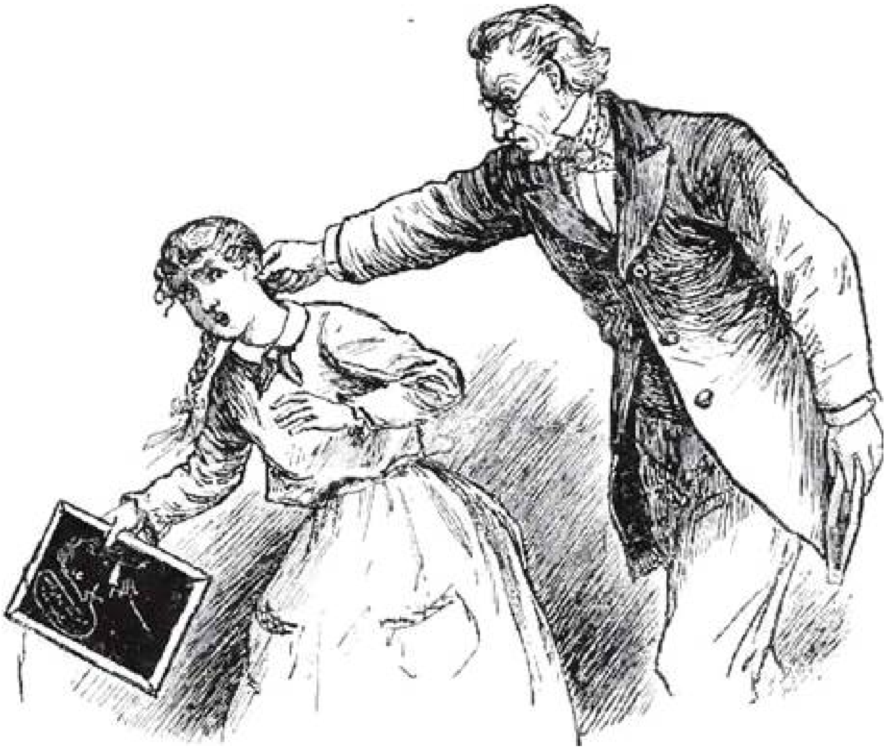
"Oh, bless you, no! But she let old Belsham rest, and when I ran back after my gloves this afternoon, there she was, so hard at the Vicar that she didn't hear me laugh as I danced a jig in the hall because of the good time coming. What a pleasant life she might have if only she chose! I don't envy her much, in spite of her money, for after all rich people have about as many worries as poor ones, I think," added Jo.

"That reminds me," said Meg, "that I've got something to tell. It isn't funny, like Jo's story, but I thought about it a good deal as I came home. At the Kings' today I found everybody in a flurry, and one of the children said that her oldest brother had done something dreadful, and Papa had sent him away. I heard Mrs. King crying and Mr. King talking very loud, and Grace and Ellen turned away their faces when they passed me, so I shouldn't see how red and swollen their eyes were. I didn't ask any questions, of course, but I felt so sorry for them and was rather glad I hadn't any wild brothers to do wicked things and disgrace the family."

"I think being disgraced in school is a great deal try*inger* than anything bad boys can do," said Amy, shaking her head, as if her experience of life had been a deep one. "Susie Perkins came to school today with a lovely red carnelian ring. I wanted it dreadfully, and wished I was her with all my might. Well, she drew a picture of Mr. Davis, with a monstrous nose and a hump, and the words, 'Young ladies, my eye is upon you!' coming out of his mouth in a balloon thing. We were laughing over it when all of a sudden his eye *was* on us, and he ordered Susie to bring up her slate. She was *parry*lized with fright, but she went, and oh, what *do* you think he did? He took her by the ear — the ear! Just fancy how horrid! — and led her to the recitation platform, and made her stand there half an hour, holding the slate so everyone could see."

"Didn't the girls laugh at the picture?" asked Jo, who relished the scrape.

"Laugh? Not one! They sat still as mice, and Susie cried quarts, I know she did. I didn't envy her then, for I felt that millions of carnelian rings wouldn't have made me happy after that. I never, never should have got over such a agonizing mortification." And Amy went on with her work, in the proud consciousness of virtue and the successful utterance of two long words in a breath.



"I saw something I liked this morning, and I meant to tell it at dinner, but I forgot," said Beth, putting Jo's topsy-turvy basket in order as she talked. "When I went to get some oysters for Hannah, Mr. Laurence was in the fish shop, but he didn't see me, for I kept behind the fish barrel, and he was busy with Mr. Cutter the fish-man. A poor woman came in with a pail and a mop, and asked Mr. Cutter if he would let her do some scrubbing for a bit of fish, because she hadn't any dinner for her children, and had been disappointed of a day's work. Mr. Cutter was in a hurry and said 'No', rather crossly, so she was going away, looking hungry and sorry, when Mr. Laurence hooked up a big fish with the crooked end of his cane and held it out to her. She was so glad and surprised she took it right into her arms, and thanked him over and over. He told her to 'go along and cook it', and she hurried off, so happy! Wasn't it good of him? Oh, she did look so funny, hugging the big, slippery fish, and hoping Mr. Laurence's bed in heaven would be 'aisy'."

When they had laughed at Beth's story, they asked their mother for one, and after a moments thought, she said soberly, "As I sat cutting out blue flannel jackets today at the rooms, I felt very anxious about Father, and thought how lonely and helpless we should be, if anything happened to him. It was not a wise thing to do, but I kept on worrying till an old man came in with an order for some clothes. He sat down near me, and I began to talk to him, for he looked poor and tired and anxious.

"'Have you sons in the army?' I asked, for the note he brought was not to me."

"Yes, ma'am. I had four, but two were killed, one is a prisoner, and I'm going to the other, who is very sick in a Washington hospital.' he answered quietly."

"'You have done a great deal for your country, sir,' I said, feeling respect now, instead of pity."

"'Not a mite more than I ought, ma'am. I'd go myself, if I was any use. As I ain't, I give my boys, and give 'em free.'"

"He spoke so cheerfully, looked so sincere, and seemed so glad to give his all, that I was ashamed of myself. I'd given one man and thought it too much, while he gave four without grudging them. I had all my girls to comfort me at home, and his last son was waiting, miles away, to say good-by to him, perhaps! I felt so rich, so happy thinking of my blessings, that I made him a nice bundle, gave him some money, and thanked him heartily for the lesson he had taught me."

"Tell another story, Mother, one with a moral to it, like this. I like to think about them afterward, if they are real and not too preachy," said Jo, after a minute’s silence.

Mrs. March smiled and began at once, for she had told stories to this little audience for many years, and knew how to please them.

“Once upon a time, there were four girls, who had enough to eat and drink and wear, a good many comforts and pleasures, kind friends and parents who loved them dearly, and yet they were not contented.” (Here the listeners stole sly looks at one another, and began to sew diligently.) “These girls were anxious to be good and made many excellent resolutions, but they did not keep them very well, and were constantly saying, ‘If only we had this,’ or ‘If we could only do that,’ quite forgetting how much they already had, and how many things they actually could do. So they asked an old woman what spell they could use to make them happy, and she said, ‘When you feel discontented, think over your blessings, and be grateful.’“ (Here Jo looked up quickly, as if about to speak, but changed her mind, seeing that the story was not done yet.)

“Being sensible girls, they decided to try her advice, and soon were surprised to see how well off they were. One discovered that money couldn’t keep shame and sorrow out of rich people’s houses, another that, though she was poor, she was a great deal happier, with her youth, health, and good spirits, than a certain fretful, feeble old lady who couldn’t enjoy her comforts, a third that, disagreeable as it was to help get dinner, it was harder still to go begging for it and the fourth, that even carnelian rings were not so valuable as good behavior. So they agreed to stop complaining, to enjoy the blessings already possessed, and try to deserve them, lest they should be taken away entirely, instead of increased, and I believe they were never disappointed or sorry that they took the old woman’s advice.”

“Now, Marmee, that is very cunning of you to turn our own stories against us, and give us a sermon instead of a romance!” cried Meg.

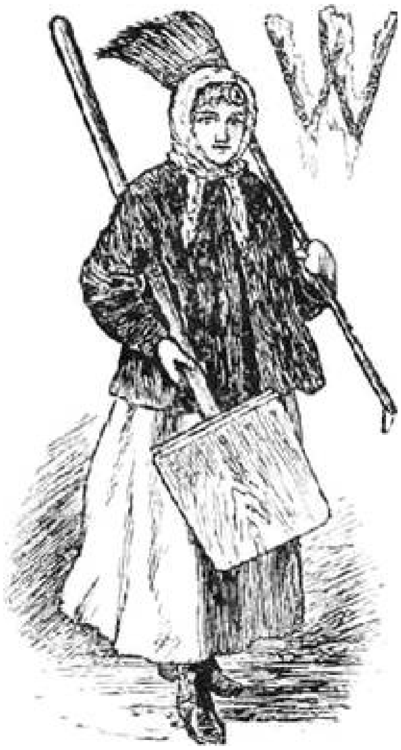
“I like that kind of sermon. It’s the sort Father used to tell us,” said Beth thoughtfully, putting the needles straight on Jo’s cushion.

“I don’t complain near as much as the others do, and I shall be more careful than ever now, for I’ve had warning from Susie’s downfall,” said Amy morally.

“We needed that lesson, and we won’t forget it. If we do so, you just say to us, as old Chloe did in *Uncle Tom*, ‘Tink ob yer marcies, chillen!’ ‘Tink ob yer marcies!’“ added Jo, who could not, for the life of her, help getting a morsel of fun out of the little sermon, though she took it to heart as much as any of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEING NEIGHBORLY



“What in the world are you going to do now, Jo?” asked Meg one snowy afternoon, as her sister came tramping through the hall, in rubber boots, old sack, and hood, with a broom in one hand and a shovel in the other.

“Going out for exercise,” answered Jo with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes.

“I should think two long walks this morning would have been enough! It’s cold and dull out, and I advise you to stay warm and dry by the fire, as I do,” said Meg with a shiver.

“Never take advice! Can’t keep still all day, and not being a pussycat, I don’t like to doze by the fire. I like adventures, and I’m going to find some.”

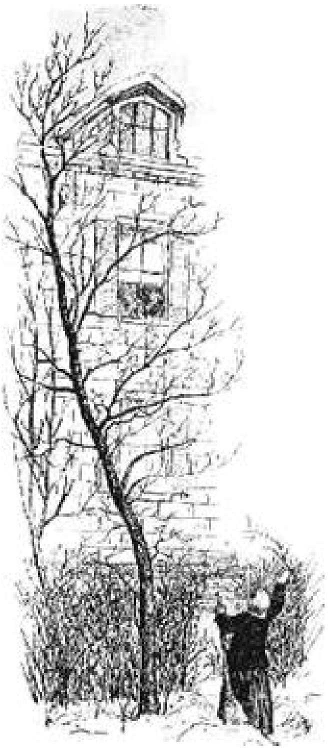
Meg went back to toast her feet and read *Ivanhoe*, and Jo began to dig paths with great energy. The snow was light, and with her broom she soon swept a path all round the garden, for Beth to walk in when the sun came out and the invalid dolls needed air. Now, the garden separated the Marches’ house from that of Mr. Laurence. Both stood in a suburb of the city, which was still country-like, with groves and lawns, large gardens, and quiet streets. A low hedge parted the two estates. On one side was an old, brown house, looking rather bare and shabby, robbed of the vines that in summer covered its walls and the flowers, which then surrounded it. On the other side was a stately stone mansion, plainly betokening every sort of comfort and luxury, from the big coach house and well-kept grounds to the conservatory and the glimpses of lovely things one caught between the rich curtains.

Yet it seemed a lonely, lifeless sort of house, for no children frolicked on the lawn, no motherly face ever smiled at the windows, and few people went in and out, except the old gentleman and his grandson.

To Jo’s lively fancy, this fine house seemed a kind of enchanted palace, full of splendors and delights which no one enjoyed. She had long wanted to behold these hidden glories, and to know the Laurence boy, who looked as if he would like to be known, if he only knew how to begin. Since the party, she had been more eager than ever, and had planned many ways of making friends with him, but he had not been seen lately, and Jo began to think he had gone away, when she one day spied a brown face at an upper window, looking wistfully down into their garden, where Beth and Amy were snow-balling one another.

“That boy is suffering for society and fun,” she said to herself. “His grandpa does not know what’s good for him, and keeps him shut up all alone. He needs a party of jolly boys to play with, or somebody young and lively. I’ve a great mind to go over and tell the old gentleman so!”

The idea amused Jo, who liked to do daring things and was always scandalizing Meg by her queer performances. The plan of ‘going over’ was not forgotten. And when the snowy afternoon came, Jo resolved to try what could be done. She saw Mr. Lawrence drive off, and then sallied out to dig her way down to the hedge, where she paused and took a survey. All quiet, curtains down at the lower windows, servants out of sight, and nothing human visible but a curly black head leaning on a thin hand at the upper window.



"There he is," thought Jo, "Poor boy! All alone and sick this dismal day. It's a shame! I'll toss up a snowball and make him look out, and then say a kind word to him."

Up went a handful of soft snow, and the head turned at once, showing a face which lost its listless look in a minute, as the big eyes brightened and the mouth began to smile. Jo nodded and laughed, and flourished her broom as she called out...

"How do you do? Are you sick?"

Laurie opened the window, and croaked out as hoarsely as a raven...

"Better, thank you. I've had a bad cold, and been shut up a week."

"I'm sorry. What do you amuse yourself with?"

"Nothing. It's dull as tombs up here."

"Don't you read?"

"Not much. They won't let me."

"Can't somebody read to you?"

"Grandpa does sometimes, but my books don't interest him, and I hate to ask Brooke all the time."

"Have someone come and see you then."

"There isn't anyone I'd like to see. Boys make such a row, and my head is weak."

"Isn't there some nice girl who'd read and amuse you? Girls are quiet and like to play nurse."

“Don’t know any.”

“You know us,” began Jo, then laughed and stopped.

“So I do! Will you come, please?” cried Laurie.

“I’m not quiet and nice, but I’ll come, if Mother will let me. I’ll go ask her. Shut the window, like a good boy, and wait till I come.”

With that, Jo shouldered her broom and marched into the house, wondering what they would all say to her. Laurie was in a flutter of excitement at the idea of having company, and flew about to get ready, for as Mrs. March said, he was ‘a little gentleman’, and did honor to the coming guest by brushing his curly pate, putting on a fresh color, and trying to tidy up the room, which in spite of half a dozen servants, was anything but neat. Presently there came a loud ring, than a decided voice, asking for ‘Mr. Laurie’, and a surprised-looking servant came running up to announce a young lady.

“All right, show her up, it’s Miss Jo,” said Laurie, going to the door of his little parlor to meet Jo, who appeared, looking rosy and quite at her ease, with a covered dish in one hand and Beth’s three kittens in the other.

“Here I am, bag and baggage,” she said briskly. “Mother sent her love, and was glad if I could do anything for you. Meg wanted me to bring some of her blanc mange, she makes it very nicely, and Beth thought her cats would be comforting. I knew you’d laugh at them, but I couldn’t refuse, she was so anxious to do something.”

It so happened that Beth’s funny loan was just the thing, for in laughing over the kits, Laurie forgot his bashfulness, and grew sociable at once.

“That looks too pretty to eat,” he said, smiling with pleasure, as Jo uncovered the dish, and showed the blanc mange, surrounded by a garland of green leaves, and the scarlet flowers of Amy’s pet geranium.

“It isn’t anything, only they all felt kindly and wanted to show it. Tell the girl to put it away for your tea. It’s so simple you can eat it, and being soft, it will slip down without hurting your sore throat. What a cozy room this is!”

“It might be if it was kept nice, but the maids are lazy, and I don’t know how to make them mind. It worries me though.”

“I’ll right it up in two minutes, for it only needs to have the hearth brushed, so — and the things made straight on the mantelpiece, so — and the books put here, and the bottles there, and your sofa turned from the light, and the pillows plumped up a bit. Now then, you’re fixed.”

And so he was, for, as she laughed and talked, Jo had whisked things into place and given quite a different air to the room. Laurie watched her in respectful silence, and when she beckoned him to his sofa, he sat down with a sigh of satisfaction, saying gratefully...

“How kind you are! Yes, that’s what it wanted. Now please take the big chair and let me do something to amuse my company.”

“No, I came to amuse you. Shall I read aloud?” and Jo looked affectionately toward some inviting books near by.

“Thank you! I’ve read all those, and if you don’t mind, I’d rather talk,” answered Laurie.

“Not a bit. I’ll talk all day if you’ll only set me going. Beth says I never know when to stop.”

“Is Beth the rosy one, who stays at home good deal and sometimes goes out with a little basket?” asked Laurie with interest.

“Yes, that’s Beth. She’s my girl, and a regular good one she is, too.”

“The pretty one is Meg, and the curly-haired one is Amy, I believe?”

“How did you find that out?”

Laurie colored up, but answered frankly, “Why, you see I often hear you calling to one another, and when I’m alone up here, I can’t help looking over at your house, you always seem to be having such good times. I beg your pardon for being so rude, but sometimes you forget to put down the curtain at the window where the flowers are. And when the lamps are lighted, it’s like looking at a picture to see the fire, and you all around the table with your mother. Her face is right opposite, and it looks so sweet behind the flowers, I can’t help watching it. I haven’t got any mother, you know.” And Laurie poked the fire to hide a little twitching of the lips that he could not control.

The solitary, hungry look in his eyes went straight to Jo’s warm heart. She had been so simply taught that there was no nonsense in her head, and at fifteen she was as innocent and frank as any child. Laurie was sick and lonely, and feeling how rich she was in home and happiness, she gladly tried to share it with him. Her face was very friendly and her sharp voice unusually gentle as she said...

“We’ll never draw that curtain any more, and I give you leave to look as much as you like. I just wish, though, instead of peeping, you’d come over and see us. Mother is so splendid, she’d do you heaps of good, and Beth would sing to you if I begged her to, and Amy would dance. Meg and I would make you laugh over our funny stage properties, and we’d have jolly times. Wouldn’t your grandpa let you?”

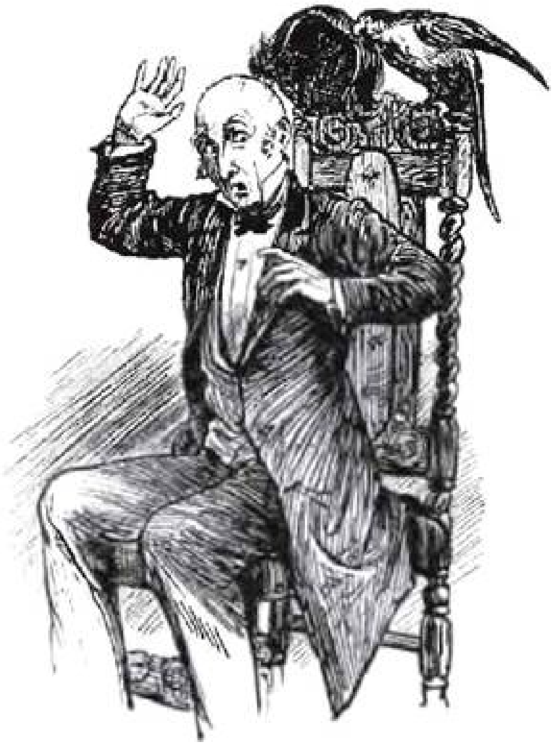
“I think he would, if your mother asked him. He’s very kind, though he does not look so, and he lets me do what I like, pretty much, only he’s afraid I might be a bother to strangers,” began Laurie, brightening more and more.

“We are not strangers, we are neighbors, and you needn’t think you’d be a bother. We want to know you, and I’ve been trying to do it this ever so long. We haven’t been here a great while, you know, but we have got acquainted with all our neighbors but you."

"You see, Grandpa lives among his books, and doesn't mind much what happens outside. Mr. Brooke, my tutor, doesn't stay here, you know, and I have no one to go about with me, so I just stop at home and get on as I can."

"That's bad. You ought to make an effort and go visiting everywhere you are asked, then you'll have plenty of friends, and pleasant places to go to. Never mind being bashful. It won't last long if you keep going."

Laurie turned red again, but wasn't offended at being accused of bashfulness, for there was so much good will in Jo it was impossible not to take her blunt speeches as kindly as they were meant.



"Do you like your school?" asked the boy, changing the subject, after a little pause, during which he stared at the fire and Jo looked about her, well pleased.

"Don't go to school, I'm a businessman — girl, I mean. I go to wait on my great-aunt, and a dear, cross old soul she is, too," answered Jo.

Laurie opened his mouth to ask another question, but remembering just in time that it wasn't manners to make too many inquiries into people's affairs, he shut it again, and looked uncomfortable.

Jo liked his good breeding, and didn't mind having a laugh at Aunt March, so she gave him a lively description of the fidgety old lady, her fat poodle, the parrot that talked Spanish, and the library where she reveled.

Laurie enjoyed that immensely, and when she told about the prim old gentleman who came once to woo Aunt March, and in the middle of a fine speech, how Poll had tweaked his wig off to his great dismay, the boy lay back and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and a maid popped her head in to see what was the matter.

"Oh! That does me no end of good. Tell on, please," he said, taking his face out of the sofa cushion, red and shining with merriment.

Much elated with her success, Jo did 'tell on', all about their plays and plans, their hopes and fears for Father, and the most interesting events of the little world in which the sisters lived. Then they got to talking about books, and to Jo's delight, she found that Laurie loved them as well as she did, and had read even more than herself.

"If you like them so much, come down and see ours. Grandfather is out, so you needn't be afraid," said Laurie, getting up.

"I'm not afraid of anything," returned Jo, with a toss of the head.

"I don't believe you are!" exclaimed the boy, looking at her with much admiration, though he privately thought she would have good reason to be a trifle afraid of the old gentleman, if she met him in some of his moods.

The atmosphere of the whole house being summerlike, Laurie led the way from room to room, letting Jo stop to examine whatever struck her fancy. And so, at last they came to the library, where she clapped her hands and pranced, as she always did when especially delighted. It was lined with books, and there were pictures and statues, and distracting little cabinets full of coins and curiosities, and Sleepy Hollow chairs, and queer tables, and bronzes, and best of all, a great open fireplace with quaint tiles all round it.

"What richness!" sighed Jo, sinking into the depth of a velour chair and gazing about her with an air of intense satisfaction. "Theodore Laurence, you ought to be the happiest boy in the world," she added impressively.

"A fellow can't live on books," said Laurie, shaking his head as he perched on a table opposite.

Before he could more, a bell rang, and Jo flew up, exclaiming with alarm, "Mercy me! It's your grandpa!"

"Well, what if it is? You are not afraid of anything, you know," returned the boy, looking wicked.

"I think I am a little bit afraid of him, but I don't know why I should be. Marmee said I might come, and I don't think you're any the worse for it," said Jo, composing herself, though she kept her eyes on the door.

"I'm a great deal better for it, and ever so much obliged. I'm only afraid you are very tired of talking to me. It was so pleasant, I couldn't bear to stop," said

Laurie gratefully.

“The doctor to see you, sir,” and the maid beckoned as she spoke.

“Would you mind if I left you for a minute? I suppose I must see him,” said Laurie.

“Don’t mind me. I’m happy as a cricket here,” answered Jo.

Laurie went away, and his guest amused herself in her own way. She was standing before a fine portrait of the old gentleman when the door opened again, and without turning, she said decidedly, “I’m sure now that I shouldn’t be afraid of him, for he’s got kind eyes, though his mouth is grim, and he looks as if he had a tremendous will of his own. He isn’t as handsome as my grandfather, but I like him.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” said a gruff voice behind her, and there, to her great dismay, stood old Mr. Laurence.

Poor Jo blushed till she couldn’t blush any redder, and her heart began to beat uncomfortably fast as she thought what she had said. For a minute a wild desire to run away possessed her, but that was cowardly, and the girls would laugh at her, so she resolved to stay and get out of the scrape as she could. A second look showed her that the living eyes, under the bushy eyebrows, were kinder even than the painted ones, and there was a sly twinkle in them, which lessened her fear a good deal. The gruff voice was gruffer than ever, as the old gentleman said abruptly, after the dreadful pause, “So you’re not afraid of me, hey?”

“Not much, sir.”

“And you don’t think me as handsome as your grandfather?”

“Not quite, sir.”

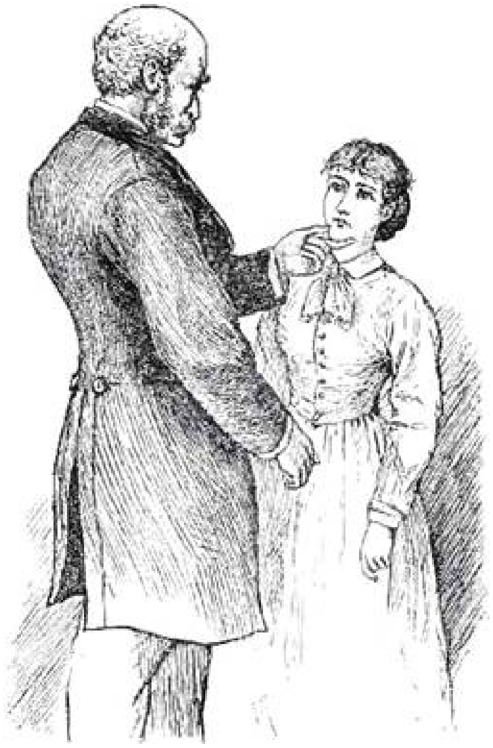
“And I’ve got a tremendous will, have I?”

“I only said I thought so.”

“But you like me in spite of it?”

“Yes, I do, sir.”

That answer pleased the old gentleman. He gave a short laugh, shook hands with her, and, putting his finger under her chin, turned up her face, examined it gravely, and let it go, saying with a nod, “You’ve got your grandfather’s spirit, if you haven’t his face. He was a fine man, my dear, but what is better, he was a brave and an honest one, and I was proud to be his friend.”



“Thank you, sir,” And Jo was quite comfortable after that, for it suited her exactly.

“What have you been doing to this boy of mine, hey?” was the next question, sharply put.

“Only trying to be neighborly, sir.” And Jo told how her visit came about.

“You think he needs cheering up a bit, do you?”

“Yes, sir, he seems a little lonely, and young folks would do him good perhaps. We are only girls, but we should be glad to help if we could, for we don’t forget the splendid Christmas present you sent us,” said Jo eagerly.

“Tut, tut, tut! That was the boy’s affair. How is the poor woman?”

“Doing nicely, sir.” And off went Jo, talking very fast, as she told all about the Hummels, in whom her mother had interested richer friends than they were.

“Just her father’s way of doing good. I shall come and see your mother some fine day. Tell her so. There’s the tea bell, we have it early on the boy’s account. Come down and go on being neighborly.”

“If you’d like to have me, sir.”

“Shouldn’t ask you, if I didn’t.” And Mr. Laurence offered her his arm with old-fashioned courtesy.

“What would Meg say to this?” thought Jo, as she was marched away, while her eyes danced with fun as she imagined herself telling the story at home.

“Hey! Why, what the dickens has come to the fellow?” said the old gentleman, as Laurie came running downstairs and brought up with a start of surprise at the astounding sight of Jo arm in arm with his redoubtable grandfather.

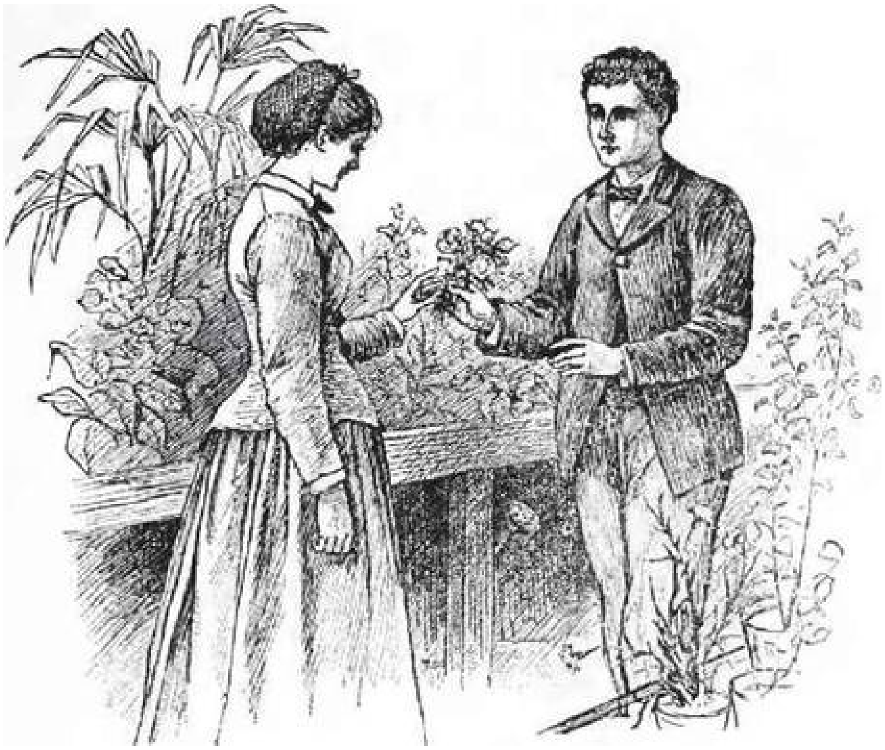
"I didn't know you'd come, sir," he began, as Jo gave him a triumphant little glance.

"That's evident, by the way you racket downstairs. Come to your tea, sir, and behave like a gentleman." And having pulled the boy's hair by way of a caress, Mr. Laurence walked on, while Laurie went through a series of comic evolutions behind their backs, which nearly produced an explosion of laughter from Jo.

The old gentleman did not say much as he drank his four cups of tea, but he watched the young people, who soon chatted away like old friends, and the change in his grandson did not escape him. There was color, light, and life in the boy's face now, vivacity in his manner, and genuine merriment in his laugh.

"She's right, the lad is lonely. I'll see what these little girls can do for him," thought Mr. Laurence, as he looked and listened. He liked Jo, for her odd, blunt ways suited him, and she seemed to understand the boy almost as well as if she had been one herself.

If the Laurences had been what Jo called 'prim and poky', she would not have got on at all, for such people always made her shy and awkward. But finding them free and easy, she was so herself, and made a good impression. When they rose she proposed to go, but Laurie said he had something more to show her, and took her away to the conservatory, which had been lighted for her benefit. It seemed quite fairylike to Jo, as she went up and down the walks, enjoying the blooming walls on either side, the soft light, the damp sweet air, and the wonderful vines and trees that hung about her, while her new friend cut the finest flowers till his hands were full. Then he tied them up, saying, with the happy look Jo liked to see, "Please give these to your mother, and tell her I like the medicine she sent me very much."



They found Mr. Laurence standing before the fire in the great drawing room, but Jo's attention was entirely absorbed by a grand piano, which stood open.

"Do you play?" she asked, turning to Laurie with a respectful expression.

"Sometimes," he answered modestly.

"Please do now. I want to hear it, so I can tell Beth."

"Won't you first?"

"Don't know how. Too stupid to learn, but I love music dearly."

So Laurie played and Jo listened, with her nose luxuriously buried in heliotrope and tea roses. Her respect and regard for the 'Laurence' boy increased very much, for he played remarkably well and didn't put on any airs. She wished Beth could hear him, but she did not say so, only praised him till he was quite abashed, and his grandfather came to his rescue.

"That will do, that will do, young lady. Too many sugarplums are not good for him. His music isn't bad, but I hope he will do as well in more important things. Going? well, I'm much obliged to you, and I hope you'll come again. My respects to your mother. Good night, Doctor Jo."

He shook hands kindly, but looked as if something did not please him. When they got into the hall, Jo asked Laurie if she had said something amiss. He shook his head.

"No, it was me. He doesn't like to hear me play."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you some day. John is going home with you, as I can't."

"No need of that. I am not a young lady, and it's only a step. Take care of yourself, won't you?"

"Yes, but you will come again, I hope?"

"If you promise to come and see us after you are well."

"I will."

"Good night, Laurie!"

"Good night, Jo, good night!"

When all the afternoon's adventures had been told, the family felt inclined to go visiting in a body, for each found something very attractive in the big house on the other side of the hedge. Mrs. March wanted to talk of her father with the old man who had not forgotten him, Meg longed to walk in the conservatory, Beth sighed for the grand piano, and Amy was eager to see the fine pictures and statues.

"Mother, why didn't Mr. Laurence like to have Laurie play?" asked Jo, who was of an inquiring disposition.

"I am not sure, but I think it was because his son, Laurie's father, married an Italian lady, a musician, which displeased the old man, who is very proud. The lady was good and lovely and accomplished, but he did not like her, and never saw his son after he married. They both died when Laurie was a little child, and then his grandfather took him home. I fancy the boy, who was born in Italy, is not very strong, and the old man is afraid of losing him, which makes him so careful. Laurie comes naturally by his love of music, for he is like his mother, and I dare say his grandfather fears that he may want to be a musician. At any rate, his skill reminds him of the woman he did not like, and so he 'glowered' as Jo said."

"Dear me, how romantic!" exclaimed Meg.

"How silly!" said Jo. "Let him be a musician if he wants to, and not plague his life out sending him to college, when he hates to go."

"That's why he has such handsome black eyes and pretty manners, I suppose. Italians are always nice," said Meg, who was a little sentimental.

"What do you know about his eyes and his manners? You never spoke to him, hardly," cried Jo, who was not sentimental.

"I saw him at the party, and what you tell shows that he knows how to behave. That was a nice little speech about the medicine Mother sent him."

"He meant the blanc mange, I suppose."

"How stupid you are, child! He meant you, of course."

"Did he?" And Jo opened her eyes as if it had never occurred to her before.

"I never saw such a girl! You don't know a compliment when you get it," said Meg, with the air of a young lady who knew all about the matter.

“I think they are great nonsense, and I’ll thank you not to be silly and spoil my fun. Laurie’s a nice boy and I like him, and I won’t have any sentimental stuff about compliments and such rubbish. We’ll all be good to him because he hasn’t got any mother, and he may come over and see us, mayn’t he, Marmee?”

“Yes, Jo, your little friend is very welcome, and I hope Meg will remember that children should be children as long as they can.”

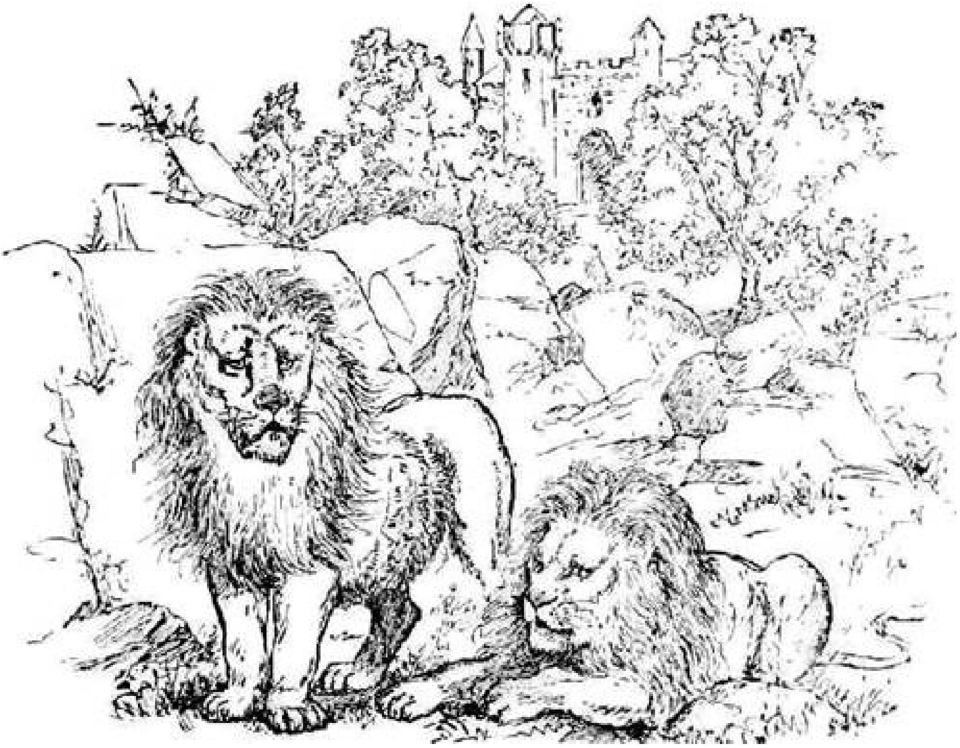
“I don’t call myself a child, and I’m not in my teens yet,” observed Amy. “What do you say, Beth?”

“I was thinking about our ‘*Pilgrim’s Progress*’,” answered Beth, who had not heard a word. “How we got out of the Slough and through the Wicket Gate by resolving to be good, and up the steep hill by trying, and that maybe the house over there, full of splendid things, is going to be our Palace Beautiful.”

“We have got to get by the lions first,” said Jo, as if she rather liked the prospect.

CHAPTER SIX

BETH FINDS THE PALACE BEAUTIFUL



The big house did prove a Palace Beautiful, though it took some time for all to get in, and Beth found it very hard to pass the lions. Old Mr. Laurence was the biggest one, but after he had called, said something funny or kind to each one of the girls, and talked over old times with their mother, nobody felt much afraid of him, except timid Beth. The other lion was the fact that they were poor and Laurie rich, for this made them shy of accepting favors which they could not return. But, after a while, they found that he considered them the benefactors, and could not do enough to show how grateful he was for Mrs. March's motherly welcome, their cheerful society, and the comfort he took in that humble home of theirs. So they soon forgot their pride and interchanged kindnesses without stopping to think which was the greater.

All sorts of pleasant things happened about that time, for the new friendship flourished like grass in spring. Every one liked Laurie, and he privately informed his tutor that "the Marches were regularly splendid girls." With the delightful enthusiasm of youth, they took the solitary boy into their midst and made much of him, and he found something very charming in the innocent companionship of these simple-hearted girls. Never having known mother or sisters, he was quick to feel the influences they brought about him, and their busy, lively ways made him ashamed of the indolent life he led. He was tired of books, and found people so interesting now that Mr. Brooke was obliged to make very unsatisfactory reports, for Laurie was always playing truant and running over to the Marches'.

"Never mind, let him take a holiday, and make it up afterward," said the old gentleman. "The good lady next door says he is studying too hard and needs young society, amusement, and exercise. I suspect she is right, and that I've been coddling the fellow as if I'd been his grandmother. Let him do what he likes, as long as he is happy. He can't get into mischief in that little nunnery over there, and Mrs. March is doing more for him than we can."

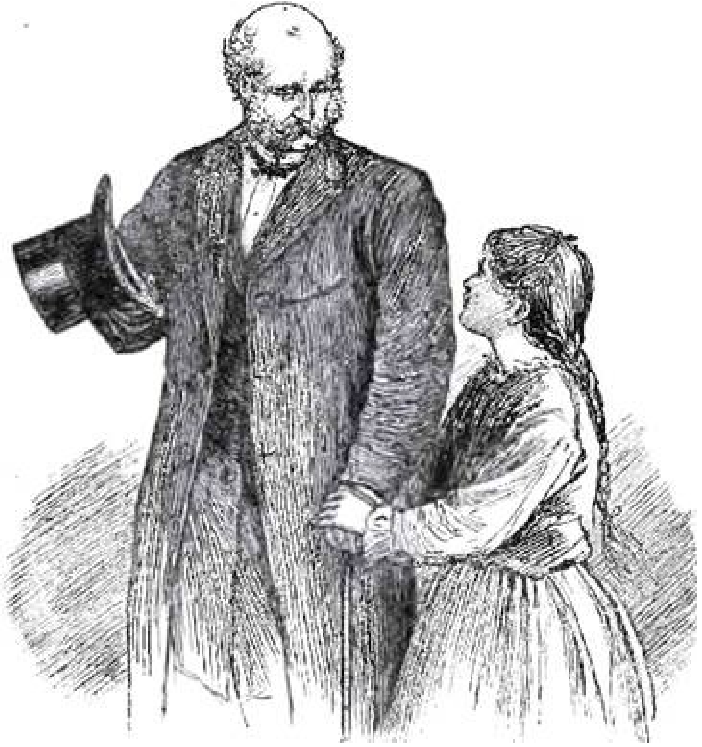
What good times they had, to be sure. Such plays and tableaux, such sleigh rides and skating frolics, such pleasant evenings in the old parlor, and now and then such gay little parties at the great house. Meg could walk in the conservatory whenever she liked and revel in bouquets, Jo browsed over the new library voraciously, and convulsed the old gentleman with her criticisms, Amy copied pictures and enjoyed beauty to her heart's content, and Laurie played 'lord of the manor' in the most delightful style.

But Beth, though yearning for the grand piano, could not pluck up courage to go to the 'Mansion of Bliss', as Meg called it. She went once with Jo, but the old gentleman, not being aware of her infirmity, stared at her so hard from under his heavy eyebrows, and said "Hey!" so loud, that he frightened her so much her 'feet chattered on the floor', she never told her mother, and she ran away, declaring she would never go there any more, not even for the dear piano. No persuasions or enticements could overcome her fear, till, the fact coming to Mr. Laurence's ear in some mysterious way, he set about mending matters. During one of the brief calls he made, he artfully led the conversation to music, and talked away about great singers whom he had seen, fine organs he had heard, and told such charming anecdotes that Beth found it impossible to stay in her distant corner, but crept nearer and nearer, as if fascinated. At the back of his chair she stopped and stood listening, with her great eyes wide open and her cheeks red with excitement of this unusual performance. Taking no more notice of her than if she had been a fly, Mr. Laurence talked on about Laurie's lessons and teachers. And presently, as if the idea had just occurred to him, he said to Mrs. March...

"The boy neglects his music now, and I'm glad of it, for he was getting too fond of it. But the piano suffers for want of use. Wouldn't some of your girls like to run over, and practice on it now and then, just to keep it in tune, you know, ma’am?”

Beth took a step forward, and pressed her hands tightly together to keep from clapping them, for this was an irresistible temptation, and the thought of practicing on that splendid instrument quite took her breath away. Before Mrs. March could reply, Mr. Laurence went on with an odd little nod and smile...

“They needn’t see or speak to anyone, but run in at any time. For I’m shut up in my study at the other end of the house, Laurie is out a great deal, and the servants are never near the drawing room after nine o’clock.”



Here he rose, as if going, and Beth made up her mind to speak, for that last arrangement left nothing to be desired. “Please, tell the young ladies what I say, and if they don’t care to come, why, never mind.” Here a little hand slipped into his, and Beth looked up at him with a face full of gratitude, as she said, in her earnest yet timid way...

“Oh sir, they do care, very very much!”

“Are you the musical girl?” he asked, without any startling “Hey!” as he looked down at her very kindly.

“I’m Beth. I love it dearly, and I’ll come, if you are quite sure nobody will hear me, and be disturbed,” she added, fearing to be rude, and trembling at her own boldness as she spoke.

“Not a soul, my dear. The house is empty half the day, so come and drum away as much as you like, and I shall be obliged to you.”

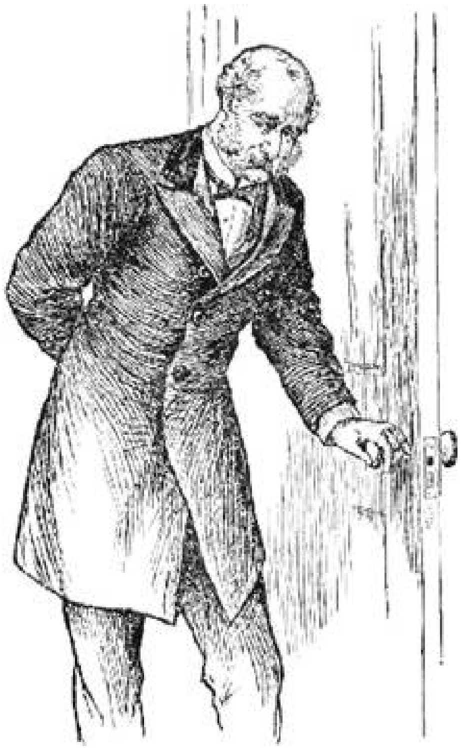
“How kind you are, sir!”

Beth blushed like a rose under the friendly look he wore, but she was not frightened now, and gave the hand a grateful squeeze because she had no words to thank him for the precious gift he had given her. The old gentleman softly stroked the hair off her forehead, and, stooping down, he kissed her, saying, in a tone few people ever heard...

"I had a little girl once, with eyes like these. God bless you, my dear! Good day, madam." And away he went, in a great hurry.

Beth had a rapture with her mother, and then rushed up to impart the glorious news to her family of invalids, as the girls were not home. How blithely she sang that evening, and how they all laughed at her because she woke Amy in the night by playing the piano on her face in her sleep. Next day, having seen both the old and young gentleman out of the house, Beth, after two or three retreats, fairly got in at the side door, and made her way as noiselessly as any mouse to the drawing room where her idol stood. Quite by accident, of course, some pretty, easy music lay on the piano, and with trembling fingers and frequent stops to listen and look about, Beth at last touched the great instrument, and straightway forgot her fear, herself, and everything else but the unspeakable delight which the music gave her, for it was like the voice of a beloved friend.

She stayed till Hannah came to take her home to dinner, but she had no appetite, and could only sit and smile upon everyone in a general state of beatitude.



After that, the little brown hood slipped through the hedge nearly every day, and the great drawing room was haunted by a tuneful spirit that came and went unseen. She never knew that Mr. Laurence opened his study door to hear the old-fashioned airs he liked. She never saw Laurie mount guard in the hall to warn the servants away. She never suspected that the exercise books and new songs which she found in the rack were put there for her especial benefit, and when he talked to her about music at home, she only thought how kind he was to tell things that helped her so much. So she enjoyed herself heartily, and found, what isn't always the case, that her granted wish was all she had hoped. Perhaps it was because she was so grateful for this blessing that a greater was given her. At any rate she deserved both.

"Mother, I'm going to work Mr. Laurence a pair of slippers. He is so kind to me, I must thank him, and I don't know any other way. Can I do it?" asked Beth, a few weeks after that eventful call of his.

"Yes, dear. It will please him very much, and be a nice way of thanking him. The girls will help you about them, and I will pay for the making up," replied Mrs. March, who took peculiar pleasure in granting Beth's requests because she so seldom asked anything for herself.

After many serious discussions with Meg and Jo, the pattern was chosen, the materials bought, and the slippers begun. A cluster of grave yet cheerful pansies on a deeper purple ground was pronounced very appropriate and pretty, and Beth worked away early and late, with occasional lifts over hard parts. She was a nimble little needlewoman, and they were finished before anyone got tired of them. Then she wrote a short, simple note, and with Laurie's help, got them smuggled onto the study table one morning before the old gentleman was up.

When this excitement was over, Beth waited to see what would happen. All day passed and a part of the next before any acknowledgement arrived, and she was beginning to fear she had offended her crochety friend. On the afternoon of the second day, she went out to do an errand, and give poor Joanna, the invalid doll, her daily exercise. As she came up the street, on her return, she saw three, yes, four heads popping in and out of the parlor windows, and the moment they saw her, several hands were waved, and several joyful voices screamed...

"Here's a letter from the old gentleman! Come quick, and read it!"

"Oh, Beth, he's sent you..." began Amy, gesticulating with unseemly energy, but she got no further, for Jo quenched her by slamming down the window.

Beth hurried on in a flutter of suspense. At the door her sisters seized and bore her to the parlor in a triumphal procession, all pointing and all saying at once, "Look there! Look there!" Beth did look, and turned pale with delight and surprise, for there stood a little cabinet piano, with a letter lying on the glossy lid, directed like a sign board to "Miss Elizabeth March."

“For me?” gasped Beth, holding onto Jo and feeling as if she should tumble down, it was such an overwhelming thing altogether.

“Yes, all for you, my precious! Isn’t it splendid of him? Don’t you think he’s the dearest old man in the world? Here’s the key in the letter. We didn’t open it, but we are dying to know what he says,” cried Jo, hugging her sister and offering the note.

“You read it! I can’t, I feel so queer! Oh, it is too lovely!” and Beth hid her face in Jo’s apron, quite upset by her present.

Jo opened the paper and began to laugh, for the first words she saw were...

“Miss March: “Dear Madam — ”

“How nice it sounds! I wish someone would write to me so!” said Amy, who thought the old-fashioned address very elegant.

“‘I have had many pairs of slippers in my life, but I never had any that suited me so well as yours,’“ continues Jo. “‘Heart’s-ease is my favorite flower, and these will always remind me of the gentle giver. I like to pay my debts, so I know you will allow ‘the old gentleman’ to send you something which once belonged to the little grand daughter he lost. With hearty thanks and best wishes, I remain “‘Your grateful friend and humble servant, ‘JAMES LAURENCE’.”

“There, Beth, that’s an honor to be proud of, I’m sure! Laurie told me how fond Mr. Laurence used to be of the child who died, and how he kept all her little things carefully. Just think, he’s given you her piano. That comes of having big blue eyes and loving music,” said Jo, trying to soothe Beth, who trembled and looked more excited than she had ever been before.

“See the cunning brackets to hold candles, and the nice green silk, puckered up, with a gold rose in the middle, and the pretty rack and stool, all complete,” added Meg, opening the instrument and displaying its beauties.

“‘Your humble servant, James Laurence’. Only think of his writing that to you. I’ll tell the girls. They’ll think it’s splendid,” said Amy, much impressed by the note.

“Try it, honey. Let’s hear the sound of the baby pianny,” said Hannah, who always took a share in the family joys and sorrows.

So Beth tried it, and everyone pronounced it the most remarkable piano ever heard. It had evidently been newly tuned and put in apple-pie order, but, perfect as it was, I think the real charm lay in the happiest of all happy faces which leaned over it, as Beth lovingly touched the beautiful black and white keys and pressed the bright pedals.

“You’ll have to go and thank him,” said Jo, by way of a joke, for the idea of the child’s really going never entered her head.

“Yes, I mean to. I guess I’ll go now, before I get frightened thinking about it.”

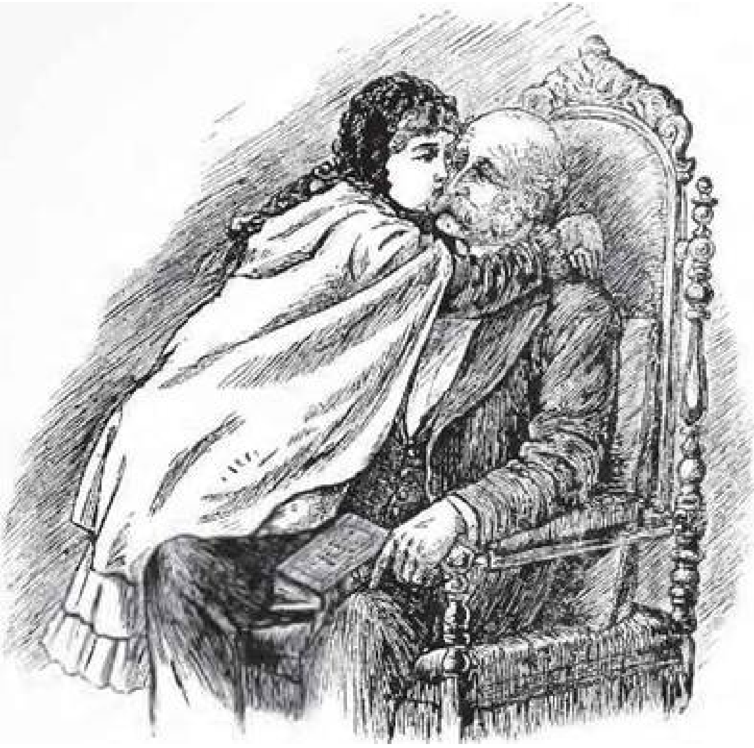
And, to the utter amazement of the assembled family, Beth walked deliberately down the garden, through the hedge, and in at the Laurences' door.

"Well, I wish I may die if it ain't the queerest thing I ever see! The pianny has turned her head! She'd never have gone in her right mind," cried Hannah, staring after her, while the girls were rendered quite speechless by the miracle.

They would have been still more amazed if they had seen what Beth did afterward. If you will believe me, she went and knocked at the study door before she gave herself time to think, and when a gruff voice called out, "come in!" she did go in, right up to Mr. Laurence, who looked quite taken aback, and held out her hand, saying, with only a small quaver in her voice, "I came to thank you, sir, for..." But she didn't finish, for he looked so friendly that she forgot her speech and, only remembering that he had lost the little girl he loved, she put both arms round his neck and kissed him.

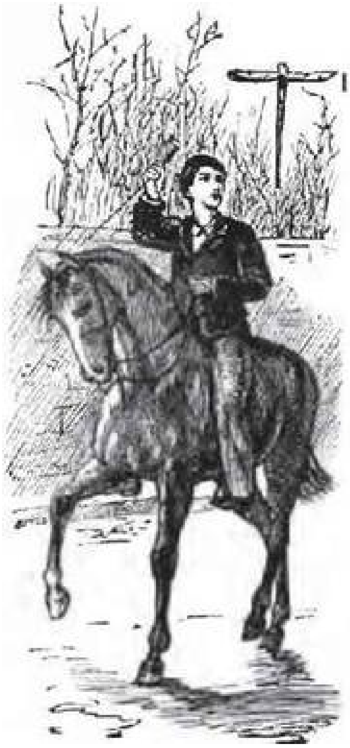
If the roof of the house had suddenly flown off, the old gentleman wouldn't have been more astonished. But he liked it. Oh, dear, yes, he liked it amazingly! And was so touched and pleased by that confiding little kiss that all his crustiness vanished, and he just set her on his knee, and laid his wrinkled cheek against her rosy one, feeling as if he had got his own little granddaughter back again. Beth ceased to fear him from that moment, and sat there talking to him as cozily as if she had known him all her life, for love casts out fear, and gratitude can conquer pride. When she went home, he walked with her to her own gate, shook hands cordially, and touched his hat as he marched back again, looking very stately and erect, like a handsome, soldierly old gentleman, as he was.

When the girls saw that performance, Jo began to dance a jig, by way of expressing her satisfaction, Amy nearly fell out of the window in her surprise, and Meg exclaimed, with up-lifted hands, "Well, I do believe the world is coming to an end."



CHAPTER SEVEN

AMY’S VALLEY OF HUMILIATION



“That boy is a perfect cyclops, isn’t he?” said Amy one day, as Laurie clattered by on horseback, with a flourish of his whip as he passed.

“How dare you say so, when he’s got both his eyes? And very handsome ones they are, too,” cried Jo, who resented any slighting remarks about her friend.

“I didn’t say anything about his eyes, and I don’t see why you need fire up when I admire his riding.”

“Oh, my goodness! That little goose means a centaur, and she called him a Cyclops,” exclaimed Jo, with a burst of laughter.

“You needn’t be so rude, it’s only a ‘lapse of lingy’, as Mr. Davis says,” retorted Amy, finishing Jo with her Latin. “I just wish I had a little of the money Laurie spends on that horse,” she added, as if to herself, yet hoping her sisters would hear.

“Why?” asked Meg kindly, for Jo had gone off in another laugh at Amy’s second blunder.

“I need it so much. I’m dreadfully in debt, and it won’t be my turn to have the rag money for a month.”

“In debt, Amy? What do you mean?” And Meg looked sober.

“Why, I owe at least a dozen pickled limes, and I can’t pay them, you know, till I have money, for Marmee forbade my having anything charged at the shop.”

“Tell me all about it. Are limes the fashion now? It used to be pricking bits of rubber to make balls.” And Meg tried to keep her countenance, Amy looked so grave and important.

“Why, you see, the girls are always buying them, and unless you want to be thought mean, you must do it too. It’s nothing but limes now, for everyone is sucking them in their desks in schooltime, and trading them off for pencils, bead rings, paper dolls, or something else, at recess. If one girl likes another, she gives her a lime. If she’s mad with her, she eats one before her face, and doesn’t offer even a suck. They treat by turns, and I’ve had ever so many but haven’t returned them, and I ought for they are debts of honor, you know.”

“How much will pay them off and restore your credit?” asked Meg, taking out her purse.

“A quarter would more than do it, and leave a few cents over for a treat for you. Don’t you like limes?”

“Not much. You may have my share. Here’s the money. Make it last as long as you can, for it isn’t very plenty, you know.”

“Oh, thank you! It must be so nice to have pocket money! I’ll have a grand feast, for I haven’t tasted a lime this week. I felt delicate about taking any, as I couldn’t return them, and I’m actually suffering for one.”

Next day Amy was rather late at school, but could not resist the temptation of displaying, with pardonable pride, a moist brown-paper parcel, before she consigned it to the inmost recesses of her desk. During the next few minutes the rumor that Amy March had got twenty-four delicious limes (she ate one on the way) and was going to treat circulated through her ‘set’, and the attentions of her friends became quite overwhelming. Katy Brown invited her to her next party on the spot. Mary Kinglsey insisted on lending her her watch till recess, and Jenny Snow, a satirical young lady, who had basely twitted Amy upon her limeless state, promptly buried the hatchet and offered to furnish answers to certain appalling sums. But Amy had not forgotten Miss Snow’s cutting remarks about ‘some persons whose noses were not too flat to smell other people’s limes, and stuck-up people who were not too proud to ask for them’, and she instantly crushed ‘that Snow girl’s’ hopes by the withering telegram, “You needn’t be so polite all of a sudden, for you won’t get any.”

A distinguished personage happened to visit the school that morning, and Amy’s beautifully drawn maps received praise, which honor to her foe rankled in the soul of Miss Snow, and caused Miss March to assume the airs of a studious young peacock. But, alas, alas! Pride goes before a fall, and the revengeful Snow turned the tables with disastrous success. No sooner had the guest paid the usual stale compliments and bowed himself out, than Jenny, under pretense of asking an important question, informed Mr. Davis, the teacher, that Amy March had pickled limes in her desk.

Now Mr. Davis had declared limes a contraband article, and solemnly vowed to publicly ferrule the first person who was found breaking the law. This much-enduring man had succeeded in banishing chewing gum after a long and stormy war, had made a bonfire of the confiscated novels and newspapers, had suppressed a private post office, had forbidden distortions of the face, nicknames, and caricatures, and done all that one man could do to keep half a hundred rebellious girls in order. Boys are trying enough to human patience, goodness knows, but girls are infinitely more so, especially to nervous gentlemen with tyrannical tempers and no more talent for teaching than Dr. Blimber. Mr. Davis knew any quantity of Greek, Latin, algebra, and ologies of all sorts so he was called a fine teacher, and manners, morals, feelings, and examples were not considered of any particular importance. It was a most unfortunate moment for denouncing Amy, and Jenny knew it. Mr. Davis had evidently taken his coffee too strong that morning, there was an east wind, which always affected his neuralgia, and his pupils had not done him the credit which he felt he deserved. Therefore, to use the expressive, if not elegant, language of a schoolgirl, “He was as nervous as a witch and as cross as a bear”. The word ‘limes’ was like fire to powder, his yellow face flushed, and he rapped on his desk with an energy which made Jenny skip to her seat with unusual rapidity.

“Young ladies, attention, if you please!”

At the stern order the buzz ceased, and fifty pairs of blue, black, gray, and brown eyes were obediently fixed upon his awful countenance.

“Miss March, come to the desk.”

Amy rose to comply with outward composure, but a secret fear oppressed her, for the limes weighed upon her conscience.

“Bring with you the limes you have in your desk,” was the unexpected command which arrested her before she got out of her seat.

“Don’t take all.” whispered her neighbor, a young lady of great presence of mind.

Amy hastily shook out half a dozen and laid the rest down before Mr. Davis, feeling that any man possessing a human heart would relent when that delicious perfume met his nose. Unfortunately, Mr. Davis particularly detested the odor of the fashionable pickle, and disgust added to his wrath.

“Is that all?”

“Not quite,” stammered Amy.

“Bring the rest immediately.”

With a despairing glance at her set, she obeyed.

“You are sure there are no more?”

“I never lie, sir.”

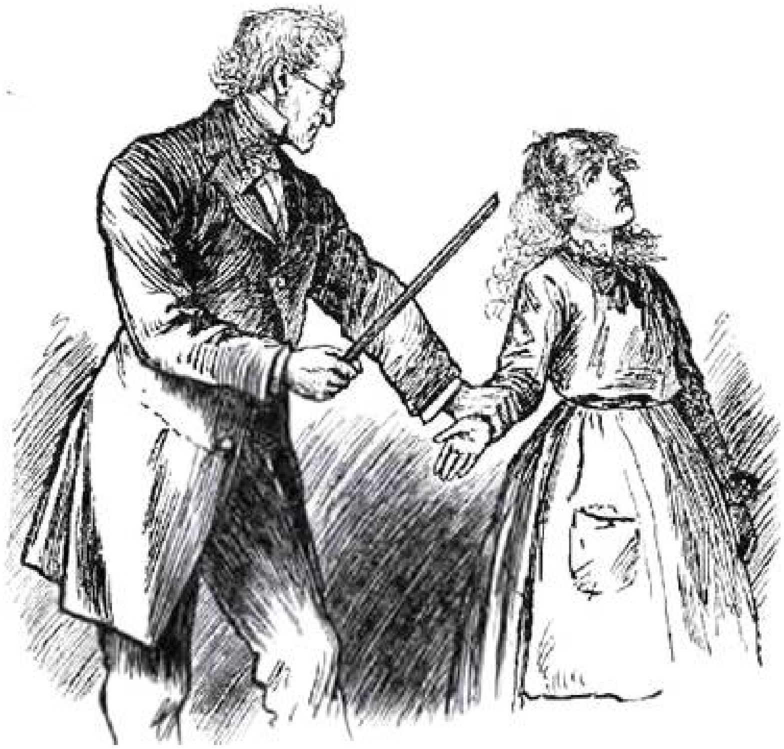
“So I see. Now take these disgusting things two by two, and throw them out of the window.”

There was a simultaneous sigh, which created quite a little gust, as the last hope fled, and the treat was ravished from their longing lips. Scarlet with shame and anger, Amy went to and fro six dreadful times, and as each doomed couple, looking oh, so plump and juicy, fell from her reluctant hands, a shout from the street completed the anguish of the girls, for it told them that their feast was being exulted over by the little Irish children, who were their sworn foes. This — this was too much. All flashed indignant or appealing glances at the inexorable Davis, and one passionate lime lover burst into tears.

As Amy returned from her last trip, Mr. Davis gave a portentous “Hem!” and said, in his most impressive manner...

“Young ladies, you remember what I said to you a week ago. I am sorry this has happened, but I never allow my rules to be infringed, and I never break my word. Miss March, hold out your hand.”

Amy started, and put both hands behind her, turning on him an imploring look which pleaded for her better than the words she could not utter. She was rather a favorite with ‘old Davis’, as, of course, he was called, and it’s my private belief that he would have broken his word if the indignation of one irrepressible young lady had not found vent in a hiss. That hiss, faint as it was, irritated the irascible gentleman, and sealed the culprit’s fate.



“Your hand, Miss March!” was the only answer her mute appeal received, and too proud to cry or beseech, Amy set her teeth, threw back her head defiantly, and bore without flinching several tingling blows on her little palm. They were neither many nor heavy, but that made no difference to her. For the first time in her life she had been struck, and the disgrace, in her eyes, was as deep as if he had knocked her down.

“You will now stand on the platform till recess,” said Mr. Davis, resolved to do the thing thoroughly, since he had begun.

That was dreadful. It would have been bad enough to go to her seat, and see the pitying faces of her friends, or the satisfied ones of her few enemies, but to face the whole school, with that shame fresh upon her, seemed impossible, and for a second she felt as if she could only drop down where she stood, and break her heart with crying. A bitter sense of wrong and the thought of Jenny Snow helped her to bear it, and, taking the ignominious place, she fixed her eyes on the stove funnel above what now seemed a sea of faces, and stood there, so motionless and white that the girls found it hard to study with that pathetic figure before them.

During the fifteen minutes that followed, the proud and sensitive little girl suffered a shame and pain which she never forgot. To others it might seem a ludicrous or trivial affair, but to her it was a hard experience, for during the twelve years of her life she had been governed by love alone, and a blow of that sort had never touched her before. The smart of her hand and the ache of her heart were forgotten in the sting of the thought, “I shall have to tell at home, and they will be so disappointed in me!”

The fifteen minutes seemed an hour, but they came to an end at last, and the word ‘Recess!’ had never seemed so welcome to her before.

“You can go, Miss March,” said Mr. Davis, looking, as he felt, uncomfortable.

He did not soon forget the reproachful glance Amy gave him, as she went, without a word to anyone, straight into the anteroom, snatched her things, and left the place “forever,” as she passionately declared to herself. She was in a sad state when she got home, and when the older girls arrived, some time later, an indignation meeting was held at once. Mrs. March did not say much but looked disturbed, and comforted her afflicted little daughter in her tenderest manner. Meg bathed the insulted hand with glycerine and tears, Beth felt that even her beloved kittens would fail as a balm for griefs like this, Jo wrathfully proposed that Mr. Davis be arrested without delay, and Hannah shook her fist at the ‘villain’ and pounded potatoes for dinner as if she had him under her pestle.

No notice was taken of Amy’s flight, except by her mates, but the sharp-eyed demoiselles discovered that Mr. Davis was quite benignant in the afternoon, also unusually nervous. Just before school closed, Jo appeared, wearing a grim expression as she stalked up to the desk, and delivered a letter from her mother, then collected Amy’s property, and departed, carefully scraping the mud from her boots on the door mat, as if she shook the dust of the place off her feet.

“Yes, you can have a vacation from school, but I want you to study a little every day with Beth,” said Mrs. March that evening. “I don’t approve of corporal punishment, especially for girls. I dislike Mr. Davis’s manner of teaching and don’t think the girls you associate with are doing you any good, so I shall ask your father’s advice before I send you anywhere else.”

“That’s good! I wish all the girls would leave, and spoil his old school. It’s perfectly maddening to think of those lovely limes,” sighed Amy, with the air of a martyr.

“I am not sorry you lost them, for you broke the rules, and deserved some punishment for disobedience,” was the severe reply, which rather disappointed the young lady, who expected nothing but sympathy.

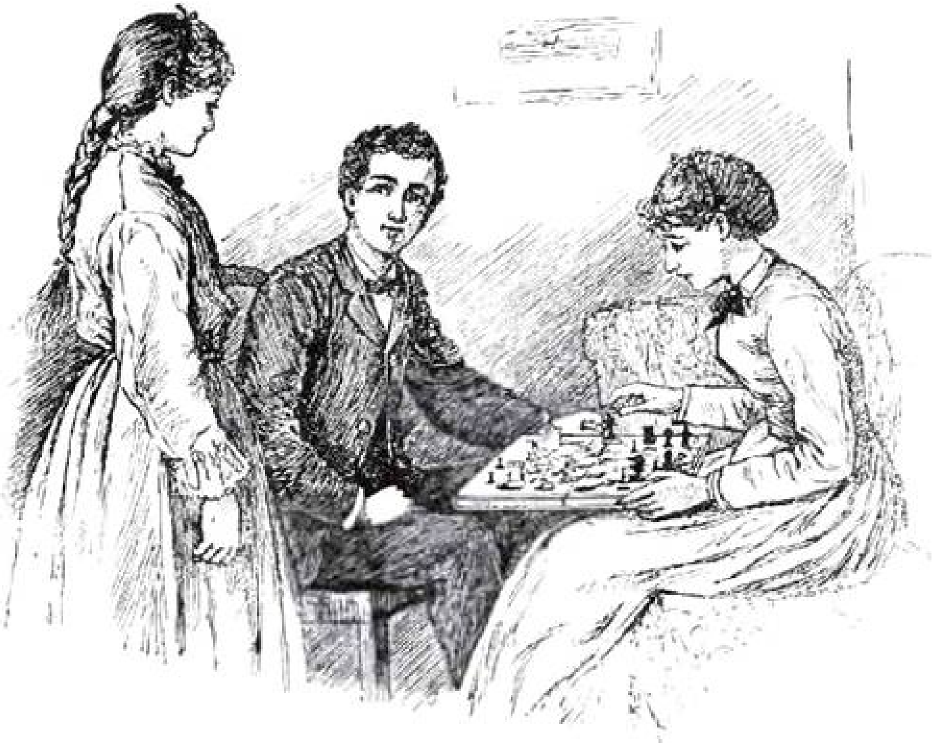
“Do you mean you are glad I was disgraced before the whole school?” cried Amy.

“I should not have chosen that way of mending a fault,” replied her mother, “but I’m not sure that it won’t do you more good than a bolder method. You are getting to be rather conceited, my dear, and it is quite time you set about correcting it. You have a good many little gifts and virtues, but there is no need of parading them, for conceit spoils the finest genius. There is not much danger that real talent or goodness will be overlooked long, even if it is, the consciousness of possessing and using it well should satisfy one, and the great charm of all power is modesty."

"So it is!" cried Laurie, who was playing chess in a corner with Jo. "I knew a girl once, who had a really remarkable talent for music, and she didn't know it, never guessed what sweet little things she composed when she was alone, and wouldn't have believed it if anyone had told her."

"I wish I'd known that nice girl. Maybe she would have helped me, I'm so stupid," said Beth, who stood beside him, listening eagerly.

"You do know her, and she helps you better than anyone else could," answered Laurie, looking at her with such mischievous meaning in his merry black eyes that Beth suddenly turned very red, and hid her face in the sofa cushion, quite overcome by such an unexpected discovery.



Jo let Laurie win the game to pay for that praise of her Beth, who could not be prevailed upon to play for them after her compliment. So Laurie did his best, and sang delightfully, being in a particularly lively humor, for to the Marches he seldom showed the moody side of his character. When he was gone, Amy, who had been pensive all evening, said suddenly, as if busy over some new idea, "Is Laurie an accomplished boy?"

"Yes, he has had an excellent education, and has much talent. He will make a fine man, if not spoiled by petting," replied her mother.

"And he isn't conceited, is he?" asked Amy.

“Not in the least. That is why he is so charming and we all like him so much.”

“I see. It’s nice to have accomplishments and be elegant, but not to show off or get perked up,” said Amy thoughtfully.

“These things are always seen and felt in a person’s manner and conversations, if modestly used, but it is not necessary to display them,” said Mrs. March.

“Any more than it’s proper to wear all your bonnets and gowns and ribbons at once, that folks may know you’ve got them,” added Jo, and the lecture ended in a laugh.

CHAPTER EIGHT

JO MEETS APOLLYON

“Girls, where are you going?” asked Amy, coming into their room one Saturday afternoon, and finding them getting ready to go out with an air of secrecy which excited her curiosity.

“Never mind. Little girls shouldn’t ask questions,” returned Jo sharply.

Now if there is anything mortifying to our feelings when we are young, it is to be told that, and to be bidden to “run away, dear” is still more trying to us. Amy bridled up at this insult, and determined to find out the secret, if she teased for an hour. Turning to Meg, who never refused her anything very long, she said coaxingly, “Do tell me! I should think you might let me go, too, for Beth is fussing over her piano, and I haven’t got anything to do, and am so lonely.”

“I can’t, dear, because you aren’t invited,” began Meg, but Jo broke in impatiently, “Now, Meg, be quiet or you will spoil it all. You can’t go, Amy, so don’t be a baby and whine about it.”

“You are going somewhere with Laurie, I know you are. You were whispering and laughing together on the sofa last night, and you stopped when I came in. Aren’t you going with him?”

“Yes, we are. Now do be still, and stop bothering.”

Amy held her tongue, but used her eyes, and saw Meg slip a fan into her pocket.

“I know! I know! You’re going to the theater to see the *Seven Castles!*” she cried, adding resolutely, “and I shall go, for Mother said I might see it, and I’ve got my rag money, and it was mean not to tell me in time.”

“Just listen to me a minute, and be a good child,” said Meg soothingly. “Mother doesn’t wish you to go this week, because your eyes are not well enough yet to bear the light of this fairy piece. Next week you can go with Beth and Hannah, and have a nice time.”

“I don’t like that half as well as going with you and Laurie. Please let me. I’ve been sick with this cold so long, and shut up, I’m dying for some fun. Do, Meg! I’ll be ever so good,” pleaded Amy, looking as pathetic as she could.

“Suppose we take her. I don’t believe Mother would mind, if we bundle her up well,” began Meg.

“If she goes I shan’t, and if I don’t, Laurie won’t like it, and it will be very rude, after he invited only us, to go and drag in Amy. I should think she’d hate to poke herself where she isn’t wanted,” said Jo crossly, for she disliked the trouble of overseeing a fidgety child when she wanted to enjoy herself.

Her tone and manner angered Amy, who began to put her boots on, saying, in her most aggravating way, “I shall go. Meg says I may, and if I pay for myself, Laurie hasn’t anything to do with it.”

“You can’t sit with us, for our seats are reserved, and you mustn’t sit alone, so Laurie will give you his place, and that will spoil our pleasure. Or he’ll get another seat for you, and that isn’t proper when you weren’t asked. You shan’t stir a step, so you may just stay where you are,” scolded Jo, crosser than ever, having just pricked her finger in her hurry.

Sitting on the floor with one boot on, Amy began to cry and Meg to reason with her, when Laurie called from below, and the two girls hurried down, leaving their sister wailing. For now and then she forgot her grown-up ways and acted like a spoiled child. Just as the party was setting out, Amy called over the banisters in a threatening tone, “You’ll be sorry for this, Jo March, see if you ain’t.”

“Fiddlesticks!” returned Jo, slamming the door.

They had a charming time, for *The Seven Castles Of The Diamond Lake* was as brilliant and wonderful as heart could wish. But in spite of the comical red imps, sparkling elves, and the gorgeous princes and princesses, Jo’s pleasure had a drop of bitterness in it. The fairy queen’s yellow curls reminded her of Amy, and between the acts she amused herself with wondering what her sister would do to make her ‘sorry for it’. She and Amy had had many lively skirmishes in the course of their lives, for both had quick tempers and were apt to be violent when fairly roused. Amy teased Jo, and Jo irritated Amy, and semioccasional explosions occurred, of which both were much ashamed afterward. Although the oldest, Jo had the least self-control, and had hard times trying to curb the fiery spirit which was continually getting her into trouble. Her anger never lasted long, and having humbly confessed her fault, she sincerely repented and tried to do better. Her sisters used to say that they rather liked to get Jo into a fury because she was such an angel afterward. Poor Jo tried desperately to be good, but her bosom enemy was always ready to flame up and defeat her, and it took years of patient effort to subdue it.

When they got home, they found Amy reading in the parlor. She assumed an injured air as they came in, never lifted her eyes from her book, or asked a single question. Perhaps curiosity might have conquered resentment, if Beth had not been there to inquire and receive a glowing description of the play. On going up to put away her best hat, Jo’s first look was toward the bureau, for in their last quarrel Amy had soothed her feelings by turning Jo’s top drawer upside down on the floor. Everything was in its place, however, and after a hasty glance into her various closets, bags, and boxes, Jo decided that Amy had forgiven and forgotten her wrongs.

There Jo was mistaken, for next day she made a discovery which produced a tempest. Meg, Beth, and Amy were sitting together, late in the afternoon, when Jo burst into the room, looking excited and demanding breathlessly, "Has anyone taken my book?"

Meg and Beth said, "No." at once, and looked surprised. Amy poked the fire and said nothing. Jo saw her color rise and was down upon her in a minute.

"Amy, you've got it!"

"No, I haven't."

"You know where it is, then!"

"No, I don't."

"That's a fib!" cried Jo, taking her by the shoulders, and looking fierce enough to frighten a much braver child than Amy.

"It isn't. I haven't got it, don't know where it is now, and don't care."

"You know something about it, and you'd better tell at once, or I'll make you." And Jo gave her a slight shake.

"Scold as much as you like, you'll never see your silly old book again," cried Amy, getting excited in her turn.

"Why not?"

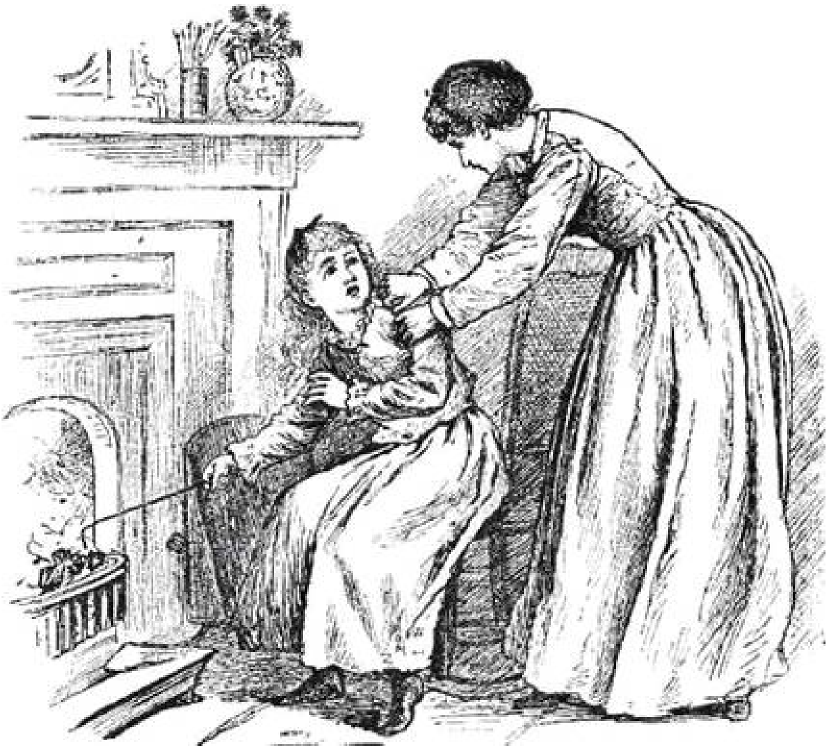
"I burned it up."

"What! My little book I was so fond of, and worked over, and meant to finish before Father got home? Have you really burned it?" said Jo, turning very pale, while her eyes kindled and her hands clutched Amy nervously.

"Yes, I did! I told you I'd make you pay for being so cross yesterday, and I have, so..."

Amy got no farther, for Jo's hot temper mastered her, and she shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head, crying in a passion of grief and anger...

"You wicked, wicked girl! I never can write it again, and I'll never forgive you as long as I live."



Meg flew to rescue Amy, and Beth to pacify Jo, but Jo was quite beside herself, and with a parting box on her sister’s ear, she rushed out of the room up to the old sofa in the garret, and finished her fight alone.

The storm cleared up below, for Mrs. March came home, and, having heard the story, soon brought Amy to a sense of the wrong she had done her sister. Jo’s book was the pride of her heart, and was regarded by her family as a literary sprout of great promise. It was only half a dozen little fairy tales, but Jo had worked over them patiently, putting her whole heart into her work, hoping to make something good enough to print. She had just copied them with great care, and had destroyed the old manuscript, so that Amy’s bonfire had consumed the loving work of several years. It seemed a small loss to others, but to Jo it was a dreadful calamity, and she felt that it never could be made up to her. Beth mourned as for a departed kitten, and Meg refused to defend her pet. Mrs. March looked grave and grieved, and Amy felt that no one would love her till she had asked pardon for the act which she now regretted more than any of them.

When the tea bell rang, Jo appeared, looking so grim and unapproachable that it took all Amy’s courage to say meekly...

“Please forgive me, Jo. I’m very, very sorry.”

“I never shall forgive you,” was Jo’s stern answer, and from that moment she ignored Amy entirely.

No one spoke of the great trouble, not even Mrs. March, for all had learned by experience that when Jo was in that mood words were wasted, and the wisest course was to wait till some little accident, or her own generous nature, softened Jo's resentment and healed the breach. It was not a happy evening, for though they sewed as usual, while their mother read aloud from Bremer, Scott, or Edgeworth, something was wanting, and the sweet home peace was disturbed. They felt this most when singing time came, for Beth could only play, Jo stood dumb as a stone, and Amy broke down, so Meg and Mother sang alone. But in spite of their efforts to be as cheery as larks, the flutelike voices did not seem to chord as well as usual, and all felt out of tune.

As Jo received her good-night kiss, Mrs. March whispered gently, "My dear, don't let the sun go down upon your anger. Forgive each other, help each other, and begin again tomorrow."

Jo wanted to lay her head down on that motherly bosom, and cry her grief and anger all away, but tears were an unmanly weakness, and she felt so deeply injured that she really couldn't quite forgive yet. So she winked hard, shook her head, and said gruffly because Amy was listening, "It was an abominable thing, and she doesn't deserve to be forgiven."

With that she marched off to bed, and there was no merry or confidential gossip that night.

Amy was much offended that her overtures of peace had been repulsed, and began to wish she had not humbled herself, to feel more injured than ever, and to plume herself on her superior virtue in a way which was particularly exasperating. Jo still looked like a thunder cloud, and nothing went well all day. It was bitter cold in the morning, she dropped her precious turnover in the gutter, Aunt March had an attack of the fidgets, Meg was sensitive, Beth would look grieved and wistful when she got home, and Amy kept making remarks about people who were always talking about being good and yet wouldn't even try when other people set them a virtuous example.

"Everybody is so hateful, I'll ask Laurie to go skating. He is always kind and jolly, and will put me to rights, I know," said Jo to herself, and off she went.

Amy heard the clash of skates, and looked out with an impatient exclamation.

"There! She promised I should go next time, for this is the last ice we shall have. But it's no use to ask such a crosspatch to take me."

"Don't say that. You were very naughty, and it is hard to forgive the loss of her precious little book, but I think she might do it now, and I guess she will, if you try her at the right minute," said Meg. "Go after them. Don't say anything till Jo has got good-natured with Laurie, than take a quiet minute and just kiss her, or do some kind thing, and I'm sure she'll be friends again with all her heart."

"I'll try," said Amy, for the advice suited her, and after a flurry to get ready, she ran after the friends, who were just disappearing over the hill.

It was not far to the river, but both were ready before Amy reached them. Jo saw her coming, and turned her back. Laurie did not see, for he was carefully skating along the shore, sounding the ice, for a warm spell had preceded the cold snap.

“I’ll go on to the first bend, and see if it’s all right before we begin to race,” Amy heard him say, as he shot away, looking like a young Russian in his fur-trimmed coat and cap.

Jo heard Amy panting after her run, stamping her feet and blowing on her fingers as she tried to put her skates on, but Jo never turned and went slowly zigzagging down the river, taking a bitter, unhappy sort of satisfaction in her sister’s troubles. She had cherished her anger till it grew strong and took possession of her, as evil thoughts and feelings always do unless cast out at once. As Laurie turned the bend, he shouted back...

“Keep near the shore. It isn’t safe in the middle.” Jo heard, but Amy was struggling to her feet and did not catch a word. Jo glanced over her shoulder, and the little demon she was harboring said in her ear...

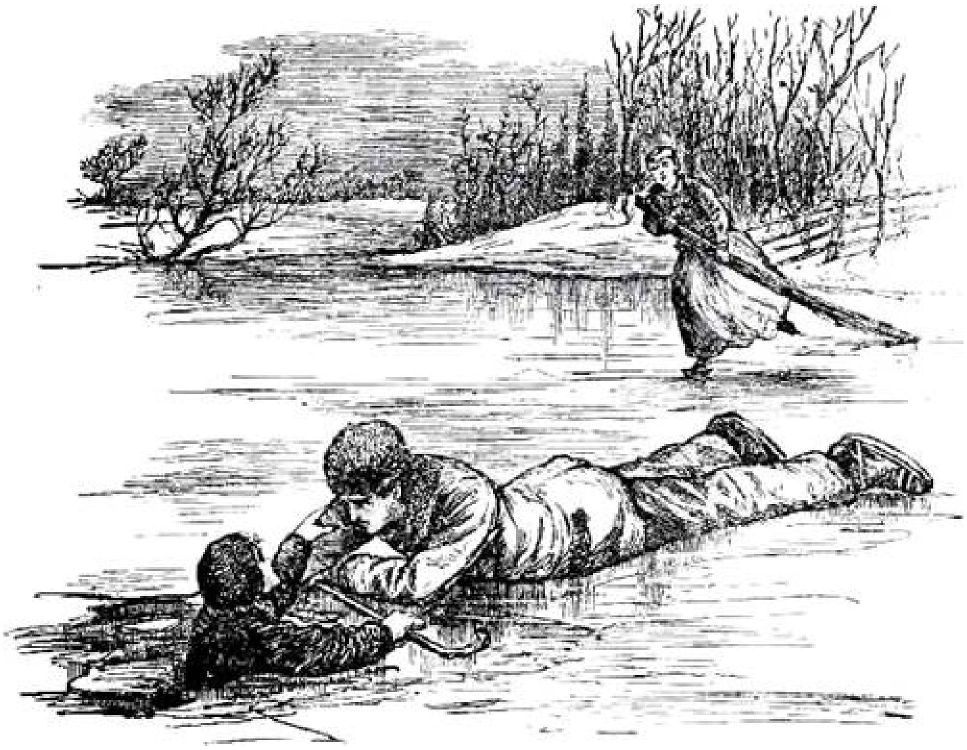
“No matter whether she heard or not, let her take care of herself.”

Laurie had vanished round the bend, Jo was just at the turn, and Amy, far behind, striking out toward the smoother ice in the middle of the river. For a minute Jo stood still with a strange feeling in her heart, then she resolved to go on, but something held and turned her round, just in time to see Amy throw up her hands and go down, with a sudden crash of rotten ice, the splash of water, and a cry that made Jo’s heart stand still with fear. She tried to call Laurie, but her voice was gone. She tried to rush forward, but her feet seemed to have no strength in them, and for a second, she could only stand motionless, staring with a terror-stricken face at the little blue hood above the black water. Something rushed swiftly by her, and Laurie’s voice cried out...

“Bring a rail. Quick, quick!”

How she did it, she never knew, but for the next few minutes she worked as if possessed, blindly obeying Laurie, who was quite self-possessed, and lying flat, held Amy up by his arm and hockey stick till Jo dragged a rail from the fence, and together they got the child out, more frightened than hurt.

“Now then, we must walk her home as fast as we can. Pile our things on her, while I get off these confounded skates,” cried Laurie, wrapping his coat round Amy, and tugging away at the straps which never seemed so intricate before.



Shivering, dripping, and crying, they got Amy home, and after an exciting time of it, she fell asleep, rolled in blankets before a hot fire. During the bustle Jo had scarcely spoken but flown about, looking pale and wild, with her things half off, her dress torn, and her hands cut and bruised by ice and rails and refractory buckles. When Amy was comfortably asleep, the house quiet, and Mrs. March sitting by the bed, she called Jo to her and began to bind up the hurt hands.

"Are you sure she is safe?" whispered Jo, looking remorsefully at the golden head, which might have been swept away from her sight forever under the treacherous ice.

"Quite safe, dear. She is not hurt, and won't even take cold, I think, you were so sensible in covering and getting her home quickly," replied her mother cheerfully.

"Laurie did it all. I only let her go. Mother, if she should die, it would be my fault." And Jo dropped down beside the bed in a passion of penitent tears, telling all that had happened, bitterly condemning her hardness of heart, and sobbing out her gratitude for being spared the heavy punishment which might have come upon her.

"It's my dreadful temper! I try to cure it, I think I have, and then it breaks out worse than ever. Oh, Mother, what shall I do? What shall I do?" cried poor Jo, in despair.

“Watch and pray, dear, never get tired of trying, and never think it is impossible to conquer your fault,” said Mrs. March, drawing the blowzy head to her shoulder and kissing the wet cheek so tenderly that Jo cried even harder.

“You don’t know, you can’t guess how bad it is! It seems as if I could do anything when I’m in a passion. I get so savage, I could hurt anyone and enjoy it. I’m afraid I shall do something dreadful some day, and spoil my life, and make everybody hate me. Oh, Mother, help me, do help me!”

“I will, my child, I will. Don’t cry so bitterly, but remember this day, and resolve with all your soul that you will never know another like it. Jo, dear, we all have our temptations, some far greater than yours, and it often takes us all our lives to conquer them. You think your temper is the worst in the world, but mine used to be just like it.”

“Yours, Mother? Why, you are never angry!” And for the moment Jo forgot remorse in surprise.

“I’ve been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it, and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so.”

The patience and the humility of the face she loved so well was a better lesson to Jo than the wisest lecture, the sharpest reproof. She felt comforted at once by the sympathy and confidence given her. The knowledge that her mother had a fault like hers, and tried to mend it, made her own easier to bear and strengthened her resolution to cure it, though forty years seemed rather a long time to watch and pray to a girl of fifteen.

“Mother, are you angry when you fold your lips tight together and go out of the room sometimes, when Aunt March scolds or people worry you?” asked Jo, feeling nearer and dearer to her mother than ever before.

“Yes, I’ve learned to check the hasty words that rise to my lips, and when I feel that they mean to break out against my will, I just go away for a minute, and give myself a little shake for being so weak and wicked,” answered Mrs. March with a sigh and a smile, as she smoothed and fastened up Jo’s disheveled hair.

“How did you learn to keep still? That is what troubles me, for the sharp words fly out before I know what I’m about, and the more I say the worse I get, till it’s a pleasure to hurt people’s feelings and say dreadful things. Tell me how you do it, Marmee dear.”

“My good mother used to help me...”

“As you do us...” interrupted Jo, with a grateful kiss.

“But I lost her when I was a little older than you are, and for years had to struggle on alone, for I was too proud to confess my weakness to anyone else. I had a hard time, Jo, and shed a good many bitter tears over my failures, for in spite of my efforts I never seemed to get on. Then your father came, and I was so happy that I found it easy to be good. But by-and-by, when I had four little daughters round me and we were poor, then the old trouble began again, for I am not patient by nature, and it tried me very much to see my children wanting anything."

"Poor Mother! What helped you then?"

"Your father, Jo. He never loses patience, never doubts or complains, but always hopes, and works and waits so cheerfully that one is ashamed to do otherwise before him. He helped and comforted me, and showed me that I must try to practice all the virtues I would have my little girls possess, for I was their example. It was easier to try for your sakes than for my own. A startled or surprised look from one of you when I spoke sharply rebuked me more than any words could have done, and the love, respect, and confidence of my children was the sweetest reward I could receive for my efforts to be the woman I would have them copy."

"Oh, Mother, if I'm ever half as good as you, I shall be satisfied," cried Jo, much touched.

"I hope you will be a great deal better, dear, but you must keep watch over your 'bosom enemy', as father calls it, or it may sadden, if not spoil your life. You have had a warning. Remember it, and try with heart and soul to master this quick temper, before it brings you greater sorrow and regret than you have known today."

"I will try, Mother, I truly will. But you must help me, remind me, and keep me from flying out. I used to see Father sometimes put his finger on his lips, and look at you with a very kind but sober face, and you always folded your lips tight and went away. Was he reminding you then?" asked Jo softly.

"Yes. I asked him to help me so, and he never forgot it, but saved me from many a sharp word by that little gesture and kind look."

Jo saw that her mother's eyes filled and her lips trembled as she spoke, and fearing that she had said too much, she whispered anxiously, "Was it wrong to watch you and to speak of it? I didn't mean to be rude, but it's so comfortable to say all I think to you, and feel so safe and happy here."

"My Jo, you may say anything to your mother, for it is my greatest happiness and pride to feel that my girls confide in me and know how much I love them."

"I thought I'd grieved you."

"No, dear, but speaking of Father reminded me how much I miss him, how much I owe him, and how faithfully I should watch and work to keep his little daughters safe and good for him."

"Yet you told him to go, Mother, and didn't cry when he went, and never complain now, or seem as if you needed any help," said Jo, wondering.

"I gave my best to the country I love, and kept my tears till he was gone. Why should I complain, when we both have merely done our duty and will surely be the happier for it in the end? If I don't seem to need help, it is because I have a better friend, even than Father, to comfort and sustain me. My child, the troubles and temptations of your life are beginning and may be many, but you can overcome and outlive them all if you learn to feel the strength and tenderness of your Heavenly Father as you do that of your earthly one. The more you love and trust Him, the nearer you will feel to Him, and the less you will depend on human power and wisdom. His love and care never tire or change, can never be taken from you, but may become the source of lifelong peace, happiness, and strength. Believe this heartily, and go to God with all your little cares, and hopes, and sins, and sorrows, as freely and confidingly as you come to your mother."

Jo's only answer was to hold her mother close, and in the silence which followed the sincerest prayer she had ever prayed left her heart without words. For in that sad yet happy hour, she had learned not only the bitterness of remorse and despair, but the sweetness of self-denial and self-control, and led by her mother's hand, she had drawn nearer to the Friend who always welcomes every child with a love stronger than that of any father, tenderer than that of any mother.

Amy stirred and sighed in her sleep, and as if eager to begin at once to mend her fault, Jo looked up with an expression on her face which it had never worn before.

"I let the sun go down on my anger. I wouldn't forgive her, and today, if it hadn't been for Laurie, it might have been too late! How could I be so wicked?" said Jo, half aloud, as she leaned over her sister softly stroking the wet hair scattered on the pillow.

As if she heard, Amy opened her eyes, and held out her arms, with a smile that went straight to Jo's heart. Neither said a word, but they hugged one another close, in spite of the blankets, and everything was forgiven and forgotten in one hearty kiss.

CHAPTER NINE

MEG GOES TO VANITY FAIR

“I do think it was the most fortunate thing in the world that those children should have the measles just now,” said Meg, one April day, as she stood packing the ‘go abroady’ trunk in her room, surrounded by her sisters.

“And so nice of Annie Moffat not to forget her promise. A whole fortnight of fun will be regularly splendid,” replied Jo, looking like a windmill as she folded skirts with her long arms.

“And such lovely weather, I’m so glad of that,” added Beth, tidily sorting neck and hair ribbons in her best box, lent for the great occasion.

“I wish I was going to have a fine time and wear all these nice things,” said Amy with her mouth full of pins, as she artistically replenished her sister’s cushion.

“I wish you were all going, but as you can’t, I shall keep my adventures to tell you when I come back. I’m sure it’s the least I can do when you have been so kind, lending me things and helping me get ready,” said Meg, glancing round the room at the very simple outfit, which seemed nearly perfect in their eyes.

“What did Mother give you out of the treasure box?” asked Amy, who had not been present at the opening of a certain cedar chest in which Mrs. March kept a few relics of past splendor, as gifts for her girls when the proper time came.

“A pair of silk stockings, that pretty carved fan, and a lovely blue sash. I wanted the violet silk, but there isn’t time to make it over, so I must be contented with my old tarlaton.”

“It will look nice over my new muslin skirt, and the sash will set it off beautifully. I wish I hadn’t smashed my coral bracelet, for you might have had it,” said Jo, who loved to give and lend, but whose possessions were usually too dilapidated to be of much use.

“There is a lovely old-fashioned pearl set in the treasure chest, but Mother said real flowers were the prettiest ornament for a young girl, and Laurie promised to send me all I want,” replied Meg. “Now, let me see, there’s my new gray walking suit, just curl up the feather in my hat, Beth, then my poplin for Sunday and the small party, it looks heavy for spring, doesn’t it? The violet silk would be so nice. Oh, dear!”

“Never mind, you’ve got the tarlaton for the big party, and you always look like an angel in white,” said Amy, brooding over the little store of finery in which her soul delighted.

“It isn’t low-necked, and it doesn’t sweep enough, but it will have to do. My blue housedress looks so well, turned and freshly trimmed, that I feel as if I’d got a new one. My silk sacque isn’t a bit the fashion, and my bonnet doesn’t look like Sallie’s. I didn’t like to say anything, but I was sadly disappointed in my umbrella. I told Mother black with a white handle, but she forgot and bought a green one with a yellowish handle. It’s strong and neat, so I ought not to complain, but I know I shall feel ashamed of it beside Annie’s silk one with a gold top,” sighed Meg, surveying the little umbrella with great disfavor.

“Change it,” advised Jo.

“I won’t be so silly, or hurt Marmee’s feelings, when she took so much pains to get my things. It’s a nonsensical notion of mine, and I’m not going to give up to it. My silk stockings and two pairs of new gloves are my comfort. You are a dear to lend me yours, Jo. I feel so rich and sort of elegant, with two new pairs, and the old ones cleaned up for common.” And Meg took a refreshing peep at her glove box.

“Annie Moffat has blue and pink bows on her nightcaps. Would you put some on mine?” she asked, as Beth brought up a pile of snowy muslins, fresh from Hannah’s hands.

“No, I wouldn’t, for the smart caps won’t match the plain gowns without any trimming on them. Poor folks shouldn’t rig,” said Jo decidedly.

“I wonder if I shall ever be happy enough to have real lace on my clothes and bows on my caps?” said Meg impatiently.

“You said the other day that you’d be perfectly happy if you could only go to Annie Moffat’s,” observed Beth in her quiet way.

“So I did! Well, I am happy, and I won’t fret, but it does seem as if the more one gets the more one wants, doesn’t it? There now, the trays are ready, and everything in but my ball dress, which I shall leave for Mother to pack,” said Meg, cheering up, as she glanced from the half-filled trunk to the many times pressed and mended white tarlaton, which she called her ‘ball dress’ with an important air.

The next day was fine, and Meg departed in style for a fortnight of novelty and pleasure. Mrs. March had consented to the visit rather reluctantly, fearing that Margaret would come back more discontented than she went. But she begged so hard, and Sallie had promised to take good care of her, and a little pleasure seemed so delightful after a winter of irksome work that the mother yielded, and the daughter went to take her first taste of fashionable life.

The Moffats were very fashionable, and simple Meg was rather daunted, at first, by the splendor of the house and the elegance of its occupants. But they were kindly people, in spite of the frivolous life they led, and soon put their guest at her ease. Perhaps Meg felt, without understanding why, that they were not particularly cultivated or intelligent people, and that all their gilding could not quite conceal the ordinary material of which they were made. It certainly was agreeable to fare sumptuously, drive in a fine carriage, wear her best frock every day, and do nothing but enjoy herself. It suited her exactly, and soon she began to imitate the manners and conversation of those about her, to put on little airs and graces, use French phrases, crimp her hair, take in her dresses, and talk about the fashions as well as she could. The more she saw of Annie Moffat's pretty things, the more she envied her and sighed to be rich. Home now looked bare and dismal as she thought of it, work grew harder than ever, and she felt that she was a very destitute and much-injured girl, in spite of the new gloves and silk stockings.

She had not much time for repining, however, for the three young girls were busily employed in 'having a good time'. They shopped, walked, rode, and called all day, went to theaters and operas or frolicked at home in the evening, for Annie had many friends and knew how to entertain them. Her older sisters were very fine young ladies, and one was engaged, which was extremely interesting and romantic, Meg thought. Mr. Moffat was a fat, jolly old gentleman, who knew her father, and Mrs. Moffat, a fat, jolly old lady, who took as great a fancy to Meg as her daughter had done. Everyone petted her, and 'Daisey', as they called her, was in a fair way to have her head turned.

When the evening for the small party came, she found that the poplin wouldn't do at all, for the other girls were putting on thin dresses and making themselves very fine indeed. So out came the tarlatan, looking older, limper, and shabbier than ever beside Sallie's crisp new one. Meg saw the girls glance at it and then at one another, and her cheeks began to burn, for with all her gentleness she was very proud. No one said a word about it, but Sallie offered to dress her hair, and Annie to tie her sash, and Belle, the engaged sister, praised her white arms. But in their kindness Meg saw only pity for her poverty, and her heart felt very heavy as she stood by herself, while the others laughed, chattered, and flew about like gauzy butterflies. The hard, bitter feeling was getting pretty bad, when the maid brought in a box of flowers. Before she could speak, Annie had the cover off, and all were exclaiming at the lovely roses, heath, and fern within.

"It's for Belle, of course, George always sends her some, but these are altogether ravishing," cried Annie, with a great sniff.

"They are for Miss March, the man said. And here's a note," put in the maid, holding it to Meg.

"What fun! Who are they from? Didn't know you had a lover," cried the girls, fluttering about Meg in a high state of curiosity and surprise.

"The note is from Mother, and the flowers from Laurie," said Meg simply, yet much gratified that he had not forgotten her.

"Oh, indeed!" said Annie with a funny look, as Meg slipped the note into her pocket as a sort of talisman against envy, vanity, and false pride, for the few loving words had done her good, and the flowers cheered her up by their beauty.

Feeling almost happy again, she laid by a few ferns and roses for herself, and quickly made up the rest in dainty bouquets for the breasts, hair, or skirts of her friends, offering them so prettily that Clara, the elder sister, told her she was 'the sweetest little thing she ever saw', and they looked quite charmed with her small attention. Somehow the kind act finished her despondency, and when all the rest went to show themselves to Mrs. Moffat, she saw a happy, bright-eyed face in the mirror, as she laid her ferns against her rippling hair and fastened the roses in the dress that didn't strike her as so very shabby now.

She enjoyed herself very much that evening, for she danced to her heart's content. Everyone was very kind, and she had three compliments. Annie made her sing, and some one said she had a remarkably fine voice. Major Lincoln asked who 'the fresh little girl with the beautiful eyes' was, and Mr. Moffat insisted on dancing with her because she 'didn't dawdle, but had some spring in her', as he gracefully expressed it. So altogether she had a very nice time, till she overheard a bit of conversation, which disturbed her extremely. She was sitting just inside the conservatory, waiting for her partner to bring her an ice, when she heard a voice ask on the other side of the flowery wall...

"How old is he?"

"Sixteen or seventeen, I should say," replied another voice.

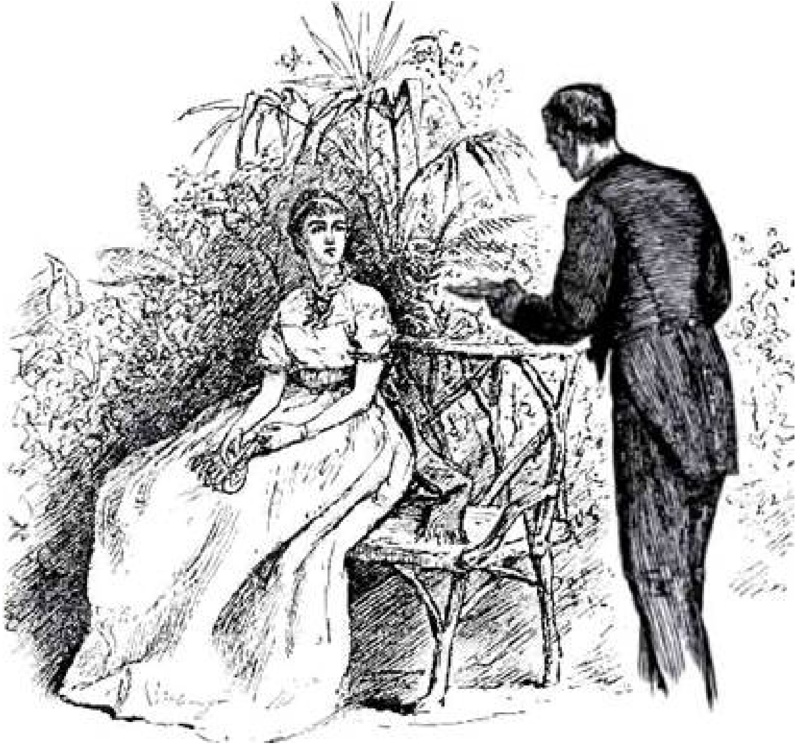
"It would be a grand thing for one of those girls, wouldn't it? Sallie says they are very intimate now, and the old man quite dotes on them."

"Mrs. M. has made her plans, I dare say, and will play her cards well, early as it is. The girl evidently doesn't think of it yet," said Mrs. Moffat.

"She told that fib about her momma, as if she did know, and colored up when the flowers came quite prettily. Poor thing! She'd be so nice if she was only got up in style. Do you think she'd be offended if we offered to lend her a dress for Thursday?" asked another voice.

"She's proud, but I don't believe she'd mind, for that dowdy tarlaton is all she has got. She may tear it tonight, and that will be a good excuse for offering a decent one."

Here Meg's partner appeared, to find her looking much flushed and rather agitated. She was proud, and her pride was useful just then, for it helped her hide her mortification, anger, and disgust at what she had just heard. For, innocent and unsuspicious as she was, she could not help understanding the gossip of her friends. She tried to forget it, but could not, and kept repeating to herself, “Mrs. M. has made her plans,” “that fib about her mamma,” and “dowdy tarlaton,” till she was ready to cry and rush home to tell her troubles and ask for advice. As that was impossible, she did her best to seem gay, and being rather excited, she succeeded so well that no one dreamed what an effort she was making. She was very glad when it was all over and she was quiet in her bed, where she could think and wonder and fume till her head ached and her hot cheeks were cooled by a few natural tears. Those foolish, yet well meant words, had opened a new world to Meg, and much disturbed the peace of the old one in which till now she had lived as happily as a child. Her innocent friendship with Laurie was spoiled by the silly speeches she had overheard. Her faith in her mother was a little shaken by the worldly plans attributed to her by Mrs. Moffat, who judged others by herself, and the sensible resolution to be contented with the simple wardrobe which suited a poor man’s daughter was weakened by the unnecessary pity of girls who thought a shabby dress one of the greatest calamities under heaven.



Poor Meg had a restless night, and got up heavy-eyed, unhappy, half resentful toward her friends, and half ashamed of herself for not speaking out frankly and setting everything right. Everybody dawdled that morning, and it was noon before the girls found energy enough even to take up their worsted work. Something in the manner of her friends struck Meg at once. They treated her with more respect, she thought, took quite a tender interest in what she said, and looked at her with eyes that plainly betrayed curiosity. All this surprised and flattered her, though she did not understand it till Miss Belle looked up from her writing, and said, with a sentimental air...

“Daisy, dear, I’ve sent an invitation to your friend, Mr. Laurence, for Thursday. We should like to know him, and it’s only a proper compliment to you.”

Meg colored, but a mischievous fancy to tease the girls made her reply demurely, “You are very kind, but I’m afraid he won’t come.”

“Why not, Cherie?” asked Miss Belle.

“He’s too old.”

“My child, what do you mean? What is his age, I beg to know!” cried Miss Clara.

“Nearly seventy, I believe,” answered Meg, counting stitches to hide the merriment in her eyes.

“You sly creature! Of course we meant the young man,” exclaimed Miss Belle, laughing.

“There isn’t any, Laurie is only a little boy.” And Meg laughed also at the queer look which the sisters exchanged as she thus described her supposed lover.

“About your age,” Nan said.

“Nearer my sister Jo’s; I am seventeen in August,” returned Meg, tossing her head.

“It’s very nice of him to send you flowers, isn’t it?” said Annie, looking wise about nothing.

“Yes, he often does, to all of us, for their house is full, and we are so fond of them. My mother and old Mr. Laurence are friends, you know, so it is quite natural that we children should play together,” and Meg hoped they would say no more.

“It’s evident Daisy isn’t out yet,” said Miss Clara to Belle with a nod.

“Quite a pastoral state of innocence all round,” returned Miss Belle with a shrug.

“I’m going out to get some little matters for my girls. Can I do anything for you, young ladies?” asked Mrs. Moffat, lumbering in like an elephant in silk and lace.

“No, thank you, ma’am,” replied Sallie. “I’ve got my new pink silk for Thursday and don’t want a thing.”

“Nor I...” began Meg, but stopped because it occurred to her that she did want several things and could not have them.

“What shall you wear?” asked Sallie.

“My old white one again, if I can mend it fit to be seen, it got sadly torn last night," said Meg, trying to speak quite easily, but feeling very uncomfortable.

"Why don't you send home for another?" said Sallie, who was not an observing young lady.

"I haven't got any other." It cost Meg an effort to say that, but Sallie did not see it and exclaimed in amiable surprise, "Only that? How funny..." She did not finish her speech, for Belle shook her head at her and broke in, saying kindly...

"Not at all. Where is the use of having a lot of dresses when she isn't out yet? There's no need of sending home, Daisy, even if you had a dozen, for I've got a sweet blue silk laid away, which I've outgrown, and you shall wear it to please me, won't you, dear?"

"You are very kind, but I don't mind my old dress if you don't, it does well enough for a little girl like me," said Meg.

"Now do let me please myself by dressing you up in style. I admire to do it, and you'd be a regular little beauty with a touch here and there. I shan't let anyone see you till you are done, and then we'll burst upon them like Cinderella and her godmother going to the ball," said Belle in her persuasive tone.

Meg couldn't refuse the offer so kindly made, for a desire to see if she would be 'a little beauty' after touching up caused her to accept and forget all her former uncomfortable feelings toward the Moffats.

On the Thursday evening, Belle shut herself up with her maid, and between them they turned Meg into a fine lady. They crimped and curled her hair, they polished her neck and arms with some fragrant powder, touched her lips with coralline salve to make them redder, and Hortense would have added 'a soupcon of rouge', if Meg had not rebelled. They laced her into a sky-blue dress, which was so tight she could hardly breathe and so low in the neck that modest Meg blushed at herself in the mirror. A set of silver filagree was added, bracelets, necklace, brooch, and even earrings, for Hortense tied them on with a bit of pink silk which did not show. A cluster of tea-rose buds at the bosom, and a ruche, reconciled Meg to the display of her pretty, white shoulders, and a pair of high-heeled silk boots satisfied the last wish of her heart. A lace handkerchief, a plumy fan, and a bouquet in a shoulder holder finished her off, and Miss Belle surveyed her with the satisfaction of a little girl with a newly dressed doll.

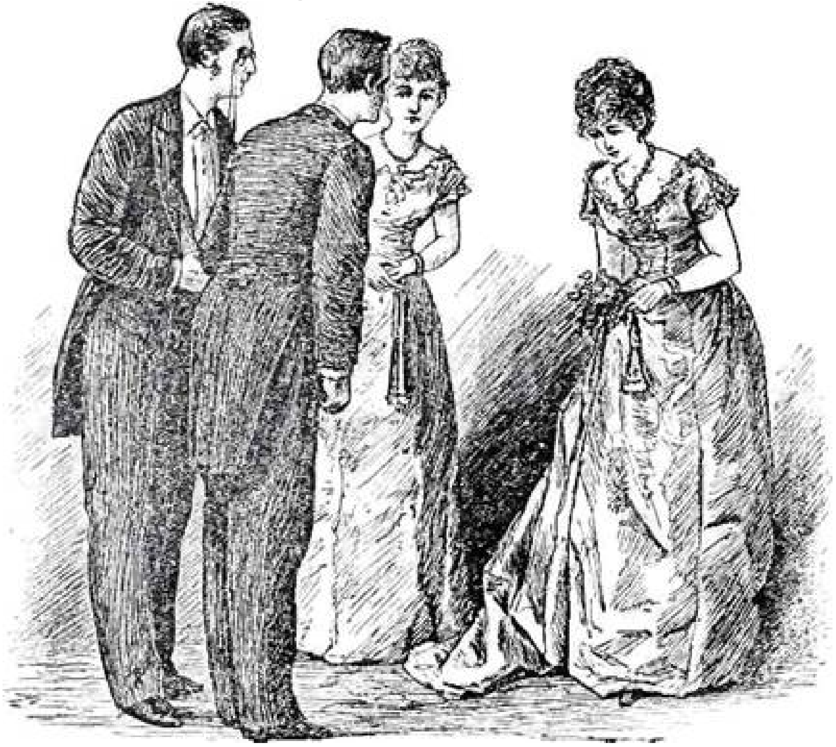
"Mademoiselle is charmante, tres jolie, is she not?" cried Hortense, clasping her hands in an affected rapture.

"Come and show yourself," said Miss Belle, leading the way to the room where the others were waiting.

As Meg went rustling after, with her long skirts trailing, her earrings tinkling, her curls waving, and her heart beating, she felt as if her fun had really begun at last, for the mirror had plainly told her that she was 'a little beauty'. Her friends repeated the pleasing phrase enthusiastically, and for several minutes she stood, like a jackdaw in the fable, enjoying her borrowed plumes, while the rest chattered like a party of magpies.

“While I dress, do you drill her, Nan, in the management of her skirt and those French heels, or she will trip herself up. Take your silver butterfly, and catch up that long curl on the left side of her head, Clara, and don’t any of you disturb the charming work of my hands,” said Belle, as she hurried away, looking well pleased with her success.

“You don’t look a bit like yourself, but you are very nice. I’m nowhere beside you, for Belle has heaps of taste, and you’re quite French, I assure you. Let your flowers hang, don’t be so careful of them, and be sure you don’t trip,” returned Sallie, trying not to care that Meg was prettier than herself.



Keeping that warning carefully in mind, Margaret got safely down stairs and sailed into the drawing rooms where the Moffats and a few early guests were assembled. She very soon discovered that there is a charm about fine clothes which attracts a certain class of people and secures their respect. Several young ladies, who had taken no notice of her before, were very affectionate all of a sudden. Several young gentlemen, who had only stared at her at the other party, now not only stared, but asked to be introduced, and said all manner of foolish but agreeable things to her, and several old ladies, who sat on the sofas, and criticized the rest of the party, inquired who she was with an air of interest. She heard Mrs. Moffat reply to one of them...

“Daisy March — father a colonel in the army — one of our first families, but reverses of fortune, you know; intimate friends of the Laurences; sweet creature, I assure you; my Ned is quite wild about her.”

“Dear me!” said the old lady, putting up her glass for another observation of Meg, who tried to look as if she had not heard and been rather shocked at Mrs. Moffat’s fibs. The ‘queer feeling’ did not pass away, but she imagined herself acting the new part of fine lady and so got on pretty well, though the tight dress gave her a side-ache, the train kept getting under her feet, and she was in constant fear lest her earrings should fly off and get lost or broken. She was flirting her fan and laughing at the feeble jokes of a young gentleman who tried to be witty, when she suddenly stopped laughing and looked confused, for just opposite, she saw Laurie. He was staring at her with undisguised surprise, and disapproval also, she thought, for though he bowed and smiled, yet something in his honest eyes made her blush and wish she had her old dress on. To complete her confusion, she saw Belle nudge Annie, and both glance from her to Laurie, who, she was happy to see, looked unusually boyish and shy.

“Silly creatures, to put such thoughts into my head. I won’t care for it, or let it change me a bit,” thought Meg, and rustled across the room to shake hands with her friend.

“I’m glad you came, I was afraid you wouldn’t.” she said, with her most grown-up air.

“Jo wanted me to come, and tell her how you looked, so I did,” answered Laurie, without turning his eyes upon her, though he half smiled at her maternal tone.

“What shall you tell her?” asked Meg, full of curiosity to know his opinion of her, yet feeling ill at ease with him for the first time.

“I shall say I didn’t know you, for you look so grown-up and unlike yourself, I’m quite afraid of you,” he said, fumbling at his glove button.

“How absurd of you! The girls dressed me up for fun, and I rather like it. Wouldn’t Jo stare if she saw me?” said Meg, bent on making him say whether he thought her improved or not.

“Yes, I think she would,” returned Laurie gravely.

“Don’t you like me so?” asked Meg.

“No, I don’t,” was the blunt reply.

“Why not?” in an anxious tone.

He glanced at her frizzled head, bare shoulders, and fantastically trimmed dress with an expression that abashed her more than his answer, which had not a particle of his usual politeness in it.

“I don’t like fuss and feathers.”

That was altogether too much from a lad younger than herself, and Meg walked away, saying petulantly, “You are the rudest boy I ever saw.”

Feeling very much ruffled, she went and stood at a quiet window to cool her cheeks, for the tight dress gave her an uncomfortably brilliant color. As she stood there, Major Lincoln passed by, and a minute after she heard him saying to his mother...

“They are making a fool of that little girl. I wanted you to see her, but they have spoiled her entirely. She’s nothing but a doll tonight.”

“Oh, dear!” sighed Meg. “I wish I’d been sensible and worn my own things, then I should not have disgusted other people, or felt so uncomfortable and ashamed of myself.”

She leaned her forehead on the cool pane, and stood half hidden by the curtains, never minding that her favorite waltz had begun, till some one touched her, and turning, she saw Laurie, looking penitent, as he said, with his very best bow and his hand out...

“Please forgive my rudeness, and come and dance with me.”

“I’m afraid it will be too disagreeable to you,” said Meg, trying to look offended and failing entirely.

“Not a bit of it, I’m dying to do it. Come, I’ll be good. I don’t like your gown, but I do think you are just splendid.” And he waved his hands, as if words failed to express his admiration.

Meg smiled and relented, and whispered as they stood waiting to catch the time, “Take care my skirt doesn’t trip you up. It’s the plague of my life and I was a goose to wear it.”

“Pin it round your neck, and then it will be useful,” said Laurie, looking down at the little blue boots, which he evidently approved of.

Away they went fleetly and gracefully, for having practiced at home, they were well matched, and the blithe young couple were a pleasant sight to see, as they twirled merrily round and round, feeling more friendly than ever after their small tiff.

“Laurie, I want you to do me a favor, will you?” said Meg, as he stood fanning her when her breath gave out, which it did very soon though she would not own why.

“Won’t I!” said Laurie, with alacrity.

“Please don’t tell them at home about my dress tonight. They won’t understand the joke, and it will worry Mother.”

“Then why did you do it?” said Laurie’s eyes, so plainly that Meg hastily added...

“I shall tell them myself all about it, and ‘fess’ to Mother how silly I’ve been. But I’d rather do it myself. So you’ll not tell, will you?”

“I give you my word I won’t, only what shall I say when they ask me?”

“Just say I looked pretty well and was having a good time.”

“I’ll say the first with all my heart, but how about the other? You don’t look as if you were having a good time. Are you?” And Laurie looked at her with an expression which made her answer in a whisper...

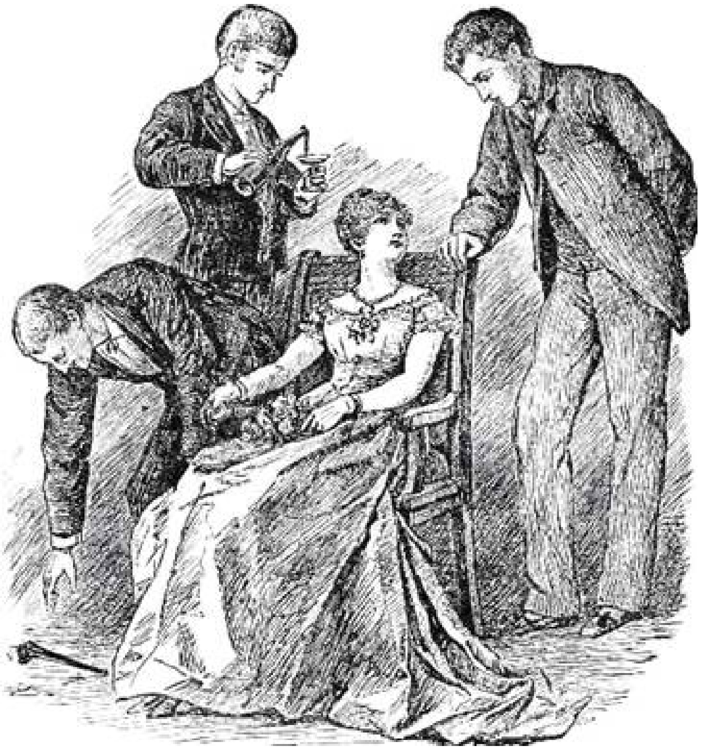
“No, not just now. Don’t think I’m horrid. I only wanted a little fun, but this sort doesn’t pay, I find, and I’m getting tired of it.”

“Here comes Ned Moffat. What does he want?” said Laurie, knitting his black brows as if he did not regard his young host in the light of a pleasant addition to the party.

“He put his name down for three dances, and I suppose he’s coming for them. What a bore!” said Meg, assuming a languid air which amused Laurie immensely.

He did not speak to her again till suppertime, when he saw her drinking champagne with Ned and his friend Fisher, who were behaving ‘like a pair of fools’, as Laurie said to himself, for he felt a brotherly sort of right to watch over the Marches and fight their battles whenever a defender was needed.

“You’ll have a splitting headache tomorrow, if you drink much of that. I wouldn’t, Meg, your mother doesn’t like it, you know,” he whispered, leaning over her chair, as Ned turned to refill her glass and Fisher stooped to pick up her fan.



“I’m not Meg tonight, I’m ‘a doll’ who does all sorts of crazy things. Tomorrow I shall put away my ‘fuss and feathers’ and be desperately good again,” she answered with an affected little laugh.

“Wish tomorrow was here, then,” muttered Laurie, walking off, ill-pleased at the change he saw in her.

Meg danced and flirted, chattered and giggled, as the other girls did. After supper she undertook the German, and blundered through it, nearly upsetting her partner with her long skirt, and romping in a way that scandalized Laurie, who looked on and meditated a lecture. But he got no chance to deliver it, for Meg kept away from him till he came to say good night.

“Remember!” she said, trying to smile, for the splitting headache had already begun.

“Silence a la mort,” replied Laurie, with a melodramatic flourish, as he went away.

This little bit of byplay excited Annie’s curiosity, but Meg was too tired for gossip and went to bed, feeling as if she had been to a masquerade and hadn’t enjoyed herself as much as she expected. She was sick all the next day, and on Saturday went home, quite used up with her fortnight’s fun and feeling that she had ‘sat in the lap of luxury’ long enough.

“It does seem pleasant to be quiet, and not have company manners on all the time. Home is a nice place, though it isn’t splendid,” said Meg, looking about her with a restful expression, as she sat with her mother and Jo on the Sunday evening.

“I’m glad to hear you say so, dear, for I was afraid home would seem dull and poor to you after your fine quarters,” replied her mother, who had given her many anxious looks that day. For motherly eyes are quick to see any change in children’s faces.

Meg had told her adventures gayly and said over and over what a charming time she had had, but something still seemed to weigh upon her spirits, and when the younger girls were gone to bed, she sat thoughtfully staring at the fire, saying little and looking worried. As the clock struck nine and Jo proposed bed, Meg suddenly left her chair and, taking Beth’s stool, leaned her elbows on her mother’s knee, saying bravely...

“Marmee, I want to ‘fess’.”

“I thought so. What is it, dear?”

“Shall I go away?” asked Jo discreetly.

“Of course not. Don’t I always tell you everything? I was ashamed to speak of it before the younger children, but I want you to know all the dreadful things I did at the Moffats’.”

“We are prepared,” said Mrs. March, smiling but looking a little anxious.

“I told you they dressed me up, but I didn’t tell you that they powdered and squeezed and frizzled, and made me look like a fashion-plate. Laurie thought I wasn’t proper. I know he did, though he didn’t say so, and one man called me ‘a doll’. I knew it was silly, but they flattered me and said I was a beauty, and quantities of nonsense, so I let them make a fool of me.”

“Is that all?” asked Jo, as Mrs. March looked silently at the downcast face of her pretty daughter, and could not find it in her heart to blame her little follies.

“No, I drank champagne and romped and tried to flirt, and was altogether abominable,” said Meg self-reproachfully.

“There is something more, I think.” And Mrs. March smoothed the soft cheek, which suddenly grew rosy as Meg answered slowly...

“Yes. It’s very silly, but I want to tell it, because I hate to have people say and think such things about us and Laurie.”

Then she told the various bits of gossip she had heard at the Moffats’, and as she spoke, Jo saw her mother fold her lips tightly, as if ill pleased that such ideas should be put into Meg’s innocent mind.

“Well, if that isn’t the greatest rubbish I ever heard,” cried Jo indignantly. “Why didn’t you pop out and tell them so on the spot?”

“I couldn’t, it was so embarrassing for me. I couldn’t help hearing at first, and then I was so angry and ashamed, I didn’t remember that I ought to go away.”

“Just wait till I see Annie Moffat, and I’ll show you how to settle such ridiculous stuff. The idea of having ‘plans’ and being kind to Laurie because he’s rich and may marry us by-and-by! Won’t he shout when I tell him what those silly things say about us poor children?” And Jo laughed, as if on second thoughts the thing struck her as a good joke.

“If you tell Laurie, I’ll never forgive you! She mustn’t, must she, Mother?” said Meg, looking distressed.

“No, never repeat that foolish gossip, and forget it as soon as you can,” said Mrs. March gravely. “I was very unwise to let you go among people of whom I know so little, kind, I dare say, but worldly, ill-bred, and full of these vulgar ideas about young people. I am more sorry than I can express for the mischief this visit may have done you, Meg.”

“Don’t be sorry, I won’t let it hurt me. I’ll forget all the bad and remember only the good, for I did enjoy a great deal, and thank you very much for letting me go. I’ll not be sentimental or dissatisfied, Mother. I know I’m a silly little girl, and I’ll stay with you till I’m fit to take care of myself. But it is nice to be praised and admired, and I can’t help saying I like it,” said Meg, looking half ashamed of the confession.

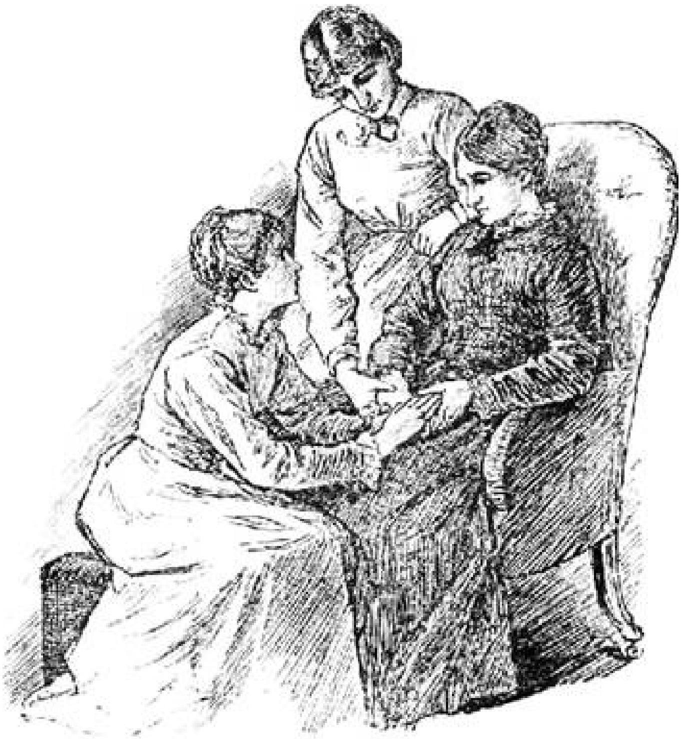
“That is perfectly natural, and quite harmless, if the liking does not become a passion and lead one to do foolish or unmaidenly things. Learn to know and value the praise which is worth having, and to excite the admiration of excellent people by being modest as well as pretty, Meg.”

Margaret sat thinking a moment, while Jo stood with her hands behind her, looking both interested and a little perplexed, for it was a new thing to see Meg blushing and talking about admiration, lovers, and things of that sort. And Jo felt as if during that fortnight her sister had grown up amazingly, and was drifting away from her into a world where she could not follow.

“Mother, do you have ‘plans’, as Mrs. Moffat said?” asked Meg bashfully.

“Yes, my dear, I have a great many, all mothers do, but mine differ somewhat from Mrs. Moffat’s, I suspect. I will tell you some of them, for the time has come when a word may set this romantic little head and heart of yours right, on a very serious subject. You are young, Meg, but not too young to understand me, and mothers’ lips are the fittest to speak of such things to girls like you. Jo, your turn will come in time, perhaps, so listen to my ‘plans’ and help me carry them out, if they are good.”

Jo went and sat on one arm of the chair, looking as if she thought they were about to join in some very solemn affair. Holding a hand of each, and watching the two young faces wistfully, Mrs. March said, in her serious yet cheery way...



"I want my daughters to be beautiful, accomplished, and good. To be admired, loved, and respected. To have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married, and to lead useful, pleasant lives, with as little care and sorrow to try them as God sees fit to send. To be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman, and I sincerely hope my girls may know this beautiful experience. It is natural to think of it, Meg, right to hope and wait for it, and wise to prepare for it, so that when the happy time comes, you may feel ready for the duties and worthy of the joy. My dear girls, I am ambitious for you, but not to have you make a dash in the world, marry rich men merely because they are rich, or have splendid houses, which are not homes because love is wanting. Money is a needful and precious thing, and when well used, a noble thing, but I never want you to think it is the first or only prize to strive for. I'd rather see you poor men's wives, if you were happy, beloved, contented, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace."

"Poor girls don't stand any chance, Belle says, unless they put themselves forward," sighed Meg.

"Then we'll be old maids," said Jo stoutly.

"Right, Jo. Better be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands," said Mrs. March decidedly. "Don't be troubled, Meg, poverty seldom daunts a sincere lover. Some of the best and most honored women I know were poor girls, but so love-worthy that they were not allowed to be old maids. Leave these things to time. Make this home happy, so that you may be fit for homes of your own, if they are offered you, and contented here if they are not. One thing remember, my girls. Mother is always ready to be your confidant, Father to be your friend, and both of us hope and trust that our daughters, whether married or single, will be the pride and comfort of our lives."

"We will, Marmee, we will!" cried both, with all their hearts, as she bade them good night.

CHAPTER TEN

THE P.C. AND P.O.

As spring came on, a new set of amusements became the fashion, and the lengthening days gave long afternoons for work and play of all sorts. The garden had to be put in order, and each sister had a quarter of the little plot to do what she liked with. Hannah used to say, “I’d know which each of them gardings belonged to, ef I see ‘em in Chiny,” and so she might, for the girls’ tastes differed as much as their characters. Meg’s had roses and heliotrope, myrtle, and a little orange tree in it. Jo’s bed was never alike two seasons, for she was always trying experiments. This year it was to be a plantation of sun flowers, the seeds of which cheerful land aspiring plant were to feed Aunt Cockle-top and her family of chicks. Beth had old-fashioned fragrant flowers in her garden, sweet peas and mignonette, larkspur, pinks, pansies, and southernwood, with chickweed for the birds and catnip for the pussies. Amy had a bower in hers, rather small and earwiggy, but very pretty to look at, with honeysuckle and morning-glories hanging their colored horns and bells in graceful wreaths all over it, tall white lilies, delicate ferns, and as many brilliant, picturesque plants as would consent to blossom there.

Gardening, walks, rows on the river, and flower hunts employed the fine days, and for rainy ones, they had house diversions, some old, some new, all more or less original. One of these was the ‘P.C.’, for as secret societies were the fashion, it was thought proper to have one, and as all of the girls admired Dickens, they called themselves the Pickwick Club. With a few interruptions, they had kept this up for a year, and met every Saturday evening in the big garret, on which occasions the ceremonies were as follows: Three chairs were arranged in a row before a table on which was a lamp, also four white badges, with a big ‘P.C.’ in different colors on each, and the weekly newspaper called, The Pickwick Portfolio, to which all contributed something, while Jo, who reveled in pens and ink, was the editor. At seven o’clock, the four members ascended to the clubroom, tied their badges round their heads, and took their seats with great solemnity. Meg, as the eldest, was Samuel Pickwick, Jo, being of a literary turn, Augustus Snodgrass, Beth, because she was round and rosy, Tracy Tupman, and Amy, who was always trying to do what she couldn’t, was Nathaniel Winkle. Pickwick, the president, read the paper, which was filled with original tales, poetry, local news, funny advertisements, and hints, in which they good-naturedly reminded each other of their faults and short comings. On one occasion, Mr. Pickwick put on a pair of spectacles without any glass, rapped upon the table, hemmed, and having stared hard at Mr. Snodgrass, who was tilting back in his chair, till he arranged himself properly, began to read:

“THE PICKWICK PORTFOLIO”

MAY 20, 18 —

POET’S CORNER

ANNIVERSARY ODE

Again we meet to celebrate
With badge and solemn rite,
Our fifty-second anniversary,
In Pickwick Hall, tonight.

We all are here in perfect health,
None gone from our small band:
Again we see each well-known face,
And press each friendly hand.

Our Pickwick, always at his post,
With reverence we greet,
As, spectacles on nose, he reads
Our well-filled weekly sheet.

Although he suffers from a cold,
We joy to hear him speak,
For words of wisdom from him fall,
In spite of croak or squeak.

Old six-foot Snodgrass looms on high,
With elephantine grace,
And beams upon the company,
With brown and jovial face.

Poetic fire lights up his eye,
He struggles ‘gainst his lot.
Behold ambition on his brow,
And on his nose, a blot.

Next our peaceful Tupman comes,
So rosy, plump, and sweet,
Who chokes with laughter at the puns,
And tumbles off his seat.

Prim little Winkle too is here,
With every hair in place,
A model of propriety,
Though he hates to wash his face.

The year is gone, we still unite
To joke and laugh and read,
And tread the path of literature

That doth to glory lead.

Long may our paper prosper well,
Our club unbroken be,
And coming years their blessings pour
On the useful, gay ‘P. C.’.
A. SNODGRASS

THE MASKED MARRIAGE
(A Tale Of Venice)

Gondola after gondola swept up to the marble steps, and left its lovely load to swell the brilliant throng that filled the stately halls of Count Adelon. Knights and ladies, elves and pages, monks and flower girls, all mingled gaily in the dance. Sweet voices and rich melody filled the air, and so with mirth and music the masquerade went on. “Has your Highness seen the Lady Viola tonight?” asked a gallant troubadour of the fairy queen who floated down the hall upon his arm.

“Yes, is she not lovely, though so sad! Her dress is well chosen, too, for in a week she weds Count Antonio, whom she passionately hates.”

“By my faith, I envy him. Yonder he comes, arrayed like a bridegroom, except the black mask. When that is off we shall see how he regards the fair maid whose heart he cannot win, though her stern father bestows her hand,” returned the troubadour.

“Tis whispered that she loves the young English artist who haunts her steps, and is spurned by the old Count,” said the lady, as they joined the dance. The revel was at its height when a priest appeared, and withdrawing the young pair to an alcove, hung with purple velvet, he motioned them to kneel. Instant silence fell on the gay throng, and not a sound, but the dash of fountains or the rustle of orange groves sleeping in the moonlight, broke the hush, as Count de Adelon spoke thus:

"My lords and ladies, pardon the ruse by which I have gathered you here to witness the marriage of my daughter. Father, we wait your services."
All eyes turned toward the bridal party, and a murmur of amazement went through the throng, for neither bride nor groom removed their masks. Curiosity and wonder possessed all hearts, but respect restrained all tongues till the holy rite was over. Then the eager spectators gathered round the count, demanding an explanation.

"Gladly would I give it if I could, but I only know that it was the whim of my timid Viola, and I yielded to it. Now, my children, let the play end. Unmask and receive my blessing."

But neither bent the knee, for the young bridegroom replied in a tone that startled all listeners
as the mask fell, disclosing the noble face of Ferdinand Devereux, the artist lover, and leaning on the breast where now flashed the star of an English earl was the lovely Viola, radiant with joy and beauty.

"My lord, you scornfully bade me claim your daughter when I could boast as high a name and vast a fortune as the Count Antonio. I can do more, for even your ambitious soul cannot refuse the Earl of Devereux and De Vere, when he gives his ancient name and boundless wealth in return for the beloved hand of this fair lady, now my wife."

The count stood like one changed to stone, and turning to the bewildered crowd, Ferdinand added, with

a gay smile of triumph, “To you, my gallant friends, I can only wish that your wooing may prosper as mine has done, and that you may all win as fair a bride as I have by this masked marriage.”
S. PICKWICK

Why is the P. C. like the Tower of Babel?
It is full of unruly members.

THE HISTORY OF A SQUASH

Once upon a time a farmer planted a little seed in his garden, and after a while it sprouted and became a vine and bore many squashes. One day in October, when they were ripe, he picked one and took it to market. A gorcerman bought and put it in his shop. That same morning, a little girl in a brown hat and blue dress, with a round face and snub nose, went and bought it for her mother. She lugged it home, cut it up, and boiled it in the big pot, mashed some of it with salt and butter, for dinner. And to the rest she added a pint of milk, two eggs, four spoons of sugar, nutmeg, and some crackers, put it in a deep dish, and baked it till it was brown and nice, and next day it was eaten by a family named March.
T. TUPMAN

Mr. Pickwick, Sir: —
I address you upon the subject of sin the sinner I mean is a man named Winkle who makes trouble in his club by laughing and sometimes won’t write his piece in this fine paper I hope you will pardon his badness and let him send a French fable because he can’t write out

of his head as he has so many lessons to do and no brains in future I will try to take time by the fetlock and prepare some work which will be all commy la fo that means all right I am in haste as it is nearly school time.

Yours respectably,
N. WINKLE

[The above is a manly and handsome acknowledgment of past misdemeanors. If our young friend studied punctuation, it would be well.]

A SAD ACCIDENT

On Friday last, we were startled by a violent shock in our basement, followed by cries of distress. On rushing in a body to the cellar, we discovered our beloved President prostrate upon the floor, having tripped and fallen while getting wood for domestic purposes. A perfect scene of ruin met our eyes, for in his fall Mr. Pickwick had plunged his head and shoulders into a tub of water, upset a keg of soft soap upon his manly form, and torn his garments badly. On being removed from this perilous situation, it was discovered that he had suffered no injury but several bruises, and we are happy to add, is now doing well.
ED.

THE PUBLIC BEREAVEMENT

It is our painful duty to record the sudden and mysterious disappearance of our cherished friend, Mrs. Snowball Pat Paw. This lovely and beloved cat was the pet of a large circle of warm and admiring friends; for her beauty attracted all eyes, her graces and virtues endeared her to all hearts, and her loss is deeply felt by the whole community.

When last seen, she was sitting at the gate, watching the butcher’s cart, and it is feared that some villain, tempted by her charms, basely stole her. Weeks have passed, but no trace of her has been discovered, and we relinquish all hope, tie a black ribbon to her basket, set aside her dish, and weep for her as one lost to us forever.

A sympathizing friend sends the following gem:

A LAMENT
(FOR S. B. PAT PAW)

We mourn the loss of our little pet,
And sigh o’er her hapless fate,
For never more by the fire she’ll sit,
Nor play by the old green gate.

The little grave where her infant sleeps
Is ‘neath the chestnut tree.
But o’er her grave we may not weep,
We know not where it may be.

Her empty bed, her idle ball,
Will never see her more;
No gentle tap, no loving purr
Is heard at the parlor door.

Another cat comes after her mice,
A cat with a dirty face,
But she does not hunt as our darling did,
Nor play with her airy grace.

Her stealthy paws tread the very hall

Where Snowball used to play,
But she only spits at the dogs our pet
So gallantly drove away.

She is useful and mild, and does her best,
But she is not fair to see,
And we cannot give her your place dear,
Nor worship her as we worship thee.
A.S.

ADVERTISEMENTS

MISS ORANTHY BLUGGAGE, the accomplished strong-minded lecturer, will deliver her famous lecture on "WOMAN AND HER POSITION" at Pickwick Hall, next Saturday Evening, after the usual performances.

A WEEKLY MEETING will be held at Kitchen Place, to teach young ladies how to cook. Hannah Brown will preside, and all are invited to attend.

The DUSTPAN SOCIETY will meet on Wednesday next, and parade in the upper story of the Club House. All members to appear in uniform and shoulder their brooms at nine precisely.

Mrs. BETH BOUNCER will open her new assortment of Doll's Millinery next week. The latest Paris fashions have arrived, and orders are respectfully solicited.

A NEW PLAY will appear at the Barnville Theatre, in the course of a few weeks, which will surpass anything ever seen on the American stage.

“The Greek Slave, or Constantine the Avenger,” is the name of this thrilling drama!!!

HINTS

If S.P. didn’t use so much soap on his hands, he wouldn’t always be late at breakfast. A.S. is requested not to whistle in the street. T.T. please don’t forget Amy’s napkin. N.W. must not fret because his dress has not nine tucks.

WEEKLY REPORT

Meg — Good.
Jo — Bad.
Beth — Very Good.
Amy — Middling.

As the President finished reading the paper (which I beg leave to assure my readers is a bona fide copy of one written by bona fide girls once upon a time), a round of applause followed, and then Mr. Snodgrass rose to make a proposition.

“Mr. President and gentlemen,” he began, assuming a parliamentary attitude and tone, “I wish to propose the admission of a new member — one who highly deserves the honor, would be deeply grateful for it, and would add immensely to the spirit of the club, the literary value of the paper, and be no end jolly and nice. I propose Mr. Theodore Laurence as an honorary member of the P. C. Come now, do have him.”

Jo’s sudden change of tone made the girls laugh, but all looked rather anxious, and no one said a word as Snodgrass took his seat.

“We’ll put it to a vote,” said the President. “All in favor of this motion please to manifest it by saying, ‘Aye’.”

A loud response from Snodgrass, followed, to everybody’s surprise, by a timid one from Beth.

“Contrary-minded say, ‘No’.”

Meg and Amy were contrary-minded, and Mr. Winkle rose to say with great elegance, “We don’t wish any boys, they only joke and bounce about. This is a ladies’ club, and we wish to be private and proper.”

“I’m afraid he’ll laugh at our paper, and make fun of us afterward,” observed Pickwick, pulling the little curl on her forehead, as she always did when doubtful.

Up rose Snodgrass, very much in earnest. “Sir, I give you my word as a gentleman, Laurie won’t do anything of the sort. He likes to write, and he’ll give a tone to our contributions and keep us from being sentimental, don’t you see? We can do so little for him, and he does so much for us, I think the least we can do is to offer him a place here, and make him welcome if he comes.”

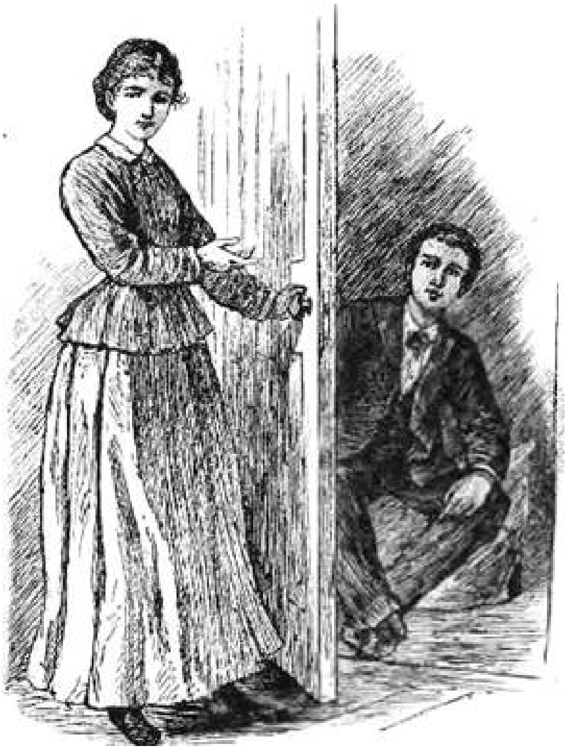
This artful allusion to benefits conferred brought Tupman to his feet, looking as if he had quite made up his mind.

“Yes; we ought to do it, even if we are afraid. I say he may come, and his grandpa, too, if he likes.”

This spirited burst from Beth electrified the club, and Jo left her seat to shake hands approvingly. “Now then, vote again. Everybody remember it’s our Laurie, and say, ‘Aye!’“ cried Snodgrass excitedly.

“Aye! Aye! Aye!” replied three voices at once.

“Good! Bless you! Now, as there’s nothing like ‘taking time by the fetlock’, as Winkle characteristically observes, allow me to present the new member.” And, to the dismay of the rest of the club, Jo threw open the door of the closet, and displayed Laurie sitting on a rag bag, flushed and twinkling with suppressed laughter.



“You rogue! You traitor! Jo, how could you?” cried the three girls, as Snodgrass led her friend triumphantly forth, and producing both a chair and a badge, installed him in a jiffy.

“The coolness of you two rascals is amazing,” began Mr. Pickwick, trying to get up an awful frown and only succeeding in producing an amiable smile. But the new member was equal to the occasion, and rising, with a grateful salutation to the Chair, said in the most engaging manner, “Mr. President and ladies — I beg pardon, gentlemen — allow me to introduce myself as Sam Weller, the very humble servant of the club.”

“Good! Good!” cried Jo, pounding with the handle of the old warming pan on which she leaned.

“My faithful friend and noble patron,” continued Laurie with a wave of the hand, “who has so flatteringly presented me, is not to be blamed for the base stratagem of tonight. I planned it, and she only gave in after lots of teasing.”

“Come now, don’t lay it all on yourself. You know I proposed the cupboard,” broke in Snodgrass, who was enjoying the joke amazingly.

“Never mind what she says. I’m the wretch that did it, sir,” said the new member, with a Welleresque nod to Mr. Pickwick. “But on my honor, I never will do so again, and henceforth devote myself to the interest of this immortal club.”

“Hear! Hear!” cried Jo, clashing the lid of the warming pan like a cymbal.

“Go on, go on!” added Winkle and Tupman, while the President bowed benignly.

"I merely wish to say, that as a slight token of my gratitude for the honor done me, and as a means of promoting friendly relations between adjoining nations, I have set up a post office in the hedge in the lower corner of the garden, a fine, spacious building with padlocks on the doors and every convenience for the mails, also the females, if I may be allowed the expression. It's the old martin house, but I've stopped up the door and made the roof open, so it will hold all sorts of things, and save our valuable time. Letters, manuscripts, books, and bundles can be passed in there, and as each nation has a key, it will be uncommonly nice, I fancy. Allow me to present the club key, and with many thanks for your favor, take my seat."

Great applause as Mr. Weller deposited a little key on the table and subsided, the warming pan clashed and waved wildly, and it was some time before order could be restored. A long discussion followed, and everyone came out surprising, for everyone did her best. So it was an unusually lively meeting, and did not adjourn till a late hour, when it broke up with three shrill cheers for the new member.

No one ever regretted the admittance of Sam Weller, for a more devoted, well-behaved, and jovial member no club could have. He certainly did add 'spirit' to the meetings, and 'a tone' to the paper, for his orations convulsed his hearers and his contributions were excellent, being patriotic, classical, comical, or dramatic, but never sentimental. Jo regarded them as worthy of Bacon, Milton, or Shakespeare, and remodeled her own works with good effect, she thought.

The P. O. was a capital little institution, and flourished wonderfully, for nearly as many queer things passed through it as through the real post office. Tragedies and cravats, poetry and pickles, garden seeds and long letters, music and gingerbread, rubbers, invitations, scoldings, and puppies. The old gentleman liked the fun, and amused himself by sending odd bundles, mysterious messages, and funny telegrams, and his gardener, who was smitten with Hannah's charms, actually sent a love letter to Jo's care. How they laughed when the secret came out, never dreaming how many love letters that little post office would hold in the years to come.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

EXPERIMENTS

“The first of June! The Kings are off to the seashore tomorrow, and I’m free. Three months’ vacation — how I shall enjoy it!” exclaimed Meg, coming home one warm day to find Jo laid upon the sofa in an unusual state of exhaustion, while Beth took off her dusty boots, and Amy made lemonade for the refreshment of the whole party.

“Aunt March went today, for which, oh, be joyful!” said Jo. “I was mortally afraid she’d ask me to go with her. If she had, I should have felt as if I ought to do it, but Plumfield is about as gay as a churchyard, you know, and I’d rather be excused. We had a flurry getting the old lady off, and I had a fright every time she spoke to me, for I was in such a hurry to be through that I was uncommonly helpful and sweet, and feared she’d find it impossible to part from me. I quaked till she was fairly in the carriage, and had a final fright, for as it drove of, she popped out her head, saying, ‘Josyphine, won’t you — ?’ I didn’t hear any more, for I basely turned and fled. I did actually run, and whisked round the corner where I felt safe.”

“Poor old Jo! She came in looking as if bears were after her,” said Beth, as she cuddled her sister’s feet with a motherly air.

“Aunt March is a regular samphire, is she not?” observed Amy, tasting her mixture critically.

“She means vampire, not seaweed, but it doesn’t matter. It’s too warm to be particular about one’s parts of speech,” murmured Jo.

“What shall you do all your vacation?” asked Amy, changing the subject with tact.

“I shall lie abed late, and do nothing,” replied Meg, from the depths of the rocking chair. “I’ve been routed up early all winter and had to spend my days working for other people, so now I’m going to rest and revel to my heart’s content.”

“No,” said Jo, “that dozy way wouldn’t suit me. I’ve laid in a heap of books, and I’m going to improve my shining hours reading on my perch in the old apple tree, when I’m not having l — — ”

“Don’t say ‘larks!’“ implored Amy, as a return snub for the ‘samphire’ correction.

“I’ll say ‘nightingales’ then, with Laurie. That’s proper and appropriate, since he’s a warbler.”

“Don’t let us do any lessons, Beth, for a while, but play all the time and rest, as the girls mean to,” proposed Amy.

“Well, I will, if Mother doesn’t mind. I want to learn some new songs, and my children need fitting up for the summer. They are dreadfully out of order and really suffering for clothes.”

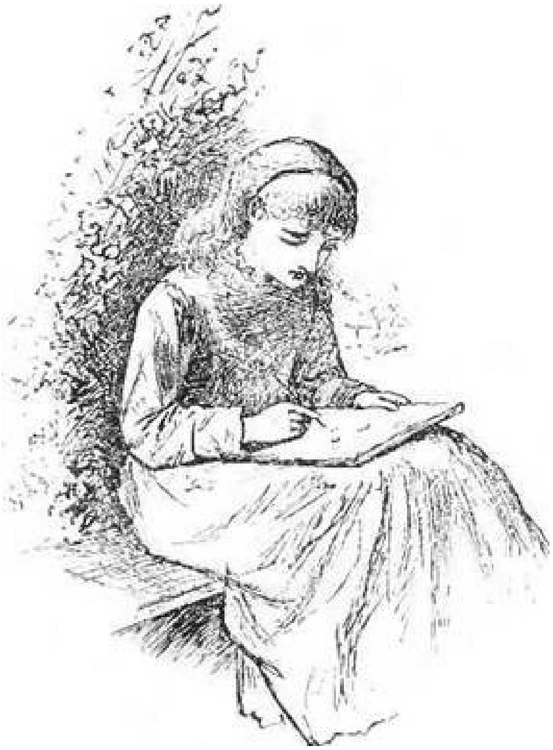
“May we, Mother?” asked Meg, turning to Mrs. March, who sat sewing in what they called ‘Marmee’s corner’.

“You may try your experiment for a week and see how you like it. I think by Saturday night you will find that all play and no work is as bad as all work and no play.”

“Oh, dear, no! It will be delicious, I’m sure,” said Meg complacently.

“I now propose a toast, as my ‘friend and pardner, Sairy Gamp’, says. Fun forever, and no grubbing!” cried Jo, rising, glass in hand, as the lemonade went round.

They all drank it merrily, and began the experiment by lounging for the rest of the day. Next morning, Meg did not appear till ten o’clock. Her solitary breakfast did not taste good, and the room seemed lonely and untidy, for Jo had not filled the vases, Beth had not dusted, and Amy’s books lay scattered about. Nothing was neat and pleasant but ‘Marmee’s corner’, which looked as usual. And there Meg sat, to ‘rest and read’, which meant to yawn and imagine what pretty summer dresses she would get with her salary. Jo spent the morning on the river with Laurie and the afternoon reading and crying over *The Wide, Wide World*, up in the apple tree. Beth began by rummaging everything out of the big closet where her family resided, but getting tired before half done, she left her establishment topsy-turvy and went to her music, rejoicing that she had no dishes to wash. Amy arranged her bower, put on her best white frock, smoothed her curls, and sat down to draw under the honeysuckle, hoping someone would see and inquire who the young artist was. As no one appeared but an inquisitive daddy-longlegs, who examined her work with interest, she went to walk, got caught in a shower, and came home dripping.



At teatime they compared notes, and all agreed that it had been a delightful, though unusually long day. Meg, who went shopping in the afternoon and got a ‘sweet blue muslin’, had discovered, after she had cut the breadths off, that it wouldn’t wash, which mishap made her slightly cross. Jo had burned the skin off her nose boating, and got a raging headache by reading too long. Beth was worried by the confusion of her closet and the difficulty of learning three or four songs at once, and Amy deeply regretted the damage done her frock, for Katy Brown’s party was to be the next day and now like Flora McFlimsey, she had ‘nothing to wear’. But these were mere trifles, and they assured their mother that the experiment was working finely. She smiled, said nothing, and with Hannah’s help did their neglected work, keeping home pleasant and the domestic machinery running smoothly. It was astonishing what a peculiar and uncomfortable state of things was produced by the ‘resting and reveling’ process. The days kept getting longer and longer, the weather was unusually variable and so were tempers; an unsettled feeling possessed everyone, and Satan found plenty of mischief for the idle hands to do. As the height of luxury, Meg put out some of her sewing, and then found time hang so heavily, that she fell to snipping and spoiling her clothes in her attempts to furbish them up a la Moffat. Jo read till her eyes gave out and she was sick of books, got so fidgety that even good-natured Laurie had a quarrel with her, and so reduced in spirits that she desperately wished she had gone with Aunt March. Beth got on pretty well, for she was constantly forgetting that it was to be all play and no work, and fell back into her old ways now and then. But something in the air affected her, and more than once her tranquility was much disturbed, so much so that on one occasion she actually shook poor dear Joanna and told her she was ‘a fright’. Amy fared worst of all, for her resources were small, and when her sisters left her to amuse herself, she soon found that accomplished and important little self a great burden. She didn’t like dolls, fairy tales were childish, and one couldn’t draw all the time. Tea parties didn’t amount to much, neither did picnics, unless very well conducted. “If one could have a fine house, full of nice girls, or go traveling, the summer would be delightful, but to stay at home with three selfish sisters and a grown-up boy was enough to try the patience of a Boaz,” complained Miss Malaprop, after several days devoted to pleasure, fretting, and ennui.

No one would own that they were tired of the experiment, but by Friday night each acknowledged to herself that she was glad the week was nearly done. Hoping to impress the lesson more deeply, Mrs. March, who had a good deal of humor, resolved to finish off the trial in an appropriate manner, so she gave Hannah a holiday and let the girls enjoy the full effect of the play system.

When they got up on Saturday morning, there was no fire in the kitchen, no breakfast in the dining room, and no mother anywhere to be seen.

“Mercy on us! What has happened?” cried Jo, staring about her in dismay.

Meg ran upstairs and soon came back again, looking relieved but rather bewildered, and a little ashamed.

“Mother isn’t sick, only very tired, and she says she is going to stay quietly in her room all day and let us do the best we can. It’s a very queer thing for her to do, she doesn’t act a bit like herself. But she says it has been a hard week for her, so we mustn’t grumble but take care of ourselves.”

“That’s easy enough, and I like the idea, I’m aching for something to do, that is, some new amusement, you know,” added Jo quickly.

In fact it was an immense relief to them all to have a little work, and they took hold with a will, but soon realized the truth of Hannah’s saying, “Housekeeping ain’t no joke.” There was plenty of food in the larder, and while Beth and Amy set the table, Meg and Jo got breakfast, wondering as they did why servants ever talked about hard work.

“I shall take some up to Mother, though she said we were not to think of her, for she’d take care of herself,” said Meg, who presided and felt quite matronly behind the teapot.

So a tray was fitted out before anyone began, and taken up with the cook’s compliments. The boiled tea was very bitter, the omelet scorched, and the biscuits speckled with saleratus, but Mrs. March received her repast with thanks and laughed heartily over it after Jo was gone.

“Poor little souls, they will have a hard time, I’m afraid, but they won’t suffer, and it will do them good,” she said, producing the more palatable viands with which she had provided herself, and disposing of the bad breakfast, so that their feelings might not be hurt, a motherly little deception for which they were grateful.

Many were the complaints below, and great the chagrin of the head cook at her failures. “Never mind, I’ll get the dinner and be servant, you be mistress, keep your hands nice, see company, and give orders,” said Jo, who knew still less than Meg about culinary affairs.

This obliging offer was gladly accepted, and Margaret retired to the parlor, which she hastily put in order by whisking the litter under the sofa and shutting the blinds to save the trouble of dusting. Jo, with perfect faith in her own powers and a friendly desire to make up the quarrel, immediately put a note in the office, inviting Laurie to dinner.

“You’d better see what you have got before you think of having company,” said Meg, when informed of the hospitable but rash act.

“Oh, there’s corned beef and plenty of potatoes, and I shall get some asparagus and a lobster, ‘for a relish’, as Hannah says. We’ll have lettuce and make a salad. I don’t know how, but the book tells. I’ll have blanc mange and strawberries for dessert, and coffee too, if you want to be elegant.”

“Don’t try too many messes, Jo, for you can’t make anything but gingerbread and molasses candy fit to eat. I wash my hands of the dinner party, and since you have asked Laurie on your own responsibility, you may just take care of him.”

“I don’t want you to do anything but be civil to him and help to the pudding. You’ll give me your advice if I get in a muddle, won’t you?” asked Jo, rather hurt.

“Yes, but I don’t know much, except about bread and a few trifles. You had better ask Mother’s leave before you order anything,” returned Meg prudently.

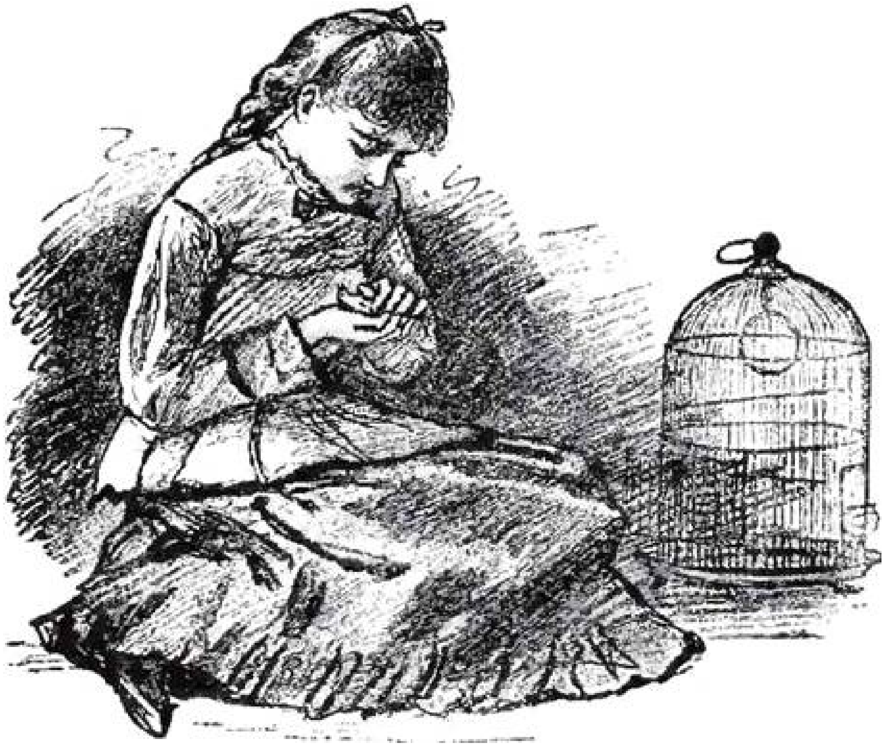
“Of course I shall. I’m not a fool.” And Jo went off in a huff at the doubts expressed of her powers.

“Get what you like, and don’t disturb me. I’m going out to dinner and can’t worry about things at home,” said Mrs. March, when Jo spoke to her. “I never enjoyed housekeeping, and I’m going to take a vacation today, and read, write, go visiting, and amuse myself.”

The unusual spectacle of her busy mother rocking comfortably and reading early in the morning made Jo feel as if some unnatural phenomenon had occurred, for an eclipse, an earthquake, or a volcanic eruption would hardly have seemed stranger.

“Everything is out of sorts, somehow,” she said to herself, going downstairs.

“There’s Beth crying, that’s a sure sign that something is wrong in this family. If Amy is bothering, I’ll shake her.”



Feeling very much out of sorts herself, Jo hurried into the parlor to find Beth sobbing over Pip, the canary, who lay dead in the cage with his little claws pathetically extended, as if imploring the food for want of which he had died.

“It’s all my fault, I forgot him, there isn’t a seed or a drop left. Oh, Pip! Oh, Pip! How could I be so cruel to you?” cried Beth, taking the poor thing in her hands and trying to restore him.

Jo peeped into his half-open eye, felt his little heart, and finding him stiff and cold, shook her head, and offered her domino box for a coffin.

“Put him in the oven, and maybe he will get warm and revive,” said Amy hopefully.

“He’s been starved, and he shan’t be baked now he’s dead. I’ll make him a shroud, and he shall be buried in the garden, and I’ll never have another bird, never, my Pip! for I am too bad to own one,” murmured Beth, sitting on the floor with her pet folded in her hands.

“The funeral shall be this afternoon, and we will all go. Now, don’t cry, Bethy. It’s a pity, but nothing goes right this week, and Pip has had the worst of the experiment. Make the shroud, and lay him in my box, and after the dinner party, we’ll have a nice little funeral,” said Jo, beginning to feel as if she had undertaken a good deal.

Leaving the others to console Beth, she departed to the kitchen, which was in a most discouraging state of confusion. Putting on a big apron, she fell to work and got the dishes piled up ready for washing, when she discovered that the fire was out.

“Here’s a sweet prospect!” muttered Jo, slamming the stove door open, and poking vigorously among the cinders.

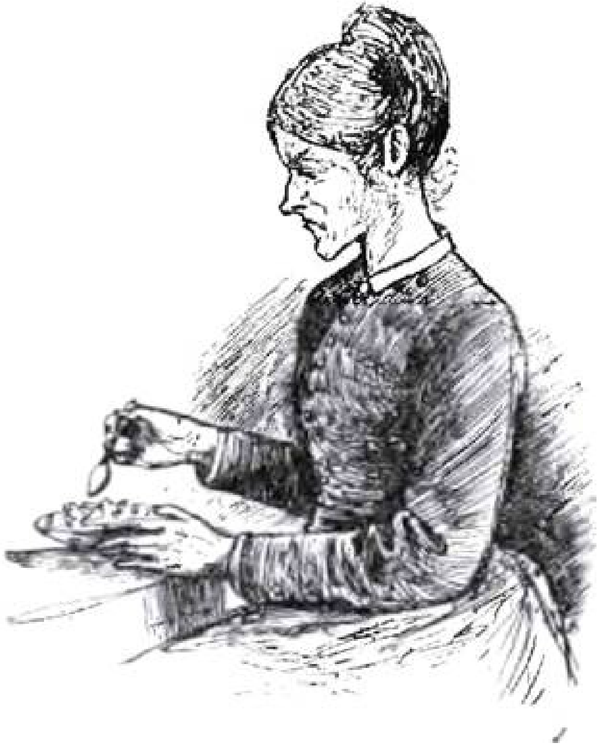
Having rekindled the fire, she thought she would go to market while the water heated. The walk revived her spirits, and flattering herself that she had made good bargains, she trudged home again, after buying a very young lobster, some very old asparagus, and two boxes of acid strawberries. By the time she got cleared up, the dinner arrived and the stove was red-hot. Hannah had left a pan of bread to rise, Meg had worked it up early, set it on the hearth for a second rising, and forgotten it. Meg was entertaining Sallie Gardiner in the parlor, when the door flew open and a floury, crocky, flushed, and disheveled figure appeared, demanding tartly...

“I say, isn’t bread ‘riz’ enough when it runs over the pans?”

Sallie began to laugh, but Meg nodded and lifted her eyebrows as high as they would go, which caused the apparition to vanish and put the sour bread into the oven without further delay. Mrs. March went out, after peeping here and there to see how matters went, also saying a word of comfort to Beth, who sat making a winding sheet, while the dear departed lay in state in the domino box. A strange sense of helplessness fell upon the girls as the gray bonnet vanished round the corner, and despair seized them when a few minutes later Miss Crocker appeared, and said she’d come to dinner. Now this lady was a thin, yellow spinster, with a sharp nose and inquisitive eyes, who saw everything and gossiped about all she saw. They disliked her, but had been taught to be kind to her, simply because she was old and poor and had few friends. So Meg gave her the easy chair and tried to entertain her, while she asked questions, criticized everything, and told stories of the people whom she knew.

Language cannot describe the anxieties, experiences, and exertions which Jo underwent that morning, and the dinner she served up became a standing joke. Fearing to ask any more advice, she did her best alone, and discovered that something more than energy and good will is necessary to make a cook. She boiled the asparagus for an hour and was grieved to find the heads cooked off and the stalks harder than ever. The bread burned black; for the salad dressing so aggravated her that she could not make it fit to eat. The lobster was a scarlet mystery to her, but she hammered and poked till it was unshelled and its meager proportions concealed in a grove of lettuce leaves. The potatoes had to be hurried, not to keep the asparagus waiting, and were not done at the last. The blanc mange was lumpy, and the strawberries not as ripe as they looked, having been skilfully ‘deaconed’.

“Well, they can eat beef and bread and butter, if they are hungry, only it’s mortifying to have to spend your whole morning for nothing,” thought Jo, as she rang the bell half an hour later than usual, and stood, hot, tired, and dispirited, surveying the feast spread before Laurie, accustomed to all sorts of elegance, and Miss Crocker, whose tattling tongue would report them far and wide.



Poor Jo would gladly have gone under the table, as one thing after another was tasted and left, while Amy giggled, Meg looked distressed, Miss Crocker pursed her lips, and Laurie talked and laughed with all his might to give a cheerful tone to the festive scene. Jo’s one strong point was the fruit, for she had sugared it well, and had a pitcher of rich cream to eat with it. Her hot cheeks cooled a trifle, and she drew a long breath as the pretty glass plates went round, and everyone looked graciously at the little rosy islands floating in a sea of cream. Miss Crocker tasted first, made a wry face, and drank some water hastily. Jo, who refused, thinking there might not be enough, for they dwindled sadly after the picking over, glanced at Laurie, but he was eating away manfully, though there was a slight pucker about his mouth and he kept his eye fixed on his plate. Amy, who was fond of delicate fare, took a heaping spoonful, choked, hid her face in her napkin, and left the table precipitately.

“Oh, what is it?” exclaimed Jo, trembling.

“Salt instead of sugar, and the cream is sour,” replied Meg with a tragic gesture.

Jo uttered a groan and fell back in her chair, remembering that she had given a last hasty powdering to the berries out of one of the two boxes on the kitchen table, and had neglected to put the milk in the refrigerator. She turned scarlet and was on the verge of crying, when she met Laurie's eyes, which would look merry in spite of his heroic efforts. The comical side of the affair suddenly struck her, and she laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. So did everyone else, even 'Croaker' as the girls called the old lady, and the unfortunate dinner ended gaily, with bread and butter, olives and fun.

"I haven't strength of mind enough to clear up now, so we will sober ourselves with a funeral," said Jo, as they rose, and Miss Crocker made ready to go, being eager to tell the new story at another friend's dinner table.

They did sober themselves for Beth's sake. Laurie dug a grave under the ferns in the grove, little Pip was laid in, with many tears by his tender-hearted mistress, and covered with moss, while a wreath of violets and chickweed was hung on the stone which bore his epitaph, composed by Jo while she struggled with the dinner.

Here lies Pip March,
Who died the 7th of June;
Loved and lamented sore,
And not forgotten soon.

At the conclusion of the ceremonies, Beth retired to her room, overcome with emotion and lobster, but there was no place of repose, for the beds were not made, and she found her grief much assuaged by beating up the pillows and putting things in order. Meg helped Jo clear away the remains of the feast, which took half the afternoon and left them so tired that they agreed to be contented with tea and toast for supper.

Laurie took Amy to drive, which was a deed of charity, for the sour cream seemed to have had a bad effect upon her temper. Mrs. March came home to find the three older girls hard at work in the middle of the afternoon, and a glance at the closet gave her an idea of the success of one part of the experiment.

Before the housewives could rest, several people called, and there was a scramble to get ready to see them. Then tea must be got, errands done, and one or two necessary bits of sewing neglected until the last minute. As twilight fell, dewy and still, one by one they gathered on the porch where the June roses were budding beautifully, and each groaned or sighed as she sat down, as if tired or troubled.

"What a dreadful day this has been!" began Jo, usually the first to speak.

"It has seemed shorter than usual, but so uncomfortable," said Meg.

"Not a bit like home," added Amy.

"It can't seem so without Marmee and little Pip," sighed Beth, glancing with full eyes at the empty cage above her head.

"Here's Mother, dear, and you shall have another bird tomorrow, if you want it."

As she spoke, Mrs. March came and took her place among them, looking as if her holiday had not been much pleasanter than theirs.

"Are you satisfied with your experiment, girls, or do you want another week of it?" she asked, as Beth nestled up to her and the rest turned toward her with brightening faces, as flowers turn toward the sun.

"I don't!" cried Jo decidedly.

"Nor I," echoed the others.

"You think then, that it is better to have a few duties and live a little for others, do you?"

"Lounging and larking doesn't pay," observed Jo, shaking her head. "I'm tired of it and mean to go to work at something right off."

"Suppose you learn plain cooking. That's a useful accomplishment, which no woman should be without," said Mrs. March, laughing inaudibly at the recollection of Jo's dinner party, for she had met Miss Crocker and heard her account of it.

"Mother, did you go away and let everything be, just to see how we'd get on?" cried Meg, who had had suspicions all day.

"Yes, I wanted you to see how the comfort of all depends on each doing her share faithfully. While Hannah and I did your work, you got on pretty well, though I don't think you were very happy or amiable. So I thought, as a little lesson, I would show you what happens when everyone thinks only of herself. Don't you feel that it is pleasanter to help one another, to have daily duties which make leisure sweet when it comes, and to bear and forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to us all?"

"We do, Mother, we do!" cried the girls.

"Then let me advise you to take up your little burdens again, for though they seem heavy sometimes, they are good for us, and lighten as we learn to carry them. Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for everyone. It keeps us from ennui and mischief, is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion."

"We'll work like bees, and love it too, see if we don't," said Jo. "I'll learn plain cooking for my holiday task, and the next dinner party I have shall be a success."

“I’ll make the set of shirts for father, instead of letting you do it, Marmee. I can and I will, though I’m not fond of sewing. That will be better than fussing over my own things, which are plenty nice enough as they are.” said Meg.

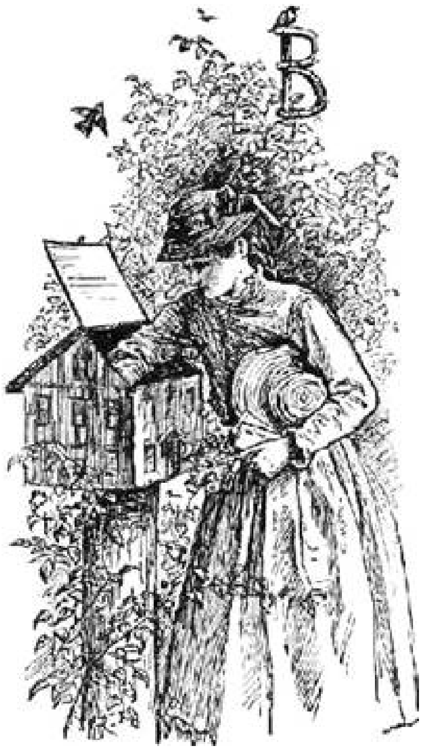
“I’ll do my lessons every day, and not spend so much time with my music and dolls. I am a stupid thing, and ought to be studying, not playing,” was Beth’s resolution, while Amy followed their example by heroically declaring, “I shall learn to make buttonholes, and attend to my parts of speech.”

“Very good! Then I am quite satisfied with the experiment, and fancy that we shall not have to repeat it, only don’t go to the other extreme and delve like slaves. Have regular hours for work and play, make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand the worth of time by employing it well. Then youth will be delightful, old age will bring few regrets, and life become a beautiful success, in spite of poverty.”

“We’ll remember, Mother!” and they did.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CAMP LAURENCE



Beth was postmistress, for, being most at home, she could attend to it regularly, and dearly liked the daily task of unlocking the little door and distributing the mail. One July day she came in with her hands full, and went about the house leaving letters and parcels like the penny post.

“Here’s your posy, Mother! Laurie never forgets that,” she said, putting the fresh nosegay in the vase that stood in ‘Marmee’s corner’, and was kept supplied by the affectionate boy.

“Miss Meg March, one letter and a glove,” continued Beth, delivering the articles to her sister, who sat near her mother, stitching wristbands.

“Why, I left a pair over there, and here is only one,” said Meg, looking at the gray cotton glove. “Didn’t you drop the other in the garden?”

“No, I’m sure I didn’t, for there was only one in the office.”

“I hate to have odd gloves! Never mind, the other may be found. My letter is only a translation of the German song I wanted. I think Mr. Brooke did it, for this isn’t Laurie’s writing.”

Mrs. March glanced at Meg, who was looking very pretty in her gingham morning gown, with the little curls blowing about her forehead, and very womanly, as she sat sewing at her little worktable, full of tidy white rolls, so unconscious of the thought in her mother's mind as she sewed and sang, while her fingers flew and her thoughts were busied with girlish fancies as innocent and fresh as the pansies in her belt, that Mrs. March smiled and was satisfied.

"Two letters for Doctor Jo, a book, and a funny old hat, which covered the whole post office and stuck outside," said Beth, laughing as she went into the study where Jo sat writing.

"What a sly fellow Laurie is! I said I wished bigger hats were the fashion, because I burn my face every hot day. He said, 'Why mind the fashion? Wear a big hat, and be comfortable!' I said I would if I had one, and he has sent me this, to try me. I'll wear it for fun, and show him I don't care for the fashion." And hanging the antique broad-brim on a bust of Plato, Jo read her letters.

One from her mother made her cheeks glow and her eyes fill, for it said to her...

My Dear:

I write a little word to tell you with how much satisfaction I watch your efforts to control your temper. You say nothing about your trials, failures, or successes, and think, perhaps, that no one sees them but the Friend whose help you daily ask, if I may trust the well-worn cover of your guidebook. I, too, have seen them all, and heartily believe in the sincerity of your resolution, since it begins to bear fruit. Go on, dear, patiently and bravely, and always believe that no one sympathizes more tenderly with you than your loving...

Mother

"That does me good! That's worth millions of money and pecks of praise. Oh, Marmee, I do try! I will keep on trying, and not get tired, since I have you to help me."

Laying her head on her arms, Jo wet her little romance with a few happy tears, for she had thought that no one saw and appreciated her efforts to be good, and this assurance was doubly precious, doubly encouraging, because unexpected and from the person whose commendation she most valued. Feeling stronger than ever to meet and subdue her Apollyon, she pinned the note inside her frock, as a shield and a reminder, lest she be taken unaware, and proceeded to open her other letter, quite ready for either good or bad news. In a big, dashing hand, Laurie wrote...

Dear Jo, What ho!

Some English girls and boys are coming to see me tomorrow and I want to have a jolly time. If it's fine, I'm going to pitch my tent in Longmeadow, and row up the whole crew to lunch and croquet — have a fire, make messes, gypsy fashion, and all sorts of larks. They are nice people, and like such things. Brooke will go to keep us boys steady, and Kate Vaughn will play propriety for the girls. I want you all to come, can't let Beth off at any price, and nobody shall worry her. Don't bother about rations, I'll see to that and everything else, only do come, there's a good fellow!

In a tearing hurry, Yours ever, Laurie.

"Here's richness!" cried Jo, flying in to tell the news to Meg.

"Of course we can go, Mother? It will be such a help to Laurie, for I can row, and Meg see to the lunch, and the children be useful in some way."

"I hope the Vaughns are not fine grown-up people. Do you know anything about them, Jo?" asked Meg.

"Only that there are four of them. Kate is older than you, Fred and Frank (twins) about my age, and a little girl (Grace), who is nine or ten. Laurie knew them abroad, and liked the boys. I fancied, from the way he primmed up his mouth in speaking of her, that he didn't admire Kate much."

"I'm so glad my French print is clean, it's just the thing and so becoming!" observed Meg complacently. "Have you anything decent, Jo?"

"Scarlet and gray boating suit, good enough for me. I shall row and tramp about, so I don't want any starch to think of. You'll come, Betty?"

"If you won't let any boys talk to me."

"Not a boy!"

"I like to please Laurie, and I'm not afraid of Mr. Brooke, he is so kind. But I don't want to play, or sing, or say anything. I'll work hard and not trouble anyone, and you'll take care of me, Jo, so I'll go."

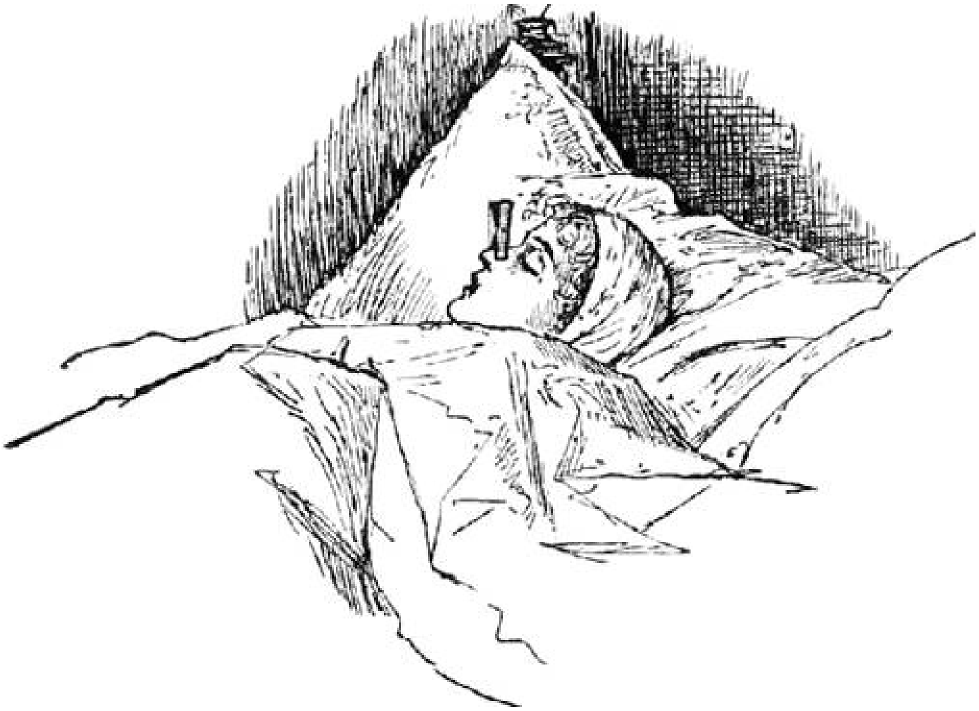
"That's my good girl. You do try to fight off your shyness, and I love you for it. Fighting faults isn't easy, as I know, and a cheery word kind of gives a lift. Thank you, Mother," And Jo gave the thin cheek a grateful kiss, more precious to Mrs. March than if it had given back the rosy roundness of her youth.

"I had a box of chocolate drops, and the picture I wanted to copy," said Amy, showing her mail.

"And I got a note from Mr. Laurence, asking me to come over and play to him tonight, before the lamps are lighted, and I shall go," added Beth, whose friendship with the old gentleman prospered finely.

"Now let's fly round, and do double duty today, so that we can play tomorrow with free minds," said Jo, preparing to replace her pen with a broom.

When the sun peeped into the girls' room early next morning to promise them a fine day, he saw a comical sight. Each had made such preparation for the fete as seemed necessary and proper. Meg had an extra row of little curlpapers across her forehead, Jo had copiously anointed her afflicted face with cold cream, Beth had taken Joanna to bed with her to atone for the approaching separation, and Amy had capped the climax by putting a clothespin on her nose to uplift the offending feature. It was one of the kind artists use to hold the paper on their drawing boards, therefore quite appropriate and effective for the purpose it was now being put. This funny spectacle appeared to amuse the sun, for he burst out with such radiance that Jo woke up and roused her sisters by a hearty laugh at Amy's ornament.



Sunshine and laughter were good omens for a pleasure party, and soon a lively bustle began in both houses. Beth, who was ready first, kept reporting what went on next door, and enlivened her sisters' toilets by frequent telegrams from the window.

"There goes the man with the tent! I see Mrs. Barker doing up the lunch in a hamper and a great basket. Now Mr. Laurence is looking up at the sky and the weathercock. I wish he would go too. There's Laurie, looking like a sailor, nice boy! Oh, mercy me! Here's a carriage full of people, a tall lady, a little girl, and two dreadful boys. One is lame, poor thing, he's got a crutch. Laurie didn't tell us that. Be quick, girls! It's getting late. Why, there is Ned Moffat, I do declare. Meg, isn't that the man who bowed to you one day when we were shopping?"

"So it is. How queer that he should come. I thought he was at the mountains. There is Sallie. I'm glad she got back in time. Am I all right, Jo?" cried Meg in a flutter.

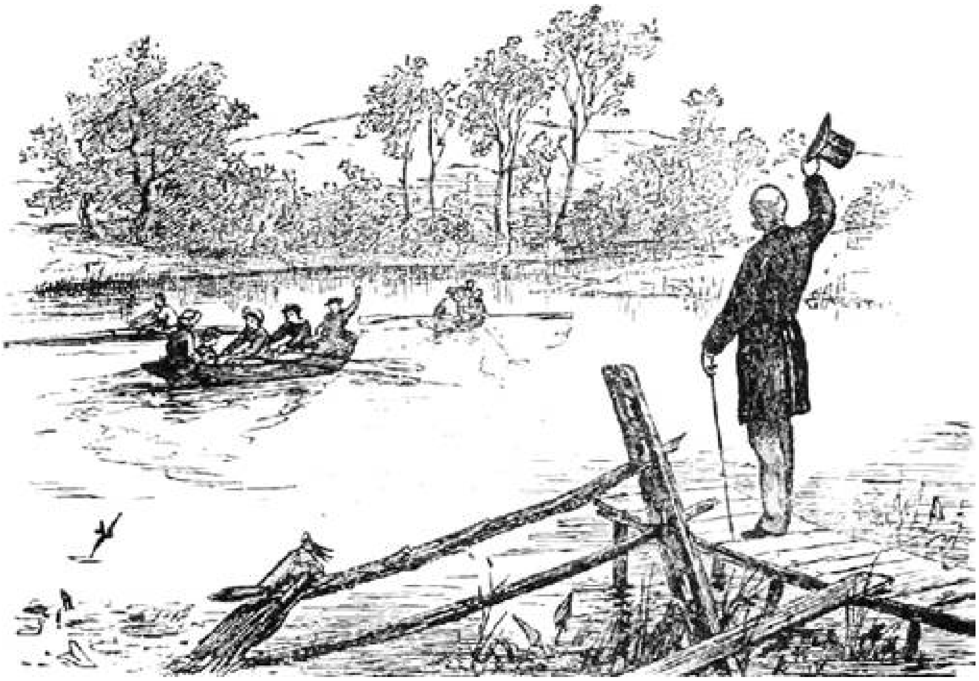
"A regular daisy. Hold up your dress and put your hat on straight, it looks sentimental tipped that way and will fly off at the first puff. Now then, come on!"

"Oh, Jo, you are not going to wear that awful hat? It's too absurd! You shall not make a guy of yourself," remonstrated Meg, as Jo tied down with a red ribbon the broad-brimmed, old-fashioned leghorn Laurie had sent for a joke.

"I just will, though, for it's capital, so shady, light, and big. It will make fun, and I don't mind being a guy if I'm comfortable." With that Jo marched straight away and the rest followed, a bright little band of sisters, all looking their best in summer suits, with happy faces under the jaunty hatbrims.

Laurie ran to meet and present them to his friends in the most cordial manner. The lawn was the reception room, and for several minutes a lively scene was enacted there. Meg was grateful to see that Miss Kate, though twenty, was dressed with a simplicity which American girls would do well to imitate, and who was much flattered by Mr. Ned's assurances that he came especially to see her. Jo understood why Laurie 'primmed up his mouth' when speaking of Kate, for that young lady had a standoff-don't-touch-me air, which contrasted strongly with the free and easy demeanor of the other girls. Beth took an observation of the new boys and decided that the lame one was not 'dreadful', but gentle and feeble, and she would be kind to him on that account. Amy found Grace a well-mannered, merry, little person, and after staring dumbly at one another for a few minutes, they suddenly became very good friends.

Tents, lunch, and croquet utensils having been sent on beforehand, the party was soon embarked, and the two boats pushed off together, leaving Mr. Laurence waving his hat on the shore. Laurie and Jo rowed one boat, Mr. Brooke and Ned the other, while Fred Vaughn, the riotous twin, did his best to upset both by paddling about in a wherry like a disturbed water bug. Jo's funny hat deserved a vote of thanks, for it was of general utility. It broke the ice in the beginning by producing a laugh, it created quite a refreshing breeze, flapping to and fro as she rowed, and would make an excellent umbrella for the whole party, if a shower came up, she said. Miss Kate decided that she was 'odd', but rather clever, and smiled upon her from afar.



Meg, in the other boat, was delightfully situated, face to face with the rowers, who both admired the prospect and feathered their oars with uncommon ‘skill and dexterity’. Mr. Brooke was a grave, silent young man, with handsome brown eyes and a pleasant voice. Meg liked his quiet manners and considered him a walking encyclopedia of useful knowledge. He never talked to her much, but he looked at her a good deal, and she felt sure that he did not regard her with aversion. Ned, being in college, of course put on all the airs which freshmen think it their bounden duty to assume. He was not very wise, but very good-natured, and altogether an excellent person to carry on a picnic. Sallie Gardiner was absorbed in keeping her white pique dress clean and chattering with the ubiquitous Fred, who kept Beth in constant terror by his pranks.

It was not far to Longmeadow, but the tent was pitched and the wickets down by the time they arrived. A pleasant green field, with three wide-spreading oaks in the middle and a smooth strip of turf for croquet.

“Welcome to Camp Laurence!” said the young host, as they landed with exclamations of delight.

“Brooke is commander in chief, I am commissary general, the other fellows are staff officers, and you, ladies, are company. The tent is for your especial benefit and that oak is your drawing room, this is the messroom and the third is the camp kitchen. Now, let’s have a game before it gets hot, and then we’ll see about dinner.”

Frank, Beth, Amy, and Grace sat down to watch the game played by the other eight. Mr. Brooke chose Meg, Kate, and Fred. Laurie took Sallie, Jo, and Ned.

The English played well, but the Americans played better, and contested every inch of the ground as strongly as if the spirit of ‘76 inspired them. Jo and Fred had several skirmishes and once narrowly escaped high words. Jo was through the last wicket and had missed the stroke, which failure ruffled her a good deal. Fred was close behind her and his turn came before hers. He gave a stroke, his ball hit the wicket, and stopped an inch on the wrong side. No one was very near, and running up to examine, he gave it a sly nudge with his toe, which put it just an inch on the right side.

“I’m through! Now, Miss Jo, I’ll settle you, and get in first,” cried the young gentleman, swinging his mallet for another blow.

“You pushed it. I saw you. It’s my turn now,” said Jo sharply.

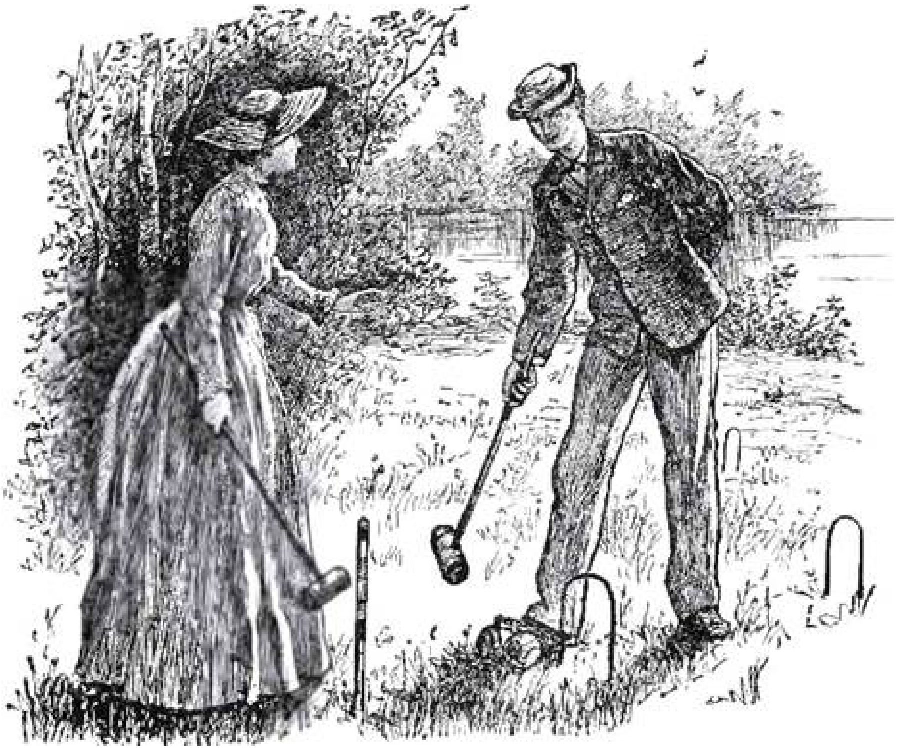
“Upon my word, I didn’t move it. It rolled a bit, perhaps, but that is allowed. So, stand off please, and let me have a go at the stake.”

“We don’t cheat in America, but you can, if you choose,” said Jo angrily.

“Yankees are a deal the most tricky, everybody knows. There you go!” returned Fred, croqueting her ball far away.

Jo opened her lips to say something rude, but checked herself in time, colored up to her forehead and stood a minute, hammering down a wicket with all her might, while Fred hit the stake and declared himself out with much exultation. She went off to get her ball, and was a long time finding it among the bushes, but she came back, looking cool and quiet, and waited her turn patiently. It took several strokes to regain the place she had lost, and when she got there, the other side had nearly won, for Kate’s ball was the last but one and lay near the stake.

“By George, it’s all up with us! Goodbye, Kate. Miss Jo owes me one, so you are finished,” cried Fred excitedly, as they all drew near to see the finish.



“Yankees have a trick of being generous to their enemies,” said Jo, with a look that made the lad redden, “especially when they beat them,” she added, as, leaving Kate’s ball untouched, she won the game by a clever stroke.

Laurie threw up his hat, then remembered that it wouldn’t do to exult over the defeat of his guests, and stopped in the middle of the cheer to whisper to his friend, “Good for you, Jo! He did cheat, I saw him. We can’t tell him so, but he won’t do it again, take my word for it.”

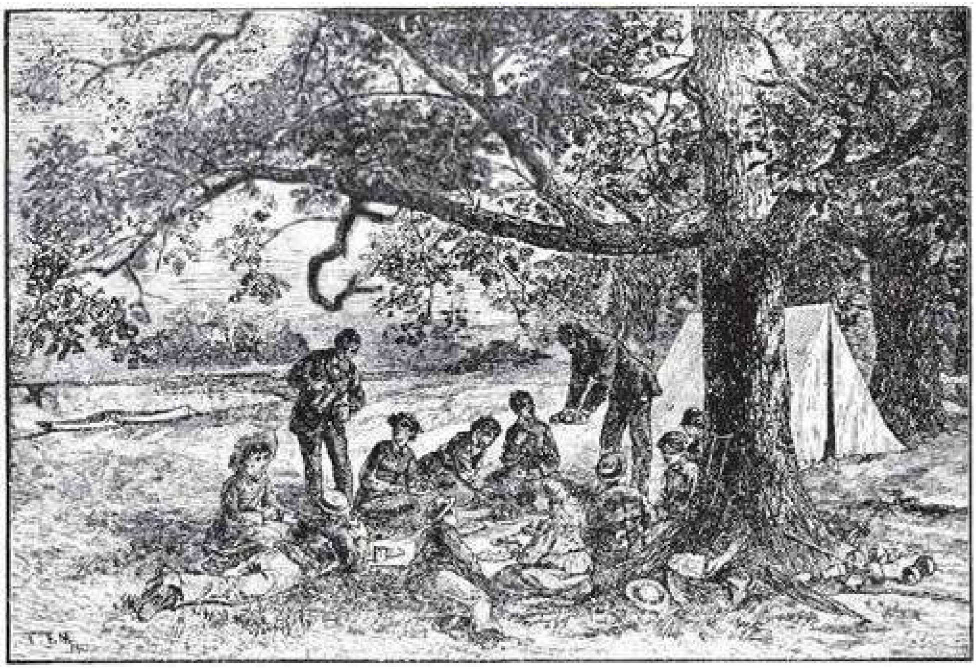
Meg drew her aside, under pretense of pinning up a loose braid, and said approvingly, “It was dreadfully provoking, but you kept your temper, and I’m so glad, Jo.”

“Don’t praise me, Meg, for I could box his ears this minute. I should certainly have boiled over if I hadn’t stayed among the nettles till I got my rage under control enough to hold my tongue. It’s simmering now, so I hope he’ll keep out of my way,” returned Jo, biting her lips as she glowered at Fred from under her big hat.

“Time for lunch,” said Mr. Brooke, looking at his watch. “Commissary general, will you make the fire and get water, while Miss March, Miss Sallie, and I spread the table? Who can make good coffee?”

“Jo can,” said Meg, glad to recommend her sister. So Jo, feeling that her late lessons in cookery were to do her honor, went to preside over the coffeepot, while the children collected dry sticks, and the boys made a fire and got water from a spring near by. Miss Kate sketched and Frank talked to Beth, who was making little mats of braided rushes to serve as plates.

The commander in chief and his aides soon spread the tablecloth with an inviting array of eatables and drinkables, prettily decorated with green leaves. Jo announced that the coffee was ready, and everyone settled themselves to a hearty meal, for youth is seldom dyspeptic, and exercise develops wholesome appetites. A very merry lunch it was, for everything seemed fresh and funny, and frequent peals of laughter startled a venerable horse who fed near by. There was a pleasing inequality in the table, which produced many mishaps to cups and plates, acorns dropped in the milk, little black ants partook of the refreshments without being invited, and fuzzy caterpillars swung down from the tree to see what was going on. Three white-headed children peeped over the fence, and an objectionable dog barked at them from the other side of the river with all his might and main.



“There’s salt here,” said Laurie, as he handed Jo a saucer of berries.

“Thank you, I prefer spiders,” she replied, fishing up two unwary little ones who had gone to a creamy death. “How dare you remind me of that horrid dinner party, when yours is so nice in every way?” added Jo, as they both laughed and ate out of one plate, the china having run short.

“I had an uncommonly good time that day, and haven’t got over it yet. This is no credit to me, you know, I don’t do anything. It’s you and Meg and Brooke who make it all go, and I’m no end obliged to you. What shall we do when we can’t eat anymore?” asked Laurie, feeling that his trump card had been played when lunch was over.

“Have games till it’s cooler. I brought Authors, and I dare say Miss Kate knows something new and nice. Go and ask her. She's company, and you ought to stay with her more."

"Aren't you company too? I thought she'd suit Brooke, but he keeps talking to Meg, and Kate just stares at them through that ridiculous glass of hers. I'm going, so you needn't try to preach propriety, for you can't do it, Jo."

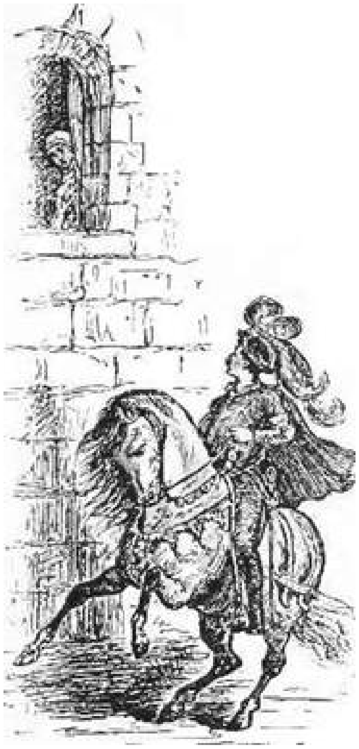
Miss Kate did know several new games, and as the girls would not, and the boys could not, eat any more, they all adjourned to the drawing room to play Rig-marole.

"One person begins a story, any nonsense you like, and tells as long as he pleases, only taking care to stop short at some exciting point, when the next takes it up and does the same. It's very funny when well done, and makes a perfect jumble of tragical comical stuff to laugh over. Please start it, Mr. Brooke," said Kate, with a commanding air, which surprised Meg, who treated the tutor with as much respect as any other gentleman.

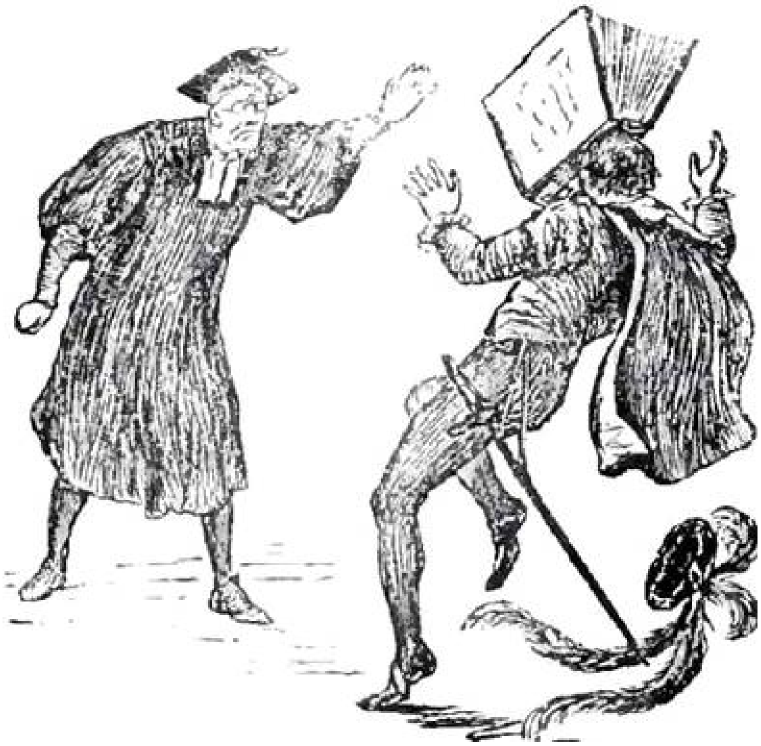
Lying on the grass at the feet of the two young ladies, Mr. Brooke obediently began the story, with the handsome brown eyes steadily fixed upon the sunshiny river.

"Once on a time, a knight went out into the world to seek his fortune, for he had nothing but his sword and his shield. He traveled a long while, nearly eight-and-twenty years, and had a hard time of it, till he came to the palace of a good old king, who had offered a reward to anyone who could tame and train a fine but unbroken colt, of which he was very fond. The knight agreed to try, and got on slowly but surely, for the colt was a gallant fellow, and soon learned to love his new master, though he was freakish and wild. Every day, when he gave his lessons to this pet of the king's, the knight rode him through the city, and as he rode, he looked everywhere for a certain beautiful face, which he had seen many times in his dreams, but never found. One day, as he went prancing down a quiet street, he saw at the window of a ruinous castle the lovely face. He was delighted, inquired who lived in this old castle, and was told that several captive princesses were kept there by a spell, and spun all day to lay up money to buy their liberty. The knight wished intensely that he could free them, but he was poor and could only go by each day, watching for the sweet face and longing to see it out in the sunshine. At last he resolved to get into the castle and ask how he could help them. He went and knocked. The great door flew open, and he beheld..."

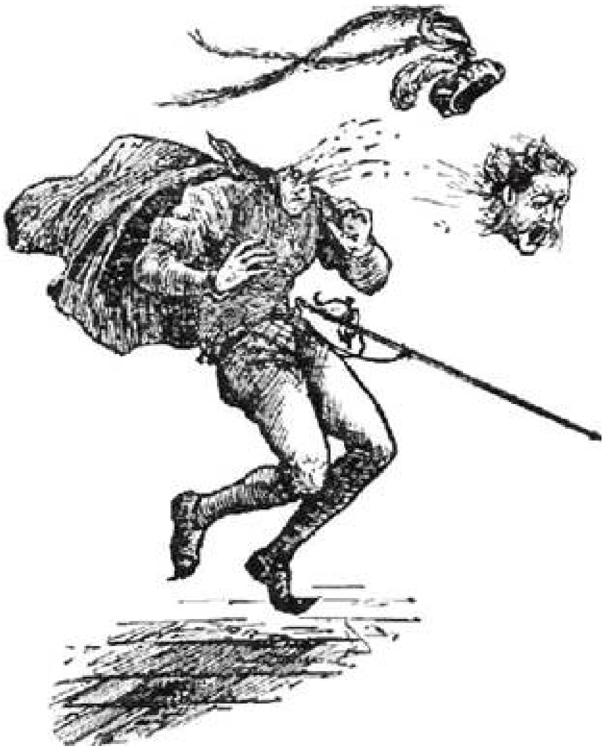
"A ravishingly lovely lady, who exclaimed, with a cry of rapture, 'At last! At last!'" continued Kate, who had read French novels, and admired the style. "'Tis she!' cried Count Gustave, and fell at her feet in an ecstasy of joy. 'Oh, rise!' she said, extending a hand of marble fairness. 'Never! Till you tell me how I may rescue you,' swore the knight, still kneeling. 'Alas, my cruel fate condemns me to remain here till my tyrant is destroyed.' 'Where is the villain?' 'In the mauve salon. Go, brave heart, and save me from despair.' 'I obey, and return victorious or dead!' With these thrilling words he rushed away, and flinging open the door of the mauve salon, was about to enter, when he received..."



"A stunning blow from the big Greek lexicon, which an old fellow in a black gown fired at him," said Ned. "Instantly, Sir What's-his-name recovered himself, pitched the tyrant out of the window, and turned to join the lady, victorious, but with a bump on his brow, found the door locked, tore up the curtains, made a rope ladder, got halfway down when the ladder broke, and he went headfirst into the moat, sixty feet below. Could swim like a duck, paddled round the castle till he came to a little door guarded by two stout fellows, knocked their heads together till they cracked like a couple of nuts, then, by a trifling exertion of his prodigious strength, he smashed in the door, went up a pair of stone steps covered with dust a foot thick, toads as big as your fist, and spiders that would frighten you into hysterics, Miss March. At the top of these steps he came plump upon a sight that took his breath away and chilled his blood..."



“A tall figure, all in white with a veil over its face and a lamp in its wasted hand,” went on Meg. “It beckoned, gliding noiselessly before him down a corridor as dark and cold as any tomb. Shadowy effigies in armor stood on either side, a dead silence reigned, the lamp burned blue, and the ghostly figure ever and anon turned its face toward him, showing the glitter of awful eyes through its white veil. They reached a curtained door, behind which sounded lovely music. He sprang forward to enter, but the specter plucked him back, and waved threateningly before him a...”



“Snuffbox,” said Jo, in a sepulchral tone, which convulsed the audience. “‘Thankee,’ said the knight politely, as he took a pinch and sneezed seven times so violently that his head fell off. ‘Ha! Ha!’ laughed the ghost, and having peeped through the keyhole at the princesses spinning away for dear life, the evil spirit picked up her victim and put him in a large tin box, where there were eleven other knights packed together without their heads, like sardines, who all rose and began to...”

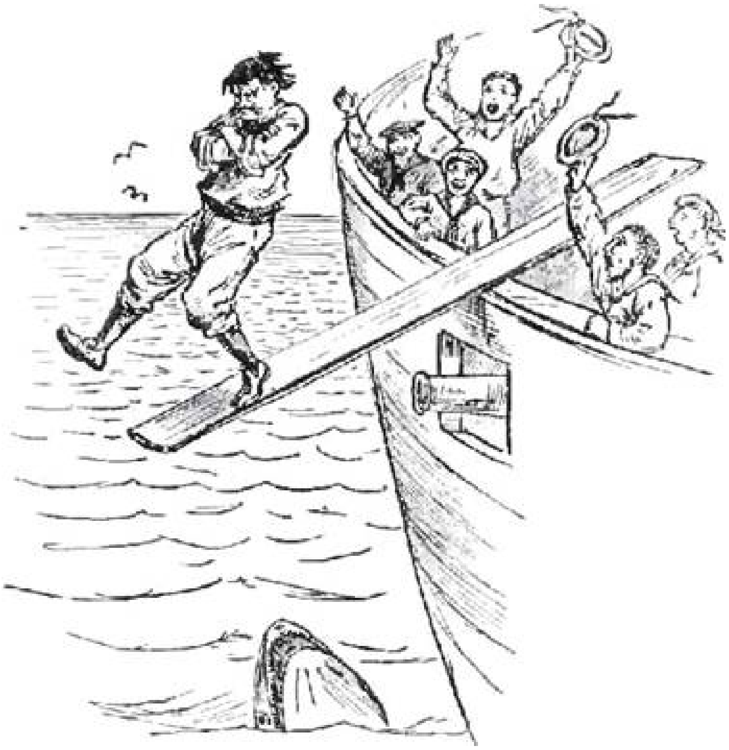
“Dance a hornpipe,” cut in Fred, as Jo paused for breath, “and, as they danced, the rubbishy old castle turned to a man-of-war in full sail. ‘Up with the jib, reef the tops’l halliards, helm hard alee, and man the guns!’ roared the captain, as a Portuguese pirate hove in sight, with a flag black as ink flying from her foremast. ‘Go in and win, my hearties!’ says the captain, and a tremendous fight began. Of course the British beat — they always do.”

“No, they don’t!” cried Jo, aside.

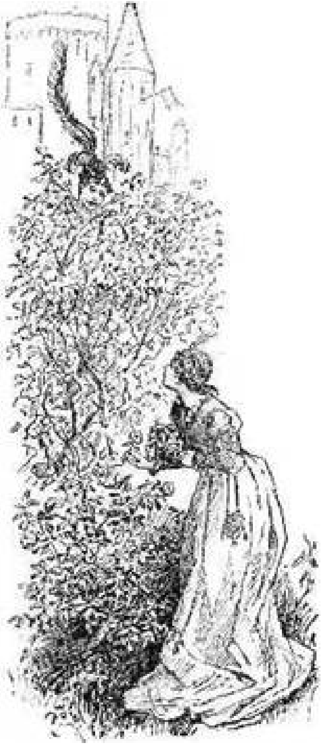
“Having taken the pirate captain prisoner, sailed slap over the schooner, whose decks were piled high with dead and whose lee scuppers ran blood, for the order had been ‘Cutlasses, and die hard!’ ‘Bosun’s mate, take a bight of the flying-jib sheet, and start this villain if he doesn’t confess his sins double quick,’ said the British captain. The Portuguese held his tongue like a brick, and walked the plank, while the jolly tars cheered like mad. But the sly dog dived, came up under the man-of-war, scuttled her, and down she went, with all sail set, ‘To the bottom of the sea, sea, sea’ where...”

“Oh, gracious! What shall I say?” cried Sallie, as Fred ended his rigmarole, in which he had jumbled together pell-mell nautical phrases and facts out of one of his favorite books. “Well, they went to the bottom, and a nice mermaid welcomed them, but was much grieved on finding the box of headless knights, and kindly pickled them in brine, hoping to discover the mystery about them, for being a woman, she was curious. By-and-by a diver came down, and the mermaid said, ‘I’ll give you a box of pearls if you can take it up,’ for she wanted to restore the poor things to life, and couldn’t raise the heavy load herself. So the diver hoisted it up, and was much disappointed on opening it to find no pearls. He left it in a great lonely field, where it was found by a...”

“Little goose girl, who kept a hundred fat geese in the field,” said Amy, when Sallie’s invention gave out. “The little girl was sorry for them, and asked an old woman what she should do to help them. ‘Your geese will tell you, they know everything.’ said the old woman. So she asked what she should use for new heads, since the old ones were lost, and all the geese opened their hundred mouths and screamed...”



“‘Cabbages!’“ continued Laurie promptly. “‘Just the thing,’ said the girl, and ran to get twelve fine ones from her garden. She put them on, the knights revived at once, thanked her, and went on their way rejoicing, never knowing the difference, for there were so many other heads like them in the world that no one thought anything of it. The knight in whom I’m interested went back to find the pretty face, and learned that the princesses had spun themselves free and all gone and married, but one. He was in a great state of mind at that, and mounting the colt, who stood by him through thick and thin, rushed to the castle to see which was left. Peeping over the hedge, he saw the queen of his affections picking flowers in her garden. ‘Will you give me a rose?’ said he. ‘You must come and get it. I can’t come to you, it isn’t proper,’ said she, as sweet as honey. He tried to climb over the hedge, but it seemed to grow higher and higher. Then he tried to push through, but it grew thicker and thicker, and he was in despair. So he patiently broke twig after twig till he had made a little hole through which he peeped, saying imploringly, ‘Let me in! Let me in!’ But the pretty princess did not seem to understand, for she picked her roses quietly, and left him to fight his way in. Whether he did or not, Frank will tell you.”



“I can’t. I’m not playing, I never do,” said Frank, dismayed at the sentimental predicament out of which he was to rescue the absurd couple. Beth had disappeared behind Jo, and Grace was asleep.

“So the poor knight is to be left sticking in the hedge, is he?” asked Mr. Brooke, still watching the river, and playing with the wild rose in his buttonhole.

“I guess the princess gave him a posy, and opened the gate after a while,” said Laurie, smiling to himself, as he threw acorns at his tutor.

“What a piece of nonsense we have made! With practice we might do something quite clever. Do you know Truth?”

“I hope so,” said Meg soberly.

“The game, I mean?”

“What is it?” said Fred.

“Why, you pile up your hands, choose a number, and draw out in turn, and the person who draws at the number has to answer truly any question put by the rest. It’s great fun.”

“Let’s try it,” said Jo, who liked new experiments.

Miss Kate and Mr. Brooke, Meg, and Ned declined, but Fred, Sallie, Jo, and Laurie piled and drew, and the lot fell to Laurie.

“Who are your heroes?” asked Jo.

“Grandfather and Napoleon.”

“Which lady here do you think prettiest?” said Sallie.

“Margaret.”

“Which do you like best?” from Fred.

“Jo, of course.”

“What silly questions you ask!” And Jo gave a disdainful shrug as the rest laughed at Laurie’s matter-of-fact tone.

“Try again. Truth isn’t a bad game,” said Fred.

“It’s a very good one for you,” retorted Jo in a low voice. Her turn came next.

“What is your greatest fault?” asked Fred, by way of testing in her the virtue he lacked himself.

“A quick temper.”

“What do you most wish for?” said Laurie.

“A pair of boot lacings,” returned Jo, guessing and defeating his purpose.

“Not a true answer. You must say what you really do want most.”

“Genius. Don’t you wish you could give it to me, Laurie?” And she slyly smiled in his disappointed face.

“What virtues do you most admire in a man?” asked Sallie.

“Courage and honesty.”

“Now my turn,” said Fred, as his hand came last.

“Let’s give it to him,” whispered Laurie to Jo, who nodded and asked at once...

“Didn’t you cheat at croquet?”

“Well, yes, a little bit.”

“Good! Didn’t you take your story out of *The Sea Lion?*” said Laurie.

“Rather.”

“Don’t you think the English nation perfect in every respect?” asked Sallie.

“I should be ashamed of myself if I didn’t.”

“He’s a true John Bull. Now, Miss Sallie, you shall have a chance without waiting to draw. I’ll harrrow up your feelings first by asking if you don’t think you are something of a flirt,” said Laurie, as Jo nodded to Fred as a sign that peace was declared.

“You impertinent boy! Of course I’m not,” exclaimed Sallie, with an air that proved the contrary.

“What do you hate most?” asked Fred.

“Spiders and rice pudding.”

“What do you like best?” asked Jo.

“Dancing and French gloves.”

“Well, I think Truth is a very silly play. Let’s have a sensible game of Authors to refresh our minds,” proposed Jo.

Ned, Frank, and the little girls joined in this, and while it went on, the three elders sat apart, talking. Miss Kate took out her sketch again, and Margaret watched her, while Mr. Brooke lay on the grass with a book, which he did not read.

“How beautifully you do it! I wish I could draw,” said Meg, with mingled admiration and regret in her voice.

“Why don’t you learn? I should think you had taste and talent for it,” replied Miss Kate graciously.

“I haven’t time.”

“Your mamma prefers other accomplishments, I fancy. So did mine, but I proved to her that I had talent by taking a few lessons privately, and then she was quite willing I should go on. Can’t you do the same with your governess?”

“I have none.”

“I forgot young ladies in America go to school more than with us. Very fine schools they are, too, Papa says. You go to a private one, I suppose?”

“I don’t go at all. I am a governess myself.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Miss Kate, but she might as well have said, “Dear me, how dreadful!” for her tone implied it, and something in her face made Meg color, and wish she had not been so frank.

Mr. Brooke looked up and said quickly, “Young ladies in America love independence as much as their ancestors did, and are admired and respected for supporting themselves.”

“Oh, yes, of course it’s very nice and proper in them to do so. We have many most respectable and worthy young women who do the same and are employed by the nobility, because, being the daughters of gentlemen, they are both well bred and accomplished, you know,” said Miss Kate in a patronizing tone that hurt Meg’s pride, and made her work seem not only more distasteful, but degrading.

“Did the German song suit, Miss March?” inquired Mr. Brooke, breaking an awkward pause.

“Oh, yes! It was very sweet, and I’m much obliged to whoever translated it for me.” And Meg’s downcast face brightened as she spoke.

“Don’t you read German?” asked Miss Kate with a look of surprise.

“Not very well. My father, who taught me, is away, and I don’t get on very fast alone, for I’ve no one to correct my pronunciation.”

“Try a little now. Here is Schiller’s Mary Stuart and a tutor who loves to teach.” And Mr. Brooke laid his book on her lap with an inviting smile.

“It’s so hard I’m afraid to try,” said Meg, grateful, but bashful in the presence of the accomplished young lady beside her.

“I’ll read a bit to encourage you.” And Miss Kate read one of the most beautiful passages in a perfectly correct but perfectly expressionless manner.

Mr. Brooke made no comment as she returned the book to Meg, who said innocently, “I thought it was poetry.”

“Some of it is. Try this passage.”

There was a queer smile about Mr. Brooke’s mouth as he opened at poor Mary’s lament.

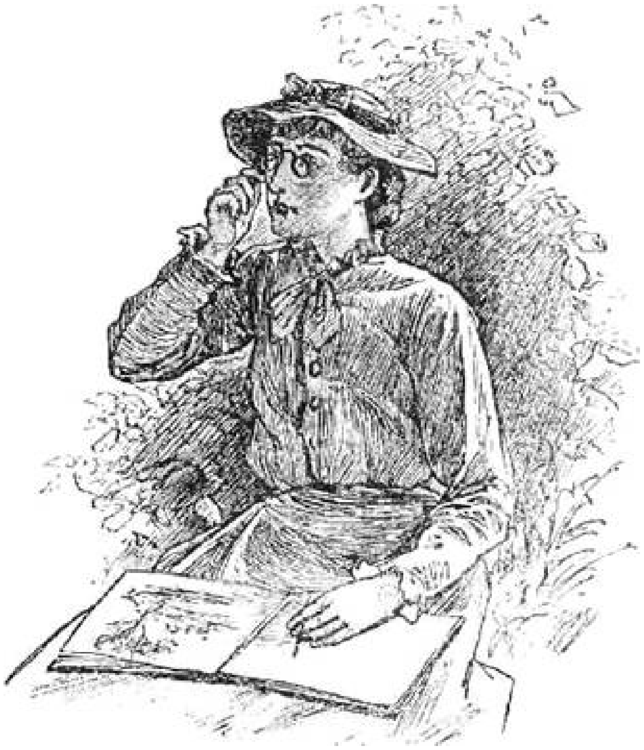
Meg obediently following the long grass-blade which her new tutor used to point with, read slowly and timidly, unconsciously making poetry of the hard words by the soft intonation of her musical voice. Down the page went the green guide, and presently, forgetting her listener in the beauty of the sad scene, Meg read as if alone, giving a little touch of tragedy to the words of the unhappy queen. If she had seen the brown eyes then, she would have stopped short, but she never looked up, and the lesson was not spoiled for her.

“Very well indeed!” said Mr. Brooke, as she paused, quite ignoring her many mistakes, and looking as if he did indeed love to teach.

Miss Kate put up her glass, and, having taken a survey of the little tableau before her, shut her sketch book, saying with condescension, “You’ve a nice accent and in time will be a clever reader. I advise you to learn, for German is a valuable accomplishment to teachers. I must look after Grace, she is romping.” And Miss Kate strolled away, adding to herself with a shrug, “I didn’t come to chaperone a governess, though she is young and pretty. What odd people these Yankees are. I’m afraid Laurie will be quite spoiled among them.”

“I forgot that English people rather turn up their noses at governesses and don’t treat them as we do,” said Meg, looking after the retreating figure with an annoyed expression.

“Tutors also have rather a hard time of it there, as I know to my sorrow. There’s no place like America for us workers, Miss Margaret.” And Mr. Brooke looked so contented and cheerful that Meg was ashamed to lament her hard lot.



"I'm glad I live in it then. I don't like my work, but I get a good deal of satisfaction out of it after all, so I won't complain. I only wished I liked teaching as you do."

"I think you would if you had Laurie for a pupil. I shall be very sorry to lose him next year," said Mr. Brooke, busily punching holes in the turf.

"Going to college, I suppose?" Meg's lips asked the question, but her eyes added, "And what becomes of you?"

"Yes, it's high time he went, for he is ready, and as soon as he is off, I shall turn soldier. I am needed."

"I am glad of that!" exclaimed Meg. "I should think every young man would want to go, though it is hard for the mothers and sisters who stay at home," she added sorrowfully.

"I have neither, and very few friends to care whether I live or die," said Mr. Brooke rather bitterly as he absently put the dead rose in the hole he had made and covered it up, like a little grave.

"Laurie and his grandfather would care a great deal, and we should all be very sorry to have any harm happen to you," said Meg heartily.

"Thank you, that sounds pleasant," began Mr. Brooke, looking cheerful again, but before he could finish his speech, Ned, mounted on the old horse, came lumbering up to display his equestrian skill before the young ladies, and there was no more quiet that day.

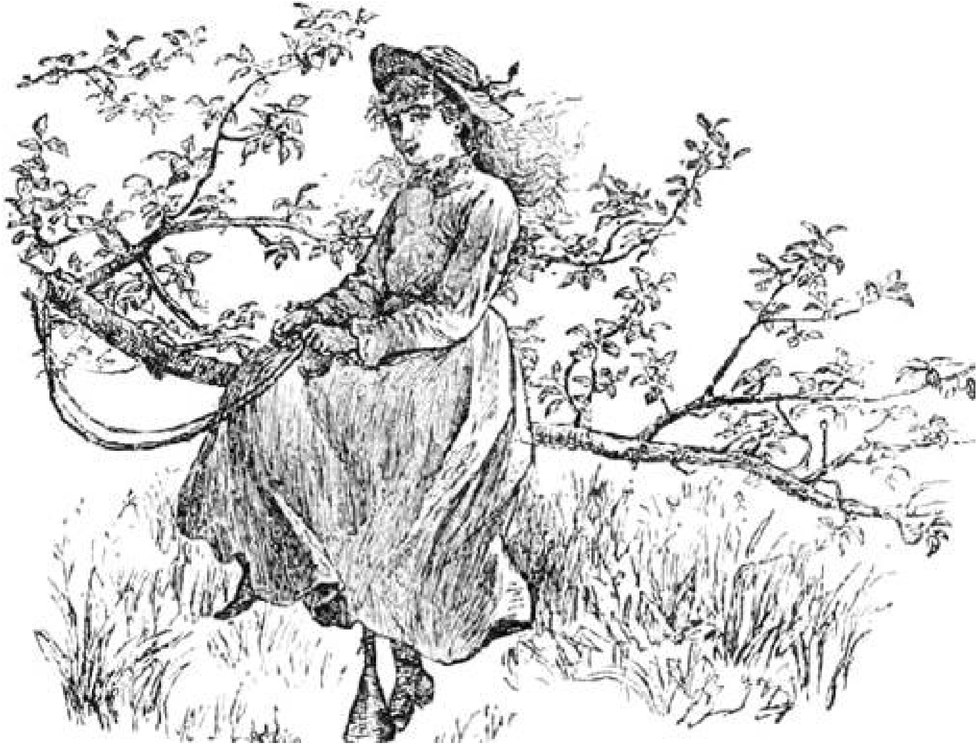
"Don't you love to ride?" asked Grace of Amy, as they stood resting after a race round the field with the others, led by Ned.

"I dote upon it. My sister, Meg, used to ride when Papa was rich, but we don't keep any horses now, except Ellen Tree," added Amy, laughing.

"Tell me about Ellen Tree. Is it a donkey?" asked Grace curiously.

"Why, you see, Jo is crazy about horses and so am I, but we've only got an old sidesaddle and no horse. Out in our garden is an apple tree that has a nice low branch, so Jo put the saddle on it, fixed some reins on the part that turns up, and we bounce away on Ellen Tree whenever we like."

"How funny!" laughed Grace. "I have a pony at home, and ride nearly every day in the park with Fred and Kate. It's very nice, for my friends go too, and the Row is full of ladies and gentlemen."



"Dear, how charming! I hope I shall go abroad some day, but I'd rather go to Rome than the Row," said Amy, who had not the remotest idea what the Row was and wouldn't have asked for the world.

Frank, sitting just behind the little girls, heard what they were saying, and pushed his crutch away from him with an impatient gesture as he watched the active lads going through all sorts of comical gymnastics. Beth, who was collecting the scattered Author cards, looked up and said, in her shy yet friendly way, "I'm afraid you are tired. Can I do anything for you?"

"Talk to me, please. It's dull, sitting by myself," answered Frank, who had evidently been used to being made much of at home.

If he asked her to deliver a Latin oration, it would not have seemed a more impossible task to bashful Beth, but there was no place to run to, no Jo to hide behind now, and the poor boy looked so wistfully at her that she bravely resolved to try.

“What do you like to talk about?” she asked, fumbling over the cards and dropping half as she tried to tie them up.

“Well, I like to hear about cricket and boating and hunting,” said Frank, who had not yet learned to suit his amusements to his strength.

My heart! What shall I do? I don’t know anything about them, thought Beth, and forgetting the boy’s misfortune in her flurry, she said, hoping to make him talk, “I never saw any hunting, but I suppose you know all about it.”

“I did once, but I can never hunt again, for I got hurt leaping a confounded five-barred gate, so there are no more horses and hounds for me,” said Frank with a sigh that made Beth hate herself for her innocent blunder.

“Your deer are much prettier than our ugly buffaloes,” she said, turning to the prairies for help and feeling glad that she had read one of the boys’ books in which Jo delighted.

Buffaloes proved soothing and satisfactory, and in her eagerness to amuse another, Beth forgot herself, and was quite unconscious of her sisters’ surprise and delight at the unusual spectacle of Beth talking away to one of the dreadful boys, against whom she had begged protection.

“Bless her heart! She pities him, so she is good to him,” said Jo, beaming at her from the croquet ground.

“I always said she was a little saint,” added Meg, as if there could be no further doubt of it.

“I haven’t heard Frank laugh so much for ever so long,” said Grace to Amy, as they sat discussing dolls and making tea sets out of the acorn cups.

“My sister Beth is a very fastidious girl, when she likes to be,” said Amy, well pleased at Beth’s success. She meant ‘facinating’, but as Grace didn’t know the exact meaning of either word, fastidious sounded well and made a good impression.

An impromptu circus, fox and geese, and an amicable game of croquet finished the afternoon. At sunset the tent was struck, hampers packed, wickets pulled up, boats loaded, and the whole party floated down the river, singing at the tops of their voices. Ned, getting sentimental, warbled a serenade with the pensive refrain...

Alone, alone, ah! Woe, alone,

and at the lines...

We each are young, we each have a heart, Oh, why should we stand thus coldly apart?

he looked at Meg with such a lackadiasical expression that she laughed outright and spoiled his song.

“How can you be so cruel to me?” he whispered, under cover of a lively chorus. “You’ve kept close to that starched-up Englishwoman all day, and now you snub me.”

“I didn’t mean to, but you looked so funny I really couldn’t help it,” replied Meg, passing over the first part of his reproach, for it was quite true that she had shunned him, remembering the Moffat party and the talk after it.

Ned was offended and turned to Sallie for consolation, saying to her rather pettishly, “There isn’t a bit of flirt in that girl, is there?”

“Not a particle, but she’s a dear,” returned Sallie, defending her friend even while confessing her shortcomings.

“She’s not a stricken deer anyway,” said Ned, trying to be witty, and succeeding as well as very young gentlemen usually do.

On the lawn where it had gathered, the little party separated with cordial good nights and good-byes, for the Vaughns were going to Canada. As the four sisters went home through the garden, Miss Kate looked after them, saying, without the patronizing tone in her voice, “In spite of their demonstrative manners, American girls are very nice when one knows them.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Mr. Brooke.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CASTLES IN THE AIR

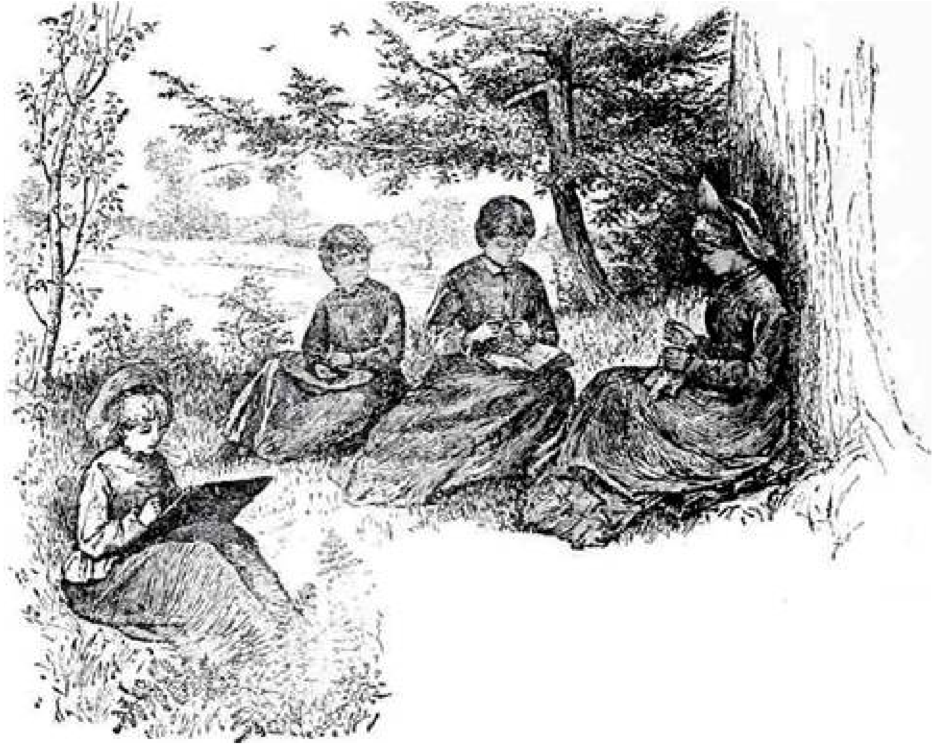
Laurie lay luxuriously swinging to and fro in his hammock one warm September afternoon, wondering what his neighbors were about, but too lazy to go and find out. He was in one of his moods, for the day had been both unprofitable and unsatisfactory, and he was wishing he could live it over again. The hot weather made him indolent, and he had shirked his studies, tried Mr. Brooke's patience to the utmost, displeased his grandfather by practicing half the afternoon, frightened the maidservants half out of their wits by mischievously hinting that one of his dogs was going mad, and, after high words with the stableman about some fancied neglect of his horse, he had flung himself into his hammock to fume over the stupidity of the world in general, till the peace of the lovely day quieted him in spite of himself. Staring up into the green gloom of the horse-chestnut trees above him, he dreamed dreams of all sorts, and was just imagining himself tossing on the ocean in a voyage round the world, when the sound of voices brought him ashore in a flash. Peeping through the meshes of the hammock, he saw the Marches coming out, as if bound on some expedition.

"What in the world are those girls about now?" thought Laurie, opening his sleepy eyes to take a good look, for there was something rather peculiar in the appearance of his neighbors. Each wore a large, flapping hat, a brown linen pouch slung over one shoulder, and carried a long staff. Meg had a cushion, Jo a book, Beth a basket, and Amy a portfolio. All walked quietly through the garden, out at the little back gate, and began to climb the hill that lay between the house and river.

"Well, that's cool," said Laurie to himself, "to have a picnic and never ask me! They can't be going in the boat, for they haven't got the key. Perhaps they forgot it. I'll take it to them, and see what's going on."

Though possessed of half a dozen hats, it took him some time to find one, then there was a hunt for the key, which was at last discovered in his pocket, so that the girls were quite out of sight when he leaped the fence and ran after them. Taking the shortest way to the boathouse, he waited for them to appear, but no one came, and he went up the hill to take an observation. A grove of pines covered one part of it, and from the heart of this green spot came a clearer sound than the soft sigh of the pines or the drowsy chirp of the crickets.

"Here's a landscape!" thought Laurie, peeping through the bushes, and looking wide-awake and good-natured already.



It was a rather pretty little picture, for the sisters sat together in the shady nook, with sun and shadow flickering over them, the aromatic wind lifting their hair and cooling their hot cheeks, and all the little wood people going on with their affairs as if these were no strangers but old friends. Meg sat upon her cushion, sewing daintily with her white hands, and looking as fresh and sweet as a rose in her pink dress among the green. Beth was sorting the cones that lay thick under the hemlock near by, for she made pretty things with them. Amy was sketching a group of ferns, and Jo was knitting as she read aloud. A shadow passed over the boy’s face as he watched them, feeling that he ought to go away because uninvited; yet lingering because home seemed very lonely and this quiet party in the woods most attractive to his restless spirit. He stood so still that a squirrel, busy with its harvesting, ran down a pine close beside him, saw him suddenly and skipped back, scolding so shrilly that Beth looked up, espied the wistful face behind the birches, and beckoned with a reassuring smile.

“May I come in, please? Or shall I be a bother?” he asked, advancing slowly.

Meg lifted her eyebrows, but Jo scowled at her defiantly and said at once, “Of course you may. We should have asked you before, only we thought you wouldn’t care for such a girl’s game as this.”

“I always like your games, but if Meg doesn’t want me, I’ll go away.”

“I’ve no objection, if you do something. It’s against the rules to be idle here,” replied Meg gravely but graciously.

“Much obliged. I’ll do anything if you’ll let me stop a bit, for it’s as dull as the Desert of Sahara down there. Shall I sew, read, cone, draw, or do all at once? Bring on your bears. I’m ready.” And Laurie sat down with a submissive expression delightful to behold.

“Finish this story while I set my heel,” said Jo, handing him the book.

“Yes’m.” was the meek answer, as he began, doing his best to prove his gratitude for the favor of admission into the ‘Busy Bee Society’.

The story was not a long one, and when it was finished, he ventured to ask a few questions as a reward of merit.

“Please, ma’am, could I inquire if this highly instructive and charming institution is a new one?”

“Would you tell him?” asked Meg of her sisters.

“He’ll laugh,” said Amy warningly.

“Who cares?” said Jo.

“I guess he’ll like it,” added Beth.

“Of course I shall! I give you my word I won’t laugh. Tell away, Jo, and don’t be afraid.”

“The idea of being afraid of you! Well, you see we used to play Pilgrim’s Progress, and we have been going on with it in earnest, all winter and summer.”

“Yes, I know,” said Laurie, nodding wisely.

“Who told you?” demanded Jo.

“Spirits.”

“No, I did. I wanted to amuse him one night when you were all away, and he was rather dismal. He did like it, so don’t scold, Jo,” said Beth meekly.

“You can’t keep a secret. Never mind, it saves trouble now.”

“Go on, please,” said Laurie, as Jo became absorbed in her work, looking a trifle displeased.

“Oh, didn’t she tell you about this new plan of ours? Well, we have tried not to waste our holiday, but each has had a task and worked at it with a will. The vacation is nearly over, the stints are all done, and we are ever so glad that we didn’t dawdle.”

“Yes, I should think so,” and Laurie thought regretfully of his own idle days.

“Mother likes to have us out-of-doors as much as possible, so we bring our work here and have nice times. For the fun of it we bring our things in these bags, wear the old hats, use poles to climb the hill, and play pilgrims, as we used to do years ago. We call this hill the Delectable Mountain, for we can look far away and see the country where we hope to live some time.”

Jo pointed, and Laurie sat up to examine, for through an opening in the wood one could look cross the wide, blue river, the meadows on the other side, far over the outskirts of the great city, to the green hills that rose to meet the sky. The sun was low, and the heavens glowed with the splendor of an autumn sunset. Gold and purple clouds lay on the hilltops, and rising high into the ruddy light were silvery white peaks that shone like the airy spires of some Celestial City.

"How beautiful that is!" said Laurie softly, for he was quick to see and feel beauty of any kind.

"It's often so, and we like to watch it, for it is never the same, but always splendid," replied Amy, wishing she could paint it.

"Jo talks about the country where we hope to live sometime — the real country, she means, with pigs and chickens and haymaking. It would be nice, but I wish the beautiful country up there was real, and we could ever go to it," said Beth musingly.

"There is a lovelier country even than that, where we shall go, by-and-by, when we are good enough," answered Meg with her sweetest voice.

"It seems so long to wait, so hard to do. I want to fly away at once, as those swallows fly, and go in at that splendid gate."

"You'll get there, Beth, sooner or later, no fear of that," said Jo. "I'm the one that will have to fight and work, and climb and wait, and maybe never get in after all."

"You'll have me for company, if that's any comfort. I shall have to do a deal of traveling before I come in sight of your Celestial City. If I arrive late, you'll say a good word for me, won't you, Beth?"

Something in the boy's face troubled his little friend, but she said cheerfully, with her quiet eyes on the changing clouds, "If people really want to go, and really try all their lives, I think they will get in, for I don't believe there are any locks on that door or any guards at the gate. I always imagine it is as it is in the picture, where the shining ones stretch out their hands to welcome poor Christian as he comes up from the river."

"Wouldn't it be fun if all the castles in the air which we make could come true, and we could live in them?" said Jo, after a little pause.

"I've made such quantities it would be hard to choose which I'd have," said Laurie, lying flat and throwing cones at the squirrel who had betrayed him.

"You'd have to take your favorite one. What is it?" asked Meg.

"If I tell mine, will you tell yours?"

"Yes, if the girls will too."

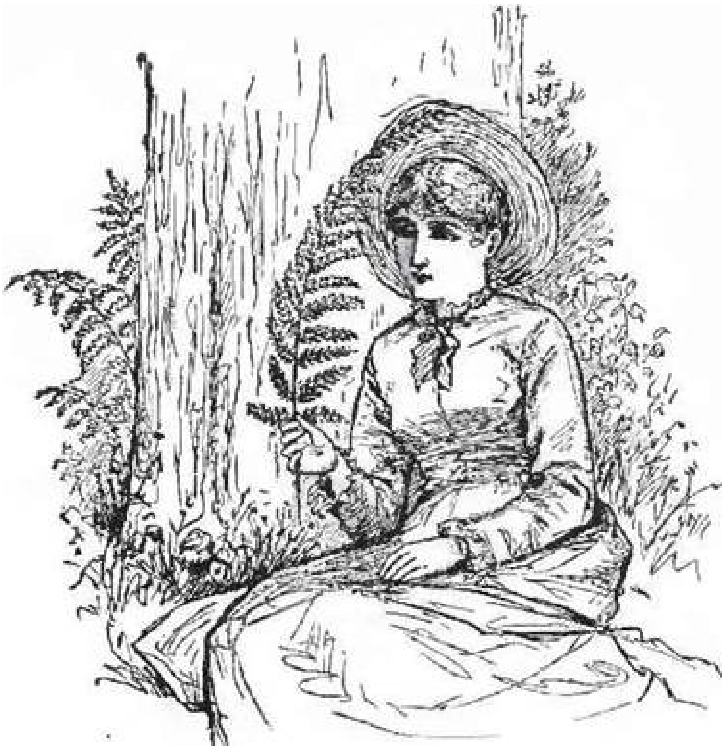
"We will. Now, Laurie."

"After I'd seen as much of the world as I want to, I'd like to settle in Germany and have just as much music as I choose. I'm to be a famous musician myself, and all creation is to rush to hear me. And I'm never to be bothered about money or business, but just enjoy myself and live for what I like. That’s my favorite castle. What’s yours, Meg?”

Margaret seemed to find it a little hard to tell hers, and waved a brake before her face, as if to disperse imaginary gnats, while she said slowly, “I should like a lovely house, full of all sorts of luxurious things — nice food, pretty clothes, handsome furniture, pleasant people, and heaps of money. I am to be mistress of it, and manage it as I like, with plenty of servants, so I never need work a bit. How I should enjoy it! For I wouldn’t be idle, but do good, and make everyone love me dearly.”

“Wouldn’t you have a master for your castle in the air?” asked Laurie slyly.

“I said ‘pleasant people’, you know,” and Meg carefully tied up her shoe as she spoke, so that no one saw her face.



“Why don’t you say you’d have a splendid, wise, good husband and some angelic little children? You know your castle wouldn’t be perfect without,” said blunt Jo, who had no tender fancies yet, and rather scorned romance, except in books.

“You’d have nothing but horses, inkstands, and novels in yours,” answered Meg petulantly.

“Wouldn’t I though? I’d have a stable full of Arabian steeds, rooms piled high with books, and I’d write out of a magic inkstand, so that my works should be as famous as Laurie’s music. I want to do something splendid before I go into my castle, something heroic or wonderful that won’t be forgotten after I’m dead. I don’t know what, but I’m on the watch for it, and mean to astonish you all some day. I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous, that would suit me, so that is my favorite dream.”

“Mine is to stay at home safe with Father and Mother, and help take care of the family,” said Beth contentedly.

“Don’t you wish for anything else?” asked Laurie.

“Since I had my little piano, I am perfectly satisfied. I only wish we may all keep well and be together, nothing else.”

“I have ever so many wishes, but the pet one is to be an artist, and go to Rome, and do fine pictures, and be the best artist in the whole world,” was Amy’s modest desire.

“We’re an ambitious set, aren’t we? Every one of us, but Beth, wants to be rich and famous, and gorgeous in every respect. I do wonder if any of us will ever get our wishes,” said Laurie, chewing grass like a meditative calf.

“I’ve got the key to my castle in the air, but whether I can unlock the door remains to be seen,” observed Jo mysteriously.

“I’ve got the key to mine, but I’m not allowed to try it. Hang college!” muttered Laurie with an impatient sigh.

“Here’s mine!” and Amy waved her pencil.

“I haven’t got any,” said Meg forlornly.

“Yes, you have,” said Laurie at once.

“Where?”

“In your face.”

“Nonsense, that’s of no use.”

“Wait and see if it doesn’t bring you something worth having,” replied the boy, laughing at the thought of a charming little secret which he fancied he knew.

Meg colored behind the brake, but asked no questions and looked across the river with the same expectant expression which Mr. Brooke had worn when he told the story of the knight.

“If we are all alive ten years hence, let’s meet, and see how many of us have got our wishes, or how much nearer we are then than now,” said Jo, always ready with a plan.

“Bless me! How old I shall be, twenty-seven!” exclaimed Meg, who felt grown up already, having just reached seventeen.

“You and I will be twenty-six, Teddy, Beth twenty-four, and Amy twenty-two. What a venerable party!” said Jo.

“I hope I shall have done something to be proud of by that time, but I’m such a lazy dog, I’m afraid I shall dawdle, Jo.”

"You need a motive, Mother says, and when you get it, she is sure you'll work splendidly."

"Is she? By Jupiter, I will, if I only get the chance!" cried Laurie, sitting up with sudden energy. "I ought to be satisfied to please Grandfather, and I do try, but it's working against the grain, you see, and comes hard. He wants me to be an India merchant, as he was, and I'd rather be shot. I hate tea and silk and spices, and every sort of rubbish his old ships bring, and I don't care how soon they go to the bottom when I own them. Going to college ought to satisfy him, for if I give him four years he ought to let me off from the business. But he's set, and I've got to do just as he did, unless I break away and please myself, as my father did. If there was anyone left to stay with the old gentleman, I'd do it tomorrow."

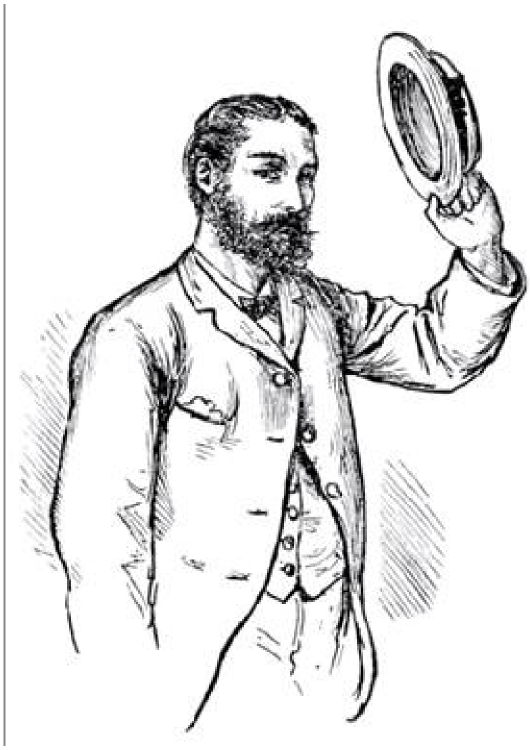
Laurie spoke excitedly, and looked ready to carry his threat into execution on the slightest provocation, for he was growing up very fast and, in spite of his indolent ways, had a young man's hatred of subjection, a young man's restless longing to try the world for himself.

"I advise you to sail away in one of your ships, and never come home again till you have tried your own way," said Jo, whose imagination was fired by the thought of such a daring exploit, and whose sympathy was excited by what she called 'Teddy's Wrongs'.

"That's not right, Jo. You mustn't talk in that way, and Laurie mustn't take your bad advice. You should do just what your grandfather wishes, my dear boy," said Meg in her most maternal tone. "Do your best at college, and when he sees that you try to please him, I'm sure he won't be hard on you or unjust to you. As you say, there is no one else to stay with and love him, and you'd never forgive yourself if you left him without his permission. Don't be dismal or fret, but do your duty and you'll get your reward, as good Mr. Brooke has, by being respected and loved."

"What do you know about him?" asked Laurie, grateful for the good advice, but objecting to the lecture, and glad to turn the conversation from himself after his unusual outbreak.

"Only what your grandpa told us about him, how he took good care of his own mother till she died, and wouldn't go abroad as tutor to some nice person because he wouldn't leave her. And how he provides now for an old woman who nursed his mother, and never tells anyone, but is just as generous and patient and good as he can be."



“So he is, dear old fellow!” said Laurie heartily, as Meg paused, looking flushed and earnest with her story. “It’s like Grandpa to find out all about him without letting him know, and to tell all his goodness to others, so that they might like him. Brooke couldn’t understand why your mother was so kind to him, asking him over with me and treating him in her beautiful friendly way. He thought she was just perfect, and talked about it for days and days, and went on about you all in flaming style. If ever I do get my wish, you see what I’ll do for Brooke.”

“Begin to do something now by not plaguing his life out,” said Meg sharply.

“How do you know I do, Miss?”

“I can always tell by his face when he goes away. If you have been good, he looks satisfied and walks briskly. If you have plagued him, he’s sober and walks slowly, as if he wanted to go back and do his work better.”

“Well, I like that? So you keep an account of my good and bad marks in Brooke’s face, do you? I see him bow and smile as he passes your window, but I didn’t know you’d got up a telegraph.”

“We haven’t. Don’t be angry, and oh, don’t tell him I said anything! It was only to show that I cared how you get on, and what is said here is said in confidence, you know,” cried Meg, much alarmed at the thought of what might follow from her careless speech.

“I don’t tell tales,” replied Laurie, with his ‘high and mighty’ air, as Jo called a certain expression which he occasionally wore. “Only if Brooke is going to be a thermometer, I must mind and have fair weather for him to report.”

“Please don’t be offended. I didn’t mean to preach or tell tales or be silly. I only thought Jo was encouraging you in a feeling which you’d be sorry for by-and-by. You are so kind to us, we feel as if you were our brother and say just what we think. Forgive me, I meant it kindly.” And Meg offered her hand with a gesture both affectionate and timid.

Ashamed of his momentary pique, Laurie squeezed the kind little hand, and said frankly, “I’m the one to be forgiven. I’m cross and have been out of sorts all day. I like to have you tell me my faults and be sisterly, so don’t mind if I am grumpy sometimes. I thank you all the same.”

Bent on showing that he was not offended, he made himself as agreeable as possible, wound cotton for Meg, recited poetry to please Jo, shook down cones for Beth, and helped Amy with her ferns, proving himself a fit person to belong to the ‘Busy Bee Society’. In the midst of an animated discussion on the domestic habits of turtles (one of those amiable creatures having strolled up from the river), the faint sound of a bell warned them that Hannah had put the tea ‘to draw’, and they would just have time to get home to supper.

“May I come again?” asked Laurie.

“Yes, if you are good, and love your book, as the boys in the primer are told to do,” said Meg, smiling.

“I’ll try.”

“Then you may come, and I’ll teach you to knit as the Scotchmen do. There’s a demand for socks just now,” added Jo, waving hers like a big blue worsted banner as they parted at the gate.

That night, when Beth played to Mr. Laurence in the twilight, Laurie, standing in the shadow of the curtain, listened to the little David, whose simple music always quieted his moody spirit, and watched the old man, who sat with his gray head on his hand, thinking tender thoughts of the dead child he had loved so much. Remembering the conversation of the afternoon, the boy said to himself, with the resolve to make the sacrifice cheerfully, “I’ll let my castle go, and stay with the dear old gentleman while he needs me, for I am all he has.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SECRETS

Jo was very busy in the garret, for the October days began to grow chilly, and the afternoons were short. For two or three hours the sun lay warmly in the high window, showing Jo seated on the old sofa, writing busily, with her papers spread out upon a trunk before her, while Scrabble, the pet rat, promenaded the beams overhead, accompanied by his oldest son, a fine young fellow, who was evidently very proud of his whiskers. Quite absorbed in her work, Jo scribbled away till the last page was filled, when she signed her name with a flourish and threw down her pen, exclaiming...

"There, I've done my best! If this won't suit I shall have to wait till I can do better."

Lying back on the sofa, she read the manuscript carefully through, making dashes here and there, and putting in many exclamation points, which looked like little balloons. Then she tied it up with a smart red ribbon, and sat a minute looking at it with a sober, wistful expression, which plainly showed how earnest her work had been. Jo's desk up here was an old tin kitchen which hung against the wall. In it she kept her papers, and a few books, safely shut away from Scrabble, who, being likewise of a literary turn, was fond of making a circulating library of such books as were left in his way by eating the leaves. From this tin receptacle Jo produced another manuscript, and putting both in her pocket, crept quietly downstairs, leaving her friends to nibble on her pens and taste her ink.

She put on her hat and jacket as noiselessly as possible, and going to the back entry window, got out upon the roof of a low porch, swung herself down to the grassy bank, and took a roundabout way to the road. Once there, she composed herself, hailed a passing omnibus, and rolled away to town, looking very merry and mysterious.

If anyone had been watching her, he would have thought her movements decidedly peculiar, for on alighting, she went off at a great pace till she reached a certain number in a certain busy street. Having found the place with some difficulty, she went into the doorway, looked up the dirty stairs, and after standing stock still a minute, suddenly dived into the street and walked away as rapidly as she came. This maneuver she repeated several times, to the great amusement of a black-eyed young gentleman lounging in the window of a building opposite. On returning for the third time, Jo gave herself a shake, pulled her hat over her eyes, and walked up the stairs, looking as if she were going to have all her teeth out.

There was a dentist's sign, among others, which adorned the entrance, and after staring a moment at the pair of artificial jaws which slowly opened and shut to draw attention to a fine set of teeth, the young gentleman put on his coat, took his hat, and went down to post himself in the opposite doorway, saying with a smile and a shiver, "It's like her to come alone, but if she has a bad time she'll need someone to help her home."

In ten minutes Jo came running downstairs with a very red face and the general appearance of a person who had just passed through a trying ordeal of some sort. When she saw the young gentleman she looked anything but pleased, and passed him with a nod. But he followed, asking with an air of sympathy, "Did you have a bad time?"

"Not very."

"You got through quickly."

"Yes, thank goodness!"

"Why did you go alone?"

"Didn't want anyone to know."

"You're the oddest fellow I ever saw. How many did you have out?"

Jo looked at her friend as if she did not understand him, then began to laugh as if mightily amused at something.

"There are two which I want to have come out, but I must wait a week."

"What are you laughing at? You are up to some mischief, Jo," said Laurie, looking mystified.

"So are you. What were you doing, sir, up in that billiard saloon?"

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, it wasn't a billiard saloon, but a gymnasium, and I was taking a lesson in fencing."

"I'm glad of that."

"Why?"

"You can teach me, and then when we play *Hamlet*, you can be Laertes, and we'll make a fine thing of the fencing scene."

Laurie burst out with a hearty boy's laugh, which made several passers-by smile in spite of themselves.

"I'll teach you whether we play *Hamlet* or not. It's grand fun and will straighten you up capitally. But I don't believe that was your only reason for saying 'I'm glad' in that decided way, was it now?"

"No, I was glad that you were not in the saloon, because I hope you never go to such places. Do you?"

"Not often."

“I wish you wouldn’t.”

“It’s no harm, Jo. I have billiards at home, but it’s no fun unless you have good players, so, as I’m fond of it, I come sometimes and have a game with Ned Moffat or some of the other fellows.”

“Oh, dear, I’m so sorry, for you’ll get to liking it better and better, and will waste time and money, and grow like those dreadful boys. I did hope you’d stay respectable and be a satisfaction to your friends,” said Jo, shaking her head.

“Can’t a fellow take a little innocent amusement now and then without losing his respectability?” asked Laurie, looking nettled.

“That depends upon how and where he takes it. I don’t like Ned and his set, and wish you’d keep out of it. Mother won’t let us have him at our house, though he wants to come. And if you grow like him she won’t be willing to have us frolic together as we do now.”

“Won’t she?” asked Laurie anxiously.

“No, she can’t bear fashionable young men, and she’d shut us all up in bandboxes rather than have us associate with them.”

“Well, she needn’t get out her bandboxes yet. I’m not a fashionable party and don’t mean to be, but I do like harmless larks now and then, don’t you?”

“Yes, nobody minds them, so lark away, but don’t get wild, will you? Or there will be an end of all our good times.”

“I’ll be a double distilled saint.”

“I can’t bear saints. Just be a simple, honest, respectable boy, and we’ll never desert you. I don’t know what I should do if you acted like Mr. King’s son. He had plenty of money, but didn’t know how to spend it, and got tipsy and gambled, and ran away, and forged his father’s name, I believe, and was altogether horrid.”

“You think I’m likely to do the same? Much obliged.”

“No, I don’t — oh, dear, no! — but I hear people talking about money being such a temptation, and I sometimes wish you were poor. I shouldn’t worry then.”

“Do you worry about me, Jo?”

“A little, when you look moody and discontented, as you sometimes do, for you’ve got such a strong will, if you once get started wrong, I’m afraid it would be hard to stop you.”

Laurie walked in silence a few minutes, and Jo watched him, wishing she had held her tongue, for his eyes looked angry, though his lips smiled as if at her warnings.

“Are you going to deliver lectures all the way home?” he asked presently.

“Of course not. Why?”

“Because if you are, I’ll take a bus. If you’re not, I’d like to walk with you and tell you something very interesting.”

“I won’t preach any more, and I’d like to hear the news immensely.”

“Very well, then, come on. It’s a secret, and if I tell you, you must tell me yours.”

“I haven’t got any,” began Jo, but stopped suddenly, remembering that she had.

“You know you have — you can’t hide anything, so up and ‘fess, or I won’t tell,” cried Laurie.

“Is your secret a nice one?”

“Oh, isn’t it! All about people you know, and such fun! You ought to hear it, and I’ve been aching to tell it this long time. Come, you begin.”

“You’ll not say anything about it at home, will you?”

“Not a word.”

“And you won’t tease me in private?”

“I never tease.”

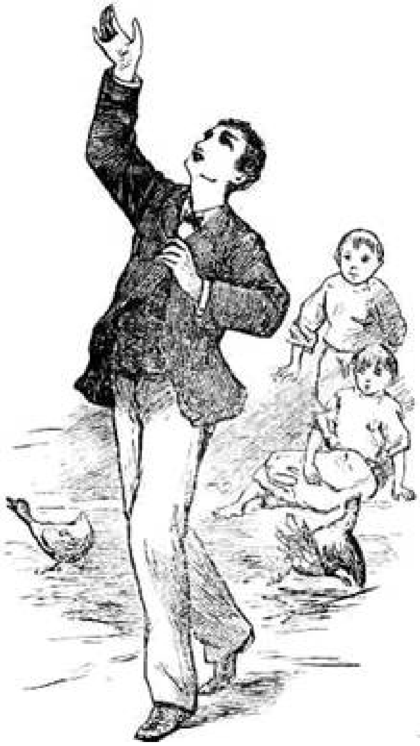
“Yes, you do. You get everything you want out of people. I don’t know how you do it, but you are a born wheedler.”

“Thank you. Fire away.”

“Well, I’ve left two stories with a newspaperman, and he’s to give his answer next week,” whispered Jo, in her confidant’s ear.

“Hurrah for Miss March, the celebrated American authoress!” cried Laurie, throwing up his hat and catching it again, to the great delight of two ducks, four cats, five hens, and half a dozen Irish children, for they were out of the city now.

“Hush! It won’t come to anything, I dare say, but I couldn’t rest till I had tried, and I said nothing about it because I didn’t want anyone else to be disappointed.”



“It won’t fail. Why, Jo, your stories are works of Shakespeare compared to half the rubbish that is published every day. Won’t it be fun to see them in print, and shan’t we feel proud of our authoress?”

Jo’s eyes sparkled, for it is always pleasant to be believed in, and a friend’s praise is always sweeter than a dozen newspaper puffs.

“Where’s your secret? Play fair, Teddy, or I’ll never believe you again,” she said, trying to extinguish the brilliant hopes that blazed up at a word of encouragement.

“I may get into a scrape for telling, but I didn’t promise not to, so I will, for I never feel easy in my mind till I’ve told you any plummy bit of news I get. I know where Meg’s glove is.”

“Is that all?” said Jo, looking disappointed, as Laurie nodded and twinkled with a face full of mysterious intelligence.

“It’s quite enough for the present, as you’ll agree when I tell you where it is.”

“Tell, then.”

Laurie bent, and whispered three words in Jo’s ear, which produced a comical change. She stood and stared at him for a minute, looking both surprised and displeased, then walked on, saying sharply, “How do you know?”

“Saw it.”

“Where?”

“Pocket.”

“All this time?”

“Yes, isn’t that romantic?”

“No, it’s horrid.”

“Don’t you like it?”

“Of course I don’t. It’s ridiculous, it won’t be allowed. My patience! What would Meg say?”

“You are not to tell anyone. Mind that.”

“I didn’t promise.”

“That was understood, and I trusted you.”

“Well, I won’t for the present, anyway, but I’m disgusted, and wish you hadn’t told me.”

“I thought you’d be pleased.”

“At the idea of anybody coming to take Meg away? No, thank you.”

“You’ll feel better about it when somebody comes to take you away.”

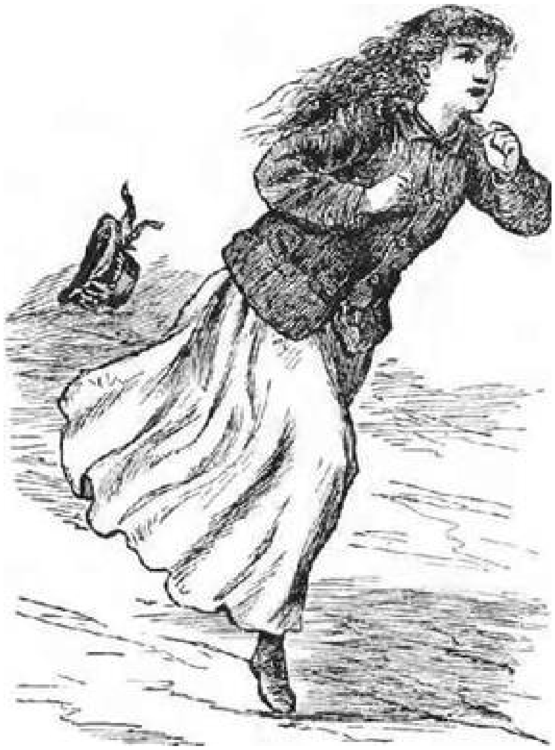
“I’d like to see anyone try it,” cried Jo fiercely.

“So should I!” and Laurie chuckled at the idea.

“I don’t think secrets agree with me, I feel rumpled up in my mind since you told me that,” said Jo rather ungratefully.

“Race down this hill with me, and you’ll be all right,” suggested Laurie.

No one was in sight, the smooth road sloped invitingly before her, and finding the temptation irresistible, Jo darted away, soon leaving hat and comb behind her and scattering hairpins as she ran. Laurie reached the goal first and was quite satisfied with the success of his treatment, for his Atlanta came panting up with flying hair, bright eyes, ruddy cheeks, and no signs of dissatisfaction in her face.



“I wish I was a horse, then I could run for miles in this splendid air, and not lose my breath. It was capital, but see what a guy it’s made me. Go, pick up my things, like a cherub, as you are,” said Jo, dropping down under a maple tree, which was carpeting the bank with crimson leaves.

Laurie leisurely departed to recover the lost property, and Jo bundled up her braids, hoping no one would pass by till she was tidy again. But someone did pass, and who should it be but Meg, looking particularly ladylike in her state and festival suit, for she had been making calls.

“What in the world are you doing here?” she asked, regarding her disheveled sister with well-bred surprise.

“Getting leaves,” meekly answered Jo, sorting the rosy handful she had just swept up.

“And hairpins,” added Laurie, throwing half a dozen into Jo’s lap. “They grow on this road, Meg, so do combs and brown straw hats.”

“You have been running, Jo. How could you? When will you stop such romping ways?” said Meg reprovingly, as she settled her cuffs and smoothed her hair, with which the wind had taken liberties.

“Never till I’m stiff and old and have to use a crutch. Don’t try to make me grow up before my time, Meg. It’s hard enough to have you change all of a sudden. Let me be a little girl as long as I can.”

As she spoke, Jo bent over the leaves to hide the trembling of her lips, for lately she had felt that Margaret was fast getting to be a woman, and Laurie’s secret made her dread the separation which must surely come some time and now seemed very near. He saw the trouble in her face and drew Meg's attention from it by asking quickly, "Where have you been calling, all so fine?"

"At the Gardiners', and Sallie has been telling me all about Belle Moffat's wedding. It was very splendid, and they have gone to spend the winter in Paris. Just think how delightful that must be!"

"Do you envy her, Meg?" said Laurie.

"I'm afraid I do."

"I'm glad of it!" muttered Jo, tying on her hat with a jerk.

"Why?" asked Meg, looking surprised.

"Because if you care much about riches, you will never go and marry a poor man," said Jo, frowning at Laurie, who was mutely warning her to mind what she said.

"I shall never '*go* and marry' anyone," observed Meg, walking on with great dignity while the others followed, laughing, whispering, skipping stones, and 'behaving like children', as Meg said to herself, though she might have been tempted to join them if she had not had her best dress on.

For a week or two, Jo behaved so queerly that her sisters were quite bewildered. She rushed to the door when the postman rang, was rude to Mr. Brooke whenever they met, would sit looking at Meg with a woe-begone face, occasionally jumping up to shake and then kiss her in a very mysterious manner. Laurie and she were always making signs to one another, and talking about 'Spread Eagles' till the girls declared they had both lost their wits. On the second Saturday after Jo got out of the window, Meg, as she sat sewing at her window, was scandalized by the sight of Laurie chasing Jo all over the garden and finally capturing her in Amy's bower. What went on there, Meg could not see, but shrieks of laughter were heard, followed by the murmur of voices and a great flapping of newspapers.

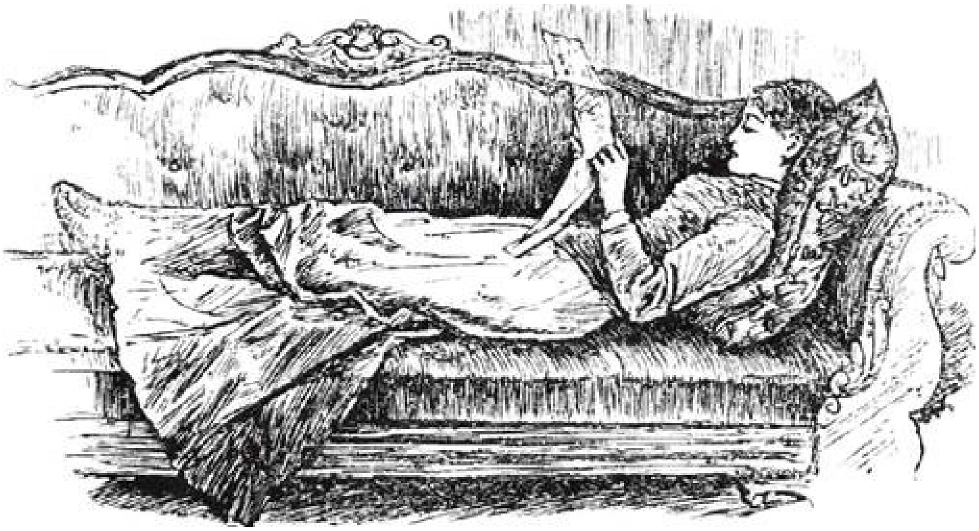
"What shall we do with that girl? She never *will* behave like a young lady," sighed Meg, as she watched the race with a disapproving face.

"I hope she won't. She is so funny and dear as she is," said Beth, who had never betrayed that she was a little hurt at Jo's having secrets with anyone but her.

"It's very trying, but we never can make her *commy la fo*," added Amy, who sat making some new frills for herself, with her curls tied up in a very becoming way, two agreeable things that made her feel unusually elegant and ladylike.

In a few minutes Jo bounced in, laid herself on the sofa, and affected to read.

"Have you anything interesting there?" asked Meg, with condescension.



“Nothing but a story, won’t amount to much, I guess,” returned Jo, carefully keeping the name of the paper out of sight.

“You’d better read it aloud. That will amuse us and keep you out of mischief,” said Amy in her most grown-up tone.

“What’s the name?” asked Beth, wondering why Jo kept her face behind the sheet.

“The Rival Painters.”

“That sounds well. Read it,” said Meg.

With a loud “Hem!” and a long breath, Jo began to read very fast.

(**Please note**: this short story was actually published in 1852 by Alcott herself, aged 19. To read the short story now, before continuing the novel, please click on this link.)

The girls listened with interest, for the tale was romantic, and somewhat pathetic, as most of the characters died in the end. “I like that about the splendid picture,” was Amy’s approving remark, as Jo paused.

“I prefer the lovering part. Viola and Angelo are two of our favorite names, isn’t that queer?” said Meg, wiping her eyes, for the lovering part was tragical.

“Who wrote it?” asked Beth, who had caught a glimpse of Jo’s face.

The reader suddenly sat up, cast away the paper, displaying a flushed countenance, and with a funny mixture of solemnity and excitement replied in a loud voice, “Your sister.”

“You?” cried Meg, dropping her work.

“It’s very good,” said Amy critically.

“I knew it! I knew it! Oh, my Jo, I am so proud!” and Beth ran to hug her sister and exult over this splendid success.

Dear me, how delighted they all were, to be sure! How Meg wouldn’t believe it till she saw the words. “Miss Josephine March,” actually printed in the paper. How graciously Amy criticized the artistic parts of the story, and offered hints for a sequel, which unfortunately couldn’t be carried out, as the hero and heroine were dead. How Beth got excited, and skipped and sang with joy. How Hannah came in to exclaim, “Sakes alive, well I never!” in great astonishment at ‘that Jo’s doin’s’. How proud Mrs. March was when she knew it. How Jo laughed, with tears in her eyes, as she declared she might as well be a peacock and done with it, and how the ‘Spread Eagle’ might be said to flap his wings triumphantly over the House of March, as the paper passed from hand to hand.

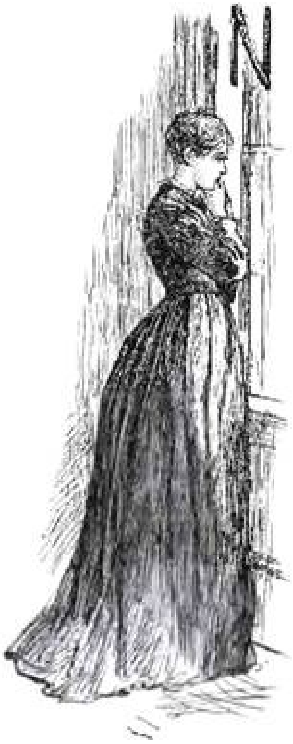
“Tell us about it.” “When did it come?” “How much did you get for it?” “What will Father say?” “Won’t Laurie laugh?” cried the family, all in one breath as they clustered about Jo, for these foolish, affectionate people made a jubilee of every little household joy.

“Stop jabbering, girls, and I’ll tell you everything,” said Jo, wondering if Miss Burney felt any grander over her Evelina than she did over her ‘Rival Painters’. Having told how she disposed of her tales, Jo added, “And when I went to get my answer, the man said he liked them both, but didn’t pay beginners, only let them print in his paper, and noticed the stories. It was good practice, he said, and when the beginners improved, anyone would pay. So I let him have the two stories, and today this was sent to me, and Laurie caught me with it and insisted on seeing it, so I let him. And he said it was good, and I shall write more, and he’s going to get the next paid for, and I am so happy, for in time I may be able to support myself and help the girls.”

Jo’s breath gave out here, and wrapping her head in the paper, she bedewed her little story with a few natural tears, for to be independent and earn the praise of those she loved were the dearest wishes of her heart, and this seemed to be the first step toward that happy end.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A TELEGRAM



“November is the most disagreeable month in the whole year,” said Margaret, standing at the window one dull afternoon, looking out at the frostbitten garden.

“That’s the reason I was born in it,” observed Jo pensively, quite unconscious of the blot on her nose.

“If something very pleasant should happen now, we should think it a delightful month,” said Beth, who took a hopeful view of everything, even November.

“I dare say, but nothing pleasant ever does happen in this family,” said Meg, who was out of sorts. “We go grubbing along day after day, without a bit of change, and very little fun. We might as well be in a treadmill.”

“My patience, how blue we are!” cried Jo. “I don’t much wonder, poor dear, for you see other girls having splendid times, while you grind, grind, year in and year out. Oh, don’t I wish I could manage things for you as I do for my heroines! You’re pretty enough and good enough already, so I’d have some rich relation leave you a fortune unexpectedly. Then you’d dash out as an heiress, scorn everyone who has slighted you, go abroad, and come home my Lady Something in a blaze of splendor and elegance."

"People don't have fortunes left them in that style nowadays, men have to work and women marry for money. It's a dreadfully unjust world," said Meg bitterly.

"Jo and I are going to make fortunes for you all. Just wait ten years, and see if we don't," said Amy, who sat in a corner making mud pies, as Hannah called her little clay models of birds, fruit, and faces.

"Can't wait, and I'm afraid I haven't much faith in ink and dirt, though I'm grateful for your good intentions."

Meg sighed, and turned to the frostbitten garden again. Jo groaned and leaned both elbows on the table in a despondent attitude, but Amy spatted away energetically, and Beth, who sat at the other window, said, smiling, "Two pleasant things are going to happen right away. Marmee is coming down the street, and Laurie is tramping through the garden as if he had something nice to tell."

In they both came, Mrs. March with her usual question, "Any letter from Father, girls?" and Laurie to say in his persuasive way, "Won't some of you come for a drive? I've been working away at mathematics till my head is in a muddle, and I'm going to freshen my wits by a brisk turn. It's a dull day, but the air isn't bad, and I'm going to take Brooke home, so it will be gay inside, if it isn't out. Come, Jo, you and Beth will go, won't you?"

"Of course we will."

"Much obliged, but I'm busy." And Meg whisked out her workbasket, for she had agreed with her mother that it was best, for her at least, not to drive too often with the young gentleman.

"We three will be ready in a minute," cried Amy, running away to wash her hands.

"Can I do anything for you, Madam Mother?" asked Laurie, leaning over Mrs. March's chair with the affectionate look and tone he always gave her.

"No, thank you, except call at the office, if you'll be so kind, dear. It's our day for a letter, and the postman hasn't been. Father is as regular as the sun, but there's some delay on the way, perhaps."

A sharp ring interrupted her, and a minute after Hannah came in with a letter.

"It's one of them horrid telegraph things, mum," she said, handling it as if she was afraid it would explode and do some damage.

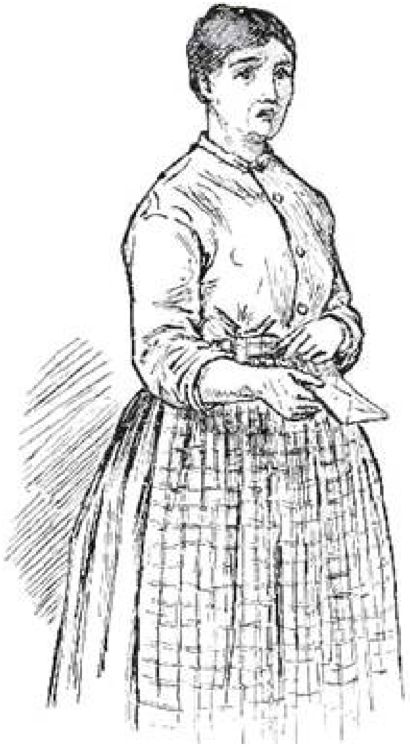
At the word 'telegraph', Mrs. March snatched it, read the two lines it contained, and dropped back into her chair as white as if the little paper had sent a bullet to her heart. Laurie dashed downstairs for water, while Meg and Hannah supported her, and Jo read aloud, in a frightened voice...

Mrs. March:
Your husband is very ill. Come at once.
S. HALE
Blank Hospital, Washington.

How still the room was as they listened breathlessly, how strangely the day darkened outside, and how suddenly the whole world seemed to change, as the girls gathered about their mother, feeling as if all the happiness and support of their lives was about to be taken from them.

Mrs. March was herself again directly, read the message over, and stretched out her arms to her daughters, saying, in a tone they never forgot, “I shall go at once, but it may be too late. Oh, children, children, help me to bear it!”

For several minutes there was nothing but the sound of sobbing in the room, mingled with broken words of comfort, tender assurances of help, and hopeful whispers that died away in tears. Poor Hannah was the first to recover, and with unconscious wisdom she set all the rest a good example, for with her, work was panacea for most afflictions.



“The Lord keep the dear man! I won’t waste no time a-cryin’, but git your things ready right away, mum,” she said heartily, as she wiped her face on her apron, gave her mistress a warm shake of the hand with her own hard one, and went away to work like three women in one.

“She’s right, there’s no time for tears now. Be calm, girls, and let me think.”

They tried to be calm, poor things, as their mother sat up, looking pale but steady, and put away her grief to think and plan for them.

“Where’s Laurie?” she asked presently, when she had collected her thoughts and decided on the first duties to be done.

“Here, ma’am. Oh, let me do something!” cried the boy, hurrying from the next room whither he had withdrawn, feeling that their first sorrow was too sacred for even his friendly eyes to see.

“Send a telegram saying I will come at once. The next train goes early in the morning. I’ll take that.”

“What else? The horses are ready. I can go anywhere, do anything,” he said, looking ready to fly to the ends of the earth.

“Leave a note at Aunt March’s. Jo, give me that pen and paper.”

Tearing off the blank side of one of her newly copied pages, Jo drew the table before her mother, well knowing that money for the long, sad journey must be borrowed, and feeling as if she could do anything to add a little to the sum for her father.

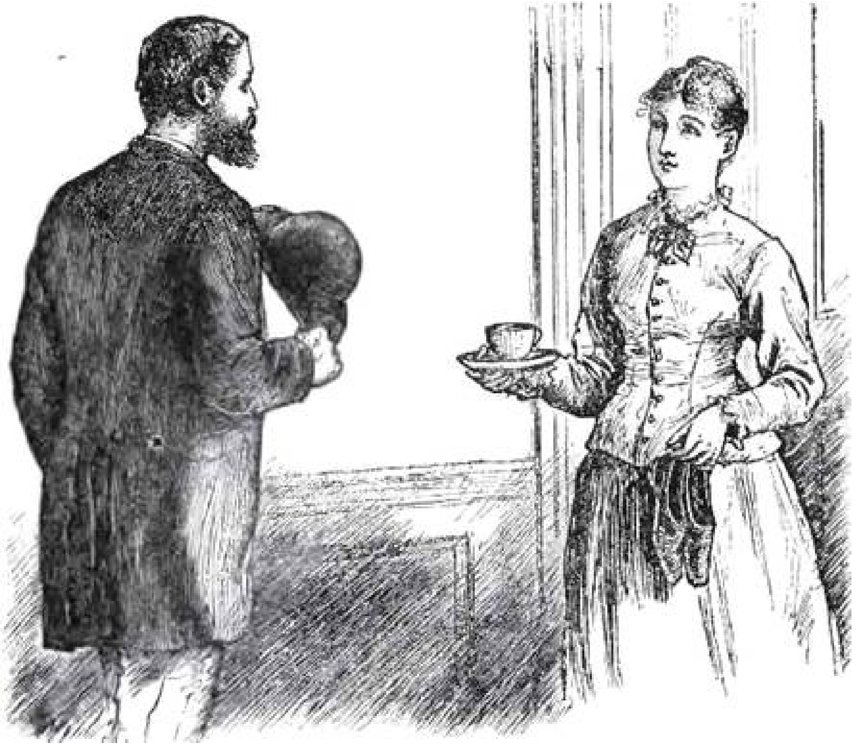
“Now go, dear, but don’t kill yourself driving at a desperate pace. There is no need of that.”

Mrs. March’s warning was evidently thrown away, for five minutes later Laurie tore by the window on his own fleet horse, riding as if for his life.

“Jo, run to the rooms, and tell Mrs. King that I can’t come. On the way get these things. I’ll put them down, they’ll be needed and I must go prepared for nursing. Hospital stores are not always good. Beth, go and ask Mr. Laurence for a couple of bottles of old wine. I’m not too proud to beg for Father. He shall have the best of everything. Amy, tell Hannah to get down the black trunk, and Meg, come and help me find my things, for I’m half bewildered.”

Writing, thinking, and directing all at once might well bewilder the poor lady, and Meg begged her to sit quietly in her room for a little while, and let them work. Everyone scattered like leaves before a gust of wind, and the quiet, happy household was broken up as suddenly as if the paper had been an evil spell.

Mr. Laurence came hurrying back with Beth, bringing every comfort the kind old gentleman could think of for the invalid, and friendliest promises of protection for the girls during the mother’s absence, which comforted her very much. There was nothing he didn’t offer, from his own dressing gown to himself as escort. But the last was impossible. Mrs. March would not hear of the old gentleman’s undertaking the long journey, yet an expression of relief was visible when he spoke of it, for anxiety ill fits one for traveling. He saw the look, knit his heavy eyebrows, rubbed his hands, and marched abruptly away, saying he'd be back directly. No one had time to think of him again till, as Meg ran through the entry, with a pair of rubbers in one hand and a cup of tea in the other, she came suddenly upon Mr. Brooke.



"I'm very sorry to hear of this, Miss March," he said, in the kind, quiet tone which sounded very pleasantly to her perturbed spirit. "I came to offer myself as escort to your mother. Mr. Laurence has commissions for me in Washington, and it will give me real satisfaction to be of service to her there."

Down dropped the rubbers, and the tea was very near following, as Meg put out her hand, with a face so full of gratitude that Mr. Brooke would have felt repaid for a much greater sacrifice than the trifling one of time and comfort which he was about to take.

"How kind you all are! Mother will accept, I'm sure, and it will be such a relief to know that she has someone to take care of her. Thank you very, very much!"

Meg spoke earnestly, and forgot herself entirely till something in the brown eyes looking down at her made her remember the cooling tea, and lead the way into the parlor, saying she would call her mother.

Everything was arranged by the time Laurie returned with a note from Aunt March, enclosing the desired sum, and a few lines repeating what she had often said before, that she had always told them it was absurd for March to go into the army, always predicted that no good would come of it, and she hoped they would take her advice the next time. Mrs. March put the note in the fire, the money in her purse, and went on with her preparations, with her lips folded tightly in a way which Jo would have understood if she had been there.

The short afternoon wore away. All other errands were done, and Meg and her mother busy at some necessary needlework, while Beth and Amy got tea, and Hannah finished her ironing with what she called a ‘slap and a bang’, but still Jo did not come. They began to get anxious, and Laurie went off to find her, for no one knew what freak Jo might take into her head. He missed her, however, and she came walking in with a very queer expression of countenance, for there was a mixture of fun and fear, satisfaction and regret in it, which puzzled the family as much as did the roll of bills she laid before her mother, saying with a little choke in her voice, “That’s my contribution toward making Father comfortable and bringing him home!”

“My dear, where did you get it? Twenty-five dollars! Jo, I hope you haven’t done anything rash?”

“No, it’s mine honestly. I didn’t beg, borrow, or steal it. I earned it, and I don’t think you’ll blame me, for I only sold what was my own.”

As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet, and a general outcry arose, for all her abundant hair was cut short.

“Your hair! Your beautiful hair!” “Oh, Jo, how could you? Your one beauty.” “My dear girl, there was no need of this.” “She doesn’t look like my Jo any more, but I love her dearly for it!”

As everyone exclaimed, and Beth hugged the cropped head tenderly, Jo assumed an indifferent air, which did not deceive anyone a particle, and said, rumpling up the brown bush and trying to look as if she liked it, “It doesn’t affect the fate of the nation, so don’t wail, Beth. It will be good for my vanity, I was getting too proud of my wig. It will do my brains good to have that mop taken off. My head feels deliciously light and cool, and the barber said I could soon have a curly crop, which will be boyish, becoming, and easy to keep in order. I’m satisfied, so please take the money and let’s have supper.”

“Tell me all about it, Jo. I am not quite satisfied, but I can’t blame you, for I know how willingly you sacrificed your vanity, as you call it, to your love. But, my dear, it was not necessary, and I’m afraid you will regret it one of these days,” said Mrs. March.

“No, I won’t!” returned Jo stoutly, feeling much relieved that her prank was not entirely condemned.

“What made you do it?” asked Amy, who would as soon have thought of cutting off her head as her pretty hair.

“Well, I was wild to do something for Father,” replied Jo, as they gathered about the table, for healthy young people can eat even in the midst of trouble. “I hate to borrow as much as Mother does, and I knew Aunt March would croak, she always does, if you ask for a ninepence. Meg gave all her quarterly salary toward the rent, and I only got some clothes with mine, so I felt wicked, and was bound to have some money, if I sold the nose off my face to get it.”

“You needn’t feel wicked, my child! You had no winter things and got the simplest with your own hard earnings,” said Mrs. March with a look that warmed Jo’s heart.

“I hadn’t the least idea of selling my hair at first, but as I went along I kept thinking what I could do, and feeling as if I’d like to dive into some of the rich stores and help myself. In a barber’s window I saw tails of hair with the prices marked, and one black tail, not so thick as mine, was forty dollars. It came to me all of a sudden that I had one thing to make money out of, and without stopping to think, I walked in, asked if they bought hair, and what they would give for mine.”

“I don’t see how you dared to do it,” said Beth in a tone of awe.

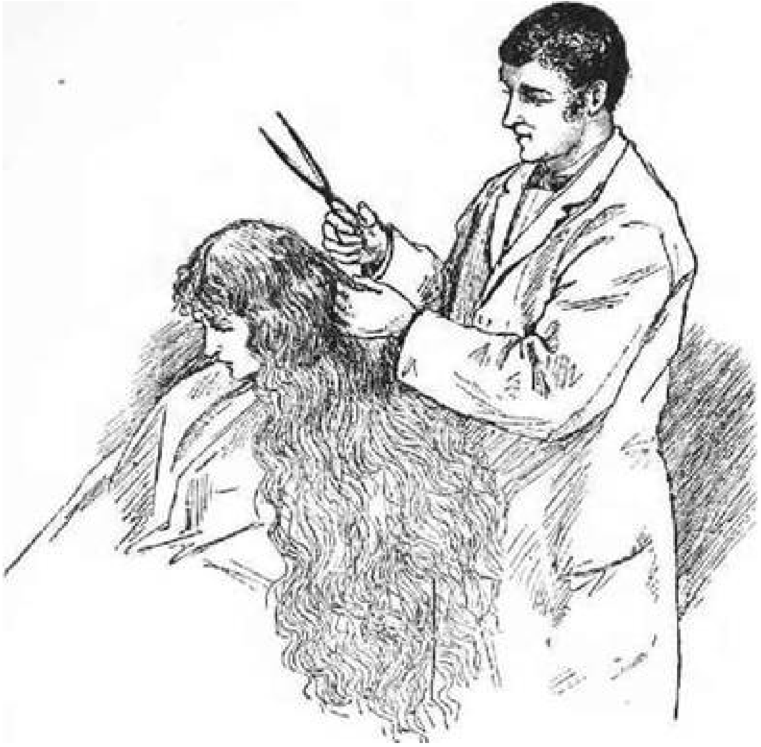
“Oh, he was a little man who looked as if he merely lived to oil his hair. He rather stared at first, as if he wasn’t used to having girls bounce into his shop and ask him to buy their hair. He said he didn’t care about mine, it wasn’t the fashionable color, and he never paid much for it in the first place. The work put into it made it dear, and so on. It was getting late, and I was afraid if it wasn’t done right away that I shouldn’t have it done at all, and you know when I start to do a thing, I hate to give it up. So I begged him to take it, and told him why I was in such a hurry. It was silly, I dare say, but it changed his mind, for I got rather excited, and told the story in my topsy-turvy way, and his wife heard, and said so kindly, ‘Take it, Thomas, and oblige the young lady. I’d do as much for our Jimmy any day if I had a spire of hair worth selling.”

“Who was Jimmy?” asked Amy, who liked to have things explained as they went along.

“Her son, she said, who was in the army. How friendly such things make strangers feel, don’t they? She talked away all the time the man clipped, and diverted my mind nicely.”

“Didn’t you feel dreadfully when the first cut came?” asked Meg, with a shiver.

“I took a last look at my hair while the man got his things, and that was the end of it. I never snivel over trifles like that. I will confess, though, I felt queer when I saw the dear old hair laid out on the table, and felt only the short rough ends of my head. It almost seemed as if I’d an arm or leg off. The woman saw me look at it, and picked out a long lock for me to keep. I’ll give it to you, Marmee, just to remember past glories by, for a crop is so comfortable I don’t think I shall ever have a mane again.”



Mrs. March folded the wavy chestnut lock, and laid it away with a short gray one in her desk. She only said, “Thank you, deary,” but something in her face made the girls change the subject, and talk as cheerfully as they could about Mr. Brooke’s kindness, the prospect of a fine day tomorrow, and the happy times they would have when Father came home to be nursed.

No one wanted to go to bed when at ten o’clock Mrs. March put by the last finished job, and said, “Come girls.” Beth went to the piano and played the father’s favorite hymn. All began bravely, but broke down one by one till Beth was left alone, singing with all her heart, for to her music was always a sweet consoler.

“Go to bed and don’t talk, for we must be up early and shall need all the sleep we can get. Good night, my darlings,” said Mrs. March, as the hymn ended, for no one cared to try another.

They kissed her quietly, and went to bed as silently as if the dear invalid lay in the next room. Beth and Amy soon fell asleep in spite of the great trouble, but Meg lay awake, thinking the most serious thoughts she had ever known in her short life. Jo lay motionless, and her sister fancied that she was asleep, till a stifled sob made her exclaim, as she touched a wet cheek...

“Jo, dear, what is it? Are you crying about father?”

“No, not now.”

“What then?”

“My... My hair!” burst out poor Jo, trying vainly to smother her emotion in the pillow.

It did not seem at all comical to Meg, who kissed and caressed the afflicted heroine in the tenderest manner.

“I’m not sorry,” protested Jo, with a choke. “I’d do it again tomorrow, if I could. It’s only the vain part of me that goes and cries in this silly way. Don’t tell anyone, it’s all over now. I thought you were asleep, so I just made a little private moan for my one beauty. How came you to be awake?”

“I can’t sleep, I’m so anxious,” said Meg.

“Think about something pleasant, and you’ll soon drop off.”

“I tried it, but felt wider awake than ever.”

“What did you think of?”

“Handsome faces — eyes particularly,” answered Meg, smiling to herself in the dark.

“What color do you like best?”

“Brown, that is, sometimes. Blue are lovely.”

Jo laughed, and Meg sharply ordered her not to talk, then amiably promised to make her hair curl, and fell asleep to dream of living in her castle in the air.

The clocks were striking midnight and the rooms were very still as a figure glided quietly from bed to bed, smoothing a coverlet here, settling a pillow there, and pausing to look long and tenderly at each unconscious face, to kiss each with lips that mutely blessed, and to pray the fervent prayers which only mothers utter. As she lifted the curtain to look out into the dreary night, the moon broke suddenly from behind the clouds and shone upon her like a bright, benignant face, which seemed to whisper in the silence, “Be comforted, dear soul! There is always light behind the clouds.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LETTERS

In the cold gray dawn the sisters lit their lamp and read their chapter with an earnestness never felt before. For now the shadow of a real trouble had come, the little books were full of help and comfort, and as they dressed, they agreed to say goodbye cheerfully and hopefully, and send their mother on her anxious journey unsaddened by tears or complaints from them. Everything seemed very strange when they went down, so dim and still outside, so full of light and bustle within. Breakfast at that early hour seemed odd, and even Hannah's familiar face looked unnatural as she flew about her kitchen with her nightcap on. The big trunk stood ready in the hall, Mother's cloak and bonnet lay on the sofa, and Mother herself sat trying to eat, but looking so pale and worn with sleeplessness and anxiety that the girls found it very hard to keep their resolution. Meg's eyes kept filling in spite of herself, Jo was obliged to hide her face in the kitchen roller more than once, and the little girls wore a grave, troubled expression, as if sorrow was a new experience to them.

Nobody talked much, but as the time drew very near and they sat waiting for the carriage, Mrs. March said to the girls, who were all busied about her, one folding her shawl, another smoothing out the strings of her bonnet, a third putting on her overshoes, and a fourth fastening up her travelling bag...

"Children, I leave you to Hannah's care and Mr. Laurence's protection. Hannah is faithfulness itself, and our good neighbor will guard you as if you were his own. I have no fears for you, yet I am anxious that you should take this trouble rightly. Don't grieve and fret when I am gone, or think that you can be idle and comfort yourselves by being idle and trying to forget. Go on with your work as usual, for work is a blessed solace. Hope and keep busy, and whatever happens, remember that you never can be fatherless."

"Yes, Mother."

"Meg, dear, be prudent, watch over your sisters, consult Hannah, and in any perplexity, go to Mr. Laurence. Be patient, Jo, don't get despondent or do rash things, write to me often, and be my brave girl, ready to help and cheer all. Beth, comfort yourself with your music, and be faithful to the little home duties, and you, Amy, help all you can, be obedient, and keep happy safe at home."

"We will, Mother! We will!"

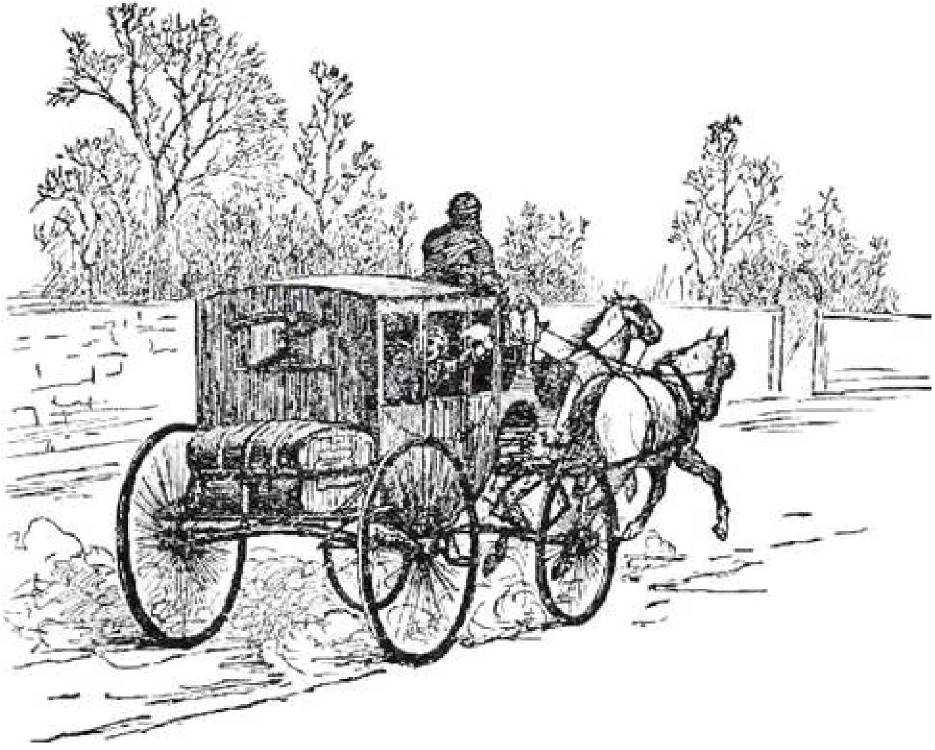
The rattle of an approaching carriage made them all start and listen. That was the hard minute, but the girls stood it well. No one cried, no one ran away or uttered a lamentation, though their hearts were very heavy as they sent loving messages to Father, remembering, as they spoke that it might be too late to deliver them. They kissed their mother quietly, clung about her tenderly, and tried to wave their hands cheerfully when she drove away.

Laurie and his grandfather came over to see her off, and Mr. Brooke looked so strong and sensible and kind that the girls christened him ‘Mr. Greatheart’ on the spot.

“Good-by, my darlings! God bless and keep us all!” whispered Mrs. March, as she kissed one dear little face after the other, and hurried into the carriage.

As she rolled away, the sun came out, and looking back, she saw it shining on the group at the gate like a good omen. They saw it also, and smiled and waved their hands, and the last thing she beheld as she turned the corner was the four bright faces, and behind them like a bodyguard, old Mr. Laurence, faithful Hannah, and devoted Laurie.

“How kind everyone is to us!” she said, turning to find fresh proof of it in the respectful sympathy of the young man’s face.



“I don’t see how they can help it,” returned Mr. Brooke, laughing so infectiously that Mrs. March could not help smiling. And so the journey began with the good omens of sunshine, smiles, and cheerful words.

“I feel as if there had been an earthquake,” said Jo, as their neighbors went home to breakfast, leaving them to rest and refresh themselves.

"It seems as if half the house was gone," added Meg forlornly.

Beth opened her lips to say something, but could only point to the pile of nicely mended hose which lay on Mother's table, showing that even in her last hurried moments she had thought and worked for them. It was a little thing, but it went straight to their hearts, and in spite of their brave resolutions, they all broke down and cried bitterly.

Hannah wisely allowed them to relieve their feelings, and when the shower showed signs of clearing up, she came to the rescue, armed with a coffeepot.

"Now, my dear young ladies, remember what your ma said, and don't fret. Come and have a cup of coffee all round, and then let's fall to work and be a credit to the family."

Coffee was a treat, and Hannah showed great tact in making it that morning. No one could resist her persuasive nods, or the fragrant invitation issuing from the nose of the coffee pot. They drew up to the table, exchanged their handkerchiefs for napkins, and in ten minutes were all right again.

"'Hope and keep busy', that's the motto for us, so let's see who will remember it best. I shall go to Aunt March, as usual. Oh, won't she lecture though!" said Jo, as she sipped with returning spirit.

"I shall go to my Kings, though I'd much rather stay at home and attend to things here," said Meg, wishing she hadn't made her eyes so red.

"No need of that. Beth and I can keep house perfectly well," put in Amy, with an important air.

"Hannah will tell us what to do, and we'll have everything nice when you come home," added Beth, getting out her mop and dish tub without delay.

"I think anxiety is very interesting," observed Amy, eating sugar pensively.

The girls couldn't help laughing, and felt better for it, though Meg shook her head at the young lady who could find consolation in a sugar bowl.

The sight of the turnovers made Jo sober again; and when the two went out to their daily tasks, they looked sorrowfully back at the window where they were accustomed to see their mother's face. It was gone, but Beth had remembered the little household ceremony, and there she was, nodding away at them like a rosyfaced mandarin.

"That's so like my Beth!" said Jo, waving her hat, with a grateful face. "Goodbye, Meggy, I hope the Kings won't strain today. Don't fret about Father, dear," she added, as they parted.

"And I hope Aunt March won't croak. Your hair is becoming, and it looks very boyish and nice," returned Meg, trying not to smile at the curly head, which looked comically small on her tall sister's shoulders.

"That's my only comfort." And, touching her hat a la Laurie, away went Jo, feeling like a shorn sheep on a wintry day.

News from their father comforted the girls very much, for though dangerously ill, the presence of the best and tenderest of nurses had already done him good. Mr. Brooke sent a bulletin every day, and as the head of the family, Meg insisted on reading the dispatches, which grew more cheerful as the week passed. At first, everyone was eager to write, and plump envelopes were carefully poked into the letter box by one or other of the sisters, who felt rather important with their Washington correspondence. As one of these packets contained characteristic notes from the party, we will rob an imaginary mail, and read them.

My dearest Mother:

It is impossible to tell you how happy your last letter made us, for the news was so good we couldn't help laughing and crying over it. How very kind Mr. Brooke is, and how fortunate that Mr. Laurence's business detains him near you so long, since he is so useful to you and Father. The girls are all as good as gold. Jo helps me with the sewing, and insists on doing all sorts of hard jobs. I should be afraid she might overdo, if I didn't know her 'moral fit' wouldn't last long. Beth is as regular about her tasks as a clock, and never forgets what you told her. She grieves about Father, and looks sober except when she is at her little piano. Amy minds me nicely, and I take great care of her. She does her own hair, and I am teaching her to make buttonholes and mend her stockings. She tries very hard, and I know you will be pleased with her improvement when you come. Mr. Laurence watches over us like a motherly old hen, as Jo says, and Laurie is very kind and neighborly. He and Jo keep us merry, for we get pretty blue sometimes, and feel like orphans, with you so far away. Hannah is a perfect saint. She does not scold at all, and always calls me Miss Margaret, which is quite proper, you know, and treats me with respect. We are all well and busy, but we long, day and night, to have you back. Give my dearest love to Father, and believe me, ever your own...

MEG

This note, prettily written on scented paper, was a great contrast to the next, which was scribbled on a big sheet of thin foreign paper, ornamented with blots and all manner of flourishes and curly-tailed letters.

My precious Marmee:

Three cheers for dear Father! Brooke was a trump to telegraph right off, and let us know the minute he was better. I rushed up garret when the letter came, and tried to thank god for being so good to us, but I could only cry, and say, "I'm glad! I'm glad!" Didn't that do as well as a regular prayer? For I felt a great many in my heart. We have such funny times, and now I can enjoy them, for everyone is so desperately good, it’s like living in a nest of turtledoves. You’d laugh to see Meg head the table and try to be motherish. She gets prettier every day, and I’m in love with her sometimes. The children are regular archangels, and I — well, I’m Jo, and never shall be anything else. Oh, I must tell you that I came near having a quarrel with Laurie. I freed my mind about a silly little thing, and he was offended. I was right, but didn’t speak as I ought, and he marched home, saying he wouldn’t come again till I begged pardon. I declared I wouldn’t and got mad. It lasted all day. I felt bad and wanted you very much. Laurie and I are both so proud, it’s hard to beg pardon. But I thought he’d come to it, for I was in the right. He didn’t come, and just at night I remembered what you said when Amy fell into the river. I read my little book, felt better, resolved not to let the sun set on my anger, and ran over to tell Laurie I was sorry. I met him at the gate, coming for the same thing. We both laughed, begged each other’s pardon, and felt all good and comfortable again.

I made a ‘pome’ yesterday, when I was helping Hannah wash, and as Father likes my silly little things, I put it in to amuse him. Give him my lovingest hug that ever was, and kiss yourself a dozen times for your...

TOPSY-TURVY JO

A SONG FROM THE SUDS

Queen of my tub, I merrily sing,
While the white foam rises high,
And sturdily wash and rinse and wring,
And fasten the clothes to dry.
Then out in the free fresh air they swing,
Under the sunny sky.

I wish we could wash from our hearts and souls
The stains of the week away,
And let water and air by their magic make
Ourselves as pure as they.
Then on the earth there would be indeed,
A glorious washing day!

Along the path of a useful life,
Will heart’s-ease ever bloom.
The busy mind has no time to think

Of sorrow or care or gloom.
And anxious thoughts may be swept away,
As we bravely wield a broom.

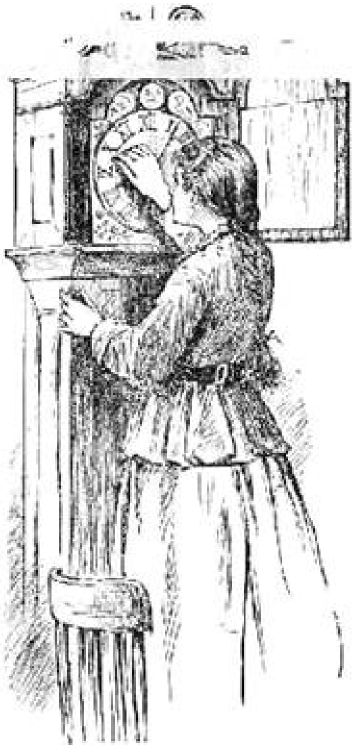
I am glad a task to me is given,
To labor at day by day,
For it brings me health and strength and hope,
And I cheerfully learn to say,
“Head, you may think, Heart, you may feel,
But, Hand, you shall work alway!”

Dear Mother,

There is only room for me to send my love, and some pressed pansies from the root I have been keeping safe in the house for Father to see. I read every morning, try to be good all day, and sing myself to sleep with Father’s tune. I can’t sing ‘LAND OF THE LEAL’ now, it makes me cry. Everyone is very kind, and we are as happy as we can be without you. Amy wants the rest of the page, so I must stop. I didn’t forget to cover the holders, and I wind the clock and air the rooms every day.

Kiss dear Father on the cheek he calls mine. Oh, do come soon to your loving...

LITTLE BETH



Ma Chere Mamma,

We are all well I do my lessons always and never corroberate the girls — Meg says I mean contradick so I put in both words and you can take the properest. Meg is a great comfort to me and lets me have jelly every night at tea its so good for me Jo says because it keeps me sweet tempered. Laurie is not as respeckful as he ought to be now I am almost in my teens, he calls me Chick and hurts my feelings by talking French to me very fast when I say Merci or Bon jour as Hattie King does. The sleeves of my blue dress were all worn out, and Meg put in new ones, but the full front came wrong and they are more blue than the dress. I felt bad but did not fret I bear my troubles well but I do wish Hannah would put more starch in my aprons and have buckwheats every day. Can't she? Didn't I make that interrigation point nice? Meg says my punchtuation and spelling are disgraceful and I am mortyfied but dear me I have so many things to do, I can't stop. Adieu, I send heaps of love to Papa. Your affectionate daughter...

AMY CURTIS MARCH

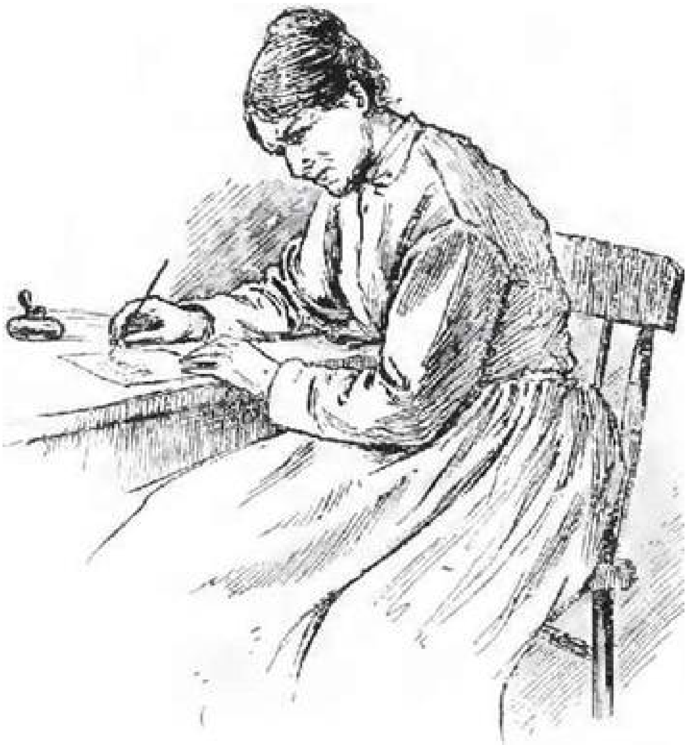
Dear Mis March,

I jes drop a line to say we git on fust rate. The girls is clever and fly round right smart. Miss Meg is going to make a proper good housekeeper. She hes the liking for it, and gits the hang of things surprisin quick. Jo doos beat all for goin ahead, but she don't stop to cal'k'late fust, and you never know where she's like to bring up. She done out a tub of clothes on Monday, but she starched 'em afore they was wrenched, and blued a pink calico dress till I thought I should a died a laughin. Beth is the best of little creeters, and a sight of help to me, bein so forehanded and dependable. She tries to learn everything, and really goes to market beyond her years, likewise keeps accounts, with my help, quite wonderful. We have got on very economical so fur. I don't let the girls hev coffee only once a week, accordin to your wish, and keep em on plain wholesome vittles. Amy does well without frettin, wearin her best clothes and eatin sweet stuff. Mr. Laurie is as full of didoes as usual, and turns the house upside down frequent, but he heartens the girls, so I let em hev full swing. The old gentleman sends heaps of things, and is rather wearin, but means wal, and it aint my place to say nothin. My bread is riz, so no more at this time. I send my duty to Mr. March, and hope he's seen the last of his Pewmonia.

Yours respectful,
Hannah Mullet

Head Nurse of Ward No. 2,

All serene on the Rappahannock, troops in fine condition, commisary department well conducted, the Home Guard under Colonel Teddy always on duty, Commander in Chief General Laurence reviews the army daily, Quartermaster Mullet keeps order in camp, and Major Lion does picket duty at night. A salute of twenty-four guns was fired on receipt of good news from Washington, and a dress parade took place at headquarters. Commander in chief sends best wishes, in which he is heartily joined by...



COLONEL TEDDY

Dear Madam:

The little girls are all well. Beth and my boy report daily. Hannah is a model servant, and guards pretty Meg like a dragon. Glad the fine weather holds. Pray make Brooke useful, and draw on me for funds if expenses exceed your estimate. Don’t let your husband want anything. Thank God he is mending.

Your sincere friend and servant, JAMES LAURENCE

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LITTLE FAITHFUL

For a week the amount of virtue in the old house would have supplied the neighborhood. It was really amazing, for everyone seemed in a heavenly frame of mind, and self-denial was all the fashion. Relieved of their first anxiety about their father, the girls insensibly relaxed their praiseworthy efforts a little, and began to fall back into old ways. They did not forget their motto, but hoping and keeping busy seemed to grow easier, and after such tremendous exertions, they felt that Endeavor deserved a holiday, and gave it a good many.

Jo caught a bad cold through neglect to cover the shorn head enough, and was ordered to stay at home till she was better, for Aunt March didn't like to hear people read with colds in their heads. Jo liked this, and after an energetic rummage from garret to cellar, subsided on the sofa to nurse her cold with arsenicum and books. Amy found that housework and art did not go well together, and returned to her mud pies. Meg went daily to her pupils, and sewed, or thought she did, at home, but much time was spent in writing long letters to her mother, or reading the Washington dispatches over and over. Beth kept on, with only slight relapses into idleness or grieving.

All the little duties were faithfully done each day, and many of her sisters' also, for they were forgetful, and the house seemed like a clock whose pendulum was gone a-visiting. When her heart got heavy with longings for Mother or fears for Father, she went away into a certain closet, hid her face in the folds of a dear old gown, and made her little moan and prayed her little prayer quietly by herself. Nobody knew what cheered her up after a sober fit, but everyone felt how sweet and helpful Beth was, and fell into a way of going to her for comfort or advice in their small affairs.

All were unconscious that this experience was a test of character, and when the first excitement was over, felt that they had done well and deserved praise. So they did, but their mistake was in ceasing to do well, and they learned this lesson through much anxiety and regret.

"Meg, I wish you'd go and see the Hummels. You know Mother told us not to forget them." said Beth, ten days after Mrs. March's departure.

"I'm too tired to go this afternoon," replied Meg, rocking comfortably as she sewed.

"Can't you, Jo?" asked Beth.

“Too stormy for me with my cold.”

“I thought it was almost well.”

“It’s well enough for me to go out with Laurie, but not well enough to go to the Hummels’,” said Jo, laughing, but looking a little ashamed of her inconsistency.

“Why don’t you go yourself?” asked Meg.

“I have been every day, but the baby is sick, and I don’t know what to do for it. Mrs. Hummel goes away to work, and Lottchen takes care of it. But it gets sicker and sicker, and I think you or Hannah ought to go.”

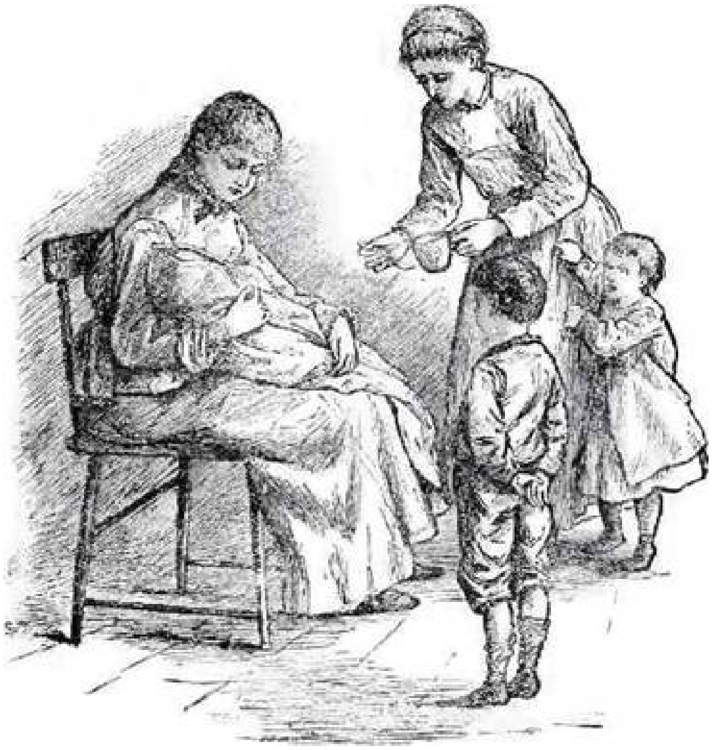
Beth spoke earnestly, and Meg promised she would go tomorrow.

“Ask Hannah for some nice little mess, and take it round, Beth, the air will do you good,” said Jo, adding apologetically, “I’d go but I want to finish my writing.”

“My head aches and I’m tired, so I thought maybe some of you would go,” said Beth.

“Amy will be in presently, and she will run down for us,” suggested Meg.

So Beth lay down on the sofa, the others returned to their work, and the Hummels were forgotten. An hour passed. Amy did not come, Meg went to her room to try on a new dress, Jo was absorbed in her story, and Hannah was sound asleep before the kitchen fire, when Beth quietly put on her hood, filled her basket with odds and ends for the poor children, and went out into the chilly air with a heavy head and a grieved look in her patient eyes. It was late when she came back, and no one saw her creep upstairs and shut herself into her mother’s room. Half an hour after, Jo went to ‘Mother’s closet’ for something, and there found little Beth sitting on the medicine chest, looking very grave, with red eyes and a camphor bottle in her hand.



“Christopher Columbus! What’s the matter?” cried Jo, as Beth put out her hand as if to warn her off, and asked quickly. . .

“You’ve had the scarlet fever, haven’t you?”

“Years ago, when Meg did. Why?”

“Then I’ll tell you. Oh, Jo, the baby’s dead!”

“What baby?”

“Mrs. Hummel’s. It died in my lap before she got home,” cried Beth with a sob.

“My poor dear, how dreadful for you! I ought to have gone,” said Jo, taking her sister in her arms as she sat down in her mother’s big chair, with a remorseful face.

“It wasn’t dreadful, Jo, only so sad! I saw in a minute it was sicker, but Lottchen said her mother had gone for a doctor, so I took Baby and let Lotty rest. It seemed asleep, but all of a sudden if gave a little cry and trembled, and then lay very still. I tried to warm its feet, and Lotty gave it some milk, but it didn’t stir, and I knew it was dead.”

“Don’t cry, dear! What did you do?”

“I just sat and held it softly till Mrs. Hummel came with the doctor. He said it was dead, and looked at Heinrich and Minna, who have sore throats. ‘Scarlet fever, ma’am. Ought to have called me before,’ he said crossly. Mrs. Hummel told him she was poor, and had tried to cure baby herself, but now it was too late, and she could only ask him to help the others and trust to charity for his pay. He smiled then, and was kinder, but it was very sad, and I cried with them till he turned round all of a sudden, and told me to go home and take belladonna right away, or I'd have the fever."

"No, you won't!" cried Jo, hugging her close, with a frightened look. "Oh, Beth, if you should be sick I never could forgive myself! What shall we do?"

"Don't be frightened, I guess I shan't have it badly. I looked in Mother's book, and saw that it begins with headache, sore throat, and queer feelings like mine, so I did take some belladonna, and I feel better," said Beth, laying her cold hands on her hot forehead and trying to look well.

"If Mother was only at home!" exclaimed Jo, seizing the book, and feeling that Washington was an immense way off. She read a page, looked at Beth, felt her head, peeped into her throat, and then said gravely, "You've been over the baby every day for more than a week, and among the others who are going to have it, so I'm afraid you are going to have it, Beth. I'll call Hannah, she knows all about sickness."

"Don't let Amy come. She never had it, and I should hate to give it to her. Can't you and Meg have it over again?" asked Beth, anxiously.

"I guess not. Don't care if I do. Serve me right, selfish pig, to let you go, and stay writing rubbish myself!" muttered Jo, as she went to consult Hannah.

The good soul was wide awake in a minute, and took the lead at once, assuring that there was no need to worry; every one had scarlet fever, and if rightly treated, nobody died, all of which Jo believed, and felt much relieved as they went up to call Meg.

"Now I'll tell you what we'll do," said Hannah, when she had examined and questioned Beth, "we will have Dr. Bangs, just to take a look at you, dear, and see that we start right. Then we'll send Amy off to Aunt March's for a spell, to keep her out of harm's way, and one of you girls can stay at home and amuse Beth for a day or two."

"I shall stay, of course, I'm oldest," began Meg, looking anxious and self-reproachful.

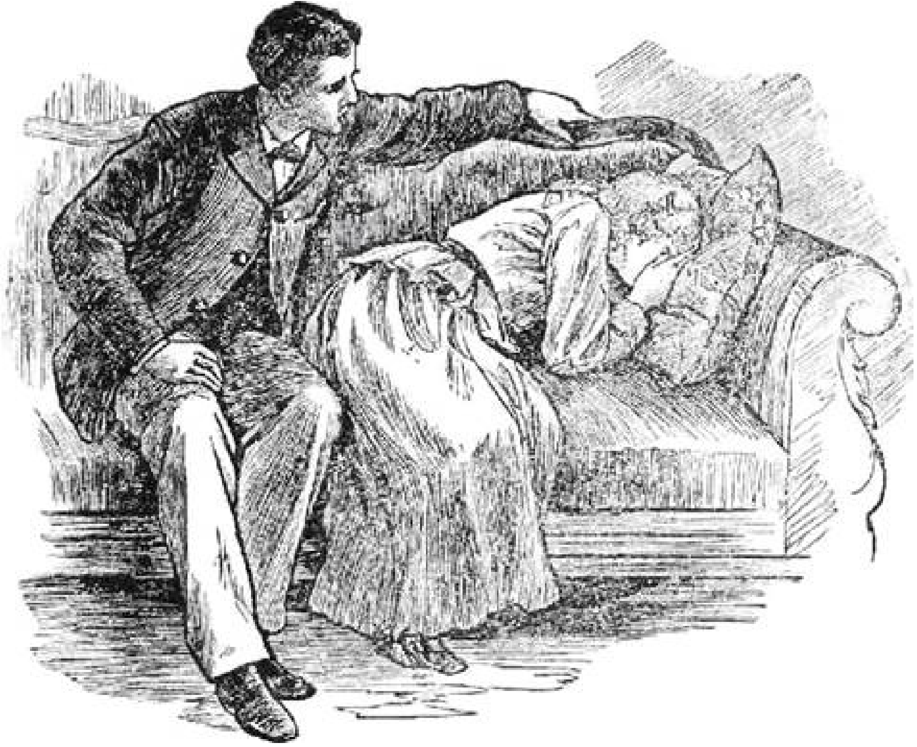
"I shall, because it's my fault she is sick. I told Mother I'd do the errands, and I haven't," said Jo decidedly.

"Which will you have, Beth? There ain't no need of but one," aid Hannah.

"Jo, please." And Beth leaned her head against her sister with a contented look, which effectually settled that point.

"I'll go and tell Amy," said Meg, feeling a little hurt, yet rather relieved on the whole, for she did not like nursing, and Jo did.

Amy rebelled outright, and passionately declared that she had rather have the fever than go to Aunt March. Meg reasoned, pleaded, and commanded, all in vain. Amy protested that she would not go, and Meg left her in despair to ask Hannah what should be done. Before she came back, Laurie walked into the parlor to find Amy sobbing, with her head in the sofa cushions. She told her story, expecting to be consoled, but Laurie only put his hands in his pockets and walked about the room, whistling softly, as he knit his brows in deep thought. Presently he sat down beside her, and said, in his most wheedlesome tone, “Now be a sensible little woman, and do as they say. No, don’t cry, but hear what a jolly plan I’ve got. You go to Aunt March’s, and I’ll come and take you out every day, driving or walking, and we’ll have capital times. Won’t that be better than moping here?”



“I don’t wish to be sent off as if I was in the way,” began Amy, in an injured voice.

“Bless your heart, child, it’s to keep you well. You don’t want to be sick, do you?”

“No, I’m sure I don’t, but I dare say I shall be, for I’ve been with Beth all the time.”

“That’s the very reason you ought to go away at once, so that you may escape it. Change of air and care will keep you well, I dare say, or if it does not entirely, you will have the fever more lightly. I advise you to be off as soon as you can, for scarlet fever is no joke, miss.”

“But it’s dull at Aunt March’s, and she is so cross,” said Amy, looking rather frightened.

“It won’t be dull with me popping in every day to tell you how Beth is, and take you out gallivanting. The old lady likes me, and I’ll be as sweet as possible to her, so she won’t peck at us, whatever we do.”

“Will you take me out in the trotting wagon with Puck?”

“On my honor as a gentleman.”

“And come every single day?”

“See if I don’t!”

“And bring me back the minute Beth is well?”

“The identical minute.”

“And go to the theater, truly?”

“A dozen theaters, if we may.”

“Well — I guess I will,” said Amy slowly.

“Good girl! Call Meg, and tell her you’ll give in,” said Laurie, with an approving pat, which annoyed Amy more than the ‘giving in’.

Meg and Jo came running down to behold the miracle which had been wrought, and Amy, feeling very precious and self-sacrificing, promised to go, if the doctor said Beth was going to be ill.

“How is the little dear?” asked Laurie, for Beth was his especial pet, and he felt more anxious about her than he liked to show.

“She is lying down on Mother’s bed, and feels better. The baby’s death troubled her, but I dare say she has only got cold. Hannah says she thinks so, but she looks worried, and that makes me fidgety,” answered Meg.

“What a trying world it is!” said Jo, rumpling up her hair in a fretful way. “No sooner do we get out of one trouble than down comes another. There doesn’t seem to be anything to hold on to when Mother’s gone, so I’m all at sea.”

“Well, don’t make a porcupine of yourself, it isn’t becoming. Settle your wig, Jo, and tell me if I shall telegraph to your mother, or do anything?” asked Laurie, who never had been reconciled to the loss of his friend’s one beauty.

“That is what troubles me,” said Meg. “I think we ought to tell her if Beth is really ill, but Hannah says we mustn’t, for Mother can’t leave Father, and it will only make them anxious. Beth won’t be sick long, and Hannah knows just what to do, and Mother said we were to mind her, so I suppose we must, but it doesn’t seem quite right to me.”

“Hum, well, I can’t say. Suppose you ask Grandfather after the doctor has been.”

“We will. Jo, go and get Dr. Bangs at once,” commanded Meg. “We can’t decide anything till he has been.”

“Stay where you are, Jo. I’m errand boy to this establishment,” said Laurie, taking up his cap.

“I’m afraid you are busy,” began Meg.

“No, I’ve done my lessons for the day.”

“Do you study in vacation time?” asked Jo.

“I follow the good example my neighbors set me,” was Laurie’s answer, as he swung himself out of the room.

“I have great hopes for my boy,” observed Jo, watching him fly over the fence with an approving smile.

“He does very well, for a boy,” was Meg’s somewhat ungracious answer, for the subject did not interest her.

Dr. Bangs came, said Beth had symptoms of the fever, but he thought she would have it lightly, though he looked sober over the Hummel story. Amy was ordered off at once, and provided with something to ward off danger, she departed in great state, with Jo and Laurie as escort.

Aunt March received them with her usual hospitality.

“What do you want now?” she asked, looking sharply over her spectacles, while the parrot, sitting on the back of her chair, called out...

“Go away. No boys allowed here.”

Laurie retired to the window, and Jo told her story.

“No more than I expected, if you are allowed to go poking about among poor folks. Amy can stay and make herself useful if she isn’t sick, which I’ve no doubt she will be, looks like it now. Don’t cry, child, it worries me to hear people sniff.”

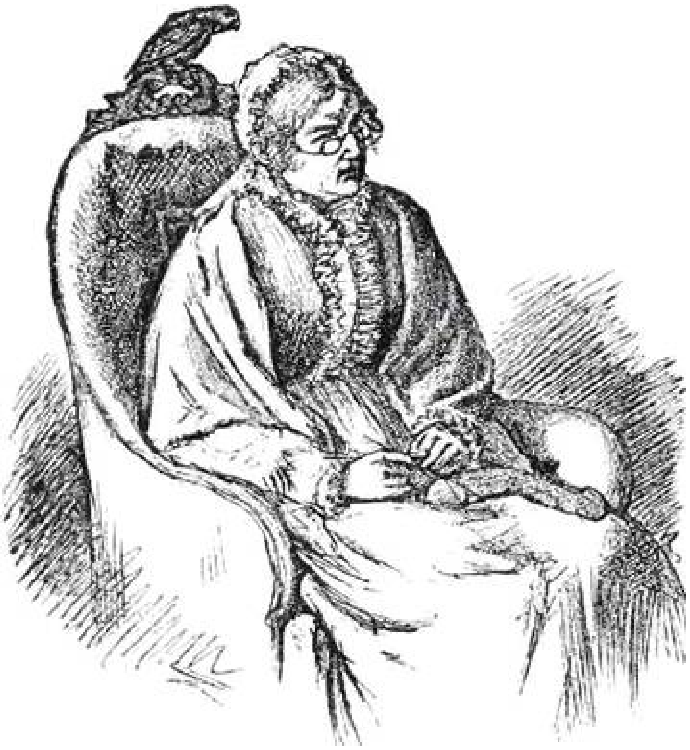
Amy was on the point of crying, but Laurie slyly pulled the parrot’s tail, which caused Polly to utter an astonished croak and call out, “Bless my boots!” in such a funny way, that she laughed instead.

“What do you hear from your mother?” asked the old lady gruffly.

“Father is much better,” replied Jo, trying to keep sober.

“Oh, is he? Well, that won’t last long, I fancy. March never had any stamina,” was the cheerful reply.

“Ha, ha! Never say die, take a pinch of snuff, goodbye, goodbye!” squalled Polly, dancing on her perch, and clawing at the old lady’s cap as Laurie tweaked him in the rear.



“Hold your tongue, you disrespectful old bird! And, Jo, you’d better go at once. It isn’t proper to be gadding about so late with a rattlepated boy like...”

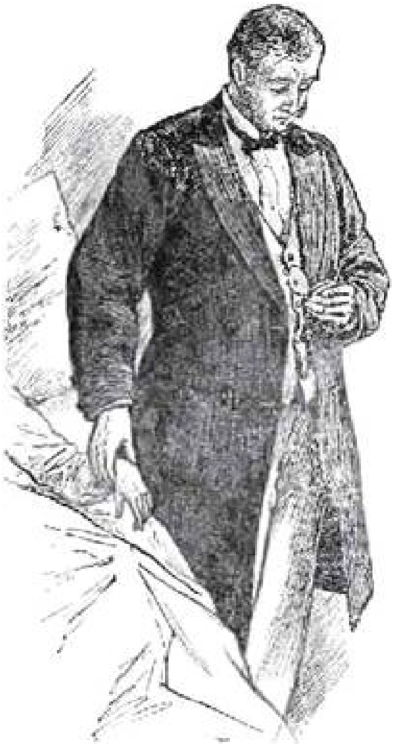
“Hold your tongue, you disrespectful old bird!” cried Polly, tumbling off the chair with a bounce, and running to peck the ‘rattlepated’ boy, who was shaking with laughter at the last speech.

“I don’t think I can bear it, but I’ll try,” thought Amy, as she was left alone with Aunt March.

“Get along, you fright!” screamed Polly, and at that rude speech Amy could not restrain a sniff.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DARK DAYS



Beth did have the fever, and was much sicker than anyone but Hannah and the doctor suspected. The girls knew nothing about illness, and Mr. Laurence was not allowed to see her, so Hannah had everything her own way, and busy Dr. Bangs did his best, but left a good deal to the excellent nurse. Meg stayed at home, lest she should infect the Kings, and kept house, feeling very anxious and a little guilty when she wrote letters in which no mention was made of Beth's illness. She could not think it right to deceive her mother, but she had been bidden to mind Hannah, and Hannah wouldn't hear of 'Mrs. March bein' told, and worried just for sech a trifle.'

Jo devoted herself to Beth day and night, not a hard task, for Beth was very patient, and bore her pain uncomplainingly as long as she could control herself. But there came a time when during the fever fits she began to talk in a hoarse, broken voice, to play on the coverlet as if on her beloved little piano, and try to sing with a throat so swollen that there was no music left, a time when she did not know the familiar faces around her, but addressed them by wrong names, and called imploringly for her mother. Then Jo grew frightened, Meg begged to be allowed to write the truth, and even Hannah said she ‘would think of it, though there was no danger yet’. A letter from Washington added to their trouble, for Mr. March had had a relapse, and could not think of coming home for a long while.

How dark the days seemed now, how sad and lonely the house, and how heavy were the hearts of the sisters as they worked and waited, while the shadow of death hovered over the once happy home. Then it was that Margaret, sitting alone with tears dropping often on her work, felt how rich she had been in things more precious than any luxuries money could buy — in love, protection, peace, and health, the real blessings of life. Then it was that Jo, living in the darkened room, with that suffering little sister always before her eyes and that pathetic voice sounding in her ears, learned to see the beauty and the sweetness of Beth’s nature, to feel how deep and tender a place she filled in all hearts, and to acknowledge the worth of Beth’s unselfish ambition to live for others, and make home happy by that exercise of those simple virtues which all may possess, and which all should love and value more than talent, wealth, or beauty. And Amy, in her exile, longed eagerly to be at home, that she might work for Beth, feeling now that no service would be hard or irksome, and remembering, with regretful grief, how many neglected tasks those willing hands had done for her. Laurie haunted the house like a restless ghost, and Mr. Laurence locked the grand piano, because he could not bear to be reminded of the young neighbor who used to make the twilight pleasant for him. Everyone missed Beth. The milkman, baker, grocer, and butcher inquired how she did, poor Mrs. Hummel came to beg pardon for her thoughtlessness and to get a shroud for Minna, the neighbors sent all sorts of comforts and good wishes, and even those who knew her best were surprised to find how many friends shy little Beth had made.

Meanwhile she lay on her bed with old Joanna at her side, for even in her wanderings she did not forget her forlorn protege. She longed for her cats, but would not have them brought, lest they should get sick, and in her quiet hours she was full of anxiety about Jo. She sent loving messages to Amy, bade them tell her mother that she would write soon, and often begged for pencil and paper to try to say a word, that Father might not think she had neglected him. But soon even these intervals of consciousness ended, and she lay hour after hour, tossing to and fro, with incoherent words on her lips, or sank into a heavy sleep which brought her no refreshment. Dr. Bangs came twice a day, Hannah sat up at night, Meg kept a telegram in her desk all ready to send off at any minute, and Jo never stirred from Beth’s side.

The first of December was a wintry day indeed to them, for a bitter wind blew, snow fell fast, and the year seemed getting ready for its death. When Dr. Bangs came that morning, he looked long at Beth, held the hot hand in both his own for a minute, and laid it gently down, saying, in a low voice to Hannah, “If Mrs. March can leave her husband she’d better be sent for.”

Hannah nodded without speaking, for her lips twitched nervously, Meg dropped down into a chair as the strength seemed to go out of her limbs at the sound of those words, and Jo, standing with a pale face for a minute, ran to the parlor, snatched up the telegram, and throwing on her things, rushed out into the storm. She was soon back, and while noiselessly taking off her cloak, Laurie came in with a letter, saying that Mr. March was mending again. Jo read it thankfully, but the heavy weight did not seem lifted off her heart, and her face was so full of misery that Laurie asked quickly, “What is it? Is Beth worse?”

“I’ve sent for Mother,” said Jo, tugging at her rubber boots with a tragic expression.

“Good for you, Jo! Did you do it on your own responsibility?” asked Laurie, as he seated her in the hall chair and took off the rebellious boots, seeing how her hands shook.

“No. The doctor told us to.”

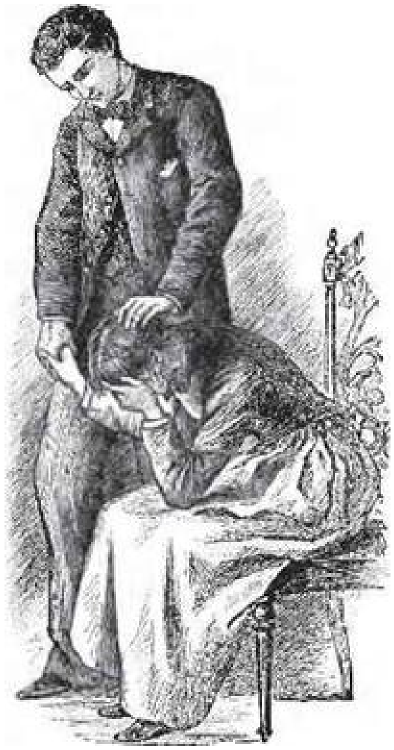
“Oh, Jo, it’s not so bad as that?” cried Laurie, with a startled face.

“Yes, it is. She doesn’t know us, she doesn’t even talk about the flocks of green doves, as she calls the vine leaves on the wall. She doesn’t look like my Beth, and there’s nobody to help us bear it. Mother and father both gone, and God seems so far away I can’t find Him.”

As the tears streamed fast down poor Jo’s cheeks, she stretched out her hand in a helpless sort of way, as if groping in the dark, and Laurie took it in his, whispering as well as he could with a lump in his throat, “I’m here. Hold on to me, Jo, dear!”

She could not speak, but she did ‘hold on’, and the warm grasp of the friendly human hand comforted her sore heart, and seemed to lead her nearer to the Divine arm which alone could uphold her in her trouble.

Laurie longed to say something tender and comfortable, but no fitting words came to him, so he stood silent, gently stroking her bent head as her mother used to do. It was the best thing he could have done, far more soothing than the most eloquent words, for Jo felt the unspoken sympathy, and in the silence learned the sweet solace which affection administers to sorrow. Soon she dried the tears which had relieved her, and looked up with a grateful face.



"Thank you, Teddy, I'm better now. I don't feel so forlorn, and will try to bear it if it comes."

"Keep hoping for the best, that will help you, Jo. Soon your mother will be here, and then everything will be all right."

"I'm so glad Father is better. Now she won't feel so bad about leaving him. Oh, me! It does seem as if all the troubles came in a heap, and I got the heaviest part on my shoulders," sighed Jo, spreading her wet handkerchief over her knees to dry.

"Doesn't Meg pull fair?" asked Laurie, looking indignant.

"Oh, yes, she tries to, but she can't love Bethy as I do, and she won't miss her as I shall. Beth is my conscience, and I can't give her up. I can't! I can't!"

Down went Jo's face into the wet handkerchief, and she cried despairingly, for she had kept up bravely till now and never shed a tear. Laurie drew his hand across his eyes, but could not speak till he had subdued the choky feeling in his throat and steadied his lips. It might be unmanly, but he couldn't help it, and I am glad of it. Presently, as Jo's sobs quieted, he said hopefully, "I don't think she will die. She's so good, and we all love her so much, I don't believe God will take her away yet."

"The good and dear people always do die," groaned Jo, but she stopped crying, for her friend's words cheered her up in spite of her own doubts and fears.

"Poor girl, you're worn out. It isn't like you to be forlorn. Stop a bit. I'll hearten you up in a jiffy."

Laurie went off two stairs at a time, and Jo laid her wearied head down on Beth's little brown hood, which no one had thought of moving from the table where she left it. It must have possessed some magic, for the submissive spirit of its gentle owner seemed to enter into Jo, and when Laurie came running down with a glass of wine, she took it with a smile, and said bravely, "I drink — Health to my Beth! You are a good doctor, Teddy, and such a comfortable friend. How can I ever pay you?" she added, as the wine refreshed her body, as the kind words had done her troubled mind.

"I'll send my bill, by-and-by, and tonight I'll give you something that will warm the cockles of your heart better than quarts of wine," said Laurie, beaming at her with a face of suppressed satisfaction at something.

"What is it?" cried Jo, forgetting her woes for a minute in her wonder.

"I telegraphed to your mother yesterday, and Brooke answered she'd come at once, and she'll be here tonight, and everything will be all right. Aren't you glad I did it?"

Laurie spoke very fast, and turned red and excited all in a minute, for he had kept his plot a secret, for fear of disappointing the girls or harming Beth. Jo grew quite white, flew out of her chair, and the moment he stopped speaking she electrified him by throwing her arms round his neck, and crying out, with a joyful cry, "Oh, Laurie! Oh, Mother! I am so glad!" She did not weep again, but laughed hysterically, and trembled and clung to her friend as if she was a little bewildered by the sudden news.

Laurie, though decidedly amazed, behaved with great presence of mind. He patted her back soothingly, and finding that she was recovering, followed it up by a bashful kiss or two, which brought Jo round at once. Holding on to the banisters, she put him gently away, saying breathlessly, "Oh, don't! I didn't mean to, it was dreadful of me, but you were such a dear to go and do it in spite of Hannah that I couldn't help flying at you. Tell me all about it, and don't give me wine again, it makes me act so."

"I don't mind," laughed Laurie, as he settled his tie. "Why, you see I got fidgety, and so did Grandpa. We thought Hannah was overdoing the authority business, and your mother ought to know. She'd never forgive us if Beth... Well, if anything happened, you know. So I got grandpa to say it was high time we did something, and off I pelted to the office yesterday, for the doctor looked sober, and Hannah most took my head off when I proposed a telegram. I never can bear to be 'lorded over', so that settled my mind, and I did it. Your mother will come, I know, and the late train is in at two A.M. I shall go for her, and you've only got to bottle up your rapture, and keep Beth quiet till that blessed lady gets here."

"Laurie, you're an angel! How shall I ever thank you?"

"Fly at me again. I rather liked it," said Laurie, looking mischievous, a thing he had not done for a fortnight.

"No, thank you. I'll do it by proxy, when your grandpa comes. Don't tease, but go home and rest, for you'll be up half the night. Bless you, Teddy, bless you!"

Jo had backed into a corner, and as she finished her speech, she vanished precipitately into the kitchen, where she sat down upon a dresser and told the assembled cats that she was "happy, oh, so happy!" while Laurie departed, feeling that he had made a rather neat thing of it.

"That's the interferingest chap I ever see, but I forgive him and do hope Mrs. March is coming right away," said Hannah, with an air of relief, when Jo told the good news.

Meg had a quiet rapture, and then brooded over the letter, while Jo set the sickroom in order, and Hannah "knocked up a couple of pies in case of company unexpected". A breath of fresh air seemed to blow through the house, and something better than sunshine brightened the quiet rooms. Everything appeared to feel the hopeful change. Beth's bird began to chirp again, and a half-blown rose was discovered on Amy's bush in the window. The fires seemed to burn with unusual cheeriness, and every time the girls met, their pale faces broke into smiles as they hugged one another, whispering encouragingly, "Mother's coming, dear! Mother's coming!" Every one rejoiced but Beth. She lay in that heavy stupor, alike unconscious of hope and joy, doubt and danger. It was a piteous sight, the once rosy face so changed and vacant, the once busy hands so weak and wasted, the once smiling lips quite dumb, and the once pretty, well-kept hair scattered rough and tangled on the pillow. All day she lay so, only rousing now and then to mutter, "Water!" with lips so parched they could hardly shape the word. All day Jo and Meg hovered over her, watching, waiting, hoping, and trusting in God and Mother, and all day the snow fell, the bitter wind raged, and the hours dragged slowly by. But night came at last, and every time the clock struck, the sisters, still sitting on either side of the bed, looked at each other with brightening eyes, for each hour brought help nearer. The doctor had been in to say that some change, for better or worse, would probably take place about midnight, at which time he would return.

Hannah, quite worn out, lay down on the sofa at the bed's foot and fell fast asleep, Mr. Laurence marched to and fro in the parlor, feeling that he would rather face a rebel battery than Mrs. March's countenance as she entered. Laurie lay on the rug, pretending to rest, but staring into the fire with the thoughtful look which made his black eyes beautifully soft and clear.

The girls never forgot that night, for no sleep came to them as they kept their watch, with that dreadful sense of powerlessness which comes to us in hours like those.

“If God spares Beth, I never will complain again,” whispered Meg earnestly.

“If god spares Beth, I’ll try to love and serve Him all my life,” answered Jo, with equal fervor.

“I wish I had no heart, it aches so,” sighed Meg, after a pause.

“If life is often as hard as this, I don’t see how we ever shall get through it,” added her sister despondently.

Here the clock struck twelve, and both forgot themselves in watching Beth, for they fancied a change passed over her wan face. The house was still as death, and nothing but the wailing of the wind broke the deep hush. Weary Hannah slept on, and no one but the sisters saw the pale shadow which seemed to fall upon the little bed. An hour went by, and nothing happened except Laurie’s quiet departure for the station. Another hour, still no one came, and anxious fears of delay in the storm, or accidents by the way, or, worst of all, a great grief at Washington, haunted the girls.

It was past two, when Jo, who stood at the window thinking how dreary the world looked in its winding sheet of snow, heard a movement by the bed, and turning quickly, saw Meg kneeling before their mother’s easy chair with her face hidden. A dreadful fear passed coldly over Jo, as she thought, “Beth is dead, and Meg is afraid to tell me.”

She was back at her post in an instant, and to her excited eyes a great change seemed to have taken place. The fever flush and the look of pain were gone, and the beloved little face looked so pale and peaceful in its utter repose that Jo felt no desire to weep or to lament. Leaning low over this dearest of her sisters, she kissed the damp forehead with her heart on her lips, and softly whispered, “Good-by, my Beth. Good-by!”

As if awaked by the stir, Hannah started out of her sleep, hurried to the bed, looked at Beth, felt her hands, listened at her lips, and then, throwing her apron over her head, sat down to rock to and fro, exclaiming, under her breath, “The fever’s turned, she’s sleepin’ nat’ral, her skin’s damp, and she breathes easy. Praise be given! Oh, my goodness me!”

Before the girls could believe the happy truth, the doctor came to confirm it. He was a homely man, but they thought his face quite heavenly when he smiled and said, with a fatherly look at them, “Yes, my dears, I think the little girl will pull through this time. Keep the house quiet, let her sleep, and when she wakes, give her...”

What they were to give, neither heard, for both crept into the dark hall, and, sitting on the stairs, held each other close, rejoicing with hearts too full for words. When they went back to be kissed and cuddled by faithful Hannah, they found Beth lying, as she used to do, with her cheek pillowed on her hand, the dreadful pallor gone, and breathing quietly, as if just fallen asleep.

“If Mother would only come now!” said Jo, as the winter night began to wane.

“See,” said Meg, coming up with a white, half-opened rose, “I thought this would hardly be ready to lay in Beth’s hand tomorrow if she — went away from us. But it has blossomed in the night, and now I mean to put it in my vase here, so that when the darling wakes, the first thing she sees will be the little rose, and Mother’s face.”

Never had the sun risen so beautifully, and never had the world seemed so lovely as it did to the heavy eyes of Meg and Jo, as they looked out in the early morning, when their long, sad vigil was done.

“It looks like a fairy world,” said Meg, smiling to herself, as she stood behind the curtain, watching the dazzling sight.

“Hark!” cried Jo, starting to her feet.

Yes, there was a sound of bells at the door below, a cry from Hannah, and then Laurie’s voice saying in a joyful whisper, “Girls, she’s come! She’s come!”

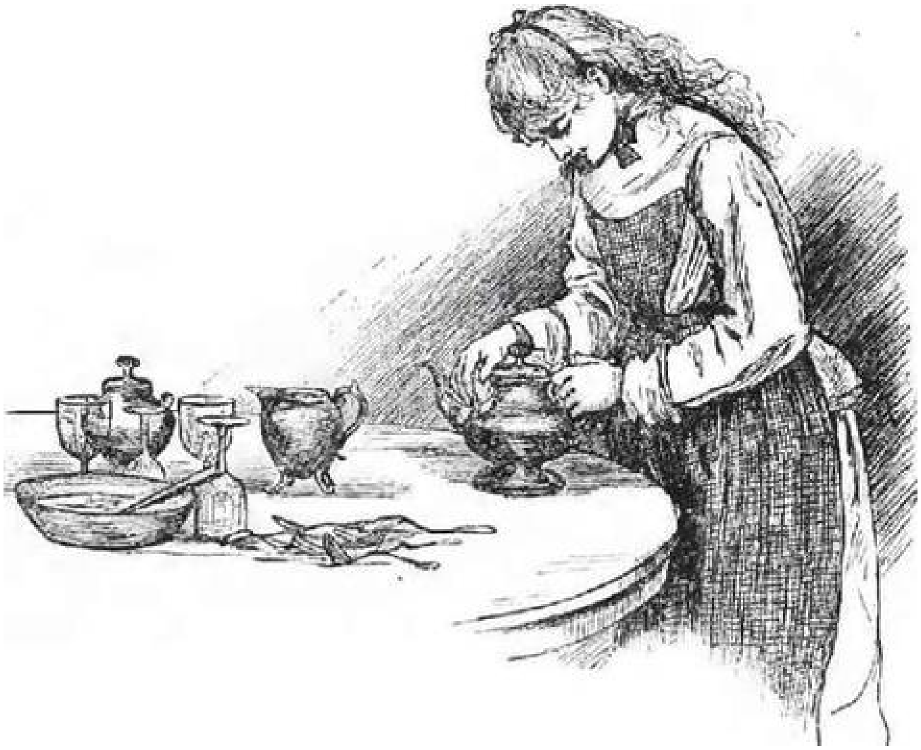
CHAPTER NINETEEN

AMY’S WILL

While these things were happening at home, Amy was having hard times at Aunt March’s. She felt her exile deeply, and for the first time in her life, realized how much she was beloved and petted at home. Aunt March never petted any one; she did not approve of it, but she meant to be kind, for the well-behaved little girl pleased her very much, and Aunt March had a soft place in her old heart for her nephew’s children, though she didn’t think it proper to confess it. She really did her best to make Amy happy, but, dear me, what mistakes she made. Some old people keep young at heart in spite of wrinkles and gray hairs, can sympathize with children’s little cares and joys, make them feel at home, and can hide wise lessons under pleasant plays, giving and receiving friendship in the sweetest way. But Aunt March had not this gift, and she worried Amy very much with her rules and orders, her prim ways, and long, prosy talks. Finding the child more docile and amiable than her sister, the old lady felt it her duty to try and counteract, as far as possible, the bad effects of home freedom and indulgence. So she took Amy by the hand, and taught her as she herself had been taught sixty years ago, a process which carried dismay to Amy’s soul, and made her feel like a fly in the web of a very strict spider.

She had to wash the cups every morning, and polish up the old-fashioned spoons, the fat silver teapot, and the glasses till they shone. Then she must dust the room, and what a trying job that was. Not a speck escaped Aunt March’s eye, and all the furniture had claw legs and much carving, which was never dusted to suit. Then Polly had to be fed, the lap dog combed, and a dozen trips upstairs and down to get things or deliver orders, for the old lady was very lame and seldom left her big chair. After these tiresome labors, she must do her lessons, which was a daily trial of every virtue she possessed. Then she was allowed one hour for exercise or play, and didn't she enjoy it?

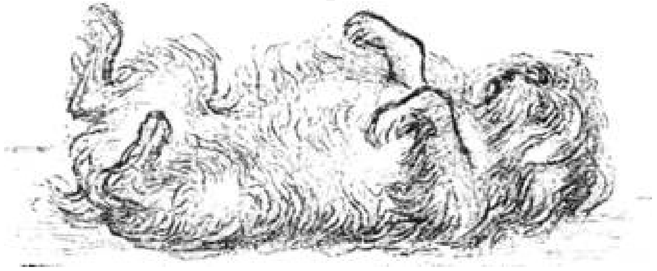
Laurie came every day, and wheedled Aunt March till Amy was allowed to go out with him, when they walked and rode and had capital times. After dinner, she had to read aloud, and sit still while the old lady slept, which she usually did for an hour, as she dropped off over the first page. Then patchwork or towels appeared, and Amy sewed with outward meekness and inward rebellion till dusk, when she was allowed to amuse herself as she liked till teatime. The evenings were the worst of all, for Aunt March fell to telling long stories about her youth, which were so unutterably dull that Amy was always ready to go to bed, intending to cry over her hard fate, but usually going to sleep before she had squeezed out more than a tear or two.



If it had not been for Laurie, and old Esther, the maid, she felt that she never could have got through that dreadful time. The parrot alone was enough to drive her distracted, for he soon felt that she did not admire him, and revenged himself by being as mischievous as possible. He pulled her hair whenever she came near him, upset his bread and milk to plague her when she had newly cleaned his cage, made Mop bark by pecking at him while Madam dozed, called her names before company, and behaved in all respects like an reprehensible old bird. Then she could not endure the dog, a fat, cross beast who snarled and yelped at her when she made his toilet, and who lay on his back with all his legs in the air and a most idiotic expression of countenance when he wanted something to eat, which was about a dozen times a day. The cook was bad-tempered, the old coachman was deaf, and Esther the only one who ever took any notice of the young lady.

Esther was a Frenchwoman, who had lived with ‘Madame’, as she called her mistress, for many years, and who rather tyrannized over the old lady, who could not get along without her. Her real name was Estelle, but Aunt March ordered her to change it, and she obeyed, on condition that she was never asked to change her religion. She took a fancy to Mademoiselle, and amused her very much with odd stories of her life in France, when Amy sat with her while she got up Madame’s laces. She also allowed her to roam about the great house, and examine the curious and pretty things stored away in the big wardrobes and the ancient chests, for Aunt March hoarded like a magpie. Amy’s chief delight was an Indian cabinet, full of queer drawers, little pigeonholes, and secret places, in which were kept all sorts of ornaments, some precious, some merely curious, all more or less antique. To examine and arrange these things gave Amy great satisfaction, especially the jewel cases, in which on velvet cushions reposed the ornaments which had adorned a belle forty years ago. There was the garnet set which Aunt March wore when she came out, the pearls her father gave her on her wedding day, her lover’s diamonds, the jet mourning rings and pins, the queer lockets, with portraits of dead friends and weeping willows made of hair inside, the baby bracelets her one little daughter had worn, Uncle March’s big watch, with the red seal so many childish hands had played with, and in a box all by itself lay Aunt March’s wedding ring, too small now for her fat finger, but put carefully away like the most precious jewel of them all.

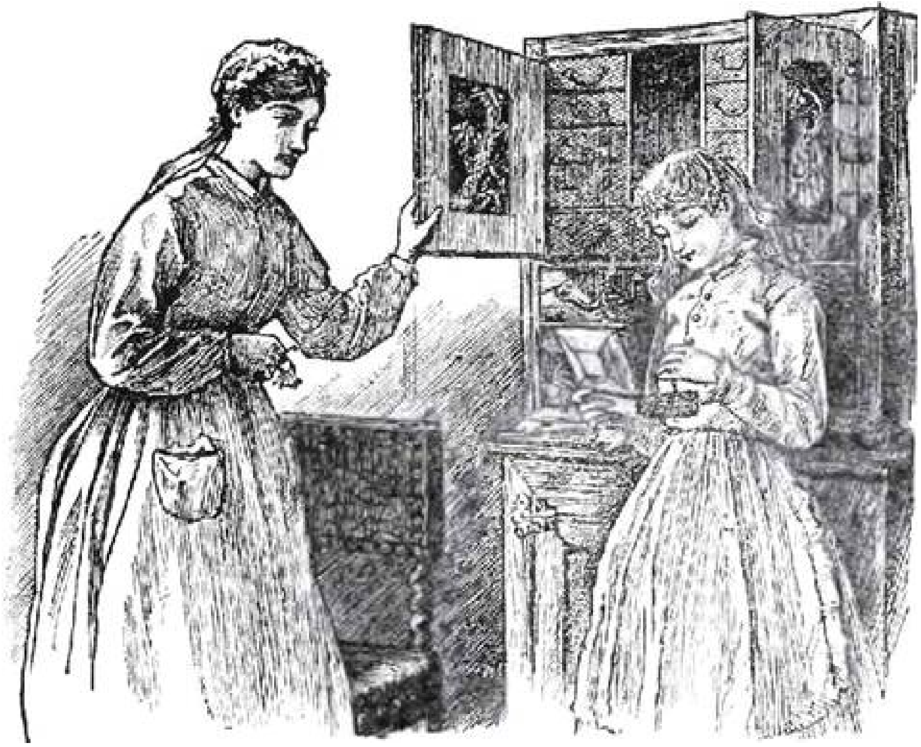
“Which would Mademoiselle choose if she had her will?” asked Esther, who always sat near to watch over and lock up the valuables.



“I like the diamonds best, but there is no necklace among them, and I’m fond of necklaces, they are so becoming. I should choose this if I might,” replied Amy, looking with great admiration at a string of gold and ebony beads from which hung a heavy cross of the same.

“I, too, covet that, but not as a necklace. Ah, no! To me it is a rosary, and as such I should use it like a good catholic," said Esther, eyeing the handsome thing wistfully.

"Is it meant to use as you use the string of good-smelling wooden beads hanging over your glass?" asked Amy.



"Truly, yes, to pray with. It would be pleasing to the saints if one used so fine a rosary as this, instead of wearing it as a vain bijou."

"You seem to take a great deal of comfort in your prayers, Esther, and always come down looking quiet and satisfied. I wish I could."

"If Mademoiselle was a Catholic, she would find true comfort, but as that is not to be, it would be well if you went apart each day to meditate and pray, as did the good mistress whom I served before Madame. She had a little chapel, and in it found solacement for much trouble."

"Would it be right for me to do so too?" asked Amy, who in her loneliness felt the need of help of some sort, and found that she was apt to forget her little book, now that Beth was not there to remind her of it.

"It would be excellent and charming, and I shall gladly arrange the little dressing room for you if you like it. Say nothing to Madame, but when she sleeps go you and sit alone a while to think good thoughts, and pray the dear God preserve your sister."

Esther was truly pious, and quite sincere in her advice, for she had an affectionate heart, and felt much for the sisters in their anxiety. Amy liked the idea, and gave her leave to arrange the light closet next her room, hoping it would do her good.

“I wish I knew where all these pretty things would go when Aunt March dies,” she said, as she slowly replaced the shining rosary and shut the jewel cases one by one.

“To you and your sisters. I know it, Madame confides in me. I witnessed her will, and it is to be so,” whispered Esther smiling.

“How nice! But I wish she’d let us have them now. Procrastination is not agreeable,” observed Amy, taking a last look at the diamonds.

“It is too soon yet for the young ladies to wear these things. The first one who is affianced will have the pearls, Madame has said it, and I have a fancy that the little turquoise ring will be given to you when you go, for Madame approves your good behavior and charming manners.”

“Do you think so? Oh, I’ll be a lamb, if I can only have that lovely ring! It’s ever so much prettier than Kitty Bryant’s. I do like Aunt March after all.” And Amy tried on the blue ring with a delighted face and a firm resolve to earn it.

From that day she was a model of obedience, and the old lady complacently admired the success of her training. Esther fitted up the closet with a little table, placed a footstool before it, and over it a picture taken from one of the shut-up rooms. She thought it was of no great value, but, being appropriate, she borrowed it, well knowing that Madame would never know it, nor care if she did. It was, however, a very valuable copy of one of the famous pictures of the world, and Amy’s beauty-loving eyes were never tired of looking up at the sweet face of the Divine Mother, while her tender thoughts of her own were busy at her heart. On the table she laid her little testament and hymnbook, kept a vase always full of the best flowers Laurie brought her, and came every day to ‘sit alone’ thinking good thoughts, and praying the dear God to preserve her sister. Esther had given her a rosary of black beads with a silver cross, but Amy hung it up and did not use it, feeling doubtful as to its fitness for Protestant prayers.

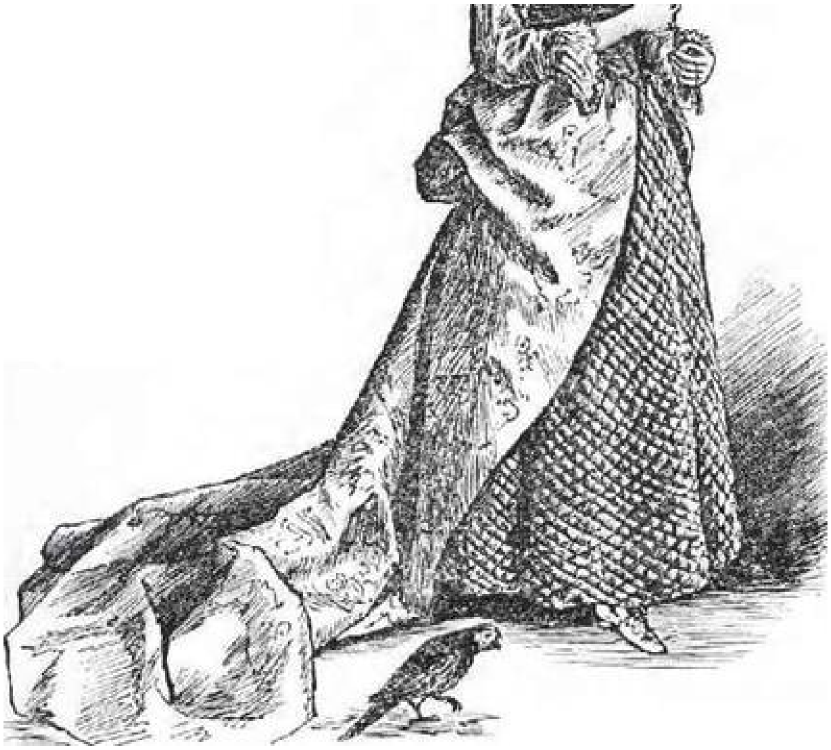
The little girl was very sincere in all this, for being left alone outside the safe home nest, she felt the need of some kind hand to hold by so sorely that she instinctively turned to the strong and tender Friend, whose fatherly love most closely surrounds His little children. She missed her mother’s help to understand and rule herself, but having been taught where to look, she did her best to find the way and walk in it confidingly. But, Amy was a young pilgrim, and just now her burden seemed very heavy. She tried to forget herself, to keep cheerful, and be satisfied with doing right, though no one saw or praised her for it. In her first effort at being very, very good, she decided to make her will, as Aunt March had done, so that if she did fall ill and die, her possessions might be justly and generously divided. It cost her a pang even to think of giving up the little treasures which in her eyes were as precious as the old lady's jewels.

During one of her play hours she wrote out the important document as well as she could, with some help from Esther as to certain legal terms, and when the good-natured Frenchwoman had signed her name, Amy felt relieved and laid it by to show Laurie, whom she wanted as a second witness. As it was a rainy day, she went upstairs to amuse herself in one of the large chambers, and took Polly with her for company. In this room there was a wardrobe full of old-fashioned costumes with which Esther allowed her to play, and it was her favorite amusement to array herself in the faded brocades, and parade up and down before the long mirror, making stately curtsies, and sweeping her train about with a rustle which delighted her ears. So busy was she on this day that she did not hear Laurie's ring nor see his face peeping in at her as she gravely promenaded to and fro, flirting her fan and tossing her head, on which she wore a great pink turban, contrasting oddly with her blue brocade dress and yellow quilted petticoat. She was obliged to walk carefully, for she had on high-heeled shoes, and, as Laurie told Jo afterward, it was a comical sight to see her mince along in her gay suit, with Polly sidling and bridling just behind her, imitating her as well as he could, and occasionally stopping to laugh or exclaim, "Ain't we fine? Get along, you fright! Hold your tongue! Kiss me, dear! Ha! Ha!"

Having with difficulty restrained an explosion of merriment, lest it should offend her majesty, Laurie tapped and was graciously received.

"Sit down and rest while I put these things away, then I want to consult you about a very serious matter," said Amy, when she had shown her splendor and driven Polly into a corner. "That bird is the trial of my life," she continued, removing the pink mountain from her head, while Laurie seated himself astride a chair.

"Yesterday, when Aunt was asleep and I was trying to be as still as a mouse, Polly began to squall and flap about in his cage, so I went to let him out, and found a big spider there. I poked it out, and it ran under the bookcase. Polly marched straight after it, stooped down and peeped under the bookcase, saying, in his funny way, with a cock of his eye, 'Come out and take a walk, my dear.' I couldn't help laughing, which made Poll swear, and Aunt woke up and scolded us both."



“Did the spider accept the old fellow’s invitation?” asked Laurie, yawning.

“Yes, out it came, and away ran Polly, frightened to death, and scrambled up on Aunt’s chair, calling out, ‘Catch her! Catch her! Catch her!’ as I chased the spider.”

“That’s a lie! Oh, lor!” cried the parrot, pecking at Laurie’s toes.

“I’d wring your neck if you were mine, you old torment,” cried Laurie, shaking his fist at the bird, who put his head on one side and gravely croaked, “Allyluyer! bless your buttons, dear!”

“Now I’m ready,” said Amy, shutting the wardrobe and taking a piece of paper out of her pocket. “I want you to read that, please, and tell me if it is legal and right. I felt I ought to do it, for life is uncertain and I don’t want any ill feeling over my tomb.”

Laurie bit his lips, and turning a little from the pensive speaker, read the following document, with praiseworthy gravity, considering the spelling:

MY LAST WILL AND TESTIMENT

I, Amy Curtis March, being in my sane mind, go give and bequeethe all my earthly property — viz. to wit: — namely

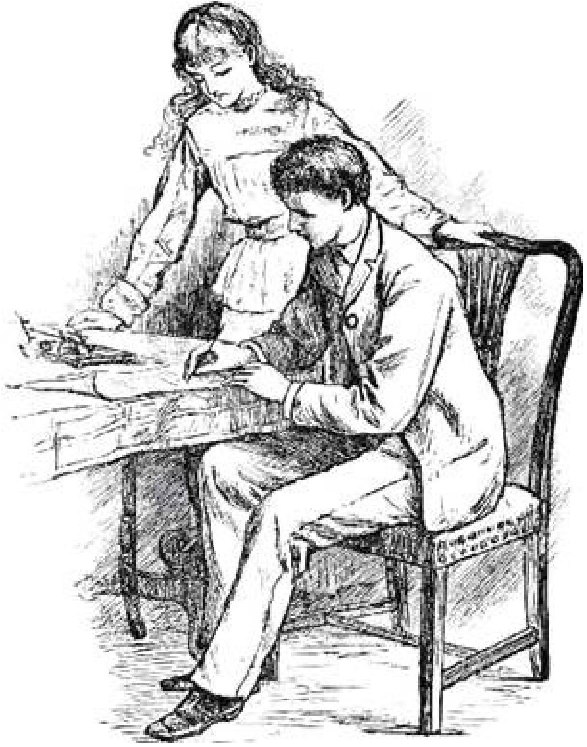
To my father, my best pictures, sketches, maps, and works of art, including frames. Also my $100, to do what he likes with.

To my mother, all my clothes, except the blue apron with pockets — also my likeness, and my medal, with much love.

To my dear sister Margaret, I give my turkquoise ring (if I get it), also my green box with the doves on it, also my piece of real lace for her neck, and my sketch of her as a memorial of her ‘little girl’.

To Jo I leave my breastpin, the one mended with sealing wax, also my bronze inkstand — she lost the cover — and my most precious plaster rabbit, because I am sorry I burned up her story.

To Beth (if she lives after me) I give my dolls and the little bureau, my fan, my linen collars and my new slippers if she can wear them being thin when she gets well. And I herewith also leave her my regret that I ever made fun of old Joanna.



To my friend and neighbor Theodore Laurence I bequeethe my paper mashay portfolio, my clay model of a horse though he did say it hadn’t any neck. Also in return for his great kindness in the hour of affliction any one of my artistic works he likes, Noter Dame is the best.

To our venerable benefactor Mr. Laurence I leave my purple box with a looking glass in the cover which will be nice for his pens and remind him of the departed girl who thanks him for his favors to her family, especially Beth.

I wish my favorite playmate Kitty Bryant to have the blue silk apron and my gold-bead ring with a kiss.

To Hannah I give the bandbox she wanted and all the patchwork I leave hoping she ‘will remember me, when it you see’.

And now having disposed of my most valuable property I hope all will be satisfied and not blame the dead. I forgive everyone, and trust we may all meet when the trump shall sound. Amen.

To this will and testiment I set my hand and seal on this 20th day of Nov. Anni Domino 1861.

Amy Curtis March

Witnesses:

Estelle Valnor, Theodore Laurence.

The last name was written in pencil, and Amy explained that he was to rewrite it in ink and seal it up for her properly.

“What put it into your head? Did anyone tell you about Beth’s giving away her things?” asked Laurie soberly, as Amy laid a bit of red tape, with sealing wax, a taper, and a standish before him.

She explained and then asked anxiously, “What about Beth?”

“I’m sorry I spoke, but as I did, I’ll tell you. She felt so ill one day that she told Jo she wanted to give her piano to Meg, her cats to you, and the poor old doll to Jo, who would love it for her sake. She was sorry she had so little to give, and left locks of hair to the rest of us, and her best love to Grandpa. She never thought of a will.”

Laurie was signing and sealing as he spoke, and did not look up till a great tear dropped on the paper. Amy’s face was full of trouble, but she only said, “Don’t people put sort of postscripts to their wills, sometimes?”

“Yes, ‘codicils’, they call them.”

“Put one in mine then, that I wish all my curls cut off, and given round to my friends. I forgot it, but I want it done though it will spoil my looks.”

Laurie added it, smiling at Amy’s last and greatest sacrifice. Then he amused her for an hour, and was much interested in all her trials. But when he came to go, Amy held him back to whisper with trembling lips, “Is there really any danger about Beth?”

“I’m afraid there is, but we must hope for the best, so don’t cry, dear.” And Laurie put his arm about her with a brotherly gesture which was very comforting.

When he had gone, she went to her little chapel, and sitting in the twilight, prayed for Beth, with streaming tears and an aching heart, feeling that a million turquoise rings would not console her for the loss of her gentle little sister.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CONFIDENTIAL

I don’t think I have any words in which to tell the meeting of the mother and daughters. Such hours are beautiful to live, but very hard to describe, so I will leave it to the imagination of my readers, merely saying that the house was full of genuine happiness, and that Meg’s tender hope was realized, for when Beth woke from that long, healing sleep, the first objects on which her eyes fell were the little rose and Mother’s face. Too weak to wonder at anything, she only smiled and nestled close in the loving arms about her, feeling that the hungry longing was satisfied at last. Then she slept again, and the girls waited upon their mother, for she would not unclasp the thin hand which clung to hers even in sleep.

Hannah had ‘dished up’ an astonishing breakfast for the traveler, finding it impossible to vent her excitement in any other way, and Meg and Jo fed their mother like dutiful young storks, while they listened to her whispered account of Father’s state, Mr. Brooke’s promise to stay and nurse him, the delays which the storm occasioned on the homeward journey, and the unspeakable comfort Laurie’s hopeful face had given her when she arrived, worn out with fatigue, anxiety, and cold.

What a strange yet pleasant day that was. So brilliant and gay without, for all the world seemed abroad to welcome the first snow. So quiet and reposeful within, for everyone slept, spent with watching, and a Sabbath stillness reigned through the house, while nodding Hannah mounted guard at the door. With a blissful sense of burdens lifted off, Meg and Jo closed their weary eyes, and lay at rest, like storm-beaten boats safe at anchor in a quiet harbor. Mrs. March would not leave Beth’s side, but rested in the big chair, waking often to look at, touch, and brood over her child, like a miser over some recovered treasure.

Laurie meanwhile posted off to comfort Amy, and told his story so well that Aunt March actually ‘sniffed’ herself, and never once said “I told you so”. Amy came out so strong on this occasion that I think the good thoughts in the little chapel really began to bear fruit. She dried her tears quickly, restrained her impatience to see her mother, and never even thought of the turquoise ring, when the old lady heartily agreed in Laurie’s opinion, that she behaved ‘like a capital little woman’. Even Polly seemed impressed, for he called her a good girl, blessed her buttons, and begged her to “come and take a walk, dear”, in his most affable tone. She would very gladly have gone out to enjoy the bright wintry weather, but discovering that Laurie was dropping with sleep in spite of manful efforts to conceal the fact, she persuaded him to rest on the sofa, while she wrote a note to her mother. She was a long time about it, and when she returned, he was stretched out with both arms under his head, sound asleep, while Aunt March had pulled down the curtains and sat doing nothing in an unusual fit of benignity.

After a while, they began to think he was not going to wake up till night, and I'm not sure that he would, had he not been effectually roused by Amy's cry of joy at sight of her mother. There probably were a good many happy little girls in and about the city that day, but it is my private opinion that Amy was the happiest of all, when she sat in her mother's lap and told her trials, receiving consolation and compensation in the shape of approving smiles and fond caresses. They were alone together in the chapel, to which her mother did not object when its purpose was explained to her.

"On the contrary, I like it very much, dear," looking from the dusty rosary to the well-worn little book, and the lovely picture with its garland of evergreen. "It is an excellent plan to have some place where we can go to be quiet, when things vex or grieve us. There are a good many hard times in this life of ours, but we can always bear them if we ask help in the right way. I think my little girl is learning this."

"Yes, Mother, and when I go home I mean to have a corner in the big closet to put my books and the copy of that picture which I've tried to make. The woman's face is not good, it's too beautiful for me to draw, but the baby is done better, and I love it very much. I like to think He was a little child once, for then I don't seem so far away, and that helps me."

As Amy pointed to the smiling Christ child on his Mother's knee, Mrs. March saw something on the lifted hand that made her smile. She said nothing, but Amy understood the look, and after a minute's pause, she added gravely, "I wanted to speak to you about this, but I forgot it. Aunt gave me the ring today. She called me to her and kissed me, and put it on my finger, and said I was a credit to her, and she'd like to keep me always. She gave that funny guard to keep the turquoise on, as it's too big. I'd like to wear them Mother, can I?"

"They are very pretty, but I think you're rather too young for such ornaments, Amy," said Mrs. March, looking at the plump little hand, with the band of sky-blue stones on the forefinger, and the quaint guard formed of two tiny golden hands clasped together.

"I'll try not to be vain," said Amy. "I don't think I like it only because it's so pretty, but I want to wear it as the girl in the story wore her bracelet, to remind me of something.”

“Do you mean Aunt March?” asked her mother, laughing.

“No, to remind me not to be selfish.” Amy looked so earnest and sincere about it that her mother stopped laughing, and listened respectfully to the little plan.

“I’ve thought a great deal lately about my ‘bundle of naughties’, and being selfish is the largest one in it, so I’m going to try hard to cure it, if I can. Beth isn’t selfish, and that’s the reason everyone loves her and feels so bad at the thoughts of losing her. People wouldn’t feel so bad about me if I was sick, and I don’t deserve to have them, but I’d like to be loved and missed by a great many friends, so I’m going to try and be like Beth all I can. I’m apt to forget my resolutions, but if I had something always about me to remind me, I guess I should do better. May we try this way?”

“Yes, but I have more faith in the corner of the big closet. Wear your ring, dear, and do your best. I think you will prosper, for the sincere wish to be good is half the battle. Now I must go back to Beth. Keep up your heart, little daughter, and we will soon have you home again.”

That evening while Meg was writing to her father to report the traveler’s safe arrival, Jo slipped upstairs into Beth’s room, and finding her mother in her usual place, stood a minute twisting her fingers in her hair, with a worried gesture and an undecided look.

“What is it, deary?” asked Mrs. March, holding out her hand, with a face which invited confidence.

“I want to tell you something, Mother.”

“About Meg?”

“How quickly you guessed! Yes, it’s about her, and though it’s a little thing, it fidgets me.”

“Beth is asleep. Speak low, and tell me all about it. That Moffat hasn’t been here, I hope?” asked Mrs. March rather sharply.

“No. I should have shut the door in his face if he had,” said Jo, settling herself on the floor at her mother’s feet. “Last summer Meg left a pair of gloves over at the Laurences’ and only one was returned. We forgot about it, till Teddy told me that Mr. Brooke owned that he liked Meg but didn’t dare say so, she was so young and he so poor. Now, isn’t it a dreadful state of things?”

“Do you think Meg cares for him?” asked Mrs. March, with an anxious look.

“Mercy me! I don’t know anything about love and such nonsense!” cried Jo, with a funny mixture of interest and contempt. “In novels, the girls show it by starting and blushing, fainting away, growing thin, and acting like fools. Now Meg does not do anything of the sort. She eats and drinks and sleeps like a sensible creature, she looks straight in my face when I talk about that man, and only blushes a little bit when Teddy jokes about lovers. I forbid him to do it, but he doesn't mind me as he ought."

"Then you fancy that Meg is not interested in John?"

"Who?" cried Jo, staring.

"Mr. Brooke. I call him 'John' now. We fell into the way of doing so at the hospital, and he likes it."

"Oh, dear! I know you'll take his part. He's been good to Father, and you won't send him away, but let Meg marry him, if she wants to. Mean thing! To go petting Papa and helping you, just to wheedle you into liking him." And Jo pulled her hair again with a wrathful tweak.

"My dear, don't get angry about it, and I will tell you how it happened. John went with me at Mr. Laurence's request, and was so devoted to poor Father that we couldn't help getting fond of him. He was perfectly open and honorable about Meg, for he told us he loved her, but would earn a comfortable home before he asked her to marry him. He only wanted our leave to love her and work for her, and the right to make her love him if he could. He is a truly excellent young man, and we could not refuse to listen to him, but I will not consent to Meg's engaging herself so young."

"Of course not. It would be idiotic! I knew there was mischief brewing. I felt it, and now it's worse than I imagined. I just wish I could marry Meg myself, and keep her safe in the family."

This odd arrangement made Mrs. March smile, but she said gravely, "Jo, I confide in you and don't wish you to say anything to Meg yet. When John comes back, and I see them together, I can judge better of her feelings toward him."

"She'll see those handsome eyes that she talks about, and then it will be all up with her. She's got such a soft heart, it will melt like butter in the sun if anyone looks sentimentlly at her. She read the short reports he sent more than she did your letters, and pinched me when I spoke of it, and likes brown eyes, and doesn't think John an ugly name, and she'll go and fall in love, and there's an end of peace and fun, and cozy times together. I see it all! They'll go lovering around the house, and we shall have to dodge. Meg will be absorbed and no good to me any more. Brooke will scratch up a fortune somehow, carry her off, and make a hole in the family, and I shall break my heart, and everything will be abominably uncomfortable. Oh, dear me! Why weren't we all boys, then there wouldn't be any bother."

Jo leaned her chin on her knees in a disconsolate attitude and shook her fist at the reprehensible John. Mrs. March sighed, and Jo looked up with an air of relief.

"You don't like it, Mother? I'm glad of it. Let's send him about his business, and not tell Meg a word of it, but all be happy together as we always have been."

"I did wrong to sigh, Jo. It is natural and right you should all go to homes of your own in time, but I do want to keep my girls as long as I can, and I am sorry that this happened so soon, for Meg is only seventeen and it will be some years before John can make a home for her. Your father and I have agreed that she shall not bind herself in any way, nor be married, before twenty. If she and John love one another, they can wait, and test the love by doing so. She is conscientious, and I have no fear of her treating him unkindly. My pretty, tender hearted girl! I hope things will go happily with her."

"Hadn't you rather have her marry a rich man?" asked Jo, as her mother's voice faltered a little over the last words.

"Money is a good and useful thing, Jo, and I hope my girls will never feel the need of it too bitterly, nor be tempted by too much. I should like to know that John was firmly established in some good business, which gave him an income large enough to keep free from debt and make Meg comfortable. I'm not ambitious for a splendid fortune, a fashionable position, or a great name for my girls. If rank and money come with love and virtue, also, I should accept them gratefully, and enjoy your good fortune, but I know, by experience, how much genuine happiness can be had in a plain little house, where the daily bread is earned, and some privations give sweetness to the few pleasures. I am content to see Meg begin humbly, for if I am not mistaken, she will be rich in the possession of a good man's heart, and that is better than a fortune."

"I understand, Mother, and quite agree, but I'm disappointed about Meg, for I'd planned to have her marry Teddy by-and-by and sit in the lap of luxury all her days. Wouldn't it be nice?" asked Jo, looking up with a brighter face.

"He is younger than she, you know," began Mrs. March, but Jo broke in...

"Only a little, he's old for his age, and tall, and can be quite grown-up in his manners if he likes. Then he's rich and generous and good, and loves us all, and I say it's a pity my plan is spoiled."

"I'm afraid Laurie is hardly grown-up enough for Meg, and altogether too much of a weathercock just now for anyone to depend on. Don't make plans, Jo, but let time and their own hearts mate your friends. We can't meddle safely in such matters, and had better not get 'romantic rubbish' as you call it, into our heads, lest it spoil our friendship."

"Well, I won't, but I hate to see things going all crisscross and getting snarled up, when a pull here and a snip there would straighten it out. I wish wearing flatirons on our heads would keep us from growing up. But buds will be roses, and kittens cats, more's the pity!"

"What's that about flatirons and cats?" asked Meg, as she crept into the room with the finished letter in her hand.

“Only one of my stupid speeches. I’m going to bed. Come, Peggy,” said Jo, unfolding herself like an animated puzzle.

“Quite right, and beautifully written. Please add that I send my love to John,” said Mrs. March, as she glanced over the letter and gave it back.

“Do you call him ‘John’?” asked Meg, smiling, with her innocent eyes looking down into her mother’s.

“Yes, he has been like a son to us, and we are very fond of him,” replied Mrs. March, returning the look with a keen one.

“I’m glad of that, he is so lonely. Good night, Mother, dear. It is so inexpressibly comfortable to have you here,” was Meg’s answer.

The kiss her mother gave her was a very tender one, and as she went away, Mrs. March said, with a mixture of satisfaction and regret, “She does not love John yet, but will soon learn to.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

LAURIE MAKES MISCHIEF, AND JO MAKES PEACE

Jo's face was a study next day, for the secret rather weighed upon her, and she found it hard not to look mysterious and important. Meg observed it, but did not trouble herself to make inquiries, for she had learned that the best way to manage Jo was by the law of contraries, so she felt sure of being told everything if she did not ask. She was rather surprised, therefore, when the silence remained unbroken, and Jo assumed a patronizing air, which decidedly aggravated Meg, who in turn assumed an air of dignified reserve and devoted herself to her mother. This left Jo to her own devices, for Mrs. March had taken her place as nurse, and bade her rest, exercise, and amuse herself after her long confinement. Amy being gone, Laurie was her only refuge, and much as she enjoyed his society, she rather dreaded him just then, for he was an incorrigible tease, and she feared he would coax the secret from her.

She was quite right, for the mischief-loving lad no sooner suspected a mystery than he set himself to find it out, and led Jo a trying life of it. He wheedled, bribed, ridiculed, threatened, and scolded; affected indifference, that he might surprise the truth from her; declared he knew, then that he didn't care; and at last, by dint of perseverance, he satisfied himself that it concerned Meg and Mr. Brooke. Feeling indignant that he was not taken into his tutor's confidence, he set his wits to work to devise some proper retaliation for the slight.

Meg meanwhile had apparently forgotten the matter and was absorbed in preparations for her father's return, but all of a sudden a change seemed to come over her, and, for a day or two, she was quite unlike herself. She started when spoken to, blushed when looked at, was very quiet, and sat over her sewing, with a timid, troubled look on her face. To her mother's inquiries she answered that she was quite well, and Jo's she silenced by begging to be let alone.

"She feels it in the air — love, I mean — and she's going very fast. She's got most of the symptoms — is twittery and cross, doesn't eat, lies awake, and mopes in corners. I caught her singing that song he gave her, and once she said 'John', as you do, and then turned as red as a poppy. Whatever shall we do?" said Jo, looking ready for any measures, however violent.

"Nothing but wait. Let her alone, be kind and patient, and Father's coming will settle everything," replied her mother.

"Here's a note to you, Meg, all sealed up. How odd! Teddy never seals mine," said Jo next day, as she distributed the contents of the little post office.

Mrs. March and Jo were deep in their own affairs, when a sound from Meg made them look up to see her staring at her note with a frightened face.

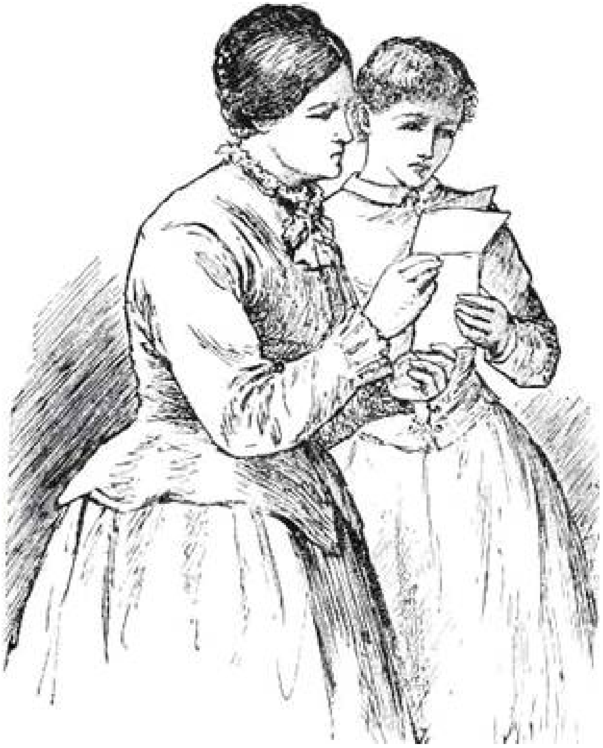
"My child, what is it?" cried her mother, running to her, while Jo tried to take the paper which had done the mischief.

"It's all a mistake, he didn't send it. Oh, Jo, how could you do it?" and Meg hid her face in her hands, crying as if her heart were quite broken.

"Me! I've done nothing! What's she talking about?" cried Jo, bewildered.

Meg's mild eyes kindled with anger as she pulled a crumpled note from her pocket and threw it at Jo, saying reproachfully, "You wrote it, and that bad boy helped you. How could you be so rude, so mean, and cruel to us both?"

Jo hardly heard her, for she and her mother were reading the note, which was written in a peculiar hand.



"My Dearest Margaret,

"I can no longer restrain my passion, and must know my fate before I return. I dare not tell your parents yet, but I think they would consent if they knew that we adored one another. Mr. Laurence will help me to some good place, and then, my sweet girl, you will make me happy. I implore you to say nothing to your family yet, but to send one word of hope through Laurie to,

"Your devoted John."

“Oh, the little villain! That’s the way he meant to pay me for keeping my word to Mother. I’ll give him a hearty scolding and bring him over to beg pardon,” cried Jo, burning to execute immediate justice. But her mother held her back, saying, with a look she seldom wore...

“Stop, Jo, you must clear yourself first. You have played so many pranks that I am afraid you have had a hand in this.”

“On my word, Mother, I haven’t! I never saw that note before, and don’t know anything about it, as true as I live!” said Jo, so earnestly that they believed her. “If I had taken part in it I’d have done it better than this, and have written a sensible note. I should think you’d have known Mr. Brooke wouldn’t write such stuff as that,” she added, scornfully tossing down the paper.

“It’s like his writing,” faltered Meg, comparing it with the note in her hand.

“Oh, Meg, you didn’t answer it?” cried Mrs. March quickly.

“Yes, I did!” and Meg hid her face again, overcome with shame.

“Here’s a scrape! Do let me bring that wicked boy over to explain and be lectured. I can’t rest till I get hold of him.” And Jo made for the door again.

“Hush! Let me handle this, for it is worse than I thought. Margaret, tell me the whole story,” commanded Mrs. March, sitting down by Meg, yet keeping hold of Jo, lest she should fly off.

“I received the first letter from Laurie, who didn’t look as if he knew anything about it,” began Meg, without looking up. “I was worried at first and meant to tell you, then I remembered how you liked Mr. Brooke, so I thought you wouldn’t mind if I kept my little secret for a few days. I’m so silly that I liked to think no one knew, and while I was deciding what to say, I felt like the girls in books, who have such things to do. Forgive me, Mother, I’m paid for my silliness now. I never can look him in the face again.”

“What did you say to him?” asked Mrs. March.

“I only said I was too young to do anything about it yet, that I didn’t wish to have secrets from you, and he must speak to father. I was very grateful for his kindness, and would be his friend, but nothing more, for a long while.”

Mrs. March smiled, as if well pleased, and Jo clapped her hands, exclaiming, with a laugh, “You are almost equal to Caroline Percy, who was a pattern of prudence! Tell on, Meg. What did he say to that?”

“He writes in a different way entirely, telling me that he never sent any love letter at all, and is very sorry that my roguish sister, Jo, should take liberties with our names. It’s very kind and respectful, but think how dreadful for me!”

Meg leaned against her mother, looking the image of despair, and Jo tramped about the room, calling Laurie names. All of a sudden she stopped, caught up the two notes, and after looking at them closely, said decidedly, “I don’t believe

Brooke ever saw either of these letters. Teddy wrote both, and keeps yours to crow over me with because I wouldn't tell him my secret."

"Don't have any secrets, Jo. Tell it to Mother and keep out of trouble, as I should have done," said Meg warningly.

"Bless you, child! Mother told me."

"That will do, Jo. I'll comfort Meg while you go and get Laurie. I shall sift the matter to the bottom, and put a stop to such pranks at once."

Away ran Jo, and Mrs. March gently told Meg Mr. Brooke's real feelings. "Now, dear, what are your own? Do you love him enough to wait till he can make a home for you, or will you keep yourself quite free for the present?"

"I've been so scared and worried, I don't want to have anything to do with lovers for a long while, perhaps never," answered Meg petulantly. "If John doesn't know anything about this nonsense, don't tell him, and make Jo and Laurie hold their tongues. I won't be deceived and plagued and made a fool of. It's a shame!"

Seeing Meg's usually gentle temper was roused and her pride hurt by this mischievous joke, Mrs. March soothed her by promises of entire silence and great discretion for the future. The instant Laurie's step was heard in the hall, Meg fled into the study, and Mrs. March received the culprit alone. Jo had not told him why he was wanted, fearing he wouldn't come, but he knew the minute he saw Mrs. March's face, and stood twirling his hat with a guilty air which convicted him at once. Jo was dismissed, but chose to march up and down the hall like a sentinel, having some fear that the prisoner might bolt. The sound of voices in the parlor rose and fell for half an hour, but what happened during that interview the girls never knew.

When they were called in, Laurie was standing by their mother with such a penitent face that Jo forgave him on the spot, but did not think it wise to betray the fact. Meg received his humble apology, and was much comforted by the assurance that Brooke knew nothing of the joke.

"I'll never tell him to my dying day, wild horses shan't drag it out of me, so you'll forgive me, Meg, and I'll do anything to show how out-and-out sorry I am," he added, looking very much ashamed of himself.

"I'll try, but it was a very ungentlemanly thing to do, I didn't think you could be so sly and malicious, Laurie," replied Meg, trying to hide her maidenly confusion under a gravely reproachful air.

"It was altogether abominable, and I don't deserve to be spoken to for a month, but you will, though, won't you?" And Laurie folded his hands together with such and imploring gesture, as he spoke in his irresistibly persuasive tone, that it was impossible to frown upon him in spite of his scandalous behavior.

Meg pardoned him, and Mrs. March's grave face relaxed, in spite of her efforts to keep sober, when she heard him declare that he would atone for his sins by all sorts of penances, and abase himself like a worm before the injured damsel.

Jo stood aloof, meanwhile, trying to harden her heart against him, and succeeding only in primming up her face into an expression of entire disapprobation. Laurie looked at her once or twice, but as she showed no sign of relenting, he felt injured, and turned his back on her till the others were done with him, when he made her a low bow and walked off without a word.

As soon as he had gone, she wished she had been more forgiving, and when Meg and her mother went upstairs, she felt lonely and longed for Teddy. After resisting for some time, she yielded to the impulse, and armed with a book to return, went over to the big house.

"Is Mr. Laurence in?" asked Jo, of a housemaid, who was coming downstairs.

"Yes, Miss, but I don't believe he's seeable just yet."

"Why not? Is he ill?"

"La, no Miss, but he's had a scene with Mr. Laurie, who is in one of his tantrums about something, which vexes the old gentleman, so I dursn't go nigh him."

"Where is Laurie?"

"Shut up in his room, and he won't answer, though I've been a-tapping. I don't know what's to become of the dinner, for it's ready, and there's no one to eat it."

"I'll go and see what the matter is. I'm not afraid of either of them."

Up went Jo, and knocked smartly on the door of Laurie's little study.

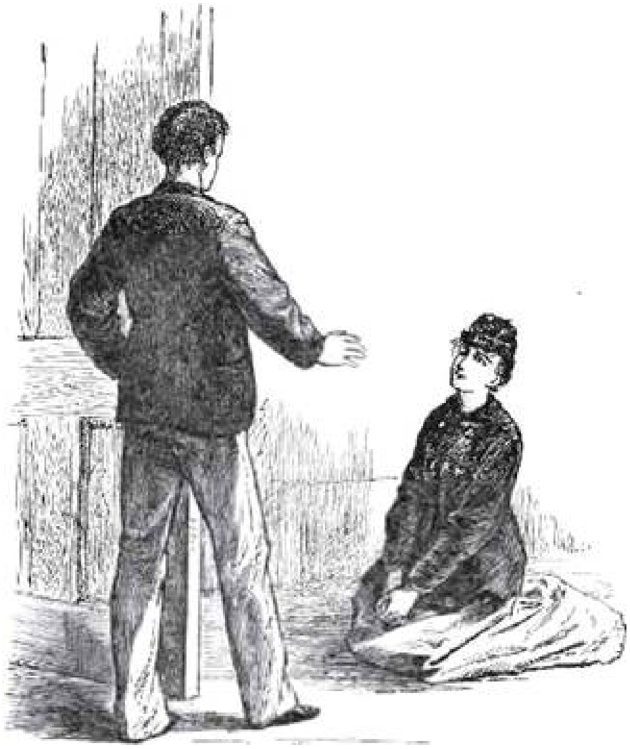
"Stop that, or I'll open the door and make you!" called out the young gentleman in a threatening tone.

Jo immediately knocked again. The door flew open, and in she bounced before Laurie could recover from his surprise. Seeing that he really was out of temper, Jo, who knew how to manage him, assumed a contrite expression, and going artistically down upon her knees, said meekly, "Please forgive me for being so cross. I came to make it up, and can't go away till I have."

"It's all right. Get up, and don't be a goose, Jo," was the cavalier reply to her petition.

"Thank you, I will. Could I ask what's the matter? You don't look exactly easy in your mind."

"I've been shaken, and I won't bear it!" growled Laurie indignantly.



“Who did it?” demanded Jo.

“Grandfather. If it had been anyone else I’d have...” And the injured youth finished his sentence by an energetic gesture of the right arm.

“That’s nothing. I often shake you, and you don’t mind,” said Jo soothingly.

“Pooh! You’re a girl, and it’s fun, but I’ll allow no man to shake me!”

“I don’t think anyone would care to try it, if you looked as much like a thundercloud as you do now. Why were you treated so?”

“Just because I wouldn’t say what your mother wanted me for. I’d promised not to tell, and of course I wasn’t going to break my word.”

“Couldn’t you satisfy your grandpa in any other way?”

“No, he would have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I’d have told my part of the scrape, if I could without bringing Meg in. As I couldn’t, I held my tongue, and bore the scolding till the old gentleman collared me. Then I bolted, for fear I should forget myself.”

“It wasn’t nice, but he’s sorry, I know, so go down and make up. I’ll help you.”

“Hanged if I do! I’m not going to be lectured and pummelled by everyone, just for a bit of a frolic. I was sorry about Meg, and begged pardon like a man, but I won’t do it again, when I wasn’t in the wrong.”

“He didn’t know that.”

“He ought to trust me, and not act as if I was a baby. It’s no use, Jo, he’s got to learn that I’m able to take care of myself, and don’t need anyone’s apron string to hold on by.”

“What pepper pots you are!” sighed Jo. “How do you mean to settle this affair?”

“Well, he ought to beg pardon, and believe me when I say I can’t tell him what the fuss’s about.”

“Bless you! He won’t do that.”

“I won’t go down till he does.”

“Now, Teddy, be sensible. Let it pass, and I’ll explain what I can. You can’t stay here, so what’s the use of being melodramatic?”

“I don’t intend to stay here long, anyway. I’ll slip off and take a journey somewhere, and when Grandpa misses me he’ll come round fast enough.”

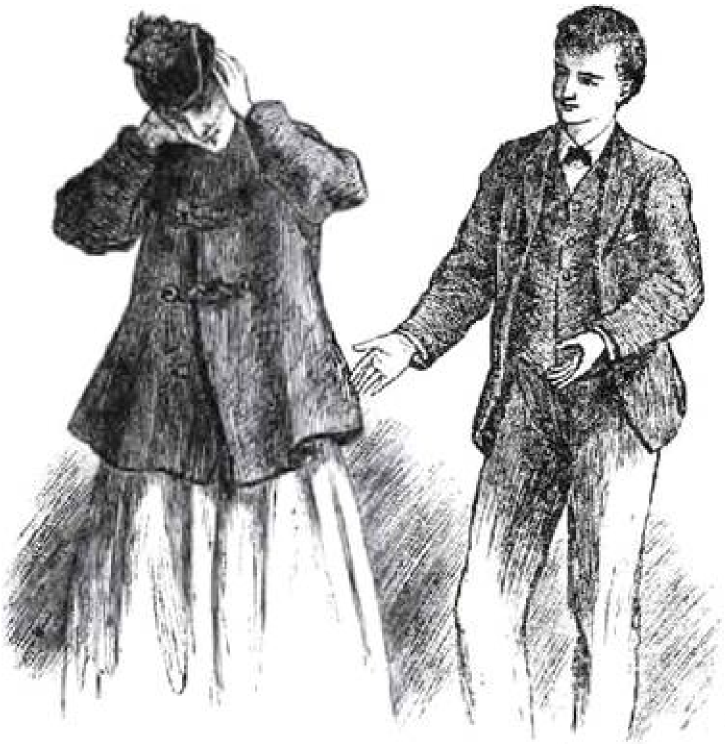
“I dare say, but you ought not to go and worry him.”

“Don’t preach. I’ll go to Washington and see Brooke. It’s gay there, and I’ll enjoy myself after the troubles.”

“What fun you’d have! I wish I could run off too,” said Jo, forgetting her part of mentor in lively visions of martial life at the capital.

“Come on, then! Why not? You go and surprise your father, and I’ll stir up old Brooke. It would be a glorious joke. Let’s do it, Jo. We’ll leave a letter saying we are all right, and trot off at once. I’ve got money enough. It will do you good, and no harm, as you go to your father.”

For a moment Jo looked as if she would agree, for wild as the plan was, it just suited her. She was tired of care and confinement, longed for change, and thoughts of her father blended temptingly with the novel charms of camps and hospitals, liberty and fun. Her eyes kindled as they turned wistfully toward the window, but they fell on the old house opposite, and she shook her head with sorrowful decision.



“If I was a boy, we’d run away together, and have a capital time, but as I’m a miserable girl, I must be proper and stop at home. Don’t tempt me, Teddy, it’s a crazy plan.”

“That’s the fun of it,” began Laurie, who had got a willful fit on him and was possessed to break out of bounds in some way.

“Hold your tongue!” cried Jo, covering her ears. “‘Prunes and prisms’ are my doom, and I may as well make up my mind to it. I came here to moralize, not to hear things that make me skip to think of.”

“I know Meg would wet-blanket such a proposal, but I thought you had more spirit,” began Laurie insinuatingly.

“Bad boy, be quiet! Sit down and think of your own sins, don’t go making me add to mine. If I get your grandpa to apologize for the shaking, will you give up running away?” asked Jo seriously.

“Yes, but you won’t do it,” answered Laurie, who wished to make up, but felt that his outraged dignity must be appeased first.

“If I can manage the young one, I can the old one,” muttered Jo, as she walked away, leaving Laurie bent over a railroad map with his head propped up on both hands.

“Come in!” and Mr. Laurence’s gruff voice sounded gruffer than ever, as Jo tapped at his door.

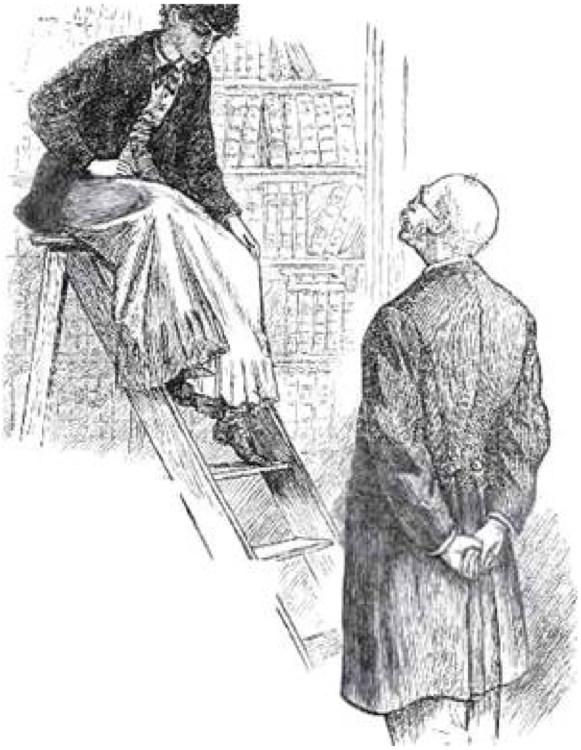
“It’s only me, Sir, come to return a book,” she said blandly, as she entered.

“Want any more?” asked the old gentleman, looking grim and vexed, but trying not to show it.

“Yes, please. I like old Sam so well, I think I’ll try the second volume,” returned Jo, hoping to propitiate him by accepting a second dose of Boswell’s Johnson, as he had recommended that lively work.

The shaggy eyebrows unbent a little as he rolled the steps toward the shelf where the Johnsonian literature was placed. Jo skipped up, and sitting on the top step, affected to be searching for her book, but was really wondering how best to introduce the dangerous object of her visit. Mr. Laurence seemed to suspect that something was brewing in her mind, for after taking several brisk turns about the room, he faced round on her, speaking so abruptly that Rasselas tumbled face downward on the floor.

“What has that boy been about? Don’t try to shield him. I know he has been in mischief by the way he acted when he came home. I can’t get a word from him, and when I threatened to shake the truth out of him he bolted upstairs and locked himself into his room.”



“He did wrong, but we forgave him, and all promised not to say a word to anyone,” began Jo reluctantly.

“That won’t do. He shall not shelter himself behind a promise from you softhearted girls. If he’s done anything amiss, he shall confess, beg pardon, and be punished. Out with it, Jo. I won’t be kept in the dark.”

Mr. Laurence looked so alarming and spoke so sharply that Jo would have gladly run away, if she could, but she was perched aloft on the steps, and he stood at the foot, a lion in the path, so she had to stay and brave it out.

"Indeed, Sir, I cannot tell. Mother forbade it. Laurie has confessed, asked pardon, and been punished quite enough. We don't keep silence to shield him, but someone else, and it will make more trouble if you interfere. Please don't. It was partly my fault, but it's all right now. So let's forget it, and talk about the *Rambler* or something pleasant."

"Hang the *Rambler!* Come down and give me your word that this harum-scarum boy of mine hasn't done anything ungrateful or impertinent. If he has, after all your kindness to him, I'll thrash him with my own hands."

The threat sounded awful, but did not alarm Jo, for she knew the irascible old gentleman would never lift a finger against his grandson, whatever he might say to the contrary. She obediently descended, and made as light of the prank as she could without betraying Meg or forgetting the truth.

"Hum... ha... well, if the boy held his tongue because he promised, and not from obstinacy, I'll forgive him. He's a stubborn fellow and hard to manage," said Mr. Laurence, rubbing up his hair till it looked as if he had been out in a gale, and smoothing the frown from his brow with an air of relief.

"So am I, but a kind word will govern me when all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't," said Jo, trying to say a kind word for her friend, who seemed to get out of one scrape only to fall into another.

"You think I'm not kind to him, hey?" was the sharp answer.

"Oh, dear no, Sir. You are rather too kind sometimes, and then just a trifle hasty when he tries your patience. Don't you think you are?"

Jo was determined to have it out now, and tried to look quite placid, though she quaked a little after her bold speech. To her great relief and surprise, the old gentleman only threw his spectacles onto the table with a rattle and exclaimed frankly, "You're right, girl, I am! I love the boy, but he tries my patience past bearing, and I know how it will end, if we go on so."

"I'll tell you, he'll run away." Jo was sorry for that speech the minute it was made. She meant to warn him that Laurie would not bear much restraint, and hoped he would be more forebearing with the lad.

Mr. Laurence's ruddy face changed suddenly, and he sat down, with a troubled glance at the picture of a handsome man, which hung over his table. It was Laurie's father, who had run away in his youth, and married against the imperious old man's will. Jo fancied he remembered and regretted the past, and she wished she had held her tongue.

"He won't do it unless he is very much worried, and only threatens it sometimes, when he gets tired of studying. I often think I should like to, especially since my hair was cut, so if you ever miss us, you may advertise for two boys and look among the ships bound for India."

She laughed as she spoke, and Mr. Laurence looked relieved, evidently taking the whole as a joke.

"You hussy, how dare you talk in that way? Where's your respect for me, and your proper bringing up? Bless the boys and girls! What torments they are, yet we can't do without them," he said, pinching her cheeks good-humoredly. "Go and bring that boy down to his dinner, tell him it's all right, and advise him not to put on tragedy airs with his grandfather. I won't bear it."

"He won't come, Sir. He feels badly because you didn't believe him when he said he couldn't tell. I think the shaking hurt his feelings very much."

Jo tried to look pathetic but must have failed, for Mr. Laurence began to laugh, and she knew the day was won.

"I'm sorry for that, and ought to thank him for not shaking me, I suppose. What the dickens does the fellow expect?" and the old gentleman looked a trifle ashamed of his own testiness.

"If I were you, I'd write him an apology, Sir. He says he won't come down till he has one, and talks about Washington, and goes on in an absurd way. A formal apology will make him see how foolish he is, and bring him down quite amiable. Try it. He likes fun, and this way is better than talking. I'll carry it up, and teach him his duty."

Mr. Laurence gave her a sharp look, and put on his spectacles, saying slowly, "You're a sly puss, but I don't mind being managed by you and Beth. Here, give me a bit of paper, and let us have done with this nonsense."

The note was written in the terms which one gentleman would use to another after offering some deep insult. Jo dropped a kiss on the top of Mr. Laurence's bald head, and ran up to slip the apology under Laurie's door, advising him through the keyhole to be submissive, decorous, and a few other agreeable impossibilities. Finding the door locked again, she left the note to do its work, and was going quietly away, when the young gentleman slid down the banisters, and waited for her at the bottom, saying, with his most virtuous expression of countenance, "What a good fellow you are, Jo! Did you get blown up?" he added, laughing.

"No, he was pretty mild, on the whole."

"Ah! I got it all round. Even you cast me off over there, and I felt just ready to go to the deuce," he began apologetically.

"Don't talk that way, turn over a new leaf and begin again, Teddy, my son."

"I keep turning over new leaves, and spoiling them, as I used to spoil my copybooks, and I make so many beginnings there never will be an end," he said dolefully.

“Go and eat your dinner, you’ll feel better after it. Men always croak when they are hungry,” and Jo whisked out at the front door after that.

“That’s a ‘label’ on my ‘sect’,” answered Laurie, quoting Amy, as he went to partake of humble pie dutifully with his grandfather, who was quite saintly in temper and overwhelmingly respectful in manner all the rest of the day.

Everyone thought the matter ended and the little cloud blown over, but the mischief was done, for though others forgot it, Meg remembered. She never alluded to a certain person, but she thought of him a good deal, dreamed dreams more than ever, and once Jo, rummaging her sister’s desk for stamps, found a bit of paper scribbled over with the words, ‘Mrs. John Brooke’, whereat she groaned tragically and cast it into the fire, feeling that Laurie’s prank had hastened the evil day for her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

PLEASANT MEADOWS

Like sunshine after a storm were the peaceful weeks which followed. The invalids improved rapidly, and Mr. March began to talk of returning early in the new year. Beth was soon able to lie on the study sofa all day, amusing herself with the well-beloved cats at first, and in time with doll's sewing, which had fallen sadly behind-hand. Her once active limbs were so stiff and feeble that Jo took her for a daily airing about the house in her strong arms. Meg cheerfully blackened and burned her white hands cooking delicate messes for 'the dear', while Amy, a loyal slave of the ring, celebrated her return by giving away as many of her treasures as she could prevail on her sisters to accept.

As Christmas approached, the usual mysteries began to haunt the house, and Jo frequently convulsed the family by proposing utterly impossible or magnificently absurd ceremonies, in honor of this unusually merry Christmas. Laurie was equally impracticable, and would have had bonfires, skyrockets, and triumphal arches, if he had had his own way. After many skirmishes and snubbings, the ambitious pair were considered effectually quenched and went about with forlorn faces, which were rather belied by explosions of laughter when the two got together.

Several days of unusually mild weather fitly ushered in a splendid Christmas Day. Hannah 'felt in her bones' that it was going to be an unusually fine day, and she proved herself a true prophetess, for everybody and everything seemed bound to produce a grand success. To begin with, Mr. March wrote that he should soon be with them, then Beth felt uncommonly well that morning, and, being dressed in her mother's gift, a soft crimson merino wrapper, was borne in high triumph to the window to behold the offering of Jo and Laurie. The Unquenchables had done their best to be worthy of the name, for like elves they had worked by night and conjured up a comical surprise. Out in the garden stood a stately snow maiden, crowned with holly, bearing a basket of fruit and flowers in one hand, a great roll of music in the other, a perfect rainbow of an Afghan round her chilly shoulders, and a Christmas carol issuing from her lips on a pink paper streamer.

THE JUNGFRAU TO BETH

God bless you, dear Queen Bess!

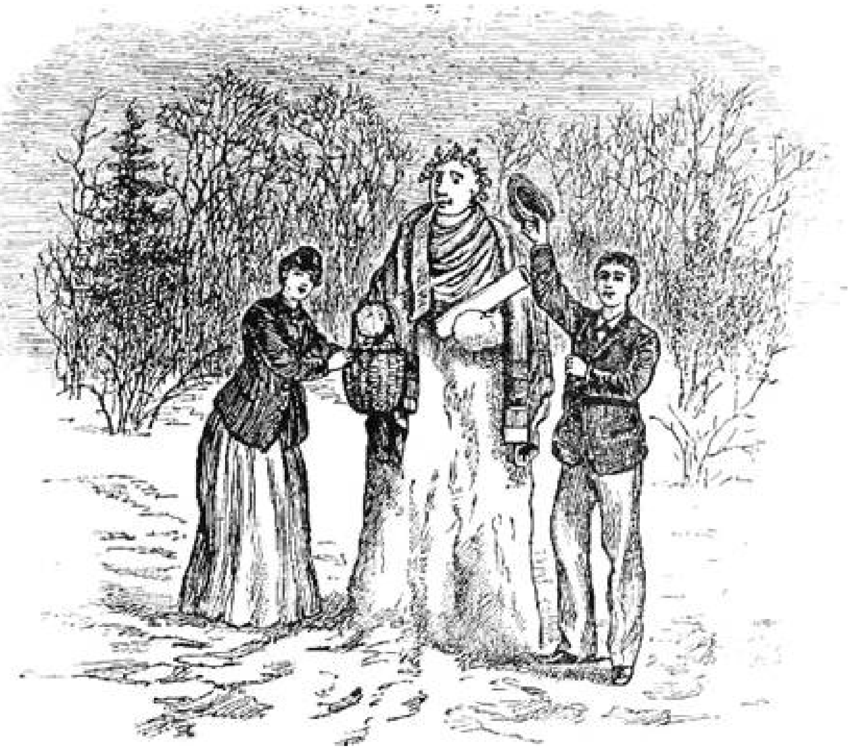
May nothing you dismay,
But health and peace and happiness
Be yours, this Christmas day.

Here’s fruit to feed our busy bee,
And flowers for her nose.
Here’s music for her pianee,
An afghan for her toes,

A portrait of Joanna, see,
By Raphael No. 2,
Who laboured with great industry
To make it fair and true.

Accept a ribbon red, I beg,
For Madam Purrer’s tail,
And ice cream made by lovely Peg,
A Mont Blanc in a pail.

Their dearest love my makers laid
Within my breast of snow.
Accept it, and the Alpine maid,
From Laurie and from Jo.



How Beth laughed when she saw it, how Laurie ran up and down to bring in the gifts, and what ridiculous speeches Jo made as she presented them.

“I’m so full of happiness, that if Father was only here, I couldn’t hold one drop more,” said Beth, quite sighing with contentment as Jo carried her off to the study to rest after the excitement, and to refresh herself with some of the delicious grapes the ‘Jungfrau’ had sent her.

“So am I,” added Jo, slapping the pocket wherein reposed the long-desired *Undine and Sintram*.

“I’m sure I am,” echoed Amy, poring over the engraved copy of the Madonna and Child, which her mother had given her in a pretty frame.

“Of course I am!” cried Meg, smoothing the silvery folds of her first silk dress, for Mr. Laurence had insisted on giving it. “How can I be otherwise?” said Mrs. March gratefully, as her eyes went from her husband’s letter to Beth’s smiling face, and her hand carressed the brooch made of gray and golden, chestnut and dark brown hair, which the girls had just fastened on her breast.

Now and then, in this workaday world, things do happen in the delightful storybook fashion, and what a comfort it is. Half an hour after everyone had said they were so happy they could only hold one drop more, the drop came. Laurie opened the parlor door and popped his head in very quietly. He might just as well have turned a somersault and uttered an Indian war whoop, for his face was so full of suppressed excitement and his voice so treacherously joyful that everyone jumped up, though he only said, in a queer, breathless voice, “Here’s another Christmas present for the March family."

Before the words were well out of his mouth, he was whisked away somehow, and in his place appeared a tall man, muffled up to the eyes, leaning on the arm of another tall man, who tried to say something and couldn't. Of course there was a general stampede, and for several minutes everybody seemed to lose their wits, for the strangest things were done, and no one said a word.

Mr. March became invisible in the embrace of four pairs of loving arms. Jo disgraced herself by nearly fainting away, and had to be doctored by Laurie in the china closet. Mr. Brooke kissed Meg entirely by mistake, as he somewhat incoherently explained. And Amy, the dignified, tumbled over a stool, and never stopping to get up, hugged and cried over her father's boots in the most touching manner. Mrs. March was the first to recover herself, and held up her hand with a warning, "Hush! Remember Beth."

But it was too late. The study door flew open, the little red wrapper appeared on the threshold, joy put strength into the feeble limbs, and Beth ran straight into her father's arms. Never mind what happened just after that, for the full hearts overflowed, washing away the bitterness of the past and leaving only the sweetness of the present.

It was not at all romantic, but a hearty laugh set everybody straight again, for Hannah was discovered behind the door, sobbing over the fat turkey, which she had forgotten to put down when she rushed up from the kitchen. As the laugh subsided, Mrs. March began to thank Mr. Brooke for his faithful care of her husband, at which Mr. Brooke suddenly remembered that Mr. March needed rest, and seizing Laurie, he precipitately retired. Then the two invalids were ordered to repose, which they did, by both sitting in one big chair and talking hard.

Mr. March told how he had longed to surprise them, and how, when the fine weather came, he had been allowed by his doctor to take advantage of it, how devoted Brooke had been, and how he was altogether a most estimable and upright young man. Why Mr. March paused a minute just there, and after a glance at Meg, who was violently poking the fire, looked at his wife with an inquiring lift of the eyebrows, I leave you to imagine. Also why Mrs. March gently nodded her head and asked, rather abruptly, if he wouldn't like to have something to eat. Jo saw and understood the look, and she stalked grimly away to get wine and beef tea, muttering to herself as she slammed the door, "I hate estimable young men with brown eyes!"

There never was such a Christmas dinner as they had that day. The fat turkey was a sight to behold, when Hannah sent him up, stuffed, browned, and decorated. So was the plum pudding, which melted in one's mouth, likewise the jellies, in which Amy reveled like a fly in a honeypot. Everything turned out well, which was a mercy, Hannah said, “For my mind was that flustered, Mum, that it’s a merrycle I didn’t roast the pudding, and stuff the turkey with raisins, let alone bilin’ of it in a cloth.”

Mr. Laurence and his grandson dined with them, also Mr. Brooke, at whom Jo glowered darkly, to Laurie’s infinite amusement. Two easy chairs stood side by side at the head of the table, in which sat Beth and her father, feasting modestly on chicken and a little fruit. They drank healths, told stories, sang songs, ‘reminisced’, as the old folks say, and had a thoroughly good time. A sleigh ride had been planned, but the girls would not leave their father, so the guests departed early, and as twilight gathered, the happy family sat together round the fire.

“Just a year ago we were groaning over the dismal Christmas we expected to have. Do you remember?” asked Jo, breaking a short pause which had followed a long conversation about many things.

“Rather a pleasant year on the whole!” said Meg, smiling at the fire, and congratulating herself on having treated Mr. Brooke with dignity.

“I think it’s been a pretty hard one,” observed Amy, watching the light shine on her ring with thoughtful eyes.

“I’m glad it’s over, because we’ve got you back,” whispered Beth, who sat on her father’s knee.

“Rather a rough road for you to travel, my little pilgrims, especially the latter part of it. But you have got on bravely, and I think the burdens are in a fair way to tumble off very soon,” said Mr. March, looking with fatherly satisfaction at the four young faces gathered round him.

“How do you know? Did Mother tell you?” asked Jo.

“Not much. Straws show which way the wind blows, and I’ve made several discoveries today.”

“Oh, tell us what they are!” cried Meg, who sat beside him.

“Here is one.” And taking up the hand which lay on the arm of his chair, he pointed to the roughened forefinger, a burn on the back, and two or three little hard spots on the palm. “I remember a time when this hand was white and smooth, and your first care was to keep it so. It was very pretty then, but to me it is much prettier now, for in this seeming blemishes I read a little history. A burnt offering has been made to vanity, this hardened palm has earned something better than blisters, and I’m sure the sewing done by these pricked fingers will last a long time, so much good will went into the stitches. Meg, my dear, I value the womanly skill which keeps home happy more than white hands or fashionable accomplishments. I’m proud to shake this good, industrious little hand, and hope I shall not soon be asked to give it away.”

If Meg had wanted a reward for hours of patient labor, she received it in the hearty pressure of her father’s hand and the approving smile he gave her.

“What about Jo? Please say something nice, for she has tried so hard and been so very, very good to me,” said Beth in her father’s ear.

He laughed and looked across at the tall girl who sat opposite, with an unusually mild expression in her face.

“In spite of the curly crop, I don’t see the ‘son Jo’ whom I left a year ago,” said Mr. March. “I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug as she used to do. Her face is rather thin and pale just now, with watching and anxiety, but I like to look at it, for it has grown gentler, and her voice is lower. She doesn’t bounce, but moves quietly, and takes care of a certain little person in a motherly way which delights me. I rather miss my wild girl, but if I get a strong, helpful, tenderhearted woman in her place, I shall feel quite satisfied. I don’t know whether the shearing sobered our black sheep, but I do know that in all Washington I couldn’t find anything beautiful enough to be bought with the five-and-twenty dollars my good girl sent me.”

Jo’s keen eyes were rather dim for a minute, and her thin face grew rosy in the firelight as she received her father’s praise, feeling that she did deserve a portion of it.

“Now, Beth,” said Amy, longing for her turn, but ready to wait.

“There’s so little of her, I’m afraid to say much, for fear she will slip away altogether, though she is not so shy as she used to be,” began their father cheerfully. But recollecting how nearly he had lost her, he held her close, saying tenderly, with her cheek against his own, “I’ve got you safe, my Beth, and I’ll keep you so, please God.”

After a minute’s silence, he looked down at Amy, who sat on the cricket at his feet, and said, with a caress of the shining hair...

“I observed that Amy took drumsticks at dinner, ran errands for her mother all the afternoon, gave Meg her place tonight, and has waited on every one with patience and good humor. I also observe that she does not fret much nor look in the glass, and has not even mentioned a very pretty ring which she wears, so I conclude that she has learned to think of other people more and of herself less, and has decided to try and mold her character as carefully as she molds her little clay figures. I am glad of this, for though I should be very proud of a graceful statue made by her, I shall be infinitely prouder of a lovable daughter with a talent for making life beautiful to herself and others.”

“What are you thinking of, Beth?” asked Jo, when Amy had thanked her father and told about her ring.

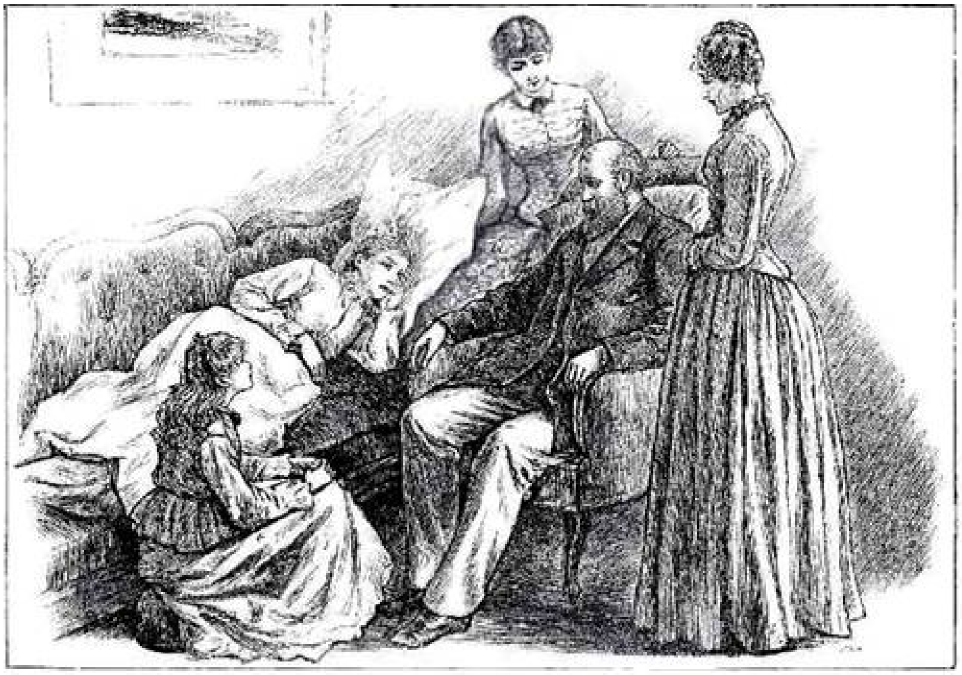
"I read in *Pilgrim's Progress* today how, after many troubles, Christian and Hopeful came to a pleasant green meadow where lilies bloomed all year round, and there they rested happily, as we do now, before they went on to their journey's end," answered Beth, adding, as she slipped out of her father's arms and went to the instrument, "It's singing time now, and I want to be in my old place. I'll try to sing the song of the shepherd boy which the Pilgrims heard. I made the music for Father, because he likes the verses."

So, sitting at the dear little piano, Beth softly touched the keys, and in the sweet voice they had never thought to hear again, sang to her own accompaniment the quaint hymn, which was a singularly fitting song for her.

He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low no pride.
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it, or much.
And, Lord! Contentment still I crave,
Because Thou savest such.

Fulness to them a burden is,
That go on pilgrimage.
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age!



"He sat in the big chair by Beth's sofa with the other three close by."—Page 277.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AUNT MARCH SETTLES THE QUESTION

Like bees swarming after their queen, mother and daughters hovered about Mr. March the next day, neglecting everything to look at, wait upon, and listen to the new invalid, who was in a fair way to be killed by kindness. As he sat propped up in a big chair by Beth's sofa, with the other three close by, and Hannah popping in her head now and then 'to peek at the dear man', nothing seemed needed to complete their happiness. But something was needed, and the elder ones felt it, though none confessed the fact. Mr. and Mrs. March looked at one another with an anxious expression, as their eyes followed Meg. Jo had sudden fits of sobriety, and was seen to shake her fist at Mr. Brooke's umbrella, which had been left in the hall. Meg was absent-minded, shy, and silent, started when the bell rang, and colored when John's name was mentioned. Amy said, "Everyone seemed waiting for something, and couldn't settle down, which was queer, since Father was safe at home," and Beth innocently wondered why their neighbors didn't run over as usual.

Laurie went by in the afternoon, and seeing Meg at the window, seemed suddenly possessed with a melodramatic fit, for he fell down on one knee in the snow, beat his breast, tore his hair, and clasped his hands imploringly, as if begging some boon. And when Meg told him to behave himself and go away, he wrung imaginary tears out of his handkerchief, and staggered round the corner as if in utter despair.

"What does the goose mean?" said Meg, laughing and trying to look unconscious.

"He's showing you how your John will go on by-and-by. Touching, isn't it?" answered Jo scornfully.

"Don't say my John, it isn't proper or true," but Meg's voice lingered over the words as if they sounded pleasant to her. "Please don't plague me, Jo, I've told you I don't care much about him, and there isn't to be anything said, but we are all to be friendly, and go on as before."

"We can't, for something has been said, and Laurie's mischief has spoiled you for me. I see it, and so does Mother. You are not like your old self a bit, and seem ever so far away from me. I don't mean to plague you and will bear it like a man, but I do wish it was all settled. I hate to wait, so if you mean ever to do it, make haste and have it over quickly," said Jo pettishly.

"I can't say anything till he speaks, and he won't, because Father said I was too young," began Meg, bending over her work with a queer little smile, which suggested that she did not quite agree with her father on that point.

"If he did speak, you wouldn't know what to say, but would cry or blush, or let him have his own way, instead of giving a good, decided no."

"I'm not so silly and weak as you think. I know just what I should say, for I've planned it all, so I needn't be taken unawares. There's no knowing what may happen, and I wished to be prepared."

Jo couldn't help smiling at the important air which Meg had unconsciously assumed and which was as becoming as the pretty color varying in her cheeks.

"Would you mind telling me what you'd say?" asked Jo more respectfully.

"Not at all. You are sixteen now, quite old enough to be my confident, and my experience will be useful to you by-and-by, perhaps, in your own affairs of this sort."

"Don't mean to have any. It's fun to watch other people philander, but I should feel like a fool doing it myself," said Jo, looking alarmed at the thought.

"I think not, if you liked anyone very much, and he liked you." Meg spoke as if to herself, and glanced out at the lane where she had often seen lovers walking together in the summer twilight.

"I thought you were going to tell your speech to that man," said Jo, rudely shortening her sister's little reverie.

“Oh, I should merely say, quite calmly and decidedly, ‘Thank you, Mr. Brooke, you are very kind, but I agree with Father that I am too young to enter into any engagement at present, so please say no more, but let us be friends as we were.’“

“Hum, that’s stiff and cool enough! I don’t believe you’ll ever say it, and I know he won’t be satisfied if you do. If he goes on like the rejected lovers in books, you’ll give in, rather than hurt his feelings.”

“No, I won’t. I shall tell him I’ve made up my mind, and shall walk out of the room with dignity.”

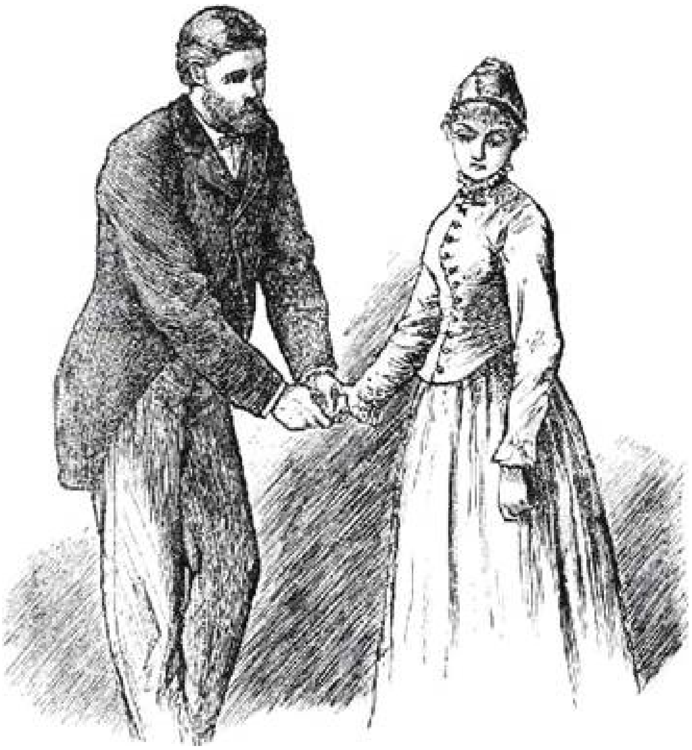
Meg rose as she spoke, and was just going to rehearse the dignified exit, when a step in the hall made her fly into her seat and begin to sew as fast as if her life depended on finishing that particular seam in a given time. Jo smothered a laugh at the sudden change, and when someone gave a modest tap, opened the door with a grim aspect which was anything but hospitable.

“Good afternoon. I came to get my umbrella, that is, to see how your father finds himself today,” said Mr. Brooke, getting a trifle confused as his eyes went from one telltale face to the other.

“It’s very well, he’s in the rack. I’ll get him, and tell it you are here.” And having jumbled her father and the umbrella well together in her reply, Jo slipped out of the room to give Meg a chance to make her speech and air her dignity. But the instant she vanished, Meg began to sidle toward the door, murmuring...

“Mother will like to see you. Pray sit down, I’ll call her.”

“Don’t go. Are you afraid of me, Margaret?” and Mr. Brooke looked so hurt that Meg thought she must have done something very rude. She blushed up to the little curls on her forehead, for he had never called her Margaret before, and she was surprised to find how natural and sweet it seemed to hear him say it. Anxious to appear friendly and at her ease, she put out her hand with a confiding gesture, and said gratefully...



“How can I be afraid when you have been so kind to Father? I only wish I could thank you for it.”

“Shall I tell you how?” asked Mr. Brooke, holding the small hand fast in both his own, and looking down at Meg with so much love in the brown eyes that her heart began to flutter, and she both longed to run away and to stop and listen.

“Oh no, please don’t, I’d rather not,” she said, trying to withdraw her hand, and looking frightened in spite of her denial.

“I won’t trouble you. I only want to know if you care for me a little, Meg. I love you so much, dear,” added Mr. Brooke tenderly.

This was the moment for the calm, proper speech, but Meg didn’t make it. She forgot every word of it, hung her head, and answered, “I don’t know,” so softly that John had to stoop down to catch the foolish little reply.

He seemed to think it was worth the trouble, for he smiled to himself as if quite satisfied, pressed the plump hand gratefully, and said in his most persuasive tone, “Will you try and find out? I want to know so much, for I can’t go to work with any heart until I learn whether I am to have my reward in the end or not.”

“I’m too young,” faltered Meg, wondering why she was so fluttered, yet rather enjoying it.

“I’ll wait, and in the meantime, you could be learning to like me. Would it be a very hard lesson, dear?”

“Not if I chose to learn it, but. . .”

“Please choose to learn, Meg. I love to teach, and this is easier than German,” broke in John, getting possession of the other hand, so that she had no way of hiding her face as he bent to look into it.

His tone was properly beseeching, but stealing a shy look at him, Meg saw that his eyes were merry as well as tender, and that he wore the satisfied smile of one who had no doubt of his success. This nettled her. Annie Moffat’s foolish lessons in coquetry came into her mind, and the love of power, which sleeps in the bosoms of the best of little women, woke up all of a sudden and took possession of her. She felt excited and strange, and not knowing what else to do, followed a capricious impulse, and, withdrawing her hands, said petulantly, “I don’t choose. Please go away and let me be!”

Poor Mr. Brooke looked as if his lovely castle in the air was tumbling about his ears, for he had never seen Meg in such a mood before, and it rather bewildered him.

“Do you really mean that?” he asked anxiously, following her as she walked away.

“Yes, I do. I don’t want to be worried about such things. Father says I needn’t, it’s too soon and I’d rather not.”

“Mayn’t I hope you’ll change your mind by-and-by? I’ll wait and say nothing till you have had more time. Don’t play with me, Meg. I didn’t think that of you.”

“Don’t think of me at all. I’d rather you wouldn’t,” said Meg, taking a naughty satisfaction in trying her lover’s patience and her own power.

He was grave and pale now, and looked decidedly more like the novel heroes whom she admired, but he neither slapped his forehead nor tramped about the room as they did. He just stood looking at her so wistfully, so tenderly, that she found her heart relenting in spite of herself. What would have happened next I cannot say, if Aunt March had not come hobbling in at this interesting minute.

The old lady couldn’t resist her longing to see her nephew, for she had met Laurie as she took her airing, and hearing of Mr. March’s arrival, drove straight out to see him. The family were all busy in the back part of the house, and she had made her way quietly in, hoping to surprise them. She did surprise two of them so much that Meg started as if she had seen a ghost, and Mr. Brooke vanished into the study.

“Bless me, what’s all this?” cried the old lady with a rap of her cane as she glanced from the pale young gentleman to the scarlet young lady.

“It’s Father’s friend. I’m so surprised to see you!” stammered Meg, feeling that she was in for a lecture now.

“That’s evident,” returned Aunt March, sitting down. “But what is Father’s friend saying to make you look like a peony? There's mischief going on, and I insist upon knowing what it is," with another rap.

"We were only talking. Mr. Brooke came for his umbrella," began Meg, wishing that Mr. Brooke and the umbrella were safely out of the house.

"Brooke? That boy's tutor? Ah! I understand now. I know all about it. Jo blundered into a wrong message in one of your Father's letters, and I made her tell me. You haven't gone and accepted him, child?" cried Aunt March, looking scandalized.

"Hush! He'll hear. Shan't I call Mother?" said Meg, much troubled.

"Not yet. I've something to say to you, and I must free my mind at once. Tell me, do you mean to marry this Cook? If you do, not one penny of my money ever goes to you. Remember that, and be a sensible girl," said the old lady impressively.

Now Aunt March possessed in perfection the art of rousing the spirit of opposition in the gentlest people, and enjoyed doing it. The best of us have a spice of perversity in us, especially when we are young and in love. If Aunt March had begged Meg to accept John Brooke, she would probably have declared she couldn't think of it, but as she was preemptorily ordered not to like him, she immediately made up her mind that she would. Inclination as well as perversity made the decision easy, and being already much excited, Meg opposed the old lady with unusual spirit.

"I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March, and you can leave your money to anyone you like," she said, nodding her head with a resolute air.

"Highty-tighty! Is that the way you take my advice, Miss? You'll be sorry for it by-and-by, when you've tried love in a cottage and found it a failure."

"It can't be a worse one than some people find in big houses," retorted Meg.

Aunt March put on her glasses and took a look at the girl, for she did not know her in this new mood. Meg hardly knew herself, she felt so brave and independent, so glad to defend John and assert her right to love him, if she liked. Aunt March saw that she had begun wrong, and after a little pause, made a fresh start, saying as mildly as she could, "Now, Meg, my dear, be reasonable and take my advice. I mean it kindly, and don't want you to spoil your whole life by making a mistake at the beginning. You ought to marry well and help your family. It's your duty to make a rich match and it ought to be impressed upon you."

"Father and Mother don't think so. They like John though he is poor."

"Your parents, my dear, have no more worldly wisdom than a pair of babies."

"I'm glad of it," cried Meg stoutly.

Aunt March took no notice, but went on with her lecture. "This Rook is poor and hasn’t got any rich relations, has he?”

“No, but he has many warm friends.”

“You can’t live on friends, try it and see how cool they’ll grow. He hasn’t any business, has he?”

“Not yet. Mr. Laurence is going to help him.”

“That won’t last long. James Laurence is a crotchety old fellow and not to be depended on. So you intend to marry a man without money, position, or business, and go on working harder than you do now, when you might be comfortable all your days by minding me and doing better? I thought you had more sense, Meg.”

“I couldn’t do better if I waited half my life! John is good and wise, he’s got heaps of talent, he’s willing to work and sure to get on, he’s so energetic and brave. Everyone likes and respects him, and I’m proud to think he cares for me, though I’m so poor and young and silly,” said Meg, looking prettier than ever in her earnestness.

“He knows you have got rich relations, child. That’s the secret of his liking, I suspect.”

“Aunt March, how dare you say such a thing? John is above such meanness, and I won’t listen to you a minute if you talk so,” cried Meg indignantly, forgetting everything but the injustice of the old lady’s suspicions. “My John wouldn’t marry for money, any more than I would. We are willing to work and we mean to wait. I’m not afraid of being poor, for I’ve been happy so far, and I know I shall be with him because he loves me, and I...”

Meg stopped there, remembering all of a sudden that she hadn’t made up her mind, that she had told ‘her John’ to go away, and that he might be overhearing her inconsistent remarks.

Aunt March was very angry, for she had set her heart on having her pretty niece make a fine match, and something in the girl’s happy young face made the lonely old woman feel both sad and sour.

“Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair! You are a willful child, and you’ve lost more than you know by this piece of folly. No, I won’t stop. I’m disappointed in you, and haven’t spirits to see your father now. Don’t expect anything from me when you are married. Your Mr. Brooke’s friends must take care of you. I’m done with you forever.”

And slamming the door in Meg’s face, Aunt March drove off in high dudgeon. She seemed to take all the girl’s courage with her, for when left alone, Meg stood for a moment, undecided whether to laugh or cry. Before she could make up her mind, she was taken possession of by Mr. Brooke, who said all in one breath, “I couldn’t help hearing, Meg. Thank you for defending me, and Aunt March for proving that you do care for me a little bit.”

“I didn’t know how much till she abused you,” began Meg.

“And I needn’t go away, but may stay and be happy, may I, dear?”

Here was another fine chance to make the crushing speech and the stately exit, but Meg never thought of doing either, and disgraced herself forever in Jo’s eyes by meekly whispering, “Yes, John,” and hiding her face on Mr. Brooke’s waistcoat.

Fifteen minutes after Aunt March’s departure, Jo came softly downstairs, paused an instant at the parlor door, and hearing no sound within, nodded and smiled with a satisfied expression, saying to herself, “She has seen him away as we planned, and that affair is settled. I’ll go and hear the fun, and have a good laugh over it.”

But poor Jo never got her laugh, for she was transfixed upon the threshold by a spectacle which held her there, staring with her mouth nearly as wide open as her eyes. Going in to exult over a fallen enemy and to praise a strong-minded sister for the banishment of an objectionable lover, it certainly was a shock to behold the aforesaid enemy serenely sitting on the sofa, with the strongminded sister enthroned upon his knee and wearing an expression of the most abject submission. Jo gave a sort of gasp, as if a cold shower bath had suddenly fallen upon her, for such an unexpected turning of the tables actually took her breath away. At the odd sound the lovers turned and saw her. Meg jumped up, looking both proud and shy, but ‘that man’, as Jo called him, actually laughed and said coolly, as he kissed the astonished newcomer, “Sister Jo, congratulate us!”

That was adding insult to injury, it was altogether too much, and making some wild demonstration with her hands, Jo vanished without a word. Rushing upstairs, she startled the invalids by exclaiming tragically as she burst into the room, “Oh, do somebody go down quick! John Brooke is acting dreadfully, and Meg likes it!”

Mr. and Mrs. March left the room with speed, and casting herself upon the bed, Jo cried and scolded tempestuously as she told the awful news to Beth and Amy. The little girls, however, considered it a most agreeable and interesting event, and Jo got little comfort from them, so she went up to her refuge in the garret, and confided her troubles to the rats.

Nobody ever knew what went on in the parlor that afternoon, but a great deal of talking was done, and quiet Mr. Brooke astonished his friends by the eloquence and spirit with which he pleaded his suit, told his plans, and persuaded them to arrange everything just as he wanted it.

The tea bell rang before he had finished describing the paradise which he meant to earn for Meg, and he proudly took her in to supper, both looking so happy that Jo hadn’t the heart to be jealous or dismal. Amy was very much impressed by John’s devotion and Meg’s dignity, Beth beamed at them from a distance, while Mr. and Mrs. March surveyed the young couple with such tender satisfaction that it was perfectly evident Aunt March was right in calling them as ‘unworldly as a pair of babies’. No one ate much, but everyone looked very happy, and the old room seemed to brighten up amazingly when the first romance of the family began there.

“You can’t say nothing pleasant ever happens now, can you, Meg?” said Amy, trying to decide how she would group the lovers in a sketch she was planning to make.

“No, I’m sure I can’t. How much has happened since I said that! It seems a year ago,” answered Meg, who was in a blissful dream lifted far above such common things as bread and butter.

“The joys come close upon the sorrows this time, and I rather think the changes have begun,” said Mrs. March. “In most families there comes, now and then, a year full of events. This has been such a one, but it ends well, after all.”

“Hope the next will end better,” muttered Jo, who found it very hard to see Meg absorbed in a stranger before her face, for Jo loved a few persons very dearly and dreaded to have their affection lost or lessened in any way.

“I hope the third year from this will end better. I mean it shall, if I live to work out my plans,” said Mr. Brooke, smiling at Meg, as if everything had become possible to him now.

“Doesn’t it seem very long to wait?” asked Amy, who was in a hurry for the wedding.

“I’ve got so much to learn before I shall be ready, it seems a short time to me,” answered Meg, with a sweet gravity in her face never seen there before.

“You have only to wait, I am to do the work,” said John beginning his labors by picking up Meg’s napkin, with an expression which caused Jo to shake her head, and then say to herself with an air of relief as the front door banged, “Here comes Laurie. Now we shall have some sensible conversation.”

But Jo was mistaken, for Laurie came prancing in, overflowing with good spirits, bearing a great bridal-looking bouquet for ‘Mrs. John Brooke’, and evidently laboring under the delusion that the whole affair had been brought about by his excellent management.

“I knew Brooke would have it all his own way, he always does, for when he makes up his mind to accomplish anything, it’s done though the sky falls,” said Laurie, when he had presented his offering and his congratulations.

“Much obliged for that recommendation. I take it as a good omen for the future and invite you to my wedding on the spot,” answered Mr. Brooke, who felt at peace with all mankind, even his mischievous pupil.

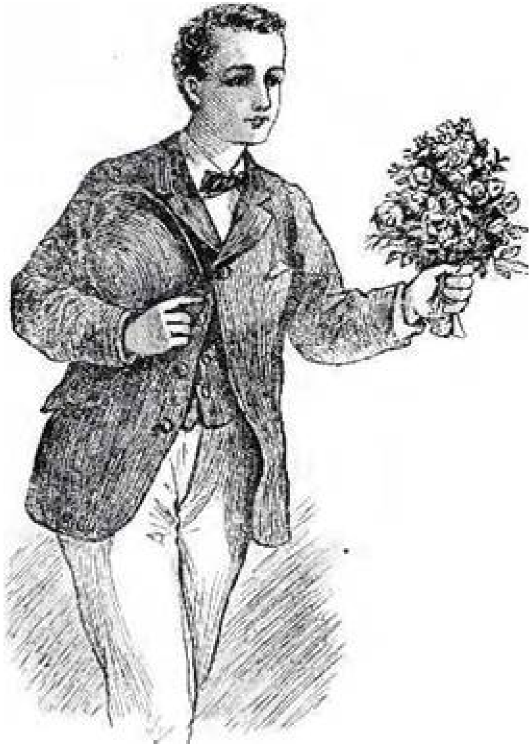
"I'll come if I'm at the ends of the earth, for the sight of Jo's face alone on that occasion would be worth a long journey. You don't look festive, ma'am, what's the matter?" asked Laurie, following her into a corner of the parlor, whither all had adjourned to greet Mr. Laurence.

"I don't approve of the match, but I've made up my mind to bear it, and shall not say a word against it," said Jo solemnly. "You can't know how hard it is for me to give up Meg," she continued with a little quiver in her voice.

"You don't give her up. You only go halves," said Laurie consolingly.

"It can never be the same again. I've lost my dearest friend," sighed Jo.

"You've got me, anyhow. I'm not good for much, I know, but I'll stand by you, Jo, all the days of my life. Upon my word I will!" and Laurie meant what he said.



"I know you will, and I'm ever so much obliged. You are always a great comfort to me, Teddy," returned Jo, gratefully shaking hands.

"Well, now, don't be dismal, there's a good fellow. It's all right you see. Meg is happy, Brooke will fly round and get settled immediately, Grandpa will attend to him, and it will be very jolly to see Meg in her own little house. We'll have capital times after she is gone, for I shall be through college before long, and then we'll go abroad on some nice trip or other. Wouldn't that console you?"

"I rather think it would, but there's no knowing what may happen in three years," said Jo thoughtfully.

"That's true. Don't you wish you could take a look forward and see where we shall all be then? I do," returned Laurie.

"I think not, for I might see something sad, and everyone looks so happy now, I don't believe they could be much improved." And Jo's eyes went slowly round the room, brightening as they looked, for the prospect was a pleasant one.

Father and Mother sat together, quietly reliving the first chapter of the romance which for them began some twenty years ago. Amy was drawing the lovers, who sat apart in a beautiful world of their own, the light of which touched their faces with a grace the little artist could not copy. Beth lay on her sofa, talking cheerily with her old friend, who held her little hand as if he felt that it possessed the power to lead him along the peaceful way she walked. Jo lounged in her favorite low seat, with the grave quiet look which best became her, and Laurie, leaning on the back of her chair, his chin on a level with her curly head, smiled with his friendliest aspect, and nodded at her in the long glass which reflected them both.

So the curtain falls upon Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. Whether it ever rises again, depends upon the reception given the first act of the domestic drama called *Little Women*.

GOOD WIVES

The first volume of *Little Women* was an immediate commercial and critical success, prompting the composition of the book's second volume called *Good Wives*, which was also succesful. The publication of the book as a single volume first occurred in 1880 under the single title *Little Women*.

VOLUME II

In order that we may start afresh and go to Meg's wedding...

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

GOSSIP

In order that we may start afresh and go to Meg's wedding with free minds, it will be well to begin with a little gossip about the Marches. And here let me premise that if any of the elders think there is too much 'lovering' in the story, as I fear they may (I'm not afraid the young folks will make that objection), I can only say with Mrs. March, "What can you expect when I have four gay girls in the house, and a dashing young neighbor over the way?"

The three years that have passed have brought but few changes to the quiet family. The war is over, and Mr. March safely at home, busy with his books and the small parish which found in him a minister by nature as by grace, a quiet, studious man, rich in the wisdom that is better than learning, the charity which calls all mankind 'brother', the piety that blossoms into character, making it august and lovely.

These attributes, in spite of poverty and the strict integrity which shut him out from the more worldly successes, attracted to him many admirable persons, as naturally as sweet herbs draw bees, and as naturally he gave them the honey into which fifty years of hard experience had distilled no bitter drop. Earnest young men found the gray-headed scholar as young at heart as they; thoughtful or troubled women instinctively brought their doubts to him, sure of finding the gentlest sympathy, the wisest counsel. Sinners told their sins to the pure-hearted old man and were both rebuked and saved. Gifted men found a companion in him. Ambitious men caught glimpses of nobler ambitions than their own, and even worldlings confessed that his beliefs were beautiful and true, although 'they wouldn't pay'.

To outsiders the five energetic women seemed to rule the house, and so they did in many things, but the quiet scholar, sitting among his books, was still the head of the family, the household conscience, anchor, and comforter, for to him the busy, anxious women always turned in troublous times, finding him, in the truest sense of those sacred words, husband and father.

The girls gave their hearts into their mother's keeping, their souls into their father's, and to both parents, who lived and labored so faithfully for them, they gave a love that grew with their growth and bound them tenderly together by the sweetest tie which blesses life and outlives death.

Mrs. March is as brisk and cheery, though rather grayer, than when we saw her last, and just now so absorbed in Meg's affairs that the hospitals and homes still full of wounded 'boys' and soldiers' widows, decidedly miss the motherly missionary's visits.

John Brooke did his duty manfully for a year, got wounded, was sent home, and not allowed to return. He received no stars or bars, but he deserved them, for he cheerfully risked all he had, and life and love are very precious when both are in full bloom. Perfectly resigned to his discharge, he devoted himself to getting well, preparing for business, and earning a home for Meg. With the good sense and sturdy independence that characterized him, he refused Mr. Laurence's more generous offers, and accepted the place of bookkeeper, feeling better satisfied to begin with an honestly earned salary than by running any risks with borrowed money.

Meg had spent the time in working as well as waiting, growing womanly in character, wise in housewifely arts, and prettier than ever, for love is a great beautifier. She had her girlish ambitions and hopes, and felt some disappointment at the humble way in which the new life must begin. Ned Moffat had just married Sallie Gardiner, and Meg couldn't help contrasting their fine house and carriage, many gifts, and splendid outfit with her own, and secretly wishing she could have the same. But somehow envy and discontent soon vanished when she thought of all the patient love and labor John had put into the little home awaiting her, and when they sat together in the twilight, talking over their small plans, the future always grew so beautiful and bright that she forgot Sallie's splendor and felt herself the richest, happiest girl in Christendom.

Jo never went back to Aunt March, for the old lady took such a fancy to Amy that she bribed her with the offer of drawing lessons from one of the best teachers going, and for the sake of this advantage, Amy would have served a far harder mistress. So she gave her mornings to duty, her afternoons to pleasure, and prospered finely. Jo meantime devoted herself to literature and Beth, who remained delicate long after the fever was a thing of the past. Not an invalid exactly, but never again the rosy, healthy creature she had been, yet always hopeful, happy, and serene, and busy with the quiet duties she loved, everyone's friend, and an angel in the house, long before those who loved her most had learned to know it.

As long as *The Spread Eagle* paid her a dollar a column for her ‘rubbish’, as she called it, Jo felt herself a woman of means, and spun her little romances diligently. But great plans fermented in her busy brain and ambitious mind, and the old tin kitchen in the garret held a slowly increasing pile of blotted manuscript, which was one day to place the name of March upon the roll of fame.

Laurie, having dutifully gone to college to please his grandfather, was now getting through it in the easiest possible manner to please himself. A universal favorite, thanks to money, manners, much talent, and the kindest heart that ever got its owner into scrapes by trying to get other people out of them, he stood in great danger of being spoiled, and probably would have been, like many another promising boy, if he had not possessed a talisman against evil in the memory of the kind old man who was bound up in his success, the motherly friend who watched over him as if he were her son, and last, but not least by any means, the knowledge that four innocent girls loved, admired, and believed in him with all their hearts.

Being only ‘a glorious human boy’, of course he frolicked and flirted, grew dandified, aquatic, sentimental, or gymnastic, as college fashions ordained, hazed and was hazed, talked slang, and more than once came perilously near suspension and expulsion. But as high spirits and the love of fun were the causes of these pranks, he always managed to save himself by frank confession, honorable atonement, or the irresistible power of persuasion which he possessed in perfection. In fact, he rather prided himself on his narrow escapes, and liked to thrill the girls with graphic accounts of his triumphs over wrathful tutors, dignified professors, and vanquished enemies. The ‘men of my class’, were heroes in the eyes of the girls, who never wearied of the exploits of ‘our fellows’, and were frequently allowed to bask in the smiles of these great creatures, when Laurie brought them home with him.

Amy especially enjoyed this high honor, and became quite a belle among them, for her ladyship early felt and learned to use the gift of fascination with which she was endowed. Meg was too much absorbed in her private and particular John to care for any other lords of creation, and Beth too shy to do more than peep at them and wonder how Amy dared to order them about so, but Jo felt quite in her own element, and found it very difficult to refrain from imitating the gentlemanly attitudes, phrases, and feats, which seemed more natural to her than the decorums prescribed for young ladies. They all liked Jo immensely, but never fell in love with her, though very few escaped without paying the tribute of a sentimental sigh or two at Amy’s shrine. And speaking of sentiment brings us very naturally to the ‘Dovecote’.

That was the name of the little brown house Mr. Brooke had prepared for Meg’s first home. Laurie had christened it, saying it was highly appropriate to the gentle lovers who ‘went on together like a pair of turtledoves, with first a bill and then a coo’. It was a tiny house, with a little garden behind and a lawn about as big as a pocket handkerchief in the front. Here Meg meant to have a fountain, shrubbery, and a profusion of lovely flowers, though just at present the fountain was represented by a weather-beaten urn, very like a dilapidated slopbowl, the shrubbery consisted of several young larches, undecided whether to live or die, and the profusion of flowers was merely hinted by regiments of sticks to show where seeds were planted. But inside, it was altogether charming, and the happy bride saw no fault from garret to cellar. To be sure, the hall was so narrow it was fortunate that they had no piano, for one never could have been got in whole, the dining room was so small that six people were a tight fit, and the kitchen stairs seemed built for the express purpose of precipitating both servants and china pell-mell into the coalbin. But once get used to these slight blemishes and nothing could be more complete, for good sense and good taste had presided over the furnishing, and the result was highly satisfactory. There were no marble-topped tables, long mirrors, or lace curtains in the little parlor, but simple furniture, plenty of books, a fine picture or two, a stand of flowers in the bay window, and, scattered all about, the pretty gifts which came from friendly hands and were the fairer for the loving messages they brought.

I don’t think the Parian Psyche Laurie gave lost any of its beauty because John put up the bracket it stood upon, that any upholsterer could have draped the plain muslin curtains more gracefully than Amy’s artistic hand, or that any store-room was ever better provided with good wishes, merry words, and happy hopes than that in which Jo and her mother put away Meg’s few boxes, barrels, and bundles, and I am morally certain that the spandy new kitchen never could have looked so cozy and neat if Hannah had not arranged every pot and pan a dozen times over, and laid the fire all ready for lighting the minute ‘Mis. Brooke came home’. I also doubt if any young matron ever began life with so rich a supply of dusters, holders, and piece bags, for Beth made enough to last till the silver wedding came round, and invented three different kinds of dishcloths for the express service of the bridal china.

People who hire all these things done for them never know what they lose, for the homeliest tasks get beautified if loving hands do them, and Meg found so many proofs of this that everything in her small nest, from the kitchen roller to the silver vase on her parlor table, was eloquent of home love and tender forethought.

What happy times they had planning together, what solemn shopping excursions, what funny mistakes they made, and what shouts of laughter arose over Laurie's ridiculous bargains. In his love of jokes, this young gentleman, though nearly through college, was a much of a boy as ever. His last whim had been to bring with him on his weekly visits some new, useful, and ingenious article for the young housekeeper. Now a bag of remarkable clothespins, next, a wonderful nutmeg grater which fell to pieces at the first trial, a knife cleaner that spoiled all the knives, or a sweeper that picked the nap neatly off the carpet and left the dirt, labor-saving soap that took the skin off one's hands, infallible cements which stuck firmly to nothing but the fingers of the deluded buyer, and every kind of tinware, from a toy savings bank for odd pennies, to a wonderful boiler which would wash articles in its own steam with every prospect of exploding in the process.

In vain Meg begged him to stop. John laughed at him, and Jo called him 'Mr. Toodles'. He was possessed with a mania for patronizing Yankee ingenuity, and seeing his friends fitly furnished forth. So each week beheld some fresh absurdity.

Everything was done at last, even to Amy's arranging different colored soaps to match the different colored rooms, and Beth's setting the table for the first meal.

"Are you satisfied? Does it seem like home, and do you feel as if you should be happy here?" asked Mrs. March, as she and her daughter went through the new kingdom arm in arm, for just then they seemed to cling together more tenderly than ever.

"Yes, Mother, perfectly satisfied, thanks to you all, and so happy that I can't talk about it," with a look that was far better than words.

"If she only had a servant or two it would be all right," said Amy, coming out of the parlor, where she had been trying to decide whether the bronze Mercury looked best on the whatnot or the mantlepiece.

"Mother and I have talked that over, and I have made up my mind to try her way first. There will be so little to do that with Lotty to run my errands and help me here and there, I shall only have enough work to keep me from getting lazy or homesick," answered Meg tranquilly.

"Sallie Moffat has four," began Amy.

"If Meg had four, the house wouldn't hold them, and master and missis would have to camp in the garden," broke in Jo, who, enveloped in a big blue pinafore, was giving the last polish to the door handles.

"Sallie isn't a poor man's wife, and many maids are in keeping with her fine establishment. Meg and John begin humbly, but I have a feeling that there will be quite as much happiness in the little house as in the big one. It’s a great mistake for young girls like Meg to leave themselves nothing to do but dress, give orders, and gossip. When I was first married, I used to long for my new clothes to wear out or get torn, so that I might have the pleasure of mending them, for I got heartily sick of doing fancywork and tending my pocket handkerchief.”

“Why didn’t you go into the kitchen and make messes, as Sallie says she does to amuse herself, though they never turn out well and the servants laugh at her,” said Meg.

“I did after a while, not to ‘mess’ but to learn of Hannah how things should be done, that my servants need not laugh at me. It was play then, but there came a time when I was truly grateful that I not only possessed the will but the power to cook wholesome food for my little girls, and help myself when I could no longer afford to hire help. You begin at the other end, Meg, dear, but the lessons you learn now will be of use to you by-and-by when John is a richer man, for the mistress of a house, however splendid, should know how work ought to be done, if she wishes to be well and honestly served.”

“Yes, Mother, I’m sure of that,” said Meg, listening respectfully to the little lecture, for the best of women will hold forth upon the all absorbing subject of house keeping. “Do you know I like this room most of all in my baby house,” added Meg, a minute after, as they went upstairs and she looked into her well-stored linen closet.

Beth was there, laying the snowy piles smoothly on the shelves and exulting over the goodly array. All three laughed as Meg spoke, for that linen closet was a joke. You see, having said that if Meg married ‘that Brooke’ she shouldn’t have a cent of her money, Aunt March was rather in a quandary when time had appeased her wrath and made her repent her vow. She never broke her word, and was much exercised in her mind how to get round it, and at last devised a plan whereby she could satisfy herself. Mrs. Carrol, Florence’s mamma, was ordered to buy, have made, and marked a generous supply of house and table linen, and send it as her present, all of which was faithfully done, but the secret leaked out, and was greatly enjoyed by the family, for Aunt March tried to look utterly unconscious, and insisted that she could give nothing but the old-fashioned pearls long promised to the first bride.

“That’s a housewifely taste which I am glad to see. I had a young friend who set up housekeeping with six sheets, but she had finger bowls for company and that satisfied her,” said Mrs. March, patting the damask tablecloths, with a truly feminine appreciation of their fineness.

“I haven’t a single finger bowl, but this is a setout that will last me all my days, Hannah says.” And Meg looked quite contented, as well she might.

A tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, with a cropped head, a felt basin of a hat, and a flyaway coat, came tramping down the road at a great pace, walked over the low fence without stopping to open the gate, straight up to Mrs. March, with both hands out and a hearty...

“Here I am, Mother! Yes, it’s all right.”

The last words were in answer to the look the elder lady gave him, a kindly questioning look which the handsome eyes met so frankly that the little ceremony closed, as usual, with a motherly kiss.

“For Mrs. John Brooke, with the maker’s congratulations and compliments. Bless you, Beth! What a refreshing spectacle you are, Jo. Amy, you are getting altogether too handsome for a single lady.”

As Laurie spoke, he delivered a brown paper parcel to Meg, pulled Beth’s hair ribbon, stared at Jo’s big pinafore, and fell into an attitude of mock rapture before Amy, then shook hands all round, and everyone began to talk.

“Where is John?” asked Meg anxiously.

“Stopped to get the license for tomorrow, ma’am.”

“Which side won the last match, Teddy?” inquired Jo, who persisted in feeling an interest in manly sports despite her nineteen years.

“Ours, of course. Wish you’d been there to see.”

“How is the lovely Miss Randal?” asked Amy with a significant smile.

“More cruel than ever. Don’t you see how I’m pining away?” and Laurie gave his broad chest a sounding slap and heaved a melodramatic sigh.

“What’s the last joke? Undo the bundle and see, Meg,” said Beth, eying the knobby parcel with curiosity.

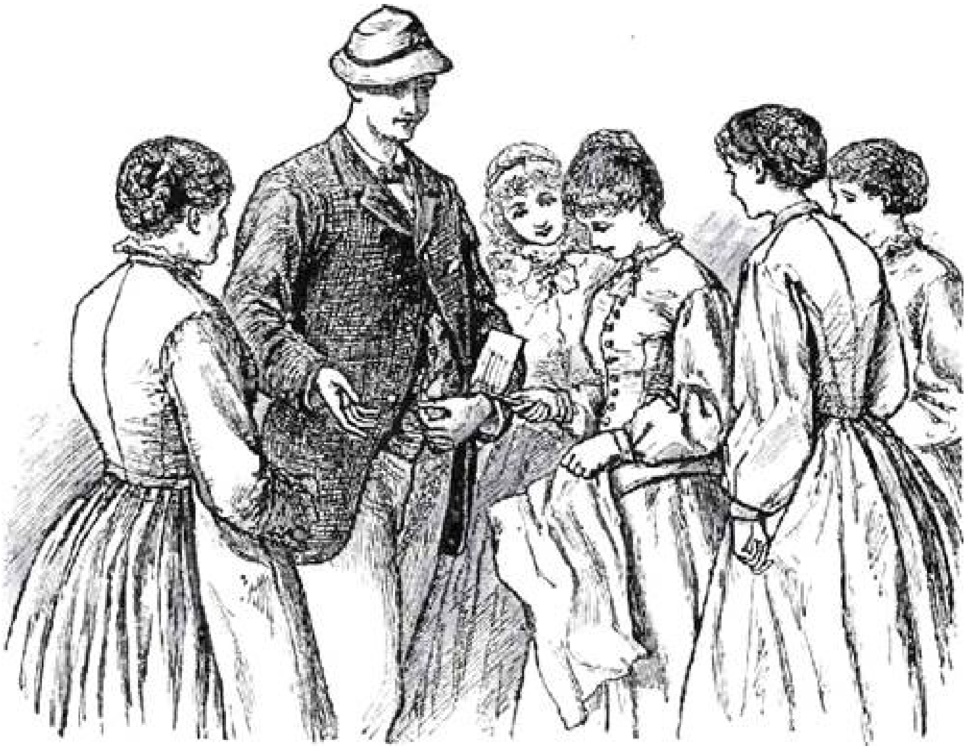
“It’s a useful thing to have in the house in case of fire or thieves,” observed Laurie, as a watchman’s rattle appeared, amid the laughter of the girls.

“Any time when John is away and you get frightened, Mrs. Meg, just swing that out of the front window, and it will rouse the neighborhood in a jiffy. Nice thing, isn’t it?” and Laurie gave them a sample of its powers that made them cover up their ears.

“There’s gratitude for you! And speaking of gratitude reminds me to mention that you may thank Hannah for saving your wedding cake from destruction. I saw it going into your house as I came by, and if she hadn’t defended it manfully I’d have had a pick at it, for it looked like a remarkably plummy one.”

“I wonder if you will ever grow up, Laurie,” said Meg in a matronly tone.

“I’m doing my best, ma’am, but can’t get much higher, I’m afraid, as six feet is about all men can do in these degenerate days,” responded the young gentleman, whose head was about level with the little chandelier.



“I suppose it would be profanation to eat anything in this spick-and-span bower, so as I’m tremendously hungry, I propose an adjournment,” he added presently.

“Mother and I are going to wait for John. There are some last things to settle,” said Meg, bustling away.

“Beth and I are going over to Kitty Bryant’s to get more flowers for tomorrow,” added Amy, tying a picturesque hat over her picturesque curls, and enjoying the effect as much as anybody.

“Come, Jo, don’t desert a fellow. I’m in such a state of exhaustion I can’t get home without help. Don’t take off your apron, whatever you do, it’s peculiarly becoming,” said Laurie, as Jo bestowed his especial aversion in her capacious pocket and offered her arm to support his feeble steps.

“Now, Teddy, I want to talk seriously to you about tomorrow,” began Jo, as they strolled away together. “You must promise to behave well, and not cut up any pranks, and spoil our plans.”

“Not a prank.”

“And don’t say funny things when we ought to be sober.”

“I never do. You are the one for that.”

“And I implore you not to look at me during the ceremony. I shall certainly laugh if you do.”

“You won’t see me, you’ll be crying so hard that the thick fog round you will obscure the prospect.”

"I never cry unless for some great affliction."

"Such as fellows going to college, hey?" cut in Laurie, with suggestive laugh.

"Don't be a peacock. I only moaned a trifle to keep the girls company."

"Exactly. I say, Jo, how is Grandpa this week? Pretty amiable?"

"Very. Why, have you got into a scrape and want to know how he'll take it?" asked Jo rather sharply.

"Now, Jo, do you think I'd look your mother in the face and say 'All right', if it wasn't?" and Laurie stopped short, with an injured air.

"No, I don't."

"Then don't go and be suspicious. I only want some money," said Laurie, walking on again, appeased by her hearty tone.

"You spend a great deal, Teddy."

"Bless you, I don't spend it, it spends itself somehow, and is gone before I know it."

"You are so generous and kind-hearted that you let people borrow, and can't say 'No' to anyone. We heard about Henshaw and all you did for him. If you always spent money in that way, no one would blame you," said Jo warmly.

"Oh, he made a mountain out of a molehill. You wouldn't have me let that fine fellow work himself to death just for want of a little help, when he is worth a dozen of us lazy chaps, would you?"

"Of course not, but I don't see the use of your having seventeen waistcoats, endless neckties, and a new hat every time you come home. I thought you'd got over the dandy period, but every now and then it breaks out in a new spot. Just now it's the fashion to be hideous, to make your head look like a scrubbing brush, wear a strait jacket, orange gloves, and clumping square-toed boots. If it was cheap ugliness, I'd say nothing, but it costs as much as the other, and I don't get any satisfaction out of it."

Laurie threw back his head, and laughed so heartily at this attack, that the felt hat fell off, and Jo walked on it, which insult only afforded him an opportunity for expatiating on the advantages of a rough-and-ready costume, as he folded up the maltreated hat, and stuffed it into his pocket.

"Don't lecture any more, there's a good soul! I have enough all through the week, and like to enjoy myself when I come home. I'll get myself up regardless of expense tomorrow and be a satisfaction to my friends."

"I'll leave you in peace if you'll only let your hair grow. I'm not aristocratic, but I do object to being seen with a person who looks like a young prize fighter," observed Jo severely.

"This unassuming style promotes study, that's why we adopt it," returned Laurie, who certainly could not be accused of vanity, having voluntarily sacrificed a handsome curly crop to the demand for quarter-inch-long stubble.

"By the way, Jo, I think that little Parker is really getting desperate about Amy. He talks of her constantly, writes poetry, and moons about in a most suspicious manner. He'd better nip his little passion in the bud, hadn't he?" added Laurie, in a confidential, elder brotherly tone, after a minute's silence.

"Of course he had. We don't want any more marrying in this family for years to come. Mercy on us, what are the children thinking of?" and Jo looked as much scandalized as if Amy and little Parker were not yet in their teens.

"It's a fast age, and I don't know what we are coming to, ma'am. You are a mere infant, but you'll go next, Jo, and we'll be left lamenting," said Laurie, shaking his head over the degeneracy of the times.

"Don't be alarmed. I'm not one of the agreeable sort. Nobody will want me, and it's a mercy, for there should always be one old maid in a family."

"You won't give anyone a chance," said Laurie, with a sidelong glance and a little more color than before in his sunburned face. "You won't show the soft side of your character, and if a fellow gets a peep at it by accident and can't help showing that he likes it, you treat him as Mrs. Gummidge did her sweetheart, throw cold water over him, and get so thorny no one dares touch or look at you."

"I don't like that sort of thing. I'm too busy to be worried with nonsense, and I think it's dreadful to break up families so. Now don't say any more about it. Meg's wedding has turned all our heads, and we talk of nothing but lovers and such absurdities. I don't wish to get cross, so let's change the subject;" and Jo looked quite ready to fling cold water on the slightest provocation.

Whatever his feelings might have been, Laurie found a vent for them in a long low whistle and the fearful prediction as they parted at the gate, "Mark my words, Jo, you'll go next."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE FIRST WEDDING

The June roses over the porch were awake bright and early on that morning, rejoicing with all their hearts in the cloudless sunshine, like friendly little neighbors, as they were. Quite flushed with excitement were their ruddy faces, as they swung in the wind, whispering to one another what they had seen, for some peeped in at the dining room windows where the feast was spread, some climbed up to nod and smile at the sisters as they dressed the bride, others waved a welcome to those who came and went on various errands in garden, porch, and hall, and all, from the rosiest full-blown flower to the palest baby bud, offered their tribute of beauty and fragrance to the gentle mistress who had loved and tended them so long.

Meg looked very like a rose herself, for all that was best and sweetest in heart and soul seemed to bloom into her face that day, making it fair and tender, with a charm more beautiful than beauty. Neither silk, lace, nor orange flowers would she have. “I don’t want a fashionable wedding, but only those about me whom I love, and to them I wish to look and be my familiar self.”

So she made her wedding gown herself, sewing into it the tender hopes and innocent romances of a girlish heart. Her sisters braided up her pretty hair, and the only ornaments she wore were the lilies of the valley, which ‘her John’ liked best of all the flowers that grew.

“You do look just like our own dear Meg, only so very sweet and lovely that I should hug you if it wouldn’t crumple your dress,” cried Amy, surveying her with delight when all was done.

“Then I am satisfied. But please hug and kiss me, everyone, and don’t mind my dress. I want a great many crumples of this sort put into it today,” and Meg opened her arms to her sisters, who clung about her with April faces for a minute, feeling that the new love had not changed the old.

“Now I’m going to tie John’s cravat for him, and then to stay a few minutes with Father quietly in the study,” and Meg ran down to perform these little ceremonies, and then to follow her mother wherever she went, conscious that in spite of the smiles on the motherly face, there was a secret sorrow hid in the motherly heart at the flight of the first bird from the nest.

As the younger girls stand together, giving the last touches to their simple toilet, it may be a good time to tell of a few changes which three years have wrought in their appearance, for all are looking their best just now.

Jo’s angles are much softened, she has learned to carry herself with ease, if not grace. The curly crop has lengthened into a thick coil, more becoming to the small head atop of the tall figure. There is a fresh color in her brown cheeks, a soft shine in her eyes, and only gentle words fall from her sharp tongue today.

Beth has grown slender, pale, and more quiet than ever. The beautiful, kind eyes are larger, and in them lies an expression that saddens one, although it is not sad itself. It is the shadow of pain which touches the young face with such pathetic patience, but Beth seldom complains and always speaks hopefully of ‘being better soon’.

Amy is with truth considered ‘the flower of the family’, for at sixteen she has the air and bearing of a full-grown woman, not beautiful, but possessed of that indescribable charm called grace. One saw it in the lines of her figure, the make and motion of her hands, the flow of her dress, the droop of her hair, unconscious yet harmonious, and as attractive to many as beauty itself. Amy’s nose still afflicted her, for it never would grow Grecian, so did her mouth, being too wide, and having a decided chin. These offending features gave character to her whole face, but she never could see it, and consoled herself with her wonderfully fair complexion, keen blue eyes, and curls more golden and abundant than ever.

All three wore suits of thin silver gray (their best gowns for the summer), with blush roses in hair and bosom, and all three looked just what they were, fresh-faced, happy-hearted girls, pausing a moment in their busy lives to read with wistful eyes the sweetest chapter in the romance of womanhood.

There were to be no ceremonious performances, everything was to be as natural and homelike as possible, so when Aunt March arrived, she was scandalized to see the bride come running to welcome and lead her in, to find the bridegroom fastening up a garland that had fallen down, and to catch a glimpse of the paternal minister marching upstairs with a grave countenance and a wine bottle under each arm.

“Upon my word, here’s a state of things!” cried the old lady, taking the seat of honor prepared for her, and settling the folds of her lavender moire with a great rustle. “You oughtn’t to be seen till the last minute, child.”

“I’m not a show, Aunty, and no one is coming to stare at me, to criticize my dress, or count the cost of my luncheon. I’m too happy to care what anyone says or thinks, and I’m going to have my little wedding just as I like it. John, dear, here’s your hammer.” And away went Meg to help ‘that man’ in his highly improper employment.

Mr. Brooke didn’t even say, “Thank you,” but as he stooped for the unromantic tool, he kissed his little bride behind the folding door, with a look that made Aunt March whisk out her pocket handkerchief with a sudden dew in her sharp old eyes.

A crash, a cry, and a laugh from Laurie, accompanied by the indecorous exclamation, “Jupiter Ammon! Jo’s upset the cake again!” caused a momentary flurry, which was hardly over when a flock of cousins arrived, and ‘the party came in’, as Beth used to say when a child.

“Don’t let that young giant come near me, he worries me worse than mosquitoes,” whispered the old lady to Amy, as the rooms filled and Laurie’s black head towered above the rest.

“He has promised to be very good today, and he can be perfectly elegant if he likes,” returned Amy, and gliding away to warn Hercules to beware of the dragon, which warning caused him to haunt the old lady with a devotion that nearly distracted her.

There was no bridal procession, but a sudden silence fell upon the room as Mr. March and the young couple took their places under the green arch. Mother and sisters gathered close, as if loath to give Meg up. The fatherly voice broke more than once, which only seemed to make the service more beautiful and solemn. The bridegroom’s hand trembled visibly, and no one heard his replies. But Meg looked straight up in her husband’s eyes, and said, “I will!” with such tender trust in her own face and voice that her mother’s heart rejoiced and Aunt March sniffed audibly.

Jo did not cry, though she was very near it once, and was only saved from a demonstration by the consciousness that Laurie was staring fixedly at her, with a comical mixture of merriment and emotion in his wicked black eyes. Beth kept her face hidden on her mother’s shoulder, but Amy stood like a graceful statue, with a most becoming ray of sunshine touching her white forehead and the flower in her hair.

It wasn’t at all the thing, I’m afraid, but the minute she was fairly married, Meg cried, “The first kiss for Marmee!” and turning, gave it with her heart on her lips. During the next fifteen minutes she looked more like a rose than ever, for everyone availed themselves of their privileges to the fullest extent, from Mr. Laurence to old Hannah, who, adorned with a headdress fearfully and wonderfully made, fell upon her in the hall, crying with a sob and a chuckle, “Bless you, deary, a hundred times! The cake ain’t hurt a mite, and everything looks lovely.”

Everybody cleared up after that, and said something brilliant, or tried to, which did just as well, for laughter is ready when hearts are light. There was no display of gifts, for they were already in the little house, nor was there an elaborate breakfast, but a plentiful lunch of cake and fruit, dressed with flowers. Mr. Laurence and Aunt March shrugged and smiled at one another when water, lemonade, and coffee were found to be to only sorts of nectar which the three Hebes carried round. No one said anything, till Laurie, who insisted on serving the bride, appeared before her, with a loaded salver in his hand and a puzzled expression on his face.

"Has Jo smashed all the bottles by accident?" he whispered, "or am I merely laboring under a delusion that I saw some lying about loose this morning?"

"No, your grandfather kindly offered us his best, and Aunt March actually sent some, but Father put away a little for Beth, and dispatched the rest to the Soldier's Home. You know he thinks that wine should be used only in illness, and Mother says that neither she nor her daughters will ever offer it to any young man under her roof."

Meg spoke seriously and expected to see Laurie frown or laugh, but he did neither, for after a quick look at her, he said, in his impetuous way, "I like that! For I've seen enough harm done to wish other women would think as you do."

"You are not made wise by experience, I hope?" and there was an anxious accent in Meg's voice.

"No. I give you my word for it. Don't think too well of me, either, this is not one of my temptations. Being brought up where wine is as common as water and almost as harmless, I don't care for it, but when a pretty girl offers it, one doesn't like to refuse, you see."

"But you will, for the sake of others, if not for your own. Come, Laurie, promise, and give me one more reason to call this the happiest day of my life."

A demand so sudden and so serious made the young man hesitate a moment, for ridicule is often harder to bear than self-denial. Meg knew that if he gave the promise he would keep it at all costs, and feeling her power, used it as a woman may for her friend's good. She did not speak, but she looked up at him with a face made very eloquent by happiness, and a smile which said, "No one can refuse me anything today."

Laurie certainly could not, and with an answering smile, he gave her his hand, saying heartily, "I promise, Mrs. Brooke!"

"I thank you, very, very much."

"And I drink 'long life to your resolution', Teddy," cried Jo, baptizing him with a splash of lemonade, as she waved her glass and beamed approvingly upon him.

So the toast was drunk, the pledge made and loyally kept in spite of many temptations, for with instinctive wisdom, the girls seized a happy moment to do their friend a service, for which he thanked them all his life.

After lunch, people strolled about, by twos and threes, through the house and garden, enjoying the sunshine without and within. Meg and John happened to be standing together in the middle of the grass plot, when Laurie was seized with an inspiration which put the finishing touch to this unfashionable wedding.

"All the married people take hands and dance round the new-made husband and wife, as the Germans do, while we bachelors and spinsters prance in couples outside!" cried Laurie, promenading down the path with Amy, with such infectious spirit and skill that everyone else followed their example without a murmur. Mr. and Mrs. March, Aunt and Uncle Carrol began it, others rapidly joined in, even Sallie Moffat, after a moment's hesitation, threw her train over her arm and whisked Ned into the ring. But the crowning joke was Mr. Laurence and Aunt March, for when the stately old gentleman chasseed solemnly up to the old lady, she just tucked her cane under her arm, and hopped briskly away to join hands with the rest and dance about the bridal pair, while the young folks pervaded the garden like butterflies on a midsummer day.

Want of breath brought the impromptu ball to a close, and then people began to go.

"I wish you well, my dear, I heartily wish you well, but I think you'll be sorry for it," said Aunt March to Meg, adding to the bridegroom, as he led her to the carriage, "You've got a treasure, young man, see that you deserve it."

"That is the prettiest wedding I've been to for an age, Ned, and I don't see why, for there wasn't a bit of style about it," observed Mrs. Moffat to her husband, as they drove away.

"Laurie, my lad, if you ever want to indulge in this sort of thing, get one of those little girls to help you, and I shall be perfectly satisfied," said Mr. Laurence, settling himself in his easy chair to rest after the excitement of the morning.

"I'll do my best to gratify you, Sir," was Laurie's unusually dutiful reply, as he carefully unpinned the posy Jo had put in his buttonhole.

The little house was not far away, and the only bridal journey Meg had was the quiet walk with John from the old home to the new. When she came down, looking like a pretty Quakeress in her dove-colored suit and straw bonnet tied with white, they all gathered about her to say 'good-by', as tenderly as if she had been going to make the grand tour.

"Don't feel that I am separated from you, Marmee dear, or that I love you any the less for loving John so much," she said, clinging to her mother, with full eyes for a moment. "I shall come every day, Father, and expect to keep my old place in all your hearts, though I am married. Beth is going to be with me a great deal, and the other girls will drop in now and then to laugh at my housekeeping struggles. Thank you all for my happy wedding day. Good-by, good-by!”

They stood watching her, with faces full of love and hope and tender pride as she walked away, leaning on her husband’s arm, with her hands full of flowers and the June sunshine brightening her happy face — and so Meg’s married life began.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ARTISTIC ATTEMPTS

It takes people a long time to learn the difference between talent and genius, especially ambitious young men and women. Amy was learning this distinction through much tribulation, for mistaking enthusiasm for inspiration, she attempted every branch of art with youthful audacity. For a long time there was a lull in the ‘mud-pie’ business, and she devoted herself to the finest pen-and-ink drawing, in which she showed such taste and skill that her graceful handiwork proved both pleasant and profitable. But over-strained eyes caused pen and ink to be laid aside for a bold attempt at poker-sketching. While this attack lasted, the family lived in constant fear of a conflagration, for the odor of burning wood pervaded the house at all hours, smoke issued from attic and shed with alarming frequency, red-hot pokers lay about promiscuously, and Hannah never went to bed without a pail of water and the dinner bell at her door in case of fire. Raphael’s face was found boldly executed on the underside of the moulding board, and Bacchus on the head of a beer barrel. A chanting cherub adorned the cover of the sugar bucket, and attempts to portray Romeo and Juliet supplied kindling for some time.

From fire to oil was a natural transition for burned fingers, and Amy fell to painting with undiminished ardor. An artist friend fitted her out with his castoff palettes, brushes, and colors, and she daubed away, producing pastoral and marine views such as were never seen on land or sea. Her monstrosities in the way of cattle would have taken prizes at an agricultural fair, and the perilous pitching of her vessels would have produced seasickness in the most nautical observer, if the utter disregard to all known rules of shipbuilding and rigging had not convulsed him with laughter at the first glance. Swarthy boys and dark-eyed Madonnas, staring at you from one corner of the studio, suggested Murillo; oily brown shadows of faces with a lurid streak in the wrong place, meant Rembrandt; buxom ladies and dropiscal infants, Rubens; and Turner appeared in tempests of blue thunder, orange lightning, brown rain, and purple clouds, with a tomato-colored splash in the middle, which might be the sun or a bouy, a sailor’s shirt or a king’s robe, as the spectator pleased.

Charcoal portraits came next, and the entire family hung in a row, looking as wild and crocky as if just evoked from a coalbin. Softened into crayon sketches, they did better, for the likenesses were good, and Amy’s hair, Jo’s nose, Meg’s mouth, and Laurie's eyes were pronounced 'wonderfully fine'. A return to clay and plaster followed, and ghostly casts of her acquaintances haunted corners of the house, or tumbled off closet shelves onto people's heads. Children were enticed in as models, till their incoherent accounts of her mysterious doings caused Miss Amy to be regarded in the light of a young ogress. Her efforts in this line, however, were brought to an abrupt close by an untoward accident, which quenched her ardor. Other models failing her for a time, she undertook to cast her own pretty foot, and the family were one day alarmed by an unearthly bumping and screaming and running to the rescue, found the young enthusiast hopping wildly about the shed with her foot held fast in a pan full of plaster, which had hardened with unexpected rapidity. With much difficulty and some danger she was dug out, for Jo was so overcome with laughter while she excavated that her knife went too far, cut the poor foot, and left a lasting memorial of one artistic attempt, at least.

After this Amy subsided, till a mania for sketching from nature set her to haunting river, field, and wood, for picturesque studies, and sighing for ruins to copy. She caught endless colds sitting on damp grass to book 'a delicious bit', composed of a stone, a stump, one mushroom, and a broken mullein stalk, or 'a heavenly mass of clouds', that looked like a choice display of featherbeds when done. She sacrificed her complexion floating on the river in the midsummer sun to study light and shade, and got a wrinkle over her nose trying after 'points of sight', or whatever the squint-and-string performance is called.

If 'genius is eternal patience', as Michelangelo affirms, Amy had some claim to the divine attribute, for she persevered in spite of all obstacles, failures, and discouragements, firmly believing that in time she should do something worthy to be called 'high art'.

She was learning, doing, and enjoying other things, meanwhile, for she had resolved to be an attractive and accomplished woman, even if she never became a great artist. Here she succeeded better, for she was one of those happily created beings who please without effort, make friends everywhere, and take life so gracefully and easily that less fortunate souls are tempted to believe that such are born under a lucky star. Everybody liked her, for among her good gifts was tact. She had an instinctive sense of what was pleasing and proper, always said the right thing to the right person, did just what suited the time and place, and was so self-possessed that her sisters used to say, "If Amy went to court without any rehearsal beforehand, she'd know exactly what to do."

One of her weaknesses was a desire to move in 'our best society', without being quite sure what the best really was. Money, position, fashionable accomplishments, and elegant manners were most desirable things in her eyes, and she liked to associate with those who possessed them, often mistaking the false for the true, and admiring what was not admirable. Never forgetting that by birth she was a gentlewoman, she cultivated her aristocratic tastes and feelings, so that when the opportunity came she might be ready to take the place from which poverty now excluded her.

"My lady," as her friends called her, sincerely desired to be a genuine lady, and was so at heart, but had yet to learn that money cannot buy refinement of nature, that rank does not always confer nobility, and that true breeding makes itself felt in spite of external drawbacks.

"I want to ask a favor of you, Mamma," Amy said, coming in with an important air one day.

"Well, little girl, what is it?" replied her mother, in whose eyes the stately young lady still remained 'the baby'.

"Our drawing class breaks up next week, and before the girls separate for the summer, I want to ask them out here for a day. They are wild to see the river, sketch the broken bridge, and copy some of the things they admire in my book. They have been very kind to me in many ways, and I am grateful, for they are all rich and I know I am poor, yet they never made any difference."

"Why should they?" and Mrs. March put the question with what the girls called her 'Maria Theresa air'.

"You know as well as I that it does make a difference with nearly everyone, so don't ruffle up like a dear, motherly hen, when your chickens get pecked by smarter birds. The ugly duckling turned out a swan, you know." and Amy smiled without bitterness, for she possessed a happy temper and hopeful spirit.

Mrs. March laughed, and smoothed down her maternal pride as she asked, "Well, my swan, what is your plan?"

"I should like to ask the girls out to lunch next week, to take them for a drive to the places they want to see, a row on the river, perhaps, and make a little artistic fete for them."

"That looks feasible. What do you want for lunch? Cake, sandwiches, fruit, and coffee will be all that is necessary, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, no! We must have cold tongue and chicken, French chocolate and ice cream, besides. The girls are used to such things, and I want my lunch to be proper and elegant, though I do work for my living."

"How many young ladies are there?" asked her mother, beginning to look sober.

"Twelve or fourteen in the class, but I dare say they won't all come."

"Bless me, child, you will have to charter an omnibus to carry them about."

"Why, Mother, how can you think of such a thing? Not more than six or eight will probably come, so I shall hire a beach wagon and borrow Mr. Laurence's cherry-bounce." (Hannah's pronunciation of char-a-banc.)

"All of this will be expensive, Amy."

"Not very. I've calculated the cost, and I'll pay for it myself."

"Don't you think, dear, that as these girls are used to such things, and the best we can do will be nothing new, that some simpler plan would be pleasanter to them, as a change if nothing more, and much better for us than buying or borrowing what we don't need, and attempting a style not in keeping with our circumstances?"

"If I can't have it as I like, I don't care to have it at all. I know that I can carry it out perfectly well, if you and the girls will help a little, and I don't see why I can't if I'm willing to pay for it," said Amy, with the decision which opposition was apt to change into obstinacy.

Mrs. March knew that experience was an excellent teacher, and when it was possible she left her children to learn alone the lessons which she would gladly have made easier, if they had not objected to taking advice as much as they did salts and senna.

"Very well, Amy, if your heart is set upon it, and you see your way through without too great an outlay of money, time, and temper, I'll say no more. Talk it over with the girls, and whichever way you decide, I'll do my best to help you."

"Thanks, Mother, you are always so kind." and away went Amy to lay her plan before her sisters.

Meg agreed at once, and promised her aid, gladly offering anything she possessed, from her little house itself to her very best saltspoons. But Jo frowned upon the whole project and would have nothing to do with it at first.

"Why in the world should you spend your money, worry your family, and turn the house upside down for a parcel of girls who don't care a sixpence for you? I thought you had too much pride and sense to truckle to any mortal woman just because she wears French boots and rides in a coupe," said Jo, who, being called from the tragic climax of her novel, was not in the best mood for social enterprises.

"I don't truckle, and I hate being patronized as much as you do!" returned Amy indignantly, for the two still jangled when such questions arose. "The girls do care for me, and I for them, and there's a great deal of kindness and sense and talent among them, in spite of what you call fashionable nonsense. You don't care to make people like you, to go into good society, and cultivate your manners and tastes. I do, and I mean to make the most of every chance that comes. You can go through the world with your elbows out and your nose in the air, and call it independence, if you like. That's not my way."

When Amy had whetted her tongue and freed her mind she usually got the best of it, for she seldom failed to have common sense on her side, while Jo carried her love of liberty and hate of conventionalities to such an unlimited extent that she naturally found herself worsted in an argument. Amy's definition of Jo's idea of independence was such a good hit that both burst out laughing, and the discussion took a more amiable turn. Much against her will, Jo at length consented to sacrifice a day to Mrs. Grundy, and help her sister through what she regarded as 'a nonsensical business'.

The invitations were sent, nearly all accepted, and the following Monday was set apart for the grand event. Hannah was out of humor because her week's work was deranged, and prophesied that "ef the washin' and ironin' warn't done reg'lar, nothin' would go well anywheres". This hitch in the mainspring of the domestic machinery had a bad effect upon the whole concern, but Amy's motto was 'Nil desperandum', and having made up her mind what to do, she proceeded to do it in spite of all obstacles. To begin with, Hannah's cooking didn't turn out well. The chicken was tough, the tongue too salty, and the chocolate wouldn't froth properly. Then the cake and ice cost more than Amy expected, so did the wagon, and various other expenses, which seemed trifling at the outset, counted up rather alarmingly afterward. Beth got a cold and took to her bed. Meg had an unusual number of callers to keep her at home, and Jo was in such a divided state of mind that her breakages, accidents, and mistakes were uncommonly numerous, serious, and trying.

If it was not fair on Monday, the young ladies were to come on Tuesday, an arrangement which aggravated Jo and Hannah to the last degree. On Monday morning the weather was in that undecided state which is more exasperating than a steady pour. It drizzled a little, shone a little, blew a little, and didn't make up its mind till it was too late for anyone else to make up theirs. Amy was up at dawn, hustling people out of their beds and through their breakfasts, that the house might be got in order. The parlor struck her as looking uncommonly shabby, but without stopping to sigh for what she had not, she skillfully made the best of what she had, arranging chairs over the worn places in the carpet, covering stains on the walls with homemade statuary, which gave an artistic air to the room, as did the lovely vases of flowers Jo scattered about.

The lunch looked charming, and as she surveyed it, she sincerely hoped it would taste well, and that the borrowed glass, china, and silver would get safely home again. The carriages were promised, Meg and Mother were all ready to do the honors, Beth was able to help Hannah behind the scenes, Jo had engaged to be as lively and amiable as an absent mind, and aching head, and a very decided disapproval of everybody and everything would allow, and as she wearily dressed, Amy cheered herself with anticipations of the happy moment when, lunch safely over, she should drive away with her friends for an afternoon of artistic delights, for the ‘cherry bounce’ and the broken bridge were her strong points.

Then came the hours of suspense, during which she vibrated from parlor to porch, while public opinion varied like the weathercock. A smart shower at eleven had evidently quenched the enthusiasm of the young ladies who were to arrive at twelve, for nobody came, and at two the exhausted family sat down in a blaze of sunshine to consume the perishable portions of the feast, that nothing might be lost.

“No doubt about the weather today, they will certainly come, so we must fly round and be ready for them,” said Amy, as the sun woke her next morning. She spoke briskly, but in her secret soul she wished she had said nothing about Tuesday, for her interest like her cake was getting a little stale.

“I can’t get any lobsters, so you will have to do without salad today,” said Mr. March, coming in half an hour later, with an expression of placid despair.

“Use the chicken then, the toughness won’t matter in a salad,” advised his wife.

“Hannah left it on the kitchen table a minute, and the kittens got at it. I’m very sorry, Amy,” added Beth, who was still a patroness of cats.

“Then I must have a lobster, for tongue alone won’t do,” said Amy decidedly.

“Shall I rush into town and demand one?” asked Jo, with the magnanimity of a martyr.

“You’d come bringing it home under your arm without any paper, just to try me. I’ll go myself,” answered Amy, whose temper was beginning to fail.

Shrouded in a thick veil and armed with a genteel traveling basket, she departed, feeling that a cool drive would soothe her ruffled spirit and fit her for the labors of the day. After some delay, the object of her desire was procured, likewise a bottle of dressing to prevent further loss of time at home, and off she drove again, well pleased with her own forethought.

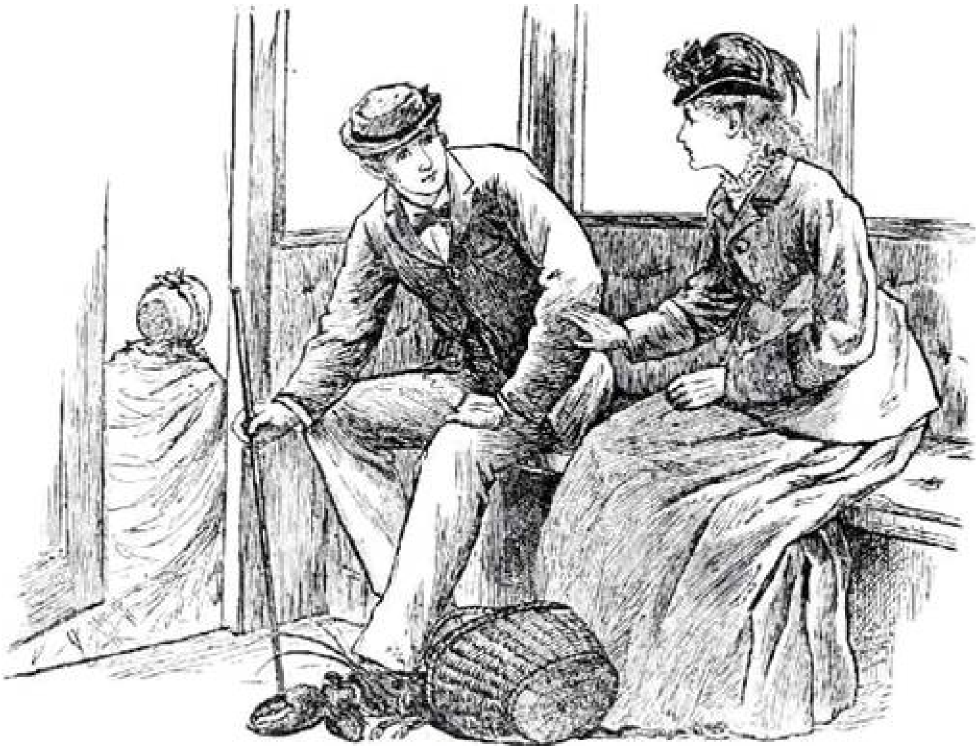
As the omnibus contained only one other passenger, a sleepy old lady, Amy pocketed her veil and beguiled the tedium of the way by trying to find out where all her money had gone to. So busy was she with her card full of refractory figures that she did not observe a newcomer, who entered without stopping the vehicle, till a masculine voice said, “Good morning, Miss March,” and, looking up, she beheld one of Laurie’s most elegant college friends. Fervently hoping that he would get out before she did, Amy utterly ignored the basket at her feet, and congratulating herself that she had on her new traveling dress, returned the young man’s greeting with her usual suavity and spirit.

They got on excellently, for Amy’s chief care was soon set at rest by learning that the gentleman would leave first, and she was chatting away in a peculiarly lofty strain, when the old lady got out. In stumbling to the door, she upset the basket, and — oh horror! — the lobster, in all its vulgar size and brilliancy, was revealed to the highborn eyes of a Tudor!

“By Jove, she’s forgotten her dinner!” cried the unconscious youth, poking the scarlet monster into its place with his cane, and preparing to hand out the basket after the old lady.

“Please don’t — it’s — it’s mine,” murmured Amy, with a face nearly as red as her fish.

“Oh, really, I beg pardon. It’s an uncommonly fine one, isn’t it?” said Tudor, with great presence of mind, and an air of sober interest that did credit to his breeding.



Amy recovered herself in a breath, set her basket boldly on the seat, and said, laughing, “Don’t you wish you were to have some of the salad he’s going to make, and to see the charming young ladies who are to eat it?”

Now that was tact, for two of the ruling foibles of the masculine mind were touched. The lobster was instantly surrounded by a halo of pleasing reminiscences, and curiosity about ‘the charming young ladies’ diverted his mind from the comical mishap.

“I suppose he’ll laugh and joke over it with Laurie, but I shan’t see them, that’s a comfort,” thought Amy, as Tudor bowed and departed.

She did not mention this meeting at home (though she discovered that, thanks to the upset, her new dress was much damaged by the rivulets of dressing that meandered down the skirt), but went through with the preparations which now seemed more irksome than before, and at twelve o'clock all was ready again. Feeling that the neighbors were interested in her movements, she wished to efface the memory of yesterday's failure by a grand success today, so she ordered the 'cherry bounce', and drove away in state to meet and escort her guests to the banquet.

"There's the rumble, they're coming! I'll go onto the porch and meet them. It looks hospitable, and I want the poor child to have a good time after all her trouble," said Mrs. March, suiting the action to the word. But after one glance, she retired, with an indescribable expression, for looking quite lost in the big carriage, sat Amy and one young lady.

"Run, Beth, and help Hannah clear half the things off the table. It will be too absurd to put a luncheon for twelve before a single girl," cried Jo, hurrying away to the lower regions, too excited to stop even for a laugh.

In came Amy, quite calm and delightfully cordial to the one guest who had kept her promise. The rest of the family, being of a dramatic turn, played their parts equally well, and Miss Eliott found them a most hilarious set, for it was impossible to control entirely the merriment which possessed them. The remodeled lunch being gaily partaken of, the studio and garden visited, and art discussed with enthusiasm, Amy ordered a buggy (alas for the elegant cherry-bounce), and drove her friend quietly about the neighborhood till sunset, when 'the party went out'.

As she came walking in, looking very tired but as composed as ever, she observed that every vestige of the unfortunate fete had disappeared, except a suspicious pucker about the corners of Jo's mouth.

"You've had a loverly afternoon for your drive, dear," said her mother, as respectfully as if the whole twelve had come.

"Miss Eliott is a very sweet girl, and seemed to enjoy herself, I thought," observed Beth, with unusual warmth.

"Could you spare me some of your cake? I really need some, I have so much company, and I can't make such delicious stuff as yours," asked Meg soberly.

"Take it all. I'm the only one here who likes sweet things, and it will mold before I can dispose of it," answered Amy, thinking with a sigh of the generous store she had laid in for such an end as this.

"It's a pity Laurie isn't here to help us," began Jo, as they sat down to ice cream and salad for the second time in two days.

A warning look from her mother checked any further remarks, and the whole family ate in heroic silence, till Mr. March mildly observed, “salad was one of the favorite dishes of the ancients, and Evelyn...” Here a general explosion of laughter cut short the ‘history of salads’, to the great surprise of the learned gentleman.

“Bundle everything into a basket and send it to the Hummels. Germans like messes. I’m sick of the sight of this, and there’s no reason you should all die of a surfeit because I’ve been a fool,” cried Amy, wiping her eyes.

“I thought I should have died when I saw you two girls rattling about in the what-you-call-it, like two little kernels in a very big nutshell, and Mother waiting in state to receive the throng,” sighed Jo, quite spent with laughter.

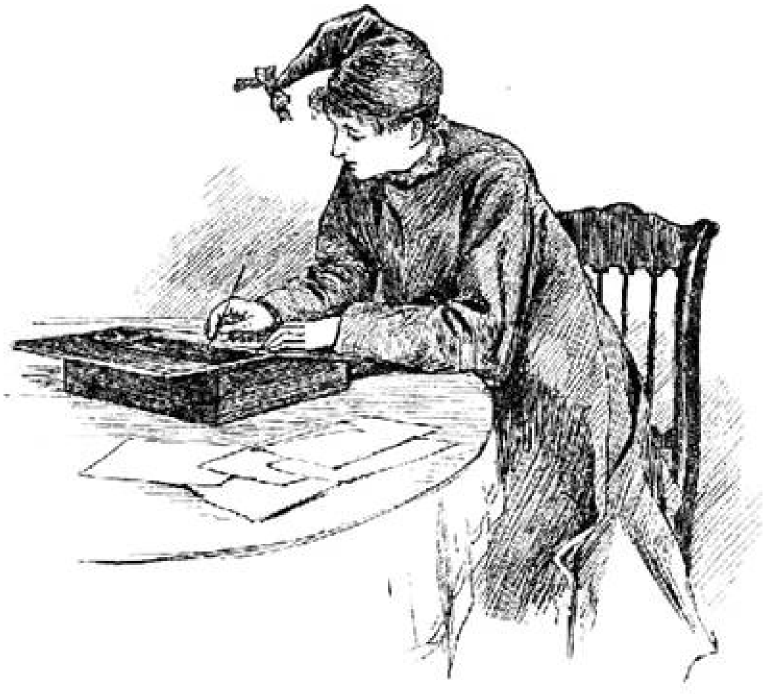
“I’m very sorry you were disappointed, dear, but we all did our best to satisfy you,” said Mrs. March, in a tone full of motherly regret.

“I am satisfied. I’ve done what I undertook, and it’s not my fault that it failed. I comfort myself with that,” said Amy with a little quiver in her voice. “I thank you all very much for helping me, and I’ll thank you still more if you won’t allude to it for a month, at least.”

No one did for several months, but the word ‘fete’ always produced a general smile, and Laurie’s birthday gift to Amy was a tiny coral lobster in the shape of a charm for her watch guard.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

LITERARY LESSONS



XXVII.

Fortune suddenly smiled upon Jo, and dropped a good luck penny in her path. Not a golden penny, exactly, but I doubt if half a million would have given more real happiness then did the little sum that came to her in this wise.

Every few weeks she would shut herself up in her room, put on her scribbling suit, and ‘fall into a vortex’, as she expressed it, writing away at her novel with all her heart and soul, for till that was finished she could find no peace. Her ‘scribbling suit’ consisted of a black woolen pinafore on which she could wipe her pen at will, and a cap of the same material, adorned with a cheerful red bow, into which she bundled her hair when the decks were cleared for action. This cap was a beacon to the inquiring eyes of her family, who during these periods kept their distance, merely popping in their heads semi-occasionally to ask, with interest, “Does genius burn, Jo?” They did not always venture even to ask this question, but took an observation of the cap, and judged accordingly. If this expressive article of dress was drawn low upon the forehead, it was a sign that hard work was going on, in exciting moments it was pushed rakishly askew, and when despair seized the author it was plucked wholly off, and cast upon the floor. At such times the intruder silently withdrew, and not until the red bow was seen gaily erect upon the gifted brow, did anyone dare address Jo.

She did not think herself a genius by any means, but when the writing fit came on, she gave herself up to it with entire abandon, and led a blissful life, unconscious of want, care, or bad weather, while she sat safe and happy in an imaginary world, full of friends almost as real and dear to her as any in the flesh. Sleep forsook her eyes, meals stood untasted, day and night were all too short to enjoy the happiness which blessed her only at such times, and made these hours worth living, even if they bore no other fruit. The devine afflatus usually lasted a week or two, and then she emerged from her 'vortex', hungry, sleepy, cross, or despondent.

She was just recovering from one of these attacks when she was prevailed upon to escort Miss Crocker to a lecture, and in return for her virtue was rewarded with a new idea. It was a People's Course, the lecture on the Pyramids, and Jo rather wondered at the choice of such a subject for such an audience, but took it for granted that some great social evil would be remedied or some great want supplied by unfolding the glories of the Pharaohs to an audience whose thoughts were busy with the price of coal and flour, and whose lives were spent in trying to solve harder riddles than that of the Sphinx.

They were early, and while Miss Crocker set the heel of her stocking, Jo amused herself by examining the faces of the people who occupied the seat with them. On her left were two matrons, with massive foreheads and bonnets to match, discussing Women's Rights and making tatting. Beyond sat a pair of humble lovers, artlessly holding each other by the hand, a somber spinster eating peppermints out of a paper bag, and an old gentleman taking his preparatory nap behind a yellow bandanna. On her right, her only neighbor was a studious looking lad absorbed in a newspaper.

It was a pictorial sheet, and Jo examined the work of art nearest her, idly wondering what fortuitous concatenation of circumstances needed the melodramatic illustration of an Indian in full war costume, tumbling over a precipice with a wolf at his throat, while two infuriated young gentlemen, with unnaturally small feet and big eyes, were stabbing each other close by, and a disheveled female was flying away in the background with her mouth wide open. Pausing to turn a page, the lad saw her looking and, with boyish good nature offered half his paper, saying bluntly, "want to read it? That's a first-rate story."

Jo accepted it with a smile, for she had never outgrown her liking for lads, and soon found herself involved in the usual labyrinth of love, mystery, and murder, for the story belonged to that class of light literature in which the passions have a holiday, and when the author's invention fails, a grand catastrophe clears the stage of one half the dramatis personae, leaving the other half to exult over their downfall.

"Prime, isn't it?" asked the boy, as her eye went down the last paragraph of her portion.

"I think you and I could do as well as that if we tried," returned Jo, amused at his admiration of the trash.

"I should think I was a pretty lucky chap if I could. She makes a good living out of such stories, they say." and he pointed to the name of Mrs. S.L.A.N.G. Northbury, under the title of the tale.

"Do you know her?" asked Jo, with sudden interest.

"No, but I read all her pieces, and I know a fellow who works in the office where this paper is printed."

"Do you say she makes a good living out of stories like this?" and Jo looked more respectfully at the agitated group and thickly sprinkled exclamation points that adorned the page.

"Guess she does! She knows just what folks like, and gets paid well for writing it."

Here the lecture began, but Jo heard very little of it, for while Professor Sands was prosing away about Belzoni, Cheops, scarabei, and hieroglyphics, she was covertly taking down the address of the paper, and boldly resolving to try for the hundred-dollar prize offered in its columns for a sensational story. By the time the lecture ended and the audience awoke, she had built up a splendid fortune for herself (not the first founded on paper), and was already deep in the concoction of her story, being unable to decide whether the duel should come before the elopement or after the murder.

She said nothing of her plan at home, but fell to work next day, much to the disquiet of her mother, who always looked a little anxious when 'genius took to burning'. Jo had never tried this style before, contenting herself with very mild romances for *The Spread Eagle*. Her experience and miscellaneous reading were of service now, for they gave her some idea of dramatic effect, and supplied plot, language, and costumes. Her story was as full of desperation and despair as her limited acquaintance with those uncomfortable emotions enabled her to make it, and having located it in Lisbon, she wound up with an earthquake, as a striking and appropriate denouement. The manuscript was privately dispatched, accompanied by a note, modestly saying that if the tale didn't get the prize, which the writer hardly dared expect, she would be very glad to receive any sum it might be considered worth.

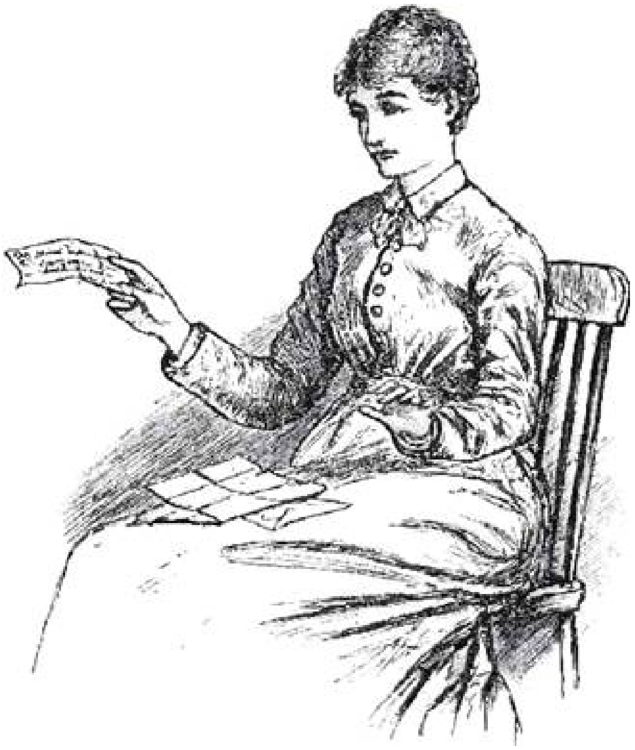
Six weeks is a long time to wait, and a still longer time for a girl to keep a secret, but Jo did both, and was just beginning to give up all hope of ever seeing her manuscript again, when a letter arrived which almost took her breath away, for on opening it, a check for a hundred dollars fell into her lap. For a minute she stared at it as if it had been a snake, then she read her letter and began to cry. If the amiable gentleman who wrote that kindly note could have known what intense happiness he was giving a fellow creature, I think he would devote his leisure hours, if he has any, to that amusement, for Jo valued the letter more than the money, because it was encouraging, and after years of effort it was so pleasant to find that she had learned to do something, though it was only to write a sensation story.

A prouder young woman was seldom seen than she, when, having composed herself, she electrified the family by appearing before them with the letter in one hand, the check in the other, announcing that she had won the prize. Of course there was a great jubilee, and when the story came everyone read and praised it, though after her father had told her that the language was good, the romance fresh and hearty, and the tragedy quite thrilling, he shook his head, and said in his unworldly way...

“You can do better than this, Jo. Aim at the highest, and never mind the money.”

“I think the money is the best part of it. What will you do with such a fortune?” asked Amy, regarding the magic slip of paper with a reverential eye.

“Send Beth and Mother to the seaside for a month or two,” answered Jo promptly.



To the seaside they went, after much discussion, and though Beth didn’t come home as plump and rosy as could be desired, she was much better, while Mrs. March declared she felt ten years younger. So Jo was satisfied with the investment of her prize money, and fell to work with a cheery spirit, bent on earning more of those delightful checks. She did earn several that year, and began to feel herself a power in the house, for by the magic of a pen, her ‘rubbish’ turned into comforts for them all. The Duke’s Daughter paid the butcher’s bill, A Phantom Hand put down a new carpet, and the Curse of the Coventrys proved the blessing of the Marches in the way of groceries and gowns.

Wealth is certainly a most desirable thing, but poverty has its sunny side, and one of the sweet uses of adversity is the genuine satisfaction which comes from hearty work of head or hand, and to the inspiration of necessity, we owe half the wise, beautiful, and useful blessings of the world. Jo enjoyed a taste of this satisfaction, and ceased to envy richer girls, taking great comfort in the knowledge that she could supply her own wants, and need ask no one for a penny.

Little notice was taken of her stories, but they found a market, and encouraged by this fact, she resolved to make a bold stroke for fame and fortune. Having copied her novel for the fourth time, read it to all her confidential friends, and submitted it with fear and trembling to three publishers, she at last disposed of it, on condition that she would cut it down one third, and omit all the parts which she particularly admired.

"Now I must either bundle it back in to my tin kitchen to mold, pay for printing it myself, or chop it up to suit purchasers and get what I can for it. Fame is a very good thing to have in the house, but cash is more convenient, so I wish to take the sense of the meeting on this important subject," said Jo, calling a family council.

"Don't spoil your book, my girl, for there is more in it than you know, and the idea is well worked out. Let it wait and ripen," was her father's advice, and he practiced what he preached, having waited patiently thirty years for fruit of his own to ripen, and being in no haste to gather it even now when it was sweet and mellow.

"It seems to me that Jo will profit more by taking the trial than by waiting," said Mrs. March. "Criticism is the best test of such work, for it will show her both unsuspected merits and faults, and help her to do better next time. We are too partial, but the praise and blame of outsiders will prove useful, even if she gets but little money."

"Yes," said Jo, knitting her brows, "that's just it. I've been fussing over the thing so long, I really don't know whether it's good, bad, or indifferent. It will be a great help to have cool, impartial persons take a look at it, and tell me what they think of it."

"I wouldn't leave a word out of it. You'll spoil it if you do, for the interest of the story is more in the minds than in the actions of the people, and it will be all a muddle if you don't explain as you go on," said Meg, who firmly believed that this book was the most remarkable novel ever written.

"But Mr. Allen says, 'Leave out the explanations, make it brief and dramatic, and let the characters tell the story'," interrupted Jo, turning to the publisher's note.

"Do as he tells you. He knows what will sell, and we don't. Make a good, popular book, and get as much money as you can. By-and-by, when you've got a name, you can afford to digress, and have philosophical and metaphysical people in your novels," said Amy, who took a strictly practical view of the subject.

"Well," said Jo, laughing, "if my people are 'philosophical and metaphysical', it isn't my fault, for I know nothing about such things, except what I hear father say, sometimes. If I've got some of his wise ideas jumbled up with my romance, so much the better for me. Now, Beth, what do you say?"

"I should so like to see it printed soon," was all Beth said, and smiled in saying it. But there was an unconscious emphasis on the last word, and a wistful look in the eyes that never lost their childlike candor, which chilled Jo's heart for a minute with a forboding fear, and decided her to make her little venture 'soon'.

So, with Spartan firmness, the young authoress laid her first-born on her table, and chopped it up as ruthlessly as any ogre. In the hope of pleasing everyone, she took everyone's advice, and like the old man and his donkey in the fable suited nobody.

Her father liked the metaphysical streak which had unconsciously got into it, so that was allowed to remain though she had her doubts about it. Her mother thought that there was a trifle too much description. Out, therefore it came, and with it many necessary links in the story. Meg admired the tragedy, so Jo piled up the agony to suit her, while Amy objected to the fun, and, with the best intentions in life, Jo quenched the spritly scenes which relieved the somber character of the story. Then, to complicate the ruin, she cut it down one third, and confidingly sent the poor little romance, like a picked robin, out into the big, busy world to try its fate.

Well, it was printed, and she got three hundred dollars for it, likewise plenty of praise and blame, both so much greater than she expected that she was thrown into a state of bewilderment from which it took her some time to recover.

"You said, Mother, that criticism would help me. But how can it, when it's so contradictory that I don't know whether I've written a promising book or broken all the ten commandments?" cried poor Jo, turning over a heap of notices, the perusal of which filled her with pride and joy one minute, wrath and dismay the next. "This man says, 'An exquisite book, full of truth, beauty, and earnestness.' 'All is sweet, pure, and healthy.'" continued the perplexed authoress. "The next, 'The theory of the book is bad, full of morbid fancies, spiritualistic ideas, and unnatural characters.' Now, as I had no theory of any kind, don't believe in Spiritualism, and copied my characters from life, I don't see how this critic can be right. Another says, 'It's one of the best American novels which has appeared for years.' (I know better than that), and the next asserts that 'Though it is original, and written with great force and feeling, it is a dangerous book.' 'Tisn't! Some make fun of it, some overpraise, and nearly all insist that I had a deep theory to expound, when I only wrote it for the pleasure and the money. I wish I'd printed the whole or not at all, for I do hate to be so misjudged."

Her family and friends administered comfort and commendation liberally. Yet it was a hard time for sensitive, high-spirited Jo, who meant so well and had apparently done so ill. But it did her good, for those whose opinion had real value gave her the criticism which is an author's best education, and when the first soreness was over, she could laugh at her poor little book, yet believe in it still, and feel herself the wiser and stronger for the buffeting she had received.

"Not being a genius, like Keats, it won't kill me," she said stoutly, "and I've got the joke on my side, after all, for the parts that were taken straight out of real life are denounced as impossible and absurd, and the scenes that I made up out of my own silly head are pronounced ‘charmingly natural, tender, and true’. So I’ll comfort myself with that, and when I’m ready, I’ll up again and take another.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DOMESTIC EXPERIENCES

Domestic Experiences.

Like most other young matrons, Meg began her married life with the determination to be a model housekeeper. John should find home a paradise, he should always see a smiling face, should fare sumptuously every day, and never know the loss of a button. She brought so much love, energy, and cheerfulness to the work that she could not but succeed, in spite of some obstacles. Her paradise was not a tranquil one, for the little woman fussed, was over-anxious to please, and bustled about like a true Martha, cumbered with many cares. She was too tired, sometimes, even to smile, John grew dyspeptic after a course of dainty dishes and ungratefully demanded plain fare. As for buttons, she soon learned to wonder where they went, to shake her head over the carelessness of men, and to threaten to make him sew them on himself, and see if his work would stand impatient and clumsy fingers any better than hers.

They were very happy, even after they discovered that they couldn’t live on love alone. John did not find Meg’s beauty diminished, though she beamed at him from behind the familiar coffee pot. Nor did Meg miss any of the romance from the daily parting, when her husband followed up his kiss with the tender inquiry, “Shall I send some veal or mutton for dinner, darling?” The little house ceased to be a glorified bower, but it became a home, and the young couple soon felt that it was a change for the better. At first they played keep-house, and frolicked over it like children. Then John took steadily to business, feeling the cares of the head of a family upon his shoulders, and Meg laid by her cambric wrappers, put on a big apron, and fell to work, as before said, with more energy than discretion.

While the cooking mania lasted she went through Mrs. Cornelius’s Receipt

Book as if it were a mathematical exercise, working out the problems with patience and care. Sometimes her family were invited in to help eat up a too bounteous feast of successes, or Lotty would be privately dispatched with a batch of failures, which were to be concealed from all eyes in the convenient stomachs of the little Hummels. An evening with John over the account books usually produced a temporary lull in the culinary enthusiasm, and a frugal fit would ensue, during which the poor man was put through a course of bread pudding, hash, and warmed-over coffee, which tried his soul, although he bore it with praiseworthy fortitude. Before the golden mean was found, however, Meg added to her domestic possessions what young couples seldom get on long without, a family jar.

Fired a with housewifely wish to see her storeroom stocked with homemade preserves, she undertook to put up her own currant jelly. John was requested to order home a dozen or so of little pots and an extra quantity of sugar, for their own currants were ripe and were to be attended to at once. As John firmly believed that ‘my wife’ was equal to anything, and took a natural pride in her skill, he resolved that she should be gratified, and their only crop of fruit laid by in a most pleasing form for winter use. Home came four dozen delightful little pots, half a barrel of sugar, and a small boy to pick the currants for her. With her pretty hair tucked into a little cap, arms bared to the elbow, and a checked apron which had a coquettish look in spite of the bib, the young housewife fell to work, feeling no doubts about her success, for hadn’t she seen Hannah do it hundreds of times? The array of pots rather amazed her at first, but John was so fond of jelly, and the nice little jars would look so well on the top shelf, that Meg resolved to fill them all, and spent a long day picking, boiling, straining, and fussing over her jelly. She did her best, she asked advice of Mrs. Cornelius, she racked her brain to remember what Hannah did that she left undone, she reboiled, resugared, and restrained, but that dreadful stuff wouldn’t ‘jell’.

She longed to run home, bib and all, and ask Mother to lend her a hand, but John and she had agreed that they would never annoy anyone with their private worries, experiments, or quarrels. They had laughed over that last word as if the idea it suggested was a most preposterous one, but they had held to their resolve, and whenever they could get on without help they did so, and no one interfered, for Mrs. March had advised the plan. So Meg wrestled alone with the refractory sweetmeats all that hot summer day, and at five o’clock sat down in her topsy-turvey kitchen, wrung her bedaubed hands, lifted up her voice and wept.

Now, in the first flush of the new life, she had often said, “My husband shall always feel free to bring a friend home whenever he likes. I shall always be prepared. There shall be no flurry, no scolding, no discomfort, but a neat house, a cheerful wife, and a good dinner. John, dear, never stop to ask my leave, invite whom you please, and be sure of a welcome from me."

How charming that was, to be sure! John quite glowed with pride to hear her say it, and felt what a blessed thing it was to have a superior wife. But, although they had had company from time to time, it never happened to be unexpected, and Meg had never had an opportunity to distinguish herself till now. It always happens so in this vale of tears, there is an inevitability about such things which we can only wonder at, deplore, and bear as we best can.

If John had not forgotten all about the jelly, it really would have been unpardonable in him to choose that day, of all the days in the year, to bring a friend home to dinner unexpectedly. Congratulating himself that a handsome repast had been ordered that morning, feeling sure that it would be ready to the minute, and indulging in pleasant anticipations of the charming effect it would produce, when his pretty wife came running out to meet him, he escorted his friend to his mansion, with the irrepressible satisfaction of a young host and husband.

It is a world of disappointments, as John discovered when he reached the Dovecote. The front door usually stood hospitably open. Now it was not only shut, but locked, and yesterday's mud still adorned the steps. The parlor windows were closed and curtained, no picture of the pretty wife sewing on the piazza, in white, with a distracting little bow in her hair, or a bright-eyed hostess, smiling a shy welcome as she greeted her guest. Nothing of the sort, for not a soul appeared but a sanginary-looking boy asleep under the current bushes.

"I'm afraid something has happened. Step into the garden, Scott, while I look up Mrs. Brooke," said John, alarmed at the silence and solitude.

Round the house he hurried, led by a pungent smell of burned sugar, and Mr. Scott strolled after him, with a queer look on his face. He paused discreetly at a distance when Brooke disappeared, but he could both see and hear, and being a bachelor, enjoyed the prospect mightily.

In the kitchen reigned confusion and despair. One edition of jelly was trickled from pot to pot, another lay upon the floor, and a third was burning gaily on the stove. Lotty, with Teutonic phlegm, was calmly eating bread and currant wine, for the jelly was still in a hopelessly liquid state, while Mrs. Brooke, with her apron over her head, sat sobbing dismally.

"My dearest girl, what is the matter?" cried John, rushing in, with awful visions of scalded hands, sudden news of affliction, and secret consternation at the thought of the guest in the garden.

"Oh, John, I am so tired and hot and cross and worried! I've been at it till I'm all worn out. Do come and help me or I shall die!" and the exhausted housewife cast herself upon his breast, giving him a sweet welcome in every sense of the word, for her pinafore had been baptized at the same time as the floor.

"What worries you dear? Has anything dreadful happened?" asked the anxious John, tenderly kissing the crown of the little cap, which was all askew.

"Yes," sobbed Meg despairingly.

"Tell me quick, then. Don't cry. I can bear anything better than that. Out with it, love."

"The... The jelly won't jell and I don't know what to do!"

John Brooke laughed then as he never dared to laugh afterward, and the derisive Scott smiled involuntarily as he heard the hearty peal, which put the finishing stroke to poor Meg's woe.

"Is that all? Fling it out of the window, and don't bother any more about it. I'll buy you quarts if you want it, but for heaven's sake don't have hysterics, for I've brought Jack Scott home to dinner, and..."

John got no further, for Meg cast him off, and clasped her hands with a tragic gesture as she fell into a chair, exclaiming in a tone of mingled indignation, reproach, and dismay...

"A man to dinner, and everything in a mess! John Brooke, how could you do such a thing?"

"Hush, he's in the garden! I forgot the confounded jelly, but it can't be helped now," said John, surveying the prospect with an anxious eye.

"You ought to have sent word, or told me this morning, and you ought to have remembered how busy I was," continued Meg petulantly, for even turtledoves will peck when ruffled.

"I didn't know it this morning, and there was no time to send word, for I met him on the way out. I never thought of asking leave, when you have always told me to do as I liked. I never tried it before, and hang me if I ever do again!" added John, with an aggrieved air.

"I should hope not! Take him away at once. I can't see him, and there isn't any dinner."

"Well, I like that! Where's the beef and vegetables I sent home, and the pudding you promised?" cried John, rushing to the larder.

"I hadn't time to cook anything. I meant to dine at Mother's. I'm sorry, but I was so busy," and Meg's tears began again.

John was a mild man, but he was human, and after a long day's work to come home tired, hungry, and hopeful, to find a chaotic house, an empty table, and a cross wife was not exactly conducive to repose of mind or manner. He restrained himself however, and the little squall would have blown over, but for one unlucky word.

"It's a scrape, I acknowledge, but if you will lend a hand, we'll pull through and have a good time yet. Don't cry, dear, but just exert yourself a bit, and fix us up something to eat. We're both as hungry as hunters, so we shan't mind what it is. Give us the cold meat, and bread and cheese. We won't ask for jelly."

He meant it to be a good-natured joke, but that one word sealed his fate. Meg thought it was too cruel to hint about her sad failure, and the last atom of patience vanished as he spoke.

"You must get yourself out of the scrape as you can. I'm too used up to 'exert' myself for anyone. It's like a man to propose a bone and vulgar bread and cheese for company. I won't have anything of the sort in my house. Take that Scott up to Mother's, and tell him I'm away, sick, dead, anything. I won't see him, and you two can laugh at me and my jelly as much as you like. You won't have anything else here." and having delivered her defiance all on one breath, Meg cast away her pinafore and precipitately left the field to bemoan herself in her own room.

What those two creatures did in her absence, she never knew, but Mr. Scott was not taken 'up to Mother's', and when Meg descended, after they had strolled away together, she found traces of a promiscuous lunch which filled her with horror. Lotty reported that they had eaten "a much, and greatly laughed, and the master bid her throw away all the sweet stuff, and hide the pots."

Meg longed to go and tell Mother, but a sense of shame at her own shortcomings, of loyalty to John, "who might be cruel, but nobody should know it," restrained her, and after a summary cleaning up, she dressed herself prettily, and sat down to wait for John to come and be forgiven.

Unfortunately, John didn't come, not seeing the matter in that light. He had carried it off as a good joke with Scott, excused his little wife as well as he could, and played the host so hospitably that his friend enjoyed the impromptu dinner, and promised to come again, but John was angry, though he did not show it, he felt that Meg had deserted him in his hour of need. "It wasn't fair to tell a man to bring folks home any time, with perfect freedom, and when he took you at your word, to flame up and blame him, and leave him in the lurch, to be laughed at or pitied. No, by George, it wasn't! And Meg must know it."

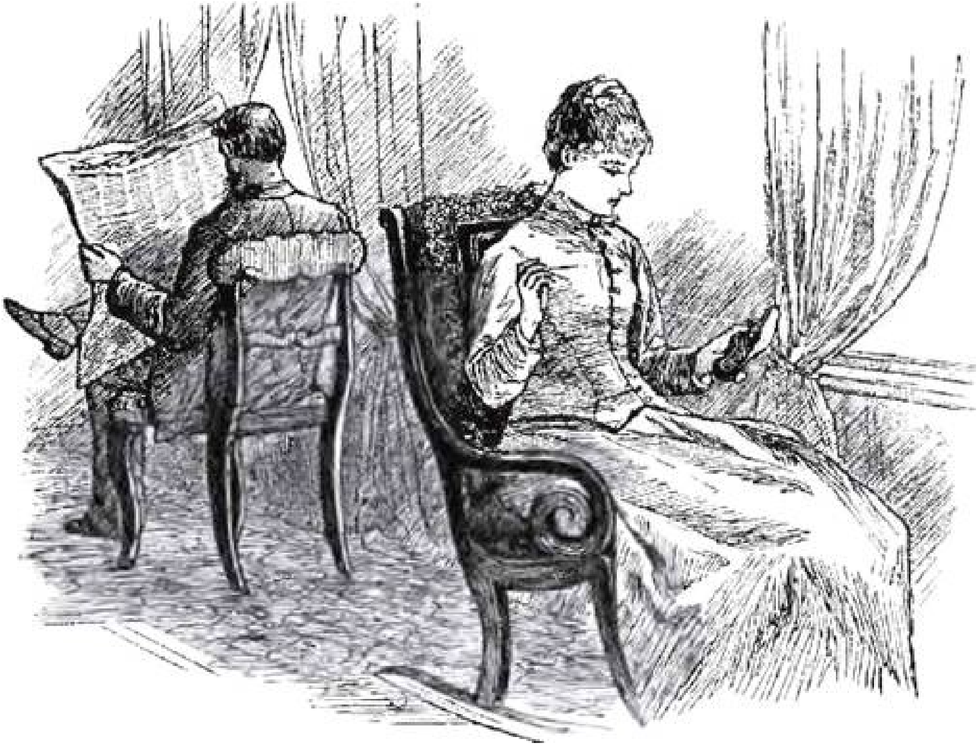
He had fumed inwardly during the feast, but when the flurry was over and he strolled home after seeing Scott off, a milder mood came over him. "Poor little thing! It was hard upon her when she tried so heartily to please me. She was wrong, of course, but then she was young. I must be patient and teach her." He hoped she had not gone home — he hated gossip and interference. For a minute he was ruffled again at the mere thought of it, and then the fear that Meg would cry herself sick softened his heart, and sent him on at a quicker pace, resolving to be calm and kind, but firm, quite firm, and show her where she had failed in her duty to her spouse.

Meg likewise resolved to be ‘calm and kind, but firm’, and show him his duty. She longed to run to meet him, and beg pardon, and be kissed and comforted, as she was sure of being, but, of course, she did nothing of the sort, and when she saw John coming, began to hum quite naturally, as she rocked and sewed, like a lady of leisure in her best parlor.

John was a little disappointed not to find a tender Niobe, but feeling that his dignity demanded the first apology, he made none, only came leisurely in and laid himself upon the sofa with the singularly relevant remark, “We are going to have a new moon, my dear.”

“I’ve no objection,” was Meg’s equally soothing remark. A few other topics of general interest were introduced by Mr. Brooke and wet-blanketed by Mrs. Brooke, and conversation languished. John went to one window, unfolded his paper, and wrapped himself in it, figuratively speaking. Meg went to the other window, and sewed as if new rosettes for slippers were among the necessaries of life. Neither spoke. Both looked quite ‘calm and firm’, and both felt desperately uncomfortable.

“Oh, dear,” thought Meg, “married life is very trying, and does need infinite patience as well as love, as Mother says.” The word ‘Mother’ suggested other maternal counsels given long ago, and received with unbelieving protests.



“John is a good man, but he has his faults, and you must learn to see and bear with them, remembering your own. He is very decided, but never will be obstinate, if you reason kindly, not oppose impatiently. He is very accurate, and particular about the truth — a good trait, though you call him ‘fussy’. Never deceive him by look or word, Meg, and he will give you the confidence you deserve, the support you need. He has a temper, not like ours — one flash and then all over — but the white, still anger that is seldom stirred, but once kindled is hard to quench. Be careful, be very careful, not to wake his anger against yourself, for peace and happiness depend on keeping his respect. Watch yourself, be the first to ask pardon if you both err, and guard against the little piques, misunderstandings, and hasty words that often pave the way for bitter sorrow and regret.”

These words came back to Meg, as she sat sewing in the sunset, especially the last. This was the first serious disagreement, her own hasty speeches sounded both silly and unkind, as she recalled them, her own anger looked childish now, and thoughts of poor John coming home to such a scene quite melted her heart. She glanced at him with tears in her eyes, but he did not see them. She put down her work and got up, thinking, “I will be the first to say, ‘Forgive me’“, but he did not seem to hear her. She went very slowly across the room, for pride was hard to swallow, and stood by him, but he did not turn his head. For a minute she felt as if she really couldn’t do it, then came the thought, “This is the beginning. I’ll do my part, and have nothing to reproach myself with,” and stooping down, she softly kissed her husband on the forehead. Of course that settled it. The penitent kiss was better than a world of words, and John had her on his knee in a minute, saying tenderly...

“It was too bad to laugh at the poor little jelly pots. Forgive me, dear. I never will again!”

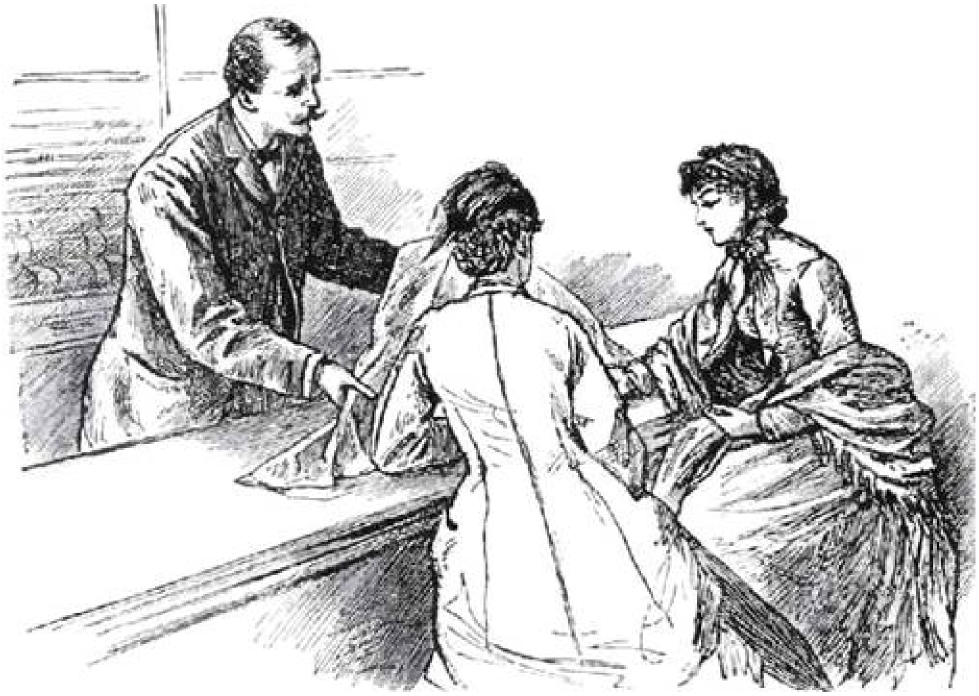
But he did, oh bless you, yes, hundreds of times, and so did Meg, both declaring that it was the sweetest jelly they ever made, for family peace was preserved in that little family jar.

After this, Meg had Mr. Scott to dinner by special invitation, and served him up a pleasant feast without a cooked wife for the first course, on which occasion she was so gay and gracious, and made everything go off so charmingly, that Mr. Scott told John he was a lucky fellow, and shook his head over the hardships of bachelorhood all the way home.

In the autumn, new trials and experiences came to Meg. Sallie Moffat renewed her friendship, was always running out for a dish of gossip at the little house, or inviting ‘that poor dear’ to come in and spend the day at the big house. It was pleasant, for in dull weather Meg often felt lonely. All were busy at home, John absent till night, and nothing to do but sew, or read, or potter about. So it naturally fell out that Meg got into the way of gadding and gossiping with her friend. Seeing Sallie's pretty things made her long for such, and pity herself because she had not got them. Sallie was very kind, and often offered her the coveted trifles, but Meg declined them, knowing that John wouldn't like it, and then this foolish little woman went and did what John disliked even worse.

She knew her husband's income, and she loved to feel that he trusted her, not only with his happiness, but what some men seem to value more — his money. She knew where it was, was free to take what she liked, and all he asked was that she should keep account of every penny, pay bills once a month, and remember that she was a poor man's wife. Till now she had done well, been prudent and exact, kept her little account books neatly, and showed them to him monthly without fear. But that autumn the serpent got into Meg's paradise, and tempted her like many a modern Eve, not with apples, but with dress. Meg didn't like to be pitied and made to feel poor. It irritated her, but she was ashamed to confess it, and now and then she tried to console herself by buying something pretty, so that Sallie needn't think she had to economize. She always felt wicked after it, for the pretty things were seldom necessaries, but then they cost so little, it wasn't worth worrying about, so the trifles increased unconsciously, and in the shopping excursions she was no longer a passive looker-on.

But the trifles cost more than one would imagine, and when she cast up her accounts at the end of the month the sum total rather scared her. John was busy that month and left the bills to her, the next month he was absent, but the third he had a grand quarterly settling up, and Meg never forgot it. A few days before she had done a dreadful thing, and it weighed upon her conscience. Sallie had been buying silks, and Meg longed for a new one, just a handsome light one for parties, her black silk was so common, and thin things for evening wear were only proper for girls. Aunt March usually gave the sisters a present of twenty-five dollars apiece at New Year's. That was only a month to wait, and here was a lovely violet silk going at a bargain, and she had the money, if she only dared to take it. John always said what was his was hers, but would he think it right to spend not only the prospective five-and-twenty, but another five-and-twenty out of the household fund? That was the question. Sallie had urged her to do it, had offered to lend the money, and with the best intentions in life had tempted Meg beyond her strength. In an evil moment the shopman held up the lovely, shimmering folds, and said, "A bargain, I assure, you, ma'am." She answered, "I'll take it," and it was cut off and paid for, and Sallie had exulted, and she had laughed as if it were a thing of no consequence, and driven away, feeling as if she had stolen something, and the police were after her.



When she got home, she tried to assuage the pangs of remorse by spreading forth the lovely silk, but it looked less silvery now, didn't become her, after all, and the words 'fifty dollars' seemed stamped like a pattern down each breadth. She put it away, but it haunted her, not delightfully as a new dress should, but dreadfully like the ghost of a folly that was not easily laid. When John got out his books that night, Meg's heart sank, and for the first time in her married life, she was afraid of her husband. The kind, brown eyes looked as if they could be stern, and though he was unusually merry, she fancied he had found her out, but didn't mean to let her know it. The house bills were all paid, the books all in order. John had praised her, and was undoing the old pocketbook which they called the 'bank', when Meg, knowing that it was quite empty, stopped his hand, saying nervously...

"You haven't seen my private expense book yet."

John never asked to see it, but she always insisted on his doing so, and used to enjoy his masculine amazement at the queer things women wanted, and made him guess what piping was, demand fiercely the meaning of a hug-me-tight, or wonder how a little thing composed of three rosebuds, a bit of velvet, and a pair of strings, could possibly be a bonnet, and cost six dollars. That night he looked as if he would like the fun of quizzing her figures and pretending to be horrified at her extravagance, as he often did, being particularly proud of his prudent wife.

The little book was brought slowly out and laid down before him. Meg got behind his chair under pretense of smoothing the wrinkles out of his tired forehead, and standing there, she said, with her panic increasing with every word...

“John, dear, I’m ashamed to show you my book, for I’ve really been dreadfully extravagant lately. I go about so much I must have things, you know, and Sallie advised my getting it, so I did, and my New Year’s money will partly pay for it, but I was sorry after I had done it, for I knew you’d think it wrong in me.”

John laughed, and drew her round beside him, saying goodhumoredly, “Don’t go and hide. I won’t beat you if you have got a pair of killing boots. I’m rather proud of my wife’s feet, and don’t mind if she does pay eight or nine dollars for her boots, if they are good ones.”

That had been one of her last ‘trifles’, and John’s eye had fallen on it as he spoke. “Oh, what will he say when he comes to that awful fifty dollars!” thought Meg, with a shiver.

“It’s worse than boots, it’s a silk dress,” she said, with the calmness of desperation, for she wanted the worst over.

“Well, dear, what is the ‘dem’d total’, as Mr. Mantalini says?”

That didn’t sound like John, and she knew he was looking up at her with the straightforward look that she had always been ready to meet and answer with one as frank till now. She turned the page and her head at the same time, pointing to the sum which would have been bad enough without the fifty, but which was appalling to her with that added. For a minute the room was very still, then John said slowly — but she could feel it cost him an effort to express no displeasure — . . .

“Well, I don’t know that fifty is much for a dress, with all the furbelows and notions you have to have to finish it off these days.”

“It isn’t made or trimmed,” sighed Meg, faintly, for a sudden recollection of the cost still to be incurred quite overwhelmed her.

“Twenty-five yards of silk seems a good deal to cover one small woman, but I’ve no doubt my wife will look as fine as Ned Moffat’s when she gets it on,” said John dryly.

“I know you are angry, John, but I can’t help it. I don’t mean to waste your money, and I didn’t think those little things would count up so. I can’t resist them when I see Sallie buying all she wants, and pitying me because I don’t. I try to be contented, but it is hard, and I’m tired of being poor.”

The last words were spoken so low she thought he did not hear them, but he did, and they wounded him deeply, for he had denied himself many pleasures for Meg’s sake. She could have bitten her tongue out the minute she had said it, for John pushed the books away and got up, saying with a little quiver in his voice, “I was afraid of this. I do my best, Meg.” If he had scolded her, or even shaken her, it would not have broken her heart like those few words. She ran to him and held him close, crying, with repentant tears, “Oh, John, my dear, kind, hard-working boy. I didn’t mean it! It was so wicked, so untrue and ungrateful, how could I say it! Oh, how could I say it!”

He was very kind, forgave her readily, and did not utter one reproach, but Meg knew that she had done and said a thing which would not be forgotten soon, although he might never allude to it again. She had promised to love him for better or worse, and then she, his wife, had reproached him with his poverty, after spending his earnings recklessly. It was dreadful, and the worst of it was John went on so quietly afterward, just as if nothing had happened, except that he stayed in town later, and worked at night when she had gone to cry herself to sleep. A week of remorse nearly made Meg sick, and the discovery that John had countermanded the order for his new greatcoat reduced her to a state of despair which was pathetic to behold. He had simply said, in answer to her surprised inquiries as to the change, “I can’t afford it, my dear.”

Meg said no more, but a few minutes after he found her in the hall with her face buried in the old greatcoat, crying as if her heart would break.

They had a long talk that night, and Meg learned to love her husband better for his poverty, because it seemed to have made a man of him, given him the strength and courage to fight his own way, and taught him a tender patience with which to bear and comfort the natural longings and failures of those he loved.

Next day she put her pride in her pocket, went to Sallie, told the truth, and asked her to buy the silk as a favor. The good-natured Mrs. Moffat willingly did so, and had the delicacy not to make her a present of it immediately afterward. Then Meg ordered home the greatcoat, and when John arrived, she put it on, and asked him how he liked her new silk gown. One can imagine what answer he made, how he received his present, and what a blissful state of things ensued. John came home early, Meg gadded no more, and that greatcoat was put on in the morning by a very happy husband, and taken off at night by a most devoted little wife. So the year rolled round, and at midsummer there came to Meg a new experience, the deepest and tenderest of a woman’s life.

Laurie came sneaking into the kitchen of the Dovecote one Saturday, with an excited face, and was received with the clash of cymbals, for Hannah clapped her hands with a saucepan in one and the cover in the other.

“How’s the little mamma? Where is everybody? Why didn’t you tell me before I came home?” began Laurie in a loud whisper.

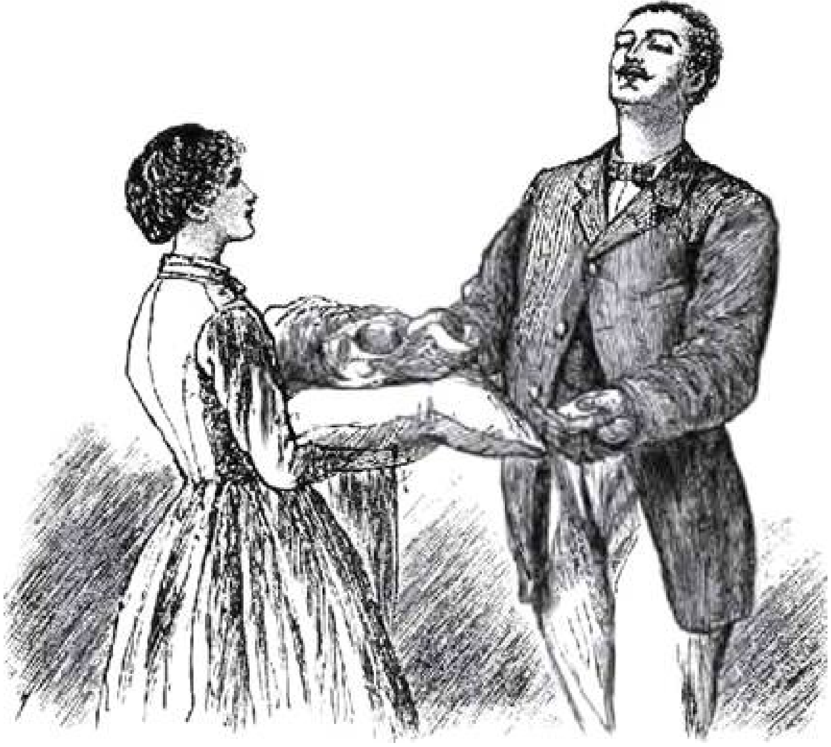
“Happy as a queen, the dear! Every soul of ‘em is upstairs a worshipin’. We didn’t want no hurrycanes round. Now you go into the parlor, and I’ll send ‘em down to you,” with which somewhat involved reply Hannah vanished, chuckling ecstatically.

Presently Jo appeared, proudly bearing a flannel bundle laid forth upon a large pillow. Jo's face was very sober, but her eyes twinkled, and there was an odd sound in her voice of repressed emotion of some sort.

"Shut your eyes and hold out your arms," she said invitingly.

Laurie backed precipitately into a corner, and put his hands behind him with an imploring gesture. "No, thank you. I'd rather not. I shall drop it or smash it, as sure as fate."

"Then you shan't see your nevvy," said Jo decidedly, turning as if to go.



"I will, I will! Only you must be responsible for damages." and obeying orders, Laurie heroically shut his eyes while something was put into his arms. A peal of laughter from Jo, Amy, Mrs. March, Hannah, and John caused him to open them the next minute, to find himself invested with two babies instead of one.

No wonder they laughed, for the expression of his face was droll enough to convulse a Quaker, as he stood and stared wildly from the unconscious innocents to the hilarious spectators with such dismay that Jo sat down on the floor and screamed.

"Twins, by Jupiter!" was all he said for a minute, then turning to the women with an appealing look that was comically piteous, he added, "Take 'em quick, somebody! I'm going to laugh, and I shall drop 'em."

Jo rescued his babies, and marched up and down, with one on each arm, as if already initiated into the mysteries of babytending, while Laurie laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

“It’s the best joke of the season, isn’t it? I wouldn’t have told you, for I set my heart on surprising you, and I flatter myself I’ve done it,” said Jo, when she got her breath.

“I never was more staggered in my life. Isn’t it fun? Are they boys? What are you going to name them? Let’s have another look. Hold me up, Jo, for upon my life it’s one too many for me,” returned Laurie, regarding the infants with the air of a big, benevolent Newfoundland looking at a pair of infantile kittens.

“Boy and girl. Aren’t they beauties?” said the proud papa, beaming upon the little red squirmers as if they were unfledged angels.

“Most remarkable children I ever saw. Which is which?” and Laurie bent like a well-sweep to examine the prodigies.

“Amy put a blue ribbon on the boy and a pink on the girl, French fashion, so you can always tell. Besides, one has blue eyes and one brown. Kiss them, Uncle Teddy,” said wicked Jo.

“I’m afraid they mightn’t like it,” began Laurie, with unusual timidity in such matters.

“Of course they will, they are used to it now. Do it this minute, sir!” commanded Jo, fearing he might propose a proxy.

Laurie screwed up his face and obeyed with a gingerly peck at each little cheek that produced another laugh, and made the babies squeal.

“There, I knew they didn’t like it! That’s the boy, see him kick, he hits out with his fists like a good one. Now then, young Brooke, pitch into a man of your own size, will you?” cried Laurie, delighted with a poke in the face from a tiny fist, flapping aimlessly about.

“He’s to be named John Laurence, and the girl Margaret, after mother and grandmother. We shall call her Daisey, so as not to have two Megs, and I suppose the mannie will be Jack, unless we find a better name,” said Amy, with aunt-like interest.

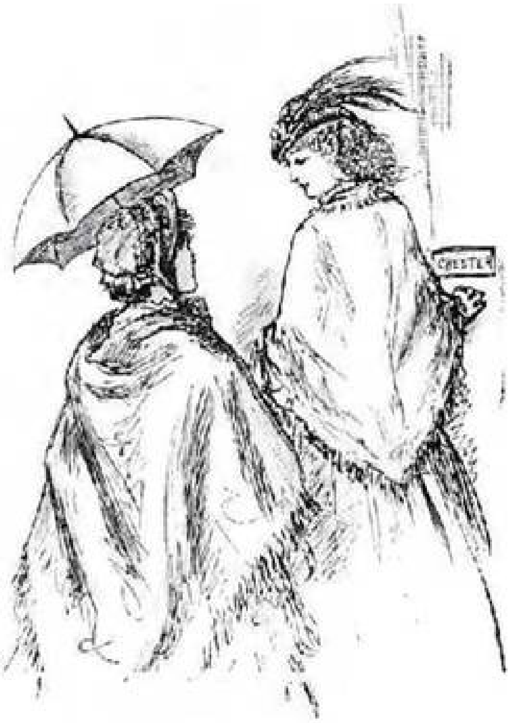
“Name him Demijohn, and call him Demi for short,” said Laurie

“Daisy and Demi, just the thing! I knew Teddy would do it,” cried Jo clapping her hands.

Teddy certainly had done it that time, for the babies were ‘Daisy’ and ‘Demi’ to the end of the chapter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

CALLS



"Come, Jo, it's time."

"For what?"

"You don't mean to say you have forgotten that you promised to make half a dozen calls with me today?"

"I've done a good many rash and foolish things in my life, but I don't think I ever was mad enough to say I'd make six calls in one day, when a single one upsets me for a week."

"Yes, you did, it was a bargain between us. I was to finish the crayon of Beth for you, and you were to go properly with me, and return our neighbors' visits."

"If it was fair, that was in the bond, and I stand to the letter of my bond, Shylock. There is a pile of clouds in the east, it's not fair, and I don't go."

"Now, that's shirking. It's a lovely day, no prospect of rain, and you pride yourself on keeping promises, so be honorable, come and do your duty, and then be at peace for another six months."

At that minute Jo was particularly absorbed in dressmaking, for she was mantua-maker general to the family, and took especial credit to herself because she could use a needle as well as a pen. It was very provoking to be arrested in the act of a first trying-on, and ordered out to make calls in her best array on a warm July day. She hated calls of the formal sort, and never made any till Amy compelled her with a bargain, bribe, or promise. In the present instance there was no escape, and having clashed her scissors rebelliously, while protesting that she smelled thunder, she gave in, put away her work, and taking up her hat and gloves with an air of resignation, told Amy the victim was ready.

"Jo March, you are perverse enough to provoke a saint! You don't intend to make calls in that state, I hope," cried Amy, surveying her with amazement.

"Why not? I'm neat and cool and comfortable, quite proper for a dusty walk on a warm day. If people care more for my clothes than they do for me, I don't wish to see them. You can dress for both, and be as elegant as you please. It pays for you to be fine. It doesn't for me, and furbelows only worry me."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Amy, "now she's in a contrary fit, and will drive me distracted before I can get her properly ready. I'm sure it's no pleasure to me to go today, but it's a debt we owe society, and there's no one to pay it but you and me. I'll do anything for you, Jo, if you'll only dress yourself nicely, and come and help me do the civil. You can talk so well, look so aristocratic in your best things, and behave so beautifully, if you try, that I'm proud of you. I'm afraid to go alone, do come and take care of me."

"You're an artful little puss to flatter and wheedle your cross old sister in that way. The idea of my being aristocratic and well-bred, and your being afraid to go anywhere alone! I don't know which is the most absurd. Well, I'll go if I must, and do my best. You shall be commander of the expedition, and I'll obey blindly, will that satisfy you?" said Jo, with a sudden change from perversity to lamblike submission.

"You're a perfect cherub! Now put on all your best things, and I'll tell you how to behave at each place, so that you will make a good impression. I want people to like you, and they would if you'd only try to be a little more agreeable. Do your hair the pretty way, and put the pink rose in your bonnet. It's becoming, and you look too sober in your plain suit. Take your light gloves and the embroidered handkerchief. We'll stop at Meg's, and borrow her white sunshade, and then you can have my dove-colored one."

While Amy dressed, she issued her orders, and Jo obeyed them, not without entering her protest, however, for she sighed as she rustled into her new organdie, frowned darkly at herself as she tied her bonnet strings in an irreproachable bow, wrestled viciously with pins as she put on her collar, wrinkled up her features generally as she shook out the handkerchief, whose embroidery was as irritating to her nose as the present mission was to her feelings, and when she had squeezed her hands into tight gloves with three buttons and a tassel, as the last touch of elegance, she turned to Amy with an imbecile expression of countenance, saying meekly...

“I’m perfectly miserable, but if you consider me presentable, I die happy.”

“You’re highly satisfactory. Turn slowly round, and let me get a careful view.” Jo revolved, and Amy gave a touch here and there, then fell back, with her head on one side, observing graciously, “Yes, you’ll do. Your head is all I could ask, for that white bonnet with the rose is quite ravishing. Hold back your shoulders, and carry your hands easily, no matter if your gloves do pinch. There’s one thing you can do well, Jo, that is, wear a shawl. I can’t, but it’s very nice to see you, and I’m so glad Aunt March gave you that lovely one. It’s simple, but handsome, and those folds over the arm are really artistic. Is the point of my mantle in the middle, and have I looped my dress evenly? I like to show my boots, for my feet are pretty, though my nose isn’t.”

“You are a thing of beauty and a joy forever,” said Jo, looking through her hand with the air of a connoisseur at the blue feather against the golden hair. “Am I to drag my best dress through the dust, or loop it up, please, ma’am?”

“Hold it up when you walk, but drop it in the house. The sweeping style suits you best, and you must learn to trail your skirts gracefully. You haven’t half buttoned one cuff, do it at once. You’ll never look finished if you are not careful about the little details, for they make up the pleasing whole.”

Jo sighed, and proceeded to burst the buttons off her glove, in doing up her cuff, but at last both were ready, and sailed away, looking as ‘pretty as picters’, Hannah said, as she hung out of the upper window to watch them.

“Now, Jo dear, the Chesters consider themselves very elegant people, so I want you to put on your best deportment. Don’t make any of your abrupt remarks, or do anything odd, will you? Just be calm, cool, and quiet, that’s safe and ladylike, and you can easily do it for fifteen minutes,” said Amy, as they approached the first place, having borrowed the white parasol and been inspected by Meg, with a baby on each arm.

“Let me see. ‘Calm, cool, and quiet’, yes, I think I can promise that. I’ve played the part of a prim young lady on the stage, and I’ll try it off. My powers are great, as you shall see, so be easy in your mind, my child.”

Amy looked relieved, but naughty Jo took her at her word, for during the first call she sat with every limb gracefully composed, every fold correctly draped, calm as a summer sea, cool as a snowbank, and as silent as the sphinx. In vain Mrs. Chester alluded to her ‘charming novel’, and the Misses Chester introduced parties, picnics, the opera, and the fashions. Each and all were answered by a smile, a bow, and a demure “Yes” or “No” with the chill on. In vain Amy telegraphed the word ‘talk’, tried to draw her out, and administered covert pokes with her foot. Jo sat as if blandly unconscious of it all, with deportment like Maud’s face, ‘icily regular, splendidly null’.

“What a haughty, uninteresting creature that oldest Miss March is!” was the unfortunately audible remark of one of the ladies, as the door closed upon their guests. Jo laughed noiselessly all through the hall, but Amy looked disgusted at the failure of her instructions, and very naturally laid the blame upon Jo.

“How could you mistake me so? I merely meant you to be properly dignified and composed, and you made yourself a perfect stock and stone. Try to be sociable at the Lambs’. Gossip as other girls do, and be interested in dress and flirtations and whatever nonsense comes up. They move in the best society, are valuable persons for us to know, and I wouldn’t fail to make a good impression there for anything.”

“I’ll be agreeable. I’ll gossip and giggle, and have horrors and raptures over any trifle you like. I rather enjoy this, and now I’ll imitate what is called ‘a charming girl’. I can do it, for I have May Chester as a model, and I’ll improve upon her. See if the Lambs don’t say, ‘What a lively, nice creature that Jo March is!”

Amy felt anxious, as well she might, for when Jo turned freakish there was no knowing where she would stop. Amy’s face was a study when she saw her sister skim into the next drawing room, kiss all the young ladies with effusion, beam graciously upon the young gentlemen, and join in the chat with a spirit which amazed the beholder. Amy was taken possession of by Mrs. Lamb, with whom she was a favorite, and forced to hear a long account of Lucretia’s last attack, while three delightful young gentlemen hovered near, waiting for a pause when they might rush in and rescue her. So situated, she was powerless to check Jo, who seemed possessed by a spirit of mischief, and talked away as volubly as the lady. A knot of heads gathered about her, and Amy strained her ears to hear what was going on, for broken sentences filled her with curiosity, and frequent peals of laughter made her wild to share the fun. One may imagine her suffering on overhearing fragments of this sort of conversation.

“She rides splendidly. Who taught her?”

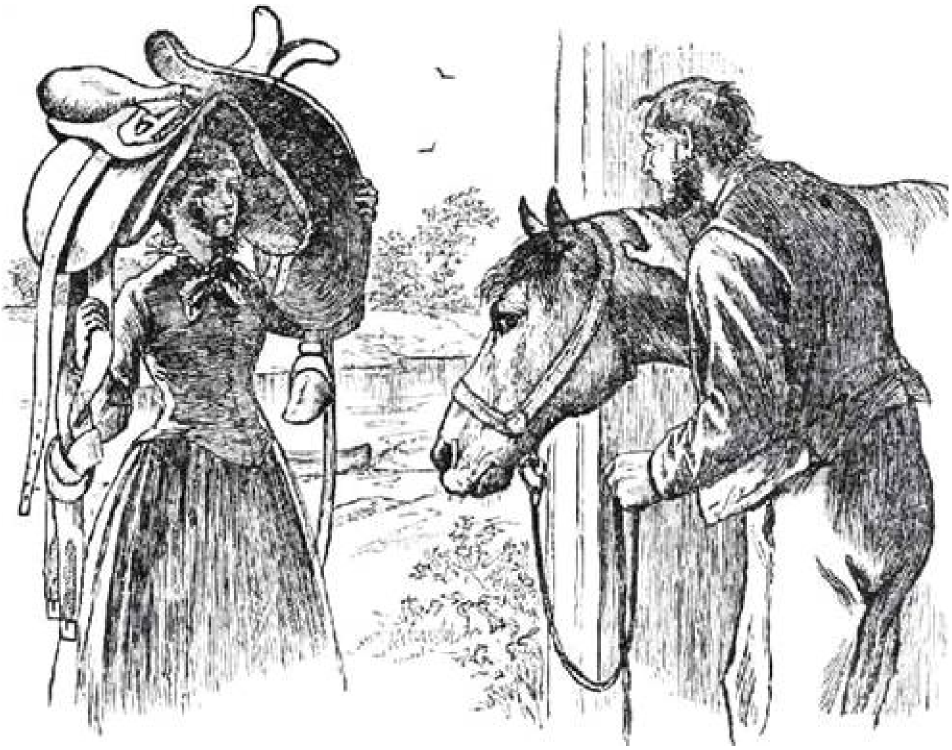
“No one. She used to practice mounting, holding the reins, and sitting straight on an old saddle in a tree. Now she rides anything, for she doesn’t know what fear is, and the stableman lets her have horses cheap because she trains them to carry ladies so well. She has such a passion for it, I often tell her if everything else fails, she can be a horsebreaker, and get her living so.”

At this awful speech Amy contained herself with difficulty, for the impression was being given that she was rather a fast young lady, which was her especial aversion. But what could she do? For the old lady was in the middle of her story, and long before it was done, Jo was off again, making more droll revelations and committing still more fearful blunders.

“Yes, Amy was in despair that day, for all the good beasts were gone, and of three left, one was lame, one blind, and the other so balky that you had to put dirt in his mouth before he would start. Nice animal for a pleasure party, wasn’t it?”

“Which did she choose?” asked one of the laughing gentlemen, who enjoyed the subject.

“None of them. She heard of a young horse at the farm house over the river, and though a lady had never ridden him, she resolved to try, because he was handsome and spirited. Her struggles were really pathetic. There was no one to bring the horse to the saddle, so she took the saddle to the horse. My dear creature, she actually rowed it over the river, put it on her head, and marched up to the barn to the utter amazement of the old man!”



“Did she ride the horse?”

“Of course she did, and had a capital time. I expected to see her brought home in fragments, but she managed him perfectly, and was the life of the party.”

“Well, I call that plucky!” and young Mr. Lamb turned an approving glance upon Amy, wondering what his mother could be saying to make the girl look so red and uncomfortable.

She was still redder and more uncomfortable a moment after, when a sudden turn in the conversation introduced the subject of dress. One of the young ladies asked Jo where she got the pretty drab hat she wore to the picnic and stupid Jo, instead of mentioning the place where it was bought two years ago, must needs answer with unnecessary frankness, “Oh, Amy painted it. You can’t buy those soft shades, so we paint ours any color we like. It’s a great comfort to have an artistic sister.”

“Isn’t that an original idea?” cried Miss Lamb, who found Jo great fun.

“That’s nothing compared to some of her brilliant performances. There’s nothing the child can’t do. Why, she wanted a pair of blue boots for Sallie’s party, so she just painted her soiled white ones the loveliest shade of sky blue you ever saw, and they looked exactly like satin,” added Jo, with an air of pride in her sister’s accomplishments that exasperated Amy till she felt that it would be a relief to throw her cardcase at her.

“We read a story of yours the other day, and enjoyed it very much,” observed the elder Miss Lamb, wishing to compliment the literary lady, who did not look the character just then, it must be confessed.

Any mention of her ‘works’ always had a bad effect upon Jo, who either grew rigid and looked offended, or changed the subject with a brusque remark, as now. “Sorry you could find nothing better to read. I write that rubbish because it sells, and ordinary people like it. Are you going to New York this winter?”

As Miss Lamb had ‘enjoyed’ the story, this speech was not exactly grateful or complimentary. The minute it was made Jo saw her mistake, but fearing to make the matter worse, suddenly remembered that it was for her to make the first move toward departure, and did so with an abruptness that left three people with half-finished sentences in their mouths.

“Amy, we must go. Good-by, dear, do come and see us. We are pining for a visit. I don’t dare to ask you, Mr. Lamb, but if you should come, I don’t think I shall have the heart to send you away.”

Jo said this with such a droll imitation of May Chester’s gushing style that Amy got out of the room as rapidly as possible, feeling a strong desire to laugh and cry at the same time.

“Didn’t I do well?” asked Jo, with a satisfied air as they walked away.

“Nothing could have been worse,” was Amy’s crushing reply. “What possessed you to tell those stories about my saddle, and the hats and boots, and all the rest of it?”

“Why, it’s funny, and amuses people. They know we are poor, so it’s no use pretending that we have grooms, buy three or four hats a season, and have things as easy and fine as they do.”

“You needn’t go and tell them all our little shifts, and expose our poverty in that perfectly unnecessary way. You haven't a bit of proper pride, and never will learn when to hold your tongue and when to speak," said Amy despairingly.

Poor Jo looked abashed, and silently chafed the end of her nose with the stiff handkerchief, as if performing a penance for her misdemeanors.

"How shall I behave here?" she asked, as they approached the third mansion.

"Just as you please. I wash my hands of you," was Amy's short answer.

"Then I'll enjoy myself. The boys are at home, and we'll have a comfortable time. Goodness knows I need a little change, for elegance has a bad effect upon my constitution," returned Jo gruffly, being disturbed by her failure to suit.

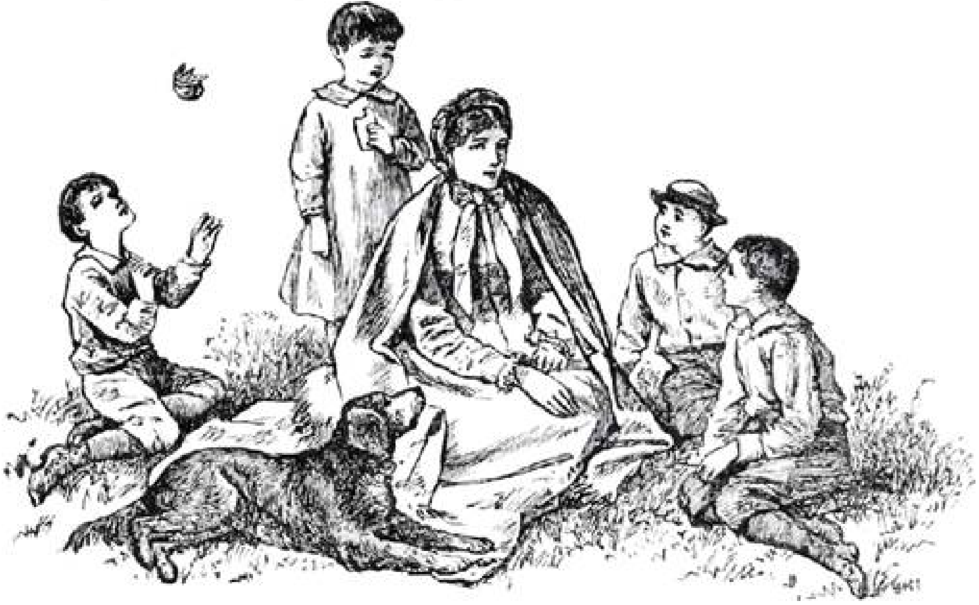
An enthusiastic welcome from three big boys and several pretty children speedily soothed her ruffled feelings, and leaving Amy to entertain the hostess and Mr. Tudor, who happened to be calling likewise, Jo devoted herself to the young folks and found the change refreshing. She listened to college stories with deep interest, caressed pointers and poodles without a murmur, agreed heartily that "Tom Brown was a brick," regardless of the improper form of praise, and when one lad proposed a visit to his turtle tank, she went with an alacrity which caused Mamma to smile upon her, as that motherly lady settled the cap which was left in a ruinous condition by filial hugs, bearlike but affectionate, and dearer to her than the most faultless coiffure from the hands of an inspired Frenchwoman.

Leaving her sister to her own devices, Amy proceeded to enjoy herself to her heart's content. Mr. Tudor's uncle had married an English lady who was third cousin to a living lord, and Amy regarded the whole family with great respect, for in spite of her American birth and breeding, she possessed that reverence for titles which haunts the best of us — that unacknowledged loyalty to the early faith in kings which set the most democratic nation under the sun in ferment at the coming of a royal yellow-haired laddie, some years ago, and which still has something to do with the love the young country bears the old, like that of a big son for an imperious little mother, who held him while she could, and let him go with a farewell scolding when he rebelled. But even the satisfaction of talking with a distant connection of the British nobility did not render Amy forgetful of time, and when the proper number of minutes had passed, she reluctantly tore herself from this aristocratic society, and looked about for Jo, fervently hoping that her incorrigible sister would not be found in any position which should bring disgrace upon the name of March.

It might have been worse, but Amy considered it bad. For Jo sat on the grass, with an encampment of boys about her, and a dirty-footed dog reposing on the skirt of her state and festival dress, as she related one of Laurie's pranks to her admiring audience. One small child was poking turtles with Amy's cherished parasol, a second was eating gingerbread over Jo's best bonnet, and a third playing ball with her gloves, but all were enjoying themselves, and when Jo collected her damaged property to go, her escort accompanied her, begging her to come again, "It was such fun to hear about Laurie's larks."

"Capital boys, aren't they? I feel quite young and brisk again after that." said Jo, strolling along with her hands behind her, partly from habit, partly to conceal the bespattered parasol.

"Why do you always avoid Mr. Tudor?" asked Amy, wisely refraining from any comment upon Jo's dilapidated appearance.



"Don't like him, he puts on airs, snubs his sisters, worries his father, and doesn't speak respectfully of his mother. Laurie says he is fast, and I don't consider him a desirable acquaintance, so I let him alone."

"You might treat him civilly, at least. You gave him a cool nod, and just now you bowed and smiled in the politest way to Tommy Chamberlain, whose father keeps a grocery store. If you had just reversed the nod and the bow, it would have been right," said Amy reprovingly.

"No, it wouldn't," returned Jo, "I neither like, respect, nor admire Tudor, though his grandfather's uncle's nephew's niece was a third cousin to a lord. Tommy is poor and bashful and good and very clever. I think well of him, and like to show that I do, for he is a gentleman in spite of the brown paper parcels."

"It's no use trying to argue with you," began Amy.

"Not the least, my dear," interrupted Jo, "so let us look amiable, and drop a card here, as the Kings are evidently out, for which I'm deeply grateful."

The family cardcase having done its duty the girls walked on, and Jo uttered another thanksgiving on reaching the fifth house, and being told that the young ladies were engaged.

“Now let us go home, and never mind Aunt March today. We can run down there any time, and it’s really a pity to trail through the dust in our best bibs and tuckers, when we are tired and cross.”

“Speak for yourself, if you please. Aunt March likes to have us pay her the compliment of coming in style, and making a formal call. It’s a little thing to do, but it gives her pleasure, and I don’t believe it will hurt your things half so much as letting dirty dogs and clumping boys spoil them. Stoop down, and let me take the crumbs off of your bonnet.”

“What a good girl you are, Amy!” said Jo, with a repentant glance from her own damaged costume to that of her sister, which was fresh and spotless still. “I wish it was as easy for me to do little things to please people as it is for you. I think of them, but it takes too much time to do them, so I wait for a chance to confer a great favor, and let the small ones slip, but they tell best in the end, I fancy.”

Amy smiled and was mollified at once, saying with a maternal air, “Women should learn to be agreeable, particularly poor ones, for they have no other way of repaying the kindnesses they receive. If you’d remember that, and practice it, you’d be better liked than I am, because there is more of you.”

“I’m a crotchety old thing, and always shall be, but I’m willing to own that you are right, only it’s easier for me to risk my life for a person than to be pleasant to him when I don’t feel like it. It’s a great misfortune to have such strong likes and dislikes, isn’t it?”

“It’s a greater not to be able to hide them. I don’t mind saying that I don’t approve of Tudor any more than you do, but I’m not called upon to tell him so. Neither are you, and there is no use in making yourself disagreeable because he is.”

“But I think girls ought to show when they disapprove of young men, and how can they do it except by their manners? Preaching does not do any good, as I know to my sorrow, since I’ve had Teddie to manage. But there are many little ways in which I can influence him without a word, and I say we ought to do it to others if we can.”

“Teddy is a remarkable boy, and can’t be taken as a sample of other boys,” said Amy, in a tone of solemn conviction, which would have convulsed the ‘remarkable boy’ if he had heard it. “If we were belles, or women of wealth and position, we might do something, perhaps, but for us to frown at one set of young gentlemen because we don’t approve of them, and smile upon another set because we do, wouldn’t have a particle of effect, and we should only be considered odd and puritanical.”

“So we are to countenance things and people which we detest, merely because we are not belles and millionaires, are we? That’s a nice sort of morality.”

“I can’t argue about it, I only know that it’s the way of the world, and people who set themselves against it only get laughed at for their pains. I don’t like reformers, and I hope you never try to be one.”

“I do like them, and I shall be one if I can, for in spite of the laughing the world would never get on without them. We can’t agree about that, for you belong to the old set, and I to the new. You will get on the best, but I shall have the liveliest time of it. I should rather enjoy the brickbats and hooting, I think.”

“Well, compose yourself now, and don’t worry Aunt with your new ideas.”

“I’ll try not to, but I’m always possessed to burst out with some particularly blunt speech or revolutionary sentiment before her. It’s my doom, and I can’t help it.”

They found Aunt Carrol with the old lady, both absorbed in some very interesting subject, but they dropped it as the girls came in, with a conscious look which betrayed that they had been talking about their nieces. Jo was not in a good humor, and the perverse fit returned, but Amy, who had virtuously done her duty, kept her temper and pleased everybody, was in a most angelic frame of mind. This amiable spirit was felt at once, and both aunts ‘my deared’ her affectionately, looking what they afterward said emphatically, “That child improves every day.”

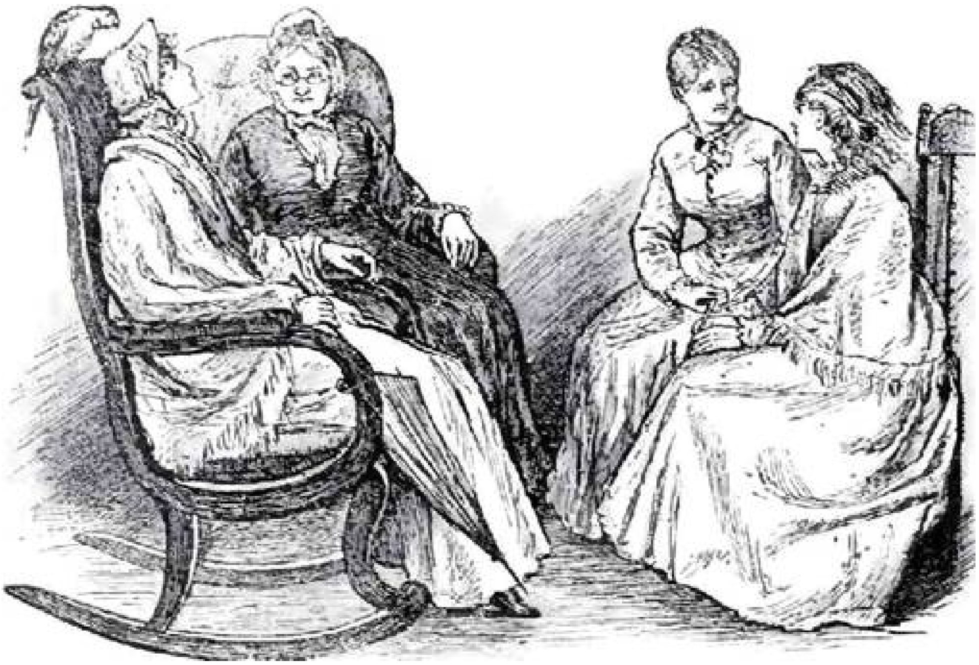
“Are you going to help about the fair, dear?” asked Mrs. Carrol, as Amy sat down beside her with the confiding air elderly people like so well in the young.

“Yes, Aunt. Mrs. Chester asked me if I would, and I offered to tend a table, as I have nothing but my time to give.”

“I’m not,” put in Jo decidedly. “I hate to be patronized, and the Chesters think it’s a great favor to allow us to help with their highly connected fair. I wonder you consented, Amy, they only want you to work.”

“I am willing to work. It’s for the freedmen as well as the Chesters, and I think it very kind of them to let me share the labor and the fun. Patronage does not trouble me when it is well meant.”

“Quite right and proper. I like your grateful spirit, my dear. It’s a pleasure to help people who appreciate our efforts. Some do not, and that is trying,” observed Aunt March, looking over her spectacles at Jo, who sat apart, rocking herself, with a somewhat morose expression.



If Jo had only known what a great happiness was wavering in the balance for one of them, she would have turned dove-like in a minute, but unfortunately, we don’t have windows in our breasts, and cannot see what goes on in the minds of our friends. Better for us that we cannot as a general thing, but now and then it would be such a comfort, such a saving of time and temper. By her next speech, Jo deprived herself of several years of pleasure, and received a timely lesson in the art of holding her tongue.

“I don’t like favors, they oppress and make me feel like a slave. I’d rather do everything for myself, and be perfectly independent.”

“Ahem!” coughed Aunt Carrol softly, with a look at Aunt March.

“I told you so,” said Aunt March, with a decided nod to Aunt Carrol.

Mercifully unconscious of what she had done, Jo sat with her nose in the air, and a revolutionary aspect which was anything but inviting.

“Do you speak French, dear?” asked Mrs. Carrol, laying a hand on Amy’s.

“Pretty well, thanks to Aunt March, who lets Esther talk to me as often as I like,” replied Amy, with a grateful look, which caused the old lady to smile affably.

“How are you about languages?” asked Mrs. Carrol of Jo.

“Don’t know a word. I’m very stupid about studying anything, can’t bear French, it’s such a slippery, silly sort of language,” was the brusque reply.

Another look passed between the ladies, and Aunt March said to Amy, “You are quite strong and well now, dear, I believe? Eyes don’t trouble you any more, do they?”

“Not at all, thank you, ma’am. I’m very well, and mean to do great things next winter, so that I may be ready for Rome, whenever that joyful time arrives.”

“Good girl! You deserve to go, and I’m sure you will some day,” said Aunt March, with an approving pat on the head, as Amy picked up her ball for her.

Crosspatch, draw the latch,
Sit by the fire and spin,

squalled Polly, bending down from his perch on the back of her chair to peep into Jo’s face, with such a comical air of impertinent inquiry that it was impossible to help laughing.

“Most observing bird,” said the old lady.

“Come and take a walk, my dear?” cried Polly, hopping toward the china closet, with a look suggestive of a lump of sugar.

“Thank you, I will. Come Amy.” and Jo brought the visit to an end, feeling more strongly than ever that calls did have a bad effect upon her constitution. She shook hands in a gentlemanly manner, but Amy kissed both the aunts, and the girls departed, leaving behind them the impression of shadow and sunshine, which impression caused Aunt March to say, as they vanished...

“You’d better do it, Mary. I’ll supply the money.” and Aunt Carrol to reply decidedly, “I certainly will, if her father and mother consent.”

CHAPTER THIRTY

CONSEQUENCES

Mrs. Chester’s fair was so very elegant and select that it was considered a great honor by the young ladies of the neighborhood to be invited to take a table, and everyone was much interested in the matter. Amy was asked, but Jo was not, which was fortunate for all parties, as her elbows were decidedly akimbo at this period of her life, and it took a good many hard knocks to teach her how to get on easily. The ‘haughty, uninteresting creature’ was let severely alone, but Amy’s talent and taste were duly complimented by the offer of the art table, and she exerted herself to prepare and secure appropriate and valuable contributions to it.

Everything went on smoothly till the day before the fair opened, then there occurred one of the little skirmishes which it is almost impossible to avoid, when some five-and-twenty women, old and young, with all their private piques and prejudices, try to work together.

May Chester was rather jealous of Amy because the latter was a greater favorite than herself, and just at this time several trifling circumstances occurred to increase the feeling. Amy’s dainty pen-and-ink work entirely eclipsed May’s painted vases — that was one thorn. Then the all conquering Tudor had danced four times with Amy at a late party and only once with May — that was thorn number two. But the chief grievance that rankled in her soul, and gave an excuse for her unfriendly conduct, was a rumor which some obliging gossip had whispered to her, that the March girls had made fun of her at the Lambs’. All the blame of this should have fallen upon Jo, for her naughty imitation had been too lifelike to escape detection, and the frolicsome Lambs had permitted the joke to escape. No hint of this had reached the culprits, however, and Amy’s dismay can be imagined, when, the very evening before the fair, as she was putting the last touches to her pretty table, Mrs. Chester, who, of course, resented the supposed ridicule of her daughter, said, in a bland tone, but with a cold look...

“I find, dear, that there is some feeling among the young ladies about my giving this table to anyone but my girls. As this is the most prominent, and some say the most attractive table of all, and they are the chief getters-up of the fair, it is thought best for them to take this place. I’m sorry, but I know you are too sincerely interested in the cause to mind a little personal disappointment, and you shall have another table if you like.”

Mrs. Chester fancied beforehand that it would be easy to deliver this little speech, but when the time came, she found it rather difficult to utter it naturally, with Amy's unsuspicious eyes looking straight at her full of surprise and trouble.

Amy felt that there was something behind this, but could not guess what, and said quietly, feeling hurt, and showing that she did, "Perhaps you had rather I took no table at all?"

"Now, my dear, don't have any ill feeling, I beg. It's merely a matter of expediency, you see, my girls will naturally take the lead, and this table is considered their proper place. I think it very appropriate to you, and feel very grateful for your efforts to make it so pretty, but we must give up our private wishes, of course, and I will see that you have a good place elsewhere. Wouldn't you like the flower table? The little girls undertook it, but they are discouraged. You could make a charming thing of it, and the flower table is always attractive you know."

"Especially to gentlemen," added May, with a look which enlightened Amy as to one cause of her sudden fall from favor. She colored angrily, but took no other notice of that girlish sarcasm, and answered with unexpected amiability...

"It shall be as you please, Mrs. Chester. I'll give up my place here at once, and attend to the flowers, if you like."

"You can put your own things on your own table, if you prefer," began May, feeling a little conscience-stricken, as she looked at the pretty racks, the painted shells, and quaint illuminations Amy had so carefully made and so gracefully arranged. She meant it kindly, but Amy mistook her meaning, and said quickly...

"Oh, certainly, if they are in your way," and sweeping her contributions into her apron, pell-mell, she walked off, feeling that herself and her works of art had been insulted past forgiveness.

"Now she's mad. Oh, dear, I wish I hadn't asked you to speak, Mama," said May, looking disconsolately at the empty spaces on her table.

"Girls' quarrels are soon over," returned her mother, feeling a trifle ashamed of her own part in this one, as well she might.

The little girls hailed Amy and her treasures with delight, which cordial reception somewhat soothed her perturbed spirit, and she fell to work, determined to succeed florally, if she could not artistically. But everything seemed against her. It was late, and she was tired. Everyone was too busy with their own affairs to help her, and the little girls were only hindrances, for the dears fussed and chattered like so many magpies, making a great deal of confusion in their artless efforts to preserve the most perfect order. The evergreen arch wouldn't stay firm after she got it up, but wiggled and threatened to tumble down on her head when the hanging baskets were filled. Her best tile got a splash of water, which left a sepia tear on the Cupid's cheek. She bruised her hands with hammering, and got cold working in a draft, which last affliction filled her with apprehensions for the morrow. Any girl reader who has suffered like afflictions will sympathize with poor Amy and wish her well through her task.

There was great indignation at home when she told her story that evening. Her mother said it was a shame, but told her she had done right. Beth declared she wouldn't go to the fair at all, and Jo demanded why she didn't take all her pretty things and leave those mean people to get on without her.

"Because they are mean is no reason why I should be. I hate such things, and though I think I've a right to be hurt, I don't intend to show it. They will feel that more than angry speeches or huffy actions, won't they, Marmee?"

"That's the right spirit, my dear. A kiss for a blow is always best, though it's not very easy to give it sometimes," said her mother, with the air of one who had learned the difference between preaching and practicing.

In spite of various very natural temptations to resent and retaliate, Amy adhered to her resolution all the next day, bent on conquering her enemy by kindness. She began well, thanks to a silent reminder that came to her unexpectedly, but most opportunely. As she arranged her table that morning, while the little girls were in the anteroom filling the baskets, she took up her pet production, a little book, the antique cover of which her father had found among his treasures, and in which on leaves of vellum she had beautifully illuminated different texts. As she turned the pages rich in dainty devices with very pardonable pride, her eye fell upon one verse that made her stop and think. Framed in a brilliant scrollwork of scarlet, blue and gold, with little spirits of good will helping one another up and down among the thorns and flowers, were the words, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

"I ought, but I don't," thought Amy, as her eye went from the bright page to May's discontented face behind the big vases, that could not hide the vacancies her pretty work had once filled. Amy stood a minute, turning the leaves in her hand, reading on each some sweet rebuke for all heartburnings and uncharitableness of spirit. Many wise and true sermons are preached us every day by unconscious ministers in street, school, office, or home. Even a fair table may become a pulpit, if it can offer the good and helpful words which are never out of season. Amy's conscience preached her a little sermon from that text, then and there, and she did what many of us do not always do, took the sermon to heart, and straightway put it in practice.

A group of girls were standing about May's table, admiring the pretty things, and talking over the change of saleswomen. They dropped their voices, but Amy knew they were speaking of her, hearing one side of the story and judging accordingly. It was not pleasant, but a better spirit had come over her, and presently a chance offered for proving it. She heard May say sorrowfully...

"It's too bad, for there is no time to make other things, and I don't want to fill up with odds and ends. The table was just complete then. Now it's spoiled."

"I dare say she'd put them back if you asked her," suggested someone.

"How could I after all the fuss?" began May, but she did not finish, for Amy's voice came across the hall, saying pleasantly...

"You may have them, and welcome, without asking, if you want them. I was just thinking I'd offer to put them back, for they belong to your table rather than mine. Here they are, please take them, and forgive me if I was hasty in carrying them away last night."

As she spoke, Amy returned her contribution, with a nod and a smile, and hurried away again, feeling that it was easier to do a friendly thing than it was to stay and be thanked for it.

"Now, I call that lovely of her, don't you?" cried one girl.

May's answer was inaudible, but another young lady, whose temper was evidently a little soured by making lemonade, added, with a disagreeable laugh, "Very lovely, for she knew she wouldn't sell them at her own table."

Now, that was hard. When we make little sacrifices we like to have them appreciated, at least, and for a minute Amy was sorry she had done it, feeling that virtue was not always its own reward. But it is, as she presently discovered, for her spirits began to rise, and her table to blossom under her skillful hands, the girls were very kind, and that one little act seemed to have cleared the atmosphere amazingly.

It was a very long day and a hard one for Amy, as she sat behind her table, often quite alone, for the little girls deserted very soon. Few cared to buy flowers in summer, and her bouquets began to droop long before night.

The art table was the most attractive in the room. There was a crowd about it all day long, and the tenders were constantly flying to and fro with important faces and rattling money boxes. Amy often looked wistfully across, longing to be there, where she felt at home and happy, instead of in a corner with nothing to do. It might seem no hardship to some of us, but to a pretty, blithe young girl, it was not only tedious, but very trying, and the thought of Laurie and his friends made it a real martyrdom.

She did not go home till night, and then she looked so pale and quiet that they knew the day had been a hard one, though she made no complaint, and did not even tell what she had done. Her mother gave her an extra cordial cup of tea. Beth helped her dress, and made a charming little wreath for her hair, while Jo astonished her family by getting herself up with unusual care, and hinting darkly that the tables were about to be turned.

"Don't do anything rude, pray Jo; I won't have any fuss made, so let it all pass and behave yourself," begged Amy, as she departed early, hoping to find a reinforcement of flowers to refresh her poor little table.

"I merely intend to make myself entrancingly agreeable to every one I know, and to keep them in your corner as long as possible. Teddy and his boys will lend a hand, and we'll have a good time yet." returned Jo, leaning over the gate to watch for Laurie. Presently the familiar tramp was heard in the dusk, and she ran out to meet him.

"Is that my boy?"

"As sure as this is my girl!" and Laurie tucked her hand under his arm with the air of a man whose every wish was gratified.

"Oh, Teddy, such doings!" and Jo told Amy's wrongs with sisterly zeal.

"A flock of our fellows are going to drive over by-and-by, and I'll be hanged if I don't make them buy every flower she's got, and camp down before her table afterward," said Laurie, espousing her cause with warmth.

"The flowers are not at all nice, Amy says, and the fresh ones may not arrive in time. I don't wish to be unjust or suspicious, but I shouldn't wonder if they never came at all. When people do one mean thing they are very likely to do another," observed Jo in a disgusted tone.

"Didn't Hayes give you the best out of our gardens? I told him to."

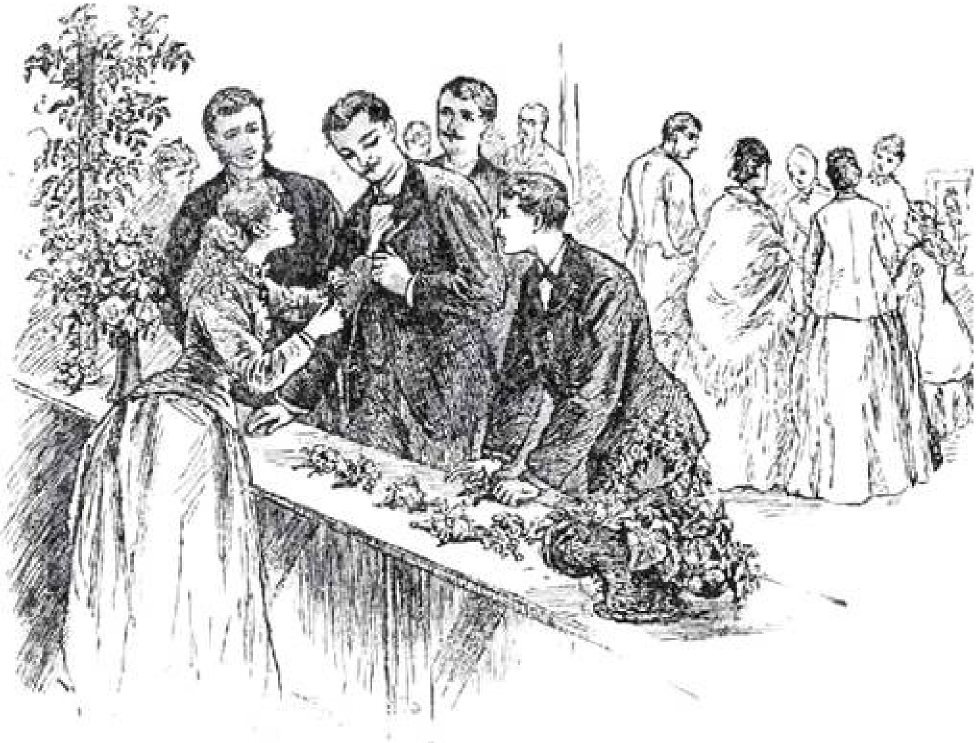
"I didn't know that, he forgot, I suppose, and, as your grandpa was poorly, I didn't like to worry him by asking, though I did want some."

"Now, Jo, how could you think there was any need of asking? They are just as much yours as mine. Don't we always go halves in everything?" began Laurie, in the tone that always made Jo turn thorny.

"Gracious, I hope not! Half of some of your things wouldn't suit me at all. But we mustn't stand philandering here. I've got to help Amy, so you go and make yourself splendid, and if you'll be so very kind as to let Hayes take a few nice flowers up to the Hall, I'll bless you forever."

"Couldn't you do it now?" asked Laurie, so suggestively that Jo shut the gate in his face with inhospitable haste, and called through the bars, "Go away, Teddy, I'm busy."

Thanks to the conspirators, the tables were turned that night, for Hayes sent up a wilderness of flowers, with a loverly basket arranged in his best manner for a centerpiece. Then the March family turned out en masse, and Jo exerted herself to some purpose, for people not only came, but stayed, laughing at her nonsense, admiring Amy's taste, and apparently enjoying themselves very much. Laurie and his friends gallantly threw themselves into the breach, bought up the bouquets, encamped before the table, and made that corner the liveliest spot in the room. Amy was in her element now, and out of gratitude, if nothing more, was as spritely and gracious as possible, coming to the conclusion, about that time, that virtue was its own reward, after all.



Jo behaved herself with exemplary propriety, and when Amy was happily surrounded by her guard of honor, Jo circulated about the Hall, picking up various bits of gossip, which enlightened her upon the subject of the Chester change of base. She reproached herself for her share of the ill feeling and resolved to exonerate Amy as soon as possible. She also discovered what Amy had done about the things in the morning, and considered her a model of magnanimity. As she passed the art table, she glanced over it for her sister’s things, but saw no sign of them. “Tucked away out of sight, I dare say,” thought Jo, who could forgive her own wrongs, but hotly resented any insult offered her family.

“Good evening, Miss Jo. How does Amy get on?” asked May with a conciliatory air, for she wanted to show that she also could be generous.

“She has sold everything she had that was worth selling, and now she is enjoying herself. The flower table is always attractive, you know, ‘especially to gentlemen’.” Jo couldn’t resist giving that little slap, but May took it so meekly she regretted it a minute after, and fell to praising the great vases, which still remained unsold.

“Is Amy’s illumination anywhere about? I took a fancy to buy that for Father,” said Jo, very anxious to learn the fate of her sister’s work.

“Everything of Amy’s sold long ago. I took care that the right people saw them, and they made a nice little sum of money for us,” returned May, who had overcome sundry small temptations, as well as Amy had, that day.

Much gratified, Jo rushed back to tell the good news, and Amy looked both touched and surprised by the report of May’s word and manner.

“Now, gentlemen, I want you to go and do your duty by the other tables as generously as you have by mine, especially the art table,” she said, ordering out ‘Teddy’s own’, as the girls called the college friends.

“‘Charge, Chester, charge!’ is the motto for that table, but do your duty like men, and you’ll get your money’s worth of art in every sense of the word,” said the irrepressible Jo, as the devoted phalanx prepared to take the field.

“To hear is to obey, but March is fairer far than May,” said little Parker, making a frantic effort to be both witty and tender, and getting promptly quenched by Laurie, who said...

“Very well, my son, for a small boy!” and walked him off, with a paternal pat on the head.

“Buy the vases,” whispered Amy to Laurie, as a final heaping of coals of fire on her enemy’s head.

To May’s great delight, Mr. Laurence not only bought the vases, but pervaded the hall with one under each arm. The other gentlemen speculated with equal rashness in all sorts of frail trifles, and wandered helplessly about afterward, burdened with wax flowers, painted fans, filigree portfolios, and other useful and appropriate purchases.

Aunt Carrol was there, heard the story, looked pleased, and said something to Mrs. March in a corner, which made the latter lady beam with satisfaction, and watch Amy with a face full of mingled pride and anxiety, though she did not betray the cause of her pleasure till several days later.

The fair was pronounced a success, and when May bade Amy goodnight, she did not gush as usual, but gave her an affectionate kiss, and a look which said ‘forgive and forget’. That satisfied Amy, and when she got home she found the vases paraded on the parlor chimney piece with a great bouquet in each. “The reward of merit for a magnanimous March,” as Laurie announced with a flourish.

“You’ve a deal more principle and generosity and nobleness of character than I ever gave you credit for, Amy. You’ve behaved sweetly, and I respect you with all my heart,” said Jo warmly, as they brushed their hair together late that night.

“Yes, we all do, and love her for being so ready to forgive. It must have been dreadfully hard, after working so long and setting your heart on selling your own pretty things. I don’t believe I could have done it as kindly as you did,” added Beth from her pillow.

“Why, girls, you needn’t praise me so. I only did as I’d be done by. You laugh at me when I say I want to be a lady, but I mean a true gentlewoman in mind and manners, and I try to do it as far as I know how. I can’t explain exactly, but I want to be above the little meannesses and follies and faults that spoil so many women. I’m far from it now, but I do my best, and hope in time to be what Mother is.”

Amy spoke earnestly, and Jo said, with a cordial hug, “I understand now what you mean, and I’ll never laugh at you again. You are getting on faster than you think, and I’ll take lessons of you in true politeness, for you’ve learned the secret, I believe. Try away, deary, you’ll get your reward some day, and no one will be more delighted than I shall.”

A week later Amy did get her reward, and poor Jo found it hard to be delighted. A letter came from Aunt Carrol, and Mrs. March’s face was illuminated to such a degree when she read it that Jo and Beth, who were with her, demanded what the glad tidings were.

“Aunt Carrol is going abroad next month, and wants...”

“Me to go with her!” burst in Jo, flying out of her chair in an uncontrollable rapture.

“No, dear, not you. It’s Amy.”

“Oh, Mother! She’s too young, it’s my turn first. I’ve wanted it so long. It would do me so much good, and be so altogether splendid. I must go!”

“I’m afraid it’s impossible, Jo. Aunt says Amy, decidedly, and it is not for us to dictate when she offers such a favor.”

“It’s always so. Amy has all the fun and I have all the work. It isn’t fair, oh, it isn’t fair!” cried Jo passionately.

“I’m afraid it’s partly your own fault, dear. When Aunt spoke to me the other day, she regretted your blunt manners and too independent spirit, and here she writes, as if quoting something you had said — ’I planned at first to ask Jo, but as ‘favors burden her’, and she ‘hates French’, I think I won’t venture to invite her. Amy is more docile, will make a good companion for Flo, and receive gratefully any help the trip may give her.”

“Oh, my tongue, my abominable tongue! Why can’t I learn to keep it quiet?” groaned Jo, remembering words which had been her undoing. When she had heard the explanation of the quoted phrases, Mrs. March said sorrowfully...

“I wish you could have gone, but there is no hope of it this time, so try to bear it cheerfully, and don’t sadden Amy’s pleasure by reproaches or regrets.”

“I’ll try,” said Jo, winking hard as she knelt down to pick up the basket she had joyfully upset. “I’ll take a leaf out of her book, and try not only to seem glad, but to be so, and not grudge her one minute of happiness. But it won’t be easy, for it is a dreadful disappointment,” and poor Jo bedewed the little fat pincushion she held with several very bitter tears.

“Jo, dear, I’m very selfish, but I couldn’t spare you, and I’m glad you are not going quite yet,” whispered Beth, embracing her, basket and all, with such a clinging touch and loving face that Jo felt comforted in spite of the sharp regret that made her want to box her own ears, and humbly beg Aunt Carrol to burden her with this favor, and see how gratefully she would bear it.

By the time Amy came in, Jo was able to take her part in the family jubilation, not quite as heartily as usual, perhaps, but without repinings at Amy’s good fortune. The young lady herself received the news as tidings of great joy, went about in a solemn sort of rapture, and began to sort her colors and pack her pencils that evening, leaving such trifles as clothes, money, and passports to those less absorbed in visions of art than herself.

“It isn’t a mere pleasure trip to me, girls,” she said impressively, as she scraped her best palette. “It will decide my career, for if I have any genius, I shall find it out in Rome, and will do something to prove it.”

“Suppose you haven’t?” said Jo, sewing away, with red eyes, at the new collars which were to be handed over to Amy.

“Then I shall come home and teach drawing for my living,” replied the aspirant for fame, with philosophic composure. But she made a wry face at the prospect, and scratched away at her palette as if bent on vigorous measures before she gave up her hopes.

“No, you won’t. You hate hard work, and you’ll marry some rich man, and come home to sit in the lap of luxury all your days,” said Jo.

“Your predictions sometimes come to pass, but I don’t believe that one will. I’m sure I wish it would, for if I can’t be an artist myself, I should like to be able to help those who are,” said Amy, smiling, as if the part of Lady Bountiful would suit her better than that of a poor drawing teacher.

“Hum!” said Jo, with a sigh. “If you wish it you’ll have it, for your wishes are always granted — mine never.”

“Would you like to go?” asked Amy, thoughtfully patting her nose with her knife.

“Rather!”

“Well, in a year or two I’ll send for you, and we’ll dig in the Forum for relics, and carry out all the plans we’ve made so many times.”

“Thank you. I’ll remind you of your promise when that joyful day comes, if it ever does,” returned Jo, accepting the vague but magnificent offer as gratefully as she could.

There was not much time for preparation, and the house was in a ferment till Amy was off. Jo bore up very well till the last flutter of blue ribbon vanished, when she retired to her refuge, the garret, and cried till she couldn’t cry any more. Amy likewise bore up stoutly till the steamer sailed. Then just as the gangway was about to be withdrawn, it suddenly came over her that a whole ocean was soon to roll between her and those who loved her best, and she clung to Laurie, the last lingerer, saying with a sob...

“Oh, take care of them for me, and if anything should happen...”

“I will, dear, I will, and if anything happens, I’ll come and comfort you,” whispered Laurie, little dreaming that he would be called upon to keep his word.

So Amy sailed away to find the Old World, which is always new and beautiful to young eyes, while her father and friend watched her from the shore, fervently hoping that none but gentle fortunes would befall the happy-hearted girl, who waved her hand to them till they could see nothing but the summer sunshine dazzling on the sea.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

OUR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

London
Dearest People, Here I really sit at a front window of the Bath Hotel, Piccadilly. It’s not a fashionable place, but Uncle stopped here years ago, and won’t go anywhere else. However, we don’t mean to stay long, so it’s no great matter. Oh, I can’t begin to tell you how I enjoy it all! I never can, so I’ll only give you bits out of my notebook, for I’ve done nothing but sketch and scribble since I started.

I sent a line from Halifax, when I felt pretty miserable, but after that I got on delightfully, seldom ill, on deck all day, with plenty of pleasant people to amuse me. Everyone was very kind to me, especially the officers. Don’t laugh, Jo, gentlemen really are very necessary aboard ship, to hold on to, or to wait upon one, and as they have nothing to do, it’s a mercy to make them useful, otherwise they would smoke themselves to death, I’m afraid.

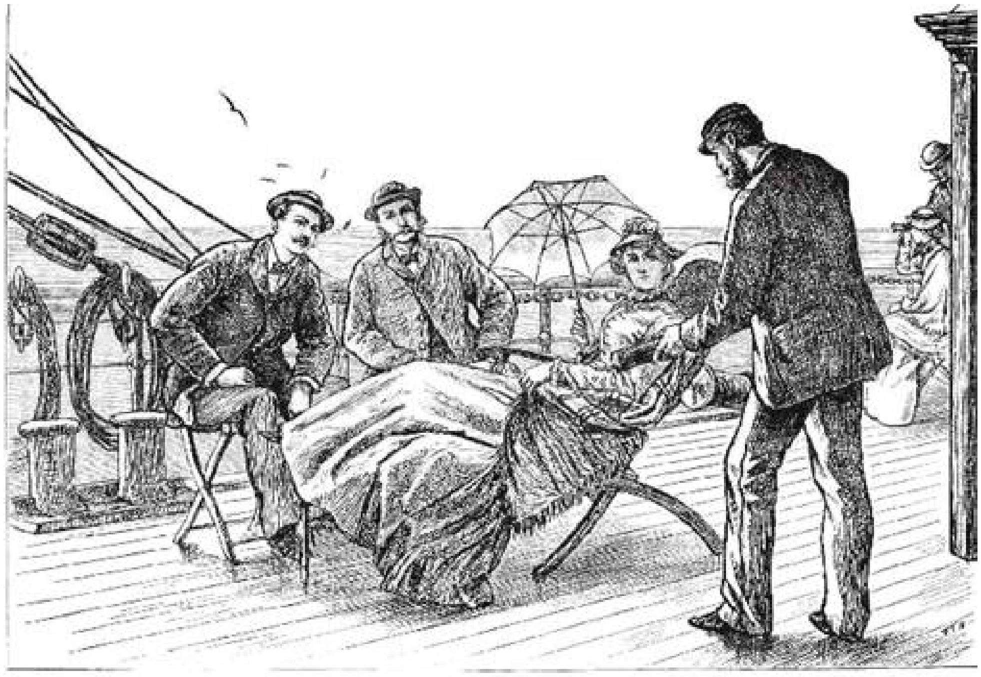
Aunt and Flo were poorly all the way, and liked to be let alone, so when I had done what I could for them, I went and enjoyed myself. Such walks on deck, such sunsets, such splendid air and waves! It was almost as exciting as riding a fast horse, when we went rushing on so grandly. I wish Beth could have come, it would have done her so much good. As for Jo, she would have gone up and sat on the maintop jib, or whatever the high thing is called, made friends with the engineers, and tooted on the captain’s speaking trumpet, she’d have been in such a state of rapture.

It was all heavenly, but I was glad to see the Irish coast, and found it very lovely, so green and sunny, with brown cabins here and there, ruins on some of the hills, and gentlemen’s countryseats in the valleys, with deer feeding in the parks. It was early in the morning, but I didn’t regret getting up to see it, for the bay was full of little boats, the shore so picturesque, and a rosy sky overhead. I never shall forget it.

At Queenstown one of my new acquaintances left us, Mr. Lennox, and when I said something about the Lakes of Killarney, he sighed, and sung, with a look at me...

“Oh, have you e’er heard of Kate Kearney?
She lives on the banks of Killarney;
From the glance of her eye,
Shun danger and fly,
For fatal’s the glance of Kate Kearney.”

Wasn’t that nonsensical?



“Every one was very kind, especially the officers.”—Page 378.

We only stopped at Liverpool a few hours. It’s a dirty, noisy place, and I was glad to leave it. Uncle rushed out and bought a pair of dogskin gloves, some ugly, thick shoes, and an umbrella, and got shaved *à la* mutton chop, the first thing. Then he flattered himself that he looked like a true Briton, but the first time he had the mud cleaned off his shoes, the little bootblack knew that an American stood in them, and said, with a grin, “There yer har, sir. I’ve given ‘em the latest Yankee shine.” It amused Uncle immensely. Oh, I must tell you what that absurd Lennox did! He got his friend Ward, who came on with us, to order a bouquet for me, and the first thing I saw in my room was a lovely one, with “Robert Lennox’s compliments,” on the card. Wasn’t that fun, girls? I like traveling.

I never shall get to London if I don’t hurry. The trip was like riding through a long picture gallery, full of lovely landscapes. The farmhouses were my delight, with thatched roofs, ivy up to the eaves, latticed windows, and stout women with rosy children at the doors. The very cattle looked more tranquil than ours, as they stood knee-deep in clover, and the hens had a contented cluck, as if they never got nervous like Yankee biddies. Such perfect color I never saw, the grass so green, sky so blue, grain so yellow, woods so dark, I was in a rapture all the way. So was Flo, and we kept bouncing from one side to the other, trying to see everything while we were whisking along at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Aunt was tired and went to sleep, but Uncle read his guidebook, and wouldn’t be astonished at anything. This is the way we went on. Amy, flying up — ”Oh, that must be Kenilworth, that gray place among the trees!” Flo, darting to my window — ”How sweet! We must go there sometime, won’t we Papa?” Uncle, calmly admiring his boots — ”No, my dear, not unless you want beer, that’s a brewery.”

A pause — then Flo cried out, “Bless me, there’s a gallows and a man going up.” “Where, where?” shrieks Amy, staring out at two tall posts with a crossbeam and some dangling chains. “A colliery,” remarks Uncle, with a twinkle of the eye. “Here’s a lovely flock of lambs all lying down,” says Amy. “See, Papa, aren’t they pretty?” added Flo sentimentally. “Geese, young ladies,” returns Uncle, in a tone that keeps us quiet till Flo settles down to enjoy the *Flirtations of Captain Cavendish*, and I have the scenery all to myself.

Of course it rained when we got to London, and there was nothing to be seen but fog and umbrellas. We rested, unpacked, and shopped a little between the showers. Aunt Mary got me some new things, for I came off in such a hurry I wasn’t half ready. A white hat and blue feather, a muslin dress to match, and the loveliest mantle you ever saw. Shopping in Regent Street is perfectly splendid. Things seem so cheap, nice ribbons only sixpence a yard. I laid in a stock, but shall get my gloves in Paris. Doesn’t that sound sort of elegant and rich?

Flo and I, for the fun of it, ordered a hansom cab, while Aunt and Uncle were out, and went for a drive, though we learned afterward that it wasn't the thing for young ladies to ride in them alone. It was so droll! For when we were shut in by the wooden apron, the man drove so fast that Flo was frightened, and told me to stop him, but he was up outside behind somewhere, and I couldn't get at him. He didn't hear me call, nor see me flap my parasol in front, and there we were, quite helpless, rattling away, and whirling around corners at a breakneck pace. At last, in my despair, I saw a little door in the roof, and on poking it open, a red eye appeared, and a beery voice said...

"Now, then, mum?"

I gave my order as soberly as I could, and slamming down the door, with an "Aye, aye, mum," the man made his horse walk, as if going to a funeral. I poked again and said, "A little faster," then off he went, helter-skelter as before, and we resigned ourselves to our fate.

Today was fair, and we went to Hyde Park, close by, for we are more aristocratic than we look. The Duke of Devonshire lives near. I often see his footmen lounging at the back gate, and the Duke of Wellington's house is not far off. Such sights as I saw, my dear! It was as good as Punch, for there were fat dowagers rolling about in their red and yellow coaches, with gorgeous Jeameses in silk stockings and velvet coats, up behind, and powdered coachmen in front. Smart maids, with the rosiest children I ever saw, handsome girls, looking half asleep, dandies in queer English hats and lavender kids lounging about, and tall soldiers, in short red jackets and muffin caps stuck on one side, looking so funny I longed to sketch them.

Rotten Row means 'Route de Roi', or the king's way, but now it's more like a riding school than anything else. The horses are splendid, and the men, especially the grooms, ride well, but the women are stiff, and bounce, which isn't according to our rules. I longed to show them a tearing American gallop, for they trotted solemnly up and down, in their scant habits and high hats, looking like the women in a toy Noah's Ark. Everyone rides — old men, stout ladies, little children — and the young folks do a deal of flirting here, I saw a pair exchange rose buds, for it's the thing to wear one in the button-hole, and I thought it rather a nice little idea.

In the P.M. to Westminster Abbey, but don't expect me to describe it, that's impossible, so I'll only say it was sublime! This evening we are going to see Fechter, which will be an appropriate end to the happiest day of my life.

It's very late, but I can't let my letter go in the morning without telling you what happened last evening. Who do you think came in, as we were at tea? Laurie's English friends, Fred and Frank Vaughn! I was so surprised, for I shouldn’t have known them but for the cards. Both are tall fellows with whiskers, Fred handsome in the English style, and Frank much better, for he only limps slightly, and uses no crutches. They had heard from Laurie where we were to be, and came to ask us to their house, but Uncle won’t go, so we shall return the call, and see them as we can. They went to the theater with us, and we did have such a good time, for Frank devoted himself to Flo, and Fred and I talked over past, present, and future fun as if we had known each other all our days. Tell Beth Frank asked for her, and was sorry to hear of her ill health. Fred laughed when I spoke of Jo, and sent his ‘respectful compliments to the big hat’. Neither of them had forgotten Camp Laurence, or the fun we had there. What ages ago it seems, doesn’t it?

Aunt is tapping on the wall for the third time, so I must stop. I really feel like a dissipated London fine lady, writing here so late, with my room full of pretty things, and my head a jumble of parks, theaters, new gowns, and gallant creatures who say “Ah!” and twirl their blond mustaches with the true English lordliness. I long to see you all, and in spite of my nonsense am, as ever, your loving...

AMY

PARIS

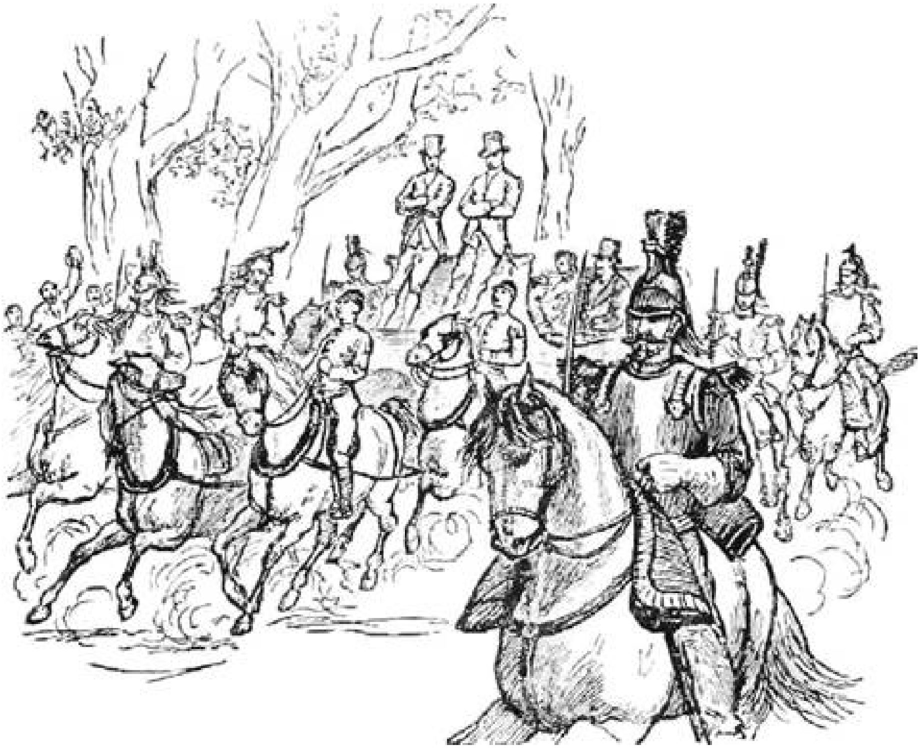
Dear girls,

In my last I told you about our London visit, how kind the Vaughns were, and what pleasant parties they made for us. I enjoyed the trips to Hampton Court and the Kensington Museum more than anything else, for at Hampton I saw Raphael’s cartoons, and at the Museum, rooms full of pictures by Turner, Lawrence, Reynolds, Hogarth, and the other great creatures. The day in Richmond Park was charming, for we had a regular English picnic, and I had more splendid oaks and groups of deer than I could copy, also heard a nightingale, and saw larks go up. We ‘did’ London to our heart’s content, thanks to Fred and Frank, and were sorry to go away, for though English people are slow to take you in, when they once make up their minds to do it they cannot be outdone in hospitality, I think. The Vaughns hope to meet us in Rome next winter, and I shall be dreadfully disappointed if they don’t, for Grace and I are great friends, and the boys very nice fellows, especially Fred.

Well, we were hardly settled here, when he turned up again, saying he had come for a holiday, and was going to Switzerland. Aunt looked sober at first, but he was so cool about it she couldn’t say a word. And now we get on nicely, and are very glad he came, for he speaks French like a native, and I don’t know what we should do without him. Uncle doesn’t know ten words, and insists on talking

English very loud, as if it would make people understand him. Aunt's pronunciation is old-fashioned, and Flo and I, though we flattered ourselves that we knew a good deal, find we don't, and are very grateful to have Fred do the '*parley vooing*', as Uncle calls it.

Such delightful times as we are having! Sight-seeing from morning till night, stopping for nice lunches in the gay *cafes*, and meeting with all sorts of droll adventures. Rainy days I spend in the Louvre, revelling in pictures. Jo would turn up her naughty nose at some of the finest, because she has no soul for art, but I have, and I'm cultivating eye and taste as fast as I can. She would like the relics of great people better, for I've seen her Napoleon's cocked hat and gray coat, his baby's cradle and his old toothbrush, also Marie Antoinette's little shoe, the ring of Saint Denis, Charlemagne's sword, and many other interesting things. I'll talk for hours about them when I come, but haven't time to write.



The Palais Royale is a heavenly place, so full of *bijouterie* and lovely things that I'm nearly distracted because I can't buy them. Fred wanted to get me some, but of course I didn't allow it. Then the Bois and Champs Elysees are *tres magnifique*. I've seen the imperial family several times, the emperor an ugly, hard-looking man, the empress pale and pretty, but dressed in bad taste, I thought — purple dress, green hat, and yellow gloves. Little Nap is a handsome boy, who sits chatting to his tutor, and kisses his hand to the people as he passes in his four-horse barouche, with postilions in red satin jackets and a mounted guard before and behind.

We often walk in the Tuileries Gardens, for they are lovely, though the antique Luxembourg Gardens suit me better. Pere la Chaise is very curious, for many of the tombs are like small rooms, and looking in, one sees a table, with images or pictures of the dead, and chairs for the mourners to sit in when they come to lament. That is so Frenchy.

Our rooms are on the Rue de Rivoli, and sitting on the balcony, we look up and down the long, brilliant street. It is so pleasant that we spend our evenings talking there when too tired with our day's work to go out. Fred is very entertaining, and is altogether the most agreeable young man I ever knew — except Laurie, whose manners are more charming. I wish Fred was dark, for I don't fancy light men, however, the Vaughns are very rich and come of an excellent family, so I won't find fault with their yellow hair, as my own is yellower.

Next week we are off to Germany and Switzerland, and as we shall travel fast, I shall only be able to give you hasty letters. I keep my diary, and try to 'remember correctly and describe clearly all that I see and admire', as Father advised. It is good practice for me, and with my sketchbook will give you a better idea of my tour than these scribbles.

Adieu, I embrace you tenderly. *"Votre Amie."*

HEIDELBERG

My dear Mamma,

Having a quiet hour before we leave for Berne, I'll try to tell you what has happened, for some of it is very important, as you will see.

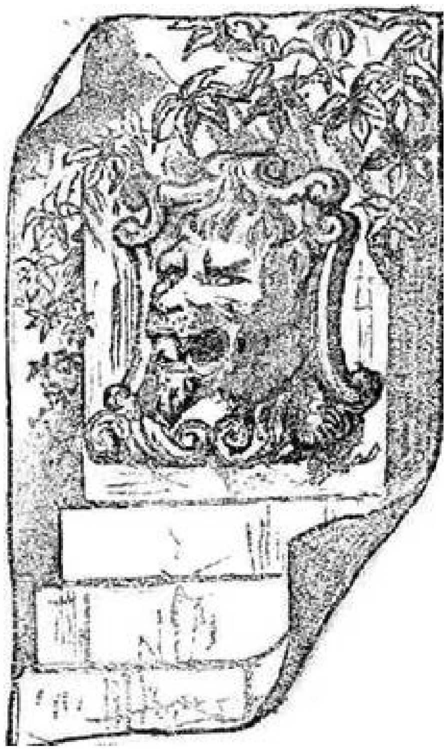
The sail up the Rhine was perfect, and I just sat and enjoyed it with all my might. Get Father's old guidebooks and read about it. I haven't words beautiful enough to describe it. At Coblentz we had a lovely time, for some students from Bonn, with whom Fred got acquainted on the boat, gave us a serenade. It was a moonlight night, and about one o'clock Flo and I were waked by the most delicious music under our windows. We flew up, and hid behind the curtains, but sly peeps showed us Fred and the students singing away down below. It was the most romantic thing I ever saw — the river, the bridge of boats, the great fortress opposite, moonlight everywhere, and music fit to melt a heart of stone.

When they were done we threw down some flowers, and saw them scramble for them, kiss their hands to the invisible ladies, and go laughing away, to smoke and drink beer, I suppose. Next morning Fred showed me one of the crumpled flowers in his vest pocket, and looked very sentimental. I laughed at him, and said I didn't throw it, but Flo, which seemed to disgust him, for he tossed it out of the window, and turned sensible again. I'm afraid I'm going to have trouble with that boy, it begins to look like it.

The baths at Nassau were very gay, so was Baden-Baden, where Fred lost some money, and I scolded him. He needs someone to look after him when Frank is not with him. Kate said once she hoped he'd marry soon, and I quite agree with her that it would be well for him. Frankfurt was delightful. I saw Goethe's house, Schiller's statue, and Dannecker's famous 'Ariadne.' It was very lovely, but I should have enjoyed it more if I had known the story better. I didn't like to ask, as everyone knew it or pretended they did. I wish Jo would tell me all about it. I ought to have read more, for I find I don't know anything, and it mortifies me.

Now comes the serious part, for it happened here, and Fred has just gone. He has been so kind and jolly that we all got quite fond of him. I never thought of anything but a traveling friendship till the serenade night. Since then I've begun to feel that the moonlight walks, balcony talks, and daily adventures were something more to him than fun. I haven't flirted, Mother, truly, but remembered what you said to me, and have done my very best. I can't help it if people like me. I don't try to make them, and it worries me if I don't care for them, though Jo says I haven't got any heart. Now I know Mother will shake her head, and the girls say, "Oh, the mercenary little wretch!", but I've made up my mind, and if Fred asks me, I shall accept him, though I'm not madly in love. I like him, and we get on comfortably together. He is handsome, young, clever enough, and very rich — ever so much richer than the Laurences. I don't think his family would object, and I should be very happy, for they are all kind, well-bred, generous people, and they like me. Fred, as the eldest twin, will have the estate, I suppose, and such a splendid one it is! A city house in a fashionable street, not so showy as our big houses, but twice as comfortable and full of solid luxury, such as English people believe in. I like it, for it's genuine. I've seen the plate, the family jewels, the old servants, and pictures of the country place, with its park, great house, lovely grounds, and fine horses. Oh, it would be all I should ask! And I'd rather have it than any title such as girls snap up so readily, and find nothing behind. I may be mercenary, but I hate poverty, and don't mean to bear it a minute longer than I can help. One of us *must* marry well. Meg didn't, Jo won't, Beth can't yet, so I shall, and make everything okay all round. I wouldn't marry a man I hated or despised. You may be sure of that, and though Fred is not my model hero, he does very well, and in time I should get fond enough of him if he was very fond of me, and let me do just as I liked. So I've been turning the matter over in my mind the last week, for it was impossible to help seeing that Fred liked me. He said nothing, but little things showed it. He never goes with Flo, always gets on my side of the carriage, table, or promenade, looks sentimental when we are alone, and frowns at anyone else who ventures to speak to me. Yesterday at dinner, when an Austrian officer stared at us and then said something to his friend, a rakish-looking baron, about '*ein wonderschones Blondchen*', Fred looked as fierce as a lion, and cut his meat so savagely it nearly flew off his plate. He isn't one of the cool, stiff Englishmen, but is rather peppery, for he has Scotch blood in him, as one might guess from his bonnie blue eyes.

Well, last evening we went up to the castle about sunset, at least all of us but Fred, who was to meet us there after going to the Post Restante for letters. We had a charming time poking about the ruins, the vaults where the monster tun is, and the beautiful gardens made by the elector long ago for his English wife. I liked the great terrace best, for the view was divine, so while the rest went to see the rooms inside, I sat there trying to sketch the gray stone lion's head on the wall, with scarlet woodbine sprays hanging round it. I felt as if I'd got into a romance, sitting there, watching the Neckar rolling through the valley, listening to the music of the Austrian band below, and waiting for my lover, like a real storybook girl. I had a feeling that something was going to happen and I was ready for it. I didn't feel blushy or quakey, but quite cool and only a little excited.



By-and-by I heard Fred's voice, and then he came hurrying through the great arch to find me. He looked so troubled that I forgot all about myself, and asked what the matter was. He said he'd just got a letter begging him to come home, for Frank was very ill. So he was going at once on the night train and only had time to say good-by. I was very sorry for him, and disappointed for myself, but only for a minute because he said, as he shook hands, and said it in a way that I could not mistake, “I shall soon come back, you won’t forget me, Amy?”

I didn’t promise, but I looked at him, and he seemed satisfied, and there was no time for anything but messages and good-byes, for he was off in an hour, and we all miss him very much. I know he wanted to speak, but I think, from something he once hinted, that he had promised his father not to do anything of the sort yet a while, for he is a rash boy, and the old gentleman dreads a foreign daughter-in-law. We shall soon meet in Rome, and then, if I don’t change my mind, I’ll say “Yes, thank you,” when he says “Will you, please?”

Of course this is all *very private*, but I wished you to know what was going on. Don’t be anxious about me, remember I am your ‘prudent Amy’, and be sure I will do nothing rashly. Send me as much advice as you like. I’ll use it if I can. I wish I could see you for a good talk, Marmee. Love and trust me.

Ever your AMY

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

TENDER TROUBLES

"Jo, I'm anxious about Beth."

"Why, Mother, she has seemed unusually well since the babies came."

"It's not her health that troubles me now, it's her spirits. I'm sure there is something on her mind, and I want you to discover what it is."

"What makes you think so, Mother?"

"She sits alone a good deal, and doesn't talk to her father as much as she used. I found her crying over the babies the other day. When she sings, the songs are always sad ones, and now and then I see a look in her face that I don't understand. This isn't like Beth, and it worries me."

"Have you asked her about it?"

"I have tried once or twice, but she either evaded my questions or looked so distressed that I stopped. I never force my children's confidence, and I seldom have to wait for long."

Mrs. March glanced at Jo as she spoke, but the face opposite seemed quite unconscious of any secret disquietude but Beth's, and after sewing thoughtfully for a minute, Jo said, "I think she is growing up, and so begins to dream dreams, and have hopes and fears and fidgets, without knowing why or being able to explain them. Why, Mother, Beth's eighteen, but we don't realize it, and treat her like a child, forgetting she's a woman."

"So she is. Dear heart, how fast you do grow up," returned her mother with a sigh and a smile.

"Can't be helped, Marmee, so you must resign yourself to all sorts of worries, and let your birds hop out of the nest, one by one. I promise never to hop very far, if that is any comfort to you."

"It's a great comfort, Jo. I always feel strong when you are at home, now Meg is gone. Beth is too feeble and Amy too young to depend upon, but when the tug comes, you are always ready."

"Why, you know I don't mind hard jobs much, and there must always be one scrub in a family. Amy is splendid in fine works and I'm not, but I feel in my element when all the carpets are to be taken up, or half the family fall sick at once. Amy is distinguishing herself abroad, but if anything is amiss at home, I'm your man."

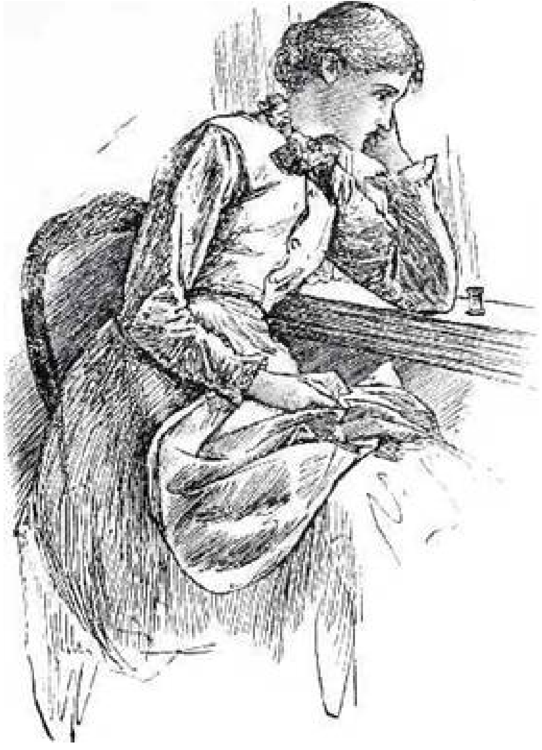
"I leave Beth to your hands, then, for she will open her tender little heart to her Jo sooner than to anyone else. Be very kind, and don’t let her think anyone watches or talks about her. If she only would get quite strong and cheerful again, I shouldn’t have a wish in the world.”

“Happy woman! I’ve got heaps.”

“My dear, what are they?”

“I’ll settle Bethy’s troubles, and then I’ll tell you mine. They are not very wearing, so they’ll keep.” and Jo stitched away, with a wise nod which set her mother’s heart at rest about her for the present at least.

While apparently absorbed in her own affairs, Jo watched Beth, and after many conflicting conjectures, finally settled upon one which seemed to explain the change in her. A slight incident gave Jo the clue to the mystery, she thought, and lively fancy, loving heart did the rest. She was affecting to write busily one Saturday afternoon, when she and Beth were alone together. Yet as she scribbled, she kept her eye on her sister, who seemed unusually quiet. Sitting at the window, Beth’s work often dropped into her lap, and she leaned her head upon her hand, in a dejected attitude, while her eyes rested on the dull, autumnal landscape. Suddenly some one passed below, whistling like an operatic blackbird, and a voice called out, “All serene! Coming in tonight.”



Beth started, leaned forward, smiled and nodded, watched the passer-by till his quick tramp died away, then said softly as if to herself, “How strong and well and happy that dear boy looks.”

“Hum!” said Jo, still intent upon her sister’s face, for the bright color faded as quickly as it came, the smile vanished, and presently a tear lay shining on the window ledge. Beth whisked it off, and in her half-averted face read a tender sorrow that made her own eyes fill. Fearing to betray herself, she slipped away, murmuring something about needing more paper.

“Mercy on me, Beth loves Laurie!” she said, sitting down in her own room, pale with the shock of the discovery which she believed she had just made. “I never dreamed of such a thing. What will Mother say? I wonder if her...” there Jo stopped and turned scarlet with a sudden thought. “If he shouldn’t love back again, how dreadful it would be. He must. I’ll make him!” and she shook her head threateningly at the picture of the mischievous-looking boy laughing at her from the wall. “Oh dear, we are growing up with a vengeance. Here’s Meg married and a mamma, Amy flourishing away at Paris, and Beth in love. I’m the only one that has sense enough to keep out of mischief.” Jo thought intently for a minute with her eyes fixed on the picture, then she smoothed out her wrinkled forehead and said, with a decided nod at the face opposite, “No thank you, sir, you’re very charming, but you’ve no more stability than a weathercock. So you needn’t write touching notes and smile in that insinuating way, for it won’t do a bit of good, and I won’t have it.”

Then she sighed, and fell into a reverie from which she did not wake till the early twilight sent her down to take new observations, which only confirmed her suspicion. Though Laurie flirted with Amy and joked with Jo, his manner to Beth had always been peculiarly kind and gentle, but so was everybody’s. Therefore, no one thought of imagining that he cared more for her than for the others. Indeed, a general impression had prevailed in the family of late that ‘our boy’ was getting fonder than ever of Jo, who, however, wouldn’t hear a word upon the subject and scolded violently if anyone dared to suggest it. If they had known the various tender passages which had been nipped in the bud, they would have had the immense satisfaction of saying, “I told you so.” But Jo hated ‘philandering’, and wouldn’t allow it, always having a joke or a smile ready at the least sign of impending danger.

When Laurie first went to college, he fell in love about once a month, but these small flames were as brief as ardent, did no damage, and much amused Jo, who took great interest in the alternations of hope, despair, and resignation, which were confided to her in their weekly conferences. But there came a time when Laurie ceased to worship at many shrines, hinted darkly at one all-absorbing passion, and indulged occasionally in Byronic fits of gloom. Then he avoided the tender subject altogether, wrote philosophical notes to Jo, turned studious, and gave out that he was going to ‘dig’, intending to graduate in a blaze of glory. This suited the young lady better than twilight confidences, tender pressures of the hand, and eloquent glances of the eye, for with Jo, brain developed earlier than heart, and she preferred imaginary heroes to real ones, because when tired of them, the former could be shut up in the tin kitchen till called for, and the latter were less manageable.

Things were in this state when the grand discovery was made, and Jo watched Laurie that night as she had never done before. If she had not got the new idea into her head, she would have seen nothing unusual in the fact that Beth was very quiet, and Laurie very kind to her. But having given the rein to her lively fancy, it galloped away with her at a great pace, and common sense, being rather weakened by a long course of romance writing, did not come to the rescue. As usual Beth lay on the sofa and Laurie sat in a low chair close by, amusing her with all sorts of gossip, for she depended on her weekly 'spin', and he never disappointed her. But that evening Jo fancied that Beth's eyes rested on the lively, dark face beside her with peculiar pleasure, and that she listened with intense interest to an account of some exciting cricket match, though the phrases, 'caught off a tice', 'stumped off his ground', and 'the leg hit for three', were as intelligible to her as Sanskrit. She also fancied, having set her heart upon seeing it, that she saw a certain increase of gentleness in Laurie's manner, that he dropped his voice now and then, laughed less than usual, was a little absent-minded, and settled the afghan over Beth's feet with an assiduity that was really almost tender.

"Who knows? Stranger things have happened," thought Jo, as she fussed about the room. "She will make quite an angel of him, and he will make life delightfully easy and pleasant for the dear, if they only love each other. I don't see how he can help it, and I do believe he would if the rest of us were out of the way."

As everyone was out of the way but herself, Jo began to feel that she ought to dispose of herself with all speed. But where should she go? And burning to lay herself upon the shrine of sisterly devotion, she sat down to settle that point.

Now, the old sofa was a regular patriarch of a sofa — long, broad, well-cushioned, and low, a trifle shabby, as well it might be, for the girls had slept and sprawled on it as babies, fished over the back, rode on the arms, and had menageries under it as children, and rested tired heads, dreamed dreams, and listened to tender talk on it as young women. They all loved it, for it was a family refuge, and one corner had always been Jo's favorite lounging place. Among the many pillows that adorned the venerable couch was one, hard, round, covered with prickly horsehair, and furnished with a knobby button at each end. This repulsive pillow was her especial property, being used as a weapon of defense, a barricade, or a stern preventive of too much slumber.

Laurie knew this pillow well, and had cause to regard it with deep aversion, having been unmercifully pummeled with it in former days when romping was allowed, and now frequently debarred by it from the seat he most coveted next to Jo in the sofa corner. If ‘the sausage’ as they called it, stood on end, it was a sign that he might approach and repose, but if it lay flat across the sofa, woe to man, woman, or child who dared disturb it! That evening Jo forgot to barricade her corner, and had not been in her seat five minutes, before a massive form appeared beside her, and with both arms spread over the sofa back, both long legs stretched out before him, Laurie exclaimed, with a sigh of satisfaction...

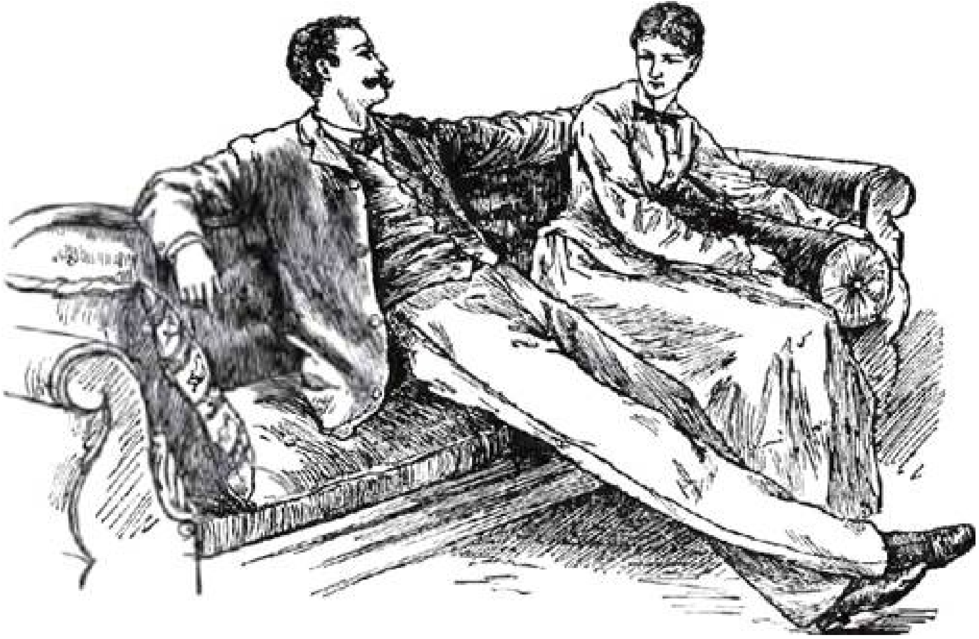
“Now, this is filling at the price.”

“No slang,” snapped Jo, slamming down the pillow. But it was too late, there was no room for it, and coasting onto the floor, it disappeared in a most mysterious manner.

“Come, Jo, don’t be thorny. After studying himself to a skeleton all the week, a fellow deserves petting and ought to get it.”

“Beth will pet you. I’m busy.”

“No, she’s not to be bothered with me, but you like that sort of thing, unless you’ve suddenly lost your taste for it. Have you? Do you hate your boy, and want to fire pillows at him?”



Anything more wheedlesome than that touching appeal was seldom heard, but Jo quenched ‘her boy’ by turning on him with a stern query, “How many bouquets have you sent Miss Randal this week?”

“Not one, upon my word. She’s engaged. Now then.”

“I’m glad of it, that’s one of your foolish extravagances, sending flowers and things to girls for whom you don’t care two pins,” continued Jo reprovingly.

“Sensible girls for whom I do care whole papers of pins won’t let me send them ‘flowers and things’, so what can I do? My feelings need a ‘vent’.”

“Mother doesn’t approve of flirting even in fun, and you do flirt desperately, Teddy.”

“I’d give anything if I could answer, ‘So do you’. As I can’t, I’ll merely say that I don’t see any harm in that pleasant little game, if all parties understand that it’s only play.”

“Well, it does look pleasant, but I can’t learn how it’s done. I’ve tried, because one feels awkward in company not to do as everybody else is doing, but I don’t seem to get on”, said Jo, forgetting to play mentor.

“Take lessons of Amy, she has a regular talent for it.”

“Yes, she does it very prettily, and never seems to go too far. I suppose it’s natural to some people to please without trying, and others to always say and do the wrong thing in the wrong place.”

“I’m glad you can’t flirt. It’s really refreshing to see a sensible, straightforward girl, who can be jolly and kind without making a fool of herself. Between ourselves, Jo, some of the girls I know really do go on at such a rate I’m ashamed of them. They don’t mean any harm, I’m sure, but if they knew how we fellows talked about them afterward, they’d mend their ways, I fancy.”

“They do the same, and as their tongues are the sharpest, you fellows get the worst of it, for you are as silly as they, every bit. If you behaved properly, they would, but knowing you like their nonsense, they keep it up, and then you blame them.”

“Much you know about it, ma’am,” said Laurie in a superior tone. “We don’t like romps and flirts, though we may act as if we did sometimes. The pretty, modest girls are never talked about, except respectfully, among gentleman. Bless your innocent soul! If you could be in my place for a month you’d see things that would astonish you a trifle. Upon my word, when I see one of those harum-scarum girls, I always want to say with our friend Cock Robin...

“Out upon you, fie upon you,
Bold-faced jig!”

It was impossible to help laughing at the funny conflict between Laurie’s chivalrous reluctance to speak ill of womankind, and his very natural dislike of the unfeminine folly of which fashionable society showed him many samples. Jo knew that ‘young Laurence’ was regarded as a most eligible parti by worldly mamas, was much smiled upon by their daughters, and flattered enough by ladies of all ages to make a coxcomb of him, so she watched him rather jealously, fearing he would be spoiled, and rejoiced more than she confessed to find that he still believed in modest girls. Returning suddenly to her admonitory tone, she said, dropping her voice, “If you must have a ‘vent’, Teddy, go and devote yourself to one of the ‘pretty, modest girls’ whom you do respect, and not waste your time with the silly ones.”

“You really advise it?” and Laurie looked at her with an odd mixture of anxiety and merriment in his face.

“Yes, I do, but you’d better wait till you are through college, on the whole, and be fitting yourself for the place meantime. You’re not half good enough for — well, whoever the modest girl may be.” and Jo looked a little queer likewise, for a name had almost escaped her.

“That I’m not!” acquiesced Laurie, with an expression of humility quite new to him, as he dropped his eyes and absently wound Jo’s apron tassel round his finger.

“Mercy on us, this will never do,” thought Jo, adding aloud, “Go and sing to me. I’m dying for some music, and always like yours.”

“I’d rather stay here, thank you.”

“Well, you can’t, there isn’t room. Go and make yourself useful, since you are too big to be ornamental. I thought you hated to be tied to a woman’s apron string?” retorted Jo, quoting certain rebellious words of his own.

“Ah, that depends on who wears the apron!” and Laurie gave an audacious tweak at the tassel.

“Are you going?” demanded Jo, diving for the pillow.

He fled at once, and the minute it was well, “Up with the bonnets of bonnie Dundee,” she slipped away to return no more till the young gentleman departed in high dudgeon.

Jo lay long awake that night, and was just dropping off when the sound of a stifled sob made her fly to Beth’s bedside, with the anxious inquiry, “What is it, dear?”

“I thought you were asleep,” sobbed Beth.

“Is it the old pain, my precious?”

“No, it’s a new one, but I can bear it,” and Beth tried to check her tears.

“Tell me all about it, and let me cure it as I often did the other.”

“You can’t, there is no cure.” There Beth’s voice gave way, and clinging to her sister, she cried so despairingly that Jo was frightened.

“Where is it? Shall I call Mother?”

"No, no, don't call her, don't tell her. I shall be better soon. Lie down here and 'poor' my head. I'll be quiet and go to sleep, indeed I will."

Jo obeyed, but as her hand went softly to and fro across Beth's hot forehead and wet eyelids, her heart was very full and she longed to speak. But young as she was, Jo had learned that hearts, like flowers, cannot be rudely handled, but must open naturally, so though she believed she knew the cause of Beth's new pain, she only said, in her tenderest tone, "Does anything trouble you, deary?"

"Yes, Jo," after a long pause.

"Wouldn't it comfort you to tell me what it is?"

"Not now, not yet."

"Then I won't ask, but remember, Bethy, that Mother and Jo are always glad to hear and help you, if they can."

"I know it. I'll tell you by-and-by."

"Is the pain better now?"

"Oh, yes, much better, you are so comfortable, Jo."

"Go to sleep, dear. I'll stay with you."

So cheek to cheek they fell asleep, and on the morrow Beth seemed quite herself again, for at eighteen neither heads nor hearts ache long, and a loving word can medicine most ills.

But Jo had made up her mind, and after pondering over a project for some days, she confided it to her mother.

"You asked me the other day what my wishes were. I'll tell you one of them, Marmee," she began, as they sat along together. "I want to go away somewhere this winter for a change."

"Why, Jo?" and her mother looked up quickly, as if the words suggested a double meaning.

With her eyes on her work Jo answered soberly, "I want something new. I feel restless and anxious to be seeing, doing, and learning more than I am. I brood too much over my own small affairs, and need stirring up, so as I can be spared this winter, I'd like to hop a little way and try my wings."

"Where will you hop?"

"To New York. I had a bright idea yesterday, and this is it. You know Mrs. Kirke wrote to you for some respectable young person to teach her children and sew. It's rather hard to find just the thing, but I think I should suit if I tried."

"My dear, go out to service in that great boarding house!" and Mrs. March looked surprised, but not displeased.

"It's not exactly going out to service, for Mrs. Kirke is your friend — the kindest soul that ever lived — and would make things pleasant for me, I know. Her family is separate from the rest, and no one knows me there. Don't care if they do. It's honest work, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Nor I. But your writing?"

"All the better for the change. I shall see and hear new things, get new ideas, and even if I haven't much time there, I shall bring home quantities of material for my rubbish."

"I have no doubt of it, but are these your only reasons for this sudden fancy?"

"No, Mother."

"May I know the others?"

Jo looked up and Jo looked down, then said slowly, with sudden color in her cheeks. "It may be vain and wrong to say it, but — I'm afraid — Laurie is getting too fond of me."

"Then you don't care for him in the way it is evident he begins to care for you?" and Mrs. March looked anxious as she put the question.

"Mercy, no! I love the dear boy, as I always have, and am immensely proud of him, but as for anything more, it's out of the question."

"I'm glad of that, Jo."

"Why, please?"

"Because, dear, I don't think you suited to one another. As friends you are very happy, and your frequent quarrels soon blow over, but I fear you would both rebel if you were mated for life. You are too much alike and too fond of freedom, not to mention hot tempers and strong wills, to get on happily together, in a relation which needs infinite patience and forbearance, as well as love."

“That’s just the feeling I had, though I couldn’t express it. I’m glad you think he is only beginning to care for me. It would trouble me sadly to make him unhappy, for I couldn’t fall in love with the dear old fellow merely out of gratitude, could I?”

“You are sure of his feeling for you?”

The color deepened in Jo’s cheeks as she answered, with the look of mingled pleasure, pride, and pain which young girls wear when speaking of first lovers, “I’m afraid it is so, Mother. He hasn’t said anything, but he looks a great deal. I think I had better go away before it comes to anything.”

“I agree with you, and if it can be managed you shall go.”

Jo looked relieved, and after a pause, said, smiling, “How Mrs. Moffat would wonder at your want of management, if she knew, and how she will rejoice that Annie may still hope.”

“Ah, Jo, mothers may differ in their management, but the hope is the same in all — the desire to see their children happy. Meg is so, and I am content with her success. You I leave to enjoy your liberty till you tire of it, for only then will you find that there is something sweeter. Amy is my chief care now, but her good sense will help her. For Beth, I indulge no hopes except that she may be well. By the way, she seems brighter this last day or two. Have you spoken to her?’

“Yes, she owned she had a trouble, and promised to tell me by-and-by. I said no more, for I think I know it,” and Jo told her little story.

Mrs. March shook her head, and did not take so romantic a view of the case, but looked grave, and repeated her opinion that for Laurie’s sake Jo should go away for a time.

“Let us say nothing about it to him till the plan is settled, then I’ll run away before he can collect his wits and be tragic. Beth must think I’m going to please myself, as I am, for I can’t talk about Laurie to her. But she can pet and comfort him after I’m gone, and so cure him of this romantic notion. He’s been through so many little trials of the sort, he’s used to it, and will soon get over his lovelornity.”

Jo spoke hopefully, but could not rid herself of the foreboding fear that this ‘little trial’ would be harder than the others, and that Laurie would not get over his ‘lovelornity’ as easily as heretofore.

The plan was talked over in a family council and agreed upon, for Mrs. Kirke gladly accepted Jo, and promised to make a pleasant home for her. The teaching would render her independent, and such leisure as she got might be made profitable by writing, while the new scenes and society would be both useful and agreeable. Jo liked the prospect and was eager to be gone, for the home nest was growing too narrow for her restless nature and adventurous spirit. When all was settled, with fear and trembling she told Laurie, but to her surprise he took it very quietly. He had been graver than usual of late, but very pleasant, and when jokingly accused of turning over a new leaf, he answered soberly, “So I am, and I mean this one shall stay turned.”

Jo was very much relieved that one of his virtuous fits should come on just then, and made her preparations with a lightened heart, for Beth seemed more cheerful, and hoped she was doing the best for all.

“One thing I leave in your especial care,” she said, the night before she left.

“You mean your papers?” asked Beth.

“No, my boy. Be very good to him, won’t you?”

“Of course I will, but I can’t fill your place, and he’ll miss you sadly.”

“It won’t hurt him, so remember, I leave him in your charge, to plague, pet, and keep in order.”

“I’ll do my best, for your sake,” promised Beth, wondering why Jo looked at her so queerly.

When Laurie said good-by, he whispered significantly, “It won’t do a bit of good, Jo. My eye is on you, so mind what you do, or I’ll come and bring you home.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

JO'S JOURNAL

New York, November
Dear Marmee and Beth,
I'm going to write you a regular volume, for I've got heaps to tell, though I'm not a fine young lady traveling on the continent. When I lost sight of Father's dear old face, I felt a trifle blue, and might have shed a briny drop or two, if an Irish lady with four small children, all crying more or less, hadn't diverted my mind, for I amused myself by dropping gingerbread nuts over the seat every time they opened their mouths to roar.

Soon the sun came out, and taking it as a good omen, I cleared up likewise and enjoyed my journey with all my heart.

Mrs. Kirke welcomed me so kindly I felt at home at once, even in that big house full of strangers. She gave me a funny little sky parlor — all she had, but there is a stove in it, and a nice table in a sunny window, so I can sit here and write whenever I like. A fine view and a church tower opposite atone for the many stairs, and I took a fancy to my den on the spot. The nursery, where I am to teach and sew, is a pleasant room next Mrs. Kirke's private parlor, and the two little girls are pretty children, rather spoiled, I fancy, but they took to me after telling them The Seven Bad Pigs, and I've no doubt I shall make a model governess.

I am to have my meals with the children, if I prefer it to the great table, and for the present I do, for I am bashful, though no one will believe it.

"Now, my dear, make yourself at home," said Mrs. K. in her motherly way, "I'm on the drive from morning to night, as you may suppose with such a family, but a great anxiety will be off my mind if I know the children are safe with you. My rooms are always open to you, and your own shall be as comfortable as I can make it. There are some pleasant people in the house if you feel sociable, and your evenings are always free. Come to me if anything goes wrong, and be as happy as you can. There's the tea bell, I must run and change my cap." And off she bustled, leaving me to settle myself in my new nest.

As I went downstairs soon after, I saw something I liked. The flights are very long in this tall house, and as I stood waiting at the head of the third one for a little servant girl to lumber up, I saw a gentleman come along behind her, take the heavy hod of coal out of her hand, carry it all the way up, put it down at a door near by, and walk away, saying, with a kind nod and a foreign accent, “It goes better so. The little back is too young to haf such heaviness.”

Wasn’t it good of him? I like such things, for as Father says, trifles show character. When I mentioned it to Mrs. K., that evening, she laughed, and said, “That must have been Professor Bhaer, he’s always doing things of that sort.”

Mrs. K. told me he was from Berlin, very learned and good, but poor as a church mouse, and gives lessons to support himself and two little orphan nephews whom he is educating here, according to the wishes of his sister, who married an American. Not a very romantic story, but it interested me, and I was glad to hear that Mrs. K. lends him her parlor for some of his scholars. There is a glass door between it and the nursery, and I mean to peep at him, and then I’ll tell you how he looks. He’s almost forty, so it’s no harm, Marmee.

After tea and a go-to-bed romp with the little girls, I attacked the big workbasket, and had a quiet evening chatting with my new friend. I shall keep a journal-letter, and send it once a week, so goodnight, and more tomorrow.

Tuesday Eve

Had a lively time in my seminary this morning, for the children acted like Sancho, and at one time I really thought I should shake them all round. Some good angel inspired me to try gymnastics, and I kept it up till they were glad to sit down and keep still. After luncheon, the girl took them out for a walk, and I went to my needlework like little Mabel ‘with a willing mind’. I was thanking my stars that I’d learned to make nice buttonholes, when the parlor door opened and shut, and someone began to hum, Kennst Du Das Land, like a big bumblebee. It was dreadfully improper, I know, but I couldn’t resist the temptation, and lifting one end of the curtain before the glass door, I peeped in. Professor Bhaer was there, and while he arranged his books, I took a good look at him. A regular German — rather stout, with brown hair tumbled all over his head, a bushy beard, good nose, the kindest eyes I ever saw, and a splendid big voice that does one’s ears good, after our sharp or slipshod American gabble. His clothes were rusty, his hands were large, and he hadn’t a really handsome feature in his face, except his beautiful teeth, yet I liked him, for he had a fine head, his linen was very nice, and he looked like a gentleman, though two buttons were off his coat and there was a patch on one shoe. He looked sober in spite of his humming, till he went to the window to turn the hyacinth bulbs toward the sun, and stroke the cat, who received him like an old friend. Then he smiled, and when a tap came at the door, called out in a loud, brisk tone, “Herein!”

I was just going to run, when I caught sight of a morsel of a child carrying a big book, and stopped, to see what was going on.

“Me wants me Bhaer,” said the mite, slamming down her book and running to meet him.

“Thou shalt haf thy Bhaer. Come, then, and take a goot hug from him, my Tina,” said the Professor, catching her up with a laugh, and holding her so high over his head that she had to stoop her little face to kiss him.

“Now me mus tuddy my lessin,” went on the funny little thing. So he put her up at the table, opened the great dictionary she had brought, and gave her a paper and pencil, and she scribbled away, turning a leaf now and then, and passing her little fat finger down the page, as if finding a word, so soberly that I nearly betrayed myself by a laugh, while Mr. Bhaer stood stroking her pretty hair with a fatherly look that made me think she must be his own, though she looked more French than German.

Another knock and the appearance of two young ladies sent me back to my work, and there I virtuously remained through all the noise and gabbling that went on next door. One of the girls kept laughing affectedly, and saying, “Now Professor,” in a coquettish tone, and the other pronounced her German with an accent that must have made it hard for him to keep sober.

Both seemed to try his patience sorely, for more than once I heard him say emphatically, “No, no, it is not so, you haf not attend to what I say,” and once there was a loud rap, as if he struck the table with his book, followed by the despairing exclamation, “Prut! It all goes bad this day.”

Poor man, I pitied him, and when the girls were gone, took just one more peep to see if he survived it. He seemed to have thrown himself back in his chair, tired out, and sat there with his eyes shut till the clock struck two, when he jumped up, put his books in his pocket, as if ready for another lesson, and taking little Tina who had fallen asleep on the sofa in his arms, he carried her quietly away. I fancy he has a hard life of it. Mrs. Kirke asked me if I wouldn’t go down to the five o’clock dinner, and feeling a little bit homesick, I thought I would, just to see what sort of people are under the same roof with me. So I made myself respectable and tried to slip in behind Mrs. Kirke, but as she is short and I’m tall, my efforts at concealment were rather a failure. She gave me a seat by her, and after my face cooled off, I plucked up courage and looked about me. The long table was full, and every one intent on getting their dinner, the gentlemen especially, who seemed to be eating on time, for they bolted in every sense of the word, vanishing as soon as they were done. There was the usual assortment of young men absorbed in themselves, young couples absorbed in each other, married ladies in their babies, and old gentlemen in politics. I don’t think I shall care to have much to do with any of them, except one sweetfaced maiden lady, who looks as if she had something in her.

Cast away at the very bottom of the table was the Professor, shouting answers to the questions of a very inquisitive, deaf old gentleman on one side, and talking philosophy with a Frenchman on the other. If Amy had been here, she’d have turned her back on him forever because, sad to relate, he had a great appetite, and shoveled in his dinner in a manner which would have horrified ‘her ladyship’. I didn’t mind, for I like ‘to see folks eat with a relish’, as Hannah says, and the poor man must have needed a deal of food after teaching idiots all day.

As I went upstairs after dinner, two of the young men were settling their hats before the hall mirror, and I heard one say low to the other, “Who’s the new party?”

“Governess, or something of that sort.”

“What the deuce is she at our table for?”

“Friend of the old lady’s.”

“Handsome head, but no style.”

“Not a bit of it. Give us a light and come on.”

I felt angry at first, and then I didn’t care, for a governess is as good as a clerk, and I’ve got sense, if I haven’t style, which is more than some people have, judging from the remarks of the elegant beings who clattered away, smoking like bad chimneys. I hate ordinary people!

Thursday

Yesterday was a quiet day spent in teaching, sewing, and writing in my little room, which is very cozy, with a light and fire. I picked up a few bits of news and was introduced to the Professor. It seems that Tina is the child of the Frenchwoman who does the fine ironing in the laundry here. The little thing has lost her heart to Mr. Bhaer, and follows him about the house like a dog whenever he is at home, which delights him, as he is very fond of children, though a ‘bacheldore’. Kitty and Minnie Kirke likewise regard him with affection, and tell all sorts of stories about the plays he invents, the presents he brings, and the splendid tales he tells. The younger men quiz him, it seems, call him Old Fritz, Lager Beer, Ursa Major, and make all manner of jokes on his name. But he enjoys it like a boy, Mrs. Kirke says, and takes it so good-naturedly that they all like him in spite of his foreign ways.

The maiden lady is a Miss Norton, rich, cultivated, and kind. She spoke to me at dinner today (for I went to table again, it’s such fun to watch people), and asked me to come and see her at her room. She has fine books and pictures, knows interesting persons, and seems friendly, so I shall make myself agreeable, for I do want to get into good society, only it isn’t the same sort that Amy likes.

I was in our parlor last evening when Mr. Bhaer came in with some newspapers for Mrs. Kirke. She wasn’t there, but Minnie, who is a little old woman, introduced me very prettily. “This is Mamma’s friend, Miss March.”

“Yes, and she’s jolly and we like her lots,” added Kitty, who is an ‘enfant terrible’.

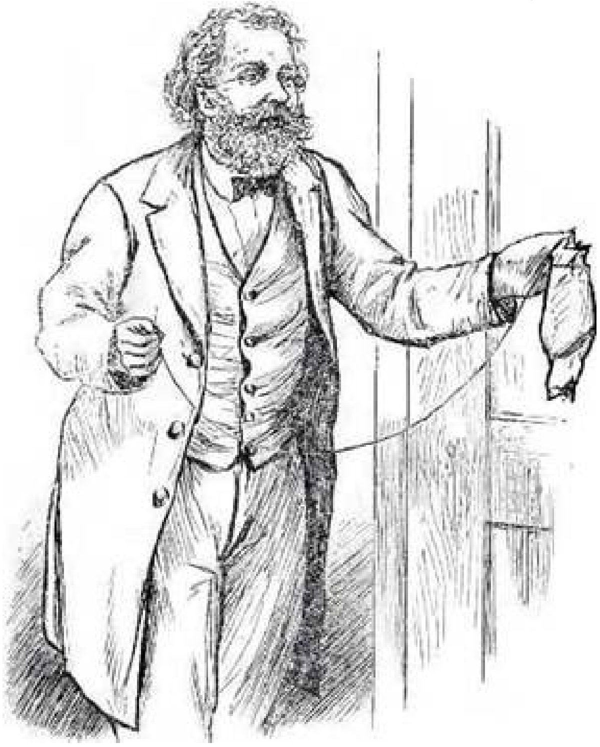
We both bowed, and then we laughed, for the prim introduction and the blunt addition were rather a comical contrast.

“Ah, yes, I hear these naughty ones go to vex you, Mees Marsch. If so again, call at me and I come,” he said, with a threatening frown that delighted the little wretches.

I promised I would, and he departed, but it seems as if I was doomed to see a good deal of him, for today as I passed his door on my way out, by accident I knocked against it with my umbrella. It flew open, and there he stood in his dressing gown, with a big blue sock on one hand and a darning needle in the other. He didn’t seem at all ashamed of it, for when I explained and hurried on, he waved his hand, sock and all, saying in his loud, cheerful way...

“You haf a fine day to make your walk. Bon voyage, Mademoiselle.”

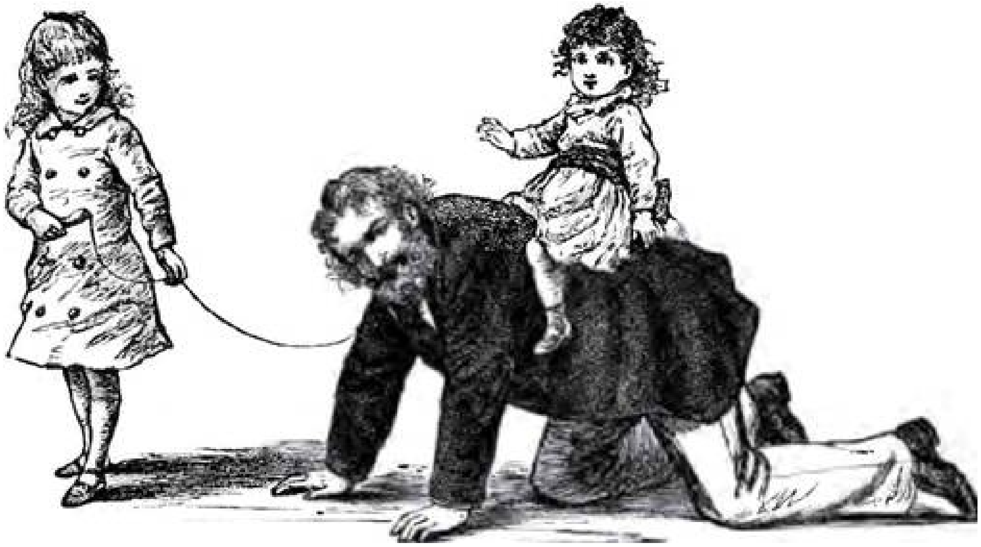
I laughed all the way downstairs, but it was a little pathetic, also to think of the poor man having to mend his own clothes. The German gentlemen embroider, I know, but darning hose is another thing and not so pretty.



Saturday

Nothing has happened to write about, except a call on Miss Norton, who has a room full of pretty things, and who was very charming, for she showed me all her treasures, and asked me if I would sometimes go with her to lectures and concerts, as her escort, if I enjoyed them. She put it as a favor, but I'm sure Mrs. Kirke has told her about us, and she does it out of kindness to me. I'm as proud as Lucifer, but such favors from such people don't burden me, and I accepted gratefully.

When I got back to the nursery there was such an uproar in the parlor that I looked in, and there was Mr. Bhaer down on his hands and knees, with Tina on his back, Kitty leading him with a jump rope, and Minnie feeding two small boys with seedcakes, as they roared and ramped in cages built of chairs.



"We are playing nargerie," explained Kitty.

"Dis is mine effalunt!" added Tina, holding on by the Professor's hair.

"Mamma always allows us to do what we like Saturday afternoon, when Franz and Emil come, doesn't she, Mr. Bhaer?" said Minnie.

The 'effalunt' sat up, looking as much in earnest as any of them, and said soberly to me, "I gif you my wort it is so, if we make too large a noise you shall say Hush! to us, and we go more softly."

I promised to do so, but left the door open and enjoyed the fun as much as they did, for a more glorious frolic I never witnessed. They played tag and soldiers, danced and sang, and when it began to grow dark they all piled onto the sofa about the Professor, while he told charming fairy stories of the storks on the chimney tops, and the little 'koblods', who ride the snowflakes as they fall. I wish Americans were as simple and natural as Germans, don't you?

I'm so fond of writing, I should go spinning on forever if motives of economy didn't stop me, for though I've used thin paper and written fine, I tremble to think of the stamps this long letter will need. Pray forward Amy's as soon as you can spare them. My small news will sound very flat after her splendors, but you will like them, I know. Is Teddy studying so hard that he can't find time to write to his friends? Take good care of him for me, Beth, and tell me all about the babies, and give heaps of love to everyone. From your faithful Jo.

P.S. On reading over my letter, it strikes me as rather Bhaery, but I am always interested in odd people, and I really had nothing else to write about. Bless you!

DECEMBER

My Precious Betsey,

As this is to be a scribble-scrabble letter, I direct it to you, for it may amuse you, and give you some idea of my goings on, for though quiet, they are rather amusing, for which, oh, be joyful! After what Amy would call Herculaneum efforts, in the way of mental and moral agriculture, my young ideas begin to shoot and my little twigs to bend as I could wish. They are not so interesting to me as Tina and the boys, but I do my duty by them, and they are fond of me. Franz and Emil are jolly little lads, quite after my own heart, for the mixture of German and American spirit in them produces a constant state of effervescence. Saturday afternoons are riotous times, whether spent in the house or out, for on pleasant days they all go to walk, like a seminary, with the Professor and myself to keep order, and then such fun!

We are very good friends now, and I've begun to take lessons. I really couldn't help it, and it all came about in such a droll way that I must tell you. To begin at the beginning, Mrs. Kirke called to me one day as I passed Mr. Bhaer's room where she was rummaging.

"Did you ever see such a den, my dear? Just come and help me put these books to rights, for I've turned everything upside down, trying to discover what he has done with the six new handkerchiefs I gave him not long ago."

I went in, and while we worked I looked about me, for it was 'a den' to be sure. Books and papers everywhere, a broken meerschaum, and an old flute over the mantlepiece as if done with, a ragged bird without any tail chirped on one window seat, and a box of white mice adorned the other. Half-finished boats and bits of string lay among the manuscripts. Dirty little boots stood drying before the fire, and traces of the dearly beloved boys, for whom he makes a slave of himself, were to be seen all over the room. After a grand rummage three of the missing articles were found, one over the bird cage, one covered with ink, and a third burned brown, having been used as a holder.

"Such a man!" laughed good-natured Mrs. K., as she put the relics in the rag bay. "I suppose the others are torn up to rig ships, bandage cut fingers, or make kite tails. It's dreadful, but I can't scold him. He's so absent-minded and goodnatured, he lets those boys ride over him roughshod. I agreed to do his washing and mending, but he forgets to give out his things and I forget to look them over, so he comes to a sad pass sometimes."

“Let me mend them,” said I. “I don’t mind it, and he needn’t know. I’d like to, he’s so kind to me about bringing my letters and lending books.”

So I have got his things in order, and knit heels into two pairs of the socks, for they were boggled out of shape with his queer darns. Nothing was said, and I hoped he wouldn’t find it out, but one day last week he caught me at it. Hearing the lessons he gives to others has interested and amused me so much that I took a fancy to learn, for Tina runs in and out, leaving the door open, and I can hear. I had been sitting near this door, finishing off the last sock, and trying to understand what he said to a new scholar, who is as stupid as I am. The girl had gone, and I thought he had also, it was so still, and I was busily gabbling over a verb, and rocking to and fro in a most absurd way, when a little crow made me look up, and there was Mr. Bhaer looking and laughing quietly, while he made signs to Tina not to betray him.

“So!” he said, as I stopped and stared like a goose, “you peep at me, I peep at you, and this is not bad, but see, I am not pleasanting when I say, haf you a wish for German?”

“Yes, but you are too busy. I am too stupid to learn,” I blundered out, as red as a peony.

“Prut! We will make the time, and we fail not to find the sense. At efening I shall gif a little lesson with much gladness, for look you, Mees Marsch, I haf this debt to pay.” And he pointed to my work ‘Yes,’ they say to one another, these so kind ladies, ‘he is a stupid old fellow, he will see not what we do, he will never observe that his sock heels go not in holes any more, he will think his buttons grow out new when they fall, and believe that strings make theirselves.’ “Ah! But I haf an eye, and I see much. I haf a heart, and I feel thanks for this. Come, a little lesson then and now, or — no more good fairy works for me and mine.”

Of course I couldn’t say anything after that, and as it really is a splendid opportunity, I made the bargain, and we began. I took four lessons, and then I stuck fast in a grammatical bog. The Professor was very patient with me, but it must have been torment to him, and now and then he’d look at me with such an expression of mild despair that it was a toss-up with me whether to laugh or cry. I tried both ways, and when it came to a sniff or utter mortification and woe, he just threw the grammar on to the floor and marched out of the room. I felt myself disgraced and deserted forever, but didn’t blame him a particle, and was scrambling my papers together, meaning to rush upstairs and shake myself hard, when in he came, as brisk and beaming as if I’d covered myself in glory.

“Now we shall try a new way. You and I will read these pleasant little *marchen* together, and dig no more in that dry book, that goes in the corner for making us trouble.”

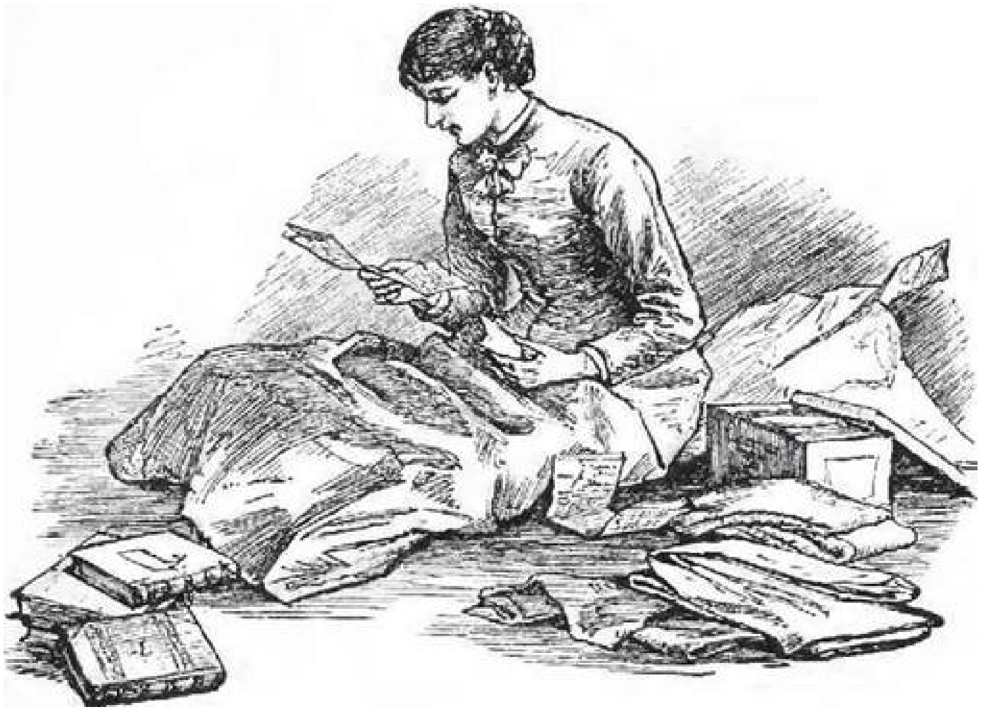
He spoke so kindly, and opened Hans Anderson's fairy tales so invitingly before me, that I was more ashamed than ever, and went at my lesson in a neck-or-nothing style that seemed to amuse him immensely. I forgot my bashfulness, and pegged away (no other word will express it) with all my might, tumbling over long words, pronouncing according to inspiration of the minute, and doing my very best. When I finished reading my first page, and stopped for breath, he clapped his hands and cried out in his hearty way, "Das ist gut! Now we go well! My turn. I do him in German, gif me your ear." And away he went, rumbling out the words with his strong voice and a relish which was good to see as well as hear. Fortunately the story was *The Constant Tin Soldier*, which is droll, you know, so I could laugh, and I did, though I didn't understand half he read, for I couldn't help it, he was so earnest, I so excited, and the whole thing so comical.

After that we got on better, and now I read my lessons pretty well, for this way of studying suits me, and I can see that the grammar gets tucked into the tales and poetry as one gives pills in jelly. I like it very much, and he doesn't seem tired of it yet, which is very good of him, isn't it? I mean to give him something on Christmas, for I dare not offer money. Tell me something nice, Marmee.

I'm glad Laurie seems so happy and busy, that he has given up smoking and lets his hair grow. You see Beth manages him better than I did. I'm not jealous, dear, do your best, only don't make a saint of him. I'm afraid I couldn't like him without a spice of human naughtiness. Read him bits of my letters. I haven't time to write much, and that will do just as well. Thank Heaven Beth continues so comfortable.

JANUARY

A Happy New Year to you all, my dearest family, which of course includes Mr. L. and a young man by the name of Teddy. I can't tell you how much I enjoyed your Christmas bundle, for I didn't get it till night and had given up hoping. Your letter came in the morning, but you said nothing about a parcel, meaning it for a surprise, so I was disappointed, for I'd had a 'kind of feeling' that you wouldn't forget me. I felt a little low in my mind as I sat up in my room after tea, and when the big, muddy, battered-looking bundle was brought to me, I just hugged it and pranced. It was so homey and refreshing that I sat down on the floor and read and looked and ate and laughed and cried, in my usual absurd way. The things were just what I wanted, and all the better for being made instead of bought. Beth's new 'ink bib' was capital, and Hannah's box of hard gingerbread will be a treasure. I'll be sure and wear the nice flannels you sent, Marmee, and read carefully the books Father has marked. Thank you all, heaps and heaps!



Speaking of books reminds me that I’m getting rich in that line, for on New Year’s Day Mr. Bhaer gave me a fine Shakespeare. It is one he values much, and I’ve often admired it, set up in the place of honor with his German Bible, Plato, Homer, and Milton, so you may imagine how I felt when he brought it down, without its cover, and showed me my own name in it, “from my friend Friedrich Bhaer”.

“You say often you wish a library. Here I gif you one, for between these lids (he meant covers) is many books in one. Read him well, and he will help you much, for the study of character in this book will help you to read it in the world and paint it with your pen.”

I thanked him as well as I could, and talk now about ‘my library’, as if I had a hundred books. I never knew how much there was in Shakespeare before, but then I never had a Bhaer to explain it to me. Now don’t laugh at his horrid name. It isn’t pronounced either Bear or Beer, as people will say it, but something between the two, as only Germans can give it. I’m glad you both like what I tell you about him, and hope you will know him some day. Mother would admire his warm heart, Father his wise head. I admire both, and feel rich in my new ‘friend Friedrich Bhaer’.

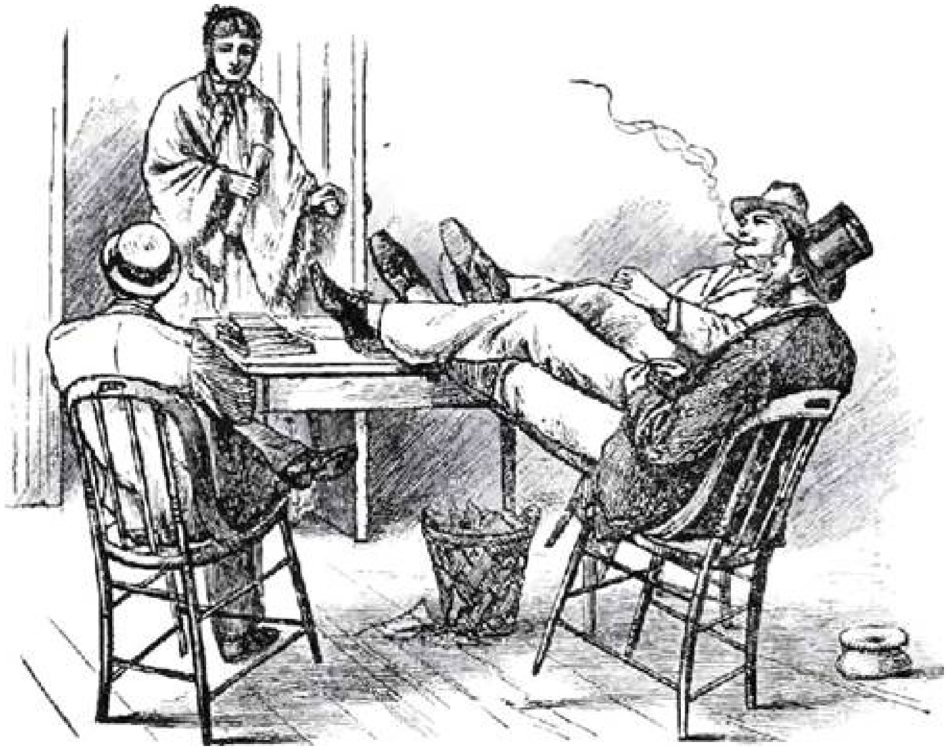
Not having much money, or knowing what he’d like, I got several little things, and put them about the room, where he would find them unexpectedly. They were useful, pretty, or funny, a new standish on his table, a little vase for his flower, he always has one, or a bit of green in a glass, to keep him fresh, he says, and a holder for his blower, so that he needn’t burn up what Amy calls ‘mouchoirs’. I made it like those Beth invented, a big butterfly with a fat body, and black and yellow wings, worsted feelers, and bead eyes. It took his fancy immensely, and he put it on his mantlepiece as an article of virtue, so it was rather a failure after all. Poor as he is, he didn’t forget a servant or a child in the house, and not a soul here, from the French laundrywoman to Miss Norton forgot him. I was so glad of that.

They got up a masquerade, and had a gay time New Year’s Eve. I didn’t mean to go down, having no dress. But at the last minute, Mrs. Kirke remembered some old brocades, and Miss Norton lent me lace and feathers. So I dressed up as Mrs. Malaprop, and sailed in with a mask on. No one knew me, for I disguised my voice, and no one dreamed of the silent, haughty Miss March (for they think I am very stiff and cool, most of them, and so I am to whippersnappers) could dance and dress, and burst out into a ‘nice derangement of epitaphs, like an allegory on the banks of the Nile’. I enjoyed it very much, and when we unmasked it was fun to see them stare at me. I heard one of the young men tell another that he knew I’d been an actress, in fact, he thought he remembered seeing me at one of the minor theaters. Meg will relish that joke. Mr. Bhaer was Nick Bottom, and Tina was Titania, a perfect little fairy in his arms. To see them dance was ‘quite a landscape’, to use a Teddyism.

I had a very happy New Year, after all, and when I thought it over in my room, I felt as if I was getting on a little in spite of my many failures, for I’m cheerful all the time now, work with a will, and take more interest in other people than I used to, which is satisfactory. Bless you all! Ever your loving... Jo

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

FRIEND



Though very happy in the social atmosphere about her, and very busy with the daily work that earned her bread and made it sweeter for the effort, Jo still found time for literary labors. The purpose which now took possession of her was a natural one to a poor and ambitious girl, but the means she took to gain her end were not the best. She saw that money conferred power, money and power, therefore, she resolved to have, not to be used for herself alone, but for those whom she loved more than life. The dream of filling home with comforts, giving Beth everything she wanted, from strawberries in winter to an organ in her bedroom, going abroad herself, and always having more than enough, so that she might indulge in the luxury of charity, had been for years Jo's most cherished castle in the air.

The prize-story experience had seemed to open a way which might, after long traveling and much uphill work, lead to this delightful chateau en Espagne. But the novel disaster quenched her courage for a time, for public opinion is a giant which has frightened stouter-hearted Jacks on bigger beanstalks than hers. Like that immortal hero, she reposed awhile after the first attempt, which resulted in a tumble and the least lovely of the giant's treasures, if I remember rightly. But the 'up again and take another' spirit was as strong in Jo as in Jack, so she scrambled up on the shady side this time and got more booty, but nearly left behind her what was far more precious than the moneybags.

She took to writing sensation stories, for in those dark ages, even all-perfect America read rubbish. She told no one, but concocted a 'thrilling tale', and boldly carried it herself to Mr. Dashwood, editor of the Weekly Volcano. She had never read Sartor Resartus, but she had a womanly instinct that clothes possess an influence more powerful over many than the worth of character or the magic of manners. So she dressed herself in her best, and trying to persuade herself that she was neither excited nor nervous, bravely climbed two pairs of dark and dirty stairs to find herself in a disorderly room, a cloud of cigar smoke, and the presence of three gentlemen, sitting with their heels rather higher than their hats, which articles of dress none of them took the trouble to remove on her appearance. Somewhat daunted by this reception, Jo hesitated on the threshold, murmuring in much embarrassment...

"Excuse me, I was looking for the Weekly Volcano office. I wished to see Mr. Dashwood."

Down went the highest pair of heels, up rose the smokiest gentleman, and carefully cherishing his cigar between his fingers, he advanced with a nod and a countenance expressive of nothing but sleep. Feeling that she must get through the matter somehow, Jo produced her manuscript and, blushing redder and redder with each sentence, blundered out fragments of the little speech carefully prepared for the occasion.

"A friend of mine desired me to offer — a story — just as an experiment — would like your opinion — be glad to write more if this suits."

While she blushed and blundered, Mr. Dashwood had taken the manuscript, and was turning over the leaves with a pair of rather dirty fingers, and casting critical glances up and down the neat pages.

"Not a first attempt, I take it?" observing that the pages were numbered, covered only on one side, and not tied up with a ribbon — sure sign of a novice.

"No, sir. She has had some experience, and got a prize for a tale in the *Blarneystone Banner*."

"Oh, did she?" and Mr. Dashwood gave Jo a quick look, which seemed to take note of everything she had on, from the bow in her bonnet to the buttons on her boots. "Well, you can leave it, if you like. We've more of this sort of thing on hand than we know what to do with at present, but I'll run my eye over it, and give you an answer next week."

Now, Jo did *not* like to leave it, for Mr. Dashwood didn’t suit her at all, but, under the circumstances, there was nothing for her to do but bow and walk away, looking particularly tall and dignified, as she was apt to do when nettled or abashed. Just then she was both, for it was perfectly evident from the knowing glances exchanged among the gentlemen that her little fiction of ‘my friend’ was considered a good joke, and a laugh, produced by some inaudible remark of the editor, as he closed the door, completed her discomfiture. Half resolving never to return, she went home, and worked off her irritation by stitching pinafores vigorously, and in an hour or two was cool enough to laugh over the scene and long for next week.

When she went again, Mr. Dashwood was alone, whereat she rejoiced. Mr. Dashwood was much wider awake than before, which was agreeable, and Mr. Dashwood was not too deeply absorbed in a cigar to remember his manners, so the second interview was much more comfortable than the first.

“We’ll take this (editors never say I), if you don’t object to a few alterations. It’s too long, but omitting the passages I’ve marked will make it just the right length,” he said, in a businesslike tone.

Jo hardly knew her own MS. again, so crumpled and underscored were its pages and paragraphs, but feeling as a tender parent might on being asked to cut off her baby’s legs in order that it might fit into a new cradle, she looked at the marked passages and was surprised to find that all the moral reflections — which she had carefully put in as ballast for much romance — had been stricken out.

“But, Sir, I thought every story should have some sort of a moral, so I took care to have a few of my sinners repent.”

Mr. Dashwoods’s editorial gravity relaxed into a smile, for Jo had forgotten her ‘friend’, and spoken as only an author could.

“People want to be amused, not preached at, you know. Morals don’t sell nowadays.” Which was not quite a correct statement, by the way.

“You think it would do with these alterations, then?”

“Yes, it’s a new plot, and pretty well worked up — language good, and so on,” was Mr. Dashwood’s affable reply.

“What do you — that is, what compensation — ” began Jo, not exactly knowing how to express herself.

“Oh, yes, well, we give from twenty-five to thirty for things of this sort. Pay when it comes out,” returned Mr. Dashwood, as if that point had escaped him. Such trifles do escape the editorial mind, it is said.

“Very well, you can have it,” said Jo, handing back the story with a satisfied air, for after the dollar-a-column work, even twenty-five seemed good pay.

"Shall I tell my friend you will take another if she has one better than this?" asked Jo, unconscious of her little slip of the tongue, and emboldened by her success.

"Well, we'll look at it. Can't promise to take it. Tell her to make it short and spicy, and never mind the moral. What name would your friend like to put on it?" in a careless tone.

"None at all, if you please, she doesn't wish her name to appear and has no nom de plume," said Jo, blushing in spite of herself.

"Just as she likes, of course. The tale will be out next week. Will you call for the money, or shall I send it?" asked Mr. Dashwood, who felt a natural desire to know who his new contributor might be.

"I'll call. Good morning, Sir."

As she departed, Mr. Dashwood put up his feet, with the graceful remark, "Poor and proud, as usual, but she'll do."

Following Mr. Dashwood's directions, and making Mrs. Northbury her model, Jo rashly took a plunge into the frothy sea of sensational literature, but thanks to the life preserver thrown her by a friend, she came up again not much the worse for her ducking.

Like most young scribblers, she went abroad for her characters and scenery, and banditti, counts, gypsies, nuns, and duchesses appeared upon her stage, and played their parts with as much accuracy and spirit as could be expected. Her readers were not particular about such trifles as grammar, punctuation, and probability, and Mr. Dashwood graciously permitted her to fill his columns at the lowest prices, not thinking it necessary to tell her that the real cause of his hospitality was the fact that one of his hacks, on being offered higher wages, had basely left him in the lurch.

She soon became interested in her work, for her emaciated purse grew stout, and the little hoard she was making to take Beth to the mountains next summer grew slowly but surely as the weeks passed. One thing disturbed her satisfaction, and that was that she did not tell them at home. She had a feeling that Father and Mother would not approve, and preferred to have her own way first, and beg pardon afterward. It was easy to keep her secret, for no name appeared with her stories. Mr. Dashwood had of course found it out very soon, but promised to be dumb, and for a wonder kept his word.

She thought it would do her no harm, for she sincerely meant to write nothing of which she would be ashamed, and quieted all pricks of conscience by anticipations of the happy minute when she should show her earnings and laugh over her well-kept secret.

But Mr. Dashwood rejected any but thrilling tales, and as thrills could not be produced except by harrowing up the souls of the readers, history and romance, land and sea, science and art, police records and lunatic asylums, had to be ransacked for the purpose. Jo soon found that her innocent experience had given her but few glimpses of the tragic world which underlies society, so regarding it in a business light, she set about supplying her deficiencies with characteristic energy. Eager to find material for stories, and bent on making them original in plot, if not masterly in execution, she searched newspapers for accidents, incidents, and crimes. She excited the suspicions of public librarians by asking for works on poisons. She studied faces in the street, and characters, good, bad, and indifferent, all about her. She delved in the dust of ancient times for facts or fictions so old that they were as good as new, and introduced herself to folly, sin, and misery, as well as her limited opportunities allowed. She thought she was prospering finely, but unconsciously she was beginning to desecrate some of the womanliest attributes of a woman’s character. She was living in bad society, and imaginary though it was, its influence affected her, for she was feeding heart and fancy on dangerous and unsubstantial food, and was fast brushing the innocent bloom from her nature by a premature acquaintance with the darker side of life, which comes soon enough to all of us.

She was beginning to feel rather than see this, for much describing of other people’s passions and feelings set her to studying and speculating about her own, a morbid amusement in which healthy young minds do not voluntarily indulge. Wrongdoing always brings its own punishment, and when Jo most needed hers, she got it.

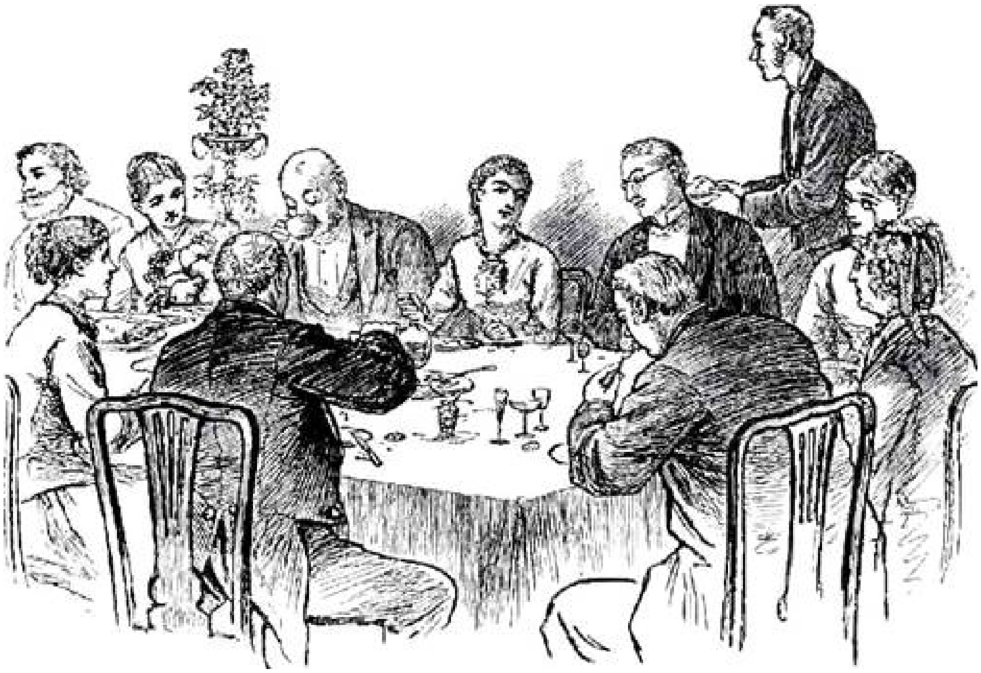
I don’t know whether the study of Shakespeare helped her to read character, or the natural instinct of a woman for what was honest, brave, and strong, but while endowing her imaginary heroes with every perfection under the sun, Jo was discovering a live hero, who interested her in spite of many human imperfections. Mr. Bhaer, in one of their conversations, had advised her to study simple, true, and lovely characters, wherever she found them, as good training for a writer. Jo took him at his word, for she coolly turned round and studied him — a proceeding which would have much surprised him, had he known it, for the worthy Professor was very humble in his own conceit.

Why everybody liked him was what puzzled Jo, at first. He was neither rich nor great, young nor handsome, in no respect what is called fascinating, imposing, or brilliant, and yet he was as attractive as a genial fire, and people seemed to gather about him as naturally as about a warm hearth. He was poor, yet always appeared to be giving something away; a stranger, yet everyone was his friend; no longer young, but as happy-hearted as a boy; plain and peculiar, yet his face looked beautiful to many, and his oddities were freely forgiven for his sake. Jo often watched him, trying to discover the charm, and at last decided that it was benevolence which worked the miracle. If he had any sorrow, ‘it sat with its head under its wing’, and he turned only his sunny side to the world. There were lines upon his forehead, but Time seemed to have touched him gently, remembering how kind he was to others. The pleasant curves about his mouth were the memorials of many friendly words and cheery laughs, his eyes were never cold or hard, and his big hand had a warm, strong grasp that was more expressive than words.

His very clothes seemed to partake of the hospitable nature of the wearer. They looked as if they were at ease, and liked to make him comfortable. His capacious waistcoat was suggestive of a large heart underneath. His rusty coat had a social air, and the baggy pockets plainly proved that little hands often went in empty and came out full. His very boots were benevolent, and his collars never stiff and raspy like other people’s.

“That’s it!” said Jo to herself, when she at length discovered that genuine good will toward one’s fellow men could beautify and dignify even a stout German teacher, who shoveled in his dinner, darned his own socks, and was burdened with the name of Bhaer.

Jo valued goodness highly, but she also possessed a most feminine respect for intellect, and a little discovery which she made about the Professor added much to her regard for him. He never spoke of himself, and no one ever knew that in his native city he had been a man much honored and esteemed for learning and integrity, till a countryman came to see him. He never spoke of himself, and in a conversation with Miss Norton divulged the pleasing fact. From her Jo learned it, and liked it all the better because Mr. Bhaer had never told it. She felt proud to know that he was an honored Professor in Berlin, though only a poor language-master in America, and his homely, hard-working life was much beautified by the spice of romance which this discovery gave it. Another and a better gift than intellect was shown her in a most unexpected manner. Miss Norton had the entree into most society, which Jo would have had no chance of seeing but for her. The solitary woman felt an interest in the ambitious girl, and kindly conferred many favors of this sort both on Jo and the Professor. She took them with her one night to a select symposium, held in honor of several celebrities.



Jo went prepared to bow down and adore the mighty ones whom she had worshiped with youthful enthusiasm afar off. But her reverence for genius received a severe shock that night, and it took her some time to recover from the discovery that the great creatures were only men and women after all. Imagine her dismay, on stealing a glance of timid admiration at the poet whose lines suggested an ethereal being fed on ‘spirit, fire, and dew’, to behold him devouring his supper with an ardor which flushed his intellectual countenance. Turning as from a fallen idol, she made other discoveries which rapidly dispelled her romantic illusions. The great novelist vibrated between two decanters with the regularity of a pendulum; the famous divine flirted openly with one of the Madame de Staels of the age, who looked daggers at another Corinne, who was amiably satirizing her, after outmaneuvering her in efforts to absorb the profound philosopher, who imbibed tea Johnsonianly and appeared to slumber, the loquacity of the lady rendering speech impossible. The scientific celebrities, forgetting their mollusks and glacial periods, gossiped about art, while devoting themselves to oysters and ices with characteristic energy; the young musician, who was charming the city like a second Orpheus, talked horses; and the specimen of the British nobility present happened to be the most ordinary man of the party.

Before the evening was half over, Jo felt so completely disillusioned, that she sat down in a corner to recover herself. Mr. Bhaer soon joined her, looking rather out of his element, and presently several of the philosophers, each mounted on his hobby, came ambling up to hold an intellectual tournament in the recess. The conversations were miles beyond Jo’s comprehension, but she enjoyed it, though

Kant and Hegel were unknown gods, the Subjective and Objective unintelligible terms, and the only thing ‘evolved from her inner consciousness’ was a bad headache after it was all over. It dawned upon her gradually that the world was being picked to pieces, and put together on new and, according to the talkers, on infinitely better principles than before, that religion was in a fair way to be reasoned into nothingness, and intellect was to be the only God. Jo knew nothing about philosophy or metaphysics of any sort, but a curious excitement, half pleasurable, half painful, came over her as she listened with a sense of being turned adrift into time and space, like a young balloon out on a holiday.

She looked round to see how the Professor liked it, and found him looking at her with the grimmest expression she had ever seen him wear. He shook his head and beckoned her to come away, but she was fascinated just then by the freedom of Speculative Philosophy, and kept her seat, trying to find out what the wise gentlemen intended to rely upon after they had annihilated all the old beliefs.

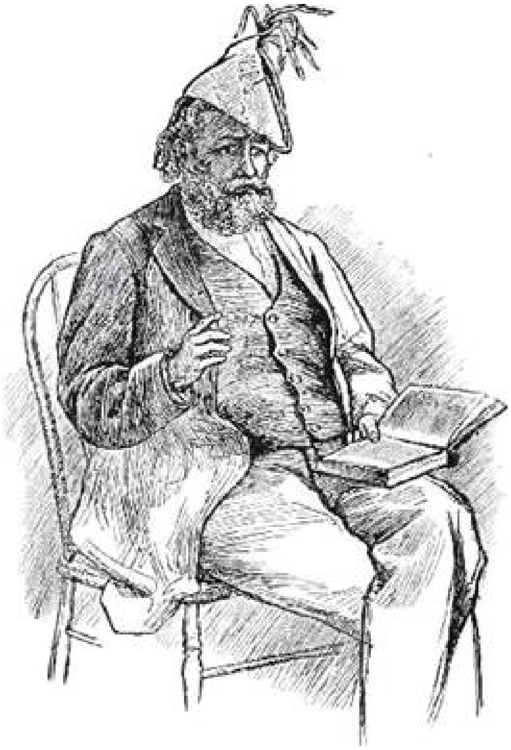
Now, Mr. Bhaer was a diffident man and slow to offer his own opinions, not because they were unsettled, but too sincere and earnest to be lightly spoken. As he glanced from Jo to several other young people, attracted by the brilliancy of the philosophic pyrotechnics, he knit his brows and longed to speak, fearing that some inflammable young soul would be led astray by the rockets, to find when the display was over that they had only an empty stick or a scorched hand.

He bore it as long as he could, but when he was appealed to for an opinion, he blazed up with honest indignation and defended religion with all the eloquence of truth — an eloquence which made his broken English musical and his plain face beautiful. He had a hard fight, for the wise men argued well, but he didn’t know when he was beaten and stood to his colors like a man. Somehow, as he talked, the world got right again to Jo. The old beliefs, that had lasted so long, seemed better than the new. God was not a blind force, and immortality was not a pretty fable, but a blessed fact. She felt as if she had solid ground under her feet again, and when Mr. Bhaer paused, outtalked but not one whit convinced, Jo wanted to clap her hands and thank him.

She did neither, but she remembered the scene, and gave the Professor her heartiest respect, for she knew it cost him an effort to speak out then and there, because his conscience would not let him be silent. She began to see that character is a better possession than money, rank, intellect, or beauty, and to feel that if greatness is what a wise man has defined it to be, ‘truth, reverence, and good will’, then her friend Friedrich Bhaer was not only good, but great.

This belief strengthened daily. She valued his esteem, she coveted his respect, she wanted to be worthy of his friendship, and just when the wish was sincerest, she came near to losing everything. It all grew out of a cocked hat, for one evening the Professor came in to give Jo her lesson with a paper soldier cap on his head, which Tina had put there and he had forgotten to take off.

"It's evident he doesn't look in his glass before coming down," thought Jo, with a smile, as he said "Goot efening," and sat soberly down, quite unconscious of the ludicrous contrast between his subject and his headgear, for he was going to read her the Death of Wallenstein.



She said nothing at first, for she liked to hear him laugh out his big, hearty laugh when anything funny happened, so she left him to discover it for himself, and presently forgot all about it, for to hear a German read Schiller is rather an absorbing occupation. After the reading came the lesson, which was a lively one, for Jo was in a gay mood that night, and the cocked hat kept her eyes dancing with merriment. The Professor didn't know what to make of her, and stopped at last to ask with an air of mild surprise that was irresistible. . .

"Mees Marsch, for what do you laugh in your master's face? Haf you no respect for me, that you go on so bad?"

"How can I be respectful, Sir, when you forget to take your hat off?" said Jo.

Lifting his hand to his head, the absent-minded Professor gravely felt and removed the little cocked hat, looked at it a minute, and then threw back his head and laughed like a merry bass viol.

"Ah! I see him now, it is that imp Tina who makes me a fool with my cap. Well, it is nothing, but see you, if this lesson goes not well, you too shall wear him."

But the lesson did not go at all for a few minutes because Mr. Bhaer caught sight of a picture on the hat, and unfolding it, said with great disgust, “I wish these papers did not come in the house. They are not for children to see, nor young people to read. It is not well, and I haf no patience with those who make this harm.”

Jo glanced at the sheet and saw a pleasing illustration composed of a lunatic, a corpse, a villain, and a viper. She did not like it, but the impulse that made her turn it over was not one of displeasure but fear, because for a minute she fancied the paper was the Volcano. It was not, however, and her panic subsided as she remembered that even if it had been and one of her own tales in it, there would have been no name to betray her. She had betrayed herself, however, by a look and a blush, for though an absent man, the Professor saw a good deal more than people fancied. He knew that Jo wrote, and had met her down among the newspaper offices more than once, but as she never spoke of it, he asked no questions in spite of a strong desire to see her work. Now it occurred to him that she was doing what she was ashamed to own, and it troubled him. He did not say to himself, “It is none of my business. I’ve no right to say anything,” as many people would have done. He only remembered that she was young and poor, a girl far away from mother’s love and father’s care, and he was moved to help her with an impulse as quick and natural as that which would prompt him to put out his hand to save a baby from a puddle. All this flashed through his mind in a minute, but not a trace of it appeared in his face, and by the time the paper was turned, and Jo’s needle threaded, he was ready to say quite naturally, but very gravely...

“Yes, you are right to put it from you. I do not think that good young girls should see such things. They are made pleasant to some, but I would more rather give my boys gunpowder to play with than this bad trash.”

“All may not be bad, only silly, you know, and if there is a demand for it, I don’t see any harm in supplying it. Many very respectable people make an honest living out of what are called sensation stories,” said Jo, scratching gathers so energetically that a row of little slits followed her pin.

“There is a demand for whisky, but I think you and I do not care to sell it. If the respectable people knew what harm they did, they would not feel that the living was honest. They haf no right to put poison in the sugarplum, and let the small ones eat it. No, they should think a little, and sweep mud in the street before they do this thing.”

Mr. Bhaer spoke warmly, and walked to the fire, crumpling the paper in his hands. Jo sat still, looking as if the fire had come to her, for her cheeks burned long after the cocked hat had turned to smoke and gone harmlessly up the chimney.

“I should like much to send all the rest after him,” muttered the Professor, coming back with a relieved air.

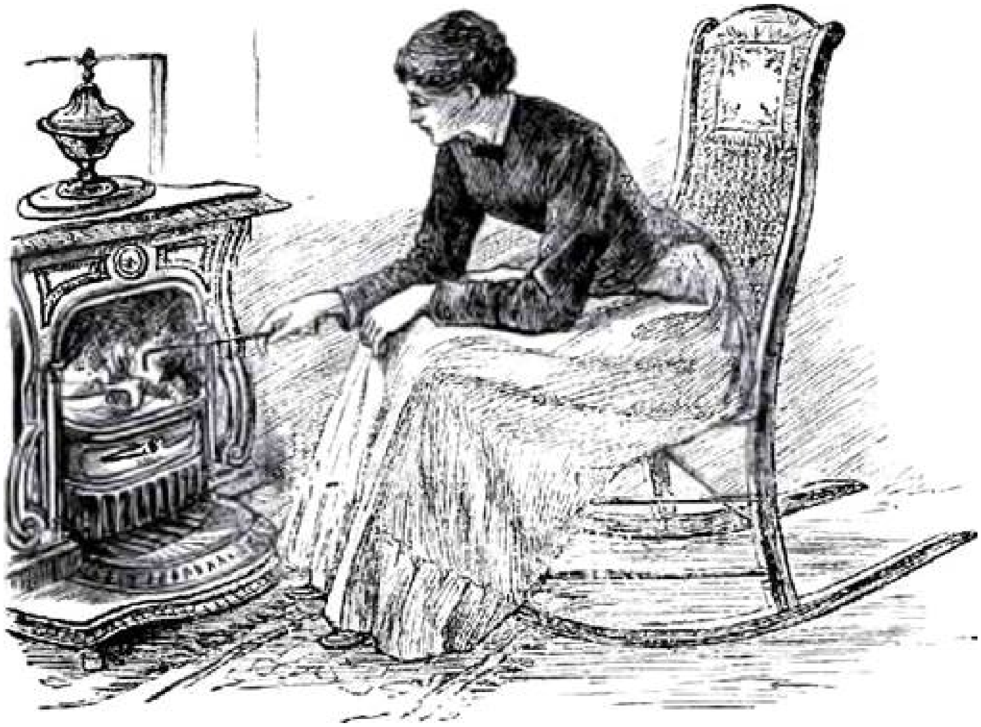
Jo thought what a blaze her pile of papers upstairs would make, and her hard-earned money lay rather heavily on her conscience at that minute. Then she thought consolingly to herself, “Mine are not like that, they are only silly, never bad, so I won’t be worried,” and taking up her book, she said, with a studious face, “Shall we go on, Sir? I’ll be very good and proper now.”

“I shall hope so,” was all he said, but he meant more than she imagined, and the grave, kind look he gave her made her feel as if the words Weekly Volcano were printed in large type on her forehead.

As soon as she went to her room, she got out her papers, and carefully reread every one of her stories. Being a little shortsighted, Mr. Bhaer sometimes used eye glasses, and Jo had tried them once, smiling to see how they magnified the fine print of her book. Now she seemed to have on the Professor’s mental or moral spectacles also, for the faults of these poor stories glared at her dreadfully and filled her with dismay.

“They are trash, and will soon be worse trash if I go on, for each is more sensational than the last. I’ve gone blindly on, hurting myself and other people, for the sake of money. I know it’s so, for I can’t read this stuff in sober earnest without being horribly ashamed of it, and what should I do if they were seen at home or Mr. Bhaer got hold of them?”

Jo turned hot at the bare idea, and stuffed the whole bundle into her stove, nearly setting the chimney afire with the blaze.



"Yes, that's the best place for such inflammable nonsense. I'd better burn the house down, I suppose, than let other people blow themselves up with my gunpowder," she thought as she watched the Demon of the Jura whisk away, a little black cinder with fiery eyes.

But when nothing remained of all her three month's work except a heap of ashes and the money in her lap, Jo looked sober, as she sat on the floor, wondering what she ought to do about her wages.

"I think I haven't done much harm yet, and may keep this to pay for my time," she said, after a long meditation, adding impatiently, "I almost wish I hadn't any conscience, it's so inconvenient. If I didn't care about doing right, and didn't feel uncomfortable when doing wrong, I should get on capitally. I can't help wishing sometimes, that Mother and Father hadn't been so particular about such things."

Ah, Jo, instead of wishing that, thank God that 'Father and Mother were particular', and pity from your heart those who have no such guardians to hedge them round with principles which may seem like prison walls to impatient youth, but which will prove sure foundations to build character upon in womanhood.

Jo wrote no more sensational stories, deciding that the money did not pay for her share of the sensation, but going to the other extreme, as is the way with people of her stamp, she took a course of Mrs. Sherwood, Miss Edgeworth, and Hannah More, and then produced a tale which might have been more properly called an essay or a sermon, so intensely moral was it. She had her doubts about it from the beginning, for her lively fancy and girlish romance felt as ill at ease in the new style as she would have done masquerading in the stiff and cumbrous costume of the last century. She sent this didactic gem to several markets, but it found no purchaser, and she was inclined to agree with Mr. Dashwood that morals didn't sell.

Then she tried a child's story, which she could easily have disposed of if she had not been mercenary enough to demand filthy lucre for it. The only person who offered enough to make it worth her while to try juvenile literature was a worthy gentleman who felt it his mission to convert all the world to his particular belief. But much as she liked to write for children, Jo could not consent to depict all her naughty boys as being eaten by bears or tossed by mad bulls because they did not go to a particular Sabbath school, nor all the good infants who did go as rewarded by every kind of bliss, from gilded gingerbread to escorts of angels when they departed this life with psalms or sermons on their lisping tongues. So nothing came of these trials, and Jo corked up her inkstand, and said in a fit of very wholesome humility...

"I don't know anything. I'll wait until I do before I try again, and meantime, 'sweep mud in the street' if I can't do better, that's honest, at least." Which decision proved that her second tumble down the beanstalk had done her some good.

While these internal revolutions were going on, her external life had been as busy and uneventful as usual, and if she sometimes looked serious or a little sad no one observed it but Professor Bhaer. He did it so quietly that Jo never knew he was watching to see if she would accept and profit by his reproof, but she stood the test, and he was satisfied, for though no words passed between them, he knew that she had given up writing. Not only did he guess it by the fact that the second finger of her right hand was no longer inky, but she spent her evenings downstairs now, was met no more among newspaper offices, and studied with a dogged patience, which assured him that she was bent on occupying her mind with something useful, if not pleasant.

He helped her in many ways, proving himself a true friend, and Jo was happy, for while her pen lay idle, she was learning other lessons besides German, and laying a foundation for the sensation story of her own life.

It was a pleasant winter and a long one, for she did not leave Mrs. Kirke till June. Everyone seemed sorry when the time came. The children were inconsolable, and Mr. Bhaer's hair stuck straight up all over his head, for he always rumpled it wildly when disturbed in mind.

"Going home? Ah, you are happy that you haf a home to go in," he said, when she told him, and sat silently pulling his beard in the corner, while she held a little levee on that last evening.

She was going early, so she bade them all goodbye overnight, and when his turn came, she said warmly, “Now, Sir, you won’t forget to come and see us, if you ever travel our way, will you? I’ll never forgive you if you do, for I want them all to know my friend.”

“Do you? Shall I come?” he asked, looking down at her with an eager expression which she did not see.

“Yes, come next month. Laurie graduates then, and you’d enjoy commencement as something new.”

“That is your best friend, of whom you speak?” he said in an altered tone.

“Yes, my boy Teddy. I’m very proud of him and should like you to see him.”

Jo looked up then, quite unconscious of anything but her own pleasure in the prospect of showing them to one another. Something in Mr. Bhaer’s face suddenly recalled the fact that she might find Laurie more than a ‘best friend’, and simply because she particularly wished not to look as if anything was the matter, she involuntarily began to blush, and the more she tried not to, the redder she grew. If it had not been for Tina on her knee. She didn’t know what would have become of her. Fortunately the child was moved to hug her, so she managed to hide her face an instant, hoping the Professor did not see it. But he did, and his own changed again from that momentary anxiety to its usual expression, as he said cordially...

“I fear I shall not make the time for that, but I wish the friend much success, and you all happiness. Gott bless you!” And with that, he shook hands warmly, shouldered Tina, and went away.

But after the boys were abed, he sat long before his fire with the tired look on his face and the ‘heimweh’, or homesickness, lying heavy at his heart. Once, when he remembered Jo as she sat with the little child in her lap and that new softness in her face, he leaned his head on his hands a minute, and then roamed about the room, as if in search of something that he could not find.

“It is not for me, I must not hope it now,” he said to himself, with a sigh that was almost a groan. Then, as if reproaching himself for the longing that he could not repress, he went and kissed the two tousled heads upon the pillow, took down his seldom-used meerschaum, and opened his Plato.

He did his best and did it manfully, but I don’t think he found that a pair of rampant boys, a pipe, or even the divine Plato, were very satisfactory substitutes for wife and child at home.

Early as it was, he was at the station next morning to see Jo off, and thanks to him, she began her solitary journey with the pleasant memory of a familiar face smiling its farewell, a bunch of violets to keep her company, and best of all, the happy thought, “Well, the winter’s gone, and I’ve written no books, earned no fortune, but I’ve made a friend worth having and I’ll try to keep him all my life.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

HEARTACHE

Whatever his motive might have been, Laurie studied to some purpose that year, for he graduated with honor, and gave the Latin oration with the grace of a Phillips and the eloquence of a Demosthenes, so his friends said. They were all there, his grandfather — oh, so proud — Mr. and Mrs. March, John and Meg, Jo and Beth, and all exulted over him with the sincere admiration which boys make light of at the time, but fail to win from the world by any after-triumphs.

“I’ve got to stay for this confounded supper, but I shall be home early tomorrow. You’ll come and meet me as usual, girls?” Laurie said, as he put the sisters into the carriage after the joys of the day were over. He said ‘girls’, but he meant Jo, for she was the only one who kept up the old custom. She had not the heart to refuse her splendid, successful boy anything, and answered warmly...

“I’ll come, Teddy, rain or shine, and march before you, playing ‘Hail the conquering hero comes’ on a jew’s-harp.”

Laurie thanked her with a look that made her think in a sudden panic, “Oh, deary me! I know he’ll say something, and then what shall I do?”

Evening meditation and morning work somewhat allayed her fears, and having decided that she wouldn’t be vain enough to think people were going to propose when she had given them every reason to know what her answer would be, she set forth at the appointed time, hoping Teddy wouldn’t do anything to make her hurt his poor feelings. A call at Meg’s, and a refreshing sniff and sip at the Daisy and Demijohn, still further fortified her for the tete-a-tete, but when she saw a stalwart figure looming in the distance, she had a strong desire to turn about and run away.

“Where’s the jew’s-harp, Jo?” cried Laurie, as soon as he was within speaking distance.

“I forgot it.” And Jo took heart again, for that salutation could not be called lover-like.

She always used to take his arm on these occasions, now she did not, and he made no complaint, which was a bad sign, but talked on rapidly about all sorts of faraway subjects, till they turned from the road into the little path that led homeward through the grove. Then he walked more slowly, suddenly lost his fine flow of language, and now and then a dreadful pause occurred. To rescue the conversation from one of the wells of silence into which it kept falling, Jo said hastily, “Now you must have a good long holiday!”

“I intend to.”

Something in his resolute tone made Jo look up quickly to find him looking down at her with an expression that assured her the dreaded moment had come, and made her put out her hand with an imploring, “No, Teddy. Please don’t!”

“I will, and you must hear me. It’s no use, Jo, we’ve got to have it out, and the sooner the better for both of us,” he answered, getting flushed and excited all at once.

“Say what you like then. I’ll listen,” said Jo, with a desperate sort of patience.

Laurie was a young lover, but he was in earnest, and meant to ‘have it out’, if he died in the attempt, so he plunged into the subject with characteristic impetuousity, saying in a voice that would get choky now and then, in spite of manful efforts to keep it steady...

“I’ve loved you ever since I’ve known you, Jo, couldn’t help it, you’ve been so good to me. I’ve tried to show it, but you wouldn’t let me. Now I’m going to make you hear, and give me an answer, for I can’t go on so any longer.”

“I wanted to save you this. I thought you’d understand...” began Jo, finding it a great deal harder than she expected.

“I know you did, but the girls are so queer you never know what they mean. They say no when they mean yes, and drive a man out of his wits just for the fun of it,” returned Laurie, entrenching himself behind an undeniable fact.

“I don’t. I never wanted to make you care for me so, and I went away to keep you from it if I could.”

“I thought so. It was like you, but it was no use. I only loved you all the more, and I worked hard to please you, and I gave up billiards and everything you didn’t like, and waited and never complained, for I hoped you’d love me, though I’m not half good enough...” Here there was a choke that couldn’t be controlled, so he decapitated buttercups while he cleared his ‘confounded throat’.

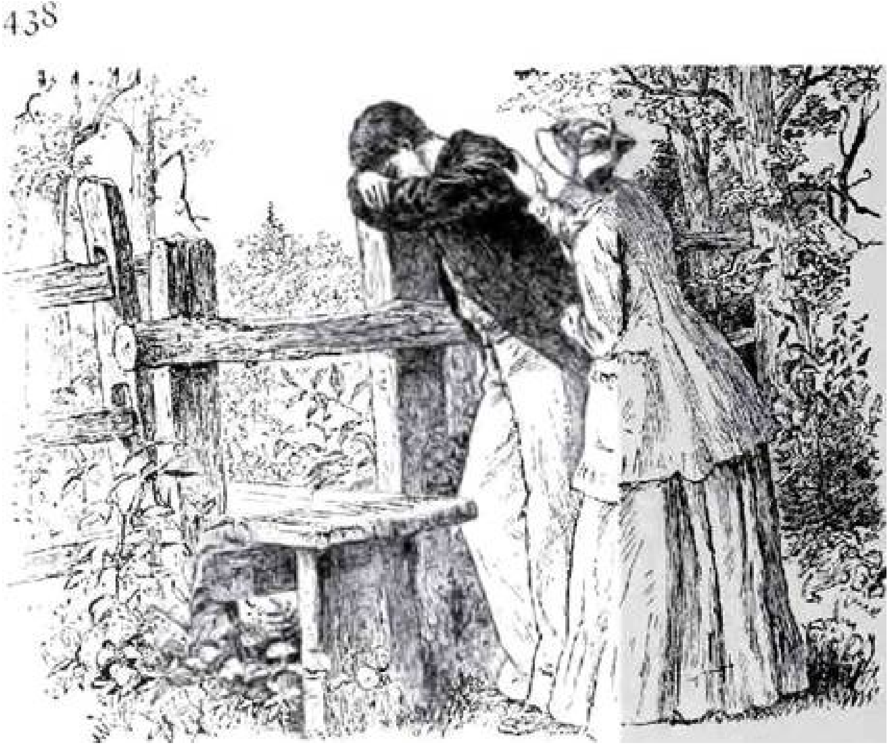
“You, you are, you’re a great deal too good for me, and I’m so grateful to you, and so proud and fond of you, I don’t know why I can’t love you as you want me to. I’ve tried, but I can’t change the feeling, and it would be a lie to say I do when I don’t.”

“Really, truly, Jo?”

He stopped short, and caught both her hands as he put his question with a look that she did not soon forget.

“Really, truly, dear.”

They were in the grove now, close by the stile, and when the last words fell reluctantly from Jo’s lips, Laurie dropped her hands and turned as if to go on, but for once in his life the fence was too much for him. So he just laid his head down on the mossy post, and stood so still that Jo was frightened.



“Oh, Teddy, I’m sorry, so desperately sorry, I could kill myself if it would do any good! I wish you wouldn’t take it so hard, I can’t help it. You know it’s impossible for people to make themselves love other people if they don’t,” cried Jo inelegantly but remorsefully, as she softly patted his shoulder, remembering the time when he had comforted her so long ago.

“They do sometimes,” said a muffled voice from the post. “I don’t believe it’s the right sort of love, and I’d rather not try it,” was the decided answer.

There was a long pause, while a blackbird sung blithely on the willow by the river, and the tall grass rustled in the wind. Presently Jo said very soberly, as she sat down on the step of the stile, “Laurie, I want to tell you something.”

He started as if he had been shot, threw up his head, and cried out in a fierce tone, “Don’t tell me that, Jo, I can’t bear it now!”

“Tell what?” she asked, wondering at his violence.

“That you love that old man.”

“What old man?” demanded Jo, thinking he must mean his grandfather.

“That devilish Professor you were always writing about. If you say you love him, I know I shall do something desperate;” and he looked as if he would keep his word, as he clenched his hands with a wrathful spark in his eyes.

Jo wanted to laugh, but restrained herself and said warmly, for she too, was getting excited with all this, “Don’t swear, Teddy! He isn’t old, nor anything bad, but good and kind, and the best friend I’ve got, next to you. Pray, don’t fly into a passion. I want to be kind, but I know I shall get angry if you abuse my Professor. I haven’t the least idea of loving him or anybody else.”

“But you will after a while, and then what will become of me?”

“You’ll love someone else too, like a sensible boy, and forget all this trouble.”

“I can’t love anyone else, and I’ll never forget you, Jo, Never! Never!” with a stamp to emphasize his passionate words.

“What shall I do with him?” sighed Jo, finding that emotions were more unmanagable than she expected. “You haven’t heard what I wanted to tell you. Sit down and listen, for indeed I want to do right and make you happy,” she said, hoping to soothe him with a little reason, which proved that she knew nothing about love.

Seeing a ray of hope in that last speech, Laurie threw himself down on the grass at her feet, leaned his arm on the lower step of the stile, and looked up at her with an expectant face. Now that arrangement was not conducive to calm speech or clear thought on Jo’s part, for how could she say hard things to her boy while he watched her with eyes full of love and longing, and lashes still wet with the bitter drop or two her hardness of heart had wrung from him? She gently turned his head away, saying, as she stroked the wavy hair which had been allowed to grow for her sake — how touching that was, to be sure! “I agree with Mother that you and I are not suited to each other, because our quick tempers and strong wills would probably make us very miserable, if we were so foolish as to...” Jo paused a little over the last word, but Laurie uttered it with a rapturous expression.

“Marry — no we shouldn’t! If you loved me, Jo, I should be a perfect saint, for you could make me anything you like.”

“No, I can’t. I’ve tried and failed, and I won’t risk our happiness by such a serious experiment. We don’t agree and we never shall, so we’ll be good friends all our lives, but we won’t go and do anything rash.”

“Yes, we will if we get the chance,” muttered Laurie rebelliously.

“Now do be reasonable, and take a sensible view of the case,” implored Jo, almost at her wit’s end.

“I won’t be reasonable. I don’t want to take what you call ‘a sensible view’. It won’t help me, and it only makes it harder. I don’t believe you’ve got any heart.”

“I wish I hadn’t.”

There was a little quiver in Jo’s voice, and thinking it a good omen, Laurie turned round, bringing all his persuasive powers to bear as he said, in the wheedlesome tone that had never been so dangerously wheedlesome before, “Don’t disappoint us, dear! Everyone expects it. Grandpa has set his heart upon it, your people like it, and I can’t get on without you. Say you will, and let’s be happy. Do, do!”

Not until months afterward did Jo understand how she had the strength of mind to hold fast to the resolution she had made when she decided that she did not love her boy, and never could. It was very hard to do, but she did it, knowing that delay was both useless and cruel.

“I can’t say ‘yes’ truly, so I won’t say it at all. You’ll see that I’m right, by-and-by, and thank me for it...” she began solemnly.

“I’ll be hanged if I do!” and Laurie bounced up off the grass, burning with indignation at the very idea.

“Yes, you will!” persisted Jo. “You’ll get over this after a while, and find some lovely accomplished girl, who will adore you, and make a fine mistress for your fine house. I shouldn’t. I’m homely and awkward and odd and old, and you’d be ashamed of me, and we should quarrel — we can’t help it even now, you see — and I shouldn’t like elegant society and you would, and you’d hate my scribbling, and I couldn’t get on without it, and we should be unhappy, and wish we hadn’t done it, and everything would be horrid!”

“Anything more?” asked Laurie, finding it hard to listen patiently to this prophetic burst.

“Nothing more, except that I don’t believe I shall ever marry. I’m happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man.”

“I know better!” broke in Laurie. “You think so now, but there’ll come a time when you will care for somebody, and you’ll love him tremendously, and live and die for him. I know you will, it’s your way, and I shall have to stand by and see it,” and the despairing lover cast his hat upon the ground with a gesture that would have seemed comical, if his face had not been so tragic.

“Yes, I will live and die for him, if he ever comes and makes me love him in spite of myself, and you must do the best you can!” cried Jo, losing patience with poor Teddy. “I’ve done my best, but you won’t be reasonable, and it’s selfish of you to keep teasing for what I can’t give. I shall always be fond of you, very fond indeed, as a friend, but I’ll never marry you, and the sooner you believe it the better for both of us — so now!”

That speech was like gunpowder. Laurie looked at her a minute as if he did not quite know what to do with himself, then turned sharply away, saying in a desperate sort of tone, “You’ll be sorry some day, Jo.”

“Oh, where are you going?” she cried, for his face frightened her.

“To the devil!” was the consoling answer.

For a minute Jo’s heart stood still, as he swung himself down the bank toward the river, but it takes much folly, sin or misery to send a young man to a violent death, and Laurie was not one of the weak sort who are conquered by a single failure. He had no thought of a melodramatic plunge, but some blind instinct led him to fling hat and coat into his boat, and row away with all his might, making better time up the river than he had done in any race. Jo drew a long breath and unclasped her hands as she watched the poor fellow trying to outstrip the trouble which he carried in his heart.

“That will do him good, and he’ll come home in such a tender, penitent state of mind, that I shan’t dare to see him,” she said, adding, as she went slowly home, feeling as if she had murdered some innocent thing, and buried it under the leaves. “Now I must go and prepare Mr. Laurence to be very kind to my poor boy. I wish he’d love Beth, perhaps he may in time, but I begin to think I was mistaken about her. Oh dear! How can girls like to have lovers and refuse them? I think it’s dreadful.”

Being sure that no one could do it so well as herself, she went straight to Mr. Laurence, told the hard story bravely through, and then broke down, crying so dismally over her own insensibility that the kind old gentleman, though sorely disappointed, did not utter a reproach. He found it difficult to understand how any girl could help loving Laurie, and hoped she would change her mind, but he knew even better than Jo that love cannot be forced, so he shook his head sadly and resolved to carry his boy out of harm’s way, for Young Impetuosity’s parting words to Jo disturbed him more than he would confess.

When Laurie came home, dead tired but quite composed, his grandfather met him as if he knew nothing, and kept up the delusion very successfully for an hour or two. But when they sat together in the twilight, the time they used to enjoy so much, it was hard work for the old man to ramble on as usual, and harder still for the young one to listen to praises of the last year’s success, which to him now seemed like love’s labor lost. He bore it as long as he could, then went to his piano and began to play. The windows were open, and Jo, walking in the garden with Beth, for once understood music better than her sister, for he played the ‘*Sonata Pathetique*’, and played it as he never did before.

“That’s very fine, I dare say, but it’s sad enough to make one cry. Give us something gayer, lad,” said Mr. Laurence, whose kind old heart was full of sympathy, which he longed to show but knew not how.

Laurie dashed into a livelier strain, played stormily for several minutes, and would have got through bravely, if in a momentary lull Mrs. March’s voice had not been heard calling, “Jo, dear, come in. I want you.”

Just what Laurie longed to say, with a different meaning! As he listened, he lost his place, the music ended with a broken chord, and the musician sat silent in the dark.

"I can't stand this," muttered the old gentleman. Up he got, groped his way to the piano, laid a kind hand on either of the broad shoulders, and said, as gently as a woman, "I know, my boy, I know."

No answer for an instant, then Laurie asked sharply, "Who told you?"

"Jo herself."

"Then there's an end of it!" And he shook off his grandfather's hands with an impatient motion, for though grateful for the sympathy, his man's pride could not bear a man's pity.

"Not quite. I want to say one thing, and then there shall be an end of it," returned Mr. Laurence with unusual mildness. "You won't care to stay at home now, perhaps?"

"I don't intend to run away from a girl. Jo can't prevent my seeing her, and I shall stay and do it as long as I like," interrupted Laurie in a defiant tone.

"Not if you are the gentleman I think you. I'm disappointed, but the girl can't help it, and the only thing left for you to do is to go away for a time. Where will you go?"

"Anywhere. I don't care what becomes of me," and Laurie got up with a reckless laugh that grated on his grandfather's ear.

"Take it like a man, and don't do anything rash, for God's sake. Why not go abroad, as you planned, and forget it?"

"I can't."

"But you've been wild to go, and I promised you should when you got through college."

"Ah, but I didn't mean to go alone!" and Laurie walked fast through the room with an expression which it was well his grandfather did not see.

"I don't ask you to go alone. There's someone ready and glad to go with you, anywhere in the world."

"Who, Sir?" stopping to listen.

"Myself."

Laurie came back as quickly as he went, and put out his hand, saying huskily, "I'm a selfish brute, but — you know — Grandfather — "

"Lord help me, yes, I do know, for I've been through it all before, once in my own young days, and then with your father. Now, my dear boy, just sit quietly down and hear my plan. It's all settled, and can be carried out at once," said Mr. Laurence, keeping hold of the young man, as if fearful that he would break away as his father had done before him.

"Well, sir, what is it?" and Laurie sat down, without a sign of interest in face or voice.

"There is business in London that needs looking after. I meant you should attend to it, but I can do it better myself, and things here will get on very well with Brooke to manage them. My partners do almost everything, I'm merely holding on until you take my place, and can be off at any time."

"But you hate traveling, Sir. I can't ask it of you at your age," began Laurie, who was grateful for the sacrifice, but much preferred to go alone, if he went at all.

The old gentleman knew that perfectly well, and particularly desired to prevent it, for the mood in which he found his grandson assured him that it would not be wise to leave him to his own devices. So, stifling a natural regret at the thought of the home comforts he would leave behind him, he said stoutly, "Bless your soul, I'm not superannuated yet. I quite enjoy the idea. It will do me good, and my old bones won't suffer, for traveling nowadays is almost as easy as sitting in a chair."

A restless movement from Laurie suggested that his chair was not easy, or that he did not like the plan, and made the old man add hastily, "I don't mean to be a marplot or a burden. I go because I think you'd feel happier than if I was left behind. I don't intend to gad about with you, but leave you free to go where you like, while I amuse myself in my own way. I've friends in London and Paris, and should like to visit them. Meantime you can go to Italy, Germany, Switzerland, where you will, and enjoy pictures, music, scenery, and adventures to your heart's content."

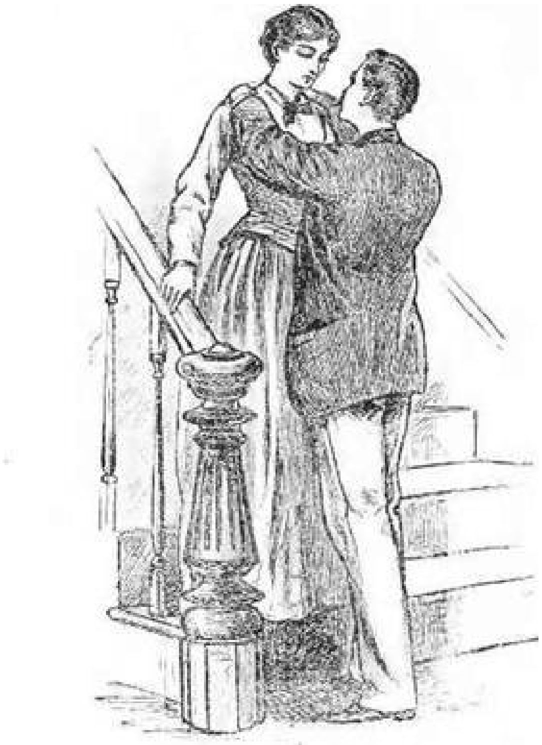
Now, Laurie felt just then that his heart was entirely broken and the world a howling wilderness, but at the sound of certain words which the old gentleman artfully introduced into his closing sentence, the broken heart gave an unexpected leap, and a green oasis or two suddenly appeared in the howling wilderness. He sighed, and then said, in a spiritless tone, "Just as you like, Sir. It doesn't matter where I go or what I do."

"It does to me, remember that, my lad. I give you entire liberty, but I trust you to make an honest use of it. Promise me that, Laurie."

"Anything you like, Sir."

"Good," thought the old gentleman. "You don't care now, but there'll come a time when that promise will keep you out of mischief, or I'm much mistaken."

Being an energetic individual, Mr. Laurence struck while the iron was hot, and before the blighted being recovered spirit enough to rebel, they were off. During the time necessary for preparation, Laurie bore himself as young gentleman usually do in such cases. He was moody, irritable, and pensive by turns, lost his appetite, neglected his dress and devoted much time to playing tempestuously on his piano, avoided Jo, but consoled himself by staring at her from his window, with a tragic face that haunted her dreams by night and oppressed her with a heavy sense of guilt by day. Unlike some sufferers, he never spoke of his unrequited passion, and would allow no one, not even Mrs. March, to attempt consolation or offer sympathy. On some accounts, this was a relief to his friends, but the weeks before his departure were very uncomfortable, and everyone rejoiced that the ‘poor, dear fellow was going away to forget his trouble, and come home happy’. Of course, he smiled darkly at their delusion, but passed it by with the sad superiority of one who knew that his fidelity like his love was unalterable.



When the parting came he affected high spirits, to conceal certain inconvenient emotions which seemed inclined to assert themselves. This gaiety did not impose upon anybody, but they tried to look as if it did for his sake, and he got on very well till Mrs. March kissed him, with a whisper full of motherly solicitude. Then feeling that he was going very fast, he hastily embraced them all round, not forgetting the afflicted Hannah, and ran downstairs as if for his life. Jo followed a minute after to wave her hand to him if he looked round. He did look round, came back, put his arms about her as she stood on the step above him, and looked up at her with a face that made his short appeal eloquent and pathetic.

“Oh, Jo, can’t you?”

“Teddy, dear, I wish I could!”

That was all, except a little pause. Then Laurie straightened himself up, said, “It’s all right, never mind,” and went away without another word. Ah, but it wasn’t all right, and Jo did mind, for while the curly head lay on her arm a minute after her hard answer, she felt as if she had stabbed her dearest friend, and when he left her without a look behind him, she knew that the boy Laurie never would come again.

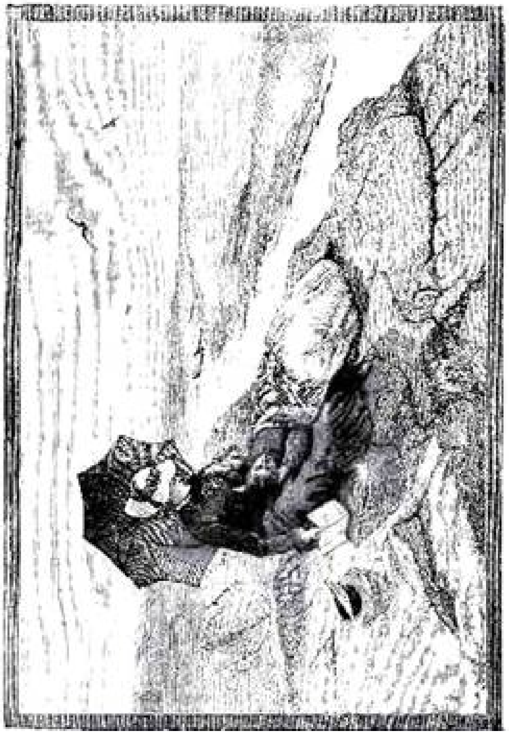
CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

BETH’S SECRET

When Jo came home that spring, she had been struck with the change in Beth. No one spoke of it or seemed aware of it, for it had come too gradually to startle those who saw her daily, but to eyes sharpened by absence, it was very plain and a heavy weight fell on Jo’s heart as she saw her sister’s face. It was no paler and but littler thinner than in the autumn, yet there was a strange, transparent look about it, as if the mortal was being slowly refined away, and the immortal shining through the frail flesh with an indescribably pathetic beauty. Jo saw and felt it, but said nothing at the time, and soon the first impression lost much of its power, for Beth seemed happy, no one appeared to doubt that she was better, and presently in other cares Jo for a time forgot her fear.

But when Laurie was gone, and peace prevailed again, the vague anxiety returned and haunted her. She had confessed her sins and been forgiven, but when she showed her savings and proposed a mountain trip, Beth had thanked her heartily, but begged not to go so far away from home. Another little visit to the seashore would suit her better, and as Grandma could not be prevailed upon to leave the babies, Jo took Beth down to the quiet place, where she could live much in the open air, and let the fresh sea breezes blow a little color into her pale cheeks.

It was not a fashionable place, but even among the pleasant people there, the girls made few friends, preferring to live for one another. Beth was too shy to enjoy society, and Jo too wrapped up in her to care for anyone else. So they were all in all to each other, and came and went, quite unconscious of the interest they exited in those about them, who watched with sympathetic eyes the strong sister and the feeble one, always together, as if they felt instinctively that a long separation was not far away.



They did feel it, yet neither spoke of it, for often between ourselves and those nearest and dearest to us there exists a reserve which it is very hard to overcome. Jo felt as if a veil had fallen between her heart and Beth's, but when she put out her hand to lift it up, there seemed something sacred in the silence, and she waited for Beth to speak. She wondered, and was thankful also, that her parents did not seem to see what she saw, and during the quiet weeks when the shadows grew so plain to her, she said nothing of it to those at home, believing that it would tell itself when Beth came back no better. She wondered still more if her sister really guessed the hard truth, and what thoughts were passing through her mind during the long hours when she lay on the warm rocks with her head in Jo's lap, while the winds blew healthfully over her and the sea made music at her feet.

One day Beth told her. Jo thought she was asleep, she lay so still, and putting down her book, sat looking at her with wistful eyes, trying to see signs of hope in the faint color on Beth's cheeks. But she could not find enough to satisfy her, for the cheeks were very thin, and the hands seemed too feeble to hold even the rosy little shells they had been collecting. It came to her then more bitterly than ever that Beth was slowly drifting away from her, and her arms instinctively tightened their hold upon the dearest treasure she possessed. For a minute her eyes were too dim for seeing, and when they cleared, Beth was looking up at her so tenderly that there was hardly any need for her to say, "Jo, dear, I'm glad you know it. I've tried to tell you, but I couldn't."

There was no answer except her sister’s cheek against her own, not even tears, for when most deeply moved, Jo did not cry. She was the weaker then, and Beth tried to comfort and sustain her, with her arms about her and the soothing words she whispered in her ear.

“I’ve known it for a good while, dear, and now I’m used to it, it isn’t hard to think of or to bear. Try to see it so and don’t be troubled about me, because it’s best, indeed it is.”

“Is this what made you so unhappy in the autumn, Beth? You did not feel it then, and keep it to yourself so long, did you?” asked Jo, refusing to see or say that it was best, but glad to know that Laurie had no part in Beth’s trouble.

“Yes, I gave up hoping then, but I didn’t like to own it. I tried to think it was a sick fancy, and would not let it trouble anyone. But when I saw you all so well and strong and full of happy plans, it was hard to feel that I could never be like you, and then I was miserable, Jo.”

“Oh, Beth, and you didn’t tell me, didn’t let me comfort and help you? How could you shut me out, bear it all alone?”

Jo’s voice was full of tender reproach, and her heart ached to think of the solitary struggle that must have gone on while Beth learned to say goodbye to health, love, and life, and take up her cross so cheerfully.

“Perhaps it was wrong, but I tried to do right. I wasn’t sure, no one said anything, and I hoped I was mistaken. It would have been selfish to frighten you all when Marmee was so anxious about Meg, and Amy away, and you so happy with Laurie — at least I thought so then.”

“And I thought you loved him, Beth, and I went away because I couldn’t,” cried Jo, glad to say all the truth.

Beth looked so amazed at the idea that Jo smiled in spite of her pain, and added softly, “Then you didn’t, dearie? I was afraid it was so, and imagined your poor little heart full of lovelornity all that while.”

“Why, Jo, how could I, when he was so fond of you?” asked Beth, as innocently as a child. “I do love him dearly. He is so good to me, how can I help It? But he could never be anything to me but my brother. I hope he truly will be, sometime.”

“Not through me,” said Jo decidedly. “Amy is left for him, and they would suit excellently, but I have no heart for such things, now. I don’t care what becomes of anybody but you, Beth. You must get well.”

“I want to, oh, so much! I try, but every day I lose a little, and feel more sure that I shall never gain it back. It’s like the tide, Jo, when it turns, it goes slowly, but it can’t be stopped.”

“It shall be stopped, your tide must not turn so soon, nineteen is too young, Beth. I can't let you go. I'll work and pray and fight against it. I'll keep you in spite of everything. There must be ways, it can't be too late. God won't be so cruel as to take you from me," cried poor Jo rebelliously, for her spirit was far less piously submissive than Beth's.

Simple, sincere people seldom speak much of their piety. It shows itself in acts rather than in words, and has more influence than homilies or protestations. Beth could not reason upon or explain the faith that gave her courage and patience to give up life, and cheerfully wait for death. Like a confiding child, she asked no questions, but left everything to God and nature, Father and Mother of us all, feeling sure that they, and they only, could teach and strengthen heart and spirit for this life and the life to come. She did not rebuke Jo with saintly speeches, only loved her better for her passionate affection, and clung more closely to the dear human love, from which our Father never means us to be weaned, but through which He draws us closer to Himself. She could not say, "I'm glad to go," for life was very sweet for her. She could only sob out, "I try to be willing," while she held fast to Jo, as the first bitter wave of this great sorrow broke over them together.

By and by Beth said, with recovered serenity, "You'll tell them this when we go home?"

"I think they will see it without words," sighed Jo, for now it seemed to her that Beth changed every day.

"Perhaps not. I've heard that the people who love best are often blindest to such things. If they don't see it, you will tell them for me. I don't want any secrets, and it's kinder to prepare them. Meg has John and the babies to comfort her, but you must stand by Father and Mother, won't you Jo?"

"If I can. But, Beth, I don't give up yet. I'm going to believe that it is a sick fancy, and not let you think it's true." said Jo, trying to speak cheerfully.

Beth lay a minute thinking, and then said in her quiet way, "I don't know how to express myself, and shouldn't try to anyone but you, because I can't speak out except to my Jo. I only mean to say that I have a feeling that it never was intended I should live long. I'm not like the rest of you. I never made any plans about what I'd do when I grew up. I never thought of being married, as you all did. I couldn't seem to imagine myself anything but stupid little Beth, trotting about at home, of no use anywhere but there. I never wanted to go away, and the hard part now is the leaving you all. I'm not afraid, but it seems as if I should be homesick for you even in heaven."

Jo could not speak, and for several minutes there was no sound but the sigh of the wind and the lapping of the tide. A white-winged gull flew by, with the flash of sunshine on its silvery breast. Beth watched it till it vanished, and her eyes were full of sadness. A little gray-coated sand bird came tripping over the beach ‘peeping’ softly to itself, as if enjoying the sun and sea. It came quite close to Beth, and looked at her with a friendly eye and sat upon a warm stone, dressing its wet feathers, quite at home. Beth smiled and felt comforted, for the tiny thing seemed to offer its small friendship and remind her that a pleasant world was still to be enjoyed.

“Dear little bird! See, Jo, how tame it is. I like peeps better than the gulls. They are not so wild and handsome, but they seem happy, confiding little things. I used to call them my birds last summer, and Mother said they reminded her of me — busy, quaker-colored creatures, always near the shore, and always chirping that contented little song of theirs. You are the gull, Jo, strong and wild, fond of the storm and the wind, flying far out to sea, and happy all alone. Meg is the turtledove, and Amy is like the lark she writes about, trying to get up among the clouds, but always dropping down into its nest again. Dear little girl! She’s so ambitious, but her heart is good and tender, and no matter how high she flies, she never will forget home. I hope I shall see her again, but she seems so far away.”

“She is coming in the spring, and I mean that you shall be all ready to see and enjoy her. I’m going to have you well and rosy by that time,” began Jo, feeling that of all the changes in Beth, the talking change was the greatest, for it seemed to cost no effort now, and she thought aloud in a way quite unlike bashful Beth.

“Jo, dear, don’t hope any more. It won’t do any good. I’m sure of that. We won’t be miserable, but enjoy being together while we wait. We’ll have happy times, for I don’t suffer much, and I think the tide will go out easily, if you help me.”

Jo leaned down to kiss the tranquil face, and with that silent kiss, she dedicated herself soul and body to Beth.

She was right. There was no need of any words when they got home, for Father and Mother saw plainly now what they had prayed to be saved from seeing. Tired with her short journey, Beth went at once to bed, saying how glad she was to be home, and when Jo went down, she found that she would be spared the hard task of telling Beth’s secret. Her father stood leaning his head on the mantelpiece and did not turn as she came in, but her mother stretched out her arms as if for help, and Jo went to comfort her without a word.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

NEW IMPRESSIONS

At three o’clock in the afternoon, all the fashionable world at Nice may be seen on the Promenade des Anglais — a charming place, for the wide walk, bordered with palms, flowers, and tropical shrubs, is bounded on one side by the sea, on the other by the grand drive, lined with hotels and villas, while beyond lie orange orchards and the hills. Many nations are represented, many languages spoken, many costumes worn, and on a sunny day the spectacle is as gay and brilliant as a carnival. Haughty English, lively French, sober Germans, handsome Spaniards, ugly Russians, meek Jews, free-and-easy Americans, all drive, sit, or saunter here, chatting over the news, and criticizing the latest celebrity who has arrived — Ristori or Dickens, Victor Emmanuel or the Queen of the Sandwich Islands. The equipages are as varied as the company and attract as much attention, especially the low basket barouches in which ladies drive themselves, with a pair of dashing ponies, gay nets to keep their voluminous flounces from overflowing the diminutive vehicles, and little grooms on the perch behind.

Along this walk, on Christmas Day, a tall young man walked slowly, with his hands behind him, and a somewhat absent expression of countenance. He looked like an Italian, was dressed like an Englishman, and had the independent air of an American — a combination which caused sundry pairs of feminine eyes to look approvingly after him, and sundry dandies in black velvet suits, with rose-colored neckties, buff gloves, and orange flowers in their buttonholes, to shrug their shoulders, and then envy him his inches. There were plenty of pretty faces to admire, but the young man took little notice of them, except to glance now and then at some blonde girl in blue. Presently he strolled out of the promenade and stood a moment at the crossing, as if undecided whether to go and listen to the band in the Jardin Publique, or to wander along the beach toward Castle Hill. The quick trot of ponies' feet made him look up, as one of the little carriages, containing a single young lady, came rapidly down the street. The lady was young, blonde, and dressed in blue. He stared a minute, then his whole face woke up, and, waving his hat like a boy, he hurried forward to meet her.

"Oh, Laurie, is it really you? I thought you'd never come!" cried Amy, dropping the reins and holding out both hands, to the great scandalization of a French mamma, who hastened her daughter's steps, lest she should be demoralized by beholding the free manners of these 'mad English'.

"I was detained by the way, but I promised to spend Christmas with you, and here I am."

"How is your grandfather? When did you come? Where are you staying?"

"Very well — last night — at the Chauvain. I called at your hotel, but you were out."

"I have so much to say, I don't know where to begin! Get in and we can talk at our ease. I was going for a drive and longing for company. Flo's saving up for tonight."

"What happens then, a ball?"

"A Christmas party at our hotel. There are many Americans there, and they give it in honor of the day. You'll go with us, of course? Aunt will be charmed."

"Thank you. Where now?" asked Laurie, leaning back and folding his arms, a proceeding which suited Amy, who preferred to drive, for her parasol whip and blue reins over the white ponies' backs afforded her infinite satisfaction.

"I'm going to the bankers first for letters, and then to Castle Hill. The view is so lovely, and I like to feed the peacocks. Have you ever been there?"

"Often, years ago, but I don't mind having a look at it."

"Now tell me all about yourself. The last I heard of you, your grandfather wrote that he expected you from Berlin."

"Yes, I spent a month there and then joined him in Paris, where he has settled for the winter. He has friends there and finds plenty to amuse him, so I go and come, and we get on capitally."

"That's a sociable arrangement," said Amy, missing something in Laurie's manner, though she couldn't tell what.

"Why, you see, he hates to travel, and I hate to keep still, so we each suit ourselves, and there is no trouble. I am often with him, and he enjoys my adventures, while I like to feel that someone is glad to see me when I get back from my wanderings. Dirty old hole, isn't it?" he added, with a look of disgust as they drove along the boulevard to the Place Napoleon in the old city.

“The dirt is picturesque, so I don’t mind. The river and the hills are delicious, and these glimpses of the narrow cross streets are my delight. Now we shall have to wait for that procession to pass. It’s going to the Church of St. John.”

While Laurie listlessly watched the procession of priests under their canopies, white-veiled nuns bearing lighted tapers, and some brotherhood in blue chanting as they walked, Amy watched him, and felt a new sort of shyness steal over her, for he was changed, and she could not find the merry-faced boy she left in the moody-looking man beside her. He was handsomer than ever and greatly improved, she thought, but now that the flush of pleasure at meeting her was over, he looked tired and spiritless — not sick, nor exactly unhappy, but older and graver than a year or two of prosperous life should have made him. She couldn’t understand it and did not venture to ask questions, so she shook her head and touched up her ponies, as the procession wound away across the arches of the Paglioni bridge and vanished in the church.

“Que pensez-vous?” she said, airing her French, which had improved in quantity, if not in quality, since she came abroad.

“That mademoiselle has made good use of her time, and the result is charming,” replied Laurie, bowing with his hand on his heart and an admiring look.

She blushed with pleasure, but somehow the compliment did not satisfy her like the blunt praises he used to give her at home, when he promenaded round her on festival occasions, and told her she was ‘altogether jolly’, with a hearty smile and an approving pat on the head. She didn’t like the new tone, for though not blase, it sounded indifferent in spite of the look.

“If that’s the way he’s going to grow up, I wish he’d stay a boy,” she thought, with a curious sense of disappointment and discomfort, trying meantime to seem quite easy and gay.

At Avigdor’s she found the precious home letters and, giving the reins to Laurie, read them luxuriously as they wound up the shady road between green hedges, where tea roses bloomed as freshly as in June.

“Beth is very poorly, Mother says. I often think I ought to go home, but they all say ‘stay’. So I do, for I shall never have another chance like this,” said Amy, looking sober over one page.

“I think you are right, there. You could do nothing at home, and it is a great comfort to them to know that you are well and happy, and enjoying so much, my dear.”

He drew a little nearer, and looked more like his old self as he said that, and the fear that sometimes weighed on Amy’s heart was lightened, for the look, the act, the brotherly ‘my dear’, seemed to assure her that if any trouble did come, she would not be alone in a strange land. Presently she laughed and showed him a small sketch of Jo in her scribbling suit, with the bow rampantly erect upon her cap, and issuing from her mouth the words, ‘Genius burns!’.

Laurie smiled, took it, put it in his vest pocket ‘to keep it from blowing away’, and listened with interest to the lively letter Amy read him.

“This will be a regularly merry Christmas to me, with presents in the morning, you and letters in the afternoon, and a party at night,” said Amy, as they alighted among the ruins of the old fort, and a flock of splendid peacocks came trooping about them, tamely waiting to be fed. While Amy stood laughing on the bank above him as she scattered crumbs to the brilliant birds, Laurie looked at her as she had looked at him, with a natural curiosity to see what changes time and absence had wrought. He found nothing to perplex or disappoint, much to admire and approve, for overlooking a few little affectations of speech and manner, she was as sprightly and graceful as ever, with the addition of that indescribable something in dress and bearing which we call elegance. Always mature for her age, she had gained a certain aplomb in both carriage and conversation, which made her seem more of a woman of the world than she was, but her old petulance now and then showed itself, her strong will still held its own, and her native frankness was unspoiled by foreign polish.

Laurie did not read all this while he watched her feed the peacocks, but he saw enough to satisfy and interest him, and carried away a pretty little picture of a bright-faced girl standing in the sunshine, which brought out the soft hue of her dress, the fresh color of her cheeks, the golden gloss of her hair, and made her a prominent figure in the pleasant scene.

As they came up onto the stone plateau that crowns the hill, Amy waved her hand as if welcoming him to her favorite haunt, and said, pointing here and there, “Do you remember the Cathedral and the Corso, the fishermen dragging their nets in the bay, and the lovely road to Villa Franca, Schubert’s Tower, just below, and best of all, that speck far out to sea which they say is Corsica?”

“I remember. It’s not much changed,” he answered without enthusiasm.

“What Jo would give for a sight of that famous speck!” said Amy, feeling in good spirits and anxious to see him so also.

“Yes,” was all he said, but he turned and strained his eyes to see the island which a greater usurper than even Napoleon now made interesting in his sight.

“Take a good look at it for her sake, and then come and tell me what you have been doing with yourself all this while,” said Amy, seating herself, ready for a good talk.

But she did not get it, for though he joined her and answered all her questions freely, she could only learn that he had roved about the Continent and been to

Greece. So after idling away an hour, they drove home again, and having paid his respects to Mrs. Carrol, Laurie left them, promising to return in the evening.

It must be recorded of Amy that she deliberately prinked that night. Time and absence had done its work on both the young people. She had seen her old friend in a new light, not as ‘our boy’, but as a handsome and agreeable man, and she was conscious of a very natural desire to find favor in his sight. Amy knew her good points, and made the most of them with the taste and skill which is a fortune to a poor and pretty woman.

Tarlatan and tulle were cheap at Nice, so she enveloped herself in them on such occasions, and following the sensible English fashion of simple dress for young girls, got up charming little toilettes with fresh flowers, a few trinkets, and all manner of dainty devices, which were both inexpensive and effective. It must be confessed that the artist sometimes got possession of the woman, and indulged in antique coiffures, statuesque attitudes, and classic draperies. But, dear heart, we all have our little weaknesses, and find it easy to pardon such in the young, who satisfy our eyes with their comeliness, and keep our hearts merry with their artless vanities.

“I do want him to think I look well, and tell them so at home,” said Amy to herself, as she put on Flo’s old white silk ball dress, and covered it with a cloud of fresh illusion, out of which her white shoulders and golden head emerged with a most artistic effect. Her hair she had the sense to let alone, after gathering up the thick waves and curls into a Hebe-like knot at the back of her head.

“It’s not the fashion, but it’s becoming, and I can’t afford to make a fright of myself,” she used to say, when advised to frizzle, puff, or braid, as the latest style commanded.

Having no ornaments fine enough for this important occasion, Amy looped her fleecy skirts with rosy clusters of azalea, and framed the white shoulders in delicate green vines. Remembering the painted boots, she surveyed her white satin slippers with girlish satisfaction, and chassed down the room, admiring her aristocratic feet all by herself.

“My new fan just matches my flowers, my gloves fit to a charm, and the real lace on Aunt’s mouchoir gives an air to my whole dress. If I only had a classical nose and mouth I should be perfectly happy,” she said, surveying herself with a critical eye and a candle in each hand.

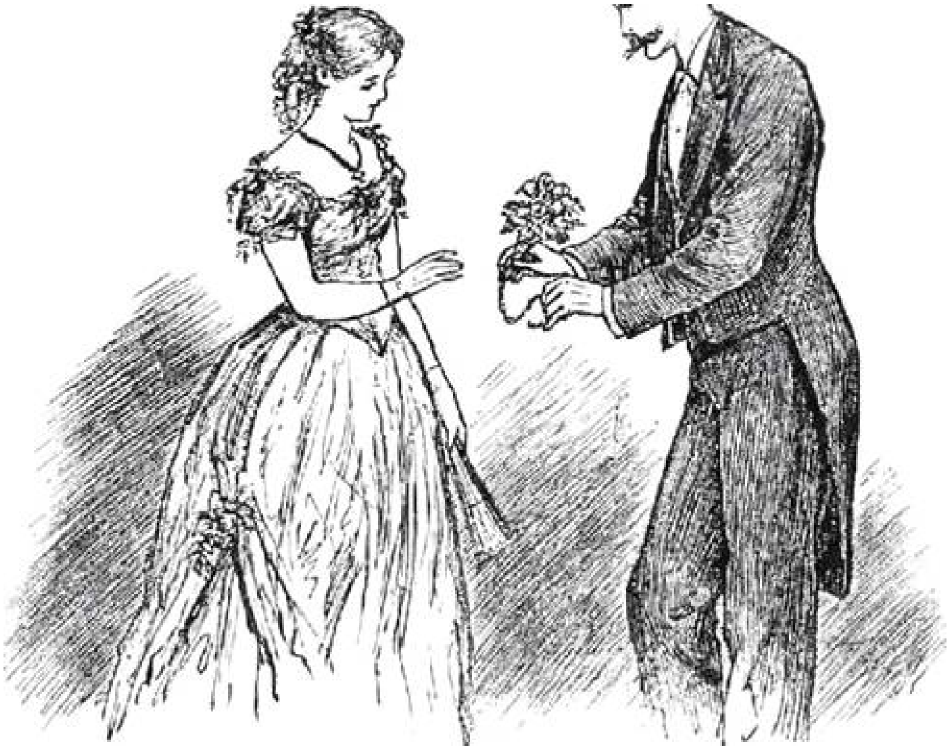
In spite of this affliction, she looked unusually gay and graceful as she glided away. She seldom ran — it did not suit her style, she thought, for being tall, the stately and Junoesque was more appropriate than the sportive or piquante. She walked up and down the long saloon while waiting for Laurie, and once arranged herself under the chandelier, which had a good effect upon her hair, then she thought better of it, and went away to the other end of the room, as if ashamed of the girlish desire to have the first view a propitious one. It so happened that she could not have done a better thing, for Laurie came in so quietly she did not hear him, and as she stood at the distant window, with her head half turned and one hand gathering up her dress, the slender, white figure against the red curtains was as effective as a well-placed statue.

“Good evening, Diana!” said Laurie, with the look of satisfaction she liked to see in his eyes when they rested on her.

“Good evening, Apollo!” she answered, smiling back at him, for he too looked unusually debonair, and the thought of entering the ballroom on the arm of such a personable man caused Amy to pity the four plain Misses Davis from the bottom of her heart.

“Here are your flowers. I arranged them myself, remembering that you didn’t like what Hannah calls a ‘sot-bookay’,” said Laurie, handing her a delicate nosegay, in a holder that she had long coveted as she daily passed it in Cardiglia’s window.

“How kind you are!” she exclaimed gratefully. “If I’d known you were coming I’d have had something ready for you today, though not as pretty as this, I’m afraid.”



“Thank you. It isn’t what it should be, but you have improved it,” he added, as she snapped the silver bracelet on her wrist.

“Please don’t.”

“I thought you liked that sort of thing.”

“Not from you, it doesn’t sound natural, and I like your old bluntness better.”

“I’m glad of it,” he answered, with a look of relief, then buttoned her gloves for her, and asked if his tie was straight, just as he used to do when they went to parties together at home.

The company assembled in the long salle a manger, that evening, was such as one sees nowhere but on the Continent. The hospitable Americans had invited every acquaintance they had in Nice, and having no prejudice against titles, secured a few to add luster to their Christmas ball.

A Russian prince condescended to sit in a corner for an hour and talk with a massive lady, dressed like Hamlet’s mother in black velvet with a pearl bridle under her chin. A Polish count, aged eighteen, devoted himself to the ladies, who pronounced him, ‘a fascinating dear’, and a German Serene Something, having come to supper alone, roamed vaguely about, seeking what he might devour. Baron Rothschild’s private secretary, a large-nosed Jew in tight boots, affably beamed upon the world, as if his master’s name crowned him with a golden halo. A stout Frenchman, who knew the Emperor, came to indulge his mania for dancing, and Lady de Jones, a British matron, adorned the scene with her little family of eight. Of course, there were many light-footed, shrill-voiced American girls, handsome, lifeless-looking English ditto, and a few plain but piquante French demoiselles, likewise the usual set of traveling young gentlemen who disported themselves gaily, while mammas of all nations lined the walls and smiled upon them benignly when they danced with their daughters.

Any young girl can imagine Amy’s state of mind when she ‘took the stage’ that night, leaning on Laurie’s arm. She knew she looked well, she loved to dance, she felt that her foot was on her native heath in a ballroom, and enjoyed the delightful sense of power which comes when young girls first discover the new and lovely kingdom they are born to rule by virtue of beauty, youth, and womanhood. She did pity the Davis girls, who were awkward, plain, and destitute of escort, except a grim papa and three grimmer maiden aunts, and she bowed to them in her friendliest manner as she passed, which was good of her, as it permitted them to see her dress, and burn with curiosity to know who her distinguished-looking friend might be. With the first burst of the band, Amy’s color rose, her eyes began to sparkle, and her feet to tap the floor impatiently, for she danced well and wanted Laurie to know it. Therefore the shock she received can better be imagined than described, when he said in a perfectly tranquil tone, “Do you care to dance?”

“One usually does at a ball.”

Her amazed look and quick answer caused Laurie to repair his error as fast as possible.

“I meant the first dance. May I have the honor?”

“I can give you one if I put off the Count. He dances devinely, but he will excuse me, as you are an old friend,” said Amy, hoping that the name would have a good effect, and show Laurie that she was not to be trifled with.

“Nice little boy, but rather a short Pole to support...

A daughter of the gods,
Devinely tall, and most devinely fair,”

was all the satisfaction she got, however.

The set in which they found themselves was composed of English, and Amy was compelled to walk decorously through a cotillion, feeling all the while as if she could dance the tarantella with relish. Laurie resigned her to the ‘nice little boy’, and went to do his duty to Flo, without securing Amy for the joys to come, which reprehensible want of forethought was properly punished, for she immediately engaged herself till supper, meaning to relent if he then gave any signs penitence. She showed him her ball book with demure satisfaction when he strolled instead of rushed up to claim her for the next, a glorious polka redowa. But his polite regrets didn’t impose upon her, and when she galloped away with the Count, she saw Laurie sit down by her aunt with an actual expression of relief.

That was unpardonable, and Amy took no more notice of him for a long while, except a word now and then when she came to her chaperon between the dances for a necessary pin or a moment’s rest. Her anger had a good effect, however, for she hid it under a smiling face, and seemed unusually blithe and brilliant. Laurie’s eyes followed her with pleasure, for she neither romped nor sauntered, but danced with spirit and grace, making the delightsome pastime what it should be. He very naturally fell to studying her from this new point of view, and before the evening was half over, had decided that ‘little Amy was going to make a very charming woman’.

It was a lively scene, for soon the spirit of the social season took possession of everyone, and Christmas merriment made all faces shine, hearts happy, and heels light. The musicians fiddled, tooted, and banged as if they enjoyed it, everybody danced who could, and those who couldn’t admired their neighbors with uncommon warmth. The air was dark with Davises, and many Joneses gamboled like a flock of young giraffes. The golden secretary darted through the room like a meteor with a dashing French-woman who carpeted the floor with her pink satin train. The serene Teuton found the supper-table and was happy, eating steadily through the bill of fare, and dismayed the garcons by the ravages he committed. But the Emperor’s friend covered himself with glory, for he danced everything, whether he knew it or not, and introduced impromptu pirouettes when the figures bewildered him. The boyish abandon of that stout man was charming to behold, for though he ‘carried weight’, he danced like an India-rubber ball. He ran, he flew, he pranced, his face glowed, his bald head shown, his coattails waved wildly, his pumps actually twinkled in the air, and when the music stopped, he wiped the drops from his brow, and beamed upon his fellow men like a French Pickwick without glasses.

Amy and her Pole distinguished themselves by equal enthusiasm but more graceful agility, and Laurie found himself involuntarily keeping time to the rhythmic rise and fall of the white slippers as they flew by as indefatigably as if winged. When little Vladimir finally relinquished her, with assurances that he was ‘desolated to leave so early’, she was ready to rest, and see how her recreant knight had borne his punishment.

It had been successful, for at three-and-twenty, blighted affections find a balm in friendly society, and young nerves will thrill, young blood dance, and healthy young spirits rise, when subjected to the enchantment of beauty, light, music, and motion. Laurie had a waked-up look as he rose to give her his seat, and when he hurried away to bring her some supper, she said to herself, with a satisfied smile, “Ah, I thought that would do him good!”

“You look like Balzac’s ‘*Femme Peinte Par Elle-Meme*’,” he said, as he fanned her with one hand and held her coffee cup in the other.

“My rouge won’t come off.” and Amy rubbed her brilliant cheek, and showed him her white glove with a sober simplicity that made him laugh outright.

“What do you call this stuff?” he asked, touching a fold of her dress that had blown over his knee.

“Illusion.”

“Good name for it. It’s very pretty — new thing, isn’t it?”

“It’s as old as the hills. You have seen it on dozens of girls, and you never found out that it was pretty till now — stupide!”

“I never saw it on you before, which accounts for the mistake, you see.”

“None of that, it is forbidden. I’d rather take coffee than compliments just now. No, don’t lounge, it makes me nervous.”

Laurie sat bold upright, and meekly took her empty plate feeling an odd sort of pleasure in having ‘little Amy’ order him about, for she had lost her shyness now, and felt an irrestible desire to trample on him, as girls have a delightful way of doing when lords of creation show any signs of subjection.

“Where did you learn all this sort of thing?” he asked with a quizzical look.

“As ‘this sort of thing’ is rather a vague expression, would you kindly explain?” returned Amy, knowing perfectly well what he meant, but wickedly leaving him to describe what is indescribable.

“Well — the general air, the style, the self-possession, the — the — illusion — you know”, laughed Laurie, breaking down and helping himself out of his quandary with the new word.

Amy was gratified, but of course didn’t show it, and demurely answered, “Foreign life polishes one in spite of one’s self. I study as well as play, and as for this” — with a little gesture toward her dress — ”why, tulle is cheap, posies to be had for nothing, and I am used to making the most of my poor little things.”

Amy rather regretted that last sentence, fearing it wasn’t in good taste, but Laurie liked her better for it, and found himself both admiring and respecting the brave patience that made the most of opportunity, and the cheerful spirit that covered poverty with flowers. Amy did not know why he looked at her so kindly, nor why he filled up her book with his own name, and devoted himself to her for the rest of the evening in the most delightful manner; but the impulse that wrought this agreeable change was the result of one of the new impressions which both of them were unconsciously giving and receiving.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

ON THE SHELF

In France the young girls have a dull time of it till they are married, when ‘Vive la liberte!’ becomes their motto. In America, as everyone knows, girls early sign the declaration of independence, and enjoy their freedom with republican zest, but the young matrons usually abdicate with the first heir to the throne and go into a seclusion almost as close as a French nunnery, though by no means as quiet. Whether they like it or not, they are virtually put upon the shelf as soon as the wedding excitement is over, and most of them might exclaim, as did a very pretty woman the other day, “I’m as handsome as ever, but no one takes any notice of me because I’m married.”

Not being a belle or even a fashionable lady, Meg did not experience this affliction till her babies were a year old, for in her little world primitive customs prevailed, and she found herself more admired and beloved than ever.

As she was a womanly little woman, the maternal instinct was very strong, and she was entirely absorbed in her children, to the utter exclusion of everything and everybody else. Day and night she brooded over them with tireless devotion and anxiety, leaving John to the tender mercies of the help, for an Irish lady now presided over the kitchen department. Being a domestic man, John decidedly missed the wifely attentions he had been accustomed to receive, but as he adored his babies, he cheerfully relinquished his comfort for a time, supposing with masculine ignorance that peace would soon be restored. But three months passed, and there was no return of repose. Meg looked worn and nervous, the babies absorbed every minute of her time, the house was neglected, and Kitty, the cook, who took life ‘aisy’, kept him on short commons. When he went out in the morning he was bewildered by small commissions for the captive mamma, if he came gaily in at night, eager to embrace his family, he was quenched by a “Hush! They are just asleep after worrying all day.” If he proposed a little amusement at home, “No, it would disturb the babies.” If he hinted at a lecture or a concert, he was answered with a reproachful look, and a decided — ”Leave my children for pleasure, never!” His sleep was broken by infant wails and visions of a phantom figure pacing noiselessly to and fro in the watches of the night. His meals were interrupted by the frequent flight of the presiding genius, who deserted him, half-helped, if a muffled chirp sounded from the nest above. And when he read his paper of an evening, Demi’s colic got into the shipping list and Daisy’s fall affected the price of stocks, for Mrs. Brooke was only interested in domestic news.

The poor man was very uncomfortable, for the children had bereft him of his wife, home was merely a nursery and the perpetual ‘hushing’ made him feel like a brutal intruder whenever he entered the sacred precincts of Babyland. He bore it very patiently for six months, and when no signs of amendment appeared, he did what other paternal exiles do — tried to get a little comfort elsewhere. Scott had married and gone to housekeeping not far off, and John fell into the way of running over for an hour or two of an evening, when his own parlor was empty, and his own wife singing lullabies that seemed to have no end. Mrs. Scott was a lively, pretty girl, with nothing to do but be agreeable, and she performed her mission most successfully. The parlor was always bright and attractive, the chessboard ready, the piano in tune, plenty of gay gossip, and a nice little supper set forth in tempting style.

John would have preferred his own fireside if it had not been so lonely, but as it was he gratefully took the next best thing and enjoyed his neighbor’s society.

Meg rather approved of the new arrangement at first, and found it a relief to know that John was having a good time instead of dozing in the parlor, or tramping about the house and waking the children. But by-and-by, when the teething worry was over and the idols went to sleep at proper hours, leaving Mamma time to rest, she began to miss John, and find her workbasket dull company, when he was not sitting opposite in his old dressing gown, comfortably scorching his slippers on the fender. She would not ask him to stay at home, but felt injured because he did not know that she wanted him without being told, entirely forgetting the many evenings he had waited for her in vain. She was nervous and worn out with watching and worry, and in that unreasonable frame of mind which the best of mothers occasionally experience when domestic cares oppress them. Want of exercise robs them of cheerfulness, and too much devotion to that idol of American women, the teapot, makes them feel as if they were all nerve and no muscle.

“Yes,” she would say, looking in the glass, “I’m getting old and ugly. John doesn’t find me interesting any longer, so he leaves his faded wife and goes to see his pretty neighbor, who has no incumbrances. Well, the babies love me, they don’t care if I am thin and pale and haven’t time to crimp my hair, they are my comfort, and some day John will see what I’ve gladly sacrificed for them, won’t he, my precious?”

To which pathetic appeal Daisy would answer with a coo, or Demi with a crow, and Meg would put by her lamentations for a maternal revel, which soothed her solitude for the time being. But the pain increased as politics absorbed John, who was always running over to discuss interesting points with Scott, quite unconscious that Meg missed him. Not a word did she say, however, till her mother found her in tears one day, and insisted on knowing what the matter was, for Meg's drooping spirits had not escaped her observation.

"I wouldn't tell anyone except you, Mother, but I really do need advice, for if John goes on much longer I might as well be widowed," replied Mrs. Brooke, drying her tears on Daisy's bib with an injured air.

"Goes on how, my dear?" asked her mother anxiously.

"He's away all day, and at night when I want to see him, he is continually going over to the Scotts'. It isn't fair that I should have the hardest work, and never any amusement. Men are very selfish, even the best of them."

"So are women. Don't blame John till you see where you are wrong yourself."

"But it can't be right for him to neglect me."

"Don't you neglect him?"

"Why, Mother, I thought you'd take my part!"

"So I do, as far as sympathizing goes, but I think the fault is yours, Meg."

"I don't see how."

"Let me show you. Did John ever neglect you, as you call it, while you made it a point to give him your society of an evening, his only leisure time?"

"No, but I can't do it now, with two babies to tend."

"I think you could, dear, and I think you ought. May I speak quite freely, and will you remember that it's Mother who blames as well as Mother who sympathizes?"

"Indeed I will! Speak to me as if I were little Meg again. I often feel as if I needed teaching more than ever since these babies look to me for everything."

Meg drew her low chair beside her mother's, and with a little interruption in either lap, the two women rocked and talked lovingly together, feeling that the tie of motherhood made them more one than ever.

"You have only made the mistake that most young wives make — forgotten your duty to your husband in your love for your children. A very natural and forgivable mistake, Meg, but one that had better be remedied before you take to different ways, for children should draw you nearer than ever, not separate you, as if they were all yours, and John had nothing to do but support them. I've seen it for some weeks, but have not spoken, feeling sure it would come right in time."

"I'm afraid it won't. If I ask him to stay, he'll think I'm jealous, and I wouldn't insult him by such an idea. He doesn't see that I want him, and I don't know how to tell him without words."

"Make it so pleasant he won't want to go away. My dear, he's longing for his little home, but it isn’t home without you, and you are always in the nursery.”

“Oughtn’t I to be there?”

“Not all the time, too much confinement makes you nervous, and then you are unfitted for everything. Besides, you owe something to John as well as to the babies. Don’t neglect husband for children, don’t shut him out of the nursery, but teach him how to help in it. His place is there as well as yours, and the children need him. Let him feel that he has a part to do, and he will do it gladly and faithfully, and it will be better for you all.”

“You really think so, Mother?”

“I know it, Meg, for I’ve tried it, and I seldom give advice unless I’ve proved its practicability. When you and Jo were little, I went on just as you are, feeling as if I didn’t do my duty unless I devoted myself wholly to you. Poor Father took to his books, after I had refused all offers of help, and left me to try my experiment alone. I struggled along as well as I could, but Jo was too much for me. I nearly spoiled her by indulgence. You were poorly, and I worried about you till I fell sick myself. Then Father came to the rescue, quietly managed everything, and made himself so helpful that I saw my mistake, and never have been able to get on without him since. That is the secret of our home happiness. He does not let business wean him from the little cares and duties that affect us all, and I try not to let domestic worries destroy my interest in his pursuits. Each do our part alone in many things, but at home we work together, always.”

“It is so, Mother, and my great wish is to be to my husband and children what you have been to yours. Show me how, I’ll do anything you say.”

“You always were my docile daughter. Well, dear, if I were you, I’d let John have more to do with the management of Demi, for the boy needs training, and it’s none too soon to begin. Then I’d do what I have often proposed, let Hannah come and help you. She is a capital nurse, and you may trust the precious babies to her while you do more housework. You need the exercise, Hannah would enjoy the rest, and John would find his wife again. Go out more, keep cheerful as well as busy, for you are the sunshine-maker of the family, and if you get dismal there is no fair weather. Then I’d try to take an interest in whatever John likes — talk with him, let him read to you, exchange ideas, and help each other in that way. Don’t shut yourself up in a bandbox because you are a woman, but understand what is going on, and educate yourself to take your part in the world’s work, for it all affects you and yours.”

“John is so sensible, I’m afraid he will think I’m stupid if I ask questions about politics and things.”

“I don’t believe he would. Love covers a multitude of sins, and of whom could you ask more freely than of him? Try it, and see if he doesn’t find your society far more agreeable than Mrs. Scott's suppers."

"I will. Poor John! I'm afraid I have neglected him sadly, but I thought I was right, and he never said anything."

"He tried not to be selfish, but he has felt rather forlorn, I fancy. This is just the time, Meg, when young married people are apt to grow apart, and the very time when they ought to be most together, for the first tenderness soon wears off, unless care is taken to preserve it. And no time is so beautiful and precious to parents as the first years of the little lives given to them to train. Don't let John be a stranger to the babies, for they will do more to keep him safe and happy in this world of trial and temptation than anything else, and through them you will learn to know and love one another as you should. Now, dear, good-by. Think over Mother's preachment, act upon it if it seems good, and God bless you all."

Meg did think it over, found it good, and acted upon it, though the first attempt was not made exactly as she planned to have it. Of course the children tyrannized over her, and ruled the house as soon as they found out that kicking and squalling brought them whatever they wanted. Mamma was an abject slave to their caprices, but Papa was not so easily subjugated, and occasionally afflicted his tender spouse by an attempt at paternal discipline with his obstreperous son. For Demi inherited a trifle of his sire's firmness of character, we won't call it obstinacy, and when he made up his little mind to have or to do anything, all the king's horses and all the king's men could not change that pertinacious little mind. Mamma thought the dear too young to be taught to conquer his prejudices, but Papa believed that it never was too soon to learn obedience. So Master Demi early discovered that when he undertook to 'wrastle' with 'Parpar', he always got the worst of it, yet like the Englishman, baby respected the man who conquered him, and loved the father whose grave "No, no," was more impressive than all Mamma's love pats.

A few days after the talk with her mother, Meg resolved to try a social evening with John, so she ordered a nice supper, set the parlor in order, dressed herself prettily, and put the children to bed early, that nothing should interfere with her experiment. But unfortunately Demi's most unconquerable prejudice was against going to bed, and that night he decided to go on a rampage. So poor Meg sang and rocked, told stories and tried every sleep-prevoking wile she could devise, but all in vain, the big eyes wouldn't shut, and long after Daisy had gone to byelow, like the chubby little bunch of good nature she was, naughty Demi lay staring at the light, with the most discouragingly wide-awake expression of countenance.

"Will Demi lie still like a good boy, while Mamma runs down and gives poor Papa his tea?" asked Meg, as the hall door softly closed, and the well-known step went tip-toeing into the dining room.

“Me has tea!” said Demi, preparing to join in the revel.

“No, but I’ll save you some little cakies for breakfast, if you’ll go bye-bye like Daisy. Will you, lovey?”

“Iss!” and Demi shut his eyes tight, as if to catch sleep and hurry the desired day.

Taking advantage of the propitious moment, Meg slipped away and ran down to greet her husband with a smiling face and the little blue bow in her hair which was his especial admiration. He saw it at once and said with pleased surprise, “Why, little mother, how gay we are tonight. Do you expect company?”

“Only you, dear.”

“Is it a birthday, anniversary, or anything?”

“No, I’m tired of being dowdy, so I dressed up as a change. You always make yourself nice for table, no matter how tired you are, so why shouldn’t I when I have the time?”

“I do it out of respect for you, my dear,” said old-fashioned John.

“Ditto, ditto, Mr. Brooke,” laughed Meg, looking young and pretty again, as she nodded to him over the teapot.

“Well, it’s altogether delightful, and like old times. This tastes right. I drink your health, dear.” and John sipped his tea with an air of reposeful rapture, which was of very short duration however, for as he put down his cup, the door handle rattled mysteriously, and a little voice was heard, saying impatiently...

“Opy doy. Me’s tummin!”

“It’s that naughty boy. I told him to go to sleep alone, and here he is, downstairs, getting his death a-cold pattering over that canvas,” said Meg, answering the call.

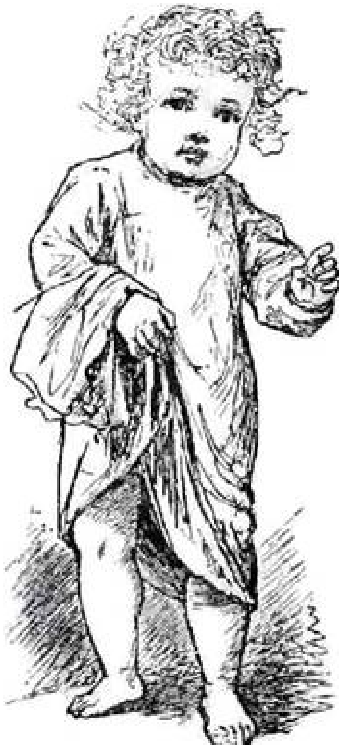
“Mornin’ now,” announced Demi in joyful tone as he entered, with his long nightgown gracefully festooned over his arm and every curl bobbing gayly as he pranced about the table, eyeing the ‘cakies’ with loving glances.

“No, it isn’t morning yet. You must go to bed, and not trouble poor Mamma. Then you can have the little cake with sugar on it.”

“Me loves Parpar,” said the artful one, preparing to climb the paternal knee and revel in forbidden joys. But John shook his head, and said to Meg...

“If you told him to stay up there, and go to sleep alone, make him do it, or he will never learn to mind you.”

“Yes, of course. Come, Demi,” and Meg led her son away, feeling a strong desire to spank the little marplot who hopped beside her, laboring under the delusion that the bribe was to be administered as soon as they reached the nursery.



Nor was he disappointed, for that shortsighted woman actually gave him a lump of sugar, tucked him into his bed, and forbade any more promenades till morning.

"Iss!" said Demi the perjured, blissfully sucking his sugar, and regarding his first attempt as eminently successful.

Meg returned to her place, and supper was progressing pleasantly, when the little ghost walked again, and exposed the maternal delinquencies by boldly demanding, "More sudar, Marmar."

"Now this won't do," said John, hardening his heart against the engaging little sinner. "We shall never know any peace till that child learns to go to bed properly. You have made a slave of yourself long enough. Give him one lesson, and then there will be an end of it. Put him in his bed and leave him, Meg."

"He won't stay there, he never does unless I sit by him."

"I'll manage him. Demi, go upstairs, and get into your bed, as Mamma bids you."

"S'ant!" replied the young rebel, helping himself to the coveted 'cakie', and beginning to eat the same with calm audacity.

"You must never say that to Papa. I shall carry you if you don't go yourself."

"Go 'way, me don't love Parpar." and Demi retired to his mother's skirts for protection.

But even that refuge proved unavailing, for he was delivered over to the enemy, with a "Be gentle with him, John," which struck the culprit with dismay, for when Mamma deserted him, then the judgment day was at hand. Bereft of his cake, defrauded of his frolic, and borne away by a strong hand to that detested bed, poor Demi could not restrain his wrath, but openly defied Papa, and kicked and screamed lustily all the way upstairs. The minute he was put into bed on one side, he rolled out on the other, and made for the door, only to be ignominiously caught up by the tail of his little toga and put back again, which lively performance was kept up till the young man's strength gave out, when he devoted himself to roaring at the top of his voice. This vocal exercise usually conquered Meg, but John sat as unmoved as the post which is popularly believed to be deaf. No coaxing, no sugar, no lullaby, no story, even the light was put out and only the red glow of the fire enlivened the 'big dark' which Demi regarded with curiosity rather than fear. This new order of things disgusted him, and he howled dismally for 'Marmar', as his angry passions subsided, and recollections of his tender bondwoman returned to the captive autocrat. The plaintive wail which succeeded the passionate roar went to Meg's heart, and she ran up to say beseechingly...

"Let me stay with him, he'll be good now, John."

"No, my dear. I've told him he must go to sleep, as you bid him, and he must, if I stay here all night."

"But he'll cry himself sick," pleaded Meg, reproaching herself for deserting her boy.

"No, he won't, he's so tired he will soon drop off and then the matter is settled, for he will understand that he has got to mind. Don't interfere, I'll manage him."

"He's my child, and I can't have his spirit broken by harshness."

"He's my child, and I won't have his temper spoiled by indulgence. Go down, my dear, and leave the boy to me."

When John spoke in that masterful tone, Meg always obeyed, and never regretted her docility.

"Please let me kiss him once, John?"

"Certainly. Demi, say good night to Mamma, and let her go and rest, for she is very tired with taking care of you all day."

Meg always insisted upon it that the kiss won the victory, for after it was given, Demi sobbed more quietly, and lay quite still at the bottom of the bed, whither he had wriggled in his anguish of mind.

"Poor little man, he's worn out with sleep and crying. I'll cover him up, and then go and set Meg's heart at rest," thought John, creeping to the bedside, hoping to find his rebellious heir asleep.

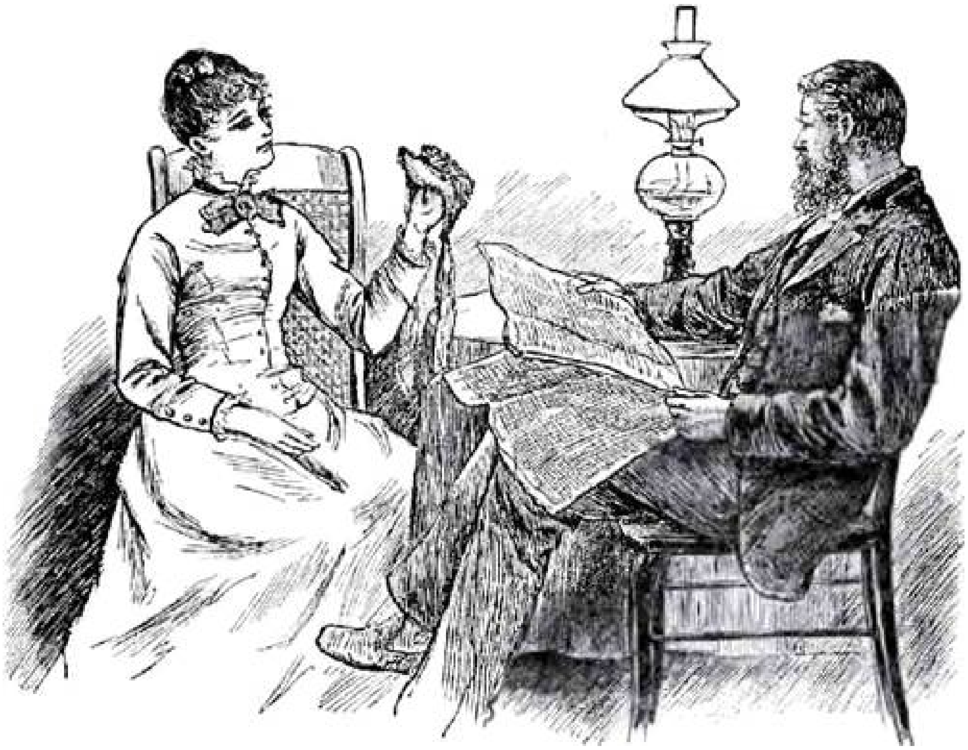
But he wasn't, for the moment his father peeped at him, Demi's eyes opened, his little chin began to quiver, and he put up his arms, saying with a penitent hiccough, “Me’s dood, now.”

Sitting on the stairs outside Meg wondered at the long silence which followed the uproar, and after imagining all sorts of impossible accidents, she slipped into the room to set her fears at rest. Demi lay fast asleep, not in his usual spreadeagle attitude, but in a subdued bunch, cuddled close in the circle of his father’s arm and holding his father’s finger, as if he felt that justice was tempered with mercy, and had gone to sleep a sadder and wiser baby. So held, John had waited with a womanly patience till the little hand relaxed its hold, and while waiting had fallen asleep, more tired by that tussle with his son than with his whole day’s work.

As Meg stood watching the two faces on the pillow, she smiled to herself, and then slipped away again, saying in a satisfied tone, “I never need fear that John will be too harsh with my babies. He does know how to manage them, and will be a great help, for Demi is getting too much for me.”

When John came down at last, expecting to find a pensive or reproachful wife, he was agreeably surprised to find Meg placidly trimming a bonnet, and to be greeted with the request to read something about the election, if he was not too tired. John saw in a minute that a revolution of some kind was going on, but wisely asked no questions, knowing that Meg was such a transparent little person, she couldn’t keep a secret to save her life, and therefore the clue would soon appear. He read a long debate with the most amiable readiness and then explained it in his most lucid manner, while Meg tried to look deeply interested, to ask intelligent questions, and keep her thoughts from wandering from the state of the nation to the state of her bonnet. In her secret soul, however, she decided that politics were as bad as mathematics, and that the mission of politicians seemed to be calling each other names, but she kept these feminine ideas to herself, and when John paused, shook her head and said with what she thought diplomatic ambiguity, “Well, I really don’t see what we are coming to.”

John laughed, and watched her for a minute, as she poised a pretty little preparation of lace and flowers on her hand, and regarded it with the genuine interest which his harangue had failed to waken.



“She is trying to like politics for my sake, so I’ll try and like millinery for hers, that’s only fair,” thought John the Just, adding aloud, “That’s very pretty. Is it what you call a breakfast cap?”

“My dear man, it’s a bonnet! My very best go-to-concert-and-theater bonnet.”

“I beg your pardon, it was so small, I naturally mistook it for one of the flyaway things you sometimes wear. How do you keep it on?”

“These bits of lace are fastened under the chin with a rosebud, so,” and Meg illustrated by putting on the bonnet and regarding him with an air of calm satisfaction that was irresistible.

“It’s a love of a bonnet, but I prefer the face inside, for it looks young and happy again,” and John kissed the smiling face, to the great detriment of the rosebud under the chin.

“I’m glad you like it, for I want you to take me to one of the new concerts some night. I really need some music to put me in tune. Will you, please?”

“Of course I will, with all my heart, or anywhere else you like. You have been shut up so long, it will do you no end of good, and I shall enjoy it, of all things. What put it into your head, little mother?”

“Well, I had a talk with Marmee the other day, and told her how nervous and cross and out of sorts I felt, and she said I needed change and less care, so Hannah is to help me with the children, and I’m to see to things about the house more, and now and then have a little fun, just to keep me from getting to be a fidgety, broken-down old woman before my time. It’s only an experiment, John, and I want to try it for your sake as much as for mine, because I've neglected you shamefully lately, and I'm going to make home what it used to be, if I can. You don't object, I hope?"

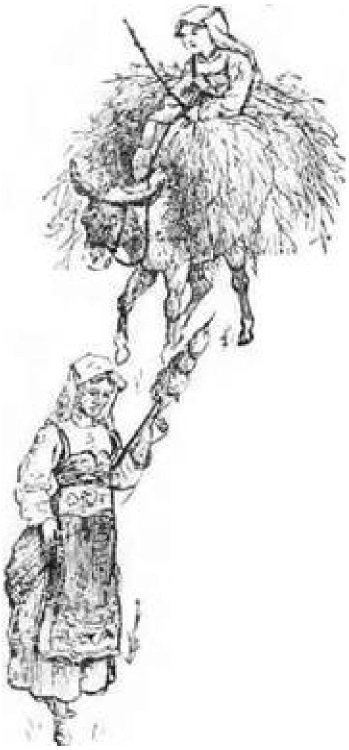
Never mind what John said, or what a very narrow escape the little bonnet had from utter ruin. All that we have any business to know is that John did not appear to object, judging from the changes which gradually took place in the house and its inmates. It was not all Paradise by any means, but everyone was better for the division of labor system. The children throve under the paternal rule, for accurate, steadfast John brought order and obedience into Babydom, while Meg recovered her spirits and composed her nerves by plenty of wholesome exercise, a little pleasure, and much confidential conversation with her sensible husband. Home grew homelike again, and John had no wish to leave it, unless he took Meg with him. The Scotts came to the Brookes' now, and everyone found the little house a cheerful place, full of happiness, content, and family love. Even Sallie Moffatt liked to go there. "It is always so quiet and pleasant here, it does me good, Meg," she used to say, looking about her with wistful eyes, as if trying to discover the charm, that she might use it in her great house, full of splendid loneliness, for there were no riotous, sunny-faced babies there, and Ned lived in a world of his own, where there was no place for her.

This household happiness did not come all at once, but John and Meg had found the key to it, and each year of married life taught them how to use it, unlocking the treasuries of real home love and mutual helpfulness, which the poorest may possess, and the richest cannot buy. This is the sort of shelf on which young wives and mothers may consent to be laid, safe from the restless fret and fever of the world, finding loyal lovers in the little sons and daughters who cling to them, undaunted by sorrow, poverty, or age, walking side by side, through fair and stormy weather, with a faithful friend, who is, in the true sense of the good old Saxon word, the 'house-band', and learning, as Meg learned, that a woman's happiest kingdom is home, her highest honor the art of ruling it not as a queen, but as a wise wife and mother.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

LAZY LAURENCE

Laurie went to Nice intending to stay a week, and remained a month. He was tired of wandering about alone, and Amy's familiar presence seemed to give a homelike charm to the foreign scenes in which she bore a part. He rather missed the 'petting' he used to receive, and enjoyed a taste of it again, for no attentions, however flattering, from strangers, were half so pleasant as the sisterly adoration of the girls at home. Amy never would pet him like the others, but she was very glad to see him now, and quite clung to him, feeling that he was the representative of the dear family for whom she longed more than she would confess. They naturally took comfort in each other's society and were much together, riding, walking, dancing, or dawdling, for at Nice no one can be very industrious during the gay season. But, while apparently amusing themselves in the most careless fashion, they were half-consciously making discoveries and forming opinions about each other. Amy rose daily in the estimation of her friend, but he sank in hers, and each felt the truth before a word was spoken. Amy tried to please, and succeeded, for she was grateful for the many pleasures he gave her, and repaid him with the little services to which womanly women know how to lend an indescribable charm. Laurie made no effort of any kind, but just let himself drift along as comfortably as possible, trying to forget, and feeling that all women owed him a kind word because one had been cold to him. It cost him no effort to be generous, and he would have given Amy all the trinkets in Nice if she would have taken them, but at the same time he felt that he could not change the opinion she was forming of him, and he rather dreaded the keen blue eyes that seemed to watch him with such half-sorrowful, half-scornful surprise.



“All the rest have gone to Monaco for the day. I preferred to stay at home and write letters. They are done now, and I am going to Valrosa to sketch, will you come?” said Amy, as she joined Laurie one lovely day when he lounged in as usual, about noon.

“Well, yes, but isn’t it rather warm for such a long walk?” he answered slowly, for the shaded salon looked inviting after the glare without.

“I’m going to have the little carriage, and Baptiste can drive, so you’ll have nothing to do but hold your umbrella, and keep your gloves nice,” returned Amy, with a sarcastic glance at the immaculate kids, which were a weak point with Laurie.

“Then I’ll go with pleasure.” and he put out his hand for her sketchbook. But she tucked it under her arm with a sharp...

“Don’t trouble yourself. It’s no exertion to me, but you don’t look equal to it.”

Laurie lifted his eyebrows and followed at a leisurely pace as she ran downstairs, but when they got into the carriage he took the reins himself, and left little Baptiste nothing to do but fold his arms and fall asleep on his perch.

The two never quarreled. Amy was too well-bred, and just now Laurie was too lazy, so in a minute he peeped under her hatbrim with an inquiring air. She answered him with a smile, and they went on together in the most amicable manner.

It was a lovely drive, along winding roads rich in the picturesque scenes that delight beauty-loving eyes. Here an ancient monastery, whence the solemn chanting of the monks came down to them. There a bare-legged shepherd, in wooden shoes, pointed hat, and rough jacket over one shoulder, sat piping on a stone while his goats skipped among the rocks or lay at his feet. Meek, mouse-colored donkeys, laden with panniers of freshly cut grass passed by, with a pretty girl in a capaline sitting between the green piles, or an old woman spinning with a distaff as she went. Brown, soft-eyed children ran out from the quaint stone hovels to offer nosegays, or bunches of oranges still on the bough. Gnarled olive trees covered the hills with their dusky foliage, fruit hung golden in the orchard, and great scarlet anemones fringed the roadside, while beyond green slopes and craggy heights, the Maritime Alps rose sharp and white against the blue Italian sky.

Valrosa well deserved its name, for in that climate of perpetual summer roses blossomed everywhere. They overhung the archway, thrust themselves between the bars of the great gate with a sweet welcome to passers-by, and lined the avenue, winding through lemon trees and feathery palms up to the villa on the hill. Every shadowy nook, where seats invited one to stop and rest, was a mass of bloom, every cool grotto had its marble nymph smiling from a veil of flowers and every fountain reflected crimson, white, or pale pink roses, leaning down to smile at their own beauty. Roses covered the walls of the house, draped the cornices, climbed the pillars, and ran riot over the balustrade of the wide terrace, whence one looked down on the sunny Mediterranean, and the white-walled city on its shore.

“This is a regular honeymoon paradise, isn’t it? Did you ever see such roses?” asked Amy, pausing on the terrace to enjoy the view, and a luxurious whiff of perfume that came wandering by.

“No, nor felt such thorns,” returned Laurie, with his thumb in his mouth, after a vain attempt to capture a solitary scarlet flower that grew just beyond his reach.

“Try lower down, and pick those that have no thorns,” said Amy, gathering three of the tiny cream-colored ones that starred the wall behind her. She put them in his buttonhole as a peace offering, and he stood a minute looking down at them with a curious expression, for in the Italian part of his nature there was a touch of superstition, and he was just then in that state of half-sweet, half-bitter melancholy, when imaginative young men find significance in trifles and food for romance everywhere. He had thought of Jo in reaching after the thorny red rose, for vivid flowers became her, and she had often worn ones like that from the greenhouse at home. The pale roses Amy gave him were the sort that the Italians lay in dead hands, never in bridal wreaths, and for a moment he wondered if the omen was for Jo or for himself, but the next instant his

American common sense got the better of sentimentality, and he laughed a heartier laugh than Amy had heard since he came.

“It’s good advice, you’d better take it and save your fingers,” she said, thinking her speech amused him.

“Thank you, I will,” he answered in jest, and a few months later he did it in earnest.

“Laurie, when are you going to your grandfather?” she asked presently, as she settled herself on a rustic seat.

“Very soon.”

“You have said that a dozen times within the last three weeks.”

“I dare say, short answers save trouble.”

“He expects you, and you really ought to go.”

“Hospitable creature! I know it.”

“Then why don’t you do it?”

“Natural depravity, I suppose.”

“Natural indolence, you mean. It’s really dreadful!” and Amy looked severe.

“Not so bad as it seems, for I should only plague him if I went, so I might as well stay and plague you a little longer, you can bear it better, in fact I think it agrees with you excellently,” and Laurie composed himself for a lounge on the broad ledge of the balustrade.

Amy shook her head and opened her sketchbook with an air of resignation, but she had made up her mind to lecture ‘that boy’ and in a minute she began again.

“What are you doing just now?”

“Watching lizards.”

“No, no. I mean what do you intend and wish to do?”

“Smoke a cigarette, if you’ll allow me.”

“How provoking you are! I don’t approve of cigars and I will only allow it on condition that you let me put you into my sketch. I need a figure.”

“With all the pleasure in life. How will you have me, full length or three-quarters, on my head or my heels? I should respectfully suggest a recumbent posture, then put yourself in also and call it ‘Dolce far niente’.”

“Stay as you are, and go to sleep if you like. I intend to work hard,” said Amy in her most energetic tone.

“What delightful enthusiasm!” and he leaned against a tall urn with an air of entire satisfaction.

“What would Jo say if she saw you now?” asked Amy impatiently, hoping to stir him up by the mention of her still more energetic sister’s name.

“As usual, ‘Go away, Teddy. I’m busy!’“ He laughed as he spoke, but the laugh was not natural, and a shade passed over his face, for the utterance of the familiar name touched the wound that was not healed yet. Both tone and shadow struck Amy, for she had seen and heard them before, and now she looked up in time to catch a new expression on Laurie's face — a hard bitter look, full of pain, dissatisfaction, and regret. It was gone before she could study it and the listless expression back again. She watched him for a moment with artistic pleasure, thinking how like an Italian he looked, as he lay basking in the sun with uncovered head and eyes full of southern dreaminess, for he seemed to have forgotten her and fallen into a reverie.

"You look like the effigy of a young knight asleep on his tomb," she said, carefully tracing the well-cut profile defined against the dark stone.

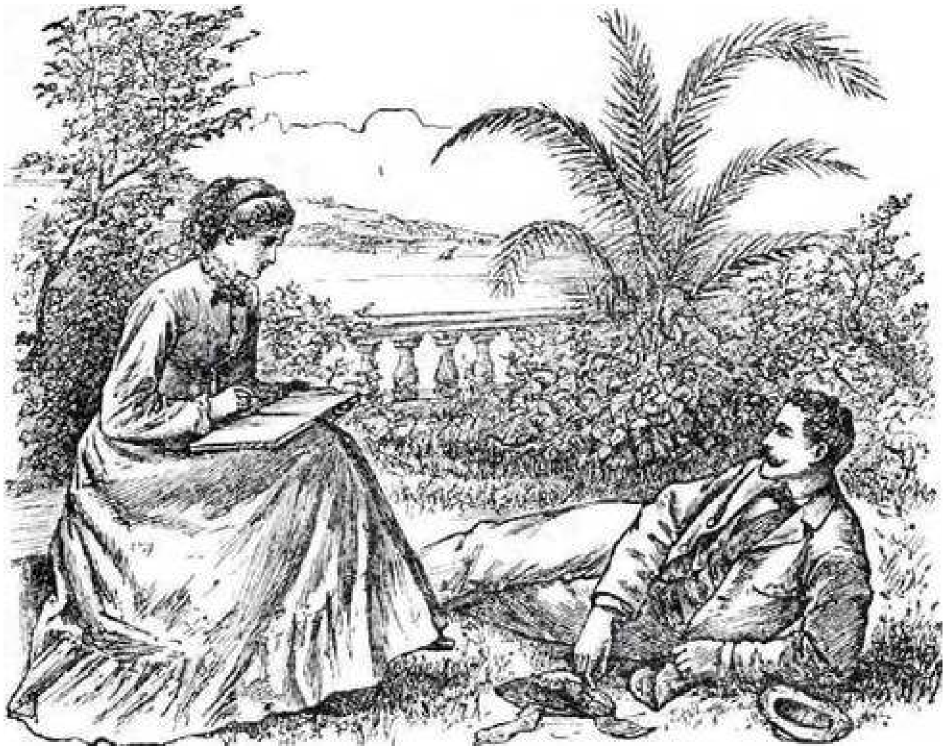
"Wish I was!"

"That's a foolish wish, unless you have spoiled your life. You are so changed, I sometimes think — " there Amy stopped, with a half-timid, half-wistful look, more significant than her unfinished speech.

Laurie saw and understood the affectionate anxiety which she hesitated to express, and looking straight into her eyes, said, just as he used to say it to her mother, "It's all right, ma'am."

That satisfied her and set at rest the doubts that had begun to worry her lately. It also touched her, and she showed that it did, by the cordial tone in which she said...

"I'm glad of that! I didn't think you'd been a very bad boy, but I fancied you might have wasted money at that wicked Baden-Baden, lost your heart to some charming Frenchwoman with a husband, or got into some of the scrapes that young men seem to consider a necessary part of a foreign tour. Don't stay out there in the sun, come and lie on the grass here and 'let us be friendly', as Jo used to say when we got in the sofa corner and told secrets."



Laurie obediently threw himself down on the turf, and began to amuse himself by sticking daisies into the ribbons of Amy’s hat, that lay there.

“I’m all ready for the secrets.” and he glanced up with a decided expression of interest in his eyes.

“I’ve none to tell. You may begin.”

“Haven’t one to bless myself with. I thought perhaps you’d had some news from home..”

“You have heard all that has come lately. Don’t you hear often? I fancied Jo would send you volumes.”

“She’s very busy. I’m roving about so, it’s impossible to be regular, you know. When do you begin your great work of art, Raphaella?” he asked, changing the subject abruptly after another pause, in which he had been wondering if Amy knew his secret and wanted to talk about it.

“Never,” she answered, with a despondent but decided air. “Rome took all the vanity out of me, for after seeing the wonders there, I felt too insignificant to live and gave up all my foolish hopes in despair.”

“Why should you, with so much energy and talent?”

“That’s just why, because talent isn’t genius, and no amount of energy can make it so. I want to be great, or nothing. I won’t be a common-place dauber, so I don’t intend to try any more.”

“And what are you going to do with yourself now, if I may ask?”

“Polish up my other talents, and be an ornament to society, if I get the chance.”

It was a characteristic speech, and sounded daring, but audacity becomes young people, and Amy’s ambition had a good foundation. Laurie smiled, but he liked the spirit with which she took up a new purpose when a long-cherished one died, and spent no time lamenting.

“Good! And here is where Fred Vaughn comes in, I fancy.”

Amy preserved a discreet silence, but there was a conscious look in her downcast face that made Laurie sit up and say gravely, “Now I’m going to play brother, and ask questions. May I?”

“I don’t promise to answer.”

“Your face will, if your tongue won’t. You aren’t woman of the world enough yet to hide your feelings, my dear. I heard rumors about Fred and you last year, and it’s my private opinion that if he had not been called home so suddenly and detained so long, something would have come of it, hey?”

“That’s not for me to say,” was Amy’s grim reply, but her lips would smile, and there was a traitorous sparkle of the eye which betrayed that she knew her power and enjoyed the knowledge.

“You are not engaged, I hope?” and Laurie looked very elder-brotherly and grave all of a sudden.

“No.”

“But you will be, if he comes back and goes properly down on his knees, won’t you?”

“Very likely.”

“Then you are fond of old Fred?”

“I could be, if I tried.”

“But you don’t intend to try till the proper moment? Bless my soul, what unearthly prudence! He’s a good fellow, Amy, but not the man I fancied you’d like.”

“He is rich, a gentleman, and has delightful manners,” began Amy, trying to be quite cool and dignified, but feeling a little ashamed of herself, in spite of the sincerity of her intentions.

“I understand. Queens of society can’t get on without money, so you mean to make a good match, and start in that way? Quite right and proper, as the world goes, but it sounds odd from the lips of one of your mother’s girls.”

“True, nevertheless.”

A short speech, but the quiet decision with which it was uttered contrasted curiously with the young speaker. Laurie felt this instinctively and laid himself down again, with a sense of disappointment which he could not explain. His look and silence, as well as a certain inward self-disapproval, ruffled Amy, and made her resolve to deliver her lecture without delay.

“I wish you’d do me the favor to rouse yourself a little,” she said sharply.

“Do it for me, there’s a dear girl.”

“I could, if I tried.” and she looked as if she would like doing it in the most summary style.

“Try, then. I give you leave,” returned Laurie, who enjoyed having someone to tease, after his long abstinence from his favorite pastime.

“You’d be angry in five minutes.”

“I’m never angry with you. It takes two flints to make a fire. You are as cool and soft as snow.”

“You don’t know what I can do. Snow produces a glow and a tingle, if applied rightly. Your indifference is half affectation, and a good stirring up would prove it.”

“Stir away, it won’t hurt me and it may amuse you, as the big man said when his little wife beat him. Regard me in the light of a husband or a carpet, and beat till you are tired, if that sort of exercise agrees with you.”

Being decidedly nettled herself, and longing to see him shake off the apathy that so altered him, Amy sharpened both tongue and pencil, and began.

“Flo and I have got a new name for you. It’s Lazy Laurence. How do you like it?”

She thought it would annoy him, but he only folded his arms under his head, with an imperturbable, “That’s not bad. Thank you, ladies.”

“Do you want to know what I honestly think of you?”

“Pining to be told.”

“Well, I despise you.”

If she had even said ‘I hate you’ in a petulant or coquettish tone, he would have laughed and rather liked it, but the grave, almost sad, accent in her voice made him open his eyes, and ask quickly...

“Why, if you please?”

“Because, with every chance for being good, useful, and happy, you are faulty, lazy, and miserable.”

“Strong language, mademoiselle.”

“If you like it, I’ll go on.”

“Pray do, it’s quite interesting.”

“I thought you’d find it so. Selfish people always like to talk about themselves.”

“Am I selfish?” the question slipped out involuntarily and in a tone of surprise, for the one virtue on which he prided himself was generosity.

“Yes, very selfish,” continued Amy, in a calm, cool voice, twice as effective just then as an angry one. “I’ll show you how, for I’ve studied you while we were frolicking, and I’m not at all satisfied with you. Here you have been abroad nearly six months, and done nothing but waste time and money and disappoint your friends.”

“Isn’t a fellow to have any pleasure after a four-year grind?”

“You don’t look as if you’d had much. At any rate, you are none the better for it, as far as I can see. I said when we first met that you had improved. Now I take it all back, for I don’t think you half so nice as when I left you at home. You have grown abominably lazy, you like gossip, and waste time on frivolous things, you are contented to be petted and admired by silly people, instead of being loved and respected by wise ones. With money, talent, position, health, and beauty, ah you like that old Vanity! But it’s the truth, so I can’t help saying it, with all these splendid things to use and enjoy, you can find nothing to do but dawdle, and instead of being the man you ought to be, you are only...” there she stopped, with a look that had both pain and pity in it.

“Saint Laurence on a gridiron,” added Laurie, blandly finishing the sentence. But the lecture began to take effect, for there was a wide-awake sparkle in his eyes now and a half-angry, half-injured expression replaced the former indifference.

“I supposed you’d take it so. You men tell us we are angels, and say we can make you what we will, but the instant we honestly try to do you good, you laugh at us and won’t listen, which proves how much your flattery is worth.” Amy spoke bitterly, and turned her back on the exasperating martyr at her feet.

In a minute a hand came down over the page, so that she could not draw, and Laurie’s voice said, with a droll imitation of a penitent child, “I will be good, oh, I will be good!”

But Amy did not laugh, for she was in earnest, and tapping on the outspread hand with her pencil, said soberly, “Aren’t you ashamed of a hand like that? It’s as soft and white as a woman’s, and looks as if it never did anything but wear Jouvin’s best gloves and pick flowers for ladies. You are not a dandy, thank Heaven, so I’m glad to see there are no diamonds or big seal rings on it, only the little old one Jo gave you so long ago. Dear soul, I wish she was here to help me!”

“So do I!”

The hand vanished as suddenly as it came, and there was energy enough in the echo of her wish to suit even Amy. She glanced down at him with a new thought in her mind, but he was lying with his hat half over his face, as if for shade, and his mustache hid his mouth. She only saw his chest rise and fall, with a long breath that might have been a sigh, and the hand that wore the ring nestled down into the grass, as if to hide something too precious or too tender to be spoken of. All in a minute various hints and trifles assumed shape and significance in Amy's mind, and told her what her sister never had confided to her. She remembered that Laurie never spoke voluntarily of Jo, she recalled the shadow on his face just now, the change in his character, and the wearing of the little old ring which was no ornament to a handsome hand. Girls are quick to read such signs and feel their eloquence. Amy had fancied that perhaps a love trouble was at the bottom of the alteration, and now she was sure of it. Her keen eyes filled, and when she spoke again, it was in a voice that could be beautifully soft and kind when she chose to make it so.

"I know I have no right to talk so to you, Laurie, and if you weren't the sweetest-tempered fellow in the world, you'd be very angry with me. But we are all so fond and proud of you, I couldn't bear to think they should be disappointed in you at home as I have been, though, perhaps they would understand the change better than I do."

"I think they would," came from under the hat, in a grim tone, quite as touching as a broken one.

"They ought to have told me, and not let me go blundering and scolding, when I should have been more kind and patient than ever. I never did like that Miss Randal and now I hate her!" said artful Amy, wishing to be sure of her facts this time.

"Hang Miss Randal!" and Laurie knocked the hat off his face with a look that left no doubt of his sentiments toward that young lady.

"I beg pardon, I thought..." and there she paused diplomatically.

"No, you didn't, you knew perfectly well I never cared for anyone but Jo," Laurie said that in his old, impetuous tone, and turned his face away as he spoke.

"I did think so, but as they never said anything about it, and you came away, I supposed I was mistaken. And Jo wouldn't be kind to you? Why, I was sure she loved you dearly."

"She was kind, but not in the right way, and it's lucky for her she didn't love me, if I'm the good-for-nothing fellow you think me. It's her fault though, and you may tell her so."

The hard, bitter look came back again as he said that, and it troubled Amy, for she did not know what balm to apply.

"I was wrong, I didn't know. I'm very sorry I was so cross, but I can't help wishing you'd bear it better, Teddy, dear."

"Don't, that's her name for me!" and Laurie put up his hand with a quick gesture to stop the words spoken in Jo's half-kind, half-reproachful tone. "Wait till you've tried it yourself," he added in a low voice, as he pulled up the grass by the handful.

“I’d take it manfully, and be respected if I couldn’t be loved,” said Amy, with the decision of one who knew nothing about it.

Now, Laurie flattered himself that he had borne it remarkably well, making no moan, asking no sympathy, and taking his trouble away to live it down alone. Amy’s lecture put the matter in a new light, and for the first time it did look weak and selfish to lose heart at the first failure, and shut himself up in moody indifference. He felt as if suddenly shaken out of a pensive dream and found it impossible to go to sleep again. Presently he sat up and asked slowly, “Do you think Jo would despise me as you do?”

“Yes, if she saw you now. She hates lazy people. Why don’t you do something splendid, and make her love you?”

“I did my best, but it was no use.”

“Graduating well, you mean? That was no more than you ought to have done, for your grandfather’s sake. It would have been shameful to fail after spending so much time and money, when everyone knew that you could do well.”

“I did fail, say what you will, for Jo wouldn’t love me,” began Laurie, leaning his head on his hand in a despondent attitude.

“No, you didn’t, and you’ll say so in the end, for it did you good, and proved that you could do something if you tried. If you’d only set about another task of some sort, you’d soon be your hearty, happy self again, and forget your trouble.”

“That’s impossible.”

“Try it and see. You needn’t shrug your shoulders, and think, ‘Much she knows about such things’. I don’t pretend to be wise, but I am observing, and I see a great deal more than you’d imagine. I’m interested in other people’s experiences and inconsistencies, and though I can’t explain, I remember and use them for my own benefit. Love Jo all your days, if you choose, but don’t let it spoil you, for it’s wicked to throw away so many good gifts because you can’t have the one you want. There, I won’t lecture any more, for I know you’ll wake up and be a man in spite of that hardhearted girl.”

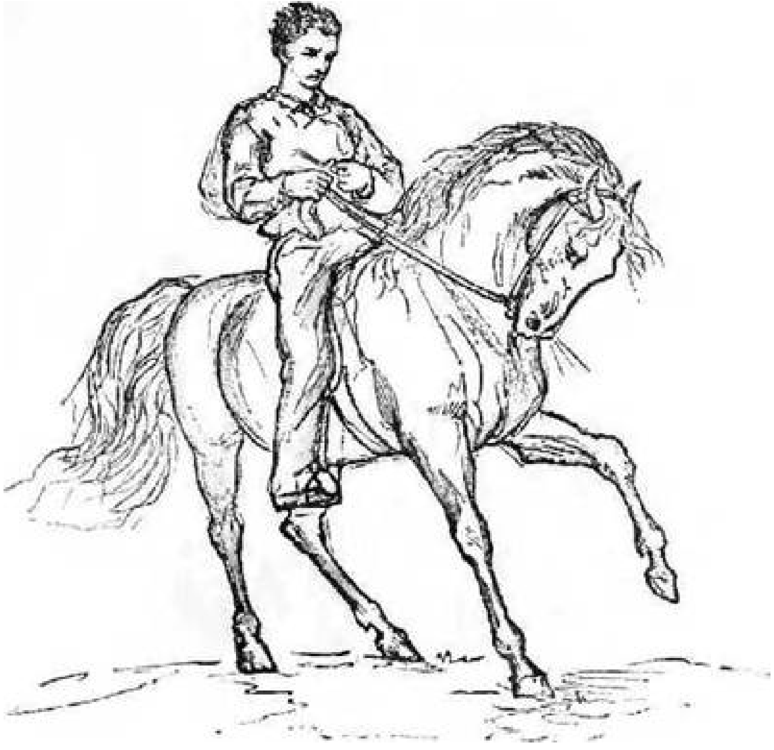
Neither spoke for several minutes. Laurie sat turning the little ring on his finger, and Amy put the last touches to the hasty sketch she had been working at while she talked. Presently she put it on his knee, merely saying, “How do you like that?”

He looked and then he smiled, as he could not well help doing, for it was capitally done, the long, lazy figure on the grass, with listless face, half-shut eyes, and one hand holding a cigar, from which came the little wreath of smoke that encircled the dreamer’s head.

“How well you draw!” he said, with a genuine surprise and pleasure at her skill, adding, with a half-laugh, “Yes, that’s me.”

“As you are. This is as you were.” and Amy laid another sketch beside the one he held.

It was not nearly so well done, but there was a life and spirit in it which atoned for many faults, and it recalled the past so vividly that a sudden change swept over the young man’s face as he looked. Only a rough sketch of Laurie taming a horse. Hat and coat were off, and every line of the active figure, resolute face, and commanding attitude was full of energy and meaning. The handsome brute, just subdued, stood arching his neck under the tightly drawn rein, with one foot impatiently pawing the ground, and ears pricked up as if listening for the voice that had mastered him. In the ruffled mane, the rider’s breezy hair and erect attitude, there was a suggestion of suddenly arrested motion, of strength, courage, and youthful buoyancy that contrasted sharply with the supine grace of the ‘*Dolce far Niente*’ sketch. Laurie said nothing but as his eye went from one to the other, Amy saw him flush up and fold his lips together as if he read and accepted the little lesson she had given him. That satisfied her, and without waiting for him to speak, she said, in her sprightly way...



“Don’t you remember the day you played Rarey with Puck, and we all looked on? Meg and Beth were frightened, but Jo clapped and pranced, and I sat on the fence and drew you. I found that sketch in my portfolio the other day, touched it up, and kept it to show you.”

“Much obliged. You’ve improved immensely since then, and I congratulate you. May I venture to suggest in ‘a honeymoon paradise’ that five o’clock is the dinner hour at your hotel?”

Laurie rose as he spoke, returned the pictures with a smile and a bow and looked at his watch, as if to remind her that even moral lectures should have an end. He tried to resume his former easy, indifferent air, but it was an affectation now, for the rousing had been more effacious than he would confess. Amy felt the shade of coldness in his manner, and said to herself...

“Now, I’ve offended him. Well, if it does him good, I’m glad, if it makes him hate me, I’m sorry, but it’s true, and I can’t take back a word of it.”

They laughed and chatted all the way home, and little Baptiste, up behind, thought that monsieur and madamoiselle were in charming spirits. But both felt ill at ease. The friendly frankness was disturbed, the sunshine had a shadow over it, and despite their apparent gaiety, there was a secret discontent in the heart of each.

“Shall we see you this evening, mon frere?” asked Amy, as they parted at her aunt’s door.

“Unfortunately I have an engagement. Au revoir, madamoiselle,” and Laurie bent as if to kiss her hand, in the foreign fashion, which became him better than many men. Something in his face made Amy say quickly and warmly...

“No, be yourself with me, Laurie, and part in the good old way. I’d rather have a hearty English handshake than all the sentimental salutations in France.”

“Goodbye, dear,” and with these words, uttered in the tone she liked, Laurie left her, after a handshake almost painful in its heartiness.

Next morning, instead of the usual call, Amy received a note which made her smile at the beginning and sigh at the end.

My Dear Mentor, Please make my adieux to your aunt, and exult within yourself, for ‘Lazy Laurence’ has gone to his grandpa, like the best of boys. A pleasant winter to you, and may the gods grant you a blissful honeymoon at Valrosa! I think Fred would be benefited by a rouser. Tell him so, with my congratulations.

Yours gratefully, Telemachus

“Good boy! I’m glad he’s gone,” said Amy, with an approving smile. The next minute her face fell as she glanced about the empty room, adding, with an involuntary sigh, “Yes, I am glad, but how I shall miss him.”

CHAPTER FORTY

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

When the first bitterness was over, the family accepted the inevitable, and tried to bear it cheerfully, helping one another by the increased affection which comes to bind households tenderly together in times of trouble. They put away their grief, and each did his or her part toward making that last year a happy one.

The pleasantest room in the house was set apart for Beth, and in it was gathered everything that she most loved, flowers, pictures, her piano, the little worktable, and the beloved pussies. Father's best books found their way there, Mother's easy chair, Jo's desk, Amy's finest sketches, and every day Meg brought her babies on a loving pilgrimage, to make sunshine for Aunty Beth. John quietly set apart a little sum, that he might enjoy the pleasure of keeping the invalid supplied with the fruit she loved and longed for. Old Hannah never wearied of concocting dainty dishes to tempt a capricious appetite, dropping tears as she worked, and from across the sea came little gifts and cheerful letters, seeming to bring breaths of warmth and fragrance from lands that know no winter.

Here, cherished like a household saint in its shrine, sat Beth, tranquil and busy as ever, for nothing could change the sweet, unselfish nature, and even while preparing to leave life, she tried to make it happier for those who should remain behind. The feeble fingers were never idle, and one of her pleasures was to make little things for the school children daily passing to and fro, to drop a pair of mittens from her window for a pair of purple hands, a needlebook for some small mother of many dolls, penwipers for young penmen toiling through forests of pothooks, scrapbooks for picture-loving eyes, and all manner of pleasant devices, till the reluctant climbers of the ladder of learning found their way strewn with flowers, as it were, and came to regard the gentle giver as a sort of fairy godmother, who sat above there, and showered down gifts miraculously suited to their tastes and needs. If Beth had wanted any reward, she found it in the bright little faces always turned up to her window, with nods and smiles, and the droll little letters which came to her, full of blots and gratitude.

The first few months were very happy ones, and Beth often used to look round, and say "How beautiful this is!" as they all sat together in her sunny room, the babies kicking and crowing on the floor, mother and sisters working near, and father reading, in his pleasant voice, from the wise old books which seemed rich in good and comfortable words, as applicable now as when written centuries ago, a little chapel, where a paternal priest taught his flock the hard lessons all must learn, trying to show them that hope can comfort love, and faith make resignation possible. Simple sermons, that went straight to the souls of those who listened, for the father's heart was in the minister's religion, and the frequent falter in the voice gave a double eloquence to the words he spoke or read.

It was well for all that this peaceful time was given them as preparation for the sad hours to come, for by-and-by, Beth said the needle was 'so heavy', and put it down forever. Talking wearied her, faces troubled her, pain claimed her for its own, and her tranquil spirit was sorrowfully perturbed by the ills that vexed her feeble flesh. Ah me! Such heavy days, such long, long nights, such aching hearts and imploring prayers, when those who loved her best were forced to see the thin hands stretched out to them beseechingly, to hear the bitter cry, "Help me, help me!" and to feel that there was no help. A sad eclipse of the serene soul, a sharp struggle of the young life with death, but both were mercifully brief, and then the natural rebellion over, the old peace returned more beautiful than ever. With the wreck of her frail body, Beth's soul grew strong, and though she said little, those about her felt that she was ready, saw that the first pilgrim called was likewise the fittest, and waited with her on the shore, trying to see the Shining Ones coming to receive her when she crossed the river.

Jo never left her for an hour since Beth had said "I feel stronger when you are here." She slept on a couch in the room, waking often to renew the fire, to feed, lift, or wait upon the patient creature who seldom asked for anything, and 'tried not to be a trouble'. All day she haunted the room, jealous of any other nurse, and prouder of being chosen then than of any honor her life ever brought her. Precious and helpful hours to Jo, for now her heart received the teaching that it needed. Lessons in patience were so sweetly taught her that she could not fail to learn them, charity for all, the lovely spirit that can forgive and truly forget unkindness, the loyalty to duty that makes the hardest easy, and the sincere faith that fears nothing, but trusts undoubtingly.

Often when she woke Jo found Beth reading in her well-worn little book, heard her singing softly, to beguile the sleepless night, or saw her lean her face upon her hands, while slow tears dropped through the transparent fingers, and Jo would lie watching her with thoughts too deep for tears, feeling that Beth, in her simple, unselfish way, was trying to wean herself from the dear old life, and fit herself for the life to come, by sacred words of comfort, quiet prayers, and the music she loved so well.

Seeing this did more for Jo than the wisest sermons, the saintliest hymns, the most fervent prayers that any voice could utter. For with eyes made clear by many tears, and a heart softened by the tenderest sorrow, she recognized the beauty of her sister's life — uneventful, unambitious, yet full of the genuine virtues which 'smell sweet, and blossom in the dust', the self-forgetfulness that makes the humblest on earth remembered soonest in heaven, the true success which is possible to all.

One night when Beth looked among the books upon her table, to find something to make her forget the mortal weariness that was almost as hard to bear as pain, as she turned the leaves of her old favorite, Pilgrims's Progress, she found a little paper, scribbled over in Jo's hand. The name caught her eye and the blurred look of the lines made her sure that tears had fallen on it.

"Poor Jo! She's fast asleep, so I won't wake her to ask leave. She shows me all her things, and I don't think she'll mind if I look at this", thought Beth, with a glance at her sister, who lay on the rug, with the tongs beside her, ready to wake up the minute the log fell apart.

MY BETH

Sitting patient in the shadow
Till the blessed light shall come,
A serene and saintly presence
Sanctifies our troubled home.
Earthly joys and hopes and sorrows
Break like ripples on the strand
Of the deep and solemn river
Where her willing feet now stand.

O my sister, passing from me,
Out of human care and strife,
Leave me, as a gift, those virtues
Which have beautified your life.
Dear, bequeath me that great patience
Which has power to sustain
A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit
In its prison-house of pain.

Give me, for I need it sorely,
Of that courage, wise and sweet,
Which has made the path of duty

Green beneath your willing feet.
Give me that unselfish nature,
That with charity devine
Can pardon wrong for love’s dear sake —
Meek heart, forgive me mine!

Thus our parting daily loseth
Something of its bitter pain,
And while learning this hard lesson,
My great loss becomes my gain.
For the touch of grief will render
My wild nature more serene,
Give to life new aspirations,
A new trust in the unseen.

Henceforth, safe across the river,
I shall see forever more
A beloved, household spirit
Waiting for me on the shore.
Hope and faith, born of my sorrow,
Guardian angels shall become,
And the sister gone before me
By their hands shall lead me home.

Blurred and blotted, faulty and feeble as the lines were, they brought a look of inexpressible comfort to Beth’s face, for her one regret had been that she had done so little, and this seemed to assure her that her life had not been useless, that her death would not bring the despair she feared. As she sat with the paper folded between her hands, the charred log fell asunder. Jo started up, revived the blaze, and crept to the bedside, hoping Beth slept.

“Not asleep, but so happy, dear. See, I found this and read it. I knew you wouldn’t care. Have I been all that to you, Jo?” she asked, with wistful, humble earnestness.

“*Oh*, Beth, so much, so much!” and Jo’s head went down upon the pillow beside her sister’s.

“Then I don’t feel as if I’d wasted my life. I’m not so good as you make me, but I have tried to do right. And now, when it’s too late to begin even to do better, it’s such a comfort to know that someone loves me so much, and feels as if I'd helped them."

"More than any one in the world, Beth. I used to think I couldn't let you go, but I'm learning to feel that I don't lose you, that you'll be more to me than ever, and death can't part us, though it seems to."

"I know it cannot, and I don't fear it any longer, for I'm sure I shall be your Beth still, to love and help you more than ever. You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to Father and Mother when I'm gone. They will turn to you, don't fail them, and if it's hard to work alone, remember that I don't forget you, and that you'll be happier in doing that than writing splendid books or seeing all the world, for love is the only thing that we can carry with us when we go, and it makes the end so easy."

"I'll try, Beth." and then and there Jo renounced her old ambition, pledged herself to a new and better one, acknowledging the poverty of other desires, and feeling the blessed solace of a belief in the immortality of love.

So the spring days came and went, the sky grew clearer, the earth greener, the flowers were up fairly early, and the birds came back in time to say goodbye to Beth, who, like a tired but trustful child, clung to the hands that had led her all her life, as Father and Mother guided her tenderly through the Valley of the Shadow, and gave her up to God.

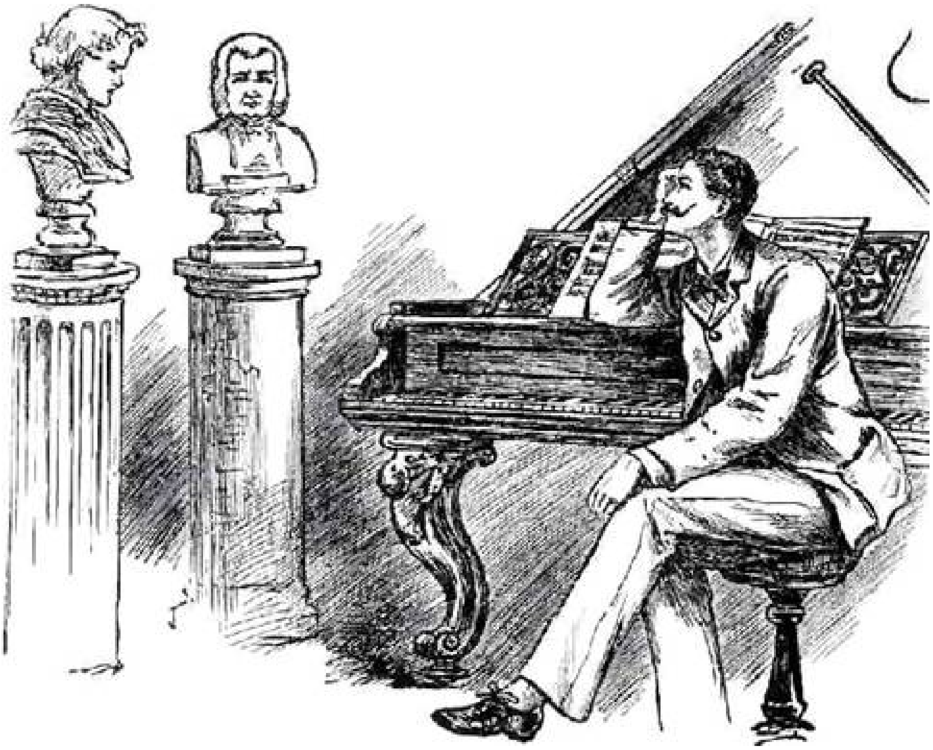
Seldom except in books do the dying utter memorable words, see visions, or depart with beatified countenances, and those who have sped many parting souls know that to most the end comes as naturally and simply as sleep. As Beth had hoped, the 'tide went out easily', and in the dark hour before dawn, on the bosom where she had drawn her first breath, she quietly drew her last, with no farewell but one loving look, one little sigh.

With tears and prayers and tender hands, Mother and sisters made her ready for the long sleep that pain would never mar again, seeing with grateful eyes the beautiful serenity that soon replaced the pathetic patience that had wrung their hearts so long, and feeling with reverent joy that to their darling death was a benignant angel, not a phantom full of dread.

When morning came, for the first time in many months the fire was out, Jo's place was empty, and the room was very still. But a bird sang blithely on a budding bough, close by, the snowdrops blossomed freshly at the window, and the spring sunshine streamed in like a benediction over the placid face upon the pillow, a face so full of painless peace that those who loved it best smiled through their tears, and thanked God that Beth was well at last.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

LEARNING TO FORGET



Amy’s lecture did Laurie good, though, of course, he did not own it till long afterward. Men seldom do, for when women are the advisers, the lords of creation don’t take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do. Then they act upon it, and, if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it. If it fails, they generously give her the whole. Laurie went back to his grandfather, and was so dutifully devoted for several weeks that the old gentleman declared the climate of Nice had improved him wonderfully, and he had better try it again. There was nothing the young gentleman would have liked better, but elephants could not have dragged him back after the scolding he had received. Pride forbid, and whenever the longing grew very strong, he fortified his resolution by repeating the words that had made the deepest impression — ”I despise you.” “Go and do something splendid that will make her love you.”

Laurie turned the matter over in his mind so often that he soon brought himself to confess that he had been selfish and lazy, but then when a man has a great sorrow, he should be indulged in all sorts of vagaries till he has lived it down. He felt that his blighted affections were quite dead now, and though he should never cease to be a faithful mourner, there was no occasion to wear his weeds ostentatiously. Jo wouldn't love him, but he might make her respect and admire him by doing something which should prove that a girl's 'No' had not spoiled his life. He had always meant to do something, and Amy's advice was quite unnecessary. He had only been waiting till the aforesaid blighted affections were decently interred. That being done, he felt that he was ready to 'hide his stricken heart, and still toil on'.

As Goethe, when he had a joy or a grief, put it into a song, so Laurie resolved to embalm his love sorrow in music, and to compose a Requiem which should harrow up Jo's soul and melt the heart of every hearer. Therefore the next time the old gentleman found him getting restless and moody and ordered him off, he went to Vienna, where he had musical friends, and fell to work with the firm determination to distinguish himself. But whether the sorrow was too vast to be embodied in music, or music too ethereal to uplift a mortal woe, he soon discovered that the Requiem was beyond him just at present. It was evident that his mind was not in working order yet, and his ideas needed clarifying, for often in the middle of a plaintive strain, he would find himself humming a dancing tune that vividly recalled the Christmas ball at Nice, especially the stout Frenchman, and put an effectual stop to tragic composition for the time being.

Then he tried an opera, for nothing seemed impossible in the beginning, but here again unforeseen difficulties beset him. He wanted Jo for his heroine, and called upon his memory to supply him with tender recollections and romantic visions of his love. But memory turned traitor, and as if possessed by the perverse spirit of the girl, would only recall Jo's oddities, faults, and freaks, would only show her in the most unsentimental aspects — beating mats with her head tied up in a bandanna, barricading herself with the sofa pillow, or throwing cold water over his passion a la Gummidge — and an irresistable laugh spoiled the pensive picture he was endeavoring to paint. Jo wouldn't be put into the opera at any price, and he had to give her up with a "Bless that girl, what a torment she is!" and a clutch at his hair, as became a distracted composer.

When he looked about him for another and a less intractable damsel to immortalize in melody, memory produced one with the most obliging readiness. This phantom wore many faces, but it always had golden hair, was enveloped in a diaphanous cloud, and floated airily before his mind's eye in a pleasing chaos of roses, peacocks, white ponies, and blue ribbons. He did not give the complacent wraith any name, but he took her for his heroine and grew quite fond of her, as well he might, for he gifted her with every gift and grace under the sun, and escorted her, unscathed, through trials which would have annihilated any mortal woman.

Thanks to this inspiration, he got on swimmingly for a time, but gradually the work lost its charm, and he forgot to compose, while he sat musing, pen in hand, or roamed about the gay city to get some new ideas and refresh his mind, which seemed to be in a somewhat unsettled state that winter. He did not do much, but he thought a great deal and was conscious of a change of some sort going on in spite of himself. “It’s genius simmering, perhaps. I’ll let it simmer, and see what comes of it,” he said, with a secret suspicion all the while that it wasn’t genius, but something far more common. Whatever it was, it simmered to some purpose, for he grew more and more discontented with his desultory life, began to long for some real and earnest work to go at, soul and body, and finally came to the wise conclusion that everyone who loved music was not a composer. Returning from one of Mozart’s grand operas, splendidly performed at the Royal Theatre, he looked over his own, played a few of the best parts, sat staring at the busts of Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Bach, who stared benignly back again. Then suddenly he tore up his music sheets, one by one, and as the last fluttered out of his hand, he said soberly to himself...

“She is right! Talent isn’t genius, and you can’t make it so. That music has taken the vanity out of me as Rome took it out of her, and I won’t be a humbug any longer. Now what shall I do?”

That seemed a hard question to answer, and Laurie began to wish he had to work for his daily bread. Now if ever, occurred an eligible opportunity for ‘going to the devil’, as he once forcibly expressed it, for he had plenty of money and nothing to do, and Satan is proverbially fond of providing employment for full and idle hands. The poor fellow had temptations enough from without and from within, but he withstood them pretty well, for much as he valued liberty, he valued good faith and confidence more, so his promise to his grandfather, and his desire to be able to look honestly into the eyes of the women who loved him, and say “All’s well,” kept him safe and steady.

Very likely some Mrs. Grundy will observe, “I don’t believe it, boys will be boys, young men must sow their wild oats, and women must not expect miracles.” I dare say you don’t, Mrs. Grundy, but it’s true nevertheless. Women work a good many miracles, and I have a persuasion that they may perform even that of raising the standard of manhood by refusing to echo such sayings. Let the boys be boys, the longer the better, and let the young men sow their wild oats if they must. But mothers, sisters, and friends may help to make the crop a small one, and keep many tares from spoiling the harvest, by believing, and showing that they believe, in the possibility of loyalty to the virtues which make men manliest in good women’s eyes. If it is a feminine delusion, leave us to enjoy it while we may, for without it half the beauty and the romance of life is lost, and sorrowful forebodings would embitter all our hopes of the brave, tenderhearted little lads, who still love their mothers better than themselves and are not ashamed to own it.

Laurie thought that the task of forgetting his love for Jo would absorb all his powers for years, but to his great surprise he discovered it grew easier every day. He refused to believe it at first, got angry with himself, and couldn’t understand it, but these hearts of ours are curious and contrary things, and time and nature work their will in spite of us. Laurie’s heart wouldn’t ache. The wound persisted in healing with a rapidity that astonished him, and instead of trying to forget, he found himself trying to remember. He had not foreseen this turn of affairs, and was not prepared for it. He was disgusted with himself, surprised at his own fickleness, and full of a queer mixture of disappointment and relief that he could recover from such a tremendous blow so soon. He carefully stirred up the embers of his lost love, but they refused to burst into a blaze. There was only a comfortable glow that warmed and did him good without putting him into a fever, and he was reluctantly obliged to confess that the boyish passion was slowly subsiding into a more tranquil sentiment, very tender, a little sad and resentful still, but that was sure to pass away in time, leaving a brotherly affection which would last unbroken to the end.

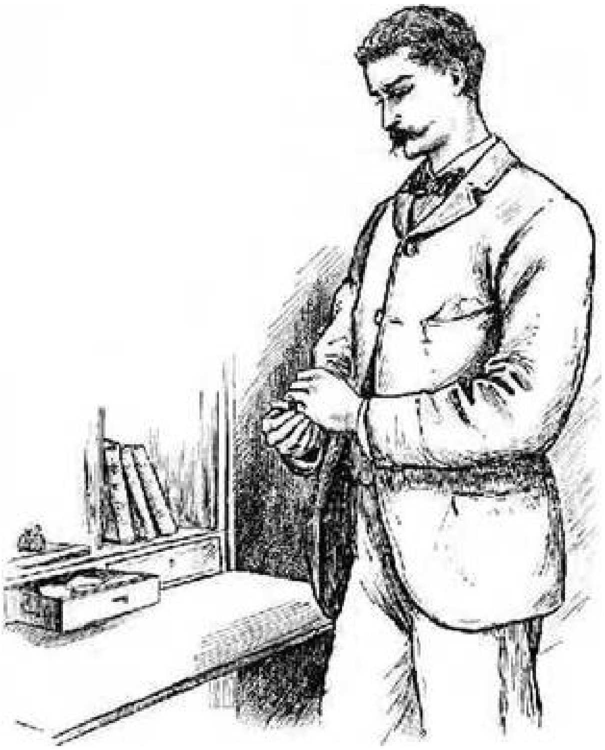
As the word ‘brotherly’ passed through his mind in one of his reveries, he smiled, and glanced up at the picture of Mozart that was before him...

“Well, he was a great man, and when he couldn’t have one sister he took the other, and was happy.”

Laurie did not utter the words, but he thought them, and the next instant kissed the little old ring, saying to himself, “No, I won’t! I haven’t forgotten, I never can. I’ll try again, and if that fails, why then...”

Leaving his sentence unfinished, he seized pen and paper and wrote to Jo, telling her that he could not settle to anything while there was the least hope of her changing her mind. Couldn’t she, wouldn’t she — and let him come home and be happy? While waiting for an answer he did nothing, but he did it energetically, for he was in a fever of impatience. It came at last, and settled his mind effectually on one point, for Jo decidedly couldn’t and wouldn’t. She was wrapped up in Beth, and never wished to hear the word love again. Then she begged him to be happy with somebody else, but always keep a little corner of his heart for his loving sister Jo. In a postscript she desired him not to tell Amy that Beth was worse, she was coming home in the spring and there was no need of saddening the remainder of her stay. That would be time enough, please God, but Laurie must write to her often, and not let her feel lonely, homesick or anxious.

"So I will, at once. Poor little girl, it will be a sad going home for her, I'm afraid," and Laurie opened his desk, as if writing to Amy had been the proper conclusion of the sentence left unfinished some weeks before.



But he did not write the letter that day, for as he rummaged out his best paper, he came across something which changed his purpose. Tumbling about in one part of the desk among bills, passports, and business documents of various kinds were several of Jo's letters, and in another compartment were three notes from Amy, carefully tied up with one of her blue ribbons and sweetly suggestive of the little dead roses put away inside. With a half-repentant, half-amused expression, Laurie gathered up all Jo's letters, smoothed, folded, and put them neatly into a small drawer of the desk, stood a minute turning the ring thoughtfully on his finger, then slowly drew it off, laid it with the letters, locked the drawer, and went out to hear High Mass at Saint Stefan's, feeling as if there had been a funeral, and though not overwhelmed with affliction, this seemed a more proper way to spend the rest of the day than in writing letters to charming young ladies.

The letter went very soon, however, and was promptly answered, for Amy was homesick, and confessed it in the most delightfully confiding manner. The correspondence flourished famously, and letters flew to and fro with unfailing regularity all through the early spring. Laurie sold his busts, made allumettes of his opera, and went back to Paris, hoping somebody would arrive before long. He wanted desperately to go to Nice, but would not till he was asked, and Amy would not ask him, for just then she was having little experiences of her own, which made her rather wish to avoid the quizzical eyes of ‘our boy’.

Fred Vaughn had returned, and put the question to which she had once decided to answer, “Yes, thank you,” but now she said, “No, thank you,” kindly but steadily, for when the time came, her courage failed her, and she found that something more than money and position was needed to satisfy the new longing that filled her heart so full of tender hopes and fears. The words, “Fred is a good fellow, but not at all the man I fancied you would ever like,” and Laurie’s face when he uttered them, kept returning to her as pertinaciously as her own did when she said in look, if not in words, “I shall marry for money.” It troubled her to remember that now, she wished she could take it back, it sounded so unwomanly. She didn’t want Laurie to think her a heartless, worldly creature. She didn’t care to be a queen of society now half so much as she did to be a lovable woman. She was so glad he didn’t hate her for the dreadful things she said, but took them so beautifully and was kinder than ever. His letters were such a comfort, for the home letters were very irregular and not half so satisfactory as his when they did come. It was not only a pleasure, but a duty to answer them, for the poor fellow was forlorn, and needed petting, since Jo persisted in being stonyhearted. She ought to have made an effort and tried to love him. It couldn’t be very hard, many people would be proud and glad to have such a dear boy care for them. But Jo never would act like other girls, so there was nothing to do but be very kind and treat him like a brother.

If all brothers were treated as well as Laurie was at this period, they would be a much happier race of beings than they are. Amy never lectured now. She asked his opinion on all subjects, she was interested in everything he did, made charming little presents for him, and sent him two letters a week, full of lively gossip, sisterly confidences, and captivating sketches of the lovely scenes about her. As few brothers are complimented by having their letters carried about in their sister’s pockets, read and reread diligently, cried over when short, kissed when long, and treasured carefully, we will not hint that Amy did any of these fond and foolish things. But she certainly did grow a little pale and pensive that spring, lost much of her relish for society, and went out sketching alone a good deal. She never had much to show when she came home, but was studying nature, I dare say, while she sat for hours, with her hands folded, on the terrace at Valrosa, or absently sketched any fancy that occurred to her, a stalwart knight carved on a tomb, a young man asleep in the grass, with his hat over his eyes, or a curly haired girl in gorgeous array, promenading down a ballroom on the arm of a tall gentleman, both faces being left a blur according to the last fashion in art, which was safe but not altogether satisfactory.

Her aunt thought that she regretted her answer to Fred, and finding denials useless and explanations impossible, Amy left her to think what she liked, taking care that Laurie should know that Fred had gone to Egypt. That was all, but he understood it, and looked relieved, as he said to himself, with a venerable air...

“I was sure she would think better of it. Poor old fellow! I’ve been through it all, and I can sympathize.”

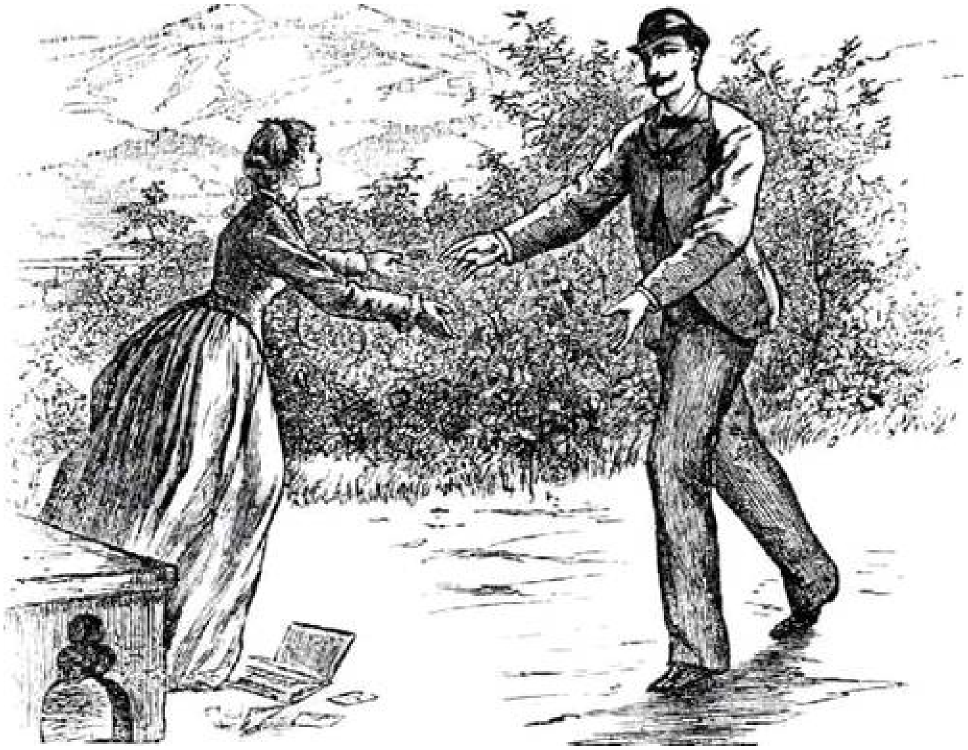
With that he heaved a great sigh, and then, as if he had discharged his duty to the past, put his feet up on the sofa and enjoyed Amy’s letter luxuriously.

While these changes were going on abroad, trouble had come at home. But the letter telling that Beth was failing never reached Amy, and when the next found her at Vevay, for the heat had driven them from Nice in May, and they had travelled slowly to Switzerland, by way of Genoa and the Italian lakes. She bore it very well, and quietly submitted to the family decree that she should not shorten her visit, for since it was too late to say goodbye to Beth, she had better stay, and let absence soften her sorrow. But her heart was very heavy, she longed to be at home, and every day looked wistfully across the lake, waiting for Laurie to come and comfort her.

He did come very soon, for the same mail brought letters to them both, but he was in Germany, and it took some days to reach him. The moment he read it, he packed his knapsack, bade adieu to his fellow pedestrians, and was off to keep his promise, with a heart full of joy and sorrow, hope and suspense.

He knew Vevay well, and as soon as the boat touched the little quay, he hurried along the shore to La Tour, where the Carrols were living en pension. The garcon was in despair that the whole family had gone to take a promenade on the lake, but no, the blonde mademoiselle might be in the chateau garden. If monsieur would give himself the pain of sitting down, a flash of time should present her. But monsieur could not wait even a ‘flash of time’, and in the middle of the speech departed to find mademoiselle himself.

A pleasant old garden on the borders of the lovely lake, with chestnuts rustling overhead, ivy climbing everywhere, and the black shadow of the tower falling far across the sunny water. At one corner of the wide, low wall was a seat, and here Amy often came to read or work, or console herself with the beauty all about her. She was sitting here that day, leaning her head on her hand, with a homesick heart and heavy eyes, thinking of Beth and wondering why Laurie did not come. She did not hear him cross the courtyard beyond, nor see him pause in the archway that led from the subterranean path into the garden. He stood a minute looking at her with new eyes, seeing what no one had ever seen before, the tender side of Amy's character. Everything about her mutely suggested love and sorrow, the blotted letters in her lap, the black ribbon that tied up her hair, the womanly pain and patience in her face, even the little ebony cross at her throat seemed pathetic to Laurie, for he had given it to her, and she wore it as her only ornament. If he had any doubts about the reception she would give him, they were set at rest the minute she looked up and saw him, for dropping everything, she ran to him, exclaiming in a tone of unmistakable love and longing...



"Oh, Laurie, Laurie, I knew you'd come to me!"

I think everything was said and settled then, for as they stood together quite silent for a moment, with the dark head bent down protectingly over the light one, Amy felt that no one could comfort and sustain her so well as Laurie, and Laurie decided that Amy was the only woman in the world who could fill Jo's place and make him happy. He did not tell her so, but she was not disappointed, for both felt the truth, were satisfied, and gladly left the rest to silence.

In a minute Amy went back to her place, and while she dried her tears, Laurie gathered up the scattered papers, finding in the sight of sundry well-worn letters and suggestive sketches good omens for the future. As he sat down beside her, Amy felt shy again, and turned rosy red at the recollection of her impulsive greeting.

"I couldn't help it, I felt so lonely and sad, and was so very glad to see you. It was such a surprise to look up and find you, just as I was beginning to fear you wouldn't come," she said, trying in vain to speak quite naturally.

"I came the minute I heard. I wish I could say something to comfort you for the loss of dear little Beth, but I can only feel, and..." He could not get any further, for he too turned bashful all of a sudden, and did not quite know what to say. He longed to lay Amy's head down on his shoulder, and tell her to have a good cry, but he did not dare, so took her hand instead, and gave it a sympathetic squeeze that was better than words.

"You needn't say anything, this comforts me," she said softly. "Beth is well and happy, and I mustn't wish her back, but I dread the going home, much as I long to see them all. We won't talk about it now, for it makes me cry, and I want to enjoy you while you stay. You needn't go right back, need you?"

"Not if you want me, dear."

"I do, so much. Aunt and Flo are very kind, but you seem like one of the family, and it would be so comfortable to have you for a little while."

Amy spoke and looked so like a homesick child whose heart was full that Laurie forgot his bashfulness all at once, and gave her just what she wanted — the petting she was used to and the cheerful conversation she needed.

"Poor little soul, you look as if you'd grieved yourself half sick! I'm going to take care of you, so don't cry any more, but come and walk about with me, the wind is too chilly for you to sit still," he said, in the half-caressing, half-commanding way that Amy liked, as he tied on her hat, drew her arm through his, and began to pace up and down the sunny walk under the new-leaved chestnuts. He felt more at ease upon his legs, and Amy found it pleasant to have a strong arm to lean upon, a familiar face to smile at her, and a kind voice to talk delightfully for her alone.

The quaint old garden had sheltered many pairs of lovers, and seemed expressly made for them, so sunny and secluded was it, with nothing but the tower to overlook them, and the wide lake to carry away the echo of their words, as it rippled by below. For an hour this new pair walked and talked, or rested on the wall, enjoying the sweet influences which gave such a charm to time and place, and when an unromantic dinner bell warned them away, Amy felt as if she left her burden of loneliness and sorrow behind her in the chateau garden.

The moment Mrs. Carrol saw the girl's altered face, she was illuminated with a new idea, and exclaimed to herself, "Now I understand it all — the child has been pining for young Laurence. Bless my heart, I never thought of such a thing!"

With praiseworthy discretion, the good lady said nothing, and betrayed no sign of enlightenment, but cordially urged Laurie to stay and begged Amy to enjoy his society, for it would do her more good than so much solitude. Amy was a model of docility, and as her aunt was a good deal occupied with Flo, she was left to entertain her friend, and did it with more than her usual success.

At Nice, Laurie had lounged and Amy had scolded. At Vevay, Laurie was never idle, but always walking, riding, boating, or studying in the most energetic manner, while Amy admired everything he did and followed his example as far and as fast as she could. He said the change was owing to the climate, and she did not contradict him, being glad of a like excuse for her own recovered health and spirits.

The invigorating air did them both good, and much exercise worked wholesome changes in minds as well as bodies. They seemed to get clearer views of life and duty up there among the everlasting hills. The fresh winds blew away desponding doubts, delusive fancies, and moody mists. The warm spring sunshine brought out all sorts of aspiring ideas, tender hopes, and happy thoughts. The lake seemed to wash away the troubles of the past, and the grand old mountains to look benignly down upon them saying, “Little children, love one another.”

In spite of the new sorrow, it was a very happy time, so happy that Laurie could not bear to disturb it by a word. It took him a little while to recover from his surprise at the cure of his first, and as he had firmly believed, his last and only love. He consoled himself for the seeming disloyalty by the thought that Jo’s sister was almost the same as Jo’s self, and the conviction that it would have been impossible to love any other woman but Amy so soon and so well. His first wooing had been of the tempestuous order, and he looked back upon it as if through a long vista of years with a feeling of compassion blended with regret. He was not ashamed of it, but put it away as one of the bitter-sweet experiences of his life, for which he could be grateful when the pain was over. His second wooing, he resolved, should be as calm and simple as possible. There was no need of having a scene, hardly any need of telling Amy that he loved her, she knew it without words and had given him his answer long ago. It all came about so naturally that no one could complain, and he knew that everybody would be pleased, even Jo. But when our first little passion has been crushed, we are apt to be wary and slow in making a second trial, so Laurie let the days pass, enjoying every hour, and leaving to chance the utterance of the word that would put an end to the first and sweetest part of his new romance.

He had rather imagined that the denoument would take place in the chateau garden by moonlight, and in the most graceful and decorous manner, but it turned out exactly the reverse, for the matter was settled on the lake at noonday in a few blunt words. They had been floating about all the morning, from gloomy St. Gingolf to sunny Montreux, with the Alps of Savoy on one side, Mont St. Bernard and the Dent du Midi on the other, pretty Vevay in the valley, and Lausanne upon the hill beyond, a cloudless blue sky overhead, and the bluer lake below, dotted with the picturesque boats that look like white-winged gulls.

They had been talking of Bonnivard, as they glided past Chillon, and of Rousseau, as they looked up at Clarens, where he wrote his Heloise. Neither had read it, but they knew it was a love story, and each privately wondered if it was half as interesting as their own. Amy had been dabbling her hand in the water during the little pause that fell between them, and when she looked up, Laurie was leaning on his oars with an expression in his eyes that made her say hastily, merely for the sake of saying something...

“You must be tired. Rest a little, and let me row. It will do me good, for since you came I have been altogether lazy and luxurious.”

“I’m not tired, but you may take an oar, if you like. There’s room enough, though I have to sit nearly in the middle, else the boat won’t trim,” returned Laurie, as if he rather liked the arrangement.

Feeling that she had not mended matters much, Amy took the offered third of a seat, shook her hair over her face, and accepted an oar. She rowed as well as she did many other things, and though she used both hands, and Laurie but one, the oars kept time, and the boat went smoothly through the water.

“How well we pull together, don’t we?” said Amy, who objected to silence just then.

“So well that I wish we might always pull in the same boat. Will you, Amy?” very tenderly.

“Yes, Laurie,” very low.

Then they both stopped rowing, and unconsciously added a pretty little tableau of human love and happiness to the dissolving views reflected in the lake.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

ALL ALONE

It was easy to promise self-abnegation when self was wrapped up in another, and heart and soul were purified by a sweet example. But when the helpful voice was silent, the daily lesson over, the beloved presence gone, and nothing remained but loneliness and grief, then Jo found her promise very hard to keep. How could she ‘comfort Father and Mother’ when her own heart ached with a ceaseless longing for her sister, how could she ‘make the house cheerful’ when all its light and warmth and beauty seemed to have deserted it when Beth left the old home for the new, and where in all the world could she ‘find some useful, happy work to do’, that would take the place of the loving service which had been its own reward? She tried in a blind, hopeless way to do her duty, secretly rebelling against it all the while, for it seemed unjust that her few joys should be lessened, her burdens made heavier, and life get harder and harder as she toiled along. Some people seemed to get all sunshine, and some all shadow. It was not fair, for she tried more than Amy to be good, but never got any reward, only disappointment, trouble and hard work.

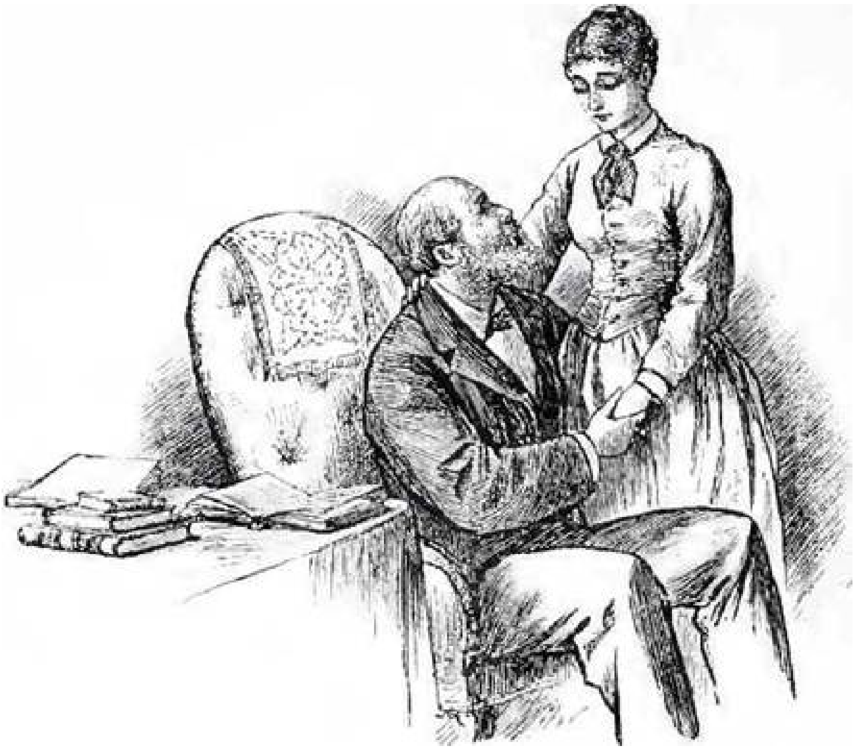
Poor Jo, these were dark days to her, for something like despair came over her when she thought of spending all her life in that quiet house, devoted to humdrum cares, a few small pleasures, and the duty that never seemed to grow any easier. “I can’t do it. I wasn’t meant for a life like this, and I know I shall break away and do something desperate if somebody doesn’t come and help me,” she said to herself, when her first efforts failed and she fell into the moody, miserable state of mind which often comes when strong wills have to yield to the inevitable.

But someone did come and help her, though Jo did not recognize her good angels at once because they wore familiar shapes and used the simple spells best fitted to poor humanity. Often she started up at night, thinking Beth called her, and when the sight of the little empty bed made her cry with the bitter cry of unsubmissive sorrow, “Oh, Beth, come back! Come back!” she did not stretch out her yearning arms in vain. For, as quick to hear her sobbing as she had been to hear her sister’s faintest whisper, her mother came to comfort her, not with words only, but the patient tenderness that soothes by a touch, tears that were mute reminders of a greater grief than Jo’s, and broken whispers, more eloquent than prayers, because hopeful resignation went hand-in-hand with natural sorrow. Sacred moments, when heart talked to heart in the silence of the night, turning affliction to a blessing, which chastened grief and strengthned love. Feeling this, Jo’s burden seemed easier to bear, duty grew sweeter, and life looked more endurable, seen from the safe shelter of her mother’s arms.

When aching heart was a little comforted, troubled mind likewise found help, for one day she went to the study, and leaning over the good gray head lifted to welcome her with a tranquil smile, she said very humbly, “Father, talk to me as you did to Beth. I need it more than she did, for I’m all wrong.”

“My dear, nothing can comfort me like this,” he answered, with a falter in his voice, and both arms round her, as if he too, needed help, and did not fear to ask for it.

Then, sitting in Beth’s little chair close beside him, Jo told her troubles, the resentful sorrow for her loss, the fruitless efforts that discouraged her, the want of faith that made life look so dark, and all the sad bewilderment which we call despair. She gave him entire confidence, he gave her the help she needed, and both found consolation in the act. For the time had come when they could talk together not only as father and daughter, but as man and woman, able and glad to serve each other with mutual sympathy as well as mutual love. Happy, thoughtful times there in the old study which Jo called ‘the church of one member’, and from which she came with fresh courage, recovered cheerfulness, and a more submissive spirit. For the parents who had taught one child to meet death without fear, were trying now to teach another to accept life without despondency or distrust, and to use its beautiful opportunities with gratitude and power.



Other helps had Jo — humble, wholesome duties and delights that would not be denied their part in serving her, and which she slowly learned to see and value. Brooms and dishcloths never could be as distasteful as they once had been, for Beth had presided over both, and something of her housewifely spirit seemed to linger around the little mop and the old brush, never thrown away. As she used them, Jo found herself humming the songs Beth used to hum, imitating Beth's orderly ways, and giving the little touches here and there that kept everything fresh and cozy, which was the first step toward making home happy, though she didn't know it till Hannah said with an approving squeeze of the hand...

"You thoughtful creeter, you're determined we shan't miss that dear lamb ef you can help it. We don't say much, but we see it, and the Lord will bless you for't, see ef He don't."

As they sat sewing together, Jo discovered how much improved her sister Meg was, how well she could talk, how much she knew about good, womanly impulses, thoughts, and feelings, how happy she was in husband and children, and how much they were all doing for each other.

"Marriage is an excellent thing, after all. I wonder if I should blossom out half as well as you have, if I tried it?, always *'perwisin'* I could," said Jo, as she constructed a kite for Demi in the topsy-turvy nursery.

"It's just what you need to bring out the tender womanly half of your nature, Jo. You are like a chestnut burr, prickly outside, but silky-soft within, and a sweet kernal, if one can only get at it. Love will make you show your heart one day, and then the rough burr will fall off."

"Frost opens chestnut burrs, ma'am, and it takes a good shake to bring them down. Boys go nutting, and I don't care to be bagged by them," returned Jo, pasting away at the kite which no wind that blows would ever carry up, for Daisy had tied herself on as a bob.

Meg laughed, for she was glad to see a glimmer of Jo's old spirit, but she felt it her duty to enforce her opinion by every argument in her power, and the sisterly chats were not wasted, especially as two of Meg's most effective arguments were the babies, whom Jo loved tenderly. Grief is the best opener of some hearts, and Jo's was nearly ready for the bag. A little more sunshine to ripen the nut, then, not a boy's impatient shake, but a man's hand reached up to pick it gently from the burr, and find the kernal sound and sweet. If she suspected this, she would have shut up tight, and been more prickly than ever, fortunately she wasn't thinking about herself, so when the time came, down she dropped.

Now, if she had been the heroine of a moral storybook, she ought at this period of her life to have become quite saintly, renounced the world, and gone about doing good in a mortified bonnet, with tracts in her pocket. But, you see, Jo wasn't a heroine, she was only a struggling human girl like hundreds of others, and she just acted out her nature, being sad, cross, listless, or energetic, as the mood suggested. It's highly virtuous to say we'll be good, but we can't do it all at once, and it takes a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together before some of us even get our feet set in the right way. Jo had got so far, she was learning to do her duty, and to feel unhappy if she did not, but to do it cheerfully, ah, that was another thing! She had often said she wanted to do something splendid, no matter how hard, and now she had her wish, for what could be more beautiful than to devote her life to Father and Mother, trying to make home as happy to them as they had to her? And if difficulties were necessary to increase the splendor of the effort, what could be harder for a restless, ambitious girl than to give up her own hopes, plans, and desires, and cheerfully live for others?

Providence had taken her at her word. Here was the task, not what she had expected, but better because self had no part in it. Now, could she do it? She decided that she would try, and in her first attempt she found the helps I have suggested. Still another was given her, and she took it, not as a reward, but as a comfort, as Christian took the refreshment afforded by the little arbor where he rested, as he climbed the hill called Difficulty.

“Why don’t you write? That always used to make you happy,” said her mother once, when the desponding fit over-shadowed Jo.

“I’ve no heart to write, and if I had, nobody cares for my things.”

“We do. Write something for us, and never mind the rest of the world. Try it, dear. I’m sure it would do you good, and please us very much.”

“Don’t believe I can.” But Jo got out her desk and began to overhaul her half-finished manuscripts.

An hour afterward her mother peeped in and there she was, scratching away, with her black pinafore on, and an absorbed expression, which caused Mrs. March to smile and slip away, well pleased with the success of her suggestion. Jo never knew how it happened, but something got into that story that went straight to the hearts of those who read it, for when her family had laughed and cried over it, her father sent it, much against her will, to one of the popular magazines, and to her utter surprise, it was not only paid for, but others requested. Letters from several persons, whose praise was honor, followed the appearance of the little story, newspapers copied it, and strangers as well as friends admired it. For a small thing it was a great success, and Jo was more astonished than when her novel was commended and condemned all at once.

“I don’t understand it. What can there be in a simple little story like that to make people praise it so?” she said, quite bewildered.

“There is truth in it, Jo, that’s the secret. Humor and pathos make it alive, and you have found your style at last. You wrote with no thoughts of fame and money, and put your heart into it, my daughter. You have had the bitter, now comes the sweet. Do your best, and grow as happy as we are in your success.”

“If there is anything good or true in what I write, it isn’t mine. I owe it all to you and Mother and Beth,” said Jo, more touched by her father’s words than by any amount of praise from the world.

So taught by love and sorrow, Jo wrote her little stories, and sent them away to make friends for themselves and her, finding it a very charitable world to such humble wanderers, for they were kindly welcomed, and sent home comfortable tokens to their mother, like dutiful children whom good fortune overtakes.

When Amy and Laurie wrote of their engagement, Mrs. March feared that Jo would find it difficult to rejoice over it, but her fears were soon set at rest, for though Jo looked grave at first, she took it very quietly, and was full of hopes and plans for ‘the children’ before she read the letter twice. It was a sort of written duet, wherein each glorified the other in loverlike fashion, very pleasant to read and satisfactory to think of, for no one had any objection to make.

“You like it, Mother?” said Jo, as they laid down the closely written sheets and looked at one another.

“Yes, I hoped it would be so, ever since Amy wrote that she had refused Fred. I felt sure then that something better than what you call the ‘mercenary spirit’ had come over her, and a hint here and there in her letters made me suspect that love and Laurie would win the day.”

“How sharp you are, Marmee, and how silent! You never said a word to me.”

“Mothers have need of sharp eyes and discreet tongues when they have girls to manage. I was half afraid to put the idea into your head, lest you should write and congratulate them before the thing was settled.”

“I’m not the scatterbrain I was. You may trust me. I’m sober and sensible enough for anyone’s confidante now.”

“So you are, my dear, and I should have made you mine, only I fancied it might pain you to learn that your Teddy loved someone else.”

“Now, Mother, did you really think I could be so silly and selfish, after I’d refused his love, when it was freshest, if not best?”

“I knew you were sincere then, Jo, but lately I have thought that if he came back, and asked again, you might perhaps, feel like giving another answer. Forgive me, dear, I can’t help seeing that you are very lonely, and sometimes there is a hungry look in your eyes that goes to my heart. So I fancied that your boy might fill the empty place if he tried now.”

“No, Mother, it is better as it is, and I’m glad Amy has learned to love him. But you are right in one thing. I am lonely, and perhaps if Teddy had tried again, I might have said ‘Yes’, not because I love him any more, but because I care more to be loved than when he went away.”

“I’m glad of that, Jo, for it shows that you are getting on. There are plenty to love you, so try to be satisfied with Father and Mother, sisters and brothers, friends and babies, till the best lover of all comes to give you your reward.”

“Mothers are the best lovers in the world, but I don’t mind whispering to Marmee that I’d like to try all kinds. It’s very curious, but the more I try to satisfy myself with all sorts of natural affections, the more I seem to want. I’d no idea hearts could take in so many. Mine is so elastic, it never seems full now, and I used to be quite contented with my family. I don’t understand it.”

“I do,” and Mrs. March smiled her wise smile, as Jo turned back the leaves to read what Amy said of Laurie.

“It is so beautiful to be loved as Laurie loves me. He isn’t sentimental, doesn’t say much about it, but I see and feel it in all he says and does, and it makes me so happy and so humble that I don’t seem to be the same girl I was. I never knew how good and generous and tender he was till now, for he lets me read his heart, and I find it full of noble impulses and hopes and purposes, and am so proud to know it’s mine. He says he feels as if he ‘could make a prosperous voyage now with me aboard as mate, and lots of love for ballast’. I pray he may, and try to be all he believes me, for I love my gallant captain with all my heart and soul and might, and never will desert him, while God lets us be together. Oh, Mother, I never knew how much like heaven this world could be, when two people love and live for one another!”

“And that’s our cool, reserved, and worldly Amy! Truly, love does work miracles. How very, very happy they must be!” and Jo laid the rustling sheets together with a careful hand, as one might shut the covers of a lovely romance, which holds the reader fast till the end comes, and he finds himself alone in the workaday world again.

By-and-by Jo roamed away upstairs, for it was rainy, and she could not walk. A restless spirit possessed her, and the old feeling came again, not bitter as it once was, but a sorrowfully patient wonder why one sister should have all she asked, the other nothing. It was not true, she knew that and tried to put it away, but the natural craving for affection was strong, and Amy’s happiness woke the hungry longing for someone to ‘love with heart and soul, and cling to while God let them be together’. Up in the garret, where Jo’s unquiet wanderings ended stood four little wooden chests in a row, each marked with its owners name, and each filled with relics of the childhood and girlhood ended now for all. Jo glanced into them, and when she came to her own, leaned her chin on the edge, and stared absently at the chaotic collection, till a bundle of old exercise books caught her eye. She drew them out, turned them over, and relived that pleasant winter at kind Mrs. Kirke’s. She had smiled at first, then she looked thoughtful, next sad, and when she came to a little message written in the Professor’s hand, her lips began to tremble, the books slid out of her lap, and she sat looking at the friendly words, as they took a new meaning, and touched a tender spot in her heart.

“Wait for me, my friend. I may be a little late, but I shall surely come.”

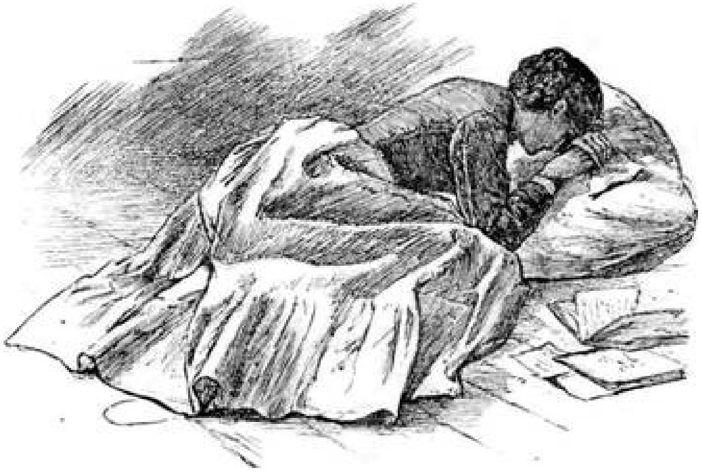
“Oh, if he only would! So kind, so good, so patient with me always, my dear old Fritz. I didn’t value him half enough when I had him, but now how I should love to see him, for everyone seems going away from me, and I’m all alone.”

And holding the little paper fast, as if it were a promise yet to be fulfilled, Jo laid her head down on a comfortable rag bag, and cried, as if in opposition to the rain pattering on the roof.

Was it all self-pity, loneliness, or low spirits? Or was it the waking up of a sentiment which had bided its time as patiently as its inspirer? Who shall say?

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

SURPRISES



Jo was alone in the twilight, lying on the old sofa, looking at the fire, and thinking. It was her favorite way of spending the hour of dusk. No one disturbed her, and she used to lie there on Beth's little red pillow, planning stories, dreaming dreams, or thinking tender thoughts of the sister who never seemed far away. Her face looked tired, grave, and rather sad, for tomorrow was her birthday, and she was thinking how fast the years went by, how old she was getting, and how little she seemed to have accomplished. Almost twenty-five, and nothing to show for it. Jo was mistaken in that. There was a good deal to show, and by-and-by she saw, and was grateful for it.

"An old maid, that's what I'm to be. A literary spinster, with a pen for a spouse, a family of stories for children, and twenty years hence a morsel of fame, perhaps, when, like poor Johnson, I'm old and can't enjoy it, solitary, and can't share it, independent, and don't need it. Well, I needn't be a sour saint nor a selfish sinner, and, I dare say, old maids are very comfortable when they get used to it, but..." and there Jo sighed, as if the prospect was not inviting.

It seldom is, at first, and thirty seems the end of all things to five-and-twenty. But it's not as bad as it looks, and one can get on quite happily if one has something in one's self to fall back upon. At twenty-five, girls begin to talk about being old maids, but secretly resolve that they never will be. At thirty they say nothing about it, but quietly accept the fact, and if sensible, console themselves by remembering that they have twenty more useful, happy years, in which they may be learning to grow old gracefully. Don’t laugh at the spinsters, dear girls, for often very tender, tragic romances are hidden away in the hearts that beat so quietly under the sober gowns, and many silent sacrifices of youth, health, ambition, love itself, make the faded faces beautiful in God’s sight. Even the sad, sour sisters should be kindly dealt with, because they have missed the sweetest part of life, if for no other reason. And looking at them with compassion, not contempt, girls in their bloom should remember that they too may miss the blossom time. That rosy cheeks don’t last forever, that silver threads will come in the bonnie brown hair, and that, by-and-by, kindness and respect will be as sweet as love and admiration now.

Gentlemen, which means boys, be courteous to the old maids, no matter how poor and plain and prim, for the only chivalry worth having is that which is the readiest to pay deference to the old, protect the feeble, and serve womankind, regardless of rank, age, or color. Just recollect the good aunts who have not only lectured and fussed, but nursed and petted, too often without thanks, the scrapes they have helped you out of, the tips they have given you from their small store, the stitches the patient old fingers have set for you, the steps the willing old feet have taken, and gratefully pay the dear old ladies the little attentions that women love to receive as long as they live. The bright-eyed girls are quick to see such traits, and will like you all the better for them, and if death, almost the only power that can part mother and son, should rob you of yours, you will be sure to find a tender welcome and maternal cherishing from some Aunt Priscilla, who has kept the warmest corner of her lonely old heart for ‘the best nevvy in the world’.

Jo must have fallen asleep (as I dare say my reader has during this little homily), for suddenly Laurie’s ghost seemed to stand before her, a substantial, lifelike ghost, leaning over her with the very look he used to wear when he felt a good deal and didn’t like to show it. But, like Jenny in the ballad...

“She could not think it he,”

and lay staring up at him in startled silence, till he stooped and kissed her. Then she knew him, and flew up, crying joyfully...

“Oh my Teddy! Oh my Teddy!”

“Dear Jo, you are glad to see me, then?”

“Glad! My blessed boy, words can’t express my gladness. Where’s Amy?”

“Your mother has got her down at Meg’s. We stopped there by the way, and there was no getting my wife out of their clutches.”

“Your what?” cried Jo, for Laurie uttered those two words with an unconscious pride and satisfaction which betrayed him.

“Oh, the dickens! Now I’ve done it,” and he looked so guilty that Jo was down on him like a flash.

“You’ve gone and got married!”

“Yes, please, but I never will again,” and he went down upon his knees, with a penitent clasping of hands, and a face full of mischief, mirth, and triumph.

“Actually married?”

“Very much so, thank you.”

“Mercy on us. What dreadful thing will you do next?” and Jo fell into her seat with a gasp.

“A characteristic, but not exactly complimentary, congratulation,” returned Laurie, still in an abject attitude, but beaming with satisfaction.

“What can you expect, when you take one’s breath away, creeping in like a burglar, and letting cats out of bags like that? Get up, you ridiculous boy, and tell me all about it.”

“Not a word, unless you let me come in my old place, and promise not to barricade.”

Jo laughed at that as she had not done for many a long day, and patted the sofa invitingly, as she said in a cordial tone, “The old pillow is up garret, and we don’t need it now. So, come and ‘fess, Teddy.”

“How good it sounds to hear you say ‘Teddy’! No one ever calls me that but you,” and Laurie sat down with an air of great content.

“What does Amy call you?”

“My lord.”

“That’s like her. Well, you look it,” and Jo’s eye plainly betrayed that she found her boy comelier than ever.

The pillow was gone, but there was a barricade, nevertheless, a natural one, raised by time, absence, and change of heart. Both felt it, and for a minute looked at one another as if that invisible barrier cast a little shadow over them. It was gone directly however, for Laurie said, with a vain attempt at dignity...

“Don’t I look like a married man and the head of a family?”

“Not a bit, and you never will. You’ve grown bigger and bonnier, but you are the same scapegrace as ever.”

“Now really, Jo, you ought to treat me with more respect,” began Laurie, who enjoyed it all immensely.

“How can I, when the mere idea of you, married and settled, is so irresistibly funny that I can’t keep sober!” answered Jo, smiling all over her face, so infectiously that they had another laugh, and then settled down for a good talk, quite in the pleasant old fashion.

“It’s no use your going out in the cold to get Amy, for they are all coming up presently. I couldn’t wait. I wanted to be the one to tell you the grand surprise, and have ‘first skim’ as we used to say when we squabbled about the cream.”

“Of course you did, and spoiled your story by beginning at the wrong end. Now, start right, and tell me how it all happened. I’m pining to know.”

“Well, I did it to please Amy,” began Laurie, with a twinkle that made Jo exclaim...

“Fib number one. Amy did it to please you. Go on, and tell the truth, if you can, sir.”

“Now she’s beginning to marm it. Isn’t it jolly to hear her?” said Laurie to the fire, and the fire glowed and sparkled as if it quite agreed. “It’s all the same, you know, she and I being one. We planned to come home with the Carrols, a month or more ago, but they suddenly changed their minds, and decided to pass another winter in Paris. But Grandpa wanted to come home. He went to please me, and I couldn’t let him go alone, neither could I leave Amy, and Mrs. Carrol had got English notions about chaperons and such nonsense, and wouldn’t let Amy come with us. So I just settled the difficulty by saying, ‘Let’s be married, and then we can do as we like’.”

“Of course you did. You always have things to suit you.”

“Not always,” and something in Laurie’s voice made Jo say hastily...

“How did you ever get Aunt to agree?”

“It was hard work, but between us, we talked her over, for we had heaps of good reasons on our side. There wasn’t time to write and ask leave, but you all liked it, had consented to it by-and-by, and it was only ‘taking time by the fetlock’, as my wife says.”

“Aren’t we proud of those two words, and don’t we like to say them?” interrupted Jo, addressing the fire in her turn, and watching with delight the happy light it seemed to kindle in the eyes that had been so tragically gloomy when she saw them last.

“A trifle, perhaps, she’s such a captivating little woman I can’t help being proud of her. Well, then Uncle and Aunt were there to play propriety. We were so absorbed in one another we were of no mortal use apart, and that charming arrangement would make everything easy all round, so we did it.”

“When, where, how?” asked Jo, in a fever of feminine interest and curiosity, for she could not realize it a particle.

“Six weeks ago, at the American consul’s, in Paris, a very quiet wedding of course, for even in our happiness we didn’t forget dear little Beth.”

Jo put her hand in his as he said that, and Laurie gently smoothed the little red pillow, which he remembered well.

“Why didn’t you let us know afterward?” asked Jo, in a quieter tone, when they had sat quite still a minute.

"We wanted to surprise you. We thought we were coming directly home, at first, but the dear old gentleman, as soon as we were married, found he couldn't be ready under a month, at least, and sent us off to spend our honeymoon wherever we liked. Amy had once called Valrosa a regular honeymoon home, so we went there, and were as happy as people are but once in their lives. My faith! Wasn't it love among the roses!"

Laurie seemed to forget Jo for a minute, and Jo was glad of it, for the fact that he told her these things so freely and so naturally assured her that he had quite forgiven and forgotten. She tried to draw away her hand, but as if he guessed the thought that prompted the half-involuntary impulse, Laurie held it fast, and said, with a manly gravity she had never seen in him before...

"Jo, dear, I want to say one thing, and then we'll put it by forever. As I told you in my letter when I wrote that Amy had been so kind to me, I never shall stop loving you, but the love is altered, and I have learned to see that it is better as it is. Amy and you changed places in my heart, that's all. I think it was meant to be so, and would have come about naturally, if I had waited, as you tried to make me, but I never could be patient, and so I got a heartache. I was a boy then, headstrong and violent, and it took a hard lesson to show me my mistake. For it was one, Jo, as you said, and I found it out, after making a fool of myself. Upon my word, I was so tumbled up in my mind, at one time, that I didn't know which I loved best, you or Amy, and tried to love you both alike. But I couldn't, and when I saw her in Switzerland, everything seemed to clear up all at once. You both got into your right places, and I felt sure that it was well off with the old love before it was on with the new, that I could honestly share my heart between sister Jo and wife Amy, and love them dearly. Will you believe it, and go back to the happy old times when we first knew one another?"

"I'll believe it, with all my heart, but, Teddy, we never can be boy and girl again. The happy old times can't come back, and we mustn't expect it. We are man and woman now, with sober work to do, for playtime is over, and we must give up frolicking. I'm sure you feel this. I see the change in you, and you'll find it in me. I shall miss my boy, but I shall love the man as much, and admire him more, because he means to be what I hoped he would. We can't be little playmates any longer, but we will be brother and sister, to love and help one another all our lives, won't we, Laurie?"

He did not say a word, but took the hand she offered him, and laid his face down on it for a minute, feeling that out of the grave of a boyish passion, there had risen a beautiful, strong friendship to bless them both. Presently Jo said cheerfully, for she didn't want the coming home to be a sad one, "I can't make it true that you children are really married and going to set up housekeeping. Why, it seems only yesterday that I was buttoning Amy's pinafore, and pulling your hair when you teased. Mercy me, how time does fly!"

"As one of the children is older than yourself, you needn't talk so like a grandma. I flatter myself I'm a 'gentleman growed' as Peggotty said of David, and when you see Amy, you'll find her rather a precocious infant," said Laurie, looking amused at her maternal air.

"You may be a little older in years, but I'm ever so much older in feeling, Teddy. Women always are, and this last year has been such a hard one that I feel forty."

"Poor Jo! We left you to bear it alone, while we went pleasuring. You are older. Here's a line, and there's another. Unless you smile, your eyes look sad, and when I touched the cushion, just now, I found a tear on it. You've had a great deal to bear, and had to bear it all alone. What a selfish beast I've been!" and Laurie pulled his own hair, with a remorseful look.

But Jo only turned over the traitorous pillow, and answered, in a tone which she tried to make more cheerful, "No, I had Father and Mother to help me, and the dear babies to comfort me, and the thought that you and Amy were safe and happy, to make the troubles here easier to bear. I am lonely, sometimes, but I dare say it's good for me, and..."

"You never shall be again," broke in Laurie, putting his arm about her, as if to fence out every human ill. "Amy and I can't get on without you, so you must come and teach 'the children' to keep house, and go halves in everything, just as we used to do, and let us pet you, and all be blissfully happy and friendly together."

"If I shouldn't be in the way, it would be very pleasant. I begin to feel quite young already, for somehow all my troubles seemed to fly away when you came. You always were a comfort, Teddy," and Jo leaned her head on his shoulder, just as she did years ago, when Beth lay ill and Laurie told her to hold on to him.

He looked down at her, wondering if she remembered the time, but Jo was smiling to herself, as if in truth her troubles had all vanished at his coming.

"You are the same Jo still, dropping tears about one minute, and laughing the next. You look a little wicked now. What is it, Grandma?"

"I was wondering how you and Amy get on together."

"Like angels!"

"Yes, of course, but which rules?"

"I don't mind telling you that she does now, at least I let her think so, it pleases her, you know. By-and-by we shall take turns, for marriage, they say, halves one's rights and doubles one's duties."

"You'll go on as you begin, and Amy will rule you all the days of your life."

“Well, she does it so imperceptibly that I don’t think I shall mind much. She is the sort of woman who knows how to rule well. In fact, I rather like it, for she winds one round her finger as softly and prettily as a skein of silk, and makes you feel as if she was doing you a favor all the while.”

“That ever I should live to see you a henpecked husband and enjoying it!” cried Jo, with uplifted hands.

It was good to see Laurie square his shoulders, and smile with masculine scorn at that insinuation, as he replied, with his “high and mighty” air, “Amy is too well-bred for that, and I am not the sort of man to submit to it. My wife and I respect ourselves and one another too much ever to tyrannize or quarrel.”

Jo liked that, and thought the new dignity very becoming, but the boy seemed changing very fast into the man, and regret mingled with her pleasure.

“I am sure of that. Amy and you never did quarrel as we used to. She is the sun and I the wind, in the fable, and the sun managed the man best, you remember.”

“She can blow him up as well as shine on him,” laughed Laurie. “Such a lecture as I got at Nice! I give you my word it was a deal worse than any of your scoldings, a regular rouser. I’ll tell you all about it sometime, she never will, because after telling me that she despised and was ashamed of me, she lost her heart to the despicable party and married the good-for-nothing.”

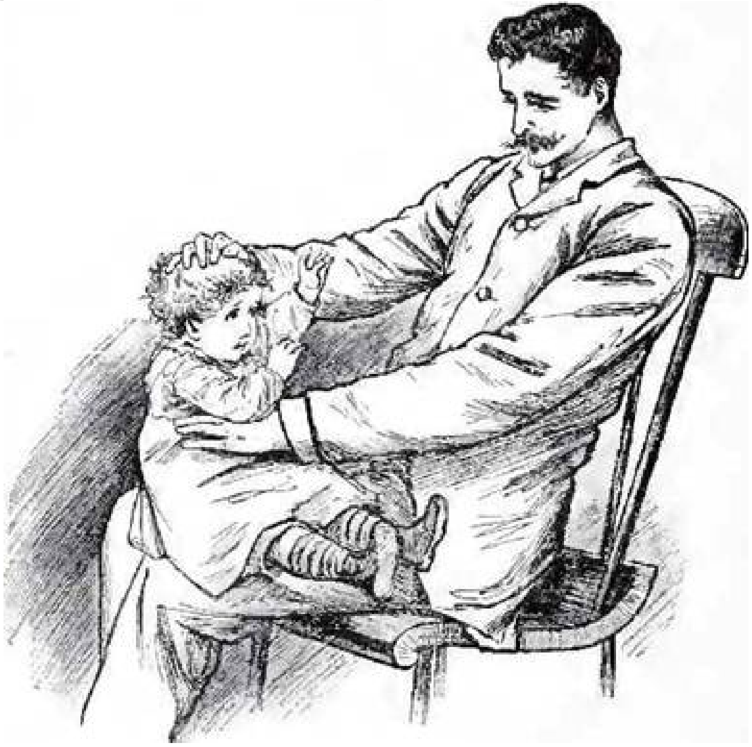
“What baseness! Well, if she abuses you, come to me, and I’ll defend you.”

“I look as if I needed it, don’t I?” said Laurie, getting up and striking an attitude which suddenly changed from the imposing to the rapturous, as Amy’s voice was heard calling, “Where is she? Where’s my dear old Jo?”

In trooped the whole family, and everyone was hugged and kissed all over again, and after several vain attempts, the three wanderers were set down to be looked at and exulted over. Mr. Laurence, hale and hearty as ever, was quite as much improved as the others by his foreign tour, for the crustiness seemed to be nearly gone, and the old-fashioned courtliness had received a polish which made it kindlier than ever. It was good to see him beam at ‘my children’, as he called the young pair. It was better still to see Amy pay him the daughterly duty and affection which completely won his old heart, and best of all, to watch Laurie revolve about the two, as if never tired of enjoying the pretty picture they made.

The minute she put her eyes upon Amy, Meg became conscious that her own dress hadn’t a Parisian air, that young Mrs. Moffat would be entirely eclipsed by young Mrs. Laurence, and that ‘her ladyship’ was altogether a most elegant and graceful woman. Jo thought, as she watched the pair, “How well they look together! I was right, and Laurie has found the beautiful, accomplished girl who will become his home better than clumsy old Jo, and be a pride, not a torment to him." Mrs. March and her husband smiled and nodded at each other with happy faces, for they saw that their youngest had done well, not only in worldly things, but the better wealth of love, confidence, and happiness.

For Amy's face was full of the soft brightness which betokens a peaceful heart, her voice had a new tenderness in it, and the cool, prim carriage was changed to a gentle dignity, both womanly and winning. No little affectations marred it, and the cordial sweetness of her manner was more charming than the new beauty or the old grace, for it stamped her at once with the unmistakable sign of the true gentlewoman she had hoped to become.



"Love has done much for our little girl," said her mother softly.

"She has had a good example before her all her life, my dear," Mr. March whispered back, with a loving look at the worn face and gray head beside him.

Daisy found it impossible to keep her eyes off her 'pitty aunty', but attached herself like a lap dog to the wonderful chatelaine full of delightful charms. Demi paused to consider the new relationship before he compromised himself by the rash acceptance of a bribe, which took the tempting form of a family of wooden bears from Berne. A flank movement produced an unconditional surrender, however, for Laurie knew where to have him.

"Young man, when I first had the honor of making your acquaintance you hit me in the face. Now I demand the satisfaction of a gentleman," and with that the tall uncle proceeded to toss and tousle the small nephew in a way that damaged his philosophical dignity as much as it delighted his boyish soul.

“Blest if she ain’t in silk from head to foot; ain’t it a relishin’ sight to see her settin’ there as fine as a fiddle, and hear folks calling little Amy ‘Mis. Laurence!’“ muttered old Hannah, who could not resist frequent “peeks” through the slide as she set the table in a most decidedly promiscuous manner.

Mercy on us, how they did talk! first one, then the other, then all burst out together — trying to tell the history of three years in half an hour. It was fortunate that tea was at hand, to produce a lull and provide refreshment — for they would have been hoarse and faint if they had gone on much longer. Such a happy procession as filed away into the little dining room! Mr. March proudly escorted Mrs. Laurence. Mrs. March as proudly leaned on the arm of ‘my son’. The old gentleman took Jo, with a whispered, “You must be my girl now,” and a glance at the empty corner by the fire, that made Jo whisper back, “I’ll try to fill her place, sir.”

The twins pranced behind, feeling that the millennium was at hand, for everyone was so busy with the newcomers that they were left to revel at their own sweet will, and you may be sure they made the most of the opportunity. Didn’t they steal sips of tea, stuff gingerbread ad libitum, get a hot biscuit apiece, and as a crowning trespass, didn’t they each whisk a captivating little tart into their tiny pockets, there to stick and crumble treacherously, teaching them that both human nature and a pastry are frail? Burdened with the guilty consciousness of the sequestered tarts, and fearing that Dodo’s sharp eyes would pierce the thin disguise of cambric and merino which hid their booty, the little sinners attached themselves to ‘Dranpa’, who hadn’t his spectacles on. Amy, who was handed about like refreshments, returned to the parlor on Father Laurence’s arm. The others paired off as before, and this arrangement left Jo companionless. She did not mind it at the minute, for she lingered to answer Hannah’s eager inquiry.

“Will Miss Amy ride in her coop (coupe), and use all them lovely silver dishes that’s stored away over yander?”

“Shouldn’t wonder if she drove six white horses, ate off gold plate, and wore diamonds and point lace every day. Teddy thinks nothing too good for her,” returned Jo with infinite satisfaction.

“No more there is! Will you have hash or fishballs for breakfast?” asked Hannah, who wisely mingled poetry and prose.

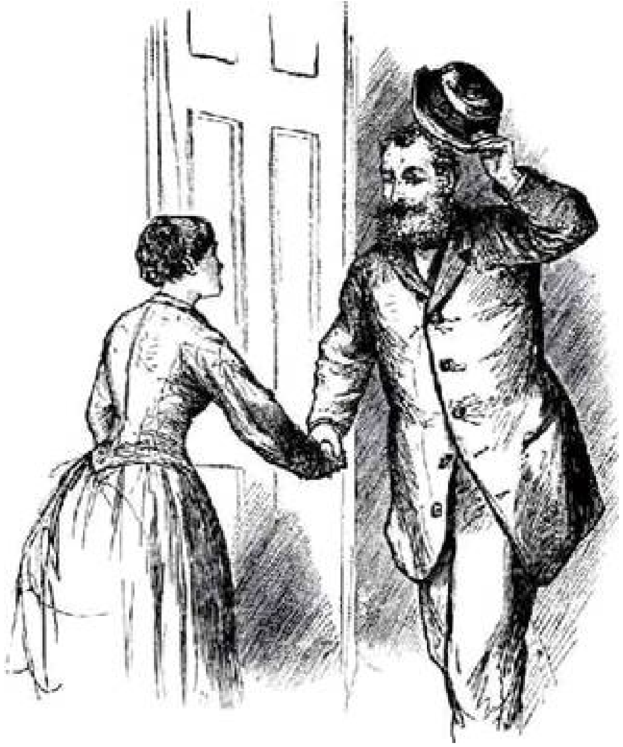
“I don’t care,” and Jo shut the door, feeling that food was an uncongenial topic just then. She stood a minute looking at the party vanishing above, and as Demi’s short plaid legs toiled up the last stair, a sudden sense of loneliness came over her so strongly that she looked about her with dim eyes, as if to find something to lean upon, for even Teddy had deserted her. If she had known what birthday gift was coming every minute nearer and nearer, she would not have said to herself, “I’ll weep a little weep when I go to bed. It won’t do to be dismal now.” Then she drew her hand over her eyes, for one of her boyish habits was never to know where her handkerchief was, and had just managed to call up a smile when there came a knock at the porch door.

She opened with hospitable haste, and started as if another ghost had come to surprise her, for there stood a tall bearded gentleman, beaming on her from the darkness like a midnight sun.

“Oh, Mr. Bhaer, I am so glad to see you!” cried Jo, with a clutch, as if she feared the night would swallow him up before she could get him in.

“And I to see Miss Marsch, but no, you haf a party,” and the Professor paused as the sound of voices and the tap of dancing feet came down to them.

“No, we haven’t, only the family. My sister and friends have just come home, and we are all very happy. Come in, and make one of us.”



Though a very social man, I think Mr. Bhaer would have gone decorously away, and come again another day, but how could he, when Jo shut the door behind him, and bereft him of his hat? Perhaps her face had something to do with it, for she forgot to hide her joy at seeing him, and showed it with a frankness that proved irresistible to the solitary man, whose welcome far exceeded his boldest hopes.

“If I shall not be Monsieur de Trop, I will so gladly see them all. You haf been ill, my friend?”

He put the question abruptly, for, as Jo hung up his coat, the light fell on her face, and he saw a change in it.

“Not ill, but tired and sorrowful. We have had trouble since I saw you last.”

“Ah, yes, I know. My heart was sore for you when I heard that,” and he shook hands again, with such a sympathetic face that Jo felt as if no comfort could equal the look of the kind eyes, the grasp of the big, warm hand.

“Father, Mother, this is my friend, Professor Bhaer,” she said, with a face and tone of such irrepressible pride and pleasure that she might as well have blown a trumpet and opened the door with a flourish.

If the stranger had any doubts about his reception, they were set at rest in a minute by the cordial welcome he received. Everyone greeted him kindly, for Jo’s sake at first, but very soon they liked him for his own. They could not help it, for he carried the talisman that opens all hearts, and these simple people warmed to him at once, feeling even the more friendly because he was poor. For poverty enriches those who live above it, and is a sure passport to truly hospitable spirits. Mr. Bhaer sat looking about him with the air of a traveler who knocks at a strange door, and when it opens, finds himself at home. The children went to him like bees to a honeypot, and establishing themselves on each knee, proceeded to captivate him by rifling his pockets, pulling his beard, and investigating his watch, with juvenile audacity. The women telegraphed their approval to one another, and Mr. March, feeling that he had got a kindred spirit, opened his choicest stores for his guest’s benefit, while silent John listened and enjoyed the talk, but said not a word, and Mr. Laurence found it impossible to go to sleep.

If Jo had not been otherwise engaged, Laurie’s behavior would have amused her, for a faint twinge, not of jealousy, but something like suspicion, caused that gentleman to stand aloof at first, and observe the newcomer with brotherly circumspection. But it did not last long. He got interested in spite of himself, and before he knew it, was drawn into the circle. For Mr. Bhaer talked well in this genial atmosphere, and did himself justice. He seldom spoke to Laurie, but he looked at him often, and a shadow would pass across his face, as if regretting his own lost youth, as he watched the young man in his prime. Then his eyes would turn to Jo so wistfully that she would have surely answered the mute inquiry if she had seen it. But Jo had her own eyes to take care of, and feeling that they could not be trusted, she prudently kept them on the little sock she was knitting, like a model maiden aunt.

A stealthy glance now and then refreshed her like sips of fresh water after a dusty walk, for the sidelong peeps showed her several propitious omens. Mr. Bhaer’s face had lost the absent-minded expression, and looked all alive with interest in the present moment, actually young and handsome, she thought, forgetting to compare him with Laurie, as she usually did strange men, to their great detriment. Then he seemed quite inspired, though the burial customs of the ancients, to which the conversation had strayed, might not be considered an exhilarating topic. Jo quite glowed with triumph when Teddy got quenched in an argument, and thought to herself, as she watched her father's absorbed face, "How he would enjoy having such a man as my Professor to talk with every day!" Lastly, Mr. Bhaer was dressed in a new suit of black, which made him look more like a gentleman than ever. His bushy hair had been cut and smoothly brushed, but didn't stay in order long, for in exciting moments, he rumpled it up in the droll way he used to do, and Jo liked it rampantly erect better than flat, because she thought it gave his fine forehead a Jove-like aspect. Poor Jo, how she did glorify that plain man, as she sat knitting away so quietly, yet letting nothing escape her, not even the fact that Mr. Bhaer actually had gold sleeve-buttons in his immaculate wristbands.

"Dear old fellow! He couldn't have got himself up with more care if he'd been going a-wooing," said Jo to herself, and then a sudden thought born of the words made her blush so dreadfully that she had to drop her ball, and go down after it to hide her face.

The maneuver did not succeed as well as she expected, however, for though just in the act of setting fire to a funeral pyre, the Professor dropped his torch, metaphorically speaking, and made a dive after the little blue ball. Of course they bumped their heads smartly together, saw stars, and both came up flushed and laughing, without the ball, to resume their seats, wishing they had not left them.

Nobody knew where the evening went to, for Hannah skillfully abstracted the babies at an early hour, nodding like two rosy poppies, and Mr. Laurence went home to rest. The others sat round the fire, talking away, utterly regardless of the lapse of time, till Meg, whose maternal mind was impressed with a firm conviction that Daisy had tumbled out of bed, and Demi set his nightgown afire studying the structure of matches, made a move to go.

"We must have our sing, in the good old way, for we are all together again once more," said Jo, feeling that a good shout would be a safe and pleasant vent for the jubilant emotions of her soul.

They were not all there. But no one found the words thougtless or untrue, for Beth still seemed among them, a peaceful presence, invisible, but dearer than ever, since death could not break the household league that love made disoluble. The little chair stood in its old place. The tidy basket, with the bit of work she left unfinished when the needle grew 'so heavy', was still on its accustomed shelf. The beloved instrument, seldom touched now had not been moved, and above it Beth's face, serene and smiling, as in the early days, looked down upon them, seeming to say, "Be happy. I am here."

"Play something, Amy. Let them hear how much you have improved," said Laurie, with pardonable pride in his promising pupil.

But Amy whispered, with full eyes, as she twirled the faded stool, "Not tonight, dear. I can't show off tonight."

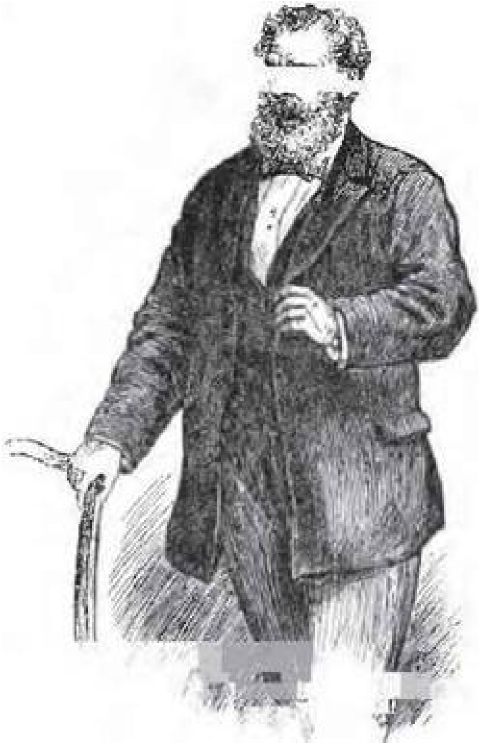
But she did show something better than brilliancy or skill, for she sang Beth's songs with a tender music in her voice which the best master could not have taught, and touched the listener's hearts with a sweeter power than any other inspiration could have given her. The room was very still, when the clear voice failed suddenly at the last line of Beth's favorite hymn. It was hard to say...

Earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal;

and Amy leaned against her husband, who stood behind her, feeling that her welcome home was not quite perfect without Beth's kiss.

"Now, we must finish with Mignon's song, for Mr. Bhaer sings that," said Jo, before the pause grew painful. And Mr. Bhaer cleared his throat with a gratified "Hem!" as he stepped into the corner where Jo stood, saying...

"You will sing with me? We go excellently well together."



A pleasing fiction, by the way, for Jo had no more idea of music than a grasshopper. But she would have consented if he had proposed to sing a whole opera, and warbled away, blissfully regardless of time and tune. It didn't much matter, for Mr. Bhaer sang like a true German, heartily and well, and Jo soon subsided into a subdued hum, that she might listen to the mellow voice that seemed to sing for her alone.

Know’st thou the land where the citron blooms,

used to be the Professor’s favorite line, for ‘das land’ meant Germany to him, but now he seemed to dwell, with peculiar warmth and melody, upon the words...

There, oh there, might I with thee,
O, my beloved, go

and one listener was so thrilled by the tender invitation that she longed to say she did know the land, and would joyfully depart thither whenever he liked.

The song was considered a great success, and the singer retired covered with laurels. But a few minutes afterward, he forgot his manners entirely, and stared at Amy putting on her bonnet, for she had been introduced simply as ‘my sister’, and no one had called her by her new name since he came. He forgot himself still further when Laurie said, in his most gracious manner, at parting...

“My wife and I are very glad to meet you, sir. Please remember that there is always a welcome waiting for you over the way.”

Then the Professor thanked him so heartily, and looked so suddenly illuminated with satisfaction, that Laurie thought him the most delightfully demonstrative old fellow he ever met.

“I too shall go, but I shall gladly come again, if you will gif me leave, dear madame, for a little business in the city will keep me here some days.”

He spoke to Mrs. March, but he looked at Jo, and the mother’s voice gave as cordial an assent as did the daughter’s eyes, for Mrs. March was not so blind to her children’s interest as Mrs. Moffat supposed.

“I suspect that is a wise man,” remarked Mr. March, with placid satisfaction, from the hearthrug, after the last guest had gone.

“I know he is a good one,” added Mrs. March, with decided approval, as she wound up the clock.

“I thought you’d like him,” was all Jo said, as she slipped away to her bed.

She wondered what the business was that brought Mr. Bhaer to the city, and finally decided that he had been appointed to some great honor, somewhere, but had been too modest to mention the fact. If she had seen his face when, safe in his own room, he looked at the picture of a severe and rigid young lady, with a good deal of hair, who appeared to be gazing darkly into futurity, it might have thrown some light upon the subject, especially when he turned off the gas, and kissed the picture in the dark.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

MY LORD AND LADY

“Please, Madam Mother, could you lend me my wife for half an hour? The luggage has come, and I’ve been making hay of Amy’s Paris finery, trying to find some things I want,” said Laurie, coming in the next day to find Mrs. Laurence sitting in her mother’s lap, as if being made ‘the baby’ again.

“Certainly. Go, dear, I forgot that you have any home but this,” and Mrs. March pressed the white hand that wore the wedding ring, as if asking pardon for her maternal covetousness.

“I shouldn’t have come over if I could have helped it, but I can’t get on without my little woman any more than a...”

“Weathercock can without the wind,” suggested Jo, as he paused for a simile. Jo had grown quite her own saucy self again since Teddy came home.

“Exactly, for Amy keeps me pointing due west most of the time, with only an occasional whiffle round to the south, and I haven’t had an easterly spell since I was married. Don’t know anything about the north, but am altogether salubrious and balmy, hey, my lady?”

“Lovely weather so far. I don’t know how long it will last, but I’m not afraid of storms, for I’m learning how to sail my ship. Come home, dear, and I’ll find your bootjack. I suppose that’s what you are rummaging after among my things. Men are so helpless, Mother,” said Amy, with a matronly air, which delighted her husband.

“What are you going to do with yourselves after you get settled?” asked Jo, buttoning Amy’s cloak as she used to button her pinafores.

“We have our plans. We don’t mean to say much about them yet, because we are such very new brooms, but we don’t intend to be idle. I’m going into business with a devotion that shall delight Grandfather, and prove to him that I’m not spoiled. I need something of the sort to keep me steady. I’m tired of dawdling, and mean to work like a man.”

“And Amy, what is she going to do?” asked Mrs. March, well pleased at Laurie’s decision and the energy with which he spoke.

“After doing the civil all round, and airing our best bonnet, we shall astonish you by the elegant hospitalities of our mansion, the brilliant society we shall draw about us, and the beneficial influence we shall exert over the world at large. That’s about it, isn’t it, Madame Recamier?” asked Laurie with a quizzical look at Amy.

“Time will show. Come away, Impertinence, and don’t shock my family by calling me names before their faces,” answered Amy, resolving that there should be a home with a good wife in it before she set up a salon as a queen of society.

“How happy those children seem together!” observed Mr. March, finding it difficult to become absorbed in his Aristotle after the young couple had gone.

“Yes, and I think it will last,” added Mrs. March, with the restful expression of a pilot who has brought a ship safely into port.

“I know it will. Happy Amy!” and Jo sighed, then smiled brightly as Professor Bhaer opened the gate with an impatient push.

Later in the evening, when his mind had been set at rest about the bootjack, Laurie said suddenly to his wife, “Mrs. Laurence.”

“My Lord!”

“That man intends to marry our Jo!”

“I hope so, don’t you, dear?”

“Well, my love, I consider him a trump, in the fullest sense of that expressive word, but I do wish he was a little younger and a good deal richer.”

“Now, Laurie, don’t be too fastidious and worldly-minded. If they love one another it doesn’t matter a particle how old they are nor how poor. Women never should marry for money...” Amy caught herself up short as the words escaped her, and looked at her husband, who replied, with malicious gravity...

“Certainly not, though you do hear charming girls say that they intend to do it sometimes. If my memory serves me, you once thought it your duty to make a rich match. That accounts, perhaps, for your marrying a good-for-nothing like me.”

“Oh, my dearest boy, don’t, don’t say that! I forgot you were rich when I said ‘Yes’. I’d have married you if you hadn’t a penny, and I sometimes wish you were poor that I might show how much I love you.” And Amy, who was very dignified in public and very fond in private, gave convincing proofs of the truth of her words.

“You don’t really think I am such a mercenary creature as I tried to be once, do you? It would break my heart if you didn’t believe that I’d gladly pull in the same boat with you, even if you had to get your living by rowing on the lake.”

“Am I an idiot and a brute? How could I think so, when you refused a richer man for me, and won’t let me give you half I want to now, when I have the right? Girls do it every day, poor things, and are taught to think it is their only salvation, but you had better lessons, and though I trembled for you at one time, I was not disappointed, for the daughter was true to the mother’s teaching. I told Mamma so yesterday, and she looked as glad and grateful as if I’d given her a check for a million, to be spent in charity. You are not listening to my moral remarks, Mrs. Laurence," and Laurie paused, for Amy's eyes had an absent look, though fixed upon his face.

"Yes, I am, and admiring the mole in your chin at the same time. I don't wish to make you vain, but I must confess that I'm prouder of my handsome husband than of all his money. Don't laugh, but your nose is such a comfort to me," and Amy softly caressed the well-cut feature with artistic satisfaction.

Laurie had received many compliments in his life, but never one that suited him better, as he plainly showed though he did laugh at his wife's peculiar taste, while she said slowly, "May I ask you a question, dear?"

"Of course, you may."

"Shall you care if Jo does marry Mr. Bhaer?"

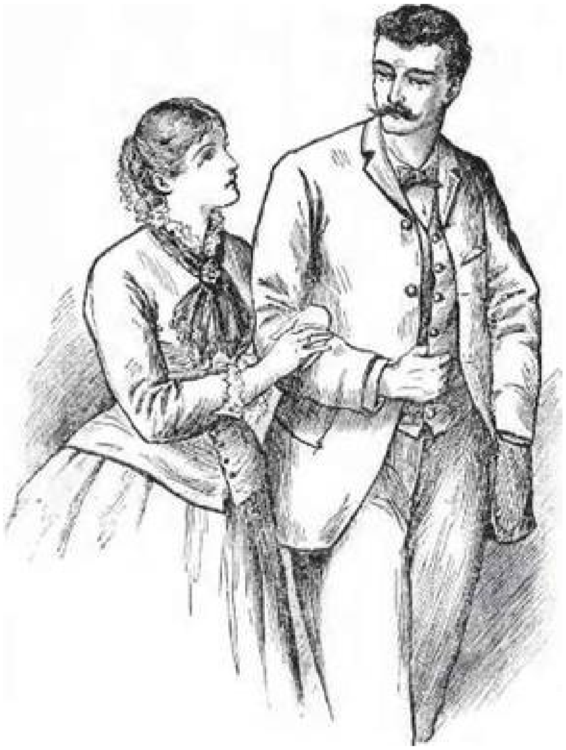
"Oh, that's the trouble is it? I thought there was something in the dimple that didn't quite suit you. Not being a dog in the manger, but the happiest fellow alive, I assure you I can dance at Jo's wedding with a heart as light as my heels. Do you doubt it, my darling?"

Amy looked up at him, and was satisfied. Her little jealous fear vanished forever, and she thanked him, with a face full of love and confidence.

"I wish we could do something for that capital old Professor. Couldn't we invent a rich relation, who shall obligingly die out there in Germany, and leave him a tidy little fortune?" said Laurie, when they began to pace up and down the long drawing room, arm in arm, as they were fond of doing, in memory of the chateau garden.

"Jo would find us out, and spoil it all. She is very proud of him, just as he is, and said yesterday that she thought poverty was a beautiful thing."

"Bless her dear heart! She won't think so when she has a literary husband, and a dozen little professors and professorins to support. We won't interfere now, but watch our chance, and do them a good turn in spite of themselves. I owe Jo for a part of my education, and she believes in people's paying their honest debts, so I'll get round her in that way."



"How delightful it is to be able to help others, isn't it? That was always one of my dreams, to have the power of giving freely, and thanks to you, the dream has come true."

"Ah, we'll do quantities of good, won't we? There's one sort of poverty that I particularly like to help. Out-and-out beggars get taken care of, but poor gentle folks fare badly, because they won't ask, and people don't dare to offer charity. Yet there are a thousand ways of helping them, if one only knows how to do it so delicately that it does not offend. I must say, I like to serve a decayed gentleman better than a blarnerying beggar. I suppose it's wrong, but I do, though it is harder."

"Because it takes a gentleman to do it," added the other member of the domestic admiration society.

"Thank you, I'm afraid I don't deserve that pretty compliment. But I was going to say that while I was dawdling about abroad, I saw a good many talented young fellows making all sorts of sacrifices, and enduring real hardships, that they might realize their dreams. Splendid fellows, some of them, working like heros, poor and friendless, but so full of courage, patience, and ambition that I was ashamed of myself, and longed to give them a right good lift. Those are people whom it's a satisfaction to help, for if they've got genius, it's an honor to be allowed to serve them, and not let it be lost or delayed for want of fuel to keep the pot boiling. If they haven't, it's a pleasure to comfort the poor souls, and keep them from despair when they find it out."

“Yes, indeed, and there’s another class who can’t ask, and who suffer in silence. I know something of it, for I belonged to it before you made a princess of me, as the king does the beggarmaid in the old story. Ambitious girls have a hard time, Laurie, and often have to see youth, health, and precious opportunities go by, just for want of a little help at the right minute. People have been very kind to me, and whenever I see girls struggling along, as we used to do, I want to put out my hand and help them, as I was helped.”

“And so you shall, like an angel as you are!” cried Laurie, resolving, with a glow of philanthropic zeal, to found and endow an institution for the express benefit of young women with artistic tendencies. “Rich people have no right to sit down and enjoy themselves, or let their money accumulate for others to waste. It’s not half so sensible to leave legacies when one dies as it is to use the money wisely while alive, and enjoy making one’s fellow creatures happy with it. We’ll have a good time ourselves, and add an extra relish to our own pleasure by giving other people a generous taste. Will you be a little Dorcas, going about emptying a big basket of comforts, and filling it up with good deeds?”

“With all my heart, if you will be a brave St. Martin, stopping as you ride gallantly through the world to share your cloak with the beggar.”

“It’s a bargain, and we shall get the best of it!”

So the young pair shook hands upon it, and then paced happily on again, feeling that their pleasant home was more homelike because they hoped to brighten other homes, believing that their own feet would walk more uprightly along the flowery path before them, if they smoothed rough ways for other feet, and feeling that their hearts were more closely knit together by a love which could tenderly remember those less blest than they.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

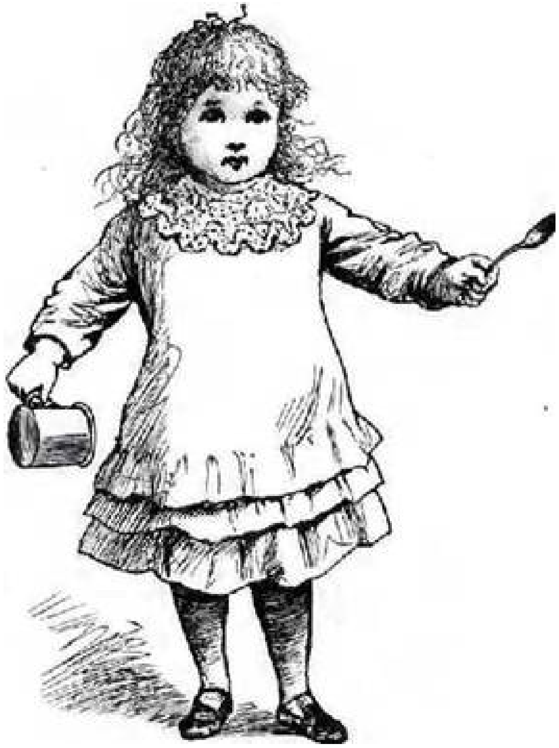
DAISY AND DEMI

I cannot feel that I have done my duty as humble historian of the March family, without devoting at least one chapter to the two most precious and important members of it. Daisy and Demi had now arrived at years of discretion, for in this fast age babies of three or four assert their rights, and get them, too, which is more than many of their elders do. If there ever were a pair of twins in danger of being utterly spoiled by adoration, it was these prattling Brookes. Of course they were the most remarkable children ever born, as will be shown when I mention that they walked at eight months, talked fluently at twelve months, and at two years they took their places at table, and behaved with a propriety which charmed all beholders. At three, Daisy demanded a ‘needler’, and actually made a bag with four stitches in it. She likewise set up housekeeping in the sideboard, and managed a microscopic cooking stove with a skill that brought tears of pride to Hannah’s eyes, while Demi learned his letters with his grandfather, who invented a new mode of teaching the alphabet by forming letters with his arms and legs, thus uniting gymnastics for head and heels. The boy early developed a mechanical genius which delighted his father and distracted his mother, for he tried to imitate every machine he saw, and kept the nursery in a chaotic condition, with his ‘sewinsheen’, a mysterious structure of string, chairs, clothespins, and spools, for wheels to go ‘wound and wound’. Also a basket hung over the back of a chair, in which he vainly tried to hoist his too confiding sister, who, with feminine devotion, allowed her little head to be bumped till rescued, when the young inventor indignantly remarked, “Why, Marmar, dat’s my lellywaiter, and me’s trying to pull her up.”

Though utterly unlike in character, the twins got on remarkably well together, and seldom quarreled more than thrice a day. Of course, Demi tyrannized over Daisy, and gallantly defended her from every other aggressor, while Daisy made a galley slave of herself, and adored her brother as the one perfect being in the world. A rosy, chubby, sunshiny little soul was Daisy, who found her way to everybody’s heart, and nestled there. One of the captivating children, who seem made to be kissed and cuddled, adorned and adored like little goddesses, and produced for general approval on all festive occasions. Her small virtues were so sweet that she would have been quite angelic if a few small naughtinesses had not kept her delightfully human. It was all fair weather in her world, and every morning she scrambled up to the window in her little nightgown to look out, and say, no matter whether it rained or shone, “Oh, pitty day, oh, pitty day!” Everyone was a friend, and she offered kisses to a stranger so confidingly that the most inveterate bachelor relented, and baby-lovers became faithful worshipers.

“Me loves evvybody,” she once said, opening her arms, with her spoon in one hand, and her mug in the other, as if eager to embrace and nourish the whole world.

As she grew, her mother began to feel that the Dovecote would be blessed by the presence of an inmate as serene and loving as that which had helped to make the old house home, and to pray that she might be spared a loss like that which had lately taught them how long they had entertained an angel unawares. Her grandfather often called her ‘Beth’, and her grandmother watched over her with untiring devotion, as if trying to atone for some past mistake, which no eye but her own could see.



Demi, like a true Yankee, was of an inquiring turn, wanting to know everything, and often getting much disturbed because he could not get satisfactory answers to his perpetual “What for?”

He also possessed a philosophic bent, to the great delight of his grandfather, who used to hold Socratic conversations with him, in which the precocious pupil occasionally posed his teacher, to the undisguised satisfaction of the womenfolk.

“What makes my legs go, Dranpa?” asked the young philosopher, surveying those active portions of his frame with a meditative air, while resting after a go-to-bed frolic one night.

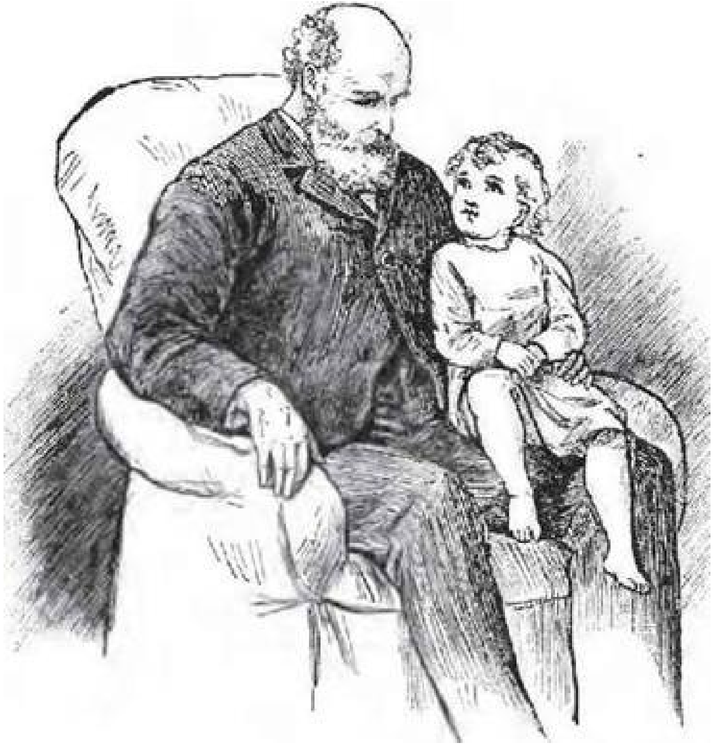
"It's your little mind, Demi," replied the sage, stroking the yellow head respectfully.

"What is a little mine?"

"It is something which makes your body move, as the spring made the wheels go in my watch when I showed it to you."

"Open me. I want to see it go wound."

"I can't do that any more than you could open the watch. God winds you up, and you go till He stops you."



"Does I?" and Demi's brown eyes grew big and bright as he took in the new thought. "Is I wounded up like the watch?"

"Yes, but I can't show you how, for it is done when we don't see."

Demi felt his back, as if expecting to find it like that of the watch, and then gravely remarked, "I dess Dod does it when I's asleep."

A careful explanation followed, to which he listened so attentively that his anxious grandmother said, "My dear, do you think it wise to talk about such things to that baby? He's getting great bumps over his eyes, and learning to ask the most unanswerable questions."

"If he is old enough to ask the question he is old enough to receive true answers. I am not putting the thoughts into his head, but helping him unfold those already there. These children are wiser than we are, and I have no doubt the boy understands every word I have said to him. Now, Demi, tell me where you keep your mind."

If the boy had replied like Alcibiades, "By the gods, Socrates, I cannot tell," his grandfather would not have been surprised, but when, after standing a moment on one leg, like a meditative young stork, he answered, in a tone of calm conviction, "In my little belly," the old gentleman could only join in Grandma's laugh, and dismiss the class in metaphysics.

There might have been cause for maternal anxiety, if Demi had not given convincing proofs that he was a true boy, as well as a budding philosopher, for often, after a discussion which caused Hannah to prophesy, with ominous nods, "That child ain't long for this world," he would turn about and set her fears at rest by some of the pranks with which dear, dirty, naughty little rascals distract and delight their parent's souls.

Meg made many moral rules, and tried to keep them, but what mother was ever proof against the winning wiles, the ingenious evasions, or the tranquil audacity of the miniature men and women who so early show themselves accomplished Artful Dodgers?

"No more raisins, Demi. They'll make you sick," says Mamma to the young person who offers his services in the kitchen with unfailing regularity on plum-pudding day.

"Me likes to be sick."

"I don't want to have you, so run away and help Daisy make patty cakes."

He reluctantly departs, but his wrongs weigh upon his spirit, and by-and-by when an opportunity comes to redress them, he outwits Mamma by a shrewd bargain.

"Now you have been good children, and I'll play anything you like," says Meg, as she leads her assistant cooks upstairs, when the pudding is safely bouncing in the pot.

"Truly, Marmar?" asks Demi, with a brilliant idea in his well-powdered head.

"Yes, truly. Anything you say," replies the shortsighted parent, preparing herself to sing, "The Three Little Kittens" half a dozen times over, or to take her family to "Buy a penny bun," regardless of wind or limb. But Demi corners her by the cool reply...

"Then we'll go and eat up all the raisins."

Aunt Dodo was chief playmate and confidante of both children, and the trio turned the little house topsy-turvy. Aunt Amy was as yet only a name to them, Aunt Beth soon faded into a pleasantly vague memory, but Aunt Dodo was a living reality, and they made the most of her, for which compliment she was deeply grateful. But when Mr. Bhaer came, Jo neglected her playfellows, and dismay and desolation fell upon their little souls. Daisy, who was fond of going about peddling kisses, lost her best customer and became bankrupt. Demi, with infantile penetration, soon discovered that Dodo like to play with ‘the bear-man’ better than she did him, but though hurt, he concealed his anguish, for he hadn’t the heart to insult a rival who kept a mine of chocolate drops in his waistcoat pocket, and a watch that could be taken out of its case and freely shaken by ardent admirers.

Some persons might have considered these pleasing liberties as bribes, but Demi didn’t see it in that light, and continued to patronize the ‘the bear-man’ with pensive affability, while Daisy bestowed her small affections upon him at the third call, and considered his shoulder her throne, his arm her refuge, his gifts treasures surpassing worth.

Gentlemen are sometimes seized with sudden fits of admiration for the young relatives of ladies whom they honor with their regard, but this counterfeit philoprogenitiveness sits uneasily upon them, and does not deceive anybody a particle. Mr. Bhaer’s devotion was sincere, however likewise effective — for honesty is the best policy in love as in law. He was one of the men who are at home with children, and looked particularly well when little faces made a pleasant contrast with his manly one. His business, whatever it was, detained him from day to day, but evening seldom failed to bring him out to see — well, he always asked for Mr. March, so I suppose he was the attraction. The excellent papa labored under the delusion that he was, and reveled in long discussions with the kindred spirit, till a chance remark of his more observing grandson suddenly enlightened him.

Mr. Bhaer came in one evening to pause on the threshold of the study, astonished by the spectacle that met his eye. Prone upon the floor lay Mr. March, with his respectable legs in the air, and beside him, likewise prone, was Demi, trying to imitate the attitude with his own short, scarlet-stockinged legs, both grovelers so seriously absorbed that they were unconscious of spectators, till Mr. Bhaer laughed his sonorous laugh, and Jo cried out, with a scandalized face...

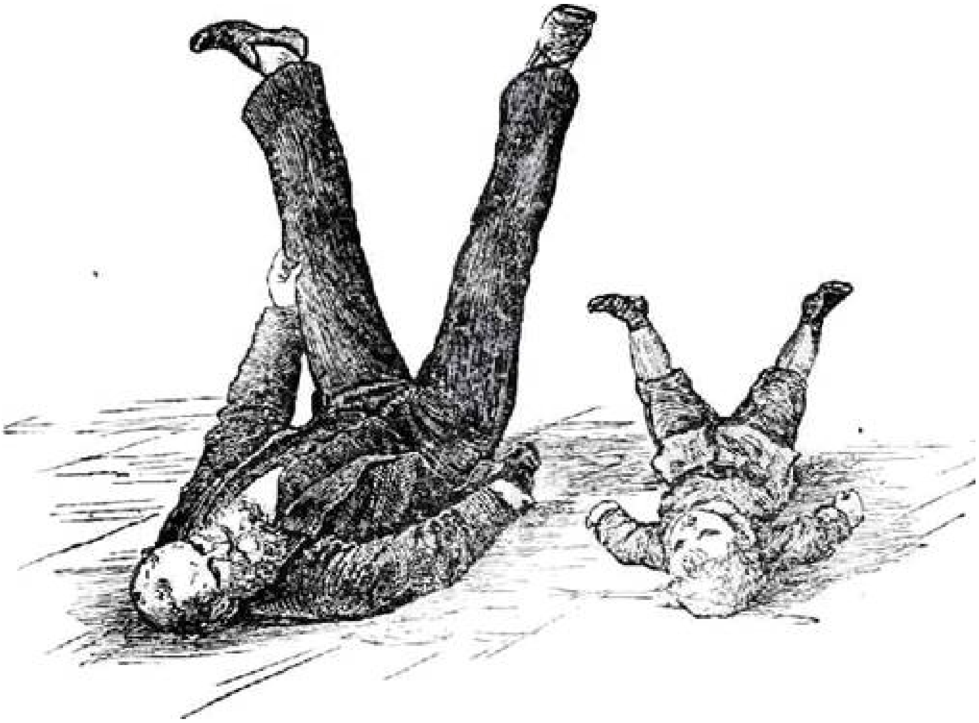
“Father, Father, here’s the Professor!”

Down went the black legs and up came the gray head, as the preceptor said, with undisturbed dignity, “Good evening, Mr. Bhaer. Excuse me for a moment. We are just finishing our lesson. Now, Demi, make the letter and tell its name.”

“I knows him!” and, after a few convulsive efforts, the red legs took the shape of a pair of compasses, and the intelligent pupil triumphantly shouted, “It’s a We, Dranpa, it’s a We!”

“He’s a born Weller,” laughed Jo, as her parent gathered himself up, and her nephew tried to stand on his head, as the only mode of expressing his satisfaction that school was over.

“What have you been at today, bubchen?” asked Mr. Bhaer, picking up the gymnast.



“Me went to see little Mary.”

“And what did you there?”

“I kissed her,” began Demi, with artless frankness.

“Prut! Thou beginnest early. What did the little Mary say to that?” asked Mr. Bhaer, continuing to confess the young sinner, who stood upon the knee, exploring the waistcoat pocket.

“Oh, she liked it, and she kissed me, and I liked it. Don’t little boys like little girls?” asked Demi, with his mouth full, and an air of bland satisfaction.

“You precocious chick! Who put that into your head?” said Jo, enjoying the innocent revelation as much as the Professor.

“‘Tisn’t in mine head, it’s in mine mouf,” answered literal Demi, putting out his tongue, with a chocolate drop on it, thinking she alluded to confectionery, not ideas.

“Thou shouldst save some for the little friend. Sweets to the sweet, mannling,” and Mr. Bhaer offered Jo some, with a look that made her wonder if chocolate was not the nectar drunk by the gods. Demi also saw the smile, was impressed by it, and artlessy inquired. ..

“Do great boys like great girls, to, ‘Fessor?”

Like young Washington, Mr. Bhaer ‘couldn’t tell a lie’, so he gave the somewhat vague reply that he believed they did sometimes, in a tone that made Mr. March put down his clothesbrush, glance at Jo’s retiring face, and then sink into his chair, looking as if the ‘precocious chick’ had put an idea into his head that was both sweet and sour.

Why Dodo, when she caught him in the china closet half an hour afterward, nearly squeezed the breath out of his little body with a tender embrace, instead of shaking him for being there, and why she followed up this novel performance by the unexpected gift of a big slice of bread and jelly, remained one of the problems over which Demi puzzled his small wits, and was forced to leave unsolved forever.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

UNDER THE UMBRELLA

While Laurie and Amy were taking conjugal strolls over velvet carpets, as they set their house in order, and planned a blissful future, Mr. Bhaer and Jo were enjoying promenades of a different sort, along muddy roads and sodden fields.

"I always do take a walk toward evening, and I don't know why I should give it up, just because I happen to meet the Professor on his way out," said Jo to herself, after two or three encounters, for though there were two paths to Meg's whichever one she took she was sure to meet him, either going or returning. He was always walking rapidly, and never seemed to see her until quite close, when he would look as if his short-sighted eyes had failed to recognize the approaching lady till that moment. Then, if she was going to Meg's he always had something for the babies. If her face was turned homeward, he had merely strolled down to see the river, and was just returning, unless they were tired of his frequent calls.

Under the circumstances, what could Jo do but greet him civilly, and invite him in? If she was tired of his visits, she concealed her weariness with perfect skill, and took care that there should be coffee for supper, "as Friedrich — I mean Mr. Bhaer — doesn't like tea."

By the second week, everyone knew perfectly well what was going on, yet everyone tried to look as if they were stone-blind to the changes in Jo's face. They never asked why she sang about her work, did up her hair three times a day, and got so blooming with her evening exercise. And no one seemed to have the slightest suspicion that Professor Bhaer, while talking philosophy with the father, was giving the daughter lessons in love.

Jo couldn't even lose her heart in a decorous manner, but sternly tried to quench her feelings, and failing to do so, led a somewhat agitated life. She was mortally afraid of being laughed at for surrendering, after her many and vehement declarations of independence. Laurie was her especial dread, but thanks to the new manager, he behaved with praiseworthy propriety, never called Mr. Bhaer 'a capital old fellow' in public, never alluded, in the remotest manner, to Jo's improved appearance, or expressed the least surprise at seeing the Professor's hat on the Marches' table nearly every evening. But he exulted in private and longed for the time to come when he could give Jo a piece of plate, with a bear and a ragged staff on it as an appropriate coat of arms.

For a fortnight, the Professor came and went with lover-like regularity. Then he stayed away for three whole days, and made no sign, a proceeding which caused everybody to look sober, and Jo to become pensive, at first, and then — alas for romance — very cross.

“Disgusted, I dare say, and gone home as suddenly as he came. It’s nothing to me, of course, but I should think he would have come and bid us goodbye like a gentleman,” she said to herself, with a despairing look at the gate, as she put on her things for the customary walk one dull afternoon.

“You’d better take the little umbrella, dear. It looks like rain,” said her mother, observing that she had on her new bonnet, but not alluding to the fact.

“Yes, Marmee, do you want anything in town? I’ve got to run in and get some paper,” returned Jo, pulling out the bow under her chin before the glass as an excuse for not looking at her mother.

“Yes, I want some twilled silesia, a paper of number nine needles, and two yards of narrow lavender ribbon. Have you got your thick boots on, and something warm under your cloak?”

“I believe so,” answered Jo absently.

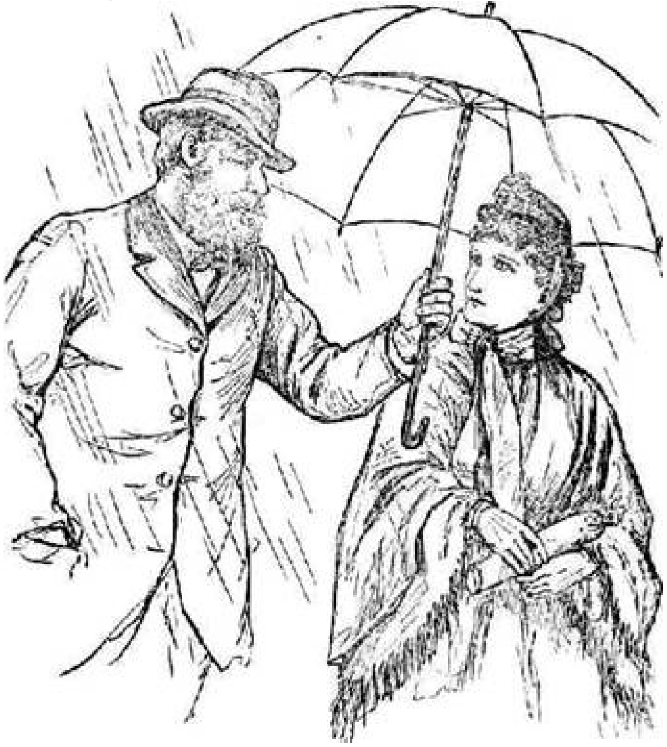
“If you happen to meet Mr. Bhaer, bring him home to tea. I quite long to see the dear man,” added Mrs. March.

Jo heard that, but made no answer, except to kiss her mother, and walk rapidly away, thinking with a glow of gratitude, in spite of her heartache, “How good she is to me! What do girls do who haven’t any mothers to help them through their troubles?”

The dry-goods stores were not down among the counting-houses, banks, and wholesale warerooms, where gentlemen most do congregate, but Jo found herself in that part of the city before she did a single errand, loitering along as if waiting for someone, examining engineering instruments in one window and samples of wool in another, with most unfeminine interest, tumbling over barrels, being half-smothered by descending bales, and hustled unceremoniously by busy men who looked as if they wondered ‘how the deuce she got there’. A drop of rain on her cheek recalled her thoughts from baffled hopes to ruined ribbons. For the drops continued to fall, and being a woman as well as a lover, she felt that, though it was too late to save her heart, she might her bonnet. Now she remembered the little umbrella, which she had forgotten to take in her hurry to be off, but regret was unavailing, and nothing could be done but borrow one or submit to a drenching. She looked up at the lowering sky, down at the crimson bow already flecked with black, forward along the muddy street, then one long, lingering look behind, at a certain grimy warehouse, with ‘Hoffmann, Swartz, & Co.’ over the door, and said to herself, with a sternly reproachful air...

"It serves me right! what business had I to put on all my best things and come philandering down here, hoping to see the Professor? Jo, I'm ashamed of you! No, you shall not go there to borrow an umbrella, or find out where he is, from his friends. You shall trudge away, and do your errands in the rain, and if you catch your death and ruin your bonnet, it's no more than you deserve. Now then!"

With that she rushed across the street so impetuously that she narrowly escaped annihilation from a passing truck, and precipitated herself into the arms of a stately old gentleman, who said, "I beg pardon, ma'am," and looked mortally offended. Somewhat daunted, Jo righted herself, spread her handkerchief over the devoted ribbons, and putting temptation behind her, hurried on, with increasing dampness about the ankles, and much clashing of umbrellas overhead. The fact that a somewhat dilapidated blue one remained stationary above the unprotected bonnet attracted her attention, and looking up, she saw Mr. Bhaer looking down.



"I feel to know the strong-minded lady who goes so bravely under many horse noses, and so fast through much mud. What do you down here, my friend?"

"I'm shopping."

Mr. Bhaer smiled, as he glanced from the pickle factory on one side to the wholesale hide and leather concern on the other, but he only said politely, "You haf no umbrella. May I go also, and take for you the bundles?"

"Yes, thank you."

Jo’s cheeks were as red as her ribbon, and she wondered what he thought of her, but she didn’t care, for in a minute she found herself walking away arm in arm with her Professor, feeling as if the sun had suddenly burst out with uncommon brilliancy, that the world was all right again, and that one thoroughly happy woman was paddling through the wet that day.

“We thought you had gone,” said Jo hastily, for she knew he was looking at her. Her bonnet wasn’t big enough to hide her face, and she feared he might think the joy it betrayed unmaidenly.

“Did you believe that I should go with no farewell to those who haf been so heavenly kind to me?” he asked so reproachfully that she felt as if she had insulted him by the suggestion, and answered heartily...

“No, I didn’t. I knew you were busy about your own affairs, but we rather missed you, Father and Mother especially.”

“And you?”

“I’m always glad to see you, sir.”

In her anxiety to keep her voice quite calm, Jo made it rather cool, and the frosty little monosyllable at the end seemed to chill the Professor, for his smile vanished, as he said gravely...

“I thank you, and come one more time before I go.”

“You are going, then?”

“I haf no longer any business here, it is done.”

“Successfully, I hope?” said Jo, for the bitterness of disappointment was in that short reply of his.

“I ought to think so, for I haf a way opened to me by which I can make my bread and gif my Junglings much help.”

“Tell me, please! I like to know all about the — the boys,” said Jo eagerly.

“That is so kind, I gladly tell you. My friends find for me a place in a college, where I teach as at home, and earn enough to make the way smooth for Franz and Emil. For this I should be grateful, should I not?”

“Indeed you should. How splendid it will be to have you doing what you like, and be able to see you often, and the boys!” cried Jo, clinging to the lads as an excuse for the satisfaction she could not help betraying.

“Ah! But we shall not meet often, I fear, this place is at the West.”

“So far away!” and Jo left her skirts to their fate, as if it didn’t matter now what became of her clothes or herself.

Mr. Bhaer could read several languages, but he had not learned to read women yet. He flattered himself that he knew Jo pretty well, and was, therefore, much amazed by the contradictions of voice, face, and manner, which she showed him in rapid succession that day, for she was in half a dozen different moods in the course of half an hour. When she met him she looked surprised, though it was impossible to help suspecting that she had come for that express purpose. When he offered her his arm, she took it with a look that filled him with delight, but when he asked if she missed him, she gave such a chilly, formal reply that despair fell upon him. On learning his good fortune she almost clapped her hands. Was the joy all for the boys? Then on hearing his destination, she said, “So far away!” in a tone of despair that lifted him on to a pinnacle of hope, but the next minute she tumbled him down again by observing, like one entirely absorbed in the matter...

“Here’s the place for my errands. Will you come in? It won’t take long.”

Jo rather prided herself upon her shopping capabilities, and particularly wished to impress her escort with the neatness and dispatch with which she would accomplish the business. But owing to the flutter she was in, everything went amiss. She upset the tray of needles, forgot the silesia was to be ‘twilled’ till it was cut off, gave the wrong change, and covered herself with confusion by asking for lavender ribbon at the calico counter. Mr. Bhaer stood by, watching her blush and blunder, and as he watched, his own bewilderment seemed to subside, for he was beginning to see that on some occasions, women, like dreams, go by contraries.

When they came out, he put the parcel under his arm with a more cheerful aspect, and splashed through the puddles as if he rather enjoyed it on the whole.

“Should we no do a little what you call shopping for the babies, and haf a farewell feast tonight if I go for my last call at your so pleasant home?” he asked, stopping before a window full of fruit and flowers.

“What will we buy?” asked Jo, ignoring the latter part of his speech, and sniffing the mingled odors with an affectation of delight as they went in.

“May they haf oranges and figs?” asked Mr. Bhaer, with a paternal air.

“They eat them when they can get them.”

“Do you care for nuts?”

“Like a squirrel.”

“Hamburg grapes. Yes, we shall drink to the Fatherland in those?”

Jo frowned upon that piece of extravagance, and asked why he didn’t buy a frail of dates, a cask of raisins, and a bag of almonds, and be done with it? Whereat Mr. Bhaer confiscated her purse, produced his own, and finished the marketing by buying several pounds of grapes, a pot of rosy daisies, and a pretty jar of honey, to be regarded in the light of a demijohn. Then distorting his pockets with knobby bundles, and giving her the flowers to hold, he put up the old umbrella, and they traveled on again.

“Miss Marsch, I haf a great favor to ask of you,” began the Professor, after a moist promenade of half a block.

"Yes, sir?" and Jo's heart began to beat so hard she was afraid he would hear it.

"I am bold to say it in spite of the rain, because so short a time remains to me."

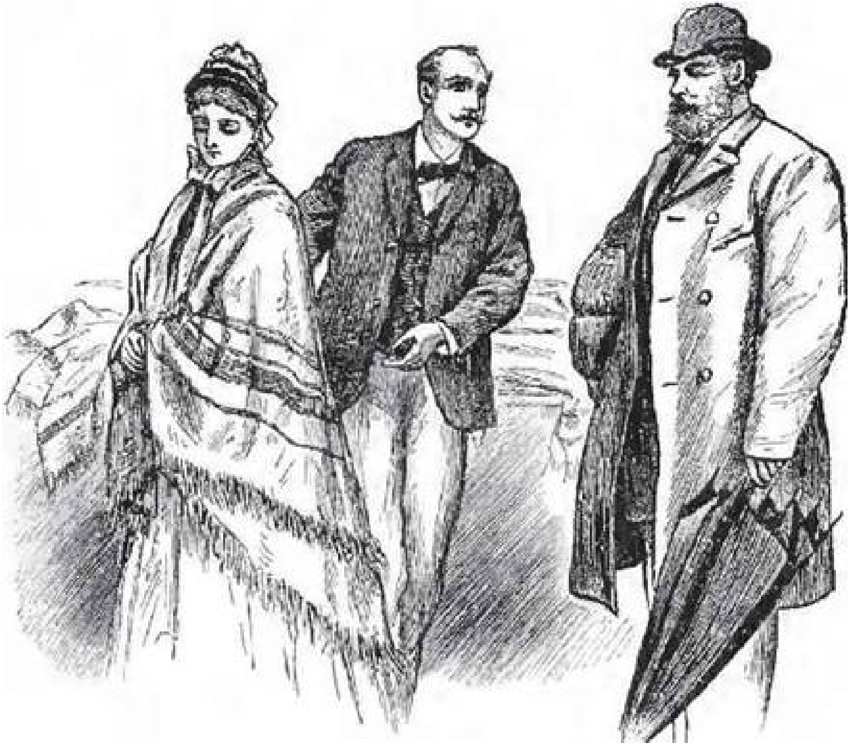
"Yes, sir," and Jo nearly crushed the small flowerpot with the sudden squeeze she gave it.

"I wish to get a little dress for my Tina, and I am too stupid to go alone. Will you kindly gif me a word of taste and help?"

"Yes, sir," and Jo felt as calm and cool all of a sudden as if she had stepped into a refrigerator.

"Perhaps also a shawl for Tina's mother, she is so poor and sick, and the husband is such a care. Yes, yes, a thick, warm shawl would be a friendly thing to take the little mother."

"I'll do it with pleasure, Mr. Bhaer." "I'm going very fast, and he's getting dearer every minute," added Jo to herself, then with a mental shake she entered into the business with an energy that was pleasant to behold.



Mr. Bhaer left it all to her, so she chose a pretty gown for Tina, and then ordered out the shawls. The clerk, being a married man, condescended to take an interest in the couple, who appeared to be shopping for their family.

"Your lady may prefer this. It's a superior article, a most desirable color, quite chaste and genteel," he said, shaking out a comfortable gray shawl, and throwing it over Jo's shoulders.

"Does this suit you, Mr. Bhaer?" she asked, turning her back to him, and feeling deeply grateful for the chance of hiding her face.

"Excellently well, we will haf it," answered the Professor, smiling to himself as he paid for it, while Jo continued to rummage the counters like a confirmed bargain-hunter.

"Now shall we go home?" he asked, as if the words were very pleasant to him.

"Yes, it's late, and I'm *so* tired." Jo's voice was more pathetic than she knew. For now the sun seemed to have gone in as suddenly as it came out, and the world grew muddy and miserable again, and for the first time she discovered that her feet were cold, her head ached, and that her heart was colder than the former, fuller of pain than the latter. Mr. Bhaer was going away, he only cared for her as a friend, it was all a mistake, and the sooner it was over the better. With this idea in her head, she hailed an approaching omnibus with such a hasty gesture that the daisies flew out of the pot and were badly damaged.

"This is not our omniboos," said the Professor, waving the loaded vehicle away, and stopping to pick up the poor little flowers.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't see the name distinctly. Never mind, I can walk. I'm used to plodding in the mud," returned Jo, winking hard, because she would have died rather than openly wipe her eyes.

Mr. Bhaer saw the drops on her cheeks, though she turned her head away. The sight seemed to touch him very much, for suddenly stooping down, he asked in a tone that meant a great deal, "Heart's dearest, why do you cry?"

Now, if Jo had not been new to this sort of thing she would have said she wasn't crying, had a cold in her head, or told any other feminine fib proper to the occasion. Instead of which, that undignified creature answered, with an irrepressible sob, "Because you are going away."

"Ach, mein Gott, that is so good!" cried Mr. Bhaer, managing to clasp his hands in spite of the umbrella and the bundles, "Jo, I haf nothing but much love to gif you. I came to see if you could care for it, and I waited to be sure that I was something more than a friend. Am I? Can you make a little place in your heart for old Fritz?" he added, all in one breath.

"Oh, yes!" said Jo, and he was quite satisfied, for she folded both hands over his arm, and looked up at him with an expression that plainly showed how happy she would be to walk through life beside him, even though she had no better shelter than the old umbrella, if he carried it.

It was certainly proposing under difficulties, for even if he had desired to do so, Mr. Bhaer could not go down upon his knees, on account of the mud. Neither could he offer Jo his hand, except figuratively, for both were full. Much less could he indulge in tender remonstrations in the open street, though he was near it. So the only way in which he could express his rapture was to look at her, with an expression which glorified his face to such a degree that there actually seemed to be little rainbows in the drops that sparkled on his beard. If he had not loved Jo very much, I don't think he could have done it then, for she looked far from lovely, with her skirts in a deplorable state, her rubber boots splashed to the ankle, and her bonnet a ruin. Fortunately, Mr. Bhaer considered her the most beautiful woman living, and she found him more "Jove-like" than ever, though his hatbrim was quite limp with the little rills trickling thence upon his shoulders (for he held the umbrella all over Jo), and every finger of his gloves needed mending.

Passers-by probably thought them a pair of harmless lunatics, for they entirely forgot to hail a bus, and strolled leisurely along, oblivious of deepening dusk and fog. Little they cared what anybody thought, for they were enjoying the happy hour that seldom comes but once in any life, the magical moment which bestows youth on the old, beauty on the plain, wealth on the poor, and gives human hearts a foretaste of heaven. The Professor looked as if he had conquered a kingdom, and the world had nothing more to offer him in the way of bliss. While Jo trudged beside him, feeling as if her place had always been there, and wondering how she ever could have chosen any other lot. Of course, she was the first to speak — intelligibly, I mean, for the emotional remarks which followed her impetuous "Oh, yes!" were not of a coherent or reportable character.

"Friedrich, why didn't you..."

"Ah, heaven, she gifs me the name that no one speaks since Minna died!" cried the Professor, pausing in a puddle to regard her with grateful delight.

"I always call you so to myself — I forgot, but I won't unless you like it."

"Like it? It is more sweet to me than I can tell. Say 'thou', also, and I shall say your language is almost as beautiful as mine."

"Isn't 'thou' a little sentimental?" asked Jo, privately thinking it a lovely monosyllable.

"Sentimental? Yes. Thank Gott, we Germans believe in sentiment, and keep ourselves young mit it. Your English 'you' is so cold, say 'thou', heart's dearest, it means so much to me," pleaded Mr. Bhaer, more like a romantic student than a grave professor.

"Well, then, why didn't thou tell me all this sooner?" asked Jo bashfully.

"Now I shall haf to show thee all my heart, and I so gladly will, because thou must take care of it hereafter. See, then, my Jo — ah, the dear, funny little name — I had a wish to tell something the day I said goodbye in New York, but I thought the handsome friend was betrothed to thee, and so I spoke not. Wouldst thou have said ‘Yes’, then, if I had spoken?”

“I don’t know. I’m afraid not, for I didn’t have any heart just then.”

“Prut! That I do not believe. It was asleep till the fairy prince came through the wood, and waked it up. Ah, well, ‘Die erste Liebe ist die beste’, but that I should not expect.”

“Yes, the first love is the best, but be so contented, for I never had another. Teddy was only a boy, and soon got over his little fancy,” said Jo, anxious to correct the Professor’s mistake.

“Good! Then I shall rest happy, and be sure that thou givest me all. I haf waited so long, I am grown selfish, as thou wilt find, Professorin.”

“I like that,” cried Jo, delighted with her new name. “Now tell me what brought you, at last, just when I wanted you?”

“This,” and Mr. Bhaer took a little worn paper out of his waistcoat pocket.

Jo unfolded it, and looked much abashed, for it was one of her own contributions to a paper that paid for poetry, which accounted for her sending it an occasional attempt.

“How could that bring you?” she asked, wondering what he meant.

“I found it by chance. I knew it by the names and the initials, and in it there was one little verse that seemed to call me. Read and find him. I will see that you go not in the wet.”

IN THE GARRET

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust, and worn by time,
All fashioned and filled, long ago,
By children now in their prime.
Four little keys hung side by side,
With faded ribbons, brave and gay
When fastened there, with childish pride,
Long ago, on a rainy day.
Four little names, one on each lid,
Carved out by a boyish hand,
And underneath there lieth hid
Histories of the happy band
Once playing here, and pausing oft
To hear the sweet refrain,
That came and went on the roof aloft,
In the falling summer rain.

“Meg” on the first lid, smooth and fair.
I look in with loving eyes,
For folded here, with well-known care,
A goodly gathering lies,
The record of a peaceful life —
Gifts to gentle child and girl,
A bridal gown, lines to a wife,
A tiny shoe, a baby curl.
No toys in this first chest remain,
For all are carried away,
In their old age, to join again
In another small Meg’s play.
Ah, happy mother! Well I know
You hear, like a sweet refrain,
Lullabies ever soft and low
In the falling summer rain.

“Jo” on the next lid, scratched and worn,
And within a motley store
Of headless dolls, of schoolbooks torn,
Birds and beasts that speak no more,
Spoils brought home from the fairy ground
Only trod by youthful feet,
Dreams of a future never found,
Memories of a past still sweet,
Half-writ poems, stories wild,
April letters, warm and cold,
Diaries of a wilful child,
Hints of a woman early old,
A woman in a lonely home,
Hearing, like a sad refrain —
“Be worthy, love, and love will come,”
In the falling summer rain.

My Beth! the dust is always swept
From the lid that bears your name,

As if by loving eyes that wept,
By careful hands that often came.
Death canonized for us one saint,
Ever less human than divine,
And still we lay, with tender plaint,
Relics in this household shrine —
The silver bell, so seldom rung,
The little cap which last she wore,
The fair, dead Catherine that hung
By angels borne above her door.
The songs she sang, without lament,
In her prison-house of pain,
Forever are they sweetly blent
With the falling summer rain.

Upon the last lid’s polished field —
Legend now both fair and true
A gallant knight bears on his shield,
“Amy” in letters gold and blue.
Within lie snoods that bound her hair,
Slippers that have danced their last,
Faded flowers laid by with care,
Fans whose airy toils are past,
Gay valentines, all ardent flames,
Trifles that have borne their part
In girlish hopes and fears and shames,
The record of a maiden heart
Now learning fairer, truer spells,
Hearing, like a blithe refrain,
The silver sound of bridal bells
In the falling summer rain.

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust, and worn by time,
Four women, taught by weal and woe
To love and labor in their prime.
Four sisters, parted for an hour,
None lost, one only gone before,

Made by love's immortal power,
Nearest and dearest evermore.
Oh, when these hidden stores of ours
Lie open to the Father's sight,
May they be rich in golden hours,
Deeds that show fairer for the light,
Lives whose brave music long shall ring,
Like a spirit-stirring strain,
Souls that shall gladly soar and sing
In the long sunshine after rain.

"It's very bad poetry, but I felt it when I wrote it, one day when I was very lonely, and had a good cry on a rag bag. I never thought it would go where it could tell tales," said Jo, tearing up the verses the Professor had treasured so long.

"Let it go, it has done its duty, and I will haf a fresh one when I read all the brown book in which she keeps her little secrets," said Mr. Bhaer with a smile as he watched the fragments fly away on the wind. "Yes," he added earnestly, "I read that, and I think to myself, She has a sorrow, she is lonely, she would find comfort in true love. I haf a heart full, full for her. Shall I not go and say, 'If this is not too poor a thing to gif for what I shall hope to receive, take it in Gott's name?'"

"And so you came to find that it was not too poor, but the one precious thing I needed," whispered Jo.

"I had no courage to think that at first, heavenly kind as was your welcome to me. But soon I began to hope, and then I said, 'I will haf her if I die for it,' and so I will!" cried Mr. Bhaer, with a defiant nod, as if the walls of mist closing round them were barriers which he was to surmount or valiantly knock down.

Jo thought that was splendid, and resolved to be worthy of her knight, though he did not come prancing on a charger in gorgeous array.

"What made you stay away so long?" she asked presently, finding it so pleasant to ask confidential questions and get delightful answers that she could not keep silent.

"It was not easy, but I could not find the heart to take you from that so happy home until I could haf a prospect of one to gif you, after much time, perhaps, and hard work. How could I ask you to gif up so much for a poor old fellow, who has no fortune but a little learning?"

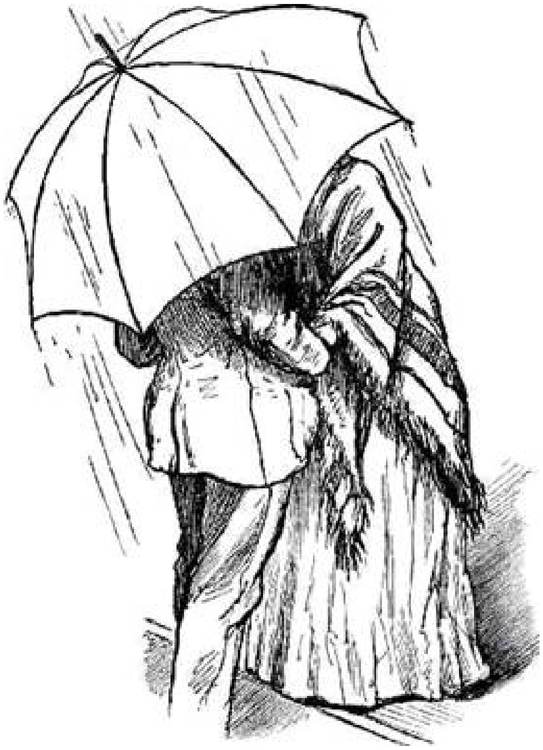
"I'm glad you are poor. I couldn't bear a rich husband," said Jo decidedly, adding in a softer tone, "Don't fear poverty. I've known it long enough to lose my dread and be happy working for those I love, and don't call yourself old — forty is the prime of life. I couldn't help loving you if you were seventy!"

The Professor found that so touching that he would have been glad of his handkerchief, if he could have got at it. As he couldn't, Jo wiped his eyes for him, and said, laughing, as she took away a bundle or two...

"I may be strong-minded, but no one can say I'm out of my sphere now, for woman's special mission is supposed to be drying tears and bearing burdens. I'm to carry my share, Friedrich, and help to earn the home. Make up your mind to that, or I'll never go," she added resolutely, as he tried to reclaim his load.

"We shall see. Haf you patience to wait a long time, Jo? I must go away and do my work alone. I must help my boys first, because, even for you, I may not break my word to Minna. Can you forgif that, and be happy while we hope and wait?"

"Yes, I know I can, for we love one another, and that makes all the rest easy to bear. I have my duty, also, and my work. I couldn't enjoy myself if I neglected them even for you, so there's no need of hurry or impatience. You can do your part out West, I can do mine here, and both be happy hoping for the best, and leaving the future to be as God wills."

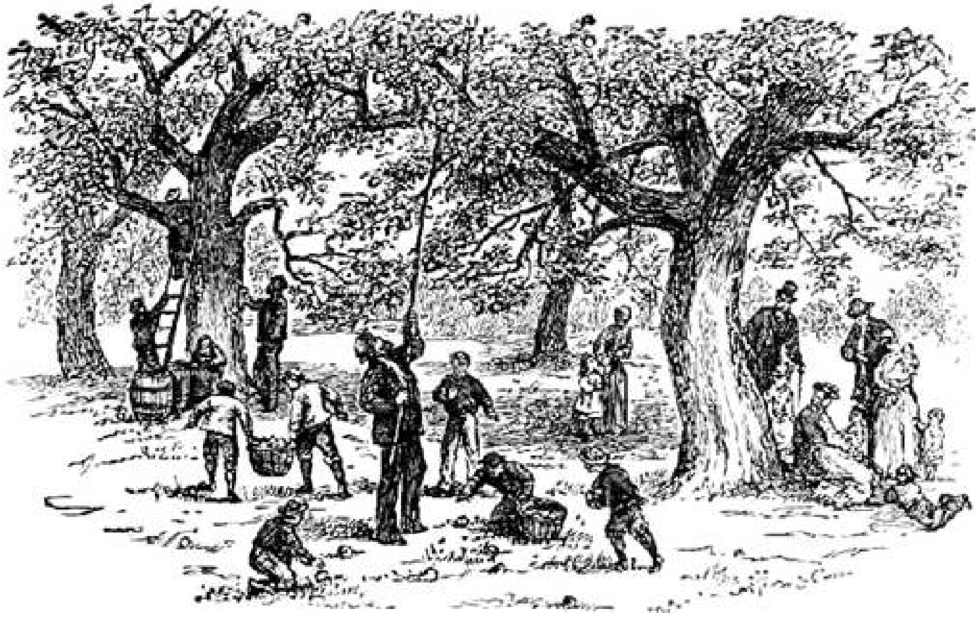


"Ah! Thou gifest me such hope and courage, and I haf nothing to gif back but a full heart and these empty hands," cried the Professor, quite overcome.

Jo never, never would learn to be proper, for when he said that as they stood upon the steps, she just put both hands into his, whispering tenderly, "Not empty now," and stooping down, kissed her Friedrich under the umbrella. It was dreadful, but she would have done it if the flock of draggle-tailed sparrows on the hedge had been human beings, for she was very far gone indeed, and quite regardless of everything but her own happiness. Though it came in such a very simple guise, that was the crowning moment of both their lives, when, turning from the night and storm and loneliness to the household light and warmth and peace waiting to receive them, with a glad "Welcome home!" Jo led her lover in, and shut the door.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

HARVEST TIME



For a year Jo and her Professor worked and waited, hoped and loved, met occasionally, and wrote such voluminous letters that the rise in the price of paper was accounted for, Laurie said. The second year began rather soberly, for their prospects did not brighten, and Aunt March died suddenly. But when their first sorrow was over — for they loved the old lady in spite of her sharp tongue — they found they had cause for rejoicing, for she had left Plumfield to Jo, which made all sorts of joyful things possible.

"It's a fine old place, and will bring a handsome sum, for of course you intend to sell it," said Laurie, as they were all talking the matter over some weeks later.

"No, I don't," was Jo's decided answer, as she petted the fat poodle, whom she had adopted, out of respect to his former mistress.

"You don't mean to live there?"

"Yes, I do."

"But, my dear girl, it's an immense house, and will take a power of money to keep it in order. The garden and orchard alone need two or three men, and farming isn't in Bhaer's line, I take it."

"He'll try his hand at it there, if I propose it."

"And you expect to live on the produce of the place? Well, that sounds paradisiacal, but you'll find it desperate hard work."

"The crop we are going to raise is a profitable one," and Jo laughed.

"Of what is this fine crop to consist, ma'am?"

"Boys. I want to open a school for little lads — a good, happy, homelike school, with me to take care of them and Fritz to teach them."

"That's a truly Joian plan for you! Isn't that just like her?" cried Laurie, appealing to the family, who looked as much surprised as he.

"I like it," said Mrs. March decidedly.

"So do I," added her husband, who welcomed the thought of a chance for trying the Socratic method of education on modern youth.

"It will be an immense care for Jo," said Meg, stroking the head of her one all-absorbing son.

"Jo can do it, and be happy in it. It's a splendid idea. Tell us all about it," cried Mr. Laurence, who had been longing to lend the lovers a hand, but knew that they would refuse his help.

"I knew you'd stand by me, sir. Amy does too — I see it in her eyes, though she prudently waits to turn it over in her mind before she speaks. Now, my dear people," continued Jo earnestly, "just understand that this isn't a new idea of mine, but a long cherished plan. Before my Fritz came, I used to think how, when I'd made my fortune, and no one needed me at home, I'd hire a big house, and pick up some poor, forlorn little lads who hadn't any mothers, and take care of them, and make life jolly for them before it was too late. I see so many going to ruin for want of help at the right minute, I love so to do anything for them, I seem to feel their wants, and sympathize with their troubles, and oh, I should so like to be a mother to them!"

Mrs. March held out her hand to Jo, who took it, smiling, with tears in her eyes, and went on in the old enthusiastic way, which they had not seen for a long while.

"I told my plan to Fritz once, and he said it was just what he would like, and agreed to try it when we got rich. Bless his dear heart, he's been doing it all his life — helping poor boys, I mean, not getting rich, that he'll never be. Money doesn't stay in his pocket long enough to lay up any. But now, thanks to my good old aunt, who loved me better than I ever deserved, I'm rich, at least I feel so, and we can live at Plumfield perfectly well, if we have a flourishing school. It's just the place for boys, the house is big, and the furniture strong and plain. There's plenty of room for dozens inside, and splendid grounds outside. They could help in the garden and orchard. Such work is healthy, isn't it, sir? Then

Fritz could train and teach in his own way, and Father will help him. I can feed and nurse and pet and scold them, and Mother will be my stand-by. I've always longed for lots of boys, and never had enough, now I can fill the house full and revel in the little dears to my heart's content. Think what luxury — Plumfield my own, and a wilderness of boys to enjoy it with me."

As Jo waved her hands and gave a sigh of rapture, the family went off into a gale of merriment, and Mr. Laurence laughed till they thought he'd have an apoplectic fit.

"I don't see anything funny," she said gravely, when she could be heard. "Nothing could be more natural and proper than for my Professor to open a school, and for me to prefer to reside in my own estate."

"She is putting on airs already," said Laurie, who regarded the idea in the light of a capital joke. "But may I inquire how you intend to support the establishment? If all the pupils are little ragamuffins, I'm afraid your crop won't be profitable in a worldly sense, Mrs. Bhaer."

"Now don't be a wet-blanket, Teddy. Of course I shall have rich pupils, also — perhaps begin with such altogether. Then, when I've got a start, I can take in a ragamuffin or two, just for a relish. Rich people's children often need care and comfort, as well as poor. I've seen unfortunate little creatures left to servants, or backward ones pushed forward, when it's real cruelty. Some are naughty through mismanagment or neglect, and some lose their mothers. Besides, the best have to get through the hobbledehoy age, and that's the very time they need most patience and kindness. People laugh at them, and hustle them about, try to keep them out of sight, and expect them to turn all at once from pretty children into fine young men. They don't complain much — plucky little souls — but they feel it. I've been through something of it, and I know all about it. I've a special interest in such young bears, and like to show them that I see the warm, honest, well-meaning boys' hearts, in spite of the clumsy arms and legs and the topsy-turvy heads. I've had experience, too, for haven't I brought up one boy to be a pride and honor to his family?"

"I'll testify that you tried to do it," said Laurie with a grateful look.

"And I've succeeded beyond my hopes, for here you are, a steady, sensible businessman, doing heaps of good with your money, and laying up the blessings of the poor, instead of dollars. But you are not merely a businessman, you love good and beautiful things, enjoy them yourself, and let others go halves, as you always did in the old times. I am proud of you, Teddy, for you get better every year, and everyone feels it, though you won't let them say so. Yes, and when I have my flock, I'll just point to you, and say 'There's your model, my lads'."

Poor Laurie didn't know where to look, for, man though he was, something of the old bashfulness came over him as this burst of praise made all faces turn approvingly upon him.

“I say, Jo, that’s rather too much,” he began, just in his old boyish way. “You have all done more for me than I can ever thank you for, except by doing my best not to disappoint you. You have rather cast me off lately, Jo, but I’ve had the best of help, nevertheless. So, if I’ve got on at all, you may thank these two for it,” and he laid one hand gently on his grandfather’s head, and the other on Amy’s golden one, for the three were never far apart.

“I do think that families are the most beautiful things in all the world!” burst out Jo, who was in an unusually up-lifted frame of mind just then. “When I have one of my own, I hope it will be as happy as the three I know and love the best. If John and my Fritz were only here, it would be quite a little heaven on earth,” she added more quietly. And that night when she went to her room after a blissful evening of family counsels, hopes, and plans, her heart was so full of happiness that she could only calm it by kneeling beside the empty bed always near her own, and thinking tender thoughts of Beth.

It was a very astonishing year altogether, for things seemed to happen in an unusually rapid and delightful manner. Almost before she knew where she was, Jo found herself married and settled at Plumfield. Then a family of six or seven boys sprung up like mushrooms, and flourished surprisingly, poor boys as well as rich, for Mr. Laurence was continually finding some touching case of destitution, and begging the Bhaers to take pity on the child, and he would gladly pay a trifle for its support. In this way, the sly old gentleman got round proud Jo, and furnished her with the style of boy in which she most delighted.

Of course it was uphill work at first, and Jo made queer mistakes, but the wise Professor steered her safely into calmer waters, and the most rampant ragamuffin was conquered in the end. How Jo did enjoy her ‘wilderness of boys’, and how poor, dear Aunt March would have lamented had she been there to see the sacred precincts of prim, well-ordered Plumfield overrun with Toms, Dicks, and Harrys! There was a sort of poetic justice about it, after all, for the old lady had been the terror of the boys for miles around, and now the exiles feasted freely on forbidden plums, kicked up the gravel with profane boots unreproved, and played cricket in the big field where the irritable ‘cow with a crumpled horn’ used to invite rash youths to come and be tossed. It became a sort of boys’ paradise, and Laurie suggested that it should be called the ‘Bhaer-garten’, as a compliment to its master and appropriate to its inhabitants.

It never was a fashionable school, and the Professor did not lay up a fortune, but it was just what Jo intended it to be — ’a happy, homelike place for boys, who needed teaching, care, and kindness’. Every room in the big house was soon full. Every little plot in the garden soon had its owner. A regular menagerie appeared in barn and shed, for pet animals were allowed. And three times a day, Jo smiled at her Fritz from the head of a long table lined on either side with rows of happy young faces, which all turned to her with affectionate eyes, confiding words, and grateful hearts, full of love for 'Mother Bhaer'. She had boys enough now, and did not tire of them, though they were not angels, by any means, and some of them caused both Professor and Professorin much trouble and anxiety. But her faith in the good spot which exists in the heart of the naughtiest, sauciest, most tantalizing little ragamuffin gave her patience, skill, and in time success, for no mortal boy could hold out long with Father Bhaer shining on him as benevolently as the sun, and Mother Bhaer forgiving him seventy times seven. Very precious to Jo was the friendship of the lads, their penitent sniffs and whispers after wrongdoing, their droll or touching little confidences, their pleasant enthusiasms, hopes, and plans, even their misfortunes, for they only endeared them to her all the more. There were slow boys and bashful boys, feeble boys and riotous boys, boys that lisped and boys that stuttered, one or two lame ones, and a merry little quadroon, who could not be taken in elsewhere, but who was welcome to the 'Bhaer-garten', though some people predicted that his admission would ruin the school.

Yes, Jo was a very happy woman there, in spite of hard work, much anxiety, and a perpetual racket. She enjoyed it heartily and found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world, for now she told no stories except to her flock of enthusiastic believers and admirers. As the years went on, two little lads of her own came to increase her happiness — Rob, named for Grandpa, and Teddy, a happy-go-lucky baby, who seemed to have inherited his papa's sunshiny temper as well as his mother's lively spirit. How they ever grew up alive in that whirlpool of boys was a mystery to their grandma and aunts, but they flourished like dandelions in spring, and their rough nurses loved and served them well.

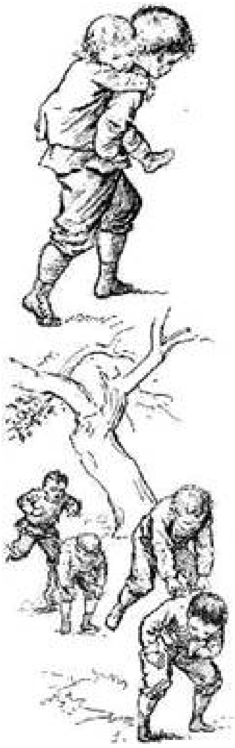
There were a great many holidays at Plumfield, and one of the most delightful was the yearly apple-picking. For then the Marches, Laurences, Brookes and Bhaers turned out in full force and made a day of it. Five years after Jo's wedding, one of these fruitful festivals occurred, a mellow October day, when the air was full of an exhilarating freshness which made the spirits rise and the blood dance healthily in the veins. The old orchard wore its holiday attire. Goldenrod and asters fringed the mossy walls. Grasshoppers skipped briskly in the sere grass, and crickets chirped like fairy pipers at a feast. Squirrels were busy with their small harvesting. Birds twittered their adieux from the alders in the lane, and every tree stood ready to send down its shower of red or yellow apples at the first shake. Everybody was there. Everybody laughed and sang, climbed up and tumbled down. Everybody declared that there never had been such a perfect day or such a jolly set to enjoy it, and everyone gave themselves up to the simple pleasures of the hour as freely as if there were no such things as care or sorrow in the world.

Mr. March strolled placidly about, quoting Tusser, Cowley, and Columella to Mr. Laurence, while enjoying...

The gentle apple's winey juice.

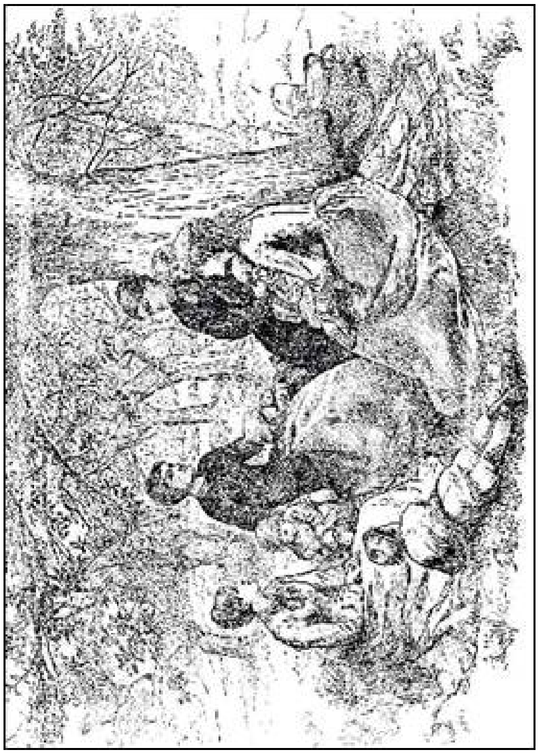
The Professor charged up and down the green aisles like a stout Teutonic knight, with a pole for a lance, leading on the boys, who made a hook and ladder company of themselves, and performed wonders in the way of ground and lofty tumbling. Laurie devoted himself to the little ones, rode his small daughter in a bushel-basket, took Daisy up among the bird's nests, and kept adventurous Rob from breaking his neck. Mrs. March and Meg sat among the apple piles like a pair of Pomonas, sorting the contributions that kept pouring in, while Amy with a beautiful motherly expression in her face sketched the various groups, and watched over one pale lad, who sat adoring her with his little crutch beside him.

Jo was in her element that day, and rushed about, with her gown pinned up, and her hat anywhere but on her head, and her baby tucked under her arm, ready for any lively adventure which might turn up. Little Teddy bore a charmed life, for nothing ever happened to him, and Jo never felt any anxiety when he was whisked up into a tree by one lad, galloped off on the back of another, or supplied with sour russets by his indulgent papa, who labored under the Germanic delusion that babies could digest anything, from pickled cabbage to buttons, nails, and their own small shoes. She knew that little Ted would turn up again in time, safe and rosy, dirty and serene, and she always received him back with a hearty welcome, for Jo loved her babies tenderly.



At four o’clock a lull took place, and baskets remained empty, while the apple pickers rested and compared rents and bruises. Then Jo and Meg, with a detachment of the bigger boys, set forth the supper on the grass, for an out-of-door tea was always the crowning joy of the day. The land literally flowed with milk and honey on such occasions, for the lads were not required to sit at table, but allowed to partake of refreshment as they liked — freedom being the sauce best beloved by the boyish soul. They availed themselves of the rare privilege to the fullest extent, for some tried the pleasing experiment of drinking milk while standing on their heads, others lent a charm to leapfrog by eating pie in the pauses of the game, cookies were sown broadcast over the field, and apple turnovers roosted in the trees like a new style of bird. The little girls had a private tea party, and Ted roved among the edibles at his own sweet will.

When no one could eat any more, the Professor proposed the first regular toast, which was always drunk at such times — ”Aunt March, God bless her!” A toast heartily given by the good man, who never forgot how much he owed her, and quietly drunk by the boys, who had been taught to keep her memory green.



“Now, Grandma’s sixtieth birthday! Long life to her, with three times three!”

That was given with a will, as you may well believe, and the cheering once begun, it was hard to stop it. Everybody’s health was proposed, from Mr. Laurence, who was considered their special patron, to the astonished guinea pig, who had strayed from its proper sphere in search of its young master. Demi, as the oldest grandchild, then presented the queen of the day with various gifts, so numerous that they were transported to the festive scene in a wheelbarrow. Funny presents, some of them, but what would have been defects to other eyes were ornaments to Grandma’s — for the children’s gifts were all their own. Every stitch Daisy’s patient little fingers had put into the handkerchiefs she hemmed was better than embroidery to Mrs. March. Demi’s miracle of mechanical skill, though the cover wouldn’t shut, Rob’s footstool had a wiggle in its uneven legs that she declared was soothing, and no page of the costly book Amy’s child gave her was so fair as that on which appeared in tipsy capitals, the words — ”To dear Grandma, from her little Beth.”

During the ceremony the boys had mysteriously disappeared, and when Mrs. March had tried to thank her children, and broken down, while Teddy wiped her eyes on his pinafore, the Professor suddenly began to sing. Then, from above him, voice after voice took up the words, and from tree to tree echoed the music of the unseen choir, as the boys sang with all their hearts the little song that Jo had written, Laurie set to music, and the Professor trained his lads to give with the best effect. This was something altogether new, and it proved a grand success, for Mrs. March couldn’t get over her surprise, and insisted on shaking hands with every one of the featherless birds, from tall Franz and Emil to the little quadroon, who had the sweetest voice of all.

After this, the boys dispersed for a final lark, leaving Mrs. March and her daughters under the festival tree.

“I don’t think I ever ought to call myself ‘unlucky Jo’ again, when my greatest wish has been so beautifully gratified,” said Mrs. Bhaer, taking Teddy’s little fist out of the milk pitcher, in which he was rapturously churning.

“And yet your life is very different from the one you pictured so long ago. Do you remember our castles in the air?” asked Amy, smiling as she watched Laurie and John playing cricket with the boys.

“Dear fellows! It does my heart good to see them forget business and frolic for a day,” answered Jo, who now spoke in a maternal way of all mankind. “Yes, I remember, but the life I wanted then seems selfish, lonely, and cold to me now. I haven’t given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I’m sure it will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these,” and Jo pointed from the lively lads in the distance to her father, leaning on the Professor’s arm, as they walked to and fro in the sunshine, deep in one of the conversations which both enjoyed so much, and then to her mother, sitting enthroned among her daughters, with their children in her lap and at her feet, as if all found help and happiness in the face which never could grow old to them.

“My castle was the most nearly realized of all. I asked for splendid things, to be sure, but in my heart I knew I should be satisfied, if I had a little home, and John, and some dear children like these. I’ve got them all, thank God, and am the happiest woman in the world,” and Meg laid her hand on her tall boy’s head, with a face full of tender and devout content.

“My castle is very different from what I planned, but I would not alter it, though, like Jo, I don’t relinquish all my artistic hopes, or confine myself to helping others fulfill their dreams of beauty. I’ve begun to model a figure of baby, and Laurie says it is the best thing I’ve ever done. I think so, myself, and mean to do it in marble, so that, whatever happens, I may at least keep the image of my little angel.”

As Amy spoke, a great tear dropped on the golden hair of the sleeping child in her arms, for her one well-beloved daughter was a frail little creature and the dread of losing her was the shadow over Amy’s sunshine. This cross was doing much for both father and mother, for one love and sorrow bound them closely together. Amy’s nature was growing sweeter, deeper, and more tender. Laurie was growing more serious, strong, and firm, and both were learning that beauty, youth, good fortune, even love itself, cannot keep care and pain, loss and sorrow, from the most blessed for ...

Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and sad and dreary.

“She is growing better, I am sure of it, my dear. Don’t despond, but hope and keep happy,” said Mrs. March, as tenderhearted Daisy stooped from her knee to lay her rosy cheek against her little cousin’s pale one.

“I never ought to, while I have you to cheer me up, Marmee, and Laurie to take more than half of every burden,” replied Amy warmly. “He never lets me see his anxiety, but is so sweet and patient with me, so devoted to Beth, and such a stay and comfort to me always that I can’t love him enough. So, in spite of my one cross, I can say with Meg, ‘Thank God, I’m a happy woman.’“

“There’s no need for me to say it, for everyone can see that I’m far happier than I deserve,” added Jo, glancing from her good husband to her chubby children, tumbling on the grass beside her. “Fritz is getting gray and stout. I’m growing as thin as a shadow, and am thirty. We never shall be rich, and Plumfield may burn up any night, for that incorrigible Tommy Bangs will smoke sweet-fern cigars under the bed-clothes, though he’s set himself afire three times already. But in spite of these unromantic facts, I have nothing to complain of, and never was so jolly in my life. Excuse the remark, but living among boys, I can’t help using their expressions now and then.”

“Yes, Jo, I think your harvest will be a good one,” began Mrs. March, frightening away a big black cricket that was staring Teddy out of countenance.

“Not half so good as yours, Mother. Here it is, and we never can thank you enough for the patient sowing and reaping you have done,” cried Jo, with the loving impetuosity which she never would outgrow.

“I hope there will be more wheat and fewer tares every year,” said Amy softly.

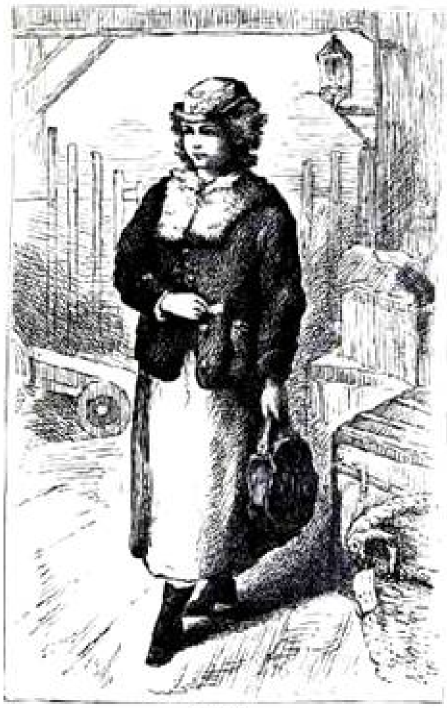
“A large sheaf, but I know there’s room in your heart for it, Marmee dear,” added Meg’s tender voice.

Touched to the heart, Mrs. March could only stretch out her arms, as if to gather children and grandchildren to herself, and say, with face and voice full of motherly love, gratitude, and humility...

“Oh, my girls, however long you may live, I never can wish you a greater happiness than this!”

AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL

Published in 1869, *An Old-Fashioned Girl* is Alcott's third novel. It was first serialised in the *Merry's Museum* magazine and consisted of only six chapters. For the finished product, however, Alcott continued the story from the chapter "Six Years Afterwards" and so it ended up with nineteen chapters in all. The book concerns Polly Milton, the old-fashioned girl of the title. Polly visits her wealthy friend Fanny Shaw in the city and is overwhelmed by the fashionable and urban life they live—but also left out because of her "countrified" manners and outdated clothes.



POLLY.

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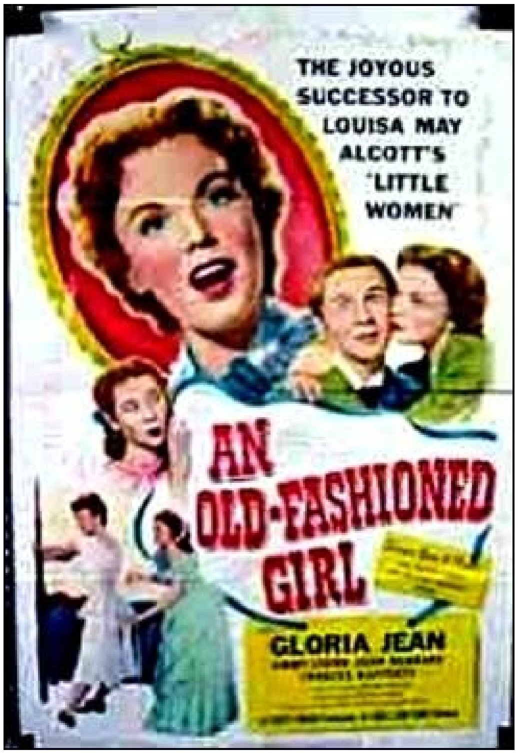

THE JOYOUS SUCCESSOR TO LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S "LITTLE WOMEN"
AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL
GLORIA JEAN

The 1949 musical adaptation

PREFACE

AS a preface is the only place where an author can with propriety explain a purpose or apologize for shortcomings, I venture to avail myself of the privilege to make a statement for the benefit of my readers.

As the first part of “An Old-Fashioned Girl” was written in 1869, the demand for a sequel, in beseeching little letters that made refusal impossible, rendered it necessary to carry my heroine boldly forward some six or seven years into the future. The domestic nature of the story makes this audacious proceeding possible; while the lively fancies of my young readers will supply all deficiencies, and overlook all discrepancies.

This explanation will, I trust, relieve those well-regulated minds, who cannot conceive of such literary lawlessness, from the bewilderment which they suffered when the same experiment was tried in a former book.

The “Old-Fashioned Girl” is not intended as a perfect model, but as a possible improvement upon [Page] the Girl of the Period, who seems sorrowfully ignorant or ashamed of the good old fashions which make woman truly beautiful and honored, and, through her, render home what it should be,-a happy place, where parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to love and know and help one another.

If the history of Polly’s girlish experiences suggests a hint or insinuates a lesson, I shall feel that, in spite of many obstacles, I have not entirely neglected my duty toward the little men and women, for whom it is an honor and a pleasure to write, since in them I have always found my kindest patrons, gentlest critics, warmest friends.

L. M. A.

CHAPTER I. POLLY ARRIVES

"IT 'S time to go to the station, Tom."

"Come on, then."

"Oh, I 'm not going; it 's too wet. Should n't have a crimp left if I went out such a day as this; and I want to look nice when Polly comes."

"You don't expect me to go and bring home a strange girl alone, do you?" And Tom looked as much alarmed as if his sister had proposed to him to escort the wild woman of Australia.

"Of course I do. It 's your place to go and get her; and if you was n't a bear, you 'd like it."

"Well, I call that mean! I supposed I 'd got to go; but you said you 'd go, too. Catch me bothering about your friends another time! No, sir!" And Tom rose from the sofa with an air of indignant resolution, the impressive effect of which was somewhat damaged by a tousled head, and the hunched appearance of his garments generally.

"Now, don't be cross; and I 'll get mamma to let you have that horrid Ned Miller, that you are so fond of, come and make you a visit after Polly 's gone," said Fanny, hoping to soothe his ruffled feelings.

"How long is she going to stay?" demanded Tom, making his toilet by a promiscuous shake.

"A month or two, maybe. She 's ever so nice; and I shall keep her as long as she 's happy."

"She won't stay long then, if I can help it," muttered Tom, who regarded girls as a very unnecessary portion of creation. Boys of fourteen are apt to think so, and perhaps it is a wise arrangement; for, being fond of turning somersaults, they have an opportunity of indulging in a good one, metaphorically speaking, when, three or four years later, they become the abject slaves of "those bothering girls."

"Look here! how am I going to know the creature? I never saw her, and she never saw me. You 'll have to come too, Fan," he added, pausing on his way to the door, arrested by the awful idea that he might have to address several strange girls before he got the right one.

"You 'll find her easy enough; she 'll probably be standing round looking for us. I dare say she 'll know you, though I 'm not there, because I 've described you to her."

"Guess she won't, then;" and Tom gave a hasty smooth to his curly pate and a glance at the mirror, feeling sure that his sister had n't done him justice. Sisters never do, as “we fellows” know too well.

“Do go along, or you ‘ll be too late; and then, what will Polly think of me?” cried Fanny, with the impatient poke which is peculiarly aggravating to masculine dignity.

“She ‘ll think you cared more about your frizzles than your friends, and she ‘ll be about right, too.”

Feeling that he said rather a neat and cutting thing, Tom sauntered leisurely away, perfectly conscious that it was late, but bent on not being hurried while in sight, though he ran himself off his legs to make up for it afterward.

“If I was the President, I ‘d make a law to shut up all boys till they were grown; for they certainly are the most provoking toads in the world,” said Fanny, as she watched the slouchy figure of her brother strolling down the street. She might have changed her mind, however, if she had followed him, for as soon as he turned the corner, his whole aspect altered; his hands came out of his pockets, he stopped whistling, buttoned his jacket, gave his cap a pull, and went off at a great pace.

The train was just in when he reached the station, panting like a race-horse, and as red as a lobster with the wind and the run.

“Suppose she ‘ll wear a top-knot and a thingumbob, like every one else; and however shall I know her? Too bad of Fan to make me come alone!” thought Tom, as he stood watching the crowd stream through the depot, and feeling rather daunted at the array of young ladies who passed. As none of them seemed looking for any one, he did not accost them, but eyed each new batch with the air of a martyr. “That ‘s her,” he said to himself, as he presently caught sight of a girl in gorgeous array, standing with her hands folded, and a very small hat perched on the top of a very large “chig-non,” as Tom pronounced it. “I suppose I ‘ve got to speak to her, so here goes;” and, nerving himself to the task, Tom slowly approached the damsel, who looked as if the wind had blown her clothes into rags, such a flapping of sashes, scallops, ruffles, curls, and feathers was there.

“I say, if you please, is your name Polly Milton?” meekly asked Tom, pausing before the breezy stranger.

“No, it is n’t,” answered the young lady, with a cool stare that utterly quenched him.

“Where in thunder is she?” growled Tom, walking off in high dudgeon. The quick tap of feet behind him made him turn in time to see a fresh-faced little girl running down the long station, and looking as if she rather liked it. As she smiled, and waved her bag at him, he stopped and waited for her, saying to himself, “Hullo! I wonder if that ‘s Polly?”

Up came the little girl, with her hand out, and a half-shy, half-merry look in her blue eyes, as she said, inquiringly, “This is Tom, is n’t it?”

“Yes. How did you know?” and Tom got over the ordeal of hand-shaking without thinking of it, he was so surprised.

“Oh, Fan told me you ‘d got curly hair, and a funny nose, and kept whistling, and wore a gray cap pulled over your eyes; so I knew you directly.” And Polly nodded at him in the most friendly manner, having politely refrained from calling the hair “red,” the nose “a pug,” and the cap “old,” all of which facts Fanny had carefully impressed upon her memory.

“Where are your trunks?” asked Tom, as he was reminded of his duty by her handing him the bag, which he had not offered to take.

“Father told me not to wait for any one, else I ‘d lose my chance of a hack; so I gave my check to a man, and there he is with my trunk;” and Polly walked off after her one modest piece of baggage, followed by Tom, who felt a trifle depressed by his own remissness in polite attentions. “She is n’t a bit of a young lady, thank goodness! Fan did n’t tell me she was pretty. Don’t look like city girls, nor act like ‘em, neither,” he thought, trudging in the rear, and eyeing with favor the brown curls bobbing along in front.

As the carriage drove off, Polly gave a little bounce on the springy seat, and laughed like a delighted child. “I do like to ride in these nice hacks, and see all the fine things, and have a good time, don’t you?” she said, composing herself the next minute, as if it suddenly occurred to her that she was going a-visiting.

“Not much,” said Tom, not minding what he said, for the fact that he was shut up with the strange girl suddenly oppressed his soul.

“How ‘s Fan? Why did n’t she come, too?” asked Polly, trying to look demure, while her eyes danced in spite of her.

“Afraid of spoiling her crinkles;” and Tom smiled, for this base betrayal of confidence made him feel his own man again.

“You and I don’t mind dampness. I ‘m much obliged to you for coming to take care of me.”

It was kind of Polly to say that, and Tom felt it; for his red crop was a tender point, and to be associated with Polly’s pretty brown curls seemed to lessen its coppery glow. Then he had n’t done anything for her but carry the bag a few steps; yet, she thanked him. He felt grateful, and in a burst of confidence, offered a handful of peanuts, for his pockets were always supplied with this agreeable delicacy, and he might be traced anywhere by the trail of shells he left behind him.

As soon as he had done it, he remembered that Fanny considered them vulgar, and felt that he had disgraced his family. So he stuck his head out of the window, and kept it there so long, that Polly asked if anything was the matter. “Pooh! who cares for a countrified little thing like her,” said Tom manfully to himself; and then the spirit of mischief entered in and took possession of him.

“He ‘s pretty drunk; but I guess he can hold his horses,” replied this evil-minded boy, with an air of calm resignation.

“Is the man tipsy? Oh, dear! let ‘s get out! Are the horses bad? It ‘s very steep here; do you think it ‘s safe?” cried poor Polly, making a cocked hat of her little beaver, by thrusting it out of the half-open window on her side.

“There ‘s plenty of folks to pick us up if anything happens; but perhaps it would be safer if I got out and sat with the man;” and Tom quite beamed with the brilliancy of this sudden mode of relief.

“Oh, do, if you ain’t afraid! Mother would be so anxious if anything should happen to me, so far away!” cried Polly, much distressed.

“Don’t you be worried. I ‘ll manage the old chap, and the horses too;” and opening the door, Tom vanished aloft, leaving poor victimized Polly to quake inside, while he placidly revelled in freedom and peanuts outside, with the staid old driver.

Fanny came flying down to meet her “darling Polly,” as Tom presented her, with the graceful remark, “I ‘ve got her!” and the air of a dauntless hunter, producing the trophies of his skill. Polly was instantly whisked up stairs; and having danced a double-shuffle on the door-mat, Tom retired to the dining-room, to restore exhausted nature with half a dozen cookies.

“Ain’t you tired to death? Don’t you want to lie down?” said Fanny, sitting on the side of the bed in Polly’s room, and chattering hard, while she examined everything her friend had on.

“Not a bit. I had a nice time coming, and no trouble, except the tipsy coachman; but Tom got out and kept him in order, so I was n’t much frightened,” answered innocent Polly, taking off her rough-and-ready coat, and the plain hat without a bit of a feather.

“Fiddlestick! he was n’t tipsy; and Tom only did it to get out of the way. He can’t bear girls,” said Fanny, with a superior air.

“Can’t he? Why, I thought he was very pleasant and kind!” and Polly opened her eyes with a surprised expression.

“He ‘s an awful boy, my dear; and if you have anything to do with him, he ‘ll torment you to death. Boys are all horrid; but he ‘s the horridest one I ever saw.”

Fanny went to a fashionable school, where the young ladies were so busy with their French, German, and Italian, that there was no time for good English. Feeling her confidence much shaken in the youth, Polly privately resolved to let him alone, and changed the conversation, by saying, as she looked admiringly about the large, handsome room, “How splendid it is! I never slept in a bed with curtains before, or had such a fine toilet-table as this.”

“I ‘m glad you like it; but don’t, for mercy sake, say such things before the other girls!” replied Fanny, wishing Polly would wear ear-rings, as every one else did.

“Why not?” asked the country mouse of the city mouse, wondering what harm there was in liking other people’s pretty things, and saying so. “Oh, they laugh at everything the least bit odd, and that is n’t pleasant.” Fanny did n’t say “countrified,” but she meant it, and Polly felt uncomfortable. So she shook out her little black silk apron with a thoughtful face, and resolved not to allude to her own home, if she could help it.

“I ‘m so poorly, mamma says I need n’t go to school regularly, while you are here, only two or three times a week, just to keep up my music and French. You can go too, if you like; papa said so. Do, it ‘s such fun!” cried Fanny, quite surprising her friend by this unexpected fondness for school.

“I should be afraid, if all the girls dress as finely as you do, and know as much,” said Polly, beginning to feel shy at the thought.

“La, child! you need n’t mind that. I ‘ll take care of you, and fix you up, so you won’t look odd.”

“Am I odd?” asked Polly, struck by the word and hoping it did n’t mean anything very bad.

“You are a dear, and ever so much prettier than you were last summer, only you ‘ve been brought up differently from us; so your ways ain’t like ours, you see,” began Fanny, finding it rather hard to explain.

“How different?” asked Polly again, for she liked to understand things.

“Well, you dress like a little girl, for one thing.”

“I am a little girl; so why should n’t I?” and Polly looked at her simple blue merino frock, stout boots, and short hair, with a puzzled air.

“You are fourteen; and we consider ourselves young ladies at that age,” continued Fanny, surveying, with complacency, the pile of hair on the top of her head, with a fringe of fuzz round her forehead, and a wavy lock streaming down her back; likewise, her scarlet-and-black suit, with its big sash, little pannier, bright buttons, points, rosettes, and, heaven knows what. There was a locket on her neck, ear-rings tinkling in her ears, watch and chain at her belt, and several rings on a pair of hands that would have been improved by soap and water.

Polly’s eye went from one little figure to the other, and she thought that Fanny looked the oddest of the two; for Polly lived in a quiet country town, and knew very little of city fashions. She was rather impressed by the elegance about her, never having seen Fanny’s home before, as they got acquainted while Fanny paid a visit to a friend who lived near Polly. But she did n't let the contrast between herself and Fan trouble her; for in a minute she laughed and said, contentedly, "My mother likes me to dress simply, and I don't mind. I should n't know what to do rigged up as you are. Don't you ever forget to lift your sash and fix those puffy things when you sit down?"

Before Fanny could answer, a scream from below made both listen. "It 's only Maud; she fusses all day long," began Fanny; and the words were hardly out of her mouth, when the door was thrown open, and a little girl, of six or seven, came roaring in. She stopped at sight of Polly, stared a minute, then took up her roar just where she left it, and cast herself into Fanny's lap, exclaiming wrathfully, "Tom 's laughing at me! Make him stop!"

"What did you do to set him going? Don't scream so, you 'll frighten Polly!" and Fan gave the cherub a shake, which produced an explanation.

"I only said we had cold cweam at the party, last night, and he laughed!"

"Ice-cream, child!" and Fanny followed Tom's reprehensible example.

"I don't care! it was cold; and I warmed mine at the wegister, and then it was nice; only, Willy Bliss spilt it on my new Gabwielle!" and Maud wailed again over her accumulated woes.

"Do go to Katy! You 're as cross as a little bear to-day!" said Fanny, pushing her away.

"Katy don't amoose me; and I must be amoosed, 'cause I 'm fwactious; mamma said I was!" sobbed Maud, evidently laboring under the delusion that fractiousness was some interesting malady.

"Come down and have dinner; that will amuse you;" and Fanny got up, pluming herself as a bird does before its flight.

Polly hoped the "dreadful boy" would not be present; but he was, and stared at her all dinner-time, in a most trying manner. Mr. Shaw, a busy-looking gentleman, said, "How do you do, my dear? Hope you 'll enjoy yourself;" and then appeared to forget her entirely. Mrs. Shaw, a pale, nervous woman, greeted her little guest kindly, and took care that she wanted for nothing. Madam Shaw, a quiet old lady, with an imposing cap, exclaimed on seeing Polly, "Bless my heart! the image of her mother a sweet woman how is she, dear?" and kept peering at the new-comer over her glasses, till, between Madam and Tom, poor Polly lost her appetite.

Fanny chatted like a magpie, and Maud fidgeted, till Tom proposed to put her under the big dish-cover, which produced such an explosion, that the young lady was borne screaming away, by the much-enduring Katy. It was altogether an uncomfortable dinner, and Polly was very glad when it was over. They all went about their own affairs; and after doing the honors of the house, Fan was called to the dressmaker, leaving Polly to amuse herself in the great drawing-room.

Polly was glad to be alone for a few minutes; and, having examined all the pretty things about her, began to walk up and down over the soft, flowery carpet, humming to herself, as the daylight faded, and only the ruddy glow of the fire filled the room. Presently Madam came slowly in, and sat down in her arm-chair, saying, “That ‘s a fine old tune; sing it to me, my dear. I have n’t heard it this many a day.” Polly did n’t like to sing before strangers, for she had had no teaching but such as her busy mother could give her; but she had been taught the utmost respect for old people, and having no reason for refusing, she directly went to the piano, and did as she was bid.

“That ‘s the sort of music it ‘s a pleasure to hear. Sing some more, dear,” said Madam, in her gentle way, when she had done.

Pleased with this praise, Polly sang away in a fresh little voice, that went straight to the listener’s heart and nestled there. The sweet old tunes that one is never tired of were all Polly’s store; and her favorites were Scotch airs, such as, “Yellow-Haired Laddie,” “Jock o’ Hazeldean,” “Down among the Heather,” and “Birks of Aberfeldie.” The more she sung, the better she did it; and when she wound up with “A Health to King Charlie,” the room quite rung with the stirring music made by the big piano and the little maid.

“By George, that ‘s a jolly tune! Sing it again, please,” cried Tom’s voice; and there was Tom’s red head bobbing up over the high back of the chair where he had hidden himself.

It gave Polly quite a turn, for she thought no one was hearing her but the old lady dozing by the fire. “I can’t sing any more; I ‘m tired,” she said, and walked away to Madam in the other room. The red head vanished like a meteor, for Polly’s tone had been decidedly cool.

The old lady put out her hand, and drawing Polly to her knee, looked into her face with such kind eyes, that Polly forgot the impressive cap, and smiled at her confidingly; for she saw that her simple music had pleased her listener, and she felt glad to know it.

“You must n’t mind my staring, dear,” said Madam, softly pinching her rosy cheek. “I have n’t seen a little girl for so long, it does my old eyes good to look at you.”

Polly thought that a very odd speech, and could n’t help saying, “Are n’t Fan and Maud little girls, too?”

“Oh, dear, no! not what I call little girls. Fan has been a young lady this two years, and Maud is a spoiled baby. Your mother ‘s a very sensible woman, my child.”

“What a very queer old lady!” thought Polly; but she said “Yes ‘m” respectfully, and looked at the fire.

“You don’t understand what I mean, do you?” asked Madam, still holding her by the chin.

“No ‘m; not quite.”

“Well, dear, I ‘ll tell you. In my day, children of fourteen and fifteen did n’t dress in the height of the fashion; go to parties, as nearly like those of grown people as it ‘s possible to make them; lead idle, giddy, unhealthy lives, and get blas, at twenty. We were little folks till eighteen or so; worked and studied, dressed and played, like children; honored our parents; and our days were much longer in the land than now, it seems to, me.”

The old lady appeared to forget Polly at the end of her speech; for she sat patting the plump little hand that lay in her own, and looking up at a faded picture of an old gentleman with a ruffled shirt and a queue.

“Was he your father, Madam?

“Yes, dear; my honored father. I did up his frills to the day of his death; and the first money I ever earned was five dollars which he offered as a prize to whichever of his six girls would lay the handsomest darn in his silk stockings.”

“How proud you must have been!” cried Polly, leaning on the old lady’s knee with an interested face.

“Yes, and we all learned to make bread, and cook, and wore little chintz gowns, and were as gay and hearty as kittens. All lived to be grandmothers and fathers; and I ‘m the last, seventy, next birthday, my dear, and not worn out yet; though daughter Shaw is an invalid at forty.”

“That ‘s the way I was brought up, and that ‘s why Fan calls me old-fashioned, I suppose. Tell more about your papa, please; I like it,” said Polly.

“Say ‘father.’ We never called him papa; and if one of my brothers had addressed him as ‘governor,’ as boys do now, I really think he ‘d have him cut off with a shilling.”

Madam raised her voice in saying this, and nodded significantly; but a mild snore from the other room seemed to assure her that it was a waste of shot to fire in that direction.

Before she could continue, in came Fanny with the joyful news that Clara Bird had invited them both to go to the theatre with her that very evening, and would call for them at seven o’clock. Polly was so excited by this sudden plunge into the dissipations of city life, that she flew about like a distracted butterfly, and hardly knew what happened, till she found herself seated before the great green curtain in the brilliant theatre. Old Mr. Bird sat on one side, Fanny on the other, and both let her alone, for which she was very grateful, as her whole attention was so absorbed in the scene around her, that she could n’t talk.

Polly had never been much to the theatre; and the few plays she had seen were the good old fairy tales, dramatized to suit young beholders, lively, bright, and full of the harmless nonsense which brings the laugh without the blush. That night she saw one of the new spectacles which have lately become the rage, and run for hundreds of nights, dazzling, exciting, and demoralizing the spectator by every allurement French ingenuity can invent, and American prodigality execute. Never mind what its name was, it was very gorgeous, very vulgar, and very fashionable; so, of course, it was much admired, and every one went to see it. At first, Polly thought she had got into fairy-land, and saw only the sparkling creatures who danced and sung in a world of light and beauty; but, presently, she began to listen to the songs and conversation, and then the illusion vanished; for the lovely phantoms sang negro melodies, talked slang, and were a disgrace to the good old-fashioned elves whom she knew and loved so well.

Our little girl was too innocent to understand half the jokes, and often wondered what people were laughing at; but, as the first enchantment subsided, Polly began to feel uncomfortable, to be sure her mother would n't like to have her there, and to wish she had n't come. Somehow, things seemed to get worse and worse, as the play went on; for our small spectator was being rapidly enlightened by the gossip going on all about her, as well as by her own quick eyes and girlish instincts. When four-and-twenty girls, dressed as jockeys, came prancing on to the stage, cracking their whips, stamping the heels of their topboots, and winking at the audience, Polly did not think it at all funny, but looked disgusted, and was glad when they were gone; but when another set appeared in a costume consisting of gauze wings, and a bit of gold fringe round the waist, poor unfashionable Polly did n't know what to do; for she felt both frightened and indignant, and sat with her eyes on her play-bill, and her cheeks getting hotter and hotter every minute.

“What are you blushing so for?” asked Fanny, as the painted sylphs vanished.

“I ‘m so ashamed of those girls,” whispered Polly, taking a long breath of relief.

“You little goose, it ‘s just the way it was done in Paris, and the dancing is splendid. It seems queer at first; but you ‘ll get used to it, as I did.”

“I ‘ll never come again,” said Polly, decidedly; for her innocent nature rebelled against the spectacle, which, as yet, gave her more pain than pleasure. She did not know how easy it was to “get used to it,” as Fanny did; and it was well for her that the temptation was not often offered. She could not explain the feeling; but she was glad when the play was done, and they were safe at home, where kind grandma was waiting to see them comfortably into bed.

“Did you have a good time, dear?” she asked, looking at Polly’s feverish cheeks and excited eyes.

“I don’t wish to be rude, but I did n’t,” answered Polly. “Some of it was splendid; but a good deal of it made me want to go under the seat. People seemed to like it, but I don’t think it was proper.”

As Polly freed her mind, and emphasized her opinion with a decided rap of the boot she had just taken off, Fanny laughed, and said, while she pirouetted about the room, like Mademoiselle Therese, “Polly was shocked, grandma. Her eyes were as big as saucers, her face as red as my sash, and once I thought she was going to cry. Some of it was rather queer; but, of course, it was proper, or all our set would n’t go. I heard Mrs. Smythe Perkins say, ‘It was charming; so like dear Paris;’ and she has lived abroad; so, of course, she knows what is what.”

“I don’t care if she has. I know it was n’t proper for little girls to see, or I should n’t have been so ashamed!” cried sturdy Polly, perplexed, but not convinced, even by Mrs. Smythe Perkins.

“I think you are right, my dear; but you have lived in the country, and have n’t yet learned that modesty has gone out of fashion.” And with a good-night kiss, grandma left Polly to dream dreadfully of dancing in jockey costume, on a great stage; while Tom played a big drum in the orchestra; and the audience all wore the faces of her father and mother, looking sorrowfully at her, with eyes like saucers, and faces as red as Fanny’s sash.

CHAPTER II. NEW FASHIONS

"I 'M going to school this morning; so come up and get ready," said Fanny, a day or two after, as she left the late breakfast-table.

"You look very nice; what have you got to do?" asked Polly, following her into the hall.

"Prink half an hour, and put on her wad," answered the irreverent Tom, whose preparations for school consisted in flinging his cap on to his head, and strapping up several big books, that looked as if they were sometimes used as weapons of defence.

"What is a wad?" asked Polly, while Fanny marched up without deigning any reply.

"Somebody's hair on the top of her head in the place where it ought not to be;" and Tom went whistling away with an air of sublime indifference as to the state of his own "curly pow."

"Why must you be so fine to go to school?" asked Polly, watching Fan arrange the little frizzles on her forehead, and settle the various streamers and festoons belonging to her dress.

"All the girls do; and it 's proper, for you never know who you may meet. I 'm going to walk, after my lessons, so I wish you 'd wear your best hat and sack," answered Fanny, trying to stick her own hat on at an angle which defied all the laws of gravitation.

"I will, if you don't think this is nice enough. I like the other best, because it has a feather; but this is warmer, so I wear it every day." And Polly ran into her own room, to prink also, fearing that her friend might be ashamed of her plain costume. "Won't your hands be cold in kid gloves?" she said, as they went down the snowy street, with a north wind blowing in their faces.

"Yes, horrid cold; but my muff is so big, I won't carry it. Mamma won't have it cut up, and my ermine one must be kept for best;" and Fanny smoothed her Bismark kids with an injured air.

"I suppose my gray squirrel is ever so much too big; but it 's nice and cosy, and you may warm your hands in it if you want to," said Polly, surveying her new woollen gloves with a dissatisfied look, though she had thought them quite elegant before.

"Perhaps I will, by and by. Now, Polly, don't you be shy. I 'll only introduce two or three of the girls; and you need n't mind old Monsieur a bit, or read if you don't want to. We shall be in the anteroom; so you 'll only see about a dozen, and they will be so busy, they won’t mind you much.”

“I guess I won’t read, but sit and look on. I like to watch people, everything is so new and queer here.”

But Polly did feel and look very shy, when she was ushered into a room full of young ladies, as they seemed to her, all very much dressed, all talking together, and all turning to examine the new-comer with a cool stare which seemed to be as much the fashion as eye-glasses. They nodded affably when Fanny introduced her, said something civil, and made room for her at the table round which they sat waiting for Monsieur. Several of the more frolicsome were imitating the Grecian Bend, some were putting their heads together over little notes, nearly all were eating confectionery, and the entire twelve chattered like magpies. Being politely supplied with caramels, Polly sat looking and listening, feeling very young and countrified among these elegant young ladies.

“Girls, do you know that Carrie has gone abroad? There has been so much talk, her father could n’t bear it, and took the whole family off. Is n’t that gay?” said one lively damsel, who had just come in.

“I should think they ‘d better go. My mamma says, if I ‘d been going to that school, she ‘d have taken me straight away,” answered another girl, with an important air.

“Carrie ran away with an Italian music-teacher, and it got into the papers, and made a great stir,” explained the first speaker to Polly, who looked mystified.

“How dreadful!” cried Polly.

“I think it was fun. She was only sixteen, and he was perfectly splendid; and she has plenty of money, and every one talked about it; and when she went anywhere, people looked, you know, and she liked it; but her papa is an old poke, so he ‘s sent them all away. It ‘s too bad, for she was the jolliest thing I ever knew.”

Polly had nothing to say to lively Miss Belle; but Fanny observed, “I like to read about such things; but it ‘s so inconvenient to have it happen right here, because it makes it harder for us. I wish you could have heard my papa go on. He threatened to send a maid to school with me every day, as they do in New York, to be sure I come all right. Did you ever?” “That ‘s because it came out that Carrie used to forge excuses in her mamma’s name, and go promenading with her Oreste, when they thought her safe at school. Oh, was n’t she a sly minx?” cried Belle, as if she rather admired the trick.

“I think a little fun is all right; and there ‘s no need of making a talk, if, now and then, some one does run off like Carrie. Boys do as they like; and I don’t see why girls need to be kept so dreadfully close. I ‘d like to see anybody watching and guarding me!” added another dashing young lady.

“It would take a policeman to do that, Trix, or a little man in a tall hat,” said Fanny, slyly, which caused a general laugh, and made Beatrice toss her head coquettishly.

“Oh, have you read ‘The Phantom Bride’? It ‘s perfectly thrilling! There ‘s a regular rush for it at the library; but some prefer ‘Breaking a Butterfly.’ Which do you like best?” asked a pale girl of Polly, in one of the momentary lulls which occurred.

“I have n’t read either.”

“You must, then. I adore Guy Livingston’s books, and Yates’s. ‘Ouida’s’ are my delight, only they are so long, I get worn out before I ‘m through.”

“I have n’t read anything but one of the Muhlbach novels since I came. I like those, because there is history in them,” said Polly, glad to have a word to say for herself.

“Those are well enough for improving reading; but I like real exciting novels; don’t you?”

Polly was spared the mortification of owning that she had never read any, by the appearance of Monsieur, a gray-headed old Frenchman, who went through his task with the resigned air of one who was used to being the victim of giggling school-girls. The young ladies gabbled over the lesson, wrote an exercise, and read a little French history. But it did not seem to make much impression upon them, though Monsieur was very ready to explain; and Polly quite blushed for her friend, when, on being asked what famous Frenchman fought in our Revolution, she answered Lamartine, instead of Lafayette.

The hour was soon over; and when Fan had taken a music lesson in another room, while Polly looked on, it was time for recess. The younger girls walked up and down the court, arm in arm, eating bread an butter; others stayed in the school-room to read and gossip; but Belle, Trix, and Fanny went to lunch at a fashionable ice-cream saloon near by, and Polly meekly followed, not daring to hint at the ginger-bread grandma had put in her pocket for luncheon. So the honest, brown cookies crumbled away in obscurity, while Polly tried to satisfy her hearty appetite on one ice and three macaroons.

The girls seemed in great spirits, particularly after they were joined by a short gentleman with such a young face that Polly would have called him a boy, if he had not worn a tall beaver. Escorted by this impressive youth, Fanny left her unfortunate friends to return to school, and went to walk, as she called a slow promenade down the most crowded streets. Polly discreetly fell behind, and amused herself looking into shop-windows, till Fanny, mindful of her manners, even at such an interesting time, took her into a picture gallery, and bade her enjoy the works of art while they rested. Obedient Polly went through the room several times, apparently examining the pictures with the interest of a connoisseur, and trying not to hear the mild prattle of the pair on the round seat. But she could n’t help wondering what Fan found so absorbing in an account of a recent German, and why she need promise so solemnly not to forget the concert that afternoon.

When Fanny rose at last, Polly’s tired face reproached her; and taking a hasty leave of the small gentleman, she turned homeward, saying, confidentially, as she put one hand in Polly’s muff, “Now, my dear, you must n’t say a word about Frank Moore, or papa will take my head off. I don’t care a bit for him, and he likes Trix; only they have quarrelled, and he wants to make her mad by flirting a little with me. I scolded him well, and he promised to make up with her. We all go to the afternoon concerts, and have a gay time, and Belle and Trix are to be there to-day; so just keep quiet, and everything will be all right.”

“I ‘m afraid it won’t,” began Polly, who, not being used to secrets, found it very hard to keep even a small one.

“Don’t worry, child. It ‘s none of our business; so we can go and enjoy the music, and if other people flirt, it won’t be our fault,” said Fanny, impatiently.

“Of course not; but, then, if your father don’t like you to do so, ought you to go?”

“I tell mamma, and she don’t care. Papa is fussy, and grandma makes a stir about every blessed thing I do. You will hold your tongue, won’t you?”

“Yes; I truly will; I never tell tales.” And Polly kept her word, feeling sure Fan did n’t mean to deceive her father, since she told her mother everything.

“Who are you going with?” asked Mrs. Shaw, when Fanny mentioned that it was concert-day, just before three o’clock.

“Only Polly; she likes music, and it was so stormy I could n’t go last week, you know,” answered Fan; adding, as they left the house again, “If any one meets us on the way, I can’t help it, can I?”

“You can tell them not to, can’t you?”

“That ‘s rude. Dear me! here ‘s Belle’s brother Gus he always goes. Is my hair all right, and my hat?”

Before Polly could answer, Mr. Gus joined them as a matter of course, and Polly soon found herself trotting on behind, feeling that things were not “all right,” though she did n’t know how to mend them. Being fond of music, she ignorantly supposed that every one else went for that alone, and was much disturbed by the whispering that went on among the young people round her. Belle and Trix were there in full dress; and, in the pauses between different pieces, Messrs. Frank and Gus, with several other “splendid fellows,” regaled the young ladies with college gossip, and bits of news full of interest, to judge from the close attention paid to their eloquent remarks. Polly regarded these noble beings with awe, and they recognized her existence with the condescension of their sex; but they evidently considered her only “a quiet little thing,” and finding her not up to society talk, blandly ignored the pretty child, and devoted themselves to the young ladies. Fortunately for Polly, she forgot all about them in her enjoyment of the fine music, which she felt rather than understood, and sat listening with such a happy face, that several true music-lovers watched her smilingly, for her heart gave a blithe welcome to the melody which put the little instrument in tune. It was dusk when they went out, and Polly was much relieved to find the carriage waiting for them, because playing third fiddle was not to her taste, and she had had enough of it for one day.

“I ‘m glad those men are gone; they did worry me so talking, when I wanted to hear,” said Polly, as they rolled away.

“Which did you like best?” asked Fanny, with a languid air of superiority.

“The plain one, who did n’t say much; he picked up my muff when it tumbled down, and took care of me in the crowd; the others did n’t mind anything about me.”

“They thought you were a little girl, I suppose.”

“My mother says a real gentleman is as polite to a little girl as to a woman; so I like Mr. Sydney best, because he was kind to me.”

“What a sharp child you are, Polly. I should n’t have thought you ‘d mind things like that,” said Fanny, beginning to understand that there may be a good deal of womanliness even in a little girl.

“I ‘m used to good manners, though I do live in the country,” replied Polly, rather warmly, for she did n’t like to be patronized even by her friends.

“Grandma says your mother is a perfect lady, and you are just like her; so don’t get in a passion with those poor fellows, and I ‘ll see that they behave better next time. Tom has no manners at all, and you don’t complain of him,” added Fan, with a laugh.

“I don’t care if he has n’t; he ‘s a boy, and acts like one, and I can get on with him a great deal better than I can with those men.”

Fanny was just going to take Polly to task for saying “those men” in such a disrespectful tone, when both were startled by a smothered “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” from under the opposite seat.

“It ‘s Tom!” cried Fanny; and with the words out tumbled that incorrigible boy, red in the face, and breathless with suppressed laughter. Seating himself, he surveyed the girls as if well satisfied with the success of his prank, and waiting to be congratulated upon it. “Did you hear what we were saying?” demanded Fanny, uneasily.

"Oh, did n't I, every word?" And Tom exulted over them visibly.

"Did you ever see such a provoking toad, Polly? Now, I suppose you 'll go and tell papa a great story."

"P'r'aps I shall, and p'r'aps I shan't. How Polly did hop when I crowed! I heard her squeal, and saw her cuddle up her feet."

"And you heard us praise your manners, did n't you?" asked Polly, slyly.

"Yes, and you liked 'em; so I won't tell on you," said Tom, with a re-assuring nod.

"There 's nothing to tell."

"Ain't there, though? What do you suppose the governor will say to you girls going on so with those dandies? I saw you."

"What has the Governor of Massachusetts to do with us?" asked Polly, trying to look as if she meant what she said.

"Pooh! you know who I mean; so you need n't try to catch me up, as grandma does."

"Tom, I 'll make a bargain with you," cried Fanny, eagerly. "It was n't my fault that Gus and Frank were there, and I could n't help their speaking to me. I do as well as I can, and papa need n't be angry; for I behave ever so much better than some of the girls. Don't I, Polly?"

"Bargain?" observed Tom, with an eye to business.

"If you won't go and make a fuss, telling what you 'd no right to hear it was so mean to hide and listen; I should think you 'd be ashamed of it! I 'll help you tease for your velocipede, and won't say a word against it, when mamma and granny beg papa not to let you have it."

"Will you?" and Tom paused to consider the offer in all its bearings.

"Yes, and Polly will help; won't you?"

"I 'd rather not have anything to do with it; but I 'll be quiet, and not do any harm."

"Why won't you?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Because it seems like deceiving."

"Well, papa need n't be so fussy," said Fan, petulantly.

"After hearing about that Carrie, and the rest, I don't wonder he is fussy. Why don't you tell right out, and not do it any more, if he don't want you to?" said Polly, persuasively.

"Do you go and tell your father and mother everything right out?"

"Yes, I do; and it saves ever so much trouble."

"Ain't you afraid of them?"

"Of course I 'm not. It 's hard to tell sometimes; but it 's so comfortable when it 's over."

"Let 's!" was Tom's brief advice.

"Mercy me! what a fuss about nothing!" said Fanny, ready to cry with vexation.

"T is n't nothing. You know you are forbidden to go gallivanting round with those chaps, and that 's the reason you 're in a pucker now. I won't make any bargain, and I will tell," returned Tom, seized with a sudden fit of moral firmness.

"Will you if I promise never, never to do so any more?" asked Fanny, meekly; for when Thomas took matters into his own hands, his sister usually submitted in spite of herself.

"I 'll think about it; and if you behave, maybe I won't do it at all. I can watch you better than papa can; so, if you try it again, it 's all up with you, miss," said Tom, finding it impossible to resist the pleasure of tyrannizing a little when he got the chance.

"She won't; don't plague her any more, and she will be good to you when you get into scrapes," answered Polly, with her arm round Fan.

"I never do; and if I did, I should n't ask a girl to help me out."

"Why not? I 'd ask you in a minute, if I was in trouble," said Polly, in her confiding way.

"Would you? Well, I 'd put you through, as sure as my name 's Tom Shaw. Now, then, don't slip, Polly," and Mr. Thomas helped them out with unusual politeness, for that friendly little speech gratified him. He felt that one person appreciated him; and it had a good effect upon manners and temper made rough and belligerent by constant snubbing and opposition.

After tea that evening, Fanny proposed that Polly should show her how to make molasses candy, as it was cook's holiday, and the coast would be clear. Hoping to propitiate her tormentor, Fan invited Tom to join in the revel, and Polly begged that Maud might sit up and see the fun; so all four descended to the big kitchen, armed with aprons, hammers, spoons, and pans, and Polly assumed command of the forces. Tom was set to cracking nuts, and Maud to picking out the meats, for the candy was to be "tip-top." Fan waited on Polly cook, who hovered over the kettle of boiling molasses till her face was the color of a peony. "Now, put in the nuts," she said at last; and Tom emptied his plate into the foamy syrup, while the others watched with deep interest the mysterious concoction of this well-beloved sweetmeat. "I pour it into the buttered pan, you see, and it cools, and then we can eat it," explained Polly, suiting the action to the word.

"Why, it 's all full of shells!" exclaimed Maud, peering into the pan.

"Oh, thunder! I must have put 'em in by mistake, and ate up the meats without thinking," said Tom, trying to conceal his naughty satisfaction, as the girls hung over the pan with faces full of disappointment and despair.

“You did it on purpose, you horrid boy! I ‘ll never let you have anything to do with my fun again!” cried Fan, in a passion, trying to catch and shake him, while he dodged and chuckled in high glee.

Maud began to wail over her lost delight, and Polly gravely poked at the mess, which was quite spoilt. But her attention was speedily diverted by the squabble going on in the corner; for Fanny, forgetful of her young-ladyism and her sixteen years, had boxed Tom’s ears, and Tom, resenting the insult, had forcibly seated her in the coal-hod, where he held her with one hand while he returned the compliment with the other. Both were very angry, and kept twitting one another with every aggravation they could invent, as they scolded and scuffled, presenting a most unlovely spectacle.

Polly was not a model girl by any means, and had her little pets and tempers like the rest of us; but she did n’t fight, scream, and squabble with her brothers and sisters in this disgraceful way, and was much surprised to see her elegant friend in such a passion. “Oh, don’t! Please, don’t! You ‘ll hurt her, Tom! Let him go, Fanny! It ‘s no matter about the candy; we can make some more!” cried Polly, trying to part them, and looking so distressed, that they stopped ashamed, and in a minute sorry that she should see such a display of temper.

“I ain’t going to be hustled round; so you ‘d better let me alone, Fan,” said Tom, drawing off with a threatening wag of the head, adding, in a different tone, “I only put the shells in for fun, Polly. You cook another kettleful, and I ‘ll pick you some meats all fair. Will you?”

“It ‘s pretty hot work, and it ‘s a pity to waste things; but I ‘ll try again, if you want me to,” said Polly, with a patient sigh, for her arms were tired and her face uncomfortably hot.

“We don’t want you; get away!” said Maud, shaking a sticky spoon at him.

“Keep quiet, cry-baby. I ‘m going to stay and help; may n’t I, Polly?”

“Bears like sweet things, so you want some candy, I guess. Where is the molasses? We ‘ve used up all there was in the jug,” said Polly, good-naturedly, beginning again.

“Down cellar; I ‘ll get it;” and taking the lamp and jug, Tom departed, bent on doing his duty now like a saint.

The moment his light vanished, Fanny bolted the door, saying, spitefully, “Now, we are safe from any more tricks. Let him thump and call, it only serves him right; and when the candy is done, we ‘ll let the rascal out.”

“How can we make it without molasses?” asked Polly, thinking that would settle the matter.

“There ‘s plenty in the store-room. No; you shan’t let him up till I ‘m ready.

He ‘s got to learn that I ‘m not to be shaken by a little chit like him. Make your candy, and let him alone, or I ‘ll go and tell papa, and then Tom will get a lecture.”

Polly thought it was n’t fair; but Maud clamored for her candy, and finding she could do nothing to appease Fan, Polly devoted her mind to her cookery till the nuts were safely in, and a nice panful set in the yard to cool. A few bangs at the locked door, a few threats of vengeance from the prisoner, such as setting the house on fire, drinking up the wine, and mashing the jelly-pots, and then all was so quiet that the girls forgot him in the exciting crisis of their work.

“He can’t possibly get out anywhere, and as soon we ‘ve cut up the candy, we ‘ll unbolt the door and run. Come and get a nice dish to put it in,” said Fan, when Polly proposed to go halves with Tom, lest he should come bursting in somehow, and seize the whole.

When they came down with the dish in which to set forth their treat, and opened the back-door to find it, imagine their dismay on discovering that it was gone, pan, candy, and all, utterly and mysteriously gone!

A general lament arose, when a careful rummage left no hopes; for the fates had evidently decreed at candy was not to prosper on this unpropitious night.

“The hot pan has melted and sunk in the snow perhaps,” said Fanny, digging into the drift where it was left.

“Those old cats have got it, I guess,” suggested Maud, too much overwhelmed by this second blow to howl as usual.

“The gate is n’t locked, and some beggar has stolen it. I hope it will do him good,” added Polly, turning from her exploring expedition.

“If Tom could get out, I should think he ‘d carried it off; but not being a rat, he can’t go through the bits of windows; so it was n’t him,” said Fanny, disconsolately, for she began to think this double loss a punishment for letting angry passions rise, “Let ‘s open the door and tell him about it,” proposed Polly.

“He ‘ll crow over us. No; we ‘ll open it and go to bed, and he can come out when he likes. Provoking boy! if he had n’t plagued us so, we should have had a nice time.”

Unbolting the cellar door, the girls announced to the invisible captive that they were through, and then departed much depressed. Half-way up the second flight, they all stopped as suddenly as if they had seen a ghost; for looking over the banisters was Tom’s face, crocky but triumphant, and in either hand a junk of candy, which he waved above them as he vanished, with the tantalizing remark, “Don’t you wish you had some?”

“How in the world did he get out?” cried Fanny, steadying herself after a start that nearly sent all three tumbling down stairs.

“Coal-hole!” answered a spectral voice from the gloom above.

“Good gracious! He must have poked up the cover, climbed into the street, stole the candy, and sneaked in at the shed-window while we were looking for it.”

“Cats got it, did n’t they?” jeered the voice in a tone that made Polly sit down and laugh till she could n’t laugh any longer.

“Just give Maud a bit, she ‘s so disappointed. Fan and I are sick of it, and so will you be, if you eat it all,” called Polly, when she got her breath.

“Go to bed, Maudie, and look under your pillow when you get there,” was the oracular reply that came down to them, as Tom’s door closed after a jubilant solo on the tin pan.

The girls went to bed tired out; and Maud slumbered placidly, hugging the sticky bundle, found where molasses candy is not often discovered. Polly was very tired, and soon fell asleep; but Fanny, who slept with her, lay awake longer than usual, thinking about her troubles, for her head ached, and the dissatisfaction that follows anger would not let her rest with the tranquillity that made the rosy face in the little round nightcap such a pleasant sight to see as it lay beside her. The gas was turned down, but Fanny saw a figure in a gray wrapper creep by her door, and presently return, pausing to look in. “Who is it?” she cried, so loud that Polly woke.

“Only me, dear,” answered grandma’s mild voice. “Poor Tom has got a dreadful toothache, and I came down to find some creosote for him. He told me not to tell you; but I can’t find the bottle, and don’t want to disturb mamma.”

“It ‘s in my closet. Old Tom will pay for his trick this time,” said Fanny, in a satisfied tone.

“I thought he ‘d get enough of our candy,” laughed Polly; and then they fell asleep, leaving Tom to the delights of toothache and the tender mercies of kind old grandma.

CHAPTER III. POLLY’S TROUBLES

POLLY soon found that she was in a new world, a world where the manners and customs were so different from the simple ways at home, that she felt like a stranger in a strange land, and often wished that she had not come. In the first place, she had nothing to do but lounge and gossip, read novels, parade the streets, and dress; and before a week was gone, she was as heartily sick of all this, as a healthy person would be who attempted to live on confectionery. Fanny liked it, because she was used to it, and had never known anything better; but Polly had, and often felt like a little wood-bird shut up in a gilded cage. Nevertheless, she was much impressed by the luxuries all about her, enjoyed them, wished she owned them, and wondered why the Shaws were not a happier family. She was not wise enough to know where the trouble lay; she did not attempt to say which of the two lives was the right one; she only knew which she liked best, and supposed it was merely another of her “old-fashioned” ways.

Fanny’s friends did not interest her much; she was rather afraid of them, they seemed so much older and wiser than herself, even those younger in years. They talked about things of which she knew nothing and when Fanny tried to explain, she did n’t find them interesting; indeed, some of them rather shocked and puzzled her; so the girls let her alone, being civil when they met, but evidently feeling that she was too “odd” to belong to their set. Then she turned to Maud for companionship, for her own little sister was excellent company, and Polly loved her dearly. But Miss Maud was much absorbed in her own affairs, for she belonged to a “set” also; and these mites of five and six had their “musicals,” their parties, receptions, and promenades, as well as their elders; and, the chief idea of their little lives seemed to be to ape the fashionable follies they should have been too innocent to understand. Maud had her tiny card-case, and paid calls, “like mamma and Fan”; her box of dainty gloves, her jewel-drawer, her crimping-pins, as fine and fanciful a wardrobe as a Paris doll, and a French maid to dress her. Polly could n’t get on with her at first, for Maud did n’t seem like a child, and often corrected Polly in her conversation and manners, though little mademoiselle’s own were anything but perfect. Now and then, when Maud felt poorly, or had a “fwactious” turn, for she had “nerves” as well as mamma, she would go to Polly to “be amoosed,” for her gentle ways and kind forbearance soothed the little fine lady better than anything else. Polly enjoyed these times, and told stories, played games, or went out walking, just as Maud liked, slowly and surely winning the child’s heart, and relieving the whole house of the young tyrant who ruled it.

Tom soon got over staring at Polly, and at first did not take much notice of her, for, in his opinion, "girls did n't amount to much, anyway"; and, considering, the style of girl he knew most about, Polly quite agreed with him. He occasionally refreshed himself by teasing her, to see how she 'd stand it, and caused Polly much anguish of spirit, for she never knew where he would take her next. He bounced out at her from behind doors, booed at her in dark entries, clutched her feet as she went up stairs, startled her by shrill whistles right in her ear, or sudden tweaks of the hair as he passed her in the street; and as sure as there was company to dinner, he fixed his round eyes on her, and never took them off till she was reduced to a piteous state of confusion and distress. She used to beg him not to plague her; but he said he did it for her good; she was too shy, and needed toughening like the other girls. In vain she protested that she did n't want to be like the other girls in that respect; he only laughed in her face, stuck his red hair straight up all over his head, and glared at her, till she fled in dismay.

Yet Polly rather liked Tom, for she soon saw that he was neglected, hustled out of the way, and left to get on pretty much by himself. She often wondered why his mother did n't pet him as she did the girls; why his father ordered him about as if he was a born rebel, and took so little interest in his only son. Fanny considered him a bear, and was ashamed of him; but never tried to polish him up a bit; and Maud and he lived together like a cat and dog who did not belong to a "happy family." Grandma was the only one who stood by poor old Tom; and Polly more than once discovered him doing something kind for Madam, and seeming very much ashamed when it was found out. He was n't respectful at all; he called her "the old lady," and told her he "would n't be fussed over"; but when anything was the matter, he always went to "the old lady," and was very grateful for the "fussing." Polly liked him for this, and often wanted to speak of it; but she had a feeling that it would n't do, for in praising their affection, she was reproaching others with neglect; so she held her tongue, and thought about it all the more. Grandma was rather neglected, too, and perhaps that is the reason why Tom and she were such good friends. She was even more old-fashioned than Polly; but people did n't seem to mind it so much in her, as her day was supposed to be over, and nothing was expected of her but to keep out of everybody's way, and to be handsomely dressed when she appeared "before people." Grandma led a quiet, solitary life in her own rooms, full of old furniture, pictures, books, and relics of a past for which no one cared but herself. Her son went up every evening for a little call, was very kind to her, and saw that she wanted nothing money could buy; but he was a busy man, so intent on getting rich that he had no time to enjoy what he already possessed. Madam never complained, interfered, or suggested; but there was a sad sort of quietude about her, a wistful look in her faded eyes, as if she wanted something which money could not buy, and when children were near, she hovered about them, evidently longing to cuddle and caress them as only grandmothers can. Polly felt this; and as she missed the home-petting, gladly showed that she liked to see the quiet old face brighten, as she entered the solitary room, where few children came, except the phantoms of little sons and daughters, who, to the motherly heart that loved them, never faded or grew up. Polly wished the children would be kinder to grandma; but it was not for her to tell them so, although it troubled her a good deal, and she could only try to make up for it by being as dutiful and affectionate as if their grandma was her own.

Another thing that disturbed Polly was the want of exercise. To dress up and parade certain streets for an hour every day, to stand talking in doorways, or drive out in a fine carriage, was not the sort of exercise she liked, and Fan would take no other. Indeed, she was so shocked, when Polly, one day, proposed a run down the mall, that her friend never dared suggest such a thing again. At home, Polly ran and rode, coasted and skated, jumped rope and raked hay, worked in her garden and rowed her boat; so no wonder she longed for something more lively than a daily promenade with a flock of giddy girls, who tilted along in high-heeled boots, and costumes which made Polly ashamed to be seen with some of them. So she used to slip out alone sometimes, when Fanny was absorbed in novels, company, or millinery, and get fine brisk walks round the park, on the unfashionable side, where the babies took their airings; or she went inside, to watch the boys coasting, and to wish she could coast too, as she did at home. She never went far, and always came back rosy and gay.

One afternoon, just before dinner, she felt so tired of doing nothing, that she slipped out for a run. It had been a dull day; but the sun was visible now, setting brightly below the clouds. It was cold but still and Polly trotted down the smooth, snow-covered mall humming to herself, and trying not to feel homesick. The coasters were at it with all their might, and she watched them, till her longing to join the fun grew irresistible. On the hill, some little girls were playing with their sleds, real little girls, in warm hoods and coats, rubber boots and mittens, and Polly felt drawn toward them in spite of her fear of Fan.

“I want to go down, but I dars n’t, it ‘s so steep,” said one of these “common children,” as Maud called them.

“If you ‘ll lend me your sled, and sit in my lap, I ‘ll take you down all nice,” answered Polly, in a confidential tone.

The little girls took a look at her, seemed satisfied, and accepted her offer. Polly looked carefully round to see that no fashionable eye beheld the awful deed, and finding all safe, settled her freight, and spun away down hill, feeling all over the delightsome excitement of swift motion which makes coasting such a favorite pastime with the more sensible portion of the child-world. One after another, she took the little girls down the hill and dragged them up again, while they regarded her in the light of a gray-coated angel, descended for their express benefit. Polly was just finishing off with one delicious "go" all by herself, when she heard a familiar whistle behind her, and before she could get off, up came Tom, looking as much astonished as if he had found her mounted, on an elephant.

"Hullo, Polly! What 'll Fan say to you?" was his polished salutation.

"Don't know, and don't care. Coasting is no harm; I like it, and I 'm going to do it, now I 've got a chance; so clear the lul-la!" And away went independent Polly, with her hair blowing in the wind, and an expression of genuine enjoyment, which a very red nose did n't damage in the least.

"Good for you, Polly!" And casting himself upon his sled, with the most reckless disregard for his ribs, off whizzed Tom after her, and came alongside just as she reined up "General Grant" on the broad path below. "Oh, won't you get it when we go home?" cried the young gentleman, even before he changed his graceful attitude.

"I shan't, if you don't go and tell; but of course you will," added Polly, sitting still, while an anxious expression began to steal over her happy face.

"I just won't, then," returned Tom, with the natural perversity of his tribe.

"If they ask me, I shall tell, of course; if they don't ask, I think there 's no harm in keeping still. I should n't have done it, if I had n't known my mother was willing; but I don't wish to trouble your mother by telling of it. Do you think it was very dreadful of me?" asked Polly, looking at him.

"I think it was downright jolly; and I won't tell, if you don't want me to. Now, come up and have another," said Tom, heartily.

"Just one more; the little girls want to go, this is their sled."

"Let 'em take it, it is n't good for much; and you come on mine. Mazeppa's a stunner; you see if he is n't."

So Polly tucked herself up in front, Tom hung on behind in some mysterious manner, and Mazeppa proved that he fully merited his master's sincere if inelegant praise. They got on capitally now, for Tom was in his proper sphere, and showed his best side, being civil and gay in the bluff boy-fashion that was natural to him; while Polly forgot to be shy, and liked this sort of "toughening" much better than the other. They laughed and talked, and kept taking "just one more," till the sunshine was all gone, and the clocks struck dinner-time.

"We shall be late; let 's run," said Polly, as they came into the path after the last coast.

"You just sit still, and I 'll get you home in a jiffy;" and before she could unpack herself, Tom trotted off with her at a fine pace.

"Here 's a pair of cheeks! I wish you 'd get a color like this, Fanny," said Mr. Shaw, as Polly came into the dining-room after smoothing her hair.

"Your nose is as red as that cranberry sauce," answered Fan, coming out of the big chair where she had been curled up for an hour or two, deep in "Lady Audley's Secret."

"So it is," said Polly, shutting one eye to look at the offending feature. "Never mind; I 've had a good time, anyway," she added, giving a little prance in her chair.

"I don't see much fun in these cold runs you are so fond of taking," said Fanny, with a yawn and a shiver.

"Perhaps you would if you tried it;" and Polly laughed as she glanced at Tom.

"Did you go alone, dear?" asked grandma, patting the rosy cheek beside her.

"Yes 'm; but I met Tom, and we came home together." Polly's eyes twinkled when she said that, and Tom choked in his soup.

"Thomas, leave the table!" commanded Mr. Shaw, as his incorrigible son gurgled and gasped behind his napkin.

"Please don't send him away, sir. I made him laugh," said Polly, penitently.

"What's the joke?" asked Fanny, waking up at last.

"I should n't think you 'd make him laugh, when he 's always making you cwy," observed Maud, who had just come in.

"What have you been doing now, sir?" demanded Mr. Shaw, as Tom emerged, red and solemn, from his brief obscurity.

"Nothing but coast," he said, gruffly, for papa was always lecturing him, and letting the girls do just as they liked.

"So 's Polly; I saw her. Me and Blanche were coming home just now, and we saw her and Tom widing down the hill on his sled, and then he dwagged her ever so far!" cried Maud, with her mouth full.

"You did n't?" and Fanny dropped her fork with a scandalized face.

"Yes, I did, and liked it ever so much," answered Polly, looking anxious but resolute.

"Did any one see you?" cried Fanny.

"Only some little girls, and Tom."

"It was horridly improper; and Tom ought to have told you so, if you did n't know any better. I should be mortified to death if any of my friends saw you," added Fan, much disturbed.

"Now, don't you scold. It 's no harm, and Polly shall coast if she wants to;

may n't she, grandma?" cried Tom, gallantly coming to the rescue, and securing a powerful ally.

"My mother lets me; and if I don't go among the boys, I can't see what harm there is in it," said Polly, before Madam could speak.

"People do many things in the country that are not proper here," began Mrs. Shaw, in her reproving tone.

"Let the child do it if she likes, and take Maud with her. I should be glad to have one hearty girl in my house," interrupted Mr. Shaw, and that was the end of it.

"Thank you, sir," said Polly, gratefully, and nodded at Tom, who telegraphed back "All right!" and fell upon his dinner with the appetite of a young wolf.

"Oh, you sly-boots! you 're getting up a flirtation with Tom, are you?" whispered Fanny to her friend, as if much amused.

"What!" and Polly looked so surprised and indignant, that Fanny was ashamed of herself, and changed the subject by telling her mother she needed some new gloves.

Polly was very quiet after that, and the minute dinner was over, she left the room to go and have a quiet "think" about the whole matter. Before she got half-way up stairs, she saw Tom coming after, and immediately sat down to guard her feet. He laughed, and said, as he perched himself on the post of the banisters, "I won't grab you, honor bright. I just wanted to say, if you 'll come out to-morrow some time, we 'll have a good coast."

"No," said Polly, "I can't come."

"Why not? Are you mad? I did n't tell." And Tom looked amazed at the change which had come over her.

"No; you kept your word, and stood by me like a good boy. I 'm not mad, either; but I don't mean to coast any more. Your mother don't like it."

"That is n't the reason, I know. You nodded to me after she 'd freed her mind, and you meant to go then. Come, now, what is it?"

"I shan't tell you; but I 'm not going," was Polly's determined answer.

"Well, I did think you had more sense than most girls; but you have n't, and I would n't give a sixpence for you."

"That 's polite," said Polly, getting ruffled.

"Well, I hate cowards."

"I ain't a coward."

"Yes, you are. You 're afraid of what folks will say; ain't you, now?"

Polly knew she was, and held her peace, though she longed to speak; but how could she?

"Ah, I knew you 'd back out." And Tom walked away with an air of scorn that cut Polly to the heart.

“It ‘s too bad! Just as he was growing kind to me, and I was going to have a good time, it ‘s all spoilt by Fan’s nonsense. Mrs. Shaw don’t like it, nor grandma either, I dare say. There ‘ll be a fuss if I go, and Fan will plague me; so I ‘ll give it up, and let Tom think I ‘m afraid. Oh, dear! I never did see such ridiculous people.”

Polly shut her door hard, and felt ready to cry with vexation, that her pleasure should be spoilt by such a silly idea; for, of all the silly freaks of this fast age, that of little people playing at love is about the silliest. Polly had been taught that it was a very serious and sacred thing; and, according to her notions, it was far more improper to flirt with one boy than to coast with a dozen. She had been much amazed, only the day before, to hear Maud say to her mother, “Mamma, must I have a beau? The girls all do, and say I ought to have Fweddy Lovell; but I don’t like him as well as Hawry Fiske.”

“Oh, yes; I ‘d have a little sweetheart, dear, it ‘s so cunning,” answered Mrs. Shaw. And Maud announced soon after that she was engaged to “Fweddy, ‘cause Hawry slapped her” when she proposed the match.

Polly laughed with the rest at the time; but when she thought of it afterward, and wondered what her own mother would have said, if little Kitty had put such a question, she did n’t find it cunning or funny, but ridiculous and unnatural. She felt so now about herself; and when her first petulance was over, resolved to give up coasting and everything else, rather than have any nonsense with Tom, who, thanks to his neglected education, was as ignorant as herself of the charms of this new amusement for school-children. So Polly tried to console herself by jumping rope in the back-yard, and playing tag with Maud in the drying-room, where she likewise gave lessons in “nas-gim-nics,” as Maud called it, which did that little person good. Fanny came up sometimes to teach them a new dancing step, and more than once was betrayed into a game of romps, for which she was none the worse. But Tom turned a cold shoulder to Polly, and made it evident, by his cavalier manner that he really did n’t think her “worth a sixpence.”

Another thing that troubled Polly was her clothes, for, though no one said anything, she knew they were very plain; and now and then she wished that her blue and mouse colored merinos were rather more trimmed, her sashes had bigger bows, and her little ruffles more lace on them. She sighed for a locket, and, for the first time in her life, thought seriously of turning up her pretty curls and putting on a “wad.” She kept these discontents to herself, however, after she had written to ask her mother if she might have her best dress altered like Fanny’s, and received this reply: “No, dear; the dress is proper and becoming as it is, and the old fashion of simplicity the best for all of us. I don’t want my Polly to be loved for her clothes, but for herself; so wear the plain frocks mother took such pleasure in making for you, and let the panniers go. The least of us have some influence in this big world; and perhaps my little girl can do some good by showing others that a contented heart and a happy face are better ornaments than any Paris can give her. You want a locket, deary; so I send one that my mother gave me years ago. You will find father's face on one side, mine on the other; and when things trouble you, just look at your talisman, and I think the sunshine will come back again."

Of course it did, for the best of all magic was shut up in the quaint little case that Polly wore inside her frock, and kissed so tenderly each night and morning. The thought that, insignificant as she was, she yet might do some good, made her very careful of her acts and words, and so anxious to keep head contented and face happy, that she forgot her clothes, and made others do the same. She did not know it, but that good old fashion of simplicity made the plain gowns pretty, and the grace of unconsciousness beautified their little wearer with the charm that makes girlhood sweetest to those who truly love and reverence it. One temptation Polly had already yielded to before the letter came, and repented heartily of afterward.

"Polly, I wish you 'd let me call you Marie," said Fanny one day, as they were shopping together.

"You may call me Mary, if you like; but I won't have any ie put on to my name. I 'm Polly at home and I 'm fond of being called so; but Marie is Frenchified and silly."

"I spell my own name with an ie, and so do all the girls."

"And what a jumble of Netties, Nellies, Hatties, and Sallies there is. How 'Pollie' would look spelt so!"

"Well, never mind; that was n't what I began to say. There 's one thing you must have, and that is, bronze boots," said Fan, impressively.

"Why must I, when I 've got enough without?"

"Because it 's the fashion to have them, and you can't be finished off properly without. I 'm going to get a pair, and so must you."

"Don't they cost a great deal?"

"Eight or nine dollars, I believe. I have mine charged; but it don't matter if you have n't got the money. I can lend you some."

"I 've got ten dollars to do what I like with; but it 's meant to get some presents for the children." And Polly took out her purse in an undecided way.

"You can make presents easy enough. Grandma knows all sorts of nice contrivances. They 'll do just as well; and then you can get your boots."

"Well; I 'll look at them," said Polly, following Fanny into the store, feeling rather rich and important to be shopping in this elegant manner.

“Are n’t they lovely? Your foot is perfectly divine in that boot, Polly. Get them for my party; you ‘ll dance like a fairy,” whispered Fan.

Polly surveyed the dainty, shining boot with the scalloped top, the jaunty heel, and the delicate toe, thought her foot did look very well in it, and after a little pause, said she would have them. It was all very delightful till she got home, and was alone; then, on looking into her purse, she saw one dollar and the list of things she meant to get for mother and the children. How mean the dollar looked all alone! and how long the list grew when there was nothing to buy the articles.

“I can’t make skates for Ned, nor a desk for Will; and those are what they have set their hearts upon. Father’s book and mother’s collar are impossible now; and I ‘m a selfish thing to go and spend all my money for myself. How could I do it?” And Polly eyed the new boots reproachfully, as they stood in the first position as if ready for the party. “They are lovely; but I don’t believe they will feel good, for I shall be thinking about my lost presents all the time,” sighed Polly, pushing the enticing boots out of sight. “I ‘ll go and ask grandma what I can do; for if I ‘ve got to make something for every one, I must begin right away, or I shan’t get done;” and off she bustled, glad to forget her remorse in hard work.

Grandma proved equal to the emergency, and planned something for every one, supplying materials, taste, and skill in the most delightful manner. Polly felt much comforted; but while she began to knit a pretty pair of white bed-socks, to be tied with rose-colored ribbons, for her mother, she thought some very sober thoughts upon the subject of temptation; and if any one had asked her just then what made her sigh, as if something lay heavy on her conscience, she would have answered, “Bronze boots.”

CHAPTER IV. LITTLE THINGS

"IT 'S so wainy, I can't go out, and evwybody is so cwoss they won't play with me," said Maud, when Polly found her fretting on the stairs, and paused to ask the cause of her wails.

"I 'll play with you; only don't scream and wake your mother. What shall we play?"

"I don't know; I 'm tired of evwything, 'cause my toys are all bwoken, and my dolls are all sick but Clawa," moaned Maud, giving a jerk to the Paris doll which she held upside down by one leg in the most unmaternal manner.

"I 'm going to dress a dolly for my little sister; would n't you like to see me do it?" asked Polly, persuasively, hoping to beguile the cross child and finish her own work at the same time.

"No, I should n't, 'cause she 'll look nicer than my Clawa. Her clothes won't come off; and Tom spoilt 'em playing ball with her in the yard."

"Would n't you like to rip these clothes off, and have me show you how to make some new ones, so you can dress and undress Clara as much as you like?"

"Yes; I love to cut." And Maud's, face brightened; for destructiveness is one of the earliest traits of childhood, and ripping was Maud's delight.

Establishing themselves in the deserted dining-room, the children fell to work; and when Fanny discovered them, Maud was laughing with all her heart at poor Clara, who, denuded of her finery, was cutting up all sorts of capers in the hands of her merry little mistress.

"I should think you 'd be ashamed to play with dolls, Polly. I have n't touched one this ever so long," said Fanny, looking down with a superior air.

"I ain't ashamed, for it keeps Maud happy, and will please my sister Kitty; and I think sewing is better than prinking or reading silly novels, so, now." And Polly stitched away with a resolute air, for she and Fanny had had a little tiff; because Polly would n't let her friend do up her hair "like other folks," and bore her ears.

"Don't be cross, dear, but come and do something nice, it 's so dull to-day," said Fanny, anxious to be friends again, for it was doubly dull without Polly.

"Can't; I 'm busy."

"You always are busy. I never saw such a girl. What in the world do you find to do all the time?" asked Fanny, watching with interest the set of the little red merino frock Polly was putting on to her doll.

"Lots of things; but I like to be lazy sometimes as much as you do; just lie on the sofa, and read fairy stories, or think about nothing. Would you have a white-muslin apron or a black silk?” added Polly, surveying her work with satisfaction.

“Muslin, with pockets and tiny blue bows. I ‘ll show you how.” And forgetting her hate and contempt for dolls, down sat Fanny, soon getting as much absorbed as either of the others.

The dull day brightened wonderfully after that, and the time flew pleasantly, as tongues and needles went together. Grandma peeped in, and smiled at the busy group, saying, “Sew away, my dears; dollies are safe companions, and needlework an accomplishment that ‘s sadly neglected nowadays. Small stitches, Maud; neat button-holes, Fan; cut carefully, Polly, and don’t waste your cloth. Take pains; and the best needlewoman shall have a pretty bit of white satin for a doll’s bonnet.”

Fanny exerted herself, and won the prize, for Polly helped Maud, and neglected her own work; but she did n’t care much, for Mr. Shaw said, looking at the three bright faces at the tea-table, “I guess Polly has been making sunshine for you to-day.” “No, indeed, sir, I have n’t done anything, only dress Maud’s doll.”

And Polly did n’t think she had done much; but it was one of the little things which are always waiting to be done in this world of ours, where rainy days come so often, where spirits get out of tune, and duty won’t go hand in hand with pleasure. Little things of this sort are especially good work for little people; a kind little thought, an unselfish little act, a cheery little word, are so sweet and comfortable, that no one can fail to feel their beauty and love the giver, no matter how small they are. Mothers do a deal of this sort of thing, unseen, unthanked, but felt and remembered long afterward, and never lost, for this is the simple magic that binds hearts together, and keeps home happy. Polly had learned this secret.

She loved to do the “little things” that others did not see, or were too busy to stop for; and while doing them, without a thought of thanks, she made sunshine for herself as well as others. There was so much love in her own home, that she quickly felt the want of it in Fanny’s, and puzzled herself to find out why these people were not kind and patient to one another. She did not try to settle the question, but did her best to love and serve and bear with each, and the good will, the gentle heart, the helpful ways and simple manners of our Polly made her dear to every one, for these virtues, even in a little child, are lovely and attractive.

Mr. Shaw was very kind to her, for he liked her modest, respectful manners; and Polly was so grateful for his many favors, that she soon forgot her fear, and showed her affection in all sorts of confiding little ways, which pleased him extremely. She used to walk across the park with him when he went to his office in the morning, talking busily all the way, and saying “Good-by” with a nod and a smile when they parted at the great gate. At first, Mr. Shaw did not care much about it; but soon he missed her if she did not come, and found that something fresh and pleasant seemed to brighten all his day, if a small, gray-coated figure, with an intelligent face, a merry voice, and a little hand slipped confidingly into his, went with him through the wintry park. Coming home late, he liked to see a curly, brown head watching at the window; to find his slippers ready, his paper in its place, and a pair of willing feet, eager to wait upon him. “I wish my Fanny was more like her,” he often said to himself, as he watched the girls, while they thought him deep in politics or the state of the money market. Poor Mr. Shaw had been so busy getting rich, that he had not found time to teach his children to love him; he was more at leisure now, and as his boy and girls grew up, he missed something. Polly was unconsciously showing him what it was, and making child-love so sweet, that he felt he could not do without it any more, yet did n’t quite know how to win the confidence of the children, who had always found him busy, indifferent, and absentminded.

As the girls were going to bed one night, Polly kissed grandma, as usual, and Fanny laughed at her, saying, “What a baby you are! We are too old for such things now.”

“I don’t think people ever are too old to kiss their fathers and mothers,” was the quick answer.

“Right, my little Polly;” and Mr. Shaw stretched out his hand to her with such a kindly look, that Fanny stared surprised, and then said, shyly, “I thought you did n’t care about it, father.” “I do, my dear:” And Mr. Shaw put out the other hand to Fanny, who gave him a daughterly kiss, quite forgetting everything but the tender feeling that sprung up in her heart at the renewal of the childish custom which we never need outgrow.

Mrs. Shaw was a nervous, fussy invalid, who wanted something every five minutes; so Polly found plenty of small things to do for her and did, them so cheerfully, that the poor lady loved to have the quiet, helpful child near, to wait upon her, read to her, run errands, or hand the seven different shawls which were continually being put on or off.

Grandma, too, was glad to find willing hands and feet to serve her; and Polly passed many happy hours in the quaint rooms, learning all sorts of pretty arts, and listening to pleasant chat, never dreaming how much sunshine she brought to the solitary old lady.

Tom was Polly’s rock ahead for a long time, because he was always breaking out in a new place, and one never knew where to find him. He tormented yet amused her; was kind one day, and a bear the next; at times she fancied he was never going to be bad again, and the next thing she knew he was deep in mischief, and hooted at the idea of repentance and reformation. Polly gave him up as a hard case; but was so in the habit of helping any one who seemed in trouble, that she was good to him simply because she could n't help it.

"What 's the matter? Is your lesson too hard for you?" she asked one evening, as a groan made her look across the table to where Tom sat scowling over a pile of dilapidated books, with his hands in his hair, as if his head was in danger of flying asunder with the tremendous effort he was making.

"Hard! Guess it is. What in thunder do I care about the old Carthaginians? Regulus was n't bad; but I 'm sick of him!" And Tom dealt "Harkness's Latin Reader" a thump, which expressed his feelings better than words.

"I like Latin, and used to get on well when I studied it with Jimmy. Perhaps I can help you a little bit," said Polly, as Tom wiped his hot face and refreshed himself with a peanut.

"You? pooh! girls' Latin don't amount to much anyway," was the grateful reply.

But Polly was used to him now, and, nothing daunted, took a look at the grimy page in the middle of which Tom had stuck. She read it so well, that the young gentleman stopped munching to regard her with respectful astonishment, and when she stopped, he said, suspiciously, "You are a sly one, Polly, to study up so you can show off before me. But it won't do, ma'am; turn over a dozen pages, and try again."

Polly obeyed, and did even better than before, saying, as she looked up, with a laugh, "I 've been through the whole book; so you won't catch me that way, Tom."

"I say, how came you to know such a lot?" asked Tom, much impressed.

"I studied with Jimmy, and kept up with him, for father let us be together in all our lessons. It was so nice, and we learned so fast!"

"Tell me about Jimmy. He 's your brother, is n't he?"

"Yes; but he 's dead, you know. I 'll tell about him some other time; you ought to study now, and perhaps I can help you," said Polly, with a little quiver of the lips.

"Should n't wonder if you could." And Tom spread the book between them with a grave and business-like air, for he felt that Polly had got the better of him, and it behooved him to do his best for the honor of his sex. He went at the lesson with a will, and soon floundered out of his difficulties, for Polly gave him a lift here and there, and they went on swimmingly, till they came to some rules to be learned. Polly had forgotten them, so they, both committed them to memory;

Tom, with hands in his pockets, rocked to and fro, muttering rapidly, while Polly twisted the little curl on her forehead and stared at the wall, gabbling with all her might.

"Done!" cried Tom, presently.

"Done!" echoed Polly; and then they heard each other recite till both were perfect "That 's pretty good fun," said Tom, joyfully, tossing poor Harkness away, and feeling that the pleasant excitement of companionship could lend a charm even to Latin Grammar.

"Now, ma'am, we 'll take a turn at algibbera. I like that as much as I hate Latin."

Polly accepted the invitation, and soon owned that Tom could beat her here. This fact restored his equanimity; but he did n't crow over her, far from it; for he helped her with a paternal patience that made her eyes twinkle with suppressed fun, as he soberly explained and illustrated, unconsciously imitating Dominie Deane, till Polly found it difficult to keep from laughing in his face.

"You may have another go at it any, time you like," generously remarked Tom, as he shied the algebra after the Latin Reader.

"I 'll come every evening, then. I 'd like to, for I have n't studied a bit since I came. You shall try and make me like algebra, and I 'll try and make you like Latin, will you?"

"Oh, I 'd like it well enough, if there was any one explain it to me. Old Deane puts us through double-quick, and don't give a fellow time to ask questions when we read."

"Ask your father; he knows."

"Don't believe he does; should n't dare to bother him, if he did."

"Why not?"

"He 'd pull my ears, and call me a 'stupid,' or tell me not to worry him."

"I don't think he would. He 's very kind to me, and I ask lots of questions."

"He likes you better than he does me."

"Now, Tom! it 's wrong of you to say so. Of course he loves you ever so much more than he does me," cried Polly, reprovingly.

"Why don't he show it then?" muttered Tom, with a half-wistful, half-defiant glance toward the library door, which stood ajar.

"You act so, how can he?" asked Polly, after a pause, in which she put Tom's question to herself, and could find no better reply than the one she gave him.

"Why don't he give me my velocipede? He said, if I did well at school for a month, I should have it; and I 've been pegging away like fury for most six weeks, and he don't do a thing about it. The girls get their duds, because they tease. I won't do that anyway; but you don't catch me studying myself to death, and no pay for it."

"It is too bad; but you ought to do it because it 's right, and never mind being paid," began Polly, trying to be moral, but secretly sympathizing heartily with poor Tom.

"Don't you preach, Polly. If the governor took any notice of me, and cared how I got on, I would n't mind the presents so much; but he don't care a hang, and never even asked if I did well last declamation day, when I 'd gone and learned 'The Battle of Lake Regillus,' because he said he liked it."

"Oh, Tom! Did you say that? It 's splendid! Jim and I used to say Horatius together, and it was such fun. Do speak your piece to me, I do so like 'Macaulay's Lays.'"

"It 's dreadful long," began Tom; but his face brightened, for Polly's interest soothed his injured feelings, and he was glad to prove his elocutionary powers. He began without much spirit; but soon the martial ring of the lines fired him, and before he knew it, he was on his legs thundering away in grand style, while Polly listened with kindling face and absorbed attention. Tom did declaim well, for he quite forgot himself, and delivered the stirring ballad with an energy that made Polly flush and tingle with admiration and delight, and quite electrified a second listener, who had heard all that went on, and watched the little scene from behind his newspaper.

As Tom paused, breathless, and Polly clapped her hands enthusiastically, the sound was loudly echoed from behind him. Both whirled round, and there was Mr. Shaw, standing in the doorway, applauding with all his might.

Tom looked much abashed, and said not a word; Polly ran to Mr. Shaw, and danced before him, saying, eagerly, "Was n't it splendid? Did n't he do well? May n't he have his velocipede now?"

"Capital, Tom; you 'll be an orator yet. Learn another piece like that, and I 'll come and hear you speak it. Are you ready for your velocipede, hey?"

Polly was right; and Tom owned that "the governor" was kind, did like him and had n't entirely forgotten his promise. The boy turned red with pleasure, and picked at the buttons on his jacket, while listening to this unexpected praise; but when he spoke, he looked straight up in his father's face, while his own shone with pleasure, as he answered, in one breath, "Thankee, sir. I 'll do it, sir. Guess I am, sir!"

"Very good; then look out for your new horse tomorrow, sir." And Mr. Shaw stroked the fuzzy red head with a kind hand, feeling a fatherly pleasure in the conviction that there was something in his boy after all.

Tom got his velocipede next day, named it Black Auster, in memory of the horse in "The Battle of Lake Regillus," and came to grief as soon as he began to ride his new steed.

"Come out and see me go it," whispered Tom to Polly, after three days' practice in the street, for he had already learned to ride in the rink.

Polly and Maud willingly went, and watched his struggles, with deep interest, till he got an upset, which nearly put an end to his velocipeding forever.

"Hi, there! Auster's coming!" shouted Tom, as came rattling down the long, steep street outside the park.

They stepped aside, and he whizzed by, arms and legs going like mad, with the general appearance of a runaway engine. It would have been a triumphant descent, if a big dog had not bounced suddenly through one of the openings, and sent the whole concern helter-skelter into the gutter. Polly laughed as she ran to view the ruin, for Tom lay flat on his back with the velocipede atop him, while the big dog barked wildly, and his master scolded him for his awkwardness. But when she saw Tom's face, Polly was frightened, for the color had all gone out of it, his eyes looked strange and dizzy, and drops of blood began to trickle from a great cut on his forehead. The man saw it, too, and had him up in a minute; but he could n't stand, and stared about him in a dazed sort of way, as he sat on the curbstone, while Polly held her handkerchief to his forehead, and pathetically begged to know if he was killed.

"Don't scare mother, I 'm all right. Got upset, did n't I?" he asked, presently, eyeing the prostrate velocipede with more anxiety about its damages than his own.

"I knew you 'd hurt yourself with that horrid thing just let it be, and come home, for your head bleeds dreadfully, and everybody is looking at us," whispered Polly, trying to tie the little handkerchief over the ugly cut.

"Come on, then. Jove! how queer my head feels! Give us a boost, please. Stop howling, Maud, and come home. You bring the machine, and I 'll pay you, Pat." As he spoke, Tom slowly picked himself and steadying himself by Polly's shoulder, issued commands, and the procession fell into line. First, the big dog, barking at intervals; then the good-natured Irishman, trundling "that divil of a whirligig," as he disrespectfully called the idolized velocipede; then the wounded hero, supported by the helpful Polly; and Maud brought up the rear in tears, bearing Tom's cap.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Shaw was out driving with grandma, and Fanny was making calls; so that there was no one but Polly to stand by Tom, for the parlor-maid turned faint at the sight of blood, and the chamber-maid lost her wits in the flurry. It was a bad cut, and must be sewed up at once, the doctor said, as soon as he came. "Somebody must hold his head;" he added, as he threaded his queer little needle.

"I 'll keep still, but if anybody must hold me, let Polly. You ain't afraid, are you?" asked Tom, with imploring look, for he did n't like the idea of being sewed a bit.

Polly was just going to shrink away, saying, "Oh I can't!" when she remembered that Tom once called her a coward. Here was a chance to prove that she was n't; besides, poor Tom had no one else to help him; so she came up to the sofa where he lay, and nodded reassuringly, as she put a soft little hand on either side of the damaged head.

"You are a trump, Polly," whispered Tom. Then he set his teeth, clenched his hands, lay quite still, and bore it like a man. It was all over in a minute or two, and when he had had a glass of wine, and was nicely settled on his bed, he felt pretty comfortable, in spite of the pain in his head; and being ordered to keep quiet, he said, "Thank you ever so much, Polly," and watched her with a grateful face as she crept away.

He had to keep the house for a week, and laid about looking very interesting with a great black patch on his forehead. Every one 'petted him;' for the doctor said, that if the blow had been an inch nearer the temple, it would have been fatal, and the thought of losing him so suddenly made bluff old Tom very precious all at once. His father asked him how he was a dozen times a day; his mother talked continually of "that dear boy's narrow escape"; and grandma cockered him up with every delicacy she could invent; and the girls waited on him like devoted slaves. This new treatment had an excellent effect; for when neglected Tom got over his first amazement at this change of base, he blossomed out delightfully, as sick people do sometimes, and surprised his family by being unexpectedly patient, grateful, and amiable. Nobody ever knew how much good it did him; for boys seldom have confidences of this sort except with their mothers, and Mrs. Shaw had never found the key to her son's heart. But a little seed was sowed then that took root, and though it grew very slowly, it came to something in the end. Perhaps Polly helped it a little. Evening was his hardest time, for want of exercise made him as restless and nervous as it was possible for a hearty lad to be on such a short notice.

He could n't sleep so the girls amused him; Fanny played and read aloud; Polly sung, and told stories; and did the latter so well, that it got to be a regular thing for her to begin as soon as twilight came, and Tom was settled in his favorite place on grandma's sofa.

"Fire away, Polly," said the young sultan, one evening, as his little Scheherazade sat down in her low chair, after stirring up the fire till the room was bright and cosy.

"I don't feel like stories to-night, Tom. I 've told all I know, and can't make up any more," answered Polly, leaning her head on her hand with a sorrowful look that Tom had never seen before. He watched her a minute, and then asked, curiously, "What were you thinking about, just now, when you sat staring at the fire, and getting soberer and soberer every minute?

"I was thinking about Jimmy."

"Would you mind telling about him? You know, you said you would some time; but don't, if you 'd rather not," said Tom, lowering his rough voice respectfully.

"I like to talk about him; but there is n't much to tell," began Polly, grateful for his interest. "Sitting here with you reminded me of the way I used to sit with him when he was sick. We used to have such happy times, and it 's so pleasant to think about them now."

"He was awfully good, was n't he?"

"No, he was n't; but he tried to be, and mother says that is half the battle. We used to get tired of trying; but we kept making resolutions, and working hard to keep 'em. I don't think I got on much; but Jimmy did, and every one loved him."

"Did n't you ever squabble, as we do?"

"Yes, indeed, sometimes; but we could n't stay mad, and always made it up again as soon as we could. Jimmy used to come round first, and say, 'All serene, Polly,' so kind and jolly, that I could n't help laughing and being friends right away."

"Did he not know a lot?"

"Yes, I think he did, for he liked to study, and wanted to get on, so he could help father. People used to call him a fine boy, and I felt so proud to hear it; but they did n't know half how wise he was, because he did n't show off a bit. I suppose sisters always are grand of their brothers; but I don't believe many girls had as much right to be as I had."

"Most girls don't care two pins about their brothers; so that shows you don't know much about it."

"Well, they ought to, if they don't; and they would if the boys were as kind to them as Jimmy was to me."

"Why, what did he do?"

"Loved me dearly, and was n't ashamed to show it," cried Polly, with a sob in her voice, that made her answer very eloquent.

"What made him die, Polly?" asked Tom, soberly, after little pause.

"He got hurt coasting, last winter; but he never told which boy did it, and he only lived a week. I helped take care of him; and he was so patient, I used to wonder at him, for he was in dreadful pain all time. He gave me his books, and his dog, and his speckled hens, and his big knife, and said, 'Good-by, Polly,' and kissed me the last thing and then O Jimmy! Jimmy! If he only could come back!”

Poor Polly’s eyes had been getting fuller and fuller, lips trembling more and more, as she went on; when she came to that “good-by,” she could n’t get any further, but covered up her face, and cried as her heart would break. Tom was full of sympathy, but did n’t know how to show it; so he sat shaking up the camphor bottle, and trying to think of something proper and comfortable to say, when Fanny came to the rescue, and cuddled Polly in her arms, with soothing little pats and whispers and kisses, till the tears stopped, and Polly said, she “did n’t mean to, and would n’t any more. I ‘ve been thinking about my dear boy all the evening, for Tom reminds me of him,” she added, with a sigh.

“Me? How can I, when I ain’t a bit like him?” cried Tom, amazed.

“But you are in some ways.”

“Wish I was; but I can’t be, for he was good, you know.”

“So are you, when you choose. Has n’t he been good and patient, and don’t we all like to pet him when he ‘s clever, Fan?”‘ said Polly, whose heart was still aching for her brother, and ready for his sake to find virtues even in tormenting Tom.

“Yes; I don’t know the boy lately; but he ‘ll be as bad as ever when he ‘s well,” returned Fanny, who had n’t much faith in sick-bed repentances.

“Much you know about it,” growled Tom, lying down again, for he had sat bolt upright when Polly made the astounding declaration that he was like the well-beloved Jimmy. That simple little history had made a deep impression on Tom, and the tearful ending touched the tender spot that most boys hide so carefully. It is very pleasant to be loved and admired, very sweet to think we shall be missed and mourned when we die; and Tom was seized with a sudden desire to imitate this boy, who had n’t done anything wonderful, yet was so dear to his sister, that she cried for him a whole year after he was dead; so studious and clever, the people called him “a fine fellow”; and so anxious to be good, that he kept on trying, till he was better even than Polly, whom Tom privately considered a model of virtue, as girls go.

“I just wish I had a sister like you,” he broke out, all of a sudden.

“And I just wish I had a brother like Jim,” cried Fanny, for she felt the reproach in Tom’s words, and knew she deserved it.

“I should n’t think you ‘d envy anybody, for you ‘ve got one another,” said Polly, with such a wistful look, that it suddenly set Tom and Fanny to wondering why they did n’t have better times together, and enjoy themselves, as Polly and Jim did.

“Fan don’t care for anybody but herself,” said Tom.

“Tom is such a bear,” retorted Fanny.

“I would n’t say such things, for if anything should happen to either of you, the other one would feel so sorry. Every cross word I ever said to Jimmy comes back now, and makes me wish I had n’t.”

Two great tears rolled down Polly’s cheeks, and were quietly wiped away; but I think they watered that sweet sentiment, called fraternal love, which till now had been neglected in the hearts of this brother and sister. They did n’t say anything then, or make any plans, or confess any faults; but when they parted for the night, Fanny gave the wounded head a gentle pat (Tom never would have forgiven her if she had kissed him), and said, in a whisper, “I hope you ‘ll have a good sleep, Tommy, dear.”

And Tom nodded back at her, with a hearty “Same to you, Fan.”

That was all; but it meant a good deal, for the voices were kind, and the eyes met full of that affection which makes words of little consequence. Polly saw it; and though she did n’t know that she had made the sunshine, it shone back upon her so pleasantly, that she fell happily asleep, though her Jimmy was n’t there to say “good-night.”

CHAPTER V. SCRAPES

AFTER being unusually good, children are apt to turn short round and refresh themselves by acting like Sancho. For a week after Tom's mishap, the young folks were quite angelic, so much so that grandma said she was afraid "something was going to happen to them." The dear old lady need n't have felt anxious, for such excessive virtue does n't last long enough to lead to translation, except with little prigs in the goody story-books; and no sooner was Tom on his legs again, when the whole party went astray, and much tribulation was the consequence.

It all began with "Polly's stupidity," as Fan said afterward. Just as Polly ran down to meet Mr. Shaw one evening, and was helping him off with his coat, the bell rang, and a fine bouquet of hothouse flowers was left in Polly's hands, for she never could learn city ways, and opened the door herself.

"Hey! what's this? My little Polly is beginning early, after all," said Mr. Shaw, laughing, as he watched the girl's face dimple and flush, as she smelt the lovely nosegay, and glanced at a note half hidden in the heliotrope.

Now, if Polly had n't been "stupid," as Fan said, she would have had her wits about her, and let it pass; but, you see, Polly was an honest little soul and it never occurred to her that there was any need of concealment, so she answered in her straightforward way, "Oh, they ain't for me, sir; they are for Fan; from Mr. Frank, I guess. She 'll be so pleased."

"That puppy sends her things of this sort, does he?" And Mr. Shaw looked far from pleased as he pulled out the note, and coolly opened it.

Polly had her doubts about Fan's approval of that "sort of thing," but dared not say a word, and stood thinking how she used to show her father the funny valentines the boys sent her, and how they laughed over them together. But Mr. Shaw did not laugh when he had read the sentimental verses accompanying the bouquet, and his face quite scared Polly, as he asked, angrily, "How long has this nonsense been going on?"

"Indeed, sir, I don't know. Fan does n't mean any harm. I wish I had n't said anything!" stammered Polly, remembering the promise given to Fanny the day of the concert. She had forgotten all about it and had become accustomed to see the "big boys," as she called Mr. Frank and his friends, with the girls on all occasions. Now, it suddenly occurred to her that Mr. Shaw did n't like such amusements, and had forbidden Fan to indulge in them. "Oh, dear! how mad she will be. Well, I can't help it. Girls should n't have secrets from their fathers, then there would n't be any fuss," thought Polly, as she watched Mr. Shaw twist up the pink note and poke it back among the flowers which he took from her, saying, shortly, "Send Fanny to me in the library."

"Now you 've done it, you stupid thing!" cried Fanny, both angry and dismayed, when Polly delivered the message.

"Why, what else could I do?" asked Polly, much disturbed.

"Let him think the bouquet was for you; then there'd have been no trouble."

"But that would have been doing a lie, which is most as bad as telling one."

"Don't be a goose. You 've got me into a scrape, and you ought to help me out."

"I will if I can; but I won't tell lies for anybody!" cried Polly, getting excited.

"Nobody wants you to just hold, your tongue, and let me manage."

"Then I 'd better not go down," began Polly, when a stern voice from below called, like Bluebeard, "Are you coming down?"

"Yes, sir," answered a meek voice; and Fanny clutched Polly, whispering, "You must come; I 'm frightened out of my wits when he speaks like that. Stand by me, Polly; there 's a dear."

"I will," whispered "sister Ann"; and down they went with fluttering hearts.

Mr. Shaw stood on the rug, looking rather grim; the bouquet lay on the table, and beside it a note, directed to "Frank Moore, Esq.," in a very decided hand, with a fierce-looking flourish after the "Esq." Pointing to this impressive epistle, Mr. Shaw said, knitting his black eyebrows as he looked at Fanny, "I 'm going to put a stop to this nonsense at once; and if I see any more of it, I 'll send you to school in a Canadian convent."

This awful threat quite took Polly's breath away; but Fanny had heard it before, and having a temper of her own, said, pertly, "I 'm sure I have n't done anything so very dreadful. I can't help it if the boys send me philopena presents, as they do to the other girls."

"There was nothing about philopenas in the note. But that 's not the question. I forbid you to have anything to do with this Moore. He 's not a boy, but a fast fellow, and I won't have him about. You knew this, and yet disobeyed me."

"I hardly ever see him," began Fanny.

"Is that true?" asked Mr. Shaw, turning suddenly to Polly.

"Oh, please, sir, don't ask me. I promised I would n't that is Fanny will tell you," cried Polly, quite red with distress at the predicament she was in.

"No matter about your promise; tell me all you know of this absurd affair. It will do Fanny more good than harm." And Mr. Shaw sat down looking more amiable, for Polly's dismay touched him.

"May I?" she whispered to Fanny.

"I don't care," answered Fan, looking both angry and ashamed, as she stood sullenly tying knots in her handkerchief.

So Polly told, with much reluctance and much questioning, all she knew of the walks, the lunches, the meetings, and the notes. It was n't much, and evidently less serious than Mr. Shaw expected; for, as he listened, his eyebrows smoothed themselves out, and more than once his lips twitched as if he wanted to laugh, for after all, it was rather comical to see how the young people aped their elders, playing the new-fashioned game, quite unconscious of its real beauty, power, and sacredness.

"Oh, please, sir, don't blame Fan much, for she truly is n't half as silly as Trix and the other, girls. She would n't go sleigh-riding, though Mr. Frank teased, and she wanted to ever so much. She 's sorry, I know, and won't forget what you say any more, if you 'll forgive her this once," cried Polly, very earnestly, when the foolish little story was told.

"I don't see how I can help it, when you plead so well for her. Come here, Fan, and mind this one thing; drop all this nonsense, and attend to your books, or off you go; and Canada is no joke in winter time, let me tell you."

As he spoke, Mr. Shaw stroked his sulky daughter's cheek, hoping to see some sign of regret; but Fanny felt injured, and would n't show that she was sorry, so she only said, pettishly, "I suppose I can have my flowers, now the fuss is over."

"They are going straight back where they came from, with a line from me, which will keep that puppy from ever sending you any more." Ringing the bell, Mr. Shaw despatched the unfortunate posy, and then turned to Polly, saying, kindly but gravely, "Set this silly child of mine a good example and do your best for her, won't you?"

"Me? What can I do, sir?" asked Polly, looking ready, but quite ignorant how to begin.

"Make her as like yourself as possible, my dear; nothing would please me better. Now go, and let us hear no more of this folly."

They went without a word, and Mr. Shaw heard no more of the affair; but poor Polly did, for Fan scolded her, till Polly thought seriously of packing up and going home next day. I really have n't the heart to relate the dreadful lectures she got, the snubs she suffered, or the cold shoulders turned upon her for several days after this. Polly's heart was full, but she told no one, and bore her trouble silently, feeling her friend's ingratitude and injustice deeply.

Tom found out what the matter was, and sided with Polly, which proceeding led to scrape number two.

"Where 's Fan?" asked the young gentleman, strolling into his sister's room, where Polly lay on the sofa, trying to forget her troubles in an interesting book.

“Down stairs, seeing company.”

“Why did n’t you go, too?”

“I don’t like Trix, and I don’t know her fine New York friends.”

“Don’t want to, neither, why don’t you say?”

“Not polite.”

“Who cares? I say, Polly, come and have some fun.”

“I ‘d rather read.”

“That is n’t polite.”

Polly laughed, and turned a page. Tom whistled a minute, then sighed deeply, and put his hand to his forehead, which the black plaster still adorned.

“Does your head ache?” asked Polly.

“Awfully.”

“Better lie down, then.”

“Can’t; I ‘m fidgety, and want to be ‘amoosed’ as Pug says.”

“Just wait till I finish my chapter, and then I ‘ll come,” said pitiful Polly.

“All right,” returned the perjured boy, who had discovered that a broken head was sometimes more useful than a whole one, and exulting in his base stratagem, he roved about the room, till Fan’s bureau arrested him. It was covered with all sorts of finery, for she had dressed in a hurry, and left everything topsy-turvy. A well-conducted boy would have let things alone, or a moral brother would have put things to rights; being neither, Tom rummaged to his hearts content, till Fan’s drawers looked as if some one had been making hay in them. He tried the effect of ear-rings, ribbons, and collars; wound up the watch, though it was n’t time; burnt his inquisitive nose with smelling-salts; deluged his grimy handkerchief with Fan’s best cologne; anointed his curly crop with her hair-oil; powdered his face with her violet-powder; and finished off by pinning on a bunch of false ringlets, which Fanny tried, to keep a profound secret. The ravages committed by this bad boy are beyond the power of language to describe, as he revelled in the interesting drawers, boxes, and cases, which held his sister’s treasures.

When the curls had been put on, with much pricking of fingers, and a blue ribbon added, la Fan, he surveyed himself with satisfaction, and considered the effect so fine, that he was inspired to try a still greater metamorphosis. The dress Fan had taken off lay on a chair, and into it got Tom, chuckling with suppressed laughter, for Polly was absorbed, and the bed-curtains hid his iniquity. Fan’s best velvet jacket and hat, ermine muff, and a sofa-pillow for pannier, finished off the costume, and tripping along with elbows out, Tom appeared before the amazed Polly just as the chapter ended. She enjoyed the joke so heartily, that Tom forgot consequences, and proposed going down into the parlor to surprise, the girls.

“Goodness, no! Fanny never would forgive us if you showed her curls and things to those people. There are gentlemen among them, and it would n’t be proper,” said Polly, alarmed at the idea.

“All the more fun. Fan has n’t treated you well, and it will serve her right if you introduce me as your dear friend, Miss Shaw. Come on, it will be a jolly lark.”

“I would n’t for the world; it would be so mean. Take ‘em off, Tom, and I ‘ll play anything else you like.”

“I ain’t going to dress up for nothing; I look so lovely, someone must admire me. Take me down, Polly, and see if they don’t call me ‘a sweet creature.’“

Tom looked so unutterably ridiculous as he tossed his curls and pranced, that Polly went off into another gale of merriment; but even while she laughed, she resolved not to let him mortify his sister.

“Now, then, get out of the way if you won’t come; I ‘m going down,” said Tom.

“No, you ‘re not.”

“How will you help it, Miss Prim?”

“So.” And Polly locked the door, put the key in her pocket, and nodded at him defiantly.

Tom was a pepper-pot as to temper, and anything like opposition always had a bad effect. Forgetting his costume, he strode up to Polly, saying, with a threatening wag of the head, “None of that. I won’t stand it.”

“Promise not to plague Fan, and I ‘ll let you out.”

“Won’t promise anything. Give me that key, or I ‘ll make you.”

“Now, Tom, don’t be savage. I only want to keep you out of a scrape, for Fan will be raging if you go. Take off her things, and I ‘ll give up.”

Tom vouchsafed no reply, but marched to the other door, which was fast, as Polly knew, looked out of the three-story window, and finding no escape possible, came back with a wrathful face. “Will you give me that key?”

“No, I won’t,” said Polly, valiantly.

“I ‘m stronger than you are; so you ‘d better hand over.”

“I know you are; but it ‘s cowardly for a great boy like you to rob a girl.”

“I don’t want to hurt you; but, by George! I won’t stand this!”

Tom paused as Polly spoke, evidently ashamed of himself; but his temper was up, and he would n’t give in. If Polly had cried a little just here, he would have yielded; unfortunately she giggled, for Tom’s fierce attitude was such a funny contrast to his dress that she could n’t help it. That settled the matter. No girl that ever lived should giggle at him, much less lock him up like a small child. Without a word, he made a grab at Polly’s arm, for the hand holding the key was still in her, pocket. With her other hand she clutched her frock, and for a minute held on stoutly. But Tom's strong fingers were irresistible; rip went the pocket, out came the hand, and with a cry of pain from Polly, the key fell on the floor.

"It 's your own fault if you 're hurt. I did n't mean to," muttered Tom, as he hastily departed, leaving Polly to groan over her sprained wrist. He went down, but not into the parlor, for somehow the joke seemed to have lost its relish; so he made the girls in the kitchen laugh, and then crept up the back way, hoping to make it all right with Polly. But she had gone to grandma's room, for, though the old lady was out, it seemed a refuge. He had just time to get things in order, when Fanny came up, crosser than ever; for Trix had been telling her of all sorts of fun in which she might have had a share, if Polly had held her tongue.

"Where is she?" asked Fan, wishing to vent her vexation on her friend.

"Moping in her room, I suppose," replied Tom, who was discovered reading studiously.

Now, while this had been happening, Maud had been getting into hot water also; for when her maid left her, to see a friend below, Miss Maud paraded into Polly's room, and solaced herself with mischief. In an evil hour Polly had let her play boat in her big trunk, which stood empty. Since then Polly had stored some of her most private treasures in the upper tray, so that she might feel sure they were safe from all eyes. She had forgotten to lock the trunk, and when Maud raised the lid to begin her voyage, several objects of interest met her eyes. She was deep in her researches when Fan came in and looked over her shoulder, feeling too cross with Polly to chide Maud.

As Polly had no money for presents, she had exerted her ingenuity to devise all sorts of gifts, hoping by quantity to atone for any shortcomings in quality. Some of her attempts were successful, others were failures; but she kept them all, fine or funny, knowing the children at home would enjoy anything new. Some of Maud's cast-off toys had been neatly mended for Kitty; some of Fan's old ribbons and laces were converted into dolls' finery; and Tom's little figures, whittled out of wood in idle minutes, were laid away to show Will what could be done with a knife.

"What rubbish!" said Fanny.

"Queer girl, is n't she?" added Tom, who had followed to see what was going on.

"Don't you laugh at Polly's things. She makes nicer dolls than you, Fan; and she can wite and dwar ever so much better than Tom," cried Maud. "How do you know? I never saw her draw," said Tom.

"Here 's a book with lots of pictures in it. I can't wead the witing; but the pictures are so funny."

Eager to display her friend's accomplishments, Maud pulled out a fat little book, marked “Polly’s Journal,” and spread it in her lap.

“Only the pictures; no harm in taking a look at ‘em,” said Tom.

“Just one peep,” answered Fanny; and the next minute both were laughing at a droll sketch of Tom in the gutter, with the big dog howling over him, and the velocipede running away. Very rough and faulty, but so funny, that it was evident Polly’s sense of humor was strong. A few pages farther back came Fanny and Mr. Frank, caricatured; then grandma, carefully done; Tom reciting his battle-piece; Mr. Shaw and Polly in the park; Maud being borne away by Katy; and all the school-girls turned into ridicule with an unsparing hand.

“Sly little puss, to make fun of us behind our backs,” said Fan, rather nettled by Polly’s quiet retaliation for many slights from herself and friends.

“She does draw well,” said Tom, looking critically at the sketch of a boy with a pleasant face, round whom Polly had drawn rays like the sun, and under which was written, “My dear Jimmy.”

“You would n’t admire her, if you knew what she wrote here about you,” said Fanny, whose eyes had strayed to the written page opposite, and lingered there long enough to read something that excited her curiosity.

“What is it?” asked Tom, forgetting his honorable resolves for a minute.

“She says, ‘I try to like Tom, and when he is pleasant we do very well; but he don’t stay so long. He gets cross and rough, and disrespectful to his father and mother, and plagues us girls, and is so horrid I almost hate him. It ‘s very wrong, but I can’t help it.’ How do you like that?” asked Fanny.

“Go ahead, and see how she comes down on you, ma’am,” retorted Tom, who had read on a bit.

“Does she?” And Fanny continued, rapidly: “As for Fan, I don’t think we can be friends any more; for she told her father a lie, and won’t forgive me for not doing so too. I used to think her a very fine girl; but I don’t now. If she would be as she was when I first knew her, I should love her just the same; but she is n’t kind to me; and though she is always talking about politeness, I don’t think it is polite to treat company as she does me. She thinks I am odd and countrified, and I dare say I am; but I should n’t laugh at a girl’s clothes because she was poor, or keep her out of the way because she did n’t do just as other girls do here. I see her make fun of me, and I can’t feel as I did; and I ‘d go home, only it would seem ungrateful to Mr. Shaw and grandma, and I do love them dearly.”

“I say, Fan, you ‘ve got it now. Shut the book and come away,” cried Tom, enjoying this broadside immensely, but feeling guilty, as well he might.

“Just one bit more,” whispered Fanny, turning on a page or two, and stopping at a leaf that was blurred here and there as if tears had dropped on it.

“Sunday morning, early. Nobody is up to spoil my quiet time, and I must write my journal, for I ‘ve been so bad lately, I could n’t bear to do it. I ‘m glad my visit is most done, for things worry me here, and there is n’t any one to help me get right when I get wrong. I used to envy Fanny; but I don’t now, for her father and mother don’t take care of her as mine do of me. She is afraid of her father, and makes her mother do as she likes. I ‘m glad I came though, for I see money don’t give people everything; but I ‘d like a little all the same, for it is so comfortable to buy nice things. I read over my journal just now, and I ‘m afraid it ‘s not a good one; for I have said all sorts of things about the people here, and it is n’t kind. I should tear it out, only I promised to keep my diary, and I want to talk over things that puzzle me with mother. I see now that it is my fault a good deal; for I have n’t been half as patient, and pleasant as I ought to be. I will truly try for the rest of the time, and be as good and grateful as I can; for I want them to like me, though I ‘m only ‘an old-fashioned country girl.’“

That last sentence made Fanny shut the book, with a face full of self-reproach; for she had said those words herself, in a fit of petulance, and Polly had made no answer, though her eyes filled and her cheeks burned. Fan opened her lips to say something, but not a sound followed, for there stood Polly looking at them with an expression they had never seen before.

“What are you doing with my things?” she demanded, in a low tone, while her eyes kindled and her color changed.

“Maud showed us a book she found, and we were just looking at the pictures,” began Fanny, dropping it as if it burnt her fingers.

“And reading my journal, and laughing at my presents, and then putting the blame on Maud. It ‘s the meanest thing I ever saw; and I ‘ll never forgive you as long as I live!”

Polly said, this all in one indignant breath, and then as if afraid of saying too much, ran out of the room with such a look of mingled contempt, grief, and anger, that the three culprits stood dumb with shame. Tom had n’t even a whistle at his command; Maud was so scared at gentle Polly’s outbreak, that she sat as still as a mouse; while Fanny, conscience stricken, laid back the poor little presents with a respectful hand, for somehow the thought of Polly’s poverty came over her as it never had done before; and these odds and ends, so carefully treasured up for those at home, touched Fanny, and grew beautiful in her eyes. As she laid by the little book, the confessions in it reproached her more sharply that any words Polly could have spoken; for she had laughed at her friend, had slighted her sometimes, and been unforgiving for an innocent offence. That last page, where Polly took the blame on herself, and promised to “truly try” to be more kind and patient, went to Fanny’s heart, melting all the coldness away, and she could only lay her head on the trunk, sobbing, “It was n’t Polly’s fault; it was all mine."

Tom, still red with shame at being caught in such a scrape, left Fanny to her tears, and went manfully away to find the injured Polly, and confess his manifold transgressions. But Polly could n't be found. He searched high and low in every room, yet no sign of the girt appeared, and Tom began to get anxious. "She can't have run away home, can she?" he said to himself, as he paused before the hat-tree. There was the little round hat, and Tom gave it a remorseful smooth, remembering how many times he had tweaked it half off, or poked it over poor Polly's eyes. "Maybe she 's gone down to the office, to tell pa. 'T is n't a bit like her, though. Anyway, I 'll take a look round the corner."

Eager to get his boots, Tom pulled open the door of a dark closet under the stairs, and nearly tumbled over backward with surprise; for there, on the floor, with her head pillowed on a pair of rubbers, lay Polly in an attitude of despair. This mournful spectacle sent Tom's penitent speech straight out of his head, and with an astonished "Hullo!" he stood and stared in impressive silence. Polly was n't crying, and lay so still, that Tom began to think she might be in a fit or a faint, and bent anxiously down to inspect the pathetic bunch. A glimpse of wet eyelashes, a round cheek redder than usual, and lips parted by quick, breathing, relieved his mind upon that point; so, taking courage, he sat down on the boot-jack, and begged pardon like a man.

Now, Polly was very angry, and I think she had a right to be; but she was not resentful, and after the first flash was over, she soon began to feel better about it. It was n't easy to forgive; but, as she listened to Tom's honest voice, getting gruff with remorse now and then, she could n't harden her heart against him, or refuse to make up when he so frankly owned that it "was confounded mean to read her book that way." She liked his coming and begging pardon at once; it was a handsome thing to do; she appreciated it, and forgave him in her heart some time before she did with her lips; for, to tell the truth, Polly had a spice of girlish malice, and rather liked to see domineering Tom eat humble-pie, just enough to do him good, you know. She felt that atonement was proper, and considered it no more than just that Fan should drench a handkerchief or two with repentant tears, and that Tom should sit on a very uncomfortable seat and call himself hard names for five or ten minutes before she relented.

"Come, now, do say a word to a fellow. I 'm getting the worst of it, anyway; for there 's Fan, crying her eyes out upstairs, and here are you stowed away in a dark closet as dumb as a fish, and nobody but me to bring you both round. I 'd have cut over to the Smythes and got ma home to fix things, only it looked like backing out of the scrape; so I did n't," said Tom, as a last appeal.

Polly was glad to hear that Fan was crying. It would do her good; but she could n't help softening to Tom, who did seem in a predicament between two weeping damsels. A little smile began to dimple the cheek that was n't hidden, and then a hand came slowly out from under the curly head, and was stretched toward him silently. Tom was just going to give it a hearty shake, when he saw a red mark on the wrist, and knew what made it. His face changed, and he took the chubby hand so gently, that Polly peeped to see what it meant.

"Will you forgive that, too?" he asked, in a whisper, stroking the red wrist.

"Yes, it don't hurt much now." And Polly drew her hand away, sorry he had seen it.

"I was a beast, that 's what I was!" said Tom, in a tone of great disgust. And just at that awkward minute down tumbled his father's old beaver over his head and face, putting a comical quencher on his self-reproaches. Of course, neither could help laughing at that; and when he emerged, Polly was sitting up, looking as much better for her shower as he did for his momentary eclipse.

"Fan feels dreadfully. Will you kiss and be friends, if I trot her down?" asked Tom, remembering his fellow-sinner.

"I 'll go to her." And Polly whisked out of the closet as suddenly as she had whisked in, leaving Tom sitting on the boot-jack, with a radiant countenance.

How the girls made it up no one ever knew. But after much talking and crying, kissing and laughing, the breach was healed, and peace declared. A slight haze still lingered in the air after the storm, for Fanny was very humble and tender that evening; Tom a trifle pensive, but distressingly polite, and Polly magnanimously friendly to every one; for generous natures like to forgive, and Polly enjoyed the petting after the insult, like a very human girl.

As she was brushing her hair at bedtime there came a tap on her door and, opening it, she beheld nothing but a tall black bottle, with a strip of red flannel tied round it like a cravat, and a cocked-hat note on the cork. Inside were these lines, written in a sprawling hand with very black ink:

DEAR POLLY, Opydilldock is first-rate for sprains. You put a lot on the flannel and do up your wrist, and I guess it will be all right in the morning. Will you come a sleigh-ride tomorrow? I 'm awful sorry I hurt you.

TOM

CHAPTER VI. GRANDMA

“WHERE ‘S Polly?” asked Fan one snowy afternoon, as she came into the dining-room where Tom was reposing on the sofa with his boots in the air, absorbed in one of those delightful books in which boys are cast away on desert islands, where every known fruit, vegetable and flower is in its prime all the year round; or, lost in boundless forests, where the young heroes have thrilling adventures, kill impossible beasts, and, when the author’s invention gives out, suddenly find their way home, laden with tiger skins, tame buffaloes and other pleasing trophies of their prowess.

“Dun no,” was Tom’s brief reply, for he was just escaping from an alligator of the largest size.

“Do put down that stupid book, and let ‘s do something,” said Fanny, after a listless stroll round the room.

“Hi, they ‘ve got him!” was the only answer vouchsafed by the absorbed reader.

“Where ‘s Polly?” asked Maud, joining the party with her hands full of paper dolls all suffering for ball-dresses.

“Do get along, and don’t bother me,” cried Tom exasperated at the interruption.

“Then tell us where she is. I ‘m sure you know, for she was down here a little while ago,” said Fanny.

“Up in grandma’s room, maybe.”

“Provoking thing! you knew it all the time, and did n’t tell, just to plague us,” scolded Maud.

But Tom was now under water stabbing his alligator, and took no notice of the indignant departure of the young ladies.

“Polly ‘s always poking up in grandma’s room. I don’t see what fun there is in it,” said Fanny as they went up stairs.

“Polly ‘s a verwy queer girl, and gwandma pets her a gweat deal more than she does me,” observed Maud, with an injured air.

“Let ‘s peek and see what they are doing,” whispered Fan, pausing at the half-open door.

Grandma was sitting before a quaint old cabinet, the doors of which stood wide open, showing glimpses of the faded relics treasured there. On a stool, at the old lady’s feet, sat Polly, looking up with intent face and eager eyes, quite absorbed in the history of a high-heeled brocade shoe which lay in her lap.

"Well, my dear," grandma was saying, "she had it on the very day that Uncle Joe came in as she sat at work, and said, 'Dolly, we must be married at once.' 'Very well, Joe,' says Aunt Dolly, and down she went to the parlor, where the minister was waiting, never stopping to change the dimity dress she wore, and was actually married with her scissors and pin-ball at her side, and her thimble on. That was in war times, 1812, my dear, and Uncle Joe was in the army, so he had to go, and he took that very little pin-ball with him. Here it is with the mark of a bullet through it, for he always said his Dolly's cushion saved his life."

"How interesting that is!" cried Polly, as she examined the faded cushion with the hole in it.

"Why, grandma, you never told me that story," said Fanny, hurrying in, finding the prospect was a pleasant one for a stormy afternoon.

"You never asked me to tell you anything, my dear, so I kept my old stories to myself," answered grandma, quietly.

"Tell some now, please. May we stay and see the funny things?" said Fan and Maud, eyeing the open cabinet with interest.

"If Polly likes; she is my company, and I am trying to entertain her, for I love to have her come," said grandma, with her old-time politeness.

"Oh, yes! do let them stay and hear the stories. I 've often told them what good times we have up here, and teased them to come, but they think it 's too quiet. Now, sit down, girls, and let grandma go on. You see I pick out something in the cabinet that looks interesting, and then she tells me about it," said Polly, eager to include the girls in her pleasures, and glad to get them interested in grandma's reminiscences, for Polly knew how happy it made the lonely old lady to live over her past, and to have the children round her.

"Here are three drawers that have not been opened yet; each take one, and choose something from it for me to tell about," said Madam, quite excited at the unusual interest in her treasures.

So the girls each opened a drawer and turned over the contents till they found something they wanted to know about. Maud was ready first, and holding up an oddly shaped linen bag, with a big blue F embroidered on it, demanded her story. Grandma smiled as she smoothed the old thing tenderly, and began her story with evident pleasure.

"My sister Nelly and I went to visit an aunt of ours, when we were little girls, but we did n't have a very good time, for she was extremely strict. One afternoon, when she had gone out to tea, and old Debby, the maid, was asleep in her room, we sat on the doorstep, feeling homesick, and ready for any thing to amuse us.

"'What shall we do?' said Nelly.

“Just as she spoke, a ripe plum dropped bounce on the grass before us, as if answering her question. It was all the plum’s fault, for if it had n’t fallen at that minute, I never should have had the thought which popped into my mischievous mind.

“‘Let ‘s have as many as we want, and plague Aunt Betsey, to pay her for being so cross,’ I said, giving Nelly half the great purple plum.

“‘It would be dreadful naughty,’ began Nelly, ‘but I guess we will,’ she added, as the sweet mouthful slipped down her throat.

“‘Debby ‘s asleep. Come on, then, and help me shake,’ I said, getting up, eager for the fun.

“We shook and shook till we got red in the face, but not one dropped, for the tree was large, and our little arms were not strong enough to stir the boughs. Then we threw stones, but only one green and one half-ripe one came down, and my last stone broke the shed window, so there was an end of that.

“‘It ‘s as provoking as Aunt Betsey herself,’ said Nelly, as we sat down, out of breath.

“‘I wish the wind would come and blow ‘em down for us,’ panted I, staring up at the plums with longing eyes.

“‘If wishing would do any good, I should wish ‘em in my lap at once,’ added Nelly.

“‘You might as well wish ‘em in your mouth and done with it, if you are too lazy to pick ‘em up. If the ladder was n’t too heavy we could try that,’ said I, determined to have them.

“‘You know we can’t stir it, so what is the use of talking about it? You proposed getting the plums, now let ‘s see you do it,’ answered Nelly, rather crossly, for she had bitten the green plum, and it puckered her mouth.

“‘Wait a minute, and you will see me do it,’ cried I, as a new thought came into my naughty head.

“‘What are you taking your shoes and socks off for? You can’t climb the tree, Fan.’“ ‘Don’t ask questions, but be ready to pick ‘em up when they fall, Miss Lazybones.’ “With this mysterious speech I pattered into the house bare-footed and full of my plan. Up stairs I went to a window opening on the shed roof. Out I got, and creeping carefully along till I came near the tree, I stood up, and suddenly crowed like the little rooster. Nelly looked up, and stared, and laughed, and clapped her hands when she saw what I was going to do.

“‘I ‘m afraid you ‘ll slip and get hurt.’“ ‘Don’t care if I do; I ‘ll have those plums if I break my neck doing it,’ and half sliding, half walking I went down the sloping roof, till the boughs of the tree were within my reach.

“Hurrah!” cried Nelly, dancing down below, as my first shake sent a dozen plums rattling round her.

"'Hurrah!" cried I, letting go one branch and trying to reach another. But as I did so my foot slipped, I tried to catch something to hold by, but found nothing, and with a cry, down I fell, like a very big plum on the grass below.

"Fortunately the shed was low, the grass was thick and the tree broke my fall, but I got a bad bump and a terrible shaking. Nelly thought I was killed, and began to cry with her mouth full. But I picked myself up in a minute, for I was used to such tumbles; and did n't mind the pain half as much as the loss of the plums.

"'Hush! Debby will hear and spoil all the fun. I said I 'd get 'em and I have. See what lots have come down with me.'" So there had, for my fall shook the tree almost as much as it did me, and the green and purple fruit lay all about us.

"By the time the bump on my forehead had swelled as big as a nut, our aprons were half full, and we sat down to enjoy ourselves. But we did n't. O dear, no! for many of the plums were not ripe, some were hurt by the birds, some crushed in falling, and many as hard as stones. Nelly got stung by a wasp, my head began to ache, and we sat looking at one another rather dismally, when Nelly had a bright idea.

"'Let 's cook 'em, then they 'll be good, and we can put some away in our little pails for to-morrow.'" 'That will be splendid! There 's a fire in the kitchen, Debby always leaves the kettle on, and we can use her saucepan, and I know where the sugar is, and we 'll have a grand time.' "In we went, and fell to work very quietly. It was a large, open fire-place, with the coals nicely covered up, and the big kettle simmering on the hook. We raked open the fire, put on the saucepan, and in it the best of our plums, with water enough to spoil them. But we did n't know that, and felt very important as we sat waiting for it to boil, each armed with a big spoon, while the sugar box stood between us ready to be used.

"How slow they were, to be sure! I never knew such obstinate things, for they would n't soften, though they danced about in the boiling water, and bobbed against the cover as if they were doing their best.

"The sun began to get low, we were afraid Debby would come down, and still those dreadful plums would n't look like sauce. At last they began to burst, the water got a lovely purple, we put lots of sugar in, and kept tasting till our aprons and faces were red, and our lips burnt with the hot spoons.

"'There 's too much juice,' said Nelly, shaking her head wisely. 'It ought to be thick and nice like mamma's.' "'I 'll pour off some of the juice, and we can drink it,' said I, feeling that I 'd made a mistake in my cooking.

"So Nelly got a bowl, and I got a towel and lifted the big saucepan carefully off. It was heavy and hot, and I was a little afraid of it, but did n't like to say so.

Just as I began to pour, Debby suddenly called from the top of the stairs, 'Children, what under the sun are you doing?' It startled us both. Nelly dropped the bowl and ran. I dropped the saucepan and did n't run, for a part of the hot juice splashed upon my bare feet, and ankles, and made me scream with dreadful pain.

"Down rushed Debby to find me dancing about the kitchen with a great bump on my forehead, a big spoon in my hand, and a pair of bright purple feet. The plums were lying all over the hearth, the saucepan in the middle of the room, the basin was broken, and the sugar swimming about as if the bowl had turned itself over trying to sweeten our mess for us.

"Debby was very good to me, for she never stopped to scold, but laid me down on the old sofa, and bound up my poor little feet with oil and cotton wool. Nelly, seeing me lie white and weak, thought I was dying, and went over to the neighbor's for Aunt Betsey, and burst in upon the old ladies sitting primly at, their tea, crying, distractedly, 'Oh, Aunt Betsey, come quick! for the saucepan fell off the shed, and Fan's feet are all boiled purple!' Nobody laughed at this funny message, and Aunt Betsey ran all the way home with a muffin in her hand and her ball in her pocket, though the knitting was left behind.

"I suffered a great deal, but I was n't sorry afterward, for I learned to love Aunt Betsey, who nursed me tenderly, and seemed to forget her strict ways in her anxiety for me.

"This bag was made for my special comfort, and hung on the sofa where I lay all those weary days. Aunt kept it full of pretty patchwork or, what I liked better, ginger-nuts, and peppermint drops, to amuse me, though she did n't approve of cosseting children up, any more than I do now."

"I like that vewy well, and I wish I could have been there," was Maud's condescending remark, as she put back the little bag, after a careful peep inside, as if she hoped to find an ancient ginger-nut, or a well-preserved peppermint drop still lingering in some corner.

"We had plums enough that autumn, but did n't seem to care much about them, after all, for our prank became a household joke, and, for years, we never saw the fruit, but Nelly would look at me with a funny face, and whisper, 'Purple stockings, Fan!'"

"Thank you, ma'am," said Polly. "Now, Fan, your turn next."

"Well, I 've a bundle of old letters, and I 'd like to know if there is any story about them," answered Fanny, hoping some romance might be forthcoming.

Grandma turned over the little packet tied up with a faded pink ribbon; a dozen yellow notes written on rough, thick paper, with red wafers still adhering to the folds, showing plainly that they were written before the day of initial notepaper and self-sealing envelopes.

"They are not love-letters, deary, but notes from my mates after I left Miss Cotton's boarding-school. I don't think there is any story about them," and grandma turned them over with spectacles before the dim eyes, so young and bright when they first read the very same notes.

Fanny was about to say, "I 'll choose again," when grandma began to laugh so heartily that the girls felt sure she had caught some merry old memory which would amuse them.

"Bless my heart, I have n't thought of that frolic this forty years. Poor, dear, giddy Sally Pomroy, and she 's a great-grandmother now!" cried the old lady, after reading one of the notes, and clearing the mist off her glasses.

"Now, please tell about her; I know it 's something funny to make you laugh so," said Polly and Fan together.

"Well, it was droll, and I 'm glad I remembered it for it 's just the story to tell you young things.

"It was years ago," began grandma, briskly, "and teachers were very much stricter than they are now. The girls at Miss Cotton's were not allowed lights in their rooms after nine o'clock, never went out alone, and were expected to behave like models of propriety from morning till night.

"As you may imagine, ten young girls, full of spirits and fun, found these rules hard to keep, and made up for good behavior in public by all sorts of frolics in private.

"Miss Cotton and her brother sat in the back parlor after school was over, and the young ladies were sent to bed. Mr. John was very deaf, and Miss Priscilla very near-sighted, two convenient afflictions for the girls on some occasions, but once they proved quite the reverse, as you shall hear.

"We had been very prim for a week, and our bottled up spirits could no longer be contained; so we planed a revel after our own hearts, and set our wits to work to execute it.

"The first obstacle was surmounted in this way. As none of us could get out alone, we resolved to lower Sally from the window, for she was light and small, and very smart.

"With our combined pocket-money she was to buy nuts and candy, cake and fruit, pie, and a candle, so that we might have a light, after Betsey took ours away as usual. We were to darken the window of the inner chamber, set a watch in the little entry, light up, and then for a good time.

"At eight o'clock on the appointed evening, several of us professed great weariness, and went to our room, leaving the rest sewing virtuously with Miss Cotton, who read Hannah More's Sacred Dramas aloud, in a way that fitted the listeners for bed as well as a dose of opium would have done.

"I am sorry to say I was one of the ringleaders; and as soon as we got up stairs, produced the rope provided for the purpose, and invited Sally to be lowered. It was an old-fashioned house, sloping down behind, and the closet window chosen by us was not many feet from the ground.

"It was a summer evening, so that at eight o'clock it was still light; but we were not afraid of being seen, for the street was a lonely one, and our only neighbors two old ladies, who put down their curtains at sunset, and never looked out till morning.

"Sally had been bribed by promises of as many 'goodies' as she could eat, and being a regular madcap, she was ready for anything.

"Tying the rope round her waist she crept out, and we let her safely down, sent a big basket after her, and saw her slip round the corner in my big sun bonnet and another girl's shawl, so that she should not be recognized.

"Then we put our night-gowns over our dresses, and were laid peacefully in bed when Betsey came up, earlier than usual; for it was evident that Miss Cotton felt a little suspicious at our sudden weariness.

"For half an hour we lay laughing and whispering, as we waited for the signal from Sally. At last we heard a cricket chirp shrilly under the window, and flying up, saw a little figure below in the twilight.

"'O, quick! quick!' cried Sally, panting with haste. 'Draw up the basket and then get me in, for I saw Mr. Cotton in the market, and ran all the way home, so that I might get in before he came.' Up came the heavy basket, bumping and scraping on the way, and smelling, O, so nice! Down went the rope, and with a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, we hoisted poor Sally half-way up to the window, when, sad to tell, the rope slipped and down she fell, only being saved from broken bones by the hay-cock under the window.

"'He 's coming! he 's coming! O pull me up, for mercy sake!' cried Sally, scrambling to her feet unhurt, but a good deal shaken.

"We saw a dark figure approaching, and dragged her in with more bumping and scraping, and embraced her with rapture, for we had just escaped being detected by Mr. John, whose eyes were as sharp as his ears were dull.

"We heard the front-door shut, then a murmur of voices, and then Betsey's heavy step coming up stairs.

"Under the bed went the basket, and into the beds went the conspirators, and nothing could have been more decorous than the appearance of the room when Betsey popped her head in.

"'Master's an old fidget to send me travelling up again, just because he fancied he saw something amiss at the window. Nothing but a curtain flapping, or a shadder, for the poor dears is sleeping like lambs.’ We heard her say this to herself, and a general titter agitated the white coverlets as she departed.

“Sally was in high feather at the success of her exploit, and danced about like an elf, as she put her night-gown on over her frock, braided her hair in funny little tails all over her head, and fastened the great red pin-cushion on her bosom for a breast-pin in honor of the feast.

“The other girls went to their rooms as agreed upon, and all was soon dark and still up stairs, while Miss Cotton began to enjoy herself below, as she always did when ‘her young charges’ were safely disposed of.

“Then ghosts began to walk, and the mice scuttled back to their holes in alarm, for white figures glided from room to room, till all were assembled in the little chamber.

“The watch was set at the entry door, the signal agreed upon, the candle lighted, and the feast spread forth upon a newspaper on the bed, with the coverlet arranged so that it could be whisked over the refreshments at a moment’s notice.

“How good everything was, to be sure! I don’t think I ‘ve eaten any pies since that had such a delicious flavor as those broken ones, eaten hastily, in that little oven of a room, with Sally making jokes and the others enjoying stolen sweets with true girlish relish. Of course it was very wicked, but I must tell the truth.

“We were just beginning on the cake when the loud scratching of a rat disturbed us.

“‘The signal! fly! run! hide! Hush, don’t laugh!’ cried several voices, and we scuttled into bed as rapidly and noiselessly as possible, with our mouths and hands full.

“A long pause, broken by more scratching; but as no one came, we decided on sending to inquire what it meant. I went and found Mary, the picket guard half asleep, and longing for her share of the feast.

“‘It was a real rat; I ‘ve not made a sound. Do go and finish; I ‘m tired of this,’ said Mary, slapping away at the mosquitoes.

“Back I hurried with the good news. Every one flew up, briskly. We lighted the candle again, and returned to our revel. The refreshments were somewhat injured by Sally’s bouncing in among them, bit we did n’t care, and soon finished the cake.

“‘Now let ‘s have the nuts,’ I said, groping for the paper bag.

“‘They are almonds and peanuts, so we can crack them with our teeth. Be sure you get the bag by the right end,’ said Sally.

“‘I know what I ‘m about,’ and to show her that it was all right, I gave the bag a little shake, when out flew the nuts, rattling like a hail-storm all over the uncarpeted floor.

"'Now you 've done it,' cried Sally, as Mary scratched like a mad rat, and a door creaked below, for Miss Cotton was not deaf.

"Such a flurry as we were in! Out went the candle, and each one rushed away with as much of the feast as she could seize in her haste. Sally dived into her bed, recklessly demolishing the last pie, and scattering the candy far and wide.

"Poor Mary was nearly caught for Miss Cotton was quicker than Betsey, and our guard had to run for her life.

"Our room was the first, and was in good order, though the two flushed faces on the pillows were rather suspicious. Miss Cotton stood staring about her, looking so funny, without her cap, that my bedfellow would have gone off in a fit of laughter, if I had not pinched her warningly.

"'Young ladies, what is this unseemly noise?' No answer from us but a faint snore. Miss Cotton marched into the next room, put the same question and received the same reply.

"In the third chamber lay Sally, and we trembled as the old lady went in. Sitting up, we peeped and listened breathlessly.

"'Sarah, I command you to tell me what this all means?' But Sally only sighed in her sleep, and muttered, wickedly, 'Ma, take me home. I 'm starved at Cotton's.' 'Mercy on me! is the child going to have a fever?' cried the old lady, who did not observe the tell tale nuts at her feet.

"'So dull, so strict! O take me home!' moaned Sally, tossing her arms and gurgling, like a naughty little gypsy.

"That last bit of acting upset the whole concern, for as she tossed her arms she showed the big red cushion on her breast. Near-sighted as she was, that ridiculous object could not escape Miss Cotton, neither did the orange that rolled out from the pillow, nor the boots appearing at the foot of the bed.

"With sudden energy the old lady plucked off the cover, and there lay Sally with her hair dressed, la Topsy, her absurd breast-pin and her dusty boots, among papers of candy, bits of pie and cake, oranges and apples, and a candle upside down burning a hole in the sheet.

"At the sound of Miss Cotton's horrified exclamation Sally woke up, and began laughing so merrily that none of us could resist following her example, and the rooms rang with merriment far many minutes. I really don't know when we should have stopped if Sally had not got choked with the nut she had in her mouth, and so frightened us nearly out of our wits."

"What became of the things, and how were you punished?" asked Fan, in the middle of her laughter.

"The remains of the feast went to the pig, and we were kept on bread and water for three days."

“Did that cure you?”

“Oh, dear, no! we had half a dozen other frolics that very summer; and although I cannot help laughing at the remembrance of this, you must not think, child, that I approve of such conduct, or excuse it. No, no, my dear, far from it.”

“I call that a tip-top story! Drive on, grandma, and tell one about boys,” broke in a new voice, and there was Tom astride of a chair listening and laughing with all his might, for his book had come to an end, and he had joined the party unobserved.

“Wait for your turn, Tommy. Now, Polly, dear, what will you have?” said grandma, looking, so lively and happy, that it was very evident “reminiscing” did her good.

“Let mine come last, and tell one for Tom next,” said Polly, looking round, and beckoning him nearer.

He came and sat himself cross-legged on the floor, before the lower drawer of the cabinet, which grandma opened for him, saying, with a benign stroke of the curly head, “There, dear, that ‘s where I keep the little memorials of my brother Jack. Poor lad, he was lost at sea, you know. Well, choose anything you like, and I ‘ll try to remember a story about it.”

Tom made a rapid rummage, and fished up a little broken pistol.

“There, that ‘s the chap for me! Wish it was n’t spoilt, then we ‘d have fun popping away at the cats in the yard. Now, then, grandma.”

“I remember one of Jack’s pranks, when that was used with great effect,” said grandma, after a thoughtful pause, during which Tom teased the girls by snapping the lock of the pistol in their faces.

“Once upon a time,” continued Madam, much flattered by the row of interested faces before her, “my father went away on business, leaving mother, aunt, and us girls to Jack’s care. Very proud he was, to be sure, of the responsibility, and the first thing he did was to load that pistol and keep it by his bed, in our great worriment, for we feared he ‘d kill himself with it. For a week all went well; then we were startled by the news that robbers were about. All sorts of stories flew through the town (we were living in the country then); some said that certain houses were marked with a black cross, and those were always robbed; others, that there was a boy in the gang, for windows, so small that they were considered safe, were entered by some little rogue. At one place the thieves had a supper, and left ham and cake in the front yard. Mrs. Jones found Mrs. Smith’s shawl in her orchard, with a hammer and an unknown teapot near it. One man reported that some one tapped at his window, in the night, saying, softly, ‘Is anyone here?’ and when he looked out, two men were seen to run down the road.

“We lived just out of town, in a lonely place; the house was old, with convenient little back windows, and five outside doors. Jack was the only man about the place, and he was barely thirteen. Mother and aunt were very timid, and the children weren’t old enough to be of any use, so Jack and I were the home-guard, and vowed to defend the family manfully.”

“Good for you! Hope the fellows came!” cried Tom, charmed with this opening.

“One day, an ill-looking man came in and asked for food,” continued grandma, with a mysterious nod; “and while he ate, I saw him glance sharply about from the wooden buttons on the back-doors, to the silver urn and tankards on the dining-room sideboard. A strong suspicion took possession of me, and I watched him as a cat does a mouse.

“‘He came to examine the premises, I ‘m sure of it, but we will be ready for him,’ I said, fiercely, as I told the family about him.

“This fancy haunted us all, and our preparations were very funny. Mother borrowed a rattle, and kept it under her pillow. Aunt took a big bell to bed with her; the children had little Tip, the terrier, to sleep in their room; while Jack and I mounted guard, he with the pistol, and I with a hatchet, for I did n’t like fire-arms. Biddy, who slept in the attic, practised getting out on the shed roof, so that she might run away at the first alarm. Every night we arranged pit-falls for the robbers, and all filed up to bed, bearing plate, money, weapons, and things to barricade with, as if we lived in war times.

“We waited a week and no one came, so we began to feel rather slighted, for other people got ‘a scare,’ as Tom says, and after all our preparations we really felt a trifle disappointed that we had had no chance to show our courage. At last a black mark was found upon our door, and a great panic ensued, for we felt that now our time had come.

“That night we put a tub of water at the bottom of the back-stairs, and a pile of tin pans at the top of the front stairs, so that any attempt to come up would produce a splash or a rattle. Bells were hung on door handles, sticks of wood piled up in dark corners for robbers to fall over, and the family retired, all armed and all provided with lamps and matches.

“Jack and I left our doors open, and kept asking one another if we did n’t hear something, till he fell asleep. I was wakeful and lay listening to the crickets till the clock struck twelve; then I got drowsy, and was just dropping off when the sound of steps outside woke me up staring wide awake. Creeping to the window I was in time to see by the dim moonlight a shadow glide round the corner and disappear. A queer little thrill went over me, but I resolved to keep quiet till I was sure something was wrong, for I had given so many false alarms, I did n’t want Jack to laugh at me again. Popping my head out of the door, I listened, and presently heard a scraping sound near the shed.

"'There they are; but I won't rouse the house till the bell rings or the pans fall. The rogues can't go far without a clatter of some sort, and if we could only catch one of them we should get the reward and a deal of glory,' I said to myself, grasping my hatchet firmly.

"A door closed softly below, and a step came creeping towards the back-stairs. Sure now of my prey, I was just about to scream 'Jack!' when something went splash into the tub at the foot of the back-stairs.

"In a minute every one was awake and up, for Jack fired his pistol before he was half out of bed, and roared 'Fire!' so loud it roused the house. Mother sprung her rattle, aunt rang her bell, Jip barked like mad, and we all screamed, while from below came up a regular Irish howl.

"Some one brought a lamp, and we peeped anxiously down, to see our own stupid Biddy sitting in the tub wringing her hands and wailing dismally.

"'Och, murther, and it 's kilt I am! The saints be about us! how iver did I come forninst this say iv wather, just crapin in quiet afther a bit iv sthroll wid Mike Mahoney, me own b'y, that 's to marry me intirely, come Saint Patrick's day nixt.' We laughed so we could hardly fish the poor thing up, or listen while she explained that she had slipped out of her window for a word with Mike, and found it fastened when she wanted to come back, so she had sat on the roof, trying to discover the cause of this mysterious barring out, till she was tired, when she prowled round the house till she found a cellar window unfastened, after all our care, and got in quite cleverly, she thought; but the tub was a new arrangement which she knew nothing about; and when she fell into the 'say,' she was bewildered and could only howl.

"This was not all the damage either, for aunt fainted with the fright, mother cut her hand with a broken lamp, the children took cold hopping about on the wet stairs, Jip barked himself sick, I sprained my ankle, and Jack not only smashed a looking-glass with his bullets, but spoilt his pistol by the heavy charge put in it. After the damages were repaired and the flurry was well over, Jack confessed that he had marked the door for fun, and shut Biddy out as a punishment for 'gallivanting,' of which he did n't approve. Such a rogue as that boy was!'"

"But did n't the robbers ever come?" cried Tom, enjoying the joke, but feeling defrauded of the fight.

"Never, my dear; but we had our 'scare,' and tested our courage, and that was a great satisfaction, of course," answered grandma, placidly.

"Well, I think you were the bravest of the lot. I 'd like to have seen you flourishing round there with your hatchet," added Tom, admiringly, and the old lady looked as much pleased with the compliment as if she had been a girl.

“I choose this,” said Polly, holding up a long white kid glove, shrunken and yellow with time, but looking as if it had a history.

“Ah, that now has a story worth telling!” cried grandma; adding, proudly, “Treat that old glove respectfully, my children, for Lafayette’s honored hand has touched it.”

“Oh, grandma, did you wear it? Did you see him? Do tell us all about it, and that will be the best of the whole,” cried Polly, who loved history, and knew a good deal about the gallant Frenchman and his brave life.

Grandma loved to tell this story, and always assumed her most imposing air to do honor to her theme. Drawing herself up, therefore, she folded her hands, and after two or three little “hems,” began with an absent look, as if her eyes beheld a far-away time, which brightened as she gazed.

“The first visit of Lafayette was before my time, of course, but I heard so much about it from my grandfather that I really felt as if I ‘d seen it all. Our Aunt Hancock lived in the Governor’s house, on Beacon Hill, at that time.” Here the old lady bridled up still more, for she was very proud of “our aunt.” “Ah, my dears, those were the good old times!” she continued, with a sigh. “Such dinners and tea parties, such damask table cloths and fine plate, such solid, handsome furniture and elegant carriages; aunt’s was lined with red silk velvet, and when the coach was taken away from her at the Governor’s death, she just ripped out the lining, and we girls had spencers made of it. Dear heart, how well I remember playing in aunt’s great garden, and chasing Jack up and down those winding stairs; and my blessed father, in his plum-colored coat and knee buckles, and the queue I used to tie up for him every day, handing aunt in to dinner, looking so dignified and splendid.”

Grandma seemed to forget her story for a minute, and become a little girl again, among the playmates dead and gone so many years. Polly motioned the others to be quiet, and no one spoke till the old lady, with a long sigh, came back to the present, and went on.

“Well, as I was saying, the Governor wanted to give a breakfast to the French officers, and Madam, who was a hospitable soul, got up a splendid one for them. But by some mistake, or accident, it was discovered at the last minute that there was no milk.

“A great deal was needed, and very little could be bought or borrowed, so despair fell upon the cooks and maids, and the great breakfast would have been a failure, if Madam, with the presence of mind of her sex, had not suddenly bethought herself of the cows feeding on the Common.

“To be sure, they belonged to her neighbors, and there was no time to ask leave, but it was a national affair; our allies must be fed; and feeling sure that her patriotic friends would gladly lay their cows on the altar of their country, Madam Hancock covered herself with glory, by calmly issuing the command, ‘Milk ‘em!’ It was done, to the great astonishment of the cows, and the entire satisfaction of the guests, among whom was Lafayette.

“This milking feat was such a good joke, that no one seems to have remembered much about the great man, though one of his officers, a count, signalized himself by getting very tipsy, and going to bed with his boots and spurs on, which caused the destruction of aunt’s best yellow damask coverlet, for the restless sleeper kicked it into rags by morning.

“Aunt valued it very much, even in its tattered condition, and kept it a long while, as a memorial of her distinguished guests.

“The time when I saw Lafayette was in 1825, and there were no tipsy counts then. Uncle Hancock (a sweet man, my dears, though some call him mean now-a-days) was dead, and aunt had married Captain Scott.

“It was not at all the thing for her to do; however, that ‘s neither here nor there. She was living in Federal Street at the time, a most aristocratic street then, children, and we lived close by.

“Old Josiah Quincy was mayor of the city, and he sent aunt word that the Marquis Lafayette wished to pay his respects to her.

“Of course she was delighted, and we all flew about to make ready for him. Aunt was an old lady, but she made a grand toilet, and was as anxious to look well as any girl.”

“What did she wear?” asked Fan, with interest.

“She wore a steel-colored satin, trimmed with black lace, and on her cap was pinned a Lafayette badge of white satin.

“I never shall forget how b-e-a-utifully she looked as she sat in state on the front parlor sophy, right under a great portrait of her first husband; and on either side of her sat Madam Storer and Madam Williams, elegant to behold, in their stiff silks, rich lace, and stately turbans. We don’t see such splendid old ladies now-a-days.”

“I think we do sometimes,” said Polly, slyly.

Grandma shook her head, but it pleased her very much to be admired, for she had been a beauty in her day.

“We girls had dressed the house with flowers; old Mr. Coolidge sent in a clothes-basket full. Joe Joy provided the badges, and aunt got out some of the Revolutionary wine from the old Beacon Street cellar.

“I wore my green and white palmyrine, my hair bowed high, the beautiful leg-o’-mutton sleeves that were so becoming, and these very gloves.

“Well, by-and-by the General, escorted by the Mayor, drove up. Dear me, I see him now! a little old man in nankeen trousers and vest, a long blue coat and ruffled shirt, leaning on his cane, for he was lame, and smiling and bowing like a true Frenchman.

"As he approached, the three old ladies rose, and courtesied with the utmost dignity. Lafayette bowed first to the Governor's picture, then to the Governor's widow, and kissed her hand.

"That was droll; for on the back of her glove was stamped Lafayette's likeness, and the gallant old gentleman kissed his own face.

"Then some of the young ladies were presented, and, as if to escape any further self-salutations, the marquis kissed the pretty girls on the cheek.

"Yes, my dears, here is just the spot where the dear old man saluted me. I 'm quite as proud of it now as I was then, for he was a brave, good man, and helped us in our trouble.

"He did not stay long, but we were very merry, drinking his health, receiving his compliments, and enjoying the honor he did us.

"Down in the street there was a crowd, of course, and when he left they wanted to take out the horses and drag him home in triumph. But he did n't wish it; and while that affair was being arranged, we girls had been pelting him with the flowers which we tore from the vases, the walls, and our own topknots, to scatter over him.

"He liked that, and laughed, and waved his hand to us, while we ran, and pelted, and begged him to come again.

"We young folks quite lost our heads that night, and I have n't a very clear idea of how I got home. The last thing I remember was hanging out of the window with a flock of girls, watching the carriage roll away, while the crowd cheered as if they were mad.

"Bless my heart, it seems as if I heard 'em now! 'Hurrah for Lafayette and Mayor Quincy! Hurrah for Madam Hancock and the pretty girls! Hurrah for Col. May!' 'Three cheers for Boston! Now, then! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!'"

And here the old lady stopped, out of breath, with her cap askew, her spectacles on the end of her nose, and her knitting much the worse for being waved enthusiastically in the air, while she hung over the arm of her chair, shrilly cheering an imaginary Lafayette. The girls clapped their hands, and Tom hurrahed with all his might, saying, when he got his breath, "Lafayette was a regular old trump; I always liked him."

"My dear! what a disrespectful way to speak of that great man," said grandma, shocked at Young America's irreverence.

"Well, he was a trump, anyway, so why not call him one?" asked Tom, feeling that the objectionable word was all that could be desired.

“What queer gloves you wore then,” interrupted Fanny, who had been trying on the much-honored glove, and finding it a tight fit.

“Much better and cheaper than we have now,” returned grandma, ready to defend “the good old times” against every insinuation. “You are an extravagant set now-a-days, and I really don’t know what you are coming to. By the way, I ‘ve got somewhere two letters written by two young ladies, one in 1517, and the other in 1868. The contrast between the two will amuse you, I think.”

After a little search, grandma produced an old portfolio, and selecting the papers, read the following letter, written by Anne Boleyn before her marriage to Henry VIII, and now in the possession of a celebrated antiquarian:

DEAR MARY, I have been in town almost a month, yet I cannot say I have found anything in London extremely agreeable. We rise so late in the morning, seldom before six o’clock, and sit up so late at night, being scarcely in bed before ten, that I am quite sick of it; and was it not for the abundance of fine things I am every day getting I should be impatient of returning into the country.

My indulgent mother bought me, yesterday, at a merchant’s in Cheapside, three new shifts, that cost fourteen pence an ell, and I am to have a pair of new stuff shoes, for my Lord of Norfolk’s ball, which will be three shillings.

The irregular life I have led since my coming to this place has quite destroyed my appetite. You know I could manage a pound of bacon and a tankard of good ale for my breakfast, in the country, but in London I find it difficult to get through half the quantity, though I must own I am generally eager enough for the dinner hour, which is here delayed till twelve, in your polite society.

I played at hot cockles, last night, at my Lord of Leicester’s. The Lord of Surrey was there, a very elegant young man, who sung a song of his own composition, on the “Lord of Kildare’s Daughter.” It was much approved, and my brother whispered me that the fair Geraldine, for so my Lord of Surrey calls his sweetheart, is the finest woman of the age. I should be glad to see her, for I hear she is good as she is beautiful.

Pray take care of the poultry during my absence. Poor things! I always fed them myself; and if Margery has knitted me the crimson worsted mittens, I should be glad if they were sent up the first opportunity.

Adieu, dear Mary. I am just going to mass, and you shall speedily have the prayers, as you have now the kindest love of your own ANNE BOLEYN.

“Up before six, and think it late to go to bed at ten! What a countrified thing Anne must have been. Bacon and ale for breakfast, and dinner at twelve; how very queer to live so!” cried Fanny. “Lord Surrey and Lord Leicester sound fine, but hot cockles, and red mittens, and shoes for three shillings, are horrid.”

“I like it,” said Polly, thoughtfully, “and I ‘m glad poor Anne had a little fun before her troubles began. May I copy that letter some time, grandma?"

"Yes, dear, and welcome. Now, here 's the other, by a modern girl on her first visit to London. This will suit you better, Fan," and grandma read what a friend had sent her as a pendant to Anne's little picture of London life long ago:

MY DEAREST CONSTANCE, After three months of intense excitement I snatch a leisure moment to tell you how much I enjoy my first visit to London. Having been educated abroad, it really seems like coming to a strange city. At first the smoke, dirt and noise were very disagreeable, but I soon got used to these things, and now find all I see perfectly charming.

We plunged at once into a whirl of gayety and I have had no time to think of anything but pleasure. It is the height of the season, and every hour is engaged either in going to balls, concerts, theatres, fetes and church, or in preparing for them. We often go to two or three parties in an evening, and seldom get home till morning, so of course we don't rise till noon next day. This leaves very little time for our drives, shopping, and calls before dinner at eight, and then the evening gayeties begin again.

At a ball at Lady Russell's last night, I saw the Prince of Wales, and danced in the set with him. He is growing stout, and looks dissipated. I was disappointed in him, for neither in appearance nor conversation was he at all princely. I was introduced to a very brilliant and delightful young gentleman from America. I was charmed with him, and rather surprised to learn that he wrote the poems which were so much admired last season, also that he is the son of a rich tailor. How odd these Americans are, with their money, and talent, and independence!

O my dear, I must not forget to tell you the great event of my first season. I am to be presented at the next Drawing Room! Think how absorbed I must be in preparation for this grand affair. Mamma is resolved that I shall do her credit, and we have spent the last two weeks driving about from milliners to mantua-makers, from merchants to jewellers. I am to wear white satin and plumes, pearls and roses. My dress will cost a hundred pounds or more, and is very elegant.

My cousins and friends lavish lovely things upon me, and you will open your unsophisticated eyes when I display my silks and laces, trinkets and French hats, not to mention billet deux, photographs, and other relics of a young belle's first season.

You ask if I ever think of home. I really have n't time, but I do sometimes long a little for the quiet, the pure air and the girlish amusements I used to enjoy so much. One gets pale, and old, and sadly fagged out, with all this dissipation, pleasant as it is. I feel quite blas, already.

If you could send me the rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and gay spirits I always had at home, I 'd thank you. As you cannot do that, please send me a bottle of June rain water, for my maid tells me it is better than any cosmetic for the complexion, and mine is getting ruined by late hours.

I fancy some fruit off our own trees would suit me, for I have no appetite, and mamma is quite desolate about me. One cannot live on French cookery without dyspepsia, and one can get nothing simple here, for food, like everything else, is regulated by the fashion.

Adieu, ma chere, I must dress for church. I only wish you could see my new hat and go with me, for Lord Rockingham promised to be there.

Adieu, yours eternally, FLORENCE.

“Yes, I do like that better, and I wish I had been in this girl’s place, don’t you, Polly?” said Fan, as grandma took off her glasses.

“I should love to go to London, and have a good time, but I don’t think I should care about spending ever so much money, or going to Court. Maybe I might when I got there, for I do like fun and splendor,” added honest Polly, feeling that pleasure was a very tempting thing.

“Grandma looks tired; let ‘s go and play in the dwying-woom,” said Maud, who found the conversation getting beyond her depth.

“Let us all kiss and thank grandma, for amusing us so nicely, before we go,” whispered Polly. Maud and Fanny agreed, and grandma looked so gratified by their thanks, that Tom followed suit, merely waiting till “those girls” were out of sight, to give the old lady a hearty hug, and a kiss on the very cheek Lafayette had saluted.

When he reached the play-room Polly was sitting in the swing, saying, very earnestly, “I always told you it was nice up in grandma’s room, and now you see it is. I wish you ‘d go oftener; she admires to have you, and likes to tell stories and do pleasant things, only she thinks you don’t care for her quiet sort of fun. I do, anyway, and I think she ‘s the kindest, best old lady that ever lived, and I love her dearly!”

“I did n’t say she was n’t, only old people are sort of tedious and fussy, so I keep out of their way,” said Fanny.

“Well, you ought not to, and you miss lots of pleasant times. My mother says we ought to be kind and patient and respectful to all old folks just because they are old, and I always mean to be.”

“Your mother ‘s everlastingly preaching,” muttered Fan, nettled by the consciousness of her own shortcomings with regard to grandma.

“She don’t preach!” cried Polly, firing up like a flash; “she only explains things to us, and helps us be good, and never scolds, and I ‘d rather have her than any other mother in the world, though she don’t wear velvet cloaks and splendid bonnets, so now!”

“Go it, Polly!” called Tom, who was gracefully hanging head downward from the bar put up for his special benefit.

“Polly ‘s mad! Polly ‘s mad!” sung Maud, skipping rope round the room.

“If Mr. Sydney could see you now he would n’t think you such an angel any more,” added Fanny, tossing a bean-bag and her head at the same time.

Polly was mad, her face was very red, her eyes very bright and her lips twitched, but she held her tongue and began to swing as hard as she could, fearing to say something she would be sorry for afterward. For a few minutes no one spoke, Tom whistled and Maud hummed but Fan and Polly were each soberly thinking of something, for they had reached an age when children, girls especially, begin to observe, contrast, and speculate upon the words, acts, manners, and looks of those about them. A good deal of thinking goes on in the heads of these shrewd little folks, and the elders should mind their ways, for they get criticised pretty sharply and imitated very closely.

Two little things had happened that day, and the influence of a few words, a careless action, was still working in the active minds of the girls.

Mr. Sydney had called, and while Fanny was talking with him she saw his eye rest on Polly, who sat apart watching the faces round her with the modest, intelligent look which many found so attractive. At that minute Madam Shaw came in, and stopped to speak to the little girl. Polly rose at once, and remained standing till the old lady passed on.

“Are you laughing at Polly’s prim ways?” Fanny had asked, as she saw Mr. Sydney smile.

“No, I am admiring Miss Polly’s fine manners,” he answered in a grave, respectful tone, which had impressed Fanny very much, for Mr. Sydney was considered by all the girls as a model of good breeding, and that indescribable something which they called “elegance.”

Fanny wished she had done that little thing, and won that approving look, for she valued the young man’s good opinion, because it was so hard to win, by her set at least. So, when Polly talked about old people, it recalled this scene and made Fan cross.

Polly was remembering how, when Mrs. Shaw came home that day in her fine visiting costume, and Maud ran to welcome her with unusual affection, she gathered up her lustrous silk and pushed the little girl away saying, impatiently, “Don’t touch me, child, your hands are dirty.” Then the thought had come to Polly that the velvet cloak did n’t cover a right motherly heart, that the fretful face under the nodding purple plumes was not a tender motherly face, and that the hands in the delicate primrose gloves had put away something very sweet and precious. She thought of another woman, whose dress never was too fine for little wet cheeks to lie against, or loving little arms to press; whose face, in spite of many lines and the gray hairs above it, was never sour or unsympathetic when children’s eyes turned towards it; and whose hands never were too busy, too full or too nice to welcome and serve the little sons and daughters who freely brought their small hopes and fears, sins and sorrows, to her, who dealt out justice and mercy with such wise love. “Ah, that ‘s a mother!” thought Polly, as the memory came warm into her heart, making her feel very rich, and pity Maud for being so poor.

This it was that caused such sudden indignation at Fanny’s dreadful speech, and this it was that made quick-tempered Polly try to calm her wrath before she used toward Fanny’s mother the disrespectful tone she so resented toward her own. As the swing came down after some dozen quick journeys to and fro, Polly seemed to have found a smile somewhere up aloft, for she looked toward Fan, saying pleasantly, as she paused a little in her airy exercise, “I ‘m not mad now, shall I come and toss with you?”

“No, I ‘ll come and swing with you,” answered Fanny, quick to feel the generous spirit of her friend.

“You are an angel, and I ‘ll never be so rude again,” she added, as Polly’s arm came round her, and half the seat was gladly offered.

“No, I ain’t; but if I ever get at all like one, it will be ‘mother’s preaching’ that did it,” said Polly, with a happy laugh.

“Good for you, Polly Peacemaker,” cried Tom, quoting his father, and giving them a grand push as the most appropriate way of expressing his approbation of the sentiment.

Nothing more was said; but from that day there slowly crept into the family more respect for grandma, more forbearance with her infirmities, more interest in her little stories, and many a pleasant gossip did the dear old lady enjoy with the children as they gathered round her fire, solitary so long.

CHAPTER VII. GOOD-BY

"OH, dear! Must you really go home Saturday?" said Fan, some days after what Tom called the "grand scrimmage."

"I really must; for I only came to stay a month and here I 've been nearly six weeks," answered Polly, feeling as if she had been absent a year.

"Make it two months and stay over Christmas. Come, do, now," urged Tom, heartily.

"You are very kind; but I would n't miss Christmas at home for anything. Besides, mother says they can't possibly do without me."

"Neither can we. Can't you tease your mother, and make up your mind to stay?" began Fan.

"Polly never teases. She says it 's selfish; and I don't do it now much," put in Maud, with a virtuous air.

"Don't you bother Polly. She 'd rather go, and I don't wonder. Let 's be just as jolly as we can while she stays, and finish up with your party, Fan," said Tom, in a tone that settled the matter.

Polly had expected to be very happy in getting ready for the party; but when the time came, she was disappointed; for somehow that naughty thing called envy took possession of her, and spoiled her pleasure. Before she left home, she thought her new white muslin dress, with its fresh blue ribbons, the most elegant and proper costume she could have; but now, when she saw Fanny's pink silk, with a white tarlatan tunic, and innumerable puffings, bows, and streamers, her own simple little toilet lost all its charms in her eyes, and looked very babyish and old-fashioned.

Even Maud was much better dressed than herself, and looked very splendid in her cherry-colored and white suit, with a sash so big she could hardly carry it, and little white boots with red buttons. They both had necklaces and bracelets, ear-rings and brooches; but Polly had no ornament, except the plain locket on a bit of blue velvet. Her sash was only a wide ribbon, tied in a simple bow, and nothing but a blue snood in the pretty curls. Her only comfort was the knowledge that the modest tucker drawn up round the plump shoulders was real lace, and that her bronze boots cost nine dollars.

Poor Polly, with all her efforts to be contented, and not to mind looking unlike other people, found it hard work to keep her face bright and her voice happy that night. No one dreamed what was going an under the muslin frock, till grandma's wise old eyes spied out the little shadow on Polly's spirits, and guessed the cause of it. When dressed, the three girls went up to show themselves to the elders, who were in grandma's room, where Tom was being helped into an agonizingly stiff collar.

Maud pranced like a small peacock, and Fan made a splendid courtesy as every one turned to survey them; but Polly stood still, and her eyes went from face to face, with an anxious, wistful air, which seemed to say, "I know I 'm not right; but I hope I don't look very bad."

Grandma read the look in a minute; and when Fanny said, with a satisfied smile, "How do we look?" she answered, drawing Polly toward her so kindly.

"Very like the fashion-plates you got the patterns of your dresses from. But this little costume suits me best."

"Do you really think I look nice?" and Polly's face brightened, for she valued the old lady's opinion very much.

"Yes, my dear; you look just as I like to see a child of your age look. What particularly pleases me is that you have kept your promise to your mother, and have n't let anyone persuade you to wear borrowed finery. Young things like you don't need any ornaments but those you wear to-night, youth, health, intelligence, and modesty."

As she spoke, grandma gave a tender kiss that made Polly glow like a rose, and for a minute she forgot that there were such things as pink silk and coral ear-rings in the world. She only said, "Thank you, ma'am," and heartily returned the kiss; but the words did her good, and her plain dress looked charming all of a sudden.

"Polly 's so pretty, it don't matter what she wears," observed Tom, surveying her over his collar with an air of calm approval.

"She has n't got any bwetelles to her dwess, and I have," said Maud, settling her ruffled bands over her shoulders, which looked like cherry-colored wings on a stout little cherub.

"I did wish she 'd just wear my blue set, ribbon is so very plain; but, as Tom says, it don't much matter;" and Fanny gave an effective touch to the blue bow above Polly's left temple.

"She might wear flowers; they always suit young girls," said Mrs. Shaw, privately thinking that her own daughters looked much the best, yet conscious that blooming Polly had the most attractive face. "Bless me! I forgot my posies in admiring the belles. Hand them out, Tom;" and Mr. Shaw nodded toward an interesting looking box that stood on the table.

Seizing them wrong side-up, Tom produced three little bouquets, all different in color, size, and construction.

"Why, papa! how very kind of you," cried Fanny, who had not dared to receive even a geranium leaf since the late scrape.

"Your father used to be a very gallant young gentleman, once upon a time," said Mrs. Shaw, with a simper.

"Ah, Tom, it 's a good sign when you find time to think of giving pleasure to your little girls!" And grandma patted her son's bald head as if he was n't more than eighteen.

Thomas Jr. had given a somewhat scornful sniff at first; but when grandma praised his father, the young man thought better of the matter, and regarded the flowers with more respect, as he asked, "Which is for which?"

"Guess," said Mr. Shaw, pleased that his unusual demonstration had produced such an effect.

The largest was a regular hothouse bouquet, of tea-rosebuds, scentless heath, and smilax; the second was just a handful of sweet-peas and mignonette, with a few cheerful pansies, and one fragrant little rose in the middle; the third, a small posy of scarlet verbenas, white feverfew, and green leaves.

"Not hard to guess. The smart one for Fan, the sweet one for Polly, and the gay one for Pug. Now, then, catch hold, girls." And Tom proceeded to deliver the nosegays, with as much grace as could be expected from a youth in a new suit of clothes and very tight boots.

"That finishes you off just right, and is a very pretty attention of papa's. Now run down, for the bell has rung; and remember, not to dance too often, Fan; be as quiet as you can, Tom; and Maud, don't eat too much supper. Grandma will attend to things, for my poor nerves won't allow me to come down."

With that, Mrs. Shaw dismissed them, and the four descended to receive the first batch of visitors, several little girls who had been asked for the express purpose of keeping Maud out of her sister's way. Tom had likewise been propitiated, by being allowed to bring his three bosom friends, who went by the school-boy names of Rumple, Sherry, and Spider.

"They will do to make up sets, as gentlemen are scarce; and the party is for Polly, so I must have some young folks on her account," said Fanny, when sending out her invitations.

Of course, the boys came early, and stood about in corners, looking as if they had more arms and legs than they knew what to do with. Tom did his best to be a good host; but ceremony oppressed his spirits, and he was forced to struggle manfully with the wild desire to propose a game of leap-frog, for the long drawing-rooms, cleared for dancing, tempted him sorely.

Polly sat where she was told, and suffered bashful agonies as Fan introduced very fine young ladies and very stiff young gentlemen, who all said about the same civil things, and then appeared to forget all about her. When the first dance was called, Fanny cornered Tom, who had been dodging her, for he knew what she wanted, and said, in an earnest whisper: “Now, Tom, you must dance this with Polly. You are the young gentleman of the house, and it ‘s only proper that you should ask your company first.”

“Polly don’t care for manners. I hate dancing; don’t know how. Let go my jacket, and don’t bother, or I ‘ll cut away altogether,” growled Tom, daunted by the awful prospect of opening the ball with Polly.

“I ‘ll never forgive you if you do. Come, be clever, and help me, there ‘s a dear. You know we both were dreadfully rude to Polly, and agreed that we ‘d be as kind and civil to her as ever we could. I shall keep my word, and see that she is n’t slighted at my party, for I want her to love me, and go home feeling all right.”

This artful speech made an impression on the rebellious Thomas, who glanced at Polly’s happy face, remembered his promise, and, with a groan, resolved to do his duty.

“Well, I ‘ll take her; but I shall come to grief, for I don’t know anything about your old dances.”

“Yes, you do. I ‘ve taught you the steps a dozen times. I ‘m going to begin with a redowa, because the girls like it, and it ‘s better fun than square dances. Now, put on your gloves, and go and ask Polly like a gentleman.”

“Oh, thunder!” muttered Tom. And having split the detested gloves in dragging them on, he nerved himself for the effort, walked up to Polly, made a stiff bow, stuck out his elbow, and said, solemnly, “May I have the pleasure, Miss Milton?”

He did it as much like the big fellows as he could, and expected that Polly would be impressed. But she was n’t a bit; for after a surprised look she laughed in his face, and took him by the hand, saying, heartily, “Of course you may; but don’t be a goose, Tommy.”

“Well, Fan told me to be elegant, so I tried to,” whispered Tom, adding, as he clutched his partner with a somewhat desperate air, “Hold on tight, and we ‘ll get through somehow.”

The music struck up, and away they went; Tom hopping one way and Polly the other, in a most ungraceful manner.

“Keep time to the music,” gasped Polly.

“Can’t; never could,” returned Tom.

“Keep step with me, then, and don’t tread on my toes,” pleaded Polly.

“Never mind; keep bobbing, and we ‘ll come right by and by,” muttered Tom, giving his unfortunate partner a sudden whisk, which nearly landed both on the floor.

But they did not “get right by and by”; for Tom, In his frantic efforts to do his duty, nearly annihilated poor Polly. He tramped, he bobbed, he skated, he twirled her to the right, dragged her to the left, backed her up against people and furniture, trod on her feet, rumpled her dress, and made a spectacle of himself generally. Polly was much disturbed; but as everyone else was flying about also, she bore it as long as she could, knowing that Tom had made a martyr of himself, and feeling grateful to him for the sacrifice.

“Oh, do stop now; this is dreadful!” cried Polly, breathlessly, after a few wild turns.

“Is n’t it?” said Tom, wiping his red face with such an air of intense relief, that Polly had not the heart to scold him, but said, “Thank you,” and dropped into a chair exhausted.

“I know I ‘ve made a guy of myself; but Fan insisted on it, for fear you ‘d be offended if I did n’t go the first dance with you,” said Tom, remorsefully, watching Polly as she settled the bow of her crushed sash, which Tom had used as a sort of handle by which to turn and twist her; “I can do the Lancers tip-top; but you won’t ever want to dance with me any more,” he added, as he began to fan her so violently, that her hair flew about as if in a gale of wind.

“Yes, I will. I ‘d like to; and you shall put your name down here on the sticks of my fan. That ‘s the way, Trix says, when you don’t have a ball-book.”

Looking much gratified, Tom produced the stump of a lead-pencil, and wrote his name with a flourish, saying, as he gave it back, “Now I ‘m going to get Sherry, or some of the fellows that do the redowa well, so you can have a real good go before the music stops.”

Off went Tom; but before he could catch any eligible partner, Polly was provided with the best dancer in the room. Mr. Sydney had seen and heard the whole thing; and though he had laughed quietly, he liked honest Tom and good-natured Polly all the better for their simplicity. Polly’s foot was keeping time to the lively music, and her eyes were fixed wistfully on the smoothly-gliding couples before her, when Mr. Sydney came to her, saying, in the pleasant yet respectful way she liked so much, “Miss Polly, can you give me a turn?”

“Oh, yes; I ‘m dying for another.” And Polly jumped up, with both hands out, and such a grateful face, that Mr. Sydney resolved she should have as many turns as she liked.

This time all went well; and Tom, returning from an unsuccessful search, was amazed to behold Polly circling gracefully about the room, guided by a most accomplished partner.

“Ah, that ‘s something like,” he thought, as he watched the bronze boots retreating and advancing in perfect time to the music. “Don’t see how Sydney does the steering so well; but it must be fun; and, by Jupiter! I ‘ll learn it!” added Shaw, Jr., with an emphatic gesture which burst the last button off his gloves.

Polly enjoyed herself till the music stopped; and before she had time to thank Mr. Sydney as warmly as she wished, Tom came up to say, with his most lordly air, “You dance splendidly, Polly. Now, you just show me any one you like the looks of, and I ‘ll get him for you, no matter who he is.”

“I don’t want any of the gentlemen; they are so stiff, and don’t care to dance with me; but I like those boys over there, and I ‘ll dance with any of them if they are willing,” said Polly, after a survey.

“I ‘ll trot out the whole lot.” And Tom gladly brought up his friends, who all admired Polly immensely, and were proud to be chosen instead of the “big fellows.”

There was no sitting still for Polly after that, for the lads kept her going at a great pace; and she was so happy, she never saw or suspected how many little manoeuvres, heart-burnings, displays of vanity, affectation, and nonsense were going on all round her. She loved dancing, and entered into the gayety of the scene with a heartiness that was pleasant to see. Her eyes shone, her face glowed, her lips smiled, and the brown curls waved in the air, as she danced, with a heart as light as her feet.

“Are you enjoying yourself, Polly?” asked Mr. Shaw, who looked in, now and then, to report to grandma that all was going well.

“Oh, such a splendid time!” cried Polly, with an enthusiastic little gesture, as she chassed into the corner where he stood.

“She is a regular belle among the boys,” said Fanny, as she promenaded by.

“They are so kind in asking me and I ‘m not afraid of them,” explained Polly, prancing, simply because she could n’t keep still.

“So you are afraid of the young gentlemen, hey?” and Mr. Shaw held her by one curl.

“All but Mr. Sydney. He don’t put on airs and talk nonsense; and, oh! he does ‘dance like an angel,’ as Trix says.”

“Papa, I wish you ‘d come and waltz with me. Fan told me not to go near her, ‘cause my wed dwess makes her pink one look ugly; and Tom won’t; and I want to dwedfully.”

“I ‘ve forgotten how, Maudie. Ask Polly; she ‘ll spin you round like a teetotum.” “Mr. Sydney’s name is down for that,” answered Polly, looking at her fan with a pretty little air of importance. “But I guess he would n’t mind my taking poor Maud instead. She has n’t danced hardly any, and I ‘ve had more than my share. Would it be very improper to change my mind?” And Polly looked up at her tall partner with eye which plainly showed that the change was a sacrifice.

“Not a bit. Give the little dear a good waltz, and we will look on,” answered Mr. Sydney, with a nod and smile.

“That is a refreshing little piece of nature,” said Mr. Shaw, as Polly and Maud whirled away.

“She will make a charming little woman, if she is n’t spoilt.”

“No danger of that. She has got a sensible mother.”

“I thought so.” And Sydney sighed, for he had lately lost his own good mother.

When supper was announced, Polly happened to be talking, or trying to talk, to one of the “poky” gentlemen whom Fan had introduced. He took Miss Milton down, of course, put her in a corner, and having served her to a dab of ice and one macaroon, he devoted himself to his own supper with such interest, that Polly would have fared badly, if Tom had not come and rescued her.

“I ‘ve been looking everywhere for you. Come with me, and don’t sit starving here,” said Tom, with a scornful look from her empty plate to that of her recreant escort, which was piled with good things.

Following her guide, Polly was taken to the big china closet, opening from the dining-room to the kitchen, and here she found a jovial little party feasting at ease. Maud and her bosom friend, “Gwace,” were seated on tin cake-boxes; Sherry and Spider adorned the refrigerator; while Tom and Rumple foraged for the party.

“Here ‘s fun,” said Polly, as she was received with a clash of spoons and a waving of napkins.

“You just perch on that cracker-keg, and I ‘ll see that you get enough,” said Tom, putting a dumbwaiter before her, and issuing his orders with a fine air of authority.

“We are a band of robbers in our cave, and I ‘m the captain; and we pitch into the folks passing by, and go out and bring home plunder. Now, Rumple, you go and carry off a basket of cake, and I ‘ll watch here till Katy comes by with a fresh lot of oysters; Polly must have some. Sherry, cut into the kitchen, and bring a cup of coffee. Spider, scrape up the salad, and poke the dish through the slide for more. Eat away, Polly, and my men will be back with supplies in a jiffy.”

Such fun as they had in that closet; such daring robberies of jelly-pots and cake-boxes; such successful raids into the dining-room and kitchen; such base assaults upon poor Katy and the colored waiter, who did his best, but was helpless in the hands of the robber horde. A very harmless little revel; for no wine was allowed, and the gallant band were so busy skirmishing to supply the ladies, that they had not time to eat too much. No one missed them; and when they emerged, the feast was over, except for a few voracious young gentlemen, who still lingered among the ruins.

"That 's the way they always do; poke the girls in corners, give 'em just one taste of something, and then go and stuff like pigs," whispered Tom, with a superior air, forgetting certain private banquets of his own, after company had departed.

The rest of the evening was to be devoted to the German; and, as Polly knew nothing about it, she established herself in a window recess to watch the mysteries. For a time she enjoyed it, for it was all new to her, and the various pretty devices were very charming; but, by and by, that bitter weed, envy, cropped up again, and she could not feel happy to be left out in the cold, while the other girls were getting gay tissue-paper suits, droll bonbons, flowers, ribbons, and all manner of tasteful trifles in which girlish souls delight. Everyone was absorbed; Mr. Sydney was dancing; Tom and his friends were discussing base-ball on the stairs; and Maud's set had returned to the library to play.

Polly tried to conquer the bad feeling; but it worried her, till she remembered something her mother once said to her, "When you feel out of sorts, try to make some one else happy, and you will soon be so yourself."

"I will try it," thought Polly, and looked round to see what she could do. Sounds of strife in the library led her to enter. Maud and the young ladies were sitting on the sofa, talking about each other's clothes, as they had seen their mammas do.

"Was your dress imported?" asked Grace.

"No; was yours?" returned Blanche.

"Yes; and it cost oh, ever so much."

"I don't think it is as pretty as Maud's."

"Mine was made in New York," said Miss Shaw, smoothing her skirts complacently.

"I can't dress much now, you know, 'cause mamma's in black for somebody," observed Miss Alice Lovett, feeling the importance which affliction conferred upon her when it took the form of a jet necklace.

"Well, I don't care if my dress is n't imported; my cousin had three kinds of wine at her party; so, now," said Blanche.

"Did she?" And all the little girls looked deeply impressed, till Maud observed, with a funny imitation of her father's manner, "My papa said it was scan-dill-us; for some of the little boys got tipsy, and had to be tooked home. He would n't let us have any wine; and gwandma said it was vewy impwoper for childwen to do so."

"My mother says your mother's coup, is n't half so stylish as ours," put in

Alice.

“Yes, it is, too. It ‘s all lined with gween silk, and that ‘s nicer than old wed cloth,” cried Maud, ruffling up like an insulted chicken.

“Well, my brother don’t wear a horrid old cap, and he ‘s got nice hair. I would n’t have a brother like Tom. He ‘s horrid rude, my sister says,” retorted Alice.

“He is n’t. Your brother is a pig.”

“You ‘re a fib!”

“So are you!”

Here, I regret to say, Miss Shaw slapped Miss Lovett, who promptly returned the compliment, and both began to cry.

Polly, who had paused to listen to the edifying chat, parted the belligerents, and finding the poor things tired, cross, and sleepy, yet unable to go home till sent for, proposed to play games. The young ladies consented, and “Puss in the corner” proved a peacemaker. Presently, in came the boys; and being exiles from the German, gladly joined in the games, which soon were lively enough to wake the sleepiest. “Blind-man’s-buff” was in full swing when Mr. Shaw peeped in, and seeing Polly flying about with band-aged eyes, joined in the fun to puzzle her. He got caught directly; and great merriment was caused by Polly’s bewilderment, for she could n’t guess who he was, till she felt the bald spot on his head.

This frolic put every one in such spirits, that Polly forgot her trouble, and the little girls kissed each other good-night as affectionately as if such things as imported frocks, coups, and rival brothers did n’t exist “Well, Polly, do you like parties?” asked Fan when the last guest was gone.

“Very much; but I don’t think it would be good for me to go to many,” answered Polly, slowly.

“Why not?”

“I should n’t enjoy them if I did n’t have a fine dress, and dance all the time, and be admired, and all the rest of it.”

“I did n’t know you cared for such things,” cried Fanny, surprised.

“Neither did I till to-night; but I do; and as I can’t have ‘em, it ‘s lucky I ‘m going home tomorrow.”

“Oh, dear! So you are! What shall I do without my ‘sweet P.,’ as Sydney calls you?” sighed Fanny, bearing Polly away to be cuddled.

Every one echoed the exclamation next day; and many loving eyes followed the little figure in the drab frock as it went quietly about, doing for the last time the small services which would help to make its absence keenly felt. Polly was to go directly after an early dinner, and having packed her trunk, all but one tray, she was told to go and take a run while grandma finished. Polly suspected that some pleasant surprise was going to be put in; for Fan did n't offer to go with her, Maud kept dodging about with something under her apron, and Tom had just whisked into his mother's room in a mysterious manner. So Polly took the hint and went away, rejoicing in the thought of the unknown treasures she was to carry home.

Mr. Shaw had not said he should come home so early, but Polly thought he might, and went to meet him. Mr. Shaw did n't expect to see Polly, for he had left her very busy, and now a light snow was falling; but, as he turned into the mall there was the round hat, and under it the bright face, looking all the rosier for being powdered with snow-flakes, as Polly came running to meet him.

"There won't be any one to help the old gentleman safely home to-morrow," he said, as Polly took his hand in both hers with an affectionate squeeze.

"Yes, there will; see if there is n't," cried Polly, nodding and smiling, for Fan had confided to her that she meant to try it after her friend had gone.

"I 'm glad of it. But, my dear, I want you to promise that you will come and make us a visit every winter, a good long one," said Mr. Shaw, patting the blue mittens folded round his hand.

"If they can spare me from home, I 'd love to come dearly."

"They must lend you for a little while, because you do us all good, and we need you."

"Do I? I don't see how; but I 'm glad to hear you say so," cried Polly, much touched.

"I can't tell you how, exactly; but you brought something into my house that makes it warmer and pleasanter, and won't quite vanish, I hope, when you go away, my child."

Polly had never heard Mr. Shaw speak like that before, and did n't know what to say, she felt so proud and happy at this proof of the truth of her mother's words, when she said that "even a little girl could exert an influence, and do some good in this big, busy world." She only gave her friend a grateful look sweeter than any words, and they went on together, hand in hand, through the "soft-falling snow."

If Polly could have seen what went into that top tray, she would have been entirely overcome; for Fanny had told grandma about the poor little presents she had once laughed at, and they had all laid their heads together to provide something really fine and appropriate for every member of the Milton family. Such a mine of riches! and so much good-will, affection, and kindly forethought was packed away in the tempting bundles, that no one could feel offended, but would find an unusual charm about the pretty gifts that made them doubly welcome. I only know that if Polly had suspected that a little watch was ticking away in a little case, with her name on it, inside that trunk, she never could have left it locked as grandma advised, or have eaten her dinner so quietly. As it was, her heart was very full, and the tears rose to her eyes more than once, everyone was so kind, and so sorry to have her go.

Tom did n't need any urging to play escort now; and both Fan and Maud insisted on going too. Mrs. Shaw forgot her nerves, and put up some gingerbread with her own hands; Mr. Shaw kissed Polly as if she had been his dearest daughter; and grandma held her close, whispering in a tremulous tone, “My little comfort, come again soon”; while Katy waved her apron from the nursery window, crying, as they drove, away, “The saints bless ye, Miss Polly, dear, and sind ye the best of lucks!”

But the crowning joke of all was Tom’s good-by, for, when Polly was fairly settled in the car, the last “All aboard!” uttered, and the train in motion, Tom suddenly produced a knobby little bundle, and thrusting it in at the window, while he hung on in some breakneck fashion, said, with a droll mixture of fun and feeling in his face, “It ‘s horrid; but you wanted it, so I put it in to make you laugh. Good-by, Polly; good-by, good-by!”

The last adieu was a trifle husky, and Tom vanished as it was uttered, leaving Polly to laugh over his parting souvenir till the tears ran down her cheeks. It was a paper bag of peanuts, and poked down at the very bottom a photograph of Tom. It was “horrid,” for he looked as if taken by a flash of lightning, so black, wild, and staring was it; but Polly liked it, and whenever she felt a little pensive at parting with her friends, she took a peanut, or a peep at Tom’s funny picture, which made her merry again.

So the short journey came blithely to an end, and in the twilight she saw a group of loving faces at the door of a humble little house, which was more beautiful than any palace in her eyes, for it was home.

CHAPTER VIII. SIX YEARS AFTERWARD

"WHAT do you think Polly is going to do this winter?" exclaimed Fanny, looking up from the letter she had been eagerly reading.

"Going to deliver lectures on Woman's Rights," said the young gentleman who was carefully examining his luxuriant crop of decidedly auburn hair, as he lounged with both elbows on the chimney-piece.

"Going to set her cap for some young minister and marry him in the spring," added Mrs. Shaw, whose mind ran a good deal upon match-making just now.

"I think she is going to stay at home, and do all the work, 'cause servants cost so much; it would be just like her," observed Maud, who could pronounce the letter R now.

"It 's my opinion she is going to open a school, or something of that sort, to help those brothers of hers along," said Mr. Shaw, who had put down his paper at the sound of Polly's name.

"Every one of you wrong, though papa comes nearest the truth," cried Fanny; "she is going to give music lessons, and support herself, so that Will may go to college. He is the studious one, and Polly is very proud of him. Ned, the other brother, has a business talent, and don't care for books, so he has gone out West, and will make his own way anywhere. Polly says she is n't needed at home now, the family is so small, and Kitty can take her place nicely; so she is actually going to earn her own living, and hand over her share of the family income to Will. What a martyr that girl does make of herself," and Fanny looked as solemn as if Polly had proposed some awful self-sacrifice.

"She is a sensible, brave-hearted girl, and I respect her for doing it," said Mr. Shaw, emphatically. "One never knows what may happen, and it does no harm for young people to learn to be independent."

"If she is as pretty as she was last time I saw her, she 'll get pupils fast enough. I would n't mind taking lessons myself," was the gracious observation of Shaw, Jr., as he turned from the mirror, with the soothing certainty that his objectionable hair actually was growing darker.

"She would n't take you at any price," said Fanny, remembering Polly's look of disappointment and disapproval when she came on her last visit and found him an unmistakable dandy.

"You just wait and see," was the placid reply.

"If Polly does carry out her plan, I wish Maud to take lessons of her; Fanny can do as she likes, but it would please me very much to have one of my girls sing as Polly sings. It suits old people better than your opera things, and mother used to enjoy it so much.”

As he spoke, Mr. Shaw’s eye turned toward the corner of the fire where grandma used to sit. The easy-chair was empty now, the kind old face was gone, and nothing but a very tender memory remained.

“I ‘d like to learn, papa, and Polly is a splendid teacher, I know; she ‘s always so patient, and makes everything so pleasant. I do hope she will get scholars enough to begin right away,” said Maud.

“When is she coming?” asked Mrs. Shaw, quite willing to help Polly, but privately resolving that Maud should be finished off by the most fashionable master in the city.

“She does n’t say. She thanks me for asking her here, as usual, but says she shall go right to work and had better begin with her own little room at once. Won’t it seem strange to have Polly in town, and yet not with us?”

“We ‘ll get her somehow. The little room will cost something, and she can stay with us just as well as not, even if she does teach. Tell her I say so,” said Mr. Shaw.

“She won’t come, I know; for if she undertakes to be independent, she ‘ll do it in the most thorough manner,” answered Fanny, and Mrs. Shaw sincerely hoped she would. It was all very well to patronize the little music-teacher, but it was not so pleasant to have her settled in the family.

“I shall do what I can for her among my friends, and I dare say she will get on very well with young pupils to begin with. If she starts right, puts her terms high enough, and gets a few good names to give her the entre into our first families, I don’t doubt she will do nicely, for I must say Polly has the manners of a lady,” observed Mrs. Shaw.

“She ‘s a mighty taking little body, and I ‘m glad she ‘s to be in town, though I ‘d like it better if she did n’t bother about teaching, but just stayed here and enjoyed herself,” said Tom, lazily.

“I ‘ve no doubt she would feel highly honored to be allowed to devote her time to your amusement; but she can’t afford expensive luxuries, and she don’t approve of flirting, so you will have to let her go her own way, and refresh herself with such glimpses of you as her engagements permit,” answered Fanny, in the sarcastic tone which was becoming habitual to her.

“You are getting to be a regular old maid, Fan; as sharp as a lemon, and twice as sour,” returned Tom, looking down at her with an air of calm superiority.

“Do be quiet, children; you know I can’t bear anything like contention. Maud, give me my Shetland shawl, and put a cushion at my back.”

As Maud obeyed her mother, with a reproving look at her erring brother and sister, a pause followed, for which every one seemed grateful. They were sitting about the fire after dinner, and all looked as if a little sunshine would do them good. It had been a dull November day, but all of a sudden the clouds lifted, and a bright ray shot into the room. Every one turned involuntarily to welcome it, and every one cried out, “Why, Polly!” for there on the threshold stood a bright-faced girl, smiling as if there was no such thing as November weather in the world.

“You dear thing, when did you come?” cried Fanny, kissing both the blooming checks with real affection, while the rest hovered near, waiting for a chance.

“I came yesterday, and have been getting my nest in order; but I could n’t keep away any longer, so I ran up to say ‘How do you do?’“ answered Polly, in the cheery voice that did one’s heart good to hear.

“My Polly always brings the sunshine with her,” and Mr. Shaw held out his hands to his little friend, for she was his favorite still.

It was good to see her put both arms about his neck, and give him a tender kiss, that said a great deal, for grandma had died since Polly met him last and she longed to comfort him, seeing how gray and old he had grown.

If Tom had had any thoughts of following his father’s example, something in Polly’s manner made him change his mind, and shake hands with a hearty “I ‘m very glad to see you, Polly,” adding to himself, as he looked at the face in the modest little bonnet: “Prettier than ever, by Jove!”

There was something more than mere prettiness in Polly’s face, though Tom had not learned to see it yet. The blue eyes were clear and steady, the fresh mouth frank and sweet, the white chin was a very firm one in spite of the dimple, and the smooth forehead under the little curls had a broad, benevolent arch; while all about the face were those unmistakable lines and curves which can make even a plain countenance comely, by breathing into it the beauty of a lovely character. Polly had grown up, but she had no more style now than in the days of the round hat and rough coat, for she was all in gray, like a young Quakeress, with no ornament but a blue bow at the throat and another in the hair. Yet the plain suit became her excellently, and one never thought of the dress, looking at the active figure that wore it, for the freedom of her childhood gave to Polly that good gift, health, and every movement was full of the vigor, grace, and ease, which nothing else can so surely bestow. A happy soul in a healthy body is a rare sight in these days, when doctors flourish and every one is ill, and this pleasant union was the charm which Polly possessed without knowing it.

“It does seem so good to have you here again,” said Maud, cuddling Polly’s cold hand, as she sat at her feet, when she was fairly established between Fanny and Mr. Shaw, while Tom leaned on the back of his mother’s chair, and enjoyed the prospect.

"How do you get on? When do you begin? Where is your nest? Now tell all about it," began Fanny, who was full of curiosity about the new plan.

"I shall get on very well, I think, for I 've got twelve scholars to begin with, all able to pay a good price, and I shall give my first lesson on Monday."

"Don't you dread it?" asked Fanny.

"Not much; why should I?" answered Polly, stoutly.

"Well, I don't know; it 's a new thing, and must be a little bit hard at first," stammered Fanny, not liking to say that working for one's living seemed a dreadful hardship to her.

"It will be tiresome, of course, but I shall get used to it; I shall like the exercise, and the new people and places I must see will amuse me. Then the independence will be delightful, and if I can save a little to help Kitty along with, that will be best of all."

Polly's face shone as if the prospect was full of pleasure instead of work, and the hearty good will with which she undertook the new task, seemed to dignify her humble hopes and plans, and make them interesting in the sight of others.

"Who have you got for pupils?" asked Mrs. Shaw, forgetting her nerves for a minute.

Polly named her list, and took a secret satisfaction in seeing the impression which certain names made upon her hearers.

"How in the world did you get the Davenports and the Greys, my dear?" said Mrs. Shaw, sitting erect in her surprise.

"Mrs. Davenport and mother are relations, you know."

"You never told us that before!" "The Davenports have been away some years, and I forgot all about them. But when I was making my plan, I knew I must have a good name or two to set me going, so I just wrote and asked Mrs. D. if she would help me. She came and saw us and was very kind, and has got these pupils for me, like a dear, good woman as she is."

"Where did you learn so much worldly wisdom, Polly?" asked Mr. Shaw, as his wife fell back in her chair, and took out her salts, as if this discovery had been too much for her.

"I learnt it here, sir," answered Polly, laughing. "I used to think patronage and things of that sort very disagreeable and not worth having, but I 've got wiser, and to a certain extent I 'm glad to use whatever advantages I have in my power, if they can be honestly got."

"Why did n't you let us help you in the beginning? We should have been very glad to, I 'm sure," put in Mrs. Shaw, who quite burned to be known as a joint patroness with Mrs. Davenport.

"I know you would, but you have all been so kind to me I did n't want to trouble you with my little plans till the first steps were taken. Besides, I did n't know as you would like to recommend me as a teacher, though you like me well enough as plain Polly."

"My dear, of course I would, and we want you to take Maud at once, and teach her your sweet songs. She has a fine voice, and is really suffering for a teacher."

A slight smile passed over Polly's face as she returned her thanks for the new pupil, for she remembered a time when Mrs. Shaw considered her "sweet songs" quite unfit for a fashionable young lady's repertoire. "Where is your room?" asked Maud.

"My old friend Miss Mills has taken me in, and I am nicely settled. Mother did n't like the idea of my going to a strange boarding-house, so Miss Mills kindly made a place for me. You know she lets her rooms without board, but she is going to give me my dinners, and I 'm to get my own breakfast and tea, quite independently. I like that way, and it 's very little trouble, my habits are so simple; a bowl of bread and milk night and morning, with baked apples or something of that sort, is all I want, and I can have it when I like."

"Is your room comfortably furnished? Can't we lend you anything, my dear? An easy-chair now, or a little couch, so necessary when one comes in tired," said Mrs. Shaw, taking unusual interest in the affair.

"Thank you, but I don't need anything, for I brought all sorts of home comforts with me. Oh, Fan, you ought to have seen my triumphal entry into the city, sitting among my goods and chattels, in a farmer's cart." Polly's laugh was so infectious that every one smiled and forgot to be shocked at her performance. "Yes," she added, "I kept wishing I could meet you, just to see your horrified face when you saw me sitting on my little sofa, with boxes and bundles all round me, a bird-cage on one side, a fishing basket, with a kitten's head popping in and out of the hole, on the other side, and jolly old Mr. Brown, in his blue frock, perched on a keg of apples in front. It was a lovely bright day, and I enjoyed the ride immensely, for we had all sorts of adventures."

"Oh, tell about it," begged Maud, when the general laugh at Polly's picture had subsided.

"Well, in the first place, we forgot my ivy, and Kitty came running after me, with it. Then we started again, but were soon stopped by a great shouting, and there was Will racing down the hill, waving a pillow in one hand and a squash pie in the other. How we did laugh when he came up and explained that our neighbor, old Mrs. Dodd, had sent in a hop-pillow for me, in case of headache, and a pie to begin housekeeping with. She seemed so disappointed at being too late that Will promised to get them to me, if he ran all the way to town. The pillow was easily disposed of, but that pie! I do believe it was stowed in every part of the wagon, and never staid anywhere. I found it in my lap, then on the floor, next, upside down among the books, then just on the point of coasting off a trunk into the road, and at last it landed in my rocking-chair. Such a remarkable pie as it was, too, for in spite of all its wanderings, it never got spilt or broken, and we finally ate it for lunch, in order to be left in peace. Next, my kitty got away, and I had a chase over walls and brooks before I got her, while Mr. Brown sat shaking with fun, to see me run. We finished off by having the book-shelves tumble on our heads as we went down a hill, and losing my chair off behind, as we went up a hill. A shout made us pause, and, looking back, there was the poor little chair rocking all by itself in the middle of the road, while a small boy sat on the fence and whooped. It was great fun, I do assure you."

Polly had run on in her lively way, not because she thought her adventures amounted to much, but from a wish to cheer up her friends, who had struck her as looking rather dull and out of sorts, especially Mr. Shaw; and when she saw him lean back in his chair with the old hearty laugh, she was satisfied, and blessed the unlucky pie for amusing him.

"Oh, Polly, you do tell such interesting things!" sighed Maud, wiping her eyes.

"I wish I 'd met you, I 'd have given you three cheers and a tiger, for it must have been an imposing spectacle," said Tom.

"No, you would n't; you 'd have whisked round the corner when you saw me coming or have stared straight before you, utterly unconscious of the young woman in the baggage wagon."

Polly laughed in his face just as she used to do, when she said that, and, in spite of the doubt cast upon his courtesy, Tom rather liked it, though he had nothing to say for himself but a reproachful, "Now, Polly, that 's too bad."

"True, nevertheless. You must come and see my pets, Maud, for my cat and bird live together as happily as brother and sister," said Polly, turning to Maud, who devoured every word she said.

"That 's not saying much for them," muttered Tom, feeling that Polly ought to address more of her conversation to him.

"Polly knows what she 's talking about; her brothers appreciate their sisters," observed Fanny, in her sharp tone.

"And Polly appreciates her brothers, don't forget to add that, ma'am," answered Tom.

"Did I tell you that Will was going to college?" broke in Polly, to avert the rising storm.

"Hope he 'll enjoy himself," observed Tom, with the air of a man who had passed through all the mysteries, and reached that state of sublime indifference which juniors seem to pride themselves upon.

"I think he will, he is so fond of study, and is so anxious to improve every opportunity. I only hope he won't overwork and get sick, as so many boys do," said simple Polly, with such a respectful belief in the eager thirst for knowledge of collegians as a class, that Tom regarded the deluded girl with a smile of lofty pity, from the heights of his vast and varied experience.

"Guess he won't hurt himself. I 'll see that he don't study too hard." And Tom's eyes twinkled as they used to do, when he planned his boyish pranks.

"I 'm afraid you can't be trusted as a guide, if various rumors I 've heard are true," said Polly, looking up at him with a wistful expression, that caused his face to assume the sobriety of an owl's.

"Base slanders; I 'm as steady as a clock, an ornament to my class, and a model young man, ain't I, mother?" And Tom patted her thin cheek with a caressing hand, sure of one firm friend in her; for when he ceased to be a harum-scarum boy, Mrs. Shaw began to take great pride in her son, and he, missing grandma, tried to fill her place with his feeble mother.

"Yes, dear, you are all I could ask," and Mrs. Shaw looked up at him with such affection and confidence in her eyes, that Polly gave Tom the first approving look she had vouchsafed him since she came.

Why Tom should look troubled and turn grave all at once, she could n't understand, but she liked to see him stroke his mother's cheek so softly, as he stood with his head resting on the high back of her chair, for Polly fancied that he felt a man's pity for her weakness, and was learning a son's patient love for a mother who had had much to bear with him.

"I 'm so glad you are going to be here all winter, for we are to be very gay, and I shall enjoy taking you round with me," began Fanny, forgetting Polly's plan for a moment.

Polly shook her head decidedly. "It sounds very nice, but it can't be done, Fan, for I 've come to work, not play; to save, not spend; and parties will be quite out of the question for me."

"You don't intend to work all the time, without a bit of fun, I hope," cried Fanny, dismayed at the idea.

"I mean to do what I 've undertaken, and not to be tempted away from my purpose by anything. I should n't be fit to give lessons if I was up late, should I? And how far would my earnings go towards dress, carriages, and all the little expenses which would come if I set up for a young lady in society? I can't do both, and I 'm not going to try, but I can pick up bits of fun as I go along, and be contented with free concerts and lectures, seeing you pretty often, and every Sunday Will is to spend with me, so I shall have quite as much dissipation as is good for me."

"If you don't come to my parties, I 'll never forgive you," said Fanny, as Polly paused, while Tom chuckled inwardly at the idea of calling visits from a brother "dissipation."

"Any small party, where it will do to wear a plain black silk, I can come to; but the big ones must n't be thought of, thank you."

It was charming to see the resolution of Polly's face when she said that; for she knew her weakness, and beyond that black silk she had determined not to go. Fanny said no more, for she felt quite sure that Polly would relent when the time came, and she planned to give her a pretty dress for a Christmas present, so that one excuse should be removed.

"I say, Polly, won't you give some of us fellows music lessons? Somebody wants me to play, and I 'd rather learn of you than any Senor Twankydillo," said Tom, who did n't find the conversation interesting.

"Oh, yes; if any of you boys honestly want to learn, and will behave yourselves, I 'll take you; but I shall charge extra," answered Polly, with a wicked sparkle of the eye, though her face was quite sober, and her tone delightfully business-like.

"Why, Polly, Tom is n't a boy; he 's twenty, and he says I must treat him with respect. Besides, he 's engaged, and does put on such airs," broke in Maud who regarded her brother as a venerable being.

"Who is the little girl?" asked Polly taking the news as a joke.

"Trix; why, did n't you know it?" answered Maud, as if it had been an event of national importance.

"No! is it true, Fan?" and Polly turned to her friend with a face full of surprise, while Tom struck an imposing attitude, and affected absence of mind.

"I forgot to tell you in my last letter; it 's just out, and we don't like it very well," observed Fanny, who would have preferred to be engaged first herself.

"It 's a very nice thing, and I am perfectly satisfied," announced Mrs. Shaw, rousing from a slight doze.

"Polly looks as if she did n't believe it. Have n't I the appearance of 'the happiest man alive'?" asked Tom, wondering if it could be pity which he saw in the steady eyes fixed on him.

"No, I don't think you have," she said, slowly.

"How the deuce should a man look, then?" cried Tom, rather nettled at her sober reception of the grand news.

"As if he had learned to care for some one a great deal more than for himself," answered Polly, with sudden color in her cheeks, and a sudden softening of the voice, as her eyes turned away from Tom, who was the picture of a complacent dandy, from the topmost curl of his auburn head to the tips of his aristocratic boots.

"Tommy 's quenched; I agree with you, Polly; I never liked Trix, and I hope it 's only a boy-and-girl fancy, that will soon die a natural death," said Mr. Shaw, who seemed to find it difficult to help falling into a brown study, in spite of the lively chatter going on about him.

Shaw, Jr., being highly incensed at the disrespectful manner in which his engagement was treated, tried to assume a superb air of indifference, and finding that a decided failure, was about to stroll out of the room with a comprehensive nod, when his mother called after him: "Where are you going, dear?"

"To see Trix, of course. Good-by, Polly," and Mr. Thomas departed, hoping that by the skillful change of tone, from ardent impatience to condescending coolness, he had impressed one hearer at least with the fact that he regarded Trix as the star of his existence, and Polly as a presuming little chit.

If he could have heard her laugh, and Fanny's remarks, his wrath would have boiled over; fortunately he was spared the trial, and went away hoping that the coquetries of his Trix would make him forget Polly's look when she answered his question.

"My dear, that boy is the most deluded creature you ever saw," began Fanny, as soon as the front door banged. "Belle and Trix both tried to catch him, and the slyest got him; for, in spite of his airs, he is as soft-hearted as a baby. You see Trix has broken off two engagements already, and the third time she got jilted herself. Such a fuss as she made! I declare, it really was absurd. But I do think she felt it very much, for she would n't go out at all, and got thin, and pale, and blue, and was really quite touching. I pitied her, and had her here a good deal, and Tom took her part; he always does stand up for the crushed ones, and that 's good of him, I allow. Well, she did the forsaken very prettily; let Tom amuse her, and led him on till the poor fellow lost his wits, and finding her crying one day (about her hat, which was n't becoming), he thought she was mourning for Mr. Banks, and so, to comfort her, the goose proposed. That was all she wanted; she snapped him up at once, and there he is in a nice scrape; for since her engagement she is as gay as ever, flirts awfully with any one who comes along, and keeps Tom in a fume all the time. I really don't think he cares for her half as much as he makes believe, but he 'll stand by her through thick and thin, rather than do as Banks did."

"Poor Tom!" was all Polly said, when Fan had poured the story into her ear, as they sat whispering in the sofa corner.

"My only consolation is that Trix will break off the affair before spring; she always does, so that she may be free for the summer campaign. It won't hurt

Tom, but I hate to have him make a fool of himself out of pity, for he is more of a man than he seems, and I don't want any one to plague him."

"No one but yourself," said Polly, smiling.

"Well, that 's all fair; he is a torment sometimes, but I 'm rather fond of him in spite of it. I get so tired of the other fellows, they are such absurd things and when Tom is in his good mood he is very nice and quite refreshing."

"I 'm glad to hear it," said Polly, making a mental note of the fact.

"Yes, and when grandma was ill he was perfectly devoted. I did n't know the boy had so much gentleness in him. He took her death sadly to heart, for, though he did n't say much, he was very grave and steady for a long time. I tried to comfort him, and we had two or three real sweet little talks together, and seemed to get acquainted for the first time. It was very nice, but it did n't last; good times never do with us. We soon got back into the old way, and now we hector one another just as before."

Fanny sighed, then yawned, and fell into her usual listless attitude, as if the brief excitement of Polly's coming had begun to subside.

"Walk home with me and see my funny little room. It 's bright now, and the air will do you good. Come, both of you, and have a frolic as we used to," said Polly, for the red sunset now burning in the west seemed to invite them out.

They agreed, and soon the three were walking briskly away to Polly's new home, in a quiet street, where a few old trees rustled in the summer, and the morning sun shone pleasantly in winter time.

"The way into my parlor
Is up a winding stair,"

sang Polly, running up two flights of broad, old-fashioned steps, and opening the door of a back room, out of which streamed the welcome glow of firelight.

"These are my pets, Maud," she added, pausing on the threshold, and beckoning the girls to look in quietly.

On the rug, luxuriously basking in the warmth, lay a gray kitten, and close by, meditatively roosting on one leg, stood a plump canary, who cocked his bright eye at the new-comers, gave a loud chirp as if to wake his comrade, and then flew straight to Polly's shoulder, where he broke into a joyful song to welcome his mistress home.

"Allow me to introduce my family," said Polly; "this noisy little chap the boys named Nicodemus; and this dozy cat is called Ashputtel, because the joy of her life is to get among the cinders. Now, take off your things, and let me do the honors, for you are to stop to tea, and the carriage is to come for you at eight. I arranged it with your mother while you were upstairs."

"I want to see everything," said Maud, when the hats were off, and the hands warmed.

"So you shall; for I think my housekeeping arrangements will amuse you."

Then Polly showed her kingdom, and the three had a merry time over it. The big piano took up so much room there was no place for a bed; but Polly proudly displayed the resources of her chintz-covered couch, for the back let down, the seat lifted up, and inside were all the pillows and blankets. "So convenient, you see, and yet out of the way in the daytime, for two or three of my pupils come to me," explained Polly.

Then there was a bright drugget over the faded carpet, the little rocking-chair and sewing-table stood at one window, the ivy ran all over the other, and hid the banqueting performances which went on in that corner. Book-shelves hung over the sofa, a picture or two on the walls, and a great vase of autumn leaves and grasses beautified the low chimney-piece. It was a very humble little room, but Polly had done her best to make it pleasant, and it already had a home-like look, with the cheery fire, and the household pets chirping and purring confidingly on the rug.

"How nice it is!" exclaimed Maud, as she emerged from the big closet where Polly kept her stores. "Such a cunning teakettle and saucepan, and a tete-a-tete set, and lots of good things to eat. Do have toast for tea, Polly, and let me make it with the new toasting fork; it 's such fun to play cook."

Fanny was not so enthusiastic as her sister, for her eyes saw many traces of what seemed like poverty to her; but Polly was so gay, so satisfied with her small establishment, so full of happy hopes and plans, that her friend had not the heart to find a fault or suggest an improvement, and sat where she was told, laughing and talking while the others got tea.

"This will be a country supper, girls," said Polly, bustling about. "Here is real cream, brown bread, home-made cake, and honey from my own beehives. Mother fitted me out with such a supply, I 'm glad to have a party, for I can't eat it all quick enough. Butter the toast, Maudie, and put that little cover over it. Tell me when the kettle boils, and don't step on Nicodemus, whatever you do."

"What a capital house-keeper you will make some day," said Fanny, as she watched Polly spread her table with a neatness and despatch which was pleasant to behold.

"Yes, it 's good practice," laughed Polly, filling her tiny teapot, and taking her place behind the tray, with a matronly air, which was the best joke of the whole.

"This is the most delicious party I ever went to," observed Maud, with her mouth full of honey, when the feast was well under way. "I do wish I could have a nice room like this, and a cat and a bird that would n't eat each other up, and a dear little teakettle, and make just as much toast as I like."

Such a peal of laughter greeted Maud’s pensive aspiration, that Miss Mills smiled over her solitary cup of tea, and little Nick burst into a perfect ecstasy of song, as he sat on the sugar-bowl helping himself.

“I don’t care for the toast and the kettle, but I do envy you your good spirits, Polly,” said Fanny, as the merriment subsided. “I ‘m so tired of everybody and everything, it seems sometimes as if I should die of ennui. Don’t you ever feel so?”

“Things worry me sometimes, but I just catch up a broom and sweep, or wash hard, or walk, or go at something with all my might, and I usually find that by the time I get through the worry is gone, or I ‘ve got courage enough to bear it without grumbling,” answered Polly, cutting the brown loaf energetically.

“I can’t do those things, you know; there ‘s no need of it, and I don’t think they ‘d cure my worrying,” said Fanny, languidly feeding Ashputtel, who sat decorously beside her, at the table, winking at the cream pot.

“A little poverty would do you good, Fan; just enough necessity to keep you busy till you find how good work is; and when you once learn that, you won’t complain of ennui any more,” returned Polly, who had taken kindly the hard lesson which twenty years of cheerful poverty had taught her.

“Mercy, no, I should hate that; but I wish some one would invent a new amusement for rich people. I ‘m dead sick of parties, and flirtations, trying to out-dress my neighbors, and going the same round year after year, like a squirrel in a cage.”

Fanny’s tone was bitter as well as discontented, her face sad as well as listless, and Polly had an instinctive feeling that some trouble, more real than any she had ever known before, was lying heavy at her friend’s heart. That was not the time to speak of it, but Polly resolved to stand ready to offer sympathy, if nothing more, whenever the confidential minute came; and her manner was so kind, so comfortable, that Fanny felt its silent magic, grew more cheerful in the quiet atmosphere of that little room, and when they said good-night, after an old-time gossip by the fire, she kissed her hostess warmly, saying, with a grateful look, “Polly, dear, I shall come often, you do me so much good.”

CHAPTER IX. LESSONS

THE first few weeks were hard ones, for Polly had not yet outgrown her natural shyness and going among so many strangers caused her frequent panics. But her purpose gave her courage, and when the ice was once broken, her little pupils quickly learned to love her. The novelty soon wore off, and though she thought she was prepared for drudgery, she found it very tedious to go on doing the same thing day after day. Then she was lonely, for Will could only come once a week, her leisure hours were Fanny's busiest, and the "bits of pleasure" were so few and far between that they only tantalized her. Even her small housekeeping lost its charms, for Polly was a social creature, and the solitary meals were often sad ones. Ashputtel and Nick did their best to cheer her, but they too, seemed to pine for country freedom and home atmosphere. Poor Puttel, after gazing wistfully out of the window at the gaunt city cats skulking about the yard, would retire to the rug, and curl herself up as if all hope of finding congenial society had failed; while little Nick would sing till he vibrated on his perch, without receiving any response except an inquisitive chirp from the pert sparrows, who seemed to twit him with his captivity. Yes, by the time the little teakettle had lost its brightness, Polly had decided that getting one's living was no joke, and many of her brilliant hopes had shared the fate of the little kettle.

If one could only make the sacrifice all at once, and done with it, then it would seem easier; but to keep up a daily sacrifice of one's wishes, tastes, and pleasures, is rather a hard task, especially when one is pretty, young, and gay. Lessons all day, a highly instructive lecture, books over a solitary fire, or music with no audience but a sleepy cat and a bird with his head tucked under his wing, for evening entertainment, was not exactly what might be called festive; so, in spite of her brave resolutions, Polly did long for a little fun sometimes, and after saying virtuously to herself at nine: "Yes, it is much wiser and better for me to go to bed early, and be ready for work tomorrow," she would lie awake hearing the carriages roll to and fro, and imagining the gay girls inside, going to party, opera, or play, till Mrs. Dodd's hop pillow might as well have been stuffed with nettles, for any sleep it brought, or any use it was, except to catch and hide the tears that dropped on it when Polly's heart was very full.

Another thorn that wounded our Polly in her first attempt to make her way through the thicket that always bars a woman's progress, was the discovery that working for a living shuts a good many doors in one's face even in democratic America. As Fanny's guest she had been, in spite of poverty, kindly received wherever her friend took her, both as child and woman. Now, things were changed; the kindly people patronized, the careless forgot all about her, and even Fanny, with all her affection, felt that Polly the music teacher would not be welcome in many places where Polly the young lady had been accepted as “Miss Shaw’s friend.”

Some of the girls still nodded amiably, but never invited her to visit them; others merely dropped their eyelids, and went by without speaking, while a good many ignored her as entirely as if she had been invisible. These things hurt Polly more than she would confess, for at home every one worked, and every one was respected for it. She tried not to care, but girls feel little slights keenly, and more than once Polly was severely tempted to give up her plan, and run away to the safe shelter at home.

Fanny never failed to ask her to every sort of festivity in the Shaw mansion; but after a few trials, Polly firmly declined everything but informal visits when the family were alone. She soon found that even the new black silk was n’t fine enough for Fanny’s smallest party, and, after receiving a few of the expressive glances by which women convey their opinion of their neighbor’s toilet, and overhearing a joke or two “about that inevitable dress,” and “the little blackbird,” Polly folded away the once treasured frock, saying, with a choke in her voice: “I ‘ll wear it for Will, he likes it, and clothes can’t change his love for me.”

I am afraid the wholesome sweetness of Polly’s nature was getting a little soured by these troubles; but before lasting harm was done, she received, from an unexpected source, some of the real help which teaches young people how to bear these small crosses, by showing them the heavier ones they have escaped, and by giving them an idea of the higher pleasures one may earn in the good, old-fashioned ways that keep hearts sweet, heads sane, hands busy.

Everybody has their days of misfortune like little Rosamond, and Polly was beginning to think she had more than her share. One of these ended in a way which influenced her whole life, and so we will record it. It began early; for the hard-hearted little grate would n’t behave itself till she had used up a ruinous quantity of kindlings. Then she scalded poor Puttel by upsetting her coffee-pot; and instead of a leisurely, cosy meal, had to hurry away uncomfortably, for everything went wrong even to the coming off of both bonnet strings in the last dreadful scramble. Being late, she of course forgot her music, and hurrying back for it, fell into a puddle, which capped the climax of her despair.

Such a trying morning as that was! Polly felt out of tune herself, and all the pianos seemed to need a tuner as much as she did. The pupils were unusually stupid, and two of them announced that their mamma was going to take them to the South, whither she was suddenly called. This was a blow, for they had just begun, and Polly had n't the face to send in a bill for a whole quarter, though her plans and calculations were sadly disturbed by the failure of that sum.

Trudging home to dinner, tired and disappointed, poor Polly received another blow, which hurt her more than the loss of all her pupils. As she went hurrying along with a big music book in one hand and a paper bag of rolls for tea in the other, she saw Tom and Trix coming. As she watched them while they slowly approached, looking so gay and handsome and happy, it seemed to Polly as if all the sunshine and good walking was on their side of the street, all the wintry wind and mud on hers. Longing to see a friendly face and receive a kind word, she crossed over, meaning to nod and smile at least. Trix saw her first, and suddenly became absorbed in the distant horizon. Tom apparently did not see her, for his eyes were fixed on a fine horse just prancing by. Polly thought that he had seen her, and approached with a curious little flutter at her heart, for if Tom cut her she felt that her cup would be full.

On they came, Trix intent on the view, Tom staring at the handsome horse, and Polly, with red checks, expectant eyes, and the brown bundle, in full sight. One dreadful minute as they came parallel, and no one spoke or bowed, then it was all over, and Polly went on, feeling as if some one had slapped her in the face. “She would n't have believed it of Tom; it was all the doings of that horrid Trix; well, she would n't trouble him any more, if he was such a snob as to be ashamed of her just because she carried bundles and worked for her bread.” She clutched the paper bag fiercely as she said this to herself, then her eyes filled, and her lips trembled, as she added, “How could he do it, before her, too?”

Now Tom was quite guiltless of this offence, and had always nodded to Polly when they met; but it so happened he had always been alone till now, and that was why it cut so deeply, especially as Polly never had approved of Trix. Before she could clear her eyes or steady her face, a gentleman met her, lifted his hat, smiled, and said pleasantly, “Good morning, Miss Polly, I ‘m glad to meet you.” Then, with a sudden change of voice and manner, he added, “I beg pardon is anything the matter can I be of service?”

It was very awkward, but it could n't be helped, and all Polly could do was to tell the truth and make the best of it.

“It ‘s very silly, but it hurts me to be cut by my old friends. I shall get used to it presently, I dare say.”

Mr. Sydney glanced back, recognized the couple behind them, and turned round with a disgusted expression. Polly was fumbling for her handkerchief, and without a word he took both book and bundle from her, a little bit of kindness that meant a good deal just then. Polly felt it, and it did her good; hastily wiping the traitorous eyes, she laughed and said cheerfully, “There, I ‘m all right again; thank you, don’t trouble yourself with my parcels.”

“No trouble, I assure you, and this book reminds me of what I was about to say. Have you an hour to spare for my little niece? Her mother wants her to begin, and desired me to make the inquiry.”

“Did she, really?” and Polly looked up at him, as if she suspected him of inventing the whole thing, out of kindness.

Mr. Sydney smiled, and taking a note from his pocket, presented it, saying, with a reproachful look, “Behold the proof of my truth, and never doubt again.”

Polly begged pardon, read the note from the little girl’s mother, which was to have been left at her room if she was absent, and gave the bearer a very grateful look as she accepted this welcome addition to her pupils. Well pleased at the success of his mission, Sydney artfully led the conversation to music, and for a time Polly forgot her woes, talking enthusiastically on her favorite theme. As she reclaimed her book and bag, at her own door, she said, in her honest way, “Thank you very much for trying to make me forget my foolish little troubles.”

“Then let me say one thing more; though appearances are against him, I don’t believe Tom Shaw saw you. Miss Trix is equal to that sort of thing, but it is n’t like Tom, for with all his foppery he is a good fellow at heart.”

As Mr. Sydney said this, Polly held out her hand with a hearty “Thank you for that.” The young man shook the little hand in the gray woollen glove, gave her exactly the same bow which he did the Honorable Mrs. Davenport, and went away, leaving Polly to walk up stairs and address Puttel with the peculiar remark, “You are a true gentleman! so kind to say that about Tom. I ‘ll think it ‘s so, anyway; and won’t I teach Minnie in my very best style!”

Puttel purred, Nick chirped approvingly, and Polly ate her dinner with a better appetite than she had expected. But at the bottom of her heart there was a sore spot still, and the afternoon lessons dragged dismally. It was dusk when she got home, and as she sat in the firelight eating her bread and milk, several tears bedewed the little rolls, and even the home honey had a bitter taste.

“Now this won’t do,” she broke out all at once; “this is silly and wicked, and can’t be allowed. I ‘ll try the old plan and put myself right by doing some little kindness to somebody. Now what shall it be? O, I know! Fan is going to a party to-night; I ‘ll run up and help her dress; she likes to have me, and I enjoy seeing the pretty things. Yes, and I ‘ll take her two or three clusters of my daphne, it ‘s so sweet.”

Up got Polly, and taking her little posy, trotted away to the Shaws’, determined to be happy and contented in spite of Trix and hard work.

She found Fanny enduring torment under the hands of the hair-dresser, who was doing his best to spoil her hair, and distort her head with a mass of curls, braids, frizzles, and puffs; for though I discreetly refrain from any particular description, still, judging from the present fashions, I think one may venture to predict that six years hence they would be something frightful.

"How kind of you, Polly; I was just wishing you were here to arrange my flowers. These lovely daphnes will give odor to my camellias, and you were a dear to bring them. There 's my dress; how do you like it?" said Fanny, hardly daring to lift her eyes from under the yellow tower on her head.

"It 's regularly splendid; but how do you ever get into it?" answered Polly, surveying with girlish interest the cloud of pink and white lace that lay upon the bed.

"It 's fearfully and wonderfully made, but distractingly becoming, as you shall see. Trix thinks I 'm going to wear blue, so she has got a green one, and told Belle it would spoil the effect of mine, as we are much together, of course. Was n't that sweet of her? Belle came and told me in, time, and I just got pink, so my amiable sister, that is to be, won't succeed in her pretty little plot."

"I guess she has been reading the life of Josephine. You know she made a pretty lady, of whom she was jealous, sit beside her on a green sofa, which set off her own white dress and spoilt the blue one of her guest," answered Polly, busy with the flowers.

"Trix never reads anything; you are the one to pick up clever little stories. I 'll remember and use this one. Am I done? Yes, that is charming, is n't it, Polly?" and Fan rose to inspect the success of Monsieur's long labor.

"You know I don't appreciate a stylish coiffure as I ought, so I like your hair in the old way best. But this is 'the thing,' I suppose, and not a word must be said."

"Of course it is. Why, child, I have frizzed and burnt my hair so that I look like an old maniac with it in its natural state, and have to repair damages as well as I can. Now put the flowers just here," and Fanny laid a pink camellia in a nest of fuzz, and stuck a spray of daphne straight up at the back of her head.

"O, Fan, don't, it looks horridly so!" cried Polly, longing to add a little beauty to her friend's sallow face by a graceful adjustment of the flowers.

"Can't help it, that 's the way, and so it must be," answered Fan, planting another sprig half-way up the tower.

Polly groaned and offered no more suggestions as the work went on; but when Fan was finished from top to toe, she admired all she honestly could, and tried to keep her thoughts to herself. But her frank face betrayed her, for Fanny turned on her suddenly, saying, "You may as well free your mind, Polly, for I see by your eyes that something don't suit."

"I was only thinking of what grandma once said, that modesty had gone out of fashion," answered Polly, glancing at the waist of her friend's dress, which consisted of a belt, a bit of lace, and a pair of shoulder straps.

Fanny laughed good-naturedly, saying, as she clasped her necklace, "If I had such shoulders as yours, I should n't care what the fashion was. Now don't preach, but put my cloak on nicely, and come along, for I 'm to meet Tom and Trix, and promised to be there early."

Polly was to be left at home after depositing Fan at Belle's.

"I feel as if I was going myself," she said, as they rolled along.

"I wish you were, and you would be, Polly, if you weren't such a resolute thing. I 've teased, and begged, and offered anything I have if you 'll only break your absurd vow, and come and enjoy yourself."

"Thank you; but I won't, so don't trouble your kind heart about me; I 'm all right," said Polly, stoutly.

But when they drew up before the lighted house, and she found herself in the midst of the pleasant stir of festivity, the coming and going of carriages, the glimpses of bright colors, forms, and faces, the bursts of music, and a general atmosphere of gayety, Polly felt that she was n't all right, and as she drove away for a dull evening in her lonely little room, she just cried as heartily as any child denied a stick of candy.

"It 's dreadful wicked of me, but I can't help it," she sobbed to herself, in the corner of the carriage. "That music sets me all in a twitter, and I should have looked nice in Fan's blue tarlatan, and I know I could behave as well as any one, and have lots of partners, though I 'm not in that set. Oh, just one good gallop with Mr. Sydney or Tom! No, Tom would n't ask me there, and I would n't accept if he did. Oh, me! oh, me! I wish I was as old and homely, and good and happy, as Miss Mills!"

So Polly made her moan, and by the time she got home, was just in the mood to go to bed and cry herself to sleep, as girls have a way of doing when their small affliction becomes unbearable.

But Polly did n't get a chance to be miserable very long, for as she went up stairs feeling like the most injured girl in the world, she caught a glimpse of Miss Mills, sewing away with such a bright face that she could n't resist stopping for a word or two.

"Sit down, my dear, I 'm glad to see you, but excuse me if I go on with my work, as I 'm in a driving hurry to get these things done to-night," said the brisk little lady, with a smile and a nod, as she took a new needleful of thread, and ran up a seam as if for a wager.

"Let me help you, then; I 'm lazy and cross, and it will do me good," said

Polly, sitting down with the resigned feeling. “Well, if I can’t be happy, I can be useful, perhaps.”

“Thank you, my dear; yes, you can just hem the skirt while I put in the sleeves, and that will be a great lift.”

Polly put on her thimble in silence, but as Miss Mills spread the white flannel over her lap, she exclaimed, “Why, it looks like a shroud! Is it one?”

“No, dear, thank God, it is n’t, but it might have been, if we had n’t saved the poor little soul,” cried Miss Mills, with a sudden brightening of the face, which made it beautiful in spite of the stiff gray curl that bobbed on each temple, the want of teeth, and a crooked nose.

“Will you tell me about it? I like to hear your adventures and good works so much,” said Polly, ready to be amused by anything that made her forget herself.

“Ah, my dear, it ‘s a very common story, and that ‘s the saddest part of it. I ‘ll tell you all about it, for I think you may be able to help me. Last night I watched with poor Mary Floyd. She ‘s dying of consumption, you know,” began Miss Mills, as her nimble fingers flew, and her kind old face beamed over the work, as if she put a blessing in with every stitch. “Mary was very low, but about midnight fell asleep, and I was trying to keep things quiet, when Mrs. Finn she ‘s the woman of the house came and beckoned me out, with a scared face. ‘Little Jane has killed herself, and I don’t know what to do,’ she said, leading me up to the attic.”

“Who was little Jane?” broke in Polly, dropping her work.

“I only knew her as a pale, shy young girl who went in and out, and seldom spoke to any one. Mrs. Finn told me she was poor, but a busy, honest, little thing, who did n’t mix with the other folks, but lived and worked alone. ‘She has looked so down-hearted and pale for a week, that I thought she was sick, and asked her about it,’ said Mrs. Finn, ‘but she thanked me in her bashful way, and said she was pretty well, so I let her alone. But to-night, as I went up late to bed, I was kind of impressed to look in and see how the poor thing did, for she had n’t left her room all day. I did look in, and here ‘s what I found.’ As Mrs. Finn ended she opened the door of the back attic, and I saw about as sad a sight as these old eyes ever looked at.”

“O, what?” cried Polly, pale now with interest.

“A bare room, cold as a barn, and on the bed a little dead, white face that almost broke my heart, it was so thin, so patient, and so young. On the table was a bottle half full of laudanum, an old pocket-book, and a letter. Read that, my dear and don’t think hard of little Jane.”

Polly took the bit of paper Miss Mills gave her, and read these words:

DEAR MRS. FINN, Please forgive me for the trouble I make you, but I don’t see any other way. I can’t get work that pays enough to keep me; the Dr. says I can’t be well unless I rest. I hate to be a burden, so I ‘m going away not to trouble anybody anymore. I ‘ve sold my things to pay what I owe you. Please let me be as I am, and don’t let people come and look at me. I hope it is n’t very wicked, but there don’t seem any room for me in the world, and I ‘m not afraid to die now, though I should be if I stayed and got bad because I had n’t strength to keep right. Give my love to the baby, and so good-by, good-by.

JANE BRYANT.

“O, Miss Mills, how dreadful!” cried Polly, with her eyes so full she could hardly read the little letter.

“Not so dreadful as it might have been, but a bitter, sad thing to see that child, only seventeen, lying there in her little clean, old night-gown, waiting for death to come and take her, because ‘there did n’t seem to be any room for her in the world.’ Ah, well, we saved her, for it was n’t too late, thank heaven, and the first thing she said was, ‘Oh, why did you bring me back?’ I ‘ve been nursing her all day, hearing her story, and trying to show her that there is room and a welcome for her. Her mother died a year ago, and since then she has been struggling along alone. She is one of the timid, innocent, humble creatures who can’t push their way, and so get put aside and forgotten. She has tried all sorts of poorly paid work, could n’t live on it decently, got discouraged, sick, frightened, and could see no refuge from the big, bad world but to get out of it while she was n’t afraid to die. A very old story, my dear, new and dreadful as it seems to you, and I think it won’t do you any harm to see and help this little girl, who has gone through dark places that you are never like to know.”

“I will; indeed, I will do all I can! Where is she now?” asked Polly, touched to the heart by the story, so simple yet so sad.

“There,” and Miss Mills pointed to the door of her own little bedroom. “She was well enough to be moved to-night, so I brought her home and laid her safely in my bed. Poor little soul! she looked about her for a minute, then the lost look went away, and she gave a great sigh, and took my hand in both her thin bits of ones, and said, ‘O, ma’am, I feel as if I ‘d been born into a new world. Help me to begin again, and I ‘ll do better.’ So I told her she was my child now, and might rest here, sure of a home as long as I had one.”

As Miss Mills spoke in her motherly tone, and cast a proud and happy look toward the warm and quiet nest in which she had sheltered this friendless little sparrow, feeling sure that God meant her to keep it from falling to the ground, Polly put both arms about her neck, and kissed her withered cheek with as much loving reverence as if she had been a splendid saint, for in the likeness of this plain old maid she saw the lovely charity that blesses and saves the world.

“How good you are! Dear Miss Mills, tell me what to do, let me help you, I ‘m ready for anything,” said Polly, very humbly, for her own troubles looked so small and foolish beside the stern hardships which had nearly had so tragical an end, that she felt heartily ashamed of herself, and quite burned to atone for them.

Miss, Mills stopped to stroke the fresh cheek opposite, to smile, and say, “Then, Polly, I think I ‘ll ask you to go in and say a friendly word to my little girl. The sight of you will do her good; and you have just the right way of comforting people, without making a fuss.”

“Have I?” said Polly, looking much gratified by the words.

“Yes, dear, you ‘ve the gift of sympathy, and the rare art of showing it without offending. I would n’t let many girls in to see my poor Jenny, because they ‘d only flutter and worry her; but you ‘ll know what to do; so go, and take this wrapper with you; it ‘s done now, thanks to your nimble fingers.”

Polly threw the warm garment over her arm, feeling a thrill of gratitude that it was to wrap a living girl in, and not to hide away a young heart that had grown cold too soon. Pushing open the door, she went quietly into the dimly lighted room, and on the pillow saw a face that drew her to it with an irresistible power, for it was touched by a solemn shadow that made its youth pathetic. As she paused at the bedside, thinking the girl asleep, a pair of hollow, dark eyes opened wide, and looked up at her; startled at first, then softening with pleasure, at sight of the bonny face before them, and then a humble, beseeching expression filled them, as if asking pardon for the rash act nearly committed, and pity for the hard fate that prompted it. Polly read the language of these eyes, and answered their mute prayer with a simple eloquence that said more than any words for she just stooped down and kissed the poor child, with her own eyes full, and lips that trembled with the sympathy she could not tell. Jenny put both arms about her neck, and began to shed the quiet tears that so refresh and comfort heavy hearts when a tender touch unseals the fountain where they lie.

“Everybody is so kind,” she sobbed, “and I was so wicked, I don’t deserve it.”

“Oh, yes, you do; don’t think of that, but rest and let us pet you. The old life was too hard for such a little thing as you, and we are going to try and make the new one ever so much easier and happier,” said Polly, forgetting everything except that this was a girl like herself, who needed heartening up.

“Do you live here?” asked Jenny, when her tears were wiped away, still clinging to the new-found friend.

“Yes, Miss Mills lets me have a little room up stairs, and there I have my cat and bird, my piano and my posy pots, and live like a queen. You must come up and see me to-morrow if you are able. I ‘m often lonely, for there are no young people in the house to play with me,” answered Polly, smiling hospitably.

"Do you sew?" asked Jenny.

"No, I 'm a music teacher, and trot round giving lessons all day."

"How beautiful it sounds, and how happy you must be, so strong and pretty, and able to go round making music all the time," sighed Jenny, looking with respectful admiration at the plump, firm hand held in both her thin and feeble ones.

It did sound pleasant even to Polly's ears, and she felt suddenly so rich, and so contented, that she seemed a different creature from the silly girl who cried because she could n't go to the party. It passed through her mind like a flash, the contrast between her life, and that of the wan creature lying before her, and she felt as if she could not give enough out of her abundance to this needy little sister, who had nothing in the wide world but the life just saved to her. That minute did more for Polly than many sermons, or the wisest books, for it brought her face to face with bitter truths, showed her the dark side of life, and seemed to blow away her little vanities, her frivolous desires, like a wintry wind, that left a wholesome atmosphere behind. Sitting on the bedside, Polly listened while Jane told the story, which was so new to her listener, that every word sank deep into her heart, and never was forgotten.

"Now you must go to sleep. Don't cry nor think, nor do anything but rest. That will please Miss Mills best. I 'll leave the doors open, and play you a lullaby that you can't resist. Good night, dear." And with another kiss, Polly went away to sit in the darkness of her own room, playing her softest airs till the tired eyes below were shut, and little Jane seemed to float away on a sea of pleasant sounds, into the happier life which had just dawned for her.

Polly had fully intended to be very miserable, and cry herself to sleep; but when she lay down at last, her pillow seemed very soft, her little room very lovely, with the firelight flickering on all the home-like objects, and her new-blown roses breathing her a sweet good-night. She no longer felt an injured, hard-working, unhappy Polly, but as if quite burdened with blessings, for which she was n't half grateful enough. She had heard of poverty and suffering, in the vague, far-off way, which is all that many girls, safe in happy homes, ever know of it; but now she had seen it, in a shape which she could feel and understand, and life grew more earnest to her from that minute. So much to do in the great, busy world, and she had done so little. Where should she begin? Then, like an answer came little Jenny's words, now taking a 'new significance' to Polly's mind, "To be strong, and beautiful, and go round making music all the time." Yes, she could do that; and with a very earnest prayer, Polly asked for the strength of an upright soul, the beauty of a tender heart, the power to make her life a sweet and stirring song, helpful while it lasted, remembered when it died.

Little Jane’s last thought had been to wish with all her might, that “God would bless the dear, kind girl up there, and give her all she asked.” I think both prayers, although too humble to be put in words, went up together, for in the fulness of time they were beautifully answered.

CHAPTER X. BROTHERS AND SISTERS

POLLY'S happiest day was Sunday, for Will never failed to spend it with her. Instead of sleeping later than usual that morning, she was always up bright and early, flying round to get ready for her guest, for Will came to breakfast, and they made a long day of it. Will considered his sister the best and prettiest girl going, and Polly, knowing well that a time would come when he would find a better and a prettier, was grateful for his good opinion, and tried to deserve it. So she made her room and herself as neat and inviting as possible, and always ran to meet him with a bright face and a motherly greeting, when he came tramping in, ruddy, brisk, and beaming, with the brown loaf and the little pot of beans from the bake-house near by.

They liked a good country breakfast, and nothing gave Polly more satisfaction than to see her big boy clear the dishes, empty the little coffee-pot, and then sit and laugh at her across the ravaged table. Another pleasure was to let him help clear away, as they used to do at home, while the peals of laughter that always accompanied this performance did Miss Mills' heart good to hear, for the room was so small and Will so big that he seemed to be everywhere at once, and Polly and Puttel were continually dodging his long arms and legs. Then they used to inspect the flower pots, pay Nick a visit, and have a little music as a good beginning for the day, after which they went to church and dined with Miss Mills, who considered Will "an excellent young man." If the afternoon was fair, they took a long walk together over the bridges into the country, or about the city streets full of Sabbath quietude. Most people meeting them would have seen only an awkward young man, with a boy's face atop of his tall body, and a quietly dressed, fresh faced little woman hanging on his arm; but a few people, with eyes to read romances and pleasant histories everywhere, found something very attractive in this couple, and smiled as they passed, wondering if they were young, lovers, or country cousins "looking round."

If the day was stormy, they stayed at home, reading, writing letters, talking over their affairs, and giving each other good advice; for, though Will was nearly three years younger than Polly, he could n't for the life of him help assuming amusingly venerable airs, when he became a Freshman. In the twilight he had a good lounge on the sofa, and Polly sung to him, which arrangement he particularly enjoyed, it was so "cosy and homey." At nine o'clock, Polly packed his bag with clean clothes, nicely mended, such remnants of the festive tea as were transportable, and kissed him "good-night," with many injunctions to muffle up his throat going over the bridge, and be sure that his feet were dry and warm when he went to bed. All of which Will laughed at, accepted graciously, and did n't obey; but he liked it, and trudged away for another week's work, rested, cheered, and strengthened by that quiet, happy day with Polly, for he had been brought up to believe in home influences, and this brother and sister loved one another dearly, and were not ashamed to own it.

One other person enjoyed the humble pleasures of these Sundays quite as much as Polly and Will. Maud used to beg to come to tea, and Polly, glad to do anything for those who had done a good deal for her, made a point of calling for the little girl as they came home from their walk, or sending Will to escort her in the carriage, which Maud always managed to secure if bad weather threatened to quench her hopes. Tom and Fanny laughed at her fancy, but she did not tire of it, for the child was lonely, and found something in that little room which the great house could not give her.

Maud was twelve now; a pale, plain child, with sharp, intelligent eyes, and a busy little mind, that did a good deal more thinking than anybody imagined. She was just at the unattractive, fidgety age when no one knew what to do with her, and so let her fumble her way up as she could, finding pleasure in odd things, and living much alone, for she did not go to school, because her shoulders were growing round, and Mrs. Shaw would not "allow her figure to be spoiled." That suited Maud excellently; and whenever her father spoke of sending her again, or getting a governess, she was seized with bad headaches, a pain in her back, or weakness of the eyes, at which Mr. Shaw laughed, but let her holiday go on. Nobody seemed to care much for plain, pug-nosed little Maudie; her father was busy, her mother nervous and sick, Fanny absorbed in her own affairs, and Tom regarded her as most young men do their younger sisters, as a person born for his amusement and convenience, nothing more. Maud admired Tom with all her heart, and made a little slave of herself to him, feeling well repaid if he merely said, "Thank you, chicken," or did n't pinch her nose, or nip her ear, as he had a way of doing, "just as if I was a doll, or a dog, and had n't got any feelings," she sometimes said to Fanny, when some service or sacrifice had been accepted without gratitude or respect. It never occurred to Tom, when Maud sat watching him with her face full of wistfulness, that she wanted to be petted as much as ever he did in his neglected boyhood, or that when he called her "Pug" before people, her little feelings were as deeply wounded as his used to be, when the boys called him "Carrots." He was fond of her in his fashion, but he did n't take the trouble to show it, so Maud worshipped him afar off, afraid to betray the affection that no rebuff could kill or cool.

One snowy Sunday afternoon Tom lay on the sofa in his favorite attitude, reading “Pendennis” for the fourth time, and smoking like a chimney as he did so. Maud stood at the window watching the falling flakes with an anxious countenance, and presently a great sigh broke from her.

“Don’t do that again, chicken, or you ‘ll blow me away. What’s the matter?” asked Tom, throwing down his book with a yawn that threatened dislocation.

“I ‘m afraid I can’t go to Polly’s,” answered Maud, disconsolately.

“Of course you can’t; it ‘s snowing hard, and father won’t be home with the carriage till this evening. What are you always cutting off to Polly’s for?”

“I like it; we have such nice times, and Will is there, and we bake little johnny-cakes in the baker before the fire, and they sing, and it is so pleasant.”

“Warbling johnny-cakes must be interesting. Come and tell me all about it.”

“No, you ‘ll only laugh at me.”

“I give you my word I won’t, if I can help it; but I really am dying of curiosity to know what you do down there. You like to hear secrets, so tell me yours, and I ‘ll be as dumb as an oyster.”

“It is n’t a secret, and you would n’t care for it. Do you want another pillow?” she added, as Tom gave his a thump.

“This will do; but why you women always stick tassels and fringe all over a sofa-cushion, to tease and tickle a fellow, is what I don’t understand.”

“One thing that Polly does Sunday nights, is to take Will’s head in her lap, and smooth his forehead. It rests him after studying so hard, she says. If you don’t like the pillow, I could do that for you, ‘cause you look as if you were more tired of studying than Will,” said Maud, with some hesitation, but an evident desire to be useful and agreeable.

“Well, I don’t care if you do try it, for I am confoundedly tired.” And Tom laughed, as he recalled the frolic he had been on the night before.

Maud established herself with great satisfaction, and Tom owned that a silk apron was nicer than a fuzzy cushion.

“Do you like it?” she asked, after a few strokes over the hot forehead, which she thought was fevered by intense application to Greek and Latin.

“Not bad; play away,” was the gracious reply, as Tom shut his eyes, and lay so still that Maud was charmed at the success of her attempt. Presently, she said, softly, “Tom, are you asleep?”

“Just turning the corner.”

“Before you get quite round would you please tell me what a Public Admonition is?”

“What do you want to know for?” demanded Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

“I heard Will talking about Publics and Privates, and I meant to ask him, but I forgot."

"What did he say?"

"I don't remember; it was about somebody who cut prayers, and got a Private, and had done all sorts of bad things, and had one or two Publics. I did n't hear the name and did n't care; I only wanted to know what the words meant."

"So Will tells tales, does he?" and Tom's forehead wrinkled with a frown.

"No, he did n't; Polly knew about it and asked him."

"Will's a 'dig,'" growled Tom, shutting his eyes again, as if nothing more could be said of the delinquent William.

"I don't care if he is; I like him very much, and so does Polly."

"Happy Fresh!" said Tom, with a comical groan.

"You need n't sniff at him, for he is nice, and treats me with respect," cried Maud, with an energy that made Tom laugh in her face.

"He 's good to Polly always, and puts on her cloak for her, and says 'my dear,' and kisses her 'good-night,' and don't think it 's silly, and I wish I had a brother just like him, yes, I do!" And Maud showed signs of woe, for her disappointment about going was very great.

"Bless my boots! what's the chicken ruffling up her little feathers and pecking at me for? Is that the way Polly soothes the best of brothers?" said Tom, still laughing.

"Oh, I forgot! there, I won't cry; but I do want to go," and Maud swallowed her tears, and began to stroke again.

Now Tom's horse and sleigh were in the stable, for he meant to drive out to College that evening, but he did n't take Maud's hint. It was less trouble to lie still, and say in a conciliatory tone, "Tell me some more about this good boy, it 's very interesting."

"No, I shan't, but I 'll tell about Puttel's playing on the piano," said Maud, anxious to efface the memory of her momentary weakness. "Polly points to the right key with a little stick, and Puttel sits on the stool and pats each key as it 's touched, and it makes a tune. It 's so funny to see her, and Nick perches on the rack and sings as if he 'd kill himself."

"Very thrilling," said Tom, in a sleepy tone.

Maud felt that her conversation was not as interesting as she hoped, and tried again.

"Polly thinks you are handsomer than Mr. Sydney."

"Much obliged."

"I asked which she thought had the nicest face, and she said yours was the handsomest, and his the best."

"Does he ever go there?" asked a sharp voice behind them; and looking round

Maud saw Fanny in the big chair, cooking her feet over the register.

“I never saw him there; he sent up some books one day, and Will teased her about it.”

“What did she do?” demanded Fanny. “Oh, she shook him.”

“What a spectacle!” and Tom looked as if he would have enjoyed seeing it, but Fanny’s face grew so forbidding, that Tom’s little dog, who was approaching to welcome her, put his tail between his legs and fled under the table.

“Then there is n’t any ‘Sparking Sunday night’?” sung Tom, who appeared to have waked up again.

“Of course not. Polly is n’t going to marry anybody; she ‘s going to keep house for Will when he ‘s a minister, I heard her say so,” cried Maud, with importance.

“What a fate for pretty Polly!” ejaculated Tom.

“She likes it, and I ‘m sure I should think she would; it ‘s beautiful to hear ‘em plan it all out.”

“Any more gossip to retail, Pug?” asked Tom a minute after, as Maud seemed absorbed in visions of the future.

“He told a funny story about blowing up one of the professors. You never told us, so I suppose you did n’t know it. Some bad fellow put a torpedo, or some sort of powder thing, under the chair, and it went off in the midst of the lesson, and the poor man flew up, frightened most to pieces, and the boys ran with pails of water to put the fire out. But the thing that made Will laugh most was, that the very fellow who did it got his trousers burnt trying to put out the fire, and he asked the is it Faculty or President?”

“Either will do,” murmured Tom, who was shaking with suppressed laughter.

“Well, he asked ‘em to give him some new ones, and they did give him money enough, for a nice pair; but he got some cheap ones, with horrid great stripes on ‘em, and always wore ‘em to that particular class, ‘which was one too many for the fellows,’ Will said, and with the rest of the money he had a punch party. Was n’t it dreadful?”

“Awful!” And Tom exploded into a great laugh, that made Fanny cover her ears, and the little dog bark wildly.

“Did you know that bad boy?” asked innocent Maud.

“Slightly,” gasped Tom, in whose wardrobe at college those identical trousers were hanging at that moment.

“Don’t make such a noise, my head aches dreadfully,” said Fanny, fretfully.

“Girls’ heads always do ache,” answered Tom, subsiding from a roar into a chuckle.

“What pleasure you boys can find in such ungentlemanly things, I don’t see,” said Fanny, who was evidently out of sorts.

“As much a mystery to you as it is to us, how you girls can like to gabble and prink from one week’s end to the other,” retorted Tom.

There was a pause after this little passage-at-arms, but Fan wanted to be amused, for time hung heavily on her hands, so she asked, in a more amiable tone, “How ‘s Trix?”

“As sweet as ever,” answered Tom, gruffly.

“Did she scold you, as usual?”

“She just did.”

“What was the matter?”

“Well, I ‘ll leave it to you if this is n’t unreasonable: she won’t dance with me herself, yet don’t like me to go it with anybody else. I said, I thought, if a fellow took a girl to a party, she ought to dance with him once, at least, especially if they were engaged. She said that was the very reason why she should n’t do it; so, at the last hop, I let her alone, and had a gay time with Belle, and to-day Trix gave it to me hot and heavy, coming home from church.”

“If you go and engage yourself to a girl like that, I don’t know what you can expect. Did she wear her Paris hat to-day?” added Fan, with sudden interest in her voice.

“She wore some sort of a blue thing, with a confounded bird of Paradise in it, that kept whisking into my face every time she turned her head.”

“Men never know a pretty thing when they see it. That hat is perfectly lovely.”

“They know a lady when they see her, and Trix don’t look like one; I can’t say where the trouble is, but there ‘s too much fuss and feathers for my taste. You are twice as stylish, yet you never look loud or fast.”

Touched by this unusual compliment, Fanny drew her chair nearer as she replied with complacency, “Yes, I flatter myself I do know how to dress well. Trix never did; she ‘s fond of gay colors, and generally looks like a walking rainbow.”

“Can’t you give her a hint? Tell her not to wear blue gloves anyway, she knows I hate ‘em.”

“I ‘ve done my best for your sake, Tom, but she is a perverse creature, and don’t mind a word I say, even about things much more objectionable than blue gloves.”

“Maudie, run and bring me my other cigar case, it ‘s lying round somewhere.”

Maud went; and as soon as the door was shut, Tom rose on his elbow, saying in a cautiously lowered voice, “Fan, does Trix paint?”

“Yes, and draws too,” answered Fanny, with a sly laugh.

“Come, you know what I mean; I ‘ve a right to ask and you ought to tell,” said

Tom, soberly, for he was beginning to find that being engaged was not unmitigated bliss.

"What makes you think she does?"

"Well, between ourselves," said Tom, looking a little sheepish, but anxious to set his mind at rest, "she never will let me kiss her on her cheek, nothing but an unsatisfactory peck at her lips. Then the other day, as I took a bit of heliotrope out of a vase to put in my button-hole, I whisked a drop of water into her face; I was going to wipe it off, but she pushed my hand away, and ran to the glass, where she carefully dabbed it dry, and came back with one cheek redder than the other. I did n't say anything, but I had my suspicions. Come now, does she?"

"Yes, she does; but don't say a word to her, for she 'll never forgive my telling if she knew it."

"I don't care for that; I don't like it, and I won't have it," said Tom, decidedly.

"You can't help yourself. Half the girls do it, either paint or powder, darken their lashes with burnt hair-pins, or take cologne on lumps of sugar or belladonna to make their eyes bright. Clara tried arsenic for her complexion, but her mother stopped it," said Fanny, betraying the secrets of the prison-house in the basest manner.

"I knew you girls were a set of humbugs, and very pretty ones, too, some of you, but I can't say I like to see you painted up like a lot of actresses," said Tom, with an air of disgust.

"I don't do anything of the sort, or need it, but Trix does; and having chosen her, you must abide your choice, for better or worse."

"It has n't come to that yet," muttered Tom, as he lay down again with a rebellious air.

Maud's return put an end to these confidences, though Tom excited her curiosity by asking the mysterious question, "I say, Fan, is Polly up to that sort of thing?"

"No, she thinks it 's awful. When she gets pale and dragged out she will probably change her mind."

"I doubt it," said Tom.

"Polly says it is n't proper to talk secrets before people who ain't in 'em," observed Maud, with dignity.

"Do, for mercy sake, stop talking about Polly, I 'm sick to death of it," cried Fanny, snappishly.

"Hullo!" and Tom sat up to take a survey. "I thought you were bosom friends, and as spoony as ever."

"Well, I am fond of Polly, but I get tired of hearing Maud sing her praises everlastingly. Now don't go and repeat that, chatterbox."

"My goodness, is n't she cross?" whispered Maud to Tom.

"As two sticks; let her be. There 's the bell; see who it is, Pug," answered Tom, as a tingle broke the silence of the house.

Maud went to peep over the banisters, and came flying back in a rapture.

"It 's Will come for me! Can't I go? It don't snow hard, and I 'll bundle up, and you can send for me when papa comes."

"I don't care what you do," answered Fan, who was in a very bad temper.

Without waiting for any other permission, Maud rushed away to get ready. Will would n't come up, he was so snowy, and Fanny was glad, because with her he was bashful, awkward, and silent, so Tom went down and entertained him with Maud's report. They were very good friends, but led entirely different lives, Will being a "dig," and Tom a "bird," or, in plain English, one was a hard student, and the other a jolly young gentleman. Tom had rather patronized Will, who did n't like it, and showed that he did n't by refusing to borrow money of him, or accept any of his invitations to join the clubs and societies to which Tom belonged. So Shaw let Milton alone, and he got on very well in his own way, doggedly sticking to his books, and resisting all temptations but those of certain libraries, athletic games, and such inexpensive pleasures as were within his means; for this benighted youth had not yet discovered that college nowadays is a place in which to "sky-lark," not to study.

When Maud came down and trotted contentedly away, holding Will's hand, Tom watched them out of sight, and then strolled about the house whistling and thinking, till he went to sleep in his father's arm-chair, for want of something better to do. He awoke to the joys of a solitary tea, for his mother never came down, and Fanny shut herself and her headache up in her own room.

"Well, this is cheerful," he said, as the clock struck eight, and his fourth cigar came to an end. "Trix is mad, and Fan in the dumps, so I 'll take myself off. Guess I 'll go round to Polly's, and ask Will to drive out with me, and save him the walk, poor chap. Might bring Midget home, it will please her, and there 's no knowing when the governor will be back."

With these thoughts in his head, Tom leisurely got under way, and left his horse at a neighboring stable, for he meant to make a little call, and see what it was Maud enjoyed so much.

"Polly is holding forth," he said to himself, as he went quietly up stairs, and the steady murmur of a pleasant voice came down to him. Tom laughed at Polly's earnest way of talking when she was interested in anything. But he liked it because it was so different from the coquettish clatter of most of the girls with whom he talked. Young men often laugh at the sensible girls whom they secretly respect, and affect to admire the silly ones whom they secretly despise, because earnestness, intelligence, and womanly dignity are not the fashion.

The door was ajar, and pausing in the dark entry Tom took a survey before he went in. The prospect was not dazzling, but home-like and pleasant. The light of a bright fire filled the little room, and down on a stool before it was Maud tending Puttel, and watching with deep interest the roasting of an apple intended for her special benefit. On the couch lounged Will, his thoughtful eyes fixed on Polly, who, while she talked, smoothed the broad forehead of her “yellow-haired laddie” in a way that Tom thought an immense improvement on Maud’s performance. They had evidently been building castles in the air, for Polly was saying in her most impressive manner, “Well, whatever you do, Will, don’t have a great, costly church that takes so much money to build and support it that you have nothing to give away. I like the plain, old-fashioned churches, built for use, not show, where people met for hearty praying and preaching, and where everybody made their own music instead of listening to opera singers, as we do now. I don’t care if the old churches were bare and cold, and the seats hard, there was real piety in them, and the sincerity of it was felt in the lives of the people. I don’t want a religion that I put away with my Sunday clothes, and don’t take out till the day comes round again; I want something to see and feel and live by day-by-day, and I hope you ‘ll be one of the true ministers, who can teach by precept and example, how to get and keep it.”

“I hope I shall be, Polly, but you know they say that in families, if there is a boy who can’t do anything else, they make a minister of him. I sometimes think I ain’t good for much, and that seems to me the reason why I should n’t even try to be a minister,” said Will, smiling, yet looking as if with all his humility he did have faith in the aspirations that came to him in his best moments.

“Some one said that very thing to father once, and I remember he answered, ‘I am glad to give my best and brightest son to the service of God.’“

“Did he say that?” and Will’s color rose, for the big, book-loving fellow was as sensitive as a girl to the praise of those dearest to him.

“Yes,” said Polly, unconsciously giving the strongest stimulus to her brother’s hope and courage. “Yes, and he added, ‘I shall let my boys follow the guide that is in them, and only ask of them to use their gifts conscientiously, and be honest, useful men.’“

“So we will! Ned is doing well out West, and I ‘m hard at it here. If father does his best to give us the chance we each want, the least we can do is to work with a will.”

“Whatever you do, you can’t help working with a Will,” cried Tom, who had been so interested, that he forgot he was playing eavesdropper.

Polly flew up, looking so pleased and surprised, that Tom reproached himself for not having called oftener.

"I 've come for Maud," he announced, in a paternal tone, which made that young lady open her eyes.

"I can't go till my apple is done; besides, it is n't nine yet, and Will is going to take me along, when he goes. I 'd rather have him."

"I 'm going to take you both in the cutter. The storm is over, but it is heavy walking, so you 'll drive out with me, old man?" said Tom, with a nod at Will.

"Of course he will; and thank you very much. I 've been trying to keep him all night; Miss Mills always manages to find a corner for stray people, but he insists on going, so as to get to work early to-morrow," said Polly, delighted to see that Tom was taking off his coat, as if he meant to wait for Maud's apple, which Polly blessed for being so slow to cook.

Putting her guest into the best chair, Polly sat down and beamed at him with such hospitable satisfaction, that Tom went up several pegs in his own estimation.

"You don't come very often, so we are rather over-powered when you do honor us," she said, demurely.

"Well, you, know we fellows are so busy, we have n't much time to enjoy ourselves," answered Tom.

"Ahem!" said Will, loudly.

"Take a troche," said Tom.

Then they both burst out laughing, and Polly, fully understanding the joke, joined them, saying, "Here are some peanuts, Tom; do enjoy yourself while you can."

"Now I call that a delicate compliment!" And Tom, who had not lost his early relish for this sort of refreshment, though he seldom indulged his passion nowadays, because peanuts are considered vulgar, fell to cracking and munching with great satisfaction.

"Do you remember the first visit I made at your house, how you gave me peanuts, coming from the depot, and frightened me out of my wits, pretending the coachman was tipsy?" asked Polly.

"Of course I do, and how we coasted one day," answered Tom, laughing.

"Yes, and the velocipede; you 've got the scar of that yet, I see."

"I remember how you stood by me while it was sewed up; that was very plucky, Polly."

"I was dreadfully afraid, but I remember I wanted to seem very brave, because you 'd called me a coward."

"Did I? Ought to have been ashamed of myself. I used to rough you shamefully, Polly, and you were so good-natured, you let me do it."

"Could n't help myself," laughed Polly. "I did use to think you were an awful boy, but seems to me I rather liked it."

"She had so much of it at home, she got used to it," put in Will, pulling the little curl behind Polly's ear.

"You boys never teased me as Tom did, that 's the reason it amused me, I suppose; novelty hath charms, you know."

"Grandma used to lecture Tom for plaguing you, Polly, and he used to say he 'd be a tip-top boy, but he was n't," observed Maud, with a venerable air.

"Dear old grandma; she did her best, but I 'm a bad lot," said Tom, with a shake of the head and a sober face.

"It always seems as if she must be up in her rooms, and I can't get used to finding them empty," added Polly, softly.

"Father would n't have anything moved, and Tom sits up there sometimes; it makes him feel good, he says," said Maud, who had a talent for betraying trifles which people preferred should not be mentioned in public.

"You 'd better hurry up your apple, for if it is n't done pretty soon, you 'll have to leave it, Pug," said Tom, looking annoyed.

"How is Fan?" asked Polly, with tact.

"Well, Fan is rather under the weather; says she 's dyspeptic, which means cross."

"She is cross, but she 's sick too, for I found her crying one day, and she said nobody cared about her, and she might as well be dead," added Maud, having turned her apple with tender care.

"We must try to cheer her up, among us. If I was n't so busy I 'd like to devote myself to her, she has done so much for me," said Polly, gratefully.

"I wish you could. I can't understand her, for she acts like a weathercock, and I never know how I 'm going to find her. I hate to have her mope so, but, upon my life, I don't know what to do," said Tom; but as he uttered the words, something was suggested by the sight before him. Chairs were few, and Polly had taken half of Will's when they drew round the fire. Now she was leaning against him, in a cosy, confiding way, delightful to behold, while Will's strong arm went round her with a protecting air, which said, as plainly as any words, that this big brother and small sister knew how to love and help one another. It was a pleasant little picture, all the pleasanter for its unconsciousness, and Tom found it both suggestive and agreeable.

"Poor old Fan, she don't get much petting; maybe that 's what she wants. I 'll try it and see, for she stands by me like a trump. If she was a rosy, cosy little woman, like Polly, it would come easier, though," thought Tom, as he meditatively ate his last nut, feeling that fraternal affection could not be very difficult of demonstration, to brothers blessed with pretty, good-tempered sisters.

"I told Tom about the bad fellow who blew up the professor, and he said he knew him, slightly; and I was so relieved, because I had a kind of a feeling that it was Tom himself, you and Will laughed so about it."

Maud had a queer way of going on with her own thoughts, and suddenly coming out with whatever lay uppermost, regardless of time, place, or company. As this remark fell from her, there was a general smile, and Polly said, with mock solemnity, "It was a sad thing, and I 've no doubt that misguided young man is very sorry for it now."

"He looked perfectly bowed down with remorse last time I saw him," said Will, regarding Tom with eyes full of fun, for Will was a boy as well as a bookworm, and relished a joke as well as scatter-brained Tom.

"He always is remorseful after a scrape, I 've understood, for he is n't a very bad fellow, only his spirits are one too many for him, and he is n't as fond of his book as another fellow I know."

"I 'm afraid he 'll he expelled if he don't mind," said Polly, warningly.

"Should n't wonder if he was, he 's such an unlucky dog," answered Tom, rather soberly.

"I hope he 'll remember that his friends will be very much disappointed if he is. He might make them so proud and happy; that I guess he will, for he is n't half as thoughtless as he makes himself out," said Polly, looking across at Tom with such friendly eyes that he was quite touched, though of course he did n't show it.

"Thank you, Polly; he may pull through, but I have my doubts. Now old man, let us 'pud' along; it 's getting late for the chicken," he added, relapsing into the graceful diction with which a classical education gifts its fortunate possessor.

Taking advantage of the moment while Will was wrestling with his boots in the closet, and Maud was absorbed in packing her apple into a large basket, Polly said to Tom in a low tone, "Thank you very much, for being so kind to Will."

"Bless your heart, I have n't done anything; he 's such a proud fellow he won't let me," answered Tom.

"But you do in many little ways; to-night, for example. Do you think I don't know that the suit of clothes he 's just got would have cost a good deal more, if your tailor had n't made them? He 's only a boy, and don't understand things yet; but I know your way of helping proud people; so that they don't find it out, and I do thank you, Tom, so much."

"Oh, come, Polly, that won't do. What do you know about tailors and college matters?" said Tom, looking as much confused as if she had found him out in something reprehensible.

"I don't know much, and that 's the reason why I 'm grateful for your kindness to Will. I don't care what stories they tell about you, I 'm sure, you won't lead him into trouble, but keep him straight, for my sake. You know I 've lost one brother, and Will takes Jimmy's place to me now."

The tears in Polly's eyes as she said that made Tom vow a tremendous vow within himself to stand by Will through thick and thin, and "keep him straight for Polly's sake"; feeling all the time how ill-fitted he was for such a task.

"I 'll do my best," he said, heartily, as he pressed the hand Polly gave him, with a look which assured her that he felt the appeal to his honor, and that henceforth the country lad was safe from all the temptations Tom could have offered him.

"There! now I shall give that to mamma to take her pills in; it 's just what she likes, and it pleases her to be thought of," said Maud, surveying her gift with complacency, as she put on her things.

"You 're a good little soul, to remember poor mum, said Tom, with an approving nod.

"Well, she was so pleased with the grapes you brought her, I thought I 'd try something, and maybe she 'd say 'Thank you, darling,' to me too. Do you think she will?" whispered Maud, with the wistful look so often seen on her little plain face.

"See if she don't;" and to Maud's great surprise Tom did n't laugh at her project.

"Good night, dear; take care of yourself, and keep your muffler round your mouth going over the bridge, or you 'll be as hoarse as a crow to-morrow," said Polly, as she kissed her brother, who returned it without looking as if he thought it "girl's nonsense" Then the three piled into the sleigh and drove off, leave Polly nodding on the doorstep.

Maud found the drive altogether too short, but was consoled by the promise of a longer one if the sleighing lasted till next Saturday: and when Tom ran up to bid his mother good-by, and give her a hint about Maud's gift, she stayed below to say, at the last minute, in unconscious imitation of Polly.

"Good night; take care of yourself, my dear."

Tom laughed, and was about to pinch the much enduring little nose; but, as if the words reminded him of something, he gave her a kiss instead, a piece of forbearance which almost took Maud's breath away with surprise and gratification.

It was rather a silent drive, for Will obediently kept his muffler up, and Tom fell into a brown study.

He was not much given to reflection, but occasionally indulged when something gave him a turn in that direction, and at such times he was as sober and sincere as could be desired. Any one might have lectured him for an hour without doing as much good as that little call and the chat that grew out of it, for, though nothing very wise or witty was said, many things were suggested, and every one knows that persuasive influences are better than any amount of moralizing. Neither Polly nor Will tried to do anything of the sort, and that was the charm of it. Nobody likes to be talked to, but nobody can resist the eloquence of unconscious preaching. With all his thoughtlessness, Tom was quick to see and feel these things, and was not spoilt enough yet to laugh at them. The sight of Will and Polly's simple affection for one another reminded him of a neglected duty so pleasantly, that he could not forget it. Talking of early days made him wish he could go back and start again, doing better. Grandma's name recalled the tender memory that always did him good, and the thought that Polly trusted her dearest brother to his care stirred up a manful desire to deserve the confidence. Tortures would n't have drawn a word of all this from him, but it had its effect, for boys don't leave their hearts and consciences behind them when they enter college, and little things of this sort do much to keep both from being damaged by the four years' scrimmage which begins the battle of life for most of them.

CHAPTER XI. NEEDLES AND TONGUES

DEAR POLLY, The Sewing Circle meets at our house this P. M. This is in your line, so do come and help me through. I shall depend on you.

Yours ever, FAN.

“Bad news, my dear?” asked Miss Mills, who had just handed the note to Polly as she came in one noon, a few weeks after Jenny’s arrival.

Polly told her what it was, adding, “I suppose I ought to go and help Fanny, but I can’t say I want to. The girls talk about things I have nothing to do with, and I don’t find their gossip very amusing. I ‘m an outsider, and they only accept me on Fan’s account; so I sit in a corner and sew, while they chatter and laugh.”

“Would n’t it be a good chance to say a word for Jenny? She wants work, and these young ladies probably have quantities done somewhere. Jenny does fine work exquisitely, and begins to feel anxious to be earning something. I don’t want her to feel dependent and unhappy, and a little well-paid sewing would be all she needs to do nicely. I can get it for her by running round to my friends, but I really have n’t the time, till I get the Mullers off. They are paupers here, but out West they can take care of themselves, so I ‘ve begged the money to send them, and as soon as I can get them some clothes, off they go. That ‘s the way to help people help themselves,” and Miss Mills clashed her big scissors energetically, as she cut out a little red flannel shirt.

“I know it is, and I want to help, but I don’t know where to begin,” said Polly, feeling quite oppressed with the immensity of the work.

“We can’t any of us do all we would like, but we can do our best for every case that comes to us, and that helps amazingly. Begin with Jenny, my dear; tell those girls about her, and if I ‘m not much mistaken, you will find them ready to help, for half the time it is n’t hardness of heart, but ignorance or thoughtlessness on the part of the rich, that makes them seem so careless of the poor.”

“To tell the truth, I ‘m afraid of being laughed at, if I try to talk seriously about such things to the girls,” said Polly, frankly.

“You believe that ‘such things’ are true? You are sincere in your wish to help better them, and you respect those who work for that end?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Then, my dear, can’t you bear a little ridicule for the sake of a good cause? You said yesterday that you were going to make it a principle of your life, to help up your sex as far and as fast as you could. It did my heart good to hear you say it, for I was sure that in time you would keep your word. But, Polly, a principle that can’t bear being laughed at, frowned on, and cold-shouldered, is n’t worthy of the name.”

“I want to be strong-minded in the real sense of the word, but I don’t like to be called so by people who don’t understand my meaning; and I shall be if I try to make the girls think soberly about anything sensible or philanthropic. They call me old-fashioned now, and I ‘d rather be thought that, though it is n’t pleasant, than be set down as a rampant woman’s rights reformer,” said Polly, in whose memory many laughs, and snubs, and sarcasms still lingered, forgiven but not forgotten.

“This love and thought and care for those weaker, poorer, or worse than ourselves, which we call Christian charity, is a very old fashion, my dear. It began eighteen hundred years ago, and only those who honestly follow the beautiful example set us then, learn how to get genuine happiness out of life. I ‘m not a ‘rampant woman’s rights reformer,’“ added Miss Mills, with a smile at Polly’s sober face; “but I think that women can do a great deal for each other, if they will only stop fearing what ‘people will think,’ and take a hearty interest in whatever is going to fit their sisters and themselves to deserve and enjoy the rights God gave them. There are so many ways in which this can be done, that I wonder they don’t see and improve them. I don’t ask you to go and make speeches, only a few have the gift for that, but I do want every girl and woman to feel this duty, and make any little sacrifice of time or feeling that may be asked of them, because there is so much to do, and no one can do it as well as ourselves, if we only think so.”

“I ‘ll try!” said Polly, influenced more by her desire to keep Miss Mills’ good opinion than any love of self-sacrifice for her sex. It was rather a hard thing to ask of a shy, sensitive girl, and the kind old lady knew it, for in spite of the gray hair and withered face, her heart was very young, and her own girlish trials not forgotten. But she knew also that Polly had more influence over others than she herself suspected, simply because of her candid, upright nature; and that while she tried to help others, she was serving herself in a way that would improve heart and soul more than any mere social success she might gain by following the rules of fashionable life, which drill the character out of girls till they are as much alike as pins in a paper, and have about as much true sense and sentiment in their little heads. There was good stuff in Polly, unspoiled as yet, and Miss Mills was only acting out her principle of women helping each other. The wise old lady saw that Polly had reached that point where the girl suddenly blooms into a woman, asking something more substantial than pleasure to satisfy the new aspirations that are born; a time as precious and important to the after-life, as the hour when the apple blossoms fall, and the young fruit waits for the elements to ripen or destroy the harvest.

Polly did not know this, and was fortunate in possessing a friend who knew what influences would serve her best, and who could give her what all women should desire to give each other, the example of a sweet, good life, more eloquent and powerful than any words; for this is a right no one can deny us.

Polly turned the matter over in her mind as she dressed, while Jenny played waiting maid, little dreaming what this new friend was meaning to do for her, if she dared.

"Is it going to be a tea-party, Miss?" asked Jenny, as the black silk went rustling on, to her great admiration, for she considered Polly a beauty.

"Well, no, I think it will probably be a lecture," answered Polly, laughing, for Jenny's grateful service and affectionate eyes confirmed the purpose which Miss Mills' little homily had suggested.

As she entered the Shaws' parlor an hour or two later, an appalling array of well-dressed girls appeared, each provided with a dainty reticule, basket, or bag, and each tongue going a good deal faster than the needle, while the white fingers stitched sleeves in upside down, put flannel jackets together hind part before, or gobbled button-holes with the best intentions in life.

"You are a dear to come so early. Here 's a nice place for you between Belle and Miss Perkins, and here 's a sweet little dress to make, unless you like something else better," said Fanny, receiving her friend with warmth and placing her where she thought she would enjoy herself.

"Thank you, I 'll take an unbleached cotton shirt if you have such a thing, for it is likely to be needed before a cambric frock," replied Polly, subsiding into her corner as quickly as possible, for at least six eye-glasses were up, and she did n't enjoy being stared at.

Miss Perkins, a grave, cold-looking young lady, with an aristocratic nose, bowed politely, and then went on with her work, which displayed two diamond rings to great advantage. Belle, being of the demonstrative sort, smiled and nodded, drew up her chair, and began a whispered account of Trix's last quarrel with Tom. Polly listened with interest while she sewed diligently, occasionally permitting her eyes to study the elegant intricacies of Miss Perkins' dress, for that young lady sat like a statue, quirking her delicate fingers, and accomplishing about two stitches a minute.

In the midst of Belle's story, a more exciting bit of gossip caught her ear, and she plunged into the conversation going on across the table, leaving Polly free to listen and admire the wit, wisdom, and charitable spirit of the accomplished young ladies about her. There was a perfect Babel of tongues, but out of the confusion Polly gathered scraps of fashionable intelligence which somewhat lessened her respect for the dwellers in high places. One fair creature asserted that Joe Somebody took so much champagne at the last German, that he had to be got away, and sent home with two servants. Another divulged the awful fact that Carrie P.'s wedding presents were half of them hired for the occasion. A third circulated a whisper to the effect that though Mrs. Buckminster wore a thousand-dollar cloak, her boys were not allowed but one sheet to their beds. And a fourth young gossip assured the company that a certain person never had offered himself to a certain other person, though the report was industriously spread by interested parties. This latter remark caused such a clamor that Fanny called the meeting to order in a most unparliamentary fashion.

"Girls! girls! you really must talk less and sew more, or our society will be disgraced. Do you know our branch sent in less work than any of the others last month, and Mrs. Fitz George said, she did n't see how fifteen young ladies could manage to do so little?"

"We don't talk a bit more than the old ladies do. I just wish you could have heard them go on, last time. The way they get so much done, is, they take work home, and make their seamstresses do it, and then they take credit for vast industry," said Belle, who always spoke her mind with charming candor.

"That reminds me that mamma says they want as many things as we can make, for it 's a hard winter, and the poor are suffering very much. Do any of you wish to take articles home, to do at odd times?" said Fan, who was president of this energetic Dorcas Society.

"Mercy, no! It takes all my leisure time to mend my gloves and refresh my dresses," answered Belle.

"I think if we meet once a week, it is all that should be expected of us, with our other engagements. Poor people always complain that the winter is a hard one, and never are satisfied," remarked Miss Perkins, making her diamonds sparkle as she sewed buttons on the wrong side of a pink calico apron, which would hardly survive one washing.

"Nobody can ask me to do any more, if they remember all I 've got to attend to before summer," said Trix, with an important air. "I 've got three women hard at work, and want another, but everyone is so busy, and ask such abominable prices, that I 'm in despair, and shall have to take hold myself, I 'm afraid."

"There 's a chance for Jane," thought Polly, but had n't courage "to speak out loud in meeting," just then, and resolved to ask Trix for work, in private.

"Prices are high, but you forget how much more it costs to live now than it used to do. Mamma never allows us to beat down workwomen, but wishes us to pay them well, and economize in some other way, if we must," said Emma Davenport, a quiet, bright-eyed girl, who was called "odd" among the young ladies, because she dressed simply, when her father was a millionaire.

“Just hear that girl talk about economy! I beg your pardon, she ‘s some relation of yours, I believe!” said Belle, in a low tone.

“Very distant; but I ‘m proud of it; for with her, economy does n’t mean scrimping in one place to make a show in another. If every one would follow the Davenports’ example, workwomen would n’t starve, or servants be such a trouble. Emma is the plainest dressed girl in the room, next to me, yet any one can see she is a true gentlewoman,” said Polly, warmly.

“And you are another,” answered Belle, who had always loved Polly, in her scatter-brained way.

“Hush! Trix has the floor.”

“If they spent their wages properly, I should n’t mind so much, but they think they must be as fine as anybody, and dress so well that it is hard to tell mistress from maid. Why our cook got a bonnet just like mine (the materials were cheaper, but the effect was the same), and had the impertinence to wear it before my face. I forbid it, and she left, of course, which made papa so cross he would n’t give me the camel’s hair shawl he promised this year.”

“It ‘s perfectly shameful!” said Miss Perkins, as Trix paused out of breath. “Servants ought to be made to dress like servants, as they do abroad; then we should have no more trouble,” observed Miss Perkins, who had just made the grand tour, and had brought home a French maid.

“Perky don’t practise as she preaches,” whispered Belle to Polly, as Miss P. became absorbed in the chat of her other neighbors. “She pays her chamber girl with old finery; and the other day, when Betsey was out parading in her missis’s cast-off purple plush suit, Mr. Curtis thought she was mademoiselle, and bowed to her. He is as blind as a bat, but recognized the dress, and pulled off his hat to it in the most elegant style. Perky adores him, and was mad enough to beat Betsey when she told the story and giggled over it. Betsey is quite as stylish and ever so much prettier than Perky, and she knows it, which is an aggravation.”

Polly could n’t help laughing, but grew sober a minute after, as Trix said, pettishly, “Well, I ‘m sick of hearing about beggars; I believe half of them are humbugs, and if we let them alone they ‘d go to work and take care of themselves. There ‘s altogether too much fuss made about charity. I do wish we could be left in peace.”

“There can’t be too much charity!” burst out Polly, forgetting her shyness all at once.

“Oh, indeed! Well, I take the liberty to differ from you,” returned Trix, putting up her glass, and bestowing upon Polly her most “toploftical stare,” as the girls called it.

I regret to say that Polly never could talk with or be near Trix without feeling irritated and combative. She tried to conquer this feeling, but she could n't, and when Trix put on airs, Polly felt an intense desire to box her ears. That eye-glass was her especial aversion, for Trix was no more near-sighted than herself, but pretended to be because it was the fashion, and at times used the innocent glass as a weapon with which to put down any one who presumed to set themselves up. The supercilious glance which accompanied her ironically polite speech roused Polly, who answered with sudden color and the kindling of the eyes that always betrayed a perturbed spirit, "I don't think many of us would enjoy that selfish sort of peace, while little children starve, and girls no older than us kill themselves because their dreadful poverty leaves them no choice but sin or death."

A sudden lull took place, for, though Polly, did not raise her voice, it was full of indignant emotion, and the most frivolous girl there felt a little thrill of sympathy; for the most utterly fashionable life does not kill the heart out of women, till years of selfish pleasure have passed over their heads. Trix was ashamed of herself; but she felt the same antagonism toward Polly, that Polly did toward her; and, being less generous, took satisfaction in plaguing her. Polly did not know that the secret of this was the fact that Tom often held her up as a model for his fiance to follow, which caused that young lady to dislike her more than ever.

"Half the awful stories in the papers are made up for a sensation, and it 's absurd to believe them, unless one likes to be harrowed up. I don't; and as for peace, I 'm not likely to get much, while I have Tom to look after," said Trix, with an aggravating laugh.

Polly's needle snapped in two, but she did not mind it, as she said, with a look that silenced even sharp-tongued Trix, "I can't help believing what my own eyes and ears have seen and heard. You lead such safe and happy lives, you can't imagine the misery that is all round you; but if you could get a glimpse of it, it would make your hearts ache, as it has mine."

"Do you suffer from heartache? Some one hinted as much to me, but you looked so well, I could n't believe it."

Now that was cruel in Trix, more cruel than any one guessed; but girls' tongues can deal wounds as sharp and sudden as the slender stiletto Spanish women wear in their hair, and Polly turned pale, as those words stabbed her. Belle saw it, and rushed to the rescue with more good-will than wisdom.

"Nobody ever accused you of having any heart to ache with. Polly and I are not old enough yet to get tough and cool, and we are still silly enough to pity unhappy people, Tom Shaw especially," added Belle, under her breath.

That was a two-edged thrust, for Trix was decidedly an old girl, and Tom was generally regarded as a hapless victim. Trix turned red; but before she could load and fire again, Emma Davenport, who labored under the delusion that this sort of skirmishing was ill-natured, and therefore ill-bred, spoke up in her pleasant way, "Speaking of pitying the poor, I always wonder why it is that we all like to read and cry over their troubles in books, but when we have the real thing before us, we think it is uninteresting and disagreeable."

"It 's the genius that gets into the books, which makes us like the poverty, I fancy. But I don't quite agree that the real thing is n't interesting. I think it would be, if we knew how to look at and feel it," said Polly, very quietly, as she pushed her chair out of the arctic circle of Miss Perkins, into the temperate one of friendly Emma.

"But how shall we learn that? I don't see what we girls can do, more than we do now. We have n't much money for such things, should n't know how to use it if we had; and it is n't proper for us to go poking into dirty places, to hunt up the needy. 'Going about doing good, in pony phaetons,' as somebody says, may succeed in England, but it won't work here," said Fanny, who had begun, lately, to think a good deal of some one beside herself, and so found her interest in her fellow-beings increasing daily.

"We can't do much, perhaps, just yet; but still there are things left undone that naturally fall to us. I know a house," said Polly, sewing busily as she talked, "where every servant who enters it becomes an object of interest to the mistress and her daughters. These women are taught good habits, books are put where they can get them, sensible amusements are planned for them sometimes, and they soon feel that they are not considered mere scrubs, to do as much work as possible, for as little money as possible, but helpers in the family, who are loved and respected in proportion to their faithfulness. This lady feels her duty to them, owns it, and does it, as conscientiously as she wants them to do theirs by her; and that is the way it ought to be, I think."

As Polly paused, several keen eyes discovered that Emma's cheeks were very red, and saw a smile lurking in the corners of the mouth that tried to look demure, which told them who Polly meant.

"Do the Biddies all turn out saints in that well regulated family?" asked the irrepressible Trix.

"No; few of us do that, even in the parlor; but every one of the Biddies is better for being there, whether they are grateful or not. I ought not to have mentioned this, perhaps, but I wanted to show you one thing that we girls can do. We all complain about bad servants, most as much as if we were house-keepers ourselves; but it never occurs to us to try and mend the matter, by getting up a better spirit between mistress and maid. Then there ‘s another thing we can do,” added Polly, warming up. “Most of us find money enough for our little vanities and pleasures, but feel dreadfully poor when we come to pay for work, sewing especially. Could n’t we give up a few of the vanities, and pay the seamstresses better?”

“I declare I will!” cried Belle, whose conscience suddenly woke, and smote her for beating down the woman who did her plain sewing, in order that she might have an extra flounce on a new dress. “Belle has got a virtuous fit; pity it won’t last a week,” said Trix.

“Wait and see,” retorted Belle, resolving that it should last, just to disappoint “that spiteful minx;” as she sweetly called her old school-mate.

“Now we shall behold Belle galloping away at a great pace, on her new hobby. I should n’t be surprised to hear of her preaching in the jail, adopting a nice dirty little orphan, or passing round tracts at a Woman’s Rights meeting,” said Trix, who never could forgive Belle for having a lovely complexion, and so much hair of her own that she never patronized either rats, mice, waterfalls, switches, or puff-combs.

“Well, I might do worse; and I think, of the two, I ‘d rather amuse myself so, than as some young ladies do, who get into the papers for their pranks,” returned Belle, with a moral air.

“Suppose we have a little recess, and rest while Polly plays to us. Will you, Polly? It will do us good; they all want to hear you, and begged I ‘d ask.”

“Then I will, with pleasure”; and Polly went to the piano with such obliging readiness, that several reproachful glances fell upon Trix, who did n’t need her glass to see them.

Polly was never too sad, perturbed, or lazy to sing, for it was almost as easy to her as breathing, and seemed the most natural outlet for her emotions. For a minute her hands wandered over the keys, as if uncertain what to play; then, falling into a sad, sweet strain, she sang “The Bridge of Sighs.” Polly did n’t know why she chose it, but the instinct seemed to have been a true one, for, old as the song was, it went straight to the hearts of the hearers, and Polly sung it better than she ever had before, for now the memory of little Jane lent it a tender pathos which no art could give. It did them all good, for music is a beautiful magician, and few can resist its power. The girls were touched by the appeal; Polly was lifted out of herself, and when she turned round, the softened look on all the faces told her that for the moment foolish differences and frivolous beliefs were forgotten in the one womanly sentiment of pity for the wrongs and woes of which the listeners’ happy lives were ignorant.

“That song always makes me cry, and feel as if I had no right to be so comfortable,” said Belle, openly wiping her eyes on a crash towel.

“Fortunately such cases are very rare,” said another young lady, who seldom read the newspapers.

“I wish they were, but I ‘m afraid they are not; for only three weeks ago, I saw a girl younger than any of us, and no worse, who tried to destroy herself simply because she was so discouraged, sick, and poor,” said Polly.

“Do tell about her,” cried Belle, eagerly.

Feeling that the song had paved the way for the story, and given her courage to tell it, Polly did tell it, and must have done it well, for the girls stopped work to listen, and when she ended, other eyes beside warm-hearted Belle’s were wet. Trix looked quite subdued; Miss Perkins thawed to such a degree, that something glittered on her hand as she bent over the pink pinafore again, better and brighter than her biggest diamond; Emma got up and went to Polly with a face full of affectionate respect, while Fanny, moved by a sudden impulse, caught up a costly Sevres plate that stood on the etagere, and laying a five-dollar bill in it, passed it round, quoting Polly’s words, “Girls, I know you ‘ll like to help poor little Jenny ‘begin again, and do better this time.’“

It was good to see how quickly the pretty purses were out, how generously each gave of its abundance, and what hearty applause broke from the girls, as Belle laid down her gold thimble, saying with an April face, “There, take that; I never have any money, somehow it won’t stay with me, but I can’t let the plate pass me this time.”

When Fanny brought the contributions to Polly, she just gathered it up in her two hands with such a glad, grateful face, the girls wished they had had more to give.

“I can’t thank you enough,” she said, with an eloquent little choke in her voice. “This will help Jenny very much; but the way in which it was done will do her more good than double the money, because it will prove to her that she is n’t without friends, and make her feel that there is a place in the world for her. Let her work for you in return for this; she don’t ask alms, she only wants employment and a little kindness, and the best charity we can bestow is to see that she has both.”

“I ‘ll give her as much sewing as she wants, and she can stay at our house while she does it, if she needs a home,” said Trix, in a spasm of benevolence.

“She does n’t need a home, thank you; Miss Mills has given half of hers, and considers Jane her child,” answered Polly, with proud satisfaction in the fact.

“What an old dear!” cried Belle.

“I want to know her. May I?” whispered Emma.

“Oh, yes; I ‘m glad to make her known to any one. She is a quiet little old lady, but she does one heaps of good, and shows you how to be charitable in the wisest way.”

“Do tell us about it. I ‘m sure I want to do my duty, but it ‘s such a muddle, I don’t know how,” said Belle.

Then, quite naturally, the conversation fell upon the great work that none should be too busy to think of, and which few are too young or too poor to help on with their mite. The faces grew more earnest, the fingers flew faster, as the quick young hearts and brains took in the new facts, ideas, and plans that grew out of the true stories, the sensible hints, the successful efforts which Polly told them, fresh from the lips of Miss Mills; for, of late, Polly had talked much with the good lady, and learned quickly the lessons her unselfish life conveyed. The girls found this more interesting than gossip, partly owing to its novelty, doubtless; but the enthusiasm was sincere while it lasted, and did them good. Many of them forgot all about it in a week, but Polly’s effort was not lost, for Emma, Belle, and Fanny remained firm friends to Jane, so kindly helping her that the poor child felt as if she had indeed been born again, into a new and happy world.

Not till long afterward did Polly see how much good this little effort had done her, for the first small sacrifice of this sort leads the way to others, and a single hand’s turn given heartily to the world’s great work helps one amazingly with one’s own small tasks. Polly found this out as her life slowly grew easier and brighter, and the beautiful law of compensation gave her better purposes and pleasures than any she had lost. The parents of some of her pupils were persons of real refinement, and such are always quick to perceive the marks of culture in others, no matter where they find them. These, attracted first by Polly’s cheerful face, modest manners, and faithful work, soon found in her something more than a good teacher; they found a real talent for music, an eager desire for helpful opportunities, and a heart grateful for the kindly sympathy that makes rough places smooth. Fortunately those who have the skill to detect these traits also possess the spirit to appreciate and often the power to serve and develop them. In ways so delicate that the most sensitive pride could not resent the favor, these true gentlefolk showed Polly their respect and regard, put many pleasures in her way, and when they paid her for her work, gave her also the hearty thanks that takes away all sense of degradation even from the humblest service, for money so earned and paid sweetens the daily bread it buys, and makes the mutual obligation a mutual benefit and pleasure.

A few such patrons did much for Polly, and the music she gave them had an undertone of gratitude that left blithe echoes in those great houses, which money could not buy.

Then, as her butterfly acquaintances deserted her, she found her way into a hive of friendly bees, who welcomed her, and showed her how to find the honey that keeps life sweet and wholesome. Through Miss Mills, who was the counsellor and comforter of several, Polly came to know a little sisterhood of busy, happy, independent girls, who each had a purpose to execute, a talent to develop, an ambition to achieve, and brought to the work patience and perseverance, hope and courage. Here Polly found her place at once, for in this little world love and liberty prevailed; talent, energy, and character took the first rank; money, fashion, and position were literally nowhere; for here, as in the big world outside, genius seemed to blossom best when poverty was head gardener. Young teachers, doing much work for little pay; young artists, trying to pencil, paint, or carve their way to Rome; young writers, burning to distinguish themselves; young singers, dreaming of triumphs, great as those of Jenny Lind; and some who tried to conquer independence, armed only with a needle, like poor Jane. All these helped Polly as unconsciously as she helped them, for purpose and principle are the best teachers we can have, and the want of them makes half the women of America what they are, restless, aimless, frivolous, and sick.

To outsiders that was a very hard-working and uneventful winter to Polly. She thought so herself; but as spring came on, the seed of new virtues, planted in the winter time, and ripened by the sunshine of endeavor, began to bud in Polly’s nature, betraying their presence to others by the added strength and sweetness of her character, long before she herself discovered these May flowers that had blossomed for her underneath the snow.

CHAPTER XII. FORBIDDEN FRUIT

"I 'M perfectly aching for some fun," said Polly to herself as she opened her window one morning and the sunshine and frosty air set her blood dancing and her eyes sparkling with youth, health, and overflowing spirits. "I really must break out somewhere and have a good time. It 's quite impossible to keep steady any longer. Now what will I do?" Polly sprinkled crumbs to the doves, who came daily to be fed, and while she watched the gleaming necks and rosy feet, she racked her brain to devise some unusually delightful way of enjoying herself, for she really had bottled up her spirits so long, they were in a state of uncontrollable effervescence.

"I 'll go to the opera," she suddenly announced to the doves. "It 's expensive, I know, but it 's remarkably good, and music is such a treat to me. Yes, I 'll get two tickets as cheap as I can, send a note to Will, poor lad, he needs fun as much as I do, and we 'll go and have a nice time in some corner, as Charles Lamb and his sister used to."

With that Polly slammed down the window, to the dismay of her gentle little pensioners, and began to fly about with great energy, singing and talking to herself as if it was impossible to keep quiet. She started early to her first lesson that she might have time to buy the tickets, hoping, as she put a five-dollar bill into her purse, that they would n't be very high, for she felt that she was not in a mood to resist temptation. But she was spared any struggle, for when she reached the place, the ticket office was blocked up by eager purchasers and the disappointed faces that turned away told Polly there was no hope for her.

"Well, I don't care, I 'll go somewhere, for I will have my fun," she said with great determination, for disappointment only seemed to whet her appetite. But the playbills showed her nothing inviting and she was forced to go away to her work with the money burning her pocket and all manner of wild schemes floating in her head. At noon, instead of going home to dinner, she went and took an ice, trying to feet very gay and festive all by herself. It was rather a failure, however, and after a tour of the picture shops she went to give Maud a lesson, feeling that it was very hard to quench her longings, and subside into a prim little music teacher.

Fortunately she did not have to do violence to her feelings very long, for the first thing Fanny said to her was: "Can you go?"

"Where?"

"Did n't you get my note?"

“I did n’t go home to dinner.”

“Tom wants us to go to the opera to-night and” Fan got no further, for Polly uttered a cry of rapture and clasped her hands.

“Go? Of course I will. I ‘ve been dying to go all day, tried to get tickets this morning and could n’t, been fuming about it ever since, and now oh, how splendid!” And Polly could not restrain an ecstatic skip, for this burst of joy rather upset her.

“Well, you come to tea, and we ‘ll dress together, and go all comfortable with Tom, who is in a heavenly frame of mind to-day.”

“I must run home and get my things,” said Polly, resolving on the spot to buy the nicest pair of gloves the city afforded.

“You shall have my white cloak and any other little rigging you want. Tommy likes to have his ladies a credit to him, you know,” said Fanny, departing to take a beauty sleep.

Polly instantly decided that she would n’t borrow Becky’s best bonnet, as she at first intended, but get a new one, for in her present excited state, no extravagance seemed too prodigal in honor of this grand occasion. I am afraid that Maud’s lesson was not as thorough as it should have been, for Polly’s head was such a chaos of bonnets, gloves, opera-cloaks and fans, that Maud blundered through, murdering time and tune at her own sweet will. The instant it was over Polly rushed away and bought not only the kids but a bonnet frame, a bit of illusion, and a pink crape rose, which had tempted her for weeks in a certain shop window, then home and to work with all the skill and speed of a distracted milliner.

“I ‘m rushing madly into expense, I ‘m afraid, but the fit is on me and I ‘ll eat bread and water for a week to make up for it. I must look nice, for Tom seldom takes me and ought to be gratified when he does. I want to do like other girls, just for once, and enjoy myself without thinking about right and wrong. Now a bit of pink ribbon to tie it with, and I shall be done in time to do up my best collar,” she said, turning her boxes topsy-turvy for the necessary ribbon in that delightful flurry which young ladies feel on such occasions.

It is my private opinion that the little shifts and struggles we poor girls have to undergo beforehand give a peculiar relish to our fun when we get it. This fact will account for the rapturous mood in which Polly found herself when, after making her bonnet, washing and ironing her best set, blacking her boots and mending her fan, she at last, like Consuelo, “put on a little dress of black silk” and, with the smaller adornments pinned up in a paper, started for the Shaws’, finding it difficult to walk decorously when her heart was dancing in her bosom.

Maud happened to be playing a redowa up in the parlor, and Polly came prancing into the room so evidently spoiling for a dance that Tom, who was there, found it impossible to resist catching her about the waist, and putting her through the most intricate evolutions till Maud's fingers gave out.

"That was splendid! Oh, Tom, thank you so much for asking me to-night. I feel just like having a regular good time," cried Polly, when she stopped, with her hat hanging round her neck and her hair looking as if she had been out in a high wind.

"Glad of it. I felt so myself and thought we 'd have a jolly little party all in the family," said Tom, looking much gratified at her delight.

"Is Trix sick?" asked Polly.

"Gone to New York for a week."

"Ah, when the cat's away the mice will play."

"Exactly. Come and have another turn."

Before they could start, however, the awful spectacle of a little dog trotting out of the room with a paper parcel in his mouth, made Polly clasp her hands with the despairing cry: "My bonnet! Oh, my bonnet!"

"Where? what? which?" And Tom looked about him, bewildered.

"Snip's got it. Save it! save it!"

"I will!" And Tom gave chase with more vigor than discretion.

Snip, evidently regarding it as a game got up for his special benefit, enjoyed the race immensely and scampered all over the house, shaking the precious parcel like a rat while his master ran and whistled, commanded and coaxed, in vain. Polly followed, consumed with anxiety, and Maud laughed till Mrs. Shaw sent down to know who was in hysterics. A piteous yelp from the lower regions at last announced that the thief was captured, and Tom appeared bearing Snip by the nape of the neck in one hand and Polly's cherished bonnet in the other.

"The little scamp was just going to worry it when I grabbed him. I 'm afraid he has eaten one of your gloves. I can't find it, and this one is pretty well chewed up," said Tom, bereaving Snip of the torn kid, to which he still pertinaciously clung.

"Serves me right," said Polly with a groan. "I 'd no business to get a new pair, but I wanted to be extra gorgeous to-night, and this is my punishment for such mad extravagance."

"Was there anything else?" asked Tom.

"Only my best cuffs and collar. You 'll probably find them in the coal-bin," said Polly, with the calmness of despair.

"I saw some little white things on the dining-room floor as I raced through. Go get them, Maud, and we 'll repair damages," said Tom, shutting the culprit into the boot closet, where he placidly rolled himself up and went to sleep.

“They ain’t hurt a bit,” proclaimed Maud, restoring the lost treasures.

“Neither is my bonnet, for which I ‘m deeply grateful,” said Polly, who had been examining it with a solicitude which made Tom’s eyes twinkle.

“So am I, for it strikes me that is an uncommonly ‘nobby’ little affair,” he said approvingly. Tom had a weakness for pale pink roses, and perhaps Polly knew it.

“I ‘m afraid it ‘s too gay,” said Polly, with a dubious look.

“Not a bit. Sort of bridal, you know. Must be becoming. Put it on and let ‘s see.”

“I would n’t for the world, with my hair all tumbling down. Don’t look at me till I ‘m respectable, and don’t tell any one how I ‘ve been acting. I think I must be a little crazy to-night,” said Polly, gathering up her rescued finery and preparing to go and find Fan.

“Lunacy is mighty becoming, Polly. Try it again,” answered Tom, watching her as she went laughing away, looking all the prettier for her dishevelment. “Dress that girl up, and she ‘d be a raving, tearing beauty,” added Tom to Maud in a lower tone as he look her into the parlor under his arm.

Polly heard it and instantly resolved to be as “raving and as tearing” as her means would allow, “just for one night,” she said as she peeped over the banisters, glad to see that the dance and the race had taken the “band-boxy” air out of Tom’s elegant array.

I deeply regret being obliged to shock the eyes and ears of such of my readers as have a prejudice in favor of pure English by expressions like the above, but, having rashly undertaken to write a little story about Young America, for Young America, I feel bound to depict my honored patrons as faithfully as my limited powers permit. Otherwise, I must expect the crushing criticism, “Well, I dare say it ‘s all very prim and proper, but it is n’t a bit like us,” and never hope to arrive at the distinction of finding the covers of “An Old-Fashioned Girl” the dirtiest in the library.

The friends had a social “cup o’ tea” upstairs, which Polly considered the height of luxury, and then each took a mirror and proceeded to prink to her heart’s content. The earnestness with which Polly made her toilet that night was delightful to behold. Feeling in a daring mood, she released her pretty hair from the braids in which she usually wore it and permitted the curls to display themselves in all their brown abundance, especially several dangerous little ones about the temples and forehead. The putting on of the rescued collar and cuffs was a task which absorbed her whole mind. So was the settling of a minute bit of court-plaster just to the left of the dimple in her chin, an unusual piece of coquetry in which Polly would not have indulged, if an almost invisible scratch had not given her an excuse for doing it. The white, down-trimmed cloak, with certain imposing ornaments on the hood, was assumed with becoming gravity and draped with much advancing and retreating before the glass, as its wearer practised the true Boston gait, elbows back, shoulders forward, a bend and a slide, occasionally varied by a slight skip. But when that bonnet went on, Polly actually held her breath till it was safely landed and the pink rose bloomed above the smooth waves of hair with what Fanny called "a ravishing effect." At this successful stage of affairs Polly found it impossible to resist the loan of a pair of gold bands for the wrists and Fanny's white fan with the little mirror in the middle.

"I can put them in my pocket if I feel too much dressed," said Polly as she snapped on the bracelets, but after a wave or two of the fan she felt that it would be impossible to take them off till the evening was over, so enticing was their glitter.

Fanny also lent her a pair of three-button gloves, which completed her content, and when Tom greeted her with an approving, "Here 's a sight for gods and men! Why, Polly, you 're gorgeous!" she felt that her "fun" had decidedly begun.

"Would n't Polly make a lovely bride?" said Maud, who was revolving about the two girls, trying to decide whether she would have a blue or a white cloak when she grew up and went to operas.

"Faith, and she would! Allow me to congratulate you, Mrs. Sydney," added Tom, advancing with his wedding-reception bow and a wicked look at Fanny.

"Go away! How dare you?" cried Polly, growing much redder than her rose.

"If we are going to the opera to-night, perhaps we 'd better start, as the carriage has been waiting some time," observed Fan coolly, and sailed out of the room in an unusually lofty manner.

"Don't you like it, Polly?" whispered Tom, as they went down stairs together.

"Very much."

"The deuce you do!"

"I 'm so fond of music, how can I help it?

"I 'm talking about Syd."

"Well, I 'm not."

"You 'd better try for him."

"I 'll think of it."

"Oh, Polly, Polly, what are you coming to?"

"A tumble into the street, apparently," answered Polly as she slipped a little on the step, and Tom stopped in the middle of his laugh to pilot her safely into the carriage, where Fanny was already seated.

"Here 's richness!" said Polly to herself as she rolled away, feeling as Cinderella probably did when the pumpkin-coach bore her to the first ball, only

Polly had two princes to think about, and poor Cinderella, on that occasion, had not even one. Fanny did n't seem inclined to talk much, and Tom would go on in such a ridiculous manner that Polly told him she would n't listen and began to hum bits of the opera. But she heard every word, nevertheless, and resolved to pay him for his impertinence as soon as possible by showing him what he had lost.

Their seats were in the balcony, and hardly were they settled, when, by one of those remarkable coincidences which are continually occurring in our youth, Mr. Sydney and Fanny's old friend Frank Moore took their places just behind them.

"Oh, you villain! You did it on purpose," whispered Polly as she turned from greeting their neighbors and saw a droll look on Tom's face.

"I give you my word I did n't. It 's the law of attraction, don't you see?"

"If Fan likes it, I don't care."

"She looks resigned, I think."

She certainly did, for she was talking and laughing in the gayest manner with Frank while Sydney was covertly surveying Polly as if he did n't quite understand how the gray grub got so suddenly transformed into a white butterfly. It is a well-known fact that dress plays a very important part in the lives of most women and even the most sensible cannot help owning sometimes how much happiness they owe to a becoming gown, gracefully arranged hair, or a bonnet which brings out the best points in their faces and puts them in a good humor. A great man was once heard to say that what first attracted him to his well-beloved wife was seeing her in a white muslin dress with a blue shawl on the chair behind her. The dress caught his eye, and, stopping to admire that, the wearer's intelligent conversation interested his mind, and in time, the woman's sweetness won his heart. It is not the finest dress which does the most execution, I fancy, but that which best interprets individual taste and character. Wise people understand this, and everybody is more influenced by it than they know, perhaps. Polly was not very wise, but she felt that every one about her found something more attractive than usual in her and modestly attributed Tom's devotion, Sydney's interest, and Frank's undisguised admiration, to the new bonnet or, more likely, to that delightful combination of cashmere, silk, and swan's-down, which, like Charity's mantle, seemed to cover a multitude of sins in other people's eyes and exalt the little music teacher to the rank of a young lady.

Polly scoffed at this sort of thing sometimes, but to-night she accepted it without a murmur rather enjoyed it in fact, let her bracelets shine before the eyes of all men, and felt that it was good to seem comely in their sight. She forgot one thing, however: that her own happy spirits gave the crowning charm to a picture which every one liked to see a blithe young girl enjoying herself with all her heart. The music and the light, costume and company, excited Polly and made many things possible which at most times she would never have thought of saying or doing. She did not mean to flirt, but somehow "it flirted itself" and she could n't help it, for, once started, it was hard to stop, with Tom goading her on, and Sydney looking at her with that new interest in his eyes. Polly's flirting was such a very mild imitation of the fashionable thing that Trix & Co. would not have recognized it, but it did very well for a beginner, and Polly understood that night wherein the fascination of it lay, for she felt as if she had found a new gift all of a sudden, and was learning how to use it, knowing that it was dangerous, yet finding its chief charm in that very fact.

Tom did n't know what to make of her at first, though he thought the change uncommonly becoming and finally decided that Polly had taken his advice and was "setting her cap for Syd," as he gracefully expressed it. Sydney, being a modest man, thought nothing of the kind, but simply fancied that little Polly was growing up to be a very charming woman. He had known her since her first visit and had always liked the child; this winter he had been interested in the success of her plans and had done what he could to help them, but he never thought of failing in love with Polly till that night. Then he began to feel that he had not fully appreciated his young friend; that she was such a bright and lovable girl, it was a pity she should not always be gay and pretty, and enjoy herself; that she would make a capital wife for somebody, and perhaps it was about time to think of "settling," as his sister often said. These thoughts came and went as he watched the white figure in front, felt the enchantment of the music, and found everybody unusually blithe and beautiful. He had heard the opera many times, but it had never seemed so fine before, perhaps because he had never happened to have had an ingenuous young face so near him in which the varying emotions born of the music, and the romance it portrayed, came and went so eloquently that it was impossible to help reading them. Polly did not know that this was why he leaned down so often to speak to her, with an expression which she did not understand but liked very much nevertheless.

"Don't shut your eyes, Polly. They are so full of mischief to-night, I like to see them," said Tom, after idly wondering for a minute if she knew how long and curly her lashes were.

"I don't wish to look affected, but the music tells the story so much better than the acting that I don't care to look on half the time," answered Polly, hoping Tom would n't see the tears she had so cleverly suppressed.

"Now I like the acting best. The music is all very fine, I know, but it does seem so absurd for people to go round telling tremendous secrets at the top of their voices. I can't get used to it."

“That ‘s because you ‘ve more common-sense than romance. I don’t mind the absurdity, and quite long to go and comfort that poor girl with the broken heart,” said Polly with a sigh as the curtain fell on a most affecting tableau.

“What’s-his-name is a great jack not to see that she adores him. In real life we fellows ain’t such bats as all that,” observed Tom, who had decided opinions on many subjects that he knew very little about, and expressed them with great candor.

A curious smile passed over Polly’s face and she put up her glass to hide her eyes, as she said: “I think you are bats sometimes, but women are taught to wear masks, and that accounts for it, I suppose.”

“I don’t agree. There ‘s precious little masking nowadays; wish there was a little more sometimes,” added Tom, thinking of several blooming damsels whose beseeching eyes had begged him not to leave them to wither on the parent stem.

“I hope not, but I guess there ‘s a good deal more than any one would suspect.”

“What can you know about broken hearts and blighted beings?” asked Sydney, smiling at the girl’s pensive tone.

Polly glanced up at him and her face dimpled and shone again, as she answered, laughing: “Not much; my time is to come.”

“I can’t imagine you walking about the world with your back hair down, bewailing a hard-hearted lover,” said Tom.

“Neither can I. That would n’t be my way.”

“No; Miss Polly would let concealment prey on her damask cheeks and still smile on in the novel fashion, or turn sister of charity and nurse the heartless lover through small-pox, or some other contagious disease, and die seraphically, leaving him to the agonies of remorse and tardy love.”

Polly gave Sydney an indignant look as he said that in a slow satirical way that nettled her very much, for she hated to be thought sentimental.

“That ‘s not my way either,” she said decidedly. “I ‘d try to outlive it, and if I could n’t, I ‘d try to be the better for it. Disappointment need n’t make a woman a fool.”

“Nor an old maid, if she ‘s pretty and good. Remember that, and don’t visit the sins of one blockhead on all the rest of mankind,” said Tom, laughing at her earnestness.

“I don’t think there is the slightest possibility of Miss Polly’s being either,” added Sydney with a look which made it evident that concealment had not seriously damaged Polly’s damask cheek as yet.

“There ‘s Clara Bird. I have n’t seen her but once since she was married. How pretty she looks!” and Polly retired behind the big glass again, thinking the chat was becoming rather personal.

"Now, there 's a girl who tried a different cure for unrequited affection from any you mention. People say she was fond of Belle's brother. He did n't reciprocate but went off to India to spoil his constitution, so Clara married a man twenty years older than she is and consoles herself by being the best-dressed woman in the city."

"That accounts for it," said Polly, when Tom's long whisper ended.

"For what?"

"The tired look in her eyes."

"I don't see it," said Tom, after a survey through the glass.

"Did n't expect you would."

"I see what you mean. A good many women have it nowadays," said Sydney over Polly's shoulder.

"What's she tired of? The old gentleman?" asked Tom.

"And herself," added Polly.

"You 've been reading French novels, I know you have. That 's just the way the heroines go on," cried Tom.

"I have n't read one, but it 's evident you have, young man, and you 'd better stop."

"I don't care for 'em; only do it to keep up my French. But how came you to be so wise, ma'am?"

"Observation, sir. I like to watch faces, and I seldom see a grown-up one that looks perfectly happy."

"True for you, Polly; no more you do, now I think of it. I don't know but one that always looks so, and there it is."

"Where?" asked Polly, with interest.

"Look straight before you and you 'll see it."

Polly did look, but all she saw was her own face in the little mirror of the fan which Tom held up and peeped over with a laugh in his eyes.

"Do I look happy? I 'm glad of that," And Polly surveyed herself with care.

Both young men thought it was girlish vanity and smiled at its naive display, but Polly was looking for something deeper than beauty and was glad not to find it.

"Rather a pleasant little prospect, hey, Polly?"

"My bonnet is straight, and that 's all I care about. Did you ever see a picture of Beau Brummel?" asked Polly quickly.

"No."

"Well, there he is, modernized." And turning the fan, she showed him himself.

"Any more portraits in your gallery?" asked Sydney, as if he liked to share all the nonsense going.

"One more."

"What do you call it?"

"The portrait of a gentleman." And the little glass reflected a gratified face for the space of two seconds.

"Thank you. I 'm glad I don't disgrace my name," said Sydney, looking down into the merry blue eyes that thanked him silently for many of the small kindnesses that women never can forget.

"Very good, Polly, you are getting on fast," whispered Tom, patting his yellow kids approvingly.

"Be quiet! Dear me, how warm it is!" And Polly gave him a frown that delighted his soul.

"Come out and have an ice, we shall have time."

"Fan is so absorbed, I could n't think of disturbing her," said Polly, fancying that her friend was enjoying the evening as much as she was a great mistake, by the way, for Fan was acting for effect, and though she longed to turn and join them, would n't do it, unless a certain person showed signs of missing her. He did n't, and Fanny chatted on, raging inwardly over her disappointment, and wondering how Polly could be so gay and selfish.

It was delicious to see the little airs Polly put on, for she felt as if she were somebody else, and acting a part. She leaned back, as if quite oppressed by the heat, permitted Sydney to fan her, and paid him for the service by giving him a flower from her bouquet, proceedings which amused Tom immensely, even while it piqued him a little to be treated like an old friend who did n't count.

"Go in and win, Polly; I 'll give you my blessing," he whispered, as the curtain rose again.

"It 's only part of the fun, so don't you laugh, you disrespectful boy," she whispered back in a tone never used toward Sydney.

Tom did n't quite like the different way in which she treated them, and the word "boy" disturbed his dignity, for he was almost twenty-one and Polly ought to treat him with more respect. Sydney at the same moment was wishing he was in Tom's place young, comely, and such a familiar friend that Polly would scold and lecture him in the delightful way she did Tom; while Polly forgot them both when the music began and left them ample time to look at her and think about themselves.

While they waited to get out when all was over Polly heard Fan whisper to Tom: "What do you think Trix will say to this?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, the way you 've been going on to-night."

"Don't know, and don't care; it 's only Polly."

"That 's the very thing. She can't bear P."

"Well, I can; and I don't see why I should n't enjoy myself as well as Trix."

"You 'll get to enjoying yourself too much if you are n't careful. Polly 's waked up."

"I 'm glad of it, and so 's Syd."

"I only spoke for your good."

"Don't trouble yourself about me; I get lecturing enough in another quarter and can't stand any more. Come, Polly."

She took the arm he offered her, but her heart was sore and angry, for that phrase, "It 's only Polly," hurt her sadly. "As if I was n't anybody, had n't any feelings, and was only made to amuse or work for people! Fan and Tom are both mistaken and I 'll show them that Polly is awake," she thought, indignantly. "Why should n't I enjoy myself as well as the rest? Besides, it 's only Tom," she added with a bitter smile as she thought of Trix.

"Are you tired, Polly?" asked Tom, bending down to look into her face.

"Yes, of being nobody."

"Ah, but you ain't nobody, you 're Polly, and you could n't better that if you tried ever so hard," said Tom, warmly, for he really was fond of Polly, and felt uncommonly so just then.

"I 'm glad you think so, anyway. It 's so pleasant to be liked." And she looked up with her face quite bright again.

"I always did like you, don't you know, ever since that first visit."

"But you teased me shamefully, for all that."

"So I did, but I don't now."

Polly did not answer, and Tom asked, with more anxiety than the occasion required: "Do I, Polly?"

"Not in the same way, Tom," she answered in a tone that did n't sound quite natural.

"Well, I never will again."

"Yes, you will, you can't help it." And Polly's eye glanced at Sydney, who was in front with Fan.

Tom laughed, and drew Polly closer as the crowd pressed, saying, with mock tenderness: "Did n't she like to be chaffed about her sweethearts? Well, she shan't be if I can help it. Poor dear, did she get her little bonnet knocked into a cocked hat and her little temper riled at the same time?"

Polly could n't help laughing, and, in spite of the crush, enjoyed the slow journey from seat to carriage, for Tom took such excellent care of her, she was rather sorry when it was over.

They had a merry little supper after they got home, and Polly gave them a burlesque opera that convulsed her hearers, for her spirits rose again and she was determined to get the last drop of fun before she went back to her humdrum life again.

“I ‘ve had a regularly splendid time, and thank you ever so much,” she said when the “good-nights” were being exchanged.

“So have I. Let ‘s go and do it again to-morrow,” said Tom, holding the hand from which he had helped to pull a refractory glove.

“Not for a long while, please. Too much pleasure would soon spoil me,” answered Polly, shaking her head.

“I don’t believe it. Good-night, ‘sweet Mistress Milton,’ as Syd called you. Sleep like an angel, and don’t dream of I forgot, no teasing allowed.” And Tom took himself off with a theatrical farewell.

“Now it ‘s all over and done with,” thought Polly as she fell asleep after a long vigil. But it was not, and Polly’s fun cost more than the price of gloves and bonnet, for, having nibbled at forbidden fruit, she had to pay the penalty. She only meant to have a good time, and there was no harm in that, but unfortunately she yielded to the various small temptations that beset pretty young girls and did more mischief to others than to herself. Fanny’s friendship grew cooler after that night. Tom kept wishing Trix was half as satisfactory as Polly, and Mr. Sydney began to build castles that had no foundation.

CHAPTER XIII. THE SUNNY SIDE

"I 'VE won the wager, Tom."

"Did n't know there was one."

"Don't you remember you said Polly would be tired of her teaching and give it up in three months, and I said she would n't?"

"Well, is n't she?"

"Not a bit of it. I thought she was at one time, and expected every day to have her come in with a long face, and say she could n't stand it. But somehow, lately, she is always bright and happy, seems to like her work, and don't have the tired, worried look she used to at first. The three months are out, so pay up, Tommy."

"All right, what will you have?"

"You may make it gloves. I always need them, and papa looks sober when I want money."

There was a minute's pause as Fan returned to her practising, and Tom relapsed into the reverie he was enjoying seated astride of a chair, with his chin on his folded arms.

"Seems to me Polly don't come here as often as she used to," he said, presently.

"No, she seems to be very busy; got some new friends, I believe, old ladies, sewing-girls, and things of that sort. I miss her, but know she 'll get tired of being goody, and will come back to me before long."

"Don't be too sure of that, ma'am." Something in Tom's tone made Fan turn round, and ask, "What do you mean?"

"Well, it strikes me that Sydney is one of Polly's new friends. Have n't you observed that she is uncommonly jolly, and don't that sort of thing account for it?"

"Nonsense!" said Fanny, sharply.

"Hope it is," coolly returned Tom.

"What put it into your head?" demanded Fanny, twirling round again so that her face was hidden.

"Oh, well, I keep meeting Syd and Polly circulating in the same directions; she looks as if she had found something uncommonly nice, and he looks as if all creation was getting Pollyfied pretty rapidly. Wonder you have n't observed it."

"I have."

It was Tom's turn to look surprised now, for Fanny's voice sounded strange to him. He looked at her steadily for a minute, but saw only a rosy ear and a bent head. A cloud passed over his face, and he leaned his chin on his arm again with a despondent whistle, as he said to himself, “Poor Fan! Both of us in a scrape at once.”

“Don’t you think it would be a good thing?” asked Fanny, after playing a bar or two, very badly.

“Yes, for Syd.”

“Not for Polly? Why, he ‘s rich, and clever, and better than most of you good-for-nothing fellows. What can the girl expect?”

“Can’t say, but I don’t fancy the match myself.”

“Don’t be a dog in the manger, Tom. Bless your little heart, I only take a brotherly sort of interest in Polly. She ‘s a capital girl, and she ought to marry a missionary, or one of your reformer fellows, and be a shining light of some sort. I don’t think setting up for a fine lady would suit her.”

“I think it would, and I hope she ‘ll have the chance,” said Fanny, evidently making an effort to speak kindly.

“Good for you, Fan!” and Tom gave an emphatic nod, as if her words meant more than she suspected “Mind you,” he added, “I don’t know anything, and only fancied there might be some little flirtation going on. But I dare say it ‘s nothing.”

“Time will show.” Then Fan began to sing, and Tom’s horse came, so he departed with the very unusual demonstration of a gentle pat on the head, as he said kindly, “That ‘s right, my dear, keep jolly.” It was n’t an elegant way of expressing sympathy, but it was hearty, and Fan thanked him for it, though she only said, “Don’t break your neck, Tommy.”

When he was gone, Fan’s song ended as suddenly as it began, and she sat thinking, with varying expressions of doubt and trouble passing rapidly across her face.

“Well, I can’t do anything but wait!” she said, at last, slamming the music-book together with a desperate look. “Yes, I can,” she added, a minute after, “it ‘s Polly’s holiday. I can go and see her, and if there is anything in it I shall find it out.”

Fanny dropped her face into her hands, with a little shiver, as she said that; then got up, looking as pale and resolute as if going to meet some dreadful doom, and putting on her things, went away to Polly’s as fast as her dignity would allow.

Saturday morning was Polly’s clearing-up day, and Fan found her with a handkerchief tied over her head, and a big apron on, just putting the last touches to the tidy little room, which was as fresh and bright as water, air, and a pair of hands could make it.

“All ready for company. I ‘ll just whisk off my regimentals, and Polly, the maid, becomes Polly, the missis. It was lovely of you to come early; take off your things. Another new bonnet? you extravagant wretch! How is your mother and Maudie? It ‘s a nice day, and we ‘ll have a walk, won’t we?”

By the time Polly’s welcome was uttered, she had got Fan on the little sofa beside her, and was smiling at her in such an infectious manner, that Fan could n’t help smiling back.

“I came to see what you have been doing with yourself lately. You don’t come and report, and I got anxious about you,” said Fanny, looking into the clear eyes before her.

“I ‘ve been so busy; and I knew you would n’t care to hear about my doings, for they are n’t the sort you like,” answered Polly.

“Your lessons did n’t use to take up all your time. It ‘s my private opinion that you are taking as well as giving lessons, miss,” said Fan, putting on a playfully stern air, to hide her real anxiety.

“Yes, I am,” answered Polly, soberly.

“In what? Love?”

A quick color came to Polly’s cheeks, as she laughed, and said, looking away, “No; friendship and good works.”

“Oh, indeed! May I ask who is your teacher?”

“I ‘ve more than one; but Miss Mills is head teacher.”

“She instructs in good works; who gives the friendship lessons?”

“Such pleasant girls! I wish you knew them, Fan. So clever, and energetic, and kind, and happy, it always does me good to see them,” cried Polly, with a face full of enthusiasm.

“Is that all?” And Fan gave her a curious look of mingled disappointment and relief.

“There, I told you my doings would not interest you, and they don’t; they sound flat and prosy after your brilliant adventures. Let ‘s change the subject,” said Polly, looking relieved herself.

“Dear me, which of our sweethearts sends us dainty bouquets of violets so early in the morning?” asked Fanny, suddenly spying the purple cluster in a graceful little vase on the piano.

“He sends me one every week; he knows I love them so,” and Polly’s eyes turned that way full of pride and pleasure.

“I ‘d no idea he was so devoted,” said Fanny, stooping to smell the flowers, and at the same time read a card that lay near them.

“You need n’t plague me about it, now you know it. I never speak of our fondness for one another, because such things seem silly to other people. Will is n’t all that Jimmy was to me; but he tries to be, and I love him dearly for it.”

“Will?” Fanny’s voice quite startled Polly, it was so sharp and sudden, and her face grew red and pale all in a minute, as she upset the little vase with the start she gave.

“Yes, of course; who did you think I meant?” asked Polly, sopping up the water before it damaged her piano.

“Never mind; I thought you might be having a quiet little flirtation with somebody. I feel responsible, you know, because I told your mother I ‘d look after you. The flowers are all right. My head aches so, I hardly know what I ‘m doing this morning.”

Fanny spoke fast, and laughed uncomfortably, as she went back to the sofa, wondering if Polly had told her a lie. Polly seemed to guess at her thoughts as she saw the card, and turning toward her, she held it up, saying, with a conscious look in her eyes, “You thought Mr. Sydney sent them? Well, you are mistaken, and the next time you want to know anything, please ask straight out. I like it better than talking at cross purposes.”

“Now, my dear, don’t be angry; I was only teasing you in fun. Tom took it into his foolish head that something was going on, and I felt a natural interest, you know.”

“Tom! What does he know or care about my affairs?” demanded Polly.

“He met you two in the street pretty often, and being in a sentimental mood himself, got up a romance for you and Sydney.”

“I ‘m much obliged to him for his interest, but it ‘s quite wasted, thank you.”

Fan’s next proceeding gave her friend another surprise, for, being rather ashamed of herself, very much relieved, and quite at a loss what to say, she took refuge in an hysterical fit of tears, which changed Polly’s anger into tenderness at once.

“Is that the trouble she has been hiding all winter? Poor dear, I wish I ‘d known it sooner,” thought Polly, as she tried to soothe her with comfortable pats, sniffs of cologne and sympathizing remarks upon the subject of headache, carefully ignoring that other feminine affliction, the heartache.

“There, I feel better. I ‘ve been needing a good cry for some time, and now I shall be all right. Never mind it, Polly, I ‘m nervous and tired; I ‘ve danced too much lately, and dyspepsia makes me blue;” and Fanny wiped her eyes and laughed.

“Of course it does; you need rest and petting, and here I ‘ve been scolding you, when I ought to have been extra kind. Now tell me what I can do for you,” said Polly, with a remorseful face.

“Talk to me, and tell me all about yourself. You don’t seem to have as many worries as other people. What’s the secret, Polly?” And Fan looked up with wet eyes, and a wistful face at Polly, who was putting little dabs of cologne all over her head.

“Well,” said Polly, slowly, “I just try to look on the bright side of things; that helps one amazingly. Why, you ‘ve no idea how much goodness and sunshine you can get out of the most unpromising things, if you make the best of them.”

“I don’t know how,” said Fan, despondently.

“You can learn; I did. I used to croak and fret dreadfully, and get so unhappy, I was n’t fit for anything. I do it still more than I ought, but I try not to, and it gets easier, I find. Get a-top of your troubles, and then they are half cured, Miss Mills says.”

“Everything is so contrary and provoking,” said Fanny, petulantly.

“Now what in the world have you to fret about?” asked Polly, rather anxiously.

“Quantities of things,” began Fan, and then stopped, for somehow she felt ashamed to own that she was afflicted because she could n’t have a new set of furs, go to Paris in the spring, and make Mr. Sydney love her. She hunted up something more presentable, and said in a despairing tone, “Well, mother is very poorly, Tom and Trix quarrel all the time, Maud gets more and more wilful every day, and papa is worried about his affairs.”

“A sad state of things, but nothing very desperate. Can’t you lend a hand anywhere? That might do good all round.”

“No; I have n’t the talent for managing people, but I see what ought to be done.”

“Well, don’t wail about it; keep yourself happy, if you can; it will help other people to see you cheerful.”

“Just what Tom said,’Keep jolly’; but, dear me, how can one, when everything is so stupid and tiresome?”

“If ever a girl needed work, it ‘s you!” cried Polly. “You began to be a young lady so early, that you are tired of everything at twenty-two. I wish you ‘d go at something, then you ‘d find how much talent and energy you really had.”

“I know ever so many girls who are just like me, sick to death of fashionable life but don’t know what to take in its place. I ‘d like to travel; but papa says he can’t afford it, so I can only drag about and get on as I may.”

“I pity you rich girls so much, you have so many opportunities, and don’t seem to know how to use them! I suppose I should do just the same in your place, but it seems now as if I could be very happy and useful with plenty of money.”

“You are that without it. There, I won’t croak any more. Let us go and take a good walk, and don’t you tell any one how I came and cried like a baby.”

“Never!” said Polly, putting on her bonnet.

“I ought to go and make calls,” said Fanny, “but I don’t feel now as if I ever wanted to see any of the girls again. Dreadful state of mind, is n’t it?”

“Suppose you come and see some of my friends instead! They are not fine or ceremonious, but lively, odd, and pleasant. Come, it will amuse you.”

“I will,” cried Fanny, whose spirits seemed improved by the shower. “Nice little old lady, is n’t she?” added Fan, as she caught sight of Miss Mills, on their way out, sitting at a table piled with work, and sewing away with an energy that made the gray curls vibrate.

“Saint Mehitable, I call her. Now, there is a rich woman who knew how to get happiness out of her money,” said Polly, as they walked away. “She was poor till she was nearly fifty; then a comfortable fortune was left her, and she knew just how to use it. That house was given her, but instead of living in it all alone, she filled it with poor gentlefolks who needed neat, respectable homes, but could n’t get anything comfortable for their little money. I ‘m one of them, and I know the worth of what she does for me. Two old widow ladies live below me, several students overhead, poor Mrs. Kean and her lame boy have the back parlor, and Jenny the little bedroom next Miss Mills. Each pays what they can; that ‘s independent, and makes us feel better but that dear woman does a thousand things that money can’t pay for, and we feel her influence all through the house. I ‘d rather be married, and have a home of my own; but next to that, I should like to be an old maid like Miss Mills.”

Polly’s sober face and emphatic tone made Fanny laugh, and at the cheery sound a young girl pushing a baby-carriage looked round and smiled.

“What lovely eyes!” whispered Fanny.

“Yes, that ‘s little Jane,” returned Polly, adding, when she had passed, with a nod and a friendly “Don’t get tired, Jenny,” “we help one another at our house, and every fine morning Jenny takes Johnny Kean out when she goes for her own walk. That gives his mother time to rest, does both the children good, and keeps things neighborly. Miss Mills suggested it, and Jenny is so glad to do anything for anybody, it ‘s a pleasure to let her.”

“I ‘ve heard of Miss Mills before. But I should think she would get tired to death, sitting there making hoods and petticoats day after day,” said Fanny, after thinking over Jenny’s story for a few minutes, for seeing the girl seemed to bring it nearer, and make it more real to her.

“But she don’t sit there all the time. People come to her with their troubles, and she goes to them with all sorts of help, from soap and soup, to shrouds for the dead and comfort for the living. I go with her sometimes, and it is more exciting than any play, to see and hear the lives and stories of the poor.”

“How can you bear the dreadful sights and sounds, the bad air, and the poverty that can’t be cured?”

“But it is n’t all dreadful. There are good and lovely things among them, if one only has eyes to see them. It makes me grateful and contented, shows me how rich I am, and keeps me ready to do all I can for these poor souls.”

“My good Polly!” and Fanny gave her friends arm an affectionate squeeze, wondering if it was this alone that had worked the change in Polly.

“You have seen two of my new friends, Miss Mills and Jenny, now I ‘ll show you two more,” said Polly, presently, as they reached a door, and she led the way up several flights of public stairs. “Rebecca Jeffrey is a regularly splendid girl, full of talent; she won’t let us call it genius; she will be famous some day, I know, she is so modest, and yet so intent on her work. Lizzie Small is an engraver, and designs the most delightful little pictures. Becky and she live together, and take care of one another in true Damon and Pythias style. This studio is their home, they work, eat, sleep, and live here, going halves in everything. They are all alone in the world, but as happy and independent as birds; real friends, whom nothing will part.”

“Let a lover come between them, and their friendship won’t last long,” said Fanny.

“I think it will. Take a look at them, and you ‘ll change your mind,” answered Polly, tapping at a door, on which two modest cards were tacked.

“Come in!” said a voice, and obeying, Fanny found herself in a large, queerly furnished room, lighted from above, and occupied by two girls. One stood before a great clay figure, in a corner. This one was tall, with a strong face, keen eyes, short, curly hair, and a fine head. Fanny was struck at once by this face and figure, though the one was not handsome, and the other half hidden by a great pinafore covered with clay. At a table where the light was clearest, sat a frail-looking girl, with a thin face, big eyes, and pale hair, a dreamy, absorbed little person, who bent over a block, skillfully wielding her tools.

“Becky and Bess, how do you do? This is my friend, Fanny Shaw. We are out on a rampage; so go on with your work, and let us lazy ones look on and admire.”

As Polly spoke, both girls looked up and nodded, smilingly; Bess gave Fan the one easy-chair; Becky took an artistic survey of the new-comer, with eyes that seemed to see everything; then each went on with her work, and all began to talk.

“You are just what I want, Polly. Pull up your sleeve, and give me an arm while you sit; the muscles here are n’t right, and you ‘ve got just what I want,” said Becky, slapping the round arm of the statue, at which Fan was gazing with awe.

“How do you get on?” asked Polly, throwing off her cloak, and rolling up her sleeves, as if going to washing.

“Slowly. The idea is working itself clear, and I follow as fast as my hands can. Is the face better, do you think?” said Becky, taking off a wet cloth, and showing the head of the statue.

“How beautiful it is!” cried Fanny, staring at it with increased respect.

“What does it mean to you?” asked Rebecca, turning to her with a sudden shine in her keen eyes.

“I don’t know whether it is meant for a saint or a muse, a goddess or a fate; but to me it is only a beautiful woman, bigger, lovelier, and more imposing than any woman I ever saw,” answered Fanny, slowly, trying to express the impression the statue made upon her.

Rebecca smiled brightly, and Bess looked round to nod approvingly, but Polly clapped her hands, and said, “Well done, Fan! I did n’t think you ‘d get the idea so well, but you have, and I ‘m proud of your insight. Now I ‘ll tell you, for Becky will let me, since you have paid her the compliment of understanding her work. Some time ago we got into a famous talk about what women should be, and Becky said she ‘d show us her idea of the coming woman. There she is, as you say, bigger, lovelier, and more imposing than any we see nowadays; and at the same time, she is a true woman. See what a fine forehead, yet the mouth is both firm and tender, as if it could say strong, wise things, as well as teach children and kiss babies. We could n’t decide what to put in the hands as the most appropriate symbol. What do you say?”

“Give her a sceptre: she would make a fine queen,” answered Fanny.

“No, we have had enough of that; women have been called queens a long time, but the kingdom given them is n’t worth ruling,” answered Rebecca.

“I don’t think it is nowadays,” said Fanny, with a tired sort of sigh.

“Put a man’s hand in hers to help her along, then,” said Polly, whose happy fortune it had been to find friends and helpers in father and brothers.

“No; my woman is to stand alone, and help herself,” said Rebecca, decidedly.

“She ‘s to be strong-minded, is she?” and Fanny’s lip curled a little as she uttered the misused words.

“Yes, strong-minded, strong-hearted, strong-souled, and strong-bodied; that is why I made her larger than the miserable, pinched-up woman of our day. Strength and beauty must go together. Don’t you think these broad shoulders can bear burdens without breaking down, these hands work well, these eyes see clearly, and these lips do something besides simper and gossip?”

Fanny was silent; but a voice from Bess’s corner said, “Put a child in her arms,

Becky.”

“Not that even, for she is to be something more than a nurse.”

“Give her a ballot-box,” cried a new voice, and turning round, they saw an odd-looking woman perched on a sofa behind them.

“Thank you for the suggestion, Kate. I ‘ll put that with the other symbols at her feet; for I ‘m going to have needle, pen, palette, and broom somewhere, to suggest the various talents she owns, and the ballot-box will show that she has earned the right to use them. How goes it?” and Rebecca offered a clay-daubed hand, which the new-comer cordially shook.

“Great news, girls! Anna is going to Italy!” cried Kate, tossing up her bonnet like a school-boy.

“Oh, how splendid! Who takes her? Has she had a fortune left her? Tell all about it,” exclaimed the girls, gathering round the speaker.

“Yes, it is splendid; just one of the beautiful things that does everybody heaps of good, it is so generous and so deserved. You know Anna has been longing to go; working and hoping for a chance, and never getting it, till all of a sudden Miss Burton is inspired to invite the girl to go with her for several years to Italy. Think of the luck of that dear soul, the advantages she ‘ll have, the good it will do her, and, best of all, the lovely way in which it comes to her. Miss Burton wants, her as a friend, asks nothing of her but her company, and Anna will go through fire and water for her, of course. Now, is n’t that fine?”

It was good to see how heartily these girls sympathized in their comrade’s good fortune. Polly danced all over the room, Bess and Becky hugged one another, and Kate laughed with her eyes full, while even Fanny felt a glow of, pride and pleasure at the kind act.

“Who is that?” she whispered to Polly, who had subsided into a corner.

“Why, it Is Kate King, the authoress. Bless me, how rude not to introduce you! Here, my King, is an admirer of yours, Fanny Shaw, and my well beloved friend,” cried Polly, presenting Fan, who regarded the shabby young woman with as much respect, as if she had been arrayed in velvet and ermine; for Kate had written a successful book by accident, and happened to be the fashion, just then.

“It ‘s time for lunch, girls, and I brought mine along with me, it ‘s so much jollier to eat in sisterhood. Let ‘s club together, and have a revel,” said Kate, producing a bag of oranges, and several big, plummy buns.

“We ‘ve got sardines, crackers, and cheese,” said Bess, clearing off a table with all speed.

“Wait a bit, and I ‘ll add my share,” cried Polly, and catching up her cloak, she ran off to the grocery store near by.

“You ‘ll be shocked at our performances, Miss Shaw, but you can call it a picnic, and never tell what dreadful things you saw us do,” said Rebecca, polishing a paint knife by rubbing it up and down in a pot of ivy, while Kate spread forth the feast in several odd plates, and a flat shell or two.

“Let us have coffee to finish off with; put on the pot, Bess, and skim the milk,” added Becky, as she produced cups, mugs, and a queer little vase, to supply drinking vessels for the party.

“Here ‘s nuts, a pot of jam, and some cake. Fan likes sweet things, and we want to be elegant when we have company,” said Polly, flying in again, and depositing her share on the table.

“Now, then, fall to, ladies, and help yourselves. Never mind if the china don’t hold out; take the sardines by their little tails, and wipe your fingers on my brown-paper napkins,” said Kate, setting the example with such a relish, that the others followed it in a gale of merriment.

Fanny had been to many elegant lunches, but never enjoyed one more than that droll picnic in the studio; for there was a freedom about it that was charming, an artistic flavor to everything, and such a spirit of good-will and gayety, that she felt at home at once. As they ate, the others talked and she listened, finding it as interesting as any romance to hear these young women discuss their plans, ambitions, successes, and defeats. It was a new world to her, and they seemed a different race of creatures from the girls whose lives were spent in dress, gossip, pleasure, or ennui. They were girls still, full of spirits fun, and youth; but below the light-heartedness each cherished a purpose, which seemed to ennoble her womanhood, to give her a certain power, a sustaining satisfaction, a daily stimulus, that led her on to daily effort, and in time to some success in circumstance or character, which was worth all the patience, hope, and labor of her life.

Fanny was just then in the mood to feel the beauty of this, for the sincerest emotion she had ever known was beginning to make her dissatisfied with herself, and the aimless life she led. “Men must respect such girls as these,” she thought; “yes, and love them too, for in spite of their independence, they are womanly. I wish I had a talent to live for, if it would do as much for me as it does for them. It is this sort of thing that is improving Polly, that makes her society interesting to Sydney, and herself so dear to every one. Money can’t buy these things for me, and I want them very much.”

As these thoughts were passing through her mind, Fanny was hearing all sorts of topics discussed with feminine enthusiasm and frankness. Art, morals, politics, society, books, religion, housekeeping, dress, and economy, for the minds and tongues roved from subject to subject with youthful rapidity, and seemed to get something from the dryest and the dullest.

“How does the new book come on?” asked Polly, sucking her orange in public with a composure which would have scandalized the good ladies of “Cranford.”

“Better than it deserves. My children, beware of popularity; it is a delusion and a snare; it puffeth up the heart of man, and especially of woman; it blindeth the eyes to faults; it exalteth unduly the humble powers of the victim; it is apt to be capricious, and just as one gets to liking the taste of this intoxicating draught, it suddenly faileth, and one is left gasping, like a fish out of water,” and Kate emphasized her speech by spearing a sardine with a penknife, and eating it with a groan.

“It won’t hurt you much, I guess; you have worked and waited so long, a large dose will do you good,” said Rebecca, giving her a generous spoonful of jam, as if eager to add as much sweetness as possible to a life that had not been an easy one.

“When are you and Becky going to dissolve partnership?” asked Polly, eager for news of all.

“Never! George knows he can’t have one without the other, and has not suggested such a thing as parting us. There is always room in my house for Becky, and she lets me do as she would if she was in my place,” answered Bess, with a look which her friend answered by a smile.

“The lover won’t separate this pair of friends, you see,” whispered Polly to Fan. “Bess is to be married in the spring, and Becky is to live with her.”

“By the way, Polly, I ‘ve got some tickets for you. People are always sending me such things, and as I don’t care for them, I ‘m glad to make them over to you young and giddy infants. There are passes for the statuary exhibition, Becky shall have those, here are the concert tickets for you, my musical girl; and that is for a course of lectures on literature, which I ‘ll keep for myself.”

As Kate dealt out the colored cards to the grateful girls, Fanny took a good look at her, wondering if the time would ever come when women could earn a little money and success, without paying such a heavy price for them; for Kate looked sick, tired, and too early old. Then her eye went to the unfinished statue, and she said, impulsively, “I hope you ‘ll put that in marble, and show us what we ought to be.”

“I wish I could!” And an intense desire shone in Rebecca’s face, as she saw her faulty work, and felt how fair her model was.

For a minute, the five young women sat silent looking up at the beautiful, strong figure before them, each longing to see it done, and each unconscious that she was helping, by her individual effort and experience, to bring the day when their noblest ideal of womanhood should be embodied in flesh and blood, not clay.

The city bells rung one, and Polly started up.

“I must go, for I promised a neighbor of mine a lesson at two.”

“I thought this was a holiday,” said Fanny.

“So it is, but this is a little labor of love, and does n’t spoil the day at all. The child has talent, loves music, and needs help. I can’t give her money, but I can teach her; so I do, and she is the most promising pupil I have. Help one another, is part of the religion of our sisterhood, Fan.”

“I must put you in a story, Polly. I want a heroine, and you will do,” said Kate.

“Me! why, there never was such a humdrum, unromantic thing as I am,” cried Polly, amazed.

“I ‘ve booked you, nevertheless, so in you go; but you may add as much romance as you like, it ‘s time you did.”

“I ‘m ready for it when it comes, but it can’t be forced, you know,” and Polly blushed and smiled as if some little spice of that delightful thing had stolen into her life, for all its prosaic seeming.

Fanny was amused to see that the girls did not kiss at parting, but shook hands in a quiet, friendly fashion, looking at one another with eyes that said more than the most “gushing” words.

“I like your friends very much, Polly. I was afraid I should find them mannish and rough, or sentimental and conceited. But they are simple, sensible creatures, full of talent, and all sorts of fine things. I admire and respect them, and want to go again, if I may.”

“Oh, Fan, I am so glad! I hoped you ‘d like them, I knew they ‘d do you good, and I ‘ll take you any time, for you stood the test better than I expected. Becky asked me to bring you again, and she seldom does that for fashionable young ladies, let me tell you.”

“I want to be ever so much better, and I think you and they might show me how,” said Fanny, with a traitorous tremble in her voice.

“We ‘ll show you the sunny side of poverty and work, and that is a useful lesson for any one, Miss Mills says,” answered Polly, hoping that Fan would learn how much the poor can teach the rich, and what helpful friends girls may be to one another.

CHAPTER XIV. NIPPED IN THE BUD

ON the evening of Fan’s visit, Polly sat down before her fire with a resolute and thoughtful aspect. She pulled her hair down, turned her skirt back, put her feet on the fender, and took Puttel into her lap, all of which arrangements signified that something very important had got to be thought over and settled. Polly did not soliloquize aloud, as heroines on the stage and in books have a way of doing, but the conversation she held with herself was very much like this: “I ‘m afraid there is something in it. I ‘ve tried to think it ‘s nothing but vanity or imagination, yet I can’t help seeing a difference, and feeling as if I ought not to pretend that I don’t. I know it ‘s considered proper for girls to shut their eyes and let things come to a crisis no matter how much mischief is done. But I don’t think it ‘s doing as we ‘d be done by, and it seems a great deal more honest to show a man that you don’t love him before he has entirely lost his heart. The girls laughed at me when I said so, and they declared that it would be a very improper thing to do, but I ‘ve observed that they don’t hesitate to snub ‘ineligible parties,’ as they call poor, very young, or unpopular men. It ‘s all right then, but when a nice person comes it ‘s part of the fun to let him go on to the very end, whether the girls care for him or not. The more proposals, the more credit. Fan says Trix always asks when she comes home after the summer excursions, ‘How many birds have you bagged?’ as if men were partridges. What wicked creatures we are! some of us at least. I wonder why such a love of conquest was put into us? Mother says a great deal of it is owing to bad education nowadays, but some girls seem born for the express purpose of making trouble and would manage to do it if they lived in a howling wilderness. I ‘m afraid I ‘ve got a spice of it, and if I had the chance, should be as bad as any of them. I ‘ve tried it and liked it, and maybe this is the consequence of that night’s fun.”

Here Polly leaned back and looked up at the little mirror over the chimney-piece, which was hung so that it reflected the faces of those about the fire. In it Polly saw a pair of telltale eyes looking out from a tangle of bright brown hair, cheeks that flushed and dimpled suddenly as the fresh mouth smiled with an expression of conscious power, half proud, half ashamed, and as pretty to see as the coquettish gesture with which she smoothed back her curls and flourished a white hand. For a minute she regarded the pleasant picture while visions of girlish romances and triumphs danced through her head, then she shook her hair all over her face and pushed her chair out of range of the mirror, saying, with a droll mixture of self-reproach and self-approval in her tone; “Oh, Puttel, Puttel, what a fool I am!”

Puss appeared to endorse the sentiment by a loud purr and a graceful wave of her tail, and Polly returned to the subject from which these little vanities had beguiled her.

“Just suppose it is true, that he does ask me, and I say yes! What a stir it would make, and what fun it would be to see the faces of the girls when it came out! They all think a great deal of him because he is so hard to please, and almost any of them would feel immensely flattered if he liked them, whether they chose to marry him or not. Trix has tried for years to fascinate him, and he can’t bear her, and I ‘m so glad! What a spiteful thing I am. Well, I can’t help it, she does aggravate me so!” And Polly gave the cat such a tweak of the ear that Puttel bounced out of her lap in high dudgeon.

“It don’t do to think of her, and I won’t!” said Polly to herself, setting her lips with a grim look that was not at all becoming. “What an easy life I should have plenty of money, quantities of friends, all sorts of pleasures, and no work, no poverty, no cold shoulders or patched boots. I could do so much for all at home how I should enjoy that!” And Polly let her thoughts revel in the luxurious future her fancy painted. It was a very bright picture, but something seemed amiss with it, for presently she sighed and shook her head, thinking sorrowfully, “Ah, but I don’t love him, and I ‘m afraid I never can as I ought! He ‘s very good, and generous, and wise, and would be kind, I know, but somehow I can’t imagine spending my life with him; I ‘m so afraid I should get tired of him, and then what should I do? Polly Sydney don’t sound well, and Mrs. Arthur Sydney don’t seem to fit me a bit. Wonder how it would seem to call him ‘Arthur’?” And Polly said it under her breath, with a look over her shoulder to be sure no one heard it. “It ‘s a pretty name, but rather too fine, and I should n’t dare to say ‘Syd,’ as his sister does. I like short, plain, home-like names, such as Will, Ned, or Tom. No, no, I can never care for him, and it ‘s no use to try!” The exclamation broke from Polly as if a sudden trouble had seized her, and laying her head down on her knees, she sat motionless for many minutes.

When she looked up, her face wore an expression which no one had ever seen on it before; a look of mingled pain and patience, as if some loss had come to her, and left the bitterness of regret behind.

“I won’t think of myself, or try to mend one mistake by making another,” she said with a heavy sigh. “I ‘ll do what I can for Fan, and not stand between her and a chance of happiness. Let me see, how can I begin? I won’t walk with him any more; I ‘ll dodge and go roundabout ways, so that we can’t meet. I never had much faith in the remarkable coincidence of his always happening home to dinner just as I go to give the Roths their lesson. The fact is, I like to meet him, I am glad to be seen with him, and put on airs, I dare say, like a vain goose as I am. Well, I won't do it any more, and that will spare Fan one affliction. Poor dear, how I must have worried her all this time, and never guessed it. She has n't been quite as kind as ever; but when she got sharp, I fancied it was dyspepsia. Oh, me! I wish the other trouble could be cured as easily as this."

Here puss showed an amiable desire to forgive and forget, and Polly took her up, saying aloud: "Puttel, when missis abuses you, play it 's dyspepsia, and don't bear malice, because it 's a very trying disease, my dear."

Then, going back to her thoughts, she rambled on again; "If he does n't take that hint, I will give him a stronger one, for I will not have matters come to a crisis, though I can't deny that my wicked vanity strongly tempts me to try and 'bag a bird' just for the excitement and credit of the thing. Polly, I 'm ashamed of you! What would your blessed mother say to hear such expressions from you? I 'd write and tell her all the worry, only it would n't do any good, and would only trouble her. I 've no right to tell Fan's secrets, and I 'm ashamed to tell mine. No, I 'll leave mother in peace, and fight it out alone. I do think Fan would suit him excellently by and by. He has known her all her life, and has a good influence over her. Love would do so much toward making her what she might be; it 's a shame to have the chance lost just because he happens to see me. I should think she 'd hate me; but I 'll show her that she need n't, and do all I can to help her; for she has been so good to me nothing shall ever make me forget that. It is a delicate and dangerous task, but I guess I can manage it; at any rate I 'll try, and have nothing to reproach myself with if things do go 'contrary.'"

What Polly thought of, as she lay back in her chair, with her eyes shut, and a hopeless look on her face, is none of our business, though we might feel a wish to know what caused a tear to gather slowly from time to time under her lashes, and roll down on Puttel's Quaker-colored coat. Was it regret for the conquest she relinquished, was it sympathy for her friend, or was it an uncontrollable overflow of feeling as she read some sad or tender passage of the little romance which she kept hidden away in her own heart?

On Monday, Polly began the "delicate and dangerous task." Instead of going to her pupils by way of the park and the pleasant streets adjoining, she took a roundabout route through back streets, and thus escaped Mr. Sydney, who, as usual, came home to dinner very early that day and looked disappointed because he nowhere saw the bright face in the modest bonnet. Polly kept this up for a week, and by carefully avoiding the Shaws' house during calling hours, she saw nothing of Mr. Sydney, who, of course, did n't visit her at Miss Mills'. Minnie happened to be poorly that week and took no lesson, so Uncle Syd was deprived of his last hope, and looked as if his allowance of sunshine had been suddenly cut off.

Now, as Polly was by no means a perfect creature, I am free to confess that the old temptation assailed her more than once that week, for, when the first excitement of the dodging reform had subsided, she missed the pleasant little interviews that used to put a certain flavor of romance into her dull, hard-working days. She liked Mr. Sydney very much, for he had always been kind and friendly since the early times when he had treated the little girl with a courtesy which the young woman gratefully remembered. I don’t think it was his wealth, accomplishments, or position that most attracted Polly, though these doubtless possessed a greater influence than she suspected. It was that indescribable something which women are quick to see and feel in men who have been blessed with wise and good mothers. This had an especial charm to Polly, for she soon found that this side of his character was not shown to every one. With most girls, he was very like the other young men of his set, except perhaps in a certain grace of manner which was as natural to him as his respect for all womankind. But with Fanny and Polly he showed the domestic traits and virtues which are more engaging to womanly women than any amount of cool intellect or worldly wisdom.

Polly had seen a good deal of him during her visits at the Shaws’, where he was intimate, owing to the friendship between Madam and his mother; but she had never thought of him as a possible lover for either Fanny or herself because he was six or eight years older than they, and still sometimes assumed the part of a venerable mentor, as in the early days. Lately this had changed, especially towards Polly, and it flattered her more than she would confess even to herself. She knew he admired her one talent, respected her independence, and enjoyed her society; but when something warmer and more flattering than admiration, respect, or pleasure crept into his manner, she could not help seeing that one of the good gifts of this life was daily coming more and more within her reach, and began to ask herself if she could honestly receive the gift, and reward the giver.

At first she tried to think she could, but unfortunately hearts are so “contrary” that they won’t be obedient to reason, will, or even gratitude. Polly felt a very cordial friendship for Mr. Sydney, but not one particle of the love which is the only coin in which love can be truly paid. Then she took a fancy into her head that she ought to accept this piece of good fortune for the sake of the family, and forget herself. But this false idea of self-sacrifice did not satisfy, for she was not a fashionable girl trained to believe that her first duty was to make “a good match” and never mind the consequences, though they rendered her miserable for life. Polly’s creed was very simple: “If I don’t love him, I ought not to marry him, especially when I do love somebody else, though everything is against me." If she had read as many French novels as some young ladies, she might have considered it interesting to marry under the circumstances and suffer a secret anguish to make her a romantic victim. But Polly's education had been neglected, and after a good deal of natural indecision she did what most women do in such cases, thought she would "wait and see."

The discovery of Fanny's secret seemed to show her something to do, for if the "wait and see" decision was making her friend unhappy, it must be changed as soon as possible. This finished Polly's indecision, and after that night she never allowed herself to dwell upon the pleasant temptation which came in a guise particularly attractive to a young girl with a spice of the old Eve in her composition. So day after day she trudged through the dull back streets, longing for the sunny park, the face that always brightened when it saw her coming, and most of all the chance of meeting well, it was n't Trix.

When Saturday came, Polly started as usual for a visit to Becky and Bess, but could n't resist stopping at the Shaws' to leave a little parcel for Fan, though it was calling time. As she stepped in, meaning to run up for a word if Fanny should chance to be alone, two hats on the hall table arrested her.

"Who is here, Katy?"

"Only Mr. Sydney and Master Tom. Won't you stop a bit, Miss Polly?"

"Not this morning, I 'm rather in a hurry." And away went Polly as if a dozen eager pupils were clamoring for her presence. But as the door shut behind her she felt so left out in the cold, that her eyes filled, and when Nep, Tom's great Newfoundland, came blundering after her, she stopped and hugged his shaggy head, saying softly, as she looked into the brown, benevolent eyes, full of almost human sympathy: "Now, go back, old dear, you must n't follow me. Oh, Nep, it 's so hard to put love away when you want it very much and it is n't right to take it." A foolish little speech to make to a dog, but you see Polly was only a tender-hearted girl, trying to do her duty.

"Since he is safe with Fanny, I may venture to walk where I like. It 's such a lovely day, all the babies will be out, and it always does me good to see them," thought Polly, turning into the wide, sunny street, where West End-dom promenaded at that hour.

The babies were out in full force, looking as gay and delicate and sweet as the snow-drops, hyacinths, and daffodils on the banks whence the snow had melted. But somehow the babies did n't do Polly the good she expected, though they smiled at her from their carriages, and kissed their chubby hands as she passed them, for Polly had the sort of face that babies love. One tiny creature in blue plush was casting despairing glances after a very small lord of creation who was walking away with a toddling belle in white, while a second young gentleman in gorgeous purple gaiters was endeavoring to console the deserted damsel.

“Take hold of Master Charley’s hand, Miss Mamie, and walk pretty, like Willy and Flossy,” said the maid.

“No, no, I want to do wid Willy, and he won’t let me. Do ‘way, Tarley, I don’t lite you,” cried little Blue-bonnet, casting down her ermine muff and sobbing in a microscopic handkerchief, the thread-lace edging on which could n’t mitigate her woe, as it might have done that of an older sufferer.

“Willy likes Flossy best, so stop crying and come right along, you naughty child.”

As poor little Dido was jerked away by the unsympathetic maid, and Purple-gaiters essayed in vain to plead his cause, Polly said to herself, with a smile and a sigh; “How early the old story begins!”

It seemed as if the spring weather had brought out all manner of tender things beside fresh grass and the first dandelions, for as she went down the street Polly kept seeing different phases of the sweet old story which she was trying to forget.

At a street corner, a black-eyed school-boy was parting from a rosy-faced school-girl, whose music roll he was reluctantly surrendering.

“Don’t you forget, now,” said the boy, looking bashfully into the bright eyes that danced with pleasure as the girl blushed and smiled, and answered reproachfully; “Why, of course I shan’t!”

“That little romance runs smoothly so far; I hope it may to the end,” said Polly heartily as she watched the lad tramp away, whistling as blithely as if his pleasurable emotions must find a vent, or endanger the buttons on the round jacket; while the girl pranced on her own doorstep, as if practising for the joyful dance which she had promised not to forget.

A little farther on Polly passed a newly engaged couple whom she knew, walking arm in arm for the first time, both wearing that proud yet conscious look which is so delightful to behold upon the countenances of these temporarily glorified beings.

“How happy they seem; oh, dear!” said Polly, and trudged on, wondering if her turn would ever come and fearing that it was impossible.

A glimpse of a motherly-looking lady entering a door, received by a flock of pretty children, who cast themselves upon mamma and her parcels with cries of rapture, did Polly good; and when, a minute after she passed a gray old couple walking placidly together in the sunshine, she felt better still, and was glad to see such a happy ending to the romance she had read all down the street.

As if the mischievous little god wished to take Polly at a disadvantage, or perhaps to give her another chance, just at that instant Mr. Sydney appeared at her side. How he got there was never very clear to Polly, but there he was, flushed, and a little out of breath, but looking so glad to see her that she had n't the heart to be stiff and cool, as she had fully intended to be when they met.

"Very warm, is n't it?" he said when he had shaken hands and fallen into step, just in the old way.

"You seem to find it so." And Polly laughed, with a sudden sparkle in her eyes. She really could n't help it, it was so pleasant to see him again, just when she was feeling so lonely.

"Have you given up teaching the Roths?" asked Sydney, changing the subject.

"No."

"Do you go as usual?"

"Yes."

"Well, it 's a mystery to me how you get there."

"As much as it is to me how you got here so suddenly."

"I saw you from the Shaws' window and took the liberty of running after you by the back street," he said, laughing.

"That is the way I get to the Roths," answered Polly. She did not mean to tell, but his frankness was so agreeable she forgot herself.

"It 's not nearly so pleasant or so short for you as the park."

"I know it, but people sometimes get tired of old ways and like to try new ones."

Polly did n't say that quite naturally, and Sydney gave her a quick look, as he asked; "Do you get tired of old friends, too, Miss Polly?"

"Not often; but" And there she stuck, for the fear of being ungrateful or unkind made her almost hope that he would n't take the hint which she had been carefully preparing for him.

There was a dreadful little pause, which Polly broke by saying abruptly; "How is Fan?"

"Dashing, as ever. Do you know I 'm rather disappointed in Fanny, for she don't seem to improve with her years," said Sydney, as if he accepted the diversion and was glad of it.

"Ah, you never see her at her best. She puts on that dashing air before people to hide her real self. But I know her better; and I assure you that she does improve; she tries to mend her faults, though she won't own it, and will surprise you some day, by the amount of heart and sense and goodness she has got."

Polly spoke heartily now, and Sydney looked at her as if Fanny's defender pleased him more than Fanny's defence.

"I 'm very glad to hear it, and willingly take your word for it. Everybody shows you their good side, I think, and that is why you find the world such a pleasant place."

"Oh, but I don't! It often seems like a very hard and dismal place, and I croak over my trials like an ungrateful raven."

"Can't we make the trials lighter for you?"

The voice that put the question was so very kind, that Polly dared not look up, because she knew what the eyes were silently saying.

"Thank you, no. I don't get more tribulation than is good for me, I fancy, and we are apt to make mistakes when we try to dodge troubles."

"Or people," added Sydney in a tone that made Polly color up to her forehead.

"How lovely the park looks," she said, in great confusion.

"Yes, it 's the pleasantest walk we have; don't you think so?" asked the artful young man, laying a trap, into which Polly immediately fell.

"Yes, indeed! It 's always so refreshing to me to see a little bit of the country, as it were, especially at this season."

Oh, Polly, Polly, what a stupid speech to make, when you had just given him to understand that you were tired of the park! Not being a fool or a cox-comb, Sydney put this and that together, and taking various trifles into the account, he had by this time come to the conclusion that Polly had heard the same bits of gossip that he had, which linked their names together, that she did n't like it, and tried to show she did n't in this way. He was quicker to take a hint than she had expected, and being both proud and generous, resolved to settle the matter at once, for Polly's sake as well as his own. So, when she made her last brilliant remark, he said quietly, watching her face keenly all the while; "I thought so; well, I 'm going out of town on business for several weeks, so you can enjoy your 'little bit of country' without being annoyed by me."

"Annoyed? Oh, no!" cried Polly earnestly; then stopped short, not knowing what to say for herself. She thought she had a good deal of the coquette in her, and I 've no doubt that with time and training she would have become a very dangerous little person, but now she was far too transparent and straightforward by nature even to tell a white lie cleverly. Sydney knew this, and liked her for it, but he took advantage of it, nevertheless by asking suddenly; "Honestly, now, would n't you go the old way and enjoy it as much as ever, if I was n't anywhere about to set the busybodies gossiping?"

"Yes," said Polly, before she could stop herself, and then could have bitten her tongue out for being so rude. Another awful pause seemed impending, but just at that moment a horseman clattered by with a smile and a salute, which caused Polly to exclaim, "Oh, there 's Tom!" with a tone and a look that silenced the words hovering on Sydney's lips, and caused him to hold out his hand with a look which made Polly's heart flutter then and ache with pity for a good while afterward, though he only said, "Good by, Polly."

He was gone before she could do anything but look up at him with a remorseful face, and she walked on, feeling that the first and perhaps the only lover she would ever have, had read his answer and accepted it in silence. She did not know what else he had read, and comforted herself with the thought that he did not care for her very much, since he took the first rebuff so quickly.

Polly did not return to her favorite walk till she learned from Minnie that "Uncle" had really left town, and then she found that his friendly company and conversation was what had made the way so pleasant after all. She sighed over the perversity of things in general, and croaked a little over her trials in particular, but on the whole got over her loss better than she expected, for soon she had other sorrows beside her own to comfort, and such work does a body more good than floods of regretful tears, or hours of sentimental lamentation.

She shunned Fanny for a day or two, but gained nothing by it, for that young lady, hearing of Sydney's sudden departure, could not rest till she discovered the cause of it, and walked in upon Polly one afternoon just when the dusk made it a propitious hour for tender confidences.

"What have you been doing with yourself lately?" asked Fanny, composing herself, with her back toward the rapidly waning light.

"Wagging to and fro as usual. What's the news with you?" answered Polly, feeling that something was coming and rather glad to have it over and done with.

"Nothing particular. Trix treats Tom shamefully, and he bears it like a lamb. I tell him to break his engagement, and not be worried so; but he won't, because she has been jilted once and he thinks it 's such a mean thing to do."

"Perhaps she 'll jilt him."

"I 've no doubt she will, if anything better comes along. But Trix is getting passe, and I should n't wonder if she kept him to his word, just out of perversity, if nothing else."

"Poor Tom, what a fate!" said Polly with what was meant to be a comical groan; but it sounded so tragical that she saw it would n't pass, and hastened to hide the failure by saying, with a laugh, "If you call Trix passe at twenty-three, what shall we all be at twenty-five?" "Utterly done with, and laid upon the shelf. I feel so already, for I don't get half the attention I used to have, and the other night I heard Maud and Grace wondering why those old girls 'did n't stay at home, and give them a chance.'"

"How is Maudie?"

"Pretty well, but she worries me by her queer tastes and notions. She loves to go into the kitchen and mess, she hates to study, and said right before the

Vincents that she should think it would be great fun to be a beggar-girl, to go round with a basket, it must be so interesting to see what you ‘d get.”

“Minnie said the other day she wished she was a pigeon so she could paddle in the puddles and not fuss about rubbers.”

“By the way, when is her uncle coming back?” asked Fanny, who could n’t wait any longer and joyfully seized the opening Polly made for her.

“I ‘m sure I don’t know.”

“Nor care, I suppose, you hard-hearted thing.”

“Why, Fan, what do you mean?”

“I ‘m not blind, my dear, neither is Tom, and when a young gentleman cuts a call abruptly short, and races after a young lady, and is seen holding her hand at the quietest corner of the park, and then goes travelling all of a sudden, we know what it means if you don’t.”

“Who got up that nice idea, I should like to know?” demanded Polly, as Fanny stopped for breath.

“Now don’t be affected, Polly, but just tell me, like a dear, has n’t he proposed?”

“No, he has n’t.”

“Don’t you think he means to?”

“I don’t think he ‘ll ever say a word to me.”

“Well, I am surprised!” And Fanny drew a long breath, as if a load was off her mind. Then she added in a changed tone: “But don’t you love him, Polly?”

“No.”

“Truly?”

“Truly, Fan.”

Neither spoke for a minute, but the heart of one of them beat joyfully and the dusk hid a very happy face.

“Don’t you think he cared for you, dear?” asked Fanny, presently. “I don’t mean to be prying, but I really thought he did.”

“That ‘s not for me to say, but if it is so, it ‘s only a passing fancy and he ‘ll soon get over it.”

“Do tell me all about it; I ‘m so interested, and I know something has happened, I hear it in your voice, for I can’t see your face.”

“Do you remember the talk we once had after reading one of Miss Edgeworth’s stories about not letting one’s lovers come to a declaration if one did n’t love them?”

“Yes.”

“And you girls said it was n’t proper, and I said it was honest, anyway. Well, I always meant to try it if I got a chance, and I have. Mind you, I don’t say Mr.

Sydney loved me, for he never said so, and never will, now, but I did fancy he rather liked me and might do more if I did n't show him that it was of no use."

"And you did?" cried Fanny, much excited.

"I just gave him a hint and he took it. He meant to go away before that, so don't think his heart is broken, or mind what silly tattlers say. I did n't like his meeting me so much and told him so by going another way. He understood, and being a gentleman, made no fuss. I dare say he thought I was a vain goose, and laughed at me for my pains, like Churchill in 'Helen.'"

"No, he would n't; He 'd like it and respect you for doing it. But, Polly, it would have been a grand thing for you."

"I can't sell myself for an establishment."

"Mercy! What an idea!"

"Well, that 's the plain English of half your fashionable matches. I 'm 'odd,' you know, and prefer to be an independent spinster and teach music all my days."

"Ah, but you won't. You were made for a nice, happy home of your own, and I hope you 'll get it, Polly, dear," said Fanny warmly, feeling so grateful to Polly, that she found it hard not to pour out all her secret at once.

"I hope I may; but I doubt it," answered Polly in a tone that made Fanny wonder if she, too, knew what heartache meant.

"Something troubles you, Polly, what is it? Confide in me, as I do in you," said Fanny tenderly, for all the coldness she had tried to hide from Polly, had melted in the sudden sunshine that had come to her.

"Do you always?" asked her friend, leaning forward with an irresistible desire to win back the old-time love and confidence, too precious to be exchanged for a little brief excitement or the barren honor of "bagging a bird," to use Trix's elegant expression. Fanny understood it then, and threw herself into Polly's arms, crying, with a shower of grateful tears; "Oh, my dear! my dear! did you do it for my sake?"

And Polly held her close, saying in that tender voice of hers, "I did n't mean to let a lover part this pair of friends if I could help it."

CHAPTER XV. BREAKERS AHEAD

GOING into the Shaws' one evening, Polly found Maud sitting on the stairs, with a troubled face.

"Oh, Polly, I 'm so glad you 've come!" cried the little girl, running to hug her.

"What's the matter, deary?"

"I don't know; something dreadful must have happened, for mamma and Fan are crying together upstairs, papa is shut up in the library, and Tom is raging round like a bear, in the dining-room."

"I guess it is n't anything very bad. Perhaps mamma is sicker than usual, or papa worried about business, or Tom in some new scrape. Don't look so frightened, Maudie, but come into the parlor and see what I 've got for you," said Polly, feeling that there was trouble of some sort in the air, but trying to cheer the child, for her little face was full of a sorrowful anxiety, that went to Polly's heart.

"I don't think I can like anything till I know what the matter is," answered Maud. "It 's something horrid, I 'm sure, for when papa came home, he went up to mamma's room, and talked ever so long, and mamma cried very loud, and when I tried to go in, Fan would n't let me, and she looked scared and strange. I wanted to go to papa when he came down, but the door was locked, and he said, 'Not now, my little girl,' and then I sat here waiting to see what would happen, and Tom came home. But when I ran to tell him, he said, 'Go away, and don't bother,' and just took me by the shoulders and put me out. Oh, dear! everything is so queer and horrid, I don't know what to do."

Maud began to cry, and Polly sat down on the stairs beside her, trying to comfort her, while her own thoughts were full of a vague fear. All at once the dining-room door opened, and Tom's head appeared. A single glance showed Polly that something was the matter, for the care and elegance which usually marked his appearance were entirely wanting. His tie was under one ear, his hair in a toss, the cherished moustache had a neglected air, and his face an expression both excited, ashamed, and distressed; even his voice betrayed disturbance, for instead of the affable greeting he usually bestowed upon the young lady, he seemed to have fallen back into the bluff tone of his boyish days, and all he said was, "Hullo, Polly."

"How do you do?" answered Polly.

"I 'm in a devil of a mess, thank you; send that chicken up stairs, and come in and hear about it," he said, as if he had been longing to tell some one, and welcomed prudent Polly as a special providence.

"Go up, deary, and amuse yourself with this book, and these ginger snaps that I made for you, there 's a good child," whispered Polly, as Maud rubbed away her tears, and stared at Tom with round, inquisitive eyes.

"You 'll tell me all about it, by and by, won't you?" she whispered, preparing to obey.

"If I may," answered Polly.

Maud departed with unexpected docility, and Polly went into the dining-room, where Tom was wandering about in a restless way. If he had been "raging like a bear," Polly would n't have cared, she was so pleased that he wanted her, and so glad to be a confidante, as she used to be in the happy old days, that she would joyfully have faced a much more formidable person than reckless Tom.

"Now, then, what is it?" she said, coming straight to the point.

"Guess."

"You 've killed your horse racing."

"Worse than that."

"You are suspended again."

"Worse than that."

"Trix has run away with somebody," cried Polly, with a gasp.

"Worse still."

"Oh, Tom, you have n't horse whipped or shot any one?"

"Came pretty near blowing my own brains out but you see I did n't."

"I can't guess; tell me, quick."

"Well, I 'm expelled."

Tom paused on the rug as he gave the answer, and looked at Polly to see how she took it. To his surprise she seemed almost relieved, and after a minute silence, said, soberly, "That 's bad, very bad; but it might have been worse."

"It is worse;" and Tom walked away again with a despairing sort of groan.

"Don't knock the chairs about, but come and sit down, and tell me quietly."

"Can't do it."

"Well, go on, then. Are you truly expelled? Can't it be made up? What did you do?"

"It 's a true bill this time. I just had a row with the Chapel watchman, and knocked him down. If it was a first offence, I might have got off; but you see I 've had no end of narrow escapes, and this was my last chance; I 've lost it, and now there 'll be the dickens to pay. I knew it was all up with me, so I did n't wait to be turned out, but just took myself off."

"What will your father say?"

"It will come hard on the governor, but the worst of it is" there Tom stopped, and stood a minute in the middle of the room with his head down, as if he did n't find it easy to tell even kind little Polly. Then out came the truth all in a breath, just as he used to bolt out his boyish misdemeanors, and then back up against the wall ready to take the consequences.

"I owe an awful lot of money that the governor don't know about."

"Oh, Tom, how could you?"

"I 've been an extravagant rascal, I know it, and I 'm thundering sorry, but that don't help a fellow, I 've got to tell the dear old buffer, and there 's where it cuts."

At another time Polly would have laughed at the contrast between Tom's face and his language, but there was a sincere remorse, which made even the dreadful word "buffer" rather touching than otherwise.

"He will be very angry, I dare say; but he 'll help you, won't he? He always does, Fan says."

"That 's the worst of it, you see. He 's paid up so often, that the last time he said his patience could n't stand it, nor his pocket either, and if I got into any more scrapes of that sort, I must get out as I could. I meant to be as steady as Bunker Hill Monument; but here I am again, worse than ever, for last quarter I did n't say anything to father, he was so bothered by the loss of those ships just then, so things have mounted up confoundedly."

"What have you done with all your money?"

"Hanged if I know."

"Can't you pay it anyway?"

"Don't see how, as I have n't a cent of my own, and no way of getting it, unless I try gambling."

"Oh, mercy, no! Sell your horse," cried Polly, after a minute of deep meditation.

"I have; but he did n't bring half I gave for him. I lamed him last winter, and the beggar won't get over it."

"And that did n't pay up the debts?"

"Only about a half of 'em."

"Why, Tom, how much do you owe?"

"I have dodged figuring it up till yesterday; then things were so desperate, I thought I might as well face the truth, so I overhauled my accounts, and there 's the result."

Tom threw a blotted, crumpled paper into Polly's lap, and tramped up and down again, faster than ever. Polly took one look at the total and clasped her hands, for to her inexperienced eyes it looked appalling.

"Tidy little sum, is n't it?" asked Tom, who could n't bear the silence, or the startled, grieved look in Polly’s eyes.

“It ‘s awful! I don’t wonder you dread telling your father.”

“I ‘d rather be shot. I say, Polly, suppose we break it to him easy!” added Tom, after another turn.

“How do you mean?”

“Why, suppose Fan, or, better still, you go and sort of pave the way. I can’t bear to come down on him with the whole truth at once.”

“So you ‘d like to have me go and tell him for you?” Polly’s lip curled a little as she said that, and she gave Tom a look that would have shown him how blue eyes can flash, if he had seen it. But he was at the window, and did n’t turn, as he said slowly, “Well, you see, he ‘s so fond of you; we all confide in you; and you are so like one of the family, that it seems quite natural. Just tell him I ‘m expelled, you know, and as much more as you like; then I ‘ll come in, and we ‘ll have it out.”

Polly rose and went to the door without a word. In doing so, Tom caught a glimpse of her face, and said, hastily, “Don’t you think it would be a good plan?”

“No, I don’t.”

“Why not? Don’t you think he ‘d rather have it told him nicely by you, than blurted out as I always do blurt things?”

“I know he ‘d rather have his son go to him and tell the truth, like a man, instead of sending a girl to do what he is afraid to do himself.”

If Polly had suddenly boxed his ears, Tom could n’t have looked more taken aback than by that burst. He looked at her excited face, seemed to understand the meaning of it, and remembered all at once that he was trying to hide behind a girl. He turned scarlet, said shortly, “Come back, Polly,” and walked straight out of the room, looking as if going to instant execution, for poor Tom had been taught to fear his father, and had not entirely outgrown the dread.

Polly sat down, looking both satisfied and troubled. “I hope I did right,” she said to herself, “I could n’t bear to have him shirk and seem cowardly. He is n’t, only he did n’t think how it seemed to me, and I don’t wonder he was a little afraid, Mr. Shaw is so severe with the poor fellow. Oh, dear, what should we do if Will got into such scrapes. Thank goodness, he ‘s poor, and can’t; I ‘m so glad of that!”

Then she sat silent beside the half-open door, hearing the murmur of Tom’s voice across the hall, and hoping, with all her heart, that he would n’t have a very hard time. He seemed to tell his story rapidly and steadily, without interruption, to the end; then Polly heard Mr. Shaw’s deeper voice say a few words, at which Tom uttered a loud exclamation, as if taken by surprise. Polly could n’t distinguish a word, so she kept her seat, wondering anxiously what was going on between the two men. A sudden pause seemed to follow Tom's ejaculation, then Mr. Shaw talked a long time in a low, earnest tone, so different from the angry one Polly had expected to hear, that it made her nervous, for Mr. Shaw usually "blew Tom up first, and forgave him afterward," as Maud said. Presently Tom's voice was heard, apparently asking eager questions, to which brief replies were given. Then a dead silence fell upon the room, and nothing was heard but the spring rain softly falling out of doors. All of a sudden she heard a movement, and Tom's voice say audibly, "Let me bring Polly;" and he appeared, looking so pale and miserable that Polly was frightened.

"Go and say something to him; I can't; poor old father, if I 'd only known," and to Polly's utter dismay, Tom threw himself into a chair, and laid his head down on the table, as if he had got a blow that was too much for him.

"Oh, Tom, what is it?" cried Polly, hurrying to him, full of fears she dared not speak.

Without looking up, Tom answered, in a smothered voice, "Failed; all gone to smash; and to-morrow every one will know it."

Polly held on to the back of Tom's chair, for a minute, for the news took her breath away, and she felt as if the world was coming to an end, "failed" was such a vaguely dreadful word to her.

"Is it very bad?" she asked, softly, feeling as if anything was better than to stand still and see Tom so wretched.

"Yes; he means to give up everything. He 's done his best; but it can't be staved off any longer, and it 's all up with him."

"Oh, I wish I had a million to give him!" cried Polly, clasping her hands, with the tears running down her cheeks. "How does he bear it, Tom?"

"Like a man, Polly; and I 'm proud of him," said Tom, looking up, all red and excited with the emotions he was trying to keep under. "Everything has been against him, and he has fought all alone to stand the pressure, but it 's too much for him, and he 's given in. It 's an honorable failure, mind you, and no one can say a word against him. I 'd like to see 'em try it!" and Tom clenched his hands, as if it would be an immense relief to him to thrash half a dozen aspersers of his father's honest name.

"Of course they can't! This is what poor Maud troubled about. He had told your mother and Fan before you came, and that is why they are so unhappy, I suppose."

"They are safe enough. Father has n't touched mother's money; he 'could n't rob his girls,' he said, and that 's all safe for 'em. Is n't he a trump, Polly?" And Tom's face shone with pride, even while his lips would twitch with a tenderer feeling.

"If I could only do anything to help," cried Polly, oppressed with her own powerlessness.

"You can. Go and be good to him; you know how; he needs it enough, all alone there. I can't do it, for I 'm only a curse instead of a comfort to him."

"How did he take your news?" asked Polly, who, for a time, had forgotten the lesser trouble in the greater.

"Like a lamb; for when I 'd done, he only said, 'My poor lad, we must bear with one another.' and then told his story."

"I 'm glad he was kind," began Polly, in a soothing tone; but Tom cried out, remorsefully, "That 's what knocks me over! Just when I ought to be a pride and a prop to him, I bring him my debts and disgrace, and he never says a word of blame. It 's no use, I can't stand it!" and Tom's head went down again with something very like a sob, that would come in spite of manful efforts to keep it back, for the poor fellow had the warmest heart that ever was, and all the fine waistcoats outside could n't spoil it.

That sound gave Polly more pain than the news of a dozen failures and expulsions, and it was as impossible for her to resist putting her hand tenderly on the bent head, as it was for her to help noticing with pleasure how brown the little curls were growing, and how soft they were. In spite of her sorrow, she enjoyed that minute very much, for she was a born consoler, and, it is hardly necessary for me to add, loved this reprehensible Tom with all her heart. It was a very foolish thing for her to do, she quite agreed to that; she could n't understand it, explain it, or help it; she only felt that she did care for him very much, in spite of his faults, his indifference, and his engagement. You see, she learned to love him one summer, when he made them a visit. That was before Trix caught him; and when she heard that piece of news, Polly could n't unlove him all at once, though she tried very hard, as was her duty. That engagement was such a farce, that she never had much faith in it, so she put her love away in a corner of her heart, and tried to forget it, hoping it would either die, or have a right to live. It did n't make her very miserable, because patience, work, and common-sense lent her a hand, and hope would keep popping up its bright face from the bottom of her Pandora-box of troubles. Now and then, when any one said Trix would n't jilt Tom, or that Tom did care for Trix more than he should, Polly had a pang, and thought she could n't possibly bear it. But she always found she could, and so came to the conclusion that it was a merciful provision of nature that girls' hearts could stand so much, and their appetites continue good, when unrequited love was starving.

Now, she could not help yearning over this faulty, well-beloved scapegrace Tom, or help thinking, with a little thrill of hope, "If Trix only cared for his money, she may cast him off now he ‘s lost it; but I ‘ll love him all the better because he ‘s poor.” With this feeling warm at her heart, I don’t wonder that Polly’s hand had a soothing effect, and that after a heave or two, Tom’s shoulders were quiet, and certain smothered sniffs suggested that he would be all right again, if he could only wipe his eyes without any one’s seeing him do it.

Polly seemed to divine his wish, and tucking a little, clean handkerchief into one of his half-open hands, she said, “I ‘m going to your father, now,” and with a farewell smooth, so comforting that Tom wished she ‘d do it again, she went away.

As she paused a minute in the hall to steady herself, Maud called her from above, and thinking that the women might need her more than the men, she ran up to find Fanny waiting for her in her own room.

“Mamma’s asleep, quite worn out, poor dear, so we can talk in here without troubling her,” said Fanny, receiving her friend so quietly, that Polly was amazed.

“Let me come, too, I won’t make any fuss; it ‘s so dreadful to be shut out everywhere, and have people crying and talking, and locked up, and I not know what it means,” said Maud, beseechingly.

“You do know, now; I ‘ve told her, Polly,” said Fan, as they sat down together, and Maud perched herself on the bed, so that she might retire among the pillows if her feelings were too much for her.

“I ‘m glad you take it so well, dear; I was afraid it might upset you,” said Polly, seeing now that in spite of her quiet manner, Fan’s eyes had an excited look, and her cheeks a feverish color.

“I shall groan and moan by and by, I dare say, but at first it sort of dazed me, and now it begins to excite me. I ought to be full of sorrow for poor papa, and I am truly sorry, but, wicked as it may seem, it ‘s a fact, Polly, that I ‘m half glad it ‘s happened, for it takes me out of myself, and gives me something to do.”

Fanny’s eyes fell and her color rose as she spoke, but Polly understood why she wanted to forget herself, and put her arm round her with a more tender sympathy than Fanny guessed.

“Perhaps things are not as bad as they seem; I don’t know much about such matters, but I ‘ve seen people who have failed, and they seemed just as comfortable as before,” said Polly.

“It won’t be so with us, for papa means to give up everything, and not have a word said against him. Mamma’s little property is settled upon her, and has n’t been risked. That touched her so much! She dreads poverty even more than I do, but she begged him to take it if it would help him. That pleased him, but he said nothing would induce him to do it, for it would n’t help much, and was hardly enough to keep her comfortable."

"Do you know what he means to do?" asked Polly, anxiously.

"He said his plans were not made, but he meant to go into the little house that belonged to grandma, as soon as he could, for it was n't honest for a bankrupt to keep up an establishment like this."

"I shan't mind that at all, I like the little house 'cause it 's got a garden, and there 's a cunning room with a three-cornered closet in it that I always wanted. If that 's all, I don't think bankrupting is so very bad," said Maud, taking a cheerful view of things.

"Ah, just wait till the carriage goes and the nice clothes and the servants, and we have to scratch along as we can. You 'll change your mind then, poor child," said Fanny, whose ideas of failure were decidedly tragical.

"Will they take all my things away?" cried Maud, in dismay.

"I dare say; I don't know what we are allowed to keep; but not much, I fancy," and Fan looked as if strung up to sacrifice everything she possessed.

"They shan't have my new ear-rings, I 'll hide 'em, and my best dress, and my gold smelling bottle. Oh, oh, oh! I think it 's mean to take a little girl's things away!" And Maud dived among the pillows to smother a wail of anguish at the prospect of being bereft of her treasures.

Polly soon lured her out again, by assurances that she would n't be utterly despoiled, and promises to try and soften the hard hearts of her father's creditors, if the ear-rings and the smelling-bottle were attached.

"I wonder if we shall be able to keep one servant, just till we learn how to do the work," said Fanny, looking at her white hands, with a sigh.

But Maud clapped hers, and gave a joyful bounce, as she cried, "Now I can learn to cook! I love so to beat eggs! I 'll have an apron, with a bib to it, like Polly's, and a feather duster, and sweep the stairs, maybe, with my head tied up, like Katy. Oh, what fun!"

"Don't laugh at her, or discourage her; let her find comfort in bibs and dust-pans, if she can," whispered Polly to Fan, while Maud took a joyful "header" among the pillows, and came up smiling and blowzy, for she loved house-work, and often got lectured for stolen visits to the kitchen, and surreptitious sweepings and dustings when the coast was clear.

"Mamma is so feeble, I shall have to keep house, I suppose, and you must show me how, Polly," said Fan.

"Good practice, ma'am, as you 'll find out some day," answered Polly, laughing significantly.

Fanny smiled, then grew both grave and sad. "This changes everything; the old set will drop me, as we did the Mertons when their father failed, and my ‘prospects,’ as we say, are quite ruined.”

“I don’t believe it; your real friends won’t drop you, and you ‘ll find out which the true ones are now. I know one friend who will be kinder than ever.”

“Oh, Polly, do you think so?” and Fanny’s eyes softened with sudden tears.

“I know who she means,” cried Maud, always eager to find out things. “It ‘s herself; Polly won’t mind if we are poor, ‘cause she likes beggars.”

“Is that who you meant?” asked Fan, wistfully.

“No, it ‘s a much better and dearer friend than I am,” said Polly, pinching Fanny’s cheek, as it reddened prettily under her eyes. “You ‘ll never guess, Maud, so I would n’t try, but be planning what you will put in your cunning, three-cornered closet, when you get it.”

Having got rid of “Miss Paulina Pry,” as Tom called Maud, who was immediately absorbed by her cupboard, the older girls soberly discussed the sudden change which had come, and Polly was surprised to see what unexpected strength and sense Fanny showed. Polly was too unconscious of the change which love had made in herself to understand at first the cause of her friend’s new patience and fortitude; but she rejoiced over it, and felt that her prophecy would yet be fulfilled. Presently Maud emerged from her new closet, bringing a somewhat startling idea with her.

“Do bankrupting men” (Maud liked that new word) “always have fits?”

“Mercy, no! What put that into your head, child?” cried Polly.

“Why, Mr. Merton did; and I was thinking perhaps papa had got one down there, and it kind of frightened me.”

“Mr. Merton’s was a bad, disgraceful failure, and I don’t wonder he had a fit. Ours is n’t, and papa won’t do anything of that sort, you may be sure,” said Fanny, with as proud an air as if “our failure” was rather an honor than otherwise.

“Don’t you think you and Maud had better go down and see him?” asked Polly.

“Perhaps he would n’t like it; and I don’t know what to say, either,” began Fan; but Polly said, eagerly, “I know he would like it. Never mind what you say; just go, and show him that you don’t doubt or blame him for this, but love him all the more, and are ready and glad to help him bear the trouble.”

“I ‘m going, I ain’t afraid; I ‘ll just hug him, and say I ‘m ever so glad we are going to the little house,” cried Maud, scrambling off the bed, and running down stairs.

“Come with me, Polly, and tell me what to do,” said Fanny, drawing her friend after her.

“You ‘ll know what to do when you see him, better than I can tell you,” answered Polly, readily yielding, for she knew they considered her “quite one of the family,” as Tom said.

At the study door they found Maud, whose courage had given out, for Mr. Merton’s fit rather haunted her. Polly opened the door; and the minute Fanny saw her father, she did know what to do. The fire was low, the gas dim, and Mr. Shaw was sitting in his easy-chair, his gray head in both his hands, looking lonely, old, and bowed down with care. Fanny gave Polly one look, then went and took the gray head in both her arms, saying, with a tender quiver in her voice, “Father dear, we ‘ve come to help you bear it.”

Mr. Shaw looked up, and seeing in his daughter’s face something that never had been there before, put his arm about her, and leaned his tired head against her, as if, when least expected, he had found the consolation he most needed. In that minute, Fanny felt, with mingled joy and self-reproach, what a daughter might be to her father; and Polly, thinking of feeble, selfish Mrs. Shaw, asleep up stairs, saw with sudden clearness what a wife should be to her husband, a helpmeet, not a burden. Touched by these unusual demonstrations, Maud crept quietly to her father’s knee, and whispered, with a great tear shining on her little pug nose, “Papa, we don’t mind it much, and I ‘m going to help Fan keep house for you; I ‘d like to do it, truly.”

Mr. Shaw’s other arm went round the child, and for a minute no one said anything, for Polly had slipped behind his chair, that nothing should disturb the three, who were learning from misfortune how much they loved one another. Presently Mr. Shaw steadied himself and asked, “Where is my other daughter, where ‘s my Polly?”

She was there at once; gave him one of the quiet kisses that had more than usual tenderness in it, for she loved to hear him say “my other daughter,” and then she whispered, “Don’t you want Tom, too?”

“Of course I do; where is the poor fellow?”

“I ‘ll bring him;” and Polly departed with most obliging alacrity.

But in the hall she paused a minute to peep into the glass and see if she was all right, for somehow she was more anxious to look neat and pretty to Tom in his hour of trouble than she had ever been in his prosperous days. In lifting her arms to perk up the bow at her throat she knocked a hat off the bracket. Now, a shiny black beaver is not an object exactly calculated to inspire tender or romantic sentiments, one would fancy, but that particular “stove pipe” seemed to touch Polly to the heart, for she caught it up, as if its fall suggested a greater one, smoothed out a slight dint, as if it was symbolical of the hard knocks its owner’s head was now in danger of receiving, and stood looking at it with as much pity and respect, as if it had been the crown of a disinherited prince. Girls will do such foolish little things, and though we laugh at them, I think we like them the better for it, after all.

Richard was himself again when Polly entered, for the handkerchief had disappeared, his head was erect, his face was steady, and his whole air had a dogged composure which seemed to say to fate, “Hit away, I ‘m ready.” He did not hear Polly come in, for he was looking fixedly at the fire with eyes that evidently saw a very different future there from that which it used to show him; but when she said, “Tom, dear, your father wants you,” he got up at once, held out his hand to her, saying, “Come too, we can’t get on without you,” and took her back into the study with him.

Then they had a long talk, for the family troubles seemed to warm and strengthen the family affection and confidence, and as the young people listened while Mr. Shaw told them as much of his business perplexities as they could understand, every one of them blamed him or herself for going on so gayly and blindly, while the storm was gathering, and the poor man was left to meet it all alone. Now, however, the thunder-clap had come, and after the first alarm, finding they were not killed, they began to discover a certain half-anxious, half-pleasant excitement in talking it over, encouraging one another, and feeling unusually friendly, as people do when a sudden shower drives two or three to the shelter of one umbrella.

It was a sober talk, but not all sad, for Mr. Shaw felt inexpressibly comforted by his children’s unexpected sympathy, and they, trying to take the downfall cheerfully for his sake, found it easier to bear themselves. They even laughed occasionally, for the girls, in their ignorance, asked queer questions; Tom made ludicrously unbusiness-like propositions; and Maud gave them one hearty peal, that did a world of good, by pensively remarking, when the plans for the future had been explained to her, “I ‘m so relieved; for when papa said we must give up everything, and mamma called us all beggars, I did think I ‘d got to go round asking for cold vittles, with a big basket, and an old shawl over my head. I said once I ‘d like that, but I ‘m afraid I should n’t, for I can’t bear Indian cake and cold potatoes, that ‘s what the poor children always seem to get, and I should hate to have Grace and the rest see me scuffing round the back gates.”

“My little girl shall never come to that, if I can help it,” said Mr. Shaw, holding her close, with a look that made Maud add, as she laid her cheek against his own, “But I ‘d do it, father, if you asked me to, for I truly want to help.”

“So do I!” cried Fanny, wondering at the same minute how it would seem to wear turned silks, and clean her gloves.

Tom said nothing, but drew toward him a paper of figures which his father had drawn up, and speedily reduced himself to the verge of distraction by trying to understand them, in his ardent desire to prove his willingness to put his shoulder to the wheel.

"We shall pull through, children, so don't borrow trouble, only be ready for discomforts and annoyances. Put your pride in your pockets, and remember poverty is n't disgraceful, but dishonesty is."

Polly had always loved kind Mr. Shaw, but now she respected him heartily, and felt that she had not done him justice when she sometimes thought that he only cared for making money.

"I should n't wonder if this was a good thing for the whole family, though it don't look so. Mrs. Shaw will take it the hardest, but it may stir her up, so she will forget her nerves, and be as busy and happy as mother is," said Polly to herself, in a hopeful mood, for poverty was an old friend, and she had learned long ago not to fear it, but to take its bitter and its sweet, and make the best of both.

When they parted for the night, Polly slipped away first, to leave them free, yet could n't help lingering outside to see how tenderly the girls parted from their father. Tom had n't a word to say for himself, for men don't kiss, caress, or cry when they feel most, and all he could do to express his sympathy and penitence, was to wring his father's hand with a face full of respect, regret, and affection, and then bolt up stairs as if the furies were after him, as they were, in a mild and modern form.

CHAPTER XVI. A DRESS PARADE

THE weeks that followed taught the Shaws, as many other families have been taught, how rapidly riches take to themselves wings and fly away, when they once begin to go. Mr. Shaw carried out his plans with an energy and patience that worked wonders, and touched the hearts of his hardest creditors. The big house was given up as soon as possible and the little house taken; being made comfortable with the furniture Madam left there when she went to live with her son. The old-fashioned things had been let with the house, and now seemed almost like a gift from Grandma, doubly precious in these troublous times. At the auction, several persons tried to show the family that, though they had lost their fortune, friends still remained, for one bid in Fanny's piano, and sent it to her; another secured certain luxurious articles for Mrs. Shaw's comfort; and a third saved such of Mr. Shaw's books as he valued most, for he had kept his word and given up everything, with the most punctilious integrity. So the little house was not bare, but made pleasant to their eyes by these waifs from the wreck, brought them by the tide of sympathy and good-will which soon set in. Everybody who knew them hastened to call, many from a real regard, but more from mere curiosity to "see how they took it." This was one of the hardest things they had to bear, and Tom used strong language more than once, when some fine lady came to condole, and went away to gossip. Polly's hopes of Mrs. Shaw were disappointed, for misfortune did not have a bracing effect. She took to her bed at once, received her friends in tears and a point-lace cap, and cheered her family by plaintively inquiring when she was to be taken to the almshouse. This was hard for Fanny; but after an interval of despair, she came to the conclusion that under the circumstances it was the best thing her mother could have done, and with something of her father's energy, Fanny shouldered the new burden, feeling that at last necessity had given her what she had long needed, something to do.

The poor girl knew as much of household affairs as Snip; but pride and the resolution "to stand by Father," kept up her courage, and she worked away with feverish activity at whatever task came first till, just as strength and heart were about to fail, order began to emerge from chaos and the vision of a home made happy and comfortable by her skill and care came to repay and sustain her.

Maud, being relieved from the fear of back-door beggary, soon became reconciled to bankruptcy; thought it rather a good joke, on the whole, for children like novelty, and don't care much for Mrs. Grundy. She regarded the new abode as a baby house on a large scale, where she was allowed to play her part in the most satisfactory manner. From the moment when, on taking possession of the coveted room, she opened the doors of the three-cornered closet, and found a little kettle just like Polly's, standing there, she felt that a good time was coming for her and fell to dusting furniture, washing cups, and making toast, the happiest, fussiest little housewife in the city. For Maud inherited the notable gifts of her grandmother, and would have made a capital farmer's daughter, in spite of her city breeding.

Polly came and went through all these changes, faithful, helpful, and as cheery as she could be when her friends were in trouble. The parts seemed reversed now, and it was Polly who gave, Fanny who received; for where everything seemed strange and new to Fan, Polly was quite at home, and every one of the unfashionable domestic accomplishments now came into play, to the comfort of the Shaws, and the great satisfaction of Polly. She could not do enough to prove her gratitude for former favors, and went toiling and moiling about, feeling that the hardest, most disagreeable tasks were her especial duty. In the moving nothing suited her better than to trot up and down, lugging heavy things, to pound her fingers black and blue nailing carpets and curtains, and the day she nearly broke her neck tumbling down the cellar stairs, in her eagerness to see that Mrs. Shaw's wine was rightly stored, she felt that she was only paying her debts, and told Tom she liked it, when he picked her up looking as grimy as a chimney-sweep.

"You can turn your hand to anything, you clever girl, so do come and give me some advice, for I am in the depths of despair," said Fanny when the "maid-of-all-work" as Polly called herself, found a leisure hour.

"What is it? Moths in the furs, a smoky chimney, or small-pox next door?" asked Polly, as they entered Fan's room, where Maud was trying on old bonnets before the looking-glass.

"Actually I have nothing to wear," began Fan impressively; "I 've been too busy to think or care till now, but here it is nearly May and I have hardly a decent rag to my back. Usually, you know, I just go to Mrs. O'Grady and tell her what I want; she makes my spring wardrobe, Papa pays the bill, and there I am. Now I 've looked into the matter, and I declare to you, Polly, I 'm frightened to see how much it costs to dress me."

"Not so much as some girls I know," said Polly encouragingly.

"Perhaps not, for I have a conscience, and taste is economy sometimes; but really, Polly, I have n't the heart to ask Papa for a cent just now, and yet I must have clothes. You are such a genius for planning and working wonders, that I throw myself upon you and ask, 'How shall I make a spring wardrobe out of nothing?’“

“Let me see the ‘nothing’ before I advise. Bring out every rag you ‘ve got, and we ‘ll see what can be done,” said Polly, looking as if she enjoyed the prospect, for she had a great deal of that feminine faculty which we call “knack,” and much practice had increased it.

Fanny brought out her “rags” and was astonished to see how many she had, for chair, sofa, bed, and bureau were covered, and still Maud, who was burrowing in the closets, kept crying, “Here ‘s another.”

“There ‘s a discouraging heap of rubbish for you!” said Fan, as she added a faded muslin to the last pile.

“Now, to me your ‘rubbish’ looks very encouraging, because there is good material there, and not much worn-out finery, that ‘s my detestation, for you can’t do anything with it. Let me see, five bonnets. Put the winter ones away till autumn, rip up the summer ones, and out of three old ones we ‘ll get a pretty new one, if my eyes don’t deceive me.”

“I ‘ll rip, and then do let me see you make a bonnet, it must be so interesting,” said Maud, whipping out her scissors and eagerly beginning to reduce a shabby little bonnet to its original elements. “Now the dresses,” continued Polly, who had rapidly sorted out the piles.

“Will you have the goodness to look at this?” said Fan, holding up a gray street suit faded past cure.

Polly whisked it wrong side out, and showing the clean, bright fabric, said, with a triumphant wave, “Behold your new suit; fresh trimming and less of it will finish you off as smart as ever.”

“I never wore a turned dress in my life; do you suppose people will know it?” said Fan doubtfully.

“What if they do? It won’t hurt you. Not one in a hundred will ever think anything about your dress, except that it is pretty. I ‘ve worn turned and dyed gowns all my days, and it don’t seem to have alienated my friends, or injured my constitution.”

“That it has n’t; I ‘m a goose, Polly, and I ‘ll get over the feeling that it ‘s sort of disgraceful to be poor and have to economize. We ‘ll turn the gray, and I ‘ll wear it bravely.”

“Then it will be more becoming than ever. Oh, here ‘s the pretty violet silk. That will make a lovely suit,” cried Polly, going on with the review.

“Don’t see how two draggled skirts and a stained waist can be transformed into a whole rig,” said Fan, sitting on the bed, with her garments strewn about her in various attitudes of limp despondency.

“Well, ma’am, my plan is this,” began Polly, imitating Mrs. O’Grady’s important tone, and bad grammar: “Gores is out, and plaits is in; therefore, as the top of this skirt is quite fresh, we will take off the ruffles, turn it upside down, and leave it plain. The upper skirt will be made scanter, and finished with a frill; then the waist can be refreshed with the best parts of these wide flounces, and out of those new bits we will concoct a hat. The black lace Maud has just taken off the green one will do to edge the violet, and with your nice silk mantilla you are complete, don’t you see?”

“I don’t quite see it yet, but I have firm faith that I shall in time, and consider my calling costume finished,” said Fanny, getting more and more interested as she saw her condemned wardrobe coming out fresh again under Polly’s magic knack.

“There are two; then that piqu, is all right, if you cut the tail off the jacket and change the trimming a bit. The muslins only need mending and doing up to look as well as ever; you ought not to put them away torn and soiled, my child. The two black silks will be good stand-bys for years. If I were you, I ‘d have a couple of neat, pretty prints for home-wear, and then I don’t see why you are n’t fixed well enough for our short season.”

“Can’t I do anything with this barege? It ‘s one of my favorite dresses, and I hate to give it up.”

“You wore that thoroughly out, and it ‘s only fit for the rag-bag. Yes, it was very pretty and becoming, I remember, but its day is over.”

Fanny let the dress lie in her lap a minute as she absently picked at the fringe, smiling to herself over the happy time when she wore it last and Sydney said she only needed cowslips in her lap to look like spring. Presently she folded it up and put it away with a sigh, but it never went into the rag-bag, and my sentimental readers can understand what saved it.

“The ball dresses had better be put nicely away till next year,” began Polly, coming to a rainbow colored heap.

“My day is over, I shall never use them again. Do what you like with them,” said Fan calmly.

“Did you ever sell your cast-off finery, as many ladies do?” asked Polly.

“Never; I don’t like the fashion. I give it away, or let Maud have it for tableaux.”

“I wonder if you would mind my telling you something Belle proposed?”

“If it ‘s an offer to buy my clothes, I should mind,” answered Fanny, sharply.

“Then I won’t,” and Polly retired behind a cloud of arsenic-green gauze, which made her look as if she had the cholera.

“If she wanted to buy that horrid new ‘gooseberry-colored gown,’ as Tom calls it, I ‘d let her have it cheap,” put in Maud, who was of a practical turn.

“Does she want it, Polly?” asked Fan, whose curiosity got the better of her pride.

“Well, she merely asked me if I thought you ‘d be mortally offended, if she offered to take it off your hands, as you ‘d never worn it. You don’t like it, and in another season it will be all out of fashion,” said Polly from her verdant retreat.

“What did you say?”

“I saw she meant it kindly, so I said I ‘d ask. Now between ourselves, Fan, the price of that dress would give you all you ‘ll want for your spring fixings, that ‘s one consideration; then here ‘s another, which may have some weight with you,” added Polly slyly. “Trix told Belle she was going to ask you for the dress, as you would n’t care to wear it now. That made Belle fire up, and say it was a mean thing to do without offering some return for a costly thing like that; and then Belle said, in her blunt way, ‘I ‘ll give Fan all she paid for it, and more, too, if it will be any help to her. I don’t care for the dress, but I ‘d like to slip a little money into her pocket, for I know she needs it and is too good to ask dear Mr. Shaw for anything she can get on without.’“

“Did she say that? I ‘ll give her the dress, and not take a penny for it,” cried Fan, flushing up with mingled anger toward Trix and gratitude to Belle.

“That won’t suit her; you let me manage it, and don’t feel any shame or anxiety about it. You did many a kind and generous thing for Belle when you had the power, and you liked to do it; now let her pay her debts, and have the same pleasure.”

“If she looks at it in that way, it makes a difference. Perhaps I ‘d better the money would be an immense help only I don’t quite like to take it.”

“Kings and queens sell their jewels when times are hard or they get turned off their thrones, and no one thinks it anything amiss, so why need you? It ‘s just a little transaction between two friends who exchange things they don’t want for things which they do, and I ‘d do it if I were you.”

“We ‘ll see about it,” said Fan, privately resolving to take Polly’s advice.

“If I had lots of things like Fan, I ‘d have an auction and get all I could for them. Why don’t you?” asked Maud, beginning on her third bonnet.

“We will,” said Polly, and mounting a chair, she put up, bid in, and knocked down Fan’s entire wardrobe to an imaginary group of friends, with such droll imitations of each one that the room rang with laughter.

“That ‘s enough nonsense; now we ‘ll return to business,” said Polly, descending breathless but satisfied with the effect of her fun.

“These white muslins and pretty silks will keep for years, so I should lay them by till they are needed. It will save buying, and you can go to your stock any time and make over what you want. That ‘s the way Mother does; we ‘ve always had things sent us from richer friends, and whatever was n't proper for us to wear at the time, Mother put away to be used when we needed it. Such funny bundles as we used to have sometimes, odd shoes, bonnets without crowns, stockings without heels or toes, and old finery of all sorts. We used to rush when a bundle came, and sit round while Mother opened it. The boys always made fun of the things, though they were as grateful, really, as any of us. Will made a verse one day which we thought pretty well for a little chap: 'To poor country folks Who have n't any clothes, Rich folks, to relieve them, Send old lace gowns and satin bows.'"

"I think that Will is going to be as nice a poet as Mr. Shakespeare," remarked Maud in a tone of serious conviction.

"He is already a Milton; but I don't believe he will ever be anything but a poet in name," said Polly, working away while she talked.

"Did n't your mother ever let you wear the nice things that came?" asked Maud.

"No, she thought it was n't the thing for a poor minister's girls to go flourishing about in second-hand finery, so she did what I 'm doing now, put away what would be useful and proper for us by and by, and let us play with the shabby, silk bonnets and dirty, flounced gowns. Such fun as we used to have up in our big garret! I remember one day we 'd been playing have a ball, and were all rigged up, even the boys. Some new neighbors came to call, and expressed a wish to see us, having been told that we were pattern children. Mother called us, but we had paraded out into the garden, after our ball, and were having a concert, as we sat about on the cabbages for green satin seats, so we did n't hear the call, and just as the company was going, a great noise arrested them on the doorstep, and round the corner of the house rattled Ned in full costume, wheeling Kitty in a barrow, while Jimmy, Will, and I ran screaming after, looking like Bedlamites; for we were playing that Lady Fitz Perkins had fainted, and was being borne home senseless in a cab. I thought mother would kill herself with laughing; and you can imagine what a fine impression the strangers received of the model children."

Maud was so tickled with this youthful prank that she unguardedly sat down to laugh on the edge of an open trunk, immediately doubled up, fell in, and was with difficulty extricated.

"People in the country have great deal nicer times than we do. I never rode in a wheelbarrow, I never sat on cabbages, and I don't think it 's fair," she said with an injured expression. "You need n't save any old silk gowns for me; I don't mean to be a fine lady when I grow up, I 'm going to be a farmer's wife, and make butter and cheese, and have ten children, and raise pigs," she added in one enthusiastic burst.

"I do believe she will if she can find a farmer anywhere," said Fanny.

"Oh, I 'm going to have Will; I asked him and he said, 'All right.' He 's going to preach Sundays, and work on the farm the rest of the time. Well, he is, so you need n't laugh, for we 've made all our plans," said Maud with comical dignity as she tried the effect of an old white bonnet, wondering if farmers' wives could wear ostrich feathers when they went to meeting.

"Blessed innocence! Don't you wish you were a child, and dared tell what you want?" murmured Fanny.

"I wish I had seen Will's face when Maud proposed," answered Polly, with a nod which answered her friend's speech better than her words.

"Any news of anybody?" whispered Fan, affecting to examine a sleeve with care.

"Still at the South; don't think late events have been reported yet; that accounts for absence," answered Polly.

"I think Sir Philip was hit harder than was supposed," said Fan.

"I doubt it, but time cures wounds of that sort amazing quick."

"Wish it did!"

"Who is Sir Philip?" demanded Maud, pricking up her ears.

"A famous man who lived in the time of Queen Elizabeth," answered Fan, with a look at Polly.

"Oh!" And Maud seemed satisfied, but the sharp child had her suspicions nevertheless.

"There will be an immense deal of work in all this fixing over and I hate to sew," said Fanny, to divert a certain person's thoughts.

"Jenny and I are going to help. We are your debtors, as well as Belle, and demand the privilege of paying up. Blessings, like curses, come home to roost, Fan."

"Mine come home a good deal bigger than they went," answered Fanny, looking pleased that little favors should be so faithfully remembered.

"The interest on that sort of investment rolls up beautifully, you know. Now rip that dress for Jenny to put in order, and I 'll toss you up a bonnet in less than no time," said Polly, determined to have things go smoothly, for she knew Fan's feelings had been a good deal tried lately, in many ways.

"I must have something to match my dress, and blue inside," said Fanny, bringing out her ribbon boxes.

"Anything you like, my dear; when it comes to bonnets, I am usually inspired. I have it! There we are! And nothing could be nicer," cried Polly, making a dive among the silks Fan was turning over with a lost expression. "This bit of silver-gray is all I ask, here ‘s enough for a killing bonnet, and those forget-me-nots are both pretty and appropriate.”

“You wretch, be still!” cried Fanny, as Polly looked up at her with a wicked laugh in her eyes.

“It will be done in time, and the dress likewise, so look your prettiest, and accept my blessing,” continued Polly, seeing that Fan liked her raillery.

“Time for what?” asked Paulina Pry.

“Your wedding, dear,” sweetly answered Fan, for Polly’s pleasant hints and predictions put her in a charming humor, and even made old clothes of little consequence.

Maud gave an incredulous sniff, and wondered why “big girls need to be so dreadful mysterious about their old secrets.”

“This silk reminds me of Kitty’s performance last summer. A little checked silk was sent in our spring bundle from Mrs. Davenport, and Mother said Kit might have it if she could make it do. So I washed it nicely, and we fussed and planned, but it came short by half of one sleeve. I gave it up, but Kit went to work and matched every scrap that was left so neatly that she got out the half sleeve, put it on the under side, and no one was the wiser. How many pieces do you think she put in, Maud?”

“Fifty,” was the wise reply.

“No, only ten, but that was pretty well for a fourteen-year-old dressmaker. You ought to have seen the little witch laugh in her sleeve when any one admired the dress, for she wore it all summer and looked as pretty as a pink in it. Such things are great fun when you get used to them; besides, contriving sharpens your wits, and makes you feel as if you had more hands than most people.”

“I think we ‘ll get a farm near your house; I should like to know Kitty,” said Maud, feeling a curious interest in a girl who made such peculiar patchwork.

“The dress-parade is over, and I ‘m ever so much obliged to you, Polly, for helping me through, and showing me how to make the best of things. I hope in time to have as many hands as you,” said Fan gratefully, when the simple bonnet was done and everything planned out ready to be finished.

“I hope you will soon have two good, strong ones beside your own, my dear,” answered Polly, as she vanished, with a parting twinkle that kept Fan’s face bright all day.

CHAPTER XVII. PLAYING GRANDMOTHER

I THINK Tom had the hardest time of all, for besides the family troubles, he had many of his own to perplex and harass him. College scrapes were soon forgotten in greater afflictions; but there were plenty of tongues to blame "that extravagant dog," and plenty of heads to wag ominously over prophecies of the good time Tom Shaw would now make on the road to ruin. As reporters flourish in this country, of course Tom soon heard all the friendly criticisms passed upon him and his career, and he suffered more than anybody guessed; for the truth that was at the bottom of the gossip filled him with the sharp regret and impotent wrath against himself as well as others, which drives many a proud fellow, so placed, to destruction, or the effort that redeems boyish folly, and makes a man of him.

Now that he had lost his heritage, Tom seemed to see for the first time how goodly it had been, how rich in power, pleasure, and gracious opportunities. He felt its worth even while he acknowledged, with the sense of justice that is strong in manly men, how little he deserved a gift which he had so misused. He brooded over this a good deal, for, like the bat in the fable, he did n't seem to find any place in the new life which had begun for all. Knowing nothing of business, he was not of much use to his father, though he tried to be, and generally ended by feeling that he was a hindrance, not a help. Domestic affairs were equally out of his line, and the girls, more frank than their father, did not hesitate to tell him he was in the way when he offered to lend a hand anywhere. After the first excitement was over, and he had time to think, heart and energy seemed to die out, remorse got hold of him, and, as generous, thoughtless natures are apt to do when suddenly confronted with conscience, he exaggerated his faults and follies into sins of the deepest dye, and fancied he was regarded by others as a villain and an outcast. Pride and penitence made him shrink out of sight as much as possible, for he could not bear pity, even when silently expressed by a friendly hand or a kindly eye. He stayed at home a good deal, and loafed about with a melancholy and neglected air, vanished when anyone came, talked very little, and was either pathetically humble or tragically cross. He wanted to do something, but nothing seemed to appear; and while he waited to get his poise after the downfall, he was so very miserable that I 'm afraid, if it had not been for one thing, my poor Tom would have got desperate, and been a failure. But when he seemed most useless, outcast, and forlorn, he discovered that one person needed him, one person never found him in the way, one person always welcomed and clung to him with the strongest affection of a very feeble nature. This dependence of his mother's was Tom's salvation at that crisis of his life; and the gossips, who said softly to one another over their muffins and tea. "It really would be a relief to that whole family if poor, dear Mrs. Shaw could be ahem! mercifully removed," did not know that the invalid's weak, idle hands were unconsciously keeping the son safe in that quiet room, where she gave him all that she had to give, mother-love, till he took heart again, and faced the world ready to fight his battles manfully.

"Dear, dear! how old and bent poor father does look. I hope he won't forget to order my sweetbread," sighed Mrs. Shaw one day, as she watched her husband slowly going down the street.

Tom, who stood by her, idly spinning the curtain tassel, followed the familiar figure with his eye, and seeing how gray the hair had grown, how careworn the florid face, and how like a weary old man his once strong, handsome father walked, he was smitten by a new pang of self-reproach, and with his usual impetuosity set about repairing the omission as soon as he discovered it.

"I 'll see to your sweetbread, mum. Good-by, back to dinner," and with a hasty kiss, Tom was off.

He did n't know exactly what he meant to do, but it had suddenly come over him, that he was hiding from the storm, and letting his father meet it alone; for the old man went to his office every day with the regularity of a machine, that would go its usual round until it stopped, while the young man stayed at home with the women, and let his mother comfort him.

"He has a right to be ashamed of me, but I act as if I was ashamed of him; dare say people think so. I 'll show them that I ain't; yes, by the powers, I will!" and Tom drew on his gloves with the air of a man about to meet and conquer an enemy.

"Have an arm, sir? If you don't mind I 'll walk down with you. Little commission for mother, nice day, is n't it?"

Tom rather broke down at the end of his speech, for the look of pleased surprise with which his father greeted him, the alacrity with which he accepted and leaned on the strong arm offered him, proved that the daily walks had been solitary and doubtless sad ones. I think Mr. Shaw understood the real meaning of that little act of respect, and felt better for the hopeful change it seemed to foretell. But he took it quietly, and leaving his face to speak for him, merely said, "Thanky, Tom; yes, mother will enjoy her dinner twice as much if you order it."

Then they began to talk business with all their might, as if they feared that some trace of sentiment might disgrace their masculine dignity. But it made no difference whether they discussed lawsuits or love, mortgages or mothers, the feeling was all right and they knew it, so Mr. Shaw walked straighter than usual, and Tom felt that he was in his proper place again. The walk was not without its trials, however; for while it did Tom's heart good to see the cordial respect paid to his father, it tried his patience sorely to see also inquisitive or disapproving glances fixed upon himself when hats were lifted to his father, and to hear the hearty "Good day, Mr. Shaw," drop into a cool or careless, "That 's the son; it 's hard on him. Wild fellow, do him good."

"Granted; but you need n't hit a man when he 's down," muttered Tom to himself, feeling every moment a stronger desire to do something that should silence everybody. "I 'd cut away to Australia if it was n't for mother; anything, anywhere to get out of the way of people who know me. I never can right myself here, with all the fellows watching, and laying wagers whether I sink or swim. Hang Greek and Latin! wish I 'd learned a trade, and had something to fall back upon. Have n't a blessed thing now, but decent French and my fists. Wonder if old Bell don't want a clerk for the Paris branch of the business? That would n't be bad; faith, I 'll try it."

And when Tom had landed his father safely at the office, to the great edification of all beholders, he screwed up his courage, and went to prefer his request, feeling that the prospect brightened a little. But Mr. Bell was not in a good humor, and only gave Tom a severe lecture on the error of his ways, which sent him home much depressed, and caused the horizon to lower again.

As he roamed about the house that afternoon, trying to calculate how much an Australian outfit would cost, the sound of lively voices and clattering spoons attracted him to the kitchen. There he found Polly giving Maud lessons in cookery; for the "new help" not being a high-priced article, could not be depended on for desserts, and Mrs. Shaw would have felt as if the wolf was at the door if there was not "a sweet dish" at dinner. Maud had a genius for cooking, and Fanny hated it, so that little person was in her glory, studying receipt books, and taking lessons whenever Polly could give them.

"Gracious me, Tom, don't come now; we are awful busy! Men don't belong in kitchens," cried Maud, as her brother appeared in the doorway.

"Could n't think what you were about. Mum is asleep, and Fan out, so I loafed down to see if there was any fun afoot," said Tom, lingering, as if the prospect was agreeable. He was a social fellow, and very grateful just then to any one who helped him to forget his worries for a time. Polly knew this, felt that his society would not be a great affliction to herself at least, and whispering to Maud, "He won't know," she added, aloud, "Come in if you like, and stir this cake for me; it needs a strong hand, and mine are tired. There, put on that apron to keep you tidy, sit here, and take it easy."

"I used to help grandma bat up cake, and rather liked it, if I remember right," said Tom, letting Polly tie a checked apron on him, put a big bowl into his hands, and settle him near the table, where Maud was picking raisins, and she herself stirring busily about among spice-boxes, rolling-pins, and butter-pots.

“You do it beautifully, Tom. I ‘ll give you a conundrum to lighten your labor: Why are bad boys like cake?” asked Polly, anxious to cheer him up.

“Because a good beating makes them better. I doubt that myself, though,” answered Tom, nearly knocking the bottom of the bowl out with his energetic demonstrations, for it really was a relief to do something.

“Bright boy! here ‘s a plum for you,” and Polly threw a plump raisin into his mouth.

“Put in lots, won’t you? I ‘m rather fond of plum-cake,” observed Tom, likening himself to Hercules with the distaff, and finding his employment pleasant, if not classical.

“I always do, if I can; there ‘s nothing I like better than to shovel in sugar and spice, and make nice, plummy cake for people. It ‘s one of the few things I have a gift for.”

“You ‘ve hit it this time, Polly; you certainly have a gift for putting a good deal of both articles into your own and other people’s lives, which is lucky, as, we all have to eat that sort of cake, whether we like it or not,” observed Tom, so soberly that Polly opened her eyes, and Maud exclaimed, “I do believe he ‘s preaching.”

“Feel as if I could sometimes,” continued Tom; then his eye fell upon the dimples in Polly’s elbows, and he added, with a laugh, “That ‘s more in your line, ma’am; can’t you give us a sermon?”

“A short one. Life, my brethren, is like plum-cake,” began Polly, impressively folding her floury hands. “In some the plums are all on the top, and we eat them gayly, till we suddenly find they are gone. In others the plums sink to the bottom, and we look for them in vain as we go on, and often come to them when it is too late to enjoy them. But in the well-made cake, the plums are wisely scattered all through, and every mouthful is a pleasure. We make our own cakes, in a great measure, therefore let us look to it, my brethren, that they are mixed according to the best receipt, baked in a well regulated oven, and gratefully eaten with a temperate appetite.”

“Good! good!” cried Tom, applauding with the wooden spoon. “That ‘s a model sermon, Polly, short, sweet, sensible, and not a bit sleepy. I ‘m one of your parish, and will see that you get your ‘celery punctooal,’ as old Deacon Morse used to say.”

“‘Thank you, brother, my wants is few, and ravens scurser than they used to be,’ as dear old Parson Miller used to answer. Now, Maud, bring on the citron;”

and Polly began to put the cake together in what seemed a most careless and chaotic manner, while Tom and Maud watched with absorbing interest till it was safely in the oven.

"Now make your custards, dear; Tom may like to beat the eggs for you; it seems to have a good effect upon his constitution."

"First-rate; hand 'em along," and Tom smoothed his apron with a cheerful air. "By the way, Syd's got back. I met him yesterday, and he treated me like a man and a brother," he added, as if anxious to contribute to the pleasures of the hour.

"I 'm so glad!" cried Polly, clapping her hands, regardless of the egg she held, which dropped and smashed on the floor at her feet. "Careless thing! Pick it up, Maud, I 'll get some more;" and Polly whisked out of the room, glad of an excuse to run and tell Fan, who had just come in, lest, hearing the news in public, she might be startled out of the well-bred composure with which young ladies are expected to receive tidings, even of the most vital importance.

"You know all about history, don't you?" asked Maud, suddenly.

"Not quite," modestly answered Tom.

"I just want to know if there really was a man named Sir Philip, in the time of Queen Elizabeth."

"You mean Sir Philip Sidney? Yes, he lived then and a fine old fellow he was too."

"There; I knew the girls did n't mean him," cried Maud, with a chop that sent the citron flying.

"What mischief are you up to now, you little magpie?"

"I shan't tell you what they said, because I don't remember much of it; but I heard Polly and Fan talking about some one dreadful mysterious, and when I asked who it was, Fan said,'Sir Philip.' Ho! she need n't think I believe it! I saw 'em laugh, and blush, and poke one another, and I knew it was n't about any old Queen Elizabeth man," cried Maud, turning up her nose as far as that somewhat limited feature would go.

"Look here, you are letting cats out of the bag. Never mind, I thought so. They don't tell us their secrets, but we are so sharp, we can't help finding them out, can we?" said Tom, looking so much interested, that Maud could n't resist airing her knowledge a little.

"Well, I dare say, it is n't proper for you to know, but I am old enough now to be told anything, and those girls better mind what they say, for I 'm not a stupid chit, like Blanche. I just wish you could have heard them go on. I 'm sure there 's something very nice about Mr. Sydney, they looked so pleased when they whispered and giggled on the bed, and thought I was ripping bonnets, and did n't hear a word."

“Which looked most pleased?” asked Tom, investigating the kitchen boiler with deep interest.

“Well, ‘pears to me Polly did; she talked most, and looked funny and very happy all the time. Fan laughed a good deal, but I guess Polly is the loveress,” replied Maud, after a moment’s reflection.

“Hold your tongue; she ‘s coming!” and Tom began to pump as if the house was on fire.

Down came Polly, with heightened color, bright eyes, and not a single egg. Tom took a quick look at her over his shoulder, and paused as if the fire was suddenly extinguished. Something in his face made Polly feel a little guilty, so she fell to grating nutmeg, with a vigor which made red cheeks the most natural thing in life. Maud, the traitor, sat demurely at work, looking very like what Tom had called her, a magpie with mischief in its head. Polly felt a change in the atmosphere, but merely thought Tom was tired, so she graciously dismissed him with a stick of cinnamon, as she had nothing else just then to lay upon the shrine. “Fan’s got the books and maps you wanted. Go and rest now. I ‘m much obliged; here ‘s your wages, Bridget.”

“Good luck to your messes,” answered Tom, as he walked away meditatively crunching his cinnamon, and looking as if he did not find it as spicy as usual. He got his books, but did not read them; for, shutting himself up in the little room called “Tom’s den,” he just sat down and brooded.

When he came down to breakfast the next morning, he was greeted with a general “Happy birthday, Tom!” and at his place lay gifts from every member of the family; not as costly as formerly, perhaps, but infinitely dearer, as tokens of the love that had outlived the change, and only grown the warmer for the test of misfortune. In his present state of mind, Tom felt as if he did not deserve a blessed thing; so when every one exerted themselves to make it a happy day for him, he understood what it means “to be nearly killed with kindness,” and sternly resolved to be an honor to his family, or perish in the attempt. Evening brought Polly to what she called a “festive tea,” and when they gathered round the table, another gift appeared, which, though not of a sentimental nature, touched Tom more than all the rest. It was a most delectable cake, with a nosegay atop, and round it on the snowy frosting there ran a pink inscription, just as it had been every year since Tom could remember.

“Name, age, and date, like a nice white tombstone,” observed Maud, complacently, at which funereal remark, Mrs. Shaw, who was down in honor of the day, dropped her napkin, and demanded her salts.

“Whose doing is that?” asked Tom, surveying the gift with satisfaction; for it recalled the happier birthdays, which seemed very far away now.

"I did n't know what to give you, for you 've got everything a man wants, and I was in despair till I remembered that dear grandma always made you a little cake like that, and that you once said it would n't be a happy birthday without it. So I tried to make it just like hers, and I do hope it will prove a good, sweet, plummy one."

"Thank you," was all Tom said, as he smiled at the giver, but Polly knew that her present had pleased him more than the most elegant trifle she could have made.

"It ought to be good, for you beat it up yourself, Tom," cried, Maud. "It was so funny to see you working away, and never guessing who the cake was for. I perfectly trembled every time you opened your mouth, for fear you 'd ask some question about it. That was the reason Polly preached and I kept talking when she was gone."

"Very stupid of me; but I forgot all about to-day. Suppose we cut it; I don't seem to care for anything else," said Tom, feeling no appetite, but bound to do justice to that cake, if he fell a victim to his gratitude.

"I hope the plums won't all be at the bottom," said Polly, as she rose to do the honors of the cake, by universal appointment.

"I 've had a good many at the top already, you know," answered Tom, watching the operation with as much interest as if he had faith in the omen.

Cutting carefully, slice after slice fell apart; each firm and dark, spicy and rich, under the frosty rime above; and laying a specially large piece in one of grandma's quaint little china plates, Polly added the flowers and handed it to Tom, with a look that said a good deal, for, seeing that he remembered her sermon, she was glad to find that her allegory held good, in one sense at least. Tom's face brightened as he took it, and after an inspection which amused the others very much he looked up, saying, with an air of relief, "Plums all through; I 'm glad I had a hand in it, but Polly deserves the credit, and must wear the posy," and turning to her, he put the rose into her hair with more gallantry than taste, for a thorn pricked her head, the leaves tickled her ear, and the flower was upside down.

Fanny laughed at his want of skill, but Polly would n't have it altered, and everybody fell to eating cake, as if indigestion was one of the lost arts. They had a lively tea, and were getting on famously afterward, when two letters were brought for Tom, who glanced at one, and retired rather precipitately to his den, leaving Maud consumed with curiosity, and the older girls slightly excited, for Fan thought she recognized the handwriting on one, and Polly, on the other.

One half an hour and then another elapsed, and Tom did not return. Mr. Shaw went out, Mrs. Shaw retired to her room escorted by Maud, and the two girls sat together wondering if anything dreadful had happened. All of a sudden a voice called, “Polly!” and that young lady started out of her chair, as if the sound had been a thunder-clap.

“Do run! I ‘m perfectly fainting to know what the matter is,” said Fan.

“You ‘d better go,” began Polly, wishing to obey, yet feeling a little shy.

“He don’t want me; besides, I could n’t say a word for myself if that letter was from Sydney,” cried Fanny, hustling her friend towards the door, in a great flutter.

Polly went without another word, but she wore a curiously anxious look, and stopped on the threshold of the den, as if a little afraid of its occupant. Tom was sitting in his favorite attitude, astride of a chair, with his arms folded and his chin on the top rail; not an elegant posture, but the only one in which, he said, he could think well.

“Did you want me, Tom?”

“Yes. Come in, please, and don’t look scared; I only want to show you a present I ‘ve had, and ask your advice about accepting it.”

“Why, Tom, you look as if you had been knocked down!” exclaimed Polly, forgetting all about herself, as she saw his face when he rose and turned to meet her.

“I have; regularly floored; but I ‘m up again, and steadier than ever. Just you read that, and tell me what you think of it.”

Tom snatched a letter off the table, put it into her hands, and began to walk up and down the little room, like a veritable bear in its cage. As Polly read that short note, all the color went out of her face, and her eyes began to kindle. When she came to the end, she stood a minute, as if too indignant to speak, then gave the paper a nervous sort of crumple and dropped it on the floor, saying, all in one breath, “I think she is a mercenary, heartless, ungrateful girl! That ‘s what I think.”

“Oh, the deuce! I did n’t mean to show that one; it ‘s the other.” And Tom took up a second paper, looking half angry, half ashamed at his own mistake. “I don’t care, though; every one will know to-morrow; and perhaps you ‘ll be good enough to keep the girls from bothering me with questions and gabble,” he added, as if, on second thoughts, he was relieved to have the communication made to Polly first.

“I don’t wonder you looked upset. If the other letter is as bad, I ‘d better have a chair before I read it,” said Polly, feeling that she began to tremble with excitement.

“It ‘s a million times better, but it knocked me worse than the other; kindness always does.” Tom stopped short there, and stood a minute turning the letter about in his hand as if it contained a sweet which neutralized the bitter in that smaller note, and touched him very much. Then he drew up an arm-chair, and beckoning Polly to take it, said in a sober, steady tone, that surprised her greatly, “Whenever I was in a quandary, I used to go and consult grandma, and she always had something sensible or comfortable to say to me. She ‘s gone now, but somehow, Polly, you seem to take her place. Would you mind sitting in her chair, and letting me tell you two or three things, as Will does?”

Mind it? Polly felt that Tom had paid her the highest and most beautiful compliment he could have devised. She had often longed to do it, for, being brought up in the most affectionate and frank relations with her brothers, she had early learned what it takes most women some time to discover, that sex does not make nearly as much difference in hearts and souls as we fancy. Joy and sorrow, love and fear, life and death bring so many of the same needs to all, that the wonder is we do not understand each other better, but wait till times of tribulation teach us that human nature is very much the same in men and women. Thanks to this knowledge, Polly understood Tom in a way that surprised and won him. She knew that he wanted womanly sympathy, and that she could give it to him, because she was not afraid to stretch her hand across the barrier which our artificial education puts between boys and girls, and to say to him in all good faith, “If I can help you, let me.”

Ten minutes sooner Polly could have done this almost as easily to Tom as to Will, but in that ten minutes something had happened which made this difficult. Reading that Trix had given Tom back his freedom changed many things to Polly, and caused her to shrink from his confidence, because she felt as if it would be harder now to keep self out of sight; for, spite of maiden modesty, love and hope would wake and sing at the good news. Slowly she sat down, and hesitatingly she said, with her eyes on the ground, and a very humble voice, “I ‘ll do my best, but I can’t fill grandma’s place, or give you any wise, good advice. I wish I could!”

“You ‘ll do it better than any one else. Talk troubles mother, father has enough to think of without any of my worries. Fan is a good soul, but she is n’t practical, and we always get into a snarl if we try to work together, so who have I but my other sister, Polly? The pleasure that letter will give you may make up for my boring you.”

As he spoke, Tom laid the other paper in her lap, and went off to the window, as if to leave her free to enjoy it unseen; but he could not help a glance now and then, and as Polly’s face brightened, his own fell.

“Oh, Tom, that ‘s a birthday present worth having, for it ‘s so beautifully given I don’t see how you can refuse it. Arthur Sydney is a real nobleman!”

cried Polly, looking up at last, with her fact glowing, and her eyes full of delight.

"So he is! I don't know another man living, except father, who would have done such a thing, or who I could bring myself to take it from. Do you see, he 's not only paid the confounded debts, but has done it in my name, to spare me all he could?"

"I see, it 's like him; and I think he must be very happy to be able to do such a thing."

"It is an immense weight off my shoulders, for some of those men could n't afford to wait till I 'd begged, borrowed, or earned the money. Sydney can wait, but he won't long, if I know myself." "You won't take it as a gift, then?"

"Would you?"

"No."

"Then don't think I will. I 'm a pretty poor affair, Polly, but I 'm not mean enough to do that, while I 've got a conscience and a pair of hands."

A rough speech, but it pleased Polly better than the smoothest Tom had ever made in her hearing, for something in his face and voice told her that the friendly act had roused a nobler sentiment than gratitude, making the cancelled obligations of the boy, debts of honor to the man.

"What will you do, Tom?"

"I 'll tell you; may I sit here?" And Tom took the low footstool that always stood near grandma's old chair. "I 've had so many plans in my head lately, that sometimes it seems as if it would split," continued the poor fellow, rubbing his tired forehead, as if to polish up his wits. "I 've thought seriously of going to California, Australia, or some out-of-the-way place, where men get rich in a hurry."

"Oh, no!" cried Polly, putting out her hand as it to keep him, and then snatching it back again before he could turn round.

"It would be hard on mother and the girls, I suppose; besides, I don't quite like it myself; looks as if I shirked and ran away."

"So it does," said Polly, decidedly.

"Well, you see I don't seem to find anything to do unless I turn clerk, and I don't think that would suit. The fact is, I could n't stand it here, where I 'm known. It would be easier to scratch gravel on a railroad, with a gang of Paddies, than to sell pins to my friends and neighbors. False pride, I dare say, but it 's the truth, and there 's no use in dodging."

"Not a bit, and I quite agree with you."

"That 's comfortable. Now I 'm coming to the point where I specially want your advice, Polly. Yesterday I heard you telling Fan about your brother Ned; how well he got on; how he liked his business, and wanted Will to come and take some place near him. You thought I was reading, but I heard; and it struck me that perhaps I could get a chance out West somewhere. What do you think?"

"If you really mean work, I know you could," answered Polly, quickly, as all sorts of plans and projects went sweeping through her mind. "I wish you could be with Ned; you 'd get on together, I 'm sure; and he 'd be so glad to do anything he could. I 'll write and ask, straight away, if you want me to."

"Suppose you do; just for information, you know, then I shall have something to go upon. I want to have a feasible plan all ready, before I speak to father. There 's nothing so convincing to business men as facts, you know."

Polly could not help smiling at Tom's new tone, it seemed so strange to hear him talking about anything but horses and tailors, dancing and girls. She liked it, however, as much as she did the sober expression of his face, and the way he had lately of swinging his arms about, as if he wanted to do something energetic with them.

"That will be wise. Do you think your father will like this plan?"

"Pretty sure he will. Yesterday, when I told him I must go at something right off, he said, 'Anything honest, Tom, and don't forget that your father began the world as a shop-boy.' You knew that, did n't you?"

"Yes, he told me the story once, and I always liked to hear it, because it was pleasant to see how well he had succeeded."

"I never did like the story, a little bit ashamed, I 'm afraid; but when we talked it over last night, it struck me in a new light, and I understood why father took the failure so well, and seems so contented with this poorish place. It is only beginning again, he says; and having worked his way up once, he feels as if he could again. I declare to you, Polly, that sort of confidence in himself, and energy and courage in a man of his years, makes me love and respect the dear old gentleman as I never did before."

"I 'm so glad to hear you say that, Tom! I 've sometimes thought you did n't quite appreciate your father, any more than he knew how much of a man you were."

"Never was till to-day, you know," said Tom, laughing, yet looking as if he felt the dignity of his one and twenty years. "Odd, is n't it, how people live together ever so long, and don't seem to find one another out, till something comes to do it for them. Perhaps this smash-up was sent to introduce me to my own father."

"There 's philosophy for you," said Polly, smiling, even while she felt as if adversity was going to do more for Tom than years of prosperity.

They both sat quiet for a minute, Polly in the big chair looking at him with a new respect in her eyes, Tom on the stool near by slowly tearing up a folded paper he had absently taken from the floor while he talked.

"Did this surprise you?" he asked, as a little white shower fluttered from his hands.

"No."

"Well, it did me; for you know as soon as we came to grief I offered to release Trix from the engagement, and she would n't let me," continued Tom, as if, having begun the subject, he wished to explain it thoroughly.

"That surprised me," said Polly.

"So it did me, for Fan always insisted it was the money and not the man she cared for. Her first answer pleased me very much, for I did not expect it, and nothing touches a fellow more than to have a woman stand by him through thick and thin."

"She don't seem to have done it."

"Fan was right. Trix only waited to see how bad things really were, or rather her mother did. She 's as cool, hard, and worldly minded an old soul as I ever saw, and Trix is bound to obey. She gets round it very neatly in her note, 'I won't be a burden,' 'will sacrifice her hopes,' 'and always remain my warm friend,' but the truth is, Tom Shaw rich was worth making much of, but Tom Shaw poor is in the way, and may go to the devil as fast as he likes."

"Well, he is n't going!" cried Polly, defiantly, for her wrath burned hotly against Trix, though she blessed her for setting the bondman free.

"Came within an ace of it," muttered Tom to himself; adding aloud, in a tone of calm resignation that assured Polly his heart would not be broken though his engagement was, "It never rains but it pours, 'specially in hard times, but when a man is down, a rap or two more don't matter much, I suppose. It 's the first blow that hurts most."

"Glad to see you take the last blow so well." There was an ironical little twang to that speech, and Polly could n't help it. Tom colored up and looked hurt for a minute, then seemed to right himself with a shrug, and said, in his outspoken way, "To tell the honest truth, Polly, it was not a very hard one. I 've had a feeling for some time that Trix and I were not suited to one another, and it might be wiser to stop short. But she did not or would not see it; and I was not going to back out, and leave her to wear any more willows, so here we are. I don't bear malice, but hope she 'll do better, and not be disappointed again, upon my word I do."

"That 's very good of you, quite Sydneyesque, and noble," said Polly, feeling rather ill at ease, and wishing she could hide herself behind a cap and spectacles, if she was to play Grandma to this confiding youth.

"It will be all plain sailing for Syd, I fancy," observed Tom, getting up as if the little cricket suddenly ceased to be comfortable.

"I hope so," murmured Polly, wondering what was coming next.

"He deserves the very best of everything, and I pray the Lord he may get it," added Tom, poking the fire in a destructive manner.

Polly made no answer, fearing to pay too much, for she knew Fan had made no confidant of Tom, and she guarded her friend's secret as jealously as her own. "You 'll write to Ned to-morrow, will you? I 'll take anything he 's got, for I want to be off," said Tom, casting down the poker, and turning round with a resolute air which was lost on Polly, who sat twirling the rose that had fallen into her lap.

"I 'll write to-night. Would you like me to tell the girls about Trix and Sydney?" she asked as she rose, feeling that the council was over.

"I wish you would. I don't know how to thank you for all you 've done for me; I wish to heaven I did," said Tom, holding out his hand with a look that Polly thought a great deal too grateful for the little she had done.

As she gave him her hand, and looked up at him with those confiding eyes of hers, Tom's gratitude seemed to fly to his head, for, without the slightest warning, he stooped down and kissed her, a proceeding which startled Polly so that he recovered himself at once, and retreated into his den with the incoherent apology, "I beg pardon could n't help it grandma always let me on my birthday."

While Polly took refuge up stairs, forgetting all about Fan, as she sat in the dark with her face hidden, wondering why she was n't very angry, and resolving never again to indulge in the delightful but dangerous pastime of playing grandmother.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE WOMAN WHO DID NOT DARE

POLLY wrote enthusiastically, Ned answered satisfactorily, and after much corresponding, talking, and planning, it was decided that Tom should go West. Never mind what the business was; it suffices to say that it was a good beginning for a young man like Tom, who, having been born and bred in the most conservative class of the most conceited city in New England, needed just the healthy, hearty, social influences of the West to widen his views and make a man of him.

Of course there was much lamentation among the women, but every one felt it was the best thing for him; so while they sighed they sewed, packed visions of a brilliant future away with his new pocket handkerchiefs, and rejoiced that the way was open before him even in the act of bedewing his boots with tears. Sydney stood by him to the last, “like a man and a brother” (which expression of Tom’s gave Fanny infinite satisfaction), and Will felt entirely consoled for Ned’s disappointment at his refusal to go and join him, since Tom was to take the place Ned had kept for him.

Fortunately every one was so busy with the necessary preparations that there was no time for romance of any sort, and the four young people worked together as soberly and sensibly as if all sorts of emotions were not bottled up in their respective hearts. But in spite of the silence, the work, and the hurry, I think they came to know one another better in that busy little space of time than in all the years that had gone before, for the best and bravest in each was up and stirring, and the small house was as full of the magnetism of love and friendship, self-sacrifice and enthusiasm, as the world outside was full of spring sunshine and enchantment. Pity that the end should come so soon, but the hour did its work and went its way, leaving a clearer atmosphere behind, though the young folks did not see it then, for their eyes were dim because of the partings that must be.

Tom was off to the West; Polly went home for the summer; Maud was taken to the seaside with Belle; and Fanny left alone to wrestle with housekeeping, “help,” and heartache. If it had not been for two things, I fear she never would have stood a summer in town, but Sydney often called, till his vacation came, and a voluminous correspondence with Polly beguiled the long days. Tom wrote once a week to his mother, but the letters were short and not very satisfactory, for men never do tell the interesting little things that women best like to hear.

Fanny forwarded her bits of news to Polly. Polly sent back all the extracts from Ned’s letters concerning Tom, and by putting the two reports together, they gained the comfortable assurance that Tom was well, in good spirits, hard at work, and intent on coming out strong in spite of all obstacles.

Polly had a quiet summer at home, resting and getting ready in mind and body for another winter’s work, for in the autumn she tried her plan again, to the satisfaction of her pupils and the great joy of her friends. She never said much of herself in her letters, and Fanny’s first exclamation when they met again, was an anxious “Why, Polly, dear! Have you been sick and never told me?”

“No, I ‘m only tired, had a good deal to do lately, and the dull weather makes me just a trifle blue. I shall soon brighten up when I get to my work again,” answered Polly, bustling about to put away her things.

“You don’t look a bit natural. What have you been doing to your precious little self?” persisted Fanny, troubled by the change, yet finding it hard to say wherein it lay.

Polly did not look sick, though her cheeks were thinner and her color paler than formerly, but she seemed spiritless, and there was a tired look in her eyes that went to Fanny’s heart.

“I ‘m all right enough, as you ‘ll see when I ‘m in order. I ‘m proper glad to find you looking so well and happy. Does all go smoothly, Fan?” asked Polly, beginning to brush her hair industriously.

“Answer me one question first,” said Fanny, looking as if a sudden fear had come over her. “Tell me, truly, have you never repented of your hint to Sydney?”

“Never!” cried Polly, throwing back the brown veil behind which she had half hidden her face at first.

“On your honor, as an honest girl?”

“On my honor, as anything you please. Why do you suspect me of it?” demanded Polly, almost angrily.

“Because something is wrong with you. It ‘s no use to deny it, for you ‘ve got the look I used to see in that very glass on my own face when I thought he cared for you. Forgive me, Polly, but I can’t help saying it, for it is there, and I want to be as true to you as you were to me if I can.”

Fanny’s face was full of agitation, and she spoke fast and frankly, for she was trying to be generous and found it very hard. Polly understood now and put her fear at rest by saying almost passionately, “I tell you I don’t love him! If he was the only man in the world, I would n’t marry him, because I don’t want to.”

The last three words were added in a different tone, for Polly had checked herself there with a half-frightened look and turned away to hide her face behind her hair again.

"Then if it 's not him, it 's some one else. You 've got a secret, Polly, and I should think you might tell it, as you know mine," said Fanny, unable to rest till everything was told, for Polly's manner troubled her.

There was no answer to her question, but she was satisfied and putting her arm round her friend, she said, in her most persuasive tone, "My precious Polly, do I know him?"

"You have seen him."

"And is he very wise, good, and splendid, dear?"

"No."

"He ought to be if you love him. I hope he is n't bad?" cried Fan, anxiously, still holding Polly, who kept her head obstinately turned.

"I 'm suited, that 's enough."

"Oh, please just tell me one thing more. Don't he love back again?"

"No. Now don't say another word, I can't bear it!" and Polly drew herself away, as she spoke in a desperate sort of tone.

"I won't, but now I 'm not afraid to tell you that I think, I hope, I do believe that Sydney cares a little for me. He 's been very kind to us all, and lately he has seemed to like to see me always when he comes and miss me if I 'm gone. I did n't dare to hope anything, till Papa observed something in his manner, and teased me about it. I try not to deceive myself, but it does seem as if there was a chance of happiness for me."

"Thank heaven for that!" cried Polly, with the heartiest satisfaction in her voice. "Now come and tell me all about it," she added, sitting down on the couch with the air of one who has escaped a great peril.

"I 've got some notes and things I want to ask your opinion about, if they really mean anything, you know," said Fanny, getting out a bundle of papers from the inmost recesses of her desk. "There 's a photograph of Tom, came in his last letter. Good, is n't it? He looks older, but that 's the beard and the rough coat, I suppose. Dear old fellow, he is doing so well I really begin to feel quite proud of him."

Fan tossed her the photograph, and went on rummaging for a certain note. She did not see Polly catch up the picture and look at it with hungry eyes, but she did hear something in the low tone in which Polly said, "It don't do him justice," and glancing over her shoulder, Fan's quick eye caught a glimpse of the truth, though Polly was half turned away from her. Without stopping to think, Fan dropped her letters, took Polly by the shoulders, and cried in a tone full of astonishment, "Polly, is it Tom?"

Poor Polly was so taken by surprise, that she had not a word to say. None were needed; her telltale face answered for her, as well as the impulse which made her hide her head in the sofa cushion, like a foolish ostrich when the hunters are after it.

“Oh, Polly, I am so glad! I never thought of it you are so good, and he ‘s such a wild boy, I can’t believe it but it is so dear of you to care for him.”

“Could n’t help it tried not to but it was so hard you know, Fan, you know,” said a stifled voice from the depths of the very fuzzy cushion which Tom had once condemned.

The last words, and the appealing hand outstretched to her, told Fanny the secret of her friend’s tender sympathy for her own love troubles, and seemed so pathetic, that she took Polly in her arms, and cried over her, in the fond, foolish way girls have of doing when their hearts are full, and tears can say more than tongues. The silence never lasts long, however, for the feminine desire to “talk it over” usually gets the better of the deepest emotion. So presently the girls were hard at it, Polly very humble and downcast, Fanny excited and overflowing with curiosity and delight.

“Really my sister! You dear thing, how heavenly that will be,” she cried.

“It never will be,” answered Polly in a tone of calm despair.

“What will prevent it?”

“Maria Bailey,” was the tragic reply.

“What do you mean? Is she the Western girl? She shan’t have Tom; I ‘ll kill her first!”

“Too late, let me tell you is that door shut, and Maud safe?”

Fanny reconnoitered, and returning, listened breathlessly, while Polly poured into her ear the bitter secret which was preying on her soul.

“Has n’t he mentioned Maria in his letters?”

“Once or twice, but sort of jokingly, and I thought it was only some little flirtation. He can’t have time for much of that fun, he ‘s so busy.”

“Ned writes good, gossipy letters I taught him how and he tells me all that ‘s going on. When he ‘d spoken of this girl several times (they board with her mother, you know), I asked about her, quite carelessly, and he told me she was pretty, good, and well educated, and he thought Tom was rather smitten. That was a blow, for you see, Fan, since Trix broke the engagement, and it was n’t wrong to think of Tom, I let myself hope, just a little, and was so happy! Now I must give it up, and now I see how much I hoped, and what a dreadful loss it ‘s going to be.”

Two great tears rolled down Polly’s cheeks, and Fanny wiped them away, feeling an intense desire to go West by the next train, wither Maria Bailey with a single look, and bring Tom back as a gift to Polly.

“It was so stupid of me not to guess before. But you see Tom always seems so like a boy, and you are more womanly for your age than any girl I know, so I never thought of your caring for him in that way. I knew you were very good to him, you are to every one, my precious; and I knew that he was fond of you as he is of me, fonder if anything, because he thinks you are perfect; but still I never dreamed of his loving you as more than a dear friend."

"He does n't," sighed Polly.

"Well, he ought; and if I could get hold of him, he should!"

Polly clutched Fan at that, and held her tight, saying sternly, "If you ever breathe a word, drop a hint, look a look that will tell him or any one else about me, I 'll yes, as sure as my name is Mary Milton I 'll proclaim from the housetops that you like Ar" Polly got no further, for Fan's hand was on her mouth, and Fan's alarmed voice vehemently protested, "I won't! I promise solemnly I 'll never say a word to a mortal creature. Don't be so fierce, Polly; you quite frighten me."

"It 's bad enough to love some one who don't love you, but to have them told of it is perfectly awful. It makes me wild just to think of it. Oh, Fan, I 'm getting so ill-tempered and envious and wicked, I don't know what will happen to me."

"I 'm not afraid for you, my dear, and I do believe things will go right, because you are so good to every one. How Tom could help adoring you I don't see. I know he would if he had stayed at home longer after he got rid of Trix. It would be the making of him; but though he is my brother, I don't think he 's good enough for you, Polly, and I don't quite see how you can care for him so much, when you might have had a person so infinitely superior."

"I don't want a 'superior' person; he 'd tire me if he was like A. S. Besides, I do think Tom is superior to him in many things. Well, you need n't stare; I know he is, or will be. He 's so different, and very young, and has lots of faults, I know, but I like him all the better for it, and he 's honest and brave, and has got a big, warm heart, and I 'd rather have him care for me than the wisest, best, most accomplished man in the world, simply because I love him!"

If Tom could only have seen Polly's face when she said that! It was so tender, earnest, and defiant, that Fanny forgot the defence of her own lover in admiration of Polly's loyalty to hers; for this faithful, all absorbing love was a new revelation to Fanny, who was used to hearing her friends boast of two or three lovers a year, and calculate their respective values, with almost as much coolness as the young men discussed the fortunes of the girls they wished for, but "could not afford to marry." She had thought her love for Sydney very romantic, because she did not really care whether he was rich or poor, though she never dared to say so, even to Polly, for fear of being laughed at. She began to see now what true love was, and to feel that the sentiment which she could not conquer was a treasure to be accepted with reverence, and cherished with devotion.

"I don't know when I began to love Tom, but I found out that I did last winter, and was as much surprised as you are," continued Polly, as if glad to unburden her heart. "I did n't approve of him at all. I thought he was extravagant, reckless, and dandified. I was very much disappointed when he chose Trix, and the more I thought and saw of it, the worse I felt, for Tom was too good for her, and I hated to see her do so little for him, when she might have done so much; because he is one of the men who can be led by their affections, and the woman he marries can make or mar him."

"That 's true!" cried Fan, as Polly paused to look at the picture, which appeared to regard her with a grave, steady look, which seemed rather to belie her assertions.

"I don't mean that he 's weak or bad. If he was, I should hate him; but he does need some one to love him very much, and make him happy, as a good woman best knows how," said Polly, as if answering the mute language of Tom's face.

"I hope Maria Bailey is all he thinks her," she added, softly, "for I could n't bear to have him disappointed again."

"I dare say he don't care a fig for her, and you are only borrowing trouble. What do you say Ned answered when you asked about this inconvenient girl?" said Fanny turning hopeful all at once.

Polly repeated it, and added, "I asked him in another letter if he did n't admire Miss B. as much as Tom, and he wrote back that she was 'a nice girl,' but he had no time for nonsense, and I need n't get my white kids ready for some years yet, unless to dance at Tom's wedding. Since then he has n't mentioned Maria, so I was sure there was something serious going on, and being in Tom's confidence, he kept quiet."

"It does look bad. Suppose I say a word to Tom, just inquire after his heart in a general way, you know, and give him a chance to tell me, if there is anything to tell." "I 'm willing, but you must let me see the letter. I can't trust you not to hint or say too much."

"You shall. I 'll keep my promise in spite of everything, but it will be hard to see things going wrong when a word would set it right."

"You know what will happen if you do," and Polly looked so threatening that Fan trembled before her, discovering that the gentlest girls when roused are more impressive than any shrew; for even turtle doves peck gallantly to defend their nests.

"If it is true about Maria, what shall we do?" said Fanny after a pause.

"Bear it; People always do bear things, somehow," answered Polly, looking as if sentence had been passed upon her.

"But if it is n't?" cried Fan, unable to endure the sight.

"Then I shall wait." And Polly's face changed so beautifully that Fan hugged her on the spot, fervently wishing that Maria Bailey never had been born.

Then the conversation turned to lover number two, and after a long confabulation, Polly gave it as her firm belief that A. S. had forgotten M. M., and was rapidly finding consolation in the regard of F. S. With this satisfactory decision the council ended after the ratification of a Loyal League, by which the friends pledged themselves to stand staunchly by one another, through the trials of the coming year.

It was a very different winter from the last for both the girls. Fanny applied herself to her duties with redoubled ardor, for "A. S." was a domestic man, and admired housewifely accomplishments. If Fanny wanted to show him what she could do toward making a pleasant home, she certainly succeeded better than she suspected, for in spite of many failures and discouragements behind the scenes, the little house became a most attractive place, to Mr. Sydney at least, for he was more the house-friend than ever, and seemed determined to prove that change of fortune made no difference to him.

Fanny had been afraid that Polly's return might endanger her hopes, but Sydney met Polly with the old friendliness, and very soon convinced her that the nipping in the bud process had been effectual, for being taken early, the sprouting affection had died easy, and left room for an older friendship to blossom into a happier love.

Fanny seemed glad of this, and Polly soon set her heart at rest by proving that she had no wish to try her power. She kept much at home when the day's work was done, finding it pleasanter to sit dreaming over book or sewing alone, than to exert herself even to go to the Shaws'.

"Fan don't need me, and Sydney don't care whether I come or not, so I 'll keep out of the way," she would say, as if to excuse her seeming indolence.

Polly was not at all like herself that winter, and those nearest to her saw and wondered at it most. Will got very anxious, she was so quiet, pale and spiritless, and distracted poor Polly by his affectionate stupidity, till she completed his bewilderment by getting cross and scolding him. So he consoled himself with Maud, who, now being in her teens, assumed dignified airs, and ordered him about in a style that afforded him continued amusement and employment.

Western news continued vague, for Fan's general inquiries produced only provokingly unsatisfactory replies from Tom, who sang the praises of "the beautiful Miss Bailey," and professed to be consumed by a hopeless passion for somebody, in such half-comic, half-tragic terms, that the girls could not decide whether it was “all that boy’s mischief,” or only a cloak to hide the dreadful truth.

“We ‘ll have it out of him when he comes home in the spring,” said Fanny to Polly, as they compared the letters of their brothers, and agreed that “men were the most uncommunicative and provoking animals under the sun.” For Ned was so absorbed in business that he ignored the whole Bailey question and left them in utter darkness.

Hunger of any sort is a hard thing to bear, especially when the sufferer has a youthful appetite, and Polly was kept on such a short allowance of happiness for six months, that she got quite thin and interesting; and often, when she saw how big her eyes were getting, and how plainly the veins on her temples showed, indulged the pensive thought that perhaps spring dandelions might blossom o’er her grave. She had no intention of dying till Tom’s visit was over, however, and as the time drew near, she went through such alternations of hope and fear, and lived in such a state of feverish excitement, that spirits and color came back, and she saw that the interesting pallor she had counted on would be an entire failure.

May came at last, and with it a burst of sunshine which cheered even poor Polly’s much-enduring heart. Fanny came walking in upon her one day, looking as if she brought tidings of such great joy that she hardly knew how to tell them.

“Prepare yourself somebody is engaged!” she said, in a solemn tone, that made Polly put up her hand as if to ward off an expected blow. “No, don’t look like that, my poor dear; it is n’t Tom, it ‘s I!”

Of course there was a rapture, followed by one of the deliciously confidential talks which bosom friends enjoy, interspersed with tears and kisses, smiles and sighs.

“Oh, Polly, though I ‘ve waited and hoped so long I could n’t believe it when it came, and don’t deserve it; but I will! for the knowledge that he loves me seems to make everything possible,” said Fanny, with an expression which made her really beautiful, for the first time in her life.

“You happy girl!” sighed Polly, then smiled and added, “I think you deserve all that ‘s come to you, for you have truly tried to be worthy of it, and whether it ever came or not that would have been a thing to be proud of.”

“He says that is what made him love me,” answered Fanny, never calling her lover by his name, but making the little personal pronoun a very sweet word by the tone in which she uttered it. “He was disappointed in me last year, he told me, but you said good things about me and though he did n’t care much then, yet when he lost you, and came back to me, he found that you were not altogether mistaken, and he has watched me all this winter, learning to respect and love me better every day. Oh, Polly, when he said that, I could n’t bear it, because in spite of all my trying, I ‘m still so weak and poor and silly.”

“We don’t think so; and I know you ‘ll be all he hopes to find you, for he ‘s just the husband you ought to have.”

“Thank you all the more, then, for not keeping him yourself,” said Fanny, laughing the old blithe laugh again.

“That was only a slight aberration of his; he knew better all the time. It was your white cloak and my idiotic behavior the night we went to the opera that put the idea into his head,” said Polly, feeling as if the events of that evening had happened some twenty years ago, when she was a giddy young thing, fond of gay bonnets and girlish pranks.

“I ‘m not going to tell Tom a word about it, but keep it for a surprise till he comes. He will be here next week, and then we ‘ll have a grand clearing up of mysteries,” said Fan, evidently feeling that the millennium was at hand.

“Perhaps,” said Polly, as her heart fluttered and then sunk, for this was a case where she could do nothing but hope, and keep her hands busy with Will’s new set of shirts.

There is a good deal more of this sort of silent suffering than the world suspects, for the “women who dare” are few, the women who “stand and wait” are many. But if work-baskets were gifted with powers of speech, they could tell stories more true and tender than any we read. For women often sew the tragedy or comedy of life into their work as they sit apparently safe and serene at home, yet are thinking deeply, living whole heart-histories, and praying fervent prayers while they embroider pretty trifles or do the weekly mending.

CHAPTER XIX. TOM’S SUCCESS

“Come, Philander, let us be a marching,
Every one his true love a searching,”

WOULD be the most appropriate motto for this chapter, because, intimidated by the threats, denunciations, and complaints showered upon me in consequence of taking the liberty to end a certain story as I liked, I now yield to the amiable desire of giving satisfaction, and, at the risk of outraging all the unities, intend to pair off everybody I can lay my hands on.

Occasionally a matrimonial epidemic appears, especially toward spring, devastating society, thinning the ranks of bachelordom, and leaving mothers lamenting for their fairest daughters. That spring the disease broke out with great violence in the Shaw circle, causing paternal heads much bewilderment, as one case after another appeared with alarming rapidity. Fanny, as we have seen, was stricken first, and hardly had she been carried safely through the crisis, when Tom returned to swell the list of victims. As Fanny was out a good deal with her Arthur, who was sure that exercise was necessary for the convalescent, Polly went every day to see Mrs. Shaw, who found herself lonely, though much better than usual, for the engagement had a finer effect upon her constitution than any tonic she ever tried. Some three days after Fan’s joyful call Polly was startled on entering the Shaws’ door, by Maud, who came tumbling down stairs, sending an avalanche of words before her, “He ‘s come before he said he should to surprise us! He ‘s up in mamma’s room, and was just saying, ‘How ‘s Polly?’ when I heard you come, in your creep-mouse way, and you must go right up. He looks so funny with whiskers, but he ‘s ever so nice, real big and brown, and he swung me right up when he kissed me. Never mind your bonnet, I can’t wait.”

And pouncing upon Polly, Maud dragged her away like a captured ship towed by a noisy little steam-tug.

“The sooner it ‘s over the better for me,” was the only thought Polly had time for before she plunged into the room above, propelled by Maud, who cried triumphantly, “There he is! Ain’t he splendid?”

For a minute, everything danced before Polly’s eyes, as a hand shook hers warmly, and a gruffish voice said heartily, “How are you, Polly?” Then she slipped into a chair beside Mrs. Shaw, hoping that her reply had been all right and proper, for she had not the least idea what she said.

Things got steady again directly, and while Maud expatiated on the great surprise, Polly ventured to look at Tom, feeling glad that her back was toward the light, and his was not. It was not a large room, and Tom seemed to fill it entirely; not that he had grown so very much, except broader in the shoulders, but there was a brisk, genial, free-and-easy air about him, suggestive of a stirring, out-of-door life, with people who kept their eyes wide open, and were not very particular what they did with their arms and legs. The rough-and-ready travelling suit, stout boots, brown face, and manly beard, changed him so much, that Polly could find scarcely a trace of elegant Tom Shaw in the hearty-looking young man who stood with one foot on a chair, while he talked business to his father in a sensible way, which delighted the old gentleman. Polly liked the change immensely, and sat listening to the state of Western trade with as much interest as if it had been the most thrilling romance, for, as he talked, Tom kept looking at her with a nod or a smile so like old times, that for a little while, she forgot Maria Bailey, and was in bliss.

By and by Fanny came flying in, and gave Tom a greater surprise than his had been. He had not the least suspicion of what had been going on at home, for Fan had said to herself, with girlish malice, “If he don’t choose to tell me his secrets, I ‘m not going to tell mine,” and had said nothing about Sydney, except an occasional allusion to his being often there, and very kind. Therefore, when she announced her engagement, Tom looked so staggered for a minute, that Fan thought he did n’t like it; but after the first surprise passed, he showed such an affectionate satisfaction, that she was both touched and flattered.

“What do you think of this performance?” asked Tom, wheeling round to Polly, who still sat by Mrs. Shaw, in the shadow of the bed-curtains.

“I like it very much,” she said in such a hearty tone, that Tom could not doubt the genuineness of her pleasure.

“Glad of that. Hope you ‘ll be as well pleased with another engagement that ‘s coming out before long”; and with an odd laugh, Tom carried Sydney off to his den, leaving the girls to telegraph to one another the awful message, “It is Maria Bailey.”

How she managed to get through that evening, Polly never knew, yet it was not a long one, for at eight o’clock she slipped out of the room, meaning to run home alone, and not compel any one to serve as escort. But she did not succeed, for as she stood warming her rubbers at the dining-room fire, wondering pensively as she did so if Maria Bailey had small feet, and if Tom ever put her rubbers on for her, the little overshoes were taken out of her hands, and Tom’s voice said, reproachfully, “Did you really mean to run away, and not let me go home with you?”

“I ‘m not afraid; I did n’t want to take you away,” began Polly, secretly hoping that she did n’t look too pleased.

"But I like to be taken away. Why, it ‘s a whole year since I went home with you; do you remember that?" said Tom, flapping the rubbers about without any signs of haste.

"Does it seem long?"

"Everlasting!"

Polly meant to say that quite easily, and smile incredulously at his answer; but in spite of the coquettish little rose-colored hood she wore, and which she knew was very becoming, she did not look or speak gayly, and Tom saw something in the altered face that made him say hastily, "I ‘m afraid you ‘ve been doing too much this winter; you look tired out, Polly."

"Oh, no! it suits me to be very busy," and she began to drag on her gloves as if to prove it.

"But it does n't suit me to have you get thin and pale, you know."

Polly looked up to thank him, but never did, for there was something deeper than gratitude in the honest blue eyes, that could not hide the truth entirely. Tom saw it, flushed all over his brown face, and dropping the rubbers with a crash, took her hands, saying, in his old impetuous way, "Polly, I want to tell you something!"

"Yes, I know, we ‘ve been expecting it. I hope you ‘ll be very happy, Tom;" and Polly shook his hands with a smile that was more pathetic than a flood of tears.

"What!" cried Tom, looking as if he thought she had lost her mind.

"Ned told us all about her; he thought it would be so, and when you spoke of another engagement, we knew you meant your own."

"But I did n't! Ned's the man; he told me to tell you. It ‘s just settled."

"Is it Maria?" cried Polly, holding on to a chair as if to be prepared for anything.

"Of course. Who else should it be?"

"He did n't say you talked about her most and so we thought" stammered Polly, falling into a sudden flutter.

"That I was in love? Well, I am, but not with her."

"Oh!" and Polly caught her breath as if a dash of cold water had fallen on her, for the more in earnest Tom grew, the blunter he became.

"Do you want to know the name of the girl I ‘ve loved for more than a year? Well, it ‘s Polly!" As he spoke, Tom stretched out his arms to her, with the sort of mute eloquence that cannot be resisted, and Polly went straight into them, without a word.

Never mind what happened for a little bit. Love scenes, if genuine, are indescribable; for to those who have enacted them, the most elaborate description seems tame, and to those who have not, the simplest picture seems overdone. So romancers had better let imagination paint for them that which is above all art, and leave their lovers to themselves during the happiest minutes of their lives.

Before long, Tom and Polly were sitting side by side, enjoying the blissful state of mind which usually follows the first step out of our work-a-day world, into the glorified region wherein lovers rapturously exist for a month or two. Tom just sat and looked at Polly as if he found it difficult to believe that the winter of his discontent had ended in this glorious spring. But Polly, being a true woman, asked questions, even while she laughed and cried for joy.

"Now, Tom, how could I know you loved me when you went away and never said a word?" she began, in a tenderly reproachful tone, thinking of the hard year she had spent.

"And how could I have the courage to say a word, when I had nothing on the face of the earth to offer you but my worthless self?" answered Tom, warmly.

"That was all I wanted!" whispered Polly, in a tone which caused him to feel that the race of angels was not entirely extinct.

"I 've always been fond of you, my Polly, but I never realized how fond till just before I went away. I was n't free, you know, and besides I had a strong impression that you liked Sydney in spite of the damper which Fan hinted you gave him last winter. He 's such a capital fellow, I really don't see how you could help it."

"It is strange; I don't understand it myself; but women are queer creatures, and there 's no accounting for their tastes," said Polly, with a sly look, which Tom fully appreciated.

"You were so good to me those last days, that I came very near speaking out, but could n't bear to seem to be offering you a poor, disgraced sort of fellow, whom Trix would n't have, and no one seemed to think worth much. 'No,' I said to myself, 'Polly ought to have the best; if Syd can get her, let him, and I won't say a word. I 'll try to be better worthy her friendship, anyway; and perhaps, when I 've proved that I can do something, and am not ashamed to work, then, if Polly is free, I shan't be afraid to try my chance.' So I held my tongue, worked like a horse, satisfied myself and others that I could get my living honestly, and then came home to see if there was any hope for me."

"And I was waiting for you all the time," said a soft voice close to his shoulder; for Polly was much touched by Tom's manly efforts to deserve her.

"I did n't mean to do it the first minute, but look about me a little, and be sure Syd was all right. But Fan's news settled that point, and just now the look in my Polly's face settled the other. I could n't wait another minute, or let you either, and I could n’t help stretching out my arms to my little wife, God bless her, though I know I don’t deserve her.”

Tom’s voice got lower and lower as he spoke, and his face was full of an emotion of which he need not be ashamed, for a very sincere love ennobled him, making him humble, where a shallower affection would have been proud of its success. Polly understood this, and found the honest, hearty speech of her lover more eloquent than poetry itself. Her hand stole up to his cheek, and she leaned her own confidingly against the rough coat, as she said, in her frank simple way, “Tom, dear, don’t say that, as if I was the best girl in the world. I ‘ve got ever so many faults, and I want you to know them all, and help me cure them, as you have your own. Waiting has not done us any harm, and I love you all the better for your trial. But I ‘m afraid your year has been harder than mine, you look so much older and graver than when you went away. You never would complain; but I ‘ve had a feeling that you were going through a good deal more than any of us guessed.”

“Pretty tough work at first, I own. It was all so new and strange, I ‘m afraid I should n’t have stood it if it had not been for Ned. He ‘d laugh and say ‘Pooh!’ if he heard me say it, but it ‘s true nevertheless that he ‘s a grand fellow and helped me through the first six months like a well, a brother as he is. There was no reason why he should go out of his way to back up a shiftless party like me, yet he did, and made many things easy and safe that would have been confoundedly hard and dangerous if I ‘d been left to myself. The only way I can explain it is that it ‘s a family trait, and as natural to the brother as it is to the sister.”

“It ‘s a Shaw trait to do the same. But tell me about Maria; is Ned really engaged to her?”

“Very much so; you ‘ll get a letter full of raptures tomorrow; he had n’t time to send by me, I came off in such a hurry. Maria is a sensible, pretty girl and Ned will be a happy old fellow.”

“Why did you let us think it was you?”

“I only teased Fan a little; I did like Maria, for she reminded me of you sometimes, and was such a kind, cosy little woman I could n’t help enjoying her society after a hard day’s work. But Ned got jealous, and then I knew that he was in earnest, so I left him a clear field, and promised not to breathe a word to any one till he had got a Yes or No from his Maria.”

“I wish I ‘d known it,” sighed Polly. “People in love always do such stupid things!”

“So they do; for neither you nor Fan gave us poor fellows the least hint about Syd, and there I ‘ve been having all sorts of scares about you.”

“Serves us right; brothers and sisters should n’t have secrets from each other.”

"We never will again. Did you miss me very much?"

"Yes, Tom; very, very much."

"My patient little Polly!"

"Did you really care for me before you went?"

"See if I did n't;" and with great pride Tom produced a portly pocket-book stuffed with business-like documents of a most imposing appearance, opened a private compartment, and took out a worn-looking paper, unfolded it carefully, and displayed a small brown object which gave out a faint fragrance.

"That 's the rose you put in the birthday cake, and next week we 'll have a fresh one in another jolly little cake which you 'll make me; you left it on the floor of my den the night we talked there, and I 've kept it ever since. There 's love and romance for you!"

Polly touched the little relic, treasured for a year, and smiled to read the words "My Polly's rose," scribbled under the crumbling leaves.

"I did n't know you could be so sentimental," she said, looking so pleased that he did not regret confessing his folly.

"I never was till I loved you, my dear, and I 'm not very bad yet, for I don't wear my posy next my heart, but where I can see it every day, and so never forget for whom I am working. Should n't wonder if that bit of nonsense had kept me economical, honest, and hard at it, for I never opened my pocket-book that I did n't think of you."

"That 's lovely, Tom," and Polly found it so touching that she felt for her handkerchief; but Tom took it away, and made her laugh instead of cry, by saying, in a wheedlesome tone, "I don't believe you did as much, for all your romance. Did you, now?"

"If you won't laugh, I 'll show you my treasures. I began first, and I 've worn them longest."

As she spoke, Polly drew out the old locket, opened it, and showed the picture Tom gave her in the bag of peanuts cut small and fitted in on one side on the other was a curl of reddish hair and a black button. How Tom laughed when he saw them!

"You don't mean you 've kept that frightful guy of a boy all this time? Polly! Polly! you are the most faithful 'loveress,' as Maud says, that was ever known."

"Don't flatter yourself that I 've worn it all these years, sir; I only put it in last spring because I did n't dare to ask for one of the new ones. The button came off the old coat you insisted on wearing after the failure, as if it was your duty to look as shabby as possible, and the curl I stole from Maud. Are n't we silly?"

He did not seem to think so, and after a short pause for refreshments, Polly turned serious, and said anxiously, "When must you go back to your hard work?”

“In a week or two; but it won’t seem drudgery now, for you ‘ll write every day, and I shall feel that I ‘m working to get a home for you. That will give me a forty-man-power, and I ‘ll pay up my debts and get a good start, and then Ned and I will be married and go into partnership, and we ‘ll all be the happiest, busiest people in the West.”

“It sounds delightful; but won’t it take a long time, Tom?”

“Only a few years, and we need n’t wait a minute after Syd is paid, if you don’t mind beginning rather low down, Polly.”

“I ‘d rather work up with you, than sit idle while you toil away all alone. That ‘s the way father and mother did, and I think they were very happy in spite of the poverty and hard work.”

“Then we ‘ll do it by another year, for I must get more salary before I take you away from a good home here. I wish, oh, Polly, how I wish I had a half of the money I ‘ve wasted, to make you comfortable, now.”

“Never mind, I don’t want it; I ‘d rather have less, and know you earned it all yourself,” cried Polly, as Tom struck his hand on his knee with an acute pang of regret at the power he had lost.

“It ‘s like you to say it, and I won’t waste any words bewailing myself, because I was a fool. We will work up together, my brave Polly, and you shall yet be proud of your husband, though he is ‘poor Tom Shaw.’“

She was as sure of that as if an oracle had foretold it, and was not deceived; for the loving heart that had always seen, believed, and tried to strengthen all good impulses in Tom, was well repaid for its instinctive trust by the happiness of the years to come.

“Yes,” she said, hopefully, “I know you will succeed, for the best thing a man can have, is work with a purpose in it, and the will to do it heartily.”

“There is one better thing, Polly,” answered Tom, turning her face up a little, that he might see his inspiration shining in her eyes.

“What is it, dear?”

“A good woman to love and help him all his life, as you will me, please God.”

“Even though she is old-fashioned,” whispered Polly, with happy eyes, the brighter for their tears, as she looked up at the young man, who, through her, had caught a glimpse of the truest success, and was not ashamed to owe it to love and labor, two beautiful old fashions that began long ago, with the first pair in Eden.

Lest any of my young readers who have honored Maud with their interest should suffer the pangs of unsatisfied curiosity as to her future, I will add for their benefit that she did not marry Will, but remained a busy, lively spinster all her days, and kept house for her father in the most delightful manner.

Will’s ministerial dream came to pass in the course of time, however, and a gentle, bright-eyed lady ruled over the parsonage, whom the reverend William called his “little Jane.”

Farther into futurity even this rash pen dares not proceed, but pauses here, concluding in the words of the dear old fairy tales, “And so they were married, and all lived happily till they died.”

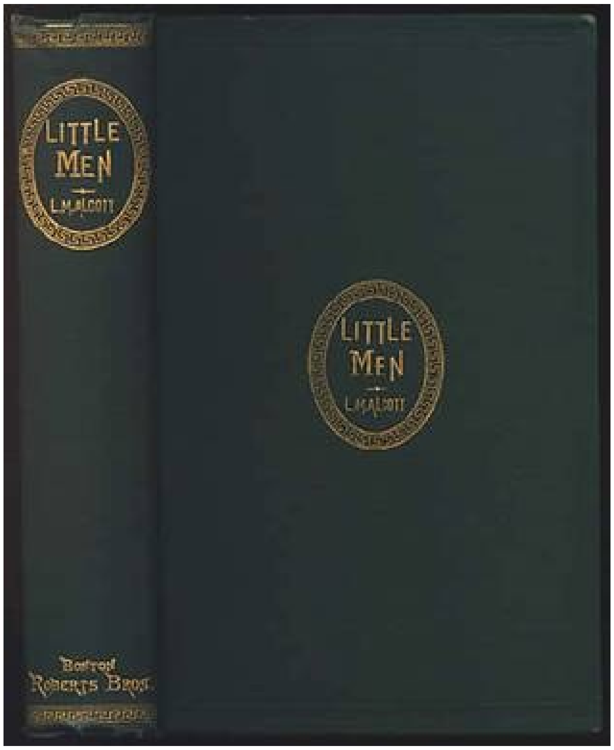
LITTLE MEN

OR

LIFE AT PLUMFIELD WITH JO’S BOYS

Alcott’s fourth novel was first published in 1871 and reprises characters from *Little Women*. It tells the story of Jo Bhaer and the children at Plumfield Estate School. The novel was inspired by the death of Alcott’s brother-in-law, which is revealed in one of the last chapters, when a beloved character from *Little Women* passes away.

Little Men follows the life of Jo Bhaer and the students who live and learn at Plumfield School, which she runs with her husband, Professor Bhaer. Jo inherited the estate from her Aunt March. The mischievous children, whom she loves and cares for as her own, learn valuable lessons as they grow to adulthood. While the story focuses mainly on Jo, her husband, and the pupils, characters from “Little Women” continue to appear. Meg is now married to John Brooke, with twins at the school; Amy is married to Laurie, and occasionally visits with her small daughter, though Laurie makes more regular appearances.


LITTLE MEN
L.M.ALCOTT
LITTLE MEN
L.M.ALCOTT
BOSTON
ROBERTS BROS.

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LITTLE MEN
LIFE AT PLUMFIELD WITH JO’S BOYS

CHAPTER I. NAT

“Please, sir, is this Plumfield?” asked a ragged boy of the man who opened the great gate at which the omnibus left him.

“Yes. Who sent you?”

“Mr. Laurence. I have got a letter for the lady.”

“All right; go up to the house, and give it to her; she’ll see to you, little chap.”

The man spoke pleasantly, and the boy went on, feeling much cheered by the words. Through the soft spring rain that fell on sprouting grass and budding trees, Nat saw a large square house before him a hospitable-looking house, with an old-fashioned porch, wide steps, and lights shining in many windows. Neither curtains nor shutters hid the cheerful glimmer; and, pausing a moment before he rang, Nat saw many little shadows dancing on the walls, heard the pleasant hum of young voices, and felt that it was hardly possible that the light and warmth and comfort within could be for a homeless “little chap” like him.

“I hope the lady will see to me,” he thought, and gave a timid rap with the great bronze knocker, which was a jovial griffin’s head.

A rosy-faced servant-maid opened the door, and smiled as she took the letter which he silently offered. She seemed used to receiving strange boys, for she pointed to a seat in the hall, and said, with a nod:

“Sit there and drip on the mat a bit, while I take this in to missis.”

Nat found plenty to amuse him while he waited, and stared about him curiously, enjoying the view, yet glad to do so unobserved in the dusky recess by the door.

The house seemed swarming with boys, who were beguiling the rainy twilight with all sorts of amusements. There were boys everywhere, “up-stairs and down-stairs and in the lady’s chamber,” apparently, for various open doors showed pleasant groups of big boys, little boys, and middle-sized boys in all stages of evening relaxation, not to say effervescence. Two large rooms on the right were evidently schoolrooms, for desks, maps, blackboards, and books were scattered about. An open fire burned on the hearth, and several indolent lads lay on their backs before it, discussing a new cricket-ground, with such animation that their boots waved in the air. A tall youth was practising on the flute in one corner, quite undisturbed by the racket all about him. Two or three others were jumping over the desks, pausing, now and then, to get their breath and laugh at the droll sketches of a little wag who was caricaturing the whole household on a blackboard.

In the room on the left a long supper-table was seen, set forth with great pitchers of new milk, piles of brown and white bread, and perfect stacks of the shiny gingerbread so dear to boyish souls. A flavor of toast was in the air, also suggestions of baked apples, very tantalizing to one hungry little nose and stomach.

The hall, however, presented the most inviting prospect of all, for a brisk game of tag was going on in the upper entry. One landing was devoted to marbles, the other to checkers, while the stairs were occupied by a boy reading, a girl singing a lullaby to her doll, two puppies, a kitten, and a constant succession of small boys sliding down the banisters, to the great detriment of their clothes and danger to their limbs.

So absorbed did Nat become in this exciting race, that he ventured farther and farther out of his corner; and when one very lively boy came down so swiftly that he could not stop himself, but fell off the banisters, with a crash that would have broken any head but one rendered nearly as hard as a cannon-ball by eleven years of constant bumping, Nat forgot himself, and ran up to the fallen rider, expecting to find him half-dead. The boy, however, only winked rapidly for a second, then lay calmly looking up at the new face with a surprised, “Hullo!”

“Hullo!” returned Nat, not knowing what else to say, and thinking that form of reply both brief and easy.

“Are you a new boy?” asked the recumbent youth, without stirring.

“Don’t know yet.”

“What’s your name?”

“Nat Blake.”

“Mine’s Tommy Bangs. Come up and have a go, will you?” and Tommy got upon his legs like one suddenly remembering the duties of hospitality.

“Guess I won’t, till I see whether I’m going to stay or not,” returned Nat, feeling the desire to stay increase every moment.

“I say, Demi, here’s a new one. Come and see to him;” and the lively Thomas returned to his sport with unabated relish.

At his call, the boy reading on the stairs looked up with a pair of big brown eyes, and after an instant’s pause, as if a little shy, he put the book under his arm, and came soberly down to greet the new-comer, who found something very attractive in the pleasant face of this slender, mild-eyed boy.

“Have you seen Aunt Jo?” he asked, as if that was some sort of important ceremony.

“I haven’t seen anybody yet but you boys; I’m waiting,” answered Nat.

“Did Uncle Laurie send you?” proceeded Demi, politely, but gravely.

“Mr. Laurence did.”

“He is Uncle Laurie; and he always sends nice boys.”

Nat looked gratified at the remark, and smiled, in a way that made his thin face very pleasant. He did not know what to say next, so the two stood staring at one another in friendly silence, till the little girl came up with her doll in her arms. She was very like Demi, only not so tall, and had a rounder, rosier face, and blue eyes.

“This is my sister, Daisy,” announced Demi, as if presenting a rare and precious creature.

The children nodded to one another; and the little girl’s face dimpled with pleasure, as she said affably:

“I hope you’ll stay. We have such good times here; don’t we, Demi?”

“Of course, we do: that’s what Aunt Jo has Plumfield for.”

“It seems a very nice place indeed,” observed Nat, feeling that he must respond to these amiable young persons.

“It’s the nicest place in the world, isn’t it, Demi?” said Daisy, who evidently regarded her brother as authority on all subjects.

“No, I think Greenland, where the icebergs and seals are, is more interesting. But I’m fond of Plumfield, and it is a very nice place to be in,” returned Demi, who was interested just now in a book on Greenland. He was about to offer to show Nat the pictures and explain them, when the servant returned, saying with a nod toward the parlor-door:

“All right; you are to stop.”

“I’m glad; now come to Aunt Jo.” And Daisy took him by the hand with a pretty protecting air, which made Nat feel at home at once.

Demi returned to his beloved book, while his sister led the new-comer into a back room, where a stout gentleman was frolicking with two little boys on the sofa, and a thin lady was just finishing the letter which she seemed to have been re-reading.

“Here he is, aunty!” cried Daisy.

“So this is my new boy? I am glad to see you, my dear, and hope you’ll be happy here,” said the lady, drawing him to her, and stroking back the hair from his forehead with a kind hand and a motherly look, which made Nat’s lonely little heart yearn toward her.

She was not at all handsome, but she had a merry sort of face that never seemed to have forgotten certain childish ways and looks, any more than her voice and manner had; and these things, hard to describe but very plain to see and feel, made her a genial, comfortable kind of person, easy to get on with, and generally "jolly," as boys would say. She saw the little tremble of Nat's lips as she smoothed his hair, and her keen eyes grew softer, but she only drew the shabby figure nearer and said, laughing:

"I am Mother Bhaer, that gentleman is Father Bhaer, and these are the two little Bhaers. Come here, boys, and see Nat."

The three wrestlers obeyed at once; and the stout man, with a chubby child on each shoulder, came up to welcome the new boy. Rob and Teddy merely grinned at him, but Mr. Bhaer shook hands, and pointing to a low chair near the fire, said, in a cordial voice:

"There is a place all ready for thee, my son; sit down and dry thy wet feet at once."

"Wet? So they are! My dear, off with your shoes this minute, and I'll have some dry things ready for you in a jiffy," cried Mrs. Bhaer, bustling about so energetically that Nat found himself in the cosy little chair, with dry socks and warm slippers on his feet, before he would have had time to say Jack Robinson, if he had wanted to try. He said "Thank you, ma'am," instead; and said it so gratefully that Mrs. Bhaer's eyes grew soft again, and she said something merry, because she felt so tender, which was a way she had.

"There are Tommy Bangs' slippers; but he never will remember to put them on in the house; so he shall not have them. They are too big; but that's all the better; you can't run away from us so fast as if they fitted."

"I don't want to run away, ma'am." And Nat spread his grimy little hands before the comfortable blaze, with a long sigh of satisfaction.

"That's good! Now I am going to toast you well, and try to get rid of that ugly cough. How long have you had it, dear?" asked Mrs. Bhaer, as she rummaged in her big basket for a strip of flannel.

"All winter. I got cold, and it wouldn't get better, somehow."

"No wonder, living in that damp cellar with hardly a rag to his poor dear back!" said Mrs. Bhaer, in a low tone to her husband, who was looking at the boy with a skillful pair of eyes that marked the thin temples and feverish lips, as well as the hoarse voice and frequent fits of coughing that shook the bent shoulders under the patched jacket.

"Robin, my man, trot up to Nursey, and tell her to give thee the cough-bottle and the liniment," said Mr. Bhaer, after his eyes had exchanged telegrams with his wife’s.

Nat looked a little anxious at the preparations, but forgot his fears in a hearty laugh, when Mrs. Bhaer whispered to him, with a droll look:

“Hear my rogue Teddy try to cough. The syrup I’m going to give you has honey in it; and he wants some.”

Little Ted was red in the face with his exertions by the time the bottle came, and was allowed to suck the spoon after Nat had manfully taken a dose and had the bit of flannel put about his throat.

These first steps toward a cure were hardly completed when a great bell rang, and a loud tramping through the hall announced supper. Bashful Nat quaked at the thought of meeting many strange boys, but Mrs. Bhaer held out her hand to him, and Rob said, patronizingly, “Don’t be ‘fraid; I’ll take care of you.”

Twelve boys, six on a side, stood behind their chairs, prancing with impatience to begin, while the tall flute-playing youth was trying to curb their ardor. But no one sat down till Mrs. Bhaer was in her place behind the teapot, with Teddy on her left, and Nat on her right.

“This is our new boy, Nat Blake. After supper you can say how do you do? Gently, boys, gently.”

As she spoke every one stared at Nat, and then whisked into their seats, trying to be orderly and failing utterly. The Bhaers did their best to have the lads behave well at meal times, and generally succeeded pretty well, for their rules were few and sensible, and the boys, knowing that they tried to make things easy and happy, did their best to obey. But there are times when hungry boys cannot be repressed without real cruelty, and Saturday evening, after a half-holiday, was one of those times.

“Dear little souls, do let them have one day in which they can howl and racket and frolic to their hearts’ content. A holiday isn’t a holiday without plenty of freedom and fun; and they shall have full swing once a week,” Mrs. Bhaer used to say, when prim people wondered why banister-sliding, pillow-fights, and all manner of jovial games were allowed under the once decorous roof of Plumfield.

It did seem at times as if the aforesaid roof was in danger of flying off, but it never did, for a word from Father Bhaer could at any time produce a lull, and the lads had learned that liberty must not be abused. So, in spite of many dark predictions, the school flourished, and manners and morals were insinuated, without the pupils exactly knowing how it was done.

Nat found himself very well off behind the tall pitchers, with Tommy Bangs just around the corner, and Mrs. Bhaer close by to fill up plate and mug as fast as he could empty them.

“Who is that boy next the girl down at the other end?” whispered Nat to his young neighbor under cover of a general laugh.

"That's Demi Brooke. Mr. Bhaer is his uncle."

"What a queer name!"

"His real name is John, but they call him Demi-John, because his father is John too. That's a joke, don't you see?" said Tommy, kindly explaining. Nat did not see, but politely smiled, and asked, with interest:

"Isn't he a very nice boy?"

"I bet you he is; knows lots and reads like any thing."

"Who is the fat one next him?"

"Oh, that's Stuffy Cole. His name is George, but we call him Stuffy 'cause he eats so much. The little fellow next Father Bhaer is his boy Rob, and then there's big Franz his nephew; he teaches some, and kind of sees to us."

"He plays the flute, doesn't he?" asked Nat as Tommy rendered himself speechless by putting a whole baked apple into his mouth at one blow.

Tommy nodded, and said, sooner than one would have imagined possible under the circumstances, "Oh, don't he, though? And we dance sometimes, and do gymnastics to music. I like a drum myself, and mean to learn as soon as ever I can."

"I like a fiddle best; I can play one too," said Nat, getting confidential on this attractive subject.

"Can you?" and Tommy stared over the rim of his mug with round eyes, full of interest. "Mr. Bhaer's got an old fiddle, and he'll let you play on it if you want to."

"Could I? Oh, I would like it ever so much. You see, I used to go round fiddling with my father, and another man, till he died."

"Wasn't that fun?" cried Tommy, much impressed.

"No, it was horrid; so cold in winter, and hot in summer. And I got tired; and they were cross sometimes; and I didn't get enough to eat." Nat paused to take a generous bite of gingerbread, as if to assure himself that the hard times were over; and then he added regretfully: "But I did love my little fiddle, and I miss it. Nicolo took it away when father died, and wouldn't have me any longer, 'cause I was sick."

"You'll belong to the band if you play good. See if you don't."

"Do you have a band here?" Nat's eyes sparkled.

"Guess we do; a jolly band, all boys; and they have concerts and things. You just see what happens to-morrow night."

After this pleasantly exciting remark, Tommy returned to his supper, and Nat sank into a blissful reverie over his full plate.

Mrs. Bhaer had heard all they said, while apparently absorbed in filling mugs, and overseeing little Ted, who was so sleepy that he put his spoon in his eye, nodded like a rosy poppy, and finally fell fast asleep, with his cheek pillowed on a soft bun. Mrs. Bhaer had put Nat next to Tommy, because that roly-poly boy had a frank and social way with him, very attractive to shy persons. Nat felt this, and had made several small confidences during supper, which gave Mrs. Bhaer the key to the new boy's character, better than if she had talked to him herself.

In the letter which Mr. Laurence had sent with Nat, he had said:

"DEAR JO: Here is a case after your own heart. This poor lad is an orphan now, sick and friendless. He has been a street-musician; and I found him in a cellar, mourning for his dead father, and his lost violin. I think there is something in him, and have a fancy that between us we may give this little man a lift. You cure his overtasked body, Fritz help his neglected mind, and when he is ready I'll see if he is a genius or only a boy with a talent which may earn his bread for him. Give him a trial, for the sake of your own boy,

"TEDDY."

"Of course we will!" cried Mrs. Bhaer, as she read the letter; and when she saw Nat she felt at once that, whether he was a genius or not, here was a lonely, sick boy who needed just what she loved to give, a home and motherly care. Both she and Mr. Bhaer observed him quietly; and in spite of ragged clothes, awkward manners, and a dirty face, they saw much about Nat that pleased them. He was a thin, pale boy, of twelve, with blue eyes, and a good forehead under the rough, neglected hair; an anxious, scared face, at times, as if he expected hard words, or blows; and a sensitive mouth that trembled when a kind glance fell on him; while a gentle speech called up a look of gratitude, very sweet to see. "Bless the poor dear, he shall fiddle all day long if he likes," said Mrs. Bhaer to herself, as she saw the eager, happy expression on his face when Tommy talked of the band.

So, after supper, when the lads flocked into the schoolroom for more "high jinks," Mrs. Jo appeared with a violin in her hand, and after a word with her husband, went to Nat, who sat in a corner watching the scene with intense interest.

"Now, my lad, give us a little tune. We want a violin in our band, and I think you will do it nicely."

She expected that he would hesitate; but he seized the old fiddle at once, and handled it with such loving care, it was plain to see that music was his passion.

"I'll do the best I can, ma'am," was all he said; and then drew the bow across the strings, as if eager to hear the dear notes again.

There was a great clatter in the room, but as if deaf to any sounds but those he made, Nat played softly to himself, forgetting every thing in his delight. It was only a simple Negro melody, such as street-musicians play, but it caught the ears of the boys at once, and silenced them, till they stood listening with surprise and pleasure. Gradually they got nearer and nearer, and Mr. Bhaer came up to watch the boy; for, as if he was in his element now, Nat played away and never minded any one, while his eyes shone, his cheeks reddened, and his thin fingers flew, as he hugged the old fiddle and made it speak to all their hearts the language that he loved.

A hearty round of applause rewarded him better than a shower of pennies, when he stopped and glanced about him, as if to say:

"I've done my best; please like it."

"I say, you do that first rate," cried Tommy, who considered Nat his protege.

"You shall be the first fiddle in my band," added Franz, with an approving smile.

Mrs. Bhaer whispered to her husband:

"Teddy is right: there's something in the child." And Mr. Bhaer nodded his head emphatically, as he clapped Nat on the shoulder, saying, heartily:

"You play well, my son. Come now and play something which we can sing."

It was the proudest, happiest minute of the poor boy's life when he was led to the place of honor by the piano, and the lads gathered round, never heeding his poor clothes, but eying him respectfully and waiting eagerly to hear him play again.

They chose a song he knew; and after one or two false starts they got going, and violin, flute, and piano led a chorus of boyish voices that made the old roof ring again. It was too much for Nat, more feeble than he knew; and as the final shout died away, his face began to work, he dropped the fiddle, and turning to the wall sobbed like a little child.

"My dear, what is it?" asked Mrs. Bhaer, who had been singing with all her might, and trying to keep little Rob from beating time with his boots.

"You are all so kind and it's so beautiful I can't help it," sobbed Nat, coughing till he was breathless.

"Come with me, dear; you must go to bed and rest; you are worn out, and this is too noisy a place for you," whispered Mrs. Bhaer; and took him away to her own parlor, where she let him cry himself quiet.

Then she won him to tell her all his troubles, and listened to the little story with tears in her own eyes, though it was not a new one to her.

"My child, you have got a father and a mother now, and this is home. Don't think of those sad times any more, but get well and happy; and be sure you shall never suffer again, if we can help it. This place is made for all sorts of boys to have a good time in, and to learn how to help themselves and be useful men, I hope. You shall have as much music as you want, only you must get strong first. Now come up to Nursey and have a bath, and then go to bed, and to-morrow we will lay some nice little plans together.”

Nat held her hand fast in his, but had not a word to say, and let his grateful eyes speak for him, as Mrs. Bhaer led him up to a big room, where they found a stout German woman with a face so round and cheery that it looked like a sort of sun, with the wide frill of her cap for rays.

“This is Nursey Hummel, and she will give you a nice bath, and cut your hair, and make you all ‘comfy,’ as Rob says. That’s the bath-room in there; and on Saturday nights we scrub all the little lads first, and pack them away in bed before the big ones get through singing. Now then, Rob, in with you.”

As she talked, Mrs. Bhaer had whipped off Rob’s clothes and popped him into a long bath-tub in the little room opening into the nursery.

There were two tubs, besides foot-baths, basins, douche-pipes, and all manner of contrivances for cleanliness. Nat was soon luxuriating in the other bath; and while simmering there, he watched the performances of the two women, who scrubbed, clean night-gowned, and bundled into bed four or five small boys, who, of course, cut up all sorts of capers during the operation, and kept every one in a gale of merriment till they were extinguished in their beds.

By the time Nat was washed and done up in a blanket by the fire, while Nursey cut his hair, a new detachment of boys arrived and were shut into the bath-room, where they made as much splashing and noise as a school of young whales at play.

“Nat had better sleep here, so that if his cough troubles him in the night you can see that he takes a good draught of flax-seed tea,” said Mrs. Bhaer, who was flying about like a distracted hen with a large brood of lively ducklings.

Nursey approved the plan, finished Nat off with a flannel night-gown, a drink of something warm and sweet, and then tucked him into one of the three little beds standing in the room, where he lay looking like a contented mummy and feeling that nothing more in the way of luxury could be offered him. Cleanliness in itself was a new and delightful sensation; flannel gowns were unknown comforts in his world; sips of “good stuff” soothed his cough as pleasantly as kind words did his lonely heart; and the feeling that somebody cared for him made that plain room seem a sort of heaven to the homeless child. It was like a cosy dream; and he often shut his eyes to see if it would not vanish when he opened them again. It was too pleasant to let him sleep, and he could not have done so if he had tried, for in a few minutes one of the peculiar institutions of Plumfield was revealed to his astonished but appreciative eyes.

A momentary lull in the aquatic exercises was followed by the sudden appearance of pillows flying in all directions, hurled by white goblins, who came rioting out of their beds. The battle raged in several rooms, all down the upper hall, and even surged at intervals into the nursery, when some hard-pressed warrior took refuge there. No one seemed to mind this explosion in the least; no one forbade it, or even looked surprised. Nursey went on hanging up towels, and Mrs. Bhaer laid out clean clothes, as calmly as if the most perfect order reigned. Nay, she even chased one daring boy out of the room, and fired after him the pillow he had slyly thrown at her.

"Won't they hurt 'em?" asked Nat, who lay laughing with all his might.

"Oh dear, no! We always allow one pillow-fight Saturday night. The cases are changed to-morrow; and it gets up a glow after the boys' baths; so I rather like it myself," said Mrs. Bhaer, busy again among her dozen pairs of socks.

"What a very nice school this is!" observed Nat, in a burst of admiration.

"It's an odd one," laughed Mrs. Bhaer, "but you see we don't believe in making children miserable by too many rules, and too much study. I forbade night-gown parties at first; but, bless you, it was of no use. I could no more keep those boys in their beds than so many jacks in the box. So I made an agreement with them: I was to allow a fifteen-minute pillow-fight every Saturday night; and they promised to go properly to bed every other night. I tried it, and it worked well. If they don't keep their word, no frolic; if they do, I just turn the glasses round, put the lamps in safe places, and let them rampage as much as they like."

"It's a beautiful plan," said Nat, feeling that he should like to join in the fray, but not venturing to propose it the first night. So he lay enjoying the spectacle, which certainly was a lively one.

Tommy Bangs led the assailing party, and Demi defended his own room with a dogged courage fine to see, collecting pillows behind him as fast as they were thrown, till the besiegers were out of ammunition, when they would charge upon him in a body, and recover their arms. A few slight accidents occurred, but nobody minded, and gave and took sounding thwacks with perfect good humor, while pillows flew like big snowflakes, till Mrs. Bhaer looked at her watch, and called out:

"Time is up, boys. Into bed, every man jack, or pay the forfeit!"

"What is the forfeit?" asked Nat, sitting up in his eagerness to know what happened to those wretches who disobeyed this most peculiar, but public-spirited school-ma'am.

"Lose their fun next time," answered Mrs. Bhaer. "I give them five minutes to settle down, then put out the lights, and expect order. They are honorable lads, and they keep their word."

That was evident, for the battle ended as abruptly as it began a parting shot or two, a final cheer, as Demi fired the seventh pillow at the retiring foe, a few challenges for next time, then order prevailed. And nothing but an occasional giggle or a suppressed whisper broke the quiet which followed the Saturday-night frolic, as Mother Bhaer kissed her new boy and left him to happy dreams of life at Plumfield.

CHAPTER II. THE BOYS

While Nat takes a good long sleep, I will tell my little readers something about the boys, among whom he found himself when he woke up.

To begin with our old friends. Franz was a tall lad, of sixteen now, a regular German, big, blond, and bookish, also very domestic, amiable, and musical. His uncle was fitting him for college, and his aunt for a happy home of his own hereafter, because she carefully fostered in him gentle manners, love of children, respect for women, old and young, and helpful ways about the house. He was her right-hand man on all occasions, steady, kind, and patient; and he loved his merry aunt like a mother, for such she had tried to be to him.

Emil was quite different, being quick-tempered, restless, and enterprising, bent on going to sea, for the blood of the old vikings stirred in his veins, and could not be tamed. His uncle promised that he should go when he was sixteen, and set him to studying navigation, gave him stories of good and famous admirals and heroes to read, and let him lead the life of a frog in river, pond, and brook, when lessons were done. His room looked like the cabin of a man-of-war, for every thing was nautical, military, and shipshape. Captain Kyd was his delight, and his favorite amusement was to rig up like that piratical gentleman, and roar out sanguinary sea-songs at the top of his voice. He would dance nothing but sailors' hornpipes, rolled in his gait, and was as nautical in conversation to his uncle would permit. The boys called him "Commodore," and took great pride in his fleet, which whitened the pond and suffered disasters that would have daunted any commander but a sea-struck boy.

Demi was one of the children who show plainly the effect of intelligent love and care, for soul and body worked harmoniously together. The natural refinement which nothing but home influence can teach, gave him sweet and simple manners: his mother had cherished an innocent and loving heart in him; his father had watched over the physical growth of his boy, and kept the little body straight and strong on wholesome food and exercise and sleep, while Grandpa March cultivated the little mind with the tender wisdom of a modern Pythagoras, not tasking it with long, hard lessons, parrot-learned, but helping it to unfold as naturally and beautifully as sun and dew help roses bloom. He was not a perfect child, by any means, but his faults were of the better sort; and being early taught the secret of self-control, he was not left at the mercy of appetites and passions, as some poor little mortals are, and then punished for yielding to the temptations against which they have no armor. A quiet, quaint boy was Demi, serious, yet cheery, quite unconscious that he was unusually bright and beautiful, yet quick to see and love intelligence or beauty in other children. Very fond of books, and full of lively fancies, born of a strong imagination and a spiritual nature, these traits made his parents anxious to balance them with useful knowledge and healthful society, lest they should make him one of those pale precocious children who amaze and delight a family sometimes, and fade away like hot-house flowers, because the young soul blooms too soon, and has not a hearty body to root it firmly in the wholesome soil of this world.

So Demi was transplanted to Plumfield, and took so kindly to the life there, that Meg and John and Grandpa felt satisfied that they had done well. Mixing with other boys brought out the practical side of him, roused his spirit, and brushed away the pretty cobwebs he was so fond of spinning in that little brain of his. To be sure, he rather shocked his mother when he came home, by banging doors, saying “by George” emphatically, and demanding tall thick boots “that clumped like papa’s.” But John rejoiced over him, laughed at his explosive remarks, got the boots, and said contentedly,

“He is doing well; so let him clump. I want my son to be a manly boy, and this temporary roughness won’t hurt him. We can polish him up by and by; and as for learning, he will pick that up as pigeons do peas. So don’t hurry him.”

Daisy was as sunshiny and charming as ever, with all sorts of womanlinesses budding in her, for she was like her gentle mother, and delighted in domestic things. She had a family of dolls, whom she brought up in the most exemplary manner; she could not get on without her little work-basket and bits of sewing, which she did so nicely, that Demi frequently pulled out his handkerchief display her neat stitches, and Baby Josy had a flannel petticoat beautifully made by Sister Daisy. She like to quiddle about the china-closet, prepare the salt-cellars, put the spoons straight on the table; and every day went round the parlor with her brush, dusting chairs and tables. Demi called her a “Betty,” but was very glad to have her keep his things in order, lend him her nimble fingers in all sorts of work, and help him with his lessons, for they kept abreast there, and had no thought of rivalry.

The love between them was as strong as ever; and no one could laugh Demi out of his affectionate ways with Daisy. He fought her battles valiantly, and never could understand why boys should be ashamed to say “right out,” that they loved their sisters. Daisy adored her twin, thought “my brother” the most remarkable boy in the world, and every morning, in her little wrapper, trotted to tap at his door with a motherly “Get up, my dear, it’s ‘most breakfast time; and here’s your clean collar.”

Rob was an energetic morsel of a boy, who seemed to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, for he never was still. Fortunately, he was not mischievous, nor very brave; so he kept out of trouble pretty well, and vibrated between father and mother like an affectionate little pendulum with a lively tick, for Rob was a chatterbox.

Teddy was too young to play a very important part in the affairs of Plumfield, yet he had his little sphere, and filled it beautifully. Every one felt the need of a pet at times, and Baby was always ready to accommodate, for kissing and cuddling suited him excellently. Mrs. Jo seldom stirred without him; so he had his little finger in all the domestic pies, and every one found them all the better for it, for they believed in babies at Plumfield.

Dick Brown, and Adolphus or Dolly Pettingill, were two eight year-olds. Dolly stuttered badly, but was gradually getting over it, for no one was allowed to mock him and Mr. Bhaer tried to cure it, by making him talk slowly. Dolly was a good little lad, quite uninteresting and ordinary, but he flourished here, and went through his daily duties and pleasures with placid content and propriety.

Dick Brown’s affliction was a crooked back, yet he bore his burden so cheerfully, that Demi once asked in his queer way, “Do humps make people good-natured? I’d like one if they do.” Dick was always merry, and did his best to be like other boys, for a plucky spirit lived in the feeble little body. When he first came, he was very sensitive about his misfortune, but soon learned to forget it, for no one dared remind him of it, after Mr. Bhaer had punished one boy for laughing at him.

“God don’t care; for my soul is straight if my back isn’t,” sobbed Dick to his tormentor on that occasion; and, by cherishing this idea, the Bhaers soon led him to believe that people also loved his soul, and did not mind his body, except to pity and help him to bear it.

Playing menagerie once with the others, some one said,

“What animal will you be, Dick?”

“Oh, I’m the dromedary; don’t you see the hump on my back?” was the laughing answer.

“So you are, my nice little one that don’t carry loads, but marches by the elephant first in the procession,” said Demi, who was arranging the spectacle.

“I hope others will be as kind to the poor dear as my boys have learned to be,” said Mrs. Jo, quite satisfied with the success of her teaching, as Dick ambled past her, looking like a very happy, but a very feeble little dromedary, beside stout Stuffy, who did the elephant with ponderous propriety.

Jack Ford was a sharp, rather a sly lad, who was sent to this school, because it was cheap. Many men would have thought him a smart boy, but Mr. Bhaer did not like his way of illustrating that Yankee word, and thought his unboyish keenness and money-loving as much of an affliction as Dolly's stutter, or Dick's hump.

Ned Barker was like a thousand other boys of fourteen, all legs, blunder, and bluster. Indeed the family called him the "Blunderbuss," and always expected to see him tumble over the chairs, bump against the tables, and knock down any small articles near him. He bragged a good deal about what he could do, but seldom did any thing to prove it, was not brave, and a little given to tale-telling. He was apt to bully the small boys, and flatter the big ones, and without being at all bad, was just the sort of fellow who could very easily be led astray.

George Cole had been spoilt by an over-indulgent mother, who stuffed him with sweetmeats till he was sick, and then thought him too delicate to study, so that at twelve years old, he was a pale, puffy boy, dull, fretful, and lazy. A friend persuaded her to send him to Plumfield, and there he soon got waked up, for sweet things were seldom allowed, much exercise required, and study made so pleasant, that Stuffy was gently lured along, till he quite amazed his anxious mamma by his improvement, and convinced her that there was really something remarkable in Plumfield air.

Billy Ward was what the Scotch tenderly call an "innocent," for though thirteen years old, he was like a child of six. He had been an unusually intelligent boy, and his father had hurried him on too fast, giving him all sorts of hard lessons, keeping at his books six hours a day, and expecting him to absorb knowledge as a Strasburg goose does the food crammed down its throat. He thought he was doing his duty, but he nearly killed the boy, for a fever gave the poor child a sad holiday, and when he recovered, the overtasked brain gave out, and Billy's mind was like a slate over which a sponge has passed, leaving it blank.

It was a terrible lesson to his ambitious father; he could not bear the sight of his promising child, changed to a feeble idiot, and he sent him away to Plumfield, scarcely hoping that he could be helped, but sure that he would be kindly treated. Quite docile and harmless was Billy, and it was pitiful to see how hard he tried to learn, as if groping dimly after the lost knowledge which had cost him so much.

Day after day, he pored over the alphabet, proudly said A and B, and thought that he knew them, but on the morrow they were gone, and all the work was to be done over again. Mr. Bhaer had infinite patience with him, and kept on in spite of the apparent hopelessness of the task, not caring for book lessons, but trying gently to clear away the mists from the darkened mind, and give it back intelligence enough to make the boy less a burden and an affliction.

Mrs. Bhaer strengthened his health by every aid she could invent, and the boys all pitied and were kind to him. He did not like their active plays, but would sit for hours watching the doves, would dig holes for Teddy till even that ardent grubber was satisfied, or follow Silas, the man, from place to place seeing him work, for honest Si was very good to him, and though he forgot his letters Billy remembered friendly faces.

Tommy Bangs was the scapegrace of the school, and the most trying scapegrace that ever lived. As full of mischief as a monkey, yet so good-hearted that one could not help forgiving his tricks; so scatter-brained that words went by him like the wind, yet so penitent for every misdeed, that it was impossible to keep sober when he vowed tremendous vows of reformation, or proposed all sorts of queer punishments to be inflicted upon himself. Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer lived in a state of preparation for any mishap, from the breaking of Tommy's own neck, to the blowing up of the entire family with gunpowder; and Nursey had a particular drawer in which she kept bandages, plasters, and salves for his especial use, for Tommy was always being brought in half dead; but nothing ever killed him, and he arose from every downfall with redoubled vigor.

The first day he came, he chopped the top off one finger in the hay-cutter, and during the week, fell from the shed roof, was chased by an angry hen who tried to pick his out because he examined her chickens, got run away with, and had his ears boxed violent by Asia, who caught him luxuriously skimming a pan of cream with half a stolen pie. Undaunted, however, by any failures or rebuffs, this indomitable youth went on amusing himself with all sorts of tricks till no one felt safe. If he did not know his lessons, he always had some droll excuse to offer, and as he was usually clever at his books, and as bright as a button in composing answers when he did not know them, he go on pretty well at school. But out of school, Ye gods and little fishes! how Tommy did carouse!

He wound fat Asia up in her own clothes line against the post, and left here there to fume and scold for half an hour one busy Monday morning. He dropped a hot cent down Mary Ann's back as that pretty maid was waiting at table one day when there were gentlemen to dinner, whereat the poor girl upset the soup and rushed out of the room in dismay, leaving the family to think that she had gone mad. He fixed a pail of water up in a tree, with a bit of ribbon fastened to the handle, and when Daisy, attracted by the gay streamer, tried to pull it down, she got a douche bath that spoiled her clean frock and hurt her little feelings very much. He put rough white pebbles in the sugar-bowl when his grandmother came to tea, and the poor old lady wondered why they didn't melt in her cup, but was too polite to say anything. He passed around snuff in church so that five of the boys sneezed with such violence they had to go out. He dug paths in winter time, and then privately watered them so that people should tumble down. He drove poor Silas nearly wild by hanging his big boots in conspicuous places, for his feet were enormous, and he was very much ashamed of them. He persuaded confiding little Dolly to tie a thread to one of his loose teeth, and leave the string hanging from his mouth when he went to sleep, so that Tommy could pull it out without his feeling the dreaded operation. But the tooth wouldn't come at the first tweak, and poor Dolly woke up in great anguish of spirit, and lost all faith in Tommy from that day forth.

The last prank had been to give the hens bread soaked in rum, which made them tipsy and scandalized all the other fowls, for the respectable old biddies went staggering about, pecking and clucking in the most maudlin manner, while the family were convulsed with laughter at their antics, till Daisy took pity on them and shut them up in the hen-house to sleep off their intoxication.

These were the boys and they lived together as happy as twelve lads could, studying and playing, working and squabbling, fighting faults and cultivating virtues in the good old-fashioned way. Boys at other schools probably learned more from books, but less of that better wisdom which makes good men. Latin, Greek, and mathematics were all very well, but in Professor Bhaer's opinion, self knowledge, self-help, and self-control were more important, and he tried to teach them carefully. People shook their heads sometimes at his ideas, even while they owned that the boys improved wonderfully in manners and morals. But then, as Mrs. Jo said to Nat, "it was an odd school."

CHAPTER III. SUNDAY

The moment the bell rang next morning Nat flew out of bed, and dressed himself with great satisfaction in the suit of clothes he found on the chair. They were not new, being half-worn garments of one of the well-to-do boys; but Mrs. Bhaer kept all such cast-off feathers for the picked robins who strayed into her nest. They were hardly on when Tommy appeared in a high state of clean collar, and escorted Nat down to breakfast.

The sun was shining into the dining-room on the well-spread table, and the flock of hungry, hearty lads who gathered round it. Nat observed that they were much more orderly than they had been the night before, and every one stood silently behind his chair while little Rob, standing beside his father at the head of the table, folded his hands, reverently bent his curly head, and softly repeated a short grace in the devout German fashion, which Mr. Bhaer loved and taught his little son to honor. Then they all sat down to enjoy the Sunday-morning breakfast of coffee, steak, and baked potatoes, instead of the bread and milk fare with which they usually satisfied their young appetites. There was much pleasant talk while the knives and forks rattled briskly, for certain Sunday lessons were to be learned, the Sunday walk settled, and plans for the week discussed. As he listened, Nat thought it seemed as if this day must be a very pleasant one, for he loved quiet, and there was a cheerful sort of hush over every thing that pleased him very much; because, in spite of his rough life, the boy possessed the sensitive nerves which belong to a music-loving nature.

"Now, my lads, get your morning jobs done, and let me find you ready for church when the 'bus comes round," said Father Bhaer, and set the example by going into the school-room to get books ready for the morrow.

Every one scattered to his or her task, for each had some little daily duty, and was expected to perform it faithfully. Some brought wood and water, brushed the steps, or ran errands for Mrs. Bhaer. Others fed the pet animals, and did chores about the barn with Franz. Daisy washed the cups, and Demi wiped them, for the twins liked to work together, and Demi had been taught to make himself useful in the little house at home. Even Baby Teddy had his small job to do, and trotted to and fro, putting napkins away, and pushing chairs into their places. For half and hour the lads buzzed about like a hive of bees, then the 'bus drove round, Father Bhaer and Franz with the eight older boys piled in, and away they went for a three-mile drive to church in town.

Because of the troublesome cough Nat prefered to stay at home with the four small boys, and spent a happy morning in Mrs. Bhaer’s room, listening to the stories she read them, learning the hymns she taught them, and then quietly employing himself pasting pictures into an old ledger.

“This is my Sunday closet,” she said, showing him shelves filled with picture-books, paint-boxes, architectural blocks, little diaries, and materials for letter-writing. “I want my boys to love Sunday, to find it a peaceful, pleasant day, when they can rest from common study and play, yet enjoy quiet pleasures, and learn, in simple ways, lessons more important than any taught in school. Do you understand me?” she asked, watching Nat’s attentive face.

“You mean to be good?” he said, after hesitating a minute.

“Yes; to be good, and to love to be good. It is hard work sometimes, I know very well; but we all help one another, and so we get on. This is one of the ways in which I try to help my boys,” and she took down a thick book, which seemed half-full of writing, and opened at a page on which there was one word at the top.

“Why, that’s my name!” cried Nat, looking both surprised and interested.

“Yes; I have a page for each boy. I keep a little account of how he gets on through the week, and Sunday night I show him the record. If it is bad I am sorry and disappointed, if it is good I am glad and proud; but, whichever it is, the boys know I want to help them, and they try to do their best for love of me and Father Bhaer.”

“I should think they would,” said Nat, catching a glimpse of Tommy’s name opposite his own, and wondering what was written under it.

Mrs. Bhaer saw his eye on the words, and shook her head, saying, as she turned a leaf,

“No, I don’t show my records to any but the one to whom each belongs. I call this my conscience book; and only you and I will ever know what is to be written on the page below your name. Whether you will be pleased or ashamed to read it next Sunday depends on yourself. I think it will be a good report; at any rate, I shall try to make things easy for you in this new place, and shall be quite contented if you keep our few rules, live happily with the boys, and learn something.”

“I’ll try ma’am;” and Nat’s thin face flushed up with the earnestness of his desire to make Mrs. Bhaer “glad and proud,” not “sorry and disappointed.” “It must be a great deal of trouble to write about so many,” he added, as she shut her book with an encouraging pat on the shoulder.

“Not to me, for I really don’t know which I like best, writing or boys,” she said, laughing to see Nat stare with astonishment at the last item. “Yes, I know many people think boys are a nuisance, but that is because they don't understand them. I do; and I never saw the boy yet whom I could not get on capitally with after I had once found the soft spot in his heart. Bless me, I couldn't get on at all without my flock of dear, noisy, naughty, harum-scarum little lads, could I, my Teddy?" and Mrs. Bhaer hugged the young rogue, just in time to save the big inkstand from going into his pocket.

Nat, who had never heard anything like this before, really did not know whether Mother Bhaer was a trifle crazy, or the most delightful woman he had ever met. He rather inclined to the latter opinion, in spite of her peculiar tastes, for she had a way of filling up a fellow's plate before he asked, of laughing at his jokes, gently tweaking him by the ear, or clapping him on the shoulder, that Nat found very engaging.

"Now, I think you would like to go into the school-room and practise some of the hymns we are to sing to-night," she said, rightly guessing the thing of all others that he wanted to do.

Alone with the beloved violin and the music-book propped up before him in the sunny window, while Spring beauty filled the world outside, and Sabbath silence reigned within, Nat enjoyed an hour or two of genuine happiness, learning the sweet old tunes, and forgetting the hard past in the cheerful present.

When the church-goers came back and dinner was over, every one read, wrote letters home, said their Sunday lessons, or talked quietly to one another, sitting here and there about the house. At three o'clock the entire family turned out to walk, for all the active young bodies must have exercise; and in these walks the active young minds were taught to see and love the providence of God in the beautiful miracles which Nature was working before their eyes. Mr. Bhaer always went with them, and in his simple, fatherly way, found for his flock, "Sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in everything."

Mrs. Bhaer with Daisy and her own two boys drove into town, to pay the weekly visit to Grandma, which was busy Mother Bhaer's one holiday and greatest pleasure. Nat was not strong enough for the long walk, and asked to stay at home with Tommy, who kindly offered to do the honors of Plumfield. "You've seen the house, so come out and have a look at the garden, and the barn, and the menagerie," said Tommy, when they were left alone with Asia, to see that they didn't get into mischief; for, though Tommy was one of the best-meaning boys who ever adorned knickerbockers, accidents of the most direful nature were always happening to him, no one could exactly tell how.

"What is your menagerie?" asked Nat, as they trotted along the drive that encircled the house.

"We all have pets, you see, and we keep 'em in the corn-barn, and call it the menagerie. Here you are. Isn't my guinea-pig a beauty?" and Tommy proudly presented one of the ugliest specimens of that pleasing animal that Nat ever saw.

"I know a boy with a dozen of 'em, and he said he'd give me one, only I hadn't any place to keep it, so I couldn't have it. It was white, with black spots, a regular rouser, and maybe I could get it for you if you'd like it," said Nat, feeling it would be a delicate return for Tommy's attentions.

"I'd like it ever so much, and I'll give you this one, and they can live together if they don't fight. Those white mice are Rob's, Franz gave 'em to him. The rabbits are Ned's, and the bantams outside are Stuffy's. That box thing is Demi's turtle-tank, only he hasn't begun to get 'em yet. Last year he had sixty-two, whackers some of 'em. He stamped one of 'em with his name and the year, and let it go; and he says maybe he will find it ever so long after and know it. He read about a turtle being found that had a mark on it that showed it must be hundreds of years old. Demi's such a funny chap."

"What is in this box?" asked Nat, stopping before a large deep one, half-full of earth.

"Oh, that's Jack Ford's worm-shop. He digs heaps of 'em and keeps 'em here, and when we want any to go afishing with, we buy some of him. It saves lots of trouble, only he charged too much for 'em. Why, last time we traded I had to pay two cents a dozen, and then got little ones. Jack's mean sometimes, and I told him I'd dig for myself if he didn't lower his prices. Now, I own two hens, those gray ones with top knots, first-rate ones they are too, and I sell Mrs. Bhaer the eggs, but I never ask her more than twenty-five cents a dozen, never! I'd be ashamed to do it," cried Tommy, with a glance of scorn at the worm-shop.

"Who owns the dogs?" asked Nat, much interested in these commercial transactions, and feeling that T. Bangs was a man whom it would be a privilege and a pleasure to patronize.

"The big dog is Emil's. His name is Christopher Columbus. Mrs. Bhaer named him because she likes to say Christopher Columbus, and no one minds it if she means the dog," answered Tommy, in the tone of a show-man displaying his menagerie. "The white pup is Rob's, and the yellow one is Teddy's. A man was going to drown them in our pond, and Pa Bhaer wouldn't let him. They do well enough for the little chaps, I don't think much of 'em myself. Their names are Castor and Pollux."

"I'd like Toby the donkey best, if I could have anything, it's so nice to ride, and he's so little and good," said Nat, remembering the weary tramps he had taken on his own tired feet.

"Mr. Laurie sent him out to Mrs. Bhaer, so she shouldn't carry Teddy on her back when we go to walk. We're all fond of Toby, and he's a first-rate donkey, sir. Those pigeons belong to the whole lot of us, we each have our pet one, and go shares in all the little ones as they come along. Squabs are great fun; there ain’t any now, but you can go up and take a look at the old fellows, while I see if Cockletop and Granny have laid any eggs.”

Nat climbed up a ladder, put his head through a trap door and took a long look at the pretty doves billing and cooing in their spacious loft. Some on their nests, some bustling in and out, and some sitting at their doors, while many went flying from the sunny housetop to the straw-strewn farmyard, where six sleek cows were placidly ruminating.

“Everybody has got something but me. I wish I had a dove, or a hen, or even a turtle, all my own,” thought Nat, feeling very poor as he saw the interesting treasures of the other boys. “How do you get these things?” he asked, when he joined Tommy in the barn.

“We find ‘em or buy ‘em, or folks give ‘em to us. My father sends me mine; but as soon as I get egg money enough, I’m going to buy a pair of ducks. There’s a nice little pond for ‘em behind the barn, and people pay well for duck-eggs, and the little duckies are pretty, and it’s fun to see ‘em swim,” said Tommy, with the air of a millionaire.

Nat sighed, for he had neither father nor money, nothing in the wide world but an old empty pocketbook, and the skill that lay in his ten finger tips. Tommy seemed to understand the question and the sigh which followed his answer, for after a moment of deep thought, he suddenly broke out,

“Look here, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. If you will hunt eggs for me, I hate it, I’ll give you one egg out of every dozen. You keep account, and when you’ve had twelve, Mother Bhaer will give you twenty-five cents for ‘em, and then you can buy what you like, don’t you see?”

“I’ll do it! What a kind feller you are, Tommy!” cried Nat, quite dazzled by this brilliant offer.

“Pooh! that is not anything. You begin now and rummage the barn, and I’ll wait here for you. Granny is cackling, so you’re sure to find one somewhere,” and Tommy threw himself down on the hay with a luxurious sense of having made a good bargain, and done a friendly thing.

Nat joyfully began his search, and went rustling from loft to loft till he found two fine eggs, one hidden under a beam, and the other in an old peck measure, which Mrs. Cockletop had appropriated.

“You may have one and I’ll have the other, that will just make up my last dozen, and to-morrow we’ll start fresh. Here, you chalk your accounts up near mine, and then we’ll be all straight,” said Tommy, showing a row of mysterious figures on the side of an old winnowing machine.

With a delightful sense of importance, the proud possessor of one egg opened his account with his friend, who laughingly wrote above the figures these imposing words,

"T. Bangs & Co."

Poor Nat found them so fascinating that he was with difficulty persuaded to go and deposit his first piece of portable property in Asia's store-room. Then they went on again, and having made the acquaintance of the two horses, six cows, three pigs, and one Alderney "Bossy," as calves are called in New England, Tommy took Nat to a certain old willow-tree that overhung a noisy little brook. From the fence it was an easy scramble into a wide niche between the three big branches, which had been cut off to send out from year to year a crowd of slender twigs, till a green canopy rustled overhead. Here little seats had been fixed, and a hollow place a closet made big enough to hold a book or two, a dismantled boat, and several half-finished whistles.

"This is Demi's and my private place; we made it, and nobody can come up unless we let 'em, except Daisy, we don't mind her," said Tommy, as Nat looked with delight from the babbling brown water below to the green arch above, where bees were making a musical murmur as they feasted on the long yellow blossoms that filled the air with sweetness.

"Oh, it's just beautiful!" cried Nat. "I do hope you'll let me up sometimes. I never saw such a nice place in all my life. I'd like to be a bird, and live here always."

"It is pretty nice. You can come if Demi don't mind, and I guess he won't, because he said last night that he liked you."

"Did he?" and Nat smiled with pleasure, for Demi's regard seemed to be valued by all the boys, partly because he was Father Bhaer's nephew, and partly because he was such a sober, conscientious little fellow.

"Yes; Demi likes quiet chaps, and I guess he and you will get on if you care about reading as he does."

Poor Nat's flush of pleasure deepened to a painful scarlet at those last words, and he stammered out,

"I can't read very well; I never had any time; I was always fiddling round, you know."

"I don't love it myself, but I can do it well enough when I want to," said Tommy, after a surprised look, which said as plainly as words, "A boy twelve years old and can't read!"

"I can read music, anyway," added Nat, rather ruffled at having to confess his ignorance.

"I can't;" and Tommy spoke in a respectful tone, which emboldened Nat to say firmly,

"I mean to study real hard and learn every thing I can, for I never had a chance before. Does Mr. Bhaer give hard lessons?"

"No; he isn't a bit cross; he sort of explains and gives you a boost over the hard places. Some folks don't; my other master didn't. If we missed a word, didn't we get raps on the head!" and Tommy rubbed his own pate as if it tingled yet with the liberal supply of raps, the memory of which was the only thing he brought away after a year with his "other master."

"I think I could read this," said Nat, who had been examining the books.

"Read a bit, then; I'll help you," resumed Tommy, with a patronizing air.

So Nat did his best, and floundered through a page with may friendly "boosts" from Tommy, who told him he would soon "go it" as well as anybody. Then they sat and talked boy-fashion about all sorts of things, among others, gardening; for Nat, looking down from his perch, asked what was planted in the many little patches lying below them on the other side of the brook.

"These are our farms," said Tommy. "We each have our own patch, and raise what we like in it, only have to choose different things, and can't change till the crop is in, and we must keep it in order all summer."

"What are you going to raise this year?"

"Wal, I cattleated to hev beans, as they are about the easiest crop a-goin'."

Nat could not help laughing, for Tommy had pushed back his hat, put his hands in his pockets, and drawled out his words in unconscious imitation of Silas, the man who managed the place for Mr. Bhaer.

"Come, you needn't laugh; beans are ever so much easier than corn or potatoes. I tried melons last year, but the bugs were a bother, and the old things wouldn't get ripe before the frost, so I didn't have but one good water and two little 'mush mellions,'" said Tommy, relapsing into a "Silasism" with the last word.

"Corn looks pretty growing," said Nat, politely, to atone for his laugh.

"Yes, but you have to hoe it over and over again. Now, six weeks' beans only have to be done once or so, and they get ripe soon. I'm going to try 'em, for I spoke first. Stuffy wanted 'em, but he's got to take peas; they only have to be picked, and he ought to do it, he eats such a lot."

"I wonder if I shall have a garden?" said Nat, thinking that even corn-hoeing must be pleasant work.

"Of course you will," said a voice from below, and there was Mr. Bhaer returned from his walk, and come to find them, for he managed to have a little talk with every one of the lads some time during the day, and found that these chats gave them a good start for the coming week.

Sympathy is a sweet thing, and it worked wonders here, for each boy knew that Father Bhaer was interested in him, and some were readier to open their hearts to him than to a woman, especially the older ones, who liked to talk over their hopes and plans, man to man. When sick or in trouble they instinctively turned to Mrs. Jo, while the little ones made her their mother-confessor on all occasions.

In descending from their nest, Tommy fell into the brook; being used to it, he calmly picked himself out and retired to the house to be dried. This left Nat to Mr. Bhaer, which was just what he wished, and, during the stroll they took among the garden plots, he won the lad's heart by giving him a little "farm," and discussing crops with him as gravely as if the food for the family depended on the harvest. From this pleasant topic they went to others, and Nat had many new and helpful thoughts put into a mind that received them as gratefully as the thirsty earth had received the warm spring rain. All supper time he brooded over them, often fixing his eyes on Mr. Bhaer with an inquiring look, that seemed to say, "I like that, do it again, sir." I don't know whether the man understood the child's mute language or not, but when the boys were all gathered together in Mrs. Bhaer's parlor for the Sunday evening talk, he chose a subject which might have been suggested by the walk in the garden.

As he looked about him Nat thought it seemed more like a great family than a school, for the lads were sitting in a wide half-circle round the fire, some on chairs, some on the rug, Daisy and Demi on the knees of Uncle Fritz, and Rob snugly stowed away in the back of his mother's easy-chair, where he could nod unseen if the talk got beyond his depth.

Every one looked quite comfortable, and listened attentively, for the long walk made rest agreeable, and as every boy there knew that he would be called upon for his views, he kept his wits awake to be ready with an answer.

"Once upon a time," began Mr. Bhaer, in the dear old-fashioned way, "there was a great and wise gardener who had the largest garden ever seen. A wonderful and lovely place it was, and he watched over it with the greatest skill and care, and raised all manner of excellent and useful things. But weeds would grow even in this fine garden; often the ground was bad and the good seeds sown in it would not spring up. He had many under gardeners to help him. Some did their duty and earned the rich wages he gave them; but others neglected their parts and let them run to waste, which displeased him very much. But he was very patient, and for thousands and thousands of years he worked and waited for his great harvest."

"He must have been pretty old," said Demi, who was looking straight into Uncle Fritz's face, as if to catch every word.

“Hush, Demi, it’s a fairy story,” whispered Daisy.

“No, I think it’s an arrygory,” said Demi.

“What is a arrygory?” called out Tommy, who was of an inquiring turn.

“Tell him, Demi, if you can, and don’t use words unless you are quite sure you know what they mean,” said Mr. Bhaer.

“I do know, Grandpa told me! A fable is a arrygory; it’s a story that means something. My ‘Story without an end’ is one, because the child in it means a soul; don’t it, Aunty?” cried Demi, eager to prove himself right.

“That’s it, dear; and Uncle’s story is an allegory, I am quite sure; so listen and see what it means,” returned Mrs. Jo, who always took part in whatever was going on, and enjoyed it as much as any boy among them.

Demi composed himself, and Mr. Bhaer went on in his best English, for he had improved much in the last five years, and said the boys did it.

“This great gardener gave a dozen or so of little plots to one of his servants, and told him to do his best and see what he could raise. Now this servant was not rich, nor wise, nor very good, but he wanted to help because the gardener had been very kind to him in many ways. So he gladly took the little plots and fell to work. They were all sorts of shapes and sizes, and some were very good soil, some rather stony, and all of them needed much care, for in the rich soil the weeds grew fast, and in the poor soil there were many stones.”

“What was growing in them besides the weeds, and stones?” asked Nat; so interested, he forgot his shyness and spoke before them all.

“Flowers,” said Mr. Bhaer, with a kind look. “Even the roughest, most neglected little bed had a bit of heart’s-ease or a sprig of mignonette in it. One had roses, sweet peas, and daisies in it,” here he pinched the plump cheek of the little girl leaning on his arm. “Another had all sorts of curious plants in it, bright pebbles, a vine that went climbing up like Jack’s beanstalk, and many good seeds just beginning to sprout; for, you see, this bed had been taken fine care of by a wise old man, who had worked in gardens of this sort all his life.”

At this part of the “arrygory,” Demi put his head on one side like an inquisitive bird, and fixed his bright eye on his uncle’s face, as if he suspected something and was on the watch. But Mr. Bhaer looked perfectly innocent, and went on glancing from one young face to another, with a grave, wistful look, that said much to his wife, who knew how earnestly he desired to do his duty in these little garden plots.

“As I tell you, some of these beds were easy to cultivate, that means to take care of Daisy, and others were very hard. There was one particularly sunshiny little bed that might have been full of fruits and vegetables as well as flowers, only it wouldn’t take any pains, and when the man sowed, well, we’ll say melons in this bed, they came to nothing, because the little bed neglected them. The man was sorry, and kept on trying, though every time the crop failed, all the bed said, was, ‘I forgot.’“

Here a general laugh broke out, and every one looked at Tommy, who had pricked up his ears at the word “melons,” and hung down his head at the sound of his favorite excuse.

“I knew he meant us!” cried Demi, clapping his hands. “You are the man, and we are the little gardens; aren’t we, Uncle Fritz?”

“You have guessed it. Now each of you tell me what crop I shall try to sow in you this spring, so that next autumn I may get a good harvest out of my twelve, no, thirteen, plots,” said Mr. Bhaer, nodding at Nat as he corrected himself.

“You can’t sow corn and beans and peas in us. Unless you mean we are to eat a great many and get fat,” said Stuffy, with a sudden brightening of his round, dull face as the pleasing idea occurred to him.

“He don’t mean that kind of seeds. He means things to make us good; and the weeds are faults,” cried Demi, who usually took the lead in these talks, because he was used to this sort of thing, and liked it very much.

“Yes, each of you think what you need most, and tell me, and I will help you to grow it; only you must do your best, or you will turn out like Tommy’s melons, all leaves and no fruit. I will begin with the oldest, and ask the mother what she will have in her plot, for we are all parts of the beautiful garden, and may have rich harvests for our Master if we love Him enough,” said Father Bhaer.

“I shall devote the whole of my plot to the largest crop of patience I can get, for that is what I need most,” said Mrs. Jo, so soberly that the lads fell to thinking in good earnest what they should say when their turns came, and some among them felt a twinge of remorse, that they had helped to use up Mother Bhaer’s stock of patience so fast.

Franz wanted perseverance, Tommy steadiness, Ned went in for good temper, Daisy for industry, Demi for “as much wiseness as Grandpa,” and Nat timidly said he wanted so many things he would let Mr. Bhaer choose for him. The others chose much the same things, and patience, good temper, and generosity seemed the favorite crops. One boy wished to like to get up early, but did not know what name to give that sort of seed; and poor Stuffy sighed out,

“I wish I loved my lessons as much as I do my dinner, but I can’t.”

“We will plant self-denial, and hoe it and water it, and make it grow so well that next Christmas no one will get ill by eating too much dinner. If you exercise your mind, George, it will get hungry just as your body does, and you will love books almost as much as my philosopher here,” said Mr. Bhaer; adding, as he stroked the hair off Demi's fine forehead, "You are greedy also, my son, and you like to stuff your little mind full of fairy tales and fancies, as well as George likes to fill his little stomach with cake and candy. Both are bad, and I want you to try something better. Arithmetic is not half so pleasant as 'Arabian Nights,' I know, but it is a very useful thing, and now is the time to learn it, else you will be ashamed and sorry by and by."

"But, 'Harry and Lucy,' and 'Frank,' are not fairy books, and they are all full of barometers, and bricks, and shoeing horses, and useful things, and I'm fond of them; ain't I, Daisy?" said Demi, anxious to defend himself.

"So they are; but I find you reading 'Roland and Maybird,' a great deal oftener than 'Harry and Lucy,' and I think you are not half so fond of 'Frank' as you are of 'Sinbad.' Come, I shall make a little bargain with you both, George shall eat but three times a day, and you shall read but one story-book a week, and I will give you the new cricket-ground; only, you must promise to play in it," said Uncle Fritz, in his persuasive way, for Stuffy hated to run about, and Demi was always reading in play hours.

"But we don't like cricket," said Demi.

"Perhaps not now, but you will when you know it. Besides, you do like to be generous, and the other boys want to play, and you can give them the new ground if you choose."

This was taken them both on the right side, and they agreed to the bargain, to the great satisfaction of the rest.

There was a little more talk about the gardens, and then they all sang together. The band delighted Nat, for Mrs. Bhaer played the piano, Franz the flute, Mr. Bhaer a bass viol, and he himself the violin. A very simple little concert, but all seemed to enjoy it, and old Asia, sitting in the corner, joined at times with the sweetest voice of any, for in this family, master and servant, old and young, black and white, shared in the Sunday song, which went up to the Father of them all. After this they each shook hands with Father Bhaer; Mother Bhaer kissed them every one from sixteen-year-old Franz to little Rob, how kept the tip of her nose for his own particular kisses, and then they trooped up to bed.

The light of the shaded lamp that burned in the nursery shone softly on a picture hanging at the foot of Nat's bed. There were several others on the walls, but the boy thought there must be something peculiar about this one, for it had a graceful frame of moss and cones about it, and on a little bracket underneath stood a vase of wild flowers freshly gathered from the spring woods. It was the most beautiful picture of them all, and Nat lay looking at it, dimly feeling what it meant, and wishing he knew all about it.

"That's my picture," said a little voice in the room. Nat popped up his head, and there was Demi in his night-gown pausing on his way back from Aunt Jo’s chamber, whither he had gone to get a cot for a cut finger.

“What is he doing to the children?” asked Nat.

“That is Christ, the Good Man, and He is blessing the children. Don’t you know about Him?” said Demi, wondering.

“Not much, but I’d like to, He looks so kind,” answered Nat, whose chief knowledge of the Good Man consisted in hearing His name taken in vain.

“I know all about it, and I like it very much, because it is true,” said Demi.

“Who told you?”

“My Grandpa, he knows every thing, and tells the best stories in the world. I used to play with his big books, and make bridges, and railroads, and houses, when I was a little boy,” began Demi.

“How old are you now?” asked Nat, respectfully.

“‘Most ten.”

“You know a lot of things, don’t you?”

“Yes; you see my head is pretty big, and Grandpa says it will take a good deal to fill it, so I keep putting pieces of wisdom into it as fast as I can,” returned Demi, in his quaint way.

Nat laughed, and then said soberly,

“Tell on, please.”

And Demi gladly told on without pause or punctuation. “I found a very pretty book one day and wanted to play with it, but Grandpa said I mustn’t, and showed me the pictures, and told me about them, and I liked the stories very much, all about Joseph and his bad brothers, and the frogs that came up out of the sea, and dear little Moses in the water, and ever so many more lovely ones, but I liked about the Good Man best of all, and Grandpa told it to me so many times that I learned it by heart, and he gave me this picture so I shouldn’t forget, and it was put up here once when I was sick, and I left it for other sick boys to see.”‘

“What makes Him bless the children?” asked Nat, who found something very attractive in the chief figure of the group.

“Because He loved them.”

“Were they poor children?” asked Nat, wistfully.

“Yes, I think so; you see some haven’t got hardly any clothes on, and the mothers don’t look like rich ladies. He liked poor people, and was very good to them. He made them well, and helped them, and told rich people they must not be cross to them, and they loved Him dearly, dearly,” cried Demi, with enthusiasm.

“Was He rich?”

“Oh no! He was born in a barn, and was so poor He hadn’t any house to live in when He grew up, and nothing to eat sometimes, but what people gave Him, and He went round preaching to everybody, and trying to make them good, till the bad men killed Him."

"What for?" and Nat sat up in his bed to look and listen, so interested was he in this man who cared for the poor so much.

"I'll tell you all about it; Aunt Jo won't mind;" and Demi settled himself on the opposite bed, glad to tell his favorite story to so good a listener.

Nursey peeped in to see if Nat was asleep, but when she saw what was going on, she slipped away again, and went to Mrs. Bhaer, saying with her kind face full of motherly emotion,

"Will the dear lady come and see a pretty sight? It's Nat listening with all his heart to Demi telling the story of the Christ-child, like a little white angel as he is."

Mrs. Bhaer had meant to go and talk with Nat a moment before he slept, for she had found that a serious word spoken at this time often did much good. But when she stole to the nursery door, and saw Nat eagerly drinking in the words of his little friends, while Demi told the sweet and solemn story as it had been taught him, speaking softly as he sat with his beautiful eyes fixed on the tender face above them, her own filled with tears, and she went silently away, thinking to herself,

"Demi is unconsciously helping the poor boy better than I can; I will not spoil it by a single word."

The murmur of the childish voice went on for a long time, as one innocent heart preached that great sermon to another, and no one hushed it. When it ceased at last, and Mrs. Bhaer went to take away the lamp, Demi was gone and Nat fast asleep, lying with his face toward the picture, as if he had already learned to love the Good Man who loved little children, and was a faithful friend to the poor. The boy's face was very placid, and as she looked at it she felt that if a single day of care and kindness had done so much, a year of patient cultivation would surely bring a grateful harvest from this neglected garden, which was already sown with the best of all seed by the little missionary in the night-gown.

CHAPTER IV. STEPPING-STONES

When Nat went into school on Monday morning, he quaked inwardly, for now he thought he should have to display his ignorance before them all. But Mr. Bhaer gave him a seat in the deep window, where he could turn his back on the others, and Franz heard him say his lessons there, so no one could hear his blunders or see how he blotted his copybook. He was truly grateful for this, and toiled away so diligently that Mr. Bhaer said, smiling, when he saw his hot face and inky fingers:

"Don't work so hard, my boy; you will tire yourself out, and there is time enough."

"But I must work hard, or I can't catch up with the others. They know heaps, and I don't know anything," said Nat, who had been reduced to a state of despair by hearing the boys recite their grammar, history, and geography with what he thought amazing ease and accuracy.

"You know a good many things which they don't," said Mr. Bhaer, sitting down beside him, while Franz led a class of small students through the intricacies of the multiplication table.

"Do I?" and Nat looked utterly incredulous.

"Yes; for one thing, you can keep your temper, and Jack, who is quick at numbers, cannot; that is an excellent lesson, and I think you have learned it well. Then, you can play the violin, and not one of the lads can, though they want to do it very much. But, best of all, Nat, you really care to learn something, and that is half the battle. It seems hard at first, and you will feel discouraged, but plod away, and things will get easier and easier as you go on."

Nat's face had brightened more and more as he listened, for, small as the list of his learning was, it cheered him immensely to feel that he had anything to fall back upon. "Yes, I can keep my temper father's beating taught me that; and I can fiddle, though I don't know where the Bay of Biscay is," he thought, with a sense of comfort impossible to express. Then he said aloud, and so earnestly that Demi heard him:

"I do want to learn, and I will try. I never went to school, but I couldn't help it; and if the fellows don't laugh at me, I guess I'll get on first rate you and the lady are so good to me."

"They shan't laugh at you; if they do, I'll I'll tell them not to," cried Demi, quite forgetting where he was.

The class stopped in the middle of 7 times 9, and everyone looked up to see what was going on.

Thinking that a lesson in learning to help one another was better than arithmetic just then, Mr. Bhaer told them about Nat, making such an interesting and touching little story out of it that the good-hearted lads all promised to lend him a hand, and felt quite honored to be called upon to impart their stores of wisdom to the chap who fiddled so capitally. This appeal established the right feeling among them, and Nat had few hindrances to struggle against, for every one was glad to give him a "boost" up the ladder of learning.

Till he was stronger, much study was not good for him, however, and Mrs. Jo found various amusements in the house for him while others were at their books. But his garden was his best medicine, and he worked away like a beaver, preparing his little farm, sowing his beans, watching eagerly to see them grow, and rejoicing over each green leaf and slender stock that shot up and flourished in the warm spring weather. Never was a garden more faithfully hoed; Mr. Bhaer really feared that nothing would find time to grow, Nat kept up such a stirring of the soil; so he gave him easy jobs in the flower garden or among the strawberries, where he worked and hummed as busily as the bees booming all about him.

"This is the crop I like best," Mrs. Bhaer used to say, as she pinched the once thin cheeks, now getting plump and ruddy, or stroked the bent shoulders that were slowly straightening up with healthful work, good food, and the absence of that heavy burden, poverty.

Demi was his little friend, Tommy his patron, and Daisy the comforter of all his woes; for, though the children were younger than he, his timid spirit found a pleasure in their innocent society, and rather shrunk from the rough sports of the elder lads. Mr. Laurence did not forget him, but sent clothes and books, music and kind messages, and now and then came out to see how his boy was getting on, or took him into town to a concert; on which occasions Nat felt himself translated into the seventh heaven of bliss, for he went to Mr. Laurence's great house, saw his pretty wife and little fairy of a daughter, had a good dinner, and was made so comfortable, that he talked and dreamed of it for days and nights afterward.

It takes so little to make a child happy that it is a pity, in a world so full of sunshine and pleasant things, that there should be any wistful faces, empty hands, or lonely little hearts. Feeling this, the Bhaers gathered up all the crumbs they could find to feed their flock of hungry sparrows, for they were not rich, except in charity. Many of Mrs. Jo's friends who had nurseries sent her they toys of which their children so soon tired, and in mending these Nat found an employment that just suited him. He was very neat and skillful with those slender fingers of his, and passed many a rainy afternoon with his gum-bottle, paint-box, and knife, repairing furniture, animals, and games, while Daisy was dressmaker to the dilapidated dolls. As fast as the toys were mended, they were put carefully away in a certain drawer which was to furnish forth a Christmas-tree for all the poor children of the neighborhood, that being the way the Plumfield boys celebrated the birthday of Him who loved the poor and blessed the little ones.

Demi was never tired of reading and explaining his favorite books, and many a pleasant hour did they spend in the old willow, revelling over “Robinson Crusoe,” “Arabian Nights,” “Edgeworth’s Tales,” and the other dear immortal stories that will delight children for centuries to come. This opened a new world to Nat, and his eagerness to see what came next in the story helped him on till he could read as well as anybody, and felt so rich and proud with his new accomplishment, that there was danger of his being as much of a bookworm as Demi.

Another helpful thing happened in a most unexpected and agreeable manner. Several of the boys were “in business,” as they called it, for most of them were poor, and knowing that they would have their own way to make by and by, the Bhaers encouraged any efforts at independence. Tommy sold his eggs; Jack speculated in live stock; Franz helped in the teaching, and was paid for it; Ned had a taste for carpentry, and a turning-lathe was set up for him in which he turned all sorts of useful or pretty things, and sold them; while Demi constructed water-mills, whirligigs, and unknown machines of an intricate and useless nature, and disposed of them to the boys.

“Let him be a mechanic if he likes,” said Mr. Bhaer. “Give a boy a trade, and he is independent. Work is wholesome, and whatever talent these lads possess, be it for poetry or ploughing, it shall be cultivated and made useful to them if possible.”

So, when Nat came running to him one day to ask with an excited face:

“Can I go and fiddle for some people who are to have a picnic in our woods? They will pay me, and I’d like to earn some money as the other boys do, and fiddling is the only way I know how to do it.”

Mr. Bhaer answered readily:

“Go, and welcome. It is an easy and a pleasant way to work, and I am glad it is offered you.”

Nat went, and did so well that when he came home he had two dollars in his pocket, which he displayed with intense satisfaction, as he told how much he had enjoyed the afternoon, how kind the young people were, and how they had praised his dance music, and promised to have him again.

“It is so much nicer than fiddling in the street, for then I got none of the money, and now I have it all, and a good time besides. I’m in business now as well as Tommy and Jack, and I like it ever so much,” said Nat, proudly patting the old pocketbook, and feeling like a millionaire already.

He was in business truly, for picnics were plenty as summer opened, and Nat’s skill was in great demand. He was always at liberty to go if lessons were not neglected, and if the picnickers were respectable young people. For Mr. Bhaer explained to him that a good plain education is necessary for everyone, and that no amount of money should hire him to go where he might be tempted to do wrong. Nat quite agreed to this, and it was a pleasant sight to see the innocent-hearted lad go driving away in the gay wagons that stopped at the gate for him, or to hear him come fiddling home tired but happy, with his well-earned money in one pocket, and some “goodies” from the feast for Daisy or little Ted, whom he never forgot.

“I’m going to save up till I get enough to buy a violin for myself, and then I can earn my own living, can’t I?” he used to say, as he brought his dollars to Mr. Bhaer to keep.

“I hope so, Nat; but we must get you strong and hearty first, and put a little more knowledge into this musical head of yours. Then Mr. Laurie will find you a place somewhere, and in a few years we will all come to hear you play in public.”

With much congenial work, encouragement, and hope, Nat found life getting easier and happier every day, and made such progress in his music lessons that his teacher forgave his slowness in some other things, knowing very well that where the heart is the mind works best. The only punishment the boy ever needed for neglect of more important lessons was to hang up the fiddle and the bow for a day. The fear of losing his bosom friend entirely made him go at his books with a will; and having proved that he could master the lessons, what was the use of saying “I can’t?”

Daisy had a great love of music, and a great reverence for any one who could make it, and she was often found sitting on the stairs outside Nat’s door while he was practising. This pleased him very much, and he played his best for that one quiet little listener; for she never would come in, but preferred to sit sewing her gay patchwork, or tending one of her many dolls, with an expression of dreamy pleasure on her face that made Aunt Jo say, with tears in her eyes: “So like my Beth,” and go softly by, lest even her familiar presence mar the child’s sweet satisfaction.

Nat was very fond of Mrs. Bhaer, but found something even more attractive in the good professor, who took fatherly care of the shy feeble boy, who had barely escaped with his life from the rough sea on which his little boat had been tossing rudderless for twelve years. Some good angel must have been watching over him, for, though his body had suffered, his soul seemed to have taken little harm, and came ashore as innocent as a shipwrecked baby. Perhaps his love of music kept it sweet in spite of the discord all about him; Mr. Laurie said so, and he ought to know. However that might be, Father Bhaer took pleasure in fostering poor Nat's virtues, and in curing his faults, finding his new pupil as docile and affectionate as a girl. He often called Nat his "daughter" when speaking of him to Mrs. Jo, and she used to laugh at his fancy, for Madame liked manly boys, and thought Nat amiable but weak, though you never would have guessed it, for she petted him as she did Daisy, and he thought her a very delightful woman.

One fault of Nat's gave the Bhaers much anxiety, although they saw how it had been strengthened by fear and ignorance. I regret to say that Nat sometimes told lies. Not very black ones, seldom getting deeper than gray, and often the mildest of white fibs; but that did not matter, a lie is a lie, and though we all tell many polite untruths in this queer world of ours, it is not right, and everybody knows it.

"You cannot be too careful; watch your tongue, and eyes, and hands, for it is easy to tell, and look, and act untruth," said Mr. Bhaer, in one of the talks he had with Nat about his chief temptation.

"I know it, and I don't mean to, but it's so much easier to get along if you ain't very fussy about being exactly true. I used to tell 'em because I was afraid of father and Nicolo, and now I do sometimes because the boys laugh at me. I know it's bad, but I forget," and Nat looked much depressed by his sins.

"When I was a little lad I used to tell lies! Ach! what fibs they were, and my old grandmother cured me of it how, do you think? My parents had talked, and cried, and punished, but still did I forget as you. Then said the dear old grandmother, 'I shall help you to remember, and put a check on this unruly part,' with that she drew out my tongue and snipped the end with her scissors till the blood ran. That was terrible, you may believe, but it did me much good, because it was sore for days, and every word I said came so slowly that I had time to think. After that I was more careful, and got on better, for I feared the big scissors. Yet the dear grandmother was most kind to me in all things, and when she lay dying far away in Nuremberg, she prayed that little Fritz might love God and tell the truth."

"I never had any grandmothers, but if you think it will cure me, I'll let you snip my tongue," said Nat, heroically, for he dreaded pain, yet did wish to stop fibbing.

Mr. Bhaer smiled, but shook his head.

“I have a better way than that, I tried it once before and it worked well. See now, when you tell a lie I will not punish you, but you shall punish me.”

“How?” asked Nat, startled at the idea.

“You shall ferule me in the good old-fashioned way; I seldom do it myself, but it may make you remember better to give me pain than to feel it yourself.”

“Strike you? Oh, I couldn’t!” cried Nat.

“Then mind that tripping tongue of thine. I have no wish to be hurt, but I would gladly bear much pain to cure this fault.”

This suggestion made such an impression on Nat, that for a long time he set a watch upon his lips, and was desperately accurate, for Mr. Bhaer judged rightly, that love of him would be more powerful with Nat that fear for himself. But alas! one sad day Nat was off his guard, and when peppery Emil threatened to thrash him, if it was he who had run over his garden and broken down his best hills of corn, Nat declared he didn’t, and then was ashamed to own up that he did do it, when Jack was chasing him the night before.

He thought no one would find it out, but Tommy happened to see him, and when Emil spoke of it a day or two later, Tommy gave his evidence, and Mr. Bhaer heard it. School was over, and they were all standing about in the hall, and Mr. Bhaer had just set down on the straw settee to enjoy his frolic with Teddy; but when he heard Tommy and saw Nat turn scarlet, and look at him with a frightened face, he put the little boy down, saying, “Go to thy mother, bubchen, I will come soon,” and taking Nat by the hand led him into the school and shut the door.

The boys looked at one another in silence for a minute, then Tommy slipped out and peeping in at the half-closed blinds, beheld a sight that quite bewildered him. Mr. Bhaer had just taken down the long rule that hung over his desk, so seldom used that it was covered with dust.

“My eye! He’s going to come down heavy on Nat this time. Wish I hadn’t told,” thought good-natured Tommy, for to be feruled was the deepest disgrace at this school.

“You remember what I told you last time?” said Mr. Bhaer, sorrowfully, not angrily.

“Yes; but please don’t make me, I can’t bear it,” cried Nat, backing up against the door with both hands behind him, and a face full of distress.

“Why don’t he up and take it like a man? I would,” thought Tommy, though his heart beat fast at the sight.

“I shall keep my word, and you must remember to tell the truth. Obey me, Nat, take this and give me six good strokes.”

Tommy was so staggered by this last speech that he nearly tumbled down the bank, but saved himself, and hung onto the window ledge, staring in with eyes as round as the stuffed owl's on the chimney-piece.

Nat took the rule, for when Mr. Bhaer spoke in that tone everyone obeyed him, and, looking as scared and guilty as if about to stab his master, he gave two feeble blows on the broad hand held out to him. Then he stopped and looked up half-blind with tears, but Mr. Bhaer said steadily:

"Go on, and strike harder."

As if seeing that it must be done, and eager to have the hard task soon over, Nat drew his sleeve across his eyes and gave two more quick hard strokes that reddened the hand, yet hurt the giver more.

"Isn't that enough?" he asked in a breathless sort of tone.

"Two more," was all the answer, and he gave them, hardly seeing where they fell, then threw the rule all across the room, and hugging the kind hand in both his own, laid his face down on it sobbing out in a passion of love, and shame, and penitence:

"I will remember! Oh! I will!"

Then Mr. Bhaer put an arm about him, and said in a tone as compassionate as it had just now been firm:

"I think you will. Ask the dear God to help you, and try to spare us both another scene like this."

Tommy saw no more, for he crept back to the hall, looking so excited and sober that the boys crowded round him to ask what was being done to Nat.

In a most impressive whisper Tommy told them, and they looked as if the sky was about to fall, for this reversing the order of things almost took their breath away.

"He made me do the same thing once," said Emil, as if confessing a crime of the deepest dye.

"And you hit him? dear old Father Bhaer? By thunder, I'd just like to see you do it now!" said Ned, collaring Emil in a fit of righteous wrath.

"It was ever so long ago. I'd rather have my head cut off than do it now," and Emil mildly laid Ned on his back instead of cuffing him, as he would have felt it his duty to do on any less solemn occasion.

"How could you?" said Demi, appalled at the idea.

"I was hopping mad at the time, and thought I shouldn't mind a bit, rather like it perhaps. But when I'd hit uncle one good crack, everything he had ever done for me came into my head all at once somehow, and I couldn't go on. No sir! If he'd laid me down and walked on me, I wouldn't have minded, I felt so mean," and Emil gave himself a good thump in the chest to express his sense of remorse for the past.

“Nat’s crying like anything, and feels no end sorry, so don’t let’s say a word about it; will we?” said tender-hearted Tommy.

“Of course we won’t, but it’s awful to tell lies,” and Demi looked as if he found the awfulness much increased when the punishment fell not upon the sinner, but his best Uncle Fritz.

“Suppose we all clear out, so Nat can cut upstairs if he wants to,” proposed Franz, and led the way to the barn, their refuge in troublous times.

Nat did not come to dinner, but Mrs. Jo took some up to him, and said a tender word, which did him good, though he could not look at her. By and by the lads playing outside heard the violin, and said among themselves: “He’s all right now.” He was all right, but felt shy about going down, till opening his door to slip away into the woods, he found Daisy sitting on the stairs with neither work nor doll, only her little handkerchief in her hand, as if she had been mourning for her captive friend.

“I’m going to walk; want to come?” asked Nat, trying to look as if nothing was the matter, yet feeling very grateful for her silent sympathy, because he fancied everyone must look upon him as a wretch.

“Oh yes!” and Daisy ran for her hat, proud to be chosen as a companion by one of the big boys.

The others saw them go, but no one followed, for boys have a great deal more delicacy than they get credit for, and the lads instinctively felt that, when in disgrace, gentle little Daisy was their most congenial friend.

The walk did Nat good, and he came home quieter than usual, but looking cheerful again, and hung all over with daisy-chains made by his little playmate while he lay on the grass and told her stories.

No one said a word about the scene of the morning, but its effect was all the more lasting for that reason, perhaps. Nat tried his very best, and found much help, not only from the earnest little prayers he prayed to his Friend in heaven, but also in the patient care of the earthly friend whose kind hand he never touched without remembering that it had willingly borne pain for his sake.

CHAPTER V. PATTYPANS

“What’s the matter, Daisy?”

“The boys won’t let me play with them.”

“Why not?”

“They say girls can’t play football.”

“They can, for I’ve done it!” and Mrs. Bhaer laughed at the remembrance of certain youthful frolics.

“I know I can play; Demi and I used to, and have nice times, but he won’t let me now because the other boys laugh at him,” and Daisy looked deeply grieved at her brother’s hardness of heart.

“On the whole, I think he is right, deary. It’s all very well when you two are alone, but it is too rough a game for you with a dozen boys; so I’d find some nice little play for myself.”

“I’m tired of playing alone!” and Daisy’s tone was very mournful.

“I’ll play with you by and by, but just now I must fly about and get things ready for a trip into town. You shall go with me and see mamma, and if you like you can stay with her.”

“I should like to go and see her and Baby Josy, but I’d rather come back, please. Demi would miss me, and I love to be here, Aunty.”

“You can’t get on without your Demi, can you?” and Aunt Jo looked as if she quite understood the love of the little girl for her only brother.

“‘Course I can’t; we’re twins, and so we love each other more than other people,” answered Daisy, with a brightening face, for she considered being a twin one of the highest honors she could ever receive.

“Now, what will you do with your little self while I fly around?” asked Mrs. Bhaer, who was whisking piles of linen into a wardrobe with great rapidity.

“I don’t know, I’m tired of dolls and things; I wish you’d make up a new play for me, Aunty Jo,” said Daisy, swinging listlessly on the door.

“I shall have to think of a brand new one, and it will take me some time; so suppose you go down and see what Asia has got for your lunch,” suggested Mrs. Bhaer, thinking that would be a good way in which to dispose of the little hindrance for a time.

“Yes, I think I’d like that, if she isn’t cross,” and Daisy slowly departed to the kitchen, where Asia, the black cook, reigned undisturbed.

In five minutes, Daisy was back again, with a wide-awake face, a bit of dough in her hand and a dab of flour on her little nose.

“Oh aunty! Please could I go and make gingersnaps and things? Asia isn’t cross, and she says I may, and it would be such fun, please do,” cried Daisy, all in one breath.

“Just the thing, go and welcome, make what you like, and stay as long as you please,” answered Mrs. Bhaer, much relieved, for sometimes the one little girl was harder to amuse than the dozen boys.

Daisy ran off, and while she worked, Aunt Jo racked her brain for a new play. All of a sudden she seemed to have an idea, for she smiled to herself, slammed the doors of the wardrobe, and walked briskly away, saying, “I’ll do it, if it’s a possible thing!”

What it was no one found out that day, but Aunt Jo’s eyes twinkled so when she told Daisy she had thought of a new play, and was going to buy it, that Daisy was much excited and asked questions all the way into town, without getting answers that told her anything. She was left at home to play with the new baby, and delight her mother’s eyes, while Aunt Jo went off shopping. When she came back with all sorts of queer parcels in corners of the carry-all, Daisy was so full of curiosity that she wanted to go back to Plumfield at once. But her aunt would not be hurried, and made a long call in mamma’s room, sitting on the floor with baby in her lap, making Mrs. Brooke laugh at the pranks of the boys, and all sorts of droll nonsense.

How her aunt told the secret Daisy could not imagine, but her mother evidently knew it, for she said, as she tied on the little bonnet and kissed the rosy little face inside, “Be a good child, my Daisy, and learn the nice new play aunty has got for you. It’s a most useful and interesting one, and it is very kind of her to play it with you, because she does not like it very well herself.”

This last speech made the two ladies laugh heartily, and increased Daisy’s bewilderment. As they drove away something rattled in the back of the carriage.

“What’s that?” asked Daisy, pricking up her ears.

“The new play,” answered Mrs. Jo, solemnly.

“What is it made of?” cried Daisy.

“Iron, tin, wood, brass, sugar, salt, coal, and a hundred other things.”

“How strange! What color is it?”

“All sorts of colors.”

“Is it large?”

“Part of it is, and a part isn’t.”

“Did I ever see one?”

“Ever so many, but never one so nice as this.”

“Oh! what can it be? I can’t wait. When shall I see it?” and Daisy bounced up and down with impatience.

"To-morrow morning, after lessons."

"Is it for the boys, too?"

"No, all for you and Bess. The boys will like to see it, and want to play one part of it. But you can do as you like about letting them."

"I'll let Demi, if he wants to."

"No fear that they won't all want to, especially Stuffy," and Mrs. Bhaer's eyes twinkled more than ever as she patted a queer knobby bundle in her lap.

"Let me feel just once," prayed Daisy.

"Not a feel; you'd guess in a minute and spoil the fun."

Daisy groaned and then smiled all over her face, for through a little hole in the paper she caught a glimpse of something bright.

"How can I wait so long? Couldn't I see it today?"

"Oh dear, no! It has got to be arranged, and ever so many parts fixed in their places. I promised Uncle Teddy that you shouldn't see it till it was all in apple-pie order."

"If uncle knows about it then it must be splendid!" cried Daisy, clapping her hands; for this kind, rich, jolly uncle of hers was as good as a fairy godmother to the children, and was always planning merry surprises, pretty gifts, and droll amusements for them.

"Yes; Teddy went and bought it with me, and we had such fun in the shop choosing the different parts. He would have everything fine and large, and my little plan got regularly splendid when he took hold. You must give him your very best kiss when he comes, for he is the kindest uncle that ever went and bought a charming little coo Bless me! I nearly told you what it was!" and Mrs. Bhaer cut that most interesting word short off in the middle, and began to look over her bills, as if afraid she would let the cat out of the bag if she talked any more. Daisy folded her hands with an air of resignation, and sat quite still trying to think what play had a "coo" in it.

When they got home she eyed every bundle that was taken out, and one large heavy one, which Franz took straight upstairs and hid in the nursery, filled her with amazement and curiosity. Something very mysterious went on up there that afternoon, for Franz was hammering, and Asia trotting up and down, and Aunt Jo flying around like a will-o'-the-wisp, with all sort of things under her apron, while little Ted, who was the only child admitted, because he couldn't talk plain, babbled and laughed, and tried to tell what the "sumpin pitty" was.

All this made Daisy half-wild, and her excitement spread among the boys, who quite overwhelmed Mother Bhaer with offers of assistance, which she declined by quoting their own words to Daisy:

"Girls can't play with boys. This is for Daisy, and Bess, and me, so we don't want you." Whereupon the young gentlemen meekly retired, and invited Daisy to a game of marbles, horse, football, anything she liked, with a sudden warmth and politeness which astonished her innocent little soul.

Thanks to these attentions, she got through the afternoon, went early to bed, and next morning did her lessons with an energy which made Uncle Fritz wish that a new game could be invented every day. Quite a thrill pervaded the schoolroom when Daisy was dismissed at eleven o'clock, for everyone knew that now she was going to have the new and mysterious play.

Many eyes followed her as she ran away, and Demi's mind was so distracted by this event that when Franz asked him where the desert of Sahara was, he mournfully replied, "In the nursery," and the whole school laughed at him.

"Aunt Jo, I've done all my lessons, and I can't wait one single minute more!" cried Daisy, flying into Mrs. Bhaer's room.

"It's all ready, come on;" and tucking Ted under one arm, and her workbasket under the other, Aunt Jo promptly led the way upstairs.

"I don't see anything," said Daisy, staring about her as she got inside the nursery door.

"Do you hear anything?" asked Aunt Jo, catching Ted back by his little frock as he was making straight for one side of the room.

Daisy did hear an odd crackling, and then a purry little sound as of a kettle singing. These noises came from behind a curtain drawn before a deep bay window. Daisy snatched it back, gave one joyful, "Oh!" and then stood gazing with delight at what do you think?

A wide seat ran round the three sides of the window; on one side hung and stood all sorts of little pots and pans, gridirons and skillets; on the other side a small dinner and tea set; and on the middle part a cooking-stove. Not a tin one, that was of no use, but a real iron stove, big enough to cook for a large family of very hungry dolls. But the best of it was that a real fire burned in it, real steam came out of the nose of the little tea-kettle, and the lid of the little boiler actually danced a jig, the water inside bubbled so hard. A pane of glass had been taken out and replaced by a sheet of tin, with a hole for the small funnel, and real smoke went sailing away outside so naturally, that it did one's heart good to see it. The box of wood with a hod of charcoal stood near by; just above hung dust-pan, brush and broom; a little market basket was on the low table at which Daisy used to play, and over the back of her little chair hung a white apron with a bib, and a droll mob cap. The sun shone in as if he enjoyed the fun, the little stove roared beautifully, the kettle steamed, the new tins sparkled on the walls, the pretty china stood in tempting rows, and it was altogether as cheery and complete a kitchen as any child could desire.

Daisy stood quite still after the first glad “Oh!” but her eyes went quickly from one charming object to another, brightening as they looked, till they came to Aunt Jo’s merry face; there they stopped as the happy little girl hugged her, saying gratefully:

“Oh aunty, it’s a splendid new play! Can I really cook at the dear stove, and have parties and mess, and sweep, and make fires that truly burn? I like it so much! What made you think of it?”

“Your liking to make gingersnaps with Asia made me think of it,” said Mrs. Bhaer, holding Daisy, who frisked as if she would fly. “I knew Asia wouldn’t let you mess in her kitchen very often, and it wouldn’t be safe at this fire up here, so I thought I’d see if I could find a little stove for you, and teach you to cook; that would be fun, and useful too. So I travelled round among the toy shops, but everything large cost too much and I was thinking I should have to give it up, when I met Uncle Teddy. As soon as he knew what I was about, he said he wanted to help, and insisted on buying the biggest toy stove we could find. I scolded, but he only laughed, and teased me about my cooking when we were young, and said I must teach Bess as well as you, and went on buying all sorts of nice little things for my ‘cooking class’ as he called it.”

“I’m so glad you met him!” said Daisy, as Mrs. Jo stopped to laugh at the memory of the funny time she had with Uncle Teddy.

“You must study hard and learn to make all kinds of things, for he says he shall come out to tea very often, and expects something uncommonly nice.”

“It’s the sweetest, dearest kitchen in the world, and I’d rather study with it than do anything else. Can’t I learn pies, and cake, and macaroni, and everything?” cried Daisy, dancing round the room with a new saucepan in one hand and the tiny poker in the other.

“All in good time. This is to be a useful play, I am to help you, and you are to be my cook, so I shall tell you what to do, and show you how. Then we shall have things fit to eat, and you will be really learning how to cook on a small scale. I’ll call you Sally, and say you are a new girl just come,” added Mrs. Jo, settling down to work, while Teddy sat on the floor sucking his thumb, and staring at the stove as if it was a live thing, whose appearance deeply interested him.

“That will be so lovely! What shall I do first?” asked Sally, with such a happy face and willing air that Aunt Jo wished all new cooks were half as pretty and pleasant.

“First of all, put on this clean cap and apron. I am rather old-fashioned, and I like my cook to be very tidy.”

Sally tucked her curly hair into the round cap, and put on the apron without a murmur, though usually she rebelled against bibs.

"Now, you can put things in order, and wash up the new china. The old set needs washing also, for my last girl was apt to leave it in a sad state after a party."

Aunt Jo spoke quite soberly, but Sally laughed, for she knew who the untidy girl was who had left the cups sticky. Then she turned up her cuffs, and with a sigh of satisfaction began to stir about her kitchen, having little raptures now and then over the "sweet rolling pin," the "darling dish-tub," or the "cunning pepper-pot."

"Now, Sally, take your basket and go to market; here is the list of things I want for dinner," said Mrs. Jo, giving her a bit of paper when the dishes were all in order.

"Where is the market?" asked Daisy, thinking that the new play got more and more interesting every minute.

"Asia is the market."

Away went Sally, causing another stir in the schoolroom as she passed the door in her new costume, and whispered to Demi, with a face full of delight, "It's a perfectly splendid play!"

Old Asia enjoyed the joke as much as Daisy, and laughed jollily as the little girl came flying into the room with her cap all on one side, the lids of her basket rattling like castanets and looking like a very crazy little cook.

"Mrs. Aunt Jo wants these things, and I must have them right away," said Daisy, importantly.

"Let's see, honey; here's two pounds of steak, potatoes, squash, apples, bread, and butter. The meat ain't come yet; when it does I'll send it up. The other things are all handy."

Then Asia packed one potato, one apple, a bit of squash, a little pat of butter, and a roll, into the basket, telling Sally to be on the watch for the butcher's boy, because he sometimes played tricks.

"Who is he?" and Daisy hoped it would be Demi.

"You'll see," was all Asia would say; and Sally went off in great spirits, singing a verse from dear Mary Howitt's sweet story in rhyme:

"Away went little Mabel,
With the wheaten cake so fine,
The new-made pot of butter,
And the little flask of wine."

"Put everything but the apple into the store-closet for the present," said Mrs.

Jo, when the cook got home.

There was a cupboard under the middle shelf, and on opening the door fresh delights appeared. One half was evidently the cellar, for wood, coal, and kindlings were piled there. The other half was full of little jars, boxes, and all sorts of droll contrivances for holding small quantities of flour, meal, sugar, salt, and other household stores. A pot of jam was there, a little tin box of gingerbread, a cologne bottle full of currant wine, and a tiny canister of tea. But the crowning charm was two doll's pans of new milk, with cream actually rising on it, and a wee skimmer all ready to skim it with. Daisy clasped her hands at this delicious spectacle, and wanted to skim it immediately. But Aunt Jo said:

"Not yet; you will want the cream to eat on your apple pie at dinner, and must not disturb it till then."

"Am I going to have pie?" cried Daisy, hardly believing that such bliss could be in store for her.

"Yes; if your oven does well we will have two pies, one apple and one strawberry," said Mrs. Jo, who was nearly as much interested in the new play as Daisy herself.

"Oh, what next?" asked Sally, all impatience to begin.

"Shut the lower draught of the stove, so that the oven may heat. Then wash your hands and get out the flour, sugar, salt, butter, and cinnamon. See if the pie-board is clean, and pare your apple ready to put in."

Daisy got things together with as little noise and spilling as could be expected, from so young a cook.

"I really don't know how to measure for such tiny pies; I must guess at it, and if these don't succeed, we must try again," said Mrs. Jo, looking rather perplexed, and very much amused with the small concern before her. "Take that little pan full of flour, put in a pinch of salt, and then rub in as much butter as will go on that plate. Always remember to put your dry things together first, and then the wet. It mixes better so."

"I know how; I saw Asia do it. Don't I butter the pie plates too? She did, the first thing," said Daisy, whisking the flour about at a great rate.

"Quite right! I do believe you have a gift for cooking, you take to it so cleverly," said Aunt Jo, approvingly. "Now a dash of cold water, just enough to wet it; then scatter some flour on the board, work in a little, and roll the paste out; yes, that's the way. Now put dabs of butter all over it, and roll it out again. We won't have our pastry very rich, or the dolls will get dyspeptic."

Daisy laughed at the idea, and scattered the dabs with a liberal hand. Then she rolled and rolled with her delightful little pin, and having got her paste ready proceeded to cover the plates with it. Next the apple was sliced in, sugar and cinnamon lavishly sprinkled over it, and then the top crust put on with breathless care.

“I always wanted to cut them round, and Asia never would let me. How nice it is to do it all my ownty donty self!” said Daisy, as the little knife went clipping round the doll’s plate poised on her hand.

All cooks, even the best, meet with mishaps sometimes, and Sally’s first one occurred then, for the knife went so fast that the plate slipped, turned a somersault in the air, and landed the dear little pie upside down on the floor. Sally screamed, Mrs. Jo laughed, Teddy scrambled to get it, and for a moment confusion reigned in the new kitchen.

“It didn’t spill or break, because I pinched the edges together so hard; it isn’t hurt a bit, so I’ll prick holes in it, and then it will be ready,” said Sally, picking up the capsized treasure and putting it into shape with a child-like disregard of the dust it had gathered in its fall.

“My new cook has a good temper, I see, and that is such a comfort,” said Mrs. Jo. “Now open the jar of strawberry jam, fill the uncovered pie, and put some strips of paste over the top as Asia does.”

“I’ll make a D in the middle, and have zigzags all round, that will be so interesting when I come to eat it,” said Sally, loading the pie with quirls and flourishes that would have driven a real pastry cook wild. “Now I put them in!” she exclaimed; when the last grimy knob had been carefully planted in the red field of jam, and with an air of triumph she shut them into the little oven.

“Clear up your things; a good cook never lets her utensils collect. Then pare your squash and potatoes.”

“There is only one potato,” giggled Sally.

“Cut it in four pieces, so it will go into the little kettle, and put the bits into cold water till it is time to cook them.”

“Do I soak the squash too?”

“No, indeed! Just pare it and cut it up, and put in into the steamer over the pot. It is drier so, though it takes longer to cook.”

Here a scratching at the door caused Sally to run and open it, when Kit appeared with a covered basket in his mouth.

“Here’s the butcher boy!” cried Daisy, much tickled at the idea, as she relieved him of his load, whereat he licked his lips and began to beg, evidently thinking that it was his own dinner, for he often carried it to his master in that way. Being undeceived, he departed in great wrath and barked all the way downstairs, to ease his wounded feelings.

In the basket were two bits of steak (doll’s pounds), a baked pear, a small cake, and paper with them on which Asia had scrawled, “For Missy’s lunch, if her cookin' don't turn out well."

"I don't want any of her old pears and things; my cooking will turn out well, and I'll have a splendid dinner; see if I don't!" cried Daisy, indignantly.

"We may like them if company should come. It is always well to have something in the storeroom," said Aunt Jo, who had been taught this valuable fact by a series of domestic panics.

"Me is hundry," announced Teddy, who began to think what with so much cooking going on it was about time for somebody to eat something. His mother gave him her workbasket to rummage, hoping to keep him quiet till dinner was ready, and returned to her housekeeping.

"Put on your vegetables, set the table, and then have some coals kindling ready for the steak."

What a thing it was to see the potatoes bobbing about in the little pot; to peep at the squash getting soft so fast in the tiny steamer; to whisk open the oven door every five minutes to see how the pies got on, and at last when the coals were red and glowing, to put two real steaks on a finger-long gridiron and proudly turn them with a fork. The potatoes were done first, and no wonder, for they had boiled frantically all the while. The were pounded up with a little pestle, had much butter and no salt put in (cook forgot it in the excitement of the moment), then it was made into a mound in a gay red dish, smoothed over with a knife dipped in milk, and put in the oven to brown.

So absorbed in these last performances had Sally been, that she forgot her pastry till she opened the door to put in the potato, then a wail arose, for alas! alas! the little pies were burnt black!

"Oh, my pies! My darling pies! They are all spoilt!" cried poor Sally, wringing her dirty little hands as she surveyed the ruin of her work. The tart was especially pathetic, for the quirls and zigzags stuck up in all directions from the blackened jelly, like the walls and chimney of a house after a fire.

"Dear, dear, I forgot to remind you to take them out; it's just my luck," said Aunt Jo, remorsefully. "Don't cry, darling, it was my fault; we'll try again after dinner," she added, as a great tear dropped from Sally's eyes and sizzled on the hot ruins of the tart.

More would have followed, if the steak had not blazed up just then, and so occupied the attention of cook, that she quickly forgot the lost pastry.

"Put the meat-dish and your own plates down to warm, while you mash the squash with butter, salt, and a little pepper on the top," said Mrs. Jo, devoutly hoping that the dinner would meet with no further disasters.

The "cunning pepper-pot" soothed Sally's feelings, and she dished up her squash in fine style. The dinner was safely put upon the table; the six dolls were seated three on a side; Teddy took the bottom, and Sally the top. When all were settled, it was a most imposing spectacle, for one doll was in full ball costume, another in her night-gown; Jerry, the worsted boy, wore his red winter suit, while Annabella, the noseless darling, was airily attired in nothing but her own kid skin. Teddy, as father of the family, behaved with great propriety, for he smilingly devoured everything offered him, and did not find a single fault. Daisy beamed upon her company like the weary, warm, but hospitable hostess so often to be seen at larger tables than this, and did the honors with an air of innocent satisfaction, which we do not often see elsewhere.

The steak was so tough that the little carving-knife would not cut it; the potato did not go round, and the squash was very lumpy; but the guests appeared politely unconscious of these trifles; and the master and mistress of the house cleared the table with appetites that anyone might envy them. The joy of skimming a jug-full of cream mitigated the anguish felt for the loss of the pies, and Asia's despised cake proved a treasure in the way of dessert.

"That is the nicest lunch I ever had; can't I do it every day?" asked Daisy as she scraped up and ate the leavings all round.

"You can cook things every day after lessons, but I prefer that you should eat your dishes at your regular meals, and only have a bit of gingerbread for lunch. To-day, being the first time, I don't mind, but we must keep our rules. This afternoon you can make something for tea if you like," said Mrs. Jo, who had enjoyed the dinner-party very much, though no one had invited her to partake.

"Do let me make flapjacks for Demi, he loves them so, and it's such fun to turn them and put sugar in between," cried Daisy, tenderly wiping a yellow stain off Annabella's broken nose, for Bella had refused to eat squash when it was pressed upon her as good for "lumatism," a complaint which it is no wonder she suffered from, considering the lightness of her attire.

"But if you give Demi goodies, all the others will expect some also, and then you will have your hands full."

"Couldn't I have Demi come up to tea alone just this one time? And after that I could cook things for the others if they were good," proposed Daisy, with a sudden inspiration.

"That is a capital idea, Posy! We will make your little messes rewards for the good boys, and I don't know one among them who would not like something nice to eat more than almost anything else. If little men are like big ones, good cooking will touch their hearts and soothe their tempers delightfully," added Aunt Jo, with a merry nod toward the door, where stood Papa Bhaer, surveying the scene with a face full of amusement.

"That last hit was for me, sharp woman. I accept it, for it is true; but if I had married thee for thy cooking, heart's dearest, I should have fared badly all these years," answered the professor, laughing as he tossed Teddy, who became quite apoplectic in his endeavors to describe the feast he had just enjoyed.

Daisy proudly showed her kitchen, and rashly promised Uncle Fritz as many flapjacks as he could eat. She was just telling about the new rewards when the boys, headed by Demi, burst into the room snuffing the air like a pack of hungry hounds, for school was out, dinner was not ready, and the fragrance of Daisy's steak led them straight to the spot.

A prouder little damsel was never seen than Sally as she displayed her treasures and told the lads what was in store for them. Several rather scoffed at the idea of her cooking anything fit to eat, but Stuffy's heart was won at once. Nat and Demi had firm faith in her skill, and the others said they would wait and see. All admired the kitchen, however, and examined the stove with deep interest. Demi offered to buy the boiler on the spot, to be used in a steam-engine which he was constructing; and Ned declared that the best and biggest saucepan was just the thing to melt his lead in when he ran bullets, hatchets, and such trifles.

Daisy looked so alarmed at these proposals, that Mrs. Jo then and there made and proclaimed a law that no boy should touch, use, or even approach the sacred stove without a special permit from the owner thereof. This increased its value immensely in the eyes of the gentlemen, especially as any infringement of the law would be punished by forfeiture of all right to partake of the delicacies promised to the virtuous.

At this point the bell rang, and the entire population went down to dinner, which meal was enlivened by each of the boys giving Daisy a list of things he would like to have cooked for him as fast as he earned them. Daisy, whose faith in her stove was unlimited, promised everything, if Aunt Jo would tell her how to make them. This suggestion rather alarmed Mrs. Jo, for some of the dishes were quite beyond her skill wedding-cake, for instance, bull's-eye candy; and cabbage soup with herrings and cherries in it, which Mr. Bhaer proposed as his favorite, and immediately reduced his wife to despair, for German cookery was beyond her.

Daisy wanted to begin again the minute dinner was done, but she was only allowed to clear up, fill the kettle ready for tea, and wash out her apron, which looked as if she had a Christmas feast. She was then sent out to play till five o'clock, for Uncle Fritz said that too much study, even at cooking stoves, was bad for little minds and bodies, and Aunt Jo knew by long experience how soon new toys lose their charm if they are not prudently used.

Everyone was very kind to Daisy that afternoon. Tommy promised her the first fruits of his garden, though the only visible crop just then was pigweed; Nat offered to supply her with wood, free of charge; Stuffy quite worshipped her; Ned immediately fell to work on a little refrigerator for her kitchen; and Demi, with a punctuality beautiful to see in one so young, escorted her to the nursery just as the clock struck five. It was not time for the party to begin, but he begged so hard to come in and help that he was allowed privileges few visitors enjoy, for he kindled the fire, ran errands, and watched the progress of his supper with intense interest. Mrs. Jo directed the affair as she came and went, being very busy putting up clean curtains all over the house.

"Ask Asia for a cup of sour cream, then your cakes will be light without much soda, which I don't like," was the first order.

Demi tore downstairs, and returned with the cream, also a puckered-up face, for he had tasted it on his way, and found it so sour that he predicted the cakes would be uneatable. Mrs. Jo took this occasion to deliver a short lecture from the step-ladder on the chemical properties of soda, to which Daisy did not listen, but Demi did, and understood it, as he proved by the brief but comprehensive reply:

"Yes, I see, soda turns sour things sweet, and the fizzling up makes them light. Let's see you do it, Daisy."

"Fill that bowl nearly full of flour and add a little salt to it," continued Mrs. Jo.

"Oh dear, everything has to have salt in it, seems to me," said Sally, who was tired of opening the pill-box in which it was kept.

"Salt is like good-humor, and nearly every thing is better for a pinch of it, Posy," and Uncle Fritz stopped as he passed, hammer in hand, to drive up two or three nails for Sally's little pans to hang on.

"You are not invited to tea, but I'll give you some cakes, and I won't be cross," said Daisy, putting up her floury little face to thank him with a kiss.

"Fritz, you must not interrupt my cooking class, or I'll come in and moralize when you are teaching Latin. How would you like that?" said Mrs. Jo, throwing a great chintz curtain down on his head.

"Very much, try it and see," and the amiable Father Bhaer went singing and tapping about the house like a mammoth woodpecker.

"Put the soda into the cream, and when it 'fizzles,' as Demi says, stir it into the flour, and beat it up as hard as ever you can. Have your griddle hot, butter it well, and then fry away till I come back," and Aunt Jo vanished also.

Such a clatter as the little spoon made, and such a beating as the batter got, it quite foamed, I assure you; and when Daisy poured some on to the griddle, it rose like magic into a puffy flapjack that made Demi's mouth water. To be sure, the first one stuck and scorched, because she forgot the butter, but after that first failure all went well, and six capital little cakes were safely landed in a dish.

"I think I like maple-syrup better than sugar," said Demi, from his arm-chair where he had settled himself after setting the table in a new and peculiar manner.

"Then go and ask Asia for some," answered Daisy, going into the bath-room to wash her hands.

While the nursery was empty something dreadful happened. You see, Kit had been feeling hurt all day because he had carried meat safely and yet got none to pay him. He was not a bad dog, but he had his little faults like the rest of us, and could not always resist temptation. Happening to stroll into the nursery at that moment, he smelt the cakes, saw them unguarded on the low table, and never stopping to think of consequences, swallowed all six at one mouthful. I am glad to say that they were very hot, and burned him so badly that he could not repress a surprised yelp. Daisy heard it, ran in, saw the empty dish, also the end of a yellow tail disappearing under the bed. Without a word she seized that tail, pulled out the thief, and shook him till his ears flapped wildly, then bundled him down-stairs to the shed, where he spent a lonely evening in the coal-bin.

Cheered by the sympathy which Demi gave her, Daisy made another bowlful of batter, and fried a dozen cakes, which were even better than the others. Indeed, Uncle Fritz after eating two sent up word that he had never tasted any so nice, and every boy at the table below envied Demi at the flapjack party above.

It was a truly delightful supper, for the little teapot lid only fell off three times and the milk jug upset but once; the cakes floated in syrup, and the toast had a delicious beef-steak flavor, owing to cook's using the gridiron to make it on. Demi forgot philosophy, and stuffed like any carnal boy, while Daisy planned sumptuous banquets, and the dolls looked on smiling affably.

"Well, dearies, have you had a good time?" asked Mrs. Jo, coming up with Teddy on her shoulder.

"A very good time. I shall come again soon," answered Demi, with emphasis.

"I'm afraid you have eaten too much, by the look of that table."

"No, I haven't; I only ate fifteen cakes, and they were very little ones," protested Demi, who had kept his sister busy supplying his plate.

"They won't hurt him, they are so nice," said Daisy, with such a funny mixture of maternal fondness and housewifely pride that Aunt Jo could only smile and say:

"Well, on the whole, the new game is a success then?"

"I like it," said Demi, as if his approval was all that was necessary.

"It is the dearest play ever made!" cried Daisy, hugging her little dish-tub as she proposed to wash up the cups. "I just wish everybody had a sweet cooking stove like mine," she added, regarding it with affection.

"This play out to have a name," said Demi, gravely removing the syrup from his countenance with his tongue.

“It has.”

“Oh, what?” asked both children eagerly.

“Well, I think we will call it Pattypans,” and Aunt Jo retired, satisfied with the success of her last trap to catch a sunbeam.

CHAPTER VI. A FIRE BRAND

"Please, ma'am, could I speak to you? It is something very important," said Nat, popping his head in at the door of Mrs. Bhaer's room.

It was the fifth head which had popped in during the last half-hour; but Mrs. Jo was used to it, so she looked up, and said, briskly,

"What is it, my lad?"

Nat came in, shut the door carefully behind him, and said in an eager, anxious tone,

"Dan has come."

"Who is Dan?"

"He's a boy I used to know when I fiddled round the streets. He sold papers, and he was kind to me, and I saw him the other day in town, and told him how nice it was here, and he's come."

"But, my dear boy, that is rather a sudden way to pay a visit."

"Oh, it isn't a visit; he wants to stay if you will let him!" said Nat innocently.

"Well, I don't know about that," began Mrs. Bhaer, rather startled by the coolness of the proposition.

"Why, I thought you liked to have poor boys come and live with you, and be kind to 'em as you were to me," said Nat, looking surprised and alarmed.

"So I do, but I like to know something about them first. I have to choose them, because there are so many. I have not room for all. I wish I had."

"I told him to come because I thought you'd like it, but if there isn't room he can go away again," said Nat, sorrowfully.

The boy's confidence in her hospitality touched Mrs. Bhaer, and she could not find the heart to disappoint his hope, and spoil his kind little plan, so she said,

"Tell me about this Dan."

"I don't know any thing, only he hasn't got any folks, and he's poor, and he was good to me, so I'd like to be good to him if I could."

"Excellent reasons every one; but really, Nat, the house is full, and I don't know where I could put him," said Mrs. Bhaer, more and more inclined to prove herself the haven of refuge he seemed to think her.

"He could have my bed, and I could sleep in the barn. It isn't cold now, and I don't mind, I used to sleep anywhere with father," said Nat, eagerly.

Something in his speech and face made Mrs. Jo put her hand on his shoulder, and say in her kindest tone:

“Bring in your friend, Nat; I think we must find room for him without giving him your place.”

Nat joyfully ran off, and soon returned followed by a most unprepossessing boy, who slouched in and stood looking about him, with a half bold, half sullen look, which made Mrs. Bhaer say to herself, after one glance,

“A bad specimen, I am afraid.”

“This is Dan,” said Nat, presenting him as if sure of his welcome.

“Nat tells me you would like to come and stay with us,” began Mrs. Jo, in a friendly tone.

“Yes,” was the gruff reply.

“Have you no friends to take care of you?”

“No.”

“Say, ‘No, ma’am,’“ whispered Nat.

“Shan’t neither,” muttered Dan.

“How old are you?”

“About fourteen.”

“You look older. What can you do?”

“‘Most anything.”

“If you stay here we shall want you to do as the others do, work and study as well as play. Are you willing to agree to that?”

“Don’t mind trying.”

“Well, you can stay a few days, and we will see how we get on together. Take him out, Nat, and amuse him till Mr. Bhaer comes home, when we will settle about the matter,” said Mrs. Jo, finding it rather difficult to get on with this cool young person, who fixed his big black eyes on her with a hard, suspicious expression, sorrowfully unboyish.

“Come on, Nat,” he said, and slouched out again.

“Thank you, ma’am,” added Nat, as he followed him, feeling without quite understanding the difference in the welcome given to him and to his ungracious friend.

“The fellows are having a circus out in the barn; don’t you want to come and see it?” he asked, as they came down the wide steps on to the lawn.

“Are they big fellows?” said Dan.

“No; the big ones are gone fishing.”

“Fire away, then,” said Dan.

Nat led him to the great barn and introduced him to his set, who were disporting themselves among the half-empty lofts. A large circle was marked out with hay on the wide floor, and in the middle stood Demi with a long whip, while Tommy, mounted on the much-enduring Toby, pranced about the circle playing being a monkey.

“You must pay a pin apiece, or you can’t see the show,” said Stuffy, who stood by the wheelbarrow in which sat the band, consisting of a pocket-comb blown upon by Ned, and a toy drum beaten spasmodically by Rob.

“He’s company, so I’ll pay for both,” said Nat, handsomely, as he stuck two crooked pins in the dried mushroom which served as money-box.

With a nod to the company they seated themselves on a couple of boards, and the performance went on. After the monkey act, Ned gave them a fine specimen of his agility by jumping over an old chair, and running up and down ladders, sailor fashion. Then Demi danced a jig with a gravity beautiful to behold. Nat was called upon to wrestle with Stuffy, and speedily laid that stout youth upon the ground. After this, Tommy proudly advanced to turn a somersault, an accomplishment which he had acquired by painful perseverance, practising in private till every joint of his little frame was black and blue. His feats were received with great applause, and he was about to retire, flushed with pride and a rush of blood to the head, when a scornful voice in the audience was heard to say,

“Ho! that ain’t any thing!”

“Say that again, will you?” and Tommy bristled up like an angry turkey-cock.

“Do you want to fight?” said Dan, promptly descending from the barrel and doubling up his fists in a business-like manner.

“No, I don’t;” and the candid Thomas retired a step, rather taken aback by the proposition.

“Fighting isn’t allowed!” cried the others, much excited.

“You’re a nice lot,” sneered Dan.

“Come, if you don’t behave, you shan’t stay,” said Nat, firing up at that insult to his friends.

“I’d like to see him do better than I did, that’s all,” observed Tommy, with a swagger.

“Clear the way, then,” and without the slightest preparation Dan turned three somersaults one after the other and came up on his feet.

“You can’t beat that, Tom; you always hit your head and tumble flat,” said Nat, pleased at his friend’s success.

Before he could say any more the audience were electrified by three more somersaults backwards, and a short promenade on the hands, head down, feet up. This brought down the house, and Tommy joined in the admiring cries which greeted the accomplished gymnast as he righted himself, and looked at them with an air of calm superiority.

“Do you think I could learn to do it without its hurting me very much?” Tom meekly asked, as he rubbed the elbows which still smarted after the last attempt.

"What will you give me if I'll teach you?" said Dan.

"My new jack-knife; it's got five blades, and only one is broken."

"Give it here, then."

Tommy handed it over with an affectionate look at its smooth handle. Dan examined it carefully, then putting it into his pocket, walked off, saying with a wink,

"Keep it up till you learn, that's all."

A howl of wrath from Tommy was followed by a general uproar, which did not subside till Dan, finding himself in a minority, proposed that they should play stick-knife, and whichever won should have the treasure. Tommy agreed, and the game was played in a circle of excited faces, which all wore an expression of satisfaction, when Tommy won and secured the knife in the depth of his safest pocket.

"You come off with me, and I'll show you round," said Nat, feeling that he must have a little serious conversation with his friend in private.

What passed between them no one knew, but when they appeared again, Dan was more respectful to every one, though still gruff in his speech, and rough in his manner; and what else could be expected of the poor lad who had been knocking about the world all his short life with no one to teach him any better?

The boys had decided that they did not like him, and so they left him to Nat, who soon felt rather oppressed by the responsibility, but too kind-hearted to desert him.

Tommy, however, felt that in spite of the jack-knife transaction, there was a bond of sympathy between them, and longed to return to the interesting subject of somersaults. He soon found an opportunity, for Dan, seeing how much he admired him, grew more amiable, and by the end of the first week was quite intimate with the lively Tom.

Mr. Bhaer, when he heard the story and saw Dan, shook his head, but only said quietly,

"The experiment may cost us something, but we will try it."

If Dan felt any gratitude for his protection, he did not show it, and took without thanks all that was give him. He was ignorant, but very quick to learn when he chose; had sharp eyes to watch what went on about him; a saucy tongue, rough manners, and a temper that was fierce and sullen by turns. He played with all his might, and played well at almost all the games. He was silent and gruff before grown people, and only now and then was thoroughly sociable among the lads. Few of them really liked him, but few could help admiring his courage and strength, for nothing daunted him, and he knocked tall Franz flat on one occasion with an ease that caused all the others to keep at a respectful distance from his fists. Mr. Bhaer watched him silently, and did his best to tame the "Wild Boy," as they called him, but in private the worthy man shook his head, and said soberly, "I hope the experiment will turn out well, but I am a little afraid it may cost too much."

Mrs. Bhaer lost her patience with him half a dozen times a day, yet never gave him up, and always insisted that there was something good in the lad, after all; for he was kinder to animals than to people, he liked to rove about in the woods, and, best of all, little Ted was fond of him. What the secret was no one could discover, but Baby took to him at once gabbled and crowed whenever he saw him preferred his strong back to ride on to any of the others and called him "My Danny" out of his own little head. Teddy was the only creature to whom Dan showed an affection, and this was only manifested when he thought no one else would see it; but mothers' eyes are quick, and motherly hearts instinctively divine who love their babies. So Mrs. Jo soon saw and felt that there was a soft spot in rough Dan, and bided her time to touch and win him.

But an unexpected and decidedly alarming event upset all their plans, and banished Dan from Plumfield.

Tommy, Nat, and Demi began by patronizing Dan, because the other lads rather slighted him; but soon they each felt there was a certain fascination about the bad boy, and from looking down upon him they came to looking up, each for a different reason. Tommy admired his skill and courage; Nat was grateful for past kindness; and Demi regarded him as a sort of animated story book, for when he chose Dan could tell his adventures in a most interesting way. It pleased Dan to have the three favorites like him, and he exerted himself to be agreeable, which was the secret of his success.

The Bhaers were surprised, but hoped the lads would have a good influence over Dan, and waited with some anxiety, trusting that no harm would come of it.

Dan felt they did not quite trust him, and never showed them his best side, but took a wilful pleasure in trying their patience and thwarting their hopes as far as he dared.

Mr. Bhaer did not approve of fighting, and did not think it a proof of either manliness or courage for two lads to pommel one another for the amusement of the rest. All sorts of hardy games and exercises were encouraged, and the boys were expected to take hard knocks and tumbles without whining; but black eyes and bloody noses given for the fun of it were forbidden as a foolish and a brutal play.

Dan laughed at this rule, and told such exciting tales of his own valor, and the many frays that he had been in, that some of the lads were fired with a desire to have a regular good “mill.”

“Don’t tell, and I’ll show you how,” said Dan; and, getting half a dozen of the lads together behind the barn, he gave them a lesson in boxing, which quite satisfied the ardor of most of them. Emil, however, could not submit to be beaten by a fellow younger than himself, for Emil was past fourteen and a plucky fellow, so he challenged Dan to a fight. Dan accepted at once, and the others looked on with intense interest.

What little bird carried the news to head-quarters no one ever knew, but, in the very hottest of the fray, when Dan and Emil were fighting like a pair of young bulldogs, and the others with fierce, excited faces were cheering them on, Mr. Bhaer walked into the ring, plucked the combatants apart with a strong hand, and said, in the voice they seldom heard,

“I can’t allow this, boys! Stop it at once; and never let me see it again. I keep a school for boys, not for wild beasts. Look at each other and be ashamed of yourselves.”

“You let me go, and I’ll knock him down again,” shouted Dan, sparring away in spite of the grip on his collar.

“Come on, come on, I ain’t thrashed yet!” cried Emil, who had been down five times, but did not know when he was beaten.

“They are playing be gladdy what-you-call-’ems, like the Romans, Uncle Fritz,” called out Demi, whose eyes were bigger than ever with the excitement of this new pastime.

“They were a fine set of brutes; but we have learned something since then, I hope, and I cannot have you make my barn a Colosseum. Who proposed this?” asked Mr. Bhaer.

“Dan,” answered several voices.

“Don’t you know that it is forbidden?”

“Yes,” growled Dan, sullenly.

“Then why break the rule?”

“They’ll all be molly-coddles, if they don’t know how to fight.”

“Have you found Emil a molly-coddle? He doesn’t look much like one,” and Mr. Bhaer brought the two face to face. Dan had a black eye, and his jacket was torn to rags, but Emil’s face was covered with blood from a cut lip and a bruised nose, while a bump on his forehead was already as purple as a plum. In spite of his wounds however, he still glared upon his foe, and evidently panted to renew the fight.

“He’d make a first-rater if he was taught,” said Dan, unable to withhold the praise from the boy who made it necessary for him to do his best.

“He’ll be taught to fence and box by and by, and till then I think he will do very well without any lessons in mauling. Go and wash your faces; and remember, Dan, if you break any more of the rules again, you will be sent away. That was the bargain; do your part and we will do ours."

The lads went off, and after a few more words to the spectators, Mr. Bhaer followed to bind up the wounds of the young gladiators. Emil went to bed sick, and Dan was an unpleasant spectacle for a week.

But the lawless lad had no thought of obeying, and soon transgressed again.

One Saturday afternoon as a party of the boys went out to play, Tommy said,

"Let's go down to the river, and cut a lot of new fish-poles."

"Take Toby to drag them back, and one of us can ride him down," proposed Stuffy, who hated to walk.

"That means you, I suppose; well, hurry up, lazy-bones," said Dan.

Away they went, and having got the poles were about to go home, when Demi unluckily said to Tommy, who was on Toby with a long rod in his hand,

"You look like the picture of the man in the bull-fight, only you haven't got a red cloth, or pretty clothes on."

"I'd like to see one; there's old Buttercup in the big meadow, ride at her, Tom, and see her run," proposed Dan, bent on mischief.

"No, you mustn't," began Demi, who was learning to distrust Dan's propositions.

"Why not, little fuss-button?" demanded Dan.

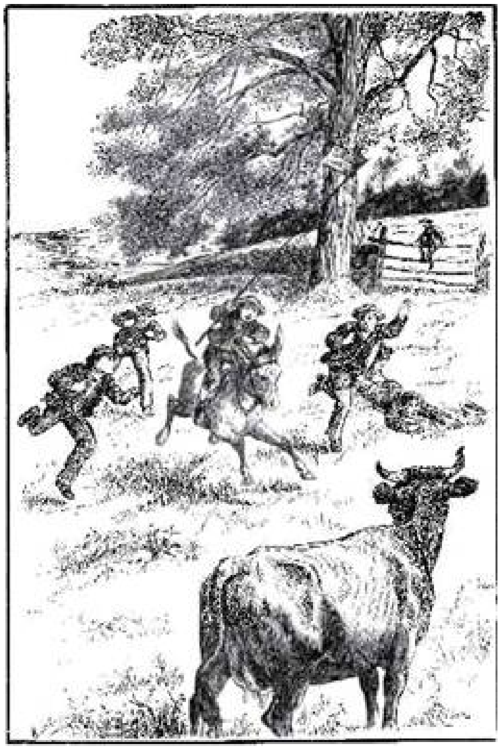
"I don't think Uncle Fritz would like it."

"Did he ever say we must not have a bull-fight?"

"No, I don't think he ever did," admitted Demi.

"Then hold your tongue. Drive on, Tom, and here's a red rag to flap at the old thing. I'll help you to stir her up," and over the wall went Dan, full of the new game, and the rest followed like a flock of sheep; even Demi, who sat upon the bars, and watched the fun with interest.

Poor Buttercup was not in a very good mood, for she had been lately bereft of her calf, and mourned for the little thing most dismally. Just now she regarded all mankind as her enemies (and I do not blame her), so when the matadore came prancing towards her with the red handkerchief flying at the end of his long lance, she threw up her head, and gave a most appropriate "Moo!" Tommy rode gallantly at her, and Toby recognizing an old friend, was quite willing to approach; but when the lance came down on her back with a loud whack, both cow and donkey were surprised and disgusted. Toby back with a bray of remonstrance, and Buttercup lowered her horns angrily.



"At her again, Tom; she's jolly cross, and will do it capitally!" called Dan, coming up behind with another rod, while Jack and Ned followed his example.

Seeing herself thus beset, and treated with such disrespect, Buttercup trotted round the field, getting more and more bewildered and excited every moment, for whichever way she turned, there was a dreadful boy, yelling and brandishing a new and very disagreeable sort of whip. It was great fun for them, but real misery for her, till she lost patience and turned the tables in the most unexpected manner. All at once she wheeled short round, and charged full at her old friend Toby, whose conduct cut her to the heart. Poor slow Toby backed so precipitately that he tripped over a stone, and down went horse, matadore, and all, in one ignominious heap, while distracted Buttercup took a surprising leap over the wall, and galloped wildly out of sight down the road.

"Catch her, stop her, head her off! run, boys, run!" shouted Dan, tearing after her at his best pace, for she was Mr. Bhaer's pet Alderney, and if anything happened to her, Dan feared it would be all over with him. Such a running and racing and bawling and puffing as there was before she was caught! The fish-poles were left behind; Toby was trotted nearly off his legs in the chase; and every boy was red, breathless, and scared. They found poor Buttercup at last in a flower garden, where she had taken refuge, worn out with the long run. Borrowing a rope for a halter, Dan led her home, followed by a party of very sober young gentlemen, for the cow was in a sad state, having strained her shoulder jumping, so that she limped, her eyes looked wild, and her glossy coat was wet and muddy.

“You’ll catch it this time, Dan,” said Tommy, as he led the wheezing donkey beside the maltreated cow.

“So will you, for you helped.”

“We all did, but Demi,” added Jack.

“He put it into our heads,” said Ned.

“I told you not to do it,” cried Demi, who was most broken-hearted at poor Buttercup’s state.

“Old Bhaer will send me off, I guess. Don’t care if he does,” muttered Dan, looking worried in spite of his words.

“We’ll ask him not to, all of us,” said Demi, and the others assented with the exception of Stuffy, who cherished the hope that all the punishment might fall on one guilty head. Dan only said, “Don’t bother about me;” but he never forgot it, even though he led the lads astray again, as soon as the temptation came.

When Mr. Bhaer saw the animal, and heard the story, he said very little, evidently fearing that he should say too much in the first moments of impatience. Buttercup was made comfortable in her stall, and the boys sent to their rooms till supper-time. This brief respite gave them time to think the matter over, to wonder what the penalty would be, and to try to imagine where Dan would be sent. He whistled briskly in his room, so that no one should think he cared a bit; but while he waited to know his fate, the longing to stay grew stronger and stronger, the more he recalled the comfort and kindness he had known here, the hardship and neglect he had felt elsewhere. He knew they tried to help him, and at the bottom of his heart he was grateful, but his rough life had made him hard and careless, suspicious and wilful. He hated restraint of any sort, and fought against it like an untamed creature, even while he knew it was kindly meant, and dimly felt that he would be the better for it. He made up his mind to be turned adrift again, to knock about the city as he had done nearly all his life; a prospect that made him knit his black brows, and look about the cosy little room with a wistful expression that would have touched a much harder heart than Mr. Bhaer’s if he had seen it. It vanished instantly, however, when the good man came in, and said in his accustomed grave way,

“I have heard all about it, Dan, and though you have broken the rules again, I am going to give you one more trial, to please Mother Bhaer.”

Dan flushed up to his forehead at this unexpected reprieve, but he only said in his gruff way,

“I didn’t know there was any rule about bull-fighting.”

“As I never expected to have any at Plumfield, I never did make such a rule,” answered Mr. Bhaer, smiling in spite of himself at the boy’s excuse. Then he added gravely, “But one of the first and most important of our few laws is the law of kindness to every dumb creature on the place. I want everybody and everything to be happy here, to love and trust, and serve us, as we try to love and trust and serve them faithfully and willingly. I have often said that you were kinder to the animals than any of the other boys, and Mrs. Bhaer liked that trait in you very much, because she thought it showed a good heart. But you have disappointed us in that, and we are sorry, for we hoped to make you quite one of us. Shall we try again?”

Dan’s eyes had been on the floor, and his hands nervously picking at the bit of wood he had been whittling as Mr. Bhaer came in, but when he heard the kind voice ask that question, he looked up quickly, and said in a more respectful tone than he had ever used before,

“Yes, please.”

“Very well, then, we will say no more, only you will stay at home from the walk to-morrow, as the other boys will and all of you must wait on poor Buttercup till she is well again.”

“I will.”

“Now, go down to supper, and do your best, my boy, more for your own sake than for ours.” Then Mr. Bhaer shook hands with him, and Dan went down more tamed by kindness than he would have been by the good whipping which Asia had strongly recommended.

Dan did try for a day or two, but not being used to it, he soon tired and relapsed into his old wilful ways. Mr. Bhaer was called from home on business one day, and the boys had no lessons. They liked this, and played hard till bedtime, when most of them turned in and slept like dormice. Dan, however, had a plan in his head, and when he and Nat were alone, he unfolded it.

“Look here!” he said, taking from under his bed a bottle, a cigar, and a pack of cards, “I’m going to have some fun, and do as I used to with the fellows in town. Here’s some beer, I got if of the old man at the station, and this cigar; you can pay for ‘em or Tommy will, he’s got heaps of money and I haven’t a cent. I’m going to ask him in; no, you go, they won’t mind you.”

“The folks won’t like it,” began Nat.

“They won’t know. Daddy Bhaer is away, and Mrs. Bhaer’s busy with Ted; he’s got croup or something, and she can’t leave him. We shan’t sit up late or make any noise, so where’s the harm?”

“Asia will know if we burn the lamp long, she always does.”

“No, she won’t, I’ve got a dark lantern on purpose; it don’t give much light, and we can shut it quick if we hear anyone coming,” said Dan.

This idea struck Nat as a fine one, and lent an air of romance to the thing. He started off to tell Tommy, but put his head in again to say,

"You want Demi, too, don't you?"

"No, I don't; the Deacon will rollup eyes and preach if you tell him. He will be asleep, so just tip the wink to Tom and cut back again."

Nat obeyed, and returned in a minute with Tommy half dressed, rather tousled about the head and very sleepy, but quite ready for fun as usual.

"Now, keep quiet, and I'll show you how to play a first-rate game called 'Poker,'" said Dan, as the three revellers gathered round the table, on which were set forth the bottle, the cigar, and the cards. "First we'll all have a drink, then we'll take a go at the 'weed,' and then we'll play. That's the way men do, and it's jolly fun."

The beer circulated in a mug, and all three smacked their lips over it, though Nat and Tommy did not like the bitter stuff. The cigar was worse still, but they dared not say so, and each puffed away till he was dizzy or choked, when he passed the "weed" on to his neighbor. Dan liked it, for it seemed like old times when he now and then had a chance to imitate the low men who surrounded him. He drank, and smoked, and swaggered as much like them as he could, and, getting into the spirit of the part he assumed, he soon began to swear under his breath for fear some one should hear him. "You mustn't; it's wicked to say 'Damn!'" cried Tommy, who had followed his leader so far.

"Oh, hang! don't you preach, but play away; it's part of the fun to swear."

"I'd rather say 'thunder turtles,'" said Tommy, who had composed this interesting exclamation and was very proud of it.

"And I'll say 'The Devil;' that sounds well," added Nat, much impressed by Dan's manly ways.

Dan scoffed at their "nonsense," and swore stoutly as he tried to teach them the new game.

But Tommy was very sleepy, and Nat's head began to ache with the beer and the smoke, so neither of them was very quick to learn, and the game dragged. The room was nearly dark, for the lantern burned badly; they could not laugh loud nor move about much, for Silas slept next door in the shed-chamber, and altogether the party was dull. In the middle of a deal Dan stopped suddenly, and called out, "Who's that?" in a startled tone, and at the same moment drew the slide over the light. A voice in the darkness said tremulously, "I can't find Tommy," and then there was the quick patter of bare feet running away down the entry that led from the wing to the main house.

"It's Demi! he's gone to call some one; cut into bed, Tom, and don't tell!" cried Dan, whisking all signs of the revel out of sight, and beginning to tear off his clothes, while Nat did the same.

Tommy flew to his room and dived into bed, where he lay, laughing till something burned his hand, when he discovered that he was still clutching the stump of the festive cigar, which he happened to be smoking when the revel broke up.

It was nearly out, and he was about to extinguish it carefully when Nursey's voice was heard, and fearing it would betray him if he hid it in the bed, he threw it underneath, after a final pinch which he thought finished it.

Nursey came in with Demi, who looked much amazed to see the red face of Tommy reposing peacefully upon his pillow.

"He wasn't there just now, because I woke up and could not find him anywhere," said Demi, pouncing on him.

"What mischief are you at now, bad child?" asked Nursey, with a good-natured shake, which made the sleeper open his eyes to say meekly,

"I only ran into Nat's room to see him about something. Go away, and let me alone; I'm awful sleepy."

Nursey tucked Demi in, and went off to reconnoitre, but only found two boys slumbering peacefully in Dan's room. "Some little frolic," she thought, and as there was no harm done she said nothing to Mrs. Bhaer, who was busy and worried over little Teddy.

Tommy was sleepy, and telling Demi to mind his own business and not ask questions, he was snoring in ten minutes, little dreaming what was going on under his bed. The cigar did not go out, but smouldered away on the straw carpet till it was nicely on fire, and a hungry little flame went creeping along till the dimity bedcover caught, then the sheets, and then the bed itself. The beer made Tommy sleep heavily, and the smoke stupified Demi, so they slept on till the fire began to scorch them, and they were in danger of being burned to death.

Franz was sitting up to study, and as he left the school-room he smelt the smoke, dashed up-stairs and saw it coming in a cloud from the left wing of the house. Without stopping to call any one, he ran into the room, dragged the boys from the blazing bed, and splashed all the water he could find at hand on to the flames. It checked but did not quench the fire, and the children wakened on being tumbled topsy-turvy into a cold hall, began to roar at the top of their voices. Mrs. Bhaer instantly appeared, and a minute after Silas burst out of his room shouting, "Fire!" in a tone that raised the whole house. A flock of white goblins with scared faces crowded into the hall, and for a minute every one was panic-stricken.

Then Mrs. Bhaer found her wits, bade Nursey see to the burnt boys, and sent Franz and Silas down-stairs for some tubs of wet clothes which she flung on the bed, over the carpet, and up against the curtains, now burning finely, and threatening to kindle the walls.

Most of the boys stood dumbly looking on, but Dan and Emil worked bravely, running to and fro with water from the bath-room, and helping to pull down the dangerous curtains.

The peril was soon over, and ordering the boys all back to bed, and leaving Silas to watch lest the fire broke out again, Mrs. Bhaer and Franz went to see how the poor boys got on. Demi had escaped with one burn and a grand scare, but Tommy had not only most of his hair scorched off his head, but a great burn on his arm, that made him half crazy with the pain. Demi was soon made cosy, and Franz took him away to his own bed, where the kind lad soothed his fright and hummed him to sleep as cosily as a woman. Nursey watched over poor Tommy all night, trying to ease his misery, and Mrs. Bhaer vibrated between him and little Teddy with oil and cotton, paregoric and squills, saying to herself from time to time, as if she found great amusement in the thought, "I always knew Tommy would set the house on fire, and now he has done it!"

When Mr. Bhaer got home next morning he found a nice state of things. Tommy in bed, Teddy wheezing like a little grampus, Mrs. Jo quite used up, and the whole flock of boys so excited that they all talked at once, and almost dragged him by main force to view the ruins. Under his quiet management things soon fell into order, for every one felt that he was equal to a dozen conflagrations, and worked with a will at whatever task he gave them.

There was no school that morning, but by afternoon the damaged room was put to rights, the invalids were better, and there was time to hear and judge the little culprits quietly. Nat and Tommy told their parts in the mischief, and were honestly sorry for the danger they had brought to the dear old house and all in it. But Dan put on his devil-may-care look, and would not own that there was much harm done.

Now, of all things, Mr. Bhaer hated drinking, gambling, and swearing; smoking he had given up that the lads might not be tempted to try it, and it grieved and angered him deeply to find that the boy, with whom he had tried to be most forbearing, should take advantage of his absence to introduce these forbidden vices, and teach his innocent little lads to think it manly and pleasant to indulge in them. He talked long and earnestly to the assembled boys, and ended by saying, with an air of mingled firmness and regret,

"I think Tommy is punished enough, and that scar on his arm will remind him for a long time to let these things alone. Nat's fright will do for him, for he is really sorry, and does try to obey me. But you, Dan, have been many times forgiven, and yet it does no good. I cannot have my boys hurt by your bad example, nor my time wasted in talking to deaf ears, so you can say good-bye to them all, and tell Nursey to put up your things in my little black bag.”

“Oh! sir, where is he going?” cried Nat.

“To a pleasant place up in the country, where I sometimes send boys when they don’t do well here. Mr. Page is a kind man, and Dan will be happy there if he chooses to do his best.”

“Will he ever come back?” asked Demi.

“That will depend on himself; I hope so.”

As he spoke, Mr. Bhaer left the room to write his letter to Mr. Page, and the boys crowded round Dan very much as people do about a man who is going on a long and perilous journey to unknown regions.

“I wonder if you’ll like it,” began Jack.

“Shan’t stay if I don’t,” said Dan coolly.

“Where will you go?” asked Nat.

“I may go to sea, or out west, or take a look at California,” answered Dan, with a reckless air that quite took away the breath of the little boys.

“Oh, don’t! stay with Mr. Page awhile and then come back here; do, Dan,” pleaded Nat, much affected at the whole affair.

“I don’t care where I go, or how long I stay, and I’ll be hanged if I ever come back here,” with which wrathful speech Dan went away to put up his things, every one of which Mr. Bhaer had given him.

That was the only good-bye he gave the boys, for they were all talking the matter over in the barn when he came down, and he told Nat not to call them. The wagon stood at the door, and Mrs. Bhaer came out to speak to Dan, looking so sad that his heart smote him, and he said in a low tone,

“May I say good-bye to Teddy?”

“Yes, dear; go in and kiss him, he will miss his Danny very much.”

No one saw the look in Dan’s eyes as he stooped over the crib, and saw the little face light up at first sight of him, but he heard Mrs. Bhaer say pleadingly,

“Can’t we give the poor lad one more trial, Fritz?” and Mr. Bhaer answer in his steady way,

“My dear, it is not best, so let him go where he can do no harm to others, while they do good to him, and by and by he shall come back, I promise you.”

“He’s the only boy we ever failed with, and I am so grieved, for I thought there was the making of a fine man in him, spite of his faults.”

Dan heard Mrs. Bhaer sigh, and he wanted to ask for one more trial himself, but his pride would not let him, and he came out with the hard look on his face, shook hands without a word, and drove away with Mr. Bhaer, leaving Nat and Mrs. Jo to look after him with tears in their eyes.

A few days afterwards they received a letter from Mr. Page, saying that Dan was doing well, whereat they all rejoiced. But three weeks later came another letter, saying that Dan had run away, and nothing had been heard of him, whereat they all looked sober, and Mr. Bhaer said,

“Perhaps I ought to have given him another chance.”

Mrs. Bhaer, however, nodded wisely and answered, “Don’t be troubled, Fritz; the boy will come back to us, I’m sure of it.”

But time went on and no Dan came.

CHAPTER VII. NAUGHTY NAN

“Fritz, I’ve got a new idea,” cried Mrs. Bhaer, as she met her husband one day after school.

“Well, my dear, what is it?” and he waited willingly to hear the new plan, for some of Mrs. Jo’s ideas were so droll, it was impossible to help laughing at them, though usually they were quite sensible, and he was glad to carry them out.

“Daisy needs a companion, and the boys would be all the better for another girl among them; you know we believe in bringing up little men and women together, and it is high time we acted up to our belief. They pet and tyrannize over Daisy by turns, and she is getting spoilt. Then they must learn gentle ways, and improve their manners, and having girls about will do it better than any thing else.”

“You are right, as usual. Now, who shall we have?” asked Mr. Bhaer, seeing by the look in her eye that Mrs. Jo had some one all ready to propose.

“Little Annie Harding.”

“What! Naughty Nan, as the lads call her?” cried Mr. Bhaer, looking very much amused.

“Yes, she is running wild at home since her mother died, and is too bright a child to be spoilt by servants. I have had my eye on her for some time, and when I met her father in town the other day I asked him why he did not send her to school. He said he would gladly if he could find as good a school for girls as ours was for boys. I know he would rejoice to have her come; so suppose we drive over this afternoon and see about it.”

“Have not you cares enough now, my Jo, without this little gypsy to torment you?” asked Mr. Bhaer, patting the hand that lay on his arm.

“Oh dear, no,” said Mother Bhaer, briskly. “I like it, and never was happier than since I had my wilderness of boys. You see, Fritz, I feel a great sympathy for Nan, because I was such a naughty child myself that I know all about it. She is full of spirits, and only needs to be taught what to do with them to be as nice a little girl as Daisy. Those quick wits of hers would enjoy lessons if they were rightly directed, and what is now a tricksy midget would soon become a busy, happy child. I know how to manage her, for I remember how my blessed mother managed me, and — ”

“And if you succeed half as well as she did, you will have done a magnificent work," interrupted Mr. Bhaer, who labored under the delusion that Mrs. B. was the best and most charming woman alive.

"Now, if you make fun of my plan I'll give you bad coffee for a week, and then where are you, sir?" cried Mrs. Jo, tweaking him by the ear just as if he was one of the boys.

"Won't Daisy's hair stand erect with horror at Nan's wild ways?" asked Mr. Bhaer, presently, when Teddy had swarmed up his waistcoat, and Rob up his back, for they always flew at their father the minute school was done.

"At first, perhaps, but it will do Posy good. She is getting prim and Bettyish, and needs stirring up a bit. She always has a good time when Nan comes over to play, and the two will help each other without knowing it. Dear me, half the science of teaching is knowing how much children do for one another, and when to mix them."

"I only hope she won't turn out another firebrand."

"My poor Dan! I never can quite forgive myself for letting him go," sighed Mrs. Bhaer.

At the sound of the name, little Teddy, who had never forgotten his friend, struggled down from his father's arms, and trotted to the door, looked out over the sunny lawn with a wistful face, and then trotted back again, saying, as he always did when disappointed of the longed-for sight,

"My Danny's tummin' soon."

"I really think we ought to have kept him, if only for Teddy's sake, he was so fond of him, and perhaps baby's love would have done for him what we failed to do."

"I've sometimes felt that myself; but after keeping the boys in a ferment, and nearly burning up the whole family, I thought it safer to remove the firebrand, for a time at least," said Mr. Bhaer.

"Dinner's ready, let me ring the bell," and Rob began a solo upon that instrument which made it impossible to hear one's self speak.

"Then I may have Nan, may I?" asked Mrs. Jo.

"A dozen Nans if you want them, my dear," answered Mr. Bhaer, who had room in his fatherly heart for all the naughty neglected children in the world.

When Mrs. Bhaer returned from her drive that afternoon, before she could unpack the load of little boys, without whom she seldom moved, a small girl of ten skipped out at the back of the carry-all and ran into the house, shouting,

"Hi, Daisy! where are you?"

Daisy came, and looked pleased to see her guest, but also a trifle alarmed, when Nan said, still prancing, as if it was impossible to keep still,

"I'm going to stay here always, papa says I may, and my box is coming tomorrow, all my things had to be washed and mended, and your aunt came and carried me off. Isn't it great fun?"

"Why, yes. Did you bring your big doll?" asked Daisy, hoping she had, for on the last visit Nan had ravaged the baby house, and insisted on washing Blanche Matilda's plaster face, which spoilt the poor dear's complexion for ever.

"Yes, she's somewhere round," returned Nan, with most unmaternal carelessness. "I made you a ring coming along, and pulled the hairs out of Dobbin's tail. Don't you want it?" and Nan presented a horse-hair ring in token of friendship, as they had both vowed they would never speak to one another again when they last parted.

Won by the beauty of the offering, Daisy grew more cordial, and proposed retiring to the nursery, but Nan said, "No, I want to see the boys, and the barn," and ran off, swinging her hat by one string till it broke, when she left it to its fate on the grass.

"Hullo! Nan!" cried the boys as she bounced in among them with the announcement,

"I'm going to stay."

"Hooray!" bawled Tommy from the wall on which he was perched, for Nan was a kindred spirit, and he foresaw "larks" in the future.

"I can bat; let me play," said Nan, who could turn her hand to any thing, and did not mind hard knocks.

"We ain't playing now, and our side beat without you."

"I can beat you in running, any way," returned Nan, falling back on her strong point.

"Can she?" asked Nat of Jack.

"She runs very well for a girl," answered Jack, who looked down upon Nan with condescending approval.

"Will you try?" said Nan, longing to display her powers.

"It's too hot," and Tommy languished against the wall as if quite exhausted.

"What's the matter with Stuffy?" asked Nan, whose quick eyes were roving from face to face.

"Ball hurt his hand; he howls at every thing," answered Jack scornfully.

"I don't, I never cry, no matter how I'm hurt; it's babyish," said Nan, loftily.

"Pooh! I could make you cry in two minutes," returned Stuffy, rousing up.

"See if you can."

"Go and pick that bunch of nettles, then," and Stuffy pointed to a sturdy specimen of that prickly plant growing by the wall.

Nan instantly "grasped the nettle," pulled it up, and held it with a defiant gesture, in spite of the almost unbearable sting.

“Good for you,” cried the boys, quick to acknowledge courage even in one of the weaker sex.

More nettled than she was, Stuffy determined to get a cry out of her somehow, and he said tauntingly, “You are used to poking your hands into every thing, so that isn’t fair. Now go and bump your head real hard against the barn, and see if you don’t howl then.”

“Don’t do it,” said Nat, who hated cruelty.

But Nan was off, and running straight at the barn, she gave her head a blow that knocked her flat, and sounded like a battering-ram. Dizzy, but undaunted, she staggered up, saying stoutly, though her face was drawn with pain,

“That hurt, but I don’t cry.”

“Do it again,” said Stuffy angrily; and Nan would have done it, but Nat held her; and Tommy, forgetting the heat, flew at Stuffy like a little game-cock, roaring out,

“Stop it, or I’ll throw you over the barn!” and so shook and hustled poor Stuffy that for a minute he did not know whether he was on his head or his heels.

“She told me to,” was all he could say, when Tommy let him alone.

“Never mind if she did; it is awfully mean to hurt a little girl,” said Demi, reproachfully.

“Ho! I don’t mind; I ain’t a little girl, I’m older than you and Daisy; so now,” cried Nan, ungratefully.

“Don’t preach, Deacon, you bully Posy every day of your life,” called out the Commodore, who just then hove in sight.

“I don’t hurt her; do I, Daisy?” and Demi turned to his sister, who was “pooring” Nan’s tingling hands, and recommending water for the purple lump rapidly developing itself on her forehead.

“You are the best boy in the world,” promptly answered Daisy; adding, as truth compelled her to do, “You hurt me sometimes, but you don’t mean to.”

“Put away the bats and things, and mind what you are about, my hearties. No fighting allowed aboard this ship,” said Emil, who rather lorded it over the others.

“How do you do, Madge Wildfire?” said Mr. Bhaer, as Nan came in with the rest to supper. “Give the right hand, little daughter, and mind thy manners,” he added, as Nan offered him her left.

“The other hurts me.”

“The poor little hand! what has it been doing to get those blisters?” he asked, drawing it from behind her back, where she had put it with a look which made him think she had been in mischief.

Before Nan could think of any excuse, Daisy burst out with the whole story, during which Stuffy tried to hide his face in a bowl of bread and milk. When the tale was finished, Mr. Bhaer looked down the long table towards his wife, and said with a laugh in his eyes,

“This rather belongs to your side of the house, so I won’t meddle with it, my dear.”

Mrs. Jo knew what he meant, but she liked her little black sheep all the better for her pluck, though she only said in her soberest way,

“Do you know why I asked Nan to come here?”

“To plague me,” muttered Stuffy, with his mouth full.

“To help make little gentlemen of you, and I think you have shown that some of you need it.”

Here Stuffy retired into his bowl again, and did not emerge till Demi made them all laugh by saying, in his slow wondering way,

“How can she, when she’s such a tomboy?”

“That’s just it, she needs help as much as you, and I expect you set her an example of good manners.”

“Is she going to be a little gentleman too?” asked Rob.

“She’d like it; wouldn’t you, Nan?” added Tommy.

“No, I shouldn’t; I hate boys!” said Nan fiercely, for her hand still smarted, and she began to think that she might have shown her courage in some wiser way.

“I am sorry you hate my boys, because they can be well-mannered, and most agreeable when they choose. Kindness in looks and words and ways is true politeness, and any one can have it if they only try to treat other people as they like to be treated themselves.”

Mrs. Bhaer had addressed herself to Nan, but the boys nudged one another, and appeared to take the hint, for that time at least, and passed the butter; said “please,” and “thank you,” “yes, sir,” and “no, ma’am,” with unusual elegance and respect. Nan said nothing, but kept herself quiet and refrained from tickling Demi, though strongly tempted to do so, because of the dignified airs he put on. She also appeared to have forgotten her hatred of boys, and played “I spy” with them till dark. Stuffy was observed to offer her frequent sucks on his candy-ball during the game, which evidently sweetened her temper, for the last thing she said on going to bed was,

“When my battledore and shuttle-cock comes, I’ll let you all play with ‘em.”

Her first remark in the morning was “Has my box come?” and when told that it would arrive sometime during the day, she fretted and fumed, and whipped her doll, till Daisy was shocked. She managed to exist, however, till five o’clock, when she disappeared, and was not missed till supper-time, because those at home thought she had gone to the hill with Tommy and Demi.

"I saw her going down the avenue alone as hard as she could pelt," said Mary Ann, coming in with the hasty-pudding, and finding every one asking, "Where is Nan?"

"She has run home, little gypsy!" cried Mrs. Bhaer, looking anxious.

"Perhaps she has gone to the station to look after her luggage," suggested Franz.

"That is impossible, she does not know the way, and if she found it, she could never carry the box a mile," said Mrs. Bhaer, beginning to think that her new idea might be rather a hard one to carry out.

"It would be like her," and Mr. Bhaer caught up his hat to go and find the child, when a shout from Jack, who was at the window, made everyone hurry to the door.

There was Miss Nan, to be sure, tugging along a very large band-box tied up in linen bag. Very hot and dusty and tired did she look, but marched stoutly along, and came puffing up to the steps, where she dropped her load with a sigh of relief, and sat down upon it, observed as she crossed her tired arms,

"I couldn't wait any longer, so I went and got it."

"But you did not know the way," said Tommy, while the rest stood round enjoying the joke.

"Oh, I found it, I never get lost."

"It's a mile, how could you go so far?"

"Well, it was pretty far, but I rested a good deal."

"Wasn't that thing very heavy?"

"It's so round, I couldn't get hold of it good, and I thought my arms would break right off."

"I don't see how the station-master let you have it," said Tommy.

"I didn't say anything to him. He was in the little ticket place, and didn't see me, so I just took it off the platform."

"Run down and tell him it is all right, Franz, or old Dodd will think it is stolen," said Mr. Bhaer, joining in the shout of laughter at Nan's coolness.

"I told you we would send for it if it did not come. Another time you must wait, for you will get into trouble if you run away. Promise me this, or I shall not dare to trust you out of my sight," said Mrs. Bhaer, wiping the dust off Nan's little hot face.

"Well, I won't, only papa tells me not to put off doing things, so I don't."

"That is rather a poser; I think you had better give her some supper now, and a private lecture by and by," said Mr. Bhaer, too much amused to be angry at the young lady's exploit.

The boys thought it “great fun,” and Nan entertained them all supper-time with an account of her adventures; for a big dog had barked at her, a man had laughed at her, a woman had given her a doughnut, and her hat had fallen into the brook when she stopped to drink, exhausted with her exertion.

“I fancy you will have your hands full now, my dear; Tommy and Nan are quite enough for one woman,” said Mr. Bhaer, half an hour later.

“I know it will take some time to tame the child, but she is such a generous, warm-hearted little thing, I should love her even if she were twice as naughty,” answered Mrs. Jo, pointing to the merry group, in the middle of which stood Nan, giving away her things right and left, as lavishly as if the big band-box had no bottom.

It was those good traits that soon made little “Giddygaddy,” as they called her, a favorite with every one. Daisy never complained of being dull again, for Nan invented the most delightful plays, and her pranks rivalled Tommy’s, to the amusement of the whole school. She buried her big doll and forgot it for a week, and found it well mildewed when she dragged it up. Daisy was in despair, but Nan took it to the painter who as at work about the house, got him to paint it brick red, with staring black eyes, then she dressed it up with feathers, and scarlet flannel, and one of Ned’s leaden hatchets; and in the character of an Indian chief, the late Poppydilla tomahawked all the other dolls, and caused the nursery to run red with imaginary gore. She gave away her new shoes to a beggar child, hoping to be allowed to go barefoot, but found it impossible to combine charity and comfort, and was ordered to ask leave before disposing of her clothes. She delighted the boys by making a fire-ship out of a shingle with two large sails wet with turpentine, which she lighted, and then sent the little vessel floating down the brook at dusk. She harnessed the old turkey-cock to a straw wagon, and made him trot round the house at a tremendous pace. She gave her coral necklace for four unhappy kittens, which had been tormented by some heartless lads, and tended them for days as gently as a mother, dressing their wounds with cold cream, feeding them with a doll’s spoon, and mourning over them when they died, till she was consoled by one of Demi’s best turtles. She made Silas tattoo an anchor on her arm like his, and begged hard to have a blue star on each cheek, but he dared not do it, though she coaxed and scolded till the soft-hearted fellow longed to give in. She rode every animal on the place, from the big horse Andy to the cross pig, from whom she was rescued with difficulty. Whatever the boys dared her to do she instantly attempted, no matter how dangerous it might be, and they were never tired of testing her courage.

Mr. Bhaer suggested that they should see who would study best, and Nan found as much pleasure in using her quick wits and fine memory as her active feet and merry tongue, while the lads had to do their best to keep their places, for Nan showed them that girls could do most things as well as boys, and some things better. There were no rewards in school, but Mr. Bhaer’s “Well done!” and Mrs. Bhaer’s good report on the conscience book, taught them to love duty for its own sake, and try to do it faithfully, sure sooner or later the recompense would come. Little Nan was quick to feel the new atmosphere, to enjoy it, to show that it was what she needed; for this little garden was full of sweet flowers, half hidden by the weeds; and when kind hands gently began to cultivate it, all sorts of green shoots sprung up, promising to blossom beautifully in the warmth of love and care, the best climate for young hearts and souls all the world over.

CHAPTER VIII. PRANKS AND PLAYS

As there is no particular plan to this story, except to describe a few scenes in the life at Plumfield for the amusement of certain little persons, we will gently ramble along in this chapter and tell some of the pastimes of Mrs. Jo’s boys. I beg leave to assure my honored readers that most of the incidents are taken from real life, and that the oddest are the truest; for no person, no matter how vivid an imagination he may have, can invent anything half so droll as the freaks and fancies that originate in the lively brains of little people.

Daisy and Demi were full of these whims, and lived in a world of their own, peopled with lovely or grotesque creatures, to whom they gave the queerest names, and with whom they played the queerest games. One of these nursery inventions was an invisible sprite called “The Naughty Kitty-mouse,” whom the children had believed in, feared, and served for a long time. They seldom spoke of it to any one else, kept their rites as private as possible; and, as they never tried to describe it even to themselves, this being had a vague mysterious charm very agreeable to Demi, who delighted in elves and goblins. A most whimsical and tyrannical imp was the Naughty Kitty-mouse, and Daisy found a fearful pleasure in its service, blindly obeying its most absurd demands, which were usually proclaimed from the lips of Demi, whose powers of invention were great. Rob and Teddy sometimes joined in these ceremonies, and considered them excellent fun, although they did not understand half that went on.

One day after school Demi whispered to his sister, with an ominous wag of the head,

“The Kitty-mouse wants us this afternoon.”

“What for?” asked Daisy, anxiously.

“A sackerryfice,” answered Demi, solemnly. “There must be a fire behind the big rock at two o’clock, and we must all bring the things we like best, and burn them!” he added, with an awful emphasis on the last words.

“Oh, dear! I love the new paper dollies Aunt Amy painted for me best of any thing; must I burn them up?” cried Daisy, who never thought of denying the unseen tyrant any thing it demanded.

“Every one. I shall burn my boat, my best scrapbook, and all my soldiers,” said Demi firmly.

“Well, I will; but it’s too bad of Kitty-mouse to want our very nicest things,” sighed Daisy.

“A sackerryfice means to give up what you are fond of, so we must,” explained Demi, to whom the new idea had been suggested by hearing Uncle Fritz describe the customs of the Greeks to the big boys who were reading about them in school.

“Is Rob coming too,” asked Daisy.

“Yes, and he is going to bring his toy village; it is all made of wood, you know, and will burn nicely. We’ll have a grand bonfire, and see them blaze up, won’t we?”

This brilliant prospect consoled Daisy, and she ate her dinner with a row of paper dolls before her, as a sort of farewell banquet.

At the appointed hour the sacrificial train set forth, each child bearing the treasures demanded by the insatiable Kitty-mouse. Teddy insisted on going also, and seeing that all the others had toys, he tucked a squeaking lamb under one arm, and old Annabella under the other, little dreaming what anguish the latter idol was to give him.

“Where are you going, my chickens?” asked Mrs. Jo, as the flock passed her door.

“To play by the big rock; can’t we?”

“Yes, only don’t do near the pond, and take good care of baby.”

“I always do,” said Daisy, leading forth her charge with a capable air.

“Now, you must all sit round, and not move till I tell you. This flat stone is an altar, and I am going to make a fire on it.”

Demi then proceeded to kindle up a small blaze, as he had seen the boys do at picnics. When the flame burned well, he ordered the company to march round it three times and then stand in a circle.

“I shall begin, and as fast as my things are burnt, you must bring yours.”

With that he solemnly laid on a little paper book full of pictures, pasted in by himself; this was followed by a dilapidated boat, and then one by one the unhappy leaden soldiers marched to death. Not one faltered or hung back, from the splendid red and yellow captain to the small drummer who had lost his legs; all vanished in the flames and mingled in one common pool of melted lead.

“Now, Daisy!” called the high priest of Kitty-mouse, when his rich offerings had been consumed, to the great satisfaction of the children.

“My dear dollies, how can I let them go?” moaned Daisy, hugging the entire dozen with a face full of maternal woe.

“You must,” commanded Demi; and with a farewell kiss to each, Daisy laid her blooming dolls upon the coals.

“Let me keep one, the dear blue thing, she is so sweet,” besought the poor little mamma, clutching her last in despair.

"More! more!" growled an awful voice, and Demi cried, "that's the Kitty-mouse! she must have every one, quick, or she will scratch us."

In went the precious blue belle, flounces, rosy hat, and all, and nothing but a few black flakes remained of that bright band.

"Stand the houses and trees round, and let them catch themselves; it will be like a real fire then," said Demi, who liked variety even in his "sackerryfices."

Charmed by this suggestion, the children arranged the doomed village, laid a line of coals along the main street, and then sat down to watch the conflagration. It was somewhat slow to kindle owing to the paint, but at last one ambitious little cottage blazed up, fired a tree of the palm species, which fell on to the roof of a large family mansion, and in a few minutes the whole town was burning merrily. The wooden population stood and stared at the destruction like blockheads, as they were, till they also caught and blazed away without a cry. It took some time to reduce the town to ashes, and the lookers-on enjoyed the spectacle immensely, cheering as each house fell, dancing like wild Indians when the steeple flamed aloft, and actually casting one wretched little churn-shaped lady, who had escaped to the suburbs, into the very heart of the fire.

The superb success of this last offering excited Teddy to such a degree, that he first threw his lamb into the conflagration, and before it had time even to roast, he planted poor Annabella on the funeral pyre. Of course she did not like it, and expressed her anguish and resentment in a way that terrified her infant destroyer. Being covered with kid, she did not blaze, but did what was worse, she squirmed. First one leg curled up, then the other, in a very awful and lifelike manner; next she flung her arms over her head as if in great agony; her head itself turned on her shoulders, her glass eyes fell out, and with one final writhe of her whole body, she sank down a blackened mass on the ruins of the town. This unexpected demonstration startled every one and frightened Teddy half out of his little wits. He looked, then screamed and fled toward the house, roaring "Marmar" at the top of his voice.

Mrs. Bhaer heard the outcry and ran to the rescue, but Teddy could only cling to her and pour out in his broken way something about "poor Bella hurted," "a dreat fire," and "all the dollies dorn." Fearing some dire mishap, his mother caught him up and hurried to the scene of action, where she found the blind worshippers of Kitty-mouse mourning over the charred remains of the lost darling.

"What have you been at? Tell me all about it," said Mrs. Jo, composing herself to listen patiently, for the culprits looked so penitent, she forgave them beforehand.

With some reluctance Demi explained their play, and Aunt Jo laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, the children were so solemn, and the play was so absurd.

“I thought you were too sensible to play such a silly game as this. If I had any Kitty-mouse I’d have a good one who liked you to play in safe pleasant ways, and not destroy and frighten. Just see what a ruin you have made; all Daisy’s pretty dolls, Demi’s soldiers, and Rob’s new village beside poor Teddy’s pet lamb, and dear old Annabella. I shall have to write up in the nursery the verse that used to come in the boxes of toys,

“The children of Holland take pleasure in making,
What the children of Boston take pleasure in breaking.”

“Only I shall put Plumfield instead of Boston.”

“We never will again, truly, truly!” cried the repentant little sinners, much abashed at this reproof.

“Demi told us to,” said Rob.

“Well, I heard Uncle tell about the Greece people, who had altars and things, and so I wanted to be like them, only I hadn’t any live creatures to sackerryfice, so we burnt up our toys.”

“Dear me, that is something like the bean story,” said Aunt Jo, laughing again.

“Tell about it,” suggested Daisy, to change the subject.

“Once there was a poor woman who had three or four little children, and she used to lock them up in her room when she went out to work, to keep them safe. On day when she was going away she said, ‘Now, my dears, don’t let baby fall out of window, don’t play with the matches, and don’t put beans up your noses.’ Now the children had never dreamed of doing that last thing, but she put it into their heads, and the minute she was gone, they ran and stuffed their naughty little noses full of beans, just to see how it felt, and she found them all crying when she came home.”

“Did it hurt?” asked Rob, with such intense interest that his mother hastily added a warning sequel, lest a new edition of the bean story should appear in her own family.

“Very much, as I know, for when my mother told me this story, I was so silly that I went and tried it myself. I had no beans, so I took some little pebbles, and poked several into my nose. I did not like it at all, and wanted to take them out again very soon, but one would not come, and I was so ashamed to tell what a goose I been that I went for hours with the stone hurting me very much. At last the pain got so bad I had to tell, and when my mother could not get it out the doctor came. Then I was put in a chair and held tight, Rob, while he used his ugly little pincers till the stone hopped out. Dear me! how my wretched little nose did ache, and how people laughed at me!” and Mrs. Jo shook her head in a dismal way, as if the memory of her sufferings was too much for her.

Rob looked deeply impressed and I am glad to say took the warning to heart. Demi proposed that they should bury poor Annabella, and in the interest of the funeral Teddy forgot his fright. Daisy was soon consoled by another batch of dolls from Aunt Amy, and the Naughty Kitty-mouse seemed to be appeased by the last offerings, for she tormented them no more.

“Brops” was the name of a new and absorbing play, invented by Bangs. As this interesting animal is not to be found in any Zoological Garden, unless Du Chaillu has recently brought one from the wilds of Africa, I will mention a few of its peculiar habits and traits, for the benefit of inquiring minds. The Brop is a winged quadruped, with a human face of a youthful and merry aspect. When it walks the earth it grunts, when it soars it gives a shrill hoot, occasionally it goes erect, and talks good English. Its body is usually covered with a substance much resembling a shawl, sometimes red, sometimes blue, often plaid, and, strange to say, they frequently change skins with one another. On their heads they have a horn very like a stiff brown paper lamp-lighter. Wings of the same substance flap upon their shoulders when they fly; this is never very far from the ground, as they usually fall with violence if they attempt any lofty flights. They browse over the earth, but can sit up and eat like the squirrel. Their favorite nourishment is the seed-cake; apples also are freely taken, and sometimes raw carrots are nibbled when food is scarce. They live in dens, where they have a sort of nest, much like a clothes-basket, in which the little Brops play till their wings are grown. These singular animals quarrel at times, and it is on these occasions that they burst into human speech, call each other names, cry, scold, and sometimes tear off horns and skin, declaring fiercely that they “won’t play.” The few privileged persons who have studied them are inclined to think them a remarkable mixture of the monkey, the sphinx, the roc, and the queer creatures seen by the famous Peter Wilkins.

This game was a great favorite, and the younger children beguiled many a rainy afternoon flapping or creeping about the nursery, acting like little bedlamites and being as merry as little grigs. To be sure, it was rather hard upon clothes, particularly trouser-knees, and jacket-elbows; but Mrs. Bhaer only said, as she patched and darned,

“We do things just as foolish, and not half so harmless. If I could get as much happiness out of it as the little dears do, I’d be a Brop myself.”

Nat’s favorite amusements were working in his garden, and sitting in the willow-tree with his violin, for that green nest was a fairy world to him, and there he loved to perch, making music like a happy bird. The lads called him "Old Chirper," because he was always humming, whistling, or fiddling, and they often stopped a minute in their work or play to listen to the soft tones of the violin, which seemed to lead a little orchestra of summer sounds. The birds appeared to regard him as one of themselves, and fearlessly sat on the fence or lit among the boughs to watch him with their quick bright eyes. The robins in the apple-tree near by evidently considered him a friend, for the father bird hunted insects close beside him, and the little mother brooded as confidingly over her blue eggs as if the boy was only a new sort of blackbird who cheered her patient watch with his song. The brown brook babbled and sparkled below him, the bees haunted the clover fields on either side, friendly faces peeped at him as they passed, the old house stretched its wide wings hospitably toward him, and with a blessed sense of rest and love and happiness, Nat dreamed for hours in this nook, unconscious what healthful miracles were being wrought upon him.

One listener he had who never tired, and to whom he was more than a mere schoolmate. Poor Billy's chief delight was to lie beside the brook, watching leaves and bits of foam dance by, listening dreamily to the music in the willow-tree. He seemed to think Nat a sort of angel who sat aloft and sang, for a few baby memories still lingered in his mind and seemed to grow brighter at these times. Seeing the interest he took in Nat, Mr. Bhaer begged him to help them lift the cloud from the feeble brain by this gentle spell. Glad to do any thing to show his gratitude, Nat always smiled on Billy when he followed him about, and let him listen undisturbed to the music which seemed to speak a language he could understand. "Help one another," was a favorite Plumfield motto, and Nat learned how much sweetness is added to life by trying to live up to it.

Jack Ford's peculiar pastime was buying and selling; and he bid fair to follow in the footsteps of his uncle, a country merchant, who sold a little of every thing and made money fast. Jack had seen the sugar sanded, the molasses watered, the butter mixed with lard, and things of that kind, and labored under the delusion that it was all a proper part of the business. His stock in trade was of a different sort, but he made as much as he could out of every worm he sold, and always got the best of the bargain when he traded with the boys for string, knives, fish-hooks, or whatever the article might be. The boys who all had nicknames, called him "Skinflint," but Jack did not care as long as the old tobacco-pouch in which he kept his money grew heavier and heavier.

He established a sort of auction-room, and now and then sold off all the odds and ends he had collected, or helped the lads exchange things with one another. He got bats, balls, hockey-sticks, etc., cheap, from one set of mates, furbished them up, and let them for a few cents a time to another set, often extending his business beyond the gates of Plumfield in spite of the rules. Mr. Bhaer put a stop to some of his speculations, and tried to give him a better idea of business talent than mere sharpness in overreaching his neighbors. Now and then Jack made a bad bargain, and felt worse about it than about any failure in lessons or conduct, and took his revenge on the next innocent customer who came along. His account-book was a curiosity; and his quickness at figures quite remarkable. Mr. Bhaer praised him for this, and tried to make his sense of honesty and honor as quick; and, by and by, when Jack found that he could not get on without these virtues, he owned that his teacher was right.

Cricket and football the boys had of course; but, after the stirring accounts of these games in the immortal "Tom Brown at Rugby," no feeble female pen may venture to do more than respectfully allude to them.

Emil spent his holidays on the river or the pond, and drilled the elder lads for a race with certain town boys, who now and then invaded their territory. The race duly came off, but as it ended in a general shipwreck, it was not mentioned in public; and the Commodore had serious thoughts of retiring to a desert island, so disgusted was he with his kind for a time. No desert island being convenient, he was forced to remain among his friends, and found consolation in building a boat-house.

The little girls indulged in the usual plays of their age, improving upon them somewhat as their lively fancies suggested. The chief and most absorbing play was called "Mrs. Shakespeare Smith;" the name was provided by Aunt Jo, but the trials of the poor lady were quite original. Daisy was Mrs. S. S., and Nan by turns her daughter or a neighbor, Mrs. Giddygaddy.

No pen can describe the adventures of these ladies, for in one short afternoon their family was the scene of births, marriages, deaths, floods, earthquakes, tea-parties, and balloon ascensions. Millions of miles did these energetic women travel, dressed in hats and habits never seen before by mortal eye, perched on the bed, driving the posts like mettlesome steeds, and bouncing up and down till their heads spun. Fits and fires were the pet afflictions, with a general massacre now and then by way of change. Nan was never tired of inventing fresh combinations, and Daisy followed her leader with blind admiration. Poor Teddy was a frequent victim, and was often rescued from real danger, for the excited ladies were apt to forget that he was not of the same stuff their longsuffering dolls. Once he was shut into the closet for a dungeon, and forgotten by the girls, who ran off to some out-of-door game. Another time he was half drowned in the bath-tub, playing be a "cunning little whale." And, worst of all, he was cut down just in time after being hung up for a robber.

But the institution most patronized by all was the Club. It had no other name, and it needed none, being the only one in the neighborhood. The elder lads got it up, and the younger were occasionally admitted if they behaved well. Tommy and Demi were honorary members, but were always obliged to retire unpleasantly early, owing to circumstances over which they had no control. The proceedings of this club were somewhat peculiar, for it met at all sorts of places and hours, had all manner of queer ceremonies and amusements, and now and then was broken up tempestuously, only to be re-established, however, on a firmer basis.

Rainy evenings the members met in the schoolroom, and passed the time in games: chess, morris, backgammon, fencing matches, recitations, debates, or dramatic performances of a darkly tragical nature. In summer the barn was the rendezvous, and what went on there no uninitiated mortal knows. On sultry evenings the Club adjourned to the brook for aquatic exercises, and the members sat about in airy attire, frog-like and cool. On such occasions the speeches were unusually eloquent, quite flowing, as one might say; and if any orator's remarks displeased the audience, cold water was thrown upon him till his ardor was effectually quenched. Franz was president, and maintained order admirably, considering the unruly nature of the members. Mr. Bhaer never interfered with their affairs, and was rewarded for this wise forbearance by being invited now and then to behold the mysteries unveiled, which he appeared to enjoy much.

When Nan came she wished to join the Club, and caused great excitement and division among the gentlemen by presenting endless petitions, both written and spoken, disturbing their solemnities by insulting them through the key-hole, performing vigorous solos on the door, and writing up derisive remarks on walls and fences, for she belonged to the "Irrepressibles." Finding these appeals in vain, the girls, by the advice of Mrs. Jo, got up an institution of their own, which they called the Cosy Club. To this they magnanimously invited the gentlemen whose youth excluded them from the other one, and entertained these favored beings so well with little suppers, new games devised by Nan, and other pleasing festivities, that, one by one, the elder boys confessed a desire to partake of these more elegant enjoyments, and, after much consultation, finally decided to propose an interchange of civilities.

The members of the Cosy Club were invited to adorn the rival establishment on certain evenings, and to the surprise of the gentlemen their presence was not found to be a restraint upon the conversation or amusement of the regular frequenters; which could not be said of all Clubs, I fancy. The ladies responded handsomely and hospitably to these overtures of peace, and both institutions flourished long and happily.

CHAPTER IX. DAISY’S BALL

“Mrs. Shakespeare Smith would like to have Mr. John Brooke, Mr. Thomas Bangs, and Mr. Nathaniel Blake to come to her ball at three o’clock today.

“P.S. Nat must bring his fiddle, so we can dance, and all the boys must be good, or they cannot have any of the nice things we have cooked.”

This elegant invitation would, I fear, have been declined, but for the hint given in the last line of the postscript.

“They have been cooking lots of goodies, I smelt ‘em. Let’s go,” said Tommy.

“We needn’t stay after the feast, you know,” added Demi.

“I never went to a ball. What do you have to do?” asked Nat.

“Oh, we just play be men, and sit round stiff and stupid like grown-up folks, and dance to please the girls. Then we eat up everything, and come away as soon as we can.”

“I think I could do that,” said Nat, after considering Tommy’s description for a minute.

“I’ll write and say we’ll come;” and Demi despatched the following gentlemanly reply,

“We will all come. Please have lots to eat. J. B. Esquire.”

Great was the anxiety of the ladies about their first ball, because if every thing went well they intended to give a dinner-party to the chosen few.

“Aunt Jo likes to have the boys play with us, if they are not rough; so we must make them like our balls, then they will do them good,” said Daisy, with her maternal air, as she set the table and surveyed the store of refreshments with an anxious eye.

“Demi and Nat will be good, but Tommy will do something bad, I know he will,” replied Nan, shaking her head over the little cake-basket which she was arranging.

“Then I shall send him right home,” said Daisy, with decision.

“People don’t do so at parties, it isn’t proper.”

“I shall never ask him any more.”

“That would do. He’d be sorry not to come to the dinner-ball, wouldn’t he?”

“I guess he would! we’ll have the splendidest things ever seen, won’t we? Real soup with a ladle and a tureem [she meant tureen] and a little bird for turkey, and gravy, and all kinds of nice vegytubbles.” Daisy never could say vegetables properly, and had given up trying.

"It is 'most three, and we ought to dress," said Nan, who had arranged a fine costume for the occasion, and was anxious to wear it.

"I am the mother, so I shan't dress up much," said Daisy, putting on a night-cap ornamented with a red bow, one of her aunt's long skirts, and a shawl; a pair of spectacles and large pocket handkerchief completed her toilette, making a plump, rosy little matron of her.

Nan had a wreath of artificial flowers, a pair of old pink slippers, a yellow scarf, a green muslin skirt, and a fan made of feathers from the duster; also, as a last touch of elegance, a smelling-bottle without any smell in it.

"I am the daughter, so I rig up a good deal, and I must sing and dance, and talk more than you do. The mothers only get the tea and be proper, you know."

A sudden very loud knock caused Miss Smith to fly into a chair, and fan herself violently, while her mamma sat bolt upright on the sofa, and tried to look quite calm and "proper." Little Bess, who was on a visit, acted the part of maid, and opened the door, saying with a smile, "Wart in, gemplemun; it's all weady."

In honor of the occasion, the boys wore high paper collars, tall black hats, and gloves of every color and material, for they were an afterthought, and not a boy among them had a perfect pair.

"Good day, mum," said Demi, in a deep voice, which was so hard to keep up that his remarks had to be extremely brief.

Every one shook hands and then sat down, looking so funny, yet so sober, that the gentlemen forgot their manners, and rolled in their chairs with laughter.

"Oh, don't!" cried Mrs. Smith, much distressed.

"You can't ever come again if you act so," added Miss Smith, rapping Mr. Bangs with her bottle because he laughed loudest.

"I can't help it, you look so like fury," gasped Mr. Bangs, with most uncourteous candor.

"So do you, but I shouldn't be so rude as to say so. He shan't come to the dinner-ball, shall he, Daisy?" cried Nan, indignantly.

"I think we had better dance now. Did you bring your fiddle, sir?" asked Mrs. Smith, trying to preserve her polite composure.

"It is outside the door," and Nat went to get it.

"Better have tea first," proposed the unabashed Tommy, winking openly at Demi to remind him that the sooner the refreshments were secured, the sooner they could escape.

"No, we never have supper first; and if you don't dance well you won't have any supper at all, not one bit, sir," said Mrs. Smith, so sternly that her wild guests saw she was not to be trifled with, and grew overwhelmingly civil all at once.

"I will take Mr. Bangs and teach him the polka, for he does not know it fit to be seen," added the hostess, with a reproachful look that sobered Tommy at once.

Nat struck up, and the ball opened with two couples, who went conscientiously through a somewhat varied dance. The ladies did well, because they liked it, but the gentlemen exerted themselves from more selfish motives, for each felt that he must earn his supper, and labored manfully toward that end. When every one was out of breath they were allowed to rest; and, indeed, poor Mrs. Smith needed it, for her long dress had tripped her up many times. The little maid passed round molasses and water in such small cups that one guest actually emptied nine. I refrain from mentioning his name, because this mild beverage affected him so much that he put cup and all into his mouth at the ninth round, and choked himself publicly.

"You must ask Nan to play and sing now," said Daisy to her brother, who sat looking very much like an owl, as he gravely regarded the festive scene between his high collars.

"Give us a song, mum," said the obedient guest, secretly wondering where the piano was.

Miss Smith sailed up to an old secretary which stood in the room, threw back the lid of the writing-desk, and sitting down before it, accompanied herself with a vigor which made the old desk rattle as she sang that new and lovely song, beginning

"Gaily the troubadour
Touched his guitar,
As he was hastening
Home from the war."

The gentlemen applauded so enthusiastically that she gave them "Bounding Billows," "Little Bo-Peep," and other gems of song, till they were obliged to hint that they had had enough. Grateful for the praises bestowed upon her daughter, Mrs. Smith graciously announced,

"Now we will have tea. Sit down carefully, and don't grab."

It was beautiful to see the air of pride with which the good lady did the honors of her table, and the calmness with which she bore the little mishaps that occurred. The best pie flew wildly on the floor when she tried to cut it with a very dull knife; the bread and butter vanished with a rapidity calculated to dismay a housekeeper's soul; and, worst of all, the custards were so soft that they had to be drunk up, instead of being eaten elegantly with the new tin spoons.

I grieve to state that Miss Smith squabbled with the maid for the best jumble, which caused Bess to toss the whole dish into the air, and burst out crying amid a rain of falling cakes. She was comforted by a seat at the table, and the sugar-bowl to empty; but during this flurry a large plate of patties was mysteriously lost, and could not be found. They were the chief ornament of the feast, and Mrs. Smith was indignant at the loss, for she had made them herself, and they were beautiful to behold. I put it to any lady if it was not hard to have one dozen delicious patties (made of flour, salt, and water, with a large raisin in the middle of each, and much sugar over the whole) swept away at one fell swoop?

"You hid them, Tommy; I know you did!" cried the outraged hostess, threatening her suspected guest with the milk-pot.

"I didn't!"

"You did!"

"It isn't proper to contradict," said Nan, who was hastily eating up the jelly during the fray.

"Give them back, Demi," said Tommy.

"That's a fib, you've got them in your own pocket," bawled Demi, roused by the false accusation.

"Let's take 'em away from him. It's too bad to make Daisy cry," suggested Nat, who found his first ball more exciting than he expected.

Daisy was already weeping, Bess like a devoted servant mingled her tears with those of her mistress, and Nan denounced the entire race of boys as "plaguey things." Meanwhile the battle raged among the gentlemen, for, when the two defenders of innocence fell upon the foe, that hardened youth intrenched himself behind a table and pelted them with the stolen tarts, which were very effective missiles, being nearly as hard as bullets. While his ammunition held out the besieged prospered, but the moment the last patty flew over the parapet, the villain was seized, dragged howling from the room, and cast upon the hall floor in an ignominious heap. The conquerors then returned flushed with victory, and while Demi consoled poor Mrs. Smith, Nat and Nan collected the scattered tarts, replaced each raisin in its proper bed, and rearranged the dish so that it really looked almost as well as ever. But their glory had departed, for the sugar was gone, and no one cared to eat them after the insult offered to them.

"I guess we had better go," said Demi, suddenly, as Aunt Jo's voice was heard on the stairs.

"P'r'aps we had," and Nat hastily dropped a stray jumble that he had just picked up.

But Mrs. Jo was among them before the retreat was accomplished, and into her sympathetic ear the young ladies poured the story of their woes.

“No more balls for these boys till they have atoned for this bad behavior by doing something kind to you,” said Mrs. Jo, shaking her head at the three culprits.

“We were only in fun,” began Demi.

“I don’t like fun that makes other people unhappy. I am disappointed in you, Demi, for I hoped you would never learn to tease Daisy. Such a kind little sister as she is to you.”

“Boys always tease their sisters; Tom says so,” muttered Demi.

“I don’t intend that my boys shall, and I must send Daisy home if you cannot play happily together,” said Aunt Jo, soberly.

At this awful threat, Demi sidled up to his sister, and Daisy hastily dried her tears, for to be separated was the worst misfortune that could happen to the twins.

“Nat was bad, too, and Tommy was baddest of all,” observed Nan, fearing that two of the sinners would not get their fair share of punishment.

“I am sorry,” said Nat, much ashamed.

“I ain’t!” bawled Tommy through the keyhole, where he was listening with all his might.

Mrs. Jo wanted very much to laugh, but kept her countenance, and said impressively, as she pointed to the door,

“You can go, boys, but remember, you are not to speak to or play with the little girls till I give you leave. You don’t deserve the pleasure, so I forbid it.”

The ill-mannered young gentlemen hastily retired, to be received outside with derision and scorn by the unrepentant Bangs, who would not associate with them for at least fifteen minutes. Daisy was soon consoled for the failure of her ball, but lamented the edict that parted her from her brother, and mourned over his short-comings in her tender little heart. Nan rather enjoyed the trouble, and went about turning up her pug nose at the three, especially Tommy, who pretended not to care, and loudly proclaimed his satisfaction at being rid of those “stupid girls.” But in his secret soul he soon repented of the rash act that caused this banishment from the society he loved, and every hour of separation taught him the value of the “stupid girls.”

The others gave in very soon, and longed to be friends, for now there was no Daisy to pet and cook for them; no Nan to amuse and doctor them; and, worst of all, no Mrs. Jo to make home life pleasant and life easy for them. To their great affliction, Mrs. Jo seemed to consider herself one of the offended girls, for she hardly spoke to the outcasts, looked as if she did not see them when she passed, and was always too busy now to attend to their requests. This sudden and entire exile from favor cast a gloom over their souls, for when Mother Bhaer deserted them, their sun had set at noon-day, as it were, and they had no refuge left.

This unnatural state of things actually lasted for three days, then they could bear it no longer, and fearing that the eclipse might become total, went to Mr. Bhaer for help and counsel.

It is my private opinion that he had received instructions how to behave if the case should be laid before him. But no one suspected it, and he gave the afflicted boys some advice, which they gratefully accepted and carried out in the following manner:

Secluding themselves in the garret, they devoted several play-hours to the manufacture of some mysterious machine, which took so much paste that Asia grumbled, and the little girls wondered mightily. Nan nearly got her inquisitive nose pinched in the door, trying to see what was going on, and Daisy sat about, openly lamenting that they could not all play nicely together, and not have any dreadful secrets. Wednesday afternoon was fine, and after a good deal of consultation about wind and weather, Nat and Tommy went off, bearing an immense flat parcel hidden under many newspapers. Nan nearly died with suppressed curiosity, Daisy nearly cried with vexation, and both quite trembled with interest when Demi marched into Mrs. Bhaer's room, hat in hand, and said, in the politest tone possible to a mortal boy of his years,

“Please, Aunt Jo, would you and the girls come out to a surprise party we have made for you? Do it's a very nice one.”

“Thank you, we will come with pleasure; only, I must take Teddy with me,” replied Mrs. Bhaer, with a smile that cheered Demi like sunshine after rain.

“We'd like to have him. The little wagon is all ready for the girls; you won't mind walking just up to Pennyroyal Hill, will you Aunty?”

“I should like it exceedingly; but are you quite sure I shall not be in the way?”

“Oh, no, indeed! we want you very much; and the party will be spoilt if you don't come,” cried Demi, with great earnestness.

“Thank you kindly, sir;” and Aunt Jo made him a grand curtsey, for she liked frolics as well as any of them.

“Now, young ladies, we must not keep them waiting; on with the hats, and let us be off at once. I'm all impatience to know what the surprise is.”

As Mrs. Bhaer spoke every one bustled about, and in five minutes the three little girls and Teddy were packed into the “clothes-basket,” as they called the wicker wagon which Toby drew. Demi walked at the head of the procession, and Mrs. Jo brought up the rear, escorted by Kit. It was a most imposing party, I assure you, for Toby had a red feather-duster in his head, two remarkable flags waved over the carriage, Kit had a blue bow on his neck, which nearly drove him wild, Demi wore a nosegay of dandelions in his buttonhole, and Mrs. Jo carried the queer Japanese umbrella in honor of the occasion.

The girls had little flutters of excitement all the way; and Teddy was so charmed with the drive that he kept dropping his hat overboard, and when it was taken from him he prepared to tumble out himself, evidently feeling that it behooved him to do something for the amusement of the party.

When they came to the hill "nothing was to be seen but the grass blowing in the wind," as the fairy books say, and the children looked disappointed. But Demi said, in his most impressive manner,

"Now, you all get out and stand still, and the surprise party with come in;" with which remark he retired behind a rock, over which heads had been bobbing at intervals for the last half-hour.

A short pause of intense suspense, and then Nat, Demi, and Tommy marched forth, each bearing a new kite, which they presented to the three young ladies. Shrieks of delight arose, but were silenced by the boys, who said, with faces brimful of merriment, "That isn't all the surprise;" and, running behind the rock, again emerged bearing a fourth kite of superb size, on which was printed, in bright yellow letters, "For Mother Bhaer."

"We thought you'd like one, too, because you were angry with us, and took the girls' part," cried all three, shaking with laughter, for this part of the affair evidently was a surprise to Mrs. Jo.

She clapped her hands, and joined in the laugh, looking thoroughly tickled at the joke.

"Now, boys, that is regularly splendid! Who did think of it?" she asked, receiving the monster kite with as much pleasure as the little girls did theirs.

"Uncle Fritz proposed it when we planned to make the others; he said you'd like it, so we made a bouncer," answered Demi, beaming with satisfaction at the success of the plot.

"Uncle Fritz knows what I like. Yes, these are magnificent kites, and we were wishing we had some the other day when you were flying yours, weren't we, girls?"

"That's why we made them for you," cried Tommy, standing on his head as the most appropriate way of expressing his emotions.

"Let us fly them," said energetic Nan.

"I don't know how," began Daisy.

"We'll show you, we want to!" cried all the boys in a burst of devotion, as Demi took Daisy's, Tommy Nan's, and Nat, with difficulty, persuaded Bess to let go her little blue one.

"Aunty, if you will wait a minute, we'll pitch yours for you," said Demi, feeling that Mrs. Bhaer's favor must not be lost again by any neglect of theirs.

"Bless your buttons, dear, I know all about it; and here is a boy who will toss up for me," added Mrs. Jo, as the professor peeped over the rock with a face full of fun.

He came out at once, tossed up the big kite, and Mrs. Jo ran off with it in fine style, while the children stood and enjoyed the spectacle. One by one all the kites went up, and floated far overhead like gay birds, balancing themselves on the fresh breeze that blew steadily over the hill. Such a merry time as they had! running and shouting, sending up the kites or pulling them down, watching their antics in the air, and feeling them tug at the string like live creatures trying to escape. Nan was quite wild with the fun, Daisy thought the new play nearly as interesting as dolls, and little Bess was so fond of her "boo tite," that she would only let it go on very short flights, preferring to hold it in her lap and look at the remarkable pictures painted on it by Tommy's dashing brush. Mrs. Jo enjoyed hers immensely, and it acted as if it knew who owned it, for it came tumbling down head first when least expected, caught on trees, nearly pitched into the river, and finally darted away to such a height that it looked a mere speck among the clouds.

By and by every one got tired, and fastening the kite-strings to trees and fences, all sat down to rest, except Mr. Bhaer, who went off to look at the cows, with Teddy on his shoulder.

"Did you ever have such a good time as this before?" asked Nat, as they lay about on the grass, nibbling pennyroyal like a flock of sheep.

"Not since I last flew a kite, years ago, when I was a girl," answered Mrs. Jo.

"I'd like to have known you when you were a girl, you must have been so jolly," said Nat.

"I was a naughty little girl, I am sorry to say."

"I like naughty little girls," observed Tommy, looking at Nan, who made a frightful grimace at him in return for the compliment.

"Why don't I remember you then, Aunty? Was I too young?" asked Demi.

"Rather, dear."

"I suppose my memory hadn't come then. Grandpa says that different parts of the mind unfold as we grow up, and the memory part of my mind hadn't unfolded when you were little, so I can't remember how you looked," explained Demi.

"Now, little Socrates, you had better keep that question for grandpa, it is beyond me," said Aunt Jo, putting on the extinguisher.

"Well, I will, he knows about those things, and you don't," returned Demi, feeling that on the whole kites were better adapted to the comprehension of the present company.

“Tell about the last time you flew a kite,” said Nat, for Mrs. Jo had laughed as she spoke of it, and he thought it might be interesting.

“Oh, it was only rather funny, for I was a great girl of fifteen, and was ashamed to be seen at such a play. So Uncle Teddy and I privately made our kites, and stole away to fly them. We had a capital time, and were resting as we are now, when suddenly we heard voices, and saw a party of young ladies and gentlemen coming back from a picnic. Teddy did not mind, though he was rather a large boy to be playing with a kite, but I was in a great flurry, for I knew I should be sadly laughed at, and never hear the last of it, because my wild ways amused the neighbors as much as Nan’s do us.

“‘What shall I do?’ I whispered to Teddy, as the voices drew nearer and nearer.

“‘I’ll show you,’ he said, and whipping out his knife he cut the strings. Away flew the kites, and when the people came up we were picking flowers as properly as you please. They never suspected us, and we had a grand laugh over our narrow escape.”

“Were the kites lost, Aunty?” asked Daisy.

“Quite lost, but I did not care, for I made up my mind that it would be best to wait till I was an old lady before I played with kites again; and you see I have waited,” said Mrs. Jo, beginning to pull in the big kite, for it was getting late.

“Must we go now?”

“I must, or you won’t have any supper; and that sort of surprise party would not suit you, I think, my chickens.”

“Hasn’t our party been a nice one?” asked Tommy, complacently.

“Splendid!” answered every one.

“Do you know why? It is because your guests have behaved themselves, and tried to make everything go well. You understand what I mean, don’t you?”

“Yes’m,” was all the boys said, but they stole a shamefaced look at one another, as they meekly shouldered their kites and walked home, thinking of another party where the guests had not behaved themselves, and things had gone badly on account of it.

CHAPTER X. HOME AGAIN

July had come, and haying begun; the little gardens were doing finely and the long summer days were full of pleasant hours. The house stood open from morning till night, and the lads lived out of doors, except at school time. The lessons were short, and there were many holidays, for the Bhaers believed in cultivating healthy bodies by much exercise, and our short summers are best used in out-of-door work. Such a rosy, sunburnt, hearty set as the boys became; such appetites as they had; such sturdy arms and legs, as outgrew jackets and trousers; such laughing and racing all over the place; such antics in house and barn; such adventures in the tramps over hill and dale; and such satisfaction in the hearts of the worthy Bhaers, as they saw their flock prospering in mind and body, I cannot begin to describe. Only one thing was needed to make them quite happy, and it came when they least expected it.

One balmy night when the little lads were in bed, the elder ones bathing down at the brook, and Mrs. Bhaer undressing Teddy in her parlor, he suddenly cried out, “Oh, my Danny!” and pointed to the window, where the moon shone brightly.

“No, lovey, he is not there, it was the pretty moon,” said his mother.

“No, no, Danny at a window; Teddy saw him,” persisted baby, much excited.

“It might have been,” and Mrs. Bhaer hurried to the window, hoping it would prove true. But the face was gone, and nowhere appeared any signs of a mortal boy; she called his name, ran to the front door with Teddy in his little shirt, and made him call too, thinking the baby voice might have more effect than her own. No one answered, nothing appeared, and they went back much disappointed. Teddy would not be satisfied with the moon, and after he was in his crib kept popping up his head to ask if Danny was not “tummin’ soon.”

By and by he fell asleep, the lads trooped up to bed, the house grew still, and nothing but the chirp of the crickets broke the soft silence of the summer night. Mrs. Bhaer sat sewing, for the big basket was always piled with socks, full of portentous holes, and thinking of the lost boy. She had decided that baby had been mistaken, and did not even disturb Mr. Bhaer by telling him of the child’s fancy, for the poor man got little time to himself till the boys were abed, and he was busy writing letters. It was past ten when she rose to shut up the house. As she paused a minute to enjoy the lovely scene from the steps, something white caught her eye on one of the hay-cocks scattered over the lawn. The children had been playing there all the afternoon, and, fancying that Nan had left her hat as usual, Mrs. Bhaer went out to get it. But as she approached, she saw that it was neither hat nor handkerchief, but a shirt sleeve with a brown hand sticking out of it. She hurried round the hay-cock, and there lay Dan, fast asleep.

Ragged, dirty, thin, and worn-out he looked; one foot was bare, the other tied up in the old gingham jacket which he had taken from his own back to use as a clumsy bandage for some hurt. He seemed to have hidden himself behind the hay-cock, but in his sleep had thrown out the arm that had betrayed him. He sighed and muttered as if his dreams disturbed him, and once when he moved, he groaned as if in pain, but still slept on quite spent with weariness.

"He must not lie here," said Mrs. Bhaer, and stooping over him she gently called his name. He opened his eyes and looked at her, as if she was a part of his dream, for he smiled and said drowsily, "Mother Bhaer, I've come home."

The look, the words, touched her very much, and she put her hand under his head to lift him up, saying in her cordial way,

"I thought you would, and I'm so glad to see you, Dan." He seemed to wake thoroughly then, and started up looking about him as if he suddenly remembered where he was, and doubted even that kind welcome. His face changed, and he said in his old rough way,

"I was going off in the morning. I only stopped to peek in, as I went by."

"But why not come in, Dan? Didn't you hear us call you? Teddy saw, and cried for you."

"Didn't suppose you'd let me in," he said, fumbling with a little bundle which he had taken up as if going immediately.

"Try and see," was all Mrs. Bhaer answered, holding out her hand and pointing to the door, where the light shone hospitably.

With a long breath, as if a load was off his mind, Dan took up a stout stick, and began to limp towards the house, but stopped suddenly, to say inquiringly,

"Mr. Bhaer won't like it. I ran away from Page."

"He knows it, and was sorry, but it will make no difference. Are you lame?" asked Mrs. Jo, as he limped on again.

"Getting over a wall a stone fell on my foot and smashed it. I don't mind," and he did his best to hide the pain each step cost him.

Mrs. Bhaer helped him into her own room, and, once there, he dropped into a chair, and laid his head back, white and faint with weariness and suffering.

"My poor Dan! drink this, and then eat a little; you are at home now, and Mother Bhaer will take good care of you."

He only looked up at her with eyes full of gratitude, as he drank the wine she held to his lips, and then began slowly to eat the food she brought him. Each mouthful seemed to put heart into him, and presently he began to talk as if anxious to have her know all about him.

"Where have you been, Dan?" she asked, beginning to get out some bandages.

"I ran off more'n a month ago. Page was good enough, but too strict. I didn't like it, so I cut away down the river with a man who was going in his boat. That's why they couldn't tell where I'd gone. When I left the man, I worked for a couple of weeks with a farmer, but I thrashed his boy, and then the old man thrashed me, and I ran off again and walked here."

"All the way?"

"Yes, the man didn't pay me, and I wouldn't ask for it. Took it out in beating the boy," and Dan laughed, yet looked ashamed, as he glanced at his ragged clothes and dirty hands.

"How did you live? It was a long, long tramp for a boy like you."

"Oh, I got on well enough, till I hurt my foot. Folks gave me things to eat, and I slept in barns and tramped by day. I got lost trying to make a short cut, or I'd have been here sooner."

"But if you did not mean to come in and stay with us, what were you going to do?"

"I thought I'd like to see Teddy again, and you; and then I was going back to my old work in the city, only I was so tired I went to sleep on the hay. I'd have been gone in the morning, if you hadn't found me."

"Are you sorry I did?" and Mrs. Jo looked at him with a half merry, half reproachful look, as she knelt down to look at his wounded foot.

The color came up into Dan's face, and he kept his eyes fixed on his plate, as he said very low, "No, ma'am, I'm glad, I wanted to stay, but I was afraid you — "

He did not finish, for Mrs. Bhaer interrupted him by an exclamation of pity, as she saw his foot, for it was seriously hurt.

"When did you do it?"

"Three days ago."

"And you have walked on it in this state?"

"I had a stick, and I washed it at every brook I came to, and one woman gave me a rag to put on it."

"Mr. Bhaer must see and dress it at once," and Mrs. Jo hastened into the next room, leaving the door ajar behind her, so that Dan heard all that passed.

"Fritz, the boy has come back."

"Who? Dan?"

"Yes, Teddy saw him at the window, and he called to him, but he went away and hid behind the hay-cocks on the lawn. I found him there just now fast asleep, and half dead with weariness and pain. He ran away from Page a month ago, and has been making his way to us ever since. He pretends that he did not mean to let us see him, but go on to the city, and his old work, after a look at us. It is evident, however, that the hope of being taken in has led him here through every thing, and there he is waiting to know if you will forgive and take him back."

"Did he say so?"

"His eyes did, and when I waked him, he said, like a lost child, 'Mother Bhaer, I've come home.' I hadn't the heart to scold him, and just took him in like a poor little black sheep come back to the fold. I may keep him, Fritz?"

"Of course you may! This proves to me that we have a hold on the boy's heart, and I would no more send him away now than I would my own Rob."

Dan heard a soft little sound, as if Mrs. Jo thanked her husband without words, and, in the instant's silence that followed, two great tears that had slowly gathered in the boy's eyes brimmed over and rolled down his dusty cheeks. No one saw them, for he brushed them hastily away; but in that little pause I think Dan's old distrust for these good people vanished for ever, the soft spot in his heart was touched, and he felt an impetuous desire to prove himself worthy of the love and pity that was so patient and forgiving. He said nothing, he only wished the wish with all his might, resolved to try in his blind boyish way, and sealed his resolution with the tears which neither pain, fatigue, nor loneliness could wring from him.

"Come and see his foot. I am afraid it is badly hurt, for he has kept on three days through heat and dust, with nothing but water and an old jacket to bind it up with. I tell you, Fritz, that boy is a brave lad, and will make a fine man yet."

"I hope so, for your sake, enthusiastic woman, your faith deserves success. Now, I will go and see your little Spartan. Where is he?"

"In my room; but, dear, you'll be very kind to him, no matter how gruff he seems. I am sure that is the way to conquer him. He won't bear sternness nor much restraint, but a soft word and infinite patience will lead him as it used to lead me."

"As if you ever like this little rascal!" cried Mr. Bhaer, laughing, yet half angry at the idea.

"I was in spirit, though I showed it in a different way. I seem to know by instinct how he feels, to understand what will win and touch him, and to sympathize with his temptations and faults. I am glad I do, for it will help me to help him; and if I can make a good man of this wild boy, it will be the best work of my life."

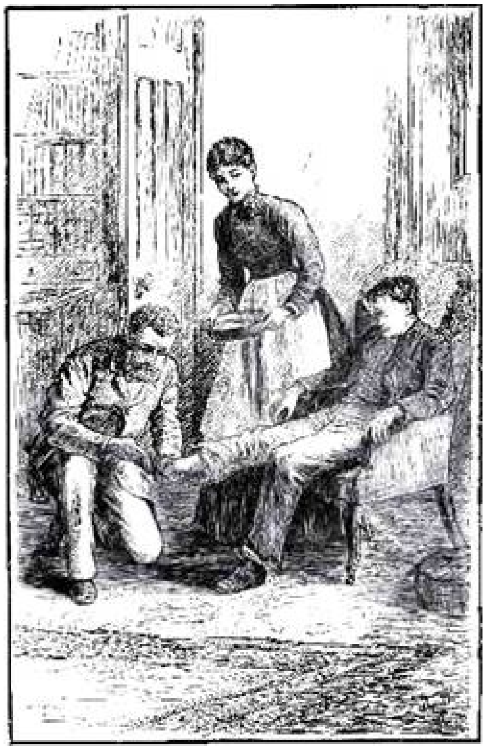
"God bless the work, and help the worker!"

Mr. Bhaer spoke now as earnestly as she had done, and both came in together to find Dan's head down upon his arm, as if he was quite overcome by sleep. But he looked up quickly, and tried to rise as Mr. Bhaer said pleasantly,

"So you like Plumfield better than Page's farm. Well, let us see if we can get on more comfortably this time than we did before."

"Thanky, sir," said Dan, trying not to be gruff, and finding it easier than he expected.

"Now, the foot! Ach! this is not well. We must have Dr. Firth to-morrow. Warm water, Jo, and old linen."



Mr. Bhaer bathed and bound up the wounded foot, while Mrs. Jo prepared the only empty bed in the house. It was in the little guest-chamber leading from the parlor, and often used when the lads were poorly, for it saved Mrs. Jo from running up and down, and the invalids could see what was going on. When it was ready, Mr. Bhaer took the boy in his arms, and carried him in, helped him undress, laid him on the little white bed, and left him with another hand-shake, and a fatherly "Good-night, my son."

Dan dropped asleep at once, and slept heavily for several hours; then his foot began to throb and ache, and he awoke to toss about uneasily, trying not to groan lest any one should hear him, for he was a brave lad, and did bear pain like "a little Spartan," as Mr. Bhaer called him.

Mrs. Jo had a way of flitting about the house at night, to shut the windows if the wind grew chilly, to draw mosquito curtains over Teddy, or look after Tommy, who occasionally walked in his sleep. The least noise waked her, and as she often heard imaginary robbers, cats, and conflagrations, the doors stood open all about, so her quick ear caught the sound of Dan's little moans, and she was up in a minute. He was just giving his hot pillow a despairing thump when a light came glimmering through the hall, and Mrs. Jo crept in, looking like a droll ghost, with her hair in a great knob on the top of her head, and a long gray dressing-gown trailing behind her.

"Are you in pain, Dan?"

"It's pretty bad; but I didn't mean to wake you."

"I'm a sort of owl, always flying about at night. Yes, your foot is like fire; the bandages must be wet again," and away flapped the maternal owl for more cooling stuff, and a great mug of ice water.

"Oh, that's so nice!" sighed Dan, the wet bandages went on again, and a long draught of water cooled his thirsty throat.

"There, now, sleep your best, and don't be frightened if you see me again, for I'll slip down by and by, and give you another sprinkle."

As she spoke, Mrs. Jo stooped to turn the pillow and smooth the bed-clothes, when, to her great surprise, Dan put his arm around her neck, drew her face down to his, and kissed her, with a broken "Thank you, ma'am," which said more than the most eloquent speech could have done; for the hasty kiss, the muttered words, meant, "I'm sorry, I will try." She understood it, accepted the unspoken confession, and did not spoil it by any token of surprise. She only remembered that he had no mother, kissed the brown cheek half hidden on the pillow, as if ashamed of the little touch of tenderness, and left him, saying, what he long remembered, "You are my boy now, and if you choose you can make me proud and glad to say so."

Once again, just at dawn, she stole down to find him so fast asleep that he did not wake, and showed no sign of consciousness as she wet his foot, except that the lines of pain smoothed themselves away, and left his face quite peaceful.

The day was Sunday, and the house so still that he never waked till near noon, and, looking round him, saw an eager little face peering in at the door. He held out his arms, and Teddy tore across the room to cast himself bodily upon the bed, shouting, "My Danny's tum!" as he hugged and wriggled with delight. Mrs. Bhaer appeared next, bringing breakfast, and never seeming to see how shamefaced Dan looked at the memory of the little scene last night. Teddy insisted on giving him his "betfus," and fed him like a baby, which, as he was not very hungry, Dan enjoyed very much.

Then came the doctor, and the poor Spartan had a bad time of it, for some of the little bones in his foot were injured, and putting them to rights was such a painful job, that Dan's lips were white, and great drops stood on his forehead, though he never cried out, and only held Mrs. Jo's hand so tight that it was red long afterwards.

"You must keep this boy quiet, for a week at least, and not let him put his foot to the ground. By that time, I shall know whether he may hop a little with a crutch, or stick to his bed for a while longer," said Dr. Firth, putting up the shining instruments that Dan did not like to see.

"It will get well sometime, won't it?" he asked, looking alarmed at the word "crutches."

"I hope so;" and with that the doctor departed, leaving Dan much depressed; for the loss of a foot is a dreadful calamity to an active boy.

"Don't be troubled, I am a famous nurse, and we will have you tramping about as well as ever in a month," said Mrs. Jo, taking a hopeful view of the case.

But the fear of being lame haunted Dan, and even Teddy's caresses did not cheer him; so Mrs. Jo proposed that one or two of the boys should come in and pay him a little visit, and asked whom he would like to see.

"Nat and Demi; I'd like my hat too, there's something in it I guess they'd like to see. I suppose you threw away my bundle of plunder?" said Dan, looking rather anxious as he put the question.

"No, I kept it, for I thought they must be treasures of some kind, you took such care of them;" and Mrs. Jo brought him his old straw hat stuck full of butterflies and beetles, and a handkerchief containing a collection of odd things picked up on his way: birds' eggs, carefully done up in moss, curious shells and stones, bits of fungus, and several little crabs, in a state of great indignation at their imprisonment.

"Could I have something to put these fellers in? Mr. Hyde and I found 'em, and they are first-rate ones, so I'd like to keep and watch 'em; can I?" asked Dan, forgetting his foot, and laughing to see the crabs go sidling and backing over the bed.

"Of course you can; Polly's old cage will be just the thing. Don't let them nip Teddy's toes while I get it;" and away went Mrs. Jo, leaving Dan overjoyed to find that his treasures were not considered rubbish, and thrown away.

Nat, Demi, and the cage arrived together, and the crabs were settled in their new house, to the great delight of the boys, who, in the excitement of the performance, forgot any awkwardness they might otherwise have felt in greeting the runaway. To these admiring listeners Dan related his adventures much more fully than he had done to the Bhaers. Then he displayed his "plunder," and described each article so well, that Mrs. Jo, who had retired to the next room to leave them free, was surprised and interested, as well as amused, at their boyish chatter.

"How much the lad knows of these things! how absorbed he is in them! and what a mercy it is just now, for he cares so little for books, it would be hard to amuse him while he is laid up; but the boys can supply him with beetles and stones to any extent, and I am glad to find out this taste of his; it is a good one, and may perhaps prove the making of him. If he should turn out a great naturalist, and Nat a musician, I should have cause to be proud of this year's work;" and Mrs. Jo sat smiling over her book as she built castles in the air, just as she used to do when a girl, only then they were for herself, and now they were for other people, which is the reason perhaps that some of them came to pass in reality for charity is an excellent foundation to build anything upon.

Nat was most interested in the adventures, but Demi enjoyed the beetles and butterflies immensely, drinking in the history of their changeful little lives as if it were a new and lovely sort of fairy tale for, even in his plain way, Dan told it well, and found great satisfaction in the thought that here at least the small philosopher could learn of him. So interested were they in the account of catching a musk rat, whose skin was among the treasures, that Mr. Bhaer had to come himself to tell Nat and Demi it was time for the walk. Dan looked so wistfully after them as they ran off that Father Bhaer proposed carrying him to the sofa in the parlor for a little change of air and scene.

When he was established, and the house quiet, Mrs. Jo, who sat near by showing Teddy pictures, said, in an interested tone, as she nodded towards the treasures still in Dan's hands,

"Where did you learn so much about these things?"

"I always liked 'em, but didn't know much till Mr. Hyde told me."

"Oh, he was a man who lived round in the woods studying these things I don't know what you call him and wrote about frogs, and fishes, and so on. He stayed at Page's, and used to want me to go and help him, and it was great fun, 'cause he told me ever so much, and was uncommon jolly and wise. Hope I'll see him again sometime."

"I hope you will," said Mrs. Jo, for Dan's face had brightened up, and he was so interested in the matter that he forgot his usual taciturnity.

"Why, he could make birds come to him, and rabbits and squirrels didn't mind him any more than if he was a tree. Did you ever tickle a lizard with a straw?" asked Dan, eagerly.

"No, but I should like to try it."

"Well, I've done it, and it's so funny to see 'em turn over and stretch out, they like it so much. Mr. Hyde used to do it; and he'd make snakes listen to him while he whistled, and he knew just when certain flowers would blow, and bees wouldn't sting him, and he'd tell the wonderfullest things about fish and flies, and the Indians and the rocks."

"I think you were so fond of going with Mr. Hyde, you rather neglected Mr. Page," said Mrs. Jo, slyly.

"Yes, I did; I hated to have to weed and hoe when I might be tramping round with Mr. Hyde. Page thought such things silly, and called Mr. Hyde crazy because he'd lay hours watching a trout or a bird."

"Suppose you say lie instead of lay, it is better grammar," said Mrs. Jo, very gently; and then added, "Yes, Page is a thorough farmer, and would not understand that a naturalist's work was just as interesting, and perhaps just as important as his own. Now, Dan, if you really love these things, as I think you do, and I am glad to see it, you shall have time to study them and books to help you; but I want you to do something besides, and to do it faithfully, else you will be sorry by and by, and find that you have got to begin again."

"Yes, ma'am," said Dan, meekly, and looked a little scared by the serious tone of the last remarks, for he hated books, yet had evidently made up his mind to study anything she proposed.

"Do you see that cabinet with twelve drawers in it?" was the next very unexpected question.

Dan did see two tall old-fashioned ones standing on either side of the piano; he knew them well, and had often seen nice bits of string, nails, brown paper, and such useful matters come out of the various drawers. He nodded and smiled. Mrs. Jo went on,

"Well, don't you think those drawers would be good places to put your eggs, and stones, and shells, and lichens?"

"Oh, splendid, but you wouldn't like my things 'clutterin' round,' as Mr. Page used to say, would you?" cried Dan, sitting up to survey the old piece of furniture with sparkling eyes.

"I like litter of that sort; and if I didn't, I should give you the drawers, because I have a regard for children's little treasures, and I think they should be treated respectfully. Now, I am going to make a bargain with you, Dan, and I hope you will keep it honorably. Here are twelve good-sized drawers, one for each month of the year, and they shall be yours as fast as you earn them, by doing the little duties that belong to you. I believe in rewards of a certain kind, especially for young folks; they help us along, and though we may begin by being good for the sake of the reward, if it is rightly used, we shall soon learn to love goodness for itself."

"Do you have 'em?" asked Dan, looking as if this was new talk for him.

"Yes, indeed! I haven't learnt to get on without them yet. My rewards are not drawers, or presents, or holidays, but they are things which I like as much as you do the others. The good behavior and success of my boys is one of the rewards I love best, and I work for it as I want you to work for your cabinet. Do what you dislike, and do it well, and you get two rewards, one, the prize you see and hold; the other, the satisfaction of a duty cheerfully performed. Do you understand that?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“We all need these little helps; so you shall try to do your lessons and your work, play kindly with all the boys, and use your holidays well; and if you bring me a good report, or if I see and know it without words for I’m quick to spy out the good little efforts of my boys you shall have a compartment in the drawer for your treasures. See, some are already divided into four parts, and I will have the others made in the same way, a place for each week; and when the drawer is filled with curious and pretty things, I shall be as proud of it as you are; prouder, I think for in the pebbles, mosses, and gay butterflies, I shall see good resolutions carried out, conquered faults, and a promise well kept. Shall we do this, Dan?”

The boys answered with one of the looks which said much, for it showed that he felt and understood her wish and words, although he did not know how to express his interest and gratitude for such care and kindness. She understood the look, and seeing by the color that flushed up to his forehead that he was touched, as she wished him to be, she said no more about that side of the new plan, but pulled out the upper drawer, dusted it, and set it on two chairs before the sofa, saying briskly,

“Now, let us begin at once by putting those nice beetles in a safe place. These compartments will hold a good deal, you see. I’d pin the butterflies and bugs round the sides; they will be quite safe there, and leave room for the heavy things below. I’ll give you some cotton wool, and clean paper and pins, and you can get ready for the week’s work.”

“But I can’t go out to find any new things,” said Dan, looking piteously at his foot.

“That’s true; never mind, we’ll let these treasures do for this week, and I dare say the boys will bring you loads of things if you ask them.”

“They don’t know the right sort; besides, if I lay, no, lie here all the time, I can’t work and study, and earn my drawers.”

“There are plenty of lessons you can learn lying there, and several little jobs of work you can do for me.”

“Can I?” and Dan looked both surprised and pleased.

“You can learn to be patient and cheerful in spite of pain and no play. You can amuse Teddy for me, wind cotton, read to me when I sew, and do many things without hurting your foot, which will make the days pass quickly, and not be wasted ones."

Here Demi ran in with a great butterfly in one hand, and a very ugly little toad in the other.

"See, Dan, I found them, and ran back to give them to you; aren't they beautiful ones?" panted Demi, all out of breath.

Dan laughed at the toad, and said he had no place to put him, but the butterfly was a beauty, and if Mrs. Jo would give him a big pin, he would stick it right up in the drawer.

"I don't like to see the poor thing struggle on a pin; if it must be killed, let us put it out of pain at once with a drop of camphor," said Mrs. Jo, getting out the bottle.

"I know how to do it Mr. Hyde always killed 'em that way but I didn't have any camphor, so I use a pin," and Dan gently poured a drop on the insect's head, when the pale green wings fluttered an instant, and then grew still.

This dainty little execution was hardly over when Teddy shouted from the bedroom, "Oh, the little trabs are out, and the big one's eaten 'em all up." Demi and his aunt ran to the rescue, and found Teddy dancing excitedly in a chair, while two little crabs were scuttling about the floor, having got through the wires of the cage. A third was clinging to the top of the cage, evidently in terror of his life, for below appeared a sad yet funny sight. The big crab had wedged himself into the little recess where Polly's cup used to stand, and there he sat eating one of his relations in the coolest way. All the claws of the poor victim were pulled off, and he was turned upside down, his upper shell held in one claw close under the mouth of the big crab like a dish, while he leisurely ate out of it with the other claw, pausing now and then to turn his queer bulging eyes from side to side, and to put out a slender tongue and lick them in a way that made the children scream with laughter. Mrs. Jo carried the cage in for Dan to see the sight, while Demi caught and confined the wanderers under an inverted wash-bowl.

"I'll have to let these fellers go, for I can't keep 'em in the house," said Dan, with evident regret.

"I'll take care of them for you, if you will tell me how, and they can live in my turtle-tank just as well as not," said Demi, who found them more interesting even that his beloved slow turtles. So Dan gave him directions about the wants and habits of the crabs, and Demi bore them away to introduce them to their new home and neighbors. "What a good boy he is!" said Dan, carefully settling the first butterfly, and remembering that Demi had given up his walk to bring it to him.

“He ought to be, for a great deal has been done to make him so.”

“He’s had folks to tell him things, and to help him; I haven’t,” said Dan, with a sigh, thinking of his neglected childhood, a thing he seldom did, and feeling as if he had not had fair play somehow.

“I know it, dear, and for that reason I don’t expect as much from you as from Demi, though he is younger; you shall have all the help that we can give you now, and I hope to teach you how to help yourself in the best way. Have you forgotten what Father Bhaer told you when you were here before, about wanting to be good, and asking God to help you?”

“No, ma’am,” very low.

“Do you try that way still?”

“No, ma’am,” lower still.

“Will you do it every night to please me?”

“Yes, ma’am,” very soberly.

“I shall depend on it, and I think I shall know if you are faithful to your promise, for these things always show to people who believe in them, though not a word is said. Now here is a pleasant story about a boy who hurt his foot worse than you did yours; read it, and see how bravely he bore his troubles.”

She put that charming little book, “The Crofton Boys,” into his hands, and left him for an hour, passing in and out from time to time that he might not feel lonely. Dan did not love to read, but soon got so interested that he was surprised when the boys came home. Daisy brought him a nosegay of wild flowers, and Nan insisted on helping bring him his supper, as he lay on the sofa with the door open into the dining-room, so that he could see the lads at table, and they could nod socially to him over their bread and butter.

Mr. Bhaer carried him away to his bed early, and Teddy came in his night-gown to say good-night, for he went to his little nest with the birds.

“I want to say my prayers to Danny; may I?” he asked; and when his mother said, “Yes,” the little fellow knelt down by Dan’s bed, and folding his chubby hands, said softly,

“Pease Dod bess everybody, and hep me to be dood.”

Then he went away smiling with sleepy sweetness over his mother’s shoulder.

But after the evening talk was done, the evening song sung, and the house grew still with beautiful Sunday silence, Dan lay in his pleasant room wide awake, thinking new thoughts, feeling new hopes and desires stirring in his boyish heart, for two good angels had entered in: love and gratitude began the work which time and effort were to finish; and with an earnest wish to keep his first promise, Dan folded his hands together in the Darkness, and softly whispered Teddy’s little prayer, “Please God bless every one, and help me to be good.”

CHAPTER XI. UNCLE TEDDY

For a week Dan only moved from bed to sofa; a long week and a hard one, for the hurt foot was very painful at times, the quiet days were very wearisome to the active lad, longing to be out enjoying the summer weather, and especially difficult was it to be patient. But Dan did his best, and every one helped him in their various ways; so the time passed, and he was rewarded at last by hearing the doctor say, on Saturday morning,

"This foot is doing better than I expected. Give the lad the crutch this afternoon, and let him stump about the house a little."

"Hooray!" shouted Nat, and raced away to tell the other boys the good news.

Everybody was very glad, and after dinner the whole flock assembled to behold Dan crutch himself up and down the hall a few times before he settled in the porch to hold a sort of levee. He was much pleased at the interest and good-will shown him, and brightened up more and more every minute; for the boys came to pay their respects, the little girls fussed about him with stools and cushions, and Teddy watched over him as if he was a frail creature unable to do anything for himself. They were still sitting and standing about the steps, when a carriage stopped at the gate, a hat was waved from it, and with a shout of "Uncle Teddy! Uncle Teddy!" Rob scampered down the avenue as fast as his short legs would carry him. All he boys but Dan ran after him to see who should be first to open the gate, and in a moment the carriage drove up with boys swarming all over it, while Uncle Teddy sat laughing in the midst, with his little daughter on his knee.

"Stop the triumphal car and let Jupiter descend," he said, and jumping out ran up the steps to meet Mrs. Bhaer, who stood smiling and clapping her hands like a girl.

"How goes it, Teddy?"

"All right, Jo."

Then they shook hands, and Mr. Laurie put Bess into her aunt's arms, saying, as the child hugged her tight, "Goldilocks wanted to see you so much that I ran away with her, for I was quite pining for a sight of you myself. We want to play with your boys for an hour or so, and to see how 'the old woman who lived in a shoe, and had so many children she did not know what to do,' is getting on."

"I'm so glad! Play away, and don't get into mischief," answered Mrs. Jo, as the lads crowded round the pretty child, admiring her long golden hair, dainty dress, and lofty ways, for the little "Princess," as they called her, allowed no one to kiss her, but sat smiling down upon them, and graciously patting their heads with her little, white hands. They all adored her, especially Rob, who considered her a sort of doll, and dared not touch her lest she should break, but worshipped her at a respectful distance, made happy by an occasional mark of favor from her little highness. As she immediately demanded to see Daisy's kitchen, she was borne off by Mrs. Jo, with a train of small boys following. The others, all but Nat and Demi, ran away to the menagerie and gardens to have all in order; for Mr. Laurie always took a general survey, and looked disappointed if things were not flourishing.

Standing on the steps, he turned to Dan, saying like an old acquaintance, though he had only seen him once or twice before,

"How is the foot?"

"Better, sir."

"Rather tired of the house, aren't you?"

"Guess I am!" and Dan's eyes roved away to the green hills and woods where he longed to be.

"Suppose we take a little turn before the others come back? That big, easy carriage will be quite safe and comfortable, and a breath of fresh air will do you good. Get a cushion and a shawl, Demi, and let's carry Dan off."

The boys thought it a capital joke, and Dan looked delighted, but asked, with an unexpected burst of virtue,

"Will Mrs. Bhaer like it?"

"Oh, yes; we settled all that a minute ago."

"You didn't say any thing about it, so I don't see how you could," said Demi, inquisitively.

"We have a way of sending messages to one another, without any words. It is a great improvement on the telegraph."

"I know it's eyes; I saw you lift your eyebrows, and nod toward the carriage, and Mrs. Bhaer laughed and nodded back again," cried Nat, who was quite at his ease with kind Mr. Laurie by this time.

"Right. Now them, come on," and in a minute Dan found himself settled in the carriage, his foot on a cushion on the seat opposite, nicely covered with a shawl, which fell down from the upper regions in a most mysterious manner, just when they wanted it. Demi climbed up to the box beside Peter, the black coachman. Nat sat next Dan in the place of honor, while Uncle Teddy would sit opposite, to take care of the foot, he said, but really that he might study the faces before him both so happy, yet so different, for Dan's was square, and brown, and strong, while Nat's was long, and fair, and rather weak, but very amiable with its mild eyes and good forehead.

“By the way, I’ve got a book somewhere here that you may like to see,” said the oldest boy of the party, diving under the seat and producing a book which make Dan exclaim,

“Oh! by George, isn’t that a stunner?” as he turned the leaves, and saw fine plates of butterflies, and birds, and every sort of interesting insect, colored like life. He was so charmed that he forgot his thanks, but Mr. Laurie did not mind, and was quite satisfied to see the boy’s eager delight, and to hear this exclamations over certain old friends as he came to them. Nat leaned on his shoulder to look, and Demi turned his back to the horses, and let his feet dangle inside the carriage, so that he might join in the conversation.

When they got among the beetles, Mr. Laurie took a curious little object out of his vest-pocket, and laying it in the palm of his hand, said,

“There’s a beetle that is thousands of years old;” and then, while the lads examined the queer stone-bug, that looked so old and gray, he told them how it came out of the wrappings of a mummy, after lying for ages in a famous tomb. Finding them interested, he went on to tell about the Egyptians, and the strange and splendid ruins they have left behind them the Nile, and how he sailed up the mighty river, with the handsome dark men to work his boat; how he shot alligators, saw wonderful beasts and birds; and afterwards crossed the desert on a camel, who pitched him about like a ship in a storm.

“Uncle Teddy tells stories ‘most as well as Grandpa,” said Demi, approvingly, when the tale was done, and the boys’ eyes asked for more.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Laurie, quite soberly, for he considered Demi’s praise worth having, for children are good critics in such cases, and to suit them is an accomplishment that any one may be proud of.

“Here’s another trifle or two that I tucked into my pocket as I was turning over my traps to see if I had any thing that would amuse Dan,” and Uncle Teddy produced a fine arrow-head and a string of wampum.

“Oh! tell about the Indians,” cried Demi, who was fond of playing wigwam.

“Dan knows lots about them,” added Nat.

“More than I do, I dare say. Tell us something,” and Mr. Laurie looked as interested as the other two.

“Mr. Hyde told me; he’s been among ‘em, and can talk their talk, and likes ‘em,” began Dan, flattered by their attention, but rather embarrassed by having a grown-up listener.

“What is wampum for?” asked curious Demi, from his perch.

The others asked questions likewise, and, before he knew it, Dan was reeling off all Mr. Hyde had told him, as they sailed down the river a few weeks before.

Mr. Laurie listened well, but found the boy more interesting than the Indians, for Mrs. Jo had told him about Dan, and he rather took a fancy to the wild lad, who ran away as he himself had often longed to do, and who was slowly getting tamed by pain and patience.

"I've been thinking that it would be a good plan for you fellows to have a museum of your own; a place in which to collect all the curious and interesting things that you find, and make, and have given you. Mrs. Jo is too kind to complain, but it is rather hard for her to have the house littered up with all sorts of rattletraps, half-a-pint of dor-bugs in one of her best vases, for instance, a couple of dead bats nailed up in the back entry, wasps nests tumbling down on people's heads, and stones lying round everywhere, enough to pave the avenue. There are not many women who would stand that sort of thing, are there, now?"

As Mr. Laurie spoke with a merry look in his eyes, the boys laughed and nudged one another, for it was evident that some one told tales out of school, else how could he know of the existence of these inconvenient treasures.

"Where can we put them, then?" said Demi, crossing his legs and leaning down to argue the question.

"In the old carriage-house."

"But it leaks, and there isn't any window, nor any place to put things, and it's all dust and cobwebs," began Nat.

"Wait till Gibbs and I have touched it up a bit, and then see how you like it. He is to come over on Monday to get it ready; then next Saturday I shall come out, and we will fix it up, and make the beginning, at least, of a fine little museum. Every one can bring his things, and have a place for them; and Dan is to be the head man, because he knows most about such matters, and it will be quiet, pleasant work for him now that he can't knock about much."

"Won't that be jolly?" cried Nat, while Dan smiled all over his face and had not a word to say, but hugged his book, and looked at Mr. Laurie as if he thought him one of the greatest public benefactors that ever blessed the world.

"Shall I go round again, sir?" asked Peter, as they came to the gate, after two slow turns about the half-mile triangle.

"No, we must be prudent, else we can't come again. I must go over the premises, take a look at the carriage-house, and have a little talk with Mrs. Jo before I go;" and, having deposited Dan on his sofa to rest and enjoy his book, Uncle Teddy went off to have a frolic with the lads who were raging about the place in search of him. Leaving the little girls to mess up-stairs, Mrs. Bhaer sat down by Dan, and listened to his eager account of the drive till the flock returned, dusty, warm, and much excited about the new museum, which every one considered the most brilliant idea of the age.

"I always wanted to endow some sort of an institution, and I am going to begin with this," said Mr. Laurie, sitting down on a stool at Mrs. Jo's feet.

"You have endowed one already. What do you call this?" and Mrs. Jo pointed to the happy-faced lads, who had camped upon the floor about him.

"I call it a very promising Bhaer-garden, and I'm proud to be a member of it. Did you know I was the head boy in this school?" he asked, turning to Dan, and changing the subject skilfully, for he hated to be thanked for the generous things he did.

"I thought Franz was!" answered Dan, wondering what the man meant.

"Oh, dear no! I'm the first boy Mrs. Jo ever had to take care of, and I was such a bad one that she isn't done with me yet, though she has been working at me for years and years."

"How old she must be!" said Nat, innocently.

"She began early, you see. Poor thing! she was only fifteen when she took me, and I led her such a life, it's a wonder she isn't wrinkled and gray, and quite worn out," and Mr. Laurie looked up at her laughing.

"Don't Teddy; I won't have you abuse yourself so;" and Mrs. Jo stroked the curly black head at her knee as affectionately as ever, for, in spite of every thing Teddy was her boy still.

"If it hadn't been for you, there never would have been a Plumfield. It was my success with you, sir, that gave me courage to try my pet plan. So the boys may thank you for it, and name the new institution 'The Laurence Museum,' in honor of its founder, won't we, boys?" she added, looking very like the lively Jo of old times.

"We will! we will!" shouted the boys, throwing up their hats, for though they had taken them off on entering the house, according to rule, they had been in too much of a hurry to hang them up.

"I'm as hungry as a bear, can't I have a cookie?" asked Mr. Laurie, when the shout subsided and he had expressed his thanks by a splendid bow.

"Trot out and ask Asia for the gingerbread-box, Demi. It isn't in order to eat between meals, but, on this joyful occasion, we won't mind, and have a cookie all round," said Mrs. Jo; and when the box came she dealt them out with a liberal hand, every one munching away in a social circle.

Suddenly, in the midst of a bite, Mr. Laurie cried out, "Bless my heart, I forgot grandma's bundle!" and running out to the carriage, returned with an interesting white parcel, which, being opened, disclosed a choice collection of beasts, birds, and pretty things cut out of crisp sugary cake, and baked a lovely brown.

"There's one for each, and a letter to tell which is whose. Grandma and Hannah made them, and I tremble to think what would have happened to me if I had forgotten to leave them.”

Then, amid much laughing and fun, the cakes were distributed. A fish for Dan, a fiddle for Nat, a book for Demi, a money for Tommy, a flower for Daisy, a hoop for Nan, who had driven twice round the triangle without stopping, a star for Emil, who put on airs because he studied astronomy, and, best of all, an omnibus for Franz, whose great delight was to drive the family bus. Stuffy got a fat pig, and the little folks had birds, and cats, and rabbits, with black currant eyes.

“Now I must go. Where is my Goldilocks? Mamma will come flying out to get her if I’m not back early,” said Uncle Teddy, when the last crumb had vanished, which it speedily did, you may be sure.

The young ladies had gone into the garden, and while they waited till Franz looked them up, Jo and Laurie stood at the door talking together.

“How does little Giddy-gaddy come on?” he asked, for Nan’s pranks amused him very much, and he was never tired of teasing Jo about her.

“Nicely; she is getting quite mannerly, and begins to see the error of her wild ways.”

“Don’t the boys encourage her in them?”

“Yes; but I keep talking, and lately she has improved much. You saw how prettily she shook hands with you, and how gentle she was with Bess. Daisy’s example has its effect upon her, and I’m quite sure that a few months will work wonders.”

Here Mrs. Jo’s remarks were cut short by the appearance of Nan tearing round the corner at a break-neck pace, driving a mettlesome team of four boys, and followed by Daisy trundling Bess in a wheelbarrow. Hat off, hair flying, whip cracking, and barrow bumping, up they came in a cloud of dust, looking as wild a set of little hoydens as one would wish to see.

“So, these are the model children, are they? It’s lucky I didn’t bring Mrs. Curtis out to see your school for the cultivation of morals and manners; she would never have recovered from the shock of this spectacle,” said Mr. Laurie, laughing at Mrs. Jo’s premature rejoicing over Nan’s improvement.

“Laugh away; I’ll succeed yet. As you used to say at College, quoting some professor, ‘Though the experiment has failed, the principle remains the same,’“ said Mrs. Bhaer, joining in the merriment.

“I’m afraid Nan’s example is taking effect upon Daisy, instead of the other way. Look at my little princess! she has utterly forgotten her dignity, and is screaming like the rest. Young ladies, what does this mean?” and Mr. Laurie rescued his small daughter from impending destruction, for the four horses were champing their bits and curvetting madly all about her, as she sat brandishing a great whip in both hands.

"We're having a race, and I beat," shouted Nan.

"I could have run faster, only I was afraid of spilling Bess," screamed Daisy.

"Hi! go long!" cried the princess, giving such a flourish with her whip that the horses ran away, and were seen no more.

"My precious child! come away from this ill-mannered crew before you are quite spoilt. Good-by, Jo! Next time I come, I shall expect to find the boys making patchwork."

"It wouldn't hurt them a bit. I don't give in, mind you; for my experiments always fail a few times before they succeed. Love to Amy and my blessed Marmee," called Mrs. Jo, as the carriage drove away; and the last Mr. Laurie saw of her, she was consoling Daisy for her failure by a ride in the wheelbarrow, and looking as if she liked it.

Great was the excitement all the week about the repairs in the carriage-house, which went briskly on in spite of the incessant questions, advice, and meddling of the boys. Old Gibbs was nearly driven wild with it all, but managed to do his work nevertheless; and by Friday night the place was all in order roof mended, shelves up, walls whitewashed, a great window cut at the back, which let in a flood of sunshine, and gave them a fine view of the brook, the meadows, and the distant hills; and over the great door, painted in red letters, was "The Laurence Museum."

All Saturday morning the boys were planning how it should be furnished with their spoils, and when Mr. Laurie arrived, bringing an aquarium which Mrs. Amy said she was tired of, their rapture was great.

The afternoon was spent in arranging things, and when the running and lugging and hammering was over, the ladies were invited to behold the institution.

It certainly was a pleasant place, airy, clean, and bright. A hop-vine shook its green bells round the open window, the pretty aquarium stood in the middle of the room, with some delicate water plants rising above the water, and gold-fish showing their brightness as they floated to and fro below. On either side of the window were rows of shelves ready to receive the curiosities yet to be found. Dan's tall cabinet stood before the great door which was fastened up, while the small door was to be used. On the cabinet stood a queer Indian idol, very ugly, but very interesting; old Mr. Laurence sent it, as well as a fine Chinese junk in full sail, which had a conspicuous place on the long table in the middle of the room. Above, swinging in a loop, and looking as if she was alive, hung Polly, who died at an advanced age, had been carefully stuffed, and was no presented by Mrs. Jo. The walls were decorated with all sorts of things. A snake's skin, a big wasp's nest, a birch-bark canoe, a string of birds' eggs, wreaths of gray moss from the South, and a bunch of cotton-pods. The dead bats had a place, also a large turtle-shell, and an ostrich-egg proudly presented by Demi, who volunteered to explain these rare curiosities to guests whenever they liked. There were so many stones that it was impossible to accept them all, so only a few of the best were arranged among the shells on the shelves, the rest were piled up in corners, to be examined by Dan at his leisure.

Every one was eager to give something, even Silas, who sent home for a stuffed wild-cat killed in his youth. It was rather moth-eaten and shabby, but on a high bracket and best side foremost the effect was fine, for the yellow glass eyes glared, and the mouth snarled so naturally, that Teddy shook in his little shoes at sight of it, when he came bringing his most cherished treasure, one cocoon, to lay upon the shrine of science.

"Isn't it beautiful? I'd no idea we had so many curious things. I gave that; don't it look well? We might make a lot by charging something for letting folks see it."

Jack added that last suggestion to the general chatter that went on as the family viewed the room.

"This is a free museum and if there is any speculating on it I'll paint out the name over the door," said Mr. Laurie, turning so quickly that Jack wished he had held his tongue.

"Hear! hear!" cried Mr. Bhaer.

"Speech! speech!" added Mrs. Jo.

"Can't, I'm too bashful. You give them a lecture yourself you are used to it," Mr. Laurie answered, retreating towards the window, meaning to escape. But she held him fast, and said, laughing as she looked at the dozen pairs of dirty hands about her,

"If I did lecture, it would on the chemical and cleansing properties of soap. Come now, as the founder of the institution, you really ought to give us a few moral remarks, and we will applaud tremendously."

Seeing that there was no way of escaping, Mr. Laurie looked up at Polly hanging overhead, seemed to find inspiration in the brilliant old bird, and sitting down upon the table, said, in his pleasant way,

"There is one thing I'd like to suggest, boys, and that is, I want you to get some good as well as much pleasure out of this. Just putting curious or pretty things here won't do it; so suppose you read up about them, so that when anybody asks questions you can answer them, and understand the matter. I used to like these things myself, and should enjoy hearing about them now, for I've forgotten all I once knew. It wasn't much, was it, Jo? Here's Dan now, full of stories about birds, and bugs, and so on; let him take care of the museum, and once a week the rest of you take turns to read a composition, or tell about some animal, mineral, or vegetable. We should all like that, and I think it would put considerable useful knowledge into our heads. What do you say, Professor?”

“I like it much, and will give the lads all the help I can. But they will need books to read up these new subjects, and we have not many, I fear,” began Mr. Bhaer, looking much pleased, planning many fine lectures on geology, which he liked. “We should have a library for the special purpose.”

“Is that a useful sort of book, Dan?” asked Mr. Laurie, pointing to the volume that lay open by the cabinet.

“Oh, yes! it tells all I want to know about insects. I had it here to see how to fix the butterflies right. I covered it, so it is not hurt;” and Dan caught it up, fearing the lender might think him careless.

“Give it here a minute;” and, pulling out his pencil, Mr. Laurie wrote Dan’s name in it, saying, as he set the book up on one of the corner shelves, where nothing stood but a stuffed bird without a tail, “There, that is the beginning of the museum library. I’ll hunt up some more books, and Demi shall keep them in order. Where are those jolly little books we used to read, Jo? ‘Insect Architecture’ or some such name, all about ants having battles, and bees having queens, and crickets eating holes in our clothes and stealing milk, and larks of that sort.”

“In the garret at home. I’ll have them sent out, and we will plunge into Natural History with a will,” said Mrs. Jo, ready for any thing.

“Won’t it be hard to write about such things?” asked Nat, who hated compositions.

“At first, perhaps; but you will soon like it. If you think that hard, how would you like to have this subject given to you, as it was to a girl of thirteen: A conversation between Themistocles, Aristides, and Pericles on the proposed appropriation of funds of the confederacy of Delos for the ornamentation of Athens?” said Mrs. Jo.

The boys groaned at the mere sound of the long names, and the gentlemen laughed at the absurdity of the lesson.

“Did she write it?” asked Demi, in an awe-stricken tone.

“Yes, but you can imagine what a piece of work she make of it, though she was rather a bright child.”

“I’d like to have seen it,” said Mr. Bhaer.

“Perhaps I can find it for you; I went to school with her,” and Mrs. Jo looked so wicked that every one knew who the little girl was.

Hearing of this fearful subject for a composition quite reconciled the boys to the thought of writing about familiar things. Wednesday afternoon was appointed for the lectures, as they preferred to call them, for some chose to talk instead of write. Mr. Bhaer promised a portfolio in which the written productions should be kept, and Mrs. Bhaer said she would attend the course with great pleasure.

Then the dirty-handed society went off the wash, followed by the Professor, trying to calm the anxiety of Rob, who had been told by Tommy that all water was full of invisible pollywogs.

“I like your plan very much, only don’t be too generous, Teddy,” said Mrs. Bhaer, when they were left alone. “You know most of the boys have got to paddle their own canoes when they leave us, and too much sitting in the lap of luxury will unfit them for it.”

“I’ll be moderate, but do let me amuse myself. I get desperately tired of business sometimes, and nothing freshens me up like a good frolic with your boys. I like that Dan very much, Jo. He isn’t demonstrative; but he has the eye of a hawk, and when you have tamed him a little he will do you credit.”

“I’m so glad you think so. Thank you very much for your kindness to him, especially for this museum affair; it will keep him happy while he is lame, give me a chance to soften and smooth this poor, rough lad, and make him love us. What did inspire you with such a beautiful, helpful idea, Teddy?” asked Mrs. Bhaer, glancing back at the pleasant room, as she turned to leave it.

Laurie took both her hands in his, and answered, with a look that made her eyes fill with happy tears,

“Dear Jo! I have known what it is to be a motherless boy, and I never can forget how much you and yours have done for me all these years.”

CHAPTER XII. HUCKLEBERRIES

There was a great clashing of tin pails, much running to and fro, and frequent demands for something to eat, one August afternoon, for the boys were going huckleberrying, and made as much stir about it as if they were setting out to find the North West Passage.

"Now, my lads, get off as quietly as you can, for Rob is safely out of the way, and won't see you," said Mrs. Bhaer, as she tied Daisy's broad-brimmed hat, and settled the great blue pinafore in which she had enveloped Nan.

But the plan did not succeed, for Rob had heard the bustle, decided to go, and prepared himself, without a thought of disappointment. The troop was just getting under way when the little man came marching downstairs with his best hat on, a bright tin pail in his hand, and a face beaming with satisfaction.

"Oh, dear! now we shall have a scene," sighed Mrs. Bhaer, who found her eldest son very hard to manage at times.

"I'm all ready," said Rob, and took his place in the ranks with such perfect unconsciousness of his mistake, that it really was very hard to undeceive him.

"It's too far for you, my love; stay and take care of me, for I shall be all alone," began his mother.

"You've got Teddy. I'm a big boy, so I can go; you said I might when I was bigger, and I am now," persisted Rob, with a cloud beginning to dim the brightness of his happy face.

"We are going up to the great pasture, and it's ever so far; we don't want you tagging on," cried Jack, who did not admire the little boys.

"I won't tag, I'll run and keep up. O Mamma! let me go! I want to fill my new pail, and I'll bring 'em all to you. Please, please, I will be good!" prayed Robby, looking up at his mother, so grieved and disappointed that her heart began to fail her.

"But, my deary, you'll get so tired and hot you won't have a good time. Wait till I go, and then we will stay all day, and pick as many berries as you want."

"You never do go, you are so busy, and I'm tired of waiting. I'd rather go and get the berries for you all myself. I love to pick 'em, and I want to fill my new pail dreffly," sobbed Rob.

The pathetic sight of great tears tinkling into the dear new pail, and threatening to fill it with salt water instead of huckleberries, touched all the ladies present. His mother patted the weeper on his back; Daisy offered to stay home with him; and Nan said, in her decided way,

"Let him come; I'll take care of him."

"If Franz was going I wouldn't mind, for he is very careful; but he is haying with the father, and I'm not sure about the rest of you," began Mrs. Bhaer.

"It's so far," put in Jack.

"I'd carry him if I was going wish I was," said Dan, with a sigh.

"Thank you, dear, but you must take care of your foot. I wish I could go. Stop a minute, I think I can manage it after all;" and Mrs. Bhaer ran out to the steps, waving her apron wildly.

Silas was just driving away in the hay-cart, but turned back, and agreed at once, when Mrs. Jo proposed that he should take the whole party to the pasture, and go for them at five o'clock.

"It will delay your work a little, but never mind; we will pay you in huckleberry pies," said Mrs. Jo, knowing Silas's weak point.

His rough, brown face brightened up, and he said, with a cheery "Haw! haw!" "Wal now, Mis' Bhaer, if you go to bribin' of me, I shall give in right away."

"Now, boys, I have arranged it so that you can all go," said Mrs. Bhaer, running back again, much relieved, for she loved to make them happy, and always felt miserable when she had disturbed the serenity of her little sons; for she believed that the small hopes and plans and pleasures of children should be tenderly respected by grown-up people, and never rudely thwarted or ridiculed.

"Can I go?" said Dan, delighted.

"I thought especially of you. Be careful, and never mind the berries, but sit about and enjoy the lovely things which you know how to find all about you," answered Mrs. Bhaer, who remembered his kind offer to her boy.

"Me too! me too!" sung Rob, dancing with joy, and clapping his precious pail and cover like castanets.

"Yes, and Daisy and Nan must take good care of you. Be at the bars at five o'clock, and Silas will come for you all."

Robby cast himself upon his mother in a burst of gratitude, promising to bring her every berry he picked, and not eat one. Then they were all packed into the hay-cart, and went rattling away, the brightest face among the dozen being that of Rob, as he sat between his two temporary little mothers, beaming upon the whole world, and waving his best hat; for his indulgent mamma had not the heart to bereave him of it, since this was a gala-day to him.

Such a happy afternoon as they had, in spite of the mishaps which usually occur on such expeditions! Of course Tommy came to grief, tumbled upon a hornet's nest and got stung; but being used to woe, he bore the smart manfully, till Dan suggested the application of damp earth, which much assuaged the pain.

Daisy saw a snake, and flying from it lost half her berries; but Demi helped her to fill up again, and discussed reptiles most learnedly the while. Ned fell out of a tree, and split his jacket down the back, but suffered no other fracture. Emil and Jack established rival claims to a certain thick patch, and while they were squabbling about it, Stuffy quickly and quietly stripped the bushes and fled to the protection of Dan, who was enjoying himself immensely. The crutch was no longer necessary, and he was delighted to see how strong his foot felt as he roamed about the great pasture, full of interesting rocks and stumps, with familiar little creatures in the grass, and well-known insects dancing in the air.

But of all the adventures that happened on this afternoon that which befell Nan and Rob was the most exciting, and it long remained one of the favorite histories of the household. Having explored the country pretty generally, torn three rents in her frock, and scratched her face in a barberry-bush, Nan began to pick the berries that shone like big, black beads on the low, green bushes. Her nimble fingers flew, but still her basket did not fill up as rapidly as she desired, so she kept wandering here and there to search for better places, instead of picking contentedly and steadily as Daisy did. Rob followed Nan, for her energy suited him better than his cousin’s patience, and he too was anxious to have the biggest and best berries for Marmar.

“I keep putting ‘em in, but it don’t fill up, and I’m so tired,” said Rob, pausing a moment to rest his short legs, and beginning to think huckleberrying was not all his fancy painted it; for the sun blazed, Nan skipped hither and thither like a grasshopper, and the berries fell out of his pail almost as fast as he put them in, because, in his struggles with the bushes, it was often upside-down.

“Last time we came they were ever so much thicker over that wall great bouncers; and there is a cave there where the boys made a fire. Let’s go and fill our things quick, and then hide in the cave and let the others find us,” proposed Nan, thirsting for adventures.

Rob consented, and away they went, scrambling over the wall and running down the sloping fields on the other side, till they were hidden among the rocks and underbrush. The berries were thick, and at last the pails were actually full. It was shady and cool down there, and a little spring gave the thirsty children a refreshing drink out of its mossy cup.

“Now we will go and rest in the cave, and eat our lunch,” said Nan, well satisfied with her success so far.

“Do you know the way?” asked Rob.

“‘Course I do; I’ve been once, and I always remember. Didn’t I go and get my box all right?”

That convinced Rob, and he followed blindly as Nan led him over stock and stone, and brought him, after much meandering, to a small recess in the rock, where the blackened stones showed that fires had been made.

“Now, isn’t it nice?” asked Nan, as she took out a bit of bread-and-butter, rather damaged by being mixed up with nails, fishhooks, stones and other foreign substances, in the young lady’s pocket.

“Yes; do you think they will find us soon?” asked Rob, who found the shadowy glen rather dull, and began to long for more society.

“No, I don’t; because if I hear them, I shall hide, and have fun making them find me.”

“P’raps they won’t come.”

“Don’t care; I can get home myself.”

“Is it a great way?” asked Rob, looking at his little stubby boots, scratched and wet with his long wandering.

“It’s six miles, I guess.” Nan’s ideas of distance were vague, and her faith in her own powers great.

“I think we better go now,” suggested Rob, presently.

“I shan’t till I have picked over my berries;” and Nan began what seemed to Rob an endless task.

“Oh, dear! you said you’d take good care of me,” he sighed, as the sun seemed to drop behind the hill all of a sudden.

“Well I am taking good care of you as hard as I can. Don’t be cross, child; I’ll go in a minute,” said Nan, who considered five-year-old Robby a mere infant compared to herself.

So little Rob sat looking anxiously about him, and waiting patiently, for, spite of some misgivings, he felt great confidence in Nan.

“I guess it’s going to be night pretty soon,” he observed, as if to himself, as a mosquito bit him, and the frogs in a neighboring marsh began to pipe up for the evening concert.

“My goodness me! so it is. Come right away this minute, or they will be gone,” cried Nan, looking up from her work, and suddenly perceiving that the sun was down.

“I heard a horn about an hour ago; may be they were blowing for us,” said Rob, trudging after his guide as she scrambled up the steep hill.

“Where was it?” asked Nan, stopping short.

“Over that way;” he pointed with a dirty little finger in an entirely wrong direction.

“Let’s go that way and meet them;” and Nan wheeled about, and began to trot through the bushes, feeling a trifle anxious, for there were so many cow-paths all about she could not remember which way they came.

On they went over stock and stone again, pausing now and then to listen for the horn, which did not blow any more, for it was only the moo of a cow on her way home.

"I don't remember seeing that pile of stones do you?" asked Nan, as she sat on a wall to rest a moment and take an observation.

"I don't remember any thing, but I want to go home," and Rob's voice had a little tremble in it that made Nan put her arms round him and lift him gently down, saying, in her most capable way,

"I'm going just as fast as I can, dear. Don't cry, and when we come to the road, I'll carry you."

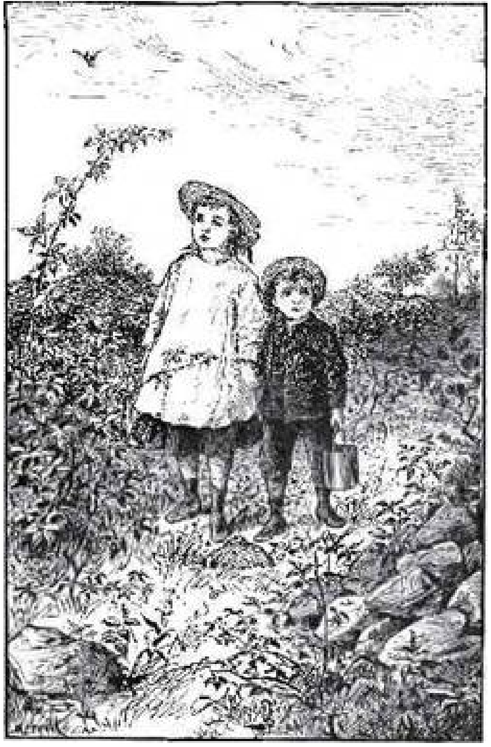
"Where is the road?" and Robby wiped his eyes to look for it.

"Over by that big tree. Don't you know that's the one Ned tumbled out of?"

"So it is. May be they waited for us; I'd like to ride home wouldn't you?" and Robby brightened up as he plodded along toward the end of the great pasture.

"No, I'd rather walk," answered Nan, feeling quite sure that she would be obliged to do so, and preparing her mind for it.

Another long trudge through the fast-deepening twilight and another disappointment, for when they reached the tree, they found to their dismay that it was not the one Ned climbed, and no road anywhere appeared.



"Are we lost?" quavered Rob, clasping his pail in despair.

"Not much. I don't just see which way to go, and I guess we'd better call."

So they both shouted till they were hoarse, yet nothing answered but the frogs in full chorus.

"There is another tall tree over there, perhaps that's the one," said Nan, whose heart sunk within her, though she still spoke bravely.

"I don't think I can go any more; my boots are so heavy I can't pull 'em;" and Robby sat down on a stone quite worn out.

"Then we must stay here all night. I don't care much, if snakes don't come."

"I'm frightened of snakes. I can't stay all night. Oh, dear! I don't like to be lost," and Rob puckered up his face to cry, when suddenly a thought occurred to him, and he said, in a tone of perfect confidence,

"Marmar will come and find me she always does; I ain't afraid now."

"She won't know where we are."

"She didn't know I was shut up in the ice-house, but she found me. I know she'll come," returned Robby, so trustfully, that Nan felt relieved, and sat down by him, saying, with a remorseful sigh,

"I wish we hadn't run away."

"You made me; but I don't mind much Marmar will love me just the same," answered Rob, clinging to his sheet-anchor when all other hope was gone.

"I'm so hungry. Let's eat our berries," proposed Nan, after a pause, during which Rob began to nod.

"So am I, but I can't eat mine, 'cause I told Marmar I'd keep them all for her."

"You'll have to eat them if no one comes for us," said Nan, who felt like contradicting every thing just then. "If we stay here a great many days, we shall eat up all the berries in the field, and then we shall starve," she added grimly.

"I shall eat sassafras. I know a big tree of it, and Dan told me how squirrels dig up the roots and eat them, and I love to dig," returned Rob, undaunted by the prospect of starvation.

"Yes; and we can catch frogs, and cook them. My father ate some once, and he said they were nice," put in Nan, beginning to find a spice of romance even in being lost in a huckleberry pasture.

"How could we cook frogs? we haven't got any fire."

"I don't know; next time I'll have matches in my pocket," said Nan, rather depressed by this obstacle to the experiment in frog-cookery.

"Couldn't we light a fire with a fire-fly?" asked Rob, hopefully, as he watched them flitting to and fro like winged sparks.

"Let's try;" and several minutes were pleasantly spent in catching the flies, and trying to make them kindle a green twig or two. "It's a lie to call them fire-flies when there isn't a fire in them," Nan said, throwing one unhappy insect away with scorn, though it shone its best, and obligingly walked up and down the twigs to please the innocent little experimenters.

"Marmar's a good while coming," said Rob, after another pause, during which they watched the stars overhead, smelt the sweet fern crushed under foot, and listened to the crickets' serenade.

"I don't see why God made any night; day is so much pleasanter," said Nan, thoughtfully.

"It's to sleep in," answered Rob, with a yawn.

"Then do go to sleep," said Nan, pettishly.

"I want my own bed. Oh, I wish I could see Teddy!" cried Rob, painfully reminded of home by the soft chirp of birds safe in their little nests.

"I don't believe your mother will ever find us," said Nan, who was becoming desperate, for she hated patient waiting of any sort. "It's so dark she won't see us."

"It was all black in the ice-house, and I was so scared I didn't call her, but she saw me; and she will see me now, no matter how dark it is," returned confiding Rob, standing up to peer into the gloom for the help which never failed him.

"I see her! I see her!" he cried, and ran as fast as his tired legs would take him toward a dark figure slowly approaching. Suddenly he stopped, then turned about, and came stumbling back, screaming in a great panic,

"No, it's a bear, a big black one!" and hid his face in Nan's skirts.

For a moment Nan quailed; ever her courage gave out at the thought of a real bear, and she was about to turn and flee in great disorder, when a mild "Moo!" changed her fear to merriment, as she said, laughing,

"It's a cow, Robby! the nice, black cow we saw this afternoon."

The cow seemed to feel that it was not just the thing to meet two little people in her pasture after dark, and the amiable beast paused to inquire into the case. She let them stroke her, and stood regarding them with her soft eyes so mildly, that Nan, who feared no animal but a bear, was fired with a desire to milk her.

"Silas taught me how; and berries and milk would be so nice," she said, emptying the contents of her pail into her hat, and boldly beginning her new task, while Rob stood by and repeated, at her command, the poem from Mother Goose:

"Cushy cow, bonny, let down your milk,
Let down your milk to me,
And I will give you a gown of silk,
A gown of silk and a silver tee."

But the immortal rhyme had little effect, for the benevolent cow had already been milked, and had only half a gill to give the thirsty children.

"Shoo! get away! you are an old cross patch," cried Nan, ungratefully, as she gave up the attempt in despair; and poor Molly walked on with a gentle gurgle of surprise and reproof.

"Each can have a sip, and then we must take a walk. We shall go to sleep if we don't; and lost people mustn't sleep. Don't you know how Hannah Lee in the pretty story slept under the snow and died?"

"But there isn't any snow now, and it's nice and warm," said Rob, who was not blessed with as lively a fancy as Nan.

"No matter, we will poke about a little, and call some more; and then, if nobody comes, we will hide under the bushes, like Hop-'o-my-thumb and his brothers."

It was a very short walk, however, for Rob was so sleepy he could not get on, and tumbled down so often that Nan entirely lost patience, being half distracted by the responsibility she had taken upon herself.

"If you tumble down again, I'll shake you," she said, lifting the poor little man up very kindly as she spoke, for Nan's bark was much worse than her bite.

"Please don't. It's my boots they keep slipping so;" and Rob manfully checked the sob just ready to break out, adding, with a plaintive patience that touched Nan's heart, "If the skeeters didn't bite me so, I could go to sleep till Marmar comes."

"Put your head on my lap, and I'll cover you up with my apron; I'm not afraid of the night," said Nan, sitting down and trying to persuade herself that she did not mind the shadow nor the mysterious rustlings all about her.

"Wake me up when she comes," said rob, and was fast asleep in five minutes with his head in Nan's lap under the pinafore.

The little girl sat for some fifteen minutes, staring about her with anxious eyes, and feeling as if each second was an hour. Then a pale light began to glimmer over the hill-top and she said to herself,

"I guess the night is over and morning is coming. I'd like to see the sun rise, so I'll watch, and when it comes up we can find our way right home."

But before the moon's round face peeped above the hill to destroy her hope, Nan had fallen asleep, leaning back in a little bower of tall ferns, and was deep in a mid-summer night's dream of fire-flies and blue aprons, mountains of huckleberries, and Robby wiping away the tears of a black cow, who sobbed, "I want to go home! I want to go home!"

While the children were sleeping, peacefully lulled by the drowsy hum of many neighborly mosquitoes, the family at home were in a great state of agitation. The hay-cart came at five, and all but Jack, Emil, Nan, and Rob were at the bars ready for it. Franz drove instead of Silas, and when the boys told him that the others were going home through the wood, he said, looking ill-pleased, “They ought to have left Rob to ride, he will be tired out by the long walk.”

“It’s shorter that way, and they will carry him,” said Stuffy, who was in a hurry for his supper.

“You are sure Nan and Rob went with them?”

“Of course they did; I saw them getting over the wall, and sung out that it was most five, and Jack called back that they were going the other way,” explained Tommy.

“Very well, pile in then,” and away rattled the hay-cart with the tired children and the full pails.

Mrs. Jo looked sober when she heard of the division of the party, and sent Franz back with Toby to find and bring the little ones home. Supper was over, and the family sitting about in the cool hall as usual, when Franz came trotting back, hot, dusty, and anxious.

“Have they come?” he called out when half-way up the avenue.

“No!” and Mrs. Jo flew out of her chair looking so alarmed that every one jumped up and gathered round Franz.

“I can’t find them anywhere,” he began; but the words were hardly spoken when a loud “Hullo!” startled them all, and the next minute Jack and Emil came round the house.

“Where are Nan and Rob?” cried Mrs. Jo, clutching Emil in a way that caused him to think his aunt had suddenly lost her wits.

“I don’t know. They came home with the others, didn’t they?” he answered, quickly.

“No; George and Tommy said they went with you.”

“Well, they didn’t. Haven’t seen them. We took a swim in the pond, and came by the wood,” said Jack, looking alarmed, as well he might.

“Call Mr. Bhaer, get the lanterns, and tell Silas I want him.”

That was all Mrs. Jo said, but they knew what she meant, and flew to obey her orders. In ten minutes, Mr. Bhaer and Silas were off to the wood, and Franz tearing down the road on old Andy to search the great pasture. Mrs. Jo caught up some food from the table, a little bottle of brandy from the medicine-closet, took a lantern, and bidding Jack and Emil come with her, and the rest not stir, she trotted away on Toby, never stopping for hat or shawl. She heard some one running after her, but said not a word till, as she paused to call and listen, the light of her lantern shone on Dan’s face.

“You here! I told Jack to come,” she said, half-inclined to send him back, much as she needed help.

“I wouldn’t let him; he and Emil hadn’t had any supper, and I wanted to come more than they did,” he said, taking the lantern from her and smiling up in her face with the steady look in his eyes that made her feel as if, boy though he was, she had some one to depend on.

Off she jumped, and ordered him on to Toby, in spite of his pleading to walk; then they went on again along the dusty, solitary road, stopping every now and then to call and hearken breathlessly for little voices to reply.

When they came to the great pasture, other lights were already flitting to and fro like will-o'-the-wisps, and Mr. Bhaer's voice was heard shouting, "Nan! Rob! Rob! Nan!" in every part of the field. Silas whistled and roared, Dan plunged here and there on Toby, who seemed to understand the case, and went over the roughest places with unusual docility. Often Mrs. Jo hushed them all, saying, with a sob in her throat, "The noise may frighten them, let me call; Robby will know my voice;" and then she would cry out the beloved little name in every tone of tenderness, till the very echoes whispered it softly, and the winds seemed to waft it willingly; but still no answer came.

The sky was overcast now, and only brief glimpses of the moon were seen, heat-lightening darted out of the dark clouds now and then, and a faint far-off rumble as of thunder told that a summer-storm was brewing.

"O my Robby! my Robby!" mourned poor Mrs. Jo, wandering up and down like a pale ghost, while Dan kept beside her like a faithful fire-fly. "What shall I say to Nan's father if she comes to harm? Why did I ever trust my darling so far away? Fritz, do you hear any thing?" and when a mournful, "No" came back, she wrung her hands so despairingly that Dan sprung down from Toby's back, tied the bridle to the bars, and said, in his decided way,

"They may have gone down the spring I'm going to look."

He was over the wall and away so fast that she could hardly follow him; but when she reached the spot, he lowered the lantern and showed her with joy the marks of little feet in the soft ground about the spring. She fell down on her knees to examine the tracks, and then sprung up, saying eagerly,

"Yes; that is the mark of my Robby's little boots! Come this way, they must have gone on."

Such a weary search! But now some inexplicable instinct seemed to lead the anxious mother, for presently Dan uttered a cry, and caught up a little shining object lying in the path. It was the cover of the new tin pail, dropped in the first alarm of being lost. Mrs. Jo hugged and kissed it as if it were a living thing; and when Dan was about to utter a glad shout to bring the others to the spot, she stopped him, saying, as she hurried on, "No, let me find them; I let Rob go, and I want to give him back to his father all myself."

A little farther on Nan's hat appeared, and after passing the place more than once, they came at last upon the babes in the wood, both sound asleep. Dan never forgot the little picture on which the light of his lantern shone that night. He thought Mrs. Jo would cry out, but she only whispered, “Hush!” as she softly lifted away the apron, and saw the little ruddy face below. The berry-stained lips were half-open as the breath came and went, the yellow hair lay damp on the hot forehead, and both the chubby hands held fast the little pail still full.

The sight of the childish harvest, treasured through all the troubles of that night for her, seemed to touch Mrs. Jo to the heart, for suddenly she gathered up her boy, and began to cry over him, so tenderly, yet so heartily, that he woke up, and at first seemed bewildered. Then he remembered, and hugged her close, saying with a laugh of triumph,

“I knew you’d come! O Marmar! I did want you so!” For a moment they kissed and clung to one another, quite forgetting all the world; for no matter how lost and soiled and worn-out wandering sons may be, mothers can forgive and forget every thing as they fold them in their fostering arms. Happy the son whose faith in his mother remains unchanged, and who, through all his wanderings, has kept some filial token to repay her brave and tender love.

Dan meantime picked Nan out of her bush, and, with a gentleness none but Teddy ever saw in him before, he soothed her first alarm at the sudden waking, and wiped away her tears; for Nan also began to cry for joy, it was so good to see a kind face and feel a strong arm round her after what seemed to her ages of loneliness and fear.

“My poor little girl, don’t cry! You are all safe now, and no one shall say a word of blame to-night,” said Mrs. Jo, taking Nan into her capacious embrace, and cuddling both children as a hen might gather her lost chickens under her motherly wings.

“It was my fault; but I am sorry. I tried to take care of him, and I covered him up and let him sleep, and didn’t touch his berries, though I was so hungry; and I never will do it again truly, never, never,” sobbed Nan, quite lost in a sea of penitence and thankfulness.

“Call them now, and let us get home,” said Mrs. Jo; and Dan, getting upon the wall, sent a joyful word “Found!” ringing over the field.

How the wandering lights came dancing from all sides, and gathered round the little group among the sweet fern bushes! Such a hugging, and kissing, and talking, and crying, as went on must have amazed the glowworms, and evidently delighted the mosquitoes, for they hummed frantically, while the little moths came in flocks to the party, and the frogs croaked as if they could not express their satisfaction loudly enough.

Then they set out for home, a queer party, for Franz rode on to tell the news; Dan and Toby led the way; then came Nan in the strong arms of Silas, who considered her “the smartest little baggage he ever saw,” and teased her all the way home about her pranks. Mrs. Bhaer would let no one carry Rob but himself, and the little fellow, refreshed by sleep, sat up, and chattered gayly, feeling himself a hero, while his mother went beside him holding on to any pat of his precious little body that came handy, and never tired of hearing him say, “I knew Marmar would come,” or seeing him lean down to kiss her, and put a plump berry into her mouth, “‘Cause he picked ‘em all for her.”

The moon shone out just as they reached the avenue, and all the boys came shouting to meet them, so the lost lambs were borne in triumph and safety, and landed in the dining-room, where the unromantic little things demanded supper instead of preferring kisses and caresses. They were set down to bread and milk, while the entire household stood round to gaze upon them. Nan soon recovered her spirits, and recounted her perils with a relish now that they were all over. Rob seemed absorbed in his food, but put down his spoon all of a sudden, and set up a doleful roar.

“My precious, why do you cry?” asked his mother, who still hung over him.

“I’m crying ‘cause I was lost,” bawled Rob, trying to squeeze out a tear, and failing entirely.

“But you are found now. Nan says you didn’t cry out in the field, and I was glad you were such a brave boy.”

“I was so busy being frightened I didn’t have any time then. But I want to cry now, ‘cause I don’t like to be lost,” explained Rob, struggling with sleep, emotion, and a mouthful of bread and milk.

The boys set up such a laugh at this funny way of making up for lost time, that Rob stopped to look at them, and the merriment was so infectious, that after a surprised stare he burst out into a merry, “Ha, ha!” and beat his spoon upon the table as if he enjoyed the joke immensely.

“It is ten o’clock; into bed, every man of you,” said Mr. Bhaer, looking at his watch.

“And, thank Heaven! there will be no empty ones to-night,” added Mrs. Bhaer, watching, with full eyes, Robby going up in his father’s arms, and Nan escorted by Daisy and Demi, who considered her the most interesting heroine of their collection.

“Poor Aunt Jo is so tired she ought to be carried up herself,” said gentle Franz, putting his arm round her as she paused at the stair-foot, looking quite exhausted by her fright and long walk.

“Let’s make an arm-chair,” proposed Tommy.

“No, thank you, my lads; but somebody may lend me a shoulder to lean on,” answered Mrs. Jo.

“Me! me!” and half-a-dozen jostled one another, all eager to be chosen, for there was something in the pale motherly face that touched the warm hearts under the round jackets.

Seeing that they considered it an honor, Mrs. Jo gave it to the one who had earned it, and nobody grumbled when she put her arm on Dan’s broad shoulder, saying, with a look that made him color up with pride and pleasure,

“He found the children; so I think he must help me up.”

Dan felt richly rewarded for his evening’s work, not only that he was chosen from all the rest to go proudly up bearing the lamp, but because Mrs. Jo said heartily, “Good-night, my boy! God bless you!” as he left her at her door.

“I wish I was your boy,” said Dan, who felt as if danger and trouble had somehow brought him nearer than ever to her.

“You shall be my oldest son,” and she sealed her promise with a kiss that made Dan hers entirely.

Little Rob was all right next day, but Nan had a headache, and lay on Mother Bhaer’s sofa with cold-cream upon her scratched face. Her remorse was quite gone, and she evidently thought being lost rather a fine amusement. Mrs. Jo was not pleased with this state of things, and had no desire to have her children led from the paths of virtue, or her pupils lying round loose in huckleberry fields. So she talked soberly to Nan, and tried to impress upon her mind the difference between liberty and license, telling several tales to enforce her lecture. She had not decided how to punish Nan, but one of these stories suggested a way, and as Mrs. Jo liked odd penalties, she tried it.

“All children run away,” pleaded Nan, as if it was as natural and necessary a thing as measles or hooping cough.

“Not all, and some who do run away don’t get found again,” answered Mrs. Jo.

“Didn’t you do it yourself?” asked Nan, whose keen little eyes saw some traces of a kindred spirit in the serious lady who was sewing so morally before her.

Mrs. Jo laughed, and owned that she did.

“Tell about it,” demanded Nan, feeling that she was getting the upper hand in the discussion.

Mrs. Jo saw that, and sobered down at once, saying, with a remorseful shake of the head,

“I did it a good many times, and led my poor mother rather a hard life with my pranks, till she cured me.”

“How?” and Nan sat up with a face full of interest.

“I had a new pair of shoes once, and wanted to show them; so, though I was told not to leave the garden, I ran away and was wandering about all day. It was in the city, and why I wasn't killed I don't know. Such a time as I had. I frolicked in the park with dogs, sailed boats in the Back Bay with strange boys, dined with a little Irish beggar-girl on salt fish and potatoes, and was found at last fast asleep on a door-step with my arms round a great dog. It was late in the evening, and I was a dirty as a little pig, and the new shoes were worn out I had travelled so far."

"How nice!" cried Nan, looking all ready to go and do it herself.

"It was not nice next day;" and Mrs. Jo tried to keep her eyes from betraying how much she enjoyed the memory of her early capers.

"Did your mother whip you?" asked Nan, curiously.

"She never whipped me but once, and then she begged my pardon, or I don't think I ever should have forgiven her, it hurt my feelings so much."

"Why did she beg your pardon? my father don't."

"Because, when she had done it, I turned round and said, 'Well, you are mad yourself, and ought to be whipped as much as me.' She looked at me a minute, then her anger all died out, and she said, as if ashamed, 'You are right, Jo, I am angry; and why should I punish you for being in a passion when I set you such a bad example? Forgive me, dear, and let us try to help one another in a better way.' I never forgot it, and it did me more good than a dozen rods."

Nan sat thoughtfully turning the little cold-cream jar for a minute, and Mrs. Jo said nothing, but let that idea get well into the busy little mind that was so quick to see and feel what went on about her.

"I like that," said Nan, presently, and her face looked less elfish, with its sharp eyes, inquisitive nose, and mischievous mouth. "What did your mother do to you when you ran away that time?"

"She tied me to the bed-post with a long string, so that I could not go out of the room, and there I stayed all day with the little worn-out shoes hanging up before me to remind me of my fault."

"I should think that would cure anybody," cried Nan, who loved her liberty above all things.

"It did cure me, and I think it will you, so I am going to try it," said Mrs. Jo, suddenly taking a ball of strong twine out of a drawer in her work-table.

Nan looked as if she was decidedly getting the worst of the argument now, and sat feeling much crestfallen while Mrs. Jo tied one end round her waist and the other to the arm of the sofa, saying, as she finished,

"I don't like to tie you up like a naughty little dog, but if you don't remember any better than a dog, I must treat you like one."

"I'd just as lief be tied up as not I like to play dog;" and Nan put on a don't-care face, and began to growl and grovel on the floor.

Mrs. Jo took no notice, but leaving a book or two and a handkerchief to hem, she went away, and left Miss Nan to her own devices. This was not agreeable, and after sitting a moment she tried to untie the cord. But it was fastened in the belt of her apron behind, so she began on the knot at the other end. It soon came loose, and, gathering it up, Nan was about to get out of the window, when she heard Mrs. Jo say to somebody as she passed through the hall,

“No, I don’t think she will run away now; she is an honorable little girl, and knows that I do it to help her.”

In a minute, Nan whisked back, tied herself up, and began to sew violently. Rob came in a moment after, and was so charmed with the new punishment, that he got a jump-rope and tethered himself to the other arm of the sofa in the most social manner.

“I got lost too, so I ought to be tied up as much as Nan,” he explained to his mother when she saw the new captive.

“I’m not sure that you don’t deserve a little punishment, for you knew it was wrong to go far away from the rest.”

“Nan took me,” began Rob, willing to enjoy the novel penalty, but not willing to take the blame.

“You needn’t have gone. You have got a conscience, though you are a little boy, and you must learn to mind it.”

“Well, my conscience didn’t prick me a bit when she said ‘Let’s get over the wall,’“ answered Rob, quoting one of Demi’s expressions.

“Did you stop to see if it did?”

“No.”

“Then you cannot tell.”

“I guess it’s such a little conscience that it don’t prick hard enough for me to feel it,” added Rob, after thinking the matter over for a minute.

“We must sharpen it up. It’s bad to have a dull conscience; so you may stay here till dinner-time, and talk about it with Nan. I trust you both not to untie yourselves till I say the word.”

“No, we won’t,” said both, feeling a certain sense of virtue in helping to punish themselves.

For an hour they were very good, then they grew tired of one room, and longed to get out. Never had the hall seemed so inviting; even the little bedroom acquired a sudden interest, and they would gladly have gone in and played tent with the curtains of the best bed. The open windows drove them wild because they could not reach them; and the outer world seemed so beautiful, they wondered how they ever found the heart to say it was dull. Nan pined for a race round the lawn, and Rob remembered with dismay that he had not fed his dog that morning, and wondered what poor Pollux would do. They watched the clock, and Nan did some nice calculations in minutes and seconds, while Rob learned to tell all the hours between eight and one so well that he never forgot them. It was maddening to smell the dinner, to know that there was to be succotash and huckleberry pudding, and to feel that they would not be on the spot to secure good helps of both. When Mary Ann began to set the table, they nearly cut themselves in two trying to see what meat there was to be; and Nan offered to help her make the beds, if she would only see that she had “lots of sauce on her pudding.”

When the boys came bursting out of school, they found the children tugging at their halters like a pair of restive little colts, and were much edified, as well as amused, by the sequel to the exciting adventures of the night.

“Untie me now, Marmar; my conscience will prick like a pin next time, I know it will,” said Rob, as the bell rang, and Teddy came to look at him with sorrowful surprise.

“We shall see,” answered his mother, setting him free. He took a good run down the hall, back through the dining-room, and brought up beside Nan, quite beaming with virtuous satisfaction.

“I’ll bring her dinner to her, may I?” he asked, pitying his fellow-captive.

“That’s my kind little son! Yes, pull out the table, and get a chair;” and Mrs. Jo hurried away to quell the ardor of the others, who were always in a raging state of hunger at noon.

Nan ate alone, and spent a long afternoon attached to the sofa. Mrs. Bhaer lengthened her bonds so that she could look out of the window; and there she stood watching the boys play, and all the little summer creatures enjoying their liberty. Daisy had a picnic for the dolls on the lawn, so that Nan might see the fun if she could not join in it. Tommy turned his best somersaults to console her; Demi sat on the steps reading aloud to himself, which amused Nan a good deal; and Dan brought a little tree-toad to show her as the most delicate attention in his power.

But nothing atoned for the loss of freedom; and a few hours of confinement taught Nan how precious it was. A good many thoughts went through the little head that lay on the window-sill during the last quiet hour when all the children went to the brook to see Emil’s new ship launched. She was to have christened it, and had depended on smashing a tiny bottle of currant-wine over the prow as it was named Josephine in honor of Mrs. Bhaer. Now she had lost her chance, and Daisy wouldn’t do it half so well. Tears rose to her eyes as she remembered that it was all her own fault; and she said aloud, addressing a fat bee who was rolling about in the yellow heart of a rose just under the window,

"If you have run away, you'd better go right home, and tell your mother you are sorry, and never do so any more."

"I am glad to hear you give him such good advice, and I think he has taken it," said Mrs. Jo, smiling, as the bee spread his dusty wings and flew away.

Nan brushed off a bright drop or two that shone on the window-sill, and nestled against her friend as she took her on her knee, adding kindly for she had seen the little drops, and knew what they meant,

"Do you think my mother's cure for running away a good one?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Nan, quite subdued by her quiet day.

"I hope I shall not have to try it again."

"I guess not;" and Nan looked up with such an earnest little face that Mrs. Jo felt satisfied, and said no more, for she liked to have her penalties do their own work, and did not spoil the effect by too much moralizing.

Here Rob appeared, bearing with infinite care what Asia called a "sarcer pie," meaning one baked in a saucer.

"It's made out of some of my berries, and I'm going to give you half at supper-time," he announced with a flourish.

"What makes you, when I'm so naughty?" asked Nan, meekly.

"Because we got lost together. You ain't going to be naughty again, are you?"

"Never," said Nan, with great decision.

"Oh, goody! now let's go and get Mary Ann to cut this for us all ready to eat; it's 'most tea time;" and Rob beckoned with the delicious little pie.

Nan started to follow, then stopped, and said,

"I forgot, I can't go."

"Try and see," said Mrs. Bhaer, who had quietly untied the cord sash while she had been talking.

Nan saw that she was free, and with one tempestuous kiss to Mrs. Jo, she was off like a humming-bird, followed by Robby, dribbling huckleberry juice as he ran.

CHAPTER XIII. GOLDILOCKS

After the last excitement peace descended upon Plumfield and reigned unbroken for several weeks, for the elder boys felt that the loss of Nan and Rob lay at their door, and all became so paternal in their care that they were rather wearying; while the little ones listened to Nan's recital of her perils so many times, that they regarded being lost as the greatest ill humanity was heir to, and hardly dared to put their little noses outside the great gate lest night should suddenly descend upon them, and ghostly black cows come looming through the dusk.

"It is too good to last," said Mrs. Jo; for years of boy-culture had taught her that such lulls were usually followed by outbreaks of some sort, and when less wise women would have thought that the boys had become confirmed saints, she prepared herself for a sudden eruption of the domestic volcano.

One cause of this welcome calm was a visit from little Bess, whose parents lent her for a week while they were away with Grandpa Laurence, who was poorly. The boys regarded Goldilocks as a mixture of child, angel, and fairy, for she was a lovely little creature, and the golden hair which she inherited from her blonde mamma enveloped her like a shining veil, behind which she smiled upon her worshippers when gracious, and hid herself when offended. Her father would not have it cut and it hung below her waist, so soft and fine and bright, that Demi insisted that it was silk spun from a cocoon. Every one praised the little Princess, but it did not seem to do her harm, only to teach her that her presence brought sunshine, her smiles made answering smiles on other faces, and her baby griefs filled every heart with tenderest sympathy.

Unconsciously, she did her young subjects more good than many a real sovereign, for her rule was very gentle and her power was felt rather than seen. Her natural refinement made her dainty in all things, and had a good effect upon the careless lads about her. She would let no one touch her roughly or with unclean hands, and more soap was used during her visits than at any other time, because the boys considered it the highest honor to be allowed to carry her highness, and the deepest disgrace to be repulsed with the disdainful command, "Do away, dirty boy!"

Lour voices displeased her and quarrelling frightened her; so gentler tones came into the boyish voices as they addressed her, and squabbles were promptly suppressed in her presence by lookers-on if the principles could not restrain themselves. She liked to be waited on, and the biggest boys did her little errands without a murmur, while the small lads were her devoted slaves in all things. They begged to be allowed to draw her carriage, bear her berry-basket, or pass her plate at table. No service was too humble, and Tommy and Ned came to blows before they could decide which should have the honor of blacking her little boots.

Nan was especially benefited by a week in the society of a well-bred lady, though such a very small one; for Bess would look at her with a mixture of wonder and alarm in her great blue eyes when the hoyden screamed and romped; and she shrunk from her as if she thought her a sort of wild animal. Warm-hearted Nan felt this very much. She said at first, “Pooh! I don’t care!” But she did care, and was so hurt when Bess said, “I love my tuzzin best, tause she is twiet,” that she shook poor Daisy till her teeth chattered in her head, and then fled to the barn to cry dismally. In that general refuge for perturbed spirits she found comfort and good counsel from some source or other. Perhaps the swallows from their mud-built nests overhead twittered her a little lecture on the beauty of gentleness. However that might have been, she came out quite subdued, and carefully searched the orchard for a certain kind of early apple that Bess liked because it was sweet and small and rosy. Armed with this peace-offering, she approached the little Princess, and humbly presented it. To her great joy it was graciously accepted, and when Daisy gave Nan a forgiving kiss, Bess did likewise, as if she felt that she had been too severe, and desired to apologize. After this they played pleasantly together, and Nan enjoyed the royal favor for days. To be sure she felt a little like a wild bird in a pretty cage at first, and occasionally had to slip out to stretch her wings in a long flight, or to sing at the top of her voice, where neither would disturb the plump turtle-dove Daisy, nor the dainty golden canary Bess. But it did her good; for, seeing how every one loved the little Princess for her small graces and virtues, she began to imitate her, because Nan wanted much love, and tried hard to win it.

Not a boy in the house but felt the pretty child’s influence, and was improved by it without exactly knowing how or why, for babies can work miracles in the hearts that love them. Poor Billy found infinite satisfaction in staring at her, and though she did not like it she permitted without a frown, after she had been made to understand that he was not quite like the others, and on that account must be more kindly treated. Dick and Dolly overwhelmed her with willow whistles, the only thing they knew how to make, and she accepted but never used them. Rob served her like a little lover, and Teddy followed her like a pet dog. Jack she did not like, because he was afflicted with warts and had a harsh voice. Stuffy displeased her because he did not eat tidily, and George tried hard not to gobble, that he might not disgust the dainty little lady opposite. Ned was banished from court in utter disgrace when he was discovered tormenting some unhappy field-mice. Goldilocks could never forget the sad spectacle, and retired behind her veil when he approached, waving him away with an imperious little hand, and crying, in a tone of mingled grief and anger,

“No, I tarn’t love him; he tut the poor mouses’ little tails off, and they queeked!”

Daisy promptly abdicated when Bess came, and took the humble post of chief cook, while Nan was first maid of honor; Emil was chancellor of the exchequer, and spent the public monies lavishly in getting up spectacles that cost whole ninepences. Franz was prime minister, and directed her affairs of state, planned royal progresses through the kingdom, and kept foreign powers in order. Demi was her philosopher, and fared much better than such gentlemen usually do among crowned heads. Dan was her standing army, and defended her territories gallantly; Tommy was court fool, and Nat a tuneful Rizzio to this innocent little Mary.

Uncle Fritz and Aunt Jo enjoyed this peaceful episode, and looked on at the pretty play in which the young folk unconsciously imitated their elders, without adding the tragedy that is so apt to spoil the dramas acted on the larger stage.

“They teach us quite as much as we teach them,” said Mr. Bhaer.

“Bless the dears! they never guess how many hints they give us as to the best way of managing them,” answered Mrs. Jo.

“I think you were right about the good effect of having girls among the boys. Nan has stirred up Daisy, and Bess is teaching the little bears how to behave better than we can. If this reformation goes on as it has begun, I shall soon feel like Dr. Blimber with his model young gentlemen,” said Professor, laughing, as he saw Tommy not only remove his own hat, but knock off Ned’s also, as they entered the hall where the Princess was taking a ride on the rocking-horse, attended by Rob and Teddy astride of chairs, and playing gallant knights to the best of their ability.

“You will never be a Blimber, Fritz, you couldn’t do it if you tried; and our boys will never submit to the forcing process of that famous hot-bed. No fear that they will be too elegant: American boys like liberty too well. But good manners they cannot fail to have, if we give them the kindly spirit that shines through the simplest demeanor, making it courteous and cordial, like yours, my dear old boy.”

“Tut! tut! we will not compliment; for if I begin you will run away, and I have a wish to enjoy this happy half hour to the end;” yet Mr. Bhaer looked pleased with the compliment, for it was true, and Mrs. Jo felt that she had received the best her husband could give her, by saying that he found his truest rest and happiness in her society.

"To return to the children: I have just had another proof of Goldilocks' good influence," said Mrs. Jo, drawing her chair nearer the sofa, where the Professor lay resting after a long day's work in his various gardens. "Nan hates sewing, but for love of Bess has been toiling half the afternoon over a remarkable bag in which to present a dozen of our love-apples to her idol when she goes. I praised her for it, and she said, in her quick way, 'I like to sew for other people; it is stupid sewing for myself.' I took the hint, and shall give her some little shirts and aprons for Mrs. Carney's children. She is so generous, she will sew her fingers sore for them, and I shall not have to make a task of it."

"But needlework is not a fashionable accomplishment, my dear."

"Sorry for it. My girls shall learn all I can teach them about it, even if they give up the Latin, Algebra, and half-a-dozen ologies it is considered necessary for girls to muddle their poor brains over now-a-days. Amy means to make Bess an accomplished woman, but the dear's mite of a forefinger has little pricks on it already, and her mother has several specimens of needlework which she values more than the clay bird without a bill, that filled Laurie with such pride when Bess made it."

"I also have proof of the Princess's power," said Mrs. Bhaer, after he had watched Mrs. Jo sew on a button with an air of scorn for the whole system of fashionable education. "Jack is so unwilling to be classed with Stuffy and Ned, as distasteful to Bess, that he came to me a little while ago, and asked me to touch his warts with caustic. I have often proposed it, and he never would consent; but now he bore the smart manfully, and consoles his present discomfort by hopes of future favor, when he can show her fastidious ladyship a smooth hand."

Mrs. Bhaer laughed at the story, and just then Stuffy came in to ask if he might give Goldilocks some of the bonbons his mother had sent him.

"She is not allowed to eat sweeties; but if you like to give her the pretty box with the pink sugar-rose in it, she would like it very much," said Mrs. Jo, unwilling to spoil this unusual piece of self-denial, for the "fat boy" seldom offered to share his sugar-plums.

"Won't she eat it? I shouldn't like to make her sick," said Stuffy, eyeing the delicate sweetmeat lovingly, yet putting it into the box.

"Oh, no, she won't touch it, if I tell her it is to look at, not to eat. She will keep it for weeks, and never think of tasting it. Can you do as much?"

"I should hope so! I'm ever so much older than she is," cried Stuffy, indignantly.

"Well, suppose we try. Here, put your bonbons in this bag, and see how long you can keep them. Let me count two hearts, four red fishes, three barley-sugar horses, nine almonds, and a dozen chocolate drops. Do you agree to that?” asked sly Mrs. Jo, popping the sweeties into her little spool-bag.

“Yes,” said Stuffy, with a sigh; and pocketing the forbidden fruit, he went away to give Bess the present, that won a smile from her, and permission to escort her round the garden.

“Poor Stuffy’s heart has really got the better of his stomach at last, and his efforts will be much encouraged by the rewards Bess gives him,” said Mrs. Jo.

“Happy is the man who can put temptation in his pocket and learn self-denial from so sweet a little teacher!” added Mr. Bhaer, as the children passed the window, Stuffy’s fat face full of placid satisfaction, and Goldilocks surveying her sugar-rose with polite interest, though she would have preferred a real flower with a “pitty smell.”

When her father came to take her home, a universal wail arose, and the parting gifts showered upon her increased her luggage to such an extent that Mr. Laurie proposed having out the big wagon to take it into town. Every one had given her something; and it was found difficult to pack white mice, cake, a parcel of shells, apples, a rabbit kicking violently in a bag, a large cabbage for his refreshment, a bottle of minnows, and a mammoth bouquet. The farewell scene was moving, for the Princess sat upon the hall-table, surrounded by her subjects. She kissed her cousins, and held out her hand to the other boys, who shook it gently with various soft speeches, for they were taught not to be ashamed of showing their emotions.

“Come again soon, little dear,” whispered Dan, fastening his best green-and-gold beetle in her hat.

“Don’t forget me, Princess, whatever you do,” said the engaging Tommy, taking a last stroke of the pretty hair.

“I am coming to your house next week, and then I shall see you, Bess,” added Nat, as if he found consolation in the thought.

“Do shake hands now,” cried Jack, offering a smooth paw.

“Here are two nice new ones to remember us by,” said Dick and Dolly, presenting fresh whistles, quite unconscious that seven old ones had been privately deposited in the kitchen-stove.

“My little precious! I shall work you a book-mark right away, and you must keep it always,” said Nan, with a warm embrace.

But of all the farewells, poor Billy’s was the most pathetic, for the thought that she was really going became so unbearable that he cast himself down before her, hugging her little blue boots and blubbering despairingly, “Don’t go away! oh, don’t!” Goldilocks was so touched by this burst of feeling, that she leaned over and lifting the poor lad’s head, said, in her soft, little voice,

“Don’t cry, poor Billy! I will tiss you and tum adain soon.”

This promise consoled Billy, and he fell back beaming with pride at the unusual honor conferred upon him.

“Me too! me too!” clamored Dick and Dolly, feeling that their devotion deserved some return. The others looked as if they would like to join in the cry; and something in the kind, merry faces about her moved the Princess to stretch out her arms and say, with reckless condescension,

“I will tiss evvybody!”

Like a swarm of bees about a very sweet flower, the affectionate lads surrounded their pretty playmate, and kissed her till she looked like a little rose, not roughly, but so enthusiastically that nothing but the crown of her hat was visible for a moment. Then her father rescued her, and she drove away still smiling and waving her hands, while the boys sat on the fence screaming like a flock of guinea-fowls, “Come back! come back!” till she was out of sight.

They all missed her, and each dimly felt that he was better for having known a creature so lovely, delicate, and sweet; for little Bess appealed to the chivalrous instinct in them as something to love, admire, and protect with a tender sort of reverence. Many a man remembers some pretty child who has made a place in his heart and kept her memory alive by the simple magic of her innocence; these little men were just learning to feel this power, and to love it for its gentle influence, not ashamed to let the small hand lead them, nor to own their loyalty to womankind, even in the bud.

CHAPTER XIV. DAMON AND PYTHIAS

Mrs. Bhaer was right; peace was only a temporary lull, a storm was brewing, and two days after Bess left, a moral earthquake shook Plumfield to its centre.

Tommy's hens were at the bottom of the trouble, for if they had not persisted in laying so many eggs, he could not have sold them and made such sums. Money is the root of all evil, and yet it is such a useful root that we cannot get on without it any more than we can without potatoes. Tommy certainly could not, for he spent his income so recklessly, that Mr. Bhaer was obliged to insist on a savings-bank, and presented him with a private one an imposing tin edifice, with the name over the door, and a tall chimney, down which the pennies were to go, there to rattle temptingly till leave was given to open a sort of trap-door in the floor.

The house increased in weight so rapidly, that Tommy soon became satisfied with his investment, and planned to buy unheard-of treasures with his capital. He kept account of the sums deposited, and was promised that he might break the bank as soon as he had five dollars, on condition that he spent the money wisely. Only one dollar was needed, and the day Mrs. Jo paid him for four dozen eggs, he was so delighted, that he raced off to the barn to display the bright quarters to Nat, who was also laying by money for the long-desired violin.

"I wish I had 'em to put with my three dollars, then I'd soon get enough to buy my fiddle," he said, looking wistfully at the money.

"P'raps I'll lend you some. I haven't decided yet what I'll do with mine," said Tommy, tossing up his quarters and catching them as they fell.

"Hi! boys! come down to the brook and see what a jolly great snake Dan's got!" called a voice from behind the barn.

"Come on," said Tommy; and, laying his money inside the old winnowing machine, away he ran, followed by Nat.

The snake was very interesting, and then a long chase after a lame crow, and its capture, so absorbed Tommy's mind and time, that he never thought of his money till he was safely in bed that night.

"Never mind, no one but Nat knows where it is," said the easy-going lad, and fell asleep untroubled by any anxiety about his property.

Next morning, just as the boys assembled for school, Tommy rushed into the room breathlessly, demanding,

"I say, who has got my dollar?"

"What are you talking about?" asked Franz.

Tommy explained, and Nat corroborated his statement.

Every one else declared they knew nothing about it, and began to look suspiciously at Nat, who got more and more alarmed and confused with each denial.

"Somebody must have taken it," said Franz, as Tommy shook his fist at the whole party, and wrathfully declared that,

"By thunder turtles! if I get hold of the thief, I'll give him what he won't forget in a hurry."

"Keep cool, Tom; we shall find him out; thieves always come to grief," said Dan, as one who knew something of the matter.

"May be some tramp slept in the barn and took it," suggested Ned.

"No, Silas don't allow that; besides, a tramp wouldn't go looking in that old machine for money," said Emil, with scorn.

"Wasn't it Silas himself?" said Jack.

"Well, I like that! Old Si is as honest as daylight. You wouldn't catch him touching a penny of ours," said Tommy, handsomely defending his chief admirer from suspicion.

"Whoever it was had better tell, and not wait to be found out," said Demi, looking as if an awful misfortune had befallen the family.

"I know you think it's me," broke out Nat, red and excited.

"You are the only one who knew where it was," said Franz.

"I can't help it I didn't take it. I tell you I didn't I didn't!" cried Nat, in a desperate sort of way.

"Gently, gently, my son! What is all this noise about?" and Mr. Bhaer walked in among them.

Tommy repeated the story of his loss, and, as he listened, Mr. Bhaer's face grew graver and graver; for, with all their faults and follies, the lads till now had been honest.

"Take your seats," he said; and, when all were in their places, he added slowly, as his eye went from face to face with a grieved look, that was harder to bear than a storm of words,

"Now, boys, I shall ask each one of you a single question, and I want an honest answer. I am not going to try to frighten, bribe, or surprise the truth out of you, for every one of you have got a conscience, and know what it is for. Now is the time to undo the wrong done to Tommy, and set yourselves right before us all. I can forgive the yielding to sudden temptation much easier than I can deceit. Don't add a lie to the theft, but confess frankly, and we will all try to help you make us forget and forgive."

He paused a moment, and one might have heard a pin drop, the room was so still; then slowly and impressively he put the question to each one, receiving the same answer in varying tones from all. Every face was flushed and excited, so that Mr. Bhaer could not take color as a witness, and some of the little boys were so frightened that they stammered over the two short words as if guilty, though it was evident that they could not be. When he came to Nat, his voice softened, for the poor lad looked so wretched, Mr. Bhaer felt for him. He believed him to be the culprit, and hoped to save the boy from another lie, by winning him to tell the truth without fear.

“Now, my son, give me an honest answer. Did you take the money?”

“No, sir!” and Nat looked up at him imploringly.

As the words fell from his trembling lips, somebody hissed.

“Stop that!” cried Mr. Bhaer, with a sharp rap on his desk, as he looked sternly toward the corner whence the sound came.

Ned, Jack, and Emil sat there, and the first two looked ashamed of themselves, but Emil called out,

“It wasn’t me, uncle! I’d be ashamed to hit a fellow when he is down.”

“Good for you!” cried Tommy, who was in a sad state of affliction at the trouble his unlucky dollar had made.

“Silence!” commanded Mr. Bhaer; and when it came, he said soberly,

“I am very sorry, Nat, but evidences are against you, and your old fault makes us more ready to doubt you than we should be if we could trust you as we do some of the boys, who never fib. But mind, my child, I do not charge you with this theft; I shall not punish you for it till I am perfectly sure, nor ask any thing more about it. I shall leave it for you to settle with your own conscience. If you are guilty, come to me at any hour of the day or night and confess it, and I will forgive and help you to amend. If you are innocent, the truth will appear sooner or later, and the instant it does, I will be the first to beg your pardon for doubting you, and will so gladly do my best to clear your character before us all.”

“I didn’t! I didn’t!” sobbed Nat, with his head down upon his arms, for he could not bear the look of distrust and dislike which he read in the many eyes fixed on him.

“I hope not.” Mr. Bhaer paused a minute, as if to give the culprit, whoever he might be, one more chance. Nobody spoke, however, and only sniffs of sympathy from some of the little fellows broke the silence. Mr. Bhaer shook his head, and added, regretfully,

“There is nothing more to be done, then, and I have but one thing to say: I shall not speak of this again, and I wish you all to follow my example. I cannot expect you to feel as kindly toward any one whom you suspect as before this happened, but I do expect and desire that you will not torment the suspected person in any way, he will have a hard enough time without that. Now go to your lessons."

"Father Bhaer let Nat off too easy," muttered Ned to Emil, as they got out their books.

"Hold your tongue," growled Emil, who felt that this event was a blot upon the family honor.

Many of the boys agreed with Ned, but Mr. Bhaer was right, nevertheless; and Nat would have been wiser to confess on the spot and have the trouble over, for even the hardest whipping he ever received from his father was far easier to bear than the cold looks, the avoidance, and general suspicion that met him on all sides. If ever a boy was sent to Coventry and kept there, it was poor Nat; and he suffered a week of slow torture, though not a hand was raised against him, and hardly a word said.

That was the worst of it; if they would only have talked it out, or even have thrashed him all round, he could have stood it better than the silent distrust that made very face so terrible to meet. Even Mrs. Bhaer's showed traces of it, though her manner was nearly as kind as ever; but the sorrowful anxious look in Father Bhaer's eyes cut Nat to the heart, for he loved his teacher dearly, and knew that he had disappointed all his hopes by this double sin.

Only one person in the house entirely believed in him, and stood up for him stoutly against all the rest. This was Daisy. She could not explain why she trusted him against all appearances, she only felt that she could not doubt him, and her warm sympathy made her strong to take his part. She would not hear a word against him from any one, and actually slapped her beloved Demi when he tried to convince her that it must have been Nat, because no one else knew where the money was.

"Maybe the hens ate it; they are greedy old things," she said; and when Demi laughed, she lost her temper, slapped the amazed boy, and then burst out crying and ran away, still declaring, "He didn't! he didn't! he didn't!"

Neither aunt nor uncle tried to shake the child's faith in her friend, but only hoped her innocent instinct might prove sure, and loved her all the better for it. Nat often said, after it was over, that he couldn't have stood it, if it had not been for Daisy. When the others shunned him, she clung to him closer than ever, and turned her back on the rest. She did not sit on the stairs now when he solaced himself with the old fiddle, but went in and sat beside him, listening with a face so full of confidence and affection, that Nat forgot disgrace for a time, and was happy. She asked him to help her with her lessons, she cooked him marvelous messes in her kitchen, which he ate manfully, no matter what they were, for gratitude gave a sweet flavor to the most distasteful. She proposed impossible games of cricket and ball, when she found that he shrank from joining the other boys. She put little nosegays from her garden on his desk, and tried in every way to show that she was not a fair-weather friend, but faithful through evil as well as good repute. Nan soon followed her example, in kindness at least; curbed her sharp tongue, and kept her scornful little nose from any demonstration of doubt or dislike, which was good of Madame Giddy-gaddy, for she firmly believed that Nat took the money.

Most of the boys let him severely alone, but Dan, though he said he despised him for being a coward, watched over him with a grim sort of protection, and promptly cuffed any lad who dared to molest his mate or make him afraid. His idea of friendship was as high as Daisy's, and, in his own rough way, he lived up to it as loyally.

Sitting by the brook one afternoon, absorbed in the study of the domestic habits of water-spiders, he overheard a bit of conversation on the other side of the wall. Ned, who was intensely inquisitive, had been on tenterhooks to know certainly who was the culprit; for of late one or two of the boys had begun to think that they were wrong, Nat was so steadfast in his denials, and so meek in his endurance of their neglect. This doubt had teased Ned past bearing, and he had several times privately beset Nat with questions, regardless of Mr. Bhaer's express command. Finding Nat reading alone on the shady side of the wall, Ned could not resist stopping for a nibble at the forbidden subject. He had worried Nat for some ten minutes before Dan arrived, and the first words the spider-student heard were these, in Nat's patient, pleading voice,

"Don't, Ned! oh, don't! I can't tell you because I don't know, and it's mean of you to keep nagging at me on the sly, when Father Bhaer told you not to plague me. You wouldn't dare to if Dan was round."

"I ain't afraid of Dan; he's nothing but an old bully. Don't believe but what he took Tom's money, and you know it, and won't tell. Come, now!"

"He didn't, but, if he did, I would stand up for him, he has always been so good to me," said Nat, so earnestly that Dan forgot his spiders, and rose quickly to thank him, but Ned's next words arrested him.

"I know Dan did it, and gave the money to you. Shouldn't wonder if he got his living picking pockets before he came here, for nobody knows any thing about him but you," said Ned, not believing his own words, but hoping to get the truth out of Nat by making him angry.

He succeeded in a part of his ungenerous wish, for Nat cried out, fiercely,

"If you say that again I'll go and tell Mr. Bhaer all about it. I don't want to tell tales, but, by George! I will, if you don't let Dan alone."

“Then you’ll be a sneak, as well as a liar and a thief,” began Ned, with a jeer, for Nat had borne insult to himself so meekly, the other did not believe he would dare to face the master just to stand up for Dan.

What he might have added I cannot tell, for the words were hardly out of his mouth when a long arm from behind took him by the collar, and, jerking him over the wall in a most promiscuous way, landed him with a splash in the middle of the brook.

“Say that again and I’ll duck you till you can’t see!” cried Dan, looking like a modern Colossus of Rhodes as he stood, with a foot on either side of the narrow stream, glaring down at the discomfited youth in the water.

“I was only in fun,” said Ned.

“You are a sneak yourself to badger Nat round the corner. Let me catch you at it again, and I’ll souse you in the river next time. Get up, and clear out!” thundered Dan, in a rage.

Ned fled, dripping, and his impromptu sitz-bath evidently did him good, for he was very respectful to both the boys after that, and seemed to have left his curiosity in the brook. As he vanished Dan jumped over the wall, and found Nat lying, as if quite worn out and bowed down with his troubles.

“He won’t pester you again, I guess. If he does, just tell me, and I’ll see to him,” said Dan, trying to cool down.

“I don’t mind what he says about me so much, I’ve got used to it,” answered Nat sadly; “but I hate to have him pitch into you.”

“How do you know he isn’t right?” asked Dan, turning his face away.

“What, about the money?” cried Nat, looking up with a startled air.

“Yes.”

“But I don’t believe it! You don’t care for money; all you want is your old bugs and things,” and Nat laughed, incredulously.

“I want a butterfly net as much as you want a fiddle; why shouldn’t I steal the money for it as much as you?” said Dan, still turning away, and busily punching holes in the turf with his stick.

“I don’t think you would. You like to fight and knock folks round sometimes, but you don’t lie, and I don’t believe you’d steal,” and Nat shook his head decidedly.

“I’ve done both. I used to fib like fury; it’s too much trouble now; and I stole things to eat out of gardens when I ran away from Page, so you see I am a bad lot,” said Dan, speaking in the rough, reckless way which he had been learning to drop lately.

“O Dan! don’t say it’s you! I’d rather have it any of the other boys,” cried Nat, in such a distressed tone that Dan looked pleased, and showed that he did, by turning round with a queer expression in his face, though he only answered,

“I won’t say any thing about it. But don’t you fret, and we’ll pull through somehow, see if we don’t.”

Something in his face and manner gave Nat a new idea; and he said, pressing his hands together, in the eagerness of his appeal,

“I think you know who did it. If you do, beg him to tell, Dan. It’s so hard to have ‘em all hate me for nothing. I don’t think I can bear it much longer. If I had any place to go to, I’d run away, though I love Plumfield dearly; but I’m not brave and big like you, so I must stay and wait till some one shows them that I haven’t lied.”

As he spoke, Nat looked so broken and despairing, that Dan could not bear it, and, muttered huskily,

“You won’t wait long,” and he walked rapidly away, and was seen no more for hours.

“What is the matter with Dan?” asked the boys of one another several times during the Sunday that followed a week which seemed as if it would never end. Dan was often moody, but that day he was so sober and silent that no one could get any thing out of him. When they walked he strayed away from the rest, and came home late. He took no part in the evening conversation, but sat in the shadow, so busy with his own thoughts that he scarcely seemed to hear what was going on. When Mrs. Jo showed him an unusually good report in the Conscience Book, he looked at it without a smile, and said, wistfully,

“You think I am getting on, don’t you?”

“Excellently, Dan! and I am so pleased, because I always thought you only needed a little help to make you a boy to be proud of.”

He looked up at her with a strange expression in his black eyes an expression of mingled pride and love and sorrow which she could not understand then but remembered afterward.

“I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed, but I do try,” he said, shutting the book with no sign of pleasure in the page that he usually liked so much to read over and talk about.

“Are you sick, dear?” asked Mrs. Jo, with her hand on his shoulder.

“My foot aches a little; I guess I’ll go to bed. Good-night, mother,” he added, and held the hand against his cheek a minute, then went away looking as if he had said good-bye to something dear.

“Poor Dan! he takes Nat’s disgrace to heart sadly. He is a strange boy; I wonder if I ever shall understand him thoroughly?” said Mrs. Jo to herself, as she thought over Dan’s late improvement with real satisfaction, yet felt that there was more in the lad than she had at first suspected.

One of things which cut Nat most deeply was an act of Tommy's, for after his loss Tommy had said to him, kindly, but firmly,

"I don't wish to hurt you, Nat, but you see I can't afford to lose my money, so I guess we won't be partners any longer;" and with that Tommy rubbed out the sign, "T. Bangs & Co."

Nat had been very proud of the "Co.," and had hunted eggs industriously, kept his accounts all straight, and had added a good sum to his income from the sale of his share of stock in trade.

"O Tom! must you?" he said, feeling that his good name was gone for ever in the business world if this was done.

"I must," returned Tommy, firmly. "Emil says that when one man 'bezzles (believe that's the word it means to take money and cut away with it) the property of a firm, the other one sues him, or pitches into him somehow, and won't have any thing more to do with him. Now you have 'bezzled my property; I shan't sue you, and I shan't pitch into you, but I must dissolve the partnership, because I can't trust you, and I don't wish to fail."

"I can't make you believe me, and you won't take my money, though I'd be thankful to give all my dollars if you'd only say you don't think I took your money. Do let me hunt for you, I won't ask any wages, but do it for nothing. I know all the places, and I like it," pleaded Nat.

But Tommy shook his head, and his jolly round face looked suspicious and hard as he said, shortly, "Can't do it; wish you didn't know the places. Mind you don't go hunting on the sly, and speculate in my eggs."

Poor Nat was so hurt that he could not get over it. He felt that he had lost not only his partner and patron, but that he was bankrupt in honor, and an outlaw from the business community. No one trusted his word, written or spoken, in spite of his efforts to redeem the past falsehood; the sign was down, the firm broken up, and he a ruined man. The barn, which was the boys' Wall Street, knew him no more. Cockletop and her sisters cackled for him in vain, and really seemed to take his misfortune to heart, for eggs were fewer, and some of the biddies retired in disgust to new nests, which Tommy could not find.

"They trust me," said Nat, when he heard of it; and though the boys shouted at the idea, Nat found comfort in it, for when one is down in the world, the confidence of even a speckled hen is most consoling.

Tommy took no new partner, however, for distrust had entered in, and poisoned the peace of his once confiding soul. Ned offered to join him, but he declined, saying, with a sense of justice that did him honor,

"It might turn out that Nat didn't take my money, and then we could be partners again. I don't think it will happen, but I will give him a chance, and keep the place open a little longer."

Billy was the only person whom Bangs felt he could trust in his shop, and Billy was trained to hunt eggs, and hand them over unbroken, being quite satisfied with an apple or a sugar-plum for wages. The morning after Dan's gloomy Sunday, Billy said to his employer, as he displayed the results of a long hunt,

"Only two."

"It gets worse and worse; I never saw such provoking old hens," growled Tommy, thinking of the days when he often had six to rejoice over. "Well, put 'em in my hat and give me a new bit of chalk; I must mark 'em up, any way."

Billy mounted a peck-measure, and looked into the top of the machine, where Tommy kept his writing materials.

"There's lots of money in here," said Billy.

"No, there isn't. Catch me leaving my cash round again," returned Tommy.

"I see 'em one, four, eight, two dollars," persisted Billy, who had not yet mastered the figures correctly.

"What a jack you are!" and Tommy hopped up to get the chalk for himself, but nearly tumbled down again, for there actually were four bright quarters in a row, with a bit of paper on them directed to "Tom Bangs," that there might be no mistake.

"Thunder turtles!" cried Tommy, and seizing them he dashed into the house, bawling wildly, "It's all right! Got my money! Where's Nat?"

He was soon found, and his surprise and pleasure were so genuine that few doubted his word when he now denied all knowledge of the money.

"How could I put it back when I didn't take it? Do believe me now, and be good to me again," he said, so imploringly, that Emil slapped him on the back, and declared he would for one.

"So will I, and I'm jolly glad it's not you. But who the dickens is it?" said Tommy, after shaking hands heartily with Nat.

"Never mind, as long as it's found," said Dan with his eyes fixed on Nat's happy face.

"Well, I like that! I'm not going to have my things hooked, and then brought back like the juggling man's tricks," cried Tommy, looking at his money as if he suspected witchcraft.

"We'll find him out somehow, though he was sly enough to print this so his writing wouldn't be known," said Franz, examining the paper.

"Demi prints tip-top," put in Rob, who had not a very clear idea what the fuss was all about.

"You can't make me believe it's him, not if you talk till you are blue," said

Tommy, and the others hooted at the mere idea; for the little deacon, as they called him, was above suspicion.

Nat felt the difference in the way they spoke of Demi and himself, and would have given all he had or ever hoped to have to be so trusted; for he had learned how easy it is to lose the confidence of others, how very, very hard to win it back, and truth became to him a precious thing since he had suffered from neglecting it.

Mr. Bhaer was very glad one step had been taken in the right direction, and waited hopefully for yet further revelations. They came sooner than he expected, and in a way that surprised and grieved him very much. As they sat at supper that night, a square parcel was handed to Mrs. Bhaer from Mrs. Bates, a neighbor. A note accompanied the parcel, and, while Mr. Bhaer read it, Demi pulled off the wrapper, exclaiming, as he saw its contents,

"Why, it's the book Uncle Teddy gave Dan!"

"The devil!" broke from Dan, for he had not yet quite cured himself of swearing, though he tried very hard.

Mr. Bhaer looked up quickly at the sound. Dan tried to meet his eyes, but could not; his own fell, and he sat biting his lips, getting redder and redder till he was the picture of shame.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Bhaer, anxiously.

"I should have preferred to talk about this in private, but Demi has spoilt that plan, so I may as well have it out now," said Mr. Bhaer, looking a little stern, as he always did when any meanness or deceit came up for judgment.

"The note is from Mrs. Bates, and she says that her boy Jimmy told her he bought this book of Dan last Saturday. She saw that it was worth much more than a dollar, and thinking there was some mistake, has sent it to me. Did you sell it, Dan?"

"Yes, sir," was the slow answer.

"Why?"

"Wanted money."

"For what?"

"To pay somebody."

"To whom did you owe it?"

"Tommy."

"Never borrowed a cent of me in his life," cried Tommy, looked scared, for he guessed what was coming now, and felt that on the whole he would have preferred witchcraft, for he admired Dan immensely.

"Perhaps he took it," cried Ned, who owed Dan a grudge for the ducking, and, being a mortal boy, liked to pay it off.

"O Dan!" cried Nat, clasping his hands, regardless of the bread and butter in them.

"It is a hard thing to do, but I must have this settled, for I cannot have you watching each other like detectives, and the whole school disturbed in this way, did you put that dollar in the barn this morning?" asked Mr. Bhaer.

Dan looked him straight in the face, and answered steadily, "Yes, I did."

A murmur went round the table, Tommy dropped his mug with a crash; Daisy cried out, "I knew it wasn't Nat;" Nan began to cry, and Mrs. Jo left the room, looking so disappointed, sorry, and ashamed that Dan could not bear it. He hid his face in his hands a moment, then threw up his head, squared his shoulders as if settling some load upon them, and said, with the dogged look, and half-resolute, half-reckless tone he had used when he first came,

"I did it; now you may do what you like to me, but I won't say another word about it."

"Not even that you are sorry?" asked Mr. Bhaer, troubled by the change in him.

"I ain't sorry."

"I'll forgive him without asking," said Tommy, feeling that it was harder somehow to see brave Dan disgraced than timid Nat.

"Don't want to be forgiven," returned Dan, gruffly.

"Perhaps you will when you have thought about it quietly by yourself, I won't tell you now how surprised and disappointed I am, but by and by I will come up and talk to you in your room."

"Won't make any difference," said Dan, trying to speak defiantly, but failing as he looked at Mr. Bhaer's sorrowful face; and, taking his words for a dismissal, Dan left the room as if he found it impossible to stay.

It would have done him good if he had stayed; for the boys talked the matter over with such sincere regret, and pity, and wonder, it might have touched and won him to ask pardon. No one was glad to find that it was he, not even Nat; for, spite of all his faults, and they were many, every one liked Dan now, because under his rough exterior lay some of the manly virtues which we most admire and love. Mrs. Jo had been the chief prop, as well as cultivator, of Dan; and she took it sadly to heart that her last and most interesting boy had turned out so ill. The theft was bad, but the lying about it, and allowing another to suffer so much from an unjust suspicion was worse; and most discouraging of all was the attempt to restore the money in an underhand way, for it showed not only a want of courage, but a power of deceit that boded ill for the future. Still more trying was his steady refusal to talk of the matter, to ask pardon, or express any remorse. Days passed; and he went about his lessons and his work, silent, grim, and unrepentant. As if taking warning by their treatment of Nat, he asked no sympathy of any one, rejected the advances of the boys, and spent his leisure hours roaming about the fields and woods, trying to find playmates in the birds and beasts, and succeeding better than most boys would have done, because he knew and loved them so well.

"If this goes on much longer, I'm afraid he will run away again, for he is too young to stand a life like this," said Mr. Bhaer, quite dejected at the failure of all his efforts.

"A little while ago I should have been quite sure that nothing would tempt him away, but now I am ready of any thing, he is so changed," answered poor Mrs. Jo, who mourned over her boy and could not be comforted, because he shunned her more than any one else, and only looked at her with the half-fierce, half-imploring eyes of a wild animal caught in a trap, when she tried to talk to him alone.

Nat followed him about like a shadow, and Dan did not repulse him as rudely as he did others, but said, in his blunt way, "You are all right; don't worry about me. I can stand it better than you did."

"But I don't like to have you all alone," Nat would say, sorrowfully.

"I like it;" and Dan would tramp away, stifling a sigh sometimes, for he was lonely.

Passing through the birch grove one day, he came up on several of the boys, who were amusing themselves by climbing up the trees and swinging down again, as they slender elastic stems bent till their tops touched the ground. Dan paused a minute to watch the fun, without offering to join in it, and as he stood there Jack took his turn. He had unfortunately chosen too large a tree; for when he swung off, it only bent a little way, and left him hanging at a dangerous height.

"Go back; you can't do it!" called Ned from below.

Jack tried, but the twigs slipped from his hands, and he could not get his legs round the trunk. He kicked, and squirmed, and clutched in vain, then gave it up, and hung breathless, saying helplessly,

"Catch me! help me! I must drop!"

"You'll be killed if you do," cried Ned, frightened out of his wits.

"Hold on!" shouted Dan; and up the tree he went, crashing his way along till he nearly reached Jack, whose face looked up at him, full of fear and hope.

"You'll both come down," said Ned, dancing with excitement on the slope underneath, while Nat held out his arms, in the wild hope of breaking the fall.

"That's what I want; stand from under," answered Dan, coolly; and, as he spoke, his added weight bent the tree many feet nearer the earth.

Jack dropped safely; but the birch, lightened of half its load, flew up again so suddenly, that Dan, in the act of swinging round to drop feet foremost, lost his hold and fell heavily.

"I'm not hurt, all right in a minute," he said, sitting up, a little pale and dizzy, as the boys gathered round him, full of admiration and alarm.

"You're a trump, Dan, and I'm ever so much obliged to you," cried Jack, gratefully.

"It wasn't any thing," muttered Dan, rising slowly.

"I say it was, and I'll shake hands with you, though you are," Ned checked the unlucky word on his tongue, and held out his hand, feeling that it was a handsome thing on his part.

"But I won't shake hands with a sneak;" and Dan turned his back with a look of scorn, that caused Ned to remember the brook, and retire with undignified haste.

"Come home, old chap; I'll give you a lift;" and Nat walked away with him leaving the others to talk over the feat together, to wonder when Dan would "come round," and to wish one and all that Tommy's "confounded money had been in Jericho before it made such a fuss."

When Mr. Bhaer came into school next morning, he looked so happy, that the boys wondered what had happened to him, and really thought he had lost his mind when they saw him go straight to Dan, and, taking him by both hands, say all in one breath, as he shook them heartily,

"I know all about it, and I beg your pardon. It was like you to do it, and I love you for it, though it's never right to tell lies, even for a friend."

"What is it?" cried Nat, for Dan said not a word, only lifted up his head, as if a weight of some sort had fallen off his back.

"Dan did not take Tommy's money;" and Mr. Bhaer quite shouted it, he was so glad.

"Who did?" cried the boys in a chorus.

Mr. Bhaer pointed to one empty seat, and every eye followed his finger, yet no one spoke for a minute, they were so surprised.

"Jack went home early this morning, but he left this behind him;" and in the silence Mr. Bhaer read the note which he had found tied to his door-handle when he rose.

"I took Tommy's dollar. I was peeking in through a crack and saw him put it there. I was afraid to tell before, though I wanted to. I didn't care so much about Nat, but Dan is a trump, and I can't stand it any longer. I never spent the money; it's under the carpet in my room, right behind the washstand. I'm awful sorry. I am going home, and don't think I shall ever come back, so Dan may have my things.

“JACK”

It was not an elegant confession, being badly written, much blotted, and very short; but it was a precious paper to Dan; and, when Mr. Bhaer paused, the boy went to him, saying, in a rather broken voice, but with clear eyes, and the frank, respectful manner they had tried to teach him,

“I’ll say I’m sorry now, and ask you to forgive me, sir.”

“It was a kind lie, Dan, and I can’t help forgiving it; but you see it did no good,” said Mr. Bhaer, with a hand on either shoulder, and a face full of relief and affection.

“It kept the boys from plaguing Nat. That’s what I did it for. It made him right down miserable. I didn’t care so much,” explained Dan, as if glad to speak out after his hard silence.

“How could you do it? You are always so kind to me,” faltered Nat, feeling a strong desire to hug his friend and cry. Two girlish performances, which would have scandalized Dan to the last degree.

“It’s all right now, old fellow, so don’t be a fool,” he said, swallowing the lump in his throat, and laughing out as he had not done for weeks. “Does Mrs. Bhaer know?” he asked, eagerly.

“Yes; and she is so happy I don’t know what she will do to you,” began Mr. Bhaer, but got no farther, for here the boys came crowding about Dan in a tumult of pleasure and curiosity; but before he had answered more than a dozen questions, a voice cried out,

“Three cheers for Dan!” and there was Mrs. Jo in the doorway waving her dish-towel, and looking as if she wanted to dance a jig for joy, as she used to do when a girl.

“Now then,” cried Mr. Bhaer, and led off a rousing hurrah, which startled Asia in the kitchen, and made old Mr. Roberts shake his head as he drove by, saying,

“Schools are not what they were when I was young!”

Dan stood it pretty well for a minute, but the sight of Mrs. Jo’s delight upset him, and he suddenly bolted across the hall into the parlor, whither she instantly followed, and neither were seen for half an hour.

Mr. Bhaer found it very difficult to calm his excited flock; and, seeing that lessons were an impossibility for a time, he caught their attention by telling them the fine old story of the friends whose fidelity to one another has made their names immortal. The lads listened and remembered, for just then their hearts were touched by the loyalty of a humbler pair of friends. The lie was wrong, but the love that prompted it and the courage that bore in silence the disgrace which belonged to another, made Dan a hero in their eyes. Honesty and honor had a new meaning now; a good name was more precious than gold; for once lost money could not buy it back; and faith in one another made life smooth and happy as nothing else could do.

Tommy proudly restored the name of the firm; Nat was devoted to Dan; and all the boys tried to atone to both for former suspicion and neglect. Mrs. Jo rejoiced over her flock, and Mr. Bhaer was never tired of telling the story of his young Damon and Pythias.

CHAPTER XV. IN THE WILLOW

The old tree saw and heard a good many little scenes and confidences that summer, because it became the favorite retreat of all the children, and the willow seemed to enjoy it, for a pleasant welcome always met them, and the quiet hours spent in its arms did them all good. It had a great deal of company one Saturday afternoon, and some little bird reported what went on there.

First came Nan and Daisy with their small tubs and bits of soap, for now and then they were seized with a tidy fit, and washed up all their dolls' clothes in the brook. Asia would not have them "slopping round" in her kitchen, and the bath-room was forbidden since Nan forgot to turn off the water till it overflowed and came gently dripping down through the ceiling. Daisy went systematically to work, washing first the white and then the colored things, rinsing them nicely, and hanging them to dry on a cord fastened from one barberry-bush to another, and pinning them up with a set of tiny clothes-pins Ned had turned for her. But Nan put all her little things to soak in the same tub, and then forgot them while she collected thistledown to stuff a pillow for Semiramis, Queen of Babylon, as one doll was named. This took some time, and when Mrs. Giddy-gaddy came to take out her clothes, deep green stains appeared on every thing, for she had forgotten the green silk lining of a certain cape, and its color had soaked nicely into the pink and blue gowns, the little chemises, and even the best ruffled petticoat.

"Oh me! what a mess!" sighed Nan.

"Lay them on the grass to bleach," said Daisy, with an air of experience.

"So I will, and we can sit up in the nest and watch that they don't blow away."

The Queen of Babylon's wardrobe was spread forth upon the bank, and, turning up their tubs to dry, the little washerwomen climbed into the nest, and fell to talking, as ladies are apt to do in the pauses of domestic labor.

"I'm going to have a feather-bed to go with my new pillow," said Mrs. Giddy-gaddy, as she transferred the thistledown from her pocket to her handkerchief, losing about half in the process.

"I wouldn't; Aunt Jo says feather-beds aren't healthy. I never let my children sleep on any thing but a mattress," returned Mrs. Shakespeare Smith, decidedly.

"I don't care; my children are so strong they often sleep on the floor, and don't mind it," (which was quite true). "I can't afford nine mattresses, and I like to make beds myself."

"Won't Tommy charge for the feathers?"

"May be he will, but I shan't pay him, and he won't care," returned Mrs. G., taking a base advantage of the well-known good nature of T. Bangs.

"I think the pink will fade out of that dress sooner than the green mark will," observed Mrs. S., looking down from her perch, and changing the subject, for she and her gossip differed on many points, and Mrs. Smith was a discreet lady.

"Never mind; I'm tired of dolls, and I guess I shall put them all away and attend to my farm; I like it rather better than playing house," said Mrs. G., unconsciously expressing the desire of many older ladies, who cannot dispose of their families so easily however.

"But you mustn't leave them; they will die without their mother," cried the tender Mrs. Smith.

"Let 'em die then; I'm tired of fussing over babies, and I'm going to play with the boys; they need me to see to 'em," returned the strong-minded lady.

Daisy knew nothing about women's rights; she quietly took all she wanted, and no one denied her claim, because she did not undertake what she could not carry out, but unconsciously used the all-powerful right of her own influence to win from others any privilege for which she had proved her fitness. Nan attempted all sorts of things, undaunted by direful failures, and clamored fiercely to be allowed to do every thing that the boys did. They laughed at her, hustled her out of the way, and protested against her meddling with their affairs. But she would not be quenched and she would be heard, for her will was strong, and she had the spirit of a rampant reformer. Mrs. Bhaer sympathized with her, but tired to curb her frantic desire for entire liberty, showing her that she must wait a little, learn self-control, and be ready to use her freedom before she asked for it. Nan had meek moments when she agreed to this, and the influences at work upon her were gradually taking effect. She no longer declared that she would be engine-driver or a blacksmith, but turned her mind to farming, and found in it a vent for the energy bottled up in her active little body. It did not quite satisfy her, however; for her sage and sweet marjoram were dumb things, and could not thank her for her care. She wanted something human to love, work for, and protect, and was never happier than when the little boys brought their cut fingers, bumped heads, or bruised joints for her to "mend-up." Seeing this, Mrs. Jo proposed that she should learn how to do it nicely, and Nursey had an apt pupil in bandaging, plastering, and fomenting. The boys began to call her "Dr. Giddy-gaddy," and she liked it so well that Mrs. Jo one day said to the Professor,

"Fritz, I see what we can do for that child. She wants something to live for even now, and will be one of the sharp, strong, discontented women if she does not have it. Don't let us snub her restless little nature, but do our best to give her the work she likes, and by and by persuade her father to let her study medicine. She will make a capital doctor, for she has courage, strong nerves, a tender heart, and an intense love and pity for the weak and suffering."

Mr. Bhaer smiled at first, but agreed to try, and gave Nan an herb-garden, teaching her the various healing properties of the plants she tended, and letting her try their virtues on the children in the little illnesses they had from time to time. She learned fast, remembered well, and showed a sense and interest most encouraging to her Professor, who did not shut his door in her face because she was a little woman.

She was thinking of this, as she sat in the willow that day, and when Daisy said in her gentle way,

"I love to keep house, and mean to have a nice one for Demi when we grow up and live together."

Nan replied with decision

"Well, I haven't got any brother, and I don't want any house to fuss over. I shall have an office, with lots of bottles and drawers and pestle things in it, and I shall drive round in a horse and chaise and cure sick people. That will be such fun."

"Ugh! how can you bear the bad-smelling stuff and the nasty little powders and castor-oil and senna and hive syrup?" cried Daisy, with a shudder.

"I shan't have to take any, so I don't care. Besides, they make people well, and I like to cure folks. Didn't my sage-tea make Mother Bhaer's headache go away, and my hops stop Ned's toothache in five hours? So now!"

"Shall you put leeches on people, and cut off legs and pull out teeth?" asked Daisy, quaking at the thought.

"Yes, I shall do every thing; I don't care if the people are all smashed up, I shall mend them. My grandpa was a doctor, and I saw him sew a great cut in a man's cheek, and I held the sponge, and wasn't frightened a bit, and Grandpa said I was a brave girl."

"How could you? I'm sorry for sick people, and I like to nurse them, but it makes my legs shake so I have to run away. I'm not a brave girl," sighed Daisy.

"Well, you can be my nurse, and cuddle my patients when I have given them the physic and cut off their legs," said Nan, whose practice was evidently to be of the heroic kind.

"Ship ahoy! Where are you, Nan?" called a voice from below.

"Here we are."

"Ay, ay!" said the voice, and Emil appeared holding one hand in the other, with his face puckered up as if in pain.

"Oh, what's the matter?" cried Daisy, anxiously.

“A confounded splinter in my thumb. Can’t get it out. Take a pick at it, will you, Nanny?”

“It’s in very deep, and I haven’t any needle,” said Nan, examining a tarry thumb with interest.

“Take a pin,” said Emil, in a hurry.

“No, it’s too big and hasn’t got a sharp point.”

Here Daisy, who had dived into her pocket, presented a neat little housewife with four needles in it.

“You are the Posy who always has what we want,” said Emil; and Nan resolved to have a needle-book in her own pocket henceforth, for just such cases as this were always occurring in her practice.

Daisy covered her eyes, but Nan probed and picked with a steady hand, while Emil gave directions not down in any medical work or record.

“Starboard now! Steady, boys, steady! Try another tack. Heave ho! there she is!”

“Suck it,” ordered the Doctor, surveying the splinter with an experienced eye.

“Too dirty,” responded the patient, shaking his bleeding hand.

“Wait; I’ll tie it up if you have got a handkerchief.”

“Haven’t; take one of those rags down there.”

“Gracious! no, indeed; they are doll’s clothes,” cried Daisy, indignantly.

“Take one of mine; I’d like to have you,” said Nan; and swinging himself down, Emil caught up the first “rag” he saw. It happened to be the frilled skirt; but Nan tore it up without a murmur; and when the royal petticoat was turned into a neat little bandage, she dismissed her patient with the command,

“Keep it wet, and let it alone; then it will heal right up, and not be sore.”

“What do you charge?” asked the Commodore, laughing.

“Nothing; I keep a ‘spensary; that is a place where poor people are doctored free gratis for nothing,” explained Nan, with an air.

“Thank you, Doctor Giddy-gaddy. I’ll always call you in when I come to grief;” and Emil departed, but looked back to say for one good turn deserves another “Your duds are blowing away, Doctor.”

Forgiving the disrespectful word, “duds,” the ladies hastily descended, and, gathering up their wash, retired to the house to fire up the little stove, and go to ironing.

A passing breath of air shook the old willow, as if it laughed softly at the childish chatter which went on in the nest, and it had hardly composed itself when another pair of birds alighted for a confidential twitter.

“Now, I’ll tell you the secret,” began Tommy, who was “swellin’ wisibly” with the importance of his news.

“Tell away,” answered Nat, wishing he had brought his fiddle, it was so shady and quiet here.

“Well, we fellows were talking over the late interesting case of circumstantial evidence,” said Tommy, quoting at random from a speech Franz had made at the club, “and I proposed giving Dan something to make up for our suspecting him, to show our respect, and so on, you know something handsome and useful, that he could keep always and be proud of. What do you think we chose?”

“A butterfly-net; he wants one ever so much,” said Nat, looking a little disappointed, for he meant to get it himself.

“No, sir; it’s to be a microscope, a real swell one, that we see what-do-you-call-’ems in water with, and stars, and ant-eggs, and all sorts of games, you know. Won’t it be a jolly good present?” said Tommy, rather confusing microscopes and telescopes in his remarks.

“Tip-top! I’m so glad! Won’t it cost a heap, though?” cried Nat, feeling that his friend was beginning to be appreciated.

“Of course it will; but we are all going to give something. I headed the paper with my five dollars; for if it is done at all, it must be done handsome.”

“What! all of it? I never did see such a generous chap as you are;” and Nat beamed upon him with sincere admiration.

“Well, you see, I’ve been so bothered with my property, that I’m tired of it, and don’t mean to save up any more, but give it away as I go along, and then nobody will envy me, or want to steal it, and I shan’t be suspecting folks and worrying about my old cash,” replied Tommy, on whom the cares and anxieties of a millionaire weighed heavily.

“Will Mr. Bhaer let you do it?”

“He thought it was a first-rate plan, and said that some of the best men he knew preferred to do good with their money instead of laying it up to be squabbled over when they died.”

“Your father is rich; does he do that way?”

“I’m not sure; he gives me all I want; I know that much. I’m going to talk to him about it when I go home. Anyhow, I shall set him a good example;” and Tommy was so serious, that Nat did not dare to laugh, but said, respectfully,

“You will be able to do ever so much with your money, won’t you?”

“So Mr. Bhaer said, and he promised to advise me about useful ways of spending it. I’m going to begin with Dan; and next time I get a dollar or so, I shall do something for Dick, he’s such a good little chap, and only has a cent a week for pocket-money. He can’t earn much, you know; so I’m going to kind of see to him;” and good-hearted Tommy quite longed to begin.

“I think that’s a beautiful plan, and I’m not going to try to buy a fiddle any more; I'm going to get Dan his net all myself, and if there is any money left, I'll do something to please poor Billy. He's fond of me, and though he isn't poor, he'd like some little thing from me, because I can make out what he wants better than the rest of you." And Nat fell to wondering how much happiness could be got out of his precious three dollars.

"So I would. Now come and ask Mr. Bhaer if you can't go in town with me on Monday afternoon, so you can get the net, while I get the microscope. Franz and Emil are going too, and we'll have a jolly time larking round among the shops."

The lads walked away arm-in-arm, discussing the new plans with droll importance, yet beginning already to feel the sweet satisfaction which comes to those who try, no matter how humbly, to be earthly providences to the poor and helpless, and gild their mite with the gold of charity before it is laid up where thieves cannot break through and steal.

"Come up and rest while we sort the leaves; it's so cool and pleasant here," said Demi, as he and Dan came sauntering home from a long walk in the woods.

"All right!" answered Dan, who was a boy of few words, and up they went.

"What makes birch leaves shake so much more than the others?" asked inquiring Demi, who was always sure of an answer from Dan.

"They are hung differently. Don't you see the stem where it joins the leaf is sort of pinched one way, and where it joins the twig, it is pinched another. This makes it waggle with the least bit of wind, but the elm leaves hang straight, and keep stiller."

"How curious! will this do so?" and Demi held up a sprig of acacia, which he had broken from a little tree on the lawn, because it was so pretty.

"No; that belongs to the sort that shuts up when you touch it. Draw your finger down the middle of the stem, and see if the leaves don't curl up," said Dan, who was examining a bit of mica.

Demi tried it, and presently the little leaves did fold together, till the spray showed a single instead of a double line of leaves.

"I like that; tell me about the others. What do these do?" asked Demi, taking up a new branch.

"Feed silk-worms; they live on mulberry leaves, till they begin to spin themselves up. I was in a silk-factory once, and there were rooms full of shelves all covered with leaves, and worms eating them so fast that it made a rustle. Sometimes they eat so much they die. Tell that to Stuffy," and Dan laughed, as he took up another bit of rock with a lichen on it.

"I know one thing about this mullein leaf: the fairies use them for blankets," said Demi, who had not quite given up his faith in the existence of the little folk in green.

“If I had a microscope, I’d show you something prettier than fairies,” said Dan, wondering if he should ever own that coveted treasure. “I knew an old woman who used mullein leaves for a night-cap because she had face-ache. She sewed them together, and wore it all the time.”

“How funny! was she your grandmother?”

“Never had any. She was a queer old woman, and lived alone in a little tumble-down house with nineteen cats. Folks called her a witch, but she wasn’t, though she looked like an old rag-bag. She was real kind to me when I lived in that place, and used to let me get warm at her fire when the folks at the poorhouse were hard on me.”

“Did you live in a poorhouse?”

“A little while. Never mind that I didn’t mean to speak of it;” and Dan stopped short in his unusual fit of communicativeness.

“Tell about the cats, please,” said Demi, feeling that he had asked an unpleasant question, and sorry for it.

“Nothing to tell; only she had a lot of ‘em, and kept ‘em in a barrel nights; and I used to go and tip over the barrel sometimes, and let ‘em out all over the house, and then she’d scold, and chase ‘em and put ‘em in again, spitting and yowling like fury.”

“Was she good to them?” asked Demi, with a hearty child’s laugh, pleasant to hear.

“Guess she was. Poor old soul! she took in all the lost and sick cats in the town; and when anybody wanted one they went to Marm Webber, and she let ‘em pick any kind and color they wanted, and only asked ninepence, she was glad to have her pussies get a good home.”

“I should like to see Marm Webber. Could I, if I went to that place?”

“She’s dead. All my folks are,” said Dan, briefly.

“I’m sorry;” and Demi sat silent a minute, wondering what subject would be safe to try next. He felt delicate about speaking of the departed lady, but was very curious about the cats, and could not resist asking softly,

“Did she cure the sick ones?”

“Sometimes. One had a broken leg, and she tied it up to a stick, and it got well; and another had fits, and she doctored it with yarbs till it was cured. But some of ‘em died, and she buried ‘em; and when they couldn’t get well, she killed ‘em easy.”

“How?” asked Demi, feeling that there was a peculiar charm about this old woman, and some sort of joke about the cats, because Dan was smiling to himself.

“A kind lady, who was fond of cats, told her how, and gave her some stuff, and sent all her own pussies to be killed that way. Marm used to put a sponge wet with ether, in the bottom of an old boot, then poke puss in head downwards. The ether put her to sleep in a jiffy, and she was drowned in warm water before she woke up."

"I hope the cats didn't feel it. I shall tell Daisy about that. You have known a great many interesting things, haven't you?" asked Demi, and fell to meditating on the vast experience of a boy who had run away more than once, and taken care of himself in a big city.

"Wish I hadn't sometimes."

"Why? Don't remembering them feel good?"

"No."

"It's very singular how hard it is to manage your mind," said Demi, clasping his hands round his knees, and looking up at the sky as if for information upon his favorite topic.

"Devilish hard no, I don't mean that;" and Dan bit his lips, for the forbidden word slipped out in spite of him, and he wanted to be more careful with Demi than with any of the other boys.

"I'll play I didn't hear it," said Demi; "and you won't do it again, I'm sure."

"Not if I can help it. That's one of the things I don't want to remember. I keep pegging away, but it don't seem to do much good;" and Dan looked discouraged.

"Yes, it does. You don't say half so many bad words as you used to; and Aunt Jo is pleased, because she said it was a hard habit to break up."

"Did she?" and Dan cheered up a bit.

"You must put swearing away in your fault-drawer, and lock it up; that's the way I do with my badness."

"What do you mean?" asked Dan, looking as if he found Demi almost as amusing as a new sort of cockchafer or beetle.

"Well, it's one of my private plays, and I'll tell you, but I think you'll laugh at it," began Demi, glad to hold forth on this congenial subject. "I play that my mind is a round room, and my soul is a little sort of creature with wings that lives in it. The walls are full of shelves and drawers, and in them I keep my thoughts, and my goodness and badness, and all sorts of things. The goods I keep where I can see them, and the bads I lock up tight, but they get out, and I have to keep putting them in and squeezing them down, they are so strong. The thoughts I play with when I am alone or in bed, and I make up and do what I like with them. Every Sunday I put my room in order, and talk with the little spirit that lives there, and tell him what to do. He is very bad sometimes, and won't mind me, and I have to scold him, and take him to Grandpa. He always makes him behave, and be sorry for his faults, because Grandpa likes this play, and gives me nice things to put in the drawers, and tells me how to shut up the naughties. Hadn't you better try that way? It's a very good one;" and Demi looked so earnest and full of faith, that Dan did not laugh at his quaint fancy, but said, soberly,

"I don't think there is a lock strong enough to keep my badness shut up. Any way my room is in such a clutter I don't know how to clear it up."

"You keep your drawers in the cabinet all spandy nice; why can't you do the others?"

"I ain't used to it. Will you show me how?" and Dan looked as if inclined to try Demi's childish way of keeping a soul in order.

"I'd love to, but I don't know how, except to talk as Grandpa does. I can't do it good like him, but I'll try."

"Don't tell any one; only now and then we'll come here and talk things over, and I'll pay you for it by telling all I know about my sort of things. Will that do?" and Dan held out his big, rough hand.

Demi gave his smooth, little hand readily, and the league was made; for in the happy, peaceful world where the younger boy lived, lions and lambs played together, and little children innocently taught their elders.

"Hush!" said Dan, pointing toward the house, as Demi was about to indulge in another discourse on the best way of getting badness down, and keeping it down; and peeping from their perch, they saw Mrs. Jo strolling slowly along, reading as she went, while Teddy trotted behind her, dragging a little cart upside down.

"Wait till they see us," whispered Demi, and both sat still as the pair came nearer, Mrs. Jo so absorbed in her book that she would have walked into the brook if Teddy had not stopped her by saying,

"Marmar, I wanter fis."

Mrs. Jo put down the charming book which she had been trying to read for a week, and looked about her for a fishing-pole, being used to making toys out of nothing. Before she had broken one from the hedge, a slender willow bough fell at her feet; and, looking up, she saw the boys laughing in the nest.

"Up! up!" cried Teddy, stretching his arms and flapping his skirts as if about to fly.

"I'll come down and you come up. I must go to Daisy now;" and Demi departed to rehearse the tale of the nineteen cats, with the exciting boot-and-barrel episodes.

Teddy was speedily whisked up; and then Dan said, laughing, "Come, too; there's plenty of room. I'll lend you a hand."

Mrs. Jo glanced over her shoulder, but no one was in sight; and rather liking the joke of the thing, she laughed back, saying, "Well, if you won't mention it, I think I will;” and with two nimble steps was in the willow.

“I haven’t climbed a tree since I was married. I used to be very fond of it when I was a girl,” she said, looking well-pleased with her shady perch.

“Now, you read if you want to, and I’ll take care of Teddy,” proposed Dan, beginning to make a fishing-rod for impatient Baby.

“I don’t think I care about it now. What were you and Demi at up here?” asked Mrs. Jo, thinking, from the sober look on Dan’s face, that he had something on his mind.

“Oh! we were talking. I’d been telling him about leaves and things, and he was telling me some of his queer plays. Now, then, Major, fish away;” and Dan finished off his work by putting a big blue fly on the bent pin which hung at the end of the cord he had tied to the willow-rod.

Teddy leaned down from the tree, and was soon wrapt up in watching for the fish which he felt sure would come. Dan held him by his little petticoats, lest he should take a “header” into the brook, and Mrs. Jo soon won him to talk by doing so herself.

“I am so glad you told Demi about ‘leaves and things;’ it is just what he needs; and I wish you would teach him, and take him to walk with you.”

“I’d like to, he is so bright; but — ”

“But what?”

“I didn’t think you’d trust me.”

“Why not?”

“Well, Demi is so kind of precious, and so good, and I’m such a bad lot, I thought you’d keep him away from me.”

“But you are not a ‘bad lot,’ as you say; and I do trust you, Dan, entirely, because you honestly try to improve, and do better and better every week.”

“Really?” and Dan looked up at her with the cloud of despondency lifting from his face.

“Yes; don’t you feel it?”

“I hoped so, but I didn’t know.”

“I have been waiting and watching quietly, for I thought I’d give you a good trial first; and if you stood it, I would give you the best reward I had. You have stood it well; and now I’m going to trust not only Demi, but my own boy, to you, because you can teach them some things better than any of us.”

“Can I?” and Dan looked amazed at the idea.

“Demi has lived among older people so much that he needs just what you have knowledge of common things, strength, and courage. He thinks you are the bravest boy he ever saw, and admires your strong way of doing things. Then you know a great deal about natural objects, and can tell him more wonderful tales of birds, and bees, and leaves, and animals, than his story-books give him; and, being true, these stories will teach and do him good. Don’t you see now how much you can help him, and why I like to have him with you?”

“But I swear sometimes, and might tell him something wrong. I wouldn’t mean to, but it might slip out, just as ‘devil’ did a few minutes ago,” said Dan, anxious to do his duty, and let her know his shortcomings.

“I know you try not to say or do any thing to harm the little fellow, and here is where I think Demi will help you, because he is so innocent and wise in his small way, and has what I am trying to give you, dear, good principles. It is never too early to try and plant them in a child, and never too late to cultivate them in the most neglected person. You are only boys yet; you can teach one another. Demi will unconsciously strengthen your moral sense, you will strengthen his common sense, and I shall feel as if I had helped you both.”

Words could not express how pleased and touched Dan was by this confidence and praise. No one had ever trusted him before, no one had cared to find out and foster the good in him, and no one had suspected how much there was hidden away in the breast of the neglected boy, going fast to ruin, yet quick to feel and value sympathy and help. No honor that he might earn hereafter would ever be half so precious as the right to teach his few virtues and small store of learning to the child whom he most respected; and no more powerful restraint could have been imposed upon him than the innocent companion confided to his care. He found courage now to tell Mrs. Jo of the plan already made with Demi, and she was glad that the first step had been so naturally taken. Every thing seemed to be working well for Dan, and she rejoiced over him, because it had seemed a hard task, yet, working on with a firm belief in the possibility of reformation in far older and worse subjects than he, there had come this quick and hopeful change to encourage her. He felt that he had friends now and a place in the world, something to live and work for, and, though he said little, all that was best and bravest in a character made old by a hard experience responded to the love and faith bestowed on him, and Dan’s salvation was assured.

Their quiet talk was interrupted by a shout of delight from Teddy, who, to the surprise of every one, did actually catch a trout where no trout had been seen for years. He was so enchanted with his splendid success that he insisted on showing his prize to the family before Asia cooked it for supper; so the three descended and went happily away together, all satisfied with the work of that half hour.

Ned was the next visitor to the tree, but he only made a short stay, sitting there at his ease while Dick and Dolly caught a pailful of grasshoppers and crickets for him. He wanted to play a joke on Tommy, and intended to tuck up a few dozen of the lively creatures in his bed, so that when Bangs got in he would speedily tumble out again, and pass a portion of the night in chasing “hopper-grasses” round the room. The hunt was soon over, and having paid the hunters with a few peppermints apiece Ned retired to make Tommy’s bed.

For an hour the old willow sighed and sung to itself, talked with the brook, and watched the lengthening shadows as the sun went down. The first rosy color was touching its graceful branches when a boy came stealing up the avenue, across the lawn, and, spying Billy by the brook-side, went to him, saying, in a mysterious tone,

“Go and tell Mr. Bhaer I want to see him down here, please. Don’t let any one hear.”

Billy nodded and ran off, while the boy swung himself up into the tree, and sat there looking anxious, yet evidently feeling the charm of the place and hour. In five minutes, Mr. Bhaer appeared, and, stepping up on the fence, leaned into the nest, saying, kindly,

“I am glad to see you, Jack; but why not come in and meet us all at once?”

“I wanted to see you first, please, sir. Uncle made me come back. I know I don’t deserve any thing, but I hope the fellows won’t be hard upon me.”

Poor Jack did not get on very well, but it was evident that he was sorry and ashamed, and wanted to be received as easily as possible; for his Uncle had thrashed him well and scolded him soundly for following the example he himself set. Jack had begged not to be sent back, but the school was cheap, and Mr. Ford insisted, so the boy returned as quietly as possible, and took refuge behind Mr. Bhaer.

“I hope not, but I can’t answer for them, though I will see that they are not unjust. I think, as Dan and Nat have suffered so much, being innocent, you should suffer something, being guilty. Don’t you?” asked Mr. Bhaer, pitying Jack, yet feeling he deserved punishment for a fault which had so little excuse.

“I suppose so, but I sent Tommy’s money back, and I said I was sorry, isn’t that enough?” said Jack, rather sullenly; for the boy who could do so mean a thing was not brave enough to bear the consequences well.

“No; I think you should ask pardon of all three boys, openly and honestly. You cannot expect them to respect and trust you for a time, but you can live down this disgrace if you try, and I will help you. Stealing and lying are detestable sins, and I hope this will be a lesson to you. I am glad you are ashamed, it is a good sign; bear it patiently, and do your best to earn a better reputation.”

“I’ll have an auction, and sell off all my goods dirt cheap,” said Jack, showing his repentance in the most characteristic way.

“I think it would be better to give them away, and begin on a new foundation. Take ‘Honesty is the best policy’ for your motto, and live up to it in act, and word, and thought, and though you don't make a cent of money this summer, you will be a rich boy in the autumn," said Mr. Bhaer, earnestly.

It was hard, but Jack consented, for he really felt that cheating didn't pay, and wanted to win back the friendship of the boys. His heart clung to his possessions, and he groaned inwardly at the thought of actually giving away certain precious things. Asking pardon publicly was easy compared to this; but then he began to discover that certain other things, invisible, but most valuable, were better property than knives, fish-hooks, or even money itself. So he decided to buy up a little integrity, even at a high price, and secure the respect of his playmates, though it was not a salable article.

"Well, I'll do it," he said, with a sudden air of resolution, which pleased Mr. Bhaer.

"Good! and I'll stand by you. Now come and begin at once."

And Father Bhaer led the bankrupt boy back into the little world, which received him coldly at first, but slowly warmed to him, when he showed that he had profited by the lesson, and was sincerely anxious to go into a better business with a new stock-in-trade.

CHAPTER XVI. TAMING THE COLT

“What in the world is that boy doing?” said Mrs. Jo to herself, as she watched Dan running round the half-mile triangle as if for a wager. He was all alone, and seemed possessed by some strange desire to run himself into a fever, or break his neck; for, after several rounds, he tried leaping walls, and turning somersaults up the avenue, and finally dropped down on the grass before the door as if exhausted.

“Are you training for a race, Dan?” asked Mrs. Jo, from the window where she sat.

He looked up quickly, and stopped panting to answer, with a laugh,

“No; I’m only working off my steam.”

“Can’t you find a cooler way of doing it? You will be ill if you tear about so in such warm weather,” said Mrs. Jo, laughing also, as she threw him out a great palm-leaf fan.

“Can’t help it. I must run somewhere,” answered Dan, with such an odd expression in his restless eyes, that Mrs. Jo was troubled, and asked, quickly,

“Is Plumfield getting too narrow for you?”

“I wouldn’t mind if it was a little bigger. I like it though; only the fact is the devil gets into me sometimes, and then I do want to bolt.”

The words seemed to come against his will, for he looked sorry the minute they were spoken, and seemed to think he deserved a reproof for his ingratitude. But Mrs. Jo understood the feeling, and though sorry to see it, she could not blame the boy for confessing it. She looked at him anxiously, seeing how tall and strong he had grown, how full of energy his face was, with its eager eyes and resolute mouth; and remembering the utter freedom he had known for years before, she felt how even the gentle restraint of this home would weigh upon him at times when the old lawless spirit stirred in him. “Yes,” she said to herself, “my wild hawk needs a larger cage; and yet, if I let him go, I am afraid he will be lost. I must try and find some lure strong enough to keep him safe.”

“I know all about it,” she added, aloud. “It is not ‘the devil,’ as you call it, but the very natural desire of all young people for liberty. I used to feel just so, and once, I really did think for a minute that I would bolt.”

“Why didn’t you?” said Dan, coming to lean on the low window-ledge, with an evident desire to continue the subject.

“I knew it was foolish, and love for my mother kept me at home.”

"I haven't got any mother," began Dan.

"I thought you had now," said Mrs. Jo, gently stroking the rough hair off his hot forehead.

"You are no end good to me, and I can't ever thank you enough, but it just isn't the same, is it?" and Dan looked up at her with a wistful, hungry look that went to her heart.

"No, dear, it is not the same, and never can be. I think an own mother would have been a great deal to you. But as that cannot be, you must try to let me fill her place. I fear I have not done all I ought, or you would not want to leave me," she added, sorrowfully.

"Yes, you have!" cried Dan, eagerly. "I don't want to go, and I won't go, if I can help it; but every now and then I feel as if I must burst out somehow. I want to run straight ahead somewhere, to smash something, or pitch into somebody. Don't know why, but I do, and that's all about it."

Dan laughed as he spoke, but he meant what he said, for he knit his black brows, and brought down his fist on the ledge with such force, that Mrs. Jo's thimble flew off into the grass. He brought it back, and as she took it she held the big, brown hand a minute, saying, with a look that showed the words cost her something,

"Well, Dan, run if you must, but don't run very far; and come back to me soon, for I want you very much."

He was rather taken aback by this unexpected permission to play truant, and somehow it seemed to lessen his desire to go. He did not understand why, but Mrs. Jo did, and, knowing the natural perversity of the human mind, counted on it to help her now. She felt instinctively that the more the boy was restrained the more he would fret against it; but leave him free, and the mere sense of liberty would content him, joined to the knowledge that his presence was dear to those whom he loved best. It was a little experiment, but it succeeded, for Dan stood silent a moment, unconsciously picking the fan to pieces and turning the matter over in his mind. He felt that she appealed to his heart and his honor, and owned that he understood it by saying presently, with a mixture of regret and resolution in his face,

"I won't go yet awhile, and I'll give you fair warning before I bolt. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Yes, we will let it stand so. Now, I want to see if I can't find some way for you to work off your steam better than running about the place like a mad dog, spoiling my fans, or fighting with the boys. What can we invent?" and while Dan tried to repair the mischief he had done, Mrs. Jo racked her brain for some new device to keep her truant safe until he had learned to love his lessons better.

"How would you like to be my express-man?" she said, as a sudden thought popped into her head.

"Go into town, and do the errands?" asked Dan, looking interested at once.

"Yes; Franz is tired of it, Silas cannot be spared just now, and Mr. Bhaer has no time. Old Andy is a safe horse, you are a good driver, and know your way about the city as well as a postman. Suppose you try it, and see if it won't do most as well to drive away two or three times a week as to run away once a month."

"I'd like it ever so much, only I must go alone and do it all myself. I don't want any of the other fellows bothering round," said Dan, taking to the new idea so kindly that he began to put on business airs already.

"If Mr. Bhaer does not object you shall have it all your own way. I suppose Emil will growl, but he cannot be trusted with horses, and you can. By the way, to-morrow is market-day, and I must make out my list. You had better see that the wagon is in order, and tell Silas to have the fruit and vegetables ready for mother. You will have to be up early and get back in time for school, can you do that?"

"I'm always an early bird, so I don't mind," and Dan slung on his jacket with despatch.

"The early bird got the worm this time, I'm sure," said Mrs. Jo, merrily.

"And a jolly good worm it is," answered Dan, as he went laughing away to put a new lash to the whip, wash the wagon, and order Silas about with all the importance of a young express-man.

"Before he is tired of this I will find something else and have it ready when the next restless fit comes on," said Mrs. Jo to herself, as she wrote her list with a deep sense of gratitude that all her boys were not Dans.

Mr. Bhaer did not entirely approve of the new plan, but agreed to give it a trial, which put Dan on his mettle, and caused him to give up certain wild plans of his own, in which the new lash and the long hill were to have borne a part. He was up and away very early the next morning, heroically resisting the temptation to race with the milkmen going into town. Once there, he did his errands carefully, to Mr. Bhaer's surprise and Mrs. Jo's great satisfaction. The Commodore did growl at Dan's promotion, but was pacified by a superior padlock to his new boat-house, and the thought that seamen were meant for higher honors than driving market-wagons and doing family errands. So Dan filled his new office well and contentedly for weeks, and said no more about bolting. But one day Mr. Bhaer found him pummelling Jack, who was roaring for mercy under his knee.

"Why, Dan, I thought you had given up fighting," he said, as he went to the rescue.

“We ain’t fighting, we are only wrestling,” answered Dan, leaving off reluctantly.

“It looks very much like it, and feels like it, hey, Jack?” said Mr. Bhaer, as the defeated gentleman got upon his legs with difficulty.

“Catch me wrestling with him again. He’s most knocked my head off,” snarled Jack, holding on to that portion of his frame as if it really was loose upon his shoulders.

“The fact is, we began in fun, but when I got him down I couldn’t help pounding him. Sorry I hurt you, old fellow,” explained Dan, looking rather ashamed of himself.

“I understand. The longing to pitch into somebody was so strong you couldn’t resist. You are a sort of Berserker, Dan, and something to tussle with is as necessary to you as music is to Nat,” said Mr. Bhaer, who knew all about the conversation between the boy and Mrs. Jo.

“Can’t help it. So if you don’t want to be pounded you’d better keep out of the way,” answered Dan, with a warning look in his black eyes that made Jack sheer off in haste.

“If you want something to wrestle with, I will give you a tougher specimen than Jack,” said Mr. Bhaer; and, leading the way to the wood-yard, he pointed out certain roots of trees that had been grubbed up in the spring, and had been lying there waiting to be split.

“There, when you feel inclined to maltreat the boys, just come and work off your energies here, and I’ll thank you for it.”

“So I will;” and, seizing the axe that lay near Dan hauled out a tough root, and went at it so vigorously, that the chips flew far and wide, and Mr. Bhaer fled for his life.

To his great amusement, Dan took him at his word, and was often seen wrestling with the ungainly knots, hat and jacket off, red face, and wrathful eyes; for he got into royal rages over some of his adversaries, and swore at them under his breath till he had conquered them, when he exulted, and marched off to the shed with an armful of gnarled oak-wood in triumph. He blistered his hands, tired his back, and dulled the axe, but it did him good, and he got more comfort out of the ugly roots than any one dreamed, for with each blow he worked off some of the pent-up power that would otherwise have been expended in some less harmless way.

“When this is gone I really don’t know what I shall do,” said Mrs. Jo to herself, for no inspiration came, and she was at the end of her resources.

But Dan found a new occupation for himself, and enjoyed it some time before any one discovered the cause of his contentment. A fine young horse of Mr. Laurie's was kept at Plumfield that summer, running loose in a large pasture across the brook. The boys were all interested in the handsome, spirited creature, and for a time were fond of watching him gallop and frisk with his plumey tail flying, and his handsome head in the air. But they soon got tired of it, and left Prince Charlie to himself. All but Dan, he never tired of looking at the horse, and seldom failed to visit him each day with a lump of sugar, a bit of bread, or an apple to make him welcome. Charlie was grateful, accepted his friendship, and the two loved one another as if they felt some tie between them, inexplicable but strong. In whatever part of the wide field he might be, Charlie always came at full speed when Dan whistled at the bars, and the boy was never happier than when the beautiful, fleet creature put its head on his shoulder, looking up at him with fine eyes full of intelligent affection.

"We understand one another without any palaver, don't we, old fellow?" Dan would say, proud of the horse's confidence, and, so jealous of his regard, that he told no one how well the friendship prospered, and never asked anybody but Teddy to accompany him on these daily visits.

Mr. Laurie came now and then to see how Charlie got on, and spoke of having him broken to harness in the autumn.

"He won't need much taming, he is such a gentle, fine-tempered brute. I shall come out and try him with a saddle myself some day," he said, on one of these visits.

"He lets me put a halter on him, but I don't believe he will bear a saddle even if you put it on," answered Dan, who never failed to be present when Charlie and his master met.

"I shall coax him to bear it, and not mind a few tumbles at first. He has never been harshly treated, so, though he will be surprised at the new performance, I think he won't be frightened, and his antics will do no harm."

"I wonder what he would do," said Dan to himself, as Mr. Laurie went away with the Professor, and Charlie returned to the bars, from which he had retired when the gentlemen came up.

A daring fancy to try the experiment took possession of the boy as he sat on the topmost rail with the glossy back temptingly near him. Never thinking of danger, he obeyed the impulse, and while Charlie unsuspectingly nibbled at the apple he held, Dan quickly and quietly took his seat. He did not keep it long, however, for with an astonished snort, Charlie reared straight up, and deposited Dan on the ground. The fall did not hurt him, for the turf was soft, and he jumped up, saying, with a laugh,

"I did it anyway! Come here, you rascal, and I'll try it again."

But Charlie declined to approach, and Dan left him resolving to succeed in the end; for a struggle like this suited him exactly. Next time he took a halter, and having got it on, he played with the horse for a while, leading him to and fro, and putting him through various antics till he was a little tired; then Dan sat on the wall and gave him bread, but watched his chance, and getting a good grip of the halter, slipped on to his back. Charlie tried the old trick, but Dan held on, having had practice with Toby, who occasionally had an obstinate fit, and tried to shake off his rider. Charlie was both amazed and indignant; and after prancing for a minute, set off at a gallop, and away went Dan heels over head. If he had not belonged to the class of boys who go through all sorts of dangers unscathed, he would have broken his neck; as it was, he got a heavy fall, and lay still collecting his wits, while Charlie tore round the field tossing his head with every sign of satisfaction at the discomfiture of his rider. Presently it seemed to occur to him that something was wrong with Dan, and, being of a magnanimous nature, he went to see what the matter was. Dan let him sniff about and perplex himself for a few minutes; then he looked up at him, saying, as decidedly as if the horse could understand,

"You think you have beaten, but you are mistaken, old boy; and I'll ride you yet see if I don't."

He tried no more that day, but soon after attempted a new method of introducing Charlie to a burden. He strapped a folded blanket on his back, and then let him race, and rear, and roll, and fume as much as he liked. After a few fits of rebellion Charlie submitted, and in a few days permitted Dan to mount him, often stopped short to look round, as if he said, half patiently, half reproachfully, "I don't understand it, but I suppose you mean no harm, so I permit the liberty."

Dan patted and praised him, and took a short turn every day, getting frequent falls, but persisting in spite of them, and longing to try a saddle and bridle, but not daring to confess what he had done. He had his wish, however, for there had been a witness of his pranks who said a good word for him.

"Do you know what that chap has ben doin' lately?" asked Silas of his master, one evening, as he received his orders for the next day.

"Which boy?" said Mr. Bhaer, with an air of resignation, expecting some sad revelation.

"Dan, he's ben a breaking the colt, sir, and I wish I may die if he ain't done it," answered Silas, chuckling.

"How do you know?"

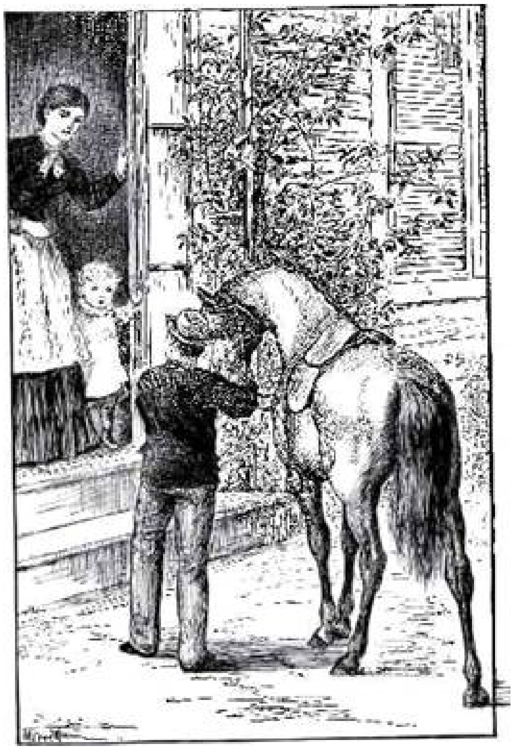
"Wal, I kinder keep an eye on the little fellers, and most gen'lly know what they're up to; so when Dan kep going off to the paster, and coming home black and blue, I mistrusted that suthing was goin' on. I didn't say nothin', but I crep up into the barn chamber, and from there I see him goin' through all manner of games with Charlie. Blest if he warn't throwed time and agin, and knocked round like a bag o' meal. But the pluck of that boy did beat all, and he 'peared to like it, and kep on as ef bound to beat."

"But, Silas, you should have stopped it the boy might have been killed," said Mr. Bhaer, wondering what freak his irrepressibles would take into their heads next.

"S'pose I oughter; but there warn't no real danger, for Charlie ain't no tricks, and is as pretty a tempered horse as ever I see. Fact was, I couldn't bear to spile sport, for ef there's any thing I do admire it's grit, and Dan is chock full on 't. But now I know he's hankerin' after a saddle, and yet won't take even the old one on the sly; so I just thought I'd up and tell, and may be you'd let him try what he can do. Mr. Laurie won't mind, and Charlie's all the better for 't."

"We shall see;" and off went Mr. Bhaer to inquire into the matter.

Dan owned up at once, and proudly proved that Silas was right by showing off his power over Charlie; for by dint of much coaxing, many carrots, and infinite perseverance, he really had succeeded in riding the colt with a halter and blanket. Mr. Laurie was much amused, and well pleased with Dan's courage and skill, and let him have a hand in all future performances; for he set about Charlie's education at once, saying that he was not going to be outdone by a slip of a boy. Thanks to Dan, Charlie took kindly to the saddle and bridle when he had once reconciled himself to the indignity of the bit; and after Mr. Laurie had trained him a little, Dan was permitted to ride him, to the great envy and admiration of the other boys.



"Isn't he handsome? and don't he mind me like a lamb?" said Dan one day as he dismounted and stood with his arm round Charlie's neck.

"Yes, and isn't he a much more useful and agreeable animal than the wild colt who spent his days racing about the field, jumping fences, and running away now and then?" asked Mrs. Bhaer from the steps where she always appeared when Dan performed with Charlie.

"Of course he is. See he won't run away now, even if I don't hold him, and he comes to me the minute I whistle; I have tamed him well, haven't I?" and Dan looked both proud and pleased, as well he might, for, in spite of their struggles together, Charlie loved him better than his master.

"I am taming a colt too, and I think I shall succeed as well as you if I am as patient and persevering," said Mrs. Jo, smiling so significantly at him, that Dan understood and answered, laughing, yet in earnest,

"We won't jump over the fence and run away, but stay and let them make a handsome, useful span of us, hey, Charlie?"

CHAPTER XVII. COMPOSITION DAY

“Hurry up, boys, it’s three o’clock, and Uncle Fritz likes us to be punctual, you know,” said Franz one Wednesday afternoon as a bell rang, and a stream of literary-looking young gentlemen with books and paper in their hands were seen going toward the museum.

Tommy was in the school-room, bending over his desk, much bedaubed with ink, flushed with the ardor of inspiration, and in a great hurry as usual, for easy-going Bangs never was ready till the very last minute. As Franz passed the door looking up laggards, Tommy gave one last blot and flourish, and departed out the window, waving his paper to dry as he went. Nan followed, looking very important, with a large roll in her hand, and Demi escorted Daisy, both evidently brimful of some delightful secret.

The museum was all in order, and the sunshine among the hop-vines made pretty shadows on the floor as it peeped through the great window. On one side sat Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer, on the other was a little table on which the compositions were laid as soon as read, and in a large semicircle sat the children on camp-stools which occasionally shut up and let the sitter down, thus preventing any stiffness in the assembly. As it took too much time to have all read, they took turns, and on this Wednesday the younger pupils were the chief performers, while the elder ones listened with condescension and criticised freely.

“Ladies first; so Nan may begin,” said Mr. Bhaer, when the settling of stools and rustling of papers had subsided.

Nan took her place beside the little table, and, with a preliminary giggle, read the following interesting essay on,

“THE SPONGE

“The sponge, my friends, is a most useful and interesting plant. It grows on rocks under the water, and is a kind of sea-weed, I believe. People go and pick it and dry it and wash it, because little fish and insects live in the holes of the sponge; I found shells in my new one, and sand. Some are very fine and soft; babies are washed with them. The sponge has many uses. I will relate some of them, and I hope my friends will remember what I say. One use is to wash the face; I don’t like it myself, but I do it because I wish to be clean. Some people don’t, and they are dirty.” Here the eye of the reader rested sternly upon Dick and Dolly, who quailed under it, and instantly resolved to scrub themselves virtuously on all occasions. “Another use is to wake people up; I allude to boys par-tic-u-lar-ly.” Another pause after the long word to enjoy the smothered laugh that went round the room. “Some boys do not get up when called, and Mary Ann squeezes the water out of a wet sponge on their faces, and it makes them so mad they wake up.” Here the laugh broke out, and Emil said, as if he had been hit,

“Seems to me you are wandering from the subject.”

“No, I ain’t; we are to write about vegetables or animals, and I’m doing both: for boys are animals, aren’t they?” cried Nan; and, undaunted by the indignant “No!” shouted at her, she calmly proceeded,

“One more interesting thing is done with sponges, and this is when doctors put ether on it, and hold it to people’s noses when they have teeth out. I shall do this when I am bigger, and give ether to the sick, so they will go to sleep and not feel me cut off their legs and arms.”

“I know somebody who killed cats with it,” called out Demi, but was promptly crushed by Dan, who upset his camp-stool and put a hat over his face.

“I will not be interruckted,” said Nan, frowning upon the unseemly scrimmagers. Order was instantly restored, and the young lady closed her remarks as follows:

“My composition has three morals, my friends.” Somebody groaned, but no notice was taken of the insult. “First, is keep your faces clean second, get up early third, when the ether sponge is put over your nose, breathe hard and don’t kick, and your teeth will come out easy. I have no more to say.” And Miss Nan sat down amid tumultuous applause.

“That is a very remarkable composition; its tone is high, and there is a good deal of humor in it. Very well done, Nan. Now, Daisy,” and Mr. Bhaer smiled at one young lady as he beckoned the other.

Daisy colored prettily as she took her place, and said, in her modest little voice,

“I’m afraid you won’t like mine; it isn’t nice and funny like Nan’s. But I couldn’t do any better.”

“We always like yours, Posy,” said Uncle Fritz, and a gentle murmur from the boys seemed to confirm the remark. Thus encouraged, Daisy read her little paper, which was listened to with respectful attention.

“THE CAT

“The cat is a sweet animal. I love them very much. They are clean and pretty, and catch rats and mice, and let you pet them, and are fond of you if you are kind. They are very wise, and can find their way anywhere. Little cats are called kittens, and are dear things. I have two, named Huz and Buz, and their mother is Topaz, because she has yellow eyes. Uncle told me a pretty story about a man named Ma-ho-met. He had a nice cat, and when she was asleep on his sleeve, and he wanted to go away, he cut off the sleeve so as not to wake her up. I think he was a kind man. Some cats catch fish."

"So do I!" cried Teddy, jumping up eager to tell about his trout.

"Hush!" said his mother, setting him down again as quickly as possible, for orderly Daisy hated to be "interruckted," as Nan expressed it.

"I read about one who used to do it very slyly. I tried to make Topaz, but she did not like the water, and scratched me. She does like tea, and when I play in my kitchen she pats the teapot with her paw, till I give her some. She is a fine cat, she eats apple-pudding and molasses. Most cats do not."

"That's a first-rater," called out Nat, and Daisy retired, pleased with the praise of her friend.

"Demi looks so impatient we must have him up at once or he won't hold out," said Uncle Fritz, and Demi skipped up with alacrity.

"Mine is a poem!" he announced in a tone of triumph, and read his first effort in a loud and solemn voice:

"I write about the butterfly,
  It is a pretty thing;
And flies about like the birds,
  But it does not sing.
"First it is a little grub,
  And then it is a nice yellow cocoon,
And then the butterfly
  Eats its way out soon.
"They live on dew and honey,
  They do not have any hive,
They do not sting like wasps, and bees, and hornets,
  And to be as good as they are we should strive.
"I should like to be a beautiful butterfly,
  All yellow, and blue, and green, and red;
But I should not like
  To have Dan put camphor on my poor little head."

This unusual burst of genius brought down the house, and Demi was obliged to read it again, a somewhat difficult task, as there was no punctuation whatever, and the little poet's breath gave out before he got to the end of some of the long lines.

"He will be a Shakespeare yet," said Aunt Jo, laughing as if she would die, for this poetic gem reminded her of one of her own, written at the age of ten, and beginning gloomily,

"I wish I had a quiet tomb,

  Beside a little rill;
Where birds, and bees, and butterflies,
  Would sing upon the hill."

"Come on, Tommy. If there is as much ink inside your paper as there is outside, it will be a long composition," said Mr. Bhaer, when Demi had been induced to tear himself from his poem and sit down.

"It isn't a composition, it's a letter. You see, I forgot all about its being my turn till after school, and then I didn't know what to have, and there wasn't time to read up; so I thought you wouldn't mind my taking a letter that I wrote to my Grandma. It's got something about birds in it, so I thought it would do."

With this long excuse, Tommy plunged into a sea of ink and floundered through, pausing now and then to decipher one of his own flourishes.

"MY DEAR GRANDMA, I hope you are well. Uncle James sent me a pocket rifle. It is a beautiful little instrument of killing, shaped like this [Here Tommy displayed a remarkable sketch of what looked like an intricate pump, or the inside of a small steam-engine] 44 are the sights; 6 is a false stock that fits in at A; 3 is the trigger, and 2 is the cock. It loads at the breech, and fires with great force and straightness. I am going out shooting squirrels soon. I shot several fine birds for the museum. They had speckled breasts, and Dan liked them very much. He stuffed them tip-top, and they sit on the tree quite natural, only one looks a little tipsy. We had a Frenchman working here the other day, and Asia called his name so funnily that I will tell you about it. His name was Germain: first she called him Jerry, but we laughed at her, and she changed it to Jeremiah; but ridicule was the result, so it became Mr. Germany; but ridicule having been again resumed, it became Garrymon, which it has remained ever since. I do not write often, I am so busy; but I think of you often, and sympathize with you, and sincerely hope you get on as well as can be expected without me. Your affectionate grandson,

"THOMAS BUCKMINSTER BANGS.

"P.S.? If you come across any postage-stamps, remember me.

"N.B. Love to all, and a great deal to Aunt Almira. Does she make any nice plum-cakes now?

"P.S.? Mrs. Bhaer sends her respects.

"P.S.? And so would Mr. B, if he knew I was in act to write.

"N.B. Father is going to give me a watch on my birthday. I am glad as at present I have no means of telling time, and am often late at school.

"P.S.? I hope to see you soon. Don't you wish to send for me?

"T. B. B."

As each postscript was received with a fresh laugh from the boys, by the time he came to the sixth and last, Tommy was so exhausted that he was glad to sit down and wipe his ruddy face.

"I hope the dear old lady will live through it," said Mr. Bhaer, under cover of the noise.

"We won't take any notice of the broad hint given in that last P.S. The letter will be quite as much as she can bear without a visit from Tommy," answered Mrs. Jo, remembering that the old lady usually took to her bed after a visitation from her irrepressible grandson.

"Now, me," said Teddy, who had learned a bit of poetry, and was so eager to say it that he had been bobbing up and down during the reading, and could no longer be restrained.

"I'm afraid he will forget it if he waits; and I have had a deal of trouble teaching him," said his mother.

Teddy trotted to the rostrum, dropped a curtsey and nodded his head at the same time, as if anxious to suit every one; then, in his baby voice, and putting the emphasis on the wrong words, he said his verse all in one breath:

"Little drops of water,
  Little drains of sand,
Mate a might okum (ocean),
  And a peasant land.
"Little words of kindness,
  Pokin evvy day,
Make a home a hebbin,
  And hep us on a way."

Clapping his hands at the end, he made another double salutation, and then ran to hide his head in his mother's lap, quite overcome by the success of his "piece," for the applause was tremendous.

Dick and Dolly did not write, but were encouraged to observe the habits of animals and insects, and report what they saw. Dick liked this, and always had a great deal to say; so, when his name was called, he marched up, and, looking at the audience with his bright confiding eyes, told his little story so earnestly that no one smiled at his crooked body, because the "straight soul" shone through it beautifully.

"I've been watching dragonflies, and I read about them in Dan's book, and I'll try and tell you what I remember. There's lots of them flying round on the pond, all blue, with big eyes, and sort of lace wings, very pretty. I caught one, and looked at him, and I think he was the handsomest insect I ever saw. They catch littler creatures than they are to eat, and have a queer kind of hook thing that folds up when they ain't hunting. It likes the sunshine, and dances round all day.

Let me see! what else was there to tell about? Oh, I know! The eggs are laid in the water, and go down to the bottom, and are hatched in the mud. Little ugly things come out of ‘em; I can’t say the name, but they are brown, and keep having new skins, and getting bigger and bigger. Only think! it takes them two years to be a dragonfly! Now this is the curiousest part of it, so you listen tight, for I don’t believe you know it. When it is ready it knows somehow, and the ugly, grubby thing climbs up out of the water on a flag or a bulrush, and bursts open its back.”

“Come, I don’t believe that,” said Tommy, who was not an observant boy, and really thought Dick was “making up.”

“It does burst open its back, don’t it?” and Dick appealed to Mr. Bhaer, who nodded a very decided affirmative, to the little speaker’s great satisfaction.

“Well, out comes the dragonfly, all whole, and he sits in the sun sort of coming alive, you know; and he gets strong, and then he spreads his pretty wings, and flies away up in the air, and never is a grub any more. That’s all I know; but I shall watch and try to see him do it, for I think it’s splendid to turn into a beautiful dragonfly, don’t you?”

Dick had told his story well, and, when he described the flight of the new-born insect, had waved his hands, and looked up as if he saw, and wanted to follow it. Something in his face suggested to the minds of the elder listeners the thought that some day little Dick would have his wish, and after years of helplessness and pain would climb up into the sun some happy day, and, leaving his poor little body behind him, find a new lovely shape in a fairer world than this. Mrs. Jo drew him to her side, and said, with a kiss on his thin cheek,

“That is a sweet little story, dear, and you remembered it wonderfully well. I shall write and tell your mother all about it;” and Dick sat on her knee, contentedly smiling at the praise, and resolving to watch well, and catch the dragonfly in the act of leaving its old body for the new, and see how he did it. Dolly had a few remarks to make upon the “Duck,” and made them in a sing-song tone, for he had learned it by heart, and thought it a great plague to do it at all.

“Wild ducks are hard to kill; men hide and shoot at them, and have tame ducks to quack and make the wild ones come where the men can fire at them. They have wooden ducks made too, and they sail round, and the wild ones come to see them; they are stupid, I think. Our ducks are very tame. They eat a great deal, and go poking round in the mud and water. They don’t take good care of their eggs, but them spoil, and — ”

“Mine don’t!” cried Tommy.

“Well, some people’s do; Silas said so. Hens take good care of little ducks, only they don't like to have them go in the water, and make a great fuss. But the little ones don't care a bit. I like to eat ducks with stuffing in them and lots of apple-sauce."

"I have something to say about owls," began Nat, who had carefully prepared a paper upon this subject with some help from Dan.

"Owls have big heads, round eyes, hooked bills, and strong claws. Some are gray, some white, some black and yellowish. Their feathers are very soft, and stick out a great deal. They fly very quietly, and hunt bats, mice, little birds, and such things. They build nests in barns, hollow trees, and some take the nests of other birds. The great horned owl has two eggs bigger than a hen's and reddish brown. The tawny owl has five eggs, white and smooth; and this is the kind that hoots at night. Another kind sounds like a child crying. They eat mice and bats whole, and the parts that they cannot digest they make into little balls and spit out."

"My gracious! how funny!" Nan was heard to observe.

"They cannot see by day; and if they get out into the light, they go flapping round half blind, and the other birds chase and peck at them, as if they were making fun. The horned owl is very big, 'most as big as the eagle. It eats rabbits, rats, snakes, and birds; and lives in rocks and old tumble-down houses. They have a good many cries, and scream like a person being choked, and say, 'Waugh O! waugh O!' and it scares people at night in the woods. The white owl lives by the sea, and in cold places, and looks something like a hawk. There is a kind of owl that makes holes to live in like moles. It is called the burrowing owl, and is very small. The barn-owl is the commonest kind; and I have watched one sitting in a hole in a tree, looking like a little gray cat, with one eye shut and the other open. He comes out at dusk, and sits round waiting for the bats. I caught one, and here he is."

With that Nat suddenly produced from inside his jacket a little downy bird, who blinked and ruffled his feathers, looking very plump and sleepy and scared.

"Don't touch him! He is going to show off," said Nat, displaying his new pet with great pride. First he put a cocked hat on the bird's head, and the boys laughed at the funny effect; then he added a pair of paper spectacles, and that gave the owl such a wise look that they shouted with merriment. The performance closed with making the bird angry, and seeing him cling to a handkerchief upside down, pecking and "clucking," as Rob called it. He was allowed to fly after that, and settled himself on the bunch of pine-cones over the door, where he sat staring down at the company with an air of sleepy dignity that amused them very much.

"Have you anything for us, George?" asked Mr. Bhaer, when the room was still again.

"Well, I read and learned ever so much about moles, but I declare I've forgotten every bit of it, except that they dig holes to live in, that you catch them by pouring water down, and that they can't possibly live without eating very often;" and Stuffy sat down, wishing he had not been too lazy to write out his valuable observations, for a general smile went round when he mentioned the last of the three facts which lingered in his memory.

"Then we are done for to-day," began Mr. Bhaer, but Tommy called out in a great hurry,

"No we ain't. Don't you know? We must give the thing;" and he winked violently as he made an eye-glass of his fingers.

"Bless my heart, I forgot! Now is your time, Tom;" and Mr. Bhaer dropped into his seat again, while all the boys but Dan looked mightily tickled at something.

Nat, Tommy, and Demi left the room, and speedily returned with a little red morocco box set forth in state on Mrs. Jo's best silver salver. Tommy bore it, and, still escorted by Nat and Demi, marched up to unsuspecting Dan, who stared at them as if he thought they were going to make fun of him. Tommy had prepared an elegant and impressive speech for the occasion, but when the minute came, it all went out of his head, and he just said, straight from his kindly boyish heart,

"Here, old fellow, we all wanted to give you something to kind of pay for what happened awhile ago, and to show how much we liked you for being such a trump. Please take it, and have a jolly good time with it."

Dan was so surprised he could only get as red as the little box, and mutter, "Thanky, boys!" as he fumbled to open it. But when he saw what was inside, his face lighted up, and he seized the long desired treasure, saying so enthusiastically that every one was satisfied, though is language was anything but polished,

"What a stunner! I say, you fellows are regular bricks to give me this; it's just what I wanted. Give us your paw, Tommy."

Many paws were given, and heartily shaken, for the boys were charmed with Dan's pleasure, and crowded round him to shake hands and expatiate on the beauties of their gift. In the midst of this pleasant chatter, Dan's eye went to Mrs. Jo, who stood outside the group enjoying the scene with all her heart.

"No, I had nothing to do with it. The boys got it up all themselves," she said, answering the grateful look that seemed to thank her for that happy moment. Dan smiled, and said, in a tone that only she could understand,

"It's you all the same;" and making his way through the boys, he held out his hand first to her and then to the good Professor, who was beaming benevolently on his flock.

He thanked them both with the silent, hearty squeeze he gave the kind hands that had held him up, and led him into the safe refuge of a happy home. Not a word was spoken, but they felt all he would say, and little Teddy expressed his pleasure for them as he leaned from his father's arm to hug the boy, and say, in his baby way,

"My dood Danny! everybody loves him now."

"Come here, show off your spy-glass, Dan, and let us see some of your magnified pollywogs and annymalcumisms as you call 'em," said Jack, who felt so uncomfortable during this scene that he would have slipped away if Emil had not kept him.

"So I will, take a squint at that and see what you think of it," said Dan, glad to show off his precious microscope.

He held it over a beetle that happened to be lying on the table, and Jack bent down to take his squint, but looked up with an amazed face, saying,

"My eye! what nippers the old thing has got! I see now why it hurts so confoundedly when you grab a dorbug and he grabs back again."

"He winked at me," cried Nan, who had poked her head under Jack's elbow and got the second peep.

Every one took a look, and then Dan showed them the lovely plumage on a moth's wing, the four feathery corners to a hair, the veins on a leaf, hardly visible to the naked eye, but like a thick net through the wonderful little glass; the skin on their own fingers, looking like queer hills and valleys; a cobweb like a bit of coarse sewing silk, and the sting of a bee.

"It's like the fairy spectacles in my story-book, only more curious," said Demi, enchanted with the wonders he saw.

"Dan is a magician now, and he can show you many miracles going on all round you; for he has two things needful patience and a love of nature. We live in a beautiful and wonderful world, Demi, and the more you know about it the wiser and the better you will be. This little glass will give you a new set of teachers, and you may learn fine lessons from them if you will," said Mr. Bhaer, glad to see how interested the boys were in the matter.

"Could I see anybody's soul with this microscope if I looked hard?" asked Demi, who was much impressed with the power of the bit of glass.

"No, dear; it's not powerful enough for that, and never can be made so. You must wait a long while before your eyes are clear enough to see the most invisible of God's wonders. But looking at the lovely things you can see will help you to understand the lovelier things you can not see," answered Uncle

Fritz, with his hand on the boy’s head.

“Well, Daisy and I both think that if there are any angels, their wings look like that butterfly’s as we see it through the glass, only more soft and gold.”

“Believe it if you like, and keep your own little wings as bright and beautiful, only don’t fly away for a long time yet.”

“No, I won’t,” and Demi kept his word.

“Good-by, my boys; I must go now, but I leave you with our new Professor of Natural History;” and Mrs. Jo went away well pleased with that composition day.

CHAPTER XVIII. CROPS

The gardens did well that summer, and in September the little crops were gathered in with much rejoicing. Jack and Ned joined their farms and raised potatoes, those being a good salable article. They got twelve bushels, counting little ones and all, and sold them to Mr. Bhaer at a fair price, for potatoes went fast in that house. Emil and Franz devoted themselves to corn, and had a jolly little husking in the barn, after which they took their corn to the mill, and came proudly home with meal enough to supply the family with hasty-pudding and Johnny-cake for a lone time. They would not take money for their crop; because, as Franz said, "We never can pay Uncle for all he has done for us if we raised corn for the rest of our days."

Nat had beans in such abundance that he despaired of ever shelling them, till Mrs. Jo proposed a new way, which succeeded admirably. The dry pods were spread upon the barn-floor, Nat fiddled, and the boys danced quadrilles on them, till they were thrashed out with much merriment and very little labor.

Tommy's six weeks' beans were a failure; for a dry spell early in the season hurt them, because he gave them no water; and after that he was so sure that they could take care of themselves, he let the poor things struggle with bugs and weeds till they were exhausted and died a lingering death. So Tommy had to dig his farm over again, and plant peas. But they were late; the birds ate many; the bushes, not being firmly planted, blew down, and when the poor peas came at last, no one cared for them, as their day was over, and spring-lamb had grown into mutton. Tommy consoled himself with a charitable effort; for he transplanted all the thistles he could find, and tended them carefully for Toby, who was fond of the prickly delicacy, and had eaten all he could find on the place. The boys had great fun over Tom's thistle bed; but he insisted that it was better to care for poor Toby than for himself, and declared that he would devote his entire farm next year to thistles, worms, and snails, that Demi's turtles and Nat's pet owl might have the food they loved, as well as the donkey. So like shiftless, kind-hearted, happy-go-lucky Tommy!

Demi had supplied his grandmother with lettuce all summer, and in the
autumn sent his grandfather a basket of turnips, each one scrubbed up
till it looked like a great white egg. His Grandma was fond of salad,
and one of his Grandpa's favorite quotations was,

“Lucullus, whom frugality could charm,
Ate roasted turnips at the Sabine farm.”

Therefore these vegetable offerings to the dear domestic god and goddess were affectionate, appropriate, and classical.

Daisy had nothing but flowers in her little plot, and it bloomed all summer long with a succession of gay or fragrant posies. She was very fond of her garden, and delved away in it at all hours, watching over her roses, and pansies, sweet-peas, and mignonette, as faithfully and tenderly as she did over her dolls or her friends. Little nosegays were sent into town on all occasions, and certain vases about the house were her especial care. She had all sorts of pretty fancies about her flowers, and loved to tell the children the story of the pansy, and show them how the step-mother-leaf sat up in her green chair in purple and gold; how the two own children in gay yellow had each its little seat, while the step children, in dull colors, both sat on one small stool, and the poor little father in his red nightcap, was kept out of sight in the middle of the flower; that a monk’s dark face looked out of the monk’s-hood larkspur; that the flowers of the canary-vine were so like dainty birds fluttering their yellow wings, that one almost expected to see them fly away, and the snapdragons that went off like little pistol-shots when you cracked them. Splendid dollies did she make out of scarlet and white poppies, with ruffled robes tied round the waist with grass blade sashes, and astonishing hats of coreopsis on their green heads. Pea-pod boats, with rose-leaf sails, received these flower-people, and floated them about a placid pool in the most charming style; for finding that there were no elves, Daisy made her own, and loved the fanciful little friends who played their parts in her summer-life.

Nan went in for herbs, and had a fine display of useful plants, which she tended with steadily increasing interest and care. Very busy was she in September cutting, drying, and tying up her sweet harvest, and writing down in a little book how the different herbs are to be used. She had tried several experiments, and made several mistakes; so she wished to be particular lest she should give little Huz another fit by administering wormwood instead of catnip.

Dick, Dolly, and Rob each grubbed away on his small farm, and made more stir about it than all the rest put together. Parsnips and carrots were the crops of the two D.’s; and they longed for it to be late enough to pull up the precious vegetables. Dick did privately examine his carrots, and plant them again, feeling that Silas was right in saying it was too soon for them yet.

Rob’s crop was four small squashes and one immense pumpkin. It really was a “bouncer,” as every one said; and I assure you that two small persons could sit on it side by side. It seemed to have absorbed all the goodness of the little garden, and all the sunshine that shone down on it, and lay there a great round, golden ball, full of rich suggestions of pumpkin-pies for weeks to come. Robby was so proud of his mammoth vegetable that he took every one to see it, and, when frosts began to nip, covered it up each night with an old bedquilt, tucking it round as if the pumpkin was a well-beloved baby. The day it was gathered he would let no one touch it but himself, and nearly broke his back tugging it to the barn in his little wheelbarrow, with Dick and Dolly harnessed in front to give a heave up the path. His mother promised him that the Thanksgiving-pies should be made from it, and hinted vaguely that she had a plan in her head which would cover the prize pumpkin and its owner with glory.

Poor Billy had planted cucumbers, but unfortunately hoed them up and left the pig-weed. This mistake grieved him very much for tem minutes, then he forgot all about it, and sowed a handful of bright buttons which he had collected, evidently thinking in his feeble mind that they were money, and would come up and multiply, so that he might make many quarters, as Tommy did. No one disturbed him, and he did what he liked with his plot, which soon looked as if a series of small earthquakes had stirred it up. When the general harvest-day came, he would have had nothing but stones and weeds to show, if kind old Asia had not hung half-a-dozen oranges on the dead tree he stuck up in the middle. Billy was delighted with his crop; and no one spoiled his pleasure in the little miracle which pity wrought for him, by making withered branches bear strange fruit.

Stuffy had various trials with his melons; for, being impatient to taste them, he had a solitary revel before they were ripe, and made himself so ill, that for a day or two it seemed doubtful if he would ever eat any more. But he pulled through it, and served up his first cantaloupe without tasting a mouthful himself. They were excellent melons, for he had a warm slope for them, and they ripened fast. The last and best were lingering on the vines, and Stuffy had announced that he should sell them to a neighbor. This disappointed the boys, who had hoped to eat the melons themselves, and they expressed their displeasure in a new and striking manner. Going one morning to gaze upon the three fine watermelons which he had kept for the market, Stuffy was horrified to find the word “PIG” cut in white letters on the green rind, staring at him from every one. He was in a great rage, and flew to Mrs. Jo for redress. She listened, condoled with him, and then said,

“If you want to turn the laugh, I’ll tell you how, but you must give up the melons.”

“Well, I will; for I can’t thrash all the boys, but I’d like to give them something to remember, the mean sneaks,” growled Stuff, still in a fume.

Now Mrs. Jo was pretty sure who had done the trick, for she had seen three heads suspiciously near to one another in the sofa-corner the evening before; and when these heads had nodded with chuckles and whispers, this experienced woman knew mischief was afoot. A moonlight night, a rustling in the old cherry-tree near Emil's window, a cut on Tommy's finger, all helped to confirm her suspicions; and having cooled Stuffy's wrath a little, she bade him bring his maltreated melons to her room, and say not a word to any one of what had happened. He did so, and the three wags were amazed to find their joke so quietly taken. It spoilt the fun, and the entire disappearance of the melons made them uneasy. So did Stuffy's good-nature, for he looked more placid and plump than ever, and surveyed them with an air of calm pity that perplexed them very much.

At dinner-time they discovered why; for then Stuffy's vengeance fell upon them, and the laugh was turned against them. When the pudding was eaten, and the fruit was put on, Mary Ann re-appeared in a high state of giggle, bearing a large watermelon; Silas followed with another; and Dan brought up the rear with a third. One was placed before each of the three guilty lads; and they read on the smooth green skins this addition to their own work, "With the compliments of the PIG." Every one else read it also, and the whole table was in a roar, for the trick had been whispered about; so every one understood the sequel. Emil, Ned, and Tommy did not know where to look, and had not a word to say for themselves; so they wisely joined in the laugh, cut up the melons, and handed them round, saying, what all the rest agreed to, that Stuffy had taken a wise and merry way to return good for evil.

Dan had no garden, for he was away or lame the greater part of the summer; so he had helped Silas wherever he could, chopped wood for Asia, and taken care of the lawn so well, that Mrs. Jo always had smooth paths and nicely shaven turf before her door.

When the others got in their crops, he looked sorry that he had so little to show; but as autumn went on, he bethought himself of a woodland harvest which no one would dispute with him, and which was peculiarly his own. Every Saturday he was away alone to the forests, fields, and hills, and always came back loaded with spoils; for he seemed to know the meadows where the best flag-root grew, the thicket where the sassafras was spiciest, the haunts where the squirrels went for nuts, the white oak whose bark was most valuable, and the little gold-thread vine that Nursey liked to cure the canker with. All sorts of splendid red and yellow leaves did Dan bring home for Mrs. Jo to dress her parlor with, graceful-seeded grasses, clematis tassels, downy, soft, yellow wax-work berries, and mosses, red-brimmed, white, or emerald green.

"I need not sigh for the woods now, because Dan brings the woods to me," Mrs. Jo used to say, as she glorified the walls with yellow maple boughs and scarlet woodbine wreaths, or filled her vases with russet ferns, hemlock sprays full of delicate cones, and hardy autumn flowers; for Dan's crop suited her well.

The great garret was full of the children's little stores and for a time was one of the sights of the house. Daisy's flower seeds in neat little paper bags, all labelled, lay in a drawer of a three-legged table. Nan's herbs hung in bunches against the wall, filling the air with their aromatic breath. Tommy had a basket of thistle-down with the tiny seeds attached, for he meant to plant them next year, if they did not all fly away before that time. Emil had bunches of pop-corn hanging there to dry, and Demi laid up acorns and different sorts of grain for the pets. But Dan's crop made the best show, for fully one half of the floor was covered with the nuts he brought. All kinds were there, for he ranged the woods for miles round, climbed the tallest trees, and forced his way into the thickest hedges for his plunder. Walnuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts, and beechnuts lay in separate compartments, getting brown, and dry, and sweet, ready for winter revels.

There was one butternut-tree on the place, and Rob and Teddy called it theirs. It bore well this year, and the great dingy nuts came dropping down to hide among the dead leaves, where the busy squirrels found them better than the lazy Bhaers. Their father had told them (the boys, not the squirrels) they should have the nuts if they would pick them up, but no one was to help. It was easy work, and Teddy liked it, only he soon got tired, and left his little basket half full for another day. But the other day was slow to arrive, and, meantime, the sly squirrels were hard at work, scampering up and down the old elm-trees stowing the nuts away till their holes were full, then all about the crotches of the boughs, to be removed at their leisure. Their funny little ways amused the boys, till one day Silas said,

"Hev you sold them nuts to the squirrels?"

"No," answered Rob, wondering what Silas meant.

"Wal, then, you'd better fly round, or them spry little fellers won't leave you none."

"Oh, we can beat them when we begin. There are such lots of nuts we shall have a plenty."

"There ain't many more to come down, and they have cleared the ground pretty well, see if they hain't."

Robby ran to look, and was alarmed to find how few remained. He called Teddy, and they worked hard all one afternoon, while the squirrels sat on the fence and scolded.

"Now, Ted, we must keep watch, and pick up just as fast as they fall, or we shan't have more than a bushel, and every one will laugh at us if we don't."

“The naughty quillies tarn’t have ‘em. I’ll pick fast and run and put ‘em in the barn twick,” said Teddy, frowning at little Frisky, who chattered and whisked his tail indignantly.

That night a high wind blew down hundreds of nuts, and when Mrs. Jo came to wake her little sons, she said, briskly,

“Come, my laddies, the squirrels are hard at it, and you will have to work well to-day, or they will have every nut on the ground.”

“No, they won’t,” and Robby tumbled up in a great hurry, gobbled his breakfast, and rushed out to save his property.

Teddy went too, and worked like a little beaver, trotting to and fro with full and empty baskets. Another bushel was soon put away in the corn-barn, and they were scrambling among the leaves for more nuts when the bell rang for school.

“O father! let me stay out and pick. Those horrid squirrels will have my nuts if you don’t. I’ll do my lessons by and by,” cried Rob, running into the school-room, flushed and tousled by the fresh cold wind and his eager work.

“If you had been up early and done a little every morning there would be no hurry now. I told you that, Rob, and you never minded. I cannot have the lessons neglected as the work has been. The squirrels will get more than their share this year, and they deserve it, for they have worked best. You may go an hour earlier, but that is all,” and Mr. Bhaer led Rob to his place where the little man dashed at his books as if bent on making sure of the precious hour promised him.

It was almost maddening to sit still and see the wind shaking down the last nuts, and the lively thieves flying about, pausing now and then to eat one in his face, and flirt their tails, as if they said, saucily, “We’ll have them in spite of you, lazy Rob.” The only thing that sustained the poor child in this trying moment was the sight of Teddy working away all alone. It was really splendid the pluck and perseverance of the little lad. He picked and picked till his back ached; he trudged to and fro till his small legs were tired; and he defied wind, weariness, and wicked “quillies,” till his mother left her work and did the carrying for him, full of admiration for the kind little fellow who tried to help his brother. When Rob was dismissed, he found Teddy reposing in the bushel-basket quite used up, but unwilling to quit the field; for he flapped his hat at the thieves with one grubby little hand, while he refreshed himself with the big apple held in the other.

Rob fell to work and the ground was cleared before two o’clock, the nuts safely in the corn-barn loft, and the weary workers exulted in their success. But Frisky and his wife were not to be vanquished so easily; and when Rob went up to look at his nuts a few days later he was amazed to see how many had vanished. None of the boys could have stolen them, because the door had been locked; the doves could not have eaten them, and there were no rats about. There was great lamentation among the young Bhaers till Dick said,

"I saw Frisky on the roof of the corn-barn, may be he took them."

"I know he did! I'll have a trap, and kill him dead," cried Rob, disgusted with Frisky's grasping nature.

"Perhaps if you watch, you can find out where he puts them, and I may be able to get them back for you," said Dan, who was much amused by the fight between the boys and squirrels.

So Rob watched and saw Mr. and Mrs. Frisky drop from the drooping elm boughs on to the roof of the corn-barn, dodge in at one of the little doors, much to the disturbance of the doves, and come out with a nut in each mouth. So laden they could not get back the way they came, but ran down the low roof, along the wall, and leaping off at a corner they vanished a minute and re-appeared without their plunder. Rob ran to the place, and in a hollow under the leaves he found a heap of the stolen property hidden away to be carried off to the holes by and by.

"Oh, you little villains! I'll cheat you now, and not leave one," said Rob. So he cleared the corner and the corn-barn, and put the contested nuts in the garret, making sure that no broken window-pane could anywhere let in the unprincipled squirrels. They seemed to feel that the contest was over, and retired to their hole, but now and then could not resist throwing down nut-shells on Rob's head, and scolding violently as if they could not forgive him nor forget that he had the best of the battle.

Father and Mother Bhaer's crop was of a different sort, and not so easily described; but they were satisfied with it, felt that their summer work had prospered well, and by and by had a harvest that made them very happy.

CHAPTER XIX. JOHN BROOKE

“Wake up, Demi, dear! I want you.”

“Why, I’ve just gone to bed; it can’t be morning yet;” and Demi blinked like a little owl as he waked from his first sound sleep.

“It’s only ten, but your father is ill, and we must go to him. O my little John! my poor little John!” and Aunt Jo laid her head down on the pillow with a sob that scared sleep from Demi’s eyes and filled his heart with fear and wonder; for he dimly felt why Aunt Jo called him “John,” and wept over him as if some loss had come that left him poor. He clung to her without a word, and in a minute she was quite steady again, and said, with a tender kiss as she saw his troubled face,

“We are going to say good-by to him, my darling, and there is no time to lose; so dress quickly and come to me in my room. I must go to Daisy.”

“Yes, I will;” and when Aunt Jo was gone, little Demi got up quietly, dressed as if in a dream, and leaving Tommy fast asleep went away through the silent house, feeling that something new and sorrowful was going to happen something that set him apart from the other boys for a time, and made the world seem as dark and still and strange as those familiar rooms did in the night. A carriage sent by Mr. Laurie stood before the door. Daisy was soon ready, and the brother and sister held each other by the hand all the way into town, as they drove swiftly and silently with aunt and uncle through the shadowy roads to say good-by to father.

None of the boys but Franz and Emil knew what had happened, and when they came down next morning, great was their wonderment and discomfort, for the house seemed forlorn without its master and mistress. Breakfast was a dismal meal with no cheery Mrs. Jo behind the teapots; and when school-time came, Father Bhaer’s place was empty. They wandered about in a disconsolate kind of way for an hour, waiting for news and hoping it would be all right with Demi’s father, for good John Brooke was much beloved by the boys. Ten o’clock came, and no one arrived to relieve their anxiety. They did not feel like playing, yet the time dragged heavily, and they sat about listless and sober. All at once, Franz got up, and said, in his persuasive way,

“Look here, boys! let’s go into school and do our lessons just as if Uncle was here. It will make the day go faster, and will please him, I know.”

“But who will hear us say them?” asked Jack.

“I will; I don’t know much more than you do, but I’m the oldest here, and I’ll try to fill Uncle's place till he comes, if you don't mind."

Something in the modest, serious way Franz said this impressed the boys, for, though the poor lad's eyes were red with quiet crying for Uncle John in that long sad night, there was a new manliness about him, as if he had already begun to feel the cares and troubles of life, and tried to take them bravely.

"I will, for one," and Emil went to his seat, remembering that obedience to his superior officer is a seaman's first duty.

The others followed; Franz took his uncle's seat, and for an hour order reigned. Lessons were learned and said, and Franz made a patient, pleasant teacher, wisely omitting such lessons as he was not equal to, and keeping order more by the unconscious dignity that sorrow gave him than by any words of his own. The little boys were reading when a step was heard in the hall, and every one looked up to read the news in Mr. Bhaer's face as he came in. The kind face told them instantly that Demi had no father now, for it was worn and pale, and full of tender grief, which left him no words with which to answer Rob, as he ran to him, saying, reproachfully,

"What made you go and leave me in the night, papa?"

The memory of the other father who had left his children in the night, never to return, made Mr. Bhaer hold his own boy close, and, for a minute, hide his face in Robby's curly hair. Emil laid his head down on his arms, Franz, went to put his hand on his uncle's shoulder, his boyish face pale with sympathy and sorrow, and the others sat so still that the soft rustle of the falling leaves outside was distinctly heard.

Rob did not clearly understand what had happened, but he hated to see papa unhappy, so he lifted up the bent head, and said, in his chirpy little voice,

"Don't cry, mein Vater! we were all so good, we did our lessons, without you, and Franz was the master."

Mr. Bhaer looked up then, tried to smile, and said in a grateful tone that made the lads feel like saints, "I thank you very much, my boys. It was a beautiful way to help and comfort me. I shall not forget it, I assure you."

"Franz proposed it, and was a first-rate master, too," said Nat; and the others gave a murmur of assent most gratifying to the young dominie.

Mr. Bhaer put Rob down, and, standing up, put his arm round his tall nephew's shoulder, as he said, with a look of genuine pleasure,

"This makes my hard day easier, and gives me confidence in you all. I am needed there in town, and must leave you for some hours. I thought to give you a holiday, or send some of you home, but if you like to stay and go on as you have begun, I shall be glad and proud of my good boys."

"We'll stay;" "We'd rather;" "Franz can see to us;" cried several, delighted with the confidence shown in them.

"Isn't Marmar coming home?" asked Rob, wistfully; for home without "Marmar" was the world without the sun to him.

"We shall both come to-night; but dear Aunt Meg needs Mother more than you do now, and I know you like to lend her for a little while."

"Well, I will; but Teddy's been crying for her, and he slapped Nursey, and was dreadful naughty," answered Rob, as if the news might bring mother home.

"Where is my little man?" asked Mr. Bhaer.

"Dan took him out, to keep him quiet. He's all right now," said Franz, pointing to the window, through which they could see Dan drawing baby in his little wagon, with the dogs frolicking about him.

"I won't see him, it would only upset him again; but tell Dan I leave Teddy in his care. You older boys I trust to manage yourselves for a day. Franz will direct you, and Silas is here to over see matters. So good-by till to-night."

"Just tell me a word about Uncle John," said Emil, detaining Mr. Bhaer, as he was about hurrying away again.

"He was only ill a few hours, and died as he has lived, so cheerfully, so peacefully, that it seems a sin to mar the beauty of it with any violent or selfish grief. We were in time to say good-by: and Daisy and Demi were in his arms as he fell asleep on Aunt Meg's breast. No more now, I cannot bear it," and Mr. Bhaer went hastily away quite bowed with grief, for in John Brooke he had lost both friend and brother, and there was no one left to take his place.

All that day the house was very still; the small boys played quietly in the nursery; the others, feeling as if Sunday had come in the middle of the week, spent it in walking, sitting in the willow, or among their pets, all talking much of "Uncle John," and feeling that something gentle, just, and strong, had gone out of their little world, leaving a sense of loss that deepened every hour. At dusk, Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer came home alone, for Demi and Daisy were their mother's best comfort now, and could not leave her. Poor Mrs. Jo seemed quite spent, and evidently needed the same sort of comfort, for her first words, as she came up the stairs, were, "Where is my baby?"

"Here I is," answered a little voice, as Dan put Teddy into her arms, adding, as she hugged him close, "My Danny tooked tare of me all day, and I was dood."

Mrs. Jo turned to thank the faithful nurse, but Dan was waving off the boys, who had gathered in the hall to meet her, and was saying, in a low voice, "Keep back; she don't want to be bothered with us now."

"No, don't keep back. I want you all. Come in and see me, my boys. I've neglected you all day," and Mrs. Jo held out her hands to them as they gathered round and escorted her into her own room, saying little, but expressing much by affectionate looks and clumsy little efforts to show their sorrow and sympathy.

"I am so tired, I will lie here and cuddle Teddy, and you shall bring me in some tea," she said, trying to speak cheerfully for their sakes.

A general stampede into the dining-room followed, and the supper-table would have been ravaged if Mr. Bhaer had not interfered. It was agreed that one squad should carry in the mother's tea, and another bring it out. The four nearest and dearest claimed the first honor, so Franz bore the teapot, Emil the bread, Rob the milk, and Teddy insisted on carrying the sugar basin, which was lighter by several lumps when it arrived than when it started. Some women might have found it annoying at such a time to have boys creaking in and out, upsetting cups and rattling spoons in violent efforts to be quiet and helpful; but it suited Mrs. Jo, because just then her heart was very tender; and remembering that many of her boys were fatherless or motherless, she yearned over them, and found comfort in their blundering affection. It was the sort of food that did her more good than the very thick bread-and-butter that they gave her, and the rough Commodore's broken whisper,

"Bear up, Aunty, it's a hard blow; but we'll weather it somehow;" cheered her more than the sloppy cup he brought her, full of tea as bitter as if some salt tear of his own had dropped into it on the way. When supper was over, a second deputation removed the tray; and Dan said, holding out his arms for sleepy little Teddy,

"Let me put him to bed, you're so tired, Mother."

"Will you go with him, lovey?" asked Mrs. Jo of her small lord and master, who lay on her arm among the sofa-pillows.

"Torse I will;" and he was proudly carried off by his faithful bearer.

"I wish I could do something," said Nat, with a sigh, as Franz leaned over the sofa, and softly stroked Aunt Jo's hot forehead.

"You can, dear. Go and get your violin, and play me the sweet little airs Uncle Teddy sent you last. Music will comfort me better than any thing else to-night."

Nat flew for his fiddle, and, sitting just outside her door, played as he had never done before, for now his heart was in it, and seemed to magnetize his fingers. The other lads sat quietly upon the steps, keeping watch that no new-comer should disturb the house; Franz lingered at his post; and so, soothed, served, and guarded by her boys, poor Mrs. Jo slept at last, and forgot her sorrow for an hour.

Two quiet days, and on the third Mr. Bhaer came in just after school, with a note in his hand, looking both moved and pleased.

"I want to read you something, boys," he said; and as they stood round him he read this:

“DEAR BROTHER FRITZ, I hear that you do not mean to bring your flock today, thinking that I may not like it. Please do. The sight of his friends will help Demi through the hard hour, and I want the boys to hear what father says of my John. It will do them good, I know. If they would sing one of the sweet old hymns you have taught them so well, I should like it better than any other music, and feel that it was beautifully suited to the occasion. Please ask them, with my love.

“MEG.”

“Will you go?” and Mr. Bhaer looked at the lads, who were greatly touched by Mrs. Brooke’s kind words and wishes.

“Yes,” they answered, like one boy; and an hour later they went away with Franz to bear their part in John Brooke’s simple funeral.

The little house looked as quiet, sunny, and home-like as when Meg entered it as a bride, ten years ago, only then it was early summer, and rose blossomed everywhere; now it was early autumn, and dead leaves rustled softly down, leaving the branches bare. The bride was a widow now; but the same beautiful serenity shone in her face, and the sweet resignation of a truly pious soul made her presence a consolation to those who came to comfort her.

“O Meg! how can you bear it so?” whispered Jo, as she met them at the door with a smile of welcome, and no change in her gentle manner, except more gentleness.

“Dear Jo, the love that has blest me for ten happy years supports me still. It could not die, and John is more my own than ever,” whispered Meg; and in her eyes the tender trust was so beautiful and bright, that Jo believed her, and thanked God for the immortality of love like hers.

They were all there father and mother, Uncle Teddy, and Aunt Amy, old Mr. Laurence, white-haired and feeble now, Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer, with their flock, and many friends, come to do honor to the dead. One would have said that modest John Brooke, in his busy, quiet, humble life, had had little time to make friends; but now they seemed to start up everywhere, old and young, rich and poor, high and low; for all unconsciously his influence had made itself widely felt, his virtues were remembered, and his hidden charities rose up to bless him. The group about his coffin was a far more eloquent eulogy than any Mr. March could utter. There were the rich men whom he had served faithfully for years; the poor old women whom he cherished with his little store, in memory of his mother; the wife to whom he had given such happiness that death could not mar it utterly; the brothers and sisters in whose hearts he had made a place for ever; the little son and daughter, who already felt the loss of his strong arm and tender voice; the young children, sobbing for their kindest playmate, and the tall lads, watching with softened faces a scene which they never could forget. A very simple service, and very short; for the fatherly voice that had faltered in the marriage-sacrament now failed entirely as Mr. March endeavored to pay his tribute of reverence and love to the son whom he most honored. Nothing but the soft coo of Baby Josy's voice up-stairs broke the long hush that followed the last Amen, till, at a sign from Mr. Bhaer, the well-trained boyish voices broke out in a hymn, so full of lofty cheer, that one by one all joined in it, singing with full hearts, and finding their troubled spirits lifted into peace on the wings of that brave, sweet psalm.

As Meg listened, she felt that she had done well; for not only did the moment comfort her with the assurance that John's last lullaby was sung by the young voices he loved so well, but in the faces of the boys she saw that they had caught a glimpse of the beauty of virtue in its most impressive form, and that the memory of the good man lying dead before them would live long and helpfully in their remembrance. Daisy's head lay in her lap, and Demi held her hand, looking often at her, with eyes so like his father's, and a little gesture that seemed to say, "Don't be troubled, mother; I am here;" and all about her were friends to lean upon and love; so patient, pious Meg put by her heavy grief, feeling that her best help would be to live for others, as her John had done.

That evening, as the Plumfield boys sat on the steps, as usual, in the mild September moonlight, they naturally fell to talking of the event of the day.

Emil began by breaking out, in his impetuous way, "Uncle Fritz is the wisest, and Uncle Laurie the jolliest, but Uncle John was the best; and I'd rather be like him than any man I ever saw."

"So would I. Did you hear what those gentlemen said to Grandpa to-day? I would like to have that said of me when I was dead;" and Franz felt with regret that he had not appreciated Uncle John enough.

"What did they say?" asked Jack, who had been much impressed by the scenes of the day.

"Why, one of the partners of Mr. Laurence, where Uncle John has been ever so long, was saying that he was conscientious almost to a fault as a business man, and above reproach in all things. Another gentleman said no money could repay the fidelity and honesty with which Uncle John had served him, and then Grandpa told them the best of all. Uncle John once had a place in the office of a man who cheated, and when this man wanted uncle to help him do it, uncle wouldn't, though he was offered a big salary. The man was angry and said, 'You will never get on in business with such strict principles;' and uncle answered back, 'I never will try to get on without them,' and left the place for a much harder and poorer one."

“Good!” cried several of the boys warmly, for they were in the mood to understand and value the little story as never before.

“He wasn’t rich, was he?” asked Jack.

“No.”

“He never did any thing to make a stir in the world, did he?”

“No.”

“He was only good?”

“That’s all;” and Franz found himself wishing that Uncle John had done something to boast of, for it was evident that Jack was disappointed by his replies.

“Only good. That is all and every thing,” said Mr. Bhaer, who had overheard the last few words, and guessed what was going on the minds of the lads.

“Let me tell you a little about John Brooke, and you will see why men honor him, and why he was satisfied to be good rather than rich or famous. He simply did his duty in all things, and did it so cheerfully, so faithfully, that it kept him patient and brave, and happy through poverty and loneliness and years of hard work. He was a good son, and gave up his own plans to stay and live with his mother while she needed him. He was a good friend, and taught Laurie much beside his Greek and Latin, did it unconsciously, perhaps, by showing him an example of an upright man. He was a faithful servant, and made himself so valuable to those who employed him that they will find it hard to fill his place. He was a good husband and father, so tender, wise, and thoughtful, that Laurie and I learned much of him, and only knew how well he loved his family, when we discovered all he had done for them, unsuspected and unassisted.”

Mr. Bhaer stopped a minute, and the boys sat like statues in the moonlight until he went on again, in a subdued, but earnest voice: “As he lay dying, I said to him, ‘Have no care for Meg and the little ones; I will see that they never want.’ Then he smiled and pressed my hand, and answered, in his cheerful way, ‘No need of that; I have cared for them.’ And so he had, for when we looked among his papers, all was in order, not a debt remained; and safely put away was enough to keep Meg comfortable and independent. Then we knew why he had lived so plainly, denied himself so many pleasures, except that of charity, and worked so hard that I fear he shortened his good life. He never asked help for himself, though often for others, but bore his own burden and worked out his own task bravely and quietly. No one can say a word of complaint against him, so just and generous and kind was he; and now, when he is gone, all find so much to love and praise and honor, that I am proud to have been his friend, and would rather leave my children the legacy he leaves his than the largest fortune ever made. Yes! Simple, generous goodness is the best capital to found the business of this life upon. It lasts when fame and money fail, and is the only riches we can take out of this world with us. Remember that, my boys; and if you want to earn respect and confidence and love follow in the footsteps of John Brooke."

When Demi returned to school, after some weeks at home, he seemed to have recovered from his loss with the blessed elasticity of childhood, and so he had in a measure; but he did not forget, for his was a nature into which things sank deeply, to be pondered over, and absorbed into the soil where the small virtues were growing fast. He played and studied, worked and sang, just as before, and few suspected any change; but there was one and Aunt Jo saw it for she watched over the boy with her whole heart, trying to fill John's place in her poor way. He seldom spoke of his loss, but Aunt Jo often heard a stifled sobbing in the little bed at night; and when she went to comfort him, all his cry was, "I want my father! oh, I want my father!" for the tie between the two had been a very tender one, and the child's heart bled when it was broken. But time was kind to him, and slowly he came to feel that father was not lost, only invisible for a while, and sure to be found again, well and strong and fond as ever, even though his little son should see the purple asters blossom on his grave many, many times before they met. To this belief Demi held fast, and in it found both help and comfort, because it led him unconsciously through a tender longing for the father whom he had seen to a childlike trust in the Father whom he had not seen. Both were in heaven, and he prayed to both, trying to be good for love of them.

The outward change corresponded to the inward, for in those few weeks Demi seemed to have grown tall, and began to drop his childish plays, not as if ashamed of them, as some boys do, but as if he had outgrown them, and wanted something manlier. He took to the hated arithmetic, and held on so steadily that his uncle was charmed, though he could not understand the whim, until Demi said,

"I am going to be a bookkeeper when I grow up, like papa, and I must know about figures and things, else I can't have nice, neat ledgers like his."

At another time he came to his aunt with a very serious face, and said

"What can a small boy do to earn money?"

"Why do you ask, my deary?"

"My father told me to take care of mother and the little girls, and I want to, but I don't know how to begin."

"He did not mean now, Demi, but by and by, when you are large."

"But I wish to begin now, if I can, because I think I ought to make some money to buy things for the family. I am ten, and other boys no bigger than I earn pennies sometimes."

"Well, then, suppose you rake up all the dead leaves and cover the strawberry bed. I'll pay you a dollar for the job," said Aunt Jo.

"Isn't that a great deal? I could do it in one day. You must be fair, and no pay too much, because I want to truly earn it."

"My little John, I will be fair, and not pay a penny too much. Don't work too hard; and when that is done I will have something else for you to do," said Mrs. Jo, much touched by his desire to help, and his sense of justice, so like his scrupulous father.

When the leaves were done, many barrowloads of chips were wheeled from the wood to the shed, and another dollar earned. Then Demi helped cover the schoolbooks, working in the evenings under Franz's direction, tugging patiently away at each book, letting no one help, and receiving his wages with such satisfaction that the dingy bills became quite glorified in his sight.

"Now, I have a dollar for each of them, and I should like to take my money to mother all myself, so she can see that I have minded my father."

So Demi made a duteous pilgrimage to his mother, who received his little earnings as a treasure of great worth, and would have kept it untouched, if Demi had not begged her to buy some useful thing for herself and the women-children, whom he felt were left to his care.

This made him very happy, and, though he often forgot his responsibilities for a time, the desire to help was still there, strengthening with his years. He always uttered the words "my father" with an air of gentle pride, and often said, as if he claimed a title full of honor, "Don't call me Demi any more. I am John Brooke now." So, strengthened by a purpose and a hope, the little lad of ten bravely began the world, and entered into his inheritance, the memory of a wise and tender father, the legacy of an honest name.

CHAPTER XX. ROUND THE FIRE

With the October frosts came the cheery fires in the great fireplaces; and Demi's dry pine-chips helped Dan's oak-knots to blaze royally, and go roaring up the chimney with a jolly sound. All were glad to gather round the hearth, as the evenings grew longer, to play games, read, or lay plans for the winter. But the favorite amusement was story-telling, and Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer were expected to have a store of lively tales always on hand. Their supply occasionally gave out, and then the boys were thrown upon their own resources, which were not always successful. Ghost-parties were the rage at one time; for the fun of the thing consisted in putting out the lights, letting the fire die down, and then sitting in the dark, and telling the most awful tales they could invent. As this resulted in scares of all sorts among the boys, Tommy's walking in his sleep on the shed roof, and a general state of nervousness in the little ones, it was forbidden, and they fell back on more harmless amusements.

One evening, when the small boys were snugly tucked in bed, and the older lads were lounging about the school-room fire, trying to decide what they should do, Demi suggested a new way of settling the question.

Seizing the hearth-brush, he marched up and down the room, saying, "Row, row, row;" and when the boys, laughing and pushing, had got into line, he said, "Now, I'll give you two minutes to think of a play." Franz was writing, and Emil reading the Life of Lord Nelson, and neither joined the party, but the others thought hard, and when the time was up were ready to reply.

"Now, Tom!" and the poker softly rapped him on the head.

"Blind-man's Buff."

"Jack!"

"Commerce; a good round game, and have cents for the pool."

"Uncle forbids our playing for money. Dan, what do you want?"

"Let's have a battle between the Greeks and Romans."

"Stuffy?"

"Roast apples, pop corn, and crack nuts."

"Good! good!" cried several; and when the vote was taken, Stuffy's proposal carried the day.

Some went to the cellar for apples, some to the garret for nuts, and others looked up the popper and the corn.

"We had better ask the girls to come in, hadn't we?" said Demi, in a sudden fit of politeness.

"Daisy pricks chestnuts beautifully," put in Nat, who wanted his little friend to share the fun.

"Nan pops corn tip-top, we must have her," added Tommy.

"Bring in your sweethearts then, we don't mind," said Jack, who laughed at the innocent regard the little people had for one another.

"You shan't call my sister a sweetheart; it is so silly!" cried Demi, in a way that made Jack laugh.

"She is Nat's darling, isn't she, old chirper?"

"Yes, if Demi don't mind. I can't help being fond of her, she is so good to me," answered Nat, with bashful earnestness, for Jack's rough ways disturbed him.

"Nan is my sweetheart, and I shall marry her in about a year, so don't you get in the way, any of you," said Tommy, stoutly; for he and Nan had settled their future, child-fashion, and were to live in the willow, lower down a basket for food, and do other charmingly impossible things.

Demi was quenched by the decision of Bangs, who took him by the arm and walked him off to get the ladies. Nan and Daisy were sewing with Aunt Jo on certain small garments, for Mrs. Carney's newest baby.

"Please, ma'am, could you lend us the girls for a little while? We'll be very careful of them," said Tommy, winking one eye to express apples, snapping his fingers to signify pop-corn, and gnashing his teeth to convey the idea of nut-cracking.

The girls understood this pantomime at once, and began to pull of their thimbles before Mrs. Jo could decide whether Tommy was going into convulsions or was brewing some unusual piece of mischief. Demi explained with elaboration, permission was readily granted, and the boys departed with their prize.

"Don't you speak to Jack," whispered Tommy, as he and Nan promenaded down the hall to get a fork to prick the apples.

"Why not?"

"He laughs at me, so I don't wish you to have any thing to do with him."

"Shall, if I like," said Nan, promptly resenting this premature assumption of authority on the part of her lord.

"Then I won't have you for my sweetheart."

"I don't care."

"Why, Nan, I thought you were fond of me!" and Tommy's voice was full of tender reproach.

"If you mind Jack's laughing I don't care for you one bit."

“Then you may take back your old ring; I won’t wear it any longer;” and Tommy plucked off a horsehair pledge of affection which Nan had given him in return for one made of a lobster’s feeler.

“I shall give it to Ned,” was her cruel reply; for Ned liked Mrs. Giddy-gaddy, and had turned her clothespins, boxes, and spools enough to set up housekeeping with.

Tommy said, “Thunder turtles!” as the only vent equal to the pent-up anguish of the moment, and, dropping Nan’s arm, retired in high dudgeon, leaving her to follow with the fork, a neglect which naughty Nan punished by proceeding to prick his heart with jealousy as if it were another sort of apple.

The hearth was swept, and the rosy Baldwins put down to roast. A shovel was heated, and the chestnuts danced merrily upon it, while the corn popped wildly in its wire prison. Dan cracked his best walnuts, and every one chattered and laughed, while the rain beat on the window-pane and the wind howled round the house.

“Why is Billy like this nut?” asked Emil, who was frequently inspired with bad conundrums.

“Because he is cracked,” answered Ned.

“That’s not fair; you mustn’t make fun of Billy, because he can’t hit back again. It’s mean,” cried Dan, smashing a nut wrathfully.

“To what family of insects does Blake belong?” asked peacemaker Franz, seeing that Emil looked ashamed and Dan lowering.

“Gnats,” answered Jack.

“Why is Daisy like a bee?” cried Nat, who had been wrapt in thought for several minutes.

“Because she is queen of the hive,” said Dan.

“No.”

“Because she is sweet.”

“Bees are not sweet.”

“Give it up.”

“Because she makes sweet things, is always busy, and likes flowers,” said Nat, piling up his boyish compliments till Daisy blushed like a rosy clover.

“Why is Nan like a hornet?” demanded Tommy, glowering at her, and adding, without giving any one time to answer, “Because she isn’t sweet, makes a great buzzing about nothing, and stings like fury.”

“Tommy’s mad, and I’m glad,” cried Ned, as Nan tossed her head and answered quickly,

“What thing in the china-closet is Tom like?”

“A pepper pot,” answered Ned, giving Nan a nut meat with a tantalizing laugh that made Tommy feel as if he would like to bounce up like a hot chestnut and hit somebody.

Seeing that ill-humor was getting the better of the small supply of wit in the company, Franz cast himself into the breach again.

“Let’s make a law that the first person who comes into the room shall tell us a story. No matter who it is, he must do it, and it will be fun to see who comes first.”

The others agreed, and did not have to wait long, for a heavy step soon came clumping through the hall, and Silas appeared, bearing an armful of wood. He was greeted by a general shout, and stood staring about him with a bewildered grin on his big red face, till Franz explained the joke.

“Sho! I can’t tell a story,” he said, putting down his load and preparing to leave the room. But the boys fell upon him, forced him into a seat, and held him there, laughing, and clamoring for their story, till the good-natured giant was overpowered.

“I don’t know but jest one story, and that’s about a horse,” he said, much flattered by the reception he received.

“Tell it! tell it!” cried the boys.

“Wal,” began Silas, tipping his chair back against the wall, and putting his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, “I jined a cavalry regiment durin’ the war, and see a consid’able amount of fightin’. My horse, Major, was a fust-rate animal, and I was as fond on him as ef he’d ben a human critter. He warn’t harnsome, but he was the best-tempered, stiddyest, lovenest brute I ever see. I fust battle we went into, he gave me a lesson that I didn’t forgit in a hurry, and I’ll tell you how it was. It ain’t no use tryin’ to picter the noise and hurry, and general horridness of a battle to you young fellers, for I ain’t no words to do it in; but I’m free to confess that I got so sort of confused and upset at the fust on it, that I didn’t know what I was about. We was ordered to charge, and went ahead like good ones, never stoppin’ to pick up them that went down in the scrimmage. I got a shot in the arm, and was pitched out of the saddle don’t know how, but there I was left behind with two or three others, dead and wounded, for the rest went on, as I say. Wal, I picked myself up and looked round for Major, feeling as ef I’d had about enough for that spell. I didn’t see him nowhere, and was kinder walking back to camp, when I heard a whinny that sounded nateral. I looked round, and there was Major stopping for me a long way off, and lookin’ as ef he didn’t understand why I was loiterin’ behind. I whistled, and he trotted up to me as I’d trained him to do. I mounted as well as I could with my left arm bleedin’ and was for going on to camp, for I declare I felt as sick and wimbly as a woman; folks often do in their fust battle. But, no sir! Major was the bravest of the two, and he wouldn’t go, not a peg; he jest rared up, and danced, and snorted, and acted as ef the smell of powder and the noise had drove him half wild. I done my best, but he wouldn’t give in, so I did; and what do you think that plucky brute done? He wheeled slap round, and galloped back like a hurricane, right into the thickest of the scrimmage!”

“Good for him!” cried Dan excitedly, while the other boys forgot apples and nuts in their interest.

“I wish I may die ef I warn’t ashamed of myself,” continued Silas, warming up at the recollection of that day. “I was mad as a hornet, and I forgot my waound, and jest pitched in, rampagin’ raound like fury till there come a shell into the midst of us, and in bustin’ knocked a lot of us flat. I didn’t know nothin’ for a spell, and when I come-to, the fight was over just there, and I found myself layin’ by a wall of poor Major long-side wuss wounded than I was. My leg was broke, and I had a ball in my shoulder, but he, poor old feller! was all tore in the side with a piece of that blasted shell.”

“O Silas! what did you do?” cried Nan, pressing close to him with a face full of eager sympathy and interest.

“I dragged myself nigher, and tried to stop the bleedin’ with sech rags as I could tear off of me with one hand. But it warn’t no use, and he lay moanin’ with horrid pain, and lookin’ at me with them lovin’ eyes of his, till I thought I couldn’t bear it. I give him all the help I could, and when the sun got hotter and hotter, and he began to lap out his tongue, I tried to get to a brook that was a good piece away, but I couldn’t do it, being stiff and faint, so I give it up and fanned him with my hat. Now you listen to this, and when you hear folks comin’ down on the rebs, you jest remember what one on ‘em did, and give him credit of it. I poor feller in gray laid not fur off, shot through the lungs and dyin’ fast. I’d offered him my handkerchief to keep the sun off his face, and he’d thanked me kindly, for in sech times as that men don’t stop to think on which side they belong, but jest buckle-to and help one another. When he see me mournin’ over Major and tryin’ to ease his pain, he looked up with his face all damp and white with sufferin’, and sez he, ‘There’s water in my canteen; take it, for it can’t help me,’ and he flung it to me. I couldn’t have took it ef I hadn’t had a little brandy in a pocket flask, and I made him drink it. It done him good, and I felt as much set up as if I’d drunk it myself. It’s surprisin’ the good sech little things do folks sometime;” and Silas paused as if he felt again the comfort of that moment when he and his enemy forgot their feud, and helped one another like brothers.

“Tell about Major,” cried the boys, impatient for the catastrophe.

“I poured the water over his poor pantin’ tongue, and ef ever a dumb critter looked grateful, he did then. But it warn’t of much use, for the dreadful waound kep on tormentin' him, till I couldn't bear it any longer. It was hard, but I done it in mercy, and I know he forgive me."

"What did you do?" asked Emil, as Silas stopped abruptly with a loud "hem," and a look in his rough face that made Daisy go and stand by him with her little hand on his knee.

"I shot him."

Quite a thrill went through the listeners as Silas said that, for Major seemed a hero in their eyes, and his tragic end roused all their sympathy.

"Yes, I shot him, and put him out of his misery. I patted him fust, and said, 'Good-by;' then I laid his head easy on the grass, give a last look into his lovin' eyes, and sent a bullet through his head. He hardly stirred, I aimed so true, and when I seen him quite still, with no more moanin' and pain, I was glad, and yet wal, I don't know as I need by ashamed on't I jest put my arms raound his neck and boo-hooed like a great baby. Sho! I didn't know I was sech a fool;" and Silas drew his sleeve across his eyes, as much touched by Daisy's sob, as by the memory of faithful Major.

No one spoke for a minute, because the boys were as quick to feel the pathos of the little story as tender-hearted Daisy, though they did not show it by crying.

"I'd like a horse like that," said Dan, half-aloud.

"Did the rebel man die, too?" asked Nan, anxiously.

"Not then. We laid there all day, and at night some of our fellers came to look after the missing ones. They nat'rally wanted to take me fust, but I knew I could wait, and the rebel had but one chance, maybe, so I made them carry him off right away. He had jest strength enough to hold out his hand to me and say, 'Thanky, comrade!' and them was the last words he spoke, for he died an hour after he got to the hospital-tent."

"How glad you must have been that you were kind to him!" said Demi, who was deeply impressed by this story.

"Wal, I did take comfort thinkin' of it, as I laid there alone for a number of hours with my head on Major's neck, and see the moon come up. I'd like to have buried the poor beast decent, but it warn't possible; so I cut off a bit of his mane, and I've kep it ever sence. Want to see it, sissy?"

"Oh, yes, please," answered Daisy, wiping away her tears to look.

Silas took out an old "wallet" as he called his pocket-book, and produced from an inner fold a bit of brown paper, in which was a rough lock of white horse-hair. The children looked at it silently, as it lay in the broad palm, and no one found any thing to ridicule in the love Silas bore his good horse Major.

"That is a sweet story, and I like it, though it did make me cry. Thank you very much, Si," and Daisy helped him fold and put away his little relic; while Nan stuffed a handful of pop-corn into his pocket, and the boys loudly expressed their flattering opinions of his story, feeling that there had been two heroes in it.

He departed, quite overcome by his honors, and the little conspirators talked the tale over, while they waited for their next victim. It was Mrs. Jo, who came in to measure Nan for some new pinafores she was making for her. They let her get well in, and then pounced upon her, telling her the law, and demanding the story. Mrs. Jo was very much amused at the new trap, and consented at once, for the sound of happy voices had been coming across the hall so pleasantly that she quite longed to join them, and forget her own anxious thoughts of Sister Meg.

“Am I the first mouse you have caught, you sly pussies-in-boots?” she asked, as she was conducted to the big chair, supplied with refreshments, and surrounded by a flock of merry-faced listeners.

They told her about Silas and his contribution, and she slapped her forehead in despair, for she was quite at her wits’ end, being called upon so unexpectedly for a bran new tale.

“What shall I tell about?” she said.

“Boys,” was the general answer.

“Have a party in it,” said Daisy.

“And something good to eat,” added Stuffy.

“That reminds me of a story, written years ago, by a dear old lady. I used to be very fond of it, and I fancy you will like it, for it has both boys, and ‘something good to eat’ in it.”

“What is it called?” asked Demi.

“‘The Suspected Boy.’“

Nat looked up from the nuts he was picking, and Mrs. Jo smiled at him, guessing what was in his mind.

“Miss Crane kept a school for boys in a quiet little town, and a very good school it was, of the old-fashioned sort. Six boys lived in her house, and four or five more came in from the town. Among those who lived with her was one named Lewis White. Lewis was not a bad boy, but rather timid, and now and then he told a lie. One day a neighbor sent Miss Crane a basket of gooseberries. There were not enough to go round, so kind Miss Crane, who liked to please her boys, went to work and made a dozen nice little gooseberry tarts.”

“I’d like to try gooseberry tarts. I wonder if she made them as I do my raspberry ones,” said Daisy, whose interest in cooking had lately revived.

“Hush,” said Nat, tucking a plump pop-corn into her mouth to silence her, for he felt a particular interest in this tale, and thought it opened well.

“When the tarts were done, Miss Crane put them away in the best parlor closet, and said not a word about them, for she wanted to surprise the boys at tea-time. When the minute came and all were seated at table, she went to get her tarts, but came back looking much troubled, for what do you think had happened?”

“Somebody had hooked them!” cried Ned.

“No, there they were, but some one had stolen all the fruit out of them by lifting up the upper crust and then putting it down after the gooseberry had been scraped out.”

“What a mean trick!” and Nan looked at Tommy, as if to imply that he would do the same.

“When she told the boys her plan and showed them the poor little patties all robbed of their sweetness, the boys were much grieved and disappointed, and all declared that they knew nothing about the matter. ‘Perhaps the rats did it,’ said Lewis, who was among the loudest to deny any knowledge of the tarts. ‘No, rats would have nibbled crust and all, and never lifted it up and scooped out the fruit. Hands did that,’ said Miss Crane, who was more troubled about the lie that some one must have told than about her lost patties. Well, they had supper and went to bed, but in the night Miss Crane heard some one groaning, and going to see who it was she found Lewis in great pain. He had evidently eaten something that disagreed with him, and was so sick that Miss Crane was alarmed, and was going to send for the doctor, when Lewis moaned out, ‘It’s the gooseberries; I ate them, and I must tell before I die,’ for the thought of a doctor frightened him. ‘If that is all, I’ll give you an emetic and you will soon get over it,’ said Miss Crane. So Lewis had a good dose, and by morning was quite comfortable. ‘Oh, don’t tell the boys; they will laugh at me so,’ begged the invalid. Kind Miss Crane promised not to, but Sally, the girl, told the story, and poor Lewis had no peace for a long time. His mates called him Old Gooseberry, and were never tired of asking him the price of tarts.”

“Served him right,” said Emil.

“Badness always gets found out,” added Demi, morally.

“No, it don’t,” muttered Jack, who was tending the apples with great devotion, so that he might keep his back to the rest and account for his red face.

“Is that all?” asked Dan.

“No, that is only the first part; the second part is more interesting. Some time after this a peddler came by one day and stopped to show his things to the boys, several of whom bought pocket-combs, jew’s-harps, and various trifles of that sort. Among the knives was a little white-handled penknife that Lewis wanted very much, but he had spent all his pocket-money, and no one had any to lend him. He held the knife in his hand, admiring and longing for it, till the man packed up his goods to go, then he reluctantly laid it down, and the man went on his way. The next day, however, the peddler returned to say that he could not find that very knife, and thought he must have left it at Miss Crane's. It was a very nice one with a pearl handle, and he could not afford to lose it. Every one looked, and every one declared they knew nothing about it. 'This young gentleman had it last, and seemed to want it very much. Are you quite sure you put it back?' said the man to Lewis, who was much troubled at the loss, and vowed over and over again that he did return it. His denials seemed to do no good, however, for every one was sure he had taken it, and after a stormy scene Miss Crane paid for it, and the man went grumbling away."

"Did Lewis have it?" cried Nat, much excited.

"You will see. Now poor Lewis had another trial to bear, for the boys were constantly saying, 'Lend me your pearl-handled knife, Gooseberry,' and things of that sort, till Lewis was so unhappy he begged to be sent home. Miss Crane did her best to keep the boys quiet, but it was hard work, for they would tease, and she could not be with them all the time. That is one of the hardest things to teach boys; they won't 'hit a fellow when he is down,' as they say, but they will torment him in little ways till he would thank them to fight it out all round."

"I know that," said Dan.

"So do I," added Nat, softly.

Jack said nothing, but he quite agreed; for he knew that the elder boys despised him, and let him alone for that very reason.

"Do go on about poor Lewis, Aunt Jo. I don't believe he took the knife, but I want to be sure," said Daisy, in great anxiety.

"Well, week after week went on and the matter was not cleared up. The boys avoided Lewis, and he, poor fellow, was almost sick with the trouble he had brought upon himself. He resolved never to tell another lie, and tried so hard that Miss Crane pitied and helped him, and really came at last to believe that he did not take the knife. Two months after the peddler's first visit, he came again, and the first thing he said was,

"'Well, ma'am, I found that knife after all. It had slipped behind the lining of my valise, and fell out the other day when I was putting in a new stock of goods. I thought I'd call and let you know, as you paid for it, and maybe would like it, so here it is.'"

"The boys had all gathered round, and at these words they felt much ashamed, and begged Lewis' pardon so heartily that he could not refuse to give it. Miss Crane presented the knife to him, and he kept it many years to remind him of the fault that had brought him so much trouble."

"I wonder why it is that things you eat on the sly hurt you, and don't when you eat them at table," observed Stuffy, thoughtfully.

“Perhaps your conscience affects your stomach,” said Mrs. Jo, smiling at his speech.

“He is thinking of the cucumbers,” said Ned, and a gale of merriment followed the words, for Stuffy’s last mishap had been a funny one.

He ate two large cucumbers in private, felt very ill, and confided his anguish to Ned, imploring him to do something. Ned good-naturedly recommended a mustard plaster and a hot flat iron to the feet; only in applying these remedies he reversed the order of things, and put the plaster on the feet, the flat iron on the stomach, and poor Stuffy was found in the barn with blistered soles and a scorched jacket.

“Suppose you tell another story, that was such an interesting one,” said Nat, as the laughter subsided.

Before Mrs. Jo could refuse these insatiable Oliver Twists, Rob walked into the room trailing his little bed-cover after him, and wearing an expression of great sweetness as he said, steering straight to his mother as a sure haven of refuge,

“I heard a great noise, and I thought sumfin dreffle might have happened, so I came to see.”

“Did you think I would forget you, naughty boy?” asked his mother, trying to look stern.

“No; but I thought you’d feel better to see me right here,” responded the insinuating little party.

“I had much rather see you in bed, so march straight up again, Robin.”

“Everybody that comes in here has to tell a story, and you can’t so you’d better cut and run,” said Emil.

“Yes, I can! I tell Teddy lots of ones, all about bears and moons, and little flies that say things when they buzz,” protested Rob, bound to stay at any price.

“Tell one now, then, right away,” said Dan, preparing to shoulder and bear him off.

“Well, I will; let me fink a minute,” and Rob climbed into his mother’s lap, where he was cuddled, with the remark

“It is a family failing, this getting out of bed at wrong times. Demi used to do it; and as for me, I was hopping in and out all night long. Meg used to think the house was on fire, and send me down to see, and I used to stay and enjoy myself, as you mean to, my bad son.”

“I’ve finked now,” observed Rob, quite at his ease, and eager to win the entree into this delightful circle.

Every one looked and listened with faces full of suppressed merriment as Rob, perched on his mother’s knee and wrapped in the gay coverlet, told the following brief but tragic tale with an earnestness that made it very funny:

"Once a lady had a million children, and one nice little boy. She went up-stairs and said, 'You mustn't go in the yard.' But he wented, and fell into the pump, and was drowned dead."

"Is that all?" asked Franz, as Rob paused out of breath with this startling beginning.

"No, there is another piece of it," and Rob knit his downy eyebrows in the effort to evolve another inspiration.

"What did the lady do when he fell into the pump?" asked his mother, to help him on.

"Oh, she pumped him up, and wrapped him in a newspaper, and put him on a shelf to dry for seed."

A general explosion of laughter greeted this surprising conclusion, and Mrs. Jo patted the curly head, as she said, solemnly,

"My son, you inherit your mother's gift of story-telling. Go where glory waits thee."

"Now I can stay, can't I? Wasn't it a good story?" cried Rob, in high feather at his superb success.

"You can stay till you have eaten these twelve pop-corns," said his mother, expecting to see them vanish at one mouthful.

But Rob was a shrewd little man, and got the better of her by eating them one by one very slowly, and enjoying every minute with all his might.

"Hadn't you better tell the other story, while you wait for him?" said Demi, anxious that no time should be lost.

"I really have nothing but a little tale about a wood-box," said Mrs. Jo, seeing that Rob had still seven corns to eat.

"Is there a boy in it?"

"It is all boy."

"Is it true?" asked Demi.

"Every bit of it."

"Goody! tell on, please."

"James Snow and his mother lived in a little house, up in New Hampshire. They were poor, and James had to work to help his mother, but he loved books so well he hated work, and just wanted to sit and study all day long."

"How could he! I hate books, and like work," said Dan, objecting to James at the very outset.

"It takes all sorts of people to make a world; workers and students both are needed, and there is room for all. But I think the workers should study some, and the students should know how to work if necessary," answered Mrs. Jo, looking from Dan to Demi with a significant expression.

"I'm sure I do work," and Demi showed three small hard spots in his little palm, with pride.

"And I'm sure I study," added Dan, nodding with a groan toward the blackboard full of neat figures.

"See what James did. He did not mean to be selfish, but his mother was proud of him, and let him do as he liked, working by herself that he might have books and time to read them. One autumn James wanted to go to school, and went to the minister to see if he would help him, about decent clothes and books. Now the minister had heard the gossip about James's idleness, and was not inclined to do much for him, thinking that a boy who neglected his mother, and let her slave for him, was not likely to do very well even at school. But the good man felt more interested when he found how earnest James was, and being rather an odd man, he made this proposal to the boy, to try now sincere he was.

"'I will give you clothes and books on one condition, James.'

"'What is that, sir?' and the boy brightened up at once.

"'You are to keep your mother's wood-box full all winter long, and do it yourself. If you fail, school stops.' James laughed at the queer condition and readily agreed to it, thinking it a very easy one.

"He began school, and for a time got on capitally with the wood-box, for it was autumn, and chips and brushwood were plentiful. He ran out morning and evening and got a basket full, or chopped up the cat sticks for the little cooking stove, and as his mother was careful and saving, the task was not hard. But in November the frost came, the days were dull and cold, and wood went fast. His mother bought a load with her own earnings, but it seemed to melt away, and was nearly gone, before James remembered that he was to get the next. Mrs. Snow was feeble and lame with rheumatism, and unable to work as she had done, so James had to put down the books, and see what he could do.

"It was hard, for he was going on well, and so interested in his lessons that he hated to stop except for food and sleep. But he knew the minister would keep his word, and much against his will James set about earning money in his spare hours, lest the wood-box should get empty. He did all sorts of things, ran errands, took care of a neighbor's cow, helped the old sexton dust and warm the church on Sundays, and in these ways got enough to buy fuel in small quantities. But it was hard work; the days were short, the winter was bitterly cold, and precious time went fast, and the dear books were so fascinating, that it was sad to leave them, for dull duties that never seemed done.

"The minister watched him quietly, and seeing that he was in earnest helped him without his knowledge. He met him often driving the wood sleds from the forest, where the men were chopping and as James plodded beside the slow oxen, he read or studied, anxious to use every minute. ‘The boy is worth helping, this lesson will do him good, and when he has learned it, I will give him an easier one,’ said the minister to himself, and on Christmas eve a splendid load of wood was quietly dropped at the door of the little house, with a new saw and a bit of paper, saying only,

“‘The Lord helps those who help themselves.’

“Poor James expected nothing, but when he woke on that cold Christmas morning, he found a pair of warm mittens, knit by his mother, with her stiff painful fingers. This gift pleased him very much, but her kiss and tender look as she called him her ‘good son,’ was better still. In trying to keep her warm, he had warmed his own heart, you see, and in filling the wood-box he had also filled those months with duties faithfully done. He began to see this, to feel that there was something better than books, and to try to learn the lessons God set him, as well as those his school-master gave.

“When he saw the great pile of oak and pine logs at his door, and read the little paper, he knew who sent it, and understood the minister’s plan; thanked him for it, and fell to work with all his might. Other boys frolicked that day, but James sawed wood, and I think of all the lads in the town the happiest was the one in the new mittens, who whistled like a blackbird as he filled his mother’s wood-box.”

“That’s a first rater!” cried Dan, who enjoyed a simple matter-of-face story better than the finest fairy tale; “I like that fellow after all.”

“I could saw wood for you, Aunt Jo!” said Demi, feeling as if a new means of earning money for his mother was suggested by the story.

“Tell about a bad boy. I like them best,” said Nan.

“You’d better tell about a naughty cross-patch of a girl,” said Tommy, whose evening had been spoilt by Nan’s unkindness. It made his apple taste bitter, his pop-corn was insipid, his nuts were hard to crack, and the sight of Ned and Nan on one bench made him feel his life a burden.

But there were no more stories from Mrs. Jo, for on looking down at Rob he was discovered to be fast asleep with his last corn firmly clasped in his chubby hand. Bundling him up in his coverlet, his mother carried him away and tucked him up with no fear of his popping out again.

“Now let’s see who will come next,” said Emil, setting the door temptingly ajar.

Mary Ann passed first, and he called out to her, but Silas had warned her, and she only laughed and hurried on in spite of their enticements.

Presently a door opened, and a strong voice was heard humming in the hall,

“Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten
Dass ich so traurig bin.”

“It’s Uncle Fritz; all laugh loud and he will be sure to come in,” said Emil.

A wild burst of laughter followed, and in came Uncle Fritz, asking, “What is the joke, my lads?”

“Caught! caught! you can’t go out till you’ve told a story,” cried the boys, slamming the door.

“So! that is the joke then? Well, I have no wish to go, it is so pleasant here, and I pay my forfeit at once,” which he did by sitting down and beginning instantly,

“A long time ago your Grandfather, Demi, went to lecture in a great town, hoping to get some money for a home for little orphans that some good people were getting up. His lecture did well, and he put a considerable sum of money in his pocket, feeling very happy about it. As he was driving in a chaise to another town, he came to a lonely bit of road, late in the afternoon, and was just thinking what a good place it was for robbers when he saw a bad-looking man come out of the woods in front of him and go slowly along as if waiting till he came up. The thought of the money made Grandfather rather anxious, and at first he had a mind to turn round and drive away. But the horse was tired, and then he did not like to suspect the man, so he kept on, and when he got nearer and saw how poor and sick and ragged the stranger looked, his heart reproached him, and stopping, he said in a kind voice,

“‘My friend, you look tired; let me give you a lift.’ The man seemed surprised, hesitated a minute, and then got in. He did not seem inclined to talk, but Grandfather kept on in his wise, cheerful way, speaking of what a hard year it had been, how much the poor had suffered, and how difficult it was to get on sometimes. The man slowly softened a little, and won by the kind chat, told his story. How he had been sick, could get no work, had a family of children, and was almost in despair. Grandfather was so full of pity that he forgot his fear, and, asking the man his name, said he would try to get him work in the next town, as he had friends there. Wishing to get at pencil and paper to write down the address, Grandfather took out his plump pocket-book, and the minute he did so, the man’s eye was on it. Then Grandfather remembered what was in it and trembled for his money, but said quietly,

“‘Yes, I have a little sum here for some poor orphans. I wish it was my own, I would so gladly give you some of it. I am not rich, but I know many of the trials of the poor; this five dollars is mine, and I want to give it to you for your children.’

“The hard, hungry look in the man’s eyes changed to a grateful one as he took the small sum, freely given, and left the orphans’ money untouched. He rode on with Grandfather till they approached the town, then he asked to be set down. Grandpa shook hands with him, and was about to drive on, when the man said, as if something made him, ‘I was desperate when we met, and I meant to rob you, but you were so kind I couldn’t do it. God bless you, sir, for keeping me from it!’“

“Did Grandpa ever see him again?” asked Daisy, eagerly.

“No; but I believe the man found work, and did not try robbery any more.”

“That was a curious way to treat him; I’d have knocked him down,” said Dan.

“Kindness is always better than force. Try it and see,” answered Mr. Bhaer, rising.

“Tell another, please,” cried Daisy.

“You must, Aunt Jo did,” added Demi.

“Then I certainly won’t, but keep my others for next time. Too many tales are as bad as too many bonbons. I have paid my forfeit and I go,” and Mr. Bhaer ran for his life, with the whole flock in full pursuit. He had the start, however, and escaped safely into his study, leaving the boys to go rioting back again.

They were so stirred up by the race that they could not settle to their former quiet, and a lively game of Blindman’s Buff followed, in which Tommy showed that he had taken the moral of the last story to heart, for, when he caught Nan, he whispered in her ear, “I’m sorry I called you a cross-patch.”

Nan was not to be outdone in kindness, so, when they played “Button, button, who’s got the button?” and it was her turn to go round, she said, “Hold fast all I give you,” with such a friendly smile at Tommy, that he was not surprised to find the horse-hair ring in his hand instead of the button. He only smiled back at her then, but when they were going to bed, he offered Nan the best bite of his last apple; she saw the ring on his stumpy little finger, accepted the bite, and peace was declared. Both were ashamed of the temporary coldness, neither was ashamed to say, “I was wrong, forgive me,” so the childish friendship remained unbroken, and the home in the willow lasted long, a pleasant little castle in the air.

CHAPTER XXI. THANKSGIVING

This yearly festival was always kept at Plumfield in the good old-fashioned way, and nothing was allowed to interfere with it. For days beforehand, the little girls helped Asia and Mrs. Jo in store-room and kitchen, making pies and puddings, sorting fruit, dusting dishes, and being very busy and immensely important. The boys hovered on the outskirts of the forbidden ground, sniffing the savory odors, peeping in at the mysterious performances, and occasionally being permitted to taste some delicacy in the process of preparation.

Something more than usual seemed to be on foot this year, for the girls were as busy up-stairs as down, so were the boys in school-room and barn, and a general air of bustle pervaded the house. There was a great hunting up of old ribbons and finery, much cutting and pasting of gold paper, and the most remarkable quantity of straw, gray cotton, flannel, and big black beads, used by Franz and Mrs. Jo. Ned hammered at strange machines in the workshop, Demi and Tommy went about murmuring to themselves as if learning something. A fearful racket was heard in Emil’s room at intervals, and peals of laughter from the nursery when Rob and Teddy were sent for and hidden from sight whole hours at a time. But the thing that puzzled Mr. Bhaer the most was what became of Rob’s big pumpkin. It had been borne in triumph to the kitchen, where a dozen golden-tinted pies soon after appeared. It would not have taken more than a quarter of the mammoth vegetable to make them, yet where was the rest? It disappeared, and Rob never seemed to care, only chuckled when it was mentioned, and told his father, “To wait and see,” for the fun of the whole thing was to surprise Father Bhaer at the end, and not let him know a bit about what was to happen.

He obediently shut eyes, ears, and mouth, and went about trying not to see what was in plain sight, not to hear the tell-tale sounds that filled the air, not to understand any of the perfectly transparent mysteries going on all about him. Being a German, he loved these simple domestic festivals, and encouraged them with all his heart, for they made home so pleasant that the boys did not care to go elsewhere for fun.

When at last the day came, the boys went off for a long walk, that they might have good appetites for dinner; as if they ever needed them! The girls remained at home to help set the table, and give last touches to various affairs which filled their busy little souls with anxiety. The school-room had been shut up since the night before, and Mr. Bhaer was forbidden to enter it on pain of a beating from Teddy, who guarded the door like a small dragon, though he was dying to tell about it, and nothing but his father's heroic self-denial in not listening, kept him from betraying a grand secret.

"It's all done, and it's perfectly splendid," cried Nan, coming out at last with an air of triumph.

"The you know goes beautifully, and Silas knows just what to do now," added Daisy, skipping with delight at some unspeakable success.

"I'm blest if it ain't the 'cutest thing I ever see, them critters in particular," said Silas, who had been let into the secret, went off laughing like a great boy.

"They are coming; I hear Emil roaring 'Land lubbers lying down below,' so we must run and dress," cried Nan, and up-stairs they scampered in a great hurry.

The boys came trooping home with appetites that would have made the big turkey tremble, if it had not been past all fear. They also retired to dress; and for half-an-hour there was a washing, brushing, and prinking that would have done any tidy woman's heart good to see. When the bell rang, a troop of fresh-faced lads with shiny hair, clean collars, and Sunday jackets on, filed into the dining-room, where Mrs. Jo, in her one black silk, with a knot of her favorite white chrysanthemums in her bosom, sat at the head of the table, "looking splendid," as the boys said, whenever she got herself up. Daisy and Nan were as gay as a posy bed in their new winter dresses, with bright sashes and hair ribbons. Teddy was gorgeous to behold in a crimson merino blouse, and his best button boots, which absorbed and distracted him as much as Mr. Toot's wristbands did on one occasion.

As Mr. and Mrs. Bhaer glanced at each other down the long table, with those rows of happy faces on either side, they had a little thanksgiving all to themselves, and without a word, for one heart said to the other,

"Our work has prospered, let us be grateful and go on."

The clatter of knives and forks prevented much conversation for a few minutes, and Mary Ann with an amazing pink bow in her hair "flew round" briskly, handing plates and ladling out gravy. Nearly every one had contributed to the feast, so the dinner was a peculiarly interesting ones to the eaters of it, who beguiled the pauses by remarks on their own productions.

"If these are not good potatoes I never saw any," observed Jack, as he received his fourth big mealy one.

"Some of my herbs are in the stuffing of the turkey, that's why it's so nice," said Nan, taking a mouthful with intense satisfaction.

"My ducks are prime any way; Asia said she never cooked such fat ones," added Tommy.

“Well, our carrots are beautiful, ain’t they, and our parsnips will be ever so good when we dig them,” put in Dick, and Dolly murmured his assent from behind the bone he was picking.

“I helped make the pies with my pumpkin,” called out Robby, with a laugh which he stopped by retiring into his mug.

“I picked some of the apples that the cider is made of,” said Demi.

“I raked the cranberries for the sauce,” cried Nat.

“I got the nuts,” added Dan, and so it went on all round the table.

“Who made up Thanksgiving?” asked Rob, for being lately promoted to jacket and trousers he felt a new and manly interest in the institutions of his country.

“See who can answer that question,” and Mr. Bhaer nodded to one or two of his best history boys.

“I know,” said Demi, “the Pilgrims made it.”

“What for?” asked Rob, without waiting to learn who the Pilgrims were.

“I forget,” and Demi subsided.

“I believe it was because they were starved once, and so when they had a good harvest, they said, ‘We will thank God for it,’ and they had a day and called it Thanksgiving,” said Dan, who liked the story of the brave men who suffered so nobly for their faith.

“Good! I didn’t think you would remember any thing but natural history,” and Mr. Bhaer tapped gently on the table as applause for his pupil.

Dan looked pleased; and Mrs. Jo said to her son, “Now do you understand about it, Robby?”

“No, I don’t. I thought pil-grins were a sort of big bird that lived on rocks, and I saw pictures of them in Demi’s book.”

“He means penguins. Oh, isn’t he a little goosey!” and Demi laid back in his chair and laughed aloud.

“Don’t laugh at him, but tell him all about it if you can,” said Mrs. Bhaer, consoling Rob with more cranberry sauce for the general smile that went round the table at his mistake.

“Well, I will;” and, after a pause to collect his ideas, Demi delivered the following sketch of the Pilgrim Fathers, which would have made even those grave gentlemen smile if they could have heard it.

“You see, Rob, some of the people in England didn’t like the king, or something, so they got into ships and sailed away to this country. It was all full of Indians, and bears, and wild creatures, and they lived in forts, and had a dreadful time.”

“The bears?” asked Robby, with interest.

“No; the Pilgrims, because the Indians troubled them. They hadn’t enough to eat, and they went to church with guns, and ever so many died, and they got out of the ships on a rock, and it's called Plymouth Rock, and Aunt Jo saw it and touched it. The Pilgrims killed all the Indians, and got rich; and hung the witches, and were very good; and some of the greatest great-grandpas came in the ships. One was the Mayflower; and they made Thanksgiving, and we have it always, and I like it. Some more turkey, please."

"I think Demi will be an historian, there is such order and clearness in his account of events;" and Uncle Fritz's eyes laughed at Aunt Jo, as he helped the descendant of the Pilgrims to his third bit of turkey.

"I thought you must eat as much as ever you could on Thanksgiving. But Franz says you mustn't even then;" and Stuffy looked as if he had received bad news.

"Franz is right, so mind your knife and fork, and be moderate, or else you won't be able to help in the surprise by and by," said Mrs. Jo.

"I'll be careful; but everybody does eat lots, and I like it better than being moderate," said Stuffy, who leaned to the popular belief that Thanksgiving must be kept by coming as near apoplexy as possible, and escaping with merely a fit of indigestion or a headache.

"Now, my 'pilgrims' amuse yourselves quietly till tea-time, for you will have enough excitement this evening," said Mrs. Jo, as they rose from the table after a protracted sitting, finished by drinking every one's health in cider.

"I think I will take the whole flock for a drive, it is so pleasant; then you can rest, my dear, or you will be worn out this evening," added Mr. Bhaer; and as soon as coats and hats could be put on, the great omnibus was packed full, and away they went for a long gay drive, leaving Mrs. Jo to rest and finish sundry small affairs in peace.

An early and light tea was followed by more brushing of hair and washing of hands; then the flock waited impatiently for the company to come. Only the family was expected; for these small revels were strictly domestic, and such being the case, sorrow was not allowed to sadden the present festival. All came; Mr. and Mrs. March, with Aunt Meg, so sweet and lovely, in spite of her black dress and the little widow's cap that encircled her tranquil face. Uncle Teddy and Aunt Amy, with the Princess looking more fairy-like than ever, in a sky-blue gown, and a great bouquet of hot-house flowers, which she divided among the boys, sticking one in each button-hole, making them feel peculiarly elegant and festive. One strange face appeared, and Uncle Teddy led the unknown gentleman up to the Bhaers, saying,

"This is Mr. Hyde; he has been inquiring about Dan, and I ventured to bring him to-night, that he might see how much the boy has improved."

The Bhaers received him cordially, for Dan's sake, pleased that the lad had been remembered. But, after a few minutes' chat, they were glad to know Mr. Hyde for his own sake, so genial, simple, and interesting was he. It was pleasant to see the boy's face light up when he caught sight of his friend; pleasanter still to see Mr. Hyde's surprise and satisfaction in Dan's improved manners and appearance, and pleasantest of all to watch the two sit talking in a corner, forgetting the differences of age, culture, and position, in the one subject which interested both, as man and boy compared notes, and told the story of their summer life.

"The performance must begin soon, or the actors will go to sleep," said Mrs. Jo, when the first greetings were over.

So every one went into the school-room, and took seats before a curtain made of two bed-covers. The children had already vanished; but stifled laughter, and funny little exclamations from behind the curtain, betrayed their whereabouts. The entertainment began with a spirited exhibition of gymnastics, led by Franz. The six elder lads, in blue trousers and red shirts, made a fine display of muscle with dumb-bells, clubs, and weights, keeping time to the music of the piano, played by Mrs. Jo behind the scenes. Dan was so energetic in this exercise, that there was some danger of his knocking down his neighbors, like so many nine-pins, or sending his bean-bags whizzing among the audience; for he was excited by Mr. Hyde's presence, and a burning desire to do honor to his teachers.

"A fine, strong lad. If I go on my trip to South America, in a year or two, I shall be tempted to ask you to lend him to me, Mr. Bhaer," said Mr. Hyde, whose interest in Dan was much increased by the report he had just heard of him.

"You shall have him, and welcome, though we shall miss our young Hercules very much. It would do him a world of good, and I am sure he would serve his friend faithfully."

Dan heard both question and answer, and his heart leaped with joy at the thought of travelling in a new country with Mr. Hyde, and swelled with gratitude for the kindly commendation which rewarded his efforts to be all these friends desired to see him.

After the gymnastics, Demi and Tommy spoke the old school dialogue, "Money makes the mare go." Demi did very well, but Tommy was capital as the old farmer; for he imitated Silas in a way that convulsed the audience, and caused Silas himself to laugh so hard that Asia had to slap him on the back, as they stood in the hall enjoying the fun immensely.

Then Emil, who had got his breath by this time, gave them a sea-song in costume, with a great deal about "stormy winds," "lee shores," and a rousing chorus of "Luff, boys, luff," which made the room ring; after which Ned performed a funny Chinese dance, and hopped about like a large frog in a pagoda hat. As this was the only public exhibition ever held at Plumfield, a few exercises in lightning-arithmetic, spelling, and reading were given. Jack quite amazed the public by his rapid calculations on the blackboard. Tommy won in the spelling match, and Demi read a little French fable so well that Uncle Teddy was charmed.

"Where are the other children?" asked every one as the curtain fell, and none of the little ones appeared.

"Oh, that is the surprise. It's so lovely, I pity you because you don't know it," said Demi, who had gone to get his mother's kiss, and stayed by her to explain the mystery when it should be revealed.

Goldilocks had been carried off by Aunt Jo, to the great amazement of her papa, who quite outdid Mr. Bhaer in acting wonder, suspense, and wild impatience to know "what was going to happen."

At last, after much rustling, hammering, and very audible directions from the stage manager, the curtain rose to soft music, and Bess was discovered sitting on a stool beside a brown paper fire-place. A dearer little Cinderella was never seen; for the gray gown was very ragged, the tiny shoes all worn, the face so pretty under the bright hair, and the attitude so dejected, it brought tears, as well as smiles, to the fond eyes looking at the baby actress. She sat quite still, till a voice whispered, "Now!" then she sighed a funny little sigh, and said, "Oh I wish I tood go to the ball!" so naturally, that her father clapped frantically, and her mother called out, "Little darling!" These highly improper expressions of feeling caused Cinderella to forget herself, and shake her head at them, saying, reprovingly, "You mustn't 'peak to me."

Silence instantly prevailed, and three taps were heard on the wall. Cinderella looked alarmed, but before she could remember to say, "What is dat?" the back of the brown paper fire-place opened like a door, and, with some difficulty, the fairy godmother got herself and her pointed hat through. It was Nan, in a red cloak, a cap, and a wand, which she waved as she said decidedly,

"You shall go to the ball, my dear."

"Now you must pull and show my pretty dress," returned Cinderella, tugging at her brown gown.

"No, no; you must say, 'How can I go in my rags?'" said the godmother in her own voice.

"Oh yes, so I mus';" and the Princess said it, quite undisturbed by her forgetfulness.

"I change your rags into a splendid dress, because you are good," said the godmother in her stage tones; and deliberately unbuttoning the brown pinafore, she displayed a gorgeous sight.

The little Princess really was pretty enough to turn the heads of any number of small princes, for her mamma had dressed her like a tiny court lady, in a rosy silk train with satin under-skirt, and bits of bouquets here and there, quite lovely to behold. The godmother put a crown, with pink and white feathers drooping from it, on her head, and gave her a pair of silver paper slippers, which she put on, and then stood up, lifting her skirts to show them to the audience, saying, with pride, “My dlass ones, ain’t they pitty?”

She was so charmed with them, that she was with difficulty recalled to her part, and made to say,

“But I have no toach, Dodmother.”

“Behold it!” and Nan waved her wand with such a flourish, that she nearly knocked off the crown of the Princess.

Then appeared the grand triumph of the piece. First, a rope was seen to flap on the floor, to tighten with a twitch as Emil’s voice was heard to say, “Heave, ahoy!” and Silas’s gruff one to reply, “Stiddy, now, stiddy!” A shout of laughter followed, for four large gray rats appeared, rather shaky as to their legs, and queer as to their tails, but quite fine about the head, where black beads shone in the most lifelike manner. They drew, or were intended to appear as if they did, a magnificent coach made of half the mammoth pumpkin, mounted on the wheels of Teddy’s wagon, painted yellow to match the gay carriage. Perched on a seat in front sat a jolly little coachman in a white cotton-wool wig, cocked hat, scarlet breeches, and laced coat, who cracked a long whip and jerked the red reins so energetically, that the gray steeds reared finely. It was Teddy, and he beamed upon the company so affably that they gave him a round all to himself; and Uncle Laurie said, “If I could find as sober a coachman as that one, I would engage him on the spot.” The coach stopped, the godmother lifted in the Princess, and she was trundled away in state, kissing her hand to the public, with her glass shoes sticking up in front, and her pink train sweeping the ground behind, for, elegant as the coach was, I regret to say that her Highness was rather a tight fit.

The next scene was the ball, and here Nan and Daisy appeared as gay as peacocks in all sorts of finery. Nan was especially good as the proud sister, and crushed many imaginary ladies as she swept about the palace-hall. The Prince, in solitary state upon a somewhat unsteady throne, sat gazing about him from under an imposing crown, as he played with his sword and admired the rosettes in his shoes. When Cinderella came in he jumped up, and exclaimed, with more warmth than elegance,

“My gracious! who is that?” and immediately led the lady out to dance, while the sisters scowled and turned up their noses in the corner.

The stately jig executed by the little couple was very pretty, for the childish faces were so earnest, the costumes so gay, and the steps so peculiar, that they looked like the dainty quaint figures painted on a Watteau fan. The Princess's train was very much in her way, and the sword of Prince Rob nearly tripped him up several times. But they overcame these obstacles remarkably well, and finished the dance with much grace and spirit, considering that neither knew what the other was about.

"Drop your shoe," whispered Mrs. Jo's voice as the lady was about to sit down.

"Oh, I fordot!" and, taking off one of the silvery slippers, Cinderella planted it carefully in the middle of the stage, said to Rob, "Now you must try and tatch me," and ran away, while the Prince, picking up the shoe, obediently trotted after her.

The third scene, as everybody knows, is where the herald comes to try on the shoe. Teddy, still in coachman's dress, came in blowing a tin fish-horn melodiously, and the proud sisters each tried to put on the slipper. Nan insisted on playing cut off her toe with a carving-knife, and performed that operation so well that the herald was alarmed, and begged her to be "welly keerful." Cinderella then was called, and came in with the pinafore half on, slipped her foot into the slipper, and announced, with satisfaction,

"I am the Pinsiss."

Daisy wept, and begged pardon; but Nan, who liked tragedy, improved upon the story, and fell in a fainting-fit upon the floor, where she remained comfortably enjoying the rest of the play. It was not long, for the Prince ran in, dropped upon his knees, and kissed the hand of Goldilocks with great ardor, while the herald blew a blast that nearly deafened the audience. The curtain had no chance to fall, for the Princess ran off the stage to her father, crying, "Didn't I do well?" while the Prince and herald had a fencing-match with the tin horn and wooden sword.

"It was beautiful!" said every one; and, when the raptures had a little subsided, Nat came out with his violin in his hand.

"Hush! hush!" cried all the children, and silence followed, for something in the boy's bashful manner and appealing eyes make every one listen kindly.

The Bhaers thought he would play some of the old airs he knew so well, but, to their surprise, they heard a new and lovely melody, so softly, sweetly played, that they could hardly believe it could be Nat. It was one of those songs without words that touch the heart, and sing of all tender home-like hopes and joys, soothing and cheering those who listen to its simple music. Aunt Meg leaned her head on Demi’s shoulder, Grandmother wiped her eyes, and Mrs. Jo looked up at Mr. Laurie, saying, in a choky whisper,

“You composed that.”

“I wanted your boy to do you honor, and thank you in his own way,” answered Laurie, leaning down to answer her.

When Nat made his bow and was about to go, he was called back by many hands, and had to play again. He did so with such a happy face, that it was good to see him, for he did his best, and gave them the gay old tunes that set the feet to dancing, and made quietude impossible.

“Clear the floor!” cried Emil; and in a minute the chairs were pushed back, the older people put safely in corners and the children gathered on the stage.

“Show your manners!” called Emil; and the boys pranced up to the ladies, old and young; with polite invitations to “tread the mazy,” as dear Dick Swiveller has it. The small lads nearly came to blows for the Princess, but she chose Dick, like a kind, little gentlewoman as she was, and let him lead her proudly to her place. Mrs. Jo was not allowed to decline; and Aunt Amy filled Dan with unspeakable delight by refusing Franz and taking him. Of course Nan and Tommy, Nat and Daisy paired off, while Uncle Teddy went and got Asia, who was longing to “jig it,” and felt much elated by the honor done her. Silas and Mary Ann had a private dance in the hall; and for half-an-hour Plumfield was at its merriest.

The party wound up with a grand promenade of all the young folks, headed by the pumpkin-coach with the Princess and driver inside, and the rats in a wildly frisky state.

While the children enjoyed this final frolic, the elders sat in the parlor looking on as they talked together of the little people with the interest of parents and friends.

“What are you thinking of, all by yourself, with such a happy face, sister Jo?” asked Laurie, sitting down beside her on the sofa.

“My summer’s work, Teddy, and amusing myself by imagining the future of my boys,” she answered, smiling as she made room for him.

“They are all to be poets, painters, and statesmen, famous soldiers, or at least merchant princes, I suppose.”

“No, I am not as aspiring as I once was, and I shall be satisfied if they are honest men. But I will confess that I do expect a little glory and a career for some of them. Demi is not a common child, and I think he will blossom into something good and great in the best sense of the word. The others will do well, I hope, especially my last two boys, for, after hearing Nat play to-night, I really think he has genius.”

“Too soon to say; talent he certainly has, and there is no doubt that the boy can soon earn his bread by the work he loves. Build him up for another year or so, and then I will take him off your hands, and launch him properly.”

“That is such a pleasant prospect for poor Nat, who came to me six months ago so friendless and forlorn. Dan’s future is already plain to me. Mr. Hyde will want him soon, and I mean to give him a brave and faithful little servant. Dan is one who can serve well if the wages are love and confidence, and he has the energy to carve out his own future in his own way. Yes, I am very happy over our success with these boys one so weak, and one so wild; both so much better now, and so full of promise.”

“What magic did you use, Jo?”

“I only loved them, and let them see it. Fritz did the rest.”

“Dear soul! you look as if ‘only loving’ had been rather hard work sometimes,” said Laurie, stroking her thin cheek with a look of more tender admiration than he had ever given her as a girl.

“I’m a faded old woman, but I’m a very happy one; so don’t pity me, Teddy;” and she glanced about the room with eyes full of a sincere content.

“Yes, your plan seems to work better and better every year,” he said, with an emphatic nod of approval toward the cheery scene before him.

“How can it fail to work well when I have so much help from you all?” answered Mrs. Jo, looking gratefully at her most generous patron.

“It is the best joke of the family, this school of yours and its success. So unlike the future we planned for you, and yet so suited to you after all. It was a regular inspiration, Jo,” said Laurie, dodging her thanks as usual.

“Ah! but you laughed at it in the beginning, and still make all manner of fun of me and my inspirations. Didn’t you predict that having girls with the boys would be a dead failure? Now see how well it works;” and she pointed to the happy group of lads and lassies dancing, singing, and chattering together with every sign of kindly good fellowship.

“I give in, and when my Goldilocks is old enough I’ll send her to you. Can I say more than that?”

“I shall be so proud to have your little treasure trusted to me. But really, Teddy, the effect of these girls has been excellent. I know you will laugh at me, but I don’t mind, I’m used to it; so I’ll tell you that one of my favorite fancies is to look at my family as a small world, to watch the progress of my little men, and, lately, to see how well the influence of my little women works upon them. Daisy is the domestic element, and they all feel the charm of her quiet, womanly ways. Nan is the restless, energetic, strong-minded one; they admire her courage, and give her a fair chance to work out her will, seeing that she has sympathy as well as strength, and the power to do much in their small world. Your Bess is the lady, full of natural refinement, grace, and beauty. She polishes them unconsciously, and fills her place as any lovely woman may, using her gentle influence to lift and hold them above the coarse, rough things of life, and keep them gentlemen in the best sense of the fine old word."

"It is not always the ladies who do that best, Jo. It is sometimes the strong brave woman who stirs up the boy and makes a man of him;" and Laurie bowed to her with a significant laugh.

"No; I think the graceful woman, whom the boy you allude to married, has done more for him than the wild Nan of his youth; or, better still, the wise, motherly woman who watched over him, as Daisy watches over Demi, did more to make him what he is;" and Jo turned toward her mother, who sat a little apart with Meg, looking so full of the sweet dignity and beauty of old age, that Laurie gave her a glance of filial respect and love as he replied, in serious earnest,

"All three did much for him, and I can understand how well these little girls will help your lads."

"Not more than the lads help them; it is mutual, I assure you. Nat does much for Daisy with his music; Dan can manage Nan better than any of us; and Demi teaches your Goldilocks so easily and well that Fritz calls them Roger Ascham and Lady Jane Grey. Dear me! if men and women would only trust, understand, and help one another as my children do, what a capital place the world would be!" and Mrs. Jo's eyes grew absent, as if she was looking at a new and charming state of society in which people lived as happily and innocently as her flock at Plumfield.

"You are doing your best to help on the good time, my dear. Continue to believe in it, to work for it, and to prove its possibility by the success of her small experiment," said Mr. March, pausing as he passed to say an encouraging word, for the good man never lost his faith in humanity, and still hoped to see peace, good-will, and happiness reign upon the earth.

"I am not so ambitious as that, father. I only want to give these children a home in which they can be taught a few simple things which will help to make life less hard to them when they go out to fight their battles in the world. Honesty, courage, industry, faith in God, their fellow-creatures, and themselves; that is all I try for."

"That is every thing. Give them these helps, then let them go to work out their life as men and women; and whatever their success or failure is, I think they will remember and bless your efforts, my good son and daughter."

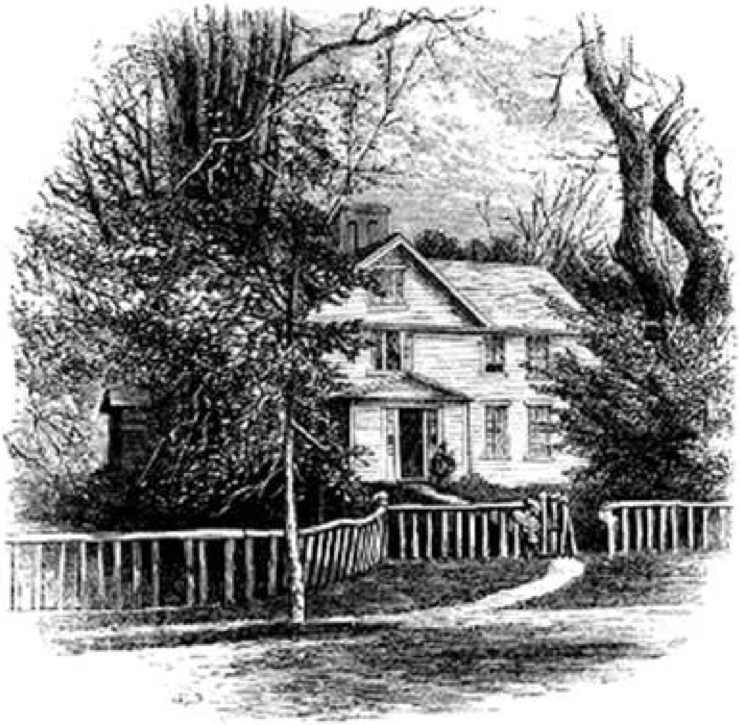
The Professor had joined them, and as Mr. March spoke he gave a hand to each, and left them with a look that was a blessing. As Jo and her husband stood together for a moment talking quietly, and feeling that their summer work had been well done if father approved, Mr. Laurie slipped into the hall, said a word to the children, and all of a sudden the whole flock pranced into the room, joined hands and danced about Father and Mother Bhaer, singing blithely,

“Summer days are over,
Summer work is done;
Harvests have been gathered
Gayly one by one.
Now the feast is eaten,
Finished is the play;
But one rite remains for
Our Thanksgiving-day.
“Best of all the harvest
In the dear God’s sight,
Are the happy children
In the home to-night;
And we come to offer
Thanks where thanks are due,
With grateful hearts and voices,
Father, mother, unto you.”

With the last words the circle narrowed till the good Professor and his wife were taken prisoner by many arms, and half hidden by the bouquet of laughing young faces which surrounded them, proving that one plant had taken root and blossomed beautifully in all the little gardens. For love is a flower that grows in any soil, works its sweet miracles undaunted by autumn frost or winter snow, blooming fair and fragrant all the year, and blessing those who give and those who receive.

WORK: A STORY OF EXPERIENCE

Published in1873 and based on Alcott’s own personal struggles, this novel tells the story of a poor girl trying to support herself by a succession of menial jobs.



An engraving of the Alcott family home

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WORK: A STORY OF EXPERIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIE.

"AUNT BETSEY, there's going to be a new Declaration of Independence."

"Bless and save us, what do you mean, child?" And the startled old lady precipitated a pie into the oven with destructive haste.

"I mean that, being of age, I'm going to take care of myself, and not be a burden any longer. Uncle wishes me out of the way; thinks I ought to go, and, sooner or later, will tell me so. I don't intend to wait for that, but, like the people in fairy tales, travel away into the world and seek my fortune. I know I can find it."

Christie emphasized her speech by energetic demonstrations in the bread-trough, kneading the dough as if it was her destiny, and she was shaping it to suit herself; while Aunt Betsey stood listening, with uplifted pie-fork, and as much astonishment as her placid face was capable of expressing. As the girl paused, with a decided thump, the old lady exclaimed:

"What crazy idee you got into your head now?"

"A very sane and sensible one that's got to be worked out, so please listen to it, ma'am. I've had it a good while, I've thought it over thoroughly, and I'm sure it's the right thing for me to do. I'm old enough to take care of myself; and if I'd been a boy, I should have been told to do it long ago. I hate to be dependent; and now there's no need of it, I can't bear it any longer. If you were poor, I wouldn't leave you; for I never forget how kind you have been to me. But Uncle doesn't love or understand me; I am a burden to him, and I must go where I can take care of myself. I can't be happy till I do, for there's nothing here for me. I'm sick of this dull town, where the one idea is eat, drink, and get rich; I don't find any friends to help me as I want to be helped, or any work that I can do well; so let me go, Aunty, and find my place, wherever it is."

"But I do need you, deary; and you mustn't think Uncle don't like you. He does, only he don't show it; and when your odd ways fret him, he ain't pleasant, I know. I don't see why you can't be contented; I've lived here all my days, and never found the place lonesome, or the folks unneighborly." And Aunt Betsey looked perplexed by the new idea.

"You and I are very different, ma'am. There was more yeast put into my composition, I guess; and, after standing quiet in a warm corner so long, I begin to ferment, and ought to be kneaded up in time, so that I may turn out a wholesome loaf. You can't do this; so let me go where it can be done, else I shall turn sour and good for nothing. Does that make the matter any clearer?" And Christie's serious face relaxed into a smile as her aunt's eye went from her to the nicely moulded loaf offered as an illustration.

"I see what you mean, Kitty; but I never thought on't before. You be better riz than me; though, let me tell you, too much emptins makes bread poor stuff, like baker's trash; and too much workin' up makes it hard and dry. Now fly 'round, for the big oven is most het, and this cake takes a sight of time in the mixin'."

"You haven't said I might go, Aunty," began the girl, after a long pause devoted by the old lady to the preparation of some compound which seemed to require great nicety of measurement in its ingredients; for when she replied, Aunt Betsey curiously interlarded her speech with audible directions to herself from the receipt-book before her.

AUNT BETSEY'S INTERLARDED SPEECH.

"I ain't no right to keep you, dear, ef you choose to take (a pinch of salt). I'm sorry you ain't happy, and think you might be ef you'd only (beat six eggs, yolks and whites together). But ef you can't, and feel that you need (two cups of sugar), only speak to Uncle, and ef he says (a squeeze of fresh lemon), go, my dear, and take my blessin' with you (not forgettin' to cover with a piece of paper)."

Christie's laugh echoed through the kitchen; and the old lady smiled benignly, quite unconscious of the cause of the girl's merriment.

"I shall ask Uncle to-night, and I know he won't object. Then I shall write to see if Mrs. Flint has a room for me, where I can stay till I get something to do. There is plenty of work in the world, and I'm not afraid of it; so you'll soon hear good news of me. Don't look sad, for you know I never could forget you, even if I should become the greatest lady in the land." And Christie left the prints of two floury but affectionate hands on the old lady's shoulders, as she kissed the wrinkled face that had never worn a frown to her.

Full of hopeful fancies, Christie salted the pans and buttered the dough in pleasant forgetfulness of all mundane affairs, and the ludicrous dismay of Aunt Betsey, who followed her about rectifying her mistakes, and watching over her as if this sudden absence of mind had roused suspicions of her sanity.

"Uncle, I want to go away, and get my own living, if you please," was Christie's abrupt beginning, as they sat round the evening fire.

"Hey! what's that?" said Uncle Enos, rousing from the doze he was enjoying, with a candle in perilous proximity to his newspaper and his nose.

Christie repeated her request, and was much relieved, when, after a meditative stare, the old man briefly answered:

"Wal, go ahead."

"I was afraid you might think it rash or silly, sir."

"I think it's the best thing you could do; and I like your good sense in pupposin' on't."

"Then I may really go?"

"Soon's ever you like. Don't pester me about it till you're ready; then I'll give you a little suthing to start off with." And Uncle Enos returned to "The Farmer's Friend," as if cattle were more interesting than kindred.

Christie was accustomed to his curt speech and careless manner; had expected nothing more cordial; and, turning to her aunt, said, rather bitterly:

"Didn't I tell you he'd be glad to have me go? No matter! When I've done something to be proud of, he will be as glad to see me back again." Then her voice changed, her eyes kindled, and the firm lips softened with a smile. "Yes, I'll try my experiment; then I'll get rich; found a home for girls like myself; or, better still, be a Mrs. Fry, a Florence Nightingale, or" —

"How are you on't for stockin's, dear?"

Christie's castles in the air vanished at the prosaic question; but, after a blank look, she answered pleasantly:

"Thank you for bringing me down to my feet again, when I was soaring away too far and too fast. I'm poorly off, ma'am; but if you are knitting these for me, I shall certainly start on a firm foundation." And, leaning on Aunt Betsey's knee, she patiently discussed the wardrobe question from hose to head-gear.

"Don't you think you could be contented any way, Christie, ef I make the work lighter, and leave you more time for your books and things?" asked the old lady, loth to lose the one youthful element in her quiet life.

"No, ma'am, for I can't find what I want here," was the decided answer.

"What do you want, child?"

"Look in the fire, and I'll try to show you."

The old lady obediently turned her spectacles that way; and Christie said in a tone half serious, half playful:

"Do you see those two logs? Well that one smouldering dismally away in the corner is what my life is now; the other blazing and singing is what I want my life to be."

"Bless me, what an idee! They are both a-burnin' where they are put, and both will be ashes to-morrow; so what difference doos it make?"

Christie smiled at the literal old lady; but, following the fancy that pleased her, she added earnestly:

"I know the end is the same; but it does make a difference how they turn to ashes, and how I spend my life. That log, with its one dull spot of fire, gives neither light nor warmth, but lies sizzling despondently among the cinders. But the other glows from end to end with cheerful little flames that go singing up the chimney with a pleasant sound. Its light fills the room and shines out into the dark; its warmth draws us nearer, making the hearth the cosiest place in the house, and we shall all miss the friendly blaze when it dies. Yes," she added, as if to herself, "I hope my life may be like that, so that, whether it be long or short, it will be useful and cheerful while it lasts, will be missed when it ends, and leave something behind besides ashes."

Though she only half understood them, the girl's words touched the kind old lady, and made her look anxiously at the eager young face gazing so wistfully into the fire.

"A good smart blowin' up with the belluses would make the green stick burn most as well as the dry one after a spell. I guess contentedness is the best bellus for young folks, ef they would only think so."

"I dare say you are right, Aunty; but I want to try for myself; and if I fail, I'll come back and follow your advice. Young folks always have discontented fits, you know. Didn't you when you were a girl?"

"Shouldn't wonder ef I did; but Enos came along, and I forgot 'em."

"My Enos has not come along yet, and never may; so I'm not going to sit and wait for any man to give me independence, if I can earn it for myself." And a quick glance at the gruff, gray old man in the corner plainly betrayed that, in Christie's opinion, Aunt Betsey made a bad bargain when she exchanged her girlish aspirations for a man whose soul was in his pocket.

"Jest like her mother, full of hifalutin notions, discontented, and sot in her own idees. Poor capital to start a fortin' on."

Christie's eye met that of her uncle peering over the top of his paper with an expression that always tried her patience. Now it was like a dash of cold water on her enthusiasm, and her face fell as she asked quickly:

"How do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that you are startin' all wrong; your redic'lus notions about independence and self-cultur won't come to nothin' in the long run, and you'll make as bad a failure of your life as your mother did of her'n."

"Please, don't say that to me; I can't bear it, for I shall never think her life a failure, because she tried to help herself, and married a good man in spite of poverty, when she loved him! You call that folly; but I'll do the same if I can; and I'd rather have what my father and mother left me, than all the money you are piling up, just for the pleasure of being richer than your neighbors."

"Never mind, dear, he don't mean no harm!" whispered Aunt Betsey, fearing a storm.

But though Christie's eyes had kindled and her color deepened, her voice was low and steady, and her indignation was of the inward sort.

"Uncle likes to try me by saying such things, and this is one reason why I want to go away before I get sharp and bitter and distrustful as he is. I don't suppose I can make you understand my feeling, but I'd like to try, and then I'll never speak of it again;" and, carefully controlling voice and face, Christie slowly added, with a look that would have been pathetically eloquent to one who could have understood the instincts of a strong nature for light and freedom: "You say I am discontented, proud and ambitious; that's true, and I'm glad of it. I am discontented, because I can't help feeling that there is a better sort of life than this dull one made up of everlasting work, with no object but money. I can't starve my soul for the sake of my body, and I mean to get out of the treadmill if I can. I'm proud, as you call it, because I hate dependence where there isn't any love to make it bearable. You don't say so in words, but I know you begrudge me a home, though you will call me ungrateful when I'm gone. I'm willing to work, but I want work that I can put my heart into, and feel that it does me good, no matter how hard it is. I only ask for a chance to be a useful, happy woman, and I don't think that is a bad ambition. Even if I only do what my dear mother did, earn my living honestly and happily, and leave a beautiful example behind me, to help one other woman as hers helps me, I shall be satisfied."

Christie's voice faltered over the last words, for the thoughts and feelings which had been working within her during the last few days had stirred her deeply, and the resolution to cut loose from the old life had not been lightly made. Mr. Devon had listened behind his paper to this unusual outpouring with a sense of discomfort which was new to him. But though the words reproached and annoyed, they did not soften him, and when Christie paused with tearful eyes, her uncle rose, saying, slowly, as he lighted his candle:

"Ef I'd refused to let you go before, I'd agree to it now; for you need breakin' in, my girl, and you are goin' where you'll get it, so the sooner you're off the better for all on us. Come, Betsey, we may as wal leave, for we can't understand the wants of her higher nater, as Christie calls it, and we've had lecterin' enough for one night." And with a grim laugh the old man quitted the field, worsted but in good order.

"There, there, dear, hev a good cry, and forgit all about it!" purred Aunt Betsey, as the heavy footsteps creaked away, for the good soul had a most old-fashioned and dutiful awe of her lord and master.

"I shan't cry but act; for it is high time I was off. I've stayed for your sake;

now I'm more trouble than comfort, and away I go. Good-night, my dear old Aunty, and don't look troubled, for I'll be a lamb while I stay."

Having kissed the old lady, Christie swept her work away, and sat down to write the letter which was the first step toward freedom. When it was done, she drew nearer, to her friendly confidante the fire, and till late into the night sat thinking tenderly of the past, bravely of the present, hopefully of the future. Twenty-one to-morrow, and her inheritance a head, a heart, a pair of hands; also the dower of most New England girls, intelligence, courage, and common sense, many practical gifts, and, hidden under the reserve that soon melts in a genial atmosphere, much romance and enthusiasm, and the spirit which can rise to heroism when the great moment comes.

Christie was one of that large class of women who, moderately endowed with talents, earnest and true-hearted, are driven by necessity, temperament, or principle out into the world to find support, happiness, and homes for themselves. Many turn back discouraged; more accept shadow for substance, and discover their mistake too late; the weakest lose their purpose and themselves; but the strongest struggle on, and, after danger and defeat, earn at last the best success this world can give us, the possession of a brave and cheerful spirit, rich in self-knowledge, self-control, self-help. This was the real desire of Christie's heart; this was to be her lesson and reward, and to this happy end she was slowly yet surely brought by the long discipline of life and labor.

Sitting alone there in the night, she tried to strengthen herself with all the good and helpful memories she could recall, before she went away to find her place in the great unknown world. She thought of her mother, so like herself, who had borne the commonplace life of home till she could bear it no longer. Then had gone away to teach, as most country girls are forced to do. Had met, loved, and married a poor gentleman, and, after a few years of genuine happiness, untroubled even by much care and poverty, had followed him out of the world, leaving her little child to the protection of her brother.

Christie looked back over the long, lonely years she had spent in the old farm-house, plodding to school and church, and doing her tasks with kind Aunt Betsey while a child; and slowly growing into girlhood, with a world of romance locked up in a heart hungry for love and a larger, nobler life.

She had tried to appease this hunger in many ways, but found little help. Her father's old books were all she could command, and these she wore out with much reading. Inheriting his refined tastes, she found nothing to attract her in the society of the commonplace and often coarse people about her. She tried to like the buxom girls whose one ambition was to "get married," and whose only subjects of conversation were "smart bonnets" and "nice dresses." She tried to believe that the admiration and regard of the bluff young farmers was worth striving for; but when one well-to-do neighbor laid his acres at her feet, she found it impossible to accept for her life's companion a man whose soul was wrapped up in prize cattle and big turnips.

Uncle Enos never could forgive her for this piece of folly, and Christie plainly saw that one of three things would surely happen, if she lived on there with no vent for her full heart and busy mind. She would either marry Joe Butterfield in sheer desperation, and become a farmer's household drudge; settle down into a sour spinster, content to make butter, gossip, and lay up money all her days; or do what poor Matty Stone had done, try to crush and curb her needs and aspirations till the struggle grew too hard, and then in a fit of despair end her life, and leave a tragic story to haunt their quiet river.

To escape these fates but one way appeared; to break loose from this narrow life, go out into the world and see what she could do for herself. This idea was full of enchantment to the eager girl, and, after much earnest thought, she had resolved to try it.

"If I fail, I can come back," she said to herself, even while she scorned the thought of failure, for with all her shy pride she was both brave and ardent, and her dreams were of the rosiest sort.

"I won't marry Joe; I won't wear myself out in a district-school for the mean sum they give a woman; I won't delve away here where I'm not wanted; and I won't end my life like a coward, because it is dull and hard. I'll try my fate as mother did, and perhaps I may succeed as well." And Christie's thoughts went wandering away into the dim, sweet past when she, a happy child, lived with loving parents in a different world from that.

Lost in these tender memories, she sat till the old moon-faced clock behind the door struck twelve, then the visions vanished, leaving their benison behind them.

As she glanced backward at the smouldering fire, a slender spire of flame shot up from the log that had blazed so cheerily, and shone upon her as she went. A good omen, gratefully accepted then, and remembered often in the years to come.

CHAPTER II.

SERVANT.

A FORTNIGHT later, and Christie was off. Mrs. Flint had briefly answered that she had a room, and that work was always to be found in the city. So the girl packed her one trunk, folding away splendid hopes among her plain gowns, and filling every corner with happy fancies, utterly impossible plans, and tender little dreams, so lovely at the time, so pathetic to remember, when contact with the hard realities of life has collapsed our bright bubbles, and the frost of disappointment nipped all our morning glories in their prime. The old red stage stopped at Enos Devon's door, and his niece crossed the threshold after a cool handshake with the master of the house, and a close embrace with the mistress, who stood pouring out last words with spectacles too dim for seeing. Fat Ben swung up the trunk, slammed the door, mounted his perch, and the ancient vehicle swayed with premonitory symptoms of departure.

Then something smote Christie's heart. "Stop!" she cried, and springing out ran back into the dismal room where the old man sat. Straight up to him she went with outstretched hand, saying steadily, though her face was full of feeling:

"Uncle, I'm not satisfied with that good-bye. I don't mean to be sentimental, but I do want to say, 'Forgive me!' I see now that I might have made you sorry to part with me, if I had tried to make you love me more. It's too late now, but I'm not too proud to confess when I'm wrong. I want to part kindly; I ask your pardon; I thank you for all you've done for me, and I say good-bye affectionately now."

Mr. Devon had a heart somewhere, though it seldom troubled him; but it did make itself felt when the girl looked at him with his dead sister's eyes, and spoke in a tone whose unaccustomed tenderness was a reproach.

Conscience had pricked him more than once that week, and he was glad to own it now; his rough sense of honor was touched by her frank expression, and, as he answered, his hand was offered readily.

"I like that, Kitty, and think the better of you for't. Let bygones be bygones. I gen'lly got as good as I give, and I guess I deserved some on't. I wish you wal, my girl, I heartily wish you wal, and hope you won't forgit that the old house ain't never shet aginst you."

Christie astonished him with a cordial kiss; then bestowing another warm hug on Aunt Niobe, as she called the old lady in a tearful joke, she ran into the carriage, taking with her all the sunshine of the place.

Christie found Mrs. Flint a dreary woman, with "boarders" written all over her sour face and faded figure. Butcher's bills and house rent seemed to fill her eyes with sleepless anxiety; thriftless cooks and saucy housemaids to sharpen the tones of her shrill voice; and an incapable husband to burden her shoulders like a modern "Old man of the sea."

A little room far up in the tall house was at the girl's disposal for a reasonable sum, and she took possession, feeling very rich with the hundred dollars Uncle Enos gave her, and delightfully independent, with no milk-pans to scald; no heavy lover to elude; no humdrum district school to imprison her day after day.

For a week she enjoyed her liberty heartily, then set about finding something to do. Her wish was to be a governess, that being the usual refuge for respectable girls who have a living to get. But Christie soon found her want of accomplishments a barrier to success in that line, for the mammas thought less of the solid than of the ornamental branches, and wished their little darlings to learn French before English, music before grammar, and drawing before writing.

So, after several disappointments, Christie decided that her education was too old-fashioned for the city, and gave up the idea of teaching. Sewing she resolved not to try till every thing else failed; and, after a few more attempts to get writing to do, she said to herself, in a fit of humility and good sense: "I'll begin at the beginning, and work my way up. I'll put my pride in my pocket, and go out to service. Housework I like, and can do well, thanks to Aunt Betsey. I never thought it degradation to do it for her, so why should I mind doing it for others if they pay for it? It isn't what I want, but it's better than idleness, so I'll try it!"

Full of this wise resolution, she took to haunting that purgatory of the poor, an intelligence office. Mrs. Flint gave her a recommendation, and she hopefully took her place among the ranks of buxom German, incapable Irish, and "smart" American women; for in those days foreign help had not driven farmers' daughters out of the field, and made domestic comfort a lost art.

At first Christie enjoyed the novelty of the thing, and watched with interest the anxious housewives who flocked in demanding that rara avis, an angel at nine shillings a week; and not finding it, bewailed the degeneracy of the times. Being too honest to profess herself absolutely perfect in every known branch of housework, it was some time before she suited herself. Meanwhile, she was questioned and lectured, half engaged and kept waiting, dismissed for a whim, and so worried that she began to regard herself as the incarnation of all human vanities and shortcomings.

"A desirable place in a small, genteel family," was at last offered her, and she posted away to secure it, having reached a state of desperation and resolved to go as a first-class cook rather than sit with her hands before her any longer.

A well-appointed house, good wages, and light duties seemed things to be grateful for, and Christie decided that going out to service was not the hardest fate in life, as she stood at the door of a handsome house in a sunny square waiting to be inspected.

Mrs. Stuart, having just returned from Italy, affected the artistic, and the new applicant found her with a Roman scarf about her head, a rosary like a string of small cannon balls at her side, and azure draperies which became her as well as they did the sea-green furniture of her marine boudoir, where unwary walkers tripped over coral and shells, grew sea-sick looking at pictures of tempestuous billows engulfing every sort of craft, from a man-of-war to a hencoop with a ghostly young lady clinging to it with one hand, and had their appetites effectually taken away by a choice collection of water-bugs and snakes in a glass globe, that looked like a jar of mixed pickles in a state of agitation.

MRS. STUART.

Madame was intent on a water-color copy of Turner's "Rain, Wind, and Hail," that pleasing work which was sold upsidedown and no one found it out. Motioning Christie to a seat she finished some delicate sloppy process before speaking. In that little pause Christie examined her, and the impression then received was afterward confirmed.

Mrs. Stuart possessed some beauty and chose to think herself a queen of society. She assumed majestic manners in public and could not entirely divest herself of them in private, which often produced comic effects. Zenobia troubled about fish-sauce, or Aspasia indignant at the price of eggs will give some idea of this lady when she condescended to the cares of housekeeping.

Presently she looked up and inspected the girl as if a new servant were no more than a new bonnet, a necessary article to be ordered home for examination. Christie presented her recommendation, made her modest little speech, and awaited her doom.

Mrs. Stuart read, listened, and then demanded with queenly brevity:

"Your name?"

"Christie Devon."

"Too long; I should prefer to call you Jane as I am accustomed to the name."

"As you please, ma'am."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-one."

"You are an American?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Stuart gazed into space a moment, then delivered the following address with impressive solemnity:

"I wish a capable, intelligent, honest, neat, well-conducted person who knows her place and keeps it. The work is light, as there are but two in the family. I am very particular and so is Mr. Stuart. I pay two dollars and a half, allow one afternoon out, one service on Sunday, and no followers. My table-girl must understand her duties thoroughly, be extremely neat, and always wear white aprons."

"I think I can suit you, ma'am, when I have learned the ways of the house," meekly replied Christie.

Mrs. Stuart looked graciously satisfied and returned the paper with a gesture that Victoria might have used in restoring a granted petition, though her next words rather marred the effect of the regal act, "My cook is black."

"I have no objection to color, ma'am."

An expression of relief dawned upon Mrs. Stuart's countenance, for the black cook had been an insurmountable obstacle to all the Irish ladies who had applied. Thoughtfully tapping her Roman nose with the handle of her brush Madame took another survey of the new applicant, and seeing that she looked neat, intelligent, and respectful, gave a sigh of thankfulness and engaged her on the spot.

Much elated Christie rushed home, selected a bag of necessary articles, bundled the rest of her possessions into an empty closet (lent her rent-free owing to a profusion of cockroaches), paid up her board, and at two o'clock introduced herself to Hepsey Johnson, her fellow servant.

Hepsey was a tall, gaunt woman, bearing the tragedy of her race written in her face, with its melancholy eyes, subdued expression, and the pathetic patience of a wronged dumb animal. She received Christie with an air of resignation, and speedily bewildered her with an account of the duties she would be expected to perform.

A long and careful drill enabled Christie to set the table with but few mistakes, and to retain a tolerably clear recollection of the order of performances. She had just assumed her badge of servitude, as she called the white apron, when the bell rang violently and Hepsey, who was hurrying away to "dish up," said:

"It's de marster. You has to answer de bell, honey, and he likes it done bery spry."

Christie ran and admitted an impetuous, stout gentleman, who appeared to be incensed against the elements, for he burst in as if blown, shook himself like a Newfoundland dog, and said all in one breath:

"You're the new girl, are you? Well, take my umbrella and pull off my rubbers.”

“Sir?”

Mr. Stuart was struggling with his gloves, and, quite unconscious of the astonishment of his new maid, impatiently repeated his request.

“Take this wet thing away, and pull off my overshoes. Don’t you see it’s raining like the very deuce!”

Christie folded her lips together in a peculiar manner as she knelt down and removed a pair of muddy overshoes, took the dripping umbrella, and was walking away with her agreeable burden when Mr. Stuart gave her another shock by calling over the banister:

“I’m going out again; so clean those rubbers, and see that the boots

I sent down this morning are in order.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Christie meekly, and immediately afterward startled Hepsey by casting overshoes and umbrella upon the kitchen floor, and indignantly demanding:

“Am I expected to be a boot-jack to that man?”

“I ‘spects you is, honey.”

“Am I also expected to clean his boots?”

“Yes, chile. Katy did, and de work ain’t hard when you gits used to it.”

“It isn’t the work; it’s the degradation; and I won’t submit to it.”

Christie looked fiercely determined; but Hepsey shook her head, saying quietly as she went on garnishing a dish:

“Dere’s more ‘gradin’ works dan dat, chile, and dem dat’s bin ‘bliged to do um finds dis sort bery easy. You’s paid for it, honey; and if you does it willin, it won’t hurt you more dan washin’ de marster’s dishes, or sweepin’ his rooms.”

“There ought to be a boy to do this sort of thing. Do you think it’s right to ask it of me?” cried Christie, feeling that being servant was not as pleasant a task as she had thought it.

“Dunno, chile. I’se shore I’d never ask it of any woman if I was a man, ‘less I was sick or ole. But folks don’t seem to ‘member dat we’ve got feelin’s, and de best way is not to mind dese ere little trubbles. You jes leave de boots to me; blackin’ can’t do dese ole hands no hurt, and dis ain’t no deggydation to me now; I’s a free woman.”

“Why, Hepsey, were you ever a slave?” asked the girl, forgetting her own small injury at this suggestion of the greatest of all wrongs.

“All my life, till I run away five year ago. My ole folks, and eight brudders and sisters, is down dere in de pit now; waitin’ for the Lord to set ‘em free. And He’s gwine to do it soon, soon!” As she uttered the last words, a sudden light chased the tragic shadow from Hepsey's face, and the solemn fervor of her voice thrilled Christie's heart. All her anger died out in a great pity, and she put her hand on the woman's shoulder, saying earnestly:

"I hope so; and I wish I could help to bring that happy day at once!"

For the first time Hepsey smiled, as she said gratefully, "De Lord bress you for dat wish, chile." Then, dropping suddenly into her old, quiet way, she added, turning to her work:

"Now you tote up de dinner, and I'll be handy by to 'fresh your mind 'bout how de dishes goes, for missis is bery 'ticular, and don't like no 'stakes in tendin'."

Thanks to her own neat-handed ways and Hepsey's prompting through the slide, Christie got on very well; managed her salver dexterously, only upset one glass, clashed one dish-cover, and forgot to sugar the pie before putting it on the table; an omission which was majestically pointed out, and graciously pardoned as a first offence.

By seven o'clock the ceremonial was fairly over, and Christie dropped into a chair quite tired out with frequent pacings to and fro. In the kitchen she found the table spread for one, and Hepsey busy with the boots.

"Aren't you coming to your dinner, Mrs. Johnson?" she asked, not pleased at the arrangement.

"When you's done, honey; dere's no hurry 'bout me. Katy liked dat way best, and I'se used ter waitin'."

"But I don't like that way, and I won't have it. I suppose Katy thought her white skin gave her a right to be disrespectful to a woman old enough to be her mother just because she was black. I don't; and while I'm here, there must be no difference made. If we can work together, we can eat together; and because you have been a slave is all the more reason I should be good to you now."

If Hepsey had been surprised by the new girl's protest against being made a boot-jack of, she was still more surprised at this sudden kindness, for she had set Christie down in her own mind as "one ob dem toppin' smart ones dat don't stay long nowheres." She changed her opinion now, and sat watching the girl with a new expression on her face, as Christie took boot and brush from her, and fell to work energetically, saying as she scrubbed:

"I'm ashamed of complaining about such a little thing as this, and don't mean to feel degraded by it, though I should by letting you do it for me. I never lived out before: that's the reason I made a fuss. There's a polish, for you, and I'm in a good humor again; so Mr. Stuart may call for his boots whenever he likes, and we'll go to dinner like fashionable people, as we are."

There was something so irresistible in the girl's hearty manner, that Hepsey submitted at once with a visible satisfaction, which gave a relish to Christie's dinner, though it was eaten at a kitchen table, with a bare-armed cook sitting opposite, and three rows of burnished dish-covers reflecting the dreadful spectacle.

After this, Christie got on excellently, for she did her best, and found both pleasure and profit in her new employment. It gave her real satisfaction to keep the handsome rooms in order, to polish plate, and spread bountiful meals. There was an atmosphere of ease and comfort about her which contrasted agreeably with the shabbiness of Mrs. Flint's boarding-house, and the bare simplicity of the old home. Like most young people, Christie loved luxury, and was sensible enough to see and value the comforts of her situation, and to wonder why more girls placed as she was did not choose a life like this rather than the confinements of a sewing-room, or the fatigue and publicity of a shop.

She did not learn to love her mistress, because Mrs. Stuart evidently considered herself as one belonging to a superior race of beings, and had no desire to establish any of the friendly relations that may become so helpful and pleasant to both mistress and maid. She made a royal progress through her dominions every morning, issued orders, found fault liberally, bestowed praise sparingly, and took no more personal interest in her servants than if they were clocks, to be wound up once a day, and sent away the moment they got out of repair.

Mr. Stuart was absent from morning till night, and all Christie ever knew about him was that he was a kind-hearted, hot-tempered, and very conceited man; fond of his wife, proud of the society they managed to draw about them, and bent on making his way in the world at any cost.

If masters and mistresses knew how skilfully they are studied, criticised, and imitated by their servants, they would take more heed to their ways, and set better examples, perhaps. Mrs. Stuart never dreamed that her quiet, respectful Jane kept a sharp eye on all her movements, smiled covertly at her affectations, envied her accomplishments, and practised certain little elegancies that struck her fancy.

Mr. Stuart would have become apoplectic with indignation if he had known that this too intelligent table-girl often contrasted her master with his guests, and dared to think him wanting in good breeding when he boasted of his money, flattered a great man, or laid plans to lure some lion into his house. When he lost his temper, she always wanted to laugh, he bounced and bumbled about so like an angry blue-bottle fly; and when he got himself up elaborately for a party, this disrespectful hussy confided to Hepsey her opinion that "master was a fat dandy, with nothing to be vain of but his clothes," — a sacrilegious remark which would have caused her to be summarily ejected from the house if it had reached the august ears of master or mistress.

“My father was a gentleman; and I shall never forget it, though I do go out to service. I’ve got no rich friends to help me up, but, sooner or later, I mean to find a place among cultivated people; and while I’m working and waiting, I can be fitting myself to fill that place like a gentlewoman, as I am.”

With this ambition in her mind, Christie took notes of all that went on in the polite world, of which she got frequent glimpses while “living out.” Mrs. Stuart received one evening of each week, and on these occasions Christie, with an extra frill on her white apron, served the company, and enjoyed herself more than they did, if the truth had been known.

While helping the ladies with their wraps, she observed what they wore, how they carried themselves, and what a vast amount of prinking they did, not to mention the flood of gossip they talked while shaking out their flounces and settling their topknots.

Later in the evening, when she passed cups and glasses, this demure-looking damsel heard much fine discourse, saw many famous beings, and improved her mind with surreptitious studies of the rich and great when on parade. But her best time was after supper, when, through the crack of the door of the little room where she was supposed to be clearing away the relics of the feast, she looked and listened at her ease; laughed at the wits, stared at the lions, heard the music, was impressed by the wisdom, and much edified by the gentility of the whole affair.

After a time, however, Christie got rather tired of it, for there was an elegant sameness about these evenings that became intensely wearisome to the uninitiated, but she fancied that as each had his part to play he managed to do it with spirit. Night after night the wag told his stories, the poet read his poems, the singers warbled, the pretty women simpered and dressed, the heavy scientific was duly discussed by the elect precious, and Mrs. Stuart, in amazing costumes, sailed to and fro in her most swan-like manner; while my lord stirred up the lions he had captured, till they roared their best, great and small.

“Good heavens! why don’t they do or say something new and interesting, and not keep twaddling on about art, and music, and poetry, and cosmos? The papers are full of appeals for help for the poor, reforms of all sorts, and splendid work that others are doing; but these people seem to think it isn’t genteel enough to be spoken of here. I suppose it is all very elegant to go on like a set of trained canaries, but it’s very dull fun to watch them, and Hepsey’s stories are a deal more interesting to me.”

Having come to this conclusion, after studying dilettanteism through the crack of the door for some months, Christie left the “trained canaries” to twitter and hop about their gilded cage, and devoted herself to Hepsey, who gave her glimpses into another sort of life so bitterly real that she never could forget it.

HEPSEY.

Friendship had prospered in the lower regions, for Hepsey had a motherly heart, and Christie soon won her confidence by bestowing her own. Her story was like many another; yet, being the first Christie had ever heard, and told with the unconscious eloquence of one who had suffered and escaped, it made a deep impression on her, bringing home to her a sense of obligation so forcibly that she began at once to pay a little part of the great debt which the white race owes the black.

Christie loved books; and the attic next her own was full of them. To this store she found her way by a sort of instinct as sure as that which leads a fly to a honey-pot, and, finding many novels, she read her fill. This amusement lightened many heavy hours, peopled the silent house with troops of friends, and, for a time, was the joy of her life.

Hepsey used to watch her as she sat buried in her book when the day’s work was done, and once a heavy sigh roused Christie from the most exciting crisis of “The Abbot.”

“What’s the matter? Are you very tired, Aunty?” she asked, using the name that came most readily to her lips.

“No, honey; I was only wishin’ I could read fast like you does. I’s berry slow ‘bout readin’ and I want to learn a heap,” answered Hepsey, with such a wistful look in her soft eyes that Christie shut her book, saying briskly:

“Then I’ll teach you. Bring out your primer and let’s begin at once.”

“Dear chile, it’s orful hard work to put learnin’ in my ole head, and I wouldn’t ‘cept such a ting from you only I needs dis sort of help so bad, and I can trust you to gib it to me as I wants it.”

Then in a whisper that went straight to Christie’s heart, Hepsey told her plan and showed what help she craved.

For five years she had worked hard, and saved her earnings for the purpose of her life. When a considerable sum had been hoarded up, she confided it to one whom she believed to be a friend, and sent him to buy her old mother. But he proved false, and she never saw either mother or money. It was a hard blow, but she took heart and went to work again, resolving this time to trust no one with the dangerous part of the affair, but when she had scraped together enough to pay her way she meant to go South and steal her mother at the risk of her life.

“I don’t want much money, but I must know little ‘bout readin’ and countin’ up, else I’ll get lost and cheated. You’ll help me do dis, honey, and I’ll bless you all my days, and so will my old mammy, if I ever gets her safe away."

With tears of sympathy shining on her cheeks, and both hands stretched out to the poor soul who implored this small boon of her, Christie promised all the help that in her lay, and kept her word religiously.

From that time, Hepsey's cause was hers; she laid by a part of her wages for "ole mammy," she comforted Hepsey with happy prophecies of success, and taught with an energy and skill she had never known before. Novels lost their charms now, for Hepsey could give her a comedy and tragedy surpassing any thing she found in them, because truth stamped her tales with a power and pathos the most gifted fancy could but poorly imitate.

The select receptions upstairs seemed duller than ever to her now, and her happiest evenings were spent in the tidy kitchen, watching Hepsey laboriously shaping A's and B's, or counting up on her worn fingers the wages they had earned by months of weary work, that she might purchase one treasure, — a feeble, old woman, worn out with seventy years of slavery far away there in Virginia.

For a year Christie was a faithful servant to her mistress, who appreciated her virtues, but did not encourage them; a true friend to poor Hepsey, who loved her dearly, and found in her sympathy and affection a solace for many griefs and wrongs. But Providence had other lessons for Christie, and when this one was well learned she was sent away to learn another phase of woman's life and labor.

While their domestics amused themselves with privy conspiracy and rebellion at home, Mr. and Mrs. Stuart spent their evenings in chasing that bright bubble called social success, and usually came home rather cross because they could not catch it.

On one of these occasions they received a warm welcome, for, as they approached the house, smoke was seen issuing from an attic window, and flames flickering behind the half-drawn curtain. Bursting out of the carriage with his usual impetuosity, Mr. Stuart let himself in and tore upstairs shouting "Fire!" like an engine company.

In the attic Christie was discovered lying dressed upon her bed, asleep or suffocated by the smoke that filled the room. A book had slipped from her hand, and in falling had upset the candle on a chair beside her; the long wick leaned against a cotton gown hanging on the wall, and a greater part of Christie's wardrobe was burning brilliantly.

"I forbade her to keep the gas lighted so late, and see what the deceitful creature has done with her private candle!" cried Mrs. Stuart with a shrillness that roused the girl from her heavy sleep more effectually than the anathemas Mr. Stuart was fulminating against the fire.

Sitting up she looked dizzily about her. The smoke was clearing fast, a window having been opened; and the tableau was a striking one. Mr. Stuart with an excited countenance was dancing frantically on a heap of half-consumed clothes pulled from the wall. He had not only drenched them with water from bowl and pitcher, but had also cast those articles upon the pile like extinguishers, and was skipping among the fragments with an agility which contrasted with his stout figure in full evening costume, and his besmirched face, made the sight irresistibly ludicrous.

Mrs. Stuart, though in her most regal array, seemed to have left her dignity downstairs with her opera cloak, for with skirts gathered closely about her, tiara all askew, and face full of fear and anger, she stood upon a chair and scolded like any shrew.

The comic overpowered the tragic, and being a little hysterical with the sudden alarm, Christie broke into a peal of laughter that sealed her fate.

“Look at her! look at her!” cried Mrs. Stuart gesticulating on her perch as if about to fly. “She has been at the wine, or lost her wits. She must go, Horatio, she must go! I cannot have my nerves shattered by such dreadful scenes. She is too fond of books, and it has turned her brain. Hepsey can watch her to-night, and at dawn she shall leave the house for ever.”

“Not till after breakfast, my dear. Let us have that in comfort I beg, for upon my soul we shall need it,” panted Mr. Stuart, sinking into a chair exhausted with the vigorous measures which had quenched the conflagration.

Christie checked her untimely mirth, explained the probable cause of the mischief, and penitently promised to be more careful for the future.

Mr. Stuart would have pardoned her on the spot, but Madame was inexorable, for she had so completely forgotten her dignity that she felt it would be impossible ever to recover it in the eyes of this disrespectful menial. Therefore she dismissed her with a lecture that made both mistress and maid glad to part.

She did not appear at breakfast, and after that meal Mr. Stuart paid Christie her wages with a solemnity which proved that he had taken a curtain lecture to heart. There was a twinkle in his eye, however, as he kindly added a recommendation, and after the door closed behind him Christie was sure that he exploded into a laugh at the recollection of his last night’s performance.

This lightened her sense of disgrace very much, so, leaving a part of her money to repair damages, she packed up her dilapidated wardrobe, and, making Hepsey promise to report progress from time to time, Christie went back to Mrs. Flint’s to compose her mind and be ready à la Micawber “for something to turn up.”

CHAPTER III.

ACTRESS.

FEELING that she had all the world before her where to choose, and that her next step ought to take her up at least one round higher on the ladder she was climbing, Christie decided not to try going out to service again. She knew very well that she would never live with Irish mates, and could not expect to find another Hepsey. So she tried to get a place as companion to an invalid, but failed to secure the only situation of the sort that was offered her, because she mildly objected to waiting on a nervous cripple all day, and reading aloud half the night. The old lady called har an “impertinent baggage,” and Christie retired in great disgust, resolving not to be a slave to anybody.

Things seldom turn out as we plan them, and after much waiting and hoping for other work Christie at last accepted about the only employment which had not entered her mind.

Among the boarders at Mrs. Flint’s were an old lady and her pretty daughter, both actresses at a respectable theatre. Not stars by any means, but good second-rate players, doing their work creditably and earning an honest living. The mother had been kind to Christie in offering advice, and sympathizing with her disappointments. The daughter, a gay little lass, had taken Christie to the theatre several times, there to behold her in all the gauzy glories that surround the nymphs of spectacular romance.

To Christie this was a great delight, for, though she had pored over her father’s Shakespeare till she knew many scenes by heart, she had never seen a play till Lucy led her into what seemed an enchanted world. Her interest and admiration pleased the little actress, and sundry lifts when she was hurried with her dresses made her grateful to Christie.

The girl’s despondent face, as she came in day after day from her unsuccessful quest, told its own story, though she uttered no complaint, and these friendly souls laid their heads together, eager to help her in their own dramatic fashion.

“I’ve got it! I’ve got it! All hail to the queen!” was the cry that one day startled Christie as she sat thinking anxiously, while sewing mock-pearls on a crown for Mrs. Black.

Looking up she saw Lucy just home from rehearsal, going through a series of pantomimic evolutions suggestive of a warrior doing battle with incredible valor, and a very limited knowledge of the noble art of self-defence.

"What have you got? Who is the queen?" she asked, laughing, as the breathless hero lowered her umbrella, and laid her bonnet at Christie's feet.

"You are to be the Queen of the Amazons in our new spectacle, at half a dollar a night for six or eight weeks, if the piece goes well."

"No!" cried Christie, with a gasp.

"Yes!" cried Lucy, clapping her hands; and then she proceeded to tell her news with theatrical volubility. "Mr. Sharp, the manager, wants a lot of tallish girls, and I told him I knew of a perfect dear. He said: 'Bring her on, then,' and I flew home to tell you. Now, don't look wild, and say no. You've only got to sing in one chorus, march in the grand procession, and lead your band in the terrific battle-scene. The dress is splendid! Red tunic, tiger-skin over shoulder, helmet, shield, lance, fleshings, sandals, hair down, and as much cork to your eyebrows as you like."

Christie certainly did look wild, for Lucy had burst into the room like a small hurricane, and her rapid words rattled about the listeners' ears as if a hail-storm had followed the gust. While Christie still sat with her mouth open, too bewildered to reply, Mrs. Black said in her cosey voice:

"Try it, me dear, it's just what you'll enjoy, and a capital beginning I assure ye; for if you do well old Sharp will want you again, and then, when some one slips out of the company, you can slip in, and there you are quite comfortable. Try it, me dear, and if you don't like it drop it when the piece is over, and there's no harm done."

"It's much easier and jollier than any of the things you are after. We'll stand by you like bricks, and in a week you'll say it's the best lark you ever had in your life. Don't be prim, now, but say yes, like a trump, as you are," added Lucy, waving a pink satin train temptingly before her friend.

"I will try it!" said Christie, with sudden decision, feeling that something entirely new and absorbing was what she needed to expend the vigor, romance, and enthusiasm of her youth upon.

With a shriek of delight Lucy swept her off her chair, and twirled her about the room as excitable young ladies are fond of doing when their joyful emotions need a vent. When both were giddy they subsided into a corner and a breathless discussion of the important step.

Though she had consented, Christie had endless doubts and fears, but Lucy removed many of the former, and her own desire for pleasant employment conquered many of the latter. In her most despairing moods she had never thought of trying this. Uncle Enos considered "play-actin'" as the sum of all iniquity. What would he say if she went calmly to destruction by that road? Sad to relate, this recollection rather strengthened her purpose, for a delicious sense of freedom pervaded her soul, and the old defiant spirit seemed to rise up within her at the memory of her Uncle's grim prophecies and narrow views.

"Lucy is happy, virtuous, and independent, why can't I be so too if I have any talent? It isn't exactly what I should choose, but any thing honest is better than idleness. I'll try it any way, and get a little fun, even if I don't make much money or glory out of it."

So Christie held to her resolution in spite of many secret misgivings, and followed Mrs. Black's advice on all points with a docility which caused that sanguine lady to predict that she would be a star before she knew where she was.

"Is this the stage? How dusty and dull it is by daylight!" said Christie next day, as she stood by Lucy on the very spot where she had seen Hamlet die in great anguish two nights before.

"Bless you, child, it's in curl-papers now, as I am of a morning.

Mr. Sharp, here's an Amazon for you."

As she spoke, Lucy hurried across the stage, followed by Christie, wearing any thing but an Amazonian expression just then.

"Ever on before?" abruptly asked, a keen-faced, little man, glancing with an experienced eye at the young person who stood before him bathed in blushes.

"No, sir."

"Do you sing?"

"A little, sir."

"Dance, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"Just take a turn across the stage, will you? Must walk well to lead a march."

As she went, Christie heard Mr. Sharp taking notes audibly:

"Good tread; capital figure; fine eye. She'll make up well, and behave herself, I fancy."

A strong desire to make off seized the girl; but, remembering that she had presented herself for inspection, she controlled the impulse, and returned to him with no demonstration of displeasure, but a little more fire in "the fine eye," and a more erect carriage of the "capital figure."

"All right, my dear. Give your name to Mr. Tripp, and your mind to the business, and consider yourself engaged," — with which satisfactory remark the little man vanished like a ghost.

"Lucy, did you hear that impertinent 'my dear'?" asked Christie, whose sense of propriety had received its first shock.

"Lord, child, all managers do it. They don't mean any thing; so be resigned, and thank your stars he didn't say 'love' and 'darling,' and kiss you, as old Vining used to," was all the sympathy she got.

Having obeyed orders, Lucy initiated her into the mysteries of the place, and then put her in a corner to look over the scenes in which she was to appear. Christie soon caught the idea of her part, — not a difficult matter, as there were but few ideas in the whole piece, after which she sat watching the arrival of the troop she was to lead. A most forlorn band of warriors they seemed, huddled together, and looking as if afraid to speak, lest they should infringe some rule; or to move, lest they be swallowed up by some unsuspected trap-door.

Presently the ballet-master appeared, the orchestra struck up, and Christie found herself marching and counter-marching at word of command. At first, a most uncomfortable sense of the absurdity of her position oppressed and confused her; then the ludicrous contrast between the solemn anxiety of the troop and the fantastic evolutions they were performing amused her till the novelty wore off; the martial music excited her; the desire to please sharpened her wits; and natural grace made it easy for her to catch and copy the steps and poses given her to imitate. Soon she forgot herself, entered into the spirit of the thing, and exerted every sense to please, so successfully that Mr. Tripp praised her quickness at comprehension, Lucy applauded heartily from a fairy car, and Mr. Sharp popped his head out of a palace window to watch the Amazon’s descent from the Mountains of the Moon.

When the regular company arrived, the troop was dismissed till the progress of the play demanded their reappearance. Much interested in the piece, Christie stood aside under a palm-tree, the foliage of which was strongly suggestive of a dilapidated green umbrella, enjoying the novel sights and sounds about her.

Yellow-faced gentlemen and sleepy-eyed ladies roamed languidly about with much incoherent jabbering of parts, and frequent explosions of laughter. Princes, with varnished boots and suppressed cigars, fought, bled, and died, without a change of countenance. Damsels of unparalleled beauty, according to the text, gaped in the faces of adoring lovers, and crocheted serenely on the brink of annihilation. Fairies, in rubber-boots and woollen head-gear, disported themselves on flowery barks of canvas, or were suspended aloft with hooks in their backs like young Hindoo devotees. Demons, guiltless of hoof or horn, clutched their victims with the inevitable “Ha! ha!” and vanished darkly, eating pea-nuts. The ubiquitous Mr. Sharp seemed to pervade the whole theatre; for his voice came shrilly from above or spectrally from below, and his active little figure darted to and fro like a critical will-o-the-wisp.

The grand march and chorus in the closing scene were easily accomplished; for, as Lucy bade her, Christie “sung with all her might,” and kept step as she led her band with the dignity of a Boadicea. No one spoke to her; few observed her; all were intent on their own affairs; and when the final shriek and bang died away without lifting the roof by its din, she could hardly believe that the dreaded first rehearsal was safely over.

A visit to the wardrobe-room to see her dress came next; and here Christie had a slight skirmish with the mistress of that department relative to the length of her classical garments. As studies from the nude had not yet become one of the amusements of the elite of Little Babel, Christie was not required to appear in the severe simplicity of a costume consisting of a necklace, sandals, and a bit of gold fringe about the waist, but was allowed an extra inch or two on her tunic, and departed, much comforted by the assurance that her dress would not be “a shock to modesty,” as Lucy expressed it.

“Now, look at yourself, and, for my sake, prove an honor to your country and a terror to the foe,” said Lucy, as she led her protégée before the green-room mirror on the first night of “The Demon’s Daughter, or The Castle of the Sun!! The most Magnificent Spectacle ever produced upon the American Stage!!!”

Christie looked, and saw a warlike figure with glittering helmet, shield and lance, streaming hair and savage cloak. She liked the picture, for there was much of the heroic spirit in the girl, and even this poor counterfeit pleased her eye and filled her fancy with martial memories of Joan of Arc, Zenobia, and Britomarte.

“Go to!” cried Lucy, who affected theatrical modes of speech. “Don’t admire yourself any longer, but tie up your sandals and come on. Be sure you rush down the instant I cry, ‘Demon, I defy thee!’ Don’t break your neck, or pick your way like a cat in wet weather, but come with effect, for I want that scene to make a hit.”

CHRISTIE AS QUEEN OF THE AMAZONS.

Princess Caremfil swept away, and the Amazonian queen climbed to her perch among the painted mountains, where her troop already sat like a flock of pigeons shining in the sun. The gilded breast-plate rose and fell with the quick beating of her heart, the spear shook with the trembling of her hand, her lips were dry, her head dizzy, and more than once, as she waited for her cue, she was sorely tempted to run away and take the consequences.

But the thought of Lucy’s good-will and confidence kept her, and when the cry came she answered with a ringing shout, rushed down the ten-foot precipice, and charged upon the foe with an energy that inspired her followers, and quite satisfied the princess struggling in the demon’s grasp.

With clashing of arms and shrill war-cries the rescuers of innocence assailed the sooty fiends who fell before their unscientific blows with a rapidity which inspired in the minds of beholders a suspicion that the goblins’ own voluminous tails tripped them up and gallantry kept them prostrate. As the last groan expired, the last agonized squirm subsided, the conquerors performed the intricate dance with which it appears the Amazons were wont to celebrate their victories. Then the scene closed with a glare of red light and a “grand tableau” of the martial queen standing in a bower of lances, the rescued princess gracefully fainting in her arms, and the vanquished demon scowling fiercely under her foot, while four-and-twenty dishevelled damsels sang a song of exultation, to the barbaric music of a tattoo on their shields.

All went well that night, and when at last the girls doffed crown and helmet, they confided to one another the firm opinion that the success of the piece was in a great measure owing to their talent, their exertions, and went gaily home predicting for themselves careers as brilliant as those of Siddons and Rachel.

It would be a pleasant task to paint the vicissitudes and victories of a successful actress; but Christie was no dramatic genius born to shine before the world and leave a name behind her. She had no talent except that which may be developed in any girl possessing the lively fancy, sympathetic nature, and ambitious spirit which make such girls naturally dramatic. This was to be only one of many experiences which were to show her her own weakness and strength, and through effort, pain, and disappointment fit her to play a nobler part on a wider stage.

For a few weeks Christie’s illusions lasted; then she discovered that the new life was nearly as humdrum as the old, that her companions were ordinary men and women, and her bright hopes were growing as dim as her tarnished shield. She grew unutterably weary of “The Castle of the Sun,” and found the “Demon’s Daughter” an unmitigated bore. She was not tired of the profession, only dissatisfied with the place she held in it, and eager to attempt a part that gave some scope for power and passion.

Mrs. Black wisely reminded her that she must learn to use her wings before she tried to fly, and comforted her with stories of celebrities who had begun as she was beginning, yet who had suddenly burst from their grub-like obscurity to adorn the world as splendid butterflies.

“We’ll stand by you, Kit; so keep up your courage, and do your best. Be clever to every one in general, old Sharp in particular, and when a chance comes, have your wits about you and grab it. That’s the way to get on,” said Lucy, as sagely as if she had been a star for years.

“If I had beauty I should stand a better chance,” sighed Christie, surveying herself with great disfavor, quite unconscious that to a cultivated eye the soul of beauty was often visible in that face of hers, with its intelligent eyes, sensitive mouth, and fine lines about the forehead, making it a far more significant and attractive countenance than that of her friend, possessing only piquant prettiness.

“Never mind, child; you’ve got a lovely figure, and an actress’s best feature,

— fine eyes and eyebrows. I heard old Kent say so, and he's a judge. So make the best of what you've got, as I do," answered Lucy, glancing at her own comely little person with an air of perfect resignation.

Christie laughed at the adviser, but wisely took the advice, and, though she fretted in private, was cheerful and alert in public. Always modest, attentive, and obliging, she soon became a favorite with her mates, and, thanks to Lucy's good offices with Mr. Sharp, whose favorite she was, Christie got promoted sooner than she otherwise would have been.

A great Christmas spectacle was brought out the next season, and Christie had a good part in it. When that was over she thought there was no hope for her, as the regular company was full and a different sort of performance was to begin. But just then her chance came, and she "grabbed it." The first soubrette died suddenly, and in the emergency Mr. Sharp offered the place to Christie till he could fill it to his mind. Lucy was second soubrette, and had hoped for this promotion; but Lucy did not sing well. Christie had a good voice, had taken lessons and much improved of late, so she had the preference and resolved to stand the test so well that this temporary elevation should become permanent.

She did her best, and though many of the parts were distasteful to her she got through them successfully, while now and then she had one which she thoroughly enjoyed. Her Tilly Slowboy was a hit, and a proud girl was Christie when Kent, the comedian, congratulated her on it, and told her he had seldom seen it better done.

To find favor in Kent's eyes was an honor indeed, for he belonged to the old school, and rarely condescended to praise modern actors. His own style was so admirable that he was justly considered the first comedian in the country, and was the pride and mainstay of the old theatre where he had played for years. Of course he possessed much influence in that little world, and being a kindly man used it generously to help up any young aspirant who seemed to him deserving.

He had observed Christie, attracted by her intelligent face and modest manners, for in spite of her youth there was a native refinement about her that made it impossible for her to romp and flirt as some of her mates did. But till she played Tilly he had not thought she possessed any talent. That pleased him, and seeing how much she valued his praise, and was flattered by his notice, he gave her the wise but unpalatable advice always offered young actors. Finding that she accepted it, was willing to study hard, work faithfully, and wait patiently, he predicted that in time she would make a clever actress, never a great one.

Of course Christie thought he was mistaken, and secretly resolved to prove him a false prophet by the triumphs of her career. But she meekly bowed to his opinion; this docility pleased him, and he took a paternal sort of interest in her, which, coming from the powerful favorite, did her good service with the higher powers, and helped her on more rapidly than years of meritorious effort.

Toward the end of that second season several of Dickens’s dramatized novels were played, and Christie earned fresh laurels. She loved those books, and seemed by instinct to understand and personate the humor and pathos of many of those grotesque creations. Believing she had little beauty to sacrifice, she dressed such parts to the life, and played them with a spirit and ease that surprised those who had considered her a dignified and rather dull young person.

“I’ll tell you what it is, Sharp, that girl is going to make a capital character actress. When her parts suit, she forgets herself entirely and does admirably well. Her Miggs was nearly the death of me to-night. She’s got that one gift, and it’s a good one. You ‘d better give her a chance, for I think she’ll be a credit to the old concern.”

Kent said that, — Christie heard it, and flew to Lucy, waving Miggs’s cap for joy as she told the news.

“What did Mr. Sharp say?” asked Lucy, turning round with her face half “made up.”

“He merely said ‘Hum,’ and smiled. Wasn’t that a good sign?” said
Christie, anxiously.

“Can’t say,” and Lucy touched up her eyebrows as if she took no interest in the affair.

Christie’s face fell, and her heart sunk at the thought of failure; but she kept up her spirits by working harder than ever, and soon had her reward. Mr. Sharp’s “Hum” did mean yes, and the next season she was regularly engaged, with a salary of thirty dollars a week.

It was a grand step, and knowing that she owed it to Kent, Christie did her utmost to show that she deserved his good opinion. New trials and temptations beset her now, but hard work and an innocent nature kept her safe and busy. Obstacles only spurred her on to redoubled exertion, and whether she did well or ill, was praised or blamed, she found a never-failing excitement in her attempts to reach the standard of perfection she had set up for herself. Kent did not regret his patronage. Mr. Sharp was satisfied with the success of the experiment, and Christie soon became a favorite in a small way, because behind the actress the public always saw a woman who never “forgot the modesty of nature.”

But as she grew prosperous in outward things, Christie found herself burdened with a private cross that tried her very much. Lucy was no longer her friend; something had come between them, and a steadily increasing coldness took the place of the confidence and affection which had once existed. Lucy was jealous for Christie had passed her in the race. She knew she could not fill the place

Christie had gained by favor, and now held by her own exertions, still she was bitterly envious, though ashamed to own it.

Christie tried to be just and gentle, to prove her gratitude to her first friend, and to show that her heart was unchanged. But she failed to win Lucy back and felt herself injured by such unjust resentment. Mrs. Black took her daughter's part, and though they preserved the peace outwardly the old friendliness was quite gone.

Hoping to forget this trouble in excitement Christie gave herself entirely to her profession, finding in it a satisfaction which for a time consoled her.

But gradually she underwent the sorrowful change which comes to strong natures when they wrong themselves through ignorance or wilfulness.

Pride and native integrity kept her from the worst temptations of such a life, but to the lesser ones she yielded, growing selfish, frivolous, and vain, — intent on her own advancement, and careless by what means she reached it. She had no thought now beyond her art, no desire beyond the commendation of those whose opinion was serviceable, no care for any one but herself.

Her love of admiration grew by what it fed on, till the sound of applause became the sweetest music to her ear. She rose with this hope, lay down with this satisfaction, and month after month passed in this feverish life, with no wish to change it, but a growing appetite for its unsatisfactory delights, an ever-increasing forgetfulness of any higher aspiration than dramatic fame.

"Give me joy, Lucy, I'm to have a benefit next week! Everybody else has had one, and I've played for them all, so no one seemed to begrudge me my turn when dear old Kent proposed it," said Christie, coming in one night still flushed and excited with the good news.

"What shall you have?" asked Lucy, trying to look pleased, and failing decidedly.

"'Masks and Faces.' I've always wanted to play Peg. and it has good parts for you and Kent, and St. George I chose it for that reason, for I shall need all the help I can get to pull me through, I dare say."

The smile vanished entirely at this speech, and Christie was suddenly seized with a suspicion that Lucy was not only jealous of her as an actress, but as a woman. St. George was a comely young actor who usually played lovers' parts with Christie, and played them very well, too, being possessed of much talent, and a gentleman. They had never thought of falling in love with each other, though St. George wooed and won Christie night after night in vaudeville and farce. But it was very easy to imagine that so much mock passion had a basis of truth, and Lucy evidently tormented herself with this belief.

"Why didn't you choose Juliet: St. George would do Romeo so well?" said

Lucy, with a sneer.

“No, that is beyond me. Kent says Shakespeare will never be my line, and I believe him. I should think you’d be satisfied with ‘Masks and Faces,’ for you know Mabel gets her husband safely back in the end,” answered Christie, watching the effect of her words.

“As if I wanted the man! No, thank you, other people’s leavings won’t suit me,” cried Lucy, tossing her head, though her face belied her words.

“Not even though he has ‘heavenly eyes,’ ‘distracting legs,’ and ‘a melting voice?’“ asked Christie maliciously, quoting Lucy’s own rapturous speeches when the new actor came.

“Come, come, girls, don’t quarrel. I won’t ‘ave it in me room.
Lucy’s tired to death, and it’s not nice of you, Kitty, to come and
crow over her this way,” said Mamma Black, coming to the rescue, for
Lucy was in tears, and Christie looking dangerous.

“It’s impossible to please you, so I’ll say good-night,” and Christie went to her room with resentment burning hotly in her heart.

As she crossed the chamber her eye fell on her own figure reflected in the long glass, and with a sudden impulse she tinned up the gas, wiped the rouge from her cheeks, pushed back her hair, and studied her own face intently for several moments. It was pale and jaded now, and all its freshness seemed gone; hard lines had come about the mouth, a feverish disquiet filled the eyes, and on the forehead seemed to lie the shadow of a discontent that saddened the whole face. If one could believe the testimony of that countenance things were not going well with Christie, and she owned it with a regretful sigh, as she asked herself, “Am I what I hoped I should be? No, and it is my fault. If three years of this life have made me this, what shall I be in ten? A fine actress perhaps, but how good a woman?”

With gloomy eyes fixed on her altered face she stood a moment struggling with herself. Then the hard look returned, and she spoke out defiantly, as if in answer to some warning voice within herself. “No one cares what I am, so why care myself? Why not go on and get as much fame as I can? Success gives me power if it cannot give me happiness, and I must have some reward for my hard work. Yes! a gay life and a short one, then out with the lights and down with the curtain!”

But in spite of her reckless words Christie sobbed herself to sleep that night like a child who knows it is astray, yet cannot see the right path or hear its mother’s voice calling it home.

On the night of the benefit, Lucy was in a most exasperating mood, Christie in a very indignant one, and as they entered their dressing-room they looked as if they might have played the Rival Queens with great effect. Lucy offered no help and Christie asked none, but putting her vexation resolutely out of sight fixed her mind on the task before her.

As the pleasant stir began all about her, actress-like, she felt her spirits rise, her courage increase with every curl she fastened up, every gay garment she put on, and soon smiled approvingly at herself, for excitement lent her cheeks a better color than rouge, her eyes shone with satisfaction, and her heart beat high with the resolve to make a hit or die.

Christie needed encouragement that night, and found it in the hearty welcome that greeted her, and the full house, which proved how kind a regard was entertained for her by many who knew her only by a fictitious name. She felt this deeply, and it helped her much, for she was vexed with many trials those before the footlights knew nothing of.

The other players were full of kindly interest in her success, but Lucy took a naughty satisfaction in harassing her by all the small slights and unanswerable provocations which one actress has it in her power to inflict upon another.

Christie was fretted almost beyond endurance, and retaliated by an ominous frown when her position allowed, threatening asides when a moment's by-play favored their delivery, and angry protests whenever she met Lucy off the stage.

But in spite of all annoyances she had never played better in her life. She liked the part, and acted the warm-hearted, quick-witted, sharp-tongued Peg with a spirit and grace that surprised even those who knew her best. Especially good was she in the scenes with Triplet, for Kent played the part admirably, and cheered her on with many an encouraging look and word. Anxious to do honor to her patron and friend she threw her whole heart into the work; in the scene where she comes like a good angel to the home of the poor play-wright, she brought tears to the eyes of her audience; and when at her command Triplet strikes up a jig to amuse the children she "covered the buckle" in gallant style, dancing with all the frolicsome abandon of the Irish orange-girl who for a moment forgot her grandeur and her grief.

That scene was her best, for it is full of those touches of nature that need very little art to make them effective; and when a great bouquet fell with a thump at Christie's feet, as she paused to bow her thanks for an encore, she felt that she had reached the height of earthly bliss.

In the studio scene Lucy seemed suddenly gifted with unsuspected skill; for when Mabel kneels to the picture, praying her rival to give her back her husband's heart, Christie was amazed to see real tears roll down Lucy's cheeks, and to hear real love and longing thrill her trembling words with sudden power and passion.

"That is not acting. She does love St. George, and thinks I mean to keep him from her. Poor dear! I'll tell her all about it to-night, and set her heart at rest," thought Christie; and when Peg left the frame, her face expressed the genuine pity that she felt, and her voice was beautifully tender as she promised to restore the stolen treasure.

Lucy felt comforted without knowing why, and the piece went smoothly on to its last scene. Peg was just relinquishing the repentant husband to his forgiving wife with those brave words of hers, when a rending sound above their heads made all look up and start back; all but Lucy, who stood bewildered. Christie's quick eye saw the impending danger, and with a sudden spring she caught her friend from it. It was only a second's work, but it cost her much; for in the act, down crashed one of the mechanical contrivances used in a late spectacle, and in its fall stretched Christie stunned and senseless on the stage.

A swift uprising filled the house with tumult; a crowd of actors hurried forward, and the panic-stricken audience caught glimpses of poor Peg lying mute and pallid in Mabel's arms, while Vane wrung his hands, and Triplet audibly demanded, "Why the devil somebody didn't go for a doctor?"

Then a brilliant view of Mount Parnassus, with Apollo and the Nine Muses in full blast, shut the scene from sight, and soon Mr. Sharp appeared to ask their patience till the after-piece was ready, for Miss Douglas was too much injured to appear again. And with an unwonted expression of feeling, the little man alluded to "the generous act which perhaps had changed the comedy to a tragedy and robbed the beneficiary of her well-earned reward at their hands."

All had seen the impulsive spring toward, not from, the danger, and this unpremeditated action won heartier applause than Christie ever had received for her best rendering of more heroic deeds.

But she did not hear the cordial round they gave her. She had said she would "make a hit or die;" and just then it seemed as if she had done both, for she was deaf and blind to the admiration and the sympathy bestowed upon her as the curtain fell on the first, last benefit she ever was to have.

CHAPTER IV.

GOVERNESS.

MR. PHILIP FLETCHER.

DURING the next few weeks Christie learned the worth of many things which she had valued very lightly until then. Health became a boon too precious to be trifled with; life assumed a deeper significance when death's shadow fell upon its light, and she discovered that dependence might be made endurable by the sympathy of unsuspected friends.

Lucy waited upon her with a remorseful devotion which touched her very much and won entire forgiveness for the past, long before it was repentantly implored. All her comrades came with offers of help and affectionate regrets. Several whom she had most disliked now earned her gratitude by the kindly thoughtfulness which filled her sick-room with fruit and flowers, supplied carriages for the convalescent, and paid her doctor's bill without her knowledge.

Thus Christie learned, like many another needy member of the gay profession, that though often extravagant and jovial in their way of life, these men and women give as freely as they spend, wear warm, true hearts under their motley, and make misfortune only another link in the bond of good-fellowship which binds them loyally together.

Slowly Christie gathered her energies after weeks of suffering, and took up her life again, grateful for the gift, and anxious to be more worthy of it. Looking back upon the past she felt that she had made a mistake and lost more than she had gained in those three years. Others might lead that life of alternate excitement and hard work unharmed, but she could not. The very ardor and insight which gave power to the actress made that mimic life unsatisfactory to the woman, for hers was an earnest nature that took fast hold of whatever task she gave herself to do, and lived in it heartily while duty made it right, or novelty lent it charms. But when she saw the error of a step, the emptiness of a belief, with a like earnestness she tried to retrieve the one and to replace the other with a better substitute.

In the silence of wakeful nights and the solitude of quiet days, she took counsel with her better self, condemned the reckless spirit which had possessed her, and came at last to the decision which conscience prompted and much thought confirmed.

"The stage is not the place for me," she said. "I have no genius to glorify the drudgery, keep me from temptation, and repay me for any sacrifice I make. Other women can lead this life safely and happily: I cannot, and I must not go back to it, because, with all my past experience, and in spite of all my present good resolutions, I should do no better, and I might do worse. I'm not wise enough to keep steady there; I must return to the old ways, dull but safe, and plod along till I find my real place and work."

Great was the surprise of Lucy and her mother when Christie told her resolution, adding, in a whisper, to the girl, "I leave the field clear for you, dear, and will dance at your wedding with all my heart when St. George asks you to play the 'Honeymoon' with him, as I'm sure he will before long."

Many entreaties from friends, as well as secret longings, tried and tempted Christie sorely, but she withstood them all, carried her point, and renounced the profession she could not follow without self-injury and self-reproach. The season was nearly over when she was well enough to take her place again, but she refused to return, relinquished her salary, sold her wardrobe, and never crossed the threshold of the theatre after she had said good-bye.

Then she asked, "What next?" and was speedily answered. An advertisement for a governess met her eye, which seemed to combine the two things she most needed just then, — employment and change of air.

"Mind you don't mention that you've been an actress or it will be all up with you, me dear," said Mrs. Black, as Christie prepared to investigate the matter, for since her last effort in that line she had increased her knowledge of music, and learned French enough to venture teaching it to very young pupils.

"I'd rather tell in the beginning, for if you keep any thing back it's sure to pop out when you least expect or want it. I don't believe these people will care as long as I'm respectable and teach well," returned Christie, wishing she looked stronger and rosier.

"You'll be sorry if you do tell," warned Mrs. Black, who knew the ways of the world.

"I shall be sorry if I don't," laughed Christie, and so she was, in the end.

"L. N. Saltonstall" was the name on the door, and L. N. Saltonstall's servant was so leisurely about answering Christie's meek solo on the bell, that she had time to pull out her bonnet-strings half-a-dozen times before a very black man in a very white jacket condescended to conduct her to his mistress.

A frail, tea-colored lady appeared, displaying such a small proportion of woman to such a large proportion of purple and fine linen, that she looked as if she was literally as well as figuratively "dressed to death."

Christie went to the point in a business-like manner that seemed to suit Mrs. Saltonstall, because it saved so much trouble, and she replied, with a languid affability:

"I wish some one to teach the children a little, for they are getting too old to be left entirely to nurse. I am anxious to get to the sea-shore as soon as possible, for they have been poorly all winter, and my own health has suffered. Do you feel inclined to try the place? And what compensation do you require?"

Christie had but a vague idea of what wages were usually paid to nursery governesses, and hesitatingly named a sum which seemed reasonable to her, but was so much less than any other applicant had asked, that Mrs. Saltonstall began to think she could not do better than secure this cheap young person, who looked firm enough to manage her rebellious son and heir, and well-bred enough to begin the education of a little fine lady. Her winter had been an extravagant one, and she could economize in the governess better perhaps than elsewhere; so she decided to try Christie, and get out of town at once.

"Your terms are quite satisfactory, Miss Devon, and if my brother approves, I think we will consider the matter settled. Perhaps you would like to see the children? They are little darlings, and you will soon be fond of them, I am sure."

A bell was rung, an order given, and presently appeared an eight-year old boy, so excessively Scotch in his costume that he looked like an animated checkerboard; and a little girl, who presented the appearance of a miniature opera-dancer staggering under the weight of an immense sash.

"Go and speak prettily to Miss Devon, my pets, for she is coming to play with you, and you must mind what she says," commanded mamma.

The pale, fretful-looking little pair went solemnly to Christie's knee, and stood there staring at her with a dull composure that quite daunted her, it was so sadly unchildlike.

"What is your name, dear?" she asked, laying her hand on the young lady's head.

"Villamena Temmatina Taltentall. You mustn't touch my hair; it's just turled," was the somewhat embarrassing reply.

"Mine's Louy 'Poleon Thaltensthall, like papa's," volunteered the other young person, and Christie privately wondered if the possession of names nearly as long as themselves was not a burden to the poor dears.

Feeling that she must say something, she asked, in her most persuasive tone:

"Would you like to have me come and teach you some nice lessons out of your little books?"

If she had proposed corporal punishment on the spot it could not have caused greater dismay. Wilhelmina cast herself upon the floor passionately, declaring that she "touldn't tuddy," and Saltonstall, Jr., retreated precipitately to the door, and from that refuge defied the whole race of governesses and "nasty lessons" jointly.

"There, run away to Justine. They are sadly out of sorts, and quite pining for sea-air," said mamma, with both hands at her ears, for the war-cries of her darlings were piercing as they departed, proclaiming their wrongs while swarming up stairs, with a skirmish on each landing.

With a few more words Christie took leave, and scandalized the sable retainer by smiling all through the hall, and laughing audibly as the door closed. The contrast of the plaid boy and beruffled girl's irritability with their mother's languid affectation, and her own unfortunate efforts, was too much for her. In the middle of her merriment she paused suddenly, saying to herself:

"I never told about my acting. I must go back and have it settled."

She retraced a few steps, then turned and went on again, thinking,

"No; for once I'll be guided by other people's advice, and let well alone."

A note arrived soon after, bidding Miss Devon consider herself engaged, and desiring her to join the family at the boat on Monday next.

At the appointed time Christie was on board, and looked about for her party. Mrs. Saltonstall appeared in the distance with her family about her, and Christie took a survey before reporting herself. Madame looked more like a fashion-plate than ever, in a mass of green flounces, and an impressive bonnet flushed with poppies and bristling with wheat-ears. Beside her sat a gentleman, rapt in a newspaper, of course, for to an American man life is a burden till the daily news have been absorbed. Mrs. Saltonstall's brother was the possessor of a handsome eye without softness, thin lips without benevolence, but plenty of will; a face and figure which some thirty-five years of ease and pleasure had done their best to polish and spoil, and a costume without flaw, from his aristocratic boots to the summer hat on his head.

The little boy more checkered and the little girl more operatic than before, sat on stools eating bonbons, while a French maid and the African footman hovered in the background.

MRS. SALTONSTALL AND FAMILY.

Feeling very much like a meek gray moth among a flock of butterflies, Christie modestly presented herself.

"Good morning," said Madame with a nod, which, slight as it was, caused a great commotion among the poppies and the wheat; "I began to be anxious about you. Miss Devon, my brother, Mr. Fletcher."

The gentleman bowed, and as Christie sat down he got up, saying, as he sauntered away with a bored expression:

"Will you have the paper, Charlotte? There's nothing in it."

As Mrs. Saltonstall seemed going to sleep and she felt delicate about addressing the irritable infants in public, Christie amused herself by watching Mr. Fletcher as he roamed listlessly about, and deciding, in her usual rash way, that she did not like him because he looked both lazy and cross, and ennui was evidently his bosom friend. Soon, however, she forgot every thing but the shimmer of the sunshine on the sea, the fresh wind that brought color to her pale cheeks, and the happy thoughts that left a smile upon her lips. Then Mr. Fletcher put up his glass and stared at her, shook his head, and said, as he lit a cigar:

"Poor little wretch, what a time she will have of it between

Charlotte and the brats!"

But Christie needed no pity, and thought herself a fortunate young woman when fairly established in her corner of the luxurious apartments occupied by the family. Her duties seemed light compared to those she had left, her dreams were almost as bright as of old, and the new life looked pleasant to her, for she was one of those who could find little bits of happiness for herself and enjoy them heartily in spite of loneliness or neglect.

One of her amusements was studying her companions, and for a time this occupied her, for Christie possessed penetration and a feminine fancy for finding out people.

Mrs. Saltonstall's mission appeared to be the illustration of each new fashion as it came, and she performed it with a devotion worthy of a better cause. If a color reigned supreme she flushed herself with scarlet or faded into primrose, made herself pretty in the bluest of blue gowns, or turned livid under a gooseberry colored bonnet. Her hat-brims went up or down, were preposterously wide or dwindled to an inch, as the mode demanded. Her skirts were rampant with sixteen frills, or picturesque with landscapes down each side, and a Greek border or a plain hem. Her waists were as pointed as those of Queen Bess or as short as Diana's; and it was the opinion of those who knew her that if the autocrat who ruled her life decreed the wearing of black cats as well as of vegetables, bugs, and birds, the blackest, glossiest Puss procurable for money would have adorned her head in some way.

Her time was spent in dressing, driving, dining and dancing; in skimming novels, and embroidering muslin; going to church with a velvet prayer-book and a new bonnet; and writing to her husband when she wanted money, for she had a husband somewhere abroad, who so happily combined business with pleasure that he never found time to come home. Her children were inconvenient blessings, but she loved them with the love of a shallow heart, and took such good care of their little bodies that there was none left for their little souls. A few days' trial satisfied her as to Christie's capabilities, and, relieved of that anxiety, she gave herself up to her social duties, leaving the ocean and the governess to make the summer wholesome and agreeable to “the darlings.”

Mr. Fletcher, having tried all sorts of pleasure and found that, like his newspaper, there was “nothing in it,” was now paying the penalty for that unsatisfactory knowledge. Ill health soured his temper and made his life a burden to him. Having few resources within himself to fall back upon, he was very dependent upon other people, and other people were so busy amusing themselves, they seemed to find little time or inclination to amuse a man who had never troubled himself about them. He was rich, but while his money could hire a servant to supply each want, gratify each caprice, it could not buy a tender, faithful friend to serve for love, and ask no wages but his comfort.

He knew this, and felt the vain regret that inevitably comes to those who waste life and learn the value of good gifts by their loss. But he was not wise or brave enough to bear his punishment manfully, and lay the lesson honestly to heart. Fretful and imperious when in pain, listless and selfish when at ease, his one aim in life now was to kill time, and any thing that aided him in this was most gratefully welcomed.

For a long while he took no more notice of Christie than if she had been a shadow, seldom speaking beyond the necessary salutations, and merely carrying his finger to his hat-brim when he passed her on the beach with the children. Her first dislike was softened by pity when she found he was an invalid, but she troubled herself very little about him, and made no romances with him, for all her dreams were of younger, nobler lovers.

Busied with her own affairs, the days though monotonous were not unhappy. She prospered in her work and the children soon believed in her as devoutly as young Turks in their Prophet. She devised amusements for herself as well as for them; walked, bathed, drove, and romped with the little people till her own eyes shone like theirs, her cheek grew rosy, and her thin figure rounded with the promise of vigorous health again.

Christie was at her best that summer, physically speaking, for sickness had refined her face, giving it that indescribable expression which pain often leaves upon a countenance as if in compensation for the bloom it takes away. The frank eyes had a softer shadow in their depths, the firm lips smiled less often, but when it came the smile was the sweeter for the gravity that went before, and in her voice there was a new undertone of that subtle music, called sympathy, which steals into the heart and nestles there.

She was unconscious of this gracious change, but others saw and felt it, and to some a face bright with health, intelligence, and modesty was more attractive than mere beauty. Thanks to this and her quiet, cordial manners, she found friends here and there to add charms to that summer by the sea.

The dashing young men took no more notice of her than if she had been a little gray peep on the sands; not so much, for they shot peeps now and then, but a governess was not worth bringing down. The fashionable belles and beauties were not even aware of her existence, being too entirely absorbed in their yearly husband-hunt to think of any one but themselves and their prey. The dowagers had more interesting topics to discuss, and found nothing in Christie's humble fortunes worthy of a thought, for they liked their gossip strong and highly flavored, like their tea.

But a kind-hearted girl or two found her out, several lively old maids, as full of the romance of the past as ancient novels, a bashful boy, three or four invalids, and all the children, for Christie had a motherly heart and could find charms in the plainest, crossest baby that ever squalled.

Of her old friends she saw nothing, as her theatrical ones were off on their vacations, Hepsey had left her place for one in another city, and Aunt Betsey seldom wrote.

But one day a letter came, telling her that the dear old lady would never write again, and Christie felt as if her nearest and dearest friend was lost. She had gone away to a quiet spot among the rocks to get over her first grief alone, but found it very hard to check her tears, as memory brought back the past, tenderly recalling every kind act, every loving word, and familiar scene. She seldom wept, but when any thing did unseal the fountains that lay so deep, she cried with all her heart, and felt the better for it.

With the letter crumpled in her hand, her head on her knees, and her hat at her feet, she was sobbing like a child, when steps startled her, and, looking up, she saw Mr. Fletcher regarding her with an astonished countenance from under his big sun umbrella.

Something in the flushed, wet face, with its tremulous lips and great tears rolling down, seemed to touch even lazy Mr. Fletcher, for he furled his umbrella with unusual rapidity, and came up, saying, anxiously:

"My dear Miss Devon, what's the matter? Are you hurt? Has Mrs. S. been scolding? Or have the children been too much for you?"

"No; oh, no! it's bad news from home," and Christie's head went down again, for a kind word was more than she could bear just then.

"Some one ill, I fancy? I'm sorry to hear it, but you must hope for the best, you know," replied Mr. Fletcher, really quite exerting himself to remember and present this well-worn consolation.

"There is no hope; Aunt Betsey's dead!"

"Dear me! that's very sad."

Mr. Fletcher tried not to smile as Christie sobbed out the old-fashioned name, but a minute afterward there were actually tears in his eyes, for, as if won by his sympathy, she poured out the homely little story of Aunt Betsey's life and love, unconsciously pronouncing the kind old lady's best epitaph in the unaffected grief that made her broken words so eloquent.

For a minute Mr. Fletcher forgot himself, and felt as he remembered feeling long ago, when, a warm-hearted boy, he had comforted his little sister for a lost kitten or a broken doll. It was a new sensation, therefore interesting and agreeable while it lasted, and when it vanished, which it speedily did, he sighed, then shrugged his shoulders and wished "the girl would stop crying like a water-spout."

"It's hard, but we all have to bear it, you know; and sometimes I fancy if half the pity we give the dead, who don't need it, was given to the living, who do, they'd bear their troubles more comfortably. I know I should," added Mr. Fletcher, returning to his own afflictions, and vaguely wondering if any one would cry like that when he departed this life.

Christie minded little what he said, for his voice was pitiful and it comforted her. She dried her tears, put back her hair, and thanked him with a grateful smile, which gave him another pleasant sensation; for, though young ladies showered smiles upon him with midsummer radiance, they seemed cool and pale beside the sweet sincerity of this one given by a girl whose eyes were red with tender tears.

"That's right, cheer up, take a little run on the beach, and forget all about it," he said, with a heartiness that surprised himself as much as it did Christie.

"I will, thank you. Please don't speak of this; I'm used to bearing my troubles alone, and time will help me to do it cheerfully."

"That's brave! If I can do any thing, let me know; I shall be most happy." And Mr. Fletcher evidently meant what he said.

Christie gave him another grateful "Thank you," then picked up her hat and went away along the sands to try his prescription; while Mr. Fletcher walked the other way, so rapt in thought that he forgot to put up his umbrella till the end of his aristocratic nose was burnt a deep red.

That was the beginning of it; for when Mr. Fletcher found a new amusement, he usually pursued it regardless of consequences. Christie took his pity for what it was worth, and thought no more of that little interview, for her heart was very heavy. But he remembered it, and, when they met on the beach next day, wondered how the governess would behave. She was reading as she walked, and, with a mute acknowledgment of his nod, tranquilly turned a page and read on without a pause, a smile, or change of color.

Mr. Fletcher laughed as he strolled away; but Christie was all the more amusing for her want of coquetry, and soon after he tried her again. The great hotel was all astir one evening with bustle, light, and music; for the young people had a hop, as an appropriate entertainment for a melting July night. With no taste for such folly, even if health had not forbidden it, Mr. Fletcher lounged about the piazzas, tantalizing the fair fowlers who spread their nets for him, and goading sundry desperate spinsters to despair by his erratic movements. Coming to a quiet nook, where a long window gave a fine view of the brilliant scene, he found Christie leaning in, with a bright, wistful face, while her hand kept time to the enchanting music of a waltz.

"Wisely watching the lunatics, instead of joining in their antics," he said, sitting down with a sigh.

Christie looked around and answered, with the wistful look still in her eyes:

"I'm very fond of that sort of insanity; but there is no place for me in Bedlam at present."

"I daresay I can find you one, if you care to try it. I don't indulge myself." And Mr. Fletcher's eye went from the rose in Christie's brown hair to the silvery folds of her best gown, put on merely for the pleasure of wearing it because every one else was in festival array.

She shook her head. "No, thank you. Governesses are very kindly treated in America; but ball-rooms like that are not for them. I enjoy looking on, fortunately; so I have my share of fun after all."

"I shan't get any complaints out of her. Plucky little soul! I rather like that," said Mr. Fletcher to himself; and, finding his seat comfortable, the corner cool, and his companion pleasant to look at, with the moonlight doing its best for her, he went on talking for his own satisfaction.

Christie would rather have been left in peace; but fancying that he did it out of kindness to her, and that she had done him injustice before, she was grateful now, and exerted herself to seem so; in which endeavor she succeeded so well that Mr. Fletcher proved he could be a very agreeable companion when he chose. He talked well; and Christie was a good listener. Soon interest conquered her reserve, and she ventured to ask a question, make a criticism, or express an opinion in her own simple way. Unconsciously she piqued the curiosity of the man; for, though he knew many lovely, wise, and witty women, he had never chanced to meet with one like this before; and novelty was the desire of his life. Of course he did not find moonlight, music, and agreeable chat as delightful as she did; but there was something animating in the fresh face opposite, something flattering in the eager interest she showed, and something most attractive in the glimpses unconsciously given him of a nature genuine in its womanly sincerity and strength. Something about this girl seemed to appeal to the old self, so long neglected that he thought it dead. He could not analyze the feeling, but was conscious of a desire to seem better than he was as he looked into those honest eyes; to talk well, that he might bring that frank smile to the lips that grew either sad or scornful when he tried worldly gossip or bitter satire; and to prove himself a man under all the elegance and polish of the gentleman.

He was discovering then, what Christie learned when her turn came, that fine natures seldom fail to draw out the finer traits of those who approach them, as the little witch-hazel wand, even in the hand of a child, detects and points to hidden springs in unsuspected spots. Women often possess this gift, and when used worthily find it as powerful as beauty; for, if less alluring, it is more lasting and more helpful, since it appeals, not to the senses, but the souls of men.

Christie was one of these; and in proportion as her own nature was sound and sweet so was its power as a touchstone for the genuineness of others. It was this unconscious gift that made her wonder at the unexpected kindness she found in Mr. Fletcher, and this which made him, for an hour or two at least, heartily wish he could live his life over again and do it better.

After that evening Mr. Fletcher spoke to Christie when he met her, turned and joined her sometimes as she walked with the children, and fell into the way of lounging near when she sat reading aloud to an invalid friend on piazza or sea-shore. Christie much preferred to have no auditor but kind Miss Tudor; but finding the old lady enjoyed his chat she resigned herself, and when he brought them new books as well as himself, she became quite cordial.

Everybody sauntered and lounged, so no one minded the little group that met day after day among the rocks. Christie read aloud, while the children revelled in sand, shells, and puddles; Miss Tudor spun endless webs of gay silk and wool; and Mr. Fletcher, with his hat over his eyes, lay sunning himself like a luxurious lizard, as he watched the face that grew daily fairer in his sight, and listened to the pleasant voice that went reading on till all his ills and ennui seemed lulled to sleep as by a spell.

A week or two of this new caprice set Christie to thinking. She knew that Uncle Philip was not fond of “the darlings;” it was evident that good Miss Tudor, with her mild twaddle and eternal knitting, was not the attraction, so she was forced to believe that he came for her sake alone. She laughed at herself for this fancy at first; but not possessing the sweet unconsciousness of those heroines who can live through three volumes with a burning passion before their eyes, and never see it till the proper moment comes, and Eugene goes down upon his knees, she soon felt sure that Mr. Pletcher found her society agreeable, and wished her to know it.

Being a mortal woman, her vanity was flattered, and she found herself showing that she liked it by those small signs and symbols which lovers' eyes are so quick to see and understand, — an artful bow on her hat, a flower in her belt, fresh muslin gowns, and the most becoming arrangement of her hair.

"Poor man, he has so few pleasures I'm sure I needn't grudge him such a small one as looking at and listening to me if he likes it," she said to herself one day, as she was preparing for her daily stroll with unusual care. "But how will it end? If he only wants a mild flirtation he is welcome to it; but if he really cares for me, I must make up my mind about it, and not deceive him. I don't believe he loves me: how can he? such an insignificant creature as I am."

Here she looked in the glass, and as she looked the color deepened in her cheek, her eyes shone, and a smile would sit upon her lips, for the reflection showed her a very winning face under the coquettish hat put on to captivate.

"Don't be foolish, Christie! Mind what you do, and be sure vanity doesn't delude you, for you are only a woman, and in tilings of this sort we are so blind and silly. I'll think of this possibility soberly, but I won't flirt, and then which ever way I decide I shall have nothing to reproach myself with."

Armed with this virtuous resolution, Christie sternly replaced the pretty hat with her old brown one, fastened up a becoming curl, which of late she had worn behind her ear, and put on a pair of stout, rusty boots, much fitter for rocks and sand than the smart slippers she was preparing to sacrifice. Then she trudged away to Miss Tudor, bent on being very quiet and reserved, as became a meek and lowly governess.

But, dear heart, how feeble are the resolutions of womankind! When she found herself sitting in her favorite nook, with the wide, blue sea glittering below, the fresh wind making her blood dance in her veins, and all the earth and sky so full of summer life and loveliness, her heart would sing for joy, her face would shine with the mere bliss of living, and underneath all this natural content the new thought, half confessed, yet very sweet, would whisper, "Somebody cares for me."

If she had doubted it, the expression of Mr. Fletcher's face that morning would have dispelled the doubt, for, as she read, he was saying to himself: "Yes, this healthful, cheery, helpful creature is what I want to make life pleasant. Every thing else is used up; why not try this, and make the most of my last chance? She does me good, and I don't seem to get tired of her. I can't have a long life, they tell me, nor an easy one, with the devil to pay with my vitals generally; so it would be a wise thing to provide myself with a good-tempered, faithful soul to take care of me. My fortune would pay for loss of time, and my death leave her a bonny widow. I won't be rash, but I think I'll try it," With this mixture of tender, selfish, and regretful thoughts in his mind, it is no wonder Mr. Fletchcr's eyes betrayed him, as he lay looking at Christie. Never had she read so badly, for she could not keep her mind on her book. It would wander to that new and troublesome fancy of hers; she could not help thinking that Mr. Fletcher must have been a handsome man before he was so ill; wondering if his temper was very bad, and fancying that he might prove both generous and kind and true to one who loved and served him well. At this point she was suddenly checked by a slip of the tongue that covered her with confusion.

She was reading "John Halifax," and instead of saying "Phineas Fletcher" she said Philip, and then colored to her forehead, and lost her place. Miss Tudor did not mind it, but Mr. Fletcher laughed, and Christie thanked Heaven that her face was half hidden by the old brown hat.

Nothing was said, but she was much relieved to find that Mr. Fletcher had joined a yachting party next day and he would be away for a week. During that week Christie thought over the matter, and fancied she had made up her mind. She recalled certain speeches she had heard, and which had more weight with her than she suspected. One dowager had said to another: "P. F. intends to marry, I assure you, for his sister told me so, with tears in her eyes. Men who have been gay in their youth make very good husbands when their wild oats are sowed. Clara could not do better, and I should be quite content to give her to him."

"Well, dear, I should be sorry to see my Augusta his wife, for whoever he marries will be a perfect slave to him. His fortune would be a nice thing if he did not live long; but even for that my Augusta shall not be sacrificed," returned the other matron whose Augusta had vainly tried to captivate "P. F.," and revenged herself by calling him "a wreck, my dear, a perfect wreck."

At another time Christie heard some girls discussing the eligibility of several gentlemen, and Mr. Fletcher was considered the best match among; them.

"You can do any thing you like with a husband a good deal older than yourself. He's happy with his business, his club, and his dinner, and leaves you to do what you please; just keep him comfortable and he'll pay your bills without much fuss," said one young thing who had seen life at twenty.

"I'd take him if I had the chance, just because everybody wants him. Don't admire him a particle, but it will make a jolly stir whenever he does marry, and I wouldn't mind having a hand in it," said the second budding belle.

"I'd take him for the diamonds alone. Mamma says they are splendid, and have been in the family for ages. He won't let Mrs. S. wear them, for they always go to the eldest son's wife. Hope he'll choose a handsome woman who will show them off well," said a third sweet girl, glancing at her own fine neck.

"He won't; he'll take some poky old maid who will cuddle him when he is sick, and keep out of his way when he is well. See if he don't."

"I saw him dawdling round with old Tudor, perhaps he means to take her: she's a capital nurse, got ill herself taking care of her father, you know."

"Perhaps he's after the governess; she's rather nice looking, though she hasn't a bit of style."

"Gracious, no! she's a dowdy thing, always trailing round with a book and those horrid children. No danger of his marrying her." And a derisive laugh seemed to settle that question beyond a doubt.

"Oh, indeed!" said Christie, as the girls went trooping out of the bath-house, where this pleasing chatter had been carried on regardless of listeners. She called them "mercenary, worldly, unwomanly flirts," and felt herself much their superior. Yet the memory of their gossip haunted her, and had its influence upon her decision, though she thought she came to it through her own good judgment and discretion.

"If he really cares for me I will listen, and not refuse till I know him well enough to decide. I'm tired of being alone, and should enjoy ease and pleasure so much. He's going abroad for the winter, and that would be charming. I'll try not to be worldly-minded and marry without love, but it does look tempting to a poor soul like me."

So Christie made up her mind to accept, if this promotion was offered her; and while she waited, went through so many alternations of feeling, and was so harassed by doubts and fears that she sometimes found herself wishing it had never occurred to her.

Mr. Pletcher, meantime, with the help of many meditative cigars, was making up his mind. Absence only proved to him how much he needed a better time-killer than billiards, horses, or newspapers, for the long, listless days seemed endless without the cheerful governess to tone him up, like a new and agreeable sort of bitters. A gradually increasing desire to secure this satisfaction had taken possession of him, and the thought of always having a pleasant companion, with no nerves, nonsense, or affectation about her, was an inviting idea to a man tired of fashionable follies and tormented with the ennui of his own society.

The gossip, wonder, and chagrin such a step would cause rather pleased his fancy; the excitement of trying almost the only thing as yet untried allured him; and deeper than all the desire to forget the past in a better future led him to Christie by the nobler instincts that never wholly die in any soul. He wanted her as he had wanted many other things in his life, and had little doubt that he could have her for the asking. Even if love was not abounding, surely his fortune, which hitherto had procured him all he wished (except health and happiness) could buy him a wife, when his friends made better bargains every day. So, having settled the question, he came home again, and every one said the trip had done him a world of good.

Christie sat in her favorite nook one bright September morning, with the inevitable children hunting hapless crabs in a pool near by. A book lay on her knee, but she was not reading; her eyes were looking far across the blue waste before her with an eager gaze, and her face was bright with some happy thought. The sound of approaching steps disturbed her reverie, and, recognizing them, she plunged into the heart of the story, reading as if utterly absorbed, till a shadow fell athwart the page, and the voice she had expected to hear asked blandly:

"What book now, Miss Devon?"

"'Jane Eyre,' sir."

Mr. Fletcher sat down just where her hat-brim was no screen, pulled off his gloves, and leisurely composed himself for a comfortable lounge.

"What is your opinion of Rochester?" he asked, presently.

"Not a very high one."

"Then you think Jane was a fool to love and try to make a saint of him, I suppose?"

"I like Jane, but never can forgive her marrying that man, as I haven't much faith in the saints such sinners make."

"But don't you think a man who had only follies to regret might expect a good woman to lend him a hand and make him happy?"

"If he has wasted his life he must take the consequences, and be content with pity and indifference, instead of respect and love. Many good women do 'lend a hand,' as you say, and it is quite Christian and amiable, I 've no doubt; but I cannot think it a fair bargain."

Mr. Fletcher liked to make Christie talk, for in the interest of the subject she forgot herself, and her chief charm for him was her earnestness. But just then the earnestness did not seem to suit him, and he said, rather sharply:

"What hard-hearted creatures you women are sometimes! Now, I fancied you were one of those who wouldn't leave a poor fellow to his fate, if his salvation lay in your hands."

"I can't say what I should do in such a case; but it always seemed to me that a man should have energy enough to save himself, and not expect the 'weaker vessel,' as he calls her, to do it for him," answered Christie, with a conscious look, for Mr. Fletcher's face made her feel as if something was going to happen.

Evidently anxious to know what she would do in aforesaid case, Mr. Fletcher decided to put one before her as speedily as possible, so he said, in a pensive tone, and with a wistful glance:

"You looked very happy just now when I came up. I wish I could believe that my return had any thing to do with it."

Christie wished she could control her tell-tale color, but finding she could not, looked hard at the sea, and, ignoring his tender insinuation, said, with suspicious enthusiasm:

"I was thinking of what Mrs. Saltonstall said this morning. She asked me if I would like to go to Paris with her for the winter. It has always been one of my dreams to go abroad, and I do hope I shall not be disappointed."

Christie's blush seemed to be a truer answer than her words, and, leaning a little nearer, Mr. Fletcher said, in his most persuasive tone:

"Will you go to Paris as my governess, instead of Charlotte's?"

Christie thought her reply was all ready; but when the moment came, she found it was not, and sat silent, feeling as if that "Yes" would promise far more than she could give. Mr. Fletcher had no doubt what the answer would be, and was in no haste to get it, for that was one of the moments that are so pleasant and so short-lived they should be enjoyed to the uttermost. He liked to watch her color come and go, to see the asters on her bosom tremble with the quickened beating of her heart, and tasted, in anticipation, the satisfaction of the moment when that pleasant voice of hers would falter out its grateful assent. Drawing yet nearer, he went on, still in the persuasive tone that would have been more lover-like if it had been less assured.

"I think I am not mistaken in believing that you care for me a little. You must know how fond I am of you, how much I need you, and how glad I should be to give all I have if I might keep you always to make my hard life happy. May I, Christie?"

"You would soon tire of me. I have no beauty, no accomplishments, no fortune, — nothing but my heart, and my hand to give the man I marry. Is that enough?" asked Christie, looking at him with eyes that betrayed the hunger of an empty heart longing to be fed with genuine food.

But Mr. Fletcher did not understand its meaning; he saw the humility in her face, thought she was overcome by the weight of the honor he did her, and tried to reassure her with the gracious air of one who wishes to lighten the favor he confers.

"It might not be for some men, but it is for me, because I want you very much. Let people say what they will, if you say yes I am satisfied. You shall not regret it, Christie; I'll do my best to make you happy; you shall travel wherever I can go with you, have what you like, if possible, and when we come back by and by, you shall take your place in the world as my wife. You will fill it well, I fancy, and I shall be a happy man. I've had my own way all my life, and I mean to have it now, so smile, and say, ‘Yes, Philip,’ like a sweet soul, as you are.”

But Christie did not smile, and felt no inclination to say “Yes, Philip,” for that last speech of his jarred on her ear. The tone of unconscious condescension in it wounded the woman’s sensitive pride; self was too apparent, and the most generous words seemed to her like bribes. This was not the lover she had dreamed of, the brave, true man who gave her all, and felt it could not half repay the treasure of her innocent, first love. This was not the happiness she had hoped for, the perfect faith, the glad surrender, the sweet content that made all things possible, and changed this work-a-day world into a heaven while the joy lasted.

She had decided to say “yes,” but her heart said “no” decidedly, and with instinctive loyalty she obeyed it, even while she seemed to yield to the temptation which appeals to three of the strongest foibles in most women’s nature, — vanity, ambition, and the love of pleasure.

“You are very kind, but you may repent it, you know so little of me,” she began, trying to soften her refusal, but sadly hindered by a feeling of contempt.

“I know more about you than you think; but it makes no difference,” interrupted Mr. Fletcher, with a smile that irritated Christie, even before she understood its significance. “I thought it would at first, but I found I couldn’t get on without you, so I made up my mind to forgive and forget that my wife had ever been an actress.”

Christie had forgotten it, and it would have been well for him if he had held his tongue. Now she understood the tone that had chilled her, the smile that angered her, and Mr. Fletcher’s fate was settled in the drawing of a breath.

“Who told you that?” she asked, quickly, while every nerve tingled with the mortification of being found out then and there in the one secret of her life.

“I saw you dancing on the beach with the children one day, and it reminded me of an actress I had once seen. I should not have remembered it but for the accident which impressed it on my mind. Powder, paint, and costume made ‘Miss Douglas’ a very different woman from Miss Devon, but a few cautious inquiries settled the matter, and I then understood where you got that slight soupcon of dash and daring which makes our demure governess so charming when with me.”

As he spoke, Mr. Fletcher smiled again, and kissed his hand to her with a dramatic little gesture that exasperated Christie beyond measure. She would not make light of it, as he did, and submit to be forgiven for a past she was not ashamed of. Heartily wishing she had been frank at first, she resolved to have it out now, and accept nothing Mr. Fletcher offered her, not even silence.

“Yes,” she said, as steadily as she could, “I was an actress for three years, and though it was a hard life it was an honest one, and I’m not ashamed of it. I ought to have told Mrs. Saltonstall, but I was warned that if I did it would be difficult to find a place, people are so prejudiced. I sincerely regret it now, and shall tell her at once, so you may save yourself the trouble."

"My dear girl, I never dreamed of telling any one!" cried Mr. Fletcher in an injured tone. "I beg you won't speak, but trust me, and let it be a little secret between us two. I assure you it makes no difference to me, for I should marry an opera dancer if I chose, so forget it, as I do, and set my mind at rest upon the other point. I'm still waiting for my answer, you know."

"It is ready."

"A kind one, I'm sure. What is it, Christie?"

"No, I thank you."

"But you are not in earnest?"

"Perfectly so."

Mr. Fletcher got up suddenly and set his back against the rock, saying in a tone of such unaffected surprise and disappointment that her heart reproached her:

"NO, I THANK YOU."

"Am I to understand that as your final answer, Miss Devon?"

"Distinctly and decidedly my final answer, Mr, Pletcher."

Christie tried to speak kindly, but she was angry with herself and him, and unconsciously showed it both in face and voice, for she was no actress off the stage, and wanted to be very true just then as a late atonement for that earlier want of candor.

A quick change passed over Mr. Fletcher's face; his cold eyes kindled with an angry spark, his lips were pale with anger, and his voice was very bitter, as he slowly said:

"I've made many blunders in my life, and this is one of the greatest; for I believed in a woman, was fool enough to care for her with the sincerest love I ever knew, and fancied that she would be grateful for the sacrifice I made."

He got no further, for Christie rose straight up and answered him with all the indignation she felt burning in her face and stirring the voice she tried in vain to keep as steady as his own.

"The sacrifice would not have been all yours, for it is what we are, not what we have, that makes one human being superior to another. I am as well-born as you in spite of my poverty; my life, I think, has been a better one than yours; my heart, I know, is fresher, and my memory has fewer faults and follies to reproach me with. What can you give me but money and position in return for the youth and freedom I should sacrifice in marrying you? Not love, for you count the cost of your bargain, as no true lover could, and you reproach me for deceit when in your heart you know you only cared for me because I can amuse and serve you. I too deceived myself, I too see my mistake, and I decline the honor you would do me, since it is so great in your eyes that you must remind me of it as you offer it."

In the excitement of the moment Christie unconsciously spoke with something of her old dramatic fervor in voice and gesture; Mr. Fletcher saw it, and, while he never had admired her so much, could not resist avenging himself for the words that angered him, the more deeply for their truth. Wounded vanity and baffled will can make an ungenerous man as spiteful as a woman; and Mr. Fletcher proved it then, for he saw where Christie's pride was sorest, and touched the wound with the skill of a resentful nature.

As she paused, he softly clapped his hands, saying, with a smile that made her eyes flash:

"Very well done! infinitely superior to your 'Woffington,' Miss Devon. I am disappointed in the woman, but I make my compliment to the actress, and leave the stage free for another and a more successful Romeo." Still smiling, he bowed and went away apparently quite calm and much amused, but a more wrathful, disappointed man never crossed those sands than the one who kicked his dog and swore at himself for a fool that day when no one saw him.

For a minute Christie stood and watched him, then, feeling that she must either laugh or cry, wisely chose the former vent for her emotions, and sat down feeling inclined to look at the whole scene from a ludicrous point of view.

"My second love affair is a worse failure than my first, for I did pity poor Joe, but this man is detestable, and I never will forgive him that last insult. I dare say I was absurdly tragical, I'm apt to be when very angry, but what a temper he has got! The white, cold kind, that smoulders and stabs, instead of blazing up and being over in a minute. Thank Heaven, I'm not his wife! Well, I've made an enemy and lost my place, for of course Mrs. Saltonstall won't keep me after this awful discovery. I'll tell her at once, for I will have no 'little secrets' with him. No Paris either, and that's the worst of it all! Never mind, I haven't sold my liberty for the Fletcher diamonds, and that's a comfort. Now a short scene with my lady and then exit governess."

But though she laughed, Christie felt troubled at the part she had played in this affair; repented of her worldly aspirations; confessed her vanity; accepted her mortification and disappointment as a just punishment for her sins; and yet at the bottom of her heart she did enjoy it mightily.

She tried to spare Mr. Fletcher in her interview with his sister, and only betrayed her own iniquities. But, to her surprise, Mrs. Saltonstall, though much disturbed at the discovery, valued Christie as a governess, and respected her as a woman, so she was willing to bury the past, she said, and still hoped Miss Devon would remain.

Then Christie was forced to tell her why it was impossible for her to do so; and, in her secret soul, she took a naughty satisfaction in demurely mentioning that she had refused my lord.

Mrs. Saltonstall's consternation was comical, for she had been so absorbed in her own affairs she had suspected nothing; and horror fell upon her when she learned how near dear Philip had been to the fate from which she jealously guarded him, that his property might one day benefit the darlings.

In a moment every thing was changed; and it was evident to Christie that the sooner she left the better it would suit madame. The proprieties were preserved to the end, and Mrs. Saltonstall treated her with unusual respect, for she had come to honor, and also conducted herself in a most praiseworthy manner. How she could refuse a Fletcher visibly amazed the lady; but she forgave the slight, and gently insinuated that "my brother" was, perhaps, only amusing himself.

Christie was but too glad to be off; and when Mrs. Saltonstall asked when she would prefer to leave, promptly replied, "To-morrow," received her salary, which was forthcoming with unusual punctuality, and packed her trunks with delightful rapidity.

As the family was to leave in a week, her sudden departure caused no surprise to the few who knew her, and with kind farewells to such of her summer friends as still remained, she went to bed that night all ready for an early start. She saw nothing more of Mr. Fletcher that day, but the sound of excited voices in the drawing-room assured her that madame was having it out with her brother; and with truly feminine inconsistency Christie hoped that she would not be too hard upon the poor man, for, after all, it was kind of him to overlook the actress, and ask the governess to share his good things with him.

She did not repent, but she got herself to sleep, imagining a bridal trip to Paris, and dreamed so delightfully of lost splendors that the awakening was rather blank, the future rather cold and hard.

She was early astir, meaning to take the first boat and so escape all disagreeable rencontres, and having kissed the children in their little beds, with tender promises not to forget them, she took a hasty breakfast and stepped into the carriage waiting at the door. The sleepy waiters stared, a friendly housemaid nodded, and Miss Walker, the hearty English lady who did her ten miles a day, cried out, as she tramped by, blooming and bedraggled:

"Bless me, are you off?"

"Yes, thank Heaven!" answered Christie; but as she spoke Mr. Fletcher came down the steps looking as wan and heavy-eyed as if a sleepless night had been added to his day’s defeat. Leaning in at the window, he asked abruptly, but with a look she never could forget:

“Will nothing change your answer, Christie?”

“Nothing.”

His eyes said, “Forgive me,” but his lips only said, “Good-by,” and the carriage rolled away.

Then, being a woman, two great tears fell on the hand still red with the lingering grasp he had given it, and Christie said, as pitifully as if she loved him:

“He has got a heart, after all, and perhaps I might have been glad to fill it if he had only shown it to me sooner. Now it is too late.”

CHAPTER V.

COMPANION.

BEFORE she had time to find a new situation, Christie received a note from Miss Tudor, saying that hearing she had left Mrs. Saltonstall she wanted to offer her the place of companion to an invalid girl, where the duties were light and the compensation large.

"How kind of her to think of me," said Christie, gratefully. "I'll go at once and do my best to secure it, for it must be a good thing or she wouldn't recommend it."

Away went Christie to the address sent by Miss Tudor, and as she waited at the door she thought:

"What a happy family the Carrols must be!" for the house was one of an imposing block in a West End square, which had its own little park where a fountain sparkled in the autumn sunshine, and pretty children played among the fallen leaves.

Mrs. Carrol was a stately woman, still beautiful in spite of her fifty years. But though there were few lines on her forehead, few silver threads in the dark hair that lay smoothly over it, and a gracious smile showed the fine teeth, an indescribable expression of unsubmissive sorrow touched the whole face, betraying that life had brought some heavy cross, from which her wealth could purchase no release, for which her pride could find no effectual screen.

She looked at Christie with a searching eye, listened attentively when she spoke, and seemed testing her with covert care as if the place she was to fill demanded some unusual gift or skill.

"Miss Tudor tells me that you read aloud well, sing sweetly, possess a cheerful temper, and the quiet, patient ways which are peculiarly grateful to an invalid," began Mrs. Carrol, with that keen yet wistful gaze, and an anxious accent in her voice that went to Christie's heart.

"Miss Tudor is very kind to think so well of me and my few accomplishments. I have never been with an invalid, but I think I can promise to be patient, willing, and cheerful. My own experience of illness has taught me how to sympathize with others and love to lighten pain. I shall be very glad to try if you think I have any fitness for the place."

"I do," and Mrs. Carrol's face softened as she spoke, for something in Christie's words or manner seemed to please her. Then slowly, as if the task was a hard one, she added:

"My daughter has been very ill and is still weak and nervous. I must hint to you that the loss of one very dear to her was the cause of the illness and the melancholy which now oppresses her. Therefore we must avoid any thing that can suggest or recall this trouble. She cares for nothing as yet, will see no one, and prefers to live alone. She is still so feeble this is but natural; yet solitude is bad for her, and her physician thinks that a new face might rouse her, and the society of one in no way connected with the painful past might interest and do her good. You see it is a little difficult to find just what we want, for a young companion is best, yet must be discreet and firm, as few young people are."

Fancying from Mrs. Carrol's manner that Miss Tudor had said more in her favor than had been repeated to her, Christie in a few plain-words told her little story, resolving to have no concealments here, and feeling that perhaps her experiences might have given her more firmness and discretion than many women of her age possessed. Mrs. Carrol seemed to find it so; the anxious look lifted a little as she listened, and when Christie ended she said, with a sigh of relief:

"Yes, I think Miss Tudor is right, and you are the one we want. Come and try it for a week and then we can decide. Can you begin to-day?" she added, as Christie rose. "Every hour is precious, for my poor girl's sad solitude weighs on my heart, and this is my one hope."

"I will stay with pleasure," answered Christie, thinking Mrs. Carrol's anxiety excessive, yet pitying the mother's pain, for something in her face suggested the idea that she reproached herself in some way for her daughter's state.

With secret gratitude that she had dressed with care, Christie took off her things and followed Mrs. Carrol upstairs. Entering a room in what seemed to be a wing of the great house, they found an old woman sewing.

"How is Helen to-day, Nurse?" asked Mrs. Carrol, pausing.

"Poorly, ma'am. I've been in every hour, but she only says: 'Let me be quiet,' and lies looking up at the picture till it's fit to break your heart to see her," answered the woman, with a shake of the head.

"I have brought Miss Devon to sit with her a little while. Doctor advises it, and I fancy the experiment may succeed if we can only amuse the dear child, and make her forget herself and her troubles."

"As you please, ma'am," said the old woman, looking with little favor at the new-comer, for the good soul was jealous of any interference between herself and the child she had tended for years.

"I won't disturb her, but you shall take Miss Devon in and tell Helen mamma sends her love, and hopes she will make an effort for all our sakes."

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Go, my dear, and do your best.” With these words Mrs. Carrol hastily left the room, and Christie followed Nurse.

A quick glance showed her that she was in the daintily furnished boudoir of a rich man’s daughter, but before she could take a second look her eyes were arrested by the occupant of this pretty place, and she forgot all else. On a low luxurious couch lay a girl, so beautiful and pale and still, that for an instant Christie thought her dead or sleeping. She was neither, for at the sound of a voice the great eyes opened wide, darkening and dilating with a strange expression as they fell on the unfamiliar face.

“Nurse, who is that? I told you I would see no one. I’m too ill to be so worried,” she said, in an imperious tone.

HELEN CARROL

“Yes, dear, I know, but your mamma wished you to make an effort. Miss Devon is to sit with you and try to cheer you up a bit,” said the old woman in a dissatisfied tone, that contrasted strangely with the tender way in which she stroked the beautiful disordered hair that hung about the girl’s shoulders.

Helen knit her brows and looked most ungracious, but evidently tried to be civil, for with a courteous wave of her hand toward an easy chair in the sunny window she said, quietly:

“Please sit down, Miss Devon, and excuse me for a little while. I’ve had a bad night, and am too tired to talk just yet. There are books of all sorts, or the conservatory if you like it better.”

“Thank you. I’ll read quietly till you want me. Then I shall be very glad to do any thing I can for you.”

With that Christie retired to the big chair, and fell to reading the first book she took up, a good deal embarrassed by her reception, and very curious to know what would come next.

The old woman went away after folding the down coverlet carefully over her darling’s feet, and Helen seemed to go to sleep.

For a time the room was very still; the fire burned softly on the marble hearth, the sun shone warmly on velvet carpet and rich hangings, the delicate breath of flowers blew in through the halt-open door that led to a gay little conservatory, and nothing but the roll of a distant carriage broke the silence now and then.

Christie’s eyes soon wandered from her book to the lovely face and motionless figure on the couch. Just opposite, in a recess, hung the portrait of a young and handsome man, and below it stood a vase of flowers, a graceful Roman lamp, and several little relics, as if it were the shrine where some dead love was mourned and worshipped still.

As she looked from the living face, so pale and so pathetic in its quietude, to the painted one so full of color, strength, and happiness, her heart ached for poor Helen, and her eyes were wet with tears of pity. A sudden movement on the couch gave her no time to hide them, and as she hastily looked down upon her book a treacherous drop fell glittering on the page.

"What have you there so interesting?" asked Helen, in that softly imperious tone of hers.

"Don Quixote," answered Christie, too much abashed to have her wits about her.

Helen smiled a melancholy smile as she rose, saying wearily:

"They gave me that to make me laugh, but I did not find it funny; neither was it sad enough to make me cry as you do."

"I was not reading, I was" — there Christie broke down, and could have cried with vexation at the bad beginning she had made. But that involuntary tear was better balm to Helen than the most perfect tact, the most brilliant conversation. It touched and won her without words, for sympathy works miracles. Her whole face changed, and her mournful eyes grew soft as with the gentle freedom of a child she lifted Christie's downcast face and said, with a falter in her voice:

"I know you were pitying me. Well, I need pity, and from you I'll take it, because you don't force it on me. Have you been ill and wretched too? I think so, else you would never care to come and shut yourself up here with me!"

"I have been ill, and I know how hard it is to get one's spirits back again. I've had my troubles, too, but not heavier than I could bear, thank God."

"What made you ill? Would you mind telling me about it? I seem to fancy hearing other people's woes, though it can't make mine seem lighter."

"A piece of the Castle of the Sun fell on my head and nearly killed me," and Christie laughed in spite of herself at the astonishment in Helen's face. "I was an actress once; your mother knows and didn't mind," she added, quickly.

"I'm glad of that. I used to wish I could be one, I was so fond of the theatre. They should have consented, it would have given me something to do, and, however hard it is, it couldn't be worse than this." Helen spoke vehemently and an excited flush rose to her white cheeks; then she checked herself and dropped into a chair, saying, hurriedly:

"Tell about it: don't let me think; it's bad for me." Glad to be set to work, and bent on retrieving her first mistake, Christie plunged into her theatrical experiences and talked away in her most lively style. People usually get eloquent when telling their own stories, and true tales are always the most interesting. Helen listened at first with a half-absent air, but presently grew more attentive, and when the catastrophe came sat erect, quite absorbed in the interest of this glimpse behind the curtain.

Charmed with her success, Christie branched off right and left, stimulated by questions, led on by suggestive incidents, and generously supplied by memory. Before she knew it, she was telling her whole history in the most expansive manner, for women soon get sociable together, and Helen's interest flattered her immensely. Once she made her laugh at some droll trifle, and as if the unaccustomed sound had startled her, old nurse popped in her head; but seeing nothing amiss retired, wondering what on earth that girl could be doing to cheer up Miss Helen so.

"Tell about your lovers: you must have had some; actresses always do. Happy women, they can love as they like!" said Helen, with the inquisitive frankness of an invalid for whom etiquette has ceased to exist.

Remembering in time that this was a forbidden subject, Christie smiled and shook her head.

"I had a few, but one does not tell those secrets, you know."

Evidently disappointed, and a little displeased at being reminded of her want of good-breeding, Helen got up and began to wander restlessly about the room. Presently, as if wishing to atone for her impatience, she bade Christie come and see her flowers. Following her, the new companion found herself in a little world where perpetual summer reigned. Vines curtained the roof, slender shrubs and trees made leafy walls on either side, flowers bloomed above and below, birds carolled in half-hidden prisons, aquariums and ferneries stood all about, and the soft plash of a little fountain made pleasant music as it rose and fell.

Helen threw herself wearily down on a pile of cushions that lay beside the basin, and beckoning Christie to sit near, said, as she pressed her hands to her hot forehead and looked up with a distressful brightness in the haggard eyes that seemed to have no rest in them:

"Please sing to me; any humdrum air will do. I am so tired, and yet I cannot sleep. If my head would only stop this dreadful thinking and let me forget one hour it would do me so much good."

"I know the feeling, and I'll try what Lucy used to do to quiet me. Put your poor head in my lap, dear, and lie quite still while I cool and comfort it."

Obeying like a worn-out child, Helen lay motionless while Christie, dipping her fingers in the basin, passed the wet tips softly to and fro across the hot forehead, and the thin temples where the pulses throbbed so fast. And while she soothed she sang the "Land o' the Leal," and sang it well; for the tender words, the plaintive air were dear to her, because her mother loved and sang it to her years ago. Slowly the heavy eyelids drooped, slowly the lines of pain were smoothed away from the broad brow, slowly the restless hands grew still, and

Helen lay asleep.

So intent upon her task was Christie, that she forgot herself till the discomfort of her position reminded her that she had a body. Fearing to wake the poor girl in her arms, she tried to lean against the basin, but could not reach a cushion to lay upon the cold stone ledge. An unseen hand supplied the want, and, looking round, she saw two young men standing behind her.

Helen's brothers, without doubt; for, though utterly unlike in expression, some of the family traits were strongly marked in both. The elder wore the dress of a priest, had a pale, ascetic face, with melancholy eyes, stern mouth, and the absent air of one who leads an inward life. The younger had a more attractive face, for, though bearing marks of dissipation, it betrayed a generous, ardent nature, proud and wilful, yet lovable in spite of all defects. He was very boyish still, and plainly showed how much he felt, as, with a hasty nod to Christie, he knelt down beside his sister, saying, in a whisper:

"Look at her, Augustine! so beautiful, so quiet! What a comfort it is to see her like herself again."

"Ah, yes; and but for the sin of it, I could find it in my heart to wish she might never wake!" returned the other, gloomily.

"Don't say that! How could we live without her?" Then, turning to

Christie, the younger said, in a friendly tone:

"You must be very tired; let us lay her on the sofa. It is very damp here, and if she sleeps long you will faint from weariness."

Carefully lifting her, the brothers carried the sleeping girl into her room, and laid her down. She sighed as her head touched the pillow, and her arm clung to Harry's neck, as if she felt his nearness even in sleep. He put his cheek to hers, and lingered over her with an affectionate solicitude beautiful to see. Augustine stood silent, grave and cold as if he had done with human ties, yet found it hard to sever this one, for he stretched his hand above his sister as if he blessed her, then, with another grave bow to Christie, went away as noiselessly as he had come. But Harry kissed the sleeper tenderly, whispered, "Be kind to her," with an imploring voice, and hurried from the room as if to hide the feeling that he must not show.

A few minutes later the nurse brought in a note from Mrs. Carrol.

"My son tells me that Helen is asleep, and you look very tired. Leave her to Hester, now; you have done enough to-day, so let me thank you heartily, and send you home for a quiet night before you continue your good work to-morrow."

Christie went, found a carriage waiting for her, and drove home very happy at the success of her first attempt at companionship.

The next day she entered upon the new duties with interest and good-will, for this was work in which heart took part, as well as head and hand. Many things surprised, and some things perplexed her, as she came to know the family better. But she discreetly held her tongue, used her eyes, and did her best to please.

Mrs. Carrol seemed satisfied, often thanked her for her faithfulness to Helen, but seldom visited her daughter, never seemed surprised or grieved that the girl expressed no wish to see her; and, though her handsome face always wore its gracious smile, Christie soon felt very sure that it was a mask put on to hide some heavy sorrow from a curious world.

Augustine never came except when Helen was asleep: then, like a shadow, he passed in and out, always silent, cold, and grave, but in his eyes the gloom of some remorseful pain that prayers and penances seemed powerless to heal.

Harry came every day, and no matter how melancholy, listless, or irritable his sister might be, for him she always had a smile, an affectionate greeting, a word of praise, or a tender warning against the reckless spirit that seemed to possess him. The love between them was very strong, and Christie found a never-failing pleasure in watching them together, for then Helen showed what she once had been, and Harry was his best self. A boy still, in spite of his one-and-twenty years, he seemed to feel that Helen’s room was a safe refuge from the temptations that beset one of his thoughtless and impetuous nature. Here he came to confess his faults and follies with the frankness which is half sad, half comical, and wholly charming in a good-hearted young scatter-brain. Here he brought gay gossip, lively descriptions, and masculine criticisms of the world he moved in. All his hopes and plans, joys and sorrows, successes and defeats, he told to Helen. And she, poor soul, in this one happy love of her sad life, forgot a little the burden of despair that darkened all the world to her. For his sake she smiled, to him she talked when others got no word from her, and Harry’s salvation was the only duty that she owned or tried to fulfil.

A younger sister was away at school, but the others seldom spoke of her, and Christie tired herself with wondering why Bella never wrote to Helen, and why Harry seemed to have nothing but a gloomy sort of pity to bestow upon the blooming girl whose picture hung in the great drawing-room below.

It was a very quiet winter, yet a very pleasant one to Christie, for she felt herself loved and trusted, saw that she suited, and believed that she was doing good, as women best love to do it, by bestowing sympathy and care with generous devotion.

Helen and Harry loved her like an elder sister; Augustine showed that he was grateful, and Mrs. Carrol sometimes forgot to put on her mask before one who seemed fast becoming confidante as well as companion.

In the spring the family went to the fine old country-house just out of town, and here Christie and her charge led a freer, happier life. Walking and driving, boating and gardening, with pleasant days on the wide terrace, where Helen swung idly in her hammock, while Christie read or talked to her; and summer twilights beguiled with music, or the silent reveries more eloquent than speech, which real friends may enjoy together, and find the sweeter for the mute companionship.

Harry was with them, and devoted to his sister, who seemed slowly to be coming out of her sad gloom, won by patient tenderness and the cheerful influences all about her.

Christie's heart was full of pride and satisfaction, as she saw the altered face, heard the tone of interest in that once hopeless voice, and felt each day more sure that Helen had outlived the loss that seemed to have broken her heart.

Alas, for Christie's pride, for Harry's hope, and for poor Helen's bitter fate! When all was brightest, the black shadow came; when all looked safest, danger was at hand; and when the past seemed buried, the ghost which haunted it returned, for the punishment of a broken law is as inevitable as death.

When settled in town again Bella came home, a gay, young girl, who should have brought sunshine and happiness into her home. But from the hour she returned a strange anxiety seemed to possess the others. Mrs. Carrol watched over her with sleepless care, was evidently full of maternal pride in the lovely creature, and began to dream dreams about her future. She seemed to wish to keep the sisters apart, and said to Christie, as if to explain this wish:

"Bella was away when Helen's trouble and illness came, she knows very little of it, and I do not want her to be saddened by the knowledge. Helen cares only for Hal, and Bella is too young to be of any use to my poor girl; therefore the less they see of each other the better for both. I am sure you agree with me?" she added, with that covert scrutiny which Christie had often felt before.

She could but acquiesce in the mother's decision, and devote herself more faithfully than ever to Helen, who soon needed all her care and patience, for a terrible unrest grew upon her, bringing sleepless nights again, moody days, and all the old afflictions with redoubled force.

Bella "came out" and began her career as a beauty and a belle most brilliantly. Harry was proud of her, but seemed jealous of other men's admiration for his charming sister, and would excite both Helen and himself over the flirtations into which "that child" as they called her, plunged with all the zest of a light-hearted girl whose head was a little turned with sudden and excessive adoration.

In vain Christie begged Harry not to report these things, in vain she hinted that Bella had better not come to show herself to Helen night after night in all the dainty splendor of her youth and beauty; in vain she asked Mrs. Carrol to let her go away to some quieter place with Helen, since she never could be persuaded to join in any gayety at home or abroad. All seemed wilful, blind, or governed by the fear of the gossiping world. So the days rolled on till an event occurred which enlightened Christie, with startling abruptness, and showed her the skeleton that haunted this unhappy family.

Going in one morning to Helen she found her walking to and fro as she often walked of late, with hurried steps and excited face as if driven by some power beyond her control.

“Good morning, dear. I’m so sorry you had a restless night, and wish you had sent for me. Will you come out now for an early drive? It’s a lovely day, and your mother thinks it would do you good,” began Christie, troubled by the state in which she found the girl.

But as she spoke Helen turned on her, crying passionately:

“My mother! don’t speak of her to me, I hate her!”

“Oh, Helen, don’t say that. Forgive and forget if she has displeased you, and don’t exhaust yourself by brooding over it. Come, dear, and let us soothe ourselves with a little music. I want to hear that new song again, though I can never hope to sing it as you do.”

“Sing!” echoed Helen, with a shrill laugh, “you don’t know what you ask. Could you sing when your heart was heavy with the knowledge of a sin about to be committed by those nearest to you? Don’t try to quiet me, I must talk whether you listen or not; I shall go frantic if I don’t tell some one; all the world will know it soon. Sit down, I’ll not hurt you, but don’t thwart me or you’ll be sorry for it.”

Speaking with a vehemence that left her breathless, Helen thrust Christie down upon a seat, and went on with an expression in her face that bereft the listener of power to move or speak.

“Harry has just told me of it; he was very angry, and I saw it, and made him tell me. Poor boy, he can keep nothing from me. I’ve been dreading it, and now it’s coming. You don’t know it, then? Young Butler is in love with Bella, and no one has prevented it. Think how wicked when such a curse is on us all.”

The question, “What curse?” rose involuntarily to Christie’s lips, but did not pass them, for, as if she read the thought, Helen answered it in a whisper that made the blood tingle in the other’s veins, so full of ominous suggestion was it.

“The curse of insanity I mean. We are all mad, or shall be; we come of a mad race, and for years we have gone recklessly on bequeathing this awful inheritance to our descendants. It should end with us, we are the last; none of us should marry; none dare think of it but Bella, and she knows nothing. She must be told, she must be kept from the sin of deceiving her lover, the agony of seeing her children become what I am, and what we all may be."

Here Helen wrung her hands and paced the room in such a paroxysm of impotent despair that Christie sat bewildered and aghast, wondering if this were true, or but the fancy of a troubled brain. Mrs. Carrol's face and manner returned to her with sudden vividness, so did Augustine's gloomy expression, and the strange wish uttered over his sleeping sister long ago. Harry's reckless, aimless life might be explained in this way; and all that had perplexed her through that year. Every thing confirmed the belief that this tragical assertion was true, and Christie covered up her face, murmuring, with an involuntary shiver:

"My God, how terrible!"

Helen came and stood before her with such grief and penitence in her countenance that for a moment it conquered the despair that had broken bounds.

"We should have told you this at first; I longed to do it, but I was afraid you'd go and leave me. I was so lonely, so miserable, Christie. I could not give you up when I had learned to love you; and I did learn very soon, for no wretched creature ever needed help and comfort more than I. For your sake I tried to be quiet, to control my shattered nerves, and hide my desperate thoughts. You helped me very much, and your unconsciousness made me doubly watchful. Forgive me; don't desert me now, for the old horror may be coming back, and I want you more than ever."

Too much moved to speak, Christie held out her hands, with a face full of pity, love, and grief. Poor Helen clung to them as if her only help lay there, and for a moment was quite still. But not long; the old anguish was too sharp to be borne in silence; the relief of confidence once tasted was too great to be denied; and, breaking loose, she went to and fro again, pouring out the bitter secret which had been weighing upon heart and conscience for a year.

"You wonder that I hate my mother; let me tell you why. When she was beautiful and young she married, knowing the sad history of my father's family. He was rich, she poor and proud; ambition made her wicked, and she did it after being warned that, though he might escape, his children were sure to inherit the curse, for when one generation goes free it falls more heavily upon the rest. She knew it all, and yet she married him. I have her to thank for all I suffer, and I cannot love her though she is my mother. It may be wrong to say these things, but they are true; they burn in my heart, and I must speak out; for I tell you there comes a time when children judge their parents as men and women, in spite of filial duty, and woe to those whose actions change affection and respect to hatred or contempt."

The bitter grief, the solemn fervor of her words, both touched and awed

Christie too much for speech. Helen had passed beyond the bounds of ceremony, fear, or shame: her hard lot, her dark experience, set her apart, and gave her the right to utter the bare truth. To her heart's core Christie felt that warning; and for the first time saw what many never see or wilfully deny, — the awful responsibility that lies on every man and woman's soul forbidding them to entail upon the innocent the burden of their own infirmities, the curse that surely follows their own sins.

Sad and stern, as an accusing angel, that most unhappy daughter spoke:

"If ever a woman had cause to repent, it is my mother; but she will not, and till she does, God has forsaken us. Nothing can subdue her pride, not even an affliction like mine. She hides the truth; she hides me, and lets the world believe I am dying of consumption; not a word about insanity, and no one knows the secret beyond ourselves, but doctor, nurse, and you. This is why I was not sent away, but for a year was shut up in that room yonder where the door is always locked. If you look in, you'll see barred windows, guarded fire, muffled walls, and other sights to chill your blood, when you remember all those dreadful things were meant for me."

"Don't speak, don't think of them! Don't talk any more; let me do something to comfort you, for my heart is broken with all this," cried Christie, panic-stricken at the picture Helen's words had conjured up.

"I must go on! There is no rest for me till I have tried to lighten this burden by sharing it with you. Let me talk, let me wear myself out, then you shall help and comfort me, if there is any help and comfort for such as I. Now I can tell you all about my Edward, and you'll listen, though mamma forbade it. Three years ago my father died, and we came here. I was well then, and oh, how happy!"

Clasping her hands above her head, she stood like a beautiful, pale image of despair; tearless and mute, but with such a world of anguish in the eyes lifted to the smiling picture opposite that it needed no words to tell the story of a broken heart.

"How I loved him!" she said, softly, while her whole face glowed for an instant with the light and warmth of a deathless passion. "How I loved him, and how he loved me! Too well to let me darken both our lives with a remorse which would come too late for a just atonement. I thought him cruel then, — I bless him for it now. I had far rather be the innocent sufferer I am, than a wretched woman like my mother. I shall never see him any more, but I know he thinks of me far away in India, and when I die one faithful heart will remember me."

There her voice faltered and failed, and for a moment the fire of her eyes was quenched in tears. Christie thought the reaction had come, and rose to go and comfort her. But instantly Helen's hand was on her shoulder, and pressing her back into her seat, she said, almost fiercely:

"I'm not done yet; yon must hear the whole, and help me to save Bella. We knew nothing of the blight that hung over us till father told Augustine upon his death-bed. August, urged by mother, kept it to himself, and went away to bear it as he could. He should have spoken out and saved me in time. But not till he came home and found me engaged did he have courage to warn me of the fate in store for us. So Edward tore himself away, although it broke his heart, and I — do you see that?"

With a quick gesture she rent open her dress, and on her bosom

Christie saw a scar that made her turn yet paler than before.

"Yes, I tried to kill myself; but they would not let me die, so the old tragedy of our house begins again. August became a priest, hoping to hide his calamity and expiate his father's sin by endless penances and prayers. Harry turned reckless; for what had he to look forward to? A short life, and a gay one, he says, and when his turn comes he will spare himself long suffering, as I tried to do it. Bella was never told; she was so young they kept her ignorant of all they could, even the knowledge of my state. She was long away at school, but now she has come home, now she has learned to love, and is going blindly as I went, because no one tells her what she must know soon or late. Mamma will not. August hesitates, remembering me. Harry swears he will speak out, but I implore him not to do it, for he will be too violent; and I am powerless. I never knew about this man till Hal told me to-day. Bella only comes in for a moment, and I have no chance to tell her she must not love him."

Pressing her hands to her temples, Helen resumed her restless march again, but suddenly broke out more violently than before:

"Now do you wonder why I am half frantic? Now will you ask me to sing and smile, and sit calmly by while this wrong goes on? You have done much for me, and God will bless you for it, but you cannot keep me sane. Death is the only cure for a mad Carrol, and I'm so young, so strong, it will be long in coming unless I hurry it."

She clenched her hands, set her teeth, and looked about her as if ready for any desperate act that should set her free from the dark and dreadful future that lay before her.

For a moment Christie feared and trembled; then pity conquered fear. She forgot herself, and only remembered this poor girl, so hopeless, helpless, and afflicted. Led by a sudden impulse, she put both arms about her, and held her close with a strong but silent tenderness better than any bonds. At first, Helen seemed unconscious of it, as she stood rigid and motionless, with her wild eyes dumbly imploring help of earth and heaven. Suddenly both strength and excitement seemed to leave her, and she would have fallen but for the living, loving prop that sustained her.

Still silent, Christie laid her down, kissed her white lips, and busied herself about her till she looked up quite herself again, but so wan and weak, it was pitiful to see her.

“It’s over now,” she whispered, with a desolate sigh. “Sing to me, and keep the evil spirit quiet for a little while. To-morrow, if I’m strong enough, we’ll talk about poor little Bella.”

And Christie sang, with tears dropping fast upon the keys, that made a soft accompaniment to the sweet old hymns which soothed this troubled soul as David’s music brought repose to Saul.

When Helen slept at last from sheer exhaustion, Christie executed the resolution she had made as soon as the excitement of that stormy scene was over. She went straight to Mrs. Carrol’s room, and, undeterred by the presence of her sons, told all that had passed. They were evidently not unprepared for it, thanks to old Hester, who had overheard enough of Helen’s wild words to know that something was amiss, and had reported accordingly; but none of them had ventured to interrupt the interview, lest Helen should be driven to desperation as before.

“Mother, Helen is right; we should speak out, and not hide this bitter fact any longer. The world will pity us, and we must bear the pity, but it would condemn us for deceit, and we should deserve the condemnation if we let this misery go on. Living a lie will ruin us all. Bella will be destroyed as Helen was; I am only the shadow of a man now, and Hal is killing himself as fast as he can, to avoid the fate we all dread.”

Augustine spoke first, for Mrs. Carrol sat speechless with her trouble as Christie paused.

“Keep to your prayers, and let me go my own way, it’s the shortest,” muttered Harry, with his face hidden, and his head down on his folded arms.

“Boys, boys, you’ll kill me if you say such things! I have more now than I can bear. Don’t drive me wild with your reproaches to each other!” cried their mother, her heart rent with the remorse that came too late.

“No fear of that; you are not a Carrol,” answered Harry, with the pitiless bluntness of a resentful and rebellious boy.

Augustine turned on him with a wrathful flash of the eye, and a warning ring in his stern voice, as he pointed to the door.

“You shall not insult your mother! Ask her pardon, or go!”

“She should ask mine! I’ll go. When you want me, you’ll know where to find me.” And, with a reckless laugh, Harry stormed out of the room.

Augustine’s indignant face grew full of a new trouble as the door banged below, and he pressed his thin hands tightly together, saying, as if to himself:

“Heaven help me! Yes, I do know; for, night after night, I find and bring the poor lad home from gambling-tables and the hells where souls like his are lost.”

Here Christie thought to slip away, feeling that it was no place for her now that her errand was done. But Mrs. Carrol called her back.

“Miss Devon — Christie — forgive me that I did not trust you sooner. It was so hard to tell; I hoped so much from time; I never could believe that my poor children would be made the victims of my mistake. Do not forsake us: Helen loves you so. Stay with her, I implore you, and let a most unhappy mother plead for a most unhappy child.” Then Christie went to the poor woman, and earnestly assured her of her love and loyalty; for now she felt doubly bound to them because they trusted her.

“What shall we do?” they said to her, with pathetic submission, turning like sick people to a healthful soul for help and comfort.

“Tell Bella all the truth, and help her to refuse her lover. Do this just thing, and God will strengthen you to bear the consequences,” was her answer, though she trembled at the responsibility they put upon her.

“Not yet,” cried Mrs. Carrol. “Let the poor child enjoy the holidays with a light heart, — then we will tell her; and then Heaven help us all!”

So it was decided; for only a week or two of the old year remained, and no one had the heart to rob poor Bella of the little span of blissful ignorance that now remained to her.

A terrible time was that to Christie; for, while one sister, blessed with beauty, youth, love, and pleasure, tasted life at its sweetest, the other sat in the black shadow of a growing dread, and wearied Heaven with piteous prayers for her relief.

“The old horror is coming back; I feel it creeping over me. Don’t let it come, Christie! Stay by me! Help me! Keep me sane! And if you cannot, ask God to take me quickly!”

With words like these, poor Helen clung to Christie; and, soul and body, Christie devoted herself to the afflicted girl. She would not see her mother; and the unhappy woman haunted that closed door, hungering for the look, the word, that never came to her. Augustine was her consolation, and, during those troublous days, the priest was forgotten in the son. But Harry was all in all to Helen then; and it was touching to see how these unfortunate young creatures clung to one another, she tenderly trying to keep him from the wild life that was surely hastening the fate he might otherwise escape for years, and he patiently bearing all her moods, eager to cheer and soothe the sad captivity from which he could not save her.

These tender ministrations seemed to be blessed at last; and Christie began to hope the haunting terror would pass by, as quiet gloom succeeded to wild excitement. The cheerful spirit of the season seemed to reach even that sad room; and, in preparing gifts for others, Helen seemed to find a little of that best of all gifts, — peace for herself.

On New Year's morning, Christie found her garlanding her lover's picture with white roses and the myrtle sprays brides wear.

"These were his favorite flowers, and I meant to make my wedding wreath of this sweet-scented myrtle, because he gave it to me," she said, with a look that made Christie's eyes grow dim. "Don't grieve for me, dear; we shall surely meet hereafter, though so far asunder here. Nothing can part us there, I devoutly believe; for we leave our burdens all behind us when we go." Then, in a lighter tone, she said, with her arm on Christie's neck:

"This day is to be a happy one, no matter what comes after it. I'm going to be my old self for a little while, and forget there's such a word as sorrow. Help me to dress, so that when the boys come up they may find the sister Nell they have not seen for two long years."

"Will you wear this, my darling? Your mother beads it, and she tried to have it dainty and beautiful enough to please you. See, your own colors, though the bows are only laid on that they may be changed for others if you like."

As she spoke Christie lifted the cover of the box old Hester had just brought in, and displayed a cashmere wrapper, creamy-white, silk-lined, down-trimmed, and delicately relieved by rosy knots, like holly berries lying upon snow. Helen looked at it without a word for several minutes, then gathering up the ribbons, with a strange smile, she said:

"I like it better so; but I'll not wear it yet."

"Bless and save us, deary; it must have a bit of color somewhere, else it looks just like a shroud," cried Hester, and then wrung her hands in dismay as Helen answered, quietly:

"Ah, well, keep it for me, then. I shall be happier when I wear it so than in the gayest gown I own, for when you put it on, this poor head and heart of mine will be quiet at last."

Motioning Hester to remove the box, Christie tried to banish the cloud her unlucky words had brought to Helen's face, by chatting cheerfully as she helped her make herself "pretty for the boys."

All that day she was unusually calm and sweet, and seemed to yield herself wholly to the happy influences of the hour, gave and received her gifts so cheerfully that her brothers watched her with delight; and unconscious Bella said, as she hung about her sister, with loving admiration in her eyes:

"I always thought you would get well, and now I'm sure of it, for you look as you used before I went away to school, and seem just like our own dear Nell."

"I'm glad of that; I wanted you to feel so, my Bella. I'll accept your happy prophecy, and hope I may get well soon, very soon."

So cheerfully she spoke, so tranquilly she smiled, that all rejoiced over her believing, with love's blindness, that she might yet conquer her malady in spite of their forebodings.

It was a very happy day to Christie, not only that she was generously remembered and made one of them by all the family, but because this change for the better in Helen made her heart sing for joy. She had given time, health, and much love to the task, and ventured now to hope they had not been given in vain. One thing only marred her happiness, the sad estrangement of the daughter from her mother, and that evening she resolved to take advantage of Helen's tender mood, and plead for the poor soul who dared not plead for herself.

As the brothers and sisters said good-night, Helen clung to them as if loth to part, saying, with each embrace:

"Keep hoping for me, Bella; kiss me, Harry; bless me, Augustine, and all wish for me a happier New Year than the last."

When they were gone she wandered slowly round the room, stood long before the picture with its fading garland, sung a little softly to herself, and came at last to Christie, saying, like a tired child:

"I have been good all day; now let me rest."

"One thing has been forgotten, dear," began Christie, fearing to disturb the quietude that seemed to have been so dearly bought.

Helen understood her, and looked up with a sane sweet face, out of which all resentful bitterness had passed.

"No, Christie, not forgotten, only kept until the last. To-day is a good day to forgive, as we would be forgiven, and I mean to do it before I sleep," Then holding Christie close, she added, with a quiver of emotion in her voice: "I have no words warm enough to thank you, my good angel, for all you have been to me, but I know it will give you a great pleasure to do one thing more. Give dear mamma my love, and tell her that when I am quiet for the night I want her to come and get me to sleep with the old lullaby she used to sing when I was a little child."

No gift bestowed that day was so precious to Christie as the joy of carrying this loving message from daughter to mother. How Mrs. Carrol received it need not be told. She would have gone at once, but Christie begged her to wait till rest and quiet, after the efforts of the day, had prepared Helen for an interview which might undo all that had been done if too hastily attempted.

Hester always waited upon her child at night; so, feeling that she might be wanted later, Christie went to her own room to rest. Quite sure that Mrs. Carrol would come to tell her what had passed, she waited for an hour or two, then went to ask of Hester how the visit had sped.

“Her mamma came up long ago, but the dear thing was fast asleep, so I wouldn’t let her be disturbed, and Mrs. Carrol went away again,” said the old woman, rousing from a nap.

Grieved at the mother’s disappointment, Christie stole in, hoping that Helen might rouse. She did not, and Christie was about to leave her, when, as she bent to smooth the tumbled coverlet, something dropped at her feet. Only a little pearl-handled penknife of Harry’s; but her heart stood still with fear, for it was open, and, as she took it up, a red stain came off upon her hand.

Helen’s face was turned away, and, bending nearer, Christie saw how deathly pale it looked in the shadow of the darkened room. She listened at her lips; only a faint flutter of breath parted them; she lifted up the averted head, and on the white throat saw a little wound, from which the blood still flowed. Then, like a flash of light, the meaning of the sudden change which came over her grew clear, — her brave efforts to make the last day happy, her tender good-night partings, her wish to be at peace with every one, the tragic death she had chosen rather than live out the tragic life that lay before her.

Christie’s nerves had been tried to the uttermost; the shock of this discovery was too much for her, and, in the act of calling for help, she fainted, for the first time in her life.

When she was herself again, the room was full of people; terror-stricken faces passed before her; broken voices whispered, “It is too late,” and, as she saw the group about the bed, she wished for unconsciousness again.

Helen lay in her mother’s arms at last, quietly breathing her life away, for though every thing that love and skill could devise had been tried to save her, the little knife in that desperate hand had done its work, and this world held no more suffering for her. Harry was down upon his knees beside her, trying to stifle his passionate grief. Augustine prayed audibly above her, and the fervor of his broken words comforted all hearts but one. Bella was clinging, panic-stricken, to the kind old doctor, who was sobbing like a boy, for he had loved and served poor Helen as faithfully as if she had been his own.

“Can nothing save her?” Christie whispered, as the prayer ended, and a sound of bitter weeping filled the room.

“Nothing; she is sane and safe at last, thank God!”

Christie could not but echo his thanksgiving, for the blessed tranquillity of the girl’s countenance was such as none but death, the great healer, can bring; and, as they looked, her eyes opened, beautifully clear and calm before they closed for ever. From face to face they passed, as if they looked for some one, and her lips moved in vain efforts to speak.

Christie went to her, but still the wide, wistful eyes searched the room as if unsatisfied; and, with a longing that conquered the mortal weakness of the body, the heart sent forth one tender cry:

“My mother — I want my mother!”

There was no need to repeat the piteous call, for, as it left her lips, she saw her mother’s face bending over her, and felt her mother’s arms gathering her in an embrace which held her close even after death had set its seal upon the voiceless prayers for pardon which passed between those reunited hearts.

When she was asleep at last, Christie and her mother made her ready for her grave; weeping tender tears as they folded her in the soft, white garment she had put by for that sad hour; and on her breast they laid the flowers she had hung about her lover as a farewell gift. So beautiful she looked when all was done, that in the early dawn they called her brothers, that they might not lose the memory of the blessed peace that shone upon her face, a mute assurance that for her the new year had happily begun.

“Now my work here is done, and I must go,” thought Christie, when the waves of life closed over the spot where another tired swimmer had gone down. But she found that one more task remained for her before she left the family which, on her coming, she had thought so happy.

Mrs. Carrol, worn out with the long effort to conceal her secret cross, broke down entirely under this last blow, and besought Christie to tell Bella all that she must know. It was a hard task, but Christie accepted it, and, when the time came, found that there was very little to be told, for at the death-bed of the elder sister, the younger had learned much of the sad truth. Thus prepared, she listened to all that was most carefully and tenderly confided to her, and, when the heavy tale was done, she surprised Christie by the unsuspected strength she showed. No tears, no lamentations, for she was her mother’s daughter, and inherited the pride that can bear heavy burdens, if they are borne unseen.

“Tell me what I must do, and I will do it,” she said, with the quiet despair of one who submits to the inevitable, but will not complain.

When Christie with difficulty told her that she should give up her lover, Bella bowed her head, and for a moment could not speak, then lifted it as if defying her own weakness, and spoke out bravely:

“It shall be done, for it is right. It is very hard for me, because I love him; he will not suffer much, for he can love again. I should be glad of that, and I’ll try to wish it for his sake. He is young, and if, as Harry says, he cares more for my fortune than myself, so much the better. What next, Christie?"

Amazed and touched at the courage of the creature she had fancied a sort of lovely butterfly to be crushed by a single blow, Christie took heart, and, instead of soothing sympathy, gave her the solace best fitted for strong natures, something to do for others. What inspired her, Christie never knew; perhaps it was the year of self-denying service she had rendered for pity's sake; such devotion is its own reward, and now, in herself, she discovered unsuspected powers.

"Live for your mother and your brothers, Bella; they need you sorely, and in time I know you will find true consolation in it, although you must relinquish much. Sustain your mother, cheer Augustine, watch over Harry, and be to them what Helen longed to be."

"And fail to do it, as she failed!" cried Bella, with a shudder.

"Listen, and let me give you this hope, for I sincerely do believe it. Since I came here, I have read many books, thought much, and talked often with Dr. Shirley about this sad affliction. He thinks you and Harry may escape it, if you will. You are like your mother in temperament and temper; you have self-control, strong wills, good nerves, and cheerful spirits. Poor Harry is willfully spoiling all his chances now; but you may save him, and, in the endeavor, save yourself."

"Oh, Christie, may I hope it? Give me one chance of escape, and I will suffer any hardship to keep it. Let me see any thing before me but a life and death like Helen's, and I'll bless you for ever!" cried Bella, welcoming this ray of light as a prisoner welcomes sunshine in his cell.

Christie trembled at the power of her words, yet, honestly believing them, she let them uplift this disconsolate soul, trusting that they might be in time fulfilled through God's mercy and the saving grace of sincere endeavor.

Holding fast to this frail spar, Bella bravely took up arms against her sea of troubles, and rode out the storm. When her lover came to know his fate, she hid her heart, and answered "no," finding a bitter satisfaction in the end, for Harry was right, and, when the fortune was denied him, young Butler did not mourn the woman long. Pride helped Bella to bear it; but it needed all her courage to look down the coming years so bare of all that makes life sweet to youthful souls, so desolate and dark, with duty alone to cheer the thorny way, and the haunting shadow of her race lurking in the background.

Submission and self-sacrifice are stern, sad angels, but in time one learns to know and love them, for when they have chastened, they uplift and bless. Dimly discerning this, poor Bella put her hands in theirs, saying, "Lead me, teach me; I will follow and obey you."

All soon felt that they could not stay in a house so full of heavy memories, and decided to return to their old home. They begged Christie to go with them, using every argument and entreaty their affection could suggest. But Christie needed rest, longed for freedom, and felt that in spite of their regard it would be very hard for her to live among them any longer. Her healthy nature needed brighter influences, stronger comrades, and the memory of Helen weighed so heavily upon her heart that she was eager to forget it for a time in other scenes and other work.

So they parted, very sadly, very tenderly, and laden with good gifts Christie went on her way weary, but well satisfied, for she had earned her rest.

CHAPTER VI.

SEAMSTRESS.

FOR some weeks Christie rested and refreshed herself by making her room gay and comfortable with the gifts lavished on her by the Carrols, and by sharing with others the money which Harry had smuggled into her possession after she had steadily refused to take one penny more than the sum agreed upon when she first went to them.

She took infinite satisfaction in sending one hundred dollars to Uncle Enos, for she had accepted what he gave her as a loan, and set her heart on repaying every fraction of it. Another hundred she gave to Hepsey, who found her out and came to report her trials and tribulations. The good soul had ventured South and tried to buy her mother. But “ole missis” would not let her go at any price, and the faithful chattel would not run away. Sorely disappointed, Hepsey had been obliged to submit; but her trip was not a failure, for she liberated several brothers and sent them triumphantly to Canada.

“You must take it, Hepsey, for I could not rest happy if I put it away to lie idle while you can save men and women from torment with it. I’d give it if it was my last penny, for I can help in no other way; and if I need money, I can always earn it, thank God!” said Christie, as Hepsey hesitated to take so much from a fellow-worker.

The thought of that investment lay warm at Christie’s heart, and never woke a regret, for well she knew that every dollar of it would be blessed, since shares in the Underground Railroad pay splendid dividends that never fail.

Another portion of her fortune, as she called Harry’s gift, was bestowed in wedding presents upon Lucy, who at length succeeded in winning the heart of the owner of the “heavenly eyes” and “distracting legs;” and, having gained her point, married him with dramatic celerity, and went West to follow the fortunes of her lord.

The old theatre was to be demolished and the company scattered, so a farewell festival was held, and Christie went to it, feeling more solitary than ever as she bade her old friends a long good-bye.

The rest of the money burned in her pocket, but she prudently put it by for a rainy day, and fell to work again when her brief vacation was over.

Hearing of a chance for a good needle-woman in a large and well-conducted mantua-making establishment, she secured it as a temporary thing, for she wanted to divert her mind from that last sad experience by entirely different employment and surroundings. She liked to return at night to her own little home, solitary and simple as it was, and felt a great repugnance to accept any place where she would be mixed up with family affairs again.

So day after day she went to her seat in the workroom where a dozen other young women sat sewing busily on gay garments, with as much lively gossip to beguile the time as Miss Cotton, the forewoman, would allow.

For a while it diverted Christie, as she had a feminine love for pretty things, and enjoyed seeing delicate silks, costly lace, and all the indescribable fantasies of fashion. But as spring came on, the old desire for something fresh and free began to haunt her, and she had both waking and sleeping dreams of a home in the country somewhere, with cows and flowers, clothes bleaching on green grass, bob-o'-links making rapturous music by the river, and the smell of new-mown hay, all lending their charms to the picture she painted for herself.

Most assuredly she would have gone to find these things, led by the instincts of a healthful nature, had not one slender tie held her till it grew into a bond so strong she could not break it.

Among her companions was one, and one only, who attracted her. The others were well-meaning girls, but full of the frivolous purposes and pleasures which their tastes prompted and their dull life fostered. Dress, gossip, and wages were the three topics which absorbed them. Christie soon tired of the innumerable changes rung upon these themes, and took refuge in her own thoughts, soon learning to enjoy them undisturbed by the clack of many tongues about her. Her evenings at home were devoted to books, for she had the true New England woman's desire for education, and read or studied for the love of it. Thus she had much to think of as her needle flew, and was rapidly becoming a sort of sewing-machine when life was brightened for her by the finding of a friend.

Among the girls was one quiet, skilful creature, whose black dress, peculiar face, and silent ways attracted Christie. Her evident desire to be let alone amused the new comer at first, and she made no effort to know her. But presently she became aware that Rachel watched her with covert interest, stealing quick, shy glances at her as she sat musing over her work. Christie smiled at her when she caught these glances, as if to reassure the looker of her good-will. But Rachel only colored, kept her eyes fixed on her work, and was more reserved than ever.

This interested Christie, and she fell to studying this young woman with some curiosity, for she was different from the others. Though evidently younger than she looked, Rachel's face was that of one who had known some great sorrow, some deep experience; for there were lines on the forehead that contrasted strongly with the bright, abundant hair above it; in repose, the youthfully red, soft lips had a mournful droop, and the eyes were old with that indescribable expression which comes to those who count their lives by emotions, not by years.

Strangely haunting eyes to Christie, for they seemed to appeal to her with a mute eloquence she could not resist. In vain did Rachel answer her with quiet coldness, nod silently when she wished her a cheery “good morning,” and keep resolutely in her own somewhat isolated corner, though invited to share the sunny window where the other sat. Her eyes belied her words, and those fugitive glances betrayed the longing of a lonely heart that dared not yield itself to the genial companionship so freely offered it.

Christie was sure of this, and would not be repulsed; for her own heart was very solitary. She missed Helen, and longed to fill the empty place. She wooed this shy, cold girl as patiently and as gently as a lover might, determined to win her confidence, because all the others had failed to do it. Sometimes she left a flower in Rachel’s basket, always smiled and nodded as she entered, and often stopped to admire the work of her tasteful fingers. It was impossible to resist such friendly overtures, and slowly Rachel’s coldness melted; into the beseeching eyes came a look of gratitude, the more touching for its wordlessness, and an irrepressible smile broke over her face in answer to the cordial ones that made the sunshine of her day.

Emboldened by these demonstrations, Christie changed her seat, and quietly established between them a daily interchange of something beside needles, pins, and spools. Then, as Rachel did not draw back offended, she went a step farther, and, one day when they chanced to be left alone to finish off a delicate bit of work, she spoke out frankly:

“Why can’t we be friends? I want one sadly, and so do you, unless your looks deceive me. We both seem to be alone in the world, to have had trouble, and to like one another. I won’t annoy you by any impertinent curiosity, nor burden you with uninteresting confidences; I only want to feel that you like me a little and don’t mind my liking you a great deal. Will you be my friend, and let me be yours?”

A great tear rolled clown upon the shining silk in Rachel’s hands as she looked into Christie’s earnest face, and answered with an almost passionate gratitude in her own:

“You can never need a friend as much as I do, or know what a blessed thing it is to find such an one as you are.”

“Then I may love you, and not be afraid of offending?” cried Christie, much touched.

“Yes. But remember I didn’t ask it first,” said Rachel, half dropping the hand she had held in both her own.

"You proud creature! I'll remember; and when we quarrel, I'll take all the blame upon myself."

Then Christie kissed her warmly, whisked away the tear, and began to paint the delights in store for them in her most enthusiastic way, being much elated with her victory; while Rachel listened with a newly kindled light in her lovely eyes, and a smile that showed how winsome her face had been before many tears washed its bloom away, and much trouble made it old too soon.

Christie kept her word, — asked no questions, volunteered no confidences, but heartily enjoyed the new friendship, and found that it gave to life the zest which it had lacked before. Now some one cared for her, and, better still, she could make some one happy, and in the act of lavishing the affection of her generous nature on a creature sadder and more solitary than herself, she found a satisfaction that never lost its charm. There was nothing in her possession that she did not offer Rachel, from the whole of her heart to the larger half of her little room.

"I'm tired of thinking only of myself. It makes me selfish and low-spirited; for I'm not a bit interesting. I must love somebody, and 'love them hard,' as children say; so why can't you come and stay with me? There's room enough, and we could be so cosy evenings with our books and work. I know you need some one to look after you, and I love dearly to take care of people. Do come," she would say, with most persuasive hospitality.

But Rachel always answered steadily: "Not yet, Christie, not yet. I 've got something to do before I can think of doing any thing so beautiful as that. Only love me, dear, and some day I'll show you all my heart, and thank you as I ought."

So Christie was content to wait, and, meantime, enjoyed much; for, with Rachel as a friend, she ceased to care for country pleasures, found happiness in the work that gave her better food than mere daily bread, and never thought of change; for love can make a home for itself anywhere.

A very bright and happy time was this in Christie's life; but, like most happy times, it was very brief. Only one summer allowed for the blossoming of the friendship that budded so slowly in the spring; then the frost came and killed the flowers; but the root lived long underneath the snows of suffering, doubt, and absence.

Coming to her work late one morning, she found the usually orderly room in confusion. Some of the girls were crying; some whispering together, — all looking excited and dismayed. Mrs. King sat majestically at her table, with an ominous frown upon her face. Miss Cotton stood beside her, looking unusually sour and stern, for the ancient virgin’s temper was not of the best. Alone, before them all, with her face hidden in her hands, and despair in every line of her drooping figure, stood Rachel, — a meek culprit at the stern bar of justice, where women try a sister woman.

“What’s the matter?” cried Christie, pausing on the threshold.

MRS. KING AND MISS COTTON.

Rachel shivered, as if the sound of that familiar voice was a fresh wound, but she did not lift her head; and Mrs. King answered, with a nervous emphasis that made the bugles of her head-dress rattle dismally:

“A very sad thing, Miss Devon, — very sad, indeed; a thing which never occurred in my establishment before, and never shall again. It appears that Rachel, whom we all considered a most respectable and worthy girl, has been quite the reverse. I shudder to think what the consequences of my taking her without a character (a thing I never do, and was only tempted by her superior taste as a trimmer) might have been if Miss Cotton, having suspicions, had not made strict inquiry and confirmed them.”

“That was a kind and generous act, and Miss Cotton must feel proud of it,” said Christie, with an indignant recollection of Mr. Fletcher’s “cautious inquiries” about herself.

“It was perfectly right and proper, Miss Devon; and I thank her for her care of my interests.” And Mrs. King bowed her acknowledgment of the service with a perfect castanet accompaniment, whereat Miss Cotton bridled with malicious complacency.

“Mrs. King, are you sure of this?” said Christie. “Miss Cotton does not like Rachel because her work is so much praised. May not her jealousy make her unjust, or her zeal for you mislead her?”

“I thank you for your polite insinuations, miss,” returned the irate forewoman. “I never make mistakes; but you will find that you have made a very great one in choosing Rachel for your bosom friend instead of gome one who would be a credit to you. Ask the creature herself if all I’ve said of her isn’t true. She can’t deny it.”

With the same indefinable misgiving which had held her aloof, Christie turned to Rachel, lifted up the hidden face with gentle force, and looked into it imploringly, as she whispered: “Is it true?”

The woful countenance she saw made any other answer needless. Involuntarily her hands fell away, and she hid her own face, uttering the one reproach, which, tender and tearful though it was, seemed harder to be borne than the stern condemnation gone before.

“Oh, Rachel, I so loved and trusted you!”

The grief, affection, and regret that trembled in her voice roused Rachel from her state of passive endurance and gave her courage to plead for herself. But it was Christie whom she addressed, Christie whose pardon she implored, Christie's sorrowful reproach that she most keenly felt.

"Yes, it is true," she said, looking only at the woman who had been the first to befriend and now was the last to desert her. "It is true that I once went astray, but God knows I have repented; that for years I've tried to be an honest girl again, and that but for His help I should be a far sadder creature than I am this day. Christie, you can never know how bitter hard it is to outlive a sin like mine, and struggle up again from such a fall. It clings to me; it won't be shaken off or buried out of sight. No sooner do I find a safe place like this, and try to forget the past, than some one reads my secret in my face and hunts me down. It seems very cruel, very hard, yet it is my punishment, so I try to bear it, and begin again. What hurts me now more than all the rest, what breaks my heart, is that I deceived you. I never meant to do it. I did not seek you, did I? I tried to be cold and stiff; never asked for love, though starving for it, till you came to me, so kind, so generous, so dear, — how could I help it? Oh, how could I help it then?"

Christie had watched Rachel while she spoke, and spoke to her alone; her heart yearned toward this one friend, for she still loved her, and, loving, she believed in her.

"I don't reproach you, dear: I don't despise or desert you, and though I'm grieved and disappointed, I'll stand by you still, because you need me more than ever now, and I want to prove that I am a true friend. Mrs. King, please forgive and let poor Rachel stay here, safe among us."

"Miss Devon, I'm surprised at you! By no means; it would be the ruin of my establishment; not a girl would remain, and the character of my rooms would be lost for ever," replied Mrs. King, goaded on by the relentless Cotton.

"But where will she go if you send her away? Who will employ her if you inform against her? What stranger will believe in her if we, who have known her so long, fail to befriend her now? Mrs. King, think of your own daughters, and be a mother to this poor girl for their sake."

That last stroke touched the woman's heart; her cold eye softened, her hard mouth relaxed, and pity was about to win the day, when prudence, in the shape of Miss Cotton, turned the scale, for that spiteful spinster suddenly cried out, in a burst of righteous wrath:

"If that hussy stays, I leave this establishment for ever!" and followed up the blow by putting on her bonnet with a flourish.

At this spectacle, self-interest got the better of sympathy in Mrs. King's worldly mind. To lose Cotton was to lose her right hand, and charity at that price was too expensive a luxury to be indulged in; so she hardened her heart, composed her features, and said, impressively:

"Take off your bonnet, Cotton; I have no intention of offending you, or any one else, by such a step. I forgive you, Rachel, and I pity you; but I can't think of allowing you to stay. There are proper institutions for such as you, and I advise you to go to one and repent. You were paid Saturday night, so nothing prevents your leaving at once. Time is money here, and we are wasting it. Young ladies, take your seats."

All but Christie obeyed, yet no one touched a needle, and Mrs. King sat, hurriedly stabbing pins into the fat cushion on her breast, as if testing the hardness of her heart.

Rachel's eye went round the room; saw pity, aversion, or contempt, on every face, but met no answering glance, for even Christie's eyes were bent thoughtfully on the ground, and Christie's heart seemed closed against her. As she looked her whole manner changed; her tears ceased to fall, her face grew hard, and a reckless mood seemed to take possession of her, as if finding herself deserted by womankind, she would desert her own womanhood.

"I might have known it would be so," she said abruptly, with a bitter smile, sadder to see than her most hopeless tears. "It's no use for such as me to try; better go back to the old life, for there are kinder hearts among the sinners than among the saints, and no one can live without a bit of love. Your Magdalen Asylums are penitentiaries, not homes; I won't go to any of them. Your piety isn't worth much, for though you read in your Bible how the Lord treated a poor soul like me, yet when I stretch out my hand to you for help, not one of all you virtuous, Christian women dare take it and keep me from a life that's worse than hell."

As she spoke Rachel flung out her hand with a half-defiant gesture, and Christie took it. That touch, full of womanly compassion, seemed to exorcise the desperate spirit that possessed the poor girl in her despair, for, with a stifled exclamation, she sunk down at Christie's feet, and lay there weeping in all the passionate abandonment of love and gratitude, remorse and shame. Never had human voice sounded so heavenly sweet to her as that which broke the silence of the room, as this one friend said, with the earnestness of a true and tender heart:

"Mrs. King, if you send her away, I must take her in; for if she does go back to the old life, the sin of it will lie at our door, and God will remember it against us in the end. Some one must trust her, help her, love her, and so save her, as nothing else will. Perhaps I can do this better than you, — at least, I'll try; for even if I risk the loss of my good name, I could bear that better than the thought that Rachel had lost the work of these hard years for want of upholding now. She shall come home with me; no one there need know of this discovery, and I will take any work to her that you will give me, to keep her from want and its temptations. Will you do this, and let me sew for less, if I can pay you for the kindness in no other way?"

Poor Mrs. King was "much tumbled up and down in her own mind;" she longed to consent, but Cotton's eye was upon her, and Cotton's departure would be an irreparable loss, so she decided to end the matter in the most summary manner. Plunging a particularly large pin into her cushioned breast, as if it was a relief to inflict that mock torture upon herself, she said sharply:

"It is impossible. You can do as you please, Miss Devon, but I prefer to wash my hands of the affair at once and entirely."

Christie's eye went from the figure at her feet to the hard-featured woman who had been a kind and just mistress until now, and she asked, anxiously:

"Do you mean that you wash your hands of me also, if I stand by

Rachel?"

"I do. I'm very sorry, but my young ladies must keep respectable company, or leave my service," was the brief reply, for Mrs. King grew grimmer externally as the mental rebellion increased internally.

"Then I will leave it!" cried Christie, with an indignant voice and eye. "Come, dear, we'll go together." And without a look or word for any in the room, she raised the prostrate girl, and led her out into the little hall.

There she essayed to comfort her, but before many words had passed her lips Rachel looked up, and she was silent with surprise, for the face she saw was neither despairing nor defiant, but beautifully sweet and clear, as the unfallen spirit of the woman shone through the grateful eyes, and blessed her for her loyalty.

"Christie, you have done enough for me," she said. "Go back, and keep the good place you need, for such are hard to find. I can get on alone; I'm used to this, and the pain will soon be over."

"I'll not go back!" cried Christie, hotly. "I'll do slop-work and starve, before I'll stay with such a narrow-minded, cold-hearted woman. Come home with me at once, and let us lay our plans together."

"No, dear; if I wouldn't go when you first asked me, much less will I go now, for I've done you harm enough already. I never can thank you for your great goodness to me, never tell you what it has been to me. We must part now; but some day I'll come back and show you that I've not forgotten how you loved and helped and trusted me, when all the others cast me off."

Vain were Christie's arguments and appeals. Rachel was immovable, and all her friend could win from her was a promise to send word, now and then, how things prospered with her.

"And, Rachel, I charge you to come to me in any strait, no matter what it is, no matter where I am; for if any thing could break my heart, it would be to know that you had gone back to the old life, because there was no one to help and hold you up."

"I never can go back; you have saved me, Christie, for you love me, you have faith in me, and that will keep me strong and safe when you are gone. Oh, my dear, my dear, God bless you for ever and for ever!"

Then Christie, remembering only that they were two loving women, alone in a world of sin and sorrow, took Rachel in her arms, kissed and cried over her with sisterly affection, and watched her prayerfully, as she went away to begin her hard task anew, with nothing but the touch of innocent lips upon her cheek, the baptism, of tender tears upon her forehead to keep her from despair.

Still cherishing the hope that Rachel would come back to her, Christie neither returned to Mrs. King nor sought another place of any sort, but took home work from a larger establishment, and sat sewing diligently in her little room, waiting, hoping, longing for her friend. But month after month went by, and no word, no sign came to comfort her. She would not doubt, yet she could not help fearing, and in her nightly prayer no petition was more fervently made than that which asked the Father of both saint and sinner to keep poor Rachel safe, and bring her back in his good time.

Never had she been so lonely as now, for Christie had a social heart, and, having known the joy of a cordial friendship even for a little while, life seemed very barren to her when she lost it. No new friend took Rachel's place, for none came to her, and a feeling of loyalty kept her from seeking one. But she suffered for the want of genial society, for all the tenderness of her nature seemed to have been roused by that brief but most sincere affection. Her hungry heart clamored for the happiness that was its right, and grew very heavy as she watched friends or lovers walking in the summer twilight when she took her evening stroll. Often her eyes followed some humble pair, longing to bless and to be blessed by the divine passion whose magic beautifies the little milliner and her lad with the same tender grace as the poet and the mistress whom he makes immortal in a song. But neither friend nor lover came to Christie, and she said to herself, with a sad sort of courage:

"I shall be solitary all my life, perhaps; so the sooner I make up my mind to it, the easier it will be to bear."

At Christmas-tide she made a little festival for herself, by giving to each of the household drudges the most generous gift she could afford, for no one else thought of them, and having known some of the hardships of servitude herself, she had much sympathy with those in like case.

Then, with the pleasant recollection of two plain faces, brightened by gratitude, surprise, and joy, she went out into the busy streets to forget the solitude she left behind her.

Very gay they were with snow and sleigh-bells, holly-boughs, and garlands, below, and Christmas sunshine in the winter sky above. All faces shone, all voices had a cheery ring, and everybody stepped briskly on errands of good-will. Up and down went Christie, making herself happy in the happiness of others. Looking in at the shop-windows, she watched, with interest, the purchases of busy parents, calculating how best to fill the little socks hung up at home, with a childish faith that never must be disappointed, no matter how hard the times might be. She was glad to see so many turkeys on their way to garnish hospitable tables, and hoped that all the dear home circles might be found unbroken, though she had place in none. No Christmas-tree went by leaving a whiff of piny sweetness behind, that she did not wish it all success, and picture to herself the merry little people dancing in its light. And whenever she saw a ragged child eying a window full of goodies, smiling even, while it shivered, she could not resist playing Santa Claus till her purse was empty, sending the poor little souls enraptured home with oranges and apples in either hand, and splendid sweeties in their pockets, for the babies.

No envy mingled with the melancholy that would not be dispelled even by these gentle acts, for her heart was very tender that night, and if any one had asked what gifts she desired most, she would have answered with a look more pathetic than any shivering child had given her:

“I want the sound of a loving voice; the touch of a friendly hand.”

Going home, at last, to the lonely little room where no Christmas fire burned, no tree shone, no household group awaited her, she climbed the long, dark stairs, with drops on her cheeks, warmer than any melted snow-flake could have left, and opening her door paused on the threshold, smiling with wonder and delight, for in her absence some gentle spirit had remembered her. A fire burned cheerily upon the hearth, her lamp was lighted, a lovely rose-tree, in full bloom, filled the air with its delicate breath, and in its shadow lay a note from Rachel.

“A merry Christmas and a happy New Year, Christie! Long ago you gave me your little rose; I have watched and tended it for your sake, dear, and now when I want to show my love and thankfulness, I give it back again as my one treasure. I crept in while you were gone, because I feared I might harm you in some way if you saw me. I longed to stay and tell you that I am safe and well, and busy, with your good face looking into mine, but I don’t deserve that yet. Only love me, trust me, pray for me, and some day you shall know what you have done for me. Till then, God bless and keep you, dearest friend, your RACHEL.”

Never had sweeter tears fallen than those that dropped upon the little tree as Christie took it in her arms, and all the rosy clusters leaned toward her as if eager to deliver tender messages. Surely her wish was granted now, for friendly hands had been at work for her. Warm against her heart lay words as precious as if uttered by a loving voice, and nowhere, on that happy night, stood a fairer Christmas tree than that which bloomed so beautifully from the heart of a Magdalen who loved much and was forgiven.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE MIST.

THE year that followed was the saddest Christie had ever known, for she suffered a sort of poverty which is more difficult to bear than actual want, since money cannot lighten it, and the rarest charity alone can minister to it. Her heart was empty and she could not fill it; her soul was hungry and she could not feed it; life was cold and dark and she could not warm and brighten it, for she knew not where to go.

She tried to help herself by all the means in her power, and when effort after effort failed she said: “I am not good enough yet to deserve happiness. I think too much of human love, too little of divine. When I have made God my friend perhaps He will let me find and keep one heart to make life happy with. How shall I know God? Who will tell me where to find Him, and help me to love and lean upon Him as I ought?”

In all sincerity she asked these questions, in all sincerity she began her search, and with pathetic patience waited for an answer. She read many books, some wise, some vague, some full of superstition, all unsatisfactory to one who wanted a living God. She went to many churches, studied many creeds, and watched their fruits as well as she could; but still remained unsatisfied. Some were cold and narrow, some seemed theatrical and superficial, some stern and terrible, none simple, sweet, and strong enough for humanity’s many needs. There was too much machinery, too many walls, laws, and penalties between the Father and His children. Too much fear, too little love; too many saints and intercessors; too little faith in the instincts of the soul which turns to God as flowers to the sun. Too much idle strife about names and creeds; too little knowledge of the natural religion which has no name but godliness, whose creed is boundless and benignant as the sunshine, whose faith is as the tender trust of little children in their mother’s love.

Nowhere did Christie find this all-sustaining power, this paternal friend, and comforter, and after months of patient searching she gave up her quest, saying, despondently:

“I’m afraid I never shall get religion, for all that’s offered me seems so poor, so narrow, or so hard that I cannot take it for my stay. A God of wrath I cannot love; a God that must be propitiated, adorned, and adored like an idol I cannot respect; and a God who can be blinded to men’s iniquities through the week by a little beating of the breast and bowing down on the seventh day, I cannot serve. I want a Father to whom I can go with all my sins and sorrows, all my hopes and joys, as freely and fearlessly as I used to go to my human father, sure of help and sympathy and love. Shall I ever find Him?"

Alas, poor Christie! she was going through the sorrowful perplexity that comes to so many before they learn that religion cannot be given or bought, but must grow as trees grow, needing frost and snow, rain and wind to strengthen it before it is deep-rooted in the soul; that God is in the hearts of all, and they that seek shall surely find Him when they need Him most.

So Christie waited for religion to reveal itself to her, and while she waited worked with an almost desperate industry, trying to buy a little happiness for herself by giving a part of her earnings to those whose needs money could supply. She clung to her little room, for there she could live her own life undisturbed, and preferred to stint herself in other ways rather than give up this liberty. Day after day she sat there sewing health of mind and body into the long seams or dainty stitching that passed through her busy hands, and while she sewed she thought sad, bitter, oftentimes rebellious thoughts.

It was the worst life she could have led just then, for, deprived of the active, cheerful influences she most needed, her mind preyed on itself, slowly and surely, preparing her for the dark experience to come. She knew that there was fitter work for her somewhere, but how to find it was a problem which wiser women have often failed to solve. She was no pauper, yet was one of those whom poverty sets at odds with the world, for favors burden and dependence makes the bread bitter unless love brightens the one and sweetens the other.

There are many Christies, willing to work, yet unable to bear the contact with coarser natures which makes labor seem degrading, or to endure the hard struggle for the bare necessities of life when life has lost all that makes it beautiful. People wonder when such as she say they can find little to do; but to those who know nothing of the pangs of pride, the sacrifices of feeling, the martyrdoms of youth, love, hope, and ambition that go on under the faded cloaks of these poor gentle-women, who tell them to go into factories, or scrub in kitchens, for there is work enough for all, the most convincing answer would be, "Try it."

Christie kept up bravely till a wearisome low fever broke both strength and spirit, and brought the weight of debt upon her when least fitted to bear or cast it off. For the first time she began to feel that she had nerves which would rebel, and a heart that could not long endure isolation from its kind without losing the cheerful courage which hitherto had been her staunchest friend. Perfect rest, kind care, and genial society were the medicines she needed, but there was no one to minister to her, and she went blindly on along the road so many women tread.

She left her bed too soon, fearing to ask too much of the busy people who had done their best to be neighborly. She returned to her work when it felt heavy in her feeble hands, for debt made idleness seem wicked to her conscientious mind. And, worst of all, she fell back into the bitter, brooding mood which had become habitual to her since she lived alone. While the tired hands slowly worked, the weary brain ached and burned with heavy thoughts, vain longings, and feverish fancies, till things about her sometimes seemed as strange and spectral as the phantoms that had haunted her half-delirious sleep. Inexpressibly wretched were the dreary days, the restless nights, with only pain and labor for companions. The world looked very dark to her, life seemed an utter failure, God a delusion, and the long, lonely years before her too hard to be endured.

It is not always want, insanity, or sin that drives women to desperate deaths; often it is a dreadful loneliness of heart, a hunger for home and friends, worse than starvation, a bitter sense of wrong in being denied the tender ties, the pleasant duties, the sweet rewards that can make the humblest life happy; a rebellious protest against God, who, when they cry for bread, seems to offer them a stone. Some of these impatient souls throw life away, and learn too late how rich it might have been with a stronger faith, a more submissive spirit. Others are kept, and slowly taught to stand and wait, till blest with a happiness the sweeter for the doubt that went before.

There came a time to Christie when the mist about her was so thick she would have stumbled and fallen had not the little candle, kept alight by her own hand, showed her how far “a good deed shines in a naughty world;” and when God seemed utterly forgetful of her He sent a friend to save and comfort her.

March winds were whistling among the house-tops, and the sky was darkening with a rainy twilight as Christie folded up her finished work, stretched her weary limbs, and made ready for her daily walk. Even this was turned to profit, for then she took home her work, went in search of more, and did her own small marketing. As late hours and unhealthy labor destroyed appetite, and unpaid debts made each mouthful difficult to swallow with Mrs. Flint’s hard eye upon her, she had undertaken to supply her own food, and so lessen the obligation that burdened her. An unwise retrenchment, for, busied with the tasks that must be done, she too often neglected or deferred the meals to which no society lent interest, no appetite gave flavor; and when the fuel was withheld the fire began to die out spark by spark.

As she stood before the little mirror, smoothing the hair upon her forehead, she watched the face reflected there, wondering if it could be the same she used to see so full of youth and hope and energy.

"Yes, I'm growing old; my youth is nearly over, and at thirty I shall be a faded, dreary woman, like so many I see and pity. It's hard to come to this after trying so long to find my place, and do my duty. I'm a failure after all, and might as well have stayed with Aunt Betsey or married Joe."

"Miss Devon, to-day is Saturday, and I'm makin' up my bills, so I'll trouble you for your month's board, and as much on the old account as you can let me have."

Mrs. Flint spoke, and her sharp voice rasped the silence like a file, for she had entered without knocking, and her demand was the first intimation of her presence.

Christie turned slowly round, for there was no elasticity in her motions now; through the melancholy anxiety her face always wore of late, there came the worried look of one driven almost beyond endurance, and her hands began to tremble nervously as she tied on her bonnet. Mrs. Flint was a hard woman, and dunned her debtors relentlessly; Christie dreaded the sight of her, and would have left the house had she been free of debt.

"I am just going to take these things home and get more work. I am sure of being paid, and you shall have all I get. But, for Heaven's sake, give me time."

Two days and a night of almost uninterrupted labor had given a severe strain to her nerves, and left her in a dangerous state. Something in her face arrested Mrs. Flint's attention; she observed that Christie was putting on her best cloak and hat, and to her suspicious eye the bundle of work looked unduly large.

It had been a hard day for the poor woman, for the cook had gone off in a huff; the chamber girl been detected in petty larceny; two desirable boarders had disappointed her; and the incapable husband had fallen ill, so it was little wonder that her soul was tried, her sharp voice sharper, and her sour temper sourer than ever.

"I have heard of folks putting on their best things and going out, but never coming back again, when they owed money. It's a mean trick, but it's sometimes done by them you wouldn't think it of," she said, with an aggravating sniff of intelligence.

To be suspected of dishonesty was the last drop in Christie's full cup. She looked at the woman with a strong desire to do something violent, for every nerve was tingling with irritation and anger. But she controlled herself, though her face was colorless and her hands were more tremulous than before. Unfastening her comfortable cloak she replaced it with a shabby shawl; took off her neat bonnet and put on a hood, unfolded six linen shirts, and shook them out before her landlady's eyes; then retied the parcel, and, pausing on the threshold of the door, looked back with an expression that haunted the woman long afterward, as she said, with the quiver of strong excitement in her voice:

"Mrs. Flint, I have always dealt honorably by you; I always mean to do it, and don't deserve to be suspected of dishonesty like that. I leave every thing I own behind me, and if I don't come back, you can sell them all and pay yourself, for I feel now as if I never wanted to see you or this room again."

Then she went rapidly away, supported by her indignation, for she had done her best to pay her debts; had sold the few trinkets she possessed, and several treasures given by the Carrols, to settle her doctor's bill, and had been half killing herself to satisfy Mrs. Flint's demands. The consciousness that she had been too lavish in her generosity when fortune smiled upon her, made the present want all the harder to bear. But she would neither beg nor borrow, though she knew Harry would delight to give, and Uncle Enos lend her money, with a lecture on extravagance, gratis.

"I'll paddle my own canoe as long as I can," she said, sternly; "and when I must ask help I'll turn to strangers for it, or scuttle my boat, and go down without troubling any one."

When she came to her employer's door, the servant said: "Missis was out;" then seeing Christie's disappointed face, she added, confidentially:

"If it's any comfort to know it, I can tell you that missis wouldn't have paid you if she had a been to home. There's been three other women here with work, and she's put 'em all off. She always does, and beats 'em down into the bargain, which ain't genteel to my thinkin'."

"She promised me I should be well paid for these, because I undertook to get them done without fail. I've worked day and night rather than disappoint her, and felt sure of my money," said Christie, despondently.

"I'm sorry, but you won't get it. She told me to tell you your prices was too high, and she could find folks to work cheaper."

"She did not object to the price when I took the work, and I have half-ruined my eyes over the fine stitching. See if it isn't nicely done." And Christie displayed her exquisite needlework with pride.

The girl admired it, and, having a grievance of her own, took satisfaction in berating her mistress.

"It's a shame! These things are part of a present, the ladies are going to give the minister; but I don't believe he'll feel easy in 'em if poor folks is wronged to get 'em. Missis won't pay what they are worth, I know; for, don't you see, the cheaper the work is done, the more money she has to make a spread with her share of the present? It's my opinion you'd better hold on to these shirts till she pays for 'em handsome."

"No; I'll keep my promise, and I hope she will keep hers. Tell her I need the money very much, and have worked very hard to please her. I'll come again on Monday, if I'm able."

Christie's lips trembled as she spoke, for she was feeble still, and the thought of that hard-earned money had been her sustaining hope through the weary hours spent over that ill-paid work. The girl said "Good-bye," with a look of mingled pity and respect, for in her eyes the seamstress was more of a lady than the mistress in this transaction.

Christie hurried to another place, and asked eagerly if the young ladies had any work for her. "Not a stitch," was the reply, and the door closed. She stood a moment looking down upon the passers-by wondering what answer she would get if she accosted any one; and had any especially benevolent face looked back at her she would have been tempted to do it, so heart-sick and forlorn did she feel just then.

She knocked at several other doors, to receive the same reply. She even tried a slop-shop, but it was full, and her pale face was against her. Her long illness had lost her many patrons, and if one steps out from the ranks of needle-women, it is very hard to press in again, so crowded are they, and so desperate the need of money.

One hope remained, and, though the way was long, and a foggy drizzle had set in, she minded neither distance nor the chilly rain, but hurried away with anxious thoughts still dogging her steps. Across a long bridge, through muddy roads and up a stately avenue she went, pausing, at last, spent and breathless at another door.

A servant with a wedding-favor in his button-hole opened to her, and, while he went to deliver her urgent message, she peered in wistfully from the dreary world without, catching glimpses of home-love and happiness that made her heart ache for very pity of its own loneliness. A wedding was evidently afoot, for hall and staircase blazed with light and bloomed with flowers. Smiling men and maids ran to and fro; opening doors showed tables beautiful with bridal white and silver; savory odors filled the air; gay voices echoed above and below; and once she caught a brief glance at the bonny bride, standing with her father's arm about her, while her mother gave some last, loving touch to her array; and a group of young sisters with April faces clustered round her.

The pretty picture vanished all too soon; the man returned with a hurried "No" for answer, and Christie went out into the deepening twilight with a strange sense of desperation at her heart. It was not the refusal, not the fear of want, nor the reaction of overtaxed nerves alone; it was the sharpness of the contrast between that other woman's fate and her own that made her wring her hands together, and cry out, bitterly:

“Oh, it isn’t fair, it isn’t right, that she should have so much and I so little! What have I ever done to be so desolate and miserable, and never to find any happiness, however hard I try to do what seems my duty?”

There was no answer, and she went slowly down the long avenue, feeling that there was no cause for hurry now, and even night and rain and wind were better than her lonely room or Mrs. Flint’s complaints. Afar off the city lights shone faintly through the fog, like pale lamps seen in dreams; the damp air cooled her feverish cheeks; the road was dark and still, and she longed to lie down and rest among the sodden leaves.

When she reached the bridge she saw the draw was up, and a spectral ship was slowly passing through. With no desire to mingle in the crowd that waited on either side, she paused, and, leaning on the railing, let her thoughts wander where they would. As she stood there the heavy air seemed to clog her breath and wrap her in its chilly arms. She felt as if the springs of life were running down, and presently would stop; for, even when the old question, “What shall I do?” came haunting her, she no longer cared even to try to answer it, and had no feeling but one of utter weariness. She tried to shake off the strange mood that was stealing over her, but spent body and spent brain were not strong enough to obey her will, and, in spite of her efforts to control it, the impulse that had seized her grew more intense each moment.

“Why should I work and suffer any longer for myself alone?” she thought; “why wear out my life struggling for the bread I have no heart to eat? I am not wise enough to find my place, nor patient enough to wait until it comes to me. Better give up trying, and leave room for those who have something to live for.”

Many a stronger soul has known a dark hour when the importunate wish has risen that it were possible and right to lay down the burdens that oppress, the perplexities that harass, and hasten the coming of the long sleep that needs no lullaby. Such an hour was this to Christie, for, as she stood there, that sorrowful bewilderment which we call despair came over her, and ruled her with a power she could not resist.

A flight of steps close by led to a lumber wharf, and, scarcely knowing why, she went down there, with a vague desire to sit still somewhere, and think her way out of the mist that seemed to obscure her mind. A single tall lamp shone at the farther end of the platform, and presently she found herself leaning her hot forehead against the iron pillar, while she watched with curious interest the black water rolling sluggishly below.

She knew it was no place for her, yet no one waited for her, no one would care if she staid for ever, and, yielding to the perilous fascination that drew her there, she lingered with a heavy throbbing in her temples, and a troop of wild fancies whirling through her brain. Something white swept by below, — only a broken oar — but she began to wonder how a human body would look floating through the night. It was an awesome fancy, but it took possession of her, and, as it grew, her eyes dilated, her breath came fast, and her lips fell apart, for she seemed to see the phantom she had conjured up, and it wore the likeness of herself.

With an ominous chill creeping through her blood, and a growing tumult in her mind, she thought, “I must go,” but still stood motionless, leaning over the wide gulf, eager to see where that dead thing would pass away. So plainly did she see it, so peaceful was the white face, so full of rest the folded hands, so strangely like, and yet unlike, herself, that she seemed to lose her identity, and wondered which was the real and which the imaginary Christie. Lower and lower she bent; looser and looser grew her hold upon the pillar; faster and faster beat the pulses in her temples, and the rush of some blind impulse was swiftly coming on, when a hand seized and caught her back.

For an instant every thing grew black before her eyes, and the earth seemed to slip away from underneath her feet. Then she was herself again, and found that she was sitting on a pile of lumber, with her head uncovered, and a woman’s arm about her.

THE RESCUE.

“Was I going to drown myself?” she asked, slowly, with a fancy that she had been dreaming frightfully, and some one had wakened her.

“You were most gone; but I came in time, thank God! O Christie! don’t you know me?”

Ah! no fear of that; for with one bewildered look, one glad cry of recognition, Christie found her friend again, and was gathered close to Rachel’s heart.

“My dear, my dear, what drove you to it? Tell me all, and let me help you in your trouble, as you helped me in mine,” she said, as she tenderly laid the poor, white face upon her breast, and wrapped her shawl about the trembling figure clinging to her with such passionate delight.

“I have been ill; I worked too hard; I’m not myself to-night. I owe money. People disappoint and worry me; and I was so worn out, and weak, and wicked, I think I meant to take my life.”

“No, dear; it was not you that meant to do it, but the weakness and the trouble that bewildered you. Forget it all, and rest a little, safe with me; then we’ll talk again.”

Rachel spoke soothingly, for Christie shivered and sighed as if her own thoughts frightened her. For a moment they sat silent, while the mist trailed its white shroud above them, as if death had paused to beckon a tired child away, but, finding her so gently cradled on a warm, human heart, had relented and passed on, leaving no waif but the broken oar for the river to carry toward the sea.

"Tell me about yourself, Rachel. Where have you been so long? I 've looked and waited for you ever since the second little note you sent me on last Christinas; but you never came."

"I've been away, dear heart, hard at work in another city, larger and wickeder than this. I tried to get work here, that I might be near you; but that cruel Cotton always found me out; and I was so afraid I should get desperate that I went away where I was not known. There it came into my mind to do for others more wretched than I what you had done for me. God put the thought into my heart, and He helped me in my work, for it has prospered wonderfully. All this year I have been busy with it, and almost happy; for I felt that your love made me strong to do it, and that, in time, I might grow good enough to be your friend."

"See what I am, Rachel, and never say that any more!"

"Hush, my poor dear, and let me talk. You are not able to do any thing, but rest, and listen. I knew how many poor souls went wrong when the devil tempted them; and I gave all my strength to saving those who were going the way I went. I had no fear, no shame to overcome, for I was one of them. They would listen to me, for I knew what I spoke; they could believe in salvation, for I was saved; they did not feel so outcast and forlorn when I told them you had taken me into your innocent arms, and loved me like a sister. With every one I helped my power increased, and I felt as if I had washed away a little of my own great sin. O Christie! never think it's time to die till you are called; for the Lord leaves us till we have done our work, and never sends more sin and sorrow than we can bear and be the better for, if we hold fast by Him."

So beautiful and brave she looked, so full of strength and yet of meek submission was her voice, that Christie's heart was thrilled; for it was plain that Rachel had learned how to distil balm from the bitterness of life, and, groping in the mire to save lost souls, had found her own salvation there.

"Show me how to grow pious, strong, and useful, as you are," she said. "I am all wrong, and feel as if I never could get right again, for I haven't energy enough to care what becomes of me."

"I know the state, Christie: I've been through it all! but when I stood where you stand now, there was no hand to pull me back, and I fell into a blacker river than this underneath our feet. Thank God, I came in time to save you from either death!"

"How did you find me?" asked Christie, when she had echoed in her heart the thanksgiving that came with such fervor from the other's lips.

"I passed you on the bridge. I did not see your face, but you stood leaning there so wearily, and looking down into the water, as I used to look, that I wanted to speak, but did not; and I went on to comfort a poor girl who is dying yonder. Something turned me back, however; and when I saw you down here I knew why I was sent. You were almost gone, but I kept you; and when I had you in my arms I knew you, though it nearly broke my heart to find you here. Now, dear, come home.

"Home! ah, Rachel, I've got no home, and for want of one I shall be lost!"

The lament that broke from her was more pathetic than the tears that streamed down, hot and heavy, melting from her heart the frost of her despair. Her friend let her weep, knowing well the worth of tears, and while Christie sobbed herself quiet, Rachel took thought for her as tenderly as any mother.

When she had heard the story of Christie's troubles, she stood up as if inspired with a happy thought, and stretching both hands to her friend, said, with an air of cheerful assurance most comforting to see:

"I'll take care of you; come with me, my poor Christie, and I'll give you a home, very humble, but honest and happy."

"With you, Rachel?"

"No, dear, I must go back to my work, and you are not fit for that. Neither must you go again to your own room, because for you it is haunted, and the worst place you could be in. You want change, and I'll give you one. It will seem queer at first, but it is a wholesome place, and just what you need."

"I'll do any thing you tell me. I'm past thinking for myself to-night, and only want to be taken care of till I find strength and courage enough to stand alone," said Christie, rising slowly and looking about her with an aspect as helpless and hopeless as if the cloud of mist was a wall of iron.

Rachel put on her bonnet for her and wrapped her shawl about her, saying, in a tender voice, that warmed the other's heart:

"Close by lives a dear, good woman who often befriends such as you and I. She will take you in without a question, and love to do it, for she is the most hospitable soul I know. Just tell her you want work, that I sent you, and there will be no trouble. Then, when you know her a little, confide in her, and you will never come to such a pass as this again. Keep up your heart, dear; I'll not leave you till you are safe."

So cheerily she spoke, so confident she looked, that the lost expression passed from Christie's face, and hand in hand they went away together, — two types of the sad sisterhood standing on either shore of the dark river that is spanned by a Bridge of Sighs.

Rachel led her friend toward the city, and, coming to the mechanics' quarter, stopped before the door of a small, old house.

"Just knock, say 'Rachel sent me,' and you'll find yourself at home."

"Stay with me, or let me go with you. I can't lose you again, for I need you very much," pleaded Christie, clinging to her friend.

"Not so much as that poor girl dying all alone. She's waiting for me, and I must go. But I'll write soon; and remember, Christie, I shall feel as if I had only paid a very little of my debt if you go back to the sad old life, and lose your faith and hope again. God bless and keep you, and when we meet next time let me find a happier face than this."

Rachel kissed it with her heart on her lips, smiled her brave sweet smile, and vanished in the mist.

Pausing a moment to collect herself, Christie recollected that she had not asked the name of the new friend whose help she was about to ask. A little sign on the door caught her eye, and, bending down, she managed to read by the dim light of the street lamp these words:

"C. WILKINS, Clear-Starcher.

"Laces done up in the best style."

Too tired to care whether a laundress or a lady took her in, she knocked timidly, and, while she waited for an answer to her summons, stood listening to the noises within.

A swashing sound as of water was audible, likewise a scuffling as of flying feet; some one clapped hands, and a voice said, warningly, "Into your beds this instant minute or I'll come to you! Andrew Jackson, give Gusty a boost; Ann Lizy, don't you tech Wash's feet to tickle 'em. Set pretty in the tub, Victory, dear, while ma sees who's rappin'."

"C. WILKINS, CLEAR STARCHER."

Then heavy footsteps approached, the door opened wide, and a large woman appeared, with fuzzy red hair, no front teeth, and a plump, clean face, brightly illuminated by the lamp she carried.

"If you please, Rachel sent me. She thought you might be able" —

Christie got no further, for C. Wilkins put out a strong bare arm, still damp, and gently drew her in, saying, with the same motherly tone as when addressing her children, "Come right in, dear, and don't mind the clutter things is in. I'm givin' the children their Sat'day scrubbin', and they will slop and kite 'round, no matter ef I do spank 'em."

Talking all the way in such an easy, comfortable voice that Christie felt as if she must have heard it before, Mrs. Wilkins led her unexpected guest into a small kitchen, smelling suggestively of soap-suds and warm flat-irons. In the middle of this apartment was a large tub; in the tub a chubby child sat, sucking a sponge and staring calmly at the new-comer with a pair of big blue eyes, while little drops shone in the yellow curls and on the rosy shoulders.

"How pretty!" cried Christie, seeing nothing else and stopping short to admire this innocent little Venus rising from the sea.

"So she is! Ma's darlin' lamb! and ketchin' her death a cold this blessed minnit. Set right down, my dear, and tuck your wet feet into the oven. I'll have a dish o' tea for you in less 'n no time; and while it's drawin' I'll clap Victory Adelaide into her bed."

Christie sank into a shabby but most hospitable old chair, dropped her bonnet on the floor, put her feet in the oven, and, leaning back, watched Mrs. Wilkins wipe the baby as if she had come for that especial purpose. As Rachel predicted, she found herself, at home at once, and presently was startled to hear a laugh from her own lips when several children in red and yellow flannel night-gowns darted like meteors across the open doorway of an adjoining room, with whoops and howls, bursts of laughter, and antics of all sorts.

How pleasant it was; that plain room, with no ornaments but the happy faces, no elegance, but cleanliness, no wealth, but hospitality and lots of love. This latter blessing gave the place its charm, for, though Mrs. Wilkins threatened to take her infants' noses off if they got out of bed again, or "put 'em in the kettle and bile 'em" they evidently knew no fear, but gambolled all the nearer to her for the threat; and she beamed upon them with such maternal tenderness and pride that her homely face grew beautiful in Christie's eyes.

When the baby was bundled up in a blanket and about to be set down before the stove to simmer a trifle before being put to bed, Christie held out her arms, saying with an irresistible longing in her eyes and voice:

"Let me hold her! I love babies dearly, and it seems as if it would do me more good than quarts of tea to cuddle her, if she'll let me."

"There now, that's real sensible; and mother's bird'll set along with you as good as a kitten. Toast her tootsies wal, for she's croupy, and I have to be extra choice of her."

"How good it feels!" sighed Christie, half devouring the warm and rosy little bunch in her lap, while baby lay back luxuriously, spreading her pink toes to the pleasant warmth and smiling sleepily up in the hungry face that hung over her.

Mrs. Wilkins's quick eyes saw it all, and she said to herself, in the closet, as she cut bread and rattled down a cup and saucer:

"That's what she wants, poor creeter; I'll let her have a right nice time, and warm and feed and chirk her up, and then I'll see what's to be done for her. She ain't one of the common sort, and goodness only knows what Rachel sent her here for. She's poor and sick, but she ain't bad. I can tell that by her face, and she's the sort I like to help. It's a mercy I ain't eat my supper, so she can have that bit of meat and the pie."

Putting a tray on the little table, the good soul set forth all she had to give, and offered it with such hospitable warmth that Christie ate and drank with unaccustomed appetite, finishing off deliciously with a kiss from baby before she was borne away by her mother to the back bedroom, where peace soon reigned.

"Now let me tell you who I am, and how I came to you in such an unceremonious way," began Christie, when her hostess returned and found her warmed, refreshed, and composed by a woman's three best comforters, — kind words, a baby, and a cup of tea.

"'Pears to me, dear, I wouldn't rile myself up by telling any werryments to-night, but git right warm inter bed, and have a good long sleep," said Mrs. Wilkins, without a ray of curiosity in her wholesome red face.

"But you don't know any thing about me, and I may be the worst woman in the world," cried Christie, anxious to prove herself worthy of such confidence.

"I know that you want takin' care of, child, or Rachel wouldn't a sent you. Ef I can help any one, I don't want no introduction; and ef you be the wust woman in the world (which you ain't), I wouldn't shet my door on you, for then you'd need a lift more'n you do now."

Christie could only put out her hand, and mutely thank her new friend with full eyes.

"You're fairly tuckered out, you poor soul, so you jest come right up chamber and let me tuck you up, else you'll be down sick. It ain't a mite of inconvenience; the room is kep for company, and it's all ready, even to a clean night-cap. I'm goin' to clap this warm flat to your feet when you're fixed; it's amazin' comfortin' and keeps your head cool."

Up they went to a tidy little chamber, and Christie found herself laid down to rest none too soon, for she was quite worn out. Sleep began to steal over her the moment her head touched the pillow, in spite of the much beruffled cap which Mrs. Wilkins put on with visible pride in its stiffly crimped borders. She was dimly conscious of a kind hand tucking her up, a comfortable voice purring over her, and, best of all, a motherly good-night kiss, then the weary world faded quite away and she was at rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CURE FOR DESPAIR.

LISHA WILKINS.

WHEN Christie opened the eyes that had closed so wearily, afternoon sunshine streamed across the room, and seemed the herald of happier days. Refreshed by sleep, and comforted by grateful recollections of her kindly welcome, she lay tranquilly enjoying the friendly atmosphere about her, with so strong a feeling that a skilful hand had taken the rudder, that she felt very little anxiety or curiosity about the haven which was to receive her boat after this narrow escape from shipwreck.

Her eye wandered to and fro, and brightened as it went; for though a poor, plain room it was as neat as hands could make it, and so glorified with sunshine that she thought it a lovely place, in spite of the yellow paper with green cabbage roses on it, the gorgeous plaster statuary on the mantel-piece, and the fragrance of dough-nuts which pervaded the air. Every thing suggested home life, humble but happy, and Christie's solitary heart warmed at the sights and sounds about her.

A half open closet-door gave her glimpses of little frocks and jackets, stubby little shoes, and go-to-meeting hats all in a row. From below came up the sound of childish voices chattering, childish feet trotting to and fro, and childish laughter sounding sweetly through the Sabbath stillness of the place. From a room near by, came the soothing creak of a rocking-chair, the rustle of a newspaper, and now and then a scrap of conversation common-place enough, but pleasant to hear, because so full of domestic love and confidence; and, as she listened, Christie pictured Mrs. Wilkins and her husband taking their rest together after the week's hard work was done.

"I wish I could stay here; it's so comfortable and home-like. I wonder if they wouldn't let me have this room, and help me to find some better work than sewing? I'll get up and ask them," thought Christie, feeling an irresistible desire to stay, and strong repugnance to returning to the room she had left, for, as Rachel truly said, it was haunted for her.

When she opened the door to go down, Mrs. Wilkins bounced out of her rocking-chair and hurried to meet her with a smiling face, saying all in one breath:

"Good mornin', dear! Rested well, I hope? I'm proper glad to hear it. Now come right down and have your dinner. I kep it hot, for I couldn't bear to wake you up, you was sleepin' so beautiful."

"I was so worn out I slept like a baby, and feel like a new creature. It was so kind of you to take me in, and I'm so grateful I don't know how to show it," said Christie, warmly, as her hostess ponderously descended the complaining stairs and ushered her into the tidy kitchen from which tubs and flat-irons were banished one day in the week.

"Lawful sakes, the' ain't nothing to be grateful for, child, and you're heartily welcome to the little I done. We are country folks in our ways, though we be livin' in the city, and we have a reg'lar country dinner Sundays. Hope you'll relish it; my vittles is clean ef they ain't rich."

As she spoke, Mrs. Wilkins dished up baked beans, Indian-pudding, and brown bread enough for half a dozen. Christie was hungry now, and ate with an appetite that delighted the good lady who vibrated between her guest and her children, shut up in the "settin'-room."

"Now please let me tell you all about myself, for I am afraid you think me something better than I am. If I ask help from you, it is right that you should know whom you are helping," said Christie, when the table was cleared and her hostess came and sat down beside her.

"Yes, my dear, free your mind, and then we'll fix things up right smart. Nothin' I like better, and Lisha says I have considerable of a knack that way," replied Mrs. Wilkins, with a smile, a nod, and an air of interest most reassuring.

So Christie told her story, won to entire confidence by the sympathetic face opposite, and the motherly pats so gently given by the big, rough hand that often met her own. When all was told, Christie said very earnestly:

"I am ready to go to work to-morrow, and will do any thing I can find, but I should love to stay here a little while, if I could; I do so dread to be alone. Is it possible? I mean to pay my board of course, and help you besides if you'll let me."

Mrs. Wilkins glowed with pleasure at this compliment, and leaning toward Christie, looked into her face a moment in silence, as if to test the sincerity of the wish. In that moment Christie saw what steady, sagacious eyes the woman had; so clear, so honest that she looked through them into the great, warm heart below, and looking forgot the fuzzy, red hair, the paucity of teeth, the faded gown, and felt only the attraction of a nature genuine and genial as the sunshine dancing on the kitchen floor.

Beautiful souls often get put into plain bodies, but they cannot be hidden, and have a power all their own, the greater for the unconsciousness or the humility which gives it grace. Christie saw and felt this then, and when the homely woman spoke, listened to her with implicit confidence.

"My dear, I'd no more send you away now than I would my Adelaide, for you need looking after for a spell, most as much as she doos. You've been thinkin' and broodin' too much, and sewin' yourself to death. We'll stop all that, and keep you so busy there won't be no time for the hypo. You're one of them that can't live alone without starvin' somehow, so I'm jest goin' to turn you in among them children to paster, so to speak. That's wholesome and fillin' for you, and goodness knows it will be a puffect charity to me, for I'm goin' to be dreadful drove with gettin' up curtins and all manner of things, as spring comes on. So it ain't no favor on my part, and you can take out your board in tendin' baby and putterin' over them little tykes."

"I should like it so much! But I forgot my debt to Mrs. Flint; perhaps she won't let me go," said Christie, with an anxious cloud coming over her brightening face.

"Merciful, suz! don't you be worried about her. I'll see to her, and ef she acts ugly Lisha 'll fetch her round; men can always settle such things better'n we can, and he's a dreadful smart man Lisha is. We'll go to-morrer and get your belongins, and then settle right down for a spell; and by-an'-by when you git a trifle more chipper we'll find a nice place in the country some'rs. That's what you want; nothin' like green grass and woodsy smells to right folks up. When I was a gal, ef I got low in my mind, or riled in my temper, I jest went out and grubbed in the gardin, or made hay, or walked a good piece, and it fetched me round beautiful. Never failed; so I come to see that good fresh dirt is fust rate physic for folk's spirits as it is for wounds, as they tell on."

"That sounds sensible and pleasant, and I like it. Oh, it is so beautiful to feel that somebody cares for you a little bit, and you ain't one too many in the world," sighed Christie.

"Don't you never feel that agin, my dear. What's the Lord for ef He ain't to hold on to in times of trouble. Faith ain't wuth much ef it's only lively in fair weather; you've got to believe hearty and stan' by the Lord through thick and thin, and He'll stan' by you as no one else begins to. I remember of havin' this bore in upon me by somethin' that happened to a man I knew. He got blowed up in a powder-mill, and when folks asked him what he thought when the bust come, he said, real sober and impressive: 'Wal, it come through me, like a flash, that I'd served the Lord as faithful as I knew how for a number a years, and I guessed He'd fetch me through somehow, and He did.' Sure enough the man warn't killed; I'm bound to confess he was shook dreadful, but his faith warn't."

Christie could not help smiling at the story, but she liked it, and sincerely wished she could imitate the hero of it in his piety, not his powder. She was about to say so when the sound of approaching steps announced the advent of her host. She had been rather impressed with the “smartness” of Lisha by his wife’s praises, but when a small, sallow, sickly looking man came in she changed her mind; for not even an immensely stiff collar, nor a pair of boots that seemed composed entirely of what the boys call “creak leather,” could inspire her with confidence.

Without a particle of expression in his yellow face, Mr. Wilkins nodded to the stranger over the picket fence of his collar, lighted his pipe, and clumped away to enjoy his afternoon promenade without compromising himself by a single word.

His wife looked after him with an admiring gaze as she said:

“Them boots is as good as an advertisement, for he made every stitch on ‘em himself;” then she added, laughing like a girl: “It’s redick’lus my bein’ so proud of Lisha, but ef a woman ain’t a right to think wal of her own husband, I should like to know who has!”

Christie was afraid that Mrs. Wilkins had seen her disappointment in her face, and tried, with wifely zeal, to defend her lord from even a disparaging thought. Wishing to atone for this transgression she was about to sing the praises of the wooden-faced Elisha, but was spared any polite fibs by the appearance of a small girl who delivered an urgent message to the effect, that “Mis Plumly was down sick and wanted Mis Wilkins to run over and set a spell.”

As the good lady hesitated with an involuntary glance at her guest,

Christie said quickly:

“Don’t mind me; I’ll take care of the house for you if you want to go. You may be sure I won’t run off with the children or steal the spoons.”

“I ain’t a mite afraid of anybody wantin’ to steal them little toads; and as for spoons, I ain’t got a silver one to bless myself with,” laughed Mrs. Wilkins. “I guess I will go, then, ef you don’t mind, as it’s only acrost the street. Like’s not settin’ quiet will be better for you ‘n talkin’, for I’m a dreadful hand to gab when I git started. Tell Mis Plumly I’m a comin’.”

Then, as the child ran off, the stout lady began to rummage in her closet, saying, as she rattled and slammed:

“I’ll jest take her a drawin’ of tea and a couple of nut-cakes: mebby she’ll relish ‘em, for I shouldn’t wonder ef she hadn’t had a mouthful this blessed day. She’s dreadful slack at the best of times, but no one can much wonder, seein’ she’s got nine children, and is jest up from a rheumatic fever. I’m sure I never grudge a meal of vittles or a hand’s turn to such as she is, though she does beat all for dependin’ on her neighbors. I’m a thousand times obleeged. You needn’t werry about the children, only don’t let ‘em git lost, or burnt, or pitch out a winder; and when it’s done give ‘em the patty-cake that’s bakin’ for ‘em.”

With which maternal orders Mrs. Wilkins assumed a sky-blue bonnet, and went beaming away with several dishes genteelly hidden under her purple shawl.

Being irresistibly attracted toward the children Christie opened the door and took a survey of her responsibilities.

Six lively infants were congregated in the “settin’-room,” and chaos seemed to have come again, for every sort of destructive amusement was in full operation. George Washington, the eldest blossom, was shearing a resigned kitten; Gusty and Ann Eliza were concocting mud pies in the ashes; Adelaide Victoria was studying the structure of lamp-wicks, while Daniel Webster and Andrew Jackson were dragging one another in a clothes-basket, to the great detriment of the old carpet and still older chariot.

Thinking that some employment more suited to the day might be introduced, Christie soon made friends with these young persons, and, having rescued the kitten, banished the basket, lured the elder girls from their mud-piety, and quenched the curiosity of the Pickwickian Adelaide, she proposed teaching them some little hymns.

The idea was graciously received, and the class decorously seated in a row. But before a single verse was given out, Gusty, being of a house-wifely turn of mind, suggested that the patty-cake might burn. Instant alarm pervaded the party, and a precipitate rush was made for the cooking-stove, where Christie proved by ocular demonstration that the cake showed no signs of baking, much less of burning. The family pronounced themselves satisfied, after each member had poked a grimy little finger into the doughy delicacy, whereon one large raisin reposed in proud pre-eminence over the vulgar herd of caraways.

Order being with difficulty restored, Christie taught her flock an appropriate hymn, and was flattering herself that their youthful minds were receiving a devotional bent, when they volunteered a song, and incited thereunto by the irreverent Wash, burst forth with a gem from Mother Goose, closing with a smart skirmish of arms and legs that set all law and order at defiance. Hoping to quell the insurrection Christie invited the breathless rioters to calm themselves by looking at the pictures in the big Bible. But, unfortunately, her explanations were so vivid that her audience were fired with a desire to enact some of the scenes portrayed, and no persuasions could keep them from playing Ark on the spot. The clothes-basket was elevated upon two chairs, and into it marched the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, to judge by the noise, and all set sail, with Washington at the helm, Jackson and Webster plying the clothes and pudding-sticks for oars, while the young ladies rescued their dolls from the flood, and waved their hands to imaginary friends who were not unmindful of the courtesies of life even in the act of drowning.

Finding her authority defied Christie left the rebels to their own devices, and sitting in a corner, began to think about her own affairs. But before she had time to get anxious or perplexed the children diverted her mind, as if the little flibberty-gibbets knew that their pranks and perils were far wholesomer for her just then than brooding.

The much-enduring kitten being sent forth as a dove upon the waters failed to return with the olive-branch; of which peaceful emblem there was soon great need, for mutiny broke out, and spread with disastrous rapidity.

Ann Eliza slapped Gusty because she had the biggest bandbox; Andrew threatened to “chuck” Daniel overboard if he continued to trample on the fraternal toes, and in the midst of the fray, by some unguarded motion, Washington capsized the ship and precipitated the patriarchal family into the bosom of the deep.

Christie flew to the rescue, and, hydropathically treated, the anguish of bumps and bruises was soon assuaged. Then appeared the appropriate moment for a story, and gathering the dilapidated party about her she soon enraptured them by a recital of the immortal history of “Frank and the little dog Trusty.” Charmed with her success she was about to tell another moral tale, but no sooner had she announced the name, “The Three Cakes,” when, like an electric flash a sudden recollection seized the young Wilkinses, and with one voice they demanded their lawful prize, sure that now it must be done.

Christie had forgotten all about it, and was harassed with secret misgivings as she headed the investigating committee. With skipping of feet and clapping of hands the eager tribe surrounded the stove, and with fear and trembling Christie drew forth a melancholy cinder, where, like Casablanca, the lofty raisin still remained, blackened, but undaunted, at its post.

Then were six little vials of wrath poured out upon her devoted head, and sounds of lamentation filled the air, for the irate Wilkinses refused to be comforted till the rash vow to present each member of the outraged family with a private cake produced a lull, during which the younger ones were decoyed into the back yard, and the three elders solaced themselves with mischief.

Mounted on mettlesome broomsticks Andrew and Daniel were riding merrily away to the Banbury Cross, of blessed memory, and little Vie was erecting a pagoda of oyster-shells, under Christie’s superintendence, when a shrill scream from within sent horsemen and architects flying to the rescue.

Gusty’s pinafore was in a blaze; Ann Eliza was dancing frantically about her sister as if bent on making a suttee of herself, while George Washington hung out of window, roaring, “Fire!” “water!” “engine!” “pa!” with a presence of mind worthy of his sex.

A speedy application of the hearth-rug quenched the conflagration, and when a minute burn had been enveloped in cotton-wool, like a gem, a coroner sat upon the pinafore and investigated the case.

It appeared that the ladies were "only playing paper dolls," when Wash, sighing for the enlightenment of his race, proposed to make a bonfire, and did so with an old book; but Gusty, with a firm belief in future punishment, tried to save it, and fell a victim to her principles, as the virtuous are very apt to do.

The book was brought into court, and proved to be an ancient volume of ballads, cut, torn, and half consumed. Several peculiarly developed paper dolls, branded here and there with large letters, like galley-slaves, were then produced by the accused, and the judge could with difficulty preserve her gravity when she found "John Gilpin" converted into a painted petticoat, "The Bay of Biscay, O," situated in the crown of a hat, and "Chevy Chase" issuing from the mouth of a triangular gentleman, who, like Dickens's cherub, probably sung it by ear, having no lungs to speak of.

It was further apparent from the agricultural appearance of the room that beans had been sowed broadcast by means of the apple-corer, which Wash had converted into a pop-gun with a mechanical ingenuity worthy of more general appreciation. He felt this deeply, and when Christie reproved him for leading his sisters astray, he resented the liberty she took, and retired in high dudgeon to the cellar, where he appeared to set up a menagerie, — for bears, lions, and unknown animals, endowed with great vocal powers, were heard to solicit patronage from below.

Somewhat exhausted by her labors, Christie rested, after clearing up the room, while the children found a solace for all afflictions in the consumption of relays of bread and molasses, which infantile restorative occurred like an inspiration to the mind of their guardian.

Peace reigned for fifteen minutes; then came a loud crash from the cellar, followed by a violent splashing, and wild cries of, "Oh, oh, oh, I've fell into the pork barrel! I'm drownin', I'm drownin'!"

Down rushed Christie, and the sticky innocents ran screaming after, to behold their pickled brother fished up from the briny deep. A spectacle well calculated to impress upon their infant minds the awful consequences of straying from the paths of virtue.

At this crisis Mrs. Wilkins providentially appeared, breathless, but brisk and beaming, and in no wise dismayed by the plight of her luckless son, for a ten years' acquaintance with Wash's dauntless nature had inured his mother to "didoes" that would have appalled most women.

"Go right up chamber, and change every rag on you, and don't come down agin till I rap on the ceilin'; you dreadful boy, disgracin' your family by sech actions. I'm sorry I was kep' so long, but Mis Plumly got tellin' her werryments, and 'peared to take so much comfort in it I couldn't bear to stop her. Then I jest run round to your place and told that woman that you was safe and well, along'r friends, and would call in to-morrer to get your things. She 'd ben so scart by your not comin' home that she was as mild as milk, so you won't have no trouble with her, I expect."

"Thank you very much! How kind you are, and how tired you must be! Sit down and let me take your things," cried Christie, more relieved than she could express.

"Lor', no, I'm fond of walkin', but bein' ruther hefty it takes my breath away some to hurry. I'm afraid these children have tuckered you out though. They are proper good gen'lly, but when they do take to trainen they're a sight of care," said Mrs. Wilkins, as she surveyed her imposing bonnet with calm satisfaction.

"I've enjoyed it very much, and it's done me good, for I haven't laughed so much for six months as I have this afternoon," answered Christie, and it was quite true, for she had been too busy to think of herself or her woes.

"Wal, I thought likely it would chirk you up some, or I shouldn't have went," and Mrs. Wilkins put away a contented smile with her cherished bonnet, for Christie's face had grown so much brighter since she saw it last, that the good woman felt sure her treatment was the right one.

At supper Lisha reappeared, and while his wife and children talked incessantly, he ate four slices of bread and butter, three pieces of pie, five doughnuts, and drank a small ocean of tea out of his saucer. Then, evidently feeling that he had done his duty like a man, he gave Christie another nod, and disappeared again without a word.

When she had done up her dishes Mrs. Wilkins brought out a few books and papers, and said to Christie, who sat apart by the window, with the old shadow creeping over her face:

"Now don't feel lonesome, my dear, but jest lop right down on the sotfy and have a sociable kind of a time. Lisha's gone down street for the evenin'. I'll keep the children as quiet as one woman can, and you may read or rest, or talk, jest as you're a mind."

"Thank you; I'll sit here and rock little Vie to sleep for you. I don't care to read, but I'd like to have you talk to me, for it seems as if I'd known you a long time and it does me good," said Christie, as she settled herself and baby on the old settee which had served as a cradle for six young Wilkinses, and now received the honorable name of sofa in its old age.

Mrs. Wilkins looked gratified, as she settled her brood round the table with a pile of pictorial papers to amuse them. Then having laid herself out to be agreeable, she sat thoughtfully rubbing the bridge of her nose, at a loss how to begin. Presently Christie helped her by an involuntary sigh.

"What's the matter, dear? Is there any thing I can do to make you comfortable?" asked the kind soul, alert at once, and ready to offer sympathy.

"I'm very cosy, thank you, and I don't know why I sighed. It's a way I've got into when I think of my worries," explained Christie, in haste.

"Wal, dear, I wouldn't ef I was you. Don't keep turnin' your troubles over. Git atop of 'em somehow, and stay there ef you can," said Mrs. Wilkins, very earnestly.

"But that's just what I can't do. I've lost all my spirits and courage, and got into a dismal state of mind. You seem to be very cheerful, and yet you must have a good deal to try you sometimes. I wish you'd tell me how you do it;" and Christie looked wistfully into that other face, so plain, yet so placid, wondering to see how little poverty, hard work, and many cares had soured or saddened it.

"Really I don't know, unless it's jest doin' whatever comes along, and doin' of it hearty, sure that things is all right, though very often I don't see it at fust."

"Do you see it at last?"

"Gen'lly I do; and if I don't I take it on trust, same as children do what older folks tell 'em; and byme-by when I'm grown up in spiritual things I'll understan' as the dears do, when they git to be men and women."

That suited Christie, and she thought hopefully within herself:

"This woman has got the sort of religion I want, if it makes her what she is. Some day I'll get her to tell me where she found it." Then aloud she said:

"But it's so hard to be patient and contented when nothing happens as you want it to, and you don't get your share of happiness, no matter how much you try to deserve it."

"It ain't easy to bear, I know, but having tried my own way and made a dreadful mess on 't, I concluded that the Lord knows what's best for us, and things go better when He manages than when we go scratchin' round and can't wait."

"Tried your own way? How do you mean?" asked Christie, curiously; for she liked to hear her hostess talk, and found something besides amusement in the conversation, which seemed to possess a fresh country flavor as well as country phrases.

Mrs. Wilkins smiled all over her plump face, as if she liked to tell her experience, and having hunched sleepy little Andy more comfortably into her lap, and given a preparatory hem or two, she began with great good-will.

"It happened a number a years ago and ain't much of a story any way. But you're welcome to it, as some of it is rather humorsome, the laugh may do you good ef the story don't. We was livin' down to the east'ard at the time. It was a real pretty place; the house stood under a couple of maples and a gret brook come foamin' down the rayvine and away through the medders to the river. Dear sakes, seems as ef I see it now, jest as I used to settin' on the doorsteps with the lay-locks all in blow, the squirrels jabberin' on the wall, and the saw-mill screekin' way off by the dam."

Pausing a moment, Mrs. Wilkins looked musingly at the steam of the tea-kettle, as if through its silvery haze she saw her early home again. Wash promptly roused her from this reverie by tumbling off the boiler with a crash. His mother picked him up and placidly went on, falling more and more into the country dialect which city life had not yet polished.

"I oushter hev been the contentedest woman alive, but I warn't, for you see I'd worked at millineryin' before I was married, and had an easy time on't, Afterwards the children come along pretty fast, there was sights of work to do, and no time for pleasuring so I got wore out, and used to hanker after old times in a dreadful wicked way.

"Finally I got acquainted with a Mis Bascum, and she done me a sight of harm. You see, havin' few pies of her own to bake, she was fond of puttin' her fingers into her neighborses, but she done it so neat that no one mistrusted she was takin' all the sarce and leavin' all the crust to them, as you may say. Wal, I told her my werryments and she sympathized real hearty, and said I didn't ought to stan' it, but have things to suit me, and enjoy myself, as other folks did. So when she put it into my head I thought it amazin' good advice, and jest went and done as she told me.

"Lisha was the kindest man you ever see, so when I up and said I warn't goin' to drudge round no more, but must hev a girl, he got one, and goodness knows what a trial she was. After she came I got dreadful slack, and left the house and the children to Hen'retta, and went pleasurin' frequent all in my best. I always was a dressy woman in them days, and Lisha give me his earnin's real lavish, bless his heart! and I went and spent 'em on my sinful gowns and bunnets."

Here Mrs. Wilkins stopped to give a remorseful groan and stroke her faded dress, as if she found great comfort in its dinginess.

"It ain't no use tellin' all I done, but I had full swing, and at fust I thought luck was in my dish sure. But it warn't, seein' I didn't deserve it, and I had to take my mess of trouble, which was needful and nourishin,' ef I'd had the grace to see it so.

"Lisha got into debt, and no wonder, with me a wastin' of his substance;

Hen'retta went off suddin', with whatever she could lay her hands on, and everything was at sixes and sevens. Lisha's patience give out at last, for I was dreadful fractious, knowin' it was all my fault. The children seemed to git out of sorts, too, and acted like time in the primer, with croup and pins, and whoopin'-cough and temper. I declare I used to think the pots and kettles biled over to spite each other and me too in them days.

"All this was nuts to Mis Bascum, and she kep' advisin' and encouragin' of me, and I didn't see through her a mite, or guess that settin' folks by the ears was as relishin' to her as bitters is to some. Merciful, suz! what a piece a work we did make betwixt us! I scolded and moped 'cause I couldn't have my way; Lisha swore and threatened to take to drinkin' ef I didn't make home more comfortable; the children run wild, and the house was gittin' too hot to hold us, when we was brought up with a round turn, and I see the redicklousness of my doin's in time.

"One day Lisha come home tired and cross, for bills was pressin', work slack, and folks talkin' about us as ef they 'd nothin' else to do. I was dishin' up dinner, feelin' as nervous as a witch, for a whole batch of bread had burnt to a cinder while I was trimmin' a new bunnet, Wash had scart me most to death swallerin' a cent, and the steak had been on the floor more'n once, owin' to my havin' babies, dogs, cats, or hens under my feet the whole blessed time.

"Lisha looked as black as thunder, throwed his hat into a corner, and came along to the sink where I was skinnin' pertaters. As he washed his hands, I asked what the matter was; but he only muttered and slopped, and I couldn't git nothin' out of him, for he ain't talkative at the best of times as you see, and when he's werried corkscrews wouldn't draw a word from him.

"Bein' riled myself didn't mend matters, and so we fell to hectorin' one another right smart. He said somethin' that dreened my last drop of patience; I give a sharp answer, and fust thing I knew he up with his hand and slapped me. It warn't a hard blow by no means, only a kind of a wet spat side of the head; but I thought I should have flew, and was as mad as ef I'd been knocked down. You never see a man look so 'shamed as Lisha did, and ef I'd been wise I should have made up the quarrel then. But I was a fool. I jest flung fork, dish, pertaters and all into the pot, and says, as ferce as you please:

"'Lisha Wilkins, when you can treat me decent you may come and fetch me back; you won't see me till then, and so I tell you.'

"Then I made a bee-line for Mis Bascum's; told her the whole story, had a good cry, and was all ready to go home in half an hour, but Lisha didn't come.

"Wal, that night passed, and what a long one it was to be sure! and me without a wink of sleep, thinkin' of Wash and the cent, my emptins and the baby. Next day come, but no Lisha, no message, no nuthin', and I began to think I'd got my match though I had a sight of grit in them days. I sewed, and Mis Bascum she clacked; but I didn't say much, and jest worked like sixty to pay for my keep, for I warn't goin' to be beholden to her for nothin'.

"The day dragged on terrible slow, and at last I begged her to go and git me a clean dress, for I'd come off jest as I was, and folks kep' droppin' in, for the story was all round, thanks to Mis Bascum's long tongue.

"Wal, she went, and ef you'll believe me Lisha wouldn't let her in! He handed my best things out a winder and told her to tell me they were gittin' along fust rate with Florindy Walch to do the work. He hoped I'd have a good time, and not expect him for a consider'ble spell, for he liked a quiet house, and now he'd got it.

"When I heard that, I knew he must be provoked the wust kind, for he ain't a hash man by nater. I could have crep' in at the winder ef he wouldn't open the door, I was so took down by that message. But Mis Bascum wouldn't hear of it, and kep' stirrin' of me up till I was ashamed to eat 'umble pie fust; so I waited to see how soon he'd come round. But he had the best on't you see, for he'd got the babies and lost a cross wife, while I'd lost every thing but Mis Bascum, who grew hatefuler to me every hour, for I begun to mistrust she was a mischief-maker, — widders most always is, — seein' how she pampered up my pride and 'peared to like the quarrel.

"I thought I should have died more'n once, for sure as you live it went on three mortal days, and of all miser'ble creeters I was the miser'blest. Then I see how wicked and ungrateful I'd been; how I'd shirked my bounden duty and scorned my best blessins. There warn't a hard job that ever I'd hated but what grew easy when I remembered who it was done for; there warn't a trouble or a care that I wouldn't have welcomed hearty, nor one hour of them dear fractious babies that didn't seem precious when I'd gone and left 'em. I'd got time to rest enough now, and might go pleasuring all day long; but I couldn't do it, and would have given a dozin bunnets trimmed to kill ef I could only have been back moilin' in my old kitchen with the children hangin' round me and Lisha a comin' in cheerful from his work as he used to 'fore I spoilt his home for him. How sing'lar it is folks never do know when they are wal off!"

"I know it now," said Christie, rocking lazily to and fro, with a face almost as tranquil as little Vic's, lying half asleep in her lap.

"Glad to hear it, my dear. As I was goin' on to say, when Saturday come, a tremenjus storm set in, and it rained guns all day. I never shall forgit it, for I was hankerin' after baby, and dreadful worried about the others, all bein' croupy, and Florindy with no more idee of nussin' than a baa lamb. The rain come down like a reg'lar deluge, but I didn't seem to have no ark to run to. As night come on things got wuss and wuss, for the wind blowed the roof off Mis Bascum's barn and stove in the butt'ry window; the brook riz and went ragin' every which way, and you never did see such a piece of work.

"My heart was most broke by that time, and I knew I should give in 'fore Monday. But I set and sewed and listened to the tinkle tankle of the drops in the pans set round to ketch 'em, for the house leaked like a sieve. Mis Bascurn was down suller putterin' about, for every kag and sarce jar was afloat. Moses, her brother, was lookin' after his stock and tryin' to stop the damage. All of a sudden he bust in lookin' kinder wild, and settin' down the lantern, he sez, sez he: 'You're ruthern an unfortinate woman to-night, Mis Wilkins.' 'How so?' sez I, as ef nuthin' was the matter already. "'Why,' sez he, 'the spilins have give way up in the rayvine, and the brook 's come down like a river, upsot your lean-to, washed the mellion patch slap into the road, and while your husband was tryin' to git the pig out of the pen, the water took a turn and swep him away.'

"'Drownded?' sez I, with only breath enough for that one word. 'Shouldn't wonder,' sez Moses, 'nothin' ever did come up alive after goin' over them falls.'

"It come over me like a streak of lightenin'; every thin' kinder slewed round, and I dropped in the first faint I ever had in my life. Next I knew Lisha was holdin' of me and cryin' fit to kill himself. I thought I was dreamin', and only had wits enough to give a sort of permiscuous grab at him and call out:

"'Oh, Lisha! ain't you drownded?' He give a gret start at that, swallered down his sobbin', and sez as lovin' as ever a man did in this world:

"'Bless your dear heart, Cynthy, it warn't me it was the pig;' and then fell to kissin' of me, till betwixt laughin' and cryin' I was most choked. Deary me, it all comes back so livin' real it kinder takes my breath away."

And well it might, for the good soul entered so heartily into her story that she unconsciously embellished it with dramatic illustrations. At the slapping episode she flung an invisible "fork, dish, and pertaters" into an imaginary kettle, and glared; when the catastrophe arrived, she fell back upon her chair to express fainting; gave Christie's arm the "permiscuous grab" at the proper moment, and uttered the repentant Lisha's explanation with an incoherent pathos that forbid a laugh at the sudden introduction of the porcine martyr.

"What did you do then?" asked Christie in a most flattering state of interest.

"Oh, law! I went right home and hugged them children for a couple of hours stiddy," answered Mrs; Wilkins, as if but one conclusion was possible.

"Did all your troubles go down with the pig?" asked Christie, presently.

"Massy, no, we're all poor, feeble worms, and the best meanin' of us fails too often," sighed Mrs. Wilkins, as she tenderly adjusted the sleepy head of the young worm in her lap. “After that scrape I done my best; Lisha was as meek as a whole flock of sheep, and we give Mis Bascum a wide berth. Things went lovely for ever so long, and though, after a spell, we had our ups and downs, as is but natural to human creeters, we never come to such a pass agin. Both on us tried real hard; whenever I felt my temper risin’ or discontent comin’ on I remembered them days and kep’ a taut rein; and as for Lisha he never said a raspin’ word, or got sulky, but what he’d bust out laughin’ after it and say: ‘Bless you, Cynthy, it warn’t me, it was the pig.’“

Mrs. Wilkins’ hearty laugh fired a long train of lesser ones, for the children recognized a household word. Christie enjoyed the joke, and even the tea-kettle boiled over as if carried away by the fun.

“Tell some more, please,” said Christie, when the merriment subsided, for she felt her spirits rising.

“There’s nothin’ more to tell, except one thing that prevented my ever forgittin’ the lesson I got then. My little Almiry took cold that week and pined away rapid. She’d always been so ailin’ I never expected to raise her, and more ‘n once in them sinful tempers of mine I’d thought it would be a mercy ef she was took out of her pain. But when I laid away that patient, sufferin’ little creeter I found she was the dearest of ‘em all. I most broke my heart to hev her back, and never, never forgive myself for leavin’ her that time.” With trembling lips and full eyes Mrs. Wilkins stopped to wipe her features generally on Andrew Jackson’s pinafore, and heave a remorseful sigh.

“And this is how you came to be the cheerful, contented woman you are?” said Christie, hoping to divert the mother’s mind from that too tender memory.

“Yes,” she answered, thoughtfully, “I told you Lisha was a smart man; he give me a good lesson, and it set me to thinkin’ serious. ‘Pears to me trouble is a kind of mellerin’ process, and ef you take it kindly it doos you good, and you learn to be glad of it. I’m sure Lisha and me is twice as fond of one another, twice as willin’ to work, and twice as patient with our trials sense dear little Almiry died, and times was hard. I ain’t what I ought to be, not by a long chalk, but I try to live up to my light, do my duty cheerful, love my neighbors, and fetch up my family in the fear of God. Ef I do this the best way I know how, I’m sure I’ll get my rest some day, and the good Lord won’t forgit Cynthy Wilkins. He ain’t so fur, for I keep my health wonderfle, Lisha is kind and stiddy, the children flourishin’, and I’m a happy woman though I be a humly one.”

There she was mistaken, for as her eye roved round the narrow room from the old hat on the wall to the curly heads bobbing here and there, contentment, piety, and mother-love made her plain face beautiful.

“That story has done me ever so much good, and I shall not forget it. Now, good-night, for I must be up early to-morrow, and I don’t want to drive Mr. Wilkins away entirely,” said Christie, after she had helped put the little folk to bed, during which process she had heard her host creaking about the kitchen as if afraid to enter the sitting-room.

She laughed as she spoke, and ran up stairs, wondering if she could be the same forlorn creature who had crept so wearily up only the night before.

It was a very humble little sermon that Mrs. Wilkins had preached to her, but she took it to heart and profited by it; for she was a pupil in the great charity school where the best teachers are often unknown, unhonored here, but who surely will receive commendation and reward from the head master when their long vacation comes.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. WILKINS’S MINISTER.

MR. POWER.

NEXT day Christie braved the lion in his den, otherwise the flinty Flint, in her second-class boarding-house, and found that alarm and remorse had produced a softening effect upon her. She was unfeignedly glad to see her lost lodger safe, and finding that the new friends were likely to put her in the way of paying her debts, this much harassed matron permitted her to pack up her possessions, leaving one trunk as a sort of hostage. Then, with promises to redeem it as soon as possible, Christie said good-bye to the little room where she had hoped and suffered, lived and labored so long, and went joyfully back to the humble home she had found with the good laundress.

All the following week Christie “chored round,” as Mrs. Wilkins called the miscellaneous light work she let her do. Much washing, combing, and clean pinaforing of children fell to her share, and she enjoyed it amazingly; then, when the elder ones were packed off to school she lent a hand to any of the numberless tasks housewives find to do from morning till night. In the afternoon, when other work was done, and little Vic asleep or happy with her playthings, Christie clapped laces, sprinkled muslins, and picked out edgings at the great table where Mrs. Wilkins stood ironing, fluting, and crimping till the kitchen bristled all over with immaculate frills and flounces.

It was pretty delicate work, and Christie liked it, for Mrs. Wilkins was an adept at her trade and took as much pride and pleasure in it as any French blanchis-seuse tripping through the streets of Paris with a tree full of coquettish caps, capes, and petticoats borne before her by a half invisible boy.

Being women, of course they talked as industriously as they worked; fingers flew and tongues clacked with equal profit and pleasure, and, by Saturday, Christie had made up her mind that Mrs. Wilkins was the most sensible woman she ever knew. Her grammar was an outrage upon the memory of Lindley Murray, but the goodness of her heart would have done honor to any saint in the calendar. She was very plain, and her manners were by no means elegant, but good temper made that homely face most lovable, and natural refinement of soul made mere external polish of small account. Her shrewd ideas and odd sayings amused Christie very much, while her good sense and bright way of looking at things did the younger woman a world of good.

Mr. Wilkins devoted himself to the making of shoes and the consumption of food, with the silent regularity of a placid animal. His one dissipation was tobacco, and in a fragrant cloud of smoke he lived and moved and had his being so entirely that he might have been described as a pipe with a man somewhere behind it. Christie once laughingly spoke of this habit and declared she would try it herself if she thought it would make her as quiet and undemonstrative as Mr. Wilkins, who, to tell the truth, made no more impression on her than a fly.

"I don't approve on't, but he might do wuss. We all have to have our comfort somehow, so I let Lisha smoke as much as he likes, and he lets me gab, so it's about fair, I reckon," answered Mrs. Wilkins, from the suds.

She laughed as she spoke, but something in her face made Christie suspect that at some period of his life Lisha had done "wuss;" and subsequent observations confirmed this suspicion and another one also, — that his good wife had saved him, and was gently easing him back to self-control and self-respect. But, as old Fuller quaintly says, "She so gently folded up his faults in silence that few guessed them," and loyally paid him that respect which she desired others to bestow. It was always "Lisha and me," "I'll ask my husband" or "Lisha 'll know; he don't say much, but he's a dreadful smart man," and she kept up the fiction so dear to her wifely soul by endowing him with her own virtues, and giving him the credit of her own intelligence.

Christie loved her all the better for this devotion, and for her sake treated Mr. Wilkins as if he possessed the strength of Samson and the wisdom of Solomon. He received her respect as if it was his due, and now and then graciously accorded her a few words beyond the usual scanty allowance of morning and evening greetings. At his shop all day, she only saw him at meals and sometimes of an evening, for Mrs. Wilkins tried to keep him at home safe from temptation, and Christie helped her by reading, talking, and frolicking with the children, so that he might find home attractive. He loved his babies and would even relinquish his precious pipe for a time to ride the little chaps on his foot, or amuse Vic with shadow rabbit's on the wall.

At such times the entire content in Mrs. Wilkins's face made tobacco fumes endurable, and the burden of a dull man's presence less oppressive to Christie, who loved to pay her debts in something besides money.

As they sat together finishing off some delicate laces that Saturday afternoon, Mrs. Wilkins said, "Ef it's fair to-morrow I want you to go to my meetin' and hear my minister. It'll do you good."

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Power."

Christie looked rather startled, for she had heard of Thomas Power as a rampant radical and infidel of the deepest dye, and been warned never to visit that den of iniquity called his free church.

“Why, Mrs. Wilkins, you don’t mean it!” she said, leaving her lace to dry at the most critical stage.

“Yee, I do!” answered Mrs. Wilkins, setting down her flat-iron with emphasis, and evidently preparing to fight valiantly for her minister, as most women will.

“I beg your pardon; I was a little surprised, for I’d heard all sorts of things about him,” Christie hastened to say.

“Did you ever hear him, or read any of his writins?” demanded Mrs. Wilkins, with a calmer air.

“Never.”

“Then don’t judge. You go hear and see that blessed man, and ef you don’t say he’s the shadder of a great rock in a desert land, I’ll give up,” cried the good woman, waxing poetical in her warmth.

“I will to please you, if nothing else. I did go once just because I was told not to; but he did not preach that day and every thing was so peculiar, I didn’t know whether to like it or be shocked.”

“It is kind of sing’lar at fust, I’m free to confess, and not as churchy as some folks like. But there ain’t no place but that big enough to hold the crowds that want to go, for the more he’s abused the more folks flock to see him. They git their money’s wuth I do believe, for though there ain’t no pulpits and pews, there’s a sight of brotherly love round in them seats, and pious practice, as well as powerful preaching, in that shabby desk. He don’t need no commandments painted up behind him to read on Sunday, for he keeps ‘em in his heart and life all the week as honest as man can.”

There Mrs. Wilkins paused, flushed and breathless with her defence, and Christie said, candidly: “I did like the freedom and good-will there, for people sat where they liked, and no one frowned over shut pew-doors, at me a stranger. An old black woman sat next me, and said ‘Amen’ when she liked what she heard, and a very shabby young man was on the other, listening as if his soul was as hungry as his body. People read books, laughed and cried, clapped when pleased, and hissed when angry; that I did not like.”

“No more does Mr. Power; he don’t mind the cryin’ and the smilin’ as it’s nat’ral, but noise and disrespect of no kind ain’t pleasin’ to him. His own folks behave becomin’, but strangers go and act as they like, thinkin’ that there ain’t no bounds to the word free. Then we are picked at for their doin’s, and Mr. Power has to carry other folkses’ sins on his shoulders. But, dear suz, it ain’t much matter after all, ef the souls is well-meanin’. Children always make a noise a strivin’ after what they want most, and I shouldn’t wonder ef the Lord forgive all our short-comin’s of that sort, sense we are hankerin’ and reachin’ for the truth.”

“I wish I had heard Mr. Power that day, for I was striving after peace with all my heart, and he might have given it to me,” said Christie, interested and impressed with what she heard.

“Wal, no, dear, I guess not. Peace ain’t give to no one all of a suddin, it gen’lly comes through much tribulation, and the sort that comes hardest is best wuth havin’. Mr. Power would a’ ploughed and harrered you, so to speak, and sowed good seed liberal; then ef you warn’t barren ground things would have throve, and the Lord give you a harvest accordin’ to your labor. Who did you hear?” asked Mrs. Wilkins, pausing to starch and clap vigorously.

“A very young man who seemed to be airing his ideas and beliefs in the frankest manner. He belabored everybody and every thing, upset church and state, called names, arranged heaven and earth to suit himself, and evidently meant every word he said. Much of it would have been ridiculous if the boy had not been so thoroughly in earnest; sincerity always commands respect, and though people smiled, they liked his courage, and seemed to think he would make a man when his spiritual wild oats were sown.”

“I ain’t a doubt on’t. We often have such, and they ain’t all empty talk, nuther; some of ‘em are surprisingly bright, and all mean so well I don’t never reluct to hear ‘em. They must blow off their steam somewheres, else they’d bust with the big idees a swellin’ in ‘em; Mr. Power knows it and gives ‘em the chance they can’t find nowheres else. ‘Pears to me,” added Mrs. Wilkins, ironing rapidly as she spoke, “that folks is very like clothes, and a sight has to be done to keep ‘em clean and whole. All on us has to lend a hand in this dreadful mixed-up wash, and each do our part, same as you and me is now. There’s scrubbin’ and bilin’, wrenchin’ and bluein’, dryin’ and foldin’, ironin’ and polishin’, before any of us is fit for wear a Sunday mornin’.”

“What part does Mr. Power do?” asked Christie, much amused at this peculiarly appropriate simile.

“The scrubbin’ and the bilin’; that’s always the hardest and the hottest part. He starts the dirt and gits the stains out, and leaves ‘em ready for other folks to finish off. It ain’t such pleasant work as hangin’ out, or such pretty work as doin’ up, but some one’s got to do it, and them that’s strongest does it best, though they don’t git half so much credit as them as polishes and crimps. That’s showy work, but it wouldn’t be no use ef the things warn’t well washed fust,” and Mrs. Wilkins thoughtfully surveyed the snowy muslin cap, with its border fluted like the petals of a prim white daisy, that hung on her hand.

“I’d like to be a washerwoman of that sort; but as I’m not one of the strong, I'll be a laundress, and try to make purity as attractive as you do," said Christie, soberly.

"Ah, my dear, it's warm and wearin' work I do assure you, and hard to give satisfaction, try as you may. Crowns of glory ain't wore in this world, but it's my 'pinion that them that does the hard jobs here will stand a good chance of havin' extra bright ones when they git through."

"I know you will," said Christie, warmly.

"Land alive, child! I warn't thinking of Cynthy Wilkins, but Mr. Power. I'll be satisfied ef I can set low down somewheres and see him git the meddle. He won't in this world, but I know there's rewards savin' up for him byme-by."

"I'll go to-morrow if it pours!" said Christie, with decision.

"Do, and I'll lend you my bunnit," cried Mrs. Wilkins, passing, with comical rapidity, from crowns of glory to her own cherished head-gear.

"Thank you, but I can't wear blue, I look as yellow as a dandelion in it. Mrs. Flint let me have my best things though I offered to leave them, so I shall be respectable and by-and-by blossom out."

On the morrow Christie went early, got a good seat, and for half an hour watched the gathering of the motley congregation that filled the great hall. Some came in timidly, as if doubtful of their welcome; some noisily, as if, as Mrs. Wilkins said, they had not learned the wide difference between liberty and license; many as if eager and curious; and a large number with the look of children gathering round a family table ready to be fed, and sure that wholesome food would be bountifully provided for them.

Christie was struck by the large proportion of young people in the place, of all classes, both sexes, and strongly contrasting faces. Delicate girls looking with the sweet wistfulness of maidenly hearts for something strong to lean upon and love; sad-eyed women turning to heaven for the consolations or the satisfactions earth could not give them; anxious mothers perplexed with many cares, trying to find light and strength; young men with ardent faces, restless, aspiring, and impetuous, longing to do and dare; tired-looking students, with perplexed wrinkles on their foreheads, evidently come to see if this man had discovered the great secrets they were delving after; and soul-sick people trying this new, and perhaps dangerous medicine, when others failed to cure. Many earnest, thoughtful men and women were there, some on the anxious seat, and some already at peace, having found the clew that leads safely through the labyrinth of life. Here and there a white head, a placid old face, or one of those fine countenances that tell, unconsciously, the beautiful story of a victorious soul.

Some read, some talked, some had flowers in their hands, and all sat at ease, rich and poor, black and white, young and old, waiting for the coming of the man who had power to attract and hold so many of his kind. Christie was so intent on watching those about her that she did not see him enter, and only knew it by the silence which began just in front of her, and seemed to flow backward like a wave, leaving a sea of expectant faces turning to one point. That point was a gray head, just visible above the little desk which stood in the middle of a great platform. A vase of lovely flowers was on the little shelf at one side, a great Bible reposed on the other, and a manuscript lay on the red slope between.

In a moment Christie forgot every thing else, and waited with a curious anxiety to see what manner of man this was. Presently he got up with an open book in his hand, saying, in a strong, cheerful voice: “Let us sing,” and having read a hymn as if he had composed it, he sat down again.

Then everybody did sing; not harmoniously, but heartily, led by an organ, which the voices followed at their own sweet will. At first, Christie wanted to smile, for some shouted and some hummed, some sat silent, and others sung sweetly; but before the hymn ended she liked it, and thought that the natural praise of each individual soul was perhaps more grateful to the ear of God than masses by great masters, or psalms warbled tunefully by hired opera singers.

Then Mr. Power rose again, and laying his hands together, with a peculiarly soft and reverent gesture, lifted up his face and prayed. Christie had never heard a prayer like that before; so devout, so comprehensive, and so brief. A quiet talk with God, asking nothing but more love and duty toward Him and our fellow-men; thanking Him for many mercies, and confiding all things trustfully to the “dear father and mother of souls.”

The sermon which followed was as peculiar as the prayer, and as effective. “One of Power’s judgment-day sermons,” as she heard one man say to another, when it was over. Christie certainly felt at first as if kingdoms and thrones were going down, and each man being sent to his own place. A powerful and popular wrong was arrested, tried, and sentenced then and there, with a courage and fidelity that made plain words eloquent, and stern justice beautiful. He did not take David of old for his text, but the strong, sinful, splendid Davids of our day, who had not fulfilled the promise of their youth, and whose seeming success was a delusion and a snare to themselves and others, sure to be followed by sorrowful abandonment, defeat, and shame. The ashes of the ancient hypocrites and Pharisees was left in peace, but those now living were heartily denounced; modern money-changers scourged out of the temple, and the everlasting truth set up therein.

As he spoke, not loudly nor vehemently, but with the indescribable effect of inward force and true inspiration, a curious stir went through the crowd at times, as a great wind sweeps over a corn field, lifting the broad leaves to the light and testing the strength of root and stem. People looked at one another with a roused expression; eyes kindled, heads nodded involuntary approval, and an emphatic, “that’s so!” dropped from the lips of men who saw their own vague instincts and silent opinions strongly confirmed and nobly uttered. Consciences seemed to have been pricked to duty, eyes cleared to see that their golden idols had feet of clay, and wavering wills strengthened by the salutary courage and integrity of one indomitable man. Another hymn, and a benediction that seemed like a fit grace after meat, and then the crowd poured out; not yawning, thinking of best clothes, or longing for dinner, but waked up, full of talk, and eager to do something to redeem the country and the world.

Christie went rapidly home because she could not help it, and burst in upon Mrs. Wilkins with a face full of enthusiasm, exclaiming, while she cast off her bonnet as if her head had outgrown it since she left:

“It was splendid! I never heard such a sermon before, and I’ll never go to church anywhere else.”

“I knew it! ain’t it fillin’? don’t it give you a kind of spiritnl h’ist, and make things wuth more somehow?” cried Mrs. Wilkins, gesticulating with the pepper-pot in a way which did not improve the steak she was cooking, and caused great anguish to the noses of her offspring, who were watching the operation.

Quite deaf to the chorus of sneezes which accompanied her words, Christie answered, brushing back her hair, as if to get a better out-look at creation generally:

“Oh, yes, indeed! At first it was rather terrible, and yet so true I wouldn’t change a word of it. But I don’t wonder he is misunderstood, belied, and abused. He tells the truth so plainly, and lets in the light so clearly, that hypocrites and sinners must fear and hate him. I think he was a little hard and unsparing, sometimes, though I don’t know enough to judge the men and measures he condemned. I admire him very much, but I should be afraid of him if I ever saw him nearer.”

“No, you wouldn’t; not a grain. You hear him preach agin and you’ll find him as gentle as a lamb. Strong folks is apt to be ruther ha’sh at times; they can’t help it no more than this stove can help scorchin’ the vittles when it gits red hot. Dinner’s ready, so set right up and tell me all about it,” said Mrs. Wilkins, slapping the steak on to the platter, and beginning to deal out fried potatoes all round with absent-minded lavishness.

Christie talked, and the good soul enjoyed that far more than her dinner, for she meant to ask Mr. Power to help her find the right sort of home for the stranger whose unfitness for her present place was every day made more apparent to the mind of her hostess.

“What took you there first?” asked Christie, still wondering at Mrs. Wilkins’s choice of a minister.

“The Lord, my dear,” answered the good woman, in a tone of calm conviction. “I’d heard of him, and I always have a leanin’ towards them that’s reviled; so one Sabbath I felt to go, and did. ‘That’s the gospel for me,’ says I, ‘my old church ain’t big enough now, and I ain’t goin’ to set and nod there any longer,’ and I didn’t.”

“Hadn’t you any doubts about it, any fears of going wrong or being sorry afterwards?” asked Christie, who believed, as many do, that religion could not be attained without much tribulation of some kind.

“In some things folks is led; I be frequent, and when them leadin’s corne I don’t ask no questions but jest foller, and it always turns out right.”

“I wish I could be led.”

“You be, my dear, every day of your life only you don’t see it. When you are doubtful, set still till the call conies, then git up and walk whichever way it says, and you won’t fall. You’ve had bread and water long enough, now you want meat and wine a spell; take it, and when it’s time for milk and honey some one will fetch ‘em ef you keep your table ready. The Lord feeds us right; it’s we that quarrel with our vittles.”

“I will,” said Christie, and began at once to prepare her little board for the solid food of which she had had a taste that day.

That afternoon Mrs. Wilkins took her turn at church-going, saw Mr. Power, told Christie’s story in her best style, and ended by saying:

“She’s true grit, I do assure you, sir. Willin’ to work, but she’s seen the hard side of things and got kind of discouraged. Soul and body both wants tinkerin’ up, and I don’t know anybody who can do the job better ‘n you can.”

“Very well, I’ll come and see her,” answered Mr. Power, and Mrs. Wilkins went home well satisfied.

He kept his word, and about the middle of the week came walking in upon them as they were at work.

“Don’t let the irons cool,” he said, and sitting down in the kitchen began to talk as comfortably as if in the best parlor; more so, perhaps, for best parlors are apt to have a depressing effect upon the spirits, while the mere sight of labor is exhilarating to energetic minds.

He greeted Christie kindly, and then addressed himself to Mrs. Wilkins on various charitable matters, for he was a minister at large, and she one of his almoners. Christie could really see him now, for when he preached she forgot the man in the sermon, and thought of him only as a visible conscience.

A sturdy man of fifty, with a keen, brave face, penetrating eyes, and mouth a little grim; but a voice so resonant and sweet it reminded one of silver trumpets, and stirred and won the hearer with irresistible power. Rough gray hair, and all the features rather rugged, as if the Great Sculptor had blocked out a grand statue, and left the man’s own soul to finish it.

Had Christie known that he came to see her she would have been ill at ease; but Mrs. Wilkins had kept her own counsel, so when Mr. Power turned to Christie, saying:

“My friend here tells me you want something to do. Would you like to help a Quaker lady with her housework, just out of town?”

She answered readily: “Yes, sir, any thing that is honest.”

“Not as a servant, exactly, but companion and helper. Mrs. Sterling is a dear old lady, and the place a pleasant little nest. It is good to be there, and I think you’ll say so if you go.”

“It sounds pleasant. When shall I go?”

Mr. Power smiled at her alacrity, but the longing look in her eyes explained it, for he saw at a glance that her place was not here.

“I will write at once and let you know how matters are settled. Then you shall try it, and if it is not what you want, we will find you something else. There’s plenty to do, and nothing pleasanter than to put the right pair of hands to the right task. Good-by; come and see me if the spirit moves, and don’t let go of Mrs. Wilkins till you lay hold of a better friend, if you can find one.”

Then he shook hands cordially, and went walking out again into the wild March weather as if he liked it.

“Were you afraid of him?” asked Mrs. Wilkins.

“I forgot all about it: he looked so kind and friendly. But I shouldn’t like to have those piercing eyes of his fixed on me long if I had any secret on my conscience,” answered Christie.

“You ain’t nothin’ to fear. He liked your way of speakin’ fust rate,

I see that, and you’ll be all right now he’s took hold.”

“Do you know Mrs. Sterling?”

“Only by sight, but she’s a sweet appearin’ woman, and I wouldn’t ask nothin’ better ‘n to see more of her,” said Mrs. Wilkins, warmly, fearing Christie’s heart might misgive her.

But it did not, and when a note came saying Mrs. Sterling would be ready for her the next week, she seemed quite content with every thing, for though the wages were not high she felt that country air and quiet were worth more to her just then than money, and that Wilkinses were better taken homceopathically.

The spirit did move her to go and see Mr. Power, but she could not make up her mind to pass that invisible barrier which stands between so many who could give one another genuine help if they only dared to ask it. But when Sunday came she went to church, eager for more, and thankful that she knew where to go for it.

This was a very different sermon from the other, and Christie felt as if he preached it for her alone. “Keep innocency and take heed to the thing that is right, for this will bring a man peace at the last,” might have been the text, and Mr. Power treated it as if he had known all the trials and temptations that made it hard to live up to.

Justice and righteous wrath possessed him before, now mercy and tenderest sympathy for those who faltered in well-doing, and the stern judge seemed changed to a pitiful father. But better than the pity was the wise counsel, the cheering words, and the devout surrender of the soul to its best instincts; its close communion with its Maker, unchilled by fear, untrammelled by the narrowness of sect or superstition, but full and free and natural as the breath of life.

As she listened Christie felt as if she was climbing up from a solitary valley, through mist and shadow toward a mountain top, where, though the way might be rough and strong winds blow, she would get a wider outlook over the broad earth, and be nearer the serene blue sky. For the first time in her life religion seemed a visible and vital thing; a power that she could grasp and feel, take into her life and make her daily bread. Not a vague, vast idea floating before her, now beautiful, now terrible, always undefined and far away.

She was strangely and powerfully moved that day, for the ploughing had begun; and when the rest stood up for the last hymn, Christie could only bow her head and let the uncontrollable tears flow down like summer rain, while her heart sang with new aspiration:

“Nearer, my God, to thee,
E’en though a cross it be
That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be,
Nearer, my God, to thee.
Nearer to thee!”

Sitting with her hand before her eyes, she never stirred till the sound of many feet told her that service was done. Then she wiped her eyes, dropped her veil, and was about to rise when she saw a little bunch of flowers between the leaves of the hymn book lying open in her lap. Only a knot of violets set in their own broad leaves, but blue as friendly eyes looking into hers, and sweet as kind words whispered in her ear. She looked about her hoping to detect and thank the giver; but all faces were turned the other way, and all feet departing rapidly.

Christie followed with a very grateful thought in her heart for this little kindness from some unknown friend; and, anxious to recover herself entirely before she faced Mrs. Wilkins, she took a turn in the park.

The snow was gone, high winds had dried the walk, and a clear sky overhead made one forget sodden turf and chilly air. March was going out like a lamb, and Christie enjoyed an occasional vernal whiff from far-off fields and wakening woods, as she walked down the broad mall watching the buds on the boughs, and listening to the twitter of the sparrows, evidently discussing the passers-by as they sat at the doors of their little mansions.

Presently she turned to walk back again and saw Mr. Power coming toward her. She was glad, for all her fear had vanished now, and she wanted to thank him for the sermon that had moved her so deeply. He shook hands in his cordial way, and, turning, walked with her, beginning at once to talk of her affairs as if interested in them.

“Are you ready for the new experiment?” he asked.

“Quite ready, sir; very glad to go, and very much obliged to you for your kindness in providing for me.”

“That is what we were put into the world for, to help one another. You can pass on the kindness by serving my good friends who, in return, will do their best for you.”

“That’s so pleasant! I always knew there were plenty of good, friendly people in the world, only I did not seem to find them often, or be able to keep them long when I did. Is Mr. Sterling an agreeable old man?”

“Very agreeable, but not old. David is about thirty-one or two, I think. He is the son of my friend, the husband died some years ago. I thought I mentioned it.”

“You said in your note that Mr. Sterling was a florist, and might like me to help in the green-house, if I was willing. It must be lovely work, and I should like it very much.”

“Yes, David devotes himself to his flowers, and leads a very quiet life. You may think him rather grave and blunt at first, but you’ll soon find him out and get on comfortably, for he is a truly excellent fellow, and my right-hand man in good works.”

A curious little change had passed over Christie’s face during these last questions and answers, unconscious, but quite observable to keen eyes like Mr. Power’s. Surprise and interest appeared first, then a shadow of reserve as if the young woman dropped a thin veil between herself and the young man, and at the last words a half smile and a slight raising of the brows seemed to express the queer mixture of pity and indifference with which we are all apt to regard “excellent fellows” and “amiable girls.” Mr. Power understood the look, and went on more confidentially than he had at first intended, for he did not want

Christie to go off with a prejudice in her mind which might do both David and herself injustice.

"People sometimes misjudge him, for he is rather old-fashioned in manner and plain in speech, and may seem unsocial, because he does not seek society. But those who know the cause of this forgive any little short-comings for the sake of the genuine goodness of the man. David had a great trouble some years ago and suffered much. He is learning to bear it bravely, and is the better for it, though the memory of it is still bitter, and the cross hard to bear even with pride to help him hide it, and principle to keep him from despair."

Mr. Power glanced at Christie as he paused, and was satisfied with the effect of his words, for interest, pity, and respect shone in her face, and proved that he had touched the right string. She seemed to feel that this little confidence was given for a purpose, and showed that she accepted it as a sort of gage for her own fidelity to her new employers.

"Thank you, sir, I shall remember," she said, with her frank eyes lifted gravely to his own. "I like to work for people whom I can respect," she added, "and will bear with any peculiarities of Mr. Sterling's without a thought of complaint. When a man has suffered through one woman, all women should be kind and patient with him, and try to atone for the wrong which lessens his respect and faith in them."

"There you are right; and in this case all women should be kind, for David pities and protects womankind as the only retaliation for the life-long grief one woman brought upon him. That's not a common revenge, is it?"

"It's beautiful!" cried Christie, and instantly David was a hero.

"At one time it was an even chance whether that trouble sent David to 'the devil,' as he expressed it, or made a man of him. That little saint of a mother kept him safe till the first desperation was over, and now he lives for her, as he ought. Not so romantic an ending as a pistol or Byronic scorn for the world in general and women in particular, but dutiful and brave, since it often takes more courage to live than to die."

"Yes, sir," said Christie, heartily, though her eyes fell, remembering how she had failed with far less cause for despair than David.

They were at the gate now, and Mr. Power left her, saying, with a vigorous hand-shake:

"Best wishes for a happy summer. I shall come sometimes to see how you prosper; and remember, if you tire of it and want to change, let me know, for I take great satisfaction in putting the right people in the right places. Good-by, and God be with you."

CHAPTER X.

BEGINNING AGAIN.

MRS. STERLING.

IT was an April day when Christie went to her new home. Warm rains had melted the last trace of snow, and every bank was full of pricking grass-blades, brave little pioneers and heralds of the Spring. The budding elm boughs swung in the wind; blue-jays screamed among the apple-trees; and robins chirped shrilly, as if rejoicing over winter hardships safely passed. Vernal freshness was in the air despite its chill, and lovely hints of summer time were everywhere.

These welcome sights and sounds met Christie, as she walked down the lane, and, coming to a gate, paused there to look about her. An old-fashioned cottage stood in the midst of a garden just awakening from its winter sleep. One elm hung protectingly over the low roof, sunshine lay warmly on it, and at every window flowers' bright faces smiled at the passer-by invitingly.

On one side glittered a long green-house, and on the other stood a barn, with a sleek cow ruminating in the yard, and an inquiring horse poking his head out of his stall to view the world. Many comfortable gray hens were clucking and scratching about the hay-strewn floor, and a flock of doves sat cooing on the roof.

A quiet, friendly place it looked; for nothing marred its peace, and the hopeful, healthful spirit of the season seemed to haunt the spot. Snow-drops and crocuses were up in one secluded nook; a plump maltese cat sat purring in the porch; and a dignified old dog came marching down the walk to escort the stranger in. With a brightening face Christie went up the path, and tapped at the quaint knocker, hoping that the face she was about to see would be in keeping with the pleasant place.

She was not disappointed, for the dearest of little Quaker ladies opened to her, with such an air of peace and good-will that the veriest ruffian, coming to molest or make afraid, would have found it impossible to mar the tranquillity of that benign old face, or disturb one fold of the soft muslin crossed upon her breast.

“I come from Mr. Power, and I have a note for Mrs. Sterling,” began Christie in her gentlest tone, as her last fear vanished at sight of that mild maternal figure.

“I am she; come in, friend; I am glad to see thee,” said the old lady, smiling placidly, as she led the way into a room whose principal furniture seemed to be books, flowers, and sunshine.

The look, the tone, the gentle “thee,” went straight to Christie’s heart; and, while Mrs. Sterling put on her spectacles and slowly read the note, she stroked the cat and said to herself: “Surely, I have fallen among a set of angels. I thought Mrs. Wilkins a sort of saint, Mr. Power was an improvement even upon that good soul, and if I am not mistaken this sweet little lady is the best and dearest of all. I do hope she will like me.”

“It is quite right, my dear, and I am most glad to see thee; for we need help at this season of the year, and have had none for several weeks. Step up to the room at the head of the stairs, and lay off thy things. Then, if thee is not tired, I will give thee a little job with me in the kitchen,” said the old lady with a kindly directness which left no room for awkwardness on the new-comer’s part.

Up went Christie, and after a hasty look round a room as plain and white and still as a nun’s cell, she whisked on a working-apron and ran down again, feeling, as she fancied the children did in the fairy tale, when they first arrived at the house of the little old woman who lived in the wood.

Mrs. Wilkins’s kitchen was as neat as a room could be, wherein six children came and went, but this kitchen was tidy with the immaculate order of which Shakers and Quakers alone seem to possess the secret, — a fragrant, shining cleanliness, that made even black kettles ornamental and dish-pans objects of interest. Nothing burned or boiled over, though the stove was full of dinner-pots and skillets. There was no litter or hurry, though the baking of cake and pies was going on, and when Mrs. Sterling put a pan of apples, and a knife into her new assistant’s hands, saying in a tone that made the request a favor, “Will thee kindly pare these for me?” Christie wondered what would happen if she dropped a seed upon the floor, or did not cut the apples into four exact quarters.

“I never shall suit this dear prim soul,” she thought, as her eye went from Puss, sedately perched on one small mat, to the dog dozing upon another, and neither offering to stir from their own dominions.

This dainty nicety amused her at first, but she liked it, and very soon her thoughts went back to the old times when she worked with Aunt Betsey, and learned the good old-fashioned arts which now were to prove her fitness for this pleasant place.

Mrs. Sterling saw the shadow that crept into Christie’s face, and led the chat to cheerful things, not saying much herself, but beguiling the other to talk, and listening with an interest that made it easy to go on.

Mr. Power and the Wilkinses made them friends very soon; and in an hour or two Christie was moving about the kitchen as if she had already taken possession of her new kingdom.

“Thee likes housework I think,” said Mrs. Sterling, as she watched her hang up a towel to dry, and rinse her dish-cloth when the cleaning up was done.

"Oh, yes! if I need not do it with a shiftless Irish girl to drive me distracted by pretending to help. I have lived out, and did not find it hard while I had my good Hepsey. I was second girl, and can set a table in style. Shall I try now?" she asked, as the old lady went into a little dining-room with fresh napkins in her hand.

"Yes, but we have no style here. I will show thee once, and hereafter it will be thy work, as thy feet are younger than mine."

A nice old-fashioned table was soon spread, and Christie kept smiling at the contrast between this and Mrs. Stuart's. Chubby little pitchers appeared, delicate old glass, queer china, and tiny tea-spoons; linen as smooth as satin, and a quaint tankard that might have come over in the "May-flower."

"Now, will thee take that pitcher of water to David's room? It is at the top of the house, and may need a little dusting. I have not been able to attend to it as I would like since I have been alone," said Mrs. Sterling.

Rooms usually betray something of the character and tastes of their occupants, and Christie paused a moment as she entered David's, to look about her with feminine interest.

It was the attic, and extended the whole length of the house. One end was curtained off as a bedroom, and she smiled at its austere simplicity.

A gable in the middle made a sunny recess, where were stored bags and boxes of seed, bunches of herbs, and shelves full of those tiny pots in which baby plants are born and nursed till they can grow alone.

The west end was evidently the study, and here Christie took a good look as she dusted tidily. The furniture was nothing, only an old sofa, with the horsehair sticking out in tufts here and there; an antique secretary; and a table covered with books. As she whisked the duster down the front of the ancient piece of furniture, one of the doors in the upper half swung open, and Christie saw three objects that irresistibly riveted her eyes for a moment. A broken fan, a bundle of letters tied up with a black ribbon, and a little work-basket in which lay a fanciful needle-book with "Letty" embroidered on it in faded silk.

"Poor David, that is his little shrine, and I have no right to see it," thought Christie, shutting the door with self-reproachful haste.

At the table she paused again, for books always attracted her, and here she saw a goodly array whose names were like the faces of old friends, because she remembered them in her father's library.

Faust was full of ferns, Shakspeare, of rough sketches of the men and women whom he has made immortal. Saintly Herbert lay side by side with Saint Augustine's confessions. Milton and Montaigne stood socially together, and

Andersen’s lovely “Märchen” fluttered its pictured leaves in the middle of an open Plato; while several books in unknown tongues were half-hidden by volumes of Browning, Keats, and Coleridge.

In the middle of this fine society, slender and transparent as the spirit of a shape, stood a little vase holding one half-opened rose, fresh and fragrant as if just gathered.

Christie smiled as she saw it, and wondered if the dear, dead, or false woman had been fond of roses.

Then her eye went to the mantel-piece, just above the table, and she laughed; for, on it stood three busts, idols evidently, but very shabby ones; for Göthe’s nose was broken, Schiller’s head cracked visibly, and the dust of ages seemed to have settled upon Linnæus in the middle. On the wall above them hung a curious old picture of a monk kneeling in a devout ecstasy, while the face of an angel is dimly seen through the radiance that floods the cell with divine light. Portraits of Mr. Power and Martin Luther stared thoughtfully at one another from either side, as if making up their minds to shake hands in spite of time and space.

“Melancholy, learned, and sentimental,” said Christie to herself, as she settled David’s character after these discoveries.

The sound of a bell made her hasten down, more curious than ever to see if this belief was true.

“Perhaps thee had better step out and call my son. Sometimes he does not hear the bell when he is busy. Thee will find my garden-hood and shawl behind the door,” said Mrs. Sterling, presently; for punctuality was a great virtue in the old lady’s eyes.

Christie demurely tied on the little pumpkin-hood, wrapped the gray shawl about her, and set out to find her “master,” as she had a fancy to call this unknown David.

From the hints dropped by Mr. Power, and her late discoveries, she had made a hero for herself; a sort of melancholy Jaques; sad and pale and stern; retired from the world to nurse his wounds in solitude. She rather liked this picture; for romance dies hard in a woman, and, spite of her experiences, Christie still indulged in dreams and fancies. “It will be so interesting to see how he bears his secret sorrow. I am fond of woe; but I do hope he won’t be too lackadaisical, for I never could abide that sort of blighted being.”

Thinking thus, she peeped here and there, but saw no one in yard or barn, except a workman scraping the mould off his boots near the conservatory.

“This David is among the flowers, I fancy; I will just ask, and not bolt in, as he does not know me. “Where is Mr. Sterling?” added Christie aloud, as she approached.

The man looked up, and a smile came into his eyes, as he glanced from the old hood to the young face inside. Then he took off his hat, and held out his hand, saying with just his mother's simple directness:

"I am David; and this is Christie Devon, I know. How do you do?"

"Yes; dinner's ready," was all she could reply, for the discovery that this was the "master," nearly took her breath away. Not the faintest trace of the melancholy Jaques about him; nothing interesting, romantic, pensive, or even stern. Only a broad-shouldered, brown-bearded man, with an old hat and coat, trousers tucked into his boots, fresh mould on the hand he had given her to shake, and the cheeriest voice she had ever heard.

What a blow it was to be sure! Christie actually felt vexed with him for disappointing her so, and could not recover herself, but stood red and awkward, till, with a last scrape of his boots, David said with placid brevity:

"Well, shall we go in?"

Christie walked rapidly into the house, and by the time she got there the absurdity of her fancy struck her, and she stifled a laugh in the depths of the little pumpkin-hood, as she hung it up. Then, assuming her gravest air, she went to give the finishing touches to dinner.

Ten minutes later she received another surprise; for David appeared washed, brushed, and in a suit of gray, — a personable gentleman, quite unlike the workman in the yard.

Christie gave one look, met a pair of keen yet kind eyes with a suppressed laugh in them, and dropped her own, to be no more lifted up till dinner was done.

It was a very quiet meal, for no one said much; and it was evidently the custom of the house to eat silently, only now and then saying a few friendly words, to show that the hearts were social if the tongues were not.

On the present occasion this suited Christie; and she ate her dinner without making any more discoveries, except that the earth-stained hands were very clean now, and skilfully supplied her wants before she could make them known.

As they rose from table, Mrs. Sterling said: "Davy, does thee want any help this afternoon?"

"I shall be very glad of some in about an hour if thee can spare it, mother."

"I can, dear."

"Do you care for flowers?" asked David, turning to Christie, "because if you do not, this will be a very trying place for you."

"I used to love them dearly; but I have not had any for so long I hardly remember how they look," answered Christie with a sigh, as she recalled Rachel's roses, dead long ago. "Shy, sick, and sad; poor soul, we must lend a hand and cheer her up a bit" thought David, as he watched her eyes turn toward the green tilings in the windows with a bright, soft look, he liked to see.

"Come to the conservatory in an hour, and I'll show you the best part of a 'German,'" he said, with a nod and a smile, as he went away, beginning to whistle like a boy when the door was shut behind him.

"What did he mean?" thought Christie, as she helped clear the table, and put every thing in Pimlico order.

She was curious to know, and when Mrs. Sterling said: "Now, my dear, I am going to take my nap, and thee can help David if thee likes," she was quite ready to try the new work.

She would have been more than woman if she had not first slipped upstairs to smooth her hair, put on a fresh collar, and a black silk apron with certain effective frills and pockets, while a scarlet rigolette replaced the hood, and lent a little color to her pale cheeks.

"I am a poor ghost of what I was," she thought; "but that's no matter: few can be pretty, any one can be neat, and that is more than ever necessary here."

Then she went away to the conservatory, feeling rather oppressed with the pity and sympathy, for which there was no call, and fervently wishing that David would not be so comfortable, for he ate a hearty dinner, laughed four times, and whistled as no heart-broken man would dream of doing.

No one was visible as she went in, and walking slowly down the green aisle, she gave herself up to the enjoyment of the lovely place. The damp, sweet air made summer there, and a group of slender, oriental trees whispered in the breath of wind that blew in from an open sash. Strange vines and flowers hung overhead; banks of azaleas, ruddy, white, and purple, bloomed in one place; roses of every hue turned their lovely faces to the sun; ranks of delicate ferns, and heaths with their waxen bells, were close by; glowing geraniums and stately lilies side by side; savage-looking scarlet flowers with purple hearts, or orange spikes rising from leaves mottled with strange colors; dusky passion-flowers, and gay nasturtiums climbing to the roof. All manner of beautiful and curious plants were there; and Christie walked among them, as happy as a child who finds its playmates again.

Coming to a bed of pansies she sat down on a rustic chair, and, leaning forward, feasted her eyes on these her favorites. Her face grew young as she looked, her hands touched them with a lingering tenderness as if to her they were half human, and her own eyes were so busy enjoying the gold and purple spread before her, that she did not see another pair peering at her over an unneighborly old cactus, all prickles, and queer knobs. Presently a voice said at her elbow:

"You look as if you saw something beside pansies there."

David spoke so quietly that it did not startle her, and she answered before she had time to feel ashamed of her fancy.

"I do; for, ever since I was a child, I always see a little face when I look at this flower. Sometimes it is a sad one, sometimes it's merry, often roguish, but always a dear little face; and when I see so many together, it's like a flock of children, all nodding and smiling at me at once."

"So it is!" and David nodded, and smiled himself, as he handed her two or three of the finest, as if it was as natural a thing as to put a sprig of mignonette in his own button-hole.

Christie thanked him, and then jumped up, remembering that she came there to work, not to dream. He seemed to understand, and went into a little room near by, saying, as he pointed to a heap of gay flowers on the table:

"These are to be made into little bouquets for a 'German' to-night. It is pretty work, and better fitted for a woman's fingers than a man's. This is all you have to do, and you can vise your taste as to colors."

While he spoke David laid a red and white carnation on a bit of smilax, tied them together, twisted a morsel of silver foil about the stems, and laid it before Christie as a sample.

"Yes, I can do that, and shall like it very much," she said, burying her nose in the mass of sweetness before her, and feeling as if her new situation grew pleasanter every minute.

"Here is the apron my mother uses, that bit of silk will soon be spoilt, for the flowers are wet," and David gravely offered her a large checked pinafore.

Christie could not help laughing as she put it on: all this was so different from the imaginary picture she had made. She was disappointed, and yet she began to feel as if the simple truth was better than the sentimental fiction; and glanced up at David involuntarily to see if there were any traces of interesting woe about him.

But he was looking at her with the steady, straight-forward look which she liked so much, yet could not meet just yet; and all she saw was that he was smiling also with an indulgent expression as if she was a little girl whom he was trying to amuse.

"Make a few, and I'll be back directly when I have attended to another order," and he went away thinking Christie's face was very like the pansies they had been talking about, — one of the sombre ones with a bright touch of gold deep down in the heart, for thin and pale as the face was, it lighted up at a kind word, and all the sadness vanished out of the anxious eyes when the frank laugh came.

Christie fell to work with a woman's interest in such a pleasant task, and soon tied and twisted skilfully, exercising all her taste in contrasts, and the pretty little conceits flower-lovers can produce. She was so interested that presently she began to hum half unconsciously, as she was apt to do when happily employed:

“Welcome, maids of honor,
You do bring
In the spring,
And wait upon her.
She has virgins many,
Fresh and fair,
Yet you are
More sweet than any.”

There she stopped, for David’s step drew near, and she remembered where she was.

“The last verse is the best in that little poem. Have you forgotten it?” he said, pleased and surprised to find the new-comer singing Herrick’s lines “To Violets.” “Almost; my father used to say that when we went looking for early violets, and these lovely ones reminded me of it,” explained Christie, rather abashed.

DAVID AND CHRISTIE IN THE GREENHOUSE.

As if to put her at ease David added, as he laid another handful of double-violets on the table:

“‘Y’ are the maiden posies,
And so graced,
To be placed
Fore damask roses.
Yet, though thus respected,
By and by
Ye do lie,
Poor girls, neglected.’

“I always think of them as pretty, modest maids after that, and can’t bear to throw them away, even when faded.”

Christie hoped he did not think her sentimental, and changed the conversation by pointing to her work, and saying, in a business-like way:

“Will these do? I have varied the posies as much as possible, so that they may suit all sorts of tastes and whims. I never went to a ‘German’ myself; but I have looked on, and remember hearing the young people say the little bouquets didn’t mean any thing, so I tried to make these expressive.”

“Well, I should think you had succeeded excellently, and it is a very pretty fancy. Tell me what some of them mean: will you?”

“You should know better than I, being a florist,” said Christie, glad to see he approved of her work.

"I can grow the flowers, but not read them," and David looked rather depressed by his own ignorance of those delicate matters.

Still with the business-like air, Christie held up one after another of the little knots, saying soberly, though her eyes smiled:

"This white one might be given to a newly engaged girl, as suggestive of the coming bridal. That half-blown bud would say a great deal from a lover to his idol; and this heliotrope be most encouraging to a timid swain. Here is a rosy daisy for some merry little damsel; there is a scarlet posy for a soldier; this delicate azalea and fern for some lovely creature just out; and there is a bunch of sober pansies for a spinster, if spinsters go to 'Germans.' Heath, scentless but pretty, would do for many; these Parma violets for one with a sorrow; and this curious purple flower with arrow-shaped stamens would just suit a handsome, sharp-tongued woman, if any partner dared give it to her."

David laughed, as his eye went from the flowers to Christie's face, and when she laid down the last breast-knot, looking as if she would like the chance of presenting it to some one she knew, he seemed much amused.

"If the beaux and belles at this party have the wit to read your posies, my fortune will be made, and you will have your hands full supplying compliments, declarations, rebukes, and criticisms for the fashionable butterflies. I wish I could put consolation, hope, and submission into my work as easily, but I am afraid I can't," he added a moment afterward with a changed face, as he began to lay the loveliest white flowers into a box.

"Those are not for a wedding, then?"

"For a dead baby; and I can't seem to find any white and sweet enough."

"You know the people?" asked Christie, with the sympathetic tone in her voice.

"Never saw or heard of them till to-day. Isn't it enough to know that 'baby's dead,' as the poor man said, to make one feel for them?"

"Of course it is; only you seemed so interested in arranging the flowers, I naturally thought it was for some friend," Christie answered hastily, for David looked half indignant at her question.

"I want them to look lovely and comforting when the mother opens the box, and I don't seem to have the right flowers. Will you give it a touch? women have a tender way of doing such things that we can never learn."

"I don't think I can improve it, unless I add another sort of flower that seems appropriate: may I?"

"Any thing you can find."

Christie waited for no more, but ran out of the greenhouse to David's great surprise, and presently came hurrying back with a handful of snow-drops.

"Those are just what I wanted, but I didn't know the little dears were up yet! You shall put them in, and I know they will suggest what you hope to these poor people," he said approvingly, as he placed the box before her, and stood by watching her adjust the little sheaf of pale flowers tied up with a blade of grass. She added a frail fern or two, and did give just the graceful touch here and there which would speak to the mother's gore heart of the tender thought some one had taken for her dead darling.

The box was sent away, and Christie went on with her work, but that little task performed together seemed to have made them friends; and, while David tied up several grand bouquets at the same table, they talked as if the strangeness was fast melting away from their short acquaintance.

Christie's own manners were so simple that simplicity in others always put her at her ease: kindness soon banished her reserve, and the desire to show that she was grateful for it helped her to please. David's bluntness was of such a gentle sort that she soon got used to it, and found it a pleasant contrast to the polite insincerity so common. He was as frank and friendly as a boy, yet had a certain paternal way with him which rather annoyed her at first, and made her feel as if he thought her a mere girl, while she was very sure he could not be but a year or two older than herself.

"I'd rather he'd be masterful, and order me about," she thought, still rather regretting the "blighted being" she had not found.

In spite of this she spent a pleasant afternoon, sitting in that sunny place, handling flowers, asking questions about them, and getting the sort of answers she liked; not dry botanical names and facts, but all the delicate traits, curious habits, and poetical romances of the sweet things, as if the speaker knew and loved them as friends, not merely valued them as merchandise.

They had just finished when the great dog came bouncing in with a basket in his mouth.

"Mother wants eggs: will you come to the barn and get them? Hay is wholesome, and you can feed the doves if you like," said David, leading the way with Bran rioting about him.

"Why don't he offer to put up a swing for me, or get me a doll? It's the pinafore that deceives him. Never mind: I rather like it after all," thought Christie; but she left the apron behind her, and followed with the most dignified air.

It did not last long, however, for the sights and sounds that greeted her, carried her back to the days of egg-hunting in Uncle Enos's big barn; and, before she knew it, she was rustling through the hay mows, talking to the cow and receiving the attentions of Bran with a satisfaction it was impossible to conceal.

The hens gathered about her feet cocking their expectant eyes at her; the doves came circling round her head; the cow stared placidly, and the inquisitive horse responded affably when she offered him a handful of hay.

“How tame they all are! I like animals, they are so contented and intelligent,” she said, as a plump dove lit on her shoulder with an impatient coo.

“That was Kitty’s pet, she always fed the fowls. Would you like to do it?” and David offered a little measure of oats.

“Very much;” and Christie began to scatter the grain, wondering who

“Kitty” was.

As if he saw the wish in her face, David added, while he shelled corn for the hens:

“She was the little girl who was with us last. Her father kept her in a factory, and took all her wages, barely giving her clothes and food enough to keep her alive. The poor child ran away, and was trying to hide when Mr. Power found and sent her here to be cared for.”

“As he did me?” said Christie quickly.

“Yes, that’s a way he has.”

“A very kind and Christian way. Why didn’t she stay?”

“Well, it was rather quiet for the lively little thing, and rather too near the city, so we got a good place up in the country where she could go to school and learn housework. The mill had left her no time for these things, and at fifteen she was as ignorant as a child.”

“You must miss her.”

“I do very much.”

“Was she pretty?”

“She looked like a little rose sometimes,” and David smiled to himself as he fed the gray hens.

Christie immediately made a picture of the “lively little thing” with a face “like a rose,” and was uncomfortably conscious that she did not look half as well feeding doves as Kitty must have done.

Just then David handed her the basket, saying in the paternal way that half amused, half piqued her: “It, is getting too chilly for you here: take these in please, and I’ll bring the milk directly.”

In spite of herself she smiled, as a sudden vision of the elegant Mr. Fletcher, devotedly carrying her book or beach-basket, passed through her mind; then hastened to explain the smile, for David lifted his brows inquiringly, and glanced about him to see what amused her.

“I beg your pardon: I’ve lived alone so much that it seems a little odd to be told to do things, even if they are as easy and pleasant as this."

"I am so used to taking care of people, and directing, that I do so without thinking. I won't if you don't like it," and he put out his hand to take back the basket with a grave, apologetic air.

"But I do like it; only it amused me to be treated. like a little girl again, when I am nearly thirty, and feel seventy at least, life has been so hard to me lately."

Her face sobered at the last words, and David's instantly grew so pitiful she could not keep her eyes on it lest they should fill, so suddenly did the memory of past troubles overcome her.

"I know," he said in a tone that warmed her heart, "I know, but we are going to try, and make life easier for you now, and you must feel that this is home and we are friends."

"I do!" and Christie flushed with grateful feeling and a little shame, as she went in, thinking to herself: "How silly I was to say that! I may have spoilt the simple friendliness that was so pleasant, and have made him think me a foolish stuck-up old creature."

Whatever he might have thought, David's manner was unchanged when he came in and found her busy with the table.

"It's pleasant to see thee resting, mother, and every thing going on so well," he said, glancing about the room, where the old lady sat, and nodding toward the kitchen, where Christie was toasting bread in her neatest manner.

"Yes, Davy, it was about time I had a helper for thy sake, at least; and this is a great improvement upon heedless Kitty, I am inclined to think."

Mrs. Sterling dropped her voice over that last sentence; but Christie heard it, and was pleased. A moment or two later, David came toward her with a glass in his hand, saying as if rather doubtful of his reception:

"New milk is part of the cure: will you try it?"

For the first time, Christie looked straight up in the honest eyes that seemed to demand honesty in others, and took the glass, answering heartily:

"Yes, thank you; I drink good health to you, and better manners to me."

The newly lighted lamp shone full in her face, and though it was neither young nor blooming, it showed something better than youth and bloom to one who could read the subtle language of character as David could. He nodded as he took the glass, and went away saying quietly:

"We are plain people here, and you won't find it hard to get on with us, I think."

But he liked the candid look, and thought about it, as he chopped kindlings, whistling with a vigor which caused Christie to smile as she strained the milk.

After tea a spider-legged table was drawn out toward the hearth, where an open fire burned cheerily, and puss purred on the rug, with Bran near by. David unfolded his newspapers, Mrs. Sterling pinned on her knitting-sheath, and Christie sat a moment enjoying the comfortable little scene. She sighed without knowing it, and Mrs. Sterling asked quickly: "Is thee tired, my dear?" "Oh, no! only happy."

"I am glad of that: I was afraid thee would find it dull."

"It's beautiful!" then Christie checked herself feeling that these outbursts would not suit such quiet people; and, half ashamed of showing how much she felt, she added soberly, "If you will give me something to do I shall be quite contented."

"Sewing is not good for thee. If thee likes to knit I'll set up a sock for thee to-morrow," said the old lady well pleased at the industrious turn of her new handmaid.

"I like to darn, and I see some to be done in this basket. May I do it?" and Christie laid hold of the weekly job which even the best housewives are apt to set aside for pleasanter tasks.

"As thee likes, my dear. My eyes will not let me sew much in the evening, else I should have finished that batch to-night. Thee will find the yarn and needles in the little bag."

So Christie fell to work on gray socks, and neat lavender-colored hose, while the old lady knit swiftly, and David read aloud. Christie thought she was listening to the report of a fine lecture; but her ear only caught the words, for her mind wandered away into a region of its own, and lived there till her task was done. Then she laid the tidy pile in the basket, drew her chair to a corner of the hearth, and quietly enjoyed herself.

The cat, feeling sure of a welcome, got up into her lap, and went to sleep in a cosy bunch; Bran laid his nose across her feet, and blinked at her with sleepy good-will, while her eyes wandered round the room, from its quaint furniture and the dreaming flowers in the windows, to the faces of its occupants, and lingered there.

The plain border of a Quaker cap encircled that mild old face, with bands of silver hair parted on a forehead marked with many lines. But the eyes were clear and sweet; winter roses bloomed in the cheeks, and an exquisite neatness pervaded the small figure, from the trim feet on the stool, to the soft shawl folded about the shoulders, as only a Quakeress can fold one. In Mrs. Sterling, piety and peace made old age lovely, and the mere presence of this tranquil soul seemed to fill the room with a reposeful charm none could resist.

The other face possessed no striking comeliness of shape or color; but the brown, becoming beard made it manly, and the broad arch of a benevolent brow added nobility to features otherwise not beautiful, — a face plainly expressing resolution and rectitude, inspiring respect as naturally as it certain protective kindliness of manner won confidence. Even in repose wearing a vigilant look as if some hidden pain or passion lay in wait to surprise and conquer the sober cheerfulness that softened the lines of the firm-set lips, and warmed the glance of the thoughtful eyes.

Christie fancied she possessed the key to this, and longed to know all the story of the cross which Mr. Power said David had learned to bear so well. Then she began to wonder if they could like and keep her, to hope so, and to feel that here at last she was at home with friends. But the old sadness crept over her, as she remembered how often she had thought this before, and how soon the dream ended, the ties were broken, and she adrift again.

“Ah well,” she said within herself, “I won’t think of the morrow, but take the good that comes and enjoy it while I may. I must not disappoint Rachel, since she kept her word so nobly to me. Dear soul, when shall I see her again?”

The thought of Rachel always touched her heart; more now than ever; and, as she leaned back in her chair with closed eyes and idle hands, these tender memories made her unconscious face most eloquent. The eyes peering over the spectacles telegraphed a meaning message to the other eyes glancing over the paper now and then; and both these friends in deed as well as name felt assured that this woman needed all the comfort they could give her. But the busy needles never stopped their click, and the sonorous voice read on without a pause, so Christie never knew what mute confidences passed between mother and son, or what helpful confessions her traitorous face had made for her.

The clock struck nine, and these primitive people prepared for rest; for their day began at dawn, and much wholesome work made sleep a luxury.

“Davy will tap at thy door as he goes down in the morning, and I will soon follow to show thee about matters. Good-night, and good rest, my child.”

So speaking, the little lady gave Christie a maternal kiss; David shook hands; and then she went away, wondering why service was so lightened by such little kindnesses.

As she lay in her narrow white bed, with the “pale light of stars” filling the quiet, cell-like room, and some one playing softly on a flute overhead, she felt as if she had left the troublous world behind her, and shutting out want, solitude, and despair, had come into some safe, secluded spot full of flowers and sunshine, kind hearts, and charitable deeds.

CHAPTER XL

IN THE STRAWBERRY BED.

FROM that day a new life began for Christie, a happy, quiet, useful life, utterly unlike any of the brilliant futures she had planned for herself; yet indescribably pleasant to her now, for past experience had taught her its worth, and made her ready to enjoy it.

Never had spring seemed so early or so fair, never had such a crop of hopeful thoughts and happy feelings sprung up in her heart as now; and nowhere was there a brighter face, a blither voice, or more willing hands than Christie's when the apple blossoms came.

This was what she needed, the protection of a home, wholesome cares and duties; and, best of all, friends to live and labor for, loving and beloved. Her whole soul was in her work now, and as health returned, much of the old energy and cheerfulness came with it, a little sobered, but more sweet and earnest than ever. No task was too hard or humble; no day long enough to do all she longed to do; and no sacrifice would have seemed too great for those whom she regarded with steadily increasing love and gratitude.

Up at dawn, the dewy freshness of the hour, the morning rapture of the birds, the daily miracle of sunrise, set her heart in tune, and gave her Nature's most healing balm. She kept the little house in order, with Mrs. Sterling to direct and share the labor so pleasantly, that mistress and maid soon felt like mother and daughter, and Christie often said she did not care for any other wages.

The house-work of this small family was soon done, and then Christie went to tasks that she liked better. Much out-of-door life was good for her, and in garden and green-house there was plenty of light labor she could do. So she grubbed contentedly in the wholesome earth, weeding and potting, learning to prune and bud, and finding Mrs. Wilkins was quite right in her opinion of the sanitary virtues of dirt.

Trips to town to see the good woman and carry country gifts to the little folks; afternoon drives with Mrs. Sterling in the old-fashioned chaise, drawn by the Roman-nosed horse, and Sunday pilgrimages to church to be “righted up” by one of Mr. Power's stirring sermons, were among her new pleasures. But, on the whole, the evenings were her happiest times: for then David read aloud while she worked; she sung to the old piano tuned for her use; or, better still, as spring came on, they sat in the porch, and talked as people only do talk when twilight, veiling the outer world, seems to lift the curtains of that inner world where minds go exploring, hearts learn to know one another, and souls walk together in the cool of the day.

At such times Christie seemed to catch glimpses of another David than the busy, cheerful man apparently contented with the humdrum duties of an obscure, laborious life, and the few unexciting pleasures afforded by books, music, and much silent thought. She sometimes felt with a woman's instinct that under this composed, commonplace existence another life went on; for, now and then, in the interest of conversation, or the involuntary yielding to a confidential impulse, a word, a look, a gesture, betrayed an unexpected power and passion, a secret unrest, a bitter memory that would not be ignored.

Only at rare moments did she catch these glimpses, and so brief, so indistinct, were they that she half believed her own lively fancy created them. She longed to know more; but "David's trouble" made him sacred in her eyes from any prying curiosity, and always after one of these twilight betrayals Christie found him so like his unromantic self next day, that she laughed and said:

"I never shall outgrow my foolish way of trying to make people other than they are. Gods are gone, heroes hard to find, and one should be contented with good men, even if they do wear old clothes, lead prosaic lives, and have no accomplishments but gardening, playing the flute, and keeping their temper."

She felt the influences of that friendly place at once; but for a time she wondered at the natural way in which kind things were done, the protective care extended over her, and the confiding air with which these people treated her. They asked no questions, demanded no explanations, seemed unconscious of conferring favors, and took her into their life so readily that she marvelled, even while she rejoiced, at the good fortune which led her there.

She understood this better when she discovered, what Mr. Power had not mentioned, that the little cottage was a sort of refuge for many women like herself; a half-way house where they could rest and recover themselves after the wrongs, defeats, and weariness that come to such in the battle of life.

With a chivalry older and finer than any Spenser sung, Mr. Power befriended these forlorn souls, and David was his faithful squire. Whoever knocked at that low door was welcomed, warmed, and fed; comforted, and set on their way, cheered and strengthened by the sweet good-will that made charity no burden, and restored to the more desperate and despairing their faith in human nature and God's love.

There are many such green spots in this world of ours, which often seems so bad that a second Deluge could hardly wash it clean again; and these beneficent, unostentatious asylums are the salvation of more troubled souls than many a great institution gilded all over with the rich bequests of men who find themselves too heavily laden to enter in at the narrow gate of heaven.

Happy the foot-sore, heart-weary traveller who turns from the crowded, dusty highway down the green lane that leads to these humble inns, where the sign of the Good Samaritan is written on the face of whomsoever opens to the stranger, and refreshment for soul and body is freely given in the name of Him who loved the poor.

Mr. Power came now and then, for his large parish left him but little time to visit any but the needy. Christie enjoyed these brief visits heartily, for her new friends soon felt that she was one of them, and cordially took her into the large circle of workers and believers to which they belonged.

Mr. Power's heart was truly an orphan asylum, and every lonely creature found a welcome there. He could rebuke sin sternly, yet comfort and uplift the sinner with fatherly compassion; righteous wrath would flash from his eyes at injustice, and contempt sharpen his voice as he denounced hypocrisy: yet the eyes that lightened would dim with pity for a woman's wrong, a child's small sorrow; and the voice that thundered would whisper consolation like a mother, or give counsel with a wisdom books cannot teach.

He was a Moses in his day and generation, born to lead his people out of the bondage of dead superstitions, and go before them through a Red Sea of persecution into the larger liberty and love all souls hunger for, and many are just beginning to find as they come doubting, yet desiring, into the goodly land such pioneers as he have planted in the wilderness.

He was like a tonic to weak natures and wavering wills; and Christie felt a general revival going on within herself as her knowledge, honor, and affection for him grew. His strength seemed to uphold her; his integrity to rebuke all unworthiness in her own life; and the magic of his generous, genial spirit to make the hard places smooth, the bitter things sweet, and the world seem a happier, honester place than she had ever thought it since her father died.

Mr. Power had been interested in her from the first; had watched her through other eyes, and tried her by various unsuspected tests. She stood them well; showed her faults as frankly as her virtues, and tried to deserve their esteem by copying the excellencies she admired in them.

"She is made of the right stuff, and we must keep her among us; for she must not be lost or wasted by being left to drift about the world with no ties to make her safe and happy. She is doing so well here, let her stay till the restless spirit begins to stir again; then she shall come to me and learn contentment by seeing greater troubles than her own."

Mr. Power said this one day as he rose to go, after sitting an hour with Mrs.

Sterling, and hearing from her a good report of his new protegee. The young people were out at work, and had not been called in to see him, for the interview had been a confidential one. But as he stood at the gate he saw Christie in the strawberry bed, and went toward her, glad to see how well and happy she looked.

Her hat was hanging on her shoulders, and the sun giving her cheeks a healthy color; she was humming to herself like a bee as her fingers flew, and once she paused, shaded her eyes with her hand, and took a long look at a figure down in the meadow; then she worked on silent and smiling, — a pleasant creature to see, though her hair was ruffled by the wind; her gingham gown pinned up; and her fingers deeply stained with the blood of many berries.

"I wonder if that means anything?" thought Mr. Power, with a keen glance from the distant man to the busy woman close at hand. "It might be a helpful, happy thing for both, if poor David only could forget."

He had time for no more castle-building, for a startled robin flew away with a shrill chirp, and Christie looked up.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she said, rising quickly. "I was picking a special box for you, and now you can have a feast beside, just as you like it, fresh from the vines. Sit here, please, and I'll hull faster than you can eat."

"This is luxury!" and Mr. Power sat down on the three-legged stool offered him, with a rhubarb leaf on his knee which Christie kept supplying with delicious mouthfuls.

MR. POWER AND CHRISTIE IN THE STRAWBERRY BED.

"Well, and how goes it? Are we still happy and contented here?" he asked.

"I feel as if I had been born again; as if this was a new heaven and a new earth, and every thing was as it should be," answered Christie, with a look of perfect satisfaction in her face.

"That's a pleasant hearing. Mrs. Sterling has been praising you, but I wanted to be sure you were as satisfied as she. And how does David wear? well, I hope."

"Oh, yes, he is very good to me, and is teaching me to be a gardener, so that I needn't kill myself with sewing any more. Much of this is fine work for women, and so healthy. Don't I look a different creature from the ghost that came here three or four mouths ago?" and she turned her face for inspection like a child.

"Yes, David is a good gardener. I often send my sort of plants here, and he always makes them grow and blossom sooner or later," answered Mr. Power, regarding her like a beneficent genie on a three-legged stool.

"You are the fresh air, and Mrs. Sterling is the quiet sunshine that does the work, I fancy. David only digs about the roots."

"Thank you for my share of the compliment; but why say 'only digs'? That is a most important part of the work: I'm afraid you don't appreciate David."

"Oh, yes, I do; but he rather aggravates me sometimes," said Christie, laughing, as she put a particularly big berry in the green plate to atone for her frankness.

"How?" asked Mr. Power, interested in these little revelations.

"Well, he won't be ambitious. I try to stir him up, for he has talents; I've found that out: but he won't seem to care for any thing but watching over his mother, reading his old books, and making flowers bloom double when they ought to be single."

"There are worse ambitions than those, Christie. I know many a man who would be far better employed in cherishing a sweet old woman, studying Plato, and doubling the beauty of a flower, than in selling principles for money, building up a cheap reputation that dies with him, or chasing pleasures that turn to ashes in his mouth."

"Yes, sir; but isn't it natural for a young man to have some personal aim or aspiration to live for? If David was a weak or dull man I could understand it; but I seem to feel a power, a possibility for something higher and better than any thing I see, and this frets me. He is so good, I want him to be great also in some way."

"A wise man says, 'The essence of greatness is the perception that virtue is enough.' I think David one of the most ambitious men I ever knew, because at thirty he has discovered this truth, and taken it to heart. Many men can be what the world calls great: very few men are what God calls good. This is the harder task to choose, yet the only success that satisfies, the only honor that outlives death. These faithful lives, whether seen of men or hidden in corners, are the salvation of the world, and few of us fail to acknowledge it in the hours when we are brought close to the heart of things, and see a little as God sees."

Christie did not speak for a moment: Mr. Power's voice had been so grave, and his words so earnest that she could not answer lightly, but sat turning over the new thoughts in her mind. Presently she said, in a penitent but not quite satisfied tone:

"Of course you are right, sir. I'll try not to care for the outward and visible signs of these hidden virtues; but I'm afraid I still shall have a hankering for the worldly honors that are so valued by most people."

"'Success and glory are the children of hard work and God's favor,' according to Æschylus, and you will find he was right. David got a heavy blow some years ago as I told you, I think; and he took it hard, but it did not spoil him: it made a man of him; and, if I am not much mistaken, he will yet do something to be proud of, though the world may never hear of it."

“I hope so!” and Christie’s face brightened at the thought.

“Nevertheless you look as if you doubted it, O you of little faith. Every one has two sides to his nature: David has shown you the least interesting one, and you judge accordingly. I think he will show you the other side some day, — for you are one of the women who win confidence without trying, — and then you will know the real David. Don’t expect too much, or quarrel with the imperfections that make him human; but take him for what he is worth, and help him if you can to make his life a brave and good one.”

“I will, sir,” answered Christie so meekly that Mr. Power laughed; for this confessional in the strawberry bed amused him very much.

“You are a hero-worshipper, my dear; and if people don’t come up to the mark you are so disappointed that you fail to see the fine reality which remains when the pretty romance ends. Saints walk about the world today as much as ever, but instead of haircloth and halos they now wear” —

“Broadcloth and wide-brimmed hats,” added Christie, looking up as if she had already found a better St. Thomas than any the church ever canonized.

He thanked her with a smile, and went on with a glance toward the meadow.

“And knights go crusading as gallantly as ever against the giants and the dragons, though you don’t discover it, because, instead of banner, lance, and shield they carry” —

“Bushel-baskets, spades, and sweet-flag for their mothers,” put in Christie again, as David came up the path with the loam he had been digging.

Both began to laugh, and he joined in the merriment without knowing why, as he put down his load, took off his hat, and shook hands with his honored guest.

“What’s the joke?” he asked, refreshing himself with the handful of berries Christie offered him.

“Don’t tell,” she whispered, looking dismayed at the idea of letting him know what she had said of him.

But Mr. Power answered tranquilly:

“We were talking about coins, and Christie was expressing her opinion of one I showed her. The face and date she understands; but the motto puzzles her, and she has not seen the reverse side yet, so does not know its value. She will some day; and then she will agree with me, I think, that it is sterling gold.”

The emphasis on the last words enlightened David: his sunburnt cheek reddened, but he only shook his head, saying: “She will find a brass farthing I’m afraid, sir,” and began to crumble a handful of loam about the roots of a carnation that seemed to have sprung up by chance at the foot of the apple-tree.

“How did that get there?” asked Christie, with sudden interest in the flower.

“It dropped when I was setting out the others, took root, and looked so pretty and comfortable that I left it. These waifs sometimes do better than the most carefully tended ones: I only dig round them a bit and leave them to sun and air.”

Mr. Power looked at Christie with so much meaning in his face that it was her turn to color now. But with feminine perversity she would not own herself mistaken, and answered with eyes as full of meaning as his own:

“I like the single ones best: double-carnations are so untidy, all bursting out of the calyx as if the petals had quarrelled and could not live together.”

“The single ones are seldom perfect, and look poor and incomplete with little scent or beauty,” said unconscious David propping up the thin-leaved flower, that looked like a pale solitary maiden, beside the great crimson and white carnations near by, filling the air with spicy odor.

“I suspect you will change your mind by and by, Christie, as your taste improves, and you will learn to think the double ones the handsomest,” added Mr. Power, wondering in his benevolent heart if he would ever be the gardener to mix the colors of the two human plants before him.

“I must go,” and David shouldered his basket as if he felt he might be in the way.

“So must I, or they will be waiting for me at the hospital. Give me a handful of flowers, David: they often do the poor souls more good than my prayers or preaching.”

Then they went away, and left Christie sitting in the strawberry bed, thinking that David looked less than ever like a hero with his blue shirt, rough straw hat, and big boots; also wondering if he would ever show her his best side, and if she would like it when she saw it.

CHAPTER XII.

CHRISTIE’S GALA.

ON the fourth of September, Christie woke up, saying to herself: “It is my birthday, but no one knows it, so I shall get no presents. Ah, well, I’m too old for that now, I suppose;” but she sighed as she said it, for well she knew one never is too old to be remembered and beloved.

Just then the door opened, and Mrs. Sterling entered, carrying what looked very like a pile of snow-flakes in her arms. Laying this upon the bed, she kissed Christie, saying with a tone and gesture that made the words a benediction:

“A happy birthday, and God bless thee, my daughter!”

Before Christie could do more than hug both gift and giver, a great bouquet came flying in at the open window, aimed with such skill that it fell upon the bed, while David’s voice called out from below: “A happy birthday, Christie, and many of them!”

“How sweet, how kind of you, this is! I didn’t dream you knew about to-day, and never thought of such a beautiful surprise,” cried Christie, touched and charmed by this unexpected celebration.

“Thee mentioned it once long ago, and we remembered. They are very humble gifts, my dear; but we could not let the day pass without some token of the thanks we owe thee for these months of faithful service and affectionate companionship.”

Christie had no answer to this little address, and was about to cry as the only adequate expression of her feelings, when a hearty “Hear! Hear!” from below made her laugh, and call out:

“You conspirators! how dare you lay plots, and then exult over me when I can’t find words to thank you? I always did think you were a set of angels, and now I’m quite sure of it.”

“Thee may be right about Davy, but I am only a prudent old woman, and have taken much pleasure in privately knitting this light wrap to wear when thee sits in the porch, for the evenings will soon grow chilly. My son did not know what to get, and finally decided that flowers would suit thee best; so he made a bunch of those thee loves, and would toss it in as if he was a boy.”

“I like that way, and both my presents suit me exactly,” said Christie, wrapping the fleecy shawl about her, and admiring the nosegay in which her quick eye saw all her favorites, even to a plumy spray of the little wild asters which she loved so much.

“Now, child, I will step down, and see about breakfast. Take thy time; for this is to be a holiday, and we mean to make it a happy one if we can.”

With that the old lady went away, and Christie soon followed, looking very fresh and blithe as she ran down smiling behind her great bouquet. David was in the porch, training up the morning-glories that bloomed late and lovely in that sheltered spot. He turned as she approached, held out his hand, and bent a little as if he was moved to add a tenderer greeting. But he did not, only held the hand she gave him for a moment, as he said with the paternal expression unusually visible:

“I wished you many happy birthdays; and, if you go on getting younger every year like this, you will surely have them.”

It was the first compliment he had ever paid her, and she liked it, though she shook her head as if disclaiming it, and answered brightly:

“I used to think many years would be burdensome, and just before I came here I felt as if I could not bear another one. But now I like to live, and hope I shall a long, long time.”

“I’m glad of that; and how do you mean to spend these long years of yours?” asked David, brushing back the lock of hair that was always falling into his eyes, as if he wanted to see more clearly the hopeful face before him.

“In doing what your morning-glories do, — climb up as far and as fast as I can before the frost comes,” answered Christie, looking at the pretty symbols she had chosen.

“You have got on a good way already then,” began David, smiling at her fancy.

“Oh no, I haven’t!” she said quickly. “I’m only about half way up. See here: I’ll tell how it is;” and, pointing to the different parts of the flowery wall, she added in her earnest way: “I’ve watched these grow, and had many thoughts about them, as I sit sewing in the porch. These variegated ones down low are my childish fancies; most of them gone to seed you see. These lovely blue ones of all shades are my girlish dreams and hopes and plans. Poor things! some are dead, some torn by the wind, and only a few pale ones left quite perfect. Here you observe they grow sombre with a tinge of purple; that means pain and gloom, and there is where I was when I came here. Now they turn from those sad colors to crimson, rose, and soft pink. That’s the happiness and health I found here. You and your dear mother planted them, and you see how strong and bright they are.”

She lifted up her hand, and gathering one of the great rosy cups offered it to him, as if it were brimful of the thanks she could not utter. He comprehended, took it with a quiet “Thank you,” and stood looking at it for a moment, as if her little compliment pleased him very much.

“And these?” he said presently, pointing to the delicate violet bells that grew next the crimson ones.

The color deepened a shade in Christie’s cheek, but she went on with no other sign of shyness; for with David she always spoke out frankly, because she could not help it.

“Those mean love to me, not passion: the deep red ones half hidden under the leaves mean that. My violet flowers are the best and purest love we can know: the sort that makes life beautiful and lasts for ever. The white ones that come next are tinged with that soft color here and there, and they mean holiness. I know there will be love in heaven; so, whether I ever find it here or not, I am sure I shall not miss it wholly.”

Then, as if glad to leave the theme that never can be touched without reverent emotion by a true woman, she added, looking up to where a few spotless blossoms shone like silver in the light:

“Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I cannot reach them: but I can look up, and see their beauty; believe in them, and try to follow where they lead; remember that frost comes latest to those that bloom the highest; and keep my beautiful white flowers as long as I can.”

“The mush is ready; come to breakfast, children,” called Mrs.

Sterling, as she crossed the hall with a teapot in her hand.

Christie’s face fell, then she exclaimed laughing: “That’s always the way; I never take a poetic flight but in comes the mush, and spoils it all.”

“Not a bit; and that’s where women are mistaken. Souls and bodies should go on together; and you will find that a hearty breakfast won’t spoil the little hymn the morning-glories sung;” and David set her a good example by eating two bowls of hasty-pudding and milk, with the lovely flower in his button-hole.

“Now, what are we to do next?” asked Christie, when the usual morning work was finished.

“In about ten minutes thee will see, I think,” answered Mrs. Sterling, glancing at the clock, and smiling at the bright expectant look in the younger woman’s eyes.

She did see; for in less than ten minutes the rumble of an omnibus was heard, a sound of many voices, and then the whole Wilkins brood came whooping down the lane. It was good to see Ma Wilkins jog ponderously after in full state and festival array; her bonnet trembling with bows, red roses all over her gown, and a parasol of uncommon brilliancy brandished joyfully in her hand. It was better still to see her hug Christie, when the latter emerged, flushed and breathless, from the chaos of arms, legs, and chubby faces in which she was lost for several tumultuous moments; and it was best of all to see the good woman place her cherished "bunnit" in the middle of the parlor table as a choice and lovely ornament, administer the family pocket-handkerchief all round, and then settle down with a hearty:

"Wal, now, Mis Sterlin', you've no idee how tickled we all was when Mr. David came, and told us you was goin' to have a galy here to-day. It was so kind of providential, for 'Lisha was invited out to a day's pleasuring so I could leave jest as wal as not. The childern's ben hankerin' to come the wust kind, and go plummin' as they did last month, though I told 'em berries was gone weeks ago. I reelly thought I'd never get 'em here whole, they trained so in that bus. Wash would go on the step, and kep fallin' off; Gusty's hat blew out a winder; them two bad boys tumbled round loose; and dear little Victory set like a lady, only I found she'd got both feet in the basket right atop of the birthday cake, I made a puppose for Christie."

"It hasn't hurt it a bit; there was a cloth over it, and I like it all the better for the marks of Totty's little feet, bless 'em!" and Christie cuddled the culprit with one hand while she revealed the damaged delicacy with the other, wondering inwardly what evil star was always in the ascendant when Mrs. Wilkins made cake.

"Now, my dear, you jest go and have a good frolic with them childern, I'm a goin' to git dinner, and you a goin' to play; so we don't want to see no more of you till the bell rings," said Mrs. Wilkins pinning up her gown, and "shooing" her brood out of the room, which they entirely filled.

Catching up her hat Christie obeyed, feeling as much like a child as any of the excited six. The revels that followed no pen can justly record, for Goths and Vandals on the rampage but feebly describes the youthful Wilkinses when their spirits effervesced after a month's bottling up in close home quarters.

David locked the greenhouse door the instant he saw them; and pervaded the premises generally like a most affable but very watchful policeman, for the ravages those innocents committed much afflicted him. Yet he never had the heart to say a word of reproof, when he saw their raptures over dandelions, the relish with which they devoured fruit, and the good it did the little souls and bodies to enjoy unlimited liberty, green grass, and country air, even for a day.

Christie usually got them into the big meadow as soon as possible, and there let them gambol at will; while she sat on the broken bough of an apple-tree, and watched her flock like an old-fashioned shepherdess. To-day she did so; and when the children were happily sailing boats, tearing to and fro like wild colts, or discovering the rustic treasures Nurse Nature lays ready to gladden little hearts and hands, Christie sat idly making a garland of green brakes, and ruddy sumach leaves ripened before the early frosts had come.

A FRIENDLY CHAT.

David saw her there, and, feeling that he might come off guard for a time, went strolling down to lean upon the wall, and chat in the friendly fashion that had naturally grown up between these fellow-workers. She was waiting for the new supply of ferns little Adelaide was getting for her by the wall; and while she waited she sat resting her cheek upon her hand, and smiling to herself, as if she saw some pleasant picture in the green grass at her feet.

“Now I wonder what she’s thinking about,” said David’s voice close by, and Christie straightway answered:

“Philip Fletcher.”

“And who is he?” asked David, settling his elbow in a comfortable niche between the mossy stones, so that he could “lean and loaf” at his ease.

“The brother of the lady whose children I took care of;” and Christie wished she had thought before she answered that first question, for in telling her adventures at diiferent times she had omitted all mention of this gentleman.

“Tell about him, as the children say: your experiences are always interesting, and you look as if this man was uncommonly entertaining in some way,” said David, indolently inclined to be amused.

“Oh, dear no, not at all entertaining! invalids seldom are, and he was sick and lazy, conceited and very cross sometimes.” Christie’s heart rather smote her as she said this, remembering the last look poor Fletcher gave her.

“A nice man to be sure; but I don’t see any thing to smile about,” persisted David, who liked reasons for things; a masculine trait often very trying to feminine minds.

“I was thinking of a little quarrel we once had. He found out that I had been an actress; for I basely did not mention that fact when I took the place, and so got properly punished for my deceit. I thought he’d tell his sister of course, so I did it myself, and retired from the situation as much disgusted with Christie Devon as you are.”

“Perhaps I ought to be, but I don’t find that I am. Do you know I think that old Fletcher was a sneak?” and David looked as if he would rather like to mention his opinion to that gentleman.

“He probably thought he was doing his duty to the children: few people would approve of an actress for a teacher you know. He had seen me play, and remembered it all of a sudden, and told me of it: that was the way it came about,” said Christie hastily, feeling that she must get out of the scrape as soon as possible, or she would be driven to tell every thing in justice to Mr. Fletcher.

“I should like to see you act.”

“You a Quaker, and express such a worldly and dreadful wish?” cried Christie, much amused, and very grateful that his thoughts had taken a new direction.

“I’m not, and never have been. Mother married out of the sect, and, though she keeps many of her old ways, always left me free to believe what I chose. I wear drab because I like it, and say ‘thee’ to her because she likes it, and it is pleasant to have a little word all our own. I’ve been to theatres, but I don’t care much for them. Perhaps I should if I’d had Fletcher’s luck in seeing you play.”

“You didn’t lose much: I was not a good actress; though now and then when I liked my part I did pretty well they said,” answered Christie, modestly.

“Why didn’t you go back after the accident?” asked David, who had heard that part of the story.

“I felt that it was bad for me, and so retired to private life.”

“Do you ever regret it?”

“Sometimes when the restless fit is on me: but not so often now as I used to do; for on the whole I’d rather be a woman than act a queen.”

“Good!” said David, and then added persuasively: “But you will play for me some time: won’t you? I’ve a curious desire to see you do it.”

“Perhaps I’ll try,” replied Christie, flattered by his interest, and not unwilling to display her little talent.

“Who are you making that for? it’s very pretty,” asked David, who seemed to be in an inquiring frame of mind that day.

“Any one who wants it. I only do it for the pleasure: I always liked pretty things; but, since I have lived among flowers and natural people, I seem to care more than ever for beauty of all kinds, and love to make it if I can without stopping for any reason but the satisfaction.”

“‘Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing, “‘Then beauty is its own excuse for being,’“ observed David, who had a weakness for poetry, and, finding she liked his sort, quoted to Christie almost as freely as to himself.

“Exactly, so look at that and enjoy it,” and she pointed to the child standing knee-deep in graceful ferns, looking as if she grew there, a living buttercup, with her buff frock off at one plump shoulder and her bright hair shining in the sun.

Before David could express his admiration, the little picture was spoilt; for Christie called out, “Come, Vic, bring me some more pretties!” startling baby so that she lost her balance, and disappeared with a muffled cry, leaving nothing to be seen but a pair of small convulsive shoes, soles uppermost, among the brakes. David took a leap, reversed Vic, and then let her compose her little feelings by sticking bits of green in all the button-holes of his coat, as he sat on the wall while she stood beside him in the safe shelter of his arm.

"You are very like an Englishman," said Christie, after watching the pair for a few minutes.

"How do you know?" asked David, looking surprised.

"There were several in our company, and I found them very much alike. Blunt and honest, domestic and kind; hard to get at, but true as steel when once won; not so brilliant and original as Americans, perhaps, but more solid and steadfast. On the whole, I think them the manliest men in the world," answered Christie, in the decided way young people have of expressing their opinions.

"You speak as if you had known and studied a great variety of men," said David, feeling that he need not resent the comparison she had made.

"I have, and it has done me good. Women who stand alone in the world, and have their own way to make, have a better chance to know men truly than those who sit safe at home and only see one side of mankind. We lose something; but I think we gain a great deal that is more valuable than admiration, flattery, and the superficial service most men give to our sex. Some one says, 'Companionship teaches men and women to know, judge, and treat one another justly.' I believe it; for we who are compelled to be fellow workers with men understand and value them more truly than many a belle who has a dozen lovers sighing at her feet. I see their faults and follies; but I also see so much to honor, love, and trust, that I feel as if the world was full of brothers. Yes, as a general rule, men have been kinder to me than women; and if I wanted a staunch friend I'd choose a man, for they wear better than women, who ask too much, and cannot see that friendship lasts longer if a little respect and reserve go with the love and confidence."

Christie had spoken soberly, with no thought of flattery or effect; for the memory of many kindnesses bestowed on her by many men, from rough Joe Butterfield to Mr. Power, gave warmth and emphasis to her words.

The man sitting on the wall appreciated the compliment to his sex, and proved that he deserved his share of it by taking it exactly as she meant it, and saying heartily:

"I like that, Christie, and wish more women thought and spoke as you do."

"If they had had my experience they would, and not be ashamed of it. I am so old now I can say these things and not be misjudged; for even some sensible people think this honest sort of fellowship impossible if not improper. I don't, and I never shall, so if I can ever do any thing for you, David, forget that I am a woman and tell me as freely as if I was a younger brother."

"I wish you were!"

"So do I; you'd make a splendid elder brother."

"No, a very bad one."

There was a sudden sharpness in David’s voice that jarred on Christie’s ear and made her look up quickly. She only caught a glimpse of his face, and saw that it was strangely troubled, as he swung himself over the wall with little Vic on his arm and went toward the house, saying abruptly:

“Baby ‘s sleepy: she must go in.”

Christie sat some time longer, wondering what she had said to disturb him, and when the bell rang went in still perplexed. But David looked as usual, and the only trace of disquiet was an occasional hasty shaking back of the troublesome lock, and a slight knitting of the brows; two tokens, as she had learned to know, of impatience or pain.

She was soon so absorbed in feeding the children, hungry and clamorous as young birds for their food, that she forgot every thing else. When dinner was done and cleared away, she devoted herself to Mrs. Wilkins for an hour or two, while Mrs. Sterling took her nap, the infants played riotously in the lane, and David was busy with orders.

The arrival of Mr. Power drew every one to the porch to welcome him.

As he handed Christie a book, he asked with a significant smile:

“Have you found him yet?”

She glanced at the title of the new gift, read “Heroes and Hero-worship,” and answered merrily: “No, sir, but I’m looking hard.” “Success to your search,” and Mr. Power turned to greet David, who approached.

“Now, what shall we play?” asked Christie, as the children gathered about her demanding to be amused.

George Washington suggested leap-frog, and the others added equally impracticable requests; but Mrs. Wilkins settled the matter by saying:

“Let’s have some play-actin’, Christie. That used to tickle the children amazin’ly, and I was never tired of hearin’ them pieces, specially the solemn ones.”

“Yes, yes! do the funny girl with the baby, and the old woman, and the lady that took pison and had fits!” shouted the children, charmed with the idea.

Christie felt ready for any thing just then, and gave them Tilly Slowboy, Miss Miggs, and Mrs. Gummage, in her best style, while the young folks rolled on the grass in ecstasies, and Mrs. Wilkins laughed till she cried.

“Now a touch of tragedy!” said Mr. Power, who sat under the elm, with David leaning on the back of his chair, both applauding heartily.

“You insatiable people! do you expect me to give you low comedy and heavy tragedy all alone? I’m equal to melodrama I think, and I’ll give you Miss St. Clair as Juliet, if you wait a moment.”

Christie stepped into the house, and soon reappeared with a white table-cloth draped about her, two dishevelled locks of hair on her shoulders, and the vinegar cruet in her hand, that being the first bottle she could find. She meant to burlesque the poison scene, and began in the usual ranting way; but she soon forgot St. Clair in poor Juliet, and did it as she had often longed to do it, with all the power and passion she possessed. Very faulty was her rendering, but the earnestness she put into it made it most effective to her uncritical audience, who "brought down the house," when she fell upon the grass with her best stage drop, and lay there getting her breath after the mouthful of vinegar she had taken in the excitement of the moment.

She was up again directly, and, inspired by this superb success, ran in and presently reappeared as Lady Macbeth with Mrs. Wilkins's scarlet shawl for royal robes, and the leafy chaplet of the morning for a crown. She took the stage with some difficulty, for the unevenness of the turf impaired the majesty of her tragic stride, and fixing her eyes on an invisible Thane (who cut his part shamefully, and spoke in the gruffest of gruff voices) she gave them the dagger scene.

David as the orchestra, had been performing a drum solo on the back of a chair with two of the corn-cobs Victoria had been building houses with; but, when Lady Macbeth said, "Give me the daggers," Christie plucked the cobs suddenly from his hands, looking so fiercely scornful, and lowering upon him so wrathfully with her corked brows that he ejaculated an involuntary, "Bless me!" as he stepped back quite daunted.

Being in the spirit of her part, Christie closed with the sleep-walking scene, using the table-cloth again, while a towel composed the tragic nightcap of her ladyship. This was an imitation, and having a fine model and being a good mimic, she did well; for the children sat staring with round eyes, the gentlemen watched the woful face and gestures intently, and Mrs. Wilkins took a long breath at the end, exclaiming: "I never did see the beat of that for gastliness! My sister Clarissy used to walk in her sleep, but she warn't half so kind of dreadful."

"If she had had the murder of a few friends on her conscience, I dare say she would have been," said Christie, going in to make herself tidy.

"Well, how do you like her as an actress?" asked Mr. Power of David, who stood looking, as if he still saw and heard the haunted lady.

"Very much; but better as a woman. I'd no idea she had it in her," answered David, in a wonder-stricken tone.

"Plenty of tragedy and comedy in all of us," began Mr. Power; but

David said hastily:

"Yes, but few of us have passion and imagination enough to act

Shakspeare in that way."

"Very true: Christie herself could not give a whole character in that style, and would not think of trying."

"I think she could; and I'd like to see her try it," said David, much impressed by the dramatic ability which Christie's usual quietude had most effectually hidden.

He was still thinking about it, when she came out again. Mr. Power beckoned to her; saying, as she came and stood before him, flushed and kindled with her efforts:

"Now, you must give me a bit from the 'Merchant of Venice.' Portia is a favorite character of mine, and I want to see if you can do any thing with it."

"No, sir, I cannot. I used to study it, but it was too sober to suit me. I am not a judicial woman, so I gave it up," answered Christie, much flattered by his request, and amused at the respectful way in which David looked at her. Then, as if it just occurred to her, she added, "I remember one little speech that I can say to you, sir, with great truth, and I will, since you like that play."

Still standing before him, she bent her head a little, and with a graceful gesture of the hands, as if offering something, she delivered with heartfelt emphasis the first part of Portia's pretty speech to her fortunate suitor:

"You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am: though, for myself alone,
I would not be ambitious in my wish,
To wish myself much better; yet for you,
I would be trebled twenty times myself;
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich;
That, only to stand high in your account,
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account: but the full sum of me
Is sum of something; which, to term in gross,
Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd: —
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all, is that her willing spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed,
As from her lord, her governor, her king."

David applauded vigorously; but Mr. Power rose silently, looking both touched and surprised; and, drawing Christie's hand through his arm, led her away into the garden for one of the quiet talks that were so much to her.

When they returned, the Wilkinses were preparing to depart; and, after repeated leave-takings, finally got under way, were packed into the omnibus, and rumbled off with hats, hands, and handkerchiefs waving from every window. Mr. Power soon followed, and peace returned to the little house in the lane.

Later in the evening, when Mrs. Sterling was engaged with a neighbor, who had come to confide some affliction to the good lady, Christie went into the porch, and found David sitting on the step, enjoying the mellow moonlight and the balmy air. As he did not speak, she sat down silently, folded her hands in her lap, and began to enjoy the beauty of the night in her own way. Presently she became conscious that David's eyes had turned from the moon to her own face. He sat in the shade, she in the light, and he was looking at her with the new expression which amused her.

"Well, what is it? You look as if you never saw me before," she said, smiling.

"I feel as if I never had," he answered, still regarding her as if she had been a picture.

"What do I look like?"

"A peaceful, pious nun, just now."

"Oh! that is owing to my pretty shawl. I put it on in honor of the day, though it is a trifle warm, I confess." And Christie stroked the soft folds about her shoulders, and settled the corner that lay lightly on her hair. "I do feel peaceful to-night, but not pious. I am afraid I never shall do that," she added soberly.

"Why not?"

"Well, it does not seem to be my nature, and I don't know how to change it. I want something to keep me steady, but I can't find it. So I whiffle about this way and that, and sometimes think I am a most degenerate creature."

"That is only human nature, so don't be troubled. We are all compasses pointing due north. We get shaken often, and the needle varies in spite of us; but the minute we are quiet, it points right, and we have only to follow it."

"The keeping quiet is just what I cannot do. Tour mother shows me how lovely it is, and I try to imitate it; but this restless soul of mine will ask questions and doubt and fear, and worry me in many ways. What shall I do to keep it still?" asked Christie, smiling, yet earnest.

"Let it alone: you cannot force these things, and the best way is to wait till the attraction is strong enough to keep the needle steady. Some people get their ballast slowly, some don't need much, and some have to work hard for theirs."

"Did you?" asked Christie; for David's voice fell a little, as he uttered the last words.

"I have not got much yet."

"I think you have. Why, David, you are always cheerful and contented, good and generous. If that is not true piety, what is?”

“You are very much deceived, and I am sorry for it,” said David, with the impatient gesture of the head, and a troubled look.

“Prove it!” And Christie looked at him with such sincere respect and regard, that his honest nature would not let him accept it, though it gratified him much.

He made no answer for a minute. Then he said slowly, as if feeling a modest man’s hesitation to speak of himself, yet urged to it by some irresistible impulse:

“I will prove it if you won’t mind the unavoidable egotism; for I cannot let you think me so much better than I am. Outwardly I seem to you ‘cheerful, contented, generous, and good.’ In reality I am sad, dissatisfied, bad, and selfish: see if I’m not. I often tire of this quiet life, hate my work, and long to break away, and follow my own wild and wilful impulses, no matter where they lead. Nothing keeps me at such times but my mother and God’s patience.”

David began quietly; but the latter part of this confession was made with a sudden impetuosity that startled Christie, so utterly unlike his usual self-control was it. She could only look at him with the surprise she felt. His face was in the shadow; but she saw that it was flushed, his eyes excited, and in his voice she heard an undertone that made it sternly self-accusing.

“I am not a hypocrite,” he went on rapidly, as if driven to speak in spite of himself. “I try to be what I seem, but it is too hard sometimes and I despair. Especially hard is it to feel that I have learned to feign happiness so well that others are entirely deceived. Mr. Power and mother know me as I am: other friends I have not, unless you will let me call you one. Whether you do or not after this, I respect you too much to let you delude yourself about my virtues, so I tell you the truth and abide the consequences.”

He looked up at her as he paused, with a curious mixture of pride and humility in his face, and squared his broad shoulders as if he had thrown off a burden that had much oppressed him.

Christie offered him her hand, saying in a tone that did his heart good: “The consequences are that I respect, admire, and trust you more than ever, and feel proud to be your friend.”

David gave the hand a strong and grateful pressure, said, “Thank you,” in a moved tone, and then leaned back into the shadow, as if trying to recover from this unusual burst of confidence, won from him by the soft magic of time, place, and companionship.

Fearing he would regret the glimpse he had given her, and anxious to show how much she liked it, Christie talked on to give him time to regain composure.

“I always thought in reading the lives of saints or good men of any time, that their struggles were the most interesting and helpful things recorded. Human imperfection only seems to make real piety more possible, and to me more beautiful; for where others have conquered I can conquer, having suffered as they suffer, and seen their hard-won success. That is the sort of religion I want; something to hold by, live in, and enjoy, if I can only get it."

"I know you will." He said it heartily, and seemed quite calm again; so Christie obeyed the instinct which told her that questions would be good for David, and that he was in the mood for answering them. "May I ask you something," she began a little timidly. "Any thing, Christie," he answered instantly. "That is a rash promise: I am a woman, and therefore curious; what shall you do if I take advantage of the privilege?" "Try and see."

"I will be discreet, and only ask one thing," she replied, charmed with her success. "You said just now that you had learned to feign happiness. I wish you would tell me how you do it, for it is such an excellent imitation I shall be quite content with it till I can learn the genuine thing."

David fingered the troublesome forelock thoughtfully for a moment, then said, with something of the former impetuosity coming back into his voice and manner:

"I will tell you all about it; that's the best way: I know I shall some day because I can't help it; so I may as well have done with it now, since I have begun. It is not interesting, mind you, — only a grim little history of one man's fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil: will you have it?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Christie, so eagerly that David laughed, in spite of the bitter memories stirring at his heart.

"So like a woman, always ready to hear and forgive sinners," he said, then took a long breath, and added rapidly:

"I'll put it in as few words as possible and much good may it do you. Some years ago I was desperately miserable; never mind why: I dare say I shall tell you all about it some day if I go on at this rate. Well, being miserable, as I say, every thing looked black and bad to me: I hated all men, distrusted all women, doubted the existence of God, and was a forlorn wretch generally. Why I did not go to the devil I can't say: I did start once or twice; but the thought of that dear old woman in there sitting all alone and waiting for me dragged me back, and kept me here till the first recklessness was over. People talk about duty being sweet; I have not found it so, but there it was: I should have been a brute to shirk it; so I took it up, and held on desperately till it grew bearable."

"It has grovn sweet now, David, I am sure," said Christie, very low.

"No, not yet," he answered with the stern honesty that would not let him deceive himself or others, cost what it might to be true. "There is a certain solid satisfaction in it that I did not use to find. It is not a mere dogged persistence now, as it once was, and that is a step towards loving it perhaps."

He spoke half to himself, and sat leaning his head on both hands propped on his knees, looking down as if the weight of the old trouble bent his shoulders again.

"What more, David?" said Christie.

"Only this. When I found I had got to live, and live manfully, I said to myself, 'I must have help or I cannot do it.' To no living soul could I tell my grief, not even to my mother, for she had her own to bear: no human being could help me, yet I must have help or give up shamefully. Then I did what others do when all else fails to sustain them; I turned to God: not humbly, not devoutly or trustfully, but doubtfully, bitterly, and rebelliously; for I said in my despairing heart, 'If there is a God, let Him help me, and I will believe.' He did help me, and I kept my word."

"Oh, David, how?" whispered Christie after a moment's silence, for the last words were solemn in their earnestness.

"The help did not come at once. No miracle answered me, and I thought my cry had not been heard. But it had, and slowly something like submission came to me. It was not cheerful nor pious: it was only a dumb, sad sort of patience without hope or faith. It was better than desperation; so I accepted it, and bore the inevitable as well as I could. Presently, courage seemed to spring up again: I was ashamed to be beaten in the first battle, and some sort of blind instinct made me long to break away from the past and begin again. My father was dead; mother left all to me, and followed where I led. I sold the old place, bought this, and, shutting out the world as much as I could, I fell to work as if my life depended on it. That was five or six years ago: and for a long time I delved away without interest or pleasure, merely as a safety-valve for my energies, and a means of living; for I gave up all my earlier hopes and plans when the trouble came.

"I did not love my work; but it was good for me, and helped cure my sick soul. I never guessed why I felt better, but dug on with indifference first, then felt pride in my garden, then interest in the plants I tended, and by and by I saw what they had done for me, and loved them like true friends."

A broad woodbine leaf had been fluttering against David's head, as he leaned on the slender pillar of the porch where it grew. Now, as if involuntarily, he laid his cheek against it with a caressing gesture, and sat looking over the garden lying dewy and still in the moonlight, with the grateful look of a man who has learned the healing miracles of Nature and how near she is to God.

"Mr. Power helped you: didn't he?" said Christie, longing to hear more.

"So much! I never can tell you what he was to me, nor how I thank him. To him, and to my work I owe the little I have won in the way of strength and comfort after years of effort. I see now the compensation that comes out of trouble, the lovely possibilities that exist for all of us, and the infinite patience of God, which is to me one of the greatest of His divine attributes. I have only got so far, but things grow easier as one goes on; and if I keep tugging I may yet be the cheerful, contented man I seem. That is all, Christie, and a longer story than I meant to tell."

"Not long enough: some time you will tell me more perhaps, since you have once begun. It seems quite natural now, and I am so pleased and honored by your confidence. But I cannot help wondering what made you do it all at once," said Christie presently, after they had listened to a whippoorwill, and watched the flight of a downy owl.

"I do not think I quite know myself, unless it was because I have been on my good behavior since you came, and, being a humbug, as I tell you, was forced to unmask in spite of myself. There are limits to human endurance, and the proudest man longs to unpack his woes before a sympathizing friend now and then. I have been longing to do this for some time; but I never like to disturb mother's peace, or take Mr. Power from those who need him more. So to-day, when you so sweetly offered to help me if you could, it quite went to my heart, and seemed so friendly and comfortable, I could not resist trying it tonight, when you began about my imaginary virtues. That is the truth, I believe: now, what shall we do about it?"

"Just go on, and do it again whenever you feel like it. I know what loneliness is, and how telling worries often cures them. I meant every word I said this morning, and will prove it by doing any thing in the world I can for you. Believe this, and let me be your friend."

They had risen, as a stir within told them the guest was going; and as Christie spoke she was looking up with the moonlight full upon her face.

If there had been any hidden purpose in her mind, any false sentiment, or trace of coquetry in her manner, it would have spoiled that hearty little speech of hers.

But in her heart was nothing but a sincere desire to prove gratitude and offer sympathy; in her manner the gentle frankness of a woman speaking to a brother; and in her face the earnestness of one who felt the value of friendship, and did not ask or give it lightly.

"I will," was David's emphatic answer, and then, as if to seal the bargain, he stooped down, and gravely kissed her on the forehead.

Christie was a little startled, but neither offended nor confused; for there was no love in that quiet kiss, — only respect, affection, and much gratitude; an involuntary demonstration from the lonely man to the true-hearted woman who had dared to come and comfort him.

Out trotted neighbor Miller, and that was the end of confidences in the porch; but David played melodiously on his flute that night, and Christie fell asleep saying happily to herself:

“Now we are all right, friends for ever, and every thing will go beautifully.”

CHAPTER XIII.

WAKING UP.

EVERY thing did “go beautifully” for a time; so much so, that Christie began to think she really had “got religion.” A delightful peace pervaded her soul, a new interest made the dullest task agreeable, and life grew so inexpressibly sweet that she felt as if she could forgive all her enemies, love her friends more than ever, and do any thing great, good, or glorious.

She had known such moods before, but they had never lasted long, and were not so intense as this; therefore, she was sure some blessed power had come to uphold and cheer her. She sang like a lark as she swept and dusted; thought high and happy thoughts among the pots and kettles, and, when she sat sewing, smiled unconsciously as if some deep satisfaction made sunshine from within. Heart and soul seemed to wake up and rejoice as naturally and beautifully as flowers in the spring. A soft brightness shone in her eyes, a fuller tone sounded in her voice, and her face grew young and blooming with the happiness that transfigures all it touches.

“Christie ‘s growing handsome,” David would say to his mother, as if she was a flower in which he took pride.

“Thee is a good gardener, Davy,” the old lady would reply, and when he was busy would watch him with a tender sort of anxiety, as if to discover a like change in him.

But no alteration appeared, except more cheerfulness and less silence; for now there was no need to hide his real self, and all the social virtues in him came out delightfully after their long solitude.

In her present uplifted state, Christie could no more help regarding David as a martyr and admiring him for it, than she could help mixing sentiment with her sympathy. By the light of the late confessions, his life and character looked very different to her now. His apparent contentment was resignation; his cheerfulness, a manly contempt for complaint; his reserve, the modest reticence of one who, having done a hard duty well, desires no praise for it. Like all enthusiastic persons, Christie had a hearty admiration for self-sacrifice and self-control; and, while she learned to see David’s virtues, she also exaggerated them, and could not do enough to show the daily increasing esteem and respect she felt for him, and to atone for the injustice she once did him.

She grubbed in the garden and green-house, and learned hard botanical names that she might be able to talk intelligently upon subjects that interested her comrade. Then, as autumn ended out-of-door work, she tried to make home more comfortable and attractive than ever.

David's room was her especial care; for now to her there was something pathetic in the place and its poor furnishing. He had fought many a silent battle there; won many a secret victory; and tried to cheer his solitude with the best thoughts the minds of the bravest, wisest men could give him.

She did not smile at the dilapidated idols now, but touched them tenderly, and let no dust obscure their well-beloved faces. She set the books in order daily, taking many a sip of refreshment from them by the way, and respectfully regarded those in unknown tongues, full of admiration for David's learning. She covered the irruptive sofa neatly; saw that the little vase was always clear and freshly filled; cared for the nursery in the gable-window; and preserved an exquisite neatness everywhere, which delighted the soul of the room's order-loving occupant.

She also — alas, for romance! — cooked the dishes David loved, and liked to see him enjoy them with the appetite which once had shocked her so. She watched over his buttons with a vigilance that would have softened the heart of the crustiest bachelor: she even gave herself the complexion of a lemon by wearing blue, because David liked the pretty contrast with his mother's drabs.

After recording that last fact, it is unnecessary to explain what was the matter with Christie. She honestly thought she had got religion; but it was piety's twin-sister, who produced this wonderful revival in her soul; and though she began in all good faith she presently discovered that she was

"Not the first maiden
Who came but for friendship,
And took away love."

After the birthnight confessions, David found it easier to go on with the humdrum life he had chosen from a sense of duty; for now he felt as if he had not only a fellow-worker, but a comrade and friend who understood, sympathized with, and encouraged him by an interest and good-will inexpressibly comfortable and inspiring. Nothing disturbed the charm of the new league in those early days; for Christie was thoroughly simple and sincere, and did her womanly work with no thought of reward or love or admiration.

David saw this, and felt it more attractive than any gift of beauty or fascination of manner would have been. He had no desire to be a lover, having forbidden himself that hope; but he found it so easy and pleasant to be a friend that he reproached himself for not trying it before; and explained his neglect by the fact that Christie was not an ordinary woman, since none of all the many he had known and helped, had ever been any thing to him but objects of pity and protection.

Mrs. Sterling saw these changes with her wise, motherly eyes, but said nothing; for she influenced others by the silent power of character. Speaking little, and unusually gifted with the meditative habits of age, she seemed to live in a more peaceful world than this. As George MacDonald somewhere says, "Her soul seemed to sit apart in a sunny little room, safe from dust and noise, serenely regarding passers-by through the clear muslin curtains of her window."

Yet, she was neither cold nor careless, stern nor selfish, but ready to share all the joys and sorrows of those about her; and when advice was asked she gave it gladly. Christie had won her heart long ago, and now was as devoted as a daughter to her; lightening her cares so skilfully that many of them slipped naturally on to the young shoulders, and left the old lady much time for rest, or the lighter tasks fitted for feeble hands. Christie often called her "Mother," and felt herself rewarded for the hardest, humblest job she ever did when the sweet old voice said gratefully, "I thank thee, daughter."

Things were in this prosperous, not to say paradisiacal, state, when one member of the family began to make discoveries of an alarming nature. The first was that the Sunday pilgrimages to church were seasons of great refreshment to soul and body when David went also, and utter failures if he did not. Next, that the restless ambitions of all sorts were quite gone; for now Christie's mission seemed to be sitting in a quiet corner and making shirts in the most exquisite manner, while thinking about — well, say botany, or any kindred subject. Thirdly, that home was woman's sphere after all, and the perfect roasting of beef, brewing of tea, and concocting of delectable puddings, an end worth living for if masculine commendation rewarded the labor.

Fourthly, and worst of all, she discovered that she was not satisfied with half confidences, and quite pined to know all about "David's trouble." The little needle-book with the faded "Letty" on it haunted her; and when, after a pleasant evening below, she heard him pace his room for hours, or play melancholy airs upon the flute, she was jealous of that unknown woman who had such power to disturb his peace, and felt a strong desire to smash the musical confidante into whose responsive breast he poured his woe.

At this point Christie paused; and, after evading any explanation of these phenomena in the most skilful manner for a time, suddenly faced the fact, saying to herself with great candor and decision:

"I know what all this means: I'm beginning to like David more than is good for me. I see this clearly, and won't dodge any longer, but put a stop to it at once. Of course I can if I choose, and now is the time to do it; for I understand myself perfectly, and if I reach a certain point it is all over with me. That point I will not reach: David's heart is in that Letty's grave, and he only cares for me as a friend. I promised to be one to him, and I'll keep my word like an honest woman. It may not be easy; but all the sacrifices shall not be his, and I won't be a fool."

With praiseworthy resolution Christie set about the reformation without delay; not an easy task and one that taxed all her wit and wisdom to execute without betraying the motive for it. She decided that Mrs. Sterling must not be left alone on Sunday, so the young people took turns to go to church, and such dismal trips Christie had never known; for all her Sundays were bad weather, and Mr. Power seemed to hit on unusually uninteresting texts.

She talked while she sewed instead of indulging in dangerous thoughts, and Mrs. Sterling was surprised and entertained by this new loquacity. In the evening she read and studied with a diligence that amazed and rather disgusted David; since she kept all her lively chat for his mother, and pored over her books when he wanted her for other things.

"I'm trying to brighten up my wits," she said, and went on trying to stifle her affections.

But though "the absurdity," as she called the new revelation, was stopped externally, it continued with redoubled vigor internally. Each night she said, "this must be conquered," yet each morning it rose fair and strong to make the light and beauty of her day, and conquer her again. She did her best and bravest, but was forced at last to own that she could not "put a stop to it," because she had already reached the point where "it was all over with her."

Just at this critical moment an event occurred which completed Christie's defeat, and made her feel that her only safety lay in flight.

One evening she sat studying ferns, and heroically saying over and over, "Andiantum, Aspidium, and Asplenium, Trichomanes," while longing to go and talk delightfully to David, who sat musing by the fire.

"I can't go on so much longer," she thought despairingly. "Polypodium aureum, a native of Florida," is all very interesting in its place; but it doesn't help me to gain self-control a bit, and I shall disgrace myself if something doesn't happen very soon."

Something did happen almost instantly; for as she shut the cover sharply on the poor Polypods, a knock was heard, and before David could answer it the door flew open and a girl ran in. Straight to him she went, and clinging to his arm said excitedly: "Oh, do take care of me: I 've run away again!"

"Why, Kitty, what's the matter now?" asked David, putting back her hood, and looking down at her with the paternal expression Christie had not seen for a long time, and missed very much.

“Father found me, and took me home, and wanted me to marry a dreadful man, and I wouldn’t, so I ran away to you. He didn’t know I came here before, and I’m safe if you’ll let me stay,” cried Kitty, still clinging and imploring.

“Of course I will, and glad to see you back again,” answered David, adding pitifully, as he put her in his easy-chair, took her cloak and hood off and stood stroking her curly hair: “Poor little girl! it is hard to have to run away so much: isn’t it?”

“Not if I come here; it’s so pleasant I’d like to stay all my life,” and Kitty took a long breath, as if her troubles were over now. “Who’s that?” she asked suddenly, as her eye fell on Christie, who sat watching her with interest:

“That is our good friend Miss Devon. She came to take your place, and we got so fond of her we could not let her go,” answered David with a gesture of introduction, quite unconscious that his position just then was about as safe and pleasant as that of a man between a lighted candle and an open powder barrel.

The two young women nodded to each other, took a swift survey, and made up their minds before David had poked the fire. Christie saw a pretty face with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and brown rings of hair lying on the smooth, low forehead; a young face, but not childlike, for it was conscious of its own prettiness, and betrayed the fact by little airs and graces that reminded one of a coquettish kitten. Short and slender, she looked more youthful than she was; while a gay dress, with gilt ear-rings, locket at the throat, and a cherry ribbon in her hair made her a bright little figure in that plain room.

Christie suddenly felt as if ten years had been added to her age, as she eyed the new-comer, who leaned back in the great chair talking to David, who stood on the rug, evidently finding it pleasanter to look at the vivacious face before him than at the fire.

“Just the pretty, lively sort of girl sensible men often marry, and then discover how silly they are,” thought Christie, taking up her work and assuming an indifferent air.

“She’s a lady and nice looking, but I know I shan’t like her,” was Kitty’s decision, as she turned away and devoted herself to David, hoping he would perceive how much she had improved and admire her accordingly.

“So you don’t want to marry this Miles because he is not handsome. You’d better think again before you make up your mind. He is respectable, well off, and fond of you, it seems. Why not try it, Kitty? You need some one to take care of you sadly,” David said, when her story had been told.

“If father plagues me much I may take the man; but I’d rather have the other one if he wasn’t poor,” answered Kitty with a side-long glance of the blue eyes, and a conscious smile on the red lips.

"Oh, there's another lover, is there?"

"Lots of 'em."

David laughed and looked at Christie as if inviting her to be amused with the freaks and prattle of a child. But Christie sewed away without a sign of interest.

"That won't do, Kitty: you are too young for much of such nonsense. I shall keep you here a while, and see if we can't settle matters both wisely and pleasantly," he said, shaking his head as sagely as a grandfather.

"I'm sure I wish you would: I love to stay here, you are always so good to me. I'm in no hurry to be married; and you won't make me: will you?"

Kitty rose as she spoke, and stood before him with a beseeching little gesture, and a confiding air quite captivating to behold.

Christie was suddenly seized with a strong desire to shake the girl and call her an "artful little hussy," but crushed this unaccountable impulse, and hemmed a pocket-handkerchief with reckless rapidity, while she stole covert glances at the tableau by the fire.

David put his finger under Kitty's round chin, and lifting her face looked into it, trying to discover if she really cared for this suitor who seemed so providentially provided for her. Kitty smiled and blushed, and dimpled under that grave look so prettily that it soon changed, and David let her go, saying indulgently:

"You shall not be troubled, for you are only a child after all. Let the lovers go, and stay and play with me, for I've been rather lonely lately."

"That's a reproach for me," thought Christie, longing to cry out: "No, no; send the girl away and let me be all in all to you." But she only turned up the lamp and pretended to be looking for a spool, while her heart ached and her eyes were too dim for seeing.

"I'm too old to play, but I'll stay and tease you as I used to, if Miles don't come and carry me off as he said he would," answered Kitty, with a toss of the head which showed she was not so childlike as David fancied. But the next minute she was sitting on a stool at his feet petting the cat, while she told her adventures with girlish volubility.

Christie could not bear to sit and look on any longer, so she left the room, saying she would see if Mrs. Sterling wanted any thing, for the old lady kept her room with a touch of rheumatism. As she shut the door, Christie heard Kitty say softly:

"Now we'll be comfortable as we used to be: won't we?"

What David answered Christie did not stay to hear, but went into the kitchen, and had her first pang of jealousy out alone, while she beat up the buckwheats for breakfast with an energy that made them miracles of lightness on the morrow.

When she told Mrs. Sterling of the new arrival, the placid little lady gave a cluck of regret and said with unusual emphasis:

“I’m sorry for it.”

“Why?” asked Christie, feeling as if she could embrace the speaker for the words.

“She is a giddy little thing, and much care to whoever befriends her.” Mrs. Sterling would say no more, but, as Christie bade her good-night, she held her hand, saying with a kiss:

“No one will take thy place with me, my daughter.”

For a week Christie suffered constant pin-pricks of jealousy, despising herself all the time, and trying to be friendly with the disturber of her peace. As if prompted by an evil spirit, Kitty unconsciously tried and tormented her from morning to night, and no one saw or guessed it unless Mrs. Sterling’s motherly heart divined the truth. David seemed to enjoy the girl’s lively chat, her openly expressed affection, and the fresh young face that always brightened when he came.

Presently, however, Christie saw a change in him, and suspected that he had discovered that Kitty was a child no longer, but a young girl with her head full of love and lovers. The blue eyes grew shy, the pretty face grew eloquent with blushes now and then, as he looked at it, and the lively tongue faltered sometimes in speaking to him. A thousand little coquetries were played off for his benefit, and frequent appeals for advice in her heart affairs kept tender subjects uppermost in their conversations.

At first all this seemed to amuse David as much as if Kitty were a small child playing at sweethearts; but soon his manner changed, growing respectful, and a little cool when Kitty was most confiding. He no longer laughed about Miles, stopped calling her “little girl,” and dropped his paternal ways as he had done with Christie. By many indescribable but significant signs he showed that he considered Kitty a woman now and treated her as such, being all the more scrupulous in the respect he paid her, because she was so unprotected, and so wanting in the natural dignity and refinement which are a woman’s best protection.

Christie admired him for this, but saw in it the beginning of a tenderer feeling than pity, and felt each day that she was one too many now.

Kitty was puzzled and piqued by these changes, and being a born flirt tried all her powers on David, veiled under guileless girlishness. She was very pretty, very charming, and at times most lovable and sweet when all that was best in her shallow little heart was touched. But it was evident to all that her early acquaintance with the hard and sordid side of life had brushed the bloom from her nature, and filled her mind with thoughts and feelings unfitted to her years.

Mrs. Sterling was very kind to her, but never treated her as she did Christie; and though not a word was spoken between them the elder women knew that they quite agreed in their opinion of Kitty. She evidently was rather afraid of the old lady, who said so little and saw so much. Christie also she shunned without appearing to do so, and when alone with her put on airs that half amused, half irritated the other.

"David is my friend, and I don't care for any one else," her manner said as plainly as words; and to him she devoted herself so entirely, and apparently so successfully, that Christie made up her mind he had at last begun to forget his Letty, and think of filling the void her loss had left.

A few words which she accidentally overheard confirmed this idea, and showed her what she must do. As she came quietly in one evening from a stroll in the lane, and stood taking off cloak and hood, she caught a glimpse through the half-open parlor door of David pacing to and fro with a curiously excited expression on his face, and heard Mrs. Sterling say with unusual warmth:

"Thee is too hard upon thyself, Davy. Forget the past and be happy as other men are. Thee has atoned for thy fault long ago, so let me see thee at peace before I die, my son."

"Not yet, mother, not yet. I have no right to hope or ask for any woman's love till I am worthier of it," answered David in a tone that thrilled Christie's heart: it was so full of love and longing.

Here Kitty came running in from the green-house with her hands full of flowers, and passing Christie, who was fumbling among the cloaks in the passage, she went to show David some new blossom.

He had no time to alter the expression of his face for its usual grave serenity: Kitty saw the change at once, and spoke of it with her accustomed want of tact.

"How handsome you look! What are you thinking about?" she said, gazing up at him with her own eyes bright with wonder, and her cheeks glowing with the delicate carmine of the frosty air.

"I am thinking that you look more like a rose than ever," answered David turning her attention from himself by a compliment, and beginning to admire the flowers, still with that flushed and kindled look on his own face.

Christie crept upstairs, and, sitting in the dark, decided with the firmness of despair to go away, lest she should betray the secret that possessed her, a dead hope now, but still too dear to be concealed.

"Mr. Power told me to come to him when I got tired of this. I'll say I am tired and try something else, no matter what: I can bear any thing, but to stand quietly by and see David marry that empty-hearted girl, who dares to show that she desires to win him. Out of sight of all this, I can conquer my love, at least hide it; but if I stay I know I shall betray myself in some bitter minute, and I'd rather die than do that."

Armed with this resolution, Christie went the next day to Mr. Power, and simply said: "I am not needed at the Sterlings any more: can you give me other work to do?"

Mr. Power's keen eye searched her face for a moment, as if to discover the real motive for her wish. But Christie had nerved herself to bear that look, and showed no sign of her real trouble, unless the set expression of her lips, and the unnatural steadiness of her eyes betrayed it to that experienced reader of human hearts.

Whatever he suspected or saw, Mr. Power kept to himself, and answered in his cordial way:

"Well, I've been expecting you would tire of that quiet life, and have plenty of work ready for you. One of my good Dorcases is tired out and must rest; so you shall take her place and visit my poor, report their needs, and supply them as fast as we can. Does that suit you?"

"Entirely, sir. Where shall I live?" asked Christie, with an expression of relief that said much.

"Here for the present. I want a secretary to put my papers in order, write some of my letters, and do a thousand things to help a busy man. My old housekeeper likes you, and will let you take a duster now and then if you don't find enough other work to do. When can you come?"

Christie answered with a long breath of satisfaction: "To-morrow, if you like."

"I do: can you be spared so soon?"

"Oh, yes! they don't want me now at all, or I would not leave them. Kitty can take my place: she needs protection more than I; and there is not room for two." She checked herself there, conscious that a tone of bitterness had crept into her voice. Then quite steadily she added:

"Will you be kind enough to write, and ask Mrs. Sterling if she can spare me? I shall find it hard to tell her myself, for I fear she may think me ungrateful after all her kindness."

"No: she is used to parting with those whom she has helped, and is always glad to set them on their way toward better things. I will write to-morrow, and you can come whenever you will, sure of a welcome, my child."

Something in the tone of those last words, and the pressure of the strong, kind hand, touched Christie's sore heart, and made it impossible for her to hide the truth entirely.

She only said: “Thank you, sir. I shall be very glad to come;” but her eyes were full, and she held his hand an instant, as if she clung to it sure of succor and support.

Then she went home so pale and quiet; so helpful, patient, and affectionate, that Mrs. Sterling watched her anxiously; David looked amazed; and, even self-absorbed Kitty saw the change, and was touched by it.

On the morrow, Mr. Power’s note came, and Christie fled upstairs while it was read and discussed.

“If I get through this parting without disgracing myself, I don’t care what happens to me afterward,” she said; and, in order that she might do so, she assumed a cheerful air, and determined to depart with all the honors of war, if she died in the attempt.

So, when Mrs. Sterling called her down, she went humming into the parlor, smiled as she read the note silently given her, and then said with an effort greater than any she had ever made in her most arduous part on the stage:

“Yes, I did say to Mr. Power that I thought I’d better be moving on. I’m a restless creature as you know; and, now that you don’t need me, I’ve a fancy to see more of the world. If you want me back again in the spring, I’ll come.”

“I shall want thee, my dear, but will not say a word to keep thee now, for thee does need a change, and Mr. Power can give thee work better suited to thy taste than any here. We shall see thee sometimes, and spring will make thee long for the flowers, I hope,” was Mrs. Sterling’s answer, as Christie gave back the note at the end of her difficult speech.

“Don’t think me ungrateful. I have been very happy here, and never shall forget how motherly kind you have been to me. You will believe this and love me still, though I go away and leave you for a little while?” prayed Christie, with a face full of treacherous emotion.

Mrs. Sterling laid her hand on Christie’s head, as she knelt down impulsively before her, and with a soft solemnity that made the words both an assurance and a blessing, she said:

“I believe and love and honor thee, my child. My heart warmed to thee from the first: it has taken thee to itself now; and nothing can ever come between us, unless thee wills it. Remember that, and go in peace with an old friend’s thanks, and good wishes in return for faithful service, which no money can repay.”

Christie laid her cheek against that wrinkled one, and, for a moment, was held close to that peaceful old heart which felt so tenderly for her, yet never wounded her by a word of pity. Infinitely comforting was that little instant of time, when the venerable woman consoled the young one with a touch, and strengthened her by the mute eloquence of sympathy.

This made the hardest task of all easier to perform; and, when David met her in the evening, Christie was ready to play out her part, feeling that Mrs. Sterling would help her, if need be. But David took it very quietly; at least, he showed no very poignant regret at her departure, though he lamented it, and hoped it would not be a very long absence. This wounded Christie terribly; for all of a sudden a barrier seemed to rise between them, and the old friendliness grew chilled.

"He thinks I am ungrateful, and is offended," she said to herself. "Well, I can bear coldness better than kindness now, and it will make it easier to go."

Kitty was pleased at the prospect of reigning alone, and did not disguise her satisfaction; so Christie's last day was any thing but pleasant. Mr. Power would send for her on the morrow, and she busied herself in packing her own possessions, setting every thing in order, and making various little arrangements for Mrs. Sterling's comfort, as Kitty was a heedless creature; willing enough, but very forgetful. In the evening some neighbors came in; so that dangerous time was safely passed, and Christie escaped to her own room with her usual quiet good-night all round.

"We won't have any sentimental demonstrations; no wailing, or tender adieux. If I'm weak enough to break my heart, no one need know it, — least of all, that little fool," thought Christie, grimly, as she burnt up several long-cherished relics of her love.

She was up early, and went about her usual work with the sad pleasure with which one performs a task for the last time. Lazy little Kitty never appeared till the bell rang; and Christie was fond of that early hour, busy though it was, for David was always before her with blazing fires; and, while she got breakfast, he came and went with wood and water, milk and marketing; often stopping to talk, and always in his happiest mood.

The first snow-fall had made the world wonderfully lovely that morning; and Christie stood at the window admiring the bridal look of the earth, as it lay dazzlingly white in the early sunshine. The little parlor was fresh and clean, with no speck of dust anywhere; the fire burned on the bright andirons; the flowers were rejoicing in their morning bath; and the table was set out with dainty care. So homelike, so pleasant, so very dear to her, that Christie yearned to stay, yet dared not, and had barely time to steady face and voice, when David came in with the little posies he always had ready for his mother and Christie at breakfast time. Only a flower by their plates; but it meant much to them: for, in these lives of ours, tender little acts do more to bind hearts together than great, deeds or heroic words; since the first are like the dear daily bread that none can live without; the latter but occasional feasts, beautiful and memorable, but not possible to all.

This morning David laid a sprig of sweet-scented balm at his mother's place, two or three rosy daisies at Kitty's, and a bunch of Christie's favorite violets at hers. She smiled as her eye went from the scentless daisies, so pertly pretty, to her own posy full of perfume, and the half sad, half sweet associations that haunt these blue-eyed flowers.

"I wanted pansies for you, but not one would bloom; so I did the next best, since you don't like roses," said David, as Christie stood looking at the violets with a thoughtful face, for something in the peculiarly graceful arrangement of the heart-shaped leaves recalled another nosegay to her mind.

"I like these very much, because they came to me in the beginning of this, the happiest year of my life;" and scarcely knowing why, except that it was very sweet to talk with David in the early sunshine, she told about the flowers some one had given her at church. As she finished she looked up at him; and, though his face was perfectly grave, his eyes laughed, and with a sudden conviction of the truth, Christie exclaimed!

"David, I do believe it was you!"

"I couldn't help it: you seemed so touched and troubled. I longed to speak to you, but didn't dare, so dropped the flowers and got away as fast as possible. Did you think it very rude?"

"I thought it the sweetest thing that ever happened to me. That was my first step along a road that you have strewn with flowers ever since. I can't thank you, but I never shall forget it." Christie spoke out fervently, and for an instant her heart shone in her face. Then she checked herself, and, fearing she had said too much, fell to slicing bread with an energetic rapidity which resulted in a cut finger. Dropping the knife, she tried to get her handkerchief, but the blood flowed fast, and the pain of a deep gash made her a little faint. David sprung to help her, tied up the wound, put her in the big chair, held water to her lips, and bathed her temples with a wet napkin; silently, but so tenderly, that it was almost too much for poor Christie.

For one happy moment her head lay on his arm, and his hand brushed back her hair with a touch that was a caress: she heard his heart beat fast with anxiety; felt his breath on her cheek, and wished that she might die then and there, though a bread-knife was not a romantic weapon, nor a cut finger as interesting as a broken heart. Kitty's voice made her start up, and the blissful vision of life, with David in the little house alone, van ished like a bright bubble, leaving the hard reality to be lived out with nothing but a woman's pride to conceal a woman's most passionate pain.

"It's nothing: I'm all right now. Don't say any thing to worry your mother; I'll put on a bit of court-plaster, and no one will be the wiser," she said, hastily removing all traces of the accident but her own pale face.

“ONE HAPPY MOMENT.”

“Poor Christie, it’s hard that you should go away with a wound like this on the hand that has done so much for us,” said David, as he carefully adjusted the black strip on that forefinger, roughened by many stitches set for him.

“I loved to do it,” was all Christie trusted herself to say.

“I know you did; and in your own words I can only answer: ‘I don’t know how to thank you, but I never shall forget it.’“ And David kissed the wounded hand as gratefully and reverently as if its palm was not hardened by the humblest tasks.

If he had only known — ah, if he had only known! — how easily he might repay that debt, and heal the deeper wound in Christie’s heart. As it was, she could only say, “You are too kind,” and begin to shovel tea into the pot, as Kitty came in, as rosy and fresh as the daisies she put in her hair.

“Ain’t they becoming?” she asked, turning to David for admiration.

“No, thank you,” he answered absently, looking out over her head, as he stood upon the rug in the attitude which the best men will assume in the bosoms of their families.

Kitty looked offended, and turned to the mirror for comfort; while Christie went on shovelling tea, quite unconscious what she was about till David said gravely:

“Won’t that be rather strong?”

“How stupid of me! I always forget that Kitty does not drink tea,” and Christie rectified her mistake with all speed.

Kitty laughed, and said in her pert little way:

“Getting up early don’t seem to agree with either of you this morning: I wonder what you’ve been doing?”

“Your work. Suppose you bring in the kettle: Christie has hurt her hand.”

David spoke quietly; but Kitty looked as much surprised as if he had boxed her ears, for he had never used that tone to her before. She meekly obeyed; and David added with a smile to Christie:

“Mother is coming down, and you’ll have to get more color into your checks if you mean to hide your accident from her.”

“That is easily done;” and Christie rubbed her pale cheeks till they rivalled Kitty’s in their bloom.

“How well you women know how to conceal your wounds,” said David, half to himself.

“It is an invaluable accomplishment for us sometimes: you forget that I have been an actress,” answered Christie, with a bitter sort of smile.

"I wish I could forget what I have been!" muttered David, turning his back to her and kicking a log that had rolled out of place.

In came Mrs. Sterling, and every one brightened up to meet her.

Kitty was silent, and wore an injured air which nobody minded;

Christie was very lively; and David did his best to help her through

that last meal, which was a hard one to three out of the four.

At noon a carriage came for Christie, and she said good-by, as she had drilled herself to say it, cheerfully and steadily.

"It is only for a time, else I couldn't let thee go, my dear," said

Mrs. Sterling, with a close embrace.

"I shall see you at church, and Tuesday evenings, even if you don't find time to come to us, so I shall not say good-by at all;" and David shook hands warmly, as he put her into the carriage.

"I'll invite you to my wedding when I make up my mind," said Kitty, with feminine malice; for in her eyes Christie was an old maid who doubtless envied her her "lots of lovers."

"I hope you will be very happy. In the mean time try to save dear Mrs. Sterling all you can, and let her make you worthy a good husband," was Christie's answer to a speech she was too noble to resent by a sharp word, or even a contemptuous look.

Then she drove away, smiling and waving her hand to the old lady at her window; but the last thing she saw as she left the well-beloved lane, was David going slowly up the path, with Kitty close beside him, talking busily. If she had heard the short dialogue between them, the sight would have been less bitter, for Kitty said:

"She's dreadful good; but I'm glad she's gone: ain't you?"

"No."

"Had you rather have her here than me?"

"Yes."

"Then why don't you ask her to come back."

"I would if I could!"

"I never did see any thing like it; every one is so queer and cross to-day I get snubbed all round. If folks ain't good to me, I'll go and marry Miles! I declare I will."

"You'd better," and with that David left her frowning and pouting in the porch, and went to shovelling snow with unusual vigor.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH?

DAVID.

MR. POWER received Christie so hospitably that she felt at home at once, and took up her new duties with the energy of one anxious to repay a favor. Her friend knew well the saving power of work, and gave her plenty of it; but it was a sort that at once interested and absorbed her, so that she had little time for dangerous thoughts or vain regrets. As he once said, Mr. Power made her own troubles seem light by showing her others so terribly real and great that she was ashamed to repine at her own lot.

Her gift of sympathy served her well, past experience gave her a quick eye to read the truth in others, and the earnest desire to help and comfort made her an excellent almoner for the rich, a welcome friend to the poor. She was in just the right mood to give herself gladly to any sort of sacrifice, and labored with a quiet energy, painful to witness had any one known the hidden suffering that would not let her rest.

If she had been a regular novel heroine at this crisis, she would have grown gray in a single night, had a dangerous illness, gone mad, or at least taken to pervading the house at unseasonable hours with her back hair down and much wringing of the hands. Being only a commonplace woman she did nothing so romantic, but instinctively tried to sustain and comfort herself with the humble, wholesome duties and affections which seldom fail to keep heads sane and hearts safe. Yet, though her days seemed to pass so busily and cheerfully, it must be confessed that there were lonely vigils in the night; and sometimes in the morning Christie's eyes were very heavy, Christie's pillow wet with tears.

But life never is all work or sorrow; and happy hours, helpful pleasures, are mercifully given like wayside springs to pilgrims trudging wearily along. Mr. Power showed Christie many such, and silently provided her with better consolation than pity or advice.

"Deeds not words," was his motto; and he lived it out most faithfully. "Books and work" he gave his new charge; and then followed up that prescription with "healthful play" of a sort she liked, and had longed for all her life. Sitting at his table Christie saw the best and bravest men and women of our times; for Mr. Power was a magnet that drew them from all parts of the world. She saw and heard, admired and loved them; felt her soul kindle with the desire to follow in their steps, share their great tasks, know their difficulties and dangers, and in the end taste the immortal satisfactions given to those who live and labor for their fellow-men. In such society all other aims seemed poor and petty; for they appeared to live in a nobler world than any she had known, and she felt as if they belonged to another race; not men nor angels, but a delightful mixture of the two; more as she imagined the gods and heroes of old; not perfect, but wonderfully strong and brave and good; each gifted with a separate virtue, and each bent on a mission that should benefit mankind.

Nor was this the only pleasure given her. One evening of each week was set apart by Mr. Power for the reception of whomsoever chose to visit him; for his parish was a large one, and his house a safe haunt for refugees from all countries, all oppressions.

Christie enjoyed these evenings heartily, for there was no ceremony; each comer brought his mission, idea, or need, and genuine hospitality made the visit profitable or memorable to all, for entire freedom prevailed, and there was stabling for every one’s hobby.

Christie felt that she was now receiving the best culture, acquiring the polish that society gives, and makes truly admirable when character adds warmth and power to its charm. The presence of her bosom-care calmed the old unrest, softened her manners, and at times touched her face with an expression more beautiful than beauty. She was quite unconscious of the changes passing over her; and if any one had told her she was fast becoming a most attractive woman, she would have been utterly incredulous. But others saw and felt the new charm; for no deep experience bravely borne can fail to leave its mark, often giving power in return for patience, and lending a subtle loveliness to faces whose bloom it has destroyed.

This fact was made apparent to Christie one evening when she went down to the weekly gathering in one of the melancholy moods which sometimes oppressed her. She felt dissatisfied with herself because her interest in all things began to flag, and a restless longing for some new excitement to break up the monotonous pain of her inner life possessed her. Being still a little shy in company, she slipped quietly into a recess which commanded a view of both rooms, and sat looking listlessly about her while waiting for David, who seldom failed to come.

A curious collection of fellow-beings was before herj and at another time she would have found much to interest and amuse her. In one corner a newly imported German with an Orson-like head, thumb-ring, and the fragrance of many meerschaums still hovering about him, was hammering away upon some disputed point with a scientific Frenchman, whose national politeness was only equalled by his national volubility. A prominent statesman was talking with a fugitive slave; a young poet getting inspiration from the face and voice of a handsome girl who had earned the right to put M. D. to her name. An old philosopher was calming the ardor of several rampant radicals, and a famous singer was comforting the heart of an Italian exile by talking politics in his own melodious tongue.

There were plenty of reformers: some as truculent as Martin Luther; others as beaming and benevolent as if the pelting of the world had only mellowed them, and no amount of denunciatory thunder could sour the milk of human kindness creaming in their happy hearts. There were eager women just beginning their protest against the wrongs that had wrecked their peace; subdued women who had been worsted in the unequal conflict and given it up; resolute women with “No surrender” written all over their strong-minded countenances; and sweet, hopeful women, whose faith in God and man nothing could shake or sadden.

But to Christie there was only one face worth looking at till David came, and that was Mr. Power’s; for he was a perfect host, and pervaded the rooms like a genial atmosphere, using the welcome of eye and hand which needs no language to interpret it, giving to each guest the intellectual fare he loved, and making their enjoyment his own.

“Bless the dear man! what should we all do without him?” thought Christie, following him with grateful eyes, as he led an awkward youth in rusty black to the statesman whom it had been the desire of his ambitious soul to meet.

The next minute she proved that she at least could do without the “dear man;” for David entered the room, and she forgot all about him. Here and at church were the only places where the friends had met during these months, except one or two short visits to the little house in the lane when Christie devoted herself to Mrs. Sterling.

David was quite unchanged, though once or twice Christie fancied he seemed ill at ease with her, and immediately tormented herself with the idea that some alteration in her own manner had perplexed or offended him. She did her best to be as frank and cordial as in the happy old days; but it was impossible, and she soon gave it up, assuming in the place of that former friendliness, a grave and quiet manner which would have led a wiser man than David to believe her busied with her own affairs and rather indifferent to every thing else.

If he had known how her heart danced in her bosom, her eyes brightened, and all the world became endurable, the moment he appeared, he would not have been so long in joining her, nor have doubted what welcome awaited him.

As it was, he stopped to speak to his host; and, before he reappeared, Christie had found the excitement she had been longing for.

“Now some bore will keep him an hour, and the evening is so short,” she thought, with a pang of disappointment; and, turning her eyes away from the crowd which had swallowed up her heart’s desire, they fell upon a gentleman just entering, and remained fixed with an expression of unutterable surprise; for there, elegant, calm, and cool as ever, stood Mr. Fletcher.

“How came he here?” was her first question; “How will he behave to me?” her second. As she could answer neither, she composed herself as fast as possible, resolving to let matters take their own course, and feeling in the mood for an encounter with a discarded lover, as she took a womanish satisfaction in remembering that the very personable gentleman before her had once been.

Mr. Fletcher and his companion passed on to find their host; and, with a glance at the mirror opposite, which showed her that the surprise of the moment had given her the color she lacked before, Christie occupied herself with a portfolio of engravings, feeling very much as she used to feel when waiting at a side scene for her cue.

She had not long to wait before Mr. Power came up, and presented the stranger; for such he fancied him, never having heard a certain episode in Christie’s life. Mr. Fletcher bowed, with no sign of recognition in his face, and began to talk in the smooth, low voice she remembered so well. For the moment, through sheer surprise, Christie listened and replied as any young lady might have done to a new-made acquaintance. But very soon she felt sure that Mr. Fletcher intended to ignore the past; and, finding her on a higher round of the social ladder, to accept the fact and begin again.

At first she was angry, then amused, then interested in the somewhat dramatic turn affairs were taking, and very wisely decided to meet him on his own ground, and see what came of it.

In the midst of an apparently absorbing discussion of one of Raphael’s most insipid Madonnas, she was conscious that David had approached, paused, and was scrutinizing her companion with unusual interest. Seized with a sudden desire to see the two men together, Christie beckoned; and when he obeyed, she introduced him, drew him into the conversation, and then left him in the lurch by falling silent and taking notes while they talked.

If she wished to wean her heart from David by seeing him at a disadvantage, she could have devised no better way; for, though a very feminine test, it answered the purpose excellently.

Mr. Fletcher was a handsome man, and just then looked his best. Improved health gave energy and color to his formerly sallow, listless face: the cold eyes were softer, the hard mouth suave and smiling, and about the whole man there was that indescribable something which often proves more attractive than worth or wisdom to keener-sighted women than Christie. Never had he talked better; for, as if he suspected what was in the mind of one hearer, he exerted himself to be as brilliant as possible, and succeeded admirably.

David never appeared so ill, for he had no clew to the little comedy being played before him; and long seclusion and natural reserve unfitted him to shine beside a man of the world like Mr. Fletcher. His simple English sounded harsh, after the foreign phrases that slipped so easily over the other's tongue. He had visited no galleries, seen few of the world's wonders, and could only listen when they were discussed. More than once he was right, but failed to prove it, for Mr. Fletcher skilfully changed the subject or quenched him with a politely incredulous shrug.

Even in the matter of costume, poor David was worsted; for, in a woman's eyes, dress has wonderful significance. Christie used to think his suit of sober gray the most becoming man could wear; but now it looked shapeless and shabby, beside garments which bore the stamp of Paris in the gloss and grace of broadcloth and fine linen. David wore no gloves: Mr. Fletcher's were immaculate. David's tie was so plain no one observed it: Mr. Fletcher's, elegant and faultless enough for a modern Beau Brummel. David's handkerchief was of the commonest sort (she knew that, for she hemmed it herself): Mr. Fletcher's was the finest cambric, and a delicate breath of perfume refreshed the aristocratic nose to which the article belonged.

Christie despised herself as she made these comparisons, and felt how superficial they were; but, having resolved to exalt one man at the expense of the other for her own good, she did not relent till David took advantage of a pause, and left them with a reproachful look that made her wish Mr. Fletcher at the bottom of the sea.

When they were alone a subtle change in his face and manner convinced her that he also had been taking notes, and had arrived at a favorable decision regarding herself. Women are quick at making such discoveries; and, even while she talked with him as a stranger, she felt assured that, if she chose, she might make him again her lover.

Here was a temptation! She had longed for some new excitement, and fate seemed to have put one of the most dangerous within her reach. It was natural to find comfort in the knowledge that somebody loved her, and to take pride in her power over one man, because another did not own it. In spite of her better self she felt the fascination of the hour, and yielded to it, half unconsciously assuming something of the "dash and daring" which Mr. Fletcher had once confessed to finding so captivating in the demure governess. He evidently thought so still, and played his part with spirit; for, while apparently enjoying a conversation which contained no allusion to the past, the memory of it gave piquancy to that long tete-a-tete.

As the first guests began to go, Mr. Fletcher's friend beckoned to him; and he rose, saying with an accent of regret which changed to one of entreaty, as he put his question:

"I, too, must go. May I come again, Miss Devon?"

"I am scarcely more than a guest myself; but Mr. Power is always glad to see whoever cares to come," replied Christie rather primly, though her eyes were dancing with amusement at the recollection of those love passages upon the beach.

"Next time, I shall come not as a stranger, but as a former — may I say friend?" he added quickly, as if emboldened by the mirthful eyes that so belied the demure lips.

"Now you forget your part," and Christie's primness vanished in a laugh. "I am glad of it, for I want to ask about Mrs. Saltonstall and the children. I've often thought of the little dears, and longed to see them."

"They are in Paris with their father."

"Mrs. Saltonstall is well, I hope?"

"She died six months ago."

An expression of genuine sorrow came over Mr. Fletcher's face as he spoke; and, remembering that the silly little woman was his sister, Christie put out her hand with a look and gesture so full of sympathy that words were unnecessary. Taking advantage of this propitious moment, he said, with an expressive glance and effective tone: "I am all alone now. You will let me come again?"

"Certainly, if it can give you pleasure," she answered heartily, forgetting herself in pity for his sorrow.

Mr. Fletcher pressed her hand with a grateful, "Thank you!" and wisely went away at once, leaving compassion to plead for him better than he could have done it for himself.

Leaning back in her chair, Christie was thinking over this interview so intently that she started when David's voice said close beside her:

"Shall I disturb you if I say, 'Good-night'?"

"I thought you were not going to say it at all," she answered rather sharply.

"I've been looking for a chance; but you were so absorbed with that man I had to wait."

"Considering the elegance of 'that man,' you don't treat him with much respect."

"I don't feel much. What brought him here, I wonder. A French salon is more in his line."

“He came to see Mr. Power, as every one else does, of course.”

“Don’t dodge, Christie: you know he came to see you.”

“How do you like him?” she asked, with treacherous abruptness.

“Not particularly, so far. But if I knew him, I dare say I should find many good traits in him.”

“I know you would!” said Christie, warmly, not thinking of Fletcher, but of David’s kindly way of finding good in every one.

“He must have improved since you saw him last; for then, if I remember rightly, you found him ‘lazy, cross, selfish,” and conceited.’“

“Now, David, I never said any thing of the sort,” began Christie, wondering what possessed him to be so satirical and short with her.

“Yes, you did, last September, sitting on the old apple-tree the morning of your birthday.”

“What an inconvenient memory you have! Well, he was all that then; but he is not an invalid now, and so we see his real self.”

“I also remember that you gave me the impression that he was an elderly man.”

“Isn’t forty elderly?”

“He wasn’t forty when you taught his sister’s children.”

“No; but he looked older than he does now, being so ill. I used to think he would be very handsome with good health; and now I see I was right,” said Christie, with feigned enthusiasm; for it was a new thing to tease David, and she liked it.

But she got no more of it; for, just then, the singer began to sing to the select few who remained, and every one was silent. Leaning on the high back of Christie’s chair, David watched the reflection of her face in the long mirror; for she listened to the music with downcast eyes, unconscious what eloquent expressions were passing over her countenance. She seemed a new Christie to David, in that excited mood; and, as he watched her, he thought:

“She loved this man once, or he loved her; and tonight it all comes back to her. How will it end?”

So earnestly did he try to read that altered face that Christie felt the intentness of his gaze, looked up suddenly, and met his eyes in the glass. Something in the expression of those usually serene eyes, now darkened and dilated with the intensity of that long scrutiny, surprised and troubled her; and, scarcely knowing what she said, she asked quickly:

“Who are you admiring?”

“Not myself.”

“I wonder if you’d think me vain if I asked you something that I want to know?” she said, obeying a sudden impulse.

“Ask it, and I’ll tell you.”

“Am I much changed since you first knew me?”

“Very much.”

“For the better or the worse?”

“The better, decidedly.”

“Thank you, I hoped so; but one never knows how one seems to other people. I was wondering what you saw in the glass.”

“A good and lovely woman, Christie.”

How sweet it sounded to hear David say that! so simply and sincerely that it was far more than a mere compliment. She did not thank him, but said softly as if to herself:

“So let me seem until I be” —

and then sat silent, so full of satisfaction in the thought that David found her “good and lovely,” she could not resist stealing a glance at the tell-tale mirror to see if she might believe him.

She forgot herself, however; for he was off guard now, and stood looking away with brows knit, lips tightly set, and eyes fixed, yet full of fire; his whole attitude and expression that of a man intent on subduing some strong impulse by a yet stronger will.

It startled Christie; and she leaned forward, watching him with breathless interest till the song ceased, and, with the old impatient gesture, David seemed to relapse into his accustomed quietude.

“It was the wonderful music that excited him: that was all;” thought Christie; yet, when he came round to say good-night, the strange expression was not gone, and his manner was not his own.

“Shall I ask if I may come again,” he said, imitating Mr. Flctcher’s graceful bow with an odd smile.

“I let him come because he has lost his sister, and is lonely,” began Christie, but got no further, for David said, “Good-night!” abruptly, and was gone without a word to Mr. Power.

“He’s in a hurry to get back to his Kitty,” she thought, tormenting herself with feminine skill. “Never mind,” she added, with a defiant sort of smile; “I ‘ve got my Philip, handsomer and more in love than ever, if I’m not deceived. I wonder if he will come again?”

Mr. Fletcher did come again, and with flattering regularity, for several weeks, evidently finding something very attractive in those novel gatherings. Mr. Power soon saw why he came; and, as Christie seemed to enjoy his presence, the good man said nothing to disturb her, though he sometimes cast an anxious glance toward the recess where the two usually sat, apparently busy with books or pictures; yet, by their faces, showing that an under current of deeper interest than art or literature flowed through their intercourse.

Christie had not deceived herself, and it was evident that her old lover meant to try his fate again, if she continued to smile upon him as she had done of late. He showed her his sunny side now, and very pleasant she found it. The loss of his sister had touched his heart, and made him long to fill the place her death left vacant. Better health sweetened his temper, and woke the desire to do something worth the doing; and the sight of the only woman he had ever really loved, reawakened the sentiment that had not died, and made it doubly sweet.

Why he cared for Christie he could not tell, but he never had forgotten her; and, when he met her again with that new beauty in her face, he felt that time had only ripened the blithe girl into a deep-hearted woman, and he loved her with a better love than before. His whole manner showed this; for the half-careless, half-condescending air of former times was replaced by the most courteous respect, a sincere desire to win her favor, and at times the tender sort of devotion women find so charming.

Christie felt all this, enjoyed it, and tried to be grateful for it in the way he wished, thinking that hearts could be managed like children, and when one toy is unattainable, be appeased by a bigger or a brighter one of another sort.

“I must love some one,” she said, as she leaned over a basket of magnificent flowers just left for her by Mr. Fletcher’s servant, a thing which often happened now. “Philip has loved me with a fidelity that ought to touch my heart. Why not accept him, and enjoy a new life of luxury, novelty, and pleasure? All these things he can give me: all these things are valued, admired, and sought for: and who would appreciate them more than I? I could travel, cultivate myself in many delightful ways, and do so much good. No matter if I was not very happy: I should make Philip so, and have it in my power to comfort many poor souls. That ought to satisfy me; for what is nobler than to live for others?”

This idea attracted her, as it does all generous natures; she became enamoured of self-sacrifice, and almost persuaded herself that it was her duty to marry Mr. Fletcher, whether she loved him or not, in order that she might dedicate her life to the service of poorer, sadder creatures than herself.

But in spite of this amiable delusion, in spite of the desire to forget the love she would have in the love she might have, and in spite of the great improvement in her faithful Philip, Christie could not blind herself to the fact that her head, rather than her heart, advised the match; she could not conquer a suspicion that, however much Mr. Fletcher might love his wife, he would be something of a tyrant, and she was very sure she never would make a good slave. In her cooler moments she remembered that men are not puppets, to be moved as a woman’s will commands, and the uncertainty of being able to carry out her charitable plans made her pause to consider whether she would not be selling her liberty too cheaply, if in return she got only dependence and bondage along with fortune and a home.

So tempted and perplexed, self-deluded and self-warned, attracted and repelled, was poor Christie, that she began to feel as if she had got into a labyrinth without any clew to bring her safely out. She longed to ask advice of some one, but could not turn to Mrs. Sterling; and what other woman friend had she except Rachel, from whom she had not heard for months?

As she asked herself this question one day, feeling sure that Mr. Fletcher would come in the evening, and would soon put his fortune to the touch again, the thought of Mrs. Wilkins seemed to answer her.

“Why not?” said Christie: “she is sensible, kind, and discreet; she may put me right, for I’m all in a tangle now with doubts and fears, feelings and fancies. I’ll go and see her: that will do me good, even if I don’t say a word about my ‘werryments,’ as the dear soul would call them.”

Away she went, and fortunately found her friend alone in the “settin’-room,” darning away at a perfect stack of socks, as she creaked comfortably to and fro in her old rocking-chair.

“I was jest wishin’ somebody would drop in: it’s so kinder lonesome with the children to school and Adelaide asleep. How be you, dear?” said Mrs. Wilkins, with a hospitable hug and a beaming smile.

“I’m worried in my mind, so I came to see you,” answered Christie, sitting down with a sigh.

“Bless your dear heart, what is to pay. Free your mind, and I’ll do my best to lend a hand.”

The mere sound of that hearty voice comforted Christie, and gave her courage to introduce the little fiction under which she had decided to defraud Mrs. Wilkins of her advice. So she helped herself to a very fragmentary blue sock and a big needle, that she might have employment for her eyes, as they were not so obedient as her tongue, and then began in as easy a tone as she could assume.

“Well, you see a friend of mine wants my advice on a very serious matter, and I really don’t know what to give her. It is strictly confidential, you know, so I won’t mention any names, but just set the case before you and get your opinion, for I’ve great faith in your sensible way of looking at things.”

“Thanky, dear, you’r welcome to my ‘pinion ef it’s wuth any thing. Be these folks you tell of young?” asked Mrs. Wilkins, with evident relish for the mystery.

“No, the woman is past thirty, and the man ‘most forty, I believe,” said

Christie, darning away in some trepidation at having taken the first plunge.

“My patience! ain’t the creater old enough to know her own mind? for I s’pose she’s the one in the quanderry?” exclaimed Mrs. Wilkins, looking over her spectacles with dangerously keen eyes.

“The case is this,” said Christie, in guilty haste. “The ‘creature’ is poor and nobody, the man rich and of good family, so you see it’s rather hard for her to decide.”

“No, I don’t see nothin’ of the sort,” returned blunt Mrs. Wilkins. “Ef she loves the man, take him: ef she don’t, give him the mittin and done with it. Money and friends and family ain’t much to do with the matter accordin’ to my view. It’s jest a plain question betwixt them two. Ef it takes much settlin’ they ‘d better let it alone.”

“She doesn’t love him as much as she might, I fancy, but she is tired of grubbing along alone. He is very fond of her, and very rich; and it would be a fine thing for her in a worldly way, I’m sure.”

“Oh, she’s goin’ to marry for a livin’ is she? Wal, now I’d ruther one of my girls should grub the wust kind all their days than do that. Hows’ever, it may suit some folks ef they ain’t got much heart, and is contented with fine clothes, nice vittles, and handsome furnitoor. Selfish, cold, silly kinder women might git on, I dare say; but I shouldn’t think any friend of your’n would be one of that sort.”

“But she might do a great deal of good, and make others happy even if she was not so herself.”

“She might, but I doubt it, for money got that way wouldn’t prosper wal. Mis’able folks ain’t half so charitable as happy ones; and I don’t believe five dollars from one of ‘em would go half so fur, or be half so comfortin’ as a kind word straight out of a cheerful heart. I know some thinks that is a dreadful smart thing to do; but I don’t, and ef any one wants to go a sacrificin’ herself for the good of others, there’s better ways of doin’ it than startin’ with a lie in her mouth.”

Mrs. Wilkins spoke warmly; for Christie’s face made her fiction perfectly transparent, though the good woman with true delicacy showed no sign of intelligence on that point.

“Then you wouldn’t advise my friend to say yes?”

“Sakes alive, no! I’d say to her as I did to my younger sisters when their courtin’ time come: ‘Jest be sure you’re right as to there bein’ love enough, then go ahead, and the Lord will bless you.’“

“Did they follow your advice?”

“They did, and both is prosperin’ in different ways. Gusty, she found she was well on’t for love, so she married, though Samuel Buck was poor, and they’re happy as can be a workin' up together, same as Lisha and me did. Addy, she calc'lated she wan't satisfied somehow, so she didn't marry, though James Miller was wal off; and she's kep stiddy to her trade, and ain't never repented. There's a sight said and writ about such things," continued Mrs. Wilkins, rambling on to give Christie time to think; "but I've an idee that women's hearts is to be trusted ef they ain't been taught all wrong. Jest let 'em remember that they take a husband for wuss as well as better (and there's a sight of wuss in this tryin' world for some on us), and be ready to do their part patient and faithful, and I ain't a grain afraid but what they'll be fetched through, always pervidin' they love the man and not his money."

There was a pause after that last speech, and Christie felt as if her perplexity was clearing away very fast; for Mrs. Wilkins's plain talk seemed to show her things in their true light, with all the illusions of false sentiment and false reasoning stripped away. She felt clearer and stronger already, and as if she could make up her mind very soon when one other point had been discussed.

"I fancy my friend is somewhat influenced by the fact that this man loved and asked her to marry him some years ago. He has not forgotten her, and this touches her heart more than any thing else. It seems as if his love must be genuine to last so long, and not to mind her poverty, want of beauty, and accomplishments; for he is a proud and fastidious man."

"I think wal of him for that!" said Mrs. Wilkins, approvingly; "but I guess she's wuth all he gives her, for there must be somethin' pretty gennywin' in her to make him overlook her lacks and hold on so stiddy. It don't alter her side of the case one mite though; for love is love, and ef she ain't got it, he'd better not take gratitude instid, but sheer off and leave her for somebody else."

"Nobody else wants her!" broke from Christie like an involuntary cry of pain; then she hid her face by stooping to gather up the avalanche of hosiery which fell from her lap to the floor.

"She can't be sure of that," said Mrs. Wilkins cheerily, though her spectacles were dim with sudden mist. "I know there's a mate for her somewheres, so she'd better wait a spell and trust in Providence. It wouldn't be so pleasant to see the right one come along after she'd went and took the wrong one in a hurry: would it? Waitin' is always safe, and time needn't be wasted in frettin' or bewailin'; for the Lord knows there's a sight of good works sufferin' to be done, and single women has the best chance at 'em."

"I've accomplished one good work at any rate; and, small as it is, I feel better for it. Give this sock to your husband, and tell him his wife sets a good example both by precept and practice to other women, married or single. Thank you very much, both for myself and my friend, who shall profit by your advice," said

Christie, feeling that she had better go before she told every thing.

"I hope she will," returned Mrs. Wilkins, as her guest went away with a much happier face than the one she brought. "And ef I know her, which I think I do, she'll find that Cinthy Wilkins ain't fur from right, ef her experience is good for any thing," added the matron with a sigh, and a glance at a dingy photograph of her Lisha on the wall, a sigh that seemed to say there had been a good deal of "wuss" in her bargain, though she was too loyal to confess it.

Something in Christie's face struck Mr. Fletcher at once when he appeared that evening. He had sometimes found her cold and quiet, often gay and capricious, usually earnest and cordial, with a wistful look that searched his face and both won and checked him by its mute appeal, seeming to say, "Wait a little till I have taught my heart to answer as you wish."

To-night her eyes shunned his, and when he caught a glimpse of them they were full of a soft trouble; her manner was kinder than ever before, and yet it made him anxious, for there was a resolute expression about her lips even when she smiled, and though he ventured upon allusions to the past hitherto tacitly avoided, she listened as if it had no tender charm for her.

Being thoroughly in earnest now, Mr. Fletcher resolved to ask the momentous question again without delay. David was not there, and had not been for several weeks, another thorn in Christie's heart, though she showed no sign of regret, and said to herself, "It is better so." His absence left Fletcher master of the field, and he seized the propitious moment.

"Will you show me the new picture? Mr. Power spoke of it, but I do not like to trouble him."

"With pleasure," and Christie led the way to a little room where the newly arrived gift was placed.

She knew what was coming, but was ready, and felt a tragic sort of satisfaction in the thought of all she was relinquishing for love of David.

No one was in the room, but a fine copy of Michael Angelo's Fates hung on the wall, looking down at them with weird significance.

"They look as if they would give a stern answer to any questioning of ours," Mr. Fletcher said, after a glance of affected interest.

"They would give a true one I fancy," answered Christie, shading her eyes as if to see the better.

"I 'd rather question a younger, fairer Fate, hoping that she will give me an answer both true and kind. May I, Christie?"

"I will be true but — I cannot be kind." It cost her much to say that; yet she did it steadily, though he held her hand in both his own, and waited for her words with ardent expectation.

"Not yet perhaps, — but in time, when I have proved how sincere my love is, how entire my repentance for the ungenerous words you have not forgotten. I wanted you then for my own sake, now I want you for yourself, because I love and honor you above all women. I tried to forget you, but I could not; and all these years have carried in my heart a very tender memory of the girl who dared to tell me that all I could offer her was not worth her love."

"I was mistaken," began Christie, finding this wooing much harder to withstand than the other.

"No, you were right: I felt it then and resented it, but I owned it later, and regretted it more bitterly than I can tell. I'm not worthy of you; I never shall be: but I've loved you for five years without hope, and I'll wait five more if in the end you will come to me. Christie, I need you very much!"

If Mr. Fletcher had gone down upon his knees and poured out the most ardent protestations that ever left a lover's lips, it would not have touched her as did that last little appeal, uttered with a break in the voice that once was so proud and was so humble now.

"Forgive me!" she cried, looking up at him with real respect in her face, and real remorse smiting her conscience. "Forgive me! I have misled you and myself. I tried to love you: I was grateful for your regard, touched by your fidelity, and I hoped I might repay it; but I cannot! I cannot!"

"Why?"

Such a hard question! She owed him all the truth, yet how could she tell it? She could not in words, but her face did, for the color rose and burned on cheeks and forehead with painful fervor; her eyes fell, and her lips trembled as if endeavoring to keep down the secret that was escaping against her will. A moment of silence as Mr. Fletcher searched for the truth and found it; then he said with such sharp pain in his voice that Christie's heart ached at the sound:

"I see: I am too late?"

"Yes."

"And there is no hope?"

"None."

"Then there is nothing more for me to say but good-by. May you be happy."

"I shall not be; — I have no hope; — I only try to be true to you and to myself. Oh, believe it, and pity me as I do you!"

As the words broke from Christie, she covered up her face, bowed down with the weight of remorse that made her long to atone for what she had done by any self-humiliation.

Mr. Fletcher was at his best at that moment; for real love ennobles the worst and weakest while it lasts: but he could not resist the temptation that confession offered him. He tried to be generous, but the genuine virtue was not in him; he did want Christie very much, and the knowledge of a rival in her heart only made her the dearer.

"I'm not content with your pity, sweet as it is: I want your love, and I believe that I might earn it if you would let me try. You are all alone, and life is hard to you: come to me and let me make it happier. I'll be satisfied with friendship till you can give me more."

He said this very tenderly, caressing the bent head while he spoke, and trying to express by tone and gesture how eagerly he longed to receive and cherish what that other man neglected.

Christie felt this to her heart's core, and for a moment longed to end the struggle, say, "Take me," and accept the shadow for the substance. But those last words of his vividly recalled the compact made with David that happy birthday night. How could she be his friend if she was Mr. Fletcher's wife? She knew she could not be true to both, while her heart reversed the sentiment she then would owe them: David's friendship was dearer than Philip's love, and she would keep it at all costs. These thoughts flashed through her mind in the drawing of a breath, and she looked up, saying steadily in spite of wet eyes and still burning cheeks:

"Hope nothing; wait for nothing from me. I will have no more delusions for either of us: it is weak and wicked, for I know I shall not change. Some time we may venture to be friends perhaps, but not now. Forgive me, and be sure I shall suffer more than you for this mistake of mine."

When she had denied his suit before he had been ungenerous and angry; for his pride was hurt and his will thwarted: now his heart bled and hope died hard; but all that was manliest in him rose to help him bear the loss, for this love was genuine, and made him both just and kind. His face was pale with the pain of that fruitless passion, and his voice betrayed how hard he strove for self-control, as he said hurriedly:

"You need not suffer: this mistake has given me the happiest hours of my life, and I am better for having known so sweet and true a woman. God bless you, Christie!" and with a quick embrace that startled her by its suddenness and strength he left her, standing there alone before the three grim Fates.

CHAPTER XV.

MIDSUMMER.

"NOW it is all over. I shall never have another chance like that, and must make up my mind to be a lonely and laborious spinster all my life. Youth is going fast, and I have little in myself to attract or win, though David did call me 'good and lovely.' Ah, well, I'll try to deserve his praise, and not let disappointment sour or sadden me. Better to hope and wait all my life than marry without love."

Christie often said this to herself during the hard days that followed Mr. Fletcher's disappearance; a disappearance, by the way, which caused Mr. Power much satisfaction, though he only betrayed it by added kindness to Christie, and in his manner an increased respect very comforting to her.

But she missed her lover, for nothing now broke up the monotony of a useful life. She had enjoyed that little episode; for it had lent romance to every thing while it lasted, even the charity basket with which she went her rounds; for Mr. Fletcher often met her by accident apparently, and carried it as if to prove the sincerity of his devotion. No bouquets came now; no graceful little notes with books or invitations to some coveted pleasure; no dangerously delightful evenings in the recess, where, for a time, she felt and used the power which to a woman is so full of subtle satisfaction; no bitter-sweet hopes; no exciting dreams of what might be with the utterance of a word; no soft uncertainty to give a charm to every hour that passed. Nothing but daily duties, a little leisure that hung heavy on her hands with no hope to stimulate, no lover to lighten it, and a sore, sad heart that would clamor for its right; and even when pride silenced it ached on with the dull pain which only time and patience have the power to heal.

But as those weeks went slowly by, she began to discover some of the miracles true love can work. She thought she had laid it in its grave; but an angel rolled the stone away, and the lost passion rose stronger, purer, and more beautiful than when she buried it with bitter tears. A spirit now, fed by no hope, warmed by no tenderness, clothed in no fond delusion; the vital soul of love which outlives the fairest, noblest form humanity can give it, and sits among the ruins singing the immortal hymn of consolation the Great Musician taught.

Christie felt this strange comfort resting like a baby in her lonely bosom, cherished and blessed it; wondering while she rejoiced, and soon perceiving with the swift instinct of a woman, that this was a lesson, hard to learn, but infinitely precious, helpful, and sustaining when once gained. She was not happy, only patient; not hopeful, but trusting; and when life looked dark and barren without, she went away into that inner world of deep feeling, high thought, and earnest aspiration; which is a never-failing refuge to those whose experience has built within them

“The nunnery of a chaste heart and quiet mind.”

Some women live fast; and Christie fought her battle, won her victory, and found peace declared during that winter: for her loyalty to love brought its own reward in time, giving her the tranquil steadfastness which comes to those who submit and ask nothing but fortitude.

She had seen little of David, except at church, and began to regard him almost as one might a statue on a tomb, the marble effigy of the beloved dead below; for the sweet old friendship was only a pale shadow now. He always found her out, gave her the posy she best liked, said cheerfully, “How goes it, Christie?” and she always answered, “Good-morning, David. I am well and busy, thank you.” Then they sat together listening to Mr. Power, sung from the same book, walked a little way together, and parted for another week with a hand-shake for good-by.

Christie often wondered what prayers David prayed when he sat so still with his face hidden by his hand, and looked up with such a clear and steady look when he had done. She tried to do the same; but her thoughts would wander to the motionless gray figure beside her, and she felt as if peace and strength unconsciously flowed from it to sustain and comfort her. Some of her happiest moments were those she spent sitting there, pale and silent, with absent eyes, and lips that trembled now and then, hidden by the flowers held before them, kissed covertly, and kept like relics long after they were dead.

One bitter drop always marred the pleasure of that hour; for when she had asked for Mrs. Sterling, and sent her love, she forced herself to say kindly:

“And Kitty, is she doing well?”

“Capitally; come and see how she has improved; we are quite proud of her.”

“I will if I can find time. It’s a hard winter and we have so much to do,” she would answer smiling, and then go home to struggle back into the patient mood she tried to make habitual.

But she seldom made time to go and see Kitty’s improvement; and, when she did run out for an hour she failed to discover any thing, except that the girl was prettier and more coquettish than ever, and assumed airs of superiority that tried Christie very much.

“I am ready for any thing,” she always said with a resolute air after one of these visits; but, when the time seemed to have come she was not so ready as she fancied.

Passing out of a store one day, she saw Kitty all in her best, buying white gloves with a most important air. “That looks suspicious,” she thought, and could not resist speaking.

“All well at home?” she asked.

“Grandma and I have been alone for nearly a week; David went off on business; but he’s back now and — oh, my goodness! I forgot: I’m not to tell a soul yet;” and Kitty pursed up her lips, looking quite oppressed with some great secret.

“Bless me, how mysterious! Well, I won’t ask any dangerous questions, only tell me if the dear old lady is well,” said Christie, desperately curious, but too proud to show it.

“She’s well, but dreadfully upset by what’s happened; well she may be.” And Kitty shook her head with a look of mingled mystery and malicious merriment.

“Mr. Sterling is all right I hope?” Christie never called him David to Kitty; so that impertinent little person took especial pains to speak familiarly, sometimes even fondly of him to Christie.

“Dear fellow! he’s so happy he don’t know what to do with himself. I just wish you could see him go round smiling, and singing, and looking as if he’d like to dance.”

“That looks as if he was going to get a chance to do it,” said Christie, with a glance at the gloves, as Kitty turned from the counter.

“So he is!” laughed Kitty, patting the little parcel with a joyful face.

“I do believe you are going to be married:” exclaimed Christie, half distracted with curiosity.

“I am, but not to Miles. Now don’t you say another word, for I’m dying to tell, and I promised I wouldn’t. David wants to do it himself. By-by.” And Kitty hurried away, leaving Christie as pale as if she had seen a ghost at noonday.

She had; for the thought of David’s marrying Kitty had haunted her all those months, and now she was quite sure the blow had come.

“If she was only a nobler woman I could bear it better; but I am sure he will regret it when the first illusion is past. I fancy she reminds him of his lost Letty, and so he thinks he loves her. I pray he may be happy, and I hope it will be over soon,” thought Christie, with a groan, as she trudged away to carry comfort to those whose woes could be relieved by tea and sugar, flannel petticoats, and orders for a ton of coal.

It was over soon, but not as Christie had expected.

That evening Mr. Power was called away, and she sat alone, bravely trying to forget suspense and grief in copying the record of her last month’s labor. But she made sad work of it; for her mind was full of David and his wife, so happy in the little home which had grown doubly dear to her since she left it. No wonder then that she put down "two dozen children" to Mrs. Flanagan, and "four knit hoods" with the measles; or that a great blot fell upon "twenty yards red flannel," as the pen dropped from the hands she clasped together; saying with all the fervor of true self-abnegation: "I hope he will be happy; oh, I hope he will be happy!"

If ever woman deserved reward for patient endeavor, hard-won submission, and unselfish love, Christie did then. And she received it in full measure; for the dear Lord requites some faithful hearts, blesses some lives that seem set apart for silent pain and solitary labor.

Snow was falling fast, and a bitter wind moaned without; the house was very still, and nothing stirred in the room but the flames dancing on the hearth, and the thin hand moving to and fro among the records of a useful life.

Suddenly the bell rang loudly and repeatedly, as if the new-comer was impatient of delay. Christie paused to listen. It was not Mr. Power's ring, not his voice in the hall below, not his step that came leaping up the stairs, nor his hand that threw wide the door. She knew them all, and her heart stood still an instant; then she gathered up her strength, said low to herself, "Now it is coming," and was ready for the truth, with a colorless face; eyes unnaturally bright and fixed; and one hand on her breast, as if to hold in check the rebellious heart that would throb so fast.

It was David who came in with such impetuosity. Snow-flakes shone in his hair; the glow of the keen wind was on his cheek, a smile on his lips, and in his eyes an expression she had never seen before. Happiness, touched with the shadow of some past pain; doubt and desire; gratitude and love, — all seemed to meet and mingle in it; while, about the whole man, was the free and ardent air of one relieved from some heavy burden, released from some long captivity.

"O David, what is it?" cried Christie, as he stood looking at her with this strange look.

"News, Christie! such happy news I can't find words to tell them," he answered, coming nearer, but too absorbed in his own emotion to heed hers.

She drew a long breath and pressed her hand a little heavier on her breast, as she said, with the ghost of a smile, more pathetic than the saddest tears:

"I guess it, David."

"How?" he demanded, as if defrauded of a joy he had set his heart upon.

"I met Kitty, — she told me nothing, — but her face betrayed what I have long suspected."

David laughed, such a glad yet scornful laugh, and, snatching a little miniature from his pocket, offered it, saying, with the new impetuosity that changed him so:

"That is the daughter I have found for my mother. You know her, — you love her; and you will not be ashamed to welcome her, I think."

Christie took it; saw a faded, time-worn likeness of a young girl's happy face; a face strangely familiar, yet, for a moment, she groped to find the name belonging to it. Then memory helped her; and she said, half incredulously, half joyfully:

"Is it my Rachel?"

"It is my Letty!" cried David, with an accent of such mingled love and sorrow, remorse and joy, that Christie seemed to hear in it the death-knell of her faith in him. The picture fell from the hands she put up, as if to ward off some heavy blow, and her voice was sharp with reproachful anguish, as she cried:

"O David, David, any thing but that!"

An instant he seemed bewildered, then the meaning of the grief in her face flashed on him, and his own grew white with indignant repudiation of the thought that daunted her; but he only said with the stern brevity of truth:

"Letty is my sister."

"Forgive me, — how could I know? Oh, thank God! thank God!" and, dropping down upon a chair, Christie broke into a passion of the happiest tears she ever shed.

David stood beside her silent, till tie first irrepressible paroxysm was over; then, while she sat weeping softly, quite bowed down by emotion, he said, sadly now, not sternly:

"You could not know, because we hid the truth so carefully. I have no right to resent that belief of yours, for I did wrong my poor Letty, almost as much as that lover of hers, who, being dead, I do not curse. Let me tell you every thing, Christie, before I ask your respect and confidence again. I never deserved them, but I tried to; for they were very precious to me."

He paused a moment, then went on rapidly, as if anxious to accomplish a hard task; and Christie forgot to weep while listening breathlessly.

"Letty was the pride of my heart; and I loved her very dearly, for she was all I had. Such a pretty child; such a gay, sweet girl; how could I help it, when she was so fond of me? We were poor then, — poorer than now, — and she grew restless; tired of hard work; longed for a little pleasure, and could not bear to waste her youth and beauty in that dull town. I did not blame my little girl; but I could not help her, for I was tugging away to fill father's place, he being broken down and helpless. She wanted to go away and support herself. You know the feeling; and I need not tell you how the proud, high-hearted creature hated dependence, even on a brother who would have worked his soul out for her. She would go, and we had faith in her. For a time she did bravely; but life was too hard for her; pleasure too alluring, and, when temptation came in the guise of love, she could not resist. One dreadful day, news came that she was gone, never to come back, my innocent little Letty, any more.”

His voice failed there, and he walked fast through the room, as if the memory of that bitter day was still unbearable. Christie could not speak for very pity; and he soon continued, pacing restlessly before her, as he had often done when she sat by, wondering what unquiet spirit drove him to and fro:

“That was the beginning of my trouble; but not the worst of it: God forgive me, not the worst! Father was very feeble, and the shock killed him; mother’s heart was nearly broken, and all the happiness was taken out of life for me. But I could bear it, heavy as the blow was, for I had no part in that sin and sorrow. A year later, there came a letter from Letty, — a penitent, imploring, little letter, asking to be forgiven and taken home, for her lover was dead, and she alone in a foreign land. How would you answer such a letter, Christie?”

“As you did; saying: ‘Corne home and let us comfort you.’“

“I said: ‘You have killed your father; broken your mother’s heart; ruined your brother’s hopes, and disgraced your family. You no longer have a home with us; and we never want to see your face again.’“

“O David, that was cruel!”

“I said you did not know me; now you see how deceived you have been. A stern, resentful devil possessed me then, and I obeyed it. I was very proud; full of ambitious plans and jealous love for the few I took into my heart. Letty had brought a stain upon our honest name that time could never wash away; had quenched my hopes in despair and shame; had made home desolate, and destroyed my faith in every thing; for whom could I trust, when she, the nearest and dearest creature in the world, deceived and deserted me. I could not forgive; wrath burned hot within me, and the desire for retribution would not be appeased till those cruel words were said. The retribution and remorse came swift and sure; but they came most heavily to me.”

Still standing where he had paused abruptly as he asked his question, David wrung his strong hands together with a gesture of passionate regret, while his face grew sharp with the remembered suffering of the years he had given to the atonement of that wrong.

Christie put her own hand on those clenched ones, and whispered softly:

“Don’t tell me any more now: I can wait.”

“I must, and you must listen! I’ve longed to tell you, but I was afraid; now, you shall know every thing, and then decide if you can forgive me for Letty’s sake,” he said, so resolutely that she listened with a face full of mute compassion.

“That little letter came to me; I never told my mother, but answered it, and kept silent till news arrived that the ship in which Letty had taken passage was lost. Remorse had been tugging at my heart; and, when I knew that she was dead, I forgave her with a vain forgiveness, and mourned for my darling, as if she had never left me. I told my mother then, and she did not utter one reproach; but age seemed to fall upon her all at once, and the pathetic quietude you see.

"Then, but for her, I should have been desperate; for day and night Letty's face haunted me; Letty's voice cried: 'Take me home!' and every word of that imploring letter burned before my eyes as if written in fire. Do you wonder now that I hid myself; that I had no heart to try for any honorable place in the world, and only struggled to forget, only hoped to expiate my sin?"

With his head bowed down upon his breast, David stood silent, asking himself if he had even now done enough to win the reward he coveted. Christie's voice seemed to answer him; for she said, with heartfelt gratitude and respect:

"Surely you have atoned for that harshness to one woman by years of devotion to many. Was it this that made you 'a brother of girls,' as Mr. Power once called you? And, when I asked what he meant, he said the Arabs call a man that who has 'a clean heart to love all women as his sisters, and strength and courage to fight for their protection!'"

She hoped to lighten his trouble a little, and spoke with a smile that was like cordial to poor David.

"Yes," he said, lifting his head again. "I tried to be that, and, for Letty's sake, had pity on the most forlorn, patience with the most abandoned; always remembering that she might have been what they were, if death had not been more merciful than I."

"But she was not dead: she was alive and working as bravely as you. Ah, how little I thought, when I loved Rachel, and she loved me, that we should ever meet so happily as we soon shall. Tell me how you found her? Does she know I am the woman she once saved? Tell me all about her; and tell it fast," prayed Christie, getting excited, as she more fully grasped the happy fact that Rachel and Letty were one.

David came nearer, and his face kindled as he spoke. "The ship sailed without her; she came later; and, finding that her name was among the lost, she did not deny it, for she was dead to us, and decided to remain so till she had earned the right to be forgiven. You know how she lived and worked, stood firm with no one to befriend her till you came, and, by years of patient well-doing, washed away her single sin. If any one dares think I am ashamed to own her now, let him know what cause I have to be proud of her; let him come and see how tenderly I love her; how devoutly I thank God for permitting me to find and bring my little Letty home."

Only the snow-flakes drifting against the window-pane, and the wailing of the wind, was heard for a moment; then David added, with brightening eyes and a glad voice:

"I went into a hospital while away, to look after one of my poor girls who had been doing well till illness brought her there. As I was passing out I saw a sleeping face, and stopped involuntarily: it was so like Letty's. I never doubted she was dead; the name over the bed was not hers; the face was sadly altered from the happy, rosy one I knew, but it held me fast; and as I paused the eyes opened, — Letty's own soft eyes, — they saw me, and, as if I was the figure of a dream, she smiled, put up her arms and said, just as she used to say, a child, when I woke her in her little bed — 'Why, Davy!' — I can't tell any more, — only that when I brought her home and put her in mother's arms, I felt as if I was forgiven at last."

He broke down there, and went and stood behind the window curtains, letting no one see the grateful tears that washed away the bitterness of those long years.

Christie had taken up the miniature and was looking at it, while her heart sang for joy that the lost was found, when David came back to her, wearing the same look she had seen the night she listened among the cloaks. Moved and happy, with eager eyes and ardent manner, yet behind it all a pale expectancy as if some great crisis was at hand:

"Christie, I never can forget that when all others, even I, cast Letty off, you comforted and saved her. What can I do to thank you for it?"

"Be my friend, and let me be hers again," she answered, too deeply moved to think of any private hope or pain.

"Then the past, now that you know it all, does not change your heart to us?"

"It only makes you dearer."

"And if I asked you to come back to the home that has been desolate since you went, would you come?"

"Gladly, David."

"And if I dared to say I loved you?"

She only looked at him with a quick rising light and warmth over her whole face; he stretched both arms to her, and, going to him, Christie gave her answer silently.

Lovers usually ascend straight into the seventh heaven for a time: unfortunately they cannot stay long; the air is too rarefied, the light too brilliant, the fare too ethereal, and they are forced to come down to mundane things, as larks drop from heaven's gate into their grassy nests. David was summoned from that blissful region, after a brief enjoyment of its divine delights, by Christie, who looked up from her new refuge with the abrupt question:

"What becomes of Kitty?"

He regarded her with a dazed expression for an instant, for she had been speaking the delightful language of lips and eyes that lovers use, and the old tongue sounded harsh to him.

"She is safe with her father, and is to marry the 'other one' next week."

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated Christie, so fervently that David looked suddenly enlightened and much amused, as he said quickly: "What becomes of Fletcher?" "He's safely out of the way, and I sincerely hope he will marry some 'other one' as soon as possible." "Christie, you were jealous of that girl." "David, you were jealous of that man." Then they both burst out laughing like two children, for heavy burdens had been lifted off their hearts and they were bubbling over with happiness.

"But truly, David, weren't you a little jealous of P. F.?" persisted Christie, feeling an intense desire to ask all manner of harassing questions, with the agreeable certainty that they would be fully answered.

"Desperately jealous. You were so kind, so gay, so altogether charming when with him, that I could not stand by and see it, so I kept away. Why were you never so to me?"

"Because you never showed that you cared for me, and he did. But it was wrong in me to do it, and I repent of it heartily; for it hurt him more than I thought it would when the experiment failed. I truly tried to love him, but I couldn't."

"Yet he had so much to offer, and could give you all you most enjoy. It is very singular that you failed to care for him, and preferred a poor old fellow like me," said David, beaming at her like a beatified man.

"I do love luxury and pleasure, but I love independence more. I'm happier poking in the dirt with you than I should be driving in a fine carriage with 'that piece of elegance' as Mr. Power called him; prouder of being your wife than his; and none of the costly things he offered me were half so precious in my sight as your little nosegays, now mouldering away in my treasure-box upstairs. Why, Davy, I've longed more intensely for the right to push up the curly lock that is always tumbling into your eyes, than for Philip's whole fortune. May I do it now?"

"You may," and Christie did it with a tender satisfaction that made David love her the more, though he laughed like a boy at the womanly whim.

"And so you thought I cared for Kitty?" he said presently, taking his turn at the new game.

"How could I help it when she was so young and pretty and fond of you?"

"Was she?" innocently.

"Didn't you see it? How blind men are!"

"Not always."

"David, did you see that I cared for you?" asked Christie, turning crimson under the significant glance he gave her.

"I wish I had; I confess I once or twice fancied that I caught glimpses of bliss round the corner, as it were; but, before I could decide, the glimpses vanished, and I was very sure I was a conceited coxcomb to think it for a moment. It was very hard, and yet I was glad."

"Glad!"

"Yes, because I had made a sort of vow that I'd never love or marry as a punishment for my cruelty to Letty."

"That was wrong, David."

"I see it now; but it was not hard to keep that foolish vow till you came; and you see I've broken it without a shadow of regret to-night."

"You might have done it months ago and saved me so much woe if you had not been a dear, modest, morbidly conscientious bat," sighed Christie, pleased and proud to learn her power, yet sorry for the long delay.

"Thank you, love. You see I didn't find out why I liked my friend so well till I lost her. I had just begun to feel that you were very dear, — for after the birthday you were like an angel in the house, Christie, — when you changed all at once, and I thought you suspected me, and didn't like it. Your running away when Kitty came confirmed my fear; then in came that — would you mind if I said — confounded Fletcher?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, as he didn't win, I won't be hard on him; but I gave up then and had a tough time of it; especially that first night when this splendid lover appeared and received such a kind welcome."

Christie saw the strong hand that lay on David's knee clenched slowly, as he knit his brows with a grim look, plainly showing that he was not what she was inclined to think him, a perfect saint.

"Oh, my heart! and there I was loving you so dearly all the time, and you wouldn't see or speak or understand, but went away, left me to torment all three of us," cried Christie with a tragic gesture.

"My dearest girl, did you ever know a man in love do, say, or think the right thing at the right time? I never did," said David, so penitently that she forgave him on the spot.

"Never mind, dear. It has taught us the worth of love, and perhaps we are the better for the seeming waste of precious time. Now I've not only got you but Letty also, and your mother is mine in very truth. Ah, how rich I am!"

"But I thought it was all over with me when I found Letty, because, seeing no more of Fletcher, I had begun to hope again, and when she came back to me I knew my home must be hers, yet feared you would refuse to share it if you knew all. You are very proud, and the purest-hearted woman I ever knew."

"And if I had refused, you would have let me go and held fast to

Letty?"

"Yes, for I owe her every thing."

"You should have known me better, David. But I don't refuse, and there is no need to choose between us."

"No, thank heaven, and you, my Christie! Imagine what I felt when Letty told me all you had been to her. If any thing could make me love you more than I now do, it would be that! No, don't hide your face; I like to see it blush and smile and turn to me confidingly, as it has not done all these long months."

"Did Letty tell you what she had done for me?" asked Christie, looking more like a rose than ever Kitty did.

"She told me every thing, and wished me to tell you all her story, even the saddest part of it. I'd better do it now before you meet again."

He paused as if the tale was hard to tell; but Christie put her hand on his lips saying softly:

"Never tell it; let her past be as sacred as if she were dead. She was my friend when I had no other: she is my dear sister now, and nothing can ever change the love between us."

If she had thought David's face beautiful with gratitude when he told the happier portions of that history, she found it doubly so when she spared him the recital of its darkest chapter, and bade him "leave the rest to silence."

"Now you will come home? Mother wants you, Letty longs for you, and

I have got and mean to keep you all my life, God willing!"

"I'd better die to-night and make a blessed end, for so much happiness is hardly possible in a world of woe," answered Christie to that fervent invitation.

"We shall be married very soon, take a wedding trip to any part of the world you like, and our honeymoon will last for ever, Mrs. Sterling, Jr.," said David, soaring away into the future with sublime disregard of obstacles.

Before Christie could get her breath after that somewhat startling announcement, Mr. Power appeared, took in the situation at a glance, gave them a smile that was a benediction, and said heartily as he offered a hand to each:

"Now I'm satisfied; I've watched and waited patiently, and after many tribulations you have found each other in good time;" then with a meaning look at Christie he added slyly: "But David is 'no hero' you know."

She remembered the chat in the strawberry bed, laughed, and colored brightly, as she answered with her hand trustfully in David’s, her eyes full of loving pride and reverence lifted to his face:

“I’ve seen both sides of the medal now, and found it ‘sterling gold.’ Hero or not I’m content; for, though he ‘loves his mother much,’ there is room in his heart for me too; his ‘old books’ have given him something better than learning, and he has convinced me that ‘double flowers’ are loveliest and best.”

CHAPTER XVI.

MUSTERED IN.

CHRISTIE'S return was a very happy one, and could not well be otherwise with a mother, sister, and lover to welcome her back. Her meeting with Letty was indescribably tender, and the days that followed were pretty equally divided between her and her brother, in nursing the one and loving the other. There was no cloud now in Christie's sky, and all the world seemed in bloom. But even while she enjoyed every hour of life, and begrudged the time given to sleep, she felt as if the dream was too beautiful to last, and often said:

"Something will happen: such perfect happiness is not possible in this world."

"Then let us make the most of it," David would reply, wisely bent on getting his honey while he could, and not borrowing trouble for the morrow.

So Christie turned a deaf ear to her "prophetic soul," and gave herself up to the blissful holiday that had come at last. Even while March winds were howling outside, she blissfully "poked in the dirt" with David in the green-house, put up the curly lock as often as she liked, and told him she loved him a dozen times a day, not in words, but in silent ways, that touched him to the heart, and made his future look so bright he hardly dared believe in it.

A happier man it would have been difficult to find just then; all his burdens seemed to have fallen off, and his spirits rose again with an elasticity which surprised even those who knew him best. Christie often stopped to watch and wonder if the blithe young man who went whistling and singing about the house, often stopping to kiss somebody, to joke, or to exclaim with a beaming face like a child at a party: "Isn't every thing beautiful?" could be the sober, steady David, who used to plod to and fro with his shoulders a little bent, and the absent look in his eyes that told of thoughts above or beyond the daily task.

It was good to see his mother rejoice over him with an exceeding great joy; it was better still to see Letty's eyes follow him with unspeakable love and gratitude in their soft depths; but it was best of all to see Christie marvel and exult over the discoveries she made: for, though she had known David for a year, she had never seen the real man till now.

"Davy, you are a humbug," she said one day when they were making up a bridal order in the greenhouse.

"I told you so, but you wouldn't believe it," he answered, using long stemmed rose-buds with as prodigal a hand as if the wedding was to be his own.

"I thought I was going to marry a quiet, studious, steady-going man; and here I find myself engaged to a romantic youth who flies about in the most undignified manner, embraces people behind doors, sings opera airs, — very much out of tune by the way, — and conducts himself more like an infatuated Claude Melnotte, than a respectable gentleman on the awful verge of matrimony. Nothing can surprise me now: I'm prepared for any thing, even the sight of my Quakerish lover dancing a jig."

"Just what I've been longing to do! Come and take a turn: it will do you good;" and, to Christie's utter amazement, David caught her round the waist and waltzed her down the boarded walk with a speed and skill that caused less havoc among the flower-pots than one would imagine, and seemed to delight the plants, who rustled and nodded as if applauding the dance of the finest double flower that had ever blossomed in their midst.

"I can't help it, Christie," he said, when he had landed her breathless and laughing at the other end. "I feel like a boy out of school, or rather a man out of prison, and must enjoy my liberty in some way. I'm not a talker, you know; and, as the laws of gravitation forbid my soaring aloft anywhere, I can only express my joyfully uplifted state of mind by 'prancing,' as you call it. Never mind dignity: let's be happy, and by and by I'll sober down."

"I don't want you to; I love to see you so young and happy, only you are not the old David, and I've got to get acquainted with the new one."

"I hope you'll like him better than the frost-bitten 'old David' you first knew and were kind enough to love. Mother says I've gone back to the time before we lost Letty, and I sometimes feel as if I had. In that case you will find me a proud, impetuous, ambitious fellow, Christie, and how will that suit?"

"Excellently; I like pride of your sort; impetuosity becomes you, for you have learned to control it if need be; and the ambition is best of all. I always wondered at your want of it, and longed to stir you up; for you did not seem the sort of man to be contented with mere creature comforts when there are so many fine things men may do. What shall you choose, Davy?"

"I shall wait for time to show. The sap is all astir in me, and I'm ready for my chance. I don't know what it is, but I feel very sure that some work will be given me into which I can put my whole heart and soul and strength. I spoilt my first chance; but I know I shall have another, and, whatever it is, I am ready to do my best, and live or die for it as God wills."

"So am I," answered Christie, with a voice as earnest and a face as full of hopeful resolution as his own.

Then they went back to their work, little dreaming as they tied roses and twined smilax wreaths, how near that other chance was; how soon they were to be called upon to keep their promise, and how well each was to perform the part given them in life and death.

The gun fired one April morning at Fort Sumter told many men like David what their work was to be, and showed many women like Christie a new right to claim and bravely prove their fitness to possess.

No need to repeat the story of the war begun that day; it has been so often told that it will only be touched upon here as one of the experiences of Christie’s life, an experience which did for her what it did for all who took a share in it, and loyally acted their part.

The North woke up from its prosperous lethargy, and began to stir with the ominous hum of bees when rude hands shake the hive. Rich and poor were proud to prove that they loved their liberty better than their money or their lives, and the descendants of the brave old Puritans were worthy of their race. Many said: “It will soon be over;” but the wise men, who had warned in vain, shook their heads, as that first disastrous summer showed that the time for compromise was past, and the stern reckoning day of eternal justice was at hand.

To no home in the land did the great trouble bring a more sudden change than the little cottage in the lane. All its happy peace was broken; excitement and anxiety, grief and indignation, banished the sweet home joys and darkened the future that had seemed so clear. David was sober enough now, and went about his work with a grim set to his lips, and a spark in his eyes that made the three women look at one another pale with unspoken apprehension. As they sat together, picking lint or rolling bandages while David read aloud some dismal tale of a lost battle that chilled their blood and made their hearts ache with pity, each woman, listening to the voice that stirred her like martial music, said within herself: “Sooner or later he will go, and I have no right to keep him.” Each tried to be ready to make her sacrifice bravely when the time came, and each prayed that it might not be required of her.

David said little, but they knew by the way he neglected his garden and worked for the soldiers, that his heart was in the war. Day after day he left Christie and his sister to fill the orders that came so often now for flowers to lay on the grave of some dear, dead boy brought home to his mother in a shroud. Day after day he hurried away to help Mr. Power in the sanitary work that soon claimed all hearts and hands; and, day after day, he came home with what Christie called the “heroic look” more plainly written on his face. All that first summer, so short and strange; all that first winter, so long and hard to those who went and those who stayed, David worked and waited, and the women waxed strong in the new atmosphere of self-sacrifice which pervaded the air, bringing out the sturdy virtues of the North.

“How terrible! Oh, when will it be over!” sighed Letty one day, after hearing a long list of the dead and wounded in one of the great battles of that second summer.

“Never till we have beaten!” cried David, throwing down the paper and walking about the room with his head up like a war-horse who smells powder. “It is terrible and yet glorious. I thank heaven I live to see this great wrong righted, and only wish I could do my share like a man.”

“That is natural; but there are plenty of men who have fewer ties than you, who can fight better, and whose places are easier to fill than yours if they die,” said Christie, hastily.

“But the men who have most to lose fight best they say; and to my thinking a soldier needs a principle as well as a weapon, if he is to do real service.”

“As the only son of a widow, you can’t be drafted: that’s one comfort,” said Letty, who could not bear to give up the brother lost to her for so many years.

“I should not wait for that, and I know mother would give her widow’s mite if she saw that it was needed.”

“Yes, Davy.” The soft, old voice answered steadily; but the feeble hand closed instinctively on the arm of this only son, who was so dear to her. David held it close in both of his, saying gratefully: “Thank you, mother;” then, fixing his eyes on the younger yet not dearer women, he added with a ring in his voice that made their hearts answer with a prompt “Ay, ay!” in spite of love or fear:

“Now listen, you dear souls, and understand that, if I do this thing, I shall not do it hastily, nor without counting well the cost. My first and most natural impulse was to go in the beginning; but I stayed for your sakes. I saw I was not really needed: I thought the war would soon be over, and those who went then could do the work. You see how mistaken we were, and God only knows when the end will come. The boys — bless their brave hearts! — have done nobly, but older men are needed now. We cannot sacrifice all the gallant lads; and we who have more to lose than they must take our turn and try to do as well. You own this; I see it in your faces: then don’t hold me back when the time comes for me to go. I must do my part, however small it is, or I shall never feel as if I deserved the love you give me. You will let me go, I am sure, and not regret that I did what seemed to me a solemn duty, leaving the consequences to the Lord!”

“Yes, David,” sister and sweetheart answered, bravely forgetting in the fervor of the moment what heavy consequences God might see fit to send.

“Good! I knew my Spartans would be ready, and I won’t disgrace them. I’ve waited more than a year, and done what I could. But all the while I felt that I was going to get a chance at the hard work, and I’ve been preparing for it. Bennet will take the garden and green-house off my hands this autumn for a year or longer, if I like. He's a kind, neighborly man, and his boy will take my place about the house and protect you faithfully. Mr. Power cannot be spared to go as chaplain, though he longs to desperately; so he is near in case of need, and with your two devoted daughters by you, mother, I surely can be spared for a little while."

"Only one daughter near her, David: I shall enlist when you do," said Christie, resolutely.

"You mean it?"

"I mean it as honestly as you do. I knew you would go: I saw you getting ready, and I made up my mind to follow. I, too, have prepared for it, and even spoken to Mrs. Amory. She has gone as matron of a hospital, and promised to find a place for me when I was ready. The day you enlist I shall write and tell her I am ready."

There was fire in Christie's eyes and a flush on her cheek now, as she stood up with the look of a woman bent on doing well her part. David caught her hands in his, regardless of the ominous bandages they held, and said, with tender admiration and reproach in his voice:

"You wouldn't marry me when I asked you this summer, fearing you would be a burden to me; but now you want to share hardship and danger with me, and support me by the knowledge of your nearness. Dear, ought I to let you do it?"

"You will let me do it, and in return I will marry you whenever you ask me," answered Christie, sealing the promise with a kiss that silenced him.

He had been anxious to be married long ago, but when he asked Mr. Power to make him happy, a month after his engagement, that wise friend said to them:

"I don't advise it yet. You have tried and proved one another as friends, now try and prove one another as lovers; then, if you feel that all is safe and happy, you will be ready for the greatest of the three experiments, and then in God's name marry."

"We will," they said, and for a year had been content, studying one another, finding much to love, and something to learn in the art of bearing and forbearing.

David had begun to think they had waited long enough, but Christie still delayed, fearing she was not worthy, and secretly afflicted by the thought of her poverty. She had so little to give in return for all she received that it troubled her, and she was sometimes tempted to ask Uncle Enos for a modest marriage portion. She never had yet, and now resolved to ask nothing, but to earn her blessing by doing her share in the great work.

"I shall remember that," was all David answered to that last promise of hers, and three months later he took her at her word.

For a week or two they went on in the old way; Christie did her housework with her head full of new plans, read books on nursing, made gruel, plasters, and poultices, till Mrs. Sterling pronounced her perfect; and dreamed dreams of a happy time to come when peace had returned, and David was safe at home with all the stars and bars a man could win without dying for them.

David set things in order, conferred with Bennet, petted his womankind, and then hurried away to pack boxes of stores, visit camps, and watch departing regiments with a daily increasing certainty that his time had come.

One September day he went slowly home, and, seeing Christie in the garden, joined her, helped her finish matting up some delicate shrubs, put by the tools, and when all was done said with unusual gentleness:

"Come and walk a little in the lane."

She put her arm in his, and answered quickly:

"You've something to tell me: I see it in your face."

"Dear, I must go."

"Yes, David."

"And you?"

"I go too."

"Yes, Christie."

That was all: she did not offer to detain him now; he did not deny her right to follow. They looked each other bravely in the face a moment, seeing, acknowledging the duty and the danger, yet ready to do the one and dare the other, since they went together. Then shoulder to shoulder, as if already mustered in, these faithful comrades marched to and fro, planning their campaign.

Next evening, as Mrs. Sterling sat alone in the twilight, a tall man in army blue entered quietly, stood watching the tranquil figure for a moment, then went and knelt down beside it, saying, with a most unsoldierly choke in the voice:

"I've done it, mother: tell me you're not sorry."

But the little Quaker cap went down on the broad shoulder, and the only answer he heard was a sob that stirred the soft folds over the tender old heart that clung so closely to the son who had lived for her so long. What happened in the twilight no one ever knew; but David received promotion for bravery in a harder battle than any he was going to, and from his mother's breast a decoration more precious to him than the cross of the Legion of Honor from a royal hand.

When Mr. Power presently came in, followed by the others, they found their soldier standing very erect in his old place on the rug, with the firelight gleaming on his bright buttons, and Bran staring at him with a perplexed aspect; for the uniform, shorn hair, trimmed beard, and a certain lofty carriage of the head so changed his master that the sagacious beast was disturbed.

Letty smiled at him approvingly, then went to comfort her mother who could not recover her tranquillity so soon. But Christie stood aloof, looking at her lover with something more than admiration in the face that kindled beautifully as she exclaimed:

"O David, you are splendid! Once I was so blind I thought you plain; but now my 'boy in blue' is the noblest looking man I ever saw. Yes, Mr. Power, I've found my hero at last! Here he is, my knight without reproach or fear, going out to take his part in the grandest battle ever fought. I wouldn't keep him if I could; I'm glad and proud to have him go; and if he never should come back to me I can bear it better for knowing that he dutifully did his best, and left the consequences to the Lord."

Then, having poured out the love and pride and confidence that enriched her sacrifice, she broke down and clung to him, weeping as so many clung and wept in those hard days when men and women gave their dearest, and those who prayed and waited suffered almost as much as those who fought and died.

When the deed was once done, it was astonishing what satisfaction they all took in it, how soon they got accustomed to the change, and what pride they felt in "our soldier." The loyal frenzy fell upon the three quiet women, and they could not do too much for their country. Mrs. Sterling cut up her treasured old linen without a murmur; Letty made "comfort bags" by the dozen, put up jelly, and sewed on blue jackets with tireless industry; while Christie proclaimed that if she had twenty lovers she would send them all; and then made preparations enough to nurse the entire party.

David meantime was in camp, getting his first taste of martial life, and not liking it any better than he thought he should; but no one heard a complaint, and he never regretted his "love among the roses," for he was one of the men who had a "principle as well as a weapon," and meant to do good service with both.

It would have taken many knapsacks to hold all the gifts showered upon him by his friends and neighbors. He accepted all that came, and furnished forth those of his company who were less favored. Among these was Elisha Wilkins, and how he got there should be told.

Elisha had not the slightest intention of enlisting, but Mrs. Wilkins was a loyal soul, and could not rest till she had sent a substitute, since she could not go herself. Finding that Lisha showed little enthusiasm on the subject, she tried to rouse him by patriotic appeals of various sorts. She read stirring accounts of battles, carefully omitting the dead and wounded; she turned out, baby and all if possible, to cheer every regiment that left; and was never tired of telling Wash how she wished she could add ten years to his age and send him off to fight for his country like a man.

But nothing seemed to rouse the supine Elisha, who chewed his quid like a placid beast of the field, and showed no sign of a proper spirit.

"Very well," said Mrs. Wilkins resolutely to herself, "ef I can't make no impression on his soul I will on his stommick, and see how that'll work."

Which threat she carried out with such skill and force that Lisha was effectually waked up, for he was "partial to good vittles," and Cynthy was a capital cook. Poor rations did not suit him, and he demanded why his favorite dishes were not forthcoming.

"We can't afford no nice vittles now when our men are sufferin' so. I should be ashamed to cook 'em, and expect to choke tryin' to eat 'em. Every one is sacrificin' somethin', and we mustn't be slack in doin' our part, — the Lord knows it's precious little, — and there won't be no stuffin' in this house for a consid'able spell. Ef I could save up enough to send a man to do my share of the fightin', I should be proud to do it. Anyway I shall stint the family and send them dear brave fellers every cent I can git without starvin' the children."

"Now, Cynthy, don't be ferce. Things will come out all right, and it ain't no use upsettin' every thing and bein' so darned uncomfortable," answered Mr. Wilkins with unusual energy.

"Yes it is, Lisha. No one has a right to be comfortable in such times as these, and this family ain't goin' to be ef I can help it," and Mrs. Wilkins set down her flat-iron with a slam which plainly told her Lisha war was declared.

He said no more but fell a thinking. He was not as unmoved as he seemed by the general excitement, and had felt sundry manly impulses to "up and at 'em," when his comrades in the shop discussed the crisis with ireful brandishing of awls, and vengeful pounding of sole leather, as if the rebels were under the hammer. But the selfish, slothful little man could not make up his mind to brave hardship and danger, and fell back on his duty to his family as a reason for keeping safe at home.

But now that home was no longer comfortable, now that Cynthy had sharpened her tongue, and turned "ferce," and now — hardest blow of all — that he was kept on short commons, he began to think he might as well be on the tented field, and get a little glory along with the discomfort if that was inevitable. Nature abhors a vacuum, and when food fell short patriotism had a chance to fill the aching void. Lisha had about made up his mind, for he knew the value of peace and quietness; and, though his wife was no scold, she was the ruling power, and in his secret soul he considered her a very remarkable woman. He knew what she wanted, but was not going to be hurried for anybody; so he still kept silent, and Mrs. Wilkins began to think she must give it up. An unexpected ally appeared however, and the good woman took advantage of it to strike one last blow.

Lisha sat eating a late breakfast one morning, with a small son at either elbow, waiting for stray mouthfuls and committing petty larcenies right and left, for Pa was in a brown study. Mrs. Wilkins was frying flap-jacks, and though this is not considered an heroical employment she made it so that day. This was a favorite dish of Lisha's, and she had prepared it as a bait for this cautious fish. To say that the fish rose at once and swallowed the bait, hook and all, but feebly expresses the justice done to the cakes by that long-suffering man. Waiting till he had a tempting pile of the lightest, brownest flapjacks ever seen upon his plate, and was watching an extra big bit of butter melt luxuriously into the warm bosom of the upper one, with a face as benign as if some of the molasses he was trickling over them had been absorbed into his nature, Mrs. Wilkins seized the propitious moment to say impressively:

"David Sterlin' has enlisted!"

"Sho! has he, though?"

"Of course he has! any man with the spirit of a muskeeter would."

"Well, he ain't got a family, you see."

"He's got his old mother, that sister home from furrin' parts somewheres, and Christie just going to be married. I should like to know who's got a harder family to leave than that?"

"Six young children is harder: ef I went fifin' and drummin' off, who 'd take care of them I'd like to know?"

"I guess I could support the family ef I give my mind to it;" and Mrs. Wilkins turned a flapjack with an emphasis that caused her lord to bolt a hot triangle with dangerous rapidity; for well he knew very little of his money went into the common purse. She never reproached him, but the fact nettled him now; and something in the tone of her voice made that sweet morsel hard to swallow.

"'Pears to me you 're in ruther a hurry to be a widder, Cynthy, shovin' me off to git shot in this kind of a way," growled Lisha, ill at ease.

"I'd ruther be a brave man's widder than a coward's wife, any day!" cried the rebellious Cynthy: then she relented, and softly slid two hot cakes into his plate; adding, with her hand upon his shoulder, "Lisha, dear, I want to be proud of my husband as other women be of theirs. Every one gives somethin', I've only got you, and I want to do my share, and do it hearty."

She went back to her work, and Mr. Wilkins sat thoughtfully stroking the curly heads beside him, while the boys ravaged his plate, with no reproof, but a half audible, "My little chaps, my little chaps!"

She thought she had got him, and smiled to herself, even while a great tear sputtered on the griddle at those last words of his.

Imagine her dismay, when, having consumed the bait, her fish gave signs of breaking the line, and escaping after all; for Mr. Wilkins pushed back his chair, and said slowly, as he filled his pipe:

"I'm blest ef I can see the sense of a lot of decent men going off to be froze, and starved, and blowed up jest for them confounded niggers."

He got no further, for his wife's patience gave out; and, leaving her cakes to burn black, she turned to him with a face glowing like her stove, and cried out:

"Lisha, ain't you got no heart? can you remember what Hepsey told us, and call them poor, long-sufferin' creeters names? Can you think of them wretched wives sold from their husbands; them children as clear as ourn tore from their mothers; and old folks kep slavin eighty long, hard years with no pay, no help, no pity, when they git past work? Lisha Wilkins, look at that, and say no ef you darst!"

Mrs. Wilkins was a homely woman in an old calico gown, but her face, her voice, her attitude were grand, as she flung wide the door of the little back bedroom. and pointed with her tin spatula to the sight beyond.

Only Hepsey sitting by a bed where lay what looked more like a shrivelled mummy than a woman. Ah! but it was that old mother worked and waited for so long: blind now, and deaf; childish, and half dead with many hardships, but safe and free at last; and Hepsey's black face was full of a pride, a peace, and happiness more eloquent and touching than any speech or sermon ever uttered.

Mr. Wilkins had heard her story, and been more affected by it than he would confess: now it came home to him with sudden force; the thought of his own mother, wife, or babies torn from him stirred him to the heart, and the manliest emotion he had ever known caused him to cast his pipe at his feet, put on his hat with an energetic slap, and walk out of the house, wearing an expression on his usually wooden face that caused his wife to clap her hands and cry exultingly:

"I thought that would fetch him!"

Then she fell to work like an inspired woman; and at noon a sumptuous dinner "smoked upon the board;" the children were scrubbed till their faces shone; and the room was as fresh and neat as any apartment could be with the penetrating perfume of burnt flapjacks still pervading the air, and three dozen ruffled nightcaps decorating the clothes-lines overhead.

"Tell me the instant minute you see Pa a comin', and I'll dish up the gravy," was Mrs. Wilkins's command, as she stepped in with a cup of tea for old "Harm," as she called Hepsey's mother.

"He's a comin', Ma!" called Gusty, presently.

"No, he ain't: it's a trainer," added Ann Lizy.

"Yes, 'tis Pa! oh, my eye! ain't he stunnin'!" cried Wash, stricken for the first time with admiration of his sire.

Before Mrs. Wilkins could reply to these conflicting rumors her husband walked in, looking as martial as his hollow chest and thin legs permitted, and, turning his cap nervously in his hands, said half-proudly, half-reproachfully:

"Now, Cynthy, be you satisfied?"

"Oh, my Lisha! I be, I be!" and the inconsistent woman fell upon his buttony breast weeping copiously.

If ever a man was praised and petted, admired and caressed, it was Elisha Wilkins that day. His wife fed him with the fat of the land, regardless of consequences; his children revolved about him with tireless curiosity and wonder; his neighbors flocked in to applaud, advise, and admire; every one treated him with a respect most grateful to his feelings; he was an object of interest, and with every hour his importance increased, so that by night he felt like a Commander-in-Chief, and bore himself accordingly. He had enlisted in David's regiment, which was a great comfort to his wife; for though her stout heart never failed her, it grew very heavy at times; and when Lisha was gone, she often dropped a private tear over the broken pipe that always lay in its old place, and vented her emotions by sending baskets of nourishment to Private Wilkins, which caused that bandy-legged warrior to be much envied and cherished by his mates.

"I'm glad I done it; for it will make a man of Lisha; and, if I've sent him to his death, God knows he'll be fitter to die than if he stayed here idlin' his life away."

Then the good soul openly shouldered the burden she had borne so long in secret, and bravely trudged on alone.

"Another great battle!" screamed the excited news-boys in the streets. "Another great battle!" read Letty in the cottage parlor. "Another great battle!" cried David, coming in with the war-horse expression on his face a month or two after he enlisted.

The women dropped their work to look and listen; for his visits were few and short, and every instant was precious. When the first greetings were over, David stood silent an instant, and a sudden mist came over his eyes as he glanced from one beloved face to another; then he threw back his head with the old impatient gesture, squared his shoulders, and said in a loud, cheerful voice, with a suspicious undertone of emotion in it, however:

"My precious people, I've got something to tell you: are you ready?"

They knew what it was without a word. Mrs. Sterling clasped her hands and bowed her head. Letty turned pale and dropped her work; but Christie's eyes kindled, as she answered with a salute:

"Ready, my General."

"We are ordered off at once, and go at four this afternoon. I've got a three hours' leave to say good-by in. Now, let's be brave and enjoy every minute of it."

"We will: what can I do for you, Davy?" asked Christie, wonderfully supported by the thought that she was going too.

"Keep your promise, dear," he answered, while the warlike expression changed to one of infinite tenderness.

"What promise?"

"This;" and he held out his hand with a little paper in it. She saw it was a marriage license, and on it lay a wedding-ring. She did not hesitate an instant, but laid her own hand in his, and answered with her heart in her face:

"I'll keep it, David."

"I knew you would!" then holding her close he said in a tone that made it very hard for her to keep steady, as she had vowed she would do to the last: "I know it is much to ask, but I want to feel that you are mine before I go. Not only that, but it will be a help and protection to you, dear, when you follow. As a married woman you will get on better, as my wife you will be allowed to come to me if I need you, and as my" — he stopped there, for he could not add — "as my widow you will have my pension to support you."

She understood, put both arms about his neck as if to keep him safe, and whispered fervently:

"Nothing can part us any more, not even death; for love like ours will last for ever."

"Then you are quite willing to try the third great experiment?"

"Glad and proud to do it." "With no doubt, no fear, to mar your consent." "Not one, David." "That's true love, Christie!"

Then they stood quite still for a time, and in the silence the two hearts talked together in the sweet language no tongue can utter. Presently David said regretfully:

"I meant it should be so different. I always planned that we'd be married some bright summer day, with many friends about us; then take a happy little journey somewhere together, and come back to settle down at home in the dear old way. Now it's all so hurried, sorrowful, and strange. A dull November day; no friends but Mr. Power, who will be here soon; no journey but my march to Washington alone; and no happy coming home together in this world perhaps. Can you bear it, love?"

"Have no fear for me: I feel as if I could bear any thing just now; for I've got into a heroic mood and I mean to keep so as long as I can. I've always wanted to live in stirring times, to have a part in great deeds, to sacrifice and suffer something for a principle or a person; and now I have my wish. I like it, David:

it’s a grand time to live, a splendid chance to do and suffer; and I want to be in it heart and soul, and earn a little of the glory or the martyrdom that will come in the end. Surely I shall if I give you and myself to the cause; and I do it gladly, though I know that my heart has got to ache as it never has ached yet, when my courage fails, as it will by and by, and my selfish soul counts the cost of my offering after the excitement is over. Help me to be brave and strong, David: don’t let me complain or regret, but show me what lies beyond, and teach me to believe that simply doing the right is reward and happiness enough.”

Christie was lifted out of herself for the moment, and looked inspired by the high mood which was but the beginning of a nobler life for her. David caught the exaltation, and gave no further thought to any thing but the duty of the hour, finding himself stronger and braver for that long look into the illuminated face of the woman he loved.

“I’ll try,” was all his answer to her appeal; then proved that he meant it by adding, with his lips against her cheek: “I must go to mother and Letty. We leave them behind, and they must be comforted.”

He went, and Christie vanished to make ready for her wedding, conscious, in spite of her exalted state of mind, that every thing was very hurried, sad, and strange, and very different from the happy day she had so often planned.

“No matter, we are ‘well on’t for love,’ and that is all we really need,” she thought, recalling with a smile Mrs. Wilkins’s advice.

“David sends you these, dear. Can I help in any way?” asked Letty, coming with a cluster of lovely white roses in her hand, and a world of affection in her eyes.

“I thought he’d give me violets,” and a shadow came over Christie’s face.

“But they are mourning flowers, you know.”

“Not to me. The roses are, for they remind me of poor Helen, and the first work I did with David was arranging flowers like these for a dead baby’s little coffin.”

“My dearest Christie, don’t be superstitious: all brides wear roses, and Davy thought you’d like them,” said Letty, troubled at her words.

“Then I’ll wear them, and I won’t have fancies if I can help it. But I think few brides dress with a braver, happier heart than mine, though I do choose a sober wedding-gown,” answered Christie, smiling again, as she took from a half-packed trunk her new hospital suit of soft, gray, woollen stuff.

“Won’t you wear the pretty silvery silk we like so well?” asked Letty timidly, for something in Christie’s face and manner impressed her very much.

“No, I will be married in my uniform as David is,” she answered with a look Letty long remembered.

“Mr. Power has come,” she said softly a few minutes later, with an anxious glance at the clock.

“Go dear, I’ll come directly. But first” — and Christie held her friend close a moment, kissed her tenderly, and whispered in a broken voice: “Remember, I don’t take his heart from you, I only share it with my sister and my mother.”

“I’m glad to give him to you, Christie; for now I feel as if I had partly paid the great debt I’ve owed so long,” answered Letty through her tears.

Then she went away, and Christie soon followed, looking very like a Quaker bride in her gray gown with no ornament but delicate frills at neck and wrist, and the roses in her bosom.

“No bridal white, dear?” said David, going to her.

“Only this,” and she touched the flowers, adding with her hand on the blue coat sleeve that embraced her: “I want to consecrate my uniform as you do yours by being married in it. Isn’t it fitter for a soldier’s wife than lace and silk at such a time as this?”

“Much fitter: I like it; and I find you beautiful, my Christie,” whispered David, as she put one of her roses in his button-hole.

“Then I’m satisfied.”

“Mr. Power is waiting: are you ready, love?”

“Quite ready.”

Then they were married, with Letty and her mother standing beside them, Bennet and his wife dimly visible in the door-way, and poor Bran at his master’s feet, looking up with wistful eyes, half human in the anxious affection they expressed.

Christie never forgot that service, so simple, sweet, and solemn; nor the look her husband gave her at the end, when he kissed her on lips and forehead, saying fervently, “God bless my wife!”

A tender little scene followed that can better be imagined than described; then Mr. Power said cheerily:

“One hour more is all you have, so make the most of it, dearly beloved. You young folks take a wedding-trip to the green-house, while we see how well we can get on without you.”

“THEN THEY WERE MARRIED.”

David and Christie went smiling away together, and if they shed any tears over the brief happiness no one saw them but the flowers, and they loyally kept the secret folded up in their tender hearts.

Mr. Power cheered the old lady, while Letty, always glad to serve, made ready the last meal David might ever take at home.

A very simple little marriage feast, but more love, good-will, and tender wishes adorned the plain table than is often found at wedding breakfasts; and better than any speech or song was Letty’s broken whisper, as she folded her arms round David’s empty chair when no one saw her, “Heaven bless and keep and bring him back to us.”

How time went that day! The inexorable clock would strike twelve so soon, and then the minutes flew till one was at hand, and the last words were still half said, the last good-byes still unuttered.

“I must go!” cried David with a sort of desperation, as Letty clung to one arm, Christie to the other.

“I shall see you soon: good-by, rny husband,” whispered Christie, setting him free.

“Give the last kiss to mother,” added Letty, following her example, and in another minute David was gone.

At the turn of the lane, he looked back and swung his cap; all waved their hands to him; and then he marched away to the great work before him, leaving those loving hearts to ask the unanswerable question: “How will he come home?”

Christie was going to town to see the regiment off, and soon followed with Mr. Power. They went early to a certain favorable spot, and there found Mrs. Wilkins, with her entire family perched upon a fence, on the spikes of which they impaled themselves at intervals, and had to be plucked off by the stout girl engaged to assist in this memorable expedition.

“Yes, Lisha ‘s goin’, and I was bound he should see every one of his blessed children the last thing, ef I took ‘em all on my back. He knows where to look, and he’s a goin’ to see seven cheerful faces as he goes by. Time enough to cry byme by; so set stiddy, boys, and cheer loud when you see Pa,” said Mrs. Wilkins, fanning her hot face, and utterly forgetting her cherished bonnet in the excitement of the moment.

“I hear drums! They’re comin’!” cried Wash, after a long half hour’s waiting had nearly driven him frantic.

The two younger boys immediately tumbled off the fence, and were with difficulty restored to their perches. Gusty began to cry, Ann Elizy to wave a minute red cotton handkerchief, and Adelaide to kick delightedly in her mother’s arms.

“Jane Carter, take this child for massy sake: my legs do tremble so I can’t h’ist her another minute. Hold on to me behind, somebody, for I must see ef I do pitch into the gutter,” cried Mrs. Wilkins, with a gasp, as she wiped her eyes on her shawl, clutched the railing, and stood ready to cheer bravely when her conquering hero came.

Wash had heard drums every five minutes since he arrived, but this time he was right, and began to cheer the instant a red cockade appeared at the other end of the long street.

It was a different scene now than in the first enthusiastic, hopeful days. Young men and ardent boys filled the ranks then, brave by instinct, burning with loyal zeal, and blissfully ignorant of all that lay before them.

Now the blue coats were worn by mature men, some gray, all grave and resolute; husbands and fathers with the memory of wives and children tugging at their heart-strings; homes left desolate behind them, and before them the grim certainty of danger, hardship, and perhaps a captivity worse than death. Little of the glamour of romance about the war now: they saw what it was, a long, hard task; and here were the men to do it well.

Even the lookers-on were different. Once all was wild enthusiasm and glad uproar; now men's lips were set, and women's smileless even as they cheered; fewer handkerchiefs whitened the air, for wet eyes needed them; and sudden lulls, almost solemn in their stillness, followed the acclamations of the crowd. All watched with quickened breath and proud souls that living wave, blue below, and bright with a steely glitter above, as it flowed down the street and away to join the sea of dauntless hearts that for months had rolled up against the South, and ebbed back reddened with the blood of men like these.

As the inspiring music, the grand tramp drew near, Christie felt the old thrill and longed to fall in and follow the flag anywhere. Then she saw David, and the regiment became one man to her. He was pale, but his eyes shone, and his whole face expressed that two of the best and bravest emotions of a man, love and loyalty, were at their height as he gave his new-made wife a long, lingering look that seemed to say:

"I could not love thee, dear, so much, Loved I not honor more."

Christie smiled and waved her hand to him, showed him his wedding roses still on her breast, and bore up as gallantly as he, resolved that his last impression of her should be a cheerful one. But when it was all over, and nothing remained but the trampled street, the hurrying crowd, the bleak November sky, when Mrs. Wilkins sat sobbing on the steps like Niobe with her children scattered about her, then Christie's heart gave way, and she hid her face on Mr. Power's shoulder for a moment, all her ardor quenched in tears as she cried within herself:

"No, I could not bear it if I was not going too!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COLONEL.

TEN years earlier Christie made her début as an Amazon, now she had a braver part to play on a larger stage, with a nation for audience, martial music and the boom of cannon for orchestra; the glare of battle-fields was the "red light;" danger, disease, and death, the foes she was to contend against; and the troupe she joined, not timid girls, but high-hearted women, who fought gallantly till the "demon" lay dead, and sang their song of exultation with bleeding hearts, for this great spectacle was a dire tragedy to them.

Christie followed David in a week, and soon proved herself so capable that Mrs. Amory rapidly promoted her from one important post to another, and bestowed upon her the only honors left the women, hard work, responsibility, and the gratitude of many men.

"You are a treasure, my dear, for you can turn your hand to any thing and do well whatever you undertake. So many come with plenty of good-will, but not a particle of practical ability, and are offended because I decline their help. The boys don't want to be cried over, or have their brows 'everlastingly swabbed,' as old Watkins calls it: they want to be well fed and nursed, and cheered up with creature comforts. Your nice beef-tea and cheery ways are worth oceans of tears and cart-loads of tracts."

Mrs. Amory said this, as Christie stood waiting while she wrote an order for some extra delicacy for a very sick patient. Mrs. Sterling, Jr., certainly did look like an efficient nurse, who thought more of "the boys" than of herself; for one hand bore a pitcher of gruel, the other a bag of oranges, clean shirts hung over the right arm, a rubber cushion under the left, and every pocket in the big apron was full of bottles and bandages, papers and letters.

"I never discovered what an accomplished woman I was till I came here," answered Christie, laughing. "I'm getting vain with so much praise, but I like it immensely, and never was so pleased in my life as I was yesterday when Dr. Harvey came for me to take care of poor Dunbar, because no one else could manage him."

"It's your firm yet pitiful way the men like so well. I can't describe it better than in big Ben's words: 'Mis Sterlin' is the nuss for me, marm. She takes care of me as ef she was my own mother, and it's a comfort jest to see her round.' It's a gift, my dear, and you may thank heaven you have got it, for it works wonders in a place like this.”

“I only treat the poor fellows as I would have other women treat my

David if he should be in their care. He may be any hour, you know.”

“And my boys, God keep them!”

The pen lay idle, and the gruel cooled, as young wife and gray-haired mother forgot their duty for a moment in tender thoughts of the absent. Only a moment, for in came an attendant with a troubled face, and an important young surgeon with the well-worn little case under his arm.

“Bartlett ‘s dying, marm: could you come and see to him?” says the man to Mrs. Amory.

“We have got to amputate Porter’s arm this morning, and he won’t consent unless you are with him. You will come, of course?” added the surgeon to Christie, having tried and found her a woman with no “confounded nerves” to impair her usefulness.

So matron and nurse go back to their duty, and dying Bartlett and suffering Porter are all the more tenderly served for that wasted minute.

Like David, Christie had enlisted for the war, and in the two years that followed, she saw all sorts of service; for Mrs. Amory had influence, and her right-hand woman, after a few months’ apprenticeship, was ready for any post. The gray gown and comforting face were known in many hospitals, seen on crowded transports, among the ambulances at the front, invalid cars, relief tents, and food depots up and down the land, and many men went out of life like tired children holding the hand that did its work so well.

David meanwhile was doing his part manfully, not only in some of the great battles of those years, but among the hardships, temptations, and sacrifices of a soldiers’ life. Spite of his Quaker ancestors, he was a good fighter, and, better still, a magnanimous enemy, hating slavery, but not the slave-holder, and often spared the master while he saved the chattel. He was soon promoted, and might have risen rapidly, but was content to remain as captain of his company; for his men loved him, and he was prouder of his influence over them than of any decoration he could win.

His was the sort of courage that keeps a man faithful to death, and though he made no brilliant charge, uttered few protestations of loyalty, and was never heard to “damn the rebs,” his comrades felt that his brave example had often kept them steady till a forlorn hope turned into a victory, knew that all the wealth of the world could not bribe him from his duty, and learned of him to treat with respect an enemy as brave and less fortunate than themselves. A noble nature soon takes its proper rank and exerts its purifying influence, and Private Sterling won confidence, affection, and respect, long before promotion came; for, though he had tended his flowers like a woman and loved his books like a student, he now proved that he could also do his duty and keep his honor stainless as a soldier and a gentleman.

He and Christie met as often as the one could get a brief furlough, or the other be spared from hospital duty; but when these meetings did come, they were wonderfully beautiful and rich, for into them was distilled a concentration of the love, happiness, and communion which many men and women only know through years of wedded life.

Christie liked romance, and now she had it, with a very sombre reality to give it an added charm. No Juliet ever welcomed her Romeo more joyfully than she welcomed David when he paid her a flying visit unexpectedly; no Bayard ever had a more devoted lady in his tent than David, when his wife came through every obstacle to bring him comforts or to nurse the few wounds he received. Love-letters, written beside watch-fires and sick-beds, flew to and fro like carrier-doves with wondrous speed; and nowhere in all the brave and busy land was there a fonder pair than this, although their honeymoon was spent apart in camp and hospital, and well they knew that there might never be for them a happy going home together.

In her wanderings to and fro, Christie not only made many new friends, but met some old ones; and among these one whose unexpected appearance much surprised and touched her.

She was "scrabbling" eggs in a tin basin on board a crowded transport, going up the river with the echoes of a battle dying away behind her, and before her the prospect of passing the next day on a wharf serving out food to the wounded in an easterly storm.

"O Mrs. Sterling, do go up and see what's to be done! We are all full below, and more poor fellows are lying about on deck in a dreadful state. I'll take your place here, but I can't stand that any longer," said one of her aids, coming in heart-sick and exhausted by the ghastly sights and terrible confusion of the day.

"I'll go: keep scrabbling while the eggs last, then knock out the head of that barrel and make gruel till I pass the word to stop."

Forgetting her bonnet, and tying the ends of her shawl behind her, Christie caught up a bottle of brandy and a canteen of water, and ran on deck. There a sight to daunt most any woman, met her eyes; for all about her, so thick that she could hardly step without treading on them, lay the sad wrecks of men: some moaning for help; some silent, with set, white faces turned up to the gray sky; all shelterless from the cold wind that blew, and the fog rising from the river. Surgeons and nurses were doing their best; but the boat was loaded, and greater suffering reigned below.

"Heaven help us all!" sighed Christie, and then she fell to work.

Bottle and canteen were both nearly empty by the time she came to the end of the long line, where lay a silent figure with a hidden face. "Poor fellow, is he dead?" she said, kneeling down to lift a corner of the blanket lent by a neighbor.

A familiar face looked up at her, and a well remembered voice said courteously, but feebly:

"Thanks, not yet. Excuse my left hand. I'm very glad to see you."

"Mr. Fletcher, can it be you!" she cried, looking at him with pitiful amazement. Well she might ask, for any thing more unlike his former self can hardly be imagined. Unshaven, haggard, and begrimed with powder, mud to the knees, coat half on, and, worst of all, the right arm gone, there lay the "piece of elegance" she had known, and answered with a smile she never saw before:

"All that's left of me, and very much at your service. I must apologize for the dirt, but I've laid in a mud-puddle for two days; and, though it was much easier than a board, it doesn't improve one's appearance."

"What can I do for you? Where can I put you? I can't bear to see you here!" said Christie, much afflicted by the spectacle before her.

"Why not? we are all alike when it comes to this pass. I shall do very well if I might trouble you for a draught of water."

She poured her last drop into his parched mouth and hurried off for more. She was detained by the way, and, when she returned, fancied he was asleep, but soon discovered that he had fainted quietly away, utterly spent with two days of hunger, suffering, and exposure. He was himself again directly, and lay contentedly looking up at her as she fed him with hot soup, longing to talk, but refusing to listen to a word till he was refreshed.

"That's very nice," he said gratefully, as he finished, adding with a pathetic sort of gayety, as he groped about with his one hand: "I don't expect napkins, but I should like a handkerchief. They took my coat off when they did my arm, and the gentleman who kindly lent me this doesn't seem to have possessed such an article."

Christie wiped his lips with the clean towel at her side, and smiled as she did it, at the idea of Mr. Fletcher's praising burnt soup, and her feeding him like a baby out of a tin cup.

"I think it would comfort you if I washed your face: can you bear to have it done?" she asked.

"If you can bear to do it," he answered, with an apologetic look, evidently troubled at receiving such services from her.

Yet as her hands moved gently about his face, he shut his eyes, and there was a little quiver of the lips now and then, as if he was remembering a time when he had hoped to have her near him in a tenderer capacity than that of nurse. She guessed the thought, and tried to banish it by saying cheerfully as she finished:

“There, you look more like yourself after that. Now the hands.”

“Fortunately for you, there is but one,” and he rather reluctantly surrendered a very dirty member.

“Forgive me, I forgot. It is a brave hand, and I am proud to wash it!”

“How do you know that?” he asked, surprised at her little burst of enthusiasm, for as she spoke she pressed the grimy hand in both her own.

“While I was recovering you from your faint, that man over there informed me that you were his Colonel; that you ‘fit like a tiger,’ and when your right arm was disabled, you took your sword in the left and cheered them on as if you ‘were bound to beat the whole rebel army.’“

“That’s Drake’s story,” and Mr. Fletcher tried to give the old shrug, but gave an irrepressible groan instead, then endeavored to cover it, by saying in a careless tone, “I thought I might get a little excitement out of it, so I went soldiering like all the rest of you. I’m not good for much, but I can lead the way for the brave fellows who do the work. Officers make good targets, and a rebel bullet would cause no sorrow in taking me out of the world.”

“Don’t say that! I should grieve sincerely; and yet I’m very glad you came, for it will always be a satisfaction to you in spite of your great loss.”

“There are greater losses than right arms,” muttered Mr. Fletcher gloomily, then checked himself, and added with a pleasant change in voice and face, as he glanced at the wedding-ring she wore:

“This is not exactly the place for congratulations, but I can’t help offering mine; for if I’m not mistaken your left hand also has grown doubly precious since we met?”

Christie had been wondering if he knew, and was much relieved to find he took it so well. Her face said more than her words, as she answered briefly:

“Thank you. Yes, we were married the day David left, and have both been in the ranks ever since.”

“Not wounded yet? your husband, I mean,” he said, getting over the hard words bravely.

“Three times, but not badly. I think a special angel stands before him with a shield;” and Christie smiled as she spoke.

“I think a special angel stands behind him with prayers that avail much,” added Mr. Fletcher, looking up at her with an expression of reverence that touched her heart.

“Now I must go to my work, and you to sleep: you need all the rest you can get before you have to knock about in the ambulances again,” she said, marking the feverish color in his face, and knowing well that excitement was his only strength.

"How can I sleep in such an Inferno as this?"

"Try, you are so weak, you'll soon drop off;" and, laying the cool tips of her fingers on his eyelids, she kept them shut till he yielded with a long sigh of mingled weariness and pleasure, and was asleep before he knew it.

When he woke it was late at night; but little of night's blessed rest was known on board that boat laden with a freight of suffering. Cries still came up from below, and moans of pain still sounded from the deck, where shadowy figures with lanterns went to and fro among the beds that in the darkness looked like graves.

Weak with pain and fever, the poor man gazed about him half bewildered, and, conscious only of one desire, feebly called "Christie!"

"Here I am;" and the dull light of a lantern showed him her face very worn arid tired, but full of friendliest compassion.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, as he clutched her gown, and peered up at her with mingled doubt and satisfaction in his haggard eyes.

"Just speak to me; let me touch you: I thought it was a dream; thank God it isn't. How much longer will this last?" he added, falling back on the softest pillows she could find for him.

"We shall soon land now; I believe there is an officers' hospital in the town, and you will be quite comfortable there."

"I want to go to your hospital: where is it?"

"I have none; and, unless the old hotel is ready, I shall stay on the wharf with the boys until it is."

"Then I shall stay also. Don't send me away, Christie: I shall not be a trouble long; surely David will let you help me die?" and poor Fletcher stretched his one hand imploringly to her in the first terror of the delirium that was coming on.

"I will not leave you: I'll take care of you, and no one can forbid it. Drink this, Philip, and trust to Christie."

He obeyed like a child, and soon fell again into a troubled sleep while she sat by him thinking about David.

The old hotel was ready; but by the time he got there Mr. Fletcher was past caring where he went, and for a week was too ill to know any thing, except that Christie nursed him. Then he turned the corner and began to recover. She wanted him to go into more comfortable quarters; but he would not stir as long as she remained; so she put him in a little room by himself, got a man to wait on him, and gave him as much of her care and time as she could spare from her many duties. He was not an agreeable patient, I regret to say; he tried to bear his woes heroically, but did not succeed very well, not being used to any exertion of that sort; and, though in Christie's presence he did his best, his man confided to her that the Colonel was "as fractious as a teething baby, and the domineeringest party he ever nussed."

Some of Mr. Fletcher's attempts were comical, and some pathetic, for though the sacred circle of her wedding-ring was an effectual barrier against a look or word of love, Christie knew that the old affection was not dead, and it showed itself in his desire to win her respect by all sorts of small sacrifices and efforts at self-control. He would not use many of the comforts sent him, but insisted on wearing an army dressing-gown, and slippers that cost him a secret pang every time his eye was affronted by their ugliness. Always after an angry scene with his servant, he would be found going round among the men bestowing little luxuries and kind words; not condescendingly, but humbly, as if it was an atonement for his own shortcomings, and a tribute due to the brave fellows who bore their pains with a fortitude he could not imitate.

"Poor Philip, he tries so hard I must pity, not despise him; for he was never taught the manly virtues that make David what he is," thought Christie, as she went to him one day with an unusually happy heart.

She found him sitting with a newly opened package before him, and a gloomy look upon his face.

"See what rubbish one of my men has sent me, thinking I might value it," he said, pointing to a broken sword-hilt and offering her a badly written letter.

She read it, and was touched by its affectionate respect and manly sympathy; for the good fellow had been one of those who saved the Colonel when he fell, and had kept the broken sword as a trophy of his bravery, "thinking it might be precious in the eyes of them that loved him."

"Poor Burny might have spared himself the trouble, for I've no one to give it to, and in my eyes it's nothing but a bit of old metal," said Pletcher, pushing the parcel away with a half-irritated, half-melancholy look.

"Give it to me as a parting keepsake. I have a fine collection of relics of the brave men I have known; and this shall have a high place in my museum when I go home," said Christie, taking up the "bit of old metal" with more interest than she had ever felt in the brightest blade.

"Parting keepsake! are you going away?" asked Fletcher, catching at the words in anxious haste, yet looking pleased at her desire to keep the relic.

"Yes, I'm ordered to report in Washington, and start to-morrow."

"Then I'll go as escort. The doctor has been wanting me to leave for a week, and now I 've no desire to stay," he said eagerly.

But Christie shook her head, and began to fold up paper and string with nervous industry as she answered:

"I am not going directly to Washington: I have a week's furlough first."

"And what is to become of me?" asked Mr. Fletcher, as fretfully as a sick child; for he knew where her short holiday would be passed, and his temper got the upper-hand for a minute.

"You should go home and be comfortably nursed: you'll need care for some time; and your friends will be glad of a chance to give it I've no doubt."

"I have no home, as you know; and I don't believe I've got a friend in the world who cares whether I live or die."

"This looks as if you were mistaken;" and Christie glanced about the little room, which was full of comforts and luxuries accumulated during his stay.

His face changed instantly, and he answered with the honest look and tone never given to any one but her.

"I beg your pardon: I'm an ungrateful brute. But you see I'd just made up my mind to do something worth the doing, and now it is made impossible in a way that renders it hard to bear. You are very patient with me, and I owe my life to your care: I never can thank you for it; but I will take myself out of your way as soon as I can, and leave you free to enjoy your happy holiday. Heaven knows you have earned it!"

He said those last words so heartily that all the bitterness went out of his voice, and Christie found it easy to reply with a cordial smile:

"I shall stay and see you comfortably off before I go myself. As for thanks and reward I have had both; for you have done something worth the doing, and you give me this."

She took up the broken blade as she spoke, and carried it away, looking proud of her new trophy.

Fletcher left next day, saying, while he pressed her hand as warmly as if the vigor of two had gone into his one:

"You will let me come and see you by and by when you too get your discharge: won't you?"

"So gladly that you shall never again say you have no home. But you must take care of yourself, or you will get the long discharge, and we can't spare you yet," she answered warmly.

"No danger of that: the worthless ones are too often left to cumber the earth; it is the precious ones who are taken," he said, thinking of her as he looked into her tired face, and remembered all she had done for him.

Christie shivered involuntarily at those ominous words, but only said, "Good-by, Philip," as he went feebly away, leaning on his servant's arm, while all the men touched their caps and wished the Colonel a pleasant journey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUNRISE.

THREE months later the war seemed drawing toward an end, and Christie was dreaming happy dreams of home and rest with David, when, as she sat one day writing a letter full of good news to the wife of a patient, a telegram was handed to her, and tearing it open she read:

“Captain Sterling dangerously wounded. Tell his wife to come at once. E. WILKINS.”

“No bad news I hope, ma’am?” said the young fellow anxiously, as his half-written letter fluttered to the ground, and Christie sat looking at that fateful strip of paper with all the strength and color stricken out of her face by the fear that fell upon her.

“It might be worse. They told me he was dying once, and when I got to him he met me at the door. I’ll hope for the best now as I did then, but I never felt like this before,” and she hid her face as if daunted by ominous forebodings too strong to be controlled.

In a moment she was up and doing as calm and steady as if her heart was not torn by an anxiety too keen for words. By the time the news had flown through the house, she was ready; and, coming down with no luggage but a basket of comforts on her arm, she found the hall full of wan and crippled creatures gathered there to see her off, for no nurse in the hospital was more beloved than Mrs. Sterling. Many eyes followed her, — many lips blessed her, many hands were outstretched for a sympathetic grasp: and, as the ambulance went clattering away, many hearts echoed the words of one grateful ghost of a man, “The Lord go with her and stand by her as she’s stood by us.”

It was not a long journey that lay before her; but to Christie it seemed interminable, for all the way one unanswerable question haunted her, “Surely God will not be so cruel as to take David now when he has done his part so well and the reward is so near.”

It was dark when she arrived at the appointed spot; but Elisha Wilkins was there to receive her, and to her first breathless question, “How is David?” answered briskly:

“Asleep and doin’ well, ma’am. At least I should say so, and I peeked at him the last thing before I started.”

“Where is he?”

“In the little hospital over yonder. Camp warn’t no place for him, and I fetched him here as the nighest, and the best thing I could do for him.”

“How is he wounded?”

“Shot in the shoulder, side, and arm.”

“Dangerously you said?”

“No, ma’am, that warn’t and ain’t my opinion. The sergeant sent that telegram, and I think he done wrong. The Captain is hit pretty bad; but it ain’t by no means desperate accordin’ to my way of thinkin’,” replied the hopeful Wilkins, who seemed mercifully gifted with an unusual flow of language.

“Thank heaven! Now go on and tell me all about it as fast as you can,” commanded Christie, walking along the rough road so rapidly that Private Wilkins would have been distressed both in wind and limb if discipline and hardship had not done much for him.

“Well, you see we’ve been skirmishin’ round here for a week, for the woods are full of rebs waitin’ to surprise some commissary stores that’s expected along. Contrabands is always comin’ into camp, and we do the best we can for the poor devils, and send ‘em along where they’ll be safe. Yesterday four women and a boy come: about as desperate a lot as I ever see; for they’d been two days and a night in the big swamp, wadin’ up to their waists in mud and water, with nothin’ to eat, and babies on their backs all the way. Every woman had a child, one dead, but she’d fetched it, ‘so it might be buried free,’ the poor soul said.”

Mr. Wilkins stopped an instant as if for breath, but the thought of his own “little chaps” filled his heart with pity for that bereaved mother; and he understood now why decent men were willing to be shot and starved for “the confounded niggers,” as he once called them.

“Go on,” said Christie, and he made haste to tell the little story that was so full of intense interest to his listener.

“I never saw the Captain so worked up as he was by the sight of them wretched women. He fed and warmed ‘em, comforted their poor scared souls, give what clothes we could find, buried the dead baby with his own hands, and nussed the other little creeters as if they were his own. It warn’t safe to keep ‘em more ‘n a day, so when night come the Captain got ‘em off down the river as quiet as he could. Me and another man helped him, for he wouldn’t trust no one but himself to boss the job. A boat was ready, — blest if I know how he got it, — and about midnight we led them women down to it. The boy was a strong lad, and any of ‘em could help row, for the current would take ‘em along rapid. This way, ma’am; be we goin’ too fast for you?”

“Not fast enough. Finish quick.”

“We got down the bank all right, the Captain standing in the little path that led to the river to keep guard, while Bates held the boat stiddy and I put the women in. Things was goin' lovely when the poor gal who'd lost her baby must needs jump out and run up to thank the Captain agin for all he'd done for her. Some of them sly rascals was watchin' the river: they see her, heard Bates call out, 'Come back, wench; come back!' and they fired. She did come back like a shot, and we give that boat a push that sent it into the middle of the stream. Then we run along below the bank, and come out further down to draw off the rebs. Some followed us and we give it to 'em handsome. But some warn't deceived, and we heard 'em firin' away at the Captain; so we got back to him as fast as we could, but it warn't soon enough. — Take my arm, Mis' Sterlin': it's kinder rough here."

"And you found him?" —

"Lyin' right acrost the path with two dead men in front of him; for he'd kep 'em off like a lion till the firin' brought up a lot of our fellers and the rebs skedaddled. I thought he was dead, for by the starlight I see he was bleedin' awful, — hold on, my dear, hold on to me, — he warn't, thank God, and looked up at me and sez, sez he, 'Are they safe?' 'They be, Captain,' sez I. 'Then it's all right,' sez he, smilin' in that bright way of his, and then dropped off as quiet as a lamb. We got him back to camp double quick, and when the surgeon see them three wounds he shook his head, and I mistrusted that it warn't no joke. So when the Captain come to I asked him what I could do or git for him, and he answered in a whisper, 'My wife.'"

For an instant Christie did "hold on" to Mr. Wilkins's arm, for those two words seemed to take all her strength away. Then the thought that David was waiting for her strung her nerves and gave her courage to bear any thing.

"Is he here?" she asked of her guide a moment later, as he stopped before a large, half-ruined house, through whose windows dim lights and figures were seen moving to and fro.

"Yes, ma'am; we've made a hospital of this; the Captain's got the best room in it, and now he's got the best miss that's goin' anywheres. Won't you have a drop of something jest as a stand-by before you see him?"

"Nothing; take me to him at once."

"Here we be then. Still sleepin': that looks well."

Mr. Wilkins softly led the way down a long hall, opened a door, and after one look fell back and saluted as the Captain's wife passed in.

A surgeon was bending over the low bed, and when a hoarse voice at his elbow asked:

"How is he?" The doctor answered without looking up:

"Done for: this shot through the lungs will finish him before morning I'm afraid."

"Then leave him to me: I am his wife," said the voice, clear and sharp now with the anguish those hard words had brought.

"Good God, why did no one tell me! My dear lady, I thought you were a nurse!" cried the poor surgeon rent with remorse for what now seemed the brutal frankness of his answer, as he saw the white face of the woman at his side, with a look in her eyes harder to see than the bitterest tears that ever fell.

"I am a nurse. If you can do nothing, please go and leave him to me the little while he has to live."

Without a word the surgeon vanished, and Christie was alone with

David.

The instant she saw him she felt that there was no hope, for she had seen too many faces wear the look his wore to be deceived even by her love. Lying with closed eyes already sunken by keen suffering, hair damp with the cold dew on his forehead, a scarlet spot on either cheek, gray lines about the mouth, and pale lips parted by the painful breaths that came in heavy gasps or fluttered fitfully. This was what Christie saw, and after that long look she knew the truth, and sunk down beside the bed, crying with an exceeding bitter cry:

"O David, O my husband, must I give you up so soon?"

His eyes opened then, and he turned his cheek to hers, whispering with a look that tried to be a smile, but ended in a sigh of satisfaction:

"I knew you'd come;" then, as a tearless sob shook her from head to foot, he added steadily, though each breath cost a pang, "'Yes, dear, I must go first, but it won't be hard with you to help me do it bravely."

In that supremely bitter moment there returned to Christie's memory certain words of the marriage service that had seemed so beautiful when she took part in it: "For better for worse, till death us do part." She had known the better, so short, so sweet! This was the worse, and till death came she must keep faithfully the promise made with such a happy heart. The thought brought with it unexpected strength, and gave her courage to crush down her grief, seal up her tears, and show a brave and tender face as she took that feeble hand in hers ready to help her husband die.

He saw and thanked her for the effort, felt the sustaining power of a true wife's heart, and seemed to have no other care, since she was by him steadfast to the end. He lay looking at her with such serene and happy eyes that she would not let a tear, a murmur, mar his peace; and for a little while she felt as if she had gone out of this turbulent world into a heavenly one, where love reigned supreme.

But such hours are as brief as beautiful, and at midnight mortal suffering proved that immortal joy had not yet begun.

Christie had sat by many death-beds, but never one like this; for, through all the bitter pangs that tried his flesh, David's soul remained patient and strong, upheld by the faith that conquers pain and makes even Death a friend. In the quiet time that went before, he had told his last wishes, given his last messages of love, and now had but one desire, — to go soon that Christie might be spared the trial of seeing suffering she could neither lighten nor share.

"Go and rest, dear; go and rest," he whispered more than once. "Let Wilkins come: this is too much for you. I thought it would be easier, but I am so strong life fights for me inch by inch."

But Christie would not go, and for her sake David made haste to die.

Hour after hour the tide ebbed fast, hour after hour the man's patient soul sat waiting for release, and hour after hour the woman's passionate heart clung to the love that seemed drifting away leaving her alone upon the shore. Once or twice she could not bear it, and cried out in her despair:

"No, it is not just that you should suffer this for a creature whose whole life is not worth a day of your brave, useful, precious one! Why did you pay such a price for that girl's liberty?" she said, as the thought of her own wrecked future fell upon her dark and heavy.

"Because I owed it; — she suffered more than this seeing her baby die; — I thought of you in her place, and I could not help doing it."

The broken answer, the reproachful look, wrung Christie's heart, and she was silent: for, in all the knightly tales she loved so well, what Sir Galahad had rescued a more wretched, wronged, and helpless woman than the poor soul whose dead baby David buried tenderly before he bought the mother's freedom with his life?

Only one regret escaped him as the end drew very near, and mortal weakness brought relief from mortal pain. The first red streaks of dawn shone in the east, and his dim eyes brightened at the sight;

"Such a beautiful world!" he whispered with the ghost of a smile, "and so much good work to do in it, I wish I could stay and help a little longer," he added, while the shadow deepened on his face. But soon he said, trying to press Christie's hand, still holding his: "You will do my part, and do it better than I could. Don't mourn, dear heart, but work; and by and by you will be comforted."

"DON'T MOURN, DEAR HEART, BUT WORK."

"I will try; but I think I shall soon follow you, and need no comfort here," answered Christie, already finding consolation in the thought. "What is it, David?" she asked a little later, as she saw his eyes turn wistfully toward the window where the rosy glow was slowly creeping up the sky.

"I want to see the sun rise; — that used to be our happy time; — turn my face toward the light, Christie, and we'll wait for it together."

An hour later when the first pale ray crept in at the low window, two faces lay upon the pillow; one full of the despairing grief for which there seems no balm; the other with lips and eyes of solemn peace, and that mysterious expression, lovelier than any smile, which death leaves as a tender token that all is well with the new-born soul.

To Christie that was the darkest hour of the dawn, but for David sunrise had already come.

CHAPTER XIX.

LITTLE HEART'S-EASE.

WHEN it was all over, the long journey home, the quiet funeral, the first sad excitement, then came the bitter moment when life says to the bereaved: "Take up your burden and go on alone." Christie's had been the still, tearless grief hardest to bear, most impossible to comfort; and, while Mrs. Sterling bore her loss with the sweet patience of a pious heart, and Letty mourned her brother with the tender sorrow that finds relief in natural ways, the widow sat among them, as tranquil, colorless, and mute, as if her soul had followed David, leaving the shadow of her former self behind.

"He will not come to me, but I shall go to him," seemed to be the thought that sustained her, and those who loved her said despairingly to one another: "Her heart is broken: she will not linger long."

But one woman wise in her own motherliness always answered hopefully: "Don't you be troubled; Nater knows what's good for us, and works in her own way. Hearts like this don't break, and sorrer only makes 'em stronger. You mark my words: the blessed baby that's a comin' in the summer will work a merrycle, and you'll see this poor dear a happy woman yet."

Few believed in the prophecy; but Mrs. Wilkins stoutly repeated it and watched over Christie like a mother; often trudging up the lane in spite of wind or weather to bring some dainty mess, some remarkable puzzle in red or yellow calico to be used as a pattern for the little garments the three women sewed with such tender interest, consecrated with such tender tears; or news of the war fresh from Lisha who "was goin' to see it through ef he come home without a leg to stand on." A cheery, hopeful, wholesome influence she brought with her, and all the house seemed to brighten as she sat there freeing her mind upon every subject that came up, from the delicate little shirts Mrs. Sterling knit in spite of failing eyesight, to the fall of Richmond, which, the prophetic spirit being strong within her, Mrs. Wilkins foretold with sibylline precision.

She alone could win a faint smile from Christie with some odd saying, some shrewd opinion, and she alone brought tears to the melancholy eyes that sorely needed such healing dew; for she carried little Adelaide, and without a word put her into Christie's arms, there to cling and smile and babble till she had soothed the bitter pain and hunger of a suffering heart.

She and Mr. Power held Christie up through that hard time, ministering to soul and body with their hope and faith till life grew possible again, and from the dust of a great affliction rose the sustaining power she had sought so long.

As spring came on, and victory after victory proclaimed that the war was drawing to an end, Christie's sad resignation was broken, by gusts of grief so stormy, so inconsolable, that those about her trembled for her life. It was so hard to see the regiments come home proudly bearing the torn battle-flags, weary, wounded, but victorious, to be rapturously welcomed, thanked, and honored by the grateful country they had served so well; to see all this and think of David in his grave unknown, unrewarded, and forgotten by all but a faithful few.

"I used to dream of a time like this, to hope and plan for it, and cheer myself with the assurance that, after all our hard work, our long separation, and the dangers we had faced, David would get some honor, receive some reward, at least be kept for me to love and serve and live with for a little while. But these men who have merely saved a banner, led a charge, or lost an arm, get all the glory, while he gave his life so nobly; yet few know it, no one thanked him, and I am left desolate when so many useless ones might have been taken in his place. Oh, it is not just! I cannot forgive God for robbing him of all his honors, and me of all my happiness."

So lamented Christie with the rebellious protest of a strong nature learning submission through the stern discipline of grief. In vain Mr. Power told her that David had received a better reward than any human hand could give him, in the gratitude of many women, the respect of many men. That to do bravely the daily duties of an upright life was more heroic in God's sight, than to achieve in an enthusiastic moment a single deed that won the world's applause; and that the seeming incompleteness of his life was beautifully rounded by the act that caused his death, although no eulogy recorded it, no song embalmed it, and few knew it but those he saved, those he loved, and the Great Commander who promoted him to the higher rank he had won.

Christie could not be content with this invisible, intangible recompense for her hero: she wanted to see, to know beyond a doubt, that justice had been done; and beat herself against the barrier that baffles bereaved humanity till impatient despair was wearied out, and passionate heart gave up the struggle.

Then, when no help seemed possible, she found it where she least expected it, in herself. Searching for religion, she had found love: now seeking to follow love she found religion. The desire for it had never left her, and, while serving others, she was earning this reward; for when her life seemed to lie in ashes, from their midst, this slender spire of flame, purifying while it burned, rose trembling toward heaven; showing her how great sacrifices turn to greater compensations; giving her light, warmth, and consolation, and teaching her the lesson all must learn.

God was very patient with her, sending much help, and letting her climb up to Him by all the tender ways in which aspiring souls can lead unhappy hearts.

David's room had been her refuge when those dark hours came, and sitting there one day trying to understand the great mystery that parted her from David, she seemed to receive an answer to her many prayers for some sign that death had not estranged them. The house was very still, the window open, and a soft south wind was wandering through the room with hints of May-flowers on its wings. Suddenly a breath of music startled her, so airy, sweet, and short-lived that no human voice or hand could have produced it. Again and again it came, a fitful and melodious sigh, that to one made superstitious by much sorrow, seemed like a spirit's voice delivering some message from another world.

Christie looked and listened with hushed breath and expectant heart, believing that some special answer was to be given her. But in a moment she saw it was no supernatural sound, only the south wind whispering in David's flute that hung beside the window. Disappointment came first, then warm over her sore heart flowed the tender recollection that she used to call the old flute "David's voice," for into it he poured the joy and sorrow, unrest and pain, he told no living soul. How often it had been her lullaby, before she learned to read its language; how gaily it had piped for others; how plaintively it had sung for him, alone and in the night; and now how full of pathetic music was that hymn of consolation fitfully whispered by the wind's soft breath.

Ah, yes! this was a better answer than any supernatural voice could have given her; a more helpful sign than any phantom face or hand; a surer confirmation of her hope than subtle argument or sacred promise: for it brought back the memory of the living, loving man so vividly, so tenderly, that Christie felt as if the barrier was down, and welcomed a new sense of David's nearness with the softest tears that had flowed since she closed the serene eyes whose last look had been for her.

After that hour she spent the long spring days lying on the old couch in his room, reading his books, thinking of his love and life, and listening to "David's voice." She always heard it now, whether the wind touched the flute with airy fingers or it hung mute; and it sung to her songs of patience, hope, and cheer, till a mysterious peace came to her, and she discovered in herself the strength she had asked, yet never thought to find. Under the snow, herbs of grace had been growing silently; and, when the heavy rains had melted all the frost away, they sprung up to blossom beautifully in the sun that shines for every spire of grass, and makes it perfect in its time and place.

Mrs. Wilkins was right; for one June morning, when she laid "that blessed baby" in its mother's arms, Christie's first words were:

"Don't let me die: I must live for baby now," and gathered David's little daughter to her breast, as if the soft touch of the fumbling hands had healed every wound and brightened all the world.

"I told you so; God bless 'em both!" and Mrs. Wilkins retired precipitately to the hall, where she sat down upon the stairs and cried most comfortable tears; for her maternal heart was full of a thanksgiving too deep for words.

A sweet, secluded time to Christie, as she brooded over her little treasure and forgot there was a world outside. A fond and jealous mother, but a very happy one, for after the bitterest came the tenderest experience of her life. She felt its sacredness, its beauty, and its high responsibilities; accepted them prayerfully, and found unspeakable delight in fitting herself to bear them worthily, always remembering that she had a double duty to perform toward the fatherless little creature given to her care.

It is hardly necessary to mention the changes one small individual made in that feminine household. The purring and clucking that went on; the panics over a pin-prick; the consultations over a pellet of chamomilla; the raptures at the dawn of a first smile; the solemn prophecies of future beauty, wit, and wisdom in the bud of a woman; the general adoration of the entire family at the wicker shrine wherein lay the idol, a mass of flannel and cambric with a bald head at one end, and a pair of microscopic blue socks at the other. Mysterious little porringers sat unreproved upon the parlor fire, small garments aired at every window, lights burned at unholy hours, and three agitated nightcaps congregated at the faintest chirp of the restless bird in the maternal nest.

Of course Grandma grew young again, and produced nursery reminiscences on every occasion; Aunt Letty trotted day and night to gratify the imaginary wants of the idol, and Christie was so entirely absorbed that the whole South might have been swallowed up by an earthquake without causing her as much consternation as the appearance of a slight rash upon the baby.

No flower in David's garden throve like his little June rose, for no wind was allowed to visit her too roughly; and when rain fell without, she took her daily airing in the green-house, where from her mother's arms she soon regarded the gay sight with such sprightly satisfaction that she seemed a little flower herself dancing on its stem.

She was named Ruth for grandma, but Christie always called her "Little Heart's-ease," or "Pansy," and those who smiled at first at the mother's fancy, came in time to see that there was an unusual fitness in the name. All the bitterness seemed taken out of Christie's sorrow by the soft magic of the child: there was so much to live for now she spoke no more of dying; and, holding that little hand in hers, it grew easier to go on along the way that led to David.

A prouder mother never lived; and, as baby waxed in beauty and in strength, Christie longed for all the world to see her. A sweet, peculiar, little face she had, sunny and fair; but, under the broad forehead where the bright hair fell as David's used to do, there shone a pair of dark and solemn eyes, so large, so deep, and often so unchildlike, that her mother wondered where she got them. Even when she smiled the shadow lingered in these eyes, and when she wept they filled and overflowed with great, quiet tears like flowers too full of dew. Christie often said remorsefully:

"My little Pansy! I put my own sorrow into your baby soul, and now it looks back at me with this strange wistfulness, and these great drops are the unsubmissive tears I locked up in my heart because I would not be grateful for the good gift God gave me, even while he took that other one away. O Baby, forgive your mother; and don't let her find that she has given you clouds instead of sunshine."

This fear helped Christie to keep her own face cheerful, her own heart tranquil, her own life as sunny, healthful, and hopeful as she wished her child's to be. For this reason she took garden and green-house into her own hands when Bennet gave them up, and, with a stout lad to help her, did well this part of the work that David bequeathed to her. It was a pretty sight to see the mother with her year-old daughter out among the fresh, green things: the little golden head bobbing here and there like a stray sunbeam; the baby voice telling sweet, unintelligible stories to bird and bee and butterfly; or the small creature fast asleep in a basket under a rose-bush, swinging in a hammock from a tree, or in Bran's keeping, rosy, vigorous, and sweet with sun and air, and the wholesome influence of a wise and tender love.

While Christie worked she planned her daughter's future, as mothers will, and had but one care concerning it. She did not fear poverty, but the thought of being straitened for the means of educating little Ruth afflicted her. She meant to teach her to labor heartily and see no degradation in it, but she could not bear to feel that her child should be denied the harmless pleasures that make youth sweet, the opportunities that educate, the society that ripens character and gives a rank which money cannot buy. A little sum to put away for Baby, safe from all risk, ready to draw from as each need came, and sacredly devoted to this end, was now Christie's sole ambition.

With this purpose at her heart, she watched her fruit and nursed her flowers; found no task too hard, no sun too hot, no weed too unconquerable; and soon the garden David planted when his life seemed barren, yielded lovely harvests to swell his little daughter's portion.

One day Christie received a letter from Uncle Enos expressing a wish to see her if she cared to come so far and “stop a spell.” It both surprised and pleased her, and she resolved to go, glad that the old man remembered her, and proud to show him the great success of her life, as she considered Baby.

So she went, was hospitably received by the ancient cousin five times removed who kept house, and greeted with as much cordiality as Uncle Enos ever showed to any one. He looked askance at Baby, as if he had not bargained for the honor of her presence; but he said nothing, and Christie wisely refrained from mentioning that Ruth was the most remarkable child ever born.

She soon felt at home, and went about the old house visiting familiar nooks with the bitter, sweet satisfaction of such returns. It was sad to miss Aunt Betsey in the big kitchen, strange to see Uncle Enos sit all day in his arm-chair too helpless now to plod about the farm and carry terror to the souls of those who served him. He was still a crabbed, gruff, old man; but the narrow, hard, old heart was a little softer than it used to be; and he sometimes betrayed the longing for his kindred that the aged often feel when infirmity makes them desire tenderer props than any they can hire.

Christie saw this wish, and tried to gratify it with a dutiful affection which could not fail to win its way. Baby unconsciously lent a hand, for Uncle Enos could not long withstand the sweet enticements of this little kinswoman. He did not own the conquest in words, but was seen to cuddle his small captivator in private; allowed all sorts of liberties with his spectacles, his pockets, and bald pate; and never seemed more comfortable than when she confiscated his newspaper, and sitting on his knee read it to him in a pretty language of her own.

“She’s a good little gal; looks consid’able like you; but you warn’t never such a quiet puss as she is,” he said one day, as the child was toddling about the room with an old doll of her mother’s lately disinterred from its tomb in the garret.

“She is like her father in that. But I get quieter as I grow old, uncle,” answered Christie, who sat sewing near him.

“You be growing old, that’s a fact; but somehow it’s kind of becomin’. I never thought you’d be so much of a lady, and look so well after all you’ve ben through,” added Uncle Enos, vainly trying to discover what made Christie’s manners so agreeable in spite of her plain dress, and her face so pleasant in spite of the gray hair at her temples and the lines about her mouth.

It grew still pleasanter to see as she smiled and looked up at him with the soft yet bright expression that always made him think of her mother.

“I’m glad you don’t consider me an entire failure, uncle. You know you predicted it. But though I have gone through a good deal, I don’t regret my attempt, and when I look at Pansy I feel as if I’d made a grand success.”

“You haven’t made much money, I guess. If you don’t mind tellin’, what have you got to live on?” asked the old man, unwilling to acknowledge any life a success, if dollars and cents were left out of it.

“Only David’s pension and what I can make by my garden.”

“The old lady has to have some on’t, don’t she?” “She has a little money of her own; but I see that she and Letty have two-thirds of all I make.”

“That ain’t a fair bargain if you do all the work.” “Ah, but we don’t make bargains, sir: we work for one another and share every thing together.”

“So like women!” grumbled Uncle Enos, longing to see that “the property was fixed up square.”

“SHE’S A GOOD LITTLE GAL! LOOKS CONSID’ABLE LIKE YOU.”

“How are you goin’ to eddicate the little gal? I s’pose you think as much of culter and so on as ever you did,” he presently added with a gruff laugh.

“More,” answered Christie, smiling too, as she remembered the old quarrels. “I shall earn the money, sir. If the garden fails I can teach, nurse, sew, write, cook even, for I’ve half a dozen useful accomplishments at my fingers’ ends, thanks to the education you and dear Aunt Betsey gave me, and I may have to use them all for Pansy’s sake.”

Pleased by the compliment, yet a little conscience-stricken at the small share he deserved of it, Uncle Enos sat rubbing up his glasses a minute, before he led to the subject he had in his mind.

“Ef you fall sick or die, what then?”

“I’ve thought of that,” and Christie caught up the child as if her love could keep even death at bay. But Pansy soon struggled down again, for the dirty-faced doll was taking a walk and could not be detained. “If I am taken from her, then my little girl must do as her mother did. God has orphans in His special care, and He won’t forget her I am sure.”

Uncle Enos had a coughing spell just then; and, when he got over it, he said with an effort, for even to talk of giving away his substance cost him a pang:

“I’m gettin’ into years now, and it’s about time I fixed up matters in case I’m took suddin’. I always meant to give you a little suthing, but as you didn’t ask for’t, I took good care on ‘t, and it ain’t none the worse for waitin’ a spell. I jest speak on’t, so you needn’t be anxious about the little gal. It ain’t much, but it will make things easy I reckon.”

“You are very kind, uncle; and I am more grateful than I can tell. I don’t want a penny for myself, but I should love to know that my daughter was to have an easier life than mine.”

“I s’pose you thought of that when you come so quick?” said the old man, with a suspicious look, that made Christie’s eyes kindle as they used to years ago, but she answered honestly:

"I did think of it and hope it, yet I should have come quicker if you had been in the poor-house."

Neither spoke for a minute; for, in spite of generosity and gratitude, the two natures struck fire when they met as inevitably as flint and steel.

"What's your opinion of missionaries," asked Uncle Enos, after a spell of meditation.

"If I had any money to leave them, I should bequeath it to those who help the heathen here at home, and should let the innocent Feejee Islanders worship their idols a little longer in benighted peace," answered Christie, in her usual decided way.

"That's my idee exactly; but it's uncommon hard to settle which of them that stays at home you'll trust your money to. You see Betsey was always pesterin' me to give to charity things; but I told her it was better to save up and give it in a handsome lump that looked well, and was a credit to you. When she was dyin' she reminded me on't, and I promised I'd do suthing before I follered. I've been turnin' on't over in my mind for a number of months, and I don't seem to find any thing that's jest right. You've ben round among the charity folks lately accordin' to your tell, now what would you do if you had a tidy little sum to dispose on?"

"Help the Freed people."

The answer came so quick that it nearly took the old gentleman's breath away, and he looked at his niece with his mouth open after an involuntary, "Sho!" had escaped him.

"David helped give them their liberty, and I would so gladly help them to enjoy it!" cried Christie, all the old enthusiasm blazing up, but with a clearer, steadier flame than in the days when she dreamed splendid dreams by the kitchen fire.

"Well, no, that wouldn't meet my views. What else is there?" asked the old man quite unwarmed by her benevolent ardor.

"Wounded soldiers, destitute children, ill-paid women, young people struggling for independence, homes, hospitals, schools, churches, and God's charity all over the world."

"That's the pesky part on 't: there's such a lot to choose from; I don't know much about any of 'em," began Uncle Enos, looking like a perplexed raven with a treasure which it cannot decide where to hide.

"Whose fault is that, sir?"

The question hit the old man full in the conscience, and he winced, remembering how many of Betsey's charitable impulses he had nipped in the bud, and now all the accumulated alms she would have been so glad to scatter weighed upon him heavily. He rubbed his bald head with a yellow bandana, and moved uneasily in his chair, as if he wanted to get up and finish the neglected job that made his helplessness so burdensome.

"I'll ponder on 't a spell, and make up my mind," was all he said, and never renewed the subject again.

But he had very little time to ponder, and he never did make up his mind; for a few months after Christie's long visit ended, Uncle Enos "was took suddin'," and left all he had to her.

Not an immense fortune, but far larger than she expected, and great was her anxiety to use wisely this unlooked-for benefaction. She was very grateful, but she kept nothing for herself, feeling that David's pension was enough, and preferring the small sum he earned so dearly to the thousands the old man had hoarded up for years. A good portion was put by for Ruth, something for "mother and Letty" that want might never touch them, and the rest she kept for David's work, believing that, so spent, the money would be blest.

CHAPTER XX.

AT FORTY.

"NEARLY twenty years since I set out to seek my fortune. It has been a long search, but I think I have found it at last. I only asked to be a useful, happy woman, and my wish is granted: for, I believe I am useful; I know I am happy."

Christie looked so as she sat alone in the flowery parlor one September afternoon, thinking over her life with a grateful, cheerful spirit. Forty to-day, and pausing at that half-way house between youth and age, she looked back into the past without bitter regret or unsubmissive grief, and forward into the future with courageous patience; for three good angels attended her, and with faith, hope, and charity to brighten life, no woman need lament lost youth or fear approaching age. Christie did not, and though her eyes filled with quiet tears as they were raised to the faded cap and sheathed sword hanging on the wall, none fell; and in a moment tender sorrow changed to still tenderer joy as her glance wandered to rosy little Ruth playing hospital with her dollies in the porch. Then they shone with genuine satisfaction as they went from the letters and papers on her table to the garden, where several young women were at work with a healthful color in the cheeks that had been very pale and thin in the spring.

"I think David is satisfied with me; for I have given all my heart and strength to his work, and it prospers well," she said to herself, and then her face grew thoughtful, as she recalled a late event which seemed to have opened a new field of labor for her if she chose to enter it.

A few evenings before she had gone to one of the many meetings of working-women, which had made some stir of late. Not a first visit, for she was much interested in the subject and full of sympathy for this class of workers.

There were speeches of course, and of the most unparliamentary sort, for the meeting was composed almost entirely of women, each eager to tell her special grievance or theory. Any one who chose got up and spoke; and whether wisely or foolishly each proved how great was the ferment now going on, and how difficult it was for the two classes to meet and help one another in spite of the utmost need on one side and the sincerest good-will on the other. The workers poured out their wrongs and hardships passionately or plaintively, demanding or imploring justice, sympathy, and help; displaying the ignorance, incapacity, and prejudice, which make their need all the more pitiful, their relief all the more imperative.

The ladies did their part with kindliness, patience, and often unconscious condescension, showing in their turn how little they knew of the real trials of the women whom they longed to serve, how very narrow a sphere of usefulness they were fitted for in spite of culture and intelligence, and how rich they were in generous theories, how poor in practical methods of relief.

One accomplished creature with learning radiating from every pore, delivered a charming little essay on the strong-minded women of antiquity; then, taking labor into the region of art, painted delightful pictures of the time when all would work harmoniously together in an Ideal Republic, where each did the task she liked, and was paid for it in liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Unfortunately she talked over the heads of her audience, and it was like telling fairy tales to hungry children to describe Aspasia discussing Greek politics with Pericles and Plato reposing upon ivory couches, or Hypatia modestly delivering philosophical lectures to young men behind a Tyrian purple curtain; and the Ideal Republic met with little favor from anxious seamstresses, type-setters, and shop-girls, who said ungratefully among themselves, “That’s all very pretty, but I don’t see how it’s going to better wages among us now”

Another eloquent sister gave them a political oration which fired the revolutionary blood in their veins, and made them eager to rush to the State-house en masse, and demand the ballot before one-half of them were quite clear what it meant, and the other half were as unfit for it as any ignorant Patrick bribed with a dollar and a sup of whiskey.

A third well-wisher quenched their ardor like a wet blanket, by reading reports of sundry labor reforms in foreign parts; most interesting, but made entirely futile by differences of climate, needs, and customs. She closed with a cheerful budget of statistics, giving the exact number of needle-women who had starved, gone mad, or committed suicide during the past year; the enormous profits wrung by capitalists from the blood and muscles of their employes; and the alarming increase in the cost of living, which was about to plunge the nation into debt and famine, if not destruction generally.

When she sat down despair was visible on many countenances, and immediate starvation seemed to be waiting at the door to clutch them as they went out; for the impressible creatures believed every word and saw no salvation anywhere.

Christie had listened intently to all this; had admired, regretted, or condemned as each spoke; and felt a steadily increasing sympathy for all, and a strong desire to bring the helpers and the helped into truer relations with each other.

The dear ladies were so earnest, so hopeful, and so unpractically benevolent, that it grieved her to see so much breath wasted, so much good-will astray; while the expectant, despondent, or excited faces of the work-women touched her heart; for well she knew how much they needed help, how eager they were for light, how ready to be led if some one would only show a possible way.

As the statistical extinguisher retired, beaming with satisfaction at having added her mite to the good cause, a sudden and uncontrollable impulse moved Christie to rise in her place and ask leave to speak. It was readily granted, and a little stir of interest greeted her; for she was known to many as Mr. Power's friend, David Sterling's wife, or an army nurse who had done well. Whispers circulated quickly, and faces brightened as they turned toward her; for she had a helpful look, and her first words pleased them. When the president invited her to the platform she paused on the lowest step, saying with an expressive look and gesture:

"I am better here, thank you; for I have been and mean to be a working-woman all my life."

"Hear! hear!" cried a stout matron in a gay bonnet, and the rest indorsed the sentiment with a hearty round. Then they were very still, and then in a clear, steady voice, with the sympathetic undertone to it that is so magical in its effect, Christie made her first speech in public since she left the stage.

That early training stood her in good stead now, giving her self-possession, power of voice, and ease of gesture; while the purpose at her heart lent her the sort of simple eloquence that touches, persuades, and convinces better than logic, flattery, or oratory.

What she said she hardly knew: words came faster than she could utter them, thoughts pressed upon her, and all the lessons of her life rose vividly before her to give weight to her arguments, value to her counsel, and the force of truth to every sentence she uttered. She had known so many of the same trials, troubles, and temptations that she could speak understandingly of them; and, better still, she had conquered or outlived so many of them, that she could not only pity but help others to do as she had done. Having found in labor her best teacher, comforter, and friend, she could tell those who listened that, no matter how hard or humble the task at the beginning, if faithfully and bravely performed, it would surely prove a stepping-stone to something better, and with each honest effort they were fitting themselves for the nobler labor, and larger liberty God meant them to enjoy.

The women felt that this speaker was one of them; for the same lines were on her face that they saw on their own, her hands were no fine lady's hands, her dress plainer than some of theirs, her speech simple enough for all to understand; cheerful, comforting, and full of practical suggestion, illustrations out of their own experience, and a spirit of companionship that uplifted their despondent hearts.

Yet more impressive than any thing she said was the subtle magnetism of character, for that has a universal language which all can understand. They saw and felt that a genuine woman stood down there among them like a sister, ready with head, heart, and hand to help them help themselves; not offering pity as an alms, but justice as a right. Hardship and sorrow, long effort and late-won reward had been hers they knew; wifehood, motherhood, and widowhood brought her very near to them; and behind her was the background of an earnest life, against which this figure with health on the cheeks, hope in the eyes, courage on the lips, and the ardor of a wide benevolence warming the whole countenance stood out full of unconscious dignity and beauty; an example to comfort, touch, and inspire them.

It was not a long speech, and in it there was no learning, no statistics, and no politics; yet it was the speech of the evening, and when it was over no one else seemed to have any thing to say. As the meeting broke up Christie's hand was shaken by many roughened by the needle, stained with printer's ink, or hard with humbler toil; many faces smiled gratefully at her, and many voices thanked her heartily. But sweeter than any applause were the words of one woman who grasped her hand, and whispered with wet eyes:

"I knew your blessed husband; he was very good to me, and I've been thanking the Lord he had such a wife for his reward!"

Christie was thinking of all this as she sat alone that day, and asking herself if she should go on; for the ladies had been as grateful as the women; had begged her to come and speak again, saying they needed just such a mediator to bridge across the space that now divided them from those they wished to serve. She certainly seemed fitted to act as interpreter between the two classes; for, from the gentleman her father she had inherited the fine instincts, gracious manners, and unblemished name of an old and honorable race; from the farmer's daughter, her mother, came the equally valuable dower of practical virtues, a sturdy love of independence, and great respect for the skill and courage that can win it.

Such women were much needed and are not always easy to find; for even in democratic America the hand that earns its daily bread must wear some talent, name, or honor as an ornament, before it is very cordially shaken by those that wear white gloves.

"Perhaps this is the task my life has been fitting me for," she said. "A great and noble one which I should be proud to accept and help accomplish if I can. Others have finished the emancipation work and done it splendidly, even at the cost of all this blood and sorrow. I came too late to do any thing but give my husband and behold the glorious end. This new task seems to offer me the chance of being among the pioneers, to do the hard work, share the persecution, and help lay the foundation of a new emancipation whose happy success I may never see. Yet I had rather be remembered as those brave beginners are, though many of them missed the triumph, than as the late comers will be, who only beat the drums and wave the banners when the victory is won."

Just then the gate creaked on its hinges, a step sounded in the porch, and little Ruth ran in to say in an audible whisper:

"It's a lady, mamma, a very pretty lady: can you see her?"

"Yes, dear, ask her in."

There was a rustle of sweeping silks through the narrow hall, a vision of a very lovely woman in the door-way, and two daintily gloved hands were extended as an eager voice asked: "Dearest Christie, don't you remember Bella Carrol?"

Christie did remember, and had her in her arms directly, utterly regardless of the imminent destruction of a marvellous hat, or the bad effect of tears on violet ribbons. Presently they were sitting close together, talking with April faces, and telling their stories as women must when they meet after the lapse of years. A few letters had passed between them, but Bella had been abroad, and Christie too busy living her life to have much time to write about it.

"Your mother, Bella? how is she, and where?"

"Still with Augustine, and he you know is melancholy mad: very quiet, very patient, and very kind to every one but himself. His penances for the sins of his race would soon kill him if mother was not there to watch over him. And her penance is never to leave him."

"Dear child, don't tell me any more; it is too sad. Talk of yourself and Harry. Now you smile, so I'm sure all is well with him."

"Yes, thank heaven! Christie, I do believe fate means to spare us as dear old Dr. Shirley said. I never can be gay again, but I keep as cheerful and busy as I can, for Harry's sake, and he does the same for mine. We shall always be together, and all in all to one another, for we can never marry and have homes apart you know. We have wandered over the face of the earth for several years, and now we mean to settle down and be as happy and as useful as we can."

"That's brave! I am so glad to hear it, and so truly thankful it is possible. But tell me, Bella, what Harry means to do? You spoke in one of your first letters of his being hard at work studying medicine. Is that to be his profession?"

"Yes; I don't know what made him choose it, unless it was the hope that he might spare other families from a curse like ours, or lighten it if it came. After Helen's death he was a changed creature; no longer a wild boy, but a man. I told him what you said to me, and it gave him hope. Dr. Shirley confirmed it as far as he dared; and Hal resolved to make the most of his one chance by interesting himself in some absorbing study, and leaving no room for fear, no time for dangerous recollections. I was so glad, and mother so comforted, for we both feared that sad trouble would destroy him. He studied hard, got on splendidly, and then went abroad to finish off. I went with him; for poor August was past hope, and mamma would not let me help her. The doctor said it was best for me to be away, and excellent for Hal to have me with him, to cheer him up, and keep him steady with a little responsibility. We have been happy together in spite of our trouble, he in his profession, and I in him; now he is ready, so we have come home, and now the hardest part begins for me."

"How, Bella?"

"He has his work and loves it: I have nothing after my duty to him is done. I find I've lost my taste for the old pleasures and pursuits, and though I have tried more sober, solid ones, there still remains much time to hang heavy on my hands, and such an empty place in my heart, that even Harry's love cannot fill it. I'm afraid I shall get melancholy, — that is the beginning of the end for us, you know."

As Bella spoke the light died out of her eyes, and they grew despairing with the gloom of a tragic memory. Christie drew the beautiful, pathetic face clown upon her bosom, longing to comfort, yet feeling very powerless to lighten Bella's burden.

But Christie's little daughter did it for her. Ruth had been standing near regarding the "pretty lady," with as much wonder and admiration as if she thought her a fairy princess, who might vanish before she got a good look at her. Divining with a child's quick instinct that the princess was in trouble, Ruth flew into the porch, caught up her latest and dearest treasure, and presented it as a sure consolation, with such sweet good-will, that Bella could not refuse, although it was only a fuzzy caterpillar in a little box.

"I give it to you because it is my nicest one and just ready to spin up. Do you like pussy-pillars, and know how they do it?" asked Ruth, emboldened by the kiss she got in return for her offering.

"Tell me all about it, darling," and Bella could not help smiling, as the child fixed her great eyes upon her, and told her little story with such earnestness, that she was breathless by the time she ended.

"At first they are only grubs you know, and stay down in the earth; then they are like this, nice and downy and humpy, when they walk; and when it's time they spin up and go to sleep. It's all dark in their little beds, and they don't know what may happen to 'em; but they are not afraid 'cause God takes care of 'em. So they wait and don't fret, and when it's right for 'em they come out splendid butterflies, all beautiful and shining like your gown. They are happy then, and fly away to eat honey, and live in the air, and never be creeping worms any more.”

“That’s a pretty lesson for me,” said Bella softly, “I accept and thank you for it, little teacher; I’ll try to be a patient ‘pussy-pillar’ though it is dark, and I don’t know what may happen to me; and I’ll wait hopefully till it’s time to float away a happy butterfly.”

“Go and get the friend some flowers, the gayest and sweetest you can find, Pansy,” said Christie, and, as the child ran off, she added to her friend:

“Now we must think of something pleasant for you to do. It may take a little time, but I know we shall find your niche if we give our minds to it.”

“That’s one reason why I came. I heard some friends of mine talking about you yesterday, and they seemed to think you were equal to any thing in the way of good works. Charity is the usual refuge for people like me, so I wish to try it. I don’t mind doing or seeing sad or disagreeable things, if it only fills up my life and helps me to forget.”

“You will help more by giving of your abundance to those who know how to dispense it wisely, than by trying to do it yourself, my dear. I never advise pretty creatures like you to tuck up their silk gowns and go down into the sloughs with alms for the poor, who don’t like it any better than you do, and so much pity and money are wasted in sentimental charity.”

“Then what shall I do?”

“If you choose you can find plenty of work in your own class; for, if you will allow me to say it, they need help quite as much as the paupers, though in a very different way.”

“Oh, you mean I’m to be strong-minded, to cry aloud and spare not, to denounce their iniquities, and demand their money or their lives?”

“Now, Bella, that’s personal; for I made my first speech a night or two ago.”

“I know you did, and I wish I’d heard it. I’d make mine to-night if I could do it half as well as I’m told you did,” interrupted Bella, clapping her hands with a face full of approval.

But Christie was in earnest, and produced her new project with all speed.

“I want you to try a little experiment for me, and if it succeeds you shall have all the glory; I’ve been waiting for some one to undertake it, and I fancy you are the woman. Not every one could attempt it; for it needs wealth and position, beauty and accomplishments, much tact, and more than all a heart that has not been spoilt by the world, but taught through sorrow how to value and use life well.”

“Christie, what is it? this experiment that needs so much, and yet which you think me capable of trying?” asked Bella, interested and flattered by this opening.

"I want you to set a new fashion: you know you can set almost any you choose in your own circle; for people are very like sheep, and will follow their leader if it happens to be one they fancy. I don't ask you to be a De Staël, and have a brilliant salon: I only want you to provide employment and pleasure for others like yourself, who now are dying of frivolity or ennui."

"I should love to do that if I could. Tell me how."

"Well, dear, I want you to make Harry's home as beautiful and attractive as you can; to keep all the elegance and refinement of former times, and to add to it a new charm by setting the fashion of common sense. Invite all the old friends, and as many new ones as you choose; but have it understood that they are to come as intelligent men and women, not as pleasure-hunting beaux and belles; give them conversation instead of gossip; less food for the body and more for the mind; the healthy stimulus of the nobler pleasures they can command, instead of the harmful excitements of present dissipation. In short, show them the sort of society we need more of, and might so easily have if those who possess the means of culture cared for the best sort, and took pride in acquiring it. Do you understand, Bella?"

"Yes, but it's a great undertaking, and you could do it better than I."

"Bless you, no! I haven't a single qualification for it but the will to have it done. I'm 'strong-minded,' a radical, and a reformer. I've done all sorts of dreadful things to get my living, and I have neither youth, beauty, talent, or position to back me up; so I should only be politely ignored if I tried the experiment myself. I don't want you to break out and announce your purpose with a flourish; or try to reform society at large, but I do want you to devote yourself and your advantages to quietly insinuating a better state of things into one little circle. The very fact of your own want, your own weariness, proves how much such a reform is needed. There are so many fine young women longing for something to fill up the empty places that come when the first flush of youth is over, and the serious side of life appears; so many promising young men learning to conceal or condemn the high ideals and the noble purposes they started with, because they find no welcome for them. You might help both by simply creating a purer atmosphere for them to breathe, sunshine to foster instead of frost to nip their good aspirations, and so, even if you planted no seed, you might encourage a timid sprout or two that would one day be a lovely flower or a grand tree all would admire and enjoy."

As Christie ended with the figure suggested by her favorite work, Bella said after a thoughtful pause:

"But few of the women I know can talk about any thing but servants, dress, and gossip. Here and there one knows something of music, art, or literature; but the superior ones are not favorites with the larger class of gentlemen."

"Then let the superior women cultivate the smaller class of men who do admire intelligence as well as beauty. There are plenty of them, and you had better introduce a few as samples, though their coats may not be of the finest broadcloth, nor their fathers 'solid men.' Women lead in society, and when men find that they can not only dress with taste, but talk with sense, the lords of creation will be glad to drop mere twaddle and converse as with their equals. Bless my heart!" cried Christie, walking about the room as if she had mounted her hobby, and was off for a canter, "how people can go on in such an idiotic fashion passes my understanding. Why keep up an endless clatter about gowns and dinners, your neighbors' affairs, and your own aches, when there is a world full of grand questions to settle, lovely things to see, wise things to study, and noble things to imitate. Bella, you must try the experiment, and be the queen of a better society than any you can reign over now."

"It looks inviting, and I will try it with you to help me. I know Harry would like it, and I'll get him to recommend it to his patients. If he is as successful here as elsewhere they will swallow any dose he orders; for he knows how to manage people wonderfully well. He prescribed a silk dress to a despondent, dowdy patient once, telling her the electricity of silk was good for her nerves: she obeyed, and when well dressed felt so much better that she bestirred herself generally and recovered; but to this day she sings the praises of Dr. Carrol's electric cure."

Bella was laughing gaily as she spoke, and so was Christie as she replied:

"That's just what I want you to do with your patients. Dress up their minds in their best; get them out into the air; and cure their ills by the magnetism of more active, earnest lives."

They talked over the new plan with increasing interest; for Christie did not mean that Bella should be one of the brilliant women who shine for a little while, and then go out like a firework. And Bella felt as if she had found something to do in her own sphere, a sort of charity she was fitted for, and with it a pleasant sense of power to give it zest.

When Letty and her mother came in, they found a much happier looking guest than the one Christie had welcomed an hour before. Scarcely had she introduced them when voices in the lane made all look up to see old Hepsey and Mrs. Wilkins approaching.

"Two more of my dear friends, Bella: a fugitive slave and a laundress. One has saved scores of her own people, and is my pet heroine. The other has the bravest, cheeriest soul I know, and is my private oracle."

The words were hardly out of Christie's mouth when in they came; Hepsey's black face shining with affection, and Mrs. Wilkins as usual running over with kind words.

"My dear creeter, the best of wishes and no end of happy birthdays. There 's a triflin' keepsake; tuck it away, and look at it byme by. Mis' Sterlin', I'm proper glad to see you lookin' so well. Aunt Letty, how's that darlin' child? I ain't the pleasure of your acquaintance, Miss, but I'm pleased to see you. The children all sent love, likewise Lisha, whose bones is better sense I tried the camfire and red flannel."

Then they settled down like a flock of birds of various plumage and power of song, but all amicably disposed, and ready to peck socially at any topic which might turn up.

Mrs. Wilkins started one by exclaiming as she "laid off" her bonnet:

"Sakes alive, there's a new picter! Ain't it beautiful?"

"Colonel Fletcher brought it this morning. A great artist painted it for him, and he gave it to me in a way that added much to its value," answered Christie, with both gratitude and affection in her face; for she was a woman who could change a lover to a friend, and keep him all her life.

It was a quaint and lovely picture of Mr. Greatheart, leading the fugitives from the City of Destruction. A dark wood lay behind; a wide river rolled before; Mercy and Christiana pressed close to their faithful guide, who went down the rough and narrow path bearing a cross-hilted sword in his right hand, and holding a sleeping baby with the left. The sun was just rising, and a long ray made a bright path athwart the river, turned Greatheart's dinted armor to gold, and shone into the brave and tender face that seemed to look beyond the sunrise.

"There's just a hint of Davy in it that is very comforting to me," said Mrs. Sterling, as she laid her old hands softly together, and looked up with her devout eyes full of love.

"Dem women oughter bin black," murmured Hepsey, tearfully; for she considered David worthy of a place with old John Brown and Colonel Shaw.

"The child looks like Pansy, we all think," added Letty, as the little girl brought her nosegay for Aunty to tie up prettily.

Christie said nothing, because she felt too much; and Bella was also silent because she knew too little. But Mrs. Wilkins with her kindly tact changed the subject before it grew painful, and asked with sudden interest:

"When be you a goin' to hold forth agin, Christie? Jest let me know beforehand, and I'll wear my old gloves: I tore my best ones all to rags clappin' of you; it was so extra good."

"I don't deserve any credit for the speech, because it spoke itself, and I couldn't help it. I had no thought of such a thing till it came over me all at once, and I was up before I knew it. I'm truly glad you liked it, but I shall never make another, unless you think I'd better. You know I always ask your advice, and what is more remarkable usually take it," said Christie, glad to consult her oracle.

"Hadn't you better rest a little before you begin any new task, my daughter? You have done so much these last years you must be tired," interrupted Mrs. Sterling, with a look of tender anxiety.

"You know I work for two, mother," answered Christie, with the clear, sweet expression her face always wore when she spoke of David. "I am not tired yet: I hope I never shall be, for without my work I should fall into despair or ennui. There is so much to be done, and it is so delightful to help do it, that I never mean to fold my hands till they are useless. I owe all I can do, for in labor, and the efforts and experiences that grew out of it, I have found independence, education, happiness, and religion."

"Then, my dear, you are ready to help other folks into the same blessed state, and it's your duty to do it!" cried Mrs. Wilkins, her keen eyes full of sympathy and commendation as they rested on Christie's cheerful, earnest face. "Ef the sperrit moves you to speak, up and do it without no misgivin's. I think it was a special leadin' that night, and I hope you'll foller, for it ain't every one that can make folks laugh and cry with a few plain words that go right to a body's heart and stop there real comfortable and fillin'. I guess this is your next job, my dear, and you'd better ketch hold and give it the right turn; for it's goin' to take time, and women ain't stood alone for so long they'll need a sight of boostin'."

There was a general laugh at the close of Mrs. Wilkins's remarks; but Christie answered seriously: "I accept the task, and will do my share faithfully with words or work, as shall seem best. We all need much preparation for the good time that is coming to us, and can get it best by trying to know and help, love and educate one another, — as we do here."

With an impulsive gesture Christie stretched her hands to the friends about her, and with one accord they laid theirs on hers, a loving league of sisters, old and young, black and white, rich and poor, each ready to do her part to hasten the coming of the happy end.

"Me too!" cried little Ruth, and spread her chubby hand above the rest: a hopeful omen, seeming to promise that the coming generation of women will not only receive but deserve their liberty, by learning that the greatest of God's gifts to us is the privilege of sharing His great work.

"Each ready to do her part to hasten the coming of the happy end."

EIGHT COUSINS

OR

THE AUNT-HILL

This novel was published in 1875 and is the story of Rose Campbell, a lonely and sickly girl, who has been recently orphaned and must now reside with her maiden aunts, the matriarchs of her wealthy Boston family. When Rose’s guardian, Uncle Alec, returns from abroad, he takes control of her care. Through his unorthodox theories about child-rearing, she becomes happier and healthier while finding her place in her family of seven boy cousins and numerous aunts and uncles. She also makes friends with Phebe, her aunts’ young housemaid, whose cheerful attitude in the face of poverty helps Rose to understand and value her own good fortune.

Each chapter describes an adventure in Rose’s life as she learns to help herself and others make good choices. Rose must define for herself her role as the only woman of her generation in her family and as an heiress in Boston’s elite society
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Alcott, 1865

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Preface

The Author is quite aware of the defects of this little story, many of which were unavoidable, as it first appeared serially. But, as Uncle Alec’s experiment was intended to amuse the young folks, rather than suggest educational improvements for the consideration of the elders, she trusts that these shortcomings will be overlooked by the friends of the Eight Cousins, and she will try to make amends in a second volume, which shall attempt to show The Rose in Bloom.

L.M.A.

Chapter 1 — Two Girls

Rose sat all alone in the big best parlor, with her little handkerchief laid ready to catch the first tear, for she was thinking of her troubles, and a shower was expected. She had retired to this room as a good place in which to be miserable; for it was dark and still, full of ancient furniture, sombre curtains, and hung all around with portraits of solemn old gentlemen in wigs, severe-nosed ladies in top-heavy caps, and staring children in little bob-tailed coats or short-waisted frocks. It was an excellent place for woe; and the fitful spring rain that pattered on the window-pane seemed to sob, “Cry away: I’m with you.”

Rose really did have some cause to be sad; for she had no mother, and had lately lost her father also, which left her no home but this with her great-aunts. She had been with them only a week, and, though the dear old ladies had tried their best to make her happy, they had not succeeded very well, for she was unlike any child they had ever seen, and they felt very much as if they had the care of a low-spirited butterfly.

They had given her the freedom of the house, and for a day or two she had amused herself roaming all over it, for it was a capital old mansion, and was full of all manner of odd nooks, charming rooms, and mysterious passages. Windows broke out in unexpected places, little balconies overhung the garden most romantically, and there was a long upper hall full of curiosities from all parts of the world; for the Campbells had been sea-captains for generations.

Aunt Plenty had even allowed Rose to rummage in her great china closet a spicy retreat, rich in all the “goodies” that children love; but Rose seemed to care little for these toothsome temptations; and when that hope failed, Aunt Plenty gave up in despair.

Gentle Aunt Peace had tried all sorts of pretty needle-work, and planned a doll’s wardrobe that would have won the heart of even an older child. But Rose took little interest in pink satin hats and tiny hose, though she sewed dutifully till her aunt caught her wiping tears away with the train of a wedding-dress, and that discovery put an end to the sewing society.

Then both old ladies put their heads together and picked out the model child of the neighbourhood to come and play with their niece. But Ariadne Blish was the worst failure of all, for Rose could not bear the sight of her, and said she was so like a wax doll she longed to give her a pinch and see if she would squeak. So prim little Ariadne was sent home, and the exhausted aunties left Rose to her own devices for a day or two.

Bad weather and a cold kept her in-doors, and she spent most of her time in the library where her father's books were stored. Here she read a great deal, cried a little, and dreamed many of the innocent bright dreams in which imaginative children find such comfort and delight. This suited her better than anything else, but it was not good for her, and she grew pale, heavy-eyed and listless, though Aunt Plenty gave her iron enough to make a cooking-stove, and Aunt Peace petted her like a poodle.

Seeing this, the poor aunties racked their brains for a new amusement and determined to venture a bold stroke, though not very hopeful of its success. They said nothing to Rose about their plan for this Saturday afternoon, but let her alone till the time came for the grand surprise, little dreaming that the odd child would find pleasure for herself in a most unexpected quarter.

Before she had time to squeeze out a single tear a sound broke the stillness, making her prick up her ears. It was only the soft twitter of a bird, but it seemed to be a peculiarly gifted bird, for while she listened the soft twitter changed to a lively whistle, then a trill, a coo, a chirp, and ended in a musical mixture of all the notes, as if the bird burst out laughing. Rose laughed also, and, forgetting her woes, jumped up, saying eagerly,

"It is a mocking-bird. Where is it?"

Running down the long hall, she peeped out at both doors, but saw nothing feathered except a draggle-tailed chicken under a burdock leaf. She listened again, and the sound seemed to be in the house. Away she went, much excited by the chase, and following the changeful song, it led her to the china-closet door.

"In there? How funny!" she said. But when she entered, not a bird appeared except the everlastingly kissing swallows on the Canton china that lined the shelves. All of a sudden Rose's face brightened, and, softly opening the slide, she peered into the kitchen. But the music had stopped, and all she saw was a girl in a blue apron scrubbing the hearth. Rose stared about her for a minute, and then asked abruptly,

"Did you hear that mocking-bird?"

"I should call it a phebe-bird," answered the girl, looking up with a twinkle in her black eyes.

"Where did it go?"

"It is here still."

"Where?"

"In my throat. Do you want to hear it?"

"Oh, yes! I'll come in." And Rose crept through the slide to the wide shelf on the other side, being too hurried and puzzled to go round by the door.

The girl wiped her hands, crossed her feet on the little island of carpet where she was stranded in a sea of soap-suds, and then, sure enough, out of her slender throat came the swallow’s twitter, the robin’s whistle, the blue-jay’s call, the thrush’s song, the wood-dove’s coo, and many another familiar note, all ending as before with the musical ecstacy of a bobolink singing and swinging among the meadow grass on a bright June day.

Rose was so astonished that she nearly fell off her perch, and when the little concert was over clapped her hands delightedly.

“Oh, it was lovely! Who taught you?”

“The birds,” answered the girl, with a smile, as she fell to work again.

“It is very wonderful! I can sing, but nothing half so fine as that. What is your name, please?”

“Phebe Moore.”

“I’ve heard of phebe-birds; but I don’t believe the real ones could do that,” laughed Rose, adding, as she watched with interest the scattering of dabs of soft soap over the bricks, “May I stay and see you work? It is very lonely in the parlor.”

“Yes, indeed, if you want to,” answered Phebe, wringing out her cloth in a capable sort of way that impressed Rose very much.

“It must be fun to swash the water round and dig out the soap. I’d love to do it, only aunt wouldn’t like it, I suppose,” said Rose, quite taken with the new employment.

“You’d soon get tired, so you’d better keep tidy and look on.”

“I suppose you help your mother a good deal?”

“I haven’t got any folks.”

“Why, where do you live, then?”

“I’m going to live here, I hope. Debby wants some one to help round, and I’ve come to try for a week.”

“I hope you will stay, for it is very dull,” said Rose, who had taken a sudden fancy to this girl, who sung like a bird and worked like a woman.

“Hope I shall; for I’m fifteen now, and old enough to earn my own living. You have come to stay a spell, haven’t you?” asked Phebe, looking up at her guest and wondering how life could be dull to a girl who wore a silk frock, a daintily frilled apron, a pretty locket, and had her hair tied up with a velvet snood.

“Yes, I shall stay till my uncle comes. He is my guardian now, and I don’t know what he will do with me. Have you a guardian?”

“My sakes, no! I was left on the poor-house steps a little mite of a baby, and Miss Rogers took a liking to me, so I’ve been there ever since. But she is dead now, and I take care of myself.”

“How interesting! It is like Arabella Montgomery in the ‘Gypsy’s Child.’ Did you ever read that sweet story?” asked Rose, who was fond of tales of foundlings, and had read many.

“I don’t have any books to read, and all the spare time I get I run off into the woods; that rests me better than stories,” answered Phebe, as she finished one job and began on another.

Rose watched her as she got out a great pan of beans to look over, and wondered how it would seem to have life all work and no play. Presently Phebe seemed to think it was her turn to ask questions, and said, wistfully,

“You’ve had lots of schooling, I suppose?”

“Oh, dear me, yes! I’ve been at boarding school nearly a year, and I’m almost dead with lessons. The more I got, the more Miss Power gave me, and I was so miserable that I ‘most cried my eyes out. Papa never gave me hard things to do, and he always taught me so pleasantly I loved to study. Oh, we were so happy and so fond of one another! But now he is gone, and I am left all alone.”

The tear that would not come when Rose sat waiting for it came now of its own accord two of them in fact and rolled down her cheeks, telling the tale of love and sorrow better than any words could do it.

For a minute there was no sound in the kitchen but the little daughter’s sobbing and the sympathetic patter of the rain. Phebe stopped rattling her beans from one pan to another, and her eyes were full of pity as they rested on the curly head bent down on Rose’s knee, for she saw that the heart under the pretty locket ached with its loss, and the dainty apron was used to dry sadder tears than any she had ever shed.

Somehow, she felt more contented with her brown calico gown and blue-checked pinafore; envy changed to compassion; and if she had dared she would have gone and hugged her afflicted guest.

Fearing that might not be considered proper, she said, in her cheery voice,

“I’m sure you ain’t all alone with such a lot of folks belonging to you, and all so rich and clever. You’ll be petted to pieces, Debby says, because you are the only girl in the family.”

Phebe’s last words made Rose smile in spite of her tears, and she looked out from behind her apron with an April face, saying in a tone of comic distress,

“That’s one of my troubles! I’ve got six aunts, and they all want me, and I don’t know any of them very well. Papa named this place the Aunt-hill, and now I see why.”

Phebe laughed with her as she said encouragingly,

“Everyone calls it so, and it’s a real good name, for all the Mrs. Campbells live handy by, and keep coming up to see the old ladies.”

"I could stand the aunts, but there are dozens of cousins, dreadful boys all of them, and I detest boys! Some of them came to see me last Wednesday, but I was lying down, and when auntie came to call me I went under the quilt and pretended to be asleep. I shall have to see them some time, but I do dread it so." And Rose gave a shudder, for, having lived alone with her invalid father, she knew nothing of boys, and considered them a species of wild animal.

"Oh! I guess you'll like 'em. I've seen 'em flying round when they come over from the Point, sometimes in their boats and sometimes on horseback. If you like boats and horses, you'll enjoy yourself first-rate."

"But I don't! I'm afraid of horses, and boats make me ill, and I hate boys!" And poor Rose wrung her hands at the awful prospect before her. One of these horrors alone she could have borne, but all together were too much for her, and she began to think of a speedy return to the detested school.

Phebe laughed at her woe till the beans danced in the pan, but tried to comfort her by suggesting a means of relief.

"Perhaps your uncle will take you away where there ain't any boys. Debby says he is a real kind man, and always bring heaps of nice things when he comes."

"Yes, but you see that is another trouble, for I don't know Uncle Alec at all. He hardly ever came to see us, though he sent me pretty things very often. Now I belong to him, and shall have to mind him, till I am eighteen. I may not like him a bit, and I fret about it all the time."

"Well, I wouldn't borrow trouble, but have a real good time. I'm sure I should think I was in clover if I had folks and money, and nothing to do but enjoy myself," began Phebe, but got no further, for a sudden rush and tumble outside made them both jump.

"It's thunder," said Phebe.

"It's a circus!" cried Rose, who from her elevated perch had caught glimpses of a gay cart of some sort and several ponies with flying manes and tails.

The sound died away, and the girls were about to continue their confidences when old Debby appeared, looking rather cross and sleepy after her nap.

"You are wanted in the parlor, Miss Rose."

"Has anybody come?"

"Little girls shouldn't ask questions, but do as they are bid," was all Debby would answer.

"I do hope it isn't Aunt Myra; she always scares me out of my wits asking how my cough is, and groaning over me as if I was going to die," said Rose, preparing to retire the way she came, for the slide, being cut for the admission of bouncing Christmas turkeys and puddings, was plenty large enough for a slender girl.

“Guess you’ll wish it was Aunt Myra when you see who has come. Don’t never let me catch you coming into my kitchen that way again, or I’ll shut you up in the big b’iler,” growled Debby, who thought it her duty to snub children on all occasions.

Chapter 2 — The Clan

Rose scrambled into the china-closet as rapidly as possible, and there refreshed herself by making faces at Debby, while she settled her plumage and screwed up her courage. Then she crept softly down the hall and peeped into the parlor. No one appeared, and all was so still she felt sure the company was upstairs. So she skipped boldly through the half-open folding-doors, to behold on the other side a sight that nearly took her breath away.

Seven boys stood in a row all ages, all sizes, all yellow-haired and blue-eyed, all in full Scotch costume, and all smiling, nodding, and saying as with one voice, “How are you, cousin?”

Rose gave a little gasp, and looked wildly about her as if ready to fly, for fear magnified the seven and the room seemed full of boys. Before she could run, however, the tallest lad stepped out of the line, saying pleasantly,

“Don’t be frightened. This is the Clan come to welcome you; and I’m the chief, Archie, at your service.”

He held out his hand as he spoke, and Rose timidly put her own into a brown paw, which closed over the white morsel and held it as the chief continued his introductions.

“We came in full rig, for we always turn out in style on grand occasions. Hope you like it. Now I’ll tell you who these chaps are, and then we shall be all right. This big one is Prince Charlie, Aunt Clara’s boy. She has but one, so he is an extra good one. This old fellow is Mac, the bookworm, called Worm for short. This sweet creature is Steve the Dandy. Look at his gloves and top-knot, if you please. They are Aunt Jane’s lads, and a precious pair you’d better believe. These are the Brats, my brothers, Geordie and Will, and Jamie the Baby. Now, my men, step out and show your manners.”

At this command, to Rose’s great dismay, six more hands were offered, and it was evident that she was expected to shake them all. It was a trying moment to the bashful child; but, remembering that they were her kinsmen come to welcome her, she tried her best to return the greeting cordially.

This impressive ceremony being over, the Clan broke ranks, and both rooms instantly appeared to be pervaded with boys. Rose hastily retired to the shelter of a big chair and sat there watching the invaders and wondering when her aunt would come and rescue her.

As if bound to do their duty manfully, yet rather oppressed by it, each lad paused beside her chair in his wanderings, made a brief remark, received a still briefer answer, and then sheered off with a relieved expression.

Archie came first, and, leaning over the chair-back, observed in a paternal tone,

"I'm glad you've come, cousin, and I hope you'll find the Aunt-hill pretty jolly."

"I think I shall."

Mac shook his hair out of his eyes, stumbled over a stool, and asked abruptly,

"Did you bring any books with you?"

"Four boxes full. They are in the library."

Mac vanished from the room, and Steve, striking an attitude which displayed his costume effectively, said with an affable smile,

"We were sorry not to see you last Wednesday. I hope your cold is better."

"Yes, thank you." And a smile began to dimple about Rose's mouth, as she remembered her retreat under the bed-cover.

Feeling that he had been received with distinguished marks of attention, Steve strolled away with his topknot higher than ever, and Prince Charlie pranced across the room, saying in a free and easy tone,

"Mamma sent her love and hopes you will be well enough to come over for a day next week. It must be desperately dull here for a little thing like you."

"I'm thirteen and a half, though I do look small," cried Rose, forgetting her shyness in indignation at this insult to her newly acquired teens.

"Beg pardon, ma'am; never should have guessed it." And Charlie went off with a laugh, glad to have struck a spark out of his meek cousin.

Geordie and Will came together, two sturdy eleven and twelve year olders, and, fixing their round blue eyes on Rose, fired off a question apiece, as if it was a shooting match and she the target.

"Did you bring your monkey?"

"No; he is dead."

"Are you going to have a boat?"

"I hope not."

Here the two, with a right-about-face movement, abruptly marched away, and little Jamie demanded with childish frankness,

"Did you bring me anything nice?"

"Yes, lots of candy," answered Rose, whereupon Jamie ascended into her lap with a sounding kiss and the announcement that he liked her very much.

This proceeding rather startled Rose, for the other lads looked and laughed, and in her confusion she said hastily to the young usurper,

"Did you see the circus go by?"

“When? Where?” cried all the boys in great excitement at once.

“Just before you came. At least I thought it was a circus, for I saw a red and black sort of cart and ever so many little ponies, and — ”

She got no farther, for a general shout made her pause suddenly, as Archie explained the joke by saying in the middle of his laugh,

“It was our new dog-cart and the Shetland ponies. You’ll never hear the last of your circus, cousin.”

“But there were so many, and they went so fast, and the cart was so very red,” began Rose, trying to explain her mistake.

“Come and see them all!” cried the Prince. And before she knew what was happening, she was borne away to the barn and tumultuously introduced to three shaggy ponies and the gay new dog-cart.

She had never visited these regions before, and had her doubts as to the propriety of her being there now, but when she suggested that “Auntie might not like it,” there was a general cry of,

“She told us to amuse you, and we can do it ever so much better out here than poking round in the house.”

“I’m afraid I shall get cold without my sacque,” began Rose, who wanted to stay, but felt rather out of her element.

“No, you won’t! We’ll fix you,” cried the lads, as one clapped his cap on her head, another tied a rough jacket round her neck by the sleeves, a third neatly smothered her in a carriage blanket, and a fourth threw open the door of the old barouche that stood there, saying with a flourish,

“Step in, ma’am, and make yourself comfortable while we show you some fun.”

So Rose sat in state enjoying herself very much, for the lads proceeded to dance a Highland Fling with a spirit and skill that made her clap her hands and laugh as she had not done for weeks.

“How is that, my lassie?” asked the Prince, coming up all flushed and breathless when the ballet was over.

“It was splendid! I never went to the theatre but once, and the dancing was not half so pretty as this. What clever boys you must be!” said Rose, smiling upon her kinsmen like a little queen upon her subjects.

“Ah, we’re a fine lot, and that is only the beginning of our larks. We haven’t got the pipes here or we’d,

‘Sing for you, play for you
A dulcy melody,’“

answered Charlie, looking much elated at her praise.

“I did not know we were Scotch; papa never said anything about it, or seemed to care about Scotland, except to have me sing the old ballads," said Rose, beginning to feel as if she had left America behind her somewhere.

"Neither did we till lately. We've been reading Scott's novels, and all of a sudden we remembered that our grandfather was a Scotchman. So we hunted up the old stories, got a bagpipe, put on our plaids, and went in, heart and soul, for the glory of the Clan. We've been at it some time now, and it's great fun. Our people like it, and I think we are a pretty canny set."

Archie said this from the other coach-step, where he had perched, while the rest climbed up before and behind to join in the chat as they rested.

"I'm Fitzjames and he's Roderick Dhu, and we'll give you the broadsword combat some day. It's a great thing, you'd better believe," added the Prince.

"Yes, and you should hear Steve play the pipes. He makes 'em skirl like a good one," cried Will from the box, eager to air the accomplishments of his race.

"Mac's the fellow to hunt up the old stories and tell us how to dress right, and pick out rousing bits for us to speak and sing," put in Geordie, saying a good word for the absent Worm.

"And what do you and Will do?" asked Rose of Jamie, who sat beside her as if bound to keep her in sight till the promised gift had been handed over.

"Oh, I'm the little foot-page, and do errands, and Will and Geordie are the troops when we march, and the stags when we hunt, and the traitors when we want to cut any heads off."

"They are very obliging, I'm sure," said Rose, whereat the "utility men" beamed with modest pride and resolved to enact Wallace and Montrose as soon as possible for their cousin's special benefit.

"Let's have a game of tag," cried the Prince, swinging himself up to a beam with a sounding slap on Stevie's shoulder.

Regardless of his gloves, Dandy tore after him, and the rest swarmed in every direction as if bent on breaking their necks and dislocating their joints as rapidly as possible.

It was a new and astonishing spectacle to Rose, fresh from a prim boarding-school, and she watched the active lads with breathless interest, thinking their antics far superior to those of Mops, the dear departed monkey.

Will had just covered himself with glory by pitching off a high loft head first and coming up all right, when Phebe appeared with a cloak, hood, and rubbers, also a message from Aunt Plenty that "Miss Rose was to come in directly."

"All right; we'll bring her!" answered Archie, issuing some mysterious order, which was so promptly obeyed that, before Rose could get out of the carriage, the boys had caught hold of the pole and rattled her out of the barn, round the oval and up to the front door with a cheer that brought two caps to an upper window, and caused Debby to cry aloud from the back porch,

"Them harum-scarum boys will certainly be the death of that delicate little creter!"

But the "delicate little creter" seemed all the better for her trip, and ran up the steps looking rosy, gay, and dishevelled, to be received with lamentation by Aunt Plenty, who begged her to go and lie down at once.

"Oh, please don't! We have come to tea with our cousin, and we'll be as good as gold if you'll let us stay, auntie," clamoured the boys, who not only approved of "our cousin" but had no mind to lose their tea, for Aunt Plenty's name but feebly expressed her bountiful nature.

"Well, dears, you can; only be quiet, and let Rose go and take her iron and be made tidy, and then we will see what we can find for supper," said the old lady as she trotted away, followed by a volley of directions for the approaching feast.

"Marmalade for me, auntie."

"Plenty of plum-cake, please."

"Tell Debby to trot out the baked pears."

"I'm your man for lemon-pie, ma'am."

"Do have fritters; Rose will like 'em."

"She'd rather have tarts, I know."

When Rose came down, fifteen minutes later, with every curl smoothed and her most beruffled apron on, she found the boys loafing about the long hall, and paused on the half-way landing to take an observation, for till now she had not really examined her new-found cousins.

There was a strong family resemblance among them, though some of the yellow heads were darker than others, some of the cheeks brown instead of rosy, and the ages varied all the way from sixteen-year-old Archie to Jamie, who was ten years younger. None of them were especially comely but the Prince, yet all were hearty, happy-looking lads, and Rose decided that boys were not as dreadful as she had expected to find them.

They were all so characteristically employed that she could not help smiling as she looked. Archie and Charlie, evidently great cronies, were pacing up and down, shoulder to shoulder, whistling "Bonnie Dundee"; Mac was reading in a corner, with his book close to his near-sighted eyes; Dandy was arranging his hair before the oval glass in the hat-stand; Geordie and Will investigating the internal economy of the moon-faced clock; and Jamie lay kicking up his heels on the mat at the foot of the stairs, bent on demanding his sweeties the instant Rose appeared.

She guessed his intention, and forestalled his demand by dropping a handful of sugar-plums down upon him.

At his cry of rapture the other lads looked up and smiled involuntarily, for the little kinswoman standing there above was a winsome sight with her shy, soft eyes, bright hair, and laughing face. The black frock reminded them of her loss, and filled the boyish hearts with a kindly desire to be good to “our cousin,” who had no longer any home but this.

“There she is, as fine as you please,” cried Steve, kissing his hand to her.

“Come on, Missy; tea is ready,” added the Prince encouragingly.

“I shall take her in.” And Archie offered his arm with great dignity, an honour that made Rose turn as red as a cherry and long to run upstairs again.

It was a merry supper, and the two elder boys added much to the fun by tormenting the rest with dark hints of some interesting event which was about to occur. Something uncommonly fine, they declared it was, but enveloped in the deepest mystery for the present.

“Did I ever see it?” asked Jamie.

“Not to remember it; but Mac and Steve have, and liked it immensely,” answered Archie, thereby causing the two mentioned to neglect Debby’s delectable fritters for several minutes, while they cudgelled their brains.

“Who will have it first?” asked Will, with his mouth full of marmalade.

“Aunt Plenty, I guess.”

“When will she have it?” demanded Geordie, bouncing in his seat with impatience.

“Sometime on Monday.”

“Heart alive! what is the boy talking about?” cried the old lady from behind the tall urn, which left little to be seen but the topmost bow of her cap.

“Doesn’t auntie know?” asked a chorus of voices.

“No; and that’s the best of the joke, for she is desperately fond of it.”

“What colour is it?” asked Rose, joining in the fun.

“Blue and brown.”

“Is it good to eat?” asked Jamie.

“Some people think so, but I shouldn’t like to try it,” answered Charlie, laughing so he split his tea.

“Who does it belong to?” put in Steve.

Archie and the Prince stared at one another rather blankly for a minute, then Archie answered with a twinkle of the eye that made Charlie explode again,

“To Grandfather Campbell.”

This was a poser, and they gave up the puzzle, though Jamie confided to Rose that he did not think he could live till Monday without knowing what this remarkable thing was.

Soon after tea the Clan departed, singing “All the blue bonnets are over the border,” at the tops of their voices.

“Well, dear, how do you like your cousins?” asked Aunt Plenty, as the last pony frisked round the corner and the din died away.

“Pretty well, ma’am; but I like Phebe better.” An answer which caused Aunt Plenty to hold up her hands in despair and trot away to tell sister Peace that she never should understand that child, and it was a mercy Alec was coming soon to take the responsibility off their hands.

Fatigued by the unusual exertions of the afternoon, Rose curled herself up in the sofa corner to rest and think about the great mystery, little guessing that she was to know it first of all.

Right in the middle of her meditations she fell asleep and dreamed she was at home again in her own little bed. She seemed to wake and see her father bending over her; to hear him say, “My little Rose”; to answer, “Yes, papa”; and then to feel him take her in his arms and kiss her tenderly. So sweet, so real was the dream, that she started up with a cry of joy to find herself in the arms of a brown, bearded man, who held her close, and whispered in a voice so like her father’s that she clung to him involuntarily,

“This is my little girl, and I am Uncle Alec.”

Chapter 3 — Uncles

When Rose woke next morning, she was not sure whether she had dreamed what occurred the night before, or it had actually happened. So she hopped up and dressed, although it was an hour earlier than she usually rose, for she could not sleep any more, being possessed with a strong desire to slip down and see if the big portmanteau and packing cases were really in the hall. She seemed to remember tumbling over them when she went to bed, for the aunts had sent her off very punctually, because they wanted their pet nephew all to themselves.

The sun was shining, and Rose opened her window to let in the soft May air fresh from the sea. As she leaned over her little balcony, watching an early bird get the worm, and wondering how she should like Uncle Alec, she saw a man leap the garden wall and come whistling up the path. At first she thought it was some trespasser, but a second look showed her that it was her uncle returning from an early dip into the sea. She had hardly dared to look at him the night before, because whenever she tried to do so she always found a pair of keen blue eyes looking at her. Now she could take a good stare at him as he lingered along, looking about him as if glad to see the old place again.

A brown, breezy man, in a blue jacket, with no hat on the curly head, which he shook now and then like a water dog; broad-shouldered, alert in his motions, and with a general air of strength and stability about him which pleased Rose, though she could not explain the feeling of comfort it gave her. She had just said to herself, with a sense of relief, “I guess I shall like him, though he looks as if he made people mind,” when he lifted his eyes to examine the budding horse-chestnut overhead, and saw the eager face peering down at him. He waved his hand to her, nodded, and called out in a bluff, cheery voice,

“You are on deck early, little niece.”

“I got up to see if you had really come, uncle.”

“Did you? Well, come down here and make sure of it.”

“I’m not allowed to go out before breakfast, sir.”

“Oh, indeed!” with a shrug. “Then I’ll come aboard and salute,” he added; and, to Rose’s great amazement, Uncle Alec went up one of the pillars of the back piazza hand over hand, stepped across the roof, and swung himself into her balcony, saying, as he landed on the wide balustrade: “Have you any doubts about me now, ma’am?”

Rose was so taken aback, she could only answer with a smile as she went to meet him.

“How does my girl do this morning?” he asked, taking the little cold hand she gave him in both his big warm ones.

“Pretty well, thank you, sir.”

“Ah, but it should be very well. Why isn’t it?”

“I always wake up with a headache, and feel tired.”

“Don’t you sleep well?”

“I lie awake a long time, and then I dream, and my sleep does not seem to rest me much.”

“What do you do all day?”

“Oh, I read, and sew a little, and take naps, and sit with auntie.”

“No running about out of doors, or house-work, or riding, hey?”

“Aunt Plenty says I’m not strong enough for much exercise. I drive out with her sometimes, but I don’t care for it.”

“I’m not surprised at that,” said Uncle Alec, half to himself, adding, in his quick way: “Who have you had to play with?”

“No one but Ariadne Blish, and she was such a goose I couldn’t bear her. The boys came yesterday, and seemed rather nice; but, of course, I couldn’t play with them.”

“Why not?”

“I’m too old to play with boys.”

“Not a bit of it; that’s just what you need, for you’ve been molly-coddled too much. They are good lads, and you’ll be mixed up with them more or less for years to come, so you may as well be friends and playmates at once. I will look you up some girls also, if I can find a sensible one who is not spoilt by her nonsensical education.”

“Phebe is sensible, I’m sure, and I like her, though I only saw her yesterday,” cried Rose, waking up suddenly.

“And who is Phebe, if you please?”

Rose eagerly told all she knew, and Uncle Alec listened, with an odd smile lurking about his mouth, though his eyes were quite sober as he watched the face before him.

“I’m glad to see that you are not aristocratic in your tastes, but I don’t quite make out why you like this young lady from the poor-house.”

“You may laugh at me, but I do. I can’t tell why, only she seems so happy and busy, and sings so beautifully, and is strong enough to scrub and sweep, and hasn’t any troubles to plague her,” said Rose, making a funny jumble of reasons in her efforts to explain.

“How do you know that?”

"Oh, I was telling her about mine, and asked if she had any, and she said, 'No, only I'd like to go to school, and I mean to some day."

"So she doesn't call desertion, poverty, and hard work, troubles? She's a brave little girl, and I shall be proud to know her." And Uncle Alec gave an approving nod, that made Rose wish she had been the one to earn it.

"But what are these troubles of yours, child?" he asked, after a minute of silence.

"Please don't ask me, uncle."

"Can't you tell them to me as well as to Phebe?"

Something in his tone made Rose feel that it would be better to speak out and be done with it, so she answered, with sudden colour and averted eyes,

"The greatest one was losing dear papa."

As she said that, Uncle Alec's arm came gently round her, and he drew her to him, saying, in the voice so like papa's,

"That is a trouble which I cannot cure, my child; but I shall try to make you feel it less. What else, dear?"

"I am so tired and poorly all the time, I can't do anything I want to, and it makes me cross," sighed Rose, rubbing the aching head like a fretful child.

"That we can cure and we will," said her uncle, with a decided nod that made the curls bob on his head, to that Rose saw the gray ones underneath the brown.

"Aunt Myra says I have no constitution, and never shall be strong," observed Rose, in a pensive tone, as if it was rather a nice thing to be an invalid.

"Aunt Myra is a ahem! an excellent woman, but it is her hobby to believe that everyone is tottering on the brink of the grave; and, upon my life, I believe she is offended if people don't fall into it! We will show her how to make constitutions and turn pale-faced little ghosts into rosy, hearty girls. That's my business, you know," he added, more quietly, for his sudden outburst had rather startled Rose.

"I had forgotten you were a doctor. I'm glad of it, for I do want to be well, only I hope you won't give me much medicine, for I've taken quarts already, and it does me no good."

As she spoke, Rose pointed to a little table just inside the window, on which appeared a regiment of bottles.

"Ah, ha! Now we'll see what mischief these blessed women have been at." And, making a long arm, Dr. Alec set the bottles on the wide railing before him, examined each carefully, smiled over some, frowned over others, and said, as he put down the last: "Now I'll show you the best way to take these messes." And, as quick as a flash, he sent one after another smashing down into the posy-beds below.

"But Aunt Plenty won't like it; and Aunt Myra will be angry, for she sent most of them!" cried Rose, half frightened and half pleased at such energetic measures.

"You are my patient now, and I'll take the responsibility. My way of giving physic is evidently the best, for you look better already," he said, laughing so infectiously that Rose followed suit, saying saucily,

"If I don't like your medicines any better than those, I shall throw them into the garden, and then what will you do?"

"When I prescribe such rubbish, I'll give you leave to pitch it overboard as soon as you like. Now what is the next trouble?"

"I hoped you would forget to ask."

"But how can I help you if I don't know them? Come, let us have No. 3."

"It is very wrong, I suppose, but I do sometimes wish I had not quite so many aunts. They are all very good to me, and I want to please them; but they are so different, I feel sort of pulled to pieces among them," said Rose, trying to express the emotions of a stray chicken with six hens all clucking over it at once.

Uncle Alec threw back his head and laughed like a boy, for he could entirely understand how the good ladies had each put in her oar and tried to paddle her own way, to the great disturbance of the waters and the entire bewilderment of poor Rose.

"I intend to try a course of uncles now, and see how that suits your constitution. I'm going to have you all to myself, and no one is to give a word of advice unless I ask it. There is no other way to keep order aboard, and I am captain of this little craft, for a time at least. What comes next?"

But Rose stuck there, and grew so red, her uncle guessed what that trouble was.

"I don't think I can tell this one. It wouldn't be polite, and I feel pretty sure that it isn't going to be a trouble any more."

As she blushed and stammered over these words, Dr. Alec turned his eyes away to the distant sea, and said so seriously, so tenderly, that she felt every word and long remembered them,

"My child, I don't expect you to love and trust me all at once, but I do want you to believe that I shall give my whole heart to this new duty; and if I make mistakes, as I probably shall, no one will grieve over them more bitterly than I. It is my fault that I am a stranger to you, when I want to be your best friend. That is one of my mistakes, and I never repented it more deeply than I do now. Your father and I had a trouble once, and I thought I could never forgive him; so I kept away for years. Thank God, we made it all up the last time I saw him, and he told me then, that if he was forced to leave her he should bequeath his little girl to me as a token of his love. I can't fill his place, but I shall try to be a father to her; and if she learns to love me half as well as she did the good one she has lost, I shall be a proud and happy man. Will she believe this and try?”

Something in Uncle Alec’s face touched Rose to the heart, and when he held out his hand with that anxious troubled look in his eyes, she was moved to put up her innocent lips and seal the contract with a confiding kiss. The strong arm held her close a minute, and she felt the broad chest heave once as if with a great sigh of relief; but not a word was spoken till a tap at the door made both start.

Rose popped her head through the window to say “come in,” while Dr. Alec hastily rubbed the sleeve of his jacket across his eyes and began to whistle again.

Phebe appeared with a cup of coffee.

“Debby told me to bring this and help you get up,” she said, opening her black eyes wide, as if she wondered how on earth “the sailor man” got there.

“I’m all dressed, so I don’t need any help. I hope that is good and strong,” added Rose, eyeing the steaming cup with an eager look.

But she did not get it, for a brown hand took possession of it as her uncle said quickly,

“Hold hard, my lass, and let me overhaul that dose before you take it. Do you drink all this strong coffee every morning, Rose?”

“Yes, sir, and I like it. Auntie says it ‘tones’ me up, and I always feel better after it.”

“This accounts for the sleepless nights, the flutter your heart gets into at the least start, and this is why that cheek of yours is pale yellow instead of rosy red. No more coffee for you, my dear, and by and by you’ll see that I am right. Any new milk downstairs, Phebe?”

“Yes, sir, plenty right in from the barn.”

“That’s the drink for my patient. Go bring me a pitcherful, and another cup; I want a draught myself. This won’t hurt the honeysuckles, for they have no nerves to speak of.” And, to Rose’s great discomfort, the coffee went after the medicine.

Dr. Alec saw the injured look she put on, but took no notice, and presently banished it by saying pleasantly,

“I’ve got a capital little cup among my traps, and I’ll give it to you to drink your milk in, as it is made of wood that is supposed to improve whatever is put into it something like a quassia cup. That reminds me; one of the boxes Phebe wanted to lug upstairs last night is for you. Knowing that I was coming home to find a ready-made daughter, I picked up all sorts of odd and pretty trifles along the way, hoping she would be able to find something she liked among them all. Early to-morrow we’ll have a grand rummage. Here’s our milk! I propose the health of Miss Rose Campbell and drink it with all my heart.”

It was impossible for Rose to pout with the prospect of a delightful boxful of gifts dancing before her eyes; so, in spite of herself, she smiled as she drank her own health, and found that fresh milk was not a hard dose to take.

"Now I must be off, before I am caught again with my wig in a toss," said Dr. Alec, preparing to descend the way he came.

"Do you always go in and out like a cat, uncle?" asked Rose, much amused at his odd ways.

"I used to sneak out of my window when I was a boy, so I need not disturb the aunts, and now I rather like it, for it's the shortest road, and it keeps me limber when I have no rigging to climb. Good-bye till breakfast." And away he went down the water-spout, over the roof, and vanished among the budding honeysuckles below.

"Ain't he a funny guardeen?" exclaimed Phebe, as she went off with the cups.

"He is a very kind one, I think," answered Rose, following, to prowl round the big boxes and try to guess which was hers.

When her uncle appeared at sound of the bell, he found her surveying with an anxious face a new dish that smoked upon the table.

"Got a fresh trouble, Rosy?" he asked, stroking her smooth head.

"Uncle, are you going to make me eat oatmeal?" asked Rose, in a tragic tone.

"Don't you like it?"

"I de-test it!" answered Rose, with all the emphasis which a turned-up nose, a shudder, and a groan could give to the three words.

"You are not a true Scotchwoman, if you don't like the 'parritch.' It's a pity, for I made it myself, and thought we'd have such a good time with all that cream to float it in. Well, never mind." And he sat down with a disappointed air.

Rose had made up her mind to be obstinate about it, because she did heartily "detest" the dish; but as Uncle Alec did not attempt to make her obey, she suddenly changed her mind and thought she would.

"I'll try to eat it to please you, uncle; but people are always saying how wholesome it is, and that makes me hate it," she said, half-ashamed at her silly excuse.

"I do want you to like it, because I wish my girl to be as well and strong as Jessie's boys, who are brought up on this in the good old fashion. No hot bread and fried stuff for them, and they are the biggest and bonniest lads of the lot. Bless you, auntie, and good morning!"

Dr. Alec turned to greet the old lady, and, with a firm resolve to eat or die in the attempt, Rose sat down.

In five minutes she forgot what she was eating, so interested was she in the chat that went on. It amused her very much to hear Aunt Plenty call her forty-year-old nephew “my dear boy”; and Uncle Alec was so full of lively gossip about all creation in general, and the Aunt-hill in particular, that the detested porridge vanished without a murmur.

“You will go to church with us, I hope, Alec, if you are not too tired,” said the old lady, when breakfast was over.

“I came all the way from Calcutta for that express purpose, ma’am. Only I must send the sisters word of my arrival, for they don’t expect me till to-morrow, you know, and there will be a row in church if those boys see me without warning.”

“I’ll send Ben up the hill, and you can step over to Myra’s yourself; it will please her, and you will have plenty of time.”

Dr. Alec was off at once, and they saw no more of him till the old barouche was at the door, and Aunt Plenty just rustling downstairs in her Sunday best, with Rose like a little black shadow behind her.

Away they drove in state, and all the way Uncle Alec’s hat was more off his head than on, for everyone they met smiled and bowed, and gave him as blithe a greeting as the day permitted.

It was evident that the warning had been a wise one, for, in spite of time and place, the lads were in such a ferment that their elders sat in momentary dread of an unseemly outbreak somewhere. It was simply impossible to keep those fourteen eyes off Uncle Alec, and the dreadful things that were done during sermon-time will hardly be believed.

Rose dared not look up after a while, for these bad boys vented their emotions upon her till she was ready to laugh and cry with mingled amusement and vexation. Charlie winked rapturously at her behind his mother’s fan; Mac openly pointed to the tall figure beside her; Jamie stared fixedly over the back of his pew, till Rose thought his round eyes would drop out of his head; George fell over a stool and dropped three books in his excitement; Will drew sailors and Chinamen on his clean cuffs, and displayed them, to Rose’s great tribulation; Steve nearly upset the whole party by burning his nose with salts, as he pretended to be overcome by his joy; even dignified Archie disgraced himself by writing in his hymn book, “Isn’t he blue and brown?” and passing it politely to Rose.

Her only salvation was trying to fix her attention upon Uncle Mac a portly, placid gentleman, who seemed entirely unconscious of the iniquities of the Clan, and dozed peacefully in his pew corner. This was the only uncle Rose had met for years, for Uncle Jem and Uncle Steve, the husbands of Aunt Jessie and Aunt Clara, were at sea, and Aunt Myra was a widow. Uncle Mac was a merchant, very rich and busy, and as quiet as a mouse at home, for he was in such a minority among the women folk he dared not open his lips, and let his wife rule undisturbed.

Rose liked the big, kindly, silent man who came to her when papa died, was always sending her splendid boxes of goodies at school, and often invited her into his great warehouse, full of teas and spices, wines and all sorts of foreign fruits, there to eat and carry away whatever she liked. She had secretly regretted that he was not to be her guardian; but since she had seen Uncle Alec she felt better about it, for she did not particularly admire Aunt Jane.

When church was over, Dr. Alec got into the porch as quickly as possible, and there the young bears had a hug all round, while the sisters shook hands and welcomed him with bright faces and glad hearts. Rose was nearly crushed flat behind a door in that dangerous passage from pew to porch; but Uncle Mac rescued her, and put her into the carriage for safe keeping.

“Now, girls, I want you to come and dine with Alec; Mac also, of course. But I cannot ask the boys, for we did not expect this dear fellow till tomorrow, you know, so I made no preparations. Send the lads home, and let them wait till Monday, for really I was shocked at their behaviour in church,” said Aunt Plenty, as she followed Rose.

In any other place the defrauded boys would have set up a howl; as it was, they growled and protested till Dr. Alec settled the matter by saying,

“Never mind, old chaps, I’ll make it up to you to-morrow, if you sheer off quietly; if you don’t, not a blessed thing shall you have out of my big boxes.”

Chapter 4 — Aunts

All dinner-time Rose felt that she was going to be talked about, and afterward she was sure of it, for Aunt Plenty whispered to her as they went into the parlour, “Run up and sit awhile with Sister Peace, my dear. She likes to have you read while she rests, and we are going to be busy.”

Rose obeyed, and the quiet rooms above were so like a church that she soon composed her ruffled feelings, and was unconsciously a little minister of happiness to the sweet old lady, who for years had sat there patiently waiting to be set free from pain.

Rose knew the sad romance of her life, and it gave a certain tender charm to this great-aunt of hers, whom she already loved. When Peace was twenty, she was about to be married; all was done, the wedding dress lay ready, the flowers were waiting to be put on, the happy hour at hand, when word came that the lover was dead. They thought that gentle Peace would die, too; but she bore it bravely, put away her bridal gear, took up her life afresh, and lived on a beautiful, meek woman, with hair as white as snow and cheeks that never bloomed again. She wore no black, but soft, pale colours, as if always ready for the marriage that had never come.

For thirty years she had lived on, fading slowly, but cheerful, busy, and full of interest in all that went on in the family; especially the joys and sorrows of the young girls growing up about her, and to them she was adviser, confidante, and friend in all their tender trials and delights. A truly beautiful old maiden, with her silvery hair, tranquil face, and an atmosphere of repose about her that soothed whoever came to her!

Aunt Plenty was utterly dissimilar, being a stout, brisk old lady, with a sharp eye, a lively tongue, and a face like a winter-apple. Always trotting, chatting, and bustling, she was a regular Martha, cumbered with the cares of this world and quite happy in them.

Rose was right; and while she softly read psalms to Aunt Peace, the other ladies were talking about her little self in the frankest manner.

“Well, Alec, how do you like your ward?” began Aunt Jane, as they all settled down, and Uncle Mac deposited himself in a corner to finish his doze.

“I should like her better if I could have begun at the beginning, and so got a fair start. Poor George led such a solitary life that the child has suffered in many ways, and since he died she has been going on worse than ever, judging from the state I find her in."

"My dear boy, we did what we thought best while waiting for you to wind up your affairs and get home. I always told George he was wrong to bring her up as he did; but he never took my advice, and now here we are with this poor dear child upon our hands. I, for one, freely confess that I don't know what to do with her any more than if she was one of those strange, outlandish birds you used to bring home from foreign parts." And Aunt Plenty gave a perplexed shake of the head which caused great commotion among the stiff loops of purple ribbon that bristled all over the cap like crocus buds.

"If my advice had been taken, she would have remained at the excellent school where I placed her. But our aunt thought best to remove her because she complained, and she has been dawdling about ever since she came. A most ruinous state of things for a morbid, spoilt girl like Rose," said Mrs. Jane, severely.

She had never forgiven the old ladies for yielding to Rose's pathetic petition that she might wait her guardian's arrival before beginning another term at the school, which was a regular Blimber hot-bed, and turned out many a feminine Toots.

"I never thought it the proper school for a child in good circumstances an heiress, in fact, as Rose is. It is all very well for girls who are to get their own living by teaching, and that sort of thing; but all she needs is a year or two at a fashionable finishing school, so that at eighteen she can come out with eclat," put in Aunt Clara, who had been a beauty and a belle, and was still a handsome woman.

"Dear, dear! how short-sighted you all are to be discussing education and plans for the future, when this unhappy child is so plainly marked for the tomb," sighed Aunt Myra, with a lugubrious sniff and a solemn wag of the funereal bonnet, which she refused to remove, being afflicted with a chronic catarrh.

"Now, it is my opinion that the dear thing only wants freedom, rest, and care. There is look in her eyes that goes to my heart, for it shows that she feels the need of what none of us can give her a mother," said Aunt Jessie, with tears in her own bright eyes at the thought of her boys being left, as Rose was, to the care of others.

Uncle Alec, who had listened silently as each spoke, turned quickly towards the last sister, and said, with a decided nod of approval,

"You've got it, Jessie; and, with you to help me, I hope to make the child feel that she is not quite fatherless and motherless."

"I'll do my best, Alec; and I think you will need me, for, wise as you are, you cannot understand a tender, timid little creature like Rose as a woman can," said

Mrs. Jessie, smiling back at him with a heart full of motherly goodwill.

"I cannot help feeling that I, who have had a daughter of my own, can best bring up a girl; and I am very much surprised that George did not entrust her to me," observed Aunt Myra, with an air of melancholy importance, for she was the only one who had given a daughter to the family, and she felt that she had distinguished herself, though ill-natured people said that she had dosed her darling to death.

"I never blamed him in the least, when I remember the perilous experiments you tried with poor Carrie," began Mrs. Jane, in her hard voice.

"Jane Campbell, I will not hear a word! My sainted Caroline is a sacred object," cried Aunt Myra, rising as if to leave the room.

Dr. Alec detained her, feeling that he must define his position at once, and maintain it manfully if he hoped to have any success in his new undertaking.

"Now, my dear souls, don't let us quarrel and make Rose a bone of contention though, upon my word, she is almost a bone, poor little lass! You have had her among you for a year, and done what you liked. I cannot say that your success is great, but that is owing to too many fingers in the pie. Now, I intend to try my way for a year, and if at the end of it she is not in better trim than now, I'll give up the case, and hand her over to someone else. That's fair, I think."

"She will not be here a year hence, poor darling, so no one need dread future responsibility," said Aunt Myra, folding her black gloves as if all ready for the funeral.

"By Jupiter! Myra, you are enough to damp the ardour of a saint!" cried Dr. Alec, with a sudden spark in his eyes. "Your croaking will worry that child out of her wits, for she is an imaginative puss, and will fret and fancy untold horrors. You have put it into her head that she has no constitution, and she rather likes the idea. If she had not had a pretty good one, she would have been 'marked for the tomb' by this time, at the rate you have been going on with her. I will not have any interference please understand that; so just wash your hands of her, and let me manage till I want help, then I'll ask for it."

"Hear, hear!" came from the corner where Uncle Mac was apparently wrapt in slumber.

"You were appointed guardian, so we can do nothing. But I predict that the girl will be spoilt, utterly spoilt," answered Mrs. Jane, grimly.

"Thank you, sister. I have an idea that if a woman can bring up two boys as perfectly as you do yours, a man, if he devotes his whole mind to it, may at least attempt as much with one girl," replied Dr. Alec, with a humorous look that tickled the others immensely, for it was a well-known fact in the family that Jane's boys were more indulged than all the other lads put together.

“I am quite easy, for I really do think that Alec will improve the child’s health; and by the time his year is out, it will be quite soon enough for her to go to Madame Roccabella’s and be finished off,” said Aunt Clara, settling her rings, and thinking, with languid satisfaction, of the time when she could bring out a pretty and accomplished niece.

“I suppose you will stay here in the old place, unless you think of marrying, and it’s high time you did,” put in Mrs. Jane, much nettled at her brother’s last hit.

“No, thank you. Come and have a cigar, Mac,” said Dr. Alec, abruptly.

“Don’t marry; women enough in the family already,” muttered Uncle Mac; and then the gentlemen hastily fled.

“Aunt Peace would like to see you all, she says,” was the message Rose brought before the ladies could begin again.

“Hectic, hectic! dear me, dear me!” murmured Aunt Myra, as the shadow of her gloomy bonnet fell upon Rose, and the stiff tips of a black glove touched the cheek where the colour deepened under so many eyes.

“I am glad these pretty curls are natural; they will be invaluable by and by,” said Aunt Clara, taking an observation with her head on one side.

“Now that your uncle has come, I no longer expect you to review the studies of the past year. I trust your time will not be entirely wasted in frivolous sports, however,” added Aunt Jane, sailing out of the room with the air of a martyr.

Aunt Jessie said not a word, but kissed her little niece, with a look of tender sympathy that made Rose cling to her a minute, and follow her with grateful eyes as the door closed behind her.

After everybody had gone home, Dr. Alec paced up and down the lower hall in the twilight for an hour, thinking so intently that sometimes he frowned, sometimes he smiled, and more than once he stood still in a brown study. All of a sudden he said, half aloud, as if he had made up his mind,

“I might as well begin at once, and give the child something new to think about, for Myra’s dismals and Jane’s lectures have made her as blue as a little indigo bag.”

Diving into one of the trunks that stood in a corner, he brought up, after a brisk rummage, a silken cushion, prettily embroidered, and a quaint cup of dark carved wood.

“This will do for a start,” he said, as he plumped up the cushion and dusted the cup. “It won’t do to begin too energetically, or Rose will be frightened. I must beguile her gently and pleasantly along till I’ve won her confidence, and then she will be ready for anything.”

Just then Phebe came out of the dining-room with a plate of brown bread, for

Rose had been allowed no hot biscuit for tea.

“I’ll relieve you of some of that,” said Dr. Alec, and, helping himself to a generous slice, he retired to the study, leaving Phebe to wonder at his appetite.

She would have wondered still more if she had seen him making that brown bread into neat little pills, which he packed into an attractive ivory box, out of which he emptied his own bits of lovage.

“There! if they insist on medicine, I’ll order these, and no harm will be done. I will have my own way, but I’ll keep the peace, if possible, and confess the joke when my experiment has succeeded,” he said to himself, looking very much like a mischievous boy, as he went on with his innocent prescriptions.

Rose was playing softly on the small organ that stood in the upper hall, so that Aunt Peace could enjoy it; and all the while he talked with the old ladies, Uncle Alec was listening to the fitful music of the child, and thinking of another Rose who used to play for him.

As the clock struck eight, he called out,

“Time for my girl to be abed, else she won’t be up early, and I’m full of jolly plans for to-morrow. Come and see what I’ve found for you to begin upon.”

Rose ran in and listened with bright attentive face, while Dr. Alec said impressively,

“In my wanderings over the face of the earth, I have picked up some excellent remedies, and, as they are rather agreeable ones, I think you and I will try them. This is a herb-pillow, given to me by a wise old woman when I was ill in India. It is filled with saffron, poppies, and other soothing plants; so lay your little head on it to-night, sleep sweetly without a dream, and wake to-morrow without a pain.”

“Shall I really? How nice it smells.” And Rose willingly received the pretty pillow, and stood enjoying its faint, sweet odour, as she listened to the doctor’s next remedy.

“This is the cup I told you of. Its virtue depends, they say, on the drinker filling it himself; so you must learn to milk. I’ll teach you.”

“I’m afraid I never can,” said Rose; but she surveyed the cup with favour, for a funny little imp danced on the handle, as if all ready to take a header into the white sea below.

“Don’t you think she ought to have something more strengthening than milk, Alec? I really shall feel anxious if she does not have a tonic of some sort,” said Aunt Plenty, eyeing the new remedies suspiciously, for she had more faith in her old-fashioned doses than all the magic cups and poppy pillows of the East.

“Well, ma’am, I’m willing to give her a pill, if you think best. It is a very simple one, and very large quantities may be taken without harm. You know hasheesh is the extract of hemp? Well, this is a preparation of corn and rye, much used in old times, and I hope it will be again."

"Dear me, how singular!" said Aunt Plenty, bringing her spectacles to bear upon the pills, with a face so full of respectful interest that it was almost too much for Dr. Alec's gravity.

"Take one in the morning, and a good-night to you, my dear," he said, dismissing his patient with a hearty kiss.

Then, as she vanished, he put both hands into his hair, exclaiming, with a comical mixture of anxiety and amusement,

"When I think what I have undertaken, I declare to you, aunt, I feel like running away and not coming back till Rose is eighteen!"

Chapter 5 — A Belt and a Box

When Rose came out of her chamber, cup in hand, next morning, the first person she saw was Uncle Alec standing on the threshold of the room opposite, which he appeared to be examining with care. When he heard her step, he turned about and began to sing,

“Where are you going, my pretty maid?”

“I’m going a-milking, sir, she said,” answered Rose, waving the cup; and then they finished the verse together in fine style.

Before either spoke, a head, in a nightcap so large and beruffled that it looked like a cabbage, popped out of a room farther down the hall, and an astonished voice exclaimed,

“What in the world are you doing about so early?”

“Clearing our pipes for the day, ma’am. Look here, auntie, can I have this room?” said Dr. Alec, making her a sailor’s bow.

“Any room you like, except sister’s.”

“Thanks. And may I go rummaging round in the garrets and glory-holes to furnish it as I like?”

“My dear boy, you may turn the house upside down if you will only stay in it.”

“That’s a handsome offer, I’m sure. I’ll stay, ma’am; here’s my little anchor, so you will get more than you want of me this time.”

“That’s impossible! Put on your jacket, Rose. Don’t tire her out with antics, Alec. Yes, sister, I’m coming!” and the cabbage vanished suddenly.

The first milking lesson was a droll one; but after several scares and many vain attempts, Rose at last managed to fill her cup, while Ben held Clover’s tail so that it could not flap, and Dr. Alec kept her from turning to stare at the new milkmaid, who objected to both these proceedings very much.

“You look chilly in spite of all this laughing. Take a smart run round the garden and get up a glow,” said the doctor, as they left the barn.

“I’m too old for running, uncle; Miss Power said it was not lady-like for girls in their teens,” answered Rose, primly.

“I take the liberty of differing from Madame Prunes and Prisms, and, as your physician, I order you to run. Off with you!” said Uncle Alec, with a look and a gesture that made Rose scurry away as fast as she could go.

Anxious to please him, she raced round the beds till she came back to the porch where he stood, and, dropping down upon the steps, she sat panting, with cheeks as rosy as the rigolette on her shoulders.

"Very well done, child; I see you have not lost the use of your limbs though you are in your teens. That belt is too tight; unfasten it, then you can take a long breath without panting so."

"It isn't tight, sir; I can breathe perfectly well," began Rose, trying to compose herself.

Her uncle's only answer was to lift her up and unhook the new belt of which she was so proud. The moment the clasp was open the belt flew apart several inches, for it was impossible to restrain the involuntary sigh of relief that flatly contradicted her words.

"Why, I didn't know it was tight! it didn't feel so a bit. Of course it would open if I puff like this, but I never do, because I hardly ever run," explained Rose, rather discomfited by this discovery.

"I see you don't half fill your lungs, and so you can wear this absurd thing without feeling it. The idea of cramping a tender little waist in a stiff band of leather and steel just when it ought to be growing," said Dr. Alec, surveying the belt with great disfavour as he put the clasp forward several holes, to Rose's secret dismay, for she was proud of her slender figure, and daily rejoiced that she wasn't as stout as Luly Miller, a former schoolmate, who vainly tried to repress her plumpness.

"It will fall off if it is so loose," she said anxiously, as she stood watching him pull her precious belt about.

"Not if you keep taking long breaths to hold it on. That is what I want you to do, and when you have filled this out we will go on enlarging it till your waist is more like that of Hebe, goddess of health, and less like that of a fashion-plate the ugliest thing imaginable."

"How it does look!" and Rose gave a glance of scorn at the loose belt hanging round her trim little waist. "It will be lost, and then I shall feel badly, for it cost ever so much, and is real steel and Russia leather. Just smell how nice."

"If it is lost I'll give you a better one. A soft silken sash is much fitter for a pretty child like you than a plated harness like this; and I've got no end of Italian scarfs and Turkish sashes among my traps. Ah! that makes you feel better, doesn't it?" and he pinched the cheek that had suddenly dimpled with a smile.

"It is very silly of me, but I can't help liking to know that" here she stopped and blushed and held down her head, ashamed to add, "you think I am pretty."

Dr. Alec's eyed twinkled, but he said very soberly,

"Rose, are you vain?"

"I'm afraid I am," answered a very meek voice from behind the veil of hair that hid the red face.

“That is a sad fault.” And he sighed as if grieved at the confession.

“I know it is, and I try not to be; but people praise me, and I can’t help liking it, for I really don’t think I am repulsive.”

The last word and the funny tone in which it was uttered were too much for Dr. Alec, and he laughed in spite of himself, to Rose’s great relief.

“I quite agree with you; and in order that you may be still less repulsive, I want you to grow as fine a girl as Phebe.”

“Phebe!” and Rose looked so amazed that her uncle nearly went off again.

“Yes, Phebe; for she has what you need health. If you dear little girls would only learn what real beauty is, and not pinch and starve and bleach yourselves out so, you’d save an immense deal of time and money and pain. A happy soul in a healthy body makes the best sort of beauty for man or woman. Do you understand that, my dear?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Rose, much taken down by this comparison with the girl from the poor-house. It nettled her sadly, and she showed that it did by saying quickly,

“I suppose you would like to have me sweep and scrub, and wear an old brown dress, and go round with my sleeves rolled up, as Phebe does?”

“I should very much, if you could work as well as she does, and show as strong a pair of arms as she can. I haven’t seen a prettier picture for some time than she made of herself this morning, up to the elbows in suds, singing like a blackbird whilst she scrubbed on the back stoop.”

“Well, I do think you are the queerest man that ever lived!” was all Rose could find to say after this display of bad taste.

“I haven’t begun to show you my oddities yet, so you must make up your mind to worse shocks than this,” he said, with such a whimsical look that she was glad the sound of a bell prevented her showing more plainly what a blow her little vanities had already received.

“You will find your box all open up in auntie’s parlor, and there you can amuse her and yourself by rummaging to your heart’s content; I’ve got to be cruising round all the morning getting my room to rights,” said Dr. Alec, as they rose from breakfast.

“Can’t I help you, uncle?” asked Rose, quite burning to be useful.

“No, thank you, I’m going to borrow Phebe for a while, if Aunt Plenty can spare her.”

“Anybody anything, Alec. You will want me, I know, so I’ll give orders about dinner and be all ready to lend a hand”; and the old lady bustled away full of interest and good-will.

“Uncle will find that I can do some things that Phebe can’t, so now!” thought

Rose, with a toss of the head as she flew to Aunt Peace and the long-desired box.

Every little girl can easily imagine what an extra good time she had diving into a sea of treasures and fishing up one pretty thing after another, till the air was full of the mingled odours of musk and sandalwood, the room gay with bright colours, and Rose in a rapture of delight. She began to forgive Dr. Alec for the oatmeal diet when she saw a lovely ivory workbox; became resigned to the state of her belt when she found a pile of rainbow-coloured sashes; and when she came to some distractingly pretty bottles of attar of rose, she felt that they almost atoned for the great sin of thinking Phebe the finer girl of the two.

Dr. Alec meanwhile had apparently taken Aunt Plenty at her word, and was turning the house upside down. A general revolution was evidently going on in the green-room, for the dark damask curtains were seen bundling away in Phebe's arms; the air-tight stove retiring to the cellar on Ben's shoulder; and the great bedstead going up garret in a fragmentary state, escorted by three bearers. Aunt Plenty was constantly on the trot among her store-rooms, camphor-chests, and linen-closets, looking as if the new order of things both amazed and amused her.

Half the peculiar performances of Dr. Alec cannot be revealed; but as Rose glanced up from her box now and then she caught glimpses of him striding by, bearing a bamboo chair, a pair of ancient andirons, a queer Japanese screen, a rug or two, and finally a large bathing-pan upon his head.

"What a curious room it will be," she said, as she sat resting and refreshing herself with "Lumps of Delight," all the way from Cairo.

"I fancy you will like it, deary," answered Aunt Peace, looking up with a smile from some pretty trifle she was making with blue silk and white muslin.

Rose did not see the smile, for just at that moment her uncle paused at the door, and she sprang up to dance before him, saying, with a face full of childish happiness,

"Look at me! look at me! I'm splendid I don't know myself. I haven't put these things on right, I dare say, but I do like them so much!"

"You look as gay as a parrot in your fez and cabaja, and it does my heart good to see the little black shadow turned into a rainbow," said Uncle Alec, surveying the bright figure before him with great approbation.

He did not say it, but he thought she made a much prettier picture than Phebe at the wash-tub, for she had stuck a purple fez on her blonde head, tied several brilliant scarfs about her waist, and put on a truly gorgeous scarlet jacket with a golden sun embroidered on the back, a silver moon on the front, and stars of all sizes on the sleeves. A pair of Turkish slippers adorned her feet, and necklaces of amber, coral, and filigree hung about her neck, while one hand held a smelling-bottle, and the other the spicy box of oriental sweetmeats.

"I feel like a girl in the 'Arabian Nights,' and expect to find a magic carpet or a wonderful talisman somewhere. Only I don't see how I ever can thank you for all these lovely things," she said, stopping her dance, as if suddenly oppressed with gratitude.

"I'll tell you how by leaving off the black clothes, that never should have been kept so long on such a child, and wearing the gay ones I've brought. It will do your spirits good, and cheer up this sober old house. Won't it, auntie?"

"I think you are right, Alec, and it is fortunate that we have not begun on her spring clothes yet, for Myra thought she ought not to wear anything brighter than violet, and she is too pale for that."

"You just let me direct Miss Hemming how to make some of these things. You will be surprised to see how much I know about piping hems and gathering armholes and shirring biases," began Dr. Alec, patting a pile of muslin, cloth and silk with a knowing air.

Aunt Peace and Rose laughed so that he could not display his knowledge any farther, till they stopped, when he said good-naturedly,

"That will go a great way toward filling out the belt, so laugh away, Morgiana, and I'll go back to my work, or I never shall be done."

"I couldn't help it, 'shirred biases' were so very funny!" Rose said, as she turned to her box after the splendid laugh. "But really, auntie," she added soberly, "I feel as if I ought not to have so many nice things. I suppose it wouldn't do to give Phebe some of them? Uncle might not like it."

"He would not mind; but they are not suitable for Phebe. Some of the dresses you are done with would be more useful, if they can be made over to fit her," answered Aunt Peace in the prudent, moderate tone which is so trying to our feelings when we indulge in little fits of charitable enthusiasm.

"I'd rather give her new ones, for I think she is a little bit proud and might not like old things. If she was my sister it would do, because sisters don't mind, but she isn't, and that makes it bad, you see. I know how I can manage beautifully; I'll adopt her!" and Rose looked quite radiant with this new idea.

"I'm afraid you could not do it legally till you are older, but you might see if she likes the plan, and at any rate you can be very kind to her, for in one sense we are all sisters, and should help one another."

The sweet old face looked at her so kindly that Rose was fired with a desire to settle the matter at once, and rushed away to the kitchen, just as she was. Phebe was there, polishing up the antique andirons so busily that she started when a voice cried out: "Smell that, taste this, and look at me!"

Phebe sniffed attar of rose, crunched the "Lump of Delight" tucked into her mouth, and stared with all her eyes at little Morgiana prancing about the room like a brilliant paroquet.

"My stars, ain't you splendid!" was all she could say, holding up two dusty hands.

"I've got heaps of lovely things upstairs, and I'll show them all to you, and I'd go halves, only auntie thinks they wouldn't be useful, so I shall give you something else; and you won't mind, will you? because I want to adopt you as Arabella was in the story. Won't that be nice?"

"Why, Miss Rose, have you lost your wits?"

No wonder Phebe asked, for Rose talked very fast, and looked so odd in her new costume, and was so eager she could not stop to explain. Seeing Phebe's bewilderment, she quieted down and said, with a pretty air of earnestness,

"It isn't fair that I should have so much and you so little, and I want to be as good to you as if you were my sister, for Aunt Peace says we are all sisters really. I thought if I adopted you as much as I can now, it would be nicer. Will you let me, please?"

To Rose's great surprise, Phebe sat down on the floor and hid her face in her apron for a minute without answering a word.

"Oh, dear, now she's offended, and I don't know what to do," thought Rose, much discouraged by this reception of her offer.

"Please, forgive me; I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, and hope you won't think — " she faltered presently, feeling that she must undo the mischief, if possible.

But Phebe gave her another surprise, by dropping the apron and showing a face all smiles, in spite of tears in the eyes, as she put both arms round Rose and said, with a laugh and sob,

"I think you are the dearest girl in the world, and I'll let you do anything you like with me."

"Then you do like the plan? You didn't cry because I seemed to be kind of patronising? I truly didn't mean to be," cried Rose, delighted.

"I guess I do like it! and cried because no one was ever so good to me before, and I couldn't help it. As for patronising, you may walk on me if you want to, and I won't mind," said Phebe, in a burst of gratitude, for the words, "we are sisters" went straight to her lonely heart and nestled there.

"Well, now, we can play I'm a good sprite out of the box, or, what is better, a fairy godmother come down the chimney, and you are Cinderella, and must say what you want," said Rose, trying to put the question delicately.

Phebe understood that, for she had a good deal of natural refinement, though she did come from the poor-house.

“I don’t feel as if I wanted anything now, Miss Rose, but to find some way of thanking you for all you’ve done,” she said, rubbing off a tear that went rolling down the bridge of her nose in the most unromantic way.

“Why, I haven’t done anything but given you a bit of candy! Here, have some more, and eat ‘em while you work, and think what I can do. I must go and clear up, so good-bye, and don’t forget I’ve adopted you.”

“You’ve given me sweeter things than candy, and I’m not likely to forget it.” And carefully wiping off the brick-dust, Phebe pressed the little hand Rose offered warmly in both her hard ones, while the black eyes followed the departing visitor with a grateful look that made them very soft and bright.

Chapter 6 — Uncle Alec's Room

Soon after dinner, and before she had got acquainted with half her new possessions, Dr. Alec proposed a drive, to carry round the first instalment of gifts to the aunts and cousins. Rose was quite ready to go, being anxious to try a certain soft burnous from the box, which not only possessed a most engaging little hood, but had funny tassels bobbing in all directions.

The big carriage was full of parcels, and even Ben's seat was loaded with Indian war clubs, a Chinese kite of immense size, and a pair of polished ox-horns from Africa. Uncle Alec, very blue as to his clothes, and very brown as to his face, sat bolt upright, surveying well known places with interest, while Rose, feeling unusually elegant and comfortable, leaned back folded in her soft mantle, and played she was an Eastern princess making a royal progress among her subjects.

At three of the places their calls were brief, for Aunt Myra's catarrh was unusually bad; Aunt Clara had a room full of company; and Aunt Jane showed such a tendency to discuss the population, productions, and politics of Europe, Asia and Africa, that even Dr. Alec was dismayed, and got away as soon as possible.

"Now we will have a good time! I do hope the boys will be at home," said Rose, with a sigh of relief, as they wound yet higher up the hill to Aunt Jessie's.

"I left this for the last call, so that we might find the lads just in from school. Yes, there is Jamie on the gate watching for us; now you'll see the Clan gather; they are always swarming about together."

The instant Jamie saw the approaching guests he gave a shrill whistle, which was answered by echoes from meadow, house and barn, as the cousins came running from all directions, shouting, "Hooray for Uncle Alec!" They went at the carriage like highwaymen, robbed it of every parcel, took the occupants prisoners, and marched them into the house with great exultation.

"Little Mum! little Mum! here they are with lots of goodies! Come down and see the fun right away! Quick!" bawled Will and Geordie amidst a general ripping off of papers and a reckless cutting of strings that soon turned the tidy room into a chaos.

Down came Aunt Jessie with her pretty cap half on, but such a beaming face below it that one rather thought the fly-away head-gear an improvement than otherwise. She had hardly time to greet Rose and the doctor before the boys were about her, each clamouring for her to see his gift and rejoice over it with him, for “little Mum” went halves in everything. The great horns skirmished about her as if to toss her to the ceiling; the war clubs hurtled over her head as if to annihilate her; an amazing medley from the four quarters of the globe filled her lap, and seven excited boys all talked to her at once.

But she liked it; oh dear, yes! and sat smiling, admiring, and explaining, quite untroubled by the din, which made Rose cover up her ears and Dr. Alec threaten instant flight if the riot was not quelled. That threat produced a lull, and while the uncle received thanks in one corner, the aunt had some little confidences made to her in the other.

“Well, dear, and how are things going with you now? Better, I hope, than they were a week ago.”

“Aunt Jessie, I think I’m going to be very happy, now uncle has come. He does the queerest things, but he is so good to me I can’t help loving him”; and, nestling closer to little Mum, Rose told all that had happened, ending with a rapturous account of the splendid box.

“I am very glad, dear. But, Rose, I must warn you of one thing; don’t let uncle spoil you.”

“But I like to be spoilt, auntie.”

“I don’t doubt it; but if you turn out badly when the year is over he will be blamed, and his experiment prove a failure. That would be a pity, wouldn’t it? when he wants to do so much for you, and can do it if his kind heart does not get in the way of his good judgment.”

“I never thought of that, and I’ll try not to be spoilt. But how can I help it?” asked Rose anxiously.

“By not complaining of the wholesome things he wants you to do; by giving him cheerful obedience as well as love; and even making some small sacrifices for his sake.”

“I will, I truly will! and when I get in a worry about things may I come to you? Uncle told me to, and I feel as if I shouldn’t be afraid.”

“You may, darling; this is the place where little troubles are best cured, and this is what mothers are for, I fancy”; and Aunt Jessie drew the curly head to her shoulder with a tender look that proved how well she knew what medicine the child most needed.

It was so sweet and comfortable that Rose sat still enjoying it till a little voice said,

“Mamma, don’t you think Pokey would like some of my shells? Rose gave Phebe some of her nice things, and it was very good of her. Can I?”

“Who is Pokey?” asked Rose, popping up her head, attracted by the odd name.

“My dolly; do you want to see her?” asked Jamie, who had been much impressed by the tale of adoption he had overheard.

“Yes; I’m fond of dollies, only don’t tell the boys, or they will laugh at me.”

“They don’t laugh at me, and they play with my dolly a great deal; but she likes me best”; and Jamie ran away to produce his pet.

“I brought my old doll, but I keep her hidden because I am too big to play with her, and yet I can’t bear to throw her away, I’m so fond of her,” said Rose, continuing her confidences in a whisper.

“You can come and play with Jamie’s whenever you like, for we believe in dollies up here,” began Aunt Jessie, smiling to herself as if something amused her.

Just then Jamie came back, and Rose understood the smile, for his dolly proved to be a pretty four-year-old little girl, who trotted in as fast as her fat legs would carry her, and making straight for the shells, scrambled up an armful, saying, with a laugh that showed her little white teeth,

“All for Dimmy and me, for Dimmy and me!”

“That’s my dolly; isn’t she a nice one?” asked Jamie, proudly surveying his pet with his hands behind him and his short legs rather far apart a manly attitude copied from his brothers.

“She is a dear dolly. But why call her Pokey?” asked Rose, charmed with the new plaything.

“She is such an inquisitive little body she is always poking that mite of a nose into everything; and as Paul Pry did not suit, the boys fell to calling her Pokey. Not a pretty name, but very expressive.”

It certainly was, for, having examined the shells, the busy tot laid hold of everything she could find, and continued her researches till Archie caught her sucking his carved ivory chessmen to see if they were not barley sugar. Rice paper pictures were also discovered crumpled up in her tiny pocket, and she nearly smashed Will’s ostrich egg by trying to sit upon it.

“Here, Jim, take her away; she’s worse than the puppies, and we can’t have her round,” commanded the elder brother, picking her up and handing her over to the little fellow, who received her with open arms and the warning remark,

“You’d better mind what you do, for I’m going to ‘dopt Pokey like Rose did Phebe, and then you’ll have to be very good to her, you big fellows.”

“‘Dopt away, baby, and I’ll give you a cage to keep her in, or you won’t have her long, for she is getting worse than a monkey”; and Archie went back to his mates, while Aunt Jessie, foreseeing a crisis, proposed that Jamie should take his dolly home, as she was borrowed, and it was time her visit ended.

“My dolly is better than yours, isn’t she? ‘cause she can walk and talk and sing and dance, and yours can't do anything, can she?" asked Jamie with pride, as he regarded his Pokey, who just then had been moved to execute a funny little jig and warble the well-known couplet,

"'Puss-tat, puss-tat, where you been?'
'I been Lunnin, to saw a Tween."'

After which superb display she retired, escorted by Jamie, both making a fearful din blowing on conch shells.

"We must tear ourselves away, Rose, because I want to get you home before sunset. Will you come for a drive, Jessie?" said Dr. Alec, as the music died away in the distance.

"No, thank you; but I see the boys want a scamper, so, if you don't mind, they may escort you home, but not go in. That is only allowed on holidays."

The words were hardly out of Aunt Jessie's mouth when Archie said, in a tone of command,

"Pass the word, lads. Boot and saddle, and be quick about it."

"All right!" And in a moment not a vestige of boy remained but the litter on the floor.

The cavalcade went down the hill at a pace that made Rose cling to her uncle's arm, for the fat old horses got excited by the antics of the ponies careering all about them, and went as fast as they could pelt, with the gay dog-cart rattling in front, for Archie and Charlie scorned shelties since this magnificent equipage had been set up. Ben enjoyed the fun, and the lads cut up capers till Rose declared that "circus" was the proper name for them after all.

When they reached the house they dismounted, and stood, three on each side the steps, in martial attitudes, while her ladyship was handed out with great elegance by Uncle Alec. Then the Clan saluted, mounted at word of command, and with a wild whoop tore down the avenue in what they considered the true Arab style.

"That was splendid, now it is safely ended," said Rose, skipping up the steps with her head over her shoulder to watch the dear tassels bob about.

"I shall get you a pony as soon as you are a little stronger," said Dr. Alec, watching her with a smile.

"Oh, I couldn't ride one of those horrid, frisky little beasts! They roll their eyes and bounce about so, I should die of fright," cried Rose, clasping her hands tragically.

"Are you a coward?"

"About horses I am."

"Never mind, then; come and see my new room"; and he led the way upstairs without another word.

As Rose followed she remembered her promise to Aunt Jessie, and was sorry she had objected so decidedly. She was a great deal more sorry five minutes later, and well she might be.

“Now, take a good look, and tell me what you think of it,” said Dr. Alec, opening the door and letting her enter before him, while Phebe was seen whisking down the backstairs with a dust-pan.

Rose walked to the middle of the room, stood still, and gazed about her with eyes that brightened as they looked, for all was changed.

This chamber had been built out over the library to suit some fancy, and had been unused for years, except at Christmas times, when the old house overflowed. It had three windows one to the east, that overlooked the bay; one to the south, where the horse-chestnuts waved their green fans; and one to the west, towards the hill and the evening sky. A ruddy sunset burned there now, filling the room with an enchanted glow; the soft murmur of the sea was heard, and a robin chirped “Good-night!” among the budding trees.

Rose saw and heard these things first, and felt their beauty with a child’s quick instinct; then her eye took in the altered aspect of the room, once so shrouded, still and solitary, now so full of light and warmth and simple luxury.

India matting covered the floor, with a gay rug here and there; the antique andirons shone on the wide hearth, where a cheery blaze dispelled the dampness of the long-closed room. Bamboo lounges and chairs stood about, and quaint little tables in cosy corners; one bearing a pretty basket, one a desk, and on a third lay several familiar-looking books. In a recess stood a narrow white bed, with a lovely Madonna hanging over it. The Japanese screen half-folded back showed a delicate toilet service of blue and white set forth on a marble slab, and near by was the great bath-pan, with Turkish towels and a sponge as big as Rose’s head.

“Uncle must love cold water like a duck,” she thought, with a shiver.

Then her eye went on to the tall cabinet, where a half-open door revealed a tempting array of the drawers, shelves and “cubby holes,” which so delight the hearts of children.

“What a grand place for my new things,” she thought, wondering what her uncle kept in that cedar retreat.

“Oh me, what a sweet toilet table!” was her next mental exclamation, as she approached this inviting spot.

A round old-fashioned mirror hung over it, with a gilt eagle a-top, holding in his beak the knot of blue ribbon that tied up a curtain of muslin falling on either side of the table, where appeared little ivory-handled brushes, two slender silver candle-sticks, a porcelain match-box, several pretty trays for small matters, and, most imposing of all, a plump blue silk cushion, coquettishly trimmed with lace, and pink rose-buds at the corners.

That cushion rather astonished Rose; in fact, the whole table did, and she was just thinking, with a sly smile,

“Uncle is a dandy, but I never should have guessed it,” when he opened the door of a large closet, saying, with a careless wave of the hand,

“Men like plenty of room for their rattle-traps; don’t you think that ought to satisfy me?”

Rose peeped in and gave a start, though all she saw was what one usually finds in closets clothes and boots, boxes and bags. Ah! but you see these clothes were small black and white frocks; the row of little boots that stood below had never been on Dr. Alec’s feet; the green bandbox had a gray veil straying out of it, and yes! the bag hanging on the door was certainly her own piece-bag, with a hole in one corner. She gave a quick look round the room and understood now why it had seemed too dainty for a man, why her Testament and Prayer Book were on the table by the bed, and what those rose-buds meant on the blue cushion. It came upon her in one delicious burst that this little paradise was all for her, and, not knowing how else to express her gratitude, she caught Dr. Alec round the neck, saying impetuously,

“O uncle, you are too good to me! I’ll do anything you ask me; ride wild horses and take freezing baths and eat bad-tasting messes, and let my clothes hang on me, to show how much I thank you for this dear, sweet, lovely room!”

“You like it, then? But why do you think it is yours, my lass?” asked Dr. Alec, as he sat down looking well pleased, and drew his excited little niece to his knee.

“I don’t think, I know it is for me; I see it in your face, and I feel as if I didn’t half deserve it. Aunt Jessie said you would spoil me, and I must not let you. I’m afraid this looks like it, and perhaps oh me! perhaps I ought not to have this beautiful room after all!” and Rose tried to look as if she could be heroic enough to give it up if it was best.

“I owe Mrs. Jessie one for that,” said Dr. Alec, trying to frown, though in his secret soul he felt that she was quite right. Then he smiled that cordial smile, which was like sunshine on his brown face, as he said,

“This is part of the cure, Rose, and I put you here that you might take my three great remedies in the best and easiest way. Plenty of sun, fresh air, and cold water; also cheerful surroundings, and some work; for Phebe is to show you how to take care of this room, and be your little maid as well as friend and teacher. Does that sound hard and disagreeable to you, dear?”

“No, sir; very, very pleasant, and I’ll do my best to be a good patient. But I really don’t think anyone could be sick in this delightful room,” she said, with a long sigh of happiness as her eye went from one pleasant object to another.

“Then you like my sort of medicine better than Aunt Myra’s, and don’t want to throw it out of the window, hey?”

Chapter 7 — A Trip to China

"Come, little girl, I've got another dose for you. I fancy you won't take it as well as you did the last, but you will like it better after a while," said Dr. Alec, about a week after the grand surprise.

Rose was sitting in her pretty room, where she would gladly have spent all her time if it had been allowed; but she looked up with a smile, for she had ceased to fear her uncle's remedies, and was always ready to try a new one. The last had been a set of light gardening tools, with which she had helped him put the flower-beds in order, learning all sorts of new and pleasant things about the plants as she worked, for, though she had studied botany at school, it seemed very dry stuff compared with Uncle Alec's lively lesson.

"What is it now?" she asked, shutting her work-box without a murmur.

"Salt-water."

"How must I take it?"

"Put on the new suit Miss Hemming sent home yesterday, and come down to the beach; then I'll show you."

"Yes, sir," answered Rose obediently, adding to herself, with a shiver, as he went off: "It is too early for bathing, so I know it is something to do with a dreadful boat."

Putting on the new suit of blue flannel, prettily trimmed with white, and the little sailor-hat with long streamers, diverted her mind from the approaching trial, till a shrill whistle reminded her that her uncle was waiting. Away she ran through the garden, down the sandy path, out upon the strip of beach that belonged to the house, and here she found Dr. Alec busy with a slender red and white boat that lay rocking on the rising tide.

"That is a dear little boat; and 'Bonnie Belle' is a pretty name," she said, trying not to show how nervous she felt.

"It is for you; so sit in the stern and learn to steer, till you are ready to learn to row."

"Do all boats wiggle about in that way?" she asked, lingering as if to tie her hat more firmly.

"Oh, yes, pitch about like nutshells when the sea is a bit rough," answered her sailor uncle, never guessing her secret woe.

"Is it rough to-day?"

"Not very; it looks a trifle squally to the eastward, but we are all right till the wind changes. Come."

"Can you swim, uncle?" asked Rose, clutching at his arm as he took her hand.

"Like a fish. Now then."

"Oh, please hold me very tight till I get there! Why do you have the stern so far away?" and, stifling several squeaks of alarm in her passage, Rose crept to the distant seat, and sat there holding on with both hands and looking as if she expected every wave to bring a sudden shipwreck.

Uncle Alec took no notice of her fear, but patiently instructed her in the art of steering, till she was so absorbed in remembering which was starboard and which larboard, that she forgot to say "OW!" every time a big wave slapped against the boat.

"Now where shall we go?" she asked, as the wind blew freshly in her face, and a few, long swift strokes sent them half across the little bay.

"Suppose we go to China?"

"Isn't that rather a long voyage?"

"Not as I go. Steer round the Point into the harbour, and I'll give you a glimpse of China in twenty minutes or so."

"I should like that!" and Rose sat wondering what he meant, while she enjoyed the new sights all about her.

Behind them the green Aunt-hill sloped gently upward to the grove at the top, and all along the seaward side stood familiar houses, stately, cosy, or picturesque. As they rounded the Point, the great bay opened before them full of shipping, and the city lay beyond, its spires rising above the tall masts with their gay streamers.

"Are we going there?" she asked, for she had never seen this aspect of the rich and busy old city before.

"Yes. Uncle Mac has a ship just in from Hong Kong, and I thought you would like to go and see it."

"Oh, I should. I love dearly to go poking about in the warehouses with Uncle Mac; everything is so curious and new to me; and I'm specially interested in China because you have been there."

"I'll show you two genuine Chinamen who have just arrived. You will like to welcome Whang Lo and Fun See, I'm sure."

"Don't ask me to speak to them, uncle; I shall be sure to laugh at the odd names and the pig-tails and the slanting eyes. Please let me just trot round after you; I like that best."

"Very well; now steer toward the wharf where the big ship with the queer flag is. That's the 'Rajah,' and we will go aboard if we can."

In among the ships they went, by the wharves where the water was green and still, and queer barnacles grew on the slippery piles. Odd smells saluted her nose, and odd sights met her eyes, but Rose liked it all, and played she was really landing in Hong Kong when they glided up to the steps in the shadow of the tall "Rajah." Boxes and bales were rising out of the hold and being carried into the warehouse by stout porters, who tugged and bawled and clattered about with small trucks, or worked cranes with iron claws that came down and clutched heavy weights, whisking them aloft to where wide doors like mouths swallowed them up.

Dr. Alec took her aboard the ship, and she had the satisfaction of poking her inquisitive little nose into every available corner, at the risk of being crushed, lost, or drowned.

"Well, child, how would you like to take a voyage round the world with me in a jolly old craft like this?" asked her uncle, as they rested a minute in the captain's cabin.

"I should like to see the world, but not in such a small, untidy, smelly place as this. We would go in a yacht all clean and comfortable; Charlie says that is the proper way," answered Rose, surveying the close quarters with little favour.

"You are not a true Campbell if you don't like the smell of tar and salt-water, nor Charlie either, with his luxurious yacht. Now come ashore and chin-chin with the Celestials."

After a delightful progress through the great warehouse, peeping and picking as they went, they found Uncle Mac and the yellow gentlemen in his private room, where samples, gifts, curiosities, and newly arrived treasures of all sorts were piled up in pleasing pro-fusion and con-fusion.

As soon as possible Rose retired to a corner, with a porcelain god on one side, a green dragon on the other, and, what was still more embarrassing, Fun See sat on a tea-chest in front, and stared at her with his beady black eyes till she did not know where to look.

Mr. Whang Lo was an elderly gentleman in American costume, with his pigtail neatly wound round his head. He spoke English, and was talking busily with Uncle Mac in the most commonplace way so Rose considered him a failure. But Fun See was delightfully Chinese from his junk-like shoes to the button on his pagoda hat; for he had got himself up in style, and was a mass of silk jackets and slouchy trousers. He was short and fat, and waddled comically; his eyes were very "slanting," as Rose said; his queue was long, so were his nails; his yellow face was plump and shiny, and he was altogether a highly satisfactory Chinaman.

Uncle Alec told her that Fun See had come out to be educated and could only speak a little pigeon English; so she must be kind to the poor fellow, for he was only a lad, though he looked nearly as old as Mr. Whang Lo. Rose said she would be kind; but had not the least idea how to entertain the queer guest, who looked as if he had walked out of one of the rice-paper landscapes on the wall, and sat nodding at her so like a toy Mandarin that she could hardly keep sober.

In the midst of her polite perplexity, Uncle Mac saw the two young people gazing wistfully at one another, and seemed to enjoy the joke of this making acquaintance under difficulties. Taking a box from his table, he gave it to Fun See, with an order that seemed to please him very much.

Descending from his perch, he fell to unpacking it with great neatness and despatch, while Rose watched him, wondering what was going to happen. Presently, out from the wrappings came a teapot, which caused her to clasp her hands with delight, for it was made in the likeness of a plump little Chinaman. His hat was the cover, his queue the handle, and his pipe the nose. It stood upon feet in shoes turned up at the toes, and the smile on the fat, sleepy face was so like that on Fun's when he displayed the teapot, that Rose couldn't help laughing, which pleased him much.

Two pretty cups with covers, and a fine scarlet tray completed the set, and made one long to have a "dish of tea," even in Chinese style, without cream or sugar.

When he had arranged them on a little table before her, Fun signified in pantomime that they were hers, from her uncle. She returned her thanks in the same way, whereupon he returned to his tea-chest, and, having no other means of communication, they sat smiling and nodding at one another in an absurd sort of way till a new idea seemed to strike Fun. Tumbling off his seat, he waddled away as fast as his petticoats permitted, leaving Rose hoping that he had not gone to get a roasted rat, a stewed puppy, or any other foreign mess which civility would oblige her to eat.

While she waited for her funny new friend, she improved her mind in a way that would have charmed Aunt Jane. The gentlemen were talking over all sorts of things, and she listened attentively, storing up much of what she heard, for she had an excellent memory, and longed to distinguish herself by being able to produce some useful information when reproached with her ignorance.

She was just trying to impress upon her mind that Amoy was two hundred and eighty miles from Hong Kong, when Fun came scuffling back, bearing what she thought was a small sword, till he unfurled an immense fan, and presented it with a string of Chinese compliments, the meaning of which would have amused her even more than the sound, if she could have understood it.

She had never seen such an astonishing fan, and at once became absorbed in examining it. Of course, there was no perspective whatever, which only gave it a peculiar charm to Rose, for in one place a lovely lady, with blue knitting-needles in her hair, sat directly upon the spire of a stately pagoda. In another charming view a brook appeared to flow in at the front door of a stout gentleman's house, and out at his chimney. In a third a zig-zag wall went up into the sky like a flash of lightning, and a bird with two tails was apparently brooding over a fisherman whose boat was just going aground upon the moon.

It was altogether a fascinating thing, and she would have sat wafting it to and fro all the afternoon, to Fun's great satisfaction, if Dr. Alec's attention had not suddenly been called to her by a breeze from the big fan that blew his hair into his eyes, and reminded him that they must go. So the pretty china was repacked, Rose furled her fan, and with several parcels of choice teas for the old ladies stowed away in Dr. Alec's pockets, they took their leave, after Fun had saluted them with "the three bendings and the nine knockings," as they salute the Emperor, or "Son of Heaven," at home.

"I feel as if I had really been to China, and I'm sure I look so," said Rose, as they glided out of the shadow of the "Rajah."

She certainly did, for Mr. Whang Lo had given her a Chinese umbrella; Uncle Alec had got some lanterns to light up her balcony; the great fan lay in her lap, and the tea-set reposed at her feet.

"This is not a bad way to study geography, is it?" asked her uncle, who had observed her attention to the talk.

"It is a very pleasant way, and I really think I have learned more about China to-day than in all the lessons I had at school, though I used to rattle off the answers as fast as I could go. No one explained anything to us, so all I remember is that tea and silk come from there, and the women have little bits of feet. I saw Fun looking at mine, and he must have thought them perfectly immense," answered Rose, surveying her stout boots with sudden contempt.

"We will have out the maps and the globe, and I'll show you some of my journeys, telling stories as we go. That will be next best to doing it actually."

"You are so fond of travelling, I should think it would be very dull for you here, uncle. Do you know, Aunt Plenty says she is sure you will be off in a year or two."

"Very likely."

"Oh, me! what shall I do then?" sighed Rose, in a tone of despair that made Uncle Alec's face brighten with a look of genuine pleasure as he said significantly,

"Next time I go I shall take my little anchor with me. How will that suit?"

"Really, uncle?"

"Really, niece."

Rose gave a little bounce of rapture which caused the boat to "wiggle" in a way that speedily quieted her down. But she sat beaming joyfully and trying to think which of some hundred questions she would ask first, when Dr. Alec said, pointing to a boat that was coming up behind them in great style,

"How well those fellows row! Look at them, and take notes for your own use by and by."

The "Stormy Petrel" was manned by half a dozen jaunty looking sailors, who made a fine display of blue shirts and shiny hats, with stars and anchors in every direction.

"How beautifully they go, and they are only boys. Why, I do believe they are our boys! Yes, I see Charlie laughing over his shoulder. Row, uncle, row! Oh, please do, and not let them catch up with us!" cried Rose, in such a state of excitement that the new umbrella nearly went overboard.

"All right, here we go!" and away they did go with a long steady sweep of the oars that carried the "Bonnie Belle" through the water with a rush.

The lads pulled their prettiest, but Dr. Alec would have reached the Point first, if Rose, in her flurry, had not retarded him by jerking the rudder ropes in a most unseamanlike way, and just as she got right again her hat blew off. That put an end to the race, and while they were still fishing for the hat the other boat came alongside, with all the oars in the air, and the jolly young tars ready for a frolic.

"Did you catch a crab, uncle?"

"No, a blue-fish," he answered, as the dripping hat was landed on a seat to dry.

"What have you been doing?"

"Seeing Fun."

"Good for you, Rose! I know what you mean. We are going to have him up to show us how to fly the big kite, for we can't get the hang of it. Isn't he great fun, though?"

"No, little Fun."

"Come, stop joking, and show us what you've got."

"You'd better hoist that fan for a sail."

"Lend Dandy your umbrella; he hates to burn his pretty nose."

"I say, uncle, are you going to have a Feast of Lanterns?"

"No, I'm going to have a feast of bread and butter, for it's tea-time. If that black cloud doesn't lie, we shall have a gust before long, so you had better get home as soon as you can, or your mother will be anxious, Archie."

"Ay, ay, skipper. Good-night, Rose; come out often, and we'll teach you all there is to know about rowing," was Charlie's modest invitation.

Then the boats parted company, and across the water from the "Petrel's" crew came a verse from one of the Nonsense songs in which the boys delighted.

"Oh, Timballoo! how happy we are,

We live in a sieve and a crockery jar!
And all night long, in the starlight pale,
We sail away, with a pea-green sail,
And whistle and warble a moony song
To the echoing sound of a coppery gong.
Far and few, far and few
Are the lands where the Jumblies live;
Their heads are green, and their hands are blue,
And they went to sea in a sieve.”

Chapter 8 — And what came of it

“Uncle, could you lend me a ninepence? I’ll return it as soon as I get my pocket-money,” said Rose, coming into the library in a great hurry that evening.

“I think I could, and I won’t charge any interest for it, so you need not be in any hurry to repay me. Come back here and help me settle these books if you have nothing pleasanter to do,” answered Dr. Alec, handing out the money with that readiness which is so delightful when we ask small loans.

“I’ll come in a minute; I’ve been longing to fix my books, but didn’t dare to touch them, because you always shake your head when I read.”

“I shall shake my head when you write, if you don’t do it better than you did in making out this catalogue.”

“I know it’s bad, but I was in a hurry when I did it, and I am in one now.” And away went Rose, glad to escape a lecture.

But she got it when she came back, for Uncle Alec was still knitting his brows over the list of books, and sternly demanded, pointing to a tipsy-looking title staggering down the page,

“Is that meant for ‘Pulverized Bones,’ ma’am?”

“No, sir; it’s ‘Paradise Lost.’“

“Well, I’m glad to know it, for I began to think you were planning to study surgery or farming. And what is this, if you please? ‘Babies’ Aprons’ is all I can make of it.”

Rose looked hard at the scrawl, and presently announced, with an air of superior wisdom,

“Oh, that’s ‘Bacon’s Essays.’“

“Miss Power did not teach anything so old-fashioned as writing, I see. Now look at this memorandum Aunt Plenty gave me, and see what a handsome plain hand that is. She went to a dame-school and learnt a few useful things well; that is better than a smattering of half a dozen so-called higher branches, I take the liberty of thinking.”

“Well, I’m sure I was considered a bright girl at school, and learned everything I was taught. Luly and me were the first in all our classes, and ‘specially praised for our French and music and those sort of things,” said Rose, rather offended at Uncle Alec’s criticism.

“I dare say; but if your French grammar was no better than your English, I think the praise was not deserved, my dear.”

“Why, uncle, we did study English grammar, and I could parse beautifully. Miss Power used to have us up to show off when people came. I don’t see but I talk as right as most girls.”

“I dare say you do, but we are all too careless about our English. Now, think a minute, and tell me if these expressions are correct ‘Luly and me,’ ‘those sort of things,’ and ‘as right as most girls.’“

Rose pulled her pet curl and put up her lip, but had to own that she was wrong, and said meekly, after a pause which threatened to be sulky,

“I suppose I should have said ‘Luly and I,’ in that case, and ‘that sort of things’ and ‘rightly,’ though ‘correctly’ would have been a better word, I guess.”

“Thank you; and if you will kindly drop ‘I guess,’ I shall like my little Yankee all the better. Now, see here, Rosy, I don’t pretend to set myself up for a model in anything, and you may come down on my grammar, manners or morals as often as you think I’m wrong, and I’ll thank you. I’ve been knocking about the world for years, and have got careless, but I want my girl to be what I call well-educated, even if she studies nothing but the three ‘Rs’ for a year to come. Let us be thorough, no matter how slowly we go.”

He spoke so earnestly and looked so sorry to have ruffled her that Rose went and sat on the arm of his chair, saying, with a pretty air of penitence,

“I’m sorry I was cross, uncle, when I ought to thank you for taking so much interest in me. I guess no, I think you are right about being thorough, for I used to understand a great deal better when papa taught me a few lessons than when Miss Power hurried me through so many. I declare my head used to be such a jumble of French and German, history and arithmetic, grammar and music, I used to feel sometimes as if it would split. I’m sure I don’t wonder it ached.” And she held on to it as if the mere memory of the “jumble” made it swim.

“Yet that is considered an excellent school, I find, and I dare say it would be if the benighted lady did not think it necessary to cram her pupils like Thanksgiving turkeys, instead of feeding them in a natural and wholesome way. It is the fault with most American schools, and the poor little heads will go on aching till we learn better.”

This was one of Dr. Alec’s hobbies, and Rose was afraid he was off for a gallop, but he reined himself in and gave her thoughts a new turn by saying suddenly, as he pulled out a fat pocket-book,

“Uncle Mac has put all your affairs into my hands now, and here is your month’s pocket money. You keep your own little accounts, I suppose?”

“Thank you. Yes, Uncle Mac gave me an account book when I went to school, and I used to put down my expenses, but I couldn’t make them go very well, for figures are the one thing I am not at all clever about,” said Rose, rummaging in her desk for a dilapidated little book, which she was ashamed to show when she found it.

"Well, as figures are rather important things to most of us, and you may have a good many accounts to keep some day, wouldn't it be wise to begin at once and learn to manage your pennies before the pounds come to perplex you?"

"I thought you would do all that fussy part and take care of the pounds, as you call them. Need I worry about it? I do hate sums, so!"

"I shall take care of things till you are of age, but I mean that you shall know how your property is managed, and do as much of it as you can by and by; then you won't be dependent on the honesty of other people."

"Gracious me! as if I wouldn't trust you with millions of billions if I had them," cried Rose, scandalised at the mere suggestion.

"Ah, but I might be tempted; guardians are sometimes; so you'd better keep your eye on me, and in order to do that you must learn all about these affairs," answered Dr. Alec, as he made an entry in his own very neat account-book.

Rose peeped over his shoulder at it, and then turned to the arithmetical puzzle in her hand with a sigh of despair.

"Uncle, when you add up your expenses do you ever find you have got more money than you had in the beginning?"

"No; I usually find that I have a good deal less than I had in the beginning. Are you troubled in the peculiar way you mention?"

"Yes; it is very curious, but I never can make things come out square."

"Perhaps I can help you," began Uncle Alec, in the most respectful tone.

"I think you had better, for if I have got to keep accounts I may as well begin in the right way. But please don't laugh! I know I'm very stupid, and my book is a disgrace, but I never could get it straight." And with great trepidation, Rose gave up her funny little accounts.

It really was good in Dr. Alec not to laugh, and Rose felt deeply grateful when he said in a mildly suggestive tone,

"The dollars and cents seem to be rather mixed, perhaps if I just straightened them out a bit we should find things all right."

"Please do, and then show me on a fresh leaf how to make mine look nice and ship-shape as yours do."

As Rose stood by him watching the ease with which he quickly brought order out of chaos, she privately resolved to hunt up her old arithmetic and perfect herself in the four first rules, with a good tug at fractions, before she read any more fairy tales.

"Am I a rich girl, uncle?" she asked suddenly, as he was copying a column of figures.

“Rather a poor one, I should say, since you had to borrow a ninepence.”

“That was your fault, because you forgot my pocket-money. But, really, shall I be rich by and by?”

“I am afraid you will.”

“Why afraid, uncle?”

“Too much money is a bad thing.”

“But I can give it away, you know; that is always the pleasantest part of having it I think.”

“I’m glad you feel so, for you can do much good with your fortune if you know how to use it well.”

“You shall teach me, and when I am a woman we will set up a school where nothing but the three R’s shall be taught, and all the children live on oatmeal, and the girls have waists a yard round,” said Rose, with a sudden saucy smile dimpling her cheeks.

“You are an impertinent little baggage, to turn on me in that way right in the midst of my first attempt at teaching. Never mind, I’ll have an extra bitter dose for you next time, miss.”

“I knew you wanted to laugh, so I gave you a chance. Now, I will be good, master, and do my lesson nicely.”

So Dr. Alec had his laugh, and then Rose sat down and took a lesson in accounts which she never forgot.

“Now come and read aloud to me; my eyes are tired, and it is pleasant to sit here by the fire while the rain pours outside and Aunt Jane lectures upstairs,” said Uncle Alec, when last month’s accounts had been put in good order and a fresh page neatly begun.

Rose liked to read aloud, and gladly gave him the chapter in “Nicholas Nickleby” where the Miss Kenwigses take their French lesson. She did her very best, feeling that she was being criticised, and hoping that she might not be found wanting in this as in other things.

“Shall I go on, sir?” she asked very meekly, when the chapter ended.

“If you are not tired, dear. It is a pleasure to hear you, for you read remarkably well,” was the answer that filled her heart with pride and pleasure.

“Do you really think so, uncle? I’m so glad! Papa taught me, and I read for hours to him, but I thought perhaps, he liked it because he was fond of me.”

“So am I; but you really do read unusually well, and I’m very glad of it, for it is a rare accomplishment, and one I value highly. Come here in this cosy, low chair; the light is better, and I can pull these curls if you go too fast. I see you are going to be a great comfort as well as a great credit to your old uncle, Rosy.” And Dr. Alec drew her close beside him with such a fatherly look and tone that she felt it would be very easy to love and obey him, since he knew how to mix praise and blame so pleasantly together.

Another chapter was just finished, when the sound of a carriage warned them that Aunt Jane was about to depart. Before they could go to meet her, however, she appeared in the doorway looking like an unusually tall mummy in her waterproof, with her glasses shining like cat’s eyes from the depths of the hood.

“Just as I thought! petting that child to death and letting her sit up late reading trash. I do hope you feel the weight of the responsibility you have taken upon yourself, Alec,” she said, with a certain grim sort of satisfaction at seeing things go wrong.

“I think I have a very realising sense of it, sister Jane,” answered Dr. Alec, with a comical shrug of the shoulders and a glance at Rose’s bright face.

“It is sad to see a great girl wasting these precious hours so. Now, my boys have studied all day, and Mac is still at his books, I’ve no doubt, while you have not had a lesson since you came, I suspect.”

“I’ve had five to-day, ma’am,” was Rose’s very unexpected answer.

“I’m glad to hear it; and what were they, pray?” Rose looked very demure as she replied,

“Navigation, geography, grammar, arithmetic, and keeping my temper.”

“Queer lessons, I fancy; and what have you learned from this remarkable mixture, I should like to know?”

A naughty sparkle came into Rose’s eyes as she answered, with a droll look at her uncle,

“I can’t tell you all, ma’am, but I have collected some useful information about China, which you may like, especially the teas. The best are Lapsing Souchong, Assam Pekoe, rare Ankoe, Flowery Pekoe, Howqua’s mixture, Scented Caper, Padral tea, black Congou, and green Twankey. Shanghai is on the Woosung River. Hong Kong means ‘Island of Sweet waters.’ Singapore is ‘Lion’s Town.’ ‘Chops’ are the boats they live in; and they drink tea out of little saucers. Principal productions are porcelain, tea, cinnamon, shawls, tin, tamarinds and opium. They have beautiful temples and queer gods; and in Canton is the Dwelling of the Holy Pigs, fourteen of them, very big, and all blind.”

The effect of this remarkable burst was immense, especially the fact last mentioned. It entirely took the wind out of Aunt Jane’s sails; it was so sudden, so varied and unexpected, that she had not a word to say. The glasses remained fixed full upon Rose for a moment, and then, with a hasty “Oh, indeed!” the excellent lady bundled into her carriage and drove away, somewhat bewildered and very much disturbed.

She would have been more so if she had seen her reprehensible brother-in-law dancing a triumphal polka down the hall with Rose in honour of having silenced the enemy’s battery for once.

Chapter 9 — Phebe's Secret

“Why do you keep smiling to yourself, Phebe?” asked Rose, as they were working together one morning, for Dr. Alec considered house-work the best sort of gymnastics for girls; so Rose took lessons of Phebe in sweeping, dusting and bed-making.

“I was thinking about a nice little secret I know, and couldn't help smiling.”

“Shall I know it, sometime?”

“Guess you will.”

“Shall I like it?”

“Oh, won't you, though!”

“Will it happen soon?”

“Sometime this week.”

“I know what it is! The boys are going to have fireworks on the fourth, and have got some surprise for me. Haven't they?”

“That's telling.”

“Well, I can wait; only tell me one thing is uncle in it?”

“Of course he is; there's never any fun without him.”

“Then it's all right, and sure to be nice.”

Rose went out on the balcony to shake the rugs, and, having given them a vigorous beating, hung them on the balustrade to air, while she took a look at her plants. Several tall vases and jars stood there, and a month of June sun and rain had worked wonders with the seeds and slips she had planted. Morning-glories and nasturtiums ran all over the bars, making haste to bloom. Scarlet beans and honeysuckles were climbing up from below to meet their pretty neighbours, and the woodbine was hanging its green festoons wherever it could cling.

The waters of the bay were dancing in the sunshine, a fresh wind stirred the chestnut-trees with a pleasant sound, and the garden below was full of roses, butterflies and bees. A great chirping and twittering went on among the birds, busy with their summer house-keeping, and, far away, the white-winged gulls were dipping and diving in the sea, where ships, like larger birds, went sailing to and fro.

“Oh, Phebe, it's such a lovely day, I do wish your fine secret was going to happen right away! I feel just like having a good time; don't you?” said Rose, waving her arms as if she was going to fly.

“I often feel that way, but I have to wait for my good times, and don't stop working to wish for ‘em. There, now you can finish as soon as the dust settles; I must go do my stairs,” and Phebe trudged away with the broom, singing as she went.

Rose leaned where she was, and fell to thinking how many good times she had had lately, for the gardening had prospered finely, and she was learning to swim and row, and there were drives and walks, and quiet hours of reading and talk with Uncle Alec, and, best of all, the old pain and ennui seldom troubled her now. She could work and play all day, sleep sweetly all night, and enjoy life with the zest of a healthy, happy child. She was far from being as strong and hearty as Phebe, but she was getting on; the once pale cheeks had colour in them now, the hands were growing plump and brown, and the belt was not much too loose. No one talked to her about her health, and she forgot that she had “no constitution.” She took no medicine but Dr. Alec’s three great remedies, and they seemed to suit her excellently. Aunt Plenty said it was the pills; but, as no second batch had ever followed the first, I think the old lady was mistaken.

Rose looked worthy of her name as she stood smiling to herself over a happier secret than any Phebe had a secret which she did not know herself till she found out, some years later, the magic of good health.

“‘Look only,’ said the brownie,
‘At the pretty gown of blue,
At the kerchief pinned about her head,
And at her little shoe,”‘

said a voice from below, as a great cabbage-rose came flying against her cheek.

“What is the princess dreaming about up there in her hanging-garden?” added Dr. Alec as she flung back a morning-glory.

“I was wishing I could do something pleasant this fine day; something very new and interesting, for the wind makes me feel frisky and gay.”

“Suppose we take a pull over to the Island? I intended to go this afternoon; but if you feel more like it now, we can be off at once.”

“I do! I do! I’ll come in fifteen minutes, uncle. I must just scrabble my room to rights, for Phebe has got a great deal to do.”

Rose caught up the rugs and vanished as she spoke, while Dr. Alec went in, saying to himself, with an indulgent smile,

“It may upset things a trifle, but half a child’s pleasure consists in having their fun when they want it.”

Never did duster flap more briskly than the one Rose used that day, and never was a room “scrabbled” to rights in such haste as hers. Tables and chairs flew into their places as if alive; curtains shook as if a gale was blowing; china rattled and small articles tumbled about as if a young earthquake was playing with them. The boating suit went on in a twinkling, and Rose was off with a hop and a skip, little dreaming how many hours it would be before she saw her pretty room again.

Uncle Alec was putting a large basket into the boat when she arrived, and before they were off Phebe came running down with a queer, knobby bundle done up in a water-proof.

“We can’t eat half that luncheon, and I know we shall not need so many wraps. I wouldn’t lumber the boat up so,” said Rose, who still had secret scares when on the water.

“Couldn’t you make a smaller parcel, Phebe?” asked Dr. Alec, eyeing the bundle suspiciously.

“No, sir, not in such a hurry,” and Phebe laughed as she gave a particularly large knob a good poke.

“Well, it will do for ballast. Don’t forget the note to Mrs. Jessie, I beg of you.”

“No, sir. I’ll send it right off,” and Phebe ran up the bank as if she had wings to her feet.

“We’ll take a look at the lighthouse first, for you have not been there yet, and it is worth seeing. By the time we have done that it will be pretty warm, and we will have lunch under the trees on the Island.”

Rose was ready for anything, and enjoyed her visit to the lighthouse on the Point very much, especially climbing up the narrow stairs and going inside the great lantern. They made a long stay, for Dr. Alec seemed in no hurry to go, and kept looking through his spy-glass as if he expected to discover something remarkable on sea or land. It was past twelve before they reached the Island, and Rose was ready for her lunch long before she got it.

“Now this is lovely! I do wish the boys were here. Won’t it be nice to have them with us all their vacation? Why, it begins to-day, doesn’t it? Oh, I wish I’d remembered it sooner, and perhaps they would have come with us,” she said, as they lay luxuriously eating sandwiches under the old apple-tree.

“So we might. Next time we won’t be in such a hurry. I expect the lads will take our heads off when they find us out,” answered Dr. Alec, placidly drinking cold tea.

“Uncle, I smell a frying sort of a smell,” Rose said, pausing suddenly as she was putting away the remains of the lunch half an hour later.

“So do I; it is fish, I think.”

For a moment they both sat with their noses in the air, sniffing like hounds; then Dr. Alec sprang up, saying with great decision,

“Now, this won’t do! No one is permitted on this island without asking leave. I must see who dares to fry fish on my private property."

Taking the basket on one arm and the bundle on the other, he strode away towards the traitorous smell, looking as fierce as a lion, while Rose marched behind under her umbrella.

"We are Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday going to see if the savages have come," she said presently, for her fancy was full of the dear old stories that all children love so well.

"And there they are! Two tents and two boats, as I live! These rascals mean to enjoy themselves, that's evident."

"There ought to be more boats and no tents. I wonder where the prisoners are?"

"There are traces of them," and Dr. Alec pointed to the heads and tails of fishes strewn on the grass.

"And there are more," said Rose, laughing, as she pointed to a scarlet heap of what looked like lobsters.

"The savages are probably eating their victims now; don't you hear the knives rattle in that tent?"

"We ought to creep up and peep; Crusoe was cautious, you know, and Friday scared out of his wits," added Rose, still keeping up the joke.

"But this Crusoe is going to pounce upon them, regardless of consequences. If I am killed and eaten, you seize the basket and run for the boat; there are provisions enough for your voyage home."

With that Uncle Alec slipped round to the front of the tent and, casting in the big bundle like a bomb-shell, roared out, in a voice of thunder,

"Pirates, surrender!"

A crash, a shout, a laugh, and out came the savages, brandishing knives and forks, chicken bones, and tin mugs, and all fell upon the intruder, pommelling him unmercifully as they cried,

"You came too soon! We are not half ready! You've spoilt it all! Where is Rose?"

"Here I am," answered a half-stifled voice, and Rose was discovered sitting on the pile of red flannel bathing clothes, which she had mistaken for lobsters, and where she had fallen in a fit of merriment when she discovered that the cannibals were her merry cousins.

"You good-for-nothing boys! You are always bursting out upon me in some ridiculous way, and I always get taken in because I'm not used to such pranks. Uncle is as bad as the rest, and it's great fun," she said, as the lads came round her, half scolding, half welcoming, and wholly enjoying the double surprise.

"You were not to come till afternoon, and mamma was to be here to receive you. Everything is in a mess now, except your tent; we got that in order the first thing, and you can sit there and see us work," said Archie, doing the honours as usual.

"Rose felt it in her bones, as Dolly says, that something was in the wind, and wanted to be off at once. So I let her come, and should have kept her away an hour longer if your fish had not betrayed you," explained Uncle Alec, subsiding from a ferocious Crusoe into his good-natured self again.

"As this seat is rather damp, I think I'll rise," said Rose, as the excitement lessened a little.

Several fishy hands helped her up, and Charlie said, as he scattered the scarlet garments over the grass with an oar,

"We had a jolly good swim before dinner, and I told the Brats to spread these to dry. Hope you brought your things, Rose, for you belong to the Lobsters, you know, and we can have no end of fun teaching you to dive and float and tread water."

"I didn't bring anything — " began Rose, but was interrupted by the Brats (otherwise Will and Geordie), who appeared bearing the big bundle, so much demoralised by its fall that a red flannel tunic trailed out at one end and a little blue dressing-gown at the other, while the knobs proved to be a toilet-case, rubbers, and a silver mug.

"Oh, that sly Phebe! This was the secret, and she bundled up those things after I went down to the boat," cried Rose, with sparkling eyes.

"Guess something is smashed inside, for a bit of glass fell out," observed Will, as they deposited the bundle at her feet.

"Catch a girl going anywhere without a looking-glass. We haven't got one among the whole lot of us," added Mac, with masculine scorn.

"Dandy has; I caught him touching up his wig behind the trees after our swim," cut in Geordie, wagging a derisive finger at Steve, who promptly silenced him by a smart rap on the head with the drum-stick he had just polished off.

"Come, come, you lazy lubbers, fall to work, or we shall not be ready for mamma. Take Rose's things to her tent, and tell her all about it, Prince. Mac and Steve, you cut away and bring up the rest of the straw; and you small chaps, clear off the table, if you have stuffed all you can. Please, uncle, I'd like your advice about the boundary lines and the best place for the kitchen."

Everyone obeyed the chief, and Rose was escorted to her tent by Charlie, who devoted himself to her service. She was charmed with her quarters, and still more so with the programme which he unfolded before her as they worked.

"We always camp out somewhere in vacation, and this year we thought we'd try the Island. It is handy, and our fireworks will show off well from here."

"Shall we stay over the Fourth? Three whole days! Oh, me! what a frolic it will be!"

"Bless your heart, we often camp for a week, we big fellows; but this year the small chaps wanted to come, so we let them. We have great larks, as you'll see; for we have a cave and play Captain Kidd, and have shipwrecks, and races, and all sorts of games. Arch and I are rather past that kind of thing now, but we do it to please the children," added Charlie, with a sudden recollection of his sixteen years.

"I had no idea boys had such good times. Their plays never seemed a bit interesting before. But I suppose that was because I never knew any boys very well, or perhaps you are unusually nice ones," observed Rose, with an artless air of appreciation that was very flattering.

"We are a pretty clever set, I fancy; but we have a good many advantages, you see. There are a tribe of us, to begin with; then our family has been here for ages, and we have plenty of 'spondulics,' so we can rather lord it over the other fellows, and do as we like. There, ma'am, you can hang your smashed glass on that nail and do up your back hair as fine as you please. You can have a blue blanket or a red one, and a straw pillow or an air cushion for your head, whichever you like. You can trim up to any extent, and be as free and easy as squaws in a wigwam, for this corner is set apart for you ladies and we never cross the line uncle is drawing until we ask leave. Anything more I can do for you, cousin?"

"No, thank you. I think I'll leave the rest till auntie comes, and go and help you somewhere else, if I may."

"Yes, indeed, come on and see to the kitchen. Can you cook?" asked Charlie, as he led the way to the rocky nook where Archie was putting up a sail-cloth awning.

"I can make tea and toast bread."

"Well, we'll shew you how to fry fish, and make chowder. Now you just set these pots and pans round tastefully, and sort of tidy up a bit, for Aunt Jessie insists on doing some of the work, and I want it to be decent here."

By four o'clock the camp was in order, and the weary workers settled down on Lookout Rock to watch for Mrs. Jessie and Jamie, who was never far from mamma's apron string. They looked like a flock of blue-birds, all being in sailor rig, with blue ribbon enough flying from the seven hats to have set up a milliner. Very tuneful blue-birds they were, too, for all the lads sang, and the echo of their happy voices reached Mrs. Jessie long before she saw them.

The moment the boat hove in sight up went the Island flag, and the blue-jackets cheered lustily, as they did on every possible occasion, like true young Americans. This welcome was answered by the flapping of a handkerchief and the shrill “Rah! Rah! Rah!” of the one small tar who stood in the stern waving his hat manfully, while a maternal hand clutched him firmly in the rear.

Cleopatra landing from her golden galley never received a heartier greeting than “Little Mum” as she was borne to her tent by the young folk, for love of whom she smilingly resigned herself to three days of discomfort; while Jamie immediately attached himself to Rose, assuring her of his protection from the manifold perils which might assail them.

Taught by long experience that boys are always hungry, Aunt Jessie soon proposed supper, and proceeded to get it, enveloped in an immense apron, with an old hat of Archie’s stuck atop of her cap. Rose helped, and tried to be as handy as Phebe, though the peculiar style of table she had to set made it no easy task. It was accomplished at last, and a very happy party lay about under the trees, eating and drinking out of anyone’s plate and cup, and quite untroubled by the frequent appearance of ants and spiders in places which these interesting insects are not expected to adorn.

“I never thought I should like to wash dishes, but I do,” said Rose, as she sat in a boat after supper lazily rinsing plates in the sea, and rocking luxuriously as she wiped them.

“Mum is mighty particular; we just give ‘em a scrub with sand, and dust ‘em off with a bit of paper. It’s much the best way, I think,” replied Geordie, who reposed in another boat alongside.

“How Phebe would like this! I wonder uncle did not have her come.”

“I believe he tried to, but Dolly was as cross as two sticks, and said she couldn’t spare her. I’m sorry, for we all like the Phebe bird, and she’d chirp like a good one out here, wouldn’t she?”

“She ought to have a holiday like the rest of us. It’s too bad to leave her out.”

This thought came back to Rose several times that evening, for Phebe would have added much to the little concert they had in the moonlight, would have enjoyed the stories told, been quick at guessing the conundrums, and laughed with all her heart at the fun. The merry going to bed would have been the best of all, for Rose wanted someone to cuddle under the blue blanket with her, there to whisper and giggle and tell secrets, as girls delight to do.

Long after the rest were asleep, Rose lay wide awake, excited by the novelty of all about her, and a thought that had come into her mind. Far away she heard a city clock strike twelve; a large star like a mild eye peeped in at the opening of the tent, and the soft plash of the waves seemed calling her to come out. Aunt Jessie lay fast asleep, with Jamie rolled up like a kitten at her feet, and neither stirred as Rose in her wrapper crept out to see how the world looked at midnight.

She found it very lovely, and sat down on a cracker keg to enjoy it with a heart full of the innocent sentiment of her years. Fortunately, Dr. Alec saw her before she had time to catch cold, for coming out to tie back the door-flap of his tent for more air, he beheld the small figure perched in the moonlight. Having no fear of ghosts, he quietly approached, and, seeing that she was wide awake, said, with a hand on her shining hair,

"What is my girl doing here?"

"Having a good time," answered Rose, not at all startled.

"I wonder what she was thinking about with such a sober look."

"The story you told of the brave sailor who gave up his place on the raft to the woman, and the last drop of water to the poor baby. People who make sacrifices are very much loved and admired, aren't they?" she asked, earnestly.

"If the sacrifice is a true one. But many of the bravest never are known, and get no praise. That does not lessen their beauty, though perhaps it makes them harder, for we all like sympathy," and Dr. Alec sighed a patient sort of sigh.

"I suppose you have made a great many? Would you mind telling me one of them?" asked Rose, arrested by the sigh.

"My last was to give up smoking," was the very unromantic answer to her pensive question.

"Why did you?"

"Bad example for the boys."

"That was very good of you, uncle! Was it hard?"

"I'm ashamed to say it was. But as a wise old fellow once said, 'It is necessary to do right; it is not necessary to be happy.'"

Rose pondered over the saying as if it pleased her, and then said, with a clear, bright look,

"A real sacrifice is giving up something you want or enjoy very much, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Doing it one's own self because one loves another person very much and wants her to be happy?"

"Yes."

"And doing it pleasantly, and being glad about it, and not minding the praise if it doesn't come?"

"Yes, dear, that is the true spirit of self-sacrifice; you seem to understand it, and I dare say you will have many chances in your life to try the real thing. I hope they won't be very hard ones."

"I think they will," began Rose, and there stopped short.

“Well, make one now, and go to sleep, or my girl will be ill to-morrow, and then the aunts will say camping out was bad for her.”

“I’ll go good night!” and throwing him a kiss, the little ghost vanished, leaving Uncle Alec to pace the shore and think about some of the unsuspected sacrifices that had made him what he was.

Chapter 10 — Rose's Sacrifice

There certainly were "larks" on Campbell's Island next day, as Charlie had foretold, and Rose took her part in them like one intent on enjoying every minute to the utmost. There was a merry breakfast, a successful fishing expedition, and then the lobsters came out in full force, for even Aunt Jessie appeared in red flannel. There was nothing Uncle Alec could not do in the water, and the boys tried their best to equal him in strength and skill, so there was a great diving and ducking, for every one was bent on distinguishing himself.

Rose swam out far beyond her depth, with uncle to float her back; Aunt Jessie splashed placidly in the shallow pools, with Jamie paddling near by like a little whale beside its mother; while the lads careered about, looking like a flock of distracted flamingoes, and acting like the famous dancing party in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland."

Nothing but chowder would have lured them from their gambols in the briny deep; that time-honoured dish demanded the concentrated action of several mighty minds; so the "Water Babies" came ashore and fell to cooking.

It is unnecessary to say that, when done, it was the most remarkable chowder ever cooked, and the quantity eaten would have amazed the world if the secret had been divulged. After this exertion a siesta was considered the thing, and people lay about in tents or out as they pleased, the boys looking like warriors slumbering where they fell.

The elders had just settled to a comfortable nap when the youngsters rose, refreshed and ready for further exploits. A hint sent them all off to the cave, and there were discovered bows and arrows, battle clubs, old swords, and various relics of an interesting nature. Perched upon a commanding rock, with Jamie to "splain" things to her, Rose beheld a series of stirring scenes enacted with great vigour and historical accuracy by her gifted relatives.

Captain Cook was murdered by the natives of Owhyhee in the most thrilling manner. Captain Kidd buried untold wealth in the chowder kettle at the dead of night, and shot both the trusting villains who shared the secret of the hiding place. Sinbad came ashore there and had manifold adventures, and numberless wrecks bestrewed the sands.

Rose considered them by far the most exciting dramas she had ever witnessed; and when the performance closed with a grand ballet of Feejee Islanders, whose barbaric yells alarmed the gulls, she had no words in which to express her gratification.

Another swim at sunset, another merry evening on the rocks watching the lighted steamers pass seaward and the pleasure-boats come into port, ended the second day of the camping out, and sent everyone to bed early that they might be ready for the festivities of the morrow.

“Archie, didn’t I hear uncle ask you to row home in the morning for fresh milk and things?”

“Yes, why?”

“Please, may I go too? I have something of great importance to arrange; you know I was carried off in a hurry,” Rose said in a confidential whisper as she was bidding her cousins good night.

“I’m willing, and I guess Charlie won’t mind.”

“Thank you; be sure you stand by me when I ask leave in the morning, and don’t say anything till then, except to Charlie. Promise,” urged Rose, so eagerly, that Archie struck an attitude and cried dramatically,

“By yonder moon I swear!”

“Hush! it’s all right, go along”; and Rose departed as if satisfied.

“She’s a queer little thing, isn’t she, Prince?”

“Rather a nice little thing, I think. I’m quite fond of her.”

Rose’s quick ears caught both remarks, and she retired to her tent, saying to herself with sleepy dignity,

“Little thing, indeed! Those boys talk as if I was a baby. They will treat me with more respect after to-morrow, I guess.”

Archie did stand by her in the morning, and her request was readily granted, as the lads were coming directly back. Off they went, and Rose waved her hand to the islanders with a somewhat pensive air, for an heroic purpose glowed within her, and the spirit of self-sacrifice was about to be illustrated in a new and touching manner.

While the boys got the milk Rose ran to Phebe, ordered her to leave her dishes, to put on her hat, and take a note back to Uncle Alec, which would explain this somewhat mysterious performance. Phebe obeyed, and when she went to the boat Rose accompanied her, telling the boys she was not ready to go yet, but they could, some of them, come for her when she hung a white signal on her balcony.

“But why not come now? What are you about, miss? Uncle won’t like it,” protested Charlie, in great amazement.

“Just do as I tell you, little boy; uncle will understand and explain. Obey, as Phebe does, and ask no questions. I can have secrets as well as other people”; and Rose walked off with an air of lofty independence that impressed her friends immensely.

"It's some plot between uncle and herself, so we won't meddle. All right, Phebe? Pull away, Prince"; and off they went to be received with much surprise by the islanders.

This was the note Phebe bore:

"Dear Uncle, I am going to take Phebe's place to-day, and let her have all the fun she can. Please don't mind what she says, but keep her, and tell the boys to be very good to her for my sake. Don't think it is easy to do this; it is very hard to give up the best day of all, but I feel so selfish to have all the pleasure and Phebe none, that I wish to make this sacrifice. Do let me, and don't laugh at it; I truly do not wish to be praised, and I truly want to do it. Love to all from,

"Rose."

"Bless the little dear, what a generous heart she has! Shall we go after her, Jessie, or let her have her way?" said Dr. Alec, after the first mingled amusement and astonishment had subsided.

"Let her alone, and don't spoil her little sacrifice. She means it, I know, and the best way in which we can show our respect for her effort is to give Phebe a pleasant day. I'm sure she has earned it"; and Mrs. Jessie made a sign to the boys to suppress their disappointment and exert themselves to please Rose's guest.

Phebe was with difficulty kept from going straight home, and declared that she should not enjoy herself one bit without Miss Rose.

"She won't hold out all day, and we shall see her paddling back before noon, I'll wager anything," said Charlie; and the rest so strongly inclined to his opinion that they resigned themselves to the loss of the little queen of the revels, sure that it would be only a temporary one.

But hour after hour passed, and no signal appeared on the balcony, though Phebe watched it hopefully. No passing boat brought the truant back, though more than one pair of eyes looked out for the bright hair under the round hat; and sunset came, bringing no Rose but the lovely colour in the western sky.

"I really did not think the child had it in her. I fancied it was a bit of sentiment, but I see she was in earnest, and means that her sacrifice shall be a true one. Dear little soul! I'll make it up to her a thousand times over, and beg her pardon for thinking it might be done for effect," Dr. Alec said remorsefully, as he strained his eyes through the dusk, fancying he saw a small figure sitting in the garden as it had sat on the keg the night before, laying the generous little plot that had cost more than he could guess.

"Well, she can't help seeing the fireworks, any way, unless she is goose enough to think she must hide in a dark closet and not look," said Archie, who was rather disgusted at Rose's seeming ingratitude.

"She will see ours capitally, but miss the big ones on the hill, unless papa has forgotten all about them," added Steve, cutting short the harangue Mac had begun upon the festivals of the ancients.

"I'm sure the sight of her will be better than the finest fireworks that ever went off," said Phebe, meditating an elopement with one of the boats if she could get a chance.

"Let things work; if she resists a brilliant invitation we give her she will be a heroine," added Uncle Alec, secretly hoping that she would not.

Meanwhile Rose had spent a quiet, busy day helping Dolly, waiting on Aunt Peace, and steadily resisting Aunt Plenty's attempts to send her back to the happy island. It had been hard in the morning to come in from the bright world outside, with flags flying, cannon booming, crackers popping, and everyone making ready for a holiday, and go to washing cups, while Dolly grumbled and the aunts lamented. It was very hard to see the day go by, knowing how gay each hour must have been across the water, and how a word from her would take her where she longed to be with all her heart. But it was hardest of all when evening came and Aunt Peace was asleep, Aunt Plenty seeing a gossip in the parlor, Dolly established in the porch to enjoy the show, and nothing left for the little maid to do but sit alone in her balcony and watch the gay rockets whizz up from island, hill, and city, while bands played and boats laden with happy people went to and fro in the fitful light.

Then it must be confessed that a tear or two dimmed the blue eyes, and once, when a very brilliant display illuminated the island for a moment, and she fancied she saw the tents, the curly head went down on the railing, and a wide-awake nasturtium heard a little whisper,

"I hope someone wishes I was there!"

The tears were all gone, however, and she was watching the hill and island answer each other with what Jamie called "whizzers, whirligigs and busters," and smiling as she thought how hard the boys must be working to keep up such a steady fire, when Uncle Mac came walking in upon her, saying hurriedly,

"Come, child, put on your tippet, pelisse, or whatever you call it, and run off with me. I came to get Phebe, but aunt says she is gone, so I want you. I've got Fun down in the boat, and I want you to go with us and see my fireworks. Got them up for you, and you mustn't miss them, or I shall be disappointed."

"But, uncle," began Rose, feeling as if she ought to refuse even a glimpse of bliss, "perhaps — "

"I know, my dear, I know; aunt told me; but no one needs you now so much as I do, and I insist on your coming," said Uncle Mac, who seemed in a great hurry to be off, yet was unusually kind.

So Rose went and found the little Chinaman with a funny lantern waiting to help her in and convulse her with laughter trying to express his emotions in pigeon English. The city clocks were striking nine as they got out into the bay, and the island fireworks seemed to be over, for no rocket answered the last Roman candle that shone on the Aunt-hill.

“Ours are done, I see, but they are going up all round the city, and how pretty they are,” said Rose, folding her mantle about her, and surveying the scene with pensive interest.

“Hope my fellows have not got into trouble up there,” muttered Uncle Mac, adding with a satisfied chuckle, as a spark shone out, “No; there it goes! Look, Rosy, and see how you like this one; it was ordered especially in honour of your coming.”

Rose looked with all her eyes, and saw the spark grow into the likeness of a golden vase, then green leaves came out, and then a crimson flower glowing on the darkness with a splendid lustre.

“Is it a rose, uncle?” she asked, clasping her hands with delight as she recognised the handsome flower.

“Of course it is! Look again, and guess what those are,” answered Uncle Mac, chuckling and enjoying it all like a boy.

A wreath of what looked at first like purple brooms appeared below the vase, but Rose guessed what they were meant for, and stood straight up, holding by his shoulder, and crying excitedly,

“Thistles, uncle, Scotch thistles! There are seven of them one for each boy! Oh, what a joke!” and she laughed so that she plumped into the bottom of the boat and stayed there till the brilliant spectacle was quite gone.

“That was rather a neat thing, I flatter myself,” said Uncle Mac, in high glee at the success of his illumination. “Now, shall I leave you on the Island or take you home again, my good little girl?” he added, lifting her up with such a tone of approbation in his voice that Rose kissed him on the spot.

“Home, please uncle; and I thank you very very much for the beautiful firework you got up for me. I’m so glad I saw it; and I know I shall dream about it,” answered Rose steadily, though a wistful glance went toward the Island, now so near that she could smell powder and see shadowy figures flitting about.

Home they went; and Rose fell asleep saying to herself, “It was harder than I thought, but I’m glad I did it, and I truly don’t want any reward but Phebe’s pleasure.”

Chapter 11 — Poor Mac

Rose’s sacrifice was a failure in one respect, for, though the elders loved her the better for it, and showed that they did, the boys were not inspired with the sudden respect which she had hoped for. In fact, her feelings were much hurt by overhearing Archie say that he couldn’t see any sense in it; and the Prince added another blow by pronouncing her “the queerest chicken ever seen.”

It is apt to be so, and it is hard to bear; for, though we do not want trumpets blown, we do like to have our little virtues appreciated, and cannot help feeling disappointed if they are not.

A time soon came, however, when Rose, quite unconsciously, won not only the respect of her cousins, but their gratitude and affection likewise.

Soon after the Island episode, Mac had a sunstroke, and was very ill for some time. It was so sudden that everyone was startled, and for some days the boy’s life was in danger. He pulled through, however; and then, just as the family were rejoicing, a new trouble appeared which cast a gloom over them all.

Poor Mac’s eyes gave out; and well they might, for he had abused them, and never being very strong, they suffered doubly now.

No one dared to tell him the dark predictions of the great oculist who came to look at them, and the boy tried to be patient, thinking that a few weeks of rest would repair the overwork of several years.

He was forbidden to look at a book, and as that was the one thing he most delighted in, it was a terrible affliction to the Worm. Everyone was very ready to read to him, and at first the lads contended for this honour. But as week after week went by, and Mac was still condemned to idleness and a darkened room, their zeal abated, and one after the other fell off. It was hard for the active fellows, right in the midst of their vacation; and nobody blamed them when they contented themselves with brief calls, running of errands, and warm expressions of sympathy.

The elders did their best, but Uncle Mac was a busy man, Aunt Jane’s reading was of a funereal sort, impossible to listen to long, and the other aunties were all absorbed in their own cares, though they supplied the boy with every delicacy they could invent.

Uncle Alec was a host in himself, but he could not give all his time to the invalid; and if it had not been for Rose, the afflicted Worm would have fared ill. Her pleasant voice suited him, her patience was unfailing, her time of no apparent value, and her eager good-will was very comforting.

The womanly power of self-devotion was strong in the child, and she remained faithfully at her post when all the rest dropped away. Hour after hour she sat in the dusky room, with one ray of light on her book, reading to the boy, who lay with shaded eyes silently enjoying the only pleasure that lightened the weary days. Sometimes he was peevish and hard to please, sometimes he growled because his reader could not manage the dry books he wished to hear, and sometimes he was so despondent that her heart ached to see him. Through all these trials Rose persevered, using all her little arts to please him. When he fretted, she was patient; when he growled, she ploughed bravely through the hard pages not dry to her in one sense, for quiet tears dropped on them now and then; and when Mac fell into a despairing mood, she comforted him with every hopeful word she dared to offer.

He said little, but she knew he was grateful, for she suited him better than anyone else. If she was late, he was impatient; when she had to go, he seemed forlorn; and when the tired head ached worst, she could always soothe him to sleep, crooning the old songs her father used to love.

“I don’t know what I should do without that child,” Aunt Jane often said.

“She’s worth all those racketing fellows put together,” Mac would add, fumbling about to discover if the little chair was ready for her coming.

That was the sort of reward Rose liked, the thanks that cheered her; and whenever she grew very tired, one look at the green shade, the curly head so restless on the pillow, and the poor groping hands, touched her tender heart and put new spirit into the weary voice.

She did not know how much she was learning, both from the books she read and the daily sacrifices she made. Stories and poetry were her delight, but Mac did not care for them; and since his favourite Greeks and Romans were forbidden, he satisfied himself with travels, biographies, and the history of great inventions or discoveries. Rose despised this taste at first, but soon got interested in Livingstone’s adventures, Hobson’s stirring life in India, and the brave trials and triumphs of Watt and Arkwright, Fulton, and “Palissy, the Potter.” The true, strong books helped the dreamy girl; her faithful service and sweet patience touched and won the boy; and long afterward both learned to see how useful those seemingly hard and weary hours had been to them.

One bright morning, as Rose sat down to begin a fat volume entitled “History of the French Revolution,” expecting to come to great grief over the long names, Mac, who was lumbering about the room like a blind bear, stopped her by asking abruptly,

“What day of the month is it?”

“The seventh of August, I believe.”

“More than half my vacation gone, and I’ve only had a week of it! I call that hard,” and he groaned dismally.

“So it is; but there is more to come, and you may be able to enjoy that.”

“May be able! I will be able! Does that old noodle think I’m going to stay stived up here much longer?”

“I guess he does, unless your eyes get on faster than they have yet.”

“Has he said anything more lately?”

“I haven’t seen him, you know. Shall I begin? this looks rather nice.”

“Read away; it’s all one to me.” And Mac cast himself down upon the old lounge, where his heavy head felt easiest.

Rose began with great spirit, and kept on gallantly for a couple of chapters, getting over the unpronounceable names with unexpected success, she thought, for her listener did not correct her once, and lay so still she fancied he was deeply interested. All of a sudden she was arrested in the middle of a fine paragraph by Mac, who sat bolt upright, brought both feet down with a thump, and said, in a rough, excited tone,

“Stop! I don’t hear a word, and you may as well save your breath to answer my question.”

“What is it?” asked Rose, looking uneasy, for she had something on her mind, and feared that he suspected what it was. His next words proved that she was right.

“Now, look here, I want to know something, and you’ve got to tell me.”

“Please, don’t — ” began Rose, beseechingly.

“You must, or I’ll pull off this shade and stare at the sun as hard as ever I can stare. Come now!” and he half rose, as if ready to execute the threat.

“I will! oh, I will tell, if I know! But don’t be reckless and do anything so crazy as that,” cried Rose, in great distress.

“Very well; then listen, and don’t dodge, as everyone else does. Didn’t the doctor think my eyes worse the last time he came? Mother won’t say, but you shall.”

“I believe he did,” faltered Rose.

“I thought so! Did he say I should be able to go to school when it begins?”

“No, Mac,” very low.

“Ah!”

That was all, but Rose saw her cousin set his lips together and take a long breath, as if she had hit him hard. He bore the disappointment bravely, however, and asked quite steadily in a minute,

“How soon does he think I can study again?”

It was so hard to answer that! Yet Rose knew she must, for Aunt Jane had declared she could not do it, and Uncle Mac had begged her to break the truth to the poor lad.

“Not for a good many months.”

“How many?” he asked with a pathetic sort of gruffness.

“A year, perhaps.”

“A whole year! Why, I expected to be ready for college by that time.” And, pushing up the shade, Mac stared at her with startled eyes, that soon blinked and fell before the one ray of light.

“Plenty of time for that; you must be patient now, and get them thoroughly well, or they will trouble you again when it will be harder to spare them,” she said, with tears in her own eyes.

“I won’t do it! I will study and get through somehow. It’s all humbug about taking care so long. These doctors like to keep hold of a fellow if they can. But I won’t stand it I vow I won’t!” and he banged his fist down on the unoffending pillow as if he were pommelling the hard-hearted doctor.

“Now, Mac, listen to me,” Rose said very earnestly, though her voice shook a little and her heart ached. “You know you have hurt your eyes reading by fire-light and in the dusk, and sitting up late, and now you’ll have to pay for it; the doctor said so. You must be careful, and do as he tells you, or you will be blind.”

“No!”

“Yes, it is true, and he wanted us to tell you that nothing but entire rest would cure you. I know it’s dreadfully hard, but we’ll all help you; I’ll read all day long, and lead you, and wait upon you, and try to make it easier.”

She stopped there, for it was evident that he did not hear a sound; the word “blind” seemed to have knocked him down, for he had buried his face in the pillow, and lay so still that Rose was frightened. She sat motionless for many minutes, longing to comfort him, but not knowing how, and wishing Uncle Alec would come, for he had promised to tell Mac.

Presently, a sort of choking sound came out of the pillow, and went straight to her heart the most pathetic sob she ever heard, for, though it was the most natural means of relief, the poor fellow must not indulge in it because of the afflicted eyes. The “French Revolution” tumbled out of her lap, and, running to the sofa, she knelt down by it, saying, with the motherly sort of tenderness girls feel for any sorrowing creature,

“Oh, my dear, you mustn’t cry! It is so bad for your poor eyes. Take your head out of that hot pillow, and let me cool it. I don’t wonder you feel so, but please don’t cry. I’ll cry for you; it won’t hurt me.”

As she spoke she pulled away the cushion with gentle force, and saw the green shade all crushed and stained with the few hot tears that told how bitter the disappointment had been. Mac felt her sympathy, but, being a boy, did not thank her for it; only sat up with a jerk, saying, as he tried to rub away the tell-tale drops with the sleeve of his jacket, “Don’t bother; weak eyes always water. I’m all right.”

But Rose cried out, and caught his arm, “Don’t touch them with that rough woollen stuff! Lie down and let me bathe them, there’s a dear boy; then there will be no harm done.”

“They do smart confoundedly. I say, don’t you tell the other fellows that I made a baby of myself, will you?” he added, yielding with a sigh to the orders of his nurse, who had flown for the eye-wash and linen cambric handkerchief.

“Of course I won’t; but anyone would be upset at the idea of being well troubled in this way. I’m sure you bear it splendidly, and you know it isn’t half so bad when you get used to it. Besides, it is only for a time, and you can do lots of pleasant things if you can’t study. You’ll have to wear blue goggles, perhaps; won’t that be funny?”

And while she was pouring out all the comfortable words she could think of, Rose was softly bathing the eyes and dabbing the hot forehead with lavender-water, as her patient lay quiet with a look on his face that grieved her sadly.

“Homer was blind, and so was Milton, and they did something to be remembered by, in spite of it,” he said, as if to himself, in a solemn tone, for even the blue goggles did not bring a smile.

“Papa had a picture of Milton and his daughters writing for him. It was a very sweet picture, I thought,” observed Rose in a serious voice, trying to meet the sufferer on his own ground.

“Perhaps I could study if someone read and did the eye part. Do you suppose I could, by and by?” he asked, with a sudden ray of hope.

“I dare say, if your head is strong enough. This sunstroke, you know, is what upset you, and your brain needs rest, the doctor says.”

“I’ll have a talk with the old fellow next time he comes, and find out just what I may do; then I shall know where I am. What a fool I was that day to be stewing my brains and letting the sun glare on my book till the letters danced before me! I see ‘em now when I shut my eyes; black balls bobbing round, and stars and all sorts of queer things. Wonder if all blind people do?”

“Don’t think about them; I’ll go on reading, shall I? We shall come to the exciting part soon, and then you’ll forget all this,” suggested Rose.

“No, I never shall forget. Hang the old ‘Revolution’! I don’t want to hear another word of it. My head aches, and I’m hot. Oh, wouldn’t I like to go for a pull in the ‘Stormy Petrel!”‘ and poor Mac tossed about as if he did not know what to do with himself.

“Let me sing, and perhaps you’ll drop off; then the day will seem shorter,” said Rose, taking up a fan and sitting down beside him.

“Perhaps I shall; I didn’t sleep much last night, and when I did I dreamed like fun. See here, you tell the people that I know, and it’s all right, and I don’t want them to talk about it or howl over me. That’s all; now drone away, and I’ll try to sleep. Wish I could for a year, and wake up cured.”

“Oh, I wish, I wish you could!”

Rose said it so fervently that Mac was moved to grope for her apron and hold on to a corner of it, as if it was comfortable to feel her near him. But all he said was,

“You are a good little soul, Rosy. Give us ‘The Birks’; that is a drowsy one that always sends me off.”

Quite contented with this small return for all her sympathy, Rose waved her fan and sang, in a dreamy tone, the pretty Scotch air, the burden of which is,

“Bonny lassie, will ye gang, will ye gang
To the Birks of Aberfeldie?”

Whether the lassie went or not I cannot say, but the laddie was off to the land of Nod, in about ten minutes, quite worn out with hearing the bad tidings and the effort to bear them manfully.

Chapter 12 — ”The Other Fellows”

Rose did tell “the people” what had passed, and no one “howled” over Mac, or said a word to trouble him. He had his talk with the doctor, and got very little comfort out of it, for he found that “just what he might do” was nothing at all; though the prospect of some study by and by, if all went well, gave him courage to bear the woes of the present. Having made up his mind to this, he behaved so well that everyone was astonished, never having suspected so much manliness in the quiet Worm.

The boys were much impressed, both by the greatness of the affliction which hung over him and by his way of bearing it. They were very good to him, but not always particularly wise in their attempts to cheer and amuse; and Rose often found him much downcast after a visit of condolence from the Clan. She still kept her place as head-nurse and chief-reader, though the boys did their best in an irregular sort of way. They were rather taken aback sometimes at finding Rose’s services preferred to their’s, and privately confided to one another that “Old Mac was getting fond of being molly-coddled.” But they could not help seeing how useful she was, and owning that she alone had remained faithful a fact which caused some of them much secret compunction now and then.

Rose felt that she ruled in that room, if nowhere else, for Aunt Jane left a great deal to her, finding that her experience with her invalid father fitted her for a nurse, and in a case like this, her youth was an advantage rather than a drawback. Mac soon came to think that no one could take care of him so well as Rose, and Rose soon grew fond of her patient, though at first she had considered this cousin the least attractive of the seven. He was not polite and sensible like Archie, nor gay and handsome like Prince Charlie, nor neat and obliging like Steve, nor amusing like the “Brats,” nor confiding and affectionate like little Jamie. He was rough, absent-minded, careless, and awkward, rather priggish, and not at all agreeable to a dainty, beauty-loving girl like Rose.

But when his trouble came upon him, she discovered many good things in this cousin of hers, and learned not only to pity but to respect and love the poor Worm, who tried to be patient, brave, and cheerful, and found it a harder task than anyone guessed, except the little nurse, who saw him in his gloomiest moods. She soon came to think that his friends did not appreciate him, and upon one occasion was moved to free her mind in a way that made a deep impression on the boys.

Vacation was almost over, and the time drawing near when Mac would be left outside the happy school-world which he so much enjoyed. This made him rather low in his mind, and his cousins exerted themselves to cheer him up, especially one afternoon when a spasm of devotion seemed to seize them all. Jamie trudged down the hill with a basket of blackberries which he had "picked all his ownself," as his scratched fingers and stained lips plainly testified. Will and Geordie brought their puppies to beguile the weary hours, and the three elder lads called to discuss baseball, cricket, and kindred subjects, eminently fitted to remind the invalid of his privations.

Rose had gone to drive with Uncle Alec, who declared she was getting as pale as a potato sprout, living so much in a dark room. But her thoughts were with her boy all the while, and she ran up to him the moment she returned, to find things in a fine state of confusion.

With the best intentions in life, the lads had done more harm than good, and the spectacle that met Nurse Rose's eye was a trying one. The puppies were yelping, the small boys romping, and the big boys all talking at once; the curtains were up, the room close, berries scattered freely about, Mac's shade half off, his cheeks flushed, his temper ruffled, and his voice loudest of all as he disputed hotly with Steve about lending certain treasured books which he could no longer use.

Now Rose considered this her special kingdom, and came down upon the invaders with an energy which amazed them and quelled the riot at once. They had never seen her roused before, and the effect was tremendous; also comical, for she drove the whole flock of boys out of the room like an indignant little hen defending her brood. They all went as meekly as sheep; the small lads fled from the house precipitately, but the three elder ones only retired to the next room, and remained there hoping for a chance to explain and apologise, and so appease the irate young lady, who had suddenly turned the tables and clattered them about their ears.

As they waited, they observed her proceedings through the half-open door, and commented upon them briefly but expressively, feeling quite bowed down with remorse at the harm they had innocently done.

"She's put the room to rights in a jiffey. What jacks we were to let those dogs in and kick up such a row," observed Steve, after a prolonged peep.

"The poor old Worm turns as if she was treading on him instead of cuddling him like a pussy cat. Isn't he cross, though?" added Charlie, as Mac was heard growling about his "confounded head."

"She will manage him; but it's mean in us to rumple him up and then leave her to smooth him down. I'd go and help, but I don't know how," said Archie, looking much depressed, for he was a conscientious fellow, and blamed himself for his want of thought.

"No, more do I. Odd, isn't it, what a knack women have for taking care of sick folks?" and Charlie fell a-musing over this undeniable fact.

"She has been ever so good to Mac," began Steve, in a self-reproachful tone.

"Better than his own brother, hey?" cut in Archie, finding relief for his own regret in the delinquencies of another.

"Well, you needn't preach; you didn't any of you do any more, and you might have, for Mac likes you better than he does me. I always fret him, he says, and it isn't my fault if I am a quiddle," protested Steve, in self-defence.

"We have all been selfish and neglected him, so we won't fight about it, but try and do better," said Archie, generously taking more than his share of blame, for he had been less inattentive than either of the others.

"Rose has stood by him like a good one, and it's no wonder he likes to have her round best. I should myself if I was down on my luck as he is," put in Charlie, feeling that he really had not done "the little thing" justice.

"I'll tell you what it is, boys we haven't been half good enough to Rose, and we've got to make it up to her somehow," said Archie, who had a very manly sense of honour about paying his debts, even to a girl.

"I'm awfully sorry I made fun of her doll when Jamie lugged it out; and I called her 'baby bunting' when she cried over the dead kitten. Girls are such geese sometimes, I can't help it," said Steve, confessing his transgressions handsomely, and feeling quite ready to atone for them if he only knew how.

"I'll go down on my knees and beg her pardon for treating her as if she was a child. Don't it make her mad, though? Come to think of it, she's only two years or so younger than I am. But she is so small and pretty, she always seems like a dolly to me," and the Prince looked down from his lofty height of five feet five as if Rose was indeed a pygmy beside him.

"That dolly has got a real good little heart, and a bright mind of her own, you'd better believe. Mac says she understands some things quicker than he can, and mother thinks she is an uncommonly nice girl, though she don't know all creation. You needn't put on airs, Charlie, though you are a tall one, for Rose likes Archie better than you; she said she did because he treated her respectfully."

"Steve looks as fierce as a game-cock; but don't you get excited, my son, for it won't do a bit of good. Of course, everybody likes the Chief best; they ought to, and I'll punch their heads if they don't. So calm yourself, Dandy, and mend your own manners before you come down on other people's."

Thus the Prince with great dignity and perfect good nature, while Archie looked modestly gratified with the flattering opinions of his kinsfolk, and Steve subsided, feeling he had done his duty as a cousin and a brother. A pause ensued, during which Aunt Jane appeared in the other room, accompanied by a tea-tray sumptuously spread, and prepared to feed her big nestling, as that was a task she allowed no one to share with her.

"If you have a minute to spare before you go, child, I wish you'd just make Mac a fresh shade; this has got a berry stain on it, and he must be tidy, for he is to go out to-morrow if it is a cloudy day," said Mrs. Jane, spreading toast in a stately manner, while Mac slopped his tea about without receiving a word of reproof.

"Yes, aunt," answered Rose, so meekly that the boys could hardly believe it could be the same voice which had issued the stern command, "Out of this room, every one of you!" not very long ago.

They had not time to retire, without unseemly haste, before she walked into the parlour and sat down at the work-table without a word. It was funny to see the look the three tall lads cast at the little person sedately threading a needle with green silk. They all wanted to say something expressive of repentance, but no one knew how to begin, and it was evident, from the prim expression of Rose's face, that she intended to stand upon her dignity till they had properly abased themselves. The pause was becoming very awkward, when Charlie, who possessed all the persuasive arts of a born scapegrace, went slowly down upon his knees before her, beat his breast, and said, in a heart-broken tone,

"Please forgive me this time, and I'll never do so any more."

It was very hard to keep sober, but Rose managed it and answered gravely,

"It is Mac's pardon you should ask, not mine, for you haven't hurt me, and I shouldn't wonder if you had him a great deal, with all that light and racket, and talk about things that only worry him."

"Do you really think we've hurt him, cousin?" asked Archie, with a troubled look, while Charlie settled down in a remorseful heap among the table legs.

"Yes, I do, for he has got a raging headache, and his eyes are as red as as this emery bag," answered Rose, solemnly plunging her needle into a fat flannel strawberry.

Steve tore his hair, metaphorically speaking, for he clutched his cherished top-knot, and wildly dishevelled it, as if that was the heaviest penance he could inflict upon himself at such short notice. Charlie laid himself out flat, melodramatically begging someone to take him away and hang him; but Archie, who felt worst of all, said nothing except to vow within himself that he would read to Mac till his own eyes were as red as a dozen emery bags combined.

Seeing the wholesome effects of her treatment upon these culprits, Rose felt that she might relent and allow them a gleam of hope. She found it impossible to help trampling upon the prostrate Prince a little, in words at least, for he had hurt her feelings oftener than he knew; so she gave him a thimble-pie on the top of his head, and said, with an air of an infinitely superior being,

“Don’t be silly, but get up, and I’ll tell you something much better to do than sprawling on the floor and getting all over lint.”

Charlie obediently sat himself upon a hassock at her feet; the other sinners drew near to catch the words of wisdom about to fall from her lips, and Rose, softened by this gratifying humility, addressed them in her most maternal tone.

“Now, boys, if you really want to be good to Mac, you can do it in this way. Don’t keep talking about things he can’t do, or go and tell what fun you have had batting your ridiculous balls about. Get some nice book and read quietly; cheer him up about school, and offer to help him study by and by; you can do that better than I, because I’m only a girl, and don’t learn Greek and Latin and all sorts of headachy stuff.”

“Yes, but you can do heaps of things better than we can; you’ve proved that,” said Archie, with an approving look that delighted Rose, though she could not resist giving Charlie one more rebuke, by saying, with a little bridling of the head, and a curl of the lip that wanted to smile instead,

“I’m glad you think so, though I am a ‘queer chicken.”‘

This scathing remark caused the Prince to hide his face for shame, and Steve to erect his head in the proud consciousness that this shot was not meant for him. Archie laughed, and Rose, seeing a merry blue eye winking at her from behind two brown hands, gave Charlie’s ear a friendly tweak, and extended the olive-branch of peace.

“Now we’ll all be good, and plan nice things for poor Mac,” she said, smiling so graciously that the boys felt as if the sun had suddenly burst out from behind a heavy cloud and was shining with great brilliancy.

The storm had cleared the air, and quite a heavenly calm succeeded, during which plans of a most varied and surprising sort were laid, for everyone burned to make noble sacrifices upon the shrine of “poor Mac,” and Rose was the guiding star to whom the others looked with most gratifying submission. Of course, this elevated state of things could not endure long, but it was very nice while it lasted, and left an excellent effect upon the minds of all when the first ardour had subsided.

“There, that’s ready for to-morrow, and I do hope it will be cloudy,” said Rose, as she finished off the new shade, the progress of which the boys had watched with interest.

“I’d bespoken an extra sunny day, but I’ll tell the clerk of the weather to change it. He’s an obliging fellow, and he’ll attend to it, so make yourself easy,” said Charlie, who had become quite perky again.

“It is very easy for you to joke, but how would you like to wear a blinder like that for weeks and weeks, sir?” and Rose quenched his rising spirits by slipping the shade over his eyes, as he still sat on the cushion at her feet.

“It’s horrid! Take it off, take it off! I don’t wonder the poor old boy has the blues with a thing like that on”; and Charlie sat looking at what seemed to him an instrument of torture, with such a sober face that Rose took it gently away, and went in to bid Mac good-night.

“I shall go home with her, for it is getting darkish, and she is rather timid,” said Archie, forgetting that he had often laughed at this very timidity.

“I think I might, for she’s taking care of my brother,” put in Steve, asserting his rights.

“Let’s all go, that will please her”; proposed Charlie, with a burst of gallantry which electrified his mates.

“We will!” they said with one voice, and they did, to Rose’s great surprise and secret contentment; though Archie had all the care of her, for the other two were leaping fences, running races, and having wrestling matches all the way down.

They composed themselves on reaching the door, however; shook hands cordially all round, made their best bows, and retired with great elegance and dignity, leaving Rose to say to herself, with girlish satisfaction, as she went in,

“Now, that is the way I like to be treated.”

Chapter 13 — Cosey Corner

Vacation was over, the boys went back to school, and poor Mac was left lamenting. He was out of the darkened room now, and promoted to blue goggles, through which he took a gloomy view of life, as might have been expected; for there was nothing he could do but wander about, and try to amuse himself without using his eyes. Anyone who has ever been condemned to that sort of idleness knows how irksome it is, and can understand the state of mind which caused Mac to say to Rose in a desperate tone one day,

"Look here, if you don't invent some new employment or amusement for me, I shall knock myself on the head as sure as you live."

Rose flew to Uncle Alec for advice, and he ordered both patient and nurse to the mountains for a month, with Aunt Jessie and Jamie as escort. Pokey and her mother joined the party, and one bright September morning six very happy-looking people were aboard the express train for Portland two smiling mammas, laden with luncheon baskets and wraps; a pretty young girl with a bag of books on her arm; a tall thin lad with his hat over his eyes; and two small children, who sat with their short legs straight out before them, and their chubby faces beaming with the first speechless delight of "truly travelling."

An especially splendid sunset seemed to have been prepared to welcome them when, after a long day's journey, they drove into a wide, green door-yard, where a white colt, a red cow, two cats, four kittens, many hens, and a dozen people, old and young, were gaily disporting themselves. Everyone nodded and smiled in the friendliest manner, and a lively old lady kissed the new-comers all round, as she said heartily,

"Well, now, I'm proper glad to see you! Come right in and rest, and we'll have tea in less than no time, for you must be tired. Lizzie, you show the folks upstairs; Kitty, you fly round and help father in with the trunks; and Jenny and I will have the table all ready by the time you come down. Bless the dears, they want to go see the pussies, and so they shall!"

The three pretty daughters did "fly round," and everyone felt at home at once, all were so hospitable and kind. Aunt Jessie had raptures over the home-made carpets, quilts and quaint furniture; Rose could not keep away from the windows, for each framed a lovely picture; and the little folks made friends at once with the other children, who filled their arms with chickens and kittens, and did the honours handsomely.

The toot of a horn called all to supper, and a goodly party, including six children besides the Camp-bells, assembled in the long dining-room, armed with mountain appetites and the gayest spirits. It was impossible for anyone to be shy or sober, for such gales of merriment arose they blew the starch out of the stiffest, and made the saddest jolly. Mother Atkinson, as all called their hostess, was the merriest there, and the busiest; for she kept flying up to wait on the children, to bring out some new dish, or to banish the live stock, who were of such a social turn that the colt came into the entry and demanded sugar; the cats sat about in people's laps, winking suggestively at the food; and speckled hens cleared the kitchen floor of crumbs, as they joined in the chat with a cheerful clucking.

Everybody turned out after tea to watch the sunset till all the lovely red was gone, and mosquitoes wound their shrill horns to sound the retreat. The music of an organ surprised the new-comers, and in the parlor they found Father Atkinson playing sweetly on the little instrument made by himself. All the children gathered about him, and, led by the tuneful sisters, sang prettily till Pokey fell asleep behind the door, and Jamie gaped audibly right in the middle of his favourite,

> "Coo," said the little doves: "Coo," said she,
> "All in the top of the old pine-tree."

The older travellers, being tired, went to "bye low" at the same time, and slept like tops in home-spun sheets, on husk mattresses made by Mother Atkinson, who seemed to have put some soothing powder among them, so deep and sweet was the slumber that came.

Next day began the wholesome out-of-door life, which works such wonders with tired minds and feeble bodies. The weather was perfect, and the mountain air made the children as frisky as young lambs; while the elders went about smiling at one another, and saying, "Isn't it splendid?" Even Mac, the "slow coach," was seen to leap over a fence as if he really could not help it; and when Rose ran after him with his broad-brimmed hat, he made the spirited proposal to go into the woods and hunt for a catamount.

Jamie and Pokey were at once enrolled in the Cosey Corner Light Infantry a truly superb company, composed entirely of officers, all wearing cocked hats, carrying flags, waving swords, or beating drums. It was a spectacle to stir the dullest soul when this gallant band marched out of the yard in full regimentals, with Captain Dove a solemn, big-headed boy of eleven issuing his orders with the gravity of a general, and his Falstaffian regiment obeying them with more docility than skill. The little Snow children did very well, and Lieutenant Jack Dove was fine to see; so was Drummer Frank, the errand-boy of the house, as he rub-a-dub-dubbed with all his heart and drumsticks. Jamie had “trained” before, and was made a colonel at once; but Pokey was the best of all, and called forth a spontaneous burst of applause from the spectators as she brought up the rear, her cocked hat all over one eye, her flag trailing over her shoulder, and her wooden sword straight up in the air; her face beaming and every curl bobbing with delight as her fat legs tottered in the vain attempt to keep step manfully.

Mac and Rose were picking blackberries in the bushes beside the road when the soldiers passed without seeing them, and they witnessed a sight that was both pretty and comical. A little farther on was one of the family burial spots so common in those parts, and just this side of it Captain Fred Dove ordered his company to halt, explaining his reason for so doing in the following words,

“That’s a graveyard, and it’s proper to muffle the drums and lower the flags as we go by, and we’d better take off our hats, too; it’s more respectable, I think.”

“Isn’t that cunning of the dears?” whispered Rose, as the little troop marched slowly by to the muffled roll of the drums, every flag and sword held low, all the little heads uncovered, and the childish faces very sober as the leafy shadows flickered over them.

“Let’s follow and see what they are after,” proposed Mac, who found sitting on the wall and being fed with blackberries luxurious but tiresome.

So they followed and heard the music grow lively, saw the banners wave in the breeze again when the graveyard was passed, and watched the company file into the dilapidated old church that stood at the corner of three woodland roads. Presently the sound of singing made the outsiders quicken their steps, and, stealing up, they peeped in at one of the broken windows.

Captain Dove was up in the old wooden pulpit, gazing solemnly down upon his company, who, having stacked their arms in the porch, now sat in the bare pews singing a Sunday-school hymn with great vigour and relish.

“Let us pray,” said Captain Dove, with as much reverence as an army chaplain; and, folding his hands, he repeated a prayer which he thought all would know an excellent little prayer, but not exactly appropriate to the morning, for it was,

“Now I lay me down to sleep.”

Everyone joined in saying it, and it was a pretty sight to see the little creatures bowing their curly heads and lisping out the words they knew so well. Tears came into Rose’s eyes as she looked; Mac took his hat off involuntarily, and then clapped it on again as if ashamed of showing any feeling.

“Now I shall preach you a short sermon, and my text is, ‘Little children, love one another.’ I asked mamma to give me one, and she thought that would be good; so you all sit still and I’ll preach it. You mustn’t whisper, Marion, but hear me. It means that we should be good to each other, and play fair, and not quarrel as we did this very day about the wagon. Jack can't always drive, and needn't be mad because I like to go with Frank. Annette ought to be horse sometimes and not always driver; and Willie may as well make up his mind to let Marion build her house by his, for she will do it, and he needn't fuss about it. Jamie seems to be a good boy, but I shall preach to him if he isn't. No, Pokey, people don't kiss in church or put their hats on. Now you must all remember what I tell you, because I am the captain, and you should mind me."

Here Lieutenant Jack spoke right out in meeting with the rebellious remark,

"Don't care if you are; you'd better mind yourself, and tell how you took away my strap, and kept the biggest doughnut, and didn't draw fair when we had the truck."

"Yes, and you slapped Frank; I saw you!" bawled Willie Snow, bobbing up in his pew.

"And you took my book away and hid it 'cause I wouldn't go and swing when you wanted me to," added Annette, the oldest of the Snow trio.

"I shan't build my house by Willie's if he don't want me to, so now!" put in little Marion, joining the mutiny.

"I will tiss Dimmy! and I tored up my hat 'tause a pin picked me," shouted Pokey, regardless of Jamie's efforts to restrain her.

Captain Dove looked rather taken aback at this outbreak in the ranks; but, being a dignified and calm personage, he quelled the rising rebellion with great tact and skill, by saying, briefly,

"We'll sing the last hymn; 'Sweet, sweet good-by' you all know that, so do it nicely, and then we will go and have luncheon."

Peace was instantly restored, and a burst of melody drowned the suppressed giggles of Rose and Mac, who found it impossible to keep sober during the latter part of this somewhat remarkable service. Fifteen minutes of repose rendered it a physical impossibility for the company to march out as quietly as they had marched in. I grieve to state that the entire troop raced home as hard as they could pelt, and were soon skirmishing briskly over their lunch, utterly oblivious of what Jamie (who had been much impressed by the sermon) called "the captain's beautiful teck."

It was astonishing how much they all found to do at Cosey Corner; and Mac, instead of lying in a hammock and being read to, as he had expected, was busiest of all. He was invited to survey and lay out Skeeterville, a town which the children were getting up in a huckleberry pasture; and he found much amusement in planning little roads, staking off house-lots, attending to the water-works, and consulting with the "selectmen" about the best sites for public buildings; for Mac was a boy still, in spite of his fifteen years and his love of books.

Then he went fishing with a certain jovial gentleman from the West; and though they seldom caught anything but colds, they had great fun and exercise chasing the phantom trout they were bound to have. Mac also developed a geological mania, and went tapping about at rocks and stones, discoursing wisely of “strata, periods, and fossil remains”; while Rose picked up leaves and lichens, and gave him lessons in botany in return for his lectures on geology.

They led a very merry life; for the Atkinson girls kept up a sort of perpetual picnic; and did it so capitally, that one was never tired of it. So their visitors throve finely, and long before the month was out it was evident that Dr. Alec had prescribed the right medicine for his patients.

Chapter 14 — A Happy Birthday

The twelfth of October was Rose's birthday, but no one seemed to remember that interesting fact, and she felt delicate about mentioning it, so fell asleep the night before wondering if she would have any presents. That question was settled early the next morning, for she was awakened by a soft tap on her face, and opening her eyes she beheld a little black and white figure sitting on her pillow, staring at her with a pair of round eyes very like blueberries, while one downy paw patted her nose to attract her notice. It was Kitty Comet, the prettiest of all the pussies, and Comet evidently had a mission to perform, for a pink bow adorned her neck, and a bit of paper was pinned to it bearing the words, "For Miss Rose, from Frank."

That pleased her extremely, and that was only the beginning of the fun, for surprises and presents kept popping out in the most delightful manner all through the day, the Atkinson girls being famous jokers and Rose a favourite. But the best gift of all came on the way to Mount Windy-Top, where it was decided to picnic in honour of the great occasion. Three jolly loads set off soon after breakfast, for everybody went, and everybody seemed bound to have an extra good time, especially Mother Atkinson, who wore a hat as broad-brimmed as an umbrella, and took the dinner-horn to keep her flock from straying away.

"I'm going to drive auntie and a lot of the babies, so you must ride the pony. And please stay behind us a good bit when we go to the station, for a parcel is coming, and you are not to see it till dinner-time. You won't mind, will you?" said Mac, in a confidential aside during the wild flurry of the start.

"Not a bit," answered Rose. "It hurts my feelings very much to be told to keep out of the way at any other time, but birthdays and Christmas it is part of the fun to be blind and stupid, and poked into corners. I'll be ready as soon as you are, Giglamps."

"Stop under the big maple till I call then you can't possibly see anything," added Mac, as he mounted her on the pony his father had sent up for his use. "Barkis" was so gentle and so "willin'," however, that Rose was ashamed to be afraid to ride him; so she had learned, that she might surprise Dr. Alec when she got home; meantime she had many a fine canter "over the hills and far away" with Mac, who preferred Mr. Atkinson's old Sorrel.

Away they went, and, coming to the red maple, Rose obediently paused; but could not help stealing a glance in the forbidden direction before the call came.

Yes, there was a hamper going under the seat, and then she caught sight of a tall man whom Mac seemed to be hustling into the carriage in a great hurry. One look was enough, and with a cry of delight, Rose was off down the road as fast as Barkis could go.

"Now I'll astonish uncle," she thought. "I'll dash up in grand style, and show him that I am not a coward, after all."

Fired by this ambition, she startled Barkis by a sharp cut, and still more bewildered him by leaving him to his own guidance down the steep, stony road. The approach would have been a fine success if, just as Rose was about to pull up and salute, two or three distracted hens had not scuttled across the road with a great squawking, which caused Barkis to shy and stop so suddenly that his careless rider landed in an ignominious heap just under old Sorrel's astonished nose.

Rose was up again before Dr. Alec was out of the carryall, and threw two dusty arms about his neck crying with a breathless voice,

"O uncle, I'm so glad to see you! It is better than a cart-load of goodies, and so dear of you to come!"

"But aren't you hurt, child! That was a rough tumble, and I'm afraid you must be damaged somewhere," answered the Doctor, full of fond anxiety, as he surveyed his girl with pride.

"My feelings are hurt, but my bones are all safe. It's too bad! I was going to do it so nicely, and those stupid hens spoilt it all," said Rose, quite crestfallen, as well as much shaken.

"I couldn't believe my eyes when I asked 'Where is Rose?' and Mac pointed to the little Amazon pelting down the hill at such a rate. You couldn't have done anything that would please me more, and I'm delighted to see how well you ride. Now, will you mount again, or shall we turn Mac out and take you in?" asked Dr. Alec, as Aunt Jessie proposed a start, for the others were beckoning them to follow.

"Pride goeth before a fall better not try to show off again, ma'am," said Mac, who would have been more than mortal if he had refrained from teasing when so good a chance offered.

"Pride does go before a fall, but I wonder if a sprained ankle always comes after it?" thought Rose, bravely concealing her pain, as she answered, with great dignity,

"I prefer to ride. Come on, and see who will catch up first."

She was up and away as she spoke, doing her best to efface the memory of her downfall by sitting very erect, elbows down, head well up, and taking the motion of the pony as Barkis cantered along as easily as a rocking-chair.

"You ought to see her go over a fence and race when we ride together. She can scud, too, like a deer when we play 'Follow the leader,' and skip stones and bat balls almost as well as I can," said Mac, in reply to his uncle's praise of his pupil.

"I'm afraid you will think her a sad tomboy, Alec; but really she seems so well and happy, I have not the heart to check her. She has broken out in the most unexpected way, and frisks like a colt; for she says she feels so full of spirits she must run and shout whether it is proper or not," added Mrs. Jessie, who had been a pretty hoyden years ago herself.

"Good good! that's the best news you could tell me," and Dr. Alec rubbed his hands heartily. "Let the girl run and shout as much as she will it is a sure sign of health, and as natural to a happy child as frisking is to any young animal full of life. Tomboys make strong women usually, and I had far rather find Rose playing football with Mac than puttering over bead-work like that affected midget, Ariadne Blish."

"But she cannot go on playing football very long, and we must not forget that she has a woman's work to do by and by," began Mrs. Jessie.

"Neither will Mac play football much longer, but he will be all the better fitted for business, because of the health it gives him. Polish is easily added, if the foundations are strong; but no amount of gilding will be of use if your timber is not sound. I'm sure I'm right, Jessie; and if I can do as well by my girl during the next six months as I have the last, my experiment will succeed."

"It certainly will; for when I contrast that bright, blooming face with the pale, listless one that made my heart ache a while ago, I can believe in almost any miracle," said Mrs. Jessie, as Rose looked round to point out a lovely view, with cheeks like the ruddy apples in the orchard near by, eyes clear as the autumn sky overhead, and vigour in every line of her girlish figure.

A general scramble among the rocks was followed by a regular gypsy lunch, which the young folks had the rapture of helping to prepare. Mother Atkinson put on her apron, turned up her sleeves, and fell to work as gaily as if in her own kitchen, boiling the kettle slung on three sticks, over a fire of cones and fir boughs; while the girls spread the mossy table with a feast of country goodies, and the children tumbled about in everyone's way till the toot of the horn made them settle down like a flock of hungry birds.

As soon as the merry meal and a brief interval of repose were over, it was unanimously voted to have some charades. A smooth, green spot between two stately pines was chosen for the stage; shawls hung up, properties collected, audience and actors separated, and a word quickly chosen.

The first scene discovered Mac in a despondent attitude and shabby dress, evidently much troubled in mind. To him entered a remarkable creature with a brown paper bag over its head. A little pink nose peeped through one hole in the middle, white teeth through another, and above two eyes glared fiercely. Spires of grass stuck in each side of the mouth seemed meant to represent whiskers; the upper corners of the bag were twisted like ears, and no one could doubt for a moment that the black scarf pinned on behind was a tail.

This singular animal seemed in pantomime to be comforting his master and offering advice, which was finally acted upon, for Mac pulled off his boots, helped the little beast into them, and gave him a bag; then, kissing his paw, with a hopeful gesture, the creature retired, purring so successfully that there was a general cry of “Cat, puss, boots!”

“Cat is the word,” replied a voice, and the curtain fell.

The next scene was a puzzler, for in came another animal, on all-fours this time, with a new sort of tail and long ears. A gray shawl concealed its face, but an inquisitive sunbeam betrayed the glitter as of goggles under the fringe. On its back rode a small gentleman in Eastern costume, who appeared to find some difficulty in keeping his seat as his steed jogged along. Suddenly a spirit appeared, all in white, with long newspaper wings upon its back and golden locks about its face. Singularly enough, the beast beheld this apparition and backed instantly, but the rider evidently saw nothing and whipped up unmercifully, also unsuccessfully, for the spirit stood directly in the path, and the amiable beast would not budge a foot. A lively skirmish followed, which ended in the Eastern gentleman being upset into a sweet-fern bush, while the better bred animal abased itself before the shining one.

The children were all in the dark till Mother Atkinson said, in an inquiring tone,

“If that isn’t Balaam and the ass, I’d like to know what it is. Rose makes a sweet angel, doesn’t she?”

“Ass” was evidently the word, and the angel retired, smiling with mundane satisfaction over the compliment that reached her ears.

The next was a pretty little scene from the immortal story of “Babes in the Wood.” Jamie and Pokey came trotting in, hand in hand, and, having been through the parts many times before, acted with great ease and much fluency, audibly directing each other from time to time as they went along. The berries were picked, the way lost, tears shed, baby consolation administered, and then the little pair lay down among the brakes and died with their eyes wide open and the toes of their four little boots turned up to the daisies in the most pathetic manner.

“Now the wobins tum. You be twite dead, Dimmy, and I’ll peep in and see ‘em,” one defunct innocent was heard to say.

“I hope they’ll be quick, for I’m lying on a stone, and ants are walking up my leg like fury,” murmured the other.

Here the robins came flapping in with red scarves over their breasts and leaves in their mouths, which they carefully laid upon the babes wherever they would show best. A prickly blackberry leaf placed directly over Pokey’s nose caused her to sneeze so violently that her little legs flew into the air; Jamie gave a startled “Ow!” and the pitying fowls fled giggling.

After some discussion it was decided that the syllable must be “strew or strow” and then they waited to see if it was a good guess.

This scene discovered Annette Snow in bed, evidently very ill; Miss Jenny was her anxious mamma, and her merry conversation amused the audience till Mac came in as a physician, and made great fun with his big watch, pompous manner, and absurd questions. He prescribed one pellet with an unpronounceable name, and left after demanding twenty dollars for his brief visit.

The pellet was administered, and such awful agonies immediately set in that the distracted mamma bade a sympathetic neighbour run for Mother Know-all. The neighbour ran, and in came a brisk little old lady in cap and specs, with a bundle of herbs under her arm, which she at once applied in all sorts of funny ways, explaining their virtues as she clapped a plantain poultice here, put a pounded catnip plaster there, or tied a couple of mullein leaves round the sufferer’s throat. Instant relief ensued, the dying child sat up and demanded baked beans. The grateful parent offered fifty dollars; but Mother Know-all indignantly refused it and went smiling away, declaring that a neighbourly turn needed no reward, and a doctor’s fee was all a humbug.

The audience were in fits of laughter over this scene, for Rose imitated Mrs. Atkinson capitally, and the herb cure was a good hit at the excellent lady’s belief that “yarbs” would save mankind if properly applied. No one enjoyed it more than herself, and the saucy children prepared for the grand finale in high feather.

This closing scene was brief but striking, for two trains of cars whizzed in from opposite sides, met with a terrible collision in the middle of the stage, and a general smash-up completed the word catastrophe.

“Now let us act a proverb. I’ve got one all ready,” said Rose, who was dying to distinguish herself in some way before Uncle Alec.

So everyone but Mac, the gay Westerner, and Rose, took their places on the rocky seats and discussed the late beautiful and varied charade, in which Pokey frankly pronounced her own scene the “bestest of all.”

In five minutes the curtain was lifted; nothing appeared but a very large sheet of brown paper pinned to a tree, and on it was drawn a clock-face, the hands pointing to four. A small note below informed the public that 4 A.M. was the time. Hardly had the audience grasped this important fact when a long waterproof serpent was seen uncoiling itself from behind a stump. An inch-worm, perhaps, would be a better description, for it travelled in the same humpy way as that pleasing reptile. Suddenly a very wide-awake and active fowl advanced, pecking, chirping, and scratching vigorously. A tuft of green leaves waved upon his crest, a larger tuft of brakes made an umbrageous tail, and a shawl of many colours formed his flapping wings. A truly noble bird, whose legs had the genuine strut, whose eyes shone watchfully, and whose voice had a ring that evidently struck terror into the catterpillar's soul, if it was a catterpillar. He squirmed, he wriggled, he humped as fast as he could, trying to escape; but all in vain. The tufted bird espied him, gave one warbling sort of crow, pounced upon him, and flapped triumphantly away.

"That early bird got such a big worm he could hardly carry him off," laughed Aunt Jessie, as the children shouted over the joke suggested by Mac's nickname.

"That is one of uncle's favourite proverbs, so I got it up for his especial benefit," said Rose, coming up with the two-legged worm beside her.

"Very clever; what next?" asked Dr. Alec as she sat down beside him.

"The Dove boys are going to give us an 'Incident in the Life of Napoleon,' as they call it; the children think it very splendid, and the little fellows do it rather nicely," answered Mac with condescension.

A tent appeared, and pacing to and fro before it was a little sentinel, who, in a brief soliloquy, informed the observers that the elements were in a great state of confusion, that he had marched some hundred miles or so that day, and that he was dying for want of sleep. Then he paused, leaned upon his gun, and seemed to doze; dropped slowly down, overpowered with slumber, and finally lay flat, with his gun beside him, a faithless little sentinel. Enter Napoleon, cocked hat, gray coat, high boots, folded arms, grim mouth, and a melodramatic stride. Freddy Dove always covered himself with glory in this part, and "took the stage" with a Napoleonic attitude that brought down the house; for the big-headed boy, with solemn, dark eyes and square brow, was "the very moral of that rascal, Boneyparty," Mother Atkinson said.

Some great scheme was evidently brewing in his mighty mind a trip across the Alps, a bonfire at Moscow, or a little skirmish at Waterloo perhaps, for he marched in silent majesty till suddenly a gentle snore disturbed the imperial reverie. He saw the sleeping soldier and glared upon him, saying in an awful tone,

"Ha! asleep at his post! Death is the penalty he must die!"

Picking up the musket, he is about to execute summary justice, as emperors are in the habit of doing, when something in the face of the weary sentinel appears to touch him. And well it might, for a most engaging little warrior was Jack as he lay with his shako half off, his childish face trying to keep sober, and a great black moustache over his rosy mouth. It would have softened the heart of any Napoleon, and the Little Corporal proved himself a man by relenting, and saying, with a lofty gesture of forgiveness,

"Brave fellow, he is worn out; I will let him sleep, and mount guard in his place."

Then, shouldering the gun, this noble being strode to and fro with a dignity which thrilled the younger spectators. The sentinel awakes, sees what has happened, and gives himself up for lost. But the Emperor restores his weapon, and, with that smile which won all hearts, says, pointing to a high rock whereon a crow happens to be sitting, "Be brave, be vigilant, and remember that from yonder Pyramid generations are beholding you," and with these memorable words he vanishes, leaving the grateful soldier bolt upright, with his hand at his temple and deathless devotion stamped upon his youthful countenance.

The applause which followed this superb piece had hardly subsided, when a sudden splash and a shrill cry caused a general rush toward the waterfall that went gambolling down the rocks, singing sweetly as it ran. Pokey had tried to gambol also, and had tumbled into a shallow pool, whither Jamie had gallantly followed, in a vain attempt to fish her out, and both were paddling about half frightened, half pleased with the unexpected bath.

This mishap made it necessary to get the dripping infants home as soon as possible; so the wagons were loaded up, and away they went, as merry as if the mountain air had really been "Oxygenated Sweets not Bitters," as Dr. Alec suggested when Mac said he felt as jolly as if he had been drinking champagne instead of the current wine that came with a great frosted cake wreathed with sugar roses in Aunt Plenty's hamper of goodies.

Rose took part in all the fun, and never betrayed by look or word the twinges of pain she suffered in her ankle. She excused herself from the games in the evening, however, and sat talking to Uncle Alec in a lively way, that both amazed and delighted him; for she confided to him that she played horse with the children, drilled with the light infantry, climbed trees, and did other dreadful things that would have caused the aunts to cry aloud if they knew of them.

"I don't care a pin what they say if you don't mind, uncle," she answered, when he pictured the dismay of the good ladies.

"Ah, it's all very well to defy them, but you are getting so rampant, I'm afraid you will defy me next, and then where are we?"

"No, I won't! I shouldn't dare; because you are my guardian, and can put me in a strait-jacket if you like;" and Rose laughed in his face, even while she nestled closer with a confiding gesture pleasant to see.

"Upon my word, Rosy, I begin to feel like the man who bought an elephant, and then didn't know what to do with him. I thought I had got a pet and plaything for years to come; but here you are growing up like a bean-stalk, and I shall find I've got a strong-minded little woman on my hands before I can turn round. There's predicament for a man and an uncle!"

Dr. Alec's comic distress was mercifully relieved for the time being by a dance of goblins on the lawn, where the children, with pumpkin lanterns on their heads, frisked about like will-o'-the-wisps, as a parting surprise.

When Rose went to bed, she found that Uncle Alec had not forgotten her; for on the table stood a delicate little easel, holding two miniatures set in velvet. She knew them both, and stood looking at them till her eyes brimmed over with tears that were both sweet and sad; for they were the faces of her father and mother, beautifully copied from portraits fast fading away.

Presently, she knelt down, and, putting her arms round the little shrine, kissed one after the other, saying with an earnest voice, "I'll truly try to make them glad to see me by and by."

And that was Rose's little prayer on the night of her fourteenth birthday.

Two days later the Campbells went home, a larger party than when they came; for Dr. Alec was escort and Kitty Comet was borne in state in a basket, with a bottle of milk, some tiny sandwiches, and a doll's dish to drink out of, as well as a bit of carpet to lie on in her palace car, out of which she kept popping her head in the most fascinating manner.

There was a great kissing and cuddling, waving of handkerchiefs, and last good-byes, as they went; and when they had started, Mother Atkinson came running after them, to tuck in some little pies, hot from the oven, "for the dears, who might get tired of bread and butter during that long day's travel."

Another start, and another halt; for the Snow children came shrieking up to demand the three kittens that Pokey was cooly carrying off in a travelling bag. The unhappy kits were rescued, half smothered, and restored to their lawful owners, amid dire lamentation from the little kidnapper, who declared that she only "tooked um 'cause they'd want to go wid their sister Tomit."

Start number three and stoppage number three, as Frank hailed them with the luncheon basket, which had been forgotten, after everyone had protested that it was safely in.

All went well after that, and the long journey was pleasantly beguiled by Pokey and Pussy, who played together so prettily that they were considered public benefactors.

“Rose doesn’t want to go home, for she knows the aunts won’t let her rampage as she did up at Cosey Corner,” said Mac, as they approached the old house.

“I can’t rampage if I want to for a time, at least; and I’ll tell you why. I sprained my ankle when I tumbled off of Barkis, and it gets worse and worse; though I’ve done all I know to cure it and hide it, so it shouldn’t trouble anyone,” whispered Rose, knitting her brows with pain, as she prepared to descend, wishing her uncle would take her instead of her bundles.

How he did it, she never knew; but Mac had her up the steps and on the parlour sofa before she could put her foot to the ground.

“There you are right side up with care; and mind, now, if your ankle bothers you, and you are laid up with it, I am to be your footman. It’s only fair, you know; for I don’t forget how good you have been to me.” And Mac went to call Phebe, so full of gratitude and good-will that his very goggles shone.

Chapter 15 — Ear-Rings

Rose’s sprain proved to be a serious one, owing to neglect, and Dr. Alec ordered her to lie on the sofa for a fortnight at least; whereat she groaned dismally, but dared not openly complain, lest the boys turn upon her with some of the wise little sermons on patience which she had delivered for their benefit.

It was Mac’s turn now, and honourably did he repay his debt; for, as school was still forbidden, he had plenty of leisure, and devoted most of it to Rose. He took many steps for her, and even allowed her to teach him to knit, after assuring himself that many a brave Scotchman knew how to “click the pricks.” She was obliged to take a solemn vow of secrecy, however, before he would consent; for, though he did not mind being called “Giglamps,” “Granny” was more than his boyish soul could bear, and at the approach of any of the Clan his knitting vanished as if by magic, which frequent “chucking” out of sight did not improve the stripe he was doing for Rose’s new afghan.

She was busy with this pretty work one bright October afternoon, all nicely established on her sofa in the upper hall, while Jamie and Pokey (lent for her amusement) were keeping house in a corner, with Comet and Rose’s old doll for their “childerns.”

Presently, Phebe appeared with a card. Rose read it, made a grimace, then laughed and said,

“I’ll see Miss Blish,” and immediately put on her company face, pulled out her locket, and settled her curls.

“You dear thing, how do you do? I’ve been trying to call every day since you got back, but I have so many engagements, I really couldn’t manage it till to-day. So glad you are alone, for mamma said I could sit awhile, and I brought my lace-work to show you, for it’s perfectly lovely.” cried Miss Blish, greeting Rose with a kiss, which was not very warmly returned, though Rose politely thanked her for coming, and bid Phebe roll up the easy chair.

“How nice to have a maid!” said Ariadne, as she settled herself with much commotion. “Still, dear, you must be very lonely, and feel the need of a bosom friend.”

“I have my cousins,” began Rose, with dignity, for her visitor’s patronising manner ruffled her temper.

“Gracious, child! you don’t make friends of those great boys, do you? Mamma says she really doesn’t think it’s proper for you to be with them so much.”

“They are like brothers, and my aunts do think it’s proper,” replied Rose, rather sharply, for it struck her that this was none of Miss Blish’s business.

“I was merely going to say I should be glad to have you for my bosom friend, for Hatty Mason and I have had an awful quarrel, and don’t speak. She is too mean to live, so I gave her up. Just think, she never paid back one of the caramels I’ve given her, and never invited me to her party. I could have forgiven the caramels, but to be left out in that rude way was more than I could bear, and I told her never to look at me again as long as she lived.”

“You are very kind, but I don’t think I want a bosom friend, thank you,” said Rose, as Ariadne stopped to bridle and shake her flaxen head over the delinquent Hatty Mason.

Now, in her heart Miss Blish thought Rose “a stuck-up puss,” but the other girls wanted to know her and couldn’t, the old house was a charming place to visit, the lads were considered fine fellows, and the Campbells “are one of our first families,” mamma said. So Ariadne concealed her vexation at Rose’s coolness, and changed the subject as fast as possible.

“Studying French, I see; who is your teacher?” she asked, flitting over the leaves of “Paul and Virginia,” that lay on the table.

“I don’t study it, for I read French as well as English, and uncle and I often speak it for hours. He talks like a native, and says I have a remarkably good accent.”

Rose really could not help this small display of superiority, for French was one of her strong points, and she was vain of it, though she usually managed to hide this weakness. She felt that Ariadne would be the better for a little crushing, and could not resist the temptation to patronise in her turn.

“Oh, indeed!” said Miss Blish, rather blankly, for French was not her strong point by any means.

“I am to go abroad with uncle in a year or two, and he knows how important it is to understand the languages. Half the girls who leave school can’t speak decent French, and when they go abroad they are so mortified. I shall be very glad to help you, if you like, for, of course, you have no one to talk with at home.”

Now Ariadne, though she looked like a wax doll, had feelings within her instead of sawdust, and these feelings were hurt by Rose’s lofty tone. She thought her more “stuck up” than ever, but did not know how to bring her down, yet longed to do it, for she felt as if she had received a box on the ear, and involuntarily put her hand up to it. The touch of an ear-ring consoled her, and suggested a way of returning tit for tat in a telling manner.

“Thank you, dear; I don’t need any help, for our teacher is from Paris, and of course he speaks better French than your uncle." Then she added, with a gesture of her head that set the little bells on her ears to tingling: "How do you like my new ear-rings? Papa gave them to me last week, and everyone says they are lovely."

Rose came down from her high horse with a rapidity that was comical, for Ariadne had the upper hand now. Rose adored pretty things, longed to wear them, and the desire of her girlish soul was to have her ears bored, only Dr. Alec thought it foolish, so she never had done it. She would gladly have given all the French she could jabber for a pair of golden bells with pearl-tipped tongues, like those Ariadne wore; and, clasping her hands, she answered, in a tone that went to the hearer's heart,

"They are too sweet for anything! If uncle would only let me wear some, I should be perfectly happy."

"I wouldn't mind what he says. Papa laughed at me at first, but he likes them now, and says I shall have diamond solitaires when I am eighteen," said Ariadne, quite satisfied with her shot.

"I've got a pair now that were mamma's, and a beautiful little pair of pearl and turquoise ones, that I am dying to wear," sighed Rose.

"Then do it. I'll pierce your ears, and you must wear a bit of silk in them till they are well; your curls will hide them nicely; then, some day, slip in your smallest ear-rings, and see if your uncle don't like them."

"I asked him if it wouldn't do my eyes good once when they were red, and he only laughed. People do cure weak eyes that way, don't they?"

"Yes, indeed, and yours are sort of red. Let me see. Yes, I really think you ought to do it before they get worse," said Ariadne, peering into the large clear eye offered for inspection.

"Does it hurt much?" asked Rose, wavering.

"Oh dear, no; just a prick and a pull, and it's all over. I've done lots of ears, and know just how. Come, push up your hair and get a big needle."

"I don't quite like to do it without asking uncle's leave," faltered Rose, when all was ready for the operation.

"Did he ever forbid it?" demanded Ariadne, hovering over her prey like a vampire.

"No, never!"

"Then do it, unless you are afraid," cried Miss Blish, bent on accomplishing the deed.

That last word settled the matter, and, closing her eyes, Rose said "Punch!" in the tone of one giving the fatal order "Fire!"

Ariadne punched, and the victim bore it in heroic silence, though she turned pale and her eyes were full of tears of anguish.

"There! Now pull the bits of silk often, and cold-cream your ears every night, and you'll soon be ready for the rings," said Ariadne, well pleased with her job, for the girl who spoke French with "a fine accent" lay flat upon the sofa, looking as exhausted as if she had had both ears cut off.

"It does hurt dreadfully, and I know uncle won't like it," sighed Rose, as remorse began to gnaw. "Promise not to tell, or I shall be teased to death," she added, anxiously, entirely forgetting the two little pitchers gifted with eyes as well as ears, who had been watching the whole performance from afar.

"Never. Mercy me, what's that?" and Ariadne started as a sudden sound of steps and voices came up from below.

"It's the boys! Hide the needle. Do my ears show? Don't breathe a word!" whispered Rose, scrambling about to conceal all traces of their iniquity from the sharp eyes of the Clan.

Up they came, all in good order, laden with the proceeds of a nutting expedition, for they always reported to Rose and paid tribute to their queen in the handsomest manner.

"How many, and how big! We'll have a grand roasting frolic after tea, won't we?" said Rose, plunging both hands into a bag of glossy brown nuts, while the Clan "stood at ease" and nodded to Ariadne.

"That lot was picked especially for you, Rosy. I got every one myself, and they are extra whackers," said Mac, presenting a bushel or so.

"You should have seen Giglamps when he was after them. He pitched out of the tree, and would have broken his blessed old neck if Arch had not caught him," observed Steve, as he lounged gracefully in the window seat.

"You needn't talk, Dandy, when you didn't know a chestnut from a beech, and kept on thrashing till I told you of it," retorted Mac, festooning himself over the back of the sofa, being a privileged boy.

"I don't make mistakes when I thrash you, old Worm, so you'd better mind what you are about," answered Steve, without a ray of proper respect for his elder brother.

"It is getting dark, and I must go, or mamma will be alarmed," said Ariadne, rising in sudden haste, though she hoped to be asked to remain to the nut-party.

No one invited her; and all the while she was putting on her things and chatting to Rose the boys were telegraphing to one another the sad fact that someone ought to escort the young lady home. Not a boy felt heroic enough to cast himself into the breach, however; even polite Archie shirked the duty, saying to Charlie, as they quietly slipped into an adjoining room,

"I'm not going to do all the gallivanting. Let Steve take that chit home and show his manners.”

“I’ll be hanged if I do!” answered Prince, who disliked Miss Blish because she tried to be coquettish with him.

“Then I will,” and, to the dismay of both recreant lads, Dr. Alec walked out of the room to offer his services to the “chit.”

He was too late, however, for Mac, obeying a look from Rose, had already made a victim of himself, and trudged meekly away, wishing the gentle Ariadne at the bottom of the Red Sea.

“Then I will take this lady down to tea, as the other one has found a gentleman to go home with her. I see the lamps are lighted below, and I smell a smell which tells me that auntie has something extra nice for us to-night.”

As he spoke, Dr. Alec was preparing to carry Rose downstairs as usual; but Archie and Prince rushed forward, begging with penitent eagerness for the honour of carrying her in an arm-chair. Rose consented, fearing that her uncle’s keen eye would discover the fatal bits of silk; so the boys crossed hands, and, taking a good grip of each curly pate, she was borne down in state, while the others followed by way of the banisters.

Tea was ordered earlier than usual, so that Jamie and his dolly could have a taste, at least, of the holiday fun, for they were to stay till seven, and be allowed twelve roasted chestnuts apiece, which they were under bonds not to eat till next day.

Tea was despatched rapidly, therefore, and the party gathered round the wide hearth in the dining-room, where the nuts were soon dancing gaily on hot shovels or bouncing out among the company, thereby causing delightful panics among the little ones.

“Come, Rosy, tell us a story while we work, for you can’t help much, and must amuse us as your share,” proposed Mac, who sat in the shade pricking nuts, and who knew by experience what a capital little Scheherazade his cousin was.

“Yes, we poor monkeys can’t burn our paws for nothing, so tell away, Pussy,” added Charlie, as he threw several hot nuts into her lap and shook his fingers afterwards.

“Well, I happen to have a little story with a moral to it in my mind, and I will tell it, though it is intended for younger children than you,” answered Rose, who was rather fond of telling instructive tales.

“Fire away,” said Geordie, and she obeyed, little thinking what a disastrous story it would prove to herself.

“Well, once upon a time, a little girl went to see a young lady who was very fond of her. Now, the young lady happened to be lame, and had to have her foot bandaged up every day; so she kept a basketful of bandages, all nicely rolled and ready. The little girl liked to play with this basket, and one day, when she thought no one saw her, she took one of the rolls without asking leave, and put it in her pocket."

Here Pokey, who had been peering lovingly down at the five warm nuts that lay at the bottom of her tiny pocket, suddenly looked up and said, "Oh!" in a startled tone, as if the moral tale had become intensely interesting all at once.

Rose heard and saw the innocent betrayal of the small sinner, and went on in a most impressive manner, while the boys nudged one another and winked as they caught the joke.

"But an eye did see this naughty little girl, and whose eye do you think it was?"

"Eye of Dod," murmured conscience-stricken Pokey, spreading two chubby little hands before the round face, which they were not half big enough to hide.

Rose was rather taken aback by this reply, but, feeling that she was producing a good effect, she added seriously,

"Yes, God saw her, and so did the young lady, but she did not say anything; she waited to see what the little girl would do about it. She had been very happy before she took the bandage, but when it was in her pocket she seemed troubled, and pretty soon stopped playing, and sat down in a corner looking very sober. She thought a few minutes, and then went and put back the roll very softly, and her face cleared up, and she was a happy child again. The young lady was glad to see that, and wondered what made the little girl put it back."

"Tonscience p'icked her," murmured a contrite voice from behind the small hands pressed tightly over Pokey's red face.

"And why did she take it, do you suppose?" asked Rose, in a school-marmish tone, feeling that all the listeners were interested in her tale and its unexpected application.

"It was so nice and wound, and she wanted it deffly," answered the little voice.

"Well, I'm glad she had such a good conscience. The moral is that people who steal don't enjoy what they take, and are not happy till they put it back. What makes that little girl hide her face?" asked Rose, as she concluded.

"Me's so 'shamed of Pokey," sobbed the small culprit, quite overcome by remorse and confusion at this awful disclosure.

"Come, Rose, it's too bad to tell her little tricks before everyone, and preach at her in that way; you wouldn't like it yourself," began Dr. Alec, taking the weeper on his knee and administering consolation in the shape of kisses and nuts.

Before Rose could express her regret, Jamie, who had been reddening and ruffling like a little turkey-cock for several minutes, burst out indignantly, bent on avenging the wound given to his beloved dolly.

"I know something bad that you did, and I'm going to tell right out. You thought we didn't see you, but we did, and you said uncle wouldn't like it, and the boys would tease, and you made Ariadne promise not to tell, and she punched holes in your ears to put ear-rings in. So now! and that's much badder than to take an old piece of rag; and I hate you for making my Pokey cry."

Jamie's somewhat incoherent explosion produced such an effect that Pokey's small sin was instantly forgotten, and Rose felt that her hour had come.

"What! what! what!" cried the boys in a chorus, dropping their shovels and knives to gather round Rose, for a guilty clutching at her ears betrayed her, and with a feeble cry of "Ariadne made me!" she hid her head among the pillows like an absurd little ostrich.

"Now she'll go prancing round with bird cages and baskets and carts and pigs, for all I know, in her ears, as the other girls do, and won't she look like a goose?" asked one tormentor, tweaking a curl that strayed out from the cushions.

"I didn't think she'd be so silly," said Mac, in a tone of disappointment that told Rose she had sunk in the esteem of her wise cousin.

"That Blish girl is a nuisance, and ought not to be allowed to come here with her nonsensical notions," said the Prince, feeling a strong desire to shake that young person as an angry dog might shake a mischievous kitten.

"How do you like it, uncle?" asked Archie, who, being the head of a family himself, believed in preserving discipline at all costs.

"I am very much surprised; but I see she is a girl, after all, and must have her vanities like all the rest of them," answered Dr. Alec, with a sigh, as if he had expected to find Rose a sort of angel, above all earthly temptations.

"What shall you do about it, sir?" inquired Geordie, wondering what punishment would be inflicted on a feminine culprit.

"As she is fond of ornaments, perhaps we had better give her a nose-ring also. I have one somewhere that a Fiji belle once wore; I'll look it up," and, leaving Pokey to Jamie's care, Dr. Alec rose as if to carry out his suggestion in earnest.

"Good! good! We'll do it right away! Here's a gimlet, so you hold her, boys, while I get her dear little nose all ready," cried Charlie, whisking away the pillow as the other boys danced about the sofa in true Fiji style.

It was a dreadful moment, for Rose could not run away she could only grasp her precious nose with one hand and extend the other, crying distractedly,

"O uncle, save me, save me!"

Of course he saved her; and when she was securely barricaded by his strong arm, she confessed her folly in such humiliation of spirit, that the lads, after a good laugh at her, decided to forgive her and lay all the blame on the tempter, Ariadne. Even Dr. Alec relented so far as to propose two gold rings for the ears instead of one copper one for the nose; a proceeding which proved that if Rose had all the weakness of her sex for jewellery, he had all the inconsistency of his in giving a pretty penitent exactly what she wanted, spite of his better judgment.

Chapter 16 — Bread and Button-Holes

"What in the world is my girl thinking about all alone here, with such a solemn face?" asked Dr. Alec, coming into the study, one November day, to find Rose sitting there with folded hands and a very thoughtful aspect.

"Uncle, I want to have some serious conversation with you, if you have time," she said, coming out of a brown study, as if she had not heard his question.

"I'm entirely at your service, and most happy to listen," he answered, in his politest manner, for when Rose put on her womanly little airs he always treated her with a playful sort of respect that pleased her very much.

Now, as he sat down beside her, she said, very soberly,

"I've been trying to decide what trade I would learn, and I want you to advise me."

"Trade, my dear?" and Dr. Alec looked so astonished that she hastened to explain.

"I forgot that you didn't hear the talk about it up at Cosey Corner. You see we used to sit under the pines and sew, and talk a great deal all the ladies, I mean and I liked it very much. Mother Atkinson thought that everyone should have a trade, or something to make a living out of, for rich people may grow poor, you know, and poor people have to work. Her girls were very clever, and could do ever so many things, and Aunt Jessie thought the old lady was right; so when I saw how happy and independent those young ladies were, I wanted to have a trade, and then it wouldn't matter about money, though I like to have it well enough."

Dr. Alec listened to this explanation with a curious mixture of surprise, pleasure, and amusement in his face, and looked at his little niece as if she had suddenly changed into a young woman. She had grown a good deal in the last six months, and an amount of thinking had gone on in that young head which would have astonished him greatly could he have known it all, for Rose was one of the children who observe and meditate much, and now and then nonplus their friends by a wise or curious remark.

"I quite agree with the ladies, and shall be glad to help you decide on something if I can," said the Doctor seriously. "What do you incline to? A natural taste or talent is a great help in choosing, you know."

"I haven't any talent, or any especial taste that I can see, and that is why I can't decide, uncle. So, I think it would be a good plan to pick out some very useful business and learn it, because I don’t do it for pleasure, you see, but as a part of my education, and to be ready in case I’m ever poor,” answered Rose, looking as if she rather longed for a little poverty so that her useful gift might be exercised.

“Well, now, there is one very excellent, necessary, and womanly accomplishment that no girl should be without, for it is a help to rich and poor, and the comfort of families depends upon it. This fine talent is neglected nowadays, and considered old-fashioned, which is a sad mistake, and one that I don’t mean to make in bringing up my girl. It should be a part of every girl’s education, and I know of a most accomplished lady who will teach you in the best and pleasantest manner.”

“Oh, what is it?” cried Rose eagerly, charmed to be met in this helpful and cordial way.

“Housekeeping!” answered Dr. Alec.

“Is that an accomplishment?” asked Rose, while her face fell, for she had indulged in all sorts of vague, delightful dreams.

“Yes; it is one of the most beautiful as well as useful of all the arts a woman can learn. Not so romantic, perhaps, as singing, painting, writing, or teaching, even; but one that makes many happy and comfortable, and home the sweetest place in the world. Yes, you may open your big eyes; but it is a fact that I had rather see you a good housekeeper than the greatest belle in the city. It need not interfere with any talent you may possess, but it is a necessary part of your training, and I hope that you will set about it at once, now that you are well and strong.”

“Who is the lady?” asked Rose, rather impressed by her uncle’s earnest speech.

“Aunt Plenty.”

“Is she accomplished?” began Rose in a wondering tone, for this great-aunt of hers had seemed the least cultivated of them all.

“In the good old-fashioned way she is very accomplished, and has made this house a happy home to us all, ever since we can remember. She is not elegant, but genuinely good, and so beloved and respected that there will be universal mourning for her when her place is empty. No one can fill it, for the solid, homely virtues of the dear soul have gone out of fashion, as I say, and nothing new can be half so satisfactory, to me at least.”

“I should like to have people feel so about me. Can she teach me to do what she does, and to grow as good?” asked Rose, with a little prick of remorse for even thinking that Aunt Plenty was a commonplace old lady.

“Yes, if you don’t despise such simple lessons as she can give. I know it would fill her dear old heart with pride and pleasure to feel that anyone cared to learn of her, for she fancies her day gone by. Let her teach you how to be what she has been a skilful, frugal, cheerful housewife; the maker and the keeper of a happy home, and by and by you will see what a valuable lesson it is."

"I will, uncle. But how shall I begin?"

"I'll speak to her about it, and she will make it all right with Dolly, for cooking is one of the main things, you know."

"So it is! I don't mind that a bit, for I like to mess, and used to try at home; but I had no one to tell me, so I never did much but spoil my aprons. Pies are great fun, only Dolly is so cross, I don't believe she will ever let me do a thing in the kitchen."

"Then we'll cook in the parlour. I fancy Aunt Plenty will manage her, so don't be troubled. Only mind this, I'd rather you learned how to make good bread than the best pies ever baked. When you bring me a handsome, wholesome loaf, entirely made by yourself, I shall be more pleased than if you offered me a pair of slippers embroidered in the very latest style. I don't wish to bribe you, but I'll give you my heartiest kiss, and promise to eat every crumb of the loaf myself."

"It's a bargain! it's a bargain! Come and tell aunty all about it, for I'm in a hurry to begin," cried Rose, dancing before him toward the parlor, where Miss Plenty sat alone knitting contentedly, yet ready to run at the first call for help of any sort, from any quarter.

No need to tell how surprised and gratified she was at the invitation she received to teach the child the domestic arts which were her only accomplishments, nor to relate how energetically she set about her pleasant task. Dolly dared not grumble, for Miss Plenty was the one person whom she obeyed, and Phebe openly rejoiced, for these new lessons brought Rose nearer to her, and glorified the kitchen in the good girl's eyes.

To tell the truth, the elder aunts had sometimes felt that they did not have quite their share of the little niece who had won their hearts long ago, and was the sunshine of the house. They talked it over together sometimes, but always ended by saying that as Alec had all the responsibility, he should have the larger share of the dear girl's love and time, and they would be contented with such crumbs of comfort as they could get.

Dr. Alec had found out this little secret, and, after reproaching himself for being blind and selfish, was trying to devise some way of mending matters without troubling anyone, when Rose's new whim suggested an excellent method of weaning her a little from himself. He did not know how fond he was of her till he gave her up to the new teacher, and often could not resist peeping in at the door to see how she got on, or stealing sly looks through the slide when she was deep in dough, or listening intently to some impressive lecture from Aunt Plenty. They caught him at it now and then, and ordered him off the premises at the point of the rolling-pin; or, if unusually successful, and, therefore, in a milder mood, they lured him away with bribes of ginger-bread, a stray pickle, or a tart that was not quite symmetrical enough to suit their critical eyes.

Of course he made a point of partaking copiously of all the delectable messes that now appeared at table, for both the cooks were on their mettle, and he fared sumptuously every day. But an especial relish was given to any dish when, in reply to his honest praise of it, Rose coloured up with innocent pride, and said modestly,

“I made that, uncle, and I’m glad you like it.”

It was some time before the perfect loaf appeared, for bread-making is an art not easily learned, and Aunt Plenty was very thorough in her teaching; so Rose studied yeast first, and through various stages of cake and biscuit came at last to the crowning glory of the “handsome, wholesome loaf.” It appeared at tea-time, on a silver salver, proudly borne in by Phebe, who could not refrain from whispering, with a beaming face, as she set it down before Dr. Alec,

“Ain’t it just lovely, sir?”

“It is a regularly splendid loaf! Did my girl make it all herself?” he asked, surveying the shapely, sweet-smelling object with real interest and pleasure.

“Every particle herself, and never asked a bit of help or advice from anyone,” answered Aunt Plenty, folding her hands with an air of unmitigated satisfaction, for her pupil certainly did her great credit.

“I’ve had so many failures and troubles that I really thought I never should be able to do it alone. Dolly let one splendid batch burn up because I forgot it. She was there and smelt it, but never did a thing, for she said, when I undertook to bake bread I must give my whole mind to it. Wasn’t it hard? She might have called me at least,” said Rose, recollecting, with a sigh, the anguish of that moment.

“She meant you should learn by experience, as Rosamond did in that little affair of the purple jar, you remember.”

“I always thought it very unfair in her mother not to warn the poor thing a little bit; and she was regularly mean when Rosamond asked for a bowl to put the purple stuff in, and she said, in such a provoking way, ‘I did not agree to lend you a bowl, but I will, my dear.’ Ugh! I always want to shake that hateful woman, though she was a moral mamma.”

“Never mind her now, but tell me all about my loaf,” said Dr. Alec, much amused at Rose’s burst of indignation.

“There’s nothing to tell, uncle, except that I did my best, gave my mind to it, and sat watching over it all the while it was in the oven till I was quite baked myself. Everything went right this time, and it came out a nice, round, crusty loaf, as you see. Now taste it, and tell me if it is good as well as handsome.”

“Must I cut it? Can’t I put it under a glass cover and keep it in the parlor as they do wax flowers and fine works of that sort?”

“What an idea, uncle! It would mould and be spoilt. Besides, people would laugh at us, and make fun of my old-fashioned accomplishment. You promised to eat it, and you must; not all at once, but as soon as you can, so I can make you some more.”

Dr. Alec solemnly cut off his favourite crusty slice, and solemnly ate it; then wiped his lips, and brushing back Rose’s hair, solemnly kissed her on the forehead, saying, heartily,

“My dear, it is perfect bread, and you are an honour to your teacher. When we have our model school I shall offer a prize for the best bread, and you will get it.”

“I’ve got it already, and I’m quite satisfied,” said Rose, slipping into her seat, and trying to hide her right hand which had a burn on it.

But Dr. Alec saw it, guessed how it came there, and after tea insisted on easing the pain which she would hardly confess.

“Aunt Clara says I am spoiling my hands, but I don’t care, for I’ve had such good times with Aunt Plenty, and I think she has enjoyed it as much as I have. Only one thing troubles me, uncle, and I want to ask you about it,” said Rose, as they paced up and down the hall in the twilight, the bandaged hand very carefully laid on Dr. Alec’s arm.

“More little confidences? I like them immensely, so tell away, my dear.”

“Well, you see I feel as if Aunt Peace would like to do something for me, and I’ve found out what it can be. You know she can’t go about like Aunty Plen, and we are so busy nowadays that she is rather lonely, I’m afraid. So I want to take lessons in sewing of her. She works so beautifully, and it is a useful thing, you know, and I ought to be a good needlewoman as well as housekeeper, oughtn’t I?”

“Bless your kind little heart, that is what I was thinking of the other day when Aunt Peace said she saw you very seldom now, you were so busy I wanted to speak of it, but fancied you had as much on your hands as you could manage. It would delight the dear woman to teach you all her delicate handicraft, especially button-holes, for I believe that is where young ladies fail; at least, I’ve heard them say so. So, do you devote your mind to button-holes; make ‘em all over my clothes if you want something to practice on. I’ll wear any quantity.”

Rose laughed at this reckless offer, but promised to attend to that important branch, though she confessed that darning was her weak point. Whereupon Uncle Alec engaged to supply her with socks in all stages of dilapidation, and to have a new set at once, so that she could run the heels for him as a pleasant beginning.

Then they went up to make their request in due form, to the great delight of gentle Aunt Peace, who got quite excited with the fun that went on while they would yarn, looked up darning needles, and fitted out a nice little mending basket for her pupil.

Very busy and very happy were Rose's days now, for in the morning she went about the house with Aunt Plenty attending to linen-closets and store-rooms, pickling and preserving, exploring garret and cellar to see that all was right, and learning, in the good old-fashioned manner, to look well after the ways of the household.

In the afternoon, after her walk or drive, she sat with Aunt Peace plying her needle, while Aunt Plenty, whose eyes were failing, knitted and chatted briskly, telling many a pleasant story of old times, till the three were moved to laugh and cry together, for the busy needles were embroidering all sorts of bright patterns on the lives of the workers, though they seemed to be only stitching cotton and darning hose.

It was a pretty sight to see the rosy-faced little maid sitting between the two old ladies, listening dutifully to their instructions, and cheering the lessons with her lively chatter and blithe laugh. If the kitchen had proved attractive to Dr. Alec when Rose was there at work, the sewing-room was quite irresistible, and he made himself so agreeable that no one had the heart to drive him away, especially when he read aloud or spun yarns.

"There! I've made you a new set of warm night-gowns with four button-holes in each. See if they are not neatly done," said Rose, one day, some weeks after the new lessons began.

"Even to a thread, and nice little bars across the end so I can't tear them when I twitch the buttons out. Most superior work, ma'am, and I'm deeply grateful; so much so, that I'll sew on these buttons myself, and save those tired fingers from another prick."

"You sew them on?" cried Rose, with her eyes wide open in amazement.

"Wait a bit till I get my sewing tackle, and then you shall see what I can do."

"Can he, really?" asked Rose of Aunt Peace, as Uncle Alec marched off with a comical air of importance.

"Oh, yes, I taught him years ago, before he went to sea; and I suppose he has had to do things for himself, more or less, ever since; so he has kept his hand in."

He evidently had, for he was soon back with a funny little work-bag, out of which he produced a thimble without a top; and, having threaded his needle, he proceeded to sew on the buttons so handily that Rose was much impressed and amused.

“I wonder if there is anything in the world that you cannot do,” she said, in a tone of respectful admiration.

“There are one or two things that I am not up to yet,” he answered, with a laugh in the corner of his eye, as he waxed his thread with a flourish.

“I should like to know what?”

“Bread and button-holes, ma’am.”

Chapter 17 — Good Bargains

It was a rainy Sunday afternoon, and four boys were trying to spend it quietly in the “liberry,” as Jamie called the room devoted to books and boys, at Aunt Jessie’s. Will and Geordie were sprawling on the sofa, deep in the adventures of the scapegraces and ragamuffins whose histories are now the fashion. Archie lounged in the easy chair, surrounded by newspapers; Charlie stood upon the rug, in an Englishman’s favourite attitude, and, I regret to say, both were smoking cigars.

“It is my opinion that this day will never come to an end,” said Prince, with a yawn that nearly rent him asunder.

“Read and improve your mind, my son,” answered Archie, peering solemnly over the paper behind which he had been dozing.

“Don’t you preach, parson, but put on your boots and come out for a tramp, instead of mulling over the fire like a granny.”

“No, thank you, tramps in an easterly storm don’t strike me as amusing.” There Archie stopped and held up his hand, for a pleasant voice was heard saying outside,

“Are the boys in the library, auntie?”

“Yes, dear, and longing for sunshine; so run in and make it for them,” answered Mrs. Jessie.

“It’s Rose,” and Archie threw his cigar into the fire.

“What’s that for?” asked Charlie.

“Gentlemen don’t smoke before ladies.”

“True; but I’m not going to waste my weed,” and Prince poked his into the empty inkstand that served them for an ash tray.

A gentle tap at the door was answered by a chorus of “Come in,” and Rose appeared, looking blooming and breezy with the chilly air.

“If I disturb you, say so, and I’ll go away,” she began, pausing on the threshold with modest hesitation, for something in the elder boys’ faces excited her curiosity.

“You never disturb us, cousin,” said the smokers, while the readers tore themselves from the heroes of the bar-room and gutter long enough to nod affably to their guest.

As Rose bent to warm her hands, one end of Archie’s cigar stuck out of the ashes, smoking furiously and smelling strongly.

“Oh, you bad boys, how could you do it, to-day of all days?” she said reproachfully.

“Where’s the harm?” asked Archie.

“You know as well as I do; your mother doesn’t like it, and it’s a bad habit, for it wastes money and does you no good.”

“Fiddlesticks! every man smokes, even Uncle Alec, whom you think so perfect,” began Charlie, in his teasing way.

“No, he doesn’t! He has given it up, and I know why,” cried Rose eagerly.

“Now I think of it, I haven’t seen the old meerschaum since he came home. Did he stop it on our account?” asked Archie.

“Yes,” and Rose told the little scene on the seashore in the camping-out time.

Archie seemed much impressed, and said manfully, “He won’t have done that in vain so far as I’m concerned. I don’t care a pin about smoking, so can give it up as easy as not, and I promise you I will. I only do it now and then for fun.”

“You too?” and Rose looked up at the bonny Prince, who never looked less bonny than at that moment, for he had resumed his cigar just to torment her.

Now Charlie cared as little as Archie about smoking, but it would not do to yield too soon: so he shook his head, gave a great puff, and said loftily,

“You women are always asking us to give up harmless little things just because you don’t approve of them. How would you like it if we did the same by you, miss?”

“If I did harmful or silly things, I’d thank you for telling me of them, and I’d try to mend my ways,” answered Rose heartily.

“Well, now, we’ll see if you mean what you say. I’ll give up smoking to please you, if you will give up something to please me,” said Prince, seeing a good chance to lord it over the weaker vessel at small cost to himself.

“I’ll agree if it is as foolish as cigars.”

“Oh, it’s ever so much sillier.”

“Then I promise; what is it?” and Rose quite trembled with anxiety to know which of her pet habits or possessions she must lose.

“Give up your ear-rings,” and Charlie laughed wickedly, sure that she would never hold to that bargain.

Rose uttered a cry and clapped both hands to her ears where the gold rings hung.

“Oh, Charlie, wouldn’t anything else do as well? I’ve been through so much teasing and trouble, I do want to enjoy my pretty ear-rings, for I can wear them now.”

“Wear as many as you like, and I’ll smoke in peace,” returned this bad boy.

“Will nothing else satisfy you?” imploringly.

“Nothing,” sternly.

Rose stood silent for a minute, thinking of something Aunt Jessie once said “You have more influence over the boys than you know; use it for their good, and I shall thank you all my life.” Here was a chance to do some good by sacrificing a little vanity of her own. She felt it was right to do it, yet found it very hard, and asked wistfully,

“Do you mean never wear them, Charlie?”

“Never, unless you want me to smoke.”

“I never do.”

“Then clinch the bargain.”

He had no idea she would do it, and was much surprised when she took the dear rings from her ears, with a quick gesture, and held them out to him, saying, in a tone that made the colour come up to his brown cheek, it was so full of sweet good will,

“I care more for my cousins than for my ear-rings, so I promise, and I’ll keep my word.”

“For shame, Prince! let her wear her little danglers if she likes, and don’t bargain about doing what you know is right,” cried Archie, coming out of his grove of newspapers with an indignant bounce.

But Rose was bent on showing her aunt that she could use her influence for the boys’ good, and said steadily,

“It is fair, and I want it to be so, then you will believe I’m in earnest. Here, each of you wear one of these on your watch-guard to remind you. I shall not forget, because very soon I cannot wear ear-rings if I want to.”

As she spoke, Rose offered a little ring to each cousin, and the boys, seeing how sincere she was, obeyed her. When the pledges were safe, Rose stretched a hand to each, and the lads gave hers a hearty grip, half pleased and half ashamed of their part in the compact.

Just at that moment Dr. Alec and Mrs. Jessie came in.

“What’s this? Dancing Ladies’ Triumph on Sunday?” exclaimed Uncle Alec, surveying the trio with surprise.

“No, sir, it is the Anti-Tobacco League. Will you join?” said Charlie, while Rose slipped away to her aunt, and Archie buried both cigars behind the back log.

When the mystery was explained, the elders were well pleased, and Rose received a vote of thanks, which made her feel as if she had done a service to her country, as she had, for every boy who grows up free from bad habits bids fair to make a good citizen.

“I wish Rose would drive a bargain with Will and Geordie also, for I think these books are as bad for the small boys as cigars for the large ones,” said Mrs. Jessie, sitting down on the sofa between the readers, who politely curled up their legs to make room for her.

“I thought they were all the fashion,” answered Dr. Alec, settling in the big chair with Rose.

“So is smoking, but it is harmful. The writers of these popular stories intend to do good, I have no doubt, but it seems to me they fail because their motto is, ‘Be smart, and you will be rich,’ instead of ‘Be honest, and you will be happy.’ I do not judge hastily, Alec, for I have read a dozen, at least, of these stories, and, with much that is attractive to boys, I find a great deal to condemn in them, and other parents say the same when I ask them.”

“Now, Mum, that’s too bad! I like ‘em tip-top. This one is a regular screamer,” cried Will.

“They’re bully books, and I’d like to know where’s the harm,” added Geordie.

“You have just shown us one of the chief evils, and that is slang,” answered their mother quickly.

“Must have it, ma’am. If these chaps talked all right, there’d be no fun in ‘em,” protested Will.

“A boot-black mustn’t use good grammar, and a newsboy must swear a little, or he wouldn’t be natural,” explained Geordie, both boys ready to fight gallantly for their favourites.

“But my sons are neither boot-blacks nor newsboys, and I object to hearing them use such words as ‘screamer,’ ‘bully,’ and ‘buster.’ In fact, I fail to see the advantage of writing books about such people unless it is done in a very different way. I cannot think they will help to refine the ragamuffins if they read them, and I’m sure they can do no good to the better class of boys, who through these books are introduced to police courts, counterfeiters’ dens, gambling houses, drinking saloons, and all sorts of low life.”

“Some of them are about first-rate boys, mother; and they go to sea and study, and sail round the world, having great larks all the way.”

“I have read about them, Geordie, and though they are better than the others, I am not satisfied with these optical delusions, as I call them. Now, I put it to you, boys, is it natural for lads from fifteen to eighteen to command ships, defeat pirates, outwit smugglers, and so cover themselves with glory, that Admiral Farragut invites them to dinner, saying, ‘Noble boy, you are an honour to your country!’ Or, if the hero is in the army, he has hair-breadth escapes and adventures enough in one small volume to turn his hair white, and in the end he goes to Washington at the express desire of the President or Commander-in-chief to be promoted to no end of stars and bars. Even if the hero is merely an honest boy trying to get his living, he is not permitted to do so in a natural way, by hard work and years of patient effort, but is suddenly adopted by a millionaire whose pocket-book he has returned; or a rich uncle appears from sea just in the nick of time; or the remarkable boy earns a few dollars, speculates in pea-nuts or neckties, and grows rich so rapidly that Sinbad in the diamond valley is a pauper compared to him. Isn't it so, boys?"

"Well, the fellows in these books are mighty lucky, and very smart, I must say," answered Will, surveying an illustration on the open page before him, where a small but virtuous youth is upsetting a tipsy giant in a bar-room, and under it the elegant inscription, "Dick Dauntless punches the head of Sam Soaker."

"It gives boys such wrong ideas of life and business; shows them so much evil and vulgarity that they need not know about, and makes the one success worth having a fortune, a lord's daughter, or some worldly honour, often not worth the time it takes to win. It does seem to me that some one might write stories that should be lively, natural and helpful tales in which the English should be good, the morals pure, and the characters such as we can love in spite of the faults that all may have. I can't bear to see such crowds of eager little fellows at the libraries reading such trash; weak, when it is not wicked, and totally unfit to feed the hungry minds that feast on it for want of something better. There! my lecture is done; now I should like to hear what you gentlemen have to say," and Aunt Jessie subsided with a pretty flush on the face that was full of motherly anxiety for her boys.

"Tom Brown just suits mother, and me too, so I wish Mr. Hughes would write another story as good," said Archie.

"You don't find things of this sort in Tom Brown; yet these books are all in the Sunday-school libraries" and Mrs. Jessie read the following paragraph from the book she had taken from Will's hand,

"'In this place we saw a tooth of John the Baptist. Ben said he could see locust and wild honey sticking to it. I couldn't. Perhaps John used a piece of the true cross for a tooth-pick.'"

"A larky sort of a boy says that, Mum, and we skip the parts where they describe what they saw in the different countries," cried Will.

"And those descriptions, taken mostly from guidebooks, I fancy, are the only parts of any real worth. The scrapes of the bad boys make up the rest of the story, and it is for those you read these books, I think," answered his mother, stroking back the hair off the honest little face that looked rather abashed at this true statement of the case.

"Anyway, mother, the ship part is useful, for we learn how to sail her, and by and by that will all come handy when we go to sea,” put in Geordie.

“Indeed, then you can explain this manoeuvre to me, of course,” and Mrs. Jessie read from another page the following nautical paragraph,

“The wind is south-south-west, and we can have her up four points closer to the wind, and still be six points off the wind. As she luffs up we shall man the fore and main sheets, slack on the weather, and haul on the lee braces.”

“I guess I could, if I wasn’t afraid of uncle. He knows so much more than I do, he’d laugh,” began Geordie, evidently puzzled by the question.

“Ho, you know you can’t, so why make believe? We don’t understand half of the sea lingo, Mum, and I dare say it’s all wrong,” cried Will, suddenly going over to the enemy, to Geordie’s great disgust.

“I do wish the boys wouldn’t talk to me as if I was a ship,” said Rose, bringing forward a private grievance. “Coming home from church this morning, the wind blew me about, and Will called out, right in the street, ‘Brail up the foresail, and take in the flying-jib, that will ease her.’“

The boys shouted at the plaintive tone in which Rose repeated the words that offended her, and Will vainly endeavoured to explain that he only meant to tell her to wrap her cloak closer, and tie a veil over the tempest-tossed feathers in her hat.

“To tell the truth, if the boys must have slang, I can bear the ‘sea lingo,’ as Will calls it, better than the other. It afflicts me less to hear my sons talk about ‘brailing up the foresail’ than doing as they ‘darn please,’ and ‘cut your cable’ is decidedly preferable to ‘let her rip.’ I once made a rule that I would have no slang in the house. I give it up now, for I cannot keep it; but I will not have rubbishy books; so, Archie, please send these two after your cigars.”

Mrs. Jessie held both the small boys fast with an arm round each neck, and when she took this base advantage of them they could only squirm with dismay. “Yes, right behind the back log,” she continued, energetically. “There, my hearties (you like sea slang, so I’ll give you a bit) now, I want you to promise not to read any more stuff for a month, and I’ll agree to supply you with wholesome fare.”

“Oh, mother, not a single one?” cried Will.

“Couldn’t we just finish those?” pleaded Geordie.

“The boys threw away half-smoked cigars; and your books must go after them. Surely you would not be outdone by the ‘old fellows,’ as you call them, or be less obedient to little Mum than they were to Rose.”

“Course not! Come on, Geordie,” and Will took the vow like a hero. His brother sighed and obeyed, but privately resolved to finish his story the minute the month was over.

"You have laid out a hard task for yourself, Jessie, in trying to provide good reading for boys who have been living on sensation stories. It will be like going from raspberry tarts to plain bread and butter; but you will probably save them from a bilious fever," said Dr. Alec, much amused at the proceedings.

"I remember hearing grandpa say that a love for good books was one of the best safeguards a man could have," began Archie, staring thoughtfully at the fine library before him.

"Yes, but there's no time to read nowadays; a fellow has to keep scratching round to make money or he's nobody," cut in Charlie, trying to look worldly-wise.

"This love of money is the curse of America, and for the sake of it men will sell honour and honesty, till we don't know whom to trust, and it is only a genius like Agassiz who dares to say, 'I cannot waste my time in getting rich,'" said Mrs. Jessie sadly.

"Do you want us to be poor, mother?" asked Archie, wondering.

"No, dear, and you never need be, while you can use your hands; but I am afraid of this thirst for wealth, and the temptations it brings. O, my boys! I tremble for the time when I must let you go, because I think it would break my heart to have you fail as so many fail. It would be far easier to see you dead if it could be said of you as of Sumner 'No man dared offer him a bribe.'"

Mrs. Jessie was so earnest in her motherly anxiety that her voice faltered over the last words, and she hugged the yellow heads closer in her arms, as if she feared to let them leave that safe harbour for the great sea where so many little boats go down. The younger lads nestled closer to her, and Archie said, in his quiet, resolute way,

"I cannot promise to be an Agassiz or a Sumner, mother; but I do promise to be an honest man, please God."

"Then I'm satisfied!" and holding fast the hand he gave her, she sealed his promise with a kiss that had all a mother's hope and faith in it.

"I don't see how they ever can be bad, she is so fond and proud of them," whispered Rose, quite touched by the little scene.

"You must help her make them what they should be. You have begun already, and when I see those rings where they are, my girl is prettier in my sight than if the biggest diamonds that ever twinkled shone in her ears," answered Dr. Alec, looking at her with approving eyes.

"I'm so glad you think I can do anything, for I perfectly ache to be useful; everyone is so good to me, especially Aunt Jessie."

"I think you are in a fair way to pay your debts, Rosy, for when girls give up their little vanities, and boys their small vices, and try to strengthen each other in well-doing, matters are going as they ought. Work away, my dear, and help their mother keep these sons fit friends for an innocent creature like yourself; they will be the manlier men for it, I can assure you.”

Chapter 18 — Fashion and Physiology

"Please, sir, I guess you'd better step up right away, or it will be too late, for I heard Miss Rose say she knew you wouldn't like it, and she'd never dare to let you see her."

Phebe said this as she popped her head into the study, where Dr. Alec sat reading a new book.

"They are at it, are they?" he said, looking up quickly, and giving himself a shake, as if ready for a battle of some sort.

"Yes, sir, as hard as they can talk, and Miss Rose don't seem to know what to do, for the things are ever so stylish, and she looks elegant in 'em; though I like her best in the old ones," answered Phebe.

"You are a girl of sense. I'll settle matters for Rosy, and you'll lend a hand. Is everything ready in her room, and are you sure you understand how they go?"

"Oh, yes, sir; but they are so funny! I know Miss Rose will think it's a joke," and Phebe laughed as if something tickled her immensely.

"Never mind what she thinks so long as she obeys. Tell her to do it for my sake, and she will find it the best joke she ever saw. I expect to have a tough time of it, but we'll win yet," said the Doctor, as he marched upstairs with the book in his hand, and an odd smile on his face.

There was such a clatter of tongues in the sewing-room that no one heard his tap at the door, so he pushed it open and took an observation. Aunt Plenty, Aunt Clara, and Aunt Jessie were all absorbed in gazing at Rose, who slowly revolved between them and the great mirror, in a full winter costume of the latest fashion.

"Bless my heart! worse even than I expected," thought the Doctor, with an inward groan, for, to his benighted eyes, the girl looked like a trussed fowl, and the fine new dress had neither grace, beauty, nor fitness to recommend it.

The suit was of two peculiar shades of blue, so arranged that patches of light and dark distracted the eye. The upper skirt was tied so lightly back that it was impossible to take a long step, and the under one was so loaded with plaited frills that it "wobbled" no other word will express it ungracefully, both fore and aft. A bunch of folds was gathered up just below the waist behind, and a great bow rode a-top. A small jacket of the same material was adorned with a high ruff at the back, and laid well open over the breast, to display some lace and a locket. Heavy fringes, bows, puffs, ruffles, and revers finished off the dress, making one's head ache to think of the amount of work wasted, for not a single graceful line struck the eye, and the beauty of the material was quite lost in the profusion of ornament.

A high velvet hat, audaciously turned up in front, with a bunch of pink roses and a sweeping plume, was cocked over one ear, and, with her curls braided into a club at the back of her neck, Rose's head looked more like that of a dashing young cavalier than a modest little girl's. High-heeled boots tilted her well forward, a tiny muff pinioned her arms, and a spotted veil, tied so closely over her face that her eyelashes were rumpled by it, gave the last touch of absurdity to her appearance.

"Now she looks like other girls, and as I like to see her," Mrs. Clara was saying, with an air of great satisfaction.

"She does look like a fashionable young lady, but somehow I miss my little Rose, for children dressed like children in my day," answered Aunt Plenty, peering through her glasses with a troubled look, for she could not imagine the creature before her ever sitting in her lap, running to wait upon her, or making the house gay with a child's blithe presence.

"Things have changed since your day, Aunt, and it takes time to get used to new ways. But you, Jessie, surely like this costume better than the dowdy things Rose has been wearing all summer. Now, be honest, and own you do," said Mrs. Clara, bent on being praised for her work.

"Well, dear to be quite honest, then, I think it is frightful," answered Mrs. Jessie, with a candour that caused revolving Rose to stop in dismay.

"Hear, hear," cried a deep voice, and with a general start the ladies became aware that the enemy was among them.

Rose blushed up to her hat brim, and stood, looking, as she felt, like a fool, while Mrs. Clara hastened to explain.

"Of course, I don't expect you to like it, Alec, but I don't consider you a judge of what is proper and becoming for a young lady. Therefore, I have taken the liberty of providing a pretty street suit for Rose. She need not wear it if you object, for I know we promised to let you do what you liked with the poor dear for a year."

"It is a street costume, is it?" asked the Doctor, mildly. "Do you know, I never should have guessed that it was meant for winter weather and brisk locomotion. Take a turn, Rosy, and let me see all its beauties and advantages."

Rose tried to walk off with her usual free tread, but the under-skirt got in her way, the over-skirt was so tight she could not take a long step, and her boots made it impossible to carry herself perfectly erect.

"I haven't got used to it yet," she said, petulantly, kicking at her train, as she turned to toddle back again.

“Suppose a mad dog or a runaway horse was after you, could you get out of the way without upsetting, Colonel,” asked the Doctor, with a twinkle in the eyes that were fixed on the rakish hat.

“Don’t think I could, but I’ll try,” and Rose made a rush across the room. Her boot-heels caught on a rug, several strings broke, her hat tipped over her eyes, and she plunged promiscuously into a chair, where she sat laughing so infectiously that all but Mrs. Clara joined in her mirth.

“I should say that a walking suit in which one could not walk, and a winter suit which exposes the throat, head, and feet to cold and damp, was rather a failure, Clara, especially as it has no beauty to reconcile one to its utter unfitness,” said Dr. Alec, as he helped Rose undo her veil, adding, in a low tone, “Nice thing for the eyes; you’ll soon see spots when it’s off as well as when it’s on, and, by and by, be a case for an oculist.”

“No beauty!” cried Mrs. Clara, warmly, “Now, that is just a man’s blindness. This is the best of silk and camel’s hair, real ostrich feathers, and an expensive ermine muff. What could be in better taste, or more proper for a young girl?”

“I’ll shew you, if Rose will go to her room and oblige me by putting on what she finds there,” answered the Doctor, with unexpected readiness.

“Alec, if it is a Bloomer, I shall protest. I’ve been expecting it, but I know I cannot bear to see that pretty child sacrificed to your wild ideas of health. Tell me it isn’t a Bloomer!” and Mrs. Clara clasped her hands imploringly.

“It is not.”

“Thank Heaven!” and she resigned herself with a sigh of relief, adding plaintively, “I did hope you’d accept my suit, for poor Rose has been afflicted with frightful clothes long enough to spoil the taste of any girl.”

“You talk of my afflicting the child, and then make a helpless guy like that of her!” answered the Doctor, pointing to the little fashion plate that was scuttling out of sight as fast as it could go.

He closed the door with a shrug, but before anyone could speak, his quick eye fell upon an object which caused him to frown, and demand in an indignant tone,

“After all I have said, were you really going to tempt my girl with those abominable things?”

“I thought we put them away when she wouldn’t wear them,” murmured Mrs. Clara, whisking a little pair of corsets out of sight with guilty haste. “I only brought them to try, for Rose is growing stout, and will have no figure if it is not attended to soon,” she added, with an air of calm conviction that roused the Doctor still more, for this was one of his especial abominations.

“Growing stout! Yes, thank Heaven, she is, and shall continue to do it, for Nature knows how to mould a woman better than any corset-maker, and I won’t have her interfered with. My dear Clara, have you lost your senses that you can for a moment dream of putting a growing girl into an instrument of torture like this?” and with a sudden gesture he plucked forth the offending corsets from under the sofa cushion, and held them out with the expression one would wear on beholding the thumbscrews or the rack of ancient times.

“Don’t be absurd, Alec. There is no torture about it, for tight lacing is out of fashion, and we have nice, sensible things nowadays. Everyone wears them; even babies have stiffened waists to support their weak little backs,” began Mrs. Clara, rushing to the defence of the pet delusion of most women.

“I know it, and so the poor little souls have weak backs all their days, as their mothers had before them. It is vain to argue the matter, and I won’t try, but I wish to state, once for all, that if I ever see a pair of corsets near Rose, I’ll put them in the fire, and you may send the bill to me.”

As he spoke the corsets were on their way to destruction, but Mrs. Jessie caught his arm, exclaiming merrily, “Don’t burn them, for mercy sake, Alec; they are full of whalebones, and will make a dreadful odour. Give them to me. I’ll see that they do no harm.”

“Whalebones, indeed! A regular fence of them, and metal gate-posts in front. As if our own bones were not enough, if we’d give them a chance to do their duty,” growled the Doctor, yielding up the bone of contention with a last shake of contempt. Then his face cleared suddenly, and he held up his finger, saying, with a smile, “Hear those girls laugh; cramped lungs could not make hearty music like that.”

Peals of laughter issued from Rose’s room, and smiles involuntarily touched the lips of those who listened to the happy sound.

“Some new prank of yours, Alec?” asked Aunt Plenty, indulgently, for she had come to believe in most of her nephew’s odd notions, because they seemed to work so well.

“Yes, ma’am, my last, and I hope you will like it. I discovered what Clara was at, and got my rival suit ready for to-day. I’m not going to ‘afflict’ Rose, but let her choose, and if I’m not entirely mistaken, she will like my rig best. While we wait I’ll explain, and then you will appreciate the general effect better. I got hold of this little book, and was struck with its good sense and good taste, for it suggests a way to clothe women both healthfully and handsomely, and that is a great point. It begins at the foundations, as you will see if you will look at these pictures, and I should think women would rejoice at this lightening of their burdens.”

As he spoke, the Doctor laid the book before Aunt Plenty, who obediently brought her spectacles to bear upon the illustrations, and after a long look exclaimed, with a scandalised face,

“Mercy on us, these things are like the night-drawers Jamie wears! You don’t mean to say you want Rose to come out in this costume? It’s not proper, and I won’t consent to it!”

“I do mean it, and I’m sure my sensible aunt will consent when she understands that these well I’ll call them by an Indian name, and say pajamas are for underwear, and Rose can have as pretty frocks as she likes outside. These two suits of flannel, each in one piece from head to foot, with a skirt or so hung on this easily-fitting waist, will keep the child warm without burdening her with belts, and gathers, and buckles, and bunches round the waist, and leave free the muscles that need plenty of room to work in. She shall never have the back-ache if I can help it, nor the long list of ills you dear women think you cannot escape.”

“I don’t consider it modest, and I’m sure Rose will be shocked at it,” began Mrs. Clara, but stopped suddenly, as Rose appeared in the doorway, not looking shocked a bit.

“Come on, my hygienic model, and let us see you,” said her uncle, with an approving glance, as she walked in, looking so mischievously merry, that it was evident she enjoyed the joke.

“Well, I don’t see anything remarkable. That is a neat, plain suit; the materials are good, and it’s not unbecoming, if you want her to look like a little school-girl; but it has not a particle of style, and no one would ever give it a second glance,” said Mrs. Clara, feeling that her last remark condemned the whole thing.

“Exactly what I want,” answered the provoking Doctor, rubbing his hands with a satisfied air. “Rosy looks now like what she is, a modest little girl, who does not want to be stared at. I think she would get a glance of approval, though, from people who like sense and simplicity rather than fuss and feathers. Revolve, my Hebe, and let me refresh my eyes by the sight of you.”

There was very little to see, however, only a pretty Gabrielle dress, of a soft warm shade of brown, coming to the tops of a trim pair of boots with low heels. A seal-skin sack, cap, and mittens, with a glimpse of scarlet at the throat, and the pretty curls tied up with a bright velvet of the same colour, completed the external adornment, making her look like a robin redbreast wintry, yet warm.

“How do you like it, Rosy?” asked the Doctor, feeling that her opinion was more important to the success of his new idea than that of all the aunts on the hill.

“I feel very odd and light, but I’m warm as a toast, and nothing seems to be in my way,” answered Rose, with a skip which displayed shapely gaiters on legs that now might be as free and active as a boy’s under the modest skirts of the girl.

“You can run away from the mad dogs, and walk off at a smart pace without tumbling on your nose, now, I fancy?”

“Yes, uncle! suppose the dog coming, I just hop over a wall so and when I walk of a cold day, I go like this.”

Entering fully into the spirit of the thing, Rose swung herself over the high back of the sofa as easily as one of her cousins, and then went down the long hall as if her stout boots were related to the famous seven-leaguers.

“There! you see how it will be; dress her in that boyish way and she will act like a boy. I do hate all these inventions of strong-minded women!” exclaimed Mrs. Clara, as Rose came back at a run.

“Ah, but you see some of these sensible inventions come from the brain of a fashionable modiste, who will make you more lovely, or what you value more ‘stylish’ outside and comfortable within. Mrs. Van Tassel has been to Madame Stone, and is wearing a full suit of this sort. Van himself told me, when I asked how she was, that she had given up lying on the sofa, and was going about in a most astonishing way, considering her feeble health.”

“You don’t say so! Let me see that book a moment,” and Aunt Clara examined the new patterns with a more respectful air, for if the elegant Mrs. Van Tassel wore these “dreadful things” it would never do to be left behind, in spite of her prejudices.

Dr. Alec looked at Mrs. Jessie, and both smiled, for “little Mum” had been in the secret, and enjoyed it mightily.

“I thought that would settle it,” he said with a nod.

“I didn’t wait for Mrs. Van to lead the way, and for once in my life I have adopted a new fashion before Clara. My freedom suit is ordered, and you may see me playing tag with Rose and the boys before long,” answered Mrs. Jessie, nodding back at him.

Meantime Aunt Plenty was examining Rose’s costume, for the hat and sack were off, and the girl was eagerly explaining the new under-garments.

“See, auntie, all nice scarlet flannel, and a gay little petticoat, and long stockings, oh, so warm! Phebe and I nearly died laughing when I put this rig on, but I like it ever so much. The dress is so comfortable, and doesn’t need any belt or sash, and I can sit without rumpling any trimming, that’s such a comfort! I like to be tidy, and so, when I wear fussed-up things, I’m thinking of my clothes all the time, and that’s tiresome. Do say you like it. I resolved I would, just to please uncle, for he does know more about health than anyone else, I’m sure, and I’d wear a bag if he asked me to do it.”

“I don’t ask that, Rose, but I wish you’d weigh and compare the two suits, and then choose which seems best. I leave it to your own commonsense," answered Dr. Alec, feeling pretty sure he had won.

"Why, I take this one, of course, uncle. The other is fashionable, and yes I must say I think it's pretty but it's very heavy, and I should have to go round like a walking doll if I wore it. I'm much obliged to auntie, but I'll keep this, please."

Rose spoke gently but decidedly, though there was a look of regret when her eye fell on the other suit which Phebe had brought in; and it was very natural to like to look as other girls did. Aunt Clara sighed; Uncle Alec smiled, and said heartily,

"Thank you, dear; now read this book and you will understand why I ask it of you. Then, if you like, I'll give you a new lesson; you asked for one yesterday, and this is more necessary than French or housekeeping."

"Oh, what?" and Rose caught up the book which Mrs. Clara had thrown down with a disgusted look.

Though Dr. Alec was forty, the boyish love of teasing was not yet dead in him, and, being much elated at his victory, he could not resist the temptation of shocking Mrs. Clara by suggesting dreadful possibilities, so he answered, half in earnest, half in jest, "Physiology, Rose. Wouldn't you like to be a little medical student, with Uncle Doctor for teacher, and be ready to take up his practice when he has to stop? If you agree, I'll hunt up my old skeleton to-morrow."

That was too much for Aunt Clara, and she hastily departed, with her mind in a sad state of perturbation about Mrs. Van Tassel's new costume and Rose's new study.

Chapter 19 — Brother Bones

Rose accepted her uncle’s offer, as Aunt Myra discovered two or three days later. Coming in for an early call, and hearing voices in the study, she opened the door, gave a cry and shut it quickly, looking a good deal startled. The Doctor appeared in a moment, and begged to know what the matter was.

“How can you ask when that long box looks so like a coffin I thought it was one, and that dreadful thing stared me in the face as I opened the door,” answered Mrs. Myra, pointing to the skeleton that hung from the chandelier cheerfully grinning at all beholders.

“This is a medical college where women are freely admitted, so walk in, madam, and join the class if you’ll do me the honour,” said the Doctor, waving her forward with his politest bow.

“Do, auntie, it’s perfectly splendid,” cried Rose’s voice, and Rose’s blooming face was seen behind the ribs of the skeleton, smiling and nodding in the gayest possible manner.

“What are you doing, child?” demanded Aunt Myra, dropping into a chair and staring about her.

“Oh, I’m learning bones to-day, and I like it so much. There are twelve ribs, you know, and the two lower ones are called floating ribs, because they are not fastened to the breastbone. That’s why they go in so easily if you lace tight and squeeze the lungs and heart in the let me see, what was that big word oh, I know thoracic cavity,” and Rose beamed with pride as she aired her little bit of knowledge.

“Do you think that is a good sort of thing for her to be poking over? She is a nervous child, and I’m afraid it will be bad for her,” said Aunt Myra, watching Rose as she counted vertebrae, and waggled a hip-joint in its socket with an inquiring expression.

“An excellent study, for she enjoys it, and I mean to teach her how to manage her nerves so that they won’t be a curse to her, as many a woman’s become through ignorance or want of thought. To make a mystery or terror of these things is a mistake, and I mean Rose shall understand and respect her body so well that she won’t dare to trifle with it as most women do.”

“And she really likes it?”

“Very much, auntie! It’s all so wonderful, and so nicely planned, you can hardly believe what you see. Just think, there are 600,000,000 air cells in one pair of lungs, and 2,000 pores to a square inch of surface; so you see what quantities of air we must have, and what care we should take of our skin so all the little doors will open and shut right. And brains, auntie, you've no idea how curious they are; I haven't got to them yet, but I long to, and uncle is going to show me a manikin that you can take to pieces. Just think how nice it will be to see all the organs in their places; I only wish they could be made to work as ours do."

It was funny to see Aunt Myra's face as Rose stood before her talking rapidly with one hand laid in the friendliest manner on the skeleton's shoulder. Every word both the Doctor and Rose uttered hit the good lady in her weakest spot, and as she looked and listened a long array of bottles and pill-boxes rose up before her, reproaching her with the "ignorance and want of thought" that made her what she was, a nervous, dyspeptic, unhappy old woman.

"Well, I don't know but you may be right, Alec, only I wouldn't carry it too far. Women don't need much of this sort of knowledge, and are not fit for it. I couldn't bear to touch that ugly thing, and it gives me the creeps to hear about 'organs,'" said Aunt Myra, with a sigh and her hand on her side.

"Wouldn't it be a comfort to know that your liver was on the right side, auntie, and not on the left!" asked Rose with a naughty laugh in her eyes, for she had lately learnt that Aunt Myra's liver complaint was not in the proper place.

"It's a dying world, child, and it don't much matter where the pain is, for sooner or later we all drop off and are seen no more," was Aunt Myra's cheerful reply.

"Well, I intend to know what kills me if I can, and meantime, I'm going to enjoy myself in spite of a dying world. I wish you'd do so too, and come and study with uncle, it would do you good, I'm sure," and Rose went back to counting vertebrae with such a happy face, that Aunt Myra had not the heart to say a word to dampen her ardour.

"Perhaps it's as well to let her do what she likes the little while she is with us. But pray be careful of her, Alec, and not allow her to overwork," she whispered as she went out.

"That's exactly what I'm trying to do, ma'am, and rather a hard job I find it," he added, as he shut the door, for the dear aunts were dreadfully in his way sometimes.

Half an hour later came another interruption in the shape of Mac, who announced his arrival by the brief but elegant remark,

"Hullo! what new game is this?"

Rose explained, Mac gave a long whistle of surprise, and then took a promenade round the skeleton, observing gravely, "Brother Bones looks very jolly, but I can't say much for his beauty."

"You mustn't make fun of him, for he's a good old fellow, and you'd be just as ugly if your flesh was off," said Rose, defending her new friend with warmth.

"I dare say, so I'll keep my flesh on, thank you. You are so busy you can't read to a fellow, I suppose?" asked Mac, whose eyes were better, but still too weak for books.

"Don't you want to come and join my class? Uncle explains it all to us, and you can take a look at the plates as they come along. We'll give up bones today and have eyes instead; that will be more interesting to you," added Rose, seeing no ardent thirst for physiological information in his face.

"Rose, we must not fly about from one thing to another in this way," began Dr. Alec, but she whispered quickly, with a nod towards Mac, whose goggles were turned wistfully in the direction of the forbidden books,

"He's blue to-day, and we must amuse him; give a little lecture on eyes, and it will do him good. No matter about me, uncle."

"Very well; the class will please be seated," and the Doctor gave a sounding rap on the table.

"Come, sit by me, dear, then we can both see the pictures; and if your head gets tired you can lie down," said Rose, generously opening her little college to a brother, and kindly providing for the weaknesses that all humanity is subject to.

Side by side they sat and listened to a very simple explanation of the mechanism of the eye, finding it as wonderful as a fairy tale, for fine plates illustrated it, and a very willing teacher did his best to make the lesson pleasant.

"Jove! if I'd known what mischief I was doing to that mighty delicate machine of mine, you wouldn't have caught me reading by firelight, or studying with a glare of sunshine on my book," said Mac, peering solemnly at a magnified eye-ball; then, pushing it away, he added indignantly, "Why isn't a fellow taught all about his works, and how to manage 'em, and not left to go blundering into all sorts of worries? Telling him after he's down isn't much use, for then he's found it out himself and won't thank you."

"Ah, Mac, that's just what I keep lecturing about, and people won't listen. You lads need that sort of knowledge so much, and fathers and mothers ought to be able to give it to you. Few of them are able, and so we all go blundering, as you say. Less Greek and Latin and more knowledge of the laws of health for my boys, if I had them. Mathematics are all very well, but morals are better, and I wish, how I wish that I could help teachers and parents to feel it as they ought."

"Some do; Aunt Jessie and her boys have capital talks, and I wish we could; but mother's so busy with her housekeeping, and father with his business, there never seems to be any time for that sort of thing; even if there was, it don't seem as if it would be easy to talk to them, because we've never got into the way of it, you know."

Poor Mac was right there, and expressed a want that many a boy and girl feels. Fathers and mothers are too absorbed in business and housekeeping to study their children, and cherish that sweet and natural confidence which is a child's surest safeguard, and a parent's subtlest power. So the young hearts hide trouble or temptation till the harm is done, and mutual regret comes too late. Happy the boys and girls who tell all things freely to father or mother, sure of pity, help, and pardon; and thrice happy the parents who, out of their own experience, and by their own virtues, can teach and uplift the souls for which they are responsible.

This longing stirred in the hearts of Rose and Mac, and by a natural impulse both turned to Dr. Alec, for in this queer world of ours, fatherly and motherly hearts often beat warm and wise in the breasts of bachelor uncles and maiden aunts; and it is my private opinion that these worthy creatures are a beautiful provision of nature for the cherishing of other people's children. They certainly get great comfort out of it, and receive much innocent affection that otherwise would be lost.

Dr. Alec was one of these, and his big heart had room for every one of the eight cousins, especially orphaned Rose and afflicted Mac; so, when the boy uttered that unconscious reproach to his parents, and Rose added with a sigh, "It must be beautiful to have a mother!" the good Doctor yearned over them, and, shutting his book with a decided slam, said in that cordial voice of his,

"Now, look here, children, you just come and tell me all your worries, and with God's help, I'll settle them for you. That is what I'm here for, I believe, and it will be a great happiness to me if you can trust me."

"We can, uncle, and we will!" both answered, with a heartiness that gratified him much.

"Good! now school is dismissed, and I advise you to go and refresh your 600,000,000 air cells by a brisk run in the garden. Come again whenever you like, Mac, and we'll teach you all we can about your 'works,' as you call them, so you can keep them running smoothly."

"We'll come, sir, much obliged," and the class in physiology went out to walk.

Mac did come again, glad to find something he could study in spite of his weak eyes, and learned much that was of more value than anything his school had ever taught him.

Of course, the other lads made great fun of the whole thing, and plagued Dr. Alec's students half out of their lives. But they kept on persistently, and one day something happened which made the other fellows behave themselves for ever after.

It was a holiday, and Rose up in her room thought she heard the voices of her cousins, so she ran down to welcome them, but found no one there.

“Never mind, they will be here soon, and then we’ll have a frolic,” she said to herself, and thinking she had been mistaken she went into the study to wait. She was lounging over the table looking at a map when an odd noise caught her ear. A gentle tapping somewhere, and following the sound it seemed to come from the inside of the long case in which the skeleton lived when not professionally engaged. This case stood upright in a niche between two book-cases at the back of the room, a darkish corner, where Brother Bones, as the boys would call him, was out of the way.

As Rose stood looking in that direction, and wondering if a rat had got shut in, the door of the case swung slowly open, and with a great start she saw a bony arm lifted, and a bony finger beckon to her. For a minute she was frightened, and ran to the study door with a fluttering heart, but just as she touched the handle a queer, stifled sort of giggle made her stop short and turn red with anger. She paused an instant to collect herself, and then went softly toward the bony beckoner. A nearer look revealed black threads tied to the arm and fingers, the ends of threads disappearing through holes bored in the back of the case. Peeping into the dark recess, she also caught sight of the tip of an elbow covered with a rough gray cloth which she knew very well.

Quick as a flash she understood the joke, her fear vanished, and with a wicked smile, she whipped out her scissors, cut the threads, and the bony arm dropped with a rattle. Before she could say, “Come out, Charlie, and let my skeleton alone,” a sudden irruption of boys, all in a high state of tickle, proclaimed to the hidden rogue that his joke was a failure.

“I told him not to do it, because it might give you a start,” explained Archie, emerging from the closet.

“I had a smelling bottle all ready if she fainted away,” added Steve, popping up from behind the great chair.

“It’s too bad of you not to squawk and run; we depended on it, it’s such fun to howl after you,” said Will and Geordie, rolling out from under the sofa in a promiscuous heap.

“You are getting altogether too strong-minded, Rose; most girls would have been in a jolly twitter to see this old fellow waggling his finger at them,” complained Charlie, squeezing out from his tight quarters, dusty and disgusted.

“I’m used to your pranks now, so I’m always on the watch and prepared. But I won’t have Brother Bones made fun of. I know uncle wouldn’t like it, so please don’t,” began Rose just as Dr. Alec came in, and, seeing the state of the case at a glance, he said quietly,

“Hear how I got that skeleton, and then I’m sure you will treat it with respect.”

The boys settled down at once on any article of furniture that was nearest and listened dutifully.

“Years ago, when I was in the hospital, a poor fellow was brought there with a rare and very painful disease. There was no hope for him, but we did our best, and he was so grateful that when he died he left us his body that we might discover the mysteries of his complaint, and so be able to help others afflicted in the same way. It did do good, and his brave patience made us remember him long after he was gone. He thought I had been kind to him, and said to a fellow-student of mine, ‘Tell the Doctor I lave him me bones, for I’ve nothing else in the wide world, and I’ll nos be wanting ‘em at all, at all, when the great pain hat kilt me entirely.’ So that is how they came to be mine, and why I’ve kept them carefully, for, though only a poor, ignorant fellow, Mike Nolan did what he could to help others, and prove his gratitude to those who tried to help him.”

As Dr. Alec paused, Archie closed the door of the case as respectfully as if the mummy of an Egyptian king was inside; Will and Geordie looked solemnly at one another, evidently much impressed, and Charlie pensively remarked from the coal-hod where he sat,

“I’ve often heard of a skeleton in the house, but I think few people have one as useful and as interesting as ours.”

Chapter 20 — Under The Mistletoe

Rose made Phebe promise that she would bring her stocking into the “Bower,” as she called her pretty room, on Christmas morning, because that first delicious rummage loses half its charm if two little night-caps at least do not meet over the treasures, and two happy voices Oh and Ah together.

So when Rose opened her eyes that day they fell upon faithful Phebe, rolled up in a shawl, sitting on the rug before a blazing fire, with her untouched stocking laid beside her.

“Merry Christmas!” cried the little mistress smiling gaily.

“Merry Christmas!” answered the little maid, so heartily that it did one good to hear her.

“Bring the stockings right away, Phebe, and let’s see what we’ve got,” said Rose, sitting up among the pillows, and looking as eager as a child.

A pair of long knobby hose were laid out upon the coverlet, and their contents examined with delight, though each knew every blessed thing that had been put into the other’s stocking.

Never mind what they were; it is evident that they were quite satisfactory, for as Rose leaned back, she said, with a luxurious sigh of satisfaction, “Now, I believe I’ve got everything in the world that I want,” and Phebe answered, smiling over a lapful of treasures, “This is the most splendid Christmas I ever had since I was born.” Then she added with an important air,

“Do wish for something else, because I happen to know of two more presents outside the door this minute.”

“Oh, me, what richness!” cried Rose, much excited. “I used to wish for a pair of glass slippers like Cinderella’s, but as I can’t have them, I really don’t know what to ask for.”

Phebe clapped her hands as she skipped off the bed and ran to the door, saying merrily, “One of them is for your feet, anyway. I don’t know what you’ll say to the other, but I think it’s elegant.”

So did Rose, when a shining pair of skates and a fine sled appeared.

“Uncle sent those; I know he did; and, now I see them, I remember that I did want to skate and coast. Isn’t it a beauty? See! they fit nicely,” and, sitting on the new sled, Rose tried a skate on her little bare foot, while Phebe stood by admiring the pretty tableau.

“Now we must hurry and get dressed, for there is a deal to do to-day, and I want to get through in time to try my sled before dinner."

"Gracious me, and I ought to be dusting my parlors this blessed minute!" and mistress and maid separated with such happy faces that anyone would have known what day it was without being told.

"Birnam Wood has come to Dunsinane, Rosy," said Dr. Alec, as he left the breakfast table to open the door for a procession of holly, hemlock, and cedar boughs that came marching up the steps.

Snowballs and "Merry Christmases!" flew about pretty briskly for several minutes; then all fell to work trimming the old house, for the family always dined together there on that day.

"I rode miles and mileses, as Ben says, to get this fine bit, and I'm going to hang it there as the last touch to the rig-a-madooning," said Charlie, as he fastened a dull green branch to the chandelier in the front parlor.

"It isn't very pretty," said Rose, who was trimming the chimney-piece with glossy holly sprays.

"Never mind that, it's mistletoe, and anyone who stands under it will get kissed whether they like it or not. Now's your time, ladies," answered the saucy Prince, keeping his place and looking sentimentally at the girls, who retired precipitately from the dangerous spot.

"You won't catch me," said Rose, with great dignity.

"See if I don't!"

"I've got my eye on Phebe," observed Will, in a patronising tone that made them all laugh.

"Bless the dear; I shan't mind it a bit," answered Phebe, with such a maternal air that Will's budding gallantry was chilled to death.

"Oh, the mistletoe bough," sang Rose.

"Oh, the mistletoe bough!" echoed all the boys, and the teasing ended in the plaintive ballad they all liked so well.

There was plenty of time to try the new skates before dinner, and then Rose took her first lesson on the little bay, which seemed to have frozen over for that express purpose. She found tumbling down and getting up again warm work for a time, but with six boys to teach her, she managed at last to stand alone; and, satisfied with that success, she refreshed herself with a dozen grand coasts on the Amazon, as her sled was called.

"Ah, that fatal colour! it breaks my heart to see it," croaked Aunt Myra, as Rose came down a little late, with cheeks almost as ruddy as the holly berries on the wall, and every curl as smooth as Phebe's careful hands could make it.

"I'm glad to see that Alec allows the poor child to make herself pretty in spite of his absurd notions," added Aunt Clara, taking infinite satisfaction in the fact that Rose's blue silk dress had three frills on it.

"She's a very intelligent child, and has a nice little manner of her own," observed Aunt Jane, with unusual affability; for Rose had just handed Mac a screen to guard his eyes from the brilliant fire.

"If I had a daughter like that to show my Jem when he gets home, I should be a very proud and happy woman," thought Aunt Jessie, and then reproached herself for not being perfectly satisfied with her four brave lads.

Aunt Plenty was too absorbed in the dinner to have an eye for anything else; if she had not been, she would have seen what an effect her new cap produced upon the boys. The good lady owned that she did "love a dressy cap," and on this occasion her head gear was magnificent; for the towering structure of lace was adorned with buff ribbons to such an extent that it looked as if a flock of yellow butterflies had settled on her dear old head. When she trotted about the rooms the ruches quivered, the little bows all stood erect, and the streamers waved in the breeze so comically that it was absolutely necessary for Archie to smother the Brats in the curtains till they had had their first laugh out.

Uncle Mac had brought Fun See to dinner, and it was a mercy he did, for the elder lads found a vent for their merriment in joking the young Chinaman on his improved appearance. He was in American costume now, with a cropped head, and spoke remarkably good English after six months at school; but, for all that, his yellow face and beady eyes made a curious contrast to the blonde Campbells all about him. Will called him the "Typhoon," meaning Tycoon, and the name stuck to him to his great disgust.

Aunt Peace was brought down and set in the chair of state at table, for she never failed to join the family on this day, and sat smiling at them all, "like an embodiment of Peace on earth," Uncle Alec said, as he took his place beside her, while Uncle Mac supported Aunt Plenty at the other end.

"I ate hardly any breakfast, and I've done everything I know to make myself extra hungry, but I really don't think I can eat straight through, unless I burst my buttons off," whispered Geordie to Will, as he surveyed the bounteous stores before him with a hopeless sigh.

"A fellow never knows what he can do till he tries," answered Will, attacking his heaped-up plate with an evident intention of doing his duty like a man.

Everybody knows what a Christmas dinner is, so we need waste no words in describing this one, but hasten at once to tell what happened at the end of it. The end, by the way, was so long in coming that the gas was lighted before dessert was over, for a snow flurry had come on and the wintry daylight faded fast. But that only made it all the jollier in the warm, bright rooms, full of happy souls. Everyone was very merry, but Archie seemed particularly uplifted so much so, that Charlie confided to Rose that he was afraid the Chief had been at the decanters.

Rose indignantly denied the insinuation, for when healths were drunk in the good old-fashioned way to suit the elders, she had observed that Aunt Jessie's boys filled their glasses with water, and had done the same herself in spite of the Prince's jokes about "the rosy."

But Archie certainly was unusually excited, and when someone remembered that it was the anniversary of Uncle Jem's wedding, and wished he was there to make a speech, his son electrified the family by trying to do it for him. It was rather incoherent and flowery, as maiden speeches are apt to be, but the end was considered superb; for, turning to his mother with a queer little choke in his voice, he said that she "deserved to be blessed with peace and plenty, to be crowned with roses and lads'-love, and to receive the cargo of happiness sailing home to her in spite of wind or tide to add another Jem to the family jewels."

That allusion to the Captain, now on his return trip, made Mrs. Jessie sob in her napkin, and set the boys cheering. Then, as if that was not sensation enough, Archie suddenly dashed out of the room, as if he had lost his wits.

"Too bashful to stay and be praised," began Charlie, excusing the peculiarities of his chief as in duty bound.

"Phebe beckoned to him; I saw her," cried Rose, staring hard at the door.

"Is it more presents coming?" asked Jamie, just as his brother re-appeared, looking more excited than ever.

"Yes; a present for mother, and here it is!" roared Archie, flinging wide the door to let in a tall man, who cried out,

"Where's my little woman? The first kiss for her, then the rest may come on as fast as they like."

Before the words were out of his mouth, Mrs. Jessie was half-hidden under his rough great-coat, and four boys were prancing about him clamouring for their turn.

Of course, there was a joyful tumult for a time, during which Rose slipped into the window recess and watched what went on, as if it were a chapter in a Christmas story. It was good to see bluff Uncle Jem look proudly at his tall son, and fondly hug the little ones. It was better still to see him shake his brothers' hands as if he would never leave off, and kiss all the sisters in a way that made even solemn Aunt Myra brighten up for a minute. But it was best of all to see him finally established in grandfather's chair, with his "little woman" beside him, his three youngest boys in his lap, and Archie hovering over him like a large-sized cherub. That really was, as Charlie said, "A landscape to do one's heart good."

"All hearty and all here, thank God!" said Captain Jem in the first pause that came, as he looked about him with a grateful face.

"All but Rose," answered loyal little Jamie, remembering the absent.

"Faith, I forgot the child! Where is George's little girl?" asked the Captain, who had not seen her since she was a baby.

"You'd better say Alec's great girl," said Uncle Mac, who professed to be madly jealous of his brother.

"Here I am, sir," and Rose appeared from behind the curtains, looking as if she had rather have stayed there.

"Saint George Germain, how the mite has grown!" cried Captain Jem, as he tumbled the boys out of his lap, and rose to greet the tall girl, like a gentleman as he was. But, somehow, when he shook her hand it looked so small in his big one, and her face reminded him so strongly of his dead brother, that he was not satisfied with so cold a welcome, and with a sudden softening of the keen eyes he took her up in his arms, whispering, with a rough cheek against her smooth one,

"God bless you, child! forgive me if I forgot you for a minute, and be sure that not one of your kinsfolk is happier to see you here than Uncle Jem."

That made it all right; and when he set her down, Rose's face was so bright it was evident that some spell had been used to banish the feeling of neglect that had kept her moping behind the curtain so long.

That everyone sat round and heard all about the voyage home how the Captain had set his heart on getting there in time to keep Christmas; how everything had conspired to thwart his plan; and how, at the very last minute, he had managed to do it, and had sent a telegram to Archie, bidding him keep the secret, and be ready for his father at any moment, for the ship got into another port, and he might be late.

Then Archie told how that telegram had burnt in his pocket all dinner-time; how he had to take Phebe into his confidence, and how clever she was to keep the Captain back till the speech was over and he could come in with effect.

The elders would have sat and talked all the evening, but the young folks were bent on having their usual Christmas frolic; so, after an hour of pleasant chat, they began to get restless, and having consulted together in dumb show, they devised a way to very effectually break up the family council.

Steve vanished, and, sooner than the boys imagined Dandy could get himself up, the skirl of the bag-pipe was heard in the hall, and the bonny piper came to lead Clan Campbell to the revel.

"Draw it mild, Stevie, my man; ye play unco weel, but ye mak a most infernal din," cried Uncle Jem, with his hands over his ears, for this accomplishment was new to him, and “took him all aback,” as he expressed it.

So Steve droned out a Highland reel as softly as he could, and the boys danced it to a circle of admiring relations. Captain Jem was a true sailor, however, and could not stand idle while anything lively was going on; so, when the piper’s breath gave out, he cut a splendid pigeon-wing into the middle of the hall, saying, “Who can dance a Fore and After?” and, waiting for no reply, began to whistle the air so invitingly that Mrs Jessie “set” to him laughing like a girl; Rose and Charlie took their places behind, and away went the four with a spirit and skill that inspired all the rest to “cut in” as fast as they could.

That was a grand beginning, and they had many another dance before anyone would own they were tired. Even Fun See distinguished himself with Aunt Plenty, whom he greatly admired as the stoutest lady in the company; plumpness being considered a beauty in his country. The merry old soul professed herself immensely flattered by his admiration, and the boys declared she “set her cap at him,” else he would never have dared to catch her under the mistletoe, and, rising on the tips of his own toes, gallantly salute her fat cheek.

How they all laughed at her astonishment, and how Fun’s little black eyes twinkled over this exploit! Charlie put him up to it, and Charlie was so bent on catching Rose, that he laid all sorts of pitfalls for her, and bribed the other lads to help him. But Rose was wide-awake, and escaped all his snares, professing great contempt for such foolish customs. Poor Phebe did not fare so well, and Archie was the only one who took a base advantage of her as she stood innocently offering tea to Aunt Myra, whom she happened to meet just under the fatal bough. If his father’s arrival had not rather upset him, I doubt if the dignified Chief would have done it, for he apologized at once in the handsomest manner, and caught the tray that nearly dropped from Phebe’s hands.

Jamie boldly invited all the ladies to come and salute him; and as for Uncle Jem, he behaved as if the entire room was a grove of mistletoe. Uncle Alec slyly laid a bit of it on Aunt Peace’s cap, and then softly kissed her; which little joke seemed to please her very much, for she liked to have part in all the home pastimes, and Alec was her favourite nephew.

Charlie alone failed to catch his shy bird, and the oftener she escaped the more determined he was to ensnare her. When every other wile had been tried in vain, he got Archie to propose a game with forfeits.

“I understand that dodge,” thought Rose, and was on her guard so carefully that not one among the pile soon collected belonged to her.

“Now let us redeem them and play something else,” said Will, quite unconscious of the deeply-laid plots all about him.

“One more round and then we will,” answered the Prince, who had now baited his trap anew.

Just as the question came to Rose, Jamie's voice was heard in the hall, crying distressfully, "Oh, come quick, quick!" Rose started up, missed the question, and was greeted with a general cry of "Forfeit! forfeit!" in which the little traitor came to join.

"Now I've got her," thought the young rascal, exulting in his fun-loving soul.

"Now I'm lost," thought Rose, as she gave up her pin-cushion with a sternly defiant look that would have daunted anyone but the reckless Prince. In fact, it made even him think twice, and resolve to "let Rose off easy,'' she had been so clever.

"Here's a very pretty pawn, and what shall be done to redeem it?" asked Steve, holding the pin-cushion over Charlie's head, for he had insisted on being judge, and kept that for the last.

"Fine or superfine?"

"Super."

"Hum, well, she shall take old Mac under the mistletoe, and kiss him prettily. Won't he be mad, though?" and this bad boy chuckled over the discomfort he had caused two harmless beings.

There was an impressive pause among the young folks in their corner, for they all knew that Mac would "be mad," since he hated nonsense of this sort, and had gone to talk with the elders when the game began. At this moment he was standing before the fire, listening to a discussion between his uncles and his father, looking as wise as a young owl, and blissfully unconscious of the plots against him.

Charlie expected that Rose would say, "I won't!" therefore he was rather astonished, not to say gratified, when, after a look at the victim, she laughed suddenly, and, going up to the group of gentlemen, drew her uncle Mac under the mistletoe and surprised him with a hearty kiss.

"Thank you, my dear," said the innocent gentleman, looking much pleased at the unexpected honour.

"Oh, come; that's not fair," began Charlie. But Rose cut him short by saying, as she made him a fine courtesy,

"You said 'Old Mac,' and though it was very disrespectful, I did it. That was your last chance, sir, and you've lost it."

He certainly had, for, as he spoke, Rose pulled down the mistletoe and threw it into the fire, while the boys jeered at the crestfallen Prince, and exalted quick-witted Rose to the skies.

"What's the joke?" asked young Mac, waked out of a brown study by the laughter, in which the elders joined.

But there was a regular shout when, the matter having been explained to him, Mac took a meditative stare at Rose through his goggles, and said in a philosophical tone, “Well, I don’t think I should have minded much if she had done it.”

That tickled the lads immensely, and nothing but the appearance of a slight refection would have induced them to stop chaffing the poor Worm, who could not see anything funny in the beautiful resignation he had shown on this trying occasion.

Soon after this, the discovery of Jamie curled up in the sofa corner, as sound asleep as a dormouse, suggested the propriety of going home, and a general move was made.

They were all standing about the hall lingering over the good-nights, when the sound of a voice softly singing “Sweet Home,” made them pause and listen. It was Phebe, poor little Phebe, who never had a home, never knew the love of father or mother, brother or sister; who stood all alone in the wide world, yet was not sad nor afraid, but took her bits of happiness gratefully, and sung over her work without a thought of discontent.

I fancy the happy family standing there together remembered this and felt the beauty of it, for when the solitary voice came to the burden of its song, other voices took it up and finished it so sweetly, that the old house seemed to echo the word “Home” in the ears of both the orphan girls, who had just spent their first Christmas under its hospitable roof.

Chapter 21 — A Scare

"Brother Alec, you surely don't mean to allow that child to go out such a bitter cold day as this," said Mrs. Myra, looking into the study, where the Doctor sat reading his paper, one February morning.

"Why not? If a delicate invalid like yourself can bear it, surely my hearty girl can, especially as she is dressed for cold weather," answered Dr. Alec with provoking confidence.

"But you have no idea how sharp the wind is. I am chilled to the very marrow of my bones," answered Aunt Myra, chafing the end of her purple nose with her sombre glove.

"I don't doubt it, ma'am, if you will wear crape and silk instead of fur and flannel. Rosy goes out in all weathers, and will be none the worse for an hour's brisk skating."

"Well, I warn you that you are trifling with the child's health, and depending too much on the seeming improvement she has made this year. She is a delicate creature for all that, and will drop away suddenly at the first serious attack, as her poor mother did," croaked Aunt Myra, with a despondent wag of the big bonnet.

"I'll risk it," answered Dr. Alec, knitting his brows, as he always did when any allusion was made to that other Rose.

"Mark my words, you will repent it," and with that awful prophecy, Aunt Myra departed like a black shadow.

Now it must be confessed that among the Doctor's failings and he had his share was a very masculine dislike of advice which was thrust upon him unasked. He always listened with respect to the great-aunts, and often consulted Mrs. Jessie; but the other three ladies tried his patience sorely, by constant warnings, complaints and counsels. Aunt Myra was an especial trial, and he always turned contrary the moment she began to talk. He could not help it, and often laughed about it with comic frankness. Here now was a sample of it, for he had just been thinking that Rose had better defer her run till the wind went down and the sun was warmer. But Aunt Myra spoke, and he could not resist the temptation to make light of her advice, and let Rose brave the cold. He had no fear of its harming her, for she went out every day, and it was a great satisfaction to him to see her run down the avenue a minute afterward, with her skates on her arm, looking like a rosy-faced Esquimaux in her seal-skin suit, as she smiled at

Aunt Myra stalking along as solemnly as a crow.

"I hope the child won't stay out long, for this wind is enough to chill the marrow in younger bones than Myra's," thought Dr. Alec, half an hour later, as he drove toward the city to see the few patients he had consented to take for old acquaintance' sake.

The thought returned several times that morning, for it was truly a bitter day, and, in spite of his bear-skin coat, the Doctor shivered. But he had great faith in Rose's good sense, and it never occurred to him that she was making a little Casabianca of herself, with the difference of freezing instead of burning at her post.

You see, Mac had made an appointment to meet her at a certain spot, and have a grand skating bout as soon as the few lessons he was allowed were over. She had promised to wait for him, and did so with a faithfulness that cost her dear, because Mac forgot his appointment when the lessons were done, and became absorbed in a chemical experiment, till a general combustion of gases drove him out of his laboratory. Then he suddenly remembered Rose, and would gladly have hurried away to her, but his mother forbade his going out, for the sharp wind would hurt his eyes.

"She will wait and wait, mother, for she always keeps her word, and I told her to hold on till I came," explained Mac, with visions of a shivering little figure watching on the windy hill-top.

"Of course, your uncle won't let her go out such a day as this. If he does, she will have the sense to come here for you, or to go home again when you don't appear," said Aunt Jane, returning to her "Watts on the Mind."

"I wish Steve would just cut up and see if she's there, since I can't go," began Mac, anxiously.

"Steve won't stir a peg, thank you. He's got his own toes to thaw out, and wants his dinner," answered Dandy, just in from school, and wrestling impatiently with his boots.

So Mac resigned himself, and Rose waited dutifully till dinner-time assured her that her waiting was in vain. She had done her best to keep warm, had skated till she was tired and hot, then stood watching others till she was chilled; tried to get up a glow again by trotting up and down the road, but failed to do so, and finally cuddled disconsolately under a pine-tree to wait and watch. When she at length started for home, she was benumbed with cold, and could hardly make her way against the wind that buffeted the frost-bitten rose most unmercifully.

Dr. Alec was basking in the warmth of the study fire, after his drive, when the sound of a stifled sob made him hurry to the door and look anxiously into the hall. Rose lay in a shivering bunch near the register, with her things half off, wringing her hands, and trying not to cry with the pain returning warmth brought to her half-frozen fingers.

“My darling, what is it?” and Uncle Alec had her in his arms in a minute.

“Mac didn’t come I can’t get warm the fire makes me ache!” and with a long shiver Rose burst out crying, while her teeth chattered, and her poor little nose was so blue, it made one’s heart ache to see it.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Dr. Alec had her on the sofa rolled up in the bear-skin coat, with Phebe rubbing her cold feet while he rubbed the aching hands, and Aunt Plenty made a comfortable hot drink, and Aunt Peace sent down her own foot-warmer and embroidered blanket “for the dear.”

Full of remorseful tenderness, Uncle Alec worked over his new patient till she declared she was all right again. He would not let her get up to dinner, but fed her himself, and then forgot his own while he sat watching her fall into a drowse, for Aunt Plenty’s cordial made her sleepy.

She lay so several hours for the drowse deepened into a heavy sleep, and Uncle Alec, still at his post, saw with growing anxiety that a feverish colour began to burn in her cheeks, that her breathing was quick and uneven, and now and then she gave a little moan, as if in pain. Suddenly she woke up with a start, and seeing Aunt Plenty bending over her, put out her arms like a sick child, saying wearily,

“Please, could I go to bed?”

“The best place for you, deary. Take her right up, Alec; I’ve got the hot water ready, and after a nice bath, she shall have a cup of my sage tea, and be rolled up in blankets to sleep off her cold,” answered the old lady, cheerily, as she bustled away to give orders.

“Are you in pain, darling?” asked Uncle Alec, as he carried her up.

“My side aches when I breathe, and I feel stiff and queer; but it isn’t bad, so don’t be troubled, uncle,” whispered Rose, with a little hot hand against his cheek.

But the poor doctor did look troubled, and had cause to do so, for just then Rose tried to laugh at Dolly charging into the room with a warming-pan, but could not, for the sharp pain took her breath away and made her cry out.

“Pleurisy,” sighed Aunt Plenty, from the depths of the bath-tub.

“Pewmonia!” groaned Dolly, burrowing among the bedclothes with the long-handled pan, as if bent on fishing up that treacherous disease.

“Oh, is it bad?” asked Phebe, nearly dropping a pail of hot water in her dismay, for she knew nothing of sickness, and Dolly’s suggestion had a peculiarly dreadful sound to her.

“Hush!” ordered the Doctor, in a tone that silenced all further predictions, and made everyone work with a will.

"Make her as comfortable as you can, and when she is in her little bed I'll come and say good-night," he added, when the bath was ready and the blankets browning nicely before the fire.

Then he went away to talk quite cheerfully to Aunt Peace about its being "only a chill"; after which he tramped up and down the hall, pulling his beard and knitting his brows, sure signs of great inward perturbation.

"I thought it would be too good luck to get through the year without a downfall. Confound my perversity! Why couldn't I take Myra's advice and keep Rose at home. It's not fair that the poor child should suffer for my sinful over-confidence. She shall not suffer for it! Pneumonia, indeed! I defy it," and he shook his fist in the ugly face of an Indian idol that happened to be before him, as if that particularly hideous god had some spite against his own little goddess.

In spite of his defiance his heart sunk when he saw Rose again, for the pain was worse, and the bath and blankets, the warming-pan and piping-hot sage tea, were all in vain. For several hours there was no rest for the poor child, and all manner of gloomy forebodings haunted the minds of those who hovered about her with faces full of the tenderest anxiety.

In the midst of the worst paroxysm Charlie came to leave a message from his mother, and was met by Phebe coming despondently downstairs with a mustard plaster that had brought no relief.

"What the dickens is the matter? You look as dismal as a tombstone," he said, as she held up her hand to stop his lively whistling.

"Miss Rose is dreadful sick."

"The deuce she is!"

"Don't swear, Mr. Charlie; she really is, and it's Mr. Mac's fault," and Phebe told the sad tale in a few sharp words, for she felt at war with the entire race of boys at that moment.

"I'll give it to him, make your mind easy about that," said Charlie, with an ominous doubling up of his fist. "But Rose isn't dangerously ill, is she?" he added anxiously, as Aunt Plenty was seen to trot across the upper hall, shaking a bottle violently as she went.

"Oh, but she is though. The Doctor don't say much, but he don't call it a 'chill' any more. It's 'pleurisy' now, and I'm so afraid it will be pewmonia to-morrow," answered Phebe, with a despairing glance at the plaster.

Charlie exploded into a stifled laugh at the new pronunciation of pneumonia, to Phebe's great indignation.

"How can you have the heart to do it, and she in such horrid pain? Hark to that, and then laugh if you darst," she said with a tragic gesture, and her black eyes full of fire.

Charlie listened and heard little moans that went to his heart and made his face as sober as Phebe's. "O uncle, please stop the pain, and let me rest a minute! Don't tell the boys I wasn't brave. I try to bear it, but it's so sharp I can't help crying."

Neither could Charlie, when he heard the broken voice say that; but, boy-like, he wouldn't own it, and said pettishly, as he rubbed his sleeve across his eyes,

"Don't hold that confounded thing right under my nose; the mustard makes my eyes smart."

"Don't see how it can, when it hasn't any more strength in it than meal. The Doctor said so, and I'm going to get some better," began Phebe, not a bit ashamed of the great tears that were bedewing the condemned plaster.

"I'll go!" and Charlie was off like a shot, glad of an excuse to get out of sight for a few minutes.

When he came back all inconvenient emotion had been disposed of, and, having delivered a box of the hottest mustard procurable for money, he departed to "blow up" Mac, that being his next duty in his opinion. He did it so energetically and thoroughly that the poor Worm was cast into the depths of remorseful despair, and went to bed that evening feeling that he was an outcast from among men, and bore the mark of Cain upon his brow.

Thanks to the skill of the Doctor, and the devotion of his helpers, Rose grew easier about midnight, and all hoped that the worst was over. Phebe was making tea by the study fire, for the Doctor had forgotten to eat and drink since Rose was ill, and Aunt Plenty insisted on his having a "good cordial dish of tea" after his exertions. A tap on the window startled Phebe, and, looking up, she saw a face peering in. She was not afraid, for a second look showed her that it was neither ghost nor burglar, but Mac, looking pale and wild in the wintry moonlight.

"Come and let a fellow in," he said in a low tone, and when he stood in the hall he clutched Phebe's arm, whispering gruffly, "How is Rose?"

"Thanks be to goodness, she's better," answered Phebe, with a smile that was like broad sunshine to the poor lad's anxious heart.

"And she will be all right again to-morrow?"

"Oh, dear no! Dolly says she's sure to have rheumatic fever, if she don't have noo-monia!" answered Phebe, careful to pronounce the word rightly this time.

Down went Mac's face, and remorse began to gnaw at him again as he gave a great sigh and said doubtfully,

"I suppose I couldn't see her?"

"Of course not at this time of night, when we want her to go to sleep!"

Mac opened his mouth to say something more, when a sneeze came upon him unawares, and a loud “Ah rash hoo!” awoke the echoes of the quiet house.

“Why didn’t you stop it?” said Phebe reproachfully. “I dare say you’ve waked her up.”

“Didn’t know it was coming. Just my luck!” groaned Mac, turning to go before his unfortunate presence did more harm.

But a voice from the stair-head called softly, “Mac, come up; Rose wants to see you.”

Up he went, and found his uncle waiting for him.

“What brings you here at this hour, my boy?” asked the Doctor in a whisper.

“Charlie said it was all my fault, and if she died I’d killed her. I couldn’t sleep, so I came to see how she was, and no one knows it but Steve,” he said with such a troubled face and voice that the Doctor had not the heart to blame him.

Before he could say anything more a feeble voice called “Mac!” and with a hasty “Stay a minute just to please her, and then slip away, for I want her to sleep,” the Doctor led him into the room.

The face on the pillow looked very pale and childish, and the smile that welcomed Mac was very faint, for Rose was spent with pain, yet could not rest till she had said a word of comfort to her cousin.

“I knew your funny sneeze, and I guessed that you came to see how I did, though it is very late. Don’t be worried, I’m better now, and it is my fault I was ill, not yours; for I needn’t have been so silly as to wait in the cold just because I said I would.”

Mac hastened to explain, to load himself with reproaches, and to beg her not to die on any account, for Charlie’s lecture had made a deep impression on the poor boy’s mind.

“I didn’t know there was any danger of my dying,” and Rose looked up at him with a solemn expression in her great eyes.

“Oh, I hope not; but people do sometimes go suddenly, you know, and I couldn’t rest till I’d asked you to forgive me,” faltered Mac, thinking that Rose looked very like an angel already, with the golden hair loose on the pillow, and the meekness of suffering on her little white face.

“I don’t think I shall die; uncle won’t let me; but if I do, remember I forgave you.”

She looked at him with a tender light in her eyes, and, seeing how pathetic his dumb grief was, she added softly, drawing his head down, “I wouldn’t kiss you under the mistletoe, but I will now, for I want you to be sure I do forgive and love you just the same.”

That quite upset poor Mac; he could only murmur his thanks and get out of the room as fast as possible, to grope his way to the couch at the far end of the hall, and lie there till he fell asleep, worn out with trying not to “make a baby” of himself.

Chapter 22 — Something to do

Whatever danger there might have been from the effects of that sudden chill, it was soon over, though, of course, Aunt Myra refused to believe it, and Dr. Alec cherished his girl with redoubled vigilance and tenderness for months afterward. Rose quite enjoyed being sick, because as soon as the pain ended the fun began, and for a week or two she led the life of a little princess secluded in the Bower, while every one served, amused, and watched over her in the most delightful manner. But the doctor was called away to see an old friend, who was dangerously ill, and then Rose felt like a young bird deprived of its mother's sheltering wing; especially on one afternoon when the aunts were taking their naps, and the house was very still within while snow fell softly without.

"I'll go and hunt up Phebe, she is always nice and busy, and likes to have me help her. If Dolly is out of the way we can make caramels and surprise the boys when they come," Rose said to herself, as she threw down her book and felt ready for society of some sort.

She took the precaution to peep through the slide before she entered the kitchen, for Dolly allowed no messing when she was round. But the coast was clear, and no one but Phebe appeared, sitting at the table with her head on her arms apparently asleep. Rose was just about to wake her with a "Boo!" when she lifted her head, dried her wet eyes with her blue apron, and fell to work with a resolute face on something she was evidently much interested in. Rose could not make out what it was, and her curiosity was greatly excited, for Phebe was writing with a sputtering pen on some bits of brown paper, apparently copying something from a little book.

"I must know what the dear thing is about, and why she cried, and then set her lips tight and went to work with all her might," thought Rose, forgetting all about the caramels, and, going round to the door, she entered the kitchen, saying pleasantly,

"Phebe, I want something to do. Can't you let me help you about anything, or shall I be in the way?"

"Oh, dear no, miss; I always love to have you round when things are tidy. What would you like to do?" answered Phebe, opening a drawer as if about to sweep her own affairs out of sight; but Rose stopped her, exclaiming, like a curious child,

"Let me see! What is it? I won't tell if you'd rather not have Dolly know."

"I'm only trying to study a bit; but I'm so stupid I don't get on much," answered the girl reluctantly, permitting her little mistress to examine the poor contrivances she was trying to work with.

A broken slate that had blown off the roof, an inch or two of pencil, an old almanac for a reader, several bits of brown or yellow paper ironed smoothly and sewn together for a copy-book, and the copies sundry receipts written in Aunt Plenty's neat hand. These, with a small bottle of ink and a rusty pen, made up Phebe's outfit, and it was little wonder that she did not "get on" in spite of the patient persistence that dried the desponding tears and drove along the sputtering pen with a will.

"You may laugh if you want to, Miss Rose, I know my things are queer, and that's why I hide 'em; but I don't mind since you've found me out, and I ain't a bit ashamed except of being so backward at my age," said Phebe humbly, though her cheeks grew redder as she washed out some crooked capitals with a tear or two not yet dried upon the slate.

"Laugh at you! I feel more like crying to think what a selfish girl I am, to have loads of books and things and never remember to give you some. Why didn't you come and ask me, and not go struggling along alone in this way? It was very wrong of you, Phebe, and I'll never forgive you if you do so again," answered Rose, with one hand on Phebe's shoulder, while the other gently turned the leaves of the poor little copy-book.

"I didn't like to ask for anything more when you are so good to me all the time, miss, dear," began Phebe, looking up with grateful eyes.

"O you proud thing! just as if it wasn't fun to give away, and I had the best of it. Now, see here, I've got a plan and you mustn't say no, or I shall scold. I want something to do, and I'm going to teach you all I know; it won't take long," and Rose laughed as she put her arm around Phebe's neck, and patted the smooth dark head with the kind little hand that so loved to give.

"It would be just heavenly!" and Phebe's face shone at the mere idea; but fell again as she added wistfully, "Only I'm afraid I ought not to let you do it, Miss Rose. It will take time, and maybe the Doctor wouldn't like it."

"He didn't want me to study much, but he never said a word about teaching, and I don't believe he will mind a bit. Anyway, we can try it till he comes, so pack up your things and go right to my room and we'll begin this very day; I'd truly like to do it, and we'll have nice times, see if we don't!" cried Rose eagerly.

It was a pretty sight to see Phebe bundle her humble outfit into her apron, and spring up as if the desire of her heart had suddenly been made a happy fact to her; it was a still prettier sight to see Rose run gaily on before, smiling like a good fairy as she beckoned to the other, singing as she went,

“The way into my parlour is up a winding stair,
And many are the curious things I’ll show you when you’re there.
Will you, will you walk in, Phebe dear?”

“Oh, won’t I!” answered Phebe fervently, adding, as they entered the Bower, “You are the dearest spider that ever was, and I’m the happiest fly.”

“I’m going to be very strict, so sit down in that chair and don’t say a word till school is ready to open,” ordered Rose, delighted with the prospect of such a useful and pleasant “something to do.”

So Phebe sat demurely in her place while her new teacher laid forth books and slates, a pretty inkstand and a little globe; hastily tore a bit off her big sponge, sharpened pencils with more energy than skill, and when all was ready gave a prance of satisfaction that set the pupil laughing.

“Now the school is open, and I shall hear you read, so that I may know in which class to put you, Miss Moore,” began Rose with great dignity, as she laid a book before her scholar, and sat down in the easy chair with a long rule in her hand.

Phebe did pretty well, only tripping now and then over a hard word, and pronouncing identical “identickle,” in a sober way that tickled Rose, though never a smile betrayed her. The spelling lesson which followed was rather discouraging; Phebe’s ideas of geography were very vague, and grammar was nowhere, though the pupil protested that she tried so hard to “talk nice like educated folks” that Dolly called her “a stuck-up piece who didn’t know her place.”

“Dolly’s an old goose, so don’t you mind her, for she will say ‘nater,’ ‘vittles,’ and ‘doos’ as long as she lives, and insist that they are right. You do talk very nicely, Phebe, I’ve observed it, and grammar will help you, and show you some things are right and others ain’t are not, I mean,” added Rose, correcting herself, and feeling that she must mind her own parts of speech if she was to serve as an example for Phebe.

When the arithmetic came, the little teacher was surprised to find her scholar quicker in some things than herself, for Phebe had worked away at the columns in the butcher’s and baker’s books till she could add so quickly and correctly that Rose was amazed, and felt that in this branch the pupil would soon excel the teacher if she kept on at the same pace. Her praise cheered Phebe immensely, and they went bravely on, both getting so interested that time flew unheeded till Aunt Plenty appeared, exclaiming, as she stared at the two heads bent over one slate,

“Bless my heart, what is going on now?”

“School, aunty. I’m teaching Phebe, and it’s great fun!” cried Rose, looking up with a bright face.

But Phebe's was brighter, though she added with a wistful look,

"Maybe I ought to have asked leave first; only when Miss Rose proposed this, I was so happy I forgot to. Shall I stop, ma'am?"

"Of course not, child; I'm glad to see you fond of your book, and to find Rose helping you along. My blessed mother used to sit at work with her maids about her, teaching them many a useful thing in the good old fashion that's gone by now. Only don't neglect your work, dear, or let the books interfere with the duties."

As Aunt Plenty spoke, with her kind old face beaming approvingly upon the girls, Phebe glanced at the clock, saw that it pointed to five, knew that Dolly would soon be down, expecting to find preparations for supper under way, and, hastily dropping her pencil, she jumped up, saying,

"Please, can I go? I'll clear up after I've done my chores."

"School is dismissed," answered Rose, and with a grateful "Thank you, heaps and heaps!" Phebe ran away singing the multiplication table as she set the tea ditto.

That was the way it began, and for a week the class of one went on with great pleasure and profit to all concerned; for the pupil proved a bright one, and came to her lessons as to a feast, while the young teacher did her best to be worthy the high opinion held of her, for Phebe firmly believed that Miss Rose knew everything in the way of learning.

Of course the lads found out what was going on, and chaffed the girls about the "Seminary," as they called the new enterprise; but they thought it a good thing on the whole, kindly offered to give lessons in Greek and Latin gratis, and decided among themselves that "Rose was a little trump to give the Phebe-bird such a capital boost."

Rose herself had some doubts as to how it would strike her uncle, and concocted a wheedlesome speech which should at once convince him that it was the most useful, wholesome, and delightful plan ever devised. But she got no chance to deliver her address, for Dr. Alec came upon her so unexpectedly that it went out of her head entirely. She was sitting on the floor in the library, poring over a big book laid open in her lap, and knew nothing of the long-desired arrival till two large, warm hands met under her chin and gently turned her head back, so that someone could kiss her heartily on either cheek, while a fatherly voice said, half reproachfully, "Why is my girl brooding over a dusty Encyclopedia when she ought to be running to meet the old gentleman who couldn't get on another minute without her?"

"O uncle! I'm so glad! and so sorry! Why didn't you let us know what time you'd be here, or call out the minute you came? Haven't I been home-sick for you? and now I'm so happy to have you back I could hug your dear old curly head off," cried Rose, as the Encyclopedia went down with a bang, and she up with a spring that carried her into Dr. Alec's arms, to be kept there in the sort of embrace a man gives to the dearest creature the world holds for him.

Presently he was in his easy chair with Rose upon his knee smiling up in his face and talking as fast as her tongue could go, while he watched her with an expression of supreme content, as he stroked the smooth round cheek, or held the little hand in his, rejoicing to see how rosy was the one, how plump and strong the other.

"Have you had a good time? Did you save the poor lady? Aren't you glad to be home again with your girl to torment you?"

"Yes, to all those questions. Now tell me what you've been at, little sinner? Aunty Plen says you want to consult me about some new and remarkable project which you have dared to start in my absence."

"She didn't tell you, I hope?"

"Not a word more expect that you were rather doubtful how I'd take it, and so wanted to 'fess' yourself and get round me as you always try to do, though you don't often succeed. Now, then, own up and take the consequences."

So Rose told about her school in her pretty, earnest way, dwelling on Phebe's hunger for knowledge, and the delight it was to help her, adding, with a wise nod,

"And it helps me too, uncle, for she is so quick and eager I have to do my best or she will get ahead of me in some things. To-day, now, she had the word 'cotton' in a lesson and asked all about it, and I was ashamed to find I really knew so little that I could only say that it was a plant that grew down South in a kind of a pod, and was made into cloth. That's what I was reading up when you came, and to-morrow I shall tell her all about it, and indigo too. So you see it teaches me also, and is as good as a general review of what I've learned, in a pleasanter way than going over it alone."

"You artful little baggage! that's the way you expect to get round me, is it? That's not studying, I suppose?"

"No, sir, it's teaching; and please, I like it much better than having a good time by myself. Besides, you know, I adopted Phebe and promised to be a sister to her, so I am bound to keep my word, am I not?" answered Rose, looking both anxious and resolute as she waited for her sentence.

Dr. Alec was evidently already won, for Rose had described the old slate and brown paper copy-book with pathetic effect, and the excellent man had not only decided to send Phebe to school long before the story was done, but reproached himself for forgetting his duty to one little girl in his love for another. So when Rose tried to look meek and failed utterly, he laughed and pinched her cheek, and answered in that genial way which adds such warmth and grace to any favour,

“I haven’t the slightest objection in the world. In fact, I was beginning to think I might let you go at your books again, moderately, since you are so well; and this is an excellent way to try your powers. Phebe is a brave, bright lass, and shall have a fair chance in the world, if we can give it to her, so that if she ever finds her friends they need not be ashamed of her.”

“I think she has found some already,” began Rose eagerly.

“Hey? what? has anyone turned up since I’ve been gone?” asked Dr. Alec quickly, for it was a firm belief in the family that Phebe would prove to be “somebody” sooner or later.

“No, her best friend turned up when you came home, uncle,” answered Rose with an approving pat, adding gratefully, “I can’t half thank you for being so good to my girl, but she will, because I know she is going to make a woman to be proud of, she’s so strong and true, and loving.”

“Bless your dear heart, I haven’t begun to do anything yet, more shame to me! But I’m going at it now, and as soon as she gets on a bit, she shall go to school as long as she likes. How will that do for a beginning?”

“It will be ‘just heavenly,’ as Phebe says, for it is the wish of her life to ‘get lots of schooling,’ and she will be too happy when I tell her. May I, please? it will be so lovely to see the dear thing open her big eyes and clap her hands at the splendid news.”

“No one shall have a finger in this nice little pie; you shall do it all yourself, only don’t go too fast, or make too many castles in the air, my dear; for time and patience must go into this pie of ours if it is to turn out well.”

“Yes, uncle, only when it is opened won’t ‘the birds begin to sing?”‘ laughed Rose, taking a turn about the room as a vent for the joyful emotions that made her eyes shine. All of a sudden she stopped and asked soberly,

“If Phebe goes to school who will do her work? I’m willing, if I can.”

“Come here and I’ll tell you a secret. Dolly’s ‘bones’ are getting so troublesome, and her dear old temper so bad, that the aunts have decided to pension her off and let her go and live with her daughter, who has married very well. I saw her this week, and she’d like to have her mother come, so in the spring we shall have a grand change, and get a new cook and chamber-girl if any can be found to suit our honoured relatives.”

“Oh, me! how can I ever get on without Phebe? Couldn’t she stay, just so I could see her? I’d pay her board rather than have her go, I’m so fond of her.”

How Dr. Alec laughed at that proposal, and how satisfied Rose was when he explained that Phebe was still to be her maid, with no duties except such as she could easily perform between school-hours.

"She is a proud creature, for all her humble ways, and even from us would not take a favour if she did not earn it somewhere. So this arrangement makes it all square and comfortable, you see, and she will pay for the schooling by curling these goldilocks a dozen times a day if you let her."

"Your plans are always so wise and kind! That's why they work so well, I suppose, and why people let you do what you like with them. I really don't see how other girls get along without an Uncle Alec!" answered Rose, with a sigh of pity for those who had missed so great a blessing.

When Phebe was told the splendid news, she did not "stand on her head with rapture," as Charlie prophesied she would, but took it quietly, because it was such a happy thing she had no words "big and beautiful enough to thank them in," she said; but every hour of her day was brightened by this granted wish, and dedicated to the service of those who gave it.

Her heart was so full of content that if overflowed in music, and the sweet voice singing all about the house gave thanks so blithely that no other words were needed. Her willing feet were never tired of taking steps for those who had smoothed her way; her skilful hands were always busy in some labour of love for them, and on the face fast growing in comeliness there was an almost womanly expression of devotion, which proved how well Phebe had already learned one of life's great lessons gratitude.

Chapter 23 — Peace-Making

"Steve, I want you to tell me something," said Rose to Dandy, who was making faces at himself in the glass, while he waited for an answer to the note he brought from his mother to Aunt Plenty.

"P'raps I will, and p'raps I won't. What is it?"

"Haven't Arch and Charlie quarrelled?"

"Dare say; we fellows are always having little rows, you know. I do believe a sty is coming on my star-board eye," and Steve affected to be absorbed in a survey of his yellow lashes.

"No, that won't do; I want to know all about it; for I'm sure something more serious than a 'little row' is the matter. Come, please tell me, Stenie, there's a dear."

"Botheration! you don't want me to turn telltale, do you?" growled Steve, pulling his top-knot, as he always did when perplexed.

"Yes, I do," was Rose's decided answer for she saw from his manner that she was right, and determined to have the secret out of him if coaxing would do it. "I don't wish you to tell things to everyone, of course, but to me you may, and you must, because I have a right to know. You boys need somebody to look after you, and I'm going to do it, for girls are nice peacemakers, and know how to manage people. Uncle said so, and he is never wrong."

Steve was about to indulge in a derisive hoot at the idea of her looking after them, but a sudden thought restrained him, and suggested a way in which he could satisfy Rose, and better himself at the same time.

"What will you give me if I'll tell you every bit about it?" he asked, with a sudden red in his cheeks and an uneasy look in his eyes, for he was half ashamed of the proposition.

"What do you want?" and Rose looked up rather surprised at his question.

"I'd like to borrow some money. I shouldn't think of asking you, only Mac never has a cent. since he's set up his old chemical shop, where he'll blow himself to bits some day, and you and uncle will have the fun of putting him together again," and Steve tried to look as if the idea amused him.

"I'll lend it to you with pleasure, so tell away," said Rose, bound to get at the secret.

Evidently much relieved by the promise, Steve set his top-knot cheerfully erect again, and briefly stated the case.

"As you say, it's all right to tell you, but don't let the boys know I blabbed, or Prince will take my head off. You see, Archie don't like some of the fellows Charlie goes with, and cuts 'em. That makes Prince mad, and he holds on just to plague Arch, so they don't speak to one another, if they can help it, and that's the row."

"Are those boys bad?" asked Rose, anxiously.

"Guess not, only rather wild. They are older than our fellows, but they like Prince, he's such a jolly boy; sings so well, dances jigs and breakdowns, you know, and plays any game that's going. He beat Morse at billiards, and that's something to brag of, for Morse thinks he knows everything. I saw the match, and it was great fun!"

Steve got quite excited over the prowess of Charlie, whom he admired immensely, and tried to imitate. Rose did not know half the danger of such gifts and tastes as Charlie's, but felt instinctively that something must be wrong if Archie disapproved.

"If Prince likes any billiard-playing boy better than Archie, I don't think much of his sense," she said severely.

"Of course he doesn't; but, you see, Charlie and Arch are both as proud as they can be, and won't give in. I suppose Arch is right, but I don't blame Charlie a bit for liking to be with the others sometimes, they are such a jolly set," and Steve shook his head morally, even while his eye twinkled over the memory of some of the exploits of the "jolly set."

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Rose, "I don't see what I can do about it, but I wish the boys would make up, for Prince can't come to any harm with Archie, he's so good and sensible."

"That's the trouble; Arch preaches, and Prince won't stand it. He told Arch he was a prig and a parson, and Arch told him he wasn't a gentleman. My boots! weren't they both mad, though! I thought for a minute they'd pitch into one another and have it out. Wish they had, and not gone stalking round stiff and glum ever since. Mac and I settle our rows with a bat or so over the head, and then we are all right."

Rose couldn't help laughing as Steve sparred away at a fat sofa-pillow, to illustrate his meaning; and, having given it several scientific whacks, he pulled down his cuffs and smiled upon her with benign pity for her feminine ignorance of this summary way of settling a quarrel.

"What droll things boys are!" she said, with a mixture of admiration and perplexity in her face, which Steve accepted as a compliment to his sex.

"We're a pretty clever invention, miss, and you can't get on without us," he answered, with his nose in the air. Then, taking a sudden plunge into business, he added, “How about that bit of money you were going to lend me? I’ve told, now you pay up.”

“Of course I will! How much do you want?” and Rose pulled out her purse.

“Could you spare five dollars? I want to pay a little debt of honour that is rather pressing,” and Steve put on a mannish air that was comical to see.

“Aren’t all debts honourable?” asked innocent Rose.

“Yes, of course; but this is a bet I made, and it ought to be settled up at once,” began Steve, finding it awkward to explain.

“Oh, don’t bet, it’s not right, and I know your father wouldn’t like it. Promise you won’t do so again; please promise!” and Rose held fast the hand into which she had just put the money.

“Well, I won’t. It’s worried me a good deal, but I was joked into it. Much obliged, cousin, I’m all right now,” and Steve departed hastily.

Having decided to be a peace-maker, Rose waited for an opportunity, and very soon it came.

She was spending the day with Aunt Clara, who had been entertaining some young guests, and invited Rose to meet them, for she thought it high time her niece conquered her bashfulness and saw a little of society. Dinner was over, and everyone had gone. Aunt Clara was resting before going out to an evening party, and Rose was waiting for Charlie to come and take her home.

She sat alone in the elegant drawing-room, feeling particularly nice and pretty, for she had her best frock on, a pair of gold bands her aunt had just given her, and a tea-rose bud in her sash, like the beautiful Miss Van Tassel, whom everyone admired. She had spread out her little skirts to the best advantage, and, leaning back in a luxurious chair, sat admiring her own feet in new slippers with rosettes almost as big as dahlias. Presently Charlie came lounging in, looking rather sleepy and queer, Rose thought. On seeing her, however, he roused up and said with a smile that ended in a gape,

“I thought you were with mother, so I took forty winks after I got those girls off. Now, I’m at your service, Rosamunda, whenever you like.”

“You look as if your head ached. If it does, don’t mind me. I’m not afraid to run home alone, it’s so early,” answered Rose, observing the flushed cheeks and heavy eyes of her cousin.

“I think I see myself letting you do it. Champagne always makes my headache, but the air will set me up.”

“Why do you drink it, then?” asked Rose, anxiously.

“Can’t help it, when I’m host. Now, don’t you begin to lecture; I’ve had enough of Archie’s old-fashioned notions, and I don’t want any more.”

Charlie’s tone was decidedly cross, and his whole manner so unlike his usual merry good-nature, that Rose felt crushed, and answered meekly,

"I wasn't going to lecture, only when people like other people, they can't bear to see them suffer pain."

That brought Charlie round at once, for Rose's lips trembled a little, though she tried to hide it by smelling the flower she pulled from her sash.

"I'm a regular bear, and I beg your pardon for being so cross, Rosy," he said in the old frank way that was so winning.

"I wish you'd beg Archie's too, and be good friends again. You never were cross when he was your chum," Rose said, looking up at him as he bent toward her from the low chimney-piece, where he had been leaning his elbows.

In an instant he stood as stiff and straight as a ramrod, and the heavy eyes kindled with an angry spark as he said, in his high and mighty manner,

"You'd better not meddle with what you don't understand, cousin."

"But I do understand, and it troubles me very much to see you so cold and stiff to one another. You always used to be together, and now you hardly speak. You are so ready to beg my pardon I don't see why you can't beg Archie's, if you are in the wrong."

"I'm not!" this was so short and sharp that Rose started, and Charlie added in a calmer but still very haughty tone: "A gentleman always begs pardon when he has been rude to a lady, but one man doesn't apologize to another man who has insulted him."

"Oh, my heart, what a pepperpot!" thought Rose, and, hoping to make him laugh, she added slyly: "I was not talking about men, but boys, and one of them a Prince, who ought to set a good example to his subjects."

But Charlie would not relent, and tried to turn the subject by saying gravely, as he unfastened the little gold ring from his watch-guard,

"I've broken my word, so I want to give this back and free you from the bargain. I'm sorry, but I think it a foolish promise, and don't intend to keep it. Choose a pair of ear-rings to suit yourself, as my forfeit. You have a right to wear them now."

"No, I can only wear one, and that is no use, for Archie will keep his word I'm sure!" Rose was so mortified and grieved at this downfall of her hopes that she spoke sharply, and would not take the ring the deserter offered her.

He shrugged his shoulders, and threw it into her lap, trying to look cool and careless, but failing entirely, for he was ashamed of himself, and out of sorts generally. Rose wanted to cry, but pride would not let her, and, being very angry, she relieved herself by talk instead of tears. Looking pale and excited, she rose out of her chair, cast away the ring, and said in a voice that she vainly tried to keep steady, "You are not at all the boy I thought you were, and I don't respect you one bit. I've tried to help you be good, but you won't let me, and I shall not try any more. You talk a great deal about being a gentleman, but you are not, for you've broken your word, and I can never trust you again. I don't wish you to go home with me. I'd rather have Mary. Good-night."

And with that last dreadful blow, Rose walked out of the room, leaving Charlie as much astonished as if one of his pet pigeons had flown in his face and pecked at him. She was so seldom angry, that when her temper did get the better of her it made a deep impression on the lads, for it was generally a righteous sort of indignation at some injustice or wrong-doing, not childish passion.

Her little thunderstorm cleared off in a sob or two as she put on her things in the entry-closet, and when she emerged she looked the brighter for the shower. A hasty good-night to Aunt Clara now under the hands of the hairdresser and then she crept down to find Mary the maid. But Mary was out, so was the man, and Rose slipped away by the back-door, flattering herself that she had escaped the awkwardness of having Charlie for escort.

There she was mistaken, however, for the gate had hardly closed behind her when a well-known tramp was heard, and the Prince was beside her, saying in a tone of penitent politeness that banished Rose's wrath like magic,

"You needn't speak to me if you don't choose, but I must see you safely home, cousin."

She turned at once, put out her hand, and answered heartily,

"I was the cross one. Please forgive me, and let's be friends again."

Now that was better than a dozen sermons on the beauty of forgiveness, and did Charlie more good, for it showed him how sweet humility was, and proved that Rose practised as she preached.

He shook the hand warmly, then drew it through his arm and said, as if anxious to recover the good opinion with the loss of which he had been threatened,

"Look here, Rosy, I've put the ring back, and I'm going to try again. But you don't know how hard it is to stand being laughed at."

"Yes, I do! Ariadne plagues me every time I see her, because I don't wear ear-rings after all the trouble I had getting ready for them."

"Ah, but her twaddle isn't half as bad as the chaffing I get. It takes a deal of pluck to hold out when you are told you are tied to an apron string, and all that sort of thing," sighed Charlie.

"I thought you had a 'deal of pluck,' as you call it. The boys all say you are the bravest of the seven," said Rose.

"So I am about some things, but I cannot bear to be laughed at."

“It is hard, but if one is right won’t that make it easier?”

“Not to me; it might to a pious parson like Arch.”

“Please don’t call him names! I guess he has what is called moral courage, and you physical courage. Uncle explained the difference to me, and moral is the best, though often it doesn’t look so,” said Rose thoughtfully.

Charlie didn’t like that, and answered quickly, “I don’t believe he’d stand it any better than I do, if he had those fellows at him.”

“Perhaps that’s why he keeps out of their way, and wants you to.”

Rose had him there, and Charlie felt it, but would not give in just yet, though he was going fast, for somehow, in the dark he seemed to see things clearer than in the light, and found it very easy to be confidential when it was “only Rose.”

“If he was my brother, now, he’d have some right to interfere,” began Charlie, in an injured tone.

“I wish he was!” cried Rose.

“So do I,” answered Charlie, and then they both laughed at his inconsistency.

The laugh did them good, and when Prince spoke again, it was in a different tone pensive, not proud nor perverse.

“You see, it’s hard upon me that I have no brothers and sisters. The others are better off and needn’t go abroad for chums if they don’t like. I am all alone, and I’d be thankful even for a little sister.”

Rose thought that very pathetic, and, overlooking the uncomplimentary word “even” in that last sentence, she said, with a timid sort of earnestness that conquered her cousin at once,

“Play I was a little sister. I know I’m silly, but perhaps I’m better than nothing, and I’d dearly love to do it.”

“So should I! and we will, for you are not silly, my dear, but a very sensible girl, we all think, and I’m proud to have you for a sister. There, now!” and Charlie looked down at the curly head bobbing along beside him with real affection in his face.

Rose gave a skip of pleasure, and laid one seal-skin mitten over the other on his arm, as she said happily,

“That’s so nice of you! Now, you needn’t be lonely any more, and I’ll try to fill Archie’s place till he comes back, for I know he will, as soon as you let him.”

“Well, I don’t mind telling you that while he was my mate I never missed brothers and sisters, or wanted anyone else; but since he cast me off, I’ll be hanged if I don’t feel as forlorn as old Crusoe before Friday turned up.”

This burst of confidence confirmed Rose in her purpose of winning Charlie’s Mentor back to him, but she said no more, contented to have done so well. They parted excellent friends, and Prince went home, wondering why “a fellow didn’t mind saying things to a girl or woman which they would die before they'd own to another fellow."

Rose also had some sage reflections upon the subject, and fell asleep thinking that there were a great many curious things in this world, and feeling that she was beginning to find out some of them.

Next day she trudged up the hill to see Archie, and having told him as much as she thought best about her talk with Charlie, begged him to forget and forgive.

"I've been thinking that perhaps I ought to, though I am in the right. I'm no end fond of Charlie, and he's the best-hearted lad alive; but he can't say No, and that will play the mischief with him, if he does not take care," said Archie in his grave, kind way.

"While father was home, I was very busy with him, so Prince got into a set I don't like. They try to be fast, and think it's manly, and they flatter him, and lead him on to do all sorts of things play for money, and bet, and loaf about. I hate to have him do so, and tried to stop it, but went to work the wrong way, so we got into a mess."

"He is all ready to make up if you don't say much, for he owned to me he was wrong; but I don't think he will own it to you, in words," began Rose.

"I don't care for that; if he'll just drop those row-dies and come back, I'll hold my tongue and not preach. I wonder if he owes those fellows money, and so doesn't like to break off till he can pay it. I hope not, but don't dare to ask; though, perhaps, Steve knows, he's always after Prince, more's the pity," and Archie looked anxious.

"I think Steve does know, for he talked about debts of honour the day I gave him — " There Rose stopped short and turned scarlet.

But Archie ordered her to "fess," and had the whole story in five minutes, for none dared disobey the Chief. He completed her affliction by putting a five-dollar bill into her pocket by main force, looking both indignant and resolute as he said,

"Never do so again; but send Steve to me, if he is afraid to go to his father. Charlie had nothing to do with that; he wouldn't borrow a penny of a girl, don't think it. But that's the harm he does Steve, who adores him, and tries to be like him in all things. Don't say a word; I'll make it all right, and no one shall blame you."

"Oh me! I always make trouble by trying to help, and then letting out the wrong thing," sighed Rose, much depressed by her slip of the tongue.

Archie comforted her with the novel remark that it was always best to tell the truth, and made her quite cheerful by promising to heal the breach with Charlie as soon as possible.

He kept his word so well that the very next afternoon, as Rose looked out of the window, she beheld the joyful spectacle of Archie and Prince coming up the avenue, arm-in-arm, as of old, talking away as if to make up for the unhappy silence of the past weeks.

Rose dropped her work, hurried to the door, and, opening it wide, stood there smiling down upon them so happily, that the faces of the lads brightened as they ran up the steps eager to show that all was well with them.

“Here’s our little peace-maker!” said Archie, shaking hands with vigour.

But Charlie added, with a look that made Rose very proud and happy, “And my little sister.”

Chapter 24 — Which?

“Uncle, I have discovered what girls are made for,” said Rose, the day after the reconciliation of Archie and the Prince.

“Well, my dear, what is it?” asked Dr. Alec, who was “planking the deck,” as he called his daily promenade up and down the hall.

“To take care of boys,” answered Rose, quite beaming with satisfaction as she spoke. “Phebe laughed when I told her, and said she thought girls had better learn to take care of themselves first. But that’s because she hasn’t got seven boy-cousins as I have.”

“She is right, nevertheless, Rosy, and so are you, for the two things go together, and in helping seven lads you are unconsciously doing much to improve one lass,” said Dr. Alec, stopping to nod and smile at the bright-faced figure resting on the old bamboo chair, after a lively game of battledore and shuttlecock, in place of a run which a storm prevented.

“Am I? I’m glad of that; but really, uncle, I do feel as if I must take care of the boys, for they come to me in all sorts of troubles, and ask advice, and I like it so much. Only I don’t always know what to do, and I’m going to consult you privately and then surprise them with my wisdom.”

“All right, my dear; what’s the first worry? I see you have something on your little mind, so come and tell uncle.”

Rose put her arm in his, and, pacing to and fro, told him all about Charlie, asking what she could do to keep him straight, and be a real sister to him.

“Could you make up your mind to go and stay with Aunt Clara a month?” asked the Doctor, when she ended.

“Yes, sir; but I shouldn’t like it. Do you really want me to go?”

“The best cure for Charlie is a daily dose of Rose water, or Rose and water, or Rose and water; will you go and see that he takes it?” laughed Dr. Alec.

“You mean that if I’m there and try to make it pleasant, he will stay at home and keep out of mischief?”

“Exactly.”

“But could I make it pleasant? He would want the boys.”

“No danger but he’d have the boys, for they swarm after you like bees after their queen. Haven’t you found that out?”

“Aunt Plen often says they never used to be here half so much before I came, but I never thought I made the difference, it seemed so natural to have them round."

"Little modesty doesn't know what a magnet she is; but she will find it out some day," and the Doctor softly stroked the cheek that had grown rosy with pleasure at the thought of being so much loved. "Now, you see, if I move the magnet to Aunt Clara's, the lads will go there as sure as iron to steel, and Charlie will be so happy at home he won't care for these mischievous mates of his I hope," added the Doctor, well knowing how hard it was to wean a seventeen-year-old boy from his first taste of what is called "seeing life," which, alas! often ends in seeing death.

"I'll go, uncle, right away! Aunt Clara is always asking me, and will be glad to get me. I shall have to dress and dine late, and see lots of company, and be very fashionable, but I'll try not to let it hurt me; and if I get in a puzzle or worried about anything I can run to you," answered Rose, good-will conquering timidity.

So it was decided, and without saying much about the real reason for this visit, Rose was transplanted to Aunt Clara's, feeling that she had a work to do, and very eager to do it well.

Dr. Alec was right about the bees, for the boys did follow their queen, and astonished Mrs. Clara by their sudden assiduity in making calls, dropping in to dinner, and getting up evening frolics. Charlie was a devoted host, and tried to show his gratitude by being very kind to his "little sister," for he guessed why she came, and his heart was touched by her artless endeavours to "help him be good."

Rose often longed to be back in the old house with the simpler pleasures and more useful duties of the life there; but, having made up her mind, in spite of Phebe, that "girls were made to take care of boys," here motherly little soul found much to enjoy in the new task she had undertaken.

It was a pretty sight to see the one earnest, sweet-faced girl among the flock of tall lads, trying to understand, to help and please them with a patient affection that worked many a small miracle unperceived. Slang, rough manners, and careless habits were banished or bettered by the presence of a little gentlewoman; and all the manly virtues cropping up were encouraged by the hearty admiration bestowed upon them by one whose good opinion all valued more than they confessed; while Rose tried to imitate the good qualities she praised in them, to put away her girlish vanities and fears, to be strong and just, and frank and brave, as well as modest, kind, and beautiful.

This trial worked so well that when the month was over, Mac and Steve demanded a visit in their turn, and Rose went, feeling that she would like to hear grim Aunt Jane say, as Aunt Clara did at parting, "I wish I could keep you all my life, dear."

After Mac and Steve had had their turn, Archie and Company bore her away for some weeks; and with them she was so happy, she felt as if she would like to stay for ever, if she could have Uncle Alec also.

Of course, Aunt Myra could not be neglected, and, with secret despair, Rose went to the “Mausoleum,” as the boys called her gloomy abode. Fortunately, she was very near home, and Dr. Alec dropped in so often that her visit was far less dismal than she expected. Between them, they actually made Aunt Myra laugh heartily more than once; and Rose did her so much good by letting in the sunshine, singing about the silent house, cooking wholesome messes, and amusing the old lady with funny little lectures on physiology, that she forgot to take her pills and gave up “Mum’s Elixir,” because she slept so well, after the long walks and drives she was beguiled into taking, that she needed no narcotic.

So the winter flew rapidly away, and it was May before Rose was fairly settled again at home. They called her the “Monthly Rose,” because she had spent a month with each of the aunts, and left such pleasant memories of bloom and fragrance behind her, that all wanted the family flower back again.

Dr. Alec rejoiced greatly over his recovered treasure; but as the time drew near when his year of experiment ended, he had many a secret fear that Rose might like to make her home for the next twelve month with Aunt Jessie, or even Aunt Clara, for Charlie’s sake. He said nothing, but waited with much anxiety for the day when the matter should be decided; and while he waited he did his best to finish as far as possible the task he had begun so well.

Rose was very happy now, being out nearly all day enjoying the beautiful awakening of the world, for spring came bright and early, as if anxious to do its part. The old horse-chestnuts budded round her windows, green things sprung up like magic in the garden under her hands, hardy flowers bloomed as fast as they could, the birds sang blithely overhead, and every day a chorus of pleasant voices cried, “Good morning, cousin, isn’t it jolly weather?”

No one remembered the date of the eventful conversation which resulted in the Doctor’s experiment (no one but himself at least); so when the aunts were invited to tea one Saturday they came quite unsuspiciously, and were all sitting together having a social chat, when Brother Alec entered with two photographs in his hand.

“Do you remember that?” he said, showing one to Aunt Clara, who happened to be nearest.

“Yes, indeed; it is very like her when she came. Quite her sad, unchildlike expression, and thin little face, with the big dark eyes.”

The picture was passed round, and all agreed that “it was very like Rose a year ago.” This point being settled, the Doctor showed the second picture, which was received with great approbation, and pronounced a "charming likeness."

It certainly was, and a striking contrast to the first one, for it was a blooming, smiling face, full of girlish spirit and health, with no sign of melancholy, though the soft eyes were thoughtful, and the lines about the lips betrayed a sensitive nature.

Dr. Alec set both photographs on the chimneypiece, and, falling back a step or two, surveyed them with infinite satisfaction for several minutes, then wheeled round, saying briefly, as he pointed to the two faces,

"Time is up; how do you think my experiment has succeeded, ladies?"

"Bless me, so it is!" cried Aunt Plenty, dropping a stitch in her surprise.

"Beautifully, dear," answered Aunt Peace, smiling entire approval.

"She certainly has improved, but appearances are deceitful, and she had no constitution to build upon," croaked Aunt Myra.

"I am willing to allow that, as far as mere health goes, the experiment is a success," graciously observed Aunt Jane, unable to forget Rose's kindness to her Mac.

"So am I; and I'll go farther, for I really do believe Alec has done wonders for the child; she will be a beauty in two or three years," added Aunt Clara, feeling that she could say nothing better than that.

"I always knew he would succeed, and I'm so glad you all allow it, for he deserves more credit than you know, and more praise than he will ever get," cried Aunt Jessie, clapping her hands with an enthusiasm that caused Jamie's little red stocking to wave like a triumphal banner in the air.

Dr. Alec made them a splendid bow, looking much gratified, and then said soberly,

"Thank you; now the question is, shall I go on? for this is only the beginning. None of you know the hindrances I've had, the mistakes I've made, the study I've given the case, and the anxiety I've often felt. Sister Myra is right is one thing Rose is a delicate creature, quick to flourish in the sunshine, and as quick to droop without it. She has no special weakness, but inherits her mother's sensitive nature, and needs the wisest, tenderest care, to keep a very ardent little soul from wearing out a finely organised little body. I think I have found the right treatment, and; with you to help me, I believe we may build up a lovely and a noble woman, who will be a pride and comfort to us all."

There Dr. Alec stopped to get his breath, for he had spoken very earnestly, and his voice got a little husky over the last words. A gentle murmur from the aunts seemed to encourage him, and he went on with an engaging smile, for the good man was slyly trying to win all the ladies to vote for him when the time came.

"Now, I don't wish to be selfish or arbitrary, because I am her guardian, and I shall leave Rose free to choose for herself. We all want her, and if she likes to make her home with any of you rather than with me, she shall do so. In fact, I encouraged her visits last winter, that she might see what we can all offer her, and judge where she will be happiest. Is not that the fairest way? Will you agree to abide by her choice, as I do?"

"Yes, we will," said all the aunts, in quite a flutter of excitement at the prospect of having Rose for a whole year.

"Good! she will be here directly, and then we will settle the question for another year. A most important year, mind you, for she has got a good start, and will blossom rapidly now if all goes well with her. So I beg of you don't undo my work, but deal very wisely and gently with my little girl, for if any harm come to her, I think it would break my heart."

As he spoke, Dr. Alec turned his back abruptly and affected to be examining the pictures again; but the aunts understood how dear the child was to the solitary man who had loved her mother years ago, and who now found his happiness in cherishing the little Rose who was so like her. The good ladies nodded and sighed, and telegraphed to one another that none of them would complain if not chosen, or ever try to rob Brother Alec of his "Heart's Delight," as the boys called Rose.

Just then a pleasant sound of happy voices came up from the garden, and smiles broke out on all serious faces. Dr. Alec turned at once, saying, as he threw back his head, "There she is; now for it!"

The cousins had been a-Maying, and soon came flocking in laden with the spoils.

"Here is our bonny Scotch rose with all her thorns about her," said Dr. Alec, surveying her with unusual pride and tenderness, as she went to show Aunt Peace her basket full of early flowers, fresh leaves, and curious lichens.

"Leave your clutter in the hall, boys, and sit quietly down if you choose to stop here, for we are busy," said Aunt Plenty, shaking her finger at the turbulent Clan, who were bubbling over with the jollity born of spring sunshine and healthy exercise.

"Of course, we choose to stay! Wouldn't miss our Saturday high tea for anything," said the Chief, as he restored order among his men with a nod, a word, and an occasional shake.

"What is up? a court-martial?" asked Charlie, looking at the assembled ladies with affected awe and real curiosity, for these faces betrayed that some interesting business was afloat.

Dr. Alec explained in a few words, which he made as brief and calm as he could; but the effect was exciting, nevertheless, for each of the lads began at once to bribe, entice, and wheedle “our cousin” to choose his home.

“You really ought to come to us for mother’s sake, as a relish, you know, for she must be perfectly satiated with boys,” began Archie, using the strongest argument he could think of at the moment.

“Oh, do! we’ll never slam, or bounce at you or call you ‘fraid cat,’ if you only will,” besought Geordie and Will, distorting their countenances in the attempt to smile with overpowering sweetness.

“And I’ll always wash my hands ‘fore I touch you, and you shall be my dolly, ‘cause Pokey’s gone away, and I’ll love you *hard*,” cried Jamie, clinging to her with his chubby face full of affection.

“Brothers and sister ought to live together; especially when the brother needs some one to make home pleasant for him,” added Charlie, with the wheedlesome tone and look that Rose always found so difficult to resist.

“You had her longest, and it’s our turn now; Mac needs her more than you do, Prince, for she’s ‘the light of his eyes,’ he says. Come, Rose, choose us, and I’ll never use the musky pomade you hate again as long as I live,” said Steve, with his most killing air, as he offered this noble sacrifice.

Mac peered wistfully over his goggles, saying in an unusually wide-awake and earnest way, —

“Do, cousin, then we can study chemistry together. My experiments don’t blow up very often now, and the gases aren’t at all bad when you get used to them.”

Rose meantime had stood quite still, with the flowers dropping from her hands as her eyes went from one eager face to another, while smiles rippled over her own at the various enticements offered her. During the laugh that followed Mac’s handsome proposition, she looked at her uncle, whose eyes were fixed on her with an expression of love and longing that went to her heart.

“Ah! yes,” she thought, “he wants me most! I’ve often longed to give him something that he wished for very much, and now I can.”

So, when, at a sudden gesture from Aunt Peace, silence fell, Rose said slowly, with a pretty colour in her cheeks, and a beseeching look about the room, as if asking pardon of the boys,

“It’s very hard to choose when everybody is so fond of me; therefore I think I’d better go to the one who seems to need me most.”

“No, dear, the one you love the best and will be happiest with,” said Dr. Alec quickly, as a doleful sniff from Aunt Myra, and a murmur of “My sainted Caroline,” made Rose pause and look that way.

“Take time, cousin; don’t be in a hurry to make up your mind, and remember, ‘Codlin’s your friend,’“ added Charlie, hopeful still.

“I don’t want any time! I know who I love best, who I’m happiest with, and I choose uncle. Will he have me?” cried Rose, in a tone that produced a sympathetic thrill among the hearers, it was so full of tender confidence and love.

If she really had any doubt, the look in Dr. Alec’s face banished it without a word, as he opened wide his arms, and she ran into them, feeling that home was there.

No one spoke for a minute, but there were signs of emotion among the aunts, which warned the boys to bestir themselves before the water-works began to play. So they took hands and began to prance about uncle and niece, singing, with sudden inspiration, the nursery rhyme,

“Ring around a Rosy!”

Of course that put an end to all sentiment, and Rose emerged laughing from Dr. Alec’s bosom, with the mark of a waistcoat button nicely imprinted on her left cheek. He saw it, and said with a merry kiss that half effaced it, “This is my ewe lamb, and I have set my mark on her, so no one can steal her away.”

That tickled the boys, and they set up a shout of,

“Uncle had a little lamb!”

But Rose hushed the noise by slipping into the circle, and making them dance prettily like lads and lasses round a May-pole; while Phebe, coming in with fresh water for the flowers, began to twitter, chirp, and coo, as if all the birds of the air had come to join in the spring revel of the eight cousins.

ROSE IN BLOOM

Rose in Bloom tells the story of Rose Campbell, a nineteenth century girl finding her way in society and is a sequel to *Eight Cousins*. The story begins when Rose comes back from a long trip to Europe.

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Chapter 1 COMING HOME

Three young men stood together on a wharf one bright October day awaiting the arrival of an ocean steamer with an impatience which found a vent in lively skirmishes with a small lad, who pervaded the premises like a will-o’-the-wisp and afforded much amusement to the other groups assembled there.

“They are the Campbells, waiting for their cousin, who has been abroad several years with her uncle, the doctor,” whispered one lady to another as the handsomest of the young men touched his hat to her as he passed, lugging the boy, whom he had just rescued from a little expedition down among the piles.

“Which is that?” asked the stranger.

“Prince Charlie, as he’s called a fine fellow, the most promising of the seven, but a little fast, people say,” answered the first speaker with a shake of the head.

“Are the others his brothers?”

“No, cousins. The elder is Archie, a most exemplary young man. He has just gone into business with the merchant uncle and bids fair to be an honor to his family. The other, with the eyeglasses and no gloves, is Mac, the odd one, just out of college.”

“And the boy?”

“Oh, he is Jamie, the youngest brother of Archibald, and the pet of the whole family. Mercy on us he’ll be in if they don’t hold on to him!”

The ladies’ chat came to a sudden end just there, for by the time Jamie had been fished out of a hogshead, the steamer hove in sight and everything else was forgotten. As it swung slowly around to enter the dock, a boyish voice shouted, “There she is! I see her and Uncle and Phebe! Hooray for Cousin Rose!” And three small cheers were given with a will by Jamie as he stood on a post waving his arms like a windmill while his brother held onto the tail of his jacket.

Yes, there they were Uncle Alec swinging his hat like a boy, with Phebe smiling and nodding on one side and Rose kissing both hands delightedly on the other as she recognized familiar faces and heard familiar voices welcoming her home.

“Bless her dear heart, she’s bonnier than ever! Looks like a Madonna doesn’t she? with that blue cloak round her, and her bright hair flying in the wind!” said Charlie excitedly as they watched the group upon the deck with eager eyes.

“Madonnas don’t wear hats like that. Rose hasn’t changed much, but Phebe has. Why, she’s a regular beauty!” answered Archie, staring with all his might at the dark-eyed young woman with the brilliant color and glossy black braids shining in the sun.

“Dear old Uncle! Doesn’t it seem good to have him back?” was all Mac said, but he was not looking at “dear old uncle” as he made the fervent remark, for he saw only the slender blond girl nearby and stretched out his hands to meet hers, forgetful of the green water tumbling between them.

During the confusion that reigned for a moment as the steamer settled to her moorings, Rose looked down into the four faces upturned to hers and seemed to read in them something that both pleased and pained her. It was only a glance, and her own eyes were full, but through the mist of happy tears she received the impression that Archie was about the same, that Mac had decidedly improved, and that something was amiss with Charlie. There was no time for observation, however, for in a moment the shoreward rush began, and before she could grasp her traveling bag, Jamie was clinging to her like an ecstatic young bear. She was with difficulty released from his embrace to fall into the gentler ones of the elder cousins, who took advantage of the general excitement to welcome both blooming girls with affectionate impartiality. Then the wanderers were borne ashore in a triumphal procession, while Jamie danced rapturous jigs before them even on the gangway.

Archie remained to help his uncle get the luggage through the Custom House, and the others escorted the damsels home. No sooner were they shut up in a carriage, however, than a new and curious constraint seemed to fall upon the young people, for they realized, all at once, that their former playmates were men and women now. Fortunately, Jamie was quite free from this feeling of restraint and, sitting bodkinwise between the ladies, took all sorts of liberties with them and their belongings.

“Well, my mannikin, what do you think of us?” asked Rose, to break an awkward pause.

“You’ve both grown so pretty, I can’t decide which I like best. Phebe is the biggest and brightest-looking, and I was always fond of Phebe, but somehow you are so kind of sweet and precious, I really think I must hug you again,” and the small youth did it tempestuously.

“If you love me best, I shall not mind a bit about your thinking Phebe the handsomest, because she is. Isn’t she, boys?” asked Rose, with a mischievous look at the gentlemen opposite, whose faces expressed a respectful admiration which much amused her.

“I’m so dazzled by the brilliancy and beauty that has suddenly burst upon me, I have no words to express my emotions,” answered Charlie, gallantly dodging the dangerous question.

"I can't say yet, for I have not had time to look at anyone. I will now, if you don't mind." And, to the great amusement of the rest, Mac gravely adjusted his eyeglasses and took an observation.

"Well?" said Phebe, smiling and blushing under his honest stare, yet seeming not to resent it as she did the lordly sort of approval which made her answer the glance of Charlie's audacious blue eyes with a flash of her black ones.

"I think if you were my sister, I should be very proud of you, because your face shows what I admire more than its beauty truth and courage, Phebe," answered Mac with a little bow full of such genuine respect that surprise and pleasure brought a sudden dew to quench the fire of the girl's eyes and soothe the sensitive pride of the girl's heart.

Rose clapped her hands just as she used to do when anything delighted her, and beamed at Mac approvingly as she said: "Now that's a criticism worth having, and we are much obliged. I was sure you'd admire my Phebe when you knew her, but I didn't believe you would be wise enough to see it at once, and you have gone up many pegs in my estimation, I assure you."

"I was always fond of mineralogy you remember, and I've been tapping round a good deal lately, so I've learned to know precious metals when I see them," Mac said with his shrewd smile.

"That is the latest hobby, then? Your letters have amused us immensely, for each one had a new theory or experiment, and the latest was always the best. I thought Uncle would have died of laughter over the vegetarian mania it was so funny to imagine you living on bread and milk, baked apples, and potatoes roasted in your own fire," continued Rose, changing the subject again.

"This old chap was the laughingstock of his class. They called him Don Quixote, and the way he went at windmills of all sorts was a sight to see," put in Charlie, evidently feeling that Mac had been patted on the head quite as much as was good for him.

"But in spite of that the Don got through college with all the honors. Oh, wasn't I proud when Aunt Jane wrote to us about it and didn't she rejoice that her boy kept at the head of his class and won the medal!" cried Rose, shaking Mac by both hands in a way that caused Charlie to wish "the old chap" had been left behind with Dr. Alec.

"Oh, come, that's all Mother's nonsense. I began earlier than the other fellows and liked it better, so I don't deserve any praise. Prince is right, though. I did make a regular jack of myself, but on the whole I'm not sure that my wild oats weren't better than some I've seen sowed. Anyway, they didn't cost much, and I'm none the worse for them," said Mac placidly.

"I know what 'wild oats' means. I heard Uncle Mac say Charlie was sowing ‘em too fast, and I asked Mama, so she told me. And I know that he was suspelled or expended, I don’t remember which, but it was something bad, and Aunt Clara cried,” added Jamie all in one breath, for he possessed a fatal gift of making malapropos remarks, which caused him to be a terror to his family.

“Do you want to go on the box again?” demanded Prince with a warning frown.

“No, I don’t.”

“Then hold your tongue.”

“Well, Mac needn’t kick me, for I was only...” began the culprit, innocently trying to make a bad matter worse.

“That will do,” interrupted Charlie sternly, and James subsided, a crushed boy, consoling himself with Rose’s new watch for the indignities he suffered at the hands of the “old fellows” as he vengefully called his elders.

Mac and Charlie immediately began to talk as hard as their tongues could wag, bringing up all sorts of pleasant subjects so successfully that peals of laughter made passersby look after the merry load with sympathetic smiles.

An avalanche of aunts fell upon Rose as soon as she reached home, and for the rest of the day the old house buzzed like a beehive. Evening found the whole tribe collected in the drawing rooms, with the exception of Aunt Peace, whose place was empty now.

Naturally enough, the elders settled into one group after a while, and the young fellows clustered about the girls like butterflies around two attractive flowers. Dr. Alec was the central figure in one room and Rose in the other, for the little girl, whom they had all loved and petted, had bloomed into a woman, and two years of absence had wrought a curious change in the relative positions of the cousins, especially the three elder ones, who eyed her with a mixture of boyish affection and manly admiration that was both new and pleasant.

Something sweet yet spirited about her charmed them and piqued their curiosity, for she was not quite like other girls, and rather startled them now and then by some independent little speech or act which made them look at one another with a sly smile, as if reminded that Rose was “Uncle’s girl.”

Let us listen, as in duty bound, to what the elders are saying first, for they are already building castles in air for the boys and girls to inhabit.

“Dear child how nice it is to see her safely back, so well and happy and like her sweet little self!” said Aunt Plenty, folding her hands as if giving thanks for a great happiness.

“I shouldn’t wonder if you found that you’d brought a firebrand into the family, Alec. Two, in fact, for Phebe is a fine girl, and the lads have found it out already if I’m not mistaken,” added Uncle Mac, with a nod toward the other room.

All eyes followed his, and a highly suggestive tableau presented itself to the paternal and maternal audience in the back parlor.

Rose and Phebe, sitting side by side on the sofa, had evidently assumed at once the places which they were destined to fill by right of youth, sex, and beauty, for Phebe had long since ceased to be the maid and become the friend, and Rose meant to have that fact established at once.

Jamie occupied the rug, on which Will and Geordie stood at ease, showing their uniforms to the best advantage, for they were now in a great school, where military drill was the delight of their souls. Steve posed gracefully in an armchair, with Mac lounging over the back of it, while Archie leaned on one corner of the low chimneypiece, looking down at Phebe as she listened to his chat with smiling lips and cheeks almost as rich in color as the carnations in her belt.

But Charlie was particularly effective, although he sat upon a music stool, that most trying position for any man not gifted with grace in the management of his legs. Fortunately Prince was, and had fallen into an easy attitude, with one arm over the back of the sofa, his handsome head bent a little, as he monopolized Rose, with a devoted air and a very becoming expression of contentment on his face.

Aunt Clara smiled as if well pleased; Aunt Jessie looked thoughtful; Aunt Jane's keen eyes went from dapper Steve to broad-shouldered Mac with an anxious glance; Mrs. Myra murmured something about her "blessed Caroline"; and Aunt Plenty said warmly, "Bless the dears! Anyone might be proud of such a bonny flock of bairns as that."

"I am all ready to play chaperon as soon as you please, Alec, for I suppose the dear girl will come out at once, as she did not before you went away. My services won't be wanted long, I fancy, for with her many advantages she will be carried off in her first season or I'm much mistaken," said Mrs. Clara, with significant nods and smiles.

"You must settle all those matters with Rose. I am no longer captain, only first mate now, you know," answered Dr. Alec, adding soberly, half to himself, half to his brother, "I wonder people are in such haste to 'bring out' their daughters, as it's called. To me there is something almost pathetic in the sight of a young girl standing on the threshold of the world, so innocent and hopeful, so ignorant of all that lies before her, and usually so ill prepared to meet the ups and downs of life. We do our duty better by the boys, but the poor little women are seldom provided with any armor worth having, and sooner or later they are sure to need it, for every one must fight her own battle, and only the brave and strong can win.”

“You can’t reproach yourself with neglect of that sort, Alec, for you have done your duty faithfully by George’s girl, and I envy you the pride and happiness of having such a daughter, for she is that to you,” answered old Mac, unexpectedly betraying the paternal sort of tenderness men seldom feel for their sons.

“I’ve tried, Mac, and I am both proud and happy, but with every year my anxiety seems to increase. I’ve done my best to fit Rose for what may come, as far as I can foresee it, but now she must stand alone, and all my care is powerless to keep her heart from aching, her life from being saddened by mistakes, or thwarted by the acts of others. I can only stand ready to share her joy and sorrow and watch her shape her life.”

“Why, Alec, what is the child going to do that you need look so solemn?” exclaimed Mrs. Clara, who seemed to have assumed a sort of right to Rose already.

“Hark! And let her tell you herself,” answered Dr. Alec, as Rose’s voice was heard saying very earnestly, “Now, you have all told your plans for the future, why don’t you ask us ours?”

“Because we know that there is only one thing for a pretty girl to do break a dozen or so hearts before she finds one to suit, then marry and settle,” answered Charlie, as if no other reply was possible.

“That may be the case with many, but not with us, for Phebe and I believe that it is as much a right and a duty for women to do something with their lives as for men, and we are not going to be satisfied with such frivolous parts as you give us,” cried Rose with kindling eyes. “I mean what I say, and you cannot laugh me down. Would you be contented to be told to enjoy yourself for a little while, then marry and do nothing more till you die?” she added, turning to Archie.

“Of course not that is only a part of a man’s life,” he answered decidedly.

“A very precious and lovely part, but not all,” continued Rose. “Neither should it be for a woman, for we’ve got minds and souls as well as hearts; ambition and talents as well as beauty and accomplishments; and we want to live and learn as well as love and be loved. I’m sick of being told that is all a woman is fit for! I won’t have anything to do with love till I prove that I am something besides a housekeeper and baby-tender!”

“Heaven preserve us! Here’s woman’s rights with a vengeance!” cried Charlie, starting up with mock horror, while the others regarded Rose with mingled surprise and amusement, evidently fancying it all a girlish outbreak.

“Ah, you needn’t pretend to be shocked you will be in earnest presently, for this is only the beginning of my strong-mindedness,” continued Rose, nothing daunted by the smiles of good-natured incredulity or derision on the faces of her cousins. “I have made up my mind not to be cheated out of the real things that make one good and happy and, just because I’m a rich girl, fold my hands and drift as so many do. I haven’t lived with Phebe all these years in vain. I know what courage and self-reliance can do for one, and I sometimes wish I hadn’t a penny in the world so that I could go and earn my bread with her, and be as brave and independent as she will be pretty soon.”

It was evident that Rose was in earnest now, for as she spoke she turned to her friend with such respect as well as love in her face that the look told better than any words how heartily the rich girl appreciated the virtues hard experience had given the poor girl, and how eagerly she desired to earn what all her fortune could not buy for her.

Something in the glance exchanged between the friends impressed the young men in spite of their prejudices, and it was in a perfectly serious tone that Archie said, “I fancy you’ll find your hands full, Cousin, if you want work, for I’ve heard people say that wealth has its troubles and trials as well as poverty.”

“I know it, and I’m going to try and fill my place well. I’ve got some capital little plans all made, and have begun to study my profession already,” answered Rose with an energetic nod.

“Could I ask what it is to be?” inquired Charlie in a tone of awe.

“Guess!” and Rose looked up at him with an expression half-earnest, half-merry.

“Well, I should say that you were fitted for a beauty and a belle, but as that is evidently not to your taste, I am afraid you are going to study medicine and be a doctor. Won’t your patients have a heavenly time though? It will be easy dying with an angel to poison them.”

“Now, Charlie, that’s base of you, when you know how well women have succeeded in this profession and what a comfort Dr. Mary Kirk was to dear Aunt Peace. I did want to study medicine, but Uncle thought it wouldn’t do to have so many M.D.’s in one family, since Mac thinks of trying it. Besides, I seem to have other work put into my hands that I am better fitted for.”

“You are fitted for anything that is generous and good, and I’ll stand by you, no matter what you’ve chosen,” cried Mac heartily, for this was a new style of talk from a girl’s lips, and he liked it immensely.

“Philanthropy is a generous, good, and beautiful profession, and I’ve chosen it for mine because I have much to give. I’m only the steward of the fortune Papa left me, and I think, if I use it wisely for the happiness of others, it will be more blest than if I keep it all for myself.”

Very sweetly and simply was this said, but it was curious to see how differently the various hearers received it.

Charlie shot a quick look at his mother, who exclaimed, as if in spite of herself, “Now, Alec, are you going to let that girl squander a fine fortune on all sorts of charitable nonsense and wild schemes for the prevention of pauperism and crime?”

“‘They who give to the poor lend to the Lord,’ and practical Christianity is the kind He loves the best,” was all Dr. Alec answered, but it silenced the aunts and caused even prudent Uncle Mac to think with sudden satisfaction of certain secret investments he had made which paid him no interest but the thanks of the poor.

Archie and Mac looked well pleased and promised their advice and assistance with the enthusiasm of generous young hearts. Steve shook his head, but said nothing, and the lads on the rug at once proposed founding a hospital for invalid dogs and horses, white mice, and wounded heroes.

“Don’t you think that will be a better way for a woman to spend her life than in dancing, dressing, and husband-hunting, Charlie?” asked Rose, observing his silence and anxious for his approval.

“Very pretty for a little while, and very effective too, for I don’t know anything more captivating than a sweet girl in a meek little bonnet going on charitable errands and glorifying poor people’s houses with a delightful mixture of beauty and benevolence. Fortunately, the dear souls soon tire of it, but it’s heavenly while it lasts.”

Charlie spoke in a tone of mingled admiration and contempt, and smiled a superior sort of smile, as if he understood all the innocent delusions as well as the artful devices of the sex and expected nothing more from them. It both surprised and grieved Rose, for it did not sound like the Charlie she had left two years ago. But she only said, with a reproachful look and a proud little gesture of head and hand, as if she put the subject aside since it was not treated with respect: “I am sorry you have so low an opinion of women. There was a time when you believed in them sincerely.”

“I do still, upon my word I do! They haven’t a more devoted admirer and slave in the world than I am. Just try me and see,” cried Charlie, gallantly kissing his hand to the sex in general.

But Rose was not appeased, and gave a disdainful shrug as she answered with a look in her eyes that his lordship did not like, “Thank you. I don’t want admirers or slaves, but friends and helpers. I’ve lived so long with a wise, good man that I am rather hard to suit, perhaps, but I don’t intend to lower my standard, and anyone who cares for my regard must at least try to live up to it.”

“Whew! Here’s a wrathful dove! Come and smooth her ruffled plumage, Mac. I’ll dodge before I do further mischief,” and Charlie strolled away into the other room, privately lamenting that Uncle Alec had spoiled a fine girl by making her strong-minded.

He wished himself back again in five minutes, for Mac said something that produced a gale of laughter, and when he took a look over his shoulder the “wrathful dove” was cooing so peacefully and pleasantly he was sorely tempted to return and share the fun. But Charlie had been spoiled by too much indulgence, and it was hard for him to own himself in the wrong even when he knew it. He always got what he wanted sooner or later, and having long ago made up his mind that Rose and her fortune were to be his, he was secretly displeased at the new plans and beliefs of the young lady, but flattered himself that they would soon be changed when she saw how unfashionable and inconvenient they were.

Musing over the delightful future he had laid out, he made himself comfortable in the sofa corner near his mother till the appearance of a slight refection caused both groups to melt into one. Aunt Plenty believed in eating and drinking, so the slightest excuse for festivity delighted her hospitable soul, and on this joyful occasion she surpassed herself.

It was during this informal banquet that Rose, roaming about from one admiring relative to another, came upon the three younger lads, who were having a quiet little scuffle in a secluded corner.

“Come out here and let me have a look at you,” she said enticingly, for she predicted an explosion and public disgrace if peace was not speedily restored.

Hastily smoothing themselves down, the young gentlemen presented three flushed and merry countenances for inspection, feeling highly honored by the command.

“Dear me, how you two have grown! You big things how dare you get head of me in this way!” she said, standing on tiptoe to pat the curly pates before her, for Will and Geordie had shot up like weeds, and now grinned cheerfully down upon her as she surveyed them in comic amazement.

“The Campbells are all fine, tall fellows, and we mean to be the best of the lot. Shouldn’t wonder if we were six-footers like Grandpa,” observed Will proudly, looking so like a young Shanghai rooster, all legs and an insignificant head, that Rose kept her countenance with difficulty.

“We shall broaden out when we get our growth. We are taller than Steve now, a half a head, both of us,” added Geordie, with his nose in the air.

Rose turned to look at Steve and, with a sudden smile, beckoned to him. He dropped his napkin and flew to obey the summons, for she was queen of the hour, and he had openly announced his deathless loyalty.

“Tell the other boys to come here. I’ve a fancy to stand you all in a row and look you over, as you did me that dreadful day when you nearly frightened me out of my wits," she said, laughing at the memory of it as she spoke.

They came in a body and, standing shoulder to shoulder, made such an imposing array that the young commander was rather daunted for a moment. But she had seen too much of the world lately to be abashed by a trifle, and the desire to see a girlish test gave her courage to face the line of smiling cousins with dignity and spirit.

"Now, I'm going to stare at you as you stared at me. It is my revenge on you seven bad boys for entrapping one poor little girl and enjoying her alarm. I'm not a bit afraid of you now, so tremble and beware!"

As she spoke, Rose looked up into Archie's face and nodded approvingly, for the steady gray eyes met hers fairly and softened as they did so a becoming change, for naturally they were rather keen than kind.

"A true Campbell, bless you!" she said, and shook his hand heartily as she passed on.

Charlie came next, and here she felt less satisfied, though scarcely conscious why, for, as she looked, there came a defiant sort of flash, changing suddenly to something warmer than anger, stronger than pride, making her shrink a little and say, hastily, "I don't find the Charlie I left, but the Prince is there still, I see."

Turning to Mac with a sense of relief, she gently took off his "winkers," as Jamie called them, and looked straight into the honest blue eyes that looked straight back at her, full of a frank and friendly affection that warmed her heart and made her own eyes brighten as she gave back the glasses, saying, with a look and tone of cordial satisfaction, "You are not changed, my dear old Mac, and I'm so glad of that!"

"Now say something extra sweet to me, because I'm the flower of the family," said Steve, twirling the blond moustache, which was evidently the pride of his life.

Rose saw at a glance that Dandy deserved his name more than ever, and promptly quenched his vanities by answering, with a provoking laugh, "Then the name of the flower of the family is Cockscomb."

"Ah, ha! who's got it now?" jeered Will.

"Let us off easy, please," whispered Geordie, mindful that their turn came next.

"You blessed beanstalks! I'm proud of you only don't grow quite out of sight, or even be ashamed to look a woman in the face," answered Rose, with a gentle pat on the cheek of either bashful young giant, for both were red as peonies, though their boyish eyes were as clear and calm as summer lakes.

"Now me!" and Jamie assumed his manliest air, feeling that he did not appear to advantage among his tall kinsmen. But he went to the head of the class in everyone’s opinion when Rose put her arms around him, saying, with a kiss, “You must be my boy now, for all the others are too old, and I want a faithful little page to do my errands for me.”

“I will, I will I’ll marry you too, if you’ll just hold on till I grow up!” cried Jamie, rather losing his head at this sudden promotion.

“Bless the baby, what is he talking about?” laughed Rose, looking down at her little knight as he clung about her with grateful ardor.

“Oh, I heard the aunts say that you’d better marry one of us, and keep the property in the family, so I speak first, because you are very fond of me, and I do love curls.”

Alas for Jamie! This awful speech had hardly left his innocent lips when Will and Geordie swept him out of the room like a whirlwind, and the howls of that hapless boy were heard from the torture hall, where being shut into the skeleton case was one of the mildest punishments inflicted upon him.

Dismay fell upon the unfortunates who remained, but their confusion was soon ended, for Rose, with a look which they had never seen upon her face before, dismissed them with the brief command, “Break ranks the review is over,” and walked away to Phebe.

“Confound that boy! You ought to shut him up or gag him!” fumed Charlie irritably.

“He shall be attended to,” answered poor Archie, who was trying to bring up the little marplot with the success of most parents and guardians.

“The whole thing was deuced disagreeable,” growled Steve, who felt that he had not distinguished himself in the late engagement.

“Truth generally is,” observed Mac dryly as he strolled away with his odd smile.

As if he suspected discord somewhere, Dr. Alec proposed music at this crisis, and the young people felt that it was a happy thought.

“I want you to hear both my birds, for they have improved immensely, and I am very proud of them,” said the doctor, twirling up the stool and pulling out the old music books.

“I had better come first, for after you have heard the nightingale you won’t care for the canary,” added Rose, wishing to put Phebe at her ease, for she sat among them looking like a picture, but rather shy and silent, remembering the days when her place was in the kitchen.

“I’ll give you some of the dear old songs you used to like so much. This was a favorite, I think,” and sitting down she sang the first familiar air that came, and sang it well in a pleasant, but by no means finished, manner.

It chanced to be “The Birks of Aberfeldie,” and vividly recalled the time when Mac was ill and she took care of him. The memory was sweet to her, and involuntarily her eye wandered in search of him. He was not far away, sitting just as he used to sit when she soothed his most despondent moods astride of a chair with his head down on his arms, as if the song suggested the attitude. Her heart quite softened to him as she looked, and she decided to forgive him if no one else, for she was sure that he had no mercenary plans about her tiresome money.

Charlie had assumed a pensive air and fixed his fine eyes upon her with an expression of tender admiration, which made her laugh in spite of all her efforts to seem unconscious of it. She was both amused and annoyed at his very evident desire to remind her of certain sentimental passages in the last year of their girl- and boy-hood, and to change what she had considered a childish joke into romantic earnest. Rose had very serious ideas of love and had no intention of being beguiled into even a flirtation with her handsome cousin.

So Charlie attitudinized unnoticed and was getting rather out of temper when Phebe began to sing, and he forgot all about himself in admiration of her. It took everyone by surprise, for two years of foreign training added to several at home had worked wonders, and the beautiful voice that used to warble cheerily over pots and kettles now rang out melodiously or melted to a mellow music that woke a sympathetic thrill in those who listened. Rose glowed with pride as she accompanied her friend, for Phebe was in her own world now a lovely world where no depressing memory of poorhouse or kitchen, ignorance or loneliness, came to trouble her, a happy world where she could be herself and rule others by the magic of her sweet gift.

Yes, Phebe was herself now, and showed it in the change that came over her at the first note of music. No longer shy and silent, no longer the image of a handsome girl but a blooming woman, alive and full of the eloquence her art gave her, as she laid her hands softly together, fixed her eye on the light, and just poured out her song as simply and joyfully as the lark does soaring toward the sun.

“My faith, Alec that’s the sort of voice that wins a man’s heart out of his breast!” exclaimed Uncle Mac, wiping his eyes after one of the plaintive ballads that never grow old.

“So it would!” answered Dr. Alec delightedly.

“So it has,” added Archie to himself; and he was right, for just at that moment he fell in love with Phebe. He actually did, and could fix the time almost to a second, for at a quarter past nine, he merely thought her a very charming young person; at twenty minutes past, he considered her the loveliest woman he ever beheld; at five and twenty minutes past, she was an angel singing his soul away; and at half after nine he was a lost man, floating over a delicious sea to that temporary heaven on earth where lovers usually land after the first rapturous plunge.

If anyone had mentioned this astonishing fact, nobody would have believed it; nevertheless, it was quite true, and sober, businesslike Archie suddenly discovered a fund of romance at the bottom of his hitherto well-conducted heart that amazed him. He was not quite clear what had happened to him at first, and sat about in a dazed sort of way, seeing, hearing, knowing nothing but Phebe, while the unconscious idol found something wanting in the cordial praise so modestly received because Mr. Archie never said a word.

This was one of the remarkable things which occurred that evening. Another was that Mac paid Rose a compliment, which was such an unprecedented fact, it produced a great sensation, though only one person heard it.

Everybody had gone but Mac and his father, who was busy with the doctor. Aunt Plenty was counting the teaspoons in the dining room, and Phebe was helping her as of old. Mac and Rose were alone he apparently in a brown study, leaning his elbows on the chimneypiece, and she lying back in a low chair looking thoughtfully at the fire. She was tired, and the quiet was grateful to her, so she kept silence and Mac respectfully held his tongue. Presently, however, she became conscious that he was looking at her as intently as eyes and glasses could do it, and without stirring from her comfortable attitude, she said, smiling up at him, “He looks as wise as an owl I wonder what he’s thinking about?”

“You, Cousin.”

“Something good, I hope?”

“I was thinking Leigh Hunt was about right when he said, ‘A girl is the sweetest thing God ever made.’“

“Why, Mac!” and Rose sat bolt upright with an astonished face this was such an entirely unexpected sort of remark for the philosopher to make.

Evidently interested in the new discovery, Mac placidly continued, “Do you know, it seems as if I never really saw a girl before, or had any idea what agreeable creatures they could be. I fancy you are a remarkably good specimen, Rose.”

“No, indeed! I’m only hearty and happy, and being safe at home again may make me look better than usual perhaps, but I’m no beauty except to Uncle.”

“‘Hearty and happy’ that must be it,” echoed Mac, soberly investigating the problem. “Most girls are sickly or silly, I think I have observed, and that is probably why I am so struck with you.”

“Of all the queer boys you are the queerest! Do you really mean that you don’t like or notice girls?” asked Rose, much amused at this new peculiarity of her studious cousin.

“Well, no, I am only conscious of two sorts noisy and quiet ones. I prefer the latter, but, as a general thing, I don’t notice any of them much more than I do flies, unless they bother me, then I’d like to flap them away, but as that won’t do, I hide.”

Rose leaned back and laughed until her eyes were full. It was so comical to hear Mac sink his voice to a confidential whisper at the last words and see him smile with sinful satisfaction at the memory of the tormentors he had eluded.

“You needn’t laugh it’s a fact, I assure you. Charlie likes the creatures, and they spoil him. Steve follows suit, of course. Archie is a respectful slave when he can’t help himself. As for me, I don’t often give them a chance, and when I get caught I talk science and dead languages till they run for their lives. Now and then I find a sensible one, and then we get on excellently.”

“A sad prospect for Phebe and me,” sighed Rose, trying to keep sober.

“Phebe is evidently a quiet one. I know she is sensible, or you wouldn’t care for her. I can see that she is pleasant to look at, so I fancy I shall like her. As for you, I helped bring you up, therefore I am a little anxious to see how you turn out. I was afraid your foreign polish might spoil you, but I think it has not. In fact, I find you quite satisfactory so far, if you don’t mind my saying it. I don’t quite know what the charm is, though. Must be the power of inward graces, since you insist that you have no outer ones.”

Mac was peering at her with a shrewd smile on his lips, but such a kindly look behind the glasses that she found both words and glance very pleasant and answered merrily, “I am glad you approve of me, and much obliged for your care of my early youth. I hope to be a credit to you and depend on your keeping me straight, for I’m afraid I shall be spoilt among you all.”

“I’ll keep my eye on you upon one condition,” replied the youthful mentor.

“Name it.”

“If you are going to have a lot of lovers around, I wash my hands of you. If not, I’m your man.”

“You must be sheep dog and help keep them away, for I don’t want any yet awhile and, between ourselves, I don’t believe I shall have any if it is known that I am strong-minded. That fact will scare most men away like a yellow flag,” said Rose, for, thanks to Dr. Alec’s guardianship, she had wasted neither heart nor time in the foolish flirtations so many girls fritter away their youth upon.

“Hum! I rather doubt that,” muttered Mac as he surveyed the damsel before him.

She certainly did not look unpleasantly strong-minded, and she was beautiful in spite of her modest denials. Beautiful with the truest sort of beauty, for nobility of character lent its subtle charm to the bloom of youth, the freshness of health, the innocence of a nature whose sweet maidenliness Mac felt but could not describe. Gentle yet full of spirit, and all aglow with the earnestness that suggests lovely possibilities and makes one hope that such human flowers may have heaven’s purest air and warmest sunshine to blossom in.

“Wait and see,” answered Rose; then, as her uncle’s voice was heard in the hall, she held out her hand, adding pleasantly, “The old times are to begin again, so come soon and tell me all your doings and help me with mine just as you used to do.”

“You really mean it?” And Mac looked much pleased.

“I really do. You are so little altered, except to grow big, that I don’t feel at all strange with you and want to begin where we left off.”

“That will be capital. Good night, Cousin,” and to her great amazement, he gave her a hearty kiss.

“Oh, but that is not the old way at all!” cried Rose, stepping back in merry confusion while the audacious youth assumed an air of mild surprise as he innocently asked: “Didn’t we always say good night in that way? I had an impression that we did and were to begin just as we left off.”

“Of course not. No power on earth would have bribed you to do it, as you know well enough. I don’t mind the first night, but we are too old for that sort of thing now.”

“I’ll remember. It was the force of habit, I suppose, for I’m sure I must have done it in former times, it seemed so natural. Coming, Father!” and Mac retired, evidently convinced he was right.

“Dear old thing! He is as much a boy as ever, and that is such a comfort, for some of the others have grown up very fast,” said Rose to herself, recalling Charlie’s sentimental airs and Archie’s beatified expression while Phebe sang.

Chapter 2 OLD FRIENDS WITH NEW FACES

“It is so good to be home again! I wonder how we ever made up our minds to go away!” exclaimed Rose as she went roaming about the old house next morning, full of the satisfaction one feels at revisiting familiar nooks and corners and finding them unchanged.

“That we might have the pleasure of coming back again,” answered Phebe, walking down the hall beside her little mistress, as happy as she.

“Everything seems just as we left it, even to the rose leaves we used to tuck in here,” continued the younger girl, peeping into one of the tall India jars that stood about the hall.

“Don’t you remember how Jamie and Pokey used to play Forty Thieves with them, and how you tried to get into that blue one and got stuck, and the other boys found us before I could pull you out?” asked Phebe, laughing.

“Yes, indeed, and speaking of angels, one is apt to hear the rustling of their wings,” added Rose, as a shrill whistle came up the avenue accompanied by the clatter of hoofs.

“It is the circus!” cried Phebe gaily as they both recalled the red cart and the charge of the clan.

There was only one boy now, alas, but he made noise enough for half a dozen, and before Rose could run to the door, Jamie came bouncing in with a “shining morning face,” a bat over his shoulder, a red and white jockey cap on his head, one pocket bulging with a big ball, the other overflowing with cookies, and his mouth full of the apple he was just finishing off in hot haste.

“Morning! I just looked in to make sure you’d really come and see that you were all right,” he observed, saluting with bat and doffing the gay cap with one effective twitch.

“Good morning, dear. Yes, we really are here, and getting to rights as fast as possible. But it seems to me you are rather gorgeous, Jamie. What do you belong to a fire company or a jockey club?” asked Rose, turning up the once chubby face, which now was getting brown and square about the chin.

“No, ma’am! Why, don’t you know? I’m captain of the Base Ball Star Club. Look at that, will you?” And, as if the fact were one of national importance, Jamie flung open his jacket to display upon his proudly swelling chest an heart-shaped red flannel shield decorated with a white cotton star the size of a tea plate.

“Superb! I’ve been away so long I forgot there was such a game. And you the captain?” cried Rose, deeply impressed by the high honor to which her kinsman had arrived.

“I just am, and it’s no joke you’d better believe, for we knock our teeth out, black our eyes, and split our fingers almost as well as the big fellows. You come down to the Common between one and two and see us play a match, then you’ll understand what hard work it is. I’ll teach you to bat now if you’ll come out on the lawn,” added Jamie, fired with a wish to exhibit his prowess.

“No, thank you, captain. The grass is wet, and you’ll be late at school if you stay for us.”

“I’m not afraid. Girls are not good for much generally, but you never used to mind a little wet and played cricket like a good one. Can’t you ever do that sort of thing now?” asked the boy, with a pitying look at these hapless creatures debarred from the joys and perils of manly sports.

“I can run still and I’ll get to the gate before you, see if I don’t.” And, yielding to the impulse of the moment, Rose darted down the steps before astonished Jamie could mount and follow.

He was off in a moment, but Rose had the start, and though old Sheltie did his best, she reached the goal just ahead, and stood there laughing and panting, all rosy with fresh October air, a pretty picture for several gentlemen who were driving by.

“Good for you, Rose!” said Archie, jumping out to shake hands while Will and Geordie saluted and Uncle Mac laughed at Jamie, who looked as if girls had risen slightly in his opinion.

“I’m glad it is you, because you won’t be shocked. But I’m so happy to be back I forgot I was not little Rose still,” said Atalanta, smoothing down her flying hair.

“You look very like her, with the curls on your shoulders in the old way. I missed them last night and wondered what it was. How are Uncle and Phebe?” asked Archie, whose eyes had been looking over Rose’s head while he spoke toward the piazza, where a female figure was visible among the reddening woodbines.

“All well, thanks. Won’t you come up and see for yourselves?”

“Can’t, my dear, can’t possibly. Business, you know, business. This fellow is my right-hand man, and I can’t spare him a minute. Come, Arch, we must be off, or these boys will miss their train,” answered Uncle Mac, pulling out his watch.

With a last look from the light-haired figure at the gate to the dark-haired one among the vines, Archie drove away and Jamie cantered after, consoling himself for his defeat with apple number two.

Rose lingered a moment, feeling much inclined to continue her run and pop in upon all the aunts in succession, but, remembering her uncovered head, was about to turn back when a cheerful “Ahoy! ahoy!” made her look up to see Mac approaching at a great pace, waving his hat as he came.

“The Campbells are coming, thick and fast this morning, and the more the merrier,” she said, running to meet him. “You look like a good boy going to school, and virtuously conning your lesson by the way,” she added, smiling to see him take his finger out of the book he had evidently been reading, and tuck it under his arm, just as he used to do years ago.

“I am a schoolboy, going to the school I like best,” he answered, waving a plumy spray of asters as if pointing out the lovely autumn world about them, full of gay hues, fresh airs, and mellow sunshine.

“That reminds me that I didn’t get a chance to hear much about your plans last night the other boys all talked at once, and you only got a word now and then. What have you decided to be, Mac?” asked Rose as they went up the avenue side by side.

“A man first, and a good one if possible. After that, what God pleases.”

Something in the tone, as well as the words, made Rose look up quickly into Mac’s face to see a new expression there. It was indescribable, but she felt as she had often done when watching the mists part suddenly, giving glimpses of some mountaintop, shining serene and high against the blue.

“I think you will be something splendid, for you really look quite glorified, walking under this arch of yellow leaves with the sunshine on your face,” she exclaimed, conscious of a sudden admiration never felt before, for Mac was the plainest of all the cousins.

“I don’t know about that, but I have my dreams and aspirations, and some of them are pretty high ones. Aim at the best, you know, and keep climbing if you want to get on,” he said, looking at the asters with an inward sort of smile, as if he and they had some sweet secret between them.

“You are queerer than ever. But I like your ambition, and hope you will get on. Only mustn’t you begin at something soon? I fancied you would study medicine with Uncle that used to be our plan, you know.”

“I shall, for the present at least, because I quite agree with you that it is necessary to have an anchor somewhere and not go floating off into the world of imagination without ballast of the right sort. Uncle and I had some talk about it last night and I’m going to begin as soon as possible, for I’ve mooned long enough,” and giving himself a shake, Mac threw down the pretty spray, adding half aloud:

“Chide me not, laborious band,

For the idle flowers I brought:

Every aster in my hand
Goes home laden with a thought."

Rose caught the words and smiled, thinking to herself, "Oh, that's it he is getting into the sentimental age and Aunt Jane has been lecturing him. Dear me, how we are growing up!"

"You look as if you didn't like the prospect very well," she said aloud, for Mac had rammed the volume of Shelley into his pocket and the glorified expression was so entirely gone, Rose fancied she had been mistaken about the mountaintop behind the mists.

"Yes, well enough I always thought the profession a grand one, and where could I find a better teacher than Uncle? I've got into lazy ways lately, and it is high time I went at something useful, so here I go," and Mac abruptly vanished into the study while Rose joined Phebe in Aunt Plenty's room.

The dear old lady had just decided, after long and earnest discussion, which of six favorite puddings should be served for dinner, and thus had a few moments to devote to sentiment, so when Rose came in she held out her arms, saying fondly: "I shall not feel as if I'd got my child back again until I have her in my lap a minute. No, you're not a bit too heavy, my rheumatism doesn't begin much before November, so sit here, darling, and put your two arms round my neck."

Rose obeyed, and neither spoke for a moment as the old woman held the young one close and appeased the two years' longing of a motherly heart by the caresses women give the creatures dearest to them. Right in the middle of a kiss, however, she stopped suddenly and, holding out one arm, caught Phebe, who was trying to steal away unobserved.

"Don't go there's room for both in my love, though there isn't in my lap. I'm so grateful to get my dear girls safely home again that I hardly know what I'm about," said Aunt Plenty, embracing Phebe so heartily that she could not feel left out in the cold and stood there with her black eyes shining through the happiest tears.

"There, now I've had a good hug, and feel as if I was all right again. I wish you'd set that cap in order, Rose I went to bed in such a hurry, I pulled the strings off it and left it all in a heap. Phebe, dear, you shall dust round a mite, just as you used to, for I haven't had anyone to do it as I like since you've been gone, and it will do me good to see all my knickknacks straightened out in your tidy way," said the elder lady, getting up with a refreshed expression on her rosy old face.

"Shall I dust in here too?" asked Phebe, glancing toward an inner room which used to be her care.

“No, dear, I’d rather do that myself. Go in if you like, nothing is changed. I must go and see to my pudding.” And Aunt Plenty trotted abruptly away with a quiver of emotion in her voice which made even her last words pathetic.

Pausing on the threshold as if it was a sacred place, the girls looked in with eyes soon dimmed by tender tears, for it seemed as if the gentle occupant was still there. Sunshine shone on the old geraniums by the window; the cushioned chair stood in its accustomed place, with the white wrapper hung across it and the faded slippers lying ready. Books and basket, knitting and spectacles, were all just as she had left them, and the beautiful tranquility that always filled the room seemed so natural, both lookers turned involuntarily toward the bed, where Aunt Peace used to greet them with a smile. There was no sweet old face upon the pillow now, yet the tears that wet the blooming cheeks were not for her who had gone, but for her who was left, because they saw something which spoke eloquently of the love which outlives death and makes the humblest things beautiful and sacred.

A well-worn footstool stood beside the bed, and in the high-piled whiteness of the empty couch there was a little hollow where a gray head nightly rested while Aunt Plenty said the prayers her mother taught her seventy years ago.

Without a word, the girls softly shut the door. And while Phebe put the room in the most exquisite order, Rose retrimmed the plain white cap, where pink and yellow ribbons never rustled now, both feeling honored by their tasks and better for their knowledge of the faithful love and piety which sanctified a good old woman’s life.

“You darling creature, I’m so glad to get you back! I know it’s shamefully early, but I really couldn’t keep away another minute. Let me help you I’m dying to see all your splendid things. I saw the trunks pass and I know you’ve quantities of treasures,” cried Annabel Bliss all in one breath as she embraced Rose an hour later and glanced about the room bestrewn with a variety of agreeable objects.

“How well you are looking! Sit down and I’ll show you my lovely photographs. Uncle chose all the best for me, and it’s a treat to see them,” answered Rose, putting a roll on the table and looking about for more.

“Oh, thanks! I haven’t time now one needs hours to study such things. Show me your Paris dresses, there’s a dear I’m perfectly aching to see the last styles,” and Annabel cast a hungry eye toward certain large boxes delightfully suggestive of French finery.

“I haven’t got any,” said Rose, fondly surveying the fine photographs as she laid them away.

“Rose Campbell! You don’t mean to say that you didn’t get one Paris dress at least?” cried Annabel, scandalized at the bare idea of such neglect.

“Not one for myself. Aunt Clara ordered several, and will be charmed to show them when her box comes.”

“Such a chance! Right there and plenty of money! How could you love your uncle after such cruelty?” sighed Annabel, with a face full of sympathy.

Rose looked puzzled for a minute, then seemed to understand, and assumed a superior air which became her very well as she said, good-naturedly opening a box of laces, “Uncle did not forbid my doing it, and I had money enough, but I chose not to spend it on things of that sort.”

“Could and didn’t! I can’t believe it!” And Annabel sank into a chair, as if the thought was too much for her.

“I did rather want to at first, just for the fun of the thing. In fact, I went and looked at some amazing gowns. But they were very expensive, very much trimmed, and not my style at all, so I gave them up and kept what I valued more than all the gowns Worth every made.”

“What in the world was it?” cried Annabel, hoping she would say diamonds.

“Uncle’s good opinion,” answered Rose, looking thoughtfully into the depths of a packing case, where lay the lovely picture that would always remind her of the little triumph over girlish vanity, which not only kept but increased “Uncle’s good opinion.”

“Oh, indeed!” said Annabel blankly, and fell to examining Aunt Plenty’s lace while Rose went on with a happy smile in her eyes as she dived into another trunk.

“Uncle thinks one has no right to waste money on such things, but he is very generous and loves to give useful, beautiful, or curious gifts. See, all these pretty ornaments are for presents, and you shall choose first whatever you like.”

“He’s a perfect dear!” cried Annabel, reveling in the crystal, filigree, coral, and mosaic trinkets spread before her while Rose completed her rapture by adding sundry tasteful trifles fresh from Paris.

“Now tell me, when do you mean to have your coming-out party? I ask because I’ve nothing ready and want plenty of time, for I suppose it will be the event of the season,” asked Annabel a few minutes later as she wavered between a pink coral and a blue lava set.

“I came out when I went to Europe, but I suppose Aunty Plen will want to have some sort of merry-making to celebrate our return. I shall begin as I mean to go on, and have a simple, sociable sort of party and invite everyone whom I like, no matter in what ‘set’ they happen to belong. No one shall ever say I am aristocratic and exclusive so prepare yourself to be shocked, for old friends and young, rich and poor, will be asked to all my parties.”

“Oh, my heart! You are going to be odd, just as Mama predicted!” sighed Annabel, clasping her hands in despair and studying the effect of three bracelets on her chubby arm in the midst of her woe.

“In my own house I’m going to do as I think best, and if people call me odd, I can’t help it. I shall endeavor not to do anything very dreadful, but I seem to inherit Uncle’s love for experiments and mean to try some. I daresay they will fail and I shall get laughed at. I intend to do it nevertheless, so you had better drop me now before I begin,” said Rose with an air of resolution that was rather alarming.

“What shall you wear at this new sort of party of yours?” asked Annabel, wisely turning a deaf ear to all delicate or dangerous topics and keeping to matters she understood.

“That white thing over there. It is fresh and pretty, and Phebe has one like it. I never want to dress more than she does, and gowns of that sort are always most becoming and appropriate to girls of our age.”

“Phebe! You don’t mean to say you are going to make a lady of her!” gasped Annabel, upsetting her treasures as she fell back with a gesture that made the little chair creak again, for Miss Bliss was as plump as a partridge.

“She is one already, and anybody who slights her slights me, for she is the best girl I know and the dearest,” cried Rose warmly.

“Yes, of course I was only surprised you are quite right, for she may turn out to be somebody, and then how glad you’ll feel that you were so good to her!” said Annabel, veering around at once, seeing which way the wind blew.

Before Rose could speak again, a cheery voice called from the hall, “Little mistress, where are you?”

“In my room, Phebe, dear,” and up came the girl Rose was going to “make a lady of,” looking so like one that Annabel opened her china-blue eyes and smiled involuntarily as Phebe dropped a little curtsey in playful imitation of her old manner and said quietly: “How do you do, Miss Bliss?”

“Glad to see you back, Miss Moore,” answered Annabel, shaking hands in a way that settled the question of Phebe’s place in her mind forever, for the stout damsel had a kind heart in spite of a weak head and was really fond of Rose. It was evidently “Love me, love my Phebe,” so she made up her mind on the spot that Phebe was somebody, and that gave an air of romance even to the poorhouse.

She could not help staring a little as she watched the two friends work together and listened to their happy talk over each new treasure as it came to light, for every look and word plainly showed that years of close companionship had made them very dear to one another. It was pretty to see Rose try to do the hardest part of any little job herself still prettier to see Phebe circumvent her and untie the hard knots, fold the stiff papers, or lift the heavy trays with her own strong hands, and prettiest of all to hear her say in a motherly tone, as she put Rose into an easy chair: “Now, my deary, sit and rest, for you will have to see company all day, and I can’t let you get tired out so early.”

“That is no reason why I should let you either. Call Jane to help or I’ll bob up again directly,” answered Rose, with a very bad assumption of authority.

“Jane may take my place downstairs, but no one shall wait on you here except me, as long as I’m with you,” said stately Phebe, stooping to put a hassock under the feet of her little mistress.

“It is very nice and pretty to see, but I don’t know what people will say when she goes into society with the rest of us. I do hope Rose won’t be very odd,” said Annabel to herself as she went away to circulate the depressing news that there was to be no grand ball and, saddest disappointment of all, that Rose had not a single Paris costume with which to refresh the eyes and rouse the envy of her amiable friends.

“Now I’ve seen or heard from all the boys but Charlie, and I suppose he is too busy. I wonder what he is about,” thought Rose, turning from the hall door, whither she had courteously accompanied her guest.

The wish was granted a moment after, for, going into the parlor to decide where some of her pictures should hang, she saw a pair of brown boots at one end of the sofa, a tawny-brown head at the other, and discovered that Charlie was busily occupied in doing nothing.

“The voice of the Bliss was heard in the land, so I dodged till she went upstairs, and then took a brief siesta while waiting to pay my respects to the distinguished traveler, Lady Hester Stanhope,” he said, leaping up to make his best bow.

“The voice of the sluggard would be a more appropriate quotation, I think. Does Annabel still pine for you?” asked Rose, recalling certain youthful jokes upon the subject of unrequited affections.

“Not a bit of it. Fun has cut me out, and the fair Annabella will be Mrs. Tokio before the winter is over if I’m not much mistaken.”

“What, little Fun See? How droll it seems to think of him grown up and married to Annabel of all people! She never said a word about him, but this accounts for her admiring my pretty Chinese things and being so interested in Canton.”

“Little Fun is a great swell now, and much enamored of our fat friend, who will take to chopsticks whenever he says the word. I needn’t ask how you do, Cousin, for you beat that Aurora all hollow in the way of color. I should have been up before, but I thought you'd like a good rest after your voyage."

"I was running a race with Jamie before nine o'clock. What were you doing, young man?"

"'Sleeping I dreamed, love, dreamed, love, of thee,'" began Charlie, but Rose cut him short by saying as reproachfully as she could, while the culprit stood regarding her with placid satisfaction: "You ought to have been up and at work like the rest of the boys. I felt like a drone in a hive of very busy bees when I saw them all hurrying off to their business."

"But, my dear girl, I've got no business. I'm making up my mind, you see, and do the ornamental while I'm deciding. There always ought to be one gentleman in a family, and that seems to be rather my line," answered Charlie, posing for the character with an assumption of languid elegance which would have been very effective if his twinkling eyes had not spoilt it.

"There are none but gentlemen in our family, I hope," answered Rose, with the proud air she always wore when anything was said derogatory to the name of Campbell.

"Of course, of course. I should have said gentleman of leisure. You see it is against my principles to slave as Archie does. What's the use? Don't need the money, got plenty, so why not enjoy it and keep jolly as long as possible? I'm sure cheerful people are public benefactors in this world of woe."

It was not easy to object to this proposition, especially when made by a comely young man who looked the picture of health and happiness as he sat on the arm of the sofa smiling at his cousin in the most engaging manner. Rose knew very well that the Epicurean philosophy was not the true one to begin life upon, but it was difficult to reason with Charlie because he always dodged sober subjects and was so full of cheery spirits, one hated to lessen the sort of sunshine which certainly is a public benefactor.

"You have such a clever way of putting things that I don't know how to contradict you, though I still think I'm right," she said gravely. "Mac likes to idle as well as you, but he is not going to do it because he knows it's bad for him to fritter away his time. He is going to study a profession like a wise boy, though he would much prefer to live among his beloved books or ride his hobbies in peace."

"That's all very well for him, because he doesn't care for society and may as well be studying medicine as philandering about the woods with his pockets full of musty philosophers and old-fashioned poets," answered Charlie with a shrug which plainly expressed his opinion of Mac.

"I wonder if musty philosophers, like Socrates and Aristotle, and old-fashioned poets, like Shakespeare and Milton, are not safer company for him to keep than some of the more modern friends you have?" said Rose, remembering Jamie's hints about wild oats, for she could be a little sharp sometimes and had not lectured "the boys" for so long it seemed unusually pleasant.

But Charlie changed the subject skillfully by exclaiming with an anxious expression: "I do believe you are going to be like Aunt Jane, for that's just the way she comes down on me whenever she gets the chance! Don't take her for a model, I beg she is a good woman but a mighty disagreeable one in my humble opinion."

The fear of being disagreeable is a great bugbear to a girl, as this artful young man well knew, and Rose fell into the trap at once, for Aunt Jane was far from being her model, though she could not help respecting her worth.

"Have you given up your painting?" she asked rather abruptly, turning to a gilded Fra Angelico angel which leaned in the sofa corner.

"Sweetest face I ever saw, and very like you about the eyes, isn't it?" said Charlie, who seemed to have a Yankee trick of replying to one question with another.

"I want an answer, not a compliment," and Rose tried to look severe as she put away the picture more quickly than she had taken it up.

"Have I given up painting? Oh, no! I daub a little in oils, slop a little in watercolors, sketch now and then, and poke about the studios when the artistic fit comes on."

"How is the music?"

"More flourishing. I don't practice much, but sing a good deal in company. Set up a guitar last summer and went troubadouring round in great style. The girls like it, and it's jolly among the fellows."

"Are you studying anything?"

"Well, I have some lawbooks on my table good, big, wise-looking chaps and I take a turn at them semioccasionally when pleasure palls or parents chide. But I doubt if I do more than learn what 'a allybi' is this year," and a sly laugh in Charlie's eye suggested that he sometimes availed himself of this bit of legal knowledge.

"What do you do then?"

"Fair catechist, I enjoy myself. Private theatricals have been the rage of late, and I have won such laurels that I seriously think of adopting the stage as my profession."

"Really!" cried Rose, alarmed.

"Why not? If I must go to work, isn't that as good as anything?"

"Not without more talent than I think you possess. With genius one can do anything without it one had better let the stage alone."

"There's a quencher for the 'star of the goodlie companie' to which I belong. Mac hasn't a ray of genius for anything, yet you admire him for trying to be an M.D.," cried Charlie, rather nettled at her words.

"It is respectable, at all events, and I'd rather be a second-rate doctor than a second-rate actor. But I know you don't mean it, and only say so to frighten me."

"Exactly. I always bring it up when anyone begins to lecture and it works wonders. Uncle Mac turns pale, the aunts hold up their hands in holy horror, and a general panic ensues. Then I magnanimously promise not to disgrace the family and in the first burst of gratitude the dear souls agree to everything I ask, so peace is restored and I go on my way rejoicing."

"Just the way you used to threaten to run off to sea if your mother objected to any of your whims. You are not changed in that respect, though you are in others. You had great plans and projects once, Charlie, and now you seem to be contented with being a 'jack of all trades and master of none'".

"Boyish nonsense! Time has brought wisdom, and I don't see the sense of tying myself down to one particular thing and grinding away at it year after year. People of one idea get so deucedly narrow and tame, I've no patience with them. Culture is the thing, and the sort one gets by ranging over a wide field is the easiest to acquire, the handiest to have, and the most successful in the end. At any rate, it is the kind I like and the only kind I intend to bother myself about."

With this declaration, Charlie smoothed his brow, clasped his hands over his head, and, leaning back, gently warbled the chorus of a college song as if it expressed his views of life better than he could:

"While our rosy fillets shed
Blushes o'er each fervid head,
With many a cup and many a smile
The festal moments we beguile."

"Some of my saints here were people of one idea, and though they were not very successful from a worldly point of view while alive, they were loved and canonized when dead," said Rose, who had been turning over a pile of photographs on the table and just then found her favorite, St. Francis, among them.

"This is more to my taste. Those worn-out, cadaverous fellows give me the blues, but here's a gentlemanly saint who takes things easy and does good as he goes along without howling over his own sins or making other people miserable by telling them of theirs." And Charlie laid a handsome St. Martin beside the brown-frocked monk.

Rose looked at both and understood why her cousin preferred the soldierly figure with the sword to the ascetic with his crucifix. One was riding bravely through the world in purple and fine linen, with horse and hound and squires at his back; and the other was in a lazar-house, praying over the dead and dying. The contrast was a strong one, and the girl's eyes lingered longest on the knight, though she said thoughtfully, "Yours is certainly the pleasantest and yet I never heard of any good deed he did, except divide his cloak with a beggar, while St. Francis gave himself to charity just when life was most tempting and spent years working for God without reward. He's old and poor, and in a dreadful place, but I won't give him up, and you may have your gay St. Martin if you want him."

"No, thank you, saints are not in my line but I'd like the golden-haired angel in the blue gown if you'll let me have her. She shall be my little Madonna, and I'll pray to her like a good Catholic," answered Charlie, turning to the delicate, deep-eyed figure with the lilies in its hand.

"With all my heart, and any others that you like. Choose some for your mother and give them to her with my love."

So Charlie sat down beside Rose to turn and talk over the pictures for a long and pleasant hour. But when they went away to lunch, if there had been anyone to observe so small but significant a trifle, good St. Francis lay face downward behind the sofa, while gallant St. Martin stood erect upon the chimneypiece.

Chapter 3 MISS CAMPBELL

While the travelers unpack their trunks, we will pick up, as briefly as possible, the dropped stitches in the little romance we are weaving.

Rose's life had been a very busy and quiet one for the four years following the May day when she made her choice. Study, exercise, housework, and many wholesome pleasures kept her a happy, hearty creature, yearly growing in womanly graces, yet always preserving the innocent freshness girls lose so soon when too early set upon the world's stage and given a part to play.

Not a remarkably gifted girl in any way, and far from perfect; full of all manner of youthful whims and fancies; a little spoiled by much love; rather apt to think all lives as safe and sweet as her own; and, when want or pain appealed to her, the tender heart overflowed with a remorseful charity which gave of its abundance recklessly. Yet, with all her human imperfections, the upright nature of the child kept her desires climbing toward the just and pure and true, as flowers struggle to the light; and the woman's soul was budding beautifully under the green leaves behind the little thorns.

At seventeen, Dr. Alec pronounced her ready for the voyage around the world, which he considered a better finishing off than any school could give her. But just then Aunt Peace began to fail and soon slipped quietly away to rejoin the lover she had waited for so long. Youth seemed to come back in a mysterious way to touch the dead face with lost loveliness, and all the romance of her past to gather around her memory. Unlike most aged women, her friends were among the young, and at her funeral the grayheads gave place to the band of loving girls who made the sweet old maiden ready for her rest, bore her pall, and covered her grave with the white flowers she had never worn.

When this was over poor Aunt Plenty seemed so lost without her lifelong charge that Dr. Alec would not leave her, and Rose gladly paid the debt she owed by the tender service which comforts without words. But Aunt Plenty, having lived for others all her days, soon rebelled against this willing sacrifice, soon found strength in her own sincere piety, solace in cheerful occupation, and amusement in nursing Aunt Myra, who was a capital patient, as she never died and never got well.

So at last the moment came when, with free minds, the travelers could set out, and on Rose's eighteenth birthday, with Uncle Alec and the faithful Phebe, she sailed away to see and study the big, beautiful world which lies ready for us all if we only know how to use and enjoy it.

Phebe was set to studying music in the best schools, and while she trained her lovely voice with happy industry, Rose and her uncle roamed about in the most delightful way till two years were gone like a dream and those at home clamored for their return.

Back they came, and now the heiress must make ready to take her place, for at twenty-one she came into possession of the fortune she had been trying to learn how to use well. Great plans fermented in her brain, for, though the heart was as generous as ever, time had taught her prudence and observation shown her that the wisest charity is that which helps the poor to help themselves.

Dr. Alec found it a little difficult to restrain the ardor of this young philanthropist who wanted to begin at once to endow hospitals, build homes, adopt children, and befriend all mankind.

“Take a little time to look about you and get your bearings, child. The world you have been living in is a much simpler, honester one than that you are now to enter. Test yourself a bit and see if the old ways seem best after all, for you are old enough to decide, and wise enough to discover, what is for your truest good, I hope,” he said, trying to feel ready to let the bird escape from under his wing and make little flights alone.

“Now, Uncle, I’m very much afraid you are going to be disappointed in me,” answered Rose with unusual hesitation yet a very strong desire visible in her eyes. “You like to have me quite honest, and I’ve learned to tell you all my foolish thoughts so I’ll speak out, and if you find my wish very wrong and silly, please say so, for I don’t want you to cast me off entirely, though I am grown up. You say, wait a little, test myself, and try if the old ways are best. I should like to do that, and can I in a better way than leading the life other girls lead? Just for a little while,” she added, as her uncle’s face grew grave.

He was disappointed, yet acknowledged that the desire was natural and in a moment saw that a trial of this sort might have its advantages. Nevertheless, he dreaded it, for he had intended to choose her society carefully and try to keep her unspoiled by the world as long as possible, like many another fond parent and guardian. But the spirit of Eve is strong in all her daughters forbidden fruit will look rosier to them than any in their own orchards, and the temptation to take just one little bite proves irresistible to the wisest. So Rose, looking out from the safe seclusion of her girlhood into the woman’s kingdom which she was about to take possession of, felt a sudden wish to try its pleasures before assuming its responsibilities, and was too sincere to hide the longing.

“Very well, my dear, try it if you like, only take care of your health be temperate in your gaiety and don’t lose more than you gain, if that is possible,” he added under his breath, endeavoring to speak cheerfully and not look anxious.

"I know it is foolish, but I do want to be a regular butterfly for a little while and see what it is like. You know I couldn't help seeing a good deal of fashionable life abroad, though we were not in it, and here at home the girls tell me about all sorts of pleasant things that are to happen this winter, so if you won't despise me very much, I should like to try it."

"For how long?"

"Would three months be too long? New Year is a good time to take a fresh start. Everyone is going to welcome me, so I must be gay in spite of myself, unless I'm willing to seem very ungrateful and morose," said Rose, glad to have so good a reason to offer for her new experiment.

"You may like it so well that the three months may become years. Pleasure is very sweet when we are young."

"Do you think it will intoxicate me?"

"We shall see, my dear."

"We shall!" And Rose marched away, looking as if she had taken a pledge of some sort, and meant to keep it.

It was a great relief to the public mind when it became known that Miss Campbell was really coming out at last, and invitations to Aunt Plenty's party were promptly accepted. Aunt Clara was much disappointed about the grand ball she had planned, but Rose stood firm, and the dear old lady had her way about everything.

The consequence was a delightfully informal gathering of friends to welcome the travelers home. Just a good, old-fashioned, hospitable housewarming, so simple, cordial, and genuine that those who came to criticize remained to enjoy, and many owned the charm they could neither describe nor imitate.

Much curiosity was felt about Phebe, and much gossip went on behind fans that evening, for those who had known her years ago found it hard to recognize the little housemaid in the handsome young woman who bore herself with such quiet dignity and charmed them all with her fine voice. "Cinderella has turned out a princess," was the general verdict, and Rose enjoyed the little sensation immensely, for she had had many battles to fight for her Phebe since she came among them, and now her faith was vindicated.

Miss Campbell herself was in great demand and did the honors so prettily that even Miss Bliss forgave her for her sad neglect of Worth, though she shook her head over the white gowns, just alike except that Phebe wore crimson and Rose, blue trimmings.

The girls swarmed eagerly around their recovered friend, for Rose had been a favorite before she went away and found her throne waiting for her now. The young men privately pronounced Phebe the handsomest "But then you know there's neither family nor money, so it's no use." Phebe, therefore, was admired as one of the ornamental properties belonging to the house and left respectfully alone.

But bonny Rose was "all right," as these amiable youths expressed it, and many a wistful eye followed the bright head as it flitted about the rooms as if it were a second Golden Fleece to be won with difficulty, for stalwart kinsmen hedged it round, and watchful aunts kept guard.

Little wonder that the girl found her new world an enchanting one and that her first sip of pleasure rather went to her head, for everybody welcomed and smiled on her, flattered and praised, whispered agreeable prophecies in her ear, and looked the compliments and congratulations they dared not utter till she felt as if she must have left her old self somewhere abroad and suddenly become a new and wonderfully gifted being.

"It is very nice, Uncle, and I'm not sure I mayn't want another three months of it when the first are gone," she whispered to Dr. Alec as he stood watching the dance she was leading with Charlie in the long hall after supper.

"Steady, my lass, steady, and remember that you are not really a butterfly but a mortal girl with a head that will ache tomorrow," he answered, watching the flushed and smiling face before him. "I almost wish there wasn't any tomorrow, but that tonight would last forever it is so pleasant, and everyone so kind," she said with a little sigh of happiness as she gathered up her fleecy skirts like a white bird pluming itself for flight.

"I'll ask your opinion about that at two A.M.," began her uncle with a warning nod.

"I'll give it honestly," was all Rose had time to say before Charlie swept her away into the particolored cloud before them.

"It's no use, Alec train a girl as wisely as you choose, she will break loose when the time comes and go in for pleasure as eagerly as the most frivolous, for ''tis their nature to,'" said Uncle Mac, keeping time to the music as if he would not mind "going in" for a bit of pleasure himself.

"My girl shall taste and try, but unless I'm much mistaken, a little bit of it will satisfy her. I want to see if she will stand the test, because if not, all my work is a failure and I'd like to know it," answered the doctor with a hopeful smile on his lips but an anxious look in his eyes.

"She will come out all right bless her heart! so let her sow her innocent wild oats and enjoy herself till she is ready to settle down. I wish all our young folks were likely to have as small a crop and get through as safely as she will," added Uncle Mac with a shake of the head as he glanced at some of the young men revolving before him.

“Nothing amiss with your lads, I hope?”

“No, thank heaven! So far I’ve had little trouble with either, though Mac is an odd stick and Steve a puppy. I don’t complain, for both will outgrow that sort of thing and are good fellows at heart, thanks to their mother. But Clara’s boy is in a bad way, and she will spoil him as a man as she has as a boy if his father doesn’t interfere.”

“I told brother Stephen all about him when I was in Calcutta last year, and he wrote to the boy, but Clara has got no end of plans in her head and so she insisted on keeping Charlie a year longer when his father ordered him off to India,” replied the doctor as they walked away.

“It is too late to ‘order’ Charlie is a man now, and Stephen will find he has been too easy with him all these years. Poor fellow, it has been hard lines for him, and is likely to be harder, I fancy, unless he comes home and straightens things out.”

“He won’t do that if he can help it. He has lost all his energy living in that climate and hates worry more than ever, so you can imagine what an effort it would be to manage a foolish woman and a headstrong boy. We must lend a hand, Mac, and do our best for poor old Steve.”

“The best we can do for the lad is to marry and settle him as soon as possible.”

“My dear fellow, he is only three and twenty,” began the doctor, as if the idea was preposterous. Then a sudden change came over him as he added with a melancholy smile, “I forget how much one can hope and suffer, even at twenty-three.”

“And be all the better for, if bravely outlived,” said Uncle Mac, with his hand on his brother’s shoulder and the sincerest approval in his voice. Then, kindly returning to the younger people, he went on inquiringly, “You don’t incline to Clara’s view of a certain matter, I fancy?”

“Decidedly not. My girl must have the best, and Clara’s training would spoil an angel,” answered Dr. Alec quickly.

“But we shall find it hard to let our little Rose go out of the family. How would Archie do? He has been well brought up and is a thoroughly excellent lad.”

The brothers had retired to the study by this time and were alone, yet Dr. Alec lowered his voice as he said with a tender sort of anxiety pleasant to see: “You know I do not approve of cousins marrying, so I’m in a quandary, Mac, for I love the child as if she were my own and feel as if I could not give her up to any man whom I did not know and trust entirely. It is of no use for us to plan, for she must choose for herself yet I do wish we could keep her among us and give one of our boys a wife worth having."

"We must, so never mind your theories but devote yourself to testing our elder lads and making one of them a happy fellow. All are heart-whole, I believe, and, though young still for this sort of thing, we can be gently shaping matters for them, since no one knows how soon the moment may come. My faith it is like living in a powder mill to be among a lot of young folks nowadays! All looks as calm as possible till a sudden spark produces an explosion, and heaven only knows where we find ourselves after it is over."

And Uncle Mac sat himself comfortably down to settle Rose's fate while the doctor paced the room, plucking at his beard and knitting his brows as if he found it hard to see his way.

"Yes, Archie is a good fellow," he said, answering the question he had ignored before. "An upright, steady, intelligent lad who will make an excellent husband if he ever finds out that he has a heart. I suppose I'm an old fool, but I do like a little more romance in a young man than he seems to have more warmth and enthusiasm, you know. Bless the boy! He might be forty instead of three or four and twenty, he's so sober, calm, and cool. I'm younger than he is, and could go a-wooing like a Romeo if I had any heart to offer a woman."

The doctor looked rather shamefaced as he spoke, and his brother burst out laughing. "See here, Alec, it's a pity so much romance and excellence as yours should be lost, so why don't you set these young fellows an example and go a-wooing yourself? Jessie has been wondering how you have managed to keep from falling in love with Phebe all this time, and Clara is quite sure that you waited only till she was safe under Aunt Plenty's wing to offer yourself in the good old-fashioned style."

"I!" And the doctor stood aghast at the mere idea, then he gave a resigned sort of sigh and added like a martyr, "If those dear women would let me alone, I'd thank them forever. Put the idea out of their minds for heaven's sake, Mac, or I shall be having that poor girl flung at my head and her comfort destroyed. She is a fine creature and I'm proud of her, but she deserves a better lot than to be tied to an old fellow like me whose only merit is his fidelity."

"As you please, I was only joking," and Uncle Mac dropped the subject with secret relief. The excellent man thought a good deal of family and had been rather worried at the hints of the ladies. After a moment's silence he returned to a former topic, which was rather a pet plan of his. "I don't think you do Archie justice, Alec. You don't know him as well as I do, but you'll find that he has heart enough under his cool, quiet manner. I've grown very fond of him, think highly of him, and don't see how you could do better for Rose than to give her to him."

"If she will go," said the doctor, smiling at his brother's businesslike way of disposing of the young people.

"She'll do anything to please you," began Uncle Mac in perfect good faith, for twenty-five years in the society of a very prosaic wife had taken nearly all the romance out of him.

"It is of no use for us to plan, and I shall never interfere except to advise, and if I were to choose one of the boys, I should incline to my godson," answered the doctor gravely.

"What, my Ugly Duckling!" exclaimed Uncle Mac in great surprise.

"The Ugly Duckling turned out a swan, you remember. I've always been fond of the boy because he's so genuine and original. Crude as a green apple now, but sound at the core, and only needs time to ripen. I'm sure he'll turn out a capital specimen of the Campbell variety."

"Much obliged, Alec, but it will never do at all. He's a good fellow, and may do something to be proud of by and by, but he's not the mate for our Rose. She needs someone who can manage her property when we are gone, and Archie is the man for that, depend upon it."

"Confound the property!" cried Dr. Alec impetuously. "I want her to be happy, and I don't care how soon she gets rid of her money if it is going to be a millstone round her neck. I declare to you, I dreaded the thought of this time so much that I've kept her away as long as I could and trembled whenever a young fellow joined us while we were abroad. Had one or two narrow escapes, and now I'm in for it, as you can see by tonight's 'success' as Clara calls it. Thank heaven I haven't many daughters to look after!"

"Come, come, don't be anxious take Archie and settle it right up safely and happily. That's my advice, and you'll find it sound," replied the elder conspirator, like one having experience.

"I'll think of it, but mind you, Mac, not a word of this to the sisters. We are a couple of old fools to be matchmaking so soon but I see what is before me and it's a comfort to free my mind to someone."

"So it is. Depend on me not a breath even to Jane," answered Uncle Mac, with a hearty shake and a sympathetic slap on the shoulder.

"Why, what dark and awful secrets are going on here? Is it a Freemason's Lodge and those the mystic signs?" asked a gay voice at the door; and there stood Rose, full of smiling wonder at the sight of her two uncles hand in hand, whispering and nodding to one another mysteriously.

They stared like schoolboys caught plotting mischief and looked so guilty that she took pity on them, innocently imagining the brothers were indulging in a little sentiment on this joyful occasion, so she added quickly, as she beckoned, without crossing the threshold, “Women not allowed, of course, but both of you dear Odd Fellows are wanted, for Aunt Plenty begs we will have an old-fashioned contra dance, and I’m to lead off with Uncle Mac. I chose you, sir, because you do it in style, pigeon wings and all. So, please come and Phebe is waiting for you, Uncle Alec. She is rather shy you know, but will enjoy it with you to take care of her.”

“Thank you, thank you!” cried both gentlemen, following with great alacrity.

Unconscious, Rose enjoyed that Virginia reel immensely, for the pigeon wings were superb, and her partner conducted her through the convolutions of the dance without a fault, going down the middle in his most gallant style. Landing safely at the bottom, she stood aside to let him get his breath, for stout Uncle Mac was bound to do or die on that occasion and would have danced his pumps through without a murmur if she had desired it.

Leaning against the wall with his hair in his eyes, and a decidedly bored expression of countenance, was Mac, Jr., who had been surveying the gymnastics of his parent with respectful astonishment.

“Come and take a turn, my lad. Rose is fresh as a daisy, but we old fellows soon get enough of it, so you shall have my place,” said his father, wiping his face, which glowed like a cheerful peony.

“No, thank you, sir I can’t stand that sort of thing. I’ll race you round the piazza with pleasure, Cousin, but his oven is too much for me,” was Mac’s uncivil reply as he backed toward the open window, as if glad of an excuse to escape.

“Fragile creature, don’t stay on my account, I beg. I can’t leave my guests for a moonlight run, even if I dared to take it on a frosty night in a thin dress,” said Rose, fanning herself and not a bit ruffled by Mac’s refusal, for she knew his ways and they amused her.

“Not half so bad as all this dust, gas, heat, and noise. What do you suppose lungs are made of?” demanded Mac, ready for a discussion then and there.

“I used to know, but I’ve forgotten now. Been so busy with other things that I’ve neglected the hobbies I used to ride five or six years ago,” she said, laughing.

“Ah, those were times worth having! Are you going in for much of this sort of thing, Rose?” he asked with a disapproving glance at the dancers.

“About three months of it, I think.”

“Then good-bye till New Year.” And Mac vanished behind the curtains.

“Rose, my dear, you really must take that fellow in hand before he gets to be quite a bear. Since you have been gone he has lived in his books and got on so finely that we have let him alone, though his mother groans over his manners.

Polish him up a bit, I beg of you, for it is high time he mended his odd ways and did justice to the fine gifts he hides behind them," said Uncle Mac, scandalized at the bluntness of his son.

"I know my chestnut burr too well to mind his prickles. But others do not, so I will take him in hand and make him a credit to his family," answered Rose readily.

"Take Archie for your model he's one of a thousand, and the girl who gets him gets a prize, I do assure you," added Uncle Mac, who found matchmaking to his taste and thought that closing remark a deep one.

"Oh, me, how tired I am!" cried Rose, dropping into a chair as the last carriage rolled away somewhere between one and two.

"What is your opinion now, Miss Campbell?" asked the doctor, addressing her for the first time by the name which had been uttered so often that night.

"My opinion is that Miss Campbell is likely to have a gay life if she goes on as she has begun, and that she finds it very delightful so far," answered the girl, with lips still smiling from their first taste of what the world calls pleasure.

Chapter 4 THORNS AMONG THE ROSES

For a time everything went smoothly, and Rose was a happy girl. The world seemed a beautiful and friendly place, and fulfillment of her brightest dreams appeared to be a possibility. Of course this could not last, and disappointment was inevitable, because young eyes look for a Paradise and weep when they find a workaday world which seems full of care and trouble till one learns to gladden and glorify it with high thoughts and holy living.

Those who loved her waited anxiously for the disillusion which must come in spite of all their cherishing, for till now Rose had been so busy with her studies, travels, and home duties that she knew very little of the triumphs, trials, and temptations of fashionable life. Birth and fortune placed her where she could not well escape some of them, and Dr. Alec, knowing that experience is the best teacher, wisely left her to learn this lesson as she must many another, devoutly hoping that it would not be a hard one.

October and November passed rapidly, and Christmas was at hand, with all its merry mysteries, home gatherings, and good wishes.

Rose sat in her own little sanctum, opening from the parlor, busily preparing gifts for the dear five hundred friends who seemed to grow fonder and fonder as the holidays drew near. The drawers of her commode stood open, giving glimpses of dainty trifles, which she was tying up with bright ribbons.

A young girl’s face at such moments is apt to be a happy one, but Rose’s was very grave as she worked, and now and then she threw a parcel into the drawer with a careless toss, as if no love made the gift precious. So unusual was this expression that it struck Dr. Alec as he came in and brought an anxious look to his eyes, for any cloud on that other countenance dropped its shadow over his.

“Can you spare a minute from your pretty work to take a stitch in my old glove?” he asked, coming up to the table strewn with ribbon, lace, and colored papers.

“Yes, Uncle, as many as you please.”

The face brightened with sudden sunshine; both hands were put out to receive the shabby driving glove, and the voice was full of that affectionate alacrity which makes the smallest service sweet.

“My Lady Bountiful is hard at work, I see. Can I help in any way?” he asked, glancing at the display before him.

“No, thank you, unless you can make me as full of interest and pleasure in these things as I used to be. Don’t you think preparing presents a great bore, except for those you love and who love you?” she added in a tone which had a slight tremor in it as she uttered the last words.

“I don’t give to people whom I care nothing for. Can’t do it, especially at Christmas, when goodwill should go into everything one does. If all these ‘pretties’ are for dear friends, you must have a great many.”

“I thought they were friends, but I find many of them are not, and that’s the trouble, sir.”

“Tell me all about it, dear, and let the old glove go,” he said, sitting down beside her with his most sympathetic air.

But she held the glove fast, saying eagerly, “No, no, I love to do this! I don’t feel as if I could look at you while I tell what a bad, suspicious girl I am,” she added, keeping her eyes on her work.

“Very well, I’m ready for confessions of any iniquity and glad to get them, for sometimes lately I’ve seen a cloud in my girl’s eyes and caught a worried tone in her voice. Is there a bitter drop in the cup that promised to be so sweet, Rose?”

“Yes, Uncle. I’ve tried to think there was not, but it is there, and I don’t like it. I’m ashamed to tell, and yet I want to, because you will show me how to make it sweet or assure me that I shall be the better for it, as you used to do when I took medicine.”

She paused a minute, sewing swiftly; then out came the trouble all in one burst of girlish grief and chagrin.

“Uncle, half the people who are so kind to me don’t care a bit for me, but for what I can give them, and that makes me unhappy, because I was so glad and proud to be liked. I do wish I hadn’t a penny in the world, then I should know who my true friends were.”

“Poor little lass! She has found out that all that glitters is not gold, and the disillusion has begun,” said the doctor to himself, adding aloud, smiling yet pitiful, “And so all the pleasure is gone out of the pretty gifts and Christmas is a failure?”

“Oh, no not for those whom nothing can make me doubt! It is sweeter than ever to make these things, because my heart is in every stitch and I know that, poor as they are, they will be dear to you, Aunty Plen, Aunt Jessie, Phebe, and the boys.”

She opened a drawer where lay a pile of pretty gifts, wrought with loving care by her own hands, touching them tenderly as she spoke and patting the sailor’s knot of blue ribbon on one fat parcel with a smile that told how unshakable her faith in someone was. “But these,” she said, pulling open another drawer and tossing over its gay contents with an air half sad, half scornful, “these I bought and give because they are expected. These people care only for a rich gift, not one bit for the giver, whom they will secretly abuse if she is not as generous as they expect. How can I enjoy that sort of thing, Uncle?"

"You cannot, but perhaps you do some of them injustice, my dear. Don't let the envy or selfishness of a few poison your faith in all. Are you sure that none of these girls care for you?" he asked, reading a name here and there on the parcels scattered about.

"I'm afraid I am. You see I heard several talking together the other evening at Annabel's, only a few words, but it hurt me very much, for nearly everyone was speculating on what I would give them and hoping it would be something fine. 'She's so rich she ought to be generous,' said one. 'I've been perfectly devoted to her for weeks and hope she won't forget it,' said another. 'If she doesn't give me some of her gloves, I shall think she's very mean, for she has heaps, and I tried on a pair in fun so she could see they fitted and take a hint,' added a third. I did take the hint, you see." And Rose opened a handsome box in which lay several pairs of her best gloves, with buttons enough to satisfy the heart of the most covetous.

"Plenty of silver paper and perfume, but not much love went into that bundle, I fancy?" And Dr. Alec could not help smiling at the disdainful little gesture with which Rose pushed away the box.

"Not a particle, nor in most of these. I have given them what they wanted and taken back the confidence and respect they didn't care for. It is wrong, I know, but I can't bear to think all the seeming goodwill and friendliness I've been enjoying was insincere and for a purpose. That's not the way I treat people."

"I am sure of it. Take things for what they are worth, dear, and try to find the wheat among the tares, for there is plenty if one knows how to look. Is that all the trouble?"

"No, sir, that is the lightest part of it. I shall soon get over my disappointment in those girls and take them for what they are worth as you advise, but being deceived in them makes me suspicious of others, and that is hateful. If I cannot trust people I'd rather keep by myself and be happy. I do detest maneuvering and underhanded plots and plans!"

Rose spoke petulantly and twitched her silk till it broke, while regret seemed to give place to anger as she spoke.

"There is evidently another thorn pricking. Let us have it out, and then I'll kiss the place to make it well as I used to do when I took the splinters from the fingers you are pricking so unmercifully," said the doctor, anxious to relieve his pet patient as soon as possible.

Rose laughed, but the color deepened in her cheeks as she answered with a pretty mixture of maidenly shyness and natural candor.

"Aunt Clara worries me by warning me against half the young men I meet and insisting that they want only my money. Now that is dreadful, and I won't listen, but I can't help thinking of it sometimes, for they are very kind to me and I'm not vain enough to think it is my beauty. I suppose I am foolish, but I do like to feel that I am something besides an heiress."

The little quiver was in Rose's voice again as she ended, and Dr. Alec gave a quick sigh as he looked at the downcast face so full of the perplexity ingenuous spirits feel when doubt first mars their faith and dims the innocent beliefs still left from childhood. He had been expecting this and knew that what the girl just began to perceive and try modestly to tell had long ago been plain to worldlier eyes. The heiress was the attraction to most of the young men whom she met. Good fellows enough, but educated, as nearly all are nowadays, to believe that girls with beauty or money are brought to market to sell or buy as the case may be.

Rose could purchase anything she liked, as she combined both advantages, and was soon surrounded by many admirers, each striving to secure the prize. Not being trained to believe that the only end and aim of a woman's life was a good match, she was a little disturbed, when the first pleasing excitement was over, to discover that her fortune was her chief attraction.

It was impossible for her to help seeing, hearing, guessing this from a significant glance, a stray word, a slight hint here and there, and the quick instinct of a woman felt even before it understood the self-interest which chilled for her so many opening friendships. In her eyes love was a very sacred thing, hardly to be thought of till it came, reverently received and cherished faithfully to the end. Therefore, it is not strange that she shrank from hearing it flippantly discussed and marriage treated as a bargain to be haggled over, with little thought of its high duties, great responsibilities, and tender joys. Many things perplexed her, and sometimes a doubt of all that till now she had believed and trusted made her feel as if at sea without a compass, for the new world was so unlike the one she had been living in that it bewildered while it charmed the novice.

Dr. Alec understood the mood in which he found her and did his best to warn without saddening by too much worldly wisdom.

"You are something besides an heiress to those who know and love you, so take heart, my girl, and hold fast to the faith that is in you. There is a touchstone for all these things, and whatever does not ring true, doubt and avoid. Test and try men and women as they come along, and I am sure conscience, instinct, and experience will keep you from any dire mistake," he said, with a protecting arm about her and a trustful look that was very comforting.

After a moment’s pause she answered, while a sudden smile dimpled around her mouth and the big glove went up to hide her telltale cheeks: “Uncle, if I must have lovers, I do wish they’d be more interesting. How can I like or respect men who go on as some of them do and then imagine women can feel honored by the offer of their hands? Hearts are out of fashion, so they don’t say much about them.”

“Ah, ha! That is the trouble, is it? And we begin to have delicate distresses, do we?” said Dr. Alec, glad to see her brightening and full of interest in the new topic, for he was a romantic old fellow, as he had confessed to his brother.

Rose put down the glove and looked up with a droll mixture of amusement and disgust in her face. “Uncle, it is perfectly disgraceful! I’ve wanted to tell you, but I was ashamed, because I never could boast of such things as some girls do, and they were so absurd I couldn’t feel as if they were worth repeating even to you. Perhaps I ought, though, for you may think it proper to command me to make a good match, and of course I should have to obey,” she added, trying to look meek.

“Tell, by all means. Don’t I always keep your secrets and give you the best advice, like a model guardian? You must have a confidant, and where find a better one than here?” he asked, tapping his waistcoat with an inviting gesture.

“Nowhere so I’ll tell all but the names. I’d best be prudent, for I’m afraid you may get a little fierce you do sometimes when people vex me,” began Rose, rather liking the prospect of a confidential chat with Uncle, for he had kept himself a good deal in the background lately.

“You know our ideas are old-fashioned, so I was not prepared to have men propose at all times and places with no warning but a few smiles and soft speeches. I expected things of that sort would be very interesting and proper, not to say thrilling, on my part but they are not, and I find myself laughing instead of crying, feeling angry instead of glad, and forgetting all about it very soon. Why, Uncle, one absurd boy proposed when we’d met only half a dozen times. But he was dreadfully in debt, so that accounted for it perhaps.” And Rose dusted her fingers, as if she had soiled them.

“I know him, and I thought he’d do it,” observed the doctor with a shrug.

“You see and know everything, so there’s no need of going on, is there?”

“Do, do! Who else? I won’t even guess.”

“Well, another went down upon his knees in Mrs. Van’s greenhouse and poured forth his passion manfully, with a great cactus pricking his poor legs all the while. Kitty found him there, and it was impossible to keep sober, so he has hated me ever since.”

The doctor’s “Ha! Ha!” was good to hear, and Rose joined him, for it was impossible to regard these episodes seriously, since no true sentiment redeemed them from absurdity.

“Another sent me reams of poetry and went on so Byronically that I began to wish I had red hair and my name was Betsy Ann. I burnt all the verses, so don’t expect to see them, and he, poor fellow, is consoling himself with Emma. But the worst of all was the one who would make love in public and insisted on proposing in the middle of a dance. I seldom dance round dances except with our boys, but that night I did because the girls laughed at me for being so ‘prudish,’ as they called it. I don’t mind them now, for I found I was right, and felt that I deserved my fate.”

“Is that all?” asked her uncle, looking “fierce,” as she predicted, at the idea of his beloved girl obliged to listen to a declaration, twirling on the arm of a lover.

“One more but him I shall not tell about, for I know he was in earnest and really suffered, though I was as kind as I knew how to be. I’m young in these things yet, so I grieved for him, and treat his love with the tenderest respect.”

Rose’s voice sank almost to a whisper as she ended, and Dr. Alec bent his head, as if involuntarily saluting a comrade in misfortune. Then he got up, saying with a keen look into the face he lifted by a finger under the chin: “Do you want another three months of this?”

“I’ll tell you on New Year’s Day, Uncle.”

“Very well. Try to keep a straight course, my little captain, and if you see dirty weather ahead, call on your first mate.”

“Aye, aye, sir. I’ll remember.”

Chapter 5 PRINCE CHARMING

The old glove lay upon the floor forgotten while Rose sat musing, till a quick step sounded in the hall and a voice drew near, tunefully humming.

“As he was walkin’ doun the street
The city for to view,
Oh, there he spied a bonny lass,
The window lookin’ through.”

“Sae licht he jumpèd up the stair,
And tirled at the pin;
Oh, wha sae ready as hersel’
To let the laddie in?”

sang Rose as the voice paused and a tap came at the door.

“Good morning, Rosamunda, here are your letters, and your most devoted ready to execute any commissions you may have for him,” was Charlie’s greeting as he came in looking comely, gay, and debonair as usual.

“Thanks. I’ve no errands unless you mail my replies, if these need answering, so by your leave, Prince,” and Rose began to open the handful of notes he threw into her lap.

“Ha! What sight is this to blast mine eyes?” ejaculated Charlie, as he pointed to the glove with a melodramatic start, for, like most accomplished amateur actors, he was fond of introducing private theatricals into his daily talk and conversation.

“Uncle left it.”

“‘Tis well. Methought perchance a rival had been here,” and, picking it up, Charlie amused himself with putting it on the head of a little Psyche which ornamented the mantelpiece, softly singing as he did so, another verse of the old song:

“He set his Jenny on his knee,
All in his Highland dress;
For brawly well he kenned the way
To please a bonny lass.”

Rose went on reading her letters, but all the while was thinking of her conversation with her uncle as well as something else suggested by the newcomer and his ditty.

During the three months since her return she had seen more of this cousin than any of the others, for he seemed to be the only one who had leisure to "play with Rose," as they used to say years ago. The other boys were all at work, even little Jamie, many of whose play hours were devoted to manful struggles with Latin grammar, the evil genius of his boyish life. Dr. Alec had many affairs to arrange after his long absence; Phebe was busy with her music; and Aunt Plenty still actively superintended her housekeeping. Thus it fell out, quite naturally, that Charlie should form the habit of lounging in at all hours with letters, messages, bits of news, and agreeable plans for Rose. He helped her with her sketching, rode with her, sang with her, and took her to parties as a matter of course, for Aunt Clara, being the gaiest of the sisters, played chaperon on all occasions.

For a time it was very pleasant, but, by and by, Rose began to wish Charlie would find something to do like the rest and not make dawdling after her the business of his life. The family was used to his self-indulgent ways, and there was an amiable delusion in the minds of the boys that he had a right to the best of everything, for to them he was still the Prince, the flower of the flock, and in time to be an honor to the name. No one exactly knew how, for, though full of talent, he seemed to have no especial gift or bias, and the elders began to shake their heads because, in spite of many grand promises and projects, the moment for decisive action never came.

Rose saw all this and longed to inspire her brilliant cousin with some manful purpose which should win for him respect as well as admiration. But she found it very hard, for though he listened with imperturbable good humor, and owned his shortcomings with delightful frankness, he always had some argument, reason, or excuse to offer and out-talked her in five minutes, leaving her silenced but unconvinced.

Of late she had observed that he seemed to feel as if her time and thoughts belonged exclusively to him and rather resented the approach of any other claimant. This annoyed her and suggested the idea that her affectionate interest and efforts were misunderstood by him, misrepresented and taken advantage of by Aunt Clara, who had been most urgent that she should "use her influence with the dear boy," though the fond mother resented all other interference. This troubled Rose and made her feel as if caught in a snare, for, while she owned to herself that Charlie was the most attractive of her cousins, she was not ready to be taken possession of in this masterful way, especially since other and sometimes better men sought her favor more humbly.

These thoughts were floating vaguely in her mind as she read her letters and unconsciously influenced her in the chat that followed.

"Only invitations, and I can't stop to answer them now or I shall never get through this job," she said, returning to her work.

"Let me help. You do up, and I'll direct. Have a secretary, do now, and see what a comfort it will be," proposed Charlie, who could turn his hand to anything and had made himself quite at home in the sanctum.

"I'd rather finish this myself, but you may answer the notes if you will. Just regrets to all but two or three. Read the names as you go along and I'll tell you which."

"To hear is to obey. Who says I'm a 'frivolous idler' now?" And Charlie sat down at the writing table with alacrity, for these hours in the little room were his best and happiest.

"Order is heaven's first law, and the view a lovely one, but I don't see any notepaper," he added, opening the desk and surveying its contents with interest.

"Right-hand drawer violet monogram for the notes, plain paper for the business letter. I'll see to that, though," answered Rose, trying to decide whether Annabel or Emma should have the laced handkerchief.

"Confiding creature! Suppose I open the wrong drawer and come upon the tender secrets of your soul?" continued the new secretary, rummaging out the delicate notepaper with masculine disregard of order.

"I haven't got any," answered Rose demurely.

"What, not one despairing scrawl, one cherished miniature, one faded floweret, etc., etc.? I can't believe it, Cousin," and he shook his head incredulously.

"If I had, I certainly should not show them to you, impertinent person! There are a few little souvenirs in that desk, but nothing very sentimental or interesting."

"How I'd like to see 'em! But I should never dare to ask," observed Charlie, peering over the top of the half-open lid with a most persuasive pair of eyes.

"You may if you want to, but you'll be disappointed, Paul Pry. Lower left-hand drawer with the key in it."

"'Angel of goodness, how shall I requite thee? Interesting moment, with what palpitating emotions art thou fraught!'" And, quoting from the "Mysteries of Udolpho," he unlocked and opened the drawer with a tragic gesture.

"Seven locks of hair in a box, all light, for 'here's your straw color, your orange tawny, your French crown color, and your perfect yellow' Shakespeare. They look very familiar, and I fancy I know the heads they thatched."

"Yes, you all gave me one when I went away, you know, and I carried them round the world with me in that very box."

"I wish the heads had gone too. Here's a jolly little amber god with a gold ring in his back and a most balmy breath," continued Charlie, taking a long sniff at the scent bottle.

"Uncle brought me that long ago, and I'm very fond of it."

"This now looks suspicious man's ring with a lotus cut on the stone and a note attached. I tremble as I ask, who, when, and where?"

"A gentleman, on my birthday, in Calcutta."

"I breathe again it was my sire?"

"Don't be absurd. Of course it was, and he did everything to make my visit pleasant. I wish you'd go and see him like a dutiful son, instead of idling here."

"That's what Uncle Mac is eternally telling me, but I don't intend to be lectured into the treadmill till I've had my fling first," muttered Charlie rebelliously.

"If you fling yourself in the wrong direction, you may find it hard to get back again," began Rose gravely.

"No fear, if you look after me as you seem to have promised to do, judging by the thanks you get in this note. Poor old governor! I should like to see him, for it's almost four years since he came home last and he must be getting on."

Charlie was the only one of the boys who ever called his father "governor," perhaps because the others knew and loved their fathers, while he had seen so little of his that the less respectful name came more readily to his lips, since the elder man in truth seemed a governor issuing requests or commands, which the younger too often neglected or resented.

Long ago Rose had discovered that Uncle Stephen found home made so distasteful by his wife's devotion to society that he preferred to exile himself, taking business as an excuse for his protracted absences.

The girl was thinking of this as she watched her cousin turn the ring about with a sudden sobriety which became him well; and, believing that the moment was propitious, she said earnestly: "He is getting on. Dear Charlie, do think of duty more than pleasure in this case and I'm sure you never will regret it."

"Do you want me to go?" he asked quickly.

"I think you ought."

"And I think you'd be much more charming if you wouldn't always be worrying about right and wrong! Uncle Alec taught you that along with the rest of his queer notions."

"I'm glad he did!" cried Rose warmly, then checked herself and said with a patient sort of sigh, "You know women always want the men they care for to be good and can't help trying to make them so."

"So they do, and we ought to be a set of angels, but I've a strong conviction that, if we were, the dear souls wouldn't like us half as well. Would they now?" asked Charlie with an insinuating smile.

“Perhaps not, but that is dodging the point. Will you go?” persisted Rose unwisely.

“No, I will not.”

That was sufficiently decided and an uncomfortable pause followed, during which Rose tied a knot unnecessarily tight and Charlie went on exploring the drawer with more energy than interest.

“Why, here’s an old thing I gave you ages ago!” he suddenly exclaimed in a pleased tone, holding up a little agate heart on a faded blue ribbon. “Will you let me take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh?” he asked, half in earnest, half in jest, touched by the little trinket and the recollections it awakened.

“No, I will not,” answered Rose bluntly, much displeased by the irreverent and audacious question.

Charlie looked rather abashed for a moment, but his natural lightheartedness made it easy for him to get the better of his own brief fits of waywardness and put others in good humor with him and themselves.

“Now we are even let’s drop the subject and start afresh,” he said with irresistible affability as he coolly put the little heart in his pocket and prepared to shut the drawer. But something caught his eye, and exclaiming, “What’s this? What’s this?” he snatched up a photograph which lay half under a pile of letters with foreign postmarks.

“Oh! I forgot that was there,” said Rose hastily.

“Who is the man?” demanded Charlie, eyeing the good-looking countenance before him with a frown.

“That is the Honorable Gilbert Murray, who went up the Nile with us and shot crocodiles and other small game, being a mighty hunter, as I told you in my letters,” answered Rose gaily, though ill pleased at the little discovery just then, for this had been one of the narrow escapes her uncle spoke of.

“And they haven’t eaten him yet, I infer from the pile of letters?” said Charlie jealously.

“I hope not. His sister did not mention it when she wrote last.”

“Ah! Then she is your correspondent? Sisters are dangerous things sometimes.” And Charlie eyed the packet suspiciously.

“In this case, a very convenient thing, for she tells me all about her brother’s wedding, as no one else would take the trouble to do.”

“Oh! Well, if he’s married, I don’t care a straw about him. I fancied I’d found out why you are such a hard-hearted charmer. But if there is no secret idol, I’m all at sea again.” And Charlie tossed the photograph into the drawer as if it no longer interested him.

"I'm hard-hearted because I'm particular and, as yet, do not find anyone at all to my taste."

"No one?" with a tender glance.

"No one" with a rebellious blush, and the truthful addition "I see much to admire and like in many persons, but none quite strong and good enough to suit me. My heroes are old-fashioned, you know."

"Prigs, like Guy Carleton, Count Altenberg, and John Halifax I know the pattern you goody girls like," sneered Charlie, who preferred the Guy Livingston, Beauclerc, and Rochester style.

"Then I'm not a 'goody girl,' for I don't like prigs. I want a gentleman in the best sense of the word, and I can wait, for I've seen one, and know there are more in the world."

"The deuce you have! Do I know him?" asked Charlie, much alarmed.

"You think you do," answered Rose with a mischievous sparkle in her eye.

"If it isn't Pem, I give it up. He's the best-bred fellow I know."

"Oh, dear, no! Far superior to Mr. Pemberton and many years older," said Rose, with so much respect that Charlie looked perplexed as well as anxious.

"Some apostolic minister, I fancy. You pious creatures always like to adore a parson. But all we know are married."

"He isn't."

"Give a name, for pity's sake I'm suffering tortures of suspense," begged Charlie.

"Alexander Campbell."

"Uncle? Well, upon my word, that's a relief, but mighty absurd all the same. So, when you find a young saint of that sort, you intend to marry him, do you?" demanded Charlie much amused and rather disappointed.

"When I find any man half as honest, good, and noble as Uncle, I shall be proud to marry him if he asks me," answered Rose decidedly.

"What odd tastes women have!" And Charlie leaned his chin on his hand to muse pensively for a moment over the blindness of one woman who could admire an excellent old uncle more than a dashing young cousin.

Rose, meanwhile, tied up her parcels industriously, hoping she had not been too severe, for it was very hard to lecture Charlie, though he seemed to like it sometimes and came to confession voluntarily, knowing that women love to forgive when the sinners are of his sort.

"It will be mail time before you are done," she said presently, for silence was less pleasant than his rattle.

Charlie took the hint and dashed off several notes in his best manner. Coming to the business letter, he glanced at it and asked, with a puzzled expression:

“What is all this? Cost of repairs, etc., from a man named Buffum?”

“Never mind that I’ll see to it by and by.”

“But I do mind, for I’m interested in all your affairs, and though you think I’ve no head for business, you’ll find I have if you’ll try me.”

“This is only about my two old houses in the city, which are being repaired and altered so that the rooms can be let singly.”

“Going to make tenement houses of them? Well, that’s not a bad idea such places pay well, I’ve heard.”

“That is just what I’m not going to do. I wouldn’t have a tenement house on my conscience for a million dollars not as they are now,” said Rose decidedly.

“Why, what do you know about it, except that people live in them and the owners turn a pretty penny on the rents?”

“I know a good deal about them, for I’ve seen many such, both here and abroad. It was not all pleasure with us, I assure you. Uncle was interested in hospitals and prisons, and I sometimes went with him, but they made me sad so he suggested other charities that I could be of help about when we came home. I visited infant schools, working women’s homes, orphan asylums, and places of that sort. You don’t know how much good it did me and how glad I am that I have the means of lightening a little some of the misery in the world.”

“But, my dear girl, you needn’t make ducks and drakes of your fortune trying to feed and cure and clothe all the poor wretches you see. Give, of course everyone should do something in that line and no one likes it better than I. But don’t, for mercy’s sake, go at it as some women do and get so desperately earnest, practical, and charity-mad that there is no living in peace with you,” protested Charlie, looking alarmed at the prospect.

“You can do as you please. I intend to do all the good I can by asking the advice and following the example of the most ‘earnest,’ ‘practical,’ and ‘charitable’ people I know so, if you don’t approve, you can drop my acquaintance,” answered Rose, emphasizing the obnoxious words and assuming the resolute air she always wore when defending her hobbies.

“You’ll be laughed at.”

“I’m used to that.”

“And criticized and shunned.”

“Not by people whose opinion I value.”

“Women shouldn’t go poking into such places.”

“I’ve been taught that they should.”

“Well, you’ll get some dreadful disease and lose your beauty, and then where are you?” added Charlie, thinking that might daunt the young philanthropist.

But it did not, for Rose answered, with a sudden kindling of the eyes as she remembered her talk with Uncle Alec: “I shouldn’t like it. But there would be one satisfaction in it, for when I’d lost my beauty and given away my money, I should know who really cared for me.”

Charlie nibbled his pen in silence for a moment, then asked, meekly, “Could I respectfully inquire what great reform is to be carried on in the old houses which their amiable owner is repairing?”

“I am merely going to make them comfortable homes for poor but respectable women to live in. There is a class who cannot afford to pay much, yet suffer a great deal from being obliged to stay in noisy, dirty, crowded places like tenement houses and cheap lodgings. I can help a few of them and I’m going to try.”

“May I humbly ask if these decayed gentlewomen are to inhabit their palatial retreat rent-free?”

“That was my first plan, but Uncle showed me that it was wiser not make genteel paupers of them, but let them pay a small rent and feel independent. I don’t want the money, of course, and shall use it in keeping the houses tidy or helping other women in like case,” said Rose, entirely ignoring her cousin’s covert ridicule.

“Don’t expect any gratitude, for you won’t get it; nor much comfort with a lot of forlornities on your hands, and be sure that when it is too late you will tire of it all and wish you had done as other people do.”

“Thanks for your cheerful prophecies, but I think I’ll venture.”

She looked so undaunted that Charlie was a little nettled and fired his last shot rather recklessly: “Well, one thing I do know you’ll never get a husband if you go on in this absurd way, and by Jove! you need one to take care of you and keep the property together!”

Rose had a temper, but seldom let it get the better of her; now, however, it flashed up for a moment. Those last words were peculiarly unfortunate, because Aunt Clara had used them more than once when warning her against impecunious suitors and generous projects. She was disappointed in her cousin, annoyed at having her little plans laughed at, and indignant with him for his final suggestion.

“I’ll never have one, if I must give up the liberty of doing what I know is right, and I’d rather go into the poorhouse tomorrow than ‘keep the property together’ in the selfish way you mean!”

That was all but Charlie saw that he had gone too far and hastened to make his peace with the skill of a lover, for, turning to the little cabinet piano behind him, he sang in his best style the sweet old song:

“Oh were thou in the cauld blast,”

dwelling with great effect, not only upon the tender assurance that “My plaid should shelter thee,”

but also that, even if a king,

“The brightest jewel in my crown
Wad be my queen, wad be my queen.”

It was very evident that Prince Charming had not gone troubadouring in vain, for Orpheus himself could not have restored harmony more successfully. The tuneful apology was accepted with a forgiving smile and a frank “I’m sorry I was cross, but you haven’t forgotten how to tease, and I’m rather out of sorts today. Late hours don’t agree with me.”

“Then you won’t feel like going to Mrs. Hope’s tomorrow, I’m afraid,” and Charlie took up the last note with an expression of regret which was very flattering.

“I must go, because it is made for me, but I can come away early and make up lost sleep. I do hate to be so fractious,” and Rose rubbed the forehead that ached with too much racketing.

“But the German does not begin till late I’m to lead and depend upon you. Just stay this once to oblige me,” pleaded Charlie, for he had set his heart on distinguishing himself.

“No I promised Uncle to be temperate in my pleasures and I must keep my word. I’m so well now, it would be very foolish to get ill and make him anxious not to mention losing my beauty, as you are good enough to call it, for that depends on health, you know.”

“But the fun doesn’t begin till after supper. Everything will be delightful, I assure you, and we’ll have a gay old time as we did last week at Emma’s.”

“Then I certainly will not, for I’m ashamed of myself when I remember what a romp that was and how sober Uncle looked as he let me in at three in the morning, all fagged out my dress in rags, my head aching, my feet so tired that I could hardly stand, and nothing to show for five hours’ hard work but a pocketful of bonbons, artificial flowers, and tissue-paper fool’s caps. Uncle said I’d better put one on and go to bed, for I looked as though I’d been to a French bal masque. I never want to hear him say so again, and I’ll never let dawn catch me out in such a plight anymore.”

“You were all right enough, for mother didn’t object and I got you both home before daylight. Uncle is notional about such things, so I shouldn’t mind, for we had a jolly time and we were none the worse for it.”

“Indeed we were, every one of us! Aunt Clara hasn’t gotten over her cold yet. I slept all the next day, and you looked like a ghost, for you’d been out every night for weeks, I think.”

"Oh, nonsense! Everyone does it during the season, and you'll get used to the pace very soon," began Charlie, bent on making her go, for he was in his element in a ballroom and never happier than when he had his pretty cousin on his arm.

"Ah! But I don't want to get used to it, for it costs too much in the end. I don't wish to get used to being whisked about a hot room by men who have taken too much wine, to turn day into night, wasting time that might be better spent, and grow into a fashionable fast girl who can't get along without excitement. I don't deny that much of it is pleasant, but don't try to make me too fond of gaiety. Help me to resist what I know is hurtful, and please don't laugh me out of the good habits Uncle has tried so hard to give me."

Rose was quite sincere in her appeal, and Charlie knew she was right, but he always found it hard to give up anything he had set his heart on, no matter how trivial, for the maternal indulgence which had harmed the boy had fostered the habit of self-indulgence, which was ruining the man. So when Rose looked up at him, with a very honest desire to save him as well as herself from being swept into the giddy vortex which keeps so many young people revolving aimlessly, till they go down or are cast upon the shore, wrecks of what they might have been, he gave a shrug and answered briefly: "As you please. I'll bring you home as early as you like, and Effie Waring shall take your place in the German. What flowers shall I send you?"

Now, that was an artful speech of Charlie's, for Miss Waring was a fast and fashionable damsel who openly admired Prince Charming and had given him the name. Rose disliked her and was sure her influence was bad, for youth made frivolity forgivable, wit hid want of refinement, and beauty always covers a multitude of sins in a man's eyes. At the sound of Effie's name, Rose wavered, and would have yielded but for the memory of the "first mate's" last words. She did desire to "keep a straight course"; so, though the current of impulse set strongly in a southerly direction, principle, the only compass worth having, pointed due north, and she tried to obey it like a wise young navigator, saying steadily, while she directed to Annabel the parcel containing a capacious pair of slippers intended for Uncle Mac: "Don't trouble yourself about me. I can go with Uncle and slip away without disturbing anybody."

"I don't believe you'll have the heart to do it," said Charlie incredulously as he sealed the last note.

"Wait and see."

"I will, but I shall hope to the last." And kissing his hand to her, he departed to post her letters, quite sure that Miss Waring would not lead the German.

It certainly looked for a moment as if Miss Campbell would, because she ran to the door with the words “I’ll go” upon her lips. But she did not open it till she had stood a minute staring hard at the old glove on Psyche’s head; then like one who had suddenly gotten a bright idea, she gave a decided nod and walked slowly out of the room.

Chapter 6 POLISHING MAC

“Please could I say one word?” was the question three times repeated before a rough head bobbed out from the grotto of books in which Mac usually sat when he studied.

“Did anyone speak?” he asked, blinking in the flood of sunshine that entered with Rose.

“Only three times, thank you. Don’t disturb yourself, I beg, for I merely want to say a word,” answered Rose as she prevented him from offering the easy chair in which he sat.

“I was rather deep in a compound fracture and didn’t hear. What can I do for you, Cousin?” And Mac shoved a stack of pamphlets off the chair near him with a hospitable wave of the hand that sent his papers flying in all directions.

Rose sat down, but did not seem to find her “word” an easy one to utter, for she twisted her handkerchief about her fingers in embarrassed silence till Mac put on his glasses and, after a keen look, asked soberly: “Is it a splinter, a cut, or a whitlow, ma’am?”

“It is neither. Do forget your tiresome surgery for a minute and be the kindest cousin that ever was,” answered Rose, beginning rather sharply and ending with her most engaging smile.

“Can’t promise in the dark,” said the wary youth.

“It is a favor, a great favor, and one I don’t choose to ask any of the other boys,” answered the artful damsel.

Mac looked pleased and leaned forward, saying more affably, “Name it, and be sure I’ll grant it if I can.”

“Go with me to Mrs. Hope’s party tomorrow night.”

“What!” And Mac recoiled as if she had put a pistol to his head.

“I’ve left you in peace a long time, but it is your turn now, so do your duty like a man and a cousin.”

“But I never go to parties!” cried the unhappy victim in great dismay.

“High time you began, sir.”

“But I don’t dance fit to be seen.”

“I’ll teach you.”

“My dress coat isn’t decent, I know.”

“Archie will lend you one he isn’t going.”

“I’m afraid there’s a lecture that I ought not to cut.”

“No, there isn’t I asked Uncle.”

“I’m always so tired and dull in the evening.”

“This sort of thing is just what you want to rest and freshen up your spirits.”

Mac gave a groan and fell back vanquished, for it was evident that escape was impossible.

“What put such a perfectly wild idea into your head?” he demanded, rather roughly, for hitherto he had been left in peace and this sudden attack decidedly amazed him.

“Sheer necessity, but don’t do it if it is so very dreadful to you. I must go to several more parties, because they are made for me, but after that I’ll refuse, and then no one need be troubled with me.”

Something in Rose’s voice made Mac answer penitently, even while he knit his brows in perplexity. “I don’t mean to be rude, and of course I’ll go anywhere if I’m really needed. But I don’t understand where the sudden necessity is, with three other fellows at command, all better dancers and beaus than I am.”

“I don’t want them, and I do want you, for I haven’t the heart to drag Uncle out anymore, and you know I never go with any gentleman but those of my own family.”

“Now look here, Rose if Steve has been doing anything to tease you, just mention it and I’ll attend to him,” cried Mac, plainly seeing that something was amiss and fancying that Dandy was at the bottom of it, as he had done escort duty several times lately.

“No, Steve has been very good, but I know he had rather be with Kitty Van, so of course I feel like a marplot, though he is too polite to hint it.”

“What a noodle that boy is! But there’s Archie he’s steady as a church and has no sweetheart to interfere,” continued Mac, bound to get at the truth and half suspecting what it was.

“He is on his feet all day, and Aunt Jessie wants him in the evening. He does not care for dancing as he used, and I suppose he really does prefer to rest and read.” Rose might have added, “And hear Phebe sing,” for Phebe did not go out as much as Rose did, and Aunt Jessie often came to sit with the old lady when the young folks were away and, of course, dutiful Archie came with her, so willingly of late!

“What’s amiss with Charlie? I thought he was the prince of cavaliers. Annabel says he dances ‘like an angel,’ and I know a dozen mothers couldn’t keep him at home of an evening. Have you had a tiff with Adonis and so fall back on poor me?” asked Mac, coming last to the person of whom he thought first but did not mention, feeling shy about alluding to a subject often discussed behind her back.

“Yes, I have, and I don’t intend to go with him any more for some time. His ways do not suit me, and mine do not suit him, so I want to be quite independent, and you can help me if you will," said Rose, rather nervously spinning the big globe close by.

Mac gave a low whistle, looking wide awake all in a minute as he said with a gesture, as if he brushed a cobweb off his face: "Now, see here, Cousin, I'm not good at mysteries and shall only blunder if you put me blindfold into any nice maneuver. Just tell me straight out what you want and I'll do it if I can. Play I'm Uncle and free your mind come now."

He spoke so kindly, and the honest eyes were so full of merry goodwill, that Rose thought she might confide in him and answered as frankly as he could desire: "You are right, Mac, and I don't mind talking to you almost as freely as to Uncle, because you are such a reliable fellow and won't think me silly for trying to do what I believe to be right. Charlie does, and so makes it hard for me to hold to my resolutions. I want to keep early hours, dress simply, and behave properly no matter what fashionable people do. You will agree to that, I'm sure, and stand by me through thick and thin for principle's sake."

"I will, and begin by showing you that I understand the case. I don't wonder you are not pleased, for Charlie is too presuming, and you do need someone to help you head him off a bit. Hey, Cousin?"

"What a way to put it!" And Rose laughed in spite of herself, adding with an air of relief, "That is it, and I do want someone to help me make him understand that I don't choose to be taken possession of in that lordly way, as if I belonged to him more than to the rest of the family. I don't like it, for people begin to talk, and Charlie won't see how disagreeable it is to me."

"Tell him so," was Mac's blunt advice.

"I have, but he only laughs and promises to behave, and then he does it again when I am so placed that I can't say anything. You will never understand, and I cannot explain, for it is only a look, or a word, or some little thing but I won't have it, and the best way to cure him is to put it out of his power to annoy me so."

"He is a great flirt and wants to teach you how, I suppose. I'll speak to him if you like and tell him you don't want to learn. Shall I?" asked Mac, finding the case rather an interesting one.

"No, thank you that would only make trouble. If you will kindly play escort a few times, it will show Charlie that I am in earnest without more words and put a stop to the gossip," said Rose, coloring like a poppy at the recollection of what she heard one young man whisper to another as Charlie led her through a crowded supper room with his most devoted air, "Lucky dog! He is sure to get the heiress, and we are nowhere."

“There’s no danger of people gossiping about us, is there?” And Mac looked up with the oddest of all his odd expressions.

“Of course not you’re only a boy.”

“I’m twenty-one, thank you, and Prince is but a couple of years older,” said Mac, promptly resenting the slight put upon his manhood.

“Yes, but he is like other young men, while you are a dear old bookworm. No one would ever mind what you did, so you may go to parties with me every night and not a word would be said or, if there was, I shouldn’t mind since it is ‘only Mac,’“ answered Rose, smiling as she quoted a household phrase often used to excuse his vagaries.

“Then I am nobody?” he said, lifting his brows as if the discovery surprised and rather nettled him.

“Nobody in society as yet, but my very best cousin in private, and I’ve just proved my regard by making you my confidant and choosing you for my knight,” said Rose, hastening to soothe the feelings her careless words seemed to have ruffled slightly.

“Much good that is likely to do me,” grumbled Mac.

“You ungrateful boy, not to appreciate the honor I’ve conferred upon you! I know a dozen who would be proud of the place, but you only care for compound fractures, so I won’t detain you any longer, except to ask if I may consider myself provided with an escort for tomorrow night?” said Rose, a trifle hurt at his indifference, for she was not used to refusals.

“If I may hope for the honor.” And, rising, he made her a bow which was such a capital imitation of Charlie’s grand manner that she forgave him at once, exclaiming with amused surprise: “Why, Mac! I didn’t know you could be so elegant!”

“A fellow can be almost anything he likes if he tries hard enough,” he answered, standing very straight and looking so tall and dignified that Rose was quite impressed, and with a stately courtesy she retired, saying graciously: “I accept with thanks. Good morning, Dr. Alexander Mackenzie Campbell.”

When Friday evening came and word was sent up that her escort had arrived, Rose ran down, devoutly hoping that he had not come in a velveteen jacket, top-boots, black gloves, or made any trifling mistake of that sort. A young gentleman was standing before the long mirror, apparently intent upon the arrangement of his hair, and Rose paused suddenly as her eye went from the glossy broadcloth to the white-gloved hands, busy with an unruly lock that would not stay in place.

“Why, Charlie, I thought — ” she began with an accent of surprise in her voice, but got no further, for the gentleman turned and she beheld Mac in immaculate evening costume, with his hair parted sweetly on his brow, a superior posy at his buttonhole, and the expression of a martyr on his face.

"Ah, don't you wish it was? No one but yourself to thank that it isn't he. Am I right? Dandy got me up, and he ought to know what is what," demanded Mac, folding his hands and standing as stiff as a ramrod.

"You are so regularly splendid that I don't know you."

"Neither do I."

"I really had no idea you could look so like a gentleman," added Rose, surveying him with great approval.

"Nor that I could feel so like a fool."

"Poor boy! He does look rather miserable. What can I do to cheer him up in return for the sacrifice he is making?"

"Stop calling me a boy. It will soothe my agony immensely and give me courage to appear in a low-necked coat and curl on my forehead, for I'm not used to such elegancies and I find them no end of a trial."

Mac spoke in such a pathetic tone, and gave such a gloomy glare at the aforesaid curl, that Rose laughed in his face and added to his woe by handing him her cloak. He surveyed it gravely for a minute, then carefully put it on wrong side out and gave the swan's-down hood a good pull over the head, to the utter destruction of all smoothness to the curls inside.

Rose uttered a cry and cast off the cloak, bidding him learn to do it properly, which he meekly did and then led her down the hall without walking on her skirts more than three times on the way. But at the door she discovered that she had forgotten her furred overshoes and bade Mac get them.

"Never mind it's not wet," he said, pulling his cap over his eyes and plunging into his coat, regardless of the "elegancies" that afflicted him.

"But I can't walk on cold stones with thin slippers, can I?" began Rose, showing him a little white foot.

"You needn't, for there you are, my lady." And, unceremoniously picking her up, Mac landed her in the carriage before she could say a word.

"What an escort!" she exclaimed in comic dismay, as she rescued her delicate dress from a rug in which he was about to tuck her up like a mummy.

"It's 'only Mac,' so don't mind," and he cast himself into an opposite corner with the air of a man who had nerved himself to the accomplishment of many painful duties and was bound to do them or die.

"But gentlemen don't catch up ladies like bags of meal and poke them into carriages in this way. It is evident that you need looking after, and it is high time I undertook your society manners. Now, do mind what you are about and don't get yourself or me into a scrape if you can help it," besought Rose, feeling that on many accounts she had gone further and fared worse.

"I'll behave like a Turveydrop see if I don't."

Mac's idea of the immortal Turveydrop's behavior seemed to be a peculiar one; for, after dancing once with his cousin, he left her to her own devices and soon forgot all about her in a long conversation with Professor Stumph, the learned geologist. Rose did not care, for one dance proved to her that that branch of Mac's education had been sadly neglected, and she was glad to glide smoothly about with Steve, though he was only an inch or two taller than herself. She had plenty of partners, however, and plenty of chaperons, for all the young men were her most devoted, and all the matrons beamed upon her with maternal benignity.

Charlie was not there, for when he found that Rose stood firm, and had moreover engaged Mac as a permanency, he would not go at all and retired in high dudgeon to console himself with more dangerous pastimes. Rose feared it would be so, and even in the midst of the gaiety about her an anxious mood came over her now and then and made her thoughtful for a moment. She felt her power and wanted to use it wisely, but did not know how to be kind to Charlie without being untrue to herself and giving him false hopes.

"I wish we were all children again, with no hearts to perplex us and no great temptations to try us," she said to herself as she rested a minute in a quiet nook while her partner went to get a glass of water. Right in the midst of this half-sad, half-sentimental reverie, she heard a familiar voice behind her say earnestly: "And allophite is the new hydrous silicate of alumina and magnesia, much resembling pseudophite, which Websky found in Silesia."

"What is Mac talking about!" she thought, and, peeping behind a great azalea in full bloom, she saw her cousin in deep conversation with the professor, evidently having a capital time, for his face had lost its melancholy expression and was all alive with interest, while the elder man was listening as if his remarks were both intelligent and agreeable.

"What is it?" asked Steve, coming up with the water and seeing a smile on Rose's face.

She pointed out the scientific tete-a-tete going on behind the azalea, and Steve grinned as he peeped, then grew sober and said in a tone of despair: "If you had seen the pains I took with that fellow, the patience with which I brushed his wig, the time I spent trying to convince him that he must wear thin boots, and the fight I had to get him into that coat, you'd understand my feelings when I see him now."

"Why, what's the matter with him?" asked Rose.

"Will you take a look and see what a spectacle he has made of himself. He'd better be sent home at once or he will disgrace the family by looking as if he'd been in a row."

Steve spoke in such a tragic tone that Rose took another peep and did sympathize with Dandy, for Mac's elegance was quite gone. His tie was under one ear, his posy hung upside down, his gloves were rolled into a ball, which he absently squeezed and pounded as he talked, and his hair looked as if a whirlwind had passed over it, for his ten fingers set it on end now and then, as they had a habit of doing when he studied or talked earnestly. But he looked so happy and wide awake, in spite of his dishevelment, that Rose gave an approving nod and said behind her fan: "It is a trying spectacle, Steve yet, on the whole, I think his own odd ways suit him best and I fancy we shall be proud of him, for he knows more than all the rest of us put together. Hear that now." And Rose paused that they might listen to the following burst of eloquence from Mac's lips: "You know Frenzal has shown that the globular forms of silicate of bismuth at Schneeburg and Johanngeorgenstadt are not isometric, but monoclinic in crystalline form, and consequently he separates them from the old eulytite and gives them the new name Agricolite."

"Isn't it awful? Let us get out of this before there's another avalanche or we shall be globular silicates and isometric crystals in spite of ourselves," whispered Steve with a panic-stricken air, and they fled from the hailstorm of hard words that rattled about their ears, leaving Mac to enjoy himself in his own way.

But when Rose was ready to go home and looked about for her escort, he was nowhere to be seen, for the professor had departed, and Mac with him, so absorbed in some new topic that he entirely forgot his cousin and went placidly home, still pondering on the charms of geology. When this pleasing fact dawned upon Rose her feelings may be imagined. She was both angry and amused it was so like Mac to go mooning off and leave her to her fate. Not a hard one, however; for, though Steve was gone with Kitty before her plight was discovered, Mrs. Bliss was only too glad to take the deserted damsel under her wing and bear her safely home.

Rose was warming her feet and sipping the chocolate which Phebe always had ready for her, as she never ate supper, when a hurried tap came at the long window whence the light streamed and Mac's voice was heard softly asking to be let in "just for one minute."

Curious to know what had befallen him, Rose bade Phebe obey his call and the delinquent cavalier appeared, breathless, anxious, and more dilapidated than ever, for he had forgotten his overcoat; his tie was at the back of his neck now; and his hair as rampantly erect as if all the winds of heaven had been blowing freely through it, as they had, for he had been tearing to and fro the last half hour, trying to undo the dreadful deed he had so innocently committed.

"Don't take any notice of me, for I don't deserve it. I only came to see that you were safe, Cousin, and then go hang myself, as Steve advised," he began in a remorseful tone that would have been very effective if he had not been obliged to catch his breath with a comical gasp now and then.

"I never thought you would be the one to desert me," said Rose with a reproachful look, thinking it best not to relent too soon, though she was quite ready to do it when she saw how sincerely distressed he was.

"It was that confounded man! He was a regular walking encyclopedia, and, finding I could get a good deal out of him, I went in for general information, as the time was short. You know I always forget everything else when I get hold of such a fellow."

"That is evident. I wonder how you came to remember me at all," answered Rose, on the brink of a laugh it was so absurd.

"I didn't till Steve said something that reminded me then it burst upon me, in one awful shock, that I'd gone and left you, and you might have knocked me down with a feather," said honest Mac, hiding none of his iniquity.

"What did you do then?"

"Do! I went off like a shot and never stopped till I reached the Hopes'"

"You didn't walk all the way?" cried Rose.

"Bless you, no I ran. But you were gone with Mrs. Bliss, so I pelted back again to see with my own eyes that you were safe at home," answered Mac with a sigh of relief, wiping his hot forehead.

"But it is three miles at least each way, and twelve o'clock, and dark and cold. Oh, Mac! How could you!" exclaimed Rose, suddenly realizing what he had done as she heard his labored breathing, saw the state of the thin boots, and detected the absence of an overcoat.

"Couldn't do less, could I?" asked Mac, leaning up against the door and trying not to pant.

"There was no need of half killing yourself for such a trifle. You might have known I could take care of myself for once, at least, with so many friends about. Sit down this minute. Bring another cup, please, Phebe this boy isn't going home till he is rested and refreshed after such a run as that," commanded Rose.

"Don't be good to me I'd rather take a scolding than a chair, and drink hemlock instead of chocolate if you happen to have any ready," answered Mac with a pathetic puff as he subsided onto the sofa and meekly took the draft Phebe brought him.

"If you had anything the matter with your heart, sir, a race of this sort might be the death of you so never do it again," said Rose, offering her fan to cool his heated countenance.

"Haven't got any heart."

"Yes, you have, for I hear it beating like a trip-hammer, and it is my fault I ought to have stopped as we went by and told you I was all right."

"It's the mortification, not the miles, that upsets me. I often take that run for exercise and think nothing of it but tonight I was so mad I made extra-good time, I fancy. Now don't you worry, but compose your mind and 'sip your dish of tea,' as Evelina says," answered Mac, artfully turning the conversation from himself.

"What do you know about Evelina?" asked Rose in great surprise.

"All about her. Do you suppose I never read a novel?"

"I thought you read nothing but Greek and Latin, with an occasional glance at Websky's pseudophites and the monoclinics of Johanngeorgenstadt."

Mac opened his eyes wide at this reply, then seemed to see the joke and joined in the laugh with such heartiness that Aunt Plenty's voice was heard demanding from above with sleepy anxiety: "Is the house afire?"

"No, ma'am, everything is safe, and I'm only saying good night," answered Mac, diving for his cap.

"Then go at once and let that child have her sleep," added the old lady, retiring to her bed.

Rose ran into the hall, and catching up her uncle's fur coat, met Mac as he came out of the study, absently looking about for his own.

"You haven't any, you benighted boy! So take this, and have your wits about you next time or I won't let you off so easily," she said, holding up the heavy garment and peeping over it, with no sign of displeasure in her laughing eyes.

"Next time! Then you do forgive me? You will try me again, and give me a chance to prove that I'm not a fool?" cried Mac, embracing the big coat with emotion.

"Of course I will, and, so far from thinking you a fool, I was much impressed with your learning tonight and told Steve that we ought to be proud of our philosopher."

"Learning be hanged! I'll show you that I'm not a bookworm but as much a man as any of them, and then you may be proud or not, as you like!" cried Mac with a defiant nod that caused the glasses to leap wildly off his nose as he caught up his hat and departed as he came.

A day or two later Rose went to call upon Aunt Jane, as she dutifully did once or twice a week. On her way upstairs she heard a singular sound in the drawing room and involuntarily stopped to listen.

"One, two, three, slide! One, two, three, turn! Now, then, come on!" said one voice impatiently.

"It's very easy to say 'come on,' but what the dickens do I do with my left leg while I'm turning and sliding with my right?" demanded another voice in a breathless and mournful tone.

Then the whistling and thumping went on more vigorously than before, and Rose, recognizing the voices, peeped through the half-open door to behold a sight which made her shake with suppressed laughter. Steve, with a red tablecloth tied around his waist, languished upon Mac's shoulder, dancing in perfect time to the air he whistled, for Dandy was proficient in the graceful art and plumed himself upon his skill. Mac, with a flushed face and dizzy eye, clutched his brother by the small of his back, vainly endeavoring to steer him down the long room without entangling his own legs in the tablecloth, treading on his partner's toes, or colliding with the furniture. It was very droll, and Rose enjoyed the spectacle till Mac, in a frantic attempt to swing around, dashed himself against the wall and landed Steve upon the floor. Then it was impossible to restrain her laughter any longer and she walked in upon them, saying merrily: "It was splendid! Do it again, and I'll play for you."

Steve sprang up and tore off the tablecloth in great confusion, while Mac, still rubbing his head, dropped into a chair, trying to look quite calm and cheerful as he gasped out: "How are you, Cousin? When did you come? John should have told us."

"I'm glad he didn't, for then I should have missed this touching tableau of cousinly devotion and brotherly love. Getting ready for our next party, I see."

"Trying to, but there are so many things to remember all at once keep time, steer straight, dodge the petticoats, and manage my confounded legs that it isn't easy to get on at first," answered Mac with a sigh of exhaustion, wiping his hot forehead.

"Hardest job I ever undertook and, as I'm not a battering ram, I decline to be knocked round any longer," growled Steve, dusting his knees and ruefully surveying the feet that had been trampled on till they tingled, for his boots and broadcloth were dear to the heart of the dapper youth.

"Very good of you, and I'm much obliged. I've got the pace, I think, and can practice with a chair to keep my hand in," said Mac with such a comic mixture of gratitude and resignation that Rose went off again so irresistibly that her cousins joined her with a hearty roar.

"As you are making a martyr of yourself in my service, the least I can do is lend a hand. Play for us, Steve, and I'll give Mac a lesson, unless he prefers the chair." And, throwing off her hat and cloak, Rose beckoned so invitingly that the gravest philosopher would have yielded.

"A thousand thanks, but I'm afraid I shall hurt you," began Mac, much gratified, but mindful of past mishaps.

"I'm not. Steve didn't manage his train well, for good dancers always loop theirs up. I have none at all, so that trouble is gone and the music will make it much easier to keep step. Just do as I tell you, and you'll go beautifully after a few turns."

"I will, I will! Pipe up, Steve! Now, Rose!" And, brushing his hair out of his eyes with an air of stern determination, Mac grasped Rose and returned to the charge bent on distinguishing himself if he died in the attempt.

The second lesson prospered, for Steve marked the time by a series of emphatic bangs; Mac obeyed orders as promptly as if his life depended on it; and, after several narrow escapes at exciting moments, Rose had the satisfaction of being steered safely down the room and landed with a grand pirouette at the bottom. Steve applauded, and Mac, much elated, exclaimed with artless candor: "There really is a sort of inspiration about you, Rose. I always detested dancing before, but now, do you know, I rather like it."

"I knew you would, only you mustn't stand with your arm round your partner in this way when you are done. You must seat and fan her, if she likes it," said Rose, anxious to perfect a pupil who seemed so lamentably in need of a teacher.

"Yes, of course, I know how they do it." And, releasing his cousin, Mac raised a small whirlwind around her with a folded newspaper, so full of zeal that she had not the heart to chide him again.

"Well done, old fellow. I begin to have hopes of you and will order you a new dress coat at once, since you are really going in for the proprieties of life," said Steve from the music stool, with the approving nod of one who was a judge of said proprieties. "Now, Rose, if you will just coach him a little in his small talk, he won't make a laughingstock of himself as he did the other night," added Steve. "I don't mean his geological gabble that was bad enough, but his chat with Emma Curtis was much worse. Tell her, Mac, and see if she doesn't think poor Emma had a right to think you a first-class bore."

"I don't see why, when I merely tried to have a little sensible conversation," began Mac with reluctance, for he had been unmercifully chaffed by his cousins, to whom his brother had betrayed him.

"What did you say? I won't laugh if I can help it," said Rose, curious to hear, for Steve's eyes were twinkling with fun.

"Well, I knew she was fond of theaters, so I tried that first and got on pretty well till I began to tell her how they managed those things in Greece. Most interesting subject, you know?"

"Very. Did you give her one of the choruses or a bit of Agamemnon, as you did when you described it to me?" asked Rose, keeping sober with difficulty as she recalled that serio-comic scene.

"Of course not, but I was advising her to read Prometheus when she gaped behind her fan and began to talk about Phebe. What a ‘nice creature’ she was, ‘kept her place,’ dressed according to her station, and that sort of twaddle. I suppose it was rather rude, but being pulled up so short confused me a bit, and I said the first thing that came into my head, which was that I thought Phebe the best-dressed woman in the room because she wasn’t all fuss and feathers like most of the girls.”

“Oh, Mac! That to Emma, who makes it the labor of her life to be always in the height of fashion and was particularly splendid that night. What did she say?” cried Rose, full of sympathy for both parties.

“She bridled and looked daggers at me.”

“And what did you do?”

“I bit my tongue and tumbled out of one scrape into another. Following her example, I changed the subject by talking about the charity concert for the orphans, and when she gushed about the ‘little darlings,’ I advised her to adopt one and wondered why young ladies didn’t do that sort of thing, instead of cuddling cats and lapdogs.”

“Unhappy boy! Her pug is the idol of her life, and she hates babies,” said Rose.

“More fool she! Well, she got my opinion on the subject, anyway, and she’s very welcome, for I went on to say that I thought it would not only be a lovely charity, but excellent training for the time when they had little darlings of their own. No end of poor things die through the ignorance of mothers, you know,” added Mac, so seriously that Rose dared not smile at what went before.

“Imagine Emma trotting round with a pauper baby under her arm instead of her cherished Toto,” said Steve with an ecstatic twirl on the stool.

“Did she seem to like your advice, Monsieur Malapropos?” asked Rose, wishing she had been there.

“No, she gave a little shriek and said, ‘Good gracious, Mr. Campbell, how droll you are! Take me to Mama, please,’ which I did with a thankful heart. Catch me setting her pug’s leg again,” ended Mac with a grim shake of the head.

“Never mind. You were unfortunate in your listener that time. Don’t think all girls are so foolish. I can show you a dozen sensible ones who would discuss dress reform and charity with you and enjoy Greek tragedy if you did the chorus for them as you did for me,” said Rose consolingly, for Steve would only jeer.

“Give me a list of them, please, and I’ll cultivate their acquaintance. A fellow must have some reward for making a teetotum of himself.”

“I will with pleasure; and if you dance well they will make it very pleasant for you, and you’ll enjoy parties in spite of yourself.”

“I cannot be a ‘glass of fashion and a mold of form’ like Dandy here, but I’ll do my best: only, if I had my choice, I’d much rather go round the streets with an organ and a monkey,” answered Mac despondently.

“Thank you kindly for the compliment,” and Rose made him a low courtesy, while Steve cried, “Now you have done it!” in a tone of reproach which reminded the culprit, all too late, that he was Rose’s chosen escort.

“By the gods, so I have!” And casting away the newspaper with a gesture of comic despair, Mac strode from the room, chanting tragically the words of Cassandra, “‘Woe! woe! O Earth! O Apollo! I will dare to die; I will accost the gates of Hades, and make my prayer that I may receive a mortal blow!’“

Chapter 7 PHEBE

While Rose was making discoveries and having experiences, Phebe was doing the same in a quieter way, but though they usually compared notes during the bedtime tete-a-tete which always ended their day, certain topics were never mentioned, so each had a little world of her own into which even the eye of friendship did not peep.

Rose’s life just now was the gaiest but Phebe’s the happiest. Both went out a good deal, for the beautiful voice was welcomed everywhere, and many were ready to patronize the singer who would have been slow to recognize the woman. Phebe knew this and made no attempt to assert herself, content to know that those whose regard she valued felt her worth and hopeful of a time when she could gracefully take the place she was meant to fill.

Proud as a princess was Phebe about some things, though in most as humble as a child; therefore, when each year lessened the service she loved to give and increased the obligations she would have refused from any other source, dependence became a burden which even the most fervent gratitude could not lighten. Hitherto the children had gone on together, finding no obstacles to their companionship in the secluded world in which they lived. Now that they were women their paths inevitably diverged, and both reluctantly felt that they must part before long.

It had been settled, when they were abroad, that on their return Phebe should take her one gift in her hand and try her fortunes. On no other terms would she accept the teaching which was to fit her for the independence she desired. Faithfully had she used the facilities so generously afforded both at home and abroad and now was ready to prove that they had not been in vain. Much encouraged by the small successes she won in drawing rooms, and the praise bestowed by interested friends, she began to feel that she might venture on a larger field and begin her career as a concert singer, for she aimed no higher.

Just at this time much interest was felt in a new asylum for orphan girls, which could not be completed for want of funds. The Campbells well had borne their part and still labored to accomplish the much-needed charity. Several fairs had been given for this purpose, followed by a series of concerts. Rose had thrown herself into the work with all her heart and now proposed that Phebe should make her debut at the last concert, which was to be a peculiarly interesting one, as all the orphans were to be present and were expected to plead their own cause by the sight of their innocent helplessness as well as touch hearts by the simple airs they were to sing.

Some of the family thought Phebe would object to so humble a beginning, but Rose knew her better and was not disappointed, for when she made her proposal Phebe answered readily: “Where could I find a fitter time and place to come before the public than here among my little sisters in misfortune? I’ll sing for them with all my heart only I must be one of them and have no flourish made about me.”

“You shall arrange it as you like, and as there is to be little vocal music but yours and the children’s, I’ll see that you have everything as you please,” promised Rose.

It was well she did, for the family got much excited over the prospect of “our Phebe’s debut” and would have made a flourish if the girls had not resisted. Aunt Clara was in despair about the dress because Phebe decided to wear a plain claret-colored merino with frills at neck and wrists so that she might look, as much as possible, like the other orphans in their stuff gowns and white aprons. Aunt Plenty wanted to have a little supper afterward in honor of the occasion, but Phebe begged her to change it to a Christmas dinner for the poor children. The boys planned to throw bushels of flowers, and Charlie claimed the honor of leading the singer in. But Phebe, with tears in her eyes, declined their kindly offers, saying earnestly: “I had better begin as I am to go on and depend upon myself entirely. Indeed, Mr. Charlie, I’d rather walk in alone, for you’d be out of place among us and spoil the pathetic effect we wish to produce.” And a smile sparkled through the tears as Phebe looked at the piece of elegance before her and thought of the brown gowns and pinafores.

So, after much discussion, it was decided that she should have her way in all things and the family content themselves with applauding from the front.

“We’ll blister our hands every man of us, and carry you home in a chariot and four see if we don’t, you perverse prima donna!” threatened Steve, not at all satisfied with the simplicity of the affair.

“A chariot and two will be very acceptable as soon as I’m done. I shall be quite steady till my part is all over, and then I may feel a little upset, so I’d like to get away before the confusion begins. Indeed, I don’t mean to be perverse, but you are all so kind to me, my heart is full whenever I think of it, and that wouldn’t do if I’m to sing,” said Phebe, dropping one of the tears on the little frill she was making.

“No diamond could have adorned it better,” Archie thought as he watched it shine there for a moment, and felt like shaking Steve for daring to pat the dark head with an encouraging “All right. I’ll be on hand and whisk you away while the rest are splitting their gloves. No fear of your breaking down. If you feel the least bit like it, though, just look at me and I'll glare at you and shake my fist, since kindness upsets you."

"I wish you would, because one of my ballads is rather touching and I always want to cry when I sing it. The sight of you trying to glare will make me want to laugh and that will steady me nicely, so sit in front, please, ready to slip out when I come off the last time."

"Depend upon me!" And the little man departed, taking great credit to himself for his influence over tall, handsome Phebe.

If he had known what was going on in the mind of the silent young gentleman behind the newspaper, Steve would have been much astonished, for Archie, though apparently engrossed by business, was fathoms deep in love by this time. No one suspected this but Rose, for he did his wooing with his eyes, and only Phebe knew how eloquent they could be. He had discovered what the matter was long ago had made many attempts to reason himself out of it, but, finding it a hopeless task, had given up trying and let himself drift deliciously. The knowledge that the family would not approve only seemed to add ardor to his love and strength to his purpose, for the same energy and persistence which he brought to business went into everything he did, and having once made up his mind to marry Phebe, nothing could change this plan except a word from her.

He watched and waited for three months, so that he might not be accused of precipitation, though it did not take him one to decide that this was the woman to make him happy. Her steadfast nature, quiet, busy ways, and the reserved power and passion betrayed sometimes by a flash of the black eyes, a quiver of the firm lips, suited Archie, who possessed many of the same attributes himself. The obscurity of her birth and isolation of her lot, which would have deterred some lovers, not only appealed to his kindly heart, but touched the hidden romance which ran like a vein of gold through his strong common sense and made practical, steady-going Archie a poet when he fell in love. If Uncle Mac had guessed what dreams and fancies went on in the head bent over his ledgers, and what emotions were fermenting in the bosom of his staid "right-hand man," he would have tapped his forehead and suggested a lunatic asylum. The boys thought Archie had sobered down too soon. His mother began to fear that the air of the counting room did not suit him, and Dr. Alec was deluded into the belief that the fellow really began to "think of Rose," he came so often in the evening, seeming quite content to sit beside her worktable and snip tape or draw patterns while they chatted.

No one observed that, though he talked to Rose on these occasions, he looked at Phebe, in her low chair close by, busy but silent, for she always tried to efface herself when Rose was near and often mourned that she was too big to keep out of sight. No matter what he talked about, Archie always saw the glossy black braids on the other side of the table, the damask cheek curving down into the firm white throat, and the dark lashes, lifted now and then, showing eyes so deep and soft he dared not look into them long. Even the swift needle charmed him, the little brooch which rose and fell with her quiet breath, the plain work she did, and the tidy way she gathered her bits of thread into a tiny bag. He seldom spoke to her; never touched her basket, though he ravaged Rose's if he wanted string or scissors; very rarely ventured to bring her some curious or pretty thing when ships came in from China only sat and thought of her, imagined that this was his parlor, this her worktable, and they two sitting there alone a happy man and wife.

At this stage of the little evening drama he would be conscious of such a strong desire to do something rash that he took refuge in a new form of intoxication and proposed music, sometimes so abruptly that Rose would pause in the middle of a sentence and look at him, surprised to meet a curiously excited look in the usually cool gray eyes.

Then Phebe, folding up her work, would go to the piano, as if glad to find a vent for the inner life which she seemed to have no power of expressing except in song. Rose would follow to accompany her, and Archie, moving to a certain shady corner whence he could see Phebe's face as she sang, would give himself up to unmitigated rapture for half an hour. Phebe never sang so well as at such times, for the kindly atmosphere was like sunshine to a bird, criticisms were few and gentle, praises hearty and abundant, and she poured out her soul as freely as a spring gushes up when its hidden source is full.

In moments such as these Phebe was beautiful with the beauty that makes a man's eye brighten with honest admiration and fills his heart with a sense of womanly nobility and sweetness. Little wonder, then, that the chief spectator of this agreeable tableau grew nightly more enamored, and while the elders were deep in whist, the young people were playing that still more absorbing game in which hearts are always trumps.

Rose, having Dummy for a partner, soon discovered the fact and lately had begun to feel as she fancied Wall must have done when Pyramus wooed Thisbe through its chinks. She was a little startled at first, then amused, then anxious, then heartily interested, as every woman is in such affairs, and willingly continued to be a medium, though sometimes she quite tingled with the electricity which seemed to pervade the air. She said nothing, waiting for Phebe to speak, but Phebe was silent, seeming to doubt the truth till doubt became impossible, then to shrink as if suddenly conscious of wrongdoing and seize every possible pretext for absenting herself from the "girls' corner," as the pretty recess was called.

The concert plan afforded excellent opportunities for doing this, and evening after evening she slipped away to practice her songs upstairs while Archie sat staring disconsolately at the neglected work basket and mute piano. Rose pitied him and longed to say a word of comfort, but felt shy he was such a reserved fellow so left him to conduct his quiet wooing in his own way, feeling that the crisis would soon arrive.

She was sure of this as she sat beside him on the evening of the concert, for while the rest of the family nodded and smiled, chatted and laughed in great spirits, Archie was as mute as a fish and sat with his arms tightly folded, as if to keep in any unruly emotions which might attempt to escape. He never looked at the program, but Rose knew when Phebe’s turn came by the quick breath he drew and the intent look, so absent before, that came into his eyes.

But her own excitement prevented much notice of his, for Rose was in a flutter of hope and fear, sympathy and delight, about Phebe and her success. The house was crowded; the audience sufficiently mixed to make the general opinion impartial; and the stage full of little orphans with shining faces, a most effective reminder of the object in view.

“Little dears, how nice they look!” “Poor things, so young to be fatherless and motherless.” “It will be a disgrace to the city if those girls are not taken proper care of.” “Subscriptions are always in order, you know, and pretty Miss Campbell will give you her sweetest smile if you hand her a handsome check.” “I’ve heard this Phebe Moore, and she really has a delicious voice such a pity she won’t fit herself for opera!” “Only sings three times tonight; that’s modest, I’m sure, when she’s the chief attraction, so we must give her an encore after the Italian piece.” “The orphans lead off, I see. Stop your ears if you like, but don’t fail to applaud or the ladies will never forgive you.”

Chat of this sort went on briskly while fans waved, programs rustled, and ushers flew about distractedly, till an important gentleman appeared, made his bow, skipped upon the leader’s stand, and with a wave of his baton caused a general uprising of white pinafores as the orphans led off with that much-enduring melody “America” in shrill small voices, but with creditable attention to time and tune. Pity and patriotism produced a generous round of applause, and the little girls sat down, beaming with innocent satisfaction.

An instrumental piece followed, and then a youthful gentleman, with his hair in picturesque confusion, and what his friends called a “musical brow,” bounded up the steps and, clutching a roll of music with a pair of tightly gloved hands, proceed to inform the audience, in a husky tenor voice, that “It was a lovely violet.”

What else the song contained in the way of sense or sentiment it was impossible to discover as the three pages of music appeared to consist of variations upon that one line, ending with a prolonged quaver which flushed the musical brow and left the youth quite breathless when he made his bow.

“Now she’s coming! Oh, Uncle, my heart beats as if it were myself!” whispered Rose, clutching Dr. Alec’s arm with a little gasp as the piano was rolled forward, the leader’s stand pushed back, and all eyes turned toward the anteroom door.

She forgot to glance at Archie, and it was as well perhaps, for his heart was thumping almost audibly as he waited for his Phebe. Not from the anteroom, but out among the children, where she had sat unseen in the shadow of the organ, came stately Phebe in her wine-colored dress, with no ornament but her fine hair and a white flower at her throat. Very pale, but quite composed, apparently, for she stepped slowly through the narrow lane of upturned faces, holding back her skirts lest they should rudely brush against some little head. Straight to the front she went, bowed hastily, and, with a gesture to the accompanist, stood waiting to begin, her eyes fixed on the great gilt clock at the opposite end of the hall.

They never wandered from that point while she sang, but as she ended they dropped for an instant on an eager, girlish countenance bending from a front seat; then, with her hasty little bow, she went quickly back among the children, who clapped and nodded as she passed, well pleased with the ballad she had sung.

Everyone courteously followed their example, but there was no enthusiasm, and it was evident that Phebe had not produced a particularly favorable impression.

“Never sang so badly in her life,” muttered Charlie irefully.

“She was frightened, poor thing. Give her time, give her time,” said Uncle Mac kindly.

“I know she was, and I glared like a gorgon, but she never looked at me,” added Steve, smoothing his gloves and his brows at the same time.

“That first song was the hardest, and she got through much better than I expected,” put in Dr. Alec, bound not to show the disappointment he felt.

“Don’t be troubled. Phebe has courage enough for anything, and she’ll astonish you before the evening’s over,” prophesied Mac with unabated confidence, for he knew something the rest did not.

Rose said nothing, but under cover of her burnous gave Archie’s hand a sympathetic squeeze, for his arms were unfolded now, as if the strain was over, and one lay on his knee while with the other he wiped his hot forehead with an air of relief.

Friends about them murmured complimentary fibs and affected great delight and surprise at Miss Moore’s “charming style,” “exquisite simplicity,” and “undoubted talent.” But strangers freely criticized, and Rose was so indignant at some of their remarks, she could not listen to anything on the stage, though a fine overture was played, a man with a remarkable bass voice growled and roared melodiously, and the orphans sang a lively air with a chorus of “Tra, la, la,” which was a great relief to little tongues unused to long silence.

“I’ve often heard that women’s tongues were hung in the middle and went at both ends now I’m sure of it,” whispered Charlie, trying to cheer her up by pointing out the comical effect of some seventy-five open mouths in each of which the unruly member was wagging briskly.

Rose laughed and let him fan her, leaning from his seat behind with the devoted air he always assumed in public, but her wounded feelings were not soothed and she continued to frown at the stout man on the left who had dared to say with a shrug and a glance at Phebe’s next piece, “That young woman can no more sing this Italian thing than she can fly, and they ought not to let her attempt it.”

Phebe did, however, and suddenly changed the stout man’s opinion by singing it grandly, for the consciousness of her first failure pricked her pride and spurred her to do her best with the calm sort of determination which conquers fear, fires ambition, and changes defeat to success. She looked steadily at Rose now, or the flushed, intent face beside her, and throwing all her soul into the task, let her voice ring out like a silver clarion, filling the great hall and setting the hearers’ blood a-tingle with the exulting strain.

That settled Phebe’s fate as a cantatrice. The applause was genuine and spontaneous this time and broke out again and again with the generous desire to atone for former coldness. But she would not return, and the shadow of the great organ seemed to have swallowed her up, for no eye could find her, no pleasant clamor win her back.

“Now I can die content,” said Rose, beaming with heartfelt satisfaction while Archie looked steadfastly at his program, trying to keep his face in order, and the rest of the family assumed a triumphant air, as if they had never doubted from the first.

“Very well, indeed,” said the stout man with an approving nod. “Quite promising for a beginner. Shouldn’t wonder if in time they made a second Cary or Kellogg of her.”

“Now you’ll forgive him, won’t you?” murmured Charlie in his cousin’s ear.

“Yes, and I’d like to pat him on the head. But take warning and never judge by first appearances again,” whispered Rose, at peace now with all mankind.

Phebe's last song was another ballad; she meant to devote her talent to that much neglected but always attractive branch of her art. It was a great surprise, therefore, to all but one person in the hall when, instead of singing "Auld Robin Grey," she placed herself at the piano, and, with a smiling glance over her shoulder at the children, broke out in the old bird song which first won Rose. But the chirping, twittering, and cooing were now the burden to three verses of a charming little song, full of springtime and the awakening life that makes it lovely. A rippling accompaniment flowed through it all, and a burst of delighted laughter from the children filled up the first pause with a fitting answer to the voices that seemed calling to them from the vernal woods.

It was very beautiful, and novelty lent its charm to the surprise, for art and nature worked a pretty miracle and the clever imitation, first heard from a kitchen hearth, now became the favorite in a crowded concert room. Phebe was quite herself again; color in the cheeks now; eyes that wandered smiling to and fro; and lips that sang as gaily and far more sweetly than when she kept time to her blithe music with a scrubbing brush.

This song was evidently intended for the children, and they appreciated the kindly thought, for as Phebe went back among them, they clapped ecstatically, flapped their pinafores, and some caught her by the skirts with audible requests to "Do it again, please; do it again."

But Phebe shook her head and vanished, for it was getting late for such small people, several of whom "lay sweetly slumbering there" till roused by the clamor round them. The elders, however, were not to be denied and applauded persistently, especially Aunt Plenty, who seized Uncle Mac's cane and pounded with it as vigorously as "Mrs. Nubbles" at the play.

"Never mind your gloves, Steve; keep it up till she comes," cried Charlie, enjoying the fun like a boy while Jamie lost his head with excitement and, standing up, called "Phebe! Phebe!" in spite of his mother's attempts to silence him.

Even the stout man clapped, and Rose could only laugh delightedly as she turned to look at Archie, who seemed to have let himself loose at last and was stamping with a dogged energy funny to see.

So Phebe had to come, and stood there meekly bowing, with a moved look on her face that showed how glad and grateful she was, till a sudden hush came; then, as if inspired by the memory of the cause that brought her there, she looked down into the sea of friendly faces before her, with no trace of fear in her own, and sang the song that never will grow old.

That went straight to the hearts of those who heard her, for there was something inexpressibly touching in the sight of this sweet-voiced woman singing of home for the little creatures who were homeless, and Phebe made her tuneful plea irresistible by an almost involuntary gesture of the hands which had hung loosely clasped before her till, with the last echo of the beloved word, they fell apart and were half outstretched, as if pleading to be filled.

It was the touch of nature that works wonders, for it made full purses suddenly weigh heavily in pockets slow to open, brought tears to eyes unused to weep, and caused that group of red-gowned girls to grow very pathetic in the sight of fathers and mothers who had left little daughters safe asleep at home. This was evident from the stillness that remained unbroken for an instant after Phebe ended; and before people could get rid of their handkerchiefs she would have been gone if the sudden appearance of a mite in a pinafore, climbing up the stairs from the anteroom with a great bouquet grasped in both hands, had not arrested her.

Up came the little creature, intent on performing the mission for which rich bribes of sugarplums had been promised, and trotting bravely across the stage, she held up the lovely nosegay, saying in her baby voice, “Dis for you, ma’am.” Then, startled by the sudden outburst of applause, she hid her face in Phebe’s gown and began to sob with fright.

An awkward minute for poor Phebe, but she showed unexpected presence of mind and left behind her a pretty picture of the oldest and youngest orphan as she went quickly down the step, smiling over the great bouquet with the baby on her arm.

Nobody minded the closing piece, for people began to go, sleepy children to be carried off, and whispers grew into a buzz of conversation. In the general confusion Rose looked to see if Steve had remembered his promise to help Phebe slip away before the rush began. No, there he was putting on Kitty’s cloak, quite oblivious to any other duty. Turning to ask Archie to hurry out, Rose found that he had already vanished, leaving his gloves behind him.

“Have you lost anything?” asked Dr. Alec, catching a glimpse of her face.

“No, sir, I’ve found something,” she whispered back, giving him the gloves to pocket along with her fan and glass, adding hastily as the concert ended, “Please, Uncle, tell them all not to come with us. Phebe has had enough excitement and ought to rest.”

Rose’s word was law to the family in all things concerning Phebe. So word was passed that there were to be no congratulations until tomorrow, and Dr. Alec got his party off as soon as possible. But all the way home, while he and Aunt Plenty were prophesying a brilliant future for the singer, Rose sat rejoicing over the happy present of the woman. She was sure that Archie had spoken and imagined the whole scene with feminine delight how tenderly he had asked the momentous question, how gratefully Phebe had given the desired reply, and now how both were enjoying that delicious hour which Rose had been given to understand never came but once. Such a pity to shorten it, she thought, and begged her uncle to go home the longest way the night was so mild, the moonlight so clear, and herself so in need of fresh air after the excitement of the evening.

"I thought you would want to rush into Phebe's arms the instant she got done," said Aunt Plenty, innocently wondering at the whims girls took into their heads.

"So I should if I consulted my own wishes, but as Phebe asked to be let alone I want to gratify her," answered Rose, making the best excuse she could.

"A little piqued," thought the doctor, fancying he understood the case.

As the old lady's rheumatism forbade their driving about till midnight, home was reached much too soon, Rose thought, and tripped away to warn the lovers the instant she entered the house. But study, parlor, and boudoir were empty; and, when Jane appeared with cake and wine, she reported that "Miss Phebe went right upstairs and wished to be excused, please, being very tired."

"That isn't at all like Phebe I hope she isn't ill," began Aunt Plenty, sitting down to toast her feet.

"She may be a little hysterical, for she is a proud thing and represses her emotions as long as she can. I'll step up and see if she doesn't need a soothing draft of some sort." And Dr. Alec threw off his coat as he spoke.

"No, no, she's only tired. I'll run up to her she won't mind me and I'll report if anything is amiss."

Away went Rose, quite trembling with suspense, but Phebe's door was shut, no light shone underneath, and no sound came from the room within. She tapped and receiving no answer, went on to her own chamber, thinking to herself: "Love always makes people queer, I've heard, so I suppose they settled it all in the carriage and the dear thing ran away to think about her happiness alone. I'll not disturb her. Why, Phebe!" said Rose, surprised, for, entering her room, there was the cantatrice, busy about the nightly services she always rendered her little mistress.

"I'm waiting for you, dear. Where have you been so long?" asked Phebe, poking the fire as if anxious to get some color into cheeks that were unnaturally pale.

The instant she spoke Rose knew that something was wrong, and a glance at her face confirmed the fear. It was like a dash of cold water and quenched her happy fancies in a moment; but being a delicate-minded girl, she respected Phebe's mood and asked no questions, made no comments, and left her friend to speak or be silent as she chose.

"I was so excited I would take a turn in the moonlight to calm my nerves. Oh, dearest Phebe, I am so glad, so proud, so full of wonder at your courage and skill and sweet ways altogether that I cannot half tell you how I love and honor you!" she cried, kissing the white cheeks with such tender warmth they could not help glowing faintly as Phebe held her little mistress close, sure that nothing could disturb this innocent affection.

"It is all your work, dear, because but for you I might still be scrubbing floors and hardly dare to dream of anything like this," she said in her old grateful way, but in her voice there was a thrill of something deeper than gratitude, and at the last two words her head went up with a gesture of soft pride as if it had been newly crowned.

Rose heard and saw and guessed at the meaning of both tone and gesture, feeling that her Phebe deserved both the singer's laurel and the bride's myrtle wreath. But she only looked up, saying very wistfully: "Then it has been a happy night for you as well as for us."

"The happiest of my life, and the hardest," answered Phebe briefly as she looked away from the questioning eyes.

"You should have let us come nearer and help you through. I'm afraid you are very proud, my Jenny Lind."

"I have to be, for sometimes I feel as if I had nothing else to keep me up." She stopped short there, fearing that her voice would prove traitorous if she went on. In a moment she asked in a tone that was almost hard: "You think I did well tonight?"

"They all think so, and were so delighted they wanted to come in a body and tell you so, but I sent them home because I knew you'd be tired out. Perhaps I ought not to have done it and you'd rather have had a crowd about you than just me?"

"It was the kindest thing you ever did, and what could I like better than 'just you,' my darling?"

Phebe seldom called her that, and when she did her heart was in the little word, making it so tender that Rose thought it the sweetest in the world, next to Uncle Alec's "my little girl." Now it was almost passionate, and Phebe's face grew rather tragical as she looked down at Rose. It was impossible to seem unconscious any longer, and Rose said, caressing Phebe's cheek, which burned with a feverish color now: "Then don't shut me out if you have a trouble, but let me share it as I let you share all mine."

"I will! Little mistress, I've got to go away, sooner even than we planned."

"Why, Phebe?"

"Because Archie loves me."

“That’s the very reason you should stay and make him happy.”

“Not if it caused dissension in the family, and you know it would.”

Rose opened her lips to deny this impetuously, but checked herself and answered honestly: “Uncle and I would be heartily glad, and I’m sure Aunt Jessie never could object if you loved Archie as he does you.”

“She has other hopes, I think, and kind as she is, it would be a disappointment if he brought me home. She is right, they all are, and I alone am to blame. I should have gone long ago I knew I should, but it was so pleasant, I couldn’t bear to go away alone.”

“I kept you, and I am to blame if anyone, but indeed, dear Phebe, I cannot see why you should care even if Aunt Myra croaks and Aunt Clara exclaims or Aunt Jane makes disagreeable remarks. Be happy, and never mind them,” cried Rose, so much excited by all this that she felt the spirit of revolt rise up within her and was ready to defy even that awe-inspiring institution “the family” for her friend’s sake.

But Phebe shook her head with a sad smile and answered, still with the hard tone in her voice as if forcing back all emotion that she might see her duty clearly: “You could do that, but I never can. Answer me this, Rose, and answer truly as you love me. If you had been taken into a house, a friendless, penniless, forlorn girl, and for years been heaped with benefits, trusted, taught, loved, and made, oh, so happy! could you think it right to steal away something that these good people valued very much? To have them feel that you had been ungrateful, had deceived them, and meant to thrust yourself into a high place not fit for you when they had been generously helping you in other ways, far more than you deserved. Could you then say as you do now, ‘Be happy, and never mind them’?”

Phebe held Rose by the shoulders now and searched her face so keenly that the other shrank a little, for the black eyes were full of fire and there was something almost grand about this girl who seemed suddenly to have become a woman. There was no need for words to answer the question so swiftly asked, for Rose put herself in Phebe’s place in the drawing of a breath, and her own pride made her truthfully reply: “No I could not!”

“I knew you’d say that, and help me do my duty.” And all the coldness melted out of Phebe’s manner as she hugged her little mistress close, feeling the comfort of sympathy even through the blunt sincerity of Rose’s words.

“I will if I know how. Now, come and tell me all about it.” And, seating herself in the great chair which had often held them both, Rose stretched out her hands as if glad and ready to give help of any sort.

But Phebe would not take her accustomed place, for, as if coming to confession, she knelt down upon the rug and, leaning on the arm of the chair, told her love story in the simplest words.

"I never thought he cared for me until a little while ago. I fancied it was you, and even when I knew he liked to hear me sing I supposed it was because you helped, and so I did my best and was glad you were to be a happy girl. But his eyes told the truth. Then I saw what I had been doing and was frightened. He did not speak, so I believed, what is quite true, that he felt I was not a fit wife for him and would never ask me. It was right I was glad of it, yet I was proud and, though I did not ask or hope for anything, I did want him to see that I respected myself, remembered my duty, and could do right as well as he. I kept away. I planned to go as soon as possible and resolved that at this concert I would do so well, he should not be ashamed of poor Phebe and her one gift."

"It was this that made you so strange, then, preferring to go alone and refusing every little favor at our hands?" asked Rose, feeling very sure now about the state of Phebe's heart.

"Yes, I wanted to do everything myself and not owe one jot of my success, if I had any, to even the dearest friend I've got. It was bad and foolish of me, and I was punished by the first dreadful failure. I was so frightened, Rose! My breath was all gone, my eyes so dizzy I could hardly see, and that great crowd of faces seemed so near, I dared not look. If it had not been for the clock I never should have gotten through, and when I did, not knowing in the least how I'd sung, one look at your distressed face told me I'd failed."

"But I smiled, Phebe indeed I did as sweetly as I could, for I was sure it was only fright," protested Rose eagerly.

"So you did, but the smile was full of pity, not of pride, as I wanted it to be, and I rushed into a dark place behind the organ, feeling ready to kill myself. How angry and miserable I was! I set my teeth, clenched my hands, and vowed that I would do well next time or never sing another note. I was quite desperate when my turn came, and felt as if I could do almost anything, for I remembered that he was there. I'm not sure how it was, but it seemed as if I was all voice, for I let myself go, trying to forget everything except that two people must not be disappointed, though I died when the song was done."

"Oh, Phebe, it was splendid! I nearly cried, I was so proud and glad to see you do yourself justice at last."

"And he?" whispered Phebe, with her face half hidden on the arm of the chair.

"Said not a word, but I saw his lips tremble and his eyes shine and I knew he was the happiest creature there, because I was sure he did think you fit to be his wife and did mean to speak very soon."

Phebe made no answer for a moment, seeming to forget the small success in the greater one which followed and to comfort her sore heart with the knowledge that Rose was right.

“He sent the flowers, he came for me, and, on the way home, showed me how wrong I had been to doubt him for an hour. Don’t ask me to tell that part, but be sure I was the happiest creature in the world then.”

And Phebe hid her face again, all wet with tender tears that fell soft and sudden as a summer shower.

Rose let them flow undisturbed while she silently caressed the bent head, wondering, with a wistful look in her own wet eyes, what this mysterious passion was which could so move, ennoble, and beautify the beings whom it blessed.

An impertinent little clock upon the chimneypiece striking eleven broke the silence and reminded Phebe that she could not indulge in love dreams there. She started up, brushed off her tears, and said resolutely: “That is enough for tonight. Go happily to bed, and leave the troubles for tomorrow.”

“But, Phebe, I must know what you said,” cried Rose, like a child defrauded of half its bedtime story.

“I said, ‘No.’“

“Ah! But it will change to ‘yes’ by and by, I’m sure of that so I’ll let you go to dream of him. The Campbells are rather proud of being descendants of Robert the Bruce, but they have common sense and love you dearly, as you’ll see tomorrow.”

“Perhaps.” And with a good night kiss, poor Phebe went away, to lie awake till dawn.

Chapter 8 BREAKERS AHEAD

Anxious to smooth the way for Phebe, Rose was up betimes and slipped into Aunt Plenty's room before the old lady had gotten her cap on.

"Aunty, I've something pleasant to tell you, and while you listen, I'll brush your hair, as you like to have me," she began, well aware that the proposed process was a very soothing one.

"Yes, dear only don't be too particular, because I'm late and must hurry down or Jane won't get things straight, and it does fidget me to have the saltcellars uneven, the tea strainer forgotten, and your uncle's paper not aired," returned Miss Plenty, briskly unrolling the two gray curls she wore at her temples.

Then Rose, brushing away at the scanty back hair, led skillfully up to the crisis of her tale by describing Phebe's panic and brave efforts to conquer it; all about the flowers Archie sent her; and how Steve forgot, and dear, thoughtful Archie took his place. So far it went well and Aunt Plenty was full of interest, sympathy, and approbation, but when Rose added, as if it was quite a matter of course, "So, on the way home, he told her he loved her," a great start twitched the gray locks out of her hands as the old lady turned around, with the little curls standing erect, exclaiming, in undisguised dismay: "Not seriously, Rose?"

"Yes, Aunty, very seriously. He never jokes about such things."

"Mercy on us! What shall we do about it?"

"Nothing, ma'am, but be as glad as we ought and congratulate him as soon as she says 'yes.'?

"Do you mean to say she didn't accept at once?"

"She never will if we don't welcome her as kindly as if she belonged to one of our best families, and I don't blame her."

"I'm glad the girl has so much sense. Of course we can't do anything of the sort, and I'm surprised at Archie's forgetting what he owes to the family in this rash manner. Give me my cap, child I must speak to Alec at once." And Aunt Plenty twisted her hair into a button at the back of her head with one energetic twirl.

"Do speak kindly, Aunty, and remember that it was not Phebe's fault. She never thought of this till very lately and began at once to prepare for going away," said Rose pleadingly.

"She ought to have gone long ago. I told Myra we should have trouble somewhere as soon as I saw what a good-looking creature she was, and here it is as bad as can be. Dear, dear! Why can't young people have a little prudence?"

"I don't see that anyone need object if Uncle Jem and Aunt Jessie approve, and I do think it will be very, very unkind to scold poor Phebe for being well-bred, pretty, and good, after doing all we could to make her so."

"Child, you don't understand these things yet, but you ought to feel your duty toward your family and do all you can to keep the name as honorable as it always has been. What do you suppose our blessed ancestress Lady Marget would say to our oldest boy taking a wife from the poorhouse?"

As she spoke, Miss Plenty looked up, almost apprehensively, at one of the wooden-faced old portraits with which her room was hung, as if asking pardon of the severe-nosed matron who stared back at her from under the sort of blue dish cover which formed her headgear.

"As Lady Marget died about two hundred years ago, I don't care a pin what she would say, especially as she looks like a very narrow-minded, haughty woman. But I do care very much what Miss Plenty Campbell says, for she is a very sensible, generous, discreet, and dear old lady who wouldn't hurt a fly, much less a good and faithful girl who has been a sister to me. Would she?" entreated Rose, knowing well that the elder aunt led all the rest more or less.

But Miss Plenty had her cap on now and consequently felt herself twice the woman she was without it, so she not only gave it a somewhat belligerent air by setting it well up, but she shook her head decidedly, smoothed down her stiff white apron, and stood up as if ready for battle.

"I shall do my duty, Rose, and expect the same of others. Don't say any more now I must turn the matter over in my mind, for it has come upon me suddenly and needs serious consideration."

With which unusually solemn address she took up her keys and trotted away, leaving her niece to follow with an anxious countenance, uncertain whether her championship had done good or ill to the cause she had at heart.

She was much cheered by the sound of Phebe's voice in the study, for Rose was sure that if Uncle Alec was on their side all would be well. But the clouds lowered again when they came in to breakfast, for Phebe's heavy eyes and pale cheeks did not look encouraging, while Dr. Alec was as sober as a judge and sent an inquiring glance toward Rose now and then as if curious to discover how she bore the news.

An uncomfortable meal, though all tried to seem as usual and talked over last night's events with all the interest they could. But the old peace was disturbed by a word, as a pebble thrown into a quiet pool sends telltale circles rippling its surface far and wide. Aunt Plenty, while "turning the subject over in her mind," also seemed intent on upsetting everything she touched and made sad havoc in her tea tray; Dr. Alec unsociably read his paper; Rose, having salted instead of sugared her oatmeal, absently ate it, feeling that the sweetness had gone out of everything; and Phebe, after choking down a cup of tea and crumbling a roll, excused herself and went away, sternly resolving not to be a bone of contention to this beloved family.

As soon as the door was shut Rose pushed away her plate and, going to Dr. Alec, she peeped over the paper with such an anxious face that he put it down at once.

“Uncle, this is a serious matter, and we must take our stand at once, for you are Phebe’s guardian and I am her sister,” began Rose with pretty solemnity. “You have often been disappointed in me,” she continued, “but I know I never shall be in you because you are too wise and good to let any worldly pride or prudence spoil your sympathy with Archie and our Phebe. You won’t desert them, will you?”

“Never!” answered Dr. Alec with gratifying energy.

“Thank you! Thank you!” cried Rose. “Now, if I have you and Aunty on my side, I’m not afraid of anybody.”

“Gently, gently, child. I don’t intend to desert the lovers, but I certainly shall advise them to consider well what they are about. I’ll own I am rather disappointed, because Archie is young to decide his life in this way and Phebe’s career seemed settled in another fashion. Old people don’t like to have their plans upset, you know,” he added more lightly, for Rose’s face fell as he went on.

“Old people shouldn’t plan too much for the young ones, then. We are very grateful, I’m sure, but we cannot always be disposed of in the most prudent and sensible way, so don’t set your hearts on little arrangements of that sort, I beg,” And Rose looked wondrous wise, for she could not help suspecting even her best uncle of “plans” in her behalf.

“You are quite right-we shouldn’t, yet it is very hard to help it,” confessed Dr. Alec with a conscious air, and, returning hastily to the lovers, he added kindly: “I was much pleased with the straightforward way in which Phebe came to me this morning and told me all about it, as if I really was her guardian. She did not own it in words, but it was perfectly evident that she loves Archie with all her heart, yet, knowing the objections which will be made, very sensibly and bravely proposes to go away at once and end the matter as if that were possible, poor child.” And the tenderhearted man gave a sigh of sympathy that did Rose good to hear and mollified her rising indignation at the bare idea of ending Phebe’s love affairs in such a summary way.

“You don’t think she ought to go, I hope?”

"I think she will go."

"We must not let her."

"We have no right to keep her."

"Oh, Uncle, surely we have! Our Phebe, whom we all love so much."

"You forget that she is a woman now, and we have no claim on her. Because we've befriended her for years is the very reason we should not make our benefits a burden, but leave her free, and if she chooses to do this in spite of Archie, we must let her with a Godspeed."

Before Rose could answer, Aunt Plenty spoke out like one having authority, for old-fashioned ways were dear to her soul and she thought even love affairs should be conducted with a proper regard to the powers that be.

"The family must talk the matter over and decide what is best for the children, who of course will listen to reason and do nothing ill advised. For my part, I am quite upset by the news, but shall not commit myself till I've seen Jessie and the boy. Jane, clear away, and bring me the hot water."

That ended the morning conference. And, leaving the old lady to soothe her mind by polishing spoons and washing cups, Rose went away to find Phebe while the doctor retired to laugh over the downfall of brother Mac's matchmaking schemes.

The Campbells did not gossip about their concerns in public, but being a very united family, it had long been the custom to "talk over" any interesting event which occurred to any member thereof, and everyone gave his or her opinion, advice, or censure with the utmost candor. Therefore the first engagement, if such it could be called, created a great sensation, among the aunts especially, and they were in as much of a flutter as a flock of maternal birds when their young begin to hop out of the nest. So at all hours the excellent ladies were seen excitedly nodding their caps together as they discussed the affair in all its bearings, without ever arriving at any unanimous decision.

The boys took it much more calmly. Mac was the only one who came out strongly in Archie's favor. Charlie thought the Chief ought to do better and called Phebe "a siren who had bewitched the sage youth." Steve was scandalized and delivered long orations upon one's duty to society, keeping the old name up, and the danger of mésalliances, while all the time he secretly sympathized with Archie, being much smitten with Kitty Van himself. Will and Geordie, unfortunately home for the holidays, considered it "a jolly lark," and little Jamie nearly drove his elder brother distracted by curious inquiries as to "how folks felt when they were in love."

Uncle Mac's dismay was so comical that it kept Dr. Alec in good spirits, for he alone knew how deep was the deluded man's chagrin at the failure of the little plot which he fancied was prospering finely.

"I'll never set my heart on anything of the sort again, and the young rascals may marry whom they like. I'm prepared for anything now — so if Steve brings home the washerwoman's daughter, and Mac runs away with our pretty chambermaid, I shall say, 'Bless you my children,' with mournful resignation, for, upon my soul, that is all that's left for a modern parent to do."

With which tragic burst, poor Uncle Mac washed his hands of the whole affair and buried himself in the countinghouse while the storm raged.

About this time Archie might have echoed Rose's childish wish, that she had not quite so many aunts, for the tongues of those interested relatives made sad havoc with his little romance and caused him to long fervently for a desert island where he could woo and win his love in delicious peace. That nothing of the sort was possible soon became evident, since every word uttered only confirmed Phebe's resolution to go away and proved to Rose how mistaken she had been in believing that she could bring everyone to her way of thinking.

Prejudices are unmanageable things, and the good aunts, like most women, possessed a plentiful supply, so Rose found it like beating her head against a wall to try and convince them that Archie was wise in loving poor Phebe. His mother, who had hoped to have Rose for her daughter not because of her fortune, but the tender affection she felt for her put away her disappointment without a word and welcomed Phebe as kindly as she could for her boy's sake. But the girl felt the truth with the quickness of a nature made sensitive by love and clung to her resolve all the more tenaciously, though grateful for the motherly words that would have been so sweet if genuine happiness had prompted them.

Aunt Jane called it romantic nonsense and advised strong measures "kind, but firm, Jessie." Aunt Clara was sadly distressed about "what people would say" if one of "our boys" married a nobody's daughter. And Aunt Myra not only seconded her views by painting portraits of Phebe's unknown relations in the darkest colors but uttered direful prophecies regarding the disreputable beings who would start up in swarms the moment the girl made a good match.

These suggestions so wrought upon Aunt Plenty that she turned a deaf ear to the benevolent emotions native to her breast and, taking refuge behind "our blessed ancestress, Lady Marget," refused to sanction any engagement which could bring discredit upon the stainless name which was her pride.

So it all ended where it began, for Archie steadily refused to listen to anyone but Phebe, and she as steadily reiterated her bitter "No!" fortifying herself half unconsciously with the hope that, by and by, when she had won a name, fate might be kinder.

While the rest talked, she had been working, for every hour showed her that her instinct had been a true one and pride would not let her stay, though love pleaded eloquently. So, after a Christmas anything but merry, Phebe packed her trunks, rich in gifts from those who generously gave her all but the one thing she desired, and, with a pocketful of letters to people who could further her plans, she went away to seek her fortune, with a brave face and a very heavy heart.

“Write often, and let me know all you do, my Phebe, and remember I shall never be contented till you come back again,” whispered Rose, clinging to her till the last.

“She will come back, for in a year I’m going to bring her home, please God,” said Archie, pale with the pain of parting but as resolute as she.

“I’ll earn my welcome then perhaps it will be easier for them to give and me to receive it,” answered Phebe, with a backward glance at the group of caps in the hall as she went down the steps on Dr. Alec’s arm.

“You earned it long ago, and it is always waiting for you while I am here. Remember that, and God bless you, my good girl,” he said, with a paternal kiss that warmed her heart.

“I never shall forget it!” And Phebe never did.

Chapter 9 NEW YEAR'S CALLS

"Now I'm going to turn over a new leaf, as I promised. I wonder what I shall find on the next page?" said Rose, coming down on New Year's morning with a serious face and a thick letter in her hand.

"Tired of frivolity, my dear?" asked her uncle, pausing in his walk up and down the hall to glance at her with a quick, bright look she liked to bring into his eyes.

"No, sir, and that's the sad part of it, but I've made up my mind to stop while I can because I'm sure it is not good for me. I've had some very sober thoughts lately, for since my Phebe went away I've had no heart for gaiety, so it is a good place to stop and make a fresh start," answered Rose, taking his arm and walking on with him.

"An excellent time! Now, how are you going to fill the aching void?" he asked, well pleased.

"By trying to be as unselfish, brave, and good as she is." And Rose held the letter against her bosom with a tender touch, for Phebe's strength had inspired her with a desire to be as self-reliant. "I'm going to set about living in earnest, as she has; though I think it will be harder for me than for her, because she stands alone and has a career marked out for her. I'm nothing but a commonplace sort of girl, with no end of relations to be consulted every time I wink and a dreadful fortune hanging like a millstone round my neck to weigh me down if I try to fly. It is a hard case, Uncle, and I get low in my mind when I think about it," sighed Rose, oppressed with her blessings.

"Afflicted child! How can I relieve you?" And there was amusement as well as sympathy in Dr. Alec's face as he patted the hand upon his arm.

"Please don't laugh, for I really am trying to be good. In the first place, help me to wean myself from foolish pleasures and show me how to occupy my thoughts and time so that I may not idle about and dream instead of doing great things."

"Good! We'll begin at once. Come to town with me this morning and see your houses. They are all ready, and Mrs. Gardner has half a dozen poor souls waiting to go in as soon as you give the word," answered the doctor promptly, glad to get his girl back again, though not surprised that she still looked with regretful eyes at the Vanity Fair, always so enticing when we are young.

"I'll give it today, and make the new year a happy one to those poor souls at least. I’m so sorry that it’s impossible for me to go with you, but you know I must help Aunty Plen receive. We haven’t been here for so long that she had set her heart on having a grand time today, and I particularly want to please her because I have not been as amiable as I ought lately. I really couldn’t forgive her for siding against Phebe.”

“She did what she thought was right, so we must not blame her. I am going to make my New Year’s calls today and, as my friends live down that way, I’ll get the list of names from Mrs. G. and tell the poor ladies, with Miss Campbell’s compliments, that their new home is ready. Shall I?”

“Yes, Uncle, but take all the credit to yourself, for I never should have thought of it if you had not proposed the plan.”

“Bless your heart! I’m only your agent, and suggest now and then. I’ve nothing to offer but advice, so I lavish that on all occasions.”

“You have nothing because you’ve given your substance all away as generously as you do your advice. Never mind you shall never come to want while I live. I’ll save enough for us two, though I do make ‘ducks and drakes of my fortune.’“

Dr. Alec laughed at the toss of the head with which she quoted Charlie’s offensive words, then offered to take the letter, saying, as he looked at his watch: “I’ll post that for you in time for the early mail. I like a run before breakfast.”

But Rose held her letter fast, dimpling with sudden smiles, half merry and half shy.

“No thank you, sir. Archie likes to do that, and never fails to call for all I write. He gets a peep at Phebe’s in return and I cheer him up a bit, for, though he says nothing, he has a hard time of it, poor fellow.”

“How many letters in five days?”

“Four, sir, to me. She doesn’t write to him, Uncle.”

“As yet. Well, you show hers, so it’s all right and you are a set of sentimental youngsters.” And the doctor walked away, looking as if he enjoyed the sentiment as much as any of them.

Old Miss Campbell was nearly as great a favorite as young Miss Campbell, so a succession of black coats and white gloves flowed in and out of the hospitable mansion pretty steadily all day. The clan was out in great force, and came by in installments to pay their duty to Aunt Plenty and wish the compliments of the season to “our cousin.” Archie appeared first, looking sad but steadfast, and went away with Phebe’s letter in his left breast pocket feeling that life was still endurable, though his love was torn from him, for Rose had many comfortable things to say and read him delicious bits from the voluminous correspondence lately begun.

Hardly was he gone when Will and Geordie came marching in, looking as fine as gray uniforms with much scarlet piping could make them and feeling peculiarly important, as this was their first essay in New Year’s call-making. Brief was their stay, for they planned to visit every friend they had, and Rose could not help laughing at the droll mixture of manly dignity and boyish delight with which they drove off in their own carriage, both as erect as ramrods, arms folded, and caps stuck at exactly the same angle on each blond head.

“Here comes the other couple Steve, in full feather, with a big bouquet for Kitty, and poor Mac, looking like a gentleman and feeling like a martyr, I’m sure,” said Rose, watching one carriage turn in as the other turned out of the great gate, with its arch of holly, ivy, and evergreen.

“Here he is. I’ve got him in tow for the day and want you to cheer him up with a word of praise, for he came without a struggle though planning to bolt somewhere with Uncle,” cried Steve, falling back to display his brother, who came in looking remarkably well in his state and festival array, for polishing had begun to tell.

“A happy New Year, Aunty, same to you, Cousin, and best wishes for as many more as you deserve,” said Mac, heeding Steve no more than if he had been a fly as he gave the old lady a hearty kiss and offered Rose a quaint little nosegay of pansies.

“Heart’s-ease do you think I need it?” she asked, looking up with sudden sobriety.

“We all do. Could I give you anything better on a day like this?”

“No thank you very much.” And a sudden dew came to Rose’s eyes, for, though often blunt in speech, when Mac did do a tender thing, it always touched her because he seemed to understand her moods so well.

“Has Archie been here? He said he shouldn’t go anywhere else, but I hope you talked that nonsense out of his head,” said Steve, settling his tie before the mirror.

“Yes, dear, he came but looked so out of spirits I really felt reproached. Rose cheered him up a little, but I don’t believe he will feel equal to making calls and I hope he won’t, for his face tells the whole story much too plainly,” answered Aunty Plenty, rustling about her bountiful table in her richest black silk with all her old lace on.

“Oh, he’ll get over it in a month or two, and Phebe will soon find another lover, so don’t be worried about him, Aunty,” said Steve, with the air of a man who knew all about that sort of thing.

“If Archie does forget, I shall despise him, and I know Phebe won’t try to find another lover, though she’ll probably have them she is so sweet and good!” cried

Rose indignantly, for, having taken the pair under her protection, she defended them valiantly.

"Then you'd have Arch hope against hope and never give up, would you?" asked Mac, putting on his glasses to survey the thin boots which were his especial abomination.

"Yes, I would, for a lover is not worth having if he's not in earnest!"

"Exactly. So you'd like them to wait and work and keep on loving till they made you relent or plainly proved that it was no use."

"If they were good as well as constant, I think I should relent in time."

"I'll mention that to Pemberton, for he seemed to be hit the hardest, and a ray of hope will do him good, whether he is equal to the ten years' wait or not," put in Steve, who liked to rally Rose about her lovers.

"I'll never forgive you if you say a word to anyone. It is only Mac's odd way of asking questions, and I ought not to answer them. You will talk about such things and I can't stop you, but I don't like it," said Rose, much annoyed.

"Poor little Penelope! She shall not be teased about her suitors but left in peace till her Ulysses comes home," said Mac, sitting down to read the mottoes sticking out of certain fanciful bonbons on the table.

"It is this fuss about Archie which has demoralized us all. Even the owl waked up and hasn't got over the excitement yet, you see. He's had no experience, poor fellow, so he doesn't know how to behave," observed Steve, regarding his bouquet with tender interest.

"That's true, and I asked for information because I may be in love myself someday and all this will be useful, don't you see?"

"You in love!" And Steve could not restrain a laugh at the idea of the bookworm a slave to the tender passion.

Quite unruffled, Mac leaned his chin in both hands, regarding them with a meditative eye as he answered in his whimsical way: "Why not? I intend to study love as well as medicine, for it is one of the most mysterious and remarkable diseases that afflict mankind, and the best way to understand it is to have it. I may catch it someday, and then I should like to know how to treat and cure it."

"If you take it as badly as you did measles and whooping cough, it will go hard with you, old fellow," said Steve, much amused with the fancy.

"I want it to. No great experience comes or goes easily, and this is the greatest we can know, I believe, except death."

Something in Mac's quiet tone and thoughtful eyes made Rose look at him in surprise, for she had never heard him speak in that way before. Steve also stared for an instant, equally amazed, then said below his breath, with an air of mock anxiety: “He’s been catching something at the hospital, typhoid probably, and is beginning to wander. I’ll take him quietly away before he gets any wilder. Come, old lunatic, we must be off.”

“Don’t be alarmed. I’m all right and much obliged for your advice, for I fancy I shall be a desperate lover when my time comes, if it ever does. You don’t think it impossible, do you?” And Mac put the question so soberly that there was a general smile.

“Certainly not you’ll be a regular Douglas, tender and true,” answered Rose, wondering what queer question would come next.

“Thank you. The fact is, I’ve been with Archie so much in his trouble lately that I’ve gotten interested in this matter and very naturally want to investigate the subject as every rational man must, sooner or later, that’s all. Now, Steve, I’m ready.” And Mac got up as if the lesson was over.

“My dear, that boy is either a fool or a genius, and I’m sure I should be glad to know which,” said Aunt Plenty, putting her bonbons to rights with a puzzled shake of her best cap.

“Time will show, but I incline to think that he is not a fool by any means,” answered the girl, pulling a cluster of white roses out of her bosom to make room for the pansies, though they did not suit the blue gown half so well.

Just then Aunt Jessie came in to help them receive, with Jamie to make himself generally useful, which he proceeded to do by hovering around the table like a fly about a honey pot when not flattening his nose against the windowpanes to announce excitedly, “Here’s another man coming up the drive!”

Charlie arrived next in his most sunshiny humor, for anything social and festive was his delight, and when in this mood the Prince was quite irresistible. He brought a pretty bracelet for Rose and was graciously allowed to put it on while she chid him gently for his extravagance.

“I am only following your example, for you know ‘nothing is too good for those we love, and giving away is the best thing one can do,’“ he retorted, quoting words of her own.

“I wish you would follow my example in some other things as well as you do in this,” said Rose soberly as Aunt Plenty called him to come and see if the punch was right.

“Must conform to the customs of society. Aunty’s heart would be broken if we did not drink her health in the good old fashion. But don’t be alarmed I’ve a strong head of my own, and that’s lucky, for I shall need it before I get through,” laughed Charlie, showing a long list as he turned away to gratify the old lady with all sorts of merry and affectionate compliments as the glasses touched.

Rose did feel rather alarmed, for if he drank the health of all the owners of those names, she felt sure that Charlie would need a very strong head indeed. It was hard to say anything then and there without seeming disrespect to Aunt Plenty, yet she longed to remind her cousin of the example she tried to set him in this respect, for Rose never touched wine, and the boys knew it. She was thoughtfully turning the bracelet, with its pretty device of turquoise forget-me-nots, when the giver came back to her, still bubbling over with good spirits.

“Dear little saint, you look as if you’d like to smash all the punch bowls in the city, and save us jolly young fellows from tomorrow’s headache.”

“I should, for such headaches sometimes end in heartaches, I’m afraid. Dear Charlie, don’t be angry, but you know better than I that this is a dangerous day for such as you so do be careful for my sake,” she added, with an unwonted touch of tenderness in her voice, for, looking at the gallant figure before her, it was impossible to repress the womanly longing to keep it always as brave and blithe as now.

Charlie saw that new softness in the eyes that never looked unkindly on him, fancied that it meant more than it did, and, with a sudden fervor in his own voice, answered quickly: “My darling, I will!”

The glow which had risen to his face was reflected in hers, for at that moment it seemed as if it would be possible to love this cousin who was so willing to be led by her and so much needed some helpful influence to make a noble man of him. The thought came and went like a flash, but gave her a quick heartthrob, as if the old affection was trembling on the verge of some warmer sentiment, and left her with a sense of responsibility never felt before. Obeying the impulse, she said, with a pretty blending of earnestness and playfulness, “If I wear the bracelet to remember you by, you must wear this to remind you of your promise.”

“And you,” whispered Charlie, bending his head to kiss the hands that put a little white rose in his buttonhole.

Just at that most interesting moment they became aware of an arrival in the front drawing room, whither Aunt Plenty had discreetly retired. Rose felt grateful for the interruption, because, not being at all sure of the state of her heart as yet, she was afraid of letting a sudden impulse lead her too far. But Charlie, conscious that a very propitious instant had been spoiled, regarded the newcomer with anything but a benignant expression of countenance and, whispering, “Good-bye, my Rose, I shall look in this evening to see how you are after the fatigues of the day,” he went away, with such a cool nod to poor Fun See that the amiable Asiatic thought he must have mortally offended him.

Rose had little leisure to analyze the new emotions of which she was conscious, for Mr. Tokio came up at once to make his compliments with a comical mingling of Chinese courtesy and American awkwardness, and before he had got his hat on Jamie shouted with admiring energy: “Here’s another! Oh, such a swell!”

They now came thick and fast for many hours, and the ladies stood bravely at their posts till late into the evening. Then Aunt Jessie went home, escorted by a very sleepy little son, and Aunt Plenty retired to bed, used up. Dr. Alec had returned in good season, for his friends were not fashionable ones, but Aunt Myra had sent up for him in hot haste and he had good-naturedly obeyed the summons. In fact, he was quite used to them now, for Mrs. Myra, having tried a variety of dangerous diseases, had finally decided upon heart complaint as the one most likely to keep her friends in a chronic state of anxiety and was continually sending word that she was dying. One gets used to palpitations as well as everything else, so the doctor felt no alarm but always went and prescribed some harmless remedy with the most amiable sobriety and patience.

Rose was tired but not sleepy and wanted to think over several things, so instead of going to bed she sat down before the open fire in the study to wait for her uncle and perhaps Charlie, though she did not expect him so late.

Aunt Myra’s palpitations must have been unusually severe, for the clock struck twelve before Dr. Alec came, and Rose was preparing to end her reverie when the sound of someone fumbling at the hall door made her jump up, saying to herself: “Poor man! His hands are so cold he can’t get his latchkey in. Is that you, Uncle?” she added, running to admit him, for Jane was slow and the night as bitter as it was brilliant.

A voice answered, “Yes.” And as the door swung open, in walked, not Dr. Alec, but Charlie, who immediately took one of the hall chairs and sat there with his hat on, rubbing his gloveless hands and blinking as if the light dazzled him, as he said in a rapid, abrupt sort of tone, “I told you I’d come left the fellows keeping it up gloriously going to see the old year out, you know. But I promised never break my word and here I am. Angel in blue, did you slay your thousands?”

“Hush! The waiters are still about. Come to the study fire and warm yourself, you must be frozen,” said Rose, going before to roll up the easy chair.

“Not at all never warmer looks very comfortable, though. Where’s Uncle?” asked Charlie, following with his hat still on, his hands in his pockets, and his eye fixed steadily on the bright head in front of him.

“Aunt Myra sent for him, and I was waiting up to see how she was,” answered Rose, busily mending the fire.

Charlie laughed and sat down upon a corner of the library table. “Poor old soul! What a pity she doesn’t die before he is quite worn out. A little too much ether some of these times would send her off quite comfortably, you know.”

“Don’t speak in that way. Uncle says imaginary troubles are often as hard to bear as real ones,” said Rose, turning around displeased.

Till now she had not fairly looked at him, for recollections of the morning made her a little shy. His attitude and appearance surprised her as much as his words, and the quick change in her face seemed to remind him of his manners. Getting up, he hastily took off his hat and stood looking at her with a curiously fixed yet absent look as he said in the same rapid, abrupt way, as if, when once started, he found it hard to stop, “I beg pardon only joking very bad taste I know, and won’t do it again. The heat of the room makes me a little dizzy, and I think I got a chill coming out. It is cold I am frozen, I daresay though I drove like the devil.”

“Not that bad horse of yours, I hope? I know it is dangerous, so late and alone,” said Rose, shrinking behind the big chair as Charlie approached the fire, carefully avoiding a footstool in his way.

“Danger is exciting that’s why I like it. No man ever called me a coward let him try it once. I never give in and that horse shall not conquer me. I’ll break his neck, if he breaks my spirit doing it. No I don’t mean that never mind it’s all right,” and Charlie laughed in a way that troubled her, because there was no mirth in it.

“Have you had a pleasant day?” asked Rose, looking at him intently as he stood pondering over the cigar and match which he held, as if doubtful which to strike and which to smoke.

“Day? Oh, yes, capital. About two thousand calls, and a nice little supper at the Club. Randal can’t sing any more than a crow, but I left him with a glass of champagne upside down, trying to give them my old favorite:

“‘Tis better to laugh than be sighing,”

and Charlie burst forth in that bacchanalian melody at the top of his voice, waving an allumette holder over his head to represent Randal’s inverted wineglass.

“Hush! You’ll wake Aunty,” cried Rose in a tone so commanding that he broke off in the middle of a roulade to stare at her with a blank look as he said apologetically, “I was merely showing how it should be done. Don’t be angry, dearest look at me as you did this morning, and I’ll swear never to sing another note if you say so. I’m only a little gay we drank your health handsomely, and they all congratulated me. Told ‘em it wasn’t out yet. Stop, though I didn’t mean to mention that. No matter I’m always in a scrape, but you always forgive me in the sweetest way. Do it now, and don’t be angry, little darling.” And, dropping the vase, he went toward her with a sudden excitement that made her shrink behind the chair.

She was not angry, but shocked and frightened, for she knew now what the matter was and grew so pale, he saw it and asked pardon before she could utter a rebuke.

“We’ll talk of that tomorrow. It is very late. Go home now, please, before Uncle comes,” she said, trying to speak naturally yet betraying her distress by the tremor of her voice and the sad anxiety in her eyes.

“Yes, yes, I will go you are tired I’ll make it all right tomorrow.” And as if the sound of his uncle’s name steadied him for an instant, Charlie made for the door with an unevenness of gait which would have told the shameful truth if his words had not already done so. Before he reached it, however, the sound of wheels arrested him and, leaning against the wall, he listened with a look of dismay mingled with amusement creeping over his face. “Brutus has bolted now I am in a fix. Can’t walk home with this horrid dizziness in my head. It’s the cold, Rose, nothing else, I do assure you, and a chill yes, a chill. See here! Let one of those fellows there lend me an arm no use to go after that brute. Won’t Mother be frightened though when he gets home?” And with that empty laugh again, he fumbled for the door handle.

“No, no don’t let them see you! Don’t let anyone know! Stay here till Uncle comes, and he’ll take care of you. Oh, Charlie! How could you do it! How could you when you promised?” And, forgetting fear in the sudden sense of shame and anguish that came over her, Rose ran to him, caught his hand from the lock, and turned the key; then, as if she could not bear to see him standing there with that vacant smile on his lips, she dropped into a chair and covered up her face.

The cry, the act, and, more than all, the sight of the bowed head would have sobered poor Charlie if it had not been too late. He looked about the room with a vague, despairing look, as if to find reason fast slipping from his control, but heat and cold, excitement and reckless pledging of many healths had done their work too well to make instant sobriety possible, and owning his defeat with a groan, he turned away and threw himself face-downward on the sofa, one of the saddest sights the new year looked upon as it came in.

As she sat there with hidden eyes, Rose felt that something dear to her was dead forever. The ideal, which all women cherish, look for, and too often think they have found when love glorifies a mortal man, is hard to give up, especially when it comes in the likeness of the first lover who touches a young girl’s heart. Rose had just begun to feel that perhaps this cousin, despite his faults, might yet become the hero that he sometimes looked, and the thought that she might be his inspiration was growing sweet to her, although she had not entertained it until very lately. Alas, how short the tender dream had been, how rude the awakening!

How impossible it would be ever again to surround that fallen figure with all the romance of an innocent fancy or gift it with the high attributes beloved by a noble nature!

Breathing heavily in the sudden sleep that kindly brought a brief oblivion of himself, he lay with flushed cheeks, disordered hair, and at his feet the little rose that never would be fresh and fair again a pitiful contrast now to the brave, blithe young man who went so gaily out that morning to be so ignominiously overthrown at night.

Many girls would have made light of a trespass so readily forgiven by the world, but Rose had not yet learned to offer temptation with a smile and shut her eyes to the weakness that makes a man a brute. It always grieved or disgusted her to see it in others, and now it was very terrible to have it brought so near not in its worst form, by any means, but bad enough to wring her heart with shame and sorrow and fill her mind with dark forebodings for the future. So she could only sit mourning for the Charlie that might have been while watching the Charlie that was with an ache in her heart which found no relief till, putting her hands there as if to ease the pain, they touched the pansies, faded but still showing gold among the somber purple, and then two great tears dropped on them as she sighed: “Ah, me! I do need heart’s-ease sooner than I thought!”

Her uncle’s step made her spring up and unlock the door, showing him such an altered face that he stopped short, ejaculating in dismay, “Good heavens, child! What’s the matter?” adding, as she pointed to the sofa in pathetic silence, “Is he hurt? ill? dead?”

“No, Uncle, he is — ” She could not utter the ugly word but whispered with a sob in her throat, “Be kind to him,” and fled away to her own room, feeling as if a great disgrace had fallen on the house.

Chapter 10 THE SAD AND SOBER PART

"How will he look? What will he say? Can anything make us forget and be happy again?" were the first questions Rose asked herself as soon as she woke from the brief sleep which followed a long, sad vigil. It seemed as if the whole world must be changed because a trouble darkened it for her. She was too young yet to know how possible it is to forgive much greater sins than this, forget far heavier disappointments, outlive higher hopes, and bury loves compared to which hers was but a girlish fancy. She wished it had not been so bright a day, wondered how her birds could sing with such shrill gaiety, put no ribbon in her hair, and said, as she looked at the reflection of her own tired face in the glass, "Poor thing! You thought the new leaf would have something pleasant on it. The story has been very sweet and easy to read so far, but the sad and sober part is coming now."

A tap at the door reminded her that, in spite of her afflictions, breakfast must be eaten, and the sudden thought that Charlie might still be in the house made her hurry to the door, to find Dr. Alec waiting for her with his morning smile. She drew him in and whispered anxiously, as if someone lay dangerously ill nearby, "Is he better, Uncle? Tell me all about it I can bear it now."

Some men would have smiled at her innocent distress and told her this was only what was to be expected and endured, but Dr. Alec believed in the pure instincts that make youth beautiful, desired to keep them true, and hoped his girl would never learn to look unmoved by pain and pity upon any human being vanquished by a vice, no matter how trivial it seemed, how venial it was held. So his face grew grave, though his voice was cheerful as he answered: "All right, I daresay, by this time, for sleep is the best medicine in such cases. I took him home last night, and no one knows he came but you and I."

"No one ever shall. How did you do it, Uncle?"

"Just slipped out of the long study window and got him cannily off, for the air and motion, after a dash of cold water, brought him around, and he was glad to be safely landed at home. His rooms are below, you know, so no one was disturbed, and I left him sleeping nicely."

"Thank you so much," sighed Rose. "And Brutus? Weren't they frightened when he got back alone?"

"Not at all. The sagacious beast went quietly to the stable, and the sleepy groom asked no questions, for Charlie often sends the horse round by himself when it is late or stormy. Rest easy, dear no eye but ours saw the poor lad come and go, and we'll forgive it for love's sake."

"Yes, but not forget it. I never can, and he will never be again to me the Charlie I've been so proud and fond of all these years. Oh, Uncle, such a pity! Such a pity!"

"Don't break your tender heart about it, child, for it is not incurable, thank God! I don't make light of it, but I am sure that under better influences Charlie will redeem himself because his impulses are good and this his only vice. I can hardly blame him for what he is, because his mother did the harm. I declare to you, Rose, I sometimes feel as if I must break out against that woman and thunder in her ears that she is ruining the immortal soul for which she is responsible to heaven!"

Dr. Alec seldom spoke in this way, and when he did it was rather awful, for his indignation was of the righteous sort and such thunder often rouses up a drowsy soul when sunshine has no effect. Rose liked it, and sincerely wished Aunt Clara had been there to get the benefit of the outbreak, for she needed just such an awakening from the self-indulgent dream in which she lived.

"Do it, and save Charlie before it is too late!" she cried, kindling herself as she watched him, for he looked like a roused lion as he walked about the room with his hand clenched and a spark in his eye, evidently in desperate earnest and ready to do almost anything.

"Will you help?" he asked, stopping suddenly with a look that made her stand up straight and strong as she answered with an eager voice: "I will."

"Then don't love him yet."

That startled her, but she asked steadily, though her heart began to beat and her color to come: "Why not?"

"Firstly, because no woman should give her happiness into the keeping of a man without fixed principles; secondly, because the hope of being worthy of you will help him more than any prayers or preaching of mine. Thirdly, because it will need all our wit and patience to undo the work of nearly four and twenty years. You understand what I mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you say 'no' when he asks you to say 'yes' and wait a little for your happiness?"

"I can."

"And will you?"

"I will."

"Then I'm satisfied, and a great weight taken off my heart. I can't help seeing what goes on, or trembling when I think of you setting sail with no better pilot than poor Charlie. Now you answer as I hoped you would, and I am proud of my girl!”

They had been standing with the width of the room between them, Dr. Alec looking very much like a commander issuing orders, Rose like a well-drilled private obediently receiving them, and both wore the air of soldiers getting ready for a battle, with the bracing of nerves and quickening of the blood brave souls feel as they put on their armor. At the last words he went to her, brushed back the hair, and kissed her on the forehead with a tender sort of gravity and a look that made her feel as if he had endowed her with the Victoria Cross for courage on the field.

No more was said then, for Aunt Plenty called them down and the day’s duties began. But that brief talk showed Rose what to do and fitted her to do it, for it set her to thinking of the duty one owes one’s self in loving as in all the other great passions or experiences which make or mar a life.

She had plenty of time for quiet meditation that day because everyone was resting after yesterday’s festivity, and she sat in her little room planning out a new year so full of good works, grand successes, and beautiful romances that if it could have been realized, the Millennium would have begun. It was a great comfort to her, however, and lightened the long hours haunted by a secret desire to know when Charlie would come and a secret fear of the first meeting. She was sure he would be bowed down with humiliation and repentance, and a struggle took place in her mind between the pity she could not help feeling and the disapprobation she ought to show. She decided to be gentle, but very frank; to reprove, but also to console; and to try to improve the softened moment by inspiring the culprit with a wish for all the virtues which make a perfect man.

The fond delusion grew quite absorbing, and her mind was full of it as she sat watching the sun set from her western window and admiring with dreamy eyes the fine effect of the distant hills clear and dark against a daffodil sky when the bang of a door made her sit suddenly erect in her low chair and say with a catch in her breath: “He’s coming! I must remember what I promised Uncle and be very firm.”

Usually Charlie announced his approach with music of some sort. Now he neither whistled, hummed, nor sang, but came so quietly Rose was sure that he dreaded this meeting as much as she did and, compassionating his natural confusion, did not look around as the steps drew near. She thought perhaps he would go down upon his knees, as he used to after a boyish offense, but hoped not, for too much humility distressed her, so she waited for the first demonstration anxiously.

It was rather a shock when it came, however, for a great nosegay dropped into her lap and a voice, bold and gay as usual, said lightly: “Here she is, as pretty and pensive as you please. Is the world hollow, our doll stuffed with sawdust, and do we want to go into a nunnery today, Cousin?”

Rose was so taken aback by this unexpected coolness that the flowers lay unnoticed as she looked up with a face so full of surprise, reproach, and something like shame that it was impossible to mistake its meaning. Charlie did not, and had the grace to redden deeply, and his eyes fell as he said quickly, though in the same light tone: “I humbly apologize for coming so late last night. Don’t be hard upon me, Cousin. You know America expects every man to do his duty on New Year’s Day.”

“I am tired of forgiving! You make and break promises as easily as you did years ago, and I shall never ask you for another,” answered Rose, putting the bouquet away, for the apology did not satisfy her and she would not be bribed to silence.

“But, my dear girl, you are so very exacting, so peculiar in your notions, and so angry about trifles that a poor fellow can’t please you, try as he will,” began Charlie, ill at ease, but too proud to show half the penitence he felt, not so much for the fault as for her discovery of it.

“I am not angry I am grieved and disappointed, for I expect every man to do his duty in another way and keep his word to the uttermost, as I try to do. If that is exacting, I’m sorry, and won’t trouble you with my old-fashioned notions anymore.”

“Bless my soul! What a rout about nothing! I own that I forgot I know I acted like a fool and I beg pardon. What more can I do?”

“Act like a man, and never let me be so terribly ashamed of you again as I was last night.” And Rose gave a little shiver as she thought of it.

That involuntary act hurt Charlie more than her words, and it was his turn now to feel “terribly ashamed,” for the events of the previous evening were very hazy in his mind and fear magnified them greatly. Turning sharply away, he went and stood by the fire, quite at a loss how to make his peace this time, because Rose was so unlike herself. Usually a word of excuse sufficed, and she seemed glad to pardon and forget; now, though very quiet, there was something almost stern about her that surprised and daunted him, for how could he know that all the while her pitiful heart was pleading for him and the very effort to control it made her a little hard and cold?

As he stood there, restlessly fingering the ornaments upon the chimneypiece, his eye brightened suddenly and, taking up the pretty bracelet lying there, he went slowly back to her, saying in a tone that was humble and serious enough now: “I will act like a man, and you shall never be ashamed again. Only be kind to me. Let me put this on, and promise afresh this time I swear I'll keep it. Won't you trust me, Rose?"

It was very hard to resist the pleading voice and eyes, for this humility was dangerous; and, but for Uncle Alec, Rose would have answered "yes." The blue forget-me-nots reminded her of her own promise, and she kept it with difficulty now, to be glad always afterward. Putting back the offered trinket with a gentle touch, she said firmly, though she dared not look up into the anxious face bending toward her: "No, Charlie I can't wear it. My hands must be free if I'm to help you as I ought. I will be kind, I will trust you, but don't swear anything, only try to resist temptation, and we'll all stand by you."

Charlie did not like that and lost the ground he had gained by saying impetuously: "I don't want anyone but you to stand by me, and I must be sure you won't desert me, else, while I'm mortifying soul and body to please you, some stranger will come and steal your heart away from me. I couldn't bear that, so I give you fair warning, in such a case I'll break the bargain, and go straight to the devil."

The last sentence spoiled it all, for it was both masterful and defiant. Rose had the Campbell spirit in her, though it seldom showed; as yet she valued her liberty more than any love offered her, and she resented the authority he assumed too soon resented it all the more warmly because of the effort she was making to reinstate her hero, who would insist on being a very faulty and ungrateful man. She rose straight out of her chair, saying with a look and tone which rather startled her hearer and convinced him that she was no longer a tenderhearted child but a woman with a will of her own and a spirit as proud and fiery as any of her race: "My heart is my own, to dispose of as I please. Don't shut yourself out of it by presuming too much, for you have no claim on me but that of cousinship, and you never will have unless you earn it. Remember that, and neither threaten nor defy me anymore."

For a minute it was doubtful whether Charlie would answer this flash with another, and a general explosion ensue, or wisely quench the flame with the mild answer which turneth away wrath. He chose the latter course and made it very effective by throwing himself down before his offended goddess, as he had often done in jest. This time it was not acting, but serious, earnest, and there was real passion in his voice as he caught Rose's dress in both hands, saying eagerly: "No, no! Don't shut your heart against me or I shall turn desperate. I'm not half good enough for such a saint as you, but you can do what you will with me. I only need a motive to make a man of me, and where can I find a stronger one than in trying to keep your love?"

"It is not yours yet," began Rose, much moved, though all the while she felt as if she were on a stage and had a part to play, for Charlie had made life so like a melodrama that it was hard for him to be quite simple even when most sincere.

"Let me earn it, then. Show me how, and I'll do anything, for you are my good angel, Rose, and if you cast me off, I feel as if I shouldn't care how soon there was an end of me," cried Charlie, getting tragic in his earnestness and putting both arms around her, as if his only safety lay in clinging to this beloved fellow creature.

Behind footlights it would have been irresistible, but somehow it did not touch the one spectator, though she had neither time nor skill to discover why. For all their ardor the words did not ring quite true. Despite the grace of the attitude, she would have liked him better manfully erect upon his feet, and though the gesture was full of tenderness, a subtle instinct made her shrink away as she said with a composure that surprised herself even more than it did him: "Please don't. No, I will promise nothing yet, for I must respect the man I love."

That brought Charlie to his feet, pale with something deeper than anger, for the recoil told him more plainly than the words how much he had fallen in her regard since yesterday. The memory of the happy moment when she gave the rose with that new softness in her eyes, the shy color, the sweet "for my sake" came back with sudden vividness, contrasting sharply with the now averted face, the hand outstretched to put him back, the shrinking figure, and in that instant's silence, poor Charlie realized what he had lost, for a girl's first thought of love is as delicate a thing as the rosy morning glory, which a breath of air can shatter. Only a hint of evil, only an hour's debasement for him, a moment's glimpse for her of the coarser pleasures men know, and the innocent heart, just opening to bless and to be blessed, closed again like a sensitive plant and shut him out perhaps forever.

The consciousness of this turned him pale with fear, for his love was deeper than she knew, and he proved this when he said in a tone so full of mingled pain and patience that it touched her to the heart: "You shall respect me if I can make you, and when I've earned it, may I hope for something more?"

She looked up then, saw in his face the noble shame, the humble sort of courage that shows repentance to be genuine and gives promise of success, and, with a hopeful smile that was a cordial to him, answered heartily: "You may."

"Bless you for that! I'll make no promises, I'll ask for none only trust me, Rose, and while you treat me like a cousin, remember that no matter how many lovers you may have you'll never be to any of them as dear as you are to me."

A traitorous break in his voice warned Charlie to stop there, and with no other good-bye, he very wisely went away, leaving Rose to put the neglected flowers into water with remorseful care and lay away the bracelet, saying to herself: "I'll never wear it till I feel as I did before. Then he shall put it on and I’ll say ‘yes.’“

Chapter 11 SMALL TEMPTATIONS

"Oh, Rose, I've got something so exciting to tell you!" cried Kitty Van Tassel, skipping into the carriage next morning when her friend called for her to go shopping.

Kitty always did have some "perfectly thrilling" communication to make and Rose had learned to take them quietly, but the next demonstration was a new one, for, regardless alike of curious observers outside and disordered hats within, Kitty caught Rose around the neck, exclaiming in a rapturous whisper: "My dearest creature, I'm engaged!"

"I'm so glad! Of course it is Steve?"

"Dear fellow, he did it last night in the nicest way, and Mama is so delighted. Now what shall I be married in?" And Kitty composed herself with a face full of the deepest anxiety.

"How can you talk of that so soon? Why, Kit, you unromantic girl, you ought to be thinking of your lover and not your clothes," said Rose, amused yet rather scandalized at such want of sentiment.

"I am thinking of my lover, for he says he will not have a long engagement, so I must begin to think about the most important things at once, mustn't I?"

"Ah, he wants to be sure of you, for you are such a slippery creature he is afraid you'll treat him as you did poor Jackson and the rest," interrupted Rose, shaking her finger at her prospective cousin, who had tried this pastime twice before and was rather proud than otherwise of her brief engagements.

"You needn't scold, for I know I'm right, and when you've been in society as long as I have you'll find that the only way to really know a man is to be engaged to him. While they want you they are all devotion, but when they think they've got you, then you find out what wretches they are," answered Kitty with an air of worldly wisdom which contrasted oddly with her youthful face and giddy manners.

"A sad prospect for poor Steve, unless I give him a hint to look well to his ways."

"Oh, my dear child, I'm sure of him, for my experience has made me very sharp and I'm convinced I can manage him without a bit of trouble. We've known each other for ages" Steve was twenty and Kitty eighteen "and always been the best of friends. Besides, he is quite my ideal man. I never could bear big hands and feet, and his are simply adorable. Then he's the best dancer I know and dresses in perfect taste. I really do believe I fell in love with his pocket handkerchiefs first, they were so enchanting I couldn't resist," laughed Kitty, pulling a large one out of her pocket and burying her little nose in the folds, which shed a delicious fragrance upon the air.

"Now, that looks promising, and I begin to think you have got a little sentiment after all," said Rose, well pleased, for the merry brown eyes had softened suddenly and a quick color came up in Kitty's cheek as she answered, still half hiding her face in the beloved handkerchief: "Of course I have, lots of it, only I'm ashamed to show it to most people, because it's the style to take everything in the most nonchalant way. My gracious, Rose, you'd have thought me a romantic goose last night while Steve proposed in the back parlor, for I actually cried, he was so dreadfully in earnest when I pretended that I didn't care for him, and so very dear and nice when I told the truth. I didn't know he had it in him, but he came out delightfully and never cared a particle, though I dropped tears all over his lovely shirtfront. Wasn't that good of him? For you know he hates his things to be mussed."

"He's a true Campbell, and has got a good warm heart of his own under those fine fronts of his. Aunt Jane doesn't believe in sentiment, so he has been trained never to show any, but it is there, and you must encourage him to let it out, not foolishly, but in a way to make him more manly and serious."

"I will if I can, for though I wouldn't own this to everybody, I like it in him very much and feel as if Steve and I should get on beautifully. Here we are now, be sure not to breathe a word if we meet anyone. I want it to be a profound secret for a week at least," added Kitty, whisking her handkerchief out of sight as the carriage stopped before the fashionable store they were about to visit.

Rose promised with a smile, for Kitty's face betrayed her without words, so full was it of the happiness which few eyes fail to understand whenever they see it.

"Just a glance at the silks. You ask my opinion about white ones, and I'll look at the colors. Mama says satin, but that is out now, and I've set my heart on the heaviest corded thing I can find," whispered Kitty as they went rustling by the long counters strewn with all that could delight the feminine eye and tempt the feminine pocket.

"Isn't that opal the loveliest thing you ever saw? I'm afraid I'm too dark to wear it, but it would just suit you. You'll need a variety, you know," added Kitty in a significant aside as Rose stood among the white silks while her companion affected great interest in the delicate hues laid before her.

"But I have a variety now, and don't need a new dress of any sort."

"No matter, get it, else it will be gone. You've worn all yours several times already and must have a new one whether you need it or not. Dear me! If I had as much pocket money as you have, I’d come out in a fresh toilet at every party I went to,” answered Kitty, casting an envious eye upon the rainbow piles before her.

The quick-witted shopman saw that a wedding was afoot, for when two pretty girls whisper, smile, and blush over their shopping, clerks scent bridal finery and a transient gleam of interest brightens their imperturbable countenances and lends a brief energy to languid voices weary with crying, “Cash!” Gathering both silks with a practiced turn of the hand, he held them up for inspection, detecting at a glance which was the bride-elect and which the friend, for Kitty fell back to study the effect of silvery white folds with an absorbing interest impossible to mistake while Rose sat looking at the opal as if she scarcely heard a bland voice saying, with the rustle of silk so dear to girlish ears: “A superb thing, just opened; all the rage in Paris; very rare shade; trying to most, as the lady says, but quite perfect for a blonde.”

Rose was not listening to those words but to others which Aunt Clara had lately uttered, laughed at then, but thought over more than once since.

“I’m tired of hearing people wonder why Miss Campbell does not dress more. Simplicity is all very well for schoolgirls and women who can’t afford anything better, but you can, and you really ought. Your things are pretty enough in their way, and I rather like you to have a style of your own, but it looks odd and people will think you are mean if you don’t make more show. Besides, you don’t do justice to your beauty, which would be both peculiar and striking if you’d devote your mind to getting up ravishing costumes.”

Much more to the same effect did her aunt say, discussing the subject quite artistically and unconsciously appealing to several of Rose’s ruling passions. One was a love for the delicate fabrics, colors, and ornaments which refined tastes enjoy and whose costliness keeps them from ever growing common; another, her strong desire to please the eyes of those she cared for and gratify their wishes in the smallest matter if she could. And last, but not least, the natural desire of a young and pretty woman to enhance the beauty which she so soon discovers to be her most potent charm for the other sex, her passport to a high place among her maiden peers.

She had thought seriously of surprising and delighting everyone by appearing in a costume which should do justice to the loveliness which was so modest that it was apt to forget itself in admiring others what girls call a “ravishing” dress, such as she could imagine and easily procure by the magic of the Fortunatus’ purse in her pocket. She had planned it all, the shimmer of pale silk through lace like woven frostwork, ornaments of some classic pattern, and all the dainty accessories as perfect as time, taste, and money could make them.

She knew that Uncle Alec’s healthful training had given her a figure that could venture on any fashion and Nature blessed her with a complexion that defied all hues. So it was little wonder that she felt a strong desire to use these gifts, not for the pleasure of display, but to seem fair in the eyes that seldom looked at her without a tender sort of admiration, all the more winning when no words marred the involuntary homage women love.

These thoughts were busy in Rose’s mind as she sat looking at the lovely silk and wondering what Charlie would say if she should some night burst upon him in a pale rosy cloud, like the Aurora to whom he often likened her. She knew it would please him very much and she longed to do all she honestly could to gratify the poor fellow, for her tender heart already felt some remorseful pangs, remembering how severe she had been the night before. She could not revoke her words, because she meant them every one, but she might be kind and show that she did not wholly shut him out from her regard by asking him to go with her to Kitty’s ball and gratify his artistic taste by a lovely costume. A very girlish but kindly plan, for that ball was to be the last of her frivolities, so she wanted it to be a pleasant one and felt that “being friends” with Charlie would add much to her enjoyment.

This idea made her fingers tighten on the gleaming fabric so temptingly upheld, and she was about to take it when, “If ye please, sir, would ye kindly tell me where I’d be finding the flannel place?” said a voice behind her, and, glancing up, she saw a meek little Irishwoman looking quite lost and out of place among the luxuries around her.

“Downstairs, turn to the left,” was the clerk’s hasty reply, with a vague wave of the hand which left the inquirer more in the dark than ever.

Rose saw the woman’s perplexity and said kindly, “I’ll show you this way.”

“I’m ashamed to be throublin’ ye, miss, but it’s strange I am in it, and wouldn’t be comin’ here at all, at all, barrin’ they tould me I’d get the bit I’m wantin’ chaper in this big shop than the little ones more becomin’ the like o’ me,” explained the little woman humbly.

Rose looked again as she led the way through a well-dressed crowd of busy shoppers, and something in the anxious, tired face under the old woolen hood the bare, purple hands holding fast a meager wallet and a faded scrap of the dotted flannel little children’s frocks are so often made of touched the generous heart that never could see want without an impulse to relieve it. She had meant only to point the way, but, following a new impulse, she went on, listening to the poor soul’s motherly prattle about “me baby” and the “throuble” it was to “find clothes for the growin’ childer when me man is out av work and the bit and sup inconvaynient these hard times" as they descended to that darksome lower world where necessities take refuge when luxuries crowd them out from the gayer place above.

The presence of a lady made Mrs. Sullivan's shopping very easy now, and her one poor "bit" of flannel grew miraculously into yards of several colors, since the shabby purse was no lighter when she went away, wiping her eyes on the corner of a big, brown bundle. A very little thing, and no one saw it but a wooden-faced clerk, who never told, yet it did Rose good and sent her up into the light again with a sober face, thinking self-reproachfully, "What right have I to more gay gowns when some poor babies have none, or to spend time making myself fine while there is so much bitter want in the world?"

Nevertheless the pretty things were just as tempting as ever, and she yearned for the opal silk with a renewed yearning when she got back. It is not certain that it would not have been bought in spite of her better self if a good angel in the likeness of a stout lady with silvery curls about the benevolent face, enshrined in a plain bonnet, had not accosted her as she joined Kitty, still brooding over the wedding gowns.

"I waited a moment for you, my dear, because I'm in haste, and very glad to save myself a journey or a note," began the newcomer in a low tone as Rose shook hands with the most affectionate respect. "You know the great box factory was burned a day or two ago and over a hundred girls thrown out of work. Some were hurt and are in the hospital, many have no homes to go to, and nearly all need temporary help of some sort. We've had so many calls this winter I hardly know which way to turn, for want is pressing, and I've had my finger in so many purses I'm almost ashamed to ask again. Any little contribution ah, thank you, I was sure you wouldn't fail me, my good child," and Mrs. Gardener warmly pressed the hand that went so quickly into the little porte-monnaie and came out so generously filled.

"Let me know how else I can help, and thank you very much for allowing me to have a share in your good works," said Rose, forgetting all about gay gowns as she watched the black bonnet go briskly away with an approving smile on the fine old face inside it.

"You extravagant thing! How could you give so much?" whispered Kitty, whose curious eye had seen three figures on the single bill which had so rapidly changed hands.

"I believe if Mrs. Gardener asked me for my head I should give it to her," answered Rose lightly, then, turning to the silks, she asked, "Which have you decided upon, the yellow white or the blue, the corded or the striped?"

"I've decided nothing; except that you are to have the pink and wear it at my ahem! ball," said Kitty, who had made up her mind, but could not give her orders till Mama had been consulted.

"No, I can't afford it just yet. I never overstep my allowance, and I shall have to if I get any more finery. Come, we ought not to waste time here if you have all the patterns you want." And Rose walked quickly away, glad that it was out of her power to break through two resolutions which hitherto had been faithfully kept one to dress simply for example's sake, the other not to be extravagant for charity's sake.

As Rosamond had her day of misfortunes, so this seemed to be one of small temptations to Rose. After she had set Kitty down at home and been to see her new houses, she drove about doing various errands for the aunts and, while waiting in the carriage for the execution of an order, young Pemberton came by.

As Steve said, this gentleman had been "hard hit" and still hovered mothlike about the forbidden light. Being the most eligible parti of the season, his regard was considered a distinction to be proud of, and Rose had been well scolded by Aunt Clara for refusing so honorable a mate. The girl liked him, and he was the suitor of whom she had spoken so respectfully to Dr. Alec because he had no need of the heiress and had sincerely loved Rose. He had been away, and she hoped had gotten over his disappointment as happily as the rest, but now when he saw her, and came hurrying up so hungry for a word, she felt that he had not forgotten and was too kind to chill him with the bow which plainly says "Don't stop."

A personable youth was Pemberton, and had brought with him from the wilds of Canada a sable-lined overcoat which was the envy of every masculine and the admiration of every feminine friend he had, and as he stood at her carriage window Rose knew that this luxurious garment and its stalwart wearer were objects of interest to the passersby. It chanced that the tide of shoppers flowed in that direction and, as she chatted, familiar faces often passed with glances, smiles, and nods of varying curiosity, significance, and wonder.

She could not help feeling a certain satisfaction in giving him a moment's pleasure, since she could do no more, but it was not that amiable desire alone which made her ignore the neat white parcels which the druggist's boy deposited on the front seat and kept her lingering a little longer to enjoy one of the small triumphs which girls often risk more than a cold in the head to display. The sight of several snowflakes on the broad shoulders which partially obstructed her view, as well as the rapidly increasing animation of Pemberton's chat, reminded her that it was high time to go.

"I mustn't keep you it is beginning to storm," she said, taking up her muff, much to old Jacob's satisfaction, for small talk is not exciting to a hungry man whose nose feels like an icicle.

“Is it? I thought the sun was shining.” And the absorbed gentleman turned to the outer world with visible reluctance, for it looked very warm and cozy in the red-lined carriage.

“Wise people say we must carry our sunshine with us,” answered Rose, taking refuge in commonplaces, for the face at the window grew pensive suddenly as he answered, with a longing look, “I wish I could.” Then, smiling gratefully, he added, “Thank you for giving me a little of yours.”

“You are very welcome.” And Rose offered him her hand while her eyes mutely asked pardon for withholding her leave to keep it.

He pressed it silently and, shouldering the umbrella which he forgot to open, turned away with an “up again and take another” expression, which caused the soft eyes to follow him admiringly.

“I ought not to have kept him a minute longer than I could help, for it wasn’t all pity; it was my foolish wish to show off and do as I liked for a minute, to pay for being good about the gown. Oh, me! How weak and silly I am in spite of all my trying!” And Miss Campbell fell into a remorseful reverie, which lasted till she got home.

“Now, young man, what brought you out in this driving storm?” asked Rose as Jamie came stamping in that same afternoon.

“Mama sent you a new book thought you’d like it. I don’t mind your old storms!” replied the boy, wrestling his way out of his coat and presenting a face as round and red and shiny as a well-polished Baldwin apple.

“Much obliged it is just the day to enjoy it and I was longing for something nice to read,” said Rose as Jamie sat down upon the lower stair for a protracted struggle with his rubber boots.

“Here you are, then no yes I do believe I’ve forgotten it, after all!” cried Jamie, slapping his pockets one after the other with a dismayed expression of countenance.

“Never mind, I’ll hunt up something else. Let me help you with those your hands are so cold.” And Rose good-naturedly gave a tug at the boots while Jamie clutched the banisters, murmuring somewhat incoherently as his legs flew up and down: “I’ll go back if you want me to. I’m so sorry! It’s very good of you, I’m sure. Getting these horrid things on made me forget. Mother would make me wear ‘em, though I told her they’d stick like like gumdrops,” he added, inspired by recollections of certain dire disappointments when the above-mentioned sweetmeat melted in his pockets and refused to come out.

“Now what shall we do?” asked Rose when he was finally extricated. “Since I’ve nothing to read, I may as well play.”

"I'll teach you to pitch and toss. You catch very well for a girl, but you can't throw worth a cent," replied Jamie, gamboling down the hall in his slippers and producing a ball from some of the mysterious receptacles in which boys have the art of storing rubbish enough to fill a peck measure.

Of course Rose agreed and cheerfully risked getting her eyes blackened and her fingers bruised till her young receptor gratefully observed that "it was no fun playing where you had to look out for windows and jars and things, so I'd like that jolly book about Captain Nemo and the Nautilus, please."

Being gratified, he spread himself upon the couch, crossed his legs in the air, and without another word dived Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, where he remained for two mortal hours, to the general satisfaction of his relatives.

Bereft both of her unexpected playfellow and the much desired book, Rose went into the parlor, there to discover a French novel which Kitty had taken from a library and left in the carriage among the bundles. Settling herself in her favorite lounging chair, she read as diligently as Jamie while the wind howled and snow fell fast without.

For an hour nothing disturbed the cozy quiet of the house for Aunt Plenty was napping upstairs and Dr. Alec writing in his own sanctum; at least Rose thought so, till his step made her hastily drop the book and look up with very much the expression she used to wear when caught in mischief years ago.

"Did I startle you? Have a screen you are burning your face before this hot fire." And Dr. Alec pulled one forward.

"Thank you, Uncle. I didn't feel it." And the color seemed to deepen in spite of the screen while the uneasy eyes fell upon the book in her lap.

"Have you got the Quarterly there? I want to glance at an article in it if you can spare it for a moment," he said, leaning toward her with an inquiring glance.

"No, sir, I am reading." And, without mentioning the name, Rose put the book into his hand.

The instant his eye fell on the title he understood the look she wore and knew what "mischief" she had been in. He knit his brows, then smiled, because it was impossible to help it Rose looked so conscience-stricken in spite of her twenty years.

"How do you find it? Interesting?"

"Oh, very! I felt as if I was in another world and forgot all about this."

"Not a very good world, I fancy, if you were afraid or ashamed to be found in it. Where did this come from?" asked Dr. Alec, surveying the book with great disfavor. Rose told him, and added slowly, "I particularly wanted to read it, and fancied I might, because you did when it was so much talked about the winter we were in Rome."

"I did read it to see if it was fit for you."

"And decided that it was not, I suppose, since you never gave it to me!"

"Yes."

"Then I won't finish it. But, Uncle, I don't see why I should not," added Rose wistfully, for she had reached the heart of the romance and found it wonderfully fascinating.

"You may not see, but don't you feel why not?" asked Dr. Alec gravely.

Rose leaned her flushed cheek on her hand and thought a minute, then looked up and answered honestly, "Yes, I do, but can't explain it, except that I know something must be wrong, because I blushed and started when you came in."

"Exactly." And the doctor gave an emphatic nod, as if the symptoms pleased him.

"But I really don't see any harm in the book so far. It is by a famous author, wonderfully well written, as you know, and the characters so lifelike that I feel as if I should really meet them somewhere."

"I hope not!" ejaculated the doctor, shutting the book quickly, as if to keep the objectionable beings from escaping.

Rose laughed, but persisted in her defense, for she did want to finish the absorbing story, yet would not without leave.

"I have read French novels before, and you gave them to me. Not many, to be sure, but the best, so I think I know what is good and shouldn't like this if it was harmful."

Her uncle's answer was to reopen the volume and turn the leaves an instant as if to find a particular place. Then he put it into her hand, saying quietly: "Read a page or two aloud, translating as you go. You used to like that try it again."

Rose obeyed and went glibly down a page, doing her best to give the sense in her purest English. Presently she went more slowly, then skipped a sentence here and there, and finally stopped short, looking as if she needed a screen again.

"What's the matter?" asked her uncle, who had been watching her with a serious eye.

"Some phrases are untranslatable, and it only spoils them to try. They are not amiss in French, but sound coarse and bad in our blunt English," she said a little pettishly, for she felt annoyed by her failure to prove the contested point.

"Ah, my dear, if the fine phrases won't bear putting into honest English, the thoughts they express won't bear putting into your innocent mind! That chapter is the key to the whole book, and if you had been led up, or rather down, to it artfully and artistically, you might have read it to yourself without seeing how bad it is. All the worse for the undeniable talent which hides the evil so subtly and makes the danger so delightful."

He paused a moment, then added with an anxious glance at the book, over which she was still bending, "Finish it if you choose only remember, my girl, that one may read at forty what is unsafe at twenty, and that we never can be too careful what food we give that precious yet perilous thing called imagination."

And taking his Review, he went away to look over a learned article which interested him much less than the workings of a young mind nearby.

Another long silence, broken only by an occasional excited bounce from Jamie when the sociable cuttlefish looked in at the windows or the Nautilus scuttled a ship or two in its terrific course. A bell rang, and the doctor popped his head out to see if he was wanted. It was only a message for Aunt Plenty, and he was about to pop in again when his eye was caught by a square parcel on the slab.

"What's this?" he asked, taking it up.

"Rose wants me to leave it at Kitty Van's when I go. I forgot to bring her book from Mama, so I shall go and get it as soon as ever I've done this," replied Jamie from his nest.

As the volume in his hands was a corpulent one, and Jamie only a third of the way through, Dr. Alec thought Rose's prospect rather doubtful and, slipping the parcel into his pocket, he walked away, saying with a satisfied air: "Virtue doesn't always get rewarded, but it shall be this time if I can do it."

More than half an hour afterward, Rose woke from a little nap and found the various old favorites with which she had tried to solace herself replaced by the simple, wholesome story promised by Aunt Jessie.

"Good boy! I'll go and thank him," she said half aloud, jumping up, wide awake and much pleased.

But she did not go, for just then she spied her uncle standing on the rug warming his hands with a generally fresh and breezy look about him which suggested a recent struggle with the elements.

"How did this come?" she asked suspiciously.

"A man brought it."

"This man? Oh, Uncle! Why did you take so much trouble just to gratify a wish of mine?" she cried, taking both the cold hands in hers with a tenderly reproachful glance from the storm without to the ruddy face above her.

"Because, having taken away your French bonbons with the poisonous color on them, I wanted to get you something better. Here it is, all pure sugar, the sort that sweetens the heart as well as the tongue and leaves no bad taste behind."

"How good you are to me! I don't deserve it, for I didn't resist temptation, though I tried. Uncle, after I'd put the book away, I thought I must just see how it ended, and I'm afraid I should have read it all if it had not been gone," said Rose, laying her face down on the hands she held as humbly as a repentant child.

But Uncle Alec lifted up the bent head and, looking into the eyes that met his frankly, though either held a tear, he said, with the energy that always made his words remembered: "My little girl, I would face a dozen storms far worse than this to keep your soul as stainless as snow, for it is the small temptations which undermine integrity unless we watch and pray and never think them too trivial to be resisted."

Some people would consider Dr. Alec an overcareful man, but Rose felt that he was right, and when she said her prayers that night, added a meek petition to be kept from yielding to three of the small temptations which beset a rich, pretty, and romantic girl extravagance, coquetry, and novel reading.

Chapter 12 AT KITTY’S BALL

Rose had no new gown to wear on this festive occasion, and gave one little sigh of regret as she put on the pale blue silk refreshed with clouds of gaze de Chambéry. But a smile followed, very bright and sweet, as she added the clusters of forget-me-not which Charlie had conjured up through the agency of an old German florist, for one part of her plan had been carried out, and Prince was invited to be her escort, much to his delight, though he wisely made no protestations of any sort and showed his gratitude by being a model gentleman. This pleased Rose, for the late humiliation and a very sincere desire to atone for it gave him an air of pensive dignity which was very effective.

Aunt Clara could not go, for a certain new cosmetic, privately used to improve the once fine complexion, which had been her pride till late hours impaired it, had brought out an unsightly eruption, reducing her to the depths of woe and leaving her no solace for her disappointment but the sight of the elegant velvet dress spread forth upon her bed in melancholy state.

So Aunt Jessie was chaperon, to Rose’s great satisfaction, and looked as “pretty as a pink,” Archie thought, in her matronly pearl-colored gown with a dainty trifle of rich lace on her still abundant hair. He was very proud of his little mama, and as devoted as a lover, “to keep his hand in against Phebe’s return,” she said laughingly when he brought her a nosegay of blush roses to light up her quiet costume.

A happier mother did not live than Mrs. Jessie as she sat contentedly beside Sister Jane (who graced the frivolous scene in a serious black gown with a diadem of purple asters nodding above her severe brow), both watching their boys with the maternal conviction that no other parent could show such remarkable specimens as these. Each had done her best according to her light, and years of faithful care were now beginning to bear fruit in the promise of goodly men, so dear to the hearts of true mothers.

Mrs. Jessie watched her three tall sons with something like wonder, for Archie was a fine fellow, grave and rather stately, but full of the cordial courtesy and respect we see so little of nowadays and which is the sure sign of good home training. “The cadets,” as Will and Geordie called themselves, were there as gorgeous as you please, and the agonies they suffered that night with tight boots and stiff collars no pen can fitly tell. But only to one another did they confide these sufferings and the rare moments of repose when they could stand on one aching foot with heads comfortably sunken inside the excruciating collars, which rasped their ears and made the lobes thereof a pleasing scarlet. Brief were these moments, however, and the Spartan boys danced on with smiling faces, undaunted by the hidden anguish which preyed upon them “fore and aft,” as Will expressed it.

Mrs. Jane’s pair were an odd contrast, and even the stern disciplinarian herself could not help smiling as she watched them. Steve was superb, and might have been married on the spot, so superfine was his broad-cloth, glossy his linen, and perfect the fit of his gloves. While pride and happiness so fermented in his youthful bosom, there would have been danger of spontaneous combustion if dancing had not proved a safety valve, for his strong sense of the proprieties would not permit him to vent his emotions in any other way.

Kitty felt no such restraint, and looked like a blissful little gypsy, with her brunet prettiness set off by a dashing costume of cardinal and cream color and every hair on her head curled in a Merry Pecksniffian crop, for youth was her strong point, and she much enjoyed the fact that she had been engaged three times before she was nineteen.

To see her and Steve spin around the room was a sight to bring a smile to the lips of the crustiest bachelor or saddest spinster, for happy lovers are always a pleasing spectacle, and two such merry little grigs as these are seldom seen.

Mac, meantime, with glasses astride his nose, surveyed his brother’s performances “on the light fantastic” very much as a benevolent Newfoundland would the gambols of a toy terrier, receiving with thanks the hasty hints for his guidance which Steve breathed into his ear as he passed and forgetting all about them the next minute. When not thus engaged Mac stood about with his thumbs in his vest pockets, regarding the lively crowd like a meditative philosopher of a cheerful aspect, often smiling to himself at some whimsical fancy of his own, knitting his brows as some bit of ill-natured gossip met his ear, or staring with undisguised admiration as a beautiful face or figure caught his eye.

“I hope that girl knows what a treasure she has got. But I doubt if she ever fully appreciates it,” said Mrs. Jane, bringing her spectacles to bear upon Kitty as she whisked by, causing quite a gale with her flying skirts.

“I think she will, for Steve has been so well brought up, she cannot but see and feel the worth of what she has never had, and being so young she will profit by it,” answered Mrs. Jessie softly, thinking of the days when she and her Jem danced together, just betrothed.

“I’ve done my duty by both the boys, and done it thoroughly, or their father would have spoilt them, for he’s no more idea of discipline than a child.” And Aunt Jane gave her own palm a smart rap with her closed fan, emphasizing the word “thoroughly” in a most suggestive manner.

“I’ve often wished I had your firmness, Jane but after all, I’m not sure that I don’t like my own way best, at least with my boys, for plenty of love, and plenty of patience, seem to have succeeded pretty well.” And Aunt Jessie lifted the nosegay from her lap, feeling as if that unfailing love and patience were already blooming into her life as beautifully as the sweet-breathed roses given by her boy refreshed and brightened these long hours of patient waiting in a corner.

“I don’t deny that you’ve done well, Jessie, but you’ve been let alone and had no one to hold your hand or interfere. If my Mac had gone to sea as your Jem did, I never should have been as severe as I am. Men are so perverse and shortsighted, they don’t trouble about the future as long as things are quiet and comfortable in the present,” continued Mrs. Jane, quite forgetting that the shortsighted partner of the firm, physically speaking at least, was herself.

“Ah, yes! We mothers love to foresee and foretell our children’s lives even before they are born, and are very apt to be disappointed if they do not turn out as we planned. I know I am yet I really have no cause to complain and am learning to see that all we can do is to give the dear boys good principles and the best training we may, then leave them to finish what we have begun.” And Mrs. Jessie’s eye wandered away to Archie, dancing with Rose, quite unconscious what a pretty little castle in the air tumbled down when he fell in love with Phebe.

“Right, quite right on that point we agree exactly. I have spared nothing to give my boys good principles and good habits, and I am willing to trust them anywhere. Nine times did I whip my Steve to cure him of fibbing, and over and over again did Mac go without his dinner rather than wash his hands. But I whipped and starved them both into obedience, and now I have my reward,” concluded the “stern parent” with a proud wave of the fan, which looked very like a ferule, being as big, hard, and uncompromising as such an article could be.

Mrs. Jessie gave a mild murmur of assent, but could not help thinking, with a smile, that in spite of their early tribulations the sins for which the boys suffered had gotten a little mixed in their result, for fibbing Steve was now the tidy one, and careless Mac the truth teller. But such small contradictions will happen in the best-regulated families, and all perplexed parents can do is to keep up a steadfast preaching and practicing in the hope that it will bear fruit sometime, for according to an old proverb, Children pick up words as pigeons pease, To utter them again as God shall please.

“I hope they won’t dance the child to death among them, for each one seems bound to have his turn, even your sober Mac,” said Mrs. Jessie a few minutes later as she saw Archie hand Rose over to his cousin, who carried her off with an air of triumph from several other claimants.

“She’s very good to him, and her influence is excellent, for he is of an age now when a young woman’s opinion has more weight than an old one’s. Though he is always good to his mother, and I feel as if I should take great comfort in him. He’s one of the sort who will not marry till late, if ever, being fond of books and a quiet life,” responded Mrs. Jane, remembering how often her son had expressed his belief that philosophers should not marry and brought up Plato as an example of the serene wisdom to be attained only by a single man while her husband sided with Socrates, for whom he felt a profound sympathy, though he didn’t dare to own it.

“Well, I don’t know about that. Since my Archie surprised me by losing his heart as he did, I’m prepared for anything, and advise you to do likewise. I really shouldn’t wonder if Mac did something remarkable in that line, though he shows no sign of it yet, I confess,” answered Mrs. Jessie, laughing.

“It won’t be in that direction, you may be sure, for her fate is sealed. Dear me, how sad it is to see a superior girl like that about to throw herself away on a handsome scapegrace. I won’t mention names, but you understand me.” And Mrs. Jane shook her head, as if she could mention the name of one superior girl who had thrown herself away and now saw the folly of it.

“I’m very anxious, of course, and so is Alec, but it may be the saving of one party and the happiness of the other, for some women love to give more than they receive,” said Mrs. Jessie, privately wondering, for the thousandth time, why brother Mac ever married the learned Miss Humphries.

“You’ll see that it won’t prosper, and I shall always maintain that a wife cannot entirely undo a mother’s work. Rose will have her hands full if she tries to set all Clara’s mistakes right,” answered Aunt Jane grimly, then began to fan violently as their hostess approached to have a dish of chat about “our dear young people.”

Rose was in a merry mood that night, and found Mac quite ready for fun, which was fortunate, since her first remark set them off on a droll subject.

“Oh, Mac! Annabel has just confided to me that she is engaged to Fun See! Think of her going to housekeeping in Canton someday and having to order rats, puppies, and bird’s-nest soup for dinner,” whispered Rose, too much amused to keep the news to herself.

“By Confucius! Isn’t that a sweet prospect?” And Mac burst out laughing, to the great surprise of his neighbors, who wondered what there was amusing about the Chinese sage. “It is rather alarming, though, to have these infants going on at this rate. Seems to be catching, a new sort of scarlet fever, to judge by Annabel’s cheeks and Kitty’s gown,” he added, regarding the aforesaid ladies with eyes still twinkling with merriment.

"Don't be ungallant, but go and do likewise, for it is all the fashion. I heard Mrs. Van tell old Mrs. Joy that it was going to be a marrying year, so you'll be sure to catch it," answered Rose, reefing her skirts, for, with all his training, Mac still found it difficult to keep his long legs out of the man-traps.

"It doesn't look like a painful disease, but I must be careful, for I've no time to be ill now. What are the symptoms?" asked Mac, trying to combine business with pleasure and improve his mind while doing his duty.

"If you ever come back I'll tell you," laughed Rose as he danced away into the wrong corner, bumped smartly against another gentleman, and returned as soberly as if that was the proper figure.

"Well, tell me 'how not to do it,'" he said, subsiding for a moment's talk when Rose had floated to and fro in her turn.

"Oh! You see some young girl who strikes you as particularly charming whether she really is or not doesn't matter a bit and you begin to think about her a great deal, to want to see her, and to get generally sentimental and absurd," began Rose, finding it difficult to give a diagnosis of the most mysterious disease under the sun.

"Don't think it sounds enticing. Can't I find an antidote somewhere, for if it is in the air this year I'm sure to get it, and it may be fatal," said Mac, who felt pretty lively and liked to make Rose merry, for he suspected that she had a little trouble from a hint Dr. Alec had given him.

"I hope you will catch it, because you'll be so funny."

"Will you take care of me as you did before, or have you got your hands full?"

"I'll help, but really with Archie and Steve and Charlie, I shall have enough to do. You'd better take it lightly the first time, and so won't need much care."

"Very well, how shall I begin? Enlighten my ignorance and start me right, I beg."

"Go about and see people, make yourself agreeable, and not sit in corners observing other people as if they were puppets dancing for your amusement. I heard Mrs. Van once say that propinquity works wonders, and she ought to know, having married off two daughters, and just engaged a third to 'a most charming young man.'?

"Good lack! The cure sounds worse than the disease. Propinquity, hey? Why, I may be in danger this identical moment and can't flee for my life," said Mac, gently catching her round the waist for a general waltz.

"Don't be alarmed, but mind your steps, for Charlie is looking at us, and I want you to do your best. That's perfect take me quite round, for I love to waltz and seldom get a good turn except with you boys," said Rose, smiling up at him approvingly as his strong arm guided her among the revolving couples and his feet kept time without a fault.

"This certainly is a great improvement on the chair business, to which I have devoted myself with such energy that I've broken the backs of two partners and dislocated the arm of the old rocker. I took an occasional turn with that heavy party, thinking it good practice in case I ever happen to dance with stout ladies." And Mac nodded toward Annabel, pounding gaily with Mr. Tokio, whose yellow countenance beamed as his beady eyes rested on his plump fiancée.

Pausing in the midst of her merriment at the image of Mac and the old rocking chair, Rose said reprovingly, "Though a heathen Chinee, Fun puts you to shame, for he did not ask foolish questions but went a-wooing like a sensible little man, and I've no doubt Annabel will be very happy."

"Choose me a suitable divinity and I will try to adore. Can I do more than that to retrieve my character?" answered Mac, safely landing his partner and plying the fan according to instructions.

"How would Emma do?" inquired Rose, whose sense of the ludicrous was strong and who could not resist the temptation of horrifying Mac by the suggestion.

"Never! It sets my teeth on edge to look at her tonight. I suppose that dress is 'a sweet thing just out,' but upon my word she reminds me of nothing but a Harlequin ice," and Mac turned his back on her with a shudder, for he was sensitive to discords of all kinds.

"She certainly does, and that mixture of chocolate, pea green, and pink is simply detestable, though many people would consider it decidedly 'chic,' to use her favorite word. I suppose you will dress your wife like a Spartan matron of the time of Lycurgus," added Rose, much tickled by his new conceit.

"I'll wait till I get her before I decide. But one thing I'm sure of she shall not dress like a Greek dancer of the time of Pericles," answered Mac, regarding with great disfavor a young lady who, having a statuesque figure, affected drapery of the scanty and clinging description.

"Then it is of no use to suggest that classic creature, so as you reject my first attempts, I won't go on but look about me quietly, and you had better do the same. Seriously, Mac, more gaiety and less study would do you good, for you will grow old before your time if you shut yourself up and pore over books so much."

"I don't believe there is a younger or a jollier-feeling fellow in the room than I am, though I may not conduct myself like a dancing dervish. But I own you may be right about the books, for there are many sorts of intemperance, and a library is as irresistible to me as a barroom to a toper. I shall have to sign a pledge and cork up the only bottle that tempts me my ink-stand."

"I'll tell you how to make it easier to abstain. Stop studying and write a novel into which you can put all your wise things, and so clear your brains for a new start by and by. Do I should so like to read it," cried Rose, delighted with the project, for she was sure Mac could do anything he liked in that line.

"First live, then write. How can I go to romancing till I know what romance means?" he asked soberly, feeling that so far he had had very little in his life.

"Then you must find out, and nothing will help you more than to love someone very much. Do as I've advised and be a modern Diogenes going about with spectacles instead of a lantern in search, not of an honest man, but a perfect woman. I do hope you will be successful." And Rose made her curtsey as the dance ended.

"I don't expect perfection, but I should like one as good as they ever make them nowadays. If you are looking for the honest man, I wish you success in return," said Mac, relinquishing her fan with a glance of such sympathetic significance that a quick flush of feeling rose to the girl's face as she answered very low, "If honesty was all I wanted, I certainly have found it in you."

Then she went away with Charlie, who was waiting for his turn, and Mac roamed about, wondering if anywhere in all that crowd his future wife was hidden, saying to himself, as he glanced from face to face, quite unresponsive to the various allurements displayed,

"What care I how fair she be,
If she be not fair for me?"

Just before supper several young ladies met in the dressing room to repair damages and, being friends, they fell into discourse as they smoothed their locks and had their tattered furbelows sewed or pinned up by the neat-handed Phillis-in-waiting.

When each had asked the other, "How do I look tonight, dear?" and been answered with reciprocal enthusiasm, "Perfectly lovely, darling!" Kitty said to Rose, who was helping her to restore order out of the chaos to which much exercise had reduced her curls: "By the way, young Randal is dying to be presented to you. May I after supper?"

"No, thank you," answered Rose very decidedly.

"Well, I'm sure I don't see why not," began Kitty, looking displeased but not surprised.

"I think you do, else why didn't you present him when he asked? You seldom stop to think of etiquette why did you now?"

"I didn't like to do it till I had you are so particular I thought you'd say 'no,' but I couldn't tell him so," stammered Kitty, feeling that she had better have settled the matter herself, for Rose was very particular and had especial reason to dislike this person because he was not only a dissipated young reprobate himself but seemed possessed of Satan to lead others astray likewise.

“I don’t wish to be rude, dear, but I really must decline, for I cannot know such people, even though I meet them here,” said Rose, remembering Charlie’s revelations on New Year’s night and hardening her heart against the man who had been his undoing on that as well as on other occasions, she had reason to believe.

“I couldn’t help it! Old Mr. Randal and Papa are friends, and though I spoke of it, brother Alf wouldn’t hear of passing that bad boy over,” explained Kitty eagerly.

“Yet Alf forbade you driving or skating with him, for he knows better than we how unfit he is to come among us.”

“I’d drop him tomorrow if I could, but I must be civil in my own house. His mother brought him, and he won’t dare to behave here as he does at their bachelor parties.”

“She ought not to have brought him till he had shown some desire to mend his ways. It is none of my business, I know, but I do wish people wouldn’t be so inconsistent, letting boys go to destruction and then expecting us girls to receive them like decent people.” Rose spoke in an energetic whisper, but Annabel heard her and exclaimed, as she turned round with a powder puff in her hand: “My goodness, Rose! What is all that about going to destruction?”

“She is being strong-minded, and I don’t very much blame her in this case. But it leaves me in a dreadful scrape,” said Kitty, supporting her spirits with a sniff of aromatic vinegar.

“I appeal to you, since you heard me, and there’s no one here but ourselves do you consider young Randal a nice person to know?” And Rose turned to Annabel and Emma with an anxious eye, for she did not find it easy to abide by her principles when so doing annoyed friends.

“No, indeed, he’s perfectly horrid! Papa says he and Gorham are the wildest young men he knows, and enough to spoil the whole set. I’m so glad I’ve got no brothers,” responded Annabel, placidly powdering her pink arms, quite undeterred by the memory of sundry white streaks left on sundry coat sleeves.

“I think that sort of scrupulousness is very ill-bred, if you’ll excuse my saying so, Rose. We are not supposed to know anything about fastness, and wildness, and so on, but to treat every man alike and not be fussy and prudish,” said Emma, settling her many-colored streamers with the superior air of a woman of the world, aged twenty.

“Ah! But we do know, and if our silence and civility have no effect, we ought to try something else and not encourage wickedness of any kind. We needn't scold and preach, but we can refuse to know such people and that will do some good, for they don't like to be shunned and shut out from respectable society. Uncle Alec told me not to know that man, and I won't." Rose spoke with unusual warmth, forgetting that she could not tell the real reason for her strong prejudice against "that man."

"Well, I know him. I think him very jolly, and I'm engaged to dance the German with him after supper. He leads quite as well as your cousin Charlie and is quite as fascinating, some people think," returned Emma, tossing her head disdainfully, for Prince Charming did not worship at her shrine and it piqued her vanity.

In spite of her quandary, Rose could not help smiling as she recalled Mac's comparison, for Emma turned so red with spiteful chagrin, she seemed to have added strawberry ice to the other varieties composing the Harlequin.

"Each must judge for herself. I shall follow Aunt Jessie's advice and try to keep my atmosphere as pure as I can, for she says every woman has her own little circle and in it can use her influence for good, if she will. I do will heartily, and I'll prove that I'm neither proud nor fussy by receiving, here or at home, any respectable man you like to present to me, no matter how poor or plain or insignificant he may be."

With which declaration Rose ended her protest, and the four damsels streamed downstairs together like a wandering rainbow. But Kitty laid to heart what she had said; Annabel took credit herself for siding with her; and Emma owned that she was not trying to keep her atmosphere pure when she came to dance with the objectionable Randal. So Rose's "little circle" was the better for the influence she tried to exert, although she never knew it.

At suppertime Charlie kept near her, and she was quite content with him, for he drank only coffee, and she saw him shake his head with a frown when young Van beckoned him toward an anteroom, from whence the sound of popping corks had issued with increasing frequency as the evening wore on.

"Dear fellow, he does try," thought Rose, longing to show how she admired his self-denial, but she could only say, as they left the supper room with the aunts, who were going early: "If I had not promised Uncle to get home as soon after midnight as possible, I'd stay and dance the German with you, for you deserve a reward tonight."

"A thousand thanks, but I am going when you do," answered Charlie, understanding both her look and words and very grateful for them.

"Really?" cried Rose, delighted.

"Really. I'll be in the hall when you come down." And Charlie thought the Fra

Angelico angel was not half so bright and beautiful as the one who looked back at him out of a pale blue cloud as Rose went upstairs as if on wings.

When she came down again Charlie was not in the hall, however, and, after waiting a few minutes, Mac offered to go and find him, for Aunt Jane was still hunting a lost rubber above.

"Please say I'm ready, but he needn't come if he doesn't want to," said Rose, not wishing to demand too much of her promising penitent.

"If he has gone into that barroom, I'll have him out, no matter who is there!" growled Mac to himself as he made his way to the small apartment whither the gentlemen retired for a little private refreshment when the spirit moved, as it often did.

The door was ajar, and Charlie seemed to have just entered, for Mac heard a familiar voice call out in a jovial tone: "Come, Prince! You're just in time to help us drink Steve's health with all the honors."

"Can't stop, only ran in to say good night, Van. Had a capital time, but I'm on duty and must go."

"That's a new dodge. Take a stirrup cup anyway, and come back in time for a merry-go-rounder when you've disposed of the ladies," answered the young host, diving into the wine cooler for another bottle.

"Charlie's going in for sanctity, and it doesn't seem to agree with him," laughed one of the two other young men who occupied several chairs apiece, resting their soles in every sense of the word.

"Apron strings are coming into fashion the bluer the better hey, Prince?" added the other, trying to be witty, with the usual success.

"You'd better go home early yourself, Barrow, or that tongue of yours will get you into trouble," retorted Charlie, conscious that he ought to take his own advice, yet lingering, nervously putting on his gloves while the glasses were being filled.

"Now, brother-in-law, fire away! Here you are, Prince." And Steve handed a glass across the table to his cousin, feeling too much elated with various pleasurable emotions to think what he was doing, for the boys all knew Charlie's weakness and usually tried to defend him from it.

Before the glass could be taken, however, Mac entered in a great hurry, delivering his message in an abbreviated and rather peremptory form: "Rose is waiting for you. Hurry up!"

"All right. Good night, old fellows!" And Charlie was off, as if the name had power to stop him in the very act of breaking the promise made to himself.

"Come, Solon, take a social drop, and give us an epithalamium in your best Greek. Here's to you!" And Steve was lifting the wine to his own lips when Mac knocked the glass out of his hand with a flash of the eye that caused his brother to stare at him with his mouth open in an imbecile sort of way, which seemed to excite Mac still more, for, turning to his young host, he said, in a low voice, and with a look that made the gentlemen on the chairs sit up suddenly: “I beg pardon, Van, for making a mess, but I can’t stand by and see my own brother tempt another man beyond his strength or make a brute of himself. That’s plain English, but I can’t help speaking out, for I know not one of you would willingly hurt Charlie, and you will if you don’t let him alone.”

“What do you pitch into me for? I’ve done nothing. A fellow must be civil in his own house, mustn’t he?” asked Van good-humoredly as he faced about, corkscrew in hand.

“Yes, but it is not civil to urge or joke a guest into doing what you know and he knows is bad for him. That’s only a glass of wine to you, but it is perdition to Charlie, and if Steve knew what he was about, he’d cut his right hand off before he’d offer it.”

“Do you mean to say I’m tipsy?” demanded Steve, ruffling up like a little gamecock, for though he saw now what he had done and was ashamed of it, he hated to have Mac air his peculiar notions before other people.

“With excitement, not champagne, I hope, for I wouldn’t own you if you were,” answered Mac, in whom indignation was effervescing like the wine in the forgotten bottle, for the men were all young, friends of Steve’s and admirers of Charlie’s. “Look here, boys,” he went on more quietly, “I know I ought not to explode in this violent sort of way, but upon my life I couldn’t help it when I heard what you were saying and saw what Steve was doing. Since I have begun, I may as well finish and tell you straight out that Prince can’t stand this sort of thing. He is trying to flee temptation, and whoever leads him into it does a cowardly and sinful act, for the loss of one’s own self-respect is bad enough, without losing the more precious things that make life worth having. Don’t tell him I’ve said this, but lend a hand if you can, and never have to reproach yourselves with the knowledge that you helped to ruin a fellow creature, soul and body.”

It was well for the success of Mac’s first crusade that his hearers were gentlemen and sober, so his outburst was not received with jeers or laughter but listened to in silence, while the expression of the faces changed from one of surprise to regret and respect, for earnestness is always effective and championship of this sort seldom fails to touch hearts as yet unspoiled. As he paused with an eloquent little quiver in his eager voice, Van corked the bottle at a blow, threw down the corkscrew, and offered Mac his hand, saying heartily, in spite of his slang: “You are a first-class old brick! I’ll lend a hand for one, and do my best to back up Charlie, for he's the finest fellow I know, and shan't go to the devil like poor Randal if I can help it."

Murmurs of applause from the others seemed to express a general assent to this vigorous statement, and, giving the hand a grateful shake, Mac retreated to the door, anxious to be off now that he had freed his mind with such unusual impetuosity.

"Count on me for anything I can do in return for this, Van. I'm sorry to be such a marplot, but you can take it out in quizzing me after I'm gone. I'm fair game, and Steve can set you going."

With that, Mac departed as abruptly as he had come, feeling that he had "made a mess" of it, but comforting himself with the thought that perhaps he had secured help for Charlie at his own expense and thinking with a droll smile as he went back to his mother: "My romance begins by looking after other girls' lovers instead of finding a sweetheart for myself, but I can't tell Rose, so she won't laugh at me."

Chapter 13 BOTH SIDES

Steve's engagement made a great stir in the family a pleasant one this time, for nobody objected, everything seemed felicitous, and the course of true love ran very smoothly for the young couple, who promised to remove the only obstacle to their union by growing old and wise as soon as possible. If he had not been so genuinely happy, the little lover's airs would have been unbearable, for he patronized all mankind in general, his brother and elder cousins in particular.

"Now, that is the way to manage matters," he declared, standing before the fire in Aunt Clara's billiard room a day or two after the ball, with his hands behind his back. "No nonsense, no delay, no domestic rows or tragic separations. Just choose with taste and judgment, make yourself agreeable through thick and thin, and when it is perfectly evident that the dear creature adores the ground you walk on, say the word like a man, and there you are."

"All very easy to do that with a girl like Kitty, who has no confounded notions to spoil her and trip you up every time you don't exactly toe the mark," muttered Charlie, knocking the balls about as if it were a relief to hit something, for he was in a gloriously bad humor that evening, because time hung heavy on his hands since he had forsworn the company he could not keep without danger to himself.

"You should humor those little notions, for all women have them, and it needs tact to steer clear of them. Kitty's got dozens, but I treat them with respect, have my own way when I can, give in without growling when I can't, and we get on like a couple of — "

"Spoons," put in Charlie, who felt that he had not steered clear and so suffered shipwreck in sight of land.

Steve meant to have said "doves," but his cousin's levity caused him to add with calm dignity, "reasonable beings," and then revenged himself by making a good shot which won him the game.

"You always were a lucky little dog, Steve. I don't begrudge you a particle of your happiness, but it does seem as if things weren't quite fair sometimes," said Archie, suppressing an envious sigh, for, though he seldom complained, it was impossible to contrast his own and his cousin's prospects with perfect equanimity.

"His worth shines forth the brightest who in hope
Always confides: the Abject soul despairs,"

observed Mac, quoting Euripides in a conversational tone as he lay upon a divan reposing after a hard day’s work.

“Thank you,” said Archie, brightening a little, for a hopeful word from any source was very comfortable.

“That’s your favorite Rip, isn’t it? He was a wise old boy, but you could find advice as good as that nearer home,” put in Steve, who just then felt equal to slapping Plato on the shoulder, so elated was he at being engaged “first of all the lot,” as he gracefully expressed it.

“Don’t halloo till you are out of the wood, Dandy Mrs. Kit has jilted two men, and may a third, so you’d better not brag of your wisdom too soon, for she may make a fool of you yet,” said Charlie, cynically, his views of life being very gloomy about this time.

“No, she won’t, Steve, if you do your part honestly. There’s the making of a good little woman in Kitty, and she has proved it by taking you instead of those other fellows. You are not a Solomon, but you’re not spoilt yet, and she had the sense to see it,” said Mac encouragingly from his corner, for he and his brother were better friends than even since the little scene at the Van Tassels’.

“Hear! Hear!” cried Steve, looking more than ever like a cheerful young cockerel trying to crow as he stood upon the hearth rug with his hands under his coat tails, rising and falling alternately upon the toes and heels of his neat little boots.

“Come, you’ve given them each a pat on the head haven’t you got one for me? I need it enough, for if ever there was a poor devil born under an evil star, it is C. C. Campbell,” exclaimed Charlie, leaning his chin on his cue with a discontented expression of countenance, for trying to be good is often very hard work till one gets used to it.

“Oh, yes! I can accommodate you.” And, as if his words suggested the selection, Mac, still lying flat upon his back, repeated one of his favorite bits from Beaumont and Fletcher, for he had a wonderful memory and could reel off poetry by the hour together.

“Man is his own star; and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man
Commands all light, all influence, all fate.
Nothing to him falls early or too late.

Our acts our angels are; or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.”

“Confoundedly bad angels they are too,” muttered Charlie ruefully, remembering the one that undid him.

His cousins never knew exactly what occurred on New Year's night, but suspected that something was amiss, for Charlie had the blues, and Rose, though as kind as ever, expressed no surprise at his long absences. They had all observed and wondered at this state of things, yet discreetly made no remark till Steve, who was as inquisitive as a magpie, seized this opportunity to say in a friendly tone, which showed that he bore no malice for the dark prophecy regarding his Kitty's faithfulness: "What's the trouble, Prince? You are so seldom in a bad humor that we don't know what to make of it and all feel out of spirits when you have the blues. Had a tiff with Rose?"

"Never you mind, little boy, but this I will say the better women are, the more unreasonable they are. They don't require us to be saints like themselves, which is lucky, but they do expect us to render an 'honest and a perfect man' sometimes, and that is asking rather too much in a fallen world like this," said Charlie, glad to get a little sympathy, though he had no intention of confessing his transgressions.

"No, it isn't," said Mac, decidedly.

"Much you know about it," began Charlie, ill pleased to be so flatly contradicted.

"Well, I know this much," added Mac, suddenly sitting up with his hair in a highly disheveled condition. "It is very unreasonable in us to ask women to be saints and then expect them to feel honored when we offer them our damaged hearts or, at best, one not half as good as theirs. If they weren't blinded by love, they'd see what a mean advantage we take of them and not make such bad bargains."

"Upon my word, the philosopher is coming out strong upon the subject! We shall have him preaching 'Women's Rights' directly," said Steve, much amazed at this outburst.

"I've begun, you see, and much good may it do you," answered Mac, laying himself placidly down again.

"Well, but look here, man you are arguing on the wrong side," put in Archie, quite agreeing with him, but feeling that he must stand by his order at all costs.

"Never mind sides, uphold the right wherever you find it. You needn't stare, Steve I told you I was going to look into this matter, and I am. You think I'm wrapped up in books, but I see a great deal more of what is going on around me than you imagine, and I'm getting on in this new branch, let me tell you, quite as fast as is good for me, I daresay."

"Going in for perfection, are you?" asked Charlie, both amused and interested, for he respected Mac more than he owned even to himself, and though he had never alluded to the timely warning, neither forgot.

“Yes, I think of it.”

“How will you begin?”

“Do my best all-round keep good company, read good books, love good things, and cultivate soul and body as faithfully and wisely as I can.”

“And you expect to succeed, do you?”

“Please God, I will.”

The quiet energy of Mac’s last words produced a momentary silence. Charlie thoughtfully studied the carpet; Archie, who had been absently poking the fire, looked over at Mac as if he thanked him again, and Steve, forgetting his self-conceit, began to wonder if it was not possible to improve himself a little for Kitty’s sake. Only a minute, for young men do not give much time to thoughts of this kind, even when love stirs up the noblest impulses within them. To act rather than to talk is more natural to most of them, as Charlie’s next question showed, for, having the matter much at heart, he ventured to ask in an offhand way as he laughed and twirled his cue: “Do you intend to reach the highest point of perfection before you address one of the fair saints, or shall you ask her to lend a hand somewhere short of that?”

“As it takes a long lifetime to do what I plan, I think I shall ask some good woman ‘to lend a hand’ when I’ve got anything worth offering her. Not a saint, for I never shall be one myself, but a gentle creature who will help me, as I shall try to help her, so that we can go on together and finish our work hereafter, if we haven’t time to do it here.”

If Mac had been a lover, he would not have discussed the subject in this simple and sincere fashion, though he might have felt it far more deeply, but being quite heart-free, he frankly showed his interest and, curiously enough, out of his wise young head unconsciously gave the three lovers before him counsel which they valued, because he practiced what he preached.

“Well, I hope you’ll find her!” said Charlie heartily as he went back to his game.

“I think I shall.” And while the others played, Mac lay staring at the window curtain as contentedly as if, through it, he beheld “a dream of fair women” from which to choose his future mate.

A few days after this talk in the billiard room, Kitty went to call upon Rose, for as she was about to enter the family she felt it her duty to become acquainted with all its branches. This branch, however, she cultivated more assiduously than any other and was continually running in to confer with “Cousin Rose,” whom she considered the wisest, dearest, kindest girl ever created. And Rose, finding that, in spite of her flighty head, Kitty had a good heart of her own, did her best to encourage all the new hopes and aspirations springing up in it under the warmth of the first genuine affection she had ever known.

“My dear, I want to have some serious conversation with you upon a subject in which I take an interest for the first time in my life,” began Miss Kitty, seating herself and pulling off her gloves as if the subject was one which needed a firm grasp.

“Tell away, and don’t mind if I go on working, as I want to finish this job today,” answered Rose, with a long-handled paintbrush in her hand and a great pair of shears at her side.

“You are always so busy! What is it now? Let me help I can talk faster when I’m doing something,” which seemed hardly possible, for Kitty’s tongue went like a mill clapper at all hours.

“Making picture books for my sick babies at the hospital. Pretty work, isn’t it? You cut out, and I’ll paste them on these squares of gay cambric then we just tie up a few pages with a ribbon and there is a nice, light, durable book for the poor dears to look at as they lie in their little beds.”

“A capital idea. Do you go there often? How ever do you find the time for such things?” asked Kitty, busily cutting from a big sheet the touching picture of a parent bird with a red head and a blue tail offering what looked like a small boa constrictor to one of its nestlings, a fat young squab with a green head, yellow body, and no tail at all.

“I have plenty of time now I don’t go out so much, for a party uses up two days generally one to prepare for it and one to get over it, you know.”

“People think it is so odd of you to give up society all of a sudden. They say you have ‘turned pious’ and it is owing to your peculiar bringing-up. I always take your part and say it is a pity other girls haven’t as sensible an education, for I don’t know one who is as satisfactory on the whole as you are.”

“Much obliged. You may also tell people I gave up gaiety because I value health more. But I haven’t forsworn everything of the kind, Kit. I go to concerts and lectures, and all sorts of early things, and have nice times at home, as you know. I like fun as well as ever, but I’m getting on, you see, and must be preparing a little for the serious part of life. One never knows when it may come,” said Rose, thoughtfully as she pasted a squirrel upside down on the pink cotton page before her.

“That reminds me of what I wanted to say. If you’ll believe me, my dear, Steve has got that very idea into his head! Did you or Mac put it there?” asked Kitty, industriously clashing her shears.

“No, I’ve given up lecturing the boys lately they are so big now they don’t like it, and I fancy I’d got into a way that was rather tiresome.”

“Well, then, he is ‘turning pious’ too. And what is very singular, I like it. Now don’t smile I really do and I want to be getting ready for the ‘serious part of life,’ as you call it. That is, I want to grow better as fast as I can, for Steve says he isn’t half good enough for me. Just think of that!”

Kitty looked so surprised and pleased and proud that Rose felt no desire to laugh at her sudden fancy for sobriety but said in her most sympathetic tone: “I’m very glad to hear it, for it shows that he loves you in the right way.”

“Is there more than one way?”

“Yes, I fancy so, because some people improve so much after they fall in love, and others do not at all. Have you never observed that?”

“I never learned how to observe. Of course I know that some matches turn out well and some don’t, but I never thought much about it.”

“Well, I have, for I was rather interested in the subject lately and had a talk with Aunt Jessie and Uncle about it.”

“Gracious! You don’t talk to them about such things, do you?”

“Yes, indeed. I ask any questions I like, and always get a good answer. It is such a nice way to learn, Kitty, for you don’t have to pore over books, but as things come along you talk about them and remember, and when they are spoken of afterward you understand and are interested, though you don’t say a word,” explained Rose.

“It must be nice, but I haven’t anyone to do so for me. Papa is too busy, and Mama always says when I ask question, ‘Don’t trouble your head with such things, child,’ so I don’t. What did you learn about matches turning out well? I’m interested in that, because I want mine to be quite perfect in all respects.”

“After thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that Uncle was right, and it is not always safe to marry a person just because you love him,” began Rose, trying to enlighten Kitty without betraying herself.

“Of course not if they haven’t money or are bad. But otherwise I don’t see what more is needed,” said Kitty wonderingly.

“One should stop and see if it is a wise love, likely to help both parties and wear well, for you know it ought to last all one’s lifetime, and it is very sad if it doesn’t.”

“I declare it quite scares me to think of it, for I don’t usually go beyond my wedding day in making plans. I remember, though, that when I was engaged the first time you don’t know the man; it was just after you went away, and I was only sixteen someone very ill-naturedly said I should ‘marry in haste and repent at leisure,’ and that made me try to imagine how it would seem to go on year after year with Gustavus who had a dreadful temper, by the way and it worried me so to think of it that I broke the engagement, and was so glad ever afterward.”

"You were a wise girl and I hope you'll do it again if you find, after a time, that you and Steve do not truly trust and respect as well as love one another. If you don't, you'll be miserable when it is too late, as so many people are who do marry in haste and have a lifetime to repent it. Aunt Jessie says so, and she knows."

"Don't be solemn, Rose. It fidgets me to think about life-times, and respecting, and all those responsible things. I'm not used to it, and I don't know how to do it."

"But you must think, and you must learn how before you take the responsibility upon yourself. That is what your life is for, and you mustn't spoil it by doing a very solemn thing without seeing if you are ready for it."

"Do you think about all this?" asked Kitty, shrugging up her shoulders as if responsibility of any sort did not sit comfortably on them.

"One has to sometimes, you know. But is that all you wanted to tell me?" added Rose, anxious to turn the conversation from herself.

"Oh, dear, no! The most serious thing of all is this. Steve is putting himself in order generally, and so I want to do my part, and I must begin right away before my thoughts get distracted with clothes and all sorts of dear, delightful, frivolous things that I can't help liking. Now I wish you'd tell me where to begin. Shouldn't I improve my mind by reading something solid?" And Kitty looked over at the well-filled bookcase as if to see if it contained anything large and dry enough to be considered "solid."

"It would be an excellent plan, and we'll look up something. What do you feel as if you needed most?"

"A little of everything I should say, for when I look into my mind there really doesn't seem to be much there but odds and ends, and yet I'm sure I've read a great deal more than some girls do. I suppose novels don't count, though, and are of no use, for, goodness knows, the people and things they describe aren't a bit like the real ones."

"Some novels are very useful and do as much good as sermons, I've heard Uncle say, because they not only describe truly, but teach so pleasantly that people like to learn in that way," said Rose, who knew the sort of books Kitty had read and did not wonder that she felt rather astray when she tried to guide herself by their teaching.

"You pick me out some of the right kind, and I'll apply my mind to them. Then I ought to have some 'serious views' and 'methods' and 'principles.' Steve said 'principles,' good firm ones, you know." And Kitty gave a little pull at the bit of cambric she was cutting as housewives pull cotton or calico when they want "a good firm article."

Rose could not help laughing now, though much pleased, for Kitty was so prettily in earnest, and yet so perfectly ignorant how to begin on the self-improvement she very much needed, that it was pathetic as well as comical to see and hear her.

"You certainly want some of those, and must begin at once to get them, but Aunt Jessie can help you there better than I can, or Aunt Jane, for she has very 'firm' ones, I assure you," said Rose, sobering down as quickly as possible.

"Mercy on us! I should never dare to say a word about it to Mrs. Mac, for I'm dreadfully afraid of her, she is so stern, and how I'm ever to get on when she is my mother-in-law I don't know!" cried Kitty, clasping her hands in dismay at the idea.

"She isn't half as stern as she looks, and if you go to her without fear, you've no idea how sensible and helpful she is. I used to be frightened out of my wits with her, but now I'm not a bit, and we get on nicely. Indeed, I'm fond of her, she is so reliable and upright in all things."

"She certainly is the straightest woman I ever saw, and the most precise. I never shall forget how scared I was when Steve took me up to see her that first time. I put on all my plainest things, did my hair in a meek knob, and tried to act like a sober, sedate young woman. Steve would laugh at me and say I looked like a pretty nun, so I couldn't be as proper as I wished. Mrs. Mac was very kind, of course, but her eye was so sharp I felt as if she saw right through me, and knew that I'd pinned on my bonnet strings, lost a button off my boot, and didn't brush my hair for ten minutes every night," said Kitty in an awe-stricken tone.

"She likes you, though, and so does Uncle, and he's set his heart on having you live with them by and by, so don't mind her eyes but look straight up at her, and you'll see how kind they can grow."

"Mac likes me, too, and that did please me, for he doesn't like girls generally. Steve told me he said I had the 'making of a capital little woman in me.' Wasn't it nice of him? Steve was so proud, though he does laugh at Mac sometimes."

"Don't disappoint them, dear. Encourage Steve in all the good things he likes or wants, make friends with Mac, love Aunt Jane, and be a daughter to Uncle, and you'll find yourself a very happy girl."

"I truly will, and thank you very much for not making fun of me. I know I'm a little goose, but lately I've felt as if I might come to something if I had the right sort of help. I'll go up and see Aunt Jessie tomorrow. I'm not a bit afraid of her, and then if you'll just quietly find out from Uncle Doctor what I must read, I'll work as hard as I can. Don't tell anyone, please, they'll think it odd and affected, and I can't bear to be laughed at, though I daresay it is good discipline."

Rose promised, and both worked in silence for a moment, then Kitty asked rather timidly: “Are you and Charlie trying this plan too? Since you’ve left off going out so much, he keeps away also, and we don’t know what to make of it.”

“He has had what he calls an ‘artistic fit’ lately, set up a studio, and is doing some crayon sketches of us all. If he’d only finish his things, they would be excellent, but he likes to try a great variety at once. I’ll take you in sometime, and perhaps he will do a portrait of you for Steve. He likes girls’ faces and gets the likenesses wonderfully well.”

“People say you are engaged but I contradict it, because, of course, I should know if you were.”

“We are not.”

“I’m glad of it, for really, Rose, I’m afraid Charlie hasn’t got ‘firm principles,’ though he is a fascinating fellow and one can’t scold him. You don’t mind my saying so, do you, dear?” added Kitty, for Rose did not answer at once.

“Not in the least, for you are one of us now, and I can speak frankly and I will, for I think in one way you can help Steve very much. You are right about Charlie, both as to the principles and the fascination. Steve admires him exceedingly, and always from a boy liked to imitate his pleasant ways. Some of them are very harmless and do Steve good, but some are not. I needn’t talk about it, only you must show your boy that you depend on him to keep out of harm and help him do it.”

“I will, I will! And then perhaps, when he is a perfect model, Charlie will imitate him. I really begin to feel as if I had a great deal to do.” And Kitty looked as if she was beginning to like it also.

“We all have and the sooner we go to work the better for us and those we love. You wouldn’t think now that Phebe was doing anything for Archie, but she is, and writes such splendid letters, they stir him up wonderfully and make us all love and admire her more than ever.”

“How is she getting on?” asked Kitty, who, though she called herself a “little goose,” had tact enough to see that Rose did not care to talk about Charlie.

“Nicely, for you know she used to sing in our choir, so that was a good recommendation for another. She got a fine place in the new church at L — — , and that gives her a comfortable salary, though she has something put away. She was always a saving creature and kept her wages carefully. Uncle invested them, and she begins to feel quite independent already. No fear but my Phebe will get on she has such energy and manages so well. I sometimes wish I could run away and work with her.”

“Ah, my dear! We rich girls have our trials as well as poor ones, though we don’t get as much pity as they do,” sighed Kitty. “Nobody knows what I suffer sometimes from worries that I can’t talk about, and I shouldn’t get much sympathy if I did, just because I live in a big house, wear good gowns, and have lots of lovers. Annabel used to say she envied me above all created beings, but she doesn’t now, and is perfectly absorbed in her dear little Chinaman. Do you see how she ever could like him?”

So they began to gossip, and the sober talk was over for that time, but when Kitty departed, after criticizing all her dear friends and their respective sweethearts, she had a helpful little book in her muff, a resolute expression on her bright face, and so many excellent plans for self-improvement in her busy brain that she and Steve bid fair to turn out the model couple of the century.

Chapter 14 AUNT CLARA’S PLAN

Being seriously alarmed by the fear of losing the desire of his heart, Charlie had gone resolutely to work and, like many another young reformer, he rather overdid the matter, for in trying to keep out of the way of temptation, he denied himself much innocent enjoyment. The “artistic fit” was a good excuse for the seclusion which he fancied would be a proper penance, and he sat listlessly plying crayon or paintbrush, with daily wild rides on black Brutus, which seemed to do him good, for danger of that sort was his delight.

People were used to his whims and made light of what they considered a new one, but when it lasted week after week and all attempts to draw him out were vain, his jolly comrades gave him up and the family began to say approvingly, “Now he really is going to settle down and do something.” Fortunately, his mother let him alone, for though Dr. Alec had not “thundered in her ear” as he threatened, he had talked with her in a way which first made her very angry, then anxious, and, lastly, quite submissive, for her heart was set on the boy’s winning Rose and she would have had him put on sackcloth and ashes if that would have secured the prize. She made light of the cause of Rose’s displeasure, considering her extremely foolish and straitlaced, “for all young men of any spirit had their little vices, and came out well enough when the wild oats were sowed.” So she indulged Charlie in his new vagary, as she had in all his others, and treated him like an ill-used being, which was neither an inspiring nor helpful course on her part. Poor soul! She saw her mistake by and by, and when too late repented of it bitterly.

Rose wanted to be kind, and tried in various ways to help her cousin, feeling very sure she should succeed as many another hopeful woman has done, quite unconscious how much stronger an undisciplined will is than the truest love, and what a difficult task the wisest find it to undo the mistakes of a bad education. But it was a hard thing to do, for at the least hint of commendation or encouragement, he looked so hopeful that she was afraid of seeming to promise too much, and, of all things, she desired to escape the accusation of having trifled with him.

So life was not very comfortable to either just then; and while Charlie was “mortifying soul and body” to please her, she was studying how to serve him best. Aunt Jessie helped her very much, and no one guessed, when they saw pretty Miss Campbell going up and down the hill with such a serious face, that she was intent upon anything except taking, with praiseworthy regularity, the constitutionals which gave her such a charming color.

Matters were in this state when one day a note came to Rose from Mrs. Clara.

MY SWEET CHILD, Do take pity on my poor boy and cheer him up with a sight of you, for he is so triste it breaks my heart to see him. He has a new plan in his head, which strikes me as an excellent one, if you will only favor it. Let him come and take you for a drive this fine afternoon and talk things over. It will do him a world of good and deeply oblige

Your ever loving

AUNT CLARA.

Rose read the note twice and stood a moment pondering, with her eyes absently fixed on the little bay before her window. The sight of several black figures moving briskly to and fro across its frozen surface seemed to suggest a mode of escape from the drive she dreaded in more ways than one. “That will be safer and pleasanter,” she said, and going to her desk wrote her answer.

DEAR AUNTY, I’m afraid of Brutus, but if Charlie will go skating with me, I should enjoy it very much and it would do us both good. I can listen to the new plan with an undivided mind there, so give him my love, please, and say I shall expect him at three.

Affectionately, ROSE.

Punctually at three Charlie appeared with his skates over his arm and with a very contented face, which brightened wonderfully as Rose came downstairs in a sealskin suit and scarlet skirt, so like the one she wore years ago that he involuntarily exclaimed as he took her skates: “You look so like little Rose I hardly know you, and it seems so like old times I feel sixteen again.”

“That is just the way one ought to feel on such a day as this. Now let us be off and have a good spin before anyone comes. There are only a few children there now, but it is Saturday, you know, and everybody will be out before long,” answered Rose, carefully putting on her mittens as she talked, for her heart was not as light as the one little Rose carried under the brown jacket, and the boy of sixteen never looked at her with the love and longing she read in the eyes of the young man before her.

Away they went, and were soon almost as merry and warm as the children around them, for the ice was in good condition, the February sunshine brilliant, and the keen wind set their blood a-tingle with a healthful glow.

“Now tell me the plan your mother spoke of,” began Rose as they went gliding across the wide expanse before them, for Charlie seemed to have forgotten everything but the bliss of having her all to himself for a little while.

“Plan? Oh, yes! It is simply this. I’m going out to Father next month.”

“Really?” and Rose looked both surprised and incredulous, for this plan was not a new one.

“Really. You don’t believe it, but I am, and mother means to go with me. We’ve had another letter from the governor, and he says if she can’t part from her big baby to come along too, and all be happy together. What do you think of that?” he asked, eyeing her intently, for they were face to face as she went backward and he held both of her hands to steer and steady her.

“I like it immensely, and do believe it now only it rather takes my breath away to think of Aunty’s going, when she never would hear of it before.”

“She doesn’t like the plan very well now and consents to go only on one condition.”

“What is that?” asked Rose, trying to free her hands, for a look at Charlie made her suspect what was coming.

“That you go with us.” And, holding the hands fast, he added rapidly, “Let me finish before you speak. I don’t mean that anything is to be changed till you are ready, but if you go, I am willing to give up everything else and live anywhere as long as you like. Why shouldn’t you come to us for a year or two? We’ve never had our share. Father would be delighted, mother contented, and I the happiest man alive.”

“Who made this plan?” asked Rose as soon as she got the breath which certainly had been rather taken away by this entirely new and by no means agreeable scheme.

“Mother suggested it I shouldn’t have dared even to dream of such richness. I’d made up my mind to go alone, and when I told her, she was in despair till this superb idea came into her head. After that, of course, it was easy enough for me to stick to the resolution I’d made.”

“Why did you decide to go, Charlie?” And Rose looked up into the eyes that were fixed beseechingly on hers.

They wavered and glanced aside, then met hers honestly yet full of humility, which made her own fall as he answered very low: “Because I don’t dare to stay.”

“Is it so hard?” she said pitifully.

“Very hard. I haven’t the moral courage to own up and face ridicule, and it seems so mean to hide for fear of breaking my word. I will keep it this time, Rose, if I go to the ends of the earth to do it.”

“It is not cowardly to flee temptation, and nobody whose opinion is worth having will ridicule any brave attempt to conquer one’s self. Don’t mind it, Charlie, but stand fast, and I am sure you will succeed.”

“You don’t know what it is, and I can’t tell you, for till I tried to give it up I never guessed what a grip it had on me. I thought it was only a habit, easy to drop when I liked, but it is stronger than I, and sometimes I feel as if possessed of a devil that will get the better of me, try as I may."

He dropped her hands abruptly as he said that, with the energy of despair; and, as if afraid of saying too much, he left her for a minute, striking away at full speed, as if in truth he would "go to the ends of the earth" to escape the enemy within himself.

Rose stood still, appalled by this sudden knowledge of how much greater the evil was than she had dreamed. What ought she to do? Go with her cousin, and by so doing tacitly pledge herself as his companion on that longer journey for which he was as yet so poorly equipped? Both heart and conscience protested against this so strongly that she put the thought away. But compassion pleaded for him tenderly, and the spirit of self-sacrifice, which makes women love to give more than they receive, caused her to feel as if in a measure this man's fate lay in her hands, to be decided for good or ill through her. How should she be true both to him and to herself?

Before this question could be answered, he was back again, looking as if he had left his care behind him, for his moods varied like the wind. Her attitude, as she stood motionless and alone with downcast face, was so unlike the cheerful creature who came to meet him an hour ago, it filled him with self-reproach, and, coming up, he drew one hand through his arm, saying, as she involuntarily followed him, "You must not stand still. Forget my heroics and answer my question. Will you go with us, Rose?"

"Not now that is asking too much, Charlie, and I will promise nothing, because I cannot do it honestly," she answered, so firmly that he knew appeal was useless.

"Am I to go alone, then, leaving all I care for behind me?"

"No, take your mother with you, and do your best to reunite your parents. You could not give yourself to a better task."

"She won't go without you."

"I think she will if you hold fast to your resolution. You won't give that up, I hope?"

"No I must go somewhere, for I can't stay here, and it may as well be India, since that pleases Father," answered Charlie doggedly.

"It will more than you can imagine. Tell him all the truth, and see how glad he will be to help you, and how sincerely he will respect you for what you've done."

"If you respect me, I don't care much about the opinion of anyone else," answered Charlie, clinging with a lover's pertinacity to the hope that was dearest.

“I shall, if you go manfully away and do the duty you owe your father and yourself.”

“And when I’ve done it, may I come back to be rewarded, Rose?” he asked, taking possession of the hand on his arm as if it was already his.

“I wish I could say what you want me to. But how can I promise when I am not sure of anything? I don’t love you as I ought, and perhaps I never shall so why persist in making me bind myself in this way? Be generous, Charlie, and don’t ask it,” implored Rose, much afflicted by his persistence.

“I thought you did love me it looked very like it a month ago, unless you have turned coquette, and I can’t quite believe that,” he answered bitterly.

“I was beginning to love you, but you made me afraid to go on,” murmured Rose, trying to tell the truth kindly.

“That cursed custom! What can a man do when his hostess asks him to drink wine with her?” And Charlie looked as if he could have cursed himself even more heartily.

“He can say ‘no.’“

“I can’t.”

“Ah, that’s the trouble! You never learned to say it even to yourself, and now it is so hard, you want me to help you.”

“And you won’t.”

“Yes, I will, by showing you that I can say it to myself, for your sake.” And Rose looked up with a face so full of tender sorrow he could not doubt the words which both reproached and comforted him.

“My little saint! I don’t deserve one half your goodness to me, but I will, and go away without one complaint to do my best, for your sake,” he cried, touched by her grief and stirred to emulation by the example of courage and integrity she tried to set him.

Here Kitty and Steve bore down upon them; and, obeying the impulse to put care behind them, which makes it possible for young hearts to ache one minute and dance the next, Rose and Charlie banished their troubles, joined in the sport that soon turned the lonely little bay into a ballroom, and enjoyed the splendors of a winter sunset forgetful of separation and Calcutta.

Chapter 15 ALAS FOR CHARLIE!

In spite of much internal rebellion, Charlie held fast to his resolution, and Aunt Clara, finding all persuasions vain, gave in and in a state of chronic indignation against the world in general and Rose in particular, prepared to accompany him. The poor girl had a hard time of it and, but for her uncle, would have fared still worse. He was a sort of shield upon which Mrs. Clara’s lamentations, reproaches, and irate glances fell unavailingly instead of wounding the heart against which they were aimed.

The days passed very quickly now, for everyone seemed anxious to have the parting over and preparations went on rapidly. The big house was made ready to shut up for a year at least, comforts for the long voyage laid in, and farewell visits paid. The general activity and excitement rendered it impossible for Charlie to lead the life of an artistic hermit any longer and he fell into a restless condition which caused Rose to long for the departure of the Rajah when she felt that he would be safe, for these farewell festivities were dangerous to one who was just learning to say “no.”

“Half the month safely gone. If we can only get well over these last weeks, a great weight will be off my mind,” thought Rose as she went down one wild, wet morning toward the end of February.

Opening the study door to greet her uncle, she exclaimed, “Why, Archie!” then paused upon the threshold, transfixed by fear, for in her cousin’s white face she read the tidings of some great affliction.

“Hush! Don’t be frightened. Come in and I’ll tell you,” he whispered, putting down the bottle he had just taken from the doctor’s medicine closet.

Rose understood and obeyed, for Aunt Plenty was poorly with her rheumatism and depended on her morning doze.

“What is it?” she said, looking about the room with a shiver, as if expecting to see again what she saw there New Year’s night. Archie was alone, however, and, drawing her toward the closet, answered with an evident effort to be quite calm and steady “Charlie is hurt! Uncle wants more ether and the wide bandages in some drawer or other. He told me, but I forget. You keep this place in order find them for me. Quick!”

Before he had done, Rose was at the drawer, turning over the bandages with hands that trembled as they searched.

“All narrow! I must make some. Can you wait?” And, catching up a piece of old linen, she tore it into wide strips, adding, in the same quick tone, as she began to roll them, “Now, tell me.”

“I can wait those are not needed just yet. I didn’t mean anyone should know, you least of all,” began Archie, smoothing out the strips as they lay across the table and evidently surprised at the girl’s nerve and skill.

“I can bear it make haste! Is he much hurt?”

“I’m afraid he is. Uncle looks sober, and the poor boy suffers so, I couldn’t stay,” answered Archie, turning still whiter about the lips that never had so hard a tale to tell before.

“You see, he went to town last evening to meet the man who is going to buy Brutus.”

“And Brutus did it? I knew he would!” cried Rose, dropping her work to wring her hands, as if she guessed the ending of the story now.

“Yes, and if he wasn’t shot already I’d do it myself with pleasure, for he’s done his best to kill Charlie,” muttered Charlie’s mate with a grim look, then gave a great sigh and added with averted face, “I shouldn’t blame the brute, it wasn’t his fault. He needed a firm hand and — ” He stopped there, but Rose said quickly: “Go on. I must know.”

“Charlie met some of his old cronies, quite by accident; there was a dinner party, and they made him go, just for a good-bye, they said. He couldn’t refuse, and it was too much for him. He would come home alone in the storm, though they tried to keep him, as he wasn’t fit. Down by the new bridge that high embankment, you know the wind had put the lantern out he forgot or something scared Brutus, and all went down together.”

Archie had spoken fast and brokenly but Rose understood and at the last word hid her face with a little moan, as if she saw it all.

“Drink this and never mind the rest,” he said, dashing into the next room and coming back with a glass of water, longing to be done and away, for this sort of pain seemed almost as bad as that he had left.

Rose drank, but held his arm tightly, as he would have turned away, saying in a tone of command he could not disobey: “Don’t keep anything back tell me the worst at once.”

“We knew nothing of it,” he went on obediently. “Aunt Clara thought he was with me, and no one found him till early this morning. A workman recognized him and he was brought home, dead they thought. I came for Uncle an hour ago. Charlie is conscious now, but awfully hurt, and I’m afraid from the way Mac and Uncle looked at one another that Oh! Think of it, Rose! Crushed and helpless, alone in the rain all night, and I never knew, I never knew!”

With that, poor Archie broke down entirely and, flinging himself into a chair, laid his face on the table, sobbing like a girl. Rose had never seen a man cry before, and it was so unlike a woman's gentler grief that it moved her very much. Putting by her own anguish, she tried to comfort his and, going to him, lifted up his head and made him lean on her, for in such hours as this women are the stronger. It was a very little to do, but it did comfort Archie, for the poor fellow felt as if fate was very hard upon him just then, and in this faithful bosom he could pour his brief but pathetic plaint.

"Phebe's gone, and now if Charlie's taken, I don't see how I can bear it!"

"Phebe will come back, dear, and let us hope poor Charlie isn't going to be taken yet. Such things always seem worst at first, I've heard people say, so cheer up and hope for the best," answered Rose, seeking for some comfortable words to say and finding very few.

They took effect, however, for Archie did cheer up like a man. Wiping away the tears which he so seldom shed that they did not know where to go, he got up, gave himself a little shake, and said with a long breath, as if he had been underwater: "Now I'm all right, thank you. I couldn't help it the shock of being waked suddenly to find the dear old fellow in such a pitiful state upset me. I ought to go are these ready?"

"In a minute. Tell Uncle to send for me if I can be of any use. Oh, poor Aunt Clara! How does she bear it?"

"Almost distracted. I took Mother to her, and she will do all that anybody can. Heaven only knows what Aunt will do if — "

"And only heaven can help her," added Rose as Archie stopped at the words he could not utter. "Now take them, and let me know often."

"You brave little soul, I will." And Archie went away through the rain with his sad burden, wondering how Rose could be so calm when the beloved Prince might be dying.

A long dark day followed, with nothing to break its melancholy monotony except the bulletins that came from hour to hour reporting little change either for better or for worse. Rose broke the news gently to Aunt Plenty and set herself to the task of keeping up the old lady's spirits, for, being helpless, the good soul felt as if everything would go wrong without her. At dusk she fell asleep, and Rose went down to order lights and fire in the parlor, with tea ready to serve at any moment, for she felt sure some of the men would come and that a cheerful greeting and creature comforts would suit them better than tears, darkness, and desolation.

Presently Mac arrived, saying the instant he entered the room: "More comfortable, Cousin."

"Thank heaven!" cried Rose, unclasping her hands. Then seeing how worn out, wet, and weary Mac looked as he came into the light, she added in a tone that was a cordial in itself, “Poor boy, how tired you are! Come here, and let me make you comfortable.”

“I was going home to freshen up a bit, for I must be back in an hour. Mother took my place, so I could be spared, and came off, as Uncle refused to stir.”

“Don’t go home, for if Aunty isn’t there it will be very dismal. Step into Uncle’s room and refresh, then come back and I’ll give you your tea. Let me, let me! I can’t help in any other way, and I must do something, this waiting is so dreadful.”

Her last words betrayed how much suspense was trying her, and Mac yielded at once, glad to comfort and be comforted. When he came back, looking much revived, a tempting little tea table stood before the fire and Rose went to meet him, saying with a faint smile, as she liberally bedewed him with the contents of a cologne flask: “I can’t bear the smell of ether it suggests such dreadful things.”

“What curious creatures women are! Archie told us you bore the news like a hero, and now you turn pale at a whiff of bad air. I can’t explain it,” mused Mac as he meekly endured the fragrant shower bath.

“Neither can I, but I’ve been imagining horrors all day and made myself nervous. Don’t let us talk about it, but come and have some tea.”

“That’s another queer thing. Tea is your panacea for all human ills yet there isn’t any nourishment in it. I’d rather have a glass of milk, thank you,” said Mac, taking an easy chair and stretching his feet to the fire.

She brought it to him and made him eat something; then, as he shut his eyes wearily, she went away to the piano and, having no heart to sing, played softly till he seemed asleep. But at the stroke of six he was up and ready to be off again.

“He gave me that. Take it with you and put some on his hair. He likes it, and I do so want to help a little,” she said, slipping the pretty flagon into his pocket with such a wistful look Mac never thought of smiling at this very feminine request.

“I’ll tell him. Is there anything else I can do for you, Cousin?” he asked, holding the cold hand that had been serving him so helpfully.

“Only this if there is any sudden change, promise to send for me, no matter at what hour it is. I must say ‘good-bye’“.

“I will come for you. But, Rose, I am sure you may sleep in peace tonight, and I hope to have good news for you in the morning.”

“Bless you for that! Come early, and let me see him soon. I will be very good, and I know it will not do him any harm.”

“No fear of that. The first thing he said when he could speak was ‘Tell Rose carefully,' and as I came away he guessed where I was going and tried to kiss his hand in the old way, you know."

Mac thought it would cheer her to hear that Charlie remembered her, but the sudden thought that she might never see the familiar little gesture anymore was the last drop that made her full heart overflow, and Mac saw the "hero" of the morning sink down at his feet in a passion of tears that frightened him. He took her to the sofa and tried to comfort her, but as soon as the bitter sobbing quieted she looked up and said quite steadily, great drops rolling down her cheeks the while: "Let me cry it is what I need, and I shall be all the better for it by and by. Go to Charlie now and tell him I said with all my heart, 'Good night!'?

"I will!" And Mac trudged away, marveling in his turn at the curiously blended strength and weakness of womankind.

That was the longest night Rose ever spent, but joy came in the morning with the early message: "He is better. You are to come by and by." Then Aunt Plenty forgot her lumbago and arose; Aunt Myra, who had come to have a social croak, took off her black bonnet as if it would not be needed at present, and the girl made ready to go and say "Welcome back," not the hard "Good-bye."

It seemed very long to wait, for no summons came till afternoon, then her uncle arrived, and at the first sight of his face Rose began to tremble.

"I came for my little girl myself, because we must go back at once," he said as she hurried toward him hat in hand.

"I'm ready, sir." But her hands shook as she tried to tie the ribbons, and her eyes never left the face that was full of tender pity for her.

He took her quickly into the carriage and, as they rolled away, said with the quiet directness which soothes such agitation better than any sympathetic demonstration: "Charlie is worse. I feared it when the pain went so suddenly this morning, but the chief injuries are internal and one can never tell what the chances are. He insists that he is better, but he will soon begin to fail, I fear, become unconscious, and slip away without more suffering. This is the time for you to see him, for he has set his heart on it, and nothing can hurt him now. My child, it is very hard, but we must help each other bear it."

Rose tried to say, "Yes, Uncle" bravely, but the words would not come, and she could only slip her hand into his with a look of mute submission. He laid her head on his shoulder and went on talking so quietly that anyone who did not see how worn and haggard his face had grown with two days and a night of sharp anxiety might have thought him cold.

"Jessie has gone home to rest, and Jane is with poor Clara, who has dropped asleep at last. I've sent for Steve and the other boys. There will be time for them later, but he so begged to see you now, I thought it best to come while this temporary strength keeps him up. I have told him how it is, but he will not believe me. If he asks you, answer honestly and try to fit him a little for this sudden ending of so many hopes."

"How soon, Uncle?"

"A few hours, probably. This tranquil moment is yours make the most of it and, when we can do no more for him, we'll comfort one another."

Mac met them in the hall, but Rose hardly saw him. She was conscious only of the task before her and, when her uncle led her to the door, she said quietly, "Let me go in alone, please."

Archie, who had been hanging over the bed, slipped away into the inner room as she appeared, and Rose found Charlie waiting for her with such a happy face, she could not believe what she had heard and found it easy to say almost cheerfully as she took his eager hand in both of hers: "Dear Charlie, I'm so glad you sent for me. I longed to come, but waited till you were better. You surely are?" she added, as a second glance showed to her the indescribable change which had come upon the face which at first seemed to have both light and color in it.

"Uncle says not, but I think he is mistaken, because the agony is all gone, and except for this odd sinking now and then, I don't feel so much amiss," he answered feebly but with something of the old lightness in his voice.

"You will hardly be able to sail in the Rajah, I fear, but you won't mind waiting a little while we nurse you," said poor Rose, trying to talk on quietly, with her heart growing heavier every minute.

"I shall go if I'm carried! I'll keep that promise, though it costs me my life. Oh, Rose! You know? They've told you?" And, with a sudden memory of what brought him there, he hid his face in the pillow.

"You broke no promise, for I would not let you make one, you remember. Forget all that, and let us talk about the better time that may be coming for you."

"Always so generous, so kind!" he murmured, with her hand against his feverish cheek; then, looking up, he went on in a tone so humbly contrite it made her eyes fill with slow, hot tears.

"I tried to flee temptation I tried to say 'no,' but I am so pitiably weak, I couldn't. You must despise me. But don't give me up entirely, for if I live, I'll do better. I'll go away to Father and begin again."

Rose tried to keep back the bitter drops, but they would fall, to hear him still speak hopefully when there was no hope. Something in the mute anguish of her face seemed to tell him what she could not speak, and a quick change came over him as he grasped her hand tighter, saying in a sharp whisper: "Have I really got to die, Rose?"

Her only answer was to kneel down and put her arms about him, as if she tried to keep death away a little longer. He believed it then, and lay so still, she looked up in a moment, fearing she knew not what.

But Charlie bore it manfully, for he had the courage which can face a great danger bravely, though not the strength to fight a bosom sin and conquer it. His eyes were fixed, as if trying to look into the unseen world whither he was going, and his lips firmly set that no word of complaint should spoil the proof he meant to give that, though he had not known how to live, he did know how to die. It seemed to Rose as if for one brief instant she saw the man that might have been if early training had taught him how to rule himself; and the first words he uttered with a long sigh, as his eye came back to her, showed that he felt the failure and owned it with pathetic candor.

“Better so, perhaps; better go before I bring any more sorrow to you and shame to myself. I’d like to stay a little longer and try to redeem the past; it seems so wasted now, but if I can’t, don’t grieve, Rose. I’m no loss to anyone, and perhaps it is too late to mend.”

“Oh, don’t say that! No one will find your place among us we never can forget how much we loved you, and you must believe how freely we forgive as we would be forgiven,” cried Rose, steadied by the pale despair that had fallen on Charlie’s face with those bitter words.

“‘Forgive us our trespasses!’ Yes, I should say that. Rose, I’m not ready, it is so sudden. What can I do?” he whispered, clinging to her as if he had no anchor except the creature whom he loved so much.

“Uncle will tell you I am not good enough I can only pray for you.” And she moved as if to call in the help so sorely needed.

“No, no, not yet! Stay by me, darling read something there, in Grandfather’s old book, some prayer for such as I. It will do me more good from you than any minister alive.”

She got the venerable book given to Charlie because he bore the good man’s name and, turning to the “Prayer for the Dying,” read it brokenly while the voice beside her echoed now and then some word that reproved or comforted.

“The testimony of a good conscience.” “By the sadness of his countenance may his heart be made better.” “Christian patience and fortitude.” “Leave the world in peace.” “Amen.”

There was silence for a little; then Rose, seeing how wan he looked, said softly, “Shall I call Uncle now?”

“If you will. But first don’t smile at my foolishness, dear I want my little heart. They took it off please give it back and let me keep it always,” he answered with the old fondness strong as ever, even when he could show it only by holding fast the childish trinket which she found and had given him the old agate heart with the faded ribbon. “Put it on, and never let them take it off,” he said, and when she asked if there was anything else she could do for him, he tried to stretch out his arms to her with a look which asked for more.

She kissed him very tenderly on lips and forehead, tried to say “good-bye,” but could not speak, and groped her way to the door. Turning for a last look, Charlie’s hopeful spirit rose for a moment, as if anxious to send her away more cheerful, and he said with a shadow of the old blithe smile, a feeble attempt at the familiar farewell gesture: “Till tomorrow, Rose.”

Alas for Charlie! His tomorrow never came, and when she saw him next, he lay there looking so serene and noble, it seemed as if it must be well with him, for all the pain was past; temptation ended; doubt and fear, hope and love, could no more stir his quiet heart, and in solemn truth he had gone to meet his Father, and begin again.

Chapter 16 GOOD WORKS

The Rajah was delayed awhile, and when it sailed poor Mrs. Clara was on board, for everything was ready. All thought she had better go to comfort her husband, and since her boy died she seemed to care very little what became of her. So, with friends to cheer the long voyage, she sailed away, a heavyhearted woman, yet not quite disconsolate, for she knew her mourning was excessively becoming and felt sure that Stephen would not find her altered by her trials as much as might have been expected.

Then nothing was left of that gay household but the empty rooms, silence never broken by a blithe voice anymore, and pictures full of promise, but all unfinished, like poor Charlie's life.

There was much mourning for the bonny Prince, but no need to tell of it except as it affected Rose, for it is with her we have most to do, the other characters being of secondary importance.

When time had soothed the first shock of sudden loss, she was surprised to find the memory of his faults and failings, short life and piteous death, grew dim, as if a kindly hand had wiped out the record and given him back to her in the likeness of the brave, bright boy she had loved, not as the wayward, passionate young man who had loved her.

This comforted her very much, and folding down the last blotted leaf where his name was written, she gladly turned back to reopen and reread the happier chapters which painted the youthful knight before he went out to fall in his first battle. None of the bitterness of love bereaved marred this memory for Rose, because she found that the warmer sentiment, just budding in her heart, had died with Charlie and lay cold and quiet in his grave. She wondered, yet was glad, though sometimes a remorseful pang smote her when she discovered how possible it was to go on without him, feeling almost as if a burden had been lifted off, since his happiness was taken out of her hands. The time had not yet come when the knowledge that a man's heart was in her keeping would make the pride and joy of her life, and while she waited for that moment she enjoyed the liberty she seemed to have recovered.

Such being her inward state, it much annoyed her to be regarded as a brokenhearted girl and pitied for the loss of her young lover. She could not explain to all the world, so let it pass, and occupied her mind with the good works which always lie ready to be taken up and carried on. Having chosen philanthropy as her profession, she felt that it was high time to begin the task too long neglected.

Her projects were excellent, but did not prosper as rapidly as she hoped, for, having to deal with people, not things, unexpected obstacles were constantly arising. The “Home for Decayed Gentlewomen,” as the boys insisted on calling her two newly repaired houses, started finely and it was a pleasant sight to see the comfortable rooms filled with respectable women busy at their various tasks, surrounded by the decencies and many of the comforts which make life endurable. But, presently, Rose was disturbed to find that the good people expected her to take care of them in a way she had not bargained for. Buffum, her agent, was constantly reporting complaints, new wants, and general discontent if they were not attended to. Things were very neglected, water pipes froze and burst, drains got out of order, yards were in a mess, and rents behindhand. Worst of all, outsiders, instead of sympathizing, only laughed and said, “We told you so,” which is a most discouraging remark to older and wiser workers than Rose.

Uncle Alec, however, stood by her staunchly and helped her out of many of her woes by good advice and an occasional visit of inspection, which did much to impress upon the dwellers there the fact that, if they did not do their part, their leases would be short ones.

“I didn’t expect to make anything out of it, but I did think they would be grateful,” said Rose on one occasion when several complaints had come in at once and Buffum had reported great difficulty in collecting the low rents.

“If you do this thing for the sake of the gratitude, then it is a failure but if it is done for the love of helping those who need help, it is a success, for in spite of their worry every one of these women feel what privileges they enjoy and value them highly,” said Dr. Alec as they went home after one of these unsatisfactory calls.

“Then the least they can do is to say ‘thank you.’ I’m afraid I have thought more of the gratitude than the work, but if there isn’t any, I must make up my mind to go without,” answered Rose, feeling defrauded of her due.

“Favors often separate instead of attracting people nearer to one another, and I’ve seen many a friendship spoilt by the obligation being all on one side. Can’t explain it, but it is so, and I’ve come to the conclusion that it is as hard to give in the right spirit as it is to receive. Puzzle it out, my dear, while you are learning to do good for its own sake.”

“I know one sort of people who are grateful and I’m going to devote my mind to them. They thank me in many ways, and helping them is all pleasure and no worry. Come into the hospital and see the dear babies, or the Asylum, and carry oranges to Phebe’s orphans they don’t complain and fidget one’s life out, bless their hearts!” cried Rose, cheering up suddenly.

After that she left Buffum to manage the “Retreat,” and devoted her energies to the little folks, always so ready to receive the smallest gift and repay the giver with their artless thanks. Here she found plenty to do, and did it with such sweet goodwill that she won her way like sunshine, making many a little heart dance over splendid dolls, gay picture books, and pots of flowers, as well as food, fire, and clothes for the small bodies pinched with want and pain.

As spring came new plans sprang up as naturally as dandelions. The poor children longed for the country; and, as the green fields could not come to them, Rose carried them to the green fields. Down on the Point stood an old farmhouse, often used by the Campbell tribe for summer holidays. That spring it was set to rights unusually early, several women installed as housekeeper, cook, and nurses, and when the May days grew bright and warm, squads of pale children came to toddle in the grass, run over the rocks, and play upon the smooth sands of the beach. A pretty sight, and one that well repaid those who brought it to pass.

Everyone took an interest in the “Rose Garden,” as Mac named it, and the womenfolk were continually driving over to the Point for something for the “poor dears.” Aunt Plenty sowed gingerbread broadcast; Aunt Jessie made pinafores by the dozen while Aunt Jane “kept her eye” on the nurses, and Aunt Myra supplied medicines so liberally that the mortality would have been awful if Dr. Alec had not taken them in charge. To him this was the most delightful spot in the world and well it might be, for he suggested the idea and gave Rose all the credit of it. He was often there, and his appearance was always greeted with shrieks of rapture, as the children gathered from all quarters creeping, running, hopping on crutches, or carried in arms which they gladly left to sit on “Uncle Doctor’s” knee, for that was the title by which he went among them.

He seemed as young as any of his comrades, though the curly head was getting gray, and the frolics that went on when he arrived were better than any medicine to children who had never learned to play. It was a standing joke among the friends that the bachelor brother had the largest family and was the most domestic man of the remaining four, though Uncle Mac did his part manfully and kept Aunt Jane in a constant fidget by his rash propositions to adopt the heartiest boys and prettiest girls to amuse him and employ her.

On one occasion Aunt Jane had a very narrow escape, and the culprit being her son, not her husband, she felt free to repay herself for many scares of this sort by a good scolding, which, unlike many, produced excellent results.

One bright June day, as Rose came cantering home from the Point on her pretty bay pony, she saw a man sitting on a fallen tree beside the road and something in his despondent attitude arrested her attention. As she drew nearer he turned his head, and she stopped short, exclaiming in great surprise: “Why, Mac! What are you doing here?”

“Trying to solve a problem,” he answered, looking up with a whimsical expression of perplexity and amusement in his face which made Rose smile till his next words turned her sober in a twinkling: “I’ve eloped with a young lady, and don’t know what to do with her. I took her home, of course, but mother turned her out of the house, and I’m in a quandary.”

“Is that her baggage?” asked Rose, pointing with her whip to the large bundle which he held while the wild idea flashed through her head that perhaps he really had done some rash deed of this sort.

“No, this is the young lady herself.” And, opening a corner of the brown shawl, he displayed a child of three so pale, so thin and tiny that she looked like a small scared bird just fallen from the nest as she shrank away from the light with great frightened eyes and a hand like a little claw tightly clutched a button of Mac’s coat.

“Poor baby! Where did it come from?” cried Rose, leaning down to look.

“I’ll tell you the story, and then you shall advise me what to do. At our hospital we’ve had a poor woman who got hurt and died two days ago. I had nothing to do with her, only took her a bit of fruit once or twice, for she had big, wistful sort of eyes that haunted me. The day she died I stopped a minute, and the nurse said she’d been wanting to speak to me but didn’t dare. So I asked if I could do anything for her and, though she could hardly breathe for pain being almost gone she implored me to take care of baby. I found out where the child was, and promised I’d see after her for the poor soul couldn’t seem to die till I’d given her that comfort. I never can forget the look in her eyes as I held her hand and said, ‘Baby shall be taken care of.’ She tried to thank me, and died soon after quite peacefully. Well, I went today and hunted up the poor little wretch. Found her in a miserable place, left in the care of an old hag who had shut her up alone to keep her out of the way, and there this mite was, huddled in a corner, crying ‘Marmar, marmar!’ fit to touch a heart of stone. I blew up at the woman and took the baby straightaway, for she had been abused. It was high time. Look there, will you?”

Mac turned the little skinny arm and showed a blue mark which made Rose drop her reins and stretch out both hands, crying with a tender sort of indignation: “How dared they do it? Give her to me, poor little motherless thing!”

Mac laid the bundle in her arms, and Rose began to cuddle it in the fond, foolish way women have a most comfortable and effective way, nevertheless and baby evidently felt that things were changing for the better when warm lips touched her cheeks, a soft hand smoothed her tumbled hair, and a womanly face bent over her with the inarticulate cooings and purrings mothers make. The frightened eyes went up to this gentle countenance and rested there as if reassured; the little claw crept to the girl's neck, and poor baby nestled to her with a long sigh and a plaintive murmur of "Marmar, marmar" that certainly would have touched a stony heart.

"Now, go on. No, Rosa, not you," said the new nurse as the intelligent animal looked around to see if things were all right before she proceeded.

"I took the child home to mother, not knowing what else to do, but she wouldn't have it at any price, even for a night. She doesn't like children, you know, and Father has joked so much about 'the Pointers' that she is quite rampant at the mere idea of a child in the house. She told me to take it to the Rose Garden. I said it was running over now, and no room even for a mite like this. 'Go to the Hospital,' says she. 'Baby isn't ill, ma'am,' says I. 'Orphan Asylum,' says she. 'Not an orphan got a father who can't take care of her,' says I. 'Take her to the Foundling place, or Mrs. Gardener, or someone whose business it is. I will not have the creature here, sick and dirty and noisy. Carry it back, and ask Rose to tell you what to do with it.' So my cruel parent cast me forth but relented as I shouldered baby, gave me a shawl to put her in, a jumble to feed her with, and money to pay her board in some good place. Mother's bark is always worse than her bite, you know."

"And you were trying to think of the 'good place' as you sat here?" asked Rose, looking down at him with great approval as he stood patting Rosa's glossy neck.

"Exactly. I didn't want to trouble you, for you have your house full already, and I really couldn't lay my hand on any good soul who would be bothered with this little forlornity. She has nothing to recommend her, you see not pretty; feeble; shy as a mouse; no end of care, I daresay yet she needs every bit she can get to keep soul and body together, if I'm any judge."

Rose opened her lips impulsively, but closed them without speaking and sat a minute looking straight between Rosa's ears, as if forcing herself to think twice before she spoke. Mac watched her out of the corner of his eyes as he said, in a musing tone, tucking the shawl around a pair of shabby little feet the while, "This seems to be one of the charities that no one wants to undertake, yet I can't help feeling that my promise to the mother binds me to something more than merely handing baby over to some busy matron or careless nurse in any of our overcrowded institutions. She is such a frail creature she won't trouble anyone long, perhaps, and I should like to give her just a taste of comfort, if not love, before she finds her ‘Marmar’ again.”

“Lead Rosa I’m going to take this child home, and if Uncle is willing, I’ll adopt her, and she shall be happy!” cried Rose, with the sudden glow of feeling that always made her lovely. And gathering poor baby close, she went on her way like a modern Britomart, ready to redress the wrongs of any who had need of her.

As he led the slowly stepping horse along the quiet road, Mac could not help thinking that they looked a little like the Flight into Egypt, but he did not say so, being a reverent youth only glanced back now and then at the figure above him, for Rose had taken off her hat to keep the light from baby’s eyes and sat with the sunshine turning her uncovered hair to gold as she looked down at the little creature resting on the saddle before her with the sweet thoughtfulness one sees in some of Correggio’s young Madonnas.

No one else saw the picture, but Mac long remembered it, and ever after there was a touch of reverence added to the warm affection he had always borne his cousin Rose.

“What is the child’s name?” was the sudden question which disturbed a brief silence, broken only by the sound of pacing hoofs, the rustle of green boughs overhead, and the blithe caroling of birds.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” answered Mac, suddenly aware that he had fallen out of one quandary into another.

“Didn’t you ask?”

“No, the mother called her ‘Baby,’ and the old woman, ‘Brat.’ And that is all I know of the first name the last is Kennedy. You may christen her what you like.”

“Then I shall name her Dulcinea, as you are her knight, and call her Dulce for short. That is a sweet diminutive, I’m sure,” laughed Rose, much amused at the idea.

Don Quixote looked pleased and vowed to defend his little lady stoutly, beginning his services on the spot by filling the small hands with buttercups, thereby winning for himself the first smile baby’s face had known for weeks.

When they got home Aunt Plenty received her new guest with her accustomed hospitality and, on learning the story, was as warmly interested as even enthusiastic Rose could desire, bustling about to make the child comfortable with an energy pleasant to see, for the grandmotherly instincts were strong in the old lady and of late had been beautifully developed.

In less than half an hour from the time baby went upstairs, she came down again on Rose’s arm, freshly washed and brushed, in a pink gown much too large and a white apron decidedly too small; an immaculate pair of socks, but no shoes; a neat bandage on the bruised arm, and a string of spools for a plaything hanging on the other. A resigned expression sat upon her little face, but the frightened eyes were only shy now, and the forlorn heart evidently much comforted.

"There! How do you like your Dulce now?" said Rose, proudly displaying the work of her hands as she came in with her habit pinned up and carrying a silver porringer of bread and milk.

Mac knelt down, took the small, reluctant hand, and kissed it as devoutly as ever good Alonzo Quixada did that of the Duchess while he said, merrily quoting from the immortal story: "'High and Sovereign Lady, thine till death, the Knight of the Rueful Countenance.'"

But baby had no heart for play and, withdrawing her hand, pointed to the porringer with the suggestive remark: "Din-din, now."

So Rose sat down and fed the Duchess while the Don stood by and watched the feast with much satisfaction.

"How nice she looks! Do you consider shoes unhealthy?" he asked, surveying the socks with respectful interest.

"No, her shoes are drying. You must have let her go in the mud."

"I only put her down for a minute when she howled, and she made for a puddle, like a duck. I'll buy her some new ones clothes too. Where do I go, what do I ask for, and how much do I get?" he said, diving for his pocketbook, amiably anxious but pitiably ignorant.

"I'll see to that. We always have things on hand for the Pointers as they come along and can soon fit Dulce out. You may make some inquiries about the father if you will, for I don't want to have her taken away just as I get fond of her. Do you know anything about him?"

"Only that he is in State Prison for twenty-one years, and not likely to trouble you."

"How dreadful! I really think Phebe was better off to have none at all. I'll go to work at once, then, and try to bring up the convict's little daughter to be a good woman so that she will have an honest name of her own, since he has nothing but disgrace to give her."

"Uncle can show you how to do that if you need any help. He has been so successful in his first attempt, I fancy you won't require much," said Mac, picking up the spools for the sixth time.

"Yes, I shall, for it is a great responsibility, and I do not undertake it lightly," answered Rose soberly, though the double-barreled compliment pleased her very much.

"I'm sure Phebe has turned out splendidly, and you began very early with her.”

“So I did! That’s encouraging. Dear thing, how bewildered she looked when I proposed adopting her. I remember all about it, for Uncle had just come and I was quite crazy over a box of presents and rushed at Phebe as she was cleaning brasses. How little I thought my childish offer would end so well!” And Rose fell a-musing with a happy smile on her face while baby picked the last morsels out of the porringer with her own busy fingers.

It certainly had ended well, for Phebe at the end of six months not only had a good place as choir singer but several young pupils and excellent prospects for the next winter.

“Accept the blessing of a poor young man, Whose lucky steps have led him to your door, and let me help as much as I can. Good-bye, my Dulcinea.”

And, with a farewell stroke of the smooth head, Mac went away to report his success to his mother, who, in spite of her seeming harshness, was already planning how she could best befriend this inconvenient baby.

Chapter 17 AMONG THE HAYCOCKS

Uncle Alec did not object and, finding that no one had any claim upon the child, permitted Rose to keep it for a time at least. So little Dulce, newly equipped even to a name, took her place among them and slowly began to thrive. But she did not grow pretty and never was a gay, attractive child, for she seemed to have been born in sorrow and brought up in misery. A pale, pensive little creature, always creeping into corners and looking timidly out, as if asking leave to live, and, when offered playthings, taking them with a meek surprise that was very touching.

Rose soon won her heart, and then almost wished she had not, for baby clung to her with inconvenient fondness, changing her former wail of “Marmar” into a lament for “Aunty Wose” if separated long. Nevertheless, there was great satisfaction in cherishing the little waif, for she learned more than she could teach and felt a sense of responsibility which was excellent ballast for her enthusiastic nature.

Kitty Van, who made Rose her model in all things, was immediately inspired to go and do likewise, to the great amusement as well as annoyance of her family. Selecting the prettiest, liveliest child in the Asylum, she took it home on trial for a week. “A perfect cherub” she pronounced it the first day, but an “enfant terrible” before the week was over, for the young hero rioted by day, howled by night, ravaged the house from top to bottom, and kept his guardians in a series of panics by his hairbreadth escapes. So early on Saturday, poor exhausted Kitty restored the “cherub” with many thanks, and decided to wait until her views of education were rather more advanced.

As the warm weather came on, Rose announced that Dulce needed mountain air, for she dutifully repeated as many of Dr. Alec’s prescriptions as possible and, remembering how much good Cozy Corner did her long ago, resolved to try it on her baby. Aunt Jessie and Jamie went with her, and Mother Atkinson received them as cordially as ever. The pretty daughters were all married and gone, but a stout damsel took their place, and nothing seemed changed except that the old heads were grayer and the young ones a good deal taller than six years ago.

Jamie immediately fraternized with neighboring boys and devoted himself to fishing with an ardor which deserved greater success. Aunt Jessie reveled in reading, for which she had no time at home, and lay in her hammock a happy woman, with no socks to darn, buttons to sew, or housekeeping cares to vex her soul. Rose went about with Dulce like a very devoted hen with one rather feeble chicken, for she was anxious to have this treatment work well and tended her little patient with daily increasing satisfaction. Dr. Alec came up to pass a few days and pronounced the child in a most promising condition. But the grand event of the season was the unexpected arrival of Phebe.

Two of her pupils had invited her to join them in a trip to the mountains, and she ran away from the great hotel to surprise her little mistress with a sight of her, so well and happy that Rose had no anxiety left on her account.

Three delightful days they spent, roaming about together, talking as only girls can talk after a long separation, and enjoying one another like a pair of lovers. As if to make it quite perfect, by one of those remarkable coincidences which sometimes occur, Archie happened to run up for the Sunday, so Phebe had her surprise, and Aunt Jessie and the telegraph kept their secret so well, no one ever knew what maternal machinations brought the happy accident to pass.

Then Rose saw a very pretty, pastoral bit of lovemaking, and long after it was over, and Phebe gone one way, Archie another, the echo of sweet words seemed to linger in the air, tender ghosts to haunt the pine grove, and even the big coffeepot had a halo of romance about it, for its burnished sides reflected the soft glances the lovers interchanged as one filled the other’s cup at that last breakfast.

Rose found these reminiscences more interesting than any novel she had read, and often beguiled her long leisure by planning a splendid future for her Phebe as she trotted about after her baby in the lovely July weather.

On one of the most perfect days she sat under an old apple tree on the slope behind the house where they used to play. Before her opened the wide intervale, dotted with haymakers at their picturesque work. On the left flowed the swift river fringed with graceful elms in their bravest greenery; on the right rose the purple hills serene and grand; and overhead glowed the midsummer sky, which glorified it all.

Little Dulce, tired of play, lay fast asleep in the nest she had made in one of the haycocks close by, and Rose leaned against the gnarled old tree, dreaming daydreams with her work at her feet. Happy and absorbing fancies they seemed to be, for her face was beautifully tranquil, and she took no heed of the train which suddenly went speeding down the valley, leaving a white cloud behind. Its rumble concealed the sound of approaching steps, and her eyes never turned from the distant hills till the abrupt appearance of a very sunburned but smiling young man made her jump up, exclaiming joyfully: “Why, Mac! Where did you drop from?”

“The top of Mount Washington. How do you do?”

“Never better. Won’t you go in? You must be tired after such a fall.”

"No, thank you. I've seen the old lady. She told me Aunt Jessie and the boy had gone to town and that you were 'settin' round' in the old place. I came on at once and will take a lounge here if you don't mind," answered Mac, unstrapping his knapsack and taking a haycock as if it were a chair.

Rose subsided into her former seat, surveying her cousin with much satisfaction as she said: "This is the third surprise I've had since I came. Uncle popped in upon us first, then Phebe, and now you. Have you had a pleasant tramp? Uncle said you were off."

"Delightful! I feel as if I'd been in heaven, or near it, for about three weeks, and thought I'd break the shock of coming down to the earth by calling here on my way home."

"You look as if heaven suited you. Brown as a berry, but so fresh and happy I should never guess you had been scrambling down a mountain," said Rose, trying to discover why he looked so well in spite of the blue flannel suit and dusty shoes, for there was a certain sylvan freshness about him as he sat there full of reposeful strength the hills seemed to have given, the wholesome cheerful days of air and sunshine put into a man, and the clear, bright look of one who had caught glimpses of a new world from the mountaintop.

"Tramping agrees with me. I took a dip in the river as I came along and made my toilet in a place where Milton's Sabrina might have lived," he said, shaking back his damp hair and settling the knot of scarlet bunchberries stuck in his buttonhole.

"You look as if you found the nymph at home," said Rose, knowing how much he liked the "Comus."

"I found her here," and he made a little bow.

"That's very pretty, and I'll give you one in return. You grow more like Uncle Alec every day, and I think I'll call you Alec, Jr."

"Alexander the Great wouldn't thank you for that," and Mac did not look as grateful as she had expected.

"Very like, indeed, except the forehead. His is broad and benevolent, yours high and arched. Do you know if you had no beard, and wore your hair long, I really think you'd look like Milton," added Rose, sure that would please him.

It certainly did amuse him, for he lay back on the hay and laughed so heartily that his merriment scared the squirrel on the wall and woke Dulce.

"You ungrateful boy! Will nothing suit you? When I say you look like the best man I know, you gave a shrug, and when I liken you to a great poet, you shout. I'm afraid you are very conceited, Mac." And Rose laughed, too, glad to see him so gay.

"If I am, it is your fault. Nothing I can do will ever make a Milton of me, unless I go blind someday," he said, sobering at the thought.

"You once said a man could be what he liked if he tried hard enough, so why shouldn't you be a poet?" asked Rose, liking to trip him up with his own words, as he often did her.

"I thought I was to be an M.D."

"You might be both. There have been poetical doctors, you know."

"Would you like me to be such a one?" asked Mac, looking at her as seriously as if he really thought of trying it.

"No. I'd rather have you one or the other. I don't care which, only you must be famous in either you choose. I'm very ambitious for you, because, I insist upon it, you are a genius of some sort. I think it is beginning to simmer already, and I've got a great curiosity to know what it will turn out to be."

Mac's eyes shone as she said that, but before he could speak a little voice said, "Aunty Wose!" and he turned to find Dulce sitting up in her nest staring at the broad blue back before her with round eyes.

"Do you know your Don?" he asked, offering his hand with respectful gentleness, for she seemed a little doubtful whether he was a friend or stranger.

"It is 'Mat,'" said Rose, and that familiar word seemed to reassure the child at once, for, leaning forward, she kissed him as if quite used to doing it.

"I picked up some toys for her, by the way, and she shall have them at once to pay for that. I didn't expect to be so graciously received by this shy mouse," said Mac, much gratified, for Dulce was very chary of her favors.

"She knew you, for I always carry my home album with me, and when she comes to your picture she always kisses it, because I never want her to forget her first friend," explained Rose, pleased with her pupil.

"First, but not best," answered Mac, rummaging in his knapsack for the promised toys, which he set forth upon the hay before delighted Dulce.

Neither picture books nor sweeties, but berries strung on long stems of grass, acorns, and pretty cones, bits of rock shining with mica, several bluebirds' feathers, and a nest of moss with white pebbles for eggs.

"Dearest Nature, strong and kind" knows what children love, and has plenty of such playthings ready for them all, if one only knows how to find them. These were received with rapture. And leaving the little creature to enjoy them in her own quiet way, Mac began to tumble the things back into his knapsack again. Two or three books lay near Rose, and she took up one which opened at a place marked by a scribbled paper.

"Keats? I didn't know you condescended to read anything so modern," she said, moving the paper to see the page beneath.

Mac looked up, snatched the book out of her hand, and shook down several more scraps, then returned it with a curiously shamefaced expression, saying, as he crammed the papers into his pocket, “I beg pardon, but it was full of rubbish. Oh, yes! I’m fond of Keats. Don’t you know him?”

“I used to read him a good deal, but Uncle found me crying over the ‘Pot of Basil’ and advised me to read less poetry for a while or I should get too sentimental,” answered Rose, turning the pages without seeing them, for a new idea had just popped into her head.

“‘The Eve of St. Agnes’ is the most perfect love story in the world, I think,” said Mac, enthusiastically.

“Read it to me. I feel just like hearing poetry, and you will do it justice if you are fond of it,” said Rose, handing him the book with an innocent air.

“Nothing I’d like better, but it is rather long.”

“I’ll tell you to stop if I get tired. Baby won’t interrupt; she will be contented for an hour with those pretty things.”

As if well pleased with his task, Mac laid himself comfortably on the grass and, leaning his head on his hand, read the lovely story as only one could who entered fully into the spirit of it. Rose watched him closely and saw how his face brightened over some quaint fancy, delicate description, or delicious word; heard how smoothly the melodious measures fell from his lips, and read something more than admiration in his eyes as he looked up now and then to mark if she enjoyed it as much as he.

She could not help enjoying it, for the poet’s pen painted as well as wrote, and the little romance lived before her, but she was not thinking of John Keats as she listened; she was wondering if this cousin was a kindred spirit, born to make such music and leave as sweet an echo behind him. It seemed as if it might be; and, after going through the rough caterpillar and the pent-up chrysalis changes, the beautiful butterfly would appear to astonish and delight them all. So full of this fancy was she that she never thanked him when the story ended but, leaning forward, asked in a tone that made him start and look as if he had fallen from the clouds: “Mac, do you ever write poetry?”

“Never.”

“What do you call the song Phebe sang with her bird chorus?”

“That was nothing till she put the music to it. But she promised not to tell.”

“She didn’t. I suspected, and now I know,” laughed Rose, delighted to have caught him.

Much discomfited, Mac gave poor Keats a fling and, leaning on both elbows, tried to hide his face for it had reddened like that of a modest girl when teased about her lover.

“You needn’t look so guilty; it is no sin to write poetry,” said Rose, amused at his confession.

“It’s a sin to call that rubbish poetry,” muttered Mac with great scorn.

“It is a greater sin to tell a fib and say you never write it.”

“Reading so much sets one thinking about such things, and every fellow scribbles a little jingle when he is lazy or in love, you know,” explained Mac, looking very guilty.

Rose could not quite understand the change she saw in him till his last words suggested a cause which she knew by experience was apt to inspire young men. Leaning forward again, she asked solemnly, though her eyes danced with fun, “Mac, are you in love?”

“Do I look like it?” And he sat up with such an injured and indignant face that she apologized at once, for he certainly did not look loverlike with hayseed in his hair, several lively crickets playing leapfrog over his back, and a pair of long legs stretching from tree to haycock.

“No, you don’t, and I humbly beg your pardon for making such an unwarrantable insinuation. It merely occurred to me that the general upliftedness I observe in you might be owing to that, since it wasn’t poetry.”

“It is the good company I’ve been keeping, if anything. A fellow can’t spend ‘A Week’ with Thoreau and not be the better for it. I’m glad I show it, because in the scramble life is to most of us, even an hour with such a sane, simple, and sagacious soul as his must help one,” said Mac, taking a much worn book out of his pocket with the air of introducing a dear and honored friend.

“I’ve read bits, and like them they are so original and fresh and sometimes droll,” said Rose, smiling to see what natural and appropriate marks of approbation the elements seemed to set upon the pages Mac was turning eagerly, for one had evidently been rained on, a crushed berry stained another, some appreciative field-mouse or squirrel had nibbled one corner, and the cover was faded with the sunshine, which seemed to have filtered through to the thoughts within.

“Here’s a characteristic bit for you: ‘I would rather sit on a pumpkin, and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion. I would rather ride on earth in an oxcart, with free circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion train, and breathe malaria all the way.’

“I’ve tried both and quite agree with him,” laughed Mac, and skimming down another page, gave her a paragraph here and there.

“‘Read the best books first, or you may not have a chance to read them at all.’

“‘We do not learn much from learned books, but from sincere human books: frank, honest biographies.’

“‘At least let us have healthy books. Let the poet be as vigorous as the sugar maple, with sap enough to maintain his own verdure, besides what runs into the trough; and not like a vine which, being cut in the spring, bears no fruit, but bleeds to death in the endeavor to heal its wounds.'"

"That will do for you," said Rose, still thinking of the new suspicion which pleased her by its very improbability.

Mac flashed a quick look at her and shut the book, saying quietly, although his eyes shone, and a conscious smile lurked about his mouth: "We shall see, and no one need meddle, for, as my Thoreau says,

"Whate'er we leave to God, God does
And blesses us: The work we choose should be our own
God lets alone."

Rose sat silent, as if conscious that she deserved his poetical reproof.

"Come, you have catechized me pretty well; now I'll take my turn and ask you why you look 'uplifted,' as you call it. What have you been doing to make yourself more like your namesake than ever?" asked Mac, carrying war into the enemy's camp with the sudden question.

"Nothing but live, and enjoy doing it. I actually sit here, day after day, as happy and contented with little things as Dulce is and feel as if I wasn't much older than she," answered the girl, feeling as if some change was going on in that pleasant sort of pause but unable to describe it.

"As if a rose should shut and be a bud again," murmured Mac, borrowing from his beloved Keats.

"Ah, but I can't do that! I must go on blooming whether I like it or not, and the only trouble I have is to know what leaf I ought to unfold next," said Rose, playfully smoothing out the white gown, in which she looked very like a daisy among the green.

"How far have you got?" asked Mac, continuing his catechism as if the fancy suited him.

"Let me see. Since I came home last year, I've been gay, then sad, then busy, and now I am simply happy. I don't know why, but seem to be waiting for what is to come next and getting ready for it, perhaps unconsciously," she said, looking dreamily away to the hills again, is if the new experience was coming to her from afar.

Mac watched her thoughtfully for a minute, wondering how many more leaves must unfold before the golden heart of this human flower would lie open to the sun. He felt a curious desire to help in some way, and could think of none better than to offer her what he had found most helpful to himself. Picking up another book, he opened it at a place where an oak leaf lay and, handing it to her, said, as if presenting something very excellent and precious: "If you want to be ready to take whatever comes in a brave and noble way, read that, and the one where the page is turned down."

Rose took it, saw the words "Self-Reliance," and turning the leaves, read here and there a passage which was marked: "'My life is for itself, and not for a spectacle.'

"'Insist on yourself: never imitate. That which each can do best, none but his Maker can teach him.'

"'Do that which is assigned to you, and you cannot hope or dare too much.'"

Then, coming to the folded page, whose title was "Heroism," she read, and brightened as she read:

"'Let the maiden, with erect soul, walk serenely on her way; accept the hint of each new experience; search in turn all the objects that solicit her eye, that she may learn the power and the charm of her newborn being.'

"'The fair girl who repels interference by a decided and proud choice of influences inspires every beholder with something of her own nobleness; and the silent heart encourages her. O friend, never strike sail to a fear! Come into port greatly, or sail with God the seas.'"

"You understand that, don't you?" asked Mac as she glanced up with the look of one who had found something suited to her taste and need.

"Yes, but I never dared to read these Essays, because I thought they were too wise for me."

"The wisest things are sometimes the simplest, I think. Everyone welcomes light and air, and cannot do without them, yet very few could explain them truly. I don't ask you to read or understand all of that don't myself but I do recommend the two essays I've marked, as well as 'Love' and 'Friendship.' Try them, and let me know how they suit. I'll leave you the book."

"Thanks. I wanted something fine to read up here and, judging by what I see, I fancy this will suit. Only Aunt Jessie may think I'm putting on airs if I try Emerson."

"Why should she? He has done more to set young men and women thinking than any man in this century at least. Don't you be afraid if it is what you want, take it, and go ahead as he tells you

"Without halting, without rest,
Lifting Better up to Best."

"I'll try," said Rose meekly, feeling that Mac had been going ahead himself much faster than she had any suspicion.

Here a voice exclaimed "Hallo!" and, looking around, Jamie was discovered surveying them critically as he stood in an independent attitude, like a small Colossus of Rhodes in brown linen, with a bundle of molasses candy in one hand, several new fishhooks cherished carefully in the other, and his hat well on the back of his head, displaying as many freckles as one somewhat limited nose could reasonably accommodate.

"How are you, young one?" said Mac, nodding.

"Tip-top. Glad it's you. Thought Archie might have turned up again, and he's no fun. Where did you come from? What did you come for? How long are you going to stay? Want a bit? It's jolly good."

With which varied remarks Jamie approached, shook hands in a manly way, and, sitting down beside his long cousin, hospitably offered sticks of candy all around.

"Did you get any letters?" asked Rose, declining the sticky treat.

"Lots, but Mama forgot to give 'em to me, and I was rather in a hurry, for Mrs. Atkinson said somebody had come and I couldn't wait," explained Jamie, reposing luxuriously with his head on Mac's legs and his mouth full.

"I'll step and get them. Aunty must be tired, and we should enjoy reading the news together."

"She is the most convenient girl that ever was," observed Jamie as Rose departed, thinking Mac might like some more substantial refreshment than sweetmeats.

"I should think so, if you let her run your errands, you lazy little scamp," answered Mac, looking after her as she went up the green slope, for there was something very attractive to him about the slender figure in a plain white gown with a black sash about the waist and all the wavy hair gathered to the top of the head with a little black bow.

"Sort of pre-Raphaelite, and quite refreshing after the furbelowed creatures at the hotels," he said to himself as she vanished under the arch of scarlet runners over the garden gate.

"Oh, well! She likes it. Rose is fond of me, and I'm very good to her when I have time," continued Jamie, calmly explaining. "I let her cut out a fishhook, when it caught in my leg, with a sharp penknife, and you'd better believe it hurt, but I never squirmed a bit, and she said I was a brave boy. And then, one day I got left on my desert island out in the pond, you know the boat floated off, and there I was for as much as an hour before I could make anyone hear. But Rose thought I might be there, and down she came, and told me to swim ashore. It wasn't far, but the water was horrid cold, and I didn't like it. I started though, just as she said, and got on all right, till about halfway, then cramp or something made me shut up and howl, and she came after me slapdash, and pulled me ashore. Yes, sir, as wet as a turtle, and looked so funny, I laughed, and that cured the cramp. Wasn't I good to mind when she said, 'Come on'?"

"She was, to dive after such a scapegrace. I guess you lead her a life of it, and I'd better take you home with me in the morning," suggested Mac, rolling the boy over and giving him a good-natured pummeling on the haycock while Dulce applauded from her nest.

When Rose returned with ice-cold milk, gingerbread, and letters, she found the reader of Emerson up in the tree, pelting and being pelted with green apples as Jamie vainly endeavored to get at him. The siege ended when Aunt Jessie appeared, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in chat about home affairs.

Early the next morning Mac was off, and Rose went as far as the old church with him.

"Shall you walk all the way?" she asked as he strode along beside her in the dewy freshness of the young day.

"Only about twenty miles, then take car and whisk back to my work," he answered, breaking a delicate fern for her.

"Are you never lonely?"

"Never. I take my best friends along, you know," and he gave a slap to the pocket from which peeped the volume of Thoreau.

"I'm afraid you leave your very best behind you," said Rose, alluding to the book he had lent her yesterday.

"I'm glad to share it with you. I have much of it here, and a little goes a great way, as you will soon discover," he answered, tapping his head.

"I hope the reading will do as much for me as it seems to have done for you. I'm happy, but you are wise and good I want to be also."

"Read away, and digest it well, then write and tell me what you think of it. Will you?" he asked as they paused where the four roads met.

"If you will answer. Shall you have time with all your other work? Poetry I beg pardon medicine is very absorbing, you know," answered Rose mischievously, for just then, as he stood bareheaded in the shadows of the leaves playing over his fine forehead, she remembered the chat among the haycocks, and he did not look at all like an M.D.

"I'll make time."

"Good-bye, Milton."

"Good-bye, Sabrina."

Chapter 18 WHICH WAS IT?

Rose did read and digest, and found her days much richer for the good company she kept, for an introduction to so much that was wise, beautiful, and true could not but make that month a memorable one. It is not strange that while the young man most admired “Heroism” and “Self-Reliance,” the girl preferred “Love” and “Friendship,” reading them over and over like prose poems, as they are, to the fitting accompaniment of sunshine, solitude, and sympathy, for letters went to and fro with praiseworthy regularity.

Rose much enjoyed this correspondence, and found herself regretting that it was at an end when she went home in September, for Mac wrote better than he talked, though he could do that remarkably well when he chose. But she had no chance to express either pleasure or regret, for the first time she saw him after her return the great change in his appearance made her forget everything else. Some whim had seized him to be shaven and shorn, and when he presented himself to welcome Rose, she hardly knew him. The shaggy hair was nicely trimmed and brushed, the cherished brown beard entirely gone, showing a well-cut mouth and handsome chin and giving a new expression to the whole face.

“Are you trying to look like Keats?” she asked, after a critical glance, which left her undecided whether the change was an improvement or not.

“I am trying not to look like Uncle,” answered Mac coolly.

“And why, if you please?” demanded Rose in great surprise.

“Because I prefer to look like myself, and not resemble any other man, no matter how good or great he may be.”

“You haven’t succeeded then, for you look now very much like the young Augustus,” returned Rose, rather pleased on the whole to see what a finely shaped head appeared after the rough thatch was off.

“Trust a woman to find a comparison for everything under the sun!” laughed Mac, not at all flattered by the one just made. “What do you think of me, on the whole?” he asked a minute later, as he found Rose still scrutinizing him with a meditative air.

“Haven’t made up my mind. It is such an entire change, I don’t know you, and feel as if I ought to be introduced. You certainly look much more tidy, and I fancy I shall like it when I’m used to seeing a somewhat distinguished-looking man about the house instead of my old friend Orson,” answered Rose, with her head on one side to get a profile view.

"Don't tell Uncle why I did it, please he thinks it was for the sake of coolness and likes it, so take no notice. They are all used to me now, and don't mind," said Mac, roving about the room as if rather ashamed of his whim after all.

"No, I won't, but you mustn't mind if I'm not as sociable as usual for a while. I never can be with strangers, and you really do seem like one. That will be a punishment for your want of taste and love of originality," returned Rose, resolved to punish him for the slight put upon her beloved uncle.

"As you like. I won't trouble you much anyway, for I'm going to be very busy. May go to L this winter, if Uncle thinks best, and then my 'originality' can't annoy you."

"I hope you won't go. Why, Mac, I'm just getting to know and enjoy you, and thought we'd have a nice time this winter reading something together. Must you go?" And Rose seemed to forget his strangeness, as she held him still by one button while she talked.

"That would be nice. But I feel as if I must go my plans are all made, and I've set my heart on it," answered Mac, looking so eager that Rose released him, saying sadly: "I suppose it is natural for you all to get restless and push off, but it is hard for me to let you go one after the other and stay here alone. Charlie is gone, Archie and Steve are wrapped up in their sweethearts, the boys away, and only Jamie left to 'play with Rose.'?

"But I'll come back, and you'll be glad I went if I bring you my — " began Mac with sudden animation, then stopped abruptly to bite his lips, as if he had nearly said too much.

"Your what?" asked Rose curiously, for he neither looked nor acted like himself.

"I forgot how long it takes to get a diploma," he said, walking away again.

"There will be one comfort if you go you'll see Phebe and can tell me all about her, for she is so modest, she doesn't half do it. I shall want to know how she gets on, if she is engaged to sing ballads in the concerts they talk of for next winter. You will write, won't you?"

"Oh, yes! No doubt of that," and Mac laughed low to himself as he stooped to look at the little Psyche on the mantelpiece. "What a pretty thing it is!" he added soberly as he took it up.

"Be careful. Uncle gave it to me last New Year, and I'm very fond of it. She is just lifting her lamp to see what Cupid is like, for she hasn't seen him yet," said Rose, busy putting her worktable in order.

"You ought to have a Cupid for her to look at. She has been waiting patiently a whole year, with nothing but a bronze lizard in sight," said Mac with the half-shy, half-daring look which was so new and puzzling.

"Cupid fled away as soon as she woke him, you know, and she had a bad time of it. She must wait longer till she can find and keep him."

"Do you know she looks like you? Hair tied up in a knot, and a spiritual sort of face. Don't you see it?" asked Mac, turning the graceful little figure toward her.

"Not a bit of it. I wonder whom I shall resemble next! I've been compared to a Fra Angelico angel, Saint Agnes, and now 'Syke,' as Annabel once called her."

"You'd see what I mean, if you'd ever watched your own face when you were listening to music, talking earnestly, or much moved, then your soul gets into your eyes and you are like Psyche."

"Tell me the next time you see me in a 'soulful' state, and I'll look in the glass, for I'd like to see if it is becoming," said Rose merrily as she sorted her gay worsteds.

"Your feet in the full-grown grasses,
Moved soft as a soft wind blows;
You passed me as April passes,
With a face made out of a rose,"

murmured Mac under his breath, thinking of the white figure going up a green slope one summer day; then, as if chiding himself for sentimentality, he set Psyche down with great care and began to talk about a course of solid reading for the winter.

After that, Rose saw very little of him for several weeks, as he seemed to be making up for lost time and was more odd and absent than ever when he did appear.

As she became accustomed to the change in his external appearance, she discovered that he was altering fast in other ways and watched the "distinguished-looking gentleman" with much interest, saying to herself, when she saw a new sort of dignity about him alternating with an unusual restlessness of manner, and now and then a touch of sentiment, "Genius is simmering, just as I predicted."

As the family were in mourning, there were no festivities on Rose's twenty-first birthday, though the boys had planned all sorts of rejoicings. Everyone felt particularly tender toward their girl on that day, remembering how "poor Charlie" had loved her, and they tried to show it in the gifts and good wishes they sent her. She found her sanctum all aglow with autumn leaves, and on her table so many rare and pretty things, she quite forgot she was an heiress and only felt how rich she was in loving friends.

One gift greatly pleased her, though she could not help smiling at the source from whence it came, for Mac sent her a Cupid not the chubby child with a face of naughty merriment, but a slender, winged youth leaning on his unstrung bow, with a broken arrow at his feet. A poem, “To Psyche,” came with it, and Rose was much surprised at the beauty of the lines, for, instead of being witty, complimentary, or gay, there was something nobler than mere sentiment in them, and the sweet old fable lived again in language which fitly painted the maiden Soul looking for a Love worthy to possess it.

Rose read them over and over as she sat among the gold and scarlet leaves which glorified her little room, and each time found new depth and beauty in them, looking from the words that made music in her ear to the lovely shapes that spoke with their mute grace to her eye. The whole thing suited her exactly, it was so delicate and perfect in its way, for she was tired of costly gifts and valued very much this proof of her cousin’s taste and talent, seeing nothing in it but an affectionate desire to please her.

All the rest dropped in at intervals through the day to say a loving word, and last of all came Mac. Rose happened to be alone with Dulce, enjoying a splendid sunset from her western window, for October gave her child a beautiful good night.

Rose turned around as he entered and, putting down the little girl, went to him with the evening red shining on her happy face as she said gratefully: “Dear Mac, it was so lovely! I don’t know how to thank you for it in any way but this.” And, drawing down his tall head, she gave him the birthday kiss she had given all the others.

But this time it produced a singular effect, for Mac turned scarlet, then grew pale, and when Rose added playfully, thinking to relieve the shyness of so young a poet, “Never again say you don’t write poetry, or call your verses rubbish I knew you were a genius, and now I’m sure of it,” he broke out, as if against his will: “No. It isn’t genius, it is love!” Then, as she shrank a little, startled at his energy, he added, with an effort at self-control which made his voice sound strange: “I didn’t mean to speak, but I can’t suffer you to deceive yourself so. I must tell the truth, and not let you kiss me like a cousin when I love you with all my heart and soul!”

“Oh, Mac, don’t joke!” cried Rose, bewildered by this sudden glimpse into a heart she thought she knew so well.

“I’m in solemn earnest,” he answered steadily, in such a quiet tone that, but for the pale excitement of his face, she might have doubted his words. “Be angry, if you will. I expect it, for I know it is too soon to speak. I ought to wait for years, perhaps, but you seemed so happy I dared to hope you had forgotten.”

“Forgotten what?” asked Rose sharply.

“Charlie.”

"Ah! You all will insist on believing that I loved him better than I did!" she cried, with both pain and impatience in her voice, for the family delusion tried her very much at times.

"How could we help it, when he was everything women most admire?" said Mac, not bitterly, but as if he sometimes wondered at their want of insight.

"I do not admire weakness of any sort I could never love without either confidence or respect. Do me the justice to believe that, for I'm tired of being pitied."

She spoke almost passionately, being more excited by Mac's repressed emotion than she had ever been by Charlie's most touching demonstration, though she did not know why.

"But he loved you so!" began Mac, feeling as if a barrier had suddenly gone down but not daring to venture in as yet.

"That was the hard part of it! That was why I tried to love him, why I hoped he would stand fast for my sake, if not for his own, and why I found it so sad sometimes not to be able to help despising him for his want of courage. I don't know how others feel, but, to me, love isn't all. I must look up, not down, trust and honor with my whole heart, and find strength and integrity to lean on. I have had it so far, and I know I could not live without it."

"Your ideal is a high one. Do you hope to find it, Rose?" Mac asked, feeling, with the humility of a genuine love, that he could not give her all she desired.

"Yes," she answered, with a face full of the beautiful confidence in virtue, the instinctive desire for the best which so many of us lose too soon, to find again after life's great lessons are well learned. "I do hope to find it, because I try not to be unreasonable and expect perfection. Smile if you will, but I won't give up my hero yet," and she tried to speak lightly, hoping to lead him away from a more dangerous topic.

"You'll have to look a long while, I'm afraid," and all the glow was gone out of Mac's face, for he understood her wish and knew his answer had been given.

"I have Uncle to help me, and I think my ideal grew out of my knowledge of him. How can I fail to believe in goodness, when he shows me what it can be and do?"

"It's no use for me to say any more, for I have very little to offer. I did not mean to say a word till I earned a right to hope for something in return. I cannot take it back, but I can wish you success, and I do, because you deserve the very best." And Mac moved as if he was going away without more words, accepting the inevitable as manfully as he could.

"Thank you that makes me feel very ungrateful and unkind. I wish I could answer you as you want me to for, indeed, dear Mac, I'm very fond of you in my own way," and Rose looked up with such tender pity and frank affection in her face, it was no wonder the poor fellow caught at a ray of hope and, brightening suddenly, said in his own odd way: "Couldn't you take me on trial while you are waiting for a true hero? It may be years before you find him; meantime, you could be practicing on me in ways that would be useful when you get him."

"Oh, Mac! What shall I do with you?" exclaimed Rose, so curiously affected by this very characteristic wooing that she did not know whether to laugh or cry, for he was looking at her with his heart in his eyes, though his proposition was the queerest ever made at such a time.

"Just go on being fond of me in your own way, and let me love you as much as I like in mine. I'll try to be satisfied with that." And he took both her hands so beseechingly that she felt more ungrateful than ever.

"No, it would not be fair, for you would love the most and, if the hero did appear, what would become of you?"

"I should resemble Uncle Alec in one thing at least fidelity, for my first love would be my last."

That went straight to Rose's heart, and for a minute she stood silent, looking down at the two strong hands that held hers so firmly yet so gently, and the thought went through her mind, "Must he, too, be solitary all his life? I have no dear lover as my mother had, why cannot I make him happy and forget myself?"

It did not seem very hard, and she owned that, even while she told herself that compassion was no equivalent for love. She wanted to give all she could, and keep as much of Mac's affection as she honestly might, because it seemed to grow more sweet and precious when she thought of putting it away.

"You will be like Uncle in happier ways than that, I hope, for you, too, must have a high ideal and find her and be happy," she said, resolving to be true to the voice of conscience, not be swayed by the impulse of the moment.

"I have found her, but I don't see any prospect of happiness, do you?" he asked wistfully.

"Dear Mac, I cannot give you the love you want, but I do trust and respect you from the bottom of my heart, if that is any comfort," began Rose, looking up with eyes full of contrition for the pain her reply must give.

She got no further, however, for those last words wrought a marvelous change in Mac. Dropping her hands, he stood erect, as if inspired with sudden energy and hope, while over his face there came a brave, bright look, which for the moment made him a nobler and comelier man than ever handsome Prince had been. "It is a comfort!" he said, in a tone of gratitude that touched her very much. "You said your love must be founded on respect, and that you have given me why can I not earn the rest? I'm nothing now, but everything is possible when one loves with all his heart and soul and strength. Rose, I will be your hero if a mortal man can, even though I have to work and wait for years. I'll make you love me, and be glad to do it. Don't be frightened. I've not lost my wits I've just found them. I don't ask anything I'll never speak of my hope, but it is no use to stop me. I must try it, and I will succeed!"

With the last words, uttered in a ringing voice while his face glowed, his eyes shone, and he looked as if carried out of himself by the passion that possessed him, Mac abruptly left the room, like one eager to change words to deeds and begin his task at once.

Rose was so amazed by all this that she sat down trembling a little, not with fear or anger, but a feeling half pleasure, half pain, and a sense of some new power subtle, strong, and sweet that had come into her life. It seemed as if another Mac had taken the place of the one she had known so long an ardent, ambitious man, ready for any work now that the magical moment had come when everything seems possible to love. If hope could work such a marvelous change for a moment, could not happiness do it for a lifetime? It would be an exciting experiment to try, she thought, remembering the sudden illumination which made that familiar face both beautiful and strange.

She could not help wondering how long this unsuspected sentiment had been growing in his heart and felt perplexed by its peculiar demonstration, for she had never had a lover like this before. It touched and flattered her, nevertheless and she could not but feel honored by a love so genuine and generous, for it seemed to make a man of Mac all at once, and a manly man, too, who was not daunted by disappointment but could "hope against hope" and resolve to make her love him if it took years to do it.

There was the charm of novelty about this sort of wooing, and she tried to guess how he would set about it, felt curious to see how he would behave when next they met, and was half angry with herself for not being able to decide how she ought to act. The more she thought, the more bewildered she grew, for having made up her mind that Mac was a genius, it disturbed all her plans to find him a lover, and such an ardent one. As it was impossible to predict what would come next, she gave up trying to prepare for it and, tired with vain speculations, carried Dulce off to bed, wishing she could tuck away her love troubles as quietly and comfortably as she did her sleepy little charge.

Simple and sincere in all things, Mac gave Rose a new surprise by keeping his promise to the letter asked nothing of her, said nothing of his hope, and went on as if nothing had happened, quite in the old friendly way. No, not quite, for now and then, when she least expected it, she saw again the indescribable expression on his face, a look that seemed to shed a sudden sunshine over her, making her eyes fall involuntarily, her color rise, and her heart beat quicker for a moment. Not a word did he say, but she felt that a new atmosphere surrounded her when he was by, and although he used none of the little devices most lovers employ to keep the flame alight, it was impossible to forget that underneath his quietude there was a hidden world of fire and force ready to appear at a touch, a word from her.

This was rather dangerous knowledge for Rose, and she soon began to feel that there were more subtle temptations than she had expected, for it was impossible to be unconscious of her power, or always to resist the trials of it which daily came unsought. She had never felt this desire before, for Charlie was the only one who had touched her heart, and he was constantly asking as well as giving, and wearied her by demanding too much or oppressed her by offering more than she could accept.

Mac did neither; he only loved her, silently, patiently, hopefully, and this generous sort of fidelity was very eloquent to a nature like hers. She could not refuse or chide, since nothing was asked or urged; there was no need of coldness, for he never presumed; no call for pity, since he never complained. All that could be done was to try and be as just and true as he was, and to wait as trustfully for the end, whatever it was to be.

For a time she liked the new interest it put into her life, yet did nothing to encourage it and thought that if she gave this love no food it would soon starve to death. But it seemed to thrive on air, and presently she began to feel as if a very strong will was slowly but steadily influencing her in many ways. If Mac had never told her that he meant to “make her love him,” she might have yielded unconsciously, but now she mistook the impulse to obey this undercurrent for compassion and resisted stoutly, not comprehending yet the reason for the unrest which took possession of her about this time.

She had as many moods as an April day, and would have much surprised Dr. Alec by her vagaries had he known them all. He saw enough, however, to guess what was the matter, but took no notice, for he knew this fever must run its course, and much medicine only does harm. The others were busy about their own affairs, and Aunt Plenty was too much absorbed in her rheumatism to think of love, for the cold weather set in early, and the poor lady kept her room for days at a time with Rose as nurse.

Mac had spoken of going away in November, and Rose began to hope he would, for she decided that this silent sort of adoration was bad for her, as it prevented her from steadily pursuing the employments she had marked out for that year. What was the use of trying to read useful books when her thoughts continually wandered to those charming essays on “Love” and “Friendship”? To copy antique casts, when all the masculine heads looked like Cupid and the feminine ones like the Psyche on her mantelpiece? To practice the best music if it ended in singing over and over the pretty spring song without Phebe's bird chorus? Dulce's company was pleasantest now, for Dulce seldom talked, so much meditation was possible. Even Aunt Plenty's red flannel, camphor, and Pond's Extract were preferable to general society, and long solitary rides on Rosa seemed the only thing to put her in tune after one of her attempts to find out what she ought to do or leave undone.

She made up her mind at last, and arming herself with an unmade pen, like Fanny Squeers, she boldly went into the study to confer with Dr. Alec at an hour when Mac was usually absent. "I want a pen for marking can you make me one, Uncle?" she asked, popping her head in to be sure he was alone.

"Yes, my dear," answered a voice so like the doctor's that she entered without delay.

But before she had taken three steps she stopped, looking rather annoyed, for the head that rose from behind the tall desk was not rough and gray, but brown and smooth, and Mac, not Uncle Alec, sat there writing. Late experience had taught her that she had nothing to fear from a tete-a-tete and, having with difficulty taken a resolution, she did not like to fail of carrying it out.

"Don't get up, I won't trouble you if you are busy, there is no hurry," she said, not quite sure whether it were wiser to stay or run away.

Mac settled the point by taking the pen out of her hand and beginning to cut it, as quietly as Nicholas did on that "thrilling" occasion. Perhaps he was thinking of that, for he smiled as he asked, "Hard or soft?"

Rose evidently had forgotten that the family of Squeers ever existed, for she answered: "Hard, please," in a voice to match. "I'm glad to see you doing that," she added, taking courage from his composure and going as straight to her point as could be expected of a woman.

"And I am very glad to do it."

"I don't mean making pens, but the romance I advised," and she touched the closely written page before him, looking as if she would like to read it.

"That is my abstract on a lecture on the circulation of the blood," he answered, kindly turning it so that she could see. "I don't write romances I'm living one," and he glanced up with the happy, hopeful expression which always made her feel as if he was heaping coals of fire on her head.

"I wish you wouldn't look at me in that way it fidgets me," she said a little petulantly, for she had been out riding, and knew that she did not present a "spiritual" appearance after the frosty air had reddened nose as well as cheeks.

"I'll try to remember. It does itself before I know it. Perhaps this may mend matters.” And, taking out the blue glasses he sometimes wore in the wind, he gravely put them on.

Rose could not help laughing, but his obedience only aggravated her, for she knew he could observe her all the better behind his ugly screen.

“No, it won’t they are not becoming, and I don’t want to look blue when I do not feel so,” she said, finding it impossible to guess what he would do next or to help enjoying his peculiarities.

“But you don’t to me, for in spite of the goggles everything is rose-colored now.” And he pocketed the glasses without a murmur at the charming inconsistency of his idol.

“Really, Mac, I’m tired of this nonsense, it worries me and wastes your time.”

“Never worked harder. But does it really trouble you to know I love you?” he asked anxiously.

“Don’t you see how cross it makes me?” And she walked away, feeling that things were not going as she intended to have them at all.

“I don’t mind the thorns if I get the rose at last, and I still hope I may, some ten years hence,” said this persistent suitor, quite undaunted by the prospect of a “long wait.”

“I think it is rather hard to be loved whether I like it or not,” objected Rose, at a loss how to make any headway against such indomitable hopefulness.

“But you can’t help it, nor can I so I must go on doing it with all my heart till you marry, and then well, then I’m afraid I may hate somebody instead,” and Mac spoilt the pen by an involuntary slash of his knife.

“Please don’t, Mac!”

“Do which, love or hate?”

“Don’t do either go and care for someone else; there are plenty of nice girls who will be glad to make you happy,” said Rose, intent upon ending her disquiet in some way.

“That is too easy. I enjoy working for my blessings, and the harder I have to work, the more I value them when they come.”

“Then if I suddenly grew very kind, would you stop caring about me?” asked Rose, wondering if that treatment would free her from a passion which both touched and tormented her.

“Try and see.” But there was a traitorous glimmer in Mac’s eyes which plainly showed what a failure it would be.

“No, I’ll get something to do, so absorbing I shall forget all about you.”

“Don’t think about me if it troubles you,” he said tenderly.

“I can’t help it.” Rose tried to catch back the words, but it was too late, and she added hastily, “That is, I cannot help wishing you would forget me. It is a great disappointment to find I was mistaken when I hoped such fine things of you."

"Yes, you were very sure that it was love when it was poetry, and now you want poetry when I've nothing on hand but love. Will both together please you?"

"Try and see."

"I'll do my best. Anything else?" he asked, forgetting the small task she had given him in his eagerness to attempt the greater.

"Tell me one thing. I've often wanted to know, and now you speak of it I'll venture to ask. Did you care about me when you read Keats to me last summer?"

"No."

"When did you begin?" asked Rose, smiling in spite of herself at his unflattering honesty.

"How can I tell? Perhaps it did begin up there, though, for that talk set us writing, and the letters showed me what a beautiful soul you had. I loved that first it was so quick to recognize good things, to use them when they came, and give them out again as unconsciously as a flower does its breath. I longed for you to come home, and wanted you to find me altered for the better in some way as I had found you. And when you came it was very easy to see why I needed you to love you entirely, and to tell you so. That's all, Rose."

A short story, but it was enough the voice that told it with such simple truth made the few words so eloquent, Rose felt strongly tempted to add the sequel Mac desired. But her eyes had fallen as he spoke, for she knew his were fixed upon her, dark and dilated, with the same repressed emotion that put such fervor into his quiet tones, and just as she was about to look up, they fell on a shabby little footstool. Trifles affect women curiously, and often most irresistibly when some agitation sways them. The sight of the old hassock vividly recalled Charlie, for he had kicked it on the night she never liked to remember. Like a spark it fired a long train of recollections, and the thought went through her mind: "I fancied I loved him, and let him see it, but I deceived myself, and he reproached me for a single look that said too much. This feeling is very different, but too new and sudden to be trusted. I'll neither look nor speak till I am quite sure, for Mac's love is far deeper than poor Charlie's, and I must be very true."

Not in words did the resolve shape itself, but in a quick impulse, which she obeyed certain that it was right, since it was hard to yield to it. Only an instant's silence followed Mac's answer as she stood looking down with fingers intertwined and color varying in her cheeks. A foolish attitude, but Mac thought it a sweet picture of maiden hesitation and began to hope that a month's wooing was about to end in winning for a lifetime. He deceived himself, however, and cold water fell upon his flame, subduing but by no means quenching it, when

Rose looked up with an air of determination which could not escape eyes that were growing wonderfully farsighted lately.

“I came in here to beg Uncle to advise you to go away soon. You are very patient and forbearing, and I feel it more than I can tell. But it is not good for you to depend on anyone so much for your happiness, I think, and I know it is bad for me to feel that I have so much power over a fellow creature. Go away, Mac, and see if this isn’t all a mistake. Don’t let a fancy for me change or delay your work, because it may end as suddenly as it began, and then we should both reproach ourselves and each other. Please do! I respect and care for you so much, I can’t be happy to take all and give nothing. I try to, but I’m not sure I want to think it is too soon to know yet.”

Rose began bravely, but ended in a fluttered sort of way as she moved toward the door, for Mac’s face though it fell at first, brightened as she went on, and at the last word, uttered almost involuntarily, he actually laughed low to himself, as if this order into exile pleased him much.

“Don’t say that you give nothing, when you’ve just shown me that I’m getting on. I’ll go; I’ll go at once, and see if absence won’t help you ‘to think, to know, and to be sure’ as it did me. I wish I could do something more for you. As I can’t, good-bye.”

“Are you going now?” And Rose paused in her retreat to look back with a startled face as he offered her a badly made pen and opened the door for her just as Dr. Alec always did; for, in spite of himself, Mac did resemble the best of uncles.

“Not yet, but you seem to be.”

Rose turned as red as a poppy, snatched the pen, and flew upstairs, to call herself hard names as she industriously spoiled all Aunt Plenty’s new pocket handkerchiefs by marking them “A.M.C.”

Three days later Mac said “good-bye” in earnest, and no one was surprised that he left somewhat abruptly, such being his way, and a course of lectures by a famous physician the ostensible reason for a trip to L — — . Uncle Alec deserted most shamefully at the last moment by sending word that he would be at the station to see the traveler off, Aunt Plenty was still in her room, so when Mac came down from his farewell to her, Rose met him in the hall, as if anxious not to delay him. She was a little afraid of another tete-a-tete, as she fared so badly at the last, and had assumed a calm and cousinly air which she flattered herself would plainly show on what terms she wished to part.

Mac apparently understood, and not only took the hint, but surpassed her in cheerful composure, for, merely saying “Good-bye, Cousin; write when you feel like it,” he shook hands and walked out of the house as tranquilly as if only a day instead of three months were to pass before they met again. Rose felt as if a sudden shower bath had chilled her and was about to retire, saying to herself with disdainful decision: “There’s no love about it after all, only one of the eccentricities of genius,” when a rush of cold air made her turn to find herself in what appeared to be the embrace of an impetuous overcoat, which wrapped her close for an instant, then vanished as suddenly as it had come, leaving her to hide in the sanctum and confide to Psyche with a tender sort of triumph in her breathless voice: “No, no, it isn’t genius that must be love!”

Chapter 19 BEHIND THE FOUNTAIN

Two days after Christmas a young man of serious aspect might have been seen entering one of the large churches at L — — . Being shown to a seat, he joined in the services with praiseworthy devotion, especially the music, to which he listened with such evident pleasure that a gentleman who sat nearby felt moved to address this appreciative stranger after church.

“Fine sermon today. Ever heard our minister before, sir?” he began, as they went down the aisle together among the last, for the young man had lingered as if admiring the ancient building.

“Very fine. No, sir, I have never had that pleasure. I’ve often wished to see this old place, and am not at all disappointed. Your choir, too, is unusually good,” answered the stranger, glancing up at several bonnets bobbing about behind the half-drawn curtains above.

“Finest in the city, sir. We pride ourselves on our music, and always have the best. People often come for that alone.” And the old gentleman looked as satisfied as if a choir of cherubim and seraphim “continually did cry” in his organ loft.

“Who is the contralto? That solo was beautifully sung,” observed the younger man, pausing to read a tablet on the wall.

“That is Miss Moore. Been here about a year, and is universally admired. Excellent young lady couldn’t do without her. Sings superbly in oratorios. Ever heard her?”

“Never. She came from X, I believe?

“Yes, highly recommended. She was brought up by one of the first families there. Campbell is the name. If you come from X, you doubtless know them.”

“I have met them. Good morning.” And with bows the gentlemen parted, for at that instant the young man caught sight of a tall lady going down the church steps with a devout expression in her fine eyes and a prayer-book in her hand.

Hastening after her, the serious-minded young man accosted her just as she turned into a quiet street.

“Phebe!”

Only a word, but it wrought a marvelous change, for the devout expression vanished in the drawing of a breath, and the quiet face blossomed suddenly with color, warmth, and “the light that never was on sea or land” as she turned to meet her lover with an answering word as eloquent as his.

“Archie!”

“The year is out today. I told you I should come. Have you forgotten?”

“No I knew you’d come.”

“And are you glad?”

“How can I help it?”

“You can’t don’t try. Come into this little park and let us talk.” And drawing her hand through his arm, Archie led her into what to other eyes was a very dismal square, with a boarded-up fountain in the middle, sodden grass plots, and dead leaves dancing in the wintry wind.

But to them it was a summery Paradise, and they walked to and fro in the pale sunshine, quite unconscious that they were objects of interest to several ladies and gentlemen waiting anxiously for their dinner or yawning over the dull books kept for Sunday reading. “Are you ready to come home now, Phebe?” asked Archie tenderly as he looked at the downcast face beside him and wondered why all women did not wear delightful little black velvet bonnets with one deep red flower against their hair.

“Not yet. I haven’t done enough,” began Phebe, finding it very hard to keep the resolution made a year ago.

“You have proved that you can support yourself, make friends, and earn a name, if you choose. No one can deny that, and we are all getting proud of you. What more can you ask, my dearest?”

“I don’t quite know, but I am very ambitious. I want to be famous, to do something for you all, to make some sacrifice for Rose, and, if I can, to have something to give up for your sake. Let me wait and work longer I know I haven’t earned my welcome yet,” pleaded Phebe so earnestly that her lover knew it would be in vain to try and turn her, so wisely contented himself with half, since he could not have the whole.

“Such a proud woman! Yet I love you all the better for it, and understand your feeling. Rose made me see how it seems to you, and I don’t wonder that you cannot forget the unkind things that were looked, if not said, by some of my amiable aunts. I’ll try to be patient on one condition, Phebe.”

“And what is that?”

“You are to let me come sometimes while I wait, and wear this lest you should forget me,” he said, pulling a ring from his pocket and gently drawing a warm, bare hand out of the muff where it lay hidden.

“Yes, Archie, but not here not now!” cried Phebe, glancing about her as if suddenly aware that they were not alone.

“No one can see us here I thought of that. Give me one happy minute, after this long, long year of waiting,” answered Archie, pausing just where the fountain hid them from all eyes, for there were houses only on one side.

Phebe submitted and never did a plain gold ring slip more easily to its place than the one he put on in such a hurry that cold December day. Then one hand went back into the muff red with the grasp he gave it, and the other to its old place on his arm with a confiding gesture, as if it had a right there.

"Now I feel sure of you," said Archie as they went on again, and no one the wiser for that tender transaction behind the ugly pyramid of boards. "Mac wrote me that you were much admired by your church people, and that certain wealthy bachelors evidently had designs on the retiring Miss Moore. I was horribly jealous, but now I defy every man of them."

Phebe smiled with the air of proud humility that was so becoming and answered briefly: "There was no danger kings could not change me, whether you ever came or not. But Mac should not have told you."

"You shall be revenged on him, then, for, as he told secrets about you, I'll tell you one about him. Phebe, he loves Rose!" And Archie looked as if he expected to make a great sensation with his news.

"I know it." And Phebe laughed at his sudden change of countenance as he added inquiringly, "She told you, then?"

"Not a word. I guessed it from her letters, for lately she says nothing about Mac, and before there was a good deal, so I suspected what the silence meant and asked no questions."

"Wise girl! Then you think she does care for the dear old fellow?"

"Of course she does. Didn't he tell you so?"

"No, he only said when he went away, 'Take care of my Rose, and I'll take care of your Phebe,' and not another thing could I get out of him, for I did ask questions. He stood by me like a hero, and kept Aunt Jane from driving me stark mad with her 'advice.' I don't forget that, and burned to lend him a hand somewhere, but he begged me to let him manage his wooing in his own way. And from what I see, I should say he knew how to do it," added Archie, finding it very delightful to gossip about love affairs with his sweetheart.

"Dear little mistress! How does she behave?" asked Phebe, longing for news, but too grateful to ask at headquarters, remembering how generously Rose had tried to help her, even by silence, the greatest sacrifice a woman can make at such interesting periods.

"Very sweet and shy and charming. I try not to watch but upon my word I cannot help it sometimes, she is so 'cunning,' as you girls say. When I carry her a letter from Mac she tries so hard not to show how glad she is that I want to laugh and tell her I know all about it. But I look as sober as a judge and as stupid as an owl by daylight, and she enjoys her letters in peace and thinks I'm so absorbed in my own passion that I’m blind to hers.”

“But why did Mac come away? He says lectures brought him, and he goes, but I am sure something else is in his mind, he looks so happy at times. I don’t see him very often, but when I do I’m conscious that he isn’t the Mac I left a year ago,” said Phebe, leading Archie away, for inexorable propriety forbade a longer stay, even if prudence and duty had not given her a reminding nudge, as it was very cold, and afternoon church came in an hour.

“Well, you see Mac was always peculiar, and he cannot even grow up like other fellows. I don’t understand him yet, and am sure he’s got some plan in his head that no one suspects, unless it is Uncle Alec. Love makes us all cut queer capers, and I’ve an idea that the Don will distinguish himself in some uncommon way. So be prepared to applaud whatever it is. We owe him that, you know.”

“Indeed we do! If Rose ever speaks of him to you, tell her I shall see that he comes to no harm, and she must do the same for my Archie.”

That unusual demonstration of tenderness from reserved Phebe very naturally turned the conversation into a more personal channel, and Archie devoted himself to building castles in the air so successfully that they passed the material mansion without either being aware of it.

“Will you come in?” asked Phebe when the mistake was rectified and she stood on her own steps looking down at her escort, who had discreetly released her before a pull at the bell caused five heads to pop up at five different windows.

“No, thanks. I shall be at church this afternoon, and the oratorio this evening. I must be off early in the morning, so let me make the most of precious time and come home with you tonight as I did before,” answered Archie, making his best bow, and quite sure of consent.

“You may.” And Phebe vanished, closing the door softly, as if she found it hard to shut out so much love and happiness as that in the heart of the sedate young gentleman who went briskly down the street humming a verse of old “Clyde” like a tuneful bass viol:

“Oh, let our mingling voices rise
In grateful rapture to the skies,
Where love has had its birth.

Let songs of joy this day declare
That spirits come their bliss to share
With all the sons of earth.”

That afternoon Miss Moore sang remarkably well, and that evening quite electrified even her best friends by the skill and power with which she rendered

“Inflammatus” in the oratorio.

“If that is not genius, I should like to know what it is?” said one young man to another as they went out just before the general crush at the end.

“Some genius and a great deal of love. They are a grand team, and, when well driven, astonish the world by the time they make in the great race,” answered the second young man with the look of one inclined to try his hand at driving that immortal span.

“Daresay you are right. Can’t stop now she’s waiting for me. Don’t sit up, Mac.”

“The gods go with you, Archie.”

And the cousins separated one to write till midnight, the other to bid his Phebe good-bye, little dreaming how unexpectedly and successfully she was to earn her welcome home.

Chapter 20 WHAT MAC DID

Rose, meantime, was trying to find out what the sentiment was with which she regarded her cousin Mac. She could not seem to reconcile the character she had known so long with the new one lately shown her, and the idea of loving the droll, bookish, absentminded Mac of former times appeared quite impossible and absurd, but the new Mac, wide awake, full of talent, ardent and high-handed, was such a surprise to her, she felt as if her heart was being won by a stranger, and it became her to study him well before yielding to a charm which she could not deny.

Affection came naturally, and had always been strong for the boy; regard for the studious youth easily deepened to respect for the integrity of the young man, and now something warmer was growing up within her; but at first she could not decide whether it was admiration for the rapid unfolding of talent of some sort or love answering to love.

As if to settle that point, Mac sent her on New Year’s Day a little book plainly bound and modestly entitled Songs and Sonnets. After reading this with ever-growing surprise and delight, Rose never had another doubt about the writer’s being a poet, for though she was no critic, she had read the best authors and knew what was good. Unpretentious as it was, this had the true ring, and its very simplicity showed conscious power for, unlike so many first attempts, the book was not full of “My Lady,” neither did it indulge in Swinburnian convulsions about

“The lilies and languors of peace,
The roses and raptures of love.”;

or contain any of the highly colored medieval word pictures so much in vogue. “My book should smell of pines, and resound with the hum of insects,” might have been its motto, so sweet and wholesome was it with a springlike sort of freshness which plainly betrayed that the author had learned some of Nature’s deepest secrets and possessed the skill to tell them in tuneful words. The songs went ringing through one’s memory long after they were read, and the sonnets were full of the subtle beauty, insight, and half-unconscious wisdom, which seem to prove that “genius is divine when young.”

Many faults it had, but was so full of promise that it was evident Mac had not “kept good company, read good books, loved good things, and cultivated soul and body as faithfully as he could” in vain. It all told now, for truth and virtue had blossomed into character and had a language of their own more eloquent than the poetry to which they were what the fragrance is to the flower. Wiser critics than Rose felt and admired this; less partial ones could not deny their praise to a first effort, which seemed as spontaneous and aspiring as a lark's song; and, when one or two of these Jupiters had given a nod of approval, Mac found himself, not exactly famous, but much talked about. One set abused, the other set praised, and the little book was sadly mauled among them, for it was too original to be ignored, and too robust to be killed by hard usage, so it came out of the fray none the worse but rather brighter, if anything, for the friction which proved the gold genuine.

This took time, however, and Rose could only sit at home reading all the notices she could get, as well as the literary gossip Phebe sent her, for Mac seldom wrote, and never a word about himself, so Phebe skillfully extracted from him in their occasional meetings all the personal news her feminine wit could collect and faithfully reported it.

It was a little singular that without a word of inquiry on either side, the letters of the girls were principally filled with tidings of their respective lovers. Phebe wrote about Mac; Rose answered with minute particulars about Archie; and both added hasty items concerning their own affairs, as if these were of little consequence.

Phebe got the most satisfaction out of the correspondence, for soon after the book appeared Rose began to want Mac home again and to be rather jealous of the new duties and delights that kept him. She was immensely proud of her poet, and had little jubilees over the beautiful fulfillment of her prophecies, for even Aunt Plenty owned now with contrition that “the boy was not a fool.” Every word of praise was read aloud on the housetops, so to speak, by happy Rose; every adverse criticism was hotly disputed; and the whole family was in a great state of pleasant excitement over this unexpectedly successful first flight of the Ugly Duckling, now generally considered by his relatives as the most promising young swan of the flock.

Aunt Jane was particularly funny in her new position of mother to a callow poet and conducted herself like a proud but bewildered hen when one of her brood takes to the water. She pored over the poems, trying to appreciate them but quite failing to do so, for life was all prose to her, and she vainly tried to discover where Mac got his talent from. It was pretty to see the new respect with which she treated his possessions now; the old books were dusted with a sort of reverence; scraps of paper were laid carefully by lest some immortal verse be lost; and a certain shabby velvet jacket fondly smoothed when no one was by to smile at the maternal pride with filled her heart and caused her once severe countenance to shine with unwonted benignity.

Uncle Mac talked about “my son” with ill-concealed satisfaction, and evidently began to feel as if his boy was going to confer distinction upon the whole race of Campbell, which had already possessed one poet. Steve exulted with irrepressible delight and went about quoting Songs and Sonnets till he bored his friends dreadfully by his fraternal raptures.

Archie took it more quietly, and even suggested that it was too soon to crow yet, for the dear old fellow’s first burst might be his last, since it was impossible to predict what he would do next. Having proved that he could write poetry, he might drop it for some new world to conquer, quoting his favorite Thoreau, who, having made a perfect pencil, gave up the business and took to writing books with the sort of indelible ink which grows clearer with time.

The aunts of course had their “views,” and enjoyed much prophetic gossip as they wagged their caps over many social cups of tea. The younger boys thought it “very jolly,” and hoped the Don would “go ahead and come to glory as soon as possible,” which was all that could by expected of “Young America,” with whom poetry is not usually a passion.

But Dr. Alec was a sight for “sair een,” so full of concentrated contentment was he. No one but Rose, perhaps, knew how proud and pleased the good man felt at this first small success of his godson, for he had always had high hopes of the boy, because in spite of his oddities he had such an upright nature, and promising little, did much, with the quiet persistence which foretells a manly character. All the romance of the doctor’s heart was stirred by this poetic bud of promise and the love that made it bloom so early, for Mac had confided his hopes to Uncle, finding great consolation and support in his sympathy and advice. Like a wise man, Dr. Alec left the young people to learn the great lesson in their own way, counseling Mac to work and Rose to wait till both were quite certain that their love was built on a surer foundation than admiration or youthful romance.

Meantime he went about with a well-worn little book in his pocket, humming bits from a new set of songs and repeating with great fervor certain sonnets which seemed to him quite equal, if not superior, to any that Shakespeare ever wrote. As Rose was doing the same thing, they often met for a private “read and warble,” as they called it, and while discussing the safe subject of Mac’s poetry, both arrived at a pretty clear idea of what Mac’s reward was to be when he came home.

He seemed in no hurry to do this, however, and continued to astonish his family by going into society and coming out brilliantly in that line. It takes very little to make a lion, as everyone knows who has seen what poor specimens are patted and petted every year, in spite of their bad manners, foolish vagaries, and very feeble roaring. Mac did not want to be lionized and took it rather scornfully, which only added to the charm that people suddenly discovered about the nineteenth cousin of Thomas Campbell, the poet. He desired to be distinguished in the best sense of the word, as well as to look so, and thought a little of the polish society gives would not be amiss, remembering Rose's efforts in that line. For her sake he came out of his shell and went about seeing and testing all sorts of people with those observing eyes of his, which saw so much in spite of their nearsightedness. What use he meant to make of these new experiences no one knew, for he wrote short letters and, when questioned, answered with imperturbable patience: "Wait till I get through; then I'll come home and talk about it."

So everyone waited for the poet, till something happened which produced a greater sensation in the family than if all the boys had simultaneously taken to rhyming.

Dr. Alec got very impatient and suddenly announced that he was going to L to see after those young people, for Phebe was rapidly singing herself into public favor with the sweet old ballads which she rendered so beautifully that hearers were touched as well as ears delighted, and her prospects brightened every month.

"Will you come with me, Rose, and surprise this ambitious pair who are getting famous so fast they'll forget their homekeeping friends if we don't remind them of us now and then?" he said when he proposed the trip one wild March morning.

"No, thank you, sir I'll stay with Aunty; that is all I'm fit for and I should only be in the way among those fine people," answered Rose, snipping away at the plants blooming in the study window.

There was a slight bitterness in her voice and a cloud on her face, which her uncle heard and saw at once, half guessed the meaning of, and could not rest till he had found out.

"Do you think Phebe and Mac would not care to see you?" he asked, putting down a letter in which Mac gave a glowing account of a concert at which Phebe surpassed herself.

"No, but they must be very busy," began Rose, wishing she had held her tongue.

"Then what is the matter?" persisted Dr. Alec.

Rose did not speak for a moment, and decapitated two fine geraniums with a reckless slash of her scissors, as if pent-up vexation of some kind must find a vent. It did in words also, for, as if quite against her will, she exclaimed impetuously: “The truth is, I’m jealous of them both!”

“Bless my soul! What now?” ejaculated the doctor in great surprise.

Rose put down her water pot and shears, came and stood before him with her hands nervously twisted together, and said, just as she used to do when she was a little girl confessing some misdeed: “Uncle, I must tell you, for I’ve been getting very envious, discontented, and bad lately. No, don’t be good to me yet, for you don’t know how little I deserve it. Scold me well, and make me see how wicked I am.”

“I will as soon as I know what I am to scold about. Unburden yourself, child, and let me see all your iniquity, for if you begin by being jealous of Mac and Phebe, I’m prepared for anything,” said Dr. Alec, leaning back as if nothing could surprise him now.

“But I am not jealous in that way, sir. I mean I want to be or do something splendid as well as they. I can’t write poetry or sing like a bird, but I should think I might have my share of glory in some way. I thought perhaps I could paint, and I’ve tried, but I can only copy I’ve no power to invent lovely things, and I’m so discouraged, for that is my one accomplishment. Do you think I have any gift that could be cultivated and do me credit like theirs?” she asked so wistfully that her uncle felt for a moment as if he never could forgive the fairies who endow babies in their cradles for being so niggardly to his girl. But one look into the sweet, open face before him reminded him that the good elves had been very generous and he answered cheerfully: “Yes, I do, for you have one of the best and noblest gifts a woman can possess. Music and poetry are fine things, and I don’t wonder you want them, or that you envy the pleasant fame they bring. I’ve felt just so, and been ready to ask why it didn’t please heaven to be more generous to some people, so you needn’t be ashamed to tell me all about it.”

“I know I ought to be contented, but I’m not. My life is very comfortable, but so quiet and uneventful, I get tired of it and want to launch out as the others have, and do something, or at least try. I’m glad you think it isn’t very bad of me, and I’d like to know what my gift is,” said Rose, looking less despondent already.

“The art of living for others so patiently and sweetly that we enjoy it as we do the sunshine, and are not half grateful enough for the great blessing.”

“It is very kind of you to say so, but I think I’d like a little fun and fame nevertheless.” And Rose did not look as thankful as she ought.

“Very natural, dear, but the fun and the fame do not last, while the memory of a real helper is kept green long after poetry is forgotten and music silent. Can’t you believe that, and be happy?”

“But I do so little, nobody sees or cares, and I don’t feel as if I was really of any use," sighed Rose, thinking of the long, dull winter, full of efforts that seemed fruitless.

"Sit here, and let us see if you really do very little and if no one cares." And, drawing her to his knee, Dr. Alec went on, telling off each item on one of the fingers of the soft hand he held.

"First, an infirm old aunt is kept very happy by the patient, cheerful care of this good-for-nothing niece. Secondly, a crotchety uncle, for whom she reads, runs, writes, and sews so willingly that he cannot get on without her. Thirdly, various relations who are helped in various ways. Fourthly, one dear friend never forgotten, and a certain cousin cheered by praise which is more to him than the loudest blast Fame could blow. Fifthly, several young girls find her an example of many good works and ways. Sixthly, a motherless baby is cared for as tenderly as if she were a little sister. Seventhly, half a dozen poor ladies made comfortable; and, lastly, some struggling boys and girls with artistic longings are put into a pleasant room furnished with casts, studies, easels, and all manner of helpful things, not to mention free lessons given by this same idle girl, who now sits upon my knee owning to herself that her gift is worth having after all."

"Indeed, I am! Uncle, I'd no idea I had done so many things to please you, or that anyone guessed how hard I try to fill my place usefully. I've learned to do without gratitude now I'll learn not to care for praise, but to be contented to do my best, and have only God know."

"He knows, and He rewards in His own good time. I think a quiet life like this often makes itself felt in better ways than one that the world sees and applauds, and some of the noblest are never known till they end, leaving a void in many hearts. Yours may be one of these if you choose to make it so, and no one will be prouder of this success than I, unless it be Mac."

The clouds were quite gone now, and Rose was looking straight into her uncle's face with a much happier expression when that last word made it color brightly and the eyes glance away for a second. Then they came back full of a tender sort of resolution as she said: "That will be the reward I work for," and rose, as if ready to be up and doing with renewed courage.

But her uncle held her long enough to ask quite soberly, though his eyes laughed: "Shall I tell him that?"

"No, sir, please don't! When he is tired of other people's praise, he will come home, and then I'll see what I can do for him," answered Rose, slipping away to her work with the shy, happy look that sometimes came to give to her face the charm it needed.

"He is such a thorough fellow, he never is in a hurry to go from one thing to another. An excellent habit, but a trifle trying to impatient people like me," said the doctor and, picking up Dulce, who sat upon the rug with her dolly, he composed his feelings by tossing her till she crowed with delight.

Rose heartily echoed that last remark, but said nothing aloud, only helped her uncle off with dutiful alacrity and, when he was gone, began to count the days till his return, wishing she had decided to go too.

He wrote often, giving excellent accounts of the "great creatures," as Steve called Phebe and Mac, and seemed to find so much to do in various ways that the second week of absence was nearly over before he set a day for his return, promising to astonish them with the account of his adventures.

Rose felt as if something splendid was going to happen and set her affairs in order so that the approaching crisis might find her fully prepared. She had "found out" now, was quite sure, and put away all doubts and fears to be ready to welcome home the cousin whom she was sure Uncle would bring as her reward. She was thinking of this one day as she got out her paper to write a long letter to poor Aunt Clara, who pined for news far away there in Calcutta.

Something in the task reminded her of that other lover whose wooing ended so tragically, and opening a little drawer of keepsakes, she took out the blue bracelet, feeling that she owed Charlie a tender thought in the midst of her new happiness, for of late she had forgotten him.

She had worn the trinket hidden under her black sleeve for a long time after his death, with the regretful constancy one sometimes shows in doing some little kindness all too late. But her arm had grown too round to hide the ornament, the forget-me-nots had fallen one by one, the clasp had broken, and that autumn she laid the bracelet away, acknowledging that she had outgrown the souvenir as well as the sentiment that gave it.

She looked at it in silence for a moment, then put it softly back and, shutting the drawer, took up the little gray book which was her pride, thinking as she contrasted the two men and their influence on her life the one sad and disturbing, the other sweet and inspiring "Charlie's was passion Mac's is love."

"Rose! Rose!" called a shrill voice, rudely breaking the pensive reverie, and with a start, she shut the desk, exclaiming as she ran to the door: "They have come! They have come!"

Chapter 21 HOW PHEBE EARNED HER WELCOME

Dr. Alec had not arrived, but bad tidings had, as Rose guessed the instant her eyes fell upon Aunt Plenty, hobbling downstairs with her cap awry, her face pale, and a letter flapping wildly in her hand as she cried distractedly: “Oh, my boy! My boy! Sick, and I not there to nurse him! Malignant fever, so far away. What can those children do? Why did I let Alec go?”

Rose got her into the parlor, and while the poor old lady lamented, she read the letter which Phebe had sent to her that she might “break the news carefully to Rose.”

DEAR MISS PLENTY, Please read this to yourself first, and tell my little mistress as you think best. The dear doctor is very ill, but I am with him, and shall not leave him day or night till he is safe. So trust me, and do not be anxious, for everything shall be done that care and skill and entire devotion can do. He would not let us tell you before, fearing you would try to come at the risk of your health. Indeed it would be useless, for only one nurse is needed, and I came first, so do not let Rose or anybody else rob me of my right to the danger and the duty. Mac has written to his father, for Dr. Alec is now too ill to know what we do, and we both felt that you ought to be told without further delay. He has a bad malignant fever, caught no one can tell how, unless among some poor emigrants whom he met wandering about quite forlorn in a strange city. He understood Portuguese and sent them to a proper place when they had told their story. But I fear he has suffered for his kindness, for this fever came on rapidly, and before he knew what it was I was there, and it was too late to send me away.

Now I can show you how grateful I am, and if need be give my life so gladly for this friend who has been a father to me. Tell Rose his last conscious word and thought were for her. “Don’t let her come; keep my darling safe.” Oh, do obey him! Stay safely at home and, God helping me, I’ll bring Uncle Alec back in time. Mac does all I will let him. We have the best physicians, and everything is going as well as can be hoped till the fever turns.

Dear Miss Plenty, pray for him and for me, that I may do this one happy thing for those who have done so much for Your ever dutiful and loving

PHEBE

As Rose looked up from the letter, half stunned by the sudden news and the great danger, she found that the old lady had already stopped useless bewailing and was praying heartily, like one who knew well where help was to be found. Rose went and knelt down at her knee, laying her face on the clasped hands in her lap, and for a few minutes neither wept nor spoke. Then a stifled sob broke from the girl, and Aunt Plenty gathered the young head in her arms, saying, with the slow tears of age trickling down her own withered cheeks: “Bear up, my lamb, bear up. The good Lord won’t take him from us I am sure and that brave child will be allowed to pay her debt to him. I feel she will.”

“But I want to help. I must go, Aunty, I must no matter what the danger is,” cried Rose, full of a tender jealousy of Phebe for being first to brave peril for the sake of him who had been a father to them both.

“You can’t go, dear, it’s no use now, and she is right to say, ‘Keep away.’ I know those fevers, and the ones who nurse often take it, and fare worse for the strain they’ve been through. Good girl to stand by so bravely, to be so sensible, and not let Mac go too near! She’s a grand nurse Alec couldn’t have a better, and she’ll never leave him till he’s safe,” said Miss Plenty excitedly.

“Ah, you begin to know her now, and value her as you ought. I think few would have done as she has, and if she does get ill and die, it will be our fault partly, because she’d go through fire and water to make us do her justice and receive her as we ought,” cried Rose, proud of an example which she longed to follow.

“If she brings my boy home, I’ll never say another word. She may marry every nephew I’ve got, if she likes, and I’ll give her my blessing,” exclaimed Aunt Plenty, feeling that no price would be too much to pay for such a deed.

Rose was going to clap her hands, but wrung them instead, remembering with a sudden pang that the battle was not over yet, and it was much too soon to award the honors.

Before she could speak Uncle Mac and Aunt Jane hurried in, for Mac’s letter had come with the other, and dismay fell upon the family at the thought of danger to the well-beloved Uncle Alec. His brother decided to go at once, and Aunt Jane insisted on accompanying him, though all agreed that nothing could be done but wait, and leave Phebe at her post as long as she held out, since it was too late to save her from danger now and Mac reported her quite equal to the task.

Great was the hurry and confusion till the relief party was off. Aunt Plenty was heartbroken that she could not go with them, but felt that she was too infirm to be useful and, like a sensible old soul, tried to content herself with preparing all sorts of comforts for the invalid. Rose was less patient, and at first had wild ideas of setting off alone and forcing her way to the spot where all her thoughts now centered. But before she could carry out any rash project, Aunt Myra’s palpitations set in so alarmingly that they did good service for once and kept Rose busy taking her last directions and trying to soothe her dying bed, for each attack was declared fatal till the patient demanded toast and tea, when hope was again allowable and the rally began.

The news flew fast, as such tidings always do, and Aunt Plenty was constantly employed in answering inquiries, for her knocker kept up a steady tattoo for several days. All sorts of people came: gentlefolk and paupers, children with anxious little faces, old people full of sympathy, pretty girls sobbing as they went away, and young men who relieved their feelings by swearing at all emigrants in general and Portuguese in particular. It was touching and comforting to see how many loved the good man who was known only by his benefactions and now lay suffering far away, quite unconscious how many unsuspected charities were brought to light by this grateful solicitude as hidden flowers spring up when warm rains fall.

If Rose had ever felt that the gift of living for others was a poor one, she saw now how beautiful and blessed it was how rich the returns, how wide the influence, how much more precious the tender tie which knit so many hearts together than any breath of fame or brilliant talent that dazzled but did not win and warm. In after years she found how true her uncle’s words had been and, listening to eulogies of great men, felt less moved and inspired by praises of their splendid gifts than by the sight of some good man’s patient labor for the poorest of his kind. Her heroes ceased to be the world’s favorites and became such as Garrison fighting for his chosen people; Howe restoring lost senses to the deaf, the dumb, and blind; Sumner unbribable, when other men were bought and sold and many a large-hearted woman working as quietly as Abby Gibbons, who for thirty years had made Christmas merry for two hundred little paupers in a city almshouse, besides saving Magdalens and teaching convicts.

The lesson came to Rose when she was ready for it, and showed her what a noble profession philanthropy is, made her glad of her choice, and helped fit her for a long life full of the loving labor and sweet satisfaction unostentatious charity brings to those who ask no reward and are content if “only God knows.”

Several anxious weeks went by with wearing fluctuations of hope and fear, for Life and Death fought over the prize each wanted, and more than once Death seemed to have won. But Phebe stood at her post, defying both danger and Death with the courage and devotion women often show. All her soul and strength were in her work, and when it seemed most hopeless, she cried out with the passionate energy which seems to send such appeals straight up to heaven: “Grant me this one boon, dear Lord, and I will never ask another for myself!”

Such prayers avail much, and such entire devotion often seems to work miracles when other aids are in vain. Phebe's cry was answered, her self-forgetful task accomplished, and her long vigil rewarded with a happy dawn. Dr. Alec always said that she kept him alive by the force of her will, and that, during the hours when he seemed to lie unconscious, he felt a strong, warm hand holding his, as if keeping him away from the swift current trying to sweep him away. The happiest hour of all her life was that in which he knew her, looked up with the shadow of a smile in his hollow eyes, and tried to say in his old cheery way: "Tell Rose I've turned the corner, thanks to you, my child."

She answered very quietly, smoothed the pillow, and saw him drop asleep again before she stole away into the other room, meaning to write the good news, but could only throw herself down and find relief for a full heart in the first tears she had shed for weeks. Mac found her there, and took such care of her that she was ready to go back to her place now indeed a post of honor while he ran off to send home a telegram which made many hearts sing for joy and caused Jamie, in his first burst of delight, to propose to ring all the city bells and order out the cannon: "Saved thanks to God and Phebe."

That was all, but everyone was satisfied, and everyone fell a-crying, as if hope needed much salty water to strengthen it. That was soon over, however, and then people went about smiling and saying to one another, with handshakes or embraces, "He is better no doubt of it now!" A general desire to rush away and assure themselves of the truth pervaded the family for some days, and nothing but awful threats from Mac, stern mandates from the doctor, and entreaties from Phebe not to undo her work kept Miss Plenty, Rose, and Aunt Jessie at home.

As the only way in which they could ease their minds and bear the delay, they set about spring cleaning with an energy which scared the spiders and drove charwomen distracted. If the old house had been infected with smallpox, it could not have been more vigorously scrubbed, aired, and refreshed. Early as it was, every carpet was routed up, curtains pulled down, cushions banged, and glory holes turned out till not a speck of dust, a last year's fly, or stray straw could be found. Then they all sat down and rested in such an immaculate mansion that one hardly dared to move for fear of destroying the shining order everywhere visible.

It was late in April before this was accomplished, and the necessary quarantine of the absentees well over. The first mild days seemed to come early, so that Dr. Alec might return with safety from the journey which had so nearly been his last. It was perfectly impossible to keep any member of the family away on that great occasion. They came from all quarters in spite of express directions to the contrary, for the invalid was still very feeble and no excitement must be allowed. As if the wind carried the glad news, Uncle Jem came into port the night before; Will and Geordie got a leave on their own responsibility; Steve would have defied the entire faculty, had it been necessary; and Uncle Mac and Archie said simultaneously, “Business be hanged today.”

Of course the aunts arrived in all their best, all cautioning everybody else to keep quiet and all gabbling excitedly at the least provocation. Jamie suffered the most during that day, so divided was he between the desire to behave well and the frantic impulse to shout at the top of his voice, turn somersaults, and race all over the house. Occasional bolts into the barn, where he let off steam by roaring and dancing jigs, to the great dismay of the fat old horses and two sedate cows, helped him to get through that trying period.

But the heart that was fullest beat and fluttered in Rose’s bosom as she went about putting spring flowers everywhere; very silent, but so radiant with happiness that the aunts watched her, saying softly to one another, “Could an angel look sweeter?”

If angels ever wore pale green gowns and snowdrops in their hair, had countenances full of serenest joy, and large eyes shining with an inward light that made them very lovely, then Rose did look like one. But she felt like a woman and well she might, for was not life very rich that day, when Uncle, friend, and lover were coming back to her together? Could she ask anything more, except the power to be to all of them the creature they believed her, and to return the love they gave her with one as faithful, pure, and deep? Among the portraits in the hall hung one of Dr. Alec, done soon after his return by Charlie in one of his brief fits of inspiration. Only a crayon, but wonderfully lifelike and carefully finished, as few of the others were. This had been handsomely framed and now held the place of honor, garlanded with green wreaths, while the great Indian jar below blazed with a pyramid of hothouse flowers sent by Kitty. Rose was giving these a last touch, with Dulce close by, cooing over a handful of sweet “daffydowndillies,” when the sound of wheels sent her flying to the door. She meant to have spoken the first welcome and had the first embrace, but when she saw the altered face in the carriage, the feeble figure being borne up the steps by all the boys, she stood motionless till Phebe caught her in her arms, whispering with a laugh and a cry struggling in her voice: “I did it for you, my darling, all for you!”

“Oh, Phebe, never say again you owe me anything! I never can repay you for this,” was all Rose had time to answer as they stood one instant cheek to cheek, heart to heart, both too full of happiness for many words.

Aunt Plenty had heard the wheels also and, as everybody rose en masse, had said as impressively as extreme agitation would allow, while she put her glasses on upside down and seized a lace tidy instead of her handkerchief: “Stop! All stay here, and let me receive Alec. Remember his weak state, and be calm, quite calm, as I am.’

“Yes, Aunt, certainly,” was the general murmur of assent, but it was as impossible to obey as it would have been to keep feathers still in a gale, and one irresistible impulse carried the whole roomful into the hall to behold Aunt Plenty beautifully illustrating her own theory of composure by waving the tidy wildly, rushing into Dr. Alec’s arms, and laughing and crying with a hysterical abandonment which even Aunt Myra could not have surpassed.

The tearful jubilee was soon over, however, and no one seemed the worse for it, for the instant his arms were at liberty, Dr. Alec forgot himself and began to make other people happy by saying seriously, though his thin face beamed paternally, as he drew Phebe forward: “Aunt Plenty, but for this good daughter I never should have come back to be so welcomed. Love her for my sake.”

Then the old lady came out splendidly and showed her mettle, for, turning to Phebe, she bowed her gray head as if saluting an equal and, offering her hand, answered with repentance, admiration, and tenderness trembling in her voice: “I’m proud to do it for her own sake. I ask pardon for my silly prejudices, and I’ll prove that I’m sincere by where’s that boy?”

There were six boys present, but the right one was in exactly the right place at the right moment, and, seizing Archie’s hand, Aunt Plenty put Phebe’s into it, trying to say something appropriately solemn, but could not, so hugged them both and sobbed out: “If I had a dozen nephews, I’d give them all to you, my dear, and dance at the wedding, though I had rheumatism in every limb.”

That was better than any oration, for it set them all to laughing, and Dr. Alec was floated to the sofa on a gentle wave of merriment. Once there, everyone but Rose and Aunt Plenty was ordered off by Mac, who was in command now and seemed to have sunk the poet in the physician.

“The house must be perfectly quiet, and he must go to sleep as soon as possible after the journey, so all say ‘good-bye’ now and call again tomorrow,” he said, watching his uncle anxiously as he leaned in the sofa corner, with four women taking off his wraps, three boys contending for his overshoes, two brothers shaking hands at short intervals, and Aunt Myra holding a bottle of strong salts under his devoted nose every time there was an opening anywhere.

With difficulty the house was partially cleared, and then, while Aunt Plenty mounted guard over her boy, Rose stole away to see if Mac had gone with the rest, for as yet they had hardly spoken in the joyful flurry, though eyes and hands had met.

Chapter 22 SHORT AND SWEET

In the hall she found Steve and Kitty, for he had hidden his little sweetheart behind the big couch, feeling that she had a right there, having supported his spirits during the late anxiety with great constancy and courage. They seemed so cozy, billing and cooing in the shadow of the gay vase, that Rose would have slipped silently away if they had not seen and called to her. “He’s not gone I guess you’ll find him in the parlor,” said Steve, divining with a lover’s instinct the meaning of the quick look she had cast at the hat rack as she shut the study door behind her.

“Mercy, no! Archie and Phebe are there, so he’d have the sense to pop into the sanctum and wait, unless you’d like me to go and bring him out?” added Kitty, smoothing Rose’s ruffled hair and settling the flowers on the bosom where Uncle Alec’s head had lain until he fell asleep.

“No, thank you, I’ll go to him when I’ve seen my Phebe. She won’t mind me,” answered Rose, moving on to the parlor.

“Look here,” called Steve, “do advise them to hurry up and all be married at once. We were just ready when Uncle fell ill, and now we cannot wait a day later than the first of May.”

“Rather short notice,” laughed Rose, looking back with the doorknob in her hand.

“We’ll give up all our splendor, and do it as simply as you like, if you will only come too. Think how lovely! Three weddings at once! Do fly round and settle things there’s a dear,” implored Kitty, whose imagination was fired with this romantic idea.

“How can I, when I have no bridegroom yet?” began Rose, with conscious color in her telltale face.

“Sly creature! You know you’ve only got to say a word and have a famous one. Una and her lion will be nothing to it,” cried Steve, bent on hastening his brother’s affair, which was much too dilatory and peculiar for his taste.

“He has been in no haste to come home, and I am in no haste to leave it. Don’t wait for me, ‘Mr. and Mrs. Harry Walmers, Jr.,’ I shall be a year at least making up my mind, so you may lead off as splendidly as you like and I’ll profit by your experience.” And Rose vanished into the parlor, leaving Steve to groan over the perversity of superior women and Kitty to comfort him by promising to marry him on May Day “all alone.”

A very different couple occupied the drawing room, but a happier one, for they had known the pain of separation and were now enjoying the bliss of a reunion which was to last unbroken for their lives. Phebe sat in an easy chair, resting from her labors, pale and thin and worn, but lovelier in Archie's eyes than ever before. It was very evident that he was adoring his divinity, for, after placing a footstool at her feet, he had forgotten to get up and knelt there with his elbow on the arm of her chair, looking like a thirsty man drinking long drafts of the purest water.

"Shall I disturb you if I pass through?" asked Rose, loath to spoil the pretty tableau.

"Not if you stop a minute on the way and congratulate me, Cousin, for she says 'yes' at last!" cried Archie, springing up to go and bring her to the arms Phebe opened as she appeared.

"I knew she would reward your patience and put away her pride when both had been duly tried," said Rose, laying the tired head on her bosom with such tender admiration in her eyes that Phebe had to shake some bright drops from her own before she could reply in a tone of grateful humility that showed how much her heart was touched: "How can I help it, when they are all so kind to me? Any pride would melt away under such praise and thanks and loving wishes as I've had today, for every member of the family has taken pains to welcome me, to express far too much gratitude, and to beg me to be one of you. I needed very little urging, but when Archie's father and mother came and called me 'daughter,' I would have promised anything to show my love for them."

"And him," added Rose, but Archie seemed quite satisfied and kissed the hand he held as if it had been that of a beloved princess while he said with all the pride Phebe seemed to have lost: "Think what she gives up for me fame and fortune and the admiration of many a better man. You don't know what a splendid prospect she has of becoming one of the sweet singers who are loved and honored everywhere, and all this she puts away for my sake, content to sing for me alone, with no reward but love."

"I am so glad to make a little sacrifice for a great happiness I never shall regret it or think my music lost if it makes home cheerful for my mate. Birds sing sweetest in their own nests, you know." And Phebe bent toward him with a look and gesture which plainly showed how willingly she offered up all ambitious hopes upon the altar of a woman's happy love.

Both seemed to forget that they were not alone, and in a moment they were, for a sudden impulse carried Rose to the door of her sanctum, as if the south wind which seemed to have set in was wafting this little ship also toward the Islands of the Blessed, where the others were safely anchored now.

The room was a blaze of sunshine and a bower of spring freshness and fragrance, for here Rose had let her fancy have free play, and each garland, fern, and flower had its meaning. Mac seemed to have been reading this sweet language of symbols, to have guessed why Charlie's little picture was framed in white roses, why pansies hung about his own, why Psyche was half hidden among feathery sprays of maidenhair, and a purple passion flower lay at Cupid's feet. The last fancy evidently pleased him, for he was smiling over it, and humming to himself as if to beguile his patient waiting, the burden of the air Rose had so often sung to him:

"Bonny lassie, will ye gang, will ye gang To the birks of Aberfeldie?"

"Yes, Mac, anywhere!"

He had not heard her enter, and wheeling around, looked at her with a radiant face as he said, drawing a long breath, "At last! You were so busy over the dear man, I got no word. But I can wait I'm used to it."

Rose stood quite still, surveying him with a new sort of reverence in her eyes, as she answered with a sweet solemnity that made him laugh and redden with the sensitive joy of one to whom praise from her lips was very precious: "You forget that you are not the Mac who went away. I should have run to meet my cousin, but I did not dare to be familiar with the poet whom all begin to honor."

"You like the mixture, then? You know I said I'd try to give you love and poetry together."

"Like it! I'm so glad, so proud, I haven't any words strong and beautiful enough to half express my wonder and my admiration. How could you do it, Mac?" And a whole face full of smiles broke loose as Rose clapped her hands, looking as if she could dance with sheer delight.

"It did itself, up there among the hills, and here with you, or out alone upon the sea. I could write a heavenly poem this very minute, and put you in as Spring you look like her in that green gown with snowdrops in your bonny hair. Rose, am I getting on a little? Does a hint of fame help me nearer to the prize I'm working for? Is your heart more willing to be won?"

He did not stir a step, but looked at her with such intense longing that his glance seemed to draw her nearer like an irresistible appeal, for she went and stood before him, holding out both hands, as if she offered all her little store, as she said with simplest sincerity: "It is not worth so much beautiful endeavor, but if you still want so poor a thing, it is yours."

He caught her hands in his and seemed about to take the rest of her, but hesitated for an instant, unable to believe that so much happiness was true.

"Are you sure, Rose very sure? Don't let a momentary admiration blind you I'm not a poet yet, and the best are but mortal men, you know."

“It is not admiration, Mac.”

“Nor gratitude for the small share I’ve taken in saving Uncle? I had my debt to pay, as well as Phebe, and was as glad to risk my life.”

“No it is not gratitude.”

“Nor pity for my patience? I’ve only done a little yet, and I am as far as ever from being like your hero. I can work and wait still longer if you are not sure, for I must have all or nothing.”

“Oh, Mac! Why will you be so doubtful? You said you’d make me love you, and you’ve done it. Will you believe me now?” And, with a sort of desperation, she threw herself into his arms, clinging there in eloquent silence while he held her close; feeling, with a thrill of tender triumph, that this was no longer little Rose, but a loving woman, ready to live and die for him.

“Now I’m satisfied!” he said presently, when she lifted up her face, full of maidenly shame at the sudden passion which had carried her out of herself for a moment. “No don’t slip away so soon. Let me keep you for one blessed minute and feel that I have really found my Psyche.”

“And I my Cupid,” answered Rose, laughing, in spite of her emotion, at the idea of Mac in that sentimental character.

He laughed, too, as only a happy lover could, then said, with sudden seriousness: “Sweet soul! Lift up your lamp and look well before it is too late, for I’m no god, only a very faulty man.”

“Dear love! I will. But I have no fear, except that you will fly too high for me to follow, because I have no wings.”

“You shall live the poetry, and I will write it, so my little gift will celebrate your greater one.”

“No you shall have all the fame, and I’ll be content to be known only as the poet’s wife.”

“And I’ll be proud to own that my best inspiration comes from the beneficent life of a sweet and noble woman.”

“Oh, Mac! We’ll work together and try to make the world better by the music and the love we leave behind us when we go.”

“Please God, we will!” he answered fervently and, looking at her as she stood there in the spring sunshine, glowing with the tender happiness, high hopes, and earnest purposes that make life beautiful and sacred, he felt that now the last leaf had folded back, the golden heart lay open to the light, and his Rose had bloomed.

A MODERN MEPHISTOPHELES

First published anonymously in 1877, this chilling tale of lust, deception and greed allowed Alcott to exercise “the lurid style” she believed was her “natural ambition”. A novel of psychological complexity that touches on the controversial subjects of sexuality and drug use, *A Modern Mephistopheles* is a penetrating and powerful study of evil and its terrible consequences.

Alcott, shortly before the time of publication

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A MODERN MEPHISTOPHELES.

“The Indescribable,
Here it is done :
The Woman-Soul leadeth us
Upward and on!”

Second Part of Faust.

I.

WITHOUT, a midwinter twilight, where wandering snowflakes eddied in the bitter wind between a leaden sky and frost-bound earth.

Within, a garret; gloomy, bare, and cold as the bleak night coming down.

A haggard youth knelt before a little furnace, kindling a fire, with an expression of quiet desperation on his face, which made the simple operation strange and solemn.

A pile of manuscript lay beside him, and in the hollow eyes that watched the white leaves burn was a tragic shadow, terrible to see, — for he was offering the first-born of heart and brain as sacrifice to a hard fate.

Slowly the charcoal caught and kindled, while a light smoke filled the room. Slowly the youth staggered up, and, gathering the torn sheets, thrust them into his bosom, muttering bitterly, “ Of all my hopes and dreams, my weary work and patient waiting, nothing is left but this. Poor little book, we’ll go together, and leave no trace behind.”

Throwing himself into a chair, he laid his head down upon the table, where no food had been for days, and, closing his eyes, waited in stern silence for death to come and take him.

Nothing broke the stillness but the soft crackle of the fire, which began to flicker with blue tongues of flame, and cast a lurid glow upon the motionless figure with its hidden face. Deeper grew the wintry gloom without, ruddier shone the fateful gleam within, and heavy breaths began to heave the breast so tired of life.

Suddenly a step sounded on the stair, a hand knocked at the door, and when no answer came, a voice cried, “ Open!” in a commanding tone, which won instant obedience, and dispelled the deathful trance fast benumbing every sense.

“The devil!” ejaculated the same imperious voice, as the door swung open, letting a cloud of noxious vapor rush out to greet the new-comer, — a man standing tall and dark against the outer gloom.

“Who is it? Oh! come in!” gasped the youth, falling back faint and dizzy, as the fresh air smote him in the face.

“I cannot, till you make it safe for me to enter. I beg pardon if I interrupt your suicide; I came to help you live, but if you prefer the other thing, say so, and I will take myself away again,” said the stranger, pausing on the threshold, as his quick eye took in the meaning of the scene before him.

“For God’s sake, stay!” and, rushing to the window, the youth broke it with a blow, caught up the furnace, and set it out upon the snowy roof, where it hissed and glowed like an evil thing, while he dragged forth his one chair, and waited, trembling, for his unknown guest to enter.

"For my own sake, rather: I want excitement; and this looks as if I might find it here," muttered the man with a short laugh, as he watched the boy, calmly curious, till a gust of fresh air swept through the room, making him shiver with its sharp breath.

"Jasper Helwyze, at your service," he added aloud, stepping in, and accepting courteously the only hospitality his poor young host could offer.

The dim light and shrouding cloak showed nothing but a pale, keen face, with dark penetrating eyes, and a thin hand, holding a paper on which the youth recognized the familiar words, " Felix Canaris."

"My name! You came to help me? What good angel sent you, sir?" he exclaimed, with a thrill of hope, — for in the voice, the eye, the hand that held the card with such tenacious touch, he saw and felt the influence of a stronger nature, and involuntarily believed in and clung to it.

"Your bad angel, you might say, since it was the man who damned your book and refused the aid you asked of him," returned the stranger, in a suave tone, which contrasted curiously with the vigor of his language. " A mere chance led me there to-day, and my eye fell upon a letter lying open before him. The peculiar hand attracted me, and Forsythe, being in the midst of your farewell denunciation, read it out, and told your story."

"And you were laughing at my misery while I was making ready to end it?" said the youth, with a scornful quiver of the sensitive lips that uttered the reproach.

"We all laugh at such passionate folly when we have outlived it. You will, a year hence; so bear no malice, but tell me briefly if you can forget poetry, and be content with prose tor 3

time. In plain words, can you work instead of dream?"

"I can."

"Good! then come to me for a month. I have been long from home, and my library is neglected; I have much for you to do, and believe you are the person I want, if Forsythe tells the truth. He says your father was a Greek, your mother English, both dead, and you an accomplished, ambitious young man who thinks himself a genius, and will not forgive the world for doubting what he has failed to prove. Am I right?"

"Quite right. Add also that I am friendless, penniless, and hopeless at nineteen."

A brief, pathetic story, more eloquently told by the starvation written on the pinched face, the squalor of the scanty garments, and the despair in the desperate eye, than by the words uttered with almost defiant bluntness.

The stranger read the little tragedy at a glance, and found the chief actor to his taste; for despite his hard case he possessed beauty, youth, and the high aspirations that die hard, — three gifts often peculiarly attractive to those who have lost them all.

“Wait a month, and you may find that you have earned friends, money, and the right to hope again. At nineteen, one should have courage to face the world, and master it.”

“Show me how, and I will have courage. A word of sympathy has already made it possible to live!” and, seizing the hand that offered help, Canaris kissed it with the impulsive grate and ardor of his father’s race.

“When can you come to me?” briefly demanded Helwyze, gathering his cloak about him as he rose, warned by the waning light.

“At once, to-night, if you will! I possess nothing in the world but the poor clothes that were to have been my shroud, and the relics of the book with which I kindled my last fire,” answered the youth, with eager eyes, and an involuntary shiver as the bitter wind blew in from the broken window.

“Come, then, else a mightier master than I may claim you before dawn, for it will be an awful night. Tut out your funeral pyre, Canaris, wrap jour shroud well about you, gather up your relics, and follow me. I can at least give you a warmer welcome than I have received,” added Helwyze, with that sardonic laugh of his, as he left the room.

Before he had groped his slow way down the long stairs the youth joined him, and side by side they went out into the night.

A month later the same pair sat together in a room that was a dream of luxury. A noble library, secluded, warm, and still; the reposeful atmosphere that students love pervaded it; rare books lined its lofty walls: poets and philosophers looked down upon their work with immortal satisfaction on their marble countenances; and the two living occupants well became their sumptuous surroundings.

Helwyze leaned in a great chair beside a table strewn with books which curiously betrayed the bent of a strong mind made morbid by physical suffering. Dora’s “ Dante “ spread its awful pages before him; the old Greek tragedies were scattered about and Goethe’s “ Faust” was in his hand. An unimpressive figure at first sight, this frail- looking man, whose age it would be hard to tell; for pain plays strange pranks, and sometimes preserves to manhood a youthful delicacy in return for the vigor it destroys. But at a second glance the eye was arrested and interest aroused, for an indefinable expression of power pervaded the whole face, beardless, thin-lipped, sharply cut, and colorless as ivory. A stray lock or two of dark hair streaked the high brow, and below shone the controlling feature of this singular countenance, a pair of eyes, intensely black, %and so large they seemed to burden the thin face. Violet shadows encircled them, telling of sleepless nights, days of languor, and long years of suffering, borne with stern patience. But in the eyes themselves all the vitality of the man’s indomitable spirit seemed concentrated, intense and brilliant as a flame, which nothing could quench. By turns melancholy, meditative, piercing, or contemptuous, they varied in expression with startling rapidity, unless mastered by an art stronger than nature; attracting or repelling with a magnetism few wills could resist.

Propping Ms great forehead on his hand, he read, motionless as a statue, till a restless movement made him glance up at his companion, and fall to studying him with a silent scrutiny which in another would have softened to admiration, for Canaris was scarcely less beautiful than the Narcissus in the niche behind him.

An utter contrast to his patron, for youth lent its vigor to the well-knit frame, every limb of which was so perfectly proportioned that strength and grace were most harmoniously blended. Health glowed in the rich colouring of the classically moulded face, and lurked in the luxuriant locks which clustered in glossy rings from the low brow to the white throat. Happiness shone in the large dreamy eyes and smiled on the voluptuous lips; while an indescribable expression of fire and force pervaded the whole, redeeming its beauty from effeminacy.

A gracious miracle had been wrought in that month, for the haggard youth was changed into a wonderfully attractive young man, whose natural ease and elegance fitted him to adorn that charming place, as well as to enjoy the luxury his pleasure-loving senses craved.

The pen had fallen from his hand, and lying back in his chair with eyes fixed on vacancy, he seemed dreaming dreams born of the unexpected prosperity which grew more precious with each hour of its possession.

“Youth surely is the beauty of the devil, and that boy might have come straight from the witches’ kitchen and the magic draught,” thought Helwyze, as he closed his book, adding to himself with a daring expression, “ Of all the visions haunting his ambitious brain not one is so wild and wayward as the fancy which haunts mine. Why not play fate, and finish what I have begun?”

A pause fell, more momentous than either dreamed; then it was abruptly broken.

“Felix, the time is up.”

“It is, sir. Am I to go or stay?” and Canaris rose, looking half-bewildered as his brilliant castles in the air dissolved like mist before a sudden gust.

“Stay, ii you will; but it is a quiet life tor such as you, and I am a dull companion. Could you bear it for a year? “

“For twenty! Sir, you have been most kind and generous, and this month has seemed like heaven, after the bitter want you took me from. Let me show gratitude by faithful service, if I can,” exclaimed the young man, coming to stand before his master, as he chose to call his benefactor, for favors were no burden yet.

“No thanks, I do it for my own pleasure. It is not every one who can have antique beauty in flesh and blood as well as marble; I have a fancy to keep m}r handsome secretary as the one ornament my library lacked before.”

Canaris reddened like a girl, and gave a disdainful shrug; but vanity was tickled, nevertheless, and he betrayed it by the sidelong glance he stole, towards the polished doors of glass reflecting his figure like a mirror.

“Nay, never frown and blush, man; ‘ beauty is its own excuse for being,’ and you may thank the gods for yours, since but for that I should send you away to fight your dragons single- handed,” said Helwyze, with a covert smile, adding, as he leaned forward to read the face which could wear no mask for him, “ Come, you shall give me a year of your liberty, and I will help you to prove Forsythe a liar.”

“You will bring out my book?” cried Canaris, clasping his hands as a flash of joy irradiated every lineament.

“Why not? and satisfy the hunger that torments you, though you try to hide it. I cannot promise success, but I can promise a fair trial; and if you stand the test, fame and fortune will come together. Love and happiness you can seek for at your own good pleasure.”

“You have divined my longing. I do hunger and thirst for fame; I dream of it by night, I sigh for it by day; every thought and aspiration centres in that desire; and if I did not still cling to that hope, even the perfect home you offer me would seem a prison. I must have it; the success men covet and admire, suffer and strive for, and die content if they win it only for a little time. Give me this and I am yours, body and soul; I have nothing else to offer.”

Canaris spoke with passionate energy, and flung out his hand as if he cast himself at the other’s feet, a thing of little worth compared to the tempting prize for which he lusted.

Helwyze took the hand in a light, cold clasp, that tightened slowly as he answered with the look of one before whose will all obstacles go down, —

“Done! Now show me the book, and let us see if we cannot win this time.”

II.

"NOTHING stirred about the vine-clad villa, except the curtains swaying in the balmy wind, that blew up from a garden where midsummer warmth brooded over drowsy flowers and whispering trees. The lake below gleamed like a mirror garlanded about with water-lilies, opening their white bosoms to the sun. The balcony above burned with deep-hearted roses pouring out their passionate perfume, as if in rivalry of the purple heliotrope, which overflowed great urns on either side of the stone steps.

Nothing broke the silence but the breezy rustle, the murmurous lapse of waters upon a quiet shore, and now and then the brief carol of a bird waking from its noontide sleep. A hammock swung at one end of the balcony, but it was empty; open doors showed the wide hall tenanted only by statues gleaming, cool and coy, in shadowy nooks; and the spirit of repose seemed to haunt the lovely spot.

For an hour the sweet spell lasted; then it was broken by the faint, far-off warble of a woman's Voice, which seemed to wake the sleeping palace into life; for, as if drawn by the music, a young man came through the garden, looking as Ferdinand might, when Ariel led him to Miranda.

Too beautiful for a man he was, and seemed to protest against it by a disdainful negligence of all the arts which could enhance the gracious gift. A picturesque carelessness marked his costume, the luxuriant curls that covered his head were in riotous confusion; and as he came into the light he stretched his limbs with the graceful abandon of a young wood-god rousing from his drowse in some green covert.

Swinging a knot of lilies in his hand, he sauntered up the long path, listening with a smile, for as the voice drew nearer he recognized both song and singer.

"Little Gladys must not see me, or she will end her music too soon," he whispered to himself; and, stepping behind the great vase, he peered between the plumy sprays to watch the coming of the voice that made his verses doubly melodious to their creator's ear.

Through the shadowy hall there came a slender creature in a quaint white gown, who looked as if she might have stopped down from the marble Hebe's pedestal; for there was something wonderfully virginal and fresh about the maidenly figure with its deep, soft eyes, pale hair, and features clearly cut as a fine cameo. Emerging from the gloom into a flood of sunshine, which touched her head with a glint of gold, and brought out in strong relief the crimson cover of the book, held half-closed against her breast, she came down the steps, still singing softly to herself.

A butterfly was sunning its changeful wings on the carved balustrade, and she paused to watch it, quite unconscious of the picture she made, or the hidden observer who enjoyed it with the delight of one whose senses were keenly alive to all that ministers to pleasure. A childish act enough, but it contrasted curiously with the words she sung, — fervid words, that seemed to drop lingeringly from her lips as if in a new language; lovely, yet half learned.

“Pretty thing! I wish I could sketch her as she stands, and use her as an illustration to that song. No nightingale ever had a sweeter voice for a love-lay than this charming girl,” thought the flattered listener, as, obeying a sudden impulse, he flung up the lilies, stepped out from his ambush, and half-said, half-sung, as he looked up with a glance of mirthful meaning, —

“Like a high-horn maider:
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour,
With music sweet as love which overflows her bower.”

The flowers dropped at her feet, and, leaning forward with the supple grace of girlhood, she looked down to meet the dangerous dark eyes, while her own seemed to wake and deepen with a sudden light as beautiful as the color which dawned in her innocent face. Not the guilt of shame, nor the glow of vanity, but a slow, soft flush like the shadow of a rosy cloud on snow. No otherwise disconcerted, she smiled back at him, and answered with unexpected aptness, in lines that were a truer compliment than his had been, —

“Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not.”

It was this charm of swift and subtle sympathy which made the girl seem sometimes like the embodied spirit of all that was most high and pure in his own wayward but aspiring nature. And this the spell that drew him to her now, glad to sun himself like the butterfly in the light of eyes so clear and candid, that he could read therein the emotions of a maiden heart just opening to its first, half-conscious love.

Springing up the steps, he said with the caressing air as native to him as his grace of manner. “ Sit here and weave a pretty garland for your hair, while I thank you for making my poor verses beautiful. Where did you find the air that fits those words so well?"

"It came itself; as the song did, I think," she answered simply, as she obeyed him, and began to braid the long brown stems, shaping a chaplet fit for Undine.

"Ah! you will never guess how that came!" he said, sitting at her feet to watch the small fingers at their pretty work. But though his eyes rested there, they grew absent; and he seemed to fall into a reverie not wholly pleasant, for he knit his brows as if the newly won laurel wreath sat uneasily upon a head which seemed made to wear it.

Gladys watched him in reverential silence till he became conscious of her presence again, and gave her leave to speak, with a smile which had in it something of the condescension of an idol towards its devoutest worshipper.

"Were you making poetry, then?" she asked, with the frank curiosity of a child.

"No, I was wondering where I should be now if I had never made any;" and he looked at the summer paradise around him with an involuntary shiver, as if a chill wind had blown upon him.

"Think rather what you will write next. It is so lovely I want more, although I do not understand all this," touching the book upon her knee with a regretful sigh.

"Neither do I; much of it is poor stuff, Gladys. Do not puzzle your sweet wits over it"

"That is because you are so modest. People say true genius is always humble."

"Then, I am not a true genius; for I am as proud as Lucifer."

"You may well be proud of such work as this;" and she carefully brushed a fallen petal from the silken cover.

"But I am not proud of that. At times I almost hate it!" exclaimed the capricious poet, impetuously, then checked himself, and added more composedly, " I mean to do so much better, that this first attempt shall be forgotten."

"I think you will never do better; for this came from your heart, without a thought of what the world would say. Hereafter all you write may be more perfect in form but less true In spirit, because you will have the fear of the-world, and loss of fame before your eyes."

"How can you know that? " he asked, wondering that this young girl, so lately met, should read him so well, and touch a secret doubt that kept him idle after the first essay, which had been a most flattering success.

"Nay, I do not know, I only feel as if it must be so. I always sing best when alone, and the thought of doing it for praise or money spoils the music to my ear.”

“I feel as if it would be possible to do any thing here, and forget that there is a world outside.”

“Then it is not dull to you? I am glad, for I thought it would be, because so many people want you, and you might choose many gayer places in which to spend your summer holiday.”

“I have no choice in this; yet I was willing enough to come. The first time is always pleasant, and I am tired of the gayer places,” he said, with a blast air that ill concealed how sweet the taste of praise had been to one who hungered for it.

“Yet it must seem very beautiful to be so sought, admired, and loved,” the girl said wistfully, for few of fortune’s favors had fallen into her lap as yet.

“It is, and I was intoxicated with the wine of success for a time. But after all, I find a bitter drop ‘n it, for there is always a higher step to take, a brighter prize to win, and one is never satisfied.” /

He paused an instant with the craving yet despondent look poets and painters wear as they labor for perfection in “ a divine despair;” then added, in a tone of kindly satisfaction which rung true on the sensitive ear that listened, —

“But all that nonsense pleases Helwyze, and he has so few delights, I would not rob him of one even so small as this, tor I owe every thing to him, you know.”

“I do not know. May I? “ “ You may; for I want you to like my friend, and now I think you only fear him.’’

“Mr. Canaris, I do not dislike your friend. He has been most kind to me, I am grieved if I seem ungrateful,” murmured Gladys, with a vague trouble in her artless face, for she had no power to explain the instinctive recoil which had unconsciously betrayed itself.

“Hear what he did for me, and then it may be easier to snow as well as to feel gratitude;

since but for him you would have had none of these foolish rhymes to sing.”

With a look askance, a quick gesture, and a curious laugh, Canaris tossed the book into the urn below, and the heliotrope gave a fragrant sigh as it closed above the treasure given to its keeping. Gladys uttered a little cry, but her companion took no heed, for clasping his hands about his knee he looked off into the bloomy wilderness below as if he saw a younger self there, and spoke of him with a pitiful sort of interest.

“Three years ago an ambitious boy came to seek his fortune in the great city yonder. He possessed nothing but sundry accomplishments, and a handful of verses which he tried to sell. Failing in this hope after various trials, he grew desperate, and thought to end his life like poor Chatterton. No, not like

Chatterton, — for this boy was not an impostor."

"Had he no friend anywhere?" asked Gladys, — her work neglected while she listened with intensest interest to the tale so tragically begun.

"He thought not, but chance sent him one at the last hour, and when he called on death, Helwyze came. It always seemed to me as if, unwittingly, I conjured from the fire kindled to destroy myself a genie who had power to change me from the miserable wretch I was, into the happy man I am. For more than a year I have been with him, — first as secretary, then protégé, now friend, almost son; for he asks nothing of me except such services as I love to render, and gives me every aid towards winning my way. Is not that magnificent generosity? Can I help regarding him with superstitious gratitude? Am I not rightly named Felix?"

"Yes, oh yes! Tell me more, please. I have led such a lonely life, that human beings are like wonder-books to me, and I am never tired of reading them." Gladys looked with a rapt expression into the face upturned to hers, little dreaming how dangerous such lore might be to her.

"Then you should read Helwyze; he is a romance that will both charm and make your heart ache, if you dare to try him."

"I dare, if I may, because I would so gladly lose my fear of him in the gentler feeling that grows in me as I listen."

Canaris was irresistibly led on to confidences he had no right to make, it was so pleasant to feel that he had the power to move the girl by his words, as the wind sways a leaf upon its delicate stem. A half-fledged purpose lurked in a dark corner of his mind, and even while denying its existence to himself, he yielded to its influence, careless of consequences.

"Then I will go on and let compassion finish what I have begun. Till thirty, Helwyze led a wonderfully free, rich life, I infer from hints dropped in unguarded moments, — for confidential moods are rare. Every good gift was his, and nothing to alloy his happiness, unless it was the restless nature which kept him wandering like an Arab long after most men have found some ambition to absorb, or some tie to restrain, them. From what I have gathered, I know that a great passion was beginning to tame his unquiet spirit, when a great misfortune came to afflict it, and in an hour changed a life of entire freedom to one of the bitterest bondage such a man can know."

"Oh, what?" cried Gladys, as he artfully paused just there to see her bend nearer, and her lips part with the tremor of suspense.

"A terrible fall; and for ten years he has never known a day's rest from pain of some sort, and never will, till death releases him ten years hence, perhaps, if his indomitable will keeps him alive so long."

"Alas, alas! is there no cure?" sighed Gladys, as the violet eyes grew dim for very pity of so hard a fate.

"None."

A brief silence followed while the shadow of a great white cloud drifted across the sky, blot- ling out the sunshine for a moment.

All the flowers strayed down upon the steps and lay there forgotten, as the hands that held them were clasped together on the girl's breast, as if the mere knowledge of a lot like this lay heavy at her heart.

Satisfied with his effect, the story-teller was tempted to add another stroke, and went on with the fluency of one who saw all things dramatically, and could not help coloring them in his own vivid fancy.

"That seems very terrible to you, but in truth the physical affliction was not so great as the loss that tried his soul; for he loved ardently, and had just won his suit, when the misfortune came which tied him to a bed of torment for some years. A fall from heaven to hell could hardly have seemed worse than to be precipitated from the heights of such a happiness to the depths of such a double woe; for she, the beautiful, beloved woman proved disloyal, and left him lying there, like Prometheus, with the vulture of remembered bliss to rend his heart."

"Could he not forget her?" and Gladys trembled with indignation at the perfidy which seemed impossible to a nature born for self-sacrifice.

"He never will forget or forgive, although the man she married well avenged him while he lived, and bequeathed her a memory which all his gold could not gild. Her fate is the harder now; for the old love has revived, and Helwyze is dearer than in his days of unmarred strength. He knows it, but will not accept the tardy atonement; for contempt has killed his love, and with him there is no resurrection of the dead. A very patient and remorseful love is hers : for she has been humiliated in spirit, as he can never be, by the bodily ills above which he has risen so heroically that his courage has subdued the haughtiest woman I ever met."

"You know her, then?" and Gladys bent to look into his face, with her own shadowed by an intuition of the truth.

"Yes."

"I am afraid to listen any more. It is terrible to know that such bitterness and grief lie hidden in the hearts about me. Why did you tell me this?" she demanded, shrinking from fair, as if some prophetic fear had stepped between them.

"Why did I? Because I wished to make you pity my friend, and help me put a little brightness into his hard life. You can do it if you will, for you soothe and please him, and few possess the power to give him any comfort. He makes no complaint, asks no pity, and insists on ignoring the pain which preys upon him, till it grows too great to be concealed; then shuts himself up alone, to endure it like a Spartan. Forgive me if in my eagerness I have said too much, and forget whatever troubled you.”

Canaris spoke with genuine regret, and hoped to banish the cloud from a face which had been as placid as the lake below, till he disturbed it by reflections that affrighted her.

“It is easy to forgive, but not to forget, words which cannot be unsaid. I was so happy here; and now it is all spoilt. She was a new made friend, and very kind to me when I was desolate. I shall seem a thankless beggar if I go away before I have paid my debt as best I can. How shall I tell her that I must? “

“Of whom do you speak? I gave no name. I thought you would not guess. Why must you go, Gladys?” asked the young man, surprised to see how quickly she felt the chill of doubt, and tried to escape obligation, when neither love nor respect brightened it.

“I need give no name, because you know. It is as well, perhaps, that I have guessed it. I ought not to have been so content, since I am here through charity. I must take up my life and try to shape it for myself; but the world seems very large now I am all alone.”

She spoke half to herself, and looked beyond the safe, secluded garden, to the gray mountains whose rough paths her feet had trod before they were led here to rest.

Quick to be swayed by the varying impulses which ruled him with capricious force, Canaris was now full of pity for the trouble he had wrought, and when she rose, like a bird startled from its nest, he rose also, and, taking the hand put out as if involuntarily asking help, he said with regretful gentleness, —

“Do not be afraid, we will befriend you. Helwyze shall counsel and I will comfort, if we can. I should not have told that dismal story; I will atone for it by a new song, and you shall grow happy in singing it.”

She hesitated, withdrew her hand, and looked askance at him, as if one doubt bred others.

An approaching footstep made her start, and stand a moment with head erect, eye fixed, and ear intent, like a listening deer, then whispering, “ It is she; hide me till I learn to look as if I did not know! “ — Gladys sprung down the steps, and vanished like a wraith, leaving no token of her presence but the lilies in the dust, for the young man followed fleetly.

III.

A WOMAN came into the balcony with a swift step, and paused there, as if disappointed to find it deserted. A woman in the midsummer of her life, brilliant, strong, and stately; clad in something dusky and diaphanous, unrelieved by any color, except the pale gold of the laburnum clusters, that drooped from deep bosom and darkest hair. Pride sat on the forehead, with its straight black brows, passion slept in the Southern eyes, lustrous or languid by turns, and will curved the closely folded lips of vivid red.

But over all this beauty, energy, and grace an indescribable blight seemed to have fallen, deeper than the loss of youth's first freshness, darker than the trace of any common sorrow. Something felt, rather than seen, which gave her the air of a dethroned queen; conquered, but protesting fiercely, even while forced to submit to some inexorable decree, whose bitterest pang was the knowledge that the wrong was self- inflicted.

As she stood there, looking down the green vista, two figures crossed it. A smile curved the sad mouth, and she said aloud, “ Faust and Margaret, playing the old, old game.”

“And Mephistopheles and Martha looking on,” added a melodious voice, behind her, as Helwyze swept back the half-transparent curtain from the long window where he sat.

“The part you give ne is not a flattering one,” she answered, veiling mingled pique and pleasure with well-feigned indifference.

“Nor mine; yet I think they suit us both, in a measure. Do you know, Olivia, that the accidental reading of my favorite tragedy, at a certain moment, gave me a hint which has afforded amusement for a year.”

“You mean your fancy for playing Mentor to that boy. A dangerous task for you, Jasper.”

“The danger is the charm. I crave excitement, occupation; and what but something of this sort is left me? Much saving grace in charity, we are told; and who needs it more than I? Surely I have been kinder to Felix than the Providence which left him to die of destitution and despair?”

“Perhaps not. The love of power is strong in men like you, and grows by what it feeds on.

If I am not mistaken, this whim of a moment has already hardened into a purpose which will mould his life in spite of him. It is an occupation that suits your taste, for you enjoy his beauty and his promise; you like to praise and pamper him till vanity and love of pleasure wax strong, then you check him with an equal satisfaction, and find excitement in curbing his high spirit, his wayward will. By what tie you hold him I cannot tell; but I know it must be something stronger than gratitude, for, though he chafes against the bond, he dares not break it."

"Ah, that is my secret! What would you not give if I would teach you the art of taming men as I once taught you to train a restive horse?" — and Helwyze looked out at her with eyes full of malicious merriment.

"You have taught me the art of taming a woman; is not that enough?" murmured Olivia, in a tone that would have touched any man's heart with pity, if with no tenderer emotion.

But Helwyze seemed not to hear the reproach, and went on, as if the other topic suited his mood best.

"I call Canaris my Greek slave, sometimes, %and he never knows whether to feel flattered or insulted. His father was a Greek adventurer, you know (ended tragically, I suspect), and but for the English mother's legacy of a trifle of moral sense, Felix would be as satisfactory a young heathen as if brought straight from ancient Athens. It was this peculiar mixture of unscrupulous daring and fitful virtue which attracted me, as much as his unusual beauty and undoubted talent. Money can buy almost any thing, you know; so I bought my handsome Alcibiades, and an excellent bargain I find him."

"But when you tire of him, what then? You cannot sell him again, nor throw him away, like a book you weary of. Neither can you leave him neglected in the lumber-room, with distasteful statues or bad pictures. Affection, if you have it, will not outlast your admiration, and I have much curiosity to know what will become of your 'handsome Alcibiades' then."

"Then, my cousin, I will give him to you, for I have fancied of late that you rather coveted him. You could net manage him now, — the savage in him is not quite civilized yet, — but wait a little, and I will make a charming plaything for you. I know you will treat him kindly, %since it is truly said, Those who have served, best know how to rule."

The sneer stung her deeply, for there was no humiliation this proud woman had not suffered at the hands of a brutal and unfaithful husband. Pity was as bitter a draught to her as to the man who thus cruelly reminded her of the long bondage which had left an ineffaceable blight upon her life. The wound bled inwardly, but she retaliated, as only such a woman could.

"Love is the one master who can rule and bind without danger or disgrace. I shall remember that, and when you give me Felix he will find me a gentler mistress than I was ten years ago — to you."

The last words dropped from her lips as softly as if full of tender reminiscence, but they pricked pride, since they could not touch a relentless heart. Helwyze betrayed it by the sombre fire of his eye, the tone in which he answered.

“And I will ask of you the only gift I care to accept, — your new protégée, Gladys. Tell me where you found her; the child interests me much.”

“I know it;” and, stifling a pang of jealous pain, Olivia obeyed with the docility of one in whom will was conquered by a stronger power.

“A freak took me to the hills in March. My winter had been a vain chase after happiness, and I wanted solitude. I found it where chance led me, — in this girl’s home. A poor, bleak place enough; but it suited me, for there were only the father and daughter, and they left me to myself. The man died suddenly, and no one mourned, for lie was a selfish tyrant. The gilt was left quite alone, and nearly penniless, but so happy in her freedom that she had no fears. I liked the courage of the creature, I knew how she felt; I saw great capacity for something fine in her. I said, ‘ Come with me for a little, and time will show you the next step.’ She came; time has shown her, and the next step will take her from my house to yours, unless I much mistake your purpose.”

Leaning in the low, lounging chair, Helwyze had listened motionless, except that the fingers of one thin hand moved fitfully, as if he played upon some instrument inaudible to all ears but his own. A frequent gesture of his, and most significant, to any one who knew that his favorite past time was touching human heartstrings with marvellous success in producing discords by his uncanny skill.

As Olivia paused, he asked in a voice as suave as cold, —

“My purpose? Have I any?”

“You say she interests you, and you watch her in a way that proves it. Have you not already resolved to win her for your amusement, by some bribe as cunning as that you gave Canaris for his liberty?”

“I have. You are a shrewd woman, Olivia.”

“Yet she is not beautiful;” and her eye vainly searched the inscrutable countenance, that showed so passionless and pale against the purple cushion where it leaned.

“Pardon me, the loveliest woman I have seen for years. A beautiful, fresh soul is most attractive when one is weary of more material charms. This girl seems made of spirit, fire, and dew; a mixture rare as it is exquisite, and the spell is all the greater because of its fine and elusive quality. I promise myself much satisfaction in observing how this young creature meets the trials and temptations life and love will bring her; and to do this she must be near at hand.”

“Happy Gladys!”

Olivia smiled a scornful smile, but folded her arms to curb the rebellious swelling of her heart at the thought of another woman nearer than herself. She turned away as she spoke; but Helwyze saw the quiver of her lips, and read the meaning of the piercing glance she shot into the garden, as if to find and annihilate that unconscious rival.

Content for the moment with the touch of daily torture which was the atonement exacted for past disloyalty, he lifted the poor soul from despair to delight by the utterance of three words, accompanied by a laugh as mirthless as musical, —

“Happy Felix, rather.”

“Is he to marry her?” and Olivia fronted him, glowing with a sudden joy which made her lovely as well as brilliant.

“Who else? “

“Yourself.”

“I!” and the word was full of a bitterness which thrilled every nerve the woman had. for an irrepressible regret wrung it from lips sternly shut on all complaint, except to her.

“Why not?” she cried, daring to answer with impetuous warmth and candor. “ What woman would not be glad to serve you for the sake of the luxury with which you would surround her, if not for the love you might win and give, .f you chose?”

“Bah! what have I to do with love? Think Heaven my passions are all dead, else life would be a hell, not the purgatory it is,” he said, glancing at his wasted limbs, with an expression which would have been pathetic, had it not been defiant; for that long discipline of pain had failed to conquer the spirit of the man, and it seemed to sit aloof, viewing with a curious mixture of compassion and contempt the slow ruin of the body which imprisoned it.

With an impulse womanly as winning, Olivia plucked a wine-dark rose from the trellis nearest her, and, bending towards him, laid it in his hand, with a look and gesture of one glad to give all she possessed, if that were possible.

“Your love of beauty still survives, and is a solace to you. Let me minister to it when I can; and be assured I offer my little friend as freely as I do my choicest rose.”

“Thanks; the flower for me, the friend for Felix. Young as he is, he knows how to woo, and she will listen to his love-tale as willingly as she did to the highly colored romance he was telling her just now. You would soon find her a burden, Olivia, and so should I, unless she came in this way. We need do nothing but leave the young pair to summer and seclusion; they will make the match better and more quickly than we could. Then a month for the honeymoon business, and all can be comfortably settled before October frosts set in.”

“You often say, where women are is discord; yet you are planning to bring one into your house in the most dangerous way. Have you no fears, Jasper?”

“Not of Gladys; she is so young, I can mould her as I please, and that suits me. She will become my house well, this tender, transparent little creature, with her tranquil eyes, and the sincere voice which makes truth sweeter than falsehood. You must come and sec her there; but never try to alter her, or the charm will be destroyed.”

“You may be satisfied: but how will t be with Felix? Hitherto your sway has been undivided, now you must share it; for with all her gentleness she is strong, and will rule him “

“And I, Gladys. Felix suits me excellently, and it will only add another charm to the relation if I control him through the medium of another. My young lion is discovering his power rapidly, and I must give him a Una before he breaks loose and chooses for himself. If matters must be complicated, I choose to do it, and it will occupy my winter pleasantly to watch the success of this new combination.”

While he talked, Helwyze had been absently stripping leaf after leaf from the great rose, till nothing but the golden heart remained trembling on the thorny stem.

Olivia had watched the velvet petals fall one by one, feeling a sad sympathy with the ill-used gift; yet, as the last leaf fluttered to the ground, she involuntarily lifted up her hand to break another, glad if even in the destruction of so frail a thing he could find a moment’s pleasure.

“No, let them hang; their rich color pleases best among the green; their cloying perfume is too heavy for the house. A snowdrop, leaning from its dainty sheath undaunted by March winds, is more to my taste now,” he said, dropping the relics of the rose, with the slow smile which often lent such significance to a careless word.

“I cannot give you that: spring flowers are all gone long ago,” began Olivia, regretfully.

“Nay, you give me one in Gladys; no spring flower could be more delicate than she, gathered by your own hand from the bleak nook where you found her. It is the faint, vernal fragrance of natures, coyly hidden from common eye and touch, which satisfies and soothes senses refined by suffering.”

“Yet you will destroy it, like the rose, in finding out the secret of its life. I wondered why this pale, cold nnocence was so attractive to a man like you. There was a time when you would have laughed at such a fancy, and craved sometning with more warmth and brilliancy.”

“I am wiser now, and live here, not here,” he answered, touching first his forehead then his breast, with melancholy meaning. “ While my brain is spared me I can survive the ossification of all the heart I ever had, since, at best, it is an unruly member. Almost as inconvenient as a conscience; that, thank fortune, I never had. Yes; to study the mysterious mechanism of human nature is a most absorbing pastime, when books weary, and other sources of enjoyment are forbidden. Try it, and see what an exciting game it becomes, when men and women are the pawns you learn to move at will. Goethe’s boyish puppet-show was but a symbol of the skill and power which made the man the magician he became.”

“An impious pastime, a dearly purchased fame, built on the broken hearts of women!” exclaimed Olivia, walking to and fro with the noiseless step and restless grace of a leopardess pacing its cage.

Helwyze neither seemed to see nor hear her, for his gloomy eyes stared at a little bird tilting on a spray that swung in the freshening wind, and his thoughts followed their own path.

“‘ Pale, cold innocence.’ It is curious that it should charm me. A good sign, perhaps; for poets tell us that fallen angels sigh for the heaven they have lost, and try to rise again on the wings of spirits stronger and purer than themselves. Would they not find virtue insipid after a fiery draught of sin? Did not Paradise seem a little dull to Dante, in spite of Beatrice? I wish I knew.”

“Is it for this that you want the girl’s help?” asked Olivia, pausing in her march to look at him. “ I shall wait with interest to see if she lifts you up to sainthood, or you drag her down to your level, where intellect is God, conscience ignored, and love despised. Unhappy Gladys! I should have said, because I cannot keep her from you, if I would; and in your hands she will be as helpless as the dumb creatures surgeons torture, that they may watch a living nerve, count the throbbing of an artery, or see how long the poor things will live bereft of some vital part. Let the child alone, Jasper, or you will repent of it.”

“Upon my word, Olivia, you are in an ominously prophetic mood. I hear a carriage; and, as I am invisible to all eyes but your gifted ones, pardon me if I unceremoniously leave the priestess on her tripod.”

And the curtain dropped between them as suddenly as it had been lifted, depriving the woman of the one troubled joy of her life, — companionship with him.

IV.

"FELIX, are you asleep?"

"No, sir, only resting."

"Have you been at work?"

"Decidedly; I rowed across the lake and back."

"Alone?"

"Gladys went with me, singing like a mermaid all the way."

"Ah!"

Both men were lounging in the twilight; but there was a striking difference in their way of doing it. Canaris lay motionless on a couch, his head pillowed on his arms, enjoying the luxury of repose, with the dolce far niente only possible to those in whose veins runs Southern blood. Helwyze leaned in a great chair, which looked a miracle of comfort; but its occupant stirred restlessly, as if he found no ease among its swelling cushions; and there was an alert expression in his face, betraying that the brain was at work on some thought or purpose which both absorbed and excited.

A pause followed the brief dialogue, during which Canaris seemed to relapse into his delicious drowse, while Helwyze sat looking at him with the critical regard one bestows en a fine work of art Yet something in the spectacle of rest he could not share seemed to annoy him; for, suddenly turning up the shaded lamp upon his table, he dispelled the soft gloom, and broke the silence.

"I have a request to make. May I trouble you to listen?"

There was a tone of command in the courteously worded speech, wnich made Canard sit erect, with a respectful —

"At your service, sir."

"I wish you to marry,'' continued Helwyze, with such startling abruptness that the young man gazed at him in mute amazement for a moment. Then, veiling his surprise by a laugh, he asked lightly, —

"Isn't it rather soon for that, sir? I am hardly of age."

"Geniuses are privileged; and I'm not aware of any obstacle, if I am satisfied," answered Helwyze, with an imperious gesture, which seemed to put aside all objections.

"Do you seriousl) mean it, sir?"

"I do."

"But why such haste?"

"Because it is my pleasure."

“I will not give up my liberty so soon,” cried the young man, with a mutinous flash of the eye.

“I thought you had already given it up. If you choose to annul the agreement, do it, and go. You know the forfeit.”

“I forgot this possibility. Did I agree to obey in all things? “

“It was so set down in the bond. Entire obedience in return for the success you coveted. Have I failed in my part of the bargain?”

“No, sir; no.”

“Then do yours, or let us cancel the bond, and part.”

“How can we? What can I do without you? Is there no way but this?”

“None.”

Canaris looked dismayed, — and well he might, for it seemed impossible to put away the cup he had thirsted for, when its first intoxicating draught was at his lips.

Helwyze had spoken with peculiar emphasis, and his words were full of ominous suggestion to the listener’s ear; for he alone knew how much rebellion would cost him, since luxury and fame were still dearer than liberty or honor. I Ie sprung up. and paced the room, feeling like some wild feature caught in a snare.

Helwyze, regardless of his chafing, went on calmly, as if to a willing hearer, eying him vigilantly the while, though now his own manner was as persuasive as it had been imperative before.

“I ask no more than many parents do, and will give you my reasons for the demand, though that was not among the stipulations.”

“A staning man does not stop to weigh words, or haggle about promises. I was desperate, and you offered me salvation; can you wonder that I clutched the only hand held out to me?” demanded Canaris, with a world of conflict:” ig emotions in his expressive face, as he paused before his master.

“I am not speaking of the first agreement, that was brief as simple. The second bargam was a more complicated matter. You were not desperate then; you freely entered into it, reaped the benefits of it, and now wish to escape the consequences of your own act. Is that fair?”

“How could I dream that you would exact such obedience as this? I am too young; it is a step that may change my whole life; I must have time,” murmured Canaris, while a sudden change passed over his whole face, his eye fell before the glance bent on him, as the other spoke.

“It need not change your life, except to make it freer, perhaps happier. Hitherto you have had all the pleasure, now I desire my share. You often speak of gratitude; prove it by granting my request, and, in adding a new solace to my existence, you will find you have likewise added a new charm to your own.”

“It is so sudden, — I do desire to show my gratitude, — I have tried to do my part faithfully so far,” began Canaris, as if a look, a word, had tamed his high spirit, and enforced docility sorely against his will.

“So far, I grant that, and I thank you for the service which I desire to lessen by the step you decline to take. I have spoilt you for use, but not for ornament. I still like to see you flourish; I enjoy your success; I cannot free you; but I can give you a mate, who will take your place and amuse me at home, while you sing and soar abroad. Is that sufficiently poetical for a poet’s comprehension? “ and Helwyze smiled, that satiric smile of his, still watching the young man’s agitated countenance.

“But why need I marry? Why cannot” — there Canaris hesitated, for he lacked the courage to make the very natural suggestion Olivia had done.

Helwyze divined the question on his lips, and answered it with stern brevity.

“That is impossible;” then added, with the sudden softening of tone which made his voice irresistibly seductive, “ I have given one reason for my whim: there are others, which affect you more nearly and pleasantly, pet haps. Little more than a year ago, your first book came out, making you famous for a time. You have enjoyed your laurels for a twelvemonth, and begin to sigh for more. The world has petted you, as it docs any novelty, and expects to be paid for its petting, else it will soon forget you.’

“No fear of that!” exclaimed the other, with the artless arrogance of youth, %”If I thought you would survive the experiment, I would leave you to discover what a fickle mistress you serve. But frost would soon blight your budding talent, so we will keep on the world’s sunny side, and tempt the Muse, not terrify her.”

Nothing could be smoother than the voice in which these words were said; but a keen ear would have detected an accent of delicate irony in it, and a quick eye have seen that Canaris winced, as if a sore spot had been touched.

“I should think marriage would do that last, most effectually,” he answered, with a scornful shrug, and an air of great distaste.

“Not always: some geniuses are the better for such bondage. I fancy you are one of them, and wish to try the experiment. If it fails, you can play Byron, to your heart’s content.”

“A costly experiment for some one.” Canaris paused in his impatient march, to look down with a glance of pity at the dead lily still knotted in his button-hole.

Helwyze laughed at the touch of sentiment, — a low, quiet laugh; but it made the young man flush, and hastily fling away the faded flower, whose pure loveliness had been a joy to him an hour ago. With a half docile, half defiant look, he asked coldly, —

“What next, sir.”

“Only this : you have done well. Now, you must do better, and let the second book be free from the chief fault which critics found, — that, though the poet wrote of love, it was evident he had never felt it.”

“Who shall say that?” with sudden warmth.

“I, for one. You know nothing of love, though you may flatter yourself you do. So far, it has been pretty play enough, but I will not have you waste yourself, or your time. You need inspiration, this will give it you. At your age, it is easy to love the first sweet woman brought near you, and almost impossible for any such to resist your wTooirg. An early marriage will not only give heart and brain a fillip, but add the new touch of romance needed to keep up the world’s interest in the vising star, whose mysterious advent piques curiosity as strongly as his work excites wonder and delight.”

Composure and content had been gradually creeping back into the listener’s mien, as a skilful hand touched the various chords that vibrated most tunefully in a young, maginative, ardent nature. Vivid fancy painted the “ sweet woman “ in a breath, quick w it saw at once the worldly wisdom of the advice, and ambition found no obstacle impassable.

“You are right, sir, I submit; but I claim the privilege of choosing my inspirer,” he said, warily.

“You have already chosen, if I am not much mistaken. A short wooing, but a sure one; for little Gladys has no coquetry, and will not keep you waiting for her answer.”

“Gladys is a child,” began Canaris, still hesitating to avow the truth.

“The fitter mate for you.”

“But, sir, you are mistaken: I do not love her.”

“Then, why teach her to love you?”

“I have not: I was only kind. Surely I cannot be expected to marry every young girl who blushes when I look at her,” he said, with sullen petulance, for women had spoilt the handsome youth, and he was as ungrateful as such idols usually are.

“Then, who? — ah! I perceive I had forgotten that a boy’s first tendresse is too often for a woman twice* his age. May I trouble you?” and Helwyze held up the empty glass with which he had been toying while he talked.

Among the strew of books upon the table at his elbow stood an antique silver flagon, coolly frosted over by the iced wine it held. This Canaris obediently lifted; and, as he stooped to fill the rosy bowl of the Venetian goblet, Helwyze leaned forward, till the two faces were so close that eye looked into eye, as he said, in one swift sentence, “ It was to win Olivia for 3* yourself, then, that you wooed Gladys for me, three hours ago?”

The flagon was not heavy, but it shook in the young man’s grasp, and the wine overflowed the delicate glass, dyeing red the hand that held it. One face glowed with shame and anger; the other remained unmoved, except a baffling smile upon the lips, that added, in mild reproach, —

“My Ganymede has lost his skill; it is time I filled his place with’ a neat-handed Hebe. Make haste, and bring her to me soon.”

Mutely Canaris removed all traces of the treacherous mishap, inwardly cursing his imprudent confidences, wondering what malignant chance brought within ear-shot one who rarely left his own apartments at the other end of the Villa; and conscious of an almost superstitious fear of this man. who read so surely, and dragged to light so ruthlessly, hidden hopes and half- formed designs.

Vouchsafing no enlightenment, Ilehvyze sipped the cool draught with an air of satisfaction, continuing the conversation in a tone of exasperating calmness.

“Among other amusing fables with which you beguiled poor Gladys, I think you promised counsel and comfort. Keep your word, and marry her. It is the least you can do, after destroying her faith in the one friend she possessed. A pleasant, but a dangerous pastime, and not in the best taste; let me advise you to beware of it in future.”

There was a covert menace in the tone, a warning in the significant grip of the pale fingers round the glass, as if about to snap its slender stem. Canaris was white now with impotent wrath, and a thrill went through his vigorous young frame, as if the wild creature was about to break loose, and defy its captor.

But the powerful eye was on him, with a spark of fire in its depths, and controlled till words, both sweet and bitter, soothed and won him.

“I know that any breath of tenderness would pass by Olivia as idly as the wind. You doubt this, and a word will prove it. I am not a tyrant, though I seem such; therefore you are free to try your fate before you gratify my whim and make Gladys happy.”

44 You think the answer will be ‘ No?’“ and Canaris forgot every thing but the hope which tempted, even while reason told him it was vain.

“It always has been; it always will be, if I know her.”

“Will he till you ask.”

“Rest easy; I am done with love.”

“But if she answers ‘ Yes’?”

“Then bid good-bye to peace, — and me,”

The answer startled the young lover, and made him shrink from what he ardently desired; for the new passion was but an enthralment of the senses, and he knew it by the tine instinct which permits such men to see and condemn their lower nature, even while yielding to its sway.

But pride silenced doubt, and native courage made it impossible to shun the trial or accept the warning His ey e lit, his head rose, and he spoke out manfully, though unconsciously he wore the look of one who goes to lead a forlorn hope,—

“I shall try my fate to-night, and, if I fail, you may do what you like with me.”

‘•Not a coward, thank Heaven!” mused Helwyze, as he looked after the retreating figure with the contemptuous admiration one gives to any foolhardy enterprise bravely undertaken. “ He must have his lesson, and will be the tamer for it. unless Olivia takes me at my word, and humors the boy, for vengeance’ sake. That would be a most dramatic complication, and endanger my winter’s comfort seriously. Come, suspense is a new emotion; I will enjoy it, and meantime make sure of Gladys, or I may be left in the lurch. A reckless boy and a disappointed woman are capable of any folly.”

V.

HELWYZE folded the black velvet paletot about him, stroked the damp hair off his forehead, and, with hands loosely clasped behind his back, went walking slowly through the quiet house, to find the bright drawing-room and breezy balcony already deserted.

No sound of voice or step gave him the clew he sought; and, pausing in the hall, he stood a moment, his finger on his lip, wondering whither Gladys had betaken herself.

“Not with them, assuredly. Dreaming in the moonshine somewhere. I must look again.”

Retracing his noiseless steps, he glanced here and there with eyes which nothing could escape, for trifles were significant to his quick wit; and he found answers to unspoken queries in the relics the vanished trio left behind thera. Olivia’s fan, flung down upon a couch, made him smile, as if he saw her toss it there when yielding half-impatiently to the entreaties of Canaris. An ottoman, pushed hastily aside, told where the young lover sat, till he beguiled her out to listen to the pleading which would wax eloquent and bold under cover of the summer night. The instrument stood open, a favorite song upon the rack, but the glimmering keys were mute; and the wind alone was singing fitfully. A little hat lay in the window, as if ready to be caught up in glad haste when the summons came; but the dew had dimmed the freshness of its azure ribbons, and there was a forlorn look about the girlish thing, which told the story of a timid hope, a silent disappointment.

“Where the deuce is the child?” and Helwyze cast an ireful look about the empty room; for motion wearied him, and any thwarting of his will was dangerous. Suddenly his eye brightened, and he nodded, as if well pleased; for below the dark drapery that hung before an arch, a fold of softest white betrayed the wearer.

“Now I have her!” he whispered, as if to some familiar; and, parting the curtains, looked down upon the little figure sitting there alone, bathed in moonlight as purely placid as the face turned on him when he spoke.

“Might one come in? The house seems quite deserted, and I want some charitable soul to say a friendly word to me.”

“Oh, yes! What can I do, sir? “ With the look of a suddenly awakened ch’ld, Gladys rose up, and involuntarily put out her hand as if to heap yet more commodiously the pillows of the couch which filled the alcove; then paused, remembering what Canaris had told her of the invalid’s rejection of all sympathy, and stood regarding him with a shy, yet wistful glance, which plainly showed the impulse of her tender heart.

Conscious that the surest way to win this simple creature was by submitting to be comforted, — for in her, womanly compassion was stronger than womanly ambition, vanity, or interest, — Helwyze shed a reassur’ng smile upon her, as he threw himself down, exclaiming, with a sigh of satisfaction, doubly effective from one who so seldom owned the weariness that oppressed him, —

“Yes : you shall make me comfortable, if you kindly will; the heat exhausts me, and I cannot sleep. Ah, this is pleasant! You have the gift of piling pillows for weary heads, Gladys. Now, let the moonlight make a picture of you, as it did before I spoilt it; then I shall envy no man.”

Pleased, yet abashed, the girl sank back into her place on the wide window ledge, and bent her face over the blooming linden spray that lay upon her lap, unconsciously making of herself a prettier picture than before.

“Musing here alone? Not sorrowfully, I hope?”

“I never feel alone, sir, and seldom sorrowful.”

“‘ They never are alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts;’ yet it would not be unnatural if you felt both sad and solitary, so young, so isolated, in this big, bad world of ours.”

“A beautiful and happy world to me, sir. Even loneliness is pleasant, because with it comes — liberty.”

The last word fell from her lips involuntarily; and, with a wonderfully expressive gesture, she lifted her arms as if some heavy fetter had newly dropped away.

Ardent emphasis and forceful action both surprised and interested Helwyze, confirming his suspicion that this girlish bosom hid a spirit as strong as pure, capable of deep suffering, exquisite happiness, heroic effort. His eye shone, and he gave a satisfied nod; for his first careless words had struck fire from the girl, making his task easier and more attractive.

“And how will you use this freedom? A precious, yet a perilous, gift for such as you.”

“Can any thing so infinitely sweet and sacred be dangerous? He who planted the longing for it here, and gave it me when most needed, will surely teach me how to use it. I have no fear.”

The bent head was erect now; the earnest face- turned full on Helwyze with such serene faith shining in it, that the sneer died off his Tips, and something like genuine compassion touched him, at the sight of such brave innocence tranquilly confronting the unknown future.

“May nothing molest, or make afraid. While here, you are quite safe; — you do, then, think of going?” he added, as a quick change arrested him.

“I do, sir, and soon. I only wait to see how, and where.”

It was difficult to believe that so resolute a tone could come into a voice so gentle, or that lips whose shape was a smile could curl with such soft scorn. But both were there; for the memory of that other woman’s story embittered even gratitude, since in the girl’s simple creed disloyalty to love was next to disloyalty to God.

Helwyze watched her closely, while his fingers fell to tapping idly on the sofa scroll: and the spark brightened under the lids that contracted with the intent expression of concentrated sight.

“Perhaps I can show you how and when. May I?” he asked, assuming a paternal air, which inwardly amused him much.

Gladys looked, hesitated, and a shade of perplexity dimmed the clear brightness of her glance, as if vaguely conscious of distrust, and troubled by its seeming causelessness.

Helwyze saw it, and quickly added the magical word which lulled suspicion, roused interest, and irresistibly allured her fancy.

“Pardon me; I should not have ventured to speak, if Felix had not hinted that you began to weary of dependence, as all free spirits must; your own words confirm the hint; and I desired to share my cousin’s pleasure in befriending, if I might, one who can so richly repay all obligation. Believe me, Gladys, your voice is a treasure, which, having discovered, we want to share between us.”

If the moonlight had been daybreak, the girl’s cheek could not have shown a rosier glow, as she half-averted it to hide the joy she felt at knowing Canaris had taken thought for her so soon. Her heart fluttered with tender hopes and fears, like a nestful of eager birds; and, forgetting doubt in delight, she yielded to the lure held out to her.

“You are most kind : I shall be truly grateful if you will advise me, sir. Mrs. Surry has done so much, I can ask no more, but rather hasten to relieve her of all further care of me.”

“She will be loth to lose you; but the friend of whom I am about to speak needs you much, and can give you what you love better even than kindness, — independence.”

“Yes: that is what I long for! I will do any thing for daily bread, if I may earn it honestly, and eat it in freedom,” leaning nearer, with clasped hands and eager look.

“Could you be happy to spend some hours of each day in reading, singing to, and amusing a poor soul, who sorely needs such pleasant comforting?”

“I could. It would be very sweet to do it; and I know how, excellently well, for I have had good training. My father was an invalid, and I his only nurse for years.”

“Fortunate for me in all ways,” thought Helwyze. finding another reason for his purpose; while Gladys, bee-like, getting sweetness out of bitter-herbs, said to herself, “ Those weary years had their use, and are not wasted, as I feared.”

“I think these duties will not be difficult nor distasteful,” continued Helwyze, marking the effect of each attraction, as he mentioned it with modest brevity. “ It is a quiet place; plenty of rare books to read, fine pictures to study, and music to enjoy; a little clever society, to keep wits bright and enliven solitude; hours of leisure, and entire liberty to use them as you will. Would this satisfy you, Gladys, till something better can be found?”

“Better!” echoed the girl, with the expression of one who, having asked for a crust, is bidden to a feast. “ Ah, sir, it sounds too pleasant for belief. I long for all these lovely things, but never hoped to have them. Can I earn so much happiness? Am I a fit companion for this poor lady, who must need the gentlest nursing, if she suffers in the midst of so much to enjoy?”

“You will suit exactly; have no fear of that, my good child. Just be your own happy, helpful self, and you can make sunshine anywhere. We will talk more of this when you have turned it over in that wise young head of yours. Olivia may have some more attractive plan to offer.”

But Gladys shook “ the wise young head” with a decided air, as piquante as the sudden resolution in her artless voice.

“I shall choose for myself; your plan pleases me better than any Mrs. Surry is likely to propose. She says I must not work, but rest and enjoy myself. I will work; I love it; ease steals away my strength, and pleasure seems to dazzle me. I must be strong, for I have only myself to lean upon; I must see clearly, for my only guide is my own conscience. I will think of your most kind offer, and be ready to accept it whenever you like to try me, sir.”

“Thanks; I like to try you now, then; sit here and croon some drowsy song, to show how well you can lull wakeful senses into that blessed oblivion called sleep.”

As he spoke, Helwyze drew a low seat beside the couch, and beckoned her to come and take it; for she had risen as if to go, and he had no mind to be left alone yet.

“I am so pleased you asked mc to do this, for it is my special gift. Papa was very stubborn, but he always had to yield, and often called me his ‘sleep compeller.’ Let me drop the curtain first, light is so exciting, and draws the insects. I shall keep them off with this pretty fan, and you will find the faint perfume soothing.”

Full of the sweetest good-will, Gladys leaned across the couch to darken the recess before the lullaby began. But Helwyze, feeling in a mood for investigation and experiment, arrested the outstretched hand, and, holding it in his, turned the full brilliance of his fine eyes on hers, asking with most seductive candor, —

“Gladys, if I were the friend of whom we spoke, would you come to me? You compel truth as well as sleep, and I cannot deceive you, while you so willingly serve me.”

A moment she stood looking down into the singular countenance before her with a curious intentness in her own. A slight quickening of the breath was all the sign she gave of a consciousness of the penetrative glance fixed upon her, the close grasp of his hand; otherwise unembarrassed as a child, she regarded him with an expression maidenly modest, but quite composed. Helwyze keenly enjoyed these glimpses of the new character with which he chose to meddle, yet was both piqued and amused by her present composure, when the mere name of Felix filled her with the delicious shamefaced- ness of a first love.

It was a little curious that during the instant the two surveyed each other, that, while the girl’s color faded, a light red tinged the man’s pale cheek, her eye grew clear and cold as his softened, and the small hand seemed to hold the larger by the mere contact of its passive fingers.

Slow to arrive, the answer was both comprehensive and significant, but very brief, for three words held it.

“Could I come? “

Helwyze laughed with real enjoyment.

“You certainly have the gift of surprises, if no other, and it makes you charm’ng, Gladys. I fancied you as unsophisticated as if you were eight, instead of eighteen, and here I find you as discreet as any woman of the world, — more so than many. Where did you learn it, child? “

“From myself; I have no other teacher.”

“Ah! ‘ instinct is a fine thing, my masters.’ You could not have a better guide. Rest easy, little friend, the proprieties shall be preserved, and you can come, if you decide to do me the honor. My old housekeeper is a most decorous and maternal creature, and rnto her keeping you will pass. Felix pleased me well, but his time is too valuable now; and, selfish as I am, I hesitate to keep for my own comfort the man who can charm so many. Will you come, and take his place?”

Helwyze could not deny himself the pleasure of calling back the tell-tale color, for the blushes of a chaste woman are as beautiful as the blooming of a flower. Quickly the red tide rose, even to the brow, the eyes fell, the hand thrilled, and the steady voice faltered traitorously, “I could not fill it, sir.”

Still detaining her, that he might catch the sweet aroma of an opening heart, Helwyze added, as the last temptation to this young Eve, whom he was beguiling out of the safe garden of her tranquil girlhood into the unknown world of pain and passion, waiting for womankind beyond, —

“Not for my own sake alone do I want you, but for his. Life is full of perils for him, and he needs a home. I cannot make one for him, except in this way, for my house is my prison, and he wearies of it naturally. But I can give it a new charm, add a never-failing attraction, and make it homelike by a woman’s presence. Will you help me in this? “

I am not wise enough; Mrs. Surry is often with you: surely she could make it homelike far better than I,” stammered Gladys, chilled by a sudden fear, as she remembered Canaris’ face as he departed with Olivia an hour ago.

“Pardon; that is precisely what she cannot do. Such women weary while they dazzle, the gentler sort win while they soothe. We shall see less of her in future; it is not well for Felix. Take pity on vie, at least, and answer ‘ Yes.’“

“I do, sir.”

“How shall I thank you?” and Helwyze kissed the hand as he released it, leaving a little thorn of :ealousy behind to hoodwink prudence, stimulate desire, and fret the inward peace that was her best possession.

Glad to take refuge in music, the girl assumed her seat, and began to sing dreamily to the slow waving of the green spray. Helwyze feigned to be courting slumber, but from the ambush of downcast lids he stole sidelong glances at the countenance so near his own, that he could mark the gradual subsiding of emotion, the slow return of the repose which made its greatest charm for him. And so well did he feign, that presently, as if glad to see her task successfully ended, Gladys stole away to the seclusion of her own happy thoughts.

Busied with his new plans and purposes, Helwyze waited till his patience was rewarded by seeing the face of Canaris appear at the vindow, glance in, and vanish as silently as it came. But one look was enough, and in that flash of time the other read how the rash wooing had sped, or thought he did, till Olivia came sweeping through the room, flung wide the curtains, and looked in with eyes as brilliant as if, they had borrowed light of the fire-flies dancing there without.

“A fan, a cigarette, a scarlet flower behind the ear, and the Spanish donna would be quite perfect,” he said, surveying with lazy admiration the richly colored face, which looked out from the black lace, wrapped mantilla-wise over the dark hair and whitely gleaming arms.

“Is the snowdrop gone? Then I will come in, and hear how the new handmaid suits. I saw her at her pleasing task.”

“So well that I should like to keep her at it long and often. Where is Felix?”

His words, his look, angered Olivia, and she answered with smiling ambiguity, —

“Out of his misery, at last.”

“Cruel as ever. I told him it would be so.”

“On the contrary, I have been kind, as I promised to be.”

“Then his face belied him.”

“Would it please you, if I had ventured to forestall your promised gift, and accepted all Felix has to offer me, himself. I have my whims, like you, and follow them as recklessly.”

Helwyze knit his brows, but answered negligently, “ Folly never pleases me. It will be amusing to see which tires first. I shall miss him; but his place is already filled, and Gladys has the charm of novelty.” “ You have spoken, then? “ “ Forewarned, forearmed; I have her promise, and Felix can go when he likes.”

Olivia paled, dropped her mask, and exclaimed in undisguised alarm, —

“There is no need : I have no thought of such folly! My kindness to Felix was the sparing him an avowal, which was simply absurd. A word, a laugh, did it, for ridicule cures more quickly and surely than compassion.”

I thought so. Why try to fence with me, Madama? you always get the worst of it,” and Helwyze made the green twig whistle through the air with a sharp turn of the wrist, as he rose to go; for these two, bound together by a mutual wrong, seldom met without bitter words, the dregs of a love which might have blest them both.

He found Felix waiting for him, in a somewhat haughty mood; Olivia having judged wisely that ridicule, though a harsh, was a speedy cure for the youthful delusion, which had been fostered by the isolation in which they lived, and the ardent imagination of a poet.

“You were right, sir. What are your commands?” he asked, controlling disappointment, pique, and unwillingness with a spirit that won respect and forbearance even from Helwyze, who answered with a cordial warmth, as rare as charming, —

“I have none: the completion of my wish I leave to you. Consult your own time and pleasure, and, when it is happily accomplished, be assured I shall not forget that you have shown me the obedience of a son.”

Quick as a child to be touched, and won by kindness, Canaris flushed with grateful feeling and put out his hand impulsively, as he had done when selling his liberty, for now he was selling his love.

“Forgive my waywardness. I will be guided by you, for I owe you my life, and all the happiness I have known in it. Gladys shall be a daughter to you; but give me time — I must teach myself to forget.”

His voice broke as he stumbled over the last words, for pride was sore, and submission hard.

But Helwyze soothed the one and softened the other by one of the sympathetic touches which occasionally broke from him, proving that the man’s heart, was not yet quite dead. Laying his hand upon the young man’s shoulder, he said in a tone which stirred the hearer deeply, — “ I feared this pain was in store for you, but could not save you from it. Accept the gentle comforter I bring you, for I have known the same pain, and I had no Gladys.”

VI.

SO the days went by, fast and fair in outward seeming, while an undercurrent of unquiet emotion rolled below. Helwyze made no sign of impatience, but silently forwarded his wish, by devoting himself to Olivia; thereby making a green oasis in the desert of her life, and leaving the young pair to themselves.

At first, Canaris shunned every one as much as possible; but sympathy, not solitude, was the balm he wanted, and who could give it him so freely as Gladys? Her mute surprise and doubt and grief at this capricious coldness, after such winning warmth, showed him that the guileless heart was already his, and added a soothing sense of power to the reluctance and regret which by turns tormented him.

Irresistibly drawn by the best instincts of a faulty but aspiring nature to that which was lovely, true, and pure, he soon returned to Gladys, finding in her sweet society a refreshment and repose Olivia’s could never give him.

Love he did not feel, but affection, the more helpful for its calmness; confidence, which was given again fourfold; and reverence, daily deepening as time showed him the gentle strength and crystal clarity of the spirit he was linking to his own by ties which death itself could not sever. But the very virtues which won, also made him hesitate, though rash enough when yielding to an attraction far less noble. A sense of unworthi’iess restrained hi-a, even when reluctance had passed from resignation to something like desire, and he paused, as one might, who longed to break a delicate plant, yet delayed, lest it should wither too quickly in his hand.

Helwyze and Olivia watched this brief wooing wi:h peculiar interest. She, being happy herself, was full of good hope for Gladys, and let her step, unwarned, into the magic circle drawn around her. He sat as if at a play, enjoying the pretty pastoral enacted before him, content to let “summer and seclusion” bring the young pa,-r together as naturally and eas’ly as spring-time mates the birds. Suspense gave zest to the new combination, surprise added to ts flavor, and a dash of danger made it unusuall) attractive to him.

Canaris came to him one day, with a resolute expression on his face, which rendered it noble, as well as beautiful.

“Sir, I will not do this thing; I dare not.”

“Dare not! Is cowardice to be added to disobedience and falsehood?” and Helwyze looked up from his book with a contemptuous frown.

“I will not be sneered out of my purpose; for I never did a braver, better act than when I say to you, ‘I dare not lie to Gladys.’“

“What need of lying? Surely you love her now, or you are a more accomplished actor than I thought you.”

“I have tried, — tried too faithfully for her peace, I fear; but, though I reverence her as an angel, I do not love her as a woman. How can I look into her innocent, confiding face, and tell her, — she who is all truth, — that I love as she does?”

“Yet that is the commonest, most easily forgiven falsehood a man can utter. Is it so hard for you to deceive?”

Quick and deep rose the hot scarlet to Canaris’s face, and his eyes fell, as if borne down by the emphasis of that one word. But the sincerity of his desire brought courage even out of shame; and, lifting his head with a humility more impressive than pride or anger, he said, steadily,

“If this truth redeems that falsehood, I shall, at least, have recovered my own self-respect. I never knew that I had lost it, till Gladys showed me how poor I was in the virtue which makes her what she is.”

“What conscientious qualm is this? Where would this truth-telling bring you? How would your self-respect bear the knowledge that you had broken the girl’s heart? for, angel as you call her, she has one, and you have stolen it.”

“At your bidding.”

“Long before f thought of it. Did you m- agine you could play with her, to pique Olivia, without harm to Gladys? Is yours a face to smile on a woman, day after day, and not teach her to love? In what way but this can you atone for such selfish thoughtlessness? Come,;f we are to talk of honor and honesty, do it fairly, and not shift the responsibility of your acts upon my shoulders.”

“Have I done that? I never meant to trouble her. Is there no way out of it but this? Oh, sir, I am not fit to marry her! What am I, to take a fellow-creature’s happiness into my hands? What have I to offer her but the truth in return for her love, if I must take it to secure her peace?”

“If you offer the truth, you certainly will have nothing else, and not even receive love in return, perhaps; for her respect may go with all the rest. If I know her, the loss of that would wound her heart more deeply than the disappointment your silence will bring her now. Think of this, and be wise as well as generous in the atonement you should make.”

“Bound, whichever way I look; for when I meant to be kindest I am cruel.”

Canaris stood perplexed, abashed, remorseful; for Helwyze had the art to turn even his virtues into weapons against him, making his new-born regard for Gladys a reason for being falsely true, dishonorably tender. The honest impulse suddenly looked weak and selfish, compassion seemed nobler than sincerity, and present peace better than future happiness.

Helwyze saw that he was wavering, and turned the scale by calling to his aid one of the strongest passions that rule men, — the spirit of rivalry, — knowing well its power over one so young, sc vain and sensitive.

“Felix, there must be an end of this; I am tired of it. Since you are more enamoured of truth than Gladys, choose, and abide by it. I shall miss my congenial comrade, but I will not keep him if he feels my friendship slavery. I release you from all promises: go your way, in peace; I can do without you.”

A daring offer, and Helwyze risked much in making it; but he knew the man before him, and that in seeming to set free, he only added another link to the invisible chain by which he held him. Canaris looked relieved, amazed, and touched, as he exclaimed, incredulously, —

“Do you mean it, sir? “ “ I do; bat in return for your liberty I claim the right to use mine as I will.’’ “ Use it? I do not understand.” “To comfort Gladys.” “ How? ‘

“You do not love her, and leave her doubly forlorn, since you have given her a glimpse of love. I must befriend her, as you will not; and when she comes to me, as she has promised, if she is happy, I shall keep her.”

“As fille adoptive.”

Canaris affirmed, not asked, this; and, in the changed tone, the suspicious glance, Ilelwyzc saw that he had aimed well. With a smile that was a sneer, he answered coldly, —

“Hardly that: the paternal’ element is sadly lacking in me; and, if it were not, I fear a man of forty could not adopt a girl of eighteen without compromising her, especially one so lonely and so lovely as poor little Gladys.”

“You will marry her? Yet when I hinted it, you said,’ Impossible!’“

“I did; but then I did not know how helpful she could be, how glad to love, how easy to be won by kindness. Ennui drives one to do the rashest things; and when you are gone, I shall find it difficult to fill your place. Tis a pity to tie the pretty creature to such a clod. But, if I can help and keep her in no other way, I may do it, remembering that her captivity would be a short one; it should be my care that it was a very light one while it lasted.”

“But she loves me! “ exclaimed Canaris, with jealous inconsistency.

“I fear so; yet you reject her for a scruple. Hearts are easily caught in the rebound; and who will hold hers more gently than I? Olivia will tell you I can be gentle when it suits me.”

The name stung Canaris, where pride was sorest; and the thought, that this man could take from him both the woman whom he loved and the girl who loved him, roused an ignoble desire to silence the noble one. He showed it instantly, for his eye shot a quick glance at the mirror; a smile that was almost insolent passed over his face; and his air was full of the proud consciousness of youth, health, comeliness, and talent.

“Thanks for my freedom; I shall know how to use it. Since I may tell Gladys the truth, I do not dread her love so much; and will atone generously, if I can. I think she will accept poverty with me rather than luxury with you. At least she shall have her choice.”

“Well said. You will succeed, since you possess all the gifts which win women except wealth and” —

“Stop! you shall not say it,” cried Canaris, hotly. “Are you possessed of a devil, that you torment me so?” He clenched his hands, and walked fast through the room, as if to escape from some fierce impulse.

A certain, almost brutal, frankness characterized the intercourse of these men at times; for the tie between them was a peculiar one, and fretted both, though both clung to it with strange tenacity. With equal candor and entire composure Helwyze answered the excited question.

“We are all possessed, more or less; happy the man who is master. My demon is a bad one; for your intellectual devil is hard to manage, since he demands the best of us, and is not satisfied or cheated as easily as some that are stronger, yet less cunning. Yours is ambition, — an insatiable fellow, who gives you no rest. I had a fancy to help you rule him; but he proves less interesting that I thought to find him, and is getting to be a bore. See what you can do, alone; only, when he gets the upper hand again, excuse me from interfering: once is enough.”

Canaris made no reply, but dashed out of the room, as if he could bear no more, leaving Helwyze to throw down his book, muttering impatiently, —

“Here is a froward favorite, and excitement with a vengeance! . He will not speak yet; for with all his fire he is wary, and while he fumes I must work. But how? but how? “

VII.

A STORM raged all that night; but dawn came up so dewy and serene, that the world looked l’ke a child waking after anger, with happy smiles upon its lips, penitential tears in its blue eyes.

Canaris was early astir, after a night as stormy within as without, during which he had gone through so many alternations of feeling, that, weary and still undecided, he was now in the mood to drift whithersoever the first eddy impelled him. Straight to Gladys, it seemed; and, being superstitious, he accepted the accident as a good omen, following his own desire, and calling it fate.

Wandering in the loneliest, wildest spot of all the domain, he came upon her as suddenly as if a wish had brought her to the nook haunted for both by pleasant memories. Dew-drenched her feet, hatless her head; but the feet stood firmly on the cliff which shelved down to the shore below, and the upturned head shone bright against the deep blue of the sky. Morning peace dwelt in her eyes, morning freshness glowed on her cheek, and her whole attitude was one of unconscious aspiration, as she stood there with folded hands and parted lips, drinking in the storm-cooled breeze that blew vigor ous and sweet across the lake.

“What are you doing here so early, little dryad?” and Canaris paused, with an almost irresistible desire to put out his arms and hold her, lest she fly away, so airy was her perch, so eager her look into the boundless distance before her.

“Only being happy!” and she looked down into his face with such tender and timid joy in her own, he hardly had need to ask, —

“Why, Gladys?”

“Because of this,” showing a string of pearls that hung from her hand, half-hidden among the trailing bits of greenery gathered in her walk.

“Who gave you that?” demanded Canaris, eying it with undisguised surprise; for the pearls were great, globy things, milk-white, and so perfect that any one but Gladys would have seen how costly was the gift.

“Need you ask?” she said, blushing brightly.

“Why not? Do you suspect me?”

“You cannot deceive me by speaking roughly and looking stern. Who but you would put these in my basket without a word, and let me find them there when I laid my work away last night? I was so pleased, so proud, I could not help keeping them, though far too beautiful for me.”

Then Canaris knew who had done it; and his hand tightened over the necklace, while his eye went towards the lake, as if he longed to throw it far into the water. He checked himself, and, turning it about with a disdainful air, said, coldly, —

"If I had given you this, it should have been quite perfect. The cross is not large nor fine enough to match the chain. Do you see?"

"Ah, but the little cross is more precious than all the rest! That is the one jewel my mother left me, and I put it there to make my rosary complete;" and Gladys surveyed it with a pretty mixture of devout affection and girlish pleasure.

"I'll give you a better one than this, — a string of tiny carved saints in scented wood, blessed by holy hands, and fit to say prayers like yours upon. You will take it, though my gift is not half so costly as his?" he said, eagerly.

"Whose?"

"Helwyze gave you that."

"But why?" and Gladys opened wide her clear, large eyes in genuine astonishment.

"He is a generous master; your singing pleases him, and he pays you so," replied Canaris, bitterly.

"He is not my master!"

"He will be."

"Never! I shall not go, if I am to be burdened with benefits. I will earn my just due, but not be overpaid. Tell him so."

Gladys caught back the chain, unclasped the cross, and threw the pearls upon the grass, where they lay, gleaming, like great drops of frozen dew, among the green. Canaris liked that; thought proudly, "I have no need to bribe;" and hastened to make his own the thing another seemed to covet. Drawing nearer, he looked up, asking, in a tone that gave the question its true meaning, —

"May I be your master, Gladys?"

"Not even you."

"Your slave, then?"

"Never that."

"Your lover?"

"Yes."

"But I can give you nothing except myself."

"Love is enough;" and finding his arms about her. his face, warm and wistful, close to hers. Gladys bent to give and take the first kiss, which was all they had to bestow upon each other.

Singularly unimpassioned was the embrace in which they stood for a brief instant. Canaris held her with a clasp more jealous than fond; Gladys clung to him, yet trembled, as it some feat subdued her joy; and both vaguely felt the incompleteness of a moment which should be perfect.

"You do love me, then?" she whispered, wondering at his silence.

"Should I ask you to be my wife if I did not?" and the stern look melted into an expression of what seemed, to her, reproach.

"No; ah, no! I fancied that I might have deceived myself. I am so young, you are so kind. I never had a — friend before;" and Gladys smiled shyly, as the word which meant "lover" dropped from her lips.

"I am not kind: I am selfish, cruel, perhaps, to let you love me so. You w ill never reproach me for it, Gladys? I mean to save you from ills you know nothing of; to cherish and protect you " — if I can."

Verily in earnest now; for the touch of those innocent lips reminded him of all his promise meant, recalled his own unfitness to guide or guard another, when so wayward and unwise himself. Gladys could not understand the true cause of his beseeching look, his urgency of tone; but saw in them only the generous desire to keep safe the creature dearest to him, and loved him the more for it.

"I never can think you selfish, never will reproach you but will love and trust and honor you all my life," she answered, with a simplicity as solemn as sincere; and, holding out the hand that held her dead mother's cross, Canaris pledged his troth upon it with the mistaken chivalry which makes many a man promise to defend a woman against all men but himself.

"Now you can be happy again," he said, feeling that he had done his best to keep her so.

She thought he meant look out upon the lake, dreaming of him as when he found her; and, turning, stretched forth her arms as if to embrace the whole world, and tell the smiling heaven her glad secret.

"Doubly happy; then I only hoped, now I know I"

Something in the exultant gesture, the fervent tone, the radiant face, thrilled Canaris with a sudden admiration; a feeling of proud possession; a conviction that he had gained, not lost; and he said within himself, —

"I am glad I did it. I will cherish her; she will inspire me; and good shall come out of seeming evil."

His spirits rose with a new sense of well-being and well-doing. He gathered up the rejected treasure, and gave it back to Gladys, saying lightly. —

"You may keep it as a wedding-gift; then he need give no other. He meant it so, perhaps, and it will please him. Will you, love?"

"If you ask 't. Hut why must brides wear pearls? They mean tears," she added, thoughtfully, as she received them back.

"Perhaps because then the sorrows of their lives begin. Yours shall not: I will see to that," he promised, with the blind confidence of the self-sacrificing mood he was in.

Gladys sat down upon the rock to explore a pocket, so small and empty that Canaris could not help smiling, as he, too, leaned and looked with a lover's freedom.

"Only my old chain. I must put back the cross, else I shall lose it," laughed Gladys, as she brought out a little cord of what seemed woven yellow silk.

"Is it your hair?" he asked, his eye caught by its peculiar sunshiny hue.

"Yes; I could not buy a better one, so I made this. My hair is all the gold I have."

"Give it to me, and you wear mine. See, I have an amulet as well as you."

Fumbling in his breast, Canaris undid a slender chain, whence hung a locket, curiously chased, and tarnished with long wear. This he unslung, and, opening, showed Gladys the faded picture of a beautiful, sad woman.

"That is my Madonna."

"Your mother?"

"Yes."

"Mine now." The girl touched it with her lips, then softly closed and laid it on her lap.

Silently Canaris stood watching her, as she re-slung both poor but precious relics, while the costlier one slipped down, as if ashamed to lie beside them. He caught and swung it on his finger, thinking of something he had lately read to Helwyze.

"Kharsu, the Persian, sent a necklace to Schirin, the princess, whom he loved. She was a Christian, and hung a cross upon his string of pearls, as you did," he said aloud.

"But I am not a princess, and Mr. Helwyze does not love me; so the pretty story is all spoiled."

"This thing recalled it. I have given you a necklace, and you are hanging a cross upon it. Wear the one, and use the other, for my sake. Will you, Gladys?"

"Did Schirin convert Kharsu?" asked the girl, catching his thought more from his face than his words; for it wore a look of mingled longing and regret, which she had never seen before.

"That I do not know; but you must convert me: I am a sad heathen, Helwyze says."

"Has he tried?"

"No."

"Then I will!"

"You see I've had no one to teach me any thing but worldly wisdom, and I sometimes feel as I should be better for a little of the heavenly sort. So when you wear the rosary I shall give you — ’ Fair saint, in your orisons be all my sins remembered;”‘ and Canaris put h’s hand upon her head, smiling, as if h;ilf-ashamed of his request.

“I am no Catholic, but I will pray for you, and you shall not be lost The mother in heaven and the wife on earth will keep you safe,” whispered Gladys, in her fervent voice, feeling and answering with a woman’s quickness the half-expressed desire of a nature conscious of its weakness, yet unskilled in asking help for its greatest need.

Silently the two young lovers put on their amulets, and, hand in hand, went back along the winding path, till they reached the great eglantine that threw its green arches across the outlet from the wood. All beyond was radiantly bright and blooming; and as Canaris, passing first to hold back the thorny boughs, stood an instant, bathed in the splendor of the early sunshine, Gladys exclaimed, her face full of the tender idolatry of a loving woman, —

“O Felix, you are so good, so great, so beautiful, if it were not wicked, I should worship you!”

“God forbid! Do not love me too much, Gladys: I do not deserve it”

“How can I help it, when I feel very like the girl who lost her heart to the Apollo?” she answered, feeling that she never could love too much.

“And broke her heart, you remember, because her god was only a stone.”

“Mine is not, and he will answer when I call.”

“If be does not, he will be harder and colder than the marble!”

When Canaris, some hours later, told Helwyze. he looked well pleased, thinking, “Jealousy is a helpful ally. I do not regret calling in its aid, though it has cost Olivia her pearls.” Aloud he said, with a gracious air, which did not entirely conceal some secret anxiety.

“Then you have made a clean breast of it, and she forgives all peccadilloes?”

“I have not told her; and I will not, till I have atoned for the meanest of them. May I ask you to be silent also for her sake?”

‘‘You are wise’“ Then, as if glad to throw off all doubt and care, he asked, in a pleasantly suggestive tone, —

“The wedding will soon follow the wooing, I imagine, for you make short work of matters, when you do begin?”

“You told me to execute your wish in my own way. I will do so, without troubling Mrs. Surry, or asking you to give us your blessing, since playing the father to orphans is distasteful to you.”

Very calm and cool was Canaris now; but a sense of wrong bu: ned at his heart, marring the satisfaction he felt in having done what he believed to be a just and generous act.

"It is; but I will assume the character long enough to suggest, nay, insist, that however hasty and informal this marriage may be, you will take care that it is one."

"Do you mean that for a hint or a warning, sir? I have lied and stolen by your advice; shall I also betray?" asked Canaris, white with indignation, and something like fear; for he began to feel that whatever this man commanded he must do, spite of himself.

"Strong language, Felix. But I forgive it, since I am sincere in wishing well to Gladys. Marry when and how you please, only do not annoy me with another spasm of virtue. It is a waste of time, you see, for the thing is done."

"Not yet; but soon will be, for you are fast curing me of a too tender conscience."

"Faster than you think, my Faust; since to marry without love betrays as surely as to love without marriage," said Helwyze to himself, expressing in words the thought that had restrained the younger, better man.

A week later, Canaris came in with Gladys on his arm, looking very like a bride in a little bonnet tied with white, and a great nosegay of all the sweet, pale flowers blooming in the garden that first Sunday of September.

"Good-bye, sir; we are going."

"Where, may I ask? To church?"

"We have been;" and Canaris touched the ungloved hand that lay upon his arm, showing the first ring it had ever worn.

"Ah! then I can only say, Heaven bless you, Gladys; a happy honeymoon, Felix, and welcome home when — you are tired of each other."

VIII.

“HOME at last, thank Heaven!” exclaimed Canaris, as the door opened, letting forth a stream of light and warmth into the chilly gloom of the October night. Gladys made no answer but an upward look, which seemed to utter the tender welcome he had forgotten to give; and, nestling her hand in his, let him lead her through the bright hall, up the wide stairway to her own domain.

“As we return a little before our time, we must not expect a jubilee. Look about you, love, and rest. I will send Mrs. Bland presently, and tell Helwyze we are come.”

He hurried away, showing no sign of the ennui which had fitfully betrayed itself during the last week. Gladys watched him wistfully, then turned to see what home was like, with eyes that brightened beautifully as they took in the varied charms of the luxurious apartments prepared for her. The newly kindled light filled the room with a dusky splendor; for deepest crimson glowed every where, making her feel as if she stood in the heart of a great rose whose silken petals curtained her round with a color, warmth, and fragrance which would render sleep a “rapture of repose.” Womanlike, she enjoyed every dainty device and sumptuous detail; yet the smile of pleasure was followed by a faint sigh, as if the new magnificence oppressed her, or something much desired had been forgotten.

Stepping carefully, like one who had no right there, she passed on to a charming drawing-room, evidently intended for but two occupants, and all the pleasanter to her for that suggestion. Pausing on the threshold of another door, she peeped in, expecting to find one of those scented, satin boudoirs, which are fitter for the coquetries of a Parisian belle, than for a young wife to hope and dream and pray in.

But there was no splendor here; and, with a cry of glad surprise, its new owner took possession, wondering what gentle magic had guessed and gathered here the simple treasures she best loved. White everywhere, except the pale green of the softly tinted walls, and the mossy carpet strewn with mimic snowdrops. A sheaf of lilies in a silver vase stood on the low chimney-piece above the hearth, where a hospitable fire lay ready to kindle at a touch; and this was the only sign of luxury the room displayed. Quaint furniture, with no ornament except its own grace or usefulness, gave the place a homelike air; and chintz hangings, fresh and delicate as green leaves scattered upon snow could make them, seemed to shut out the world, securing the sweet privacy a happy woman loves.

Gladys felt this instantly, and, lifting her hand to draw the pretty draperies yet closer, discovered a new surprise, which touched her to the heart. Instead of looking out into the darkness of the autumn night, she found a little woodland nook imprisoned between the glass-door and the deep window beyond. A veritable bit of the forest, with slender ferns nodding in their sleep, hardy vines climbing up a lichened stump to show their scarlet berries, pine-needles pricking through the moss, rough arbutus vleaves hiding coyly till spring should freshen their russet edges, acorns looking as if just dropped by some busy squirrel, and all manner of humble weeds, growing here as happily as when they carpeted the wood for any careless foot to tread upon.

These dear familiar things were as grateful to Gladys as the sight of friendly faces; and, throwing wide the doois, she knelt down to breathe with childish eagerness the damp, fresh odors that came out to meet her.

“How sweet of him to make such a lovely nest for me, and then slip away before I could thank him,”‘ thought the tender-hearted creature, with tears in the eyes that dwelt delightedly upon the tremulous maiden-hair bending to her touch, and the sturdy grasses waking up in this new summer.

A sound of opening doors dispelled her reverie; and with girlish trepidation she hastened to smooth the waves of her bright hair, assume the one pretty dress she would acccpt from Olivia, and clasp the bridal pearls about her neck; then hastened down before the somewhat dreaded Mrs. Bland appeared.

It pleased her to go wandering alone through the great house, warmed and lighted everywhere; for Ilelwvze made this his world, and gathered about him every luxury which taste, caprice, or necessity demanded. A marvellously beautiful and v aried home it seemed to simple Gladys, as she passed from picture-gallery to music-room, eyed with artless wonder the subdued magnificence of the salon, or paused enchanted in a conservatory whose crysial walls enclosed a fairyland of bloom and verdure.

Here and there she came upon some characteristic whim or arrangement, which made her smile with amusement, or sigh with pity, remembering the recluse who tried to cheer his solitude by these devices. One recess held a single picture glowing with the warm splendor of the East. A divan, a Persian rug, an amber- mouthed?iargileh, and a Turkish coffee service, all gold and scarlet, completed the illusion. In another shadowy nook tinkled a little fountain guarded by one white-limbed nymph, who seemed to watch with placid interest the curious sea- creatures peopling the basin below. The third showed a study-chair, a shaded lamp, and certain favorite books, left open, as if to be taken up again when the mood returned. In one of these places Gladys lingered with fresh compassion stirring at her heart, though it looked the least inviting of them all. Behind th6 curtains of a window looking out upon the broad strpet on which the mansion faced stood a single chair, and nothing more.

“He shall not be so lonely now, if I can interest or amuse him,” thought Gladys, as she looked at the worn spot in the carpet, the crumpled cushion on the window-ledge; mute witnesses that Helwyze felt drawn towards his kin, and found some solace in watching the activity he co aid no longer share.

Knowing that she should find him in the library. where most of his time was spent, she soon wended her way thither. The door stood hospitably open; and, as she approached, she saw the two men standing together, marked, as never before, the sharp contrast between them, and felt a glow of wifely pride in the young husband whom she was learning to love with all the ardor of a pure and tender soul.

Canaris was talking eagerly, as he turned the leaves of a thin manuscript which lay between them Helwyze listened, with his eyes fixed on the speaker so intently that it startled the newcomer, when, without a sound to warn him of her approach, he turned suddenly upon her with the smile which dazzled without warnrng those on whom it was shed.

“I have been chiding this capricious fellow for the haste which spoils the welcome I hoped to give you. But I pardon him, since he brings the sunshine with him,” he said, going to meet her, with genuine pleasure irr his face.

“I could not have a kinder welcome, sir. I was glad to come; Felix feared you might be needing him “

“So duty brought him back a week too soon? A poet’s honeymoon should be a long one; I regret to be the cause of its abridgment.”

Something in the satirical glimmer of his eye made Gladys glance at her husband, who spoke out frankly, —

“There were other reasons. Gladys hates a crowd, and so do I. Bad weather made it impossible to be romantic, so we thought it best to come home and be comfortable.”

“I trust you will be; but I have little to offer, since the attractions of half a dozen cities could not satisfy you.”

“Indeed, we should be most ungrateful if we were not .happy here,” cried Gladys, eagerly. “ Only let me be useful as well as happy, else I shall not deserve this lovely home you give us.”

“She is anxious to begin her ministrations; and I can recommend her, for she is quick to learn one’s ways, patient with one’s whims, fruitful in charming devices for amusement, and the best of comrades,” said Canaris, drawing her to him with a look more grateful than fond.

“From that speech, and other signs, I infer that Felix is about to leave me to your tender mercies, and fall to work upon his new book; since it seems he could not resist making poetry when he should have been making love. Are you not jealous of the rival who steals him from you, even before the honeymoon has set?” asked Helwyze, touching the little manuscript before him.

“Not if she makes him great, and I can make him happy,” answered Gladys, with an air of perfect content and trust.

“I warn you that the Muse is a jealous mistress, and will often rob you of him. Are you ready to give him up, and resign yourself to more prosaic companionship?”

“Why need I give him up? He says I do not disturb him when he writes. He allowed me to sit beside him while he made these lovely songs, and watch them grow. He even let me help with a word sometimes, and I copied the verses fairly, that he might see how beautiful they were. Did I not, Felix?”

Gladys spoke with such innocent pride, and looked up in her husband’s face so gratefully, that he could not but thank her with a caress, as he said, laughing, —

“Ah, that was only play. I’ve had my holiday, and now I must work at a task in which no one can help me. Come and see the den where I shut myself up when the divine frenzy seizes me.

Mr. Helwyze is jailer, and only lets me out when I have done my stint.”

Full of some pleasurable excitement, Canaris led his wife across the room, threw open a door, and bade her look in. Like a curious child, she peeped, but saw only a small, bare cabinet de travail.

“No room, you see, even for a little thing like you. None dare enter here without my keeper’s leave. Remember that, else you may fare like Bluebeard’s Fatima.” Canaris spoke gayly, and turned a key in the door with a warning click, as he glanced over his shoulder at Helwyze. Gladys did not see the look, but something in his words seemed to disturb her.

“I do not like this place, it is close and dark. I think I shall not want to come, even if you are here;” and, waiting for no reply, she stepped out from the chill of the unused room, as if glad to escape.

“Mysterious intuition! she felt that we had a skeleton in here, though it is such a little one,” whispered Canaris, with an uneasy laugh.

“Such a sensitive plant will fare ill between us, I am afraid,” answered Helwyze, as he followed her, leaving the other to open drawers and settle papers, like one eager to begin his work.

Glady s was standing in the full glare of the fire, as if its cheerful magic could exorcise all dark fancies. Helwyze eyed the white figure for an instant, feeling that his lonely hearthstone had acquired a new charm; then joined her, saying quietly, —

“This is the place where Felix and I have lived together for nearly two years. Do you like it?”

“More than I can tell. It does not seem strange to me, for he has often described it; and when I thought of coming here, I was more curious to see this room than any other.”

“It will be all the pleasanter henceforth if Felix can spare you to me sometimes. Come and see the corner I have prepared, hoping to tempt you here when he shuts us out. It used to be his; so you will like it, I think.” Helwyze paced slowly down the long room, Gladys beside him, saying, as she looked about her hungrily, —

“So many books! and doubtless you have read them all?”

“Not quite; but you may, if you will. See, here is your place; come often, and be sure you never will disturb me.”

But one book lay on the little table, and its white cover, silver lettered, shone against the dark cloth so invitingly that Gladys took it up, glowing with pleasure as she read her own name upon the volume she knew and loved so well.

“For me? you knew that nothing else would be so beautiful and precious. Sir, why are you so generous?”

“It amuses me to do these little things, and you must humor me, as Felix does. You shall pay for them in your own coin, so there need be no sense of obligation. Rest satisfied I shall get the best of the bargain.” Before she could reply a servant appeared, announced dinner, and vanished as noiselessly as he came.

“This has been a bachelor establishment so long that we are grown careless. If you will pardon all deficiencies of costume, we will not delay installing Madame Canaris in the place she does us the honor to fill.”

“But I am not the mistress, sir. Please change nothing; my place at home was very humble; I am afraid I cannot fill the new one as I ought,” stammered Gladys, somewhat dismayed at the prospect which the new name and duty suggested.

“You will have no care, except of us. Mrs. Bland keeps the machinery running smoothly, and we lead a very quiet life. My territory ends at that door; all beyond is yours. I chiefly haunt this wing, but sometimes roam about below stairs a little, a very harmless ghost, so do not be alarmed if you should meet me.”

Helwyze spoke lightly, and tapped at the door of the den as he passed.

“Come out, slave of the pen, and be fed.”

Canars came, wearing a preoccupied air, and sauntered after them, as Helwyze led the new mistress to her place, shy and rosy, but resolved to du honor to her husband at all costs.

Her first act, however, gave them both a slight shock of surprise; for the instant they were seated, Gladys laid her hands together, bent her head, and whispered Grace, as if obeying a natural impulse to ask Heaven’s blessing on the first bread she broke in her new home. The effect of the devoutly simple act was characteristically shown by the three observers. The servant paused, with an uplifted cover in his hand, respectfully astonished; Canaris looked intensely annoyed; and Helwyze leaned back with the suggestion of a shrug, as he glanced critically from the dimpled hands to the nugget of gold that shone against the bended neck. The instant she looked up, the man whisked off the silver cover with an air of relief; Canaris fell upon his bread like a hungry boy, and Helwyze tranquilly began to talk.

“Was the surprise Felix prepared for you a satisfactory one? Olivia and I took pleasure in obeying his directions.”

“It was lovely! I have not thanked him yet, but I shall. You, also, sir, in some better way than words. What made you think of it?” she asked, looking at Canaris with a mute request for pardon of her involuntary offence.

Glad to rush into speech, Canaris gave at some length the history of his fancy to reproduce, as nearly as he could, the little room at home, which she had described to him with regretful minuteness; for she had sold every thing to pay the debts which were the sole legacy her father left her. While they talked, Helwyze, who ate little, was observing both. Gladys looked more girlish than ever, in spite of the mingled dignity and anxiety her quiet but timid air betrayed. Canaris seemed in high spirits, talking rapidly, laughing often, and glancing about him as if glad to be again where nothing inharmonious disturbed his taste and comfort. Not till dessert was on the table, however, did he own, in words, the feeling of voluptuous satisfaction which was enhanced by the memory that he had been rash enough to risk the loss of all “It is not so very terrible, you see, Gladys. You eat and drink like a bird; but I know you enjoy this as much as I do, after those detestable hotels,” he said, detecting an expression of relief n his young wife’s face, as the noiseless servant quitted the room for the last time.

“Indeed I do. It is so pleasant to have all one’s senses gratified at once, and the common duties of life made beautiful and easy,” answered Gladys, surveying with feminine appreciation the well-appointed table which had that air of accustomed elegance so grateful to fastidious tastes.

“Ah, ha! this little ascetic of mine will become a Sybarite yet, and agree with me that enjoyment is a duty,” exclaimed Canaris, looking very like a young Bacchus, as he he’d up his wine to watch its rich color, and inhale its bouquet with zest.

“The more delicate the senses, the more delicate the delight. I suspect

Madame finds her grapes and water as delicious as you do your olives and old wine," said Helwyze, finding a still more refined satisfaction than either in the pretty contrast between the purple grapes and the white fingers that pulled them apart, the softly curling lips that were the rosier for their temperate draughts, and the unspoiled simplicity of the girl sitting there in pearls and shimmering silk.

"When one has known poverty, and the sad shifts which make it seem mean, as well as hard, perhaps one does unduly value these things. I hope I shall not; but I do find them very tempting," she said, thoughtfully eying the new scene in which she found herself.

Helwyze seemed to be absently listening to the musical chime of silver against glass; but he made a note of that hope, wondering if hardship had given her more of its austere virtue than it had her husband.

"How shall you resist temptation?" he asked, curiously.

"I shall work. This is dangerously pleasant; so let me begin at once, and sing, while you take your coffee in the drawing-room. I know the way; come when you will, I shall be ready;" and Gladys rose with the energetic expression which often broke through her native gentleness. Canaris held the door for her, and was about to resume his seat, when Helwyze checked him: —

"We will follow at once. Was I not right in my prediction? he asked, as they left the room together.

"That we should soon tire of each other? You were wrong in that."

"I meant the ease with which you would soon learn to love."

"I have not learned — yet."

"Then this vivacity is a cloak for the pangs of remorse, is it?" and Ilehvyze laughed incredulously.

"No: it is the satisfaction I already feel in the atonement I mean to make. I have a grand idea, too, shall work, and give Gladys reason to be proud of me, if nothing more."

Something of her own energy was in his mien, and it became him. But Helwyze quenched the the noble ardor by saying, coldly, —

"I see: it is the old passion under a new name. May your virtuous aspirations be blest!"

IX.

HELWYZE was right, and Canaris found that his sudden marriage did stimulate public interest wonderfully. There had always been something mysterious about this brilliant young man and his relations with his patron; who was as silent as the Sphinx regarding his past, and tantalizingly enigmatical about his plans and purposes for the future. The wildest speculations were indulged in: many believed them to be father and son; others searched vainly for the true motive of this charitable caprice; and every one waited with curiosity to see the end of it. All of which much amused Helwyze, who cared nothing for the world’s opinion, and found his sense of humor tickled by the ludicrous idea of himself in the new role of benefactor.

The romance seemed quite complete when it was known that the young poet had brought home a wife whose talent, youth and isolation seemed to render her peculiarly fitted for his mate.

Though love was lacking, vanity was strong in Canaris, and this was gratified by the commendation bestowed on the new ornament he wore; for as such simple Gladys was considered, and shone with reflected lustre, her finer gifts and graces quite eclipsed by his more conspicuous and self-asserting ones.

Wilh unquestioning docility she gave herself into his hands, following where he led her, obeying his lightest wish, and loving him with a devotion which kept alive regretful tenderness when it should have cherished a loyal love. He gladly took her into all the gayety which for a time surrounded them, and she enjoyed it with a girl’s fresh delight. He showed her wise and w.tty people whom she admired or loved; and she looked and listened with an enthusiast’s wonder. He gave her all he had to give, novelty and pleasure; though the one had lost its gloss for h:m, and too much of the other he was forced to accept from Helwyze’s hands. But through all the experiences that now rapidly befell her, Gladys was still herself; innocently happy, stanchly true, characteristically independent, a mountain stream, keeping its waters pure and bright, though mingled with the swift and turbid river which was hurrying it toward the sea.

Curiosity being satisfied, society soon found some fresher novelty to absorb it. Women still admired Canaris, but marriage lessened his attractions for them; men still thought him full of promise, but were fast forgetting the first successful effort which had won their applause; and the young lion found that he must roar loud and often, if he would not be neglected. Shutting himself into his cell, he worked with hopeful energy for several months, often coming out weary, but excited, with the joyful labor of creation. At such times there was no prose anywhere; for heaven and earth were glorified by the light of that inner world, where imagination reigns, and all things are divine. Then he would be in the gayest spirits, and carry Gladys off to some hour of pleasant relaxation at theatre, opera, or ball, where flattery refreshed or emulation inspired him; and next day would return to his task with redoubled vigor.

At other times his fickle mistress deserted him; thought would not soar, language would not sing, poetry fled, and life was unutterably "flat, stale, and unprofitable." Then it was Gladys, who took possession of him; lured him out for a brisk walk, or a long drive into a wholesomer world than that into which he took her; sung weary brain to sleep with the sweetest lullabies of brother bards; or made him merry by the display of a pretty wit, which none but he knew she could exert. With wifely patience and womanly tact she managed her wayward but beloved lord, till despondency yielded to her skill, and the buoyant spirit of hope took him by the hand, and led him to his work again.

In the intervals between these fits of intellectual intoxication and succeeding depression, Gladys devoted herself to Helwyze with a faithfulness which surprised him and satisfied her; for, as she said, her "bread tasted bitter if she did not earn it." He had expected to be amused, perhaps interested, but not so charmed, by this girl, who possessed only a single talent, a modest share of beauty, and a mind as untrained as a beautiful but neglected garden. This last was the real attraction; for, finding her hungry for knowledge, he did not hesitate to test her taste and try her mental mettle, by allowing her free range of a large and varied library. Though not a scholar, in the learned sense of the word, he had the eager, sceptical nature which interrogates all things, yet believes only in itself. This had kept him roaming solitarily up and down the earth for years, observing men and manners; now it drove him to books; and, as suffering and seclusion wrought upon body and brain, his choice of mute companions changed from the higher, healthier class to those who, like himself, leaned towards the darker, sadder side of human nature. Lawless here, as elsewhere, he let his mind wander at will, as once he had let his heart, learning too late that both are sacred gifts, and cannot safely be tampered with.

All was so fresh and wonderful to Gladys, that her society grew very attractive to him; and pleasant as it was to have her wait upon him with quiet zeal, or watch her busied in her own corner, studying, or sewing with the little basket beside her which gave such a homelike air, it was still pleasanter to have her sit and read to him, while he watched this face, so intelligent, yet so soft; studied this mind, at once sensitive and sagacious, this nature, both serious and ardent. It gave a curious charm to his old favorites when she read them; and many hours he listened contentedly to the voice whose youth made Montaigne’s worldly wisdom seem the shrewder; whose music gave a certain sweetness to Voltaire’s Litter wit or Carlyle’s rough wisdom; whose pitying wonder added pathos to the melancholy brilliancy of Heine and De Ouincy. Equally- fascinating to him, and far more dangerous to her, were George Sand’s passionate romances, Goethe’s dramatic novels, Hugo and Sue’s lurid word-pictures of suffering and sin; the haunted world of Shakespeare and Dante, the poetry of Byron, Browning, and Toe.

Rich food and strong wine for a girl of eighteen; and Gladys soon felt the effects of such a diet, though it was hard to resist when duty seconded inclination, and ignorance hid the peril. She often paused to question with eager lips, to wipe wet eyes, to protest with indignant warmth, or to shiver with the pleasurable pain of a child who longs, yet dreads, to hear an exciting story to the end. Helwyze answered willingly, if not always wisely; enjoyed the rapid unfolding of the woman, and would not deny himself any indulgence of this new whim, though conscious that the snow-drop, transplanted suddenly from the free fresh spring-time, could not live in this close air w’thout suffering.

This was the double life Gladys now began to lead. Heart and mind were divided between the two, who soon absorbed every feeling, every thought. To the younger man she was a teacher, to the elder a pupil; in the one world she ruled, in the other served; unconsciously Canaris stirred emotion to its depths, consciously Helwyze stimulated intellect to its heights; while the soul of the woman, receiving no food from either, seemed to sit apart in the wilderness of its new experience, tempted by evil as well as sustained by good spirits, who guard their own.

One evening this divided mastery was especially felt by Helwyze, who watched the young man’s influence over his wife with a mixture of interest and something like jealousy, as it was evidently fast becoming stronger than his own. Sitting in his usual place, he saw Gladys flit about the room, brushing up the hearth, brightening the lamps, and putting by the finished books, as if the day’s duties were all done, the evening’s rest and pleasure honestly earned, eagerly waited for. He well knew that this pleasure consisted in carrying Canaris away to her own domain; or, if that were impossible, she would sit silently looking at him while he read or talked in his fitful fashion on any subject his master chose to introduce.

The desire to make her forget the husband whose neglect would have sorely grieved her if his genius had not been his excuse in her eyes for many faults, possessed Helwyze that night; and he amused himself by the effort, becoming more intent with each failure.

As the accustomed hour drew near, Gladys took her place on the footstool before the chair set ready for Felix, and fell a musing, with her eyes on the newly replenished fire. Above, the un ignited fuel lay black and rough, with here ana there a deep rift opening to the red core beneath; while to and fro danced many colored flames, as if bent on some eager quest. Man) flashed up the ch’mney, and were gone; others died solitarily in dark coiners, where no heat fed them; and some van;shed down the chasms, to the fiery world below. One golden spire, tremulous and translucent, burned with a br’lilance which attracted the eye; and, when a wandering violet flame joined it, Gladys followed their motions with interest, seeing in them images of Felix and herself, for childish fancy and womanly insight met and mingled in all she thought and felt.

Forgetting that she was not alone, she leaned forward, to watch what became of them, as the wedded flames flickered here and there, now violet, now yellow. But the brighter always seemed the stronger, and the sad-colored one to grow more and more golden, as if yielding to its sunshiny mate.

“I hope they will fly up together, out into the wide, starry sky, which is their eternity, perhaps,” she thought, smiling at her own eagerness.

But no; the golden flame flew up, and left the other to take on many shapes and colors, as it wandered here and there, till, just as it glowed with a splendid crimson, Gladys was forced to hide her dazzled eyes and look no more. Turning her flushed face away, she found Helwyze watching her as intently as she had watched the fire, and, reminded of his presence, she glanced toward the empty chair with an impatient sigh for Felix.

“You are tired,” he said, answering the sigh. “ Mrs. Bland told me what a notable housewife you are, and how you helped her set the upper regions to rights to-day. I fear you did too much.”

“Oh, no, I enjoyed it heartily. I asked for something to do, and she allowed me to examine and refold the treasures you keep in the great carved wardrobe, lest moths or damp or dust had hurt the rich stuffs, curious coins, and lovely ornaments stored there. I never saw so many pretty things before,” she answered, betraying, by her sudden ammation, the love of “pretty things,” which s one of the strongest of feminine foibles.

he smiled, well pleased. “ Olivia calls that quaint press from Brittany my bazaar, for there I have collected the spoils of my early wanderings; and when I want a cadcau for a fair friend, I find it without trouble. I savv in what exquisite order you left my shelves, and, as you were not with me to choose, I brought away several trifles, more curious than costly, hoping to find a thank-offering among them.”

As he spoke, he opened one of the deep drawers in the writing-table, as if to produce some gilt. But Gladys said, hastily, —

"You are very kind, sir; but these fine things are altogether too grand for me. The pleasure of looking at and touching them is reward enough; unless you will tell me about them: il must be interesting to know what places they came from."

Feeling in the mood for it, Helwyze described to her an Eastern bazaar, so graphically that she soon forgot Felix, and sat looking up as if she actuary saw and enjoyed the splendors he spoke of.

Lustrous silks sultanas were to wear; misty muslins, into whose embroidery some dark- skinned woman's life was wrought; cashmeres, many-hued as rainbows; odorous woods and spices, that filled the air with fragrance never blown from Western hills; amber, like drops of frozen sunshine; fruits, which brought visions of vineyards, olive groves, and lovely palms dropping their honeyed clusters by desert wells; skins mooned and barred with black upon the tawny velvet, that had lain in jungles, or glided with deathful stealthiness along the track of human feet; ivory tusks that had felled Asiatic trees, gored fierce enemies, or meekly lifted princes to their seats.

These, and many more, he painted rapidly; and, as he ended, shook out of its folds a gauzy fabric, starred with silver, which he threw over her head, pointing to the mirror set in the door of the armoire behind her.

"See if that is not too pretty to refuse. Felix would surely be inspired if you appeared before him shimmering like Suleika, when Hatem says to her, —

"'Here, take this, with the pure and silver streaking, And wind it, Darling, round and round for me;

What is your Highness? Style scarce worth the speaking, When thou dost look, I am as great as He.'"

Gladys did look, and saw how beautiful it made her; but, though she did not understand the words he quoted, the names suggested a sultan and his slave, and she did not like either the idea or the expression with which Helwyze regarded her. Throwing off the gauzy veil, she refolded and put it by, saying, in that decided little way of hers, which was prettier than petulance, —

"My Hatem does not need that sort of inspiration. and had rather see his Suleika in a plain gown of his choosing, than dressed in all the splendors of the East by any other hand."

"Come, then, we must find some better souvenir of your visit, for I never let any one go away empty-handed;" with that he dipped again int.) the drawer, and held up a pretty bracelet, explaining, as he offered it with unruffled composure, though she eyed it askance, attracted, yet reluctant, a charming picture of doubt and desire, —

"Here are the Nine Muses, cut in many-tinted lava. See how well the workman suited the color to the attribute of each Muse. Urania is blue; Erato, this soft pink; Terpsichore, violet; Euterpe and Thalia, black and white; and the others, these fine shades of yellow, dun, and drab. Thar pleases you, I know; so let me put it on,"

It did please her; and she stretched out her hand to accept it, gratified, yet conscious all the while of the antagonistic spirit which often seized her when with Helwyze. He put on the bracelet with a satisfied air; but the clasp was imperfect, and, at the first turn of the round wrist, the Nine Muses fell to the ground.

"It is too heavy. I am not made to wear handcuffs of any sort, you see : they will not stay on, so it is of no use to try;" and Gladys picked up the trinket with an odd sense of relief; though poor Erato was cracked, and Thalia, like Fielding's fair Amelia, had a broken nose. She rose to lay it on the table, and, as she turned away, her eye went to the clock, as if reproaching herself for that brief forgetfulness of her husband. Half amused, half annoyed, and bent on having his own way, even in so small a thing as this, Helwyze drew up a chair, and, setting a Japanese tray upon the table, said, invitingly, —

"Come and see if these are more to your taste, since fine raiment and foolish ornaments fail to tempt you."

"Oh, how curious and beautiful!" cried Gladys, looking down upon a collection of Hindoo gods and goddesses, in ebony or ivory : some hideous, some lovely, all carved with wonderful delicacy, and each with its appropriate symbol, — Vishnu, and his serpent; Brahma, in the sacred lotus; Siva, with seven races; Kreeshna, the destroyer, with many mouths; Varoon, god of the ocean; and Kama, the Indian Cupid, bearing his bow of sugar-cane strung with bees, to typify love's sting as well as sweetness. Tins last Gladys examined longest, and kept in her hand as if it. charmed her; for the minute face of the youth was beautiful. the slender figure full of grace, and the ivory spotless.

"You choose him for your ' dol? and well you may, for he looks like Felix. Mine, if I have one, is Siva, goddess of Fate, ugly, but powerful."

"I will have no idol, — not even Felix, though I sometimes fear I may make one of him before I know it;" and Gladys put back the little figure with a guilty look, as she confessed the great temptation that beset her.

"You are wise: idols are apt to have feet of clay, and tumble down in spite of our blind adoration. Better be a Buddhist, and have no god but our own awakened thought; ' the highest wisdom,' as it is called," said Helwyze , who had lately been busy with the Sakya Mum. ano regarded all religions with calm impartiality.

"These are false gods, and we are done with them, since we know the true one," began Gladys, understanding him; for she had read aloud the life of Gautama Buddha, and enjoyed it as a legend; while he found its mystic symbolism attractive, and nothing repellent in its idolatry.

"But do we? How can you prove it? "

"It needs no proving; the knowledge of it was born in me, grows with my growth, and is the life of my life," cried Gladys, out of the fulness of that natural religion which requires no revelation except such as experience brings to strengthen and purify it.

"All are not so easily satisfied as you," he said, in the sceptical tone which always tried both her patience and her courage; for, woman-like, she could feel the truth of things, but could not reason about them. He saw her face kindle, and added, rapidly, having a mind to try how firmly planted the faith of the pretty Puritan was : "Most of us agree that Allah exists in some form or other, but we fall out about who is the true Prophet. You choose Jesus of Nazareth for yours; I rather incline to this Indian Saint. They are not unlike: this Prince left all to devote his life to the redemption of mankind, suffered persecutions and temptations, had his disciples, and sent out the first apostles of whom we hear; was a teacher, with his parables, miracles, and belief in transmigration or immortality. His doctri.ie is almost the same as the other; and the six virtues which secure Nirvana, or Heaven, are charily, purity, patience, courage, contemplafion, and wisdom. Come, why not take him for a model?"

Gladys listened with a mixture of perplexity and pain in her face, and her hand went involuntarily to the little cross which she always wore, but, though her eye was troubled, her voice was steady, as she answered, earnestly, —

"Because I have a nobler one. My Prince left a greater throne than yours to serve ma.n- kii d; suffered and resisted more terrible persecution and temptation; sent out wiser apostles, taught clearer truth, and preached an immortality for all. Yours died peacefully in the arms of h is friends, mine on a cross; and, though he came later, he has saved more souls than Buddha. Sir, I know little about those older religions; I am not wise enough even to argue about my own : I can only believe in it, love it, and hold fast to it, since it is all I need."

"How can you tell till you try others? This, now, is a fine one, if we are not too bigoted to look into it fairly. Wise men, who have done so, say that no faith — not even the Christian — has exercised so powerful an influence on the diminution of crime as the old, simple doctrine of Sakya Muni; and this is the only great historic religion that has not taken the sword to put down its enemies. Can you say as much for yours?"

"No; but it is worth fighting for, and I would fight, as the Maid of Orleans did for France, for this is my country. Can you say of your faith that it sustained you in sorrow, made you happy in loneliness, saved you from temptation, taught, guided, blessed you day by day with unfailing patience, wisdom, and love? I think you cannot; then why try to take mine away till you can give me a better?"

Seldom was Gladys so moved as now, for she felt as if he was about to meddle with her holy of holies; and, without stopping to reason, she resisted the attempt, sure that he would harm, not help, her, since neither his words nor example had done Felix any good.

Helwyze admired her all the more for her resistance, and thought her unusually lovely, as she stood there flushed and fervent with her plea for the faith that was so dear to her.

"Why, indeed! You would make an excellent martyr, and enjoy it. Pity that you have no chance of it, and so of being canonized as a saint afterward. That is decidedly your line. Then, you won't have any of my gods? not even this one?" he asked, holding up the handsome Kama, with a smile.

"No, not even that. I will have only one God, and you may keep your idols for those who believe in them My faith may not be the oldest, but it is the best, if one may judge of the two religions by the happiness and peace they give," answered Gladys, taking refuge in a very womanly, yet most convincing, argument, she thought, as she pointed to the mirror, which reflected both figures in its clear depths.

Helwyze looked, and though without an atom of vanity, the sight could not but be trying, the contrast was so great between her glad, young face, and his, so melancholy and prematurely old.

"Satrna, Tama — Truth and Darkness," he muttered to himself; adding aloud, with a vengeful sort of satisfaction in shocking her pious nature, —

"But I have no religion; so that defiant little speech is quite thrown away, my friend."

It did shod her; for, though she had suspected the fact, there was something dreadful in hearing him confess it, in a tone which proved his sincerity.

"Mr. Helwyze, do you really mean that you believe in nothing invisible and divine? no life beyond this? no God, no Christ to bless and save?" she asked, hardly knowing how to put the question, as she drew back dismayed, but still incredulous.

"Yes."

He was both surprised, and rather annoyed, to find that it cost him an effort to give even that short answer, with those innocent eyes looking so anxiously up at him, full of a sad wonder, then dim with sudden dew, as she said eagerly, forgetting every thing but a great compassion, —

"O sir, it is impossible! You think so now; but when you love and trust some human creature more than yourself, then you will find that you do believe in Him who gives such happiness, and be glad to own it."

"Perhaps. Meantime you will not make me happy by letting me give you any thing; why is it, Gladys?"

The black brows were knit, and he looked impatient with himself or her. She saw it, and exclaimed with the sweetest penitence, —

"Give me your pardon for speaking so frankly. I mean no disrespect; but I cannot help it when you say such things, though I know that gratitude should keep me silent."

"I like it. Do not take yourself to task for that, or trouble about me. There are many roads, and sooner or later we shall all reach heaven, I suppose, — if there is one," he added, with a shrug, which spoiled the smile that went before.

X.

GLADYS stood silent for a moment, with her eyes fixed on the little figures, longing for wisdom to convince this man, whom she regarded with mingled pity, admiration and distrust, that he could not walk by his own light alone. He guessed the impulse that kept her there, longed to have her stay, and felt a sudden desire to reinstate himself in her good opinion. That wish, or the hope to keep her by some new and still more powerful allurement, seemed to actuate him as he hastily thrust the gods and goddesses out of sight, and opened another drawer, with a quick glance over his shoulder towards that inner room.

At that instant the clock struck, and Gladys started, saying, in a tone of fond despair, — “ Where is Felix? Will he never come?” “ I heard him raging about some time ago, but perfect silence followed, so I suspect he caught the tormenting word, idea, or fancy, and is busy pinning it,” answered Helwyze, shutting the drawer as suddenly as he opened it, with a frown which Gladys did not see; for she had turned away, forgetting him and his salvation in the one absorbing interest of her life.

“How long it takes to write a poem! Three whole months, for he began in September; and ic was not to be a long one, he said.”

He means this to be a masterpiece, so labors like a galley-slave, and can find no rest till it is done. Good practice, but to little purpose, I am afn’id. Poetry, even the best, is not profitable now-a-days, I am told,” added Helwyze, speaking with a sort of satisfaction which he could not conceal.

“Who cares for the profit? It is the fame Felix wants, and works for,” answered Gladys, defending the absent with wifely warmth.

“True, but he would not reject the fortune if it came. He is not one of the ethereal sort, who can live on glory and a crust; his gingerbread must not only be gilded, but solid and well-spiced beside. You adore your poet, respect also the worldly wisdom of your spouse, madame.”

When Helwyze sneered, Gladys was silent; so now she mused again, leaning on the high back of the chair which she longed to see occupied. He mused also, with his eyes upon the fire, fingers idly tapping, and a furtive smile round his mouth, as if some purpose was taking shape in that busy brain of his. Suddenly he spoke, in a tone of kindly interest, well knowing where her thoughts were, and anxious to end her weary waiting.

“Perhaps the poor fellow has fallen asleep, tired out with striving after immortality. Go and wake him, if you will, for it is time he rested.”

"May I? He does not like to be disturbed; but I fear he is ill: he has eaten scarcely any thing for days, and looks so pale it troubles me. I will peep first; and if he is busy, creep away without a word."

Stepping toward the one forbidden, yet most fascinating spot in all the house, she softly opened the door and looked in. Canaris was there, apparently asleep, as Helwyze thought; for his head lay on his folded arms as if both-were weary. Glancing over her shoulder with a nod and a smile, Gladys went in, anxious to wake and comfort him; for the little room looked solitary, dark, and cold, with dead ashes on the hearth, the student lamp burning dimly, and the food she had brought him hours ago still standing untasted, among the blotted sheets strewn all about. At her first touch he looked up, and she was frightened by the expression of his face, it was so desperately miserable.

"Dear, what is it?" she asked, quickly, with her arms about him, as if defying the unknown trouble to reach him there.

"Disappointment, — nothing else;" and he leaned his head against her, grateful for sympathy, since she could give no other help.

"You mean your book, which does not satisfy you even yet?" she said, interpreting the significance of the weary, yet restless, look he wore.

"It never will! I have toiled and tried, with all my heart and soul and mind, if ever a man did; but I cannot do it, Gladys. It torments me, and I cannot escape from it; because, though it is all here in my brain, it will not be expressed in words."

"Do not try any more; rest now, and by and by, perhaps, it will be easier. You have worked too hard, and are worn out; forget the book, and come and let me take care of you. It breaks my heart to see you so."

"I was doing it for your sake, — all for you; and I thought this time it would be very good, since my purpose was a just and generous one. But it is not, and I hate it!"

With a passionate gesture, Canaris hurled a pile of manuscript into the further corner of the room, and pushed his wife from him, as if she too were an affliction and a disappointment. It grieved her bitterly; but she would not be repulsed; and, holding fast in both her own the hand that was about to grasp another sheaf of papers, she cried, with a tone of tender authority, which both controlled and touched him, —

"No, no, you shall not, Felix! Put me away, but do not spoil the book; it has cost us both too much."

"Not you; forgive me, it is myself with whom I am vexed;" and Canaris penitently kissed the hands that held his, remembering that she could not know the true cause of his effort and regret.

"I shall be jealous, if I find that I have given you up so long in vain. I must have something to repay me for the loss of your society all this weary time. I have worked to fill your place: give me my reward."

"Have you missed me, then? I thought you happy enough with Helwyze and the books."

"Missed you! happy enough! O Felix! you do not know me, if you think I can be happy without you. He is kind, but only a friend; and all the books in the wide world are not as much to me as the one you treat so cruelly." She clasped tightly the hands she held, and looked into his face with eyes full of unutterable love. Such tender flattery could not but soothe, such tearful reproach fad to soften, a far prouder, harder man than Canaris.

"What reward will you have?" he asked, making an effort to be cheerful for her sake.

"Eat, drink, and rest; then read me every word you have written. I am no critic; but I would try to be impartial: love makes even the ignorant wise, and I shall see the beauty which I know is in it."

"I put you there, or tried; so truth and beauty should be in a. Some time you shall hear it, but not now. I could not read it to-night, perhaps never; it is such a poor, pale shadow of the thing I meant it to be."

"Let me read it," said a voice behind them; and Helwyze stood upon the threshold, wearing his most benignant aspect.

"You?" ejaculated Canaris; while Gladys shrunk a little, as if the proposition did not please her.

"Why not? Young poets never read their own verses well; yet what could be more soothing to the most timorous or vain than to hear them read by an admiring and sympathetic friend? Come, let me have my reward, as well as Gladys;" and Helwyze laid his hand upon the unscattered pile of manuscript.

"A penance, rather. It is so blurred, so rough, you could not read it; then the fatigue," — began Canaris, pleased, yet reluctant still.

"I can read any thing, make rough places smooth, and not tire, for I have a great interest in this story. He has shown me some of it, and it is good."

Helwyze spoke to Gladys, and his last words conquered her reluctance, whetted her curiosity; he looked at Canaris, and his glance inspired hope, his offer tempted, for his voice could make music of any thing, his praise would be both valuable and cheering.

"Let him, Felix, since he is so kind, I so impatient that I do not want to wait;" and Gladys went to gather up the leaves, which had flown wildly about the room.

"Leave those, I will sort them while you begin. The first part is all here. I am sick of it, and so will you be, before you are through. Go, love, or I may revoke permission, and make the bonfire yet.”

Canar,’s laughed as he waved her away; and Gladys, seeing that the cloud had lifted, willingly obeyed, lingering only to give a touch to the dainty luncheon, which was none the worse for being cold.

“Dear, eat and drink, then my feast will be the sweeter.”

“I will; I’ll eat and drink stupendously when you are gone; I wish you bon appetit” he said, filling the glass, and smiling as he drank.

Contented now, Gladys hurried away, to find Helwyze already seated by the study-table, with the manuscript laid open before him. He looked up, wearing an expression of such pleasurable excitement, that it augured well for what was coming, and she slipped into the chair beside the one set ready for Canaris on the opposite side of the hearth, still hoping he would come and take if. Helwyze began, and soon she forgot every thing, — carried away by the smoothly flowing current of the story which he read so well. A metrical romance, such as many a lover might have imagined in the first inspiration of the great passion, but few could have painted with such skill. A very human story, bui all the truer and sweeter for that fact. The men and women in it were full of vitality and color;

their faces spoke, hearts beat, words glowed; and they seemed to live before the listener’s eye, as if endowed with eloquent flesh and blood.

Gladys forgot their creator utterly, but Helwyze did not; and even while reading on with steadily increasing effect, glanced now and then towards that inner room, where, after a moment of unnecessary bustle, perfect silence reigned. Presently a shadow flickered on the ceiling, a shadow bent as if listening eagerly, though not a sound betrayed its approach as it seemed to glide and vanish behind the tall screen which stood before the door. Gladys saw nothing, her face being intent upon the reader, her thoughts absorbed in following the heart-history of the woman in whom she could not help finding a likeness to herself.

Helwyze saw the shadow, however, and laughed inwardly, as if to see the singer irresistibly drawn by his own music. But no visible smile betrayed this knowledge; and the tale went on with deepening power and pathos, till at its most passionate point he paused.

“Go on; oh, pray go on!” cried Gladys, breathlessly.

“Are you not tired of it?” asked Helwyze, with a keen look.

“No, no! You are? Then let me read.”

“Not I; but there is no more here. Ask Felix if we may go on.”

“I must! I will! Where is he?” and Gladys huiried round the screen, to find Canaris flung down an) way upon a seat, looking almost as excited as herseif.

“Ah.” she cried, delightedly, “you could not keep away! You know that it is good, and you are glad and proud, although you will not own it.”

“Am I? Are you?” he asked, reading the answer in her face, before she could whisper, with the look of mingled awe and adoration which she always wore when speaking of him as a poet, —

“Never can I tell you what I feel. It almost frightens me to find how well you know me and yourself, and other hearts like ours. What gives you this wonderful power, and shows you how to use it?”

“Don’t praise it too much, or I shall wish I had destroyed, instead of re-sorting, the second part for you to hear.” Canaris spoke almost roughly, and rose, as if about to go and do it now. But Gladys caught his hand, say ing gayly, as she drew him out into the fire-light with persuasive energy. —

“That you shall never do; but come and enjoy it with us. You need not be so modest, for you know you like it. Now I am perfectly happy.”

She looked so, as she saw her husband sink into the tall-backed chair, and took her place beside him, laughing at the almost comic mixture of sternness, resignation, and impatience betrayed by his set lips, silent acquiescence, and excited eyes.

“Now we are ready;” and Gladys folded her hands with the rapturous contentment of a child at its first fairy spectacle.

“All but the story. I will fetch it;” and Helwyze stepped quickly behind the screen before either could stir.

Gladys half rose, but Canaris drew her down again/whispering, in an almost resentful tone, —

“Let him, if he will; you wait on him too much. I put the papers in order; he will read them easily enough.”

“Nay, do not be angry, dear; he does it to please me, and surely no one could read it better. I know you would feel too much to do it well,” she answered, her hand in his, with its most soothing touch.

There was no time for more. Helwyze returned, and, after a hasty resettling of the manuscript, read on, without pausing, to the story’s end, as if unconscious of fatigue, and bent on doing justice to the power of the protegee whose success was his benefactor’s best reward. At first, Gladys glanced at her husband from time to time; but presently the living man beside her grew less real than that other, who, despite a new name and country, strange surroundings, and far different circumstances, was so unmistakably the same, that she could not help feeling and following his fate to its close, with an interest almost as intense as if, in very truth, she saw Canaris going to his end. Her interest in the woman lessened, and was lost in her eagerness to have the hero worthy of the love she gave, the honor others felt for him; and, when the romance brought him to defeat and death, she was so wrought upon by this illusion, that she fell into a passion of sudden tears, weeping as she had never wept before.

Felix sat motionless, his hand over his eyes, lips closely folded, lest they should betray too much emotion; the irresistible conviction that it was good, strengthening every instant, till he felt only the fascination and excitement of an hour, which foretold others even more delicious. When the tale ended, the melodious voice grew silent, and nothing was heard but the eloquent sobbing of a woman. Words seemed unnecessary, and none were uttered for several minutes, then Helwyze asked briefly, —

“Shall we burn it?”

As briefly Canaris answered “ No;” and Gladys, quickly recovering the self-control so seldom lost, looked up with “ a face, clear shining after rain,” as she said in the emphatic tone of deepest feeling, —

“It would be like burning a live thing. But, Felix, you must not kill that man: I cannot have him die so. Let him live to conquer all his enemies, the worst in himself; then, if you must end tragically, let the woman go; she would not care, if he were safe.”

“But she is the heroine of the piece; and, if it does not end with her lamenting over the fallen hero, the dramatic point is lost,” said Helwyze; for Canaris had sprung up, and was walking restlessly about the room, as if the spirits he had evoked were too strong to be laid even by himself.

“I know nothing about that; but I feel the moral point would be lost, if it is not changed. Surely, powerful as pity is, a lofty admiration is better; and this poem would be nobler, in every way, if that man ends by living well, than by dying ignominiously in spite of his courage. I cannot explain it, but I am sure it is so; and I will not let Felix spoil his best piece of work by such a mistake.”

“Then you like it? You would be happy if I changed and let it go before the world, for your sake more than for my own?”

Canaris paused beside her, pale with some emotion stronger than gratified vanity or ambitious hope. Gladys thought if was love; and, carried out of herself by the tender pride that overflowed her heart and would not be controlled, she let an action, more eloquent than any words, express the happiness she was the first to feel, the homage she would be the first to pay. Kneeling before him, she clasped her hands together, and looked up at him with cheeks still wet, lips still tremulous, eyes still full of wonder, admiration,, fervent gratitude, and love.

In one usually so self-restrained as Gladys such joyful abandonment was doubly captivating and impressive. Canaris felt it so; and, lifting her up. pressed her to a heart whose loud throbbing thanked her, even while he gently turned her face away, as if he could not bear to see and receive such worship from so pure a source. The unexpected humility in his voice touched her strangely, and made her feel more deeply than ever how genuine was the genius which should yet make him great, as well as beloved.

"I will do what you wish, for you see more clearly than I. You shall be happy, and I will be proud of doing it, even if no one else sees any good in my work."

"They will! they must! It may not be the grandest thing you will ever do, but it is so human, it cannot fail to touch and charm; and to me that is as great an act as to astonish or dazzle by splendid learning or wonderful wit. Make it noble as well as beautiful, then people will love as well as praise you."

"I will try, Gladys. I see now what I should have written, and — if I can — it shall be done."

"I promised you inspiration, you remember: have I not kept my word?" asked Helwyze, forgotten, and content to be forgotten, until now.

Canaris looked up quickly; but there was no gratitude in his face, as he answered, with his hand on the head he pressed against his shoulder, and a certain subdued passion in his voice, —

"You have: not the highest inspiration; but, if she is happy, it will atone for much "

XI.

AND Gladys was happy for a little while.

Canaris labored doggedly till all was finished as she wished. Helwyze lent the aid which commands celerity; and early in the new year the book came out, to win for itself and its author the admiration and regard she had prophesied. But while the outside world, with which she had little to do except through her husband, rejoiced over him and his work, she, in her own small world, where he was all in all, was finding cause to wonder and grieve at the change which took place in him.

“I have done my task, now let me play,” he said; and play he did, quite as energetically as he had worked, though to far less purpose. Praise seemed to intoxicate him, for he appeared to forget every thing else, and bask in its sunshine, as if he never could have enough of it. His satisfaction would have been called egregious vanity, had it not been so gracefully expressed, and the work done so excellent that all agreed the young man had a right to be proud of it, arid enjoy his reward as he pleased. He went out much, being again caressed and feted to his heart’s content, leaving Gladys to amuse Helwyze; for a very little of this sort of gayety satisfied her, and there was something painful to her in the almost feverish eagerness with which her husband sought and enjoyed excitement of all kinds. Glad and proud though she was, it troubled her to see him as utterly engrossed as if existence had no higher aim than the most refined and varied pleasure; and she began to feel that, though the task was done, she had not got him back again from that other mistress, who seemed to have bewitched him with her dazzling charms.

“He will soon have enough of it, and return to us none the worse. Remember how young he is; how natural that he should love pleasure overmuch, when he gets it, since he has had so little hitherto,” said Helwyze, answering the silent trouble in the face of Gladys; for she never spoke of her daily increasing anxiety.

“But it does not seem to make him happy; and for that reason I sometimes think it cannot be the best kind of pleasure for him,” answered Gladys, remembering how flushed and weary he had been when he came in last night, so late that it was nearly dawn.

“He is one who will taste all kinds, and not be contented till he has had his fill. Roaming about Europe with that bad, brilliant father of his gave him glimpses of many things which he was too poor to enjoy then, but not too young to remember and desire now, when it is possible to gratify the wish. Let him go, he will come back to you when he is tired. It is the only way to manage him, I find.”

But Gladys did not think so; and, finding that Helwyze would not speak, she resolved that she would venture to do it, for many things disturbed her, which wifely loyalty forbade her to repeat; as well as a feeling that Helwyze would not see cause for anxiety in her simple fears, since he encouraged Felix in this reckless gayety.

Some hours later, she found Canaris newly risen, sitting at his escritoire in their own room, with a strew of gold and notes before him, which he affected to be counting busily; though when she entered she had seen him in a despondent attitude, doing nothing.

“How pale you look. Why will you stay so late and get these weary headaches?” she asked, stroking the thick locks off his forehead with a caressing touch.

“Too late I stayed, forgive the crime;
Unheeded flew the hours;
For lightly falls the foot of time,
That only treads on flowtrs.’ “

sang Canaris, looking up at her with an assumption of mirth, sadder than the melancholy which it could not wholly hide.

“You make light of it, Felix; but I am sure you will fail, if you do not get more sleep and quieter dreams,” she said, still smoothing the glossy dark rings of which she was so proud.

“Cara mia, what do you know about my dreams?” he asked, with a hint of surprise in the manner, which was still careless.

“You toss about, and talk so wildly sometimes, that it troubles me to hear you.”

“I will stop it at once. What do I talk about? Something amusing, I hope,” he asked, quickly.

“That I cannot tell, for you speak in French or Italian; but you sigh terribly, and often seem angry or excited about something.”

“That is odd. I do not remember my dreafns, but it is little wonder my poor wits arc distraught, after all they have been through lately. Did I talk last night, and spoil your sleep, love?” asked Canaris, idly piling up a little heap of coins, though listening intently for her reply.

“Yes: you seemed very busy, and said more than once, ‘ Le jeu est fait, rien ne va plus.’ Rouge gagne et couleur,’ — or, ‘Rouge perd et couleur gagne.’ I know what those words mean, because I have read them in a novel; and they trouble me from your lips, Felix.”

“I must have been dreaming of a week I once spent in Homberg, with my father. We don’t do that sort of thing here.”

“Not under the same name, perhaps. Dear, do you ever play?” asked Gladys, leaning her cheek against the head which had sunk a little, as he leaned forward to smooth out the crumpled notes before him.

“Why not? One must amuse one’s self.”

“Not so. Please promise that you will try some safer way? This is not — honest.” She hesitated over the last word, for his tone had been short and sharp, but uttered it bravely, and stole an arm about his neck, mutely asking pardon for the speech which cost her so much.

“What is? Life is all a lottery, and one must keep trying one’s luck while the wheel goes round; for prizes are few and blanks many, you know.”

“All, do not speak in that reckless way. Forgive me for asking questions; but you are ail I have, and I must take care of you, since no one else has the right.”

V Or the will. Ask what you please. I will tell you any thing, my visible conscience;” and Canaris took her in the circle of his arm. subdued by the courageous tenderness that made her what he called her “Is that all yours?” she whispered, pointing a small forefinger rather sternly at the money before h.m, and sweetening the question with a kiss.

“No, it is yours, every penny of it. Put it in the little drawer, and make merry with it, else I shall be sorry I won it for you.”

“That I cannot do. Please do not ask me. There is always enough in the little drawer for me, and I like better to use the money you have earned.”

“Say, rather, the salary which you earn and / spend. It is all wrong, Gladys; but I cannot help it!” and Canaris pushed away his winnings, as if he despised them and himself.

“It is my fault that you did this, because I begged you not to let Mr. Helwyze give me so much, I can take any thing from you. for I love you, but not from him; so you try to make me think you have enough to gratify my every wish. Is not that true?”

“Yes: I hate to have you accept any thing from him, and find it harder to do so myself, than before you came. Yet I cannot help liking play; for ft is an inherited taste, and he knows it.”

“And does not warn you?”

“Not he: I inherit my father’s luck as well as skill, and Helwyze enjoys hearing of my success in this, as in other things. We used to play together, till he tired of it. There is nothing equal to it when one is tormented with ennui!”

“Felix, I fear that, though a kind friend, he is not a wise one. Why does he encourage your vices, and take no interest in strengthening your virtues? Forgive me, but we all have both, and I want you to be as good as you are gifted," she said, with such an earnest, tender face, he could not feel offended.

"He does not care for that. The contest between the good and evil in me interests him most, for he knows how to lay his hand on the weak or wicked spots in a man's heart; and playing with other people's passions is his favorite amusement. Have you not discovered this?"

Canaris spoke gloomily, and Gladys shivered as she held him closer, and answered in a whisper, —

"Yes, I feel as if under a microscope when with him; yet he is very kind to me, and very- patient with my ignorance. Felix, is he trying to discover the evil in me, when he gives me strange things to read, and sits watching me while I do it? "

"Gott bewahre! — but of this I am sure, he will find no evil in you, my white-souled little wife, unless he puts it there. Gladys, refuse to read what pains and puzzles you. I will not let him vex your peace. Can he not be content with me, since I am his, body and soul?"

Canaris put her hastily away, to walk the room with a new sense of wrong hot within him at the thought of the dangers into which he had brought her against his will. But Gladys, caring only for him, ventured to add, with her kindling eyes upon his troubled face, —

"I will not let him vex your peace! Refuse to do the things which you feel are wrong, lest what are only pleasures now may become terrible temptations by and by. I love and trust you as he never can; I will not believe your vices stronger than your virtues; and I will defend you, if he tries to harm the husband God has given me."

"Bless you for that! it is so long since I have had any one to care for me, that I forget my duty to you. I am tired of all this froth and folly; I will stay at home hereafter; that will be safest, if not happiest."

He began impetuously, but his voice fell, and was almost inaudible at the last word, as he turned away to hide the expression of regret which he could not disguise. But Gladys heard and saw, and the vague fear which sometimes haunted her stirred again, and took form in the bitter thought, " Home is not happy: am I the cause?"

She put it from her instantly, as if doubt were dishonor, and spoke out in the cordial tone which always cheered and soothed him, —

"It shall be both, if I can make it so. Let me try, and perhaps I can do for you what Mr. Helwyze says I have done for him, — caused him to forget his troubles, and be glad he is alive."

Canaris swung round with a peculiar expression on his face.

"He says that, does he? Then he is satisfied with his bargain! I thought as much, though he never condescended to confess it to me."

"What bargain, Felix?"

"The pair of us. We were costly, but he got us, as he gets every thing he sets his heart upon. He was growing tired of me; but when I would have gone, he kept me, by making it possible for me to win you for myself — and him. Six months between us have shown you this, I know, and it is in vain to hide from you how much I long to break away and be free again — if I ever can."

He looked ready to break away at once, and Gladys sympathized with him, seeing now the cause of his unrest.

"I know the feeling, for I too am tired of this life; not because it is so quiet, but so divided. I want to live for you alone, no matter how poor and humble my place may be. Now I am so little with you, I sometimes feel as if I should grow less and less to you, till I am nothing but a burden and a stumbling-block. Can we not go, and be happy somewhere else? must we stay here all our lives?" she asked, confessing the desire which had been strengthening rapidly of late.

"While he lives I must stay, if he wants me. I cannot be ungrateful. Remember all he has done for me. It will not be long to wait, perhaps."

Canaris spoke huiriedly, as if regretting his involuntary outburst, and anxious to atone for it by the submission which always seemed at war with some stronger, if not nobler, sentiment. Gladys sat silent, lost in thought; while her husband swept the ill-gotten money into a drawer, and locked it up, as if relieved to have it out of sight. Soon the cloud lifted, however; and going to him, as he stood at the window, looking out with the air of a caged eagle, she said, with her hand upon his arm, —

"You are right: we will be grateful and patient; but while we wait we must work, because in that one always finds strength and comfort. What can we do to earn the wherewithal to found our own little home upon when this is gone? I have nothing valuable; have you?"

"Nothing but this;" and he touched the bright head beside him, recalling the moment when she said her hair was all the gold she had.

Gladys remembered it as well, and the promise then made to help him, both as wife and woman. The time seemed to have come; and, taking counsel of her own integrity, she had dared to speak in the " sincere voice that made truth sweeter than falsehood." Now she tried, in her simple way, to show how the self-respect he seemed in danger of losing might be preserved by a task whose purpose would be both salvation and reward.

"Then let the wit inside this head of mine show you how to turn an honest penny,” she began, unfolding her plan with an enthusiasm which redeemed its most prosaic, features. “ Mr. Helwyze says that even the best poetry is not profitable, except in fame. That you already have; and pride and pleasure in the new book is enough, without spoiling it by being vexed about the money it may bring. But you can use your pen in other ways, before it is time to write another poem. One of these ways is the translation of that curious Spanish book you were speaking of the other day. That will bring something, as it is rare and old; and you, that have half a dozen languages at your tongue’s end, can easily find plenty of such work, now that you do not absolutely need it.”

“That sounds a little bitter, Gladys. Don’t let my resentful temper spoil your sweet one.”

“I am learning fast; among other things, that to him who hath, more shall be given; so you, being a successful man, may hope for plenty of help from all now, though you were left to starve, when a kind word would have saved you so much suffering,” Gladys answered, not bitterly, but with a woman’s pitiful memory of the wrongs done those dearest her.

“God knows it would!” ejaculated Canaris, with unusual fervor.

“Mr. Helwyze remembers that, I think; and this is perhaps the reason why he is so generous now. Too much so for your good, I fear; and so I speak, because, young as I am, I cannot help trying to watch over you, as a wife should.”

“I like it, Gladys. I am old, in many things, for my years, but a boy still in love, and you must teach me how to be worthy of all you give so generously and sweetly.”

“Do I give the most?”

“All women do, they say. But go on, and tell the rest of this fine plan of yours. While I use my polyglot accomplishments, what becomes of you?” he asked, hastily returning to the safer subject; for the wistful look in her eyes smote him to the heart.

“I work also. You are still Mr. Helwyze’s hom7ne d’affaires, as he calls you; I am still his reader. But when he does not need me, I shall take up my old craft again, and embroider, as I used at home. You do not know how skilful I am with the needle, and never dreamed that the initials on the handkerchiefs you admired so much were all my work. Oh, I am a thrifty wife, though such a little one!” and Gladys broke into her clear child’s laugh, which seemed to cheer them both, as a lark’s song makes music even in a aloud.

Canaris laughed with her; for these glimpses of practical gifts and shrewd common sense in Gladys were very like the discovery of a rock under hs veil of moss, or garland of airy columbines.

But what will he say to all this?” asked the young man, with a downward gesture of the finger, and in his eye a glimmer of malicious satisfaction at the thought of having at least one secret in which Helwyze had no part.

“We need not tell him. It is nothing to him what we do up here. Let him find out, if he cares to know,” answered Gladys, with a charmingly mutinous air, as she tripped away to her own little room.

“He will care, and he will, find out. He has no right; but that will not stop him,” returned Canaris, following to lean in the door-way, and watch her kneeling before a great basket, from which she pulled reels of gay silk, unfinished bits of work, and fragments of old lace.

“See!” she said, holding up one of the latter, “I can both make and mend; and one who is clever at this sort of thing can earn a pretty penny in a quiet way. Through my old employer I can get all the work I want; so please do not forbid it, Felix: I should be so much happier, if I might?”

“I will forbid nothing that makes you happy. But Helwyze will be exceeding wroth when he* discovers it, unless the absurdity of beggars living in a palace strikes him as it does me.”

“I am not afraid!”

“You never saw him in a rage : I have. Quite calm and cool, but rather awful, as he withers you with a look, or drives you half wild with a word that stings like a whip, and makes you hate him.”

“Still I would not fear him, unless I had done wrong.”

“He makes you feel so, whether you have or not; and you ask pardon for doing what you know is right. It is singular, but he certainly does make black seem white, sometimes,” mused Canaris, knitting his brows with the old perplexity.

“I am afraid so;” and Gladys folded up a sigh in the parcel of rosy floss she laid away. Then she chased the frown from her husband’s face by talking blithely of the home they would yet earn and enjoy together.

Conscious that things were more amiss with him than she suspected, Canaris was glad to try the new cure, and soon found it so helpful, that he was anxious to continue it. Very pleasant were the hours they spent together in their own rooms, when the duties they owed Helwyze were done; all the pleasanter for them, perhaps, because this domestic league of theirs shut him out from their real life as inevitably as it drew them nearer to one another.

The task now in hand was one that Canaris could do easily and well; and Gladys’s example kept him at it when the charm of novelty was gone. While he wrote she sat near, so quietly busy, that he often forgot her presence; but when he looked up, the glance of approval, the encouraging word, the tender smile, were always ready, and wonderfully inspiring; for this sweet comrade grew dearer day by day. While he rested she still worked; and he loved to watch the flowery wonders gruw beneath her needle, swift as skful. Now a golden wheat-ear, a scarlet poppy, a blue violet; or the white embroidery, that made his eyes ache with following the tiny stitches, which seemed to sow seed-pearls along a hem, weave graceful ciphers, or make lace-work like a cobweb.

Something in it pleased his artistic sense of the beautiful, and soothed him, as did the conversation that naturally went on between them. Oftenest he talked, telling her more of his varied life than any other human being knew; and in these confidences she found the clew to many things which had pained’or puzzled her before; because, spite of her love, Gladys was clearsighted, even against her will. Then she would answer with the story of her monotonous days, her lonely labors, dreams, and hopes; and they would comfort one another by making pictures of a future too beautiful ever to be true.

Helwyze was quick to perceive the new change which came over Felix, the happy peace which had returned to Gladys. He “ did care, and he did find out,” what the young people were about. At first he smiled at the girl’s delusion in believing that she could fix a nature so mercurial as that of Canaris, but did not wonder at his yielding, for a time at least, to such tender persuasion; and, calling them “ a pair of innocents,” Helwyze let them alone, till he discovered that his power was in danger.

Presently, he began to miss the sense of undivided control which was so agreeable to him. Canaris was as serviceable as ever, but no longer made him sole confidant, counsellor, and friend. Gladys was scrupulously faithful still, but her intense interest in his world of books was much lessened : for she was reading a more engrossing volume than any of these, — the heart of the man she loved. Something was gone which he had bargained for, thought he had secured, and now felt wronged at losing, — an indescribable chrrm, especially pervading his intercourse with Gladys; for this friendship, sweet as honey, pure as dew, had just begun to blossom, when a chilly breath seemed to check its progress, leaving only cheerful service, not the spontaneous devotion which had been so much to him, He said nothing; but for all his imperturbability, t annoyed him, as the gnat annoyed the lion; and, though scarcely acknowledged even to himself, it lurked under various moods and motives, impelling him to words and acts which produced dangerous consequences.

“Pray forgive us, we are very late.”

“Time goes so fast, we quite forgot!” exclaimed Felix and Gladys both together, as they hurried into the library, one bright March morning, looking so blithe and young, that Helwyze suddenly felt old and sad and bitter- hearted, as if they had stolen something from him.

“I have learned to wait,” he said, with the cold brevity which was the only sign of displeasure Gladys ever saw in him.

In remorseful silence she hastened to find her place in the book they were reading; but Canaris, who seemed bubbling over with good spirits, took no notice of the chill, and asked, with unabated cheerfulness, —

"Any commissions, sir, beside these letters? I feel as if I ' could put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes,' it is such a glorious, springlike day."

"Nothing but the letters. Stay a moment, while I add another;" and, taking up the pen he had laid by, Helwyze wrote hastily, —

"To Olivia at the South : —

"The swallows will be returning soon; return with them, if you can. I am deadly dull: come and make a little mischief to amuse me. I miss
you.
Jasper."

Sealing and directing this, he handed it to Canaris, who had been whispering to Gladys more like a lover than a husband of half a year's standing. Something in the elder man's face made the younger glance involuntarily at the letter as he took it.

"Olivia? I promised to write her, but I " —

"Dared not?"

"No: I forgot it;" and Canaris went off, laughing at the grande passion, which now seemed very foolish and far away.

"This time, I think, you will remember, for I mean to fight fire with fire," thought Helwyze, with a grim smile, such as Louis XI. might have worn when sending some gallant young knight to carry his own death-warrant.

XII.

OLIVIA came before the swallows; for the three words, “ I miss you,” would have brought her from the ends of the earth, had she exiled herself so far. She had waited for him to want and call her, as he often did when others wearied or failed him. Seldom had so long a time passed without some word from him; and endless doubts, fears, conjectures, had harassed her, as month after month went by, and no summons came. Now she hastened, ready for any thing he might ask of her, since her reward would be a glimpse of the only heaven she knew.

“Amuse Felix: he is falling in love with his wife, and it spoils both of them “for my use. He says he has forgotten you. Come often, and teach him to remember, as penalty for his bad taste and manners,” was the single order Helwyze gave; but Olivia needed no other; and, for the sake of coming often, would have smiled upon a far less agreeable man than Canaris.

Gladys tried to welcome the new guest cordially, as an unsuspicious dove might have welcomed a falcon to its peaceful cote; hut her heart sunk when she found her happy quiet sorely disturbed, her husband’s place deserted, and the old glamour slowly returning to separate them, in spite of all her gentle arts. For Canaris, feeling quite safe in the sincere affection which now bound him to his wife, was foolhardy in his desire to show Olivia how heart-whole he nad become. This piqued her irresistible-, because Helwyze was looking on, and she would win his approval at any cost. So these three, from divers motives, joined together to teach poor Gladys how much a woman can suffer with silent fortitude and make no sign.

The weeks that followed seemed unusually gay and sunny ones; for April came in blandly, and Olivia made a pleasant stir throughout the house by her frequent visits, and the various excursions she proposed. Many of these Gladys escaped; for her pain was not the jealousy that would drive her to out-rival her rival, but the sorrowful shame and pity which made her long to hide herself, till Felix should come back and be forgiven. Helwyze naturally declined the long drives, the exhilarating rides in the bright spring weather, which were so attractive to the younger man, and sat at home watching Gladys, now more absorbingly interesting than ever. He could not but admire the patience, strength, and dignity of the creature; for she made no complaint, showed no suspicion, asked no advice, but went straight on, like one who followed with faltering feet, but unwavering eye, the single star in all the sky that would lead her right. A craving curiosity to know what she felt and thought possessed him, and he invited confidence by unwonted kindliness, as well as the unfailing courtesy he showed her.

But Gladys would not speak either to him or to her husband, who seemed wilfully blind to the slowly changing face, all the sadder for the smile it always wore when his eyes were on it. At first, Helwyze tried his gentlest arts; but, finding her as true as brave, was driven, by the morbid curiosity which he had indulged till it became a mania, to use means as subtle as sinful, — like a burglar, who, failing to pick a lock, grows desperate and breaks it, careless of consequences.

Taking his daily walk through the house, he once came upon Gladys watering the jardiniere, which was her especial care, and always kept full of her favorite plants. She was not singing as she worked, but seriously busy as a child, holding in both hands her little watering-pot to shower the thirsty ferns and flowers, who turned up their faces to be washed with the silent delight which was their thanks.

“See how the dear things enjoy it! I feel as if they knew and watched for me, and I never like to disappoint them of their bath,” she said, looking over her shoulder, as he paused beside her. She was used to this now, and was never surprised or startled when below stairs by his noiseless approach.

“They are doing finely. Did Moss bring; i some cyclamens? 7’hey are in full bloom now, and you are fond of them, I think?”

“Yes, here they are: both purple and while, so sweet and lovely! See how many buds this one has, I shall enjoy seeing ihem come out, they unfurl so prettily;” and, full of interest, Gladys parted the leaves to show several baby buds, whose rosy faces were just peeping from their green hoods.

Helwyze liked to see her among the flowers; for there was something peculiarly innocent and fresh about her then, as if the woman forgot her griefs, and was a girl again. It struck him anew, as she stood there in the sunshine, leaning down to tend the soft leaves and cherish the delicate buds with a caressing hand.

“Like seeks like: you are a sort of cyclamen yourself. I never observed it before, but the likeness is quite striking,” he said, with the slow smile which usually prefaced some speech which bore a double meaning.

“Am I?” and Gladys eyed the flowers, pleased, yet a little shy, of compliment from him.

“This is especially like you,” continued Helwyze, touching one of the freshest. “ Out of these strong sombre leaves rises a wraith-like blossom, with white, softly folded petals, a rosy color on its modest face, and a moat sweet perfume for those whose sense is fine enough to perceive it. Most of all, perhaps, it resembles you in this, — it hides its heart, and, if one tries to look too closely, there is danger of snapping the slender stem."

"That is its nature, and it cannot help being shy. I kneel down and look up without touching it; then one sees that it has nothing to hide," protested Gladys, following out the flower fancy, half in earnest, half in jest, for she felt there was a question and a reproach in his words.

"Perhaps not; let us see, in my way." With a light touch Helwyze turned the reluctant cyclamen upward, and in its purple cup there clung a newly fallen drop, like a secret tear.

Mute and stricken, Gladys looked at the little symbol of herself, owning, with a throb of pain, that,f in nothing else, they were alike in that.

Helwyze stood silent likewise, inhaling the taint fragrance while he softly ruffled the curled petals as if searching for another tear. Suddenly Gladys spoke out with the directness which always gave him a keen pleasure, asking, as she stretched her band involuntarily to shield .he more helpless flower, —

"Sir, why do you wish to read my heart?"

"To comfort it."

"Do I need comfort, then?"

"Do you not?"

"If I have a sorrow, God only can console me, and He only need know it. To you it should be sacred. Forgive me if, I seem ungrateful; but you cannot help me, if you would."

"Do you doubt my will? "

"I try to doubt no one; but I fear — I fear many things;" and, as if afraid of saying too much, Gladys broke off, to hurry away, wearing so strange a look that Helwyze was consumed with a desire to know its meaning.

He saw no more of her till twilight, for Canaris took her place just then, reading a foreign book, which she could not manage; but, when Felix went out, he sought one of his solitary haunts, hoping she would appear.

She did; for the day closed early with a gusty rain, and the sunset hour was gray and cold, leaving no after-glow to tint the western sky and bathe the great room in ruddy light. Pale and noiseless as a spirit, Gladys went to and fro, trying to quiet the unrest that made her nights sleepless, her days one long struggle to be patient, just, and kind. She tried to sing, but the song died in her throat; she tried to sew, but her eyes were dim, and the flower under her needle only reminded her that " pansies were for thoughts," and hers, alas! were too sad for thinking; she took up a book, but laid it down again, since Felix was not there to finish it with her. Her own rooms seemed so empty, she could not return thither when she had looked for him in vain; and, longing for some human voice to speak to her, it was a relief to come upon Helwyze sitting in his lonely corner, —

for she never now went to the library, unless duty called her.

“A dull evening, and dull company,” he said, as she paused beside him, glad to have found something to take her out of herself, for a time at least.

“Such a long day! and such a dreary night as it will be!” she answered, leaning her forehead against the window-pane, to watch the drops fall, and listen to the melancholy wind.

“Shorten the one and cheer the other, as I do sleep, dream, and forget.”

“I cannot!” and there was a world of suffering in the words that broke from her against her will.

“Try my sleep-compeller as freely as I tried yours. See, these will give you one, if not all the three desired blessings, — quiet slumber, delicious dreams, or utter oblivion for a time.”

As he spoke, Helwyze had drawn out a little bonbonniere of tortoise-shell and silver, which he always carried, and shaken into his palm half a dozen white comfits, which he offered to Gladys, with a benign expression born of real sympathy and compassion. She hesitated; and he added, in a tone of mild reproach, which smote her generous heart with compunction, —

“Since I may not even try to minister to your troubled mind, let me, at least, give a little rest to your weary body. Trust me, child, these cannot hurt you; and, strong as you are, you will break down if you do not sleep.”

Without a word, she took them; and, as they melted on her tongue, first sweet, then bitter, she stood leaning against the rainy window-pane, listening to Helwyze, who began to talk as if he too had tasted the Indian drug, which “made the face of Coleridge shine, as he conversed like one inspired.”

It seemed a very simple, friendly act; but this man had learned to know how subtly the mind works; to see how often an apparently impulsive action is born of an almost unconscious thought, an unacknowledged purpose, a deeply hidden motive, which to many seem rather the child than the father of the deed. Helwyze did not deceive himself, and owned that baffled desire prompted that unpremeditated offer, and was ready to avail itself of any self-betrayal which might follow its acceptance, for he had given Gladys hasheesh.

It could not harm; it might soothe and comfort her unrest. It surely would make her forget for a while, and in that temporary oblivion perhaps he might discover what he burned to know. The very uncertainty of its effect added to the daring of the deed; and, while he talked, he waited to see how it would affect her, well knowing that in such a temperament as hers all processes are rapid. For an hour he conversed so delightfully of Rome and its wonders, that Gladys was amazed to find Felix had come in, unheard for once.

All through dinner she brightened steadily, thinking the happy mood was brought by her prodigal’s return, quite forgetting Helwyze and his bitter-sweet bonbons.

“I shall stay at home, and enjoy the society of my pretty wife. What have you done to make yourself so beautiful to-night? Is it the new gown?’.’ asked Canaris, surveying her with laughing but most genuine surprise and satisfaction as they returned to the drawing-room again.

“It is not new: I made it long ago, to please you, but you never noticed it before,” answered Gladys, glancing at the pale-hued dress, all bread, soft folds from waist to ankle, with its winter trimming of swan’s down at the neck and wrists; simple, but most becoming to her flower-like face and girlish figure.

“What cruel blindness! But I see and admire if now, and honestly declare that not Olivia :n all her splendor is arrayed so much to ray taste as you, my Sancta Simplicitas.”

“It is pleasant to hear you say so; but that alone does not make me happy: it must be having you at home all to myself again,” she whispered, with shining eyes, cheeks that glowed with a deeper rose each hour, and an indescribably blest expression in a face which now was both brilliant and dreamy.

Helwyze heard what she said, and, fearing to lose sight of her, promptly challenged Canaris to chess, a favorite pastime with them both. For an hour they played, well matched and keenly interested, while Gladys sat by, already tasting the restful peace, the delicious dreams, promised her.

The clock was on the stroke of eight, the game was nearly over, when a quick ring arrested Helwyze in the act of making the final move. There was a stir in the hall, then, bringing with her a waft of fresh, damp air, Olivia appeared, brave in purple silk and Roman gold.

“I thought you were all asleep or dead; but now I see the cause of this awful silence,” she cried. “Don’t speak, don’t stir; let me enjoy the fine tableau you make. Retsch’s ‘ Game of Life,’ quite perfect, and most effective.”

It certainly was to an observer; for Canaris, flushed and eager, looked the young man to the life; Helwyze, calm but intent, with his’ finger on his lip, pondering that last fateful move, was an excellent Satan; and behind them stood Cdadys, wonderfully resembling the wistful angel, with that new brightness on her face.

“Which wins?” asked Olivia, rustling toward them, conscious of having made an impressive entrance; for both men looked up to welcome her, though Gladys never lifted her eyes from the mimic battle Felix seemed about to lose.

“I do, as usual,” answered Helwyze, turning to finish the game with the careless ease of a victor “Not this lime;” and Gladys touched a piece whkh Canaris in the hurry of the moment was about to overlook. lie saw its value at a glance, made the one move that could save hiin, and in an instant cried “ Checkmate,” with a laugh of triumph. . .

“Not fair, the angel interfered,” said Olivia, shaking a warning finger at Gladys, who echoed her husband’s laugh with one still more exultant, as she put her hand upon his shoulder, saying, in a low, intense voice never heard from her lips before, —

“I have won him; he is mine, and cannot be taken from me any more.”

“Dearest child, no one wants him, except to play with and admire,” began Olivia, rather startled by the look and manner of the lately meek, mute Gladys.

Here Helwyze struck in, anxious to avert Olivia’s attention; for her undesirable presence disconcerted him, since her woman’s wit might discover what it was easy to conceal from Canaris.

“You have come to entertain us, like the amiable enchantress that you are?” he asked, suggestively; for nothing charmed Olivia more than permission to amuse him, when others failed.

“I have a thought, — a happy thought, — if Gladys will help me. You have given me one living picture: I will give you others, and she shall sing the scenes we illustrate.”

“Take Felix and give us ‘The God and the Bayadere,’“ said Helwyze, glancing at the young pair behind them, he intent upon their conversation, she upon him. “ No, I will have only Gladys. You will act and sing for us, I know?” and Olivia turned to her with a most engaging smile.

“I never acted in my life, but I will try. I think I should like it for I feel as if I could do any thing to-night;” and she came to them with a swift step, an eager a’r, as if longing to find some outlet for the strange energy which seemed to thrill every nerve and set her heart to beating audibly.

“You look so. Do you know all these songs?” asked Olivia, taking up the book which had suggested her nappy thought.

“There are but four : I know them all. I will glaaly sing them; for I set them to music, it they had none of their own already. I often do that to those Felix writes me.”

“Come, then. I want the key of the great press, where you keep your spoils, Jasper.”

“Mrs. Bland will give it you. Order what you will, if you are going to treat us to an Arabian Night’s entertainment.”

“Better than that. We are going to teach a small poet, by illustrating the work of a great one;” and, with a mischievous laugh, Olivia v anished, beckoning Gladys to follow.

The two men beguiled the time as best they might: Canaris playing softly to himself in the music-room, Helwyze listening intently to the sounds that came from behind the curtains, now dropped over a double door-way leading to the lower end of the hall. Olivia’s imperious voice was heard, directing men and maids. More than once an excited laugh from Gladys jarred upon his ear; and, as minute after minute passed, his impatience to see her again increased.

XIII

AFTER what would have seemed a wonderfully short time to a more careless waiter, three blows were struck, in the French fashion, and Canaris had barely time to reach his place, when the deep blue curtains slid noiselessly apart, showing the visible portion of the hall, arranged to suggest a mediaeval room. An easy task, when a suit of rusty armor already stood there; and Helwyze had brought spoils from all quarters of the globe, in the shape of old furniture, tapestry, weapons, and trophies of many a wild hunt.

"What is it? " whispered Canaris eagerly.

"An Idyl of the King."

"I see : the first. How well they look it!"

They did; Olivia, as

"An ancient dame in dim brocade;
And near her, like a blossom, vermeil-white,
That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath,
Stood the iair Enid, all in faded silk."

Gladys, clad in a quaint costume of tarnished
gray and silver damask, singing, in " the sweet voice of a bird," —

Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel, and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel through sunshine, storm, and cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile and frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up nor down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.

"Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.

"Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;
Thy wheel and thou art shadows in the cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate."

There was something inexpressibly touching in the way Gladys gave the words, which had such significance addressed to those who listened so intently, that they nearly forgot to pay the tribute which all actors, the greatest as the least, desire, when the curtain dropped, and the song was done.

"A capital idea of Olivia's, and beautifully carried out. This promises to be pleasant;" and Helwyze sat erect upon the divan, where Canaris came to lounge beside him.

"Which comes next? I don't remember. If it is Vivien, they will have to skip it, unless they call you in for Merlin," he said, talking gayly, because a little conscience-stricken by the look Gladys wore, as she sung, with her eyes upon him, —

"Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great."

"They will not want a Merlin: for Gladys could not act Vivien, if she would," answered Helwyze, tapping restlessly as he waited.

"She said she could do any thing' tonight; and, upon my life, she looked as if she might even beguile you 'mighty master,' of your strongest spell."

"She will never try"

But both were mistaken; tor, when they looked again, the dim light showed a dark and hooded shape, with glittering eyes and the semblance of a flowing, hoary beard, leaning half-hidden in a bower of tall shrubs from the conservatory. It was Olivia, as Merlin; and, being of noble proportions, she looked the part excellently. Upon the wizard's knee sat Vivien, —

"A twist of gold was round her hair;
A robe of samite without price, that more exprest
Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,
In color like the satin-shining palm
On sallows in the windy gleams of March."

In any other mood, Gladys would never have consented to be loosely clad in a great mantle of some Indian fabric, which shimmered like woven light, with its alternate stripes of gold- covered silk and softest wool. Shoulders and arms showed rosy white under the veil of hair which swept to her knee, as she clung there, singing sweet and low, with eyes on Merlin's face, lips near his own, and head upon his breast: —

"In Love, if Love be Love, if Love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers;
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

"It is the little rift within the lute
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening, slowly silence all.

“The little rift within the lover’s lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner’d fruit,
That, rotting inward, slowly moulders all.

“It is not worth the keeping: let it go :
But shall it? Answer, darling, answer ‘ No;’
And trust me not at all or all in all.”

There Gladys seemed to forget her part, and, turning, stretched her arms towards her husband, as if in music she had found a tongue to plead her cause. The involuntary gesture recalled to her that other verse which Vivien added to her song; and something impelled her to sing it, standing erect, with face, figure, voice all trembling with the strong emotion that suddenly controlled her: —

“My name, once mine, now thine, is closelier mine, For fame, could fame he mine, that fame were thine;
And shame, could shame be thine, that shame were mine;
So trust me not at all or all in all.”

Down fell the curtain there, and the two men looked at one another in silence for an instant, dazzled, troubled, and surprised; for in this brilliant, impassioned creature they did not recognize the Gladys they believed they knew so well.

“What possessed her to sing that? She is so unlike herself, I do not know her,” said Canaris, excited by the discoveries he was making.

“She is inspired to-night; so be prepared for any thing. These women will work wonders, they are acting to the men they love,” answered Helwyze, warily, yet excited also; because, for him. a double drama was passing on that little stage, and he found it marvellously fascinating.

“I never knew how beautiful she was!” mused Canaris, half aloud, his eyes upon the blue draperies which hid her from his sight.

“You never saw her in such gear before. Splendor suits her present mood, as well as simplicity becomes her usual self-restraint. You have made her jealous, and your angel will prove herself a woman, after all.”

“Is that the cause of this sudden change in her? Then I don’t regret playing truant, for the woman suits me better than the angel,” cried Canaris, conscious that the pale affection he had borne his wife so long was already glowing with new warmth and color, in spite of his seeming neglect.

“Wait till you see Olivia as Guinevere. I know she cannot resist that part, and I suspect she is willing to efface herself so far that she may take us by storm by and by.”

Helwyze prophesied truly; and, when next the curtains parted, the stately Queen sat in the nunnery of Almesbury, with the little novice at her feet. Olivia was right splendid now, for her sumptuous beauty well became the costly stuffs in which she had draped herself with the graceful art of a woman whose physical loveliness was her best possession. A trifle too gorgeous, perhaps, for the repentant Guinevere; but a most grand and gracious spectacle, nevertheless, as she leaned in the tall carved chair, with jewelled arms lying languidly across her lap, and absent eyes still full of love and longing for lost Launcelot.

Gladys, in white wimple and close-folded gown of gray, sat on a stool beside the “ one low light,’ humming softly, her rosary fallen at her feet, —

“The Queen looked up, and said,
‘O maiden, if indeed you list to sing
Sing, and unbind my heart, that I may weep.
Whereat full willingly sang the little maid,

Late, lute, so late! and dark the night and chill!
I,ate, late, so late 1 but we can enter still.
Too late I too late ‘. ye cannot enter now.

No light had we : for that we do repent,
And, learning this, the bridegroom will relent.
Too late I too late 1 ye cannot enter now.

No light, so late! and dark and chill the night I
O let us in, that we may find the light!
Too late 1 too late! ye cannot enter now.

Have we not heard the bridegroom is so sweet?
O let us in, tho’ late, to kiss his feet!
No, no, too late I ye cannot enter now.”

Slowly the proud head had drooped, the stately figure sunk, till, as the last lament died away, nothing remained of splendid Guinevere but a hidden face, a cloud of black hair from which the crown had fallen, a heap of rich robes quivering with the stormy sobs of a guilty woman’s smitten heart. The curtains closed on this tableau, which was made the more effective by the strong contrast between the despairing Queen and the little novice telling her beads in meek dismay.

“Good heavens, that sounded like the wail of a lost soul! My blood runs cold, and I feel as if I ought to say my prayers,” muttered Canaris, with a shiver; for, with his susceptible temperament, music always exerted over him an almost painful power.

"If you knew any," sneered Helwyze, whose eyes now glittered with something stronger than excitement "I do: Gladys taught me, and I am not ashamed to own it."

"Much good may it do you." Then, in a quieter tone, he asked, " Is there any song in 'Elaine'? I forget; and that is the only one we have not had."

"There is 'The Song of Love and Death.' Gladys was learning it lately; and, if I remember rightly, it was heart-rending. I hope she will not sing it, for this sort of thing is rather too much for me;" and Canaris got up to wander aimlessly about, humming the gayest airs he knew, as if to drown the sorrowful " Too late! too late!" still wailing in his ear.

By this time Gladys was no longer quite herself : an inward excitement possessed her, a wild desire to sing her very heart out came over her, and a strange chill, which she thought a vague presentiment of coming ill, crept through her blood. Every thing seemed vast and awful; every sense grew painfully acute; and she walked as in a dream, so vivid, yet so mysterious, that she did not try to explain it even to herself. Her identity was doubled : one Gladys moved and spoke as she was told, — a pale, dim figure, of no interest to ary one; the other was alive in every fibre, thrilled w th intense desire for something, and bent on finding it, though deserts, oceans, and boundless realms of air were passed to gain it.

Olivia wondered at her unsuspected power, and felt a little envious of her enchanting gift. But she was too absorbed in " setting the stage," dressing her prima donna, and planning how to end the spectacle with her favorite character of Cleopatra, to do more than observe that Gladys's eyes were luminous ana large, her face growing more and more colorless, her manner less and less excited, yet unnaturally calm.

"This is the last, and you have the stage alone. I)o your best for Felix; then you shall rest and be thanked," she whispered, somewhat anxiously, as she placed Elaine in her tower, leaning against the dark screen, which was unfolded, to suggest the casement she flung back when Launcelot passed below, —

"And glanced not up, nor waved his hand,
Nor bade farewell, but sadly rode away.'

The " lily maid of Astolat" could not have looked more wan and weird than Gladys, as she stood in her trailing robes of dead white, with loosely gathered locks, hands clasped over the gay bit of tapestry which simulated the cover of the shield, eyes that seemed to see something invisible to those about her, and began her song, in a veiled voice, at once so sad and solemn, that Helwyze held his breath, and Canaris felt as if she called him from beyond the grave: —

“Sweet is true love, tho’ given in vain, in vain;
And sweet is death, who puts an end to pain;
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

Love, art thou sweet? then bitter death must be;
Love, thou art bitter; sweet is death to me.
O Love, if death be sweeter, let me die.

Sweet love, that seems not made to fade away,
Sweet death, that seems to make us loveless clay,
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.

I fain would follow love, if that could be;
I needs must follow death, who calls for me:
Call and I follow, I follow! let me die! “

Carried beyond self-control by the unsuspected presence of the drug, which was doing its work with perilous rapidity, Gladys, remembering only that the last line should be sung with force, and that she sung for Felix, obeyed the wild impulse to let her voice rise and ring out with a shrill, despairing power and passion, which startled every listener, and echoed through the room, like Elaine’s unearthly cry of hapless love and death.

Olivia dropped her asp, terrified; the maids stared, uncertain whether it was acting or insanity; and Helwyze sprung up aghast, fearing that he had dared too much. But Canaris, seeing only the wild, woful eyes fixed on his, the hands wrung as if in pain, forgot every thing but Gladys, and rushed between the curtains, exclaiming in real terror, —

“Don’t look so! don’t sing so! my God, she is dying!”

Not dying, only slipping fast into the unconscious stage of the hasheesh dream, whose coming none can foretell but those accustomed to its use. Pale and quiet she lay in her husband’s arms, with half-open eyes and fluttering breath, smiling up at him so strangely that he was bewildered as well as panic-stricken. Olivia forgot her Cleopatra to order air and water; the maids flew for salts and wine; Helwyze with difficulty hid his momentary dismay; while Canaris, almost beside himself, could only hang over the couch where lay “ the lily-maid,” looking as if already dead, and drifting down to Camelot.

“Gladys, do you know me?” he cried, as a little color came to her lips after the fiery draught Olivia energetically administered.

The eyes opened wider, the smile grew brighter, and she lifted her hand to bring him nearer, for he seemed immeasurably distant.

"Felix! Let me be still, quite still; I want to sleep. Good-night, good-night."

She thought she kissed him; then his face receded, vanished, and, as she floated buoyantly away upon the first of the many oceans to be crossed in her mysterious quest, a far-off voice seemed to say, solemnly, as if in a last farewell, —

"Hush! let her sleep in peace."

It was Helwyze; and, having felt her pulse, he assured them all that she was only over-excited, must rest an hour or two, and would soon be quite herself again. So the brief panic ended quietly; and, having lowered the lights, spread Guinevere's velvet mantle over her, and reassured themselves that she was sleeping calmly, the women went to restore order to ante-room and hall, Canaris sat down to watch beside Gladys, and Helwyze betook himself to the library.

"Is she still sleeping?" he asked, with un- concealable anxiety, when Olivia joined him there.

"Like a baby. What a high-strung little thing it is. If she had strength to bear the training, she would make a cantatrice to be proud of, Jasper."

"Ah, but she never would! Fancy that modest creature on a stage for all the world to gape af She was happiest in the nun's gown tonight, though simply ravishing as Vivien. The pretty, bare feet were most effective; but how did you persuade her to it? '

"I had no sandals as a compromise: I therefore insisted that the part must be so dressed or undressed, and she submitted. People usually do, when I command."

"She was on her mettle: I could see that; and well she might be, with you for a rival. I give you my word, Olivia, if I did not know you were nearly forty, I should swear it was a lie; for 'age cannot wither nor custom stale' my handsome Cleopatra. We ought to have bad that, by the by: it used to be your best bit. I could not be your Antony, but Felix might: he adores costuming, and would do it capitally."

"Not old enough. Ah! what happy times those were;" and Olivia sighed sincerely, yet dramatically, for she knew she was looking wonderfully well, thrown down upon a couch, with her purple skirts sweeping about her, and two fine arms banded with gold clasped over her dark head.

Helwyze had flattered with a purpose. Canaris was in the way, Gladys might betray herself, and all was not safe yet; though in one respect the experiment had succeeded admirably, for he still tingled with the excitement of the evening. Now he wanted help, not sentiment, and, ignoring the sigh, said, carelessly, —

"If all obey when you insist, just make Felix go home with you. The drive will do him good, for he is as nervous as a woman, and I shall have him fidgeting about all night, unless he forgets his fright."

“But Gladys?”

“She will be the better for a quiet nap, and ready, by the time he returns, to laugh at her heroics. He will only disturb her if he sits there, like a mourner at a death-bed.”

“That sounds sensible and friendly, and you do it very well, Jasper; but I am impressed that something is amiss. What is it? Better tell me; I shall surely find it out, and will not work .n the dark. I see mischief in your eyes, and you cannot deceive me.”

Olivia spoke half in jest; but she had so often seen his face without a mask, that it was difficult to wear one in her presence. He frowned, hesitated, then fearing she would refuse the favor if he withheld the secret, he leaned towards her and answered in a whisper, —

“I gave Gladys hasheesh, and do not care to have Felix know it.”

“Jasper, how dared you?”

“She was restless, suffering for sleep. I know what that is, and out of pity gave her the merest taste. Upon my honor, no more than a child might safely take. She did not know what :t was, and I thought she would only feel its soothing charm. She would, if it had not been for this masquerading. I did not count on that, and it was too much for her.”

“Will she not suffer from the after-effects?”

“Not a whit, if she is let alone. An hour hence she will be deliciously drowsy, and tomorrow none the worse. I had no idea it would affect her so powerfully; but I do not regret it, for it showed what the woman is capable of.”

“At your old tricks. You will never learn to let your fellow-creatures alone, till something terrible stops you. You were always prying into things, even as a boy, when I caught butterflies for you to look at.”

“I never killed them: only brushed off a trifle of the gloss by my touch, and let them go again, none the worse, except for the loss of a few invisible feathers.”

“Ah! but that delicate plumage is the glory of the insect; robbed of that, its beauty is marred. No one but their Maker can search hearts without harming them. I wonder how it will fare with yours when He looks for its perfection? “

Olivia spoke with a sudden seriousness, a yearning look, which jarred on nerves already somewhat unstrung, and Helwyze answered, in a mocking tone that silenced her effectually, —

“I am desperately curious to know. If I can come and tell you, I will: such pious interest deserves that attention.”

“Heaven forbid!” ejaculated Olivia, with a shiver.

“Then I will not. I have been such a poor ghost here, I suspect I shall be glad to rest eternally when I once fall asleep, if I can.”

Weary was his voice, weary his attitude, as, leaning an elbow on either knee, he propped his chin upon his hands, and sat brooding for a moment with his eyes upon the ground, asking Himself for the thousandth time the great question which only hope and faith can answer truly.

Olivia rose. “ You are tired; so am I. Goodnight, Jasper, and pleasant dreams. But remember, no more tampering with Gladys, or I must tell her husband.”

“I have had my lesson. Take Felix with you, and I will send Mrs. Bland to sit with her till he comes back. Good-night, my cousin; thanks for a glimpse on the old times.” Such words, uttered with a pressure of the hand, conquered Olivia’s last scruple, and she went away to prefer her request in a form which made it impossible for Canaris to refuse. Gladys still slept quietly. The distance was not long, the fresh air grateful, Olivia her kindest self, and he obeyed, believing that the motherly old woman would take his place as soon as certain housewifely duties permitted.

Then Helwyze did an evil thing, — a thing few men could or would have done. He deliberately violated the sanctity of a human soul, robbing it alike of its most secret and most precious thoughts. Hasheesh had lulled the senses which guarded the treasure now the magnetism of a potent will forced the reluctant lips to give up the key.

Like a thief he stole to Gladys’ side, took in his the dimpled hands whose very childishness should have pleaded for her, and fixed his eyes upon the face before him, untouched by its helpless innocence, its unnatural expression. The half-open eyes were heavy as dew-drunken violets, the sweet red mouth was set, the agitated bosom still rose and fell, like a troubled sea subsiding after storm.

So sitting, stern and silent as the fate he believed in, Helwyze concentrated every power upon the accomplishment of the purpose to which he bent his will. He called it psychological curiosity; for not even to himself did he dare confess the true meaning of the impulse which drove him to this act, and dearly did he pay for it.

Soon the passive palms thrilled in his own, the breath came faint and slow, color died, and life seemed to recede from the countenance, leaving a pale effigy of the woman; lately so full of vitality. “ It works! it works! “ muttered Helwyze, lifting his head at length to wipe the dampness from his brow, and send a piercing glance about the shadowy room. Then, kneeling down beside the couch, he put his lips to her ear, whispering in a tone of still command, —

“Gladys, do you hear me?”

Like the echo of a voice, so low, expressionless, and distant was it, the answer came, —

“I hear.”

“Will you answer me?”

“I must.”

“You have a sorrow, — tell it.”

“All is so false. I am unhappy without confidence,” sighed the voice.

“Can you trust no one?”

“No one here, but Felix.”

“Yet he deceives, he does not love you.”

“He will.”

“Is this the hope which sustains you?”

“Yes.”

“And you forgive, you love him still?”

“Always.”

“If the hope fails?”

“It will not: I shall have help.”

« What help?”

No answer now, but the shadow of a smile seemed to float across the silent lips as if reflected from a joy too deep and tender for speech to tell.

“Speak! what is this happiness? The hope of freedom?”

“It will come.”

“How?”

“When you die.”

He caught his breath, and for an instant seemed daunted by the truth he had evoked; for it was terrible, so told, so heard.

“You hate me, then?” he whispered, almost fiercely, in the ear that never shrank from his hot lips.

“I doubt and dread you.”

“Why, Gladys, why? To you I am not cruel”

“Too kind, alas, too kind!”

And yet you fear me?”

“God help us. Yes.”

“What is your fear?”

“No, no, I will not tell it! “

Some inward throe of shame or anguish turned the pale face paler, knotted the brow, and locked the lips, as if both soul and body revolted from the thought thus ruthlessly dragged to light. Instinct, the first, last, strongest impulse of human nature, struggled blindly to save the woman from betraying the dread which haunted her heart like a spectre, and burned her lips in the utterance of its name.

But Helwyze was pitiless, his will indomitable; bis eye held, his hand controlled, his voice commanded; and the answer came, so reluctantly, so inaudibly, that he seemed to divine, not hear it.

f What fear?”

“Your love.”

“You see, you know it, then?”

“I do not see, I vaguely feel; I pray God I may never know.”

With the involuntary recoil of a guilty joy, a shame as great, Helwyze dropped the nerveless bands, turned from the mutely accusing face, let the troubled spirit rest, and asked no more. But his punishment began as he stood there, finding the stolen truth a heavier burden than baffled doubt or desire had been; since forbidden knowledge was bitter to the taste, forbidden love possessed no sweetness, and the hidden hope, putting off its well-worn disguise, confronted him in all its ugliness.

An awesome silence filled the room, until he lifted up his eyes, and looked at Gladys with a look which would have wrung her heart could she have seen it. She did not see; for she lay there so still, so white, so dead, he seemed to have scared away the soul he had vexed with his impious questioning.

In remorseful haste, Helwyze busied himself about her, till she woke from that sleep within a sleep, moaned wearily, closed the unseeing eyes, and drifted away into more natural slumber, dream-haunted, but deep and quiet.

Then he stole away as he had come, and, sending the old woman to watch Gladys, shut himself into his own room, to keep a vigil which lasted until dawn; for all the poppies of the East could not have brought oblivion that night.

XIV.

IT seemed as if some angel had Gladys in especial charge, bringing light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, good out of evil; for no harm came to her, — only a great peace, which transfigured her face till it was as spiritually beautitul, as that of some young Madonna.

Waking late the next day she remembered little of the past night's events, and cared to remember little, having clearer and calmer thoughts to dwell upon, happier dreams to enjoy.

She suspected Helwyze of imprudent kindness, but uttered no reproach, quite unconscious of how much she had to forgive; thereby innocently adding to both the relief and the remorse he felt. The doubt and dread which had risen to the surface at his command, seemed to sink again into the depths; and hope and love, to still the troubled waters where her life-boat rode at anchor for a time.

Canaris, as if tired of playing truant, was ready now to be forgiven; more conscious than ever before that this young wife was a possession to be proud of, since, when she chose, she could eclipse even Olivia. The jealousy which could so inspire her flattered his man's vanity, and made her love more precious; for not yet had he learned all its depth, nor how to be worthy of it. The reverence he had always felt increased fourfold, but the affection began to burn with a stronger flame; and Canaris, for the first time, tasted the pure happiness of loving another better than himself. Glad to feel, yet ashamed to own, a sentiment whose sincerity made it very sweet, he kept it to himself, and showed no sign, except a new and most becoming humility of manner when with Gladys, as if silently asking pardon for many shortcomings. With Helwyze he was cold and distant, evidently dreading to have him discover the change he had foretold, and feeling as if his knowledge of it would profane the first really sacred emotion the young man had known since his mother died.

Anxious for some screen behind which to hide the novel, yet most pleasurable, sensations which beset him, he found Olivia a useful friend, and still kept up some semblance of the admiration, out of which all dangerous ardor was fast fading. She saw this at once, and did not regret 't: for she had a generous nature, which an all-absorbing and unhappy passion had not entirely spoiled.

Obedience to Helwyze was her delight; but, knowing him better than any other human being could, she was troubled by his increasing interest in Gladys, more especially since discovering that the girl possessed the originality, fire, and energy w hich were more attractive to him than her youth, gentleness, or grace.

Jealousy was stronger than the desire to obey; and, calling it compassion, Olivia resolved to be magnanimous, and spare Gladys further pain, letting Canaris return to his allegiance, as he seemed inclined to do, unhindered by any act or hers.

“The poor child is so young, so utterly unable to cope with me, it is doubly cruel to torment her, just to gratify a whim of Jasper’s. Better make my peace handsomely, and be her friend, than rob her of the only treasure she possesses, since I do not covet it,” she thought, driving through the May-day sunshine, to carry Jasper the earliest sprays of white and rosy hawthorn from the villa garden, whither she had been to set all in order for the summer.

Helwyze was not yet visible; and, full of her new design, Olivia hastened up to find Gladys, meaning by some friendly word, some unmistakable but most delicate hint, to reassure her regarding the errant young husband, whom she had not yet learned to hold.

There was no answer to her hasty tap, and Olivia went in to seek yet further. Half-way across the larger apartment she paused abruptly, and stood looking straight before her, with a face which passed rapidly from its first expression of good-will to one of surprise, then softened, till tears stood in the brilliant eyes, and some sudden memory or thought made that usually proud countenance both sad and tender.

Gladys sat alone in her little room, her work lying on her knee, her arms folded, her head bent, singing to herself as she rocked to and fro, lost in some reverie that made her lips smile faintly, and her voice very low. She often sat so now, but Olivia had never seen her thus; and, seeing, divined at once the hope which lifted her above all sorrow, the help sent by Heaven, when most she needed it. For the song Gladys sang was a lullaby, the look she wore was that which comes to a woman’s face when she rocks her first-born on her knee, and above her head was a new picture, an angel, with the Lily of Annunciation in its hand.

The one precious memory of Olivia’s stormy life was the little daughter, who for a sweet, short year was all in all to her, and whose small grave was yearly covered with the first spring flowers. Fresh from this secret pilgrimage, the woman’s nature was at its noblest now; and seeing that other woman, so young, so lonely, yet so blest, her heart yearned over her, —

“All her worser self slipped from her Like a robe,” —

and hurrying in, she said, impulsively, —

“O child. I wish you had a mother!”

Gladys looked up, unstartled from the calm in which she dwelt. Olivia’s face explained her words, and she answered them w’th the only reproach much pain had wrung from her, —

“You might have been one to me.”

“It is not too late! What shall I do to prove my sincerity?” cried Olivia, stricken with remorse.

“Help me to give my little child an honest father.”

“I will! show me how.”

Then these two women spent a memorable hour together; for the new tie of motherhood bridged across all differences of age and character, made confession easy, confidence sweet.

friendship possible. Yet, after all, Gladys was the comforter, Olivia the one who poured out her heart, and found relief in telling the sorrows that had been, the temptations that still beset her, the good that yet remained to answer, when the right chord was touched. She longed to give as much as she received; but when she had owned, with a new sense of shame, that she was merely playing with Canaris for her own amusement (being true to Helwyze even in her falsehood), there seemed no more for her to do, since Gladys asked but one other question, and that she could not answer.

“If he does not love you, and, perhaps, it is as you say, — only a poet’s admiration for beauty, — what is the trouble that keeps us apart? At first I was too blindly happy to perceive it; now tears have cleared my eyes, and I see that he hides something from me, — something which he longs, yet dares not tell.”

“I know : I saw it long ago; but Jasper alone can tell that secret. He holds Felix by it, and I fear the knowledge would be worse than the suspicion. Let it be: time sets all things right, and it is ill thwarting my poor cousin. I have a charming plan for you and Felix; and, when you have him to yourself, you may be able to win his confidence, as, I am sure, you have already won his heart.”

Then Olivia told her plan, which was both generous and politic; since it made Gladys truly happy, proved her own sincerity, secured her own peace and that of the men whose lives seemed to become more and more inextricably tangled together.

“Now I shall go to Jasper, and conquer all hU opposition; for I know I am right. Dear little creature, what is it about you that makes one feel both humble and strong when one near you?” asked Olivia, looking down at Glaays with a hand on either shoulder, and genuine wonder in the eyes still soft with unwonted tears.

“God made me truthful, and I try to keep so; that is all,” she answered, simply.

“That is enough. Kiss me, Gladys, and make me better. I am not good enough to be the mother that I might have been to you; but I am a friend; believe that, and trust me. “f you can?”

“I do;” and Gladys scaled her confidence With both lips and hand.

“Jasper, I have invited those children to spend the summer at the villa, since you have decided for the sea. Gladys is mortally tired of this hot-house life, so is Felix: give them a long holiday, or they will run away together. Mrs. Bland and I will take care of you till they come back.”

Olivia walked in upon Helwyze with this abrupt announcement, well knowing that persuasion would be useless, and vigorous measures surest to win the day. Artful as well as courageous in her assault, she answered in that one speech several objections against her plan, and suggested several strong reasons for it, sure that he would yield the first, and own the latter.

He did, with unexpected readiness; for a motive which she could not fathom prompted his seemingly careless acquiescence. He had no thought of relinquishing his hold on Canaris, since through him alone he held Gladys; but he often longed to escape from both for a time, that he might study and adjust the new power which had come into his life, unbidden, undesired. Surprise and disappointment were almost instantaneously followed by a sense of relief when Olivia spoke; for he saw at once that this project was a wiser one than she knew.

Before her rapid sentences were ended, the thought had come and gone, the decision was made, and he could answer, in a tone of indifference which both pleased and perplexed her. —

“Amiable woman, with what helpful aspirations are you blest. Seeing your failure with Felix, I have been wondering how I should get rid of him till he recovers from this comically tardy passion for his wife. They can have another and a longer honeymoon up at the villa, if they like: the other was far from romantic, I suspect. Well, why that sphinx-like expression, if you please?” he added, as Olivia stood regarding him from behind the fading hawthorn which she forgot to offer.

“I was wondering if I should ever understand you, Jasper.”

“Doubtful, since I shall never understand myself.”

“You ought, if any man; for you spend your life in studying yourself.”

“And the more I study, the less I know. It is very like a child with a toy ark: I never know what animal may appear first. I put in my hand for a dove, and I get a serpent; I open the door for the sagacious elephant, and out rushes a tiger; I think I have found a favorite dog, and it is a wolf, looking ready to devour me. An unsatisfactory toy, better put it away and choose another.”

Helwyze spoke in the half-jesting, half-serious way habitual to him; but though his mouth smiled, his eyes were gloomy, and Olivia hastened to turn his thoughts from a subject in which he took a morbid interest.

“Fanciful, but true. Now, follow your own excellent advice, and find wholesome amusement in helping me pack off the young people, and then ourselves. It is not too early for them to go at once. Canaris can come in and out as you want him for a month longer, then I will have all things ready for you in the old cottage by the sea. You used to be happy there : can you not be so again?”

“If you can give me back my twenty years. May-day is over for both of us; why try to make the dead hawthorn bloom again? Carry out your plan, and let the children be happy.”

They were very happy; for the prospect of entire freedom was so delicious, that Gladys had some difficulty in concealing her delight, while Canaris openly rejoiced when told of Olivia’s offer. All dinner-time he was talking of it; and afterward, under pretence of showing her a new plant, he took his wife into the conservatory, that he might cont” ue planning how they should spend this unexpected holiday.

Helwyze saw them wandering arm in arm; Canaris talking rapidly, and Gladys listening, with happy laughter, to his whimsical suggestions and projects. Their content displeased the looker-on; but there was something so attractive in the flower-framed picture of beauty, youth, and joy, that he could not turn his eyes away, although the sight aroused strangely conflicting thoughts within him.

He wished them gone, yet dreaded to lose the charm of his contined life, feeling that absence would inevitably become estrangement. Canaris never would be entirely his again; for he was slowly climbing upward into a region where false ambition could not blind, mere pleasure satisfy, nor license take the place of liberty. He had not planned to ruin the youth, but simply to let “ the world, the flesh, and the devil” contend against such virtues as they found, while he sat by and watched the struggle.

As Olivia predicted, however, power was a dangerous gift to such a man; and, having come to feel that Canaris belonged to him, body and soul, he was ill-pleased at losing him just when a new interest was added to their lives.

Yet losing him he assuredly was; and something like wonder mingled with his chagrin, for this girl, whom he had expected to mould to his will, exerted over him, as well as Canaris, a soft control which he could neither comprehend nor conquer. Its charm was its unconsciousness, its power was its truth; for it won gently and held firmly the regard it sought. She certainly did possess the gift of surprises; for, although brought there as a plaything, “little Gladys,” without apparent effort, had subjugated haughty Olivia, wayward Felix, ruthless

Helwyze; and none rebelled against her. She ruled them by the irresistible influence of a lovely womanhood, which made her daily life a sweeter poem than any they could write.

"Why did I not keep her for myself? If she can do so much for him, what might she not have done for me, had I been wise enough to wait," thought Helwyze, watching the bright- haired figure that stood looking up to the green roof whence Canaris was gathering passionflowers.

As if some consciousness of his longing reached her, Gladys turned to look into the softly lighted room beyond, and, seeing its master sit there solitary in the midst of its splendor, she obeyed the compassionate impulse which was continually struggling against doubt and dislike.

"It must seem very selfish and ungrateful in us to be so glad. Come, Felix, and amuse him as well as me," she said, in a tone meant for his ear alone. But Helwyze heard both question and answer.

"I have been court-fool long enough 'Tis a thankless office, and I am tired of it," replied Canaris, in the tone of a prisoner asked to go back when the door of his cell stands open.

"I must go, for there is Jean with coffee. Follow, like a good boy, when you have put your posy into a song, which I will set to music by and by, as your reward," said Gladys, turning reluctantly away.

"You make goodness so beautiful, that it is easy to obey. There is my posy set to music at once, for you are a song without words, carina; " and Canaris threw the vine about her neck, with a look and a laugh which made it hard for her to go.

Jean not only brought coffee, but the card of a friend for Felix, who went away, promising to return. Gladys carefully prepared the black and fragrant draught which Hclwvze loved, and presented it, with a sweet friendliness of mien which would have made hemlock palatable, he thought.

"Shall I sing to you till Felix comes to give you something better?" she asked, offering her best, as if anxious to atone for the sin of being happy at the cost of pain to another.

"Talk a little first. There will be time for both before he remembers us again," answered Helwyze, motioning her to a seat beside him, with the half-imperative, half-courteous, look and gesture habitual to him.

"He will not forget: Felix always keeps his promises to me," said Gladys, with an air of gentle pride, taking her place, not beside, but opposite, Helwyze, on the couch where Elaine had laid not long ago.

This involuntary act of hers gave a tone to the conversation which followed; for Helwyze, being inwardly perturbed, was seized with a desire to hover about dangerous topics: and, seeing her sit there, so near and yet so far, so willing to serve, yet so completely mistress of herself, longed to ruffle that composure, if only to make her share the disquiet of which she was the cause.

“Always?” he said, lifting his brows with an incredulous expression, as he replied to her assertion.

“I seldom ask any promise of him, hut when I do, he always keeps it You doubt that?”

“I do.”

“When you know him as well as I, you will believe it.”

“I flatter myself that I know him better; and, judging from the past, should call him both fickle and, u some things, false, .even to you.”

Up sprung the color to Gladys’s cheek, and her eyes shone with sudden fire, but her voice was low and quifit, as she answered quickly, —

“One is apt to look for what one wishes to find: I seek fidelity and truth, and I shall not be disappointed. Felix may wander, but he will come back to me: I have learned how to hold him now.”

“Then you are wiser than I. Pray impart the secret and, putting down his cup, Helwyze regarded her intently, for he saw that the spirit of the woman was roused to defend her wifely rights.

“Nay, I owe it to you; and, since it has pre- va led against your enchantress, I should ihank you for it.”

The delicate emphasis on the words, “ your enchantress,” enlightened him to the fact that Gladys divined, in part at least, the cause of Olivia’s return. He did not deny, but simply answered, with a curious contrast between the carelessness of the first half of his reply, with the vivid interest of the latter, —

“Olivia has atoned for her sins handsomely. But what do you owe me? I have taught you nothing. I dare not try.”

“I did not know my own power till you showed it to me; unintentionally, I believe, and unconsciously, I used it to such purpose that Felix felt pride in the wife whom he had thought a child before. I mean the night I sang and acted yonder, and did both well, thanks to you.”

“I comprehend, and hope to be forgiven, since I gave you help or pleasure,” he answered, with no sign of either confusion or regret, though the thought shot through his mind, “ Can she remember what came after?”

“Questionable help, and painful pleasure, yet it was a memorable hour and a useful one; so I pardon you, since after the troubled delusion comes a happy reality.”

There was a double meaning in her words, and a double reproach in the glance which went from the spot where she had played her part, to the garland still about her neck, “Your yoke is a light one, and you wear it gracefully. Long may it be so.”

Helwyze thought to slip away thus from the subject; for those accusing eyes were, hard to meet. But Gladys seemed moved to speak with more than her usual candor, as if anxious to leave no doubts behind her; and, sitting in the self-same place, uttered words which moved him even more than those which she had whispered in her tormented sleep.

“No, my yoke is not light;” she said, in that grave, sweet voice of hers, looking down at the mystic purple blossom on her breast, with the symbols of a divine passion at its heart. “ I put it on too ignorantly, too confidingly, and at times the duties, the responsibilities, which I assumed with ‘t weigh heavily. I am just learning how beautiful they are, how sacred they should be. and trying to prove worthy of them. I know that Felix did not love as I loved, when he married me, — from pity, I believe. No one told me this : I felt, I guessed it, and would have given him back his liberty, if, after patient trial, I had found that I could not make him happy.”

“Can you?”

“Yes, thank God! not only happy, but good;

and henceforth duty is delight, for I can teach him to love as I love, and he is glad to learn of me.”

Months before, when the girl Gladys had betrayed her maiden tenderness, she had glowed like the dawn, and found no language but her blushes; now the woman sat there steadfast and passion-pale, owning her love with the eloquence of fervent speech; both pleading and commanding, in the name of wifehood and motherhood, for the right to claim the man she had won at such cost “And if you fail?”

“I shall not fail, unless you come between us. I have won Olivia’s promise not to tempt Felix’s errant fancy with her beauty. Can I not win yours to abstain from troubling his soul with still more harmful trials? It is to ask this that I speak now, and I believe I shall not speak in vain.”

“Why?”

Helwyze bent and looked into her face as he uttered that one word below his breath. He dared do no more; for there was that about her, perilously frank and lovely though she was, which held in check his lawless spirit, and made it reverence, even while it rebelled against her power over him.

She neither shrank nor turned aside, but studied earnestly that unmoved countenance which hid a world of wild emotion so successfully, that even her eyes saw no token of it, except the deepening line between the brows.

“Because I am bold enough to think I know you better even than Olivia does;

that you are not cold and cruel, and, having given me the right to live for Felix, you will not disturb our peace; that, if I look into your soul, as I looked into my husband’s, I shall rind there what I seek, — justice as well as generosity.”

“You shall!”

“I knew you would not disappoint me. For this promise I am more grateful than words can express, since it takes away all fear for Felix, and shows me that I was right in appealing to the heart which you try to kill. Ah! be your best self always, and so make life a blessing, not the curse you often call it,” she added, giving him a sir le .ike sunshine, a cordial glance which was more than he could bear.

“With you I am. Stay, and show me how to do it,’ he began, stretching both hands to- waids her with an almost desperate urgency in voice and gesture.

But Gladys neither saw nor heard; for at that moment Felix came through the hall singing one of the few perfect love songs in the world, —

“Che faro senza Eurydice.”

“See, he does keep his promise to me: I knew he would come back!” she cried delightedly, and hurried to meet him, leaving Helwyze nothing but the passion-flowers to fill his empty hands.

XV.

“BACK again, earlier than before. But not to stay long, thank Heaven! By another month we will be truly at home, my Gladys,” whispered Canaris, as they went up the steps, in the mellow September sunshine.

“I hope so!” she answered, fervently, and paused an instant before entering the door; for, coming from the light and warmth without, it seemed as dark and chilly as the entrance to a tomb.

“You are tired, love? Come and rest before you see a soul.”

With a new sort of tenderness, Canaris led her up to her own little bower, and lingered there to arrange the basket of fresh recruits she had brought for her winter garden : while Gladys lay contentedly on. the couch where he placed her, looking about the room as if greeting old friends; but her eyes always came back to h-m, full of a reposeful happiness which proved that <dl wras well with her.

“There! now the little fellows sit right comfortably in the moss, and will soon feel at home. I’ll go find Mother Bland, and see what his Serene Highness is about,” said the young man, rising from his work, warm and gay, but in no haste to go, as he had been before.

Gladys remembered that; and when, at last, he left her, she shut her eyes to re-live, in thought, the three blissful months she had spent in teaching him to love her with the love in which self bears no part. Before the happy reverie was half over, the old lady arrived; and, by the time the young one was ready, Canaris came to fetch her.

“My dearest, I am afraid we must give up our plan,” he said, softly, as he led her away : n Helwyze is so changed, I come to tell you, lest it should shock you when you see him. I think it would be cruel to go at once. Can you wait a little longer?”

“If we ought. How is he changed?”

“Just worn away, as a rock is by the beating of the sea, till there seems little left of him except the big eyes and greater sharpness of both tongue and temper. Say nothing about it, and seem not to notice it; else he will freeze you with a look, as he did me when I exclaimed.”

“Poor man! we will be very patient, very kind; for it must be awful to think of dying wifh no light beyond,”‘ sighed Gladys, touching the cross at her white throat.

“A Dante witho :t a Beatrice: I am happier than he;” and Canaris laid his cheek against hers with the gesture of a boy, the look of a man who has found the solace which is also his salvation.

Helwyze received them quietly, a little coldly, even; and Gladys reproached herself with too long neglect of what she had assumed as a duty, when she saw how ill be looked, for his summer had not been a blissful one. He had spent it in wishing for her, and in persuading himself that the desire was permissible, since he asked nothing but what she had already given him, — her presence and her friendship. It was her intellect he loved and wanted, not her heart; that she might give her husband wholly, since he understood and cared for affection only: her mind, with all its lovely possibilities, Helwyze coveted, and reasoned himself into the belief that he had a right to enjoy it, conscious ail the while that his purpose was a delusion and a snare. Olivia had mourned over the moody taciturnity which made a lonely cranny of the cliffs his favorite resort, where he sat, day after day, watching, with an irresistible fascination, the ever-changing sea, — beautiful and bitter as the hidden tide of thought and feeling in his own breast, where lay the image of Gladys, as placid, yet as powerful, as the moon which ruled the ebb and flow of that vaster ocean. Being a fatalist for want of a higher faith, he left all to chance, and came home simply resolved to enjoy what was left him as long and as unobtrusively as possible; since Felix owed him much, and Gladys need never know what she had prayed not to know.

Sitting at the table, as they sat almost a year ago, he watched the two young faces as he had done then, finding each, unlike his own, changed for the better. Gladys was a girl no longer; and the new womanliness which had come to her was of the highest type, for inward beauty lent its imperishable loveliness to features faulty in themselves, and character gave its indescribable charm to the simplest manners. Helwyze saw all this; and perceiving also how much heart had already quickened intellect, began to long for both, and to grudge his pupil to her new master.

Canaris seemed to have lost something of his boyish comeliness, and had taken on a manlier air of strength and stability, most becoming, and evidently a source of pardonable pride to him. At his age even three months could work a serious alteration in one so easily affected all influences; and Helwyze felt a pang of envy as he saw the broad shoulders and vigorous limbs, the wholesome color in the cheeks, and best of all. the serene content of a happy heart.

“What have you been doing to yourself, Felix? Have you discovered the Elixir of Life up there? If so, impart the secret, and let me have a sip,” he said, as Canaris pushed away his plate after satisfying a hearty appetite with the relish of a rustic.

“Gladys did,” he answered, with a nod across the table, which said much. “ She would not let me idle about while waiting for ideas: she ,ust set me to work.

I dug acres, it seemed to me, and amazed the gardener writh my exploits. Liked it, too; for she was overseer, and would not let me off till I had done my task and earned my wages. A wonderfully pleasant life, and I am the better for it, in spite of my sunburn and blisters;” and Canaris stretched out a pair of sinewy brown hands with an air of satisfaction which made Gladys laugh so blithely it was evident that their summer had been full of the innocent jollity of youth, fine weather, and congenial pastime.

“Adam and Eve in Eden, with all the modern improvements. Not even a tree of knowledge or a serpent to disturb you!”

“Oh, yes, we had them both; but we only ate the good fruit, and the snake did ifot tempt me!” cried Gladys, anxious to defend her Paradise even from playful mockery.

“He did me. I longed to kill him, but my Eve owed him no grudge, and would not permit me to do it; so the old enemy sunned himself in peace, and went into winter quarters a reformed reptile, I am sure.”

Canaris did not look up as he spoke, but Helwyze asked hastily, —

“I hope you harvested a few fresh ideas for winter work? We ought to have something to show after so laborious a summer.”

“I have: I am going to write a novel or a play. I cannot decide which; but rather lean toward the latter, and, being particularly happy, feel inclined to write a tragedy;” and something beside the daring of an ambitious author sparkled in the eyes Canaris fixed upon his patron. It looked too much like the expression of a bondman about to become a freeman to suit Helwyze; but he replied, as lmperturbably as ever. —

“Try the tragedy, by all means : the novel would be beyond you.”

“Why, if you please?” demanded Canaris, loftily.

“Because you have neither patience nor experience enough to do it well. Goethe says: ‘ In the novel it is sentiments and events that are exhibited; in the drama it is characters and deeds. The novel goes slowly forward, the dvama must hasten. In the novel, some degree of scope may be allowed to chance; but it must be led and guided by the sentiments of the personages. Fate, on the other hand, which, by means of outward, unconnected circumstances, carries forward men, without their own concurrence, to an unforeseen catastrophe, can only have place in the drama. Chance may produce pathetic situations, but not tragic ones.’“

Helwyze paused there abruptly; for the memory which served him so well outran his tongue, and recalled the closing sentence of the quotation, — words which he had no mind to utter then and there, — ” Fate ought always to be terrible; and it is in the highest sense tragic, when it brings into a ruinous concatenation the guilty man ana the guiltless with him,”

“Then you think I could write a play?” asked Canaris, with affected carelessness.

“I think you could act one, better than imagine or write it?” “ What, I? “

“Yes, you; because you are dramatic by nature, and it is easier for you to express yourself in gesture and tone, than by written or spoken language. You were born for an actor, are fitted for it in every way, and I advise you to try it. It would pay better than poetry; and that stream may run dry.”

Gladys looked indignant at what she thought bad advice and distasteful pleasantry; but Canaris seemed struck and charmed with the new idea, protesting that he would first write, then act, his play, and prove himself a universal genius.

No more was said just then; but long afterward the conversation came back to him like an inspiration, and was the seed of a purpose which, through patient effort, bore fruit in a brilliant and successful career: for Canaris, like many another man, did not know his own strength or weakness yet, neither the true gift nor the power of evil which lay unsuspected within him.

So the old life began again, at least in outward seeming; but it was impossible for it to last long. The air was too full of the electricity of suppressed and conflicting emotions to be wholesome; former relations could not be resumed, because sincerity had gone out of them; and the quiet, which reigned for a time, was only the lull before the storm.

Gladys soon felt this, but tried to think it was owing to the contrast between the free, happy days she had enjoyed so much, and uttered no complaint; for Felix was busy with his play, sanguine as ever, inspired now by a nobler ambition than before, and happy in his work.

Helwyze had flattered himself that he could be content with the harmless shadow, since he could not possess the sweet substance of a love whose seeming purity was its most delusive danger. But he soon discovered “ how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man’s eyes;and, even while he made no effort to rob Canaris of his treasure, he hated him for possessing it. finding the hatred all the more poignant, because it: was his own hand which had forced Felix to seize and secure it. He had thought to hold and hide this new secret; but it held him, and would not be hidden, for it was stronger than even his strong will, and ruled him with a power which at times filled him with a sort of terror. Having allowed it to grow, and taken it to his bosom, he could not cast it out again, and it became a torment, not the comfort he had hoped to find it. His daily affliction was to see how much the young pair were to each other, to read in their faces a hundred happy hopes and confidences in which he had no part, and to remember the confession wrung from the lips dearest to him, that his death would bring to them their much-desired freedom.

At times he was minded to say “ Go,” but the thought of the utter blank her absence would leave behind daunted him. Often an almost uncontrollable desire to tell her that which would mar her trust in her husband tempted him; for, having yielded to a greater temptation, all lesser ones seemed innocent beside it; and, worse than all, the old morbid longing for some excitement, painful even, if it could not be pleasurable, goaded him to the utterance of half truths, which irritated Canaris and perplexed Gladys, till she could no longer doubt the cause of this strange mood. It seemed as if her innocent hand gave the touch which set the avalanche slipping swiftly but silently to its destructive fall.

One day when Helwyze was pacing to and fro in the library, driven by the inward storm which no outward sign betrayed, except his excessive pallor and unusual restlessness, she looked up from her book, asking compassionately, — “Are you suffering, sir?” “ Torment.” “ Can I do nothing?” “ Nothing!”

She went on reading, as if glad to be left in peace; for distrust, as well as pity, looked out from her frank eyes, and there was no longer any pleasure in the duties she performed for Canaiis’s sake.

But Helwyze, jealous even of the book which seemed to absorb her, soon paused again, to ask, in a calmer tone, — “What interests you?” “‘The Scarlet Letter.’“ The hands loosely clasped behind him were locked more closely by an involuntary gesture, as if the words made him wince; otherwise unmoved, he asked again, with the curiosity he often showed about her opinions of all she read, —

“What do you think of Hester?”

“I admire her courage; for she repented, and did not hide her sin with a lie.”

“Then you must despise Dimmesdale?”

“I ought, perhaps; but I cannot help pitying his weakness, while I detest his deceit: he loved so much.”

“So did Roger;” and Helwyze drew nearer, with the peculiar flicker in his eyes, as of a light kindled suddenly behind a carefully drawn curtain.

“At first; then his love turned to hate, and he committed the unpardonable sin,” answered Gladys, much moved by that weird and wonderful picture of guilt and its atonement.

“The unpardonable sin! “ echoed Helwyze, struck by her words and manner.

“Hawthorne somewhere describes it as ‘ the want of love and reverence for the human soul, which makes a man pry into its mysterious depths, not with a hope or purpose of making it better, but from a cold, philosophical curiosity. This would be the separation of the intellect from the heart: and this, perhaps, would be as unpardonable a sin as to doubt God, whom we cannot harm; for in doing this we must inevitably do great wrong both to ourselves and others.'"

As she spoke, fast and earnestly, Gladys felt herself upon the brink of a much-desired, but much-dreaded, explanation; for Canaris, while owning to her that there was a secret, would not tell it till Helwyze freed him from his promise. She thought that he delayed to ask this absolution till she was fitter to bear the truth, whatever it might be; and she had resolved to spare her husband the pain of an avowal, by demanding it herself of Helwyze. The moment seemed to have come, and both knew; for he regarded her with the quick, piercing look which read her purpose before she could put it into words.

"You are right; yet Roger was the wronged one, and the others deserved to suffer."

"They did; but Hester's suffering ennobled her, because nobly borne; Dimmesdale's destroyed him, because he paltered weakly with his conscience. Roger let his wrong turn him from a man into a devil, and deserves the contempt and horror he rouses in us. The keeping of the secret makes the romance; the confession of it is the moral, showing how falsehood can ruin a life, and truth only save it at the last."

"Never have a secret, Gladys : they are hard masters, whom we hate, yet dare not rebel against."

His accent of sad sincerity seemed to clear the way for her, and she spoke out, briefly and bravely, —

"Sir, you dare any thing! Tell me what it is which makes Felix obey you against his will. He owns it, but will not speak till you consent. Tell me, I beseech you!"

"Could you bear it?" he asked, admiring her courage, yet doubtful of the wisdom of purchasing a moment's satisfaction at such a cost; for, though he could cast down her idol, he dared not set up another in its place.

"Try me!" she cried : " nothing can lessen my love, and doubt afflicts me more than the hardest truth."

"I fear not: with you love and respect go hand in hand, and some sins you would find very hard to pardon."

Involuntarily Gladys shrunk a little, and her eye questioned his inscrutable face, as she answered slowly, thinking only of her husband, —

"Something very mean and false would be hard to forgive; but not some youthful fault, some shame borne for others, or even a crime, if a very human emotion, a generous but mistaken motive, led to it."

"Then this secret is better left untold; for it would try you sorely to know that Felix had been guilty of the fault you find harder to forgive than a crime, — deceit. Wait a little, till you are accustomed to the thought, then you shall have the facts; and pity, even while you must despise, him."

While he spoke, Gladys sat like one nerving herself to receive a blow; but at the last words she suddenly put up her hand as if to arrest it, saying, hurriedly, —

"No! do not tell me; I cannot bear it yet, nor, from you. He shall tell me; it will be easier so, and less like treachery. O sir," she added, in a passionately pleading tone, " use mercifully whatever Ktter knowledge you possess! Remember how young he is, how neglected as a boy, how tempted he may have been; and deal generously, honorably with him, — and with me."

Her voice broke there. She spread he:r hands before her eyes, and fled out of the room, as if in his face she read a more disastrous confession than any Felix could ever make. Ileiwyze stood motionless, looking as he looked the night she spoke more frankly but less forcibly: and when she vanished, he stole away to his own room, as he stole then; only now his usually colorless cheek burned with a fiery flush, and his hand went involuntarily to his breast, as if, like Dimmesdale, he carried an invisible scarlet letter branded there.

XVI.

“NEITHER had heard thE door of that inner room open quietly; neither had seen Canaris stand upon the threshold for an instant, then draw back, looking as if he had found another skeleton to hide in the cell where he was laboring at the third act of the tragedy which he was to live, not write.

He had heard the last words Gladys said, he had seen the last look Helwyze wore, and, like a flash of lightning, the truth struck and stunned hiM. At First he sat staring aghast at the thing he plainly saw, yet hardly comprehended. Then a sort of fury seized and shook him, as he sprang up with hands clenched, eyes ablaze, looking as if about to instantly avenge the deadliest injury one man could do another. But the half savage self-control adversity had taught stood him in good stead now, curbing the first natural but reckless wrath which nerved every fibre of his strong young body with an almost irresistible impulse to kill Helwyze without a word.

The gust of blind passion subsided quickly into a calmer, but not less dangerous, mood; and, fearing to trust himself so near his enemy, Canaris rushed away, to walk fast and far, unconscious where he went, till the autumnal gloaming brought him back, master of himself, he thought.

While he wandered aimlessly about the city, he had been recalling the past with the vivid skill which at such intense moments seems to bring back half-forgotten words, apparently unnoticed actions, and unconscious impressions; as fire causes invisible letters to stand out upon a page where they are traced in sympathetic ink.

Not a doubt of Gladys disturbed the ever- deepening current of a love the more precious for its newness, the more powerful for its ennobling influence. But every instinct of his nature rose in revolt against Helwyze, all the more rebellious and resentful for the long subjection in which he had been held.

A master stronger than the ambition which had been the ruling passion of his life so far asserted its supremacy now, and made it possible for him to pay the price of liberty without further weak delay or unmanly regret.

This he resolved upon, and this he believed he could accomplish safely and soon. But if Helwyze, with far greater skill and self-control, had failed to guide or subdue the conflicting passions let loose among them, how could Canaris hope to do it, or retard by so much as one minute the irresistible consequences of their acts? “ The providence of God cannot be hurried,” and His retribution falls at the appointed time, saving, even when it seems to destroy.

Returning resolute but weary, Canaris was relieved to find that a still longer reprieve was granted him; for Olivia was there, and Gladys apparently absorbed in the tender toil women love, making ready for the Christmas gift she hoped to give him. Helwyze sent word that he was suffering one of his bad attacks, and bade them all good-night, so there was nothing to mar the last quiet evening these three were ever to pass together.

When Canaris had seen Olivia to the winter quarters she inhabited near by, he went up to his own room, where Gladys lay, looking like a child who had cried itself to sleep. The sight of the pathetic patience touched with slumber’s peace, in the tear-stained face upon the pillow, wrung his heart, and, stooping, he softly kissed the hand upon the coverlet, — the small hand that wore a wedding-ring, now grown too large for it.

“God bless my dearest!” he whispered, with a sob in his throat. “ Out of this accursed house she shall go to-morrow, though I leave all but love and liberty behind me.”

Sleepless, impatient, and harassed by thoughts that would not let him rest, he yielded to the uncanny attraction which the library now had for him, and went down again, deluding himself with the idea that he could utilize emotion and work for an hour or two.

The familiar room looked strange to him; and when the door of Helwyze’s apartment opened quietly, he started, although it was only Stern, coming to nap before the comfortable fire. Something in-Canaris’s expectant air and attitude made the man answer the question his face seemed to ask.

“Quiet at last, sir. He has had no sleep for many nights, and is fairly worn out.”

“You look so, too. Go and rest a little. I shall be here writing for several hours, and can see to him,” said Canaris, kindly, as the poor old fellow respectfully tried to swallow a portentous gape behind his hand.

“Thank you, Mr, Felix: it would be a comfort just to lose myself. Master is not likely to want any thing; but, if he should call, just step and give him his drops, please. They are all ready. I fixed them myself: he is so careless when he is half-asleep, and, not being used to this new- stuff, an overdose might kill him.”

Giving these directions, Stern departed with alacrity, and left Canaris to his watch. He had often done as much before, but never with such a sense of satisfaction as now; and though he carefully abstained from giving himself a reason for the act, no sooner had the valet gone than he went to look in upon Helwyze, longing to call out commandingly, “ Wake, and hear me!”

But the helplessness of the man disarmed him, the peaceful expression of the sharp, white features mutely reproached him, the recollection of what he would awaken to made Canaris ashamed to exult over a defeated enemy; and he turned away, with an almost compassionate glance at the straight, still figure, clearly defined against the dusky background of the darkened room.

"He looks as if he were dead."

Canaris did not speak aloud, but it seemed as if a voice echoed the words with a suggestive emphasis, that made him pause as he approached the study-table, conscious of a quick thrill of comprehension tingling through him like an answer. Why he covered both ears with a sudden gesture, he could not tell, nor why he hastily seated himself, caught up the first book at hand and began to read without knowing what he read. Only for an instant, however, then the words grew clear before him, and his eyes rested on this line, —

* "Thy ominous tongue gives utterance to thy wish."

AESCHYLUS.

He dropped the book, as if it had burnt him, and looked over his shoulder, almost expecting to see the dark thought lurking in his mind take shape before him. Empty, dim, and quiet was the lofty room; but a troubled spirit and distempered imagination peopled it with such vivid and tormenting phantoms of the past, the present and the future, that he scarcely knew whether he was awake or dreaming, as he sat there alone, waiting for midnight, and the spectre of an uncommitted deed.

His wandering eye fell on a leaf of paper, lying half-shrivelled by the heat of the red fire.

This recalled the hour when, in the act of burning that first manuscript, Helwyze hud saved him, and all that followed shortly after.

Not a pleasant memory, it seemed; for his face darkened, and his glance turned to a purple- covered volume, left on the low chair where Gladys usually sat, and often read in that beloved book. A still more bitter recollection bowed his head at sight of it, till some newer, sharper thought seemed to pierce him with a sudden stab, and he laid his clenched hand on the pile of papers before him, as if taking an oath more binding than the one made there nearly three years ago.

He had been reading Shakespeare lately, for one may copy the great masters; and now, as he tried with feverish energy to work upon his play, the grim or gracious models he had been studying seemed to rise and live before him. But one and all were made subject to the strong passions which ruled him; jealousy, ambition, revenge, and love wore their appropriate guise, acted their appropriate parts, and made him one with them. Othello would only show himself as stabbing the perfidious Iago; Macbeth always grasped at the air-drawn dagger; Hamlet was continually completing his fateful task; and Romeo whispered, with the little vial at his lips,

"Oh, true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick."

Canaris tried to chase away these troubled spirits; but they would not down, and, yielding to them, he let his mind wander as it would, till he had "supped full of horrors," feeling as if in the grasp of a nightmare which led him, conscious, but powerless, toward some catastrophe forefelt, rather than foreseen. How long this lasted he never knew; for nothing broke the silence growing momently more terrible as he listened to the stealthy tread of the temptation coming nearer and nearer, till it appeared in the likeness of himself, while a voice said, in the ordinary tone which so often makes dreams grotesque at their most painful climax, —

"Master is so careless when half-asleep; and, not being used to this new stuff, an overdose might kill him."

As if these words were the summons for which he had been waiting, Canaris rose up suddenly and went into that other room, too entirely absorbed by the hurrying emotions which swept him away to see what looked like a new phantom coming in. It might have been the shade of young Juliet, gentle Desdemona, poor Ophelia, or, better still the eidolen of Margaret wandering, pale and pensive, through the baleful darkness of this Walpurgis Nacht.

He did not see it; he saw nothing but the glass upon the table where the dim light burned, the little vial with its colorless contents, and Helwyze sti -ring in his bed, as if about to wake and speak. Conscious only of the purpose which now wholly dominated him. Canaris, without either haste or hesitation, took the bottle, uncorked, and held it over the glass half - filled with water. But before a single drop could fall a cold hand touched his own, and, with a start that crushed the vial in his grasp, he found himself eye to eye with Gladys.

Guilt was frozen upon his face, terror upon hers; but neither spoke, for a third voice muttered drowsily, " Stern, give me more; don't rouse me."

Canaris could not stir; Gladys whispered, with white lips, and her hand upon the cup, —

"Dare I give it?"

He could only answer by a sign, and cowered into the shadow, while she put the draught to Helwyze's lips, fearing to let him waken now. He drank drowsily, yet seemed half-conscious of her presence; for he looked up with sleep- drunken eyes, and murmured, as if to the familiar figure of a dream, —

"Mine asleep, his awake," then whispering brokenly about "Felix, Vivien, and daring any thing," he was gone again into the lethargy which alone could bring forgetfulness.

Gladys feared her husband would hear the almost inaudible words; but he had vanished, and when she glided out to join him, carefully closing the door behind her, a glance showed that her fear was true.

Relieved, yet not repentant, he stood there looking at a red stain on his hand with such a desperate expression that Gladys could only cling to him, saying, in a terror-stricken whisper, —

“Felix, for God’s sake, come away! What are you doing here?”

“Going mad, I think,” he answered, under his breath; but added, lifting up his hand with an ominous gesture, “ I would have done it if you had not stopped me. It would be better for us all if he were dead.”

“Not so; thank Heaven I came in time to save you from the sin of murder!” she said, holding fast the hand as yet unstained by any blood but its own.

“I have committed murder in my heart. Why not profit by the sin, since it is there? I hate that man! I have cause, and you know it.”

“No, no, not all! You shall tell me every thing; but not now, not here.”

“The time has come, and this is the place to tell it. Sit there and listen. I must untie or cut the snarl to-night.”

He pointed to the great chair; and, grateful for any thing that could change or stem the dangerous current of his thoughts, Gladys sank down, feeling as if, after this shock, she was prepared for any discovery or disaster. Canaris stood before her, white and stern, as if he were both judge and culprit; for a sombre wrath still burned in his eye, and his face worked with the mingled shame and contempt warmg within him.

“I heard and saw thi* afternoon, when you two talked together yonder, and I knew then what made you so glad to go away, so loath to come back. You have had a secret as well as I.”

“I was never sure until to-day. Do not speak of that: it is enough to know it, and forget it :f we can. Tell your secret: i t has burdened you so long, you will be glad to end it. He wouid have done so, but I would not let him.”

“I thought it would be hard to tell you, yet now my fault looks so small and innocent beside his, I can confess without much shame or fear.”

But it was not easy; for he had gone so far into a deeper, darker world that night, it was difficult to come to lesser sins and lighter thoughts. As he hesitated for a word, his eye fell upon the purple-covered book, and he saw a way to shorten his confession. Catching up a pen, he bent over the volume an instant, then handed it to Gladys, open at the title-page. She knew it, — the dear romance, worn with much reading, — and looked wonderingly at the black mark drawn through the name, “ Felix Canaris,” and the words, “Jasper Helwyze,” written boldly below.

“What does it mean?” she asked, refusing to believe the discovery which the expression of his averted face confirmed.

“That I am a living lie. He wrote that book.”

“He?”

“Every line.”

“But not the other?” she said; clinging to a last hope, as every thing seemed falling about her.

“All, except half a dozen of the songs.”

Down dropped the book between them, — now a thing of little worth, — and, trying to conceal from him the contempt which even love could not repress, Gladys hid her face, with one reproach, the bitterest she could have uttered, —

“O my husband! did you give up honor, liberty, and peace for so poor a thing as that?”

It cut him to the soul: for now he saw how high a price he had paid for an empty name; how mean and poor his ambition looked; how truly he deserved to be despised for that of which he had striven to be proud. Gladys had so rejoiced over him as a poet, that it was the hardest task of all to put off his borrowed singing-robes, and show himself an ordinary man. He forgot that there was any other tribunal than this, as he stood waiting for his sentence, oppressed with the fear that out of her almost stern sense of honor she might condemn him to the loss of the respect and confidence which he had lately learned to value as much as happiness and love.

“You must despise me; but if you knew “ — he humbly began, unable to bear the silence longer.

“Tell me, then. I will not judge until I know;” and Gladys, just, even in her sorrow, looked up with an expression which said plainer than words, “ For better, for worse; this is the worse, bat I love you still.’

That made it possible for him to go on, fast and low, not stopping to choose phrases, but pouring out the little story of his temptation and fall, with a sense of intense relief that he was done with slavery for ever.

“Neither of us coolly planned this thing; it came about so simply and naturally, it seemed a mere accident. — And yet, who can tell what he might have planned, seeing how weak I was, how ready to be tempted. — It happened in that second month, when I promised to stay; he to help me with my book. It was all mine then; but when we came to look at it, there was not enough to fill even the most modest volume; for I had burnt many, and must recall them, or write more. I tried honestly, but the power was not. in me, and I fell into despair again; for the desire to be known was the breath of my life.”

“You will be, if not in this way, in some other; for power of some sort is in you. Believe it, and wait for it to show itself," said Gladys, anxious to add patience and courage to the new humility and sincerity, which could not fail to ennoble and strengthen him in time.

"Bless you for that!" he answered, gratefully, and hurried on. "It came about in this wise: one day my master — he was then, but is no longer, thank God! — sat reading over a mass of old papers, before destroying them. Here he came upon verses written in the diaries kept years ago, and threw them to me, 'to laugh over,' as he said. I did not laugh: I was filled with envy and admiration, and begged him to publish them. He scorned the idea, and bade me put them in the fire. I begged to keep them, and then, — Gladys, I swear to you I cannot tell whether I read the project in his face, or whether my own evil genius put it into my head, — then I said, audaciously, though hardly dreaming he would consent, ' You do not care for fame, and throw these away as worthless : I long for it, and see more power in these than in any I can hope to write for years, perhaps; let me add them to miie, and see what will come of it.' ' Put your own name to them, if you do, and take the consequences,' he answered, in that brusque way of his, which seems so careless, yet is so often premeditated. I assented, as I would have done to any thing that promised a quick trial of my talent; for in my secret soul I thought some of my songs better than his metaphysical verses, which impressed, rather than chained me. The small imposture seemed to amuse him, I had few scruples then, and we did it, with much private jesting about Beaumont and Fletcher, literary frauds, and borrowed plumage. You know the rest. The book succeeded, but he saved it; and the critics left me small consolation, for my songs were ignored as youthful ditties, his poems won all the praise, and I was pronounced a second Shelley."

"But he? Did he claim no share of the glory? Was he content to let you have it all?" questioned Gladys, trying to understand a thing so foreign to her nature that it seemed incredible.

"Yes; I offered to come down from my high place, as soon as I realized how little right I had to it. But he forbade me, saying, what I was fool enough to believe, that my talent only needed time and culture, and the sunshine of success to ripen it; that notoriety would be a burden to him, since he had neither health to sustain nor spirits to enjoy it; that in me he would live his youth over again, and, in return for such help as he could give, I should be a son to him. That touched and won me; now I can see in it a trap to catch and hold me, that he might amuse himself with my folly, play the generous patron, and twist my life to suit his ends. He likes curious and costly toys; he had one then, and has not paid for it yet."

"This other book? Tell me of that, and speak low, or he may hear us," whispered Gladys, trembling lest fire and powder should meet.

With a motion of his foot Canaris sent the book that lay between them spinning across the hearth-rug out of sight, and answered, with a short, exultant laugh, —

“Ah! there the fowler was taken in his own snare. I did not see it then, and found it hard to understand why he should exert himself to please you by helping me. I thought it was a mere freak of literary rivalry; and, when I taxed him with it, he owned that, though he cared nothing for the world’s praise, it was pleasant to know that his powers were still unimpaired, and be able to laugh in his sleeve at the deluded critics. That was like him, and it deceived me till to-day. Now I know that he begrudged me your admiration, wanted your tears and smiles for himself, and did not hesitate to steal them. The night he so adroitly read his work for mine, he tempted me through you. I had resolved to deserve the love and honor you gave me; and again I tried, and again I failed, for my romance was a poor, pale thing to his. He had read it; and, taking the same plot, made it what you know, writing as only such a man could write, when a strong motive stimulated him to do his best.”

“But why did you submit? Why stand silent and let him do so false a thing?” cried poor Gladys, wondering when the end of the tangle would come.

“At first his coolness staggered me; then I was curious to hear, then held even, against my will, by admiration of the thing — and you. I meant to speak out, I longed to do it; but it was very hard, while you were praising me so eloquently. The words were on my lips, when in his face I saw a look that sealed them. He meant that I should utter the self-accusation which would lower me for ever and raise him in your regard. I could not bear it. There was no time to think, only to feel, and I vowed to make you happy, at all costs. I hardly thought he would submit; but he did, and I believed that it was through surprise at being outwitted for the moment, or pity towards you. It was neither: he fancied I had discovered his secret, and he dared not defy me then.”

“But when I was gone? You were so late that night: I heard your voices, sharp and angry, as I went away.”

“Yes; that was my hour, and I enjoyed it. He had often twitted me with the hold he had on my name and fame, and I bore it; for, till I loved you, they were the dearest things I owned. That night I told him he should not speak; that you should enjoy your pride in me, even at his expense, and I refused to release him from his bond, as he had, more than once, refused to release me : for we had sworn never to confess till both agreed to it. Good heavens! how low he must have thought I had fallen, if I could consent to buy your happiness at the cost of my honor! He did think it: that made him yield; that is the cause of the contempt he has not cared to hide from me since then; and that adds a double edge to my hatred now. I was to be knave as well as fool; and while I blinded myself with his reflected light, he would have filched my one jewel from me. Gladys, save me, keep me, or I shall do something desperate yet!”

Beside himself with humiliation, remorse, and wrath, Canaris flung himself down before her, as if only by clinging to that frail spar could he ride out the storm ill which he was lost without compass or rudder.

Then Gladys showed him that such love as hers could not fail, but, like an altar-fire, glowed the stronger for every costly sacrifice thrown therein. Lifting up the discrowned head, she laid it on her bosom with a sweet motherliness which comforted more than her tender words.

“My poor Felix! you have suffered enough for this deceit; I forgive it, and keep my reproaches for the false friend who led you astray.”

“It was so paltry, weak, and selfish. You must despise me,” he said, wistfully, still thinking more of his own pain than hers.

“I do despise the sin, not the dear sinner who repents and is an honest man again.”

“But a beggar.”

“We have each other. Hush! stand up; some one is coming.” (

Canaris had barely time to spring to his feet, when Stern came in, and was about to pass on in silence, though much amazed to see Gladys there at that hour, when the expression of the young man’s face made him forget decorum and stop short, exclaiming, anxiously, —

“Mr. Felix, what’s the matter? Is master worse?”

“Safe and asleep. Mrs. Canaris came to see what I was about.”

“Then, sir, if I may make so bold, the sooner she gets to bed again the better. It is far too late for her to be down here; the poor young lady looks half-dead,” Stern whispered, with the freedom of an old servant.

“You are right. Come, love;” and without another word Canaris led her away, leaving Stern to shake his gray head as he looked after them.

Gladys was utterly exhausted; and in the hall she faltered, saying, with a patient sigh, as she looked up the long stairway, “ Dear, wait a little; it is so far, — my strength is all gone.”

Canaris caught her in his arms and carried her away, asking himself, with a remorseful pang that rent his heart, —

“Is this the murder I have committed?”

XVII.

“STERN!”

“Yes, sir.”

“What time is it?”

“Past two, sir.”

“What news? I see bad tidings of some sort in that lugubrious face of yours; out with it!”

“The little boy arrived at dawn, sir,” answered old Stern, with a paternal air.

“What little boy?”

“Canaris, Jr., sir,” simpered the valet, venturing to be jocose.

“The deuce he did! Precipitate, like his father. Where is Felix?”

“With her, sir. In a state of mind, as well he may be, letting that delicate young thing sit up to keep him company over his poetry stuff,” muttered Stern, busying himself with the shutters.

“Sit up! when? where? what are you maundering about, man?” and Helwyze himself sat up among the pillows, looking unusually wideawake.

“Last night, sir, in the study. Mr. Felix made me go for a wink’ of sleep, and when I came back, about one, there sat Mrs. Cunaris as white as her gown, and bin looking as wild as a hawk. Something was ai~iss, I could see plain enough, but it wasn’t my place to ask questions; so I just made bold to suggest that it was late for her to be up, and he took her away, looking dazed-like. That’s all I know, ir, till I found the women in a great ilustration this morn’ tg.”

“And I slept through it all?”

“Yes, sir; so soundly, I was a bit anxious till you waked. I found the glass empty and the bottle smashed, and I was afraid you might have taken too much of that choral while half- asleep.”

“No fear; nothing kills me. Now get me up;” and Helwyze nude his toilet with a speed and energy which caused Stern to consider “choral” a wonderful discovery.

A pretence of breakfast; then Helwyze sat down to wait for further tidings, — externally quite calm, internally tormented by a great anxiety, till Olivia came in, full of cheering news and sanguine expectations.

“Gladys is asleep, with baby on her arm, and Felix adoring in the background. Poor boy! he cannot bear much, and is quite bowed down with remorse for something he has done. Do you know what?”

As she spoke, Olivia stooped to pick up a book half-hidden by the fringe of a low chair. It lay face downward, and, in smoothing the crumpled leaves before closing it, she caught sight of a black and blotted name. So did Helwyze; a look of intelligence flashed over his face, and, taking the volume quickly, he answered, with his finger on the title-page, —

“Yes, now I know, and so may you; for if one woman is in the secret, it will soon be out. Felix wrote that, and it is true.”

“I thought so! One woman has known it for a long time; nevertheless, the secret was kept for your sake;” and Olivia’s dark face sparkled with malicious merriment, as she saw the expression of mingled annoyance, pride, and pleasure in his.

“My compliments and thanks : you are the eighth wonder of the world. But what led you to suspect this little fraud of ours?”

“I did not, till the last book came; then I was struck here and there by certain peculiar phrases, certain tender epithets, which I think no one ever heard from your lips but me. These, in the hero’s mouth, made me sure that you had helped Canaris, if not done the whole yourself, and his odd manner at times confirmed my suspicion.”

“You have a good memory: I forgot that.”

“I have had so few such words from you that it is easy to remember them,” murmured Olivia, reproachfully.

It seemed to touch him; for just then he felt deserted, well knowing that he had lost both Felix and Gladys; but Olivia never would desert him, no matter what discovery was made, or who might fall away. He thanked her for her devotion, with the first ray of hope given for years, as he said, in the tone so seldom heard, —

“You shall have more henceforth; for you are a staunch friend, and now I have no other.”

“Dear Jasper, you shall never find me wanting. I will be true to the death!” she cried, blooming suddenly into her best and brightest beauty, with the delight of this rare moment. Then, fearing to express too much, she wisely turned again to Felix, asking curiously, “ But why did you let this young daw deck himself out in your plumes? It enrages me, to think of his receiving the praise and honor due to you.”

He told her briefly, adding, with more than his accustomed bitterness, —

“What did I want with praise and honor? To be gaped and gossiped about would have driven me mad. It pleased that vain boy as much as fooling the public amused me. A whim, and, being a dishonest one, we shall both have to pay for it, I suppose.”

“What will he do?” .

“He has told Gladys, to begin with; and, if it had been possible, would have taken some decisive step to-day. He can do nothing sagely and quietly: there must be a dramatic cUnouement to every chapter of his life. I think he has one now.” Helwyze laughed, as he struck back the leaves of the book he still held, and looked at the dashing signature of his own name.

“He wrote that, then?” asked Olivia.

“Yes, here, at midnight, while I lay asleep and let him tell the tale as he liked to Gladys. No wonder it startled her, so tragically given. The sequel may be more tragic yet: I seem to feel it in the air.”

“What shall you do?” asked Olivia, more anxiously than before; for Helwyze looked up with as sinister an expression as if he knew how desperate an enemy had stood over him last night, and when his own turn came, would be less merciful.

“Do? Nothing They will go; I shall stay; tongues will wag, and I shall be tormented. I shall seem the gainer, he the loser; but it will not be so.”

Involuntarily Lis eye went to the little chair where Gladys would sit no longer, and darkened as if some light had gone out which used to cheer and comfort him. Olivia saw it, and could net restrain the question that broke from her lips, —

“You do love her, Jasper?”

“I shall miss her; but you shall take her place.”

Calm and a little scornful was his face, his voice quite steady, and a smile was shed upon her with the last welcome words. But Olivia was not deceived: the calmness was unnatural, the voice too steady, the smile too sudden; and her heart sank as she thanked him, without another question For a while they sat together playing well their parts, then she went away to Gladys, and he was left to several hours of solitary musing.

Had he been a better man, he would not have sinned; had he been a worse one, he could not have suffered; being what he was, he did both, and, having no one else to study now, looked deeply into himself, and was dismayed at what he saw. For the new love, purer, yet more hopeless than the old, shone like a star above an abyss, showing him whither he had wandered in the dark.

Sunset came, filling the room with its soft splendor; and he watched the red rays linger longest in Gladys’s corner. Her little basket stood as she left it, her books lay orderly, her desk was shut, a dead flower drooped from the slender vase, and across the couch trailed a soft white shawl she had been wont to wear. Helwyze did not approach the spot, but stood afar off looking at these small familiar things with the melancholy fortitude of one inured to loss and pain. Regret rather than remorse possessed him as he thought, drearily, —

“A year to-morrow since she came. How shall I exist without her? Where will her new home be?”

An answer was soon given to the last question; for, while his fancy still hovered about that nook, and the gentle presence which had vanished as the sunshine was fast vanishing, Canaris came in wearing such an expression of despair, that Helwyze recoiled, leaving half-uttered a play ful inquiry about “ the little son.”

“I have no son.”

“Dead?”

“Dead. I have murdered bolh.”

“But Gladys?”

“Dying; she asks for you, — come!” No need of that hoarse command: Helwyze was gone at the first word, swiftly through room and hall, up the stairs he had not mounted for months, straight to that chamber-door There a hand clutched his shoulder, a breathless voice said, “ Here I am first;” and Canaris passed in before him, motioning away a group of tearful women as he went, Helwyze lingered, pale and panting, till they were gone; then he looked and listened, as if turned to stone, for in the heart of the hash lay Gladys, talking softly to the dead baby on her arm. Not mourning over it, but yearning with maternal haste to follow and cherish the creature of her love.

“Only a day old; so young to go away alone. Even in heaven you will want your mother, darling, and she will come. Sleep, my baby, I will be with you when you wake.”

A stifled sound of anguish recalled the happy soul, already half-way home, and Gladys turned her quiet eyes to her husband bending over her.

“Dear, will he come?” she whispered.

“He is here.”

He was; and, standing on either side the bed, the two men seemed unconscious of each other, intent only upon her. Feebly she drew the white cover over the little cold thing in her bosom, as if too sacred for any eyes but hers to see, then lifted up her hand with a beseeching glance from one haggard face to the other. They understood; each gave the hand she asked, and, holding them together with the last effort of failing strength, she said, clear and low, —

“Forgive each other for my sake.”

Neither spoke, having no words, but by a mute gesture answered as she wished. Something brighter than a smile rested on her face, and, as if satisfied, she turned again to Canaris, seeming to forget all else in the tender farewell she gave him.

“Remember, love, remember we shall be waiting for you. The new home will not be home to us until you come.”

As her detaining touch was lifted, the two hands fell apart, never to meet again. Canaris knelt down to lay his head beside hers on the pillow, to catch the last accents of the beloved voice, sweet even now. Helwyze, forgotten by them both, drew back into the shadow of the deep red curtains, still studying with an awful curiosity the great mystery of death, asking, even while his heart grew cold within him, —

“Will the faith she trusted sustain her now?”

It did; for, leaning on the bosom of Infinite Love, like a confiding child in its father’s arms, without a doubt or fear to mar her peace, a murmur or lament to make the parting harder, Gladys went to her own place.

XVIII.

“FOR in that sleep of death, what dreams may come. Is this one?” was the vague feeling, rather than thought, of which Helwyze was dimly conscious, as he lay in what seemed a grave, so cold, so dead he felt; so powerless and pent, in what he fancied was his coffin. He remembered the slow rising of a tide of helplessness which chilled his blood and benumbed his brain, till the last idea to be distinguished was, “ I am dying: shall I meet Gladys?” then came oblivion, and now, what was this?

Something was alive still — something which strove to see, move, speak, yet could not, till the mist, which obscured every sense, should clear away. A murmur was in the air, growing clearer every instant, as it rose and fell, like the muffled sound of waves upon a distant shore. Presently he recognized human voices, and the words they uttered, — words which had no meaning, till, like an electric shock, intelligence returned, bringing with it a great fear.

Olivia was mourning over him, and he felt her tears upon his face; but it was not this which stung him to sudden life, — it was another voice, saying, low, but with a terrible distinctness, —

“There is no hope. He may remain so for some years, but sooner or later the brain will share the paralysis of the body, and leave our poor friend in a state I grieve to think of.”

“No!” burst from Helwyze, with an effort which seemed to dispel the trance which held his faculties. Stir he could not, but speak he did, and opened wide the eyes which had been closed for hours. With the unutterable relief of one roused from a nightmare he recognized his own room, Olivia’s tender face bent over him, and his physician holding a hand that had no feeling in it.

“Not dead yet;” he muttered, with a feeble sort of exultation, adding, with as feeble a despair and doubt, “but she is. Did I dream that?”

“Alas, no!” and Olivia wiped away her own tears from the forehead which began to work with the rush of returning memory and thought.

“What does this numbness mean? Why are you here?” he asked, as his eye went from one face to the other.

“Dear Jasper, it means that you are ill. Stern found you unconscious in your chair last night. You are much better now, but it alarmed us, for we thought you dead,” replied Olivia, knowing that he would have the truth at any cost “I remember thinking it was death, and being glad of it. Why did you bring me back? I had no wish to come.”

She forgave the ingratitude, and went on chafing the cold hand so tenderly, that Helwyze reproached no more, but, turning to the physician, demanded, with a trace of the old imperiousness coming back into his feeble voice, — " Is this to be the end of it? " " I fear so, Mr. Helwyze. You will not suffer any more, let that comfort you."

"My body may not, but my mind will suffer horribly. Good heavens, man, do you call this death in life a comfortable end? How long have I got to lie here watching my wits go?" " It is impossible to say." " But certain, sooner or later?" "There is a chance, — your brain has been overworked : it must have rest," began the doctor, trying to soften the hard facts, since his patient would have them. " Rest! kill me at once, then; annihilation would be far better than such rest as that. I will not lie here waiting for imbecility, — put an end to this, or let me!" cried Helwyze, struggling to lift his powerless right hand; and, finding it impossible, he looked about him with an impotent desperation which wrung Olivia's heart, and alarmed the physician, although he had long foreseen this climax.

Both vainly tried to soothe and console; but after that one despairing appeal Helwyze turned his face to the wall, and lay so for hours. Asleep, they hoped, but in reality tasting the first bitterness of the punishment sent upon him as an expiation for the sin of misusing one of Heaven's best gifts. No words could describe the terror such a fate had for him. since intellect had been his god, and he already felt it tottering to its fall. On what should he lean, if that were taken? where see any ray of hope to make the present endurable? where find any resignation to lighten the gloom of such a future?

Restless mind and lawless will, now imprisoned in a helpless body, preyed on each other like wild creatures caged, finding it impossible to escape, and as impossible to submit. Death would not have daunted him, pain he had learned to endure; but this slow decay of his most precious possession he could not bear, and suffered a new martyrdom infinitely sharper than the old.

How time went he never knew; for, although merciful unconsciousness was denied him, his thoughts, like avenging Furies, drove him from one bitter memory to another, probing his soul as he had probed others, and tormenting him with an almost supernatural activity of brain before its long rest began. Ages seemed to pass, while he took no heed of what went on about him. People came and went, faces bent over him, hands ministered to him, and voices whispered in the room. He knew all this, without the desire to do so, longing only to forget and be forgotten, with an increasing irritation, which slowly brought him back from that inner world of wordless pain to the outer one, which must be faced, and in some fashion endured.

Olivia still sat near him, as if she had not stirred, though it was morning when last he spoke, and now night had come. The familiar room was dim and still, every thing already ordered for his comfort, and the brilliant cousin had transformed herself into a quiet nurse. The rustling silks were replaced by a soft, gray gown; the ornaments all gone; even the fine hair was half-hidden by the little kerchief of lace tied over it. Yet never had Olivia been more beautiful; for now the haughty queen had changed to a sad woman, wearing for her sole ornaments constancy and love. Worn and weary she looked, but a sort of sorrowful content was visible, a jealous tenderness, which plainly told that for her, at least, there was a drop of honey even n the new affliction, since it made him more her own than ever.

"Poor soul! she promised to be faithful to the death; and she will be, — even such a death as this."

A sigh, that was almost a groan, broke from Helwyze as the thought came, and Olivia was instantly at his side.

"Are you suffering, Jasper? What can I do for you?" she said, with such a passionate desire to serve or cheer, that he could not but answer, gently, —

"I am done with pain: teach me to be patient."

"Oh, if I could! we must learn that together," she said, feeling with him how sorely both would need the meek virtue to sustain the life before them.

"Where is Felix?" asked Helwyze. after lying lor a while, with his eyes upon the fire, as if they would absorb its light and warmth into their melancholy depths.

"Mourning for Gladys," replied Olivia, fearing to touch the dangerous topic, yet anxious to know how the two men stood toward one another; for something in the manner of the younger, when the elder was mentioned, made her suspect some stronger, sadder tie between them than the one she had already guessed.

"Does he know of this?" and Helwyze struck himself a feeble blow with the one hand which he could use, now lying on his breast.

"Yes."

"What does he say of me?"

"Nothing."

"I must see him."

"You shall. I asked him if he had no word for you, and he answered, with a strange expression, 'When I have buried my dead I will come, for the last time.'"

"How does he look?" questioned Helwyze, curious to see, even through another's eyes, the effect of sorrow upon the man whom he had watched so long and closely.

"Sadly broken; but he is young and sanguine : he will soon forget, and be happy again; so do not let a thought of him disturb you, Jasper.”

“It does not: we made our bargain, and held each other to it, till he chose to break it. Let him bear the consequences, as I do.”

“Alas, they fall on him far less heavily than on you! He has all the world before him where to choose, while you have nothing left — but me.”

He did not seem to hear her, and fell into a gloomy reverie, which she dared not break, but sat, patiently beguiling her lonely watch with sad thoughts of the twilight future, they were to share together, — a future which might have been so beautiful and happy, had true love earlier made them one.

Another day, another night, then there were sounds about the house which told Helwyze what was passing, without the need of any question. He asked none; but lay silent for the most part, as if careless or unconscious of what went on around him. He missed Olivia for an hour, and when she returned, traces of tears upon her cheeks told him that she had been to say farewell to Gladys. He had not spoken that name even to himself; for now an immeasurable space seemed to lie between him and its gentle owner. She had gone into a world whither he could not follow her. A veil, invisible, yet impenetrable, separated them for ever, he believed, and nothing remained to him but a memory that would not die, — a memory so bitter-sweet, so made up of remorse and reverence, love and longing, that it seemed to waken his heart from its long sleep, and kindle in it a spark of the divine fire, whose flame purified while it consumed; for even in his darkness and desolation he was not forgotten.

Late that day Canaris came, looking like a man escaped from a great shipwreck, with nothing left him but his life. Unannounced he entered, and, with the brevity which in moments of strong feeling is more expressive than eloquence, he said, —

“I am going.”

“Where? “ asked Helwyze, conscious that any semblance of friendship, any word of sympathy, was impossible between them.

“Out into the world again.”

“What will you do?”

“Any honest work I can find.”

“Let me “ —

“No! I will take nothing from you. Poor as I came, I will go, — except the few relics I possess of her.”

A traitorous tremor in the voice which was stern with repressed emotion warned Canaris to pause there, while his eye turned to Olivia, as if reminded of some last debt to her. From his breast he drew a little paper, unfolded it, and took out what looked like a massive ring of gold; this he laid before her, saying, with a softened mien and accent, —

“You were very kind, — I have nothing else to offer, — let me give you this, in memory of Gladys.”

Only a tress of sunny hair: but Olivia received the gift as if it were a very precious one, thanking him, not only with wet eyes, but friendly words.

“Dear Felix, for her sake let me help you, if I can. Do not go away so lonely, purposeless, and poor. The world is hard; you will be disheartened, and turn desperate, with no one to love and hope and work for.”

“I must help myself. I am poor; but not purposeless, nor alone. Disheartened I may be: never desperate again; for I have some one to love and hope and work for. She is waiting for me somewhere: I must make myself worthy to follow and find her. I have promised; and. God helping me, I will keep that promise.”

Very humble, yet hopeful, was the voice; and full of a sad courage was the young man’s altered face, — for out of it the gladness and the bloom of youth had gone for ever, leaving the strength of a noble purpose to confront a life which hereafter should be honest, if not happy.

Helwyze had not the infinite patience to work in marble; the power to chisel even his own divided nature into harmony, like the sculptor, who, in the likeness of a suffering saint, hewed his own features out of granite. He could only work in clay, as caprice inspired or circumstance suggested; forgetting that life’s stream of mixed and molten metals would flow over his faulty models, fixing unalterably both beauty and blemish. He had found the youth plastic as clay, had shaped him as he would; till, tiring of the task, he had been ready to destroy his work. But the hand of a greater Master had dropped into the furnace the gold of an enduring love, to brighten the bronze in which suffering and time were to cast the statue of the man. Helwyze saw this now, and a pang of something sharper than remorse wrung from him the reluctant words, —

“Take, as my last gift, the fame which has cost you so much. I will never claim it: to me it is an added affliction, to you it may be a help.

Keep it, I implore you, and give me the pardon she asked of you.”

But Canaris turned on him with the air of one who cries, “ Get thee behind me!” and answered with enough of the old vehemence to prove that grief had not yet subdued the passionate spirit which had been his undoing, —

“It is no longer in your power to tempt me, or in mine to be tempted, by my bosom sin. Forsythe knows the truth, and the world already wonders. I will earn a better fame for myself: keep this, and enjoy it, if you can. Pardon I cannot promise yet; but I give you my pity, ‘ for her sake.’“

With that — the bitterest word he could have uttered — Canaris was gone, leaving Helwyze to writhe under the double burden imposed by one more just than generous. Olivia durst not speak; and, in the silence, both listened to the hasty footsteps that passed from room to room, till a door closed loudly, and they knew that Canaris had set forth upon that long pilgrimage which was in time to lead him up to Gladys.

Helwyze spoke first, exclaiming, with a dreary laugh, —

"So much for playing Providence! You were right, and I was rash to try it. Goethe could make his Satan as he liked; but Fate was stronger than I, and so comes ignominious failure. Margaret dies, and Faust suffers, but Mephistopheles cannot go with him on his new wanderings. Still, it holds — it holds even to the last! My end comes too soon; yet it is true. In loving the angel I lose the soul I had nearly won; the roses turn to flakes of fire, and the poor devil is left lamenting."

Olivia thought him wandering, and listened in alarm; for his thoughts seemed blown to and fro, like leaves in a fitful gust, and she had no clew to them. Presently, he broke out again, still haunted by the real tragedy in which he had borne a part; still following Canaris, whose freedom was like the thought of water to parched Tantalus.

"He will do it! he will do it! When or how, who shall say? but, soon or late, she will save him, since he believes in such salvation. Would that I did!"

Perhaps the despairing wish was the seed of a future hope, which might blossom into belief. Olivia trusted so, and tried to murmur some comfortable, though vague, assurance of a love and pity greater even than hers. He did not hear her; for his eyes were fixed, with an expression of agonized yearning, upon the sky, serene and beautiful, but infinitely distant, inexorably dumb; and, when he spoke, his words had in them both his punishment and her own, —

"Life before was Purgatory, now it is Hell; because I loved her, and I have no hope to follow and find her again."

UNDER THE LILACS

This children's novel was first published in 1878. It tells the story of two girls, Bab and Betty Moss. When the girls decide to have a tea party with their dolls and a mysterious dog comes and eats their prized cake, they end up finding a circus run-away in their play barn, Ben Brown.

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CHAPTER I A MYSTERIOUS DOG

The elm-tree avenue was all overgrown, the great gate was never unlocked, and the old house had been shut up for several years.

Yet voices were heard about the place, the lilacs nodded over the high wall as if they said, “We could tell fine secrets if we chose,” and the mullein outside the gate made haste to reach the keyhole, that it might peep in and see what was going on. If it had suddenly grown up like a magic bean-stalk, and looked in on a certain June day, it would have seen a droll but pleasant sight, for somebody evidently was going to have a party.

From the gate to the porch went a wide walk, paved with smooth slabs of dark stone, and bordered with the tall bushes which met overhead, making a green roof. All sorts of neglected flowers and wild weeds grew between their stems, covering the walls of this summer parlor with the prettiest tapestry. A board, propped on two blocks of wood, stood in the middle of the walk, covered with a little plaid shawl much the worse for wear, and on it a miniature tea-service was set forth with great elegance. To be sure, the tea-pot had lost its spout, the cream-jug its handle, the sugar-bowl its cover, and the cups and plates were all more or less cracked or nicked; but polite persons would not take notice of these trifling deficiencies, and none but polite persons were invited to this party.

On either side of the porch was a seat, and here a somewhat remarkable sight would have been revealed to any inquisitive eye peering through the aforesaid keyhole. Upon the left-hand seat lay seven dolls, upon the right-hand seat lay six; and so varied were the expressions of their countenances, owing to fractures, dirt, age, and other afflictions, that one would very naturally have thought this a doll’s hospital, and these the patients waiting for their tea.

This, however, would have been a sad mistake; for if the wind had lifted the coverings laid over them, it would have disclosed the fact that all were in full dress, and merely reposing before the feast should begin.

There was another interesting feature of the scene which would have puzzled any but those well acquainted with the manners and customs of dolls. A fourteenth rag baby, with a china head, hung by her neck from the rusty knocker in the middle of the door. A sprig of white and one of purple lilac nodded over her, a dress of yellow calico, richly trimmed with red-flannel scallops, shrouded her slender form, a garland of small flowers crowned her glossy curls, and a pair of blue boots touched toes in the friendliest, if not the most graceful, manner. An emotion of grief, as well as of surprise, might well have thrilled any youthful breast at such a spectacle; for why, oh! why, was this resplendent dolly hung up there to be stared at by thirteen of her kindred? Was she a criminal, the sight of whose execution threw them flat upon their backs in speechless horror? Or was she an idol, to be adored in that humble posture? Neither, my friends. She was blonde Belinda, set, or rather hung, aloft, in the place of honor, for this was her seventh birthday, and a superb ball was about to celebrate the great event. All were evidently awaiting a summons to the festive board; but such was the perfect breeding of these dolls, that not a single eye out of the whole twenty-seven (Dutch Hans had lost one of the black beads from his worsted countenance) turned for a moment toward the table, or so much as winked, as they lay in decorous rows, gazing with mute admiration at Belinda. She, unable to repress the joy and pride which swelled her sawdust bosom till the seams gaped, gave an occasional bounce as the wind waved her yellow skirts, or made the blue boots dance a sort of jig upon the door. Hanging was evidently not a painful operation, for she smiled contentedly, and looked as if the red ribbon around her neck was not uncomfortably tight; therefore, if slow suffocation suited her, who else had any right to complain? So a pleasing silence reigned, not even broken by a snore from Dinah, the top of whose turban alone was visible above the coverlet, or a cry from baby Jane, though her bare feet stuck out in a way that would have produced shrieks from a less well-trained infant.

Presently voices were heard approaching, and through the arch which led to a side-path came two little girls, one carrying a small pitcher, the other proudly bearing a basket covered with a napkin. They looked like twins, but were not, for Bab was a year older than Betty, though only an inch taller. Both had on brown calico frocks, much the worse for a week’s wear; but clean pink pinafores, in honor of the occasion, made up for that, as well as the gray stockings and thick boots. Both had round, rosy faces rather sunburnt, pug noses somewhat freckled, merry blue eyes, and braided tails of hair hanging down their backs like those of the dear little Kenwigses.

“Don’t they look sweet?” cried Bab, gazing with maternal pride upon the left-hand row of dolls, who might appropriately have sung in chorus, “We are seven.”

“Very nice; but my Belinda beats them all. I do think she is the splendidest child that ever was!” And Betty set down the basket to run and embrace the suspended darling, just then kicking up her heels with joyful abandon.

“The cake can be cooling while we fix the children. It does smell perfectly delicious!” said Bab, lifting the napkin to hang over the basket, fondly regarding the little round loaf that lay inside.

"Leave some smell for me!" commanded Betty, running back to get her fair share of the spicy fragrance. The pug noses sniffed it up luxuriously, and the bright eyes feasted upon the loveliness of the cake, so brown and shiny, with a tipsy-looking B in pie-crust staggering down one side, instead of sitting properly a-top.

"Ma let me put it on the very last minute, and it baked so hard I couldn't pick it off. We can give Belinda that piece, so it's just as well," observed Betty, taking the lead, as her child was queen of the revel.

"Let's set them round, so they can see too," proposed Bab, going, with a hop, skip, and jump, to collect her young family.

Betty agreed, and for several minutes both were absorbed in seating their dolls about the table; for some of the dear things were so limp they wouldn't sit up, and others so stiff they wouldn't sit down, and all sorts of seats had to be contrived to suit the peculiarities of their spines. This arduous task accomplished, the fond mammas stepped back to enjoy the spectacle, which, I assure you, was an impressive one. Belinda sat with great dignity at the head, her hands genteelly holding a pink cambric pocket-handkerchief in her lap. Josephus, her cousin, took the foot, elegantly arrayed in a new suit of purple and green gingham, with his speaking countenance much obscured by a straw hat several sizes too large for him; while on either side sat guests of every size, complexion, and costume, producing a very gay and varied effect, as all were dressed with a noble disregard of fashion.

"They will like to see us get tea. Did you forget the buns?" inquired Betty, anxiously.

"No; got them in my pocket." And Bab produced from that chaotic cupboard two rather stale and crumbly ones, saved from lunch for the fete. These were cut up and arranged in plates, forming a graceful circle around the cake, still in its basket.

"Ma couldn't spare much milk, so we must mix water with it. Strong tea isn't good for children, she says." And Bab contentedly surveyed the gill of skim-milk which was to satisfy the thirst of the company.

"While the tea draws and the cake cools, let's sit down and rest; I'm so tired!" sighed Betty, dropping down on the door-step and stretching out the stout little legs which had been on the go all day; for Saturday had its tasks as well as its fun, and much business had preceded this unusual pleasure. Bab went and sat beside her, looking idly down the walk toward the gate, where a fine cobweb shone in the afternoon sun.

"Ma says she is going over the house in a day or two, now it is warm and dry after the storm, and we may go with her. You know she wouldn't take us in the fall, cause we had whooping-cough, and it was damp there. Now we shall see all the nice things; won’t it be fun?” observed Bab, after a pause.

“Yes, indeed! Ma says there’s lots of books in one room, and I can look at ‘em while she goes round. May be I’ll have time to read some, and then I can tell you,” answered Betty, who dearly loved stories, and seldom got any new ones.

“I’d rather see the old spinning-wheel up garret, and the big pictures, and the queer clothes in the blue chest. It makes me mad to have them all shut up there, when we might have such fun with them. I’d just like to bang that old door down!” And Bab twisted round to give it a thump with her boots. “You needn’t laugh; you know you’d like it as much as me,” she added, twisting back again, rather ashamed of her impatience.

“I didn’t laugh.”

“You did! Don’t you suppose I know what laughing is?”

“I guess I know I didn’t.”

“You did laugh! How darst you tell such a fib?”

“If you say that again I’ll take Belinda and go right home; then what will you do?”

“I’ll eat up the cake.”

“No, you won’t! It’s mine, Ma said so; and you are only company, so you’d better behave or I won’t have any party at all, so now.”

This awful threat calmed Bab’s anger at once, and she hastened to introduce a safer subject.

“Never mind; don’t let’s fight before the children. Do you know, Ma says she will let us play in the coach-house next time it rains, and keep the key if we want to.”

“Oh, goody! that’s because we told her how we found the little window under the woodbine, and didn’t try to go in, though we might have just as easy as not,” cried Betty, appeased at once, for, after a ten years’ acquaintance, she had grown used to Bab’s peppery temper.

“I suppose the coach will be all dust and rats and spiders, but I don’t care. You and the dolls can be the passengers, and I shall sit up in front drive.”

“You always do. I shall like riding better than being horse all the time, with that old wooden bit in my mouth, and you jerking my arms off,” said poor Betty, who was tired of being horse continually.

“I guess we’d better go and get the water now,” suggested Bab, feeling that it was not safe to encourage her sister in such complaints.

“It is not many people who would dare to leave their children all alone with such a lovely cake, and know they wouldn’t pick at it,” said Betty proudly, as they trotted away to the spring, each with a little tin pail in her hand.

Alas, for the faith of these too confiding mammas! They were gone about five minutes, and when they returned a sight met their astonished eyes which produced a simultaneous shriek of horror. Flat upon their faces lay the fourteen dolls, and the cake, the cherished cake, was gone.

For an instant the little girls could only stand motionless, gazing at the dreadful scene. Then Bab cast her water-pail wildly away, and, doubling up her fist, cried out fiercely, —

“It was that Sally! She said she’d pay me for slapping her when she pinched little Mary Ann, and now she has. I’ll give it to her! You run that way. I’ll run this. Quick! quick!”

Away they went, Bab racing straight on, and bewildered Betty turning obediently round to trot in the opposite direction as fast as she could, with the water splashing all over her as she ran, for she had forgotten to put down her pail. Round the house they went, and met with a crash at the back door, but no sign of the thief appeared.

“In the lane!” shouted Bab.

“Down by the spring!” panted Betty; and off they went again, one to scramble up a pile of stones and look over the wall into the avenue, the other to scamper to the spot they had just left. Still, nothing appeared but the dandelions’ innocent faces looking up at Bab, and a brown bird scared from his bath in the spring by Betty’s hasty approach.

Back they rushed, but only to meet a new scare, which made them both cry “Ow!” and fly into the porch for refuge.

A strange dog was sitting calmly among the ruins of the feast, licking his lips after basely eating up the last poor bits of bun, when he had bolted the cake, basket, and all, apparently.

“Oh, the horrid thing!” cried Bab, longing to give battle, but afraid, for the dog was a peculiar as well as a dishonest animal.

“He looks like our China poodle, doesn’t he?” whispered Betty, making herself as small as possible behind her more valiant sister.

He certainly did; for, though much larger and dirtier than the well-washed China dog, this live one had the same tassel at the end of his tail, ruffles of hair round his ankles, and a body shaven behind and curly before. His eyes, however, were yellow, instead of glassy black, like the other’s; his red nose worked as he cocked it up, as if smelling for more cakes, in the most impudent manner; and never, during the three years he had stood on the parlor mantel-piece, had the China poodle done the surprising feats with which this mysterious dog now proceeded to astonish the little girls almost out of their wits. First he sat up, put his forepaws together, and begged prettily; then he suddenly flung his hind-legs into the air, and walked about with great ease. Hardly had they recovered from this shock, when the hind-legs came down, the fore-legs went up, and he paraded in a soldierly manner to and fro, like a sentinel on guard. But the crowning performance was when he took his tail in his mouth and waltzed down the walk, over the prostrate dolls, to the gate and back again, barely escaping a general upset of the ravaged table.

Bab and Betty could only hold each other tight and squeal with delight, for never had they seen any thing so funny; but, when the gymnastics ended, and the dizzy dog came and stood on the step before them barking loudly, with that pink nose of his sniffing at their feet, and his queer eyes fixed sharply upon them, their amusement turned to fear again, and they dared not stir.

“Whish, go away!” commanded Bab.

“Scat!” meekly quavered Betty.

To their great relief, the poodle gave several more inquiring barks, and then vanished as suddenly as he appeared. With one impulse, the children ran to see what became of him, and, after a brisk scamper through the orchard, saw the tasselled tail disappear under the fence at the far end.

“Where do you s’pose he came from?” asked Betty, stopping to rest on a big stone.

“I’d like to know where he’s gone, too, and give him a good beating, old thief!” scolded Bab, remembering their wrongs.

“Oh, dear, yes! I hope the cake burnt him dreadfully if he did eat it,” groaned Betty, sadly remembering the dozen good raisins she chopped up, and the “lots of ‘lasses” mother put into the dear lost loaf.

“The party’s all spoilt, so we may as well go home; and Bab mournfully led the way back. Betty puckered up her face to cry, but burst out laughing in spite of her woe.

“It was so funny to see him spin round and walk on his head! I wish he’d do it all over again; don’t you?”

“Yes: but I hate him just the same. I wonder what Ma will say when — why! why!” and Bab stopped short in the arch, with her eyes as round and almost as large as the blue saucers on the tea-tray.

“What is it? oh, what is it?” cried Betty, all ready to run away if any new terror appeared.

“Look! there! it’s come back!” said Bab in an awe-stricken whisper, pointing to the table. Betty did look, and her eyes opened even wider, — as well they might, — for there, just where they first put it, was the lost cake, unhurt, unchanged, except that the big B had coasted a little further down the gingerbread hill.

CHAPTER II WHERE THEY FOUND HIS MASTER

Neither spoke for a minute, astonishment being too great for words; then, as by one impulse, both stole up and touched the cake with a timid finger, quite prepared to see it fly away in some mysterious and startling manner. It remained sitting tranquilly in the basket, however, and the children drew a long breath of relief, for, though they did not believe in fairies, the late performances did seem rather like witchcraft.

"The dog didn't eat it!"

"Sally didn't take it!"

"How do you know?"

"She never would have put it back."

"Who did?"

"Can't tell, but I forgive 'em."

"What shall we do now?" asked Betty, feeling as if it would be very difficult to settle down to a quiet tea-party after such unusual excitement.

"Eat that cake up just as fast as ever we can," and Bab divided the contested delicacy with one chop of the big knife, bound to make sure of her own share at all events.

It did not take long, for they washed it down with sips of milk, and ate as fast as possible, glancing round all the while to see if the queer dog was coming again.

"There! now I'd like to see any one take my cake away," said Bab, defiantly crunching her half of the pie-crust B.

"Or mine either," coughed Betty, choking over a raisin that wouldn't go down in a hurry.

"We might as well clear up, and play there had been an earthquake," suggested Bab, feeling that some such convulsion of Nature was needed to explain satisfactorily the demoralized condition of her family.

"That will be splendid. My poor Linda was knocked right over on her nose. Darlin' child, come to your mother and be fixed," purred Betty, lifting the fallen idol from a grove of chickweed, and tenderly brushing the dirt from Belinda's heroically smiling face.

"She'll have croup to-night as sure as the world. We'd better make up some squills out of this sugar and water," said Bab, who dearly loved to dose the dollies all round.

"P'r'aps she will, but you needn't begin to sneeze yet awhile. I can sneeze for my own children, thank you, ma'am," returned Betty, sharply, for her usually amiable spirit had been ruffled by the late occurrences.

"I didn't sneeze! I've got enough to do to talk and cry and cough for my own poor dears, without bothering about yours," cried Bab, even more ruffled than her sister.

"Then who did? I heard a real live sneeze just as plain as anything," and Betty looked up to the green roof above her, as if the sound came from that direction.

A yellow-bird sat swinging and chirping on the tall lilac-bush, but no other living thing was in sight. "Birds don't sneeze, do they?" asked Betty, eying little Goldy suspiciously.

"You goose! of course they don't."

"Well. I should just like to know who is laughing and sneezing round here. May be it is the dog," suggested Betty looking relieved.

"I never heard of a dog's laughing, except Mother Hubbard's. This is such a queer one, may be he can, though. I wonder where he went to?" and Bab took a survey down both the side-paths, quite longing to see the funny poodle again.

"I know where I 'm going to," said Betty, piling the dolls into her apron with more haste than care. "I'm going right straight home to tell Ma all about it. I don't like such actions, and I 'm afraid to stay."

"I ain't; but I guess it is going to rain, so I shall have to go any way," answered Bab, taking advantage of the black clouds rolling up the sky, for she scorned to own that she was afraid of any thing.

Clearing the table in a summary manner by catching up the four corners of the cloth, Bab put the rattling bundle into her apron, flung her children on the top and pronounced herself ready to depart. Betty lingered an instant to pick up and ends that might be spoilt by the rain, and, when she turned from taking the red halter off the knocker, two lovely pink roses lay on the stone steps.

"Oh, Bab, just see! Here's the very ones we wanted. Wasn't it nice of the wind to blow 'em down?" she called out, picking them up and running after her sister, who had strolled moodily along, still looking about for her sworn foe, Sally Folsom. The flowers soothed the feelings of the little girls, because they had longed for them, and bravely resisted the temptation to climb up the trellis and help themselves, since their mother had forbidden such feats, owing to a fall Bab got trying to reach a honeysuckle from the vine which ran all over the porch.

Home they went and poured out their tale, to Mrs. Moss's great amusement; for she saw in it only some playmate's prank, and was not much impressed by the mysterious sneeze and laugh.

“We’ll have a grand rummage Monday, and find out what is going on over there,” was all she said. But Mrs. Moss could not keep her promise, for on Monday it still rained, and the little girls paddled off to school like a pair of young ducks, enjoying every puddle they came to, since India-rubber boots made wading a delicious possibility. They took their dinner, and at noon regaled a crowd of comrades with an account of the mysterious dog, who appeared to be haunting the neighborhood, as several of the other children had seen him examining their back yards with interest. He had begged of them, but to none had he exhibited his accomplishments except Bab and Betty; and they were therefore much set up, and called him “our dog” with an air. The cake transaction remained a riddle, for Sally Folsom solemnly declared that she was playing tag in Mamie Snow’s barn at that identical time. No one had been near the old house but the two children, and no one could throw any light upon that singular affair.

It produced a great effect, however; for even “teacher” was interested, and told such amazing tales of a juggler she once saw, that doughnuts were left forgotten in dinner-baskets, and wedges of pie remained suspended in the air for several minutes at a time, instead of vanishing with miraculous rapidity as usual. At afternoon recess, which the girls had first, Bab nearly dislocated every joint of her little body trying to imitate the poodle’s antics. She had practised on her bed with great success, but the wood-shed floor was a different thing, as her knees and elbows soon testified.

“It looked just as easy as any thing; I don’t see how he did it,” she said, coming down with a bump after vainly attempting to walk on her hands.

“My gracious, there he is this very minute!” cried Betty, who sat on a little wood-pile near the door. There was a general rush, — and sixteen small girls gazed out into the rain as eagerly as if to behold Cinderella’s magic coach, instead of one forlorn dog trotting by through the mud.

“Oh, do call him in and make him dance!” cried the girls, all chirping at once, till it sounded as if a flock of sparrows had taken possession of the shed.

“I will call him, he knows me,” and Bab scrambled up, forgetting how she had chased the poodle and called him names two days ago.

He evidently had not forgotten, however; for, though he paused and looked wistfully at them, he would not approach, but stood dripping in the rain, with his frills much bedraggled, while his tasselled tail wagged slowly, and his pink nose pointed suggestively to the pails and baskets, nearly empty now.

“He’s hungry; give him something to eat, and then he’ll see that we don’t want to hurt him,” suggested Sally, starting a contribution with her last bit of bread and butter.

Bab caught up her new pail, and collected all the odds and ends; then tried to beguile the poor beast in to eat and be comforted. But he only came as far as the door, and, sitting up, begged with such imploring eyes that Bab put down the pail and stepped back, saying pitifully, —

“The poor thing is starved; let him eat all he wants, and we won’t touch him.”

The girls drew back with little clucks of interest and compassion; but I regret to say their charity was not rewarded as they expected, for, the minute the coast was clear, the dog marched boldly up, seized the handle of the pail in his mouth, and was off with it, galloping down the road at a great pace.

Shrieks arose from the children, especially Bab and Betty, basely bereaved of their new dinner-pail; but no one could follow the thief, for the bell rang, and in they went, so much excited that the boys rushed tumultuously forth to discover the cause. By the time school was over the sun was out, and Bab and Betty hastened home to tell their wrongs and be comforted by mother, who did it most effectually.

“Never mind, dears, I’ll get you another pail, if he doesn’t bring it back as he did before. As it is too wet for you to play out, you shall go and see the old coach-house as I promised. Keep on your rubbers and come along.”

This delightful prospect much assuaged their woe, and away they went, skipping gayly down the gravelled path, while Mrs. Moss followed, with skirts well tucked up, and a great bunch of keys in her hand; for she lived at the Lodge, and had charge of the premises.

The small door of the coach-house was fastened inside, but the large one had a padlock on it; and this being quickly unfastened, one half swung open, and the little girls ran in, too eager and curious even to cry out when they found themselves at last in possession of the long-coveted old carriage. A dusty, musty concern enough; but it had a high seat, a door, steps that let down, and many other charms which rendered it most desirable in the eyes of children.

Bab made straight for the box and Betty for the door; but both came tumbling down faster than they went up, when from the gloom of the interior came a shrill bark, and a low voice saying quickly, “Down, Sancho! down!”

“Who is there?” demanded Mrs. Moss, in a stern tone, backing toward the door with both children clinging to her skirts.

The well-known curly white head was popped out of the broken window, and a mild whine seemed to say, “Don’t be alarmed, ladies; we won’t hurt you. Come out this minute, or I shall have to come and get you,” called Mrs. Moss, growing very brave all of a sudden as she caught sight of a pair of small, dusty shoes under the coach.

“Yes, ‘m, I’m coming, as fast as I can,” answered a meek voice, as what appeared to be a bundle of rags leaped out of the dark, followed by the poodle, who immediately sat down at the bare feet of his owner with a watchful air, as if ready to assault any one who might approach too near.

“Now, then, who are you, and how did you get here?” asked Mrs. Moss, trying to speak sternly, though her motherly eyes were already full of pity, as they rested on the forlorn little figure before her.

CHAPTER III BEN

"Please, 'm, my name is Ben Brown, and I'm travellin'."

"Where are you going?"

"Anywheres to get work."

"What sort of work can you do?"

"All kinds. I'm used to horses."

"Bless me! such a little chap as you?

"I'm twelve, ma'am, and can ride any thing on four legs;" and the small boy gave a nod that seemed to say, "Bring on your Cruisers. I'm ready for 'em."

"Haven't you got any folks?" asked Mrs. Moss, amused but still anxious, for the sunburnt face was very thin, the eyes hollow with hunger or pain, and the ragged figure leaned on the wheel as if too weak or weary to stand alone.

"No, 'm, not of my own; and the people I was left with beat me so, I — run away." The last words seemed to bolt out against his will as if the woman's sympathy irresistibly won the child's confidence.

"Then I don't blame you. But how did you get here?"

"I was so tired I couldn't go any further, and I thought the folks up here at the big house would take me in. But the gate was locked, and I was so discouraged, I jest laid down outside and give up."

"Poor little soul, I don't wonder," said Mrs. Moss, while the children looked deeply interested at mention of their gate.

The boy drew a long breath, and his eyes began to twinkle in spite of his forlorn state as he went on, while the dog pricked up his ears at mention of his name: —

"While I was restin' I heard some one come along inside, and I peeked, and saw them little girls playin'. The vittles looked so nice I couldn't help wantin' 'em; but I didn't take nothin', — it was Sancho, and he took the cake for me."

Bab and Betty gave a gasp and stared reproachfully at the poodle, who half closed his eyes with a meek, unconscious look that was very droll.

"And you made him put it back?" cried Bab.

"No; I did it myself. Got over the gate when you was racin' after Sancho, and then clim' up on the porch and hid," said the boy with a grin.

"And you laughed?" asked Bab.

"Yes."

"And sneezed?" added Betty.

“Yes.”

“And threw down the roses?” cried both.

“Yes; and you liked ‘em, didn’t you?”

“Course we did! What made you hide?” said Bab.

“I wasn’t fit to be seen,” muttered Ben, glancing at his tatters as if he’d like to dive out of sight into the dark coach again.

“How came you here?” demanded Mrs. Moss, suddenly remembering her responsibility.

“I heard ‘em talk about a little winder and a shed, and when they’d gone I found it and come in. The glass was broke, and I only pulled the nail out. I haven’t done a mite of harm sleepin’ here two nights. I was so tuckered out I couldn’t go on nohow, though I tried a Sunday.”

“And came back again?

“Yes, ‘m; it was so lonesome in the rain, and this place seemed kinder like home, and I could hear ‘em talkin’ outside, and Sanch he found vittles, and I was pretty comfortable.”

“Well, I never!” ejaculated Mrs. Moss, whisking up a corner of her apron to wipe her eyes, for the thought of the poor little fellow alone there for two days and nights with no bed but musty straw, no food but the scraps a dog brought him, was too much for her. “Do you know what I’m going to do with you?” she asked, trying to look calm and cool, with a great tear running down her wholesome red cheek, and a smile trying to break out at the corners of her lips.

“No, ma’am, and I dunno as I care. Only don’t be hard on Sanch; he’s been real good to me, and we ‘re fond of one another; ain’t us, old chap?” answered the boy, with his arm around the dog’s neck, and an anxious look which he had not worn for himself.

“I’m going to take you right home, and wash and feed and put you in a good bed; and to-morrow, — well, we’ll see what’ll happen then,” said Mrs. Moss, not quite sure about it herself.

“You’re very kind, ma’am, I’ll be glad to work for you. Ain’t you got a horse I can see to?” asked the boy, eagerly.

“Nothing but hens and a cat.”

Bab and Betty burst out laughing when their mother said that, and Ben gave a faint giggle, as if he would like to join in if he only had the strength to do it. But his legs shook under him, and he felt a queer dizziness; so he could only hold on to Sancho, and blink at the light like a young owl.

“Come right along, child. Run on, girls, and put the rest of the broth to warming, and fill the kettle. I’ll see to the boy,” commanded Mrs. Moss, waving off the children, and going up to feel the pulse of her new charge, for it suddenly occurred to her that he might be sick and not safe to take home.

The hand he gave her was very thin, but clean and cool, and the black eyes were clear though hollow, for the poor lad was half-starved.

"I'm awful shabby, but I ain't dirty. I had a washin' in the rain last night, and I've jest about lived on water lately," he explained, wondering why she looked at him so hard.

"Put out your tongue."

He did so, but took it in again to say quickly, —

"I ain't sick, — I'm only hungry; for I haven't had a mite but what Sanch brought, for three days; and I always go halves, don't I, Sanch?"

The poodle gave a shrill bark, and vibrated excitedly between the door and his master as if he understood all that was going on, and recommended a speedy march toward the promised food and shelter. Mrs. Moss took the hint, and bade the boy follow her at once and bring his "things" with him.

"I ain't got any. Some big fellers took away my bundle, else I wouldn't look so bad. There's only this. I'm sorry Sanch took it, and I'd like to give it back if I knew whose it was," said Ben, bringing the new dinner-pail out from the depths of the coach where he had gone to housekeeping.

"That's soon done; it's mine, and you're welcome to the bits your queer dog ran off with. Come along, I must lock up," and Mrs. Moss clanked her keys suggestively.

Ben limped out, leaning on a broken hoe-handle, for he was stiff after two days in such damp lodgings, as well as worn out with a fortnight's wandering through sun and rain. Sancho was in great spirits, evidently feeling that their woes were over and his foraging expeditions at an end, for he frisked about his master with yelps of pleasure, or made playful darts at the ankles of his benefactress, which caused her to cry, "Whish!" and "Scat!" and shake her skirts at him as if he were a cat or hen.

A hot fire was roaring in the stove under the broth-skillet and tea-kettle, and Betty was poking in more wood, with a great smirch of black on her chubby cheek, while Bab was cutting away at the loaf as if bent on slicing her own fingers off. Before Ben knew what he was about, he found himself in the old rocking-chair devouring bread and butter as only a hungry boy can, with Sancho close by gnawing a mutton-bone like a ravenous wolf in sheep's clothing.

While the new-comers were thus happily employed, Mrs. Moss beckoned the little girls out of the room, and gave them both an errand.

"Bab, you run over to Mrs. Barton's, and ask her for any old duds Billy don't want; and Betty, you go to the Cutters, and tell Miss Clarindy I'd like a couple of the shirts we made at last sewing circle. Any shoes, or a hat, or socks, would come handy, for the poor dear hasn’t a whole thread on him.”

Away went the children full of anxiety to clothe their beggar; and so well did they plead his cause with the good neighbors, that Ben hardly knew himself when he emerged from the back bedroom half an hour later, clothed in Billy Barton’s faded flannel suit, with an unbleached cotton shirt out of the Dorcas basket, and a pair of Milly Cutter’s old shoes on his feet.

Sancho also had been put in better trim, for, after his master had refreshed himself with a warm bath, he gave his dog a good scrub while Mrs. Moss set a stitch here and there in the new old clothes; and Sancho reappeared, looking more like the china poodle than ever, being as white as snow, his curls well brushed up, and his tasselly tail waving proudly over his back.

Feeling eminently respectable and comfortable, the wanderers humbly presented themselves, and were greeted with smiles of approval from the little girls and a hospitable welcome from the mother, who set them near the stove to dry, as both were decidedly damp after their ablutions.

“I declare I shouldn’t have known you!” exclaimed the good woman, surveying the boy with great satisfaction; for, though still very thin and tired, the lad had a tidy look that pleased her, and a lively way of moving about in his clothes, like an eel in a skin rather too big for him. The merry black eyes seemed to see every thing, the voice had an honest sound, and the sunburnt face looked several years younger since the unnatural despondency had gone out of it.

“It’s very nice, and me and Sanch are lots obliged, ma’am,” murmured Ben, getting red and bashful under the three pairs of friendly eyes fixed upon him.

Bab and Betty were doing up the tea-things with unusual despatch, so that they might entertain their guest, and just as Ben spoke Bab dropped a cup. To her great surprise no smash followed, for, bending quickly, the boy caught it as it fell, and presented it to her on the back of his hand with a little bow.

“Gracious! how could you do it?” asked Bab, looking as if she thought there was magic about.

“That’s nothing; look here,” and, taking two plates, Ben sent them spinning up into the air, catching and throwing so rapidly that Bab and Betty stood with their mouths open, as if to swallow the plates should they fall, while Mrs. Moss, with her dish-cloth suspended, watched the antics of her crockery with a housewife’s anxiety.

“That does beat all!” was the only exclamation she had time to make; for, as if desirous of showing his gratitude in the only way he could, Ben took clothes-pins from a basket near by, sent several saucers twirling up, caught them on the pins, balanced the pins on chin, nose, forehead, and went walking about with a new and peculiar sort of toadstool ornamenting his countenance.

The children were immensely tickled, and Mrs. Moss was so amused she would have lent her best soup-tureen if he had expressed a wish for it. But Ben was too tired to show all his accomplishments at once, and he soon stopped, looking as if he almost regretted having betrayed that he possessed any.

"I guess you've been in the juggling business," said Mrs. Moss, with a wise nod, for she saw the same look on his face as when he said his name was Ben Brown, — the look of one who was not telling the whole truth.

"Yes, 'm. I used to help Senor Pedro, the Wizard of the World, and I learned some of his tricks," stammered Ben, trying to seem innocent.

"Now, look here, boy, you'd better tell me the whole story, and tell it true, or I shall have to send you up to judge Morris. I wouldn't like to do that, for he is a harsh sort of a man; so, if you haven't done any thing bad, you needn't be afraid to speak out, and I'll do what I can for you," said Mrs. Moss, rather sternly, as she went and sat down in her rocking-chair, as if about to open the court.

"I haven't done any thing bad, and I ain't afraid, only I don't want to go back; and if I tell, may be you'll let 'em know where I be," said Ben, much distressed between his longing to confide in his new friend and his fear of his old enemies.

"If they abused you, of course I wouldn't. Tell the truth, and I'll stand by you. Girls, you go for the milk."

"Oh, Ma, do let us stay! We'll never tell, truly, truly!" cried Bab and Betty, full of dismay being sent off when secrets were about to be divulged.

"I don't mind 'em," said Ben handsomely.

"Very well, only hold your tongues. Now, boy where did you come from?" said Mrs. Moss, as the little girls hastily sat down together on their private and particular bench opposite their mother, brimming with curiosity and beaming with satisfaction at the prospect before them.

CHAPTER IV HIS STORY

"I ran away from a circus," began Ben, but got no further, for Bab and Betty gave a simultaneous bounce of delight, and both cried out at once, —

"We've been to one! It was splendid!"

"You wouldn't think so if you knew as much about it as I do," answered Ben, with a sudden frown and wriggle, as if he still felt the smart of the blows he had received. "We don't call it splendid; do we, Sancho?" he added, making a queer noise, which caused the poodle to growl and bang the floor irefully with his tail, as he lay close to his master's feet, getting acquainted with the new shoes they wore.

"How came you there?" asked Mrs. Moss, rather disturbed at the news.

"Why, my father was the 'Wild Hunter of the Plains.' Didn't you ever see or hear of him?" said Ben, as if surprised at her ignorance.

"Bless your heart, child, I haven't been to a circus this ten years, and I'm sure I don't remember what or who I saw then," answered Mrs. Moss, amused, yet touched by the son's evident admiration for his father.

"Didn't you see him?" demanded Ben, turning to the little girls.

"We saw Indians and tumbling men, and the Bounding Brothers of Borneo, and a clown and monkeys, and a little mite of a pony with blue eyes. Was he any of them?" answered Betty, innocently.

"Pooh! he didn't belong to that lot. He always rode two, four, six, eight horses to oncet, and I used to ride with him till I got too big. My father was A No. 1, and didn't do any thing but break horses and ride 'em," said Ben, with as much pride as if his parent had been a President.

"Is he dead?" asked Mrs. Moss.

"I don't know. Wish I did," — and poor Ben gave a gulp as if something rose in his throat and choked him.

"Tell us all about it, dear, and may be we can find out where he is," said Mrs. Moss, leaning forward to pat the shiny dark head that was suddenly bent over the dog.

"Yes, ma'am. I will, thank y'," and with an effort the boy steadied his voice and plunged into the middle of his story.

"Father was always good to me, and I liked bein' with him after granny died. I lived with her till I was seven; then father took me, and I was trained for rider. You jest oughter have seen me when I was a little feller all in white tights, and a gold belt, and pink riggin', standing' on father's shoulder, or hangin' on to old General's tail, and him gallopin' full pelt; or father ridin' three horses with me on his head wavin' flags, and every one clapping like fun."

"Oh, weren't you scared to pieces?" asked Betty, quaking at the mere thought.

"Not a bit. I liked it."

"So should I!" cried Bab enthusiastically.

"Then I drove the four ponies in the little chariot, when we paraded," continued Ben, "and I sat on the great ball up top of the grand car drawed by Hannibal and Nero. But I didn't like that, 'cause it was awful high and shaky, and the sun was hot, and the trees slapped my face, and my legs ached holdin' on."

"What's hanny bells and neroes?" demanded Betty.

"Big elephants. Father never let 'em put me up there, and they didn't darst till he was gone; then I had to, else they'd 'a' thrashed me."

"Didn't any one take your part?" asked Mrs. Moss.

"Yes, 'm, 'most all the ladies did; they were very good to me, 'specially 'Melia. She vowed she wouldn't go on in the Tunnymunt act if they didn't stop knockin' me round when I wouldn't help old Buck with the bears. So they had to stop it, 'cause she led first rate, and none of the other ladies rode half as well as 'Melia."

"Bears! oh, do tell about them!" exclaimed Bab, in great excitement, for at the only circus she had seen the animals were her delight.

"Buck had five of 'em, cross old fellers, and he showed 'em off. I played with 'em once, jest for fun, and he thought it would make a hit to have me show off instead of him. But they had a way of clawin' and huggin' that wasn't nice, and you couldn't never tell whether they were good-natured or ready to bite your head off. Buck was all over scars where they'd scratched and bit him, and I wasn't going to do it; and I didn't have to, owin' to Miss St. John's standin' by me like a good one."

"Who was Miss St. John?" asked Mrs. Moss, rather confused by the sudden introduction of new names and people.

"Why she was 'Melia, — Mrs. Smithers, the ringmaster's wife. His name wasn't Montgomery any more'n hers was St. John. They all change 'em to something fine on the bills, you know. Father used to be Senor Jose Montebello; and I was Master Adolphus Bloomsbury, after I stopped bein' a flyin' Coopid and a infant Progidy."

Mrs. Moss leaned back in her chair to laugh at that, greatly to the surprise of the little girls, who were much impressed with the elegance of these high-sounding names.

“Go on with your story, Ben, and tell why you ran away and what became of your Pa,” she said, composing herself to listen, really interested in the child.

“Well, you see, father had a quarrel with old Smithers, and went off sudden last fall, just before tenting season’ was over. He told me he was goin’ to a great ridin’ school in New York and when he was fixed he’d send for me. I was to stay in the museum and help Pedro with the trick business. He was a nice man and I liked him, and ‘Melia was goin’ to see to me, and I didn’t mind for awhile. But father didn’t send for me, and I began to have horrid times. If it hadn’t been for ‘Melia and Sancho I would have cut away long before I did.”

“What did you have to do?”

“Lots of things, for times was dull and I was smart. Smithers said so, any way, and I had to tumble up lively when he gave the word. I didn’t mind doin’ tricks or showin’ off Sancho, for father trained him, and he always did well with me. But they wanted me to drink gin to keep me small, and I wouldn’t, ‘cause father didn’t like that kind of thing. I used to ride tip-top, and that just suited me till I got a fall and hurt my back; but I had to go on all the same, though I ached dreadful, and used to tumble off, I was so dizzy and weak.”

“What a brute that man must have been! Why didn’t ‘Melia put a stop to it?” asked Mrs. Moss, indignantly.

“She died, ma’am, and then there was no one left but Sanch; so I run away.”

Then Ben fell to patting his dog again, to hide the tears he could not keep from coming at the thought of the kind friend he had lost.

“What did you mean to do?”

“Find father; but I couldn’t, for he wasn’t at the ridin’ school, and they told me he had gone out West to buy mustangs for a man who wanted a lot. So then I was in a fix, for I couldn’t go to father, didn’t know jest where he was, and I wouldn’t sneak back to Smithers to be abused. Tried to make ‘em take me at the ridin’ school, but they didn’t want a boy, and I travelled along and tried to get work. But I’d have starved if it hadn’t been for Sanch. I left him tied up when I ran off, for fear they’d say I stole him. He’s a very valuable dog, ma’am, the best trick dog I ever see, and they’d want him back more than they would me. He belongs to father, and I hated to leave him; but I did. I hooked it one dark night, and never thought I’d see him ag’in. Next mornin’ I was eatin’ breakfast in a barn miles away, and dreadful lonesome, when he came tearin’ in, all mud and wet, with a great piece of rope draggin’. He’d gnawed it and come after me, and wouldn’t go back or be lost; and I’ll never leave him again, will I, dear old feller?”

Sancho had listened to this portion of the tale with intense interest, and when Ben spoke to him he stood straight up, put both paws on the boy’s shoulders, licked his face with a world of dumb affection in his yellow eyes, and gave a little whine which said as plainly as words, —

“Cheer up, little master; fathers may vanish and friends die, but I never will desert you.”

Ben hugged him close and smiled over his curly, white head at the little girls, who clapped their hands at the pleasing tableau, and then went to pat and fondle the good creature, assuring him that they entirely forgave the theft of the cake and the new dinner-pail. Inspired by these endearments and certain private signals given by Ben, Sancho suddenly burst away to perform all his best antics with unusual grace and dexterity.

Bab and Betty danced about the room with rapture, while Mrs. Moss declared she was almost afraid to have such a wonderfully intelligent animal in the house. Praises of his dog pleased Ben more than praises of himself, and when the confusion had subsided he entertained his audience with a lively account of Sancho’s cleverness, fidelity, and the various adventures in which he had nobly borne his part.

While he talked, Mrs. Moss was making up her mind about him, and when he came to an end of his dog’s perfections, she said, gravely, —

“If I can find something for you to do, would you like to stay here awhile?”

“Oh, yes, ma’am, I’d be glad to!” answered Ben, eagerly; for the place seemed home-like already, and the good woman almost as motherly as the departed Mrs. Smithers.

“Well, I’ll step over to the Squire’s to-morrow to see what he says. Shouldn’t wonder if he’d take you for a chore-boy, if you are as smart as you say. He always has one in the summer, and I haven’t seen any round yet. Can you drive cows?”

“Hope so;” and Ben gave a shrug, as if it was a very unnecessary question to put to a person who had driven four calico ponies in a gilded chariot.

“It mayn’t be as lively as riding elephants and playing with bears, but it is respectable; and I guess you’ll be happier switching Brindle and Buttercup than being switched yourself,” said Mrs. Moss, shaking her head at him with a smile.

“I guess I will, ma’am,” answered Ben, with sudden meekness, remembering the trials from which he had escaped.

Very soon after this, he was sent off for a good night’s sleep in the back bedroom, with Sancho to watch over him. But both found it difficult to slumber till the racket overhead subsided; for Bab insisted on playing she was a bear and devouring poor Betty, in spite of her wails, till their mother came up and put an end to it by threatening to send Ben and his dog away in the morning, if the girls “didn’t behave and be as still as mice.”

This they solemnly promised; and they were soon dreaming of gilded cars and mouldy coaches, runaway boys and dinner-pails, dancing dogs and twirling teacups.

CHAPTER V BEN GETS A PLACE

When Ben awoke next morning, he looked about him for a moment half bewildered, because there was neither a canvas tent, a barn roof, nor the blue sky above him, but a neat white ceiling, where several flies buzzed sociably together, while from without came, not the tramping of horses, the twitter of swallows, or the chirp of early birds, but the comfortable cackle of hens and the sound of two little voices chanting the multiplication table.

Sancho sat at the open window, watching the old cat wash her face, and trying to imitate her with his great ruffled paw, so awkwardly that Ben laughed; and Sanch, to hide his confusion at being caught, made one bound from chair to bed, and licked his master's face so energetically that the boy dived under the bedclothes to escape from the rough tongue. A rap on the floor from below made both jump up, and in ten minutes a shiny-faced lad and a lively dog went racing downstairs, — one to say, "Good-mornin', ma'am," the other to wag his tail faster than ever tail wagged before, for ham frizzled on the stove, and Sancho was fond of it.

"Did you rest well?" asked Mrs. Moss, nodding at him, fork in hand.

"Guess I did! Never saw such a bed. I'm used to hay and a horse-blanket, and lately nothin' but sky for a cover and grass for my feather-bed," laughed Ben, grateful for present comforts and making light of past hardships.

"Clean, sweet corn-husks ain't bad for young bones, even if they haven't got more flesh on them than yours have," answered Mrs. Moss, giving the smooth head a motherly stroke as she went by.

"Fat ain't allowed in our profession, ma'am. The thinner the better for tight-ropes and tumblin'; likewise bareback ridin' and spry jugglin'. Muscle's the thing, and there you are."

Ben stretched out a wiry little arm with a clenched fist at the end of it, as if he were a young Hercules, ready to play ball with the stove if she gave him leave. Glad to see him in such good spirits, she pointed to the well outside, saying pleasantly, —

"Well, then, just try your muscle by bringing in some fresh water."

Ben caught up a pail and ran off, ready to be useful; but, while he waited for the bucket to fill down among the mossy stones, he looked about him, well pleased with all he saw, — the small brown house with a pretty curl of smoke rising from its chimney, the little sisters sitting in the sunshine, green hills and newly-planted fields far and near, a brook dancing through the orchard, birds singing in the elm avenue, and all the world as fresh and lovely as early summer could make it.

“Don’t you think it’s pretty nice here?” asked Bab, as his eye came back to them after a long look, which seemed to take in every thing, brightening as it roved.

“Just the nicest place that ever was. Only needs a horse round somewhere to be complete,” answered Ben, as the long well-sweep came up with a dripping bucket at one end, an old grindstone at the other.

“The judge has three, but he’s so fussy about them he won’t even let us pull a few hairs out of old Major’s tail to make rings of,” said Betty, shutting her arithmetic, with an injured expression.

“Mike lets me ride the white one to water when the judge isn’t round. It’s such fun to go jouncing down the lane and back. I do love horses!” cried Bab, bobbing up and down on the blue bench to imitate the motion of white Jenny.

“I guess you are a plucky sort of a girl,” and Ben gave her an approving look as he went by, taking care to slop a little water on Mrs. Puss, who stood curling her whiskers and humping up her back at Sancho.

“Come to breakfast!” called Mrs. Moss; and for about twenty minutes little was said, as mush and milk vanished in a way that would have astonished even Jack the Giant-killer with his leather bag.

“Now, girls, fly round and get your chores done up; Ben, you go chop me some kindlings; and I’ll make things tidy. Then we can all start off at once,” said Mrs. Moss, as the last mouthful vanished, and Sancho licked his lips over the savory scraps that fell to his share.

Ben fell to chopping so vigorously that chips flew wildly all about the shed; Bab rattled the cups into her dish-pan with dangerous haste, and Betty raised a cloud of dust “sweeping-up;” while mother seemed to be everywhere at once. Even Sanch, feeling that his fate was at stake, endeavored to help in his own somewhat erratic way, — now frisking about Ben at the risk of getting his tail chopped off, then trotting away to poke his inquisitive nose into every closet and room whither he followed Mrs. Moss in her “flying round” evolutions; next dragging off the mat so Betty could brush the door-steps, or inspecting Bab’s dish-washing by standing on his hind-legs to survey the table with a critical air. When they drove him out he was not the least offended, but gayly barked Puss up a tree, chased all the hens over the fence, and carefully interred an old shoe in the garden, where the remains of the mutton-bone were already buried.

By the time the others were ready, he had worked off his superfluous spirits, and trotted behind the party like a well-behaved dog accustomed to go out walking with ladies. At the cross-roads they separated, the little girls running on to school, while Mrs. Moss and Ben went up to the Squire's big house on the hill.

"Don't you be scared, child. I'LL make it all right about your running away; and if the Squire gives you a job, just thank him for it, and do your best to be steady and industrious; then you'll get on, I haven't a doubt," she whispered, ringing the Ben at a side-door, on which the word "Morris" shone in bright letters.

"Come in!" called a gruff voice; and, feeling very much as if he were going to have a tooth out, Ben meekly followed the good woman, who put on her pleasantest smile, anxious to make the best possible impression.

A white-headed old gentleman sat reading a paper, and peered over his glasses at the new-comers with a pair of sharp eyes, saying in a testy tone, which would have rather daunted any one who did not know what a kind heart he had under his capacious waistcoat, —

"Good-morning, ma'am. What's the matter now? Young tramp been stealing your chickens?"

"Oh, dear no, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Moss, as if shocked at the idea. Then, in a few words, she told Ben's story, unconsciously making his wrongs and destitution so pathetic by her looks and tones, that the Squire could not help being interested, and even Ben pitied himself as if he were somebody else.

"Now, then, boy, what can you do?" asked the old gentleman, with an approving nod to Mrs. Moss as she finished, and such a keen glance from under his bushy brows that Ben felt as if he was perfectly transparent.

"'Most any thing, sir, to get my livin'."

"Can you weed?"

"Never did, but I can learn, sir."

"Pull up all the beets and leave the pigweed, hey? Can you pick strawberries?"

"Never tried any thing but eatin' 'em, sir,"

"Not likely to forget that part of the job. Can you ride a horse to plow?"

"Guess I could, sir!" — and Ben's eyes began to sparkle, for he dearly loved the noble animals who had been his dearest friends lately.

"No antics allowed. My horse is a fine fellow, and I'm very particular about him." The Squire spoke soberly, but there was a twinkle in his eye, and Mrs. Moss tried not to smile; for the Squire's horse was a joke all over the town, being about twenty years old, and having a peculiar gait of his own, lifting his fore-feet very high, with a great show of speed, though never going out of a jog-trot. The boys used to say he galloped before and walked behind, and made all sorts of fun of the big, Roman-nosed beast, who allowed no liberties to be taken with him.

“I’m too fond of horses to hurt ‘em, Sir. As for ridin’, I ain’t afraid of any thing on four legs. The King of Morocco used to kick and bite like fun, but I could manage him first-rate.”

“Then you’d be able to drive cows to pasture, perhaps?”

“I’ve drove elephants and camels, ostriches and grizzly bears, and mules, and six yellow ponies all to oncet. May be I could manage cows if I tried hard,” answered Ben, endeavoring to be meek and respectful when scorn filled his soul at the idea of not being able to drive a cow.

The Squire liked him all the better for the droll mixture of indignation and amusement betrayed by the fire in his eyes and the sly smile round his lips; and being rather tickled by Ben’s list of animals, he answered gravely, —

“Don’t raise elephants and camels much round here. Bears used to be plenty, but folks got tired of them. Mules are numerous, but we have the two-legged kind; and as a general thing prefer Shanghae fowls to ostriches.”

He got no farther, for Ben laughed out so infectiously that both the others joined him; and somehow that jolly laugh seemed to settle matters than words. As they stopped, the Squire tapped on the window behind him, saying, with an attempt at the former gruffness, —

“We’ll try you on cows awhile. My man will show you where to drive them, and give you some odd jobs through the day. I’ll see what you are good for, and send you word to-night, Mrs. Moss. The boy can sleep at your house, can’t he?”

“Yes, indeed, sir. He can go on doing it, and come up to his work just as well as not. I can see to him then, and he won’t be a care to any one,” said Mrs. Moss, heartily.

“I’ll make inquiries concerning your father, boy; meantime mind what you are about, and have a good report to give when he comes for you,” returned the Squire, with a warning wag of a stern fore-finger.

“Thanky’, sir. I will, sir. Father’ll come just as soon as he can, if he isn’t sick or lost,” murmured Ben, inwardly thanking his stars that he had not done any thing to make him quake before that awful finger, and resolved that he never would.

Here a red-headed Irishman came to the door, and stood eying the boy with small favor while the Squire gave his orders.

“Pat, this lad wants work. He’s to take the cows and go for them. Give him any light jobs you have, and let me know if he’s good for any thing.”

“Yis, your honor. Come out o’ this, b’y, till I show ye the bastes,” responded Pat; and, with a hasty good-by to Mrs. Moss, Ben followed his new leader, sorely tempted to play some naughty trick upon him in return for his ungracious reception.

But in a moment he forgot that Pat existed, for in the yard stood the Duke of Wellington, so named in honor of his Roman nose. If Ben had known any thing about Shakespeare, he would have cried, “A horse, a horse! my kingdom for a horse!” for the feeling was in his heart, and he ran up to the stately animal without a fear. Duke put back his ears and swished his tail as if displeased for a moment; but Ben looked straight in his eyes, gave a scientific stroke to the iron-gray nose, and uttered a chirrup which made the ears prick up as if recognizing a familiar sound.

“He’ll nip ye, if ye go botherin’ that way. Leave him alone, and attend to the cattle as his honor told ye,” commanded Pat, who made a great show of respect toward Duke in public, and kicked him brutally in private.

“I ain’t afraid! You won’t hurt me, will you, old feller? See there now! — he knows I ‘m a friend, and takes to me right off,” said Ben, with an arm around Duke’s neck, and his own cheek confidingly laid against the animal’s; for the intelligent eyes spoke to him as plainly as the little whinny which he understood and accepted as a welcome.

The Squire saw it all from the open window, and suspecting from Pat’s face that trouble was brewing, called out, —

“Let the lad harness Duke, if he can. I’m going out directly, and he may as well try that as any thing.”

Ben was delighted, and proved himself so brisk and handy that the roomy chaise stood at the door in a surprisingly short time, with a smiling little ostler at Duke’s head when the Squire came out.

His affection for the horse pleased the old gentleman, and his neat way of harnessing suited as well; but Ben got no praise, except a nod and a brief “All right, boy,” as the equipage went creaking and jogging away.

Four sleek cows filed out of the barnyard when Pat opened the gate, and Ben drove them down the road to a distant pasture where the early grass awaited their eager cropping. By the school they went, and the boy looked pityingly at the black, brown, and yellow heads bobbing past the windows as a class went up to recite; for it seemed a hard thing to the liberty-loving lad to be shut up there so many hours on a morning like that.

But a little breeze that was playing truant round the steps did Ben a service without knowing it, for a sudden puff blew a torn leaf to his feet, and seeing a picture he took it up. It evidently had fallen from some ill-used history, for the picture showed some queer ships at anchor, some oddly dressed men just landing, and a crowd of Indians dancing about on the shore. Ben spelt out all he could about these interesting personages, but could not discover what it meant, because ink evidently had deluged the page, to the new reader’s great disappointment.

“I’ll ask the girls; may be they will know,” said Ben to himself as, after looking vainly for more stray leaves, he trudged on, enjoying the bobolink’s song, the warm sunshine, and a comfortable sense of friendliness and safety, which soon set him to whistling as gayly as any blackbird in the meadow.

CHAPTER VI A CIRCULATING LIBRARY

After supper that night, Bab and Betty sat in the old porch playing with Josephus and Belinda, and discussing the events of the day; for the appearance of the strange boy and his dog had been a most exciting occurrence in their quiet lives. They had seen nothing of him since morning, as he took his meals at the Squire's, and was at work with Pat in a distant field when the children passed. Sancho had stuck closely to his master, evidently rather bewildered by the new order of things, and bound to see that no harm happened to Ben.

"I wish they'd come. It's sundown, and I heard the cows mooing, so I know they have gone home," said Betty, impatiently; for she regarded the new-comer in the light of an entertaining book, and wished to read on as fast as possible.

"I'm going to learn the signs he makes when he wants Sancho to dance; then we can have fun with him whenever we like. He's the dearest dog I ever saw!" answered Bab, who was fonder of animals than her sister.

"Ma said — Ow, what's that?" cried Betty with a start, as something bumped against the gate outside; and in a moment Ben's head peeped over the top as he swung himself up to the iron arch, in the middle of which was the empty lantern frame.

"Please to locate, gentlemen; please to locate. The performance is about to begin with the great Flyin' Coopid act, in which Master Bloomsbury has appeared before the crowned heads of Europe. Pronounced by all beholders the most remarkable youthful progidy agoin'. Hooray! here we are!"

Having rattled off the familiar speech in Mr. Smithers's elegant manner, Ben begin to cut up such capers that even a party of dignified hens, going down the avenue to bed, paused to look on with clucks of astonishment, evidently fancying that salt had set him to fluttering and tumbling as it did them. Never had the old gate beheld such antics, though it had seen gay doings in its time; for of all the boys who had climbed over it, not one had ever stood on his head upon each of the big balls which ornamented the posts, hung by his heels from the arch, gone round and round like a wheel with the bar for an axis, played a tattoo with his toes while holding on by his chin, walked about the wall on his hands, or closed the entertainment by festooning himself in an airy posture over the side of the lantern frame, and kissing his hand to the audience as a well-bred Cupid is supposed to do on making his bow.

The little girls clapped and stamped enthusiastically, while Sancho, who had been calmly surveying the show, barked his approval as he leaped up to snap at Ben's feet.

"Come down and tell what you did up at the Squire's. Was he cross? Did you have to work hard? Do you like it?" asked Bab, when the noise had subsided.

"It's cooler up here," answered Ben, composing himself in the frame, and fanning his hot face with a green spray broken from the tall bushes rustling odorously all about him. "I did all sorts of jobs. The old gentleman wasn't cross; he gave me a dime, and I like him first-rate. But I just hate 'Carrots;' he swears at a feller, and fired a stick of wood at me. Guess I'll pay him off when I get a chance."

Fumbling in his pocket to show the bright dime, he found the torn page, and remembered the thirst for information which had seized him in the morning. "Look here, tell me about this, will you? What are these chaps up to? The ink has spoilt all but the picture and this bit of reading. I want to know what it means. Take it to 'em, Sanch."

The dog caught the leaf as it fluttered to the ground, and carrying it carefully in his mouth, deposited it at the feet of the little girls, seating himself before them with an air of deep interest. Bab and Betty picked it up and read it aloud in unison, while Ben leaned from his perch to listen and learn.

"'When day dawned, land was visible. A pleasant land it was. There were gay flowers, and tall trees with leaves and fruit, such as they had never seen before. On the shore were unclad copper-colored men, gazing with wonder at the Spanish ships. They took them for great birds, the white sails for their wings, and the Spaniards for superior beings brought down from heaven on their backs."

"Why, that's Columbus finding San Salvador. Don't you know about him?" demanded Bab, as if she were one of the "superior beings," and intimately acquainted with the immortal Christopher.

"No, I don't. Who was he any way? I s'pose that's him paddlin' ahead; but which of the Injuns is Sam Salvindoor?" asked Ben, rather ashamed of his ignorance, but bent on finding out now he had begun.

"My gracious! twelve years old and not know your Quackenbos!" laughed Bab, much amused, but rather glad to find that she could teach the "whirligig boy" something, for she considered him a remarkable creature.

"I don't care a bit for your quackin' boss, whoever he is. Tell about this fine feller with the ships; I like him," persisted Ben.

So Bab, with frequent interruptions and hints from Betty, told the wonderful tale in a simple way, which made it easy to understand; for she liked history, and had a lively tongue of her own.

“I’d like to read some more. Would my ten cents buy a book?” asked Ben, anxious to learn a little since Bab laughed at him.

“No, indeed! I’ll lend you mine when I’m not using it, and tell you all about it,” promised Bab; forgetting that she did not know “all about it” herself yet.

“I don’t have any time only evenings, and then may be you’ll want it,” begun Ben, in whom the inky page had roused a strong curiosity.

“I do get my history in the evening, but you could have it mornings before school.”

“I shall have to go off early, so there won’t be any chance. Yes, there will, — I’LL tell you how to do it. Let me read while I drive up the cows. Squire likes ‘em to eat slow along the road, so’s to keep the grass short and save mowin’. Pat said so, and I could do history instead of loafin’ round!” cried Ben full of this bright idea.

“How will I get my book back in time to recite?” asked Bab, prudently.

“Oh, I’ll leave it on the window-sill, or put it inside the door as I go back. I’ll be real careful, and just as soon as I earn enough, I’ll buy you a new one and take the old one. Will you?”

“Yes; but I’ll tell you a nicer way to do. Don’t put the book on the window, ‘cause teacher will see you; or inside the door, ‘cause some one may steal it. You put it in my cubby-house, right at the corner of the wall nearest the big maple. You’ll find a cunning place between the roots that stick up under the flat stone. That’s my closet, and I keep things there. It’s the best cubby of all, and we take turns to have it.”

“I’ll find it, and that’ll be a first-rate place,” said Ben, much gratified.

“I could put my reading-book in sometimes, if you’d like it. There’s lots of pretty stories in it and pictures,” proposed Betty, rather timidly; for she wanted to share the benevolent project, but had little to offer, not being as good a scholar as Bab.

“I’d like a ‘rithmetic better. I read tip-top, but I ain’t much on ‘rithmetic; so, if you can spare yours, I might take a look at it. Now I’m goin’ to earn wages, I ought to know about addin’ ‘em up, and so on,” said Ben, with the air of a Vanderbilt oppressed with the care of millions.

“I’ll teach you that. Betty doesn’t know much about sums. But she spells splendidly, and is always at the head of her class. Teacher is real proud of her, ‘cause she never misses, and spells hard, fussy words, like chi-rog-ra-phy and bron-chi-tis as easy as any thing.”

Bab quite beamed with sisterly pride, and Betty smoothed down her apron with modest satisfaction, for Bab seldom praised her, and she liked it very much.

“I never went to school, so that’s the reason I ain’t smart. I can write, though, better ‘n some of the boys up at school. I saw lots of names on the shed door. See here, now,” — and scrambling down, Ben pulled out a cherished bit of chalk, and flourished off ten letters of the alphabet, one on each of the dark stone slabs that paved the walk.

“Those are beautiful! I can’t make such curly ones. Who taught you to do it?” asked Bab, as she and Betty walked up and down admiring them.

“Horse blankets,” answered Ben, soberly.

“What!” cried both girls, stopping to stare.

“Our horses all had their names on their blankets, and I used to copy ‘em. The wagons had signs, and I learned to read that way after father taught me my letters off the red and yellow posters. First word I knew was lion, ‘cause I was always goin’ to see old Jubal in his cage. Father was real proud when I read it right off. I can draw one, too.”

Ben proceeded to depict an animal intended to represent his lost friend; but Jubal would not have recognized his portrait, since it looked much more like Sancho than the king of the forest. The children admired it immensely, however, and Ben gave them a lesson in natural history which was so interesting that it kept them busy and happy till bedtime; for the boy described what he had seen in such lively language, and illustrated in such a droll way, it was no wonder they were charmed.

CHAPTER VII NEW FRIENDS TROT IN

Next day Ben ran off to his work with Quackenbos's "Elementary History of the United States" in his pocket, and the Squire's cows had ample time to breakfast on way-side grass before they were put into their pasture. Even then the pleasant lesson was not ended, for Ben had an errand to town; and all the way he read busily, tumbling over the hard words, and leaving bits which he did not understand to be explained at night by Bab.

At "The First Settlements" he had to stop, for the schoolhouse was reached, and the book must be returned. The maple-tree closet was easily found, and a little surprise hidden under the flat stone; for Ben paid two sticks of red and white candy for the privilege of taking books from the new library.

When recess came, great was the rejoicing of the children over their unexpected treat, for Mrs. Moss had few pennies to spare for sweets, and, somehow, this candy tasted particularly nice, bought out of grateful Ben's solitary dime. The little girls shared their goodies with their favorite mates, but said nothing about the new arrangement, fearing it would be spoilt if generally known. They told their mother, however, and she gave them leave to lend their books and encourage Ben to love learning all they could. She also proposed that they should drop patch-work, and help her make some blue shirts for Ben. Mrs. Barton had given her the materials, and she thought it would be an excellent lesson in needle-work as well as a useful gift to Ben, — who, boy-like, never troubled himself as to what he should wear when his one suit of clothes gave out.

Wednesday afternoon was the sewing time; so the two little B's worked busily at a pair of shirt-sleeves, sitting on their bench in the doorway, while the rusty needles creaked in and out, and the childish voices sang school-songs, with frequent stoppages for lively chatter.

For a week, Ben worked away bravely, and never shirked nor complained, although Pat put many a hard or disagreeable job upon him, and chores grew more and more distasteful. His only comfort was the knowledge that Mrs. Moss and the Squire were satisfied with him; his only pleasure the lessons he learned while driving the cows, and recited in the evening when the three children met under the lilacs to "play school."

He had no thought of studying when he began, and hardly knew that he was doing it as he pored over the different books he took from the library. But the little girls tried him with all they Possessed, and he was mortified to find how ignorant he was. He never owned it in words, but gladly accepted all the bits of knowledge they offered from their small store; getting Betty to hear him spell “just for fun;” agreeing to draw Bab all the bears and tigers she wanted if she would show him how to do sums on the flags, and often beguiled his lonely labors by trying to chant the multiplication table as they did. When Tuesday night came round, the Squire paid him a dollar, said he was “a likely boy,” and might stay another week if he chose. Ben thanked him and thought he would; but the next morning, after he had put up the bars, he remained sitting on the top rail to consider his prospects, for he felt uncommonly reluctant to go back to the society of rough Pat. Like most boys, he hated work, unless it was of a sort which just suited him; then he could toil like a beaver and never tire. His wandering life had given him no habits of steady industry; and, while he was an unusually capable lad of his age, he dearly loved to “loaf” about and have a good deal of variety and excitement in his life.

Now he saw nothing before him but days of patient and very uninteresting labor. He was heartily sick of weeding; even riding Duke before the cultivator had lost its charms, and a great pile of wood lay in the Squire’s yard which he knew he would be set to piling up in the shed. Strawberry-picking would soon follow the asparagus cultivation; then haying; and and so on all the long bright summer, without any fun, unless his father came for him.

On the other hand, he was not obliged to stay a minute longer unless he liked. With a comfortable suit of clothes, a dollar in his pocket, and a row of dinner-baskets hanging in the school-house entry to supply him with provisions if he didn’t mind stealing them, what was easier than to run away again? Tramping has its charms in fair weather, and Ben had lived like a gypsy under canvas for years; so he feared nothing, and began to look down the leafy road with a restless, wistful expression, as the temptation grew stronger and stronger every minute.

Sancho seemed to share the longing, for he kept running off a little way and stopping to frisk and bark; then rushed back to sit watching his master with those intelligent eyes of his, which seemed to say, “Come on, Ben, let us scamper down this pleasant road and never stop till we are tired.” Swallows darted by, white clouds fled before the balmy west wind, a squirrel ran along the wall, and all things seemed to echo the boy’s desire to leave toil behind and roam away as care-free as they. One thing restrained him, the thought of his seeming ingratitude to good Mrs. Moss, and the disappointment of the little girls at the loss of their two new play-fellows. While he paused to think of this, something happened which kept him from doing what he would have been sure to regret afterward.

Horses had always been his best friends, and one came trotting up to help him now; though he did not know how much he owed it till long after. Just in the act of swinging himself over the bars to take a shortcut across the fields, the sound of approaching hoofs, unaccompanied by the roll of wheels, caught his ear; and, pausing, he watched eagerly to see who was coming at such a pace.

At the turn of road, however, the quick trot stopped, and in a moment a lady on a bay mare came pacing slowly into sight, — a young and pretty lady, all in dark blue, with a bunch of dandelions like yellow stars in her button-hole, and a silver-handled whip hanging from the pommel of her saddle, evidently more for ornament than use. The handsome mare limped a little, and shook her head as if something plagued her; while her mistress leaned down to see what was the matter, saying, as if she expected an answer of some sort, —

“Now, Chevalita, if you have got a stone in your foot, I shall have to get off and take it out. Why don’t you look where you step, and save me all this trouble?”

“I’ll look for you, ma’am; I’d like to!” said an eager voice so unexpectedly, that both horse and rider started as a boy came down the bank with a jump.

“I wish you would. You need not be afraid; Lita is as gentle as a lamb,” answered the young lady, smiling, as if amused by the boy’s earnestness.

“She’s a beauty, any way,” muttered Ben, lifting one foot after another till he found the stone, and with some trouble got it out.

“That was nicely done, and I’m much obliged. Can you tell me if that cross-road leads to the Elms?” asked the lady, as she went slowly on with Ben beside her.

“No, ma’am; I’m new in these parts, and I only know where Squire Morris and Mrs. Moss live.”

“I want to see both of them, so suppose you show me the way. I was here long ago, and thought I should remember how to find the old house with the elm avenue and the big gate, but I don’t.”

“I know it; they call that place the Laylocks now, ‘cause there’s a hedge of ‘em all down the path and front wall. It’s a real pretty place; Bab and Betty play there, and so do I.”

Ben could not restrain a chuckle at the recollection of his first appearance there, and, as if his merriment or his words interested her, the lady said pleasantly,

“Tell me all about it. Are Bab and Betty your sisters?” Quite forgetting his intended tramp, Ben plunged into a copious history of himself and new-made friends, led on by a kind look, an inquiring word, and sympathetic smile, till he had told every thing. At the school-house corner he stopped and said, spreading his arms like a sign-post, —

“That’s the way to the Laylocks, and this is the way to the Squire’s.”

“As I’m in a hurry to see the old house, I’ll go this way first, if you will be kind enough to give my love to Mrs. Morris, and tell the Squire Miss Celia is coming to dine with him. I won’t say good-by, because I shall see you again.”

With a nod and a smile, the young lady cantered away, and Ben hurried up the hill to deliver his message, feeling as if something pleasant was going to happen; so it would be wise to defer running away, for the present at least.

At one o’clock Miss Celia arrived, and Ben had the delight of helping Pat stable pretty Chevalita; then, his own dinner hastily eaten, he fell to work at the detested wood-pile with sudden energy; for as he worked he could steal peeps into the dining-room, and see the curly brown head between the two gay ones, as the three sat round the table. He could not help hearing a word now and then, as the windows were open, and these bits of conversation filled him with curiosity for the names “Thorny,” “Celia,” and “George” were often repeated, and an occasional merry laugh from the young lady sounded like music in that usually quiet place.

When dinner was over, Ben’s industrious fit left him, and he leisurely trundled his barrow to and fro till the guest departed. There was no chance for him to help now, since Pat, anxious to get whatever trifle might be offered for his services, was quite devoted in his attentions to the mare and her mistress, till she was mounted and off. But Miss Celia did not forget her little guide, and, spying a wistful face behind the wood-pile, paused at the gate and beckoned with that winning smile of hers. If ten Pats had stood scowling in the way, Ben would have defied them all; and, vaulting over the fence, he ran up with a shining face, hoping she wanted some last favor of him. Leaning down, Miss Celia slipped a new quarter into his hand, saying,

“Lita wants me to give you this for taking the stone out of her foot.”

“Thank y’, ma’am; I liked to do it, for I hate to see ‘em limp, ‘specially such a pretty one as she is,” answered Ben, stroking the glossy neck with a loving touch.

“The Squire says you know a good deal about horses, so I suppose you understand the Houyhnhnm language? I’m learning it, and it is very nice,” laughed Miss Celia, as Chevalita gave a little whinny and snuffled her nose into Ben’s pocket.

“No, miss, I never went to school.”

“That is not taught there. I’ll bring you a book all about it when I come back. Mr. Gulliver went to the horse-country and heard the dear things speak their own tongue.”

"My father has been on the prairies, where there's lots of wild ones, but he didn't hear 'em speak. I know what they want without talkin'," answered Ben, suspecting a joke, but not exactly seeing what it was.

"I don't doubt it, but I won't forget the book. Good-by, my lad, we shall soon meet again," and away went Miss Celia as if she were in a hurry to get back.

"If she only had a red habit and a streamin' white feather, she'd look as fine as 'Melia used to. She is 'most as kind and rides 'most as well. Wonder where she's goin' to. Hope she will come soon," thought Ben, watching till the last flutter of the blue habit vanished round the corner; and then he went back to his work with his head full of the promised book, pausing now and then to chink the two silver halves and the new quarter together in his pocket, wondering what he should buy with this vast sum.

Bab and Betty meantime had had a most exciting day; for when they went home at noon they found the pretty lady there, and she had talked to them like an old friend, given them a ride on the little horse, and kissed them both good-by when they went back to school. In the afternoon the lady was gone, the old house all open, and their mother sweeping, airing, in great spirits. So they had a splendid frolic tumbling on feather-beds, beating bits of carpet, opening closets, and racing from garret to cellar like a pair of distracted kittens.

Here Ben found them, and was at once overwhelmed with a burst of news which excited him as much as it did them. Miss Celia owned the house, was coming to liver there, and things were to be made ready as soon as possible. All thought the prospect a charming one: Mrs. Moss, because life had been dull for her during the year she had taken charge of the old house; the little girls had heard rumors of various pets who were coming; and Ben, learning that a boy and a donkey were among them, resolved that nothing but the arrival of his father should tear him from this now deeply interesting spot.

"I'm in such a hurry to see the peacocks and hear them scream. She said they did, and that we'd laugh when old Jack brayed," cried Bab, hopping about on one foot to work off her impatience.

"Is a faytun a kind of a bird? I heard her say she could keep it in the coach-house," asked Betty, inquiringly.

"It's a little carriage," and Ben rolled in the grass, much tickled at poor Betty's ignorance.

"Of course it is. I looked it out in the dic., and you mustn't call it a payton, though it is spelt with a p," added Bab, who liked to lay down the law on all occasions, and did not mention that she had looked vainly among the Vs till a school-mate set her right.

"You can't tell me much about carriages. But what I want to know is where

Lita will stay?” said Ben.

“Oh, she’s to be up at the Squire’s till things are fixed, and you are to bring her down. Squire came and told Ma all about it, and said you were a boy to be trusted, for he had tried you.”

Ben made no answer, but secretly thanked his stars that he had not proved himself untrustworthy by running away, and so missing all this fun.

“Won’t it be fine to have the house open all the time? We can run over and see the pictures and books whenever we like. I know we can, Miss Celia is so kind,” began Betty, who cared for these things more than for screaming peacocks and comical donkeys.

“Not unless you are invited,” answered their mother, locking the front door behind her. “You’d better begin to pick up your duds right away, for she won’t want them cluttering round her front yard. If you are not too tired, Ben, you might rake round a little while I shut the blinds. I want things to look nice and tidy.”

Two little groans went up from two afflicted little girls as they looked about them at the shady bower, the dear porch, and the winding walks where they loved to run “till their hair whistled in the wind,” as the fairy-books say.

“Whatever shall we do! Our attic is so hot and the shed so small, and the yard always full of hens or clothes. We shall have to pack all our things away, and never play any more,” said Bab, tragically.

“May be Ben could build us a little house in the orchard,” proposed Betty, who firmly believed that Ben could do any thing.

“He won’t have any time. Boys don’t care for baby-houses,” returned Bab, collecting her homeless goods and chattels with a dismal face.

“We sha’n’t want these much when all the new things come; see if we do,” said cheerful little Betty, who always found out a silver lining to every cloud.

CHAPTER VIII MISS CELIA'S MAN

Ben was not too tired, and the clearing-up began that very night. None too soon, for in a day or two things arrived, to the great delight of the children, who considered moving a most interesting play. First came the phaeton, which Ben spent all his leisure moments in admiring; wondering with secret envy what happy boy would ride in the little seat up behind, and beguiling his tasks by planning how, when he got rich, he would pass his time driving about in just such an equipage, and inviting all the boys he met to have a ride.

Then a load of furniture came creaking in at the lodge gate, and the girls had raptures over a cottage piano, several small chairs, and a little low table, which they pronounced just the thing for them to play at. The live stock appeared next, creating a great stir in the neighborhood, for peacocks were rare birds there; the donkey's bray startled the cattle and convulsed the people with laughter; the rabbits were continually getting out to burrow in the newly made garden; and Chevalita scandalized old Duke by dancing about the stable which he had inhabited for years in stately solitude.

Last but by no means least, Miss Celia, her young brother, and two maids arrived one evening so late that only Mrs. Moss went over to help them settle. The children were much disappointed, but were appeased by a promise that they should all go to pay their respects in the morning.

They were up so early, and were so impatient to be off, that Mrs. Moss let them go with the warning that they would find only the servants astir. She was mistaken, however, for, as the procession approached, a voice from the porch called out, "Good-morning little neighbors!" so unexpectedly, that Bab nearly spilt the new milk she carried, Betty gave such a start that the fresh-laid eggs quite skipped in the dish, and Ben's face broke into a broad grin over the armful of clover which he brought for the bunnies, as he bobbed his head, saying briskly, —

"She's all right, miss, Lita is; and I can bring her over any minute you say."

"I shall want her at four o'clock. Thorny will be too tired to drive, but I must hear from the post-office, rain or shine;" and Miss Celia's pretty color brightened as she spoke, either from some happy thought or because she was bashful, for the honest young faces before her plainly showed their admiration of the white-gowned lady under the honeysuckles.

The appearance of Miranda, the maid, reminded the children of their errand;

and having delivered their offerings, they were about to retire in some confusion, when Miss Celia said pleasantly, —

“I want to thank you for helping put things in such nice order. I see signs of busy hands and feet both inside the house and all about the grounds, and I am very much obliged.”

“I raked the beds,” said Ben, proudly eying the neat ovals and circles.

“I swept all the paths,” added Bab, with a reproachful glance at several green sprigs fallen from the load of clover on the smooth walk.

“I cleared up the porch,” and Betty’s clean pinafore rose and fell with a long sigh, as she surveyed the late summer residence of her exiled family. Miss Celia guessed the meaning of that sigh, and made haste to turn it into a smile by asking anxiously, —

“What has become of the playthings? I don’t see them anywhere.”

“Ma said you wouldn’t want our duds round, so we took them all home,” answered Betty, with a wistful face.

“But I do want them round. I like dolls and toys almost as much as ever, and quite miss the little ‘duds’ from porch and path. Suppose you come to tea with me to-night and bring some of them back? I should be very sorry to rob you of your pleasant play-place.”

“Oh, yes, ‘m, we’d love to come! and we’ll bring our best things.”

“Ma always lets us have our shiny pitchers and the china poodle when we go visiting or have company at home,” said Bab and Betty, both speaking at once.

“Bring what you like, and I’ll hunt up my toys, too. Ben is to come also, and his poodle is especially invited,” added Miss Celia, as Sancho came and begged before her, feeling that some agreeable project was under discussion.

“Thank you, miss. I told them you’d be willing they should come sometimes. They like this place ever so much, and so do I,” said Ben, feeling that few spots combined so many advantages in the way of climbable trees, arched gates, half-a-dozen gables, and other charms suited to the taste of an aspiring youth who had been a flying Cupid at the age of seven.

“So do I,” echoed Miss Celia, heartily. “Ten years ago I came here a little girl, and made lilac chains under these very bushes, and picked chickweed over there for my bird, and rode Thorny in his baby-wagon up and down these paths. Grandpa lived here then, and we had fine times; but now they are all gone except us two.”

“We haven’t got any father, either,” said Bab, for something in Miss Celia’s face made her feel as if a cloud had come over the sun.

“I have a first-rate father, if I only knew where he’d gone to,” said Ben, looking down the path as eagerly as if one waited for him behind the locked gate.

“You are a rich boy, and you are happy little girls to have so good a mother; I’ve found that out already,” and the sun shone again as the young lady nodded to the neat, rosy children before her.

“You may have a piece of her if you want to, ‘cause you haven’t got any of your own,” said Betty with a pitiful look which made her blue eyes as sweet as two wet violets.

“So I will! and you shall be my little sisters. I never had any, and I’d love to try how it seems;” and Celia took both the chubby hands in hers, feeling ready to love every one this first bright morning in the new home, which she hoped to make a very happy one.

Bab gave a satisfied nod, and fell to examining the rings upon the white hand that held her own. But Betty put her arms about the new friend’s neck, and kissed her so softly that the hungry feeling in Miss Celia’s heart felt better directly; for this was the food it wanted, and Thorny had not learned yet to return one half of the affection he received. Holding the child close, she played with the yellow braids while she told them about the little German girls in their funny black-silk caps, short-waisted gowns, and wooden shoes, whom she used to see watering long webs of linen bleaching on the grass, watching great flocks of geese, or driving pigs to market, knitting or spinning as they went.

Presently “Randa,” as she called her stout maid, came to tell her that “Master Thorny couldn’t wait another minute;” and she went in to breakfast with a good appetite, while the children raced home to bounce in upon Mrs. Moss, talking all at once like little lunatics.

“The phaeton at four, — so sweet in a beautiful white gown, — going to tea, and Sancho and all the baby things invited. Can’t we wear our Sunday frocks? A splendid new net for Lita. And she likes dolls. Goody, goody, won’t it be fun!”

With much difficulty their mother got a clear account of the approaching festivity out of the eager mouths, and with still more difficulty, got breakfast into them, for the children had few pleasures, and this brilliant prospect rather turned their heads.

Bab and Betty thought the day would never end, and cheered the long hours by expatiating on the pleasures in store for them, till their playmates were much afflicted because they were not going also. At noon their mother kept them from running over to the old house lest they should be in the way; so they consoled themselves by going to the syringa bush at the corner and sniffing the savory odors which came from the kitchen, where Katy, the cook, was evidently making nice things for tea.

Ben worked as if for a wager till four; then stood over Pat while he curried

Lita till her coat shone like satin, then drove her gently down to the coach-house, where he had the satisfaction of harnessing her “all his own self”.

“Shall I go round to the great gate and wait for you there, miss?” he asked, when all was ready, looking up at the porch, where the young lady stood watching him as she put on her gloves.

“No, Ben, the great gate is not to be opened till next October. I shall go in and out by the lodge, and leave the avenue to grass and dandelions, meantime,” answered Miss Celia, as she stepped in and took the reins, with a sudden smile.

But she did not start, even when Ben had shaken out the new duster and laid it neatly over her knees.

“Isn’t it all right now?” asked the boy, anxiously.

“Not quite; I need one thing more. Can’t you guess what it is?” and Miss Celia watched his anxious face as his eyes wandered from the tips of Lita’s ears to the hind-wheel of the phaeton, trying to discover what had been omitted.

“No, miss, I don’t see — ” he began, much mortified to think he had forgotten any thing.

“Wouldn’t a little groom up behind improve the appearance of my turnout?” she said, with a look which left no doubt in his mind that he was to be the happy boy to occupy that proud perch.

He grew red with pleasure, but stammered, as he hesitated, looking down at his bare feet and blue shirt, —

“I ain’t fit, miss; and I haven’t got any other clothes.”

Miss Celia only smiled again more kindly than before, and answered, in a tone which he understood better than her words, — ”A great man said his coat-of-arms was a pair of shirt-sleeves, and a sweet poet sang about a barefooted boy; so I need not be too proud to ride with one. Up with you, Ben, my man, and let us be off, or we shall be late for our party.”

With one bound the new groom was in his place, sitting very erect, with his legs stiff, arms folded, and nose in the air, as he had seen real grooms sit behind their masters in fine dog-carts or carriages. Mrs. Moss nodded as they drove past the lodge, and Ben touched his torn hat-brim in the most dignified manner, though he could not suppress a broad grin of delight, which deepened into a chuckle when Lita went off at a brisk trot along the smooth road toward town.

It takes so little to make a child happy, it is a pity grown people do not oftener remember it and scatter little bits of pleasure before the small people, as they throw crumbs to the hungry sparrows. Miss Celia knew the boy was pleased, but he had no words in which to express his gratitude for the great contentment she had given him. He could only beam at all he met, smile when the floating ends of the gray veil blew against his face, and long in his heart to give the new friend a boyish hug, as he used to do his dear ‘Melia when she was very good to him.

School was just out as they passed; and it was a spectacle, I assure you, to see the boys and girls stare at Ben up aloft in such state; also to see the superb indifference with which that young man regarded the vulgar herd who went afoot. He couldn’t resist an affable nod to Bab and Betty, for they stood under the maple-tree, and the memory of their circulating library made him forget his dignity in his gratitude.

“We will take them next time, but now I want to talk to you,” began Miss Celia, as Lita climbed the hill. “My brother has been ill, and I have brought him here to get well. I want to do all sorts of things to amuse him, and I think you can help me in many ways. Would you like to work for me instead of the Squire?

“I guess I would!” ejaculated Ben, so heartily that no further assurances were needed, and Miss Celia went on, well pleased: —

“You see, poor Thorny is weak and fretful, and does not like to exert himself, though he ought to be out a great deal, and kept from thinking of his little troubles. He cannot walk much yet, so I have a wheeled chair to push him in; and the paths are so hard, it will be easy to roll him about. That will be one thing you can do. Another is to take care of his pets till he is able to do it himself. Then you can tell him your adventures, and talk to him as only a boy can talk to a boy. That will amuse him when I want to write or go out; but I never leave him long, and hope he will soon be running about as well as the rest of us. How does that sort of work look to you?”

“First-rate! I’ll take real good care of the little feller, and do every thing I know to please him, and so will Sanch; he’s fond of children,” answered Ben, heartily, for the new place looked very inviting to him. Miss Celia laughed, and rather damped his ardor by her next words.

“I don’t know what Thorny would say to hear you call him ‘little.’ He is fourteen, and appears to get taller and taller every day. He seems like a child to me, because I am nearly ten years older than he is; but you needn’t be afraid of his long legs and big eyes, he is too feeble to do any harm; only you mustn’t mind if he orders you about.”

“I’m used to that. I don’t mind it if he won’t call me a ‘spalpeen,’ and fire things at me,” said Ben, thinking of his late trials with Pat.

“I can promise that; and I am sure Thorny will like you, for I told him your story, and he is anxious to see ‘the circus boy’ as he called you. Squire Allen says I may trust you, and I am glad to do so, for it saves me much trouble to find what I want all ready for me. You shall be well fed and clothed, kindly treated and honestly paid, if you like to stay with me.”

“I know I shall like it — till father comes, anyway. Squire wrote to Smithers right off, but hasn't got any answer yet. I know they are on the go now, so may be we won't hear for ever so long," answered Ben, feeling less impatient to be off than before this fine proposal was made to him.

"I dare say; meantime, we will see how we get on together, and perhaps your father will be willing leave you for the summer if he is away. Now show me the baker's, the candy-shop, and the post-office," said Miss Celia, as they rattled down the main street of the village.

Ben made himself useful; and when all the other errands were done, received his reward in the shape of a new pair of shoes and a straw hat with a streaming blue ribbon, on the ends of which shone silvery anchors. He was also allowed to drive home, while his new mistress read her letters. One particularly long one, with a queer stamp on the envelope, she read twice, never speaking a word till they got back. Then Ben was sent off with Lita and the Squire's letters, promising to get his chores done in time for tea.

CHAPTER IX A HAPPY TEA

Exactly five minutes before six the party arrived in great state, for Bab and Betty wore their best frocks and hair-ribbons, Ben had a new blue shirt and his shoes on as full-dress, and Sancho's curls were nicely brushed, his frills as white as if just done up.

No one was visible to receive them, but the low table stood in the middle of the walk, with four chairs and a foot-stool around it. A pretty set of green and white china caused the girls to cast admiring looks upon the little cups and plates, while Ben eyed the feast longingly, and Sancho with difficulty restrained himself from repeating his former naughtiness. No wonder the dog sniffed and the children smiled, for there was a noble display of little tarts and cakes, little biscuits and sandwiches, a pretty milk-pitcher shaped like a white calla rising out of its green leaves, and a jolly little tea-kettle singing away over the spirit-lamp as cosily as you please.

"Isn't it perfectly lovely?" whispered Betty, who had never seen any thing like it before.

"I just wish Sally could see us now," answered Bab, who had not yet forgiven her enemy.

"Wonder where the boy is," added Ben, feeling as good as any one, but rather doubtful how others might regard him.

Here a rumbling sound caused the guests to look toward the garden, and in a moment Miss Celia appeared, pushing a wheeled chair, in which sat her brother. A gay afghan covered the long legs, a broad-brimmed hat half hid the big eyes, and a discontented expression made the thin face as unattractive as the fretful voice, which said, complainingly, —

"If they make a noise, I'll go in. Don't see what you asked them for."

"To amuse you, dear. I know they will, if you will only try to like them," whispered the sister, smiling, and nodding over the chair-back as she came on, adding aloud, "Such a punctual party! I am all ready, however, and we will sit down at once. This is my brother Thornton, and we are all going to be very good friends by-and-by. Here 's the droll dog, Thorny; isn't he nice and curly?"

Now, Ben had heard what the other boy said, and made up his mind that he shouldn't like him; and Thorny had decided beforehand that he wouldn't play with a tramp, even if he cut capers; go both looked decidedly cool and indifferent when Miss Celia introduced them. But Sancho had better manners and no foolish pride; he, therefore, set them a good example by approaching the chair, with his tail waving like a flag of truce, and politely presented his ruffled paw for a hearty shake.

Thorny could not resist that appeal, and patted the white head, with a friendly look into the affectionate eyes of the dog, saying to his sister as he did so, —

"What a wise old fellow he is! It seems as if he could almost speak, doesn't it?"

"He can. Say 'How do you do,' Sanch," commanded Ben, relenting at once, for he saw admiration in Thorny's face.

"Wow, wow, wow!" remarked Sancho, in a mild and conversational tone, sitting up and touching one paw to his head, as if he saluted by taking off his hat. Thorny laughed in spite of himself, and Miss Celia seeing that the ice was broken, wheeled him to his place at the foot of the table. Then, seating the little girls on one side, Ben and the dog on the other, took the head herself and told her guests to begin. Bab and Betty were soon chattering away to their pleasant hostess as freely as if they had known her for months; but the boys were still rather shy, and made Sancho the medium through which they addressed one another. The excellent beast behaved with wonderful propriety, sitting upon his cushion in an attitude of such dignity that it seemed almost a liberty to offer him food. A dish of thick sandwiches had been provided for his especial refreshment; and, as Ben from time to time laid one on his plate, he affected entire unconsciousness of it till the word was given, when it vanished at one gulp, and Sancho again appeared absorbed in deep thought.

But, having once tasted of this pleasing delicacy, it was very hard to repress his longing for more; and, in spite of all his efforts, his nose would work, his eye kept a keen watch upon that particular dish, and his tail quivered with excitement as it lay like a train over the red cushion. At last, a moment came when temptation proved too strong for him. Ben was listening to something Miss Celia said; a tart lay unguarded upon his plate; Sanch looked at Thorny who was watching him; Thorny nodded, Sanch gave one wink, bolted the tart, and then gazed pensively up at a sparrow swinging on a twig overhead.

The slyness of the rascal tickled the boy so much that he pushed back his hat, clapped his hands, and burst out laughing as he had not done before for weeks. Every one looked round surprised, and Sancho regarded them with a mildly inquiring air, as if he said, "Why this unseemly mirth, my friends?"

Thorny forgot both sulks and shyness after that, and suddenly began to talk. Ben was flattered by his interest in the dear dog, and opened out so delightfully that he soon charmed the other by his lively tales of circus-life. Then Miss Celia felt relieved, and every thing went splendidly, especially the food; for the plates were emptied several times, the little tea-pot ran dry twice, and the hostess was just wondering if she ought to stop her voracious guests, when something occurred which spared her that painful task.

A small boy was suddenly discovered standing in the path behind them, regarding the company with an air of solemn interest. A pretty, well-dressed child of six, with dark hair cut short across the brow, a rosy face, a stout pair of legs, left bare by the socks which had slipped down over the dusty little shoes. One end of a wide sash trailed behind him, a straw hat hung at his back, his right hand firmly grasped a small turtle, and his left a choice collection of sticks. Before Miss Celia could speak, the stranger calmly announced his mission.

"I have come to see the peacocks."

"You shall presently — " began Miss Celia, but got no further, for the child added, coming a step nearer, —

"And the wabbits."

"Yes, but first won't you — "

"And the curly dog," continued the small voice, as another step brought the resolute young personage nearer.

"There he is."

A pause, a long look; then a new demand with the same solemn tone, the same advance.

"I wish to hear the donkey bray."

"Certainly, if he will."

"And the peacocks scream."

"Any thing more, sir?"

Having reached the table by this time, the insatiable infant surveyed its ravaged surface, then pointed a fat little finger at the last cake, left for manners, and said, commandingly, —

"I will have some of that."

"Help yourself; and sit upon the step to eat it, while you tell me whose boy you are," said Miss Celia, much amused at his proceedings.

Deliberately putting down his sticks, the child took the cake, and, composing himself upon the step, answered with his rosy mouth full, —

"I am papa's boy. He makes a paper. I help him a great deal."

"What is his name?"

"Mr. Barlow. We live in Springfield," volunteered the new guest, unbending a trifle, thanks to the charms of the cake.

"Have you a mamma, dear?"

"She takes naps. I go to walk then."

"Without leave, I suspect. Have you no brothers or sisters to go with you?"

asked Miss Celia, wondering where the little runaway belonged.

"I have two brothers, Thomas Merton Barlow and Harry Sanford Barlow. I am Alfred Tennyson Barlow. We don't have any girls in our house, only Bridget."

"Don't you go to school?"

"The boys do. I don't learn any Greeks and Latins yet. I dig, and read to mamma, and make poetrys for her."

"Couldn't you make some for me? I'm very fond of poetrys," proposed Miss Celia, seeing that this prattle amused the children.

"I guess I couldn't make any now; I made some coming along. I will say it to you." And, crossing his short legs, the inspired babe half said, half sung the following poem: (1)

"Sweet are the flowers of life,
Swept o'er my happy days at home;
Sweet are the flowers of life
When I was a little child.

"Sweet are the flowers of life
That I spent with my father at home;
Sweet are the flowers of life
When children played about the house.

"Sweet are the flowers of life
When the lamps are lighted at night;
Sweet are the flowers of life
When the flowers of summer bloomed.

"Sweet are the flowers of life
Dead with the snows of winter;
Sweet are the flowers of life
When the days of spring come on.

(1) These lines were actually composed by a six-year old child.

"That's all of that one. I made another one when I digged after the turtle. I will say that. It is a very pretty one," observed the poet with charming candor; and, taking a long breath, he tuned his little lyre afresh:

Sweet, sweet days are passing
O’er my happy home.
Passing on swift wings through the valley of life.
Cold are the days when winter comes again.
When my sweet days were passing at my happy home,
Sweet were the days on the rivulet’s green brink;
Sweet were the days when I read my father’s books;
Sweet were the winter days when bright fires are blazing.”

“Bless the baby! where did he get all that?” exclaimed Miss Celia, amazed; while the children giggled as Tennyson, Jr., took a bite at the turtle instead of the half-eaten cake, and then, to prevent further mistakes, crammed the unhappy creature into a diminutive pocket in the most business-like way imaginable.

“It comes out of my head. I make lots of them,” began the imperturbable one, yielding more and more to the social influences of the hour.

“Here are the peacocks coming to be fed,” interrupted Bab, as the handsome birds appeared with their splendid plumage glittering in the sun.

Young Barlow rose to admire; but his thirst for knowledge was not yet quenched, and he was about to request a song from Juno and Jupiter, when old Jack, pining for society, put his head over the garden wall with a tremendous bray.

This unexpected sound startled the inquiring stranger half out of his wits; for a moment the stout legs staggered and the solemn countenance lost its composure, as he whispered, with an astonished air,

“Is that the way peacocks scream?”

The children were in fits of laughter, and Miss Celia could hardly make herself heard as she answered merrily, —

“No, dear; that is the donkey asking you to come and see him: will you go?

“I guess I couldn’t stop now. Mamma might want me.”

And, without another word, the discomfited poet precipitately retired, leaving his cherished sticks behind him.

Ben ran after the child to see that he came to no harm, and presently returned to report that Alfred had been met by a servant, and gone away chanting a new verse of his poem, in which peacocks, donkeys, and “the flowers of life” were sweetly mingled.

“Now I’ll show you my toys, and we’ll have a little play before it gets too late for Thorny to stay with us,” said Miss Celia, as Randa carried away the tea-things and brought back a large tray full of picture-books, dissected maps, puzzles, games, and several pretty models of animals, the whole crowned with a large doll dressed as a baby.

At sight of that, Betty stretched out her arms to receive it with a cry of delight. Bab seized the games, and Ben was lost in admiration of the little Arab chief prancing on the white horse, — all saddled and bridled and fit for the fight. Thorny poked about to find a certain curious puzzle which he could put together without a mistake after long study. Even Sancho found something to interest him; and, standing on his hind-legs, thrust his head between the boys to paw at several red and blue letters on square blocks.

“He looks as if he knew them,” said Thorny, amused at the dog’s eager whine and scratch.

“He does. Spell your name, Sanch;” and Ben put all the gay letters down upon the flags with a chirrup which set the dog’s tail to wagging as he waited till the alphabet was spread before him. Then, with great deliberation, he pushed the letters about till he had picked out six; these he arranged with nose and paw till the word “Sancho” lay before him correctly spelt.

“Isn’t that clever? Can he do any more?” cried Thorny, delighted.

“Lots; that’s the way he gets his livin’, and mine too,” answered Ben; and proudly put his poodle through his well-learned lessons with such success that even Miss Celia was surprised.

“He has been carefully trained. Do you know how it was done?” she asked, when Sancho lay down to rest and be caressed by the children.

“No, ‘m, father did it when I was a little chap, and never told me how. I used to help teach him to dance, and that was easy enough, he is so smart. Father said the middle of the night was the best time to give him his lessons; it was so still then, and nothing disturbed Sanch and made him forget. I can’t do half the tricks, but I’m goin’ to learn when father comes back. He’d rather have me show off Sanch than ride, till I’m older.”

“I have a charming book about animals, and in it an interesting account of some trained poodles who could do the most wonderful things. Would you like to hear it while you put your maps and puzzles together?” asked Miss Celia, glad to keep her brother interested in their four-footed guest at least.

“Yes,’m, yes,’m,” answered the children; and, fetching the book, she read the pretty account, shortening and simplifying it here and there to suit her hearers.

“I invited the two dogs to dine and spend the evening; and they came with their master, who was a Frenchman. He had been a teacher in a deaf and dumb school, and thought he would try the same plan with dogs. He had also been a conjurer, and now was supported by Blanche and her daughter Lyda. These dogs behaved at dinner just like other dogs; but when I gave Blanche a bit of cheese and asked if she knew the word for it, her master said she could spell it. So a table was arranged with a lamp on it, and round the table were laid the letters of the alphabet painted on cards. Blanche sat in the middle, waiting till her master told her to spell cheese, which she at once did in French, F R O M A G E. Then she translated a word for us very cleverly. Some one wrote pferd, the German for horse, on a slate. Blanche looked at it and pretended to read it, putting by the slate with her paw when she had done. ‘Now give us the French for that word,’ said the man; and she instantly brought CHEVAL. ‘Now, as you are at an Englishman’s house, give it to us in English;’ and she brought me HORSE. Then we spelt some words wrong, and she corrected them with wonderful accuracy. But she did not seem to like it, and whined and growled and looked so worried, that she was allowed to go and rest and eat cakes in a corner.

“Then Lyda took her place on the table, and did sums on the slate with a set of figures. Also mental arithmetic, which was very pretty. ‘Now, Lyda,’ said her master, ‘I want to see if you understand division. Suppose you had ten bits of sugar, and you met ten Prussian dogs, how many lumps would you, a French dog, give to each of the Prussians?’ Lyda very decidedly replied to this with a cipher. ‘But, suppose you divided your sugar with me, how many lumps would you give me?’ Lyda took up the figure five and politely presented it to her master.”

“Wasn’t she smart? Sanch can’t do that,” exclaimed Ben, forced to own that the French doggie beat his cherished pet.

“He is not too old to learn. Shall I go on?” asked Miss Celia, seeing that the boys liked it, though Betty was absorbed with the doll, and Bab deep in a puzzle.

“Oh, yes! What else did they do?”

“They played a game of dominoes together, sitting in chairs opposite each other, and touched the dominoes that were wanted; but the man placed them and kept telling how the game went. Lyda was beaten, and hid under the sofa, evidently feeling very badly about it. Blanche was then surrounded with playing-cards, while her master held another pack and told us to choose a card; then he asked her what one had been chosen, and she always took up the right one in her teeth. I was asked to go into another room, put a light on the floor with cards round it, and leave the doors nearly shut. Then the man begged some one to whisper in the dog’s ear what card she was to bring, and she went at once and fetched it, thus showing that she understood their names. Lyda did many tricks with the numbers, so curious that no dog could possibly understand them; yet what the secret sign was I could not discover, but suppose it must have been in the tones of the master’s voice, for he certainly made none with either head or hands.

“It took an hour a day for eighteen months to educate a dog enough to appear in public, and (as you say, Ben) the night was the best time to give the lessons. Soon after this visit, the master died; and these wonderful dogs were sold because their mistress did not know how to exhibit them."

"Wouldn't I have liked to see 'em and find out how they were taught! Sanch, you'll have to study up lively, for I'm not going to have you beaten by French dogs," said Ben, shaking his finger so sternly that Sancho grovelled at his feet and put both paws over his eyes in the most abject manner.

"Is there a picture of those smart little poodles?" asked Ben, eying the book, which Miss Celia left open before her.

"Not of them, but of other interesting creatures; also anecdotes about horses, which will please you, I know," and she turned the pages for him, neither guessing how much good Mr. Hamerton's charming "Chapters on Animals" were to do the boy when he needed comfort for a sorrow which was very near.

CHAPTER X A HEAVY TROUBLE

"Thank you, ma'am, that's a tip-top book, 'specially the pictures. But I can't bear to see these poor fellows;" and Ben brooded over the fine etching of the dead and dying horses on a battle-field, one past all further pain, the other helpless, but lifting his head from his dead master to neigh a farewell to the comrades who go galloping away in a cloud of dust.

"They ought to stop for him, some of 'em," muttered Ben, hastily turning back to the cheerful picture of the three happy horses in the field, standing knee-deep among the grass as they prepare to drink at the wide stream.

"Ain't that black one a beauty? Seems as if I could see his mane blow in the wind, and hear him whinny to that small feller trotting down to see if he can't get over and be sociable. How I'd like to take a rousin' run round that meadow on the whole lot of 'em!" and Ben swayed about in his chair as if he was already doing it in imagination.

"You may take a turn round my field on Lita any day. She would like it, and Thorny's saddle will be here next week," said Miss Celia, pleased to see that the boy appreciated the fine pictures, and felt such hearty sympathy with the noble animals whom she dearly loved herself.

"Needn't wait for that. I'd rather ride bareback. Oh, I say, is this the book you told about, where the horses talked?" asked Ben, suddenly recollecting the speech he had puzzled over ever since he heard it.

"No; I brought the book, but in the hurry of my tea-party forgot to unpack it. I'll hunt it up to-night. Remind me, Thorny."

"There, now, I've forgotten something, too! Squire sent you a letter; and I'm having such a jolly time, I never thought of it."

Ben rummaged out the note with remorseful haste, protesting that he was in no hurry for Mr. Gulliver, and very glad to save him for another day. Leaving the young folks busy with their games, Miss Celia sat in the porch to read her letters, for there were two; and as she read her face grew so sober, then so sad, that if any one had been looking he would have wondered what bad news had chased away the sunshine so suddenly. No one did look; no one saw how pitifully her eyes rested on Ben's happy face when the letters were put away, and no one minded the new gentleness in her manner as she came back, to the table. But Ben thought there never was so sweet a lady as the one who leaned over him to show him how the dissected map went together and never smiled at his mistakes.

So kind, so very kind was she to them all, that when, after an hour of merry play, she took her brother in to bed, the three who remained fell to praising her enthusiastically as they put things to rights before taking leave.

“She’s like the good fairies in the books, and has all sorts of nice, pretty things in her house,” said Betty, enjoying a last hug of the fascinating doll whose lids would shut so that it was a pleasure to Sing, “Bye, sweet baby, bye,” with no staring eyes to Spoil the illusion.

“What heaps she knows! More than Teacher, I do believe; and she doesn’t mind how many questions we ask. I like folks that will tell me things,” added Bab, whose inquisitive mind was always hungry.

“I like that boy first-rate, and I guess he likes me, though I didn’t know where Nantucket ought to go. He wants me to teach him to ride when he’s on his pins again, and Miss Celia says I may. She knows how to make folks feel good, don’t she?” and Ben gratefully surveyed the Arab chief, now his own, though the best of all the collection.

“Won’t we have splendid times? She Says we may come over every night and play with her and Thorny.”

“And she’s goin’, to have the seats in the porch lift up, so we can put our things in there all day and have ‘em handy.”

“And I’m going to be her boy, and stay here all the time. I guess the letter I brought was a recommend from the Squire.”

“Yes, Ben; and if I had not already made up my mind to keep you before, I certainly would now, my boy.”

Something in Miss Celia’s voice, as she said the last two words with her hand on Ben’s shoulder, made him look up quickly and turn red with pleasure, wondering what the Squire had written about him.

“Mother must have some of the party; so you shall take her these, Bab, and Betty may carry Baby home for the night. She is so nicely asleep, it is a pity to wake her. Good by till to-morrow, little neighbors,” continued Miss Celia, and dismissed the girls with a kiss.

“Is Ben coming, too?” asked Bab, as Betty trotted off in a silent rapture with the big darling bobbing over her shoulder.

“Not yet; I’ve several things to settle with my new man. Tell mother he will come by-and-by.”

Off rushed Bab with the plateful of goodies; and, drawing Ben down beside her on the wide step, Miss Celia took out the letters, with a shadow creeping over her face as softly as the twilight was stealing over the world, while the dew fell, and every thing grew still and dim.

“Ben, dear, I’ve something to tell you,” she began, slowly; and the boy waited with a happy face, for no one had called him so since ‘Melia died.

“The Squire has heard about your father, and this is the letter Mr. Smithers sends.”

“Hooray! where is he, please?” cried Ben, wishing she would hurry up; for Miss Celia did not even offer him the letter, but sat looking down at Sancho on the lower step, as if she wanted him to come and help her. “He went after the mustangs, and sent some home, but could not come himself.”

“Went further on, I s’pose. Yes, he said he might go as far as California, and if he did he’d send for me. I’d like to go there; it’s a real splendid place, they say.”

“He has gone further away than that, to a lovelier country than California, I hope.” And Miss Celia’s eyes turned to the deep sky, where early stars were shining.

“Didn’t he send for me? Where’s he gone? When ‘s he coming back?” asked Ben, quickly; for there was a quiver in her voice, the meaning of which he felt before he understood.

Miss Celia put her arms about him, and answered very tenderly, — ”Ben, dear, if I were to tell you that he was never coming back, could you bear it?”

“I guess I could, — but you don’t mean it? Oh, ma’am, he isn’t dead?” cried Ben, with a cry that made her heart ache, and Sancho leap up with a bark.

“My poor little boy, I wish I could say no.”

There was no need of any more words, no need of tears or kind arms around him. He knew he was an orphan now, and turned instinctively to the old friend who loved him best. Throwing himself down beside his dog, Ben clung about the curly neck, sobbing bitterly, —

“Oh, Sanch, he’s never coming back again; never, never any more!”

Poor Sancho could only whine and lick away the tears that wet the half-hidden face, questioning the new friend meantime with eyes so full of dumb love and sympathy and sorrow that they seemed almost human. Wiping away her own tears, Miss Celia stooped to pat the white head, and to stroke the black one lying so near it that the dog’s breast was the boy’s pillow. Presently the sobbing ceased, and Ben whispered, without looking up, —

“Tell me all about it; I’ll be good.”

Then, as kindly as she could, Miss Celia read the brief letter which told the hard news bluntly; for Mr. Smithers was obliged to confess that he had known the truth months before, and never told the boy, lest he should be unfitted for the work they gave him. Of Ben Brown the elder’s death there was little to tell, except that he was killed in some wild place at the West, and a stranger wrote the fact to the only person whose name was found in Ben’s pocket-book. Mr. Smithers offered to take the boy back and “do well by him,” averring that the father wished his son to remain where he left him, and follow the profession to which he was trained.

“Will you go, Ben?” asked Miss Celia, hoping to distract his mind from his grief by speaking of other things.

“No, no; I’d rather tramp and starve. He’s awful hard to me and Sanch; and he’d be worse, now father’s gone. Don’t send me back! Let me stay here; folks are good to me; there’s nowhere else to go.” And the head Ben had lifted up with a desperate sort of look, went down again on Sancho’s breast as if there were no other refuge left.

“You shall stay here, and no one shall take you away against your will. I called you ‘my boy’ in play, now you shall be my boy in earnest; this shall be your home, and Thorny your brother. We are orphans, too; and we will stand by one another till a stronger friend comes to help us,” said Miss Celia, with such a mixture of resolution and tenderness in her voice, that Ben felt comforted at once, and thanked her by laying his cheek against the pretty slipper that rested on the step beside him, as if he had no words in which to swear loyalty to the gentle mistress whom he meant henceforth to serve with grateful fidelity.

Sancho felt that he must follow suit; and gravely put his paw upon her knee, with a low whine, as if he said, “Count me in, and let me help to pay my master’s debt if I can.”

Miss Celia shook the offered paw cordially, and the good creature crouched at her feet like a small lion, bound to guard her and her house for evermore.

“Don’t lie on that cold stone, Ben; come here and let me try to comfort you,” she said, stooping to wipe away the great drops that kept rolling down the brown cheek half hidden in her dress. But Ben put his arm over his face, and sobbed out with a fresh burst of grief, —

“You can’t, you didn’t know him! Oh, daddy! daddy! if I’d only seen you jest once more!”

No one could grant that wish; but Miss Celia did comfort him, for presently the sound of music floated out from the parlor, — music so soft, so sweet, that involuntarily the boy stopped his crying to listen; then quieter tears dropped slowly, seeming to soothe his pain as they fell, while the sense of loneliness passed away, and it grew possible to wait till it was time to go to father in that far-off country lovelier than golden California.

How long she played Miss Celia never minded; but, when she stole out to see if Ben had gone, she found that other friends, even kinder than herself, had taken the boy into their gentle keeping. The wind had sung a lullaby among the rustling lilacs, the moon’s mild face looked through the leafy arch to kiss the heavy eyelids, and faithful Sancho still kept guard beside his little master, who, with his head pillowed on his arm, lay fast asleep, dreaming, happily, that Daddy had come home again.

CHAPTER XI SUNDAY

Mrs. Moss woke Ben with a kiss next morning, for her heart yearned over the fatherless lad as if he had been her own, and she had no other way of showing her sympathy. Ben had forgotten his troubles in sleep; but the memory of them returned as soon as he opened his eyes, heavy with the tears they had shed. He did not cry any more, but felt strange and lonely till he called Sancho and told him all about it, for he was shy even with kind Mrs. Moss, and glad when she went away.

Sancho seemed to understand that his master was in trouble, and listened to the sad little story with gurgles of interest, whines of condolence, and intelligent barks whenever the word "daddy" was uttered. He was only a brute, but his dumb affection comforted the boy more than any words; for Sanch had known and loved "father" almost as long and well as his son, and that seemed to draw them closely together, now they were left alone.

"We must put on mourning, old feller. It's the proper thing, and there's nobody else to do it now," said Ben, as he dressed, remembering how all the company wore bits of crape somewhere about them at 'Melia's funeral.

It was a real sacrifice of boyish vanity to take the blue ribbon with its silver anchors off the new hat, and replace it with the dingy black band from the old one; but Ben was quite sincere in doing this, though doubtless his theatrical life made him think of the effect more than other lads would have done. He could find nothing in his limited wardrobe with which to decorate Sanch except a black cambric pocket. It was already half torn out of his trousers with the weight of nails, pebbles, and other light trifles; so he gave it a final wrench and tied it into the dog's collar, saying to himself, as he put away his treasures, with a sigh,—

"One pocket is enough; I sha'n't want anything but a han'k'chi'f to-day."

Fortunately, that article of dress was clean, for he had but one; and, with this somewhat ostentatiously drooping from the solitary pocket, the serious hat upon his head, the new shoes creaking mournfully, and Sanch gravely following, much impressed with his black bow, the chief mourner descended, feeling that he had done his best to show respect to the dead.

Mrs. Moss's eyes filled as she saw the rusty band, and guessed why it was there; but she found it difficult to repress a smile when she beheld the cambric symbol of woe on the dog's neck. Not a word was said to disturb the boy's comfort in these poor attempts, however; and he went out to do his chores, conscious that he was an object of interest to his friends, especially so to Bab and Betty, who, having been told of Ben's loss, now regarded him with a sort of pitying awe very grateful to his feelings.

"I want you to drive me to church by-and-by. It is going to be pretty warm, and Thorny is hardly strong enough to venture yet," said Miss Celia, when Ben ran over after breakfast to see if she had any thing for him to do; for he considered her his mistress now, though he was not to take possession of his new quarters till the morrow.

"Yes, 'm, I'd like to, if I look well enough," answered Ben, pleased to be asked, but impressed with the idea that people had to be very fine on such occasions.

"You will do very well when I have given you a touch. God doesn't mind our clothes, Ben, and the poor are as welcome as the rich to him. You have not been much, have you?" asked Miss Celia, anxious to help the boy, and not quite sure how to begin.

"No, 'm; our folks didn't hardly ever go, and father was so tired he used to rest Sundays, or go off in the woods with me."

A little quaver came into Ben's voice as he spoke, and a sudden motion made his hat-brim hide his eyes, for the thought of the happy times that would never come any more was almost too much for him.

"That was a pleasant way to rest. I often do so, and we will go to the grove this afternoon and try it. But I have to go to church in the morning; it seems to start me right for the week; and if one has a sorrow that is the place where one can always find comfort. Will you come and try it, Ben, dear?"

"I'd do any thing to please you," muttered Ben, without looking up; for, though he felt her kindness to the bottom of his heart, he did wish that no one would talk about father for a little while; it was so hard to keep from crying, and he hated to be a baby.

Miss Celia seemed to understand, for the next thing she said, in a very cheerful tone, was, "See what a pretty sight that is. When I was a little girl I used to think spiders spun cloth for the fairies, and spread it on the grass to bleach."

Ben stopped digging a hole in the ground with his toe, and looked up, to see a lovely cobweb like a wheel, circle within circle, spun across a corner of the arch over the gate. Tiny drops glittered on every thread as the light shone through the gossamer curtain, and a soft breath of air made it tremble as if about to blow it away.

"It's mighty pretty, but it will fly off, just as the others did. I never saw such a chap as that spider is. He keeps on spinning a new one every day, for they always get broke, and he don’t seem to be discouraged a mite,” said Ben, glad to change the subject, as she knew he would be.

“That is the way he gets his living, he spins his web and waits for his daily bread, — or fly, rather; and it always comes, I fancy. By-and-by you will see that pretty trap full of insects, and Mr. Spider will lay up his provisions for the day. After that he doesn’t care how soon his fine web blows away.”

“I know him; he’s a handsome feller, all black and yellow, and lives up in that corner where the shiny sort of hole is. He dives down the minute I touch the gate, but comes up after I’ve kept still a minute. I like to watch him. But he must hate me, for I took away a nice green fly and some little millers one day.”

“Did you ever hear the story of Bruce and his spider? Most children know and like that,” said Miss Celia, seeing that he seemed interested.

“No, ‘m; I don’t know ever so many things most children do,” answered Ben, soberly; for, since he had been among his new friends, he had often felt his own deficiencies.

“Ah, but you also know many things which they do not. Half the boys in town would give a great deal to be able to ride and run and leap as you do; and even the oldest are not as capable of taking care of themselves as you are. Your active life has done much in some ways to make a man of you; but in other ways it was bad, as I think you begin to see. Now, suppose you try to forget the harmful part, and remember only the good, while learning to be more like our boys, who go to school and church, and fit themselves to become industrious, honest men.” Ben had been looking straight up in Miss Celia’s face as she spoke, feeling that every word was true, though he could not have expressed it if he had tried; and, when she paused, with her bright eyes inquiringly fixed on his, he answered heartily, —

“I’d like to stay here and be respectable; for, since I came, I’ve found out that folks don’t think much of circus riders, though they like to go and see ‘em. I didn’t use to care about school and such things, but I do now; and I guess he’d like it better than to have me knockin’ round that way without him to look after me.”

“I know he would; so we will try, Benny. I dare say it will seem dull and hard at first, after the gay sort of life you have led, and you will miss the excitement. But it was not good for you, and we will do our best to find something safer. Don’t be discouraged; and, when things trouble you, come to me as Thorny does, and I’ll try to straighten them out for you. I’ve got two boys now, and I want to do my duty by both.”

Before Ben had time for more than a grateful look, a tumbled head appeared at an upper window, and a sleepy voice drawled out, —

“Celia! I can’t find a bit of a shoe-string, and I wish you’d come and do my neck-tie.”

“Lazy boy, come down here, and bring one of your black ties with you. Shoe-strings are in the little brown bag on my bureau,” called back Miss Celia; adding, with a laugh, as the tumbled head disappeared mumbling something about “bothering old bags”, “Thorny has been half spoiled since he was ill. You mustn’t mind his fidgets and dawdling ways. He’ll get over them soon, and then I know you two will be good friends.”

Ben had his doubts about that, but resolved to do his best for her sake; so, when Master Thorny presently appeared, with a careless “How are you, Ben?” that young person answered respectfully, — ”Very well, thank you,” though his nod was as condescending as his new master’s; because he felt that a boy who could ride bareback and turn a double somersault in the air ought not to “knuckle under” to a fellow who had not the strength of a pussy-cat.

“Sailor’s knot, please; keeps better so,” said Thorny, holding up his chin to have a blue-silk scarf tied to suit him, for he was already beginning to be something of a dandy.

“You ought to wear red till you get more color, dear;” and his sister rubbed her blooming cheek against his pale one, as if to lend him some of her own roses.

“Men don’t care how they look,” said Thorny, squirming out of her hold, for he hated to be “cuddled” before people.

“Oh, don’t they? Here ‘s a vain boy who brushes his hair a dozen times a day, and quiddles over his collar till he is so tired he can hardly stand,” laughed Miss Celia, with a little tweak of his ear.

“I should like to know what this is for?” demanded Thorny, in a dignified tone, presenting a black tie.

“For my other boy. He is going to church with me,” and Miss Celia tied a second knot for this young gentleman, with a smile that seemed to brighten up even the rusty hat-band.

“Well, I like that — ” began Thorny, in a tone that contradicted his words.

A look from his sister reminded him of what she had told him half an hour ago, and he stopped short, understanding now why she was “extra good to the little tramp.”

“So do I, for you are of no use as a driver yet, and I don’t like to fasten Lita when I have my best gloves on,” said Miss Celia, in a tone that rather nettled Master Thorny.

“Is Ben going to black my boots before he goes? with a glance at the new shoes which caused them to creak uneasily.

“No; he is going to black mine, if he will be so kind. You won’t need boots for a week yet, so we won’t waste any time over them. You will find every thing in the shed, Ben; and at ten you may go for Lita.”

With that, Miss Celia walked her brother off to the diningroom, and Ben retired to vent his ire in such energetic demonstrations with the blacking-brush that the little boots shone splendidly.

He thought he had never seen any thing as pretty as his mistress when, an hour later, she came out of the house in her white shawl and bonnet, holding a book and a late lily-of-the-valley in the pearl-colored gloves, which he hardly dared to touch as he helped her into the carriage. He had seen a good many fine ladies in his life; and those he had known had been very gay in the colors of their hats and gowns, very fond of cheap jewelry, and much given to feathers, lace, and furbelows; so it rather puzzled him to discover why Miss Celia looked so sweet and elegant in such a simple suit. He did not then know that the charm was in the woman, not the clothes; or that merely living near such a person would do more to give him gentle manners, good principles, and pure thoughts, than almost any other training he could have had. But he was conscious that it was pleasant to be there, neatly dressed, in good company, and going to church like a respectable boy. Somehow, the lonely feeling got better as he rolled along between green fields, with the June sunshine brightening every thing, a restful quiet in the air, and a friend beside him who sat silently looking out at the lovely world with what he afterward learned to call her “Sunday face,” — a soft, happy look, as if all the work and weariness of the past week were forgotten, and she was ready to begin afresh when this blessed day was over.

“Well, child, what is it?” she asked, catching his eye as he stole a shy glance at her, one of many which she had not seen.

“I was only thinking, you looked as if — ”

“As if what? Don’t be afraid,” she said, for Ben paused and fumbled at the reins, feeling half ashamed to tell his fancy.

“You were saying prayers,” he added, wishing she had not caught him.

“So I was. Don’t you, when you are happy?

“No,’m. I’m glad, but I don’t say any thing.”

“Words are not needed; but they help, sometimes, if they are sincere and sweet. Did you never learn any prayers, Ben?”

“Only ‘Now I lay me.’ Grandma taught me that when I was a little mite of a boy.”

“I will teach you another, the best that was ever made, because it says all we need ask.”

“Our folks wasn’t very pious; they didn’t have time, I s’pose.”

“I wonder if you know just what it means to be pious?”

"Goin' to church, and readin' the Bible, and sayin' prayers and hymns, ain't it?"

"Those things are a part of it; but being kind and cheerful, doing one's duty, helping others, and loving God, is the best way to show that we are pious in the true sense of the word."

"Then you are!" and Ben looked as if her acts had been a better definition than her words.

"I try to be, but I very often fail; so every Sunday I make new resolutions, and work hard to keep them through the week. That is a great help, as you will find when you begin to try it."

"Do you think if I said in meetin', 'I won't ever swear any more,' that I wouldn't do it again?" asked Ben, soberly; for that was his besetting sin just now.

"I'm afraid we can't get rid of our faults quite so easily; I wish we could: but I do believe that if you keep saying that, and trying to stop, you will cure the habit sooner than you think."

"I never did swear very bad, and I didn't mind much till I came here; but Bab and Betty looked so scared when I said 'damn,' and Mrs. Moss scolded me so, I tried to leave off. It's dreadful hard, though, when I get mad. 'Hang it!' don't seem half so good if I want to let off steam."

"Thorny used to 'confound!' every thing, so I proposed that he should whistle instead; and now he sometimes pipes up so suddenly and shrilly that it makes me jump. How would that do, instead of swearing?" proposed Miss Celia, not the least surprised at the habit of profanity, which the boy could hardly help learning among his former associates.

Ben laughed, and promised to try it, feeling a mischievous satisfaction at the prospect of out-whistling Master Thorny, as he knew he should; for the objectionable words rose to his lips a dozen times a day.

The Ben was ringing as they drove into town; and, by the time Lita was comfortably settled in her shed, people were coming up from all quarters to cluster around the steps of the old meeting-house like bees about a hive. Accustomed to a tent, where people kept their hats on, Ben forgot all about his, and was going down the aisle covered, when a gentle hand took it off, and Miss Celia whispered, as she gave it to him, —

"This is a holy place; remember that, and uncover at the door."

Much abashed, Ben followed to the pew, where the Squire and his wife soon joined them.

"Glad to see him here," said the old gentleman with an approving nod, as he recognized the boy and remembered his loss.

"Hope he won't nestle round in meeting-time," whispered Mrs. Allen, composing herself in the corner with much rustling of black silk.

"I'll take care that he doesn't disturb you," answered Miss Celia, pushing a stool under the short legs, and drawing a palm-leaf fan within reach.

Ben gave an inward sigh at the prospect before him; for an hour's captivity to an active lad is hard to bear, and he really did want to behave well. So he folded his arms and sat like a statue, with nothing moving but his eyes. They rolled to and fro, up and down, from the high red pulpit to the worn hymnbooks in the rack, recognizing two little faces under blue-ribboned hats in a distant pew, and finding it impossible to restrain a momentary twinkle in return for the solemn wink Billy Barton bestowed upon him across the aisle. Ten minutes of this decorous demeanor made it absolutely necessary for him to stir; so he unfolded his arms and crossed his legs as cautiously as a mouse moves in the presence of a cat; for Mrs. Allen's eye was on him, and he knew by experience that it was a very sharp one.

The music which presently began was a great relief to him, for under cover of it he could wag his foot and no one heard the creak thereof; and when they stood up to sing, he was so sure that all the boys were looking at him, he was glad to sit down again. The good old minister read the sixteenth chapter of Samuel, and then proceeded to preach a long and somewhat dull sermon. Ben listened with all his ears, for he was interested in the young shepherd, "ruddy and of a beautiful countenance," who was chosen to be Saul's armor-bearer. He wanted to hear more about him, and how he got on, and whether the evil spirits troubled Saul again after David had harped them out. But nothing more came; and the old gentleman droned on about other things till poor Ben felt that he must either go to sleep like the Squire, or tip the stool over by accident, since "nestling" was forbidden, and relief of some sort he must have.

Mrs. Allen gave him a peppermint, and he dutifully ate it, though it was so hot it made his eyes water. Then she fanned him, to his great annoyance, for it blew his hair about; and the pride of his life was to have his head as smooth and shiny as black satin. An irrepressible sigh of weariness attracted Miss Celia's attention at last; for, though she seemed to be listening devoutly, her thoughts had flown over the sea, with tender prayers for one whom she loved even more than David did his Jonathan. She guessed the trouble in a minute, and had provided for it, knowing by experience that few small boys can keep quiet through sermon-time. Finding a certain place in the little book she had brought, she put it into his hands, with the whisper, "Read if you are tired."

Ben clutched the book and gladly obeyed, though the title, "Scripture Narratives," did not look very inviting. Then his eye fell on the picture of a slender youth cutting a large man’s head off, while many people stood looking on.

“Jack, the giant-killer,” thought Ben, and turned the page to see the words “David and Goliath”, which was enough to set him to reading the story with great interest; for here was the shepherd boy turned into a hero. No more fidgets now; the sermon was no longer heard, the fan flapped unfelt, and Billy Barton’s spirited sketches in the hymnbook were vainly held up for admiration. Ben was quite absorbed in the stirring history of King David, told in a way that fitted it for children’s reading, and illustrated with fine pictures which charmed the boy’s eye.

Sermon and story ended at the same time; and, while he listened to the prayer, Ben felt as if he understood now what Miss Celia meant by saying that words helped when they were well chosen and sincere. Several petitions seemed as if especially intended for him; and he repeated them to himself that he might remember them, they sounded so sweet and comfortable heard for the first time just when he most needed comfort. Miss Celia saw a new expression in the boy’s face as she glanced down at him, and heard a little humming at her side when all stood up to sing the cheerful hymn with which they were dismissed.

“How do you like church?” asked the young lady, as they drove away.

“First-rate!” answered Ben, heartily.

“Especially the sermon?”

Ben laughed, and said, with an affectionate glance at the little book in her lap, —

“I couldn’t understand it; but that story was just elegant. There’s more; and I’d admire to read ‘em, if I could.”

“I’m glad you like them; and we will keep the rest for another sermon-time. Thorny used to do so, and always called this his ‘pew book.’ I don’t expect you to understand much that you hear yet awhile; but it is good to be there, and after reading these stories you will be more interested when you hear the names of the people mentioned here.”

“Yes, ‘m. Wasn’t David a fine feller? I liked all about the kid and the corn and the ten cheeses, and killin’ the lion and bear, and slingin’ old Goliath dead first shot. I want to know about Joseph next time, for I saw a gang of robbers puttin’ him in a hole, and it looked real interesting.”

Miss Celia could not help smiling at Ben’s way of telling things; but she was pleased to see that he was attracted by the music and the stories, and resolved to make church-going so pleasant that he would learn to love it for its own sake.

“Now, you have tried my way this morning, and we will try yours this afternoon. Come over about four and help me roll Thorny down to the grove. I am going to put one of the hammocks there, because the smell of the pines is good for him, and you can talk or read or amuse yourselves in any quiet way you like."

"Can I take Sanch along? He doesn't like to be left, and felt real bad because I shut him up, for fear he'd follow and come walkin' into meetin' to find me."

"Yes, indeed; let the clever Bow-wow have a good time and enjoy Sunday as much as I want my boys to."

Quite content with this arrangement, Ben went home to dinner, which he made very lively by recounting Billy Barton's ingenious devices to beguile the tedium of sermon time. He said nothing of his conversation with Miss Celia, because he had not quite made up his mind whether he liked it or not; it was so new and serious, he felt as if he had better lay it by, to think over a good deal before he could understand all about it. But he had time to get dismal again, and long for four o'clock; because he had nothing to do except whittle. Mrs. Moss went to take a nap; Bab and Betty sat demurely on their bench reading Sunday books; no boys were allowed to come and play; even the hens retired under the currant-bushes, and the cock stood among them, clucking drowsily, as if reading them a sermon.

"Dreadful slow day!" thought Ben; and, retiring to the recesses of his own room, he read over the two letters which seemed already old to him. Now that the first shock was over, he could not make it true that his father was dead, and he gave up trying; for he was an honest boy, and felt that it was foolish to pretend to be more unhappy than he really was. So he put away his letters, took the black pocket off Sanch's neck, and allowed himself to whistle softly as he packed up his possessions, ready to move next day, with few regrets and many bright anticipations for the future.

"Thorny, I want you to be good to Ben, and amuse him in some quiet way this afternoon. I must stay and see the Morrises, who are coming over; but you can go to the grove and have a pleasant time," said Miss Celia to her brother.

"Not much fun in talking to that horsey fellow. I'm sorry for him, but I can't do anything to amuse him," objected Thorny, pulling himself up from the sofa with a great yawn.

"You can be very agreeable when you like; and Ben has had enough of me for this time. To-morrow he will have his work, and do very well; but we must try to help him through to-day, because he doesn't know what to do with himself. Besides, it is just the time to make a good impression on him, while grief for his father softens him, and gives us a chance. I like him, and I'm sure he wants to do well; so it is our duty to help him, as there seems to be no one else."

"Here goes, then! Where is he?" and Thorny stood up, won by his sister's sweet earnestness, but very doubtful of his own success with the "horsey fellow."

"Waiting with the chair. Randa has gone on with the hammock. Be a dear boy, and I'll do as much for you some day."

"Don't see how you can be a dear boy. You're the best sister that ever was; so I'll love all the scallywags you ask me to."

With a laugh and a kiss, Thorny shambled off to ascend his chariot, good-humoredly saluting his pusher, whom he found sitting on the high rail behind, with his feet on Sanch.

"Drive on, Benjamin. I don't know the way, so I can't direct. Don't spill me out, — that's all I've got to say."

"All right, sir," — and away Ben trundled down the long walk that led through the orchard to a little grove of seven pines.

A pleasant spot; for a soft rustle filled the air, a brown carpet of pine needles, with fallen cones for a pattern, lay under foot; and over the tops of the tall brakes that fringed the knoll one had glimpses of hill and valley, farm-houses and winding river, like a silver ribbon through the low, green meadows.

"A regular summer house!" said Thorny, surveying it with approval. "What's the matter, Randa? Won't it do?" he asked, as the stout maid dropped her arms with a puff, after vainly trying to throw the hammock rope over a branch.

"That end went up beautiful, but this one won't; the branches is so high, I can't reach 'em; and I'm no hand at flinging ropes round."

"I'll fix it;" and Ben went up the pine like a squirrel, tied a stout knot, and swung himself down again before Thorny could get out of the chair.

"My patience, what a spry boy!" exclaimed Randa, admiringly.

"That 's nothing; you ought to see me shin up a smooth tent-pole," said Ben, rubbing the pitch off his hands, with a boastful wag of the head.

"You can go, Randa. Just hand me my cushion and books, Ben; then you can sit in the chair while I talk to you," commanded Thorny, tumbling into the hammock.

"What's he goin' to say to me?" wondered Ben to himself, as he sat down with Sanch sprawling among the wheels.

"Now, Ben, I think you'd better learn a hymn; I always used to when I was a little chap, and it is a good thing to do Sundays," began the new teacher, with a patronizing air, which ruffled his pupil as much as the opprobrious term "little chap."

"I'll be — whew — if I do!" whistled Ben, stopping an oath just in time.

"It is not polite to whistle in company," said Thorny, with great dignity.

"Miss Celia told me to. I'll say 'confound it,' if you like that better," answered

Ben, as a sly smile twinkled in his eyes.

"Oh, I see! She 's told you about it? Well, then, if you want to please her, you'll learn a hymn right off. Come, now, she wants me to be clever to you, and I'd like to do it; but if you get peppery, how can I?"

Thorny spoke in a hearty, blunt way, which suited Ben much better than the other, and he responded pleasantly, —

"If you won't be grand I won't be peppery. Nobody is going to boss me but Miss Celia; so I'll learn hymns if she wants me to."

"'In the soft season of thy youth' is a good one to begin with. I learned it when I was six. Nice thing; better have it." And Thorny offered the book like a patriarch addressing an infant.

Ben surveyed the yellow page with small favor, for the long s in the old-fashioned printing bewildered him; and when he came to the last two lines, he could not resist reading them wrong, —

"The earth affords no lovelier fight Than a religious youth."

"I don't believe I could ever get that into my head straight. Haven't you got a plain one any where round?" he asked, turning over the leaves with some anxiety.

"Look at the end, and see if there isn't a piece of poetry pasted in. You learn that, and see how funny Celia will look when you say it to her. She wrote it when she was a girl, and somebody had it printed for other children. I like it best, myself."

Pleased by the prospect of a little fun to cheer his virtuous task, Ben whisked over the leaves, and read with interest the lines Miss Celia had written in her girlhood:

"MY KINGDOM

A little kingdom I possess,
Where thoughts and feelings dwell;
And very hard I find the task
Of governing it well.
For passion tempts and troubles me,
A wayward will misleads,
And selfishness its shadow casts
On all my words and deeds.

"How can I learn to rule myself,
To be the child I should, —
Honest and brave, — nor ever tire

Of trying to be good?
How can I keep a sunny soul
To shine along life’s way?
How can I tune my little heart
To sweetly sing all day?

“Dear Father, help me with the love
That casteth out my fear!
Teach me to lean on thee, and feel
That thou art very near;
That no temptation is unseen,
No childish grief too small,
Since Thou, with patience infinite,
Doth soothe and comfort all.

“I do not ask for any crown,
But that which all may will
Nor seek to conquer any world
Except the one within.
Be then my guide until I find,
Led by a tender hand,
Thy happy kingdom in myself,
And dare to take command.”

“I like that!” said Ben, emphatically, when he had read the little hymn. “I understand it, and I’ll learn it right away. Don’t see how she could make it all come out so nice and pretty.”

“Celia can do any thing!” and Thorny gave an all-embracing wave of the hand, which forcibly expressed his firm belief in his sister’s boundless powers.

“I made some poetry once. Bab and Betty thought it was first-rate, I didn’t,” said Ben, moved to confidence by the discovery of Miss Celia’s poetic skill.

“Say it,” commanded Thorny, adding with tact, “I can’t make any to save my life, — never could but I’m fond of it.”

“Chevalita,
Pretty cretr,
I do love her
Like a brother;

Just to ride
Is my delight,
For she does not
Kick or bite,”

recited Ben, with modest pride, for his first attempt had been inspired by sincere affection, and pronounced “lovely” by the admiring girls.

“Very good! You must say them to Celia, too. She likes to hear Lita praised. You and she and that little Barlow boy ought to try for a prize, as the poets did in Athens. I’ll tell you all about it some time. Now, you peg away at your hymn.”

Cheered by Thorny’s commendation, Ben fell to work at his new task, squirming about in the chair as if the process of getting words into his memory was a very painful one. But he had quick wits, and had often learned comic songs; so he soon was able to repeat the four verses without mistake, much to his own and Thorny’s satisfaction.

“Now we’ll talk,” said the well-pleased preceptor; and talk they did, one swinging in the hammock, the other rolling about on the pine-needles, as they related their experiences boy fashion. Ben’s were the most exciting; but Thorny’s were not without interest, for he had lived abroad for several years, and could tell all sorts of droll stories of the countries he had seen.

Busied with friends, Miss Celia could not help wondering how the lads got on; and, when the tea-bell rang, waited a little anxiously for their return, knowing that she could tell at a glance if they had enjoyed themselves.

“All goes well so far,” she thought, as she watched their approach with a smile; for Sancho sat bolt upright in the chair which Ben pushed, while Thorny strolled beside him, leaning on a stout cane newly cut. Both boys were talking busily, and Thorny laughed from time to time, as if his comrade’s chat was very amusing.

“See what a jolly cane Ben cut for me! He’s great fun if you don’t stroke him the wrong way,” said the elder lad, flourishing his staff as they came up.

“What have you been doing down there? You look so merry, I suspect mischief,” asked Miss Celia, surveying them front the steps.

“We’ve been as good as gold. I talked, and Ben learned a hymn to please you. Come, young man, say your piece,” said Thorny, with an expression of virtuous content.

Taking off his hat, Ben soberly obeyed, much enjoying the quick color that came up in Miss Celia’s face as she listened, and feeling as if well repaid for the labor of learning by the pleased look with which she said, as he ended with a bow, —

“I feel very proud to think you chose that, and to hear you say it as if it meant something to you. I was only fourteen when I wrote it; but it came right out of my heart, and did me good. I hope it may help you a little.”

Ben murmured that he guessed it would; but felt too shy to talk about such things before Thorny, so hastily retired to put the chair away, and the others went in to tea. But later in the evening, when Miss Celia was singing like a nightingale, the boy slipped away from sleepy Bab and Betty to stand by the syringa bush and listen, with his heart full of new thoughts and happy feelings; for never before had he spent a Sunday like this. And when he went to bed, instead of saying “Now I lay me,” he repeated the third verse of Miss Celia’s hymn; for that was his favorite, because his longing for the father whom he had seen made it seem sweet and natural now to love and lean, without fear upon the Father whom he had not seen.

CHAPTER XII GOOD TIMES

Every one was very kind to Ben when his loss was known. The Squire wrote to Mr. Smithers that the boy had found friends and would stay where he was. Mrs. Moss consoled him in her motherly way, and the little girls did their very best to "be good to poor Benny." But Miss Celia was his truest comforter, and completely won his heart, not only by the friendly words she said and the pleasant things she did, but by the unspoken sympathy which showed itself just at the right minute, in a look, a touch, a smile, more helpful than any amount of condolence. She called him "my man," and Ben tried to be one, bearing his trouble so bravely that she respected him, although he was only a little boy, because it promised well for the future.

Then she was so happy herself, it was impossible for those about her to be sad, and Ben soon grew cheerful again in spite of the very tender memory of his father laid quietly away in the safest corner of his heart. He would have been a very unboyish boy if he had not been happy, for the new place was such a pleasant one, he soon felt as if, for the first time, he really had a home. No more grubbing now, but daily tasks which never grew tiresome, they were so varied and so light. No more cross Pats to try his temper, but the sweetest mistress that ever was, since praise was oftener on her lips than blame, and gratitude made willing service a delight.

At first, it seemed as if there was going to be trouble between the two boys; for Thorny was naturally masterful, and illness had left him weak and nervous, so he was often both domineering and petulant. Ben had been taught instant obedience to those older than him self, and if Thorny had been a man Ben would have made no complaint; but it was hard to be "ordered round" by a boy, and an unreasonable one into the bargain.

A word from Miss Celia blew away the threatening cloud, however; and for her sake her brother promised to try to be patient; for her sake Ben declared he never would "get mad" if Mr. Thorny did fidget; and both very soon forgot all about master and man and lived together like two friendly lads, taking each other's ups and downs good-naturedly, and finding mutual pleasure and profit in the new companionship.

The only point on which they never could agree was legs, and many a hearty laugh did they give Miss Celia by their warm and serious discussion of this vexed question. Thorny insisted that Ben was bowlegged; Ben resented the epithet, and declared that the legs of all good horsemen must have a slight curve, and any one who knew any thing about the matter would acknowledge both its necessity and its beauty. Then Thorny Would observe that it might be all very well in the saddle, but it made a man waddle like a duck when afoot; whereat Ben would retort that, for his part, he would rather waddle like a duck than tumble about like a horse with the staggers. He had his opponent there, for poor Thorny did look very like a weak-kneed colt when he tried to walk; but he would never own it, and came down upon Ben with crushing allusions to centaurs, or the Greeks and Romans, who were famous both for their horsemanship and fine limbs. Ben could not answer that, except by proudly referring to the chariot-races copied from the ancients, in which he had borne a part, which was more than some folks with long legs could say. Gentlemen never did that sort of thing, nor did they twit their best friends with their misfortunes, Thorny would remark; casting a pensive glance at his thin hands, longing the while to give Ben a good shaking. This hint would remind the other of his young master's late sufferings and all he owed his dear mistress; and he usually ended the controversy by turning a few lively somersaults as a vent for his swelling wrath, and come up with his temper all right again. Or, if Thorny happened to be in the wheeled chair, he would trot him round the garden at a pace which nearly took his breath away, thereby proving that if "bow-legs" were not beautiful to some benighted beings they were "good to go."

Thorny liked that, and would drop the subject for the time by politely introducing some more agreeable topic; so the impending quarrel would end in a laugh over some boyish joke, and the word "legs" be avoided by mutual consent till accident brought it up again.

The spirit of rivalry is hidden in the best of us, and is a helpful and inspiring power if we know how to use it. Miss Celia knew this, and tried to make the lads help one another by means of it, — not in boastful or ungenerous comparison of each other's gifts, but by interchanging them, giving and taking freely, kindly, and being glad to love what was admirable wherever they found it. Thorny admired Ben's strength, activity, and independence; Ben envied Thorny's learning, good manners, and comfortable surroundings; and, when a wise word had set the matter rightly before them, both enjoyed the feeling that there was a certain equality between them, since money could not buy health, and practical knowledge was as useful as any that can be found in books. So they interchanged their small experiences, accomplishments, and pleasures, and both were the better, as well as the happier, for it; because in this way only can we truly love our neighbor as ourself, and get the real sweetness out of life.

There was no end to the new and pleasant things Ben had to do, from keeping paths and flower-beds neat, feeding the pets, and running errands, to waiting on Thorny and being right-hand man to Miss Celia. He had a little room in the old house, newly papered with hunting scenes, which he was never tired of admiring. In the closet hung several out-grown suits of Thorny's, made over for his valet; and, what Ben valued infinitely more, a pair of boots, well blacked and ready for grand occasions, when he rode abroad, with one old spur, found in the attic, brightened up and merely worn for show, since nothing would have induced him to prick beloved Lita with it.

Many pictures, cut from illustrated papers, of races, animals, and birds, were stuck round the room, giving it rather the air of a circus and menagerie. This, however, made it only the more home-like to its present owner, who felt exceedingly rich and respectable as he surveyed his premises; almost like a retired showman who still fondly remembers past successes, though now happy in the more private walks of life.

In one drawer of the quaint little bureau which he used, were kept the relics of his father; very few and poor, and of no interest to any one but himself, — only the letter telling of his death, a worn-out watch-chain, and a photograph of Senor Jose Montebello, with his youthful son standing on his head, both airily attired, and both smiling with the calmly superior expression which gentlemen of their profession usually wear in public. Ben's other treasures had been stolen with his bundle; but these he cherished and often looked at when he went to bed, wondering what heaven was like, since it was lovelier than California, and usually fell asleep with a dreamy impression that it must be something like America when Columbus found it, — "a pleasant land, where were gay flowers and tall trees, with leaves and fruit such as they had never seen before." And through this happy hunting-ground "father" was for ever riding on a beautiful white horse with wings, like the one of which Miss Celia had a picture.

Nice times Ben had in his little room poring over his books, for he soon had several of his own; but his favorites were Hamerton's "Animals" and "Our Dumb Friends," both full of interesting pictures and anecdotes such as boys love. Still nicer times working about the house, helping get things in order; and best of all were the daily drives with Miss Celia and Thorny, when weather permitted, or solitary rides to town through the heaviest rain, for certain letters must go and come, no matter how the elements raged. The neighbors soon got used to the "antics of that boy," but Ben knew that he was an object of interest as he careered down the main street in a way that made old ladies cry out and brought people flying to the window, sure that some one was being run away with. Lita enjoyed the fun as much as he, and apparently did her best to send him heels over head, having rapidly earned to understand the signs he gave her by the touch of hand and foot, or the tones of his voice.

These performances caused the boys to regard Ben Brown with intense admiration, the girls with timid awe, all but Bab, who burned to imitate him, and tried her best whenever she got a chance, much to the anguish and dismay of poor Jack, for that long-suffering animal was the only steed she was allowed to ride. Fortunately, neither she nor Betty had much time for play just now, as school was about to close for the long vacation, and all the little people were busy finishing up, that they might go to play with free minds. So the “lilac-parties,” as they called them, were deferred till later, and the lads amused themselves in their own way, with Miss Celia to suggest and advise.

It took Thorny a long time to arrange his possessions, for he could only direct while Ben unpacked, wondering and admiring as he worked, because he had never seen so many boyish treasures before. The little printing-press was his especial delight, and leaving every thing else in confusion, Thorny taught him its and planned a newspaper on the spot, with Ben for printer, himself for editor, and “Sister” for chief contributor, while Bab should be carrier and Betty office-boy. Next came a postage-stamp book, and a rainy day was happily spent in pasting a new collection where each particular one belonged, with copious explanations from Thorny as they went along. Ben did not feel any great interest in this amusement after one trial of it, but when a book containing patterns of the flags of all nations turned up, he was seized with a desire to copy them all, so that the house could be fitly decorated on gala occasions. Finding that it amused her brother, Miss Celia generously opened her piece-drawer and rag-bag, and as the mania grew till her resources were exhausted, she bought bits of gay cambric and many-colored papers, and startled the store-keeper by purchasing several bottles of mucilage at once. Bab and Betty were invited to sew the bright strips of stars, and pricked their little fingers assiduously, finding this sort of needle-work much more attractive than piecing bed-quilts.

Such a snipping and pasting, planning and stitching as went on in the big back room, which was given up to them, and such a noble array of banners and petitions as soon decorated its walls, would have caused the dullest eye to brighten with amusement, if not with admiration. Of course, the Stars and Stripes hung highest, with the English lion ramping on the royal standard close by; then followed a regular picture-gallery, for there was the white elephant of Siam, the splendid peacock of Burmah, the double-headed Russian eagle, and black dragon of China, the winged lion of Venice, and the prancing pair on the red, white, and blue flag of Holland. The keys and mitre of the Papal States were a hard job, but up they went at last, with the yellow crescent of Turkey on one side and the red full moon of Japan on the other; the pretty blue and white flag of

Greece hung below and the cross of free Switzerland above. If materials had held out, the flags of all the United States would have followed; but paste and patience were exhausted, so the busy workers rested awhile before they “flung their banner to the breeze,” as the newspapers have it.

A spell of ship-building and rigging followed the flag fit; for Thorny, feeling too old now for such toys, made over his whole fleet to “the children,” condescending, however, to superintend a thorough repairing of the same before he disposed of all but the big man-of-war, which continued to ornament his own room, with all sail set and a little red officer perpetually waving his sword on the quarter-deck.

These gifts led to out-of-door water-works, for the brook had to be dammed up, that a shallow ocean might be made, where Ben’s piratical “Red Rover,” with the black flag, might chase and capture Bab’s smart frigate, “Queen,” while the “Bounding Betsey,” laden with lumber, safely sailed from Kennebunkport to Massachusetts Bay. Thorny, from his chair, was chief-engineer, and directed his gang of one how to dig the basin, throw up the embankment, and finally let in the water till the mimic ocean was full; then regulate the little water-gate, lest it should overflow and wreck the pretty squadron or ships, boats, canoes, and rafts, which soon rode at anchor there.

Digging and paddling in mud and water proved such a delightful pastime that the boys kept it up, till a series of water-wheels, little mills and cataracts made the once quiet brook look as if a manufacturing town was about to spring up where hitherto minnows had played in peace and the retiring frog had chanted his serenade unmolested.

Miss Celia liked all this, for any thing which would keep Thorny happy out-of-doors in the sweet June weather found favor in her eyes, and when the novelty had worn off from home affairs, she planned a series of exploring expeditions which filled their boyish souls with delight. As none of them knew much about the place, it really was quite exciting to start off on a bright morning with a roll of wraps and cushions, lunch, books, and drawing materials packed into the phaeton, and drive at random about the shady roads and lanes, pausing when and where they liked. Wonderful discoveries were made, pretty places were named, plans were drawn, and all sorts of merry adventures befell the pilgrims.

Each day they camped in a new spot, and while Lita nibbled the fresh grass at her ease, Miss Celia sketched under the big umbrella, Thorny read or lounged or slept on his rubber blanket, and Ben made himself generally useful. Unloading, filling the artist’s water-bottle, piling the invalid’s cushions, setting out the lunch, running to and fro for a Bower or a butterfly, climbing a tree to report the view, reading, chatting, or frolicking with Sancho, — any sort of duty was in Ben’s line, and he did them all well, for an out-of-door life was natural to him and he liked it.

“Ben, I want an amanuensis,” said Thorny, dropping book and pencil one day after a brief interval of silence, broken only by the whisper of the young leaves overhead and the soft babble of the brook close by.

“A what?” asked Ben, pushing back his hat with such an air of amazement that Thorny rather loftily inquired:

“Don’t you know what an amanuensis is?”

“Well, no; not unless it’s some relation to an anaconda. Shouldn’t think you’d want one of them, anyway.”

Thorny rolled over with a hoot of derision, and his sister, who sat close by, sketching an old gate, looked up to see what was going on.

“Well, you needn’t laugh at a feller. You didn’t know what a wombat was when I asked you, and I didn’t roar,” said Ben, giving his hat a slap, as nothing else was handy.

“The idea of wanting an anaconda tickled me so, I couldn’t help it. I dare say you’d have got me one if I had asked for it, you are such an obliging chap.”

“Of course I would if I could. Shouldn’t be surprised if you did some day, you want such funny things,” answered Ben, appeased by the compliment.

“I’ll try the amanuensis first. It’s only some one to write for me; I get so tired doing it without a table. You write well enough, and it will be good for you to know something about botany. I intend to teach you, Ben,” said Thorny, as if conferring a great favor.

“It looks pretty hard,” muttered Ben, with a doleful Glance at the book laid open upon a strew of torn leaves and flowers.

“No, it isn’t; it’s regularly jolly; and you’d be no end of a help if you only knew a little. Now, suppose I say, ‘Bring me a “ranunculus bulbosus,”‘ how would you know what I wanted?” demanded Thorny, waving his microscope with a learned air.

“Shouldn’t.”

“There are quantities of them all round us; and I want to analyze one. See if you can’t guess.”

Ben stared vaguely from earth to sky, and was about to give it up, when a buttercup fell at his feet, and he caught sight of Miss Celia smiling at him from behind her brother, who did not see the flower.

“S’pose you mean this? I don’t call ‘em rhinocerus bulburses, so I wasn’t sure.” And, taking the hint as quickly as it was given, Ben presented the buttercup as if he knew all about it.

"You guessed that remarkably well. Now bring me a 'leontodon taraxacum,'" said Thorny, charmed with the quickness of his pupil, and glad to display his learning.

Again Ben gazed, but the field was full of early flowers; and, if a long pencil had not pointed to a dandelion close by, he would have been lost.

"Here you are, sir," he answered with a chuckle and Thorny took his turn at being astonished now.

"How the dickens did you know that?"

"Try it again, and may be you'll find out," laughed Ben.

Diving hap-hazard into his book, Thorny demanded a "trifolium pratense."

The clever pencil pointed, and Ben brought a red clover, mightily enjoying the joke, and thinking that their kind of botany wasn't bad fun.

"Look here, no fooling!" and Thorny sat up to investigate the matter, so quickly that his sister had not time to sober down. "Ah, I've caught you! Not fair to tell, Celia. Now, Ben, you've got to learn all about this buttercup, to pay for cheating."

"Werry good, sir; bring on your rhinoceriouses," answered Ben, who couldn't help imitating his old friend the clown when he felt particularly jolly.

"Sit there and write what I tell you," ordered Thorny, with all the severity of a strict schoolmaster. Perching himself on the mossy stump, Ben obediently floundered through the following analysis, with constant help in the spelling, and much private wonder what would come of it: —

"Phaenogamous. Exogenous. Angiosperm. Polypetalous. Stamens, more than ten. Stamens on the receptacle. Pistils, more than one and separate. Leaves without stipules. Crowfoot family. Genus ranunculus. Botanical name, Ranunculus bulbosus."

"Jerusalem! what a flower! Pistols and crows' feet, and Polly put the kettles on, and Angy sperms and all the rest of 'em! If that's your botany, I won't take any more, thank you," said Ben, as he paused as hot and red as if he had been running a race.

"Yes, you Will; you'll learn that all by heart, and then I shall give you a dandelion to do. You'll like that, because it means dent de lion, or lion's tooth; and I'll show them to you through my glass. You've no idea how interesting it is, and what heaps of pretty things you'll see," answered Thorny, who had already discovered how charming the study was, and had found great satisfaction in it, since he had been forbidden more active pleasures.

"What's the good of it, anyway?" asked Ben, who would rather have been set to mowing the big field than to the task before him.

"It tells all about it in my book here, — 'Gray's Botany for Young People.'

But I can tell you what use it is to us," continued Thorny, crossing his legs in the air and preparing to argue the matter, comfortably lying flat on his back. "We are a Scientific Exploration Society, and we must keep an account of all the plants, animals, minerals, and so on, as we come across them. Then, suppose we get lost, and have to hunt for food, how are we to know what is safe and what isn't? Come, now, do you know the difference between a toadstool and a mushroom?"

"No, I don't."

"Then I'll teach you some day. There is sweet flag and poisonous flag, and all sorts of berries and things; and you'd better look out when you are in the woods, or you'll touch ivy and dogwood, and have a horrid time, if you don't know your botany."

"Thorny learned much of his by sad experience; and you will be wise to take his advice," said Miss Celia, recalling her brother's various mishaps before the new fancy came on.

"Didn't I have a time of it, though, when I had to go round for a week with plantain leaves and cream stuck all over my face! Just picked some pretty red dogwood, Ben; and then I was a regular guy, with a face like a lobster, and my eyes swelled out of sight. Come along, and learn right away, and never get into scrapes like most fellows."

Impressed by this warning, and attracted by Thorny's enthusiasm, Ben cast himself down upon the blanket, and for an hour the two heads bobbed to and fro, from microscope to book, the teacher airing his small knowledge, the pupil more and more interested in the new and curious things he saw or heard, — though it must be confessed that Ben infinitely preferred to watch ants and bugs, queer little worms and gauzy-winged flies, rather than "putter" over plants with long names. He did not dare to say so, however; but, when Thorny asked him if it wasn't capital fun, he dodged cleverly by proposing to hunt up the flowers for his master to study, offering to learn about the dangerous ones, but pleading want of time to investigate this pleasing science very deeply.

As Thorny had talked himself hoarse, he was very ready to dismiss his class of one to fish the milk-bottle out of the brook; and recess was prolonged till next day. But both boys found a new pleasure in the pretty pastime they made of it; for active Ben ranged the woods and fields with a tin box slung over his shoulder, and feeble Thorny had a little room fitted up for his own use, where he pressed flowers in newspaper books, dried herbs on the walls, had bottles and cups, pans and platters, for his treasures, and made as much litter as he liked.

Presently, Ben brought such lively accounts of the green nooks where jacks-in-the-pulpit preached their little sermons; brooks, beside which grew blue violets and lovely ferns; rocks, round which danced the columbines like rosy elves, or the trees where birds built, squirrels chattered, and woodchucks burrowed, that Thorny was seized with a desire to go and see these beauties for himself. So Jack was saddled, and went plodding, scrambling, and wandering into all manner of pleasant places, always bringing home a stronger, browner rider than he carried away.

This delighted Miss Celia; and she gladly saw them ramble off together, leaving her time to stitch happily at certain dainty bits of sewing, write voluminous letters, or dream over others quite as long, swinging in her hammock under the lilacs.

CHAPTER XIII SOMEBODY RUNS AWAY

"'School is done,
Now we'll have fun,"

Sung Bab and Betty, slamming down their books as if they never meant to take them up again, when they came home on the last day of June.

Tired teacher had dismissed them for eight whole weeks, and gone away to rest; the little school-house was shut up, lessons were over, spirits rising fast, and vacation had begun. The quiet town seemed suddenly inundated with children, all in such a rampant state that busy mothers wondered how they ever should be able to keep their frisky darlings out of mischief; thrifty fathers planned how they could bribe the idle hands to pick berries or rake hay; and the old folks, while wishing the young folks well, secretly blessed the man who invented schools.

The girls immediately began to talk about picnics, and have them, too; for little hats sprung up in the fields like a new sort of mushroom, — every hillside bloomed with gay gowns, looking as if the flowers had gone out for a walk; and the woods were full of featherless birds chirping away as blithely as the thrushes, robins, and wrens.

The boys took to base-ball like ducks to water, and the common was the scene of tremendous battles, waged with much tumult, but little bloodshed. To the uninitiated, it appeared as if these young men had lost their wits; for, no matter how warm it was, there they were, tearing about in the maddest manner, jackets off, sleeves rolled up, queer caps flung on any way, all batting shabby leather balls, and catching the same, as if their lives depended on it. Every one talking in his gruffest tone, bawling at the top of his voice, squabbling over every point of the game, and seeming to enjoy himself immensely, in spite of the heat, dust, uproar, and imminent danger of getting eyes or teeth knocked out.

Thorny was an excellent player, but, not being strong enough to show his prowess, he made Ben his proxy; and, sitting on the fence, acted as umpire to his heart's content. Ben was a promising pupil, and made rapid progress; for eye, foot, and hand had been so well trained, that they did him good service now; and Brown was considered a first-rate "catcher".

Sancho distinguished himself by his skill in hunting up stray balls, and guarding jackets when not needed, with the air of one of the Old Guard on duty at the tomb of Napoleon. Bab also longed to join in the fun, which suited her better than “stupid picnics” or “fussing over dolls;” but her heroes would not have her at any price; and she was obliged to content herself with sitting by Thorny, and watching with breathless interest the varying fortunes of “our side.”

A grand match was planned for the Fourth of July; but when the club met, things were found to be unpropitious. Thorny had gone out of town with his sister to pass the day, two of the best players did not appear, and the others were somewhat exhausted by the festivities, which began at sunrise for them. So they lay about on the grass in the shade of the big elm, languidly discussing their various wrongs and disappointments.

“It’s the meanest Fourth I ever saw. Can’t have no crackers, because somebody’s horse got scared last year,” growled Sam Kitteridge, bitterly resenting the stern edict which forbade free-born citizens to burn as much gunpowder as they liked on that glorious day.

“Last year Jimmy got his arm blown off when they fired the old cannon. Didn’t we have a lively time going for the doctors and getting him home?” asked another boy, looking as if he felt defrauded of the most interesting part of the anniversary, because no accident had occurred.

“Ain’t going to be fireworks either, unless somebody’s barn burns up. Don’t I just wish there would,” gloomily responded another youth who had so rashly indulged in pyrotechnics on a former occasion that a neighbor’s cow had been roasted whole.

“I wouldn’t give two cents for such a slow old place as this. Why, last Fourth at this time, I was rumbling though Boston streets on top of our big car, all in my best toggery. Hot as pepper, but good fun looking in at the upper windows and hearing the women scream when the old thing waggled round and I made believe I was going to tumble off, said Ben, leaning on his bat with the air of a man who had seen the world and felt some natural regret at descending from so lofty a sphere.

“Catch me cuttin’ away if I had such a chance as that!” answered Sam, trying to balance his bat on his chin and getting a smart rap across the nose as he failed to perform the feat.

“Much you know about it, old chap. It’s hard work, I can tell you, and that wouldn’t suit such a lazy-bones. Then you are too big to begin, though you might do for a fat boy if Smithers wanted one,” said Ben, surveying the stout youth, with calm contempt.

“Let’s go in swimming, not loaf round here, if we can’t play,” proposed a red and shiny boy, panting for a game of leap-frog in Sandy pond.

“May as well; don’t see much else to do,” sighed Sam, rising like a young elephant.

The others were about to follow, when a shrill “Hi, hi, boys, hold on!” made them turn about to behold Billy Barton tearing down the street like a runaway colt, waving a long strip of paper as he ran.

“Now, then, what’s the matter?” demanded Ben, as the other came up grinning and puffing, but full of great news.

“Look here, read it! I’m going; come along, the whole of you,” panted Billy, putting the paper into Sam’s hand, and surveying the crowd with a face as beaming as a full moon.

“Look out for the big show,” read Sam. “Van Amburgh & Co.’s New Great Golden Menagerie, Circus and Colosseum, will exhibit at Berryville, July 4th, at 1 and 7 precisely. Admission 50 cents, children half-price. Don’t forget day and date. H. Frost, Manager.”

While Sam read, the other boys had been gloating over the enticing pictures which covered the bill. There was the golden car, filled with noble beings in helmets, all playing on immense trumpets; the twenty-four prancing steeds with manes, tails, and feathered heads tossing in the breeze; the clowns, the tumblers, the strong men, and the riders flying about in the air as if the laws of gravitation no longer existed. But, best of all, was the grand conglomeration of animals where the giraffe appears to stand on the elephant’s back, the zebra to be jumping over the seal, the hippopotamus to be lunching off a couple of crocodiles, and lions and tigers to be raining down in all directions with their mouths, wide open and their tails as stiff as that of the famous Northumberland House lion.

“Cricky! wouldn’t I like to see that,” said little Cyrus Fay, devoutly hoping that the cage, in which this pleasing spectacle took place, was a very strong one.

“You never would, it’s only a picture! That, now, is something like,” and Ben, who had pricked up his ears at the word “circus,” laid his finger on a smaller cut of a man hanging by the back of his neck with a child in each hand, two men suspended from his feet, and the third swinging forward to alight on his head.

“I ‘m going,” said Sam, with calm decision, for this superb array of unknown pleasures fired his soul and made him forget his weight.

“How will you fix it?” asked Ben, fingering the bill with a nervous thrill all through his wiry limbs, just as he used to feel it when his father caught him up to dash into the ring.

“Foot it with Billy. It’s only four miles, and we’ve got lots of time, so we can take it easy. Mother won’t care, if I send word by Cy,” answered Sam, producing half a dollar, as if such magnificent sums were no strangers to his pocket.

“Come on, Brown; you’ll be a first-rate fellow to show us round, as you know all the dodges," said Billy, anxious to get his money's worth.

"Well, I don't know," began Ben, longing to go, but afraid Mrs. Moss would say "No!" if he asked leave.

"He's afraid," sneered the red-faced boy, who felt bitterly toward all mankind at that instant, because he knew there was no hope of his going.

"Say that again, and I'll knock your head off," and Ben faced round with a gesture which caused the other to skip out of reach precipitately.

"Hasn't got any money, more likely," observed a shabby youth, whose pockets never had any thing in them but a pair of dirty hands.

Ben calmly produced a dollar bill and waved it defiantly before this doubter, observing with dignity:

"I've got money enough to treat the whole crowd, if I choose to, which I don't."

"Then come along and have a jolly time with Sam and me. We can buy some dinner and get a ride home, as like as not," said the amiable Billy, with a slap on the shoulder, and a cordial grin which made it impossible for Ben to resist.

"What are you stopping for?" demanded Sam, ready to be off, that they might "take it easy."

"Don't know what to do with Sancho. He'll get lost or stolen if I take him, and it's too far to carry him home if you are in a hurry," began Ben, persuading himself that this was the true reason of his delay.

"Let Cy take him back. He'll do it for a cent; won't you, Cy?" proposed Billy, smoothing away all objections, for he liked Ben, and saw that he wanted to go.

"No, I won't; I don't like him. He winks at me, and growls when I touch him," muttered naughty Cy, remembering how much reason poor Sanch had to distrust his tormentor.

"There 's Bab; she'll do it. Come here, sissy; Ben wants you," called Sam, beckoning to a small figure just perching on the fence.

Down it jumped and Came fluttering up, much elated at being summoned by the captain of the sacred nine.

"I want you to take Sanch home, and tell your mother I'm going to walk, and may be won't be back till sundown. Miss Celia said I Might do what I pleased, all day. You remember, now."

Ben spoke without looking up, and affected to be very busy buckling a strap into Sanch's collar, for the two were so seldom parted that the dog always rebelled. It was a mistake on Ben's part, for while his eyes were on his work Bab's were devouring the bill which Sam still held, and her suspicions were aroused by the boys' faces.

"Where are you going? Ma will want to know," she said, as curious as a magpie all at once.

“Never you mind; girls can’t know every thing. You just catch hold of this and run along home. Lock Sanch up for an hour, and tell your mother I’m all right,” answered Ben, bound to assert his manly supremacy before his mates.

“He’s going to the circus,” whispered Fay, hoping to make mischief.

“Circus! Oh, Ben, do take me!” cried Bab, falling into a state of great excitement at the mere thought of such delight.

“You couldn’t walk four miles,” began Ben.

“Yes, I could, as easy as not.”

“You haven’t got any money.”

“You have; I saw you showing your dollar, and you could pay for me, and Ma would pay it back.”

“Can’t wait for you to get ready.”

“I’ll go as I am. I don’t care if it is my old hat,” and Bab jerked it on to her head.

“Your mother wouldn’t like it.”

“She won’t like your going, either.”

“She isn’t my missis now. Miss Celia wouldn’t care, and I’m going, any way.”

“Do, do take me, Ben! I’ll be just as good as ever was, and I’ll take care of Sanch all the way,” pleaded Bab, clasping her hands and looking round for some sign of relenting in the faces of the boys.

“Don’t you bother; we don’t want any girls tagging after us,” said Sam, walking off to escape the annoyance.

“I’ll bring you a roll of chickerberry lozengers, if you won’t tease,” whispered kind-hearted Billy, with a consoling pat on the crown of the shabby straw hat.

“When the circus comes here you shall go, certain sure, and Betty too,” said Ben, feeling mean while he proposed what he knew was a hollow mockery.

“They never do come to such little towns; you said so, and I think you are very cross, and I won’t take care of Sanch, so, now!” cried Bab, getting into a passion, yet ready to cry, she was so disappointed.

“I Suppose it wouldn’t do — ” hinted Billy, with a look from Ben to the little girl, who stood winking hard to keep the tears back.

“Of Course it wouldn’t. I’d like to see her walking eight miles. I don’t mind paying for her; it’s getting her there and back. Girls are such a bother when you want to knock round. No, Bab, you can’t go. Travel right home and don’t make a fuss. Come along, boys; it ‘s most eleven, and we don’t want to walk fast.”

Ben spoke very decidedly; and, taking Billy’s arm, away they went, leaving poor Bab and Sanch to watch them out of sight, one sobbing, the other whining dismally.

Somehow those two figures seemed to go before Ben all along the pleasant road, and half spoilt his fun; for though he laughed and talked, cut canes, and seemed as merry as a grig, he could not help feeling that he ought to have asked leave to go, and been kinder to Bab.

"Perhaps Mrs. Moss would have planned somehow so we could all go, if I'd told her, I'd like to show her round, and she's been real good to me. No use now. I'll take the girls a lot of candy and make it all right."

He tried to settle it in that way and trudged gayly off, hoping Sancho wouldn't feel hurt at being left, wondering if any of "Smithers's lot" would be round, and planning to do the honors handsomely to the boys.

It was very warm; and just outside of the town they paused by a wayside watering-trough to wash their dusty faces, and cool off before plunging into the excitements of the afternoon. As they stood refreshing themselves, a baker's cart came jingling by; and Sam proposed a hasty lunch while they rested. A supply of gingerbread was soon bought; and, climbing the green bank above, they lay on the grass under a wild cherry-tree, munching luxuriously, while they feasted their eyes at the same time on the splendors awaiting them; for the great tent, with all its flags flying, was visible from the hill.

"We'll cut across those fields, — it 's shorter than going by the road, — and then we can look round outside till it's time to go in. I want to have a good go at every thing, especially the lions," said Sam, beginning on his last cookie.

"I heard 'em roar just now;" and Billy stood up to gaze with big eyes at the flapping canvas which hid the king of beasts from his longing sight.

"That was a cow mooing. Don't you be a donkey, Bill. When you hear a real roar, you'll shake in your boots," said Ben, holding up his handkerchief to dry, after it had done double duty as towel and napkin.

"I wish you'd hurry up, Sam. Folks are going in now. I see 'em!" and Billy pranced with impatience; for this was his first circus, and he firmly believed that he was going to behold all that the pictures promised.

"Hold on a minute, while I get one more drink. Buns are dry fodder," said Sam, rolling over to the edge of the bank and preparing to descend with as little trouble as possible.

He nearly went down head first, however; for, as he looked before he leaped, he beheld a sight which caused him to stare with all his might for an instant, then turn and beckon, saying in an eager whisper, "Look here, boys, — quick!"

Ben and Billy peered over, and both suppressed an astonished "Hullo!" for there stood Bab, waiting for Sancho to lap his fill out of the overflowing trough.

Such a shabby, tired-looking couple as they were! Bab with a face as red as a lobster and streaked with tears, shoes white with dust, playfrock torn at the gathers, something bundled up in her apron, and one shoe down at the heel as if it hurt her. Sancho lapped eagerly, with his eyes shut; all his ruffles were gray with dust, and his tail hung wearily down, the tassel at half mast, as if in mourning for the master whom he had come to find. Bab still held the strap, intent on keeping her charge safe, though she lost herself; but her courage seemed to be giving out, as she looked anxiously up and down the road, seeing no sign of the three familiar figures she had been following as steadily as a little Indian on the war-trail.

"Oh, Sanch, what shall I do if they don't come along? We must have gone by them somewhere, for I don't see any one that way, and there isn't any other road to the circus, seems to me."

Bab spoke as if the dog could understand and answer; and Sancho looked as if he did both, for he stopped drinking, pricked up his cars, and, fixing his sharp eyes on the grass above him, gave a suspicious bark.

"It's only squirrels; don't mind, but come along and be good; for I 'm so tired, I don't know what to do!" sighed Bab, trying to pull him after her as she trudged on, bound to see the outside of that wonderful tent, even if she never got in.

But Sancho had heard a soft chirrup; and, with a sudden bound, twitched the strap away, sprang up the bank, and landed directly on Ben's back as he lay peeping over. A peal of laughter greeted him; and, having got the better of his master in more ways than one, he made the most of the advantage by playfully worrying him as he kept him down, licking his face in spite of his struggles, burrowing in his neck with a ticklish nose, snapping at his buttons, and yelping joyfully, as if it was the best joke in the world to play hide-and-seek for four long miles.

Before Ben could quiet him, Bab came climbing up the bank, with such a funny mixture of fear, fatigue, determination, and relief in her dirty little face, that the boys could not look awful if they tried.

"How dared you come after us, miss?" demanded Sam, as she looked calmly about her, and took a seat before she was asked.

"Sanch would come after Ben; I couldn't make him go home, so I had to hold on till he was safe here, else he'd be lost, and then Ben would feel bad."

The cleverness of that excuse tickled the boys immensely; and Sam tried again, while Ben was getting the dog down and sitting on him.

"Now you expect to go to the circus, I suppose."

"Course I do. Ben said he didn't mind paying, if I could get there without bothering him, and I have; and I'll go home alone. I ain't afraid. Sanch will take care of me, if you won't," answered Bab, stoutly.

"What do you suppose your mother will say to you?" asked Ben, feeling much reproached by her last words.

“I guess she’ll say you led me into mischief; and the sharp child nodded, as if she defied him to deny the truth of that.

“You’ll catch it when you get home, Ben; so you’d better have a good time while you can,” advised Sam, thinking Bab great fun, since none of the blame of her pranks would fall on him. “What would you have done if you hadn’t found us?” asked Billy, forgetting his impatience in his admiration for this plucky young lady.

“I’d have gone on and seen the circus, and then I’d have gone home again and told Betty all about it,” was the prompt answer.

“But you haven’t any money.”

“Oh, I’d ask somebody to pay for me. I ‘m so little, it wouldn’t be much.”

“Nobody would do it; so you’d have to stay outside, you see.”

“No, I wouldn’t. I thought of that, and planned how I’d fix it if I didn’t find Ben. I’d make Sanch do his tricks, and get a quarter that way; so, now! answered Bab, undaunted by any obstacle.

“I do believe she would! You are a smart child, Bab; and if I had enough I’d take you in myself,” said Billy, heartily; for, having sisters of his own, he kept a soft place in his heart for girls, especially enterprising ones.

“I’ll take care of her. It was very naughty to come, Bab; but, so long as you did, you needn’t worry about any thing. I’ll see to you; and you shall have a real good time,” said Ben, accepting his responsibilities without a murmur, and bound to do the handsome thing by his persistent friend.

“I thought you would;” and Bab folded her arms, as if she had nothing further to do but enjoy herself.

“Are you hungry?” asked Billy, fishing out several fragments of gingerbread.

“Starving!” and Bab ate them with such a relish that Sam added a small contribution; and Ben caught some water for her in his hand, where the little spring bubbled up beside a stone.

“Now, you wash your face and spat down your hair, and put your hat on straight, and then we’ll go,” commanded Ben, giving Sanch a roll on the grass to clean him.

Bab scrubbed her face till it shone; and, pulling down her apron to wipe it, scattered a load of treasures collected in her walk. Some of the dead flowers, bits of moss, and green twigs fell near Ben, and one attracted his attention, — a spray of broad, smooth leaves, with a bunch of whitish berries on it.

“Where did you get that?” he asked, poking it with his foot.

“In a swampy place, coming along. Sanch saw something down there; and I went with him, ‘cause I thought may be it was a musk-rat, and you’d like one if we could get him."

"Was it?" asked the boys all at once, and with intense interest.

"No; only a snake, and I don't care for snakes. I picked some of that, it was so green and pretty. Thorny likes queer leaves and berries, you know," answered Bab, "spatting," down her rough locks.

"Well, he won't like that, nor you either; it's poisonous, and I shouldn't wonder if you'd got poisoned, Bab. Don't touch it! Swamp-sumach is horrid stuff, — Miss Celia said so;" and Ben looked anxiously at Bab, who felt her chubby face all over, and examined her dingy hands with a solemn air, asking, eagerly, —

"Will it break out on me 'fore I get to the circus?"

"Not for a day or so, I guess; but it's bad when it does come."

"I don't care, if I see the animals first. Come quick, and never mind the old weeds and things," said Bab, much relieved; for present bliss was all she had room for now in her happy little heart.

CHAPTER XIV SOMEBODY GETS LOST

Putting all care behind them, the young folks ran down the hill, with a very lively dog gambolling beside them, and took a delightfully tantalizing survey of the external charms of the big tent. But people were beginning to go in, and it was impossible to delay when they came round to the entrance.

Ben felt that now “his foot was on his native heath,” and the superb air of indifference with which he threw down his dollar at the ticket-office, carelessly swept up the change, and strolled into the tent with his hands in his pockets, was so impressive that even big Sam repressed his excitement and meekly followed their leader, as he led them from cage to cage, doing the honors as if he owned the whole concern. Bab held tight to the flap of his jacket, staring about her with round eyes, and listening with little gasps of astonishment or delight to the roaring of lions, the snarling of tigers, the chatter of the monkeys, the groaning of camels, and the music of the very brass band shut up in a red bin.

Five elephants were tossing their hay about in the middle of the menagerie, and Billy’s legs shook under him as he looked up at the big beasts whose long noses and small, sagacious eyes filled him with awe. Sam was so tickled by the droll monkeys that the others left him before the cage and went on to see the zebra, “striped just like Ma’s muslin gown,” Bab declared. But the next minute she forgot all about him in her raptures over the ponies and their tiny colts; especially one mite of a thing who lay asleep on the hay, such a miniature copy of its little mouse-colored mamma that one could hardly believe it was alive.

“Oh, Ben, I must feel of it! — the cunning baby horse!” and down went Bab inside the rope to pat and admire the pretty creature, while its mother smelt suspiciously at the brown hat, and baby lazily opened one eye to see what was going on.

“Come out of that, it isn’t allowed,” commanded Ben, longing to do the same thing, but mindful of the proprieties and his own dignity.

Bab reluctantly tore herself away to find consolation in watching the young lions, who looked so like big puppies, and the tigers washing their faces just as puss did.

“If I stroked ‘em, wouldn’t they purr?” she asked, bent on enjoying herself, while Ben held her skirts lest she should try the experiment.

“You’d better not go to patting them, or you’ll get your hands clawed up. Tigers do purr like fun when they are happy, but these fellers never are, and you'll only see 'em spit and snarl," said Ben, leading the way to the humpy carrels, who were peacefully chewing their cud and longing for the desert, with a dreamy, far-away look in their mournful eyes.

Here, leaning on the rope, and scientifically biting a straw while he talked, Ben played showman to his heart's content till the neigh of a horse from the circus tent beyond reminded him of the joys to come.

"We'd better hurry along and get good seats before folks begin to crowd. I want to sit near the curtain and see if any of Smitthers's lot are 'round."

"I ain't going way off there; you can't see half so well, and that big drum makes such a noise you can't hear yourself think," said Sam, who had rejoined them.

So they settled in good places where they could see and hear all that went on in the ring and still catch glimpses of white horses, bright colors, and the glitter of helmets beyond the dingy red curtains. Ben treated Bab to peanuts and pop-corn like an indulgent parent, and she murmured protestations of undying gratitude with her mouth full, as she sat blissfully between him and the congenial Billy.

Sancho, meantime, had been much excited by the familiar sights and sounds, and now was greatly exercised in his doggish mind at the unusual proceeding of his master; for he was sure that they ought to be within there, putting on their costumes, ready to take their turn. He looked anxiously at Ben, sniffed disdainfully at the strap as if to remind him that a scarlet ribbon ought to take its place, and poked peanut shells about with his paw as if searching for the letters with which to spell his famous name.

"I know, old boy, I know; but it can't be done. We've quit the business and must just look on. No larks for us this time, Sanch, so keep quiet and behave,' whispered Ben, tucking the dog away under the seat with a sympathetic cuddle of the curly head that peeped out from between his feet.

"He wants to go and cut up, don't he?" said Billy, "and so do you, I guess. Wish you were going to. Wouldn't it be fun to see Ben showing off in there?"

"I'd be afraid to have him go up on a pile of elephants and jump through hoops like these folks," answered Bab, poring over her pictured play-bill with unabated relish.

"Done it a hundred times, and I'd just like to show you what I can do. They don't seem to have any boys in this lot; shouldn't wonder if they'd take me if I asked 'em," said Ben, moving uneasily on his seat and casting wistful glances toward the inner tent where he knew he would feel more at home than in his present place.

"I heard some men say that it's against the law to have small boys now; it's so dangerous and not good for them, this kind of thing. If that’s so, you’re done for, Ben,” observed Sam, with his most grown-up air, remembering Ben’s remarks on “fat boys.”

“Don’t believe a word of it, and Sanch and I could go this minute and get taken on, I’ll bet. We are a valuable couple, and I could prove it if I chose to,” began Ben, getting excited and boastful.

“Oh, see, they’re coming! — gold carriages and lovely horses, and flags and elephants, and every thing,” cried Bab, giving a clutch at Ben’s arm as the opening procession appeared headed by the band, tooting and banging till their faces were as red as their uniforms.

Round and round they went till every one had seen their fill, then the riders alone were left caracoling about the ring with feathers flying, horses prancing, and performers looking as tired and indifferent as if they would all like to go to sleep then and there.

“How splendid!” sighed Bab, as they went dashing out, to tumble off almost before the horses stopped.

“That’s nothing! You wait till you see the bareback riding and the ‘acrobatic exercises,’“ said Ben, quoting from the play-bill, with the air of one who knew all about the feats to come, and could never be surprised any more.

“What are ‘crowbackic exercises’?” asked Billy, thirsting for information.

“Leaping and climbing and tumbling; you’ll see George! what a stunning horse!” and Ben forgot every thing else to feast his eyes on the handsome creature who now came pacing in to dance, upset and replace chairs, kneel, bow, and perform many wonderful or graceful feats, ending with a swift gallop while the rider sat in a chair on its back fanning himself, with his legs crossed, as comfortably as you please.

“That, now, is something like,” and Ben’s eyes shone with admiration and envy as the pair vanished, and the pink and silver acrobats came leaping into the ring.

The boys were especially interested in this part, and well they might be; for strength and agility are manly attributes which lads appreciate, and these lively fellows flew about like India-rubber balls, each trying to outdo the other, till the leader of the acrobats capped the climax by turning a double somersault over five elephants standing side by side.

“There, Sir, how’s that for a jump?” asked Ben, rubbing his hands with satisfaction as his friends clapped till their palms tingled.

“We’ll rig up a spring-board and try it,” said Billy, fired with emulation.

“Where’ll you get your elephants?” asked Sam, scornfully, for gymnastics were not in his line.

"You'll do for one," retorted Ben, and Billy and Bab joined in his laugh so heartily that a rough-looking, man who sat behind them, hearing all they said, pronounced them a "jolly set," and kept his eye on Sancho, who now showed signs of insubordination.

"Hullo, that wasn't on the bill!" cried Ben, as a parti-colored clown came in, followed by half a dozen dogs.

"I'm so glad; now Sancho will like it. There's a poodle that might be his ownty donty brother — the one with the blue ribbon," said Bab. beaming with delight as the dogs took their seats in the chairs arranged for them.

Sancho did like it only too well, for be scrambled out from under the seat in a great hurry to go and greet his friends; and, being sharply checked, sat up and begged so piteously that Ben found it very hard to refuse and order him down. He subsided for a moment, but when the black spaniel, who acted the canine clown, did something funny and was applauded, Sancho made a dart as if bent on leaping into the ring to outdo his rival, and Ben was forced to box his ears and put his feet on the poor beast, fearing he would be ordered out if he made any disturbance.

Too well trained to rebel again, Sancho lay meditating on his wrongs till the dog act was over, carefully abstaining from any further sign of interest in their tricks, and only giving a sidelong glance at the two little poodles who came out of a basket to run up and down stairs on their fore-paws, dance jigs on their hind-legs, and play various pretty pranks to the great delight of all the children in the audience. If ever a dog expressed by look and attitude, "Pooh! I could do much better than that, and astonish you all, if I were only allowed to," that dog was Sancho, as he curled himself up and affected to turn his back on an unappreciative world.

"It's too bad, when he knows more than all those chaps put together. I'd give any thing if I could show him off as I used to. Folks always like it, and I was ever so proud of him. He's mad now because I had to cuff him, and won't take any notice of me till I make up," said Ben, regretfully eying his offended friend, but not daring to beg pardon yet.

More riding followed, and Bab was kept in a breathless state by the marvellous agility and skill of the gauzy lady who drove four horses at once, leaped through hoops, over banners and bars, sprang off and on at full speed, and seemed to enjoy it all so much it was impossible to believe that there could be any danger or exertion in it. Then two girls flew about on the trapeze, and walked on a tight rope, causing Bab to feel that she had at last found her sphere; for, young as she was, her mother often said,

"I really don't know what this child is fit for, except mischief, like a monkey."

"I'll fix the clothes-line when I get home, and show Ma how nice it is. Then, may be, she'd let me wear red and gold trousers, and climb round like these girls," thought the busy little brain, much excited by all it saw on that memorable day.

Nothing short of a pyramid of elephants with a glittering gentleman in a turban and top boots on the summit would have made her forget this new and charming plan. But that astonishing spectacle, and the prospect of a cage of Bengal tigers with a man among them, in imminent danger of being eaten before her eyes, entirely absorbed her thoughts till, just as the big animals went lumbering out, a peal of thunder caused considerable commotion in the audience. Men on the highest seats popped their heads through the openings in the tent-cover and reported that a heavy shower was coming up. Anxious mothers began to collect their flocks of children as hens do their chickens at sunset; timid people told cheerful stories of tents blown over in gales, cages upset and wild beasts let loose. Many left in haste, and the performers hurried to finish as soon as possible.

"I'm going now before the crowd comes, so I can get a lift home. I see two or three folks I know, so I'm off;" and, climbing hastily down, Sam vanished without further ceremony.

"Better wait till the shower is over. We can go and see the animals again, and get home all dry, just as well as not," observed Ben, encouragingly, as Billy looked anxiously at the billowing canvas over his head, the swaying posts before him, and heard the quick patter of drops outside, not to mention the melancholy roar of the lion which sounded rather awful through the sudden gloom which filled the strange place.

"I wouldn't miss the tigers for any thing. See, they are pulling in the cart now, and the shiny man is all ready with his gun. Will he shoot any of them, apprehension, for the sharp crack of a rifle startled her more than the loudest thunder-clap she ever heard.

"Bless you, no, child; it 's only powder to make a noise and scare 'em. I wouldn't like to be in his place, though; father says you can never trust tigers as you can lions, no matter how tame they are. Sly fellers, like cats, and when they scratch it's no joke, I tell you," answered Ben, with a knowing wag of the head, as the sides of the cage rattled down, and the poor, fierce creatures were seen leaping and snarling as if they resented this display of their captivity.

Bab curled up her feet and winked fast with excitement as she watched the "shiny man" fondle the great cats, lie down among them, pull open their red mouths, and make them leap over him or crouch at his feet as he snapped the long whip. When he fired the gun and they all fell as if dead, she with difficulty suppressed a small scream and clapped her hands over her ears; but poor Billy never minded it a bit, for he was pale and quaking with the fear of “heaven’s artillery” thundering overhead, and as a bright flash of lightning seemed to run down the tall tent-poles he hid his eyes and wished with all his heart that he was safe with mother.

“Afraid of thunder, Bill?” asked Ben, trying to speak stoutly, while a sense of his own responsibilities began to worry him, for how was Bab to be got home in such a pouring rain?

“It makes me sick; always did. Wish I hadn’t come,” sighed Billy, feeling, all too late, that lemonade and “lozengers” were not the fittest food for man, or a stifling tent the best place to be in on a hot July day, especially in a thunder-storm.

“I didn’t ask you to come; you asked me; so it isn’t my fault,” said Ben, rather gruffly, as people crowded by without pausing to hear the comic song the clown was singing in spite of the confusion.

“Oh, I’m so tired,” groaned Bab, getting up with a long stretch of arms and legs.

“You’ll be tireder before you get home, I guess. Nobody asked you to Come, any way;” and Ben gazed dolefully round him, wishing he could see a familiar face or find a wiser head than his own to help him out of the scrape he was in.

“I said I wouldn’t be a bother, and I won’t. I’ll walk right home this minute. I ain’t afraid of thunder, and the rain won’t hurt these old clothes. Come along,” cried Bab, bravely, bent on keeping her word, though it looked much harder after the fun was all over than before.

“My head aches like fury. Don’t I wish old Jack was here to take me back,” said Billy, following his companions in misfortune with sudden energy, as a louder peal than before rolled overhead.

“You might as well wish for Lita and the covered wagon while you are about it, then we could all ride,” answered Ben, leading the way to the outer tent, where many people were lingering in hopes of fair weather.

“Why, Billy Barton, how in the world did you get here?” cried a surprised voice as the crook of a cane caught the boy by the collar and jerked him face to face with a young farmer, who was pushing along, followed by his, wife and two or three children.

“Oh, Uncle Eben, I’m so glad you found Me! I walked over, and it’s raining, and I don’t feel well. Let me go with you, can’t I?” asked Billy, casting himself and all his woes upon the strong arm that had laid hold of him.

“Don’t see what your mother was about to let you come so far alone, and you just over scarlet fever. We are as full as ever we can be, but we’ll tuck you in somehow," said the pleasant-faced woman, bundling up her baby, and bidding the two little lads "keep close to father."

"I didn't come alone. Sam got a ride, and can't you tuck Ben and Bab in too? They ain't very big, either of them," whispered Billy, anxious to serve his friends now that he was provided for himself.

"Can't do it, any way. Got to pick up mother at the corner, and that will be all I can carry. It's lifting a little; hurry along, Lizzie, and let us get out of this as quick is possible," said Uncle Eben, impatiently; for going to a circus with a young family is not an easy task, as every one knows who has ever tried it.

"Ben, I'm real sorry there isn't room for you. I'll tell Bab's mother where she is, and may be some one will come for you," said Billy, hurriedly, as he tore himself away, feeling rather mean to desert the others, though he could be of no use.

"Cut away, and don't mind us. I'm all right, and Bab must do the best she can," was all Ben had time to answer before his comrade was hustled away by the crowd pressing round the entrance with much clashing of umbrellas and scrambling of boys and men, who rather enjoyed the flurry.

"No use for us to get knocked about in that scrimmage. We'll wait a minute and then go out easy. It's a regular rouser, and you'll be as wet as a sop before we get home. Hope you'll like that?" added Ben, looking out at the heavy rain poring down as if it never meant to stop.

"Don't care a bit," said Bab, swinging on one of the ropes with a happy-go-lucky air, for her spirits were not extinguished yet, and she was bound to enjoy this exciting holiday to the very end. "I like circuses so much! I wish I lived here all the time, and slept in a wagon, as you did, and had these dear little colties to play with."

"It wouldn't be fun if you didn't have any folks to take care of you," began Ben, thoughtfully looking about the familiar place where the men were now feeding the animals, setting their refreshment tables, or lounging on the hay to get such rest as they could before the evening entertainment. Suddenly he started, gave a long look, then turned to Bab, and thrusting Sancho's strap into her hand, said, hastily:

"I see a fellow I used to know. May be he can tell me something about father. Don't you stir till I come back."

Then he was off like a shot, and Bab saw him run after a man with a bucket who bad been watering the zebra. Sancho tried to follow, but was checked with an impatient, —

"No, you can't go! What a plague you are, tagging around when people don't want you."

Sancho might have answered, “So are you,” but, being a gentlemanly dog, he sat down with a resigned expression to watch the little colts, who were now awake and seemed ready for a game of bo-peep behind their mammas. Bab enjoyed their funny little frisks so much that she tied the wearisome strap to a post, and crept under the rope to pet the tiny mouse-colored one who came and talked to her with baby whinnies and confiding glances of its soft, dark eyes.

“Oh, luckless Bab! why did you turn your back? Oh, too accomplished Sancho! why did you neatly untie that knot and trot away to confer with the disreputable bull-dog who stood in the entrance beckoning with friendly wavings of an abbreviated tail? Oh, much afflicted Ben! why did you delay till it was too late to save your pet from the rough man who set his foot upon the trailing strap, and led poor Sanch quickly out of sight among the crowd?

“It was Bascum, but he didn’t know any thing. Why, where’s Sanch?” said Ben, returning. A breathless voice made Bab turn to see Ben looking about him with as much alarm in his hot face as if the dog had been a two years’ child.

“I tied him — he’s here somewhere — with the ponies,” stammered Bab, in sudden dismay, for no sign of a dog appeared as her eyes roved wildly to and fro.

Ben whistled, called and searched in vain, till one of the lounging men said, lazily,

“If you are looking after the big poodle you’d better go outside; I saw him trotting off with another dog.”

Away rushed Ben, with Bab following, regardless of the rain, for both felt that a great misfortune had befallen them. But, long before this, Sancho had vanished, and no one minded his indignant howls as he was driven off in a covered cart.

“If he is lost I’ll never forgive you; never, never, never!” and Ben found it impossible to resist giving Bab several hard shakes, which made her yellow braids fly up and down like pump handles.

“I’m dreadful sorry. He’ll come back — you said he always did,” pleaded Bab, quite crushed by her own afflictions, and rather scared to see Ben look so fierce, for he seldom lost his temper or was rough with the little girls.

“If he doesn’t come back, don’t you speak to me for a year. Now, I’m going home.” And, feeling that words were powerless to express his emotions, Ben walked away, looking as grim as a small boy could.

A more unhappy little lass is seldom to be found than Bab was, as she pattered after him, splashing recklessly through the puddles, and getting as wet and muddy as possible, as a sort of penance for her sins. For a mile or two she trudged stoutly along, while Ben marched before in solemn silence, which soon became both impressive and oppressive because so unusual, and such a proof of his deep displeasure. Penitent Bab longed for just one word, one sign of relenting; and when none came, she began to wonder how she could possibly bear it if he kept his dreadful threat and did not speak to her for a whole year.

But presently her own discomfort absorbed her, for her feet were wet and cold as well as very tired; pop-corn and peanuts were not particularly nourishing food; and hunger made her feel faint; excitement was a new thing, and now that it was over she longed to lie down and go to sleep; then the long walk with a circus at the end seemed a very different affair from the homeward trip with a distracted mother awaiting her. The shower had subsided into a dreary drizzle, a chilly east wind blew up, the hilly road seemed to lengthen before the weary feet, and the mute, blue flannel figure going on so fast with never a look or sound, added the last touch to Bab's remorseful anguish.

Wagons passed, but all were full, and no one offered a ride. Men and boys went by with rough jokes on the forlorn pair, for rain soon made them look like young tramps. But there was no brave Sancho to resent the impertinence, and this fact was sadly brought to both their minds by the appearance of a great Newfoundland dog who came trotting after a carriage. The good creature stopped to say a friendly word in his dumb fashion, looking up at Bab with benevolent eyes, and poking his nose into Ben's hand before he bounded away with his plumy tail curled over his back.

Ben started as the cold nose touched his fingers, gave the soft head a lingering pat, and watched the dog out of sight through a thicker mist than any the rain made. But Bab broke down; for the wistful look of the creature's eyes reminded her of lost Sancho, and she sobbed quietly as she glanced back longing to see the dear old fellow jogging along in the rear.

Ben heard the piteous sound and took a sly peep over his shoulder, seeing such a mournful spectacle that he felt appeased, saying to himself as if to excuse his late sternness, —

"She is a naughty girl, but I guess she is about sorry enough now. When we get to that sign-post I'll speak to her, only I won't forgive her till Sanch comes back."

But he was better than his word; for, just before the post was reached, Bab, blinded by tears, tripped over the root of a tree, and, rolling down the bank, landed in a bed of wet nettles. Ben had her out in a jiffy, and vainly tried to comfort her; but she was past any consolation he could offer, and roared dismally as she wrung her tingling hands, with great drops running over her cheeks almost as fast as the muddy little rills ran down the road.

"Oh dear, oh dear! I'm all stinged up, and I want my supper; and my feet ache, and I'm cold, and every thing is so horrid!" wailed the poor child lying on the grass, such a miserable little wet bunch that the sternest parent would have melted at the sight.

"Don't cry so, Babby; I was real cross, and I'm sorry. I'll forgive you right away now, and never shake you any more," cried Ben, so full of pity for her tribulations that he forgot his own, like a generous little man.

"Shake me again, if you want to; I know I was very bad to tag and lose Sanch. I never will any more, and I'm so sorry, I don't know what to do," answered Bab, completely bowed down by this magnanimity.

"Never mind; you just wipe up your face and come along, and we'll tell Ma all about it, and she'll fix us as nice as can be. I shouldn't wonder if Sanch got home now before we did," said Ben, cheering himself as well as her by the fond hope.

"I don't believe I ever shall. I'm so tired my legs won't go, and the water in my boots makes them feel dreadfully. I wish that boy would wheel me a piece. Don't you s'pose he would? asked Bab, wearily picking herself up as a tall lad trundling a barrow came out of a yard near by.

"Hullo, Joslyn!" said Ben, recognizing the boy as one of the "hill fellows" who came to town Saturday nights for play or business.

"Hullo, Brown!" responded the other, arresting his squeaking progress with signs of surprise at the moist tableau before him.

"Where goin'?" asked Ben with masculine brevity.

"Got to carry this home, hang the old thing."

"Where to?"

"Batchelor's, down yonder," and the boy pointed to a farm-house at the foot of the next hill.

"Goin' that way, take it right along."

"What for?" questioned the prudent youth, distrusting such unusual neighborliness.

"She's tired, wants a ride; I'll leave it all right, true as I live and breathe," explained Ben, half ashamed yet anxious to get his little responsibility home as soon as possible, for mishaps seemed to thicken.

"Ho, you couldn't cart her all that way! she's most as heavy as a bag of meal," jeered the taller lad, amused at the proposition.

"I'm stronger than most fellers of my size. Try, if I ain't," and Ben squared off in such scientific style that Joslyn responded with sudden amiability, —

"All right, let's see you do it."

Bab huddled into her new equipage without the least fear, and Ben trundled her off at a good pace, while the boy retired to the shelter of a barn to watch their progress, glad to be rid of an irksome errand.

At first, all went well, for the way was down hill, and the wheel squeaked briskly round and round; Bab smiled gratefully upon her bearer, and Ben "went in on his muscle with a will," as he expressed it. But presently the road grew sandy, began to ascend, and the load seemed to grow heavier with every step.

"I'll get out now. It's real nice, but I guess I am too heavy," said Bab, as the face before her got redder and redder, and the breath began to come in puffs.

"Sit still. He said I couldn't. I'm not going to give in with him looking on," panted Ben, and he pushed gallantly up the rise, over the grassy lawn to the side gate of the Batchelors' door-yard, with his head down, teeth set, and every muscle of his slender body braced to the task.

"Did ever ye see the like of that now? Ah, ha!

"The streets were so wide, and the lanes were so narry,
He brought his wife home on a little wheelbarry,"

sung a voice with an accent which made Ben drop his load and push back his hat, to see Pat's red head looking over the fence.

To have his enemy behold him then and there was the last bitter drop in poor Ben's cup of humiliation. A shrill approving whistle from the hill was some comfort, however, and gave him spirit to help Bab out with composure, though his hands were blistered and he had hardly breath enough to issue the Command,—

"Go along home, and don't mind him."

"Nice childer, ye are, runnin' off this way, settin' the women distracted, and me wastin' me time comin' after ye when I'd be milkin' airly so I'd get a bit of pleasure the day," grumbled Pat, coming up to untie the Duke, whose Roman nose Ben had already recognized, as well as the roomy chaise standing before the door.

"Did Billy tell you about us?" asked Bab, gladly following toward this welcome refuge.

"Faith he did, and the Squire sent me to fetch ye home quiet and aisy. When ye found me, I'd jist stopped here to borry a light for me pipe. Up wid ye, b'y, and not be wastin' me time stramashin' after a spalpeen that I'd like to lay me whip over," said Pat, gruffly, as Ben came along, having left the barrow in the shed.

"Don't you wish you could? You needn't wait for me; I'll come when I'm ready," answered Ben dodging round the chaise, bound not to mind Pat, if he spent the night by the road-side in consequence.

"Bedad, and I won't then. It's lively ye are; but four legs is better than two, as ye'll find this night, me young man."

With that he whipped up and was off before Bab could say a word to persuade Ben to humble himself for the sake of a ride. She lamented and Pat chuckled, both forgetting what an agile monkey the boy was, and as neither looked back, they were unaware Master Ben was hanging on behind among the straps and springs, making derisive grimaces at his unconscious foe through the little glass in the leathern back.

At the lodge gate Ben jumped down to run before with whoops of naughty satisfaction, which brought the anxious waiters to the door in a flock; so Pat could only shake his fist at the exulting little rascal as he drove away, leaving the wanderers to be welcomed as warmly as if they were a pair of model children.

Mrs. Moss had not been very much troubled after all; for Cy had told her that Bab went after Ben, and Billy had lately reported her safe arrival among them, so, mother-like, she fed, dried, and warmed the runaways, before she scolded them.

Even then, the lecture was a mild one, for when they tried to tell the adventures which to them seemed so exciting, not to say tragical, the effect astonished them immensely, as their audience went into gales of laughter, especially at the wheelbarrow episode, which Bab insisted on telling, with grateful minuteness, to Ben’s confusion. Thorny shouted, and even tender-hearted Betty forgot her tears over the lost dog to join in the familiar melody when Bab mimicked Pat’s quotation from Mother Goose.

“We must not laugh any more, or these naughty children will think they have done something very clever in running away,” said Miss Celia, when the fun subsided, adding, soberly, “I am displeased, but I will say nothing, for I think Ben is already punished enough.”

“Guess I am,” muttered Ben, with a choke in his voice as he glanced toward the empty mat where a dear curly bunch used to be with a bright eye twinkling out of the middle of it.

CHAPTER XV BEN'S RIDE

Great was the mourning for Sancho, because his talents and virtues made him universally admired and beloved. Miss Celia advertised, Thorny offered rewards, and even surly Pat kept a sharp look-out for poodle dogs when he went to market; but no Sancho or any trace of him appeared. Ben was inconsolable, and sternly said it served Bab right when the dogwood poison affected both face and hands. Poor Bab thought so, too, and dared ask no sympathy from him, though Thorny eagerly prescribed plantain leaves, and Betty kept her supplied with an endless succession of them steeped in cream and pitying tears. This treatment was so successful that the patient soon took her place in society as well as ever, but for Ben's affliction there was no cure, and the boy really suffered in his spirits.

"I don't think it's fair that I should have so much trouble, — first losing father and then Sanch. If it wasn't for Lita and Miss Celia, I don't believe I could stand it," he said, one day, in a fit of despair, about a week after the sad event.

"Oh, come now, don't give up so, old fellow. We'll find him if he s alive, and if he isn't I'll try and get you another as good," answered Thorny, with a friendly slap on the shoulder, as Ben sat disconsolately among the beans he had been hoeing.

"As if there ever could be another half as good!" cried Ben, indignant at the idea; "or as if I'd ever try to fill his place with the best and biggest dog that ever wagged a tail! No, sir, there's only one Sanch in all the world, and if I can't have him I'll never have a dog again."

"Try some other sort of pet, then. You may have any of mine you like. Have the peacocks; do now," urged Thorny, full of boyish sympathy and good-will.

"They are dreadful pretty, but I don't seem to care about em, thank you," replied the mourner.

"Have the rabbits, all of them," which was a handsome offer on Thorny's part, for there were a dozen at least.

"They don't love a fellow as a dog does; all they care for is stuff to eat and dirt to burrow in. I'm sick of rabbits." And well he might be, for he had had the charge of them ever since they came, and any boy who has ever kept bunnies knows what a care they are.

"So am I! Guess we'll have an auction and sell out. Would Jack be a comfort to you? If he will, you may have him. I'm so well now, I can walk, or ride anything," added Thorny, in a burst of generosity.

"Jack couldn't be with me always, as Sanch was, and I couldn't keep him if I had him."

Ben tried to be grateful, but nothing short of Lita would have healed his wounded heart, and she was not Thorny's to give, or he would probably have offered her to his afflicted friend.

"Well, no, you couldn't take Jack to bed with you, or keep him up in your room, and I'm afraid he Would never learn to do any thing clever. I do wish I had something you wanted, I'd so love to give it to you."

He spoke so heartily and was so kind that Ben looked up, feeling that he had given him one of the sweetest things in the world — friendship; he wanted to tell him so, but did not know how to do it, so caught up his hoe and fell to work, saying, in a tone Thorny understood better than words, —

"You are real good to me-never mind, I won't worry about it; only it seems extra hard coming so soon after the other — "

He stopped there, and a bright drop fell on the bean leaves, to shine like dew till Ben saw clearly enough to bury it out of sight in a great flurry.

"By Jove! I'll find that dog, if he is out of the ground. Keep your spirits up, my lad, and we'll have the dear old fellow back yet."

With which cheering prophecy Thorny went off to rack his brains as to what could be done about the matter.

Half an hour afterward, the sound of a hand-organ in the avenue roused him from the brown study into which he had fallen as he lay on the newly mown grass of the lawn. Peeping over the wall, Thorny reconnoitred, and, finding the organ a good one, the man a pleasant-faced Italian, and the monkey a lively animal, he ordered them all in, as a delicate attention to Ben, for music and monkey together might suggest soothing memories of the past, and so be a comfort.

In they came by way of the Lodge, escorted by Bab and Betty, full of glee, for hand-organs were rare in those parts, and the children delighted in them. Smiling till his white teeth shone and his black eyes sparkled, the man played away while the monkey made his pathetic little bows, and picked up the pennies Thorny threw him.

"It is warm, and you look tired. Sit down and I'll get you some dinner," said the young master, pointing to the seat which now stood near the great gate.

With thanks in broken English the man gladly obeyed, and Ben begged to be allowed to make Jacko equally comfortable, explaining that he knew all about monkeys and what they liked. So the poor thing was freed from his cocked hat and uniform, fed with bread and milk, and allowed to curl himself up in the cool grass for a nap, looking so like a tired littie old man in a fur coat that the children were never weary of watching him.

Meantime, Miss Celia had come out, and was talking Italian to Giacomo in a way that delighted his homesick heart. She had been to Naples, and could understand his longing for the lovely city of his birth, so they had a little chat in the language which is all Music, and the good fellow was so grateful that he played for the children to dance till they were glad to stop, lingering afterward as if he hated to set out again upon his lonely, dusty walk.

“I’d rather like to tramp round with him for a week or so. Could make enough to live on as easy as not, if I only I had Sanch to show off,” said Ben, as he was coaxing Jacko into the suit which he detested. “You go wid me, yes?” asked the man, nodding and smiling, well pleased at the prospect of company, for his quick eye and what the boys let fall in their talk showed him that Ben was not one of them.

“If I had my dog I’d love to,” and with sad eagerness Ben told the tale of his loss, for the thought of it was never long out of his mind.

“I tink I see droll dog like he, way off in New York. He do leetle trick wid letter, and dance, and go on he head, and many tings to make laugh,” said the man, when he had listened to a list of Sanch’s beauties and accomplishments.

“Who had him?” asked Thorny, full of interest at once.

“A man I not know. Cross fellow what beat him when he do letters bad.”

“Did he spell his name?” cried Ben, breathlessly.

“No; that for why man beat him. He name Generale, and he go spell Sancho all times, and cry when whip fall on him. Ha! yes! that name true one; not Generale?” and the man nodded, waved his hands, and showed his teeth, almost as much excited as the boys.

“It’s Sanch! let’s go and get him now, right off! cried Ben, in a fever to be gone.

“A hundred miles away, and no clue but this man’s story? We must wait a little, Ben, and be sure before we set out,” said Miss Celia, ready to do almost any thing, but not so certain as the boys. “What sort of a dog was it? A large, curly, white poodle, with a queer tail?” she asked of Giacomo.

“No, Signorina mia, he no curly, no wite; he black, smooth dog, littel tail, small, so;” and the man held up one brown finger with a gesture which suggested a short, wagging tail.

“There, you see how mistaken we were. Dogs are often named Sancho, especially Spanish poodles; for the original Sancho was a Spaniard, you know. This dog is not ours, and I’m so sorry.”

The boys’ faces had fallen dismally as their hope was destroyed; but Ben would not give up. For him there was and could be only one Sancho in the world, and his quick wits suggested an explanation which no one else thought of.

"It may be my dog, — they color 'em as we used to paint over trick horses. I told you he was a valuable chap, and those that stole him hide him that way, else he'd be no use, don't you see? because we'd know him."

"But the black dog had no tail," began Thorny, longing to be convinced, but still doubtful.

Ben shivered as if the mere thought hurt him, as he said, in a grim tone, —

"They might have cut Sanch's off."

"Oh, no! no! they mustn't, — they wouldn't! How Could any one be so wicked?" cried Bab and Betty, horrified at the suggestion.

"You don't know what such fellows would do to make all safe, so they could use a dog to earn their living for 'em," said Ben, with mysterious significance, quite forgetting in his wrath that he had just proposed to get his own living in that way himself.

"He no your dog? Sorry I not find him for you. Addio, signorina! Grazia, signor! Buon giorno, buon giorno!" and, kissing his hand, the Italian shouldered organ and monkey, ready to go.

Miss Celia detained him long enough to give him her address, and beg him to let her know if he met poor Sanch in any of his wanderings; for such itinerant showmen often cross each other's paths. Ben and Thorny walked to the school-corner with him, getting more exact information about the black dog and his owner, for they had no intention of giving it up so soon.

That very evening, Thorny wrote to a boy cousin in New York, giving all the particulars of the case, and begging him to hunt up the man, investigate the dog, and see that the police made sure that every thing was right. Much relieved by this performance, the boys waited anxiously for a reply, and when it came found little comfort in it. Cousin Horace had done his duty like a man, but regretted that he could only report a failure. The owner of the black poodle was a suspicious character, but told a straight story, how he had bought the dog from a stranger, and exhibited him with success till he was stolen. Knew nothing of his history, and was very sorry to lose him, for he was a remarkably clever beast.

"I told my dog-man to look about for him, but he says he has probably been killed, with ever so many more; so there is an end of it, and I call it a mean shame."

"Good for Horace! I told you he'd do it up thoroughly and see the end of it," said Thorny, as he read that paragraph in the deeply interesting letter.

"May be the end of that dog, but not of mine. I'll bet he ran away; and if it was Sanch, he'll come home. You see if he doesn't!" cried Ben, refusing to believe that all was over.

“A hundred wiles off? Oh, he couldn’t find you without help, smart as he is,” answered Thorny, incredulously.

Ben looked discouraged, but Miss Celia cheered him up again by saying, —

“Yes, he could. My father had a friend who left a little dog in Paris; and the creature found her in Milan, and died of fatigue next day. That was very wonderful, but true; and I’ve no doubt that if Sanch is alive he will come home. Let us hope so, and be happy, while we wait.”

“We will!” said the boys; and day after day looked for the wanderer’s return, kept a bone ready in the old place if he should arrive at night, and shook his mat to keep it soft for his weary bones when he came. But weeks passed, and still no Sanch.

Something else happened, however, so absorbing that he was almost forgotten for a time; and Ben found a way to repay a part of all he owed his best friend.

Miss Celia went off for a ride one afternoon, and an hour afterward, as Ben sat in the porch reading, Lita dashed into the yard with the reins dangling about her legs, the saddle turned round, and one side covered with black mud, showing that she had been down. For a minute, Ben’s heart stood still; then he flung away his book, ran to the horse, and saw at once by her heaving flanks, dilated nostrils, and wet coat, that she must have come a long way and at full speed.

“She has had a fall, but isn’t hurt or frightened,” thought the boy, as the pretty creature rubbed her nose against his shoulder, pawed the ground, and champed her bit, as if she tried to tell him all about the disaster, whatever it was.

“Lita, where’s Miss Celia?” he asked, looking straight into the intelligent eyes, which were troubled but not wild.

Lita threw up her head, and neighed loud and clear, as if she called her mistress; and, turning, would have gone again if Ben had not caught the reins and held her.

“All right, we’ll find her;” and, pulling off the broken saddle, kicking away his shoes, and ramming his hat firmly on, Ben was up like a flash, tingling all over with a sense of power as he felt the bare back between his knees, and caught the roll of Lita’s eye as she looked round with an air of satisfaction.

“Hi, there! Mrs. Moss! Something has happened to Miss Celia, and I’m going to find her. Thorny is asleep; tell him easy, and I’ll come back as soon as I can!”

Then, giving Lita her head, he was off before the startled woman had time to do more than wring her hands and cry out, —

“Go for the Squire! Oh, what shall we do?”

As if she knew exactly what was wanted of her, Lita went back the way she had come, as Ben could see by the fresh, irregular tracks that cut up the road where she had galloped for help. For a mile or more they went, then she paused at a pair of bars, which were let down to allow the carts to pass into the wide hay-fields beyond. On she went again, cantering across the new-mown turf toward a brook, across which she had evidently taken a leap before; for, on the further side, at a place where cattle went to drink, the mud showed signs of a fall.

“You were a fool to try there; but where is Miss Celia?” said Ben, who talked to animals as if they were people, and was understood much better than any one not used to their companionship would imagine.

Now Lita seemed at a loss, and put her head down, as if she expected to find her mistress where she had left her, somewhere on the ground. Ben called, but there was no answer; and he rode slowly along the brook-side, looking far and wide with anxious eyes.

“May be she wasn’t hurt, and has gone to that house to wait,” thought the boy, pausing for a last survey of the great, sunny field, which had no place of shelter in it but one rock on the other side of the little stream. As his eye wandered over it, something dark seemed to blow out from behind it, as if the wind played in the folds of a shirt, or a human limb moved. Away went Lita, and in a moment Ben had found Miss Celia, lying in the shadow of the rock, so white and motionless, he feared that she was dead. He leaped down, touched her, spoke to her; and, receiving no answer, rushed away to bring a little water in his leaky hat to sprinkle in her face, as he had seen them do when any of the riders got a fall in the circus, or fainted from exhaustion after they left the ring, where “do or die” was the motto all adopted.

In a minute, the blue eyes opened, and she recognized the anxious face bending over her, saying faintly, as she touched it, —

“My good little Ben, I knew you’d find me, — I sent Lita for you, — I’m so hurt, I couldn’t come.”

“Oh, where? What shall I do? Had I better run up to the house?” asked Ben, overjoyed to hear her speak, but much dismayed by her seeming helplessness, for he had seen bad falls, and had them, too.

“I feel bruised all over, and my arm is broken, I’m afraid. Lita tried not to hurt me. She slipped, and we went down. I came here into the shade, and the pain made me faint, I suppose. Call somebody, and get me home.”

Then she shut her eyes, and looked so white that Ben hurried away, and burst upon old Mrs. Paine, placidly knitting at the end door, so suddenly that, as she afterward said, “It sca’t her like a clap o’ thunder.”

“Ain’t a man nowheres around. All down in the big medder gettin’ in hay,” was her reply to Ben’s breathless demand for “everybody to come and see to

Miss Celia.”

He turned to mount, for he had flung himself off before Lita stopped, but the old lady caught his jacket, and asked half a dozen questions in a breath.

“Who’s your folks? What’s broke? How’d she fall? Where is she? Why didn’t she come right here? Is it a sunstroke?”

As fast as words could tumble out of his mouth, Ben answered, and then tried to free himself; but the old lady held on, while she gave her directions, expressed her sympathy, and offered her hospitality with incoherent warmth.

“Sakes alive! poor dear! Fetch her right in. Liddy, get out the camphire; and, Melissy, you haul down a bed to lay her on. Falls is dretful uncert’in things; shouldn’t wonder if her back was broke. Father’s down yender, and he and Bijah will see to her. You go call ‘em, and I’ll blow the horn to start ‘em up. Tell her we’d be pleased to see her, and it won’t make a mite of trouble.”

Ben heard no more, fur as Mrs. Paine turned to take down the tin horn he was up and away.

Several long and dismal toots sent Lita galloping through the grassy path as the sound of the trumpet excites a war-horse, and “father and Bijah,” alarmed by the signal at that hour, leaned on their rakes to survey with wonder the distracted-looking little horseman approaching like a whirlwind.

“Guess likely grandpa’s had ‘nother stroke. Told ‘em to send over soon ‘s ever it come,” said the farmer, calmly.

“Shouldn’t wonder ef suthing was afire some’r’s,” conjectured the hired man, surveying the horizon for a cloud of smoke.

Instead of advancing to meet the messenger, both stood like statues in blue overalls and red flannel shirts, till the boy arrived and told his tale.

“Sho, that’s bad,” said the farmer, anxiously.

“That brook always was the darndest place,” added Bijah; then both men bestirred themselves helpfully, the former hurrying to Miss Cella while the latter brought up the cart and made a bed of hay to lay her on.

“Now then, boy, you go for the doctor. My own folks will see to the lady, and she’d better keep quiet up yender till we see what the matter is,” said the farmer, when the pale girl was lifted in as carefully as four strong arms could do it. “Hold on,” he added, as Ben made one leap to Lita’s back. “You’ll have to go to Berryville. Dr. Mills is a master hand for broken bones and old Dr. Babcock ain’t. ‘Tisn’t but about three miles from here to his house, and you’ll fetch him ‘fore there’s any harm done waitin’.”

“Don’t kill Lita,” called Miss Celia from the cart, as it began to move.

But Ben did not hear her, for he was off across the fields, riding as if life and death depended upon his speed.

“That boy will break his neck,” said Mr. Paine, standing still to watch horse and rider go over the wall as if bent on instant destruction.

“No fear for Ben, he can ride any thing, and Lita was trained to leap,” answered Miss Celia, falling back on the hay with a groan, for she had involuntarily raised her head to see her little squire dash away in gallant style.

“I should hope so; regular jockey, that boy. Never see any thing like it out of a race-ground,” and Farmer Paine strode on, still following with his eye the figures that went thundering over the bridge, up the hill, out of sight, leaving a cloud of cloud of dust behind.

Now that his mistress was safe, Ben enjoyed that wild ride mightily, and so did the bay mare; for Lita had good blood in her, and proved it that day by doing her three miles in a wonderfully short time. People jogging along in wagons and country carry-alls stared amazed as the reckless pair went by. Women, placidly doing their afternoon sewing at the front windows, dropped their needles to run out with exclamations of alarm, sure some one was being run away with; children playing by the roadside scattered like chickens before a hawk, as Ben passed with a warning whoop, and baby-carriages were scrambled into door-yards with perilous rapidity at his approach.

But when he clattered into town, intense interest was felt in this barefooted boy on the foaming steed, and a dozen voices asked, “Who’s killed?” as he pulled up at the doctor’s gate.

“Jest drove off that way; Mrs. Flynn’s baby’s in a fit,” cried a stout lady from the piazza, never ceasing to rock, though several passers-by paused to hear the news, for she was a doctor’s wife, and used to the arrival of excited messengers from all quarters at all hours of the day and night.

Deigning no reply to any one, Ben rode away, wishing he could leap a yawning gulf, scale a precipice, or ford a raging torrent, to prove his devotion to Miss Celia, and his skill in horsemanship. But no dangers beset his path, and he found the doctor pausing to water his tired horse at the very trough where Bab and Sancho had been discovered on that ever-memorable day. The story was quickly told, and, promising to be there as soon as possible, Dr. Mills drove on to relieve baby Flynn’s inner man, a little disturbed by a bit of soap and several buttons, upon which he had privately lunched while his mamma was busy at the wash-tub.

Ben thanked his stars, as he had already done more than once, that he knew how to take care of a horse; for he delayed by the watering-place long enough to wash out Lita’s mouth with a handful of wet grass, to let her have one swallow to clear her dusty throat, and then went slowly back over the breezy hills, patting and praising the good creature for her intelligence and speed. She knew well enough that she had been a clever little mare, and tossed her head, arched her glossy neck, and ambled daintily along, as conscious and coquettish as a pretty woman, looking round at her admiring rider to return his compliments by glance of affection, and caressing sniffs of a velvet nose at his bare feet.

Miss Celia had been laid comfortably in bed by the farmer's wife and daughter; and, when the doctor arrived, bore the setting of her arm bravely. No other serious damage appeared, and bruises soon heal, so Ben was sent home to comfort Thorny with a good report, and ask the Squire to drive up in his big carry-all for her the next day, if she was able to be moved.

Mrs. Moss had been wise enough to say nothing, but quietly made what preparations she could, and waited for tidings. Bab and Betty were away berrying, so no one had alarmed Thorny, and he had his afternoon nap in peace, — an unusually long one, owing to the stillness which prevailed in the absence of the children; and when he awoke he lay reading for a while before he began to wonder where every one was. Lounging out to see, he found Ben and Lita reposing side by side on the fresh straw in the loose box, which had been made for her in the coach-house. By the pails, sponges and curry-combs lying about, it was evident that she had been refreshed by a careful washing and rubbing down, and my lady was now luxuriously resting after her labors, with her devoted groom half asleep close by.

"Well, of all queer boys you are the queerest, to spend this hot afternoon fussing over Lita, just for the fun of it!" cried Thorny, looking in at them with much amusement.

"If you knew what we'd been doing, you'd think I ought to fuss over her, and both of us had a right to rest!" answered Ben, rousing up as bright as a button; for he longed to tell his thrilling tale, and had with difficulty been restrained from bursting in on Thorny as soon as he arrived.

He made short work of the story, but was quite satisfied with the sensation it produced; for his listener was startled, relieved, excited and charmed, in such rapid succession, that he was obliged to sit upon the meal-chest and get his breath before he Could exclaim, with an emphatic demonstration of his heels against the bin, —

"Ben Brown, I'll never forget what you've done for Celia this day, or say 'bow-legs' again as long as I live."

"George! I felt as if I had six legs when we were going the pace. We were all one piece, and had a jolly spin, didn't we, my beauty?" and Ben chuckled as he took Lita's head in his lap, while she answered with a gusty sigh that nearly blew him away.

"Like the fellow that brought the good news from Ghent to Aix," said Thorny, surveying the recumbent pair with great admiration.

“What follow?” asked Ben, wondering if he didn’t mean Sheridan, of whose ride he had heard.

“Don’t you know that piece? I spoke it at school. Give it to you now; see if it isn’t a rouser.”

And, glad to find a vent from his excitement, Thorny mounted the meal-chest, to thunder out that stirring ballad with such spirit that Lita pricked up her ears and Ben gave a shrill “Hooray!” as the last verse ended.

“And all I remember is friends flocking round,
As I sat with his head ‘twixt my knees on the ground,
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.”

CHAPTER XVI DETECTIVE THORNTON

A few days later, Miss Celia was able to go about with her arm in a sling, pale still, and rather stiff, but so much better than any one expected, that all agreed Mr. Paine was right in pronouncing Dr. Mills “a master hand with broken bones.” Two devoted little maids waited on her, two eager pages stood ready to run her errands, and friendly neighbors sent in delicacies enough to keep these four young persons busily employed in disposing of them.

Every afternoon the great bamboo lounging chair was brought out and the interesting invalid conducted to it by stout Randa, who was head nurse, and followed by a train of shawl, cushion, foot-stool and book bearers, who buzzed about like swarming bees round a new queen. When all were settled, the little maids sewed and the pages read aloud, with much conversation by the way; for one of the rules was, that all should listen attentively, and if any one did not understand what was read, he or she should ask to have it explained on the spot. Whoever could answer was invited to do so, and at the end of the reading Miss Celia could ask any she liked, or add any explanations which seemed necessary. In this way much pleasure and profit was extracted from the tales Ben and Thorny read, and much unexpected knowledge as well as ignorance displayed, not to mention piles of neatly hemmed towels for which Bab and Betty were paid like regular sewing-women.

So vacation was not all play, and the girls found their picnics, berry parties, and “goin’ a visitin’,” all the more agreeable for the quiet hour spent with Miss Celia. Thorny had improved wonderfully, and was getting to be quite energetic, especially since his sister’s accident; for while she was laid up he was the head of the house, and much enjoyed his promotion. But Ben did not seem to flourish as he had done at first. The loss of Sancho preyed upon him sadly, and the longing to go and find his dog grew into such a strong temptation that he could hardly resist it. He said little about it; but now, and then a word escaped him which might have enlightened any one who chanced to be watching him. No one was, just then, so he brooded over this fancy, day by day, in silence and solitude, for there was no riding and driving now. Thorny was busy with his sister trying to show her that he remembered how good she had been to him when he was ill, and the little girls had their own affairs.

Miss Celia was the first to observe the change, having nothing to do but lie on the sofa and amuse herself by seeing others work or play. Ben was bright enough at the readings, because then he forgot his troubles; but when they were over and his various duties done, he went to his own room or sought consolation with Lita, being sober and quiet, and quite unlike the merry monkey all knew and liked so well.

“Thorny, what is the matter with Ben?” asked Miss Celia, one day, when she and her brother were alone in the “green parlor,” as they called the lilac-tree walk.

“Fretting about Sanch, I suppose. I declare I wish that dog had never been born! Losing him has just spoilt Ben. Not a bit of fun left in him, and he won’t have any thing I offer to cheer him up.”

Thorny spoke impatiently, and knit his brows over the pressed flowers he was neatly gumming into his herbal.

“I wonder if he has any thing on his mind? He acts as if he was hiding a trouble he didn’t dare to tell. Have you talked with him about it?” asked Miss Celia, looking as if she was hiding a trouble she did not like to tell.

“Oh, yes, I poke him up now and then, but he gets peppery, so I let him alone. May be he is longing for his old circus again. Shouldn’t blame him much if he was; it isn’t very lively here, and he’s used to excitement, you know.”

“I hope it isn’t that. Do you think he would slip away without telling us, and go back to the old life again? Don’t believe he would. Ben isn’t a bit of a sneak; that’s why I like him.”

“Have you ever found him sly or untrue in any way?” asked Miss Celia, lowering her voice.

“No; he’s as fair and square a fellow as I ever saw. Little bit low, now and then, but he doesn’t mean it, and wants to be a gentleman, only he never lived with one before, and it’s all new to him. I’ll get him polished up after a while.”

“Oh, Thorny, there are three peacocks on the place, and you are the finest!” laughed Miss Celia, as her brother spoke in his most condescending way with a lift of the eyebrows very droll to see.

“And two donkeys, and Ben’s the biggest, not to know when he is well off and happy!” retorted the “gentleman,” slapping a dried specimen on the page as if he were pounding discontented Ben.

“Come here and let me tell you something which worries me. I would not breathe it to another soul, but I feel rather helpless, and I dare say you can manage the matter better than I.”

Looking much mystified, Thorny went and sat on the stool at his sister’s feet, while she whispered confidentially in his ear: “I’ve lost some money out of my drawer, and I’m so afraid Ben took it.”

“But it’s always locked up and you keep the keys of the drawer and the little room?"

"It is gone, nevertheless, and I've had my keys safe all the time."

"But why think it is he any more than Randa, or Katy, or me?"

"Because I trust you three as I do myself. I've known the girls for years, and you have no object in taking it since all I have is yours, dear."

"And all mine is yours, of course. But, Celia, how could he do it? He can't pick locks, I know, for we fussed over my desk together, and had to break it after all."

"I never really thought it possible till to-day when you were playing ball and it went in at the upper window, and Ben climbed up the porch after it; you remember you said, 'If it had gone in at the garret gable you couldn't have done that so well;' and he answered, 'Yes, I could, there isn't a spout I can't shin up, or a bit of this roof I haven't been over.'"

"So he did; but there is no spout near the little room window."

"There is a tree, and such an agile boy as Ben could swing in and out easily. Now, Thorny, I hate to think this of him, but it has happened twice, and for his own sake I must stop it. If he is planning to run away, money is a good thing to have. And he may feel that it is his own; for you know he asked me to put his wages in the bank, and I did. He may not like to come to me for that, because he can give no good reason for wanting it. I'm so troubled I really don't know what to do."

She looked troubled, and Thorny put his arms about her as if to keep all worries but his own away from her.

"Don't you fret, Cely, dear; you leave it to me. I'll fix him — ungrateful little scamp!"

"That is not the way to begin. I am afraid you will make him angry and hurt his feelings, and then we can do nothing."

"Bother his feelings! I shall just say, calmly and coolly: 'Now, look here, Ben, hand over the money you took out of my sister's drawer, and we'll let you off easy,' or something like that."

"It wouldn't do, Thorny; his temper would be up in a minute, and away he would go before we could find out whether he was guilty or not. I wish I knew how to manage."

"Let me think," and Thorny leaned his chin on the arm of the chair, staring hard at the knocker as if he expected the lion's mouth to open with words of counsel then and there.

"By Jove, I do believe Ben took it!" he broke out suddenly; "for when I went to his room this morning to see why he didn't come and do my boots, he shut the drawer in his bureau as quick as a flash, and looked red and queer, for I didn't knock, and sort of startled him."

"He wouldn't be likely to put stolen money there. Ben is too wise for that."

"He wouldn't keep it there, but he might be looking at it and pitch it in when I called. He's hardly spoken to me since, and when I asked him what his flag was at half-mast for, he wouldn't answer. Besides, you know in the reading this afternoon he didn't listen, and when you asked what he was thinking about, he colored up and muttered something about Sanch. I tell you, Celia, it looks bad — very bad," and Thorny shook his head with a wise air.

"It does, and yet we may be all wrong. Let us wait a little and give the poor boy a chance to clear himself before we speak. I'd rather lose my money than suspect him falsely."

"How much was it?"

"Eleven dollars; a one went first, and I supposed I'd miscalculated somewhere when I took some out; but when I missed a ten, I felt that I ought not to let it pass."

"Look here, sister, you just put the case into my hands and let me work it up. I won't say any thing to Ben till you give the word; but I'll watch him, and now that my eyes are open, it won't be easy to deceive me."

Thorny was evidently pleased with the new play of detective, and intended to distinguish himself in that line; but when Miss Celia asked how he meant to begin, he could only respond with a blank expression: "Don't know! You give me the keys and leave a bill or two in the drawer, and may be I can find him out somehow."

So the keys were given, and the little dressing-room where the old secretary stood was closely watched for a day or two. Ben cheered up a trifle which looked as if he knew an eye was upon him, but otherwise he went on as usual, and Miss Celia feeling a little guilty at even harboring a suspicion of him, was kind and patient with his moods. Thorny was very funny in the unnecessary mystery and fuss he made; his affectation of careless indifference to Ben's movements and his clumsy attempts to watch every one of them; his dodgings up and down stairs, ostentatious clanking of keys, and the elaborate traps he set to catch his thief, such as throwing his ball in at the dressing-room window and sending Ben up the tree to get it, which he did, thereby proving beyond a doubt that he alone could have taken the money, Thorny thought. Another deep discovery was, that the old drawer was so shrunken that the lock could be pressed down by slipping a knife-blade between the hasp and socket.

"Now it is as clear as day, and you'd better let me speak," he said, full of pride as well as regret at this triumphant success of his first attempt as a detective.

"Not yet, and you need do nothing more. I'm afraid it was a mistake of mine to let you do this; and if it has spoiled your friendship with Ben, I shall be very sorry; for I do not think he is guilty," answered Miss Celia.

"Why not?" and Thorny looked annoyed.

"I've watched also, and he doesn't act like a deceitful boy. To-day I asked him if he wanted any money, or should I put what I owe him with the rest, and he looked me straight in the face with such honest, grateful eyes, I could not doubt him when he said 'Keep it, please, I don't need any thing here, you are all so good to me.'"

"Now, Celia, don't you be soft-hearted. He's a sly little dog, and knows my eye is on him. When I asked him what he saw in the dressing-room, after he brought out the ball, and looked sharply at him, he laughed, and said 'Only a mouse,' as saucy as you please."

"Do set the trap there, I heard the mouse nibbling last night, and it kept me awake. We must have a cat or we shall be overrun."

"Well, shall I give Ben a good blowing up, or will you?" asked Thorny, scorning such poor prey as mice, and bound to prove that he was in the right.

"I'll let you know what I have decided in the morning. Be kind to Ben, meantime, or I shall feel as if I had done you harm by letting you watch him."

So it was left for that day, and by the next, Miss Celia had made up her mind to speak to Ben. She was just going down to breakfast when the sound of loud voices made her pause and listen. It came from Ben's room, where the two boys seemed to be disputing about something.

"I hope Thorny has kept his promise," she thought, and hurried through the back entry, fearing a general explosion.

Ben's chamber was at the end, and she could see and hear what was going on before she was near enough to interfere. Ben stood against his closet door looking as fierce and red as a turkey-cock; Thorny sternly confronted him, saying in an excited tone, and with a threatening gesture: "You are hiding something in there, and you can't deny it."

"I don't."

"Better not; I insist on seeing it."

"Well, you won't."

"What have you been stealing now?"

"Didn't steal it, — used to be mine, — I only took it when I wanted it."

"I know what that means. You'd better give it back or I'll make you."

"Stop!" cried a third voice, as Thorny put out his arm to clutch Ben, who looked ready to defend himself to the last gasp, "Boys, I will settle this affair. Is there anything hidden in the closet, Ben?" and Miss Celia came between the belligerent parties with her one hand up to part them.

Thorny fell back at once, looking half ashamed of his heat, and Ben briefly answered, with a gulp as if shame or anger made it hard to speak steadily:

“Yes ‘m, there is.”

“Does it belong to you?”

“Yes ‘m, it does.”

“Where did you get it?”

“Up to Squire’s.”

“That’s a lie!” muttered Thorny to himself.

Ben’s eye flashed, and his fist doubled up in spite of him, but he restrained himself out of respect for Miss Celia, who looked puzzled, as she asked another question, not quite sure how to proceed with the investigation: “Is it money, Ben?”

“No ‘m, it isn’t.”

“Then what can it be?”

“Meow!” answered a fourth voice from the closet; and as Ben flung open the door a gray kitten walked out, purring with satisfaction at her release.

Miss Celia fell into a chair and laughed till her eyes were full; Thorny looked foolish, and Ben folded his arms, curled up his nose, and regarded his accuser with calm defiance, while pussy sat down to wash her face as if her morning toilette had been interrupted by her sudden abduction.

“That’s all very well, but it doesn’t mend matters much, so you needn’t laugh, Celia,” began Thorny, recovering himself, and stubbornly bent on sifting the case to the bottom, now he had begun.

“Well, it would, if you’d let a feller alone. She said she wanted a cat, so I went and got the one they gave me when I was at the Squire’s. I went early and took her without asking, and I had a right to,” explained Ben, much aggrieved by having his surprise spoiled.

“It was very kind of you, and I’m glad to have this nice kitty. We will shut her up in my room to catch the mice that plague me,” said Miss Celia, picking up the little cat, and wondering how she would get her two angry boys safely down stairs.

“The dressing-room, she means; you know the way, and you don’t need keys to get in,” added Thorny, with such sarcastic emphasis that Ben felt some insult was intended, and promptly resented it.

“You won’t get me to climb any more trees after your balls, and my cat won’t catch any of your mice, so you needn’t ask me.”

“Cats don’t catch thieves, and they are what I’m after!”

“What do you mean by that?” fiercely demanded Ben.

“Celia has lost some money out of her drawer, and you won’t let me see what’s in yours; So I thought, perhaps, you’d got it!” blurted out Thorny, finding it hard to say the words, angry as he was, for the face opposite did not look like a guilty one.

For a minute, Ben did not seem to understand him, plainly as he spoke; then he turned an angry scarlet, and, with a reproachful glance at his mistress, opened the little drawer so that both could see all that it contained.

“They ain’t any thing; but I’m fond of ‘em they are all I’ve got — I was afraid he’d laugh at me that time, so I wouldn’t let him look — it was father’s birthday, and I felt bad about him and Sanch — ” Ben’s indignant voice got more and more indistinct as he stumbled on, and broke down over the last words. He did not cry, however, but threw back his little treasures as if half their sacredness was gone; and, making a strong effort at self-control, faced around, asking of Miss Celia, with a grieved look,

“Did you think I’d steal anything of yours?”

“I tried not to, Ben, but what could I do? It was gone, and you the only stranger about the place.”

“Wasn’t there any one to think bad of but me? he said, so sorrowfully that Miss Celia made up her mind on the spot that he was as innocent of the theft as the kitten now biting her buttons, no other refreshment being offered.

“Nobody, for I know my girls well. Yet, eleven dollars are gone, and I cannot imagine where or how for both drawer and door are always locked, because my papers and valuables are in that room.”

“What a lot! But how could I get it if it was locked up?” and Ben looked as if that question was unanswerable.

“Folks that can climb in at windows for a ball, can go the same way for money, and get it easy enough when they’ve only to pry open an old lock!”

Thorny’s look and tone seemed to make plain to Ben all that they had been suspecting, and, being innocent, he was too perplexed and unhappy to defend himself. His eye went from one to the other, and, seeing doubt in both faces, his boyish heart sunk within him; for he could prove nothing, and his first impulse was to go away at once.

“I can’t say any thing, only that I didn’t take the money. You won’t believe it, so I’d better go back where I come from. They weren’t so kind, but they trusted me, and knew I wouldn’t steal a cent. You may keep my money, and the kitty, too; I don’t want ‘em,” and, snatching up his hat, Ben would gone straight away, if Thorny had not barred his passage.

“Come, now, don’t be mad. Let’s talk it over, and if I ‘m wrong I’ll take it all back and ask your pardon,” he said, in a friendly tone, rather scared at the consequences of his first attempt, though as sure as ever that he was right.

“It would break my heart to have you go in that way, Ben. Stay at least till your innocence is proved, then no one can doubt what you say now.”

“Don’t see how it can be proved,” answered Ben, appeased by her evident desire to trust him.

“We’ll try as well as we know how, and the first thing we will do is to give that old secretary a good rummage from top to bottom. I’ve done it once, but it is just possible that the bills may have slipped out of sight. Come, now, I can’t rest till I’ve done all I can to comfort you and convince Thorny.” Miss Celia rose as she spoke, and led the way to the dressing-room, which had no outlet except through her chamber. Still holding his hat, Ben followed with a troubled face, and Thorny brought up the rear, doggedly determined to keep his eye on “the little scamp” till the matter was satisfactorily cleared up. Miss Celia had made her proposal more to soothe the feelings of one boy and to employ the superfluous energies of the other, than in the expectation of throwing any light upon the mystery; for she was sadly puzzled by Ben’s manner, and much regretted that she had let her brother meddle in the matter.

“There,” she said, unlocking the door with the key Thorny reluctantly gave up to her, “this is the room and that is the drawer on the right. The lower ones have seldom been opened since we came, and hold only some of papa’s old books. Those upper ones you may turn out and investigate as much as you — Bless me! here’s something in your trap,” Thorny and Miss Celia gave a little skip as she nearly trod on a long, gray tall, which hung out of the bole now filled by a plump mouse.

But her brother was intent on more serious things, and merely pushed the trap aside as he pulled out the drawer with an excited gesture, which sent it and all its contents clattering to the floor.

“Confound the old thing! It always stuck so I had to give a jerk. Now, there it is, topsy-turvy,” and Thorny looked Much disgusted at his own awkwardness.

“No harm done; I left nothing of value in it. Look back there, Ben, and see if there is room for a paper to get worked over the top of the drawer. I felt quite a crack, but I don’t believe it is possible for things to slip out; the place was never full enough to overflow in any way.”

Miss Celia spoke to Ben, who was kneeling down to pick up the scattered papers, among which were two marked dollar bills, — Thorny’s bait for the thief. Ben looked into the dusty recess, and then put in his hand, saying carelessly, —

“There’s nothing but a bit of red stuff.”

“My old pen-wiper — Why, what’s the matter?” asked Miss Celia, as Ben dropped the handful of what looked like rubbish.

“Something warm and wiggly inside of it,” answered Ben, stooping to examine the contents of the little scarlet bundle. “Baby mice! Ain’t they funny? Look just like mites of young pigs. We’ll have to kill ‘em if you’ve caught their mamma,” he said, forgetting his own trials in boyish curiosity about his “find.”

Miss Celia stooped also, and gently poked the red cradle with her finger; for the tiny mice were nestling deeper into the fluff with small squeals of alarm. Suddenly she cried out: “Boys, boys, I’ve found the thief! Look here; pull out these bits and see if they won’t make up my lost bills.”

Down went the motherless babies as four ruthless hands pulled apart their cosey nest, and there, among the nibbled fragments, appeared enough finely printed, greenish paper, to piece out parts of two bank bills. A large cypher and part of a figure one were visible, and that accounted for the ten; but though there were other bits, no figures could be found, and they were willing to take the other bill on trust.

“Now, then, am I a thief and a liar?” demanded Ben, pointing proudly to the tell-tale letters spread forth on the table, over which all three had been eagerly bending.

“No; I beg your pardon, and I’m very sorry that we didn’t look more carefully before we spoke, then we all should have been spared this pain.”

“All right, old fellow, forgive and forget. I’ll never think hard of you again, — on my honor I won’t.”

As they spoke, Miss Celia and her brother held out their hands frankly and heartily. Ben shook both, but with a difference; for he pressed the soft one gratefully, remembering that its owner had always been good to him; but the brown paw he gripped with a vengeful squeeze that made Thorny pull it away in a hurry, exclaiming, good-naturedly, in spite of both physical and mental discomfort, —

“Come, Ben, don’t you bear malice; for you’ve got the laugh on your side, and we feel pretty small. I do, any way; for, after my fidgets, all I’ve caught is a mouse!”

“And her family. I’m so relieved I’m almost sorry the poor little mother is dead — she and her babies were so happy in the old pen-wiper,” said Miss Celia, hastening to speak merrily, for Ben still looked indignant, and she was much grieved at what had happened.

“A pretty expensive house,” began Thorny, looking about for the interesting orphans, who had been left on the floor while their paper-hangings were examined.

No further anxiety need be felt for them, however; Kitty had come upon the scene, and as judge, jury, and prisoner, turned to find the little witnesses, they beheld the last pink mite going down Pussy’s throat in one mouthful.

“I call that summary justice, — the whole family executed on the spot! Give Kit the mouse also, and let us go to breakfast. I feel as if I had found my appetite, now this worry is off my mind,” said Miss Celia, laughing so infectiously that Ben had to join in spite of himself, as she took his arm and led him away with a look which mutely asked his pardon over again.

“Rather lively for a funeral procession,” said Thorny, following with the trap in his hand and Puss at his heels, adding, to comfort his pride as a detective:

“Well, I said I’d catch the thief, and I have, though it is rather a small one!”

CHAPTER XVII BETTY’S BRAVERY

“Celia, I’ve a notion that we ought to give Ben something. A sort of peace-offering, you know; for he feels dreadfully hurt about our suspecting him,” said Thorny, at dinner that day.

“I see he does, though he tries to seem as bright and pleasant as ever. I do not wonder, and I’ve been thinking what I could do to soothe his feelings. Can you suggest any thing?”

“Cuff-buttons. I saw some jolly ones over at Berryville, oxidized silver, with dogs’ heads on them, yellow eyes, and all as natural as could be. Those, now, would just suit him for his go-to-meeting white shirts, — neat, appropriate, and in memoriam.”

Miss Celia could not help laughing, it was such a boyish suggestion; but she agreed to it, thinking Thorny knew best, and hoping the yellow-eyed dogs would be as balm to Ben’s wounds.

“Well, dear, you may give those, and Lita shall give the little whip with a horse’s foot for a handle, if it is not gone. I saw it at the harness shop in town; and Ben admired it so much that I planned to give it to him on his birthday.”

“That will tickle him immensely; and if you’d just let him put brown tops to my old boots, and stick a cockade in his hat when he sits up behind the phaeton, he’d be a happy fellow,” laughed Thorny, who had discovered that one of Ben’s ambitions was to be a tip-top groom.

“No, thank you; those things are out of place in America, and would be absurd in a small country place like this. His blue suit and straw hat please me better for a boy; though a nicer little groom, in livery or out, no one could desire, and you may tell him I said so.”

“I will, and he’ll look as proud as punch; for he thinks every word you say worth a dozen from any one else. But won’t you give him something? Just some little trifle, to show that we are both eating humble pie, feeling sorry about the mouse money.”

“I shall give him a set of school-books, and try to get him ready to begin when vacation is over. An education is the best present we can make him; and I want you to help me fit him to enter as well is he can. Bab and Betty began, little dears, — lent him their books and taught all they knew; so Ben got a taste, and, with the right encouragement, would like to go on, I am sure.”

“That’s so like you Celia! Always thinking of the best thing and doing it handsomely. I’ll help like a house a-fire, if he will let me; but, all day, he’s been as stiff as a poker, so I don’t believe he forgives me a bit.”

“He will in time, and if you are kind and patient, he will be glad to have you help him. I shall make it a sort of favor to me on his part, to let you see to his lessons, now and then. It will be quite true, for I don’t want you to touch your Latin or algebra till cool weather; teaching him will be play to you.”

Miss Celia’s last words made her brother unbend his brows, for he longed to get at his books again, and the idea of being tutor to his “man-servant” did not altogether suit him.

“I’ll tool him along at a great pace, if he will only go. Geography and arithmetic shall be my share, and you may have the writing and spelling; it gives me the fidgets to set copies’, and hear children make a mess of words. Shall I get the books when I buy the other things? Can I go this afternoon?”

“Yes, here is the list; Bab gave it to me. You can go if you will come home early and have your tooth filled.”

Gloom fell at once upon Thorny’s beaming face, and he gave such a shrill whistle that his sister jumped in her chair, as she added, persuasively, —

“It won’t hurt a bit, now, and the longer you leave it the worse it will be. Dr. Mann is ready at any time; and, once over, you will be at peace for months. Come, my hero, give your orders, and take one of the girls to support you in the trying hour. Have Bab; she will enjoy it, and amuse you with her chatter.”

“As if I needed girls round for such a trifle as that!” returned Thorny with a shrug, though he groaned inwardly at the prospect before him, as most of us do on such occasions. “I wouldn’t take Bab at any price; she’d only get into some scrape, and upset the whole plan. Betty is the chicken for me, — a real little lady, and as nice and purry as a kitten.”

“Very well; ask her mother, and take good care of her. Let her tuck her dolly in, and she will be contented anywhere. There’s a fine air, and the awning is on the phaeton, so you won’t feel the sun. Start about three, and drive carefully.”

Betty was charmed to go, for Thorny was a sort of prince in her eyes; and to be invited to such a grand expedition was an overwhelming honor. Bab was not surprised, for, since Sancho’s loss, she had felt herself in disgrace, and been unusually meek; Ben let her “severely alone,” which much afflicted her, for he was her great admiration, and had been pleased to express his approbation of her agility and courage so often, that she was ready to attempt any fool-hardy feat to recover his regard. But vainly did she risk her neck jumping off the highest beams in the barn, trying to keep her balance standing on the donkey’s back, and leaping the lodge gate at a bound; Ben vouchsafed no reward by a look, a smile, a word of commendation; and Bab felt that nothing but Sancho’s return would ever restore the broken friendship.

Into faithful Betty's bosom did she pour forth her remorseful lamentations, often bursting out with the passionate exclamation, "If I could only find Sanch, and give him back to Ben, I wouldn't care if I tumbled down and broke all my legs right away!" Such abandonment of woe made a deep impression on Betty; and she fell into the way of consoling her sister by cheerful prophecies, and a firm belief that the organ-man would yet appear with the lost darling.

"I've got five cents of my berry money, and I'll buy you an orange if I see any," promised Betty stepping to kiss Bab, as the phaeton came to the door, and Thorny handed in a young lady whose white frock was so stiff with starch that it crackled like paper.

"Lemons will do if oranges are gone. I like 'em to suck with lots of sugar," answered Bab, feeling that the sour sadly predominated in her cup just now.

"Don't she look sweet, the dear!" murmured Mrs. Moss, proudly surveying her youngest.

She certainly did, sitting under the fringed canopy with "Belinda," all in her best, upon her lap, as she turned to smile and nod, with a face so bright and winsome under the little blue hat, that it was no wonder mother and sister thought there never was such a perfect child as "our Betty."

Dr. Mann was busy when they arrived, but would be ready in an hour; so they did their shopping at once, having made sure of the whip as they came along. Thorny added some candy to Bab's lemon, and Belinda had a cake, which her mamma obligingly ate for her. Betty thought that Aladdin's palace could not have been more splendid than the jeweller's shop where the canine cuff-buttons were bought; but when they came to the book-store, she forgot gold, silver, and precious stones, to revel in picture-books, while Thorny selected Ben's modest school outfit. Seeing her delight, and feeling particularly lavish with plenty of money in his pocket, the young gentleman completed the child's bliss by telling her to choose whichever one she liked best out of the pile of Walter Crane's toy-books lying in bewildering colors before her.

"This one; Bab always wanted to see the dreadful cupboard, and there's a picture of it here," answered Betty, clasping a gorgeous copy of "Bluebeard" to the little bosom, which still heaved with the rapture of looking at that delicious mixture of lovely Fatimas in pale azure gowns, pink Sister Annes on the turret top, crimson tyrants, and yellow brothers with forests of plumage blowing wildly from their mushroom-shaped caps.

"Very good; there you are, then. Now, come on, for the fun is over and the grind begins," said Thorny, marching away to his doom, with his tongue in his tooth, and trepidation in his manly breast.

“Shall I shut my eyes and hold your head?” quavered devoted Betty, as they went up the stairs so many reluctant feet had mounted before them.

“Nonsense, child, never mind me! You look out of window and amuse yourself; we shall not be long, I guess;” and in went Thorn silently hoping that the dentist had been suddenly called away, or some person with an excruciating toothache would be waiting to take ether, and so give our young man an excuse for postponing his job.

But no; Dr. Mann was quite at leisure, and, full of smiling interest, awaited his victim, laying forth his unpleasant little tools with the exasperating alacrity of his kind. Glad to be released from any share in the operation, Betty retired to the back window to be as far away as possible, and for half in hour was so absorbed in her book that poor Thorny might have groaned dismally without disturbing her.

“Done now, directly, only a trifle of polishing off and a look round,” said Dr. Mann, at last; and Thorny, with a yawn that nearly rent him asunder, called out,—

“Thank goodness! Pack up, Bettykin.”

“I’m all ready!” and, shutting her book with a start, she slipped down from the easy chair in a great hurry.

But “looking round” took time; and, before the circuit of Thorny’s mouth was satisfactorily made, Betty had become absorbed by a more interesting tale than even the immortal “Bluebeard.” A noise of children’s voices in the narrow alley-way behind the house attracted her attention; the long window opened directly on the yard, and the gate swung in the wind. Curious as Fatima, Betty went to look; but all she saw was a group of excited boys peeping between the bars of another gate further down.

“What’s the matter?” she asked of two small girls, who stood close by her, longing but not daring to approach the scene of action.

“Boys chasing a great black cat, I believe,” answered one child.

“Want to come and see?” added the other, politely extending the invitation to the stranger.

The thought of a cat in trouble would have nerved Betty to face a dozen boys; so she followed at once, meeting several lads hurrying away on some important errand, to judge from their anxious countenances.

“Hold tight, Jimmy, and let ‘em peek, if they want to. He can’t hurt anybody now,” said one of the dusty huntsmen, who sat on the wide coping of the wall, while two others held the gate, as if a cat could only escape that way.

“You peek first, Susy, and see if it looks nice,” said one little girl, boosting her friend so that she could look through the bars in the upper part of the gate.

“No; it ‘s only an ugly old dog!” responded Susy, losing all interest at once, and descending with a bounce.

“He’s mad! and Jud’s gone to get his gun, so we can shoot him!” called out one mischievous boy, resenting the contempt expressed for their capture.

“Ain’t, neither!” howled another lad from his perch. “Mad dogs won’t drink; and this one is lapping out of a tub of water.”

“Well, he may be, and we don’t know him, and he hasn’t got any muzzle on, and the police will kill him if Jud don’t,” answered the sanguinary youth who had first started the chase after the poor animal, which had come limping into town, so evidently a lost dog that no one felt any hesitation in stoning him.

“We must go right home; my mother is dreadful ‘fraid of mad dogs, and so is yours,” said Susy; and, having satisfied their curiosity, the young ladies prudently retired.

But Betty had not had her “peep,” and could not resist one look; for she had heard of these unhappy animals, and thought Bab would like to know how they looked. So she stood on tip-toe and got a good view of a dusty, brownish dog, lying on the grass close by, with his tongue hanging out while he panted, as if exhausted by fatigue and fear, for he still cast apprehensive glances at the wall which divided him from his tormentors.

“His eyes are just like Sanch’s,” said Betty to herself, unconscious that she spoke aloud, till she saw the creature prick up his cars and half rise, as if he had been called.

“He looks as if he knew me, but it isn’t our Sancho; he was a lovely dog.” Betty said that to the little boy peeping in beside her; but before he could make any reply, the brown beast stood straight up with an inquiring bark, while his eyes shone like topaz, and the short tail wagged excitedly.

“Why, that’s just the way Sanch used to do!” cried Betty, bewildered by the familiar ways of this unfamiliar-looking dog.

As if the repetition of his name settled his own doubts, he leaped toward the gate and thrust a pink nose between the bars, with a howl of recognition as Betty’s face was more clearly seen. The boys tumbled precipitately from their perches, and the little girl fell back alarmed, yet could not bear to run away and leave those imploring eyes pleading to her through the bars so eloquently.

“He acts just like our dog, but I don’t see how it can be him. Sancho, Sancho, is it really you?” called Betty, at her wits’ end what to do.

“Bow, wow, wow!” answered the well-known bark, and the little tail did all it could to emphasize the sound, while the eyes were so full of dumb love and joy, the child could not refuse to believe that this ugly stray was their own Sancho strangely transformed.

All of a sudden, the thought rushed into her mind, how glad Ben would be! — and Bab would feel all happy again. “I must carry him home.”

Never stopping to think of danger, and forgetting all her doubts, Betty caught the gate handle out of Jimmy’s grasp, exclaiming eagerly: “He is our dog! Let me go in; I ain’t afraid.”

“Not till Jud comes back; he told us we mustn’t,” answered the astonished Jimmy, thinking the little girl as mad as the dog.

With a confused idea that the unknown Jud had gone for a gun to shoot Sanch, Betty gave a desperate pull at the latch and ran into the yard, bent on saving her friend. That it was a friend there could be no further question; for, though the creature rushed at her as if about to devour her at a mouthful, it was only to roll ecstatically at her feet, lick her hands, and gaze into her face, trying to pant out the welcome which he could not utter. An older and more prudent person would have waited to make sure before venturing in; but confiding Betty knew little of the danger which she might have run; her heart spoke more quickly than her head, and, not stopping to have the truth proved, she took the brown dog on trust, and found it was indeed dear Sanch.

Sitting on the grass, she hugged him close, careless of tumbled hat, dusty paws on her clean frock, or a row of strange boys staring from the wall.

“Darling doggy, where have you been so long?” she cried, the great thing sprawling across her lap, as if he could not get near enough to his brave little protector. “Did they make you black and beat you, dear? Oh, Sanch, where is your tail — your pretty tail?”

A plaintive growl and a pathetic wag was all the answer he could make to these tender inquiries; for never would the story of his wrongs be known, and never could the glory of his doggish beauty be restored. Betty was trying to comfort him with pats and praises, when a new face appeared at the gate, and Thorny’s authoritative voice called out, —

“Betty Moss, what on earth are you doing in there with that dirty beast?”

“It’s Sanch, it’s Sanch! Oh, come and see!” shrieked Betty, flying up to lead forth her prize. But the gate was held fast, for some one said the words, “Mad dog,” and Thorny was very naturally alarmed, because he had already seen one. “Don’t stay there another minute. Get up on that bench and I’ll pull you over,” directed Thorny, mounting the wall to rescue his charge in hot haste; for the dog did certainly behave queerly, limping hurriedly to and fro, as if anxious to escape. No wonder, when Sancho heard a voice he knew, and recognized another face, yet did not meet as kind a welcome as before.

“No, I’m not coming out till he does. It is Sanch, and I’m going to take him home to Ben,” answered Betty, decidedly, as she wet her handkerchief in the rain water to bind up the swollen paw that had travelled many miles to rest in her little hand again.

“You’re crazy, child. That is no more Ben’s dog than I am.”

“See if it isn’t!” cried Betty, perfectly unshaken in her faith; and, recalling the words of command as well as she could, she tried to put Sancho through his little performance, as the surest proof that she was right. The poor fellow did his best, weary and foot-sore though he was; but when it came to taking his tail in his mouth to waltz, he gave it up, and, dropping down, hid his face in his paws, as he always did when any of his tricks failed. The act was almost pathetic now, for one of the paws was bandaged, and his whole attitude expressed the humiliation of a broken spirit.

That touched Thorny, and, quite convinced both of the dog’s sanity and identity, he sprung down from the wall with Ben’s own whistle, which gladdened Sancho’s longing ear as much as the boy’s rough caresses comforted his homesick heart.

“Now, let’s carry him right home, and surprise Ben. Won’t he be pleased?” said Betty, so in earnest that she tried to lift the big brute in spite of his protesting yelps.

“You are a little trump to find him out in spite of all the horrid things that have been done to him. We must have a rope to lead him, for he’s got no collar and no muzzle. He has got friends though, and I’d like to see any one touch him now. Out of the way, there, boy!” Looking as commanding as a drum-major, Thorny cleared a passage, and with one arm about his neck, Betty proudly led her treasure magnanimously ignoring his late foes, and keeping his eye fixed on the faithful friend whose tender little heart had known him in spite of all disguises.

“I found him, sir,” and the lad who had been most eager for the shooting, stepped forward to claim any reward that might be offered for the now valuable victim.

“I kept him safe till she came,” added the jailer Jimmy, speaking for himself.

“I said he wasn’t mad,” cried a third, feeling that his discrimination deserved approval.

“Jud ain’t my brother,” said the fourth, eager to clear his skirts from all offence.

“But all of you chased and stoned him, I suppose? You’d better look out or you’ll get reported to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.”

With this awful and mysterious threat, Thorny slammed the doctor’s gate in the faces of the mercenary youths, nipping their hopes in the bud, and teaching them a good lesson.

After one astonished stare, Lita accepted Sancho without demur, and they greeted one another cordially, nose to nose, instead of shaking hands. Then the dog nestled into his old place under the linen duster with a grunt of intense content, and soon fell fast asleep, quite worn out with fatigue. No Roman conqueror bearing untold treasures with him, ever approached the Eternal City feeling richer or prouder than did Miss Betty as she rolled rapidly toward the little brown house with the captive won by her own arms. Poor Belinda was forgotten in a corner, "Bluebeard" was thrust under the cushion, and the lovely lemon was squeezed before its time by being sat upon; for all the child could think of was Ben's delight, Bab's remorseful burden lifted off, "Ma's" surprise, and Miss Celia's pleasure. She could hardly realize the happy fact, and kept peeping under the cover to be sure that the dear dingy bunch at her feet was truly there.

"I'll tell you how we'll do it," said Thorny, breaking a long silence as Betty composed herself with an irrepressible wriggle of delight after one of these refreshing peeps. "We'll keep Sanch hidden, and smuggle him into Ben's old room at your house. Then I'll drive on to the barn, and not say a word, but send Ben to get something out of that room. You just let him in, to see what he'll do. I'll bet you a dollar he won't know his own dog."

"I don't believe I can keep from screaming right out when I see him, but I'll try. Oh, won't it be fun!" — and Betty clapped her hands in joyful anticipation of that exciting moment.

A nice little plan, but Master Thorny forgot the keen senses of the amiable animal snoring peacefully among his boots; and, when they stopped at the Lodge, he had barely time to say in a whisper,

"Ben's coming; cover Sanch and let me get him in quick!" before the dog was out of the phaeton like a bombshell, and the approaching boy went down as if shot, for Sancho gave one leap, and the two rolled over and over, with a shout and a bark of rapturous recognition.

"Who is hurt?" asked Mrs. Moss, running out with floury hands uplifted in alarm.

"Is it a bear?" cried Bab, rushing after her, beater in hand, for a dancing bear was the delight of her heart.

"Sancho's found! Sancho's found!" shouted Thorny, throwing up his hat like a lunatic.

"Found, found, found!" echoed Betty, dancing wildly about as if she too had lost her little wits.

"Where? how? when? who did it?" asked Mrs. Moss, clapping her dusty hands delightedly.

"It isn't; it's an old dirty brown thing," stammered Bab, as the dog came uppermost for a minute, and then rooted into Ben's jacket as if he smelt a woodchuck, and was bound to have him out directly.

Then Thorny, with many interruptions from Betty, poured forth the wondrous tale, to which Bab and his mother listened breathlessly, while the muffins burned as black as a coal, and nobody cared a bit.

"My precious lamb, how did you dare to do such a thing?" exclaimed Mrs. Moss, hugging the small heroine with mingled admiration and alarm.

"I'd have dared, and slapped those horrid boys, too. I wish I'd gone!" and Bab felt that she had for ever lost the chance of distinguishing herself.

"Who cut his tail off?" demanded Ben, in a menacing tone, as he came uppermost in his turn, dusty, red and breathless, but radiant.

"The wretch who stole him, I suppose; and he deserves to be hung," answered Thorny, hotly.

"If ever I catch him, I'll — I'll cut his nose off," roared Ben, with such a vengeful glare that Sanch barked fiercely; and it was well that the unknown "wretch" was not there, for it would have gone hardly with him, since even gentle Betty frowned, while Bab brandished the egg-beater menacingly, and their mother indignantly declared that "it was too bad!"

Relieved by this general outburst, they composed their outraged feelings; and while the returned wanderer went from one to another to receive a tender welcome from each, the story of his recovery was more calmly told. Ben listened with his eye devouring the injured dog; and when Thorny paused, he turned to the little heroine, saying solemnly, as he laid her hand with his own on Sancho's head,

"Betty Moss, I'll never forget what you did; from this minute half of Sanch is your truly own, and if I die you shall have the whole of him," and Ben sealed the precious gift with a sounding kiss on either chubby check.

Betty was so deeply touched by this noble bequest, that the blue eyes filled and would have overflowed if Sanch had not politely offered his tongue like a red pocket-handkerchlef, and so made her laugh the drops away, while Bab set the rest off by saying gloomily, —

"I mean to play with all the mad dogs I can find; then folks will think I'm smart and give me nice things."

"Poor old Bab, I'll forgive you now, and lend you my half whenever you want it," said Ben, feeling at peace now with all mankind, including, girls who tagged.

"Come and show him to Celia," begged Thorny, eager to fight his battles over again.

"Better wash him up first; he's a sight to see, poor thing," suggested Mrs. Moss, as she ran in, suddenly remembering her muffins.

"It will take a lot of washings to get that brown stuff off. See, his pretty, pink skin is all stained with it. We'll bleach him out, and his curls will grow, and he'll be as good as ever — all but — "

Ben could not finish, and a general wail went up for the departed tassel that would never wave proudly in the breeze again.

"I'll buy him a new one. Now form the procession and let us go in style," said Thorny, cheerily, as he swung Betty to his shoulder and marched away whistling "Hail! the conquering hero comes," while Ben and his Bow-wow followed arm-in-arm, and Bab brought up the rear, banging on a milk-pan with the egg-beater.

CHAPTER XVIII BOWS AND ARROWS

If Sancho's abduction made a stir, one may easily imagine with what warmth and interest he was welcomed back when his wrongs and wanderings were known. For several days he held regular levees, that curious boys and sympathizing girls might see and pity the changed and curtailed dog. Sancho behaved with dignified affability, and sat upon his mat in the coach-house pensively eying his guests, and patiently submitting to their caresses; while Ben and Thorny took turns to tell the few tragical facts which were not shrouded in the deepest mystery. If the interesting sufferer could only have spoken, what thrilling adventures and hair-breadth escapes he might have related. But, alas! he was dumb; and the secrets of that memorable month never were revealed.

The lame paw soon healed, the dingy color slowly yielded to many washings, the woolly coat began to knot up into little curls, a new collar, handsomely marked, made him a respectable dog, and Sancho was himself again. But it was evident that his sufferings were not forgotten; his once sweet temper was a trifle soured; and, with a few exceptions, he had lost his faith in mankind. Before, he had been the most benevolent and hospitable of dogs; now, he eyed all strangers suspiciously, and the sight of a shabby man made him growl and bristle up, as if the memory of his wrongs still burned hotly within him.

Fortunately, his gratitude was stronger than his resentment, and he never seemed to forget that he owed his life to Betty, — running to meet her whenever she appeared, instantly obeying her commands, and suffering no one to molest her when he walked watchfully beside her, with her hand upon his neck, as they had walked out of the almost fatal backyard together, faithful friends for ever.

Miss Celia called them little Una and her lion, and read the pretty story to the children when they wondered what she meant. Ben, with great pains, taught the dog to spell "Betty," and surprised her with a display of this new accomplishment, which gratified her so much that she was never tired of seeing Sanch paw the five red letters into place, then come and lay his nose in her hand, as if he added, "That's the name of my dear mistress."

Of course Bab was glad to have everything pleasant and friendly again; but in a little dark corner of her heart there was a drop of envy, and a desperate desire to do something which would make every one in her small world like and praise her as they did Betty. Trying to be as good and gentle did not satisfy her; she must do something brave or surprising, and no chance for distinguishing herself in that way seemed likely to appear. Betty was as fond as ever, and the boys were very kind to her; but she felt that they both liked “little Betcinda,” as they called her, best, because she found Sanch, and never seemed to know that she had done any thing brave in defending him against all odds. Bab did not tell any one how she felt, but endeavored to be amiable, while waiting for her chance to come; and, when it did arrive, made the most of it, though there was nothing heroic to add a charm.

Miss Celia’s arm had been doing very well, but would, of course, be useless for some time longer. Finding that the afternoon readings amused herself as much as they did the children, she kept them up, and brought out all her old favorites enjoying a double pleasure in seeing that her young audience relished them as much as she did when a child for to all but Thorny they were brand new. Out of one of these stories came much amusement for all, and satisfaction for one of the party.

“Celia, did you bring our old bows?” asked her brother, eagerly, as she put down the book from which she had been reading Miss Edgeworth’s capital story of “Waste not Want not; or, Two Strings to your Bow.”

“Yes, I brought all the playthings we left stored away in uncle’s garret when we went abroad. The bows are in the long box where you found the mallets, fishing-rods, and bats. The old quivers and a few arrows are there also, I believe. What is the idea now? asked Miss Celia in her turn, as Thorny bounced up in a great hurry.

“I’m going to teach Ben to shoot. Grand fun this hot weather; and by-and-by we’ll have an archery meeting, and you can give us a prize. Come on, Ben. I’ve got plenty of whip-cord to rig up the bows, and then we’ll show the ladies some first-class shooting.”

“I can’t; never had a decent bow in my life. The little gilt one I used to wave round when I was a Coopid wasn’t worth a cent to go,” answered Ben, feeling as if that painted “prodigy” must have been a very distant connection of the respectable young person now walking off arm in arm with the lord of the manor.

“Practice is all you want. I used to be a capital shot, but I don’t believe I could hit any thing but a barn-door now,” answered Thorny, encouragingly.

As the boys vanished, with much tramping of boots and banging of doors, Bab observed, in the young-ladyish tone she was apt to use when she composed her active little mind and body to the feminine task of needlework, —

“We used to make bows of whalebone when we were little girls, but we are too old to play so now.”

“I’d like to, but Bab won’t, ‘cause she ‘s most ‘leven years old,” said honest

Betty, placidly rubbing her needle in the “ruster,” as she called the family emery-bag.

“Grown people enjoy archery, as bow and arrow shooting is called, especially in England. I was reading about it the other day, and saw a picture of Queen Victoria with her bow; so you needn’t be ashamed of it, Bab,” said Miss Celia, rummaging among the books and papers in her sofa corner to find the magazine she wanted, thinking a new play would be as good for the girls as for the big boys.

“A queen, just think!” and Betty looked much impressed by the fact, as well as uplifted by the knowledge that her friend did not agree in thinking her silly because she preferred playing with a harmless home-made toy to firing stones or snapping a pop-gun.

“In old times, bows and arrows were used to fight great battles with; and we read how the English archers shot so well that the air was dark with arrows, and many men were killed.”

“So did the Indians have ‘em; and I’ve got some stone arrow-heads, — found ‘em by the river, in the dirt!” cried Bab, waking up, for battles interested her more than queens.

“While you finish your stints I’ll tell you a little story about the Indians,” said Miss Celia, lying back on her cushions, while the needles began to go again, for the prospect of a story could not be resisted.

“A century or more ago, in a small settlement on the banks of the Connecticut, — which means the Long River of Pines, — there lived a little girl called Matty Kilburn. On a hill stood the fort where the people ran for protection in any danger, for the country was new and wild, and more than once the Indians had come down the river in their canoes and burned the houses, killed men, and carried away women and children. Matty lived alone with her father, but felt quite safe in the log house, for he was never far away. One afternoon, as the farmers were all busy in their fields, the bell rang suddenly, — a sign that there was danger near, — and, dropping their rakes or axes, the men hurried to their houses to save wives and babies, and such few treasures as they could. Mr. Kilburn caught up his gun with one hand and his little girl with the other, and ran as fast as he could toward the fort. But before he could reach it he heard a yell, and saw the red men coming up from the river. Then he knew it would be in vain to try to get in, so he looked about for a safe place to hide Matty till he could come for her. He was a brave man, and could fight, so he had no thought of hiding while his neighbors needed help; but the dear little daughter must be cared for first.

“In the corner of the lonely pasture which they dared not cross, stood a big hollow elm, and there the farmer hastily hid Matty, dropping her down into the dim nook, round the mouth of which young shoots had grown, so that no one would have suspected any hole was there.

“Lie still, child, till I come; say your prayers and wait for father,’ said the man, as he parted the leaves for a last glance at the small, frightened face looking up at him.

“‘Come soon,’ whispered Matty, and tried to smile bravely, as a stout settler’s girl should.

“Mr. Kilburn went away, and was taken prisoner in the fight, carried off, and for years no one knew whether he was alive or dead. People missed Matty, but supposed she was with her father, and never expected to see her again. A great while afterward the poor man came back, having escaped and made his way through the wilderness to his old home. His first question was for Matty, but no one had seen her; and when he told them where he had left her, they shook their heads as if they thought he was crazy. But they went to look, that he might be satisfied; and he was; for they they found some little bones, some faded bits of cloth, and two rusty silver buckles marked with Matty’s name in what had once been her shoes. An Indian arrow lay there, too, showing why she had never cried for help, but waited patiently so long for father to come and find her.”

If Miss Celia expected to see the last bit of hem done when her story ended, she was disappointed; for not a dozen stitches had been taken. Betty was using her crash towel for a handkerchief, and Bab’s lay on the ground as she listened with snapping eyes to the little tragedy.

“Is it true?” asked Betty, hoping to find relief in being told that it was not.

“Yes; I have seen the tree, and the mound where the fort was, and the rusty buckles in an old farmhouse where other Kilburns live, near the spot where it all happened,” answered Miss Celia, looking out the picture of Victoria to console her auditors.

“We’ll play that in the old apple-tree. Betty can scrooch down, and I’ll be the father, and put leaves on her, and then I’ll be a great Injun and fire at her. I can make arrows, and it will be fun, won’t it?” cried Bab, charmed with the new drama in which she could act the leading parts.

“No, it won’t! I don’t like to go in a cobwebby hole, and have you play kill me, I’ll make a nice fort of hay, and be all safe, and you can put Dinah down there for Matty. I don’t love her any more, now her last eye has tumbled out, and you may shoot her just as much as yon like.”

Before Bab could agree to this satisfactory arrangement, Thorny appeared, singing, as he aimed at a fat robin, whose red waistcoat looked rather warm and winterish that August day, —

“So he took up his bow,
And he feathered his arrow,
And said, ‘I will shoot
This little cock-sparrow.’“

“But he didn’t,” chirped the robin, flying away, with a contemptuous flirt of his rusty-black tail.

“That is exactly what you must promise not to do, boys. Fire away at your targets as much as you like, but do not harm any living creature,” said Miss Celia, as Ben followed armed and equipped with her own long-unused accoutrements.

“Of course we won’t if you say so; but, with a little practice, I could bring down a bird as well as that fellow you read to me about with his woodpeckers and larks and herons,” answered Thorny, who had much enjoyed the article, while his sister lamented over the destruction of the innocent birds.

“You’d do well to borrow the Squire’s old stuffed owl for a target; there would be some chance of your hitting him, he is so big,” said his sister, who always made fun of the boy when he began to brag.

Thorny’s only reply was to send his arrow straight up so far out of sight that it was a long while coming down again to stick quivering in the ground near by, whence Sancho brought it in his mouth, evidently highly approving of a game in which he could join.

“Not bad for a beginning. Now, Ben, fire away.”

But Ben’s experience with bows was small, and, in spite of his praiseworthy efforts to imitate his great exemplar, the arrow only turned a feeble sort of somersault and descended perilously near Bab’s uplifted nose.

“If you endanger other people’s life and liberty in your pursuit of happiness, I shall have to confiscate your arms, boys. Take the orchard for your archery ground; that is safe, and we can see you as we sit here. I wish I had two hands, so that I could paint you a fine, gay target;” and Miss Celia looked regretfully at the injured arm, which as yet was of little use.

“I wish you could shoot, too; you used to beat all the girls, and I was proud of you,” answered Thorny, with the air of a fond elder brother; though, at the time he alluded to, he was about twelve, and hardly up to his sister’s shoulder.

“Thank you. I shall be happy to give my place to Bab and Betty if you will make them some bows and arrows; they could not use those long ones.”

The young gentlemen did not take the hint as quickly as Miss Celia hoped they would; in fact, both looked rather blank at the suggestion, as boys generally do when it is proposed that girls — especially small ones — shall join in any game they are playing.

"P'r'aps it would be too much trouble," began Betty, in her winning little voice.

"I can make my own," declared Bab, with an independent toss of the head.

"Not a bit; I'll make you the jolliest small bow that ever was, Belinda," Thorny hastened to say, softened by the appealing glance of the little maid.

"You can use mine, Bab; you've got such a strong fist, I guess you could pull it," added Ben, remembering that it would not be amiss to have a comrade who shot worse than he did, for he felt very inferior to Thorny in many ways, and, being used to praise, had missed it very much since he retired to private life.

"I will be umpire, and brighten up the silver arrow I sometimes pin my hair with, for a prize, unless we can find something better," proposed Miss Celia, glad to see that question settled, and every prospect of the new play being a pleasant amusement for the hot weather.

It was astonishing how soon archery became the fashion in that town, for the boys discussed it enthusiastically all that evening, formed the "William Tell Club" next day, with Bab and Betty as honorary members, and, before the week was out, nearly every lad was seen, like young Norval, "With bended bow and quiver full of arrows," shooting away, with a charming disregard of the safety of their fellow citizens. Banished by the authorities to secluded spots, the members of the club set up their targets and practised indefatigably, especially Ben, who soon discovered that his early gymnastics had given him a sinewy arm and a true eye; and, taking Sanch into partnership as picker-up, he got more shots out of an hour than those who had to run to and fro.

Thorny easily recovered much of his former skill, but his strength had not fully returned, and he soon grew tired. Bab, on the contrary, threw herself into the contest heart and soul, and tugged away at the new bow Miss Celia gave her, for Ben's was too heavy. No other girls were admitted, so the outsiders got up a club of their own, and called it "The Victoria," the name being suggested by the magazine article, which went the rounds as a general guide and reference book. Bab and Betty belonged to this club and duly reported the doings of the boys, with whom they had a right to shoot if they chose, but soon waived the right, plainly seeing that their absence would be regarded in the light of a favor.

The archery fever raged as fiercely as the base-ball epidemic had done before it, and not only did the magazine circulate freely, but Miss Edgeworth's story, which was eagerly read, and so much admired that the girls at once mounted green ribbons, and the boys kept yards of whip-cord in their pockets like the provident Benjamin of the tale.

Every one enjoyed the new play very much, and something grew out of it which was a lasting pleasure to many, long after the bows and arrows were forgotten. Seeing how glad the children were to get a new story, Miss Celia was moved to send a box of books — old and new — to the town library, which was but scantily supplied, as country libraries are apt to be. This donation produced a good effect; for other people hunted up all the volumes they could spare for the same purpose, and the dusty shelves in the little room behind the post-office filled up amazingly. Coming in vacation time they were hailed with delight, and ancient books of travel, as well as modern tales, were feasted upon by happy young folks, with plenty of time to enjoy them in peace.

The success of her first attempt at being a public benefactor pleased Miss Celia very much, and suggested other ways in which she might serve the quiet town, where she seemed to feel that work was waiting for her to do. She said little to any one but the friend over the sea, yet various plans were made then that blossomed beautifully by-and-by.

CHAPTER XIX SPEAKING PIECES

The first of September came all too soon, and school began. Among the boys and girls who went trooping up to the “East Corner knowledge-box,” as they called it, was our friend Ben, with a pile of neat books under his arm. He felt very strange, and decidedly shy; but put on a bold face, and let nobody guess that, though nearly thirteen, he had never been to school before. Miss Celia had told his story to Teacher, and she, being a kind little woman, with young brothers of her own, made things as easy for him as she could. In reading and writing he did very well, and proudly took his place among lads of his own age; but when it came to arithmetic and geography, he had to go down a long way, and begin almost at the beginning, in spite of Thorny’s efforts to “tool him along fast.” It mortified him sadly, but there was no help for it; and in some of the classes he had dear little Betty to console with him when he failed, and smile contentedly when he got above her, as he soon began to do, — for she was not a quick child, and plodded through First Parts long after sister Bab was flourishing away among girls much older than herself.

Fortunately, Ben was a short boy and a clever one, so he did not look out of place among the ten and eleven year olders, and fell upon his lessons with the same resolution with which he used to take a new leap, or practise patiently till he could touch his heels with his head. That sort of exercise had given him a strong, elastic little body; this kind was to train his mind, and make its faculties as useful, quick and sure, as the obedient muscles, nerves and eye, which kept him safe where others would have broken their necks. He knew this, and found much consolation in the fact that, though mental arithmetic was a hopeless task, he could turn a dozen somersaults, and come up as steady as a judge. When the boys laughed at him for saying that China was in Africa, he routed them entirely by his superior knowledge of the animals belonging to that wild country; and when “First class in reading” was called, he marched up with the proud consciousness that the shortest boy in it did better than tall Moses Towne or fat Sam Kitteridge.

Teacher praised him all she honestly could, and corrected his many blunders so quietly that he soon ceased to be a deep, distressful red during recitation, and tugged away so manfully that no one could help respecting him for his efforts, and trying to make light of his failures. So the first hard week went by, and though the boy’s heart had sunk many a time at the prospect of a protracted wrestle with his own ignorance, he made up his mind to win, and went at it again on the Monday with fresh zeal, all the better and braver for a good, cheery talk with Miss Celia in the Sunday evening twilight.

He did not tell her one of his greatest trials, however, because he thought she could not help him there. Some of the children rather looked down upon him, called him "tramp" and "beggar," twitted him with having been a circus boy, and lived in a tent like a gypsy. They did not mean to be cruel, but did it for the sake of teasing, never stopping to think how much such sport can make a fellow-creature suffer. Being a plucky fellow, Ben pretended not to mind; but he did feel it keenly, because he wanted to start afresh, and be like other boys. He was not ashamed of the old life; but, finding those around him disapproved of it, he was glad to let it be forgotten, even by himself; for his latest recollections were not happy ones, and present comforts made past hardships seem harder than before.

He said nothing of this to Miss Celia; but she found it out, and liked him all the better for keeping some of his small worries to himself. Bab and Betty came over Monday afternoon full of indignation at some boyish insult Sam had put upon Ben; and, finding them too full of it to enjoy the reading, Miss Celia asked what the matter was. Then both little girls burst out in a rapid succession of broken exclamations, which did not give a very clear idea of the difficulty, —

"Sam didn't like it because Ben jumped farther than he did — "

"And he said Ben ought to be in the poor-house."

"And Ben said he ought to be in it pigpen."

"So he had! — such a greedy thing, bringing lovely big apples, and not giving any one a single bite!"

"Then he was mad, and we all laughed; and he said, 'Want to fight?'

"And Ben said, 'No, thanky, not much fun in pounding a feather-bed.'"

"Oh, he was awfully mad then, and chased Ben up the big maple."

"He's there now, for Sam won't let him come down till he takes it all back."

"Ben won't; and I do believe he'll have to stay up all night," said Betty, distressfully.

"He won't care, and we'll have fun firing up his supper. Nut cakes and cheese will go splendidly; and may be baked pears wouldn't get smashed, he's such a good catch," added Bab, decidedly relishing the prospect.

"If he does not come by tea-time, we will go and look after him. It seems to me I have heard something about Sam's troubling him before, haven't I?" asked Miss Celia, ready to defend her protege against all unfair persecution.

"Yes,'m, Sam and Mose are always plaguing Ben. They are big boys, and we can't make them stop. I won't let the girls do it, and the little boys don't dare to, since Teacher spoke to them." answered Bab.

"Why does not Teacher speak to the big ones?

"Ben won't tell of them, or let us. He says he'll fight his own battles, and hates tell-tales. I guess he won't like to have us tell you, but I don't care, for it is too bad!" and Betty looked ready to cry over her friend's tribulations.

"I'm glad you did, for I will attend to it, and stop this sort of thing," said Miss Celia, after the children had told some of the tormenting speeches which had tried poor Ben.

Just then Thorny appeared, looking much amused, and the little girls both called out in a breath, "Did you see Ben and get him down?"

"He got himself down in the neatest way you can imagine;" and Thorny laughed at the recollection.

"Where is Sam?" asked Bab.

"Staring up at the sky to see where Ben has flown to."

"Oh, tell about it!" begged Betty.

"Well, I came along and found Ben treed, and Sam stoning him. I stopped that at once, and told the 'fat boy' to be off. He said he wouldn't till Ben begged his pardon; and Ben said he wouldn't do it, if he stayed up for a week. I was just preparing to give that rascal a scientific thrashing, when a load of hay came along, and Ben dropped on to it so quietly that Sam, who was trying to bully me, never saw him go. It tickled me so, I told Sam I guessed I'd let him off that time, and walked away, leaving him to hunt for Ben, and wonder where the dickens he had vanished to."

The idea of Sam's bewilderment amused the others as much as Thorny, and they all had a good laugh over it before Miss Celia asked, —

"Where has Ben gone now?"

"Oh, he'll take a little ride, and then slip down and race home full of the fun of it. But I've got to settle Sam. I won't have our Ben hectored by any one — "

"But yourself," put in his sister, with a sly smile, for Thorny was rather domineering at times.

"He doesn't mind my poking him up now and then, it's good for him; and I always take his part against other people. Sam is a bully, and so is Mose; and I'll thrash them both if they don't stop."

Anxious to curb her brother's pugnacious propensities, Miss Celia proposed milder measures, promising to speak to the boys herself if there was any more trouble.

"I have been thinking that we should have some sort of merry-making for Ben on his birthday. My plan was a very simple one; but I will enlarge it, and have all the young folks come, and Ben shall be king of the fun. he needs encouragement in well-doing, for he does try; and now the first hard part is nearly over, I am sure he will get on bravely. If we treat him with respect, and show our regard for him, others will follow our example; and that will be better than fighting about it."

"So it will! What shall we do to make our party tip-top?" asked Thorny, falling into the trap at once; for he dearly loved to get up theatricals, and had not had any for a long time.

"We will plan something splendid, a 'grand combination,' as you used to call your droll mixtures of tragedy, comedy, melodrama and farce," answered his sister, with her head already full of lively plots.

"We'll startle the natives. I don't believe they ever saw a play in all their lives, hey, Bab?"

"I've seen a circus."

"We dress up and do 'Babes in the Wood,'" added Betty, with dignity.

"Pho! that's nothing. I'll show you acting that will make your hair stand on end, and you shall act too. Bab will be capital for the naughty girls," began Thorny, excited by the prospect of producing a sensation on the boards, and always ready to tease the girls.

Before Betty could protest that she did not want her hair to stand up, or Bab could indignantly decline the role offered her, a shrill whistle was heard, and Miss Celia whispered, with a warning look, —

"Hush! Ben is coming, and he must not know any thing about this yet."

The next day was Wednesday, and in the afternoon Miss Celia went to hear the children "speak pieces," though it was very seldom that any of the busy matrons and elder sisters found time or inclination for these displays of youthful oratory. Miss Celia and Mrs. Moss were all the audience on this occasion, but Teacher was both pleased and proud to see them, and a general rustle went through the school as they came in, all the girls turning from the visitors to nod at Bab and Betty, who smiled all over their round faces to see "Ma" sitting up "'side of Teacher," and the boys grinned at Ben, whose heart began to beat fast at the thought of his dear mistress coming so far to hear him say his piece.

Thorny had recommended Marco Bozzaris, but Ben preferred John Gilpin, and ran the famous race with much spirit, making excellent time in some parts and having to be spurred a little in others, but came out all right, though quite breathless at the end, sitting down amid great applause, some of which, curiously enough, seemed to come from outside; which in fact it did, for Thorny was bound to hear but would not come in, lest his presence should abash one orator at least.

Other pieces followed, all more or less patriotic and warlike, among the boys; sentimental among the girls. Sam broke down in his attempt to give one of

Webster’s great speeches, Little Cy Fay boldly attacked

“Again to the battle, Achaians!”

and shrieked his way through it in a shrill, small voice, bound to do honor to the older brother who had trained him even if he broke a vessel in the attempt. Billy chose a well-worn piece, but gave it a new interest by his style of delivery; for his gestures were so spasmodic he looked as if going into a fit, and he did such astonishing things with his voice that one never knew whether a howl or a growl would come next. When

“The woods against a stormy sky
Their giant branches tossed;”

Billy’s arms went round like the sails of a windmill; the “hymns of lofty cheer” not only “shook the depths of the desert gloom,” but the small children on their little benches, and the school-house literally rang “to the anthems of the free!” When “the ocean eagle soared,” Billy appeared to be going bodily up, and the “pines of the forest roared” as if they had taken lessons of Van Amburgh’s biggest lion. “Woman’s fearless eye” was expressed by a wild glare; “manhood’s brow, severely high,” by a sudden clutch at the reddish locks falling over the orator’s hot forehead, and a sounding thump on his blue checked bosom told where “the fiery heart of youth” was located. “What sought they thus far?” he asked, in such a natural and inquiring tone, with his eye fixed on Mamie Peters, that the startled innocent replied, “Dunno,” which caused the speaker to close in haste, devoutly pointing a stubby finger upward at the last line.

This was considered the gem of the collection, and Billy took his seat proudly conscious that his native town boasted an orator who, in time, would utterly eclipse Edward Everett and Wendell Phillips.

Sally Folsom led off with “The Coral Grove,” chosen for the express purpose of making her friend Almira Mullet start and blush, when she recited the second line of that pleasing poem,

“Where the purple mullet and gold-fish rove.”

One of the older girls gave Wordsworth’s “Lost Love” in a pensive tone, clasping her hands and bringing out the “O” as if a sudden twinge of toothache seized her when she ended.

“But she is in her grave, and O,
the difference to me!”

Bab always chose a funny piece, and on this afternoon set them all laughing by the spirit with which she spoke the droll poem, “Pussy’s Class,” which some of my young readers may have read. The “meou” and the “sptzz” were capital, and when the “fond mamma rubbed her nose,” the children shouted, for Miss Bab made a paw of her hand and ended with an impromptu purr, which was considered the best imitation ever presented to an appreciative public. Betty bashfully murmurred “Little White Lily,” swaying to and fro as regularly as if in no other way could the rhymes be ground out of her memory.

“That is all, I believe. If either of the ladies would like to say a few words to the children, I should be pleased to have them,” said Teacher, politely, pausing before she dismissed school with a song.

“Please, ‘m. I’d like to speak my piece,” answered Miss Celia, obeying a sudden impulse; and, stepping forward with her hat in her hand, she made a pretty courtesy before she recited Mary Howitt’s sweet little ballad, “Mabel on Midsummer Day.”

She looked so young and merry, and used such simple but expressive gestures, and spoke in such a clear, soft voice that the children sat as if spell-bound, learning several lessons from this new teacher, whose performance charmed them from beginning to end, and left a moral which all could understand and carry away in that last verse, —

“‘Tis good to make all duty sweet,
To be alert and kind;
‘Tis good, like Littie Mabel,
To have a willing mind.”

Of course there was an enthusiastic clapping when Miss Celia sat down, but even while hands applauded, consciences pricked, and undone tasks, complaining words and sour faces seemed to rise up reproachfully before many of the children, as well as their own faults of elocution.

“Now we will sing,” said Teacher, and a great clearing of throats ensued, but before a note could be uttered, the half-open door swung wide, and Sancho, with Ben’s hat on, walked in upon his hind-legs, and stood with his paws meekly folded, while a voice from the entry sang rapidly, —

“Benny had a little dog,
His fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Benny went,
The dog was sure to go.

He went into the School one day,

which was against the rule;
It made the children laugh and play
To see a dog — ”

Mischievous Thorny got no further, for a general explosion of laughter drowned the last words, and Ben’s command “Out, you rascal!” sent Sanch to the right-about in double-quick time.

Miss Celia tried to apologize for her bad brother, and Teacher tried to assure her that it didn’t matter in the least, as this was always a merry time, and Mrs. Moss vainly shook her finger at her naughty daughters; they as well as the others would have their laugh out, and only partially sobered down when the Bell rang for “Attention.” They thought they were to be dismissed, and repressed their giggles as well as they could in order to get a good start for a vociferous roar when they got out. But, to their great surprise, the pretty lady stood up again and said, in her friendly way, —

“I just want to thank you for this pleasant little exhibition, and ask leave to come again. I also wish to invite you all to my boy’s birthday party on Saturday week. The archery meeting is to be in the afternoon, and both clubs will be there, I believe. In the evening we are going to have some fun, when we can laugh as much as we please without breaking any of the rules. In Ben’s name I invite you, and hope you will all come, for we mean to make this the happiest birthday he ever had.”

There were twenty pupils in the room, but the eighty hands and feet made such a racket at this announcement that an outsider would have thought a hundred children, at least, must have been at it. Miss Celia was a general favorite because she nodded to all the girls, called the boys by their last names, even addressing some of the largest as “Mr.” which won their hearts at once, so that if she had invited them all to come and be whipped they would have gone sure that it was some delightful joke. With what eagerness they accepted the present invitation one can easily imagine, though they never guessed why she gave it in that way, and Ben’s face was a sight to see, he was so pleased and proud at the honor done him that he did not know where to look, and was glad to rush out with the other boys and vent his emotions in whoops of delight. He knew that some little plot was being concocted for his birthday, but never dreamed of any thing so grand as asking the whole school, Teacher and all. The effect of the invitation was seen with comical rapidity, for the boys became overpowering in their friendly attentions to Ben. Even Sam, fearing he might be left out, promptly offered the peaceful olive-branch in the shape of a big apple, warm from his pocket, and Mose proposed a trade of jack-knives which would be greatly to

Ben’s advantage. But Thorny made the noblest sacrifice of all, for he said to his sister, as they walked home together, —

“I’m not going to try for the prize at all. I shoot so much better than the rest, having had more practice, you know, that it is hardly fair. Ben and Billy are next best, and about even, for Ben’s strong wrist makes up for Billy’s true eye, and both want to win. If I am out of the way Ben stands a good chance, for the other fellows don’t amount to much.”

“Bab does; she shoots nearly as well as Ben, and wants to win even more than he or Billy. She must have her chance at any rate.”

“So she may, but she won’t do any thing; girls can’t, though it ‘s good exercise and pleases them to try.”

“If I had full use of both my arms I’d show you that girls can do a great deal when they like. Don’t be too lofty, young man, for you may have to come down,” laughed Miss Celia, amused by his airs.

“No fear,” and Thorny calmly departed to set his targets for Ben’s practice.

“We shall see,” and from that moment Miss Celia made Bab her especial pupil, feeling that a little lesson would be good for Mr. Thorny, who rather lorded it over the other young people. There was a spice of mischief in it, for Miss Celia was very young at heart, in spite of her twenty-four years, and she was bound to see that her side had a fair chance, believing that girls can do whatever they are willing to strive patiently and wisely for.

So she kept Bab at work early and late, giving her all the hints and help she could with only one efficient hand, and Bab was delighted to think she did well enough to shoot with the club. Her arms ached and her fingers grew hard with twanging the bow, but she was indefatigable, and being a strong, tall child of her age, with a great love of all athletic sports, she got on fast and well, soon learning to send arrow after arrow with ever increasing accuracy nearer and nearer to the bull’s-eye.

The boys took very little notice of her, being much absorbed in their own affairs, but Betty did for Bab what Sancho did for Ben, and trotted after arrows till her short legs were sadly tired, though her patience never gave out. She was so sure Bab would win that she cared nothing about her own success, practising little and seldom hitting any thing when she tried.

CHAPTER XX BEN'S BIRTHDAY

A superb display of flags flapped gayly in the breeze on the September morning when Ben proudly entered his teens. An irruption of bunting seemed to have broken out all over the old house, for banners of every shape and size, color and design, flew from chimney-top to gable, porch and gate-way, making the quiet place look as lively as a circus tent, which was just what Ben most desired and delighted in.

The boys had been up very early to prepare the show, and when it was ready enjoyed it hugely, for the fresh wind made the pennons cut strange capers. The winged lion of Venice looked as if trying to fly away home; the Chinese dragon appeared to brandish his forked tail as he clawed at the Burmese peacock; the double-headed eagle of Russia pecked at the Turkish crescent with one beak, while the other seemed to be screaming to the English royal beast, "Come on and lend a paw." In the hurry of hoisting the Siamese elephant got turned upside down, and now danced gayly on his head, with the stars and stripes waving proudly over him. A green flag with a yellow harp and sprig of shamrock hung in sight of the kitchen window, and Katy, the cook, got breakfast to the tune of "St. Patrick's day in the morning." Sancho's kennel was half hidden under a rustling paper imitation of the gorgeous Spanish banner, and the scarlet sun-and-moon flag of Arabia snapped and flaunted from the pole over the coach-house, as a delicate compliment to Lita, Arabian horses being considered the finest in the world.

The little girls came out to see, and declared it was the loveliest sight they ever beheld, while Thorny played "Hail Columbia" on his fife, and Ben, mounting the gate-post, crowed long and loud like a happy cockerel who had just reached his majority. He had been surprised and delighted with the gifts he found in his room on awaking and guessed why Miss Celia and Thorny gave him such pretty things, for among them was a match-box made like a mouse-trap. The doggy buttons and the horsey whip were treasures, indeed, for Miss Celia had not given them when they first planned to do so, because Sancho's return seemed to be joy and reward enough for that occasion. But he did not forget to thank Mrs. Moss for the cake she sent him, nor the girls for the red mittens which they had secretly and painfully knit. Bab's was long and thin, with a very pointed thumb, Betty's short and wide, with a stubby thumb, and all their mother's pulling and pressing could not make them look alike, to the great affliction of the little knitters. Ben, however, assured them that he rather preferred odd ones, as then he could always tell which was right and which left. He put them on immediately and went about cracking the new whip with an expression of content which was droll to see, while the children followed after, full of admiration for the hero of the day.

They were very busy all the morning preparing for the festivities to come, and as soon as dinner was over every one scrambled into his or her best clothes as fast as possible, because, although invited to come at two, impatient boys and girls were seen hovering about the avenue as early as one.

The first to arrive, however, was an uninvited guest, for just as Bab and Betty sat down on the porch steps, in their stiff pink calico frocks and white ruffled aprons, to repose a moment before the party came in, a rustling was heard among the lilacs, and out stepped Alfred Tennyson Barlow, looking like a small Robin Hood, in a green blouse with a silver buckle on his broad belt, a feather in his little cap and a bow in his hand.

“I have come to shoot. I heard about it. My papa told me what arching meant. Will there be any little cakes? I like them.”

With these opening remarks the poet took a seat and calmly awaited a response. The young ladies, I regret to say, giggled, then remembering their manners, hastened to inform him that there would be heaps of cakes, also that Miss Celia would not mind his coming without an invitation, they were quite sure.

“She asked me to come that day. I have been very busy. I had measles. Do you have them here?” asked the guest, as if anxious to compare notes on the sad subject.

“We had ours ever so long ago. What have you been doing besides having measles?” said Betty, showing a polite interest.

“I had a fight with a bumble-bee.”

“Who beat?” demanded Bab.

“I did. I ran away and he couldn’t catch me.”

“Can you shoot nicely?”

“I hit a cow. She did not mind at all. I guess she thought it was a fly.”

“Did your mother know you were coming?” asked Bab, feeling an interest in runaways.

“No; she is gone to drive, so I could not ask her.”

“It is very wrong to disobey. My Sunday-school book says that children who are naughty that way never go to heaven,” observed virtuous Betty, in a warning tone.

“I do not wish to go,” was the startling reply.

“Why not?” asked Betty, severely.

“They don’t have any dirt there. My mamma says so. I am fond of dirt. I shall stay here where there is plenty of it,” and the candid youth began to grub in the mould with the satisfaction of a genuine boy.

“I am afraid you’re a very bad child.”

“Oh yes, I am. My papa often says so and he knows all about it,” replied Alfred with an involuntary wriggle suggestive of painful memories. Then, as if anxious to change the conversation from its somewhat personal channel, he asked, pointing to a row of grinning heads above the wall, “Do you shoot at those?”

Bab and Betty looked up quickly and recognized the familiar faces of their friends peering down at them, like a choice collection of trophies or targets.

“I should think you’d be ashamed to peek before the party was ready!” cried Bab, frowning darkly upon the merry young ladies.

“Miss Celia told us to come before two, and be ready to receive folks, if she wasn’t down,” added Betty, importantly.

“It is striking two now. Come along, girls;” and over scrambled Sally Folsom, followed by three or four kindred spirits, just as their hostess appeared.

“You look like Amazons storming a fort,” she said, as the girls cattle up, each carrying her bow and arrows, while green ribbons flew in every direction.

“How do you do, sir? I have been hoping you would call again,” added Miss Celia, shaking hands with the pretty boy, who regarded with benign interest the giver of little cakes.

Here a rush of boys took place, and further remarks were cut short, for every one was in a hurry to begin. So the procession was formed at once, Miss Celia taking the lead, escorted by Ben in the post of honor, while the boys and girls paired off behind, arm in arm, bow on Shoulder, in martial array. Thorny and Billy were the band, and marched before, fifing and drumming “Yankee Doodle” with a vigor which kept feet moving briskly, made eyes sparkle, and young hearts dance under the gay gowns and summer jackets. The interesting stranger was elected to bear the prize, laid out on a red pin-cushion; and did so with great dignity, as he went beside the standard bearer, Cy Fay, who bore Ben’s choicest flag, snow-white, with a green wreath surrounding a painted bow and arrow, and with the letters W. T. C. done in red below.

Such a merry march all about the place, out at the Lodge gate, up and down the avenue, along the winding paths, till they halted in the orchard, where the target stood, and seats were placed for the archers while they waited for their turns. Various rules and regulations were discussed, and then the fun began. Miss Celia had insisted that the girls should be invited to shoot with the boys; and the lads consented without much concern, whispering to one another with condescending shrugs, “Let ‘em try, if they like; they can’t do any thing.”

There were various trials of skill before the great match came off, and in these trials the young gentlemen discovered that two at least of the girls could do something; for Bab and Sally shot better than many of the boys, and were well rewarded for their exertions by, the change which took place in the faces and conversation of their mates.

“Why, Bab, you do as well as if I’d taught you myself,” said Thorny, much surprised and not altogether pleased at the little girl’s skill.

“A lady taught me; and I mean to beat every one of you,” answered Bab, saucily, while her sparkling eyes turned to Miss Celia with a mischievous twinkle in them.

“Not a bit of it,” declared Thorny, stoutly; but he went to Ben and whispered, “Do your best, old fellow, for sister has taught Bab all the scientific points, and the little rascal is ahead of Billy.”

“She won’t get ahead of me,” said Ben, picking out his best arrow, and trying the string of his bow with a confident air which re-assured Thorny, who found it impossible to believe that a girl ever could, would, or should excel a boy in any thing he cared to try.

It really did look as if Bab would beat when the match for the prize came off; and the children got more and more excited as the six who were to try for it took turns at the bull’s-eye. Thorny was umpire, and kept account of each shot, for the arrow which went nearest the middle would win. Each had three shots; and very soon the lookers-on saw that Ben and Bab were the best marksmen, and one of them would surely get the silver arrow.

Sam, who was too lazy to practise, soon gave up the contest, saying, as Thorny did, “It wouldn’t be fair for such a big fellow to try with the little chaps,” which made a laugh, as his want of skill was painfully evident. But Mose went at it gallantly; and, if his eye had been as true as his arms were strong, the “little chaps” would have trembled. But his shots were none of them as near as Billy’s; and he retired after the third failure, declaring that it was impossible to shoot against the wind, though scarcely a breath was stirring.

Sally Folsom was bound to beat Bab, and twanged away in great style; all in vain, however, as with tall Maria Newcomb, the third girl who attempted the trial. Being a little near-sighted, she had borrowed her sister’s eye-glasses, and thereby lessened her chance of success; for the pinch on her nose distracted her attention, and not one of her arrows went beyond the second ring to her great disappointment. Billy did very well, but got nervous when his last shot came, and just missed the bull’s-eye by being in a hurry.

Bab and Ben each had one turn more; and, as they were about even, that last arrow would decide the victory. Both had sent a shot into the bull’s-eye, but neither was exactly in the middle; so there was room to do better, even, and the children crowded round, crying eagerly, “Now, Ben!” “Now, Bab!” “Hit her up, Ben!” “Beat him, Bab!” while Thorny looked as anxious as if the fate of the country depended on the success of his man. Bab’s turn came first; and, as Miss Celia examined her bow to see that all was right, the little girl said, With her eyes on her rival’s excited face, —

“I want to beat, but Ben will feel so bad, I ‘most hope I sha’n’t.”

“Losing a prize sometimes makes one happier than gaining it. You have proved that you could do better than most of them; so, if you do not beat, you may still feet proud,” answered Miss Celia, giving back the bow with a smile that said more than her words.

It seemed to give Bab a new idea, for in a minute all sorts of recollections, wishes, and plans rushed through her lively little mind, and she followed a sudden generous impulse as blindly as she often did a wilful one.

“I guess he’ll beat,” she said, softly, with a quick sparkle of the eyes, as she stepped to her place and fired without taking her usual careful aim.

Her shot struck almost as near the centre on the right as her last one had hit on the left; and there was a shout of delight from the girls as Thorny announced it before he hurried back to Ben, whispering anxiously, —

“Steady, old Man, steady; you must beat that, or we shall never hear the last of it.”

Ben did not say, “She won’t get ahead of me,” as he had said at the first; he set his teeth, threw off his hat, and, knitting his brows with a resolute expression, prepared to take steady aim, though his heart beat fast and his thumb trembled as he pressed it on the bowstring.

“I hope you’ll beat, I truly do,” said Bab, at his elbow; and, as if the breath that framed the generous wish helped it on its way, the arrow flew straight to the bull’s-eye, hitting, apparently, the very spot where Bab’s best shot had left a hole.

“A tie! a tie!” cried the girls, as a general rush took place toward the target.

“No, Ben’s is nearest. Ben’s beat!” Hooray shouted the boys, throwing up their hats. There was only a hair’s-breadth difference, and Bab could honestly have disputed the decision; but she did not, though for an instant she could not help wishing that the cry had been “Bab’s beat! Hurrah!” it sounded so pleasant. Then she saw Ben’s beaming face, Thorny’s intense relief, and caught the look Miss Celia sent her over the heads of the boys, and decided, with a sudden warm glow all over her little face, that losing a prize did sometimes make one happier than winning it. Up went her best hat, and she burst out in a shrill, “Rah, rah, rah!” that sounded very funny coming all alone after the general clamor had subsided.

“Good for you, Bab! you are an honor to the club, and I’m proud of you”, said Prince Thorny, with a hearty handshake; for, as his man had won, he could afford to praise the rival who had put him on his mettle, though she was a girl.

Bab was much uplifted by the royal commendation, but a few minutes later felt pleased as well as proud when Ben, having received the prize, came to her, as she stood behind a tree sucking her blistered thumb, while Betty braided up her dishevelled locks.

“I think it would be fairer to call it a tie, Bab, for it really was, and I want you to wear this. I wanted the fun of beating, but I don’t care a bit for this girl’s thing and I’d rather see it on you.”

As he spoke, Ben offered the rosette of green ribbon which held the silver arrow, and Bab’s eyes brightened as they fell upon the pretty ornament, for to her “the girl’s thing” was almost as good as the victory.

“Oh no; you must wear it to show who won. Miss Celia wouldn’t like it. I don’t mind not getting it; I did better than all the rest, and I guess I shouldn’t like to beat you,” answered Bab, unconsciously putting into childish words the sweet generosity which makes so many sisters glad to see their brothers carry off the prizes of life, while they are content to know that they have earned them and can do without the praise.

But if Bab was generous, Ben was just; and though he could not explain the feeling, would not consent to take all the glory without giving his little friend a share.

“You must wear it; I shall feel real mean if you don’t. You worked harder than I did, and it was only luck my getting this. Do, Bab, to please me,” he persisted, awkwardly trying to fasten the ornament in the middle of Bab’s’ white apron.

“Then I will. Now do you forgive me for losing Sancho?” asked Bab, with a wistful look which made Ben say, heartily, —

“I did that when he came home.”

“And you don’t think I’m horrid?”

“Not a bit of it; you are first-rate, and I’ll stand by you like a man, for you are ‘most as good as a boy!” cried Ben, anxious to deal handsomely with his feminine rival, whose skill had raised her immensely in his opinion.

Feeling that he could not improve that last compliment, Bab was fully satisfied, and let him leave the prize upon her breast, conscious that she had some claim to it.

“That is where it should be, and Ben is a true knight, winning the prize that he may give it to his lady, while he is content with the victory," said Miss Celia, laughingly, to Teacher, as the children ran off to join in the riotous games which soon made the orchard ring.

"He learned that at the circus 'tunnyments,' as he calls them. He is a nice boy, and I am much interested in him; for he has the two things that do most toward making a man, patience and courage," answered Teacher, also as she watched the young knight play and the honored lady tearing about in a game of tag.

"Bab is a nice child, too," said Miss Celia; "she is as quick as a flash to catch an idea and carry it out, though very often the ideas are wild ones. She could have won just now, I fancy, if she had tried, but took the notion into her head that it was nobler to let Ben win, and so atone for the trouble she gave him in losing the dog. I saw a very sweet look on her face just now, and am sure that Ben will never know why he beat."

"She does such things at school sometimes, and I can't bear to spoil her little atonements, though they are not always needed or very wise," answered Teacher. "Not long ago I found that she had been giving her lunch day after day to a poor child who seldom had any, and when I asked her why, she said, with tears, 'I used to laugh at Abby, because she had only crusty, dry bread, and so she wouldn't bring any. I ought to give her mine and be hungry, it was so mean to make fun of her poorness."

"Did you stop the sacrifice?"

"No; I let Bab 'go halves,' and added an extra bit to my own lunch, so I could make my contribution likewise."

"Come and tell me about Abby. I want to make friends with our poor people, for soon I shall have a right to help them;" and, putting her arm in Teacher's, Miss Celia led her away for a quiet chat in the porch, making her guest's visit a happy holiday by confiding several plans and asking advice in the friendliest way.

CHAPTER XXI CUPID’S LAST APPEARANCE

A picnic supper on the grass followed the games, and then, as twilight began to fall, the young people were marshalled to the coach-house, now transformed into a rustic theatre. One big door was open, and seats, arranged lengthwise, faced the red table-cloths which formed the curtain. A row of lamps made very good foot-lights, and an invisible band performed a Wagner-like overture on combs, tin trumpets, drums, and pipes, with an accompaniment of suppressed laughter.

Many of the children had never seen any thing like it, and sat staring about them in mute admiration and expectancy; but the older ones criticised freely, and indulged in wild speculations as to the meaning of various convulsions of nature going on behind the curtain.

While Teacher was dressing the actresses for the tragedy, Miss Celia and Thorny, who were old hands at this sort of amusement, gave a “Potato” pantomime as a side show.

Across an empty stall a green cloth was fastened, so high that the heads of the operators were not seen. A little curtain flew up, disclosing the front of a Chinese pagoda painted on pasteboard, with a door and window which opened quite naturally. This stood on one side, several green trees with paper lanterns hanging from the boughs were on the other side, and the words “Tea Garden,” printed over the top, showed the nature of this charming spot.

Few of the children had ever seen the immortal Punch and Judy, so this was a most agreeable novelty, and before they could make out what it meant, a voice began to sing, so distinctly that every word was heard, —

“In China there lived a little man,
His name was Chingery Wangery Chan.”

Here the hero “took the stage” with great dignity, clad in a loose yellow jacket over a blue skirt, which concealed the hand that made his body. A pointed hat adorned his head, and on removing this to bow he disclosed a bald pate with a black queue in the middle, and a Chinese face nicely painted on the potato, the lower part of which was hollowed out to fit Thorny’s first finger, while his thumb and second finger were in the sleeves of the yellow jacket, making a lively pair of arms. While he saluted, the song went on, —

“His legs were short, his feet were small, And this little man could not walk at all.”

Which assertion was proved to be false by the agility with which the “little man” danced a jig in time to the rollicking chorus, —

“Chingery changery ri co day,
Ekel tekel happy man;
Uron odesko canty oh, oh,
Gallopy wallopy China go.”

At the close of the dance and chorus, Chan retired into the tea garden, and drank so many cups of the national beverage, with such comic gestures, that the spectators were almost sorry when the opening of the opposite window drew all eyes in that direction. At the lattice appeared a lovely being; for this potato had been pared, and on the white surface were painted pretty pink checks, red lips, black eyes, and oblique brows; through the tuft of dark silk on the head were stuck several glittering pins, and a pink jacket shrouded the plump figure of this capital little Chinese lady. After peeping coyly out, so that all could see and admire, she fell to counting the money from a purse, so large her small hands could hardly hold it on the window seat. While she did this, the song went on to explain, —

“Miss Ki Hi was short and squat,
She had money and he had not
So off to her he resolved to go,
And play her a tune on his little banjo.”

During the chorus to this verse Chan was seen tuning his instrument in the garden, and at the end sallied gallantly forth to sing the following tender strain, —

“Whang fun li,
Tang hua ki,
Hong Kong do ra me!
Ah sin lo,
Pan to fo,
Tsing up chin leute!”

Carried away by his passion, Chan dropped his banjo, fell upon his knees, and, clasping his hands, bowed his forehead in the dust before his idol. But, alas! —

“Miss Ki Hi heard his notes of love,
And held her wash-bowl up above
It fell upon the little man,
And this was the end of Chingery Chan,”

Indeed it was; for, as the doll’s basin of real water was cast forth by the cruel charmer, poor Chan expired in such strong convulsions that his head rolled down among the audience. Miss Ki Hi peeped to see what had become of her victim, and the shutter decapitated her likewise, to the great delight of the children, who passed around the heads, pronouncing a “Potato” pantomime “first-rate fun.”

Then they settled themselves for the show, having been assured by Manager Thorny that they were about to behold the most elegant and varied combination ever produced on any stage. And when one reads the following very inadequate description of the somewhat mixed entertainment, it is impossible to deny that the promise made was nobly kept.

After some delay and several crashes behind the curtain, which mightily amused the audience, the performance began with the well-known tragedy of “Bluebeard;” for Bab had set her heart upon it, and the young folks had acted it so often in their plays that it was very easy to get up, with a few extra touches to scenery and costumes. Thorny was superb as the tyrant with a beard of bright blue worsted, a slouched hat and long feather, fur cloak, red hose, rubber boots, and a real sword which clanked tragically as he walked. He spoke in such a deep voice, knit his corked eye-brows, and glared so frightfully, that it was no wonder poor Fatima quaked before him as he gave into her keeping an immense bunch of keys with one particularly big, bright one, among them.

Bab was fine to see, with Miss Celia’s blue dress sweeping behind her, a white plume in her flowing hair, and a real necklace with a pearl locket about her neck. She did her part capitally, especially the shriek she gave when she looked into the fatal closet, the energy with which she scrubbed the tell-tale key, and her distracted tone when she called out: “Sister Anne, O, sister Anne, do you see anybody coming?” while her enraged husband was roaring: “Will you come down, madam, or shall I come and fetch you?”

Betty made a captivating Anne, — all in white muslin, and a hat full of such lovely pink roses that she could not help putting up one hand to feel them as she stood on the steps looking out at the little window for the approaching brothers who made such a din that it sounded like a dozen horsemen instead if two.

Ben and Billy were got up regardless of expense in the way of arms; for their belts were perfect arsenals, and their wooden swords were big enough to strike terror into any soul, though they struck no sparks out of Bluebeard’s blade in the awful combat which preceded the villain’s downfall and death.

The boys enjoyed this part intensely, and cries of “Go it, Ben!” “Hit him again, Billy!” “Two against one isn’t fair!” “Thorny’s a match for ‘em.” “Now he’s down, hurray!” cheered on the combatants, till, after a terrific struggle, the tyrant fell, and with convulsive twitchings of the scarlet legs, slowly expired while the ladies sociably fainted in each other’s arms, and the brothers waved their swords and shook hands over the corpse of their enemy.

This piece was rapturously applauded, and all the performers had to appear and bow their thanks, led by the defunct Bluebeard, who mildly warned the excited audience that if they “didn’t look out the seats would break down, and then there’d be a nice mess.”

Calmed by this fear they composed themselves, and waited with ardor for the next play, which promised to be a lively one, judging from the shrieks of laughter which came from behind the curtain.

“Sanch ‘s going to be in it, I know; for I heard Ben say, ‘Hold him still; he won’t bite,’“ whispered Sam, longing to “jounce up and down, so great was his satisfaction at the prospect, for the dog was considered the star of the company.

“I hope Bab will do something else, she is so funny. Wasn’t her dress elegant?” said Sally Folsum, burning to wear a long silk gown and a feather in her hair.

“I like Betty best, she’s so cunning, and she peeked out of the window just as if she really saw somebody coming,” answered Liddy Peckham, privately resolving to tease mother for some pink roses before another Sunday came.

Up went the curtain at last, and a voice announced “A Tragedy in Three Tableaux.” “There’s Betty!” was the general exclamation, as the audience recognized a familiar face under the little red hood worn by the child who stood receiving a basket from Teacher, who made a nice mother with her finger up, as if telling the small messenger not to loiter by the way.

“I know what that is!” cried Sally; “it’s ‘Mabel on Midsummer Day.’ The piece Miss Celia spoke; don’t you know?”

“There isn’t any sick baby, and Mabel had a ‘kerchief pinned about her head.’ I say it’s Red Riding Hood,” answered Liddy, who had begun to learn Mary Howitt’s pretty poem for her next piece, and knew all about it.

The question was settled by the appearance of the wolf in the second scene, and such a wolf! On few amateur stages do we find so natural an actor for that part, or so good a costume, for Sanch was irresistibly droll in the gray wolf-skin which usually lay beside Miss Celia’s bed, now fitted over his back and fastened neatly down underneath, with his own face peeping out at one end, and the handsome tail bobbing gayly at the other. What a comfort that tail was to

Sancho, none but a bereaved bow-wow could ever tell. It reconciled him to his distasteful part at once, it made rehearsals a joy, and even before the public he could not resist turning to catch a glimpse of the noble appendage, while his own brief member wagged with the proud consciousness that though the tail did not match the head, it was long enough to be seen of all men and dogs.

That was a pretty picture, for the little maid came walking in with the basket on her arm, and such an innocent face inside the bright hood that it was quite natural the gray wolf should trot up to her with deceitful friendliness, that she should pat and talk to him confidingly about the butter for grandma, and then that they should walk away together, he politely carrying her basket, she with her hand on his head, little dreaming what evil plans were taking shape inside.

The children encored that, but there was no time to repeat it, so they listened to more stifled merriment behind the red table-cloths, and wondered whether the next scene would be the wolf popping his head out of the window as Red Riding Hood knocks, or the tragic end of that sweet child.

It was neither, for a nice bed had been made, and in it reposed the false grandmother, with a ruffled nightcap on, a white gown, and spectacles. Betty lay beside the wolf, staring at him as if just about to say, “Why, grandma, what great teeth you’ve got!” for Sancho’s mouth was half open and a red tongue hung out, as he panted with the exertion of keeping still. This tableau was so very good, and yet so funny, that the children clapped and shouted frantically; this excited the dog, who gave a bounce and would have leaped off the bed to bark at the rioters, if Betty had not caught him by the legs, and Thorny dropped the curtain just at the moment when the wicked wolf was apparently in the act of devouring the poor little girl, with most effective growls.

They had to come out then, and did so, both much dishevelled by the late tussle, for Sancho’s cap was all over one eye, and Betty’s hood was anywhere but on her head. She made her courtesy prettily, however; her fellow-actor bowed with as much dignity as a short night-gown permitted, and they retired to their well-earned repose.

Then Thorny, looking much excited, appeared to make the following request: “As one of the actors in the next piece is new to the business, the company must all keep as still as mice, and not stir till I give the word. It’s perfectly splendid! so don’t you spoil it by making a row.”

“What do you suppose it is?” asked every one, and listened with all their might to get a hint, if possible. But what they heard only whetted their curiosity and mystified them more and more. Bab’s voice cried in a loud whisper, “Isn’t Ben beautiful?” Then there was a thumping noise, and Miss Celia said, in an anxious tone, “Oh, do be careful,” while Ben laughed out as if he was too happy to care who heard him, and Thorny bawled “Whoa!” in a way which would have attracted attention if Lita’s head had not popped out of her box, more than once, to survey the invaders of her abode, with a much astonished expression.

“Sounds kind of circusy, don’t it?” said Sam to Billy, who had come out to receive the compliments of the company and enjoy the tableau at a safe distance.

“You just wait till you see what’s coming. It beats any circus I ever saw,” answered Billy, rubbing his hands with the air of a man who had seen many instead of but one.

“Ready! Be quick and get out of the way when she goes off!” whispered Ben, but they heard him and prepared for pistols, rockets or combustibles of some sort, as ships were impossible under the circumstances, and no other “She” occurred to them.

A unanimous “O-o-o-o!” was heard when the curtain rose, but a stern “Hush!” from Thorny kept them mutely staring with all their eyes at the grand spectacle of the evening. There stood Lita with a wide flat saddle on her back, a white head-stall and reins, blue rosettes in her ears, and the look of a much-bewildered beast in her bright eyes. But who the gauzy, spangled, winged creature was, with a gilt crown on its head, a little bow in its hand, and one white slipper in the air, while the other seemed merely to touch the saddle, no one could tell for a minute, so strange and splendid did the apparition appear. No wonder Ben was not recognized in this brilliant disguise, which was more natural to him than Billy’s blue flannel or Thorny’s respectable garments. He had so begged to be allowed to show himself “just once,” as he used to be in the days when “father” tossed him up on the bare-backed old General, for hundreds to see and admire, that Miss Celia had consented, much against her will, and hastily arranged some bits of spangled tarlatan over the white cotton suit which was to simulate the regulation tights. Her old dancing slippers fitted, and gold paper did the rest, while Ben, sure of his power over Lita, promised not to break his bones, and lived for days on the thought of the moment when he could show the boys that he had not boasted vainly of past splendors.

Before the delighted children could get their breath, Lita gave signs of her dislike to the foot-lights, and, gathering up the reins that lay on her neck, Ben gave the old cry, “Houp-la!” and let her go, as he had often done before, straight out of the coach-house for a gallop round the orchard.

“Just turn about and you can see perfectly well, but stay where you are till he comes back,” commanded Thorny, as signs of commotion appeared in the excited audience.

Round went the twenty children as if turned by one crank, and sitting there they looked out into the moonlight where the shining figure flashed to and fro, now so near they could see the smiling face under the crown, now so far away that it glittered like a fire-fly among the dusky green. Lita enjoyed that race as heartily as she had done several others of late, and caracoled about as if anxious to make up for her lack of skill by speed and obedience. How much Ben liked it there is no need to tell, yet it was a proof of the good which three months of a quiet, useful life had done him, that even as he pranced gayly under the boughs thick with the red and yellow apples almost ready to be gathered, he found this riding in the fresh air with only his mates for an audience pleasanter than the crowded tent, the tired horses, profane men, and painted women, friendly as some of them had been to him.

After the first burst was over, he felt rather glad, on the whole, that he was going back to plain clothes, helpful school, and kindly people, who cared more to have him a good boy than the most famous Cupid that ever stood on one leg with a fast horse under him.

“You may make as much noise as you like, now; Lita’s had her run and will be as quiet as a lamb after it. Pull up, Ben, and come in; sister says you’ll get cold,” shouted Thorny, as the rider came cantering round after a leap over the lodge gate and back again.

So Ben pulled up, and the admiring boys and girls were allowed to gather about him, loud in their praises as they examined the pretty mare and the mythological character who lay easily on her back.

He looked very little like the god of love now; for he had lost one slipper and splashed his white legs with dew and dust, the crown had slipped down upon his neck, and the paper wings hung in an apple-tree where he had left them as he went by. No trouble in recognizing Ben, now; but somehow he didn’t want to be seen, and, instead of staying to be praised, he soon slipped away, making Lita his excuse to vanish behind the curtain while the rest went into the house to have a finishing-off game of blindman’s-buff in the big kitchen.

“Well, Ben, are you satisfied?” asked Miss Celia, as she stayed a moment to unpin the remains of his gauzy scarf and tunic.

“Yes, ‘m, thank you, it was tip-top.”

“But you look rather sober. Are you tired, or is it because you don’t want to take these trappings off and be plain Ben again?” she said, looking down into his face as he lifted it for her to free him from his gilded collar.

“I want to take ‘em off; for somehow I don’t feel respectable,” and he kicked away the crown he had helped to make so carefully, adding with a glance that said more than his words: “I’d rather be ‘plain Ben’ than any one else, for you like to have me.”

“Indeed I do; and I’m so glad to hear you say that, because I was afraid you’d long to be off to the old ways, and all I've tried to do would be undone. Would you like to go back, Ben?" and Miss Celia held his chin an instant, to watch the brown face that looked so honestly back at her.

"No, I wouldn't — unless — he was there and wanted me."

The chin quivered just a bit, but the black eyes were as bright as ever, and the boy's voice so earnest, she knew he spoke the truth, and laid her white hand softly on his head, as she answered in the tone he loved so much, because no one else had ever used it to him, —

"Father is not there; but I know he wants you, dear, and I am sure he would rather see you in a home like this than in the place you came from. Now go and dress; but, tell me first, has it been a happy birthday?"

"Oh, Miss Celia! I didn't know they could be so beautiful, and this is the beautifulest part of it; I don't know how to thank you, but I'm going to try — " and, finding words wouldn't come fast enough, Ben just put his two arms round her, quite speechless with gratitude; then, as if ashamed of his little outburst, he knelt down in a great hurry to untie his one shoe.

But Miss Celia liked his answer better than the finest speech ever made her, and went away through the moonlight, saying to herself, —

"If I can bring one lost lamb into the fold, I shall be the fitter for a shepherd's wife, by-and-by."

CHAPTER XXII A BOY'S BARGAIN

It was some days before the children were tired of talking over Ben's birthday party; for it was a great event in their small world; but, gradually, newer pleasures came to occupy their minds, and they began to plan the nutting frolics which always followed the early frosts. While waiting for Jack to open the chestnut burrs, they varied the monotony of school life by a lively scrimmage long known as "the wood-pile fight."

The girls liked to play in the half-empty shed, and the boys, merely for the fun of teasing, declared that they should not, so blocked up the doorway as fast as the girls cleared it. Seeing that the squabble was a merry one, and the exercise better for all than lounging in the sun or reading in school during recess, Teacher did not interfere, and the barrier rose and fell almost as regularly as the tide.

It would be difficult to say which side worked the harder; for the boys went before school began to build up the barricade, and the girls stayed after lessons were over to pull down the last one made in afternoon recess. They had their play-time first; and, while the boys waited inside, they heard the shouts of the girls, the banging of the wood, and the final crash, as the well-packed pile went down. Then, as the lassies came in, rosy, breathless, and triumphant, the lads rushed out to man the breach, and labor gallantly till all was as tight as hard blows could make it.

So the battle raged, and bruised knuckles, splinters in fingers, torn clothes, and rubbed shoes, were the only wounds received, while a great deal of fun was had out of the maltreated logs, and a lasting peace secured between two of the boys.

When the party was safely over, Sam began to fall into his old way of tormenting Ben by calling names, as it cost no exertion to invent trying speeches, and slyly utter them when most likely to annoy. Ben bore it as well as he could; but fortune favored him at last, as it usually does the patient, and he was able to make his own terms with his tormentor.

When the girls demolished the wood-pile, they performed a jubilee chorus on combs, and tin kettles, played like tambourines; the boys celebrated their victories with shrill whistles, and a drum accompaniment with fists on the shed walls. Billy brought his drum, and this was such an addition that Sam hunted up an old one of his little brother's, in order that he might join the drum corps. He had no sticks, however, and, casting about in his mind for a good substitute for the genuine thing, bethought him of bulrushes.

“Those will do first-rate, and there are lots in the ma’sh, if I can only get ‘em,” he said to himself, and turned off from the road on his way home to get a supply.

Now, this marsh was a treacherous spot, and the tragic story was told of a cow who got in there and sank till nothing was visible but a pair of horns above the mud, which suffocated the unwary beast. For this reason it was called “Cowslip Marsh,” the wags said, though it was generally believed to be so named for the yellow flowers which grew there in great profusion in the spring.

Sam had seen Ben hop nimbly from one tuft of grass to another when he went to gather cowslips for Betty, and the stout boy thought he could do the same. Two or three heavy jumps landed him, not among the bulrushes, as he had hoped, but in a pool of muddy water, where he sank up to his middle with alarming rapidity. Much scared, he tried to wade out, but could only flounder to a tussock of grass, and cling there, while he endeavored to kick his legs free. He got them out, but struggled in vain to coil them up or to hoist his heavy body upon the very small island in this sea of mud. Down they splashed again; and Sam gave a dismal groan as he thought of the leeches and water-snakes which might be lying in wait below. Visions of the lost cow also flashed across his agitated mind, and he gave a despairing shout very like a distracted “Moo!”

Few people passed along the lane, and the sun was setting, so the prospect of a night in the marsh nerved Sam to make a frantic plunge toward the bulrush island, which was nearer than the mainland, and looked firmer than any tussock round him. But he failed to reach this haven of rest, and was forced to stop at an old stump which stuck up, looking very like the moss-grown horns of the “dear departed.” Roosting here, Sam began to shout for aid in every key possible to the human voice. Such hoots and howls, whistles and roars, never woke the echoes of the lonely marsh before, or scared the portly frog who resided there in calm seclusion.

He hardly expected any reply but the astonished “Caw!” of the crow, who sat upon a fence watching him with gloomy interest; and when a cheerful “Hullo, there!” sounded from the lane, he was so grateful that tears of joy rolled down his fat cheeks.

“Come on! I’m in the ma’sh. Lend a hand and get me out!” bawled Sam, anxiously waiting for his deliverer to appear, for he could only see a hat bobbing along behind the hazel-bushes that fringed the lane.

Steps crashed through the bushes, and then over the wall came an active figure, at the sight of which Sam was almost ready to dive out of sight, for, of all possible boys, who should it be but Ben, the last person in the world whom he would like to have see him in his present pitiful plight.

“Is it you, Sam? Well, you are in a nice fix!” and Ben’s eyes began to twinkle with mischievous merriment, as well they might, for Sam certainly was a spectacle to convulse the soberest person. Perched unsteadily on the gnarled stump, with his muddy legs drawn up, his dismal face splashed with mud, and the whole lower half of his body as black as if he had been dipped in an inkstand, he presented such a comically doleful object that Ben danced about, laughing like a naughty will-o'-the-wisp who, having led a traveller astray then fell to jeering at him.

"Stop that, or I'll knock your head off!" roared Sam, in a rage.

"Come on and do it; I give you leave," answered Ben, sparring away derisively as the other tottered on his perch, and was forced to hold tight lest he should tumble off.

"Don't laugh, there 's a good chap, but fish me out somehow, or I shall get my death sitting here all wet and cold," whined Sam, changing his tune, and feeling bitterly that Ben had the upper hand now.

Ben felt it also; and, though a very good-natured boy, could not resist the temptation to enjoy this advantage for a moment at least.

"I won't laugh if I can help it; only you do look so like a fat, speckled frog, I may not be able to hold in. I'll pull you out pretty soon; but first I'm going to talk to you, Sam," said Ben, sobering down as he took a seat on the little point of land nearest the stranded Samuel.

"Hurry up, then; I'm as stiff as a board now, and it's no fun sitting here on this knotty old thing," growled Sam, with a discontented squirm.

"Dare say not, but 'it is good for you,' as you say when you rap me over the head. Look here, I've got you in a tight place, and I don't mean to help you a bit till you promise to let me alone. Now then!" and Ben's face grew stern with his remembered wrongs as he grimly eyed his discomfited foe.

"I'll promise fast enough if you won't tell anyone about this," answered Sam, surveying himself and his surroundings with great disgust.

"I shall do as I like about that."

"Then I won't promise a thing! I'm not going to have the whole school laughing at me," protested Sam, who hated to be ridiculed even more than Ben did.

"Very well; good-night!" and Ben walked off with his hands in his pockets as coolly as if the bog was Sam's favorite retreat.

"Hold on, don't be in such a hurry!" shouted Sam, seeing little hope of rescue if he let this chance go.

"All right!" and back came Ben, ready for further negotiations.

"I'll promise not to plague you, if you'll promise not to tell on me. Is that what you want?"

“Now I come to think of it, there is one thing more. I like to make a good bargain when I begin,” said Ben, with a shrewd air. “You must promise to keep Mose quiet, too. He follows your lead, and if you tell him to stop it he will. If I was big enough, I’d make you hold your tongues. I ain’t, so we’ll try this way.”

“Yes, Yes, I’ll see to Mose. Now, bring on a rail, there’s a good fellow. I’ve got a horrid cramp in my legs,” began Sam, thinking he had bought help dearly, yet admiring Ben’s cleverness in making the most of his chance.

Ben brought the rail, but, just as he was about to lay it from the main-land to the nearest tussock, he stopped, saying, with the naughty twinkle in his black eyes again, “One more little thing must be settled first, and then I’ll get you ashore. Promise you won’t plague the girls either, ‘specially Bab and Betty. You pull their hair, and they don’t like it.”

“Don’t neither! Wouldn’t touch that Bab for a dollar; she scratches and bites like a mad cat,” was Sam’s sulky reply.

“Glad of it; she can take care of herself. Betty can’t; and if you touch one of her pig-tails I’ll up and tell right out how I found you snivelling in the ma’sh like a great baby. So now!” and Ben emphasized his threat with a blow of the suspended rail which splashed the water over poor Sam, quenching his last spark of resistance.

“Stop! I will! — I will!”

“True as you live and breathe!” demanded Ben, sternly binding him by the most solemn oath he knew.

“True as I live and breathe,” echoed Sam, dolefully relinquishing his favorite pastime of pulling Betty’s braids and asking if she was at home.

“I’ll come over there and crook fingers on the bargain,” said Ben, settling the rail and running over it to the tuft, then bridging another pool and crossing again till he came to the stump.

“I never thought of that way,” said Sam, watching him with much inward chagrin at his own failure.

“I should think you’d written ‘Look before you leap,’ in your copy-book often enough to get the idea into your stupid head. Come, crook,” commanded Ben, leaning forward with extended little finger. Sam obediently performed the ceremony, and then Ben sat astride one of the horns of the stump while the muddy Crusoe went slowly across the rail from point to point till he landed safely on the shore, when he turned about and asked with an ungrateful jeer, —

“Now what’s going to become of you, old Look-before-you-leap?”

“Mud turtles can only sit on a stump and bawl till they are taken off, but frogs have legs worth something, and are not afraid of a little water,” answered Ben, hopping away in an opposite direction, since the pools between him and Sam were too wide for even his lively legs.

Sam waddled off to the brook in the lane to rinse the mud from his nether man before facing his mother, and was just wringing himself out when Ben came up, breathless but good natured, for he felt that he had made an excellent bargain for himself and friends.

“Better wash your face; it’s as speckled as a tiger-lily. Here’s my handkerchief if yours is wet,” he said, pulling out a dingy article which had evidently already done service as a towel.

“Don’t want it,” muttered Sam, gruffly, as he poured the water out of his muddy shoes.

“I was taught to say ‘Thanky’ when folks got me out of scrapes. But you never had much bringing up, though you do ‘live in a house with a gambrel roof,’“ retorted Ben, sarcastically quoting Sam’s frequent boast; then he walked off, much disgusted with the ingratitude of man.

Sam forgot his manners, but he remembered his promise, and kept it so well that all the school wondered. No one could guess the secret of Ben’s power over him, though it was evident that he had gained it in some sudden way, for at the least sign of Sam’s former tricks Ben would crook his little finger and wag it warningly, or call out “Bulrushes!” and Sam subsided with reluctant submission, to the great amazement of his mates. When asked what it meant, Sa, turned sulky; but Ben had much fun out of it, assuring the other boys that those were the signs and password of a secret society to which he and Sam belonged, and promised to tell them all about it if Sam would give him leave, which, of course, he would not.

This mystery, and the vain endeavors to find it out caused a lull in the war of the wood-pile, and before any new game was invented something happened which gave the children plenty to talk about for a time.

A week after the secret alliance was formed, Ben ran in one evening with a letter for Miss Celia. He found her enjoying the cheery blaze of the pine-cones the little girls had picked up for her, and Bab and Betty sat in the small chairs rocking luxuriously as they took turns to throw on the pretty fuel. Miss Celia turned quickly to receive the expected letter, glanced at the writing, post-mark and stamp, with an air of delighted surprise, then clasped it close in both hands, saying, as she hurried out of the room, —

“He has come! he has come! Now you may tell them, Thorny.”

“Tell its what? asked Bab, pricking up her cars at once.

“Oh, it’s only that George has come, and I suppose we shall go and get married right away,” answered Thorny, rubbing his hands as if he enjoyed the prospect.

“Are you going to be married? asked Betty, so soberly that the boys shouted, and Thorny, with difficulty composed himself sufficiently to explain.

“No, child, not just yet; but sister is, and I must go and see that all is done up ship-shape, and bring you home some wedding-cake. Ben will take care of you while I’m gone.”

“When shall you go?” asked Bab, beginning to long for her share of cake.

“To-morrow, I guess. Celia has been packed and ready for a week. We agreed to meet George in New York, and be married as soon as he got his best clothes unpacked. We are men of our word, and off we go. Won’t it be fun?”

“But when will you come back again?” questioned Betty, looking anxious.

“Don’t know. Sister wants to come soon, but I’d rather have our honeymoon somewhere else, — Niagara, Newfoundland, West Point, or the Rocky Mountains,” said Thorny, mentioning a few of the places he most desired to see.

“Do you like him?” asked Ben, very naturally wondering if the new master would approve of the young man-of-all-work.

“Don’t I? George is regularly jolly; though now he’s a minister, perhaps he’ll stiffen up and turn sober. Won’t it be a shame if he does?” and Thorny looked alarmed at the thought of losing his congenial friend.

“Tell about him; Miss Celia said you might”, put in Bab, whose experience of “jolly” ministers had been small.

“Oh, there isn’t much about it. We met in Switzerland going up Mount St. Bernard in a storm, and — ”

“Where the good dogs live?” inquired Betty, hoping they would come into the story.

“Yes; we spent the night up there, and George gave us his room; the house was so full, and he wouldn’t let me go down a steep place where I wanted to, and Celia thought he’d saved my life, and was very good to him. Then we kept meeting, and the first thing I knew she went and was engaged to him. I didn’t care, only she would come home so he might go on studying hard and get through quick. That was a year ago, and last winter we were in New York at uncle’s; and then, in the spring, I was sick, and we came here, and that’s all.”

“Shall you live here always when you come back? asked Bab, as Thorny paused for breath.

“Celia wants to. I shall go to college, so I don’t mind. George is going to help the old minister here and see how he likes it. I’m to study with him, and if he is as pleasant as he used to be we shall have capital times, — see if we don’t.”

“I wonder if he will want me round,” said Ben, feeling no desire to be a tramp again.

“I do, so you needn’t fret about that, my hearty,” answered Thorny, with a resounding slap on the shoulder which reassured Ben more than any promises.

"I'd like to see a live wedding, then we could play it with our dolls. I've got a nice piece of mosquito netting for a veil, and Belinda's white dress is clean. Do you s'pose Miss Celia will ask us to hers?" said Betty to Bab, as the boys began to discuss St. Bernard dogs with Spirit.

"I wish I could, dears," answered a voice behind them; and there was Miss Celia, looking so happy that the little girls wondered what the letter could have said to give her such bright eyes and smiling lips. "I shall not be gone long, or be a bit changed when I come back, to live among you years I hope, for I am fond of the old place now, and mean it shall be home," she added, caressing the yellow heads as if they were dear to her.

"Oh, goody!" cried Bab, while Betty whispered with both arms round Miss Celia, —

"I don't think we could bear to have anybody else come here to live."

"It is very pleasant to hear you say that, and I mean to make others feel so, if I can. I have been trying a little this summer, but when I come back I shall go to work in earnest to be a good minister's wife, and you must help me."

"We will," promised both children, ready for any thing except preaching in the high pulpit.

Then Miss Celia turned to Ben, saying, in the respectful way that always made him feel at least twenty-five, —

"We shall be off to-morrow, and I leave you in charge. Go on just as if we were here, and be sure nothing will be changed as far as you are concerned when we come back."

Ben's face beamed at that; but the only way he could express his relief was by making such a blaze in honor of the occasion that he nearly roasted the company.

Next morning, the brother and sister slipped quietly away, and the children hurried to school, eager to tell the great news that "Miss Celia and Thorny had gone to be married, and were coming back to live here for ever and ever."

CHAPTER XXIII SOMEBODY COMES

Bab and Betty had been playing in the avenue all the afternoon several weeks later, but as the shadows began to lengthen both agreed to sit upon the gate and rest while waiting for Ben, who had gone nutting with a party of boys. When they played house Bab was always the father, and went hunting or fishing with great energy and success, bringing home all sorts of game, from elephants and crocodiles to humming-birds and minnows. Betty was the mother, and a most notable little housewife, always mixing up imaginary delicacies with sand and dirt in old pans and broken china, which she baked in an oven of her own construction.

Both had worked hard that day, and were glad to retire to their favorite lounging-place, where Bab was happy trying to walk across the wide top bar without falling off, and Betty enjoyed slow, luxurious swings while her sister was recovering from her tumbles. On this occasion, having indulged their respective tastes, they paused for a brief interval of conversation, sitting side by side on the gate like a pair of plump gray chickens gone to roost.

“Don’t you hope Ben will get his bag full? We shall have such fun eating nuts evenings observed Bab, wrapping her arms in her apron, for it was October now, and the air was growing keen.

“Yes, and Ma says we may boil some in our little kettles. Ben promised we should have half,” answered Betty, still intent on her cookery.

“I shall save some of mine for Thorny.”

“I shall keep lots of mine for Miss Celia.”

“Doesn’t it seem more than two weeks since she went away?”

“I wonder what she’ll bring us.”

Before Bab could conjecture, the sound of a step and a familiar whistle made both look expectantly toward the turn in the road, all ready to cry out in one voice, “How many have you got?” Neither spoke a word, however, for the figure which presently appeared was not Ben, but a stranger, — a man who stopped whistling, and came slowly on dusting his shoes in the way-side grass, and brushing the sleeves of his shabby velveteen coat as if anxious to freshen himself up a bit.

“It’s a tramp, let’s run away,” whispered Betty, after a hasty look.

“I ain’t afraid,” and Bab was about to assume her boldest look when a sneeze spoilt it, and made her clutch the gate to hold on.

At that unexpected sound the man looked up, showing a thin, dark face, with a pair of sharp, black eyes, which surveyed the little girls so steadily that Betty quaked, and Bab began to wish she had at least jumped down inside the gate.

“How are you?” said the man with a goodnatured nod and smile, as if to reassure the round-eyed children staring at him.

“Pretty well, thank you, sir,” responded Bab, politely nodding back at him.

“Folks at home?” asked the man, looking over their heads toward the house.

“Only Ma; all the rest have gone to be married.”

“That sounds lively. At the other place all the folks had gone to a funeral,” and the man laughed as he glanced at the big house on the hill.

“Why, do you know the Squire?” exclaimed Bab, much surprised and reassured.

“Come on purpose to see him. Just strolling round till he gets back,” with an impatient sort of sigh.

“Betty thought you was a tramp, but I wasn’t afraid. I like tramps ever since Ben came,” explained Bab, with her usual candor.

“Who ‘s Ben!” and the man came nearer so quickly that Betty nearly fell backward. “Don’t you be scared, Sissy. I like little girls, so you set easy and tell me about Ben,” he added, in a persuasive tone, as he leaned on the gate so near that both could see what a friendly face he had in spite of its eager, anxious look.

“Ben is Miss Celia’s boy. We found him most starved in the coach-house, and he’s been here ever since,” answered Bab, comprehensively.

“Tell me about it. I like tramps, too,” and the man looked as if he did very much, as Bab told the little story in a few childish words that were better than a much more elegant account.

“You were very good to the little feller,” was all the man said when she ended her somewhat confused tale, in which she had jumbled the old coach and Miss Celia, dinner-pails and nutting, Sancho and circuses.

“‘Course we were! He’s a nice boy and we are fond of him, and he likes us,” said Bab, heartily.

“‘Specially me,” put in Betty, quite at ease now, for the black eyes had softened wonderfully, and the brown face was smiling all over.

“Don’t wonder a mite. You are the nicest pair of little girls I’ve seen this long time,” and the man put a hand on either side of them, as if he wanted to hug the chubby children. But he didn’t do it; he merely smiled and stood there asking questions till the two chatterboxes had told him every thing there was to tell in the most confiding manner, for he very soon ceased to seem like a stranger, and looked so familiar that Bab, growing inquisitive in her turn, suddenly said, —

“Haven’t you ever been here before? It seems as if I’d seen you.”

“Never in my life. Guess you’ve seen somebody that looks like me,” and the black eyes twinkled for a minute as they looked into the puzzled little faces before him, then he said, soberly, —

“I’m looking round for a likely boy; don’t you think this Ben would suite me? I want just such a lively sort of chap.”

“Are you a circus man?” asked Bab, quickly.

“Well, no, not now. I’m in better business.”

“I’m glad of it — we don’t approve of ‘em; but I do think they’re splendid!”

Bab began by gravely quoting Miss Celia, and ended with an irrepressible burst of admiration which contrasted drolly with her first remark.

Betty added, anxiously: “We can’t let Ben go any way. I know he wouldn’t want to, and Miss Celia would feel bad. Please don’t ask him.”

“He can do as he likes, I suppose. He hasn’t got any folks of his own, has he?”

“No, his father died in California, and Ben felt so bad he cried, and we were real sorry, and gave him a piece of Ma, ‘cause he was so lonesome,” answered Betty, in her tender little voice, with a pleading look which made the man stroke her smooth check and say, quite softly, —

“Bless your heart for that! I won’t take him away, child, or do a thing to trouble anybody that’s been good to him.”

“He ‘s coming now. I hear Sanch barking at the squirrels!” cried Bab, standing up to get a good look down the road.

The man turned quickly, and Betty saw that he breathed fast as he watched the spot where the low sunshine lay warmly on the red maple at the corner. Into this glow came unconscious Ben, whistling “Rory O’Moore,” loud and Clear, as he trudged along with a heavy bag of nuts over his shoulder and the light full on his contented face. Sancho trotted before and saw the stranger first, for the sun in Ben’s eyes dazzled him. Since his sad loss Sancho cherished a strong dislike to tramps, and now he paused to growl and show his teeth, evidently intending to warn this one off the premises.

“He won’t hurt you — ” began Bab, encouragingly; but before she could add a chiding word to the dog, Sanch gave an excited howl, and flew at the man’s throat as if about to throttle him.

Betty screamed, and Bab was about to go to the rescue when both perceived that the dog was licking the stranger’s face in an ecstasy of joy, and heard the man say as he hugged the curly beast, —

“Good old Sanch! I knew he wouldn’t forget master, and he doesn’t.”

“What’s the matter?” called Ben, coming up briskly, with a strong grip of his stout stick. There was no need of any answer, for, as he came into the shadow, he saw the man, and stood looking at him as if he were a ghost.

"It's father, Benny; don't you know me?" asked the man, with an odd sort of choke in his voice, as he thrust the dog away, and held out both hands to the boy. Down dropped the nuts, and crying, "Oh, Daddy, Daddy!" Ben cast himself into the arms of the shabby velveteen coat, while poor Sanch tore round them in distracted circles, barking wildly, as if that was the only way in which he could vent his rapture.

What happened next Bab and Betty never stopped to see, but, dropping from their roost, they went flying home like startled Chicken Littles with the astounding news that "Ben's father has come alive, and Sancho knew him right away!"

Mrs. Moss had just got her cleaning done up, and was resting a minute before setting the table, but she flew out of her old rocking-chair when the excited children told the wonderful tale, exclaiming as they ended, —

"Where is he? Go bring him here. I declare it fairly takes my breath away!"

Before Bab could obey, or her mother compose herself, Sancho bounced in and spun round like an insane top, trying to stand on his head, walk upright, waltz and bark all at once, for the good old fellow had so lost his head that he forgot the loss of his tail.

"They are coming! they are coming! See, Ma, what a nice man he is," said Bab, hopping about on one foot as she watched the slowly approaching pair.

"My patience, don't they look alike! I should know he was Ben's Pa anywhere!" said Mrs. Moss, running to the door in a hurry.

They certainly did resemble one another, and it was almost comical to see the same curve in the legs, the same wide-awake style of wearing the hat, the same sparkle of the eye, good-natured smile and agile motion of every limb. Old Ben carried the bag in one hand while young Ben held the other fast, looking a little shame-faced at his own emotion now, for there were marks of tears on his cheeks, but too glad to repress the delight he felt that he had really found Daddy this side heaven.

Mrs. Moss unconsciously made a pretty little picture of herself as she stood at the door with her honest face shining and both hands ont, saying in a hearty tone, which was a welcome in itself,

"I'm real glad to see you safe and well, Mr. Brown! Come right in and make yourself to home. I guess there isn't a happier boy living than Ben is to-night."

"And I know there isn't a gratefuler man living than I am for your kindness to my poor forsaken little feller," answered Mr. Brown, dropping both his burdens to give the comely woman's hands a hard shake.

"Now don't say a word about it, but sit down and rest, and we'll have tea in less'n no time. Ben must be tired and hungry, though he's so happy I don't believe he knows it," laughed Mrs. Moss, bustling away to hide the tears in her eyes, anxious to make things sociable and easy all round.

With this end in view she set forth her best china, and covered the table with food enough for a dozen, thanking her stars that it was baking day, and every thing had turned out well. Ben and his father sat talking by the window till they were bidden to "draw up and help themselves" with such hospitable warmth that every thing had an extra relish to the hungry pair.

Ben paused occasionally to stroke the rusty coat-sleeve with bread-and-buttery fingers to convince himself that "Daddy" had really come, and his father disposed of various inconvenient emotions by eating as if food was unknown in California. Mrs. Moss beamed on every one from behind the big tea-pot like a mild full moon, while Bab and Betty kept interrupting one another in their eagerness to tell something new about Ben and how Sanch lost his tail.

"Now you let Mr. Brown talk a little; we all want to hear how he 'came alive,' as you call it," said Mrs. Moss, as they drew round the fire in the "settin'-room," leaving the tea-things to take care of themselves.

It was not a long story, but a very interesting one to this circle of listeners; all about the wild life on the plains trading for mustangs, the terrible kick from a vicious horse that nearly killed Ben, sen., the long months of unconsciousness in the California hospital, the slow recovery, the journey back, Mr. Smithers's tale of the boy's disappearance, and then the anxious trip to find out from Squire Allen where he now was.

"I asked the hospital folks to write and tell you as soon as I knew whether I was on my head or my heels, and they promised; but they didn't; so I came off the minute I could, and worked my way back, expecting to find you at the old place. I was afraid you'd have worn out your welcome here and gone off again, for you are as fond of travelling as your father."

"I wanted to sometimes, but the folks here were so dreadful good to me I couldn't," confessed Ben, secretly surprised to find that the prospect of going off with Daddy even cost him a pang of regret, for the boy had taken root in the friendly soil, and was no longer a wandering thistle-down, tossed about by every wind that blew.

"I know what I owe 'em, and you and I will work out that debt before we die, or our name isn't B.B.," said Mr. Brown, with an emphatic slap on his knee, which Ben imitated half unconsciously as he exclaimed heartily, —

"That's so!" adding, more quietly, "What are you going to do now? Go back to Smithers and the old business?"

"Not likely, after the way he treated you, Sonny. I've had it out with him, and he won't want to see me again in a hurry," answered Mr. Brown, with a sudden kindling of the eye that reminded Bab of Ben's face when he shook her after losing Sancho.

"There's more circuses than his in the world; but I'll have to limber out ever so much before I'm good for much in that line," said the boy, stretching his stout arms and legs with a curious mixture of satisfaction and regret.

"You've been living in clover and got fat, you rascal," and his father gave him a poke here and there, as Mr. Squeers did the plump Wackford, when displaying him as a specimen of the fine diet at Do-the-boys Hall. "Don't believe I could put you up now if I tried, for I haven't got my strength back yet, and we are both out of practice. It's just as well, for I've about made up my mind to quit the business and settle down somewhere for a spell, if I can get any thing to do," continued the rider, folding his arms and gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

"I shouldn't wonder a mite if you could right here, for Mr. Towne has a great boarding-stable over yonder, and he's always wanting men." Said Mrs. Moss, eagerly, for she dreaded to have Ben go, and no one could forbid it if his father chose to take him away.

"That sounds likely. Thanky, ma'am. I'll look up the concern and try my chance. Would you call it too great a come-down to have father an 'ostler after being first rider in the 'Great Golden Menagerie, Circus, and Colossem,' hey, Ben?" asked Mr. Brown, quoting the well-remembered show-bill with a laugh.

"No, I shouldn't; it's real jolly up there when the big barn is full and eighty horses have to be taken care of. I love to go and see 'em. Mr. Towne asked me to come and be stable-boy when I rode the kicking gray the rest were afraid of. I hankered to go, but Miss Celia had just got my new books, and I knew she'd feel bad if I gave up going to school. Now I'm glad I didn't, for I get on first rate and like it."

"You done right, boy, and I'm pleased with you. Don't you ever be ungrateful to them that befriended you, if you want to prosper. I'll tackle the stable business a Monday and see what's to be done. Now I ought to be walking, but I'll be round in the morning ma'am, if you can spare Ben for a spell to-morrow. We'd like to have a good Sunday tramp and talk; wouldn't we, Sonny?" and Mr. Brown rose to go with his hand on Ben's shoulder, as if loth to leave him even for the night.

Mrs. Moss saw the longing in his face, and forgetting that he was an utter stranger, spoke right out of her hospitable heart.

"It's a long piece to the tavern, and my little back bedroom is always ready. It won't make a mite of trouble if you don't mind a plain place, and you are heartily welcome."

Mr. Brown looked pleased, but hesitated to accept any further favor from the good soul who had already done so much for him and his. Ben gave him no time to speak, however, for running to a door he flung it open and beckoned, saying, eagerly, —

“Do stay, father; it will be so nice to have you. This is a tip-top room; I slept here the night I came, and that bed was just splendid after bare ground for a fortnight.”

“I’ll stop, and as I’m pretty well done up, I guess we may as well turn in now,” answered the new guest; then, as if the memory of that homeless little lad so kindly cherished made his heart overflow in spite of him, Mr. Brown paused at the door to say hastily, with a hand on Bab and Betty’s heads, as if his promise was a very earnest one, —

“I don’t forget, ma’am, these children shall never want a friend while Ben Brown’s alive;” then he shut the door so quickly that the other Ben’s prompt “Hear, hear!” was cut short in the middle.

“I s’pose he means that we shall have a piece of Ben’s father, because we gave Ben a piece of our mother,” said Betty, softly.

“Of course he does, and it’s all fair,” answered Bab, decidedly. “Isn’t he a nice man, Ma?

“Go to bed, children,” was all the answer she got; but when they were gone, Mrs. Moss, as she washed up her dishes, more than once glanced at a certain nail where a man’s hat had not hung for five years, and thought with a sigh what a natural, protecting air that slouched felt had.

If one wedding were not quite enough for a child’s story, we might here hint what no one dreamed of then, that before the year came round again Ben had found a mother, Bab and Betty a father, and Mr. Brown’s hat was quite at home behind the kitchen door. But, on the whole, it is best not to say a word about it.

CHAPTER XXIV THE GREAT GATE IS OPENED

The Browns were up and out so early next morning that Bab and Betty were sure they had run away in the night. But on looking for them, they were discovered in the coach-house criticising Lita, both with their hands in their pockets, both chewing straws, and looking as much alike as a big elephant and a small one.

“That’s as pretty a little span as I’ve seen for a long time,” said the elder Ben, as the children came trotting down the path hand in hand, with the four blue bows at the ends of their braids bobbing briskly up and down.

“The nigh one is my favorite, but the off one is the best goer, though she’s dreadfully hard bitted,” answered Ben the younger, with such a comical assumption of a jockey’s important air that his father laughed as he said in an undertone, —

“Come, boy, we must drop the old slang since we’ve given up the old business. These good folks are making a gentleman of you, and I won’t be the one to spoil their work. Hold on, my dears, and I’ll show you how they say good-morning in California,” he added, beckoning to the little girls, who now came up rosy and smiling.

“Breakfast is ready, sir,” said Betty, looking much relieved to find them.

“We thought you’d run away from us,” explained Bab, as both put out their hands to shake those extended to them.

“That would be a mean trick. But I’m going to run away with you,” and Mr. Brown whisked a little girl to either shoulder before they knew what had happened, while Ben, remembering the day, with difficulty restrained himself from turning a series of triumphant somersaults before them all the way to the door, where Mrs. Moss stood waiting for them.

After breakfast Ben disappeared for a short time, and returned in his Sunday suit, looking so neat and fresh that his father surveyed him with surprise and pride as he came in full of boyish satisfaction in his trim array.

“Here’s a smart young chap! Did you take all that trouble just to go to walk with old Daddy?” asked Mr. Brown, stroking the smooth head, for they were alone just then, Mrs. Moss and the children being up stairs preparing for church.

“I thought may be you’d like to go to meeting first,” answered Ben, looking up at him with such a happy face that it was hard to refuse any thing. “I’m too shabby, Sonny, else I’d go in a minute to please you.”

“Miss Celia said God didn’t mind poor clothes, and she took me when I looked worse than you do. I always go in the morning; she likes to have me," said Ben, turning his hat about as if not quite sure what he ought to do.

"Do you want to go?" asked his father in a tone of surprise.

"I want to please her, if you don't mind. We could have our tramp this afternoon."

"I haven't been to meeting since mother died, and it don't seem to come easy, though I know I ought to, seeing I'm alive and here," and Mr. Brown looked soberly out at the lovely autumn world as if glad to be in it after his late danger and pain.

"Miss Celia said church was a good place to take our troubles, and to be thankful in. I went when I thought you were dead, and now I'd love to go when I've got my Daddy safe again."

No one saw him, so Ben could not resist giving his father a sudden hug, which was warmly returned as the man said earnestly, —

"I'll go, and thank the Lord hearty for giving me back my boy better'n I left him!"

For a minute nothing was heard but the loud tick of the old clock and a mournful whine front Sancho, shut up in the shed lest he should go to church without an invitation.

Then, as steps were heard on the stairs, Mr. Brown caught up his hat, saying hastily, —

"I ain't fit to go with them, you tell 'm, and I'll slip into a back seat after folks are in. I know the way." And, before Ben could reply, he was gone. Nothing was seen of him along the way, but he saw the little party, and rejoiced again over his boy, changed in so many ways for the better; for Ben was the one thing which had kept his heart soft through all the trials and temptations of a rough life.

"I promised Mary I'd do my best for the poor baby she had to leave, and I tried; but I guess a better friend than I am has been raised up for him when he needed her most. It won't hurt me to follow him in this road," thought Mr. Brown, as he came out into the highway from his stroll "across-lots," feeling that it would be good for him to stay in this quiet place, for his own as well as his son's sake.

The Bell had done ringing when he reached the green, but a single boy sat on the steps and rail to meet him, saying, with a reproachful look, —

"I wasn't going to let you be alone, and have folks think I was ashamed of my father. Come, Daddy, we'll sit together."

So Ben led his father straight to the Squire's pew, and sat beside him with a face so full of innocent pride and joy, that people would have suspected the truth if he had not already told many of them. Mr. Brown, painfully conscious of his shabby coat, was rather “taken aback,” as he expressed it; but the Squire’s shake of the hand, and Mrs. Allen’s gracious nod enabled him to face the eyes of the interested congregation, the younger portion of which stared steadily at him all sermon time, in spite of paternal frowns and maternal tweakings in the rear.

But the crowning glory of the day came after church, when the Squire said to Ben, and Sam heard him, —

“I’ve got a letter for you from Miss Celia. Come home with me, and bring your father. I want to talk to him.”

The boy proudly escorted his parent to the old carry-all, and, tucking himself in behind with Mrs. Allen, had the satisfaction of seeing the slouched felt hat side by side with the Squire’s Sunday beaver in front, as they drove off at such an unusually smart pace, it was evident that Duke knew there was a critical eye upon him. The interest taken in the father was owing to the son at first; but, by the time the story was told, old Ben had won friends for himself not only because of the misfortunes which he had evidently borne in a manly way, but because of his delight in the boy’s improvement, and the desire he felt to turn his hand to any honest work, that he might keep Ben happy and contented in this good home.

“I’ll give you a line to Towne. Smithers spoke well of you, and your own ability will be the best recommendation,” said the Squire, as he parted from them at his door, having given Ben the letter.

Miss Celia had been gone a fortnight, and every one was longing to have her back. The first week brought Ben a newspaper, with a crinkly line drawn round the marriages to attract attention to that spot, and one was marked by a black frame with a large hand pointing at it from the margin. Thorny sent that; but the next week came a parcel for Mrs. Moss, and in it was discovered a box of wedding cake for every member of the family, including Sancho, who ate his at one gulp, and chewed up the lace paper which covered it. This was the third week; and, as if there could not be happiness enough crowded into it for Ben, the letter he read on his way home told him that his dear mistress was coming back on the following Saturday. One passage particularly pleased him, —

“I want the great gate opened, so that the new master may go in that way. Will you see that it is done, and all made neat afterward? Randa will give you the key, and you may have out all your flags if you like, for the old place cannot look too gay for this home-coming.”

Sunday though it was, Ben could not help waving the letter over his head as he ran in to tell Mrs. Moss the glad news, and begin at once to plan the welcome they would give Miss Celia, for he never called her any thing else.

During their afternoon stroll in the mellow sunshine, Ben continued to talk of her, never tired of telling about his happy summer under her roof. And Mr. Brown was never weary of hearing, for every hour showed him more plainly what a lovely miracle her gentle words had wrought, and every hour increased his gratitude, his desire to return the kindness in some humble way. He had his wish, and did his part handsomely when he least expected to have a chance.

On Monday he saw Mr. Towne, and, thanks to the Squire’s good word, was engaged for a month on trial, making himself so useful that it was soon evident he was the right man in the right place. He lived on the hill, but managed to get down to the little brown house in the evening for a word with Ben, who just now was as full of business as if the President and his Cabinet were coming.

Every thing was put in apple-pie order in and about the old house; the great gate, with much creaking of rusty hinges and some clearing away of rubbish, was set wide open, and the first creature who entered it was Sancho, solemnly dragging the dead mullein which long ago had grown above the keyhole. October frosts seemed to have spared some of the brightest leaves for this especial occasion; and on Saturday the arched gate-way was hung with gay wreaths, red and yellow sprays strewed the flags, and the porch was a blaze of color with the red woodbine, that was in its glory when the honeysuckle was leafless.

Fortunately it was a half-holiday, so the children could trim and chatter to their heart’s content, and the little girls ran about sticking funny decorations where no one would ever think of looking for them. Ben was absorbed in his flags, which were sprinkled all down the avenue with a lavish display, suggesting several Fourth of Julys rolled into one. Mr. Brown had come to lend a hand, and did so most energetically, for the break-neck things he did with his son during the decoration fever would have terrified Mrs. Moss out of her wits, if she had not been in the house giving last touches to every room, while Randa and Katy set forth a sumptuous tea.

All was going well, and the train would be due in an hour, when luckless Bab nearly turned the rejoicing into mourning, the feast into ashes. She heard her mother say to Randa, “There ought to be a fire in every room, it looks so cheerful, and the air is chilly spite of the sunshine;” and, never waiting to hear the reply that some of the long-unused chimneys were not safe till cleaned, off went Bab with an apron full of old shingles, and made a roaring blaze in the front room fire-place, which was of all others the one to be let alone, as the flue was out of order.

Charmed with the brilliant light and the crackle of the tindery fuel, Miss Bab refilled her apron, and fed the fire till the chimney began to rumble ominously, sparks to fly out at the top, and soot and swallows’ nests to come tumbling down upon the hearth. Then, scared at what she had done, the little mischief-maker hastily buried her fire, swept up the rubbish, and ran off, thinking no one would discover her prank if she never told.

Everybody was very busy, and the big chimney blazed and rumbled unnoticed till the cloud of smoke caught Ben's eye as he festooned his last effort in the flag line, part of an old sheet with the words "Father has come!" in red cambric letters half a foot long sewed upon it.

"Hullo! I do believe they've got up a bonfire, without asking my leave. Miss Celia never would let us, because the sheds and roofs are so old and dry; I must see about it. Catch me, Daddy, I'm coming down!" cried Ben, dropping out of the elm with no more thought of where he might light than a squirrel swinging from bough to bough.

His father caught him, and followed in haste as his nimble-footed son raced up the avenue, to stop in the gate-way, frightened at the prospect before him, for falling sparks had already kindled the roof here and there, and the chimney smoked and roared like a small volcano, while Katy's wails and Randa's cries for water came from within.

"Up there with wet blankets, while I get out the hose!" cried Mr. Brown, as he saw at a glance what the danger was.

Ben vanished; and, before his father got the garden hose rigged, he was on the roof with a dripping blanket over the worst spot. Mrs. Moss had her wits about her in a minute, and ran to put in the fireboard, and stop the draught. Then, stationing Randa to watch that the falling cinders did no harm inside, she hurried off to help Mr. Brown, who might not know where things were. But he had roughed it so long, that he was the man for emergencies, and seemed to lay his hand on whatever was needed, by a sort of instinct. Finding that the hose was too short to reach the upper part of the roof, he was on the roof in a jiffy with two pails of water, and quenched the most dangerous spots before much harm was done.

This he kept up till the chimney burned itself out, while Ben dodged about among the gables with a watering pot, lest some stray sparks should be overlooked, and break out afresh.

While they worked there, Betty ran to and fro with a dipper of water, trying to help; and Sancho barked violently, as if he objected to this sort of illumination. But where was Bab, who revelled in flurries? No one missed her till the fire was out, and the tired, sooty people met to talk over the danger just escaped.

"Poor Miss Celia wouldn't have had a roof over her head, if it hadn't been for you, Mr. Brown," said Mrs. Moss, sinking into a kitchen chair, pale with the excitement.

“It would have burnt lively, but I guess it’s all right now. Keep an eye on the roof, Ben, and I’ll step up garret and see if all’s safe there. Didn’t you know that chimney was foul, ma’am?” asked the man, as he wiped the perspiration off his grimy face.

“Randa said it was, and I ‘in surprised she made a fire there,” began Mrs. Moss, looking at the maid, who just then came in with a pan full of soot.

“Bless you, ma’am, I never thought of such a thing, nor Katy neither. That naughty Bab must have done it, and so don’t dar’st to show herself,” answered the irate Randa, whose nice room was in a mess.

“Where is the child?” asked her mother; and a hunt was immediately instituted by Betty and Sancho, while the elders cleared up.

Anxious Betty searched high and low, called and cried, but all in vain; and was about to sit down in despair, when Sancho made a bolt into his new kennel and brought out a shoe with a foot in it while a doleful squeal came from the straw within.

“Oh, Bab, how could you do it? Ma was frightened dreadfully,” said Betty, gently tugging at the striped leg, as Sancho poked his head in for another shoe.

“Is it all burnt up?” demanded a smothered voice from the recesses of the kennel.

“Only pieces of the roof. Ben and his father put it out, and I helped,” answered Betty, cheering up a little as she recalled her noble exertions.

“What do they do to folks who set houses afire?” asked the voice again.

“I don’t know; but you needn’t be afraid, there isn’t much harm done, I guess, and Miss Celia will forgive you, she’s so good.”

“Thorny won’t; he calls me a ‘botheration,’ and I guess I am,” mourned the unseen culprit, with sincere contrition.

“I’ll ask him; he is always good to me. They will be here pretty soon, so you’d better come out and be made tidy,” suggested the comforter.

“I never can come out, for every one will hate me,” sobbed Bab among the straw, as she pulled in her foot, as if retiring for ever from an outraged world.

“Ma won’t, she’s too busy cleaning up; so it’s a good time to come. Let’s run home, wash our hands, and be all nice when they see us. I’ll love you, no matter what anybody else does,” said Betty, consoling the poor little sinner, and proposing the sort of repentance most likely to find favor in the eyes of the agitated elders.

“P’raps I’d better go home, for Sanch will want his bed,” and Bab gladly availed herself of that excuse to back out of her refuge, a very crumpled, dusty young lady, with a dejected face and much straw sticking in her hair.

Betty led her sadly away, for she still protested that she never should dare to meet the offended public again; but in fifteen minutes both appeared in fine order and good spirits, and naughty Bab escaped a lecture for the time being, as the train would soon be due.

At the first sound of the car whistle every one turned good-natured as if by magic, and flew to the gate smiling as if all mishaps were forgiven and forgotten. Mrs. Moss, however, slipped quietly away, and was the first to greet Mrs. Celia as the carriage stopped at the entrance of the avenue, so that the luggage might go in by way of the lodge.

“We will walk up and you shall tell us the news as we go, for I see you have some,” said the young lady, in her friendly manner, when Mrs. Moss had given her welcome and paid her respects to the gentleman who shook hands in a way that convinced her he was indeed what Thorny called him, “regularly jolly,” though he was a minister.

That being exactly what she came for, the good woman told her tidings as rapidly as possible, and the new-comers were so glad to hear of Ben’s happiness they made very light of Bab’s bonfire, though it had nearly burnt their house down.

“We won’t say a word about it, for every one must be happy to-day,” said Mr. George, so kindly that Mrs. Moss felt a load taken off her heart at once.

“Bab was always teasing me for fireworks, but I guess she has had enough for the present,” laughed Thorny, who was gallantly escorting Bab’s mother up the avenue.

“Every one is so kind! Teacher was out with the children to cheer us as we passed, and here you all are making things pretty for me,” said Mrs. Celia, smiling with tears in her eyes, as they drew near the great gate, which certainly did present an animated if not an imposing appearance.

Randa and Katy stood on one side, all in their best, bobbing delighted courtesies; Mr. Brown, half hidden behind the gate on the other side, was keeping Sancho erect, so that he might present arms promptly when the bride appeared. As flowers were scarce, on either post stood a rosy little girl clapping her hands, while out from the thicket of red and yellow boughs, which made a grand bouquet in the lantern frame, came Ben’s head and shoulders, as he waved his grandest flag with its gold paper “Welcome Home!” on a blue ground.

“Isn’t it beautiful!” cried Mrs. Celia, throwing kisses to the children, shaking hands with her maids, and glancing brightly at the stranger who was keeping Sanch quiet.

“Most people adorn their gate-posts with stone balls, vases, or griffins; your living images are a great improvement, love, especially the happy boy in the middle,” said Mr. George, eying Ben with interest, as he nearly tumbled overboard, top-heavy with his banner.

"You must finish what I have only begun," answered Celia, adding gayly as Sancho broke loose and came to offer both his paw and his congratulations. "Sanch, introduce your master, that I may thank him for coming back in time to save my old house."

"If I'd saved a dozen it wouldn't have half paid for all you've done for my boy, ma'am," answered Mr. Brown, bursting out from behind the gate quite red with gratitude and pleasure.

"I loved to do it, so please remember that this is still his home till you make one for him. Thank God, he is no longer fatherless!" and her sweet face said even more than her words as the white hand cordially shook the brown one with a burn across the back.

"Come on, sister. I see the tea-table all ready, and I'm awfully hungry," interrupted Thorny, who had not a ray of sentiment about him, though very glad Ben had got his father back again.

"Come over, by-and-by, little friends, and let me thank you for your pretty welcome, — it certainly is a warm one;" and Mrs. Celia glanced merrily from the three bright faces above her to the old chimney, which still smoked sullenly.

"Oh, don't!" cried Bab, hiding her face.

"She didn't mean to," added Betty, pleadingly.

"Three cheers for the bride!" roared Ben, dipping his flag, as leaning on her husband's arm his dear mistress passed under the gay arch, along the leaf-strewn walk, over the threshold of the house which was to be her happy home for many years.

The closed gate where the lonely little wanderer once lay was always to stand open now, and the path where children played before was free to all comers, for a hospitable welcome henceforth awaited rich and poor, young and old, sad and gay, Under the Lilacs.

JACK AND JILL

A VILLAGE STORY

This novel was first published in 1879 and takes place in a small New England town after the Civil War. Jack Minot and Janey Pecq are best friends who live next door to each other. They are always seen together, and so Janey soon gets the nickname of Jill, to mimic the old rhyme.

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JACK AND JILL

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To coast with fun and laughter;
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

Chapter I. The Catastrophe

"Clear the lulla!" was the general cry on a bright December afternoon, when all the boys and girls of Harmony Village were out enjoying the first good snow of the season. Up and down three long coasts they went as fast as legs and sleds could carry them. One smooth path led into the meadow, and here the little folk congregated; one swept across the pond, where skaters were darting about like water-bugs; and the third, from the very top of the steep hill, ended abruptly at a rail fence on the high bank above the road. There was a group of lads and lasses sitting or leaning on this fence to rest after an exciting race, and, as they reposed, they amused themselves with criticising their mates, still absorbed in this most delightful of out-door sports.

"Here comes Frank Minot, looking as solemn as a judge," cried one, as a tall fellow of sixteen spun by, with a set look about the mouth and a keen sparkle of the eyes, fixed on the distant goal with a do-or-die expression.

"Here's Molly Loo
And little Boo!"

sang out another; and down came a girl with flying hair, carrying a small boy behind her, so fat that his short legs stuck out from the sides, and his round face looked over her shoulder like a full moon.

"There's Gus Burton; doesn't he go it?" and such a very long boy whizzed by, that it looked almost as if his heels were at the top of the hill when his head was at the bottom!

"Hurrah for Ed Devlin!" and a general shout greeted a sweet-faced lad, with a laugh on his lips, a fine color on his brown cheek, and a gay word for every girl he passed.

"Laura and Lotty keep to the safe coast into the meadow, and Molly Loo is the only girl that dares to try this long one to the pond. I wouldn't for the world; the ice can't be strong yet, though it is cold enough to freeze one's nose off," said a timid damsel, who sat hugging a post and screaming whenever a mischievous lad shook the fence.

"No, she isn't; here's Jack and Jill going like fury."

"Clear the track
For jolly Jack!"

sang the boys, who had rhymes and nicknames for nearly every one.

Down came a gay red sled, bearing a boy who seemed all smile and sunshine, so white were his teeth, so golden was his hair, so bright and happy his whole air. Behind him clung a little gypsy of a girl, with black eyes and hair, cheeks as red as her hood, and a face full of fun and sparkle, as she waved Jack's blue tippet like a banner with one hand, and held on with the other.

"Jill goes wherever Jack does, and he lets her. He's such a good-natured chap, he can't say 'No.'"

"To a girl," slyly added one of the boys, who had wished to borrow the red sled, and had been politely refused because Jill wanted it.

"He's the nicest boy in the world, for he never gets mad," said the timid young lady, recalling the many times Jack had shielded her from the terrors which beset her path to school, in the shape of cows, dogs, and boys who made faces and called her "'Fraid-cat."

"He doesn't dare to get mad with Jill, for she'd take his head off in two minutes if he did," growled Joe Flint, still smarting from the rebuke Jill had given him for robbing the little ones of their safe coast because he fancied it.

"She wouldn't! she's a dear! *You* needn't sniff at her because she is poor. She's ever so much brighter than you are, or she wouldn't always be at the head of your class, old Joe," cried the girls, standing by their friend with a unanimity which proved what a favorite she was.

Joe subsided with as scornful a curl to his nose as its chilly state permitted, and Merry Grant introduced a subject of general interest by asking abruptly, —

"Who is going to the candy-scrape to-night?"

"All of us. Frank invited the whole set, and we shall have a tip-top time. We always do at the Minots'," cried Sue, the timid trembler.

"Jack said there was a barrel of molasses in the house, so there would be enough for all to eat and some to carry away. They know how to do things handsomely;" and the speaker licked his lips, as if already tasting the feast in store for him.

"Mrs. Minot is a mother worth having," said Molly Loo, coming up with Boo on the sled; and she knew what it was to need a mother, for she had none, and tried to care for the little brother with maternal love and patience.

"She is just as sweet as she can be!" declared Merry, enthusiastically.

"Especially when she has a candy-scrape," said Joe, trying to be amiable, lest he should be left out of the party.

Whereat they all laughed, and went gayly away for a farewell frolic, as the sun was setting and the keen wind nipped fingers and toes as well as noses.

Down they went, one after another, on the various coasts, — solemn Frank, long Gus, gallant Ed, fly-away Molly Loo, pretty Laura and Lotty, grumpy Joe, sweet-faced Merry with Sue shrieking wildly behind her, gay Jack and gypsy

Jill, always together, — one and all bubbling over with the innocent jollity born of healthful exercise. People passing in the road below looked up and smiled involuntarily at the red-cheeked lads and lasses, filling the frosty air with peals of laughter and cries of triumph as they flew by in every conceivable attitude; for the fun was at its height now, and the oldest and gravest observers felt a glow of pleasure as they looked, remembering their own young days.

"Jack, take me down that coast. Joe said I wouldn't dare to do it, so I must," commanded Jill, as they paused for breath after the long trudge up hill. Jill, of course, was not her real name, but had been given because of her friendship with Jack, who so admired Janey Pecq's spirit and fun.

"I guess I wouldn't. It is very bumpy and ends in a big drift; not half so nice as this one. Hop on and we'll have a good spin across the pond;" and Jack brought "Thunderbolt" round with a skilful swing and an engaging air that would have won obedience from anybody but wilful Jill.

"It is very nice, but I won't be told I don't 'dare' by any boy in the world. If you are afraid, I'll go alone." And, before he could speak, she had snatched the rope from his hand, thrown herself upon the sled, and was off, helter-skelter, down the most dangerous coast on the hill-side.

She did not get far, however; for, starting in a hurry, she did not guide her steed with care, and the red charger landed her in the snow half-way down, where she lay laughing till Jack came to pick her up.

"If you *will* go, I'll take you down all right. I'm not afraid, for I've done it a dozen times with the other fellows; but we gave it up because it is short and bad," he said, still good-natured, though a little hurt at the charge of cowardice; for Jack was as brave as a little lion, and with the best sort of bravery, — the courage to do right.

"So it is; but I *must* do it a few times, or Joe will plague me and spoil my fun to-night," answered Jill, shaking her skirts and rubbing her blue hands, wet and cold with the snow.

"Here, put these on; I never use them. Keep them if they fit; I only carry them to please mother." And Jack pulled out a pair of red mittens with the air of a boy used to giving away.

"They are lovely warm, and they do fit. Must be too small for your paws, so I'll knit you a new pair for Christmas, and make you wear them, too," said Jill, putting on the mittens with a nod of thanks, and ending her speech with a stamp of her rubber boots to enforce her threat.

Jack laughed, and up they trudged to the spot whence the three coasts diverged.

"Now, which will you have?" he asked, with a warning look in the honest blue eyes which often unconsciously controlled naughty Jill against her will.

“That one!” and the red mitten pointed firmly to the perilous path just tried.

“You will do it?”

“I will!”

“Come on, then, and hold tight.”

Jack’s smile was gone now, and he waited without a word while Jill tucked herself up, then took his place in front, and off they went on the brief, breathless trip straight into the drift by the fence below.

“I don’t see anything very awful in that. Come up and have another. Joe is watching us, and I’d like to show him that *we* aren’t afraid of anything,” said Jill, with a defiant glance at a distant boy, who had paused to watch the descent.

“It is a regular ‘go-bang,’ if that is what you like,” answered Jack, as they plowed their way up again.

“It is. You boys think girls like little mean coasts without any fun or danger in them, as if we couldn’t be brave and strong as well as you. Give me three go-bangs and then we’ll stop. My tumble doesn’t count, so give me two more and then I’ll be good.”

Jill took her seat as she spoke, and looked up with such a rosy, pleading face that Jack gave in at once, and down they went again, raising a cloud of glittering snow-dust as they reined up in fine style with their feet on the fence.

“It’s just splendid! Now, one more!” cried Jill, excited by the cheers of a sleighing party passing below.

Proud of his skill, Jack marched back, resolved to make the third “go” the crowning achievement of the afternoon, while Jill pranced after him as lightly as if the big boots were the famous seven-leagued ones, and chattering about the candy-scrape and whether there would be nuts or not.

So full were they of this important question, that they piled on hap-hazard, and started off still talking so busily that Jill forgot to hold tight and Jack to steer carefully. Alas, for the candy-scrape that never was to be! Alas, for poor “Thunderbolt” blindly setting forth on the last trip he ever made! And oh, alas, for Jack and Jill, who wilfully chose the wrong road and ended their fun for the winter! No one knew how it happened, but instead of landing in the drift, or at the fence, there was a great crash against the bars, a dreadful plunge off the steep bank, a sudden scattering of girl, boy, sled, fence, earth, and snow, all about the road, two cries, and then silence.

“I knew they’d do it!” and, standing on the post where he had perched, Joe waved his arms and shouted: “Smash-up! Smash-up! Run! Run!” like a raven croaking over a battlefield when the fight was done.

Down rushed boys and girls ready to laugh or cry, as the case might be, for accidents will happen on the best-regulated coasting-grounds. They found Jack sitting up looking about him with a queer, dazed expression, while an ugly cut on the forehead was bleeding in a way which sobered the boys and frightened the girls half out of their wits.

"He's killed! He's killed!" wailed Sue, hiding her face and beginning to cry.

"No, I'm not. I'll be all right when I get my breath. Where's Jill?" asked Jack, stoutly, though still too giddy to see straight.

The group about him opened, and his comrade in misfortune was discovered lying quietly in the snow with all the pretty color shocked out of her face by the fall, and winking rapidly, as if half stunned. But no wounds appeared, and when asked if she was dead, she answered in a vague sort of way, —

"I guess not. Is Jack hurt?"

"Broken his head," croaked Joe, stepping aside, that she might behold the fallen hero vainly trying to look calm and cheerful with red drops running down his cheek and a lump on his forehead.

Jill shut her eyes and waved the girls away, saying, faintly, —

"Never mind me. Go and see to him."

"Don't! I'm all right," and Jack tried to get up in order to prove that headers off a bank were mere trifles to him; but at the first movement of the left leg he uttered a sharp cry of pain, and would have fallen if Gus had not caught and gently laid him down.

"What is it, old chap?" asked Frank, kneeling beside him, really alarmed now, the hurts seeming worse than mere bumps, which were common affairs among baseball players, and not worth much notice.

"I lit on my head, but I guess I've broken my leg. Don't frighten mother," and Jack held fast to Frank's arm as he looked into the anxious face bent over him; for, though the elder tyrannized over the younger, the brothers loved one another dearly.

"Lift his head, Frank, while I tie my handkerchief round to stop the bleeding," said a quiet voice, as Ed Devlin laid a handful of soft snow on the wound; and Jack's face brightened as he turned to thank the one big boy who never was rough with the small ones.

"Better get him right home," advised Gus, who stood by looking on, with his little sisters Laura and Lotty clinging to him.

"Take Jill, too, for it's my opinion she has broken her back. She can't stir one bit," announced Molly Loo, with a droll air of triumph, as if rather pleased than otherwise to have her patient hurt the worse; for Jack's wound was very effective, and Molly had a taste for the tragic.

This cheerful statement was greeted with a wail from Susan and howls from

Boo, who had earned that name from the ease with which, on all occasions, he could burst into a dismal roar without shedding a tear, and stop as suddenly as he began.

“Oh, I am so sorry! It was my fault; I shouldn’t have let her do it,” said Jack, distressfully.

“It was all *my* fault; I made him. If I’d broken every bone I’ve got, it would serve me right. Don’t help me, anybody; I’m a wicked thing, and I deserve to lie here and freeze and starve and die!” cried Jill, piling up punishments in her remorseful anguish of mind and body.

“But we want to help you, and we can settle about blame by and by,” whispered Merry with a kiss; for she adored dashing Jill, and never would own that she did wrong.

“Here come the wood-sleds just in time. I’ll cut away and tell one of them to hurry up.” And, freeing himself from his sisters, Gus went off at a great pace, proving that the long legs carried a sensible head as well as a kind heart.

As the first sled approached, an air of relief pervaded the agitated party, for it was driven by Mr. Grant, a big, benevolent-looking farmer, who surveyed the scene with the sympathetic interest of a man and a father.

“Had a little accident, have you? Well, that’s a pretty likely place for a spill. Tried it once myself and broke the bridge of my nose,” he said, tapping that massive feature with a laugh which showed that fifty years of farming had not taken all the boy out of him. “Now then, let’s see about this little chore, and lively, too, for it’s late, and these parties ought to be housed,” he added, throwing down his whip, pushing back his cap, and nodding at the wounded with a reassuring smile.

“Jill first, please, sir,” said Ed, the gentle squire of dames, spreading his overcoat on the sled as eagerly as ever Raleigh laid down his velvet cloak for a queen to walk upon.

“All right. Just lay easy, my dear, and I won’t hurt you a mite if I can help it.”

Careful as Mr. Grant was, Jill could have screamed with pain as he lifted her; but she set her lips and bore it with the courage of a little Indian; for all the lads were looking on, and Jill was proud to show that a girl could bear as much as a boy. She hid her face in the coat as soon as she was settled, to hide the tears that would come, and by the time Jack was placed beside her, she had quite a little cistern of salt water stored up in Ed’s coat-pocket.

Then the mournful procession set forth, Mr. Grant driving the oxen, the girls clustering about the interesting invalids on the sled, while the boys came behind like a guard of honor, leaving the hill deserted by all but Joe, who had returned to hover about the fatal fence, and poor “Thunderbolt,” split asunder, lying on the bank to mark the spot where the great catastrophe occurred.

Chapter II. Two Penitents

Jack and Jill never cared to say much about the night which followed the first coasting party of the season, for it was the saddest and the hardest their short lives had ever known. Jack suffered most in body; for the setting of the broken leg was such a painful job, that it wrung several sharp cries from him, and made Frank, who helped, quite weak and white with sympathy, when it was over. The wounded head ached dreadfully, and the poor boy felt as if bruised all over, for he had the worst of the fall. Dr. Whiting spoke cheerfully of the case, and made so light of broken legs, that Jack innocently asked if he should not be up in a week or so.

“Well, no; it usually takes twenty-one days for bones to knit, and young ones make quick work of it,” answered the doctor, with a last scientific tuck to the various bandages, which made Jack feel like a hapless chicken trussed for the spit.

“Twenty-one days! Three whole weeks in bed! I shouldn’t call that quick work,” groaned the dismayed patient, whose experience of illness had been limited.

“It is a forty days’ job, young man, and you must make up your mind to bear it like a hero. We will do our best; but next time, look before you leap, and save your bones. Good-night; you’ll feel better in the morning. No jigs, remember;” and off went the busy doctor for another look at Jill, who had been ordered to bed and left to rest till the other case was attended to.

Any one would have thought Jack’s plight much the worse, but the doctor looked more sober over Jill’s hurt back than the boy’s compound fractures; and the poor little girl had a very bad quarter of an hour while he was trying to discover the extent of the injury.

“Keep her quiet, and time will show how much damage is done,” was all he said in her hearing; but if she had known that he told Mrs. Pecq he feared serious consequences, she would not have wondered why her mother cried as she rubbed the numb limbs and placed the pillows so tenderly.

Jill suffered most in her mind; for only a sharp stab of pain now and then reminded her of her body; but her remorseful little soul gave her no peace for thinking of Jack, whose bruises and breakages her lively fancy painted in the darkest colors.

“Oh, don’t be good to me, Mammy; I made him go, and now he’s hurt dreadfully, and may die; and it is all my fault, and everybody ought to hate me," sobbed poor Jill, as a neighbor left the room after reporting in a minute manner how Jack screamed when his leg was set, and how Frank was found white as a sheet, with his head under the pump, while Gus restored the tone of his friend's nerves, by pumping as if the house was on fire.

"Whist, my lass, and go to sleep. Take a sup of the good wine Mrs. Minot sent, for you are as cold as a clod, and it breaks my heart to see my Janey so."

"I can't go to sleep; I don't see how Jack's mother could send me anything when I've half killed him. I want to be cold and ache and have horrid things done to me. Oh, if I ever get out of this bed I'll be the best girl in the world, to pay for this. See if I ain't!" and Jill gave such a decided nod that her tears flew all about the pillow like a shower.

"You'd better begin at once, for you won't get out of that bed for a long while, I'm afraid, my lamb," sighed her mother, unable to conceal the anxiety that lay so heavy on her heart.

"Am I hurt badly, Mammy?"

"I fear it, lass."

"I'm *glad* of it; I ought to be worse than Jack, and I hope I am. I'll bear it well, and be good right away. Sing, Mammy, and I'll try to go to sleep to please you."

Jill shut her eyes with sudden and unusual meekness, and before her mother had crooned half a dozen verses of an old ballad, the little black head lay still upon the pillow, and repentant Jill was fast asleep with a red mitten in her hand.

Mrs. Pecq was an Englishwoman who had left Montreal at the death of her husband, a French Canadian, and had come to live in the tiny cottage which stood near Mrs. Minot's big house, separated only by an arbor-vitae hedge. A sad, silent person, who had seen better days, but said nothing about them, and earned her bread by sewing, nursing, work in the factory, or anything that came in her way, being anxious to educate her little girl. Now, as she sat beside the bed in the small, poor room, that hope almost died within her, for here was the child laid up for months, probably, and the one ambition and pleasure of the solitary woman's life was to see Janey Pecq's name over all the high marks in the school-reports she proudly brought home.

"She'll win through, please Heaven, and I'll see my lass a gentlewoman yet, thanks to the good friend in yonder, who will never let her want for care," thought the poor soul, looking out into the gloom where a long ray of light streamed from the great house warm and comfortable upon the cottage, like the spirit of kindness which made the inmates friends and neighbors.

Meantime, that other mother sat by her boy's bed as anxious but with better hope, for Mrs. Minot made trouble sweet and helpful by the way in which she bore it; and her boys were learning of her how to find silver linings to the clouds that must come into the bluest skies.

Jack lay wide awake, with hot cheeks, and throbbing head, and all sorts of queer sensations in the broken leg. The soothing potion he had taken did not affect him yet, and he tried to beguile the weary time by wondering who came and went below. Gentle rings at the front door, and mysterious tappings at the back, had been going on all the evening; for the report of the accident had grown astonishingly in its travels, and at eight o'clock the general belief was that Jack had broken both legs, fractured his skull, and lay at the point of death, while Jill had dislocated one shoulder, and was bruised black and blue from top to toe. Such being the case, it is no wonder that anxious playmates and neighbors haunted the doorsteps of the two houses, and that offers of help poured in.

Frank, having tied up the bell and put a notice in the lighted side-window, saying, "Go to the back door," sat in the parlor, supported by his chum, Gus, while Ed played softly on the piano, hoping to lull Jack to sleep. It did soothe him, for a very sweet friendship existed between the tall youth and the lad of thirteen. Ed went with the big fellows, but always had a kind word for the smaller boys; and affectionate Jack, never ashamed to show his love, was often seen with his arm round Ed's shoulder, as they sat together in the pleasant red parlors, where all the young people were welcome and Frank was king.

"Is the pain any easier, my darling?" asked Mrs. Minot, leaning over the pillow, where the golden head lay quiet for a moment.

"Not much. I forget it listening to the music. Dear old Ed is playing all my favorite tunes, and it is very nice. I guess he feels pretty sorry about me."

"They all do. Frank could not talk of it. Gus wouldn't go home to tea, he was so anxious to do something for us. Joe brought back the bits of your poor sled, because he didn't like to leave them lying round for any one to carry off, he said, and you might like them to remember your fall by."

Jack tried to laugh, but it was rather a failure, though he managed to say, cheerfully, —

"That was good of old Joe. I wouldn't lend him 'Thunderbolt' for fear he'd hurt it. Couldn't have smashed it up better than I did, could he? Don't think I want any pieces to remind me of *that* fall. I just wish you'd seen us, mother! It must have been a splendid spill to look at, any way."

"No, thank you; I'd rather not even try to imagine my precious boy going heels over head down that dreadful hill. No more pranks of that sort for some time, Jacky;" and Mrs. Minot looked rather pleased on the whole to have her venturesome bird safe under her maternal wing.

"No coasting till some time in January. What a fool I was to do it! Go-bangs always are dangerous, and that’s the fun of the thing. Oh dear!”

Jack threw his arms about and frowned darkly, but never said a word of the wilful little baggage who had led him into mischief; he was too much of a gentleman to tell on a girl, though it cost him an effort to hold his tongue, because Mamma’s good opinion was very precious to him, and he longed to explain. She knew all about it, however, for Jill had been carried into the house reviling herself for the mishap, and even in the midst of her own anxiety for her boy, Mrs. Minot understood the state of the case without more words. So she now set his mind at rest by saying, quietly.

“Foolish fun, as you see, dear. Another time, stand firm and help Jill to control her headstrong will. When you learn to yield less and she more, there will be no scrapes like this to try us all.”

“I’ll remember, mother. I hate not to be obliging, but I guess it would have saved us lots of trouble if I’d said No in the beginning. I tried to, but she *would* go. Poor Jill! I’ll take better care of her next time. Is she very ill, Mamma?”

“I can tell you better to-morrow. She does not suffer much, and we hope there is no great harm done.”

“I wish she had a nice place like this to be sick in. It must be very poky in those little rooms,” said Jack, as his eye roved round the large chamber where he lay so cosey, warm, and pleasant, with the gay chintz curtains draping doors and windows, the rosy carpet, comfortable chairs, and a fire glowing in the grate.

“I shall see that she suffers for nothing, so don’t trouble your kind heart about her to-night, but try to sleep; that’s what you need,” answered his mother, wetting the bandage on his forehead, and putting a cool hand on the flushed cheeks.

Jack obediently closed his eyes and listened while the boys sang “The Sweet By and By,” softening their rough young voices for his sake till the music was as soft as a lullaby. He lay so still his mother thought he was off, but presently a tear slipped out and rolled down the red cheek, wetting her hand as it passed.

“My blessed boy, what is it?” she whispered, with a touch and a tone that only mothers have.

The blue eyes opened wide, and Jack’s own sunshiny smile broke through the tears that filled them as he said with a sniff, —

“Everybody is so good to me I can’t help making a noodle of myself.

“You are not a noodle!” cried Mamma, resenting the epithet. “One of the sweet things about pain and sorrow is that they show us how well we are loved, how much kindness there is in the world, and how easily we can make others happy in the same way when they need help and sympathy. Don’t forget that, little son.”

“Don’t see how I can, with you to show me how nice it is. Kiss me good-night, and then ‘I’ll be good,’ as Jill says.”

Nestling his head upon his mother’s arm, Jack lay quiet till, lulled by the music of his mates, he drowsed away into the dreamless sleep which is Nurse Nature’s healthiest soothing sirup for weary souls and bodies.

Chapter III. Ward No. 1

For some days, nothing was seen and little was heard of the “dear sufferers,” as the old ladies called them. But they were not forgotten; the first words uttered when any of the young people met were: “How is Jack?” “Seen Jill yet?” and all waited with impatience for the moment when they could be admitted to their favorite mates, more than ever objects of interest now.

Meantime, the captives spent the first few days in sleep, pain, and trying to accept the hard fact that school and play were done with for months perhaps. But young spirits are wonderfully elastic and soon cheer up, and healthy young bodies heal fast, or easily adapt themselves to new conditions. So our invalids began to mend on the fourth day, and to drive their nurses distracted with efforts to amuse them, before the first week was over.

The most successful attempt originated in Ward No. 1, as Mrs. Minot called Jack’s apartment, and we will give our sympathizing readers some idea of this place, which became the stage whereon were enacted many varied and remarkable scenes.

Each of the Minot boys had his own room, and there collected his own treasures and trophies, arranged to suit his convenience and taste. Frank’s was full of books, maps, machinery, chemical messes, and geometrical drawings, which adorned the walls like intricate cobwebs. A big chair, where he read and studied with his heels higher than his head, a basket of apples for refreshment at all hours of the day or night, and an immense inkstand, in which several pens were always apparently bathing their feet, were the principal ornaments of his scholastic retreat.

Jack’s hobby was athletic sports, for he was bent on having a strong and active body for his happy little soul to live and enjoy itself in. So a severe simplicity reigned in his apartment; in summer, especially, for then his floor was bare, his windows were uncurtained, and the chairs uncushioned, the bed being as narrow and hard as Napoleon’s. The only ornaments were dumbbells, whips, bats, rods, skates, boxing-gloves, a big bath-pan and a small library, consisting chiefly of books on games, horses, health, hunting, and travels. In winter his mother made things more comfortable by introducing rugs, curtains, and a fire. Jack, also, relented slightly in the severity of his training, occasionally indulging in the national buckwheat cake, instead of the prescribed oatmeal porridge, for breakfast, omitting his cold bath when the thermometer was below zero, and dancing at night, instead of running a given distance by day.

Now, however, he was a helpless captive, given over to all sorts of coddling, laziness, and luxury, and there was a droll mixture of mirth and melancholy in his face, as he lay trussed up in bed, watching the comforts which had suddenly robbed his room of its Spartan simplicity. A delicious couch was there, with Frank reposing in its depths, half hidden under several folios which he was consulting for a history of the steam-engine, the subject of his next composition.

A white-covered table stood near, with all manner of dainties set forth in a way to tempt the sternest principles. Vases of flowers bloomed on the chimney-piece, — gifts from anxious young ladies, left with their love. Frivolous story-books and picture-papers strewed the bed, now shrouded in effeminate chintz curtains, beneath which Jack lay like a wounded warrior in his tent. But the saddest sight for our crippled athlete was a glimpse, through a half-opened door, at the beloved dumb-bells, bats, balls, boxing-gloves, and snow-shoes, all piled ignominiously away in the bath-pan, mournfully recalling the fact that their day was over, now, at least for some time.

He was about to groan dismally, when his eye fell on a sight which made him swallow the groan, and cough instead, as if it choked him a little. The sight was his mother’s face, as she sat in a low chair rolling bandages, with a basket beside her in which were piles of old linen, lint, plaster, and other matters, needed for the dressing of wounds. As he looked, Jack remembered how steadily and tenderly she had stood by him all through the hard times just past, and how carefully she had bathed and dressed his wound each day in spite of the effort it cost her to give him pain or even see him suffer.

“That’s a better sort of strength than swinging twenty-pound dumb-bells or running races; I guess I’ll try for that kind, too, and not howl or let her see me squirm when the doctor hurts,” thought the boy, as he saw that gentle face so pale and tired with much watching and anxiety, yet so patient, serene, and cheerful, that it was like sunshine.

“Lie down and take a good nap, mother dear, I feel first-rate, and Frank can see to me if I want anything. Do, now,” he added, with a persuasive nod toward the couch, and a boyish relish in stirring up his lazy brother.

After some urging, Mamma consented to go to her room for forty winks, leaving Jack in the care of Frank, begging him to be as quiet as possible if the dear boy wished to sleep, and to amuse him if he did not.

Being worn out, Mrs. Minot lengthened her forty winks into a three hours’ nap, and as the “dear boy” scorned repose, Mr. Frank had his hands full while on guard.

“I’ll read to you. Here’s Watt, Arkwright, Fulton, and a lot of capital fellows, with pictures that will do your heart good. Have a bit, will you?” asked the new nurse, flapping the leaves invitingly. — for Frank had a passion for such things, and drew steam-engines all over his slate, as Tommy Traddles drew hosts of skeletons when low in his spirits.

“I don’t want any of your old boilers and stokers and whirligigs. I’m tired of reading, and want something regularly jolly,” answered Jack, who had been chasing white buffaloes with “The Hunters of the West,” till he was a trifle tired and fractious.

“Play cribbage, euchre, anything you like;” and Frank obligingly disinterred himself from under the folios, feeling that it *was* hard for a fellow to lie flat a whole week.

“No fun; just two of us. Wish school was over, so the boys would come in; doctor said I might see them now.”

“They’ll be along by and by, and I’ll hail them. Till then, what shall we do? I’m your man for anything, only put a name to it.”

“Just wish I had a telegraph or a telephone, so I could talk to Jill. Wouldn’t it be fun to pipe across and get an answer!”

“I’ll make either you say;” and Frank looked as if trifles of that sort were to be had for the asking.

“Could you, really?”

“We’ll start the telegraph first, then you can send things over if you like,” said Frank, prudently proposing the surest experiment.

“Go ahead, then. I’d like that, and so would Jill, for I know she wants to hear from me.”

“There’s one trouble, though; I shall have to leave you alone for a few minutes while I rig up the ropes;” and Frank looked sober, for he was a faithful boy, and did not want to desert his post.

“Oh, never mind; I won’t want anything. If I do, I can pound for Ann.”

“And wake mother. I’ll fix you a better way than that;” and, full of inventive genius, our young Edison spliced the poker to part of a fishing-rod in a jiffy, making a long-handled hook which reached across the room.

“There’s an arm for you; now hook away, and let’s see how it works,” he said, handing over the instrument to Jack, who proceeded to show its unexpected capabilities by hooking the cloth off the table in attempting to get his handkerchief, catching Frank by the hair when fishing for a book, and breaking a pane of glass in trying to draw down the curtain.

“It’s so everlasting long, I can’t manage it,” laughed Jack, as it finally caught in his bed-hangings, and nearly pulled them, ring and all, down upon his head.

“Let it alone, unless you need something very much, and don’t bother about the glass. It's just what we want for the telegraph wire or rope to go through. Keep still, and I'll have the thing running in ten minutes;" and, delighted with the job, Frank hurried away, leaving Jack to compose a message to send as soon as it was possible.

"What in the world is that flying across the Minots' yard, — a brown hen or a boy's kite?" exclaimed old Miss Hopkins, peering out of her window at the singular performances going on in her opposite neighbor's garden.

First, Frank appeared with a hatchet and chopped a clear space in the hedge between his own house and the cottage; next, a clothes line was passed through this aperture and fastened somewhere on the other side; lastly, a small covered basket, slung on this rope, was seen hitching along, drawn either way by a set of strings; then, as if satisfied with his job, Frank retired, whistling "Hail Columbia."

"It's those children at their pranks again. I thought broken bones wouldn't keep them out of mischief long," said the old lady, watching with great interest the mysterious basket travelling up and down the rope from the big house to the cottage.

If she had seen what came and went over the wires of the "Great International Telegraph," she would have laughed till her spectacles flew off her Roman nose. A letter from Jack, with a large orange, went first, explaining the new enterprise: —

"Dear Jill, — It's too bad you can't come over to see me. I am pretty well, but awful tired of keeping still. I want to see you ever so much. Frank has fixed us a telegraph, so we can write and send things. Won't it be jolly! I can't look out to see him do it; but, when you pull your string, my little bell rings, and I know a message is coming. I send you an orange. Do you like *gorver* jelly? People send in lots of goodies, and we will go halves. Good-by.

"Jack"

Away went the basket, and in fifteen minutes it came back from the cottage with nothing in it but the orange.

"Hullo! Is she mad?" asked Jack, as Frank brought the despatch for him to examine.

But, at the first touch, the hollow peel opened, and out fell a letter, two gum-drops, and an owl made of a peanut, with round eyes drawn at the end where the stem formed a funny beak. Two bits of straw were the legs, and the face looked so like Dr. Whiting that both boys laughed at the sight.

"That's so like Jill; she'd make fun if she was half dead. Let's see what she says;" and Jack read the little note, which showed a sad neglect of the spelling-book: —

“Dear Jacky, — I can’t stir and it’s horrid. The telly graf is very nice and we will have fun with it. I never ate any *gorver* jelly. The orange was first rate. Send me a book to read. All about bears and ships and crockydiles. The doctor was coming to see you, so I sent him the quickest way. Molly Loo says it is dreadful lonesome at school without us. Yours truly,

“Jill”

Jack immediately despatched the book and a sample of guava jelly, which unfortunately upset on the way, to the great detriment of “The Wild Beasts of Asia and Africa.” Jill promptly responded with the loan of a tiny black kitten, who emerged spitting and scratching, to Jack’s great delight; and he was cudgelling his brains as to how a fat white rabbit could be transported, when a shrill whistle from without saved Jill from that inconvenient offering.

“It’s the fellows; do you want to see them?” asked Frank, gazing down with calm superiority upon the three eager faces which looked up at him.

“Guess I do!” and Jack promptly threw the kitten overboard, scorning to be seen by any manly eye amusing himself with such girlish toys.

Bang! went the front door; tramp, tramp, tramp, came six booted feet up the stairs; and, as Frank threw wide the door, three large beings paused on the threshold to deliver the courteous “Hullo!” which is the established greeting among boys on all social occasions.

“Come along, old fellows; I’m ever so glad to see you!” cried the invalid, with such energetic demonstrations of the arms that he looked as if about to fly or crow, like an excited young cockerel.

“How are you, Major?”

“Does the leg ache much, Jack?”

“Mr. Phipps says you’ll have to pay for the new rails.”

With these characteristic greetings, the gentlemen cast away their hats and sat down, all grinning cheerfully, and all with eyes irresistibly fixed upon the dainties, which proved too much for the politeness of ever-hungry boys.

“Help yourselves,” said Jack, with a hospitable wave. “All the dear old ladies in town have been sending in nice things, and I can’t begin to eat them up. Lend a hand and clear away this lot, or we shall have to throw them out of the window. Bring on the doughnuts and the tarts and the shaky stuff in the entry closet, Frank, and let’s have a lark.”

No sooner said than done. Gus took the tarts, Joe the doughnuts, Ed the jelly, and Frank suggested “spoons all round” for the Italian cream. A few trifles in the way of custard, fruit, and wafer biscuits were not worth mentioning; but every dish was soon emptied, and Jack said, as he surveyed the scene of devastation with great satisfaction, —

“Call again to-morrow, gentlemen, and we will have another bout. Free lunches at 5 P.M. till further notice. Now tell me all the news.”

For half an hour, five tongues went like mill clappers, and there is no knowing when they would have stopped if the little bell had not suddenly rung with a violence that made them jump.

“That’s Jill; see what she wants, Frank;” and while his brother sent off the basket, Jack told about the new invention, and invited his mates to examine and admire.

They did so, and shouted with merriment when the next despatch from Jill arrived. A pasteboard jumping-jack, with one leg done up in cotton-wool to preserve the likeness, and a great lump of molasses candy in a brown paper, with accompanying note: —

“Dear Sir, — I saw the boys go in, and know you are having a nice time, so I send over the candy Molly Loo and Merry brought me. Mammy says I can’t eat it, and it will all melt away if I keep it. Also a picture of Jack Minot, who will dance on one leg and waggle the other, and make you laugh. I wish I could come, too. Don’t you hate grewel? I do. — In haste,

“J.P.”

“Let’s all send her a letter,” proposed Jack, and out came pens, ink, paper, and the lamp, and every one fell to scribbling. A droll collection was the result, for Frank drew a picture of the fatal fall with broken rails flying in every direction, Jack with his head swollen to the size of a balloon, and Jill in two pieces, while the various boys and girls were hit off with a sly skill that gave Gus legs like a stork, Molly Loo hair several yards long, and Boo a series of visible howls coming out of an immense mouth in the shape of o’s. The oxen were particularly good, for their horns branched like those of the moose, and Mr. Grant had a patriarchal beard which waved in the breeze as he bore the wounded girl to a sled very like a funeral pyre, the stakes being crowned with big mittens like torches.

“You ought to be an artist. I never saw such a dabster as you are. That’s the very moral of Joe, all in a bunch on the fence, with a blot to show how purple his nose was,” said Gus, holding up the sketch for general criticism and admiration.

“I’d rather have a red nose than legs like a grasshopper; so you needn’t twit, Daddy,” growled Joe, quite unconscious that a blot actually did adorn his nose, as he labored over a brief despatch.

The boys enjoyed the joke, and one after the other read out his message to the captive lady: —

“Dear Jill, — Sorry you ain’t here. Great fun. Jack pretty lively. Laura and Lot would send love if they knew of the chance. Fly round and get well.

“Gus”

“Dear Gilliflower, — Hope you are pretty comfortable in your ‘dungeon cell.’ Would you like a serenade when the moon comes? Hope you will soon be up again, for we miss you very much. Shall be very happy to help in any way I can. Love to your mother. Your true friend,

“E.D.”

“Miss Pecq.

“*Dear Madam,* — I am happy to tell you that we are all well, and hope you are the same. I gave Jem Cox a licking because he went to your desk. You had better send for your books. You won’t have to pay for the sled or the fence. Jack says he will see to it. We have been having a spread over here. First-rate things. I wouldn’t mind breaking a leg, if I had such good grub and no chores to do. No more now, from yours, with esteem,

“Joseph P. Flint”

Joe thought that an elegant epistle, having copied portions of it from the “Letter Writer,” and proudly read it off to the boys, who assured him that Jill would be much impressed.

“Now, Jack, hurry up and let us send the lot off, for we must go,” said Gus, as Frank put the letters in the basket, and the clatter of tea-things was heard below.

“I’m not going to show mine. It’s private and you mustn’t look,” answered Jack, patting down an envelope with such care that no one had a chance to peep.

But Joe had seen the little note copied, and while the others were at the window working the telegraph he caught up the original, carelessly thrust by Jack under the pillow, and read it aloud before any one knew what he was about.

“My Dear, — I wish I could send you some of my good times. As I can’t, I send you much love, and I hope you will try and be patient as I am going to, for it was our fault, and we must not make a fuss now. Ain’t mothers sweet? Mine is coming over to-morrow to see you and tell me how you are. This round thing is a kiss for good-night.

“Your Jack”

“Isn’t that spoony? You’d better hide your face, I think. He’s getting to be a regular mollycoddle, isn’t he?” jeered Joe, as the boys laughed, and then grew sober, seeing Jack’s head buried in the bedclothes, after sending a pillow at his tormentor.

It nearly hit Mrs. Minot, coming in with her patient’s tea on a tray, and at sight of her the guests hurriedly took leave, Joe nearly tumbling downstairs to escape from Frank, who would have followed, if his mother had not said quickly, “Stay, and tell me what is the matter.”

“Only teasing Jack a bit. Don’t be mad, old boy, Joe didn’t mean any harm, and it *was* rather soft, now wasn't it?" asked Frank, trying to appease the wounded feelings of his brother.

"I charged you not to worry him. Those boys were too much for the poor dear, and I ought not to have left him," said Mamma, as she vainly endeavored to find and caress the yellow head burrowed so far out of sight that nothing but one red ear was visible.

"He liked it, and we got on capitally till Joe roughed him about Jill. Ah, Joe's getting it now! I thought Gus and Ed would do that little job for me," added Frank, running to the window as the sound of stifled cries and laughter reached him.

The red ear heard also, and Jack popped up his head to ask, with interest, —

"What are they doing to him?"

"Rolling him in the snow, and he's howling like fun."

"Serves him right," muttered Jack, with a frown. Then, as a wail arose suggestive of an unpleasant mixture of snow in the mouth and thumps on the back, he burst out laughing, and said, good-naturedly, "Go and stop them, Frank; I won't mind, only tell him it was a mean trick. Hurry! Gus is so strong he doesn't know how his pounding hurts."

Off ran Frank, and Jack told his wrongs to his mother. She sympathized heartily, and saw no harm in the affectionate little note, which would please Jill, and help her to bear her trials patiently.

"It isn't silly to be fond of her, is it? She is so nice and funny, and tries to be good, and likes me, and I won't be ashamed of my friends, if folks do laugh," protested Jack, with a rap of his teaspoon.

"No, dear, it is quite kind and proper, and I'd rather have you play with a merry little girl than with rough boys till you are big enough to hold your own," answered Mamma, putting the cup to his lips that the reclining lad might take his broma without spilling.

"Pooh! I don't mean that; I'm strong enough now to take care of myself," cried Jack, stoutly. "I can thrash Joe any day, if I like. Just look at my arm; there's muscle for you!" and up went a sleeve, to the great danger of overturning the tray, as the boy proudly displayed his biceps and expanded his chest, both of which were very fine for a lad of his years. "If I'd been on my legs, he wouldn't have dared to insult me, and it was cowardly to hit a fellow when he was down."

Mrs. Minot wanted to laugh at Jack's indignation, but the bell rang, and she had to go and pull in the basket, much amused at the new game.

Burning to distinguish herself in the eyes of the big boys, Jill had sent over a tall, red flannel night-cap, which she had been making for some proposed Christmas plays, and added the following verse, for she was considered a gifted rhymester at the game parties: —

“When it comes night,
We put out the light.
Some blow with a puff,
Some turn down and snuff;
But neat folks prefer
A nice extinguis*her*.
So here I send you back
One to put on Mr. Jack.”

“Now, I call that regularly smart; not one of us could do it, and I just wish Joe was here to see it. I want to send once more, something good for tea; she hates gruel so;” and the last despatch which the Great International Telegraph carried that day was a baked apple and a warm muffin, with “J. M.’s best regards.”

Chapter IV. Ward No. 2.

Things were not so gay in Ward No. 2, for Mrs. Pecq was very busy, and Jill had nothing to amuse her but flying visits from the girls, and such little plays as she could invent for herself in bed. Fortunately, she had a lively fancy, and so got on pretty well, till keeping still grew unbearable, and the active child ached in every limb to be up and out. That, however, was impossible, for the least attempt to sit or stand brought on the pain that took her breath away and made her glad to lie flat again. The doctor spoke cheerfully, but looked sober, and Mrs. Pecq began to fear that Janey was to be a cripple for life. She said nothing, but Jill's quick eyes saw an added trouble in the always anxious face, and it depressed her spirits, though she never guessed half the mischief the fall had done.

The telegraph was a great comfort, and the two invalids kept up a lively correspondence, not to say traffic in light articles, for the Great International was the only aerial express in existence. But even this amusement flagged after a time; neither had much to tell, and when the daily health bulletins had been exchanged, messages gave out, and the basket's travels grew more and more infrequent. Neither could read all the time, games were soon used up, their mates were at school most of the day, and after a week or two the poor children began to get pale and fractious with the confinement, always so irksome to young people.

"I do believe the child will fret herself into a fever, mem, and I'm clean distraught to know what to do for her. She never used to mind trifles, but now she frets about the oddest things, and I can't change them. This wall-paper is well enough, but she has taken a fancy that the spots on it look like spiders, and it makes her nervous. I've no other warm place to put her, and no money for a new paper. Poor lass! There are hard times before her, I'm fearing."

Mrs. Pecq said this in a low voice to Mrs. Minot, who came in as often as she could, to see what her neighbor needed; for both mothers were anxious, and sympathy drew them to one another. While one woman talked, the other looked about the little room, not wondering in the least that Jill found it hard to be contented there. It was very neat, but so plain that there was not even a picture on the walls, nor an ornament upon the mantel, except the necessary clock, lamp, and match-box. The paper *was* ugly, being a deep buff with a brown figure that did look very like spiders sprawling over it, and might well make one nervous to look at day after day.

Jill was asleep in the folding chair Dr. Whiting had sent, with a mattress to make it soft. The back could be raised or lowered at will; but only a few inches had been gained as yet, and the thin hair pillow was all she could bear. She looked very pretty as she lay, with dark lashes against the feverish cheeks, lips apart, and a cloud of curly black locks all about the face pillowed on one arm. She seemed like a brilliant little flower in that dull place, — for the French blood in her veins gave her a color, warmth, and grace which were very charming. Her natural love of beauty showed itself in many ways: a red ribbon had tied up her hair, a gay but faded shawl was thrown over the bed, and the gifts sent her were arranged with care upon the table by her side among her own few toys and treasures. There was something pathetic in this childish attempt to beautify the poor place, and Mrs. Minot's eyes were full as she looked at the tired woman, whose one joy and comfort lay there in such sad plight.

"My dear soul, cheer up, and we will help one another through the hard times," she said, with a soft hand on the rough one, and a look that promised much.

"Please God, we will, mem! With such good friends, I never should complain. I try not to do it, but it breaks my heart to see my little lass spoiled for life, most like;" and Mrs. Pecq pressed the kind hand with a despondent sigh.

"We won't say, or even think, that, yet. Everything is possible to youth and health like Janey's. We must keep her happy, and time will do the rest, I'm sure. Let us begin at once, and have a surprise for her when she wakes."

As she spoke, Mrs. Minot moved quietly about the room, pinning the pages of several illustrated papers against the wall at the foot of the bed, and placing to the best advantage the other comforts she had brought.

"Keep up your heart, neighbor. I have an idea in my head which I think will help us all, if I can carry it out," she said, cheerily, as she went, leaving Mrs. Pecq to sew on Jack's new night-gowns, with swift fingers, and the grateful wish that she might work for these good friends forever.

As if the whispering and rustling had disturbed her, Jill soon began to stir, and slowly opened the eyes which had closed so wearily on the dull December afternoon. The bare wall with its brown spiders no longer confronted her, but the colored print of a little girl dancing to the tune her father was playing on a guitar, while a stately lady, with satin dress, ruff, and powder, stood looking on, well pleased. The quaint figure, in its belaced frock, quilted petticoat, and red-heeled shoes, seemed to come tripping toward her in such a life-like way, that she almost saw the curls blow back, heard the rustle of the rich brocade, and caught the sparkle of the little maid's bright eyes.

"Oh, how pretty! Who sent them?" asked Jill, eagerly, as her eye glanced along the wall, seeing other new and interesting things beyond: an elephant-hunt, a ship in full sail, a horse-race, and a ball-room.

“The good fairy who never comes empty-handed. Look round a bit and you will see more pretties all for you, my dearie;” and her mother pointed to a bunch of purple grapes in a green leaf plate, a knot of bright flowers pinned on the white curtain, and a gay little double gown across the foot of the bed.

Jill clapped her hands, and was enjoying her new pleasures, when in came Merry and Molly Loo, with Boo, of course, trotting after her like a fat and amiable puppy. Then the good times began; the gown was put on, the fruit tasted, and the pictures were studied like famous works of art.

“It’s a splendid plan to cover up that hateful wall. I’d stick pictures all round and have a gallery. That reminds me! Up in the garret at our house is a box full of old fashion-books my aunt left. I often look at them on rainy days, and they are very funny. I’ll go this minute and get every one. We can pin them up, or make paper dolls;” and away rushed Molly Loo, with the small brother waddling behind, for, when he lost sight of her, he was desolate indeed.

The girls had fits of laughter over the queer costumes of years gone by, and put up a splendid procession of ladies in full skirts, towering hats, pointed slippers, powdered hair, simpering faces, and impossible waists.

“I do think this bride is perfectly splendid, the long train and veil are *so* sweet,” said Jill, revelling in fine clothes as she turned from one plate to another.

“I like the elephants best, and I’d give anything to go on a hunt like that!” cried Molly Loo, who rode cows, drove any horse she could get, had nine cats, and was not afraid of the biggest dog that ever barked.

“I fancy ‘The Dancing Lesson;’ it is so sort of splendid, with the great windows, gold chairs, and fine folks. Oh, I would like to live in a castle with a father and mother like that,” said Merry, who was romantic, and found the old farmhouse on the hill a sad trial to her high-flown ideas of elegance.

“Now, that ship, setting out for some far-away place, is more to my mind. I weary for home now and then, and mean to see it again some day;” and Mrs. Pecq looked longingly at the English ship, though it was evidently outward bound. Then, as if reproaching herself for discontent, she added: “It looks like those I used to see going off to India with a load of missionaries. I came near going myself once, with a lady bound for Siam; but I went to Canada with her sister, and here I am.”

“I’d like to be a missionary and go where folks throw their babies to the crocodiles. I’d watch and fish them out, and have a school, and bring them up, and convert all the people till they knew better,” said warm-hearted Molly Loo, who befriended every abused animal and forlorn child she met.

“We needn’t go to Africa to be missionaries; they have ‘em nearer home and need ‘em, too. In all the big cities there are a many, and they have their hands full with the poor, the wicked, and the helpless. One can find that sort of work anywhere, if one has a mind,” said Mrs. Pecq.

“I wish we had some to do here. I’d so like to go round with baskets of tea and rice, and give out tracts and talk to people. Wouldn’t you, girls?” asked Molly, much taken with the new idea.

“It would be rather nice to have a society all to ourselves, and have meetings and resolutions and things,” answered Merry, who was fond of little ceremonies, and always went to the sewing circle with her mother.

“We wouldn’t let the boys come in. We’d have it a secret society, as they do their temperance lodge, and we’d have badges and pass-words and grips. It would be fun if we can only get some heathen to work at!” cried Jill, ready for fresh enterprises of every sort.

“I can tell you someone to begin on right away,” said her mother, nodding at her. “As wild a little savage as I’d wish to see. Take her in hand, and make a pretty-mannered lady of her. Begin at home, my lass, and you’ll find missionary work enough for a while.”

“Now, Mammy, you mean me! Well, I will begin; and I’ll be so good, folks won’t know me. Being sick makes naughty children behave in story-books, I’ll see if live ones can’t;” and Jill put on such a sanctified face that the girls laughed and asked for their missions also, thinking they would be the same.

“You, Merry, might do a deal at home helping mother, and setting the big brothers a good example. One little girl in a house can do pretty much as she will, especially if she has a mind to make plain things nice and comfortable, and not long for castles before she knows how to do her own tasks well,” was the first unexpected reply.

Merry colored, but took the reproof sweetly, resolving to do what she could, and surprised to find how many ways seemed open to her after a few minutes’ thought.

“Where shall I begin? I’m not afraid of a dozen crocodiles after Miss Bat;” and Molly Loo looked about her with a fierce air, having had practice in battles with the old lady who kept her father’s house.

“Well, dear, you haven’t far to look for as nice a little heathen as you’d wish;” and Mrs. Pecq glanced at Boo, who sat on the floor staring hard at them, attracted by the dread word “crocodile.” He had a cold and no handkerchief, his little hands were red with chilblains, his clothes shabby, he had untidy darns in the knees of his stockings, and a head of tight curls that evidently had not been combed for some time.

“Yes, I know he is, and I try to keep him decent, but I forget, and he hates to be fixed, and Miss Bat doesn’t care, and father laughs when I talk about it.”

Poor Molly Loo looked much ashamed as she made excuses, trying at the same time to mend matters by seizing Boo and dusting him all over with her handkerchief, giving a pull at his hair as if ringing bells, and then dumping him down again with the despairing exclamation: “Yes, we’re a pair of heathens, and there’s no one to save us if I don’t.”

That was true enough; for Molly’s father was a busy man, careless of everything but his mills, Miss Bat was old and lazy, and felt as if she might take life easy after serving the motherless children for many years as well as she knew how. Molly was beginning to see how much amiss things were at home, and old enough to feel mortified, though, as yet, she had done nothing to mend the matter except be kind to the little boy.

“You will, my dear,” answered Mrs. Pecq, encouragingly, for she knew all about it. “Now you’ve each got a mission, let us see how well you will get on. Keep it secret, if you like, and report once a week. I’ll be a member, and we’ll do great things yet.”

“We won’t begin till after Christmas; there is so much to do, we never shall have time for any more. Don’t tell, and we’ll start fair at New Year’s, if not before,” said Jill, taking the lead as usual. Then they went on with the gay ladies, who certainly were heathen enough in dress to be in sad need of conversion, — to common-sense at least.

“I feel as if I was at a party,” said Jill, after a pause occupied in surveying her gallery with great satisfaction, for dress was her delight, and here she had every conceivable style and color.

“Talking of parties, isn’t it too bad that we must give up our Christmas fun? Can’t get on without you and Jack, so we are not going to do a thing, but just have our presents,” said Merry, sadly, as they began to fit different heads and bodies together, to try droll effects.

“I shall be all well in a fortnight, I know; but Jack won’t, for it will take more than a month to mend his poor leg. May be they will have a dance in the boys’ big room, and he can look on,” suggested Jill, with a glance at the dancing damsel on the wall, for she dearly loved it, and never guessed how long it would be before her light feet would keep time to music again.

“You’d better give Jack a hint about the party. Send over some smart ladies, and say they have come to his Christmas ball,” proposed audacious Molly Loo, always ready for fun.

So they put a preposterous green bonnet, top-heavy with plumes, on a little lady in yellow, who sat in a carriage; the lady beside her, in winter costume of velvet pelisse and ermine boa, was fitted to a bride's head with its orange flowers and veil, and these works of art were sent over to Jack, labelled "Miss Laura and Lotty Burton going to the Minots' Christmas ball," — a piece of naughtiness on Jill's part, for she knew Jack liked the pretty sisters, whose gentle manners made her own wild ways seem all the more blamable.

No answer came for a long time, and the girls had almost forgotten their joke in a game of Letters, when "Tingle, tangle!" went the bell, and the basket came in heavily laden. A roll of colored papers was tied outside, and within was a box that rattled, a green and silver horn, a roll of narrow ribbons, a spool of strong thread, some large needles, and a note from Mrs. Minot: —

"Dear Jill, — I think of having a Christmas tree so that our invalids can enjoy it, and all your elegant friends are cordially invited. Knowing that you would like to help, I send some paper for sugar-plum horns and some beads for necklaces. They will brighten the tree and please the girls for themselves or their dolls. Jack sends you a horn for a pattern, and will you make a ladder-necklace to show him how? Let me know if you need anything.

"Yours in haste,

"Anna Minot"

"She knew what the child would like, bless her kind heart," said Mrs. Pecq to herself, and something brighter than the most silvery bead shone on Jack's shirt-sleeve, as she saw the rapture of Jill over the new work and the promised pleasure.

Joyful cries greeted the opening of the box, for bunches of splendid large bugles appeared in all colors, and a lively discussion went on as to the best contrasts. Jill could not refuse to let her friends share the pretty work, and soon three necklaces glittered on three necks, as each admired her own choice.

"I'd be willing to hurt my back dreadfully, if I could lie and do such lovely things all day," said Merry, as she reluctantly put down her needle at last, for home duties waited to be done, and looked more than ever distasteful after this new pleasure.

"So would I! Oh, do you think Mrs. Minot will let you fill the horns when they are done? I'd love to help you then. Be sure you send for me!" cried Molly Loo, arching her neck like a proud pigeon to watch the glitter of her purple and gold necklace on her brown gown.

"I'm afraid you couldn't be trusted, you love sweeties so, and I'm sure Boo couldn't. But I'll see about it," replied Jill, with a responsible air.

The mention of the boy recalled him to their minds, and looking round they found him peacefully absorbed in polishing up the floor with Molly's pocket-handkerchief and oil from the little machine-can. Being torn from this congenial labor, he was carried off shining with grease and roaring lustily.

But Jill did not mind her loneliness now, and sang like a happy canary while she threaded her sparkling beads, or hung the gay horns to dry, ready for their cargoes of sweets. So Mrs. Minot’s recipe for sunshine proved successful, and mother-wit made the wintry day a bright and happy one for both the little prisoners.

Chapter V. Secrets

There were a great many clubs in Harmony Village, but as we intend to interest ourselves with the affairs of the young folks only, we need not dwell upon the intellectual amusements of the elders. In summer, the boys devoted themselves to baseball, the girls to boating, and all got rosy, stout, and strong, in these healthful exercises. In winter, the lads had their debating club, the lasses a dramatic ditto. At the former, astonishing bursts of oratory were heard; at the latter, everything was boldly attempted, from Romeo and Juliet to Mother Goose's immortal melodies. The two clubs frequently met and mingled their attractions in a really entertaining manner, for the speakers made good actors, and the young actresses were most appreciative listeners to the eloquence of each budding Demosthenes.

Great plans had been afoot for Christmas or New Year, but when the grand catastrophe put an end to the career of one of the best "spouters," and caused the retirement of the favorite "singing chambermaid," the affair was postponed till February, when Washington's birthday was always celebrated by the patriotic town, where the father of his country once put on his nightcap, or took off his boots, as that ubiquitous hero appears to have done in every part of the United States.

Meantime the boys were studying Revolutionary characters, and the girls rehearsing such dramatic scenes as they thought most appropriate and effective for the 22d. In both of these attempts they were much helped by the sense and spirit of Ralph Evans, a youth of nineteen, who was a great favorite with the young folks, not only because he was a good, industrious fellow, who supported his grandmother, but also full of talent, fun, and ingenuity. It was no wonder every one who really knew him liked him, for he could turn his hand to anything, and loved to do it. If the girls were in despair about a fire-place when acting "The Cricket on the Hearth," he painted one, and put a gas-log in it that made the kettle really boil, to their great delight. If the boys found the interest of their club flagging, Ralph would convulse them by imitations of the "Member from Cranberry Centre," or fire them with speeches of famous statesmen. Charity fairs could not get on without him, and in the store where he worked he did many an ingenious job, which made him valued for his mechanical skill, as well as for his energy and integrity.

Mrs. Minot liked to have him with her sons, because they also were to paddle their own canoes by and by, and she believed that, rich or poor, boys make better men for learning to use the talents they possess, not merely as ornaments, but tools with which to carve their own fortunes; and the best help toward this end is an example of faithful work, high aims, and honest living. So Ralph came often, and in times of trouble was a real rainy-day friend. Jack grew very fond of him during his imprisonment, for the good youth ran in every evening to get commissions, amuse the boy with droll accounts of the day's adventures, or invent lifts, bed-tables, and foot-rests for the impatient invalid. Frank found him a sure guide through the mechanical mysteries which he loved, and spent many a useful half-hour discussing cylinders, pistons, valves, and balance-wheels. Jill also came in for her share of care and comfort; the poor little back lay all the easier for the air-cushion Ralph got her, and the weary headaches found relief from the spray atomizer, which softly distilled its scented dew on the hot forehead till she fell asleep.

Round the beds of Jack and Jill met and mingled the schoolmates of whom our story treats. Never, probably, did invalids have gayer times than our two, after a week of solitary confinement; for school gossip crept in, games could not be prevented, and Christmas secrets were concocted in those rooms till they were regular conspirators' dens, when they were not little Bedlams.

After the horn and bead labors were over, the stringing of pop-corn on red, and cranberries on white, threads, came next, and Jack and Jill often looked like a new kind of spider in the pretty webs hung about them, till reeled off to bide their time in the Christmas closet. Paper flowers followed, and gay garlands and bouquets blossomed, regardless of the snow and frost without. Then there was a great scribbling of names, verses, and notes to accompany the steadily increasing store of odd parcels which were collected at the Minots', for gifts from every one were to ornament the tree, and contributions poured in as the day drew near.

But the secret which most excited the young people was the deep mystery of certain proceedings at the Minot house. No one but Frank, Ralph, and Mamma knew what it was, and the two boys nearly drove the others distracted by the tantalizing way in which they hinted at joys to come, talked strangely about birds, went measuring round with foot-rules, and shut themselves up in the Boys' Den, as a certain large room was called. This seemed to be the centre of operations, but beyond the fact of the promised tree no ray of light was permitted to pass the jealously guarded doors. Strange men with paste-pots and ladders went in, furniture was dragged about, and all sorts of boyish lumber was sent up garret and down cellar. Mrs. Minot was seen pondering over heaps of green stuff, hammering was heard, singular bundles were smuggled upstairs, flowering plants betrayed their presence by whiffs of fragrance when the door was opened, and Mrs. Pecq was caught smiling all by herself in a back bedroom, which usually was shut up in winter.

“They are going to have a play, after all, and that green stuff was the curtain,” said Molly Loo, as the girls talked it over one day, when they sat with their backs turned to one another, putting last stitches in certain bits of work which had to be concealed from all eyes, though it was found convenient to ask one another’s taste as to the color, materials, and sizes of these mysterious articles.

“I think it is going to be a dance. I heard the boys doing their steps when I went in last evening to find out whether Jack liked blue or yellow best, so I could put the bow on his pen-wiper,” declared Merry, knitting briskly away at the last of the pair of pretty white bed-socks she was making for Jill right under her inquisitive little nose.

“They wouldn’t have a party of that kind without Jack and me. It is only an extra nice tree, you see if it isn’t,” answered Jill from behind the pillows which made a temporary screen to hide the toilet mats she was preparing for all her friends.

“Every one of you is wrong, and you’d better rest easy, for you won’t find out the best part of it, try as you may.” And Mrs. Pecq actually chuckled as she, too, worked away at some bits of muslin, with her back turned to the very unsocial-looking group.

“Well, I don’t care, we’ve got a secret all our own, and won’t ever tell, will we?” cried Jill, falling back on the Home Missionary Society, though it was not yet begun.

“Never!” answered the girls, and all took great comfort in the idea that one mystery would not be cleared up, even at Christmas.

Jack gave up guessing, in despair, after he had suggested a new dining-room where he could eat with the family, a private school in which his lessons might go on with a tutor, or a theatre for the production of the farces in which he delighted.

“It is going to be used to keep something in that you are very fond of,” said Mamma, taking pity on him at last.

“Ducks?” asked Jack, with a half pleased, half puzzled air, not quite seeing where the water was to come from.

Frank exploded at the idea, and added to the mystification by saying, —

“There will be one little duck and one great donkey in it.” Then, fearing he had told the secret, he ran off, quacking and braying derisively.

“It is to be used for creatures that I, too, am fond of, and you know neither donkeys nor ducks are favorites of mine,” said Mamma, with a demure expression, as she sat turning over old clothes for the bundles that always went to poor neighbors, with a little store of goodies, at this time of the year.

“I know! I know! It is to be a new ward for more sick folks, isn’t it, now?” cried Jack, with what he thought a great proof of shrewdness.

“I don’t see how I could attend to many more patients till this one is off my hands,” answered Mamma, with a queer smile, adding quickly, as if she too was afraid of letting the cat out of the bag: “That reminds me of a Christmas I once spent among the hospitals and poor-houses of a great city with a good lady who, for thirty years, had made it her mission to see that these poor little souls had one merry day. We gave away two hundred dolls, several great boxes of candy and toys, besides gay pictures, and new clothes to orphan children, sick babies, and half-grown innocents. Ah, my boy, that was a day to remember all my life, to make me doubly grateful for my blessings, and very glad to serve the helpless and afflicted, as that dear woman did.”

The look and tone with which the last words were uttered effectually turned Jack’s thoughts from the great secret, and started another small one, for he fell to planning what he would buy with his pocket-money to surprise the little Pats and Biddies who were to have no Christmas tree.

Chapter VI. Surprises

"Is it pleasant?" was the question Jill asked before she was fairly awake on Christmas morning.

"Yes, dear; as bright as heart could wish. Now eat a bit, and then I'll make you nice for the day's pleasure. I only hope it won't be too much for you," answered Mrs. Pecq, bustling about, happy, yet anxious, for Jill was to be carried over to Mrs. Minot's, and it was her first attempt at going out since the accident.

It seemed as if nine o'clock would never come, and Jill, with wraps all ready, lay waiting in a fever of impatience for the doctor's visit, as he wished to superintend the moving. At last he came, found all promising, and having bundled up his small patient, carried her, with Frank's help, in her chair-bed to the ox-sled, which was drawn to the next door, and Miss Jill landed in the Boys' Den before she had time to get either cold or tired. Mrs. Minot took her things off with a cordial welcome, but Jill never said a word, for, after one exclamation, she lay staring about her, dumb with surprise and delight at what she saw.

The great room was entirely changed; for now it looked like a garden, or one of the fairy scenes children love, where in-doors and out-of-doors are pleasantly combined. The ceiling was pale blue, like the sky; the walls were covered with a paper like a rustic trellis, up which climbed morning-glories so naturally that the many-colored bells seemed dancing in the wind. Birds and butterflies flew among them, and here and there, through arches in the trellis, one seemed to look into a sunny summer world, contrasting curiously with the wintry landscape lying beyond the real windows, festooned with evergreen garlands, and curtained only by stands of living flowers. A green drugget covered the floor like grass, rustic chairs from the garden stood about, and in the middle of the room a handsome hemlock waited for its pretty burden. A Yule-log blazed on the wide hearth, and over the chimney-piece, framed in holly, shone the words that set all hearts to dancing, "Merry Christmas!"

"Do you like it, dear? This is our surprise for you and Jack, and here we mean to have good times together," said Mrs. Minot, who had stood quietly enjoying the effect of her work.

"Oh, it is so lovely I don't know what to say!" and Jill put up both arms, as words failed her, and grateful kisses were all she had to offer.

"Can you suggest anything more to add to the pleasantness?" asked the gentle lady, holding the small hands in her own, and feeling well repaid by the child's delight.

"Only Jack;" and Jill's laugh was good to hear, as she glanced up with merry, yet wistful eyes.

"You are right. We'll have him in at once, or he will come hopping on one leg;" and away hurried his mother, laughing, too, for whistles, shouts, thumps, and violent demonstrations of all kinds had been heard from the room where Jack was raging with impatience, while he waited for his share of the surprise.

Jill could hardly lie still when she heard the roll of another chair-bed coming down the hall, its passage enlivened with cries of "Starboard! Port! Easy now! Pull away!" from Ralph and Frank, as they steered the recumbent Columbus on his first voyage of discovery.

"Well, I call that handsome!" was Jack's exclamation, when the full beauty of the scene burst upon his view. Then he forgot all about it and gave a whoop of pleasure, for there beside the fire was an eager face, two hands beckoning, and Jill's voice crying, joyfully, —

"I'm here! I'm here! Oh, do come, quick!" Down the long room rattled the chair, Jack cheering all the way, and brought up beside the other one, as the long-parted friends exclaimed, with one accord, —

"Isn't this jolly!"

It certainly did look so, for Ralph and Frank danced a wild sort of fandango round the tree, Dr. Whiting stood and laughed, while the two mothers beamed from the door-way, and the children, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry, compromised the matter by clapping their hands and shouting, "Merry Christmas to everybody!" like a pair of little maniacs.

Then they all sobered down, and the busy ones went off to the various duties of the day, leaving the young invalids to repose and enjoy themselves together.

"How nice you look," said Jill, when they had duly admired the pretty room.

"So do you," gallantly returned Jack, as he surveyed her with unusual interest.

They did look very nice, though happiness was the principal beautifier. Jill wore a red wrapper, with the most brilliant of all the necklaces sparkling at her throat, over a nicely crimped frill her mother had made in honor of the day. All the curly black hair was gathered into a red net, and a pair of smart little moccasins covered the feet that had not stepped for many a weary day. Jack was not so gay, but had made himself as fine as circumstances would permit. A gray dressing-gown, with blue cuffs and collar, was very becoming to the blonde youth; an immaculate shirt, best studs, sleeve-buttons, blue tie, and handkerchief wet with cologne sticking out of the breast-pocket, gave an air of elegance in spite of the afghan spread over the lower portions of his manly form. The yellow hair was brushed till it shone, and being parted in the middle, to hide the black patch, made two engaging little “quirls” on his forehead. The summer tan had faded from his cheeks, but his eyes were as blue as the wintry sky, and nearly every white tooth was visible as he smiled on his partner in misfortune, saying cheerily, —

“I’m ever so glad to see you again; guess we are over the worst of it now, and can have good times. Won’t it be fun to stay here all the while, and amuse one another?”

“Yes, indeed; but one day is so short! It will be stupider than ever when I go home to-night,” answered Jill, looking about her with longing eyes.

“But you are not going home to-night; you are to stay ever so long. Didn’t Mamma tell you?”

“No. Oh, how splendid! Am I really? Where will I sleep? What will Mammy do without me?” and Jill almost sat up, she was so delighted with the new surprise.

“That room in there is all fixed for you. I made Frank tell me so much. Mamma said I might tell you, but I didn’t think she would be able to hold in if she saw you first. Your mother is coming, too, and we are all going to have larks together till we are well.”

The splendor of this arrangement took Jill’s breath away, and before she got it again, in came Frank and Ralph with two clothes-baskets of treasures to be hung upon the tree. While they wired on the candles the children asked questions, and found out all they wanted to know about the new plans and pleasures.

“Who fixed all this?”

“Mamma thought of it, and Ralph and I did it. He’s the man for this sort of thing, you know. He proposed cutting out the arches and sticking on birds and butterflies just where they looked best. I put those canaries over there, they looked so well against the blue;” and Frank proudly pointed out some queer orange-colored fowls, looking as if they were having fits in the air, but very effective, nevertheless.

“Your mother said you might call this the Bird Room. We caught a scarlet-tanager for you to begin with, didn’t we, Jack?” and Ralph threw a *bon-bon* at Jill, who looked very like a bright little bird in a warm nest.

“Good for you! Yes, and we are going to keep her in this pretty cage till we can both fly off together. I say, Jill, where shall we be in our classes when we do get back?” and Jack’s merry face fell at the thought.

“At the foot, if we don’t study and keep up. Doctor said I might study sometimes, if I’d lie still as long as he thought best, and Molly brought home my books, and Merry says she will come in every day and tell me where the lessons are. I don’t mean to fall behind, if my backbone is cracked,” said Jill, with a decided nod that made several black rings fly out of the net to dance on her forehead.

"Frank said he'd pull me along in my Latin, but I've been lazy and haven't done a thing. Let's go at it and start fair for New Year," proposed Jack, who did not love study as the bright girl did, but was ashamed to fall behind her in anything.

"All right. They've been reviewing, so we can keep up when they begin, if we work next week, while the rest have a holiday. Oh, dear, I do miss school dreadfully;" and Jill sighed for the old desk, every blot and notch of which was dear to her.

"There come our things, and pretty nice they look, too," said Jack; and his mother began to dress the tree, hanging up the gay horns, the gilded nuts, red and yellow apples and oranges, and festooning long strings of pop-corn and scarlet cranberries from bough to bough, with the glittering necklaces hung where the light would show their colors best.

"I never saw such a splendid tree before. I'm glad we could help, though we were ill. Is it all done now?" asked Jill, when the last parcel was tied on and everybody stood back to admire the pretty sight.

"One thing more. Hand me that box, Frank, and be very careful that you fasten this up firmly, Ralph," answered Mrs. Minot, as she took from its wrappings the waxen figure of a little child. The rosy limbs were very life-like, so was the smiling face under the locks of shining hair. Both plump arms were outspread as if to scatter blessings over all, and downy wings seemed to flutter from the dimpled shoulders, making an angel of the baby.

"Is it St. Nicholas?" asked Jill, who had never seen that famous personage, and knew but little of Christmas festivities.

"It is the Christ-child, whose birthday we are celebrating. I got the best I could find, for I like the idea better than old Santa Claus; though we *may* have him, too," said Mamma, holding the little image so that both could see it well.

"It looks like a real baby;" and Jack touched the rosy foot with the tip of his finger, as if expecting a crow from the half-open lips.

"It reminds me of the saints in the chapel of the Sacred Heart in Montreal. One little St. John looked like this, only he had a lamb instead of wings," said Jill, stroking the flaxen hair, and wishing she dared ask for it to play with.

"He is the children's saint to pray to, love, and imitate, for he never forgot them, but blessed and healed and taught them all his life. This is only a poor image of the holiest baby ever born, but I hope it will keep his memory in your minds all day, because this is the day for good resolutions, happy thoughts, and humble prayers, as well as play and gifts and feasting."

While she spoke, Mrs. Minot, touching the little figure as tenderly as if it were alive, had tied a broad white ribbon round it, and, handing it to Ralph, bade him fasten it to the hook above the tree-top, where it seemed to float as if the downy wings supported it.

Jack and Jill lay silently watching, with a sweet sort of soberness in their young faces, and for a moment the room was very still as all eyes looked up at the Blessed Child. The sunshine seemed to grow more golden as it flickered on the little head, the flames glanced about the glittering tree as if trying to climb and kiss the baby feet, and, without, a chime of bells rang sweetly, calling people to hear again the lovely story of the life begun on Christmas Day.

Only a minute, but it did them good, and presently, when the pleasant work was over, and the workers gone, the boys to church, and Mamma to see about lunch for the invalids, Jack said, gravely, to Jill, —

“I think we ought to be extra good, every one is so kind to us, and we are getting well, and going to have such capital times. Don’t see how we can do anything else to show we are grateful.”

“It isn’t easy to be good when one is sick,” said Jill, thoughtfully. “I fret dreadfully, I get so tired of being still. I want to scream sometimes, but I don’t, because it would scare Mammy, so I cry. Do you cry, Jack?”

“Men never do. I want to tramp round when things bother me; but I can’t, so I kick and say, ‘Hang it!’ and when I get very bad I pitch into Frank, and he lets me. I tell you, Jill, he’s a good brother!” and Jack privately resolved then and there to invite Frank to take it out of him in any form he pleased as soon as health would permit.

“I rather think we *shall* grow good in this pretty place, for I don’t see how we can be bad if we want to, it is all so nice and sort of pious here,” said Jill, with her eyes on the angel over the tree.

“A fellow can be awfully hungry, I know that. I didn’t half eat breakfast, I was in such a hurry to see you, and know all about the secrets. Frank kept saying I couldn’t guess, that you had come, and I never would be ready, till finally I got mad and fired an egg at him, and made no end of a mess.”

Jack and Jill went off into a gale of laughter at the idea of dignified Frank dodging the egg that smashed on the wall, leaving an indelible mark of Jack’s besetting sin, impatience.

Just then Mrs. Minot came in, well pleased to hear such pleasant sounds, and to see two merry faces, where usually one listless one met her anxious eyes.

“The new medicine works well, neighbor,” she said to Mrs. Pecq, who followed with the lunch tray.

“Indeed it does, mem. I feel as if I’d taken a sup myself, I’m that easy in my mind.”

And she looked so, too, for she seemed to have left all her cares in the little house when she locked the door behind her, and now stood smiling with a clean apron on, so fresh and cheerful, that Jill hardly knew her own mother.

“Things taste better when you have someone to eat with you,” observed Jack, as they devoured sandwiches, and drank milk out of little mugs with rosebuds on them.

“Don’t eat too much, or you won’t be ready for the next surprise,” said his mother, when the plates were empty, and the last drop gone down throats dry with much chatter.

“More surprises! Oh, what fun!” cried Jill. And all the rest of the morning, in the intervals of talk and play, they tried to guess what it could be.

At two o’clock they found out, for dinner was served in the Bird Room, and the children revelled in the simple feast prepared for them. The two mothers kept the little bed-tables well supplied, and fed their nurslings like maternal birds, while Frank presided over the feast with great dignity, and ate a dinner which would have astonished Mamma, if she had not been too busy to observe how fast the mince pie vanished.

“The girls said Christmas was spoiled because of us; but I don’t think so, and they won’t either, when they see this splendid place and know all about our nice plans,” said Jill, luxuriously eating the nut-meats Jack picked out for her, as they lay in Eastern style at the festive board.

“I call this broken bones made easy. I never had a better Christmas. Have a raisin? Here’s a good fat one.” And Jack made a long arm to Jill’s mouth, which began to sing “Little Jack Horner” as an appropriate return.

“It would have been a lonesome one to all of us, I’m thinking, but for your mother, boys. My duty and hearty thanks to you, mem,” put in grateful Mrs. Pecq, bowing over her coffee-cup as she had seen ladies bow over their wine-glasses at dinner parties in Old England.

“I rise to propose a health, Our Mothers.” And Frank stood up with a goblet of water, for not even at Christmas time was wine seen on that table.

“Hip, hip, hurrah!” called Jack, baptizing himself with a good sprinkle, as he waved his glass and drank the toast with a look that made his mother’s eyes fill with happy tears.

Jill threw her mother a kiss, feeling very grown up and elegant to be dining out in such style. Then they drank every one’s health with much merriment, till Frank declared that Jack would float off on the deluge of water he splashed about in his enthusiasm, and Mamma proposed a rest after the merry-making.

“Now the best fun is coming, and we have not long to wait,” said the boy, when naps and rides about the room had whiled away the brief interval between dinner and dusk, for the evening entertainment was to be an early one, to suit the invalids’ bedtime.

“I hope the girls will like their things. I helped to choose them, and each has a nice present. I don’t know mine, though, and I’m in a twitter to see it,” said Jill, as they lay waiting for the fun to begin.

“I do; I chose it, so I know you will like one of them, any way.”

“Have I got more than one?”

“I guess you’ll think so when they are handed down. The bell was going all day yesterday, and the girls kept bringing in bundles for you; I see seven now,” and Jack rolled his eyes from one mysterious parcel to another hanging on the laden boughs.

“I know something, too. That square bundle is what you want ever so much. I told Frank, and he got it for his present. It is all red and gold outside, and every sort of color inside; you’ll hurrah when you see it. That roundish one is yours too; I made them,” cried Jill, pointing to a flat package tied to the stem of the tree, and a neat little roll in which were the blue mittens that she had knit for him.

“I can wait;” but the boy’s eyes shone with eagerness, and he could not resist firing two or three pop-corns at it to see whether it was hard or soft.

“That barking dog is for Boo, and the little yellow sled, so Molly can drag him to school, he always tumbles down so when it is slippery,” continued Jill, proud of her superior knowledge, as she showed a small spotted animal hanging by its tail, with a red tongue displayed as if about to taste the sweeties in the horn below.

“Don’t talk about sleds, for mercy’s sake! I never want to see another, and you wouldn’t, either, if you had to lie with a flat-iron tied to your ankle, as I do,” said Jack, with a kick of the well leg and an ireful glance at the weight attached to the other that it might not contract while healing.

“Well, I think plasters, and liniment, and rubbing, as bad as flat-irons any day. I don’t believe you have ached half so much as I have, though it sounds worse to break legs than to sprain your back,” protested Jill, eager to prove herself the greater sufferer, as invalids are apt to be.

“I guess you wouldn’t think so if you’d been pulled round as I was when they set my leg. Caesar, how it did hurt!” and Jack squirmed at the recollection of it.

“You didn’t faint away as I did when the doctor was finding out if my *vertebrums* were hurt, so now!” cried Jill, bound to carry her point, though not at all clear what vertebrae were.

“Pooh! Girls always faint. Men are braver, and I didn’t faint a bit in spite of all that horrid agony."

"You howled; Frank told me so. Doctor said *I* was a brave girl, so you needn't brag, for you'll have to go on a crutch for a while. I know that."

"You may have to use two of them for years, may be. I heard the doctor tell my mother so. I shall be up and about long before you will. Now then!"

Both children were getting excited, for the various pleasures of the day had been rather too much for them, and there is no knowing but they would have added the sad surprise of a quarrel to the pleasant ones of the day, if a cheerful whistle had not been heard, as Ralph came in to light the candles and give the last artistic touches to the room.

"Well, young folks, how goes it? Had a merry time so far?" he asked, as he fixed the steps and ran up with a lighted match in his hand.

"Very nice, thank you," answered a prim little voice from the dusk below, for only the glow of the fire filled the room just then.

Jack said nothing, and two red sulky faces were hidden in the dark, watching candle after candle sputter, brighten, and twinkle, till the trembling shadows began to flit away like imps afraid of the light.

"Now he will see my face, and I know it is cross," thought Jill, as Ralph went round the last circle, leaving another line of sparks among the hemlock boughs.

Jack thought the same, and had just got the frown smoothed out of his forehead, when Frank brought a fresh log, and a glorious blaze sprung up, filling every corner of the room, and dancing over the figures in the long chairs till they had to brighten whether they liked it or not. Presently the bell began to ring and gay voices to sound below: then Jill smiled in spite of herself as Molly Loo's usual cry of "Oh, dear, where *is* that child?" reached her, and Jack could not help keeping time to the march Ed played, while Frank and Gus marshalled the procession.

"Ready!" cried Mrs. Minot, at last, and up came the troop of eager lads and lasses, brave in holiday suits, with faces to match. A unanimous "O, o, o!" burst from twenty tongues, as the full splendor of the tree, the room, and its inmates, dawned upon them; for not only did the pretty Christ-child hover above, but Santa Claus himself stood below, fur-clad, white-bearded, and powdered with snow from the dredging-box.

Ralph was a good actor, and, when the first raptures were over he distributed the presents with such droll speeches, jokes, and gambols, that the room rang with merriment, and passers-by paused to listen, sure that here, at least, Christmas was merry. It would be impossible to tell about all the gifts or the joy of the receivers, but every one was satisfied, and the king and queen of the revels so overwhelmed with little tokens of good-will, that their beds looked like booths at a fair. Jack beamed over the handsome postage-stamp book which had long been the desire of his heart, and Jill felt like a millionaire, with a silver fruit-knife, a pretty work-basket, and oh! — coals of fire on her head! — a ring from Jack.

A simple little thing enough, with one tiny turquoise forget-me-not, but something like a dew-drop fell on it when no one was looking, and she longed to say, "I'm sorry I was cross; forgive me, Jack." But it could not be done then, so she turned to admire Merry's bed-shoes, the pots of pansies, hyacinths, and geranium which Gus and his sisters sent for her window garden, Molly's queer Christmas pie, and the zither Ed promised to teach her how to play upon.

The tree was soon stripped, and pop-corns strewed the floor as the children stood about picking them off the red threads when candy gave out, with an occasional cranberry by way of relish. Boo insisted on trying the new sled at once, and enlivened the trip by the squeaking of the spotted dog, the toot of a tin trumpet, and shouts of joy at the splendor of the turn-out.

The girls all put on their necklaces, and danced about like fine ladies at a ball. The boys fell to comparing skates, balls, and cuff-buttons on the spot, while the little ones devoted all their energies to eating everything eatable they could lay their hands on.

Games were played till nine o'clock, and then the party broke up, after they had taken hands round the tree and sung a song written by one whom you all know, — so faithfully and beautifully does she love and labor for children the world over.

THE BLESSED DAY

"What shall little children bring
  On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day?
What shall little children bring
  On Christmas Day in the morning?
This shall little children bring
  On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;
Love and joy to Christ their king,
  On Christmas Day in the morning!

"What shall little children sing
  On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day?
What shall little children sing
  On Christmas Day in the morning?
The grand old carols shall they sing
  On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day;

With all their hearts, their offerings bring
On Christmas Day in the morning."

Jack was carried off to bed in such haste that he had only time to call out, "Good-night!" before he was rolled away, gaping as he went. Jill soon found herself tucked up in the great white bed she was to share with her mother, and lay looking about the pleasant chamber, while Mrs. Pecq ran home for a minute to see that all was safe there for the night.

After the merry din the house seemed very still, with only a light step now and then, the murmur of voices not far away, or the jingle of sleigh-bells from without, and the little girl rested easily among the pillows, thinking over the pleasures of the day, too wide-awake for sleep. There was no lamp in the chamber, but she could look into the pretty Bird Room, where the fire-light still shone on flowery walls, deserted tree, and Christ-child floating above the green. Jill's eyes wandered there and lingered till they were full of regretful tears, because the sight of the little angel recalled the words spoken when it was hung up, the good resolution she had taken then, and how soon it was broken.

"I said I couldn't be bad in that lovely place, and I was a cross, ungrateful girl after all they've done for Mammy and me. Poor Jack *was* hurt the worst, and he *was* brave, though he did scream. I wish I could go and tell him so, and hear him say, 'All right.' Oh, me, I've spoiled the day!"

A great sob choked more words, and Jill was about to have a comfortable cry, when someone entered the other room, and she saw Frank doing something with a long cord and a thing that looked like a tiny drum. Quiet as a bright-eyed mouse, Jill peeped out wondering what it was, and suspecting mischief, for the boy was laughing to himself as he stretched the cord, and now and then bent over the little object in his hand, touching it with great care.

"May be it's a torpedo to blow up and scare me; Jack likes to play tricks. Well, I'll scream loud when it goes off, so he will be satisfied that I'm dreadfully frightened," thought Jill, little dreaming what the last surprise of the day was to be.

Presently a voice whispered, —

"I say! Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Any one there but you?"

"No."

"Catch this, then. Hold it to your ear and see what you'll get."

The little drum came flying in, and, catching it, Jill, with some hesitation, obeyed Frank's order. Judge of her amazement when she caught in broken whispers these touching words: —

“Sorry I was cross. Forgive and forget. Start fair to-morrow. All right. Jack.”

Jill was so delighted with this handsome apology, that she could not reply for a moment, then steadied her voice, and answered back in her sweetest tone, —

“I’m sorry, too. Never, never, will again. Feel much better now. Good-night, you dear old thing.”

Satisfied with the success of his telephone, Frank twitched back the drum and vanished, leaving Jill to lay her cheek upon the hand that wore the little ring and fall asleep, saying to herself, with a farewell glance at the children’s saint, dimly seen in the soft gloom, “I will not forget. I will be good!”

Chapter VII. Jill’s Mission

The good times began immediately, and very little studying was done that week in spite of the virtuous resolutions made by certain young persons on Christmas Day. But, dear me, how was it possible to settle down to lessons in the delightful Bird Room, with not only its own charms to distract one, but all the new gifts to enjoy, and a dozen calls a day to occupy one’s time?

“I guess we’d better wait till the others are at school, and just go in for fun this week,” said Jack, who was in great spirits at the prospect of getting up, for the splints were off, and he hoped to be promoted to crutches very soon.

“*I* shall keep my Speller by me and take a look at it every day, for that is what I’m most backward in. But I intend to devote myself to you, Jack, and be real kind and useful. I’ve made a plan to do it, and I mean to carry it out, any way,” answered Jill, who had begun to be a missionary, and felt that this was a field of labor where she could distinguish herself.

“Here’s a home mission all ready for you, and you can be paying your debts beside doing yourself good,” Mrs. Pecq said to her in private, having found plenty to do herself.

Now Jill made one great mistake at the outset — she forgot that she was the one to be converted to good manners and gentleness, and devoted her efforts to looking after Jack, finding it much easier to cure other people’s faults than her own. Jack was a most engaging heathen, and needed very little instruction; therefore Jill thought her task would be an easy one. But three or four weeks of petting and play had rather demoralized both children, so Jill’s Speller, though tucked under the sofa pillow every day, was seldom looked at, and Jack shirked his Latin shamefully. Both read all the story-books they could get, held daily levees in the Bird Room, and all their spare minutes were spent in teaching Snowdrop, the great Angora cat, to bring the ball when they dropped it in their game. So Saturday came, and both were rather the worse for so much idleness, since daily duties and studies are the wholesome bread which feeds the mind better than the dyspeptic plum-cake of sensational reading, or the unsubstantial *bon-bons* of frivolous amusement.

It was a stormy day, so they had few callers, and devoted themselves to arranging the album; for these books were all the rage just then, and boys met to compare, discuss, buy, sell, and “swap” stamps with as much interest as men on ‘Change gamble in stocks. Jack had a nice little collection, and had been saving up pocket-money to buy a book in which to preserve his treasures. Now, thanks to Jill's timely suggestion, Frank had given him a fine one, and several friends had contributed a number of rare stamps to grace the large, inviting pages. Jill wielded the gum-brush and fitted on the little flaps, as her fingers were skilful at this nice work, and Jack put each stamp in its proper place with great rustling of leaves and comparing of marks. Returning, after a brief absence, Mrs. Minot beheld the countenances of the workers adorned with gay stamps, giving them a very curious appearance.

"My dears! what new play have you got now? Are you wild Indians? or letters that have gone round the world before finding the right address?" she asked, laughing at the ridiculous sight, for both were as sober as judges and deeply absorbed in some doubtful specimen.

"Oh, we just stuck them there to keep them safe; they get lost if we leave them lying round. It's very handy, for I can see in a minute what I want on Jill's face and she on mine, and put our fingers on the right chap at once," answered Jack, adding, with an anxious gaze at his friend's variegated countenance, "Where the dickens *is* my New Granada? It's rare, and I wouldn't lose it for a dollar."

"Why, there it is on your own nose. Don't you remember you put it there because you said mine was not big enough to hold it?" laughed Jill, tweaking a large orange square off the round nose of her neighbor, causing it to wrinkle up in a droll way, as the gum made the operation slightly painful.

"So I did, and gave you Little Bolivar on yours. Now I'll have Alsace and Lorraine, 1870. There are seven of them, so hold still and see how you like it," returned Jack, picking the large, pale stamps one by one from Jill's forehead, which they crossed like a band.

She bore it without flinching, saying to herself with a secret smile, as she glanced at the hot fire, which scorched her if she kept near enough to Jack to help him, "This really is being like a missionary, with a tattooed savage to look after. I have to suffer a little, as the good folks did who got speared and roasted sometimes; but I won't complain a bit, though my forehead smarts, my arms are tired, and one cheek is as red as fire."

"The Roman States make a handsome page, don't they?" asked Jack, little dreaming of the part he was playing in Jill's mind. "Oh, I say, isn't Corea a beauty? I'm ever so proud of that;" and he gazed fondly on a big blue stamp, the sole ornament of one page.

"I don't see why the Cape of Good Hope has pyramids. They ought to go in Egypt. The Sandwich Islands are all right, with heads of the black kings and queens on them," said Jill, feeling that they were very appropriate to her private play.

"Turkey has crescents, Australia swans, and Spain women's heads, with black bars across them. Frank says it is because they keep women shut up so; but that was only his fun. I'd rather have a good, honest green United States, with Washington on it, or a blue one-center with old Franklin, than all their eagles and lions and kings and queens put together," added the democratic boy, with a disrespectful slap on a crowned head as he settled Heligoland in its place.

"Why does Austria have Mercury on the stamp, I wonder? Do they wear helmets like that?" asked Jill, with the brush-handle in her mouth as she cut a fresh batch of flaps.

"May be he was postman to the gods, so he is put on stamps now. The Prussians wear helmets, but they have spikes like the old Roman fellows. I like Prussians ever so much; they fight splendidly, and always beat. Austrians have a handsome uniform, though."

"Talking of Romans reminds me that I have not heard your Latin for two days. Come, lazybones, brace up, and let us have it now. I've done my compo, and shall have just time before I go out for a tramp with Gus," said Frank, putting by a neat page to dry, for he studied every day like a conscientious lad as he was.

"Don't know it. Not going to try till next week. Grind away over your old Greek as much as you like, but don't bother me," answered Jack, frowning at the mere thought of the detested lesson.

But Frank adored his Xenophon, and would not see his old friend, Caesar, neglected without an effort to defend him; so he confiscated the gum-pot, and effectually stopped the stamp business by whisking away at one fell swoop all that lay on Jill's table.

"Now then, young man, you will quit this sort of nonsense and do your lesson, or you won't see these fellows again in a hurry. You asked me to hear you, and I'm going to do it; here's the book."

Frank's tone was the dictatorial one, which Jack hated and always found hard to obey, especially when he knew he ought to do it. Usually, when his patience was tried, he strode about the room, or ran off for a race round the garden, coming back breathless, but good-tempered. Now both these vents for irritation were denied him, and he had fallen into the way of throwing things about in a pet. He longed to send Caesar to perpetual banishment in the fire blazing close by, but resisted the temptation, and answered honestly, though gruffly: "I know I did, but I don't see any use in pouncing on a fellow when he isn't ready. I haven't got my lesson, and don't mean to worry about it; so you may just give me back my things and go about your business."

"I'll give you back a stamp for every perfect lesson you get, and you won't see them on any other terms;" and, thrusting the treasures into his pocket, Frank caught up his rubber boots, and went off swinging them like a pair of clubs, feeling that he would give a trifle to be able to use them on his lazy brother.

At this high-handed proceeding, and the threat which accompanied it, Jack's patience gave out, and catching up Caesar, as he thought, sent him flying after the retreating tyrant with the defiant declaration, —

"Keep them, then, and your old book, too! I won't look at it till you give all my stamps back and say you are sorry. So now!"

It was all over before Mamma could interfere, or Jill do more than clutch and cling to the gum-brush. Frank vanished unharmed, but the poor book dashed against the wall to fall half open on the floor, its gay cover loosened, and its smooth leaves crushed by the blow.

"It's the album! O Jack, how could you?" cried Jill, dismayed at sight of the precious book so maltreated by the owner.

"Thought it was the other. Guess it isn't hurt much. Didn't mean to hit him, any way. He does provoke me so," muttered Jack, very red and shamefaced as his mother picked up the book and laid it silently on the table before him. He did not know what to do with himself, and was thankful for the stamps still left him, finding great relief in making faces as he plucked them one by one from his mortified countenance. Jill looked on, half glad, half sorry that her savage showed such signs of unconverted ferocity, and Mrs. Minot went on writing letters, wearing the grave look her sons found harder to bear than another person's scolding. No one spoke for a moment, and the silence was becoming awkward when Gus appeared in a rubber suit, bringing a book to Jack from Laura and a note to Jill from Lotty.

"Look here, you just trundle me into my den, please, I'm going to have a nap, it's so dull to-day I don't feel like doing much," said Jack, when Gus had done his errands, trying to look as if he knew nothing about the fracas.

Jack folded his arms and departed like a warrior borne from the battle-field, to be chaffed unmercifully for a "pepper-pot," while Gus made him comfortable in his own room.

"I heard once of a boy who threw a fork at his brother and put his eye out. But he didn't mean to, and the brother forgave him, and he never did so any more," observed Jill, in a pensive tone, wishing to show that she felt all the dangers of impatience, but was sorry for the culprit.

"Did the boy ever forgive himself?" asked Mrs. Minot.

"No, 'm; I suppose not. But Jack didn't hit Frank, and feels real sorry, I know."

"He might have, and hurt him very much. Our actions are in our own hands, but the consequences of them are not. Remember that, my dear, and think twice before you do anything.”

“Yes, ‘m, I will;” and Jill composed herself to consider what missionaries usually did when the natives hurled tomahawks and boomerangs at one another, and defied the rulers of the land.

Mrs. Minot wrote one page of a new letter, then stopped, pushed her papers about, thought a little, and finally got up, saying, as if she found it impossible to resist the yearning of her heart for the naughty boy, —

“I am going to see if Jack is covered up, he is so helpless, and liable to take cold. Don’t stir till I come back.”

“No, ‘m, I won’t.”

Away went the tender parent to find her son studying Caesar for dear life, and all the more amiable for the little gust which had blown away the temporary irritability. The brothers were often called “Thunder and Lightning,” because Frank lowered and growled and was a good while clearing up, while Jack’s temper came and went like a flash, and the air was all the clearer for the escape of dangerous electricity. Of course Mamma had to stop and deliver a little lecture, illustrated by sad tales of petulant boys, and punctuated with kisses which took off the edge of these afflicting narratives.

Jill meantime meditated morally on the superiority of her own good temper over the hasty one of her dear playmate, and just when she was feeling unusually uplifted and secure, alas! like so many of us, she fell, in the most deplorable manner.

Glancing about the room for something to do, she saw a sheet of paper lying exactly out of reach, where it had fluttered from the table unperceived. At first her eye rested on it as carelessly as it did on the stray stamp Frank had dropped; then, as if one thing suggested the other, she took it into her head that the paper was Frank’s composition, or, better still, a note to Annette, for the two corresponded when absence or weather prevented the daily meeting at school.

“Wouldn’t it be fun to keep it till he gives back Jack’s stamps? It would plague him so if it was a note, and I do believe it is, for compo’s don’t begin with two words on one side. I’ll get it, and Jack and I will plan some way to pay him off, cross thing!”

Forgetting her promise not to stir, also how dishonorable it was to read other people’s letters, Jill caught up the long-handled hook, often in use now, and tried to pull the paper nearer. It would not come at once, for a seam in the carpet held it, and Jill feared to tear or crumple it if she was not very careful. The hook was rather heavy and long for her to manage, and Jack usually did the fishing, so she was not very skilful; and just as she was giving a particularly quick jerk, she lost her balance, fell off the sofa, and dropped the pole with a bang.

"Oh, my back!" was all she could think or say as she felt the jar all through her little body, and a corresponding fear in her guilty little mind that someone would come and find out the double mischief she had been at. For a moment she lay quite still to recover from the shock, then as the pain passed she began to wonder how she should get back, and looked about her to see if she could do it alone. She thought she could, as the sofa was near and she had improved so much that she could sit up a little if the doctor would have let her. She was gathering herself together for the effort, when, within arm's reach now, she saw the tempting paper, and seized it with glee, for in spite of her predicament she did want to tease Frank. A glance showed that it was not the composition nor a note, but the beginning of a letter from Mrs. Minot to her sister, and Jill was about to lay it down when her own name caught her eye, and she could not resist reading it. Hard words to write of one so young, doubly hard to read, and impossible to forget.

"Dear Lizzie, — Jack continues to do very well, and will soon be up again. But we begin to fear that the little girl is permanently injured in the back. She is here, and we do our best for her; but I never look at her without thinking of Lucinda Snow, who, you remember, was bedridden for twenty years, owing to a fall at fifteen. Poor little Janey does not know yet, and I hope" — There it ended, and "poor little Janey's" punishment for disobedience began that instant. She thought she was getting well because she did not suffer all the time, and every one spoke cheerfully about "by and by." Now she knew the truth, and shut her eyes with a shiver as she said, low, to herself, —

"Twenty years! I couldn't bear it; oh, I couldn't bear it!"

A very miserable Jill lay on the floor, and for a while did not care who came and found her; then the last words of the letter — "I hope" — seemed to shine across the blackness of the dreadful "twenty years" and cheer her up a bit, for despair never lives long in young hearts, and Jill was a brave child.

"That is why Mammy sighs so when she dresses me, and every one is so good to me. Perhaps Mrs. Minot doesn't really know, after all. She was dreadfully scared about Jack, and he is getting well. I'd like to ask Doctor, but he might find out about the letter. Oh, dear, why didn't I keep still and let the horrid thing alone!"

As she thought that, Jill pushed the paper away, pulled herself up, and with much painful effort managed to get back to her sofa, where she laid herself down with a groan, feeling as if the twenty years had already passed over her since she tumbled off.

"I've told a lie, for I said I wouldn't stir. I've hurt my back, I've done a mean thing, and I've got paid for it. A nice missionary I am; I'd better begin at home, as Mammy told me to;" and Jill groaned again, remembering her mother's words. "Now I've got another secret to keep all alone, for I'd be ashamed to tell the girls. I guess I'll turn round and study my spelling; then no one will see my face."

Jill looked the picture of a good, industrious child as she lay with her back to the large table, her book held so that nothing was to be seen but one cheek and a pair of lips moving busily. Fortunately, it is difficult for little sinners to act a part, and, even if the face is hidden, something in the body seems to betray the internal remorse and shame. Usually, Jill lay flat and still; now her back was bent in a peculiar way as she leaned over her book, and one foot wagged nervously, while on the visible cheek was a Spanish stamp with a woman's face looking through the black bars, very suggestively, if she had known it. How long the minutes seemed till some one came, and what a queer little jump her heart gave when Mrs. Minot's voice said, cheerfully, "Jack is all right, and, I declare, so is Jill. I really believe there is a telegraph still working somewhere between you two, and each knows what the other is about without words."

"I didn't have any other book handy, so I thought I'd study awhile," answered Jill, feeling that she deserved no praise for her seeming industry.

She cast a sidelong glance as she spoke, and seeing that Mrs. Minot was looking for the letter, hid her face and lay so still she could hear the rustle of the paper as it was taken from the floor. It was well she did not also see the quick look the lady gave her as she turned the letter and found a red stamp sticking to the under side, for this unlucky little witness told the story.

Mrs. Minot remembered having seen the stamp lying close to the sofa when she left the room, for she had had half a mind to take it to Jack, but did not, thinking Frank's plan had some advantages. She also recollected that a paper flew off the table, but being in haste she had not stopped to see what it was. Now, the stamp and the letter could hardly have come together without hands, for they lay a yard apart, and here, also, on the unwritten portion of the page, was the mark of a small green thumb. Jill had been winding wool for a stripe in her new afghan, and the green ball lay on her sofa. These signs suggested and confirmed what Mrs. Minot did not want to believe; so did the voice, attitude, and air of Jill, all very unlike her usual open, alert ways.

The kind lady could easily forgive the reading of her letter since the girl had found such sad news there, but the dangers of disobedience were serious in her case, and a glance showed that she was suffering either in mind or body — perhaps both.

"I will wait for her to tell me. She is an honest child, and the truth will soon come out," thought Mrs. Minot, as she took a clean sheet, and Jill tried to study.

“Shall I hear your lesson, dear? Jack means to recite his like a good boy, so suppose you follow his example,” she said, presently.

“I don’t know as I can say it, but I’ll try.”

Jill did try, and got on bravely till she came to the word “permanent;” there she hesitated, remembering where she saw it last.

“Do you know what that means?” asked her teacher, thinking to help her on by defining the word.

“Always — for a great while — or something like that; doesn’t it?” faltered Jill, with a tight feeling in her throat, and the color coming up, as she tried to speak easily, yet felt so shame-stricken she could not.

“Are you in pain, my child? Never mind the lesson; tell me, and I’ll do something for you.”

The kind words, the soft hand on her hot cheek, and the pity in the eyes that looked at her, were too much for Jill. A sob came first, and then the truth, told with hidden face and tears that washed the blush away, and set free the honest little soul that could not hide its fault from such a friend.

“I knew it all before, and was sure you would tell me, else you would not be the child I love and like to help so well.”

Then, while she soothed Jill’s trouble, Mrs. Minot told her story and showed the letter, wishing to lessen, if possible, some part of the pain it had given.

“Sly old stamp! To go and tell on me when I meant to own up, and get some credit if I could, after being so mean and bad,” said Jill, smiling through her tears when she saw the tell-tale witnesses against her.

“You had better stick it in your book to remind you of the bad consequences of disobedience, then perhaps *this* lesson will leave a ‘permanent’ impression on your mind and memory,” answered Mrs. Minot, glad to see her natural gayety coming back, and hoping that she had forgotten the contents of the unfortunate letter. But she had not; and presently, when the sad affair had been talked over and forgiven, Jill asked, slowly, as she tried to put on a brave look, —

“Please tell me about Lucinda Snow. If I am to be like her, I might as well know how she managed to bear it so long.”

“I’m sorry you ever heard of her, and yet perhaps it may help you to bear your trial, dear, which I hope will never be as heavy a one as hers. This Lucinda I knew for years, and though at first I thought her fate the saddest that could be, I came at last to see how happy she was in spite of her affliction, how good and useful and beloved.”

“Why, how could she be? What did she do?” cried Jill, forgetting her own troubles to look up with an open, eager face again.

“She was so patient, other people were ashamed to complain of their small worries; so cheerful, that her own great one grew lighter; so industrious, that she made both money and friends by pretty things she worked and sold to her many visitors. And, best of all, so wise and sweet that she seemed to get good out of everything, and make her poor room a sort of chapel where people went for comfort, counsel, and an example of a pious life. So, you see, Lucinda was not so very miserable after all."

"Well, if I could not be as I was, I'd like to be a woman like that. Only, I hope I shall not!" answered Jill, thoughtfully at first, then coming out so decidedly with the last words that it was evident the life of a bedridden saint was not at all to her mind.

"So do I; and I mean to believe that you will not. Meantime, we can try to make the waiting as useful and pleasant as possible. This painful little back will be a sort of conscience to remind you of what you ought to do and leave undone, and so you can be learning obedience. Then, when the body is strong, it will have formed a good habit to make duty easier; and my Lucinda can be a sweet example, even while lying here, if she chooses."

"Can I?" and Jill's eyes were full of softer tears as the comfortable, cheering words sank into her heart, to blossom slowly by and by into her life, for this was to be a long lesson, hard to learn, but very useful in the years to come.

When the boys returned, after the Latin was recited and peace restored, Jack showed her a recovered stamp promptly paid by Frank, who was as just as he was severe, and Jill asked for the old red one, though she did not tell why she wanted it, nor show it put away in the spelling-book, a little seal upon a promise made to be kept.

Chapter VIII. Merry and Molly

Now let us see how the other missionaries got on with their tasks.

Farmer Grant was a thrifty, well-to-do man, anxious to give his children greater advantages than he had enjoyed, and to improve the fine place of which he was justly proud. Mrs. Grant was a notable housewife, as ambitious and industrious as her husband, but too busy to spend any time on the elegancies of life, though always ready to help the poor and sick like a good neighbor and Christian woman. The three sons — Tom, Dick, and Harry — were big fellows of seventeen, nineteen, and twenty-one; the first two on the farm, and the elder in a store just setting up for himself. Kind-hearted but rough-mannered youths, who loved Merry very much, but teased her sadly about her "fine lady airs," as they called her dainty ways and love of beauty.

Merry was a thoughtful girl, full of innocent fancies, refined tastes, and romantic dreams, in which no one sympathized at home, though she was the pet of the family. It did seem, to an outsider, as if the delicate little creature had got there by mistake, for she looked very like a tea-rose in a field of clover and dandelions, whose highest aim in life was to feed cows and help make root beer.

When the girls talked over the new society, it pleased Merry very much, and she decided not only to try and love work better, but to convert her family to a liking for pretty things, as she called her own more cultivated tastes.

"I will begin at once, and show them that I don't mean to shirk my duty, though I do want to be nice," thought she, as she sat at supper one night and looked about her, planning her first move.

Not a very cheering prospect for a lover of the beautiful, certainly, for the big kitchen, though as neat as wax, had nothing lovely in it, except a red geranium blooming at the window. Nor were the people all that could be desired, in some respects, as they sat about the table shovelling in pork and beans with their knives, drinking tea from their saucers, and laughing out with a hearty "Haw, haw," when anything amused them. Yet the boys were handsome, strong specimens, the farmer a hale, benevolent-looking man, the housewife a pleasant, sharp-eyed matron, who seemed to find comfort in looking often at the bright face at her elbow, with the broad forehead, clear eyes, sweet mouth, and quiet voice that came like music in among the loud masculine ones, or the quick, nervous tones of a woman always in a hurry.

Merry's face was so thoughtful that evening that her father observed it, for, when at home, he watched her as one watches a kitten, glad to see anything so pretty, young, and happy, at its play.

"Little daughter has got something on her mind, I mistrust. Come and tell father all about it," he said, with a sounding slap on his broad knee as he turned his chair from the table to the ugly stove, where three pairs of wet boots steamed underneath, and a great kettle of cider apple-sauce simmered above.

"When I've helped clear up, I'll come and talk. Now, mother, you sit down and rest; Roxy and I can do everything," answered Merry, patting the old rocking-chair so invitingly that the tired woman could not resist, especially as watching the kettle gave her an excuse for obeying.

"Well, I don't care if I do, for I've been on my feet since five o'clock. Be sure you cover things up, and shut the buttery door, and put the cat down cellar, and sift your meal. I'll see to the buckwheats last thing before I go to bed."

Mrs. Grant subsided with her knitting, for her hands were never idle; Tom tilted his chair back against the wall and picked his teeth with his pen-knife; Dick got out a little pot of grease, to make the boots water-tight; and Harry sat down at the small table to look over his accounts, with an important air, — for every one occupied this room, and the work was done in the out-kitchen behind.

Merry hated clearing up, but dutifully did every distasteful task, and kept her eye on careless Roxy till all was in order; then she gladly went to perch on her father's knee, seeing in all the faces about her the silent welcome they always wore for the "little one."

"Yes, I do want something, but I know you will say it is silly," she began, as her father pinched her blooming cheek, with the wish that his peaches would ever look half as well.

"Shouldn't wonder if it was a doll now;" and Mr. Grant stroked her head with an indulgent smile, as if she was about six instead of fifteen.

"Why, father, you know I don't! I haven't played with dollies for years and years. No; I want to fix up my room pretty, like Jill's. I'll do it all myself, and only want a few things, for I don't expect it to look as nice as hers."

Indignation gave Merry courage to state her wishes boldly, though she knew the boys would laugh. They did, and her mother said in a tone of surprise, —

"Why, child, what more can you want? I'm sure your room is always as neat as a new pin, thanks to your bringing up, and I told you to have a fire there whenever you wanted to."

"Let me have some old things out of the garret, and I'll show you what I want. It *is* neat, but so bare and ugly I hate to be there. I do so love something pretty to look at!" and Merry gave a little shiver of disgust as she turned her eyes away from the large greasy boot Dick was holding up to be sure it was well lubricated all round.

“So do I, and that’s a fact. I couldn’t get on without my pretty girl here, any way. Why, she touches up the old place better than a dozen flower-pots in full blow,” said the farmer, as his eye went from the scarlet geranium to the bright young face so near his own.

“I wish I had a dozen in the sitting-room window. Mother says they are not tidy, but I’d keep them neat, and I know you’d like it,” broke in Merry, glad of the chance to get one of the long-desired wishes of her heart fulfilled.

“I’ll fetch you some next time I go over to Ballad’s. Tell me what you want, and we’ll have a posy bed somewhere round, see if we don’t,” said her father, dimly understanding what she wanted.

“Now, if mother says I may fix my room, I shall be satisfied, and I’ll do my chores without a bit of fuss, to show how grateful I am,” said the girl, thanking her father with a kiss, and smiling at her mother so wistfully that the good woman could not refuse.

“You may have anything you like out of the blue chest. There’s a lot of things there that the moths got at after Grandma died, and I couldn’t bear to throw or give ‘em away. Trim up your room as you like, and mind you don’t forget your part of the bargain,” answered Mrs. Grant, seeing profit in the plan.

“I won’t; I’ll work all the morning to-morrow, and in the afternoon I’ll get ready to show you what I call a nice, pretty room,” answered Merry, looking so pleased it seemed as if another flower had blossomed in the large bare kitchen.

She kept her word, and the very stormy afternoon when Jill got into trouble, Merry was working busily at her little bower. In the blue chest she found a variety of treasures, and ignoring the moth holes, used them to the best advantage, trying to imitate the simple comfort with a touch of elegance which prevailed in Mrs. Minot’s back bedroom.

Three faded red-moreen curtains went up at the windows over the chilly paper shades, giving a pleasant glow to the bare walls. A red quilt with white stars, rather the worse for many washings, covered the bed, and a gay cloth the table, where a judicious arrangement of books and baskets concealed the spots. The little air-tight stove was banished, and a pair of ancient andirons shone in the fire-light. Grandma’s last and largest braided rug lay on the hearth, and her brass candlesticks adorned the bureau, over the mirror of which was festooned a white muslin skirt, tied up with Merry’s red sash. This piece of elegance gave the last touch to her room, she thought, and she was very proud of it, setting forth all her small store of trinkets in a large shell, with an empty scent bottle, and a clean tidy over the pincushion. On the walls she hung three old-fashioned pictures, which she ventured to borrow from the garret till better could be found. One a mourning piece, with a very tall lady weeping on an urn in a grove of willows, and two small boys in knee breeches and funny little square tails to their coats, looking like cherubs in large frills. The other was as good as a bonfire, being an eruption of Vesuvius, and very lurid indeed, for the Bay of Naples was boiling like a pot, the red sky raining rocks, and a few distracted people lying flat upon the shore. The third was a really pretty scene of children dancing round a May-pole, for though nearly a hundred years old, the little maids smiled and the boys pranced as gayly as if the flowers they carried were still alive and sweet.

"Now I'll call them all to see, and say that it is pretty. Then I'll enjoy it, and come here when things look dismal and bare everywhere else," said Merry, when at last it was done. She had worked all the afternoon, and only finished at supper time, so the candles had to be lighted that the toilette might look its best, and impress the beholders with an idea of true elegance. Unfortunately, the fire smoked a little, and a window was set ajar to clear the room; an evil-disposed gust blew in, wafting the thin drapery within reach of the light, and when Merry threw open the door proudly thinking to display her success, she was horrified to find the room in a blaze, and half her labor all in vain.

The conflagration was over in a minute, however, for the boys tore down the muslin and stamped out the fire with much laughter, while Mrs. Grant bewailed the damage to her carpet, and poor Merry took refuge in her father's arms, refusing to be comforted in spite of his kind commendation of "Grandma's fixins."

The third little missionary had the hardest time of all, and her first efforts were not much more satisfactory nor successful than the others. Her father was away from morning till night, and then had his paper to read, books to keep, or "a man to see down town," so that, after a hasty word at tea, he saw no more of the children till another evening, as they were seldom up at his early breakfast. He thought they were well taken care of, for Miss Bathsheba Dawes was an energetic, middle-aged spinster when she came into the family, and had been there fifteen years, so he did not observe, what a woman would have seen at once, that Miss Bat was getting old and careless, and everything about the house was at sixes and sevens. She took good care of him, and thought she had done her duty if she got three comfortable meals, nursed the children when they were ill, and saw that the house did not burn up. So Maria Louisa and Napoleon Bonaparte got on as they could, without the tender cares of a mother. Molly had been a happy-go-lucky child, contented with her pets, her freedom, and little Boo to love; but now she was just beginning to see that they were not like other children, and to feel ashamed of it.

"Papa is busy, but Miss Bat ought to see to us; she is paid for it, and goodness knows she has an easy time now, for if I ask her to do anything, she groans over her bones, and tells me young folks should wait on themselves. I take all the care of Boo off her hands, but I can’t wash my own things, and he hasn’t a decent trouser to his blessed little legs. I’d tell papa, but it wouldn’t do any good; he’d only say, ‘Yes, child, yes, I’ll attend to it,’ and never do a thing.”

This used to be Molly’s lament, when some especially trying event occurred, and if the girls were not there to condole with her, she would retire to the shed-chamber, call her nine cats about her, and, sitting in the old bushel basket, pull her hair about her ears, and scold all alone. The cats learned to understand this habit, and nobly did their best to dispel the gloom which now and then obscured the sunshine of their little mistress. Some of them would creep into her lap and purr till the comfortable sound soothed her irritation; the sedate elders sat at her feet blinking with such wise and sympathetic faces, that she felt as if half a dozen Solomons were giving her the sagest advice; while the kittens frisked about, cutting up their drollest capers till she laughed in spite of herself. When the laugh came, the worst of the fit was over, and she soon cheered up, dismissing the consolers with a pat all round, a feast of good things from Miss Bat’s larder, and the usual speech: —

“Well, dears, it’s of no use to worry. I guess we shall get along somehow, if we don’t fret.”

With which wise resolution, Molly would leave her retreat and freshen up her spirits by a row on the river or a romp with Boo, which always finished the case. Now, however, she was bound to try the new plan and do something toward reforming not only the boy’s condition, but the disorder and discomfort of home.

“I’ll play it is Siam, and this the house of a native, and I’m come to show the folks how to live nicely. Miss Bat won’t know what to make of it, and I can’t tell her, so I shall get some fun out of it, any way,” thought Molly, as she surveyed the dining-room the day her mission began.

The prospect was not cheering; and, if the natives of Siam live in such confusion, it is high time they were attended to. The breakfast-table still stood as it was left, with slops of coffee on the cloth; bits of bread, egg-shells, and potato-skins lay about, and one lonely sausage was cast away in the middle of a large platter. The furniture was dusty, stove untidy, and the carpet looked as if crumbs had been scattered to chickens who declined their breakfast. Boo was sitting on the sofa, with his arm through a hole in the cover, hunting for some lost treasure put away there for safe keeping, like a little magpie as he was. Molly fancied she washed and dressed him well enough; but to-day she seemed to see more clearly, and sighed as she thought of the hard job in store for her if she gave him the thorough washing he needed, and combed out that curly mop of hair.

"I'll clear up first and do that by and by. I ought to have a nice little tub and good towels, like Mrs. Minot, and I will, too, if I buy them myself," she said, piling up cups with an energy that threatened destruction to handles.

Miss Bat, who was trailing about the kitchen, with her head pinned up in a little plaid shawl, was so surprised by the demand for a pan of hot water and four clean towels, that she nearly dropped her snuff-box, chief comfort of her lazy soul.

"What new whimsey now? Generally, the dishes stand round till I have time to pick 'em up, and you are off coasting or careering somewhere. Well, this tidy fit won't last long, so I may as well make the most of it," said Miss Bat, as she handed out the required articles, and then pushed her spectacles from the tip of her sharp nose to her sharper black eyes for a good look at the girl who stood primly before her, with a clean apron on and her hair braided up instead of flying wildly about her shoulders.

"Umph!" was all the comment that Miss Bat made on this unusual neatness, and she went on scraping her saucepans, while Molly returned to her work, very well pleased with the effect of her first step, for she felt that the bewilderment of Miss Bat would be a constant inspiration to fresh efforts.

An hour of hard work produced an agreeable change in the abode of the native, for the table was cleared, room swept and dusted, fire brightened, and the holes in the sofa-covering were pinned up till time could be found to mend them. To be sure, rolls of lint lay in corners, smears of ashes were on the stove hearth, and dust still lurked on chair rounds and table legs. But too much must not be expected of a new convert, so the young missionary sat down to rest, well pleased and ready for another attempt as soon as she could decide in what direction it should be made. She quailed before Boo as she looked at the unconscious innocent peacefully playing with the spotted dog, now bereft of his tail, and the lone sausage with which he was attempting to feed the hungry animal, whose red mouth always gaped for more.

"It will be an awful job, and he is so happy I won't plague him yet. Guess I'll go and put my room to rights first, and pick up some clean clothes to put on him, if he is alive after I get through with him," thought Molly, foreseeing a stormy passage for the boy, who hated a bath as much as some people hate a trip across the Atlantic.

Up she went, and finding the fire out felt discouraged, thought she would rest a little more, so retired under the blankets to read one of the Christmas books. The dinner-bell rang while she was still wandering happily in "Nelly's Silver Mine," and she ran down to find that Boo had laid out a railroad all across her neat room, using bits of coal for sleepers and books for rails, over which he was dragging the yellow sled laden with a dismayed kitten, the tailless dog, and the remains of the sausage, evidently on its way to the tomb, for Boo took bites at it now and then, no other lunch being offered him.

"Oh dear! why can't boys play without making such a mess," sighed Molly, picking up the feathers from the duster with which Boo had been trying to make a "cocky-doo" of the hapless dog. "I'll wash him right after dinner, and that will keep him out of mischief for a while," she thought, as the young engineer unsuspiciously proceeded to ornament his already crocky countenance with squash, cranberry sauce, and gravy, till he looked more like a Fiji chief in full war-paint than a Christian boy.

"I want two pails of hot water, please, Miss Bat, and the big tub," said Molly, as the ancient handmaid emptied her fourth cup of tea, for she dined with the family, and enjoyed her own good cooking in its prime.

"What are you going to wash now?"

"Boo — I'm sure he needs it enough;" and Molly could not help laughing as the victim added to his brilliant appearance by smearing the colors all together with a rub of two grimy hands, making a fine "Turner" of himself.

"Now, Maria Louisa Bemis, you ain't going to cut up no capers with that child! The idea of a hot bath in the middle of the day, and him full of dinner, and croupy into the bargain! Wet a corner of a towel at the kettle-spout and polish him off if you like, but you won't risk his life in no bath-tubs this cold day."

Miss Bat's word was law in some things, so Molly had to submit, and took Boo away, saying, loftily, as she left the room, —

"I shall ask father, and do it to-night, for I will *not* have my brother look like a pig."

"My patience! how the Siamese do leave their things round," she exclaimed, as she surveyed her room after making up the fire and polishing off Boo. "I'll put things in order, and then mend up my rags, if I can find my thimble. Now, let me see;" and she went to exploring her closet, bureau, and table, finding such disorder everywhere that her courage nearly gave out.

She had clothes enough, but all needed care; even her best dress had two buttons off, and her Sunday hat but one string. Shoes, skirts, books, and toys lay about, and her drawers were a perfect chaos of soiled ruffles, odd gloves, old ribbons, boot lacings, and bits of paper.

"Oh, my heart, what a muddle! Mrs. Minot wouldn't think much of me if she could see that," said Molly, recalling how that lady once said she could judge a good deal of a little girl's character and habits by a peep at her top drawer, and went on, with great success, to guess how each of the school-mates kept her drawer.

“Come, missionary, clear up, and don’t let me find such a glory-hole again, or I’ll report you to the society,” said Molly, tipping the whole drawer-full out upon the bed, and beguiling the tiresome job by keeping up the new play.

Twilight came before it was done, and a great pile of things loomed up on her table, with no visible means of repair, — for Molly’s work-basket was full of nuts, and her thimble down a hole in the shed-floor, where the cats had dropped it in their play.

“I’ll ask Bat for hooks and tape, and papa for some money to buy scissors and things, for I don’t know where mine are. Glad I can’t do any more now! Being neat is such hard work!” and Molly threw herself down on the rug beside the old wooden cradle in which Boo was blissfully rocking, with a cargo of toys aboard.

She watched her time, and as soon as her father had done supper, she hastened to say, before he got to his desk, —

“Please, papa, I want a dollar to get some brass buttons and things to fix Boo’s clothes with. He wore a hole in his new trousers coasting down the Kembles’ steps. And can’t I wash him? He needs it, and Miss Bat won’t let me have a tub.”

“Certainly, child, certainly; do what you like, only don’t keep me. I must be off, or I shall miss Jackson, and he’s the man I want;” and, throwing down two dollars instead of one, Mr. Bemis hurried away, with a vague impression that Boo had swallowed a dozen brass buttons, and Miss Bat had been coasting somewhere in a bath-pan; but catching Jackson was important, so he did not stop to investigate.

Armed with the paternal permission, Molly carried her point, and oh, what a dreadful evening poor Boo spent! First, he was decoyed upstairs an hour too soon, then put in a tub by main force and sternly scrubbed, in spite of shrieks that brought Miss Bat to the locked door to condole with the sufferer, scold the scrubber, and depart, darkly prophesying croup before morning.

“He always howls when he is washed; but I shall do it, since you won’t, and he must get used to it. I will not have people tell me he’s neglected, if I can help it,” cried Molly, working away with tears in her eyes — for it was as hard for her as for Boo; but she meant to be thorough for once in her life, no matter what happened.

When the worst was over, she coaxed him with candy and stories till the long task of combing out the curls was safely done; then, in the clean night-gown with a blue button newly sewed on, she laid him in bed, worn out, but sweet as a rose.

“Now, say your prayers, darling, and go to sleep with the nice red blanket all tucked round so you won’t get cold,” said Molly, rather doubtful of the effect of the wet head.

“No, I won’t! Going to sleep *now!*” and Boo shut his eyes wearily, feeling that his late trials had not left him in a prayerful mood.

“Then you’ll be a real little heathen, as Mrs. Pecq called you, and I don’t know what I shall do with you,” said Molly, longing to cuddle rather than scold the little fellow, whose soul needed looking after as well as his body.

“No, no; I won’t be a heevin! I don’t want to be frowed to the trockindiles. I will say my prayers! oh, I will!” and, rising in his bed, Boo did so, with the devotion of an infant Samuel, for he remembered the talk when the society was formed.

Molly thought her labors were over for that night, and soon went to bed, tired with her first attempts. But toward morning she was wakened by the hoarse breathing of the boy, and was forced to patter away to Miss Bat’s room, humbly asking for the squills, and confessing that the prophecy had come to pass.

“I knew it! Bring the child to me, and don’t fret. I’ll see to him, and next time you do as I say,” was the consoling welcome she received as the old lady popped up a sleepy but anxious face in a large flannel cap, and shook the bottle with the air of a general who had routed the foe before and meant to do it again.

Leaving her little responsibility in Miss Bat’s arms, Molly retired to wet her pillow with a few remorseful tears, and to fall asleep, wondering if real missionaries ever killed their pupils in the process of conversion.

So the girls all failed in the beginning; but they did not give up, and succeeded better next time, as we shall see.

Chapter IX. The Debating Club

"Look here, old man, we ought to have a meeting. Holidays are over, and we must brace up and attend to business," said Frank to Gus, as they strolled out of the schoolyard one afternoon in January, apparently absorbed in conversation, but in reality waiting for a blue cloud and a scarlet feather to appear on the steps.

"All right. When, where, and what?" asked Gus, who was a man of few words.

"To-night, our house, subject, 'Shall girls go to college with us?' Mother said we had better be making up our minds, because every one is talking about it, and we shall have to be on one side or the other, so we may as well settle it now," answered Frank, for there was an impression among the members that all vexed questions would be much helped by the united eloquence and wisdom of the club.

"Very good; I'll pass the word and be there. Hullo, Neddy! The D.C. meets to-night, at Minot's, seven sharp. Co-ed, &c.," added Gus, losing no time, as a third boy came briskly round the corner, with a little bag in his hand.

"I'll come. Got home an hour earlier to-night, and thought I'd look you up as I went by," responded Ed Devlin, as he took possession of the third post, with a glance toward the schoolhouse to see if a seal-skin cap, with a long, yellow braid depending therefrom, was anywhere in sight.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," said Gus, ironically, not a bit deceived by this polite attention.

"The longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home, hey, Ed?" and Frank gave him a playful poke that nearly sent him off his perch.

Then they all laughed at some joke of their own, and Gus added, "No girls coming to hear us to-night. Don't think it, my son.

"More's the pity," and Ed shook his head regretfully over the downfall of his hopes.

"Can't help it; the other fellows say they spoil the fun, so we have to give in, sometimes, for the sake of peace and quietness. Don't mind having them a bit myself," said Frank, in such a tone of cheerful resignation that they laughed again, for the "Triangle," as the three chums were called, always made merry music.

"We must have a game party next week. The girls like that, and so do I," candidly observed Gus, whose pleasant parlors were the scene of many such frolics.

"And so do your sisters and your cousins and your aunts," hummed Ed, for Gus was often called Admiral because he really did possess three sisters, two cousins, and four aunts, besides mother and grandmother, all living in the big house together.

The boys promptly joined in the popular chorus, and other voices all about the yard took it up, for the "Pinafore" epidemic raged fearfully in Harmony Village that winter.

"How's business?" asked Gus, when the song ended, for Ed had not returned to school in the autumn, but had gone into a store in the city.

"Dull; things will look up toward spring, they say. I get on well enough, but I miss you fellows dreadfully;" and Ed put a hand on the broad shoulder of each friend, as if he longed to be a school-boy again.

"Better give it up and go to college with me next year," said Frank, who was preparing for Boston University, while Gus fitted for Harvard.

"No; I've chosen business, and I mean to stick to it, so don't you unsettle my mind. Have you practised that March?" asked Ed, turning to a gayer subject, for he had his little troubles, but always looked on the bright side of things.

"Skating is so good, I don't get much time. Come early, and we'll have a turn at it."

"I will. Must run home now."

"Pretty cold loafing here."

"Mail is in by this time."

And with these artless excuses the three boys leaped off the posts, as if one spring moved them, as a group of girls came chattering down the path. The blue cloud floated away beside Frank, the scarlet feather marched off with the Admiral, while the fur cap nodded to the gray hat as two happy faces smiled at each other.

The same thing often happened, for twice a-day the streets were full of young couples walking to and from school together, smiled at by the elders, and laughed at by the less susceptible boys and girls, who went alone or trooped along in noisy groups. The prudent mothers had tried to stop this guileless custom, but found it very difficult, as the fathers usually sympathized with their sons, and dismissed the matter with the comfortable phrase, "Never mind; boys will be boys." "Not forever," returned the anxious mammas, seeing the tall lads daily grow more manly, and the pretty daughters fast learning to look demure when certain names were mentioned.

It could not be stopped without great parental sternness and the danger of deceit, for co-education will go on outside of school if not inside, and the safest way is to let sentiment and study go hand in hand, with teachers and parents to direct and explain the great lesson all are the better for learning soon or late. So the elders had to give in, acknowledging that this sudden readiness to go to school was a comfort, that the new sort of gentle emulation worked wonders in lazy girls and boys, and that watching these “primrose friendships” bud, blossom, and die painless deaths, gave a little touch of romance to their own work-a-day lives.

“On the whole I’d rather have my sons walking, playing, and studying with bright, well-mannered girls, than always knocking about with rough boys,” said Mrs. Minot at one of the Mothers’ Meetings, where the good ladies met to talk over their children, and help one another to do their duty by them.

“I find that Gus is more gentle with his sisters since Juliet took him in hand, for he wants to stand well with her, and they report him if he troubles them. I really see no harm in the little friendship, though I never had any such when I was a girl,” said Mrs. Burton, who adored her one boy and was his confidante.

“My Merry seems to be contented with her brothers so far, but I shouldn’t wonder if I had my hands full by and by,” added Mrs. Grant, who already foresaw that her sweet little daughter would be sought after as soon as she should lengthen her skirts and turn up her bonny brown hair.

Molly Loo had no mother to say a word for her, but she settled matters for herself by holding fast to Merry, and declaring that she would have no escort but faithful Boo.

It is necessary to dwell a moment upon this new amusement, because it was not peculiar to Harmony Village, but appears everywhere as naturally as the game parties and croquet which have taken the place of the husking frolics and apple-bees of olden times, and it is impossible to dodge the subject if one attempts to write of boys and girls as they really are nowadays.

“Here, my hero, see how you like this. If it suits, you will be ready to march as soon as the doctor gives the word,” said Ralph, coming into the Bird Room that evening with a neat little crutch under his arm.

“Ha, ha, that looks fine! I’d like to try it right off, but I won’t till I get leave. Did you make it yourself, Ral?” asked Jack, handling it with delight, as he sat bolt upright, with his leg on a rest, for he was getting on capitally now.

“Mostly. Rather a neat job, I flatter myself.”

“I should say so. What a clever fellow you are! Any new inventions lately?” asked Frank, coming up to examine and admire.

“Only an anti-snoring machine and an elbow-pad,” answered Ralph, with a twinkle in his eye, as if reminded of something funny.

“Go on, and tell about them. I never heard of an anti-snorer. Jack better have one," said Frank, interested at once.

"Well, a rich old lady kept her family awake with that lively music, so she sent to Shirtman and Codleff for something to stop it. They thought it was a good joke, and told me to see what I could do. I thought it over, and got up the nicest little affair you ever saw. It went over the mouth, and had a tube to fit the ear, so when the lady snored she woke herself up and stopped it. It suited exactly. I think of taking out a patent," concluded Ralph, joining in the boys' laugh at the droll idea.

"What was the pad?" asked Frank, returning to the small model of an engine he was making.

"Oh, that was a mere trifle for a man who had a tender elbow-joint and wanted something to protect it. I made a little pad to fit on, and his crazy-bone was safe."

"I planned to have you make me a new leg if this one was spoilt," said Jack, sure that his friend could invent anything under the sun.

"I'd do my best for you. I made a hand for a fellow once, and that got me my place, you know," answered Ralph, who thought little of such mechanical trifles, and longed to be painting portraits or modelling busts, being an artist as well as an inventor.

Here Gus, Ed, and several other boys came in, and the conversation became general. Grif, Chick, and Brickbat were three young gentlemen whose own respectable names were usually ignored, and they cheerfully answered to these nicknames.

As the clock struck seven, Frank, who ruled the club with a rod of iron when Chairman, took his place behind the study table. Seats stood about it, and a large, shabby book lay before Gus, who was Secretary, and kept the records with a lavish expenditure of ink, to judge by the blots. The members took their seats, and nearly all tilted back their chairs and put their hands in their pockets, to keep them out of mischief; for, as every one knows, it is impossible for two lads to be near each other and refrain from tickling or pinching. Frank gave three raps with an old croquet-mallet set on a short handle, and with much dignity opened the meeting.

"Gentlemen, the business of the club will be attended to, and then we will discuss the question, 'Shall girls go to our colleges?' The Secretary will now read the report of the last meeting."

Clearing his throat, Gus read the following brief and elegant report: —

"Club met, December 18th, at the house of G. Burton, Esq. Subject: 'Is summer or winter best fun?' A lively pow-wow. About evenly divided. J. Flint fined five cents for disrespect to the Chair. A collection of forty cents taken up to pay for breaking a pane of glass during a free fight of the members on the door-step. E. Devlin was chosen Secretary for the coming year, and a new book contributed by the Chairman.”

“That’s all.”

“Is there any other business before the meeting?” asked Frank, as the reader closed the old book with a slam and shoved the new one across the table.

Ed rose, and glancing about him with an appealing look, said, as if sure his proposition would not be well received, “I wish to propose the name of a new member. Bob Walker wants to join, and I think we ought to let him. He is trying to behave well, and I am sure we could help him. Can’t we?”

All the boys looked sober, and Joe, otherwise Brickbat, said, bluntly, “I won’t. He’s a bad lot, and we don’t want any such here. Let him go with chaps of his own sort.”

“That is just what I want to keep him from! He’s a good-hearted boy enough, only no one looks after him; so he gets into scrapes, as we should, if we were in his place, I dare say. He wants to come here, and would be so proud if he was let in, I know he’d behave. Come now, let’s give him a chance,” and Ed looked at Gus and Frank, sure that if they stood by him he should carry his point.

But Gus shook his head, as if doubtful of the wisdom of the plan, and Frank said gravely: “You know we made the rule that the number should never be over eight, and we cannot break it.”

“You needn’t. I can’t be here half the time, so I will resign and let Bob have my place,” began Ed, but he was silenced by shouts of “No, no, you shan’t!” “We won’t let you off!” “Club would go to smash, if you back out!”

“Let him have my place; I’m the youngest, and you won’t miss me,” cried Jack, bound to stand by Ed at all costs.

“We might do that,” said Frank, who did object to small boys, though willing to admit this particular one.

“Better make a new rule to have ten members, and admit both Bob and Tom Grant,” said Ralph, whereat Grif grinned and Joe scowled, for one lad liked Merry’s big brother and the other did not.

“That’s a good idea! Put it to vote,” said Gus, too kind-hearted to shut the door on any one.

“First I want to ask if all you fellows are ready to stand by Bob, out of the club as well as in, for it won’t do much good to be kind to him here and cut him at school and in the street,” said Ed, heartily in earnest about the matter.

“I will!” cried Jack, ready to follow where his beloved friend led, and the others nodded, unwilling to be outdone by the youngest member.

“Good! With all of us to lend a hand, we can do a great deal; and I tell you, boys, it is time, if we want to keep poor Bob straight. We all turn our backs on him, so he loafs round the tavern, and goes with fellows we don't care to know. But he isn't bad yet, and we can keep him up, I'm sure, if we just try. I hope to get him into the Lodge, and that will be half the battle, won't it, Frank?" added Ed, sure that this suggestion would have weight with the honorable Chairman.

"Bring him along; I'm with you!" answered Frank, making up his mind at once, for he had joined the Temperance Lodge four years ago, and already six boys had followed his example.

"He is learning to smoke, but we'll make him drop it before it leads to worse. You can help him there, Admiral, if you only will," added Ed, giving a grateful look at one friend, and turning to the other.

"I'm your man;" and Gus looked as if he knew what he promised, for he had given up smoking to oblige his father, and kept his word like a hero.

"You other fellows can do a good deal by just being kind and not twitting him with old scrapes, and I'll do anything I can for you all to pay for this;" and Ed sat down with a beaming smile, feeling that his cause was won.

The vote was taken, and all hands went up, for even surly Joe gave in; so Bob and Tom were duly elected, and proved their gratitude for the honor done them by becoming worthy members of the club. It was only boys' play now, but the kind heart and pure instincts of one lad showed the others how to lend a helping hand to a comrade in danger, and win him away from temptation to the safer pastimes of their more guarded lives.

Well pleased with themselves — for every genuine act or word, no matter how trifling it seems, leaves a sweet and strengthening influence behind — the members settled down to the debate, which was never very long, and often only an excuse for fun of all sorts.

"Ralph, Gus, and Ed are for, and Brickbat, Grif, and Chick against, I suppose?" said Frank, surveying his company like a general preparing for battle.

"No, sir! I believe in co-everything!" cried Chick, a mild youth, who loyally escorted a chosen damsel home from school every day.

A laugh greeted this bold declaration, and Chick sat down, red but firm.

"I'll speak for two since the Chairman can't, and Jack won't go against those who pet him most to death," said Joe, who, not being a favorite with the girls, considered them a nuisance and lost no opportunity of telling them so.

"Fire away, then, since you are up;" commanded Frank.

"Well," began Joe, feeling too late how much he had undertaken, "I don't know a great deal about it, and I don't care, but I do *not* believe in having girls at college. They don't belong there, nobody wants 'em, and they'd better be at home darning their stockings."

"Yours, too," put in Ralph, who had heard that argument so often he was tired of it.

"Of course; that's what girls are for. I don't mind 'em at school, but I'd just as soon they had a room to themselves. We should get on better."

"*You* would if Mabel wasn't in your class and always ahead of you," observed Ed, whose friend was a fine scholar, and he very proud of the fact.

"Look here, if you fellows keep interrupting, I won't sit down for half an hour," said Joe, well knowing that eloquence was not his gift, but bound to have his say out.

Deep silence reigned, for that threat quelled the most impatient member, and Joe prosed on, using all the arguments he had ever heard, and paying off several old scores by sly hits of a personal nature, as older orators often do.

"It is clear to my mind that boys would get on better without any girls fooling round. As for their being as smart as we are, it is all nonsense, for some of 'em cry over their lessons every day, or go home with headaches, or get mad and scold all recess, because something 'isn't fair.' No, sir; girls ain't meant to know much, and they can't. Wise folks say so and I believe 'em. Haven't got any sisters myself, and I don't want any, for they don't seem to amount to much, according to those who do have 'em."

Groans from Gus and Ed greeted the closing remarks of the ungallant Joe, who sat down, feeling that he had made somebody squirm. Up jumped Grif, the delight of whose life was practical jokes, which amiable weakness made him the terror of the girls, though they had no other fault to find with the merry lad.

"Mr. Chairman, the ground I take is this: girls have not the strength to go to college with us. They couldn't row a race, go on a lark, or take care of themselves, as we do. They are all well enough at home, and I like them at parties, but for real fun and go I wouldn't give a cent for them," began Grif, whose views of a collegiate life were confined to the enjoyments rather than the studies of that festive period. "I have tried them, and they can't stand anything. They scream if you tell them there is a mouse in the room, and run if they see a big dog. I just put a cockroach in Molly's desk one day, and when she opened it she jumped as if she was shot."

So did the gentlemen of the club, for at that moment half-a-dozen fire-crackers exploded under the chair Grif had left, and flew wildly about the room. Order was with difficulty restored, the mischievous party summarily chastised and commanded to hold his tongue, under penalty of ejectment from the room if he spoke again. Firmly grasping that red and unruly member, Grif composed himself to listen, with his nose in the air and his eyes shining like black beads.

Ed was always the peace-maker, and now, when he rose with his engaging smile, his voice fell like oil upon the troubled waters, and his bright face was full of the becoming bashfulness which afflicts youths of seventeen when touching upon such subjects of newly acquired interest as girls and their pleasant but perplexing ways.

"It seems to me we have hardly considered the matter enough to be able to say much. But I think that school would be awfully dry and dismal without — ahem! — any young ladies to make it nice. I wouldn't give a pin to go if there was only a crowd of fellows, though I like a good game as well as any man. I pity any boy who has no sisters," continued Ed, warming up as he thought of his own, who loved him dearly, as well they might, for a better brother never lived. "Home wouldn't be worth having without them to look after a fellow, to keep him out of scrapes, help him with his lessons, and make things jolly for his friends. I tell you we can't do without girls, and I'm not ashamed to say that I think the more we see of them, and try to be like them in many ways, the better men we shall be by and by."

"Hear! hear!" cried Frank, in his deepest tone, for he heartily agreed to that, having talked the matter over with his mother, and received much light upon things which should always be set right in young heads and hearts. And who can do this so wisely and well as mothers, if they only will?

Feeling that his sentiments had been approved, and he need not be ashamed of the honest color in his cheeks, Ed sat down amid the applause of his side, especially of Jack, who pounded so vigorously with his crutch that Mrs. Pecq popped in her head to see if anything was wanted.

"No, thank you, ma'am, we were only cheering Ed," said Gus, now upon his legs, and rather at a loss what to say till Mrs. Pecq's appearance suggested an idea, and he seized upon it.

"My honored friend has spoken so well that I have little to add. I agree with him, and if you want an example of what girls *can* do, why, look at Jill. She's young, I know, but a first-rate scholar for her age. As for pluck, she is as brave as a boy, and almost as smart at running, rowing, and so on. Of course, she can't play ball — no girl can; their arms are not made right to throw — but she can catch remarkably well. I'll say that for her. Now, if she and Mabel — and — and — some others I could name, are so clever and strong at the beginning, I don't see why they shouldn't keep up and go along with us all through. I'm willing, and will do what I can to help other fellows' sisters as I'd like to have them help mine. And I'll punch their heads if they don't;" and Gus subsided, assured, by a burst of applause, that his manly way of stating the case met with general approval.

"We shall be happy to hear from our senior member if he will honor us with a few remarks," said Frank, with a bow to Ralph.

No one ever knew whom he would choose to personate, for he never spoke in his own character. Now he rose slowly, put one hand in his bosom, and fixing his eye sternly on Grif, who was doing something suspicious with a pin, gave them a touch of Sergeant Buzfuz, from the Pickwick trial, thinking that the debate was not likely to throw much light on the subject under discussion. In the midst of this appeal to "Me lud and gentlemen of the jury," he suddenly paused, smoothed his hair down upon his forehead, rolled up his eyes, and folding his hands, droned out Mr. Chadband's sermon on Peace, delivered over poor Jo, and ending with the famous lines: —

"Oh, running stream of sparkling joy,
To be a glorious human boy!"

Then, setting his hair erect with one comprehensive sweep, he caught up his coat-skirts over his arm, and, assuming a parliamentary attitude, burst into a comical medley, composed of extracts from Jefferson Brick's and Lafayette Kettle's speeches, and Elijah Pogram's Defiance, from "Martin Chuzzlewit." Gazing at Gus, who was convulsed with suppressed merriment, he thundered forth: —

"In the name of our common country, sir, in the name of that righteous cause in which we are jined, and in the name of the star-spangled banner, I thank you for your eloquent and categorical remarks. You, sir, are a model of a man fresh from Natur's mould. A true-born child of this free hemisphere; verdant as the mountains of our land; bright and flowin' as our mineral Licks; unspiled by fashion as air our boundless perearers. Rough you may be; so air our Barrs. Wild you may be; so air our Buffalers. But, sir, you air a Child of Freedom, and your proud answer to the Tyrant is, that your bright home is in the Settin' Sun. And, sir, if any man denies this fact, though it be the British Lion himself, I defy him. Let me have him here!" — smiting the table, and causing the inkstand to skip — "here, upon this sacred altar! Here, upon the ancestral ashes cemented with the glorious blood poured out like water on the plains of Chickabiddy Lick. Alone I dare that Lion, and tell him that Freedom's hand once twisted in his mane, he rolls a corse before me, and the Eagles of the Great Republic scream, Ha, ha!"

By this time the boys were rolling about in fits of laughter; even sober Frank was red and breathless, and Jack lay back, feebly squealing, as he could laugh no more. In a moment Ralph was as meek as a Quaker, and sat looking about him with a mildly astonished air, as if inquiring the cause of such unseemly mirth. A knock at the door produced a lull, and in came a maid with apples.

"Time's up; fall to and make yourselves comfortable," was the summary way in which the club was released from its sterner duties and permitted to unbend its mighty mind for a social half-hour, chiefly devoted to whist, with an Indian war-dance as a closing ceremony.

Chapter X. The Dramatic Club

While Jack was hopping gayly about on his crutches, poor Jill was feeling the effects of her second fall, and instead of sitting up, as she hoped to do after six weeks of rest, she was ordered to lie on a board for two hours each day. Not an easy penance, by any means, for the board was very hard, and she could do nothing while she lay there, as it did not slope enough to permit her to read without great fatigue of both eyes and hands. So the little martyr spent her first hour of trial in sobbing, the second in singing, for just as her mother and Mrs. Minot were deciding in despair that neither she nor they could bear it, Jill suddenly broke out into a merry chorus she used to hear her father sing: —

“Faut jouer le mirliton,
Faut jouer le mirlitir,
Faut jouer le mirliter,
Mir — li — ton.”

The sound of the brave little voice was very comforting to the two mothers hovering about her, and Jack said, with a look of mingled pity and admiration, as he brandished his crutch over the imaginary foes, —

“That’s right! Sing away, and we’ll play you are an Indian captive being tormented by your enemies, and too proud to complain. I’ll watch the clock, and the minute time is up I’ll rush in and rescue you.”

Jill laughed, but the fancy pleased her, and she straightened herself out under the gay afghan, while she sang, in a plaintive voice, another little French song her father taught her: —

“J’avais une colombe blanche,
J’avais un blanc petit pigeon,
Tous deux volaient, de branche en branche,
Jusqu’au faîte de mon dongeon:
Mais comme un coup de vent d’automne,
S’est abattu là, l’épervier,
Et ma colombe si mignonne
Ne revient plus au colombier.”

“My poor Jean had a fine voice, and always hoped the child would take after him. It would break his heart to see her lying there trying to cheer her pain with the songs he used to sing her to sleep with,” said Mrs. Pecq, sadly.

“She really has a great deal of talent, and when she is able she shall have some lessons, for music is a comfort and a pleasure, sick or well," answered Mrs. Minot, who had often admired the fresh voice, with its pretty accent.

Here Jill began the Canadian boat-song, with great vigor, as if bound to play her part of Indian victim with spirit, and not disgrace herself by any more crying. All knew the air, and joined in, especially Jack, who came out strong on the "Row, brothers, row," but ended in a squeak on a high note, so drolly, that the rest broke down. So the hour that began with tears ended with music and laughter, and a new pleasure to think of for the future.

After that day Jill exerted all her fortitude, for she liked to have the boys call her brave and admire the cheerful way in which she endured two hours of discomfort. She found she could use her zither as it lay upon her breast, and every day the pretty music began at a certain hour, and all in the house soon learned to love and listen for it. Even the old cook set open her kitchen door, saying pitifully, "Poor darlint, hear how purty she's singin', wid the pain, on that crewel boord. It's a little saint, she is. May her bed above be aisy!"

Frank would lift her gently on and off, with a kind word that comforted her immensely, and gentle Ed would come and teach her new bits of music, while the other fellows were frolicking below. Ralph added his share to her amusement, for he asked leave to model her head in clay, and set up his work in a corner, coming to pat, scrape, and mould whenever he had a spare minute, amusing her by his lively chat, and showing her how to shape birds, rabbits, and queer faces in the soft clay, when the songs were all sung and her fingers tired of the zither.

The girls sympathized very heartily with her new trial, and brought all manner of gifts to cheer her captivity. Merry and Molly made a gay screen by pasting pictures on the black cambric which covered the folding frame that stood before her to keep the draughts from her as she lay on her board. Bright birds and flowers, figures and animals, covered one side, and on the other they put mottoes, bits of poetry, anecdotes, and short stories, so that Jill could lie and look or read without the trouble of holding a book. It was not all done at once, but grew slowly, and was a source of instruction as well as amusement to them all, as they read carefully, that they might make good selections.

But the thing that pleased Jill most was something Jack did, for he gave up going to school, and stayed at home nearly a fortnight after he might have gone, all for her sake. The day the doctor said he might try it if he would be very careful, he was in great spirits, and limped about, looking up his books, and planning how he would astonish his mates by the rapidity of his recovery. When he sat down to rest he remembered Jill, who had been lying quietly behind the screen, while he talked with his mother, busy putting fresh covers on the books.

“She is so still, I guess she is asleep,” thought Jack, peeping round the corner.

No, not asleep, but lying with her eyes fixed on the sunny window, beyond which the bright winter world sparkled after a fresh snow-fall. The jingle of sleigh-bells could be heard, the laughter of boys and girls on their way to school, all the pleasant stir of a new day of happy work and play for the rest of the world, more lonely, quiet, and wearisome than ever to her since her friend and fellow-prisoner was set free and going to leave her.

Jack understood that patient, wistful look, and, without a word, went back to his seat, staring at the fire so soberly, that his mother presently asked: “What are you thinking of so busily, with that pucker in your forehead?”

“I’ve about made up my mind that I won’t go to school just yet,” answered Jack, slowly lifting his head, for it cost him something to give up the long-expected pleasure.

“Why not?” and Mrs. Minot looked much surprised, till Jack pointed to the screen, and, making a sad face to express Jill’s anguish, answered in a cheerful tone, “Well, I’m not sure that it is best. Doctor did not want me to go, but said I might because I teased. I shall be sure to come to grief, and then every one will say, ‘I told you so,’ and that is so provoking. I’d rather keep still a week longer. Hadn’t I better?”

His mother smiled and nodded as she said, sewing away at much-abused old Caesar, as if she loved him, “Do as you think best, dear. I always want you at home, but I don’t wonder you are rather tired of it after this long confinement.”

“I say, Jill, should I be in your way if I didn’t go to school till the first of February?” called Jack, laughing to himself at the absurdity of the question.

“Not much!” answered a glad voice from behind the screen, and he knew the sorrowful eyes were shining with delight, though he could not see them.

“Well, I guess I may as well, and get quite firm on my legs before I start. Another week or so will bring me up if I study hard, so I shall not lose my time. I’ll tackle my Latin as soon as it’s ready, mother.”

Jack got a hearty kiss with the neatly covered book, and Mamma loved him for the little sacrifice more than if he had won a prize at school. He did get a reward, for, in five minutes from the time he decided, Jill was singing like a bobolink, and such a medley of merry music came from behind the screen, that it was a regular morning concert. She did not know then that he stayed for her sake, but she found it out soon after, and when the time came did as much for him, as we shall see.

It proved a wise decision, for the last part of January was so stormy Jack could not have gone half the time. So, while the snow drifted, and bitter winds raged, he sat snugly at home amusing Jill, and getting on bravely with his lessons, for

Frank took great pains with him to show his approbation of the little kindness, and, somehow, the memory of it seemed to make even the detested Latin easier.

With February fair weather set in, and Jack marched happily away to school, with Jill's new mittens on his hands, Mamma nodding from the door-step, and Frank ready to give him a lift on the new sled, if the way proved too long or too rough.

"I shall not have time to miss him now, for we are to be very busy getting ready for the Twenty-second. The Dramatic Club meets to-night, and would like to come here, if they may, so I can help?" said Jill, as Mrs. Minot came up, expecting to find her rather low in her mind.

"Certainly; and I have a basket of old finery I looked up for the club when I was rummaging out bits of silk for your blue quilt," answered the good lady, who had set up a new employment to beguile the hours of Jack's absence.

When the girls arrived, that evening, they found Mrs. Chairwoman surrounded by a strew of theatrical properties, enjoying herself very much. All brought such contributions as they could muster, and all were eager about a certain tableau which was to be the gem of the whole, they thought. Jill, of course, was not expected to take any part, but her taste was good, so all consulted her as they showed their old silks, laces, and flowers, asking who should be this, and who that. All wanted to be the "Sleeping Beauty," for that was the chosen scene, with the slumbering court about the princess, and the prince in the act of awakening her. Jack was to be the hero, brave in his mother's velvet cape, red boots, and a real sword, while the other boys were to have parts of more or less splendor.

"Mabel should be the Beauty, because her hair is so lovely," said Juliet, who was quite satisfied with her own part of the Queen.

"No, Merry ought to have it, as she is the prettiest, and has that splendid veil to wear," answered Molly, who was to be the maid of honor, cuffing the little page, Boo.

"I don't care a bit, but my feather would be fine for the Princess, and I don't know as Emma would like to have me lend it to any one else," said Annette, waving a long white plume over her head, with girlish delight in its grace.

"I should think the white silk dress, the veil, and the feather ought to go together, with the scarlet crape shawl and these pearls. That would be sweet, and just what princesses really wear," advised Jill, who was stringing a quantity of old Roman pearls.

"We all want to wear the nice things, so let us draw lots. Wouldn't that be the fairest way?" asked Merry, looking like a rosy little bride, under a great piece of illusion, which had done duty in many plays.

"The Prince is light, so the Princess must be darkish. We ought to choose the girl who will look best, as it is a picture. I heard Miss Delano say so, when the ladies got up the tableaux, last winter, and every one wanted to be Cleopatra," said Jill decidedly.

"You choose, and then if we can't agree we will draw lots," proposed Susy, who, being plain, knew there was little hope of her getting a chance in any other way.

So all stood in a row, and Jill, from her sofa, surveyed them critically, feeling that the one Jack would really prefer was not among the number.

"I choose that one, for Juliet wants to be Queen, Molly would make faces, and the others are too big or too light," pronounced Jill, pointing to Merry, who looked pleased, while Mabel's face darkened, and Susy gave a disdainful sniff.

"You'd better draw lots, and then there will be no fuss. Ju and I are out of the fight, but you three can try, and let this settle the matter," said Molly, handing Jill a long strip of paper.

All agreed to let it be so, and when the bits were ready drew in turn. This time fate was evidently on Merry's side, and no one grumbled when she showed the longest paper.

"Go and dress, then come back, and we'll plan how we are to be placed before we call up the boys," commanded Jill, who was manager, since she could be nothing else.

The girls retired to the bedroom and began to "rig up," as they called it; but discontent still lurked among them, and showed itself in sharp words, envious looks, and disobliging acts.

"Am I to have the white silk and the feather?" asked Merry, delighted with the silvery shimmer of the one and the graceful droop of the other, though both were rather shabby.

"You can use your own dress. I don't see why you should have everything," answered Susy, who was at the mirror, putting a wreath of scarlet flowers on her red head, bound to be gay since she could not be pretty.

"I think I'd better keep the plume, as I haven't anything else that is nice, and I'm afraid Emma wouldn't like me to lend it," added Annette, who was disappointed that Mabel was not to be the Beauty.

"*I* don't intend to act at all!" declared Mabel, beginning to braid up her hair with a jerk, out of humor with the whole affair.

"*I* think you are a set of cross, selfish girls to back out and keep your nice things just because you can't *all* have the best part. I'm ashamed of you!" scolded Molly, standing by Merry, who was sadly surveying her mother's old purple silk, which looked like brown in the evening.

"I'm going to have Miss Delano's red brocade for the Queen, and I shall ask her for the yellow-satin dress for Merry when I go to get mine, and tell her how mean you are," said Juliet, frowning under her gilt-paper crown as she swept about in a red table-cloth for train till the brocade arrived.

"Perhaps you'd like to have Mabel cut her hair off, so Merry can have that, too?" cried Susy, with whom hair was a tender point.

"Light hair isn't wanted, so Ju will have to give hers, or you'd better borrow Miss Bat's frisette," added Mabel, with a scornful laugh.

"I just wish Miss Bat was here to give you girls a good shaking. Do let someone else have a chance at the glass, you peacock!" exclaimed Molly Loo, pushing Susy aside to arrange her own blue turban, out of which she plucked the pink pompon to give Merry.

"Don't quarrel about me. I shall do well enough, and the scarlet shawl will hide my ugly dress," said Merry, from the corner, where she sat waiting for her turn at the mirror.

As she spoke of the shawl her eye went in search of it, and something that she saw in the other room put her own disappointment out of her head. Jill lay there all alone, rather tired with the lively chatter, and the effort it cost her not to repine at being shut out from the great delight of dressing up and acting.

Her eyes were closed, her net was off, and all the pretty black curls lay about her shoulders as one hand idly pulled them out, while the other rested on the red shawl, as if she loved its glowing color and soft texture. She was humming to herself the little song of the dove and the donjon, and something in the plaintive voice, the solitary figure, went straight to Merry's gentle heart.

"Poor Jilly can't have any of the fun," was the first thought; then came a second, that made Merry start and smile, and in a minute whisper so that all but Jill could hear her, "Girls, I'm not going to be the Princess. But I've thought of a splendid one!"

"Who?" asked the rest, staring at one another, much surprised by this sudden announcement.

"Hush! Speak low, or you will spoil it all. Look in the Bird Room, and tell me if that isn't a prettier Princess than I could make?"

They all looked, but no one spoke, and Merry added, with sweet eagerness, "It is the only thing poor Jill can be, and it would make her so happy; Jack would like it, and it would please every one, I know. Perhaps she will never walk again, so we ought to be very good to her, poor dear."

The last words, whispered with a little quiver in the voice, settled the matter better than hours of talking, for girls are tender-hearted creatures, and not one of these but would have gladly given all the pretty things she owned to see Jill dancing about well and strong again. Like a ray of sunshine the kind thought touched and brightened every face; envy, impatience, vanity, and discontent flew away like imps at the coming of the good fairy, and with one accord they all cried, —

“It will be lovely; let us go and tell her!”

Forgetting their own adornment, out they trooped after Merry, who ran to the sofa, saying, with a smile which was reflected in all the other faces, “Jill, dear, we have chosen another Princess, and I know you’ll like her.”

“Who is it?” asked Jill, languidly, opening her eyes without the least suspicion of the truth.

“I’ll show you;” and taking the cherished veil from her own head, Merry dropped it like a soft cloud over Jill; Annette added the long plume, Susy laid the white silk dress about her, while Juliet and Mabel lifted the scarlet shawl to spread it over the foot of the sofa, and Molly tore the last ornament from her turban, a silver star, to shine on Jill’s breast. Then they all took hands and danced round the couch, singing, as they laughed at her astonishment, “There she is! There she is! Princess Jill as fine as you please!

“Do you really mean it? But can I? Is it fair? How sweet of you! Come here and let me hug you all!” cried Jill, in a rapture at the surprise, and the pretty way in which it was done.

The grand scene on the Twenty-second was very fine, indeed; but the little tableau of that minute was infinitely better, though no one saw it, as Jill tried to gather them all in her arms, for that nosegay of girlish faces was the sweeter, because each one had sacrificed her own little vanity to please a friend, and her joy was reflected in the eyes that sparkled round the happy Princess.

“Oh, you dear, kind things, to think of me and give me all your best clothes! I never shall forget it, and I’ll do anything for you. Yes! I’ll write and ask Mrs. Piper to lend us her ermine cloak for the king. See if I don’t!”

Shrieks of delight hailed this noble offer, for no one had dared to borrow the much-coveted mantle, but all agreed that the old lady would not refuse Jill. It was astonishing how smoothly everything went after this, for each was eager to help, admire, and suggest, in the friendliest way; and when all were dressed, the boys found a party of very gay ladies waiting for them round the couch, where lay the brightest little Princess ever seen.

“Oh, Jack, I’m to act! Wasn’t it dear of the girls to choose me? Don’t they look lovely? Aren’t you glad?” cried Jill, as the lads stared and the lasses blushed and smiled, well pleased at the frank admiration the boyish faces showed.

“I guess I am! You are a set of trumps, and we’ll give you a first-class spread after the play to pay for it. Won’t we, fellows?” answered Jack, much gratified, and feeling that now he could act his own part capitally.

“We will. It was a handsome thing to do, and we think well of you for it. Hey, Gus?” and Frank nodded approvingly at all, though he looked only at Annette.

“As king of this crowd, I call it to order,” said Gus, retiring to the throne, where Juliet sat laughing in her red table-cloth.

“We’ll have ‘The Fair One with Golden Locks’ next time; I promise you that,” whispered Ed to Mabel, whose shining hair streamed over her blue dress like a mantle of gold-colored silk.

“Girls are pretty nice things, aren’t they? Kind of ‘em to take Jill in. Don’t Molly look fine, though?” and Grif’s black eyes twinkled as he planned to pin her skirts to Merry’s at the first opportunity.

“Susy looks as gay as a feather-duster. I like her. She never snubs a fellow,” said Joe, much impressed with the splendor of the court ladies.

The boys’ costumes were not yet ready, but they posed well, and all had a merry time, ending with a game of blind-man’s-buff, in which every one caught the right person in the most singular way, and all agreed as they went home in the moonlight that it had been an unusually jolly meeting.

So the fairy play woke the sleeping beauty that lies in all of us, and makes us lovely when we rouse it with a kiss of unselfish good-will, for, though the girls did not know it then, they had adorned themselves with pearls more precious than the waxen ones they decked their Princess in.

Chapter XI. “Down Brakes”

The greatest people have their weak points, and the best-behaved boys now and then yield to temptation and get into trouble, as everybody knows. Frank was considered a remarkably well-bred and proper lad, and rather prided himself on his good reputation, for he never got into scrapes like the other fellows. Well, hardly ever, for we must confess that at rare intervals his besetting sin overcame his prudence, and he proved himself an erring, human boy. Steam-engines had been his idols for years, and they alone could lure him from the path of virtue. Once, in trying to investigate the mechanism of a toy specimen, which had its little boiler and ran about whistling and puffing in the most delightful way, he nearly set the house afire by the sparks that dropped on the straw carpet. Another time, in trying experiments with the kitchen tea-kettle, he blew himself up, and the scars of that explosion he still carried on his hands.

He was long past such childish amusements now, but his favorite haunt was the engine-house of the new railroad, where he observed the habits of his pets with never-failing interest, and cultivated the good-will of stokers and brakemen till they allowed him many liberties, and were rather flattered by the admiration expressed for their iron horses by a young gentleman who liked them better even than his Greek and Latin.

There was not much business doing on this road as yet, and the two cars of the passenger-trains were often nearly empty, though full freight-trains rolled from the factory to the main road, of which this was only a branch. So things went on in a leisurely manner, which gave Frank many opportunities of pursuing his favorite pastime. He soon knew all about No. 11, his pet engine, and had several rides on it with Bill, the engineer, so that he felt at home there, and privately resolved that when he was a rich man he would have a road of his own, and run trains as often as he liked.

Gus took less interest than his friend in the study of steam, but usually accompanied him when he went over after school to disport himself in the engine-house, interview the stoker, or see if there was anything new in the way of brakes.

One afternoon they found No. 11 on the side-track, puffing away as if enjoying a quiet smoke before starting. No cars were attached, and no driver was to be seen, for Bill was off with the other men behind the station-house, helping the expressman, whose horse had backed down a bank and upset the wagon.

“Good chance for a look at the old lady,” said Frank, speaking of the engine as Bill did, and jumping aboard with great satisfaction, followed by Gus.

“I’d give ten dollars if I could run her up to the bend and back,” he added, fondly touching the bright brass knobs and glancing at the fire with a critical eye.

“You couldn’t do it alone,” answered Gus, sitting down on the grimy little perch, willing to indulge his mate’s amiable weakness.

“Give me leave to try? Steam is up, and I could do it as easy as not;” and Frank put his hand on the throttle-valve, as if daring Gus to give the word.

“Fire up and make her hum!” laughed Gus, quoting Bill’s frequent order to his mate, but with no idea of being obeyed.

“All right; I’ll just roll her up to the switch and back again. I’ve often done it with Bill;” and Frank cautiously opened the throttle-valve, threw back the lever, and the great thing moved with a throb and a puff.

“Steady, old fellow, or you’ll come to grief. Here, don’t open that!” shouted Gus, for just at that moment Joe appeared at the switch, looking ready for mischief.

“Wish he would; no train for twenty minutes, and we could run up to the bend as well as not,” said Frank, getting excited with the sense of power, as the monster obeyed his hand so entirely that it was impossible to resist prolonging the delight.

“By George, he has! Stop her! Back her! Hold on, Frank!” cried Gus, as Joe, only catching the words “Open that!” obeyed, without the least idea that they would dare to leave the siding.

But they did, for Frank rather lost his head for a minute, and out upon the main track rolled No. 11 as quietly as a well-trained horse taking a familiar road.

“Now you’ve done it! I’ll give you a good thrashing when I get back!” roared Gus, shaking his fist at Joe, who stood staring, half-pleased, half-scared, at what he had done.

“Are you really going to try it?” asked Gus, as they glided on with increasing speed, and he, too, felt the charm of such a novel adventure, though the consequences bid fair to be serious.

“Yes, I am,” answered Frank, with the grim look he always wore when his strong will got the upper hand. “Bill will give it to us, any way, so we may as well have our fun out. If you are afraid, I’ll slow down and you can jump off,” and his brown eyes sparkled with the double delight of getting his heart’s desire and astonishing his friend at the same time by his skill and coolness.

“Go ahead. I’ll jump when you do;” and Gus calmly sat down again, bound in honor to stand by his mate till the smash came, though rather dismayed at the audacity of the prank.

"Don't you call this just splendid?" exclaimed Frank, as they rolled along over the crossing, past the bridge, toward the curve, a mile from the station.

"Not bad. They are yelling like mad after us. Better go back, if you can," said Gus, who was anxiously peering out, and, in spite of his efforts to seem at ease, not enjoying the trip a particle.

"Let them yell. I started to go to the curve, and I'll do it if it costs me a hundred dollars. No danger; there's no train under twenty minutes, I tell you," and Frank pulled out his watch. But the sun was in his eyes, and he did not see clearly, or he would have discovered that it was later than he thought.

On they went, and were just rounding the bend when a shrill whistle in front startled both boys, and drove the color out of their cheeks.

"It's the factory train!" cried Gus, in a husky tone, as he sprang to his feet.

"No; it's the five-forty on the other road," answered Frank, with a queer thrill all through him at the thought of what might happen if it was not. Both looked straight ahead as the last tree glided by, and the long track lay before them, with the freight train slowly coming down. For an instant, the boys stood as if paralyzed.

"Jump!" said Gus, looking at the steep bank on one side and the river on the other, undecided which to try.

"Sit still!" commanded Frank, collecting his wits, as he gave a warning whistle to retard the on-coming train, while he reversed the engine and went back faster than he came.

A crowd of angry men was waiting for them, and Bill stood at the open switch in a towering passion as No. 11 returned to her place unharmed, but bearing two pale and frightened boys, who stepped slowly and silently down, without a word to say for themselves, while the freight train rumbled by on the main track.

Frank and Gus never had a very clear idea as to what occurred during the next few minutes, but vaguely remembered being well shaken, sworn at, questioned, threatened with direful penalties, and finally ordered off the premises forever by the wrathful depot-master. Joe was nowhere to be seen, and as the two culprits walked away, trying to go steadily, while their heads spun round, and all the strength seemed to have departed from their legs, Frank said, in an exhausted tone, —

"Come down to the boat-house and rest a minute."

Both were glad to get out of sight, and dropped upon the steps red, rumpled, and breathless, after the late exciting scene. Gus generously forebore to speak, though he felt that he was the least to blame; and Frank, after eating a bit of snow to moisten his dry lips, said, handsomely, —

“Now, don’t you worry, old man. I’ll pay the damages, for it was my fault. Joe will dodge, but I won’t, so make your mind easy.

“We sha’n’t hear the last of this in a hurry,” responded Gus, relieved, yet anxious, as he thought of the reprimand his father would give him.

“I hope mother won’t hear of it till I tell her quietly myself. She will be so frightened, and think I’m surely smashed up, if she is told in a hurry;” and Frank gave a shiver, as all the danger he had run came over him suddenly.

“I thought we were done for when we saw that train. Guess we should have been if you had not had your wits about you. I always said you were a cool one;” and Gus patted Frank’s back with a look of great admiration, for, now that it was all over, he considered it a very remarkable performance.

“Which do you suppose it will be, fine or imprisonment?” asked Frank, after sitting in a despondent attitude for a moment.

“Shouldn’t wonder if it was both. Running off with an engine is no joke, you know.”

“What did possess me to be such a fool?” groaned Frank, repenting, all too late, of yielding to the temptation which assailed him.

“Bear up, old fellow, I’ll stand by you; and if the worst comes, I’ll call as often as the rules of the prison allow,” said Gus, consolingly, as he gave his afflicted friend an arm, and they walked away, both feeling that they were marked men from that day forth.

Meantime, Joe, as soon as he recovered from the shock of seeing the boys actually go off, ran away, as fast as his legs could carry him, to prepare Mrs. Minot for the loss of her son; for the idea of their coming safely back never occurred to him, his knowledge of engines being limited. A loud ring at the bell brought Mrs. Pecq, who was guarding the house, while Mrs. Minot entertained a parlor full of company.

“Frank’s run off with No. 11, and he’ll be killed sure. Thought I’d come up and tell you,” stammered Joe, all out of breath and looking wild.

He got no further, for Mrs. Pecq clapped one hand over his mouth, caught him by the collar with the other, and hustled him into the ante-room before any one else could hear the bad news.

“Tell me all about it, and don’t shout. What’s come to the boy?” she demanded, in a tone that reduced Joe to a whisper at once.

“Go right back and see what has happened to him, then come and tell me quietly. I’ll wait for you here. I wouldn’t have his mother startled for the world,” said the good soul, when she knew all.

“Oh, I dar’sn’t! I opened the switch as they told me to, and Bill will half kill me when he knows it!” cried Joe, in a panic, as the awful consequences of his deed rose before him, showing both boys mortally injured and several trains wrecked.

"Then take yourself off home and hold your tongue. I'll watch the door, for I won't have any more ridiculous boys tearing in to disturb my lady."

Mrs. Pecq often called this good neighbor "my lady" when speaking of her, for Mrs. Minot was a true gentlewoman, and much pleasanter to live with than the titled mistress had been.

Joe scudded away as if the constable was after him, and presently Frank was seen slowly approaching with an unusually sober face and a pair of very dirty hands.

"Thank heaven, he's safe!" and, softly opening the door, Mrs. Pecq actually hustled the young master into the ante-room as unceremoniously as she had hustled Joe.

"I beg pardon, but the parlor is full of company, and that fool of a Joe came roaring in with a cock-and-bull story that gave me quite a turn. What is it, Mr. Frank?" she asked eagerly, seeing that something was amiss.

He told her in a few words, and she was much relieved to find that no harm had been done.

"Ah, the danger is to come," said Frank, darkly, as he went away to wash his hands and prepare to relate his misdeeds.

It was a very bad quarter of an hour for the poor fellow, who so seldom had any grave faults to confess; but he did it manfully, and his mother was so grateful for the safety of her boy that she found it difficult to be severe enough, and contented herself with forbidding any more visits to the too charming No. 11.

"What do you suppose will be done to me?" asked Frank, on whom the idea of imprisonment had made a deep impression.

"I don't know, dear, but I shall go over to see Mr. Burton right after tea. He will tell us what to do and what to expect. Gus must not suffer for your fault."

"He'll come off clear enough, but Joe must take his share, for if he hadn't opened that confounded switch, no harm would have been done. But when I saw the way clear, I actually couldn't resist going ahead," said Frank, getting excited again at the memory of that blissful moment when he started the engine.

Here Jack came hurrying in, having heard the news, and refused to believe it from any lips but Frank's. When he could no longer doubt, he was so much impressed with the daring of the deed that he had nothing but admiration for his brother, till a sudden thought made him clap his hands and exclaim exultingly, —

"His runaway beats mine all hollow, and now he can't crow over me! Won't that be a comfort? The good boy has got into a scrape. Hooray!”

This was such a droll way of taking it, that they had to laugh; and Frank took his humiliation so meekly that Jack soon fell to comforting him, instead of crowing over him.

Jill thought it a most interesting event; and, when Frank and his mother went over to consult Mr. Burton, she and Jack planned out for the dear culprit a dramatic trial which would have convulsed the soberest of judges. His sentence was ten years’ imprisonment, and such heavy fines that the family would have been reduced to beggary but for the sums made by Jill’s fancy work and Jack’s success as a champion pedestrian.

They found such comfort and amusement in this sensational programme that they were rather disappointed when Frank returned, reporting that a fine would probably be all the penalty exacted, as no harm had been done, and he and Gus were such respectable boys. What would happen to Joe, he could not tell, but he thought a good whipping ought to be added to his share.

Of course, the affair made a stir in the little world of children; and when Frank went to school, feeling that his character for good behavior was forever damaged, he found himself a lion, and was in danger of being spoiled by the admiration of his comrades, who pointed him out with pride as “the fellow who ran off with a steam-engine.”

But an interview with Judge Kemble, a fine of twenty-five dollars, and lectures from all the grown people of his acquaintance, prevented him from regarding his escapade as a feat to boast of. He discovered, also, how fickle a thing is public favor, for very soon those who had praised began to tease, and it took all his courage, patience, and pride to carry him through the next week or two. The lads were never tired of alluding to No. 11, giving shrill whistles in his ear, asking if his watch was right, and drawing locomotives on the blackboard whenever they got a chance.

The girls, too, had sly nods and smiles, hints and jokes of a milder sort, which made him color and fume, and once lose his dignity entirely. Molly Loo, who dearly loved to torment the big boys, and dared attack even solemn Frank, left one of Boo’s old tin trains on the door-step, directed to “Conductor Minot,” who, I regret to say, could not refrain from kicking it into the street, and slamming the door with a bang that shook the house. Shrieks of laughter from wicked Molly and her coadjutor, Grif, greeted this explosion of wrath, which did no good, however, for half an hour later the same cars, all in a heap, were on the steps again, with two headless dolls tumbling out of the cab, and the dilapidated engine labelled, “No. 11 after the collision.”

No one ever saw that ruin again, and for days Frank was utterly unconscious of Molly’s existence, as propriety forbade his having it out with her as he had with Grif. Then Annette made peace between them, and the approach of the Twenty-second gave the wags something else to think of.

But it was long before Frank forgot that costly prank; for he was a thoughtful boy, who honestly wanted to be good; so he remembered this episode humbly, and whenever he felt the approach of temptation he made the strong will master it, saying to himself “Down brakes!” thus saving the precious freight he carried from many of the accidents which befall us when we try to run our trains without orders, and so often wreck ourselves as well as others.

Chapter XII. The Twenty-Second of February

Of course, the young ladies and gentlemen had a ball on the evening of that day, but the boys and girls were full of excitement about their “Scenes from the Life of Washington and other brilliant tableaux,” as the programme announced. The Bird Room was the theatre, being very large, with four doors conveniently placed. Ralph was in his element, putting up a little stage, drilling boys, arranging groups, and uniting in himself carpenter, scene-painter, manager, and gas man. Mrs. Minot permitted the house to be turned topsy-turvy, and Mrs. Pecq flew about, lending a hand everywhere. Jill was costumer, with help from Miss Delano, who did not care for balls, and kindly took charge of the girls. Jack printed tickets, programmes, and placards of the most imposing sort, and the work went gayly on till all was ready.

When the evening came, the Bird Room presented a fine appearance. One end was curtained off with red drapery; and real footlights, with tin shades, gave a truly theatrical air to the little stage. Rows of chairs, filled with mammas and little people, occupied the rest of the space. The hall and Frank’s room were full of amused papas, uncles, and old gentlemen whose patriotism brought them out in spite of rheumatism. There was a great rustling of skirts, fluttering of fans, and much lively chat, till a bell rang and the orchestra struck up.

Yes, there really was an orchestra, for Ed declared that the national airs *must* be played, or the whole thing would be a failure. So he had exerted himself to collect all the musical talent he could find, a horn, a fiddle, and a flute, with drum and fife for the martial scenes. Ed looked more beaming than ever, as he waved his baton and led off with Yankee Doodle as a safe beginning, for every one knew that. It was fun to see little Johnny Cooper bang away on a big drum, and old Mr. Munson, who had been a fifer all his days, blow till he was as red as a lobster, while every one kept time to the music which put them all in good spirits for the opening scene.

Up went the curtain and several trees in tubs appeared, then a stately gentleman in small clothes, cocked hat, gray wig, and an imposing cane, came slowly walking in. It was Gus, who had been unanimously chosen not only for Washington but for the father of the hero also, that the family traits of long legs and a somewhat massive nose might be preserved.

“Ahem! My trees are doing finely,” observed Mr. W., senior, strolling along with his hands behind him, casting satisfied glances at the dwarf orange, oleander, abutilon, and little pine that represented his orchard.

Suddenly he starts, pauses, frowns, and, after examining the latter shrub, which displayed several hacks in its stem and a broken limb with six red-velvet cherries hanging on it, he gave a thump with his cane that made the little ones jump, and cried out, —

"Can it have been my son?"

He evidently thought it *was*, for he called, in tones of thunder, —

"George! George Washington, come hither this moment!"

Great suspense on the part of the audience, then a general burst of laughter as Boo trotted in, a perfect miniature of his honored parent, knee breeches, cocked hat, shoe buckles and all. He was so fat that the little tails of his coat stuck out in the drollest way, his chubby legs could hardly carry the big buckles, and the rosy face displayed, when he took his hat off with a dutiful bow, was so solemn, the real George could not have looked more anxious when he gave the immortal answer.

"Sirrah, did you cut that tree?" demanded the papa, with another rap of the cane, and such a frown that poor Boo looked dismayed, till Molly whispered, "Put your hand up, dear." Then he remembered his part, and, putting one finger in his mouth, looked down at his square-toed shoes, the image of a shame-stricken boy.

"My son, do not deceive me. If you have done this deed I shall chastise you, for it is my duty not to spare the rod, lest I spoil the child. But if you lie about it you disgrace the name of Washington forever."

This appeal seemed to convulse George with inward agony, for he squirmed most effectively as he drew from his pocket a toy hatchet, which would not have cut a straw, then looking straight up into the awe-inspiring countenance of his parent, he bravely lisped, —

"Papa, I tannot tell a lie. I did tut it with my little hanchet."

"Noble boy — come to my arms! I had rather you spoilt *all* my cherry trees than tell one lie!" cried the delighted gentleman, catching his son in an embrace so close that the fat legs kicked convulsively, and the little coat-tails waved in the breeze, while cane and hatchet fell with a dramatic bang.

The curtain descended on this affecting tableau; but the audience called out both Washingtons, and they came, hand in hand, bowing with the cocked hats pressed to their breasts, the elder smiling blandly, while the younger, still flushed by his exertions, nodded to his friends, asking, with engaging frankness, "Wasn't it nice?"

The next was a marine piece, for a boat was seen, surrounded by tumultuous waves of blue cambric, and rowed by a party of stalwart men in regimentals, who with difficulty kept their seats, for the boat was only a painted board, and they sat on boxes or stools behind it. But few marked the rowers, for in their midst, tall, straight, and steadfast as a mast, stood one figure in a cloak, with folded arms, high boots, and, under the turned-up hat, a noble countenance, stern with indomitable courage. A sword glittered at his side, and a banner waved over him, but his eye was fixed on the distant shore, and he was evidently unconscious of the roaring billows, the blocks of ice, the discouragement of his men, or the danger and death that might await him. Napoleon crossing the Alps was not half so sublime, and with one voice the audience cried, “Washington crossing the Delaware!” while the band burst forth with, “See, the conquering hero comes!” all out of tune, but bound to play it or die in the attempt.

It would have been very successful if, all of a sudden, one of the rowers had not “caught a crab” with disastrous consequences. The oars were not moving, but a veteran, who looked very much like Joe, dropped the one he held, and in trying to turn and pummel the black-eyed warrior behind him, he tumbled off his seat, upsetting two other men, and pulling the painted boat upon them as they lay kicking in the cambric deep. Shouts of laughter greeted this mishap, but George Washington never stirred. Grasping the banner, he stood firm when all else went down in the general wreck, and the icy waves engulfed his gallant crew, leaving him erect amid a chaos of wildly tossing boots, entangled oars, and red-faced victims. Such god-like dignity could not fail to impress the frivolous crowd of laughers, and the curtain fell amid a round of applause for him alone.

“Quite exciting, wasn’t it? Didn’t know Gus had so much presence of mind,” said Mr. Burton, well pleased with his boy.

“If we did not know that Washington died in his bed, December 14, 1799, I should fear that we’d seen the last of him in that shipwreck,” laughed an old gentleman, proud of his memory for dates.

Much confusion reigned behind the scenes; Ralph was heard scolding, and Joe set every one off again by explaining, audibly, that Grif tickled him, and he couldn’t stand it. A pretty, old-fashioned picture of the “Daughters of Liberty” followed, for the girls were determined to do honor to the brave and patient women who so nobly bore their part in the struggle, yet are usually forgotten when those days are celebrated. The damsels were charming in the big caps, flowered gowns, and high-heeled shoes of their great-grandmothers, as they sat about a spider-legged table talking over the tax, and pledging themselves to drink no more tea till it was taken off. Molly was on her feet proposing, “Liberty forever, and down with all tyrants,” to judge from her flashing eyes as she held her egg-shell cup aloft, while the others lifted theirs to drink the toast, and Merry, as hostess, sat with her hand on an antique teapot, labelled “Sage,” ready to fill again when the patriotic ladies were ready for a second “dish.”

This was much applauded, and the curtain went up again, for the proud parents enjoyed seeing their pretty girls in the faded finery of a hundred years ago. The band played “Auld Lang Syne,” as a gentle hint that our fore-mothers should be remembered as well as the fore-fathers.

It was evident that something very martial was to follow, for a great tramping, clashing, and flying about took place behind the scenes while the tea-party was going on. After some delay, “The Surrender of Cornwallis” was presented in the most superb manner, as you can believe when I tell you that the stage was actually lined with a glittering array of Washington and his generals, Lafayette, Kosciusko, Rochambeau and the rest, all in astonishing uniforms, with swords which were evidently the pride of their lives. Fife and drum struck up a march, and in came Cornwallis, much cast down but full of manly resignation, as he surrendered his sword, and stood aside with averted eyes while his army marched past, piling their arms at the hero’s feet.

This scene was the delight of the boys, for the rifles of Company F had been secured, and at least a dozen soldiers kept filing in and out in British uniform till Washington’s august legs were hidden by the heaps of arms rattled down before him. The martial music, the steady tramp, and the patriotic memories awakened, caused this scene to be enthusiastically encored, and the boys would have gone on marching till midnight if Ralph had not peremptorily ordered down the curtain and cleared the stage for the next tableau.

This had been artfully slipped in between two brilliant ones, to show that the Father of his Country had to pay a high price for his glory. The darkened stage represented what seemed to be a camp in a snow-storm, and a very forlorn camp, too; for on “the cold, cold ground” (a reckless display of cotton batting) lay ragged soldiers, sleeping without blankets, their worn-out boots turned up pathetically, and no sign of food or fire to be seen. A very shabby sentinel, with feet bound in bloody cloths, and his face as pale as chalk could make it, gnawed a dry crust as he kept his watch in the wintry night.

A tent at the back of the stage showed a solitary figure sitting on a log of wood, poring over the map spread upon his knee, by the light of one candle stuck in a bottle. There could be no doubt who this was, for the buff-and-blue coat, the legs, the nose, the attitude, all betrayed the great George laboring to save his country, in spite of privations, discouragements, and dangers which would have daunted any other man.

“Valley Forge,” said someone, and the room was very still as old and young looked silently at this little picture of a great and noble struggle in one of its dark hours. The crust, the wounded feet, the rags, the snow, the loneliness, the indomitable courage and endurance of these men touched the hearts of all, for the mimic scene grew real for a moment; and, when a child's voice broke the silence, asking pitifully, "Oh, mamma, was it truly as dreadful as that?" a general outburst answered, as if every one wanted to cheer up the brave fellows and bid them fight on, for victory was surely coming.

In the next scene it did come, and "Washington at Trenton" was prettily done. An arch of flowers crossed the stage, with the motto, "The Defender of the Mothers will be the Preserver of the Daughters;" and, as the hero with his generals advanced on one side, a troop of girls, in old-fashioned muslin frocks, came to scatter flowers before him, singing the song of long ago: —

"Welcome, mighty chief, once more
Welcome to this grateful shore;
Now no mercenary foe
Aims again the fatal blow, —
Aims at thee the fatal blow.

"Virgins fair and matrons grave,
Those thy conquering arm did save,
Build for thee triumphal bowers;
Strew, ye fair, his way with flowers, —
Strew your hero's way with flowers."

And they did, singing with all their hearts as they flung artificial roses and lilies at the feet of the great men, who bowed with benign grace. Jack, who did Lafayette with a limp, covered himself with glory by picking up one of the bouquets and pressing it to his heart with all the gallantry of a Frenchman; and when Washington lifted the smallest of the maids and kissed her, the audience cheered. Couldn't help it, you know, it was so pretty and inspiring.

The Washington Family, after the famous picture, came next, with Annette as the serene and sensible Martha, in a very becoming cap. The General was in uniform, there being no time to change, but his attitude was quite correct, and the Custis boy and girl displayed the wide sash and ruffled collar with historic fidelity. The band played "Home," and every one agreed that it was "Sweet!"

"Now I don't see what more they can have except the death-bed, and that would be rather out of place in this gay company," said the old gentleman to Mr. Burton, as he mopped his heated face after pounding so heartily he nearly knocked the ferule off his cane.

"No; they gave that up, for my boy wouldn't wear a night-gown in public. I can't tell secrets, but I think they have got a very clever little finale for the first part — a pretty compliment to one person and a pleasant surprise to all," answered Mr. Burton, who was in great spirits, being fond of theatricals and very justly proud of his children, for the little girls had been among the Trenton maids, and the mimic General had kissed his own small sister, Nelly, very tenderly.

A great deal of interest was felt as to what this surprise was to be, and a general “Oh!” greeted the “Minute Man,” standing motionless upon his pedestal. It was Frank, and Ralph had done his best to have the figure as perfect as possible, for the maker of the original had been a good friend to him; and, while the young sculptor was dancing gayly at the ball, this copy of his work was doing him honor among the children. Frank looked it very well, for his firm-set mouth was full of resolution, his eyes shone keen and courageous under the three-cornered hat, and the muscles stood out upon the bare arm that clutched the old gun. Even the buttons on the gaiters seemed to flash defiance, as the sturdy legs took the first step from the furrow toward the bridge where the young farmer became a hero when he “fired the shot heard ‘round the world.”

“That *is* splendid!” “As like to the original as flesh can be to bronze.” “How still he stands!” “He’ll fight when the time comes, and die hard, won’t he?” “Hush! You make the statue blush!” These very audible remarks certainly did, for the color rose visibly as the modest lad heard himself praised, though he saw but one face in all the crowd, his mother’s, far back, but full of love and pride, as she looked up at her young minute man waiting for the battle which often calls us when we least expect it, and for which she had done her best to make him ready.

If there had been any danger of Frank being puffed up by the success of his statue, it was counteracted by irrepressible Grif, who, just at the most interesting moment, when all were gazing silently, gave a whistle, followed by a “Choo, choo, choo!” and “All aboard!” so naturally that no one could mistake the joke, especially as another laughing voice added, “Now, then, No. 11!” which brought down the house and the curtain too.

Frank was so angry, it was very difficult to keep him on his perch for the last scene of all. He submitted, however, rather than spoil the grand finale, hoping that its beauty would efface that ill-timed pleasantry from the public mind. So, when the agreeable clamor of hands and voices called for a repetition, the Minute Man reappeared, grimmer than before. But not alone, for grouped all about his pedestal were Washington and his generals, the matrons and maids, with a background of troops shouldering arms, Grif and Joe doing such rash things with their muskets, that more than one hero received a poke in his august back. Before the full richness of this picture had been taken in, Ed gave a rap, and all burst out with “Hail Columbia,” in such an inspiring style that it was impossible for the audience to refrain from joining, which they did, all standing and all singing with a heartiness that made the walls ring. The fife shrilled, the horn blew sweet and clear, the fiddle was nearly drowned by the energetic boom of the drum, and out into the starry night, through open windows, rolled the song that stirs the coldest heart with patriotic warmth and tunes every voice to music.

"'America!' We must have 'America!' Pipe up, Ed, this is too good to end without one song more," cried Mr. Burton, who had been singing like a trumpet; and, hardly waiting to get their breath, off they all went again with the national hymn, singing as they never had sung it before, for somehow the little scenes they had just acted or beheld seemed to show how much this dear America of ours had cost in more than one revolution, how full of courage, energy, and virtue it was in spite of all its faults, and what a privilege, as well as duty, it was for each to do his part toward its safety and its honor in the present, as did those brave men and women in the past.

So the "Scenes from the Life of Washington" were a great success, and, when the songs were over, people were glad of a brief recess while they had raptures, and refreshed themselves with lemonade.

The girls had kept the secret of who the "Princess" was to be, and, when the curtain rose, a hum of surprise and pleasure greeted the pretty group. Jill lay asleep in all her splendor, the bonny "Prince" just lifting the veil to wake her with a kiss, and all about them the court in its nap of a hundred years. The "King" and "Queen" dozing comfortably on the throne; the maids of honor, like a garland of nodding flowers, about the couch; the little page, unconscious of the blow about to fall, and the fool dreaming, with his mouth wide open.

It was so pretty, people did not tire of looking, till Jack's lame leg began to tremble, and he whispered: "Drop her or I shall pitch." Down went the curtain; but it rose in a moment, and there was the court after the awakening: the "King" and "Queen" looking about them with sleepy dignity, the maids in various attitudes of surprise, the fool grinning from ear to ear, and the "Princess" holding out her hand to the "Prince," as if glad to welcome the right lover when he came at last.

Molly got the laugh this time, for she could not resist giving poor Boo the cuff which had been hanging over him so long. She gave it with unconscious energy, and Boo cried "Ow!" so naturally that all the children were delighted and wanted it repeated. But Boo declined, and the scenes which followed were found quite as much to their taste, having been expressly prepared for the little people.

Mother Goose's Reception was really very funny, for Ralph was the old lady, and had hired a representation of the immortal bird from a real theatre for this occasion. There they stood, the dame in her pointed hat, red petticoat, cap, and cane, with the noble fowl, a good deal larger than life, beside her, and Grif inside, enjoying himself immensely as he flapped the wings, moved the yellow legs, and waved the long neck about, while unearthly quacks issued from the bill. That was a great surprise for the children, and they got up in their seats to gaze their fill, many of them firmly believing that they actually beheld the blessed old woman who wrote the nursery songs they loved so well.

Then in came, one after another, the best of the characters she has made famous, while a voice behind the scenes sang the proper rhyme as each made their manners to the interesting pair. “Mistress Mary,” and her “pretty maids all in a row,” passed by to their places in the background; “King Cole” and his “fiddlers three” made a goodly show; so did the royal couple, who followed the great pie borne before them, with the “four-and-twenty blackbirds” popping their heads out in the most delightful way. Little “Bo-Peep” led a woolly lamb and wept over its lost tail, for not a sign of one appeared on the poor thing. “Simple Simon” followed the pie-man, gloating over his wares with the drollest antics. The little wife came trundling by in a wheelbarrow and was not upset; neither was the lady with “rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,” as she cantered along on a rocking-horse. “Bobby Shafto’s” yellow hair shone finely as he led in the maid whom he came back from sea to marry. “Miss Muffet,” bowl in hand, ran away from an immense black spider, which waggled its long legs in a way so life-like that some of the children shook in their little shoes. The beggars who came to town were out in full force, “rags, tags, and velvet gowns,” quite true to life. “Boy Blue” rubbed his eyes, with hay sticking in his hair, and tooted on a tin horn as if bound to get the cows out of the corn. Molly, with a long-handled frying-pan, made a capital “Queen,” in a tucked-up gown, checked apron, and high crown, to good “King Arthur,” who, very properly, did not appear after stealing the barley-meal, which might be seen in the pan tied up in a pudding, like a cannon-ball, ready to fry.

But Tobias, Molly’s black cat, covered himself with glory by the spirit with which he acted his part in,

> “Sing, sing, what shall I sing?
> The cat’s run away with the pudding-bag string.”

First he was led across the stage on his hind legs, looking very fierce and indignant, with a long tape trailing behind him; and, being set free at the proper moment, he gave one bound over the four-and-twenty blackbirds who happened to be in the way, and dashed off as if an enraged cook had actually been after him, straight downstairs to the coal-bin, where he sat glaring in the dark, till the fun was over.

When all the characters had filed in and stood in two long rows, music struck up and they danced, “All the way to Boston,” a simple but lively affair, which gave each a chance to show his or her costume as they pranced down the middle and up outside.

Such a funny medley as it was, for there went fat “King Cole” with the most ragged of the beggar-maids. “Mistress Mary,” in her pretty blue dress, tripped along with “Simple Simon” staring about him like a blockhead. The fine lady left her horse to dance with “Bobby Shafto” till every bell on her slippers tinkled its tongue out. “Bo-Peep” and a jolly fiddler skipped gayly up and down. “Miss Muffet” took the big spider for her partner, and made his many legs fly about in the wildest way. The little wife got out of the wheelbarrow to help “Boy Blue” along, and Molly, with the frying-pan over her shoulder, led off splendidly when it was “Grand right and left.”

But the old lady and her goose were the best of all, for the dame’s shoe-buckles cut the most astonishing pigeon-wings, and to see that mammoth bird waddle down the middle with its wings half open, its long neck bridling, and its yellow legs in the first position as it curtsied to its partner, was a sight to remember, it was so intensely funny.

The merry old gentleman laughed till he cried; Mr. Burton split his gloves, he applauded so enthusiastically; while the children beat the dust out of the carpet hopping up and down, as they cried: “Do it again!” “We want it all over!” when the curtain went down at last on the flushed and panting party, Mother G — — bowing, with her hat all awry, and the goose doing a double shuffle as if it did not know how to leave off.

But they could not “do it all over again,” for it was growing late, and the people felt that they certainly had received their money’s worth that evening.

So it all ended merrily, and when the guests departed the boys cleared the room like magic, and the promised supper to the actors was served in handsome style. Jack and Jill were at one end, Mrs. Goose and her bird at the other, and all between was a comical collection of military heroes, fairy characters, and nursery celebrities. All felt the need of refreshment after their labors, and swept over the table like a flight of locusts, leaving devastation behind. But they had earned their fun: and much innocent jollity prevailed, while a few lingering papas and mammas watched the revel from afar, and had not the heart to order these noble beings home till even the Father of his Country declared “that he’d had a perfectly splendid time, but couldn’t keep his eyes open another minute,” and very wisely retired to replace the immortal cocked hat with a night-cap.

Chapter XIII. Jack Has a Mystery

“What is the matter? Does your head ache?” asked Jill, one evening in March, observing that Jack sat with his head in his hands, an attitude which, with him, meant either pain or perplexity.

“No; but I’m bothered. I want some money, and I don’t see how I can earn it,” he answered, tumbling his hair about, and frowning darkly at the fire.

“How much?” and Jill’s ready hand went to the pocket where her little purse lay, for she felt rich with several presents lately made her.

“Two seventy-five. No, thank you, I won’t borrow.”

“What is it for?”

“Can’t tell.”

“Why, I thought you told me everything.”

“Sorry, but I can’t this time. Don’t you worry; I shall think of something.”

“Couldn’t your mother help?”

“Don’t wish to ask her.”

“Why! can’t *she* know?”

“Nobody can.”

“How queer! Is it a scrape, Jack?” asked Jill, looking as curious as a magpie.

“It is likely to be, if I can’t get out of it this week, somehow.”

“Well, I don’t see how I can help if I’m not to know anything;” and Jill seemed rather hurt.

“You can just stop asking questions, and tell me how a fellow can earn some money. That would help. I’ve got one dollar, but I must have some more;” and Jack looked worried as he fingered the little gold dollar on his watch-guard.

“Oh, do you mean to use that?”

“Yes, I do; a man must pay his debts if he sells all he has to do it,” said Jack sternly.

“Dear me; it must be something very serious.” And Jill lay quite still for five minutes, thinking over all the ways in which Jack ever did earn money, for Mrs. Minot liked to have her boys work, and paid them in some way for all they did.

“Is there any wood to saw?” she asked presently, being very anxious to help.

“All done.”

“Paths to shovel?”

“No snow.”

“Lawn to rake, then?”

"Not time for that yet."

"Catalogue of books?"

"Frank got that job."

"Copy those letters for your mother?"

"Take me too long. Must have my money Friday, if possible."

"I don't see what we can do, then. It is too early or too late for everything, and you won't borrow."

"Not of you. No, nor of any one else, if I can possibly help it. I've promised to do this myself, and I will;" and Jack wagged his head resolutely.

"Couldn't you do something with the printing-press? Do me some cards, and then, perhaps, the other girls will want some," said Jill, as a forlorn hope.

"Just the thing! What a goose I was not to think of it. I'll rig the old machine up at once." And, starting from his seat, Jack dived into the big closet, dragged out the little press, and fell to oiling, dusting, and putting it in order, like one relieved of a great anxiety.

"Give me the types; I'll sort them and set up my name, so you can begin as soon as you are ready. You know what a help I was when we did the programmes. I'm almost sure the girls *will* want cards, and I know your mother would like some more tags," said Jill, briskly rattling the letters into the different compartments, while Jack inked the rollers and hunted up his big apron, whistling the while with recovered spirits.

A dozen neat cards were soon printed, and Jill insisted on paying six cents for them, as earning was not borrowing. A few odd tags were found and done for Mamma, who immediately ordered four dozen at six cents a dozen, though she was not told why there was such a pressing call for money.

Jack's monthly half-dollar had been spent the first week, — twenty-five cents for a concert, ten paid a fine for keeping a book too long from the library, ten more to have his knife ground, and five in candy, for he dearly loved sweeties, and was under bonds to Mamma not to spend more than five cents a month on these unwholesome temptations. She never asked the boys what they did with their money, but expected them to keep account in the little books she gave them; and, now and then, they showed the neat pages with pardonable pride, though she often laughed at the queer items.

All that evening Jack & Co. worked busily, for when Frank came in he good-naturedly ordered some pale-pink cards for Annette, and ran to the store to choose the right shade, and buy some packages for the young printer also.

"What *do* you suppose he is in such a pucker for?" whispered Jill, as she set up the new name, to Frank, who sat close by, with one eye on his book and one on her.

“Oh, some notion. He’s a queer chap; but I guess it isn’t much of a scrape, or I should know it. He’s so good-natured he’s always promising to do things for people, and has too much pluck to give up when he finds he can’t. Let him alone, and it will all come out soon enough,” answered Frank, who laughed at his brother, but loved him none the less for the tender heart that often got the better of his young head.

But for once Frank was mistaken; the mystery did not come out, and Jack worked like a beaver all that week, as orders poured in when Jill and Annette showed their elegant cards; for, as everybody knows, if one girl has a new thing all the rest must, whether it is a bow on the top of her head, a peculiar sort of pencil, or the latest kind of chewing-gum. Little play did the poor fellow get, for every spare minute was spent at the press, and no invitation could tempt him away, so much in earnest was our honest little Franklin about paying his debt. Jill helped all she could, and cheered his labors with her encouragement, remembering how he stayed at home for her.

“It is real good of you to lend a hand, and I’m ever so much obliged,” said Jack, as the last order was struck off, and the drawer of the type-box held a pile of shining five and ten cent pieces, with two or three quarters.

“I love to; only it would be nicer if I knew what we were working for,” she said demurely, as she scattered type for the last time; and seeing that Jack was both tired and grateful, hoped to get a hint of the secret.

“I want to tell you, dreadfully; but I can’t, because I’ve promised.”

“What, never?”

“Never!” and Jack looked as firm as a rock.

“Then I shall find out, for *I* haven’t promised.”

“You can’t.”

“See if I don’t!”

“You are sharp, but you won’t guess this. It’s a tremendous secret, and nobody will tell it.”

“You’ll tell it yourself. You always do.”

“I won’t tell this. It would be mean.”

“Wait and see; I can get anything out of you if I try;” and Jill laughed, knowing her power well, for Jack found it very hard to keep a secret from her.

“Don’t try; please don’t! It wouldn’t be right, and you don’t want to make me do a dishonorable thing for your sake, I know.”

Jack looked so distressed that Jill promised not to *make* him tell, though she held herself free to find out in other ways, if she could.

Thus relieved, Jack trudged off to school on Friday with the two dollars and seventy-five cents jingling in his pocket, though the dear gold coin had to be sacrificed to make up the sum. He did his lessons badly that day, was late at recess in the afternoon, and, as soon as school was over, departed in his rubber boots "to take a walk," he said, though the roads were in a bad state with a spring thaw. Nothing was seen of him till after tea-time, when he came limping in, very dirty and tired, but with a reposeful expression, which betrayed that a load was off his mind. Frank was busy about his own affairs and paid little attention to him, but Jill was on tenter-hooks to know where he had been, yet dared not ask the question.

"Merry's brother wants some cards. He liked hers so much he wishes to make his lady-love a present. Here's the name;" and Jill held up the order from Harry Grant, who was to be married in the autumn.

"Must wait till next week. I'm too tired to do a thing to-night, and I hate the sight of that old press," answered Jack, laying himself down upon the rug as if every joint ached.

"What made you take such a long walk? You look as tired as if you'd been ten miles," said Jill, hoping to discover the length of the trip.

"Had to. Four or five miles isn't much, only my leg bothered me;" and Jack gave the ailing member a slap, as if he had found it much in his way that day; for, though he had given up the crutches long ago, he rather missed their support sometimes. Then, with a great yawn, he stretched himself out to bask in the blaze, pillowing his head on his arms.

"Dear old thing, he looks all used up; I won't plague him with talking;" and Jill began to sing, as she often did in the twilight.

By the time the first song ended a gentle snore was heard, and Jack lay fast asleep, worn out with the busy week and the walk, which had been longer and harder than any one guessed. Jill took up her knitting and worked quietly by firelight, still wondering and guessing what the secret could be; for she had not much to amuse her, and little things were very interesting if connected with her friends. Presently Jack rolled over and began to mutter in his sleep, as he often did when too weary for sound slumber. Jill paid no attention till he uttered a name which made her prick up her ears and listen to the broken sentences which followed. Only a few words, but she dropped her work, saying to herself, —

"I do believe he is talking about the secret. Now I shall find out, and he *will* tell me himself, as I said he would."

Much pleased, she leaned and listened, but could make no sense of the confused babble about "heavy boots;" "All right, old fellow;" "Jerry's off;" and "The ink is too thick."

The slam of the front door woke Jack, and he pulled himself up, declaring that he believed he had been having a nap.

“I wish you’d have another,” said Jill, greatly disappointed at the loss of the intelligence she seemed to be so near getting.

“Floor is too hard for tired bones. Guess I’ll go to bed and get rested up for Monday. I’ve worked like fury this week, so next I’m going in for fun;” and, little dreaming what hard times were in store for him, Jack went off to enjoy his warm bath and welcome bed, where he was soon sleeping with the serene look of one whose dreams were happy, whose conscience was at rest.

“I have a few words to say to you before you go,” said Mr. Acton, pausing with his hand on the bell, Monday afternoon, when the hour came for dismissing school.

The bustle of putting away books and preparing for as rapid a departure as propriety allowed, subsided suddenly, and the boys and girls sat as still as mice, while the hearts of such as had been guilty of any small sins began to beat fast.

“You remember that we had some trouble last winter about keeping the boys away from the saloon, and that a rule was made forbidding any pupil to go to town during recess?” began Mr. Acton, who, being a conscientious man as well as an excellent teacher, felt that he was responsible for the children in school hours, and did his best to aid parents in guarding them from the few temptations which beset them in a country town. A certain attractive little shop, where confectionery, baseballs, stationery, and picture papers were sold, was a favorite loafing place for some of the boys till the rule forbidding it was made, because in the rear of the shop was a beer and billiard saloon. A wise rule, for the picture papers were not always of the best sort; cigars were to be had; idle fellows hung about there, and some of the lads, who wanted to be thought manly, ventured to pass the green baize door “just to look on.”

A murmur answered the teacher’s question, and he continued, “You all know that the rule was broken several times, and I told you the next offender would be publicly reprimanded, as private punishments had no effect. I am sorry to say that the time has come, and the offender is a boy whom I trusted entirely. It grieves me to do this, but I must keep my promise, and hope the example will have a good effect.”

Mr. Acton paused, as if he found it hard to go on, and the boys looked at one another with inquiring eyes, for their teacher seldom punished, and when he did, it was a very solemn thing. Several of these anxious glances fell upon Joe, who was very red and sat whittling a pencil as if he dared not lift his eyes.

“He’s the chap. Won’t he catch it?” whispered Gus to Frank, for both owed him a grudge.

“The boy who broke the rule last Friday, at afternoon recess, will come to the desk,” said Mr. Acton in his most impressive manner.

If a thunderbolt had fallen through the roof it would hardly have caused a greater surprise than the sight of Jack Minot walking slowly down the aisle, with a wrathful flash in the eyes he turned on Joe as he passed him.

“Now, Minot, let us have this over as soon as possible, for I do not like it any better than you do, and I am sure there is some mistake. I’m told you went to the shop on Friday. Is it true?” asked Mr. Acton very gently, for he liked Jack and seldom had to correct him in any way.

“Yes, sir;” and Jack looked up as if proud to show that he was not afraid to tell the truth as far as he could.

“To buy something?”

“No, sir.”

“To meet someone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was it Jerry Shannon?”

No answer, but Jack’s fists doubled up of themselves as he shot another fiery glance at Joe, whose face burned as if it scorched him.

“I am told it was; also that you were seen to go into the saloon with him. Did you?” and Mr. Acton looked so sure that it was a mistake that it cost Jack a great effort to say, slowly, —

“Yes, sir.”

Quite a thrill pervaded the school at this confession, for Jerry was one of the wild fellows the boys all shunned, and to have any dealings with him was considered a very disgraceful thing.

“Did you play?”

“No, sir. I can’t.”

“Drink beer?”

“I belong to the Lodge;” and Jack stood as erect as any little soldier who ever marched under a temperance banner, and fought for the cause none are too young nor too old to help along.

“I was sure of that. Then what took you there, my boy?”

The question was so kindly put that Jack forgot himself an instant, and blurted out, —

“I only went to pay him some money, sir.”

“Ah, how much?”

“Two seventy-five,” muttered Jack, as red as a cherry at not being able to keep a secret better.

“Too much for a lad like you to owe such a fellow as Jerry. How came it?” And Mr. Acton looked disturbed.

Jack opened his lips to speak, but shut them again, and stood looking down with a little quiver about the mouth that showed how much it cost him to be silent.

“Does any one beside Jerry know of this?”

“One other fellow,” after a pause.

“Yes, I understand;” and Mr. Acton’s eye glanced at Joe with a look that seemed to say, “I wish he’d held his tongue.”

A queer smile flitted over Jack’s face, for Joe was not the “other fellow,” and knew very little about it, excepting what he had seen when he was sent on an errand by Mr. Acton on Friday.

“I wish you would explain the matter, John, for I am sure it is better than it seems, and it would be very hard to punish you when you don’t deserve it.”

“But I do deserve it; I’ve broken the rule, and I ought to be punished,” said Jack, as if a good whipping would be easier to bear than this public cross-examination.

“And you can’t explain, or even say you are sorry or ashamed?” asked Mr. Acton, hoping to surprise another fact out of the boy.

“No, sir; I can’t; I’m not ashamed; I’m not sorry, and I’d do it again to-morrow if I had to,” cried Jack, losing patience, and looking as if he would not bear much more.

A groan from the boys greeted this bare-faced declaration, and Susy quite shivered at the idea of having taken two bites out of the apple of such a hardened desperado.

“Think it over till to-morrow, and perhaps you will change your mind. Remember that this is the last week of the month, and reports are given out next Friday,” said Mr. Acton, knowing how much the boy prided himself on always having good ones to show his mother.

Poor Jack turned scarlet and bit his lips to keep them still, for he had forgotten this when he plunged into the affair which was likely to cost him dear. Then the color faded away, the boyish face grew steady, and the honest eyes looked up at his teacher as he said very low, but all heard him, the room was so still, —

“It isn’t as bad as it looks, sir, but I can’t say any more. No one is to blame but me; and I couldn’t help breaking the rule, for Jerry was going away, I had only that time, and I’d promised to pay up, so I did.”

Mr. Acton believed every word he said, and regretted that they had not been able to have it out privately, but he, too, must keep his promise and punish the offender, whoever he was.

“Very well, you will lose your recess for a week, and this month’s report will be the first one in which behavior does not get the highest mark. You may go;

and I wish it understood that Master Minot is not to be troubled with questions till he chooses to set this matter right.”

Then the bell rang, the children trooped out, Mr. Acton went off without another word, and Jack was left alone to put up his books and hide a few tears that would come because Frank turned his eyes away from the imploring look cast upon him as the culprit came down from the platform, a disgraced boy.

Elder brothers are apt to be a little hard on younger ones, so it is not surprising that Frank, who was an eminently proper boy, was much cut up when Jack publicly confessed to dealings with Jerry, leaving it to be supposed that the worst half of the story remained untold. He felt it his duty, therefore, to collar poor Jack when he came out, and talk to him all the way home, like a judge bent on getting at the truth by main force. A kind word would have been very comforting, but the scolding was too much for Jack’s temper, so he turned dogged and would not say a word, though Frank threatened not to speak to him for a week.

At tea-time both boys were very silent, one looking grim, the other excited. Frank stared sternly at his brother across the table, and no amount of marmalade sweetened or softened that reproachful look. Jack defiantly crunched his toast, with occasional slashes at the butter, as if he must vent the pent-up emotions which half distracted him. Of course, their mother saw that something was amiss, but did not allude to it, hoping that the cloud would blow over as so many did if left alone. But this one did not, and when both refused cake, this sure sign of unusual perturbation made her anxious to know the cause. As soon as tea was over, Jack retired with gloomy dignity to his own room, and Frank, casting away the paper he had been pretending to read, burst out with the whole story. Mrs. Minot was as much surprised as he, but not angry, because, like most mothers, she was sure that her sons could not do anything very bad.

“I will speak to him; my boy won’t refuse to give *me* some explanation,” she said, when Frank had freed his mind with as much warmth as if Jack had broken all the ten commandments.

“He will. You often call me obstinate, but he is as pig-headed as a mule; Joe only knows what he saw, old tell-tale! and Jerry has left town, or I’d have it out of him. Make Jack own up, whether he can or not. Little donkey!” stormed Frank, who hated rowdies and could not forgive his brother for being seen with one.

“My dear, all boys do foolish things sometimes, even the wisest and best behaved, so don’t be hard on the poor child. He has got into trouble, I’ve no doubt, but it cannot be very bad, and he earned the money to pay for his prank, whatever it was.”

Mrs. Minot left the room as she spoke, and Frank cooled down as if her words had been a shower-bath, for he remembered his own costly escapade, and how kindly both his mother and Jack had stood by him on that trying occasion. So, feeling rather remorseful, he went off to talk it over with Gus, leaving Jill in a fever of curiosity, for Merry and Molly had dropped in on their way home to break the blow to her, and Frank declined to discuss it with her, after mildly stating that Jack was “a ninny,” in his opinion.

“Well, I know one thing,” said Jill confidentially to Snow-ball, when they were left alone together, “if every one else is scolding him I won’t say a word. It’s so mean to crow over people when they are down, and I’m sure he hasn’t done anything to be ashamed of, though he won’t tell.”

Snow-ball seemed to agree to this, for he went and sat down by Jack’s slippers waiting for him on the hearth, and Jill thought that a very touching proof of affectionate fidelity to the little master who ruled them both.

When he came, it was evident that he had found it harder to refuse his mother than all the rest. But she trusted him in spite of appearances, and that was such a comfort! For poor Jack’s heart was very full, and he longed to tell the whole story, but he would not break his promise, and so kept silence bravely. Jill asked no questions, affecting to be anxious for the games they always played together in the evening, but while they played, though the lips were sealed, the bright eyes said as plainly as words, “I trust you,” and Jack was very grateful.

It was well he had something to cheer him up at home, for he got little peace at school. He bore the grave looks of Mr. Acton meekly, took the boys’ jokes good-naturedly, and withstood the artful teasing of the girls with patient silence. But it was very hard for the social, affectionate fellow to bear the general distrust, for he had been such a favorite he felt the change keenly.

But the thing that tried him most was the knowledge that his report would not be what it usually was. It was always a happy moment when he showed it to his mother, and saw her eye brighten as it fell on the 99 or 100, for she cared more for good behavior than for perfect lessons. Mr. Acton once said that Frank Minot’s moral influence in the school was unusual, and Jack never forgot her pride and delight as she told them what Frank himself had not known till then. It was Jack’s ambition to have the same said of him, for he was not much of a scholar, and he had tried hard since he went back to school to get good records in that respect at least. Now here was a dreadful downfall, tardy marks, bad company, broken rules, and something too wrong to tell, apparently.

“Well, I deserve a good report, and that’s a comfort, though nobody believes it,” he said to himself, trying to keep up his spirits, as the slow week went by, and no word from him had cleared up the mystery.

Chapter XIV. And Jill Finds It Out

Jill worried about it more than he did, for she was a faithful little friend, and it was a great trial to have Jack even suspected of doing anything wrong. School is a child's world while he is there, and its small affairs are very important to him, so Jill felt that the one thing to be done was to clear away the cloud about her dear boy, and restore him to public favor.

"Ed will be here Saturday night and may be he will find out, for Jack tells him everything. I do hate to have him hectored so, for I know he is, though he's too proud to complain," she said, on Thursday evening, when Frank told her some joke played upon his brother that day.

"I let him alone, but I see that he isn't badgered too much. That's all I can do. If Ed had only come home last Saturday it might have done some good, but now it will be too late; for the reports are given out to-morrow, you know," answered Frank, feeling a little jealous of Ed's influence over Jack, though his own would have been as great if he had been as gentle.

"Has Jerry come back?" asked Jill, who kept all her questions for Frank, because she seldom alluded to the tender subject when with Jack.

"No, he's off for the summer. Got a place somewhere. Hope he'll stay there and let Bob alone."

"Where is Bob now? I don't hear much about him lately," said Jill, who was constantly on the lookout for "the other fellow," since it was not Joe.

"Oh, he went to Captain Skinner's the first of March, chores round, and goes to school up there. Captain is strict, and won't let Bob come to town, except Sundays; but he don't mind it much, for he likes horses, has nice grub, and the Hill fellows are good chaps for him to be with. So he's all right, if he only behaves."

"How far is it to Captain Skinner's?" asked Jill suddenly, having listened, with her sharp eyes on Frank, as he tinkered away at his model, since he was forbidden all other indulgence in his beloved pastime.

"It's four miles to Hill District, but the Captain lives this side of the school-house. About three from here, I should say."

"How long would it take a boy to walk up there?" went on the questioner, with a new idea in her head.

"Depends on how much of a walkist he is."

"Suppose he was lame and it was sloshy, and he made a call and came back.

How long would that take?" asked Jill impatiently.

"Well, in that case, I should say two or three hours. But it's impossible to tell exactly, unless you know how lame the fellow was, and how long a call he made," said Frank, who liked to be accurate.

"Jack couldn't do it in less, could he?"

"He used to run up that hilly road for a breather, and think nothing of it. It would be a long job for him now, poor little chap, for his leg often troubles him, though he hates to own it."

Jill lay back and laughed, a happy little laugh, as if she was pleased about something, and Frank looked over his shoulder to ask questions in his turn.

"What are you laughing at?"

"Can't tell."

"Why do you want to know about Hill District? Are you going there?"

"Wish I could! I'd soon have it out of him."

"Who?"

"Never mind. Please push up my table. I must write a letter, and I want you to post it for me to-night, and never say a word till I give you leave."

"Oh, now *you* are going to have secrets and be mysterious, and get into a mess, are you?" and Frank looked down at her with a suspicious air, though he was intensely curious to know what she was about.

"Go away till I'm done. You will have to see the outside, but you can't know the inside till the answer comes;" and propping herself up, Jill wrote the following note, with some hesitation at the beginning and end, for she did not know the gentleman she was addressing, except by sight, and it was rather awkward: —

"Robert Walker.

"Dear Sir, I want to ask if Jack Minot came to see you last Friday afternoon. He got into trouble being seen with Jerry Shannon. He paid him some money. Jack won't tell, and Mr. Acton talked to him about it before all the school. We feel bad, because we think Jack did not do wrong. I don't know as you have anything to do with it, but I thought I'd ask. Please answer quick. Respectfully yours,

"Jane Pecq"

To make sure that her despatch was not tampered with, Jill put a great splash of red sealing-wax on it, which gave it a very official look, and much impressed Bob when he received it.

"There! Go and post it, and don't let any one see or know about it," she said, handing it over to Frank, who left his work with unusual alacrity to do her errand. When his eye fell on the address, he laughed, and said in a teasing way,

—

“Are you and Bob such good friends that you correspond? What will Jack say?”

“Don’t know, and don’t care! Be good, now, and let’s have a little secret as well as other folks. I’ll tell you all about it when he answers,” said Jill in her most coaxing tone.

“Suppose he doesn’t?”

“Then I shall send you up to see him. I *must* know something, and I want to do it myself, if I can.”

“Look here; what are you after? I do believe you think — — ” Frank got no farther, for Jill gave a little scream, and stopped him by crying eagerly, “Don’t say it out loud! I really do believe it may be, and I’m going to find out.”

“What made you think of him?” and Frank looked thoughtfully at the letter, as if turning carefully over in his mind the idea that Jill’s quick wits had jumped at.

“Come here and I’ll tell you.”

Holding him by one button, she whispered something in his ear that made him exclaim, with a look at the rug, —

“No! did he? I declare I shouldn’t wonder! It would be just like the dear old blunder-head.”

“I never thought of it till you told me where Bob was, and then it all sort of burst upon me in one minute!” cried Jill, waving her arms about to express the intellectual explosion which had thrown light upon the mystery, like sky-rockets in a dark night.

“You are as bright as a button. No time to lose; I’m off;” and off he was, splashing through the mud to post the letter, on the back of which he added, to make the thing sure, “Hurry up. F.M.”

Both felt rather guilty next day, but enjoyed themselves very much nevertheless, and kept chuckling over the mine they were making under Jack’s unconscious feet. They hardly expected an answer at noon, as the Hill people were not very eager for their mail, but at night Jill was sure of a letter, and to her great delight it came. Jack brought it himself, which added to the fun, and while she eagerly read it he sat calmly poring over the latest number of his own private and particular “Youth’s Companion.”

Bob was not a “complete letter-writer” by any means, and with great labor and much ink had produced the following brief but highly satisfactory epistle. Not knowing how to address his fair correspondent he let it alone, and went at once to the point in the frankest possible way: —

“Jack did come up Friday. Sorry he got into a mess. It was real kind of him, and I shall pay him back soon. Jack paid Jerry for me and I made him promise not to tell. Jerry said he'd come here and make a row if I didn't cash up. I was afraid I'd lose the place if he did, for the Capt. is awful strict. If Jack don't tell now, I will. I ain't mean. Glad you wrote.

"R.O.W."

"Hurrah!" cried Jill, waving the letter over her head in great triumph. "Call everybody and read it out," she added, as Frank snatched it, and ran for his mother, seeing at a glance that the news was good. Jill was so afraid she should tell before the others came that she burst out singing "Pretty Bobby Shafto" at the top of her voice, to Jack's great disgust, for he considered the song very personal, as he *was* rather fond of "combing down his yellow hair," and Jill often plagued him by singing it when he came in with the golden quirls very smooth and nice to hide the scar on his forehead.

In about five minutes the door flew open and in came Mamma, making straight for bewildered Jack, who thought the family had gone crazy when his parent caught him in her arms, saying tenderly, —

"My good, generous boy! I knew he was right all the time!" while Frank worked his hand up and down like a pump-handle, exclaiming heartily, —

"You're a trump, sir, and I'm proud of you!" Jill meantime calling out, in wild delight, —

"I told you so! I told you so! I did find out; ha, ha, I did!"

"Come, I say! What's the matter? I'm all right. Don't squeeze the breath out of me, please," expostulated Jack, looking so startled and innocent, as he struggled feebly, that they all laughed, and this plaintive protest caused him to be released. But the next proceeding did not enlighten him much, for Frank kept waving a very inky paper before him and ordering him to read it, while Mamma made a charge at Jill, as if it was absolutely necessary to hug somebody.

"Hullo!" said Jack, when he got the letter into his own hand and read it. "Now who put Bob up to this? Nobody had any business to interfere — but it's mighty good of him, anyway," he added, as the anxious lines in his round face smoothed themselves away, while a smile of relief told how hard it had been for him to keep his word.

"I did!" cried Jill, clapping her hands, and looking so happy that he could not have scolded her if he had wanted to.

"Who told you he was in the scrape?" demanded Jack, in a hurry to know all about it now the seal was taken off his own lips.

"You did;" and Jill's face twinkled with naughty satisfaction, for this was the best fun of all.

"I didn't! When? Where? It's a joke!"

"You did," cried Jill, pointing to the rug. "You went to sleep there after the long walk, and talked in your sleep about ‘Bob’ and ‘All right, old boy,’ and ever so much gibberish. I didn’t think about it then, but when I heard that Bob was up there I thought may be he knew something about it, and last night I wrote and asked him, and that’s the answer, and now it *is* all right, and you are the best boy that ever was, and I’m so glad!”

Here Jill paused, all out of breath, and Frank said, with an approving pat on the head, —

“It won’t do to have such a sharp young person round if we are going to have secrets. You’d make a good detective, miss.”

“Catch me taking naps before people again;” and Jack looked rather crestfallen that his own words had set “Fine Ear” on the track. “Never mind, I didn’t *mean* to tell, though I just ached to do it all the time, so I haven’t broken my word. I’m glad you all know, but you needn’t let it get out, for Bob is a good fellow, and it might make trouble for him,” added Jack, anxious lest his gain should be the other’s loss.

“I shall tell Mr. Acton myself, and the Captain, also, for I’m not going to have my son suspected of wrong-doing when he has only tried to help a friend, and borne enough for his sake,” said Mamma, much excited by this discovery of generous fidelity in her boy; though when one came to look at it calmly, one saw that it might have been done in a wiser way.

“Now, please, don’t make a fuss about it; that would be most as bad as having every one down on me. I can stand your praising me, but I won’t be patted on the head by anybody else;” and Jack assumed a manly air, though his face was full of genuine boyish pleasure at being set right in the eyes of those he loved.

“I’ll be discreet, dear, but you owe it to yourself, as well as Bob, to have the truth known. Both have behaved well, and no harm will come to him, I am sure. I’ll see to that myself,” said Mrs. Minot, in a tone that set Jack’s mind at rest on that point.

“Now do tell all about it,” cried Jill, who was pining to know the whole story, and felt as if she had earned the right to hear it.

“Oh, it wasn’t much. We promised Ed to stand by Bob, so I did as well as I knew how;” and Jack seemed to think that was about all there was to say.

“I never saw such a fellow for keeping a promise! You stick to it through thick and thin, no matter how silly or hard it is. You remember, mother, last summer, how you told him not to go in a boat and he promised, the day we went on the picnic. We rode up, but the horse ran off home, so we had to come back by way of the river, all but Jack, and he walked every step of five miles because he wouldn’t go near a boat, though Mr. Burton was there to take care of him. I call that rather overdoing the matter;” and Frank looked as if he thought moderation even in virtue a good thing.

"And I call it a fine sample of entire obedience. He obeyed orders, and that is what we all must do, without always seeing why, or daring to use our own judgment. It is a great safeguard to Jack, and a very great comfort to me; for I know that if he promises he will keep his word, no matter what it costs him," said Mamma warmly, as she tumbled up the quirls with an irrepressible caress, remembering how the boy came wearily in after all the others, without seeming for a moment to think that he could have done anything else.

"Like Casabianca!" cried Jill, much impressed, for obedience was her hardest trial.

"I think he was a fool to burn up," said Frank, bound not to give in.

"I don't. It's a splendid piece, and every one likes to speak it, and it was true, and it wouldn't be in all the books if he was a fool. Grown people know what is good," declared Jill, who liked heroic actions, and was always hoping for a chance to distinguish herself in that way.

"You admire 'The Charge of the Light Brigade,' and glow all over as you thunder it out. Yet they went gallantly to their death rather than disobey orders. A mistake, perhaps, but it makes us thrill to hear of it; and the same spirit keeps my Jack true as steel when once his word is passed, or he thinks it is his duty. Don't be laughed out of it, my son, for faithfulness in little things fits one for heroism when the great trials come. One's conscience can hardly be too tender when honor and honesty are concerned."

"You are right, mother, and I am wrong. I beg your pardon, Jack, and you sha'n't get ahead of me next time."

Frank made his mother a little bow, gave his brother a shake of the hand, and nodded to Jill, as if anxious to show that he was not too proud to own up when he made a mistake.

"Please tell on, Jack. This is very nice, but I do want to know all about the other," said Jill, after a short pause.

"Let me see. Oh, I saw Bob at church, and he looked rather blue; so, after Sunday School, I asked what the matter was. He said Jerry bothered him for some money he lent him at different times when they were loafing round together, before we took him up. He wouldn't get any wages for some time. The Captain keeps him short on purpose, I guess, and won't let him come down town except on Sundays. He didn't want any one to know about it, for fear he'd lose his place. So I promised I wouldn't tell. Then I was afraid Jerry would go and make a fuss, and Bob would run off, or do something desperate, being worried, and I said I'd pay it for him, if I could. So he went home pretty jolly, and I scratched 'round for the money. Got it, too, and wasn't I glad?"

Jack paused to rub his hands, and Frank said, with more than usual respect,

"Couldn't you get hold of Jerry in any other place, and out of school time? That did the mischief, thanks to Joe. I thrashed him, Jill — did I mention it?"

"I couldn't get all my money till Friday morning, and I knew Jerry was off at night. I looked for him before school, and at noon, but couldn't find him, so afternoon recess was my last chance. I was bound to do it and I didn't mean to break the rule, but Jerry was just going into the shop, so I pelted after him, and as it was private business we went to the billiard-room. I declare I never was so relieved as when I handed over that money, and made him say it was all right, and he wouldn't go near Bob. He's off, so my mind is easy, and Bob will be so grateful I can keep him steady, perhaps. That will be worth two seventy-five, I think," said Jack heartily.

"You should have come to me," began Frank.

"And got laughed at — no, thank you," interrupted Jack, recollecting several philanthropic little enterprises which were nipped in the bud for want of co-operation.

"To me, then," said his mother. "It would have saved so much trouble."

"I thought of it, but Bob didn't want the big fellows to know for fear they'd be down on him, so I thought he might not like me to tell grown people. I don't mind the fuss now, and Bob is as kind as he can be. Wanted to give me his big knife, but I wouldn't take it. I'd rather have this," and Jack put the letter in his pocket with a slap outside, as if it warmed the cockles of his heart to have it there.

"Well, it seems rather like a tempest in a teapot, now it is all over, but I do admire your pluck, little boy, in holding out so well when every one was scolding at you, and you in the right all the time," said Frank, glad to praise, now that he honestly could, after his wholesale condemnation.

"That is what pulled me through, I suppose. I used to think if I *had* done anything wrong, that I couldn't stand the snubbing a day. I should have told right off, and had it over. Now, I guess I'll have a good report if you do tell Mr. Acton," said Jack, looking at his mother so wistfully, that she resolved to slip away that very evening, and make sure that the thing was done.

"That will make you happier than anything else, won't it?" asked Jill, eager to have him rewarded after his trials.

"There's one thing I like better, though I'd be very sorry to lose my report. It's the fun of telling Ed I tried to do as he wanted us to, and seeing how pleased he'll be," added Jack, rather bashfully, for the boys laughed at him sometimes for his love of this friend.

"I know he won't be any happier about it than someone else, who stood by you all through, and set her bright wits to work till the trouble was all cleared away," said Mrs. Minot, looking at Jill's contented face, as she lay smiling on them all.

Jack understood, and, hopping across the room, gave both the thin hands a hearty shake; then, not finding any words quite cordial enough in which to thank this faithful little sister, he stooped down and kissed her gratefully.

Chapter XV. Saint Lucy

Saturday was a busy and a happy time to Jack, for in the morning Mr. Acton came to see him, having heard the story overnight, and promised to keep Bob’s secret while giving Jack an acquittal as public as the reprimand had been. Then he asked for the report which Jack had bravely received the day before and put away without showing to anybody.

“There is one mistake here which we must rectify,” said Mr. Acton, as he crossed out the low figures under the word “Behavior,” and put the much-desired 100 there.

“But I did break the rule, sir,” said Jack, though his face glowed with pleasure, for Mamma was looking on.

“I overlook that as I should your breaking into my house if you saw it was on fire. You ran to save a friend, and I wish I could tell those fellows why you were there. It would do them good. I am not going to praise you, John, but I did believe you in spite of appearances, and I am glad to have for a pupil a boy who loves his neighbor better than himself.”

Then, having shaken hands heartily, Mr. Acton went away, and Jack flew off to have rejoicings with Jill, who sat up on her sofa, without knowing it, so eager was she to hear all about the call.

In the afternoon Jack drove his mother to the Captain’s, confiding to her on the way what a hard time he had when he went before, and how nothing but the thought of cheering Bob kept him up when he slipped and hurt his knee, and his boot sprung a leak, and the wind came up very cold, and the hill seemed an endless mountain of mud and snow.

Mrs. Minot had such a gentle way of putting things that she would have won over a much harder man than the strict old Captain, who heard the story with interest, and was much pleased with the boys’ efforts to keep Bob straight. That young person dodged away into the barn with Jack, and only appeared at the last minute to shove a bag of chestnuts into the chaise. But he got a few kind words that did him good, from Mrs. Minot and the Captain, and from that day felt himself under bonds to behave well if he would keep their confidence.

“I shall give Jill the nuts; and I wish I had something she wanted very, very much, for I do think she ought to be rewarded for getting me out of the mess,” said Jack, as they drove happily home again.

“I hope to have something in a day or two that *will* delight her very much. I will say no more now, but keep my little secret and let it be a surprise to all by and by," answered his mother, looking as if she had not much doubt about the matter.

"That will be jolly. You are welcome to your secret, Mamma. I've had enough of them for one while;" and Jack shrugged his broad shoulders as if a burden had been taken off.

In the evening Ed came, and Jack was quite satisfied when he saw how pleased his friend was at what he had done.

"I never meant you should take so much trouble, only be kind to Bob," said Ed, who did not know how strong his influence was, nor what a sweet example of quiet well-doing his own life was to all his mates.

"I wished to be really useful; not just to talk about it and do nothing. That isn't your way, and I want to be like you," answered Jack, with such affectionate sincerity that Ed could not help believing him, though he modestly declined the compliment by saying, as he began to play softly, "Better than I am, I hope. I don't amount to much."

"Yes, you do! and if any one says you don't I'll shake him. I can't tell what it is, only you always look so happy and contented — sort of sweet and shiny," said Jack, as he stroked the smooth brown head, rather at a loss to describe the unusually fresh and sunny expression of Ed's face, which was always cheerful, yet had a certain thoughtfulness that made it very attractive to both young and old.

"Soap makes him shiny; I never saw such a fellow to wash and brush," put in Frank, as he came up with one of the pieces of music he and Ed were fond of practising together.

"I don't mean that!" said Jack indignantly. "I wash and brush till you call me a dandy, but I don't have the same look — it seems to come from the inside, somehow, as if he was always jolly and clean and good in his mind, you know."

"Born so," said Frank, rumbling away in the bass with a pair of hands that would have been the better for some of the above-mentioned soap, for he did not love to do much in the washing and brushing line.

"I suppose that's it. Well, I like it, and I shall keep on trying, for being loved by every one is about the nicest thing in the world. Isn't it, Ed?" asked Jack, with a gentle tweak of the ear as he put a question which he knew would get no answer, for Ed was so modest he could not see wherein he differed from other boys, nor believe that the sunshine he saw in other faces was only the reflection from his own.

Sunday evening Mrs. Minot sat by the fire, planning how she should tell some good news she had been saving up all day. Mrs. Pecq knew it, and seemed so delighted that she went about smiling as if she did not know what trouble meant, and could not do enough for the family. She was downstairs now, seeing that the clothes were properly prepared for the wash, so there was no one in the Bird Room but Mamma and the children. Frank was reading up all he could find about some Biblical hero mentioned in the day's sermon; Jill lay where she had lain for nearly four long months, and though her face was pale and thin with the confinement, there was an expression on it now sweeter even than health. Jack sat on the rug beside her, looking at a white carnation through the magnifying glass, while she was enjoying the perfume of a red one as she talked to him.

"If you look at the white petals you'll see that they sparkle like marble, and go winding a long way down to the middle of the flower where it grows sort of rosy; and in among the small, curly leaves, like fringed curtains, you can see the little green fairy sitting all alone. Your mother showed me that, and I think it is very pretty. I call it a 'fairy,' but it is really where the seeds are hidden and the sweet smell comes from."

Jill spoke softly lest she should disturb the others, and, as she turned to push up her pillow, she saw Mrs. Minot looking at her with a smile she did not understand.

"Did you speak, 'm?" she asked, smiling back again, without in the least knowing why.

"No, dear. I was listening and thinking what a pretty little story one could make out of your fairy living alone down there, and only known by her perfume."

"Tell it, Mamma. It is time for our story, and that would be a nice one, I guess," said Jack, who was as fond of stories as when he sat in his mother's lap and chuckled over the hero of the beanstalk.

"We don't have fairy tales on Sunday, you know," began Jill regretfully.

"Call it a parable, and have a moral to it, then it will be all right," put in Frank, as he shut his big book, having found what he wanted.

"I like stories about saints, and the good and wonderful things they did," said Jill, who enjoyed the wise and interesting bits Mrs. Minot often found for her in grown-up books, for Jill had thoughtful times, and asked questions which showed that she was growing fast in mind if not in body.

"This is a true story; but I will disguise it a little, and call it 'The Miracle of Saint Lucy,'" began Mrs. Minot, seeing a way to tell her good news and amuse the children likewise.

Frank retired to the easy-chair, that he might sleep if the tale should prove too childish for him. Jill settled herself among her cushions, and Jack lay flat upon the rug, with his feet up, so that he could admire his red slippers and rest his knee, which ached.

“Once upon a time there was a queen who had two princes.”

“Wasn’t there a princess?” asked Jack, interested at once.

“No; and it was a great sorrow to the queen that she had no little daughter, for the sons were growing up, and she was often very lonely.

“Like Snowdrop’s mother,” whispered Jill.

“Now, don’t keep interrupting, children, or we never shall get on,” said Frank, more anxious to hear about the boys that were than the girl that was not.

“One day, when the princes were out — ahem! we’ll say hunting — they found a little damsel lying on the snow, half dead with cold, they thought. She was the child of a poor woman who lived in the forest — a wild little thing, always dancing and singing about; as hard to catch as a squirrel, and so fearless she would climb the highest trees, leap broad brooks, or jump off the steep rocks to show her courage. The boys carried her home to the palace, and the queen was glad to have her. She had fallen and hurt herself, so she lay in bed week after week, with her mother to take care of her — ”

“That’s you,” whispered Jack, throwing the white carnation at Jill, and she threw back the red one, with her finger on her lips, for the tale was very interesting now.

“She did not suffer much after a time, but she scolded and cried, and could not be resigned, because she was a prisoner. The queen tried to help her, but she could not do much; the princes were kind, but they had their books and plays, and were away a good deal. Some friends she had came often to see her, but still she beat her wings against the bars, like a wild bird in a cage, and soon her spirits were all gone, and it was sad to see her.”

“Where was your Saint Lucy? I thought it was about her,” asked Jack, who did not like to have Jill’s past troubles dwelt upon, since his were not.

“She is coming. Saints are not born — they are made after many trials and tribulations,” answered his mother, looking at the fire as if it helped her to spin her little story. “Well, the poor child used to sing sometimes to while away the long hours — sad songs mostly, and one among them which the queen taught her was ‘Sweet Patience, Come.’

“This she used to sing a great deal after a while, never dreaming that Patience was an angel who could hear and obey. But it was so; and one night, when the girl had lulled herself to sleep with that song, the angel came. Nobody saw the lovely spirit with tender eyes, and a voice that was like balm. No one heard the rustle of wings as she hovered over the little bed and touched the lips, the eyes, the hands of the sleeper, and then flew away, leaving three gifts behind. The girl did not know why, but after that night the songs grew gayer, there seemed to be more sunshine everywhere her eyes looked, and her hands were never tired of helping others in various pretty, useful, or pleasant ways. Slowly the wild bird ceased to beat against the bars, but sat in its cage and made music for all in the palace, till the queen could not do without it, the poor mother cheered up, and the princes called the girl their nightingale."

"Was that the miracle?" asked Jack, forgetting all about his slippers, as he watched Jill's eyes brighten and the color come up in her white cheeks.

"That was the miracle, and Patience can work far greater ones if you will let her."

"And the girl's name was Lucy?"

"Yes; they did not call her a saint then, but she was trying to be as cheerful as a certain good woman she had heard of, and so the queen had that name for her, though she did not let her know it for a long time."

"That's not bad for a Sunday story, but there might have been more about the princes, seems to me," was Frank's criticism, as Jill lay very still, trying to hide her face behind the carnation, for she had no words to tell how touched and pleased she was to find that her little efforts to be good had been seen, remembered, and now rewarded in this way.

"There is more."

"Then the story isn't done?" cried Jack.

"Oh dear, no; the most interesting things are to come, if you can wait for them."

"Yes, I see, this is the moral part. Now keep still, and let us have the rest," commanded Frank, while the others composed themselves for the sequel, suspecting that it was rather nice, because Mamma's sober face changed, and her eyes laughed as they looked at the fire.

"The elder prince was very fond of driving dragons, for the people of that country used these fiery monsters as horses."

"And got run away with, didn't he?" laughed Jack, adding, with great interest, "What did the other fellow do?"

"He went about fighting other people's battles, helping the poor, and trying to do good. But he lacked judgment, so he often got into trouble, and was in such a hurry that he did not always stop to find out the wisest way. As when he gave away his best coat to a beggar boy, instead of the old one which he intended to give."

"I say, that isn't fair, mother! Neither of them was new, and the boy needed the best more than I did, and I wore the old one all winter, didn't I?" asked Jack, who had rather exulted over Frank, and was now taken down himself.

"Yes, you did, my dear; and it was not an easy thing for my dandiprat to do.

Now listen, and I'll tell you how they both learned to be wiser. The elder prince soon found that the big dragons were too much for him, and set about training his own little one, who now and then ran away with him. Its name was Will, a good servant, but a bad master; so he learned to control it, and in time this gave him great power over himself, and fitted him to be a king over others."

"Thank you, mother; I'll remember my part of the moral. Now give Jack his," said Frank, who liked the dragon episode, as he had been wrestling with his own of late, and found it hard to manage.

"He had a fine example before him in a friend, and he followed it more reasonably till he grew able to use wisely one of the best and noblest gifts of God — benevolence."

"Now tell about the girl. Was there more to that part of the story?" asked Jack, well pleased with his moral, as it took Ed in likewise.

"That is the best of all, but it seems as if I never should get to it. After Patience made Lucy sweet and cheerful, she began to have a curious power over those about her, and to work little miracles herself, though she did not know it. The queen learned to love her so dearly she could not let her go; she cheered up all her friends when they came with their small troubles; the princes found bright eyes, willing hands, and a kind heart always at their service, and felt, without quite knowing why, that it was good for them to have a gentle little creature to care for; so they softened their rough manners, loud voices, and careless ways, for her sake, and when it was proposed to take her away to her own home they could not give her up, but said she must stay longer, didn't they?"

"I'd like to see them saying anything else," said Frank, while Jack sat up to demand fiercely, —

"Who talks about taking Jill away?"

"Lucy's mother thought she ought to go, and said so, but the queen told her how much good it did them all to have her there, and begged the dear woman to let her little cottage and come and be housekeeper in the palace, for the queen was getting lazy, and liked to sit and read, and talk and sew with Lucy, better than to look after things."

"And she said she would?" cried Jill, clasping her hands in her anxiety, for she had learned to love her cage now.

"Yes." Mrs. Minot had no time to say more, for one of the red slippers flew up in the air, and Jack had to clap both hands over his mouth to suppress the "hurrah!" that nearly escaped. Frank said, "That's good!" and nodded with his most cordial smile at Jill who pulled herself up with cheeks now as rosy as the red carnation, and a little catch in her breath as she said to herself, —

"It's too lovely to be true."

"That's a first-rate end to a very good story," began Jack, with grave decision, as he put on his slipper and sat up to pat Jill's hand, wishing it was not quite so like a little claw.

"That's not the end;" and Mamma's eyes laughed more than ever as three astonished faces turned to her, and three voices cried out, —

"Still more?"

"The very best of all. You must know that, while Lucy was busy for others, she was not forgotten, and when she was expecting to lie on her bed through the summer, plans were being made for all sorts of pleasant changes. First of all, she was to have a nice little brace to support the back which was growing better every day; then, as the warm weather came on, she was to go out, or lie on the piazza; and by and by, when school was done, she was to go with the queen and the princes for a month or two down to the sea-side, where fresh air and salt water were to build her up in the most delightful way. There, now! isn't that the best ending of all?" and Mamma paused to read her answer in the bright faces of two of the listeners, for Jill hid hers in the pillow, and lay quite still, as if it was too much for her.

"That will be regularly splendid! I'll row you all about — boating is so much easier than riding, and I like it on salt water," said Frank, going to sit on the arm of the sofa, quite excited by the charms of the new plan.

"And I'll teach you to swim, and roll you over the beach, and get sea-weed and shells, and no end of nice things, and we'll all come home as strong as lions," added Jack, scrambling up as if about to set off at once.

"The doctor says you have been doing finely of late, and the brace will come to-morrow, and the first really mild day you are to have a breath of fresh air. Won't that be good?" asked Mrs. Minot, hoping her story had not been too interesting.

"Is she crying?" said Jack, much concerned as he patted the pillow in his most soothing way, while Frank lifted one curl after another to see what was hidden underneath.

Not tears, for two eyes sparkled behind the fingers, then the hands came down like clouds from before the sun, and Jill's face shone out so bright and happy it did one's heart good to see it.

"I'm not crying," she said with a laugh which was fuller of blithe music than any song she sung. "But it was so splendid, it sort of took my breath away for a minute. I thought I wasn't any better, and never should be, and I made up my mind I wouldn't ask, it would be so hard for any one to tell me so. Now I see why the doctor made me stand up, and told me to get my baskets ready to go a-Maying. I thought he was in fun; did he really mean I could go?" asked Jill, expecting too much, for a word of encouragement made her as hopeful as she had been despondent before.

"No, dear, not so soon as that. It will be months, probably, before you can walk and run, as you used to; but they will soon pass. You needn't mind about May-day; it is always too cold for flowers, and you will find more here among your own plants, than on the hills, to fill your baskets," answered Mrs. Minot, hastening to suggest something pleasant to beguile the time of probation.

"I can wait. Months are not years, and if I'm truly getting well, everything will seem beautiful and easy to me," said Jill, laying herself down again, with the patient look she had learned to wear, and gathering up the scattered carnations to enjoy their spicy breath, as if the fairies hidden there had taught her some of their sweet secrets.

"Dear little girl, it has been a long, hard trial for you, but it is coming to an end, and I think you will find that it has not been time wasted, I don't want you to be a saint quite yet, but I am sure a gentler Jill will rise up from that sofa than the one who lay down there in December."

"How could I help growing better, when you were so good to me?" cried Jill, putting up both arms, as Mrs. Minot went to take Frank's place, and he retired to the fire, there to stand surveying the scene with calm approval.

"You have done quite as much for us; so we are even. I proved that to your mother, and she is going to let the little house and take care of the big one for me, while I borrow you to keep me happy and make the boys gentle and kind. That is the bargain, and we get the best of it," said Mrs. Minot, looking well pleased, while Jack added, "That's so!" and Frank observed with an air of conviction, "We couldn't get on without Jill, possibly."

"Can I do all that? I didn't know I was of any use. I only tried to be good and grateful, for there didn't seem to be anything else I could do," said Jill, wondering why they were all so fond of her.

"No real trying is ever in vain. It is like the spring rain, and flowers are sure to follow in good time. The three gifts Patience gave Saint Lucy were courage, cheerfulness, and love, and with these one can work the sweetest miracles in the world, as you see," and Mrs. Minot pointed to the pretty room and its happy inmates.

"Am I really the least bit like that good Lucinda? I tried to be, but I didn't think I was," asked Jill softly.

"You are very like her in all ways but one. *She* did not get well, and *you* will."

A short answer, but it satisfied Jill to her heart's core, and that night, when she lay in bed, she thought to herself: "How curious it is that I've been a sort of missionary without knowing it! They all love and thank me, and won't let me go, so I suppose I must have done something, but I don’t know what, except trying to be good and pleasant.”

That was the secret, and Jill found it out just when it was most grateful as a reward for past efforts, most helpful as an encouragement toward the constant well-doing which can make even a little girl a joy and comfort to all who know and love her.

Chapter XVI. Up at Merry’s

“Now fly round, child, and get your sweeping done up smart and early.”

“Yes, mother.”

“I shall want you to help me about the baking, by and by.”

“Yes, mother.”

“Roxy is cleaning the cellar-closets, so you’ll have to get the vegetables ready for dinner. Father wants a boiled dish, and I shall be so busy I can’t see to it.”

“Yes, mother.”

A cheerful voice gave the three answers, but it cost Merry an effort to keep it so, for she had certain little plans of her own which made the work before her unusually distasteful. Saturday always was a trying day, for, though she liked to see rooms in order, she hated to sweep, as no speck escaped Mrs. Grant’s eye, and only the good old-fashioned broom, wielded by a pair of strong arms, was allowed. Baking was another trial: she loved good bread and delicate pastry, but did not enjoy burning her face over a hot stove, daubing her hands with dough, or spending hours rolling out cookies for the boys; while a “boiled dinner” was her especial horror, as it was not elegant, and the washing of vegetables was a job she always shirked when she could.

However, having made up her mind to do her work without complaint, she ran upstairs to put on her dust-cap, trying to look as if sweeping was the joy of her life.

“It is such a lovely day, I did want to rake my garden, and have a walk with Molly, and finish my book so I can get another,” she said with a sigh, as she leaned out of the open window for a breath of the unusually mild air.

Down in the ten-acre lot the boys were carting and spreading loam; out in the barn her father was getting his plows ready; over the hill rose the smoke of the distant factory, and the river that turned the wheels was gliding through the meadows, where soon the blackbirds would be singing. Old Bess pawed the ground, eager to be off; the gray hens were scratching busily all about the yard; even the green things in the garden were pushing through the brown earth, softened by April rains, and there was a shimmer of sunshine over the wide landscape that made every familiar object beautiful with hints of spring, and the activity it brings.

Something made the old nursery hymn come into Merry’s head, and humming to herself,

“In works of labor or of skill
I would be busy too,”

she tied on her cap, shouldered her broom, and fell to work so energetically that she soon swept her way through the chambers, down the front stairs to the parlor door, leaving freshness and order behind her as she went.

She always groaned when she entered that apartment, and got out of it again as soon as possible, for it was, like most country parlors, a prim and chilly place, with little beauty and no comfort. Black horse-hair furniture, very slippery and hard, stood against the wall; the table had its gift books, albums, worsted mat and ugly lamp; the mantel-piece its china vases, pink shells, and clock that never went; the gay carpet was kept distressingly bright by closed shutters six days out of the seven, and a general air of go-to-meeting solemnity pervaded the room. Merry longed to make it pretty and pleasant, but her mother would allow of no change there, so the girl gave up her dreams of rugs and hangings, fine pictures and tasteful ornaments, and dutifully aired, dusted, and shut up this awful apartment once a week, privately resolving that, if she ever had a parlor of her own, it should not be as dismal as a tomb.

The dining-room was a very different place, for here Merry had been allowed to do as she liked, yet so gradual had been the change, that she would have found it difficult to tell how it came about. It seemed to begin with the flowers, for her father kept his word about the “posy pots,” and got enough to make quite a little conservatory in the bay-window, which was sufficiently large for three rows all round, and hanging-baskets overhead. Being discouraged by her first failure, Merry gave up trying to have things nice everywhere, and contented herself with making that one nook so pretty that the boys called it her “bower.” Even busy Mrs. Grant owned that plants were not so messy as she expected, and the farmer was never tired of watching “little daughter” as she sat at work there, with her low chair and table full of books.

The lamp helped, also, for Merry set up her own, and kept it so well trimmed that it burned clear and bright, shining on the green arch of ivy overhead, and on the nasturtium vines framing the old glass, and peeping at their gay little faces, and at the pretty young girl, so pleasantly that first her father came to read his paper by it, then her mother slipped in to rest on the lounge in the corner, and finally the boys hovered about the door as if the “settin’-room” had grown more attractive than the kitchen.

But the open fire did more than anything else to win and hold them all, as it seldom fails to do when the black demon of an airtight stove is banished from the hearth. After the room was cleaned till it shone, Merry begged to have the brass andirons put in, and offered to keep them as bright as gold if her mother would consent. So the great logs were kindled, and the flames went dancing up the chimney as if glad to be set free from their prison. It changed the whole room like magic, and no one could resist the desire to enjoy its cheery comfort. The farmer's three-cornered leathern chair soon stood on one side, and mother's rocker on the other, as they toasted their feet and dozed or chatted in the pleasant warmth.

The boys' slippers were always ready on the hearth; and when the big boots were once off, they naturally settled down about the table, where the tall lamp, with its pretty shade of pressed autumn leaves, burned brightly, and the books and papers lay ready to their hands instead of being tucked out of sight in the closet. They were beginning to see that "Merry's notions" had some sense in them, since they were made comfortable, and good-naturedly took some pains to please her in various ways. Tom brushed his hair and washed his hands nicely before he came to table. Dick tried to lower his boisterous laughter, and Harry never smoked in the sitting-room. Even Roxy expressed her pleasure in seeing "things kind of spruced up," and Merry's gentle treatment of the hard-working drudge won her heart entirely.

The girl was thinking of these changes as she watered her flowers, dusted the furniture, and laid the fire ready for kindling; and, when all was done, she stood a minute to enjoy the pleasant room, full of spring sunshine, fresh air, and exquisite order. It seemed to give her heart for more distasteful labors, and she fell to work at the pies as cheerfully as if she liked it.

Mrs. Grant was flying about the kitchen, getting the loaves of brown and white bread ready for the big oven. Roxy's voice came up from the cellar singing "Bounding Billows," with a swashing and scrubbing accompaniment which suggested that she was actually enjoying a "life on the ocean wave." Merry, in her neat cap and apron, stood smiling over her work as she deftly rolled and clipped, filled and covered, finding a certain sort of pleasure in doing it well, and adding interest to it by crimping the crust, making pretty devices with strips of paste and star-shaped prickings of the fork.

"Good-will giveth skill," says the proverb, and even particular Mrs. Grant was satisfied when she paused to examine the pastry with her experienced eye.

"You are a handy child and a credit to your bringing up, though I do say it. Those are as pretty pies as I'd wish to eat, if they bake well, and there's no reason why they shouldn't."

"May I make some tarts or rabbits of these bits? The boys like them, and I enjoy modelling this sort of thing," said Merry, who was trying to mould a bird, as she had seen Ralph do with clay to amuse Jill while the bust was going on.

"No, dear; there's no time for knick-knacks to-day. The beets ought to be on this minute. Run and get ‘em, and be sure you scrape the carrots well.”

Poor Merry put away the delicate task she was just beginning to like, and taking a pan went down cellar, wishing vegetables could be grown without earth, for she hated to put her hands in dirty water. A word of praise to Roxy made that grateful scrubber leave her work to poke about in the root-cellar, choosing “sech as was pretty much of a muchness, else they wouldn’t bile even;” so Merry was spared that part of the job, and went up to scrape and wash without complaint, since it was for father. She was repaid at noon by the relish with which he enjoyed his dinner, for Merry tried to make even a boiled dish pretty by arranging the beets, carrots, turnips, and potatoes in contrasting colors, with the beef hidden under the cabbage leaves.

“Now, I’ll rest and read for an hour, then I’ll rake my garden, or run down town to see Molly and get some seeds,” she thought to herself, as she put away the spoons and glasses, which she liked to wash, that they might always be clear and bright.

“If you’ve done all your own mending, there’s a heap of socks to be looked over. Then I’ll show you about darning the tablecloths. I do hate to have a stitch of work left over till Monday,” said Mrs. Grant, who never took naps, and prided herself on sitting down to her needle at 3 P.M. every day.

“Yes, mother;” and Merry went slowly upstairs, feeling that a part of Saturday ought to be a holiday after books and work all the week. As she braided up her hair, her eye fell upon the reflection of her own face in the glass. Not a happy nor a pretty one just then, and Merry was so unaccustomed to seeing any other, that involuntarily the frown smoothed itself out, the eyes lost their weary look, the drooping lips curved into a smile, and, leaning her elbows on the bureau, she shook her head at herself, saying, half aloud, as she glanced at Ivanhoe lying near, —

“You needn’t look so cross and ugly just because you can’t have what you want. Sweeping, baking, and darning are not so bad as being plagued with lovers and carried off and burnt at the stake, so I won’t envy poor Rebecca her jewels and curls and romantic times, but make the best of my own.”

Then she laughed, and the bright face came back into the mirror, looking like an old friend, and Merry went on dressing with care, for she took pleasure in her own little charms, and felt a sense of comfort in knowing that she could always have one pretty thing to look at if she kept her own face serene and sweet. It certainly looked so as it bent over the pile of big socks half an hour later, and brightened with each that was laid aside. Her mother saw it, and, guessing why such wistful glances went from clock to window, kindly shortened the task of table-cloth darning by doing a good bit herself, before putting it into Merry’s hands.

She was a good and loving mother in spite of her strict ways, and knew that it was better for her romantic daughter to be learning all the housewifery lessons she could teach her, than to be reading novels, writing verses, or philandering about with her head full of girlish fancies, quite innocent in themselves, but not the stuff to live on. So she wisely taught the hands that preferred to pick flowers, trim up rooms and mould birds, to work well with needle, broom, and rolling-pin; put a receipt-book before the eyes that loved to laugh and weep over tender tales, and kept the young head and heart safe and happy with wholesome duties, useful studies, and such harmless pleasures as girls should love, instead of letting them waste their freshness in vague longings, idle dreams, and frivolous pastimes.

But it was often hard to thwart the docile child, and lately she had seemed to be growing up so fast that her mother began to feel a new sort of tenderness for this sweet daughter, who was almost ready to take upon herself the cares, as well as triumphs and delights, of maidenhood. Something in the droop of the brown head, and the quick motion of the busy hand with a little burn on it, made it difficult for Mrs. Grant to keep Merry at work that day, and her eye watched the clock almost as impatiently as the girl's, for she liked to see the young face brighten when the hour of release came.

"What next?" asked Merry, as the last stitch was set, and she stifled a sigh on hearing the clock strike four, for the sun was getting low, and the lovely afternoon going fast.

"One more job, if you are not too tired for it. I want the receipt for diet drink Miss Dawes promised me; would you like to run down and get it for me, dear?"

"Yes, mother!" and that answer was as blithe as a robin's chirp, for that was just where Merry wanted to go.

Away went thimble and scissors, and in five minutes away went Merry, skipping down the hill without a care in the world, for a happy heart sat singing within, and everything seemed full of beauty.

She had a capital time with Molly, called on Jill, did her shopping in the village, and had just turned to walk up the hill, when Ralph Evans came tramping along behind her, looking so pleased and proud about something that she could not help asking what it was, for they were great friends, and Merry thought that to be an artist was the most glorious career a man could choose.

"I know you've got some good news," she said, looking up at him as he touched his hat and fell into step with her, seeming more contented than before.

"I have, and was just coming up to tell you, for I was sure you would be glad. It is only a hope, a chance, but it is so splendid I feel as if I must shout and dance, or fly over a fence or two, to let off steam."

"Do tell me, quick; have you got an order?" asked Merry, full of interest at once, for artistic vicissitudes were very romantic, and she liked to hear about them.

"I may go abroad in the autumn."

"Oh, how lovely!"

"Isn't it? David German is going to spend a year in Rome, to finish a statue, and wants me to go along. Grandma is willing, as cousin Maria wants her for a long visit, so everything looks promising and I really think I may go."

"Won't it cost a great deal?" asked Merry, who, in spite of her little elegancies, had a good deal of her thrifty mother's common sense.

"Yes; and I've got to earn it. But I can — I know I can, for I've saved some, and I shall work like ten beavers all summer. I won't borrow if I can help it, but I know someone who would lend me five hundred if I wanted it;" and Ralph looked as eager and secure as if the earning of twice that sum was a mere trifle when all the longing of his life was put into his daily tasks.

"I wish I had it to give you. It must be so splendid to feel that you can do great things if you only have the chance. And to travel, and see all the lovely pictures and statues, and people and places in Italy. How happy you must be!" and Merry's eyes had the wistful look they always wore when she dreamed dreams of the world she loved to live in.

"I am — so happy that I'm afraid it never will happen. If I do go, I'll write and tell you all about the fine sights, and how I get on. Would you like me to?" asked Ralph, beginning enthusiastically and ending rather bashfully, for he admired Merry very much, and was not quite sure how this proposal would be received.

"Indeed I should! I'd feel so grand to have letters from Paris and Rome, and you'd have so much to tell it would be almost as good as going myself," she said, looking off into the daffodil sky, as they paused a minute on the hill-top to get breath, for both had walked as fast as they talked.

"And will you answer the letters?" asked Ralph, watching the innocent face, which looked unusually kind and beautiful to him in that soft light.

"Why, yes; I'd love to, only I shall not have anything interesting to say. What can I write about?" and Merry smiled as she thought how dull her letters would sound after the exciting details his would doubtless give.

"Write about yourself, and all the rest of the people I know. Grandma will be gone, and I shall want to hear how you get on." Ralph looked very anxious indeed to hear, and Merry promised she would tell all about the other people, adding, as she turned from the evening peace and loveliness to the house, whence came the clatter of milk-pans and the smell of cooking, —

"I never should have anything very nice to tell about myself, for I don't do interesting things as you do, and you wouldn't care to hear about school, and sewing, and messing round at home."

Merry gave a disdainful little sniff at the savory perfume of ham which saluted them, and paused with her hand on the gate, as if she found it pleasanter out there than in the house. Ralph seemed to agree with her, for, leaning on the gate, he lingered to say, with real sympathy in his tone and something else in his face, "Yes, I should; so you write and tell me all about it. I didn't know you had any worries, for you always seemed like one of the happiest people in the world, with so many to pet and care for you, and plenty of money, and nothing very hard or hateful to do. You'd think you were well off if you knew as much about poverty and work and never getting what you want, as I do."

"You bear your worries so well that nobody knows you have them. I ought not to complain, and I won't, for I do have all I need. I'm so glad you are going to get what you want at last;" and Merry held out her hand to say good-night, with so much pleasure in her face that Ralph could not make up his mind to go just yet.

"I shall have to scratch round in a lively way before I do get it, for David says a fellow can't live on less than four or five hundred a year, even living as poor artists have to, in garrets and on crusts. I don't mind as long as Grandma is all right. She is away to-night, or I should not be here," he added, as if some excuse was necessary. Merry needed no hint, for her tender heart was touched by the vision of her friend in a garret, and she suddenly rejoiced that there was ham and eggs for supper, so that he might be well fed once, at least, before he went away to feed on artistic crusts.

"Being here, come in and spend the evening. The boys will like to hear the news, and so will father. Do, now."

It was impossible to refuse the invitation he had been longing for, and in they went to the great delight of Roxy, who instantly retired to the pantry, smiling significantly, and brought out the most elaborate pie in honor of the occasion. Merry touched up the table, and put a little vase of flowers in the middle to redeem the vulgarity of doughnuts. Of course the boys upset it, but as there was company nothing was said, and Ralph devoured his supper with the appetite of a hungry boy, while watching Merry eat bread and cream out of an old-fashioned silver porringer, and thinking it the sweetest sight he ever beheld.

Then the young people gathered about the table, full of the new plans, and the elders listened as they rested after the week's work. A pleasant evening, for they all liked Ralph, but as the parents watched Merry sitting among the great lads like a little queen among her subjects, half unconscious as yet of the power in her hands, they nodded to one another, and then shook their heads as if they said, —

“I’m afraid the time is coming, mother.”

“No danger as long as she don’t know it, father.”

At nine the boys went off to the barn, the farmer to wind up the eight-day clock, and the housewife to see how the baked beans and Indian pudding for to-morrow were getting on in the oven. Ralph took up his hat to go, saying as he looked at the shade on the tall student lamp, —

“What a good light that gives! I can see it as I go home every night, and it burns up here like a beacon. I always look for it, and it hardly ever fails to be burning. Sort of cheers up the way, you know, when I’m tired or low in my mind.”

“Then I’m very glad I got it. I liked the shape, but the boys laughed at it as they did at my bulrushes in a ginger-jar over there. I’d been reading about ‘household art,’ and I thought I’d try a little,” answered Merry, laughing at her own whims.

“You’ve got a better sort of household art, I think, for you make people happy and places pretty, without fussing over it. This room is ever so much improved every time I come, though I hardly see what it is except the flowers,” said Ralph, looking from the girl to the tall calla that bent its white cup above her as if to pour its dew upon her head.

“Isn’t that lovely? I tried to draw it — the shape was so graceful I wanted to keep it. But I couldn’t. Isn’t it a pity such beautiful things won’t last forever?” and Merry looked regretfully at the half-faded one that grew beside the fresh blossom.

“I can keep it for you. It would look well in plaster. May I?” asked Ralph.

“Thank you, I should like that very much. Take the real one as a model — please do; there are more coming, and this will brighten up your room for a day or two.”

As she spoke, Merry cut the stem, and, adding two or three of the great green leaves, put the handsome flower in his hand with so much good-will that he felt as if he had received a very precious gift. Then he said good-night so gratefully that Merry’s hand quite tingled with the grasp of his, and went away, often looking backward through the darkness to where the light burned brightly on the hill-top — the beacon kindled by an unconscious Hero for a young Leander swimming gallantly against wind and tide toward the goal of his ambition.

Chapter XVII. Down at Molly’s

“Now, my dears, I’ve something very curious to tell you, so listen quietly and then I’ll give you your dinners,” said Molly, addressing the nine cats who came trooping after her as she went into the shed-chamber with a bowl of milk and a plate of scraps in her hands. She had taught them to behave well at meals, so, though their eyes glared and their tails quivered with impatience, they obeyed; and when she put the food on a high shelf and retired to the big basket, the four old cats sat demurely down before her, while the five kits scrambled after her and tumbled into her lap, as if hoping to hasten the desired feast by their innocent gambols.

Granny, Tobias, Mortification, and Molasses were the elders. Granny, a gray old puss, was the mother and grandmother of all the rest. Tobias was her eldest son, and Mortification his brother, so named because he had lost his tail, which affliction depressed his spirits and cast a blight over his young life. Molasses was a yellow cat, the mamma of four of the kits, the fifth being Granny’s latest darling. Toddlekins, the little aunt, was the image of her mother, and very sedate even at that early age; Miss Muffet, so called from her dread of spiders, was a timid black and white kit; Beauty, a pretty Maltese, with a serene little face and pink nose; Ragbag, a funny thing, every color that a cat could be; and Scamp, who well deserved his name, for he was the plague of Miss Bat’s life, and Molly’s especial pet.

He was now perched on her shoulder, and, as she talked, kept peeping into her face or biting her ear in the most impertinent way, while the others sprawled in her lap or promenaded round the basket rim.

“My friends, something very remarkable has happened: Miss Bat is cleaning house!” and, having made this announcement, Molly leaned back to see how the cats received it, for she insisted that they understood all she said to them.

Tobias stared, Mortification lay down as if it was too much for him, Molasses beat her tail on the floor as if whipping a dusty carpet, and Granny began to purr approvingly. The giddy kits paid no attention, as they did not know what house-cleaning meant, happy little dears!

“I thought you’d like it, Granny, for you are a decent cat, and know what is proper,” continued Molly, leaning down to stroke the old puss, who blinked affectionately at her. “I can’t imagine what put it into Miss Bat’s head. I never said a word, and gave up groaning over the clutter, as I couldn’t mend it. I just took care of Boo and myself, and left her to be as untidy as she pleased, and she is a regular old — — ”

Here Scamp put his paw on her lips because he saw them moving, but it seemed as if it was to check the disrespectful word just coming out.

“Well, I won’t call names; but what shall I do when I see everything in confusion, and she won’t let me clear up?” asked Molly, looking round at Scamp, who promptly put the little paw on her eyelid, as if the roll of the blue ball underneath amused him.

“Shut my eyes to it, you mean? I do all I can, but it is hard, when I wish to be nice, and do try; don’t I?” asked Molly. But Scamp was ready for her, and began to comb her hair with both paws as he stood on his hind legs to work so busily that Molly laughed and pulled him down, saying, as she cuddled the sly kit.

“You sharp little thing! I know my hair is not neat now, for I’ve been chasing Boo round the garden to wash him for school. Then Miss Bat threw the parlor carpet out of the window, and I was so surprised I had to run and tell you. Now, what had we better do about it?”

The cats all winked at her, but no one had any advice to offer, except Tobias, who walked to the shelf, and, looking up, uttered a deep, suggestive yowl, which said as plainly as words, “Dinner first and discussion afterward.”

“Very well, don’t scramble,” said Molly, getting up to feed her pets. First the kits, who rushed at the bowl and thrust their heads in, lapping as if for a wager; then the cats, who each went to one of the four piles of scraps laid round at intervals and placidly ate their meat; while Molly retired to the basket, to ponder over the phenomena taking place in the house.

She could not imagine what had started the old lady. It was not the example of her neighbors, who had beaten carpets and scrubbed paint every spring for years without exciting her to any greater exertion than cleaning a few windows and having a man to clear away the rubbish displayed when the snow melted. Molly never guessed that her own efforts were at the bottom of the change, or knew that a few words not meant for her ear had shamed Miss Bat into action. Coming home from prayer-meeting one dark night, she trotted along behind two old ladies who were gossiping in loud voices, as one was rather deaf, and Miss Bat was both pleased and troubled to hear herself unduly praised.

“I always said Sister Dawes meant well; but she’s getting into years, and the care of two children is a good deal for her, with her cooking and her rheumatiz. I don’t deny she did neglect ‘em for a spell, but she does well by ‘em now, and I wouldn’t wish to see better-appearing children.”

“You’ve no idee how improved Molly is. She came in to see my girls, and brought her sewing-work, shirts for the boy, and done it as neat and capable as you'd wish to see. She always was a smart child, but dreadful careless," said the other old lady, evidently much impressed by the change in harum-scarum Molly Loo.

"Being over to Mis Minot's so much has been good for her, and up to Mis Grant's. Girls catch neat ways as quick as they do untidy ones, and them wild little tykes often turn out smart women."

"Sister Dawes *has* done well by them children, and I hope Mr. Bemis sees it. He ought to give her something comfortable to live on when she can't do for him any longer. He can well afford it."

"I haven't a doubt he will. He's a lavish man when he starts to do a thing, but dreadful unobserving, else he'd have seen to matters long ago. Them children was town-talk last fall, and I used to feel as if it was my bounden duty to speak to Miss Dawes. But I never did, fearing I might speak too plain, and hurt her feelings."

"You've spoken plain enough now, and I'm beholden to you, though you'll never know it," said Miss Bat to herself, as she slipped into her own gate, while the gossips trudged on quite unconscious of the listener behind them.

Miss Bat was a worthy old soul in the main, only, like so many of us, she needed rousing up to her duty. She had got the rousing now, and it did her good, for she could not bear to be praised when she had not deserved it. She had watched Molly's efforts with lazy interest, and when the girl gave up meddling with her affairs, as she called the housekeeping, Miss Bat ceased to oppose her, and let her scrub Boo, mend clothes, and brush her hair as much as she liked. So Molly had worked along without any help from her, running in to Mrs. Pecq for advice, to Merry for comfort, or Mrs. Minot for the higher kind of help one often needs so much. Now Miss Bat found that she was getting the credit and the praise belonging to other people, and it stirred her up to try and deserve a part at least.

"Molly don't want any help about her work or the boy: it's too late for that; but if this house don't get a spring cleaning that will make it shine, my name ain't Bathsheba Dawes," said the old lady, as she put away her bonnet that night, and laid energetic plans for a grand revolution, inspired thereto not only by shame, but by the hint that "Mr. Bemis was a lavish man," as no one knew better than she.

Molly's amazement next day at seeing carpets fly out of window, ancient cobwebs come down, and long-undisturbed closets routed out to the great dismay of moths and mice, has been already confided to the cats, and as she sat there watching them lap and gnaw, she said to herself, —

"I don't understand it, but as she never says much to me about my affairs, I won’t take any notice till she gets through, then I’ll admire everything all I can. It is so pleasant to be praised after you’ve been trying hard.”

She might well say that, for she got very little herself, and her trials had been many, her efforts not always successful, and her reward seemed a long way off. Poor Boo could have sympathized with her, for he had suffered much persecution from his small schoolmates when he appeared with large gray patches on the little brown trousers, where he had worn them out coasting down those too fascinating steps. As he could not see the patches himself, he fancied them invisible, and came home much afflicted by the jeers of his friends. Then Molly tried to make him a new pair out of a sack of her own; but she cut both sides for the same leg, so one was wrong side out. Fondly hoping no one would observe it, she sewed bright buttons wherever they could be put, and sent confiding Boo away in a pair of blue trousers, which were absurdly hunchy behind and buttony before. He came home heart-broken and muddy, having been accidentally tipped into a mud-puddle by two bad boys who felt that such tailoring was an insult to mankind. That roused Molly’s spirit, and she begged her father to take the boy and have him properly fitted out, as he was old enough now to be well-dressed, and she wouldn’t have him tormented. His attention being called to the trousers, Mr. Bemis had a good laugh over them, and then got Boo a suit which caused him to be the admired of all observers, and to feel as proud as a little peacock.

Cheered by this success, Molly undertook a set of small shirts, and stitched away bravely, though her own summer clothes were in a sad state, and for the first time in her life she cared about what she should wear.

“I must ask Merry, and may be father will let me go with her and her mother when they do their shopping, instead of leaving it to Miss Bat, who dresses me like an old woman. Merry knows what is pretty and becoming: I don’t,” thought Molly, meditating in the bushel basket, with her eyes on her snuff-colored gown and the dark purple bow at the end of the long braid Muffet had been playing with.

Molly was beginning to see that even so small a matter as the choice of colors made a difference in one’s appearance, and to wonder why Merry always took such pains to have a blue tie for the gray dress, a rosy one for the brown, and gloves that matched her bonnet ribbons. Merry never wore a locket outside her sack, a gay bow in her hair and soiled cuffs, a smart hat and the braid worn off her skirts. She was exquisitely neat and simple, yet always looked well-dressed and pretty; for her love of beauty taught her what all girls should learn as soon as they begin to care for appearances — that neatness and simplicity are their best ornaments, that good habits are better than fine clothes, and the most elegant manners are the kindest.

All these thoughts were dancing through Molly’s head, and when she left her cats, after a general romp in which even decorous Granny allowed her family to play leap-frog over her respectable back, she had made up her mind not to have yellow ribbons on her summer hat if she got a pink muslin as she had planned, but to finish off Boo’s last shirt before she went shopping with Merry.

It rained that evening, and Mr. Bemis had a headache, so he threw himself down upon the lounge after tea for a nap, with his silk handkerchief spread over his face. He did get a nap, and when he waked he lay for a time drowsily listening to the patter of the rain, and another sound which was even more soothing. Putting back a corner of the handkerchief to learn what it was, he saw Molly sitting by the fire with Boo in her lap, rocking and humming as she warmed his little bare feet, having learned to guard against croup by attending to the damp shoes and socks before going to bed. Boo lay with his round face turned up to hers, stroking her cheek while the sleepy blue eyes blinked lovingly at her as she sang her lullaby with a motherly patience sweet to see. They made a pretty little picture, and Mr. Bemis looked at it with pleasure, having a leisure moment in which to discover, as all parents do sooner or later, that his children were growing up.

“Molly is getting to be quite a woman, and very like her mother,” thought papa, wiping the eye that peeped, for he had been fond of the pretty wife who died when Boo was born. “Sad loss to them, poor things! But Miss Bat seems to have done well by them. Molly is much improved, and the boy looks finely. She’s a good soul, after all;” and Mr. Bemis began to think he had been hasty when he half made up his mind to get a new housekeeper, feeling that burnt steak, weak coffee, and ragged wristbands were sure signs that Miss Bat’s days of usefulness were over.

Molly was singing the lullaby her mother used to sing to her, and her father listened to it silently till Boo was carried away too sleepy for anything but bed. When she came back she sat down to her work, fancying her father still asleep. She had a crimson bow at her throat and one on the newly braided hair, her cuffs were clean, and a white apron hid the shabbiness of the old dress. She looked like a thrifty little housewife as she sat with her basket beside her full of neat white rolls, her spools set forth, and a new pair of scissors shining on the table. There was a sort of charm in watching the busy needle flash to and fro, the anxious pucker of the forehead as she looked to see if the stitches were even, and the expression of intense relief upon her face as she surveyed the finished button-hole with girlish satisfaction. Her father was wide awake and looking at her, thinking, as he did so, —

"Really the old lady has worked well to change my tomboy into that nice little girl: I wonder how she did it." Then he gave a yawn, pulled off the handkerchief, and said aloud, "What are you making, Molly?" for it struck him that sewing was a new amusement.

"Shirts for Boo, sir. Four, and this is the last," she answered, with pardonable pride, as she held it up and nodded toward the pile in her basket.

"Isn't that a new notion? I thought Miss Bat did the sewing," said Mr. Bemis, as he smiled at the funny little garment, it looked so like Boo himself.

"No, sir; only yours. I do mine and Boo's. At least, I'm learning how, and Mrs. Pecq says I get on nicely," answered Molly, threading her needle and making a knot in her most capable way.

"I suppose it is time you did learn, for you are getting to be a great girl, and all women should know how to make and mend. You must take a stitch for me now and then: Miss Bat's eyes are not what they were, I find;" and Mr. Bemis looked at his frayed wristband, as if he particularly felt the need of a stitch just then.

"I'd love to, and I guess I could. I can mend gloves; Merry taught me, so I'd better begin on them, if you have any," said Molly, much pleased at being able to do anything for her father, and still more so at being asked.

"There's something to start with;" and he threw her a pair, with nearly every finger ripped.

Molly shook her head over them, but got out her gray silk and fell to work, glad to show how well she could sew.

"What are you smiling about?" asked her father, after a little pause, for his head felt better, and it amused him to question Molly.

"I was thinking about my summer clothes. I must get them before long, and I'd like to go with Mrs. Grant and learn how to shop, if you are willing."

"I thought Miss Bat did that for you."

"She always has, but she gets ugly, cheap things that I don't like. I think I am old enough to choose myself, if there is someone to tell me about prices and the goodness of the stuff. Merry does; and she is only a few months older than I am."

"How old are you, child?" asked her father, feeling as if he had lost his reckoning.

"Fifteen in August;" and Molly looked very proud of the fact.

"So you are! Bless my heart, how the time goes! Well, get what you please; if I'm to have a young lady here, I'd like to have her prettily dressed. It won't offend Miss Bat, will it?"

Molly's eyes sparkled, but she gave a little shrug as she answered, "She won't care. She never troubles herself about me if I let her alone.

“Hey? what? Not trouble herself? If *she* doesn’t, who does?” and Mr. Bemis sat up as if this discovery was more surprising than the other.

“I take care of myself and Boo, and she looks after you. The house goes any way.”

“I should think so! I nearly broke my neck over the parlor sofa in the hall to-night. What is it there for?”

Molly laughed. “That’s the joke, sir, Miss Bat is cleaning house, and I’m sure it needs cleaning, for it is years since it was properly done. I thought you might have told her to.”

“I’ve said nothing. Don’t like house-cleaning well enough to suggest it. I did think the hall was rather dirty when I dropped my coat and took it up covered with lint. Is she going to upset the whole place?” asked Mr. Bemis, looking alarmed at the prospect.

“I hope so, for I really am ashamed when people come, to have them see the dust and cobwebs, and old carpets and dirty windows,” said Molly, with a sigh, though she never had cared a bit till lately.

“Why don’t you dust round a little, then? No time to spare from the books and play?”

“I tried, father, but Miss Bat didn’t like it, and it was too hard for me alone. If things were once in nice order, I think I could keep them so; for I do want to be neat, and I’m learning as fast as I can.”

“It is high time someone took hold, if matters are left as you say. I’ve just been thinking what a clever woman Miss Bat was, to make such a tidy little girl out of what I used to hear called the greatest tomboy in town, and wondering what I could give the old lady. Now I find *you* are the one to be thanked, and it is a very pleasant surprise to me.”

“Give her the present, please; I’m satisfied, if you like what I’ve done. It isn’t much, and I didn’t know as you would ever observe any difference. But I did try, and now I guess I’m really getting on,” said Molly, sewing away with a bright color in her cheeks, for she, too, found it a pleasant surprise to be praised after many failures and few successes.

“You certainly are, my dear. I’ll wait till the house-cleaning is over, and then, if we are all alive, I’ll see about Miss Bat’s reward. Meantime, you go with Mrs. Grant and get whatever you and the boy need, and send the bills to me;” and Mr. Bemis lighted a cigar, as if that matter was settled.

“Oh, thank you, sir! That will be splendid. Merry always has pretty things, and I know you will like me when I get fixed,” said Molly, smoothing down her apron, with a little air.

“Seems to me you look very well as you are. Isn’t that a pretty enough frock?”

asked Mr. Bemis, quite unconscious that his own unusual interest in his daughter's affairs made her look so bright and winsome.

"This? Why, father, I've worn it all winter, and it's *frightfully* ugly, and almost in rags. I asked you for a new one a month ago, and you said you'd 'see about it'; but you didn't, so I patched this up as well as I could;" and Molly showed her elbows, feeling that such masculine blindness as this deserved a mild reproof.

"Too bad! Well, go and get half a dozen pretty muslin and gingham things, and be as gay as a butterfly, to make up for it," laughed her father, really touched by the patches and Molly's resignation to the unreliable "I'll see about it," which he recognized as a household word.

Molly clapped her hands, old gloves and all, exclaiming, with girlish delight, "How nice it will seem to have a plenty of new, neat dresses all at once, and be like other girls! Miss Bat always talks about economy, and has no more taste than a — caterpillar." Molly meant to say "cat," but remembering her pets, spared them the insult.

"I think I can afford to dress my girl as well as Grant does his. Get a new hat and coat, child, and any little notions you fancy. Miss Bat's economy isn't the sort I like;" and Mr. Bemis looked at his wristbands again, as if he could sympathize with Molly's elbows.

"At this rate, I shall have more clothes than I know what to do with, after being a rag-bag," thought the girl, in great glee, as she bravely stitched away at the worst glove, while her father smoked silently for a while, feeling that several little matters had escaped his eye which he really ought to "see about."

Presently he went to his desk, but not to bury himself in business papers, as usual, for, after rummaging in several drawers, he took out a small bunch of keys, and sat looking at them with an expression only seen on his face when he looked up at the portrait of a dark-eyed woman hanging in his room. He was a very busy man, but he had a tender place in his heart for his children; and when a look, a few words, a moment's reflection, called his attention to the fact that his little girl was growing up, he found both pride and pleasure in the thought that this young daughter was trying to fill her mother's place, and be a comfort to him, if he would let her.

"Molly, my dear, here is something for you," he said; and when she stood beside him, added, as he put the keys into her hand, keeping both in his own for a minute, —

"Those are the keys to your mother's things. I always meant you to have them, when you were old enough to use or care for them. I think you'll fancy this better than any other present, for you are a good child, and very like her."

Something seemed to get into his throat there, and Molly put her arm round his neck, saying, with a little choke in her own voice, “Thank you, father, I’d rather have this than anything else in the world, and I’ll try to be more like her every day, for your sake.”

He kissed her, then said, as he began to stir his papers about, “I must write some letters. Run off to bed, child. Good-night, my dear, good-night.”

Seeing that he wanted to be alone, Molly slipped away, feeling that she had received a very precious gift; for she remembered the dear, dead mother, and had often longed to possess the relics laid away in the one room where order reigned and Miss Bat had no power to meddle. As she slowly undressed, she was not thinking of the pretty new gowns in which she was to be “as gay as a butterfly,” but of the half-worn garments waiting for her hands to unfold with a tender touch; and when she fell asleep, with the keys under her pillow and her arms round Boo, a few happy tears on her cheeks seemed to show that, in trying to do the duty which lay nearest her, she had earned a very sweet reward.

So the little missionaries succeeded better in their second attempt than in their first; for, though still very far from being perfect girls, each was slowly learning, in her own way, one of the three lessons all are the better for knowing — that cheerfulness can change misfortune into love and friends; that in ordering one’s self aright one helps others to do the same; and that the power of finding beauty in the humblest things makes home happy and life lovely.

Chapter XVIII. May Baskets

Spring was late that year, but to Jill it seemed the loveliest she had ever known, for hope was growing green and strong in her own little heart, and all the world looked beautiful. With the help of the brace she could sit up for a short time every day, and when the air was mild enough she was warmly wrapped and allowed to look out at the open window into the garden, where the gold and purple crocuses were coming bravely up, and the snowdrops nodded their delicate heads as if calling to her, —

“Good day, little sister, come out and play with us, for winter is over and spring is here.”

“I wish I could!” thought Jill, as the soft wind kissed a tinge of color into her pale cheeks. “Never mind, they have been shut up in a darker place than I for months, and had no fun at all; I won’t fret, but think about July and the seashore while I work.”

The job now in hand was May baskets, for it was the custom of the children to hang them on the doors of their friends the night before May-day; and the girls had agreed to supply baskets if the boys would hunt for flowers, much the harder task of the two. Jill had more leisure as well as taste and skill than the other girls, so she amused herself with making a goodly store of pretty baskets of all shapes, sizes, and colors, quite confident that they would be filled, though not a flower had shown its head except a few hardy dandelions, and here and there a small cluster of saxifrage.

The violets would not open their blue eyes till the sunshine was warmer, the columbines refused to dance with the boisterous east wind, the ferns kept themselves rolled up in their brown flannel jackets, and little Hepatica, with many another spring beauty, hid away in the woods, afraid to venture out, in spite of the eager welcome awaiting them. But the birds had come, punctual as ever, and the bluejays were screaming in the orchard, robins were perking up their heads and tails as they went house-hunting, purple finches in their little red hoods were feasting on the spruce buds, and the faithful chip birds chirped gayly on the grapevine trellis where they had lived all winter, warming their little gray breasts against the southern side of the house when the sun shone, and hiding under the evergreen boughs when the snow fell.

“That tree is a sort of bird’s hotel,” said Jill, looking out at the tall spruce before her window, every spray now tipped with a soft green. “They all go there to sleep and eat, and it has room for every one. It is green when other trees die, the wind can't break it, and the snow only makes it look prettier. It sings to me, and nods as if it knew I loved it."

"We might call it 'The Holly Tree Inn,' as some of the cheap eating-houses for poor people are called in the city, as my holly bush grows at its foot for a sign. You can be the landlady, and feed your feathery customers every day, till the hard times are over," said Mrs. Minot, glad to see the child's enjoyment of the outer world from which she had been shut so long.

Jill liked the fancy, and gladly strewed crumbs on the window ledge for the chippies, who came confidingly to eat almost from her hand. She threw out grain for the handsome jays, the jaunty robins, and the neighbors' doves, who came with soft flight to trip about on their pink feet, arching their shining necks as they cooed and pecked. Carrots and cabbage-leaves also flew out of the window for the marauding gray rabbit, last of all Jack's half-dozen, who led him a weary life of it because they would *not* stay in the Bunny-house, but undermined the garden with their burrows, ate the neighbors' plants, and refused to be caught till all but one ran away, to Jack's great relief. This old fellow camped out for the winter, and seemed to get on very well among the cats and the hens, who shared their stores with him, and he might be seen at all hours of the day and night scampering about the place, or kicking up his heels by moonlight, for he was a desperate poacher.

Jill took great delight in her pretty pensioners, who soon learned to love "The Holly Tree Inn," and to feel that the Bird Room held a caged comrade; for, when it was too cold or wet to open the windows, the doves came and tapped at the pane, the chippies sat on the ledge in plump little bunches as if she were their sunshine, the jays called her in their shrill voices to ring the dinner-bell, and the robins tilted on the spruce boughs where lunch was always to be had.

The first of May came on Sunday, so all the celebrating must be done on Saturday, which happily proved fair, though too chilly for muslin gowns, paper garlands, and picnics on damp grass. Being a holiday, the boys decided to devote the morning to ball and the afternoon to the flower hunt, while the girls finished the baskets; and in the evening our particular seven were to meet at the Minots to fill them, ready for the closing frolic of hanging on door-handles, ringing bells, and running away.

"Now I must do my Maying, for there will be no more sunshine, and I want to pick my flowers before it is dark. Come, Mammy, you go too," said Jill, as the last sunbeams shone in at the western window where her hyacinths stood that no fostering ray might be lost.

It was rather pathetic to see the once merry girl who used to be the life of the wood-parties now carefully lifting herself from the couch, and, leaning on her mother’s strong arm, slowly take the half-dozen steps that made up her little expedition. But she was happy, and stood smiling out at old Bun skipping down the walk, the gold-edged clouds that drew apart so that a sunbeam might give her a good-night kiss as she gathered her long-cherished daisies, primroses, and hyacinths to fill the pretty basket in her hand.

“Who is it for, my dearie?” asked her mother, standing behind her as a prop, while the thin fingers did their work so willingly that not a flower was left.

“For My Lady, of course. Who else would I give my posies to, when I love them so well?” answered Jill, who thought no name too fine for their best friend.

“I fancied it would be for Master Jack,” said her mother, wishing the excursion to be a cheerful one.

“I’ve another for him, but *she* must have the prettiest. He is going to hang it for me, and ring and run away, and she won’t know who it’s from till she sees this. She will remember it, for I’ve been turning and tending it ever so long, to make it bloom to-day. Isn’t it a beauty?” and Jill held up her finest hyacinth, which seemed to ring its pale pink bells as if glad to carry its sweet message from a grateful little heart.

“Indeed it is; and you are right to give your best to her. Come away now, you must not stand any longer. Come and rest while I fetch a dish to put the flowers in till you want them;” and Mrs. Pecq turned her round with her small Maying safely done.

“I didn’t think I’d ever be able to do even so much, and here I am walking and sitting up, and going to drive some day. Isn’t it nice that I’m not to be a poor Lucinda after all?” and Jill drew a long sigh of relief that six months instead of twenty years would probably be the end of her captivity.

“Yes, thank Heaven! I don’t think I *could* have borne that;” and the mother took Jill in her arms as if she were a baby, holding her close for a minute, and laying her down with a tender kiss that made the arms cling about her neck as her little girl returned it heartily, for all sorts of new, sweet feelings seemed to be budding in both, born of great joy and thankfulness.

Then Mrs. Pecq hurried away to see about tea for the hungry boys, and Jill watched the pleasant twilight deepen as she lay singing to herself one of the songs her friend taught her because it fitted her so well.

“A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air,
And in my cage I sit and sing
To Him who placed me there:
Well pleased a prisoner to be,

Because, my God, it pleases Thee!

“Naught have I else to do;
I sing the whole day long;
And He whom most I love to please
Doth listen to my song,
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He bends to hear me sing.”

“Now we are ready for you, so bring on your flowers,” said Molly to the boys, as she and Merry added their store of baskets to the gay show Jill had set forth on the long table ready for the evening’s work.

“They wouldn’t let me see one, but I guess they have had good luck, they look so jolly,” answered Jill, looking at Gus, Frank, and Jack, who stood laughing, each with a large basket in his hands.

“Fair to middling. Just look in and see;” with which cheerful remark Gus tipped up his basket and displayed a few bits of green at the bottom.

“I did better. Now, don’t all scream at once over these beauties;” and Frank shook out some evergreen sprigs, half a dozen saxifrages, and two or three forlorn violets with hardly any stems.

“I don’t brag, but here’s the best of all the three,” chuckled Jack, producing a bunch of feathery carrot-tops, with a few half-shut dandelions trying to look brave and gay.

“Oh, boys, is that all?”

“What *shall* we do?”

“We’ve only a few house-flowers, and all those baskets to fill,” cried the girls, in despair; for Merry’s contribution had been small, and Molly had only a handful of artificial flowers “to fill up,” she said.

“It isn’t our fault: it is the late spring. We can’t make flowers, can we?” asked Frank, in a tone of calm resignation.

“Couldn’t you buy some, then?” said Molly, smoothing her crumpled morning-glories, with a sigh.

“Who ever heard of a fellow having any money left the last day of the month?” demanded Gus, severely.

“Or girls either. I spent all mine in ribbon and paper for my baskets, and now they are of no use. It’s a shame!” lamented Jill, while Merry began to thin out her full baskets to fill the empty ones.

“Hold on!” cried Frank, relenting. “Now, Jack, make their minds easy before they begin to weep and wail.”

“Left the box outside. You tell while I go for it;” and Jack bolted, as if afraid the young ladies might be too demonstrative when the tale was told.

"Tell away," said Frank, modestly passing the story along to Gus, who made short work of it.

"We rampaged all over the country, and got only that small mess of greens. Knew you'd be disgusted, and sat down to see what we could do. Then Jack piped up, and said he'd show us a place where we could get a plenty. 'Come on,' said we, and after leading us a nice tramp, he brought us out at Morse's greenhouse. So we got a few on tick, as we had but four cents among us, and there you are. Pretty clever of the little chap, wasn't it?"

A chorus of delight greeted Jack as he popped his head in, was promptly seized by his elders and walked up to the table, where the box was opened, displaying gay posies enough to fill most of the baskets if distributed with great economy and much green.

"You are the dearest boy that ever was!" began Jill, with her nose luxuriously buried in the box, though the flowers were more remarkable for color than perfume.

"No, I'm not; there's a much dearer one coming upstairs now, and he's got something that will make you howl for joy," said Jack, ignoring his own prowess as Ed came in with a bigger box, looking as if he had done nothing but go a Maying all his days.

"Don't believe it!" cried Jill, hugging her own treasure jealously. "It's only another joke. I won't look," said Molly, still struggling to make her cambric roses bloom again.

"I know what it is! Oh, how sweet!" added Merry, sniffing, as Ed set the box before her, saying pleasantly, —

"You shall see first, because you had faith."

Up went the cover, and a whiff of the freshest fragrance regaled the seven eager noses bent to inhale it, as a general murmur of pleasure greeted the nest of great, rosy mayflowers that lay before them.

"The dear things, how lovely they are!" and Merry looked as if greeting her cousins, so blooming and sweet was her own face.

Molly pushed her dingy garlands away, ashamed of such poor attempts beside these perfect works of nature, and Jill stretched out her hand involuntarily, as she said, forgetting her exotics, "Give me just one to smell of, it is so woodsy and delicious."

"Here you are, plenty for all. Real Pilgrim Fathers, right from Plymouth. One of our fellows lives there, and I told him to bring me a good lot; so he did, and you can do what you like with them," explained Ed, passing round bunches and shaking the rest in a mossy pile upon the table.

“Ed always gets ahead of us in doing the right thing at the right time. Hope you’ve got some first-class baskets ready for him,” said Gus, refreshing the Washingtonian nose with a pink blossom or two.

“Not much danger of *his* being forgotten,” answered Molly; and every one laughed, for Ed was much beloved by all the girls, and his door-steps always bloomed like a flower-bed on May eve.

“Now we must fly round and fill up. Come, boys, sort out the green and hand us the flowers as we want them. Then we must direct them, and, by the time that is done, you can go and leave them,” said Jill, setting all to work.

“Ed must choose his baskets first. These are ours; but any of those you can have;” and Molly pointed to a detachment of gay baskets, set apart from those already partly filled.

Ed chose a blue one, and Merry filled it with the rosiest may-flowers, knowing that it was to hang on Mabel’s door-handle.

The others did the same, and the pretty work went on, with much fun, till all were filled, and ready for the names or notes.

“Let us have poetry, as we can’t get wild flowers. That will be rather fine,” proposed Jill, who liked jingles.

All had had some practice at the game parties, and pencils went briskly for a few minutes, while silence reigned, as the poets racked their brains for rhymes, and stared at the blooming array before them for inspiration.

“Oh, dear! I can’t find a word to rhyme to ‘geranium,’“ sighed Molly, pulling her braid, as if to pump the well of her fancy dry.

“Cranium,” said Frank, who was getting on bravely with “Annette” and “violet.”

“That is elegant!” and Molly scribbled away in great glee, for her poems were always funny ones.

“How do you spell *anemoly* — the wild flower, I mean?” asked Jill, who was trying to compose a very appropriate piece for her best basket, and found it easier to feel love and gratitude than to put them into verse.

“Anemone; do spell it properly, or you’ll get laughed at,” answered Gus, wildly struggling to make his lines express great ardor, without being “too spoony,” as he expressed it.

“No, I shouldn’t. This person never laughs at other persons’ mistakes, as some persons do,” replied Jill, with dignity.

Jack was desperately chewing his pencil, for he could not get on at all; but Ed had evidently prepared his poem, for his paper was half full already, and Merry was smiling as she wrote a friendly line or two for Ralph’s basket, as she feared he would be forgotten, and knew he loved kindness even more than he did beauty.

"Now let's read them," proposed Molly, who loved to laugh even at herself.

The boys politely declined, and scrambled their notes into the chosen baskets in great haste; but the girls were less bashful. Jill was invited to begin, and gave her little piece, with the pink hyacinth basket before her, to illustrate her poem.

"TO MY LADY

"There are no flowers in the fields,
No green leaves on the tree,
No columbines, no violets,
No sweet anemone.
So I have gathered from my pots
All that I have to fill
The basket that I hang to-night,
With heaps of love from Jill."

"That's perfectly sweet! Mine isn't; but I meant it to be funny," said Molly, as if there could be any doubt about the following ditty: —

"Dear Grif,
Here is a whiff
Of beautiful spring flowers;
The big red rose
Is for your nose,
As toward the sky it towers.

"Oh, do not frown
Upon this crown
Of green pinks and blue geranium
But think of me
When this you see,
And put it on your cranium."

"O Molly, you will never hear the last of that if Grif gets it," said Jill, as the applause subsided, for the boys pronounced it "tip-top."

"Don't care, he gets the worst of it any way, for there is a pin in that rose, and if he goes to smell the mayflowers underneath he will find a thorn to pay for the tack he put in my rubber boot. I know he will play me some joke to-night, and I mean to be first if I can," answered Molly, settling the artificial wreath round the orange-colored canoe which held her effusion.

"Now, Merry, read yours: you always have sweet poems;" and Jill folded her hands to listen with pleasure to something sentimental.

"I can't read the poems in some of mine, because they are for you; but this little verse you can hear, if you like: I'm going to give that basket to Ralph. He said he should hang one for his grandmother, and I thought that was so nice of him, I'd love to surprise him with one all to himself. He's always so good to us;" and Merry looked so innocently earnest that no one smiled at her kind thought or the unconscious paraphrase she had made of a famous stanza in her own "little verse."

"To one who teaches me
The sweetness and the beauty
Of doing faithfully
And cheerfully my duty."

"He will like that, and know who sent it, for none of us have pretty pink paper but you, or write such an elegant hand," said Molly, admiring the delicate white basket shaped like a lily, with the flowers inside and the note hidden among them, all daintily tied up with the palest blush-colored ribbon.

"Well, that's no harm. He likes pretty things as much as I do, and I made my basket like a flower because I gave him one of my callas, he admired the shape so much;" and Merry smiled as she remembered how pleased Ralph looked as he went away carrying the lovely thing.

"I think it would be a good plan to hang some baskets on the doors of other people who don't expect or often have any. I'll do it if you can spare some of these, we have so many. Give me only one, and let the others go to old Mrs. Tucker, and the little Irish girl who has been sick so long, and lame Neddy, and Daddy Munson. It would please and surprise them so. Will we?" asked Ed, in that persuasive voice of his.

All agreed at once, and several people were made very happy by a bit of spring left at their doors by the May elves who haunted the town that night playing all sorts of pranks. Such a twanging of bells and rapping of knockers; such a scampering of feet in the dark; such droll collisions as boys came racing round corners, or girls ran into one another's arms as they crept up and down steps on the sly; such laughing, whistling, flying about of flowers and friendly feeling — it was almost a pity that May-day did not come oftener.

Molly got home late, and found that Grif had been before her, after all; for she stumbled over a market-basket at her door, and on taking it in found a mammoth nosegay of purple and white cabbages, her favorite vegetable. Even Miss Bat laughed at the funny sight, and Molly resolved to get Ralph to carve her a bouquet out of carrots, beets, and turnips for next time, as Grif would never think of that.

Merry ran up the garden-walk alone, for Frank left her at the gate, and was fumbling for the latch when she felt something hanging there. Opening the door carefully, she found it gay with offerings from her mates; and among them was one long quiver-shaped basket of birch bark, with something heavy under the green leaves that lay at the top. Lifting these, a slender bas-relief of a calla lily in plaster appeared, with this couplet slipped into the blue cord by which it was to hang: —

“That mercy you to others show
That Mercy Grant to me.”

“How lovely! and this one will never fade, but always be a pleasure hanging there. Now, I really have something beautiful all my own,” said Merry to herself as she ran up to hang the pretty thing on the dark wainscot of her room, where the graceful curve of its pointed leaves and the depth of its white cup would be a joy to her eyes as long as they lasted.

“I wonder what that means,” and Merry read over the lines again, while a soft color came into her cheeks and a little smile of girlish pleasure began to dimple round her lips; for she was so romantic, this touch of sentiment showed her that her friendship was more valued than she dreamed. But she only said, “How glad I am I remembered him, and how surprised he will be to see mayflowers in return for the lily.”

He was, and worked away more happily and bravely for the thought of the little friend whose eyes would daily fall on the white flower which always reminded him of her.

Chapter XIX. Good Templars

“Hi there! Bell’s rung! Get up, lazy-bones!” called Frank from his room as the clock struck six one bright morning, and a great creaking and stamping proclaimed that he was astir.

“All right, I’m coming,” responded a drowsy voice, and Jack turned over as if to obey; but there the effort ended, and he was off again, for growing lads are hard to rouse, as many a mother knows to her sorrow.

Frank made a beginning on his own toilet, and then took a look at his brother, for the stillness was suspicious.

“I thought so! He told me to wake him, and I guess this will do it;” and, filling his great sponge with water, Frank stalked into the next room and stood over the unconscious victim like a stern executioner, glad to unite business with pleasure in this agreeable manner.

A woman would have relented and tried some milder means, for when his broad shoulders and stout limbs were hidden, Jack looked very young and innocent in his sleep. Even Frank paused a moment to look at the round, rosy face, the curly eyelashes, half-open mouth, and the peaceful expression of a dreaming baby. “I *must* do it, or he won’t be ready for breakfast,” said the Spartan brother, and down came the sponge, cold, wet, and choky, as it was briskly rubbed to and fro regardless of every obstacle.

“Come, I say! That’s not fair! Leave me alone!” sputtered Jack, hitting out so vigorously that the sponge flew across the room, and Frank fell back to laugh at the indignant sufferer.

“I promised to wake you, and you believe in keeping promises, so I’m doing my best to get you up.”

“Well, you needn’t pour a quart of water down a fellow’s neck, and rub his nose off, need you? I’m awake, so take your old sponge and go along,” growled Jack, with one eye open and a mighty gape.

“See that you keep so, then, or I’ll come and give you another sort of a rouser,” said Frank, retiring well-pleased with his success.

“I shall have one good stretch, if I like. It is strengthening to the muscles, and I’m as stiff as a board with all that football yesterday,” murmured Jack, lying down for one delicious moment. He shut the open eye to enjoy it thoroughly, and forgot the stretch altogether, for the bed was warm, the pillow soft, and a half-finished dream still hung about his drowsy brain. Who does not know the fatal charm of that stolen moment — for once yield to it, and one is lost.

Jack was miles away "in the twinkling of a bedpost," and the pleasing dream seemed about to return, when a ruthless hand tore off the clothes, swept him out of bed, and he really did awake to find himself standing in the middle of his bath-pan with both windows open, and Frank about to pour a pail of water over him.

"Hold on! Yah, how cold the water is! Why, I thought I *was* up;" and, hopping out, Jack rubbed his eyes and looked about with such a genuine surprise that Frank put down the pail, feeling that the deluge would not be needed this time.

"You are now, and I'll see that you keep so," he said, as he stripped the bed and carried off the pillows.

"I don't care. What a jolly day!" and Jack took a little promenade to finish the rousing process.

"You'd better hurry up, or you won't get your chores done before breakfast. No time for a 'go as you please' now," said Frank; and both boys laughed, for it was an old joke of theirs, and rather funny.

Going up to bed one night expecting to find Jack asleep, Frank discovered him tramping round and round the room airily attired in a towel, and so dizzy with his brisk revolutions that as his brother looked he tumbled over and lay panting like a fallen gladiator.

"What on earth are you about?"

"Playing Rowell. Walking for the belt, and I've got it too," laughed Jack, pointing to an old gilt chandelier chain hanging on the bedpost.

"You little noodle, you'd better revolve into bed before you lose your head entirely. I never saw such a fellow for taking himself off his legs."

"Well, if I didn't exercise, do you suppose I should be able to do that — or that?" cried Jack, turning a somersault and striking a fine attitude as he came up, flattering himself that he was the model of a youthful athlete.

"You look more like a clothes-pin than a Hercules," was the crushing reply of this unsympathetic brother, and Jack meekly retired with a bad headache.

"I don't do such silly things now: I'm as broad across the shoulders as you are, and twice as strong on my pins, thanks to my gymnastics. Bet you a cent I'll be dressed first, though you have got the start," said Jack, knowing that Frank always had a protracted wrestle with his collar-buttons, which gave his adversary a great advantage over him.

"Done!" answered Frank, and at it they went. A wild scramble was heard in Jack's room, and a steady tramp in the other as Frank worked away at the stiff collar and the unaccommodating button till every finger ached. A clashing of boots followed, while Jack whistled "Polly Hopkins," and Frank declaimed in his deepest voice,

“Arma virumque cano, Trojae qui primus ab oris Italiam, fato profugus, Laviniaque venit litora.”

Hair-brushes came next, and here Frank got ahead, for Jack’s thick crop would stand straight up on the crown, and only a good wetting and a steady brush would make it lie down.

“Play away, No. 2,” called out Frank as he put on his vest, while Jack was still at it with a pair of the stiffest brushes procurable for money.

“Hold hard, No. 11, and don’t forget your teeth,” answered Jack, who had done his.

Frank took a hasty rub and whisked on his coat, while Jack was picking up the various treasures which had flown out of his pockets as he caught up his roundabout.

“Ready! I’ll trouble you for a cent, sonny;” and Frank held out his hand as he appeared equipped for the day.

“You haven’t hung up your night-gown, nor aired the bed, nor opened the windows. That’s part of the dressing; mother said so. I’ve got you there, for you did all that for me, except this,” and Jack threw his gown over a chair with a triumphant flourish as Frank turned back to leave his room in the order which they had been taught was one of the signs of a good bringing-up in boys as well as girls.

“Ready! I’ll trouble *you* for a cent, old man;” and Jack held out his hand, with a chuckle.

He got the money and a good clap beside; then they retired to the shed to black their boots, after which Frank filled the woodboxes and Jack split kindlings, till the daily allowance was ready. Both went at their lessons for half an hour, Jack scowling over his algebra in the sofa corner, while Frank, with his elbows on and his legs round the little stand which held his books, seemed to be having a wrestling-match with Herodotus.

When the bell rang they were glad to drop the lessons and fall upon their breakfast with the appetite of wolves, especially Jack, who sequestered oatmeal and milk with such rapidity that one would have thought he had a leathern bag hidden somewhere to slip it into, like his famous namesake when he breakfasted with the giant.

“I declare I don’t see what he does with it! He really ought not to ‘gobble’ so, mother,” said Frank, who was eating with great deliberation and propriety.

“Never you mind, old quiddle. I’m so hungry I could tuck away a bushel,” answered Jack, emptying a glass of milk and holding out his plate for more mush, regardless of his white moustache.

"Temperance in all things is wise, in speech as well as eating and drinking — remember that, boys," said Mamma from behind the urn.

"That reminds me! We promised to do the 'Observer' this week, and here it is Tuesday and I haven't done a thing: have you?" asked Frank.

"Never thought of it. We must look up some bits at noon instead of playing. Dare say Jill has got some: she always saves all she finds for me."

"I have one or two good items, and can do any copying there may be. But I think if you undertake the paper you should give some time and labor to make it good," said Mamma, who was used to this state of affairs, and often edited the little sheet read every week at the Lodge. The boys seldom missed going, but the busy lady was often unable to be there, so helped with the paper as her share of the labor.

"Yes, we ought, but somehow we don't seem to get up much steam about it lately. If more people belonged, and we could have a grand time now and then, it would be jolly;" and Jack sighed at the lack of interest felt by outsiders in the loyal little Lodge which went on year after year kept up by the faithful few.

"I remember when in this very town we used to have a Cold Water Army, and in the summer turn out with processions, banners, and bands of music to march about, and end with a picnic, songs, and speeches in some grove or hall. Nearly all the children belonged to it, and the parents also, and we had fine times here twenty-five or thirty years ago."

"It didn't do much good, seems to me, for people still drink, and we haven't a decent hotel in the place," said Frank, as his mother sat looking out of the window as if she saw again the pleasant sight of old and young working together against the great enemy of home peace and safety.

"Oh yes, it did, my dear; for to this day many of those children are true to their pledge. One little girl was, I am sure, and now has two big boys to fight for the reform she has upheld all her life. The town is better than it was in those days, and if we each do our part faithfully, it will improve yet more. Every boy and girl who joins is one gained, perhaps, and your example is the best temperance lecture you can give. Hold fast, and don't mind if it isn't 'jolly': it is *right*, and that should be enough for us."

Mamma spoke warmly, for she heartily believed in young people's guarding against this dangerous vice before it became a temptation, and hoped her boys would never break the pledge they had taken; for, young as they were, they were old enough to see its worth, feel its wisdom, and pride themselves on the promise which was fast growing into a principle. Jack's face brightened as he listened, and Frank said, with the steady look which made his face manly, —

"It shall be. Now I'll tell you what I was going to keep as a surprise till to-night, for I wanted to have my secret as well as other folks. Ed and I went up to see Bob, Sunday, and he said he'd join the Lodge, if they'd have him. I'm going to propose him to-night."

"Good! good!" cried Jack, joyfully, and Mrs. Minot clapped her hands, for every new member was rejoiced over by the good people, who were not discouraged by ridicule, indifference, or opposition.

"We've got him now, for no one will object, and it is just the thing for him. He wants to belong somewhere, he says, and he'll enjoy the fun, and the good things will help him, and we will look after him. The Captain was so pleased, and you ought to have seen Ed's face when Bob said, 'I'm ready, if you'll have me.'"

Frank's own face was beaming, and Jack forgot to "gobble," he was so interested in the new convert, while Mamma said, as she threw down her napkin and took up the newspaper, —

"We must not forget our 'Observer,' but have a good one tonight in honor of the occasion. There may be something here. Come home early at noon, and I'll help you get your paper ready."

"I'll be here, but if you want Frank, you'd better tell him not to dawdle over Annette's gate half an hour," began Jack, who could not resist teasing his dignified brother about one of the few foolish things he was fond of doing.

"Do you want your nose pulled?" demanded Frank, who never would stand joking on that tender point from his brother.

"No, I don't; and if I did, you couldn't do it;" with which taunt he was off and Frank after him, having made a futile dive at the impertinent little nose which was turned up at him and his sweetheart.

"Boys, boys, not through the parlor!" implored Mamma, resigned to skirmishes, but trembling for her piano legs as the four stout boots pranced about the table and then went thundering down the hall, through the kitchen where the fat cook cheered them on, and Mary, the maid, tried to head off Frank as Jack rushed out into the garden. But the pursuer ducked under her arm and gave chase with all speed. Then there was a glorious race all over the place; for both were good runners, and, being as full of spring vigor as frisky calves, they did astonishing things in the way of leaping fences, dodging round corners, and making good time down the wide walks.

But Jack's leg was not quite strong yet, and he felt that his round nose was in danger of a vengeful tweak as his breath began to give out and Frank's long arms drew nearer and nearer to the threatened feature. Just when he was about to give up and meet his fate like a man, old Bunny, who had been much excited by the race, came scampering across the path with such a droll skip into the air and shake of the hind legs that Frank had to dodge to avoid stepping on him, and to laugh in spite of himself. This momentary check gave Jack a chance to bolt up the back stairs and take refuge in the Bird Room, from the window of which Jill had been watching the race with great interest.

No romping was allowed there, so a truce was made by locking little fingers, and both sat down to get their breath.

"I am to go on the piazza, for an hour, by and by, Doctor said. Would you mind carrying me down before you go to school, you do it so nicely, I'm not a bit afraid," said Jill, as eager for the little change as if it had been a long and varied journey.

"Yes, indeed! Come on, Princess," answered Jack, glad to see her so well and happy.

The boys made an arm-chair, and away she went, for a pleasant day downstairs. She thanked Frank with a posy for his buttonhole, well knowing that it would soon pass into other hands, and he departed to join Annette. Having told Jill about Bob, and set her to work on the "Observer," Jack kissed his mother, and went whistling down the street, a gay little bachelor, with a nod and smile for all he met, and no turned-up hat or jaunty turban bobbing along beside him to delay his steps or trouble his peace of mind.

At noon they worked on their paper, which was a collection of items, cut from other papers, concerning temperance, a few anecdotes, a bit of poetry, a story, and, if possible, an original article by the editor. Many hands make light work, and nothing remained but a little copying, which Jill promised to do before night. So the boys had time for a game of football after school in the afternoon, which they much enjoyed. As they sat resting on the posts, Gus said, —

"Uncle Fred says he will give us a hay-cart ride to-night, as it is moony, and after it you are all to come to our house and have games.

"Can't do it," answered Frank, sadly.

"Lodge," groaned Jack, for both considered a drive in the cart, where they all sat in a merry bunch among the hay, one of the joys of life, and much regretted that a prior engagement would prevent their sharing in it.

"That's a pity! I forgot it was Tuesday, and can't put it off, as I've asked all the rest. Give up your old Lodge and come along," said Gus, who had not joined yet.

"We might for once, perhaps, but I don't like to" — began Jack, hesitating.

"*I* won't. Who's to propose Bob if we don't? I want to go awfully; but I wouldn't disappoint Bob for a good deal, now he is willing to come." And Frank sprang off his post as if anxious to flee temptation, for it *was* very pleasant to go singing, up hill and down dale, in the spring moonlight, with — well, the fellows of his set.

"Nor Ed, I forgot that. No, we can't go. We want to be Good Templars, and we mustn’t shirk,” added Jack, following his brother.

“Better come. Can’t put it off. Lots of fun,” called Gus, disappointed at losing two of his favorite mates.

But the boys did not turn back, and as they went steadily away they felt that they *were* doing their little part in the good work, and making their small sacrifices, like faithful members.

They got their reward, however, for at home they found Mr. Chauncey, a good and great man, from England, who had known their grandfather, and was an honored friend of the family. The boys loved to hear him talk, and all tea-time listened with interest to the conversation, for Mr. Chauncey was a reformer as well as a famous clergyman, and it was like inspiring music to hear him tell about the world’s work, and the brave men and women who were carrying it on. Eager to show that they had, at least, begun, the boys told him about their Lodge, and were immensely pleased when their guest took from his pocket-book a worn paper, proving that he too was a Good Templar, and belonged to the same army as they did. Nor was that all, for when they reluctantly excused themselves, Mr. Chauncey gave each a hearty “grip,” and said, holding their hands in his, as he smiled at the young faces looking up at him with so much love and honor in them, —

“Tell the brothers and sisters that if I can serve them in any way while here, to command me. I will give them a lecture at their Lodge or in public, whichever they like; and I wish you God-speed, dear boys.”

Two prouder lads never walked the streets than Frank and Jack as they hurried away, nearly forgetting the poor little paper in their haste to tell the good news; for it was seldom that such an offer was made the Lodge, and they felt the honor done them as bearers of it.

As the secrets of the association cannot be divulged to the uninitiated, we can only say that there was great rejoicing over the new member, for Bob was unanimously welcomed, and much gratitude both felt and expressed for Mr. Chauncey’s interest in this small division of the grand army; for these good folk met with little sympathy from the great people of the town, and it was very cheering to have a well-known and much-beloved man say a word for them. All agreed that the lecture should be public, that others might share the pleasure with them, and perhaps be converted by a higher eloquence than any they possessed.

So the services that night were unusually full of spirit and good cheer; for all felt the influence of a friendly word, the beauty of a fine example. The paper was much applauded, the songs were very hearty, and when Frank, whose turn it was to be chaplain, read the closing prayer, every one felt that they had much to give thanks for, since one more had joined them, and the work was slowly getting on with unexpected helpers sent to lend a hand. The lights shone out from the little hall across the street, the music reached the ears of passers-by, and the busy hum of voices up there told how faithfully some, at least, of the villagers tried to make the town a safer place for their boys to grow up in, though the tavern still had its private bar and the saloon-door stood open to invite them in.

There are many such quiet lodges, and in them many young people learning as these lads were learning something of the duty they owed their neighbors as well as themselves, and being fitted to become good men and sober citizens by practising and preaching the law and gospel of temperance.

The next night Mr. Chauncey lectured, and the town turned out to hear the distinguished man, who not only told them of the crime and misery produced by this terrible vice which afflicted both England and America, but of the great crusade against it going on everywhere, and the need of courage, patience, hard work, and much faith, that in time it might be overcome. Strong and cheerful words that all liked to hear and many heartily believed, especially the young Templars, whose boyish fancies were won by the idea of fighting as knights of old did in the famous crusades they read about in their splendid new young folks' edition of Froissart.

"We can't pitch into people as the Red Cross fellows did, but we can smash rum-jugs when we get the chance, and stand by our flag as our men did in the war," said Frank, with sparkling eyes, as they went home in the moonlight arm in arm, keeping step behind Mr. Chauncey, who led the way with their mother on his arm, a martial figure though a minister, and a good captain to follow, as the boys felt after hearing his stirring words.

"Let's try and get up a company of boys like those mother told us about, and show people that we mean what we say. I'll be color-bearer, and you may drill us as much as you like. A real Cold Water Army, with flags flying, and drums, and all sorts of larks," said Jack, much excited, and taking a dramatic view of the matter.

"We'll see about it. Something ought to be done, and perhaps we shall be the men to do it when the time comes," answered Frank, feeling ready to shoulder a musket or be a minute-man in good earnest.

Boyish talk and enthusiasm, but it was of the right sort; and when time and training had fitted them to bear arms, these young knights would be worthy to put on the red cross and ride away to help right the wrongs and slay the dragons that afflict the world.

Chapter XX. A Sweet Memory

Now the lovely June days had come, everything began to look really summer-like; school would soon be over, and the young people were joyfully preparing for the long vacation.

"We are all going up to Bethlehem. We take the seashore one year and the mountains the next. Better come along," said Gus, as the boys lay on the grass after beating the Lincolns at one of the first matches of the season.

"Can't; we are off to Pebbly Beach the second week in July. Our invalids need sea air. That one looks delicate, doesn't he?" asked Frank, giving Jack a slight rap with his bat as that young gentleman lay in his usual attitude admiring the blue hose and russet shoes which adorned his sturdy limbs.

"Stop that, Captain! You needn't talk about invalids, when you know mother says you are not to look at a book for a month because you have studied yourself thin and headachy. I'm all right;" and Jack gave himself a sounding slap on the chest, where shone the white star of the H.B.B.C.

"Hear the little cockerel crow! you just wait till you get into the college class, and see if you don't have to study like fun," said Gus, with unruffled composure, for he was going to Harvard next year, and felt himself already a Senior.

"Never shall; I don't want any of your old colleges. I'm going into business as soon as I can. Ed says I may be his book-keeper, if I am ready when he starts for himself. That is much jollier than grinding away for four years, and then having to grind ever so many more at a profession," said Jack, examining with interest the various knocks and bruises with which much ball-playing had adorned his hands.

"Much you know about it. Just as well you don't mean to try, for it would take a mighty long pull and strong pull to get you in. Business would suit you better, and you and Ed would make a capital partnership. Devlin, Minot, & Co. sounds well, hey, Gus?"

"Very, but they are such good-natured chaps, they'd never get rich. By the way, Ed came home at noon to-day sick. I met him, and he looked regularly knocked up," answered Gus, in a sober tone.

"I told him he'd better not go down Monday, for he wasn't well Saturday, and couldn't come to sing Sunday evening, you remember. I must go right round and see what the matter is;" and Jack jumped up, with an anxious face.

"Let him alone till to-morrow. He won't want any one fussing over him now.

We are going for a pull; come along and steer," said Frank, for the sunset promised to be fine, and the boys liked a brisk row in their newly painted boat, the "Rhodora."

"Go ahead and get ready, I'll just cut round and ask at the door. It will seem kind, and I must know how Ed is. Won't be long;" and Jack was off at his best pace.

The others were waiting impatiently when he came back with slower steps and a more anxious face.

"How is the old fellow?" called Frank from the boat, while Gus stood leaning on an oar in a nautical attitude.

"Pretty sick. Had the doctor. May have a fever. I didn't go in, but Ed sent his love, and wanted to know who beat," answered Jack, stepping to his place, glad to rest and cool himself.

"Guess he'll be all right in a day or two;" and Gus pushed off, leaving all care behind.

"Hope he won't have typhoid — that's no joke, I tell you," said Frank, who knew all about it, and did not care to repeat the experience.

"He's worked too hard. He's so faithful he does more than his share, and gets tired out. Mother asked him to come down and see us when he has his vacation; we are going to have high old times fishing and boating. Up or down?" asked Jack, as they glided out into the river.

Gus looked both ways, and seeing another boat with a glimpse of red in it just going round the bend, answered, with decision, "Up, of course. Don't we always pull to the bridge?"

"Not when the girls are going down," laughed Jack, who had recognized Juliet's scarlet boating-suit as he glanced over his shoulder.

"Mind what you are about, and don't gabble," commanded Captain Frank, as the crew bent to their oars and the slender boat cut through the water leaving a long furrow trembling behind.

"Oh, ah! I see! There is a blue jacket as well as a red one, so it's all right.

"Lady Queen Anne, she sits in the sun,
As white as a lily, as brown as a bun,"

sung Jack, recovering his spirits, and wishing Jill was there too.

"Do you want a ducking?" sternly demanded Gus, anxious to preserve discipline.

"Shouldn't mind, its so warm."

But Jack said no more, and soon the "Rhodora" was alongside the "Water Witch," exchanging greetings in the most amiable manner.

"Pity this boat won't hold four. We'd put Jack in yours, and take you girls a nice spin up to the Hemlocks," said Frank, whose idea of bliss was floating down the river with Annette as coxswain.

"You'd better come in here, this will hold four, and we are tired of rowing," returned the "Water Witch," so invitingly that Gus could not resist.

"I don't think it is safe to put four in there. You'd better change places with Annette, Gus, and then we shall be ship-shape," said Frank, answering a telegram from the eyes that matched the blue jacket.

"Wouldn't it be *more* ship-shape still if you put me ashore at Grif's landing? I can take his boat, or wait till you come back. Don't care what I do," said Jack, feeling himself sadly in the way.

The good-natured offer being accepted with thanks, the changes were made, and, leaving him behind, the two boats went gayly up the river. He really did not care what he did, so sat in Grif's boat awhile watching the red sky, the shining stream, and the low green meadows, where the blackbirds were singing as if they too had met their little sweethearts and were happy.

Jack remembered that quiet half-hour long afterward, because what followed seemed to impress it on his memory. As he sat enjoying the scene, he very naturally thought about Ed; for the face of the sister whom he saw was very anxious, and the word "fever" recalled the hard times when Frank was ill, particularly the night it was thought the boy would not live till dawn, and Jack cried himself to sleep, wondering how he ever could get on without his brother. Ed was almost as dear to him, and the thought that he was suffering destroyed Jack's pleasure for a little while. But, fortunately, young people do not know how to be anxious very long, so our boy soon cheered up, thinking about the late match between the Stars and the Lincolns, and after a good rest went whistling home, with a handful of mint for Mrs. Pecq, and played games with Jill as merrily as if there was no such thing as care in the world.

Next day Ed was worse, and for a week the answer was the same, when Jack crept to the back door with his eager question.

Others came also, for the dear boy lying upstairs had friends everywhere, and older neighbors thought of him even more anxiously and tenderly than his mates. It was not fever, but some swifter trouble, for when Saturday night came, Ed had gone home to a longer and more peaceful Sabbath than any he had ever known in this world.

Jack had been there in the afternoon, and a kind message had come down to him that his friend was not suffering so much, and he had gone away, hoping, in his boyish ignorance, that all danger was over. An hour later he was reading in the parlor, having no heart for play, when Frank came in with a look upon his face which would have prepared Jack for the news if he had seen it. But he did not look up, and Frank found it so hard to speak, that he lingered a moment at the piano, as he often did when he came home. It stood open, and on the rack was the "Jolly Brothers' Galop," which he had been learning to play with Ed. Big boy as he was, the sudden thought that never again would they sit shoulder to shoulder, thundering the marches or singing the songs both liked so well, made his eyes fill as he laid away the music, and shut the instrument, feeling as if he never wanted to touch it again. Then he went and sat down beside Jack with an arm round his neck, trying to steady his voice by a natural question before he told the heavy news.

"What are you reading, Jacky?"

The unusual caress, the very gentle tone, made Jack look up, and the minute he saw Frank's face he knew the truth.

"Is Ed — — ?" he could not say the hard word, and Frank could only answer by a nod as he winked fast, for the tears would come. Jack said no more, but as the book dropped from his knee he hid his face in the sofa-pillow and lay quite still, not crying, but trying to make it seem true that his dear Ed had gone away for ever. He could not do it, and presently turned his head a little to say, in a despairing tone, —

"I don't see what I *shall* do without him!"

"I know it's hard for you. It is for all of us."

"You've got Gus, but now I haven't anybody. Ed was always so good to me!" and with the name so many tender recollections came, that poor Jack broke down in spite of his manful attempts to smother the sobs in the red pillow.

There was an unconscious reproach in the words, Frank thought; for he was not as gentle as Ed, and he did not wonder that Jack loved and mourned for the lost friend like a brother.

"You've got me. I'll be good to you; cry if you want to, I don't mind."

There was such a sympathetic choke in Frank's voice that Jack felt comforted at once, and when he had had his cry out, which was very soon, he let Frank pull him up with a bear-like but affectionate hug, and sat leaning on him as they talked about their loss, both feeling that there might have been a greater one, and resolving to love one another very much hereafter.

Mrs. Minot often called Frank the "father-boy," because he was now the head of the house, and a sober, reliable fellow for his years. Usually he did not show much affection except to her, for, as he once said, "I shall never be too old to kiss my mother," and she often wished that he had a little sister, to bring out the softer side of his character. He domineered over Jack and laughed at his affectionate little ways, but now when trouble came, he was as kind and patient as a girl; and when Mamma came in, having heard the news, she found her "father-boy" comforting his brother so well that she slipped away without a word, leaving them to learn one of the sweet lessons sorrow teaches — to lean on one another, and let each trial bring them closer together.

It is often said that there should be no death or grief in children's stories. It is not wise to dwell on the dark and sad side of these things; but they have also a bright and lovely side, and since even the youngest, dearest, and most guarded child cannot escape some knowledge of the great mystery, is it not well to teach them in simple, cheerful ways that affection sweetens sorrow, and a lovely life can make death beautiful? I think so, therefore try to tell the last scene in the history of a boy who really lived and really left behind him a memory so precious that it will not be soon forgotten by those who knew and loved him. For the influence of this short life was felt by many, and even this brief record of it may do for other children what the reality did for those who still lay flowers on his grave, and try to be "as good as Eddy."

Few would have thought that the death of a quiet lad of seventeen would have been so widely felt, so sincerely mourned; but virtue, like sunshine, works its own sweet miracles, and when it was known that never again would the bright face be seen in the village streets, the cheery voice heard, the loving heart felt in any of the little acts which so endeared Ed Devlin to those about him, it seemed as if young and old grieved alike for so much promise cut off in its spring-time. This was proved at the funeral, for, though it took place at the busy hour of a busy day, men left their affairs, women their households, young people their studies and their play, and gave an hour to show their affection, respect, and sympathy for those who had lost so much.

The girls had trimmed the church with all the sweetest flowers they could find, and garlands of lilies of the valley robbed the casket of its mournful look. The boys had brought fresh boughs to make the grave a green bed for their comrade's last sleep. Now they were all gathered together, and it was a touching sight to see the rows of young faces sobered and saddened by their first look at sorrow. The girls sobbed, and the boys set their lips tightly as their glances fell upon the lilies under which the familiar face lay full of solemn peace. Tears dimmed older eyes when the hymn the dead boy loved was sung, and the pastor told with how much pride and pleasure he had watched the gracious growth of this young parishioner since he first met the lad of twelve and was attracted by the shining face, the pleasant manners. Dutiful and loving; ready to help; patient to bear and forbear; eager to excel; faithful to the smallest task, yet full of high ambitions; and, better still, possessing the childlike piety that can trust and believe, wait and hope. Good and happy — the two things we all long for and so few of us truly are. This he was, and this single fact was the best eulogy his pastor could pronounce over the beloved youth gone to a nobler manhood whose promise left so sweet a memory behind.

As the young people looked, listened, and took in the scene, they felt as if some mysterious power had changed their playmate from a creature like themselves into a sort of saint or hero for them to look up to, and imitate if they could. “What has he done, to be so loved, praised, and mourned?” they thought, with a tender sort of wonder; and the answer seemed to come to them as never before, for never had they been brought so near the solemn truth of life and death. “It was not what he did but what he was that made him so beloved. All that was sweet and noble in him still lives; for goodness is the only thing we can take with us when we die, the only thing that can comfort those we leave behind, and help us to meet again hereafter.”

This feeling was in many hearts when they went away to lay him, with prayer and music, under the budding oak that leaned over his grave, a fit emblem of the young life just beginning its new spring. As the children did their part, the beauty of the summer day soothed their sorrow, and something of the soft brightness of the June sunshine seemed to gild their thoughts, as it gilded the flower-strewn mound they left behind. The true and touching words spoken cheered as well as impressed them, and made them feel that their friend was not lost but gone on into a higher class of the great school whose Master is eternal love and wisdom. So the tears soon dried, and the young faces looked up like flowers after rain. But the heaven-sent shower sank into the earth, and they were the stronger, sweeter for it, more eager to make life brave and beautiful, because death had gently shown them what it should be.

When the boys came home they found their mother already returned, and Jill upon the parlor sofa listening to her account of the funeral with the same quiet, hopeful look which their own faces wore; for somehow the sadness seemed to have gone, and a sort of Sunday peace remained.

“I’m glad it was all so sweet and pleasant. Come and rest, you look so tired;” and Jill held out her hands to greet them — a crumpled handkerchief in one and a little bunch of fading lilies in the other.

Jack sat down in the low chair beside her and leaned his head against the arm of the sofa, for he was tired. But Frank walked slowly up and down the long rooms with a serious yet serene look on his face, for he felt as if he had learned something that day, and would always be the better for it. Presently he said, stopping before his mother, who leaned in the easy-chair looking up at the picture of her boys’ father, —

“I should like to have just such things said about me when I die.”

“So should I, if I deserved them as Ed did!” cried Jack, earnestly.

"You may if you try. I should be proud to hear them, and if they were true, they would comfort me more than anything else. I am glad you see the lovely side of sorrow, and are learning the lesson such losses teach us," answered their mother, who believed in teaching young people to face trouble bravely, and find the silver lining in the clouds that come to all of us.

"I never thought much about it before, but now dying doesn't seem dreadful at all — only solemn and beautiful. Somehow everybody seems to love everybody else more for it, and try to be kind and good and pious. I can't say what I mean, but you know, mother;" and Frank went pacing on again with the bright look his eyes always wore when he listened to music or read of some noble action.

"That's what Merry said when she and Molly came in on their way home. But Molly felt dreadfully, and so did Mabel. She brought me these flowers to press, for we are all going to keep some to remember dear Ed by," said Jill, carefully smoothing out the little bells as she laid the lilies in her hymn-book, for she too had had a thoughtful hour while she lay alone, imagining all that went on in the church, and shedding a few tender tears over the friend who was always so kind to her.

"I don't want anything to remember him by. I was so fond of him, I couldn't forget if I tried. I know I ought not to say it, but I *don't* see why God let him die," said Jack, with a quiver in his voice, for his loving heart could not help aching still.

"No, dear, we cannot see or know many things that grieve us very much, but we *can* trust that it is right, and try to believe that all is meant for our good. That is what faith means, and without it we are miserable. When you were little, you were afraid of the dark, but if I spoke or touched you, then you were sure all was well, and fell asleep holding my hand. God is wiser and stronger than any father or mother, so hold fast to Him, and you will have no doubt or fear, however dark it seems."

"As you do," said Jack, going to sit on the arm of Mamma's chair, with his cheek to hers, willing to trust as she bade him, but glad to hold fast the living hand that had led and comforted him all his life.

"Ed used to say to me when I fretted about getting well, and thought nobody cared for me, which was very naughty, 'Don't be troubled, God won't forget you; and if you must be lame, He will make you able to bear it,'" said Jill, softly, her quick little mind all alive with new thoughts and feelings.

"He believed it, and that's why he liked that hymn so much. I'm glad they sung it to-day," said Frank, bringing his heavy dictionary to lay on the book where the flowers were pressing.

"Oh, thank you! Could you play that tune for me? I didn't hear it, and I'd love to, if you are willing," asked Jill.

"I didn't think I ever should want to play again, but I do. Will you sing it for her, mother? I'm afraid I shall break down if I try alone."

"We will all sing, music is good for us now," said Mamma; and in rather broken voices they did sing Ed's favorite words: —

"Not a sparrow falleth but its God doth know,
Just as when his mandate lays a monarch low;
Not a leaflet moveth, but its God doth see,
Think not, then, O mortal, God forgetteth thee.
Far more precious surely than the birds that fly
Is a Father's image to a Father's eye.
E'en thy hairs are numbered; trust Him full and free,
Cast thy cares before Him, He will comfort thee;
For the God that planted in thy breast a soul,
On his sacred tables doth thy name enroll.
Cheer thine heart, then, mortal, never faithless be,
He that marks the sparrows will remember thee."

Chapter XXI. Pebbly Beach

"Now, Mr. Jack, it is a moral impossibility to get all those things into one trunk, and you mustn't ask it of me," said Mrs. Pecq, in a tone of despair, as she surveyed the heap of treasures she was expected to pack for the boys.

"Never mind the clothes, we only want a boating-suit apiece. Mamma can put a few collars in her trunk for us; but these necessary things *must* go," answered Jack, adding his target and air-pistol to the pile of bats, fishing-tackle, games, and a choice collection of shabby balls.

"Those are the necessaries and clothes the luxuries, are they? Why don't you add a velocipede, wheelbarrow, and printing-press, my dear?" asked Mrs. Pecq, while Jill turned up her nose at "boys' rubbish."

"Wish I could. Dare say we shall want them. Women don't know what fellows need, and always must put in a lot of stiff shirts and clean handkerchiefs and clothes-brushes and pots of cold cream. We are going to rough it, and don't want any fuss and feathers," said Jack, beginning to pack the precious balls in his rubber boots, and strap them up with the umbrellas, rods, and bats, seeing that there was no hope of a place in the trunk.

Here Frank came in with two big books, saying calmly, "Just slip these in somewhere, we shall need them."

"But you are not to study at all, so you won't want those great dictionaries," cried Jill, busily packing her new travelling-basket with all sorts of little rolls, bags, and boxes.

"They are not dics, but my Encyclopedia. We shall want to know heaps of things, and this tells about everything. With those books, and a microscope and a telescope, you could travel round the world, and learn all you wanted to. Can't possibly get on without them," said Frank, fondly patting his favorite work.

"My patience! What queer cattle boys are!" exclaimed Mrs. Pecq, while they all laughed. "It can't be done, Mr. Frank; all the boxes are brim full, and you'll have to leave those fat books behind, for there's no place anywhere."

"Then I'll carry them myself;" and Frank tucked one under each arm, with a determined air, which settled the matter.

"I suppose you'll study cockleology instead of boating, and read up on polywogs while we play tennis, or go poking round with your old spy-glass instead of having a jolly good time," said Jack, hauling away on the strap till all was taut and ship-shape with the bundle.

"Tadpoles don't live in salt water, my son, and if you mean conchology, you'd better say so. I shall play as much as I wish, and when I want to know about any new or curious thing, I shall consult my Cyclo, instead of bothering other people with questions, or giving it up like a dunce;" with which crushing reply Frank departed, leaving Jill to pack and unpack her treasures a dozen times, and Jack to dance jigs on the lids of the trunks till they would shut.

A very happy party set off the next day, leaving Mrs. Pecq waving her apron on the steps. Mrs. Minot carried the lunch, Jack his precious bundle with trifles dropping out by the way, and Jill felt very elegant bearing her new basket with red worsted cherries bobbing on the outside. Frank actually did take the Encyclopedia, done up in the roll of shawls, and whenever the others wondered about anything — tides, lighthouses, towns, or natural productions — he brought forth one of the books and triumphantly read therefrom, to the great merriment, if not edification, of his party.

A very short trip by rail and the rest of the journey by boat, to Jill's great contentment, for she hated to be shut up; and while the lads roved here and there she sat under the awning, too happy to talk. But Mrs. Minot watched with real satisfaction how the fresh wind blew the color back into the pale cheeks, how the eyes shone and the heart filled with delight at seeing the lovely world again, and being able to take a share in its active pleasures.

The Willows was a long, low house close to the beach, and as full as a beehive of pleasant people, all intent on having a good time. A great many children were swarming about, and Jill found it impossible to sleep after her journey, there was such a lively clatter of tongues on the piazzas, and so many feet going to and fro in the halls. She lay down obediently while Mrs. Minot settled matters in the two airy rooms and gave her some dinner, but she kept popping up her head to look out of the window to see what she could see. Just opposite stood an artist's cottage and studio, with all manner of charming galleries, towers, steps, and even a sort of drawbridge to pull up when the painter wished to be left in peace. He was absent now, and the visitors took possession of this fine play-place. Children were racing up and down the galleries, ladies sitting in the tower, boys disporting themselves on the roof, and young gentlemen preparing for theatricals in the large studio.

"What fun I'll have over there," thought Jill, watching the merry scene with intense interest, and wondering if the little girls she saw were as nice as Molly and Merry.

Then there were glimpses of the sea beyond the green bank where a path wound along to the beach, whence came the cool dash of waves, and now and then the glimmer of a passing sail.

“Oh, when can I go out? It looks *so* lovely, I can’t wait long,” she said, looking as eager as a little gull shut up in a cage and pining for its home on the wide ocean.

“As soon as it is a little cooler, dear, I’m getting ready for our trip, but we must be careful and not do too much at once. ‘Slow and sure’ is our motto,” answered Mrs. Minot, busily collecting the camp-stools, the shawls, the air-cushions, and the big parasols.

“I’ll be good, only do let me have my sailor-hat to wear, and my new suit. I’m not a bit tired, and I do want to be like other folks right off,” said Jill, who had been improving rapidly of late, and felt much elated at being able to drive out nearly every day, to walk a little, and sit up some hours without any pain or fatigue.

To gratify her, the blue flannel suit with its white trimming was put on, and Mamma was just buttoning the stout boots when Jack thundered at the door, and burst in with all sorts of glorious news.

“Do come out, mother, it’s perfectly splendid on the beach! I’ve found a nice place for Jill to sit, and it’s only a step. Lots of capital fellows here; one has a bicycle, and is going to teach us to ride. No end of fun up at the hotel, and every one seems glad to see us. Two ladies asked about Jill, and one of the girls has got some shells all ready for her, Gerty Somebody, and her mother is so pretty and jolly, I like her ever so much. They sit at our table, and Wally is the boy, younger than I am, but very pleasant. Bacon is the fellow in knickerbockers; just wish you could see what stout legs he’s got! Cox is the chap for me, though: we are going fishing to-morrow. He’s got a sweet-looking mother, and a sister for you, Jill. Now, then, *do* come on, I’ll take the traps.”

Off they went, and Jill thought that very short walk to the shore the most delightful she ever took; for people smiled at the little invalid as she went slowly by leaning on Mrs. Minot’s arm, while Jack pranced in front, doing the honors, as if he owned the whole Atlantic. A new world opened to her eyes as they came out upon the pebbly beach full of people enjoying their afternoon promenade. Jill save one rapturous “Oh!” and then sat on her stool, forgetting everything but the beautiful blue ocean rolling away to meet the sky, with nothing to break the wide expanse but a sail here and there, a point of rocks on one hand, the little pier on the other, and white gulls skimming by on their wide wings.

While she sat enjoying herself, Jack showed his mother the place he had found, and a very nice one it was. Just under the green bank lay an old boat propped up with some big stones. A willow drooped over it, the tide rippled up within a few yards of it, and a fine view of the waves could be seen as they dashed over the rocks at the point.

"Isn't it a good cubby-house? Ben Cox and I fixed it for Jill, and she can have it for hers. Put her cushions and things there on the sand the children have thrown in — that will make it soft; then these seats will do for tables; and up in the bow I'm going to have that old rusty tin boiler full of salt-water, so she can put seaweed and crabs and all sorts of chaps in it for an aquarium, you know," explained Jack, greatly interested in establishing his family comfortably before he left them.

"There couldn't be a nicer place, and it is very kind of you to get it ready. Spread the shawls and settle Jill, then you needn't think of us any more, but go and scramble with Frank. I see him over there with his spy-glass and some pleasant-looking boys," said Mamma, bustling about in great spirits.

So the red cushions were placed, the plaids laid, and the little work-basket set upon the seat, all ready for Jill, who was charmed with her nest, and cuddled down under the big parasol, declaring she would keep house there every day.

Even the old boiler pleased her, and Jack raced over the beach to begin his search for inhabitants for the new aquarium, leaving Jill to make friends with some pretty babies digging in the sand, while Mamma sat on the camp-stool and talked with a friend from Harmony Village.

It seemed as if there could not be anything more delightful than to lie there lulled by the sound of the sea, watching the sunset and listening to the pleasant babble of little voices close by. But when they went to tea in the great hall, with six tables full of merry people, and half a dozen maids flying about, Jill thought that was even better, because it was so new to her. Gerty and Wally nodded to her, and their pretty mamma was so kind and so gay, that Jill could not feel bashful after the first few minutes, and soon looked about her, sure of seeing friendly faces everywhere. Frank and Jack ate as if the salt air had already improved their appetites, and talked about Bacon and Cox as if they had been bosom friends for years. Mamma was as happy as they, for her friend, Mrs. Hammond, sat close by; and this rosy lady, who had been a physician, cheered her up by predicting that Jill would soon be running about as well as ever.

But the best of all was in the evening, when the elder people gathered in the parlors and played Twenty Questions, while the children looked on for an hour before going to bed, much amused at the sight of grown people laughing, squabbling, dodging, and joking as if they had all become young again; for, as every one knows, it is impossible to help lively skirmishes when that game is played. Jill lay in the sofa corner enjoying it all immensely; for she never saw anything so droll, and found it capital fun to help guess the thing, or try to puzzle the opposite side. Her quick wits and bright face attracted people, and in the pauses of the sport she held quite a levee, for everybody was interested in the little invalid. The girls shyly made friends in their own way, the mammas told thrilling tales of the accidents their darlings had survived, several gentlemen kindly offered their boats, and the boys, with the best intentions in life, suggested strolls of two or three miles to Rafe’s Chasm and Norman’s Woe, or invited her to tennis and archery, as if violent exercise was the cure for all human ills. She was very grateful, and reluctantly went away to bed, declaring, when she got upstairs, that these new friends were the dearest people she ever met, and the Willows the most delightful place in the whole world.

Next day a new life began for the young folks — a very healthy, happy life; and all threw themselves into it so heartily, that it was impossible to help getting great good from it, for these summer weeks, if well spent, work miracles in tired bodies and souls. Frank took a fancy to the bicycle boy, and, being able to hire one of the breakneck articles, soon learned to ride it; and the two might be seen wildly working their long legs on certain smooth stretches of road, or getting up their muscle rowing about the bay till they were almost as brown and nautical in appearance and language as the fishermen who lived in nooks and corners along the shore.

Jack struck up a great friendship with the sturdy Bacon and the agreeable Cox: the latter, being about his own age, was his especial favorite; and they soon were called Box and Cox by the other fellows, which did not annoy them a bit, as both had played parts in that immortal farce. They had capital times fishing, scrambling over the rocks, playing ball and tennis, and rainy days they took possession of the studio opposite, drew up the portcullis, and gallantly defended the castle, which some of the others besieged with old umbrellas for shields, bats for battering-rams, and bunches of burrs for cannon-balls. Great larks went on over there, while the girls applauded from the piazza or chamber-windows, and made a gay flag for the victors to display from the tower when the fight was over.

But Jill had the best time of all, for each day brought increasing strength and spirits, and she improved so fast it was hard to believe that she was the same girl who lay so long almost helpless in the Bird Room at home. Such lively letters as she sent her mother, all about her new friends, her fine sails, drives, and little walks; the good times she had in the evening, the lovely things people gave her, and she was learning to make with shells and sea-weed, and what splendid fun it was to keep house in a boat.

This last amusement soon grew quite absorbing, and her “cubby,” as she called it, rapidly became a pretty grotto, where she lived like a little mermaid, daily loving more and more the beauty of the wonderful sea. Finding the boat too sunny at times, the boys cut long willow boughs and arched them over the seats, laying hemlock branches across till a green roof made it cool and shady inside. There Jill sat or lay among her cushions reading, trying to sketch, sorting shells, drying gay sea-weeds, or watching her crabs, jelly-fish, and anemones in the old boiler, now buried in sand and edged about with moss from the woods.

Nobody disturbed her treasures, but kindly added to them, and often when she went to her nest she found fruit or flowers, books or bon-bons, laid ready for her. Every one pitied and liked the bright little girl who could not run and frisk with the rest, who was so patient and cheerful after her long confinement, ready to help others, and so grateful for any small favor. She found now that the weary months had not been wasted, and was very happy to discover in herself a new sort of strength and sweetness that was not only a comfort to her, but made those about her love and trust her. The songs she had learned attracted the babies, who would leave their play to peep at her and listen when she sung over her work. Passers-by paused to hear the blithe voice of the bird in the green cage, and other invalids, strolling on the beach, would take heart when they saw the child so happy in spite of her great trial.

The boys kept all their marine curiosities for her, and were always ready to take her a row or a sail, as the bay was safe and that sort of travelling suited her better than driving. But the girls had capital times together, and it did Jill good to see another sort from those she knew at home. She had been so much petted of late, that she was getting rather vain of her small accomplishments, and being with strangers richer, better bred and educated than herself, made her more humble in some things, while it showed her the worth of such virtues as she could honestly claim. Mamie Cox took her to drive in the fine carriage of her mamma, and Jill was much impressed by the fact that Mamie was not a bit proud about it, and did not put on any airs, though she had a maid to take care of her. Gerty wore pretty costumes, and came down with pink and blue ribbons in her hair that Jill envied very much; yet Gerty liked her curls, and longed to have some, while her mother, “the lady from Philadelphia,” as they called her, was so kind and gay that Jill quite adored her, and always felt as if sunshine had come into the room when she entered. Two little sisters were very interesting to her, and made her long for one of her own when she saw them going about together and heard them talk of their pleasant home, where the great silk factories were. But they invited her to come and see the wonderful cocoons, and taught her to knot pretty gray fringe on a cushion, which delighted her, being so new and easy. There were several other nice little lasses, and they all gathered about Jill with the sweet sympathy children are so quick to show toward those in pain or misfortune. She thought they would not care for a poor little girl like herself, yet here she was the queen of the troupe, and this discovery touched and pleased her very much.

In the morning they camped round the boat on the stones with books, gay work, and merry chatter, till bathing-time. Then the beach was full of life and fun, for every one looked so droll in the flannel suits, it was hard to believe that the neat ladies and respectable gentlemen who went into the little houses could be the same persons as the queer, short-skirted women with old hats tied down, and bareheaded, barefooted men in old suits, who came skipping over the sand to disport themselves in the sea in the most undignified ways. The boys raced about, looking like circus-tumblers, and the babies were regular little cupids, running away from the waves that tried to kiss their flying feet.

Some of the young ladies and girls were famous swimmers, and looked very pretty in their bright red and blue costumes, with loose hair and gay stockings, as they danced into the water and floated away as fearlessly as real mermaidens. Jill had her quiet dip and good rubbing each fine day, and then lay upon the warm sand watching the pranks of the others, and longing to run and dive and shout and tumble with the rest. Now that she was among the well and active, it seemed harder to be patient than when shut up and unable to stir. She felt so much better, and had so little pain to remind her of past troubles, it was almost impossible to help forgetting the poor back and letting her recovered spirits run away with her. If Mrs. Minot had not kept good watch, she would have been off more than once, so eager was she to be “like other girls” again, so difficult was it to keep the restless feet quietly folded among the red cushions.

One day she did yield to temptation, and took a little voyage which might have been her last, owing to the carelessness of those whom she trusted. It was a good lesson, and made her as meek as a lamb during the rest of her stay. Mrs. Minot drove to Gloucester one afternoon, leaving Jill safely established after her nap in the boat, with Gerty and Mamie making lace beside her.

“Don’t try to walk or run about, my dear. Sit on the piazza if you get tired of this, and amuse yourself quietly till I come back. I’ll not forget the worsted and the canvas,” said Mamma, peeping over the bank for a last word as she waited for the omnibus to come along.

“Oh, *don’t* forget the Gibraltars!” cried Jill, popping her head out of the green roof.

“Nor the bananas, please!” added Gerty, looking round one end.

“Nor the pink and blue ribbon to tie our shell-baskets,” called Mamie, nearly tumbling into the aquarium at the other end.

Mrs. Minot laughed, and promised, and rumbled away, leaving Jill to an experience which she never forgot.

For half an hour the little girls worked busily, then the boys came for Gerty and Mamie to go to the Chasm with a party of friends who were to leave next day. Off they went, and Jill felt very lonely as the gay voices died away. Every one had gone somewhere, and only little Harry Hammond and his maid were on the beach. Two or three sand-pipers ran about among the pebbles, and Jill envied them their nimble legs so much, that she could not resist getting up to take a few steps. She longed to run straight away over the firm, smooth sand, and feel again the delight of swift motion; but she dared not try it, and stood leaning on her tall parasol with her book in her hand, when Frank, Jack, and the bicycle boy came rowing lazily along and hailed her.

“Come for a sail, Jill? Take you anywhere you like,” called Jack, touched by the lonely figure on the beach.

“I’d love to go, if you will row. Mamma made me promise not to go sailing without a man to take care of me. Would it spoil your fun to have me?” answered Jill, eagerly.

“Not a bit; come out on the big stones and we’ll take you aboard,” said Frank, as they steered to the place where she could embark the easiest.

“All the rest are gone to the Chasm. I wanted to go, because I’ve never seen it; but, of course, I had to give it up, as I do most of the fun;” and Jill sat down with an impatient sigh.

“We’ll row you round there. Can’t land, but you can see the place and shout to the others, if that will be any comfort to you,” proposed Frank, as they pulled away round the pier.

“Oh, yes, that would be lovely!” and Jill smiled at Jack, who was steering, for she found it impossible to be dismal now with the fresh wind blowing in her face, the blue waves slapping against the boat, and three good-natured lads ready to gratify her wishes.

Away they went, laughing and talking gayly till they came to Goodwin’s Rocks, where an unusual number of people were to be seen though the tide was going out, and no white spray was dashing high into the air to make a sight worth seeing.

“What do you suppose they are about? Never saw such a lot of folks at this time. Shouldn’t wonder if something had happened. I say, put me ashore, and I’ll cut up and see,” said the bicycle boy, who was of an inquiring turn.

“I’ll go with you,” said Frank; “it won’t take but a minute, and I’d like to discover what it is. May be something we ought to know about.”

So the boys pulled round into a quiet nook, and the two elder ones scrambled up the rocks, to disappear in the crowd. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and they did not return. Jack grew impatient, so did Jill, and bade him run up and bring them back. Glad to know what kept them, Jack departed, to be swallowed up in his turn, for not a sign of a boy did she see after that; and, having vainly strained her eyes to discover the attraction which held them, she gave it up, lay down on their jackets, and began to read.

Then the treacherous tide, as it ebbed lower and lower down the beach, began to lure the boat away; for it was not fastened, and when lightened of its load was an easy prize to the hungry sea, always ready to steal all it can. Jill knew nothing of this, for her story was dull, the gentle motion proved soothing, and before she knew it she was asleep. Little by little the runaway boat slid farther from the shore, and presently was floating out to sea with its drowsy freight, while the careless boys, unconscious of the time they were wasting, lingered to see group after group photographed by the enterprising man who had trundled his camera to the rocks.

In the midst of a dream about home, Jill was roused by a loud shout, and, starting up so suddenly that the sun-umbrella went overboard, she found herself sailing off alone, while the distracted lads roared and beckoned vainly from the cove. The oars lay at their feet, where they left them; and the poor child was quite helpless, for she could not manage the sail, and even the parasol, with which she might have paddled a little, had gone down with all sail set. For a minute, Jill was so frightened that she could only look about her with a scared face, and wonder if drowning was a very disagreeable thing. Then the sight of the bicycle boy struggling with Jack, who seemed inclined to swim after her, and Frank shouting wildly, “Hold on! Come back!” made her laugh in spite of her fear, it was so comical, and their distress so much greater than hers, since it was their own carelessness which caused the trouble.

“I can’t come back! There’s nothing to hold on to! You didn’t fasten me, and now I don’t know where I’m going!” cried Jill, looking from the shore to the treacherous sea that was gently carrying her away.

“Keep cool! We’ll get a boat and come after you,” roared Frank, before he followed Jack, who had collected his wits and was tearing up the rocks like a chamois hunter.

The bicycle boy calmly sat down to keep his eye on the runaway, calling out from time to time such cheering remarks as “All aboard for Liverpool! Give my love to Victoria! Luff and bear away when you come to Halifax! If you are hard up for provisions, you’ll find an apple and some bait in my coat-pocket,” and other directions for a comfortable voyage, till his voice was lost in the distance as a stronger current bore her swiftly away and the big waves began to tumble and splash.

At first Jill had laughed at his efforts to keep up her spirits, but when the boat floated round a point of rock that shut in the cove, she felt all alone, and sat quite still, wondering what would become of her. She turned her back to the sea and looked at the dear, safe land, which never had seemed so green and beautiful before. Up on the hill rustled the wood through which the happy party were wandering to the Chasm. On the rocks she still saw the crowd all busy with their own affairs, unconscious of her danger. Here and there artists were sketching in picturesque spots, and in one place an old gentleman sat fishing peacefully. Jill called and waved her handkerchief, but he never looked up, and an ugly little dog barked at her in what seemed to her a most cruel way.

"Nobody sees or hears or cares, and those horrid boys will never catch up!" she cried in despair, as the boat began to rock more and more, and the loud swash of water dashing in and out of the Chasm drew nearer and nearer. Holding on now with both hands she turned and looked straight before her, pale and shivering, while her eyes tried to see some sign of hope among the steep cliffs that rose up on the left. No one was there, though usually at this hour they were full of visitors, and it was time for the walkers to have arrived.

"I wonder if Gerty and Mamie will be sorry if I'm drowned," thought Jill, remembering the poor girl who had been lost in the Chasm not long ago. Her lively fancy pictured the grief of her friends at her loss; but that did not help or comfort her now, and as her anxious gaze wandered along the shore, she said aloud, in a pensive tone, —

"Perhaps I shall be wrecked on Norman's Woe, and somebody will make poetry about me. It would be pretty to read, but I don't want to die that way. Oh, why did I come! Why didn't I stay safe and comfortable in my own boat?"

At the thought a sob rose, and poor Jill laid her head down on her lap to cry with all her heart, feeling very helpless, small, and forsaken alone there on the great sea. In the midst of her tears came the thought, "When people are in danger, they ask God to save them;" and, slipping down upon her knees, she said her prayer as she had never said it before, for when human help seems gone we turn to Him as naturally as lost children cry to their father, and feel sure that he will hear and answer them.

After that she felt better, and wiped away the drops that blinded her, to look out again like a shipwrecked mariner watching for a sail. And there it was! Close by, coming swiftly on with a man behind it, a sturdy brown fisher, busy with his lobster-pots, and quite unconscious how like an angel he looked to the helpless little girl in the rudderless boat.

"Hi! hi! Oh, please do stop and get me! I'm lost, no oars, nobody to fix the sail! Oh, oh! please come!" screamed Jill, waving her hat frantically as the other boat skimmed by and the man stared at her as if she really was a mermaid with a fishy tail.

“Keep still! I’ll come about and fetch you!” he called out; and Jill obeyed, sitting like a little image of faith, till with a good deal of shifting and flapping of the sail, the other boat came alongside and took her in tow.

A few words told the story, and in five minutes she was sitting snugly tucked up watching an unpleasant mass of lobsters flap about dangerously near her toes, while the boat bounded over the waves with a delightful motion, and every instant brought her nearer home. She did not say much, but felt a good deal; and when they met two boats coming to meet her, manned by very anxious crews of men and boys, she was so pale and quiet that Jack was quite bowed down with remorse, and Frank nearly pitched the bicycle boy overboard because he gayly asked Jill how she left her friends in England. There was great rejoicing over her, for the people on the rocks had heard of her loss, and ran about like ants when their hill is disturbed. Of course half a dozen amiable souls posted off to the Willows to tell the family that the little girl was drowned, so that when the rescuers appeared quite a crowd was assembled on the beach to welcome her. But Jill felt so used up with her own share of the excitement that she was glad to be carried to the house by Frank and Jack, and laid upon her bed, where Mrs. Hammond soon restored her with sugar-coated pills, and words even sweeter and more soothing.

Other people, busied with their own pleasures, forgot all about it by the next day; but Jill remembered that hour long afterward, both awake and asleep, for her dreams were troubled, and she often started up imploring someone to save her. Then she would recall the moment when, feeling most helpless, she had asked for help, and it had come as quickly as if that tearful little cry had been heard and answered, though her voice had been drowned by the dash of the waves that seemed ready to devour her. This made a deep impression on her, and a sense of childlike faith in the Father of all began to grow up within her; for in that lonely voyage, short as it was, she had found a very precious treasure to keep for ever, to lean on, and to love during the longer voyage which all must take before we reach our home.

Chapter XXII. A Happy Day

“Oh dear! Only a week more, and then we must go back. Don’t you hate the thoughts of it?” said Jack, as he was giving Jill her early walk on the beach one August morning.

“Yes, it will be dreadful to leave Gerty and Mamie and all the nice people. But I’m so much better I won’t have to be shut up again, even if I don’t go to school. How I long to see Merry and Molly. Dear things, if it wasn’t for them I should hate going home more than you do,” answered Jill, stepping along quite briskly, and finding it very hard to resist breaking into a skip or a run, she felt so well and gay.

“Wish they could be here to-day to see the fun,” said Jack, for it was the anniversary of the founding of the place, and the people celebrated it by all sorts of festivity.

“I did want to ask Molly, but your mother is so good to me I couldn’t find courage to do it. Mammy told me not to ask for a thing, and I’m sure I don’t get a chance. I feel just as if I was your truly born sister, Jack.”

“That’s all right, I’m glad you do,” answered Jack, comfortably, though his mind seemed a little absent and his eyes twinkled when she spoke of Molly. “Now, you sit in the cubby-house, and keep quiet till the boat comes in. Then the fun will begin, and you must be fresh and ready to enjoy it. Don’t run off, now, I shall want to know where to find you by and by.”

“No more running off, thank you. I’ll stay here till you come, and finish this box for Molly; she has a birthday this week, and I’ve written to ask what day, so I can send it right up and surprise her.”

Jack’s eyes twinkled more than ever as he helped Jill settle herself in the boat, and then with a whoop he tore over the beach, as if practising for the race which was to come off in the afternoon.

Jill was so busy with her work that time went quickly, and the early boat came in just as the last pink shell was stuck in its place. Putting the box in the sun to dry, she leaned out of her nook to watch the gay parties land, and go streaming up the pier along the road that went behind the bank that sheltered her. Flocks of children were running about on the sand, and presently strangers appeared, eager to see and enjoy all the delights of this gala-day.

“There’s a fat little boy who looks ever so much like Boo,” said Jill to herself, watching the people and hoping they would not come and find her, since she had promised to stay till Jack returned.

The fat little boy was staring about him in a blissful sort of maze, holding a wooden shovel in one hand and the skirts of a young girl with the other. Her back was turned to Jill, but something in the long brown braid with a fly-away blue bow hanging down her back looked very familiar to Jill. So did the gray suit and the Japanese umbrella; but the hat was strange, and while she was thinking how natural the boots looked, the girl turned round.

"Why, how much she looks like Molly! It can't be — yes, it might, I do believe it *is*!" cried Jill, starting up and hardly daring to trust her own eyes.

As she came out of her nest and showed herself, there could be no doubt about the other girl, for she gave one shout and came racing over the beach with both arms out, while her hat blew off unheeded, and the gay umbrella flew away, to the great delight of all the little people except Boo, who was upset by his sister's impetuous rush, and lay upon his back howling. Molly did not do all the running, though, and Jill got her wish, for, never stopping to think of herself, she was off at once, and met her friend half-way with an answering cry. It was a pretty sight to see them run into one another's arms and hug and kiss and talk and skip in such a state of girlish joy they never cared who saw or laughed at their innocent raptures.

"You darling dear! where did you come from?" cried Jill, holding Molly by both shoulders, and shaking her a little to be sure she was real.

"Mrs. Minot sent for us to spend a week. You look so well, I can't believe my eyes!" answered Molly, patting Jill's cheeks and kissing them over and over, as if to make sure the bright color would not come off.

"A week? How splendid! Oh, I've such heaps to tell and show you; come right over to my cubby and see how lovely it is," said Jill, forgetting everybody else in her delight at getting Molly.

"I must get poor Boo, and my hat and umbrella, I left them all behind me when I saw you," laughed Molly, looking back.

But Mrs. Minot and Jack had consoled Boo and collected the scattered property, so the girls went on arm in arm, and had a fine time before any one had the heart to disturb them. Molly was charmed with the boat, and Jill very glad the box was done in season. Both had so much to tell and hear and plan, that they would have sat there for ever if bathing-time had not come, and the beach suddenly looked like a bed of red and yellow tulips, for every one took a dip, and the strangers added much to the fun.

Molly could swim like a duck, and quite covered herself with glory by diving off the pier. Jack undertook to teach Boo, who was a promising pupil, being so plump that he could not sink if he tried. Jill was soon through, and lay on the sand enjoying the antics of the bathers till she was so faint with laughter she was glad to hear the dinner-horn and do the honors of the Willows to Molly, whose room was next hers.

Boat-races came first in the afternoon, and the girls watched them, sitting luxuriously in the nest, with the ladies and children close by. The sailing-matches were very pretty to see; but Molly and Jill were more interested in the rowing, for Frank and the bicycle boy pulled one boat, and the friends felt that this one must win. It did, though the race was not very exciting nor the prize of great worth; but the boys and girls were satisfied, and Jack was much exalted, for he always told Frank he could do great things if he would only drop books and "go in on his muscle."

Foot-races followed, and, burning to distinguish himself also, Jack insisted on trying, though his mother warned him that the weak leg might be harmed, and he had his own doubts about it, as he was all out of practice. However, he took his place with a handkerchief tied round his head, red shirt and stockings, and his sleeves rolled up as if he meant business. Jill and Molly could not sit still during this race, and stood on the bank quite trembling with excitement as the half-dozen runners stood in a line at the starting-post waiting for the word "Go!"

Off they went at last over the smooth beach to the pole with the flag at the further end, and every one watched them with mingled interest and merriment, for they were a droll set, and the running not at all scientific with most of them. One young fisherman with big boots over his trousers started off at a great pace, pounding along in the most dogged way, while a little chap in a tight bathing-suit with very thin legs skimmed by him, looking so like a sand-piper it was impossible to help laughing at both. Jack's former training stood him in good stead now; for he went to work in professional style, and kept a steady trot till the flagpole had been passed, then he put on his speed and shot ahead of all the rest, several of whom broke down and gave up. But Cox and Bacon held on gallantly; and soon it was evident that the sturdy legs in the knickerbockers were gaining fast, for Jack gave his ankle an ugly wrench on a round pebble, and the weak knee began to fail. He did his best, however, and quite a breeze of enthusiasm stirred the spectators as the three boys came down the course like mettlesome horses, panting, pale, or purple, but each bound to win at any cost.

"Now, Bacon!" "Go it, Minot!" "Hit him up, Cox!" "Jack's ahead!" "No, he isn't!" "Here they come!" "Bacon's done it!" shouted the other boys, and they were right; Bacon had won, for the gray legs came in just half a yard ahead of the red ones, and Minot tumbled into his brother's arms with hardly breath enough left to gasp out, good-humoredly, "All right, I'm glad he beat!"

Then the victor was congratulated and borne off by his friends to refresh himself, while the lookers-on scattered to see a game of tennis and the shooting of the Archery Club up at the hotel. Jack was soon rested, and, making light of his defeat, insisted on taking the girls to see the fun. So they drove up in the old omnibus, and enjoyed the pretty sight very much; for the young ladies were in uniform, and the broad green ribbons over the white dresses, the gay quivers, long bows, and big targets, made a lively scene. The shooting was good; a handsome damsel got the prize of a dozen arrows, and every one clapped in the most enthusiastic manner.

Molly and Jill did not care about tennis, so they went home to rest and dress for the evening, because to their minds the dancing, the illumination, and the fireworks were the best fun of all. Jill's white bunting with cherry ribbons was very becoming, and the lively feet in the new slippers patted the floor impatiently as the sound of dance music came down to the Willows after tea, and the other girls waltzed on the wide piazza because they could not keep still.

"No dancing for me, but Molly must have a good time. You'll see that she does, won't you, boys?" said Jill, who knew that her share of the fun would be lying on a settee and watching the rest enjoy her favorite pastime.

Frank and Jack promised, and kept their word handsomely; for there was plenty of room in the great dancing-hall at the hotel, and the band in the pavilion played such inspiring music that, as the bicycle boy said, "Every one who had a leg couldn't help shaking it." Molly was twirled about to her heart's content, and flew hither and thither like a blue butterfly; for all the lads liked her, and she kept running up to tell Jill the funny things they said and did.

As night darkened from all the houses in the valley, on the cliffs and along the shore lights shone and sparkled; for every one decorated with gay lanterns, and several yachts in the bay strung colored lamps about the little vessels, making a pretty picture on the quiet sea. Jill thought she had never seen anything so like fairy-land, and felt very like one in a dream as she drove slowly up and down with Mamie, Gerty, Molly, and Mrs. Cox in the carriage, so that she might see it all without too much fatigue. It was very lovely; and when rockets began to whizz, filling the air with golden rain, a shower of colored stars, fiery dragons, or glittering wheels, the girls could only shriek with delight, and beg to stay a little longer each time the prudent lady proposed going home.

It had to be at last; but Molly and Jill comforted themselves by a long talk in bed, for it was impossible to sleep with glares of light coming every few minutes, flocks of people talking and tramping by in the road, and bursts of music floating down to them as the older but not wiser revellers kept up the merriment till a late hour. They dropped off at last; but Jill had the nightmare, and Molly was waked up by a violent jerking of her braid as Jill tried to tow her along, dreaming she was a boat.

They were too sleepy to laugh much then, but next morning they made merry over it, and went to breakfast with such happy faces that all the young folks pronounced Jill’s friend a most delightful girl. What a good time Molly did have that week! Other people were going to leave also, and therefore much picnicking, boating, and driving was crowded into the last days. Clambakes on the shore, charades in the studio, sewing-parties at the boat, evening frolics in the big dining-room, farewell calls, gifts, and invitations, all sorts of plans for next summer, and vows of eternal friendship exchanged between people who would soon forget each other. It was very pleasant, till poor Boo innocently added to the excitement by poisoning a few of his neighbors with a bad lobster.

The ambitious little soul pined to catch one of these mysterious but lovely red creatures, and spent days fishing on the beach, investigating holes and corners, and tagging after the old man who supplied the house. One day after a high wind he found several “lobs” washed up on the beach, and, though disappointed at their color, he picked out a big one, and set off to show his prize to Molly. Half-way home he met the old man on his way with a basket of fish, and being tired of lugging his contribution laid it with the others, meaning to explain later. No one saw him do it, as the old man was busy with his pipe; and Boo ran back to get more dear lobs, leaving his treasure to go into the kettle and appear at supper, by which time he had forgotten all about it.

Fortunately none of the children ate any, but several older people were made ill, and quite a panic prevailed that night as one after the other called up the doctor, who was boarding close by; and good Mrs. Grey, the hostess, ran about with hot flannels, bottles of medicine, and distracted messages from room to room. All were comfortable by morning, but the friends of the sufferers lay in wait for the old fisherman, and gave him a good scolding for his carelessness. The poor man was protesting his innocence when Boo, who was passing by, looked into the basket, and asked what had become of his lob. A few questions brought the truth to light, and a general laugh put every one in good humor, when poor Boo mildly said, by way of explanation, —

“I fought I was helpin’ Mrs. Dray, and I did want to see the dreen lob come out all red when she boiled him. But I fordot, and I don’t fink I’ll ever find such a nice big one any more.”

“For our sakes, I hope you won’t, my dear,” said Mrs. Hammond, who had been nursing one of the sufferers.

“It’s lucky we are going home to-morrow, or that child would be the death of himself and everybody else. He is perfectly crazy about fish, and I’ve pulled him out of that old lobster-pot on the beach a dozen times,” groaned Molly, much afflicted by the mishaps of her young charge.

There was a great breaking up next day, and the old omnibus went off to the station with Bacon hanging on behind, the bicycle boy and his iron whirligig atop, and heads popping out of all the windows for last good-byes. Our party and the Hammonds were going by boat, and were all ready to start for the pier when Boo and little Harry were missing. Molly, the maid, and both boys ran different ways to find them; and all sorts of dreadful suggestions were being made when shouts of laughter were heard from the beach, and the truants appeared, proudly dragging in Harry's little wagon a dead devil-fish, as the natives call that ugly thing which looks like a magnified tadpole — all head and no body.

"We've dot him!" called the innocents, tugging up their prize with such solemn satisfaction it was impossible to help laughing.

"I always wanted to tatch a whale, and this is a baby one, I fink. A boy said, when they wanted to die they comed on the sand and did it, and we saw this one go dead just now. Ain't he pretty?" asked Boo, displaying the immense mouth with fond pride, while his friend flapped the tail.

"What are you going to do with him?" said Mrs. Hammond, regarding her infant as if she often asked herself the same question about her boy.

"Wap him up in a paper and tate him home to pay wid," answered Harry, with such confidence in his big blue eyes that it was very hard to disappoint his hopes and tell him the treasure must be left behind.

Wails of despair burst from both children as the hard-hearted boys tipped out the little whale, and hustled the indignant fishermen on board the boat, which had been whistling for them impatiently. Boo recovered his spirits first, and gulping down a sob that nearly shook his hat off, consoled his companion in affliction and convulsed his friends by taking from his pocket several little crabs, the remains of a jelly-fish, and such a collection of pebbles that Frank understood why he found the fat boy such a burden when he shouldered him, kicking and howling, in the late run to the boat. These delicate toys healed the wounds of Boo and Harry, and they were soon happily walking the little "trabs" about inside a stone wall of their own building, while the others rested after their exertions, and laid plans for coming to the Willows another year, as people usually did who had once tasted the wholesome delights and cordial hospitality of this charming place.

Chapter XXIII. Cattle Show

The children were not the only ones who had learned something at Pebbly Beach. Mrs. Minot had talked a good deal with some very superior persons, and received light upon various subjects which had much interested or perplexed her. While the ladies worked or walked together, they naturally spoke oftenest and most earnestly about their children, and each contributed her experience. Mrs. Hammond, who had been a physician for many years, was wise in the care of healthy little bodies, and the cure of sick ones. Mrs. Channing, who had read, travelled, and observed much in the cause of education, had many useful hints about the training of young minds and hearts. Several teachers reported their trials, and all the mothers were eager to know how to bring up their boys and girls to be healthy, happy, useful men and women.

As young people do not care for such discussions, we will not describe them, but as the impression they made upon one of the mammas affected our hero and heroine, we must mention the changes which took place in their life when they all got home again.

"School begins to-morrow. Oh, dear!" sighed Jack, as he looked up his books in the Bird Room, a day or two after their return.

"Don't you want to go? I long to, but don't believe I shall. I saw our mothers talking to the doctor last night, but I haven't dared to ask what they decided," said Jill, affectionately eying the long-unused books in her little library.

"I've had such a jolly good time, that I hate to be shut up all day worse than ever. Don't you, Frank?" asked Jack, with a vengeful slap at the arithmetic which was the torment of his life.

"Well, I confess I don't hanker for school as much as I expected. I'd rather take a spin on the old bicycle. Our roads are so good, it is a great temptation to hire a machine, and astonish the natives. That's what comes of idleness. So brace up, my boy, and go to work, for vacation is over," answered Frank, gravely regarding the tall pile of books before him, as if trying to welcome his old friends, or tyrants, rather, for they ruled him with a rod of iron when he once gave himself up to them.

"Ah, but vacation is not over, my dears," said Mrs. Minot, hearing the last words as she came in prepared to surprise her family.

"Glad of it. How much longer is it to be?" asked Jack, hoping for a week at least.

"Two or three years for some of you."

"What?" cried all three, in utter astonishment, as they stared at Mamma, who could not help smiling, though she was very much in earnest.

"For the next two or three years I intend to cultivate my boys' bodies, and let their minds rest a good deal, from books at least. There is plenty to learn outside of school-houses, and I don't mean to shut you up just when you most need all the air and exercise you can get. Good health, good principles, and a good education are the three blessings I ask for you, and I am going to make sure of the first, as a firm foundation for the other two."

"But, mother, what becomes of college?" asked Frank, rather disturbed at this change of base.

"Put it off for a year, and see if you are not better fitted for it then than now."

"But I am already fitted: I've worked like a tiger all this year, and I'm sure I shall pass."

"Ready in one way, but not in another. That hard work is no preparation for four years of still harder study. It has cost you these round shoulders, many a headache, and consumed hours when you had far better have been on the river or in the fields. I cannot have you break down, as so many boys do, or pull through at the cost of ill-health afterward. Eighteen is young enough to begin the steady grind, if you have a strong constitution to keep pace with the eager mind. Sixteen is too young to send even my good boy out into the world, just when he most needs his mother's care to help him be the man she hopes to see him."

Mrs. Minot laid her hand on his shoulder as she spoke, looking so fond and proud that it was impossible to rebel, though some of his most cherished plans were spoilt.

"Other fellows go at my age, and I was rather pleased to be ready at sixteen," he began. But she added, quickly, —

"They go, but how do they come out? Many lose health of body, and many what is more precious still, moral strength, because too young and ignorant to withstand temptations of all sorts. The best part of education does not come from books, and the good principles I value more than either of the other things are to be carefully watched over till firmly fixed; then you may face the world, and come to no real harm. Trust me, dear, I do it for your sake; so bear the disappointment bravely, and in the end I think you will say I'm right."

"I'll do my best; but I don't see what is to become of us if we don't go to school. You will get tired of it first," said Frank, trying to set a good example to the others, who were looking much impressed and interested.

"No danger of that, for I never sent my children to school to get rid of them, and now that they are old enough to be companions, I want them at home more than ever. There are to be some lessons, however, for busy minds must be fed, but not crammed; so you boys will go and recite at certain hours such things as seem most important. But there is to be no studying at night, no shutting up all the best hours of the day, no hurry and fret of getting on fast, or skimming over the surface of many studies without learning any thoroughly."

"So I say!" cried Jack, pleased with the new idea, for he never did love books. "I do hate to be driven so I don't half understand, because there is no time to have things explained. School is good fun as far as play goes; but I don't see the sense of making a fellow learn eighty questions in geography one day, and forget them the next.

"What is to become of me, please?" asked Jill, meekly.

"You and Molly are to have lessons here. I was a teacher when I was young, you know, and liked it, so I shall be school-ma'am, and leave my house-keeping in better hands than mine. I always thought that mothers should teach their girls during these years, and vary their studies to suit the growing creatures as only mothers can.

"That will be splendid! Will Molly's father let her come?" cried Jill, feeling quite reconciled to staying at home, if her friend was to be with her.

"He likes the plan very much, for Molly is growing fast, and needs a sort of care that Miss Dawes cannot give her. I am not a hard mistress, and I hope you will find my school a pleasant one."

"I know I shall; and I'm not disappointed, because I was pretty sure I couldn't go to the old school again, when I heard the doctor say I must be very careful for a long time. I thought he meant months; but if it must be years, I can bear it, for I've been happy this last one though I was sick," said Jill, glad to show that it had not been wasted time by being cheerful and patient now.

"That's my good girl!" and Mrs. Minot stroked the curly black head as if it was her own little daughter's. "You have done so well, I want you to go on improving, for care now will save you pain and disappointment by and by. You all have got a capital start during these six weeks, so it is a good time to begin my experiment. If it does not work well, we will go back to school and college next spring."

"Hurrah for Mamma and the long vacation!" cried Jack, catching up two big books and whirling them round like clubs, as if to get his muscles in order at once.

"Now I shall have time to go to the Gymnasium and straighten out my back," said Frank, who was growing so tall he needed more breadth to make his height symmetrical.

"And to ride horseback. I am going to hire old Jane and get out the little phaeton, so we can all enjoy the fine weather while it lasts. Molly and I can drive Jill, and you can take turns in the saddle when you are tired of ball and boating. Exercise of all sorts is one of the lessons we are to learn," said Mrs. Minot, suggesting all the pleasant things she could to sweeten the pill for her pupils, two of whom did love their books, not being old enough to know that even an excellent thing may be overdone.

"Won't that be gay? I'll get down the saddle to-day, so we can begin right off. Lem rides, and we can go together. Hope old Jane will like it as well as I shall," said Jack, who had found a new friend in a pleasant lad lately come to town.

"You must see that she does, for you boys are to take care of her. We will put the barn in order, and you can decide which shall be hostler and which gardener, for I don't intend to hire labor on the place any more. Our estate is not a large one, and it will be excellent work for you, my men."

"All right! I'll see to Jane. I love horses," said Jack, well pleased with the prospect.

"My horse won't need much care. I prefer a bicycle to a beast, so I'll get in the squashes, pick the apples, and cover the strawberry bed when it is time," added Frank, who had enjoyed the free life at Pebbly Beach so much that he was willing to prolong it.

"You may put me in a hen-coop, and keep me there a year, if you like. I won't fret, for I'm sure you know what is best for me," said Jill, gayly, as she looked up at the good friend who had done so much for her.

"I'm not sure that I won't put you in a pretty cage and send you to Cattle Show, as a sample of what we can do in the way of taming a wild bird till it is nearly as meek as a dove," answered Mrs. Minot, much gratified at the amiability of her flock.

"I don't see why there should not be an exhibition of children, and prizes for the good and pretty ones, as well as for fat pigs, fine horses, or handsome fruit and flowers — I don't mean a baby show, but boys and girls, so people can see what the prospect is of a good crop for the next generation," said Frank, glancing toward the tower of the building where the yearly Agricultural Fair was soon to be held.

"Years ago, there was a pretty custom here of collecting all the schools together in the spring, and having a festival at the Town Hall. Each school showed its best pupils, and the parents looked on at the blooming flower show. It was a pity it was ever given up, for the schools have never been so good as then, nor the interest in them so great;" and Mrs. Minot wondered, as many people do, why farmers seem to care more for their cattle and crops than for their children, willingly spending large sums on big barns and costly experiments, while the school-houses are shabby and inconvenient, and the cheapest teachers preferred.

"Ralph is going to send my bust. He asked if he might, and mother said Yes. Mr. German thinks it very good, and I hope other people will," said Jill, nodding toward the little plaster head that smiled down from its bracket with her own merry look.

"I could send my model; it is nearly done. Ralph told me it was a clever piece of work, and he knows," added Frank, quite taken with the idea of exhibiting his skill in mechanics.

"And I could send my star bedquilt! They always have things of that kind at Cattle Show;" and Jill began to rummage in the closet for the pride of her heart, burning to display it to an admiring world.

"I haven't got anything. Can't sew rags together; or make baby engines, and I have no live-stock — yes, I have too! There's old Bun. I'll send him, for the fun of it; he really is a curiosity, for he is the biggest one I ever saw, and hopping into the lime has made his fur such a queer color, he looks like a new sort of rabbit. I'll catch and shut him up before he gets wild again;" and off rushed Jack to lure unsuspecting old Bun, who had grown tame during their absence, into the cage which he detested.

They all laughed at his ardor, but the fancy pleased them; and as Mamma saw no reason why their little works of art should not be sent, Frank fell to work on his model, and Jill resolved to finish her quilt at once, while Mrs. Minot went off to see Mr. Acton about the hours and studies for the boys.

In a week or two, the young people were almost resigned to the loss of school, for they found themselves delightfully fresh for the few lessons they did have, and not weary of play, since it took many useful forms. Old Jane not only carried them all to ride, but gave Jack plenty of work keeping her premises in nice order. Frank mourned privately over the delay of college, but found a solace in his whirligig and the Gymnasium, where he set himself to developing a chest to match the big head above, which head no longer ached with eight or ten hours of study. Harvesting beans and raking up leaves seemed to have a soothing effect upon his nerves, for now he fell asleep at once instead of thumping his pillow with vexation because his brain would go on working at difficult problems and passages when he wanted it to stop.

Jill and Molly drove away in the little phaeton every fair morning over the sunny hills and through the changing woods, filling their hands with asters and golden-rod, their lungs with the pure, invigorating air, and their heads with all manner of sweet and happy fancies and feelings born of the wholesome influences about them. People shook their heads, and said it was wasting time; but the rosy-faced girls were content to trust those wiser than themselves, and found their new school very pleasant. They read aloud a good deal, rapidly acquiring one of the rarest and most beautiful accomplishments; for they could stop and ask questions as they went along, so that they understood what they read, which is half the secret. A thousand things came up as they sewed together in the afternoon, and the eager minds received much general information in an easy and well-ordered way. Physiology was one of the favorite studies, and Mrs. Hammond often came in to give them a little lecture, teaching them to understand the wonders of their own systems, and how to keep them in order — a lesson of far more importance just then than Greek or Latin, for girls are the future mothers, nurses, teachers, of the race, and should feel how much depends on them. Merry could not resist the attractions of the friendly circle, and soon persuaded her mother to let her do as they did; so she got more exercise and less study, which was just what the delicate girl needed.

The first of the new ideas seemed to prosper, and the second, though suggested in joke, was carried out in earnest, for the other young people were seized with a strong desire to send something to the Fair. In fact, all sorts of queer articles were proposed, and much fun prevailed, especially among the boys, who ransacked their gardens for mammoth vegetables, sighed for five-legged calves, blue roses, or any other natural curiosity by means of which they might distinguish themselves. Ralph was the only one who had anything really worth sending; for though Frank's model seemed quite perfect, it obstinately refused to go, and at the last moment blew up with a report like a pop-gun. So it was laid away for repairs, and its disappointed maker devoted his energies to helping Jack keep Bun in order; for that indomitable animal got out of every prison they put him in, and led Jack a dreadful life during that last week. At all hours of the day and night that distracted boy would start up, crying, "There he is again!" and dart out to give chase and capture the villain now grown too fat to run as he once did.

The very night before the Fair, Frank was wakened by a chilly draught, and, getting up to see where it came from, found Jack's door open and bed empty, while the vision of a white ghost flitting about the garden suggested a midnight rush after old Bun. Frank watched laughingly, till poor Jack came toward the house with the gentleman in gray kicking lustily in his arms, and then whispered in a sepulchral tone, —

"Put him in the old refrigerator, he can't get out of that."

Blessing him for the suggestion, the exhausted hunter shut up his victim in the new cell, and found it a safe one, for Bun could not burrow through a sheet of zinc, or climb up the smooth walls.

Jill's quilt was a very elaborate piece of work, being bright blue with little white stars all over it; this she finished nicely, and felt sure no patient old lady could outdo it. Merry decided to send butter, for she had been helping her mother in the dairy that summer, and rather liked the light part of the labor. She knew it would please her very much if she chose that instead of wild flowers, so she practised moulding the yellow pats into pretty shapes, that it might please both eye and taste.

Molly declared she would have a little pen, and put Boo in it, as the prize fat boy — a threat which so alarmed the innocent that he ran away, and was found two or three miles from home, asleep under the wall, with two seed-cakes and a pair of socks done up in a bundle. Being with difficulty convinced that it was a joke, he consented to return to his family, but was evidently suspicious, till Molly decided to send her cats, and set about preparing them for exhibition. The Minots' deserted Bunny-house was rather large; but as cats cannot be packed as closely as much-enduring sheep, Molly borrowed this desirable family mansion, and put her darlings into it, where they soon settled down, and appeared to enjoy their new residence. It had been scrubbed up and painted red, cushions and plates put in, and two American flags adorned the roof. Being barred all round, a fine view of the Happy Family could be had, now twelve in number, as Molasses had lately added three white kits to the varied collection.

The girls thought this would be the most interesting spectacle of all, and Grif proposed to give some of the cats extra tails, to increase their charms, especially poor Mortification, who would appreciate the honor of two, after having none for so long. But Molly declined, and Grif looked about him for some attractive animal to exhibit, so that he too might go in free and come to honor, perhaps.

A young lady in the town owned a donkey, a small, gray beast, who insisted on tripping along the sidewalks and bumping her rider against the walls as she paused to browse at her own sweet will, regardless of blows or cries, till ready to move on. Expressing great admiration for this rare animal, Grif obtained leave to display the charms of Graciosa at the Fair. Little did she guess the dark designs entertained against her dignity, and happily she was not as sensitive to ridicule as a less humble-minded animal, so she went willingly with her new friend, and enjoyed the combing and trimming up which she received at his hands, while he prepared for the great occasion.

When the morning of September 28th arrived, the town was all astir, and the Fair ground a lively scene. The air was full of the lowing of cattle, the tramp of horses, squealing of indignant pigs, and clatter of tongues, as people and animals streamed in at the great gate and found their proper places. Our young folks were in a high state of excitement, as they rumbled away with their treasures in a hay-cart. The Bunny-house might have been a cage of tigers, so rampant were the cats at this new move. Old Bun, in a small box, brooded over the insult of the refrigerator, and looked as fierce as a rabbit could. Gus had a coop of rare fowls, who clucked wildly all the way, while Ralph, with the bust in his arms, stood up in front, and Jill and Molly bore the precious bedquilt, as they sat behind.

These objects of interest were soon arranged, and the girls went to admire Merry's golden butter cups among the green leaves, under which lay the ice that kept the pretty flowers fresh. The boys were down below, where the cackling was very loud, but not loud enough to drown the sonorous bray which suddenly startled them as much as it did the horses outside. A shout of laughter followed, and away went the lads, to see what the fun was, while the girls ran out on the balcony, as someone said, "It's that rogue of a Grif with some new joke."

It certainly was, and, to judge from the peals of merriment, the joke was a good one. In at the gate came a two-headed donkey, ridden by Grif, in great spirits at his success, for the gate-keeper laughed so he never thought to ask for toll. A train of boys followed him across the ground, lost in admiration of the animal and the cleverness of her rider. Among the stage properties of the Dramatic Club was the old ass's head once used in some tableaux from "Midsummer Night's Dream." This Grif had mended up, and fastened by means of straps and a collar to poor Graciosa's neck, hiding his work with a red cloth over her back. One eye was gone, but the other still opened and shut, and the long ears wagged by means of strings, which he slyly managed with the bridle, so the artificial head looked almost as natural as the real one. The funniest thing of all was the innocent air of Graciosa, and the mildly inquiring expression with which she now and then turned to look at or to smell of the new ornament as if she recognized a friend's face, yet was perplexed by its want of animation. She vented her feelings in a bray, which Grif imitated, convulsing all hearers by the sound as well as by the wink the one eye gave, and the droll waggle of one erect ear, while the other pointed straight forward.

The girls laughed so at the ridiculous sight that they nearly fell over the railing, and the boys were in ecstasies, especially when Grif, emboldened by his success, trotted briskly round the race-course, followed by the cheers of the crowd. Excited by the noise, Graciosa did her best, till the false head, loosened by the rapid motion, slipped round under her nose, causing her to stop so suddenly that Grif flew off, alighting on his own head with a violence which would have killed any other boy. Sobered by his downfall, he declined to mount again, but led his steed to repose in a shed, while he rejoined his friends, who were waiting impatiently to congratulate him on his latest and best prank.

The Committee went their rounds soon after, and, when the doors were again opened, every one hurried to see if their articles had received a premium. A card lay on the butter cups, and Mrs. Grant was full of pride because *her* butter always took a prize, and this proved that Merry was walking in her mother's steps, in this direction at least. Another card swung from the blue quilt, for the kindly judges knew who made it, and were glad to please the little girl, though several others as curious but not so pretty hung near by. The cats were admired, but, as they were not among the animals usually exhibited, there was no prize awarded. Gus hoped his hens would get one; but somebody else outdid him, to the great indignation of Laura and Lotty, who had fed the white biddies faithfully for months. Jack was sure his rabbit was the biggest there, and went eagerly to look for his premium. But neither card nor Bun were to be seen, for the old rascal had escaped for the last time, and was never seen again; which was a great comfort to Jack, who was heartily tired of him.

Ralph's bust was the best of all, for not only did it get a prize, and was much admired, but a lady, who found Jill and Merry rejoicing over it, was so pleased with the truth and grace of the little head, that she asked about the artist, and whether he would do one of her own child, who was so delicate she feared he might not live long.

Merry gladly told the story of her ambitious friend, and went to find him, that he might secure the order. While she was gone, Jill took up the tale, gratefully telling how kind he had been to her, how patiently he worked and waited, and how much he longed to go abroad. Fortunately the lady was rich and generous, as well as fond of art, and being pleased with the bust, and interested in the young sculptor, gave him the order when he came, and filled his soul with joy by adding, that, if it suited her when done, it should be put into marble. She lived in the city, and Ralph soon arranged his work so that he could give up his noon hour, and go to model the child; for every penny he could earn or save now was very precious, as he still hoped to go abroad.

The girls were so delighted with this good fortune, that they did not stay for the races, but went home to tell the happy news, leaving the boys to care for the cats, and enjoy the various matches to come off that day.

"I'm so glad I tried to look pleasant when I was lying on the board while Ralph did my head, for the pleasantness got into the clay face, and that made the lady like it," said Jill, as she lay resting on the sofa.

"I always thought it was a dear, bright little face, but now I love and admire it more than ever," cried Merry, kissing it gratefully, as she remembered the help and pleasure it had given Ralph.

Chapter XXIV. Down the River

A fortnight later, the boys were picking apples one golden October afternoon, and the girls were hurrying to finish their work, that they might go and help the harvesters. It was six weeks now since the new school began, and they had learned to like it very much, though they found that it was not all play, by any means. But lessons, exercise, and various sorts of housework made an agreeable change, and they felt that they were learning things which would be useful to them all their lives. They had been making underclothes for themselves, and each had several neatly finished garments cut, fitted, and sewed by herself, and trimmed with the pretty tatting Jill made in such quantities while she lay on her sofa.

Now they were completing new dressing sacks, and had enjoyed this job very much, as each chose her own material, and suited her own taste in the making. Jill's was white, with tiny scarlet leaves all over it, trimmed with red braid and buttons so like checkerberries she was tempted to eat them. Molly's was gay, with bouquets of every sort of flower, scalloped all round, and adorned with six buttons, each of a different color, which she thought the last touch of elegance. Merry's, though the simplest, was the daintiest of the three, being pale blue, trimmed with delicate edging, and beautifully made.

Mrs. Minot had been reading from Miss Strickland's "Queens of England" while the girls worked, and an illustrated Shakspeare lay open on the table, as well as several fine photographs of historical places for them to look at as they went along. The hour was over now, the teacher gone, and the pupils setting the last stitches as they talked over the lesson, which had interested them exceedingly.

"I really believe I have got Henry's six wives into my head right at last. Two Annes, three Katherines, and one Jane. Now I've seen where they lived and heard their stories, I quite feel as if I knew them," said Merry, shaking the threads off her work before she folded it up to carry home.

"'King Henry the Eighth to six spouses was wedded,
One died, one survived, two divorced, two beheaded,'

was all I knew about them before. Poor things, what a bad time they did have," added Jill, patting down the red braid, which would pucker a bit at the corners.

"Katherine Parr had the best of it, because she outlived the old tyrant and so kept her head on," said Molly, winding the thread round her last button, as if bound to fasten it on so firmly that nothing should decapitate that.

"I used to think I'd like to be a queen or a great lady, and wear velvet and jewels, and live in a palace, but now I don't care much for that sort of splendor. I like to make things pretty at home, and know that they all depend on me, and love me very much. Queens are not happy, and I am," said Merry, pausing to look at Anne Hathaway's cottage as she put up the picture, and to wonder if it was very pleasant to have a famous man for one's husband.

"I guess your missionarying has done you good; mine has, and I'm getting to have things my own way more and more every day. Miss Bat is so amiable, I hardly know her, and father tells her to ask Miss Molly when she goes to him for orders. Isn't that fun?" laughed Molly, in high glee, at the agreeable change. "I like it ever so much, but I don't want to stay so all my days. I mean to travel, and just as soon as I can I shall take Boo and go all round the world, and see everything," she added, waving her gay sack, as if it were the flag she was about to nail to the masthead of her ship.

"Well, I should like to be famous in some way, and have people admire me very much. I'd like to act, or dance, or sing, or be what I heard the ladies at Pebbly Beach call a 'queen of society.' But I don't expect to be anything, and I'm not going to worry I shall *not* be a Lucinda, so I ought to be contented and happy all my life," said Jill, who was very ambitious in spite of the newly acquired meekness, which was all the more becoming because her natural liveliness often broke out like sunshine through a veil of light clouds.

If the three girls could have looked forward ten years they would have been surprised to see how different a fate was theirs from the one each had chosen, and how happy each was in the place she was called to fill. Merry was not making the old farmhouse pretty, but living in Italy, with a young sculptor for her husband, and beauty such as she never dreamed of all about her. Molly was not travelling round the world, but contentedly keeping house for her father and still watching over Boo, who was becoming her pride and joy as well as care. Neither was Jill a famous woman, but a very happy and useful one, with the two mothers leaning on her as they grew old, the young men better for her influence over them, many friends to love and honor her, and a charming home, where she was queen by right of her cheery spirit, grateful heart, and unfailing devotion to those who had made her what she was.

If any curious reader, not content with this peep into futurity, asks, "Did Molly and Jill ever marry?" we must reply, for the sake of peace — Molly remained a merry spinster all her days, one of the independent, brave, and busy creatures of whom there is such need in the world to help take care of other peoples' wives and children, and do the many useful jobs that the married folk have no time for. Jill certainly did wear a white veil on the day she was twenty-five and called her husband Jack. Further than that we cannot go, except to say that this leap did not end in a catastrophe, like the first one they took together.

That day, however, they never dreamed of what was in store for them, but chattered away as they cleared up the room, and then ran off ready for play, feeling that they had earned it by work well done. They found the lads just finishing, with Boo to help by picking up the windfalls for the cider-heap, after he had amused himself by putting about a bushel down the various holes old Bun had left behind him. Jack was risking his neck climbing in the most dangerous places, while Frank, with a long-handled apple-picker, nipped off the finest fruit with care, both enjoying the pleasant task and feeling proud of the handsome red and yellow piles all about the little orchard. Merry and Molly caught up baskets and fell to work with all their might, leaving Jill to sit upon a stool and sort the early apples ready to use at once, looking up now and then to nod and smile at her mother who watched her from the window, rejoicing to see her lass so well and happy.

It was such a lovely day, they all felt its cheerful influence; for the sun shone bright and warm, the air was full of an invigorating freshness which soon made the girls' faces look like rosy apples, and their spirits as gay as if they had been stealing sips of new cider through a straw. Jack whistled like a blackbird as he swung and bumped about, Frank orated and joked, Merry and Molly ran races to see who would fill and empty fastest, and Jill sung to Boo, who reposed in a barrel, exhausted with his labors.

"These are the last of the pleasant days, and we ought to make the most of them. Let's have one more picnic before the frost spoils the leaves," said Merry, resting a minute at the gate to look down the street, which was a glorified sort of avenue, with brilliant maples lining the way and carpeting the ground with crimson and gold.

"Oh, yes! Go down the river once more and have supper on the Island. I couldn't go to some of your picnics, and I do long for a last good time before winter shuts me up again," cried Jill, eager to harvest all the sunshine she could, for she was not yet quite her old self again.

"I'm your man, if the other fellows agree. We can't barrel these up for a while, so to-morrow will be a holiday for us. Better make sure of the day while you can, this weather can't last long;" and Frank shook his head like one on intimate terms with Old Prob.

"Don't worry about those high ones, Jack. Give a shake and come down and plan about the party," called Molly, throwing up a big Baldwin with what seemed a remarkably good aim, for a shower of apples followed, and a boy came tumbling earthward to catch on the lowest bough and swing down like a caterpillar, exclaiming, as he landed, —

“I’m glad that job is done! I’ve rasped every knuckle I’ve got and worn out the knees of my pants. Nice little crop though, isn’t it?”

“It will be nicer if this young man does not bite every apple he touches. Hi there! Stop it, Boo,” commanded Frank, as he caught his young assistant putting his small teeth into the best ones, to see if they were sweet or sour.

Molly set the barrel up on end, and that took the boy out of the reach of mischief, so he retired from view and peeped through a crack as he ate his fifth pearmain, regardless of consequences.

“Gus will be at home to-morrow. He always comes up early on Saturday, you know. We can’t get on without him,” said Frank, who missed his mate very much, for Gus had entered college, and so far did not like it as much as he had expected.

“Or Ralph; he is very busy every spare minute on the little boy’s bust, which is getting on nicely, he says; but he will be able to come home in time for supper, I think,” added Merry, remembering the absent, as usual.

“I’ll ask the girls on my way home, and all meet at two o’clock for a good row while it’s warm. What shall I bring?” asked Molly, wondering if Miss Bat’s amiability would extend to making goodies in the midst of her usual Saturday’s baking.

“You bring coffee and the big pot and some buttered crackers. I’ll see to the pie and cake, and the other girls can have anything else they like,” answered Merry, glad and proud that she could provide the party with her own inviting handiwork.

“I’ll take my zither, so we can have music as we sail, and Grif will bring his violin, and Ralph can imitate a banjo so that you’d be sure he had one. I do hope it will be fine, it is so splendid to go round like other folks and enjoy myself,” cried Jill, with a little bounce of satisfaction at the prospect of a row and ramble.

“Come along, then, and make sure of the girls,” said Merry, catching up her roll of work, for the harvesting was done.

Molly put her sack on as the easiest way of carrying it, and, extricating Boo, they went off, accompanied by the boys, “to make sure of the fellows” also, leaving Jill to sit among the apples, singing and sorting like a thrifty little housewife.

Next day eleven young people met at the appointed place, basket in hand. Ralph could not come till later, for he was working now as he never worked before. They were a merry flock, for the mellow autumn day was even brighter and clearer than yesterday, and the river looked its loveliest, winding away under the sombre hemlocks, or through the fairyland the gay woods made on either side. Two large boats and two small ones held them all, and away they went, first up through the three bridges and round the bend, then, turning, they floated down to the green island, where a grove of oaks rustled their sere leaves and the squirrels were still gathering acorns. Here they often met to keep their summer revels, and here they now spread their feast on the flat rock which needed no cloth beside its own gray lichens. The girls trimmed each dish with bright leaves, and made the supper look like a banquet for the elves, while the boys built a fire in the nook where ashes and blackened stones told of many a rustic meal. The big tin coffee-pot was not so romantic, but more successful than a kettle slung on three sticks, gypsy fashion; so they did not risk a downfall, but set the water boiling, and soon filled the air with the agreeable perfume associated in their minds with picnics, as most of them never tasted the fascinating stuff at any other time, being the worst children can drink.

Frank was cook, Gus helped cut bread and cake, Jack and Grif brought wood, while Bob Walker took Joe’s place and made himself generally useful, as the other gentleman never did, and so was quite out of favor lately.

All was ready at last, and they were just deciding to sit down without Ralph, when a shout told them he was coming, and down the river skimmed a wherry at such a rate the boys wondered whom he had been racing with.

“Something has happened, and he is coming to tell us,” said Jill, who sat where she could see his eager face.

“Nothing bad, or he wouldn’t smile so. He is glad of a good row and a little fun after working so hard all the week;” and Merry shook a red napkin as a welcoming signal.

Something certainly had happened, and a very happy something it must be, they all thought, as Ralph came on with flashing oars, and leaping out as the boat touched the shore, ran up the slope, waving his hat, and calling in a glad voice, sure of sympathy in his delight, —

“Good news! good news! Hurrah for Rome, next month!”

The young folks forgot their supper for a moment, to congratulate him on his happy prospect, and hear all about it, while the leaves rustled as if echoing the kind words, and the squirrels sat up aloft, wondering what all the pleasant clamor was about.

“Yes, I’m really going in November. German asked me to go with him to-day, and if there is any little hitch in my getting off, he’ll lend a hand, and I — I’ll black his boots, wet his clay, and run his errands the rest of my life to pay for this!” cried Ralph, in a burst of gratitude; for, independent as he was, the kindness of this successful friend to a deserving comrade touched and won his heart.

"I call that a handsome thing to do!" said Frank, warmly, for noble actions always pleased him. "I heard my mother say that making good or useful men was the best sort of sculpture, so I think David German may be proud of this piece of work, whether the big statue succeeds or not."

"I'm very glad, old fellow. When I run over for my trip four years from now, I'll look you up, and see how you are getting on," said Gus, with a hearty shake of the hand; and the younger lads grinned cheerfully, even while they wondered where the fun was in shaping clay and chipping marble.

"Shall you stay four years?" asked Merry's soft voice, while a wistful look came into her happy eyes.

"Ten, if I can," answered Ralph, decidedly, feeling as if a long lifetime would be all too short for the immortal work he meant to do. "I've got so much to learn, that I shall do whatever David thinks best for me at first, and when I *can* go alone, I shall just shut myself up and forget that there is any world outside my den."

"Do write and tell us how you get on now and then; I like to hear about other people's good times while I'm waiting for my own," said Molly, too much interested to observe that Grif was sticking burrs up and down her braids.

"Of course I shall write to some of you, but you mustn't expect any great things for years yet. People don't grow famous in a hurry, and it takes a deal of hard work even to earn your bread and butter, as you'll find if you ever try it," answered Ralph, sobering down a little as he remembered the long and steady effort it had taken to get even so far.

"Speaking of bread and butter reminds me that we'd better eat ours before the coffee gets quite cold," said Annette, for Merry seemed to have forgotten that she had been chosen to play matron, as she was the oldest.

The boys seconded the motion, and for a few minutes supper was the all-absorbing topic, as the cups went round and the goodies vanished rapidly, accompanied by the usual mishaps which make picnic meals such fun. Ralph's health was drunk with all sorts of good wishes; and such splendid prophecies were made, that he would have far surpassed Michael Angelo, if they could have come true. Grif gave him an order on the spot for a full-length statue of himself, and stood up to show the imposing attitude in which he wished to be taken, but unfortunately slipped and fell forward with one hand in the custard pie, the other clutching wildly at the coffee-pot, which inhospitably burnt his fingers.

"I think I grasp the idea, and will be sure to remember not to make your hair blow one way and the tails of your coat another, as a certain sculptor made those of a famous man," laughed Ralph, as the fallen hero scrambled up, amidst general merriment.

"Will the little bust be done before you go?" asked Jill, anxiously, feeling a personal interest in the success of that order.

"Yes: I've been hard at it every spare minute I could get, and have a fortnight more. It suits Mrs. Lennox, and she will pay well for it, so I shall have something to start with, though I haven't been able to save much. I'm to thank you for that, and I shall send you the first pretty thing I get hold of," answered Ralph, looking gratefully at the bright face, which grew still brighter as Jill exclaimed, —

"I do feel *so* proud to know a real artist, and have my bust done by him. I only wish *I* could pay for it as Mrs. Lennox does; but I haven't any money, and you don't need the sort of things I can make," she added, shaking her head, as she thought over knit slippers, wall-pockets, and crochet in all its forms, as offerings to her departing friend.

"You can write often, and tell me all about everybody, for I shall want to know, and people will soon forget me when I'm gone," said Ralph, looking at Merry, who was making a garland of yellow leaves for Juliet's black hair.

Jill promised, and kept her word; but the longest letters went from the farm-house on the hill, though no one knew the fact till long afterward. Merry said nothing now, but she smiled, with a pretty color in her cheeks, and was very much absorbed in her work, while the talk went on.

"I wish I was twenty, and going to seek my fortune, as you are," said Jack; and the other boys agreed with him, for something in Ralph's new plans and purposes roused the manly spirit in all of them, reminding them that playtime would soon be over, and the great world before them, where to choose.

"It is easy enough to say what you'd like; but the trouble is, you have to take what you can get, and make the best of it," said Gus, whose own views were rather vague as yet.

"No you don't, always; you can *make* things go as you want them, if you only try hard enough, and walk right over whatever stands in the way. I don't mean to give up my plans for any man; but, if I live, I'll carry them out — you see if I don't;" and Frank gave the rock where he lay a blow with his fist, that sent the acorns flying all about.

One of them hit Jack, and he said, sorrowfully, as he held it in his hand so carefully it was evident he had some association with it, —

"Ed used to say that, and he had some splendid plans, but they didn't come to anything."

"Perhaps they did; who can tell? Do your best while you live, and I don't believe anything good is lost, whether we have it a long or a short time," said Ralph, who knew what a help and comfort high hopes were, and how they led to better things, if worthily cherished.

"A great many acorns are wasted, I suppose; but some of them sprout and grow, and make splendid trees," added Merry, feeling more than she knew how to express, as she looked up at the oaks overhead.

Only seven of the party were sitting on the knoll now, for the rest had gone to wash the dishes and pack the baskets down by the boats. Jack and Jill, with the three elder boys, were in a little group, and as Merry spoke, Gus said to Frank, —

"Did you plant yours?"

"Yes, on the lawn, and I mean it shall come up if I can make it," answered Frank, gravely.

"I put mine where I can see it from the window, and not forget to water and take care of it," added Jack, still turning the pretty brown acorn to and fro as if he loved it.

"What do they mean?" whispered Merry to Jill, who was leaning against her knee to rest.

"The boys were walking in the Cemetery last Sunday, as they often do, and when they came to Ed's grave, the place was all covered with little acorns from the tree that grows on the bank. They each took up some as they stood talking, and Jack said he should plant his, for he loved Ed very much, you know. The others said they would, too; and I hope the trees will grow, though we don't need anything to remember him by," answered Jill, in a low tone, thinking of the pressed flowers the girls kept for his sake.

The boys heard her, but no one spoke for a moment as they sat looking across the river toward the hill where the pines whispered their lullabies and pointed heavenward, steadfast and green, all the year round. None of them could express the thought that was in their minds as Jill told the little story; but the act and the feeling that prompted it were perhaps as beautiful an assurance as could have been given that the dear dead boy's example had not been wasted, for the planting of the acorns was a symbol of the desire budding in those young hearts to be what he might have been, and to make their lives nobler for the knowledge and the love of him.

"It seems as if a great deal had happened this year," said Merry, in a pensive tone, for this quiet talk just suited her mood.

"So I say, for there's been a Declaration of Independence and a Revolution in our house, and I'm commander-in-chief now; and don't I like it!" cried Molly, complacently surveying the neat new uniform she wore of her own choosing.

"I feel as if I never learned so much in my life as I have since last December, and yet I never did so little," added Jill, wondering why the months of weariness and pain did not seem more dreadful to her.

"Well, pitching on my head seems to have given me a good shaking up, somehow, and I mean to do great things next year in better ways than breaking my bones coasting," said Jack, with a manly air.

"I feel like a Siamese twin without his mate now you are gone, but I'm under orders for a while, and mean to do my best. Guess it won't be lost time;" and Frank nodded at Gus, who nodded back with the slightly superior expression all Freshmen wear.

"Hope you won't find it so. My work is all cut out for me, and I intend to go in and win, though it is more of a grind than you fellows know."

"I'm sure I have everything to be grateful for. It won't be plain sailing — I don't expect it; but, if I live, I'll do something to be proud of," said Ralph, squaring his shoulders as if to meet and conquer all obstacles as he looked into the glowing west, which was not fairer than his ambitious dreams.

Here we will say good-by to these girls and boys of ours as they sit together in the sunshine talking over a year that was to be for ever memorable to them, not because of any very remarkable events, but because they were just beginning to look about them as they stepped out of childhood into youth, and some of the experiences of the past months had set them to thinking, taught them to see the use and beauty of the small duties, joys, and sorrows which make up our lives, and inspired them to resolve that the coming year should be braver and brighter than the last.

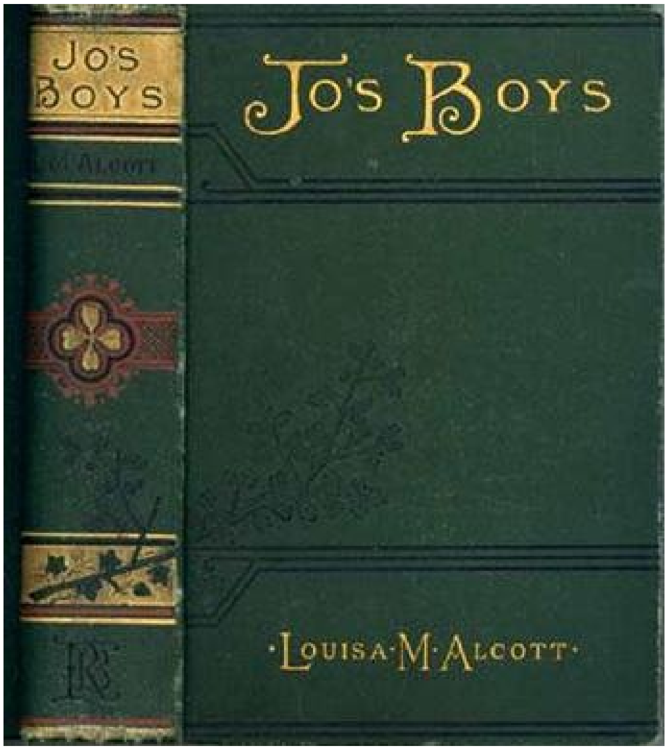
There are many such boys and girls, full of high hopes, lovely possibilities, and earnest plans, pausing a moment before they push their little boats from the safe shore. Let those who launch them see to it that they have good health to man the oars, good education for ballast, and good principles as pilots to guide them as they voyage down an ever-widening river to the sea.

JO'S BOYS

AND HOW THEY TURNED OUT

This sequel to *Little Men* was first published in 1886 and is Alcott's final novel in the *Little Women* series. The novel mostly follows the lives of Plumfield boys who were introduced in *Little Men*, particularly Tommy, Demi, Nat, Dan, and Emil and Jo's sons Rob and Teddy, although Franz, Nan, Daisy, Dolly, and Stuffy make frequent appearances as well. The book takes place ten years after Little Men. Dolly and George are college students dealing with the temptations of snobbery, arrogance, self-indulgence and vanity. Tommy becomes a medical student to impress childhood sweetheart Nan, but after "accidentally" falling in love with and proposing to Dora, he joins his family business.

Alcott wrote the novel while living at the Thoreau-Alcott House on Main Street in Concord, Massachusetts. She bought the home for her sister Anna Alcott Pratt in 1877, though she moved in as well in the 1880s.


JO'S BOYS
L. M. ALCOTT
R
JO'S BOYS
·LOUISA·M·ALCOTT·

The first edition

The house in which Alcott wrote the novel, Main Street, Concord

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Chapter 1. TEN YEARS LATER

‘If anyone had told me what wonderful changes were to take place here in ten years, I wouldn’t have believed it,’ said Mrs Jo to Mrs Meg, as they sat on the piazza at Plumfield one summer day, looking about them with faces full of pride and pleasure.

‘This is the sort of magic that money and kind hearts can work. I am sure Mr Laurence could have no nobler monument than the college he so generously endowed; and a home like this will keep Aunt March’s memory green as long as it lasts,’ answered Mrs Meg, always glad to praise the absent.

‘We used to believe in fairies, you remember, and plan what we’d ask for if we could have three wishes. Doesn’t it seem as if mine had been really granted at last? Money, fame, and plenty of the work I love,’ said Mrs Jo, carelessly rumpling up her hair as she clasped her hands over her head just as she used to do when a girl.

‘I have had mine, and Amy is enjoying hers to her heart’s content. If dear Marmee, John, and Beth were here, it would be quite perfect,’ added Meg, with a tender quiver in her voice; for Marmee’s place was empty now.

Jo put her hand on her sister’s, and both sat silent for a little while, surveying the pleasant scene before them with mingled sad and happy thoughts.

It certainly did look as if magic had been at work, for quiet Plumfield was transformed into a busy little world. The house seemed more hospitable than ever, refreshed now with new paint, added wings, well-kept lawn and garden, and a prosperous air it had not worn when riotous boys swarmed everywhere and it was rather difficult for the Bhaers to make both ends meet. On the hill, where kites used to be flown, stood the fine college which Mr Laurence’s munificent legacy had built. Busy students were going to and fro along the paths once trodden by childish feet, and many young men and women were enjoying all the advantages that wealth, wisdom, and benevolence could give them.

Just inside the gates of Plumfield a pretty brown cottage, very like the Dovecote, nestled among the trees, and on the green slope westward Laurie’s white-pillared mansion glittered in the sunshine; for when the rapid growth of the city shut in the old house, spoilt Meg’s nest, and dared to put a soap-factory under Mr Laurence’s indignant nose, our friends emigrated to Plumfield, and the great changes began.

These were the pleasant ones; and the loss of the dear old people was sweetened by the blessings they left behind; so all prospered now in the little community, and Mr Bhaer as president, and Mr March as chaplain of the college, saw their long-cherished dream beautifully realized. The sisters divided the care of the young people among them, each taking the part that suited her best. Meg was the motherly friend of the young women, Jo the confidante and defender of all the youths, and Amy the lady Bountiful who delicately smoothed the way for needy students, and entertained them all so cordially that it was no wonder they named her lovely home Mount Parnassus, so full was it of music, beauty, and the culture hungry young hearts and fancies long for.

The original twelve boys had of course scattered far and wide during these years, but all that lived still remembered old Plumfield, and came wandering back from the four quarters of the earth to tell their various experiences, laugh over the pleasures of the past, and face the duties of the present with fresh courage; for such home-comings keep hearts tender and hands helpful with the memories of young and happy days. A few words will tell the history of each, and then we can go on with the new chapter of their lives.

Franz was with a merchant kinsman in Hamburg, a man of twenty-six now, and doing well. Emil was the jolliest tar that ever ‘sailed the ocean blue’. His uncle sent him on a long voyage to disgust him with this adventurous life; but he came home so delighted with it that it was plain this was his profession, and the German kinsman gave him a good chance in his ships; so the lad was happy. Dan was a wanderer still; for after the geological researches in South America he tried sheep-farming in Australia, and was now in California looking up mines. Nat was busy with music at the Conservatory, preparing for a year or two in Germany to finish him off. Tom was studying medicine and trying to like it. Jack was in business with his father, bent on getting rich. Dolly was in college with Stuffy and Ned reading law. Poor little Dick was dead, so was Billy; and no one could mourn for them, since life would never be happy, afflicted as they were in mind and body.

Rob and Teddy were called the ‘Lion and the Lamb’; for the latter was as rampant as the king of beasts, and the former as gentle as any sheep that ever baaed. Mrs Jo called him ‘my daughter’, and found him the most dutiful of children, with plenty of manliness underlying the quiet manners and tender nature. But in Ted she seemed to see all the faults, whims, aspirations, and fun of her own youth in a new shape. With his tawny locks always in wild confusion, his long legs and arms, loud voice, and continual activity, Ted was a prominent figure at Plumfield. He had his moods of gloom, and fell into the Slough of Despond about once a week, to be hoisted out by patient Rob or his mother, who understood when to let him alone and when to shake him up. He was her pride and joy as well as torment, being a very bright lad for his age, and so full of all sorts of budding talent, that her maternal mind was much exercised as to what this remarkable boy would become.

Demi had gone through College with honour, and Mrs Meg had set her heart on his being a minister — picturing in her fond fancy the first sermon her dignified young parson would preach, as well as the long, useful, and honoured life he was to lead. But John, as she called him now, firmly declined the divinity school, saying he had had enough of books, and needed to know more of men and the world, and caused the dear woman much disappointment by deciding to try a journalist's career. It was a blow; but she knew that young minds cannot be driven, and that experience is the best teacher; so she let him follow his own inclinations, still hoping to see him in the pulpit. Aunt Jo raged when she found that there was to be a reporter in the family, and called him 'Jenkins' on the spot. She liked his literary tendencies, but had reason to detest official Paul Prys, as we shall see later. Demi knew his own mind, however, and tranquilly carried out his plans, unmoved by the tongues of the anxious mammas or the jokes of his mates. Uncle Teddy encouraged him, and painted a splendid career, mentioning Dickens and other celebrities who began as reporters and ended as famous novelists or newspaper men.

The girls were all flourishing. Daisy, as sweet and domestic as ever, was her mother's comfort and companion. Josie at fourteen was a most original young person, full of pranks and peculiarities, the latest of which was a passion for the stage, which caused her quiet mother and sister much anxiety as well as amusement. Bess had grown into a tall, beautiful girl looking several years older than she was, with the same graceful ways and dainty tastes which the little Princess had, and a rich inheritance of both the father's and mother's gifts, fostered by every aid love and money could give. But the pride of the community was naughty Nan; for, like so many restless, wilful children, she was growing into a woman full of the energy and promise that suddenly blossoms when the ambitious seeker finds the work she is fitted to do well. Nan began to study medicine at sixteen, and at twenty was getting on bravely; for now, thanks to other intelligent women, colleges and hospitals were open to her. She had never wavered in her purpose from the childish days when she shocked Daisy in the old willow by saying: 'I don't want any family to fuss over. I shall have an office, with bottles and pestle things in it, and drive round and cure folks.' The future foretold by the little girl the young woman was rapidly bringing to pass, and finding so much happiness in it that nothing could win her from the chosen work. Several worthy young gentlemen had tried to make her change her mind and choose, as Daisy did, 'a nice little house and family to take care of'. But

Nan only laughed, and routed the lovers by proposing to look at the tongue which spoke of adoration, or professionally felt the pulse in the manly hand offered for her acceptance. So all departed but one persistent youth, who was such a devoted Traddles it was impossible to quench him.

This was Tom, who was as faithful to his child sweetheart as she to her ‘pestle things’, and gave a proof of fidelity that touched her very much. He studied medicine for her sake alone, having no taste for it, and a decided fancy for a mercantile life. But Nan was firm, and Tom stoutly kept on, devoutly hoping he might not kill many of his fellow-beings when he came to practise. They were excellent friends, however, and caused much amusement to their comrades, by the vicissitudes of this merry love-chase.

Both were approaching Plumfield on the afternoon when Mrs Meg and Mrs Jo were talking on the piazza. Not together; for Nan was walking briskly along the pleasant road alone, thinking over a case that interested her, and Tom was pegging on behind to overtake her, as if by accident, when the suburbs of the city were past — a little way of his, which was part of the joke.

Nan was a handsome girl, with a fresh colour, clear eye, quick smile, and the self-poised look young women with a purpose always have. She was simply and sensibly dressed, walked easily, and seemed full of vigour, with her broad shoulders well back, arms swinging freely, and the elasticity of youth and health in every motion. The few people she met turned to look at her, as if it was a pleasant sight to see a hearty, happy girl walking countryward that lovely day; and the red-faced young man steaming along behind, hat off and every tight curl wagging with impatience, evidently agreed with them.

Presently a mild ‘Hallo!’ was borne upon the breeze, and pausing, with an effort to look surprised that was an utter failure, Nan said affably:

‘Oh, is that you, Tom?’

‘Looks like it. Thought you might be walking out today’; and Tom’s jovial face beamed with pleasure.

‘You knew it. How is your throat?’ asked Nan in her professional tone, which was always a quencher to undue raptures.

‘Throat? Oh, ah! yes, I remember. It is well. The effect of that prescription was wonderful. I’ll never call homoeopathy a humbug again.’

‘You were the humbug this time, and so were the unmedicated pellets I gave you. If sugar or milk can cure diphtheria in this remarkable manner, I’ll make a note of it. O Tom, Tom, will you never be done playing tricks?’

‘O Nan, Nan, will you never be done getting the better of me?’ And the merry pair laughed at one another just as they did in the old times, which always came back freshly when they went to Plumfield.

‘Well, I knew I shouldn’t see you for a week if I didn’t scare up some excuse for a call at the office. You are so desperately busy all the time I never get a word,’ explained Tom.

‘You ought to be busy too, and above such nonsense. Really, Tom, if you don’t give your mind to your lectures, you’ll never get on,’ said Nan soberly.

‘I have quite enough of them as it is,’ answered Tom with an air of disgust. ‘A fellow must lark a bit after dissecting corpuses all day. I can’t stand it long at a time, though some people seem to enjoy it immensely.’

‘Then why not leave it, and do what suits you better? I always thought it a foolish thing, you know,’ said Nan, with a trace of anxiety in the keen eyes that searched for signs of illness in a face as ruddy as a Baldwin apple.

‘You know why I chose it, and why I shall stick to it if it kills me. I may not look delicate, but I’ve a deep-seated heart complaint, and it will carry me off sooner or later; for only one doctor in the world can cure it, and she won’t.’

There was an air of pensive resignation about Tom that was both comic and pathetic; for he was in earnest, and kept on giving hints of this sort, without the least encouragement.

Nan frowned; but she was used to it, and knew how to treat him.

‘She is curing it in the best and only way; but a more refractory patient never lived. Did you go to that ball, as I directed?’

‘I did.’

‘And devote yourself to pretty Miss West?’

‘Danced with her the whole evening.’

‘No impression made on that susceptible organ of yours?’

‘Not the slightest. I gaped in her face once, forgot to feed her, and gave a sigh of relief when I handed her over to her mamma.’

‘Repeat the dose as often as possible, and note the symptoms. I predict that you’ll “cry for it” by and by.’

‘Never! I’m sure it doesn’t suit my constitution.’

‘We shall see. Obey orders!’ sternly.

‘Yes, Doctor,’ meekly.

Silence reigned for a moment; then, as if the bone of contention was forgotten in the pleasant recollections called up by familiar objects, Nan said suddenly:

‘What fun we used to have in that wood! Do you remember how you tumbled out of the big nut-tree and nearly broke your collar-bones?’

‘Don’t I! and how you steeped me in wormwood till I was a fine mahogany colour, and Aunt Jo wailed over my spoilt jacket,’ laughed Tom, a boy again in a minute.

‘And how you set the house afire?’

‘And you ran off for your band-box?’

‘Do you ever say “Thunder-turtles” now?’

‘Do people ever call you “Giddy-gaddy”?’

‘Daisy does. Dear thing, I haven’t seen her for a week.’

‘I saw Demi this morning, and he said she was keeping house for Mother Bhaer.’

‘She always does when Aunt Jo gets into a vortex. Daisy is a model housekeeper; and you couldn’t do better than make your bow to her, if you can’t go to work and wait till you are grown up before you begin lovering.’

‘Nat would break his fiddle over my head if I suggested such a thing. No, thank you. Another name is engraved upon my heart as indelibly as the blue anchor on my arm. “Hope” is my motto, and “No surrender”, yours; see who will hold out longest.’

‘You silly boys think we must pair off as we did when children; but we shall do nothing of the kind. How well Parnassus looks from here!’ said Nan, abruptly changing the conversation again.

‘It is a fine house; but I love old Plum best. Wouldn’t Aunt March stare if she could see the changes here?’ answered Tom, as they both paused at the great gate to look at the pleasant landscape before them.

A sudden whoop startled them, as a long boy with a wild yellow head came leaping over a hedge like a kangaroo, followed by a slender girl, who stuck in the hawthorn, and sat there laughing like a witch. A pretty little lass she was, with curly dark hair, bright eyes, and a very expressive face. Her hat was at her back, and her skirts a good deal the worse for the brooks she had crossed, the trees she had climbed, and the last leap, which added several fine rents.

‘Take me down, Nan, please. Tom, hold Ted; he’s got my book, and I will have it,’ called Josie from her perch, not at all daunted by the appearance of her friends.

Tom promptly collared the thief, while Nan picked Josie from among the thorns and set her on her feet without a word of reproof; for having been a romp in her own girlhood, she was very indulgent to like tastes in others. ‘What’s the matter, dear?’ she asked, pinning up the longest rip, while Josie examined the scratches on her hands. ‘I was studying my part in the willow, and Ted came slyly up and poked the book out of my hands with his rod. It fell in the brook, and before I could scrabble down he was off. You wretch, give it back this moment or I’ll box your ears,’ cried Josie, laughing and scolding in the same breath.

Escaping from Tom, Ted struck a sentimental attitude, and with tender glances at the wet, torn young person before him, delivered Claude Melnotte’s famous speech in a lackadaisical way that was irresistibly funny, ending with ‘Dost like the picture, love?’ as he made an object of himself by tying his long legs in a knot and distorting his face horribly.

The sound of applause from the piazza put a stop to these antics, and the young folks went up the avenue together very much in the old style when Tom drove four in hand and Nan was the best horse in the team. Rosy, breathless, and merry, they greeted the ladies and sat down on the steps to rest, Aunt Meg sewing up her daughter’s rags while Mrs Jo smoothed the Lion’s mane, and rescued the book. Daisy appeared in a moment to greet her friend, and all began to talk.

‘Muffins for tea; better stay and eat ‘em; Daisy’s never fail,’ said Ted hospitably.

‘He’s a judge; he ate nine last time. That’s why he’s so fat,’ added Josie, with a withering glance at her cousin, who was as thin as a lath.

‘I must go and see Lucy Dove. She has a whitlow, and it’s time to lance it. I’ll tea at college,’ answered Nan, feeling in her pocket to be sure she had not forgotten her case of instruments.

‘Thanks, I’m going there also. Tom Merryweather has granulated lids, and I promised to touch them up for him. Save a doctor’s fee and be good practice for me. I’m clumsy with my thumbs,’ said Tom, bound to be near his idol while he could.

‘Hush! Daisy doesn’t like to hear you saw-bones talk of your work. Muffins suit us better’; and Ted grinned sweetly, with a view to future favours in the eating line.

‘Any news of the Commodore?’ asked Tom.

‘He is on his way home, and Dan hopes to come soon. I long to see my boys together, and have begged the wanderers to come to Thanksgiving, if not before,’ answered Mrs Jo, beaming at the thought.

‘They’ll come, every man of them, if they can. Even Jack will risk losing a dollar for the sake of one of our jolly old dinners,’ laughed Tom.

‘There’s the turkey fattening for the feast. I never chase him now, but feed him well; and he’s “swellin’ wisibly”, bless his drumsticks!’ said Ted, pointing out the doomed fowl proudly parading in a neighbouring field.

‘If Nat goes the last of the month we shall want a farewell frolic for him. I suppose the dear old Chirper will come home a second Ole Bull,’ said Nan to her friend.

A pretty colour came into Daisy’s cheek, and the folds of muslin on her breast rose and fell with a quick breath; but she answered placidly: ‘Uncle Laurie says he has real talent, and after the training he will get abroad he can command a good living here, though he may never be famous.’

‘Young people seldom turn out as one predicts, so it is of little use to expect anything,’ said Mrs Meg with a sigh. ‘If our children are good and useful men and women, we should be satisfied; yet it’s very natural to wish them to be brilliant and successful.’

‘They are like my chickens, mighty uncertain. Now, that fine-looking cockerel of mine is the stupidest one of the lot, and the ugly, long-legged chap is the king of the yard, he’s so smart; crows loud enough to wake the Seven Sleepers; but the handsome one croaks, and is no end of a coward. I get snubbed; but you wait till I grow up, and then see’; and Ted looked so like his own long-legged pet that everyone laughed at his modest prediction.

‘I want to see Dan settled somewhere. “A rolling stone gathers no moss”, and at twenty-five he is still roaming about the world without a tie to hold him, except this’; and Mrs Meg nodded towards her sister.

‘Dan will find his place at last, and experience is his best teacher. He is rough still, but each time he comes home I see a change for the better, and never lose my faith in him. He may never do anything great, or get rich; but if the wild boy makes an honest man, I’m satisfied,’ said Mrs Jo, who always defended the black sheep of her flock.

‘That’s right, mother, stand by Dan! He’s worth a dozen Jacks and Neds bragging about money and trying to be swells. You see if he doesn’t do something to be proud of and take the wind out of their sails,’ added Ted, whose love for his ‘Danny’ was now strengthened by a boy’s admiration for the bold, adventurous man.

‘Hope so, I’m sure. He’s just the fellow to do rash things and come to glory — climbing the Matterhorn, taking a “header” into Niagara, or finding a big nugget. That’s his way of sowing wild oats, and perhaps it’s better than ours,’ said Tom thoughtfully; for he had gained a good deal of experience in that sort of agriculture since he became a medical student.

‘Much better!’ said Mrs Jo emphatically. ‘I’d rather send my boys off to see the world in that way than leave them alone in a city full of temptations, with nothing to do but waste time, money, and health, as so many are left. Dan has to work his way, and that teaches him courage, patience, and self-reliance. I don’t worry about him as much as I do about George and Dolly at college, no more fit than two babies to take care of themselves.’

‘How about John? He’s knocking round town as a newspaper man, reporting all sorts of things, from sermons to prize-fights,’ asked Tom, who thought that sort of life would be much more to his own taste than medical lectures and hospital wards.

‘Demi has three safeguards — good principles, refined tastes, and a wise mother. He won’t come to harm, and these experiences will be useful to him when he begins to write, as I’m sure he will in time,’ began Mrs Jo in her prophetic tone; for she was anxious to have some of her geese turn out swans.

‘Speak of Jenkins, and you’ll hear the rustling of his paper,’ cried Tom, as a fresh-faced, brown-eyed young man came up the avenue, waving a newspaper over his head.

‘Here’s your Evening Tattler! Latest Edition! Awful murder! Bank clerk absconded! Powder-mill explosion, and great strike of the Latin School boys!’ roared Ted, going to meet his cousin with the graceful gait of a young giraffe.

‘The Commodore is in, and will cut his cable and run before the wind as soon as he can get off,’ called Demi, with ‘a nice derangement of nautical epitaphs’, as he came up smiling over his good news.

Everyone talked together for a moment, and the paper passed from hand to hand that each eye might rest on the pleasant fact that the Brenda, from Hamburg, was safe in port.

‘He’ll come lurching out by tomorrow with his usual collection of marine monsters and lively yarns. I saw him, jolly and tarry and brown as a coffee-berry. Had a good run, and hopes to be second mate, as the other chap is laid up with a broken leg,’ added Demi.

‘Wish I had the setting of it,’ said Nan to herself, with a professional twist of her hand.

‘How’s Franz?’ asked Mrs Jo.

‘He’s going to be married! There’s news for you. The first of the flock, Aunty, so say good-bye to him. Her name is Ludmilla Heldegard Blumenthal; good family, well-off, pretty, and of course an angel. The dear old boy wants Uncle’s consent, and then he will settle down to be a happy and an honest burgher. Long life to him!’

‘I’m glad to hear it. I do so like to settle my boys with a good wife and a nice little home. Now, if all is right, I shall feel as if Franz was off my mind,’ said Mrs Jo, folding her hands contentedly; for she often felt like a distracted hen with a large brood of mixed chickens and ducks upon her hands.

‘So do I,’ sighed Tom, with a sly glance at Nan. ‘That’s what a fellow needs to keep him steady; and it’s the duty of nice girls to marry as soon as possible, isn’t it, Demi?’

‘If there are enough nice fellows to go round. The female population exceeds the male, you know, especially in New England; which accounts for the high state of culture we are in, perhaps,’ answered John, who was leaning over his mother’s chair, telling his day’s experiences in a whisper.

‘It is a merciful provision, my dears; for it takes three or four women to get each man into, through, and out of the world. You are costly creatures, boys; and it is well that mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters love their duty and do it so well, or you would perish off the face of the earth,’ said Mrs Jo solemnly, as she took up a basket filled with dilapidated hose; for the good Professor was still hard on his socks, and his sons resembled him in that respect.

‘Such being the case, there is plenty for the “superfluous women” to do, in taking care of these helpless men and their families. I see that more clearly every day, and am very glad and grateful that my profession will make me a useful, happy, and independent spinster.’

Nan’s emphasis on the last word caused Tom to groan, and the rest to laugh.

‘I take great pride and solid satisfaction in you, Nan, and hope to see you very successful; for we do need just such helpful women in the world. I sometimes feel as if I’ve missed my vocation and ought to have remained single; but my duty seemed to point this way, and I don’t regret it,’ said Mrs Jo, folding a large and very ragged blue sock to her bosom.

‘Neither do I. What should I ever have done without my dearest Mum?’ added Ted, with a filial hug which caused both to disappear behind the newspaper in which he had been mercifully absorbed for a few minutes.

‘My darling boy, if you would wash your hands semi-occasionally, fond caresses would be less disastrous to my collar. Never mind, my precious touslehead, better grass stains and dirt than no cuddlings at all’; and Mrs Jo emerged from that brief eclipse looking much refreshed, though her back hair was caught in Ted’s buttons and her collar under one ear.

Here Josie, who had been studying her part at the other end of the piazza, suddenly burst forth with a smothered shriek, and gave Juliet’s speech in the tomb so effectively that the boys applauded, Daisy shivered, and Nan murmured: ‘Too much cerebral excitement for one of her age.’

‘I’m afraid you’ll have to make up your mind to it, Meg. That child is a born actress. We never did anything so well, not even the Witch’s Curse,’ said Mrs Jo, casting a bouquet of many-coloured socks at the feet of her flushed and panting niece, when she fell gracefully upon the door-mat.

‘It is a sort of judgement upon me for my passion for the stage when a girl. Now I know how dear Marmee felt when I begged to be an actress. I never can consent, and yet I may be obliged to give up my wishes, hopes, and plans again.’

There was an accent of reproach in his mother’s voice, which made Demi pick up his sister with a gentle shake, and the stern command to ‘drop that nonsense in public’.

‘Drop me, Minion, or I’ll give you the Maniac Bride, with my best Ha-ha!’

cried Josie, glaring at him like an offended kitten. Being set on her feet, she made a splendid courtesy, and dramatically proclaiming, ‘Mrs Woffington’s carriage waits,’ swept down the steps and round the corner, trailing Daisy’s scarlet shawl majestically behind her.

‘Isn’t she great fun? I couldn’t stop in this dull place if I hadn’t that child to make it lively for me. If ever she turns prim, I’m off; so mind how you nip her in the bud,’ said Teddy, frowning at Demi, who was now writing out shorthand notes on the steps.

‘You two are a team, and it takes a strong hand to drive you, but I rather like it. Josie ought to have been my child, and Rob yours, Meg. Then your house would have been all peace and mine all Bedlam. Now I must go and tell Laurie the news. Come with me, Meg, a little stroll will do us good’; and sticking Ted’s straw hat on her head, Mrs Jo walked off with her sister, leaving Daisy to attend to the muffins, Ted to appease Josie, and Tom and Nan to give their respective patients a very bad quarter of an hour.

Chapter 2. PARNASSUS

It was well named; and the Muses seemed to be at home that day, for as the newcomers went up the slope appropriate sights and sounds greeted them. Passing an open window, they looked in upon a library presided over by Clio, Calliope, and Urania; Melpomene and Thalia were disporting themselves in the hall, where some young people were dancing and rehearsing a play; Erato was walking in the garden with her lover, and in the music-room Phoebus himself was drilling a tuneful choir.

A mature Apollo was our old friend Laurie, but comely and genial as ever; for time had ripened the freakish boy into a noble man. Care and sorrow, as well as ease and happiness, had done much for him; and the responsibility of carrying out his grandfather’s wishes had been a duty most faithfully performed. Prosperity suits some people, and they blossom best in a glow of sunshine; others need the shade, and are the sweeter for a touch of frost. Laurie was one of the former sort, and Amy was another; so life had been a kind of poem to them since they married — not only harmonious and happy, but earnest, useful, and rich in the beautiful benevolence which can do so much when wealth and wisdom go hand in hand with charity. Their house was full of unostentatious beauty and comfort, and here the art-loving host and hostess attracted and entertained artists of all kinds. Laurie had music enough now, and was a generous patron to the class he most liked to help. Amy had her proteges among ambitious young painters and sculptors, and found her own art double dear as her daughter grew old enough to share its labours and delights with her; for she was one of those who prove that women can be faithful wives and mothers without sacrificing the special gift bestowed upon them for their own development and the good of others.

Her sisters knew where to find her, and Jo went at once to the studio, where mother and daughter worked together. Bess was busy with the bust of a little child, while her mother added the last touches to a fine head of her husband. Time seemed to have stood still with Amy, for happiness had kept her young and prosperity given her the culture she needed. A stately, graceful woman, who showed how elegant simplicity could be made by the taste with which she chose her dress and the grace with which she wore it. As someone said: ‘I never know what Mrs Laurence has on, but I always receive the impression that she is the best-dressed lady in the room.’

It was evident that she adored her daughter, and well she might; for the beauty she had longed for seemed, to her fond eyes at least, to be impersonated in this younger self. Bess inherited her mother's Diana-like figure, blue eyes, fair skin, and golden hair, tied up in the same classic knot of curls. Also — ah! never-ending source of joy to Amy — she had her father's handsome nose and mouth, cast in a feminine mould. The severe simplicity of a long linen pinafore suited her; and she worked away with the entire absorption of the true artist, unconscious of the loving eyes upon her, till Aunt Jo came in exclaiming eagerly:

'My dear girls, stop your mud-pies and hear the news!'

Both artists dropped their tools and greeted the irrepressible woman cordially, though genius had been burning splendidly and her coming spoilt a precious hour. They were in the full tide of gossip when Laurie, who had been summoned by Meg, arrived, and sitting down between the sisters, with no barricade anywhere, listened with interest to the news of Franz and Emil.

'The epidemic has broke out, and now it will rage and ravage your flock. Be prepared for every sort of romance and rashness for the next ten years, Jo. Your boys are growing up and will plunge headlong into a sea of worse scrapes than any you have had yet,' said Laurie, enjoying her look of mingled delight and despair.

'I know it, and I hope I shall be able to pull them through and land them safely; but it's an awful responsibility, for they will come to me and insist that I can make their poor little loves run smoothly. I like it, though, and Meg is such a mush of sentiment she revels in the prospect,' answered Jo, feeling pretty easy about her own boys, whose youth made them safe for the present.

'I'm afraid she won't revel when our Nat begins to buzz too near her Daisy. Of course you see what all that means? As musical director I am also his confidante, and would like to know what advice to give,' said Laurie soberly.

'Hush! you forget that child,' began Jo, nodding towards Bess, who was at work again.

'Bless you! she's in Athens, and doesn't hear a word. She ought to leave off, though, and go out. My darling, put the baby to sleep, and go for a run. Aunt Meg is in the parlour; go and show her the new pictures till we come,' added Laurie, looking at his tall girl as Pygmalion might have looked at Galatea; for he considered her the finest statue in the house.

'Yes, papa; but please tell me if it is good'; and Bess obediently put down her tools, with a lingering glance at the bust.

'My cherished daughter, truth compels me to confess that one cheek is plumper than the other; and the curls upon its infant brow are rather too much like horns for perfect grace; otherwise it rivals Raphael's Chanting Cherubs, and I'm proud of it.'

Laurie was laughing as he spoke; for these first attempts were so like Amy's early ones, it was impossible to regard them as soberly as the enthusiastic mamma did.

'You can't see beauty in anything but music,' answered Bess, shaking the golden head that made the one bright spot in the cool north lights of the great studio.

'Well, I see beauty in you, dear. And if you are not art, what is? I wish to put a little more nature into you, and get you away from this cold clay and marble into the sunshine, to dance and laugh as the others do. I want a flesh-and-blood girl, not a sweet statue in a grey pinafore, who forgets everything but her work.' As he spoke, two dusty hands came round his neck, and Bess said earnestly, punctuating her words with soft touches of her lips:

'I never forget you, papa; but I do want to do something beautiful that you may be proud of me by and by. Mamma often tells me to stop; but when we get in here we forget there is any world outside, we are so busy and so happy. Now I'll go and run and sing, and be a girl to please you.' And throwing away the apron, Bess vanished from the room, seeming to take all the light with her.

'I'm glad you said that. The dear child is too much absorbed in her artistic dreams for one so young. It is my fault; but I sympathize so deeply in it all, I forget to be wise,' sighed Amy, carefully covering the baby with a wet towel.

'I think this power of living in our children is one of the sweetest things in the world; but I try to remember what Marmee once said to Meg — that fathers should have their share in the education of both girls and boys; so I leave Ted to his father all I can, and Fritz lends me Rob, whose quiet ways are as restful and good for me as Ted's tempests are for his father. Now I advise you, Amy, to let Bess drop the mud-pies for a time, and take up music with Laurie; then she won't be one-sided, and he won't be jealous.'

'Hear, hear! A Daniel — a very Daniel!' cried Laurie, well pleased. 'I thought you'd lend a hand, Jo, and say a word for me. I am a little jealous of Amy, and want more of a share in my girl. Come, my lady, let me have her this summer, and next year, when we go to Rome, I'll give her up to you and high art. Isn't that a fair bargain?'

'I agree; but in trying your hobby, nature, with music thrown in, don't forget that, though only fifteen, our Bess is older than most girls of that age, and cannot be treated like a child. She is so very precious to me, I feel as if I wanted to keep her always as pure and beautiful as the marble she loves so well.'

Amy spoke regretfully as she looked about the lovely room where she had spent so many happy hours with this dear child of hers.

'"Turn and turn about is fair play", as we used to say when we all wanted to ride on Ellen Tree or wear the russet boots,' said Jo briskly; 'so you must share your girl between you, and see who will do the most for her.'

'We will,' answered the fond parents, laughing at the recollections Jo's proverb brought up to them.

'How I did use to enjoy bouncing on the limbs of that old apple-tree! No real horse ever gave me half the pleasure or the exercise,' said Amy, looking out of the high window as if she saw the dear old orchard again and the little girls at play there.

'And what fun I had with those blessed boots!' laughed Jo. 'I've got the relics now. The boys reduced them to rags; but I love them still, and would enjoy a good theatrical stalk in them if it were possible.'

'My fondest memories twine about the warming-pan and the sausage. What larks we had! And how long ago it seems!' said Laurie, staring at the two women before him as if he found it hard to realize that they ever had been little Amy and riotous Jo.

'Don't suggest that we are growing old, my Lord. We have only bloomed; and a very nice bouquet we make with our buds about us,' answered Mrs Amy, shaking out the folds of her rosy muslin with much the air of dainty satisfaction the girl used to show in a new dress.

'Not to mention our thorns and dead leaves,' added Jo, with a sigh; for life had never been very easy to her, and even now she had her troubles both within and without.

'Come and have a dish of tea, old dear, and see what the young folks are about. You are tired, and want to be "stayed with flagons and comforted with apples",' said Laurie, offering an arm to each sister, and leading them away to afternoon tea, which flowed as freely on Parnassus as the nectar of old.

They found Meg in the summer-parlour, an airy and delightful room, full now of afternoon sunshine and the rustle of trees; for the three long windows opened on the garden. The great music-room was at one end, and at the other, in a deep alcove hung with purple curtains, a little household shrine had been made. Three portraits hung there, two marble busts stood in the corners, and a couch, an oval table, with its urn of flowers, were the only articles of furniture the nook contained. The busts were John Brooke and Beth — Amy's work — both excellent likenesses, and both full of the placid beauty which always recalls the saying, that 'Clay represents life; plaster, death; marble, immortality'. On the right, as became the founder of the house, hung the portrait of Mr Laurence, with its expression of mingled pride and benevolence, as fresh and attractive as when he caught the girl Jo admiring it. Opposite was Aunt March — a legacy to Amy — in an imposing turban, immense sleeves, and long mittens decorously crossed on the front of her plum-coloured satin gown. Time had mellowed the severity of her aspect; and the fixed regard of the handsome old gentleman opposite seemed to account for the amiable simper on lips that had not uttered a sharp word for years.

In the place of honour, with the sunshine warm upon it, and a green garland always round it, was Marmee's beloved face, painted with grateful skill by a great artist whom she had befriended when poor and unknown. So beautifully lifelike was it that it seemed to smile down upon her daughters, saying cheerfully:

'Be happy; I am with you still.'

The three sisters stood a moment looking up at the beloved picture with eyes full of tender reverence and the longing that never left them; for this noble mother had been so much to them that no one could ever fill her place. Only two years since she had gone away to live and love anew, leaving such a sweet memory behind her that it was both an inspiration and a comforter to all the household. They felt this as they drew closer to one another, and Laurie put it into words as he said earnestly:

'I can ask nothing better for my child than that she may be a woman like our mother. Please God, she shall be, if I can do it; for I owe the best I have to this dear saint.'

Just then a fresh voice began to sing 'Ave Maria' in the music-room, and Bess unconsciously echoed her father's prayer for her as she dutifully obeyed his wishes. The soft sound of the air Marmee used to sing led the listeners back into the world again from that momentary reaching after the loved and lost, and they sat down together near the open windows enjoying the music, while Laurie brought them tea, making the little service pleasant by the tender care he gave to it.

Nat came in with Demi, soon followed by Ted and Josie, the Professor and his faithful Rob, all anxious to hear more about 'the boys'. The rattle of cups and tongues grew brisk, and the setting sun saw a cheerful company resting in the bright room after the varied labours of the day.

Professor Bhaer was grey now, but robust and genial as ever; for he had the work he loved, and did it so heartily that the whole college felt his beautiful influence. Rob was as much like him as it was possible for a boy to be, and was already called the 'young Professor', he so adored study and closely imitated his honoured father in all ways.

'Well, heart's dearest, we go to have our boys again, all two, and may rejoice greatly,’ said Mr Bhaer, seating himself beside Jo with a beaming face and a handshake of congratulation.

‘Oh, Fritz, I’m so delighted about Emil, and if you approve about Franz also. Did you know Ludmilla? Is it a wise match?’ asked Mrs Jo, handing him her cup of tea and drawing closer, as if she welcomed her refuge in joy as well as sorrow.

‘It all goes well. I saw the Madchen when I went over to place Franz. A child then, but most sweet and charming. Blumenthal is satisfied, I think, and the boy will be happy. He is too German to be content away from Vaterland, so we shall have him as a link between the new and the old, and that pleases me much.’

‘And Emil, he is to be second mate next voyage; isn’t that fine? I’m so happy that both your boys have done well; you gave up so much for them and their mother. You make light of it, dear, but I never forget it,’ said Jo, with her hand in his as sentimentally as if she was a girl again and her Fritz had come a-wooing.

He laughed his cheery laugh, and whispered behind her fan: ‘If I had not come to America for the poor lads, I never should have found my Jo. The hard times are very sweet now, and I bless Gott for all I seemed to lose, because I gained the blessing of my life.’

‘Spooning! spooning! Here’s an awful flirtation on the sly,’ cried Teddy, peering over the fan just at that interesting moment, much to his mother’s confusion and his father’s amusement; for the Professor never was ashamed of the fact that he still considered his wife the dearest woman in the world. Rob promptly ejected his brother from one window, to see him skip in at the other, while Mrs Jo shut her fan and held it ready to rap her unruly boy’s knuckles if he came near her again.

Nat approached in answer to Mr Bhaer’s beckoning teaspoon, and stood before them with a face full of the respectful affection he felt for the excellent man who had done so much for him.

‘I have the letters ready for thee, my son. They are two old friends of mine in Leipzig, who will befriend thee in that new life. It is well to have them, for thou wilt be heartbroken with Heimweh at the first, Nat, and need comforting,’ said the Professor, giving him several letters.

‘Thanks, sir. Yes, I expect to be pretty lonely till I get started, then my music and the hope of getting on will cheer me up,’ answered Nat, who both longed and dreaded to leave all these friends behind him and make new ones.

He was a man now; but the blue eyes were as honest as ever, the mouth still a little weak, in spite of the carefully cherished moustache over it, and the broad forehead more plainly than ever betrayed the music-loving nature of the youth. Modest, affectionate, and dutiful, Nat was considered a pleasant though not a brilliant success by Mrs Jo. She loved and trusted him, and was sure he would do his best, but did not expect that he would be great in any way, unless the stimulus of foreign training and self-dependence made him a better artist and a stronger man than now seemed likely.

‘I’ve marked all your things — or rather, Daisy did — and as soon as your books are collected, we can see about the packing,’ said Mrs Jo, who was so used to fitting boys off for all quarters of the globe that a trip to the North Pole would not have been too much for her.

Nat grew red at mention of that name — or was it the last glow of sunset on his rather pale cheek? — and his heart beat happily at the thought of the dear girl working Ns and Bs on his humble socks and handkerchiefs; for Nat adored Daisy, and the cherished dream of his life was to earn a place for himself as a musician and win this angel for his wife. This hope did more for him than the Professor’s counsels, Mrs Jo’s care, or Mr Laurie’s generous help. For her sake he worked, waited, and hoped, finding courage and patience in the dream of that happy future when Daisy should make a little home for him and he fiddle a fortune into her lap. Mrs Jo knew this; and though he was not exactly the man she would have chosen for her niece, she felt that Nat would always need just the wise and loving care Daisy could give him, and that without it there was danger of his being one of the amiable and aimless men who fail for want of the right pilot to steer them safely through the world. Mrs Meg decidedly frowned upon the poor boy’s love, and would not hear of giving her dear girl to any but the best man to be found on the face of the earth. She was very kind, but as firm as such gentle souls can be; and Nat fled for comfort to Mrs Jo, who always espoused the interests of her boys heartily. A new set of anxieties was beginning now that the aforesaid boys were growing up, and she foresaw no end of worry as well as amusement in the love-affairs already budding in her flock. Mrs Meg was usually her best ally and adviser, for she loved romances as well now as when a blooming girl herself. But in this case she hardened her heart, and would not hear a word of entreaty. ‘Nat was not man enough, never would be, no one knew his family, a musician’s life was a hard one; Daisy was too young, five or six years hence when time had proved both perhaps. Let us see what absence will do for him.’ And that was the end of it, for when the maternal Pelican was roused she could be very firm, though for her precious children she would have plucked her last feather and given the last drop of her blood.

Mrs Jo was thinking of this as she looked at Nat while he talked with her husband about Leipzig, and she resolved to have a clear understanding with him before he went; for she was used to confidences, and talked freely with her boys about the trials and temptations that beset all lives in the beginning, and so often mar them, for want of the right word at the right moment.

This is the first duty of parents, and no false delicacy should keep them from the watchful care, the gentle warning, which makes self-knowledge and self-control the compass and pilot of the young as they leave the safe harbour of home.

‘Plato and his disciples approach,’ announced irreverent Teddy, as Mr March came in with several young men and women about him; for the wise old man was universally beloved, and ministered so beautifully to his flock that many of them thanked him all their lives for the help given to both hearts and souls.

Bess went to him at once; for since Marmee died, Grandpapa was her special care, and it was sweet to see the golden head bend over the silver one as she rolled out his easy-chair and waited on him with tender alacrity.

‘Aesthetic tea always on tap here, sir; will you have a flowing bowl or a bit of ambrosia?’ asked Laurie, who was wandering about with a sugar-basin in one hand and a plate of cake in the other; for sweetening cups and feeding the hungry was work he loved.

‘Neither, thanks; this child has taken care of me’; and Mr March turned to Bess, who sat on one arm of his chair, holding a glass of fresh milk.

‘Long may she live to do it, sir, and I be here to see this pretty contradiction of the song that “youth and age cannot live together”!’ answered Laurie, smiling at the pair. ‘“Crabbed age”, papa; that makes all the difference in the world,’ said Bess quickly; for she loved poetry, and read the best.

‘Wouldst thou see fresh roses grow
In a reverend bed of snow?’

quoted Mr March, as Josie came and perched on the other arm, looking like a very thorny little rose; for she had been having a hot discussion with Ted, and had got the worst of it.

‘Grandpa, must women always obey men and say they are the wisest, just because they are the strongest?’ she cried, looking fiercely at her cousin, who came stalking up with a provoking smile on the boyish face that was always very comical atop of that tall figure.

‘Well, my dear, that is the old-fashioned belief, and it will take some time to change it. But I think the woman’s hour has struck; and it looks to me as if the boys must do their best, for the girls are abreast now, and may reach the goal first,’ answered Mr March, surveying with paternal satisfaction the bright faces of the young women, who were among the best students in the college.

‘The poor little Atalantas are sadly distracted and delayed by the obstacles thrown in their way — not golden apples, by any means — but I think they will stand a fair chance when they have learned to run better,’ laughed Uncle Laurie, stroking Josie’s breezy hair, which stood up like the fur of an angry kitten.

‘Whole barrels of apples won’t stop me when I start, and a dozen Teds won’t trip me up, though they may try. I’ll show him that a woman can act as well, if not better, than a man. It has been done, and will be again; and I’ll never own that my brain isn’t as good as his, though it may be smaller,’ cried the excited young person.

‘If you shake your head in that violent way you’ll addle what brains you have got; and I’d take care of ‘em, if I were you,’ began teasing Ted.

‘What started this civil war?’ asked Grandpapa, with a gentle emphasis on the adjective, which caused the combatants to calm their ardour a little.

‘Why, we were pegging away at the Iliad and came to where Zeus tells Juno not to inquire into his plans or he’ll whip her, and Jo was disgusted because Juno meekly hushed up. I said it was all right, and agreed with the old fellow that women didn’t know much and ought to obey men,’ explained Ted, to the great amusement of his hearers.

‘Goddesses may do as they like, but those Greek and Trojan women were poor-spirited things if they minded men who couldn’t fight their own battles and had to be hustled off by Pallas, and Venus, and Juno, when they were going to get beaten. The idea of two armies stopping and sitting down while a pair of heroes flung stones at one another! I don’t think much of your old Homer. Give me Napoleon or Grant for my hero.’

Josie’s scorn was as funny as if a humming-bird scolded at an ostrich, and everyone laughed as she sniffed at the immortal poet and criticized the gods.

‘Napoleon’s Juno had a nice time; didn’t she? That’s just the way girls argue — first one way and then the other,’ jeered Ted.

‘Like Johnson’s young lady, who was “not categorical, but all wiggle-waggle”,’ added Uncle Laurie, enjoying the battle immensely.

‘I was only speaking of them as soldiers. But if you come to the woman side of it, wasn’t Grant a kind husband and Mrs Grant a happy woman? He didn’t threaten to whip her if she asked a natural question; and if Napoleon did do wrong about Josephine, he could fight, and didn’t want any Minerva to come fussing over him. They were a stupid set, from dandified Paris to Achilles sulking in his ships, and I won’t change my opinion for all the Hectors and Agamemnons in Greece,’ said Josie, still unconquered.

‘You can fight like a Trojan, that’s evident; and we will be the two obedient armies looking on while you and Ted have it out,’ began Uncle Laurie, assuming the attitude of a warrior leaning on his spear.

‘I fear we must give it up, for Pallas is about to descend and carry off our Hector,’ said Mr March, smiling, as Jo came to remind her son that suppertime was near.

‘We will fight it out later when there are no goddesses to interfere,’ said Teddy, as he turned away with unusual alacrity, remembering the treat in store.

‘Conquered by a muffin, by Jove!’ called Josie after him, exulting in an opportunity to use the classical exclamation forbidden to her sex.

But Ted shot a Parthian arrow as he retired in good order by replying, with a highly virtuous expression:

‘Obedience is a soldier’s first duty.’

Bent on her woman’s privilege of having the last word, Josie ran after him, but never uttered the scathing speech upon her lips, for a very brown young man in a blue suit came leaping up the steps with a cheery ‘Ahoy! ahoy! where is everybody?’

‘Emil! Emil!’ cried Josie, and in a moment Ted was upon him, and the late enemies ended their fray in a joyful welcome to the newcomer.

Muffins were forgotten, and towing their cousin like two fussy little tugs with a fine merchantman, the children returned to the parlour, where Emil kissed all the women and shook hands with all the men except his uncle; him he embraced in the good old German style, to the great delight of the observers.

‘Didn’t think I could get off today, but found I could, and steered straight for old Plum. Not a soul there, so I luffed and bore away for Parnassus, and here is every man Jack of you. Bless your hearts, how glad I am to see you all!’ exclaimed the sailor boy, beaming at them, as he stood with his legs apart as if he still felt the rocking deck under his feet.

‘You ought to “shiver your timbers”, not “bless our hearts”, Emil; it’s not nautical at all. Oh, how nice and shippy and tarry you do smell!’ said Josie, sniffing at him with great enjoyment of the fresh sea odours he brought with him. This was her favourite cousin, and she was his pet; so she knew that the bulging pockets of the blue jacket contained treasures for her at least.

‘Avast, my hearty, and let me take soundings before you dive,’ laughed Emil, understanding her affectionate caresses, and holding her off with one hand while with the other he rummaged out sundry foreign little boxes and parcels marked with different names, and handed them round with appropriate remarks, which caused much laughter; for Emil was a wag.

‘There’s a hawser that will hold our little cock-boat still about five minutes,’ he said, throwing a necklace of pretty pink coral over Josie’s head; ‘and here’s something the mermaids sent to Undine,’ he added, handing Bess a string of pearly shells on a silver chain.

I thought Daisy would like a fiddle, and Nat can find her a beau,’ continued the sailor, with a laugh, as he undid a dainty filigree brooch in the shape of a violin.

‘I know she will, and I’ll take it to her,’ answered Nat, as he vanished, glad of an errand, and sure that he could find Daisy though Emil had missed her.

Emil chuckled, and handed out a quaintly carved bear whose head opened, showing a capacious ink-stand. This he presented, with a scrape, to Aunt Jo.

‘Knowing your fondness for these fine animals, I brought this one to your pen.’

‘Very good, Commodore! Try again,’ said Mrs Jo, much pleased with her gift, which caused the Professor to prophesy ‘works of Shakespeare’ from its depths, so great would be the inspiration of the beloved bruin.

‘As Aunt Meg will wear caps, in spite of her youth, I got Ludmilla to get me some bits of lace. Hope you’ll like ‘em’; and out of a soft paper came some filmy things, one of which soon lay like a net of snowflakes on Mrs Meg’s pretty hair.

‘I couldn’t find anything swell enough for Aunt Amy, because she has everything she wants, so I brought a little picture that always makes me think of her when Bess was a baby’; and he handed her an oval ivory locket, on which was painted a goldenhaired Madonna, with a rosy child folded in her blue mantle.

‘How lovely!’ cried everyone; and Aunt Amy at once hung it about her neck on the blue ribbon from Bess’s hair, charmed with her gift; for it recalled the happiest year of her life.

‘Now, I flatter myself I’ve got just the thing for Nan, neat but not gaudy, a sort of sign you see, and very appropriate for a doctor,’ said Emil, proudly displaying a pair of lava earrings shaped like little skulls.

‘Horrid!’ And Bess, who hated ugly things, turned her eyes to her own pretty shells.

‘She won’t wear earrings,’ said Josie.

‘Well, she’ll enjoy punching your ears then. She’s never so happy as when she’s overhauling her fellow creatures and going for ‘em with a knife,’ answered Emil, undisturbed. ‘I’ve got a lot of plunder for you fellows in my chest, but I knew I should have no peace till my cargo for the girls was unloaded. Now tell me all the news.’ And, seated on Amy’s best marbletopped table, the sailor swung his legs and talked at the rate of ten knots an hour, till Aunt Jo carried them all off to a grand family tea in honour of the Commodore.

Chapter 3. JO’S LAST SCRAPE

The March family had enjoyed a great many surprises in the course of their varied career, but the greatest of all was when the Ugly Duckling turned out to be, not a swan, but a golden goose, whose literary eggs found such an unexpected market that in ten years Jo’s wildest and most cherished dream actually came true. How or why it happened she never clearly understood, but all of a sudden she found herself famous in a small way, and, better still, with a snug little fortune in her pocket to clear away the obstacles of the present and assure the future of her boys.

It began during a bad year when everything went wrong at Plumfield; times were hard, the school dwindled, Jo overworked herself and had a long illness; Laurie and Amy were abroad, and the Bhaers too proud to ask help even of those as near and dear as this generous pair. Confined to her room, Jo got desperate over the state of affairs, till she fell back upon the long-disused pen as the only thing she could do to help fill up the gaps in the income. A book for girls being wanted by a certain publisher, she hastily scribbled a little story describing a few scenes and adventures in the lives of herself and sisters, though boys were more in her line, and with very slight hopes of success sent it out to seek its fortune.

Things always went by contraries with Jo. Her first book, laboured over for years, and launched full of the high hopes and ambitious dreams of youth, foundered on its voyage, though the wreck continued to float long afterward, to the profit of the publisher at least. The hastily written story, sent away with no thought beyond the few dollars it might bring, sailed with a fair wind and a wise pilot at the helm into public favour, and came home heavily laden with an unexpected cargo of gold and glory.

A more astonished woman probably never existed than Josephine Bhaer when her little ship came into port with flags flying, cannon that had been silent before now booming gaily, and, better than all, many kind faces rejoicing with her, many friendly hands grasping hers with cordial congratulations. After that it was plain sailing, and she merely had to load her ships and send them off on prosperous trips, to bring home stores of comfort for all she loved and laboured for.

The fame she never did quite accept; for it takes very little fire to make a great deal of smoke nowadays, and notoriety is not real glory. The fortune she could not doubt, and gratefully received; though it was not half so large a one as a generous world reported it to be. The tide having turned continued to rise, and floated the family comfortably into a snug harbour where the older members could rest secure from storms, and whence the younger ones could launch their boats for the voyage of life.

All manner of happiness, peace, and plenty came in those years to bless the patient waiters, hopeful workers, and devout believers in the wisdom and justice of Him who sends disappointment, poverty, and sorrow to try the love of human hearts and make success the sweeter when it comes. The world saw the prosperity, and kind souls rejoiced over the improved fortunes of the family; but the success Jo valued most, the happiness that nothing could change or take away, few knew much about.

It was the power of making her mother's last years happy and serene; to see the burden of care laid down for ever, the weary hands at rest, the dear face untroubled by any anxiety, and the tender heart free to pour itself out in the wise charity which was its delight. As a girl, Jo's favourite plan had been a room where Marmee could sit in peace and enjoy herself after her hard, heroic life. Now the dream had become a happy fact, and Marmee sat in her pleasant chamber with every comfort and luxury about her, loving daughters to wait on her as infirmities increased, a faithful mate to lean upon, and grand-children to brighten the twilight of life with their dutiful affection. A very precious time to all, for she rejoiced as only mothers can in the good fortunes of their children. She had lived to reap the harvest she sowed; had seen prayers answered, hopes blossom, good gifts bear fruit, peace and prosperity bless the home she had made; and then, like some brave, patient angel, whose work was done, turned her face heavenward, glad to rest.

This was the sweet and sacred side of the change; but it had its droll and thorny one, as all things have in this curious world of ours. After the first surprise, incredulity, and joy, which came to Jo, with the ingratitude of human nature, she soon tired of renown, and began to resent her loss of liberty. For suddenly the admiring public took possession of her and all her affairs, past, present, and to come. Strangers demanded to look at her, question, advise, warn, congratulate, and drive her out of her wits by well-meant but very wearisome attentions. If she declined to open her heart to them, they reproached her; if she refused to endow her pet charities, relieve private wants, or sympathize with every ill and trial known to humanity, she was called hard-hearted, selfish, and haughty; if she found it impossible to answer the piles of letters sent her, she was neglectful of her duty to the admiring public; and if she preferred the privacy of home to the pedestal upon which she was requested to pose, 'the airs of literary people' were freely criticized.

She did her best for the children, they being the public for whom she wrote, and laboured stoutly to supply the demand always in the mouths of voracious youth — ’More stories; more right away!’ Her family objected to this devotion at their expense, and her health suffered; but for a time she gratefully offered herself up on the altar of juvenile literature, feeling that she owed a good deal to the little friends in whose sight she had found favour after twenty years of effort.

But a time came when her patience gave out; and wearying of being a lion, she became a bear in nature as in name, and returning to her den, growled awfully when ordered out. Her family enjoyed the fun, and had small sympathy with her trials, but Jo came to consider it the worse scrape of her life; for liberty had always been her dearest possession, and it seemed to be fast going from her. Living in a lantern soon loses its charm, and she was too old, too tired, and too busy to like it. She felt that she had done all that could reasonably be required of her when autographs, photographs, and autobiographical sketches had been sown broadcast over the land; when artists had taken her home in all its aspects, and reporters had taken her in the grim one she always assumed on these trying occasions; when a series of enthusiastic boarding-schools had ravaged her grounds for trophies, and a steady stream of amiable pilgrims had worn her doorsteps with their respectful feet; when servants left after a week’s trial of the bell that rang all day; when her husband was forced to guard her at meals, and the boys to cover her retreat out of back windows on certain occasions when enterprising guests walked in unannounced at unfortunate moments.

A sketch of one day may perhaps explain the state of things, offer some excuse for the unhappy woman, and give a hint to the autograph-fiend now rampant in the land; for it is a true tale.

‘There ought to be a law to protect unfortunate authors,’ said Mrs Jo one morning soon after Emil’s arrival, when the mail brought her an unusually large and varied assortment of letters. ‘To me it is a more vital subject than international copyright; for time is money, peace is health, and I lose both with no return but less respect for my fellow creatures and a wild desire to fly into the wilderness, since I cannot shut my doors even in free America.’

‘Lion-hunters are awful when in search of their prey. If they could change places for a while it would do them good; and they’d see what bores they were when they “do themselves the honour of calling to express their admiration of our charming work”,’ quoted Ted, with a bow to his parent, now frowning over twelve requests for autographs.

‘I have made up my mind on one point,’ said Mrs Jo with great firmness. ‘I will not answer this kind of letter. I’ve sent at least six to this boy, and he probably sells them. This girl writes from a seminary, and if I send her one all the other girls will at once write for more. All begin by saying they know they intrude, and that I am of course annoyed by these requests; but they venture to ask because I like boys, or they like the books, or it is only one. Emerson and Whittier put these things in the wastepaper-basket; and though only a literary nursery-maid who provides moral pap for the young, I will follow their illustrious example; for I shall have no time to eat or sleep if I try to satisfy these dear unreasonable children'; and Mrs Jo swept away the entire batch with a sigh of relief.

'I'll open the others and let you eat your breakfast in peace, liebe Mutter,' said Rob, who often acted as her secretary. 'Here's one from the South'; and breaking an imposing seal, he read:

'MADAM, As it has pleased Heaven to bless your efforts with a large fortune, I feel no hesitation in asking you to supply funds to purchase a new communion-service for our church. To whatever denomination you belong, you will of course respond with liberality to such a request,

'Respectfully yours,

'MRS X.Y. ZAVIER'

'Send a civil refusal, dear. All I have to give must go to feed and clothe the poor at my gates. That is my thank-offering for success. Go on,' answered his mother, with a grateful glance about her happy home.

'A literary youth of eighteen proposes that you put your name to a novel he has written; and after the first edition your name is to be taken off and his put on. There's a cool proposal for you. I guess you won't agree to that, in spite of your soft-heartedness towards most of the young scribblers.'

'Couldn't be done. Tell him so kindly, and don't let him send the manuscript. I have seven on hand now, and barely time to read my own,' said Mrs Jo, pensively fishing a small letter out of the slop-bowl and opening it with care, because the down-hill address suggested that a child wrote it.

'I will answer this myself. A little sick girl wants a book, and she shall have it, but I can't write sequels to all the rest to please her. I should never come to an end if I tried to suit these voracious little Oliver Twists, clamouring for more. What next, Robin?'

'This is short and sweet.

'DEAR MRS BHAER, I am now going to give you my opinion of your works. I have read them all many times, and call them first-rate. Please go ahead.

'Your admirer,

'BILLY BABCOCK'

'Now that is what I like. Billy is a man of sense and a critic worth having, since he had read my works many times before expressing his opinion. He asks for no answer, so send my thanks and regards.'

'Here's a lady in England with seven girls, and she wishes to know your views upon education. Also what careers they shall follow the oldest being twelve. Don't wonder she's worried,' laughed Rob.

'I'll try to answer it. But as I have no girls, my opinion isn't worth much and will probably shock her, as I shall tell her to let them run and play and build up good, stout bodies before she talks about careers. They will soon show what they want, if they are let alone, and not all run in the same mould.'

'Here's a fellow who wants to know what sort of a girl he shall marry, and if you know of any like those in your stories.'

'Give him Nan's address, and see what he'll get,' proposed Ted, privately resolving to do it himself if possible.

'This is from a lady who wants you to adopt her child and lend her money to study art abroad for a few years. Better take it, and try your hand at a girl, mother.'

'No, thank you, I will keep to my own line of business. What is that blotted one? It looks rather awful, to judge by the ink,' asked Mrs Jo, who beguiled her daily task by trying to guess from the outside what was inside her many letters. This proved to be a poem from an insane admirer, to judge by its incoherent style.

'TO J.M.B.

'Oh, were I a heliotrope,
I would play poet,
And blow a breeze of fragrance
To you; and none should know it.

'Your form like the stately elm
When Phoebus gilds the morning ray;
Your cheeks like the ocean bed
That blooms a rose in May.

'Your words are wise and bright,
I bequeath them to you a legacy given;
And when your spirit takes its flight,
May it bloom aflower in heaven.

'My tongue in flattering language spoke,
And sweeter silence never broke

in busiest street or loneliest glen.
I take you with the flashes of my pen.

'Consider the lilies, how they grow;
They toil not, yet are fair,
Gems and flowers and Solomon's seal.
The geranium of the world is J. M. Bhaer.

'JAMES'

While the boys shouted over this effusion — which is a true one — their mother read several liberal offers from budding magazines for her to edit them gratis; one long letter from a young girl inconsolable because her favourite hero died, and 'would dear Mrs Bhaer rewrite the tale, and make it end good?' another from an irate boy denied an autograph, who darkly foretold financial ruin and loss of favour if she did not send him and all other fellows who asked autographs, photographs, and auto-biographical sketches; a minister wished to know her religion; and an undecided maiden asked which of her two lovers she should marry. These samples will suffice to show a few of the claims made on a busy woman's time, and make my readers pardon Mrs Jo if she did not carefully reply to all.

'That job is done. Now I will dust a bit, and then go to my work. I'm all behind-hand, and serials can't wait; so deny me to everybody, Mary. I won't see Queen Victoria if she comes today.' And Mrs Bhaer threw down her napkin as if defying all creation.

'I hope the day will go well with thee, my dearest,' answered her husband, who had been busy with his own voluminous correspondence. 'I will dine at college with Professor Plock, who is to visit us today. The Junglings can lunch on Parnassus; so thou shalt have a quiet time.' And smoothing the worried lines out of her forehead with his good-bye kiss, the excellent man marched away, both pockets full of books, an old umbrella in one hand, and a bag of stones for the geology class in the other.

'If all literary women had such thoughtful angels for husbands, they would live longer and write more. Perhaps that wouldn't be a blessing to the world though, as most of us write too much now,' said Mrs Jo, waving her feather duster to her spouse, who responded with flourishes of the umbrella as he went down the avenue.

Rob started for school at the same time, looking so much like him with his books and bag and square shoulders and steady air that his mother laughed as she turned away, saying heartily: 'Bless both my dear professors, for better creatures never lived!’

Emil was already gone to his ship in the city; but Ted lingered to steal the address he wanted, ravage the sugar-bowl, and talk with ‘Mum’; for the two had great larks together. Mrs Jo always arranged her own parlour, refilled her vases, and gave the little touches that left it cool and neat for the day. Going to draw down the curtain, she beheld an artist sketching on the lawn, and groaned as she hastily retired to the back window to shake her duster.

At that moment the bell rang and the sound of wheels was heard in the road.

‘I’ll go; Mary lets ‘em in’; and Ted smoothed his hair as he made for the hall.

‘Can’t see anyone. Give me a chance to fly upstairs,’ whispered Mrs Jo, preparing to escape. But before she could do so, a man appeared at the door with a card in his hand. Ted met him with a stern air, and his mother dodged behind the window-curtains to bide her time for escape.

‘I am doing a series of articles for the Saturday Tattler, and I called to see Mrs Bhaer the first of all,’ began the newcomer in the insinuating tone of his tribe, while his quick eyes were taking in all they could, experience having taught him to make the most of his time, as his visits were usually short ones.

‘Mrs Bhaer never sees reporters, sir.’

‘But a few moments will be all I ask,’ said the man, edging his way farther in.

‘You can’t see her, for she is out,’ replied Teddy, as a backward glance showed him that his unhappy parent had vanished — through the window, he supposed, as she sometimes did when hard bestead.

‘Very sorry. I’ll call again. Is this her study? Charming room!’ And the intruder fell back on the parlour, bound to see something and bag a fact if he died in the attempt. ‘It is not,’ said Teddy, gently but firmly backing him down the hall, devoutly hoping that his mother had escaped round the corner of the house.

‘If you could tell me Mrs Bhaer’s age and birthplace, date of marriage, and number of children, I should be much obliged,’ continued the unabashed visitor as he tripped over the door-mat.

‘She is about sixty, born in Nova Zembla, married just forty years ago today, and has eleven daughters. Anything else, sir?’ And Ted’s sober face was such a funny contrast to his ridiculous reply that the reporter owned himself routed, and retired laughing just as a lady followed by three beaming girls came up the steps.

‘We are all the way from Oshkosh, and couldn’t go home without seein’ dear Aunt Jo. My girls just admire her works, and lot on gettin’ a sight of her. I know it’s early; but we are goin’ to see Holmes and Longfeller, and the rest of the celebrities, so we ran out here fust thing. Mrs Erastus Kingsbury Parmalee, of Oshkosh, tell her. We don’t mind waitin’; we can look round a spell if she ain’t ready to see folks yet.'

All this was uttered with such rapidity that Ted could only stand gazing at the buxom damsels, who fixed their six blue eyes upon him so beseechingly that his native gallantry made it impossible to deny them a civil reply at least.

'Mrs Bhaer is not visible today — out just now, I believe; but you can see the house and grounds if you like,' he murmured, falling back as the four pressed in gazing rapturously about them.

'Oh, thank you! Sweet, pretty place I'm sure! That's where she writes, ain't it? Do tell me if that's her picture! Looks just as I imagined her!'

With these remarks the ladies paused before a fine engraving of the Hon. Mrs Norton, with a pen in her hand and a rapt expression of countenance, likewise a diadem and pearl necklace.

Keeping his gravity with an effort, Teddy pointed to a very bad portrait of Mrs Jo, which hung behind the door, and afforded her much amusement, it was so dismal, in spite of a curious effect of light upon the end of the nose and cheeks as red as the chair she sat in.

'This was taken for my mother; but it is not very good,' he said, enjoying the struggles of the girls not to look dismayed at the sad difference between the real and the ideal. The youngest, aged twelve, could not conceal her disappointment, and turned away, feeling as so many of us have felt when we discover that our idols are very ordinary men and women.

'I thought she'd be about sixteen and have her hair braided in two tails down her back. I don't care about seeing her now,' said the honest child, walking off to the hall door, leaving her mother to apologize, and her sisters to declare that the bad portrait was 'perfectly lovely, so speaking and poetic, you know, 'specially about the brow'.

'Come girls, we must be goin', if we want to get through today. You can leave your albums and have them sent when Mrs Bhaer has written a sentiment in 'em. We are a thousand times obliged. Give our best love to your ma, and tell her we are so sorry not to see her.' Just as Mrs. Erastus Kingsbury Parmalee uttered the words her eye fell upon a middle-aged woman in a large checked apron, with a handkerchief tied over her head, busily dusting an end room which looked like a study.

'One peep at her sanctum since she is out,' cried the enthusiastic lady, and swept across the hall with her flock before Teddy could warn his mother, whose retreat had been cut off by the artist in front, the reporter at the back of the house — for he hadn't gone and the ladies in the hall.

'They've got her!' thought Teddy, in comical dismay. 'No use for her to play housemaid since they've seen the portrait.'

Mrs Jo did her best, and being a good actress, would have escaped if the fatal picture had not betrayed her. Mrs Parmalee paused at the desk, and regardless of the meerschaum that lay there, the man's slippers close by, and a pile of letters directed to 'Prof. F. Bhaer', she clasped her hands, exclaiming impressively: 'Girls, this is the spot where she wrote those sweet, those moral tales which have thrilled us to the soul! Could I — ah, could I take one morsel of paper, an old pen, a postage stamp even, as a memento of this gifted woman?'

'Yes'm, help yourselves,' replied the maid, moving away with a glance at the boy, whose eyes were now full of merriment he could not suppress.

The oldest girl saw it, guessed the truth, and a quick look at the woman in the apron confirmed her suspicion. Touching her mother, she whispered: 'Ma, it's Mrs Bhaer herself. I know it is.'

'No? yes? it is! Well, I do declare, how nice that is!' And hastily pursuing the unhappy woman, who was making for the door, Mrs Parmalee cried eagerly:

'Don't mind us! I know you're busy, but just let me take your hand and then we'll go.'

Giving herself up for lost, Mrs Jo turned and presented her hand like a tea-tray, submitting to have it heartily shaken, as the matron said, with somewhat alarming hospitality:

'If ever you come to Oshkosh, your feet won't be allowed to touch the pavement; for you'll be borne in the arms of the populace, we shall be so dreadful glad to see you.'

Mentally resolving never to visit that effusive town, Jo responded as cordially as she could; and having written her name in the albums, provided each visitor with a memento, and kissed them all round, they at last departed, to call on 'Longfeller, Holmes, and the rest' — who were all out, it is devoutly to be hoped.

'You villain, why didn't you give me a chance to whip away? Oh, my dear, what fibs you told that man! I hope we shall be forgiven our sins in this line, but I don't know what is to become of us if we don't dodge. So many against one isn't fair play.' And Mrs Jo hung up her apron in the hall closet, with a groan at the trials of her lot.

'More people coming up the avenue! Better dodge while the coast is clear! I'll head them off!' cried Teddy, looking back from the steps, as he was departing to school.

Mrs Jo flew upstairs, and having locked her door, calmly viewed a young ladies' seminary camp on the lawn, and being denied the house, proceed to enjoy themselves by picking the flowers, doing up their hair, eating lunch, and freely expressing their opinion of the place and its possessors before they went.

A few hours of quiet followed, and she was just settling down to a long afternoon of hard work, when Rob came home to tell her that the Young Men's Christian Union would visit the college, and two or three of the fellows whom she knew wanted to pay their respects to her on the way.

'It is going to rain, so they won't come, I dare say; but father thought you'd like to be ready, in case they do call. You always see the boys, you know, though you harden your heart to the poor girls,' said Rob, who had heard from his brother about the morning visitations.

'Boys don't gush, so I can stand it. The last time I let in a party of girls one fell into my arms and said, "Darling, love me!" I wanted to shake her,' answered Mrs Jo, wiping her pen with energy.

'You may be sure the fellows won't do it, but they will want autographs, so you'd better be prepared with a few dozen,' said Rob, laying out a quire of notepaper, being a hospitable youth and sympathizing with those who admired his mother.

'They can't outdo the girls. At X College I really believe I wrote three hundred during the day I was there, and I left a pile of cards and albums on my table when I came away. It is one of the most absurd and tiresome manias that ever afflicted the world.'

Nevertheless Mrs Jo wrote her name a dozen times, put on her black silk, and resigned herself to the impending call, praying for rain, however, as she returned to her work.

The shower came, and feeling quite secure, she rumpled up her hair, took off her cuffs, and hurried to finish her chapter; for thirty pages a day was her task, and she liked to have it well done before evening. Josie had brought some flowers for the vases, and was just putting the last touches when she saw several umbrellas bobbing down the hill.

'They are coming, Aunty! I see uncle hurrying across the field to receive them,' she called at the stair-foot.

'Keep an eye on them, and let me know when they enter the avenue. It will take but a minute to tidy up and run down,' answered Mrs Jo, scribbling away for dear life, because serials wait for no man, not even the whole Christian Union en masse.

'There are more than two or three. I see half a dozen at least,' called sister Ann from the hall door. 'No! a dozen, I do believe; Aunty, look out; they are all coming! What shall we do?' And Josie quailed at the idea of facing the black throng rapidly approaching.

'Mercy on us, there are hundreds! Run and put a tub in the back entry for their umbrellas to drip into. Tell them to go down the hall and leave them, and pile their hats on the table; the tree won't hold them all. No use to get mats; my poor carpets!' And down went Mrs Jo to prepare for the invasion, while Josie and the maids flew about dismayed at the prospect of so many muddy boots.

On they came, a long line of umbrellas, with splashed legs and flushed faces underneath; for the gentlemen had been having a good time all over the town, undisturbed by the rain. Professor Bhaer met them at the gate, and was making a little speech of welcome, when Mrs Jo, touched by their bedraggled state, appeared at the door, beckoning them in. Leaving their host to orate bareheaded in the wet, the young men hastened up the steps, merry, warm, and eager, clutching off their hats as they came, and struggling with their umbrellas, as the order was passed to march in and stack arms.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, down the hall went seventy-five pairs of boots; soon seventy-five umbrellas dripped sociably in the hospitable tub, while their owners swarmed all over the lower part of the house; and seventy-five hearty hands were shaken by the hostess without a murmur, though some were wet, some very warm, and nearly all bore trophies of the day's ramble. One impetuous party flourished a small turtle as he made his compliments; another had a load of sticks cut from noted spots; and all begged for some memento of Plumfield. A pile of cards mysteriously appeared on the table, with a written request for autographs; and despite her morning vow, Mrs Jo wrote everyone, while her husband and boys did the honours of the house.

Josie fled to the back parlour, but was discovered by exploring youths, and mortally insulted by one of them, who innocently inquired if she was Mrs Bhaer. The reception did not last long, and the end was better than the beginning; for the rain ceased, and a rainbow shone beautifully over them as the good fellows stood upon the lawn singing sweetly for a farewell. A happy omen, that bow of promise arched over the young heads, as if Heaven smiled upon their union, and showed them that above the muddy earth and rainy skies the blessed sun still shone for all. Three cheers, and then away they went, leaving a pleasant recollection of their visit to amuse the family as they scraped the mud off the carpets with shovels and emptied the tub half-full of water.

'Nice, honest, hard-working fellows, and I don't begrudge my half-hour at all; but I must finish, so don't let anyone disturb me till tea-time,' said Mrs Jo, leaving Mary to shut up the house; for papa and the boys had gone off with the guests, and Josie had run home to tell her mother about the fun at Aunt Jo's.

Peace reigned for an hour, then the bell rang and Mary came giggling up to say: 'A queer kind of a lady wants to know if she can catch a grasshopper in the garden.'

'A what?' cried Mrs Jo, dropping her pen with a blot; for of all the odd requests ever made, this was the oddest.

‘A grasshopper, ma’am. I said you was busy, and asked what she wanted, and says she: “I’ve got grasshoppers from the grounds of several famous folks, and I want one from Plumfield to add to my collection.” Did you ever?’ And Mary giggled again at the idea.

‘Tell her to take all there are and welcome. I shall be glad to get rid of them; always bouncing in my face and getting in my dress,’ laughed Mrs Jo.

Mary retired, to return in a moment nearly speechless with merriment.

‘She’s much obliged, ma’am, and she’d like an old gown or a pair of stockings of yours to put in a rug she’s making. Got a vest of Emerson’s, she says, and a pair of Mr. Holmes’s trousers, and a dress of Mrs Stowe’s. She must be crazy!’

‘Give her that old red shawl, then I shall make a gay show among the great ones in that astonishing rug. Yes, they are all lunatics, these lion-hunters; but this seems to be a harmless maniac, for she doesn’t take my time, and gives me a good laugh,’ said Mrs Jo, returning to her work after a glance from the window, which showed her a tall, thin lady in rusty black, skipping wildly to and fro on the lawn in pursuit of the lively insect she wanted.

No more interruptions till the light began to fade, then Mary popped her head in to say a gentleman wished to see Mrs Bhaer, and wouldn’t take no for an answer.

‘He must. I shall not go down. This has been an awful day, and I won’t be disturbed again,’ replied the harassed authoress, pausing in the midst of the grand finale of her chapter.

‘I told him so, ma’am; but he walked right in as bold as brass. I guess he’s another crazy one, and I declare I’m ‘most afraid of him, he’s so big and black, and cool as cucumbers, though I will say he’s good-looking,’ added Mary, with a simper; for the stranger had evidently found favour in her sight despite his boldness.

‘My day has been ruined, and I will have this last half-hour to finish. Tell him to go away; I won’t go down,’ cried Mrs Jo, fiercely.

Mary went; and listening, in spite of herself, her mistress heard first a murmur of voices, then a cry from Mary, and remembering the ways of reporters, also that her maid was both pretty and timid, Mrs Bhaer flung down her pen and went to the rescue. Descending with her most majestic air she demanded in an awe-inspiring voice, as she paused to survey the somewhat brigandish intruder, who seemed to be storming the staircase which Mary was gallantly defending:

‘Who is this person who insists on remaining when I have declined to see him?’

‘I’m sure I don’t know, ma’am. He won’t give no name, and says you’ll be sorry if you don’t see him,’ answered Mary, retiring flushed and indignant from her post.

‘Won’t you be sorry?’ asked the stranger, looking up with a pair of black eyes full of laughter, the flash of white teeth through a long beard, and both hands out as he boldly approached the irate lady.

Mrs Jo gave one keen look, for the voice was familiar; then completed Mary’s bewilderment by throwing both arms round the brigand’s neck, exclaiming joyfully: ‘My dearest boy, where did you come from?’

‘California, on purpose to see you, Mother Bhaer. Now won’t you be sorry if I go away?’ answered Dan, with a hearty kiss.

‘To think of my ordering you out of the house when I’ve been longing to see you for a year,’ laughed Mrs Jo, and she went down to have a good talk with her returned wanderer, who enjoyed the joke immensely.

Chapter 4. DAN

Mrs Jo often thought that Dan had Indian blood in him, not only because of his love of a wild, wandering life, but his appearance; for as he grew up, this became more striking. At twenty-five he was very tall, with sinewy limbs, a keen, dark face, and the alert look of one whose senses were all alive; rough in manner, full of energy, quick with word and blow, eyes full of the old fire, always watchful as if used to keep guard, and a general air of vigour and freshness very charming to those who knew the dangers and delights of his adventurous life. He was looking his best as he sat talking with ‘Mother Bhaer’, one strong brown hand in hers, and a world of affection in his voice as he said:

‘Forget old friends! How could I forget the only home I ever knew? Why, I was in such a hurry to come and tell my good luck that I didn’t stop to fix up, you see; though I knew you’d think I looked more like a wild buffalo than ever,’ with a shake of his shaggy black head, a tug at his beard, and a laugh that made the room ring.

‘I like it; I always had a fancy for banditti — and you look just like one. Mary, being a newcomer, was frightened at your looks and manners. Josie won’t know you, but Ted will recognize his Danny in spite of the big beard and flowing mane. They will all be here soon to welcome you; so before they come tell me more about yourself. Why, Dan, dear! it’s nearly two years since you were here! Has it gone well with you?’ asked Mrs Jo, who had been listening with maternal interest to his account of life in California, and the unexpected success of a small investment he had made.

‘First-rate! I don’t care for the money, you know. I only want a trifle to pay my way — rather earn as I go, and not be bothered with the care of a lot. It’s the fun of the thing coming to me, and my being able to give away, that I like. No use to lay up; I shan’t live to be old and need it, — my sort never do,’ said Dan, looking as if his little fortune rather oppressed him.

‘But if you marry and settle somewhere, as I hope you will, you must have something to begin with, my son. So be prudent and invest your money; don’t give it away, for rainy days come to all of us, and dependence would be very hard for you to bear,’ answered Mrs Jo with a sage air, though she liked to see that the money-making fever had not seized her lucky boy yet.

Dan shook his head, and glanced about the room as if he already found it rather confined and longed for all out-of-doors again.

‘Who would marry a jack-o’-lantern like me? Women like a steady-going man; I shall never be that.’

‘My dear boy, when I was a girl I liked just such adventurous fellows as you are. Anything fresh and daring, free and romantic, is always attractive to us womenfolk. Don’t be discouraged; you’ll find an anchor some day, and be content to take shorter voyages and bring home a good cargo.’

‘What should you say if I brought you an Indian squaw some day?’ asked Dan, with a glimmer of mischief in the eyes that rested on a marble bust of Galatea gleaming white and lovely in the corner.

‘Welcome her heartily, if she was a good one. Is there a prospect of it?’ and Mrs Jo peered at him with the interest which even literary ladies take in love affairs.

‘Not at present, thank you. I’m too busy “to gallivant”, as Ted calls it. How is the boy?’ asked Dan, skilfully turning the conversation, as if he had had enough of sentiment.

Mrs Jo was off at once, and expatiated upon the talents and virtues of her sons till they came bursting in and fell upon Dan like two affectionate young bears, finding a vent for their joyful emotions in a sort of friendly wrestling-match; in which both got worsted, of course, for the hunter soon settled them. The Professor followed, and tongues went like mill-clappers while Mary lighted up and cook devoted herself to an unusually good supper, instinctively divining that this guest was a welcome one.

After tea Dan was walking up and down the long rooms as he talked, with occasional trips into the hall for a fresher breath of air, his lungs seeming to need more than those of civilized people. In one of these trips he saw a white figure framed in the dark doorway, and paused to look at it. Bess paused also, not recognizing her old friend, and quite unconscious of the pretty picture she made standing, tall and slender, against the soft gloom of the summer night, with her golden hair like a halo round her head, and the ends of a white shawl blown out like wings by the cool wind sweeping through the hail. ‘Is it Dan?’ she asked, coming in with a gracious smile and outstretched hand.

‘Looks like it; but I didn’t know you, Princess. I thought it was a spirit,’ answered Dan, looking down at her with a curious softness and wonder in his face.

‘I’ve grown very much, but two years have changed you entirely’; and Bess looked up with girlish pleasure at the picturesque figure before her — for it was a decided contrast to the well-dressed people about her.

Before they could say more, Josie rushed in, and, forgetfull of the newly acquired dignity of her teens, let Dan catch her up and kiss her like a child. Not till he set her down did he discover she also was changed, and exclaimed in comic dismay:

'Hallo! Why, you are growing up too! What am I going to do, with no young one to play with? Here's Ted going it like a beanstalk, and Bess a young lady, and even you, my mustard-seed, letting down your frocks and putting on airs.'

The girls laughed, and Josie blushed as she stared at the tall man, conscious that she had leaped before she looked. They made a pretty contrast, these two young cousins — one as fair as a lily, the other a little wild rose. And Dan gave a nod of satisfaction as he surveyed them; for he had seen many bonny girls in his travels, and was glad that these old friends were blooming so beautifully.

'Here! we can't allow any monopoly of Dan!' called Mrs Jo. 'Bring him back and keep an eye on him, or he will be slipping off for another little run of a year or two before we have half seen him.'

Led by these agreeable captors, Dan returned to the parlour to receive a scolding from Josie for getting ahead of all the other boys and looking like a man first.

'Emil is older; but he's only a boy, and dances jigs and sings sailor songs just as he used to. You look about thirty, and as big and black as a villain in a play. Oh, I've got a splendid idea! You are just the thing for Arbaces in The Last Days of Pompeii. We want to act it; have the lion and the gladiators and the eruption. Tom and Ted are going to shower bushels of ashes down and roll barrels of stones about. We wanted a dark man for the Egyptian; and you will be gorgeous in red and white shawls. Won't he, Aunt Jo?'

This deluge of words made Dan clap his hands over his ears; and before Mrs Bhaer could answer her impetuous niece the Laurences, with Meg and her family, arrived, soon followed by Tom and Nan, and all sat down to listen to Dan's adventures — told in brief yet effective manner, as the varying expressions of interest, wonder, merriment, and suspense painted on the circle of faces round him plainly showed. The boys all wanted to start at once for California and make fortunes; the girls could hardly wait for the curious and pretty things he had picked up for them in his travels; while the elders rejoiced heartily over the energy and good prospects of their wild boy.

'Of course you will want to go back for another stroke of luck; and I hope you will have it. But speculation is a dangerous game, and you may lose all you've won,' said Mr Laurie, who had enjoyed the stirring tale as much as any of the boys, and would have liked to rough it with Dan as well as they.

'I've had enough of it, for a while at least; too much like gambling. The excitement is all I care for, and it isn't good for me. I have a notion to try farming out West. It's grand on a large scale; and I feel as if steady work would be rather jolly after loafing round so long. I can make a beginning, and you can send me your black sheep to stock my place with. I tried sheep-farming in Australia, and know something about black ones, any way.'

A laugh chased away the sober look in Dan's face as he ended; and those who knew him best guessed that he had learned a lesson there in San Francisco, and dared not try again.

'That is a capital idea, Dan!' cried Mrs Jo, seeing great hope in this desire to fix himself somewhere and help others. 'We shall know where you are, and can go and see you, and not have half the world between us. I'll send my Ted for a visit. He's such a restless spirit, it would do him good. With you he would be safe while he worked off his surplus energies and learned a wholesome business.'

'I'll use the "shubble and de hoe" like a good one, if I get a chance out there; but the Speranza mines sound rather jollier,' said Ted, examining the samples of ore Dan had brought for the Professor.

'You go and start a new town, and when we are ready to swarm we will come out and settle there. You will want a newspaper very soon, and I like the idea of running one myself much better than grinding away as I do now,' observed Demi, panting to distinguish himself in the journalistic line.

'We could easily plant a new college there. These sturdy Westerners are hungry for learning, and very quick to see and choose the best,' added ever-young Mr March, beholding with his prophetic eye many duplicates of their own flourishing establishment springing up in the wide West.

'Go on, Dan. It is a fine plan, and we will back you up. I shouldn't mind investing in a few prairies and cowboys myself,' said Mr Laurie, always ready to help the lads to help themselves, both by his cheery words and ever-open purse.

'A little money sort of ballasts a fellow, and investing it in land anchors him — for a while, at least. I'd like to see what I can do, but I thought I'd consult you before I decided. Have my doubts about it suiting me for many years; but I can cut loose when I'm tired,' answered Dan, both touched and pleased at the eager interest of these friends in his plans.

'I know you won't like it. After having the whole world to roam over, one farm will seem dreadfully small and stupid,' said Josie, who much preferred the romance of the wandering life which brought her thrilling tales and pretty things at each return.

'Is there any art out there?' asked Bess, thinking what a good study in black and white Dan would make as he stood talking, half turned from the light.

'Plenty of nature, dear; and that is better. You will find splendid animals to model, and scenery such as you never saw in Europe to paint. Even prosaic pumpkins are grand out there. You can play Cinderella in one of them, Josie, when you open your theatre in Dansville,' said Mr Laurie, anxious that no cold water should be thrown on the new plan.

Stage-struck Josie was caught at once, and being promised all the tragic parts on the yet unbuilt stage, she felt a deep interest in the project and begged Dan to lose no time in beginning his experiment. Bess also confessed that studies from nature would be good for her, and wild scenery improve her taste, which might grow over-nice if only the delicate and beautiful were set before her.

'I speak for the practice of the new town,' said Nan, always eager for fresh enterprises. 'I shall be ready by the time you get well started — towns grow so fast out there.'

'Dan isn't going to allow any woman under forty in his place. He doesn't like them, 'specially young and pretty ones,' put in Tom, who was raging with jealousy, because he read admiration for Nan in Dan's eyes.

'That won't affect me, because doctors are exceptions to all rules. There won't be much sickness in Dansville, everyone will lead such active, wholesome lives, and only energetic young people will go there. But accidents will be frequent, owing to wild cattle, fast riding, Indian scrimmages, and the recklessness of Western life. That will just suit me. I long for broken bones, surgery is so interesting and I get so little here,' answered Nan, yearning to put out her shingle and begin.

'I'll have you, Doctor, and be glad of such a good sample of what we can do in the East. Peg away, and I'll send for you as soon as I have a roof to cover you. I'll scalp a few red fellows or smash up a dozen or so of cowboys for your special benefit,' laughed Dan, well pleased with the energy and fine physique which made Nan a conspicuous figure among other girls.

'Thanks. I'll come. Would you just let me feel your arm? Splendid biceps! Now, boys, see here: this is what I call muscle.' And Nan delivered a short lecture with Dan's sinewy arm to illustrate it. Tom retired to the alcove and glowered at the stars, while he swung his own right arm with a vigour suggestive of knocking someone down.

'Make Tom sexton; he'll enjoy burying the patients Nan kills. He's trying to get up the glum expression proper to the business. Don't forget him, Dan,' said Ted, directing attention to the blighted being in the corner.

But Tom never sulked long, and came out from his brief eclipse with the cheerful proposition:

'Look here, we'll get the city to ship out to Dansville all the cases of yellow fever, smallpox, and cholera that arrive; then Nan will be happy and her mistakes won't matter much with emigrants and convicts.'

‘I should advise settling near Jacksonville, or some such city, that you might enjoy the society of cultivated persons. The Plato Club is there, and a most ardent thirst for philosophy. Everything from the East is welcomed hospitably, and new enterprises would flourish in such kindly soil,’ observed Mr March, mildly offering a suggestion, as he sat among the elders enjoying the lively scene.

The idea of Dan studying Plato was very funny; but no one except naughty Ted smiled, and Dan made haste to unfold another plan seething in that active brain of his.

‘I’m not sure the farming will succeed, and have a strong leaning towards my old friends the Montana Indians. They are a peaceful tribe, and need help awfully; hundreds have died of starvation because they don’t get their share. The Sioux are fighters, thirty thousand strong, so Government fears ‘em, and gives ‘em all they want. I call that a damned shame!’ Dan stopped short as the oath slipped out, but his eyes flashed, and he went on quickly: ‘It is just that, and I won’t beg pardon. If I’d had any money when I was there I’d have given every cent to those poor devils, cheated out of everything, and waiting patiently, after being driven from their own land to places where nothing will grow. Now, honest agents could do much, and I’ve a feeling that I ought to go and lend a hand. I know their lingo, and I like ‘em. I’ve got a few thousands, and I ain’t sure I have any right to spend it on myself and settle down to enjoy it. Hey?’

Dan looked very manly and earnest as he faced his friends, flushed and excited by the energy of his words; and all felt that little thrill of sympathy which links hearts together by the tie of pity for the wronged.

‘Do it, do it!’ cried Mrs Jo, fired at once; for misfortune was much more interesting to her than good luck.

‘Do it, do it!’ echoed Ted, applauding as if at a play, ‘and take me along to help. I’m just raging to get among those fine fellows and hunt.’

‘Let us hear more and see if it is wise,’ said Mr Laurie, privately resolving to people his as yet unbought prairies with Montana Indians, and increase his donations to the society that sent missionaries to this much wronged people.

Dan plunged at once into the history of what he saw among the Dakotas, and other tribes in the Northwest, telling of their wrongs, patience, and courage as if they were his brothers.

‘They called me Dan Fire Cloud, because my rifle was the best they ever saw. And Black Hawk was as good a friend as a fellow would want; saved my life more than once, and taught me just what will be useful if I go back. They are down on their luck, now, and I’d like to pay my debts.’

By this time everyone was interested, and Dansville began to lose its charm.

But prudent Mr Bhaer suggested that one honest agent among many could not do much, and noble as the effort would be, it was wiser to think over the matter carefully, get influence and authority from the right quarters, and meantime look at lands before deciding.

‘Well, I will. I’m going to take a run to Kansas and see how that promises. Met a fellow in ‘Frisco who’d been there, and he spoke well of it. The fact is, there’s so much to be done every where that I don’t know where to catch on, and half wish I hadn’t any money,’ answered Dan, knitting his brows in the perplexity all kind souls feel when anxious to help at the great task of the world’s charity.

‘I’ll keep it for you till you decide. You are such an impetuous lad you’ll give it to the first beggar that gets hold of you. I’ll turn it over while you are prospecting, and hand it back when you are ready to invest, shall I?’ asked Mr Laurie, who had learned wisdom since the days of his own extravagant youth.

‘Thanky, sir, I’d be glad to get rid of it. You just hold on till I say the word; and if anything happens to me this time, keep it to help some other scamp as you helped me. This is my will, and you all witness it. Now I feel better.’ And Dan squared his shoulders as if relieved of a burden, after handing over the belt in which he carried his little fortune.

No one dreamed how much was to happen before Dan came to take his money back, nor how nearly that act was his last will and testament; and while Mr Laurie was explaining how he would invest it, a cheery voice was heard singing:

‘Oh, Peggy was a jolly lass,
Ye heave ho, boys, ye heave ho!
She never grudged her Jack a glass,
Ye heave ho, boys, ye heave ho!
And when he sailed the raging main,
She faithful was unto her swain,
Ye heave ho, boys, ye heave ho!’

Emil always announced his arrival in that fashion, and in a moment he came hurrying in with Nat, who had been giving lessons in town all day. It was good to see the latter beam at his friend as he nearly shook his hand off; better still to see how Dan gratefully remembered all he owed Nat, and tried to pay the debt in his rough way; and best of all to hear the two travellers compare notes and reel off yarns to dazzle the land-lubbers and home-keepers.

After this addition the house would not contain the gay youngsters, so they migrated to the piazza and settled on the steps, like a flock of night-loving birds. Mr March and the Professor retired to the study, Meg and Amy went to look after the little refection of fruit and cake which was to come, and Mrs Jo and Mr

Laurie sat in the long window listening to the chat that went on outside.

‘There they are, the flower of our flock!’ she said, pointing to the group before them. ‘The others are dead or scattered, but these seven boys and four girls are my especial comfort and pride. Counting Alice Heath, my dozen is made up, and my hands are full trying to guide these young lives as far as human skill can do it.’

‘When we remember how different they are, from what some of them came, and the home influences about others, I think we may feel pretty well satisfied so far,’ answered Mr Laurie soberly, as his eyes rested on one bright head among the black and brown ones, for the young moon shone alike on all.

‘I don’t worry about the girls; Meg sees to them, and is so wise and patient and tender they can’t help doing well; but my boys are more care every year, and seem to drift farther away from me each time they go,’ sighed Mrs Jo. ‘They will grow up, and I can only hold them by one little thread, which may snap at any time, as it has with Jack and Ned. Dolly and George still like to come back, and I can say my word to them; and dear old Franz is too true ever to forget his own. But the three who are soon going out into the world again I can’t help worrying about. Emil’s good heart will keep him straight, I hope, and

‘“A sweet little cherub sits up aloft,
To look out for the life of poor Jack.”‘

Nat is to make his first flight, and he’s weak in spite of your strengthening influence; and Dan is still untamed. I fear it will take some hard lesson to do that.’

‘He’s a fine fellow, Jo, and I almost regret this farming project. A little polish would make a gentleman of him, and who knows what he might become here among us,’ answered Mr Laurie, leaning over Mrs Bhaer’s chair, just as he used to do years ago when they had mischievous secrets together.

‘It wouldn’t be safe, Teddy. Work and the free life he loves will make a good man of him, and that is better than any amount of polish, with the dangers an easy life in a city would bring him. We can’t change his nature — only help it to develop in the right direction. The old impulses are there, and must be controlled, or he will go wrong. I see that; but his love for us is a safeguard, and we must keep a hold on him till he is older or has a stronger tie to help him.’

Mrs Jo spoke earnestly, for, knowing Dan better than anyone else, she saw that her colt was not thoroughly broken yet, and feared while she hoped, knowing that life would always be hard for one like him. She was sure that before he went away again, in some quiet moment he would give her a glimpse of his inner self, and then she could say the word of warning or encouragement that he needed. So she bided her time, studying him meanwhile, glad to see all that was promising, and quick to detect the harm the world was doing him. She was very anxious to make a success of her ‘firebrand’ because others predicted failure; but having learned that people cannot be moulded like clay, she contented herself with the hope that this neglected boy might become a good man, and asked no more. Even that was much to expect, so full was he of wayward impulses, strong passions, and the lawless nature born in him. Nothing held him but the one affection of his life — the memory of Plumfield, the fear of disappointing these faithful friends, the pride, stronger than principle, that made him want to keep the regard of the mates who always had admired and loved him in spite of all his faults.

‘Don’t fret, old dear; Emil is one of the happy-go-lucky sort who always fall on their legs. I’ll see to Nat, and Dan is in a good way now. Let him take a look at Kansas, and if the farm plan loses its charm, he can fall back on poor Lo, and really do good out there. He’s unusually fitted for that peculiar task and I hope he’ll decide to do it. Fighting oppressors, and befriending the oppressed will keep those dangerous energies of his busy, and the life will suit him better than sheep-folds and wheat-fields.’

‘I hope so. What is that?’ and Mrs Jo leaned forward to listen, as exclamations from Ted and Josie caught her ear.

‘A mustang! a real, live one; and we can ride it. Dan, you are a first-class trump!’ cried the boy.

‘A whole Indian dress for me! Now I can play Namioka, if the boys act Metamora,’ added Josie, clapping her hands.

‘A buffalo’s head for Bess! Good gracious, Dan, why did you bring such a horrid thing as that to her?’ asked Nan.

‘Thought it would do her good to model something strong and natural. She’ll never amount to anything if she keeps on making namby-pamby gods and pet kittens,’ answered irreverent Dan, remembering that when he was last here Bess was vibrating distractedly between a head of Apollo and her Persian cat as models.

‘Thank you; I’ll try it, and if I fail we can put the buffalo up in the hall to remind us of you,’ said Bess, indignant at the insult offered the gods of her idolatry, but too well bred to show it except in her voice, which was as sweet and as cold as ice-cream.

‘I suppose you won’t come out to see our new settlement when the rest do? Too rough for you?’ asked Dan, trying to assume the deferential air all the boys used when addressing their Princess.

‘I am going to Rome to study for years. All the beauty and art of the world is there, and a lifetime isn’t long enough to enjoy it,’ answered Bess.

‘Rome is a mouldy old tomb compared to the “Garden of the gods” and my magnificent Rockies. I don’t care a hang for art; nature is as much as I can stand, and I guess I could show you things that would knock your old masters higher than kites. Better come, and while Josie rides the horses you can model ‘em. If a drove of a hundred or so of wild ones can’t show you beauty, I’ll give up,’ cried Dan, waxing enthusiastic over the wild grace and vigour which he could enjoy but had no power to describe.

‘I’ll come some day with papa, and see if they are better than the horses of St Mark and those on Capitol Hill. Please don’t abuse my gods, and I will try to like yours,’ said Bess, beginning to think the West might be worth seeing, though no Raphael or Angelo had yet appeared there.

‘That’s a bargain! I do think people ought to see their own country before they go scooting off to foreign parts, as if the new world wasn’t worth discovering,’ began Dan, ready to bury the hatchet.

‘It has some advantages, but not all. The women of England can vote, and we can’t. I’m ashamed of America that she isn’t ahead in all good things,’ cried Nan, who held advanced views on all reforms, and was anxious about her rights, having had to fight for some of them.

‘Oh, please don’t begin on that. People always quarrel over that question, and call names, and never agree. Do let us be quiet and happy tonight,’ pleaded Daisy, who hated discussion as much as Nan loved it.

‘You shall vote as much as you like in our new town, Nan; be mayor and aldermen, and run the whole concern. It’s going to be as free as air, or I can’t live in it,’ said Dan, adding, with a laugh, ‘I see Mrs Giddygaddy and Mrs Shakespeare Smith don’t agree any better than they used to.’

‘If everyone agreed, we should never get on. Daisy is a dear, but inclined to be an old fogy; so I stir her up; and next fall she will go and vote with me. Demi will escort us to do the one thing we are allowed to do as yet.’

‘Will you take ‘em, Deacon?’ asked Dan, using the old name as if he liked it. ‘It works capitally in Wyoming.’

‘I shall be proud to do it. Mother and the aunts go every year, and Daisy will come with me. She is my better half still; and I don’t mean to leave her behind in anything,’ said Demi, with an arm round his sister of whom he was fonder than ever.

Dan looked at them wistfully, thinking how sweet it must be to have such a tie; and his lonely youth seemed sadder than ever as he recalled its struggles. A gusty sigh from Tom made sentiment impossible, as he said pensively:

‘I always wanted to be a twin. It’s so sociable and so cosy to have someone glad to lean on a fellow and comfort him, if other girls are cruel.’

As Tom's unrequited passion was the standing joke of the family, this allusion produced a laugh, which Nan increased by whipping out a bottle of Nux, saying, with her professional air:

'I knew you ate too much lobster for tea. Take four pellets, and your dyspepsia will be all right. Tom always sighs and is silly when he's overeaten.'

'I'll take 'em. These are the only sweet things you ever give me.' And Tom gloomily crunched his dose.

'"Who can minister to a mind diseased, or pluck out a rooted sorrow?" quoted Josie tragically from her perch on the railing.

'Come with me, Tommy, and I'll make a man of you. Drop your pills and powders, and cavort round the world a spell, and you'll soon forget you've got a heart, or a stomach either,' said Dan, offering his one panacea for all ills.

'Ship with me, Tom. A good fit of seasickness will set you up, and a stiff north-easter blow your blue-devils away. Come along as surgeon — easy berth, and no end of larks.'

'"And if your Nancy frowns, my lad,
And scorns a jacket blue,
Just hoist your sails for other ports,
And find a maid more true."'

added Emil, who had a fragment of song to cheer every care and sorrow, and freely offered them to his friends.

'Perhaps I'll think of it when I've got my diploma. I'm not going to grind three mortal years and have nothing to show for it. Till then, — '

'I'll never desert Mrs Micawber,' interrupted Teddy, with a gurgling sob. Tom immediately rolled him off the step into the wet grass below; and by the time this slight skirmish was over, the jingle of teaspoons suggested refreshments of a more agreeable sort. In former times the little girls waited on the boys, to save confusion; now the young men flew to serve the ladies, young and old; and that slight fact showed plainly how the tables were turned by time. And what a pleasant arrangement it was! Even Josie sat still, and let Emil bring her berries; enjoying her young lady-hood, till Ted stole her cake, when she forgot manners, and chastised him with a rap on the knuckles. As guest of honour, Dan was only allowed to wait on Bess, who still held the highest place in this small world. Tom carefully selected the best of everything for Nan, to be crushed by the remark:

'I never eat at this hour; and you will have a nightmare if you do.'

So, dutifully curbing the pangs of hunger, he gave the plate to Daisy, and chewed rose-leaves for his supper.

When a surprising quantity of wholesome nourishment had been consumed, someone said, 'Let's sing!' and a tuneful hour followed. Nat fiddled, Demi piped, Dan strummed the old banjo, and Emil warbled a doleful ballad about the wreck of the Bounding Betsey; then everybody joined in the old songs till there was very decidedly ‘music in the air’; and passers-by said, as they listened smiling: ‘Old Plum is gay tonight!’

When all had gone Dan lingered on the piazza, enjoying the balmy wind that blew up from the hayfields, and brought the breath of flowers from Parnassus; and as he leaned there romantically in the moonlight, Mrs Jo came to shut the door.

‘Dreaming dreams, Dan?’ she asked, thinking the tender moment might have come. Imagine the shock when, instead of some interesting confidence or affectionate word, Dan swung round, saying bluntly:

‘I was wishing I could smoke.’

Mrs Jo laughed at the downfall of her hopes, and answered kindly:

‘You may, in your room; but don’t set the house afire.’

Perhaps Dan saw a little disappointment in her face, or the memory of the sequel of that boyish frolic touched his heart; for he stooped and kissed her, saying in a whisper: ‘Good night, mother.’ And Mrs Jo was half satisfied.

Chapter 5. VACATION

Everyone was glad of a holiday next morning, and all lingered over the breakfast-table, till Mrs Jo suddenly exclaimed:

‘Why, there’s a dog!’ And on the threshold of the door appeared a great deer-hound, standing motionless, with his eyes fixed on Dan.

‘Hallo, old boy! Couldn’t you wait till I came for you? Have you cut away on the sly? Own up now, and take your whipping like a man,’ said Dan, rising to meet the dog, who reared on his hind legs to look his master in the face and bark as if uttering an indignant denial of any disobedience.

‘All right; Don never lies.’ And Dan gave the tall beast a hug, adding as he glanced out of the window, where a man and horse were seen approaching:

‘I left my plunder at the hotel over night, not knowing how I should find you. Come out and see Octoo, my mustang; she’s a beauty.’ And Dan was off, with the family streaming after him, to welcome the newcomer.

They found her preparing to go up the steps in her eagerness to reach her master, to the great dismay of the man, who was holding her back.

‘Let her come,’ called Dan; ‘she climbs like a cat and jumps like a deer. Well, my girl, do you want a gallop?’ he asked, as the pretty creature clattered up to him and whinnied with pleasure as he rubbed her nose and slapped her glossy flank.

‘That’s what I call a horse worth having,’ said Ted, full of admiration and delight; for he was to have the care of her during Dan’s absence.

‘What intelligent eyes! She looks as if she would speak,’ said Mrs Jo.

‘She talks like a human in her way. Very little that she don’t know. Hey, old Lass?’ and Dan laid his cheek to hers as if the little black mare was very dear to him.

‘What does “Octoo” mean?’ asked Rob.

‘Lightning; she deserves it, as you’ll see. Black Hawk gave her to me for my rifle, and we’ve had high times together out yonder. She’s saved my life more than once. Do you see that scar?’

Dan pointed to a small one, half hidden by the long mane; and standing with his arm about Octoo’s neck, he told the story of it.

‘Black Hawk and I were after buffalo one time, but didn’t find ‘em as soon as we expected; so our food gave out, and there we were a hundred miles from Red Deer River, where our camp was. I thought we were done for, but my brave pal says: “Now I’ll show you how we can live till we find the herds.” We were unsaddling for the night by a little pond; there wasn’t a living creature in sight anywhere, not even a bird, and we could see for miles over the prairies. What do you think we did?’ And Dan looked into the faces round him.

‘Ate worms like the Australian fellows,’ said Rob. ‘Boiled grass or leaves,’ added Mrs Jo.

‘Perhaps filled the stomach with clay, as we read of savages doing?’ suggested Mr Bhaer.

‘Killed one of the horses,’ cried Ted, eager for bloodshed of some sort.

‘No; but we bled one of them. See, just here; filled a tin cup, put some wild sage leaves in it, with water, and heated it over a fire of sticks. It was good, and we slept well.’

‘I guess Octoo didn’t.’ And Josie patted the animal, with a face full of sympathy.

‘Never minded it a bit. Black Hawk said we could live on the horses several days and still travel before they felt it. But by another morning we found the buffalo, and I shot the one whose head is in my box, ready to hang up and scare brats into fits. He’s a fierce old fellow, you bet.’

‘What is this strap for?’ asked Ted, who was busily examining the Indian saddle, the single rein and snaffle, with lariat, and round the neck the leather band he spoke of.

‘We hold on to that when we lie along the horse’s flank farthest from the enemy, and fire under the neck as we gallop round and round. I’ll show you.’ And springing into the saddle, Dan was off down the steps, tearing over the lawn at a great pace, sometimes on Octoo’s back, sometimes half hidden as he hung by stirrup and strap, and sometimes off altogether, running beside her as she loped along, enjoying the fun immensely; while Don raced after, in a canine rapture at being free again and with his mates.

It was a fine sight — the three wild things at play, so full of vigour, grace, and freedom, that for the moment the smooth lawn seemed a prairie; and the spectators felt as if this glimpse of another life made their own seem rather tame and colourless.

‘This is better than a circus!’ cried Mrs Jo, wishing she were a girl again, that she might take a gallop on this chained lightning of a horse. ‘I foresee that Nan will have her hands full setting bones, for Ted will break every one of his trying to rival Dan.’

‘A few falls will not harm, and this new care and pleasure will be good for him in all ways. But I fear Dan will never follow a plough after riding a Pegasus like that,’ answered Mr Bhaer, as the black mare leaped the gate and came flying up the avenue, to stop at a word and stand quivering with excitement, while Dan swung himself off and looked up for applause.

He received plenty of it, and seemed more pleased for his pet's sake than for his own. Ted clamoured for a lesson at once, and was soon at ease in the queer saddle, finding Octoo gentle as a lamb, as he trotted away to show off at college. Bess came hastening down the hill, having seen the race from afar; and all collected on the piazza while Dan 'yanked' the cover off the big box the express had 'dumped' before the door — to borrow his own words.

Dan usually travelled in light marching order, and hated to have more luggage than he could carry in his well-worn valise. But now that he had a little money of his own, he had cumbered himself with a collection of trophies won by his bow and spear, and brought them home to bestow upon his friends.

'We shall be devoured with moths,' thought Mrs Jo, as the shaggy head appeared, followed by a wolf-skin rug for her feet, a bear-skin ditto for the Professor's study, and Indian garments bedecked with foxes' tails for the boys.

All nice and warm for a July day, but received with delight nevertheless. Ted and Josie immediately 'dressed up', learned the war-whoop, and proceeded to astonish their friends by a series of skirmishes about the house and grounds, with tomahawks and bows and arrows, till weariness produced a lull.

Gay birds' wings, plumy pampas grass, strings of wampum, and pretty work in beads, bark, and feathers, pleased the girls. Minerals, arrow-heads, and crude sketches interested the Professor; and when the box was empty, Dan gave Mr Laurie, as his gift, several plaintive Indian songs written on birch-bark.

'We only want a tent over us to be quite perfect. I feel as if I ought to give you parched corn and dried meat for dinner, my braves. Nobody will want lamb and green peas after this splendid pow-wow,' said Mrs Jo, surveying the picturesque confusion of the long hall, where people lay about on the rugs, all more or less bedecked with feathers, moccasins, or beads.

'Moose noses, buffalo tongues, bear steaks, and roasted marrow-bones would be the thing, but I don't mind a change; so bring on your baa-baa and green meat,' answered Dan from the box, where he sat in state like a chief among his tribe, with the great hound at his feet.

The girls began to clear up, but made little headway; for everything they touched had a story, and all were thrilling, comical, or wild; so they found it hard to settle to their work, till Dan was carried off by Mr Laurie.

This was the beginning of the summer holiday, and it was curious to see what a pleasant little stir Dan's and Emil's coming made in the quiet life of the studious community; for they seemed to bring a fresh breeze with them that enlivened everyone. Many of the collegians remained during vacation; and

Plumfield and Parnassus did their best to make these days pleasant for them, since most came from distant States, were poor, and had few opportunities but this for culture or amusement. Emil was hail-fellow-well-met with men and maids, and went rollicking about in true sailor fashion; but Dan stood rather in awe of the ‘fair girl-graduates’, and was silent when among them, eyeing them as an eagle might a flock of doves. He got on better with the young men, and was their hero at once. Their admiration for his manly accomplishments did him good; because he felt his educational defects keenly, and often wondered if he could find anything in books to satisfy him as thoroughly as did the lessons he was learning from Nature’s splendidly illustrated volume. In spite of his silence, the girls found out his good qualities, and regarded ‘the Spaniard’, as they named him, with great favour; for his black eyes were more eloquent than his tongue, and the kind creatures tried to show their friendly interests in many charming ways.

He saw this, and endeavoured to be worthy of it — curbing his free speech, toning down his rough manners, and watching the effect of all he said and did, anxious to make a good impression. The social atmosphere warmed his lonely heart, the culture excited him to do his best, and the changes which had taken place during his absence, both in himself and others, made the old home seem like a new world. After the life in California, it was sweet and restful to be here, with these familiar faces round him, helping him to forget much that he regretted, and to resolve to deserve more entirely the confidence of these good fellows, the respect of these innocent girls.

So there was riding, rowing, and picnicking by day, music, dancing, and plays by night; and everyone said there had not been so gay a vacation for years. Bess kept her promise, and let the dust gather on her beloved clay while she went pleasuring with her mates or studied music with her father, who rejoiced over the fresh roses in her cheeks and the laughter which chased away the dreamy look she used to wear. Josie quarrelled less with Ted; for Dan had a way of looking at her which quelled her instantly, and had almost as good an effect upon her rebellious cousin. But Octoo did even more for the lively youth, who found that her charms entirely eclipsed those of the bicycle which had been his heart’s delight before. Early and late he rode this untiring beast, and began to gain flesh — to the great joy of his mother, who feared that her beanstalk was growing too fast for health.

Demi, finding business dull, solaced his leisure by photographing everybody he could induce to sit or stand to him, producing some excellent pictures among many failures; for he had a pretty taste in grouping, and endless patience. He might be said to view the world through the lens of his camera, and seemed to enjoy himself very much squinting at his fellow beings from under a bit of black cambric. Dan was a treasure to him; for he took well, and willingly posed in his Mexican costume, with horse and hound, and all wanted copies of these effective photographs. Bess, also, was a favourite sitter; and Demi received a prize at the Amateur Photographic Exhibition for one of his cousin with all her hair about her face, which rose from the cloud of white lace draping the shoulders. These were freely handed round by the proud artist; and one copy had a tender little history yet to be told.

Nat was snatching every minute he could get with Daisy before the long parting; and Mrs Meg relented somewhat, feeling sure that absence would quite cure this unfortunate fancy. Daisy said little; but her gentle face was sad when she was alone, and a few quiet tears dropped on the handkerchiefs she marked so daintily with her own hair. She was sure Nat would not forget her; and life looked rather forlorn without the dear fellow who had been her friend since the days of patty-pans and confidences in the willow-tree. She was an old-fashioned daughter, dutiful and docile, with such love and reverence for her mother that her will was law; and if love was forbidden, friendship must suffice. So she kept her little sorrow to herself, smiled cheerfully at Nat, and made his last days of home-life very happy with every comfort and pleasure she could give, from sensible advice and sweet words to a well-filled work-bag for his bachelor establishment and a box of goodies for the voyage.

Tom and Nan took all the time they could spare from their studies to enjoy high jinks at Plumfield with their old friends; for Emil's next voyage was to be a long one, Nat's absence was uncertain, and no one ever knew when Dan would turn up again. They all seemed to feel that life was beginning to grow serious; and even while they enjoyed those lovely summer days together they were conscious that they were children no longer, and often in the pauses of their fun talked soberly of their plans and hopes, as if anxious to know and help one another before they drifted farther apart on their different ways.

A few weeks were all they had; then the Brenda was ready, Nat was to sail from New York, and Dan went along to see him off; for his own plans fermented in his head, and he was eager to be up and doing. A farewell dance was given on Parnassus in honour of the travellers, and all turned out in their best array and gayest spirits. George and Dolly came with the latest Harvard airs and graces, radiant to behold, in dress-suits and 'crushed hats', as Josie called the especial pride and joy of their boyish souls. Jack and Ned sent regrets and best wishes, and no one mourned their absence; for they were among what Mrs Jo called her failures. Poor Tom got into trouble, as usual, by deluging his head with some highly scented preparation in the vain hope of making his tight curls lie flat and smooth, as was the style. Unhappily, his rebellious crop only kinked the closer, and the odour of many barbers' shops clung to him in spite of his frantic efforts to banish it. Nan wouldn't allow him near her, and flapped her fan vigorously whenever he was in sight; which cut him to the heart, and made him feel like the Peri shut out from Paradise. Of course his mates jeered at him, and nothing but the unquenchable jollity of his nature kept him from despair.

Emil was resplendent in his new uniform, and danced with an abandon which only sailors know. His pumps seemed to be everywhere, and his partners soon lost breath trying to keep up with him; but the girls all declared he steered like an angel, and in spite of his pace no collisions took place; so he was happy, and found no lack of damsels to ship with him.

Having no dress-suit, Dan had been coaxed to wear his Mexican costume, and feeling at ease in the many-buttoned trousers, loose jacket, and gay sash, flung his serape over his shoulder with a flourish and looked his best, doing great execution with his long spurs, as he taught Josie strange steps or rolled his black eyes admiringly after certain blonde damsels whom he dared not address.

The mammas sat in the alcove, supplying pins, smiles, and kindly words to all, especially the awkward youths new to such scenes, and the bashful girls conscious of faded muslins and cleaned gloves. It was pleasant to see stately Mrs Amy promenade on the arm of a tall country boy, with thick boots and a big forehead, or Mrs Jo dance like a girl with a shy fellow whose arms went like pump-handles, and whose face was scarlet with confusion and pride at the honour of treading on the toes of the president's wife. Mrs Meg always had room on her sofa for two or three girls, and Mr Laurie devoted himself to these plain, poorly dressed damsels with a kindly grace that won their hearts and made them happy. The good Professor circulated like refreshments, and his cheerful face shone on all alike, while Mr March discussed Greek comedy in the study with such serious gentlemen as never unbent their mighty minds to frivolous joys.

The long music-room, parlour, hall, and piazza were full of white-gowned maidens with attendant shadows; the air was full of lively voices, and hearts and feet went lightly together as the home band played vigorously, and the friendly moon did her best to add enchantment to the scene.

'Pin me up, Meg; that dear Dunbar boy has nearly rent me "in sunder", as Mr Peggotty would say. But didn't he enjoy himself, bumping against his fellow men and swinging me round like a mop. On these occasions I find that I'm not as young as I was, nor as light of foot. In ten years more we shall be meal-bags, sister; so be resigned.' And Mrs Jo subsided into a corner, much dishevelled by her benevolent exertions.

'I know I shall be stout; but you won't keep still long enough to get much flesh on your bones, dear; and Amy will always keep her lovely figure. She looks about eighteen tonight, in her white gown and roses,' answered Meg, busily pinning up one sister's torn frills, while her eyes fondly followed the other's graceful movements; for Meg still adored Amy in the old fashion.

It was one of the family jokes that Jo was getting fat, and she kept it up, though as yet she had only acquired a matronly outline, which was very becoming. They were laughing over the impending double chins, when Mr Laurie came off duty for a moment.

'Repairing damages as usual, Jo? You never could take a little gentle exercise without returning in rags. Come and have a quiet stroll with me and cool off before supper. I've a series of pretty tableaux to show you while Meg listens to the raptures of lisping Miss Carr, whom I made happy by giving her Demi for a partner.'

As he spoke, Laurie led Jo to the music-room, nearly empty now after a dance which sent the young people into garden and hall. Pausing before the first of the four long windows that opened on a very wide piazza, he pointed to a group outside, saying: 'The name of this is "Jack Ashore".'

A pair of long, blue legs, ending in very neat pumps, hung from the veranda roof among the vines; and roses, gathered by unseen hands, evidently appertaining to aforesaid legs, were being dropped into the laps of several girls perched like a flock of white birds on the railing below; while a manly voice 'fell like a falling star', as it sung this pensive ditty to a most appreciative audience:

MARY'S DREAM

The moon had climbed the eastern hill
Which rises o'er the sands of Dee,
And from its highest summit shed
A silver light on tower and tree,
When Mary laid her down to sleep
(Her thoughts on Sandy far at sea);
When soft and low a voice was heard,
Saying, 'Mary, weep no more for me.'

She from her pillow gently raised
Her head, to see who there might be,
And saw young Sandy, shivering stand
With visage pale and hollow e'e.
'Oh Mary dear, cold is my clay;

It lies beneath the stormy sea;
Far, far from thee, I sleep in death.
Dear Mary, weep no more for me.

‘Three stormy nights and stormy days
We tossed upon the raging main.
And long we strove our bark to save;
But all our striving was in vain.
E’en then, when terror chilled my blood,
My heart was filled with love of thee.
The storm is past, and I’m at rest;
So, Mary, weep no more for me.

‘Oh maiden dear, yourself prepare;
We soon shall meet upon that shore
Where love is free from doubt and care,
And you and I shall part no more.’
Loud crew the cock, the shadow fled;
No more her Sandy did she see;
But soft the passing spirit said,
‘Sweet Mary, weep no more for me.’

‘The constant jollity of that boy is worth a fortune to him. He’ll never sink with such a buoyant spirit to keep him afloat through life,’ said Mrs Jo, as the roses were tossed back with much applause when the song ended.

‘Not he; and it’s a blessing to be grateful for, isn’t it? We moody people know its worth. Glad you like my first tableau. Come and see number two. Hope it isn’t spoilt; it was very pretty just now. This is “Othello telling his adventures to Desdemona”.’

The second window framed a very picturesque group of three. Mr March in an arm-chair, with Bess on a cushion at his feet, was listening to Dan, who, leaning against a pillar, was talking with unusual animation. The old man was in shadow, but little Desdemona was looking up with the moonlight full upon her into young Othello’s face, quite absorbed in the story he was telling so well. The gay drapery over Dan’s shoulder, his dark colouring, and the gesture of his arm made the picture very striking, and both spectators enjoyed it with silent pleasure, till Mrs Jo said in a quick whisper:

‘I’m glad he’s going away. He’s too picturesque to have here among so many romantic girls. Afraid his “grand, gloomy, and peculiar” style will be too much for our simple maids.’

‘No danger; Dan is in the rough as yet, and always will be, I fancy; though he is improving in many ways. How well Queenie looks in that soft light!’

‘Dear little Goldilocks looks well everywhere.’ And with a backward glance full of pride and fondness, Mrs Jo went on. But that scene returned to her long afterward and her own prophetic words also.

Number three was a tragical tableau at first sight; and Mr Laurie stifled a laugh as he whispered ‘The Wounded Knight’, pointing to Tom with his head enveloped in a large handkerchief, as he knelt before Nan, who was extracting a thorn or splinter from the palm of his hand with great skill, to judge from the patient’s blissful expression of countenance.

‘Do I hurt you?’ she asked, turning the hand to the moonlight for a better view.

‘Not a bit; dig away; I like it,’ answered Tom, regardless of his aching knees and the damage done to his best trousers.

‘I won’t keep you long.’

‘Hours, if you please. Never so happy as here.’

Quite unmoved by this tender remark, Nan put on a pair of large, round-eyed glasses, saying in a matter-of-fact tone: ‘Now I see it. Only a splinter, and there it is.

‘My hand is bleeding; won’t you bind it up?’ asked Tom, wishing to prolong the situation.

‘Nonsense; suck it. Only take care of it tomorrow if you dissect. Don’t want any more blood-poisoning.’

‘That was the only time you were kind to me. Wish I’d lost my arm.’

‘I wish you’d lost your head; it smells more like turpentine and kerosene than ever. Do take a run in the garden and air it.’

Fearing to betray themselves by laughter, the watchers went on, leaving the Knight to rush away in despair, and the Lady to bury her nose in the cup of a tall lily for refreshment.

‘Poor Tom, his fate is a hard one, and he’s wasting his time! Do advise him to quit philandering and go to work, Jo.’

‘I have, Teddy, often; but it will take some great shock to make that boy wise. I wait with interest to see what it will be. Bless me! what is all this?’

She might well ask; for on a rustic stool stood Ted trying to pose on one foot, with the other extended, and both hands waving in the air. Josie, with several young mates, was watching his contortions with deep interest as they talked about ‘little wings’, ‘gilded wire twisted’, and a ‘cunning skull-cap’.

‘This might be called “Mercury Trying to Fly”,’ said Mr Laurie, as they peeped through the lace curtains.

‘Bless the long legs of that boy! how does he expect to manage them? They are planning for the Owlsdark Marbles, and a nice muddle they will make of my gods and goddesses with no one to show them how,' answered Mrs Jo, enjoying this scene immensely. 'Now, he's got it!' 'That's perfectly splendid!' 'See how long you can keep so!' cried the girls, as Ted managed to maintain his equilibrium a moment by resting one toe on the trellis. Unfortunately this brought all his weight on the other foot; the straw seat of the stool gave way, and the flying Mercury came down with a crash, amid shrieks of laughter from the girls. Being accustomed to ground and lofty tumbling, he quickly recovered himself, and hopped gaily about, with one leg through the stool as he improvised a classic jig.

'Thanks for four nice little pictures. You have given me an idea, and I think some time we will get up regular tableaux of this sort and march our company round a set of dissolving views. New and striking; I'll propose it to our manager and give you all the glory,' said Mrs Jo, as they strolled towards the room whence came the clash of glass and china, and glimpses of agitated black coats.

Let us follow the example of our old friends and stroll about among the young people, eavesdropping, so gathering up various little threads to help in the weaving of the story. George and Dolly were at supper, and having served the ladies in their care stood in a corner absorbing nourishment of all kinds with a vain attempt to conceal hearty appetites under an air of elegant indifference.

'Good spread, this; Laurence does things in style. First-rate coffee, but no wine, and that's a mistake,' said Stuffy, who still deserved his name, and was a stout youth with a heavy eye and bilious complexion.

'Bad for boys, he says. Jove! wish he could see us at some of our wines. Don't we just "splice the main brace" as Emil says,' answered Dolly, the dandy, carefully spreading a napkin over the glossy expanse of shirt-front whereon a diamond stud shone like a lone star. His stutter was nearly outgrown; but he, as well as George, spoke in the tone of condescension, which, with the blase airs they assumed, made a very funny contrast to their youthful faces and foolish remarks. Good-hearted little fellows both, but top-heavy with the pride of being Sophs and the freedom that college life gave them.

'Little Jo is getting to be a deuced pretty girl, isn't she?' said George, with a long sigh of satisfaction as his first mouthful of ice went slowly down his throat.

'H'm — well, fairish. The Princess is rather more to my taste. I like 'em blonde and queenly and elegant, don't you know.'

'Yes, Jo is too lively; might as well dance with a grasshopper. I've tried her, and she's one too many for me. Miss Perry is a nice, easy-going girl. Got her for the german.'

'You'll never be a dancing man. Too lazy. Now I'll undertake to steer any girl and dance down any fellow you please. Dancing's my forte.' And Dolly glanced from his trim feet to his flashing gem with the defiant air of a young turkey-cock on parade.

'Miss Grey is looking for you. Wants more grub. Just see if Miss Nelson's plate is empty, there's a good fellow. Can't eat ice in a hurry.' And George remained in his safe corner, while Dolly struggled through the crowd to do his duty, coming back in a fume, with a splash of salad dressing on his coat-cuff.

'Confound these country chaps! they go blundering round like so many dor-bugs, and make a deuce of a mess. Better stick to books and not try to be society men. Can't do it. Beastly stain. Give it a rub, and let me bolt a mouthful, I'm starved. Never saw girls eat such a lot. It proves that they ought not to study so much. Never liked co-ed,' growled Dolly, much ruffled in spirit.

'So they do. 'Tisn't ladylike. Ought to be satisfied with an ice and a bit of cake, and eat it prettily. Don't like to see a girl feed. We hard-working men need it, and, by Jove, I mean to get some more of that meringue if it's not all gone. Here, waiter! bring along that dish over there, and be lively,' commanded Stuffy, poking a young man in a rather shabby dress-suit, who was passing with a tray of glasses.

His order was obeyed promptly; but George's appetite was taken away the next moment by Dolly's exclaiming, as he looked up from his damaged coat, with a scandalized face:

'You've put your foot in it now, old boy! that's Morton, Mr Bhaer's crack man. Knows everything, no end of a "dig", and bound to carry off all the honours. You won't hear the last of it in a hurry.' And Dolly laughed so heartily that a spoonful of ice flew upon the head of a lady sitting below him, and got him into a scrape also.

Leaving them to their despair, let us listen to the whispered chat of two girls comfortably seated in a recess waiting till their escorts were fed.

'I do think the Laurences give lovely parties. Don't you enjoy them?' asked the younger, looking about her with the eager air of one unused to this sort of pleasure.

'Very much, only I never feel as if I was dressed right. My things seemed elegant at home, and I thought I'd be over over-dressed if anything; but I look countrified and dowdy here. No time or money to change now, even if I knew how to do it,' answered the other, glancing anxiously at her bright pink silk grown, trimmed with cheap lace.

'You must get Mrs Brooke to tell you how to fix your things. She was very kind to me. I had a green silk, and it looked so cheap and horrid by the side of the nice dresses here I felt regularly unhappy about it, and asked her how much a dress like one Mrs Laurence had would cost. That looked so simple and elegant I thought it wouldn’t be costly; but it was India mull and Valenciennes lace, so, of course, I couldn’t have it. Then Mrs Brooke said: “Get some muslin to cover the green silk, and wear hops or some white flowers, instead of pink, in your hair, and you will have a pretty suit.” Isn’t it lovely and becoming?’ And Miss Burton surveyed herself with girlish satisfaction; for a little taste had softened the harsh green, and hop-bells became her red hair better than roses.

‘It’s sweet: I’ve been admiring it. I’ll do mine so and ask about my purple one. Mrs Brooke has helped me to get rid of my headaches, and Mary Clay’s dyspepsia is all gone since she gave up coffee and hot bread.’

‘Mrs Laurence advised me to walk and run and use the gymnasium to cure my round shoulders and open my chest, and I’m a much better figure than I was.’

‘Did you know that Mr Laurence pays all Amelia Merrill’s bills? Her father failed, and she was heartbroken at having to leave college; but that splendid man just stepped in and made it all right.’ ‘Yes, and Professor Bhaer has several of the boys down at his house evenings to help them along so they can keep up with the rest; and Mrs Bhaer took care of Charles Mackey herself when he had a fever last year. I do think they are the best and kindest people in the world.’

‘So do I, and my time here will be the happiest and most useful years of my life.’

And both girls forgot their gowns and their suppers for a moment to look with grateful, affectionate eyes at the friends who tried to care for bodies and for souls as well as minds.

Now come to a lively party supping on the stairs, girls like foam at the top, and a substratum of youths below, where the heaviest particles always settle. Emil, who never sat if he could climb or perch, adorned the newel-post; Tom, Nat, Demi, and Dan were camped on the steps, eating busily, as their ladies were well served and they had earned a moment’s rest, which they enjoyed with their eyes fixed on the pleasing prospect above them.

‘I’m so sorry the boys are going. It will be dreadfully dull without them. Now they have stopped teasing and are polite, I really enjoy them,’ said Nan, who felt unusually gracious tonight as Tom’s mishap kept him from annoying her.

‘So do I; and Bess was mourning about it today, though as a general thing she doesn’t like boys unless they are models of elegance. She has been doing Dan’s head, and it is not quite finished. I never saw her so interested in any work, and it’s very well done. He is so striking and big he always makes me think of the Dying Gladiator or some of those antique creatures. There’s Bess now. Dear child, how sweet she looks tonight!’ answered Daisy, waving her hand as the Princess went by with Grandpa on her arm.

‘I never thought he would turn out so well. Don’t you remember how we used to call him “the bad boy” and be sure he would become a pirate or something awful because he glared at us and swore sometimes? Now he is the handsomest of all the boys, and very entertaining with his stories and plans. I like him very much; he’s so big and strong and independent. I’m tired of mollycoddles and book-worms,’ said Nan in her decided way.

‘Not handsomer that Nat!’ cried loyal Daisy, contrasting two faces below, one unusually gay, the other sentimentally sober even in the act of munching cake. ‘I like Dan, and am glad he is doing well; but he tires me, and I’m still a little afraid of him. Quiet people suit me best.’

‘Life is a fight, and I like a good soldier. Boys take things too easily, don’t see how serious it all is and go to work in earnest. Look at that absurd Tom, wasting his time and making an object of himself just because he can’t have what he wants, like a baby crying for the moon. I’ve no patience with such nonsense,’ scolded Nan, looking down at the jovial Thomas, who was playfully putting macaroons in Emil’s shoes, and trying to beguile his exile as best he could.

‘Most girls would be touched by such fidelity. I think it’s beautiful,’ said Daisy behind her fan; for other girls sat just below.

‘You are a sentimental goose and not a judge. Nat will be twice the man when he comes back after his trip. I wish Tom was going with him. My idea is that if we girls have any influence we should use it for the good of these boys, and not pamper them up, making slaves of ourselves and tyrants of them. Let them prove what they can do and be before they ask anything of us, and give us a chance to do the same. Then we know where we are, and shall not make mistakes to mourn over all our lives.’

‘Hear, hear!’ cried Alice Heath, who was a girl after Nan’s own heart, and had chosen a career, like a brave and sensible young woman. ‘Only give us a chance, and have patience till we can do our best. Now we are expected to be as wise as men who have had generations of all the help there is, and we scarcely anything. Let us have equal opportunities, and in a few generations we will see what the judgement is. I like justice, and we get very little of it.’

‘Still shouting the battle-cry of freedom?’ asked Demi, peering through the banisters at this moment. ‘Up with your flag! I’ll stand by and lend a hand if you want it. With you and Nan to lead the van, I think you won’t need much help.’

‘You are a great comfort, Demi, and I’ll call on you in all emergencies; for you are an honest boy, and don’t forget that you owe much to your mother and your sisters and your aunts,’ continued Nan. ‘I do like men who come out frankly and own that they are not gods. How can we think them so when such awful mistakes are being made all the time by these great creatures? See them sick, as I do, then you know them.'

'Don't hit us when we are down; be merciful, and set us up to bless and believe in you evermore,' pleaded Demi from behind the bars.

'We'll be kind to you if you will be just to us. I don't say generous, only just. I went to a suffrage debate in the Legislature last winter; and of all the feeble, vulgar twaddle I ever heard, that was the worst; and those men were our representatives. I blushed for them, and the wives and mothers. I want an intelligent man to represent me, if I can't do it myself, not a fool.'

'Nan is on the stump. Now we shall catch it,' cried Tom, putting up an umbrella to shield his unhappy head; for Nan's earnest voice was audible, and her indignant eye happened to rest on him as she spoke.

'Go on, go on! I'll take notes, and put in "great applause" liberally,' added Demi, producing his ball-book and pencil, with his Jenkins air.

Daisy pinched his nose through the bars, and the meeting was rather tumultuous for a moment, for Emil called: 'Avast, avast, here's a squall to wind'ard'; Tom applauded wildly; Dan looked up as if the prospect of a fight, even with words, pleased him, and Nat went to support Demi, as his position seemed to be a good one. At this crisis, when everyone laughed and talked at once, Bess came floating through the upper hall and looked down like an angel of peace upon the noisy group below, as she asked, with wondering eyes and smiling lips:

'What is it?'

'An indignation meeting. Nan and Alice are on the rampage, and we are at the bar to be tried for our lives. Will Your Highness preside and judge between us?' answered Demi, as a lull at once took place; for no one rioted in the presence of the Princess.

'I'm not wise enough. I'll sit here and listen. Please go on.' And Bess took her place above them all as cool and calm as a little statue of Justice, with fan and nosegay in place of sword and scales.

'Now, ladies, free your minds, only spare us till morning; for we've got a german to dance as soon as everyone is fed, and Parnassus expects every man to do his duty. Mrs President Giddy-gaddy has the floor,' said Demi, who liked this sort of fun better than the very mild sort of flirtation which was allowed at Plumfield, for the simple reason that it could not be entirely banished, and is a part of all education, co- or otherwise.

'I have only one thing to say, and it is this,' began Nan soberly, though her eyes sparkled with a mixture of fun and earnestness. 'I want to ask every boy of you what you really think on this subject. Dan and Emil have seen the world and ought to know their own minds. Tom and Nat have had five examples before them for years. Demi is ours and we are proud of him. So is Rob. Ted is a weathercock, and Dolly and George, of course, are fogies in spite of the Annex, and girls at Girton going ahead of the men. Commodore, are you ready for the question?'

'Ay, ay, skipper.'

'Do you believe in Woman's Suffrage?'

'Bless your pretty figger head! I do, and I'll ship a crew of girls any time you say so. Aren't they worse than a press-gang to carry a fellow out of his moorings? Don't we all need one as pilot to steer us safe to port? and why shouldn't they share our mess afloat and ashore since we are sure to be wrecked without 'em?'

'Good for you, Emil! Nan will take you for first mate after that handsome speech,' said Demi, as the girls applauded, and Tom glowered. 'Now, Dan, you love liberty so well yourself, are you willing we should have it?'

'All you can get, and I'll fight any man who's mean enough to say you don't deserve it.'

This brief and forcible reply delighted the energetic President, and she beamed upon the member from California, as she said briskly:

'Nat wouldn't dare to say he was on the other side even if he were, but I hope he has made up his mind to pipe for us, at least when we take the field, and not be one of those who wait till the battle is won, and then beat the drums and share the glory.'

Mrs Giddy-gaddy's doubts were most effectually removed, and her sharp speech regretted, as Nat looked up blushing, but with a new sort of manliness in face and manner, saying, in a tone that touched them all:

'I should be the most ungrateful fellow alive if I did not love, honour, and serve women with all my heart and might, for to them I owe everything I am or ever shall be.'

Daisy clapped her hands, and Bess threw her bouquet into Nat's lap, while the other girls waved their fans, well pleased; for real feeling made his little speech eloquent.

'Thomas B. Bangs, come into court, and tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, if you can,' commanded Nan, with a rap to call the meeting to order.

Tom shut the umbrella, and standing up raised his hand, saying solemnly:

'I believe in suffrage of all kinds. I adore all women, and will die for them at any moment if it will help the cause.'

'Living and working for it is harder, and therefore more honourable. Men are always ready to die for us, but not to make our lives worth having. Cheap sentiment and bad logic. You will pass, Tom, only don’t twaddle. Now, having taken the sense of the meeting we will adjourn, as the hour for festive gymnastics has arrived. I am glad to see that old Plum has given six true men to the world, and hope they will continue to be staunch to her and the principles she has taught them, wherever they may go. Now, girls, don’t sit in draughts, and, boys, beware of ice-water when you are warm.’

With this characteristic close Nan retired from office, and the girls went to enjoy one of the few rights allowed them.

Chapter 6. LAST WORDS

The next day was Sunday, and a goodly troop of young and old set forth to church. — some driving, some walking, all enjoying the lovely weather and the happy quietude which comes to refresh us when the work and worry of the week are over. Daisy had a headache; and Aunt Jo remained at home to keep her company, knowing very well that the worst ache was in the tender heart struggling dutifully against the love that grew stronger as the parting drew nearer.

‘Daisy knows my wishes, and I trust her. You must keep an eye on Nat, and let him clearly understand that there is to be no “lovering”, or I shall forbid the letter-writing. I hate to seem cruel, but it is too soon for my dear girl to bind herself in any way,’ said Mrs Meg, as she rustled about in her best grey silk, while waiting for Demi, who always escorted his pious mother to church as a peace-offering for crossing her wishes in other things.

‘I will, dear; I’m lying in wait for all three boys today, like an old spider; and I will have a good talk with each. They know I understand them, and they always open their hearts sooner or later. You look like a nice, plump little Quakeress, Meg; and no one will believe that big boy is your son,’ added Mrs Jo, as Demi came in shining with Sunday neatness, from his well-blacked boots to his smooth brown head.

‘You flatter me, to soften my heart toward your boy. I know your ways, Jo, and I don’t give in. Be firm, and spare me a scene by and by. As for John, as long as he is satisfied with his old mother, I don’t care what people think,’ answered Mrs Meg, accepting with a smile the little posy of sweet peas and mignonette Demi brought her.

Then, having buttoned her dove-coloured gloves with care, she took her son’s arm and went proudly away to the carriage, where Amy and Bess waited, while Jo called after them, just as Marmee used to do:

‘Girls, have you got nice pocket-handkerchiefs?’ They all smiled at the familiar words, and three white banners waved as they drove away, leaving the spider to watch for her first fly. She did not wait long. Daisy was lying down with a wet cheek on the little hymnbook out of which she and Nat used to sing together; so Mrs Jo strolled about the lawn, looking very like a wandering mushroom with her large buff umbrella.

Dan had gone for a ten-mile stroll; and Nat was supposed to have accompanied him, but presently came sneaking back, unable to tear himself away from the Dovecote or lose a moment of nearness to his idol that last day. Mrs Jo saw him at once, and beckoned him to a rustic seat under the old elm, where they could have their confidences undisturbed, and both keep an eye on a certain white-curtained window, half hidden in vines.

‘Nice and cool here. I’m not up to one of Dan’s tramps today — it’s so warm, and he goes so like a steam-engine. He headed for the swamp where his pet snakes used to live, and I begged to be excused,’ said Nat, fanning himself with his straw hat, though the day was not oppressive.

‘I’m glad you did. Sit and rest with me, and have one of our good old talks. We’ve both been so busy lately, I feel as if I didn’t half know your plans; and I want to,’ answered Mrs Jo, feeling sure that though they might start with Leipzig they would bring up at Plumfield.

‘You are very kind, and there’s nothing I’d like better. I don’t realize I’m going so far — suppose I shan’t till I get afloat. It’s a splendid start, and I don’t know how I can ever thank Mr Laurie for all he’s done, or you either,’ added Nat, with a break in his voice; for he was a tender-hearted fellow, and never forgot a kindness.

‘You can thank us beautifully by being and doing all we hope and expect of you, my dear. In the new life you are going to there will be a thousand trials and temptations, and only your own wit and wisdom to rely on. That will be the time to test the principles we have tried to give you, and see how firm they are. Of course, you will make mistakes — we all do; but don’t let go of your conscience and drift along blindly. Watch and pray, dear Nat; and while your hand gains skill, let your head grow wiser, and keep your heart as innocent and warm as it is now.’

‘I’ll try, Mother Bhaer, my very best to be a credit to you. I know I shall improve in my music — can’t help it there; but I never shall be very wise, I’m afraid. As for my heart, you know, I leave it behind me in good keeping.’

As he spoke, Nat’s eyes were fixed on the window with a look of love and longing that made his quiet face both manly and sad — plainly showing how strong a hold this boyish affection had upon him.

‘I want to speak of that; and I know you will forgive what seems hard, because I do most heartily sympathize with you,’ said Mrs Jo, glad to have her say.

‘Yes, do talk about Daisy! I think of nothing but leaving and losing her. I have no hope — I suppose it is too much to ask; only I can’t help loving her, wherever I am!’ cried Nat, with a mixture of defiance and despair in his face that rather startled Mrs Jo.

‘Listen to me and I’ll try to give you both comfort and good advice. We all know that Daisy is fond of you, but her mother objects, and being a good girl she tries to obey. Young people think they never can change, but they do in the most wonderful manner, and very few die of broken hearts.' Mrs Jo smiled as she remembered another boy whom she had once tried to comfort, and then went soberly on while Nat listened as if his fate hung upon her lips.

'One of two things will happen. You will find someone else to love, or, better still, be so busy and happy in your music that you will be willing to wait for time to settle the matter for you both. Daisy will perhaps forget when you are gone, and be glad you are only friends. At any rate it is much wiser to have no promises made; then both are free, and in a year or two may meet to laugh over the little romance nipped in the bud.'

'Do you honestly think that?' asked Nat, looking at her so keenly that the truth had to come; for all his heart was in those frank blue eyes of his.

'No, I don't!' answered Mrs Jo. 'Then if you were in my place, what would you do?' he added, with a tone of command never heard in his gentle voice before.

'Bless me! the boy is in dead earnest, and I shall forget prudence in sympathy I'm afraid,' thought Mrs Jo, surprised and pleased by the unexpected manliness Nat showed.

'I'll tell you what I should do. I'd say to myself:

"I'll prove that my love is strong and faithful, and make Daisy's mother proud to give her to me by being not only a good musician but an excellent man, and so command respect and confidence. This I will try for; and if I fail, I shall be the better for the effort, and find comfort in the thought that I did my best for her sake."'

'That is what I meant to do. But I wanted a word of hope to give me courage,' cried Nat, firing up as if the smouldering spark was set ablaze by a breath of encouragement. 'Other fellows, poorer and stupider than I, have done great things and come to honour. Why may not I, though I'm nothing now? I know Mrs Brooke remembers what I came from, but my father was honest though everything went wrong; and I have nothing to be ashamed of though I was a charity boy. I never will be ashamed of my people or myself, and I'll make other folks respect me if I can.'

'Good! that's the right spirit, Nat. Hold to it and make yourself a man. No one will be quicker to see and admire the brave work than my sister Meg. She does not despise your poverty or your past; but mothers are very tender over their daughters, and we Marches, though we have been poor, are, I confess, a little proud of our good family. We don't care for money; but a long line of virtuous ancestors is something to desire and to be proud of.'

‘Well, the Blakes are a good lot. I looked ‘em up, and not one was ever in prison, hanged, or disgraced in any way. We used to be rich and honoured years ago, but we’ve died out and got poor, and father was a street musician rather than beg; and I’ll be one again before I’ll do the mean things some men do and pass muster.’

Nat was so excited that Mrs Jo indulged in a laugh to calm him, and both went on more quietly.

‘I told my sister all that and it pleased her. I am sure if you do well these next few years that she will relent and all be happily settled, unless that wonderful change, which you don’t believe possible, should occur. Now, cheer up; don’t be lackadaisical and blue. Say good-bye cheerfully and bravely, show a manly front, and leave a pleasant memory behind you. We all wish you well and hope much for you. Write to me every week and I’ll send a good, gossipy answer. Be careful what you write to Daisy; don’t gush or wail, for sister Meg will see the letters; and you can help your cause very much by sending sensible, cheery accounts of your life to us all.’

‘I will; I will; it looks brighter and better already, and I won’t lose my one comfort by any fault of my own. Thank you so much, Mother Bhaer, for taking my side. I felt so ungrateful and mean and crushed when I thought you all considered me a sneak who had no business to love such a precious girl as Daisy. No one said anything, but I knew how you felt, and that Mr Laurie sent me off partly to get me out of the way. Oh dear, life is pretty tough sometimes, isn’t it?’ And Nat took his head in both hands as if it ached with the confusion of hopes and fears, passions and plans that proved boyhood was past and manhood had begun.

‘Very tough, but it is that very struggle with obstacles which does us good. Things have been made easy for you in many ways, but no one can do everything. You must paddle your own canoe now, and learn to avoid the rapids and steer straight to the port you want to reach. I don’t know just what your temptations will be for you have no bad habits and seem to love music so well, nothing can lure you from it. I only hope you won’t work too hard.’

‘I feel as if I could work like a horse, I’m so eager to get on; but I’ll take care. Can’t waste time being sick, and you’ve given me doses enough to keep me all right, I guess.’ Nat laughed as he remembered the book of directions Mrs Jo had written for him to consult on all occasions.

She immediately added some verbal ones on the subject of foreign messes, and having mounted one of her pet hobbies, was in full gallop when Emil was seen strolling about on the roof of the old house, that being his favourite promenade; for there he could fancy himself walking the deck, with only blue sky and fresh air about him.

‘I want a word with the Commodore, and up there we shall be nice and quiet. Go and play to Daisy: it will put her to sleep and do you both good. Sit in the porch, so I can keep an eye on you as I promised’; and with a motherly pat on the shoulder Mrs Jo left Nat to his delightful task and briskly ascended to the house-top, not up the trellis as of old but by means of the stairs inside.

Emerging on the platform she found Emil cutting his initials afresh in the wood-work and singing ‘Pull for the Shore’, like the tuneful mariner he was.

‘Come aboard and make yourself at home, Aunty,’ he said, with a playful salute. ‘I’m just leaving a P.P.C. in the old place, so when you fly up here for refuge you’ll remember me.’

‘Ah, my dear, I’m not likely to forget you. It doesn’t need E. B. H. cut on all the trees and railings to remind me of my sailor boy’; and Mrs Jo took the seat nearest the blue figure astride the balustrade, not quite sure how to begin the little sermon she wanted to preach.

‘Well, you don’t pipe your eye and look squally when I sheer off as you used to, and that’s a comfort. I like to leave port in fair weather and have a jolly send-off all round. Specially this time, for it will be a year or more before we drop anchor here again,’ answered Emil, pushing his cap back, and glancing about him as if he loved old Plum and would be sorry never to see it any more.

‘You have salt water enough without my adding to it. I’m going to be quite a Spartan mother, and send my sons to battle with no wailing, only the command:

“With your shield or on it”,’ said Mrs Jo cheerfully, adding after a pause: ‘I often wish I could go too, and some day I will, when you are captain and have a ship of your own — as I’ve no doubt you will before long, with Uncle Herman to push you on.’

‘When I do I’ll christen her the Jolly Jo and take you as first mate. It would be regular larks to have you aboard, and I’d be a proud man to carry you round the world you’ve wanted to see so long and never could,’ answered Emil, caught at once by this splendid vision.

‘I’ll make my first voyage with you and enjoy myself immensely in spite of seasickness and all the stormy winds that blow. I’ve always thought I’d like to see a wreck, a nice safe one with all saved after great danger and heroic deeds, while we clung like Mr Pillicoddy to main-top jibs and lee scuppers.’

‘No wrecks yet, ma’am, but we’ll try to accommodate customers. Captain says I’m a lucky dog and bring fair weather, so we’ll save the dirty weather for you if you want it,’ laughed Emil, digging at the ship in full sail which he was adding to his design.

‘Thanks, I hope you will. This long voyage will give you new experiences, and being an officer, you will have new duties and responsibilities. Are you ready for them? You take everything so gaily, I've been wondering if you realized that now you will have not only to obey but to command also, and power is a dangerous thing. Be careful that you don't abuse it or let it make a tyrant of you.'

'Right you are, ma'am. I've seen plenty of that, and have got my bearings pretty well, I guess. I shan't have very wide swing with Peters over me, but I'll see that the boys don't get abused when he's bowsed up his jib. No right to speak before, but now I won't stand it.'

'That sounds mysteriously awful; could I ask what nautical torture "bowsing jibs" is?' asked Mrs Jo, in a tone of deep interest.

'Getting drunk. Peters can hold more grog than any man I ever saw; he keeps right side up, but is as savage as a norther, and makes things lively all round. I've seen him knock a fellow down with a belaying pin, and couldn't lend a hand. Better luck now, I hope.' And Emil frowned as if he already trod the quarter-deck, lord of all he surveyed.

'Don't get into trouble, for even Uncle Herman's favour won't cover insubordination, you know. You have proved yourself a good sailor; now be a good officer, which is a harder thing, I fancy. It takes a fine character to rule justly and kindly; you will have to put by your boyish ways and remember your dignity. That will be excellent training for you, Emil, and sober you down a bit. No more skylarking except here, so mind your ways, and do honour to your buttons,' said Mrs Jo, tapping one of the very bright brass ones that ornamented the new suit Emil was so proud of.

'I'll do my best. I know my time for skirmshander (chaff) is over, and I must steer a straighter course; but don't you fear, Jack ashore is a very different craft from what he is with blue water under his keel. I had a long talk with Uncle last night and got my orders; I won't forget 'em nor all I owe him. As for you, I'll name my first ship as I say, and have your bust for the figurehead, see if I don't,' and Emil gave his aunt a hearty kiss to seal the vow, which proceeding much amused Nat, playing softly in the porch of the Dovecote.

'You do me proud, Captain. But, dear, I want to say one thing and then I'm done; for you don't need much advice of mine after my good man has spoken. I read somewhere that every inch of rope used in the British Navy has a strand of red in it, so that wherever a bit of it is found it is known. That is the text of my little sermon to you. Virtue, which means honour, honesty, courage, and all that makes character, is the red thread that marks a good man wherever he is. Keep that always and everywhere, so that even if wrecked by misfortune, that sign shall still be found and recognized. Yours is a rough life, and your mates not all we could wish, but you can be a gentleman in the true sense of the word; and no matter what happens to your body, keep your soul clean, your heart true to those who love you, and do your duty to the end.’

As she spoke Emil had risen and stood listening with his cap off and a grave, bright look as if taking orders from a superior officer; when she ended, he answered briefly, but heartily:

‘Please God, I will!’

‘That’s all; I have little fear for you, but one never knows when or how the weak moment may come, and sometimes a chance word helps us, as so many my dear mother spoke come back to me now for my own comfort and the guidance of my boys,’ said Mrs Jo, rising; for the words had been said and no more were needed.

‘I’ve stored ‘em up and know where to find ‘em when wanted. Often and often in my watch I’ve seen old Plum, and heard you and Uncle talking so plainly, I’d have sworn I was here. It is a rough life, Aunty, but a wholesome one if a fellow loves it as I do, and has an anchor to windward as I have. Don’t worry about me, and I’ll come home next year with a chest of tea that will cheer your heart and give you ideas enough for a dozen novels. Going below? All right, steady in the gangway! I’ll be along by the time you’ve got out the cake-box. Last chance for a good old lunch ashore.’

Mrs Jo descended laughing, and Emil finished his ship whistling cheerfully, neither dreaming when and where this little chat on the house-top would return to the memory of one of them.

Dan was harder to catch, and not until evening did a quiet moment come in that busy family; when, while the rest were roaming about, Mrs Jo sat down to read in the study, and presently Dan looked in at the window.

‘Come and rest after your long tramp; you must be tired,’ she called, with an inviting nod towards the big sofa where so many boys had reposed — as much as that active animal ever does.

‘Afraid I shall disturb you’; but Dan looked as if he wanted to stay his restless feet somewhere.

‘Not a bit; I’m always ready to talk, shouldn’t be a woman if I were not,’ laughed Mrs Jo, as Dan swung himself in and sat down with an air of contentment very pleasant to see.

‘Last day is over, yet somehow I don’t seem to hanker to be off. Generally, I’m rather anxious to cut loose after a short stop. Odd, ain’t it?’ asked Dan, gravely picking grass and leaves out of his hair and beard; for he had been lying on the grass, thinking many thoughts in the quiet summer night.

‘Not at all; you are beginning to get civilized. It’s a good sign, and I’m glad to see it,’ answered Mrs Jo promptly. ‘You’ve had your swing, and want a change. Hope the farming will give it to you, though helping the Indians pleases me more: it is so much better to work for others than for one’s self alone.’

‘So ‘tis,’ assented Dan heartily. ‘I seem to want to root somewhere and have folks of my own to take care of. Tired of my own company, I suppose, now I’ve seen so much better. I’m a rough, ignorant lot, and I’ve been thinking maybe I’ve missed it loafing round creation, instead of going in for education as the other chaps did. Hey?’

He looked anxiously at Mrs Jo; and she tried to hide the surprise this new outburst caused her; for till now Dan had scorned books and gloried in his freedom.

‘No; I don’t think so in your case. So far I’m sure the free life was best. Now that you are a man you can control that lawless nature better; but as a boy only great activity and much adventure could keep you out of mischief. Time is taming my colt, you see, and I shall yet be proud of him, whether he makes a pack-horse of himself to carry help to the starving or goes to ploughing as Pegasus did.’

Dan liked the comparison, and smiled as he lounged in the sofa-corner, with the new thoughtfulness in his eyes.

‘Glad you think so. The fact is it’s going to take a heap of taming to make me go well in harness anywhere. I want to, and I try now and then, but always kick over the traces and run away. No lives lost yet; but I shouldn’t wonder if there was some time, and a general smash-up.’

‘Why, Dan, did you have any dangerous adventures during this last absence? I fancied so, but didn’t ask before, knowing you’d tell me if I could help in any way. Can I?’ And Mrs Jo looked anxiously at him; for a sudden lowering expression had come into his face, and he leaned forward as if to hide it.

‘Nothing very bad; but ‘Frisco isn’t just a heaven on earth, you know, and it’s harder to be a saint there than here,’ he answered slowly; then, as if he had made up his mind to ‘‘fess’, as the children used to say, he sat up, and added rapidly, in a half-defiant, half-shamefaced way, ‘I tried gambling, and it wasn’t good for me.’

‘Was that how you made your money?’

‘Not a penny of it! That’s all honest, if speculation isn’t a bigger sort of gambling. I won a lot; but I lost or gave it away, and cut the whole concern before it got the better of me.’

‘Thank heaven for that! Don’t try it again; it may have the terrible fascination for you it has for so many. Keep to your mountains and prairies, and shun cities, if these things tempt you, Dan. Better lose your life than your soul, and one such passion leads to worse sins, as you know better than I.'

Dan nodded, and seeing how troubled she was, said, in a lighter tone, though still the shadow of that past experience remained:

'Don't be scared; I'm all right now; and a burnt dog dreads the fire. I don't drink, or do the things you dread; don't care for 'em; but I get excited, and then this devilish temper of mine is more than I can manage. Fighting a moose or a buffalo is all right; but when you pitch into a man, no matter how great a scamp he is, you've got to look out. I shall kill someone some day; that's all I'm afraid of. I do hate a sneak!' And Dan brought his fist down on the table with a blow that made the lamp totter and the books skip.

'That always was your trial, Dan, and I can sympathize with you; for I've been trying to govern my own temper all my life, and haven't learnt yet,' said Mrs Jo, with a sigh. 'For heaven's sake, guard your demon well, and don't let a moment's fury ruin all your life. As I said to Nat, watch and pray, my dear boy. There is no other help or hope for human weakness but God's love and patience.'

Tears were in Mrs Jo's eyes as she spoke; for she felt this deeply, and knew how hard a task it is to rule these bosom sins of ours. Dan looked touched, also uncomfortable, as he always did when religion of any sort was mentioned, though he had a simple creed of his own, and tried to live up to it in his blind way.

'I don't do much praying; don't seem to come handy to me; but I can watch like a redskin, only it's easier to mount guard over a lurking grizzly than my own cursed temper. It's that I'm afraid of, if I settle down. I can get on with wild beasts first-rate; but men rile me awfully, and I can't take it out in a free fight, as I can with a bear or a wolf. Guess I'd better head for the Rockies, and stay there a spell longer — till I'm tame enough for decent folks, if I ever am.' And Dan leaned his rough head on his hands in a despondent attitude.

'Try my sort of help, and don't give up. Read more, study a little, and try to meet a better class of people, who won't "rile", but soothe and strengthen you. We don't make you savage, I'm sure; for you have been as meek as a lamb, and made us very happy.'

'Glad of it; but I've felt like a hawk in a hen-house all the same, and wanted to pounce and tear more than once. Not so much as I used, though,' added Dan, after a short laugh at Mrs Jo's surprised face. 'I'll try your plan, and keep good company this bout if I can; but a man can't pick and choose, knocking about as I do.'

'Yes, you can this time; for you are going on a peaceful errand and can keep clear of temptation if you try. Take some books and read; that's an immense help; and books are always good company if you have the right sort. Let me pick out some for you.’ And Mrs Jo made a bee-line to the well-laden shelves, which were the joy of her heart and the comfort of her life.

‘Give me travels and stories, please; don’t want any pious works, can’t seem to relish ‘em, and won’t pretend I do,’ said Dan, following to look over her head with small favour at the long lines of well-worn volumes.

Mrs Jo turned short round, and putting a hand on either broad shoulder, looked him in the eye, saying soberly:

‘Now, Dan, see here; never sneer at good things or pretend to be worse than you are. Don’t let false shame make you neglect the religion without which no man can live. You needn’t talk about it if you don’t like, but don’t shut your heart to it in whatever shape it comes. Nature is your God now; she has done much for you; let her do more, and lead you to know and love a wiser and more tender teacher, friend, and comforter than she can ever be. That is your only hope; don’t throw it away, and waste time; for sooner or later you will feel the need of Him, and He will come to you and hold you up when all other help fails.’

Dan stood motionless, and let her read in his softened eyes the dumb desire that lived in his heart, though he had no words to tell it, and only permitted her to catch a glimpse of the divine spark which smoulders or burns clearly in every human soul. He did not speak; and glad to be spared some answer which should belie his real feelings, Mrs Jo hastened to say, with her most motherly smile:

‘I saw in your room the little Bible I gave you long ago; it was well worn outside, but fresh within, as if not much read. Will you promise me to read a little once a week, dear, for my sake? Sunday is a quiet day everywhere, and this book is never old nor out of place. Begin with the stories you used to love when I told them to you boys. David was your favourite, you remember? Read him again; he’ll suit you even better now, and you’ll find his sins and repentance useful reading till you come to the life and work of a diviner example than he. You will do it, for love of mother Bhaer, who always loved her “firebrand” and hoped to save him?’

‘I will,’ answered Dan, with a sudden brightening of face that was like a sunburst through a cloud, full of promise though so short-lived and rare.

Mrs Jo turned at once to the books and began to talk of them, knowing well that Dan would not hear any more just then. He seemed relieved; for it was always hard for him to show his inner self, and he took pride in hiding it as an Indian does in concealing pain or fear.

‘Hallo, here’s old Sintram! I remember him; used to like him and his tantrums, and read about ‘em to Ted. There he is riding ahead with Death and the Devil alongside.’

As Dan looked at the little picture of the young man with horse and hound going bravely up the rocky defile, accompanied by the companions who ride beside most men through this world, a curious impulse made Mrs Jo say quickly:

‘That’s you, Dan, just you at this time! Danger and sin are near you in the life you lead; moods and passions torment you; the bad father left you to fight alone, and the wild spirit drives you to wander up and down the world looking for peace and self-control. Even the horse and hound are there, your Octoo and Don, faithful friends, unscared by the strange mates that go with you. You have not got the armour yet, but I’m trying to show you where to find it. Remember the mother Sintram loved and longed to find, and did find when his battle was bravely fought, his reward well earned? You can recollect your mother; and I have always felt that all the good qualities you possess come from her. Act out the beautiful old story in this as in the other parts, and try to give her back a son to be proud of.’

Quite carried away by the likeness of the quaint tale to Dan’s life and needs, Mrs Jo went on pointing to the various pictures which illustrated it, and when she looked up was surprised to see how struck and interested he seemed to be. Like all people of his temperament he was very impressionable, and his life among hunters and Indians had made him superstitious; he believed in dreams, liked weird tales, and whatever appealed to the eye or mind, vividly impressed him more than the wisest words. The story of poor, tormented Sintram came back clearly as he looked and listened, symbolizing his secret trials even more truly than Mrs Jo knew; and just at that moment this had an effect upon him that never was forgotten. But all he said was:

‘Small chance of that. I don’t take much stock in the idea of meeting folks in heaven. Guess mother won’t remember the poor little brat she left so long ago; why should she?’

‘Because true mothers never forget their children; and I know she was one, from the fact that she ran away from the cruel husband, to save her little son from bad influences. Had she lived, life would have been happier for you, with this tender friend to help and comfort you. Never forget that she risked everything for your sake, and don’t let it be in vain.’

Mrs Jo spoke very earnestly, knowing that this was the one sweet memory of Dan’s early life, and glad to have recalled it at this moment; for suddenly a great tear splashed down on the page where Sintram kneels at his mother’s feet, wounded, but victorious over sin and death. She looked up, well pleased to have touched Dan to the heart’s core, as that drop proved; but a sweep of the arm brushed away the tell-tale, and his beard hid the mate to it, as he shut the book, saying with a suppressed quiver in his strong voice:

‘I’ll keep this, if nobody wants it. I’ll read it over, and maybe it will do me good. I’d like to meet her anywhere, but don’t believe I ever shall.’

‘Keep it and welcome. My mother gave it to me; and when you read it try to believe that neither of your mothers will ever forget you.’

Mrs Jo gave the book with a caress; and simply saying: ‘Thanks; good night,’ Dan thrust it into his pocket, and walked straight away to the river to recover from this unwonted mood of tenderness and confidence.

Next day the travellers were off. All were in good spirits, and a cloud of handkerchiefs whitened the air as they drove away in the old bus, waving their hats to everyone and kissing their hands, especially to mother Bhaer, who said in her prophetic tone as she wiped her eyes, when the familiar rumble died away:

‘I have a feeling that something is going to happen to some of them, and they will never come back to me, or come back changed. Well, I can only say, God be with my boys!’

And He was.

Chapter 7. THE LION AND THE LAMB

When the boys were gone a lull fell upon Plumfield, and the family scattered to various places for brief outings, as August had come and all felt the need of change. The Professor took Mrs Jo to the mountains. The Laurences were at the seashore, and there Meg's family and the Bhaer boys took turns to visit, as someone must always be at home to keep things in order.

Mrs Meg, with Daisy, was in office when the events occurred which we are about to relate. Rob and Ted were just up from Rocky Nook, and Nan was passing a week with her friend as the only relaxation she allowed herself. Demi was off on a run with Tom, so Rob was man of the house, with old Silas as general overseer. The sea air seemed to have gone to Ted's head, for he was unusually freakish, and led his gentle aunt and poor Rob a life of it with his pranks. Octoo was worn out with the wild rides he took, and Don openly rebelled when ordered to leap and show off his accomplishments; while the girls at college were both amused and worried by the ghosts who haunted the grounds at night, the unearthly melodies that disturbed their studious hours, and the hairbreadth escapes of this restless boy by flood and field and fire. Something happened at length which effectually sobered Ted and made a lasting impression on both the boys; for sudden danger and a haunting fear turned the Lion into a lamb and the Lamb into a lion, as far as courage went.

On the first of September — the boys never forgot the date — after a pleasant tramp and good luck with their fishing, the brothers were lounging in the barn; for Daisy had company, and the lads kept out of the way.

'I tell you what it is, Bobby, that dog is sick. He won't play, nor eat, nor drink, and acts queerly. Dan will kill us if anything happens to him,' said Ted, looking at Don, who lay near his kennel resting a moment after one of the restless wanderings which kept him vibrating between the door of Dan's room and the shady corner of the yard, where his master had settled him with an old cap to guard till he came back.

'It's the hot weather, perhaps. But I sometimes think he's pining for Dan. Dogs do, you know, and the poor fellow has been low in his mind ever since the boys went. Maybe something has happened to Dan. Don howled last night and can't rest. I've heard of such things,' answered Rob thoughtfully.

'Pooh! he can't know. He's cross. I'll stir him up and take him for a run. Always makes me feel better. Hi, boy! wake up and be jolly'; and Ted snapped his fingers at the dog, who only looked at him with grim indifference.

'Better let him alone. If he isn't right tomorrow, we'll take him to Dr Watkins and see what he says.' And Rob went on watching the swallows as he lay in the hay polishing up some Latin verses he had made.

The spirit of perversity entered into Ted, and merely because he was told not to tease Don he went on doing it, pretending that it was for the dog's good. Don took no heed of his pats, commands, reproaches, or insults, till Ted's patience gave out; and seeing a convenient switch near by he could not resist the temptation to conquer the great hound by force, since gentleness failed to win obedience. He had the wisdom to chain Don up first; for a blow from any hand but his master's made him savage, and Ted had more than once tried the experiment, as the dog remembered. This indignity roused Don and he sat up with a growl. Rob heard it, and seeing Ted raise the switch, ran to interfere, exclaiming:

'Don't touch him! Dan forbade it! Leave the poor thing in peace; I won't allow it.'

Rob seldom commanded, but when he did Master Ted had to give in. His temper was up, and Rob's masterful tone made it impossible to resist one cut at the rebellious dog before he submitted. Only a single blow, but it was a costly one; for as it fell, the dog sprang at Ted with a snarl, and Rob, rushing between the two, felt the sharp teeth pierce his leg. A word made Don let go and drop remorsefully at Rob's feet, for he loved him and was evidently sorry to have hurt his friend by mistake. With a forgiving pat Rob left him, to limp to the barn followed by Ted, whose wrath was changed to shame and sorrow when he saw the red drops on Rob's sock and the little wounds in his leg.

'I'm awfully sorry. Why did you get in the way? Here, wash it up, and I'll get a rag to tie on it,' he said quickly filling a sponge with water and pulling out a very demoralized handkerchief. Rob usually made light of his own mishaps and was over ready to forgive if others were to blame; but now he sat quite still, looking at the purple marks with such a strange expression on his white face that Ted was troubled, though he added with a laugh: 'Why, you're not afraid of a little dig like that, are you, Bobby?'

'I am afraid of hydrophobia. But if Don is mad I'd rather be the one to have it,' answered Rob, with a smile and a shiver.

At that dreadful word Ted turned whiter than his brother, and, dropping sponge and handkerchief, stared at him with a frightened face, whispering in a tone of despair:

'Oh, Rob, don't say it! What shall we do, what shall we do?'

'Call Nan; she will know. Don't scare Aunty, or tell a soul but Nan; she's on the back piazza; get her out here as quick as you can. I'll wash it till she comes. Maybe it's nothing; don't look so staggered, Ted. I only thought it might be, as Don is queer.'

Rob tried to speak bravely; but Ted's long legs felt strangely weak as he hurried away, and it was lucky he met no one, for his face would have betrayed him. Nan was swinging luxuriously in a hammock, amusing herself with a lively treatise on croup, when an agitated boy suddenly clutched her, whispering, as he nearly pulled her overboard:

'Come to Rob in the barn! Don's mad and he's bitten him, and we don't know what to do; it's all my fault; no one must know. Oh, do be quick!'

Nan was on her feet at once, startled, but with her wits about her, and both were off without more words as they dodged round the house where unconscious Daisy chatted with her friends in the parlour and Aunt Meg peacefully took her afternoon nap upstairs.

Rob was braced up, and was as calm and steady as ever when they found him in the harness-room, whither he had wisely retired, to escape observation. The story was soon told, and after a look at Don, now in his kennel, sad and surly, Nan said slowly, with her eye on the full water-pan:

'Rob, there is one thing to do for the sake of safety, and it must be done at once. We can't wait to see if Don is — sick — or to go for a doctor. I can do it, and I will; but it is very painful, and I hate to hurt you, dear.'

A most unprofessional quiver got into Nan's voice as she spoke, and her keen eyes dimmed as she looked at the two anxious young faces turned so confidingly to her for help.

'I know, burn it; well, do it, please; I can bear it. But Ted better go away,' said Rob, with a firm setting of his lips, and a nod at his afflicted brother.

'I won't stir; I can stand it if he can, only it ought to be me!' cried Ted, with a desperate effort not to cry, so full of grief and fear and shame was he that it seemed as if he couldn't bear it like a man.

'He'd better stay and help; do him good,' answered

Nan sternly, because, her heart was faint within her, knowing as she did all that might be in store for both poor boys. 'Keep quiet; I'll be back in a minute,' she added, going towards the house, while her quick mind hastily planned what was best to be done.

It was ironing day, and a hot fire still burned in the empty kitchen, for the maids were upstairs resting. Nan put a slender poker to heat, and as she sat waiting for it, covered her face with her hands, asking help in this sudden need for strength, courage, and wisdom; for there was no one else to call upon, and young as she was, she knew what was to be done if she only had the nerve to do it. Any other patient would have been calmly interesting, but dear, good Robin, his father's pride, his mother's comfort, everyone's favourite and friend, that he should be in danger was very terrible; and a few hot tears dropped on the well-scoured table as Nan tried to calm her trouble by remembering how very likely it was to be all a mistake, a natural but vain alarm.

'I must make light of it, or the boys will break down, and then there will be a panic. Why afflict and frighten everyone when all is in doubt? I won't. I'll take Rob to Dr Morrison at once, and have the dog man see Don. Then, having done all we can, we will either laugh at our scare — if it is one — or be ready for whatever comes. Now for my poor boy.'

Armed with the red-hot poker, a pitcher of ice-water, and several handkerchiefs from the clotheshorse, Nan went back to the barn ready to do her best in this her most serious 'emergency case'. The boys sat like statues, one of despair, the other of resignation; and it took all Nan's boasted nerve to do her work quickly and well.

'Now, Rob, only a minute, then we are safe. Stand by, Ted; he may be a bit faintish.'

Rob shut his eyes, clinched his hands, and sat like a hero. Ted knelt beside him, white as a sheet, and as weak as a girl; for the pangs of remorse were rending him, and his heart failed at the thought of all this pain because of his wilfulness. It was all over in a moment, with only one little groan; but when Nan looked to her assistant to hand the water, poor Ted needed it the most, for he had fainted away, and lay on the floor in a pathetic heap of arms and legs.

Rob laughed, and, cheered by that unexpected sound, Nan bound up the wound with hands that never trembled, though great drops stood on her forehead; and she shared the water with patient number one before she turned to patient number two. Ted was much ashamed, and quite broken in spirit, when he found how he had failed at the critical moment, and begged them not to tell, as he really could not help it; then by way of finishing his utter humiliation, a burst of hysterical tears disgraced his manly soul, and did him a world of good.

'Never mind, never mind, we are all right now, and no one need be the wiser,' said Nan briskly, as poor Ted hiccoughed on Rob's shoulder, laughing and crying in the most tempestuous manner, while his brother soothed him, and the young doctor fanned both with Silas's old straw hat.

'Now, boys, listen to me and remember what I say. We won't alarm anyone yet, for I've made up my mind our scare is all nonsense. Don was out lapping the water as I came by, and I don't believe he's mad any more than I am. Still, to ease our minds and compose our spirits, and get our guilty faces out of sight for a while, I think we had better drive into town to my old friend Dr Morrison, and let him just take a look at my work, and give us some quieting little dose; for we are all rather shaken by this flurry. Sit still, Rob; and Ted, you harness up while I run and get my hat and tell Aunty to excuse me to Daisy. I don’t know those Penniman girls, and she will be glad of our room at tea, and we’ll have a cosy bite at my house, and come home as gay as larks.’

Nan talked on as a vent for the hidden emotions which professional pride would not allow her to show, and the boys approved her plan at once; for action is always easier than quiet waiting. Ted went staggering away to wash his face at the pump, and rub some colour into his cheeks before he harnessed the horse. Rob lay tranquilly on the hay, looking up at the swallows again as he lived through some very memorable moments. Boy as he was, the thought of death coming suddenly to him, and in this way, might well make him sober; for it is a very solemn thing to be arrested in the midst of busy life by the possibility of the great change. There were no sins to be repented of, few faults, and many happy, dutiful years to remember with infinite comfort. So Rob had no fears to daunt him, no regrets to sadden, and best of all, a very strong and simple piety to sustain and cheer him.

‘Mein Vater,’ was his first thought; for Rob was very near the Professor’s heart, and the loss of his eldest would have been a bitter blow. These words, whispered with a tremble of the lips that had been so firm when the hot iron burned, recalled that other Father who is always near, always tender and helpful; and, folding his hands, Rob said the heartiest little prayer he ever prayed, there on the hay, to the soft twitter of the brooding birds. It did him good; and wisely laying all his fear and doubt and trouble in God’s hand, the boy felt ready for whatever was to come, and from that hour kept steadily before him the one duty that was plain — to be brave and cheerful, keep silent, and hope for the best.

Nan stole her hat, and left a note on Daisy’s pincushion, saying she had taken the boys to drive, and all would be out of the way till after tea. Then she hurried back and found her patients much better, the one for work, the other for rest. In they got, and, putting Rob on the back seat with his leg up drove away, looking as gay and care-free as if nothing had happened.

Dr Morrison made light of the affair, but told Nan she had done right; and as the much-relieved lads went downstairs, he added in a whisper: ‘Send the dog off for a while, and keep your eye on the boy. Don’t let him know it, and report to me if anything seems wrong. One never knows in these cases. No harm to be careful.’

Nan nodded, and feeling much relieved now that the responsibility was off her shoulders, took the lads to Dr Watkins, who promised to come out later and examine Don. A merry tea at Nan’s house, which was kept open for her all summer, did them good, and by the time they got home in the cool of the evening no sign of the panic remained but Ted's heavy eyes, and a slight limp when Rob walked. As the guests were still chattering on the front piazza they retired to the back, and Ted soothed his remorseful soul by swinging Rob in the hammock, while Nan told stories till the dog man arrived.

He said Don was a little under the weather, but no more mad than the grey kitten that purred round his legs while the examination went on.

'He wants his master, and feels the heat. Fed too well, perhaps. I'll keep him a few weeks and send him home all right,' said Dr Watkins, as Don laid his great head in his hand, and kept his intelligent eyes on his face, evidently feeling that this man understood his trials, and knew what to do for him.

So Don departed without a murmur, and our three conspirators took counsel together how to spare the family all anxiety, and give Rob the rest his leg demanded. Fortunately, he always spent many hours in his little study, so he could lie on the sofa with a book in his hand as long as he liked, without exciting any remark. Being of a quiet temperament, he did not worry himself or Nan with useless fears, but believed what was told him, and dismissing all dark possibilities, went cheerfully on his way, soon recovering from the shock of what he called 'our scare'.

But excitable Ted was harder to manage, and it took all Nan's wit and wisdom to keep him from betraying the secret; for it was best to say nothing and spare all discussion of the subject for Rob's sake. Ted's remorse preyed upon him, and having no 'Mum' to confide in, he was very miserable. By day he devoted himself to Rob, waiting on him, talking to him, gazing anxiously at him, and worrying the good fellow very much; though he wouldn't own it, since Ted found comfort in it. But at night, when all was quiet, Ted's lively imagination and heavy heart got the better of him, and kept him awake, or set him walking in his sleep. Nan had her eye on him, and more than once administered a little dose to give him a rest, read to him, scolded him, and when she caught him haunting the house in the watches of the night, threatened to lock him up if he did not stay in his bed. This wore off after a while; but a change came over the freakish boy, and everyone observed it, even before his mother returned to ask what they had done to quench the Lion's spirits. He was gay, but not so heedless; and often when the old wilfulness beset him, he would check it sharply, look at Rob, and give up, or stalk away to have his sulk out alone. He no longer made fun of his brother's old-fashioned ways and bookish tastes, but treated him with a new and very marked respect, which touched and pleased modest Rob, and much amazed all observers. It seemed as if he felt that he owed him reparation for the foolish act that might have cost him his life; and love being stronger than will, Ted forgot his pride, and paid his debt like an honest boy.

‘I don’t understand it,’ said Mrs Jo, after a week of home life, much impressed by the good behaviour of her younger son. ‘Ted is such a saint, I’m afraid we are going to lose him. Is it Meg’s sweet influence, or Daisy’s fine cooking, or the pellets I catch Nan giving him on the sly? Some witchcraft has been at work during my absence, and this will-o’-the-wisp is so amiable, quiet, and obedient, I don’t know him.’

‘He is growing up, heart’s-dearest, and being a precocious plant, he begins to bloom early. I also see a change in my Robchen. He is more manly and serious than ever, and is seldom far from me, as if his love for the old papa was growing with his growth. Our boys will often surprise us in this way, Jo, and we can only rejoice over them and leave them to become what Gott pleases.’

As the Professor spoke, his eyes rested proudly on the brothers, who came walking up the steps together, Ted’s arm over Rob’s shoulder as he listened attentively to some geological remarks Rob was making on a stone he held. Usually, Ted made fun of such tastes, and loved to lay boulders in the student’s path, put brickbats under his pillow, gravel in his shoes, or send parcels of dirt by express to ‘Prof. R. M. Bhaer’. Lately, he had treated Rob’s hobbies respectfully, and had begun to appreciate the good qualities of this quiet brother whom he had always loved but rather undervalued, till his courage under fire won Ted’s admiration, and made it impossible to forget a fault, the consequences of which might have been so terrible. The leg was still lame, though doing well, and Ted was always offering an arm as support, gazing anxiously at his brother, and trying to guess his wants; for regret was still keen in Ted’s soul, and Rob’s forgiveness only made it deeper. A fortunate slip on the stairs gave Rob an excuse for limping, and no one but Nan and Ted saw the wound; so the secret was safe up to this time.

‘We are talking about you, my lads. Come in and tell us what good fairy has been at work while we were gone. Or is it because absence sharpens our eyes, that we find such pleasant changes when we come back?’ said Mrs Jo, patting the sofa on either side, while the Professor forgot his piles of letters to admire the pleasing prospect of his wife in a bower of arms, as the boys sat down beside her, smiling affectionately, but feeling a little guilty; for till now ‘Mum’ and ‘Vater’ knew every event in their boyish lives.

‘Oh, it’s only because Bobby and I have been alone so much; we are sort of twins. I stir him up a bit, and he steadies me a great deal. You and father do the same, you know. Nice plan. I like it’; and Ted felt that he had settled the matter capitally.

‘Mother won’t thank you for comparing yourself to her, Ted. I’m flattered at being like father in any way. I try to be,’ answered Rob, as they laughed at Ted’s compliment.

‘I do thank him, for it’s true; and if you, Robin, do half as much for your brother as Papa has for me, your life won’t be a failure,’ said Mrs Jo heartily. ‘I’m very glad to see you helping one another. It’s the right way, and we can’t begin too soon to try to understand the needs, virtues, and failings of those nearest us. Love should not make us blind to faults, nor familiarity make us too ready to blame the shortcomings we see. So work away, my sonnies, and give us more surprises of this sort as often as you like.’

‘The liebe Mutter has said all. I too am well pleased at the friendly brother-warmth I find. It is good for everyone; long may it last!’ and Professor Bhaer nodded at the boys, who looked gratified, but rather at a loss how to respond to these flattering remarks.

Rob wisely kept silent, fearing to say too much; but Ted burst out, finding it impossible to help telling something:

‘The fact is I’ve been finding out what a brave good chap Bobby is, and I’m trying to make up for all the bother I’ve been to him. I knew he was awfully wise, but I thought him rather soft, because he liked books better than larks, and was always fussing about his conscience. But I begin to see that it isn’t the fellows who talk the loudest and show off best that are the manliest. No, sir! quiet old Bob is a hero and a trump, and I’m proud of him; so would you be if you knew all about it.’

Here a look from Rob brought Ted up with a round turn; he stopped short, grew red, and clapped his hand on his mouth in dismay.

‘Well, are we not to “know all about it”?’ asked Mrs Jo quickly; for her sharp eye saw signs of danger and her maternal heart felt that something had come between her and her sons. ‘Boys,’ she went on solemnly, ‘I suspect that the change we talk about is not altogether the effect of growing up, as we say. It strikes me that Ted has been in mischief and Rob has got him out of some scrape; hence the lovely mood of my bad boy and the sober one of my conscientious son, who never hides anything from his mother.’

Rob was as red as Ted now, but after a moment’s hesitation he looked up and answered with an air of relief:

‘Yes, mother, that’s it; but it’s all over and no harm done, and I think we’d better let it be, for a while at least. I did feel guilty to keep anything from you, but now you know so much I shall not worry and you needn’t either. Ted’s sorry, I don’t mind, and it has done us both good.’

Mrs Jo looked at Ted, who winked hard but bore the look like a man; then she turned to Rob, who smiled at her so cheerfully that she felt reassured; but something in his face struck her, and she saw what it was that made him seem older, graver, yet more lovable than ever. It was the look pain of mind, as well as body, brings, and the patience of a sweet submission to some inevitable trial. Like a flash she guessed that some danger had been near her boy, and the glances she had caught between the two lads and Nan confirmed her fears.

‘Rob, dear, you have been ill, hurt, or seriously troubled by Ted? Tell me at once; I will not have any secrets now. Boys sometimes suffer all their lives from neglected accidents or carelessness. Fritz, make them speak out!’

Mr Bhaer put down his papers and came to stand before them, saying in a tone that quieted Mrs Jo, and gave the boys courage:

‘My sons, give us the truth. We can bear it; do not hold it back to spare us. Ted knows we forgive much because we love him, so be frank, all two.’

Ted instantly dived among the sofa pillows and kept there, with only a pair of scarlet ears visible, while Rob in a few words told the little story, truthfully, but as gently as he could, hastening to add the comfortable assurance that Don was not mad, the wound nearly well, and no danger would ever come of it.

But Mrs Jo grew so pale he had to put his arms about her, and his father turned and walked away, exclaiming: ‘Ach Himmel!’ in a tone of such mingled pain, relief, and gratitude, that Ted pulled an extra pillow over his head to smother the sound. They were all right in a minute; but such news is always a shock, even if the peril is past, and Mrs Jo hugged her boy close till his father came and took him away, saying with a strong shake of both hands and a quiver in his voice:

‘To be in danger of one’s life tries a man’s mettle, and you bear it well; but I cannot spare my good boy yet; thank Gott, we keep him safe!’

A smothered sound, between a choke and a groan, came from under the pillows, and the writhing of Ted’s long legs so plainly expressed despair that his mother relented towards him, and burrowing till she found a tousled yellow head, pulled it out and smoothed it, exclaiming with an irrepressible laugh, though her cheeks were wet with tears:

‘Come and be forgiven, poor sinner! I know you have suffered enough, and I won’t say a word; only if harm had come to Rob you would have made me more miserable than yourself. Oh, Teddy, Teddy, do try to cure that wilful spirit of yours before it is too late!’

‘Oh, Mum, I do try! I never can forget this — I hope it’s cured me; if it hasn’t, I am afraid I ain’t worth saving,’ answered Ted, pulling his own hair as the only way of expressing his deep remorse.

‘Yes, you are, my dear; I felt just so at fifteen when Amy was nearly drowned, and Marmee helped me as I’ll help you. Come to me, Teddy, when the evil one gets hold of you, and together we’ll rout him. Ah, me! I’ve had many a tussle with that old Apollyon, and often got worsted, but not always. Come under my shield, and we'll fight till we win.'

No one spoke for a minute as Ted and his mother laughed and cried in one handkerchief, and Rob stood with his father's arm round him so happy that all was told and forgiven, though never to be forgotten; for such experiences do one good, and knit hearts that love more closely together.

Presently Ted rose straight up and going to his father, said bravely and humbly:

'I ought to be punished. Please do it; but first say you forgive me, as Rob does.'

'Always that, mein Sohn, seventy time seven, if needs be, else I am not worthy the name you give me. The punishment has come; I can give no greater. Let it not be in vain. It will not with the help of the mother and the All Father. Room here for both, always!'

The good Professor opened his arms and embraced his boys like a true German, not ashamed to express by gesture or by word the fatherly emotions an American would have compressed into a slap on the shoulder and a brief 'All right'.

Mrs Jo sat and enjoyed the prospect like a romantic soul as she was, and then they had a quiet talk together, saying freely all that was in their hearts, and finding much comfort in the confidence which comes when love casts out fear. It was agreed that nothing be said except to Nan, who was to be thanked and rewarded for her courage, discretion, and fidelity.

'I always knew that girl had the making of a fine woman in her, and this proves it. No panics and shrieks and faintings and fuss, but calm sense and energetic skill. Dear child, what can I give or do to show my gratitude?' said Mrs Jo enthusiastically.

'Make Tom clear out and leave her in peace,' suggested Ted, almost himself again, though a pensive haze still partially obscured his native gaiety.

'Yes, do! he frets her like a mosquito. She forbade him to come out here while she stayed, and packed him off with Demi. I like old Tom, but he is a regular noodle about Nan,' added Rob, as he went away to help his father with the accumulated letters.

'I'll do it!' said Mrs Jo decidedly. 'That girl's career shall not be hampered by a foolish boy's fancy. In a moment of weariness she may give in, and then it's all over. Wiser women have done so and regretted it all their lives. Nan shall earn her place first, and prove that she can fill it; then she may marry if she likes, and can find a man worthy of her.'

But Mrs Jo's help was not needed; for love and gratitude can work miracles, and when youth, beauty, accident, and photography are added, success is sure; as was proved in the case of the unsuspecting but too susceptible Thomas.

Chapter 8. JOSIE PLAYS MERMAID

While the young Bhaers were having serious experiences at home, Josie was enjoying herself immensely at Rocky Nook; for the Laurences knew how to make summer idleness both charming and wholesome. Bess was very fond of her little cousin; Mrs Amy felt that whether her niece was an actress or not she must be a gentlewoman, and gave her the social training which marks the well-bred woman everywhere; while Uncle Laurie was never happier than when rowing, riding, playing, or lounging with two gay girls beside him. Josie bloomed like a wild flower in this free life, Bess grew rosy, brisk, and merry, and both were great favourites with the neighbours, whose villas were by the shore or perched on the cliffs along the pretty bay.

One crumpled rose-leaf disturbed Josie's peace, one baffled wish filled her with a longing which became a mania, and kept her as restless and watchful as a detective with a case to 'work up'. Miss Cameron, the great actress, had hired one of the villas and retired thither to rest and 'create' a new part for next season. She saw no one but a friend or two, had a private beach, and was invisible except during her daily drive, or when the opera-glasses of curious gazers were fixed on a blue figure disporting itself in the sea. The Laurences knew her, but respected her privacy, and after a call left her in peace till she expressed a wish for society — a courtesy which she remembered and repaid later, as we shall see.

But Josie was like a thirsty fly buzzing about a sealed honey-pot, for this nearness to her idol was both delightful and maddening. She pined to see, hear, talk with, and study this great and happy woman who could thrill thousands by her art, and win friends by her virtue, benevolence, and beauty. This was the sort of actress the girl meant to be, and few could object if the gift was really hers; for the stage needs just such women to purify and elevate the profession which should teach as well as amuse. If kindly Miss Cameron had known what passionate love and longing burned in the bosom of the little girl whom she idly observed skipping over the rocks, splashing about the beach, or galloping past her gate on a Shetland pony, she would have made her happy by a look or a word. But being tired with her winter's work and busy with her new part, the lady took no more notice of this young neighbour than of the sea-gulls in the bay or the daisies dancing in the fields. Nosegays left on her doorstep, serenades under her garden-wall, and the fixed stare of admiring eyes were such familiar things that she scarcely minded them; and Josie grew desperate when all her little attempts failed.

‘I might climb that pine-tree and tumble off on her piazza roof, or get Sheltie to throw me just at her gate and be taken in fainting. It’s no use to try to drown myself when she is bathing. I can’t sink, and she’d only send a man to pull me out. What can I do? I will see her and tell her my hopes and make her say I can act some day. Mamma would believe her; and if — oh, if she only would let me study with her, what perfect joy that would be!’

Josie made these remarks one afternoon as she and Bess prepared for a swim, a fishing party having prevented their morning bathe.

‘You must bide your time, dear, and not be so impatient. Papa promised to give you a chance before the season is over, and he always manages things nicely. That will be better than any queer prank of yours,’ answered Bess, tying her pretty hair in a white net to match her suit, while Josie made a little lobster of herself in scarlet.

‘I hate to wait; but I suppose I must. Hope she will bathe this afternoon, though it is low tide. She told Uncle she should have to go in then because in the morning people stared so and went on her beach. Come and have a good dive from the big rock. No one round but nurses and babies, so we can romp and splash as much as we like.’

Away they went to have a fine time; for the little bay was free from other bathers, and the babies greatly admired their aquatic gymnastics, both being expert swimmers.

As they sat dripping on the big rock Josie suddenly gave a clutch that nearly sent Bess overboard, as she cried excitedly:

‘There she is! Look! coming to bathe. How splendid! Oh, if she only would drown a little and let me save her! or even get her toe nipped by a crab; anything so I could go and speak!’

‘Don’t seem to look; she comes to be quiet and enjoy herself. Pretend we don’t see her, that’s only civil,’ answered Bess, affecting to be absorbed in a white-winged yacht going by.

‘Let’s carelessly float that way as if going for seaweed on the rocks. She can’t mind if we are flat on our backs, with only our noses out. Then when we can’t help seeing her, we’ll swim back as if anxious to retire. That will impress her, and she may call to thank the very polite young ladies who respect her wishes,’ proposed Josie, whose lively fancy was always planning dramatic situations.

Just as they were going to slip from their rock, as if Fate relented at last, Miss Cameron was seen to beckon wildly as she stood waist-deep in the water, looking down. She called to her maid, who seemed searching along the beach for something, and not finding what she sought, waved a towel towards the girls as if summoning them to help her.

‘Run, fly! she wants us, she wants us!’ cried Josie, tumbling into the water like a very energetic turtle, and swimming away in her best style towards this long desired haven of joy. Bess followed more slowly, and both came panting and smiling up to Miss Cameron, who never lifted her eyes, but said in that wonderful voice of hers:

‘I’ve dropped a bracelet. I see it, but can’t get it. Will the little boy find me a long stick? I’ll keep my eye on it, so the water shall not wash it away.’

‘I’ll dive for it with pleasure; but I’m not a boy,’ answered Josie, laughing as she shook the curly head which at a distance had deceived the lady.

‘I beg your pardon. Dive away, child; the sand is covering it fast. I value it very much. Never forgot to take it off before.’

‘I’ll get it!’ and down went Josie, to come up with a handful of pebbles, but no bracelet.

‘It’s gone; never mind — my fault,’ said Miss Cameron, disappointed, but amused at the girl’s dismay as she shook the water out of her eyes and gasped bravely:

‘No, it isn’t. I’ll have it, if I stay down all night!’ and with one long breath Josie dived again, leaving nothing but a pair of agitated feet to be seen.

‘I’m afraid she will hurt herself,’ said Miss Cameron, looking at Bess, whom she recognized by her likeness to her mother.

‘Oh, no; Josie is a little fish. She likes it’; and Bess smiled happily at this wonderful granting of her cousin’s desire.

‘You are Mr Laurence’s daughter, I think? How d’ye do, dear? Tell papa I’m coming to see him soon. Too tired before. Quite savage. Better now. Ah! here’s our pearl of divers. What luck?’ she asked, as the heels went down and a dripping head came up.

Josie could only choke and splutter at first, being half strangled; but though her hands had failed again, her courage had not; and with a resolute shake of her wet hair, a bright look at the tall lady, and a series of puffs to fill her lungs, she said calmly:

‘“Never give up” is my motto. I’m going to get it, if I go to Liverpool for it! Now, then!’ and down went the mermaid quite out of sight this time, groping like a real lobster at the bottom of the sea.

‘Plucky little girl! I like that. Who is she?’ asked the lady, sitting down on a half-covered stone to watch her diver, since the bracelet was lost sight of.

Bess told her, adding, with the persuasive smile of her father: ‘Josie longs to be an actress, and has waited for a month to see you. This is a great happiness for her.’

‘Bless the child! why didn’t she come and call? I’d have let her in; though usually I avoid stage-struck girls as I do reporters,’ laughed Miss Cameron.

There was no time for more; a brown hand, grasping the bracelet, rose out of the sea, followed by a purple face as Josie came up so blind and dizzy she could only cling to Bess, half drowned but triumphant.

Miss Cameron drew her to the rock where she sat, and pushing the hair out of her eyes, revived her with a hearty ‘Bravo! bravo!’ which assured the girl that her first act was a hit. Josie had often imagined her meeting with the great actress — the dignity and grace with which she would enter and tell her ambitious hopes, the effective dress she would wear, the witty things she would say, the deep impression her budding genius would make. But never in her wildest moments had she imagined an interview like this; scarlet, sandy, streaming, and speechless she leaned against the illustrious shoulder, looking like a beautiful seal as she blinked and wheezed till she could smile joyfully and exclaim proudly:

‘I did get it! I’m so glad!’

‘Now get your breath, my dear; then I shall be glad also. It was very nice of you to take all that trouble for me. How shall I thank you?’ asked the lady, looking at her with the beautiful eyes that could say so many things without words.

Josie clasped her hands with a wet spat which rather destroyed the effect of the gesture, and answered in a beseeching tone that would have softened a far harder heart than Miss Cameron’s:

‘Let me come and see you once — only once! I want you to tell me if I can act; you will know. I’ll abide by what you say; and if you think I can — by and by, when I’ve studied very hard — I shall be the happiest girl in the world. May I?’

‘Yes; come tomorrow at eleven. We’ll have a good talk; you shall show me what you can do, and I’ll give you my opinion. But you won’t like it.’

‘I will, no matter if you tell me I’m a fool. I want it settled; so does mamma. I’ll take it bravely if you say no; and if you say yes, I’ll never give up till I’ve done my best — as you did.’

‘Ah, my child, it’s a weary road, and there are plenty of thorns among the roses when you’ve won them. I think you have the courage, and this proves that you have perseverance. Perhaps you’ll do. Come, and we’ll see.’

Miss Cameron touched the bracelet as she spoke, and smiled so kindly that impetuous Josie wanted to kiss her; but wisely refrained, though her eyes were wet with softer water than any in the sea as she thanked her.

‘We are keeping Miss Cameron from her bath, and the tide is going out.

Come, Josie,’ said thoughtful Bess, fearing to outstay their welcome.

‘Run over the beach and get warm. Thank you very much, little mermaid. Tell papa to bring his daughter to see me any time. Good-bye’; and with a wave of her hand the tragedy queen dismissed her court, but remained on her weedy throne watching the two lithe figures race over the sand with twinkling feet till they were out of sight. Then, as she calmly bobbed up and down in the water, she said to herself: ‘The child has a good stage face, vivid, mobile; fine eyes, abandon, pluck, will. Perhaps she’ll do. Good stock — talent in the family. We shall see.’

Of course Josie never slept a wink, and was in a fever of joyful excitement next day. Uncle Laurie enjoyed the episode very much, and Aunt Amy looked out her most becoming white dress for the grand occasion; Bess lent her most artistic hat, and Josie ranged the wood and marsh for a bouquet of wild roses, sweet white azalea, ferns, and graceful grasses, as the offering of a very grateful heart.

At ten she solemnly arrayed herself, and then sat looking at her neat gloves and buckled shoes till it was time to go, growing pale and sober with the thought that her fate was soon to be decided; for, like all young people she was sure that her whole life could be settled by one human creature, quite forgetting how wonderfully Providence trains us by disappointment, surprises us with unexpected success, and turns our seeming trials into blessings.

‘I will go alone: we shall be freer so. Oh, Bess, pray that she may tell me rightly! So much depends on that! Don’t laugh, uncle! It is a very serious moment for me. Miss Cameron knows that, and will tell you so. Kiss me, Aunt Amy, since mamma isn’t here. If you say I look nice, I’m quite satisfied. Good-bye.’ And with a wave of the hand as much like her model’s as she could make it, Josie departed, looking very pretty and feeling very tragical.

Sure now of admittance, she boldly rang at the door which excluded so many, and being ushered into a shady parlour, feasted her eyes upon several fine portraits of great actors while she waited. She had read about most of them, and knew their trials and triumphs so well that she soon forgot herself, and tried to imitate Mrs Siddons as Lady Macbeth, looking up at the engraving as she held her nosegay like the candle in the sleep-walking scene, and knit her youthful brows distressfully while murmuring the speech of the haunted queen. So busy was she that Miss Cameron watched her for several minutes unseen, then startled her by suddenly sweeping in with the words upon her lips, the look upon her face, which made that one of her greatest scenes.

‘I never can do it like that; but I’ll keep trying, if you say I may,’ cried Josie, forgetting her manners in the intense interest of the moment.

‘Show me what you can do,’ answered the actress, wisely plunging into the middle of things at once, well knowing that no common chat would satisfy this very earnest little person.

‘First let me give you these. I thought you’d like wild things better than hot-house flowers; and I loved to bring them, as I’d no other way to thank you for your great kindness to me,’ said Josie, offering her nosegay with a simple warmth that was very sweet.

‘I do love them best, and keep my room full of the posies some good fairy hangs on my gate. Upon my word, I think I’ve found the fairy out — these are so like,’ she added quickly, as her eye went from the flowers in her hand to others that stood near by, arranged with the same taste.

Josie’s blush and smile betrayed her before she said, with a look full of girlish adoration and humility: ‘I couldn’t help it; I admire you so much. I know it was a liberty; but as I couldn’t get in myself, I loved to think my posies pleased you.’

Something about the child and her little offering touched the woman, and, drawing Josie to her, she said, with no trace of actress in face or voice:

‘They did please me, dear, and so do you. I’m tired of praise; and love is very sweet, when it is simple and sincere like this.’

Josie remembered to have heard, among many other stories, that Miss Cameron lost her lover years ago, and since had lived only for art. Now she felt that this might have been true; and pity for the splendid, lonely life made her face very eloquent, as well as grateful. Then, as if anxious to forget the past, her new friend said, in the commanding way that seemed natural to her:

‘Let me see what you can do. Juliet, of course. All begin with that. Poor soul, how she is murdered!’

Now, Josie had intended to begin with Romeo’s much-enduring sweetheart, and follow her up with Bianca, Pauline, and several of the favourite idols of stage-struck girls; but being a shrewd little person, she suddenly saw the wisdom of Uncle Laurie’s advice, and resolved to follow it. So instead of the rant Miss Cameron expected, Josie gave poor Ophelia’s mad scene, and gave it very well, having been trained by the college professor of elocution and done it many times. She was too young, of course, but the white gown, the loose hair, the real flowers she scattered over the imaginary grave, added to the illusion; and she sung the songs sweetly, dropped her pathetic curtsies, and vanished behind the curtain that divided the rooms with a backward look that surprised her critical auditor into a quick gesture of applause. Cheered by that welcome sound, Josie ran back as a little hoyden in one of the farces she had often acted, telling a story full of fun and naughtiness at first, but ending with a sob of repentance and an earnest prayer for pardon.

‘Very good! Try again. Better than I expected,’ called the voice of the oracle.

Josie tried Portia’s speech, and recited very well, giving due emphasis to each fine sentence. Then, unable to refrain from what she considered her greatest effort, she burst into Juliet’s balcony scene, ending with the poison and the tomb. She felt sure that she surpassed herself, and waited for applause. A ringing laugh made her tingle with indignation and disappointment, as she went to stand before Miss Cameron, saying in a tone of polite surprise:

‘I have been told that I did it very well. I’m sorry you don’t think so.’

‘My dear, it’s very bad. How can it help being so? What can a child like you know of love and fear and death? Don’t try it yet. Leave tragedy alone till you are ready for it.’

‘But you clapped Ophelia.’

‘Yes, that was very pretty. Any clever girl can do it effectively. But the real meaning of Shakespeare is far above you yet, child. The comedy bit was best. There you showed real talent. It was both comic and pathetic. That’s art. Don’t lose it. The Portia was good declamation. Go on with that sort of thing; it trains the voice — teaches shades of expression. You’ve a good voice and natural grace — great helps both, hard to acquire.’

‘Well, I’m glad I’ve got something,’ sighed Josie, sitting meekly on a stool, much crestfallen, but not daunted yet, and bound to have her say out.

‘My dear little girl, I told you that you would not like what I should say to you; yet I must be honest if I would really help you. I’ve had to do it for many like you; and most of them have never forgiven me, though my words have proved true, and they are what I advised them to be — good wives and happy mothers in quiet homes. A few have kept on, and done fairly well. One you will hear of soon, I think; for she has talent, indomitable patience, and mind as well as beauty. You are too young to show to which class you belong. Geniuses are very rare, and even at fifteen seldom give much promise of future power.’

‘Oh, I don’t think I’m a genius!’ cried Josie, growing calm and sober as she listened to the melodious voice and looked into the expressive face that filled her with confidence, so strong, sincere, and kindly was it. ‘I only want to find out if I have talent enough to go on, and after years of study to be able to act well in any of the good plays people never tire of seeing. I don’t expect to be a Mrs Siddons or a Miss Cameron, much as I long to be; but it does seem as if I had something in me which can’t come out in any way but this. When I act I’m perfectly happy. I seem to live, to be in my own world, and each new part is a new friend. I love Shakespeare, and am never tired of his splendid people. Of course, I don’t understand it all; but it’s like being alone at night with the mountains and the stars, solemn and grand, and I try to imagine how it will look when the sun comes up, and all is glorious and clear to me. I can't see, but I feel the beauty, and long to express it.'

As she spoke with the most perfect self-forgetfulness Josie was pale with excitement, her eyes shone, her lips trembled, and all her little soul seemed trying to put into words the emotions that filled it to overflowing. Miss Cameron understood, felt that this was something more than a girlish whim; and when she answered there was a new tone of sympathy in her voice, a new interest in her face, though she wisely refrained from saying all she thought, well knowing what splendid dreams young people build upon a word, and how bitter is the pain when the bright bubbles burst.

'If you feel this, I can give you no better advice than to go on loving and studying our great master,' she said slowly; but Josie caught the changed tone, and felt, with a thrill of joy, that her new friend was speaking to her now as to a comrade. 'It is an education in itself, and a lifetime is not long enough to teach you all his secret. But there is much to do before you can hope to echo his words. Have you the patience, courage, strength, to begin at the beginning, and slowly, painfully, lay the foundation for future work? Fame is a pearl many dive for and only a few bring up. Even when they do, it is not perfect, and they sigh for more, and lose better things in struggling for them.'

The last words seemed spoken more to herself than to her hearer, but Josie answered quickly, with a smile and an expressive gesture:

'I got the bracelet in spite of all the bitter water in my eyes.'

'You did! I don't forget it. A good omen. We will accept it.'

Miss Cameron answered the smile with one that was like sunshine to the girl, and stretched her white hands as if taking some invisible gift. Then added in a different tone, watching the effect of her words on the expressive face before her:

'Now you will be disappointed, for instead of telling you to come and study with me, or go and act in some second-rate theatre at once, I advise you to go back to school and finish your education. That is the first step, for all accomplishments are needed, and a single talent makes a very imperfect character. Cultivate mind and body, heart and soul, and make yourself an intelligent, graceful, beautiful, and healthy girl. Then, at eighteen or twenty, go into training and try your powers. Better start for the battle with your arms in order, and save the hard lesson which comes when we rush on too soon. Now and then genius carries all before it, but not often. We have to climb slowly, with many slips and falls. Can you wait as well as work?'

'I will!'

'We shall see. It would be pleasant to me to know that when I quit the stage I leave behind me a well-trained, faithful, gifted comrade to more than fill my place, and carry on what I have much at heart — the purification of the stage. Perhaps you are she; but remember, mere beauty and rich costumes do not make an actress, nor are the efforts of a clever little girl to play great characters real art. It is all dazzle and sham, and a disgrace and disappointment now. Why will the public be satisfied with opera bouffe, or the trash called society plays when a world of truth and beauty, poetry and pathos lies waiting to be interpreted and enjoyed?'

Miss Cameron had forgotten to whom she spoke, and walked to and fro, full of the noble regret all cultivated people feel at the low state of the stage nowadays.

'That's what Uncle Laurie says; and he and Aunt Jo try to plan plays about true and lovely things — simple domestic scenes that touch people's hearts, and make them laugh and cry and feel better. Uncle says that sort is my style, and I must not think of tragedy. But it's so much nicer to sweep about in crowns and velvet trains than to wear everyday clothes, and just be myself, though it is so easy.'

'Yet that is high art, child, and what we need for a time till we are ready for the masters. Cultivate that talent of yours. It is a special gift, this power to bring tears and smiles, and a sweeter task to touch the heart than to freeze the blood or fire the imagination. Tell your uncle he is right, and ask your aunt to try a play for you. I'll come and see it when you are ready.'

'Will you? Oh! will you? We are going to have some at Christmas, with a nice part for me. A simple little thing, but I can do it, and should be so proud, so happy to have you there.'

Josie rose as she spoke, for a glance at the clock showed her that her call was a long one; and hard as it was to end this momentous interview, she felt that she must go. Catching up her hat she went to Miss Cameron, who stood looking at her so keenly that she felt as transparent as a pane of glass, and coloured prettily as she looked up, saying, with a grateful little tremor in her voice:

'I can never thank you for this hour and all you have told me. I shall do just what you advise, and mamma will be very glad to see me settled at my books again. I can study now with all my heart, because it is to help me on; and I won't hope too much, but work and wait, and try to please you, as the only way to pay my debt.'

'That reminds me that I have not paid mine. Little friend, wear this for my sake. It is fit for a mermaid, and will remind you of your first dive. May the next bring up a better jewel, and leave no bitter water on your lips!'

As she spoke, Miss Cameron took from the lace at her throat a pretty pin of aquamarine, and fastened it like an order on Josie’s proud bosom; then lifting the happy little face, she kissed it very tenderly, and watched it go smiling away with eyes that seemed to see into a future full of the trials and the triumphs which she knew so well.

Bess expected to see Josie come flying in, all raptures and excitement, or drowned in tears of disappointment, but was surprised at the expression of calm content and resolution which she wore. Pride and satisfaction, and a new feeling of responsibility both sobered and sustained her, and she felt that any amount of dry study and long waiting would be bearable, if in the glorious future she could be an honour to her profession and a comrade to the new friend whom she already adored with girlish ardour.

She told her little story to a deeply interested audience, and all felt that Miss Cameron’s advice was good. Mrs Amy was relieved at the prospect of delay; for she did not want her niece to be an actress and hoped the fancy would die out.

Uncle Laurie was full of charming plans and prophecies and wrote one of his most delightful notes to thank their neighbour for her kindness; while Bess, who loved art of all kinds, fully sympathized with her cousin’s ambitious hopes, only wondering why she preferred to act out her visions rather than embody them in marble.

That first interview was not the last; for Miss Cameron was really interested, and had several memorable conversations with the Laurences, while the girls sat by, drinking in every word with the delight all artists feel in their own beautiful world, and learning to see how sacred good gifts are, how powerful, and how faithfully they should be used for high ends, each in its own place helping to educate, refine, and refresh.

Josie wrote reams to her mother; and when the visit ended rejoiced her heart by bringing her a somewhat changed little daughter, who fell to work at the once-detested books with a patient energy which surprised and pleased everyone. The right string had been touched, and even French exercises and piano practice became endurable, since accomplishments would be useful by and by; dress, manners, and habits were all interesting now, because ‘mind and body, heart and soul, must be cultivated’, and while training to become an ‘intelligent, graceful, healthy girl’, little Josie was unconsciously fitting herself to play her part well on whatever stage the great Manager might prepare for her.

Chapter 9. THE WORM TURNS

Two very superior bicycles went twinkling up the road to Plumfield one September afternoon, bearing two brown and dusty riders evidently returning from a successful run, for though their legs might be a trifle weary, their faces beamed as they surveyed the world from their lofty perches with the air of calm content all wheelmen wear after they have learned to ride; before that happy period anguish of mind and body is the chief expression of the manly countenance.

‘Go ahead and report, Tom; I’m due here. See you later,’ said Demi, swinging himself down at the door of the Dovecote.

‘Don’t peach, there’s a good fellow. Let me have it out with Mother Bhaer first,’ returned Tom, wheeling in at the gate with a heavy sigh.

Demi laughed, and his comrade went slowly up the avenue, devoutly hoping that the coast was clear; for he was the bearer of tidings which would, he thought, convulse the entire family with astonishment and dismay.

To his great joy Mrs Jo was discovered alone in a grove of proof-sheets, which she dropped, to greet the returning wanderer cordially. But after the first glance she saw that something was the matter, recent events having made her unusually sharp-eyed and suspicious.

‘What is it now, Tom?’ she asked, as he subsided into an easy-chair with a curious expression of mingled fear, shame, amusement, and distress in his brick-red countenance.

‘I’m in an awful scrape, ma’am.’

‘Of course; I’m always prepared for scrapes when you appear. What is it? Run over some old lady who is going to law about it?’ asked Mrs Jo cheerfully.

‘Worse than that,’ groaned Tom.

‘Not poisoned some trusting soul who asked you to prescribe, I hope?’

‘Worse than that.’

‘You haven’t let Demi catch any horrid thing and left him behind, have you?’

‘Worse even than that.’

‘I give it up. Tell me quick; I hate to wait for bad news.’

Having got his listener sufficiently excited, Tom launched his thunderbolt in one brief sentence, and fell back to watch the effect.

‘I’m engaged!’

Mrs Jo’s proof-sheets flew wildly about as she clasped her hands, exclaiming in dismay:

‘If Nan has yielded, I’ll never forgive her!’

‘She hasn’t; it’s another girl.’

Tom’s face was so funny as he said the words, that it was impossible to help laughing; for he looked both sheepish and pleased, besides very much perplexed and worried.

‘I’m glad, very glad indeed! Don’t care who it is; and I hope you’ll be married soon. Now tell me all about it,’ commanded Mrs Jo, so much relieved that she felt ready for anything.

‘What will Nan say?’ demanded Tom, rather taken aback at this view of his predicament.

‘She will be rejoiced to get rid of the mosquito who has plagued her so long. Don’t worry about Nan. Who is this “other girl”?’

‘Demi hasn’t written about her?’

‘Only something about your upsetting a Miss West down at Quitno; I thought that was scrape enough.’

‘That was only the beginning of a series of scrapes. Just my luck! Of course after sousing the poor girl I had to be attentive to her, hadn’t I? Everyone seemed to think so, and I couldn’t get away, and so I was lost before I knew it. It’s all Demi’s fault, he would stay there and fuss with his old photos, because the views were good and all the girls wanted to be taken. Look at these, will you, ma’am? That’s the way we spent our time when we weren’t playing tennis’; and Tom pulled a handful of pictures from his pocket, displaying several in which he was conspicuous, either holding a sun-umbrella over a very pretty young lady on the rocks, reposing at her feet in the grass, or perched on a piazza railing with other couples in seaside costumes and effective attitudes.

‘This is she of course?’ asked Mrs Jo, pointing to the much-ruffled damsel with the jaunty hat, coquettish shoes, and racquet in her hand.

‘That’s Dora. Isn’t she lovely?’ cried Tom, forgetting his tribulations for a moment and speaking with lover-like ardour.

‘Very nice little person to look at. Hope she is not a Dickens Dora? That curly crop looks like it.’

‘Not a bit; she’s very smart; can keep house, and sew, and do lots of things, I assure you, ma’am. All the girls like her, and she’s sweet-tempered and jolly, and sings like a bird, and dances beautifully, and loves books. Thinks yours are splendid, and made me talk about you no end.’

‘That last sentence is to flatter me and win my help to get you out of the scrape. Tell me first how you got in’; and Mrs Jo settled herself to listen with interest, never tired of boys’ affairs.

Tom gave his head a rousing rub all over to clear his wits, and plunged into his story with a will.

‘Well, we’ve met her before, but I didn’t know she was there. Demi wanted to see a fellow, so we went, and finding it nice and cool rested over Sunday. Found some pleasant people and went out rowing; I had Dora, and came to grief on a confounded rock. She could swim, no harm done, only the scare and the spoilt gown. She took it well, and we got friendly at once — couldn’t help it, scrambling into that beast of a boat while the rest laughed at us. Of course we had to stay another day to see that Dora was all right. Demi wanted to. Alice Heath is down there and two other girls from our college, so we sort of lingered along, and Demi kept taking pictures, and we danced, and got into a tennis tournament; and that was as good exercise as wheeling, we thought. Fact is, tennis is a dangerous game, ma’am. A great deal of courting goes on in those courts, and we fellows find that sort of “serving” mighty agreeable, don’t you know?’

‘Not much tennis in my day, but I understand perfectly,’ said Mrs Jo, enjoying it all as much as Tom did.

‘Upon my word, I hadn’t the least idea of being serious,’ he continued slowly, as if this part of his tale was hard to tell; ‘but everyone else spooned, so I did. Dora seemed to like it and expect it, and of course I was glad to be agreeable. She thought I amounted to something, though Nan does not, and it was pleasant to be appreciated after years of snubbing. Yes, it was right down jolly to have a sweet girl smile at you all day, and blush prettily when you said a neat thing to her, and look glad when you came, sorry when you left, and admire all you did, and make you feel like a man and act your best. That’s the sort of treatment a fellow enjoys and ought to get if he behaves himself; not frowns and cold shoulders year in and year out, and made to look like a fool when he means well, and is faithful, and has loved a girl ever since he was a boy. No, by Jove, it’s not fair, and I won’t stand it!’

Tom waxed warm and eloquent as he thought over his wrongs, and bounced up to march about the room, wagging his head and trying to feel aggrieved as usual, but surprised to find that his heart did not ache a bit.

‘I wouldn’t. Drop the old fancy, for it was nothing more, and take up the new one, if it is genuine. But how came you to propose, Tom, as you must have done to be engaged?’ asked Mrs Jo, impatient for the crisis of the tale.

‘Oh, that was an accident. I didn’t mean it at all; the donkey did it, and I couldn’t get out of the scrape without hurting Dora’s feelings, you see,’ began Tom, seeing that the fatal moment had come.

‘So there were two donkeys in it, were there?’ said Mrs Jo, foreseeing fun of some sort.

‘Don’t laugh! It sounds funny, I know; but it might have been awful,’ answered Tom darkly, though a twinkle of the eye showed that his love trials did not quite blind him to the comic side of the adventure.

‘The girls admired our new wheels, and of course we liked to show off. Took ‘em to ride, and had larks generally. Well, one day, Dora was on behind, and we were going nicely along a good bit of road, when a ridiculous old donkey got right across the way. I thought he’d move, but he didn’t, so I gave him a kick; he kicked back, and over we went in a heap, donkey and all. Such a mess! I thought only of Dora, and she had hysterics; at least, she laughed till she cried, and that beast brayed, and I lost my head. Any fellow would, with a poor girl gasping in the road, and he wiping her tears and begging pardon, not knowing whether her bones were broken or not. I called her my darling, and went on like a fool in my flurry, till she grew calmer, and said, with such a look: “I forgive you, Tom. Pick me up, and let us go on again.”

‘Wasn’t that sweet now, after I’d upset her for the second time? It touched me to the heart; and I said I’d like to go on for ever with such an angel to steer for, and — well I don’t know what I did say; but you might have knocked me down with a feather when she put her arm round my neck and whispered: “Tom, dear, with you I’m not afraid of any lions in the path.” She might have said donkeys; but she was in earnest, and she spared my feelings. Very nice of the dear girl; but there I am with two sweethearts on my hands, and in a deuce of a scrape.’

Finding it impossible to contain herself another moment, Mrs Jo laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks at this characteristic episode; and after one reproachful look, which only added to her merriment, Tom burst into a jolly roar that made the room ring.

‘Tommy Bangs! Tommy Bangs! who but you could ever get into such a catastrophe?’ said Mrs Jo, when she recovered her breath.

‘Isn’t it a muddle all round, and won’t everyone chaff me to death about it? I shall have to quit old Plum for a while,’ answered Tom, as he mopped his face, trying to realize the full danger of his position.

‘No, indeed; I’ll stand by you, for I think it the best joke of the season. But tell me how things ended. Is it really serious, or only a summer flirtation? I don’t approve of them, but boys and girls will play with edged tools and cut their fingers.’

‘Well, Dora considers herself engaged, and wrote to her people at once. I couldn’t say a word when she took it all in solemn earnest and seemed so happy. She’s only seventeen, never liked anyone before, and is sure all will be all right; as her father knows mine, and we are both well off. I was so staggered that I said:

'"Why, you can't love me really when we know so little of one another?" But she answered right out of her tender little heart: "Yes, I do, dearly, Tom; you are so gay and kind and honest, I couldn't help it." Now, after that what could I do but go ahead and make her happy while I stayed, and trust to luck to straighten the snarl out afterwards?'

'A truly Tomian way of taking things easy. I hope you told your father at once.'

'Oh yes, I wrote off and broke it to him in three lines. I said: "Dear Father, I'm engaged to Dora West, and I hope she will suit the family. She suits me tip-top. Yours ever, Tom." He was all right, never liked Nan, you know; but Dora will suit him down to the ground.' And Tom looked entirely satisfied with his own tact and taste.

'What did Demi say to this rapid and funny lovemaking? Wasn't he scandalized?' asked Mrs Jo, trying not to laugh again as she thought of the unromantic spectacle of donkey, bicycle, boy, and girl all in the dust together.

'Not a bit. He was immensely interested and very kind; talked to me like a father; said it was a good thing to steady a fellow, only I must be honest with her and myself and not trifle a moment. Demi is a regular Solomon, especially when he is in the same boat,' answered Tom, looking wise.

'You don't mean — ?' gasped Mrs Jo, in sudden alarm at the bare idea of more love-affairs just yet.

'Yes, I do, please, ma'am; it's a regular sell all the way through, and I owe Demi one for taking me into temptation blindfold. He said he went to Quitno to see Fred Wallace, but he never saw the fellow. How could he, when Wallace was off in his yacht all the time we were there? Alice was the real attraction, and I was left to my fate, while they were maundering round with that old camera. There were three donkeys in this affair, and I'm not the worst one, though I shall have to bear the laugh. Demi will look innocent and sober, and no one will say a word to him.'

'The midsummer madness has broken out, and no one knows who will be stricken next. Well, leave Demi to his mother, and let us see what you are going to do, Tom.'

'I don't know exactly; it's awkward to be in love with two girls at once. What do you advise?'

'A common-sense view of the case, by all means. Dora loves you and thinks you love her. Nan does not care for you, and you only care for her as a friend, though you have tried to do more. It is my opinion, Tom, that you love Dora, or are on the way to it; for in all these years I've never seen you look or speak about Nan as you do about Dora. Opposition has made you obstinately cling to her till accident has shown you a more attractive girl. Now, I think you had better take the old love for a friend, the new one for a sweetheart, and in due time, if the sentiment is genuine, marry her.'

If Mrs Jo had any doubts about the matter, Tom's face would have proved the truth of her opinion; for his eyes shone, his lips smiled, and in spite of dust and sunburn a new expression of happiness quite glorified him as he stood silent for a moment, trying to understand the beautiful miracle which real love works when it comes to a young man's heart.

'The fact is I meant to make Nan jealous, for she knows Dora, and I was sure would hear of our doings. I was tired of being walked on, and I thought I'd try to break away and not be a bore and a laughing-stock any more,' he said slowly, as if it relieved him to pour out his doubts and woes and hopes and joys to his old friend. 'I was regularly astonished to find it so easy and so pleasant. I didn't mean to do any harm, but drifted along beautifully, and told Demi to mention things in his letters to Daisy, so Nan might know. Then I forgot Nan altogether, and saw, heard, felt, cared for no one but Dora, till the donkey — bless his old heart! — pitched her into my arms and I found she loved me. Upon my soul, I don't see why she should! I'm not half good enough.'

'Every honest man feels that when an innocent girl puts her hand in his. Make yourself worthy of her, for she isn't an angel, but a woman with faults of her own for you to bear, and forgive, and you must help one another,' said Mrs Jo, trying to realize that this sober youth was her scapegrace Tommy.

'What troubles me is that I didn't mean it when I began, and was going to use the dear girl as an instrument of torture for Nan. It wasn't right, and I don't deserve to be so happy. If all my scrapes ended as well as this, what a state of bliss I should be in!' and Tom beamed again at the rapturous prospect.

'My dear boy, it is not a scrape, but a very sweet experience suddenly dawning upon you,' answered Mrs Jo, speaking very soberly; for she saw he was in earnest. 'Enjoy it wisely and be worthy of it, for it is a serious thing to accept a girl's love and trust, and let her look up to you for tenderness and truth in return. Don't let little Dora look in vain, but be a man in all things for her sake, and make this affection a blessing to you both.'

'I'll try. Yes, I do love her, only I can't believe it just yet. Wish you knew her. Dear little soul, I long to see her already! She cried when we parted last night and I hated to go.' Tom's hand went to his cheek as if he still felt the rosy little seal Dora had set upon his promise not to forget her, and for the first time in his happy-go-lucky life Tommy Bangs understood the difference between sentiment and sentimentality. The feeling recalled Nan, for he had never known that tender thrill when thinking of her, and the old friendship seemed rather a prosaic affair beside this delightful mingling of romance, surprise, love, and fun. ‘I declare, I feel as if a weight was off me, but what the dickens will Nan say when she knows it!’ he exclaimed with a chuckle.

‘Knows what?’ asked a clear voice that made both start and turn, for there was Nan calmly surveying them from the doorway.

Anxious to put Tom out of suspense and see how Nan would take the news, Mrs Jo answered quickly:

‘Tom’s engagement to Dora West.’

‘Really?’ and Nan looked so surprised that Mrs Jo was afraid she might be fonder of her old playmate than she knew; but her next words set the fear at rest, and made everything comfortable and merry at once.

‘I knew my prescription would work wonders if he only took it long enough. Dear old Tom, I’m so glad. Bless you! bless you!’ And she shook both his hands with hearty affection.

‘It was an accident, Nan. I didn’t mean to, but I’m always getting into messes, and I couldn’t seem to get out of this any other way. Mother Bhaer will tell you all about it. I must go and make myself tidy. Going to tea with Demi. See you later.’

Stammering, blushing, and looking both sheepish and gratified, Tom suddenly bolted, leaving the elder lady to enlighten the younger at length, and have another laugh over this new sort of courtship, which might well be called accidental. Nan was deeply interested, for she knew Dora, thought her a nice little thing, and predicted that in time she would make Tom an excellent wife, since she admired and ‘appreciated’ him so much.

‘I shall miss him of course, but it will be a relief to me and better for him; dangling is so bad for a boy. Now he will go into business with his father and do well, and everyone be happy. I shall give Dora an elegant family medicine-chest for a wedding-present, and teach her how to use it. Tom can’t be trusted, and is no more fit for the profession than Silas.’

The latter part of this speech relieved Mrs Jo’s mind, for Nan had looked about her as if she had lost something valuable when she began; but the medicine-chest seemed to cheer her, and the thought of Tom in a safe profession was evidently a great comfort.

‘The worm has turned at last, Nan, and your bond-man is free. Let him go, and give your whole mind to your work; for you are fitted for the profession, and will be an honour to it by and by,’ she said approvingly.

‘I hope so. That reminds me — measles are in the village, and you had better tell the girls not to call where there are children. It would be bad to have a run of them just as term begins. Now I'm off to Daisy. Wonder what she will say to Tom. Isn't he great fun?' And Nan departed, laughing over the joke with such genuine satisfaction that it was evident no sentimental regrets disturbed her 'maiden meditation, fancy-free'.

'I shall have my eye on Demi, but won't say a word. Meg likes to manage her children in her own way, and a very good way it is. But the dear Pelican will be somewhat ruffled if her boy has caught the epidemic which seems to have broken out among us this summer.'

Mrs Jo did not mean the measles, but that more serious malady called love, which is apt to ravage communities, spring and autumn, when winter gaiety and summer idleness produce whole bouquets of engagements, and set young people to pairing off like the birds. Franz began it, Nat was a chronic and Tom a sudden case; Demi seemed to have the symptoms; and worst of all, her own Ted had only the day before calmly said to her: 'Mum, I think I should be happier if I had a sweetheart, like the other boys.' If her cherished son had asked her for dynamite to play with, she would hardly have been more startled, or have more decidedly refused the absurd request.

'Well, Barry Morgan said I ought to have one and offered to pick me out a nice one among our set. I asked Josie first, and she hooted at the idea, so I thought I'd let Barry look round. You say it steadies a fellow, and I want to be steady,' explained Ted in a serious tone, which would have convulsed his parent at any other time.

'Good lack! What are we coming to in this fast age when babes and boys make such demands and want to play with one of the most sacred things in life?' exclaimed Mrs Jo, and having in a few words set the matter in its true light, sent her son away to wholesome baseball and Octoo for a safe sweetheart.

Now, here was Tom's bomb-shell to explode in their midst, carrying widespread destruction, perhaps; for though one swallow does not make a summer, one engagement is apt to make several, and her boys were, most of them, at the inflammable age when a spark ignites the flame, which soon flickers and dies out, or burns warm and clear for life. Nothing could be done about it but to help them make wise choices, and be worthy of good mates. But of all the lessons Mrs Jo had tried to teach her boys, this great one was the hardest; for love is apt to make lunatics of even saints and sages, so young people cannot be expected to escape the delusions, disappointments, and mistakes, as well as the delights, of this sweet madness.

'I suppose it is inevitable, since we live in America, so I won't borrow trouble, but hope that some of the new ideas of education will produce a few hearty, happy, capable, and intelligent girls for my lads. Lucky for me that I haven't the whole twelve on my hands, I should lose my wits if I had, for I foresee complications and troubles ahead worse than Tom's boats, bicycles, donkeys, and Doras,' meditated Mrs Jo, as she went back to her neglected proof-sheets.

Tom was quite satisfied with the tremendous effect his engagement produced in the little community at Plumfield.

'It was paralysing,' as Demi said; and astonishment left most of Tom's mates little breath for chaff. That he, the faithful one, should turn from the idol to strange goddesses, was a shock to the romantic and a warning to the susceptible. It was comical to see the airs our Thomas put on; for the most ludicrous parts of the affair were kindly buried in oblivion by the few who knew them, and Tom burst forth as a full-blown hero who had rescued the maiden from a watery grave, and won her gratitude and love by his daring deed. Dora kept the secret, and enjoyed the fun when she came to see Mother Bhaer and pay her respects to the family generally. Everyone liked her at once, for she was a gay and winning little soul; fresh, frank, and so happy, it was beautiful to see her innocent pride in Tom, who was a new boy, or man rather; for with this change in his life a great change took place in him. Jolly he would always be, and impulsive, but he tried to become all that Dora believed him, and his best side came uppermost for everyday wear. It was surprising to see how many good traits Tom had; and his efforts to preserve the manly dignity belonging to his proud position as an engaged man was very comical. So was the entire change from his former abasement and devotion to Nan to a somewhat lordly air with his little betrothed; for Dora made an idol of him, and resented the idea of a fault or a flaw in her Tom. This new state of things suited both, and the once blighted being bloomed finely in the warm atmosphere of appreciation, love, and confidence. He was very fond of the dear girl, but meant to be a slave no longer, and enjoyed his freedom immensely, quite unconscious that the great tyrant of the world had got hold of him for life.

To his father's satisfaction he gave up his medical studies, and prepared to go into business with the old gentleman, who was a flourishing merchant, ready now to make the way smooth and smile upon his marriage with Mr West's well-endowed daughter. The only thorn in Tom's bed of roses was Nan's placid interest in his affairs, and evident relief at his disloyalty. He did not want her to suffer, but a decent amount of regret at the loss of such a lover would have gratified him; a slight melancholy, a word of reproach, a glance of envy as he passed with adoring Dora on his arm, seemed but the fitting tribute to such years of faithful service and sincere affection. But Nan regarded him with a maternal sort of air that nettled him very much, and patted Dora's curly head with a worldlywise air worthy of the withered spinster, Julia Mills, in David

Copperfield.

It took some time to get the old and the new emotions comfortably adjusted, but Mrs Jo helped him, and Mr Laurie gave him some wise advice upon the astonishing gymnastic feats the human heart can perform, and be all the better for it if it only held fast to the balancing-pole of truth and common sense. At last our Tommy got his bearings, and as autumn came on Plumfield saw but little of him; for his new lode star was in the city, and business kept him hard at work. He was evidently in his right place now, and soon throve finely, to his father's great contentment; for his jovial presence pervaded the once quiet office like a gale of fresh wind, and his lively wits found managing men and affairs much more congenial employment than studying disease, or playing unseemly pranks with skeletons.

Here we will leave him for a time and turn to the more serious adventures of his mates, though this engagement, so merrily made, was the anchor which kept our mercurial Tom happy, and made a man of him.

Chapter 10. DEMI SETTLES

‘Mother, can I have a little serious conversation with you?’ asked Demi one evening, as they sat together enjoying the first fire of the season, while Daisy wrote letters upstairs and Josie was studying in the little library close by.

‘Certainly, dear. No bad news, I hope?’ and Mrs Meg looked up from her sewing with a mixture of pleasure and anxiety on her motherly face; for she dearly loved a good talk with her son, and knew that he always had something worth telling.

‘It will be good news for you, I think,’ answered Demi, smiling as he threw away his paper and went to sit beside her on the little sofa which just held two.

‘Let me hear it, then, at once.’

‘I know you don’t like the reporting, and will be glad to hear that I have given it up.’

‘I am very glad! It is too uncertain a business, and there is no prospect of getting on for a long time. I want you settled in some good place where you can stay, and in time make money. I wish you liked a profession; but as you don’t, any clean, well-established business will do.’

‘What do you say to a railroad office?’

‘I don’t like it. A noisy, hurried kind of place, I know, with all sorts of rough men about. I hope it isn’t that, dear?’

‘I could have it; but does book-keeping in a wholesale leather business please you better?’

‘No; you’ll get round-shouldered writing at a tall desk; and they say, once a book-keeper always a book-keeper.’

‘How does a travelling agent suit your views?’

‘Not at all; with all those dreadful accidents, and the exposure and bad food as you go from place to place, you are sure to get killed or lose your health.’

‘I could be private secretary to a literary man; but the salary is small, and may end any time.’

‘That would be better, and more what I want. It isn’t that I object to honest work of any kind; but I don’t want my son to spend his best years grubbing for a little money in a dark office, or be knocked about in a rough-and-tumble scramble to get on. I want to see you in some business where your tastes and talents can be developed and made useful; where you can go on rising, and in time put in your little fortune and be a partner; so that your years of apprenticeship will not be wasted, but fit you to take your place among the honourable men who make their lives and work useful and respected. I talked it all over with your dear father when you were a child; and if he had lived he would have shown you what I mean, and helped you to be what he was.'

Mrs Meg wiped away a quiet tear as she spoke; for the memory of her husband was a very tender one, and the education of his children had been a sacred task to which she gave all her heart and life, and so far she had done wonderfully well — as her good son and loving daughters tried to prove. Demi's arm was round her now, as he said, in a voice so like his father's that it was the sweetest music to her ear:

'Mother dear, I think I have got just what you want for me; and it shall not be my fault if I don't become the man you hope to see me. Let me tell you all about it. I didn't say anything till it was sure because it would only worry you; but Aunt Jo and I have been on the look-out for it some time, and now it has come. You know her publisher, Mr Tiber, is one of the most successful men in the business; also generous, kind, and the soul of honour — as his treatment of Aunty proves. Well, I've rather hankered for that place; for I love books, and as I can't make them I'd like to publish them. That needs some literary taste and judgement, it brings you in contact with fine people, and is an education in itself. Whenever I go into that large, handsome room to see Mr Tiber for Aunt Jo, I always want to stay; for it's lined with books and pictures, famous men and women come and go, and Mr Tiber sits at his desk like a sort of king, receiving his subjects; for the greatest authors are humble to him, and wait his Yes or No with anxiety. Of course I've nothing to do with all that, and may never have; but I like to see it, and the atmosphere is so different from the dark offices and hurly-burly of many other trades, where nothing but money is talked about, that it seems another world, and I feel at home in it. Yes, I'd rather beat the door-mats and make fires there than be head clerk in the great hide and leather store at a big salary.' Here Demi paused for breath; and Mrs Meg, whose face had been growing brighter and brighter, exclaimed eagerly:

'Just what I should like! Have you got it? Oh, my dear boy! your fortune is made if you go to that well-established and flourishing place, with those good men to help you along!'

'I think I have, but we mustn't be too sure of anything yet. I may not suit; I'm only on trial, and must begin at the beginning and work my way up faithfully. Mr Tiber was very kind, and will push me on as fast as is fair to the other fellows, and as I prove myself fit to go up. I'm to begin the first of next month in the book-room, filling orders; and I go round and get orders, and do various other things of the sort. I like it. I am ready to do anything about books, if it's only to dust them,' laughed Demi, well pleased with his prospects, for, after trying various things, he seemed at last to have found the sort of work he liked, and a prospect that was very inviting to him.

'You inherit that love of books from grandpa; he can't live without them. I'm glad of it. Tastes of that kind show a refined nature, and are both a comfort and a help all one's life. I am truly glad and grateful, John, that at last you want to settle, and have got such an entirely satisfactory place. Most boys begin much earlier; but I don't believe in sending them out to face the world so young, just when body and soul need home care and watchfulness. Now you are a man, and must begin your life for yourself. Do your best, and be as honest, useful, and happy as your father, and I won't care about making a fortune.'

'I'll try, mother. Couldn't have a better chance; for Tiber & Co. treat their people like gentlemen, and pay generously for faithful work. Things are done in a businesslike way there, and that suits me. I hate promises that are not kept, and shiftless or tyrannical ways anywhere. Mr Tiber said: "This is only to teach you the ropes, Brooke; I shall have other work for you by and by." Aunty told him I had done book notices, and had rather a fancy for literature; so though I can't produce any "works of Shakespeare", as she says, I may get up some little things later. If I don't, I think it a very honourable and noble profession to select and give good books to the world; and I'm satisfied to be a humble helper in the work.'

'I'm glad you feel so. It adds so much to one's happiness to love the task one does. I used to hate teaching; but housekeeping for my own family was always sweet, though much harder in many ways. Isn't Aunt Jo pleased about all this?' asked Mrs Meg, already seeing in her mind's eye a splendid sign with 'Tiber, Brooke & Co.' over the door of a famous publishing house.

'So pleased that I could hardly keep her from letting the cat out of the bag too soon. I've had so many plans, and disappointed you so often, I wanted to be very sure this time. I had to bribe Rob and Ted to keep her at home tonight till I'd told my news, she was eager to rush down and tell you herself. The castles that dear woman has built for me would fill all Spain, and have kept us jolly while we waited to know our fate. Mr Tiber doesn't do things in a hurry; but when he makes up his mind, you are all right; and I feel that I am fairly launched.'

'Bless you, dear, I hope so! It is a happy day for me, because I've been so anxious lest, with all my care, I have been too easy and indulgent, and my boy, with his many good gifts, might fritter his time away in harmless but unsatisfactory things. Now I am at ease about you. If only Daisy can be happy, and Josie give up her dream, I shall be quite contented.'

Demi let his mother enjoy herself for a few minutes, while he smiled over a certain little dream of his own, not ready yet for the telling; then he said, in the paternal tone which he unconsciously used when speaking of his sisters:

‘I’ll see to the girls; but I begin to think grandpa is right in saying we must each be what God and nature makes us. We can’t change it much — only help to develop the good and control the bad elements in us. I have fumbled my way into my right place at last, I hope. Let Daisy be happy in her way, since it is a good and womanly one. If Nat comes home all right, I’d say: “Bless you, my children,” and give them a nest of their own. Then you and I will help little Jo to find out if it is to be “All the world’s a stage” or “Home, sweet home”, for her.’

‘I suppose we must, John; but I can’t help making plans, and hoping they will come to pass. I see that Daisy is bound up in Nat; and if he is worthy of her I shall let them be happy in their own way, as my parents let me. But Josie will be a trial, I foresee; and much as I love the stage, and always did, I don’t see how I can ever let my little girl be an actress, though she certainly has great talent for it.’

‘Whose fault is that?’ asked Demi, smiling, as he remembered his mother’s early triumphs and unquenchable interest in the dramatic efforts of the young people round her.

‘Mine, I know. How could it be otherwise when I acted Babes in the Wood with you and Daisy before you could speak, and taught Josie to declaim Mother Goose in her cradle. Ah, me! the tastes of the mother come out in her children, and she must atone for them by letting them have their own way, I suppose.’ And Mrs Meg laughed, even while she shook her head over the undeniable fact that the Marches were a theatrical family.

‘Why not have a great actress of our name, as well as an authoress, a minister, and an eminent publisher? We don’t choose our talents, but we needn’t hide them in a napkin because they are not just what we want. I say, let Jo have her way, and do what she can. Here am I to take care of her; and you can’t deny you’d enjoy fixing her furbelows, and seeing her shine before the footlights, where you used to long to be. Come, mother, better face the music and march gaily, since your wilful children will “gang their ain gait”.’

‘I don’t see but I must, and “leave the consequences to the Lord”, as Marmee used to say when she had to decide, and only saw a step of the road. I should enjoy it immensely, if I could only feel that the life would not hurt my girl, and leave her unsatisfied when it was too late to change; for nothing is harder to give up than the excitements of that profession. I know something of it; and if your blessed father had not come along, I’m afraid I should have been an actress in spite of Aunt March and all our honoured ancestors.’

‘Let Josie add new honour to the name, and work out the family talent in its proper place. I'll play dragon to her, and you play nurse, and no harm can come to our little Juliet, no matter how many Romeos spoon under her balcony. Really, ma'am, opposition comes badly from an old lady who is going to wring the hearts of our audience in the heroine's part in Aunty's play next Christmas. It's the most pathetic thing I ever saw, mother; and I'm sorry you didn't become an actress, though we should be nowhere if you had.'

Demi was on his legs now, with his back to the fire, in the lordly attitude men like to assume when things go well with them, or they want to lay down the law on any subject.

Mrs Meg actually blushed at her son's hearty praise, and could not deny that the sound of applause was as sweet now as when she played the Witch's Curse and The Moorish Maiden's Vow long years ago.

'It's perfectly absurd for me to do it, but I couldn't resist when Jo and Laurie made the part for me, and you children were to act in it. The minute I get on the old mother's dress I forget myself and feel the same thrill at the sound of the bell that I used to feel when we got up plays in the garret. If Daisy would only take the daughter's part it would be so complete; for with you and Josie I am hardly acting, it is all so real.'

'Especially the hospital scene, where you find the wounded son. Why, mother, do you know when we did that at last rehearsal my face was wet with real tears as you cried over me. It will bring down the house; but don't forget to wipe 'em off, or I shall sneeze,' said Demi, laughing at the recollection of his mother's hit.

'I won't; but it almost broke my heart to see you so pale and dreadful. I hope there will never be another war in my time, for I should have to let you go; and I never want to live through the same experience we had with father.'

'Don't you think Alice does the part better than Daisy would? Daisy hasn't a bit of the actress in her, and Alice puts life into the dullest words she speaks. I think the Marquise is just perfect in our piece,' said Demi, strolling about the room as if the warmth of the fire sent a sudden colour to his face.

'So do I. She is a dear girl, and I'm proud and fond of her. Where is she tonight?'

'Pegging away at her Greek, I suppose. She usually is in the evening. More's the pity,' added Demi, in a low tone, as he stared intently at the book-case, though he couldn't read a title.

'Now, there is a girl after my own heart. Pretty, well-bred, well-educated, and yet domestic, a real companion as well as help-meet for some good and intelligent man. I hope she will find one.'

'So do I,' muttered Demi.

Mrs Meg had taken up her work again, and was surveying a half-finished buttonhole with so much interest that her son’s face escaped her eye. He shed a beaming smile upon the rows of poets, as if even in their glass prison they could sympathize and rejoice with him at the first rosy dawn of the great passion which they knew so well. But Demi was a wise youth, and never leaped before looking carefully. He hardly knew his own heart yet, and was contented to wait till the sentiment, the fluttering of those folded wings he began to feel, should escape from the chrysalis and be ready to soar away in the sunshine to seek and claim its lovely mate. He had said nothing; but the brown eyes were eloquent, and there was an unconscious underplot to all the little plays he and Alice Heath acted so well together. She was busy with her books, bound to graduate with high honours, and he was trying to do the same in that larger college open to all, and where each man has his own prize to win or lose. Demi had nothing but himself to offer and, being a modest youth, considered that a poor gift till he had proved his power to earn his living, and the right to take a woman’s happiness into his keeping.

No one guessed that he had caught the fever except sharp-eyed Josie, and she, having a wholesome fear of her brother — who could be rather awful when she went too far — wisely contented herself with watching him like a little cat, ready to pounce on the first visible sign of weakness. Demi had taken to playing pensively upon his flute after he was in his room for the night, making this melodious friend his confidante, and breathing into it all the tender hopes and fears that filled his heart. Mrs Meg, absorbed in domestic affairs, and Daisy, who cared for no music but Nat’s violin, paid no heed to these chamber concerts, but Josie always murmured to herself, with a naughty chuckle, ‘Dick Swiveller is thinking of his Sophy Wackles,’ and bided her time to revenge certain wrongs inflicted upon her by Demi, who always took Daisy’s side when she tried to curb the spirits of her unruly little sister.

This evening she got her chance, and made the most of it. Mrs Meg was just rounding off her buttonhole, and Demi still strolling restlessly about the room, when a book was heard to slam in the study, followed by an audible yawn and the appearance of the student looking as if sleep and a desire for mischief were struggling which should be master.

‘I heard my name; have you been saying anything bad about me?’ she demanded, perching on the arm of an easychair.

Her mother told the good news, over which Josie duly rejoiced, and Demi received her congratulations with a benignant air which made her feel that too much satisfaction was not good for him, and incited her to put a thorn into his bed of roses at once.

‘I caught something about the play just now, and I want to tell you that I’m going to introduce a song into my part to liven it up a bit. How would this do?' and seating herself at the piano she began to sing to these words the air of 'Kathleen Mavourneen':

'Sweetest of maidens, oh, how can I tell
The love that transfigures the whole earth to me?
The longing that causes my bosom to swell,
When I dream of a life all devoted to thee?'

She got no further, for Demi, red with wrath, made a rush at her, and the next moment a very agile young person was seen dodging round tables and chairs with the future partner of Tiber & Co. in hot pursuit. 'You monkey, how dare you meddle with my papers?' cried the irate poet, making futile grabs at the saucy girl, who skipped to and fro, waving a bit of paper tantalizingly before him.

'Didn't; found it in the big "Dic". Serves you right if you leave your rubbish about. Don't you like my song? It's very pretty.'

'I'll teach you one that you won't like if you don't give me my property.'

'Come and get it if you can'; and Josie vanished into the study to have out her squabble in peace, for Mrs Meg was already saying:

'Children, children! don't quarrel.'

The paper was in the fire by the time Demi arrived and he at once calmed down, seeing that the bone of contention was out of the way.

'I'm glad it's burnt; I don't care for it, only some verse I was trying to set to music for one of the girls. But I'll trouble you to let my papers alone, or I shall take back the advice I gave mother tonight about allowing you to act as much as you like.'

Josie was sobered at once by this dire threat, and in her most wheedling tone begged to know what he had said. By way of heaping coals of fire on her head he told her, and this diplomatic performance secured him an ally on the spot.

'You dear old boy! I'll never tease you again though you moon and spoon both day and night. If you stand by me, I'll stand by you and never say a word. See here! I've got a note for you from Alice. Won't that be a peace-offering and soothe your little feelings?'

Demi's eyes sparkled as Josie held up a paper cocked hat, but as he knew what was probably in it, he took the wind out of Josie's sails, and filled her with blank astonishment by saying carelessly:

'That's nothing; it's only to say whether she will go to the concert with us tomorrow night. You can read it if you like.'

With the natural perversity of her sex Josie ceased to be curious the moment she was told to read it, and meekly handed it over; but she watched Demi as he calmly read the two lines it contained and then threw it into the fire. ‘Why, Jack, I thought you’d treasure every scrap the “sweetest maid” touched. Don’t you care for her?’

‘Very much; we all do; but “mooning and spooning”, as you elegantly express it, is not in my line. My dear little girl, your plays make you romantic, and because Alice and I act lovers sometimes you take it into your silly head that we are really so. Don’t waste time hunting mares nests, but attend to your own affairs and leave me to mine. I forgive you, but don’t do it again; it’s bad taste, and tragedy queens don’t romp.’

The last cut finished Josie; she humbly begged pardon and went off to bed, while Demi soon followed, feeling that he had not only settled himself but his too inquisitive little sister also. But if he had seen her face as she listened to the soft wailing of his flute he would not have been so sure, for she looked as cunning as a magpie as she said, with a scornful sniff: ‘Pooh, you can’t deceive me; I know Dick is serenading Sophy Wackles.’

Chapter 11. EMIL’S THANKSGIVING

The Brenda was scudding along with all sail set to catch the rising wind, and everyone on board was rejoicing, for the long voyage was drawing towards an end.

‘Four weeks more, Mrs Hardy, and we’ll give you a cup of tea such as you never had before,’ said second mate Hoffmann, as he paused beside two ladies sitting in a sheltered corner of the deck.

‘I shall be glad to get it, and still gladder to put my feet on solid ground,’ answered the elder lady, smiling; for our friend Emil was a favourite, as well he might be, since he devoted himself to the captain’s wife and daughter, who were the only passengers on board.

‘So shall I, even if I have to wear a pair of shoes like Chinese junks. I’ve tramped up and down the deck so much, I shall be barefooted if we don’t arrive soon,’ laughed Mary, the daughter, showing two shabby little boots as she glanced up at the companion of these tramps, remembering gratefully how pleasant he had made them.

‘Don’t think there are any small enough in China,’ answered Emil, with a sailor’s ready gallantry, privately resolving to hunt up the handsomest shoes he could find the moment he landed.

‘I don’t know what you would have done for exercise, dear, if Mr Hoffmann had not made you walk every day. This lazy life is bad for young people, though it suits an old body like me well enough in calm weather. Is this likely to be a gale, think ye?’ added Mrs Hardy, with an anxious glance at the west, where the sun was setting redly.

‘Only a capful of wind, ma’am, just enough to send us along lively,’ answered Emil, with a comprehensive glance aloft and alow.

‘Please sing, Mr Hoffmann, it’s so pleasant to have music at this time. We shall miss it very much when we get ashore,’ said Mary, in a persuasive tone which would have won melody from a shark, if such a thing were possible.

Emil had often blessed his one accomplishment during these months, for it cheered the long days, and made the twilight hour his happiest time, wind and weather permitting. So now he gladly tuned his pipe, and leaning on the taffrail near the girl, watched the brown locks blowing in the wind as he sang her favourite song:

‘Give me freshening breeze, my boys,

A white and swelling sail,
A ship that cuts the dashing waves,
And weathers every gale.
What life is like a sailor’s life,
So free, so bold, so brave?
His home the ocean’s wide expanse,
A coral bed his grave.’

Just as the last notes of the clear, strong voice died away, Mrs Hardy suddenly exclaimed: ‘What’s that?’ Emil’s quick eye saw at once the little puff of smoke coming up a hatchway where no smoke should be, and his heart seemed to stand still for an instant as the dread word ‘Fire!’ flashed through his mind. Then he was quite steady, and strolled away saying quietly:

‘Smoking not allowed there, I’ll go and stop it.’ But the instant he was out of sight his face changed, and he leaped down the hatchway, thinking, with a queer smile on his lips: ‘If we are afire, shouldn’t wonder if I did make a coral bed my grave!’

He was gone a few minutes, and when he came up, half stifled with smoke, he was as white as a very brown man could be, but calm and cool as he went to report to the captain.

‘Fire in the hold, sir.’

‘Don’t frighten the women,’ was Captain Hardy’s first order; then both be stirred themselves to discover how strong the treacherous enemy was, and to rout it if possible.

The Brenda’s cargo was a very combustible one, and in spite of the streams of water poured into the hold it was soon evident that the ship was doomed. Smoke began to ooze up between the planks everywhere, and the rising gale soon fanned the smouldering fire to flames that began to break out here and there, telling the dreadful truth too plainly for anyone to hide. Mrs Hardy and Mary bore the shock bravely when told to be ready to quit the ship at a minute’s notice; the boats were hastily prepared, and the men worked with a will to batten down every loophole whence the fire might escape. Soon the poor Brenda was a floating furnace, and the order to ‘Take to the boats!’ came for all. The women first, of course, and it was fortunate that, being a merchantman, there were no more passengers on board, so there was no panic, and one after the other the boats pushed off. That in which the women were lingered near, for the brave captain would be the last to leave his ship.

Emil stayed by him till ordered away, and reluctantly obeyed; but it was well for him he went, for just as he had regained the boat, rocking far below, half hidden by a cloud of smoke, a mast, undermined by the fire now raging in the bowels of the ship, fell with a crash, knocking Captain Hardy overboard. The boat soon reached him as he floated out from the wreck, and Emil sprung into the sea to rescue him, for he was wounded and senseless. This accident made it necessary for the young man to take command, and he at once ordered the men to pull for their lives, as an explosion might occur at any moment.

The other boats were out of danger and all lingered to watch the splendid yet awesome spectacle of the burning ship alone on the wide sea, reddening the night and casting a lurid glare upon the water, where floated the frail boats filled with pale faces, all turned for a last look at the fated Brenda, slowly settling to her watery grave. No one saw the end, however, for the gale soon swept the watchers far away and separated them, some never to meet again till the sea gives up its dead.

The boat whose fortunes we must follow was alone when dawn came up, showing these survivors all the dangers of their situation. Food and water had been put in, and such provision for comfort and safety as time allowed; but it was evident that with a badly wounded man, two women, and seven sailors, their supply would not last long, and help was sorely needed. Their only hope was in meeting a ship, although the gale, which had raged all night, had blown them out of their course. To this hope all clung, and wiled away the weary hours, watching the horizon and cheering one another with prophecies of speedy rescue.

Second mate Hoffmann was very brave and helpful, though his unexpected responsibility weighed heavily on his shoulders; for the captain’s state seemed desperate, the poor wife’s grief wrung his heart, and the blind confidence of the young girl in his power to save them made him feel that no sign of doubt or fear must lessen it. The men did their part readily now, but Emil knew that if starvation and despair made brutes of them, his task might be a terrible one. So he clutched his courage with both hands, kept up a manly front, and spoke so cheerily of their good chances, that all instinctively turned to him for guidance and support.

The first day and night passed in comparative comfort, but when the third came, things looked dark and hope began to fail. The wounded man was delirious, the wife worn out with anxiety and suspense, the girl weak for want of food, having put away half her biscuit for her mother, and given her share of water to wet her father’s feverish lips. The sailors ceased rowing and sat grimly waiting, openly reproaching their leader for not following their advice, others demanding more food, all waxing dangerous as privation and pain brought out the animal instincts lurking in them. Emil did his best, but mortal man was helpless there, and he could only turn his haggard face from the pitiless sky, that dropped no rain for their thirst, to the boundless sea where no sail appeared to gladden their longing eyes. All day he tried to cheer and comfort them, while hunger gnawed, thirst parched, and growing fear lay heavy at his heart. He told stories to the men, implored them to bear up for the helpless women's sake, and promised rewards if they would pull while they had strength to regain the lost route, as nearly as he could make it out, and increase their chance of rescue. He rigged an awning of sailcloth over the suffering man and tended him like a son, comforted the wife, and tried to make the pale girl forget herself, by singing every song he knew or recounting his adventures by land and sea, till she smiled and took heart; for all ended well.

The fourth day came and the supply of food and water was nearly gone. Emil proposed to keep it for the sick man and the women, but two of the men rebelled, demanding their share. Emil gave up his as an example, and several of the good fellows followed it, with the quiet heroism which so often crops up in rough but manly natures. This shamed the others, and for another day an ominous peace reigned in that little world of suffering and suspense. But during the night, while Emil, worn out with fatigue, left the watch to the most trustworthy sailor, that he might snatch an hour's rest, these two men got at the stores and stole the last of the bread and water, and the one bottle of brandy, which was carefully hoarded to keep up their strength and make the brackish water drinkable. Half mad with thirst, they drank greedily and by morning one was in a stupor, from which he never woke; the other so crazed by the strong stimulant, that when Emil tried to control him, he leaped overboard and was lost. Horror-stricken by this terrible scene, the other men were submissive henceforth, and the boat floated on and on with its sad freight of suffering souls and bodies.

Another trial came to them that left all more despairing than before. A sail appeared, and for a time a frenzy of joy prevailed, to be turned to bitterest disappointment when it passed by, too far away to see the signals waved to them or hear the frantic cries for help that rang across the sea. Emil's heart sank then, for the captain seemed dying, and the women could not hold out much longer. He kept up till night came; then in the darkness, broken only by the feeble murmuring of the sick man, the whispered prayers of the poor wife, the ceaseless swash of waves, Emil hid his face, and had an hour of silent agony that aged him more than years of happy life could have done. It was not the physical hardship that daunted him, though want and weakness tortured him; it was his dreadful powerlessness to conquer the cruel fate that seemed hanging over them. The men he cared little for, since these perils were but a part of the life they chose; but the master he loved, the good woman who had been so kind to him, the sweet girl whose winsome presence had made the long voyage so pleasant for them all — if he could only save these dear and innocent creatures from a cruel death, he felt that he could willingly give his life for them.

As he sat there with his head in his hands, bowed down by the first great trial of his young life, the starless sky overhead, the restless sea beneath, and all around him suffering, for which he had no help, a soft sound broke the silence, and he listened like one in a dream. It was Mary singing to her mother, who lay sobbing in her arms, spent with this long anguish. A very faint and broken voice it was, for the poor girl's lips were parched with thirst; but the loving heart turned instinctively to the great Helper in this hour of despair, and He heard her feeble cry. It was a sweet old hymn often sung at Plumfield; and as he listened, all the happy past came back so clearly that Emil forgot the bitter present, and was at home again. His talk on the housetop with Aunt Jo seemed but yesterday, and, with a pang of self-reproach, he thought:

'The scarlet strand! I must remember it, and do my duty to the end. Steer straight, old boy; and if you can't come into port, go down with all sail set.'

Then, as the soft voice crooned on to lull the weary woman to a fitful sleep, Emil for a little while forgot his burden in a dream of Plumfield. He saw them all, heard the familiar voices, felt the grip of welcoming hands, and seemed to say to himself: 'Well, they shall not be ashamed of me if I never see them any more.'

A sudden shout startled him from that brief rest, and a drop on his forehead told him that the blessed rain had come at last, bringing salvation with it; for thirst is harder to bear than hunger, heat, or cold. Welcomed by cries of joy, all lifted up their parched lips, held out their hands, and spread their garments to catch the great drops that soon came pouring down to cool the sick man's fever, quench the agony of thirst, and bring refreshment to every weary body in the boat. All night it fell, all night the castaways revelled in the saving shower, and took heart again, like dying plants revived by heaven's dew. The clouds broke away at dawn, and Emil sprung up, wonderfully braced and cheered by those hours of silent gratitude for this answer to their cry for help. But this was not all; as his eye swept the horizon, clear against the rosy sky shone the white sails of a ship, so near that they could see the pennon at her mast-head and black figures moving on the deck.

One cry broke from all those eager throats, and rang across the sea, as every man waved hat or handkerchief and the women stretched imploring hands towards this great white angel of deliverance coming down upon them as if the fresh wind filled every sail to help her on.

No disappointment now; answering signals assured them of help; and in the rapture of that moment the happy women fell on Emil's neck, giving him his reward in tears and blessings as their grateful hearts overflowed. He always said that was the proudest moment of his life, as he stood there holding Mary in his arms; for the brave girl, who had kept up so long, broke down then, and clung to him half fainting; while her mother busied herself about the invalid, who seemed to feel the joyful stir, and gave an order, as if again on the deck of his lost ship.

It was soon over; and then all were safely aboard the good Urania, homeward bound. Emil saw his friends in tender hands, his men among their mates, and told the story of the wreck before he thought of himself. The savoury odour of the soup, carried by to the cabin for the ladies, reminded him that he was starving, and a sudden stagger betrayed his weakness. He was instantly borne away, to be half killed by kindness, and being fed, clothed, and comforted, was left to rest. Just as the surgeon left the state-room, he asked in his broken voice: ‘What day is this? My head is so confused, I’ve lost my reckoning.’

‘Thanksgiving Day, man! And we’ll give you a regular New England dinner, if you’ll eat it,’ answered the surgeon heartily.

But Emil was too spent to do anything, except lie still and give thanks, more fervently and gratefully than ever before, for the blessed gift of life, which was the sweeter for a sense of duty faithfully performed.

Chapter 12. DAN’S CHRISTMAS

Where was Dan? In prison. Alas for Mrs Jo! how her heart would have ached if she had known that while old Plum shone with Christmas cheer her boy sat alone in his cell, trying to read the little book she gave him, with eyes dimmed now and then by the hot tears no physical suffering had ever wrung from him, and longing with a homesick heart for all that he had lost.

Yes, Dan was in prison; but no cry for help from him as he faced the terrible strait he was in with the dumb despair of an Indian at the stake; for his own bosom sin had brought him there, and this was to be the bitter lesson that tamed the lawless spirit and taught him self-control.

The story of his downfall is soon told; for it came, as so often happens, just when he felt unusually full of high hopes, good resolutions, and dreams of a better life. On his journey he met a pleasant young fellow, and naturally felt an interest in him, as Blair was on his way to join his elder brothers on a ranch in Kansas. Card-playing was going on in the smoking-car, and the lad — for he was barely twenty — tired with the long journey, beguiled the way with such partners as appeared, being full of spirits, and a little intoxicated with the freedom of the West. Dan, true to his promise, would not join, but watched with intense interest the games that went on, and soon made up his mind that two of the men were sharpers anxious to fleece the boy, who had imprudently displayed a well-filled pocket-book. Dan always had a soft spot in his heart for any younger, weaker creature whom he met, and something about the lad reminded him of Teddy; so he kept an eye on Blair, and warned him against his new friends.

Vainly, of course; for when all stopped overnight in one of the great cities, Dan missed the boy from the hotel whither he had taken him for safe-keeping; and learning who had come for him, went to find him, calling himself a fool for his pains, yet unable to leave the confiding boy to the dangers that surrounded him.

He found him gambling in a low place with the men, who were bound to have his money; and by the look of relief on Blair’s anxious face when he saw him Dan knew without words that things were going badly with him, and he saw the peril too late.

‘I can’t come yet — I’ve lost; it’s not my money; I must get it back, or I dare not face my brothers,’ whispered the poor lad, when Dan begged him to get away without further loss. Shame and fear made him desperate; and he played on, sure that he could recover the money confided to his care. Seeing Dan's resolute face, keen eye, and travelled air, the sharpers were wary, played fair, and let the boy win a little; but they had no mind to give up their prey, and finding that Dan stood sentinel at the boy's back, an ominous glance was exchanged between them, which meant:

'We must get this fellow out of the way.'

Dan saw it, and was on his guard; for he and Blair were strangers, evil deeds are easily done in such places, and no tales told. But he would not desert the boy, and still kept watch of every card till he plainly detected false play, and boldly said so. High words passed, Dan's indignation overcame his prudence; and when the cheat refused to restore his plunder with insulting words and drawn pistol, Dan's hot temper flashed out, and he knocked the man down with a blow that sent him crashing head first against a stove, to roll senseless and bleeding to the floor. A wild scene followed, but in the midst of it Dan whispered to the boy: 'Get away, and hold your tongue. Don't mind me.'

Frightened and bewildered, Blair quitted the city at once, leaving Dan to pass the night in the lock-up, and a few days later to stand in court charged with manslaughter; for the man was dead. Dan had no friends, and having once briefly told the story, held his peace, anxious to keep all knowledge of this sad affair from those at home. He even concealed his name — giving that of David Kent, as he had done several times before in emergencies. It was all over very soon; but as there were extenuating circumstances his sentence was a year in prison, with hard labour.

Dazed by the rapidity with which this horrible change in his life came upon him, Dan did not fully realize it till the iron door clanged behind him and he sat alone in a cell as narrow, cold, and silent as a tomb. He knew that a word would bring Mr Laurie to help and comfort him; but he could not bear to tell of this disgrace, or see the sorrow and the shame it would cause the friends who hoped so much for him.

'No,' he said, clenching his fist, 'I'll let them think me dead first. I shall be if I am kept here long'; and he sprang up to pace the stone floor like a caged lion, with a turmoil of wrath and grief, rebellion and remorse, seething in heart and brain, till he felt as if he should go mad and beat upon the walls that shut him away from the liberty which was his life. For days he suffered terribly, then worn out, sank into a black melancholy sadder to see than his excitement.

The warden of this prison was a rough man who had won the ill will of all by unnecessary harshness, but the chaplain was full of sympathy, and did his hard duty faithfully and tenderly. He laboured with poor Dan, but seemed to make no impression, and was forced to wait till work had soothed the excited nerves and captivity tamed the proud spirit that would suffer but not complain.

Dan was put in the brush-shop, and feeling that activity was his only salvation, worked with a feverish energy that soon won the approval of the master and the envy of less skilful mates. Day after day he sat in his place, watched by an armed overseer, forbidden any but necessary words, no intercourse with the men beside him, no change but from cell to shop, no exercise but the dreary marches to and fro, each man's hand on the other's shoulder keeping step with the dreary tramp so different from the ringing tread of soldiers. Silent, gaunt, and grim, Dan did his daily task, ate his bitter bread, and obeyed commands with a rebellious flash of the eye, that made the warden say:

'That's a dangerous man. Watch him. He'll break out some day.'

There were others more dangerous than he, because older in crime and ready for any desperate outbreak to change the monotony of long sentences. These men soon divined Dan's mood, and in the mysterious way convicts invent, managed to convey to him before a month was over that plans were being made for a mutiny at the first opportunity. Thanksgiving Day was one of the few chances for them to speak together as they enjoyed an hour of freedom in the prison yard. Then all would be settled and the rash attempt made if possible, probably to end in bloodshed and defeat for most, but liberty for a few. Dan had already planned his own escape and bided his time, growing more and more moody, fierce, and rebellious, as loss of liberty wore upon soul and body; for this sudden change from his free, healthy life to such a narrow, gloomy, and miserable one, could not but have a terrible effect upon one of Dan's temperament and age.

He brooded over his ruined life, gave up all his happy hopes and plans, felt that he could never face dear old Plumfield again, or touch those friendly hands, with the stain of blood upon his own. He did not care for the wretched man whom he had killed, for such a life was better ended, he thought; but the disgrace of prison would never be wiped out of his memory, though the cropped hair would grow again, the grey suit easily be replaced, and the bolts and bars left far behind.

'It's all over with me; I've spoilt my life, now let it go. I'll give up the fight and get what pleasure I can anywhere, anyhow. They shall think me dead and so still care for me, but never know what I am. Poor Mother Bhaer! she tried to help me, but it's no use; the firebrand can't be saved.'

And dropping his head in his hands as he sat on his low bed, Dan would mourn over all he had lost in tearless misery, till merciful sleep would comfort him with dreams of the happy days when the boys played together, or those still later and happier ones when all smiled on him, and Plumfield seemed to have gained a new and curious charm.

There was one poor fellow in Dan’s shop whose fate was harder than his, for his sentence expired in the spring, but there was little hope of his living till that time; and the coldest-hearted man pitied poor Mason as he sat coughing his life away in that close place and counting the weary days yet to pass before he could see his wife and little child again. There was some hope that he might be pardoned out, but he had no friends to bestir themselves in the matter, and it was evident that the great Judge’s pardon would soon end his patient pain for ever.

Dan pitied him more than he dared to show, and this one tender emotion in that dark time was like the little flower that sprung up between the stones of the prison yard and saved the captive from despair, in the beautiful old story. Dan helped Mason with his work when he was too feeble to finish his task, and the grateful look that thanked him was a ray of sunshine to cheer his cell when he was alone. Mason envied the splendid health of his neighbour, and mourned to see it wasting there. He was a peaceful soul and tried, as far as a whispered word or warning glance could do it, to deter Dan from joining the ‘bad lot’, as the rebels were called. But having turned his face from the light, Dan found the downward way easy, and took a grim satisfaction in the prospect of a general outbreak during which he might revenge himself upon the tyrannical warden, and strike a blow for his own liberty, feeling that an hour of insurrection would be a welcome vent for the pent-up passions that tormented him. He had tamed many a wild animal, but his own lawless spirit was too much for him, till he found the curb that made him master of himself.

The Sunday before Thanksgiving, as he sat in chapel, Dan observed several guests in the seats reserved for them, and looked anxiously to see if any familiar face was there; for he had a mortal fear that someone from home would suddenly confront him. No, all were strangers, and he soon forgot them in listening to the chaplain’s cheerful words, and the sad singing of many heavy hearts. People often spoke to the convicts, so it caused no surprise when, on being invited to address them, one of the ladies rose and said she would tell them a little story; which announcement caused the younger listeners to pack up their ears, and even the older ones to look interested; for any change in their monotonous life was welcome.

The speaker was a middle-aged woman in black, with a sympathetic face, eyes full of compassion, and a voice that seemed to warm the heart, because of certain motherly tones in it. She reminded Dan of Mrs Jo, and he listened intently to every word, feeling that each was meant for him, because by chance, they came at the moment when he needed a softening memory to break up the ice of despair which was blighting all the good impulses of his nature.

It was a very simple little story, but it caught the men's attention at once, being about two soldiers in a hospital during the late war, both badly wounded in the right arm, and both anxious to save these breadwinners and go home unmaimed. One was patient, docile, and cheerfully obeyed orders, even when told that the arm must go. He submitted and after much suffering recovered, grateful for life, though he could fight no more. The other rebelled, would listen to no advice, and having delayed too long, died a lingering death, bitterly regretting his folly when it was too late. 'Now, as all stories should have a little moral, let me tell you mine,' added the lady, with a smile, as she looked at the row of young men before her, sadly wondering what brought them there.

'This is a hospital for soldiers wounded in life's battle; here are sick souls, weak wills, insane passions, blind consciences, all the ills that come from broken laws, bringing their inevitable pain and punishment with them, There is hope and help for every one, for God's mercy is infinite and man's charity is great; but penitence and submission must come before the cure is possible. Pay the forfeit manfully, for it is just; but from the suffering and shame wring new strength for a nobler life. The scar will remain, but it is better for a man to lose both arms than his soul; and these hard years, instead of being lost, may be made the most precious of your lives, if they teach you to rule yourselves. O friends, try to outlive the bitter past, to wash the sin away, and begin anew. If not for your own sakes, for that of the dear mothers, wives, and children, who wait and hope so patiently for you. Remember them, and do not let them love and long in vain. And if there be any here so forlorn that they have no friend to care for them, never forget the Father whose arms are always open to receive, forgive, and comfort His prodigal sons, even at the eleventh hour.' There the little sermon ended; but the preacher of it felt that her few hearty words had not been uttered in vain, for one boy's head was down, and several faces wore the softened look which told that a tender memory was touched. Dan was forced to set his lips to keep them steady, and drop his eyes to hide the sudden dew that dimmed them when waiting, hoping friends were spoken of. He was glad to be alone in his cell again, and sat thinking deeply, instead of trying to forget himself in sleep. It seemed as if those words were just what he needed to show him where he stood and how fateful the next few days might be to him. Should he join the 'bad lot', and perhaps add another crime to the one already committed, lengthen the sentence already so terrible to bear, deliberately turn his back on all that was good, and mar the future that might yet be redeemed? Or should he, like the wiser man in the story, submit, bear the just punishment, try to be better for it; and though the scar would remain, it might serve as a reminder of a battle not wholly lost, since he had saved his soul though innocence was gone? Then he would dare go home, perhaps, confess, and find fresh strength in the pity and consolation of those who never gave him up.

Good and evil fought for Dan that night as did the angel and the devil for Sintram, and it was hard to tell whether lawless nature or loving heart would conquer. Remorse and resentment, shame and sorrow, pride and passion, made a battle-field of that narrow cell, and the poor fellow felt as if he had fiercer enemies to fight now than any he had met in all his wanderings. A little thing turned the scale, as it so often does in these mysterious hearts of ours, and a touch of sympathy helped Dan decide the course which would bless or ban his life.

In the dark hour before the dawn, as he lay wakeful on his bed, a ray of light shone through the bars, the bolts turned softly, and a man came in. It was the good chaplain, led by the same instinct that brings a mother to her sick child's pillow; for long experience as nurse of souls had taught him to see the signs of hope in the hard faces about him, and to know when the moment came for a helpful word and the cordial of sincere prayer that brings such comfort and healing to tried and troubled hearts. He had been to Dan before at unexpected hours, but always found him sullen, indifferent, or rebellious, and had gone away to patiently bide his time. Now it had come; a look of relief was in the prisoner's face as the light shone on it, and the sound of a human voice was strangely comfortable after listening to the whispers of the passions, doubts, and fears which had haunted the cell for hours, dismaying Dan by their power, and showing him how much he needed help to fight the good fight, since he had no armour of his own.

'Kent, poor Mason has gone. He left a message for you, and I felt impelled to come and give it now, because I think you were touched by what we heard today, and in need of the help Mason tried to give you,' said the chaplain, taking the one seat and fixing his kind eyes on the grim figure in the bed.

'Thank you, sir, I'd like to hear it,' was all Dan's answer; but he forgot himself in pity for the poor fellow dead in prison, with no last look at wife or child.

He went suddenly, but remembered you, and begged me to say these words: "Tell him not to do it, but to hold on, do his best, and when his time is out go right to Mary, and she'll make him welcome for my sake. He's got no friends in these parts and will feel lonesome, but a woman's always safe and comfortable when a fellow's down on his luck. Give him my love and good-bye for he was kind to me, and God will bless him for it." Then he died quietly, and tomorrow will go home with God's pardon, since man's came too late.'

Dan said nothing, but laid his arm across his face and lay quite still. Seeing that the pathetic little message had done its work even better than he hoped, the chaplain went on, unconscious how soothing his paternal voice was to the poor prisoner who longed to ‘go home’, but felt he had forfeited the right.

‘I hope you won’t disappoint this humble friend whose last thought was for you. I know that there is trouble brewing, and fear that you may be tempted to lend a hand on the wrong side. Don’t do it, for the plot will not succeed — it never does — and it would be a pity to spoil your record which is fair so far. Keep up your courage, my son, and go out at the year’s end better, not worse, for this hard experience. Remember a grateful woman waits to welcome and thank you if you have no friends of your own; if you have, do your best for their sake, and let us ask God to help you as He only can.’

Then waiting for no answer the good man prayed heartily, and Dan listened as he never had before; for the lonely hour, the dying message, the sudden uprising of his better self, made it seem as if some kind angel had come to save and comfort him. After that night there was a change in Dan, though no one knew it but the chaplain; for to all the rest he was the same silent, stern, unsocial fellow as before, and turning his back on the bad and the good alike, found his only pleasure in the books his friend brought him. Slowly, as the steadfast drop wears away the rock, the patient kindness of this man won Dan’s confidence, and led by him he began to climb out of the Valley of Humiliation towards the mountains, whence, through the clouds, one can catch glimpses of the Celestial City whither all true pilgrims sooner or later turn their wistful eyes and stumbling feet. There were many back-slidings, many struggles with Giant Despair and fiery Apollyon, many heavy hours when life did not seem worth living and Mason’s escape the only hope. But through all, the grasp of a friendly hand, the sound of a brother’s voice, the unquenchable desire to atone for the past by a better future, and win the right to see home again, kept poor Dan to his great task as the old year drew to its end, and the new waited to turn another leaf in the book whose hardest lesson he was learning now.

At Christmas he yearned so for Plumfield that he devised a way to send a word of greeting to cheer their anxious hearts, and comfort his own. He wrote to Mary Mason, who lived in another State, asking her to mail the letter he enclosed. In it he merely said he was well and busy, had given up the farm, and had other plans which he would tell later; would not be home before autumn probably, nor write often, but was all right, and sent love and merry Christmas to everyone.

Then he took up his solitary life again, and tried to pay his forfeit manfully.

Chapter 13. NAT'S NEW YEAR

'I don't expect to hear from Emil yet, and Nat writes regularly, but where is Dan? Only two or three postals since he went. Such an energetic fellow as he is could buy up all the farms in Kansas by this time,' said Mrs Jo one morning when the mail came in and no card or envelope bore Dan's dashing hand.

'He never writes often, you know, but does his work and then comes home. Months and years seem to mean little to him, and he is probably prospecting in the wilderness, forgetful of time,' answered Mr Bhaer, deep in one of Nat's long letters from Leipzig.

'But he promised he would let me know how he got on, and Dan keeps his word if he can. I'm afraid something has happened to him'; and Mrs Jo comforted herself by patting Don's head, as he came at the sound of his master's name to look at her with eyes almost human in their wistful intelligence.

'Don't worry, Mum dear, nothing ever happens to the old fellow. He'll turn up all right, and come stalking in some day with a gold-mine in one pocket and a prairie in the other, as jolly as a grig,' said Ted, who was in no haste to deliver Octoo to her rightful owner.

'Perhaps he has gone to Montana and given up the farm plan. He seemed to like Indians best, I thought'; and Rob went to help his mother with her pile of letters and his cheerful suggestions.

'I hope so, it would suit him best. But I am sure he would have told us his change of plan and sent for some money to work with. No, I feel in my prophetic bones that something is wrong,' said Mrs Jo, looking as solemn as Fate in a breakfast-cap.

'Then we shall hear; ill news always travels fast. Don't borrow trouble, Jo, but hear how well Nat is getting on. I'd no idea the boy would care for anything but music. My good friend Baumgarten has launched him well, and it will do him good if he lose not his head. A good lad, but new to the world, and Leipzig is full of snares for the unwary. Gott be with him!'

The Professor read Nat's enthusiastic account of certain literary and musical parties he had been to, the splendours of the opera, the kindness of his new friends, the delight of studying under such a master as Bergmann, his hopes of rapid gain, and his great gratitude to those who had opened this enchanted world to him.

'That, now, is satisfactory and comfortable. I felt that Nat had unsuspected power in him before he went away; he was so manly and full of excellent plans,' said Mrs Jo, in a satisfied tone.

'We shall see. He will doubtless get his lesson and be the better for it. That comes to us all in our young days. I hope it will not be too hard for our good Jungling,' answered the Professor, with a wise smile, remembering his own student life in Germany.

He was right; and Nat was already getting his lesson in life with a rapidity which would have astonished his friends at home. The manliness over which Mrs Jo rejoiced was developing in unexpected ways, and quiet Nat had plunged into the more harmless dissipations of the gay city with all the ardour of an inexperienced youth taking his first sip of pleasure. The entire freedom and sense of independence was delicious, for many benefits began to burden him, and he longed to stand on his own legs and make his own way. No one knew his past here; and with a well-stocked wardrobe, a handsome sum at his banker's, and the best teacher in Leipzig, he made his debut as a musical young gentleman, presented by the much-respected Professor Bhaer and the wealthy Mr Laurence, who had many friends glad to throw open their houses to his protege. Thanks to these introductions, his fluent German, modest manners, and undeniable talent, the stranger was cordially welcomed, and launched at once into a circle which many an ambitious young man strove in vain to enter.

All this rather turned Nat's head; and as he sat in the brilliant opera-house, chatted among the ladies at some select coffee-party, or whisked an eminent professor's amiable daughter down the room, trying to imagine she was Daisy, he often asked himself if this gay fellow could be the poor homeless little Street musician who once stood waiting in the rain at the gates of Plumfield. His heart was true, his impulses good, and his ambitions high; but the weak side of his nature came uppermost here; vanity led him astray, pleasure intoxicated him, and for a time he forgot everything but the delights of this new and charming life. Without meaning to deceive, he allowed people to imagine him a youth of good family and prospects; he boasted a little of Mr Laurie's wealth and influence, of Professor Bhaer's eminence, and the flourishing college at which he himself had been educated. Mrs Jo was introduced to the sentimental Frauleins who read her books, and the charms and virtues of his own dear Madchen confided to sympathetic mammas. All these boyish boastings and innocent vanities were duly circulated among the gossips, and his importance much increased thereby, to his surprise and gratification, as well as some shame.

But they bore fruit that was bitter in the end; for, finding that he was considered one of the upper class, it very soon became impossible for him to live in the humble quarters he had chosen, or to lead the studious, quiet life planned for him. He met other students, young officers, and gay fellows of all sorts, and was flattered at being welcomed among them; though it was a costly pleasure, and often left a thorn of regret to vex his honest conscience. He was tempted to take better rooms in a more fashionable street, leaving good Frau Tetzel to lament his loss, and his artist neighbour, Fraulein Vogelstein, to shake her grey ringlets and predict his return, a sadder and a wiser man.

The sum placed at his disposal for expenses and such simple pleasures as his busy life could command seemed a fortune to Nat, though it was smaller than generous Mr Laurie first proposed. Professor Bhaer wisely counselled prudence, as Nat was unused to the care of money, and the good man knew the temptations that a well-filled purse makes possible at this pleasure-loving age. So Nat enjoyed his handsome little apartment immensely, and insensibly let many unaccustomed luxuries creep in. He loved his music and never missed a lesson; but the hours he should have spent in patient practice were too often wasted at theatre, ball, beer-garden, or club — doing no harm beyond that waste of precious time, and money not his own; for he had no vices, and took his recreation like a gentleman, so far. But slowly a change for the worse was beginning to show itself, and he felt it. These first steps along the flowery road were downward, not upward; and the constant sense of disloyalty which soon began to haunt him made Nat feel, in the few quiet hours he gave himself, that all was not well with him, spite of the happy whirl in which he lived.

‘Another month, and then I will be steady,’ he said more than once, trying to excuse the delay by the fact that all was new to him, that his friends at home wished him to be happy, and that society was giving him the polish he needed. But as each month slipped away it grew harder to escape; he was inevitably drawn on, and it was so easy to drift with the tide that he deferred the evil day as long as possible. Winter festivities followed the more wholesome summer pleasures, and Nat found them more costly; for the hospitable ladies expected some return from the stranger; and carriages, bouquets, theatre tickets, and all the little expenses a young man cannot escape at such times, told heavily on the purse which seemed bottomless at first. Taking Mr Laurie for his model, Nat became quite a gallant, and was universally liked; for through all the newly acquired airs and graces the genuine honesty and simplicity of his character plainly shone, winning confidence and affection from all who knew him.

Among these was a certain amiable old lady with a musical daughter — well-born but poor, and very anxious to marry the aforesaid daughter to some wealthy man. Nat’s little fictions concerning his prospects and friends charmed the gnadige Frau as much as his music and devoted manners did the sentimental Minna. Their quiet parlour seemed homelike and restful to Nat, when tired of gayer scenes; and the motherly interest of the elder lady was sweet and comfortable to him; while the tender blue eyes of the pretty girl were always so full of welcome when he came, of regret when he left, and of admiration when he played to her, that he found it impossible to keep away from this attractive spot. He meant no harm, and feared no danger, having confided to the Frau Mamma that he was betrothed; so he continued to call, little dreaming what ambitious hopes the old lady cherished, nor the peril there was in receiving the adoration of a romantic German girl, till it was too late to spare her pain and himself great regret.

Of course some inkling of these new and agreeable experiences got into the voluminous letters he never was too gay, too busy, or too tired to write each week; and while Daisy rejoiced over his happiness and success, and the boys laughed at the idea of 'old Chirper coming out as a society man', the elders looked sober, and said among themselves:

'He is going too fast; he must have a word of warning, or trouble may come.'

But Mr Laurie said: 'Oh, let him have his fling; he's been dependent and repressed long enough. He can't go far with the money he has, and I've no fear of his getting into debt. He's too timid and too honest to be reckless. It is his first taste of freedom; let him enjoy it, and he'll work the better by and by; I know — and I'm sure I'm right.'

So the warnings were very gentle, and the good people waited anxiously to hear more of hard study, and less of 'splendid times'. Daisy sometimes wondered, with a pang of her faithful heart, if one of the charming Minnas, Hildegardes, and Lottchens mentioned were not stealing her Nat away from her; but she never asked, always wrote calmly and cheerfully, and looked in vain for any hint of change in the letters that were worn out with much reading.

Month after month slipped away, till the holidays came with gifts, good wishes, and brilliant festivities. Nat expected to enjoy himself very much, and did at first; for a German Christmas is a spectacle worth seeing. But he paid dearly for the abandon with which he threw himself into the gaieties of that memorable week; and on New Year's Day the reckoning came. It seemed as if some malicious fairy had prepared the surprises that arrived, so unwelcome were they, so magical the change they wrought, turning his happy world into a scene of desolation and despair as suddenly as a transformation at the pantomime.

The first came in the morning when, duly armed with costly bouquets and bon-bons, he went to thank Minna and her mother for the braces embroidered with forget-me-nots and the silk socks knit by the old lady's nimble fingers, which he had found upon his table that day. The Frau Mamma received him graciously; but when he asked for the daughter the good lady frankly demanded what his intentions were, adding that certain gossip which had reached her ear made it necessary for him to declare himself or come no more, as Minna's peace must not be compromised.

A more panic-stricken youth was seldom seen than Nat as he received this unexpected demand. He saw too late that his American style of gallantry had deceived the artless girl, and might be used with terrible effect by the artful mother, if she chose to do it. Nothing but the truth could save him, and he had the honour and honesty to tell it faithfully. A sad scene followed; for Nat was obliged to strip off his fictitious splendour, confess himself only a poor student, and humbly ask pardon for the thoughtless freedom with which he had enjoyed their too confiding hospitality. If he had any doubts of Frau Schomburg's motives and desires, they were speedily set at rest by the frankness with which she showed her disappointment, the vigour with which she scolded him, and the scorn with which she cast him off when her splendid castles in the air collapsed.

The sincerity of Nat's penitence softened her a little and she consented to a farewell word with Minna, who had listened at the keyhole, and was produced drenched in tears, to fall on Nat's bosom, crying: 'Ah, thou dear one, never can I forget thee, though my heart is broken!'

This was worse than the scolding; for the stout lady also wept, and it was only after much German gush and twaddle that he escaped, feeling like another Werther; while the deserted Lotte consoled herself with the bonbons, her mother with the more valuable gifts.

The second surprise arrived as he dined with Professor Baumgarten. His appetite had been effectually taken away by the scene of the morning, and his spirits received another damper when a fellow student cheerfully informed him that he was about to go to America, and should make it his agreeable duty to call on the 'lieber Herr Professor Bhaer', to tell him how gaily his protege was disporting himself at Leipzig. Nat's heart died within him as he imagined the effect these glowing tales would have at Plumfield — not that he had wilfully deceived them, but in his letters many things were left untold; and when Carlsen added, with a friendly wink, that he would merely hint at the coming betrothal of the fair Minna and his 'heart's friend', Nat found himself devoutly hoping that this other inconvenient heart's friend might go to the bottom of the sea before he reached Plumfield to blast all his hopes by these tales of a mis-spent winter. Collecting his wits, he cautioned Carlsen with what he flattered himself was Mephistophelian art, and gave him such confused directions that it would be a miracle if he ever found Professor Bhaer. But the dinner was spoilt for Nat, and he got away as soon as possible, to wander disconsolately about the streets, with no heart for the theatre or the supper he was to share with some gay comrades afterwards. He comforted himself a little by giving alms to sundry beggars, making two children happy with gilded gingerbread, and drinking a lonely glass of beer, in which he toasted his Daisy and wished himself a better year than the last had been.

Going home at length, he found a third surprise awaiting him in the shower of bills which had descended upon him like a snowstorm, burying him in an avalanche of remorse, despair, and self-disgust. These bills were so many and so large that he was startled and dismayed; for, as Mr Bhaer wisely predicted, he knew little about the value of money. It would take every dollar at the bankers to pay them all at once, and leave him penniless for the next six months, unless he wrote home for more. He would rather starve than do that; and his first impulse was to seek help at the gaming-table, whither his new friends had often tempted him. But he had promised Mr Bhaer to resist what then had seemed an impossible temptation; and now he would not add another fault to the list already so long. Borrow he would not, nor beg. What could he do? For these appalling bills must be paid, and the lessons go on; or his journey was an ignominious failure. But he must live meantime. And how? Bowed down with remorse for the folly of these months, he saw too late whither he was drifting, and for hours paced up and down his pretty rooms, floundering in a Slough of Despond, with no helping hand to pull him out — at least he thought so till letters were brought in, and among fresh bills lay one well-worn envelope with an American stamp in the corner.

Ah, how welcome it was! how eagerly he read the long pages full of affectionate wishes from all at home! For everyone had sent a line, and as each familiar name appeared, his eyes grew dimmer and dimmer till, as he read the last — ’God bless my boy! Mother Bhaer’ — he broke down; and laying his head on his arms, blistered the paper with a rain of tears that eased his heart and washed away the boyish sins that now lay so heavy on his conscience.

‘Dear people, how they love and trust me! And how bitterly they would be disappointed if they knew what a fool I’ve been! I’ll fiddle in the streets again before I’ll ask for help from them!’ cried Nat, brushing away the tears of which he was ashamed, although he felt the good they had done.

Now he seemed to see more clearly what to do; for the helping hand had been stretched across the sea, and Love, the dear Evangelist, had lifted him out of the slough and shown him the narrow gate, beyond which deliverance lay. When the letter had been reread, and one corner where a daisy was painted, passionately kissed, Nat felt strong enough to face the worst and conquer it. Every bill should be paid, every salable thing of his own sold, these costly rooms given up; and once back with thrifty Frau Tetzel, he would find work of some sort by which to support himself, as many another student did. He must give up the new friends, turn his back on the gay life, cease to be a butterfly, and take his place among the grubs. It was the only honest thing to do, but very hard for the poor fellow to crush his little vanities, renounce the delights so dear to the young, own his folly, and step down from his pedestal to be pitied, laughed at, and forgotten.

It took all Nat's pride and courage to do this, for his was a sensitive nature; esteem was very precious to him, failure very bitter, and nothing but the inborn contempt for meanness and deceit kept him from asking help or trying to hide his need by some dishonest device. As he sat alone that night, Mr Bhaer's words came back to him with curious clearness, and he saw himself a boy again at Plumfield, punishing his teacher as a lesson to himself, when timidity had made him lie.

'He shall not suffer for me again, and I won't be a sneak if I am a fool. I'll go and tell Professor Baumgarten all about it and ask his advice. I'd rather face a loaded cannon; but it must be done. Then I'll sell out, pay my debts, and go back where I belong. Better be an honest pauper than a jackdaw among peacocks'; and Nat smiled in the midst of his trouble, as he looked about him at the little elegancies of his room, remembering what he came from.

He kept his word manfully, and was much comforted to find that his experience was an old story to the professor, who approved his plan, thinking wisely that the discipline would be good for him, and was very kind in offering help and promising to keep the secret of his folly from his friend Bhaer till Nat had redeemed himself.

The first week of the new year was spent by our prodigal in carrying out his plan with penitent dispatch, and his birthday found him alone in the little room high up at Frau Tetzel's, with nothing of his former splendour, but sundry unsalable keepsakes from the buxom maidens, who mourned his absence deeply. His male friends had ridiculed, pitied, and soon left him alone, with one or two exceptions, who offered their purses generously and promised to stand by him. He was lonely and heavy-hearted, and sat brooding over his small fire as he remembered the last New Year's Day at Plumfield, when at this hour he was dancing with his Daisy.

A tap at the door roused him, and with a careless 'Herein', he waited to see who had climbed so far for his sake. It was the good Frau proudly bearing a tray, on which stood a bottle of wine and an astonishing cake bedecked with sugar-plums of every hue, and crowned with candles. Fraulein Vogelstein followed, embracing a blooming rose-tree, above which her grey curls waved and her friendly face beamed joyfully as she cried:

'Dear Herr Blak, we bring you greetings and a little gift or two in honour of this ever-to-be-remembered day. Best wishes! and may the new year bloom for you as beautifully as we your heart-warm friends desire.'

'Yes, yes, in truth we do, dear Herr,' added Frau Tetzel. 'Eat of this with-joy-made Kuchen, and drink to the health of the far-away beloved ones in the good wine.'

Amused, yet touched by the kindness of the good souls, Nat thanked them both, and made them stay to enjoy the humble feast with him. This they gladly did, being motherly women full of pity for the dear youth, whose straits they knew, and having substantial help to offer, as well as kind words and creature comforts.

Frau Tetzel, with some hesitation, mentioned a friend of hers who, forced by illness to leave his place in the orchestra of a second-rate theatre, would gladly offer it to Nat, if he could accept so humble a position. Blushing and toying with the roses like a shy girl, good old Vogelstein asked if in his leisure moments he could give English lessons in the young ladies' school where she taught painting, adding that a small but certain salary would be paid him.

Gratefully Nat accepted both offers, finding it less humiliating to be helped by women than by friends of his own sex. This work would support him in a frugal way, and certain musical drudgery promised by his master assured his own teaching. Delighted with the success of their little plot, these friendly neighbours left him with cheery words, warm hand-grasps, and faces beaming with feminine satisfaction at the hearty kiss Nat put on each faded cheek, as the only return he could make for all their helpful kindness.

It was strange how much brighter the world looked after that; for hope was a better cordial than the wine, and good resolutions bloomed as freshly as the little rose-tree that filled the room with fragrance, as Nat woke the echoes with the dear old airs, finding now as always his best comforter in music, to whom henceforth he swore to be a more loyal subject.

Chapter 14. PLAYS AT PLUMFIELD

As it is as impossible for the humble historian of the March family to write a story without theatricals in it as for our dear Miss Yonge to get on with less than twelve or fourteen children in her interesting tales, we will accept the fact, and at once cheer ourselves after the last afflicting events, by proceeding to the Christmas plays at Plumfield; for they influence the fate of several of our characters, and cannot well be skipped.

When the college was built Mr Laurie added a charming little theatre which not only served for plays, but declamations, lectures, and concerts. The drop-curtain displayed Apollo with the Muses grouped about him; and as a compliment to the donor of the hall the artist had given the god a decided resemblance to our friend, which was considered a superb joke by everyone else. Home talent furnished stars, stock company, orchestra, and scene painter; and astonishing performances were given on this pretty little stage.

Mrs Jo had been trying for some time to produce a play which should be an improvement upon the adaptations from the French then in vogue, curious mixtures of fine toilettes, false sentiment, and feeble wit, with no touch of nature to redeem them. It was easy to plan plays full of noble speeches and thrilling situations, but very hard to write them; so she contented herself with a few scenes of humble life in which the comic and pathetic were mingled; and as she fitted her characters to her actors, she hoped the little venture would prove that truth and simplicity had not entirely lost their power to charm. Mr Laurie helped her, and they called themselves Beaumont and Fletcher, enjoying their joint labour very much; for Beaumont's knowledge of dramatic art was of great use in curbing Fletcher's too-aspiring pen, and they flattered themselves that they had produced a neat and effective bit of work as an experiment.

All was ready now; and Christmas Day was much enlivened by last rehearsals, the panics of timid actors, the scramble for forgotten properties, and the decoration of the theatre. Evergreen and holly from the woods, blooming plants from the hothouse on Parnassus, and flags of all nations made it very gay that night in honour of the guests who were coming, chief among them, Miss Cameron, who kept her promise faithfully. The orchestra tuned their instruments with unusual care, the scene-shifters set their stage with lavish elegance, the prompter heroically took his seat in the stifling nook provided for him, and the actors dressed with trembling hands that dropped the pins, and perspiring brows whereon the powder wouldn't stick. Beaumont and Fletcher were everywhere, feeling that their literary reputation was at stake; for sundry friendly critics were invited, and reporters, like mosquitoes, cannot be excluded from any earthly scene, be it a great man's death-bed or a dime museum.

'Has she come?' was the question asked by every tongue behind the curtain; and when Tom, who played an old man, endangered his respectable legs among the footlights to peep, announced that he saw Miss Cameron's handsome head in the place of honour, a thrill pervaded the entire company, and Josie declared with an excited gasp that she was going to have stage fright for the first time in her life.

'I'll shake you if you do,' said Mrs Jo, who was in such a wild state of dishevelment with her varied labours that she might have gone on as Madge Wildlife, without an additional rag or crazy elf-lock.

'You'll have time to get your wits together while we do our piece. We are old stagers and calm as clocks,' answered Demi, with a nod towards Alice, ready in her pretty dress and all her properties at hand.

But both clocks were going rather faster than usual, as heightened colour, brilliant eyes, and a certain flutter under the laces and velvet coat betrayed. They were to open the entertainment with a gay little piece which they had played before and did remarkably well. Alice was a tall girl, with dark hair and eyes, and a face which intelligence, health, and a happy heart made beautiful. She was looking her best now, for the brocades, plumes, and powder of the Marquise became her stately figure; and Demi in his court suit, with sword, three-cornered hat, and white wig, made as gallant a Baron as one would wish to see. Josie was the maid, and looked her part to the life, being as pretty, pert, and inquisitive as any French soubrette. These three were all the characters; and the success of the piece depended on the spirit and skill with which the quickly changing moods of the quarrelsome lovers were given, their witty speeches made to tell, and by-play suited to the courtly period in which the scene was laid.

Few would have recognized sober John and studious Alice in the dashing gentleman and coquettish lady, who kept the audience laughing at their caprices; while they enjoyed the brilliant costumes, and admired the ease and grace of the young actors. Josie was a prominent figure in the plot, as she listened at keyholes, peeped into notes, and popped in and out at all the most inopportune moments, with her nose in the air, her hands in her apron-pockets, and curiosity pervading her little figure from the topmost bow of her jaunty cap to the red heels of her slippers. All went smoothly; and the capricious Marquise, after tormenting the devoted Baron to her heart's content, owned herself conquered in the war of wits, and was just offering the hand he had fairly won, when a crash startled them, and a heavily decorated side-scene swayed forward, ready to fall upon Alice. Demi saw it and sprung before her to catch and hold it up, standing like a modern Samson with the wall of a house on his back. The danger was over in a moment, and he was about to utter his last speech, when the excited young scene-shifter, who had flown up a ladder to repair the damage, leaned over to whisper 'All right', and release Demi from his spread-eagle attitude: as he did so, a hammer slipped out of his pocket, to fall upon the upturned face below, inflicting a smart blow and literally knocking the Baron's part out of his head.

'A quick curtain,' robbed the audience of a pretty little scene not down on the bill; for the Marquise flew to staunch the blood with a cry of alarm: 'Oh! John, you are hurt! Lean on me' — which John gladly did for a moment, being a trifle dazed yet quite able to enjoy the tender touch of the hands busied about him and the anxiety of the face so near his own; for both told him something which he would have considered cheaply won by a rain of hammers and the fall of the whole college on his head.

Nan was on the spot in a moment with the case that never left her pocket; and the wound was neatly plastered up by the time Mrs Jo arrived, demanding tragically:

'Is he too much hurt to go on again? If he is, my play is lost!'

'I'm all the fitter for it, Aunty; for here's a real instead of a painted wound. I'll be ready; don't worry about me.' And catching up his wig, Demi was off, with only a very eloquent look of thanks to the Marquise, who had spoilt her gloves for his sake, but did not seem to mind it at all, though they reached above her elbows, and were most expensive.

'How are your nerves, Fletcher?' asked Mr Laurie as they stood together during the breathless minute before the last bell rings.

'About as calm as yours, Beaumont,' answered Mrs Jo, gesticulating wildly to Mrs Meg to set her cap straight.

'Bear up, partner! I'll stand by you whatever comes!'

'I feel that it ought to go; for, though it's a mere trifle, a good deal of honest work and truth have gone into it. Doesn't Meg look the picture of a dear old country woman?'

She certainly did, as she sat in the farmhouse kitchen by a cheery fire, rocking a cradle and darning stockings, as if she had done nothing else all her life. Grey hair, skilfully drawn lines on the forehead, and a plain gown, with cap, little shawl, and check apron, changed her into a comfortable, motherly creature who found favour the moment the curtain went up and discovered her rocking, darning, and crooning an old song. In a short soliloquy about Sam, her boy, who wanted to enlist; Dolly, her discontented little daughter, who longed for city ease and pleasures; and poor ‘Elizy’, who had married badly, and came home to die, bequeathing her baby to her mother, lest its bad father should claim it, the little story was very simply opened, and made effective by the real boiling of the kettle on the crane, the ticking of a tall clock, and the appearance of a pair of blue worsted shoes which waved fitfully in the air to the soft babble of a baby’s voice. Those shapeless little shoes won the first applause; and Mr Laurie, forgetting elegance in satisfaction, whispered to his coadjutor:

‘I thought the baby would fetch them!’

‘If the dear thing won’t squall in the wrong place, we are saved. But it is risky. Be ready to catch it if all Meg’s cuddlings prove in vain,’ answered Mrs Jo, adding, with a clutch at Mr Laurie’s arm as a haggard face appeared at the window:

‘Here’s Demi! I hope no one will recognize him when he comes on as the son. I’ll never forgive you for not doing the villain yourself.’

‘Can’t run the thing and act too. He’s capitally made up, and likes a bit of melodrama.’

‘This scene ought to have come later; but I wanted to show that the mother was the heroine as soon as possible. I’m tired of love-sick girls and runaway wives. We’ll prove that there’s romance in old women also. Now he’s coming!’

And in slouched a degraded-looking man, shabby, unshaven, and evil-eyed, trying to assume a masterful air as he dismayed the tranquil old woman by demanding his child. A powerful scene followed; and Mrs Meg surprised even those who knew her best by the homely dignity with which she at first met the man she dreaded; then, as he brutally pressed his claim, she pleaded with trembling voice and hands to keep the little creature she had promised the dying mother to protect; and when he turned to take it by force, quite a thrill went through the house as the old woman sprung to snatch it from the cradle, and holding it close, defied him in God’s name to tear it from that sacred refuge. It was really well done; and the round of applause that greeted the fine tableau of the indignant old woman, the rosy, blinking baby clinging to her neck, and the daunted man who dared not execute his evil purpose with such a defender for helpless innocence, told the excited authors that their first scene was a hit.

The second was quieter, and introduced Josie as a bonny country lass setting the supper-table in a bad humour. The pettish way in which she slapped down the plates, hustled the cups, and cut the big brown loaf, as she related her girlish trials and ambitions, was capital. Mrs Jo kept her eye on Miss Cameron, and saw her nod approval several times at some natural tone or gesture, some good bit of by-play or a quick change of expression in the young face, which was as variable as an April day. Her struggle with the toasting-fork made much merriment; so did her contempt for the brown sugar, and the relish with which she sweetened her irksome duties by eating it; and when she sat, like Cinderella, on the hearth, tearfully watching the flames dance on the homely room, a girlish voice was heard to exclaim impulsively:

‘Poor little thing! she ought to have some fun!’

The old woman enters; and mother and daughter have a pretty scene, in which the latter coaxes and threatens, kisses and cries, till she wins the reluctant consent of the former to visit a rich relation in the city; and from being a little thunder-cloud Dolly becomes bewitchingly gay and good, as soon as her wilful wish is granted. The poor old soul has hardly recovered from this trial when the son enters, in army blue, tells he has enlisted and must go. That is a hard blow; but the patriotic mother bears it well, and not till the thoughtless young folks have hastened away to tell their good news elsewhere does she break down. Then the country kitchen becomes pathetic as the old mother sits alone mourning over her children, till the grey head is hidden in the hands as she kneels down by the cradle to weep and pray, with only Baby to comfort her fond and faithful heart.

Sniffs were audible all through the latter part of this scene; and when the curtain fell, people were so busy wiping their eyes that for a moment they forgot to applaud. That silent moment was more flattering than noise; and as Mrs Jo wiped the real tears off her sister’s face, she said as solemnly as an unconscious dab of rouge on her nose permitted:

‘Meg, you have saved my play! Oh, why aren’t you a real actress, and I a real playwright?’

‘Don’t gush now, dear, but help me dress Josie; she’s in such a quiver of excitement, I can’t manage her, and this is her best scene, you know.’

So it was; for her aunt had written it especially for her, and little Jo was happy in a gorgeous dress, with a train long enough to satisfy her wildest dreams. The rich relation’s parlour was in festival array, and the country cousin sails in, looking back at her sweeping flounces with such artless rapture that no one had the heart to laugh at the pretty jay in borrowed plumes. She has confidences with herself in the mirror, from which it is made evident that she had discovered all is not gold that glitters, and has found greater temptations than those a girlish love of pleasure, luxury, and flattery bring her. She is sought by a rich lover; but her honest heart resists the allurements he offers, and in its innocent perplexity wishes ‘mother’ was there to comfort and counsel.

A gay little dance, in which Dora, Nan, Bess, and several of the boys took part, made a good background for the humble figure of the old woman in her widow’s bonnet, rusty shawl, big umbrella, and basket. Her naive astonishment, as she surveys the spectacle, feels the curtains, and smooths her old gloves during the moment she remains unseen, was very good; but Josie's unaffected start when she sees her, and the cry: 'Why, there's mother!' was such a hearty little bit of nature, it hardly needed the impatient tripping over her train as she ran into the arms that seemed now to be her nearest refuge.

The lover plays his part; and ripples of merriment greeted the old woman's searching questions and blunt answers during the interview which shows the girl how shallow his love is, and how near she had been to ruining her life as bitterly as poor 'Elizy' did. She gives her answer frankly, and when they are alone, looks from her own bedizened self to the shabby dress, work-worn hands, and tender face, crying with a repentant sob and kiss: 'Take me home, mother, and keep me safe. I've had enough of this!'

'That will do you good, Maria; don't forget it,' said one lady to her daughter as the curtain went down; and the girl answered: 'Well, I'm sure I don't see why it's touching; but it is,' as she spread her lace handkerchief to dry.

Tom and Nan came out strong in the next scene; for it was a ward in an army hospital, and surgeon and nurse went from bed to bed, feeling pulses, administering doses, and hearing complaints with an energy and gravity which convulsed the audience. The tragic element, never far from the comic at such times and places, came in when, while they bandaged an arm, the doctor told the nurse about an old woman who was searching through the hospital for her son, after days and nights on battlefields, through ambulances, and among scenes which would have killed most women.

'She will be here directly, and I dread her coming, for I'm afraid the poor lad who has just gone is her boy. I'd rather face a cannon than these brave women, with their hope and courage and great sorrow,' says the surgeon.

'Ah, these poor mothers break my heart!' adds the nurse, wiping her eyes on her big apron; and with the words Mrs Meg came in.

There was the same dress, the basket and umbrella, the rustic speech, the simple manners; but all were made pathetic by the terrible experience which had changed the tranquil old woman to that haggard figure with wild eyes, dusty feet, trembling hands, and an expression of mingled anguish, resolution, and despair which gave the homely figure a tragic dignity and power that touched all hearts. A few broken words told the story of her vain search, and then the sad quest began again. People held their breath as, led by the nurse, she went from bed to bed, showing in her face the alternations of hope, dread, and bitter disappointment as each was passed. On a narrow cot was a long figure covered with a sheet, and here she paused to lay one hand on her heart and one on her eyes, as if to gather courage to look at the nameless dead. Then she drew down the sheet, gave a long shivering sigh of relief, saying softly:

‘Not my son, thank God! but some mother’s boy.’ And stooping down, she kissed the cold forehead tenderly.

Somebody sobbed there, and Miss Cameron shook two tears out of her eyes, anxious to lose no look or gesture as the poor soul, nearly spent with the long strain, struggled on down the long line. But her search was happily ended for, as if her voice had roused him from his feverish sleep, a gaunt, wild-eyed man sat up in his bed, and stretching his arms to her, cried in a voice that echoed through the room:

‘Mother, mother! I knew you’d come to me!’

She did go to him, with a cry of love and joy that thrilled every listener, as she gathered him in her arms with the tears and prayers and blessing such as only a fond and faithful old mother could give.

The last scene was a cheerful contrast to this; for the country kitchen was bright with Christmas cheer, the wounded hero, with black patch and crutches well displayed, sat by the fire in the old chair whose familiar creak was soothing to his ear; pretty Dolly was stirring about, gaily trimming dresser, settle, high chimney-piece, and old-fashioned cradle with mistletoe and holly; while the mother rested beside her son, with that blessed baby on her knee. Refreshed by a nap and nourishment, this young actor now covered himself with glory by his ecstatic prancings, incoherent remarks to the audience, and vain attempts to get to the footlights, as he blinked approvingly at these brilliant toys. It was good to see Mrs Meg pat him on the back, cuddle the fat legs out of sight, and appease his vain longings with a lump of sugar, till Baby embraced her with a grateful ardour that brought him a round of applause all for his little self.

A sound of singing outside disturbs the happy family, and, after a carol in the snowy moonlight, a flock of neighbours troop in with Christmas gifts and greetings. Much by-play made this a lively picture; for Sam’s sweetheart hovered round him with a tenderness the Marquise did not show the Baron; and Dolly had a pretty bit under the mistletoe with her rustic adorer, who looked so like Ham Peggotty in his cowhide boots, rough jacket, and dark beard and wig, that no one would have recognized Ted but for the long legs, which no extent of leather could disguise. It ended with a homely feast, brought by the guests; and as they sat round the table covered with doughnuts and cheese, pumpkin-pie, and other delicacies, Sam rises on his crutches to propose the first toast, and holding up his mug of cider, says, with a salute, and a choke in his voice: ‘Mother, God bless her!’ All drink it standing, Dolly with her arm round the old woman’s neck, as she hides her happy tears on her daughter’s breast; while the irrepressible baby beat rapturously on the table with a spoon, and crowed audibly as the curtain went down.

They had it up again in a jiffy to get a last look at the group about that central figure, which was showered with bouquets, to the great delight of the infant Roscius; till a fat rosebud hit him on the nose, and produced the much-dreaded squall, which, fortunately, only added to the fun at that moment.

‘Well, that will do for a beginning,’ said Beaumont, with a sigh of relief, as the curtain descended for the last time, and the actors scattered to dress for the closing piece.

‘As an experiment, it is a success. Now we can venture to begin our great American drama,’ answered Mrs Jo, full of satisfaction and grand ideas for the famous play — which, we may add, she did not write that year, owing to various dramatic events in her own family.

The Owlsdark Marbles closed the entertainment, and, being something new, proved amusing to this very indulgent audience. The gods and goddesses on Parnassus were displayed in full conclave; and, thanks to Mrs Amy’s skill in draping and posing, the white wigs and cotton-flannel robes were classically correct and graceful, though sundry modern additions somewhat marred the effect, while adding point to the showman’s learned remarks. Mr Laurie was Professor Owlsdark in cap and gown; and, after a high-flown introduction, he proceeded to exhibit and explain his marbles. The first figure was a stately Minerva; but a second glance produced a laugh, for the words ‘Women’s Rights’ adorned her shield, a scroll bearing the motto ‘Vote early and often’ hung from the beak of the owl perched on her lance, and a tiny pestle and mortar ornamented her helmet. Attention was drawn to the firm mouth, the piercing eye, the awe-inspiring brow, of the strong-minded woman of antiquity, and some scathing remarks made upon the degeneracy of her modern sisters who failed to do their duty. Mercury came next, and was very fine in his airy attitude, though the winged legs quivered as if it was difficult to keep the lively god in his place. His restless nature was dilated upon, his mischievous freaks alluded to, and a very bad character given to the immortal messenger-boy; which delighted his friends and caused the marble nose of the victim to curl visibly with scorn when derisive applause greeted a particularly hard hit. A charming little Hebe stood next, pouring nectar from a silver teapot into a blue china tea-cup. She also pointed a moral; for the Professor explained that the nectar of old was the beverage which cheers but does not inebriate, and regretted that the excessive devotion of American women to this classic brew proved so harmful, owing to the great development of brain their culture produced. A touch at modern servants, in contrast to this accomplished table-girl, made the statue’s cheeks glow under the chalk, and brought her a hearty round as the audience recognized

Dolly and the smart soubrette.

Jove in all his majesty followed, as he and his wife occupied the central pedestals in the half-circle of immortals. A splendid Jupiter, with hair well set up off the fine brow, ambrosial beard, silver thunderbolts in one hand, and a well-worn ferule in the other. A large stuffed eagle from the museum stood at his feet; and the benign expression of his august countenance showed that he was in a good humour — as well he might be, for he was paid some handsome compliments upon his wise rule, the peaceful state of his kingdom, and the brood of all-accomplished Pallases that yearly issued from his mighty brain. Cheers greeted this and other pleasant words, and caused the thunderer to bow his thanks; for 'Jove nods', as everyone knows, and flattery wins the heart of gods and men.

Mrs Juno, with her peacocks, darning-needle, pen, and cooking-spoon, did not get off so easily; for the Professor was down on her with all manner of mirth-provoking accusations, criticisms, and insults even. He alluded to her domestic infelicity, her meddlesome disposition, sharp tongue, bad temper, and jealousy, closing, however, with a tribute to her skill in caring for the wounds and settling the quarrels of belligerent heroes, as well as her love for youths in Olympus and on earth. Gales of laughter greeted these hits, varied by hisses from some indignant boys, who would not bear, even in joke, any disrespect to dear Mother Bhaer, who, however, enjoyed it all immensely, as the twinkle in her eye and the irrepressible pucker of her lips betrayed.

A jolly Bacchus astride of his cask took Vulcan's place, and appeared to be very comfortable with a beer-mug in one hand, a champagne bottle in the other, and a garland of grapes on his curly head. He was the text of a short temperance lecture, aimed directly at a row of smart young gentlemen who lined the walls of the auditorium. George Cole was seen to dodge behind a pillar at one point, Dolly nudged his neighbour at another, and there was laughter all along the line as the Professor glared at them through his big glasses, and dragged their bacchanalian orgies to the light and held them up to scorn.

Seeing the execution he had done, the learned man turned to the lovely Diana, who stood as white and still as the plaster stag beside her, with sandals, bow, and crescent; quite perfect, and altogether the best piece of statuary in the show. She was very tenderly treated by the paternal critic who, merely alluding to her confirmed spinsterhood, fondness for athletic sports, and oracular powers, gave a graceful little exposition of true art and passed on to the last figure.

This was Apollo in full fig, his curls skilfully arranged to hide a well-whitened patch over the eye, his handsome legs correctly poised, and his gifted fingers about to draw divine music from the silvered gridiron which was his lyre. His divine attributes were described, as well as his little follies and failings, among which were his weakness for photography and flute-playing, his attempts to run a newspaper, and his fondness for the society of the Muses; which latter slap produced giggles and blushes among the girl-graduates, and much mirth among the stricken youths; for misery loves company, and after this they began to rally.

Then, with a ridiculous conclusion, the Professor bowed his thanks; and after several recalls the curtain fell, but not quickly enough to conceal Mercury, wildly waving his liberated legs, Hebe dropping her teapot, Bacchus taking a lovely roll on his barrel, and Mrs Juno rapping the impertinent Owlsdark on the head with Jove's ruler.

While the audience filed out to supper in the hall, the stage was a scene of dire confusion as gods and goddesses, farmers and barons, maids and carpenters, congratulated one another on the success of their labours. Assuming various costumes, actors and actresses soon joined their guests, to sip bounteous draughts of praise with their coffee, and cool their modest blushes with ice-cream. Mrs Meg was a proud and happy woman when Miss Cameron came to her as she sat by Josie, with Demi serving both, and said, so cordially that it was impossible to doubt the sincerity of her welcome words:

'Mrs Brooke, I no longer wonder where your children get their talent. I make my compliments to the Baron and next summer you must let me have little "Dolly" as a pupil when we are at the beach.'

One can easily imagine how this offer was received, as well as the friendly commendation bestowed by the same kind critic on the work of Beaumont and Fletcher, who hastened to explain that this trifle was only an attempt to make nature and art go hand in hand, with little help from fine writing or imposing scenery. Everybody was in the happiest mood, especially 'little Dolly', who danced like a will-o'-the-wisp with light-footed Mercury and Apollo as he promenaded with the Marquise on his arm, who seemed to have left her coquetry in the green room with her rouge.

When all was over, Mrs Juno said to Jove, to whose arm she clung as they trudged home along the snowy paths: 'Fritz dear, Christmas is a good time for new resolutions, and I've made one never to be impatient or fretful with my beloved husband again. I know I am, though you won't own it; but Laurie's fun had some truth in it, and I felt hit in a tender spot. Henceforth I am a model wife, else I don't deserve the dearest, best man ever born'; and being in a dramatic mood, Mrs Juno tenderly embraced her excellent Jove in the moonlight, to the great amusement of sundry lingerers behind them.

So all three plays might be considered successes, and that merry Christmas night a memorable one in the March family; for Demi got an unspoken question answered, Josie’s fondest wish was granted, and, thanks to Professor Owlsdark’s jest, Mrs Jo made Professor Bhaer’s busy life quite a bed of roses by the keeping of her resolution. A few days later she had her reward for this burst of virtue in Dan’s letter, which set her fears at rest and made her very happy, though she was unable to tell him so, because he sent her no address.

Chapter 15. WAITING

‘My wife, I have bad news for thee,’ said Professor Bhaer, coming in one day early in January.

‘Please tell it at once. I can’t bear to wait, Fritz,’ cried Mrs Jo, dropping her work and standing up as if to take the shot bravely.

‘But we must wait and hope, heart’s-dearest. Come and let us bear it together. Emil’s ship is lost, and as yet no news of him.’

It was well Mr Bhaer had taken his wife into his strong arms, for she looked ready to drop, but bore up after a moment, and sitting by her good man, heard all that there was to tell. Tidings had been sent to the shipowners at Hamburg by some of the survivors, and telegraphed at once by Franz to his uncle. As one boat-load was safe, there was hope that others might also escape, though the gale had sent two to the bottom. A swift-sailing steamer had brought these scanty news, and happier ones might come at any hour; but kind Franz had not added that the sailors reported the captain’s boat as undoubtedly wrecked by the falling mast, since the smoke hid its escape, and the gale soon drove all far asunder. But this sad rumour reached Plumfield in time; and deep was the mourning for the happyhearted Commodore, never to come singing home again. Mrs Jo refused to believe it, stoutly insisting that Emil would outlive any storm and yet turn up safe and gay. It was well she clung to this hopeful view, for poor Mr Bhaer was much afflicted by the loss of his boy, because his sister’s sons had been his so long he scarcely knew a different love for his very own. Now was a chance for Mrs Juno to keep her word; and she did, speaking cheerily of Emil, even when hope waxed faint and her heart was heavy. If anything could comfort the Bhaers for the loss of one boy, it would have been the affection and sorrow shown by all the rest. Franz kept the cable busy with his varying messages, Nat sent loving letters from Leipzig, and Tom harassed the shipping agents for news. Even busy Jack wrote them with unusual warmth; Dolly and George came often, bearing the loveliest flowers and the daintiest bon-bons to cheer Mrs Bhaer and sweeten Josie’s grief; while good-hearted Ned travelled all the way from Chicago to press their hands and say, with a tear in his eye: ‘I was so anxious to hear all about the dear old boy, I couldn’t keep away.’

‘That’s right comfortable, and shows me that if I didn’t teach my boys anything else, I did give them the brotherly love that will make them stand by one another all their lives,’ said Mrs Jo, when he had gone.

Rob answered reams of sympathizing letters, which showed how many friends they had; and the kindly praises of the lost man would have made Emil a hero and a saint, had they all been true. The elders bore it quietly, having learned submission in life’s hard school; but the younger people rebelled; some hoped against hope and kept up, others despaired at once, and little Josie, Emil’s pet cousin and playmate, was so broken-hearted nothing could comfort her. Nan dosed in vain, Daisy’s cheerful words went by like the wind, and Bess’s devices to amuse her all failed utterly. To cry in mother’s arms and talk about the wreck, which haunted her even in her sleep, was all she cared to do; and Mrs Meg was getting anxious when Miss Cameron sent Josie a kind note bidding her learn bravely her first lesson in real tragedy, and be like the self-sacrificing heroines she loved to act. That did the little girl good, and she made an effort in which Teddy and Octoo helped her much; for the boy was deeply impressed by this sudden eclipse of the firefly whose light and life all missed when they were gone, and lured her out every day for long drives behind the black mare, who shook her silvery bells till they made such merry music Josie could not help listening to it, and whisked her over the snowy roads at a pace which set the blood dancing in her veins and sent her home strengthened and comforted by sunshine, fresh air, and congenial society — three aids young sufferers seldom can resist.

As Emil was helping nurse Captain Hardy, safe and well, aboard the ship, all this sorrow would seem wasted; but it was not, for it drew many hearts more closely together by a common grief, taught some patience, some sympathy, some regret for faults that lie heavy on the conscience when the one sinned against is gone, and all of them the solemn lesson to be ready when the summons comes. A hush lay over Plumfield for weeks, and the studious faces on the hill reflected the sadness of those in the valley. Sacred music sounded from Parnassus to comfort all who heard; the brown cottage was beseiged with gifts for the little mourner, and Emil’s flag hung at half-mast on the roof where he last sat with Mrs Jo.

So the weeks went heavily by till suddenly, like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, came the news, ‘All safe, letters on the way.’ Then up went the flag, out rang the college bells, bang went Teddy’s long-unused cannon, and a chorus of happy voices cried ‘Thank God’, as people went about, laughing, crying, and embracing one another in a rapture of delight. By and by the longed-for letters came, and all the story of the wreck was told; briefly by Emil, eloquently by Mrs Hardy, gratefully by the captain, while Mary added a few tender words that went straight to their hearts and seemed the sweetest of all. Never were letters so read, passed round, admired, and cried over as these; for Mrs Jo carried them in her pocket when Mr Bhaer did not have them in his, and both took a look at them when they said their prayers at night. Now the Professor was heard humming like a big bee again as he went to his classes, and the lines smoothed out of Mother Bhaer's forehead, while she wrote this real story to anxious friends and let her romances wait. Now messages of congratulation flowed in, and beaming faces showed everywhere. Rob amazed his parents by producing a poem which was remarkably good for one of his years, and Demi set it to music that it might be sung when the sailor boy returned. Teddy stood on his head literally, and tore about the neighbourhood on Octoo, like a second Paul Revere — only his tidings were good. But best of all, little Josie lifted up her head as the snowdrops did, and began to bloom again, growing tall and quiet, with the shadow of past sorrow to tone down her former vivacity and show that she had learned a lesson in trying to act well her part on the real stage, where all have to take their share in the great drama of life.

Now another sort of waiting began; for the travellers were on their way to Hamburg, and would stay there awhile before coming home, as Uncle Hermann owned the Brenda, and the captain must report to him. Emil must remain to Franz's wedding, deferred till now because of the season of mourning, so happily ended. These plans were doubly welcome and pleasant after the troublous times which went before, and no spring ever seemed so beautiful as this one; for, as Teddy put it:

'Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious by these sons of Bhaer!'

Franz and Emil being regarded in the light of elder brothers by the real 'sons of Bhaer'.

There was great scrubbing and dusting among the matrons as they set their houses in order not only for Class Day, but to receive the bride and groom, who were to come to them for the honeymoon trip. Great plans were made, gifts prepared, and much joy felt at the prospect of seeing Franz again; though Emil, who was to accompany them, would be the greater hero. Little did the dear souls dream what a surprise was in store for them, as they innocently laid their plans and wished all the boys could be there to welcome home their eldest and their Casablanca.

While they wait and work so happily, let us see how our other absent boys are faring as they too wait and work and hope for better days. Nat was toiling steadily along the path he had wisely chosen, though it was by no means strewn with flowers — quite thorny was it, in fact, and hard to travel, after the taste of ease and pleasure he had got when nibbling at forbidden fruit. But his crop of wild oats was a light one, and he resolutely reaped what he had sowed, finding some good wheat among the tares. He taught by day; he fiddled night after night in the dingy little theatre, and he studied so diligently that his master was well pleased, and kept him in mind as one to whom preferment was due, if any chance occurred. Gay friends forgot him; but the old ones stood fast, and cheered him up when Heimweh and weariness made him sad. As spring came on things mended — expenses grew less, work pleasanter, and life more bearable than when wintry storms beat on his thinly clad back, and frost pinched the toes that patiently trudged in old boots. No debts burdened him; the year of absence was nearly over; and if he chose to stay, Herr Bergmann had hopes for him that would bring independence for a time at least. So he walked under the lindens with a lighter heart, and in the May evenings went about the city with a band of strolling students, making music before houses where he used to sit as guest. No one recognized him in the darkness, though old friends often listened to the band; and once Minna threw him money, which he humbly received as part of his penance, being morbid on the subject of his sins.

His reward came sooner than he expected, and was greater than he deserved, he thought, though his heart leaped with joy when his master one day informed him that he was chosen, with several other of his most promising pupils, to join the musical society which was to take part in the great festival in London the next July. Here was not only honour for the violinist but happiness for the man, as it brought him nearer home, and would open a chance of further promotion and profit in his chosen profession.

‘Make thyself useful to Bachmeister there in London with thy English, and if all goes well with him, he will be glad to take thee to America, whither he goes in the early autumn for winter concerts. Thou hast done well these last months, and I have hopes of thee.’

As the great Bergmann seldom praised his pupils, these words filled Nat’s soul with pride and joy, and he worked yet more diligently than before to fulfil his master’s prophecy. He thought the trip to England happiness enough, but found room for more when, early in June, Franz and Emil paid him a flying visit, bringing all sorts of good news, kind wishes, and comfortable gifts for the lonely fellow, who could have fallen on their necks and cried like a girl at seeing his old mates again. How glad he was to be found in his little room busy at his proper work, not living like an idle gentleman on borrowed money! How proud he was to tell his plans, assure them that he had no debts, and receive their praises for his improvement in music, their respect for his economy and steadfastness in well-doing! How relieved when, having honestly confessed his shortcomings, they only laughed, and owned that they also had known like experiences, and were the wiser for them. He was to go to the wedding late in June, and join his comrades in London. As best man, he could not refuse the new suit Franz insisted on ordering for him; and a cheque from home about that time made him feel like a millionaire — and a happy one; for this was accompanied by such kind letters full of delight in his success, he felt that he had earned it, and waited for his joyful holiday with the impatience of a boy.

Dan meantime was also counting the weeks till August, when he would be free. But neither marriage-bells nor festival music awaited him; no friends would greet him as he left the prison; no hopeful prospect lay before him; no happy home-going was to be his. Yet his success was far greater than Nat's, though only God and one good man saw it. It was a hard-won battle; but he would never have to fight so terrible a one again; for though enemies would still assail from within and from without, he had found the little guide-book that Christian carried in his bosom, and Love, Penitence, and Prayer, the three sweet sisters, had given him the armour which would keep him safe. He had not learned to wear it yet, and chafed against it, though he felt its value, thanks to the faithful friend who had stood by him all that bitter year.

Soon he was to be free again, worn and scarred in the fray, but out among men in the blessed sun and air. When he thought of it Dan felt as if he could not wait, but must burst that narrow cell and fly away, as the caddis-worms he used to watch by the brookside shed their stony coffins, to climb the ferns and soar into the sky. Night after night he lulled himself to sleep with planning how, when he had seen Mary Mason according to his promise, he would steer straight for his old friends, the Indians, and in the wilderness hide his disgrace and heal his wounds. Working to save the many would atone for the sin of killing one, he thought; and the old free life would keep him safe from the temptations that beset him in cities.

‘By and by, when I'm all right again, and have something to tell that I'm not ashamed of, I'll go home,’ he said, with a quicker beat of the impetuous heart that longed to be there so intensely, he found it as hard to curb as one of his unbroken horses on the plains. ‘Not yet. I must get over this first. They'd see and smell and feel the prison taint on me, if I went now, and I couldn't look them in the face and hide the truth. I can't lose Ted's love, Mother Bhaer's confidence, and the respect of the girls, for they did respect my strength, anyway; but now they wouldn't touch me.’ And poor Dan looked with a shudder at the brown fist he clenched involuntarily as he remembered what it had done since a certain little white hand had laid in it confidingly. ‘I'll make ‘em proud of me yet; and no one shall ever know of this awful year. I can wipe it out, and I will, so help me God!’ And the clenched hand was held up as if to take a solemn oath that this lost year should yet be made good, if resolution and repentance could work the miracle.

Chapter 16. IN THE TENNIS-COURT

Athletic sports were in high favour at Plumfield; and the river where the old punt used to wabble about with a cargo of small boys, or echo to the shrill screams of little girls trying to get lilies, now was alive with boats of all kinds, from the slender wherry to the trim pleasure-craft, gay with cushions, awnings, and fluttering pennons. Everyone rowed, and the girls as well as the youths had their races, and developed their muscles in the most scientific manner. The large, level meadow near the old willow was now the college playground, and here baseball battles raged with fury, varied by football, leaping, and kindred sports fitted to split the fingers, break the ribs, and strain the backs of the too ambitious participants. The gentler pastimes of the damsels were at a safe distance from this Champ de Mars; croquet mallets clicked under the elms that fringed the field, rackets rose and fell energetically in several tennis-courts, and gates of different heights were handy to practise the graceful bound by which every girl expected to save her life some day when the mad bull, which was always coming but never seemed to arrive, should be bellowing at her heels.

One of these tennis grounds was called ‘Jo’s Court’, and here the little lady ruled like a queen; for she was fond of the game, and being bent on developing her small self to the highest degree of perfection, she was to be found at every leisure moment with some victim hard at it. On a certain pleasant Saturday afternoon she had been playing with Bess and beating her; for, though more graceful, the Princess was less active than her cousin, and cultivated her roses by quieter methods.

‘Oh dear! you are tired, and every blessed boy is at that stupid baseball match. ‘What shall I do?’ sighed Josie, pushing back the great red hat she wore, and gazing sadly round her for more worlds to conquer.

‘I’ll play presently, when I’m a little cooler. But it is dull work for me, as I never win,’ answered Bess, fanning herself with a large leaf.

Josie was about to sit down beside her on the rustic seat and wait, when her quick eye saw afar off two manly forms arrayed in white flannel; their blue legs seemed bearing them towards the battle going on in the distance; but they never reached the fray; for with a cry of joy, Jo raced away to meet them, bent on securing this heaven-sent reinforcement. Both paused as she came flying up, and both raised their hats; but oh, the difference there was in the salutes! The stout youth pulled his off lazily and put it on again at once, as if glad to get the duty over; the slender being, with the crimson tie, lifted his with a graceful bend, and held it aloft while he accosted the rosy, breathless maid, thus permitting her to see his raven locks smoothly parted, with one little curl upon the brow. Dolly prided himself upon that bow, and practised it before his glass, but did not bestow it upon all alike, regarding it as a work of art, fit only for the fairest and most favoured of his female admirers; for he was a pretty youth, and fancied himself an Adonis.

Eager Josie evidently did not appreciate the honour he did her, for with a nod she begged them both to ‘come along and play tennis, not go and get all hot and dirty with the boys’. These two adjectives won the day; for Stuffy was already warmer than he liked to be, and Dolly had on a new suit which he desired to keep immaculate as long as possible, conscious that it was very becoming.

‘Charmed to oblige,’ answered the polite one, with another bend.

‘You play, I’ll rest,’ added the fat boy, yearning for repose and gentle converse with the Princess in the cooling shade.

‘Well, you can comfort Bess, for I’ve beaten her all to bits and she needs amusing. I know you’ve got something nice in your pocket, George; give her some, and ‘Dolphus can have her racket. Now then, fly round’; and driving her prey before her, Josie returned in triumph to the court.

Casting himself ponderously upon the bench, which creaked under his weight, Stuffy — as we will continue to call him, though no one else dared to use the old name now — promptly produced the box of confectionery, without which he never travelled far, and regaled Bess with candied violets and other dainties, while Dolly worked hard to hold his own against a most accomplished antagonist. He would have beaten her if an unlucky stumble, which produced an unsightly stain upon the knee of those new shorts, had not distracted his mind and made him careless. Much elated at her victory, Josie permitted him to rest, and offered ironical consolation for the mishap which evidently weighed upon his mind.

‘Don’t be an old Betty; it can be cleaned. You must have been a cat in some former state, you are so troubled about dirt; or a tailor, and lived for clothes.’

‘Come now, don’t hit a fellow when he is down,’ responded Dolly from the grass where he and Stuffy now lay to make room for both girls on the seat. One handkerchief was spread under him, and his elbow leaned upon another, while his eyes were sadly fixed upon the green and brown spot which afflicted him. ‘I like to be neat; don’t think it civil to cut about in old shoes and grey flannel shirts before ladies. Our fellows are gentlemen, and dress as such,’ he added, rather nettled at the word ‘tailor’; for he owed one of those too attractive persons an uncomfortably big bill.

‘So are ours; but good clothes alone don’t make a gentleman here. We require a good deal more,’ flashed Josie, in arms at once to defend her college. ‘You will hear of some of the men in “old boots and grey flannel” when you and your fine gentlemen are twiddling your ties and scenting your hair in obscurity. I like old boots and wear them, and I hate dandies; don’t you, Bess?’

‘Not when they are kind to me, and belong to our old set,’ answered Bess, with a nod of thanks to Dolly, who was carefully removing an inquisitive caterpillar from one of her little russet shoes.

‘I like a lady who is always polite, and doesn’t snap a man’s head off if he has a mind of his own; don’t you, George?’ asked Dolly, with his best smile for Bess and a Harvard stare of disapprobation for Josie.

A tranquil snore was Stuffy’s sole reply, and a general laugh restored peace for the moment. But Josie loved to harass the lords of creation who asserted themselves too much, and bided her time for another attack till she had secured more tennis. She got another game; for Dolly was a sworn knight of dames, so he obeyed her call, leaving Bess to sketch George as he lay upon his back, his stout legs crossed, and his round red face partially eclipsed by his hat. Josie got beaten this time and came back rather cross, so she woke the peaceful sleeper by tickling his nose with a straw till he sneezed himself into a sitting posture, and looked wrathfully about for ‘that confounded fly’.

‘Come, sit up and let us have a little elegant conversation; you “howling swells” ought to improve our minds and manners, for we are only poor “country girls in dowdy gowns and hats”,’ began the gad-fly, opening the battle with a sly quotation from one of Dolly’s unfortunate speeches about certain studious damsels who cared more for books than finery.

‘I didn’t mean you! Your gowns are all right, and those hats the latest thing out,’ began poor ‘Dolphus, convicting himself by the incautious exclamation.

‘Caught you that time; I thought you fellows were all gentlemen, civil as well as nice. But you are always sneering at girls who don’t dress well and that is a very unmanly thing to do; my mother said so’; and Josie felt that she had dealt a shrewd blow at the elegant youth who bowed at many shrines if they were well-decorated ones.

‘Got you there, old boy, and she’s right. You never hear me talk about clothes and such twaddle,’ said Stuffy, suppressing a yawn, and feeling for another bon-bon wherewith to refresh himself.

‘You talk about eating, and that is even worse for a man. You will marry a cook and keep a restaurant some day,’ laughed Josie, down on him at once.

This fearful prediction kept him silent for several moments; but Dolly rallied, and wisely changing the subject, carried war into the enemy’s camp.

‘As you wanted us to improve your manners, allow me to say that young ladies in good society don’t make personal remarks or deliver lectures. Little girls who are not out do it, and think it witty; but I assure you it’s not good form.’

Josie paused a moment to recover from the shock of being called ‘a little girl’, when all the honours of her fourteenth birthday were fresh upon her; and Bess said, in the lofty tone which was infinitely more crushing than Jo’s impertinence:

‘That is true; but we have lived all our lives with superior people, so we have no society talk like your young ladies. We are so accustomed to sensible conversation, and helping one another by telling our faults, that we have no gossip to offer you.’

When the Princess reproved, the boys seldom resented it; so Dolly held his peace, and Josie burst out, following her cousin’s lead, which she thought a happy one:

‘Our boys like to have us talk with them, and take kindly any hints we give. They don’t think they know everything and are quite perfect at eighteen, as I’ve observed the Harvard men do, especially the very young ones.’

Josie took immense satisfaction in that return shot; and Dolly showed that he was hit, by the nettled tone in which he answered, with a supercilious glance at the hot, dusty, and noisy crowd on the baseball ground: ‘The class of fellows you have here need all the polish and culture you can give them; and I’m glad they get it. Our men are largely from the best families all over the country, so we don’t need girls to teach us anything.’

‘It’s a pity you don’t have more of such “fellows” as ours. They value and use well what college gives them, and aren’t satisfied to slip through, getting all the fun they can and shirking the work. Oh, I’ve heard you “men” talk, and heard your fathers say they wish they hadn’t wasted time and money just that you might say you’d been through college. As for the girls, you’ll be much better off in all ways when they do get in, and keep you lazy things up to the mark, as we do here.’

‘If you have such a poor opinion of us, why do you wear our colour?’ asked Dolly, painfully conscious that he was not improving the advantages his Alma Mater offered him, but bound to defend her.

‘I don’t; my hat is scarlet, not crimson. Much you know about a colour,’ scoffed Josie.

‘I know that a cross cow would soon set you scampering, if you flaunted that red tile under her nose,’ retorted Dolly.

‘I’m ready for her. Can your fine young ladies do this? or you either?’ and burning to display her latest accomplishment, Josie ran to the nearest gate, put one hand on the top rail, and vaulted over as lightly as a bird.

Bess shook her head, and Stuffy languidly applauded; but Dolly scorning to be braved by a girl, took a flying leap and landed on his feet beside Josie, saying calmly: ‘Can you do that?’

‘Not yet; but I will by and by.’

As his foe looked a little crestfallen, Dolly relented, and affably added sundry feats of a like nature, quite unconscious that he had fallen into a dreadful snare; for the dull red paint on the gate, not being used to such vigorous handling, came off in streaks upon his shoulders when he turned a backward swing and came up smiling, to be rewarded with the aggravating remark:

‘If you want to know what crimson is, look at your back; it’s nicely stamped on and won’t wash out, I think.’

‘The deuce it won’t!’ cried Dolly, trying to get an impossible view, and giving it up in great disgust.

‘I guess we’d better be going, Dolf,’ said peaceable Stuffy, feeling that it would be wise to retreat before another skirmish took place, as his side seemed to be getting the worst of it.

‘Don’t hurry, I beg; stay and rest; you must need it after the tremendous amount of brain work you’ve done this week. It is time for our Greek. Come, Bess. Good afternoon, gentlemen.’ And, with a sweeping courtesy, Josie led the way, with her hat belligerently cocked up, and her racket borne like a triumphal banner over one shoulder; for having had the last word, she felt that she could retire with the honours of war.

Dolly gave Bess his best bow, with the chill on; and Stuffy subsided luxuriously, with his legs in the air, murmuring in a dreamy tone:

‘Little Jo is as cross as two sticks today. I’m going in for another nap: too hot to play anything.’

‘So it is. Wonder if Spitfire was right about these beastly spots?’ And Dolly sat down to try dry cleansing with one of his handkerchiefs. ‘Asleep?’ he asked, after a few moments of this cheerful occupation, fearing that his chum might be too comfortable when he was in a fume himself.

‘No. I was thinking that Jo wasn’t far wrong about shirking. ‘Tis a shame to get so little done, when we ought to be grinding like Morton and Torry and that lot. I never wanted to go to college; but my governor made me. Much good it will do either of us!’ answered Stuffy, with a groan; for he hated work, and saw two more long years of it before him.

‘Gives a man prestige, you know. No need to dig. I mean to have a gay old time, and be a “howling swell”, if I choose. Between you and me though, it would be no end jolly to have the girls along. Study be hanged! But if we’ve got to turn the grindstone, it would be mighty nice to have some of the little dears to lend a hand. Wouldn’t it now?’

‘I’d like three this minute — one to fan me, one to kiss me, and one to give me some iced lemonade!’ sighed Stuffy, with a yearning glance towards the house, whence no succour appeared.

‘How would root-beer do?’ asked a voice behind them, which made Dolly spring to his feet and Stuffy roll over like a startled porpoise.

Sitting on the stile that crossed the wall near by was Mrs Jo, with two jugs slung over her shoulder by a strap, several tin mugs in her hand, and an old-fashioned sun-bonnet on her head.

‘I knew the boys would be killing themselves with ice-water; so I strolled down with some of my good, wholesome beer. They drank like fishes. But Silas was with me; so my cruse still holds out. Have some?’

‘Yes, thanks, very much. Let us pour it.’ And Dolly held the cup while Stuffy joyfully filled it; both very grateful, but rather afraid she had heard what went before the wish she fulfilled.

She proved that she had by saying, as they stood drinking her health, while she sat between them, looking like a middle-aged vivandiere, with her jugs and mugs:

‘I was glad to hear you say you would like to have girls at your college; but I hope you will learn to speak more respectfully of them before they come; for that will be the first lesson they will teach you.’

‘Really, ma’am, I was only joking,’ began Stuffy, gulping down his beer in a hurry.

‘So was I. I’m sure I — I’m devoted to ‘em,’ stuttered Dolly, panic-stricken; for he saw that he was in for a lecture of some sort.

‘Not in the right way. Frivolous girls may like to be called “little dears” and things of that sort; but the girls who love study wish to be treated like reasonable beings, not dolls to flirt with. Yes, I’m going to preach; that’s my business; so stand up and take it like men.’

Mrs Jo laughed; but she was in earnest; for by various hints and signs during the past winter she knew that the boys were beginning to ‘see life’ in the way she especially disapproved. Both were far from home, had money enough to waste, and were as inexperienced, curious, and credulous as most lads of their age. Not fond of books, therefore without the safeguard which keeps many studious fellows out of harm; one self-indulgent, indolent, and so used to luxury that pampering of the senses was an easy thing; the other vain, as all comely boys are, full of conceit, and so eager to find favour in the eyes of his comrades that he was ready for anything which would secure it. These traits and foibles made both peculiarly liable to the temptations which assail pleasure-loving and weak-willed boys. Mrs Jo knew them well, and had dropped many a warning word since they went to college; but till lately they seemed not to understand some of her friendly hints; now she was sure they would, and meant to speak out: for long experience with boys made her both bold and skilful in handling some of the dangers usually left to silence, till it is too late for anything but pity and reproach.

‘I’m going to talk to you like a mother, because yours are far away; and there are things that mothers can manage best, if they do their duty,’ she solemnly began from the depths of the sunbonnet.

‘Great Scott! We’re in for it now!’ thought Dolly, in secret dismay; while Stuffy got the first blow by trying to sustain himself with another mug of beer.

‘That won’t hurt you; but I must warn you about drinking other things, George. Overeating is an old story; and a few more fits of illness will teach you to be wise. But drinking is a more serious thing, and leads to worse harm than any that can afflict your body alone. I hear you talk about wines as if you knew them and cared more for them than a boy should; and several times I’ve heard jokes that meant mischief. For heaven’s sake, don’t begin to play with this dangerous taste “for fun”, as you say, or because it’s the fashion, and the other fellows do. Stop at once, and learn that temperance in all things is the only safe rule.’

‘Upon my honour, I only take wine and iron. I need a tonic, mother says, to repair the waste of brain-tissue while I’m studying,’ protested Stuffy, putting down the mug as if it burnt his fingers.

‘Good beef and oatmeal will repair your tissues much better than any tonic of that sort. Work and plain fare are what you want; and I wish I had you here for a few months out of harm’s way. I’d Banting you, and fit you to run without puffing, and get on without four or five meals a day. What an absurd hand that is for a man! You ought to be ashamed of it!’ And Mrs Jo caught up the plump fist, with deep dimples at each knuckle, which was fumbling distressfully at the buckle of the belt girt about a waist far too large for a youth of his age.

‘I can’t help it — we all grow fat; it’s in the family,’ said Stuffy in self-defence.

‘All the more reason you should live carefully. Do you want to die early, or be an invalid all your life?’

‘No, ma’am!’

Stuffy looked so scared that Mrs Jo could not be hard upon his budding sins, for they lay at his overindulgent mother’s door line in a great measure; so she softened the tone of her voice, and added, with a little slap on the fat hand, as she used to do when it was small enough to pilfer lumps of sugar from her bowl:

'Then be careful; for a man writes his character in his face; and you don't want gluttony and intemperance in yours, I know.'

'I'm sure I don't! Please make out a wholesome bill of fare, and I'll stick to it, if I can. I am getting stout, and I don't like it; and my liver's torpid, and I have palpitations and headache. Overwork, mother says; but it may be overeating.' And Stuffy gave a sigh of mingled regret for the good things he renounced, and relief as he finished loosening his belt as soon as his hand was free.

'I will; follow it, and in a year you'll be a man and not a meal-bag. Now, Dolly'; and Mrs Jo turned to the other culprit, who shook in his shoes and wished he hadn't come.

'Are you studying French as industriously as you were last winter?'

'No ma'am; I don't care for it — that is, I, I'm busy with G-Greek just now,' answered Dolly, beginning bravely, quite in the dark as to what that odd question meant till a sudden memory made him stutter and look at his shoes with deep interest.

'Oh, he doesn't study it; only reads French novels and goes to the theatre when the opera bouffe is here,' said Stuffy, innocently confirming Mrs Jo's suspicions.

'So I understood; and that is what I want to speak about. Ted had a sudden desire to learn French in that way, from something you said, Dolly; so I went myself, and was quite satisfied that it was no place for a decent boy. Your men were out in full force; and I was glad to see that some of the younger ones looked as ashamed as I felt. The older fellows enjoyed it, and when we came out were waiting to take those painted girls to supper. Did you ever go with them?'

'Once.'

'Did you like it?'

'No 'm; I — I came away early,' stammered Dolly, with a face as red as his splendid tie.

'I'm glad you have not lost the grace of blushing yet; but you will soon, if you keep up this sort of study and forget to be ashamed. The society of such women will unfit you for that of good ones, and lead you into trouble and sin and shame. Oh, why don't the city fathers stop that evil thing, when they know the harm it does? It made my heart ache to see those boys, who ought to be at home and in their beds, going off for a night of riot which would help to ruin some of them for ever.'

The youths looked scared at Mrs Jo's energetic protest against one of the fashionable pleasures of the day, and waited in conscience-stricken silence — Stuffy glad that he never went to those gay suppers, and Dolly deeply grateful that he ‘came away early’. With a hand on either shoulder, and all the terrors smoothed from her brow, Mrs Jo went on in her most motherly tone, anxious to do for them what no other woman would, and do it kindly:

‘My dear boys, if I didn’t love you, I would not say these things. I know they are not pleasant; but my conscience won’t let me hold my peace when a word may keep you from two of the great sins that curse the world and send so many young men to destruction. You are just beginning to feel the allurement of them, and soon it will be hard to turn away. Stop now, I beg of you, and not only save yourselves but help others by a brave example. Come to me if things worry you; don’t be afraid or ashamed; I have heard many sadder confessions than any you are ever likely to bring me, and been able to comfort many poor fellows, gone wrong for want of a word in time. Do this, and you will be able to kiss your mothers with clean lips, and by and by have the right to ask innocent girls to love you.’

‘Yes’m, thank you. I suppose you’re right; but it’s pretty hard work to toe the mark when ladies give you wine and gentlemen take their daughters to see Aimee,’ said Dolly, foreseeing tribulations ahead though he knew it was time to ‘pull up’.

‘So it is; but all the more honour to those who are brave and wise enough to resist public opinion, and the easy-going morals of bad or careless men and women. Think of the persons whom you respect most, and in imitating them you will secure the respect of those who look up to you. I’d rather my boys should be laughed at and cold-shouldered by a hundred foolish fellows than lose what, once gone, no power can give them back — innocence and self-respect. I don’t wonder you find it “hard to toe the mark”, when books, pictures, ball-rooms, theatres, and streets offer temptations; yet you can resist, if you try. Last winter Mrs Brooke used to worry about John’s being out so late reporting; but when she spoke to him about the things he must see and hear on his way to and fro from the office at midnight, he said in his sober way, “I know what you mean, mother; but no fellow need to go wrong unless he wants to.”

‘That’s like the Deacon!’ exclaimed Stuffy, with an approving smile on his fat face.

‘I’m glad you told me that. He’s right; and it’s because he doesn’t want to go wrong we all respect him so,’ added Dolly, looking up now with an expression which assured his Mentor that the right string had been touched, and a spirit of emulation roused, more helpful, perhaps, than any words of hers. Seeing this, she was satisfied, and said, as she prepared to leave the bar before which her culprits had been tried and found guilty, but recommended to mercy:

‘Then be to others what John is to you — a good example. Forgive me for troubling you, my dear lads, and remember my little preachment. I think it will do you good, though I may never know it. Chance words spoken in kindness often help amazingly; and that's what old people are here for — else their experience is of little use. Now, come and find the young folk. I hope I shall never have to shut the gates of Plumfield upon you, as I have on some of your "gentlemen". I mean to keep my boys and girls safe if I can, and this a wholesome place where the good old-fashioned virtues are lived and taught.'

Much impressed by that dire threat, Dolly helped her from her perch with deep respect; and Stuffy relieved her of her empty jugs, solemnly vowing to abstain from all fermented beverages except root-beer, as long as feeble flesh could hold out. Of course they made light of 'Mother Bhaer's lecture' when they were alone — that was to be expected of 'men of our class' but in their secret souls they thanked her for giving their boyish consciences a jog, and more than once afterward had cause to remember gratefully that half-hour in the tennis court.

Chapter 17. AMONG THE MAIDS

Although this story is about Jo’s boys, her girls cannot be neglected, because they held a high place in this little republic, and especial care was taken to fit them to play their parts worthily in the great republic which offered them wider opportunities and more serious duties. To many the social influence was the better part of the training they received; for education is not confined to books, and the finest characters often graduate from no college, but make experience their master, and life their book. Others cared only for the mental culture, and were in danger of over-studying, under the delusion which pervades New England that learning must be had at all costs, forgetting that health and real wisdom are better. A third class of ambitious girls hardly knew what they wanted, but were hungry for whatever could fit them to face the world and earn a living, being driven by necessity, the urgency of some half-conscious talent, or the restlessness of strong young natures to break away from the narrow life which no longer satisfied.

At Plumfield all found something to help them; for the growing institution had not yet made its rules as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and believed so heartily in the right of all sexes, colours, creeds, and ranks to education, that there was room for everyone who knocked, and a welcome to the shabby youths from up country, the eager girls from the West, the awkward freedman or woman from the South, or the well-born student whose poverty made this college a possibility when other doors were barred. There still was prejudice, ridicule, neglect in high places, and prophecies of failure to contend against; but the Faculty was composed of cheerful, hopeful men and women who had seen greater reforms spring from smaller roots, and after stormy seasons blossom beautifully, to add prosperity and honour to the nation. So they worked on steadily and bided their time, full of increasing faith in their attempt as year after year their numbers grew, their plans succeeded, and the sense of usefulness in this most vital of all professions blessed them with its sweet rewards.

Among the various customs which had very naturally sprung up was one especially useful and interesting to ‘the girls’, as the young women liked to be called. It all grew out of the old sewing hour still kept up by the three sisters long after the little work-boxes had expanded into big baskets full of household mending. They were busy women, yet on Saturdays they tried to meet in one of the three sewing-rooms; for even classic Parnassus had its nook where Mrs Amy often sat among her servants, teaching them to make and mend, thereby giving them a respect for economy, since the rich lady did not scorn to darn her hose, and sew on buttons. In these household retreats, with books and work, and their daughters by them, they read and sewed and talked in the sweet privacy that domestic women love, and can make so helpful by a wise mixture of cooks and chemistry, table linen and theology, prosaic duties and good poetry.

Mrs Meg was the first to propose enlarging this little circle; for as she went her motherly rounds among the young women she found a sad lack of order, skill, and industry in this branch of education. Latin, Greek, the higher mathematics, and science of all sorts prospered finely; but the dust gathered on the work-baskets, frayed elbows went unheeded, and some of the blue stockings sadly needed mending. Anxious lest the usual sneer at learned women should apply to 'our girls', she gently lured two or three of the most untidy to her house, and made the hour so pleasant, the lesson so kindly, that they took the hint, were grateful for the favour, and asked to come again. Others soon begged to make the detested weekly duty lighter by joining the party, and soon it was a privilege so much desired that the old museum was refitted with sewing-machines, tables, rocking-chair, and a cheerful fireplace, so that, rain or shine, the needles might go on undisturbed.

Here Mrs Meg was in her glory, and stood wielding her big shears like a queen as she cut out white work, fitted dresses, and directed Daisy, her special aide, about the trimming of hats, and completing the lace and ribbon trifles which add grace to the simplest costume and save poor or busy girls so much money and time. Mrs Amy contributed taste, and decided the great question of colours and complexions; for few women, even the most learned, are without that desire to look well which makes many a plain face comely, as well as many a pretty one ugly for want of skill and knowledge of the fitness of things. She also took her turn to provide books for the readings, and as art was her forte she gave them selections from Ruskin, Hamerton, and Mrs Jameson, who is never old. Bess read these aloud as her contribution, and Josie took her turn at the romances, poetry, and plays her uncles recommended. Mrs Jo gave little lectures on health, religion, politics, and the various questions in which all should be interested, with copious extracts from Miss Cobbe's Duties of Women, Miss Brackett's Education of American Girls, Mrs Duffy's No Sex in Education, Mrs Woolson's Dress Reform, and many of the other excellent books wise women write for their sisters, now that they are waking up and asking: 'What shall we do?'

It was curious to see the prejudices melt away as ignorance was enlightened, indifference change to interest, and intelligent minds set thinking, while quick wits and lively tongues added spice to the discussions which inevitably followed.

So the feet that wore the neatly mended hose carried wiser heads than before, the pretty gowns covered hearts warmed with higher purposes, and the hands that dropped the thimbles for pens, lexicons, and celestial globes, were better fitted for life's work, whether to rock cradles, tend the sick, or help on the great work of the world.

One day a brisk discussion arose concerning careers for women. Mrs Jo had read something on the subject and asked each of the dozen girls sitting about the room, what she intended to do on leaving college. The answers were as usual: 'I shall teach, help mother, study medicine, art,' etc.; but nearly all ended with:

'Till I marry.'

'But if you don't marry, what then?' asked Mrs Jo, feeling like a girl again as she listened to the answers, and watched the thoughtful, gay, or eager faces.

'Be old maids, I suppose. Horrid, but inevitable, since there are so many superfluous women,' answered a lively lass, too pretty to fear single blessedness unless she chose it.

'It is well to consider that fact, and fit yourselves to be useful, not superfluous women. That class, by the way, is largely made up of widows, I find; so don't consider it a slur on maidenhood.'

'That's a comfort! Old maids aren't sneered at half as much as they used to be, since some of them have grown famous and proved that woman isn't a half but a whole human being, and can stand alone.'

'Don't like it all the same. We can't all be like Miss Nightingale, Miss Phelps, and the rest.'

So what can we do but sit in a corner and look on?' asked a plain girl with a dissatisfied expression.

'Cultivate cheerfulness and content, if nothing else. But there are so many little odd jobs waiting to be done that nobody need "sit idle and look on", unless she chooses,' said Mrs Meg, with a smile, laying on the girl's head the new hat she had just trimmed.

'Thank you very much. Yes, Mrs Brooke, I see; it's a little job, but it makes me neat and happy — and grateful,' she added, looking up with brighter eyes as she accepted the labour of love and the lesson as sweetly as they were given.

'One of the best and most beloved women I know has been doing odd jobs for the Lord for years, and will keep at it till her dear hands are folded in her coffin. All sorts of things she does — picks up neglected children and puts them in safe homes, saves lost girls, nurses poor women in trouble, sews, knits, trots, begs, works for the poor day after day with no reward but the thanks of the needy, the love and honour of the rich who make Saint Matilda their almoner. That's a life worth living; and I think that quiet little woman will get a higher seat in Heaven than many of those of whom the world has heard.’

‘I know it’s lovely, Mrs Bhaer; but it’s dull for young folks. We do want a little fun before we buckle to,’ said a Western girl with a wide-awake face.

‘Have your fun, my dear; but if you must earn your bread, try to make it sweet with cheerfulness, not bitter with the daily regret that it isn’t cake. I used to think mine was a very hard fate because I had to amuse a somewhat fretful old lady; but the books I read in that lonely library have been of immense use to me since, and the dear old soul bequeathed me Plumfield for my “cheerful service and affectionate care”. I didn’t deserve it, but I did use to try to be jolly and kind, and get as much honey out of duty as I could, thanks to my dear mother’s help and advice.’

‘Gracious! if I could earn a place like this, I’d sing all day and be an angel; but you have to take your chance, and get nothing for your pains, perhaps. I never do,’ said the Westerner, who had a hard time with small means and large aspirations.

‘Don’t do it for the reward; but be sure it will come, though not in the shape you expect. I worked hard for fame and money one winter; but I got neither, and was much disappointed. A year afterwards I found I had earned two prizes: skill with my pen, and Professor Bhaer.’

Mrs Jo’s laugh was echoed blithely by the girls, who liked to have these conversations enlivened by illustrations from life.

‘You are a very lucky woman,’ began the discontented damsel, whose soul soared above new hats, welcome as they were, but did not quite know where to steer.

‘Yet her name used to be “Luckless Jo”, and she never had what she wanted till she had given up hoping for it,’ said Mrs Meg.

‘I’ll give up hoping, then, right away, and see if my wishes will come. I only want to help my folks, and get a good school.’

‘Take this proverb for your guide: “Get the distaff ready, and the Lord will send the flax”,’ answered Mrs Jo.

‘We’d better all do that, if we are to be spinsters,’ said the pretty one, adding gaily, ‘I think I should like it, on the whole — they are so independent. My Aunt Jenny can do just what she likes, and ask no one’s leave; but Ma has to consult Pa about everything. Yes, I’ll give you my chance, Sally, and be a “superfluum”, as Mr Plock says.’

‘You’ll be one of the first to go into bondage, see if you aren’t. Much obliged, all the same.’

‘Well, I’ll get my distaff ready, and take whatever flax the Fates send — single, or double-twisted, as the powers please.’

‘That is the right spirit, Nelly. Keep it up, and see how happy life will be with a brave heart, a willing hand, and plenty to do.’

‘No one objects to plenty of domestic work or fashionable pleasure, I find; but the minute we begin to study, people tell us we can’t bear it, and warn us to be very careful. I’ve tried the other things, and got so tired I came to college; though my people predict nervous exhaustion and an early death. Do you think there is any danger?’ asked a stately girl, with an anxious glance at the blooming face reflected in the mirror opposite.

‘Are you stronger or weaker than when you came two years ago, Miss Winthrop?’

‘Stronger in body, and much happier in mind. I think I was dying of ennui; but the doctors called it inherited delicacy of constitution. That is why mamma is so anxious, and I wish not to go too fast.’

‘Don’t worry, my dear; that active brain of yours was starving for good food; it has plenty now, and plain living suits you better than luxury and dissipation. It is all nonsense about girls not being able to study as well as boys. Neither can bear cramming; but with proper care both are better for it; so enjoy the life your instinct led you to, and we will prove that wise headwork is a better cure for that sort of delicacy than tonics, and novels on the sofa, where far too many of our girls go to wreck nowadays. They burn the candle at both ends; and when they break down they blame the books, not the balls.’

‘Dr Nan was telling me about a patient of hers who thought she had heart-complaint, till Nan made her take off her corsets, stopped her coffee and dancing all night, and made her eat, sleep, walk, and live regularly for a time; and now she’s a brilliant cure. Common sense versus custom, Nan said.’

‘I’ve had no headaches since I came here, and can do twice as much studying as I did at home. It’s the air, I think, and the fun of going ahead of the boys,’ said another girl, tapping her big forehead with her thimble, as if the lively brain inside was in good working order and enjoyed the daily gymnastics she gave it.

‘Quality, not quantity, wins the day, you know. Our brains may be smaller, but I don’t see that they fall short of what is required of them; and if I’m not mistaken, the largest-headed man in our class is the dullest,’ said Nelly, with a solemn air which produced a gale of merriment; for all knew that the young Goliath she mentioned had been metaphorically slain by this quick-witted David on many a battle-field, to the great disgust of himself and his mates.

‘Mrs Brooke, do I gauge on the right or the wrong side?’ asked the best Greek scholar of her class, eyeing a black silk apron with a lost expression.

‘The right, Miss Pierson; and leave a space between the tucks; it looks prettier so.’

‘I’ll never make another; but it will save my dresses from ink-stains, so I’m glad I’ve got it’; and the erudite Miss Pierson laboured on, finding it a harder task than any Greek root she ever dug up.

‘We paper-stainers must learn how to make shields, or we are lost. I’ll give you a pattern of the pinafore I used to wear in my “blood-and-thunder days”, as we call them,’ said Mrs Jo, trying to remember what became of the old tin-kitchen which used to hold her works.

‘Speaking of writers reminds me that my ambition is to be a George Eliot, and thrill the world! It must be so splendid to know that one has such power, and to hear people own that one possesses a “masculine intellect”! I don’t care for most women’s novels, but hers are immense; don’t you think so, Mrs Bhaer?’ asked the girl with the big forehead, and torn braid on her skirt.

‘Yes; but they don’t thrill me as little Charlotte Bronte’s books do. The brain is there, but the heart seems left out. I admire, but I don’t love, George Eliot; and her life is far sadder to me than Miss Bronte’s, because, in spite of the genius, love, and fame, she missed the light without which no soul is truly great, good, or happy.’

‘Yes’m, I know; but still it’s so romantic and sort of new and mysterious, and she was great in one sense. Her nerves and dyspepsia do rather destroy the illusion; but I adore famous people and mean to go and see all I can scare up in London some day.’

‘You will find some of the best of them busy about just the work I recommend to you; and if you want to see a great lady, I’ll tell you that Mrs Laurence means to bring one here today. Lady Abercrombie is lunching with her, and after seeing the college is to call on us. She especially wanted to see our sewing-school, as she is interested in things of this sort, and gets them up at home.’

‘Bless me! I always imagined lords and ladies did nothing but ride round in a coach and six, go to balls, and be presented to the Queen in cocked hats, and trains and feathers,’ exclaimed an artless young person from the wilds of Maine, whither an illustrated paper occasionally wandered.

‘Not at all; Lord Abercrombie is over here studying up our American prison system, and my lady is busy with the schools — both very high-born, but the simplest and most sensible people I’ve met this long time. They are neither of them young nor handsome, and dress plainly; so don’t expect anything splendid. Mr Laurence was telling me last night about a friend of his who met my lord in the hall, and owing to a rough greatcoat and a red face, mistook him for a coachman, and said: “Now, my man, what do you want here?” Lord Abercrombie mildly mentioned who he was, and that he had come to dinner. And the poor host was much afflicted, saying afterward: “Why didn’t he wear his stars and garters? then a fellow would know he was a lord."'

The girls laughed again, and a general rustle betrayed that each was prinking a bit before the titled guest arrived. Even Mrs Jo settled her collar, and Mrs Meg felt if her cap was right, while Bess shook out her curls and Josie boldly consulted the glass; for they were women, in spite of philosophy and philanthropy.

'Shall we all rise?' asked one girl, deeply impressed by the impending honour.

'It would be courteous.'

'Shall we shake hands?'

'No, I'll present you en masse, and your pleasant faces will be introduction enough.'

'I wish I'd worn my best dress. Ought to have told us,' whispered Sally.

'Won't my folks be surprised when I tell them we have had a real lady to call on us?' said another.

'Don't look as if you'd never seen a gentlewoman before, Milly. We are not all fresh from the wilderness,' added the stately damsel who, having Mayflower ancestors, felt that she was the equal of all the crowned heads of Europe.

'Hush, she's coming! Oh, my heart, what a bonnet!' cried the gay girl in a stage whisper; and every eye was demurely fixed upon the busy hands as the door opened to admit Mrs Laurence and her guest.

It was rather a shock to find, after the general introduction was over, that this daughter of a hundred earls was a stout lady in a plain gown, and a rather weather-beaten bonnet, with a bag of papers in one hand and a note-book in the other. But the face was full of benevolence, the sonorous voice very kind, the genial manners very winning, and about the whole person an indescribable air of high breeding which made beauty of no consequence, costume soon forgotten, and the moment memorable to the keen-eyed girls whom nothing escaped.

A little chat about the rise, growth, and success of this particular class, and then Mrs Jo led the conversation to the English lady's work, anxious to show her pupils how rank dignifies labour, and charity blesses wealth.

It was good for these girls to hear of the evening-schools supported and taught by women whom they knew and honoured; of Miss Cobbe's eloquent protest winning the protection of the law for abused wives; Mrs Butler saving the lost; Mrs Taylor, who devoted one room in her historic house to a library for the servants; Lord Shaftesbury, busy with his new tenement-houses in the slums of London; of prison reforms; and all the brave work being done in God's name by the rich and great for the humble and the poor. It impressed them more than many quiet home lectures would have done, and roused an ambition to help when their time should come, well knowing that even in glorious America there is still plenty to be done before she is what she should be — truly just, and free, and great. They were also quick to see that Lady Abercrombie treated all there as her equals, from stately Mrs Laurence, to little Josie, taking notes of everything and privately resolving to have some thick-soled English boots as soon as possible. No one would have guessed that she had a big house in London, a castle in Wales, and a grand country seat in Scotland, as she spoke of Parnassus with admiration, Plumfield as a ‘dear old home’, and the college as an honour to all concerned in it. At that, of course, every head went up a little, and when my lady left, every hand was ready for the hearty shake the noble Englishwoman gave them, with words they long remembered:

‘I am very pleased to see this much-neglected branch of a woman’s education so well conducted here, and I have to thank my friend Mrs Laurence for one of the most charming pictures I’ve seen in America — Penelope among her maids.’

A group of smiling faces watched the stout boots trudge away, respectful glances followed the shabby bonnet till it was out of sight, and the girls felt a truer respect for their titled guest than if she had come in the coach and six, with all her diamonds on.

‘I feel better about the “odd jobs” now. I only wish I could do them as well as Lady Abercrombie does,’ said one.

‘I thanked my stars my buttonholes were nice, for she looked at them and said: “Quite workmanlike, upon my word,” added another, feeling that her gingham gown had come to honour.

‘Her manners were as sweet and kind as Mrs Brooke’s. Not a bit stiff or condescending, as I expected. I see now what you meant, Mrs Bhaer, when you said once that well-bred people were the same all the world over.’

Mrs Meg bowed her thanks for the compliment, and Mrs Bhaer said:

‘I know them when I see them, but never shall be a model of deportment myself. I’m glad you enjoyed the little visit. Now, if you young people don’t want England to get ahead of us in many ways, you must bestir yourselves and keep abreast; for our sisters are in earnest, you see, and don’t waste time worrying about their sphere, but make it wherever duty calls them.’

‘We will do our best, ma’am,’ answered the girls heartily, and trooped away with their work-baskets, feeling that though they might never be Harriet Martineaus, Elizabeth Brownings, or George Eliots, they might become noble, useful, and independent women, and earn for themselves some sweet title from the grateful lips of the poor, better than any a queen could bestow.

Chapter 18. CLASS DAY

The clerk of the weather evidently has a regard for young people, and sends sunshine for class days as often as he can. An especially lovely one shone over Plumfield as this interesting anniversary came round, bringing the usual accompaniments of roses, strawberries, white-gowned girls, beaming youths, proud friends, and stately dignitaries full of well-earned satisfaction with the yearly harvest. As Laurence College was a mixed one, the presence of young women as students gave to the occasion a grace and animation entirely wanting where the picturesque half of creation appear merely as spectators. The hands that turned the pages of wise books also possessed the skill to decorate the hall with flowers; eyes tired with study shone with hospitable warmth on the assembling guests; and under the white muslins beat hearts as full of ambition, hope, and courage as those agitating the broadcloth of the ruling sex.

College Hill, Parnassus, and old Plum swarmed with cheery faces, as guests, students, and professors hurried to and fro in the pleasant excitement of arriving and receiving. Everyone was welcomed cordially, whether he rolled up in a fine carriage, or trudged afoot to see the good son or daughter come to honour on the happy day that rewarded many a mutual sacrifice. Mr Laurie and his wife were on the reception committee, and their lovely house was overflowing. Mrs Meg, with Daisy and Jo as aides, was in demand among the girls, helping on belated toilettes, giving an eye to spreads, and directing the decorations. Mrs Jo had her hands full as President's lady, and the mother of Ted; for it took all the power and skill of that energetic woman to get her son into his Sunday best.

Not that he objected to be well arrayed; far from it; he adored good clothes, and owing to his great height already revelled in a dress-suit, bequeathed him by a dandy friend. The effect was very funny; but he would wear it in spite of the jeers of his mates, and sighed vainly for a beaver, because his stern parent drew the line there. He pleaded that English lads of ten wore them and were 'no end nobby'; but his mother only answered, with a consoling pat of the yellow mane:

'My child, you are absurd enough now; if I let you add a tall hat, Plumfield wouldn't hold either of us, such would be the scorn and derision of all beholders. Content yourself with looking like the ghost of a waiter, and don't ask for the most ridiculous head-gear in the known world.'

Denied this noble badge of manhood, Ted soothed his wounded soul by appearing in collars of an amazing height and stiffness, and ties which were the wonder of all female eyes. This freak was a sort of vengeance on his hard-hearted mother; for the collars drove the laundress to despair, never being just right, and the ties required such art in the tying that three women sometimes laboured long before — like Beau Brummel — he turned from a heap of ‘failures’ with the welcome words: ‘That will do.’ Rob was devoted on these trying occasions, his own toilet being distinguished only by its speed, simplicity, and neatness. Ted was usually in a frenzy before he was suited, and roars, whistles, commands, and groans were heard from the den wherein the Lion raged and the Lamb patiently toiled. Mrs Jo bore it till boots were hurled and a rain of hair-brushes set in, then, fearing for the safety of her eldest, she would go to the rescue, and by a wise mixture of fun and authority finally succeed in persuading Ted that he was ‘a thing of beauty’, if not ‘a joy for ever’. At last he would stalk majestically forth, imprisoned in collars compared to which those worn by Dickens’s afflicted Biler were trifles not worth mentioning. The dresscoat was a little loose in the shoulders, but allowed a noble expanse of glossy bosom to be seen, and with a delicate handkerchief negligently drooping at the proper angle, had a truly fine effect. Boots that shone, and likewise pinched, appeared at one end of the ‘long, black clothes-pin’ — as Josie called him — -and a youthful but solemn face at the other, carried at an angle which, if long continued, would have resulted in spinal curvature. Light gloves, a cane, and — oh, bitter drop in the cup of joy! — an ignominious straw hat, not to mention a choice floweret in the buttonhole, and a festoon of watchguard below, finished off this impressive boy.

‘How’s that for style?’ he asked, appearing to his mother and cousins whom he was to escort to the hall on this particular occasion.

A shout of laughter greeted him, followed by exclamations of horror; for he had artfully added the little blond moustache he often wore when acting. It was very becoming, and seemed the only balm to heal the wound made by the loss of the beloved hat.

‘Take it off this moment, you audacious boy! What would your father say to such a prank on this day when we must all behave our best?’ said Mrs Jo, trying to frown, but privately thinking that among the many youths about her none were so beautiful and original as her long son.

‘Let him wear it, Aunty; it’s so becoming. No one will ever guess he isn’t eighteen at least,’ cried Josie, to whom disguise of any sort was always charming.

‘Father won’t observe it; he’ll be absorbed in his big-wigs and the girls. No matter if he does, he’ll enjoy the joke and introduce me as his oldest son. Rob is nowhere when I’m in full fig’; and Ted took the stage with a tragic stalk, like

Hamlet in a tail-coat and choker.

‘My son, obey me!’ and when Mrs Jo spoke in that tone her word was law. Later, however, the moustache appeared, and many strangers firmly believed that there were three young Bhaers. So Ted found one ray of joy to light his gloom.

Mr Bhaer was a proud and happy man when, at the appointed hour, he looked down upon the parterre of youthful faces before him, thinking of the ‘little gardens’ in which he had hopefully and faithfully sowed good seed years ago, and from which this beautiful harvest seemed to have sprung. Mr March’s fine old face shone with the serenest satisfaction, for this was the dream of his life fulfilled after patient waiting; and the love and reverence in the countenances of the eager young men and women looking up at him plainly showed that the reward he coveted was his in fullest measure. Laurie always effaced himself on these occasions as much as courtesy would permit; for everyone spoke gratefully in ode, poem, and oration of the founder of the college and noble dispenser of his beneficence. The three sisters beamed with pride as they sat among the ladies, enjoying, as only women can, the honour done the men they loved; while ‘the original Plums’, as the younger ones called themselves, regarded the whole affair as their work, receiving the curious, admiring, or envious glances of strangers with a mixture of dignity and delight rather comical to behold.

The music was excellent, and well it might be when Apollo waved the baton. The poems were — as usual on such occasions — of varied excellence, as the youthful speakers tried to put old truths into new words, and made them forceful by the enthusiasm of their earnest faces and fresh voices. It was beautiful to see the eager interest with which the girls listened to some brilliant brother-student, and applauded him with a rustle as of wind over a bed of flowers. It was still more significant and pleasant to watch the young men’s faces when a slender white figure stood out against the background of black-coated dignitaries, and with cheeks that flushed and paled, and lips that trembled till earnest purpose conquered maiden fear, spoke to them straight out of a woman’s heart and brain concerning the hopes and doubts, the aspirations and rewards all must know, desire, and labour for. This clear, sweet voice seemed to reach and rouse all that was noblest in the souls of these youths, and to set a seal upon the years of comradeship which made them sacred and memorable for ever.

Alice Heath’s oration was unanimously pronounced the success of the day; for without being flowery or sentimental, as is too apt to be the case with these first efforts of youthful orators, it was earnest, sensible, and so inspiring that she left the stage in a storm of applause, the good fellows being as much fired by her stirring appeal to ‘march shoulder to shoulder’, as if she had chanted the ‘Marseillaise’ then and there. One young man was so excited that he nearly rushed out of his seat to receive her as she hastened to hide herself among her mates, who welcomed her with faces full of tender pride and tearful eye. A prudent sister detained him, however, and in a moment he was able to listen with composure to the President's remarks.

They were worth listening to, for Mr Bhaer spoke like a father to the children whom he was dismissing to the battle of life; and his tender, wise, and helpful words lingered in their hearts long after the praise was forgotten. Then came other exercises peculiar to Plumfield, and the end. Why the roof did not fly off when the sturdy lungs of the excited young men pealed out the closing hymn will for ever be a mystery; but it remained firm, and only the fading garlands vibrated as the waves of music rolled up and died away, leaving sweet echoes to haunt the place for another year.

Dinners and spreads consumed the afternoon, and at sunset came a slight lull as everyone sought some brief repose before the festivities of the evening began. The President's reception was one of the enjoyable things in store, also dancing on Parnassus, and as much strolling, singing, and flirting, as could be compressed into a few hours by youths and maidens just out of school.

Carriages were rolling about, and gay groups on piazzas, lawns, and window-seats idly speculated as to who the distinguished guests might be. The appearance of a very dusty vehicle loaded with trunks at Mr Bhaer's hospitably open door caused much curious comment among the loungers, especially as two rather foreign-looking gentlemen sprang out, followed by two young ladies, all four being greeted with cries of joy and much embracing by the Bhaers. Then they all disappeared into the house, the luggage followed, and the watchers were left to wonder who the mysterious strangers were, till a fair collegian declared that they must be the Professor's nephews, one of whom was expected on his wedding journey.

She was right; Franz proudly presented his blonde and buxom bride, and she was hardly kissed and blessed when Emil led up his bonny English Mary, with the rapturous announcement:

'Uncle, Aunt Jo, here's another daughter! Have you room for my wife, too?'

There could be no doubt of that; and Mary was with difficulty rescued from the glad embraces of her new relatives, who, remembering all the young pair had suffered together, felt that this was the natural and happy ending of the long voyage so perilously begun.

'But why not tell us, and let us be ready for two brides instead of one?' asked Mrs Jo, looking as usual rather demoralizing in a wrapper and crimping-pins, having rushed down from her chamber, where she was preparing for the labours of the evening.

‘Well, I remembered what a good joke you all considered Uncle Laurie’s marriage, and I thought I’d give you another nice little surprise,’ laughed Emil. ‘I’m off duty, and it seemed best to take advantage of wind and tide, and come along as convoy to the old boy here. We hoped to get in last night, but couldn’t fetch it, so here we are in time for the end of the jollification, anyway.’

‘Ah, my sons, it is too feeling-full to see you both so happy and again in the old home. I haf no words to outpour my gratitude, and can only ask of the dear Gott in Himmel to bless and keep you all,’ cried Professor Bhaer, trying to gather all four into his arms at once, while tears rolled down his cheeks, and his English failed him.

An April shower cleared the air and relieved the full hearts of the happy family; then of course everyone began to talk — Franz and Ludmilla in German with uncle, Emil and Mary with the aunts; and round this group gathered the young folk, clamouring to hear all about the wreck, and the rescue, and the homeward voyage. It was a very different story from the written one; and as they listened to Emil’s graphic words, with Mary’s soft voice breaking in now and then to add some fact that brought out the courage, patience, and self-sacrifice he so lightly touched upon, it became a solemn and pathetic thing to see and hear these happy creatures tell of that great danger and deliverance.

‘I never hear the patter of rain now that I don’t want to say my prayers; and as for women, I’d like to take my hat off to every one of ‘em, for they are braver than any man I ever saw,’ said Emil, with the new gravity that was as becoming to him as the new gentleness with which he treated everyone.

‘If women are brave, some men are as tender and self-sacrificing as women. I know one who in the night slipped his share of food into a girl’s pocket, though starving himself, and sat for hours rocking a sick man in his arms that he might get a little sleep. No, love, I will tell, and you must let me!’ cried Mary, holding in both her own the hand he laid on her lips to silence her.

‘Only did my duty. If that torment had lasted much longer I might have been as bad as poor Barry and the boatswain. Wasn’t that an awful night?’ And Emil shuddered as he recalled it.

‘Don’t think of it, dear. Tell about the happy days on the Urania, when papa grew better and we were all safe and homeward bound,’ said Mary, with the trusting look and comforting touch which seemed to banish the dark and recall the bright side of that terrible experience.

Emil cheered up at once, and sitting with his arm about his ‘dear lass’, in true sailor fashion told the happy ending of the tale.

‘Such a jolly old time as we had at Hamburg! Uncle Hermann couldn’t do enough for the captain, and while mamma took care of him, Mary looked after me. I had to go into dock for repairs; fire hurt my eyes, and watching for a sail and want of sleep made 'em as hazy as a London fog. She was pilot and brought me in all right, you see, only I couldn't part company, so she came aboard as first mate, and I'm bound straight for glory now.'

'Hush! that's silly, dear,' whispered Mary, trying in her turn to stop him, with English shyness about tender topics. But he took the soft hand in his, and proudly surveying the one ring it wore, went on with the air of an admiral aboard his flagship.

'The captain proposed waiting a spell; but I told him we weren't like to see any rougher weather than we'd pulled through together, and if we didn't know one another after such a year as this, we never should. I was sure I shouldn't be worth my pay without this hand on the wheel; so I had my way, and my brave little woman has shipped for the long voyage. God bless her!'

'Shall you really sail with him?' asked Daisy, admiring her courage, but shrinking with cat-like horror from the water.

'I'm not afraid,' answered Mary, with a loyal smile. 'I've proved my captain in fair weather and in foul, and if he is ever wrecked again, I'd rather be with him than waiting and watching ashore.'

'A true woman, and a born sailor's wife! You are a happy man, Emil, and I'm sure this trip will be a prosperous one,' cried Mrs Jo, delighted with the briny flavour of this courtship. 'Oh, my dear boy, I always felt you'd come back, and when everyone else despaired I never gave up, but insisted that you were clinging to the main-top jib somewhere on that dreadful sea'; and Mrs Jo illustrated her faith by grasping Emil with a truly Pillycoddian gesture.

'Of course I was!' answered Emil heartily; 'and my "main-top jib" in this case was the thought of what you and Uncle said to me. That kept me up; and among the million thoughts that came to me during those long nights none was clearer than the idea of the red strand, you remember — English navy, and all that. I liked the notion, and resolved that if a bit of my cable was left afloat, the red stripe should be there.'

'And it was, my dear, it was! Captain Hardy testifies to that, and here is your reward'; and Mrs Jo kissed Mary with a maternal tenderness which betrayed that she liked the English rose better than the blue-eyed German Kornblumen, sweet and modest though it was.

Emil surveyed the little ceremony with complacency, saying, as he looked about the room which he never thought to see again: 'Odd, isn't it, how clearly trifles come back to one in times of danger? As we floated there, half-starved, and in despair, I used to think I heard the bells ringing here, and Ted tramping downstairs, and you calling, "Boys, boys, it's time to get up!" I actually smelt the coffee we used to have, and one night I nearly cried when I woke from a dream of Asia’s ginger cookies. I declare, it was one of the bitterest disappointments of my life to face hunger with that spicy smell in my nostrils. If you’ve got any, do give me one!’

A pitiful murmur broke from all the aunts and cousins, and Emil was at once borne away to feast on the desired cookies, a supply always being on hand. Mrs Jo and her sister joined the other group, glad to hear what Franz was saying about Nat.

‘The minute I saw how thin and shabby he was, I knew that something was wrong; but he made light of it, and was so happy over our visit and news that I let him off with a brief confession, and went to Professor Baumgarten and Bergmann. From them I learned the whole story of his spending more money than he ought and trying to atone for it by unnecessary work and sacrifice. Baumgarten thought it would do him good, so kept his secret till I came. It did him good, and he’s paid his debts and earned his bread by the sweat of his brow, like an honest fellow.’

‘I like that much in Nat. It is, as I said, a lesson, and he learns it well. He proves himself a man, and has deserved the place Bergmann offers him,’ said Mr Bhaer, looking well pleased as Franz added some facts already recorded.

‘I told you, Meg, that he had good stuff in him, and love for Daisy would keep him straight. Dear lad, I wish I had him here this moment!’ cried Mrs Jo, forgetting in delight the doubts and anxieties which had troubled her for months past.

‘I am very glad, and suppose I shall give in as I always do, especially now that the epidemic rages so among us. You and Emil have set all their heads in a ferment, and Josie will be demanding a lover before I can turn round,’ answered Mrs Meg, in a tone of despair.

But her sister saw that she was touched by Nat’s trials, and hastened to add the triumphs, that the victory might be complete, for success is always charming.

‘This offer of Herr Bergmann is a good one, isn’t it?’ she asked, though Mr Laurie had already satisfied her on that point when Nat’s letter brought the news.

‘Very fine in every way. Nat will get capital drill in Bachmeister’s orchestra, see London in a delightful way, and if he suits come home with them, well started among the violins. No great honour, but a sure thing and a step up. I congratulated him, and he was very jolly over it, saying, like the true lover he is: “Tell Daisy; be sure and tell her all about it.” I’ll leave that to you, Aunt Meg, and you can also break it gently to her that the old boy had a fine blond beard. Very becoming; hides his weak mouth, and gives a noble air to his big eyes and “Mendelssohnian brow”, as a gushing girl called it. Ludmilla has a photo of it for you.’

This amused them; and they listened to many other interesting bits of news which kind Franz, even in his own happiness, had not forgotten to remember for his friend’s sake. He talked so well, and painted Nat’s patient and pathetic shifts so vividly, that Mrs Meg was half won; though if she had learned of the Minna episode and the fiddling in beer-gardens and streets, she might not have relented so soon. She stored up all she heard, however, and, womanlike, promised herself a delicious talk with Daisy, in which she would allow herself to melt by degrees, and perhaps change the doubtful ‘We shall see’ to a cordial ‘He has done well; be happy, dear’.

In the midst of this agreeable chat the sudden striking of a clock recalled Mrs Jo from romance to reality, and she exclaimed, with a clutch at her crimping-pins:

‘My blessed people, you must eat and rest; and I must dress, or receive in this disgraceful rig. Meg, will you take Ludmilla and Mary upstairs and see to them? Franz knows the way to the dining-room. Fritz, come with me and be made tidy, for what with heat and emotion, we are both perfect wrecks.’

Chapter 19. WHITE ROSES

While the travellers refreshed, and Mrs President struggled into her best gown, Josie ran into the garden to gather flowers for the brides. The sudden arrival of these interesting beings had quite enchanted the romantic girl, and her head was full of heroic rescues, tender admiration, dramatic situations, and feminine wonder as to whether the lovely creatures would wear their veils or not. She was standing before a great bush of white roses, culling the most perfect for the bouquets which she meant to tie with the ribbon festooned over her arm, and lay on the toilette tables of the new cousins, as a delicate attention. A step startled her, and looking up she saw her brother coming down the path with folded arms, bent head, and the absent air of one absorbed in deep thought.

‘Sophy Wackles,’ said the sharp child, with a superior smile, as she sucked her thumb just pricked by a too eager pull at the thorny branches.

‘What are you at here, Mischief?’ asked Demi, with an Irvingesque start, as he felt rather than saw a disturbing influence in his day-dream.

‘Getting flowers for “our brides”. Don’t you wish you had one?’ answered Josie, to whom the word ‘mischief’ suggested her favourite amusement.

‘A bride or a flower?’ asked Demi calmly, though he eyed the blooming bush as if it had a sudden and unusual interest for him.

‘Both; you get the one, and I’ll give you the other.’

‘Wish I could!’ and Demi picked a little bud, with a sigh that went to Josie’s warm heart.

‘Why don’t you, then? It’s lovely to see people so happy. Now’s a good time to do it if you ever mean to. She will be going away for ever soon.’

‘Who?’ and Demi pulled a half-opened bud, with a sudden colour in his own face; which sign of confusion delighted little Jo.

‘Don’t be a hypocrite. You know I mean Alice. Now, Jack, I’m fond of you, and want to help; it’s so interesting — all these lovers and weddings and things, and we ought to have our share. So you take my advice and speak up like a man, and make sure of Alice before she goes.’

Demi laughed at the seriousness of the small girl’s advice; but he liked it, and showed that it suited him by saying blandly, instead of snubbing her as usual:

‘You are very kind, child. Since you are so wise, could you give me a hint how I’d better ‘speak up’, as you elegantly express it?’

‘Oh, well, there are various ways, you know. In plays the lovers go down on their knees; but that's awkward when they have long legs. Ted never does it well, though I drill him for hours. You could say, "Be mine, be mine!" like the old man who threw cucumbers over the wall to Mrs Nickleby, if you want to be gay and easy; or you could write a poetical pop. You've tried it, I dare say.'

'But seriously, Jo, I do love Alice, and I think she knows it. I want to tell her so; but I lose my head when I try, and don't care to make a fool of myself. Thought you might suggest some pretty way; you read so much poetry and are so romantic.'

Demi tried to express himself clearly, but forgot his dignity and his usual reserve in the sweet perplexity of his love, and asked his little sister to teach him how to put the question which a single word can answer. The arrival of his happy cousins had scattered all his wise plans and brave resolutions to wait still longer. The Christmas play had given him courage to hope, and the oration today had filled him with tender pride; but the sight of those blooming brides and beaming grooms was too much for him, and he panted to secure his Alice without an hour's delay. Daisy was his confidante in all things but this; a brotherly feeling of sympathy had kept him from telling her his hopes, because her own were forbidden. His mother was rather jealous of any girl he admired; but knowing that she liked Alice, he loved on and enjoyed his secret alone, meaning soon to tell her all about it.

Now suddenly Josie and the rose-bush seemed to suggest a speedy end to his tender perplexities; and he was moved to accept her aid as the netted lion did that of the mouse.

'I think I'll write,' he was slowly beginning, after a pause during which both were trying to strike out a new and brilliant idea.

'I've got it! perfectly lovely! just suit her, and you too, being a poet!' cried Josie, with a skip.

'What is it? Don't be ridiculous, please,' begged the bashful lover, eager, but afraid of this sharp-tongued bit of womanhood.

'I read in one of Miss Edgeworth's stories about a man who offers three roses to his lady — a bud, a half-blown, and a full-blown rose. I don't remember which she took; but it's a pretty way; and Alice knows about it because she was there when we read it. Here are all kinds; you've got the two buds, pick the sweetest rose you can find, and I'll tie them up and put them in her room. She is coming to dress with Daisy, so I can do it nicely.'

Demi mused a moment with his eyes on the bridal bush, and a smile came over his face so unlike any it had ever worn before, that Josie was touched, and looked away as if she had no right to see the dawn of the great passion which, while it lasts, makes a young man as happy as a god.

‘Do it,’ was all he said, and gathered a full-blown rose to finish his floral love-message.

Charmed to have a finger in this romantic pie, Josie tied a graceful bow of ribbon about the stems, and finished her last nosegay with much content, while Demi wrote upon a card:

DEAR ALICE, You know what the flowers mean. Will you wear one, or all tonight, and make me still prouder, fonder, and happier than I am?

Yours entirely,

JOHN

Offering this to his sister, he said in a tone that made her feel the deep importance of her mission:

‘I trust you, Jo. This means everything to me. No jokes, dear, if you love me.’

Josie’s answer was a kiss that promised all things; and then she ran away to do her ‘gentle spiriting’, like Ariel, leaving Demi to dream among the roses like Ferdinand.

Mary and Ludmilla were charmed with their bouquets; and the giver had the delight of putting some of the flowers into the dark hair and the light as she played maid at the toilettes of ‘our brides’, which consoled her for a disappointment in the matter of veils.

No one helped Alice dress; for Daisy was in the next room with her mother; and not even their loving eyes saw the welcome which the little posy received, nor the tears and smiles and blushes that came and went as she read the note and pondered what answer she should give. There was no doubt about the one she wished to give; but duty held her back; for at home there was an invalid mother and an old father. She was needed there, with all the help she could now bring by the acquirements four years of faithful study had given her. Love looked very sweet, and a home of her own with John a little heaven on earth; but not yet. And she slowly laid away the full-blown rose as she sat before the mirror, thinking over the great question of her life.

Was it wise and kind to ask him to wait, to bind him by any promise, or even to put into words the love and honour she felt for him? No; it would be more generous to make the sacrifice alone, and spare him the pain of hope deferred. He was young; he would forget; and she would do her duty better, perhaps, if no impatient lover waited for her. With eyes that saw but dimly, and a hand that lingered on the stem he had stripped of thorns, she laid the half-blown flower by the rose, and asked herself if even the little bud might be worn. It looked very poor and pale beside the others; yet being in the self-sacrificing mood which real love brings, she felt that even a small hope was too much to give, if she could not follow it up with more.

As she sat looking sadly down on the symbols of an affection that grew dearer every moment, she listened half unconsciously to the murmur of voices in the adjoining room. Open windows, thin partitions, and the stillness of summer twilight made it impossible to help hearing, and in a few moments more she could not refrain; for they were talking of John.

‘So nice of Ludmilla to bring us all bottles of real German cologne! Just what we need after this tiring day! Be sure John has his! He likes it so!’

‘Yes, mother. Did you see him jump up when Alice ended her oration? He’d have gone to her if I hadn’t held him back. I don’t wonder he was pleased and proud. I spoilt my gloves clapping, and quite forgot my dislike of seeing women on platforms, she was so earnest and unconscious and sweet after the first moment.’

‘Has he said anything to you, dear?’

‘No; and I guess why. The kind boy thinks it would make me unhappy. It wouldn’t. But I know his ways; so I wait, and hope all will go well with him.’

‘It must. No girl in her senses would refuse our John, though he isn’t rich, and never will be. Daisy, I’ve been longing to tell you what he did with his money. He told me last night, and I’ve had no time since to tell you. He sent poor young Barton to the hospital, and kept him there till his eyes were saved — a costly thing to do. But the man can work now and care for his old parents. He was in despair, sick and poor, and too proud to beg; and our dear boy found it out, and took every penny he had, and never told even his mother till she made him.’

Alice did not hear what Daisy answered, for she was busy with her own emotions — happy ones now, to judge from the smile that shone in her eyes and the decided gesture with which she put the little bud in her bosom, as if she said: ‘He deserves some reward for that good deed, and he shall have it.’

Mrs Meg was speaking, and still of John, when she could hear again:

‘Some people would call it unwise and reckless, when John has so little; but I think his first investment a safe and good one, for “he who giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord”; and I was so pleased and proud, I wouldn’t spoil it by offering him a penny.’

‘It is his having nothing to offer that keeps him silent, I think. He is so honest, he won’t ask till he has much to give. But he forgets that love is everything. I know he’s rich in that; I see and feel it; and any woman should be glad to get it.’

‘Right, dear. I felt just so, and was willing to work and wait with and for my John.’

‘So she will be, and I hope they will find it out. But she is so dutiful and good, I’m afraid she won’t let herself be happy. You would like it, mother?’

‘Heartily; for a better, nobler girl doesn’t live. She is all I want for my son;

and I don’t mean to lose the dear, brave creature if I can help it. Her heart is big enough for both love and duty; and they can wait more happily if they do it together — for wait they must, of course.’

‘I’m so glad his choice suits you, mother, and he is spared the saddest sort of disappointment.’

Daisy’s voice broke there; and a sudden rustle, followed by a soft murmur, seemed to tell that she was in her mother’s arms, seeking and finding comfort there.

Alice heard no more, and shut her window with a guilty feeling but a shining face; for the proverb about listeners failed here, and she had learned more than she dared to hope. Things seemed to change suddenly; she felt that her heart was large enough for both love and duty; she knew now that she would be welcomed by mother and sister; and the memory of Daisy’s less happy fate, Nat’s weary probation, the long delay, and possible separation for ever — all came before her so vividly that prudence seemed cruelty; self-sacrifice, sentimental folly; and anything but the whole truth, disloyalty to her lover. As she thought thus, the half-blown rose went to join the bud; and then, after a pause, she slowly kissed the perfect rose, and added it to the tell-tale group, saying to herself with a sort of sweet solemnity, as if the words were a vow:

‘I’ll love and work and wait with and for my John.’

It was well for her that Demi was absent when she stole down to join the guests who soon began to flow through the house in a steady stream. The new brightness which touched her usually thoughtful face was easily explained by the congratulations she received as orator, and the slight agitation observable, when a fresh batch of gentlemen approached soon passed, as none of them noticed the flowers she wore over a very happy heart. Demi meantime was escorting certain venerable personages about the college, and helping his grandfather entertain them with discussion of the Socratic method of instruction, Pythagoras, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and the rest, whom he devoutly wished at the bottom of the Red Sea, and no wonder, for his head and his heart were full of love and roses, hopes and fears. He piloted the ‘potent, grave, and reverend seigniors’ safely down to Plumfield at last, and landed them before his uncle and aunt Bhaer, who were receiving in state, the one full of genuine delight in all men and things, the other suffering martyrdom with a smile, as she stood shaking hand after hand, and affecting utter unconsciousness of the sad fact that ponderous Professor Plock had camped upon the train of her state and festival velvet gown.

With a long sigh of relief Demi glanced about him for the beloved girl. Most persons would have looked some time before any particular angel could be discovered among the white-robed throng in parlours, hall, and study; but his eye went — like the needle to the pole — to the corner where a smooth dark head, with its braided crown, rose like a queen’s, he thought, above the crowd which surrounded her. Yes, she has a flower at her throat; one, two, oh, blessed sight! he saw it all across the room, and gave a rapturous sigh which caused Miss Perry’s frizzled crop to wave with a sudden gust. He did not see the rose, for it was hidden by a fold of lace; and it was well, perhaps, that bliss came by instalments, or he might have electrified the assembled multitude by flying to his idol, there being no Daisy to clutch him by the coat-tail. A stout lady, thirsting for information, seized him at that thrilling moment, and he was forced to point out celebrities with a saintly patience which deserved a better reward than it received; for a certain absence of mind and incoherence of speech at times caused the ungrateful dowager to whisper to the first friend she met after he had escaped:

‘I saw no wine at any of the spreads; but it is plain that young Brooke has had too much. Quite gentlemanly, but evidently a trifle intoxicated, my dear.’

Ah, so he was! but with a diviner wine than any that ever sparkled at a class-day lunch, though many collegians know the taste of it; and when the old lady was disposed of, he gladly turned to find the young one, bent on having a single word. He saw her standing by the piano now, idly turning over music as she talked with several gentlemen. Hiding his impatience under an air of scholastic repose, Demi hovered near, ready to advance when the happy moment came, wondering meantime why elderly persons persisted in absorbing young ones instead of sensibly sitting in corners with their contemporaries. The elderly persons in question retired at length, but only to be replaced by two impetuous youths who begged Miss Heath to accompany them to Parnassus and join the dance. Demi thirsted for their blood, but was appeased by hearing George and Dolly say, as they lingered a moment after her refusal:

‘Really, you know, I’m quite converted to co-education and almost wish I’d remained here. It gives a grace to study, a sort of relish even to Greek to see charming girls at it,’ said Stuffy, who found the feast of learning so dry, any sauce was welcome; and he felt as if he had discovered a new one.

‘Yes, by Jove! we fellows will have to look out or you’ll carry off all the honours. You were superb today, and held us all like magic, though it was so hot there, I really think I couldn’t have stood it for anyone else,’ added Dolly, labouring to be gallant and really offering a touching proof of devotion; for the heat melted his collar, took the curl out of his hair, and ruined his gloves.

‘There is room for all; and if you will leave us the books, we will cheerfully yield the baseball, boating, dancing, and flirting, which seem to be the branches you prefer,’ answered Alice sweetly.

‘Ah, now you are too hard upon us! We can’t grind all the time and you ladies don’t seem to mind taking a turn at the two latter “branches” you mention,’ returned Dolly, with a glance at George which plainly said, ‘I had her there.’

‘Some of us do in our first years. Later we give up childish things, you see. Don’t let me keep you from Parnassus’; and a smiling nod dismissed them, smarting under the bitter consciousness of youth.

‘You got it there, Doll. Better not try to fence with these superior girls. Sure to be routed, horse, foot, and dragoons,’ said Stuffy, lumbering away, somewhat cross with too many spreads.

‘So deuced sarcastic! Don’t believe she’s much older than we are. Girls grow up quicker, so she needn’t put on airs and talk like a grandmother,’ muttered Dolly, feeling that he had sacrificed his kids upon the altar of an ungrateful Pallas.

‘Come along and let’s find something to eat. I’m faint with so much talking. Old Plock cornered me and made my head spin with Kant and Hegel and that lot.’

‘I promised Dora West I’d give her a turn. Must look her up; she’s a jolly little thing, and doesn’t bother about anything but keeping in step.’

And arm in arm the boys strolled away, leaving Alice to read music as diligently as if society had indeed no charms for her. As she bent to turn a page, the eager young man behind the piano saw the rose and was struck speechless with delight. A moment he gazed, then hastened to seize the coveted place before a new detachment of bores arrived.

‘Alice, I can’t believe it — did you understand — how shall I ever thank you?’ murmured Demi, bending as if he, too, read the song, not a note or word of which did he see, however.

‘Hush! not now. I understood — I don’t deserve it — we are too young, we must wait, but — I’m very proud and happy, John!’

What would have happened after that tender whisper I tremble to think, if Tom Bangs had not come bustling up, with the cheerful remark:

‘Music? just the thing. People are thinning out, and we all want a little refreshment. My brain fairly reels with the ‘ologies and ‘isms I’ve heard discussed tonight. Yes, give us this; sweet thing! Scotch songs are always charming.’

Demi glowered; but the obtuse boy never saw it, and Alice, feeling that this would be a safe vent for sundry unruly emotions, sat down at once, and sang the song which gave her answer better than she could have done:

BIDE A WEE

‘The puir auld folk at home, ye mind,
Are frail and failing sair;
And weel I ken they’d miss me, lad,
Gin I come hame nae mair.
The grist is out, the times are hard,
The kine are only three;
I canna leave the auld folk now.
We’d better bide a wee.

‘I fear me sair they’re failing baith;
For when I sit apart,
They talk o’ Heaven so earnestly,
It well nigh breaks my heart.
So, laddie, dinna urge me now,
It surely winna be;
I canna leave the auld folk yet.
We’d better bide a wee.’

The room was very still before the first verse ended; and Alice skipped the next, fearing she could not get through; for John’s eyes were on her, showing that he knew she sang for him and let the plaintive little ballad tell what her reply must be. He took it as she meant it, and smiled at her so happily that her heart got the better of her voice, and she rose abruptly, saying something about the heat.

‘Yes, you are tired; come out and rest, my dearest’; and with a masterful air Demi took her into the starlight, leaving Tom to stare after them winking as if a sky-rocket had suddenly gone off under his nose.

‘Bless my soul! the Deacon really meant business last summer and never told me. Won’t Dora laugh?’ And Tom departed in hot haste to impart and exult over his discovery.

What was said in the garden was never exactly known; but the Brooke family sat up very late that night, and any curious eye at the window would have seen Demi receiving the homage of his womankind as he told his little romance. Josie took great credit to herself in the matter, insisting that she had made the match; Daisy was full of the sweetest sympathy and joy, and Mrs Meg so happy that when Jo had gone to dream of bridal veils, and Demi sat in his room blissfully playing the air of ‘Bide a Wee’, she had her talk about Nat, ending with her arms round her dutiful daughter and these welcome words as her reward:

‘Wait till Nat comes home, and then my good girl shall wear white roses too.’

Chapter 20. LIFE FOR LIFE

The summer days that followed were full of rest and pleasure for young and old, as they did the honours of Plumfield to their happy guests. While Franz and Emil were busy with the affairs of Uncle Hermann and Captain Hardy, Mary and Ludmilla made friends everywhere; for, though very unlike, both were excellent and charming girls. Mrs Meg and Daisy found the German bride a Hausfrau after their own hearts, and had delightful times learning new dishes, hearing about the semi-yearly washes and the splendid linen-room at Hamburg, or discussing domestic life in all its branches. Ludmilla not only taught, but learned, many things, and went home with many new and useful ideas in her blonde head.

Mary had seen so much of the world that she was unusually lively for an English girl; while her various accomplishments made her a most agreeable companion. Much good sense gave her ballast; and the late experiences of danger and happiness added a sweet gravity at times, which contrasted well with her natural gaiety. Mrs Jo was quite satisfied with Emil’s choice, and felt sure this true and tender pilot would bring him safe to port through fair or stormy weather. She had feared that Franz would settle down into a comfortable, moneymaking burgher, and be content with that; but she soon saw that his love of music and his placid Ludmilla put much poetry into his busy life, and kept it from being too prosaic. So she felt at rest about these boys, and enjoyed their visit with real, maternal satisfaction; parting with them in September most regretfully, yet hopefully, as they sailed away to the new life that lay before them.

Demi’s engagement was confided to the immediate family only, as both were pronounced too young to do anything but love and wait. They were so happy that time seemed to stand still for them, and after a blissful week they parted bravely — Alice to home duties, with a hope that sustained and cheered her through many trials; and John to his business, full of a new ardour which made all things possible when such a reward was offered.

Daisy rejoiced over them, and was never tired of hearing her brother’s plans for the future. Her own hope soon made her what she used to be — a cheery, busy creature, with a smile, kind word, and helping hand for all; and as she went singing about the house again, her mother felt that the right remedy for past sadness had been found. The dear Pelican still had doubts and fears, but kept them wisely to herself, preparing sundry searching tests to be applied when Nat came home, and keeping a sharp eye on the letters from London; for some mysterious hint had flown across the sea, and Daisy's content seemed reflected in Nat's present cheerful state of mind.

Having passed through the Werther period, and tried a little Faust — of which experience he spoke to his Marguerite as if it had included an acquaintance with Mephistopheles, Blocksburg, and Auerbach's wine-cellar — he now felt that he was a Wilhelm Meister, serving his apprenticeship to the great masters of life. As she knew the truth of his small sins and honest repentance, Daisy only smiled at the mixture of love and philosophy he sent her, knowing that it was impossible for a young man to live in Germany without catching the German spirit.

'His heart is all right; and his head will soon grow clear when he gets out of the fog of tobacco, beer, and metaphysics he's been living in. England will wake up his common sense, and good salt air blow his little follies all away,' said Mrs Jo, much pleased with the good prospects of her violinist — whose return was delayed till spring, to his private regret, but professional advancement.

Josie had a month with Miss Cameron at the seaside, and threw herself so heartily into the lesson given her that her energy, promise, and patience laid the foundation of a friendship which was of infinite value to her in the busy, brilliant years to come; for little Jo's instincts were right; and the dramatic talent of the Marches was to blossom by and by into an actress, virtuous, and beloved.

Tom and his Dora were peacefully ambling altar-ward; for Bangs senior was so afraid his son would change his mind again and try a third profession, that he gladly consented to an early marriage, as a sort of anchor to hold the mercurial Thomas fast. Aforesaid Thomas could not complain of cold shoulders now; for Dora was a most devoted and adoring little mate, and made life so pleasant to him that his gift for getting into scrapes seemed lost, and he bade fair to become a thriving man, with undeniable talent for the business he had chosen.

'We shall be married in the autumn, and live with my father for a while. The governor is getting on, you know, and my wife and I must look after him. Later we shall have an establishment of our own,' was a favourite speech of his about this time, and usually received with smiles; for the idea of Tommy Bangs at the head of an 'establishment' was irresistibly funny to all who knew him.

Things were in this flourishing condition, and Mrs Jo was beginning to think her trials were over for that year, when a new excitement came. Several postal cards had arrived at long intervals from Dan, who gave them 'Care of M. Mason, etc.', as his address. By this means he was able to gratify his longing for home news, and to send brief messages to quiet their surprise at his delay in settling. The last one, which came in September, was dated 'Montana', and simply said:

Here at last, trying mining again; but not going to stay long. All sorts of luck.

Gave up the farm idea. Tell plans soon. Well, busy, and very happy. D. K.

If they had known what the heavy dash under ‘happy’ meant, that postal would have been a very eloquent bit of pasteboard; for Dan was free, and had gone straight away to the liberty he panted for. Meeting an old friend by accident, he obliged him at a pinch by acting as overseer for a time, finding the society even of rough miners very sweet, and something in the muscular work wonderfully pleasant, after being cooped up in the brush-shop so long. He loved to take a pick and wrestle with rock and earth till he was weary — which was very soon; for that year of captivity had told upon his splendid physique. He longed to go home, but waited week after week to get the prison taint off him and the haggard look out of his face. Meanwhile he made friends of masters and men; and as no one knew his story, he took his place again in the world gratefully and gladly — with little pride now, and no plans but to do some good somewhere, and efface the past.

Mrs Jo was having a grand clearing-out of her desk one October day, while the rain poured outside, and peace reigned in her mansion. Coming across the postals, she pondered over them, and then put them carefully away in the drawer labelled ‘Boys’ Letters’, saying to herself, as she bundled eleven requests for autographs into the waste-paper basket:

‘It is quite time for another card, unless he is coming to tell his plans. I’m really curious to know what he has been about all this year, and how he’s getting on now.’

That last wish was granted within an hour; for Ted came rushing in, with a newspaper in one hand, a collapsed umbrella in the other, and a face full of excitement, announcing, all in one breathless jumble:

‘Mine caved in — twenty men shut up — no way out — wives crying — water rising — Dan knew the old shaft — risked his life — got ‘em out — most killed — papers full of it — I knew he’d be a hero — hurray for old Dan!’

‘What? Where? When? Who? Stop roaring, and let me read!’ commanded his mother, entirely bewildered.

Relinquishing the paper, Ted allowed her to read for herself, with frequent interruptions from him — and Rob, who soon followed, eager for the tale. It was nothing new; but courage and devotion always stir generous hearts, and win admiration; so the account was both graphic and enthusiastic; and the name of Daniel Kean, the brave man who saved the lives of others at the risk of his own, was on many lips that day. Very proud were the faces of these friends as they read how their Dan was the only one who, in the first panic of the accident, remembered the old shaft that led into the mine — walled up, but the only hope of escape, if the men could be got out before the rising water drowned them;

how he was lowered down alone, telling the others to keep back till he saw if it was safe; how he heard the poor fellows picking desperately for their lives on the other side, and by knocks and calls guided them to the right spot; then headed the rescue party, and working like a hero, got the men out in time. On being drawn up last of all, the worn rope broke, and he had a terrible fall, being much hurt, but was still alive. How the grateful women kissed his blackened face and bloody hands, as the men bore him away in triumph, and the owners of the mine promised a handsome reward, if he lived to receive it!

‘He must live; he shall, and come home to be nursed as soon as he can stir, if I go and bring him myself! I always knew he’d do something fine and brave, if he didn’t get shot or hung for some wild prank instead,’ cried Mrs Jo, much excited.

‘Do go, and take me with you, Mum. I ought to be the one, Dan’s so fond of me and I of him,’ began Ted, feeling that this would be an expedition after his own heart.

Before his mother could reply, Mr Laurie came in, with almost as much noise and flurry as Teddy the second, exclaiming as he waved the evening paper:

‘Seen the news, Jo? What do you think? Shall I go off at once, and see after that brave boy?’

‘I wish you would. But the thing may not be all true — rumour lies so. Perhaps a few hours will bring an entirely new version of the story.’

‘I’ve telephoned to Demi for all he can find out; and if it’s true, I’ll go at once. Should like the trip. If he’s able, I’ll bring him home; if not, I’ll stay and see to him. He’ll pull through. Dan will never die of a fall on his head. He’s got nine lives, and not lost half of them yet.’

‘If you go, uncle, mayn’t I go with you? I’m just spoiling for a journey; and it would be such larks to go out there with you, and see the mines and Dan, and hear all about it, and help. I can nurse. Can’t I, Rob?’ cried Teddy, in his most wheedlesome tones.

‘Pretty well. But if mother can’t spare you, I’m ready if uncle needs anyone,’ answered Rob, in his quiet way, looking much fitter for the trip than excitable Ted.

‘I can’t spare either of you. My boys get into trouble, unless I keep them close at home. I’ve no right to hold the others; but I won’t let you out of my sight, or something will happen. Never saw such a year, with wrecks and weddings and floods and engagements, and every sort of catastrophe!’ exclaimed Mrs Jo.

‘If you deal in girls and boys, you must expect this sort of thing, ma’am. The worst is over, I hope, till these lads begin to go off. Then I’ll stand by you; for you’ll need every kind of support and comfort, specially if Ted bolts early,’ laughed Mr Laurie, enjoying her lamentations.

‘I don’t think anything can surprise me now; but I am anxious about Dan, and feel that someone had better go to him. It’s a rough place out there, and he may need careful nursing. Poor lad, he seems to get a good many hard knocks! But perhaps he needs them as “a mellerin’ process”, as Hannah used to say.’

‘We shall hear from Demi before long, and then I’ll be off.’ With which cheerful promise Mr Laurie departed; and Ted, finding his mother firm, soon followed, to coax his uncle to take him.

Further inquiry confirmed and added interest to the news. Mr Laurie was off at once; and Ted went into town with him, still vainly imploring to be taken to his Dan. He was absent all day; but his mother said, calmly:

‘Only a fit of the sulks because he is thwarted. He’s safe with Tom or Demi, and will come home hungry and meek at night. I know him.’

But she soon found that she could still be surprised; for evening brought no Ted, and no one had seen him. Mr Bhaer was just setting off to find his lost son, when a telegram arrived, dated at one of the way-stations on Mr Laurie’s route:

> Found Ted in the cars. Take him along. Write tomorrow.
>
> T. LAURENCE

‘Ted bolted sooner than you expected, mother. Never mind — uncle will take good care of him, and Dan be very glad to see him,’ said Rob, as Mrs Jo sat, trying to realize that her youngest was actually on his way to the wild West.

‘Disobedient boy! He shall be severely punished, if I ever get him again. Laurie winked at this prank; I know he did. Just like him. Won’t the two rascals have a splendid time? Wish I was with them! Don’t believe that crazy boy took even a night-gown with him, or an overcoat. Well, there will be two patients for us to nurse when they get back, if they ever do. Those reckless express trains always go down precipices, and burn up, or telescope. Oh! my Ted, my precious boy, how can I let him go so far away from me?’

And mother-like, Mrs Jo forgot the threatened chastisement in tender lamentations over the happy scapegrace, now whizzing across the continent in high feather at the success of his first revolt. Mr Laurie was much amused at his insisting that those words, ‘when Ted bolts’, put the idea into his head; and therefore the responsibility rested upon his shoulders. He assumed it kindly from the moment he came upon the runaway asleep in a car, with no visible luggage but a bottle of wine for Dan and a blacking-brush for himself; and as Mrs Jo suspected, the ‘two rascals’ did have a splendid time. Penitent letters arrived in due season, and the irate parents soon forgot to chide in their anxiety about Dan, who was very ill, and did not know his friends for several days. Then he began to mend; and everyone forgave the bad boy when he proudly reported that the first conscious words Dan said were: ‘Hallo, Ted!’ with a smile of pleasure at seeing a familiar face bent over him.

‘Glad he went, and I won’t scold any more. Now, what shall we put in the box for Dan?’ And Mrs Jo worked off her impatience to get hold of the invalid by sending comforts enough for a hospital.

Cheering accounts soon began to come, and at length Dan was pronounced able to travel, but seemed in no haste to go home, though never tired of hearing his nurses talk of it.

‘Dan is strangely altered,’ wrote Laurie to Jo; ‘not by this illness alone, but by something which has evidently gone before. I don’t know what, and leave you to ask; but from his ravings when delirious I fear he has been in some serious trouble the past year. He seems ten years older, but improved, quieter, and so grateful to us. It is pathetic to see the hunger in his eyes as they rest on Ted, as if he couldn’t see enough of him. He says Kansas was a failure, but can’t talk much; so I bide my time. The people here love him very much, and he cares for that sort of thing now; used to scorn any show of emotion, you know; now he wants everyone to think well of him, and can’t do enough to win affection and respect. I may be all wrong. You will soon find out. Ted is in clover, and the trip has done him a world of good. Let me take him to Europe when we go? Apron-strings don’t agree with him any better than they did with me when I proposed to run away to Washington with you some century ago. Aren’t you sorry you didn’t?’

This private letter set Mrs Jo’s lively fancy in a ferment, and she imagined every known crime, affliction, and complication which could possibly have befallen Dan. He was too feeble to be worried with questions now, but she promised herself most interesting revelations when she got him safe at home; for the ‘firebrand’ was her most interesting boy. She begged him to come, and spent more time in composing a letter that should bring him, than she did over the most thrilling episodes in her ‘works’.

No one but Dan saw the letter; but it did bring him, and one November day Mr Laurie helped a feeble man out of a carriage at the door of Plumfield, and Mother Bhaer received the wanderer like a recovered son; while Ted, in a disreputable-looking hat and an astonishing pair of boots, performed a sort of war-dance round the interesting group.

‘Right upstairs and rest; I’m nurse now, and this ghost must eat before he talks to anyone,’ commanded Mrs Jo, trying not to show how shocked she was at this shorn and shaven, gaunt and pallid shadow of the stalwart man she parted with.

He was quite content to obey, and lay on the long lounge in the room prepared for him, looking about as tranquilly as a sick child restored to its own nursery and mother’s arms, while his new nurse fed and refreshed him, bravely controlling the questions that burned upon her tongue. Being weak and weary, he soon fell asleep; and then she stole away to enjoy the society of the ‘rascals’, whom she scolded and petted, pumped and praised, to her heart’s content.

‘Jo, I think Dan has committed some crime and suffered for it,’ said Mr Laurie, when Ted had departed to show his boots and tell glowing tales of the dangers and delights of the miners’ life to his mates. ‘Some terrible experience has come to the lad, and broken his spirit. He was quite out of his head when we arrived, and I took the watching, so I heard more of those sad wanderings than anyone else. He talked of the “warden”, some trail, a dead man, and Blair and Mason, and would keep offering me his hand, asking me if I would take it and forgive him. Once, when he was very wild, I held his arms, and he quieted in a moment, imploring me not to “put the handcuffs on”. I declare, it was quite awful sometimes to hear him in the night talk of old Plum and you, and beg to be let out and go home to die.’

‘He isn’t going to die, but live to repent of anything he may have done; so don’t harrow me up with these dark hints, Teddy. I don’t care if he’s broken the Ten Commandments, I’ll stand by him, and so will you, and we’ll set him on his feet and make a good man of him yet. I know he’s not spoilt, by the look in his poor face. Don’t say a word to anyone, and I’ll have the truth before long,’ answered Mrs Jo, still loyal to her bad boy, though much afflicted by what she had heard.

For some days Dan rested, and saw few people; then good care, cheerful surroundings, and the comfort of being at home began to tell, and he seemed more like himself, though still very silent as to his late experiences, pleading the doctor’s orders not to talk much. Everyone wanted to see him; but he shrank from any but old friends, and ‘wouldn’t lionize worth a cent’, Ted said, much disappointed that he could not show off his brave Dan.

‘Wasn’t a man there who wouldn’t have done the same, so why make a row over me?’ asked the hero, feeling more ashamed than proud of the broken arm, which looked so interesting in a sling.

‘But isn’t it pleasant to think that you saved twenty lives, Dan, and gave husbands, sons, and fathers back to the women who loved them?’ asked Mrs Jo one evening as they were alone together after several callers had been sent away.

‘Pleasant! it’s all that kept me alive, I do believe; yes, I’d rather have done it than be made president or any other big bug in the world. No one knows what a comfort it is to think I’ve saved twenty men to more than pay for — ’ There Dan stopped short, having evidently spoken out of some strong emotion to which his hearer had no key.

‘I thought you’d feel so. It is a splendid thing to save life at the risk of one’s own, as you did, and nearly lose it,’ began Mrs Jo, wishing he had gone on with that impulsive speech which was so like his old manner.

‘“He that loseth his life shall gain it”,’ muttered Dan, staring at the cheerful fire which lighted the room, and shone on his thin face with a ruddy glow.

Mrs Jo was so startled at hearing such words from his lips that she exclaimed joyfully:

‘Then you did read the little book I gave you, and kept your promise?’

‘I read it a good deal after a while. I don’t know much yet, but I’m ready to learn; and that’s something.’

‘It’s everything. Oh, my dear, tell me about it! I know something lies heavy on your heart; let me help you bear it, and so make the burden lighter.’

‘I know it would; I want to tell; but some things even you couldn’t forgive; and if you let go of me, I’m afraid I can’t keep afloat.’

‘Mothers can forgive anything! Tell me all, and be sure that I will never let you go, though the whole world should turn from you.’

Mrs Jo took one of the big wasted hands in both of hers and held it fast, waiting silently till that sustaining touch warmed poor Dan’s heart, and gave him courage to speak. Sitting in his old attitude, with his head in his hands, he slowly told it all, never once looking up till the last words left his lips.

‘Now you know; can you forgive a murderer, and keep a jail-bird in your house?’

Her only answer was to put her arms about him, and lay the shorn head on her breast, with eyes so full of tears they could but dimly see the hope and fear that made his own so tragical.

That was better than any words; and poor Dan clung to her in speechless gratitude, feeling the blessedness of mother love — that divine gift which comforts, purifies, and strengthens all who seek it. Two or three great, bitter drops were hidden in the little woollen shawl where Dan’s cheek rested, and no one ever knew how soft and comfortable it felt to him after the hard pillows he had known so long. Suffering of both mind and body had broken will and pride, and the lifted burden brought such a sense of relief that he paused a moment to enjoy it in dumb delight.

‘My poor boy, how you have suffered all this year, when we thought you free as air! Why didn’t you tell us, Dan, and let us help you? Did you doubt your friends?’ asked Mrs Jo, forgetting all other emotions in sympathy, as she lifted up the hidden face, and looked reproachfully into the great hollow eyes that met her own frankly now.

‘I was ashamed. I tried to bear it alone rather than shock and disappoint you, as I know I have, though you try not to show it. Don't mind; I must get used to it'; and Dan's eyes dropped again as if they could not bear to see the trouble and dismay his confession painted on his best friend's face.

'I am shocked and disappointed by the sin, but I am also very glad and proud and grateful that my sinner has repented, atoned, and is ready to profit by the bitter lesson. No one but Fritz and Laurie need ever know the truth; we owe it to them, and they will feel as I do,' answered Mrs Jo, wisely thinking that entire frankness would be a better tonic than too much sympathy.

'No, they won't; men never forgive like women. But it's right. Please tell 'em for me, and get it over. Mr Laurence knows it, I guess. I blabbed when my wits were gone; but he was very kind all the same. I can bear their knowing; but oh, not Ted and the girls!' Dan clutched her arm with such an imploring face that she hastened to assure him no one should know except the two old friends, and he calmed down as if ashamed of his sudden panic.

'It wasn't murder, mind you, it was in self-defence; he drew first, and I had to hit him. Didn't mean to kill him; but it doesn't worry me as much as it ought, I'm afraid. I've more than paid for it, and such a rascal is better out of the world than in it, showing boys the way to hell. Yes, I know you think that's awful in me; but I can't help it. I hate a scamp as I do a skulking coyote, and always want to get a shot at 'em. Perhaps it would have been better if he had killed me; my life is spoilt.'

All the old prison gloom seemed to settle like a black cloud on Dan's face as he spoke, and Mrs Jo was frightened at the glimpse it gave her of the fire through which he had passed to come out alive, but scarred for life. Hoping to turn his mind to happier things, she said cheerfully:

'No, it isn't; you have learned to value it more and use it better for this trial. It is not a lost year, but one that may prove the most helpful of any you ever know. Try to think so, and begin again; we will help, and have all the more confidence in you for this failure. We all do the same and struggle on.'

'I never can be what I was. I feel about sixty, and don't care for anything now I've got here. Let me stay till I'm on my legs, then I'll clear out and never trouble you any more,' said Dan despondently.

'You are weak and low in your mind; that will pass, and by and by you will go to your missionary work among the Indians with all the old energy and the new patience, self-control, and knowledge you have gained. Tell me more about that good chaplain and Mary Mason and the lady whose chance word helped you so much. I want to know all about the trials of my poor boy.'

Won by her tender interest, Dan brightened up and talked on till he had poured out all the story of that bitter year, and felt better for the load he lifted off.

If he had known how it weighed upon his hearer’s heart, he would have held his peace; but she hid her sorrow till she had sent him to bed, comforted and calm; then she cried her heart out, to the great dismay of Fritz and Laurie, till they heard the tale and could mourn with her; after which they all cheered up and took counsel together how best to help this worst of all the ‘catastrophes’ the year had brought them.

Chapter 21. ASLAUGA’S KNIGHT

It was curious to see the change which came over Dan after that talk. A weight seemed off his mind; and though the old impetuous spirit flashed out at times, he seemed intent on trying to show his gratitude and love and honour to these true friends by a new humility and confidence very sweet to them, very helpful to him. After hearing the story from Mrs Jo, the Professor and Mr Laurie made no allusion to it beyond the hearty hand-grasp, the look of compassion, the brief word of good cheer in which men convey sympathy, and a redoubled kindness which left no doubt of pardon. Mr Laurie began at once to interest influential persons in Dan’s mission, and set in motion the machinery which needs so much oiling before anything can be done where Government is concerned. Mr Bhaer, with the skill of a true teacher, gave Dan’s hungry mind something to do, and helped him understand himself by carrying on the good chaplain’s task so paternally that the poor fellow often said he felt as if he had found a father. The boys took him to drive, and amused him with their pranks and plans; while the women, old and young, nursed and petted him till he felt like a sultan with a crowd of devoted slaves, obedient to his lightest wish. A very little of this was enough for Dan, who had a masculine horror of ‘molly-coddling’, and so brief an acquaintance with illness that he rebelled against the doctor’s orders to keep quiet; and it took all Mrs Jo’s authority and the girls’ ingenuity to keep him from leaving his sofa long before strained back and wounded head were well. Daisy cooked for him; Nan attended to his medicines; Josie read aloud to while away the long hours of inaction that hung so heavily on his hands; while Bess brought all her pictures and casts to amuse him, and, at his special desire, set up a modelling-stand in his parlour and began to mould the buffalo head he gave her. Those afternoons seemed the pleasantest part of his day; and Mrs Jo, busy in her study close by, could see the friendly trio and enjoy the pretty pictures they made. The girls were much flattered by the success of their efforts, and exerted themselves to be very entertaining, consulting Dan’s moods with the feminine tact most women creatures learn before they are out of pinafores. When he was gay, the room rang with laughter; when gloomy, they read or worked in respectful silence till their sweet patience cheered him up again; and when in pain they hovered over him like ‘a couple of angels’, as he said. He often called Josie ‘little mother’, but Bess was always ‘Princess’; and his manner to the two cousins was quite different. Josie sometimes fretted him with her fussy ways, the long plays she liked to read, and the maternal scoldings she administered when he broke the rules; for having a lord of creation in her power was so delightful to her that she would have ruled him with a rod of iron if he had submitted. To Bess, in her gentler ministrations, he never showed either impatience or weariness, but obeyed her least word, exerted himself to seem well in her presence, and took such interest in her work that he lay looking at her with unwearied eyes; while Josie read to him in her best style unheeded.

Mrs Jo observed this, and called them ‘Una and the Lion’, which suited them very well, though the lion’s mane was shorn, and Una never tried to bridle him. The elder ladies did their part in providing delicacies and supplying all his wants; but Mrs Meg was busy at home, Mrs Amy preparing for the trip to Europe in the spring, and Mrs Jo hovering on the brink of a ‘vortex’ — for the forthcoming book had been sadly delayed by the late domestic events. As she sat at her desk, settling papers or meditatively nibbling her pen while waiting for the divine afflatus to descend upon her, she often forgot her fictitious heroes and heroines in studying the live models before her, and thus by chance looks, words, and gestures discovered a little romance unsuspected by anyone else.

The portiere between the rooms was usually drawn aside, giving a view of the group in the large bay-window — Bess at one side, in her grey blouse, busy with her tools; Josie at the other side with her book; and between, on the long couch, propped with many cushions, lay Dan in a many-hued eastern dressing-gown presented by Mr Laurie and worn to please the girls, though the invalid much preferred an old jacket ‘with no confounded tail to bother over’. He faced Mrs Jo’s room, but never seemed to see her, for his eyes were on the slender figure before him, with the pale winter sunshine touching her golden head, and the delicate hands that shaped the clay so deftly. Josie was just visible, rocking violently in a little chair at the head of the couch, and the steady murmur of her girlish voice was usually the only sound that broke the quiet of the room, unless a sudden discussion arose about the book or the buffalo.

Something in the big eyes, bigger and blacker than ever in the thin white face, fixed, so steadily on one object, had a sort of fascination for Mrs Jo after a time, and she watched the changes in them curiously; for Dan’s mind was evidently not on the story, and he often forgot to laugh or exclaim at the comic or exciting crises. Sometimes they were soft and wistful, and the watcher was very glad that neither damsel caught that dangerous look for when they spoke it vanished; sometimes it was full of eager fire, and the colour came and went rebelliously, in spite of his attempt to hide it with an impatient gesture of hand or head; but oftenest it was dark, and sad, and stern, as if those gloomy eyes looked out of captivity at some forbidden light or joy. This expression came so often that it worried Mrs Jo, and she longed to go and ask him what bitter memory overshadowed those quiet hours. She knew that his crime and its punishment must lie heavy on his mind; but youth, and time, and new hopes would bring comfort, and help to wear away the first sharpness of the prison brand. It lifted at other times, and seemed almost forgotten when he joked with the boys, talked with old friends, or enjoyed the first snows as he drove out every fair day. Why should the shadow always fall so darkly on him in the society of these innocent and friendly girls? They never seemed to see it, and if either looked or spoke, a quick smile came like a sunburst through the clouds to answer them. So Mrs Jo went on watching, wondering, and discovering, till accident confirmed her fears.

Josie was called away one day, and Bess, tired of working, offered to take her place if he cared for more reading.

‘I do; your reading suits me better than Jo’s. She goes so fast my stupid head gets in a muddle and soon begins to ache. Don’t tell her; she’s a dear little soul, and so good to sit here with a bear like me.’

The smile was ready as Bess went to the table for a new book, the last story being finished.

‘You are not a bear, but very good and patient, we think. It is always hard for a man to be shut up, mamma says, and must be terrible for you, who have always been so free.’

If Bess had not been reading titles she would have seen Dan shrink as if her last words hurt him. He made no answer; but other eyes saw and understood why he looked as if he would have liked to spring up and rush away for one of his long races up the hill, as he used to do when the longing for liberty grew uncontrollable. Moved by a sudden impulse, Mrs Jo caught up her work-basket and went to join her neighbours, feeling that a non-conductor might be needed; for Dan looked like a thundercloud full of electricity.

‘What shall we read, Aunty? Dan doesn’t seem to care. You know his taste; tell me something quiet and pleasant and short. Josie will be back soon,’ said Bess, still turning over the books piled on the centre-table.

Before Mrs Jo could answer, Dan pulled a shabby little volume from under his pillow, and handing it to her said: ‘Please read the third one; it’s short and pretty — I’m fond of it.’ The book opened at the right place, as if the third story had been often read, and Bess smiled as she saw the name.

‘Why, Dan, I shouldn’t think you’d care for this romantic German tale. There is fighting in it; but it is very sentimental, if I remember rightly.’

‘I know it; but I’ve read so few stories, I like the simple ones best. Had nothing else to read sometimes; I guess I know it all by heart, and never seem to be tired of those fighting fellows, and the fiends and angels and lovely ladies.

You read “Aslauga’s Knight”, and see if you don’t like it. Edwald was rather too soft for my fancy; but Froda was first-rate and the spirit with the golden hair always reminded me of you.’

As Dan spoke Mrs Jo settled herself where she could watch him in the glass, and Bess took a large chair facing him, saying, as she put up her hands to retie the ribbon that held the cluster of thick, soft curls at the back of her head:

‘I hope Aslauga’s hair wasn’t as troublesome as mine, for it’s always tumbling down. I’ll be ready in a minute.’

‘Don’t tie it up; please let it hang. I love to see it shine that way. It will rest your head, and be just right for the story, Goldilocks,’ pleaded Dan, using the childish name and looking more like his boyish self than he had done for many a day.

Bess laughed, shook down her pretty hair, and began to read, glad to hide her face a little; for compliments made her shy, no matter who paid them. Dan listened intently on; and Mrs Jo, with eyes that went often from her needle to the glass, could see, without turning, how he enjoyed every word as if it had more meaning for him than for the other listeners. His face brightened wonderfully, and soon wore the look that came when anything brave or beautiful inspired and touched his better self. It was Fouque’s charming story of the knight Froda, and the fair daughter of Sigurd, who was a sort of spirit, appearing to her lover in hours of danger and trial, as well as triumph and joy, till she became his guide and guard, inspiring him with courage, nobleness, and truth, leading him to great deeds in the field, sacrifices for those he loved, and victories over himself by the gleaming of her golden hair, which shone on him in battle, dreams, and perils by day and night, till after death he finds the lovely spirit waiting to receive and to reward him.

Of all the stories in the book this was the last one would have supposed Dan would like best, and even Mrs Jo was surprised at his perceiving the moral of the tale through the delicate imagery and romantic language by which it was illustrated. But as she looked and listened she remembered the streak of sentiment and refinement which lay concealed in Dan like the gold vein in a rock, making him quick to feel and to enjoy fine colour in a flower, grace in an animal, sweetness in women, heroism in men, and all the tender ties that bind heart to heart; though he was slow to show it, having no words to express the tastes and instincts which he inherited from his mother. Suffering of soul and body had tamed his stronger passions, and the atmosphere of love and pity now surrounding him purified and warmed his heart till it began to hunger for the food neglected or denied so long. This was plainly written in his too expressive face, as, fancying it unseen, he let it tell the longing after beauty, peace, and happiness embodied for him in the innocent fair girl before him.

The conviction of this sad yet natural fact came to Mrs Jo with a pang, for she felt how utterly hopeless such a longing was; since light and darkness were not farther apart than snow-white Bess and sin-stained Dan. No dream of such a thing disturbed the young girl, as her entire unconsciousness plainly showed. But how long would it be before the eloquent eyes betrayed the truth? And then what disappointment for Dan, what dismay for Bess, who was as cool and high and pure as her own marbles, and shunned all thought of love with maidenly reserve.

‘How hard everything is made for my poor boy! How can I spoil his little dream, and take away the spirit of good he is beginning to love and long for? When my own dear lads are safely settled I’ll never try another, for these things are heart-breaking, and I can’t manage any more,’ thought Mrs Jo, as she put the lining into Teddy’s coat-sleeve upside down, so perplexed and grieved was she at this new catastrophe.

The story was soon done, and as Bess shook back her hair, Dan asked as eagerly as a boy:

‘Don’t you like it?’

‘Yes, it’s very pretty, and I see the meaning of it; but Undine was always my favourite.’

‘Of course, that’s like you — lilies and pearls and souls and pure water. Sintram used to be mine; but I took a fancy to this when I was — ahem — rather down on my luck one time, and it did me good, it was so cheerful and sort of spiritual in its meaning, you know.’

Bess opened her blue eyes in wonder at this fancy of Dan’s for anything ‘spiritual’; but she only nodded, saying: ‘Some of the little songs are sweet and might be set to music.’

Dan laughed; ‘I used to sing the last one to a tune of my own sometimes at sunset:

‘“Listening to celestial lays,
Bending thy unclouded gaze
On the pure and living light,
Thou art blest, Aslauga’s Knight!”

‘And I was,’ he added, under his breath, as he glanced towards the sunshine dancing on the wall.

‘This one suits you better now’; and glad to please him by her interest, Bess read in her soft voice:

‘“Healfast, healfast, ye hero wounds;
O knight, be quickly strong!
Beloved strife

For fame and life,
Oh, tarry not too long!”‘

‘I’m no hero, never can be, and “fame and life” can’t do much for me. Never mind, read me that paper, please. This knock on the head has made a regular fool of me.’

Dan’s voice was gentle; but the light was gone out of his face now, and he moved restlessly as if the silken pillows were full of thorns. Seeing that his mood had changed, Bess quietly put down the book, took up the paper, and glanced along the columns for something to suit him.

‘You don’t care for the money market, I know, nor musical news. Here’s a murder; you used to like those; shall I read it? One man kills another — ,’

‘No!’

Only a word, but it gave Mrs Jo a thrill, and for a moment she dared not glance at the tell-tale mirror. When she did Dan lay motionless with one hand over his eyes, and Bess was happily reading the art news to ears that never heard a word. Feeling like a thief who has stolen something very precious, Mrs Jo slipped away to her study, and before long Bess followed to report that Dan was fast asleep.

Sending her home, with the firm resolve to keep her there as much as possible, Mother Bhaer had an hour of serious thought all alone in the red sunset; and when a sound in the next room led her there, she found that the feigned sleep had become real repose; for Dan lay breathing heavily, with a scarlet spot on either cheek, and one hand clinched on his broad breast. Yearning over him with a deeper pity than ever before, she sat in the little chair beside him, trying to see her way out of this tangle, till his hand slipped down, and in doing so snapped a cord he wore about his neck and let a small case drop to the floor.

Mrs Jo picked it up, and as he did not wake, sat looking at it, idly wondering what charm it held; for the case was of Indian workmanship and the broken cord, of closely woven grass, sweet scented and pale yellow.

‘I won’t pry into any more of the poor fellow’s secrets. I’ll mend and put it back, and never let him know I’ve seen his talisman.’

As she spoke she turned the little wallet to examine the fracture, and a card fell into her lap. It was a photograph, cut to fit its covering, and two words were written underneath the face, ‘My Aslauga’. For an instant Mrs Jo fancied that it might be one of herself, for all the boys had them; but as the thin paper fell away, she saw the picture Demi took of Bess that happy summer day. There was no doubt now, and with a sigh she put it back, and was about to slip it into Dan’s bosom so that not even a stitch should betray her knowledge, when as she leaned towards him, she saw that he was looking straight at her with an expression that surprised her more than any of the strange ones she had ever seen in that changeful face before.

‘Your hand slipped down; it fell; I was putting it back,’ explained Mrs Jo, feeling like a naughty child caught in mischief.

‘You saw the picture?’

‘Yes.’

‘And know what a fool I am?’

‘Yes, Dan, and am so grieved — ’

‘Don’t worry about me. I’m all right — glad you know, though I never meant to tell you. Of course it is only a crazy fancy of mine, and nothing can ever come of it. Never thought there would. Good Lord! what could that little angel ever be to me but what she is — a sort of dream of all that’s sweet and good?’

More afflicted by the quiet resignation of his look and tone than by the most passionate ardour, Mrs Jo could only say, with a face full of sympathy:

‘It is very hard, dear, but there is no other way to look at it. You are wise and brave enough to see that, and to let the secret be ours alone.’

‘I swear I will! not a word nor a look if I can help it. No one guesses, and if it troubles no one, is there any harm in my keeping this, and taking comfort in the pretty fancy that kept me sane in that cursed place?’

Dan’s face was eager now, and he hid away the little worn case as if defying any hand to take it from him. Anxious to know everything before giving counsel or comfort, Mrs Jo said quietly:

‘Keep it, and tell me all about the “fancy”. Since I have stumbled on your secret, let me know how it came, and how I can help to make it lighter to bear.’

‘You’ll laugh; but I don’t mind. You always did find out our secrets and give us a lift. Well, I never cared much for books, you know; but down yonder when the devil tormented me I had to do something or go stark mad, so I read both the books you gave me. One was beyond me, till that good old man showed me how to read it; but the other, this one, was a comfort, I tell you. It amused me, and was as pretty as poetry. I liked ‘em all, and most wore out Sintram. See how used up he is! Then I came to this, and it sort of fitted that other happy part of my life, last summer — here.’

Dan stopped a moment as the words lingered on his lips; then, with a long breath, went on, as if it was hard to lay bare the foolish little romance he had woven about a girl, a picture, and a child’s story there in the darkness of the place which was as terrible to him as Dante’s Inferno, till he found his Beatrice.

‘I couldn’t sleep, and had to think about something, so I used to fancy I was Folko, and see the shining of Aslauga’s hair in the sunset on the wall, the gum of the watchman’s lamp, and the light that came in at dawn. My cell was high. I could see a bit of sky; sometimes there was a star in it, and that was most as good as a face. I set great store by that patch of blue, and when a white cloud went by, I thought it was the prettiest thing in all this world. I guess I was pretty near a fool; but those thoughts and things helped me through, so they are all solemn true to me, and I can't let them go. The dear shiny head, the white gown, the eyes like stars, and sweet, calm ways that set her as high above me as the moon in heaven. Don't take it away! it's only a fancy, but a man must love something, and I'd better love a spirit like her than any of the poor common girls who would care for me.'

The quiet despair in Dan's voice pierced Mrs Jo to the heart; but there was no hope and she gave none. Yet she felt that he was right, and that his hapless affection might do more to uplift and purify him than any other he might know. Few women would care to marry Dan now, except such as would hinder, not help, him in the struggle which life would always be to him; and it was better to go solitary to his grave than become what she suspected his father had been — a handsome, unprincipled, and dangerous man, with more than one broken heart to answer for.

'Yes, Dan, it is wise to keep this innocent fancy, if it helps and comforts you, till something more real and possible comes to make you happier. I wish I could give you any hope; but we both know that the dear child is the apple of her father's eye, the pride of her mother's heart, and that the most perfect lover they can find will hardly seem to them worthy of their precious daughter. Let her remain for you the high, bright star that leads you up and makes you believe in heaven.' Mrs Jo broke down there; it seemed so cruel to destroy the faint hope Dan's eyes betrayed, that she could not moralize when she thought of his hard life and lonely future. Perhaps it was the wisest thing she could have done, for in her hearty sympathy he found comfort for his own loss, and very soon was able to speak again in the manly tone of resignation to the inevitable that showed how honest was his effort to give up everything but the pale shadow of what, for another, might have been a happy possibility.

They talked long and earnestly in the twilight; and this second secret bound them closer than the first; for in it there was neither sin nor shame — only the tender pain and patience which has made saints and heroes of far worse men than our poor Dan. When at length they rose at the summons of a bell, all the sunset glory had departed, and in the wintry sky there hung one star, large, soft, and clear, above a snowy world. Pausing at the window before she dropped the curtains, Mrs Jo said cheerfully:

'Come and see how beautiful the evening star is, since you love it so.' And as he stood behind her, tall and pale, like the ghost of his former self, she added softly: ‘And remember, dear, if the sweet girl is denied you, the old friend is always here — to love and trust and pray for you.’

This time she was not disappointed; and had she asked any reward for many anxieties and cares, she received it when Dan’s strong arm came round her, as he said, in a voice which showed her that she had not laboured in vain to pluck her firebrand from the burning:

‘I never can forget that; for she’s helped to save my soul, and make me dare to look up there and say:

“God bless her!”‘

Chapter 22. POSITIVELY LAST APPEARANCE

‘Upon my word, I feel as if I lived in a powder-magazine, and don’t know which barrel will explode next, and send me flying,’ said Mrs Jo to herself next day, as she trudged up to Parnassus to suggest to her sister that perhaps the most charming of the young nurses had better return to her marble gods before she unconsciously added another wound to those already won by the human hero. She told no secrets; but a hint was sufficient; for Mrs Amy guarded her daughter as a pearl of great price, and at once devised a very simple means of escape from danger. Mr Laurie was going to Washington on Dan’s behalf, and was delighted to take his family with him when the idea was carelessly suggested. So the conspiracy succeeded finely; and Mrs Jo went home, feeling more like a traitor than ever. She expected an explosion; but Dan took the news so quietly, it was plain that he cherished no hope; and Mrs Amy was sure her romantic sister had been mistaken. If she had seen Dan’s face when Bess went to say good-bye, her maternal eye would have discovered far more than the unconscious girl did. Mrs Jo trembled lest he should betray himself; but he had learned self-control in a stern school, and would have got through the hard moment bravely, only, when he took both hands, saying heartily:

‘Good-bye, Princess. If we don’t meet again, remember your old friend Dan sometimes,’ she, touched by his late danger and the wistful look he wore, answered with unusual warmth: ‘How can I help it, when you make us all so proud of you? God bless your mission, and bring you safely home to us again!’

As she looked up at him with a face full of frank affection and sweet regret, all that he was losing rose so vividly before him that Dan could not resist the impulse to take the ‘dear goldy head’ between his hands and kiss it, with a broken ‘Good-bye’; then hurried back to his room, feeling as if it were the prison-cell again, with no glimpse of heaven’s blue to comfort him.

This abrupt caress and departure rather startled Bess; for she felt with a girl’s quick instinct that there was something in that kiss unknown before, and looked after him with sudden colour in her cheeks and new trouble in her eyes. Mrs Jo saw it, and fearing a very natural question answered it before it was put.

‘Forgive him, Bess. He has had a great trouble, and it makes him tender at parting with old friends; for you know he may never come back from the wild world he is going to.’

‘You mean the fall and danger of death?’ asked Bess, innocently.

‘No, dear; a greater trouble than that. But I cannot tell you any more — except that he has come through it bravely; so you may trust and respect him, as I do.’

‘He has lost someone he loved. Poor Dan! We must be very kind to him.’

Bess did not ask the question, but seemed content with her solution of the mystery — which was so true that Mrs Jo confirmed it by a nod, and let her go away believing that some tender loss and sorrow wrought the great change all saw in Dan, and made him so slow to speak concerning the past year.

But Ted was less easily satisfied, and this unusual reticence goaded him to desperation. His mother had warned him not to trouble Dan with questions till he was quite well; but this prospect of approaching departure made him resolve to have a full, clear, and satisfactory account of the adventures which he felt sure must have been thrilling, from stray words Dan let fall in his fever. So one day when the coast was clear, Master Ted volunteered to amuse the invalid, and did so in the following manner:

‘Look here, old boy, if you don’t want me to read, you’ve got to talk, and tell me all about Kansas, and the farms, and that part. The Montana business I know, but you seem to forget what went before. Brace up, and let’s have it,’ he began, with an abruptness which roused Dan from a brown study most effectually.

‘No, I don’t forget; it isn’t interesting to anyone but myself. I didn’t see any farms — gave it up,’ he said slowly.

‘Why?’

‘Other things to do.’

‘What?’

‘Well, brush-making for one thing.’

‘Don’t chaff a fellow. Tell true.’

‘I truly did.’

‘What for?’

‘To keep out of mischief, as much as anything.’

‘Well, of all the queer things — and you’ve done a lot — that’s the queerest,’ cried Ted, taken aback at this disappointing discovery. But he didn’t mean to give up yet, and began again.

‘What mischief, Dan?’

‘Never you mind. Boys shouldn’t bother.’

‘But I do want to know, awfully, because I’m your pal, and care for you no end. Always did. Come, now, tell me a good yarn. I love scrapes. I’ll be mum as an oyster if you don’t want it known.’

‘Will you?’ and Dan looked at him, wondering how the boyish face would change if the truth were suddenly told him.

‘I’ll swear it on locked fists, if you like. I know it was jolly, and I’m aching to hear.'

'You are as curious as a girl. More than some — Josie and — and Bess never asked a question.'

'They don't care about rows and things; they liked the mine business, heroes, and that sort. So do I, and I'm as proud as Punch over it; but I see by your eyes that there was something else before that, and I'm bound to find out who Blair and Mason are, and who was hit and who ran away, and all the rest of it.'

'What!' cried Dan, in a tone that made Ted jump.

'Well, you used to mutter about 'em in your sleep, and Uncle Laurie wondered. So did I; but don't mind, if you can't remember, or would rather not.'

'What else did I say? Queer, what stuff a man will talk when his wits are gone.'

'That's all I heard; but it seemed interesting, and I just mentioned it, thinking it might refresh your memory a bit,' said Teddy, very politely; for Dan's frown was heavy at that moment.

It cleared off at this reply, and after a look at the boy squirming with suppressed impatience in his chair, Dan made up his mind to amuse him with a game of cross-purposes and half-truths, hoping to quench his curiosity, and so get peace.

'Let me see; Blair was a lad I met in the cars, and Mason a poor fellow who was in a — well, a sort of hospital where I happened to be. Blair ran off to his brothers, and I suppose I might say Mason was hit, because he died there. Does that suit you?'

'No, it doesn't. Why did Blair run? and who hit the other fellow? I'm sure there was a fight somewhere, wasn't there?'

'Yes!

'I guess I know what it was about.'

'The devil, you do! Let's hear you guess. Must be amusing,' said Dan, affecting an ease he did not feel.

Charmed to be allowed to free his mind, Ted at once unfolded the boyish solution of the mystery which he had been cherishing, for he felt that there was one somewhere.

'You needn't say yes, if I guess right and you are under oath to keep silent. I shall know by your face, and never tell. Now see if I'm not right. Out there they have wild doings, and it's my belief you were in some of 'em. I don't mean robbing mails, and KluKluxing, and that sort of thing; but defending the settlers, or hanging some scamp, or even shooting a few, as a fellow must sometimes, in self-defence. Ah, ha! I've hit it, I see. Needn't speak; I know the flash of your old eye, and the clench of your big fist.' And Ted pranced with satisfaction.

‘Drive on, smart boy, and don’t lose the trail,’ said Dan, finding a curious sense of comfort in some of these random words, and longing, but not daring, to confirm the true ones. He might have confessed the crime, but not the punishment that followed, the sense of its disgrace was still so strong upon him.

‘I knew I should get it; can’t deceive me long,’ began Ted, with such an air of pride Dan could not help a short laugh.

‘It’s a relief, isn’t it, to have it off your mind? Now, just confide in me and it’s all safe, unless you’ve sworn not to tell.’

‘I have.’

‘Oh, well, then don’t’; and Ted’s face fell, but he was himself again in a moment and said, with the air of a man of the world: ‘It’s all right — I understand — honour binds — silence to death, etc. Glad you stood by your mate in the hospital. How many did you kill?’

‘Only one.’

‘Bad lot, of course?’

‘A damned rascal.’

‘Well, don’t look so fierce; I’ve no objection. Wouldn’t mind popping at some of those bloodthirsty blackguards myself. Had to dodge and keep quiet after it, I suppose.’

‘Pretty quiet for a long spell.’

‘Got off all right in the end, and headed for your mines and did that jolly brave thing. Now, I call that decidedly interesting and capital. I’m glad to know it; but I won’t blab.’

‘Mind you don’t. Look here. Ted, if you’d killed a man, would it trouble you — a bad one, I mean?’

The lad opened his mouth to say, ‘Not a bit,’ but checked that answer as if something in Dan’s face made him change his mind. ‘Well, if it was my duty in war or self-defence, I suppose I shouldn’t; but if I’d pitched into him in a rage, I guess I should be very sorry. Shouldn’t wonder if he sort of haunted me, and remorse gnawed me as it did Aram and those fellows. You don’t mind, do you? It was a fair fight, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes, I was in the right; but I wish I’d been out of it. Women don’t see it that way, and look horrified at such things. Makes it hard; but it don’t matter.’

‘Don’t tell ‘em; then they can’t worry,’ said Ted, with the nod of one versed in the management of the sex.

‘Don’t intend to. Mind you keep your notions to yourself, for some of ‘em are wide of the mark. Now you may read if you like’; and there the talk ended; but Ted took great comfort in it, and looked as wise as an owl afterwards.

A few quiet weeks followed, during which Dan chafed at the delay; and when at length word came that his credentials were ready, he was eager to be off, to forget a vain love in hard work, and live for others, since he might not for himself.

So one wild March morning our Sintram rode away, with horse and hound, to face again the enemies who would have conquered him, but for Heaven's help and human pity.

'Ah, me! it does seem as if life was made of partings, and they get harder as we go on,' sighed Mrs Jo, a week later, as she sat in the long parlour at Parnassus one evening, whither the family had gone to welcome the travellers back.

'And meetings too, dear; for here we are, and Nat is on his way at last. Look for the silver lining, as Marmee used to say, and be comforted,' answered Mrs Amy, glad to be at home and find no wolves prowling near her sheepfold.

'I've been so worried lately, I can't help croaking. I wonder what Dan thought at not seeing you again? It was wise; but he would have enjoyed another look at home faces before he went into the wilderness,' said Mrs Jo regretfully.

'Much better so. We left notes and all we could think of that he might need, and slipped away before he came. Bess really seemed relieved; I'm sure I was'; and Mrs Amy smoothed an anxious line out of her white forehead, as she smiled at her daughter, laughing happily among her cousins.

Mrs Jo shook her head as if the silver lining of that cloud was hard to find; but she had no time to croak again, for just then Mr Laurie came in looking well pleased at something.

'A new picture has arrived; face towards the music-room, good people, and tell me how you like it. I call it "Only a fiddler", after Andersen's story. What name will you give it?'

As he spoke he threw open the wide doors, and just beyond they saw a young man standing, with a beaming face, and a violin in his hand. There was no doubt about the name to this picture, and with the cry 'Nat! Nat!' there was a general uprising. But Daisy reached him first, and seemed to have lost her usual composure somewhere on the way, for she clung to him, sobbing with the shock of a surprise and joy too great for her to bear quietly. Everything was settled by that tearful and tender embrace, for, though Mrs Meg speedily detached her daughter, it was only to take her place; while Demi shook Nat's hand with brotherly warmth, and Josie danced round them like Macbeth's three witches in one, chanting in her most tragic tones:

'Chirper thou wast; second violin thou art; first thou shalt be. Hail, all hail!'

This caused a laugh, and made things gay and comfortable at once. Then the usual fire of questions and answers began, to be kept up briskly while the boys admired Nat's blond beard and foreign clothes, the girls his improved appearance — for he was ruddy with good English beef and beer, and fresh with the sea-breezes which had blown him swiftly home — and the older folk rejoiced over his prospects. Of course all wanted to hear him play; and when tongues tired, he gladly did his best for them, surprising the most critical by his progress in music even more than by the energy and self-possession which made a new man of bashful Nat. By and by when the violin — that most human of all instruments — had sung to them the loveliest songs without words, he said, looking about him at these old friends with what Mr Bhaer called a 'feeling-full' expression of happiness and content:

'Now let me play something that you will all remember though you won't love it as I do'; and standing in the attitude which Ole Bull has immortalized, he played the street melody he gave them the first night he came to Plumfield. They remembered it, and joined in the plaintive chorus, which fitly expressed his own emotions:

'Oh my heart is sad and weary
Everywhere I roam,
Longing for the old plantation
And for the old folks at home.'

'Now I feel better,' said Mrs Jo, as they all trooped down the hill soon after. 'Some of our boys are failures, but I think this one is going to be a success, and patient Daisy a happy girl at last. Nat is your work, Fritz, and I congratulate you heartily.'

'Ach, we can but sow the seed and trust that it falls on good ground. I planted, perhaps, but you watched that the fowls of the air did not devour it, and brother Laurie watered generously; so we will share the harvest among us, and be glad even for a small one, heart's-dearest.'

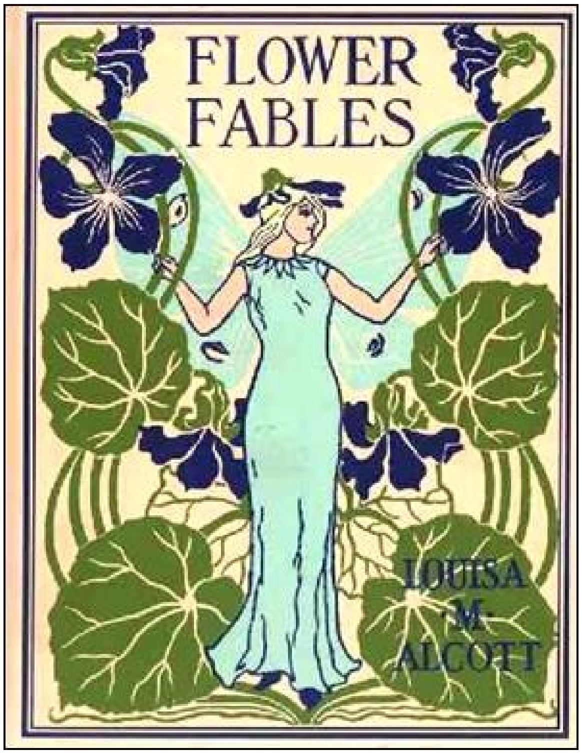
'I thought the seed had fallen on very stony ground with my poor Dan; but I shall not be surprised if he surpasses all the rest in the real success of life, since there is more rejoicing over one repentant sinner than many saints,' answered Mrs Jo, still clinging fast to her black sheep although a whole flock of white ones trotted happily before her.

It is a strong temptation to the weary historian to close the present tale with an earthquake which should engulf Plumfield and its environs so deeply in the bowels of the earth that no youthful Schliemann could ever find a vestige of it. But as that somewhat melodramatic conclusion might shock my gentle readers, I will refrain, and forestall the usual question, 'How did they end?' by briefly stating that all the marriages turned out well. The boys prospered in their various callings; so did the girls, for Bess and Josie won honours in their artistic careers, and in the course of time found worthy mates. Nan remained a busy, cheerful, independent spinster, and dedicated her life to her suffering sisters and their children, in which true woman’s work she found abiding happiness. Dan never married, but lived, bravely and usefully, among his chosen people till he was shot defending them, and at last lay quietly asleep in the green wilderness he loved so well, with a lock of golden hair upon his breast, and a smile on his face which seemed to say that Aslauga’s Knight had fought his last fight and was at peace. Stuffy became an alderman, and died suddenly of apoplexy after a public dinner. Dolly was a society man of mark till he lost his money, when he found congenial employment in a fashionable tailoring establishment. Demi became a partner, and lived to see his name above the door, and Rob was a professor at Laurence College; but Teddy eclipsed them all by becoming an eloquent and famous clergyman, to the great delight of his astonished mother. And now, having endeavoured to suit everyone by many weddings, few deaths, and as much prosperity as the eternal fitness of things will permit, let the music stop, the lights die out, and the curtain fall for ever on the March family.

The Shorter Fiction

FLOWER FABLES

This book was Alcott's first published work, appearing in 1849. It is a compilation of fanciful stories, which were written seven years earlier for Ellen Emerson (daughter of Ralph Waldo Emerson). The book was published in an edition of 1600 and sold well, though Alcott received only a small figure from her publisher.


FLOWER
FABLES
LOUISA
M
ALCOTT

An early front cover

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FLOWER FABLES

“Pondering shadows, colors, clouds
Grass-buds, and caterpillar shrouds
Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
Tints that spot the violet’s petal.”
EMERSON’S WOOD-NOTES.

TO
ELLEN EMERSON,
FOR WHOM THEY WERE FANCIED,
THESE FLOWER FABLES
ARE INSCRIBED,
BY HER FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.
Boston, Dec. 9, 1854.

FLOWER FABLES.

THE summer moon shone brightly down upon the sleeping earth, while far away from mortal eyes danced the Fairy folk. Fire-flies hung in bright clusters on the dewy leaves, that waved in the cool night-wind; and the flowers stood gazing, in very wonder, at the little Elves, who lay among the fern-leaves, swung in the vine-boughs, sailed on the lake in lily cups, or danced on the mossy ground, to the music of the hare-bells, who rung out their merriest peal in honor of the night.

Under the shade of a wild rose sat the Queen and her little Maids of Honor, beside the silvery mushroom where the feast was spread.

“Now, my friends,” said she, “to while away the time till the bright moon goes down, let us each tell a tale, or relate what we have done or learned this day. I will begin with you, Sunny Lock,” added she, turning to a lovely little Elf, who lay among the fragrant leaves of a primrose.

With a gay smile, “Sunny Lock” began her story.

“As I was painting the bright petals of a blue bell, it told me this tale.”

THE FROST-KING

OR,

THE POWER OF LOVE.

THREE little Fairies sat in the fields eating their breakfast; each among the leaves of her favorite flower, Daisy, Primrose, and Violet, were happy as Elves need be.

The morning wind gently rocked them to and fro, and the sun shone warmly down upon the dewy grass, where butterflies spread their gay wings, and bees with their deep voices sung among the flowers; while the little birds hopped merrily about to peep at them.

On a silvery mushroom was spread the breakfast; little cakes of flower-dust lay on a broad green leaf, beside a crimson strawberry, which, with sugar from the violet, and cream from the yellow milkweed, made a fairy meal, and their drink was the dew from the flowers' bright leaves.

"Ah me," sighed Primrose, throwing herself languidly back, "how warm the sun grows! give me another piece of strawberry, and then I must hasten away to the shadow of the ferns. But while I eat, tell me, dear Violet, why are you all so sad? I have scarce seen a happy face since my return from Rose Land; dear friend, what means it?"

"I will tell you," replied little Violet, the tears gathering in her soft eyes. "Our good Queen is ever striving to keep the dear flowers from the power of the cruel Frost-King; many ways she tried, but all have failed. She has sent messengers to his court with costly gifts; but all have returned sick for want of sunlight, weary and sad; we have watched over them, heedless of sun or shower, but still his dark spirits do their work, and we are left to weep over our blighted blossoms. Thus have we striven, and in vain; and this night our Queen holds council for the last time. Therefore are we sad, dear Primrose, for she has toiled and cared for us, and we can do nothing to help or advise her now."

"It is indeed a cruel thing," replied her friend; "but as we cannot help it, we must suffer patiently, and not let the sorrows of others disturb our happiness. But, dear sisters, see you not how high the sun is getting? I have my locks to curl, and my robe to prepare for the evening; therefore I must be gone, or I shall be brown as a withered leaf in this warm light." So, gathering a tiny mushroom for a parasol, she flew away; Daisy soon followed, and Violet was left alone.

Then she spread the table afresh, and to it came fearlessly the busy ant and bee, gay butterfly and bird; even the poor blind mole and humble worm were not forgotten; and with gentle words she gave to all, while each learned something of their kind little teacher; and the love that made her own heart bright shone alike on all.

The ant and bee learned generosity, the butterfly and bird contentment, the mole and worm confidence in the love of others; and each went to their home better for the little time they had been with Violet.

Evening came, and with it troops of Elves to counsel their good Queen, who, seated on her mossy throne, looked anxiously upon the throng below, whose glittering wings and rustling robes gleamed like many-colored flowers.

At length she rose, and amid the deep silence spoke thus: —

“Dear children, let us not tire of a good work, hard though it be and wearisome; think of the many little hearts that in their sorrow look to us for help. What would the green earth be without its lovely flowers, and what a lonely home for us! Their beauty fills our hearts with brightness, and their love with tender thoughts. Ought we then to leave them to die uncared for and alone? They give to us their all; ought we not to toil unceasingly, that they may bloom in peace within their quiet homes? We have tried to gain the love of the stern Frost-King, but in vain; his heart is hard as his own icy land; no love can melt, no kindness bring it back to sunlight and to joy. How then may we keep our frail blossoms from his cruel spirits? Who will give us counsel? Who will be our messenger for the last time? Speak, my subjects.”

Then a great murmuring arose, and many spoke, some for costlier gifts, some for war; and the fearful counselled patience and submission.

Long and eagerly they spoke, and their soft voices rose high.

Then sweet music sounded on the air, and the loud tones were hushed, as in wondering silence the Fairies waited what should come.

Through the crowd there came a little form, a wreath of pure white violets lay among the bright locks that fell so softly round the gentle face, where a deep blush glowed, as, kneeling at the throne, little Violet said: —

“Dear Queen, we have bent to the Frost-King’s power, we have borne gifts unto his pride, but have we gone trustingly to him and spoken fearlessly of his evil deeds? Have we shed the soft light of unwearied love around his cold heart, and with patient tenderness shown him how bright and beautiful love can make even the darkest lot?

“Our messengers have gone fearfully, and with cold looks and courtly words offered him rich gifts, things he cared not for, and with equal pride has he sent them back.

“Then let me, the weakest of your band, go to him, trusting in the love I know lies hidden in the coldest heart.

“I will bear only a garland of our fairest flowers; these will I wind about him, and their bright faces, looking lovingly in his, will bring sweet thoughts to his dark mind, and their soft breath steal in like gentle words. Then, when he sees them fading on his breast, will he not sigh that there is no warmth there to keep them fresh and lovely? This will I do, dear Queen, and never leave his dreary home, till the sunlight falls on flowers fair as those that bloom in our own dear land.”

Silently the Queen had listened, but now, rising and placing her hand on little Violet’s head, she said, turning to the throng below: — “We in our pride and power have erred, while this, the weakest and lowliest of our subjects, has from the innocence of her own pure heart counselled us more wisely than the noblest of our train. All who will aid our brave little messenger, lift your wands, that we may know who will place their trust in the Power of Love.”

Every fairy wand glistened in the air, as with silvery voices they cried, “Love and little Violet.”

Then down from the throne, hand in hand, came the Queen and Violet, and till the moon sank did the Fairies toil, to weave a wreath of the fairest flowers. Tenderly they gathered them, with the night-dew fresh upon their leaves, and as they wove chanted sweet spells, and whispered fairy blessings on the bright messengers whom they sent forth to die in a dreary land, that their gentle kindred might bloom unharmed.

At length it was done; and the fair flowers lay glowing in the soft starlight, while beside them stood the Fairies, singing to the music of the wind-harps: —

We are sending you, dear flowers,
Forth alone to die,
Where your gentle sisters may not weep
O’er the cold graves where you lie;
But you go to bring them fadeless life
In the bright homes where they dwell,
And you softly smile that ‘t is so,
As we sadly sing farewell.

O plead with gentle words for us,
And whisper tenderly
Of generous love to that cold heart,

And it will answer ye;
And though you fade in a dreary home,
Yet loving hearts will tell
Of the joy and peace that you have given:
Flowers, dear flowers, farewell!”

The morning sun looked softly down upon the broad green earth, which like a mighty altar was sending up clouds of perfume from its breast, while flowers danced gayly in the summer wind, and birds sang their morning hymn among the cool green leaves. Then high above, on shining wings, soared a little form. The sunlight rested softly on the silken hair, and the winds fanned lovingly the bright face, and brought the sweetest odors to cheer her on.

Thus went Violet through the clear air, and the earth looked smiling up to her, as, with the bright wreath folded in her arms, she flew among the soft, white clouds.

On and on she went, over hill and valley, broad rivers and rustling woods, till the warm sunlight passed away, the winds grew cold, and the air thick with falling snow. Then far below she saw the Frost-King’s home. Pillars of hard, gray ice supported the high, arched roof, hung with crystal icicles. Dreary gardens ay around, filled with withered flowers and bare, drooping trees;

while heavy clouds hung low in the dark sky, and a cold wind murmured sadly through the wintry air.

With a beating heart Violet folded her fading wreath more closely to her breast, and with weary wings flew onward to the dreary palace.

Here, before the closed doors, stood many forms with dark faces and harsh, discordant voices, who sternly asked the shivering little Fairy why she came to them.

Gently she answered, telling them her errand, beseeching them to let her pass ere the cold wind blighted her frail blossoms. Then they flung wide the doors, and she passed in.

Walls of ice, carved with strange figures, were around her; glittering icicles hung from the high roof, and soft, white snow covered the hard floors. On a throne hung with clouds sat the Frost-King; a crown of crystals bound his white locks, and a dark mantle wrought with delicate frost-work was folded over his cold breast.

His stern face could not stay little Violet, and on through the long hall she went, heedless of the snow that gathered on her feet, and the bleak wind that blew around her; while the King with wondering eyes looked on the golden light that played upon the dark walls as she passed.

The flowers, as if they knew their part, unfolded their bright leaves, and poured forth their sweetest perfume, as, kneeling at the throne, the brave little Fairy said, —

"O King of blight and sorrow, send me not away till I have brought back the light and joy that will make your dark home bright and beautiful again. Let me call back to the desolate gardens the fair forms that are gone, and their soft voices blessing you will bring to your breast a never failing joy. Cast by your icy crown and sceptre, and let the sunlight of love fall softly on your heart.

"Then will the earth bloom again in all its beauty, and your dim eyes will rest only on fair forms, while music shall sound through these dreary halls, and the love of grateful hearts be yours. Have pity on the gentle flower-spirits, and do not doom them to an early death, when they might bloom in fadeless beauty, making us wiser by their gentle teachings, and the earth brighter by their lovely forms. These fair flowers, with the prayers of all Fairy Land, I lay before you; O send me not away till they are answered."

And with tears falling thick and fast upon their tender leaves, Violet laid the wreath at his feet, while the golden light grew ever brighter as it fell upon the little form so humbly kneeling there.

The King's stern face grew milder as he gazed on the gentle Fairy, and the flowers seemed to look beseechingly upon him; while their fragrant voices sounded softly in his ear, telling of their dying sisters, and of the joy it gives to bring happiness to the weak and sorrowing. But he drew the dark mantle closer over his breast and answered coldly, —

"I cannot grant your prayer, little Fairy; it is my will the flowers should die. Go back to your Queen, and tell her that I cannot yield my power to please these foolish flowers."

Then Violet hung the wreath above the throne, and with weary foot went forth again, out into the cold, dark gardens, and still the golden shadows followed her, and wherever they fell, flowers bloomed and green leaves rustled.

Then came the Frost-Spirits, and beneath their cold wings the flowers died, while the Spirits bore Violet to a low, dark cell, saying as they left her, that their King was angry that she had dared to stay when he had bid her go.

So all alone she sat, and sad thoughts of her happy home came back to her, and she wept bitterly. But soon came visions of the gentle flowers dying in their forest homes, and their voices ringing in her ear, imploring her to save them. Then she wept no longer, but patiently awaited what might come.

Soon the golden light gleamed faintly through the cell, and she heard little voices calling for help, and high up among the heavy cobwebs hung poor little flies struggling to free themselves, while their cruel enemies sat in their nets, watching their pain.

With her wand the Fairy broke the bands that held them, tenderly bound up their broken wings, and healed their wounds; while they lay in the warm light, and feebly hummed their thanks to their kind deliverer.

Then she went to the ugly brown spiders, and in gentle words told them, how in Fairy Land their kindred spun all the elfin cloth, and in return the Fairies gave them food, and then how happily they lived among the green leaves, spinning garments for their neighbors. “And you too,” said she, “shall spin for me, and I will give you better food than helpless insects. You shall live in peace, and spin your delicate threads into a mantle for the stern King; and I will weave golden threads amid the gray, that when folded over his cold heart gentle thoughts may enter in and make it their home.”

And while she gayly sung, the little weavers spun their silken threads, the flies on glittering wings flew lovingly above her head, and over all the golden light shone softly down.

When the Frost-Spirits told their King, he greatly wondered and often stole to look at the sunny little room where friends and enemies worked peacefully together. Still the light grew brighter, and floated out into the cold air, where it hung like bright clouds above the dreary gardens, whence all the Spirits’ power could not drive it; and green leaves budded on the naked trees, and flowers bloomed; but the Spirits heaped snow upon them, and they bowed their heads and died.

At length the mantle was finished, and amid the gray threads shone golden ones, making it bright; and she sent it to the King, entreating him to wear it, for it would bring peace and love to dwell within his breast.

But he scornfully threw it aside, and bade his Spirits take her to a colder cell, deep in the earth; and there with harsh words they left her.

Still she sang gayly on, and the falling drops kept time so musically, that the King in his cold ice-halls wondered at the low, sweet sounds that came stealing up to him.

Thus Violet dwelt, and each day the golden light grew stronger; and from among the crevices of the rocky walls came troops of little velvet-coated moles, praying that they might listen to the sweet music, and lie in the warm light.

“We lead,” said they, “a dreary life in the cold earth; the flower-roots are dead, and no soft dews descend for us to drink, no little seed or leaf can we find. Ah, good Fairy, let us be your servants: give us but a few crumbs of your daily bread, and we will do all in our power to serve you.”

And Violet said, Yes; so day after day they labored to make a pathway through the frozen earth, that she might reach the roots of the withered flowers; and soon, wherever through the dark galleries she went, the soft light fell upon the roots of flowers, and they with new life spread forth in the warm ground, and forced fresh sap to the blossoms above. Brightly they bloomed and danced in the soft light, and the Frost-Spirits tried in vain to harm them, for when they came beneath the bright clouds their power to do evil left them.

From his dark castle the King looked out on the happy flowers, who nodded gayly to him, and in sweet colors strove to tell him of the good little Spirit, who toiled so faithfully below, that they might live. And when he turned from the brightness without, to his stately palace, it seemed so cold and dreary, that he folded Violet’s mantle round him, and sat beneath the faded wreath upon his ice-carved throne, wondering at the strange warmth that came from it; till at length he bade his Spirits bring the little Fairy from her dismal prison.

Soon they came hastening back, and prayed him to come and see how lovely the dark cell had grown. The rough floor was spread with deep green moss, and over wall and roof grew flowery vines, filling the air with their sweet breath; while above played the clear, soft light, casting rosy shadows on the glittering drops that lay among the fragrant leaves; and beneath the vines stood Violet, casting crumbs to the downy little moles who ran fearlessly about and listened as she sang to them.

When the old King saw how much fairer she had made the dreary cell than his palace rooms, gentle thoughts within whispered him to grant her prayer, and let the little Fairy go back to her friends and home; but the Frost-Spirits breathed upon the flowers and bid him see how frail they were, and useless to a King. Then the stern, cold thoughts came back again, and he harshly bid her follow him.

With a sad farewell to her little friends she followed him, and before the throne awaited his command. When the King saw how pale and sad the gentle face had grown, how thin her robe, and weak her wings, and yet how lovingly the golden shadows fell around her and brightened as they lay upon the wand, which, guided by patient love, had made his once desolate home so bright, he could not be cruel to the one who had done so much for him, and in kindly tone he said, —

“Little Fairy, I offer you two things, and you may choose between them. If I will vow never more to harm the flowers you may love, will you go back to your own people and leave me and my Spirits to work our will on all the other flowers that bloom? The earth is broad, and we can find them in any land, then why should you care what happens to their kindred if your own are safe? Will you do this?”

“Ah!” answered Violet sadly, “do you not know that beneath the flowers’ bright leaves there beats a little heart that loves and sorrows like our own? And can I, heedless of their beauty, doom them to pain and grief, that I might save my own dear blossoms from the cruel foes to which I leave them? Ah no! sooner would I dwell for ever in your darkest cell, than lose the love of those warm, trusting hearts.”

“Then listen,” said the King, “to the task I give you. You shall raise up for me a palace fairer than this, and if you can work that miracle I will grant your prayer or lose my kingly crown. And now go forth, and begin your task; my Spirits shall not harm you, and I will wait till it is done before I blight another flower.”

Then out into the gardens went Violet with a heavy heart; for she had toiled so long, her strength was nearly gone. But the flowers whispered their gratitude, and folded their leaves as if they blessed her; and when she saw the garden filled with loving friends, who strove to cheer and thank her for her care, courage and strength returned; and raising up thick clouds of mist, that hid her from the wondering flowers, alone and trustingly she began her work.

As time went by, the Frost-King feared the task had been too hard for the Fairy; sounds were heard behind the walls of mist, bright shadows seen to pass within, but the little voice was never heard. Meanwhile the golden light had faded from the garden, the flowers bowed their heads, and all was dark and cold as when the gentle Fairy came.

And to the stern King his home seemed more desolate and sad; for he missed the warm light, the happy flowers, and, more than all, the gay voice and bright face of little Violet. So he wandered through his dreary palace, wondering how he had been content to live before without sunlight and love.

And little Violet was mourned as dead in Fairy-Land, and many tears were shed, for the gentle Fairy was beloved by all, from the Queen down to the humblest flower. Sadly they watched over every bird and blossom which she had loved, and strove to be like her in kindly words and deeds. They wore cypress wreaths, and spoke of her as one whom they should never see again.

Thus they dwelt in deepest sorrow, till one day there came to them an unknown messenger, wrapped in a dark mantle, who looked with wondering eyes on the bright palace, and flower-crowned elves, who kindly welcomed him, and brought fresh dew and rosy fruit to refresh the weary stranger. Then he told them that he came from the Frost-King, who begged the Queen and all her subjects to come and see the palace little Violet had built; for the veil of mist would soon be withdrawn, and as she could not make a fairer home than the ice-castle, the King wished her kindred near to comfort and to bear her home. And while the Elves wept, he told them how patiently she had toiled, how her fadeless love had made the dark cell bright and beautiful.

These and many other things he told them; for little Violet had won the love of many of the Frost-Spirits, and even when they killed the flowers she had toiled so hard to bring to life and beauty, she spoke gentle words to them, and sought to teach them how beautiful is love. Long stayed the messenger, and deeper grew his wonder that the Fairy could have left so fair a home, to toil in the dreary palace of his cruel master, and suffer cold and weariness, to give life and joy to the weak and sorrowing. When the Elves had promised they would come, he bade farewell to happy Fairy-Land, and flew sadly home.

At last the time arrived, and out in his barren garden, under a canopy of dark clouds, sat the Frost-King before the misty wall, behind which were heard low, sweet sounds, as of rustling trees and warbling birds.

Soon through the air came many-colored troops of Elves. First the Queen, known by the silver lilies on her snowy robe and the bright crown in her hair, beside whom flew a band of Elves in crimson and gold, making sweet music on their flower-trumpets, while all around, with smiling faces and bright eyes, fluttered her loving subjects.

On they came, like a flock of brilliant butterflies, their shining wings and many-colored garments sparkling in the dim air; and soon the leafless trees were gay with living flowers, and their sweet voices filled the gardens with music. Like his subjects, the King looked on the lovely Elves, and no longer wondered that little Violet wept and longed for her home. Darker and more desolate seemed his stately home, and when the Fairies asked for flowers, he felt ashamed that he had none to give them.

At length a warm wind swept through the gardens, and the mist-clouds passed away, while in silent wonder looked the Frost-King and the Elves upon the scene before them.

Far as eye could reach were tall green trees whose drooping boughs made graceful arches, through which the golden light shone softly, making bright shadows on the deep green moss below, where the fairest flowers waved in the cool wind, and sang, in their low, sweet voices, how beautiful is Love.

Flowering vines folded their soft leaves around the trees, making green pillars of their rough trunks. Fountains threw their bright waters to the roof, and flocks of silver-winged birds flew singing among the flowers, or brooded lovingly above their nests. Doves with gentle eyes cooed among the green leaves, snow-white clouds floated in the sunny shy, and the golden light, brighter than before, shone softly down.

Soon through the long aisles came Violet, flowers and green leaves rustling as she passed. On she went to the Frost-King's throne, bearing two crowns, one of sparkling icicles, the other of pure white lilies, and kneeling before him, said, —

"My task is done, and, thanks to the Spirits of earth and air, I have made as fair a home as Elfin hands can form. You must now decide. Will you be King of Flower-Land, and own my gentle kindred for your loving friends? Will you possess unfading peace and joy, and the grateful love of all the green earth's fragrant children? Then take this crown of flowers. But if you can find no pleasure here, go back to your own cold home, and dwell in solitude and darkness, where no ray of sunlight or of joy can enter.

"Send forth your Spirits to carry sorrow and desolation over the happy earth, and win for yourself the fear and hatred of those who would so gladly love and reverence you. Then take this glittering crown, hard and cold as your own heart will be, if you will shut out all that is bright and beautiful. Both are before you. Choose."

The old King looked at the little Fairy, and saw how lovingly the bright shadows gathered round her, as if to shield her from every harm; the timid birds nestled in her bosom, and the flowers grew fairer as she looked upon them; while her gentle friends, with tears in their bright eyes, folded their hands beseechingly, and smiled on her.

Kind thought came thronging to his mind, and he turned to look at the two palaces. Violet's, so fair and beautiful, with its rustling trees, calm, sunny skies, and happy birds and flowers, all created by her patient love and care. His own, so cold and dark and dreary, his empty gardens where no flowers could bloom, no green trees dwell, or gay birds sing, all desolate and dim; — and while he gazed, his own Spirits, casting off their dark mantles, knelt before him and besought him not to send them forth to blight the things the gentle Fairies loved so much. "We have served you long and faithfully," said they, "give us now our freedom, that we may learn to be beloved by the sweet flowers we have harmed so long. Grant the little Fairy's prayer; and let her go back to her own dear home. She has taught us that Love is mightier than Fear. Choose the Flower crown, and we will be the truest subjects you have ever had."

Then, amid a burst of wild, sweet music, the Frost-King placed the Flower crown on his head, and knelt to little Violet; while far and near, over the broad green earth, sounded the voices of flowers, singing their thanks to the gentle Fairy, and the summer wind was laden with perfumes, which they sent as tokens of their gratitude; and wherever she went, old trees bent down to fold their slender branches round her, flowers laid their soft faces against her own, and whispered blessings; even the humble moss bent over the little feet, and kissed them as they passed.

The old King, surrounded by the happy Fairies, sat in Violet's lovely home, and watched his icy castle melt away beneath the bright sunlight; while his Spirits, cold and gloomy no longer, danced with the Elves, and waited on their King with loving eagerness. Brighter grew the golden light, gayer sang the birds, and the harmonious voices of grateful flowers, sounding over the earth, carried new joy to all their gentle kindred.

Brighter shone the golden shadows;
On the cool wind softly came
The low, sweet tones of happy flowers,
Singing little Violet’s name.
‘Mong the green trees was it whispered,
And the bright waves bore it on
To the lonely forest flowers,
Where the glad news had not gone.

Thus the Frost-King lost his kingdom,
And his power to harm and blight.
Violet conquered, and his cold heart
Warmed with music, love, and light;
And his fair home, once so dreary,
Gay with lovely Elves and flowers,
Brought a joy that never faded
Through the long bright summer hours.

Thus, by Violet’s magic power,
All dark shadows passed away,
And o’er the home of happy flowers
The golden light for ever lay.
Thus the Fairy mission ended,
And all Flower-Land was taught
The “Power of Love,” by gentle deeds
That little Violet wrought.

As Sunny Lock ceased, another little Elf came forward; and this was the tale “Silver Wing” told.

EVA’S VISIT TO FAIRY-LAND.

DOWN among the grass and fragrant clover lay little Eva by the brook-side, watching the bright waves, as they went singing by under the drooping flowers that grew on its banks. As she was wondering where the waters went, she heard a faint, low sound, as of far-off music. She thought it was the wind, but not a leaf was stirring, and soon through the rippling water came a strange little boat.

It was a lily of the valley, whose tall stem formed the mast, while the broad leaves that rose from the roots, and drooped again till they reached the water, were filled with gay little Elves, who danced to the music of the silver lily-bells above, that rang a merry peal, and filled the air with their fragrant breath.

On came the fairy boat, till it reached a moss-grown rock; and here it stopped, while the Fairies rested beneath the violet-leaves, and sang with the dancing waves.

Eva looked with wonder on their gay faces and bright garments, and in the joy of her heart sang too, and threw crimson fruit for the little folks to feast upon.

They looked kindly on the child, and, after whispering long among themselves, two little bright-eyed Elves flew over the shining water, and, lighting on the clover-blossoms, said gently, “Little maiden, many thanks for your kindness; and our Queen bids us ask if you will go with us to Fairy-Land, and learn what we can teach you.”

“Gladly would I go with you, dear Fairies,” said Eva, “but I cannot sail in your little boat. See! I can hold you in my hand, and could not live among you without harming your tiny kingdom, I am so large.”

Then the Elves laughed gayly, as they folded their arms about her, saying, “You are a good child, dear Eva, to fear doing harm to those weaker than yourself. You cannot hurt us now. Look in the water and see what we have done.”

Eva looked into the brook, and saw a tiny child standing between the Elves. “Now I can go with you,” said she, “but see, I can no longer step from the bank to yonder stone, for the brook seems now like a great river, and you have not given me wings like yours.”

But the Fairies took each a hand, and flew lightly over the stream. The Queen and her subjects came to meet her, and all seemed glad to say some kindly word of welcome to the little stranger. They placed a flower-crown upon her head, laid their soft faces against her own, and soon it seemed as if the gentle Elves had always been her friends.

"Now must we go home," said the Queen, "and you shall go with us, little one."

Then there was a great bustle, as they flew about on shining wings, some laying cushions of violet leaves in the boat, others folding the Queen's veil and mantle more closely round her, lest the falling dews should chill her.

The cool waves' gentle plashing against the boat, and the sweet chime of the lily-bells, lulled little Eva to sleep, and when she woke it was in Fairy-Land. A faint, rosy light, as of the setting sun, shone on the white pillars of the Queen's palace as they passed in, and the sleeping flowers leaned gracefully on their stems, dreaming beneath their soft green curtains. All was cool and still, and the Elves glided silently about, lest they should break their slumbers. They led Eva to a bed of pure white leaves, above which drooped the fragrant petals of a crimson rose.

"You can look at the bright colors till the light fades, and then the rose will sing you to sleep," said the Elves, as they folded the soft leaves about her, gently kissed her, and stole away.

Long she lay watching the bright shadows, and listening to the song of the rose, while through the long night dreams of lovely things floated like bright clouds through her mind; while the rose bent lovingly above her, and sang in the clear moonlight.

With the sun rose the Fairies, and, with Eva, hastened away to the fountain, whose cool waters were soon filled with little forms, and the air ringing with happy voices, as the Elves floated in the blue waves among the fair white lilies, or sat on the green moss, smoothing their bright locks, and wearing fresh garlands of dewy flowers. At length the Queen came forth, and her subjects gathered round her, and while the flowers bowed their heads, and the trees hushed their rustling, the Fairies sang their morning hymn to the Father of birds and blossoms, who had made the earth so fair a home for them.

Then they flew away to the gardens, and soon, high up among the tree-tops, or under the broad leaves, sat the Elves in little groups, taking their breakfast of fruit and pure fresh dew; while the bright-winged birds came fearlessly among them, pecking the same ripe berries, and dipping their little beaks in the same flower-cups, and the Fairies folded their arms lovingly about them, smoothed their soft bosoms, and gayly sang to them.

"Now, little Eva," said they, "you will see that Fairies are not idle, wilful Spirits, as mortals believe. Come, we will show you what we do."

They led her to a lovely room, through whose walls of deep green leaves the light stole softly in. Here lay many wounded insects, and harmless little creatures, whom cruel hands had hurt; and pale, drooping flowers grew beside urns of healing herbs, from whose fresh leaves came a faint, sweet perfume.

Eva wondered, but silently followed her guide, little Rose-Leaf, who with tender words passed among the delicate blossoms, pouring dew on their feeble roots, cheering them with her loving words and happy smile.

Then she went to the insects; first to a little fly who lay in a flower-leaf cradle.

“Do you suffer much, dear Gauzy-Wing?” asked the Fairy. “I will bind up your poor little leg, and Zephyr shall rock you to sleep.” So she folded the cool leaves tenderly about the poor fly, bathed his wings, and brought him refreshing drink, while he hummed his thanks, and forgot his pain, as Zephyr softly sung and fanned him with her waving wings.

They passed on, and Eva saw beside each bed a Fairy, who with gentle hands and loving words soothed the suffering insects. At length they stopped beside a bee, who lay among sweet honeysuckle flowers, in a cool, still place, where the summer wind blew in, and the green leaves rustled pleasantly. Yet he seemed to find no rest, and murmured of the pain he was doomed to bear. “Why must I lie here, while my kindred are out in the pleasant fields, enjoying the sunlight and the fresh air, and cruel hands have doomed me to this dark place and bitter pain when I have done no wrong? Uncared for and forgotten, I must stay here among these poor things who think only of themselves. Come here, Rose-Leaf, and bind up my wounds, for I am far more useful than idle bird or fly.”

Then said the Fairy, while she bathed the broken wing, —

“Love-Blossom, you should not murmur. We may find happiness in seeking to be patient even while we suffer. You are not forgotten or uncared for, but others need our care more than you, and to those who take cheerfully the pain and sorrow sent, do we most gladly give our help. You need not be idle, even though lying here in darkness and sorrow; you can be taking from your heart all sad and discontented feelings, and if love and patience blossom there, you will be better for the lonely hours spent here. Look on the bed beside you; this little dove has suffered far greater pain than you, and all our care can never ease it; yet through the long days he hath lain here, not an unkind word or a repining sigh hath he uttered. Ah, Love-Blossom, the gentle bird can teach a lesson you will be wiser and better for.”

Then a faint voice whispered, “Little Rose-Leaf, come quickly, or I cannot thank you as I ought for all your loving care of me.”

So they passed to the bed beside the discontented bee, and here upon the softest down lay the dove, whose gentle eyes looked gratefully upon the Fairy, as she knelt beside the little couch, smoothed the soft white bosom, folded her arms about it and wept sorrowing tears, while the bird still whispered its gratitude and love.

“Dear Fairy, the fairest flowers have cheered me with their sweet breath, fresh dew and fragrant leaves have been ever ready for me, gentle hands to tend, kindly hearts to love; and for this I can only thank you and say farewell.”

Then the quivering wings were still, and the patient little dove was dead; but the bee murmured no longer, and the dew from the flowers fell like tears around the quiet bed.

Sadly Rose-Leaf led Eva away, saying, “Lily-Bosom shall have a grave tonight beneath our fairest blossoms, and you shall see that gentleness and love are prized far above gold or beauty, here in Fairy-Land. Come now to the Flower Palace, and see the Fairy Court.”

Beneath green arches, bright with birds and flowers, beside singing waves, went Eva into a lofty hall. The roof of pure white lilies rested on pillars of green clustering vines, while many-colored blossoms threw their bright shadows on the walls, as they danced below in the deep green moss, and their low, sweet voices sounded softly through the sunlit palace, while the rustling leaves kept time.

Beside the throne stood Eva, and watched the lovely forms around her, as they stood, each little band in its own color, with glistening wings, and flower wands.

Suddenly the music grew louder and sweeter, and the Fairies knelt, and bowed their heads, as on through the crowd of loving subjects came the Queen, while the air was filled with gay voices singing to welcome her.

She placed the child beside her, saying, “Little Eva, you shall see now how the flowers on your great earth bloom so brightly. A band of loving little gardeners go daily forth from Fairy-Land, to tend and watch them, that no harm may befall the gentle spirits that dwell beneath their leaves. This is never known, for like all good it is unseen by mortal eyes, and unto only pure hearts like yours do we make known our secret. The humblest flower that grows is visited by our messengers, and often blooms in fragrant beauty unknown, unloved by all save Fairy friends, who seek to fill the spirits with all sweet and gentle virtues, that they may not be useless on the earth; for the noblest mortals stoop to learn of flowers. Now, Eglantine, what have you to tell us of your rosy namesakes on the earth?”

From a group of Elves, whose rose-wreathed wands showed the flower they loved, came one bearing a tiny urn, and, answering the Queen, she said, —

“Over hill and valley they are blooming fresh and fair as summer sun and dew can make them. No drooping stem or withered leaf tells of any evil thought within their fragrant bosoms, and thus from the fairest of their race have they gathered this sweet dew, as a token of their gratitude to one whose tenderness and care have kept them pure and happy; and this, the loveliest of their sisters, have I brought to place among the Fairy flowers that never pass away.”

Eglantine laid the urn before the Queen, and placed the fragrant rose on the dewy moss beside the throne, while a murmur of approval went through the hall, as each elfin wand waved to the little Fairy who had toiled so well and faithfully, and could bring so fair a gift to their good Queen.

Then came forth an Elf bearing a withered leaf, while her many-colored robe and the purple tulips in her hair told her name and charge.

"Dear Queen," she sadly said, "I would gladly bring as pleasant tidings as my sister, but, alas! my flowers are proud and wilful, and when I went to gather my little gift of colored leaves for royal garments, they bade me bring this withered blossom, and tell you they would serve no longer one who will not make them Queen over all the other flowers. They would yield neither dew nor honey, but proudly closed their leaves and bid me go."

"Your task has been too hard for you," said the Queen kindly, as she placed the drooping flower in the urn Eglantine had given, "you will see how this dew from a sweet, pure heart will give new life and loveliness even to this poor faded one. So can you, dear Rainbow, by loving words and gentle teachings, bring back lost purity and peace to those whom pride and selfishness have blighted. Go once again to the proud flowers, and tell them when they are queen of their own hearts they will ask no fairer kingdom. Watch more tenderly than ever over them, see that they lack neither dew nor air, speak lovingly to them, and let no unkind word or deed of theirs anger you. Let them see by your patient love and care how much fairer they might be, and when next you come, you will be laden with gifts from humble, loving flowers."

Thus they told what they had done, and received from their Queen some gentle chiding or loving word of praise.

"You will be weary of this," said little Rose-Leaf to Eva; "come now and see where we are taught to read the tales written on flower-leaves, and the sweet language of the birds, and all that can make a Fairy heart wiser and better."

Then into a cheerful place they went, where were many groups of flowers, among whose leaves sat the child Elves, and learned from their flower-books all that Fairy hands had written there. Some studied how to watch the tender buds, when to spread them to the sunlight, and when to shelter them from rain; how to guard the ripening seeds, and when to lay them in the warm earth or send them on the summer wind to far off hills and valleys, where other Fairy hands would tend and cherish them, till a sisterhood of happy flowers sprang up to beautify and gladden the lonely spot where they had fallen. Others learned to heal the wounded insects, whose frail limbs a breeze could shatter, and who, were it not for Fairy hands, would die ere half their happy summer life had gone. Some learned how by pleasant dreams to cheer and comfort mortal hearts, by whispered words of love to save from evil deeds those who had gone astray, to fill young hearts with gentle thoughts and pure affections, that no sin might mar the beauty of the human flower; while others, like mortal children, learned the Fairy alphabet. Thus the Elves made loving friends by care and love, and no evil thing could harm them, for those they helped to cherish and protect ever watched to shield and save them.

Eva nodded to the gay little ones, as they peeped from among the leaves at the stranger, and then she listened to the Fairy lessons. Several tiny Elves stood on a broad leaf while the teacher sat among the petals of a flower that bent beside them, and asked questions that none but Fairies would care to know.

“Twinkle, if there lay nine seeds within a flower-cup and the wind bore five away, how many would the blossom have?” “Four,” replied the little one.

“Rosebud, if a Cowslip opens three leaves in one day and four the next, how many rosy leaves will there be when the whole flower has bloomed?”

“Seven,” sang the gay little Elf.

“Harebell, if a silkworm spin one yard of Fairy cloth in an hour, how many will it spin in a day?”

“Twelve,” said the Fairy child.

“Primrose, where lies Violet Island?”

“In the Lake of Ripples.”

“Lilla, you may bound Rose Land.”

“On the north by Ferndale, south by Sunny Wave River, east by the hill of Morning Clouds, and west by the Evening Star.”

“Now, little ones,” said the teacher, “you may go to your painting, that our visitor may see how we repair the flowers that earthly hands have injured.”

Then Eva saw how, on large, white leaves, the Fairies learned to imitate the lovely colors, and with tiny brushes to brighten the blush on the anemone’s cheek, to deepen the blue of the violet’s eye, and add new light to the golden cowslip.

“You have stayed long enough,” said the Elves at length, “we have many things to show you. Come now and see what is our dearest work.”

So Eva said farewell to the child Elves, and hastened with little Rose-Leaf to the gates. Here she saw many bands of Fairies, folded in dark mantles that mortals might not know them, who, with the child among them, flew away over hill and valley. Some went to the cottages amid the hills, some to the sea-side to watch above the humble fisher folks; but little Rose-Leaf and many others went into the noisy city.

Eva wondered within herself what good the tiny Elves could do in this great place; but she soon learned, for the Fairy band went among the poor and friendless, bringing pleasant dreams to the sick and old, sweet, tender thoughts of love and gentleness to the young, strength to the weak, and patient cheerfulness to the poor and lonely.

Then the child wondered no longer, but deeper grew her love for the tender-hearted Elves, who left their own happy home to cheer and comfort those who never knew what hands had clothed and fed them, what hearts had given of their own joy, and brought such happiness to theirs.

Long they stayed, and many a lesson little Eva learned: but when she begged them to go back, they still led her on, saying, “Our work is not yet done; shall we leave so many sad hearts when we may cheer them, so many dark homes that we may brighten? We must stay yet longer, little Eva, and you may learn yet more.”

Then they went into a dark and lonely room, and here they found a pale, sad-eyed child, who wept bitter tears over a faded flower.

“Ah,” sighed the little one, “it was my only friend, and I cherished it with all my lone heart’s love; ‘t was all that made my sad life happy; and it is gone.”

Tenderly the child fastened the drooping stem, and placed it where the one faint ray of sunlight stole into the dreary room.

“Do you see,” said the Elves, “through this simple flower will we keep the child pure and stainless amid the sin and sorrow around her. The love of this shall lead her on through temptation and through grief, and she shall be a spirit of joy and consolation to the sinful and the sorrowing.”

And with busy love toiled the Elves amid the withered leaves, and new strength was given to the flower; while, as day by day the friendless child watered the growing buds, deeper grew her love for the unseen friends who had given her one thing to cherish in her lonely home; sweet, gentle thoughts filled her heart as she bent above it, and the blossom’s fragrant breath was to her a whispered voice of all fair and lovely things; and as the flower taught her, so she taught others.

The loving Elves brought her sweet dreams by night, and happy thoughts by day, and as she grew in childlike beauty, pure and patient amid poverty and sorrow, the sinful were rebuked, sorrowing hearts grew light, and the weak and selfish forgot their idle fears, when they saw her trustingly live on with none to aid or comfort her. The love she bore the tender flower kept her own heart innocent and bright, and the pure human flower was a lesson to those who looked upon it; and soon the gloomy house was bright with happy hearts, that learned of the gentle child to bear poverty and grief as she had done, to forgive those who brought care and wrong to them, and to seek for happiness in humble deeds of charity and love.

“Our work is done,” whispered the Elves, and with blessings on the two fair flowers, they flew away to other homes; — to a blind old man who dwelt alone with none to love him, till through long years of darkness and of silent sorrow the heart within had grown dim and cold. No sunlight could enter at the darkened eyes, and none were near to whisper gentle words, to cheer and comfort.

Thus he dwelt forgotten and alone, seeking to give no joy to others, possessing none himself. Life was dark and sad till the untiring Elves came to his dreary home, bringing sunlight and love. They whispered sweet words of comfort, — how, if the darkened eyes could find no light without, within there might be never-failing happiness; gentle feelings and sweet, loving thoughts could make the heart fair, if the gloomy, selfish sorrow were but cast away, and all would be bright and beautiful.

They brought light-hearted children, who gathered round him, making the desolate home fair with their young faces, and his sad heart gay with their sweet, childish voices. The love they bore he could not cast away, sunlight stole in, the dark thoughts passed away, and the earth was a pleasant home to him.

Thus their little hands led him back to peace and happiness, flowers bloomed beside his door, and their fragrant breath brought happy thoughts of pleasant valleys and green hills; birds sang to him, and their sweet voices woke the music in his own soul, that never failed to calm and comfort. Happy sounds were heard in his once lonely home, and bright faces gathered round his knee, and listened tenderly while he strove to tell them all the good that gentleness and love had done for him.

Still the Elves watched near, and brighter grew the heart as kindly thoughts and tender feelings entered in, and made it their home; and when the old man fell asleep, above his grave little feet trod lightly, and loving hands laid fragrant flowers.

Then went the Elves into the dreary prison-houses, where sad hearts pined in lonely sorrow for the joy and freedom they had lost. To these came the loving band with tender words, telling of the peace they yet might win by patient striving and repentant tears, thus waking in their bosoms all the holy feelings and sweet affections that had slept so long.

They told pleasant tales, and sang their sweetest songs to cheer and gladden, while the dim cells grew bright with the sunlight, and fragrant with the flowers the loving Elves had brought, and by their gentle teachings those sad, despairing hearts were filled with patient hope and earnest longing to win back their lost innocence and joy.

Thus to all who needed help or comfort went the faithful Fairies; and when at length they turned towards Fairy-Land, many were the grateful, happy hearts they left behind.

Then through the summer sky, above the blossoming earth, they journeyed home, happier for the joy they had given, wiser for the good they had done.

All Fairy-Land was dressed in flowers, and the soft wind went singing by, laden with their fragrant breath. Sweet music sounded through the air, and troops of Elves in their gayest robes hastened to the palace where the feast was spread.

Soon the bright hall was filled with smiling faces and fair forms, and little Eva, as she stood beside the Queen, thought she had never seen a sight so lovely.

The many-colored shadows of the fairest flowers played on the pure white walls, and fountains sparkled in the sunlight, making music as the cool waves rose and fell, while to and fro, with waving wings and joyous voices, went the smiling Elves, bearing fruit and honey, or fragrant garlands for each other’s hair.

Long they feasted, gayly they sang, and Eva, dancing merrily among them, longed to be an Elf that she might dwell forever in so fair a home.

At length the music ceased, and the Queen said, as she laid her hand on little Eva’s shining hair: —

“Dear child, tomorrow we must bear you home, for, much as we long to keep you, it were wrong to bring such sorrow to your loving earthly friends; therefore we will guide you to the brook-side, and there say farewell till you come again to visit us. Nay, do not weep, dear Rose-Leaf; you shall watch over little Eva’s flowers, and when she looks at them she will think of you. Come now and lead her to the Fairy garden, and show her what we think our fairest sight. Weep no more, but strive to make her last hours with us happy as you can.”

With gentle caresses and most tender words the loving Elves gathered about the child, and, with Rose-Leaf by her side, they led her through the palace, and along green, winding paths, till Eva saw what seemed a wall of flowers rising before her, while the air was filled with the most fragrant odors, and the low, sweet music as of singing blossoms.

“Where have you brought me, and what mean these lovely sounds?” asked Eva.

“Look here, and you shall see,” said Rose-Leaf, as she bent aside the vines, “but listen silently or you cannot hear.”

Then Eva, looking through the drooping vines, beheld a garden filled with the loveliest flowers; fair as were all the blossoms she had seen in Fairy-Land, none were so beautiful as these. The rose glowed with a deeper crimson, the lily’s soft leaves were more purely white, the crocus and humble cowslip shone like sunlight, and the violet was blue as the sky that smiled above it.

“How beautiful they are,” whispered Eva, “but, dear Rose-Leaf, why do you keep them here, and why call you this your fairest sight?”

“Look again, and I will tell you,” answered the Fairy.

Eva looked, and saw from every flower a tiny form come forth to welcome the Elves, who all, save Rose-Leaf, had flown above the wall, and were now scattering dew upon the flowers’ bright leaves and talking gayly with the Spirits, who gathered around them, and seemed full of joy that they had come. The child saw that each one wore the colors of the flower that was its home. Delicate and graceful were the little forms, bright the silken hair that fell about each lovely face; and Eva heard the low, sweet murmur of their silvery voices and the rustle of their wings. She gazed in silent wonder, forgetting she knew not who they were, till the Fairy said, —

“These are the spirits of the flowers, and this the Fairy Home where those whose hearts were pure and loving on the earth come to bloom in fadeless beauty here, when their earthly life is past. The humblest flower that blooms has a home with us, for outward beauty is a worthless thing if all be not fair and sweet within. Do you see yonder lovely spirit singing with my sister Moonlight? a clover blossom was her home, and she dwelt unknown, unloved; yet patient and content, bearing cheerfully the sorrows sent her. We watched and saw how fair and sweet the humble flower grew, and then gladly bore her here, to blossom with the lily and the rose. The flowers’ lives are often short, for cruel hands destroy them; therefore is it our greatest joy to bring them hither, where no careless foot or wintry wind can harm them, where they bloom in quiet beauty, repaying our care by their love and sweetest perfumes.”

“I will never break another flower,” cried Eva; “but let me go to them, dear Fairy; I would gladly know the lovely spirits, and ask forgiveness for the sorrow I have caused. May I not go in?”

“Nay, dear Eva, you are a mortal child, and cannot enter here; but I will tell them of the kind little maiden who has learned to love them, and they will remember you when you are gone. Come now, for you have seen enough, and we must be away.”

On a rosy morning cloud, surrounded by the loving Elves, went Eva through the sunny sky. The fresh wind bore them gently on, and soon they stood again beside the brook, whose waves danced brightly as if to welcome them.

“Now, ere we say farewell,” said the Queen, as they gathered nearer to the child, “tell me, dear Eva, what among all our Fairy gifts will make you happiest, and it shall be yours.”

“You good little Fairies,” said Eva, folding them in her arms, for she was no longer the tiny child she had been in Fairy-Land, “you dear good little Elves, what can I ask of you, who have done so much to make me happy, and taught me so many good and gentle lessons, the memory of which will never pass away? I can only ask of you the power to be as pure and gentle as yourselves, as tender and loving to the weak and sorrowing, as untiring in kindly deeds to all. Grant me this gift, and you shall see that little Eva has not forgotten what you have taught her."

"The power shall be yours," said the Elves, and laid their soft hands on her head; "we will watch over you in dreams, and when you would have tidings of us, ask the flowers in your garden, and they will tell you all you would know. Farewell. Remember Fairy-Land and all your loving friends."

They clung about her tenderly, and little Rose-Leaf placed a flower crown on her head, whispering softly, "When you would come to us again, stand by the brook-side and wave this in the air, and we will gladly take you to our home again. Farewell, dear Eva. Think of your little Rose-Leaf when among the flowers."

Long Eva watched their shining wings, and listened to the music of their voices as they flew singing home, and when at length the last little form had vanished among the clouds, she saw that all around her where the Elves had been, the fairest flowers had sprung up, and the lonely brook-side was a blooming garden.

Thus she stood among the waving blossoms, with the Fairy garland in her hair, and happy feelings in her heart, better and wiser for her visit to Fairy-Land.

"Now, Star-Twinkle, what have you to teach?" asked the Queen.

"Nothing but a little song I heard the hare-bells singing," replied the Fairy, and, taking her harp, sang, in a low, sweet voice: —

THE FLOWER’S LESSON.

THERE grew a fragrant rose-tree where the brook flows,
With two little tender buds, and one full rose;
When the sun went down to his bed in the west,
The little buds leaned on the rose-mother’s breast,
While the bright eyed stars their long watch kept,
And the flowers of the valley in their green cradles slept;
Then silently in odors they communed with each other,
The two little buds on the bosom of their mother.
“O sister,” said the little one, as she gazed at the sky,
“I wish that the Dew Elves, as they wander lightly by,
Would bring me a star; for they never grow dim,
And the Father does not need them to burn round him.
The shining drops of dew the Elves bring each day
And place in my bosom, so soon pass away;
But a star would glitter brightly through the long summer hours,
And I should be fairer than all my sister flowers.
That were better far than the dew-drops that fall
On the high and the low, and come alike to all.
I would be fair and stately, with a bright star to shine
And give a queenly air to this crimson robe of mine.”
And proudly she cried, “These fire-flies shall be
My jewels, since the stars can never come to me.”
Just then a tiny dew-drop that hung o’er the dell
On the breast of the bud like a soft star fell;
But impatiently she flung it away from her leaf,
And it fell on her mother like a tear of grief,
While she folded to her breast, with wilful pride,
A glittering fire-fly that hung by her side.
“Heed,” said the mother rose, “daughter mine,
Why shouldst thou seek for beauty not thine?
The Father hath made thee what thou now art;
And what he most loveth is a sweet, pure heart.
Then why dost thou take with such discontent
The loving gift which he to thee hath sent?

For the cool fresh dew will render thee far
More lovely and sweet than the brightest star;
They were made for Heaven, and can never come to shine
Like the fire-fly thou hast in that foolish breast of thine.
O my foolish little bud, do listen to thy mother;
Care only for true beauty, and seek for no other.
There will be grief and trouble in that wilful little heart;
Unfold thy leaves, my daughter, and let the fly depart.”
But the proud little bud would have her own will,
And folded the fire-fly more closely still;
Till the struggling insect tore open the vest
Of purple and green, that covered her breast.
When the sun came up, she saw with grief
The blooming of her sister bud leaf by leaf.
While she, once as fair and bright as the rest,
Hung her weary head down on her wounded breast.
Bright grew the sunshine, and the soft summer air
Was filled with the music of flowers singing there;
But faint grew the little bud with thirst and pain,
And longed for the cool dew; but now ‘t was in vain.
Then bitterly she wept for her folly and pride,
As drooping she stood by her fair sister’s side.
Then the rose mother leaned the weary little head
On her bosom to rest, and tenderly she said:
“Thou hast learned, my little bud, that, whatever may betide,
Thou canst win thyself no joy by passion or by pride.
The loving Father sends the sunshine and the shower,
That thou mayst become a perfect little flower; —
The sweet dews to feed thee, the soft wind to cheer,
And the earth as a pleasant home, while thou art dwelling here.
Then shouldst thou not be grateful for all this kindly care,
And strive to keep thyself most innocent and fair?
Then seek, my little blossom, to win humility;
Be fair without, be pure within, and thou wilt happy be.
So when the quiet Autumn of thy fragrant life shall come,
Thou mayst pass away, to bloom in the Flower Spirits’ home.”
Then from the mother’s breast, where it still lay hid,
Into the fading bud the dew-drop gently slid;
Stronger grew the little form, and happy tears fell,

As the dew did its silent work, and the bud grew well,
While the gentle rose leaned, with motherly pride,
O’er the fair little ones that bloomed at her side.

Night came again, and the fire-flies flew;
But the bud let them pass, and drank of the dew;
While the soft stars shone, from the still summer heaven,
On the happy little flower that had learned the lesson given.

The music-loving Elves clapped their hands, as Star-Twinkle ceased; and the Queen placed a flower crown, with a gentle smile, upon the Fairy’s head, saying, —

“The little bud’s lesson shall teach us how sad a thing is pride, and that humility alone can bring true happiness to flower and Fairy. You shall come next, Zephyr.”

And the little Fairy, who lay rocking to and fro upon a fluttering vine-leaf, thus began her story: —

“As I lay resting in the bosom of a cowslip that bent above the brook, a little wind, tired of play, told me this tale of

LILY-BELL AND THISTLEDOWN.

ONCE upon a time, two little Fairies went out into the world, to seek their fortune. Thistledown was as gay and gallant a little Elf as ever spread a wing. His purple mantle, and doublet of green, were embroidered with the brightest threads, and the plume in his cap came always from the wing of the gayest butterfly.

But he was not loved in Fairy-Land, for, like the flower whose name and colors he wore, though fair to look upon, many were the little thorns of cruelty and selfishness that lay concealed by his gay mantle. Many a gentle flower and harmless bird died by his hand, for he cared for himself alone, and whatever gave him pleasure must be his, though happy hearts were rendered sad, and peaceful homes destroyed.

Such was Thistledown; but far different was his little friend, Lily-Bell. Kind, compassionate, and loving, wherever her gentle face was seen, joy and gratitude were found; no suffering flower or insect, that did not love and bless the kindly Fairy; and thus all Elf-Land looked upon her as a friend.

Nor did this make her vain and heedless of others; she humbly dwelt among them, seeking to do all the good she might; and many a houseless bird and hungry insect that Thistledown had harmed did she feed and shelter, and in return no evil could befall her, for so many friends were all about her, seeking to repay her tenderness and love by their watchful care.

She would not now have left Fairy-Land, but to help and counsel her wild companion, Thistledown, who, discontented with his quiet home, WOULD seek his fortune in the great world, and she feared he would suffer from his own faults for others would not always be as gentle and forgiving as his kindred. So the kind little Fairy left her home and friends to go with him; and thus, side by side, they flew beneath the bright summer sky.

On and on, over hill and valley, they went, chasing the gay butterflies, or listening to the bees, as they flew from flower to flower like busy little housewives, singing as they worked; till at last they reached a pleasant garden, filled with flowers and green, old trees.

“See,” cried Thistledown, “what a lovely home is here; let us rest among the cool leaves, and hear the flowers sing, for I am sadly tired and hungry.”

So into the quiet garden they went, and the winds gayly welcomed them, while the flowers nodded on their stems, offering their bright leaves for the Elves to rest upon, and fresh, sweet honey to refresh them.

"Now, dear Thistle, do not harm these friendly blossoms," said Lily-Bell; "see how kindly they spread their leaves, and offer us their dew. It would be very wrong in you to repay their care with cruelty and pain. You will be tender for my sake, dear Thistle."

Then she went among the flowers, and they bent lovingly before her, and laid their soft leaves against her little face, that she might see how glad they were to welcome one so good and gentle, and kindly offered their dew and honey to the weary little Fairy, who sat among their fragrant petals and looked smilingly on the happy blossoms, who, with their soft, low voices, sang her to sleep.

While Lily-Bell lay dreaming among the rose-leaves, Thistledown went wandering through the garden. First he robbed the bees of their honey, and rudely shook the little flowers, that he might get the dew they had gathered to bathe their buds in. Then he chased the bright winged flies, and wounded them with the sharp thorn he carried for a sword; he broke the spider's shining webs, lamed the birds, and soon wherever he passed lay wounded insects and drooping flowers; while the winds carried the tidings over the garden, and bird and blossom looked upon him as an evil spirit, and fled away or closed their leaves, lest he should harm them.

Thus he went, leaving sorrow and pain behind him, till he came to the roses where Lily-Bell lay sleeping. There, weary of his cruel sport, he stayed to rest beneath a graceful rose-tree, where grew one blooming flower and a tiny bud.

"Why are you so slow in blooming, little one? You are too old to be rocked in your green cradle longer, and should be out among your sister flowers," said Thistle, as he lay idly in the shadow of the tree.

"My little bud is not yet strong enough to venture forth," replied the rose, as she bent fondly over it; "the sunlight and the rain would blight her tender form, were she to blossom now, but soon she will be fit to bear them; till then she is content to rest beside her mother, and to wait."

"You silly flower," said Thistledown, "see how quickly I will make you bloom! your waiting is all useless." And speaking thus, he pulled rudely apart the folded leaves, and laid them open to the sun and air; while the rose mother implored the cruel Fairy to leave her little bud untouched.

"It is my first, my only one," said she, "and I have watched over it with such care, hoping it would soon bloom beside me; and now you have destroyed it. How could you harm the little helpless one, that never did aught to injure you?" And while her tears fell like summer rain, she drooped in grief above the little bud, and sadly watched it fading in the sunlight; but Thistledown, heedless of the sorrow he had given, spread his wings and flew away.

Soon the sky grew dark, and heavy drops began to fall. Then Thistle hastened to the lily, for her cup was deep, and the white leaves fell like curtains over the fragrant bed; he was a dainty little Elf, and could not sleep among the clovers and bright buttercups. But when he asked the flower to unfold her leaves and take him in, she turned her pale, soft face away, and answered sadly, “I must shield my little drooping sisters whom you have harmed, and cannot let you in.”

Then Thistledown was very angry, and turned to find shelter among the stately roses; but they showed their sharp thorns, and, while their rosy faces glowed with anger, told him to begone, or they would repay him for the wrong he had done their gentle kindred.

He would have stayed to harm them, but the rain fell fast, and he hurried away, saying, “The tulips will take me in, for I have praised their beauty, and they are vain and foolish flowers.”

But when he came, all wet and cold, praying for shelter among their thick leaves, they only laughed and said scornfully, “We know you, and will not let you in, for you are false and cruel, and will only bring us sorrow. You need not come to us for another mantle, when the rain has spoilt your fine one; and do not stay here, or we will do you harm.”

Then they waved their broad leaves stormily, and scattered the heavy drops on his dripping garments.

“Now must I go to the humble daisies and blue violets,” said Thistle, “they will be glad to let in so fine a Fairy, and I shall die in this cold wind and rain.”

So away he flew, as fast as his heavy wings would bear him, to the daisies; but they nodded their heads wisely, and closed their leaves yet closer, saying sharply, —

“Go away with yourself, and do not imagine we will open our leaves to you, and spoil our seeds by letting in the rain. It serves you rightly; to gain our love and confidence, and repay it by such cruelty! You will find no shelter here for one whose careless hand wounded our little friend Violet, and broke the truest heart that ever beat in a flower’s breast. We are very angry with you, wicked Fairy; go away and hide yourself.”

“Ah,” cried the shivering Elf, “where can I find shelter? I will go to the violets: they will forgive and take me in.”

But the daisies had spoken truly; the gentle little flower was dead, and her blue-eyed sisters were weeping bitterly over her faded leaves.

“Now I have no friends,” sighed poor Thistledown, “and must die of cold. Ah, if I had but minded Lily-Bell, I might now be dreaming beneath some flower’s leaves.”

“Others can forgive and love, beside Lily-Bell and Violet,” said a faint, sweet voice; “I have no little bud to shelter now, and you can enter here.” It was the rose mother that spoke, and Thistle saw how pale the bright leaves had grown, and how the slender stem was bowed. Grieved, ashamed, and wondering at the flower’s forgiving words, he laid his weary head on the bosom he had filled with sorrow, and the fragrant leaves were folded carefully about him.

But he could find no rest. The rose strove to comfort him; but when she fancied he was sleeping, thoughts of her lost bud stole in, and the little heart beat so sadly where he lay, that no sleep came; while the bitter tears he had caused to flow fell more coldly on him than the rain without. Then he heard the other flowers whispering among themselves of his cruelty, and the sorrow he had brought to their happy home; and many wondered how the rose, who had suffered most, could yet forgive and shelter him.

“Never could I forgive one who had robbed me of my children. I could bow my head and die, but could give no happiness to one who had taken all my own,” said Hyacinth, bending fondly over the little ones that blossomed by her side.

“Dear Violet is not the only one who will leave us,” sobbed little Mignonette; “the rose mother will fade like her little bud, and we shall lose our gentlest teacher. Her last lesson is forgiveness; let us show our love for her, and the gentle stranger Lily-Bell, by allowing no unkind word or thought of him who has brought us all this grief.”

The angry words were hushed, and through the long night nothing was heard but the dropping of the rain, and the low sighs of the rose.

Soon the sunlight came again, and with it Lily-Bell seeking for Thistledown; but he was ashamed, and stole away.

When the flowers told their sorrow to kind-hearted Lily-Bell, she wept bitterly at the pain her friend had given, and with loving words strove to comfort those whom he had grieved; with gentle care she healed the wounded birds, and watched above the flowers he had harmed, bringing each day dew and sunlight to refresh and strengthen, till all were well again; and though sorrowing for their dead friends, still they forgave Thistle for the sake of her who had done so much for them. Thus, erelong, buds fairer than that she had lost lay on the rose mother’s breast, and for all she had suffered she was well repaid by the love of Lily-Bell and her sister flowers.

And when bird, bee, and blossom were strong and fair again, the gentle Fairy said farewell, and flew away to seek her friend, leaving behind many grateful hearts, who owed their joy and life to her.

Meanwhile, over hill and dale went Thistledown, and for a time was kind and gentle to every living thing. He missed sadly the little friend who had left her happy home to watch over him, but he was too proud to own his fault, and so went on, hoping she would find him.

One day he fell asleep, and when he woke the sun had set, and the dew began to fall; the flower-cups were closed, and he had nowhere to go, till a friendly little bee, belated by his heavy load of honey, bid the weary Fairy come with him.

"Help me to bear my honey home, and you can stay with us tonight," he kindly said.

So Thistle gladly went with him, and soon they came to a pleasant garden, where among the fairest flowers stood the hive, covered with vines and overhung with blossoming trees. Glow-worms stood at the door to light them home, and as they passed in, the Fairy thought how charming it must be to dwell in such a lovely place. The floor of wax was pure and white as marble, while the walls were formed of golden honey-comb, and the air was fragrant with the breath of flowers.

"You cannot see our Queen to-night," said the little bee, "but I will show you to a bed where you can rest."

And he led the tired Fairy to a little cell, where on a bed of flower-leaves he folded his wings and fell asleep.

As the first ray of sunlight stole in, he was awakened by sweet music. It was the morning song of the bees.

"Awake! awake! for the earliest gleam
Of golden sunlight shines
On the rippling waves, that brightly flow
Beneath the flowering vines.
Awake! awake! for the low, sweet chant
Of the wild-birds' morning hymn
Comes floating by on the fragrant air,
Through the forest cool and dim;
Then spread each wing,
And work, and sing,
Through the long, bright sunny hours;
O'er the pleasant earth
We journey forth,
For a day among the flowers.

"Awake! awake! for the summer wind

Hath bidden the blossoms unclose,
Hath opened the violet’s soft blue eye,
And wakened the sleeping rose.
And lightly they wave on their slender stems
Fragrant, and fresh, and fair,
Waiting for us, as we singing come
To gather our honey-dew there.
Then spread each wing,
And work, and sing,
Through the long, bright sunny hours;
O’er the pleasant earth
We journey forth,
For a day among the flowers!”

Soon his friend came to bid him rise, as the Queen desired to speak with him. So, with his purple mantle thrown gracefully over his shoulder, and his little cap held respectfully in his hand, he followed Nimble-Wing to the great hall, where the Queen was being served by her little pages. Some bore her fresh dew and honey, some fanned her with fragrant flower-leaves, while others scattered the sweetest perfumes on the air.

“Little Fairy,” said the Queen, “you are welcome to my palace; and we will gladly have you stay with us, if you will obey our laws. We do not spend the pleasant summer days in idleness and pleasure, but each one labors for the happiness and good of all. If our home is beautiful, we have made it so by industry; and here, as one large, loving family, we dwell; no sorrow, care, or discord can enter in, while all obey the voice of her who seeks to be a wise and gentle Queen to them. If you will stay with us, we will teach you many things. Order, patience, industry, who can teach so well as they who are the emblems of these virtues?

“Our laws are few and simple. You must each day gather your share of honey, see that your cell is sweet and fresh, as you yourself must be; rise with the sun, and with him to sleep. You must harm no flower in doing your work, nor take more than your just share of honey; for they so kindly give us food, it were most cruel to treat them with aught save gentleness and gratitude. Now will you stay with us, and learn what even mortals seek to know, that labor brings true happiness?”

And Thistle said he would stay and dwell with them; for he was tired of wandering alone, and thought he might live here till Lily-Bell should come, or till he was weary of the kind-hearted bees. Then they took away his gay garments, and dressed him like themselves, in the black velvet cloak with golden bands across his breast.

"Now come with us," they said. So forth into the green fields they went, and made their breakfast among the dewy flowers; and then till the sun set they flew from bud to blossom, singing as they went; and Thistle for a while was happier than when breaking flowers and harming gentle birds.

But he soon grew tired of working all day in the sun, and longed to be free again. He could find no pleasure with the industrious bees, and sighed to be away with his idle friends, the butterflies; so while the others worked he slept or played, and then, in haste to get his share, he tore the flowers, and took all they had saved for their own food. Nor was this all; he told such pleasant tales of the life he led before he came to live with them, that many grew unhappy and discontented, and they who had before wished no greater joy than the love and praise of their kind Queen, now disobeyed and blamed her for all she had done for them.

Long she bore with their unkind words and deeds; and when at length she found it was the ungrateful Fairy who had wrought this trouble in her quiet kingdom, she strove, with sweet, forgiving words, to show him all the wrong he had done; but he would not listen, and still went on destroying the happiness of those who had done so much for him.

Then, when she saw that no kindness could touch his heart, she said: —

"Thistledown, we took you in, a friendless stranger, fed and clothed you, and made our home as pleasant to you as we could; and in return for all our care, you have brought discontent and trouble to my subjects, grief and care to me. I cannot let my peaceful kingdom be disturbed by you; therefore go and seek another home. You may find other friends, but none will love you more than we, had you been worthy of it; so farewell." And the doors of the once happy home he had disturbed were closed behind him.

Then he was very angry, and determined to bring some great sorrow on the good Queen. So he sought out the idle, wilful bees, whom he had first made discontented, bidding them follow him, and win the honey the Queen had stored up for the winter.

"Let us feast and make merry in the pleasant summer-time," said Thistle; "winter is far off, why should we waste these lovely days, toiling to lay up the food we might enjoy now. Come, we will take what we have made, and think no more of what the Queen has said."

So while the industrious bees were out among the flowers, he led the drones to the hive, and took possession of the honey, destroying and laying waste the home of the kind bees; then, fearing that in their grief and anger they might harm him, Thistle flew away to seek new friends.

After many wanderings, he came at length to a great forest, and here beside a still lake he stayed to rest. Delicate wood-flowers grew near him in the deep green moss, with drooping heads, as if they listened to the soft wind singing among the pines. Bright-eyed birds peeped at him from their nests, and many-colored insects danced above the cool, still lake.

“This is a pleasant place,” said Thistle; “it shall be my home for a while. Come hither, blue dragon-fly, I would gladly make a friend of you, for I am all alone.”

The dragon-fly folded his shining wings beside the Elf, listened to the tale he told, promised to befriend the lonely one, and strove to make the forest a happy home to him.

So here dwelt Thistle, and many kind friends gathered round him, for he spoke gently to them, and they knew nothing of the cruel deeds he had done; and for a while he was happy and content. But at length he grew weary of the gentle birds, and wild-flowers, and sought new pleasure in destroying the beauty he was tired of; and soon the friends who had so kindly welcomed him looked upon him as an evil spirit, and shrunk away as he approached.

At length his friend the dragon-fly besought him to leave the quiet home he had disturbed. Then Thistle was very angry, and while the dragon-fly was sleeping among the flowers that hung over the lake, he led an ugly spider to the spot, and bade him weave his nets about the sleeping insect, and bind him fast. The cruel spider gladly obeyed the ungrateful Fairy; and soon the poor fly could move neither leg nor wing. Then Thistle flew away through the wood, leaving sorrow and trouble behind him.

He had not journeyed far before he grew weary, and lay down to rest. Long he slept, and when he awoke, and tried to rise, his hands and wings were bound; while beside him stood two strange little figures, with dark faces and garments, that rustled like withered leaves; who cried to him, as he struggled to get free, —

“Lie still, you naughty Fairy, you are in the Brownies’ power, and shall be well punished for your cruelty ere we let you go.”

So poor Thistle lay sorrowfully, wondering what would come of it, and wishing Lily-Bell would come to help and comfort him; but he had left her, and she could not help him now.

Soon a troop of Brownies came rustling through the air, and gathered round him, while one who wore an acorn-cup on his head, and was their King, said, as he stood beside the trembling Fairy, —

"You have done many cruel things, and caused much sorrow to happy hearts; now you are in my power, and I shall keep you prisoner till you have repented. You cannot dwell on the earth without harming the fair things given you to enjoy, so you shall live alone in solitude and darkness, till you have learned to find happiness in gentle deeds, and forget yourself in giving joy to others. When you have learned this, I will set you free."

Then the Brownies bore him to a high, dark rock, and, entering a little door, led him to a small cell, dimly lighted by a crevice through which came a single gleam of sunlight; and there, through long, long days, poor Thistle sat alone, and gazed with wistful eyes at the little opening, longing to be out on the green earth. No one came to him, but the silent Brownies who brought his daily food; and with bitter tears he wept for Lily-Bell, mourning his cruelty and selfishness, seeking to do some kindly deed that might atone for his wrong-doing.

A little vine that grew outside his prison rock came creeping up, and looked in through the crevice, as if to cheer the lonely Fairy, who welcomed it most gladly, and daily sprinkled its soft leaves with his small share of water, that the little vine might live, even if it darkened more and more his dim cell.

The watchful Brownies saw this kind deed, and brought him fresh flowers, and many things, which Thistle gratefully received, though he never knew it was his kindness to the vine that gained for him these pleasures.

Thus did poor Thistle strive to be more gentle and unselfish, and grew daily happier and better.

Now while Thistledown was a captive in the lonely cell, Lily-Bell was seeking him far and wide, and sadly traced him by the sorrowing hearts he had left behind.

She healed the drooping flowers, cheered the Queen Bee's grief, brought back her discontented subjects, restored the home to peace and order, and left them blessing her.

Thus she journeyed on, till she reached the forest where Thistledown had lost his freedom. She unbound the starving dragon-fly, and tended the wounded birds; but though all learned to love her, none could tell where the Brownies had borne her friend, till a little wind came whispering by, and told her that a sweet voice had been heard, singing Fairy songs, deep in a moss-grown rock.

Then Lily-Bell went seeking through the forest, listening for the voice. Long she looked and listened in vain; when one day, as she was wandering through a lonely dell, she heard a faint, low sound of music, and soon a distant voice mournfully singing, —

“Bright shines the summer sun,
Soft is the summer air;
Gayly the wood-birds sing,
Flowers are blooming fair.

“But, deep in the dark, cold rock,
Sadly I dwell,
Longing for thee, dear friend,
Lily-Bell! Lily-Bell!”

“Thistle, dear Thistle, where are you?” joyfully cried Lily-Bell, as she flew from rock to rock. But the voice was still, and she would have looked in vain, had she not seen a little vine, whose green leaves fluttering to and fro seemed beckoning her to come; and as she stood among its flowers she sang, —

“Through sunlight and summer air
I have sought for thee long,
Guided by birds and flowers,
And now by thy song.

“Thistledown! Thistledown!
O’er hill and dell
Hither to comfort thee
Comes Lily-Bell.”

Then from the vine-leaves two little arms were stretched out to her, and Thistledown was found. So Lily-Bell made her home in the shadow of the vine, and brought such joy to Thistle, that his lonely cell seemed pleasanter to him than all the world beside; and he grew daily more like his gentle friend. But it did not last long, for one day she did not come. He watched and waited long, for the little face that used to peep smiling in through the vine-leaves. He called and beckoned through the narrow opening, but no Lily-Bell answered; and he wept sadly as he thought of all she had done for him, and that now he could not go to seek and help her, for he had lost his freedom by his own cruel and wicked deeds.

At last he besought the silent Brownie earnestly to tell him whither she had gone.

"O let me go to her," prayed Thistle; "if she is in sorrow, I will comfort her, and show my gratitude for all she has done for me: dear Brownie, set me free, and when she is found I will come and be your prisoner again. I will bear and suffer any danger for her sake."

"Lily-Bell is safe," replied the Brownie; "come, you shall learn the trial that awaits you."

Then he led the wondering Fairy from his prison, to a group of tall, drooping ferns, beneath whose shade a large white lily had been placed, forming a little tent, within which, on a couch of thick green moss, lay Lily-Bell in a deep sleep; the sunlight stole softly in, and all was cool and still.

"You cannot wake her," said the Brownie, as Thistle folded his arms tenderly about her. "It is a magic slumber, and she will not wake till you shall bring hither gifts from the Earth, Air, and Water Spirits. 'T is a long and weary task, for you have made no friends to help you, and will have to seek for them alone. This is the trial we shall give you; and if your love for Lily-Bell be strong enough to keep you from all cruelty and selfishness, and make you kind and loving as you should be, she will awake to welcome you, and love you still more fondly than before."

Then Thistle, with a last look on the little friend he loved so well, set forth alone to his long task.

The home of the Earth Spirits was the first to find, and no one would tell him where to look. So far and wide he wandered, through gloomy forests and among lonely hills, with none to cheer him when sad and weary, none to guide him on his way.

On he went, thinking of Lily-Bell, and for her sake bearing all; for in his quiet prison many gentle feelings and kindly thoughts had sprung up in his heart, and he now strove to be friends with all, and win for himself the love and confidence of those whom once he sought to harm and cruelly destroy.

But few believed him; for they remembered his false promises and evil deeds, and would not trust him now; so poor Thistle found few to love or care for him.

Long he wandered, and carefully he sought; but could not find the Earth Spirits' home. And when at length he reached the pleasant garden where he and Lily-Bell first parted, he said within himself, —

"Here I will stay awhile, and try to win by kindly deeds the flowers' forgiveness for the pain and sorrow I brought them long ago; and they may learn to love and trust me. So, even if I never find the Spirits, I shall be worthier of Lily-Bell's affection if I strive to atone for the wrong I have done."

Then he went among the flowers, but they closed their leaves, and shrank away, trembling with fear; while the birds fled to hide among the leaves as he passed.

This grieved poor Thistle, and he longed to tell them how changed he had become; but they would not listen. So he tried to show, by quiet deeds of kindness, that he meant no harm to them; and soon the kind-hearted birds pitied the lonely Fairy, and when he came near sang cheering songs, and dropped ripe berries in his path, for he no longer broke their eggs, or hurt their little ones.

And when the flowers saw this, and found the once cruel Elf now watering and tending little buds, feeding hungry insects, and helping the busy ants to bear their heavy loads, they shared the pity of the birds, and longed to trust him; but they dared not yet.

He came one day, while wandering through the garden, to the little rose he had once harmed so sadly. Many buds now bloomed beside her, and her soft face glowed with motherly pride, as she bent fondly over them. But when Thistle came, he saw with sorrow how she bade them close their green curtains, and conceal themselves beneath the leaves, for there was danger near; and, drooping still more closely over them, she seemed to wait with trembling fear the cruel Fairy's coming.

But no rude hand tore her little ones away, no unkind words were spoken; but a soft shower of dew fell lightly on them, and Thistle, bending tenderly above them, said, —

"Dear flower, forgive the sorrow I once brought you, and trust me now for Lily-Bell's sake. Her gentleness has changed my cruelty to kindness, and I would gladly repay all for the harm I have done; but none will love and trust me now."

Then the little rose looked up, and while the dew-drops shone like happy tears upon her leaves, she said, —

"I WILL love and trust you, Thistle, for you are indeed much changed. Make your home among us, and my sister flowers will soon learn to love you as you deserve. Not for sweet Lily-Bell's sake, but for your own, will I become your friend; for you are kind and gentle now, and worthy of our love. Look up, my little ones, there is no danger near; look up, and welcome Thistle to our home."

Then the little buds raised their rosy faces, danced again upon their stems, and nodded kindly at Thistle, who smiled on them through happy tears, and kissed the sweet, forgiving rose, who loved and trusted him when most forlorn and friendless.

But the other flowers wondered among themselves, and Hyacinth said, —

"If Rose-Leaf is his friend, surely we may be; yet still I fear he may soon grow weary of this gentleness, and be again the wicked Fairy he once was, and we shall suffer for our kindness to him now."

"Ah, do not doubt him!" cried warm-hearted little Mignonette; "surely some good spirit has changed the wicked Thistle into this good little Elf. See how tenderly he lifts aside the leaves that overshadow pale Harebell, and listen now how softly he sings as he rocks little Eglantine to sleep. He has done many friendly things, though none save Rose-Leaf has been kind to him, and he is very sad. Last night when I awoke to draw my curtains closer, he sat weeping in the moonlight, so bitterly, I longed to speak a kindly word to him. Dear sisters, let us trust him."

And they all said little Mignonette was right; and, spreading wide their leaves, they bade him come, and drink their dew, and lie among the fragrant petals, striving to cheer his sorrow. Thistle told them all, and, after much whispering together, they said, —

"Yes, we will help you to find the Earth Spirits, for you are striving to be good, and for love of Lily-Bell we will do much for you."

So they called a little bright-eyed mole, and said, "Downy-Back, we have given you a pleasant home among our roots, and you are a grateful little friend; so will you guide dear Thistle to the Earth Spirits' home?"

Downy-Back said, "Yes," and Thistle, thanking the kindly flowers, followed his little guide, through long, dark galleries, deeper and deeper into the ground; while a glow-worm flew before to light the way. On they went, and after a while, reached a path lit up by bright jewels hung upon the walls. Here Downy-Back, and Glimmer, the glow-worm, left him, saying, —

"We can lead you no farther; you must now go on alone, and the music of the Spirits will guide you to their home."

Then they went quickly up the winding path, and Thistle, guided by the sweet music, went on alone.

He soon reached a lovely spot, whose golden halls were bright with jewels, which sparkled brightly, and threw many-colored shadows on the shining garments of the little Spirits, who danced below to the melody of soft, silvery bells.

Long Thistle stood watching the brilliant forms that flashed and sparkled round him; but he missed the flowers and the sunlight, and rejoiced that he was not an Earth Spirit.

At last they spied him out, and, gladly welcoming him, bade him join in their dance. But Thistledown was too sad for that, and when he told them all his story they no longer urged, but sought to comfort him; and one whom they called little Sparkle (for her crown and robe shone with the brightest diamonds), said: "You will have to work for us, ere you can win a gift to show the Brownies; do you see those golden bells that make such music, as we wave them to and fro? We worked long and hard ere they were won, and you can win one of those, if you will do the task we give you."

And Thistle said, "No task will be too hard for me to do for dear Lily-Bell's sake."

Then they led him to a strange, dark place, lit up with torches; where troops of Spirits flew busily to and fro, among damp rocks, and through dark galleries that led far down into the earth. "What do they here?" asked Thistle.

"I will tell," replied little Sparkle, "for I once worked here myself. Some of them watch above the flower-roots, and keep them fresh and strong; others gather the clear drops that trickle from the damp rocks, and form a little spring, which, growing ever larger, rises to the light above, and gushes forth in some green field or lonely forest; where the wild-birds come to drink, and wood-flowers spread their thirsty leaves above the clear, cool waves, as they go dancing away, carrying joy and freshness wherever they go. Others shape the bright jewels into lovely forms, and make the good-luck pennies which we give to mortals whom we love. And here you must toil till the golden flower is won."

Then Thistle went among the Spirits, and joined in their tasks; he tended the flower-roots, gathered the water-drops, and formed the good-luck pennies. Long and hard he worked, and was often sad and weary, often tempted by unkind and selfish thoughts; but he thought of Lily-Bell, and strove to be kind and loving as she had been; and soon the Spirits learned to love the patient Fairy, who had left his home to toil among them for the sake of his gentle friend.

At length came little Sparkle to him, saying, "You have done enough; come now, and dance and feast with us, for the golden flower is won."

But Thistle could not stay, for half his task was not yet done; and he longed for sunlight and Lily-Bell. So, taking a kind farewell, he hastened through the torch-lit path up to the light again; and, spreading his wings, flew over hill and dale till he reached the forest where Lily-Bell lay sleeping.

It was early morning, and the rosy light shone brightly through the lily-leaves upon her, as Thistle entered, and laid his first gift at the Brownie King's feet.

"You have done well," said he, "we hear good tidings of you from bird and flower, and you are truly seeking to repair the evil you have done. Take now one look at your little friend, and then go forth to seek from the Air Spirits your second gift."

Then Thistle said farewell again to Lily-Bell, and flew far and wide among the clouds, seeking the Air Spirits; but though he wandered till his weary wings could bear him no longer, it was in vain. So, faint and sad, he lay down to rest on a broad vine-leaf, that fluttered gently in the wind; and as he lay, he saw beneath him the home of the kind bees whom he had so disturbed, and Lily-Bell had helped and comforted.

"I will seek to win their pardon, and show them that I am no longer the cruel Fairy who so harmed them," thought Thistle, "and when they become again my friends, I will ask their help to find the Air Spirits; and if I deserve it, they will gladly aid me on my way."

So he flew down into the field below, and hastened busily from flower to flower, till he had filled a tiny blue-bell with sweet, fresh honey. Then he stole softly to the hive, and, placing it near the door, concealed himself to watch. Soon his friend Nimble-Wing came flying home, and when he spied the little cup, he hummed with joy, and called his companions around him.

"Surely, some good Elf has placed it here for us," said they; "let us bear it to our Queen; it is so fresh and fragrant it will be a fit gift for her"; and they joyfully took it in, little dreaming who had placed it there.

So each day Thistle filled a flower-cup, and laid it at the door; and each day the bees wondered more and more, for many strange things happened. The field-flowers told of the good spirit who watched above them, and the birds sang of the same kind little Elf bringing soft moss for their nests, and food for their hungry young ones; while all around the hive had grown fairer since the Fairy came.

But the bees never saw him, for he feared he had not yet done enough to win their forgiveness and friendship; so he lived alone among the vines, daily bringing them honey, and doing some kindly action.

At length, as he lay sleeping in a flower-bell, a little bee came wandering by, and knew him for the wicked Thistle; so he called his friends, and, as they flew murmuring around him, he awoke.

"What shall we do to you, naughty Elf?" said they. "You are in our power, and we will sting you if you are not still."

"Let us close the flower-leaves around him and leave him here to starve," cried one, who had not yet forgotten all the sorrow Thistle had caused them long ago.

"No, no, that were very cruel, dear Buzz," said little Hum; "let us take him to our Queen, and she will tell us how to show our anger for the wicked deeds he did. See how bitterly he weeps; be kind to him, he will not harm us more."

"You good little Hum!" cried a kind-hearted robin who had hopped near to listen to the bees. "Dear friends, do you not know that this is the good Fairy who has dwelt so quietly among us, watching over bird and blossom, giving joy to all he helps? It is HE who brings the honey-cup each day to you, and then goes silently away, that you may never know who works so faithfully for you. Be kind to him, for if he has done wrong, he has repented of it, as you may see."

"Can this be naughty Thistle?" said Nimble-Wing.

"Yes, it is I," said Thistle, "but no longer cruel and unkind. I have tried to win your love by patient industry. Ah, trust me now, and you shall see I am not naughty Thistle any more."

Then the wondering bees led him to their Queen, and when he had told his tale, and begged their forgiveness, it was gladly given; and all strove to show him that he was loved and trusted. Then he asked if they could tell him where the Air Spirits dwelt, for he must not forget dear Lily-Bell; and to his great joy the Queen said, "Yes," and bade little Hum guide Thistle to Cloud-Land.

Little Hum joyfully obeyed; and Thistle followed him, as he flew higher and higher among the soft clouds, till in the distance they saw a radiant light.

"There is their home, and I must leave you now, dear Thistle," said the little bee; and, bidding him farewell, he flew singing back; while Thistle, following the light, soon found himself in the Air Spirits' home.

The sky was gold and purple like an autumn sunset, and long walls of brilliant clouds lay round him. A rosy light shone through the silver mist, on gleaming columns and the rainbow roof; soft, fragrant winds went whispering by, and airy little forms were flitting to and fro.

Long Thistle wondered at the beauty round him; and then he went among the shining Spirits, told his tale, and asked a gift.

But they answered like the Earth Spirits. "You must serve us first, and then we will gladly give you a robe of sunlight like our own."

And then they told him how they wafted flower-seeds over the earth, to beautify and brighten lonely spots; how they watched above the blossoms by day, and scattered dews at night, brought sunlight into darkened places, and soft winds to refresh and cheer.

"These are the things we do," said they, "and you must aid us for a time."

And Thistle gladly went with the lovely Spirits; by day he joined the sunlight and the breeze in their silent work; by night, with Star-Light and her sister spirits, he flew over the moon-lit earth, dropping cool dew upon the folded flowers, and bringing happy dreams to sleeping mortals. Many a kind deed was done, many a gentle word was spoken; and each day lighter grew his heart, and stronger his power of giving joy to others.

At length Star-Light bade him work no more, and gladly gave him the gift he had won. Then his second task was done, and he flew gayly back to the green earth and slumbering Lily-Bell.

The silvery moonlight shone upon her, as he came to give his second gift; and the Brownie spoke more kindly than before.

"One more trial, Thistle, and she will awake. Go bravely forth and win your last and hardest gift."

Then with a light heart Thistle journeyed away to the brooks and rivers, seeking the Water Spirits. But he looked in vain; till, wandering through the forest where the Brownies took him captive, he stopped beside the quiet lake.

As he stood here he heard a sound of pain, and, looking in the tall grass at his side, he saw the dragon-fly whose kindness he once repayed by pain and sorrow, and who now lay suffering and alone.

Thistle bent tenderly beside him, saying, "Dear Flutter, do not fear me. I will gladly ease your pain, if you will let me; I am your friend, and long to show you how I grieve for all the wrong I did you, when you were so kind to me. Forgive, and let me help and comfort you."

Then he bound up the broken wing, and spoke so tenderly that Flutter doubted him no longer, and was his friend again.

Day by day did Thistle watch beside him, making little beds of cool, fresh moss for him to rest upon, fanning him when he slept, and singing sweet songs to cheer him when awake. And often when poor Flutter longed to be dancing once again over the blue waves, the Fairy bore him in his arms to the lake, and on a broad leaf, with a green flag for a sail, they floated on the still water; while the dragon-fly's companions flew about them, playing merry games.

At length the broken wing was well, and Thistle said he must again seek the Water Spirits. "I can tell you where to find them," said Flutter; "you must follow yonder little brook, and it will lead you to the sea, where the Spirits dwell. I would gladly do more for you, dear Thistle, but I cannot, for they live deep beneath the waves. You will find some kind friend to aid you on your way; and so farewell."

Thistle followed the little brook, as it flowed through field and valley, growing ever larger, till it reached the sea. Here the wind blew freshly, and the great waves rolled and broke at Thistle's feet, as he stood upon the shore, watching the billows dancing and sparkling in the sun.

"How shall I find the Spirits in this great sea, with none to help or guide me? Yet it is my last task, and for Lily-Bell's sake I must not fear or falter now," said Thistle. So he flew hither and thither over the sea, looking through the waves. Soon he saw, far below, the branches of the coral tree.

"They must be here," thought he, and, folding his wings, he plunged into the deep, cold sea. But he saw only fearful monsters and dark shapes that gathered round him; and, trembling with fear, he struggled up again.

The great waves tossed him to and fro, and cast him bruised and faint upon the shore. Here he lay weeping bitterly, till a voice beside him said, “Poor little Elf, what has befallen you? These rough waves are not fit playmates for so delicate a thing as you. Tell me your sorrow, and I will comfort you.”

And Thistle, looking up, saw a white sea-bird at his side, who tried with friendly words to cheer him. So he told all his wanderings, and how he sought the Sea Spirits.

“Surely, if bee and blossom do their part to help you, birds should aid you too,” said the Sea-bird. “I will call my friend, the Nautilus, and he will bear you safely to the Coral Palace where the Spirits dwell.”

So, spreading his great wings, he flew away, and soon Thistle saw a little boat come dancing over the waves, and wait beside the shore for him.

In he sprang. Nautilus raised his little sail to the wind, and the light boat glided swiftly over the blue sea. At last Thistle cried, “I see lovely arches far below; let me go, it is the Spirits’ home.”

“Nay, close your eyes, and trust to me. I will bear you safely down,” said Nautilus.

So Thistle closed his eyes, and listened to the murmur of the sea, as they sank slowly through the waves. The soft sound lulled him to sleep, and when he awoke the boat was gone, and he stood among the Water Spirits, in their strange and lovely home.

Lofty arches of snow-white coral bent above him, and the walls of brightly tinted shells were wreathed with lovely sea-flowers, and the sunlight shining on the waves cast silvery shadows on the ground, where sparkling stones glowed in the sand. A cool, fresh wind swept through the waving garlands of bright sea-moss, and the distant murmur of dashing waves came softly on the air. Soon troops of graceful Spirits flitted by, and when they found the wondering Elf, they gathered round him, bringing pearl-shells heaped with precious stones, and all the rare, strange gifts that lie beneath the sea. But Thistle wished for none of these, and when his tale was told, the kindly Spirits pitied him; and little Pearl sighed, as she told him of the long and weary task he must perform, ere he could win a crown of snow-white pearls like those they wore. But Thistle had gained strength and courage in his wanderings, and did not falter now, when they led him to a place among the coral-workers, and told him he must labor here, till the spreading branches reached the light and air, through the waves that danced above.

With a patient hope that he might yet be worthy of Lily-Bell, the Fairy left the lovely spirits and their pleasant home, to toil among the coral-builders, where all was strange and dim. Long, long, he worked; but still the waves rolled far above them, and his task was not yet done; and many bitter tears poor Thistle shed, and sadly he pined for air and sunlight, the voice of birds, and breath of flowers. Often, folded in the magic garments which the Spirits gave him, that he might pass unharmed among the fearful creatures dwelling there, he rose to the surface of the sea, and, gliding through the waves, gazed longingly upon the hills, now looking blue and dim so far away, or watched the flocks of summer birds, journeying to a warmer land; and they brought sad memories of green old forests, and sunny fields, to the lonely little Fairy floating on the great, wild sea.

Day after day went by, and slowly Thistle’s task drew towards an end. Busily toiled the coral-workers, but more busily toiled he; insect and Spirit daily wondered more and more, at the industry and patience of the silent little Elf, who had a friendly word for all, though he never joined them in their sport.

Higher and higher grew the coral-boughs, and lighter grew the Fairy’s heart, while thoughts of dear Lily-Bell cheered him on, as day by day he steadily toiled; and when at length the sun shone on his work, and it was done, he stayed but to take the garland he had won, and to thank the good Spirits for their love and care. Then up through the cold, blue waves he swiftly glided, and, shaking the bright drops from his wings, soared singing up to the sunny sky.

On through the fragrant air went Thistle, looking with glad face upon the fair, fresh earth below, where flowers looked smiling up, and green trees bowed their graceful heads as if to welcome him. Soon the forest where Lily-Bell lay sleeping rose before him, and as he passed along the cool, dim wood-paths, never had they seemed so fair.

But when he came where his little friend had slept, it was no longer the dark, silent spot where he last saw her. Garlands hung from every tree, and the fairest flowers filled the air with their sweet breath. Bird’s gay voices echoed far and wide, and the little brook went singing by, beneath the arching ferns that bent above it; green leaves rustled in the summer wind, and the air was full of music. But the fairest sight was Lily-Bell, as she lay on the couch of velvet moss that Fairy hands had spread. The golden flower lay beside her, and the glittering robe was folded round her little form. The warmest sunlight fell upon her, and the softest breezes lifted her shining hair.

Happy tears fell fast, as Thistle folded his arms around her, crying, “O Lily-Bell, dear Lily-Bell, awake! I have been true to you, and now my task is done.”

Then, with a smile, Lily-Bell awoke, and looked with wondering eyes upon the beauty that had risen round her.

“Dear Thistle, what mean these fair things, and why are we in this lovely place?”

"Listen, Lily-Bell," said the Brownie King, as he appeared beside her. And then he told all that Thistle had done to show his love for her; how he had wandered far and wide to seek the Fairy gifts, and toiled long and hard to win them; how he had been loving, true, and tender, when most lonely and forsaken.

"Bird, bee, and blossom have forgiven him, and none is more loved and trusted now by all, than the once cruel Thistle," said the King, as he bent down to the happy Elf, who bowed low before him.

"You have learned the beauty of a gentle, kindly heart, dear Thistle; and you are now worthy to become the friend of her for whom you have done so much. Place the crown upon her head, for she is Queen of all the Forest Fairies now."

And as the crown shone on the head that Lily-Bell bent down on Thistle's breast, the forest seemed alive with little forms, who sprang from flower and leaf, and gathered round her, bringing gifts for their new Queen.

"If I am Queen, then you are King, dear Thistle," said the Fairy. "Take the crown, and I will have a wreath of flowers. You have toiled and suffered for my sake, and you alone should rule over these little Elves whose love you have won."

"Keep your crown, Lily-Bell, for yonder come the Spirits with their gifts to Thistle," said the Brownie. And, as he pointed with his wand, out from among the mossy roots of an old tree came trooping the Earth Spirits, their flower-bells ringing softly as they came, and their jewelled garments glittering in the sun. On to where Thistledown stood beneath the shadow of the flowers, with Lily-Bell beside him, went the Spirits; and then forth sprang little Sparkle, waving a golden flower, whose silvery music filled the air. "Dear Thistle," said the shining Spirit, "what you toiled so faithfully to win for another, let us offer now as a token of our love for you."

As she ceased, down through the air came floating bands of lovely Air Spirits, bringing a shining robe, and they too told their love for the gentle Fairy who had dwelt with them.

Then softly on the breeze came distant music, growing ever nearer, till over the rippling waves came the singing Water Spirits, in their boats of many-colored shells; and as they placed their glittering crown on Thistle's head, loud rang the flowers, and joyously sang the birds, while all the Forest Fairies cried, with silvery voices, "Lily-Bell and Thistledown! Long live our King and Queen!"

"Have you a tale for us too, dear Violet-Eye?" said the Queen, as Zephyr ceased. The little Elf thus named looked from among the flower-leaves where she sat, and with a smile replied, "As I was weaving garlands in the field, I heard a primrose tell this tale to her friend Golden-Rod."

LITTLE BUD.

IN a great forest, high up among the green boughs, lived Bird Brown-Breast, and his bright-eyed little mate. They were now very happy; their home was done, the four blue eggs lay in the soft nest, and the little wife sat still and patient on them, while the husband sang, and told her charming tales, and brought her sweet berries and little worms.

Things went smoothly on, till one day she found in the nest a little white egg, with a golden band about it.

“My friend,” cried she, “come and see! Where can this fine egg have come from? My four are here, and this also; what think you of it?”

The husband shook his head gravely, and said, “Be not alarmed, my love; it is doubtless some good Fairy who has given us this, and we shall find some gift within; do not let us touch it, but do you sit carefully upon it, and we shall see in time what has been sent us.”

So they said nothing about it, and soon their home had four little chirping children; and then the white egg opened, and, behold, a little maiden lay singing within. Then how amazed were they, and how they welcomed her, as she lay warm beneath the mother’s wing, and how the young birds did love her.

Great joy was in the forest, and proud were the parents of their family, and still more of the little one who had come to them; while all the neighbors flocked in, to see Dame Brown-Breast’s little child. And the tiny maiden talked to them, and sang so merrily, that they could have listened for ever. Soon she was the joy of the whole forest, dancing from tree to tree, making every nest her home, and none were ever so welcome as little Bud; and so they lived right merrily in the green old forest.

The father now had much to do to supply his family with food, and choice morsels did he bring little Bud. The wild fruits were her food, the fresh dew in the flower-cups her drink, while the green leaves served her for little robes; and thus she found garments in the flowers of the field, and a happy home with Mother Brown-Breast; and all in the wood, from the stately trees to the little mosses in the turf, were friends to the merry child.

And each day she taught the young birds sweet songs, and as their gay music rang through the old forest, the stern, dark pines ceased their solemn waving, that they might hear the soft sounds stealing through the dim wood-paths, and mortal children came to listen, saying softly, “Hear the flowers sing, and touch them not, for the Fairies are here.”

Then came a band of sad little Elves to Bud, praying that they might hear the sweet music; and when she took them by the hand, and spoke gently to them, they wept and said sadly, when she asked them whence they came, —

“We dwelt once in Fairy-Land, and O how happy were we then! But alas! we were not worthy of so fair a home, and were sent forth into the cold world. Look at our robes, they are like the withered leaves; our wings are dim, our crowns are gone, and we lead sad, lonely lives in this dark forest. Let us stay with you; your gay music sounds like Fairy songs, and you have such a friendly way with you, and speak so gently to us. It is good to be near one so lovely and so kind; and you can tell us how we may again become fair and innocent. Say we may stay with you, kind little maiden.”

And Bud said, “Yes,” and they stayed; but her kind little heart was grieved that they wept so sadly, and all she could say could not make them happy; till at last she said, —

“Do not weep, and I will go to Queen Dew-Drop, and beseech her to let you come back. I will tell her that you are repentant, and will do anything to gain her love again; that you are sad, and long to be forgiven. This will I say, and more, and trust she will grant my prayer.”

“She will not say no to you, dear Bud,” said the poor little Fairies; “she will love you as we do, and if we can but come again to our lost home, we cannot give you thanks enough. Go, Bud, and if there be power in Fairy gifts, you shall be as happy as our hearts’ best love can make you.”

The tidings of Bud’s departure flew through the forest, and all her friends came to say farewell, as with the morning sun she would go; and each brought some little gift, for the land of Fairies was far away, and she must journey long.

“Nay, you shall not go on your feet, my child,” said Mother Brown-Breast; “your friend Golden-Wing shall carry you. Call him hither, that I may seat you rightly, for if you should fall off my heart would break.”

Then up came Golden-Wing, and Bud was safely seated on the cushion of violet-leaves; and it was really charming to see her merry little face, peeping from under the broad brim of her cow-slip hat, as her butterfly steed stood waving his bright wings in the sunlight. Then came the bee with his yellow honey-bags, which he begged she would take, and the little brown spider that lived under the great leaves brought a veil for her hat, and besought her to wear it, lest the sun should shine too brightly; while the ant came bringing a tiny strawberry, lest she should miss her favorite fruit. The mother gave her good advice, and the papa stood with his head on one side, and his round eyes twinkling with delight, to think that his little Bud was going to Fairy-Land.

Then they all sang gayly together, till she passed out of sight over the hills, and they saw her no more.

And now Bud left the old forest far behind her. Golden-Wing bore her swiftly along, and she looked down on the green mountains, and the peasant’s cottages, that stood among overshadowing trees; and the earth looked bright, with its broad, blue rivers winding through soft meadows, the singing birds, and flowers, who kept their bright eyes ever on the sky.

And she sang gayly as they floated in the clear air, while her friend kept time with his waving wings, and ever as they went along all grew fairer; and thus they came to Fairy-Land.

As Bud passed through the gates, she no longer wondered that the exiled Fairies wept and sorrowed for the lovely home they had lost. Bright clouds floated in the sunny sky, casting a rainbow light on the Fairy palaces below, where the Elves were dancing; while the low, sweet voices of the singing flowers sounded softly through the fragrant air, and mingled with the music of the rippling waves, as they flowed on beneath the blossoming vines that drooped above them.

All was bright and beautiful; but kind little Bud would not linger, for the forms of the weeping Fairies were before her; and though the blossoms nodded gayly on their stems to welcome her, and the soft winds kissed her cheek, she would not stay, but on to the Flower Palace she went, into a pleasant hall whose walls were formed of crimson roses, amid whose leaves sat little Elves, making sweet music on their harps. When they saw Bud, they gathered round her, and led her through the flower-wreathed arches to a group of the most beautiful Fairies, who were gathered about a stately lily, in whose fragrant cup sat one whose purple robe and glittering crown told she was their Queen.

Bud knelt before her, and, while tears streamed down her little face, she told her errand, and pleaded earnestly that the exiled Fairies might be forgiven, and not be left to pine far from their friends and kindred. And as she prayed, many wept with her; and when she ceased, and waited for her answer, many knelt beside her, praying forgiveness for the unhappy Elves.

With tearful eyes, Queen Dew-Drop replied, —

“Little maiden, your prayer has softened my heart. They shall not be left sorrowing and alone, nor shall you go back without a kindly word to cheer and comfort them. We will pardon their fault, and when they can bring hither a perfect Fairy crown, robe, and wand, they shall be again received as children of their loving Queen. The task is hard, for none but the best and purest can form the Fairy garments; yet with patience they may yet restore their robes to their former brightness. Farewell, good little maiden; come with them, for but for you they would have dwelt for ever without the walls of Fairy-Land.”

“Good speed to you, and farewell,” cried they all, as, with loving messages to their poor friends, they bore her to the gates.

Day after day toiled little Bud, cheering the Fairies, who, angry and disappointed, would not listen to her gentle words, but turned away and sat alone weeping. They grieved her kind heart with many cruel words; but patiently she bore with them, and when they told her they could never perform so hard a task, and must dwell for ever in the dark forest, she answered gently, that the snow-white lily must be planted, and watered with repentant tears, before the robe of innocence could be won; that the sun of love must shine in their hearts, before the light could return to their dim crowns, and deeds of kindness must be performed, ere the power would come again to their now useless wands.

Then they planted the lilies; but they soon drooped and died, and no light came to their crowns. They did no gentle deeds, but cared only for themselves; and when they found their labor was in vain, they tried no longer, but sat weeping. Bud, with ceaseless toil and patient care, tended the lilies, which bloomed brightly, the crowns grew bright, and in her hands the wands had power over birds and blossoms, for she was striving to give happiness to others, forgetful of herself. And the idle Fairies, with thankful words, took the garments from her, and then with Bud went forth to Fairy-Land, and stood with beating hearts before the gates; where crowds of Fairy friends came forth to welcome them.

But when Queen Dew-Drop touched them with her wand, as they passed in, the light faded from their crowns, their robes became like withered leaves, and their wands were powerless.

Amid the tears of all the Fairies, the Queen led them to the gates, and said, —

“Farewell! It is not in my power to aid you; innocence and love are not within your hearts, and were it not for this untiring little maiden, who has toiled while you have wept, you never would have entered your lost home. Go and strive again, for till all is once more fair and pure, I cannot call you mine.”

“Farewell!” sang the weeping Fairies, as the gates closed on their outcast friends; who, humbled and broken-hearted, gathered around Bud; and she, with cheering words, guided them back to the forest.

Time passed on, and the Fairies had done nothing to gain their lovely home again. They wept no longer, but watched little Bud, as she daily tended the flowers, restoring their strength and beauty, or with gentle words flew from nest to nest, teaching the little birds to live happily together; and wherever she went blessings fell, and loving hearts were filled with gratitude.

Then, one by one, the Elves secretly did some little work of kindness, and found a quiet joy come back to repay them. Flowers looked lovingly up as they passed, birds sang to cheer them when sad thoughts made them weep. And soon little Bud found out their gentle deeds, and her friendly words gave them new strength. So day after day they followed her, and like a band of guardian spirits they flew far and wide, carrying with them joy and peace.

And not only birds and flowers blessed them, but human beings also; for with tender hands they guided little children from danger, and kept their young hearts free from evil thoughts; they whispered soothing words to the sick, and brought sweet odors and fair flowers to their lonely rooms. They sent lovely visions to the old and blind, to make their hearts young and bright with happy thoughts.

But most tenderly did they watch over the poor and sorrowing, and many a poor mother blessed the unseen hands that laid food before her hungry little ones, and folded warm garments round their naked limbs. Many a poor man wondered at the fair flowers that sprang up in his little garden-plot, cheering him with their bright forms, and making his dreary home fair with their loveliness, and looked at his once barren field, where now waved the golden corn, turning its broad leaves to the warm sun, and promising a store of golden ears to give him food; while the care-worn face grew bright, and the troubled heart filled with gratitude towards the invisible spirits who had brought him such joy.

Thus time passed on, and though the exiled Fairies longed often for their home, still, knowing they did not deserve it, they toiled on, hoping one day to see the friends they had lost; while the joy of their own hearts made their life full of happiness.

One day came little Bud to them, saying, —

“Listen, dear friends. I have a hard task to offer you. It is a great sacrifice for you light loving Fairies to dwell through the long winter in the dark, cold earth, watching over the flower roots, to keep them free from the little grubs and worms that seek to harm them. But in the sunny Spring when they bloom again, their love and gratitude will give you happy homes among their bright leaves.

“It is a wearisome task, and I can give you no reward for all your tender care, but the blessings of the gentle flowers you will have saved from death. Gladly would I aid you; but my winged friends are preparing for their journey to warmer lands, and I must help them teach their little ones to fly, and see them safely on their way. Then, through the winter, must I seek the dwellings of the poor and suffering, comfort the sick and lonely, and give hope and courage to those who in their poverty are led astray. These things must I do; but when the flowers bloom again I will be with you, to welcome back our friends from over the sea."

Then, with tears, the Fairies answered, "Ah, good little Bud, you have taken the hardest task yourself, and who will repay you for all your deeds of tenderness and mercy in the great world? Should evil befall you, our hearts would break. We will labor trustingly in the earth, and thoughts of you shall cheer us on; for without you we had been worthless beings, and never known the joy that kindly actions bring. Yes, dear Bud, we will gladly toil among the roots, that the fair flowers may wear their gayest robes to welcome you."

Then deep in the earth the Fairies dwelt, and no frost or snow could harm the blossoms they tended. Every little seed was laid in the soft earth, watered, and watched. Tender roots were folded in withered leaves, that no chilling drops might reach them; and safely dreamed the flowers, till summer winds should call them forth; while lighter grew each Fairy heart, as every gentle deed was tenderly performed.

At length the snow was gone, and they heard little voices calling them to come up; but patiently they worked, till seed and root were green and strong. Then, with eager feet, they hastened to the earth above, where, over hill and valley, bright flowers and budding trees smiled in the warm sunlight, blossoms bent lovingly before them, and rang their colored bells, till the fragrant air was full of music; while the stately trees waved their great arms above them, and scattered soft leaves at their feet.

Then came the merry birds, making the wood alive with their gay voices, calling to one another, as they flew among the vines, building their little homes. Long waited the Elves, and at last she came with Father Brown-Breast. Happy days passed; and summer flowers were in their fullest beauty, when Bud bade the Fairies come with her.

Mounted on bright-winged butterflies, they flew over forest and meadow, till with joyful eyes they saw the flower-crowned walls of Fairy-Land.

Before the gates they stood, and soon troops of loving Elves came forth to meet them. And on through the sunny gardens they went, into the Lily Hall, where, among the golden stamens of a graceful flower, sat the Queen; while on the broad, green leaves around it stood the brighteyed little maids of honor.

Then, amid the deep silence, little Bud, leading the Fairies to the throne, said, —

"Dear Queen, I here bring back your subjects, wiser for their sorrow, better for their hard trial; and now might any Queen be proud of them, and bow to learn from them that giving joy and peace to others brings it fourfold to us, bearing a double happiness in the blessings to those we help. Through the dreary months, when they might have dwelt among fair Southern flowers, beneath a smiling sky, they toiled in the dark and silent earth, filling the hearts of the gentle Flower Spirits with grateful love, seeking no reward but the knowledge of their own good deeds, and the joy they always bring. This they have done unmurmuringly and alone; and now, far and wide, flower blessings fall upon them, and the summer winds bear the glad tidings unto those who droop in sorrow, and new joy and strength it brings, as they look longingly for the friends whose gentle care hath brought such happiness to their fair kindred.

“Are they not worthy of your love, dear Queen? Have they not won their lovely home? Say they are pardoned, and you have gained the love of hearts pure as the snow-white robes now folded over them.”

As Bud ceased, she touched the wondering Fairies with her wand, and the dark faded garments fell away; and beneath, the robes of lily-leaves glittered pure and spotless in the sun-light. Then, while happy tears fell, Queen Dew-Drop placed the bright crowns on the bowed heads of the kneeling Fairies, and laid before them the wands their own good deeds had rendered powerful.

They turned to thank little Bud for all her patient love, but she was gone; and high above, in the clear air, they saw the little form journeying back to the quiet forest.

She needed no reward but the joy she had given. The Fairy hearts were pure again, and her work was done; yet all Fairy-Land had learned a lesson from gentle little Bud.

“Now, little Sunbeam, what have you to tell us?” said the Queen, looking down on a bright-eyed Elf, who sat half hidden in the deep moss at her feet.

“I too, like Star-Twinkle, have nothing but a song to offer,” replied the Fairy; and then, while the nightingale’s sweet voice mingled with her own, she sang, —

CLOVER-BLOSSOM.

IN a quiet, pleasant meadow,
Beneath a summer sky,
Where green old trees their branches waved,
And winds went singing by;
Where a little brook went rippling
So musically low,
And passing clouds cast shadows
On the waving grass below;
Where low, sweet notes of brooding birds
Stole out on the fragrant air,
And golden sunlight shone undimmed
On all most fresh and fair; —
There bloomed a lovely sisterhood
Of happy little flowers,
Together in this pleasant home,
Through quiet summer hours.
No rude hand came to gather them,
No chilling winds to blight;
Warm sunbeams smiled on them by day,
And soft dews fell at night.
So here, along the brook-side,
Beneath the green old trees,
The flowers dwelt among their friends,
The sunbeams and the breeze.

One morning, as the flowers awoke,
Fragrant, and fresh, and fair,
A little worm came creeping by,
And begged a shelter there.
“Ah! pity and love me,” sighed the worm,
“I am lonely, poor, and weak;

A little spot for a resting-place,
Dear flowers, is all I seek.
I am not fair, and have dwelt unloved
By butterfly, bird, and bee.
They little knew that in this dark form
Lay the beauty they yet may see.
Then let me lie in the deep green moss,
And weave my little tomb,
And sleep my long, unbroken sleep
Till Spring’s first flowers come.
Then will I come in a fairer dress,
And your gentle care repay
By the grateful love of the humble worm;
Kind flowers, O let me stay!”
But the wild rose showed her little thorns,
While her soft face glowed with pride;
The violet hid beneath the drooping ferns,
And the daisy turned aside.
Little Houstonia scornfully laughed,
As she danced on her slender stem;
While the cowslip bent to the rippling waves,
And whispered the tale to them.
A blue-eyed grass looked down on the worm,
As it silently turned away,
And cried, “Thou wilt harm our delicate leaves,
And therefore thou canst not stay.”
Then a sweet, soft voice, called out from far,
“Come hither, poor worm, to me;
The sun lies warm in this quiet spot,
And I’ll share my home with thee.”
The wondering flowers looked up to see
Who had offered the worm a home:
‘T was a clover-blossom, whose fluttering leaves
Seemed beckoning him to come;
It dwelt in a sunny little nook,
Where cool winds rustled by,
And murmuring bees and butterflies came,
On the flower’s breast to lie.
Down through the leaves the sunlight stole,

And seemed to linger there,
As if it loved to brighten the home
Of one so sweet and fair.
Its rosy face smiled kindly down,
As the friendless worm drew near;
And its low voice, softly whispering, said
“Poor thing, thou art welcome here;
Close at my side, in the soft green moss,
Thou wilt find a quiet bed,
Where thou canst softly sleep till Spring,
With my leaves above thee spread.
I pity and love thee, friendless worm,
Though thou art not graceful or fair;
For many a dark, unlovely form,
Hath a kind heart dwelling there;
No more o’er the green and pleasant earth,
Lonely and poor, shalt thou roam,
For a loving friend hast thou found in me,
And rest in my little home.”
Then, deep in its quiet mossy bed,
Sheltered from sun and shower,
The grateful worm spun its winter tomb,
In the shadow of the flower.
And Clover guarded well its rest,
Till Autumn’s leaves were sere,
Till all her sister flowers were gone,
And her winter sleep drew near.
Then her withered leaves were softly spread
O’er the sleeping worm below,
Ere the faithful little flower lay
Beneath the winter snow.

Spring came again, and the flowers rose
From their quiet winter graves,
And gayly danced on their slender stems,
And sang with the rippling waves.
Softly the warm winds kissed their cheeks;
Brightly the sunbeams fell,

As, one by one, they came again
In their summer homes to dwell.
And little Clover bloomed once more,
Rosy, and sweet, and fair,
And patiently watched by the mossy bed,
For the worm still slumbered there.
Then her sister flowers scornfully cried,
As they waved in the summer air,
“The ugly worm was friendless and poor;
Little Clover, why shouldst thou care?
Then watch no more, nor dwell alone,
Away from thy sister flowers;
Come, dance and feast, and spend with us
These pleasant summer hours.
We pity thee, foolish little flower,
To trust what the false worm said;
He will not come in a fairer dress,
For he lies in the green moss dead.”
But little Clover still watched on,
Alone in her sunny home;
She did not doubt the poor worm’s truth,
And trusted he would come.

At last the small cell opened wide,
And a glittering butterfly,
From out the moss, on golden wings,
Soared up to the sunny sky.
Then the wondering flowers cried aloud,
“Clover, thy watch was vain;
He only sought a shelter here,
And never will come again.”
And the unkind flowers danced for joy,
When they saw him thus depart;
For the love of a beautiful butterfly
Is dear to a flower’s heart.
They feared he would stay in Clover’s home,
And her tender care repay;
So they danced for joy, when at last he rose

And silently flew away.
Then little Clover bowed her head,
While her soft tears fell like dew;
For her gentle heart was grieved, to find
That her sisters’ words were true,
And the insect she had watched so long
When helpless, poor, and lone,
Thankless for all her faithful care,
On his golden wings had flown.
But as she drooped, in silent grief,
She heard little Daisy cry,
“O sisters, look! I see him now,
Afar in the sunny sky;
He is floating back from Cloud-Land now,
Borne by the fragrant air.
Spread wide your leaves, that he may choose
The flower he deems most fair.”
Then the wild rose glowed with a deeper blush,
As she proudly waved on her stem;
The Cowslip bent to the clear blue waves,
And made her mirror of them.
Little Houstonia merrily danced,
And spread her white leaves wide;
While Daisy whispered her joy and hope,
As she stood by her gay friends’ side.
Violet peeped from the tall green ferns,
And lifted her soft blue eye
To watch the glittering form, that shone
Afar in the summer sky.
They thought no more of the ugly worm,
Who once had wakened their scorn;
But looked and longed for the butterfly now,
As the soft wind bore him on.

Nearer and nearer the bright form came,
And fairer the blossoms grew;
Each welcomed him, in her sweetest tones;
Each offered her honey and dew.

But in vain did they beckon, and smile, and call,
And wider their leaves unclose;
The glittering form still floated on,
By Violet, Daisy, and Rose.
Lightly it flew to the pleasant home
Of the flower most truly fair,
On Clover’s breast he softly lit,
And folded his bright wings there.
“Dear flower,” the butterfly whispered low,
“Long hast thou waited for me;
Now I am come, and my grateful love
Shall brighten thy home for thee;
Thou hast loved and cared for me, when alone,
Hast watched o’er me long and well;
And now will I strive to show the thanks
The poor worm could not tell.
Sunbeam and breeze shall come to thee,
And the coolest dews that fall;
Whate’er a flower can wish is thine,
For thou art worthy all.
And the home thou shared with the friendless worm
The butterfly’s home shall be;
And thou shalt find, dear, faithful flower,
A loving friend in me.”
Then, through the long, bright summer hours
Through sunshine and through shower,
Together in their happy home
Dwelt butterfly and flower.

“Ah, that is very lovely,” cried the Elves, gathering round little Sunbeam as she ceased, to place a garland in her hair and praise her song.

“Now,” said the Queen, “call hither Moon-light and Summer-Wind, for they have seen many pleasant things in their long wanderings, and will gladly tell us them.”

“Most joyfully will we do our best, dear Queen,” said the Elves, as they folded their wings beside her.

“Now, Summer-Wind,” said Moonlight, “till your turn comes, do you sit here and fan me while I tell this tale of

LITTLE ANNIE’S DREAM

OR,
THE FAIRY FLOWER.

IN a large and pleasant garden sat little Annie all alone, and she seemed very sad, for drops that were not dew fell fast upon the flowers beside her, who looked wonderingly up, and bent still nearer, as if they longed to cheer and comfort her. The warm wind lifted up her shining hair and softly kissed her cheek, while the sunbeams, looking most kindly in her face, made little rainbows in her tears, and lingered lovingly about her. But Annie paid no heed to sun, or wind, or flower; still the bright tears fell, and she forgot all but her sorrow.

“Little Annie, tell me why you weep,” said a low voice in her ear; and, looking up, the child beheld a little figure standing on a vine-leaf at her side; a lovely face smiled on her, from amid bright locks of hair, and shining wings were folded on a white and glittering robe, that fluttered in the wind.

“Who are you, lovely little thing?” cried Annie, smiling through her tears.

“I am a Fairy, little child, and am come to help and comfort you; now tell me why you weep, and let me be your friend,” replied the spirit, as she smiled more kindly still on Annie’s wondering face.

“And are you really, then, a little Elf, such as I read of in my fairy books? Do you ride on butterflies, sleep in flower-cups, and live among the clouds?”

“Yes, all these things I do, and many stranger still, that all your fairy books can never tell; but now, dear Annie,” said the Fairy, bending nearer, “tell me why I found no sunshine on your face; why are these great drops shining on the flowers, and why do you sit alone when BIRD and BEE are calling you to play?”

“Ah, you will not love me any more if I should tell you all,” said Annie, while the tears began to fall again; “I am not happy, for I am not good; how shall I learn to be a patient, gentle child? good little Fairy, will you teach me how?”

“Gladly will I aid you, Annie, and if you truly wish to be a happy child, you first must learn to conquer many passions that you cherish now, and make your heart a home for gentle feelings and happy thoughts; the task is hard, but I will give this fairy flower to help and counsel you. Bend hither, that I may place it in your breast; no hand can take it hence, till I unsay the spell that holds it there.”

As thus she spoke, the Elf took from her bosom a graceful flower, whose snow-white leaves shone with a strange, soft light. “This is a fairy flower,” said the Elf, “invisible to every eye save yours; now listen while I tell its power, Annie. When your heart is filled with loving thoughts, when some kindly deed has been done, some duty well performed, then from the flower there will arise the sweetest, softest fragrance, to reward and gladden you. But when an unkind word is on your lips, when a selfish, angry feeling rises in your heart, or an unkind, cruel deed is to be done, then will you hear the soft, low chime of the flower-bell; listen to its warning, let the word remain unspoken, the deed undone, and in the quiet joy of your own heart, and the magic perfume of your bosom flower, you will find a sweet reward.”

“O kind and generous Fairy, how can I ever thank you for this lovely gift!” cried Annie. “I will be true, and listen to my little bell whenever it may ring. But shall I never see YOU more? Ah! if you would only stay with me, I should indeed be good.”

“I cannot stay now, little Annie,” said the Elf, “but when another Spring comes round, I shall be here again, to see how well the fairy gift has done its work. And now farewell, dear child; be faithful to yourself, and the magic flower will never fade.”

Then the gentle Fairy folded her little arms around Annie’s neck, laid a soft kiss on her cheek, and, spreading wide her shining wings, flew singing up among the white clouds floating in the sky.

And little Annie sat among her flowers, and watched with wondering joy the fairy blossom shining on her breast.

The pleasant days of Spring and Summer passed away, and in little Annie’s garden Autumn flowers were blooming everywhere, with each day’s sun and dew growing still more beautiful and bright; but the fairy flower, that should have been the loveliest of all, hung pale and drooping on little Annie’s bosom; its fragrance seemed quite gone, and the clear, low music of its warning chime rang often in her ear.

When first the Fairy placed it there, she had been pleased with her new gift, and for a while obeyed the fairy bell, and often tried to win some fragrance from the flower, by kind and pleasant words and actions; then, as the Fairy said, she found a sweet reward in the strange, soft perfume of the magic blossom, as it shone upon her breast; but selfish thoughts would come to tempt her, she would yield, and unkind words fell from her lips; and then the flower drooped pale and scentless, the fairy bell rang mournfully, Annie would forget her better resolutions, and be again a selfish, wilful little child.

At last she tried no longer, but grew angry with the faithful flower, and would have torn it from her breast; but the fairy spell still held it fast, and all her angry words but made it ring a louder, sadder peal. Then she paid no heed to the silvery music sounding in her ear, and each day grew still more unhappy, discontented, and unkind; so, when the Autumn days came round, she was no better for the gentle Fairy's gift, and longed for Spring, that it might be returned; for now the constant echo of the mournful music made her very sad.

One sunny morning, when the fresh, cool Winds were blowing, and not a cloud was in the sky, little Annie walked among her flowers, looking carefully into each, hoping thus to find the Fairy, who alone could take the magic blossom from her breast. But she lifted up their drooping leaves, peeped into their dewy cups in vain; no little Elf lay hidden there, and she turned sadly from them all, saying, "I will go out into the fields and woods, and seek her there. I will not listen to this tiresome music more, nor wear this withered flower longer." So out into the fields she went, where the long grass rustled as she passed, and timid birds looked at her from their nests; where lovely wild-flowers nodded in the wind, and opened wide their fragrant leaves, to welcome in the murmuring bees, while butterflies, like winged flowers, danced and glittered in the sun.

Little Annie looked, searched, and asked them all if any one could tell her of the Fairy whom she sought; but the birds looked wonderingly at her with their soft, bright eyes, and still sang on; the flowers nodded wisely on their stems, but did not speak, while butterfly and bee buzzed and fluttered away, one far too busy, the other too idle, to stay and tell her what she asked.

Then she went through broad fields of yellow grain, that waved around her like a golden forest; here crickets chirped, grasshoppers leaped, and busy ants worked, but they could not tell her what she longed to know.

"Now will I go among the hills," said Annie, "she may be there." So up and down the green hill-sides went her little feet; long she searched and vainly she called; but still no Fairy came. Then by the river-side she went, and asked the gay dragon-flies, and the cool white lilies, if the Fairy had been there; but the blue waves rippled on the white sand at her feet, and no voice answered her.

Then into the forest little Annie went; and as she passed along the dim, cool paths, the wood-flowers smiled up in her face, gay squirrels peeped at her, as they swung amid the vines, and doves cooed softly as she wandered by; but none could answer her. So, weary with her long and useless search, she sat amid the ferns, and feasted on the rosy strawberries that grew beside her, watching meanwhile the crimson evening clouds that glowed around the setting sun.

The night-wind rustled through the boughs, rocking the flowers to sleep; the wild birds sang their evening hymns, and all within the wood grew calm and still; paler and paler grew the purple light, lower and lower drooped little Annie's head, the tall ferns bent to shield her from the dew, the whispering pines sang a soft lullaby; and when the Autumn moon rose up, her silver light shone on the child, where, pillowed on green moss, she lay asleep amid the wood-flowers in the dim old forest.

And all night long beside her stood the Fairy she had sought, and by elfin spell and charm sent to the sleeping child this dream.

Little Annie dreamed she sat in her own garden, as she had often sat before, with angry feelings in her heart, and unkind words upon her lips. The magic flower was ringing its soft warning, but she paid no heed to anything, save her own troubled thoughts; thus she sat, when suddenly a low voice whispered in her ear, —

"Little Annie, look and see the evil things that you are cherishing; I will clothe in fitting shapes the thoughts and feelings that now dwell within your heart, and you shall see how great their power becomes, unless you banish them for ever."

Then Annie saw, with fear and wonder, that the angry words she uttered changed to dark, unlovely forms, each showing plainly from what fault or passion it had sprung. Some of the shapes had scowling faces and bright, fiery eyes; these were the spirits of Anger. Others, with sullen, anxious looks, seemed gathering up all they could reach, and Annie saw that the more they gained, the less they seemed to have; and these she knew were shapes of Selfishness. Spirits of Pride were there, who folded their shadowy garments round them, and turned scornfully away from all the rest. These and many others little Annie saw, which had come from her own heart, and taken form before her eyes.

When first she saw them, they were small and weak; but as she looked they seemed to grow and gather strength, and each gained a strange power over her. She could not drive them from her sight, and they grew ever stronger, darker, and more unlovely to her eyes. They seemed to cast black shadows over all around, to dim the sunshine, blight the flowers, and drive away all bright and lovely things; while rising slowly round her Annie saw a high, dark wall, that seemed to shut out everything she loved; she dared not move, or speak, but, with a strange fear at her heart, sat watching the dim shapes that hovered round her.

Higher and higher rose the shadowy wall, slowly the flowers near her died, lingeringly the sunlight faded; but at last they both were gone, and left her all alone behind the gloomy wall. Then the spirits gathered round her, whispering strange things in her ear, bidding her obey, for by her own will she had yielded up her heart to be their home, and she was now their slave. Then she could hear no more, but, sinking down among the withered flowers, wept sad and bitter tears, for her lost liberty and joy; then through the gloom there shone a faint, soft light, and on her breast she saw her fairy flower, upon whose snow-white leaves her tears lay shining.

Clearer and brighter grew the radiant light, till the evil spirits turned away to the dark shadow of the wall, and left the child alone.

The light and perfume of the flower seemed to bring new strength to Annie, and she rose up, saying, as she bent to kiss the blossom on her breast, “Dear flower, help and guide me now, and I will listen to your voice, and cheerfully obey my faithful fairy bell.”

Then in her dream she felt how hard the spirits tried to tempt and trouble her, and how, but for her flower, they would have led her back, and made all dark and dreary as before. Long and hard she struggled, and tears often fell; but after each new trial, brighter shone her magic flower, and sweeter grew its breath, while the spirits lost still more their power to tempt her. Meanwhile, green, flowering vines crept up the high, dark wall, and hid its roughness from her sight; and over these she watched most tenderly, for soon, wherever green leaves and flowers bloomed, the wall beneath grew weak, and fell apart. Thus little Annie worked and hoped, till one by one the evil spirits fled away, and in their place came shining forms, with gentle eyes and smiling lips, who gathered round her with such loving words, and brought such strength and joy to Annie’s heart, that nothing evil dared to enter in; while slowly sank the gloomy wall, and, over wreaths of fragrant flowers, she passed out into the pleasant world again, the fairy gift no longer pale and drooping, but now shining like a star upon her breast.

Then the low voice spoke again in Annie’s sleeping ear, saying, “The dark, unlovely passions you have looked upon are in your heart; watch well while they are few and weak, lest they should darken your whole life, and shut out love and happiness for ever. Remember well the lesson of the dream, dear child, and let the shining spirits make your heart their home.”

And with that voice sounding in her ear, little Annie woke to find it was a dream; but like other dreams it did not pass away; and as she sat alone, bathed in the rosy morning light, and watched the forest waken into life, she thought of the strange forms she had seen, and, looking down upon the flower on her breast, she silently resolved to strive, as she had striven in her dream, to bring back light and beauty to its faded leaves, by being what the Fairy hoped to render her, a patient, gentle little child. And as the thought came to her mind, the flower raised its drooping head, and, looking up into the earnest little face bent over it, seemed by its fragrant breath to answer Annie’s silent thought, and strengthen her for what might come.

Meanwhile the forest was astir, birds sang their gay good-morrows from tree to tree, while leaf and flower turned to greet the sun, who rose up smiling on the world; and so beneath the forest boughs and through the dewy fields went little Annie home, better and wiser for her dream.

Autumn flowers were dead and gone, yellow leaves lay rustling on the ground, bleak winds went whistling through the naked trees, and cold, white Winter snow fell softly down; yet now, when all without looked dark and dreary, on little Annie's breast the fairy flower bloomed more beautiful than ever. The memory of her forest dream had never passed away, and through trial and temptation she had been true, and kept her resolution still unbroken; seldom now did the warning bell sound in her ear, and seldom did the flower's fragrance cease to float about her, or the fairy light to brighten all whereon it fell.

So, through the long, cold Winter, little Annie dwelt like a sunbeam in her home, each day growing richer in the love of others, and happier in herself; often was she tempted, but, remembering her dream, she listened only to the music of the fairy bell, and the unkind thought or feeling fled away, the smiling spirits of gentleness and love nestled in her heart, and all was bright again.

So better and happier grew the child, fairer and sweeter grew the flower, till Spring came smiling over the earth, and woke the flowers, set free the streams, and welcomed back the birds; then daily did the happy child sit among her flowers, longing for the gentle Elf to come again, that she might tell her gratitude for all the magic gift had done.

At length, one day, as she sat singing in the sunny nook where all her fairest flowers bloomed, weary with gazing at the far-off sky for the little form she hoped would come, she bent to look with joyful love upon her bosom flower; and as she looked, its folded leaves spread wide apart, and, rising slowly from the deep white cup, appeared the smiling face of the lovely Elf whose coming she had waited for so long.

"Dear Annie, look for me no longer; I am here on your own breast, for you have learned to love my gift, and it has done its work most faithfully and well," the Fairy said, as she looked into the happy child's bright face, and laid her little arms most tenderly about her neck.

"And now have I brought another gift from Fairy-Land, as a fit reward for you, dear child," she said, when Annie had told all her gratitude and love; then, touching the child with her shining wand, the Fairy bid her look and listen silently.

And suddenly the world seemed changed to Annie; for the air was filled with strange, sweet sounds, and all around her floated lovely forms. In every flower sat little smiling Elves, singing gayly as they rocked amid the leaves. On every breeze, bright, airy spirits came floating by; some fanned her cheek with their cool breath, and waved her long hair to and fro, while others rang the flower-bells, and made a pleasant rustling among the leaves. In the fountain, where the water danced and sparkled in the sun, astride of every drop she saw merry little spirits, who plashed and floated in the clear, cool waves, and sang as gayly as the flowers, on whom they scattered glittering dew. The tall trees, as their branches rustled in the wind, sang a low, dreamy song, while the waving grass was filled with little voices she had never heard before. Butterflies whispered lovely tales in her ear, and birds sang cheerful songs in a sweet language she had never understood before. Earth and air seemed filled with beauty and with music she had never dreamed of until now.

"O tell me what it means, dear Fairy! is it another and a lovelier dream, or is the earth in truth so beautiful as this?" she cried, looking with wondering joy upon the Elf, who lay upon the flower in her breast.

"Yes, it is true, dear child," replied the Fairy, "and few are the mortals to whom we give this lovely gift; what to you is now so full of music and of light, to others is but a pleasant summer world; they never know the language of butterfly or bird or flower, and they are blind to all that I have given you the power to see. These fair things are your friends and playmates now, and they will teach you many pleasant lessons, and give you many happy hours; while the garden where you once sat, weeping sad and bitter tears, is now brightened by your own happiness, filled with loving friends by your own kindly thoughts and feelings; and thus rendered a pleasant summer home for the gentle, happy child, whose bosom flower will never fade. And now, dear Annie, I must go; but every Springtime, with the earliest flowers, will I come again to visit you, and bring some fairy gift. Guard well the magic flower, that I may find all fair and bright when next I come."

Then, with a kind farewell, the gentle Fairy floated upward through the sunny air, smiling down upon the child, until she vanished in the soft, white clouds, and little Annie stood alone in her enchanted garden, where all was brightened with the radiant light, and fragrant with the perfume of her fairy flower.

When Moonlight ceased, Summer-Wind laid down her rose-leaf fan, and, leaning back in her acorn cup, told this tale of

RIPPLE, THE WATER-SPIRIT.

DOWN in the deep blue sea lived Ripple, a happy little Water-Spirit; all day long she danced beneath the coral arches, made garlands of bright ocean flowers, or floated on the great waves that sparkled in the sunlight; but the pastime that she loved best was lying in the many-colored shells upon the shore, listening to the low, murmuring music the waves had taught them long ago; and here for hours the little Spirit lay watching the sea and sky, while singing gayly to herself.

But when tempests rose, she hastened down below the stormy billows, to where all was calm and still, and with her sister Spirits waited till it should be fair again, listening sadly, meanwhile, to the cries of those whom the wild waves wrecked and cast into the angry sea, and who soon came floating down, pale and cold, to the Spirits' pleasant home; then they wept pitying tears above the lifeless forms, and laid them in quiet graves, where flowers bloomed, and jewels sparkled in the sand.

This was Ripple's only grief, and she often thought of those who sorrowed for the friends they loved, who now slept far down in the dim and silent coral caves, and gladly would she have saved the lives of those who lay around her; but the great ocean was far mightier than all the tender-hearted Spirits dwelling in its bosom. Thus she could only weep for them, and lay them down to sleep where no cruel waves could harm them more.

One day, when a fearful storm raged far and wide, and the Spirits saw great billows rolling like heavy clouds above their heads, and heard the wild winds sounding far away, down through the foaming waves a little child came floating to their home; its eyes were closed as if in sleep, the long hair fell like sea-weed round its pale, cold face, and the little hands still clasped the shells they had been gathering on the beach, when the great waves swept it into the troubled sea.

With tender tears the Spirits laid the little form to rest upon its bed of flowers, and, singing mournful songs, as if to make its sleep more calm and deep, watched long and lovingly above it, till the storm had died away, and all was still again.

While Ripple sang above the little child, through the distant roar of winds and waves she heard a wild, sorrowing voice, that seemed to call for help. Long she listened, thinking it was but the echo of their own plaintive song, but high above the music still sounded the sad, wailing cry. Then, stealing silently away, she glided up through foam and spray, till, through the parting clouds, the sunlight shone upon her from the tranquil sky; and, guided by the mournful sound, she floated on, till, close before her on the beach, she saw a woman stretching forth her arms, and with a sad, imploring voice praying the restless sea to give her back the little child it had so cruelly borne away. But the waves dashed foaming up among the bare rocks at her feet, mingling their cold spray with her tears, and gave no answer to her prayer.

When Ripple saw the mother’s grief, she longed to comfort her; so, bending tenderly beside her, where she knelt upon the shore, the little Spirit told her how her child lay softly sleeping, far down in a lovely place, where sorrowing tears were shed, and gentle hands laid garlands over him. But all in vain she whispered kindly words; the weeping mother only cried, —

“Dear Spirit, can you use no charm or spell to make the waves bring back my child, as full of life and strength as when they swept him from my side? O give me back my little child, or let me lie beside him in the bosom of the cruel sea.”

“Most gladly will I help you if I can, though I have little power to use; then grieve no more, for I will search both earth and sea, to find some friend who can bring back all you have lost. Watch daily on the shore, and if I do not come again, then you will know my search has been in vain. Farewell, poor mother, you shall see your little child again, if Fairy power can win him back.” And with these cheering words Ripple sprang into the sea; while, smiling through her tears, the woman watched the gentle Spirit, till her bright crown vanished in the waves.

When Ripple reached her home, she hastened to the palace of the Queen, and told her of the little child, the sorrowing mother, and the promise she had made.

“Good little Ripple,” said the Queen, when she had told her all, “your promise never can be kept; there is no power below the sea to work this charm, and you can never reach the Fire-Spirits’ home, to win from them a flame to warm the little body into life. I pity the poor mother, and would most gladly help her; but alas! I am a Spirit like yourself, and cannot serve you as I long to do.”

“Ah, dear Queen! if you had seen her sorrow, you too would seek to keep the promise I have made. I cannot let her watch for ME in vain, till I have done my best: then tell me where the Fire-Spirits dwell, and I will ask of them the flame that shall give life to the little child and such great happiness to the sad, lonely mother: tell me the path, and let me go.”

“It is far, far away, high up above the sun, where no Spirit ever dared to venture yet,” replied the Queen. “I cannot show the path, for it is through the air. Dear Ripple, do not go, for you can never reach that distant place: some harm most surely will befall; and then how shall we live, without our dearest, gentlest Spirit? Stay here with us in your own pleasant home, and think more of this, for I can never let you go."

But Ripple would not break the promise she had made, and besought so earnestly, and with such pleading words, that the Queen at last with sorrow gave consent, and Ripple joyfully prepared to go. She, with her sister Spirits, built up a tomb of delicate, bright-colored shells, wherein the child might lie, till she should come to wake him into life; then, praying them to watch most faithfully above it, she said farewell, and floated bravely forth, on her long, unknown journey, far away.

"I will search the broad earth till I find a path up to the sun, or some kind friend who will carry me; for, alas! I have no wings, and cannot glide through the blue air as through the sea," said Ripple to herself, as she went dancing over the waves, which bore her swiftly onward towards a distant shore.

Long she journeyed through the pathless ocean, with no friends to cheer her, save the white sea-birds who went sweeping by, and only stayed to dip their wide wings at her side, and then flew silently away. Sometimes great ships sailed by, and then with longing eyes did the little Spirit gaze up at the faces that looked down upon the sea; for often they were kind and pleasant ones, and she gladly would have called to them and asked them to be friends. But they would never understand the strange, sweet language that she spoke, or even see the lovely face that smiled at them above the waves; her blue, transparent garments were but water to their eyes, and the pearl chains in her hair but foam and sparkling spray; so, hoping that the sea would be most gentle with them, silently she floated on her way, and left them far behind.

At length green hills were seen, and the waves gladly bore the little Spirit on, till, rippling gently over soft white sand, they left her on the pleasant shore.

"Ah, what a lovely place it is!" said Ripple, as she passed through sunny valleys, where flowers began to bloom, and young leaves rustled on the trees.

"Why are you all so gay, dear birds?" she asked, as their cheerful voices sounded far and near; "is there a festival over the earth, that all is so beautiful and bright?"

"Do you not know that Spring is coming? The warm winds whispered it days ago, and we are learning the sweetest songs, to welcome her when she shall come," sang the lark, soaring away as the music gushed from his little throat.

"And shall I see her, Violet, as she journeys over the earth?" asked Ripple again.

"Yes, you will meet her soon, for the sunlight told me she was near; tell her we long to see her again, and are waiting to welcome her back," said the blue flower, dancing for joy on her stem, as she nodded and smiled on the Spirit.

"I will ask Spring where the Fire-Spirits dwell; she travels over the earth each year, and surely can show me the way," thought Ripple, as she went journeying on.

Soon she saw Spring come smiling over the earth; sunbeams and breezes floated before, and then, with her white garments covered with flowers, with wreaths in her hair, and dew-drops and seeds falling fast from her hands the beautiful season came singing by.

"Dear Spring, will you listen, and help a poor little Spirit, who seeks far and wide for the Fire-Spirits' home?" cried Ripple; and then told why she was there, and begged her to tell what she sought.

"The Fire-Spirits' home is far, far away, and I cannot guide you there; but Summer is coming behind me," said Spring, "and she may know better than I. But I will give you a breeze to help you on your way; it will never tire nor fail, but bear you easily over land and sea. Farewell, little Spirit! I would gladly do more, but voices are calling me far and wide, and I cannot stay."

"Many thanks, kind Spring!" cried Ripple, as she floated away on the breeze; "give a kindly word to the mother who waits on the shore, and tell her I have not forgotten my vow, but hope soon to see her again."

Then Spring flew on with her sunshine and flowers, and Ripple went swiftly over hill and vale, till she came to the land where Summer was dwelling. Here the sun shone warmly down on the early fruit, the winds blew freshly over fields of fragrant hay, and rustled with a pleasant sound among the green leaves in the forests; heavy dews fell softly down at night, and long, bright days brought strength and beauty to the blossoming earth.

"Now I must seek for Summer," said Ripple, as she sailed slowly through the sunny sky.

"I am here, what would you with me, little Spirit?" said a musical voice in her ear; and, floating by her side, she saw a graceful form, with green robes fluttering in the air, whose pleasant face looked kindly on her, from beneath a crown of golden sunbeams that cast a warm, bright glow on all beneath.

Then Ripple told her tale, and asked where she should go; but Summer answered, —

"I can tell no more than my young sister Spring where you may find the Spirits that you seek; but I too, like her, will give a gift to aid you. Take this sunbeam from my crown; it will cheer and brighten the most gloomy path through which you pass. Farewell! I shall carry tidings of you to the watcher by the sea, if in my journey round the world I find her there."

And Summer, giving her the sunbeam, passed away over the distant hills, leaving all green and bright behind her.

So Ripple journeyed on again, till the earth below her shone with yellow harvests waving in the sun, and the air was filled with cheerful voices, as the reapers sang among the fields or in the pleasant vineyards, where purple fruit hung gleaming through the leaves; while the sky above was cloudless, and the changing forest-trees shone like a many-colored garland, over hill and plain; and here, along the ripening corn-fields, with bright wreaths of crimson leaves and golden wheat-ears in her hair and on her purple mantle, stately Autumn passed, with a happy smile on her calm face, as she went scattering generous gifts from her full arms.

But when the wandering Spirit came to her, and asked for what she sought, this season, like the others, could not tell her where to go; so, giving her a yellow leaf, Autumn said, as she passed on, —

"Ask Winter, little Ripple, when you come to his cold home; he knows the Fire-Spirits well, for when he comes they fly to the earth, to warm and comfort those dwelling there; and perhaps he can tell you where they are. So take this gift of mine, and when you meet his chilly winds, fold it about you, and sit warm beneath its shelter, till you come to sunlight again. I will carry comfort to the patient woman, as my sisters have already done, and tell her you are faithful still."

Then on went the never-tiring Breeze, over forest, hill, and field, till the sky grew dark, and bleak winds whistled by. Then Ripple, folded in the soft, warm leaf, looked sadly down on the earth, that seemed to lie so desolate and still beneath its shroud of snow, and thought how bitter cold the leaves and flowers must be; for the little Water-Spirit did not know that Winter spread a soft white covering above their beds, that they might safely sleep below till Spring should waken them again. So she went sorrowfully on, till Winter, riding on the strong North-Wind, came rushing by, with a sparkling ice-crown in his streaming hair, while from beneath his crimson cloak, where glittering frost-work shone like silver threads, he scattered snow-flakes far and wide.

"What do you seek with me, fair little Spirit, that you come so bravely here amid my ice and snow? Do not fear me; I am warm at heart, though rude and cold without," said Winter, looking kindly on her, while a bright smile shone like sunlight on his pleasant face, as it glowed and glistened in the frosty air.

When Ripple told him why she had come, he pointed upward, where the sunlight dimly shone through the heavy clouds, saying, —

"Far off there, beside the sun, is the Fire-Spirits' home; and the only path is up, through cloud and mist. It is a long, strange path, for a lonely little Spirit to be going; the Fairies are wild, wilful things, and in their play may harm and trouble you. Come back with me, and do not go this dangerous journey to the sky. I'll gladly bear you home again, if you will come."

But Ripple said, “I cannot turn back now, when I am nearly there. The Spirits surely will not harm me, when I tell them why I am come; and if I win the flame, I shall be the happiest Spirit in the sea, for my promise will be kept, and the poor mother happy once again. So farewell, Winter! Speak to her gently, and tell her to hope still, for I shall surely come.”

“Adieu, little Ripple! May good angels watch above you! Journey bravely on, and take this snow-flake that will never melt, as MY gift,” Winter cried, as the North-Wind bore him on, leaving a cloud of falling snow behind.

“Now, dear Breeze,” said Ripple, “fly straight upward through the air, until we reach the place we have so long been seeking; Sunbeam shall go before to light the way, Yellow-leaf shall shelter me from heat and rain, while Snow-flake shall lie here beside me till it comes of use. So farewell to the pleasant earth, until we come again. And now away, up to the sun!”

When Ripple first began her airy journey, all was dark and dreary; heavy clouds lay piled like hills around her, and a cold mist filled the air but the Sunbeam, like a star, lit up the way, the leaf lay warmly round her, and the tireless wind went swiftly on. Higher and higher they floated up, still darker and darker grew the air, closer the damp mist gathered, while the black clouds rolled and tossed, like great waves, to and fro.

“Ah!” sighed the weary little Spirit, “shall I never see the light again, or feel the warm winds on my cheek? It is a dreary way indeed, and but for the Seasons’ gifts I should have perished long ago; but the heavy clouds MUST pass away at last, and all be fair again. So hasten on, good Breeze, and bring me quickly to my journey’s end.”

Soon the cold vapors vanished from her path, and sunshine shone upon her pleasantly; so she went gayly on, till she came up among the stars, where many new, strange sights were to be seen. With wondering eyes she looked upon the bright worlds that once seemed dim and distant, when she gazed upon them from the sea; but now they moved around her, some shining with a softly radiant light, some circled with bright, many-colored rings, while others burned with a red, angry glare. Ripple would have gladly stayed to watch them longer, for she fancied low, sweet voices called her, and lovely faces seemed to look upon her as she passed; but higher up still, nearer to the sun, she saw a far-off light, that glittered like a brilliant crimson star, and seemed to cast a rosy glow along the sky.

“The Fire-Spirits surely must be there, and I must stay no longer here,” said Ripple. So steadily she floated on, till straight before her lay a broad, bright path, that led up to a golden arch, beyond which she could see shapes flitting to and fro. As she drew near, brighter glowed the sky, hotter and hotter grew the air, till

Ripple’s leaf-cloak shrivelled up, and could no longer shield her from the heat; then she unfolded the white snow-flake, and, gladly wrapping the soft, cool mantle round her, entered through the shining arch.

Through the red mist that floated all around her, she could see high walls of changing light, where orange, blue, and violet flames went flickering to and fro, making graceful figures as they danced and glowed; and underneath these rainbow arches, little Spirits glided, far and near, wearing crowns of fire, beneath which flashed their wild, bright eyes; and as they spoke, sparks dropped quickly from their lips, and Ripple saw with wonder, through their garments of transparent light, that in each Fairy’s breast there burned a steady flame, that never wavered or went out.

As thus she stood, the Spirits gathered round her, and their hot breath would have scorched her, but she drew the snow-cloak closer round her, saying, —

“Take me to your Queen, that I may tell her why I am here, and ask for what I seek.”

So, through long halls of many-colored fire, they led her to a Spirit fairer than the rest, whose crown of flames waved to and fro like golden plumes, while, underneath her violet robe, the light within her breast glowed bright and strong.

“This is our Queen,” the Spirits said, bending low before her, as she turned her gleaming eyes upon the stranger they had brought.

Then Ripple told how she had wandered round the world in search of them, how the Seasons had most kindly helped her on, by giving Sun-beam, Breeze, Leaf, and Flake; and how, through many dangers, she had come at last to ask of them the magic flame that could give life to the little child again.

When she had told her tale, the spirits whispered earnestly among themselves, while sparks fell thick and fast with every word; at length the Fire-Queen said aloud, —

“We cannot give the flame you ask, for each of us must take a part of it from our own breasts; and this we will not do, for the brighter our bosom-fire burns, the lovelier we are. So do not ask us for this thing; but any other gift we will most gladly give, for we feel kindly towards you, and will serve you if we may.”

But Ripple asked no other boon, and, weeping sadly, begged them not to send her back without the gift she had come so far to gain.

“O dear, warm-hearted Spirits! give me each a little light from your own breasts, and surely they will glow the brighter for this kindly deed; and I will thankfully repay it if I can.” As thus she spoke, the Queen, who had spied out a chain of jewels Ripple wore upon her neck, replied, —

“If you will give me those bright, sparkling stones, I will bestow on you a part of my own flame; for we have no such lovely things to wear about our necks, and I desire much to have them. Will you give it me for what I offer, little Spirit?"

Joyfully Ripple gave her the chain; but, as soon as it touched her hand, the jewels melted like snow, and fell in bright drops to the ground; at this the Queen's eyes flashed, and the Spirits gathered angrily about poor Ripple, who looked sadly at the broken chain, and thought in vain what she could give, to win the thing she longed so earnestly for.

"I have many fairer gems than these, in my home below the sea; and I will bring all I can gather far and wide, if you will grant my prayer, and give me what I seek," she said, turning gently to the fiery Spirits, who were hovering fiercely round her.

"You must bring us each a jewel that will never vanish from our hands as these have done," they said, "and we will each give of our fire; and when the child is brought to life, you must bring hither all the jewels you can gather from the depths of the sea, that we may try them here among the flames; but if they melt away like these, then we shall keep you prisoner, till you give us back the light we lend. If you consent to this, then take our gift, and journey home again; but fail not to return, or we shall seek you out."

And Ripple said she would consent, though she knew not if the jewels could be found; still, thinking of the promise she had made, she forgot all else, and told the Spirits what they asked most surely should be done. So each one gave a little of the fire from their breasts, and placed the flame in a crystal vase, through which it shone and glittered like a star.

Then, bidding her remember all she had promised them, they led her to the golden arch, and said farewell.

So, down along the shining path, through mist and cloud, she travelled back; till, far below, she saw the broad blue sea she left so long ago.

Gladly she plunged into the clear, cool waves, and floated back to her pleasant home; where the Spirits gathered joyfully about her, listening with tears and smiles, as she told all her many wanderings, and showed the crystal vase that she had brought.

"Now come," said they, "and finish the good work you have so bravely carried on." So to the quiet tomb they went, where, like a marble image, cold and still, the little child was lying. Then Ripple placed the flame upon his breast, and watched it gleam and sparkle there, while light came slowly back into the once dim eyes, a rosy glow shone over the pale face, and breath stole through the parted lips; still brighter and warmer burned the magic fire, until the child awoke from his long sleep, and looked in smiling wonder at the faces bending over him.

Then Ripple sang for joy, and, with her sister Spirits, robed the child in graceful garments, woven of bright sea-weed, while in his shining hair they wreathed long garlands of their fairest flowers, and on his little arms hung chains of brilliant shells.

"Now come with us, dear child," said Ripple; "we will bear you safely up into the sunlight and the pleasant air; for this is not your home, and yonder, on the shore, there waits a loving friend for you."

So up they went, through foam and spray, till on the beach, where the fresh winds played among her falling hair, and the waves broke sparkling at her feet, the lonely mother still stood, gazing wistfully across the sea. Suddenly, upon a great blue billow that came rolling in, she saw the Water-Spirits smiling on her; and high aloft, in their white gleaming arms, her child stretched forth his hands to welcome her; while the little voice she so longed to hear again cried gayly, —

"See, dear mother, I am come; and look what lovely things the gentle Spirits gave, that I might seem more beautiful to you."

Then gently the great wave broke, and rolled back to the sea, leaving Ripple on the shore, and the child clasped in his mother's arms.

"O faithful little Spirit! I would gladly give some precious gift to show my gratitude for this kind deed; but I have nothing save this chain of little pearls: they are the tears I shed, and the sea has changed them thus, that I might offer them to you," the happy mother said, when her first joy was passed, and Ripple turned to go.

"Yes, I will gladly wear your gift, and look upon it as my fairest ornament," the Water-Spirit said; and with the pearls upon her breast, she left the shore, where the child was playing gayly to and fro, and the mother's glad smile shone upon her, till she sank beneath the waves.

And now another task was to be done; her promise to the Fire-Spirits must be kept. So far and wide she searched among the caverns of the sea, and gathered all the brightest jewels shining there; and then upon her faithful Breeze once more went journeying through the sky.

The Spirits gladly welcomed her, and led her to the Queen, before whom she poured out the sparkling gems she had gathered with such toil and care; but when the Spirits tried to form them into crowns, they trickled from their hands like colored drops of dew, and Ripple saw with fear and sorrow how they melted one by one away, till none of all the many she had brought remained. Then the Fire-Spirits looked upon her angrily, and when she begged them to be merciful, and let her try once more, saying, —

"Do not keep me prisoner here. I cannot breathe the flames that give you life, and but for this snow-mantle I too should melt away, and vanish like the jewels in your hands. O dear Spirits, give me some other task, but let me go from this warm place, where all is strange and fearful to a Spirit of the sea."

They would not listen; and drew nearer, saying, while bright sparks showered from their lips, "We will not let you go, for you have promised to be ours if the gems you brought proved worthless; so fling away this cold white cloak, and bathe with us in the fire fountains, and help us bring back to our bosom flames the light we gave you for the child."

Then Ripple sank down on the burning floor, and felt that her life was nearly done; for she well knew the hot air of the fire-palace would be death to her. The Spirits gathered round, and began to lift her mantle off; but underneath they saw the pearl chain, shining with a clear, soft light, that only glowed more brightly when they laid their hands upon it.

"O give us this!" cried they; "it is far lovelier than all the rest, and does not melt away like them; and see how brilliantly it glitters in our hands. If we may but have this, all will be well, and you are once more free."

And Ripple, safe again beneath her snow flake, gladly gave the chain to them; and told them how the pearls they now placed proudly on their breasts were formed of tears, which but for them might still be flowing. Then the Spirits smiled most kindly on her, and would have put their arms about her, and have kissed her cheek, but she drew back, telling them that every touch of theirs was like a wound to her.

"Then, if we may not tell our pleasure so, we will show it in a different way, and give you a pleasant journey home. Come out with us," the Spirits said, "and see the bright path we have made for you." So they led her to the lofty gate, and here, from sky to earth, a lovely rainbow arched its radiant colors in the sun.

"This is indeed a pleasant road," said Ripple. "Thank you, friendly Spirits, for your care; and now farewell. I would gladly stay yet longer, but we cannot dwell together, and I am longing sadly for my own cool home. Now Sunbeam, Breeze, Leaf, and Flake, fly back to the Seasons whence you came, and tell them that, thanks to their kind gifts, Ripple's work at last is done."

Then down along the shining pathway spread before her, the happy little Spirit glided to the sea.

"Thanks, dear Summer-Wind," said the Queen; "we will remember the lessons you have each taught us, and when next we meet in Fern Dale, you shall tell us more. And now, dear Trip, call them from the lake, for the moon is sinking fast, and we must hasten home."

The Elves gathered about their Queen, and while the rustling leaves were still, and the flowers' sweet voices mingled with their own, they sang this

FAIRY SONG.

The moonlight fades from flower and tree,
And the stars dim one by one;
The tale is told, the song is sung,
And the Fairy feast is done.
The night-wind rocks the sleeping flowers,
And sings to them, soft and low.
The early birds erelong will wake:
‘T is time for the Elves to go.

O’er the sleeping earth we silently pass,
Unseen by mortal eye,
And send sweet dreams, as we lightly float
Through the quiet moonlit sky; —
For the stars’ soft eyes alone may see,
And the flowers alone may know,
The feasts we hold, the tales we tell:
So ‘t is time for the Elves to go.

From bird, and blossom, and bee,
We learn the lessons they teach;
And seek, by kindly deeds, to win
A loving friend in each.
And though unseen on earth we dwell,
Sweet voices whisper low,
And gentle hearts most joyously greet
The Elves where’er they go.

When next we meet in the Fairy dell,
May the silver moon’s soft light
Shine then on faces gay as now,
And Elfin hearts as light.

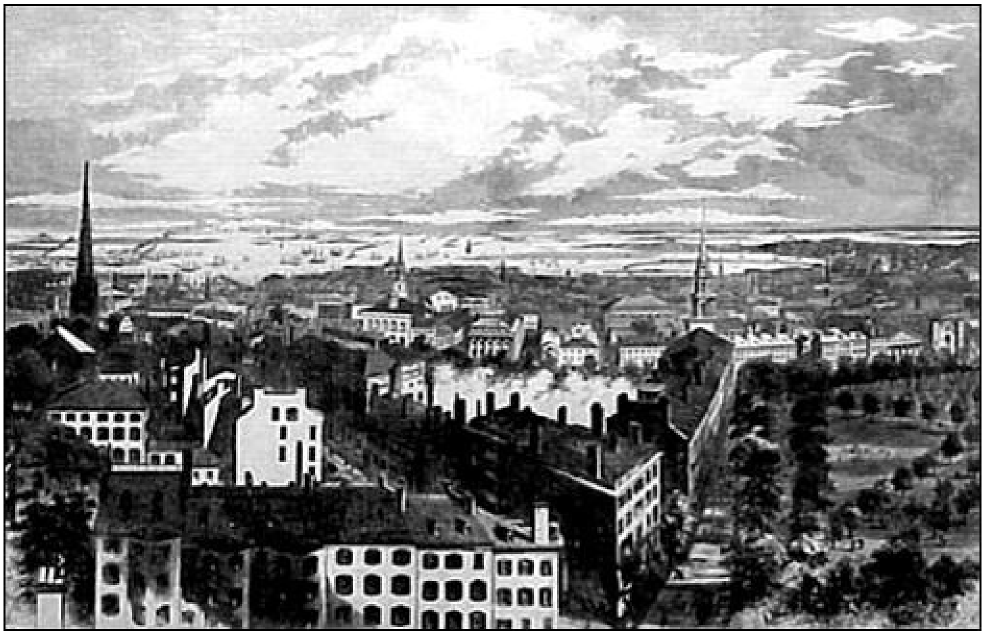
Now spread each wing, for the eastern sky
With sunlight soon will glow.
The morning star shall light us home:
Farewell! for the Elves must go.

As the music ceased, with a soft, rustling sound the Elves spread their shining wings, and flew silently over the sleeping earth; the flowers closed their bright eyes, the little winds were still, for the feast was over, and the Fairy lessons ended.

THE RIVAL PAINTERS

A TALE OF ROME

This is Alcott’s first printed story, which was published in the Boston magazine *The Olive Branch* in 1852. At the age of nineteen, writing in a house on Boston’s High Street where her mother had opened an intelligence office, hoping to increase the meagre family income, Louisa wrote this story, for which she received the payment of $5. *The Rival Painters* tells the story of Guido, a Florentine artist who falls in love with Madeline, and his rival Count Ferdinand. Interestingly, this is the story Jo reads to her sisters in chapter 14 of *Little Women.*



Boston, 1852

THE RIVAL PAINTERS

"Farewell, my son, go trustingly forth, carve thine own fortunes by untiring efforts, and it will be doubly enriched by the memory of those years of patient toil that gained so much happiness for thee. The world is bright and beautiful to a young heart, but its light and loveliness pass away. Set not, therefore, too great value upon its riches. Walk calmly in the quiet path that leads to thy duty, envying none, loving all, and a purer and more lasting joy will be thine, than the praise and homage a flattering world can give thee. Fear nothing but sin and temptation; follow only the dictates of thine own innocent heart. Be faithful to thy friends, forgiving to thine enemies, true to thyself, and earnest in thy love to God, and with a mothers blessing on thy head, fare thee well."

And with nothing but a deep love for his beautiful art, and a heart tilled with pure and lovely feelings. Guido, a young Florentine painter, left his quiet home for the great city of Rome where all his hopes and desires were centered. There in the studio of some great master, he would seek honor and wealth for himself, and a luxurious home for his mother, who with all a woman's patient constancy, had toiled to gain enough to place her son where his exalted genius might be guided and taught, till she could gain all that she so fondly hoped; and when the time came, freely gave up all that made life pleasant to her — cheerfully bade farewell to her noble son, and in her lonely room toiled on that he might lack nothing to cheer and help him on his way. Nor was all the mothers self-sacrificing love unappreciated or unfelt; it kept her son from temptation, and cheered him on to greater efforts, that he might repay with unfailing care and tenderness, the sacrifice so nobly made. Nothing could stay or turn him aside, while his mother's words lingered in his ear. No harm could fall on a head made sacred by her blessing, and no evil enter a heart filled with such holy love.

And so 'mid all the allurements of a luxurious city he passed unharmed, and labored steadily on till he won his way among the first of the highborn young artists, who crowded the studios of the great masters, and as time went on, honor and wealth seemed waiting for him, but not happiness.

The kind old painter, with whom he had spent so many happy years, had a fair young daughter whom he had loved long and silently, happy that he could be near one so good and beautiful. We never thought of asking more till a fellow-student, possessed of wealth and rank, comely in person, and courtly in manner, sought her hand, and then only, when he feared it was too late, did he gain courage to plead his love so well and earnestly that the old painter could not refuse to leave the choice to his daughter.

"Tell me truly, Madeline," he said, "and he you love shall be thine, with my blessing. But pause and consider; young Ferdinand hath wealth, rank, a splendid home, and a heart full of love for thee; Guido has nothing — nay blush not so proudly, my child! I mean no earthly riches; he hath a noble soul and a rare talent for painting, but in this cold world these are uncared for, where gold and honors are prized more highly. Judge for yourself, Madeline, which will bring thee most happiness, the pomp and show of a countess, or an humble painter's home, subject to all the care and sorrow poverty brings. Wealth or love — few maidens would pause; and yet 'tis a hard choice — both so noble and comely; I wonder not at your indecision."

The image of the pale young painter came oftenest to the girl's heart, all his silent acts of kindness, his humble, self-denying life, and most of all his deep and earnest love for herself — and the gay gallant Count, was forgotten. A flower from Guido was more highly prized than all the costly gifts her titled suitor laid at her feet; but she knew her father longed to see her the wife of some high-born lord; his own life had been darkened by hours of poverty and sorrow, and he fondly hoped to spare her that pain which he had borne unmurmuring!)'. So with a daughter's self-denying love, she answered —

"Father, as a painter's daughter, my life has been one of perfect happiness; why not as a wife? The count loves the beautiful art only as a means of gaining honor, and even that love will soon pass away, and some trifling thing succeed it. Guido is poor, and his art is his all. I know the deep, earnest love he bears for all that is great and good; beauty and purity he worships with a true painter's steadfastness, and while he humbly toils for bread, the noble genius which lies hidden now, will awake, and hallowed by such a purpose, will bring him honor, and wealth. But I am young, father, and the world is new to me; judge as your own wise love counsels, and by that judgment will I abide."

"So let it be. Madeline! and if I do not greatly err, our choice will be the same," he replied, as he passed out and left a loving heart behind, struggling with the gentle memories that thronged so tenderly about it. But with a woman's strength, all thoughts of love were banished, and she waited to fulfil her duty, hard though it might be.

"Seniors," said the old painter, when he joined the rivals, who together sought to learn their fate, "my daughter leaves the choice to me, and as a father, I would ask what you would give up to win her love? Maidens arc fond and foolish things, and would he hardly won; my lord, how highly do you prize the love of a simple girl?"

"More than life, liberty, wealth or honor," replied the Count, with a glance at his humble rival who possessed so little to sacrifice.

"And you Guido," said the old man.

The bright blood mounted to the pale face, and the clear light glowed deeper in his dark eye as he answered with a low sad voice, "I would give up that which is more precious than life or liberty; that for which I would toil and suffer long years — that for which I would most gladly give the little of honor, wealth or happiness that I possess; all these were trifles, useless and vain, if that one thing were not gained."

"And this is what?" asked the wondering painter.

"Your daughter! her happiness is more to me than all the earth can offer, l et her bestow her love where she will, and God protect him who is so blest as to possess it. My deepest, truest joy will be the knowledge of her own. Cold and selfish were the hearts that did not find pure happiness in the joy of those they truly love. My rival hath all that can make life fair and beautiful; I would not bring a cloud to darken her bright sky: but when all the blessings that the world can give are hers, I would only ask a passing thought of one, whose earnest life and abiding love, will ever link all bright and happy memories with her."

"It is enough! hear my decision: — Three weeks hence is the Carnival; he who before that time hath painted a picture the most perfect in grace, and beauty of form, design and coloring, to him will I give my daughter. Strange as it may seem. I feel a painters pride in bestowing my only earthly wealth on one worthy the glorious art that wins her. Three weeks hence at the gallery of — -, we meet again; 'till then, farewell."

And as the two rivals turned away, his eye rested proudly on Guido, as he whispered with a smile, "He is worthy of her, and will succeed."

The hours went by, and rumors of die strange trial between the rival painters were rife through the city. Many were the wondering thoughts of the people; gay jests went round, and happy visions of fame from the hand of the painters filled many a fair lady's heart.

The beautiful Madeline sat alone, and strove to banish the thoughts that would come, bringing a picture, she would not look upon, and so the tune went on, the days were spent, and the Carnival was in progress.

Gallery after gallery tilled, and still the crowd poured on till the dim old halls were brilliant with the fair and noble of the gay city; the sunlight stole softly in through the richly stained windows, throwing strange, bright hues on the old pictures within, and the air was heavy with die fragrance of the (lowers twined round statue and pillar.

Two dark mysterious curtains hung side by side, and before them stood the rival painters — a strange contrast. The young count, his proud face glowing with joy; his costly garments glittering with embroider)’, and his plumed cap, heavy with jewels, stood proudly forth, and many a light heart beat, and fair cheek flushed, as his dark eye glanced over the galleries, bright as an Eastern garden with the loveliest flowers of Rome.

But they soon turned from him to his rival, and lingered there. His humble dress and threadbare mantle were unheeded for the noble face that looked so pale in die dark shadow where he stood; but a ray of sunlight lay softly on the long, dark locks that fell heavily round his face, and all unconscious of the eyes upon him. he stood looking calmly on the sweet face of a Madonna above.

A crowd of the first painters stood around a canopied seat, conversing with the father, who listened, silently watching the dial as it fast approached the appointed hour; beside him sat Madeline; the long veil folded so closely could not hide the lovely face that blushed beneath; and the hand that clasped the victors wreath, trembled with the emotions of hope and fear that made the dark eyes fill with tears, and the gentle heart beat wildly.

As the twelve silvery chimes died away, the count sprang forward and exultingly flung back the curtain. A long breathless pause, and then loud and long sounded the applause, till the vaulted roof rung again.

It was Madeline — beautiful as love could make her. Beneath the picture, traced in golden letters, were courtly words of love and flattery, and before it the count knelt gracefully, and with uncovered head.

Then die pale young painter lifted his dark curtain, and not a sound broke the deep stillness as with fascinated eyes they gazed. Tears were on many a check, for the simple word “Mother” traced below, brought back to many a careless heart, the long-forgotten hours of innocence and youth; it was strangely beautiful. The silvered hair lay softly round the gentle face, and the mild dark eyes seemed looking down on her son with all a mother’s fondness, while the golden light that fell from the high window seemed to shut the world of sin and shadows from them.

The silence was broken by a burst of applause that shook the old walls, and often as it died away ‘twas again renewed; plumed caps waved, and flowers fell at his feet. Still, with folded hands he stood, heedless of all, for his thoughts were far away, and he saw only the gentle face before him, heard only her low, sweet voice, felt only her hand laid in blessing on his head, and all else was forgotten.

Then clear and deep above the murmuring crowd, sounded the voice of die old painter, saying — ”Guido of Florence hath won the prize, and more than this he hath gained our low and honor, for one whose holy affections prized above the young, and lovely; the face that first smiled upon him, the heart that first loved. I ask no greater wraith for my child than the love of so noble a son. She is thine, Guido, with my blessing.”

And ‘mid a burst of triumphant music the wreath fell upon his head, and Madeline upon his breast. The noblest painters crowded round him. fair ladies scattered flowers in his path, and even his rival, shrouding his own fair picture, flung a bright wreath over the other, and with tears on his proud face, stood humbly before it. while gentle memories came stealing back, bringing a quiet joy, long unknown to his ambitious heart; and he rose up a better man for the holy lesson lie had learned.

And while noble painters, and beautiful women paid their homage to the humble artist, and die deep-toned music rolled through the bright halls, high above all. the calm soft face looked proudly down on the form, whose unfailing love for her. had gained him the honor and love he so richly deserved.

HOSPITAL SKETCHES

Publishd in 1863, this compilation of four sketches are based on letters Alcott sent home during her six weeks she as a volunteer nurse for the Union Army during the Civil War in Georgetown. Tribulaton Periwinkle opens the story by complaining, “I want something to do.” She dismisses suggestions to write a book, teach, get married, or start acting. When her younger brother suggests she “go nurse the soldiers”, she immediately responds, “I will!” After substantial hardship in trying to obtain a spot, she has further difficulty finding a place on the train. She then describes her travel through New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.

After the Civil War broke out, the town of Concord, Massachusetts rallied, inspiring many young men to volunteer. The company assembled on the town common on April 19, 1861, the anniversary of the Battles of Lexington and Concord as they set off. Alcott wrote to her friend Alf Whitman that it was “a sight to behold”.

Alcott at the time of publication

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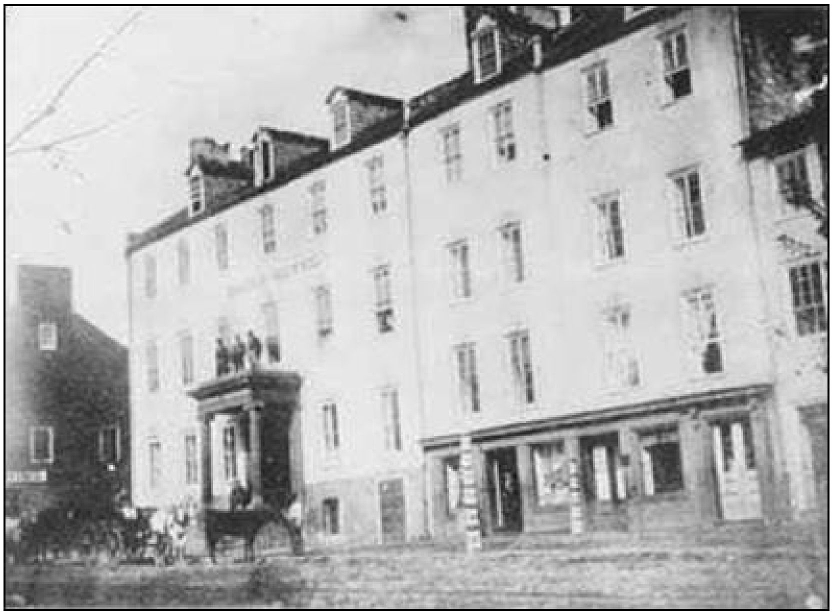
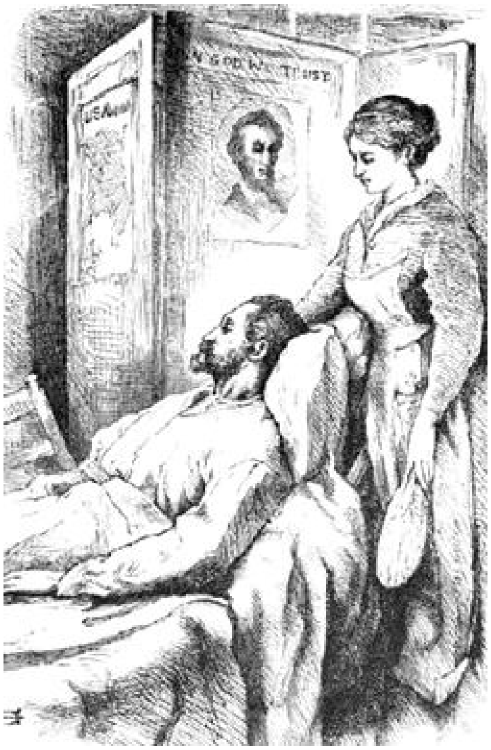


Washington D.C.’s Union Hotel Hospital — the setting of the ‘Hospital Sketches’


U.S.
IN GOD WE TRUST

CHAPTER I
OBTAINING SUPPLIES.

"I want something to do."

This remark being addressed to the world in general, no one in particular felt it their duty to reply; so I repeated it to the smaller world about me, received the following suggestions, and settled the matter by answering my own inquiry, as people are apt to do when very much in earnest.

"Write a book," quoth the author of my being.

"Don't know enough, sir. First live, then write."

"Try teaching again," suggested my mother.

"No thank you, ma'am, ten years of that is enough."

"Take a husband like my Darby, and fulfill your mission," said sister Joan, home on a visit.

"Can't afford expensive luxuries, Mrs. Coobiddy."

"Turn actress, and immortalize your name," said sister Vashti, striking an attitude.

"I won't."

"Go nurse the soldiers," said my young brother, Tom, panting for "the tented field."

"I will!"

So far, very good. Here was the will — now for the way. At first sight not a foot of it appeared, but that didn't matter, for the Periwinkles are a hopeful race; their crest is an anchor, with three cock-a-doodles crowing atop. They all wear rose-colored spectacles, and are lineal descendants of the inventor of aerial architecture. An hour's conversation on the subject set the whole family in a blaze of enthusiasm. A model hospital was erected, and each member had accepted an honorable post therein. The paternal P. was chaplain, the maternal P. was matron, and all the youthful P.s filled the pod of futurity with achievements whose brilliancy eclipsed the glories of the present and the past. Arriving at this satisfactory conclusion, the meeting adjourned, and the fact that Miss Tribulation was available as army nurse went abroad on the wings of the wind.

In a few days a townswoman heard of my desire, approved of it, and brought about an interview with one of the sisterhood which I wished to join, who was at home on a furlough, and able and willing to satisfy all inquiries. A morning chat with Miss General S. — we hear no end of Mrs. Generals, why not a Miss? —

produced three results: I felt that I could do the work, was offered a place, and accepted it, promising not to desert, but stand ready to march on Washington at an hour's notice.

A few days were necessary for the letter containing my request and recommendation to reach headquarters, and another, containing my commission, to return; therefore no time was to be lost; and heartily thanking my pair of friends, I tore home through the December slush as if the rebels were after me, and like many another recruit, burst in upon my family with the announcement —

"I've enlisted!"

An impressive silence followed. Tom, the irrepressible, broke it with a slap on the shoulder and the graceful compliment —

"Old Trib, you're a trump!"

"Thank you; then I'll take something:" which I did, in the shape of dinner, reeling off my news at the rate of three dozen words to a mouthful; and as every one else talked equally fast, and all together, the scene was most inspiring.

As boys going to sea immediately become nautical in speech, walk as if they already had their "sea legs" on, and shiver their timbers on all possible occasions, so I turned military at once, called my dinner my rations, saluted all new comers, and ordered a dress parade that very afternoon. Having reviewed every rag I possessed, I detailed some for picket duty while airing over the fence; some to the sanitary influences of the wash-tub; others to mount guard in the trunk; while the weak and wounded went to the Work-basket Hospital, to be made ready for active service again. To this squad I devoted myself for a week; but all was done, and I had time to get powerfully impatient before the letter came. It did arrive however, and brought a disappointment along with its good will and friendliness, for it told me that the place in the Armory Hospital that I supposed I was to take, was already filled, and a much less desirable one at Hurly-burly House was offered instead.

"That's just your luck, Trib. I'll tote your trunk up garret for you again; for of course you won't go," Tom remarked, with the disdainful pity which small boys affect when they get into their teens. I was wavering in my secret soul, but that settled the matter, and I crushed him on the spot with martial brevity —

"It is now one; I shall march at six."

I have a confused recollection of spending the afternoon in pervading the house like an executive whirlwind, with my family swarming after me, all working, talking, prophesying and lamenting, while I packed my "go-abroady" possessions, tumbled the rest into two big boxes, danced on the lids till they shut, and gave them in charge, with the direction, —

“If I never come back, make a bonfire of them.”

Then I choked down a cup of tea, generously salted instead of sugared, by some agitated relative, shouldered my knapsack — it was only a traveling bag, but do let me preserve the unities — hugged my family three times all round without a vestige of unmanly emotion, till a certain dear old lady broke down upon my neck, with a despairing sort of wail —

“Oh, my dear, my dear, how can I let you go?”

“I’ll stay if you say so, mother.”

“But I don’t; go, and the Lord will take care of you.”

Much of the Roman matron’s courage had gone into the Yankee matron’s composition, and, in spite of her tears, she would have sent ten sons to the war, had she possessed them, as freely as she sent one daughter, smiling and flapping on the door-step till I vanished, though the eyes that followed me were very dim, and the handkerchief she waved was very wet.

My transit from The Gables to the village depot was a funny mixture of good wishes and good byes, mud-puddles and shopping. A December twilight is not the most cheering time to enter upon a somewhat perilous enterprise, and, but for the presence of Vashti and neighbor Thorn, I fear that I might have added a drop of the briny to the native moisture of —

“The town I left behind me;”

though I’d no thought of giving out: oh, bless you, no! When the engine screeched “Here we are,” I clutched my escort in a fervent embrace, and skipped into the car with as blithe a farewell as if going on a bridal tour — though I believe brides don’t usually wear cavernous black bonnets and fuzzy brown coats, with a hair-brush, a pair of rubbers, two books, and a bag of ginger-bread distorting the pockets of the same. If I thought that any one would believe it, I’d boldly state that I slept from C. to B., which would simplify matters immensely; but as I know they wouldn’t, I’ll confess that the head under the funereal coal-hod fermented with all manner of high thoughts and heroic purposes “to do or die,” — perhaps both; and the heart under the fuzzy brown coat felt very tender with the memory of the dear old lady, probably sobbing over her army socks and the loss of her topsy-turvy Trib. At this juncture I took the veil, and what I did behind it is nobody’s business; but I maintain that the soldier who cries when his mother says “Good bye,” is the boy to fight best, and die bravest, when the time comes, or go back to her better than he went.

Till nine o’clock I trotted about the city streets, doing those last errands which no woman would even go to heaven without attempting, if she could. Then I went to my usual refuge, and, fully intending to keep awake, as a sort of vigil appropriate to the occasion, fell fast asleep and dreamed propitious dreams till my rosy-faced cousin waked me with a kiss.

A bright day smiled upon my enterprise, and at ten I reported myself to my General, received last instructions and no end of the sympathetic encouragement which women give, in look, touch, and tone more effectually than in words. The next step was to get a free pass to Washington, for I'd no desire to waste my substance on railroad companies when "the boys" needed even a spinster's mite. A friend of mine had procured such a pass, and I was bent on doing likewise, though I had to face the president of the railroad to accomplish it. I'm a bashful individual, though I can't get any one to believe it; so it cost me a great effort to poke about the Worcester depot till the right door appeared, then walk into a room containing several gentlemen, and blunder out my request in a high state of stammer and blush. Nothing could have been more courteous than this dreaded President, but it was evident that I had made as absurd a demand as if I had asked for the nose off his respectable face. He referred me to the Governor at the State House, and I backed out, leaving him no doubt to regret that such mild maniacs were left at large. Here was a Scylla and Charybdis business: as if a President wasn't trying enough, without the Governor of Massachusetts and the hub of the hub piled on top of that. "I never can do it," thought I. "Tom will hoot at you if you don't," whispered the inconvenient little voice that is always goading people to the performance of disagreeable duties, and always appeals to the most effective agent to produce the proper result. The idea of allowing any boy that ever wore a felt basin and a shoddy jacket with a microscopic tail, to crow over me, was preposterous, so giving myself a mental slap for such faint-heartedness, I streamed away across the Common, wondering if I ought to say "your Honor," or simply "Sir," and decided upon the latter, fortifying myself with recollections of an evening in a charming green library, where I beheld the Governor placidly consuming oysters, and laughing as if Massachusetts was a myth, and he had no heavier burden on his shoulders than his host's handsome hands.

Like an energetic fly in a very large cobweb, I struggled through the State House, getting into all the wrong rooms and none of the right, till I turned desperate, and went into one, resolving not to come out till I'd made somebody hear and answer me. I suspect that of all the wrong places I had blundered into, this was the most so. But I didn't care; and, though the apartment was full of soldiers, surgeons, starers, and spittoons, I cornered a perfectly incapable person, and proceeded to pump for information with the following result:

"Was the Governor anywhere about?"

No, he wasn't.

"Could he tell me where to look?"

No, he couldn’t.

“Did he know anything about free passes?”

No, he didn’t.

“Was there any one there of whom I could inquire?”

Not a person.

“Did he know of any place where information could be obtained?”

Not a place.

“Could he throw the smallest gleam of light upon the matter, in any way?”

Not a ray.

I am naturally irascible, and if I could have shaken this negative gentleman vigorously, the relief would have been immense. The prejudices of society forbidding this mode of redress, I merely glowered at him; and, before my wrath found vent in words, my General appeared, having seen me from an opposite window, and come to know what I was about. At her command the languid gentleman woke up, and troubled himself to remember that Major or Sergeant or something Mc K. knew all about the tickets, and his office was in Milk Street. I perked up instanter, and then, as if the exertion was too much for him, what did this animated wet blanket do but add —

“I think Mc K. may have left Milk Street, now, and I don’t know where he has gone.”

“Never mind; the new comers will know where he has moved to, my dear, so don’t be discouraged; and if you don’t succeed, come to me, and we will see what to do next,” said my General.

I blessed her in a fervent manner and a cool hall, fluttered round the corner, and bore down upon Milk Street, bent on discovering Mc K. if such a being was to be found. He wasn’t, and the ignorance of the neighborhood was really pitiable. Nobody knew anything, and after tumbling over bundles of leather, bumping against big boxes, being nearly annihilated by descending bales, and sworn at by aggravated truckmen, I finally elicited the advice to look for Mc K. in Haymarket Square. Who my informant was I’ve really forgotten; for, having hailed several busy gentlemen, some one of them fabricated this delusive quietus for the perturbed spirit, who instantly departed to the sequestered locality he named. If I had been in search of the Koh-i-noor diamond I should have been as likely to find it there as any vestige of Mc K. I stared at signs, inquired in shops, invaded an eating house, visited the recruiting tent in the middle of the Square, made myself a nuisance generally, and accumulated mud enough to retard another Nile. All in vain: and I mournfully turned my face toward the General’s, feeling that I should be forced to enrich the railroad company after all; when, suddenly, I beheld that admirable young man, brother-in-law Darby Coobiddy, Esq. I arrested him with a burst of news, and wants, and woes, which caused his manly countenance to lose its usual repose.

"Oh, my dear boy, I'm going to Washington at five, and I can't find the free ticket man, and there won't be time to see Joan, and I'm so tired and cross I don't know what to do; and will you help me, like a cherub as you are?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I know a fellow who will set us right," responded Darby, mildly excited, and darting into some kind of an office, held counsel with an invisible angel, who sent him out radiant. "All serene. I've got him. I'll see you through the business, and then get Joan from the Dove Cote in time to see you off."

I'm a woman's rights woman, and if any man had offered help in the morning, I should have condescendingly refused it, sure that I could do everything as well, if not better, myself. My strong-mindedness had rather abated since then, and I was now quite ready to be a "timid trembler," if necessary.

Dear me! how easily Darby did it all: he just asked one question, received an answer, tucked me under his arm, and in ten minutes I stood in the presence of Mc K., the Desired.

"Now my troubles are over," thought I, and as usual was direfully mistaken.

"You will have to get a pass from Dr. H., in Temple Place, before I can give you a pass, madam," answered Mc K., as blandly as if he wasn't carrying desolation to my soul. Oh, indeed! why didn't he send me to Dorchester Heights, India Wharf, or Bunker Hill Monument, and done with it? Here I was, after a morning's tramp, down in some place about Dock Square, and was told to step to Temple Place. Nor was that all; he might as well have asked me to catch a hummingbird, toast a salamander, or call on the man in the moon, as find a Doctor at home at the busiest hour of the day. It was a blow; but weariness had extinguished enthusiasm, and resignation clothed me as a garment. I sent Darby for Joan, and doggedly paddled off, feeling that mud was my native element, and quite sure that the evening papers would announce the appearance of the Wandering Jew, in feminine habiliments.

"Is Dr. H. in?"

"No, mum, he aint."

Of course he wasn't; I knew that before I asked: and, considering it all in the light of a hollow mockery, added:

"When will he probably return?"

If the damsel had said, "ten to-night," I should have felt a grim satisfaction, in the fulfillment of my own dark prophecy; but she said, "At two, mum;" and I felt it a personal insult.

"I'll call, then. Tell him my business is important:" with which mysteriously delivered message I departed, hoping that I left her consumed with curiosity; for mud rendered me an object of interest.

By way of resting myself, I crossed the Common, for the third time, bespoke the carriage, got some lunch, packed my purchases, smoothed my plumage, and was back again, as the clock struck two. The Doctor hadn't come yet; and I was morally certain that he would not, till, having waited till the last minute, I was driven to buy a ticket, and, five minutes after the irrevocable deed was done, he would be at my service, with all manner of helpful documents and directions. Everything goes by contraries with me; so, having made up my mind to be disappointed, of course I wasn't; for, presently, in walked Dr. H., and no sooner had he heard my errand, and glanced at my credentials, than he said, with the most engaging readiness:

"I will give you the order, with pleasure, madam."

Words cannot express how soothing and delightful it was to find, at last, somebody who could do what I wanted, without sending me from Dan to Beersheba, for a dozen other to do something else first. Peace descended, like oil, upon the ruffled waters of my being, as I sat listening to the busy scratch of his pen; and, when he turned about, giving me not only the order, but a paper of directions wherewith to smooth away all difficulties between Boston and Washington, I felt as did poor Christian when the Evangelist gave him the scroll, on the safe side of the Slough of Despond. I've no doubt many dismal nurses have inflicted themselves upon the worthy gentleman since then; but I am sure none have been more kindly helped, or are more grateful, than T. P.; for that short interview added another to the many pleasant associations that already surround his name.

Feeling myself no longer a "Martha Struggles," but a comfortable young woman, with plain sailing before her, and the worst of the voyage well over, I once more presented myself to the valuable Mc K. The order was read, and certain printed papers, necessary to be filled out, were given a young gentleman — no, I prefer to say Boy, with a scornful emphasis upon the word, as the only means of revenge now left me. This Boy, instead of doing his duty with the diligence so charming in the young, loitered and lounged, in a manner which proved his education to have been sadly neglected in the —

"How doth the little busy bee,"

direction. He stared at me, gaped out of the window, ate peanuts, and gossiped with his neighbors — Boys, like himself, and all penned in a row, like colts at a Cattle Show. I don't imagine he knew the anguish he was inflicting; for it was nearly three, the train left at five, and I had my ticket to get, my dinner to eat, my blessed sister to see, and the depot to reach, if I didn't die of apoplexy.

Meanwhile, Patience certainly had her perfect work that day, and I hope she enjoyed the job more than I did.

Having waited some twenty minutes, it pleased this reprehensible Boy to make various marks and blots on my documents, toss them to a venerable creature of sixteen, who delivered them to me with such paternal directions, that it only needed a pat on the head and an encouraging — ”Now run home to your Ma, little girl, and mind the crossings, my dear,” to make the illusion quite perfect.

Why I was sent to a steamboat office for car tickets, is not for me to say, though I went as meekly as I should have gone to the Probate Court, if sent. A fat, easy gentleman gave me several bits of paper, with coupons attached, with a warning not to separate them, which instantly inspired me with a yearning to pluck them apart, and see what came of it. But, remembering through what fear and tribulation I had obtained them, I curbed Satan’s promptings, and, clutching my prize, as if it were my pass to the Elysian Fields, I hurried home. Dinner was rapidly consumed; Joan enlightened, comforted, and kissed; the dearest of apple-faced cousins hugged; the kindest of apple-faced cousins’ fathers subjected to the same process; and I mounted the ambulance, baggage-wagon, or anything you please but hack, and drove away, too tired to feel excited, sorry, or glad.

CHAPTER II
A FORWARD MOVEMENT.

As travellers like to give their own impressions of a journey, though every inch of the way may have been described a half a dozen times before, I add some of the notes made by the way, hoping that they will amuse the reader, and convince the skeptical that such a being as Nurse Periwinkle does exist, that she really did go to Washington, and that these Sketches are not romance.

New York Train — Seven P.M. — Spinning along to take the boat at New London. Very comfortable; much gingerbread, and Mrs. C.'s fine pear, which deserves honorable mention, because my first loneliness was comforted by it, and pleasant recollections of both kindly sender and bearer. Look much at Dr. H.'s paper of directions — put my tickets in every conceivable place, that they may be get-at-able, and finish by losing them entirely. Suffer agonies till a compassionate neighbor pokes them out of a crack with his pen-knife. Put them in the inmost corner of my purse, that in the deepest recesses of my pocket, pile a collection of miscellaneous articles atop, and pin up the whole. Just get composed, feeling that I've done my best to keep them safely, when the Conductor appears, and I'm forced to rout them all out again, exposing my precautions, and getting into a flutter at keeping the man waiting. Finally, fasten them on the seat before me, and keep one eye steadily upon the yellow torments, till I forget all about them, in chat with the gentleman who shares my seat. Having heard complaints of the absurd way in which American women become images of petrified propriety, if addressed by strangers, when traveling alone, the inborn perversity of my nature causes me to assume an entirely opposite style of deportment; and, finding my companion hails from Little Athens, is acquainted with several of my three hundred and sixty-five cousins, and in every way a respectable and respectful member of society, I put my bashfulness in my pocket, and plunge into a long conversation on the war, the weather, music, Carlyle, skating, genius, hoops, and the immortality of the soul.

Ten P.M. — Very sleepy. Nothing to be seen outside, but darkness made visible; nothing inside but every variety of bunch into which the human form can be twisted, rolled, or "massed," as Miss Prescott says of her jewels. Every man's legs sprawl drowsily, every woman's head (but mine,) nods, till it finally settles on somebody's shoulder, a new proof of the truth of the everlasting oak and vine simile; children fret; lovers whisper; old folks snore, and somebody privately imbibes brandy, when the lamps go out. The penetrating perfume rouses the multitude, causing some to start up, like war horses at the smell of powder. When the lamps are relighted, every one laughs, sniffs, and looks inquiringly at his neighbor — every one but a stout gentleman, who, with well-gloved hands folded upon his broad-cloth rotundity, sleeps on impressively. Had he been innocent, he would have waked up; for, to slumber in that babe-like manner, with a car full of giggling, staring, sniffing humanity, was simply preposterous. Public suspicion was down upon him at once. I doubt if the appearance of a flat black bottle with a label would have settled the matter more effectually than did the over dignified and profound repose of this short-sighted being. His moral neck-cloth, virtuous boots, and pious attitude availed him nothing, and it was well he kept his eyes shut, for “Humbug!” twinkled at him from every window-pane, brass nail and human eye around him.

Eleven P.M. — In the boat “City of Boston,” escorted thither by my car acquaintance, and deposited in the cabin. Trying to look as if the greater portion of my life had been passed on board boats, but painfully conscious that I don’t know the first thing; so sit bolt upright, and stare about me till I hear one lady say to another — ”We must secure our berths at once;” whereupon I dart at one, and, while leisurely taking off my cloak, wait to discover what the second move may be. Several ladies draw the curtains that hang in a semi-circle before each nest — instantly I whisk mine smartly together, and then peep out to see what next. Gradually, on hooks above the blue and yellow drapery, appear the coats and bonnets of my neighbors, while their boots and shoes, in every imaginable attitude, assert themselves below, as if their owners had committed suicide in a body. A violent creaking, scrambling, and fussing, causes the fact that people are going regularly to bed to dawn upon my mind. Of course they are; and so am I — but pause at the seventh pin, remembering that, as I was born to be drowned, an eligible opportunity now presents itself; and, having twice escaped a watery grave, the third immersion will certainly extinguish my vital spark. The boat is new, but if it ever intends to blow up, spring a leak, catch afire, or be run into, it will do the deed to-night, because I’m here to fulfill my destiny. With tragic calmness I resign myself, replace my pins, lash my purse and papers together, with my handkerchief, examine the saving circumference of my hoop, and look about me for any means of deliverance when the moist moment shall arrive; for I’ve no intention of folding my hands and bubbling to death without an energetic splashing first. Barrels, hen-coops, portable settees, and life-preservers do not adorn the cabin, as they should; and, roving wildly to and fro, my eye sees no ray of hope till it falls upon a plump old lady, devoutly reading in the cabin Bible, and a voluminous night-cap. I remember that, at the swimming school, fat girls always floated best, and in an instant my plan is laid. At the first alarm I firmly attach myself to the plump lady, and cling to her through fire and water; for I feel that my old enemy, the cramp, will seize me by the foot, if I attempt to swim; and, though I can hardly expect to reach Jersey City with myself and my baggage in as good condition as I hoped, I might manage to get picked up by holding to my fat friend; if not it will be a comfort to feel that I've made an effort and shall die in good society. Poor dear woman! how little she dreamed, as she read and rocked, with her cap in a high state of starch, and her feet comfortably cooking at the register, what fell designs were hovering about her, and how intently a small but determined eye watched her, till it suddenly closed.

Sleep got the better of fear to such an extent that my boots appeared to gape, and my bonnet nodded on its peg, before I gave in. Having piled my cloak, bag, rubbers, books and umbrella on the lower shelf, I drowsily swarmed onto the upper one, tumbling down a few times, and excoriating the knobby portions of my frame in the act. A very brief nap on the upper roost was enough to set me gasping as if a dozen feather beds and the whole boat were laid over me. Out I turned; and after a series of convulsions, which caused my neighbor to ask if I wanted the stewardess, I managed to get my luggage up and myself down. But even in the lower berth, my rest was not unbroken, for various articles kept dropping off the little shelf at the bottom of the bed, and every time I flew up, thinking my hour had come, I bumped my head severely against the little shelf at the top, evidently put there for that express purpose. At last, after listening to the swash of the waves outside, wondering if the machinery usually creaked in that way, and watching a knot-hole in the side of my berth, sure that death would creep in there as soon as I took my eye from it, I dropped asleep, and dreamed of muffins.

Five A.M. — On deck, trying to wake up and enjoy an east wind and a morning fog, and a twilight sort of view of something on the shore. Rapidly achieve my purpose, and do enjoy every moment, as we go rushing through the Sound, with steamboats passing up and down, lights dancing on the shore, mist wreaths slowly furling off, and a pale pink sky above us, as the sun comes up.

Seven A.M. — In the cars, at Jersey City. Much fuss with tickets, which one man scribbles over, another snips, and a third "makes note on." Partake of refreshment, in the gloom of a very large and dirty depot. Think that my sandwiches would be more relishing without so strong a flavor of napkin, and my gingerbread more easy of consumption if it had not been pulverized by being sat upon. People act as if early traveling didn't agree with them. Children scream and scamper; men smoke and growl; women shiver and fret; porters swear; great truck horses pace up and down with loads of baggage; and every one seems to get into the wrong car, and come tumbling out again. One man, with three children, a dog, a bird-cage, and several bundles, puts himself and his possessions into every possible place where a man, three children, dog, bird-cage and bundles could be got, and is satisfied with none of them. I follow their movements, with an interest that is really exhausting, and, as they vanish, hope for rest, but don't get it. A strong-minded woman, with a tumbler in her hand, and no cloak or shawl on, comes rushing through the car, talking loudly to a small porter, who lugs a folding bed after her, and looks as if life were a burden to him.

"You promised to have it ready. It is not ready. It must be a car with a water jar, the windows must be shut, the fire must be kept up, the blinds must be down. No, this won't do. I shall go through the whole train, and suit myself, for you promised to have it ready. It is not ready," &c., all through again, like a hand-organ. She haunted the cars, the depot, the office and baggage-room, with her bed, her tumbler, and her tongue, till the train started; and a sense of fervent gratitude filled my soul, when I found that she and her unknown invalid were not to share our car.

Philadelphia. — An old place, full of Dutch women, in "bellus top" bonnets, selling vegetables, in long, open markets. Every one seems to be scrubbing their white steps. All the houses look like tidy jails, with their outside shutters. Several have crape on the door-handles, and many have flags flying from roof or balcony. Few men appear, and the women seem to do the business, which, perhaps, accounts for its being so well done. Pass fine buildings, but don't know what they are. Would like to stop and see my native city; for, having left it at the tender age of two, my recollections are not vivid.

Baltimore. — A big, dirty, shippy, shiftless place, full of goats, geese, colored people, and coal, at least the part of it I see. Pass near the spot where the riot took place, and feel as if I should enjoy throwing a stone at somebody, hard. Find a guard at the ferry, the depot, and here and there, along the road. A camp whitens one hill-side, and a cavalry training school, or whatever it should be called, is a very interesting sight, with quantities of horses and riders galloping, marching, leaping, and skirmishing, over all manner of break-neck places. A party of English people get in — the men, with sandy hair and red whiskers, all trimmed alike, to a hair; rough grey coats, very rosy, clean faces, and a fine, full way of speaking, which is particularly agreeable, after our slip-shod American gabble. The two ladies wear funny velvet fur-trimmed hoods; are done up, like compact bundles, in tartan shawls; and look as if bent on seeing everything thoroughly. The devotion of one elderly John Bull to his red-nosed spouse was really beautiful to behold. She was plain and cross, and fussy and stupid, but J.

B., Esq., read no papers when she was awake, turned no cold shoulder when she wished to sleep, and cheerfully said, “Yes, me dear,” to every wish or want the wife of his bosom expressed. I quite warmed to the excellent man, and asked a question or two, as the only means of expressing my good will. He answered very civilly, but evidently hadn’t been used to being addressed by strange women in public conveyances; and Mrs. B. fixed her green eyes upon me, as if she thought me a forward hussy, or whatever is good English for a presuming young woman. The pair left their friends before we reached Washington; and the last I saw of them was a vision of a large plaid lady, stalking grimly away, on the arm of a rosy, stout gentleman, loaded with rugs, bags, and books, but still devoted, still smiling, and waving a hearty “Fare ye well! We’ll meet ye at Willard’s on Chusday.”

Soon after their departure we had an accident; for no long journey in America would be complete without one. A coupling iron broke; and, after leaving the last car behind us, we waited for it to come up, which it did, with a crash that knocked every one forward on their faces, and caused several old ladies to screech dismally. Hats flew off, bonnets were flattened, the stove skipped, the lamps fell down, the water jar turned a somersault, and the wheel just over which I sat received some damage. Of course, it became necessary for all the men to get out, and stand about in everybody’s way, while repairs were made; and for the women to wrestle their heads out of the windows, asking ninety-nine foolish questions to one sensible one. A few wise females seized this favorable moment to better their seats, well knowing that few men can face the wooden stare with which they regard the former possessors of the places they have invaded.

The country through which we passed did not seem so very unlike that which I had left, except that it was more level and less wintry. In summer time the wide fields would have shown me new sights, and the way-side hedges blossomed with new flowers; now, everything was sere and sodden, and a general air of shiftlessness prevailed, which would have caused a New England farmer much disgust, and a strong desire to “buckle to,” and “right up” things. Dreary little houses, with chimneys built outside, with clay and rough sticks piled crosswise, as we used to build cob towers, stood in barren looking fields, with cow, pig, or mule lounging about the door. We often passed colored people, looking as if they had come out of a picture book, or off the stage, but not at all the sort of people I’d been accustomed to see at the North.

Wayside encampments made the fields and lanes gay with blue coats and the glitter of buttons. Military washes flapped and fluttered on the fences; pots were steaming in the open air; all sorts of tableaux seen through the openings of tents, and everywhere the boys threw up their caps and cut capers as we passed.

Washington. — It was dark when we arrived; and, but for the presence of another friendly gentleman, I should have yielded myself a helpless prey to the first overpowering hackman, who insisted that I wanted to go just where I didn't. Putting me into the conveyance I belonged in, my escort added to the obligation by pointing out the objects of interest which we passed in our long drive. Though I'd often been told that Washington was a spacious place, its visible magnitude quite took my breath away, and of course I quoted Randolph's expression, "a city of magnificent distances," as I suppose every one does when they see it. The Capitol was so like the pictures that hang opposite the staring Father of his Country, in boarding-houses and hotels, that it did not impress me, except to recall the time when I was sure that Cinderella went to housekeeping in just such a place, after she had married the inflammable Prince; though, even at that early period, I had my doubts as to the wisdom of a match whose foundation was of glass.

The White House was lighted up, and carriages were rolling in and out of the great gate. I stared hard at the famous East Room, and would have liked a peep through the crack of the door. My old gentleman was indefatigable in his attentions, and I said, "Splendid!" to everything he pointed out, though I suspect I often admired the wrong place, and missed the right. Pennsylvania Avenue, with its bustle, lights, music, and military, made me feel as if I'd crossed the water and landed somewhere in Carnival time. Coming to less noticeable parts of the city, my companion fell silent, and I meditated upon the perfection which Art had attained in America — having just passed a bronze statue of some hero, who looked like a black Methodist minister, in a cocked hat, above the waist, and a tipsy squire below; while his horse stood like an opera dancer, on one leg, in a high, but somewhat remarkable wind, which blew his mane one way and his massive tail the other.

"Hurly-burly House, ma'am!" called a voice, startling me from my reverie, as we stopped before a great pile of buildings, with a flag flying before it, sentinels at the door, and a very trying quantity of men lounging about. My heart beat rather faster than usual, and it suddenly struck me that I was very far from home; but I descended with dignity, wondering whether I should be stopped for want of a countersign, and forced to pass the night in the street. Marching boldly up the steps, I found that no form was necessary, for the men fell back, the guard touched their caps, a boy opened the door, and, as it closed behind me, I felt that I was fairly started, and Nurse Periwinkle's Mission was begun.

CHAPTER III
A DAY.

"They've come! they've come! hurry up, ladies — you're wanted."

"Who have come? the rebels?"

This sudden summons in the gray dawn was somewhat startling to a three days' nurse like myself, and, as the thundering knock came at our door, I sprang up in my bed, prepared

"To gird my woman's form,
And on the ramparts die,"

if necessary; but my room-mate took it more coolly, and, as she began a rapid toilet, answered my bewildered question, —

"Bless you, no child; it's the wounded from Fredericksburg; forty ambulances are at the door, and we shall have our hands full in fifteen minutes."

"What shall we have to do?"

"Wash, dress, feed, warm and nurse them for the next three months, I dare say. Eighty beds are ready, and we were getting impatient for the men to come. Now you will begin to see hospital life in earnest, for you won't probably find time to sit down all day, and may think yourself fortunate if you get to bed by midnight. Come to me in the ball-room when you are ready; the worst cases are always carried there, and I shall need your help."

So saying, the energetic little woman twirled her hair into a button at the back of her head, in a "cleared for action" sort of style, and vanished, wrestling her way into a feminine kind of pea-jacket as she went.

I am free to confess that I had a realizing sense of the fact that my hospital bed was not a bed of roses just then, or the prospect before me one of unmingled rapture. My three days' experiences had begun with a death, and, owing to the defalcation of another nurse, a somewhat abrupt plunge into the superintendence of a ward containing forty beds, where I spent my shining hours washing faces, serving rations, giving medicine, and sitting in a very hard chair, with pneumonia on one side, diphtheria on the other, five typhoids on the opposite, and a dozen dilapidated patriots, hopping, lying, and lounging about, all staring more or less at the new "nuss," who suffered untold agonies, but concealed them under as matronly an aspect as a spinster could assume, and blundered through her trying labors with a Spartan firmness, which I hope they appreciated, but am afraid they didn’t. Having a taste for “ghastliness,” I had rather longed for the wounded to arrive, for rheumatism wasn’t heroic, neither was liver complaint, or measles; even fever had lost its charms since “bathing burning brows” had been used up in romances, real and ideal; but when I peeped into the dusky street lined with what I at first had innocently called market carts, now unloading their sad freight at our door, I recalled sundry reminiscences I had heard from nurses of longer standing, my ardor experienced a sudden chill, and I indulged in a most unpatriotic wish that I was safe at home again, with a quiet day before me, and no necessity for being hustled up, as if I were a hen and had only to hop off my roost, give my plumage a peck, and be ready for action. A second bang at the door sent this recreant desire to the right about, as a little woolly head popped in, and Joey, (a six years’ old contraband,) announced —

“Miss Blank is jes’ wild fer ye, and says fly round right away. They’s comin’ in, I tell yer, heaps on ‘em — one was took out dead, and I see him, — hi! warn’t he a goner!”

With which cheerful intelligence the imp scuttled away, singing like a blackbird, and I followed, feeling that Richard was not himself again, and wouldn’t be for a long time to come.

The first thing I met was a regiment of the vilest odors that ever assaulted the human nose, and took it by storm. Cologne, with its seven and seventy evil savors, was a posy-bed to it; and the worst of this affliction was, every one had assured me that it was a chronic weakness of all hospitals, and I must bear it. I did, armed with lavender water, with which I so besprinkled myself and premises, that, like my friend Sairy, I was soon known among my patients as “the nurse with the bottle.” Having been run over by three excited surgeons, bumped against by migratory coal-hods, water-pails, and small boys, nearly scalded by an avalanche of newly-filled tea-pots, and hopelessly entangled in a knot of colored sisters coming to wash, I progressed by slow stages up stairs and down, till the main hall was reached, and I paused to take breath and a survey. There they were! “our brave boys,” as the papers justly call them, for cowards could hardly have been so riddled with shot and shell, so torn and shattered, nor have borne suffering for which we have no name, with an uncomplaining fortitude, which made one glad to cherish each as a brother. In they came, some on stretchers, some in men’s arms, some feebly staggering along propped on rude crutches, and one lay stark and still with covered face, as a comrade gave his name to be recorded before they carried him away to the dead house. All was hurry and confusion; the hall was full of these wrecks of humanity, for the most exhausted could not reach a bed till duly ticketed and registered; the walls were lined with rows of such as could sit, the floor covered with the more disabled, the steps and doorways filled with helpers and lookers on; the sound of many feet and voices made that usually quiet hour as noisy as noon; and, in the midst of it all, the matron's motherly face brought more comfort to many a poor soul, than the cordial draughts she administered, or the cheery words that welcomed all, making of the hospital a home.

The sight of several stretchers, each with its legless, armless, or desperately wounded occupant, entering my ward, admonished me that I was there to work, not to wonder or weep; so I corked up my feelings, and returned to the path of duty, which was rather "a hard road to travel" just then. The house had been a hotel before hospitals were needed, and many of the doors still bore their old names; some not so inappropriate as might be imagined, for my ward was in truth a ball-room, if gun-shot wounds could christen it. Forty beds were prepared, many already tenanted by tired men who fell down anywhere, and drowsed till the smell of food roused them. Round the great stove was gathered the dreariest group I ever saw — ragged, gaunt and pale, mud to the knees, with bloody bandages untouched since put on days before; many bundled up in blankets, coats being lost or useless; and all wearing that disheartened look which proclaimed defeat, more plainly than any telegram of the Burnside blunder. I pitied them so much, I dared not speak to them, though, remembering all they had been through since the rout at Fredericksburg, I yearned to serve the dreariest of them all. Presently, Miss Blank tore me from my refuge behind piles of one-sleeved shirts, odd socks, bandages and lint; put basin, sponge, towels, and a block of brown soap into my hands, with these appalling directions:

"Come, my dear, begin to wash as fast as you can. Tell them to take off socks, coats and shirts, scrub them well, put on clean shirts, and the attendants will finish them off, and lay them in bed."

If she had requested me to shave them all, or dance a hornpipe on the stove funnel, I should have been less staggered; but to scrub some dozen lords of creation at a moment's notice, was really — really — . However, there was no time for nonsense, and, having resolved when I came to do everything I was bid, I drowned my scruples in my wash-bowl, clutched my soap manfully, and, assuming a business-like air, made a dab at the first dirty specimen I saw, bent on performing my task vi et armis if necessary. I chanced to light on a withered old Irishman, wounded in the head, which caused that portion of his frame to be tastefully laid out like a garden, the bandages being the walks, his hair the shrubbery. He was so overpowered by the honor of having a lady wash him, as he expressed it, that he did nothing but roll up his eyes, and bless me, in an irresistible style which was too much for my sense of the ludicrous; so we laughed together, and when I knelt down to take off his shoes, he "flopped" also, and wouldn't hear of my touching "them dirty craters. May your bed above be aisy darlin', for the day's work ye ar doon! — Whoosh! there ye are, and bedad, it's hard tellin' which is the dirtiest, the fut or the shoe." It was; and if he hadn't been to the fore, I should have gone on pulling, under the impression that the "fut" was a boot, for trousers, socks, shoes and legs were a mass of mud. This comical tableau produced a general grin, at which propitious beginning I took heart and scrubbed away like any tidy parent on a Saturday night. Some of them took the performance like sleepy children, leaning their tired heads against me as I worked, others looked grimly scandalized, and several of the roughest colored like bashful girls. One wore a soiled little bag about his neck, and, as I moved it, to bathe his wounded breast, I said,

"Your talisman didn't save you, did it?"

"Well, I reckon it did, marm, for that shot would a gone a couple a inches deeper but for my old mammy's camphor bag," answered the cheerful philosopher.

Another, with a gun-shot wound through the cheek, asked for a looking-glass, and when I brought one, regarded his swollen face with a dolorous expression, as he muttered —

"I vow to gosh, that's too bad! I warn't a bad looking chap before, and now I'm done for; won't there be a thunderin' scar? and what on earth will Josephine Skinner say?"

He looked up at me with his one eye so appealingly, that I controlled my risibles, and assured him that if Josephine was a girl of sense, she would admire the honorable scar, as a lasting proof that he had faced the enemy, for all women thought a wound the best decoration a brave soldier could wear. I hope Miss Skinner verified the good opinion I so rashly expressed of her, but I shall never know.

The next scrubbee was a nice looking lad, with a curly brown mane, and a budding trace of gingerbread over the lip, which he called his beard, and defended stoutly, when the barber jocosely suggested its immolation. He lay on a bed, with one leg gone, and the right arm so shattered that it must evidently follow: yet the little Sergeant was as merry as if his afflictions were not worth lamenting over; and when a drop or two of salt water mingled with my suds at the sight of this strong young body, so marred and maimed, the boy looked up, with a brave smile, though there was a little quiver of the lips, as he said,

"Now don't you fret yourself about me, miss; I'm first rate here, for it's nuts to lie still on this bed, after knocking about in those confounded ambulances, that shake what there is left of a fellow to jelly. I never was in one of these places before, and think this cleaning up a jolly thing for us, though I'm afraid it isn't for you ladies."

"Is this your first battle, Sergeant?"

"No, miss; I've been in six scrimmages, and never got a scratch till this last one; but it's done the business pretty thoroughly for me, I should say. Lord! what a scramble there'll be for arms and legs, when we old boys come out of our graves, on the Judgment Day: wonder if we shall get our own again? If we do, my leg will have to tramp from Fredericksburg, my arm from here, I suppose, and meet my body, wherever it may be."

The fancy seemed to tickle him mightily, for he laughed blithely, and so did I; which, no doubt, caused the new nurse to be regarded as a light-minded sinner by the Chaplain, who roamed vaguely about, informing the men that they were all worms, corrupt of heart, with perishable bodies, and souls only to be saved by a diligent perusal of certain tracts, and other equally cheering bits of spiritual consolation, when spirituous ditto would have been preferred.

"I say, Mrs.!" called a voice behind me; and, turning, I saw a rough Michigander, with an arm blown off at the shoulder, and two or three bullets still in him — as he afterwards mentioned, as carelessly as if gentlemen were in the habit of carrying such trifles about with them. I went to him, and, while administering a dose of soap and water, he whispered, irefully:

"That red-headed devil, over yonder, is a reb, damn him! You'll agree to that, I'll bet? He's got shet of a foot, or he'd a cut like the rest of the lot. Don't you wash him, nor feed him, but jest let him holler till he's tired. It's a blasted shame to fetch them fellers in here, along side of us; and so I'll tell the chap that bosses this concern; cuss me if I don't."

I regret to say that I did not deliver a moral sermon upon the duty of forgiving our enemies, and the sin of profanity, then and there; but, being a red-hot Abolitionist, stared fixedly at the tall rebel, who was a copperhead, in every sense of the word, and privately resolved to put soap in his eyes, rub his nose the wrong way, and excoriate his cuticle generally, if I had the washing of him.

My amiable intentions, however, were frustrated; for, when I approached, with as Christian an expression as my principles would allow, and asked the question — "Shall I try to make you more comfortable, sir?" all I got for my pains was a gruff —

"No; I'll do it myself."

"Here's your Southern chivalry, with a witness," thought I, dumping the basin down before him, thereby quenching a strong desire to give him a summary baptism, in return for his ungraciousness; for my angry passions rose, at this rebuff, in a way that would have scandalized good Dr. Watts. He was a disappointment in all respects, (the rebel, not the blessed Doctor,) for he was neither fiendish, romantic, pathetic, or anything interesting; but a long, fat man, with a head like a burning bush, and a perfectly expressionless face: so I could dislike him without the slightest drawback, and ignored his existence from that day forth. One redeeming trait he certainly did possess, as the floor speedily testified; for his ablutions were so vigorously performed, that his bed soon stood like an isolated island, in a sea of soap-suds, and he resembled a dripping merman, suffering from the loss of a fin. If cleanliness is a near neighbor to godliness, then was the big rebel the godliest man in my ward that day.

Having done up our human wash, and laid it out to dry, the second syllable of our version of the word war-fare was enacted with much success. Great trays of bread, meat, soup and coffee appeared; and both nurses and attendants turned waiters, serving bountiful rations to all who could eat. I can call my pinafore to testify to my good will in the work, for in ten minutes it was reduced to a perambulating bill of fare, presenting samples of all the refreshments going or gone. It was a lively scene; the long room lined with rows of beds, each filled by an occupant, whom water, shears, and clean raiment, had transformed from a dismal ragamuffin into a recumbent hero, with a cropped head. To and fro rushed matrons, maids, and convalescent “boys,” skirmishing with knives and forks; retreating with empty plates; marching and counter-marching, with unvaried success, while the clash of busy spoons made most inspiring music for the charge of our Light Brigade:

“Beds to the front of them,
Beds to the right of them,
Beds to the left of them,
Nobody blundered.
Beamed at by hungry souls,
Screamed at with brimming bowls,
Steamed at by army rolls,
Buttered and sundered.
With coffee not cannon plied,
Each must be satisfied,
Whether they lived or died;
All the men wondered.”

Very welcome seemed the generous meal, after a week of suffering, exposure, and short commons; soon the brown faces began to smile, as food, warmth, and rest, did their pleasant work; and the grateful “Thankee’s” were followed by more graphic accounts of the battle and retreat, than any paid reporter could have given us. Curious contrasts of the tragic and comic met one everywhere; and some touching as well as ludicrous episodes, might have been recorded that day. A six foot New Hampshire man, with a leg broken and perforated by a piece of shell, so large that, had I not seen the wound, I should have regarded the story as a Munchausenism, beckoned me to come and help him, as he could not sit up, and both his bed and beard were getting plentifully anointed with soup. As I fed my big nestling with corresponding mouthfuls, I asked him how he felt during the battle.

"Well, 'twas my fust, you see, so I aint ashamed to say I was a trifle flustered in the beginnin', there was such an allfired racket; for ef there's anything I do spleen agin, it's noise. But when my mate, Eph Sylvester, caved, with a bullet through his head, I got mad, and pitched in, licketty cut. Our part of the fight didn't last long; so a lot of us larked round Fredericksburg, and give some of them houses a pretty consid'able of a rummage, till we was ordered out of the mess. Some of our fellows cut like time; but I warn't a-goin' to run for nobody; and, fust thing I knew, a shell bust, right in front of us, and I keeled over, feelin' as if I was blowed higher'n a kite. I sung out, and the boys come back for me, double quick; but the way they chucked me over them fences was a caution, I tell you. Next day I was most as black as that darkey yonder, lickin' plates on the sly. This is bully coffee, ain't it? Give us another pull at it, and I'll be obleeged to you."

I did; and, as the last gulp subsided, he said, with a rub of his old handkerchief over eyes as well as mouth:

"Look a here; I've got a pair a earbobs and a handkercher pin I'm a goin' to give you, if you'll have them; for you're the very moral o' Lizy Sylvester, poor Eph's wife: that's why I signalled you to come over here. They aint much, I guess, but they'll do to memorize the rebs by."

Burrowing under his pillow, he produced a little bundle of what he called "truck," and gallantly presented me with a pair of earrings, each representing a cluster of corpulent grapes, and the pin a basket of astonishing fruit, the whole large and coppery enough for a small warming-pan. Feeling delicate about depriving him of such valuable relics, I accepted the earrings alone, and was obliged to depart, somewhat abruptly, when my friend stuck the warming-pan in the bosom of his night-gown, viewing it with much complacency, and, perhaps, some tender memory, in that rough heart of his, for the comrade he had lost.

Observing that the man next him had left his meal untouched, I offered the same service I had performed for his neighbor, but he shook his head.

"Thank you, ma'am; I don't think I'll ever eat again, for I'm shot in the stomach. But I'd like a drink of water, if you aint too busy."

I rushed away, but the water-pails were gone to be refilled, and it was some time before they reappeared. I did not forget my patient patient, meanwhile, and, with the first mugful, hurried back to him. He seemed asleep; but something in the tired white face caused me to listen at his lips for a breath. None came. I touched his forehead; it was cold: and then I knew that, while he waited, a better nurse than I had given him a cooler draught, and healed him with a touch. I laid the sheet over the quiet sleeper, whom no noise could now disturb; and, half an hour later, the bed was empty. It seemed a poor requital for all he had sacrificed and suffered, — that hospital bed, lonely even in a crowd; for there was no familiar face for him to look his last upon; no friendly voice to say, Good bye; no hand to lead him gently down into the Valley of the Shadow; and he vanished, like a drop in that red sea upon whose shores so many women stand lamenting. For a moment I felt bitterly indignant at this seeming carelessness of the value of life, the sanctity of death; then consoled myself with the thought that, when the great muster roll was called, these nameless men might be promoted above many whose tall monuments record the barren honors they have won.

All having eaten, drank, and rested, the surgeons began their rounds; and I took my first lesson in the art of dressing wounds. It wasn’t a festive scene, by any means; for Dr P., whose Aid I constituted myself, fell to work with a vigor which soon convinced me that I was a weaker vessel, though nothing would have induced me to confess it then. He had served in the Crimea, and seemed to regard a dilapidated body very much as I should have regarded a damaged garment; and, turning up his cuffs, whipped out a very unpleasant looking housewife, cutting, sawing, patching and piecing, with the enthusiasm of an accomplished surgical seamstress; explaining the process, in scientific terms, to the patient, meantime; which, of course, was immensely cheering and comfortable. There was an uncanny sort of fascination in watching him, as he peered and probed into the mechanism of those wonderful bodies, whose mysteries he understood so well. The more intricate the wound, the better he liked it. A poor private, with both legs off, and shot through the lungs, possessed more attractions for him than a dozen generals, slightly scratched in some “masterly retreat;” and had any one appeared in small pieces, requesting to be put together again, he would have considered it a special dispensation.

The amputations were reserved till the morrow, and the merciful magic of ether was not thought necessary that day, so the poor souls had to bear their pains as best they might. It is all very well to talk of the patience of woman; and far be it from me to pluck that feather from her cap, for, heaven knows, she isn’t allowed to wear many; but the patient endurance of these men, under trials of the flesh, was truly wonderful. Their fortitude seemed contagious, and scarcely a cry escaped them, though I often longed to groan for them, when pride kept their white lips shut, while great drops stood upon their foreheads, and the bed shook with the irrepressible tremor of their tortured bodies. One or two Irishmen anathematized the doctors with the frankness of their nation, and ordered the Virgin to stand by them, as if she had been the wedded Biddy to whom they could administer the poker, if she didn’t; but, as a general thing, the work went on in silence, broken only by some quiet request for roller, instruments, or plaster, a sigh from the patient, or a sympathizing murmur from the nurse.

It was long past noon before these repairs were even partially made; and, having got the bodies of my boys into something like order, the next task was to minister to their minds, by writing letters to the anxious souls at home; answering questions, reading papers, taking possession of money and valuables; for the eighth commandment was reduced to a very fragmentary condition, both by the blacks and whites, who ornamented our hospital with their presence. Pocket books, purses, miniatures, and watches, were sealed up, labelled, and handed over to the matron, till such times as the owners thereof were ready to depart homeward or campward again. The letters dictated to me, and revised by me, that afternoon, would have made an excellent chapter for some future history of the war; for, like that which Thackeray’s “Ensign Spooney” wrote his mother just before Waterloo, they were “full of affection, pluck, and bad spelling;” nearly all giving lively accounts of the battle, and ending with a somewhat sudden plunge from patriotism to provender, desiring “Marm,” “Mary Ann,” or “Aunt Peters,” to send along some pies, pickles, sweet stuff, and apples, “to yourn in haste,” Joe, Sam, or Ned, as the case might be.

My little Sergeant insisted on trying to scribble something with his left hand, and patiently accomplished some half dozen lines of hieroglyphics, which he gave me to fold and direct, with a boyish blush, that rendered a glimpse of “My Dearest Jane,” unnecessary, to assure me that the heroic lad had been more successful in the service of Commander-in-Chief Cupid than that of Gen. Mars; and a charming little romance blossomed instanter in Nurse Periwinkle’s romantic fancy, though no further confidences were made that day, for Sergeant fell asleep, and, judging from his tranquil face, visited his absent sweetheart in the pleasant land of dreams.

At five o’clock a great bell rang, and the attendants flew, not to arms, but to their trays, to bring up supper, when a second uproar announced that it was ready. The new comers woke at the sound; and I presently discovered that it took a very bad wound to incapacitate the defenders of the faith for the consumption of their rations; the amount that some of them sequestered was amazing; but when I suggested the probability of a famine hereafter, to the matron, that motherly lady cried out: “Bless their hearts, why shouldn’t they eat? It’s their only amusement; so fill every one, and, if there’s not enough ready to-night, I’ll lend my share to the Lord by giving it to the boys.” And, whipping up her coffee-pot and plate of toast, she gladdened the eyes and stomachs of two or three dissatisfied heroes, by serving them with a liberal hand; and I haven’t the slightest doubt that, having cast her bread upon the waters, it came back buttered, as another large-hearted old lady was wont to say.

Then came the doctor’s evening visit; the administration of medicines; washing feverish faces; smoothing tumbled beds; wetting wounds; singing lullabies; and preparations for the night. By eleven, the last labor of love was done; the last “good night” spoken; and, if any needed a reward for that day’s work, they surely received it, in the silent eloquence of those long lines of faces, showing pale and peaceful in the shaded rooms, as we quitted them, followed by grateful glances that lighted us to bed, where rest, the sweetest, made our pillows soft, while Night and Nature took our places, filling that great house of pain with the healing miracles of Sleep, and his diviner brother, Death.

CHAPTER IV
A NIGHT.

Being fond of the night side of nature, I was soon promoted to the post of night nurse, with every facility for indulging in my favorite pastime of “owling.” My colleague, a black-eyed widow, relieved me at dawn, we two taking care of the ward, between us, like the immortal Sairy and Betsey, “turn and turn about.” I usually found my boys in the jolliest state of mind their condition allowed; for it was a known fact that Nurse Periwinkle objected to blue devils, and entertained a belief that he who laughed most was surest of recovery. At the beginning of my reign, dumps and dismals prevailed; the nurses looked anxious and tired, the men gloomy or sad; and a general “Hark!-from-the-tombs-a-doleful-sound” style of conversation seemed to be the fashion: a state of things which caused one coming from a merry, social New England town, to feel as if she had got into an exhausted receiver; and the instinct of self-preservation, to say nothing of a philanthropic desire to serve the race, caused a speedy change in Ward No. 1.

More flattering than the most gracefully turned compliment, more grateful than the most admiring glance, was the sight of those rows of faces, all strange to me a little while ago, now lighting up, with smiles of welcome, as I came among them, enjoying that moment heartily, with a womanly pride in their regard, a motherly affection for them all. The evenings were spent in reading aloud, writing letters, waiting on and amusing the men, going the rounds with Dr. P., as he made his second daily survey, dressing my dozen wounds afresh, giving last doses, and making them cozy for the long hours to come, till the nine o’clock bell rang, the gas was turned down, the day nurses went off duty, the night watch came on, and my nocturnal adventure began.

My ward was now divided into three rooms; and, under favor of the matron, I had managed to sort out the patients in such a way that I had what I called, “my duty room,” my “pleasure room,” and my “pathetic room,” and worked for each in a different way. One, I visited, armed with a dressing tray, full of rollers, plasters, and pins; another, with books, flowers, games, and gossip; a third, with teapots, lullabies, consolation, and sometimes, a shroud.

Wherever the sickest or most helpless man chanced to be, there I held my watch, often visiting the other rooms, to see that the general watchman of the ward did his duty by the fires and the wounds, the latter needing constant wetting. Not only on this account did I meander, but also to get fresher air than the close rooms afforded; for, owing to the stupidity of that mysterious “somebody” who does all the damage in the world, the windows had been carefully nailed down above, and the lower sashes could only be raised in the mildest weather, for the men lay just below. I had suggested a summary smashing of a few panes here and there, when frequent appeals to headquarters had proved unavailing, and daily orders to lazy attendants had come to nothing. No one seconded the motion, however, and the nails were far beyond my reach; for, though belonging to the sisterhood of “ministering angels,” I had no wings, and might as well have asked for Jacob’s ladder, as a pair of steps, in that charitable chaos.

One of the harmless ghosts who bore me company during the haunted hours, was Dan, the watchman, whom I regarded with a certain awe; for, though so much together, I never fairly saw his face, and, but for his legs, should never have recognized him, as we seldom met by day. These legs were remarkable, as was his whole figure, for his body was short, rotund, and done up in a big jacket, and muffler; his beard hid the lower part of his face, his hat-brim the upper; and all I ever discovered was a pair of sleepy eyes, and a very mild voice. But the legs! — very long, very thin, very crooked and feeble, looking like grey sausages in their tight coverings, without a ray of pegtopishness about them, and finished off with a pair of expansive, green cloth shoes, very like Chinese junks, with the sails down. This figure, gliding noiselessly about the dimly lighted rooms, was strongly suggestive of the spirit of a beer barrel mounted on cork-screws, haunting the old hotel in search of its lost mates, emptied and staved in long ago.

Another goblin who frequently appeared to me, was the attendant of the pathetic room, who, being a faithful soul, was often up to tend two or three men, weak and wandering as babies, after the fever had gone. The amiable creature beguiled the watches of the night by brewing jorums of a fearful beverage, which he called coffee, and insisted on sharing with me; coming in with a great bowl of something like mud soup, scalding hot, guiltless of cream, rich in an all-pervading flavor of molasses, scorch and tin pot. Such an amount of good will and neighborly kindness also went into the mess, that I never could find the heart to refuse, but always received it with thanks, sipped it with hypocritical relish while he remained, and whipped it into the slop-jar the instant he departed, thereby gratifying him, securing one rousing laugh in the doziest hour of the night, and no one was the worse for the transaction but the pigs. Whether they were “cut off untimely in their sins,” or not, I carefully abstained from inquiring.

It was a strange life — asleep half the day, exploring Washington the other half, and all night hovering, like a massive cherubim, in a red rigolette, over the slumbering sons of man. I liked it, and found many things to amuse, instruct, and interest me. The snores alone were quite a study, varying from the mild sniff to the stentorian snort, which startled the echoes and hoisted the performer erect to accuse his neighbor of the deed, magnanimously forgive him, and wrapping the drapery of his couch about him, lie down to vocal slumber. After listening for a week to this band of wind instruments, I indulged in the belief that I could recognize each by the snore alone, and was tempted to join the chorus by breaking out with John Brown's favorite hymn:

"Blow ye the trumpet, blow!"

I would have given much to have possessed the art of sketching, for many of the faces became wonderfully interesting when unconscious. Some grew stern and grim, the men evidently dreaming of war, as they gave orders, groaned over their wounds, or damned the rebels vigorously; some grew sad and infinitely pathetic, as if the pain borne silently all day, revenged itself by now betraying what the man's pride had concealed so well. Often the roughest grew young and pleasant when sleep smoothed the hard lines away, letting the real nature assert itself; many almost seemed to speak, and I learned to know these men better by night than through any intercourse by day. Sometimes they disappointed me, for faces that looked merry and good in the light, grew bad and sly when the shadows came; and though they made no confidences in words, I read their lives, leaving them to wonder at the change of manner this midnight magic wrought in their nurse. A few talked busily; one drummer boy sang sweetly, though no persuasions could win a note from him by day; and several depended on being told what they had talked of in the morning. Even my constitutionals in the chilly halls, possessed a certain charm, for the house was never still. Sentinels tramped round it all night long, their muskets glittering in the wintry moonlight as they walked, or stood before the doors, straight and silent, as figures of stone, causing one to conjure up romantic visions of guarded forts, sudden surprises, and daring deeds; for in these war times the hum drum life of Yankeedom had vanished, and the most prosaic feel some thrill of that excitement which stirs the nation's heart, and makes its capital a camp of hospitals. Wandering up and down these lower halls, I often heard cries from above, steps hurrying to and fro, saw surgeons passing up, or men coming down carrying a stretcher, where lay a long white figure, whose face was shrouded and whose fight was done. Sometimes I stopped to watch the passers in the street, the moonlight shining on the spire opposite, or the gleam of some vessel floating, like a white-winged sea-gull, down the broad Potomac, whose fullest flow can never wash away the red stain of the land.

The night whose events I have a fancy to record, opened with a little comedy, and closed with a great tragedy; for a virtuous and useful life untimely ended is always tragical to those who see not as God sees. My headquarters were beside the bed of a New Jersey boy, crazed by the horrors of that dreadful Saturday. A slight wound in the knee brought him there; but his mind had suffered more than his body; some string of that delicate machine was over strained, and, for days, he had been reliving in imagination, the scenes he could not forget, till his distress broke out in incoherent ravings, pitiful to hear. As I sat by him, endeavoring to soothe his poor distracted brain by the constant touch of wet hands over his hot forehead, he lay cheering his comrades on, hurrying them back, then counting them as they fell around him, often clutching my arm, to drag me from the vicinity of a bursting shell, or covering up his head to screen himself from a shower of shot; his face brilliant with fever; his eyes restless; his head never still; every muscle strained and rigid; while an incessant stream of defiant shouts, whispered warnings, and broken laments, poured from his lips with that forceful bewilderment which makes such wanderings so hard to overhear.

It was past eleven, and my patient was slowly wearying himself into fitful intervals of quietude, when, in one of these pauses, a curious sound arrested my attention. Looking over my shoulder, I saw a one-legged phantom hopping nimbly down the room; and, going to meet it, recognized a certain Pennsylvania gentleman, whose wound-fever had taken a turn for the worse, and, depriving him of the few wits a drunken campaign had left him, set him literally tripping on the light, fantastic toe “toward home,” as he blandly informed me, touching the military cap which formed a striking contrast to the severe simplicity of the rest of his decidedly undress uniform. When sane, the least movement produced a roar of pain or a volley of oaths; but the departure of reason seemed to have wrought an agreeable change, both in the man and his manners; for, balancing himself on one leg, like a meditative stork, he plunged into an animated discussion of the war, the President, lager beer, and Enfield rifles, regardless of any suggestions of mine as to the propriety of returning to bed, lest he be court-martialed for desertion.

Anything more supremely ridiculous can hardly be imagined than this figure, scantily draped in white, its one foot covered with a big blue sock, a dingy cap set rakingly askew on its shaven head, and placid satisfaction beaming in its broad red face, as it flourished a mug in one hand, an old boot in the other, calling them canteen and knapsack, while it skipped and fluttered in the most unearthly fashion. What to do with the creature I didn’t know; Dan was absent, and if I went to find him, the perambulator might festoon himself out of the window, set his toga on fire, or do some of his neighbors a mischief. The attendant of the room was sleeping like a near relative of the celebrated Seven, and nothing short of pins would rouse him; for he had been out that day, and whiskey asserted its supremacy in balmy whiffs. Still declaiming, in a fine flow of eloquence, the demented gentleman hopped on, blind and deaf to my graspings and entreaties; and I was about to slam the door in his face, and run for help, when a second and saner phantom, “all in white,” came to the rescue, in the likeness of a big Prussian, who spoke no English, but divined the crisis, and put an end to it, by bundling the lively monoped into his bed, like a baby, with an authoritative command to “stay put,” which received added weight from being delivered in an odd conglomeration of French and German, accompanied by warning wags of a head decorated with a yellow cotton night cap, rendered most imposing by a tassel like a bell-pull. Rather exhausted by his excursion, the member from Pennsylvania subsided; and, after an irrepressible laugh together, my Prussian ally and myself were returning to our places, when the echo of a sob caused us to glance along the beds. It came from one in the corner — such a little bed! — and such a tearful little face looked up at us, as we stopped beside it! The twelve years old drummer boy was not singing now, but sobbing, with a manly effort all the while to stifle the distressful sounds that would break out.

“What is it, Teddy?” I asked, as he rubbed the tears away, and checked himself in the middle of a great sob to answer plaintively:

“I’ve got a chill, ma’am, but I ain’t cryin’ for that, ‘cause I’m used to it. I dreamed Kit was here, and when I waked up he wasn’t, and I couldn’t help it, then.”

The boy came in with the rest, and the man who was taken dead from the ambulance was the Kit he mourned. Well he might; for, when the wounded were brought from Fredericksburg, the child lay in one of the camps thereabout, and this good friend, though sorely hurt himself, would not leave him to the exposure and neglect of such a time and place; but, wrapping him in his own blanket, carried him in his arms to the transport, tended him during the passage, and only yielded up his charge when Death met him at the door of the hospital which promised care and comfort for the boy. For ten days, Teddy had shivered or burned with fever and ague, pining the while for Kit, and refusing to be comforted, because he had not been able to thank him for the generous protection, which, perhaps, had cost the giver’s life. The vivid dream had wrung the childish heart with a fresh pang, and when I tried the solace fitted for his years, the remorseful fear that haunted him found vent in a fresh burst of tears, as he looked at the wasted hands I was endeavoring to warm:

“Oh! if I’d only been as thin when Kit carried me as I am now, maybe he wouldn’t have died; but I was heavy, he was hurt worser than we knew, and so it killed him; and I didn’t see him, to say good bye.”

This thought had troubled him in secret; and my assurances that his friend would probably have died at all events, hardly assuaged the bitterness of his regretful grief.

At this juncture, the delirious man began to shout; the one-legged rose up in his bed, as if preparing for another dart, Teddy bewailed himself more piteously than before: and if ever a woman was at her wit’s end, that distracted female was Nurse Periwinkle, during the space of two or three minutes, as she vibrated between the three beds, like an agitated pendulum. Like a most opportune reinforcement, Dan, the bandy, appeared, and devoted himself to the lively party, leaving me free to return to my post; for the Prussian, with a nod and a smile, took the lad away to his own bed, and lulled him to sleep with a soothing murmur, like a mammoth humble bee. I liked that in Fritz, and if he ever wondered afterward at the dainties which sometimes found their way into his rations, or the extra comforts of his bed, he might have found a solution of the mystery in sundry persons’ knowledge of the fatherly action of that night.

Hardly was I settled again, when the inevitable bowl appeared, and its bearer delivered a message I had expected, yet dreaded to receive:

“John is going, ma’am, and wants to see you, if you can come.”

“The moment this boy is asleep; tell him so, and let me know if I am in danger of being too late.”

My Ganymede departed, and while I quieted poor Shaw, I thought of John. He came in a day or two after the others; and, one evening, when I entered my “pathetic room,” I found a lately emptied bed occupied by a large, fair man, with a fine face, and the serenest eyes I ever met. One of the earlier comers had often spoken of a friend, who had remained behind, that those apparently worse wounded than himself might reach a shelter first. It seemed a David and Jonathan sort of friendship. The man fretted for his mate, and was never tired of praising John — his courage, sobriety, self-denial, and unfailing kindliness of heart; always winding up with: “He’s an out an’ out fine feller, ma’am; you see if he aint.”

I had some curiosity to behold this piece of excellence, and when he came, watched him for a night or two, before I made friends with him; for, to tell the truth, I was a little afraid of the stately looking man, whose bed had to be lengthened to accommodate his commanding stature; who seldom spoke, uttered no complaint, asked no sympathy, but tranquilly observed what went on about him; and, as he lay high upon his pillows, no picture of dying stateman or warrior was ever fuller of real dignity than this Virginia blacksmith. A most attractive face he had, framed in brown hair and beard, comely featured and full of vigor, as yet unsubdued by pain; thoughtful and often beautifully mild while watching the afflictions of others, as if entirely forgetful of his own. His mouth was grave and firm, with plenty of will and courage in its lines, but a smile could make it as sweet as any woman's; and his eyes were child's eyes, looking one fairly in the face, with a clear, straightforward glance, which promised well for such as placed their faith in him. He seemed to cling to life, as if it were rich in duties and delights, and he had learned the secret of content. The only time I saw his composure disturbed, was when my surgeon brought another to examine John, who scrutinized their faces with an anxious look, asking of the elder: "Do you think I shall pull through, sir?" "I hope so, my man." And, as the two passed on, John's eye still followed them, with an intentness which would have won a clearer answer from them, had they seen it. A momentary shadow flitted over his face; then came the usual serenity, as if, in that brief eclipse, he had acknowledged the existence of some hard possibility, and, asking nothing yet hoping all things, left the issue in God's hands, with that submission which is true piety.

The next night, as I went my rounds with Dr. P., I happened to ask which man in the room probably suffered most; and, to my great surprise, he glanced at John:

"Every breath he draws is like a stab; for the ball pierced the left lung, broke a rib, and did no end of damage here and there; so the poor lad can find neither forgetfulness nor ease, because he must lie on his wounded back or suffocate. It will be a hard struggle, and a long one, for he possesses great vitality; but even his temperate life can't save him; I wish it could."

"You don't mean he must die, Doctor?"

"Bless you there's not the slightest hope for him; and you'd better tell him so before long; women have a way of doing such things comfortably, so I leave it to you. He won't last more than a day or two, at furthest."

I could have sat down on the spot and cried heartily, if I had not learned the wisdom of bottling up one's tears for leisure moments. Such an end seemed very hard for such a man, when half a dozen worn out, worthless bodies round him, were gathering up the remnants of wasted lives, to linger on for years perhaps, burdens to others, daily reproaches to themselves. The army needed men like John, earnest, brave, and faithful; fighting for liberty and justice with both heart and hand, true soldiers of the Lord. I could not give him up so soon, or think with any patience of so excellent a nature robbed of its fulfillment, and blundered into eternity by the rashness or stupidity of those at whose hands so many lives may be required. It was an easy thing for Dr. P. to say: "Tell him he must die," but a cruelly hard thing to do, and by no means as "comfortable" as he politely suggested. I had not the heart to do it then, and privately indulged the hope that some change for the better might take place, in spite of gloomy prophesies; so, rendering my task unnecessary. A few minutes later, as I came in again, with fresh rollers, I saw John sitting erect, with no one to support him, while the surgeon dressed his back. I had never hitherto seen it done; for, having simpler wounds to attend to, and knowing the fidelity of the attendant, I had left John to him, thinking it might be more agreeable and safe; for both strength and experience were needed in his case. I had forgotten that the strong man might long for the gentle tendance of a woman's hands, the sympathetic magnetism of a woman's presence, as well as the feebler souls about him. The Doctor's words caused me to reproach myself with neglect, not of any real duty perhaps, but of those little cares and kindnesses that solace homesick spirits, and make the heavy hours pass easier. John looked lonely and forsaken just then, as he sat with bent head, hands folded on his knee, and no outward sign of suffering, till, looking nearer, I saw great tears roll down and drop upon the floor. It was a new sight there; for, though I had seen many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept. Yet it did not seem weak, only very touching, and straightway my fear vanished, my heart opened wide and took him in, as, gathering the bent head in my arms, as freely as if he had been a little child, I said, "Let me help you bear it, John."

Never, on any human countenance, have I seen so swift and beautiful a look of gratitude, surprise and comfort, as that which answered me more eloquently than the whispered —

"Thank you, ma'am, this is right good! this is what I wanted!"

"Then why not ask for it before?"

"I didn't like to be a trouble; you seemed so busy, and I could manage to get on alone."

"You shall not want it any more, John."

Nor did he; for now I understood the wistful look that sometimes followed me, as I went out, after a brief pause beside his bed, or merely a passing nod, while busied with those who seemed to need me more than he, because more urgent in their demands; now I knew that to him, as to so many, I was the poor substitute for mother, wife, or sister, and in his eyes no stranger, but a friend who hitherto had seemed neglectful; for, in his modesty, he had never guessed the truth. This was changed now; and, through the tedious operation of probing, bathing, and dressing his wounds, he leaned against me, holding my hand fast, and, if pain wrung further tears from him, no one saw them fall but me. When he was laid down again, I hovered about him, in a remorseful state of mind that would not let me rest, till I had bathed his face, brushed his "bonny brown hair," set all things smooth about him, and laid a knot of heath and heliotrope on his clean pillow. While doing this, he watched me with the satisfied expression I so liked to see; and when I offered the little nosegay, held it carefully in his great hand, smoothed a ruffled leaf or two, surveyed and smelt it with an air of genuine delight, and lay contentedly regarding the glimmer of the sunshine on the green. Although the manliest man among my forty, he said, “Yes, ma’am,” like a little boy; received suggestions for his comfort with the quick smile that brightened his whole face; and now and then, as I stood tidying the table by his bed, I felt him softly touch my gown, as if to assure himself that I was there. Anything more natural and frank I never saw, and found this brave John as bashful as brave, yet full of excellencies and fine aspirations, which, having no power to express themselves in words, seemed to have bloomed into his character and made him what he was.

After that night, an hour of each evening that remained to him was devoted to his ease or pleasure. He could not talk much, for breath was precious, and he spoke in whispers; but from occasional conversations, I gleaned scraps of private history which only added to the affection and respect I felt for him. Once he asked me to write a letter, and as I settled pen and paper, I said, with an irrepressible glimmer of feminine curiosity, “Shall it be addressed to wife, or mother, John?”

“Neither, ma’am; I’ve got no wife, and will write to mother myself when I get better. Did you think I was married because of this?” he asked, touching a plain ring he wore, and often turned thoughtfully on his finger when he lay alone.

“Partly that, but more from a settled sort of look you have; a look which young men seldom get until they marry.”

“I didn’t know that; but I’m not so very young, ma’am, thirty in May, and have been what you might call settled this ten years; for mother’s a widow, I’m the oldest child she has, and it wouldn’t do for me to marry until Lizzy has a home of her own, and Laurie’s learned his trade; for we’re not rich, and I must be father to the children and husband to the dear old woman, if I can.”

“No doubt but you are both, John; yet how came you to go to war, if you felt so? Wasn’t enlisting as bad as marrying?”

“No, ma’am, not as I see it, for one is helping my neighbor, the other pleasing myself. I went because I couldn’t help it. I didn’t want the glory or the pay; I wanted the right thing done, and people kept saying the men who were in earnest ought to fight. I was in earnest, the Lord knows! but I held off as long as I could, not knowing which was my duty; mother saw the case, gave me her ring to keep me steady, and said ‘Go:’ so I went.”

A short story and a simple one, but the man and the mother were portrayed better than pages of fine writing could have done it.

“Do you ever regret that you came, when you lie here suffering so much?”

“Never, ma’am; I haven’t helped a great deal, but I’ve shown I was willing to give my life, and perhaps I’ve got to; but I don’t blame anybody, and if it was to do over again, I’d do it. I’m a little sorry I wasn’t wounded in front; it looks cowardly to be hit in the back, but I obeyed orders, and it don’t matter in the end, I know.”

Poor John! it did not matter now, except that a shot in the front might have spared the long agony in store for him. He seemed to read the thought that troubled me, as he spoke so hopefully when there was no hope, for he suddenly added:

“This is my first battle; do they think it’s going to be my last?”

“I’m afraid they do, John.”

It was the hardest question I had ever been called upon to answer; doubly hard with those clear eyes fixed on mine, forcing a truthful answer by their own truth. He seemed a little startled at first, pondered over the fateful fact a moment, then shook his head, with a glance at the broad chest and muscular limbs stretched out before him:

“I’m not afraid, but it’s difficult to believe all at once. I’m so strong it don’t seem possible for such a little wound to kill me.”

Merry Mercutio’s dying words glanced through my memory as he spoke: “‘Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but ‘tis enough.” And John would have said the same could he have seen the ominous black holes between his shoulders; he never had; and, seeing the ghastly sights about him, could not believe his own wound more fatal than these, for all the suffering it caused him.

“Shall I write to your mother, now?” I asked, thinking that these sudden tidings might change all plans and purposes; but they did not; for the man received the order of the Divine Commander to march with the same unquestioning obedience with which the soldier had received that of the human one; doubtless remembering that the first led him to life, and the last to death.

“No, ma’am; to Laurie just the same; he’ll break it to her best, and I’ll add a line to her myself when you get done.”

So I wrote the letter which he dictated, finding it better than any I had sent; for, though here and there a little ungrammatical or inelegant, each sentence came to me briefly worded, but most expressive; full of excellent counsel to the boy, tenderly bequeathing “mother and Lizzie” to his care, and bidding him good bye in words the sadder for their simplicity. He added a few lines, with steady hand, and, as I sealed it, said, with a patient sort of sigh, “I hope the answer will come in time for me to see it;” then, turning away his face, laid the flowers against his lips, as if to hide some quiver of emotion at the thought of such a sudden sundering of all the dear home ties.

These things had happened two days before; now John was dying, and the letter had not come. I had been summoned to many death beds in my life, but to none that made my heart ache as it did then, since my mother called me to watch the departure of a spirit akin to this in its gentleness and patient strength. As I went in, John stretched out both hands:

“I know you’d come! I guess I’m moving on, ma’am.”

He was; and so rapidly that, even while he spoke, over his face I saw the grey veil falling that no human hand can lift. I sat down by him, wiped the drops from his forehead, stirred the air about him with the slow wave of a fan, and waited to help him die. He stood in sore need of help — and I could do so little; for, as the doctor had foretold, the strong body rebelled against death, and fought every inch of the way, forcing him to draw each breath with a spasm, and clench his hands with an imploring look, as if he asked, “How long must I endure this, and be still!” For hours he suffered dumbly, without a moment’s respire, or a moment’s murmuring; his limbs grew cold, his face damp, his lips white, and, again and again, he tore the covering off his breast, as if the lightest weight added to his agony; yet through it all, his eyes never lost their perfect serenity, and the man’s soul seemed to sit therein, undaunted by the ills that vexed his flesh.

One by one, the men woke, and round the room appeared a circle of pale faces and watchful eyes, full of awe and pity; for, though a stranger, John was beloved by all. Each man there had wondered at his patience, respected his piety, admired his fortitude, and now lamented his hard death; for the influence of an upright nature had made itself deeply felt, even in one little week. Presently, the Jonathan who so loved this comely David, came creeping from his bed for a last look and word. The kind soul was full of trouble, as the choke in his voice, the grasp of his hand, betrayed; but there were no tears, and the farewell of the friends was the more touching for its brevity.

“Old boy, how are you?” faltered the one.

“Most through, thank heaven!” whispered the other.

“Can I say or do anything for you anywheres?”

“Take my things home, and tell them that I did my best.”

“I will! I will!”

“Good bye, Ned.”

“Good bye, John, good bye!”

They kissed each other, tenderly as women, and so parted, for poor Ned could not stay to see his comrade die. For a little while, there was no sound in the room but the drip of water, from a stump or two, and John's distressful gasps, as he slowly breathed his life away. I thought him nearly gone, and had just laid down the fan, believing its help to be no longer needed, when suddenly he rose up in his bed, and cried out with a bitter cry that broke the silence, sharply startling every one with its agonized appeal:

"For God's sake, give me air!"

It was the only cry pain or death had wrung from him, the only boon he had asked; and none of us could grant it, for all the airs that blew were useless now. Dan flung up the window. The first red streak of dawn was warming the grey east, a herald of the coming sun; John saw it, and with the love of light which lingers in us to the end, seemed to read in it a sign of hope of help, for, over his whole face there broke that mysterious expression, brighter than any smile, which often comes to eyes that look their last. He laid himself gently down; and, stretching out his strong right arm, as if to grasp and bring the blessed air to his lips in a fuller flow, lapsed into a merciful unconsciousness, which assured us that for him suffering was forever past. He died then; for, though the heavy breaths still tore their way up for a little longer, they were but the waves of an ebbing tide that beat unfelt against the wreck, which an immortal voyager had deserted with a smile. He never spoke again, but to the end held my hand close, so close that when he was asleep at last, I could not draw it away. Dan helped me, warning me as he did so that it was unsafe for dead and living flesh to lie so long together; but though my hand was strangely cold and stiff, and four white marks remained across its back, even when warmth and color had returned elsewhere, I could not but be glad that, through its touch, the presence of human sympathy, perhaps, had lightened that hard hour.

When they had made him ready for the grave, John lay in state for half an hour, a thing which seldom happened in that busy place; but a universal sentiment of reverence and affection seemed to fill the hearts of all who had known or heard of him; and when the rumor of his death went through the house, always astir, many came to see him, and I felt a tender sort of pride in my lost patient; for he looked a most heroic figure, lying there stately and still as the statue of some young knight asleep upon his tomb. The lovely expression which so often beautifies dead faces, soon replaced the marks of pain, and I longed for those who loved him best to see him when half an hour's acquaintance with Death had made them friends. As we stood looking at him, the ward master handed me a letter, saying it had been forgotten the night before. It was John's letter, come just an hour too late to gladden the eyes that had longed and looked for it so eagerly! yet he had it; for, after I had cut some brown locks for his mother, and taken off the ring to send her, telling how well the talisman had done its work, I kissed this good son for her sake, and laid the letter in his hand, still folded as when I drew my own away, feeling that its place was there, and making myself happy with the thought, that, even in his solitary place in the “Government Lot,” he would not be without some token of the love which makes life beautiful and outlives death. Then I left him, glad to have known so genuine a man, and carrying with me an enduring memory of the brave Virginia blacksmith, as he lay serenely waiting for the dawn of that long day which knows no night.

CHAPTER V
OFF DUTY.

“My dear girl, we shall have you sick in your bed, unless you keep yourself warm and quiet for a few days. Widow Wadman can take care of the ward alone, now the men are so comfortable, and have her vacation when you are about again. Now do be prudent in time, and don’t let me have to add a Periwinkle to my bouquet of patients.”

This advice was delivered, in a paternal manner, by the youngest surgeon in the hospital, a kind-hearted little gentleman, who seemed to consider me a frail young blossom, that needed much cherishing, instead of a tough old spinster, who had been knocking about the world for thirty years. At the time I write of, he discovered me sitting on the stairs, with a nice cloud of unwholesome steam rising from the washroom; a party of January breezes disporting themselves in the halls; and perfumes, by no means from “Araby the blest,” keeping them company; while I enjoyed a fit of coughing, which caused my head to spin in a way that made the application of a cool banister both necessary and agreeable, as I waited for the frolicsome wind to restore the breath I’d lost; cheering myself, meantime, with a secret conviction that pneumonia was waiting for me round the corner. This piece of advice had been offered by several persons for a week, and refused by me with the obstinacy with which my sex is so richly gifted. But the last few hours had developed several surprising internal and external phenomena, which impressed upon me the fact that if I didn’t make a masterly retreat very soon, I should tumble down somewhere, and have to be borne ignominiously from the field. My head felt like a cannon ball; my feet had a tendency to cleave to the floor; the walls at times undulated in a most disagreeable manner; people looked unnaturally big; and the “very bottles on the mankle shelf” appeared to dance derisively before my eyes. Taking these things into consideration, while blinking stupidly at Dr. Z., I resolved to retire gracefully, if I must; so, with a valedictory to my boys, a private lecture to Mrs. Wadman, and a fervent wish that I could take off my body and work in my soul, I mournfully ascended to my apartment, and Nurse P was reported off duty.

For the benefit of any ardent damsel whose patriotic fancy may have surrounded hospital life with a halo of charms, I will briefly describe the bower to which I retired, in a somewhat ruinous condition. It was well ventilated, for five panes of glass had suffered compound fractures, which all the surgeons and nurses had failed to heal; the two windows were draped with sheets, the church hospital opposite being a brick and mortar Argus, and the female mind cherishing a prejudice in favor of retiracy during the night-capped periods of existence. A bare floor supported two narrow iron beds, spread with thin mattresses like plasters, furnished with pillows in the last stages of consumption. In a fire place, guiltless of shovel, tongs, andirons, or grate, burned a log inch by inch, being too long to to go on all at once; so, while the fire blazed away at one end, I did the same at the other, as I tripped over it a dozen times a day, and flew up to poke it a dozen times at night. A mirror (let us be elegant!) of the dimensions of a muffin, and about as reflective, hung over a tin basin, blue pitcher, and a brace of yellow mugs. Two invalid tables, ditto chairs, wandered here and there, and the closet contained a varied collection of bonnets, bottles, bags, boots, bread and butter, boxes and bugs. The closet was a regular Blue Beard cupboard to me; I always opened it with fear and trembling, owing to rats, and shut it in anguish of spirit; for time and space were not to be had, and chaos reigned along with the rats. Our chimney-piece was decorated with a flat-iron, a Bible, a candle minus stick, a lavender bottle, a new tin pan, so brilliant that it served nicely for a pier-glass, and such of the portly black bugs as preferred a warmer climate than the rubbish hole afforded. Two arks, commonly called trunks, lurked behind the door, containing the worldly goods of the twain who laughed and cried, slept and scrambled, in this refuge; while from the white-washed walls above either bed, looked down the pictured faces of those whose memory can make for us —

“One little room an everywhere.”

For a day or two I managed to appear at meals; for the human grub must eat till the butterfly is ready to break loose, and no one had time to come up two flights while it was possible for me to come down. Far be it from me to add another affliction or reproach to that enduring man, the steward; for, compared with his predecessor, he was a horn of plenty; but — I put it to any candid mind — is not the following bill of fare susceptible of improvement, without plunging the nation madly into debt? The three meals were “pretty much of a muchness,” and consisted of beef, evidently put down for the men of ‘76; pork, just in from the street; army bread, composed of saw-dust and saleratus; butter, salt as if churned by Lot’s wife; stewed blackberries, so much like preserved cockroaches, that only those devoid of imagination could partake thereof with relish; coffee, mild and muddy; tea, three dried huckleberry leaves to a quart of water — flavored with lime — also animated and unconscious of any approach to clearness. Variety being the spice of life, a small pinch of the article would have been appreciated by the hungry, hard-working sisterhood, one of whom, though accustomed to plain fare, soon found herself reduced to bread and water; having an inborn repugnance to the fat of the land, and the salt of the earth.

Another peculiarity of these hospital meals was the rapidity with which the edibles vanished, and the impossibility of getting a drop or crumb after the usual time. At the first ring of the bell, a general stampede took place; some twenty hungry souls rushed to the dining-room, swept over the table like a swarm of locusts, and left no fragment for any tardy creature who arrived fifteen minutes late. Thinking it of more importance that the patients should be well and comfortably fed, I took my time about my own meals for the first day or two after I came, but was speedily enlightened by Isaac, the black waiter, who bore with me a few times, and then informed me, looking as stern as fate:

"I say, mam, ef you comes so late you can't have no vittles, — 'cause I'm 'bleeged fer ter git things ready fer de doctors 'mazin' spry arter you nusses and folks is done. De gen'lemen don't kere fer ter wait, no more does I; so you jes' please ter come at de time, and dere won't be no frettin' nowheres."

It was a new sensation to stand looking at a full table, painfully conscious of one of the vacuums which Nature abhors, and receive orders to right about face, without partaking of the nourishment which your inner woman clamorously demanded. The doctors always fared better than we; and for a moment a desperate impulse prompted me to give them a hint, by walking off with the mutton, or confiscating the pie. But Ike's eye was on me, and, to my shame be it spoken, I walked meekly away; went dinnerless that day, and that evening went to market, laying in a small stock of crackers, cheese and apples, that my boys might not be neglected, nor myself obliged to bolt solid and liquid dyspepsias, or starve. This plan would have succeeded admirably had not the evil star under which I was born, been in the ascendant during that month, and cast its malign influences even into my "'umble" larder; for the rats had their dessert off my cheese, the bugs set up housekeeping in my cracker bag, and the apples like all worldly riches, took to themselves wings and flew away; whither no man could tell, though certain black imps might have thrown light upon the matter, had not the plaintiff in the case been loth to add another to the many trials of long-suffering Africa. After this failure I resigned myself to fate, and, remembering that bread was called the staff of life, leaned pretty exclusively upon it; but it proved a broken reed, and I came to the ground after a few weeks of prison fare, varied by an occasional potato or surreptitious sip of milk.

Very soon after leaving the care of my ward, I discovered that I had no appetite, and cut the bread and butter interests almost entirely, trying the exercise and sun cure instead. Flattering myself that I had plenty of time, and could see all that was to be seen, so far as a lone lorn female could venture in a city, one-half of whose male population seemed to be taking the other half to the guard-house, — every morning I took a brisk run in one direction or another; for the January days were as mild as Spring. A rollicking north wind and occasional snow storm would have been more to my taste, for the one would have braced and refreshed tired body and soul, the other have purified the air, and spread a clean coverlid over the bed, wherein the capital of these United States appeared to be dozing pretty soundly just then.

One of these trips was to the Armory Hospital, the neatness, comfort, and convenience of which makes it an honor to its presiding genius, and arouses all the covetous propensities of such nurses as came from other hospitals to visit it.

The long, clean, warm, and airy wards, built barrack-fashion, with the nurse's room at the end, were fully appreciated by Nurse Periwinkle, whose ward and private bower were cold, dirty, inconvenient, up stairs and down stairs, and in every body's chamber. At the Armory, in ward K, I found a cheery, bright-eyed, white-aproned little lady, reading at her post near the stove; matting under her feet; a draft of fresh air flowing in above her head; a table full of trays, glasses, and such matters, on one side, a large, well-stocked medicine chest on the other; and all her duty seemed to be going about now and then to give doses, issue orders, which well-trained attendants executed, and pet, advise, or comfort Tom, Dick, or Harry, as she found best. As I watched the proceedings, I recalled my own tribulations, and contrasted the two hospitals in a way that would have caused my summary dismissal, could it have been reported at headquarters. Here, order, method, common sense and liberality reigned and ruled, in a style that did one's heart good to see; at the Hurly burly Hotel, disorder, discomfort, bad management, and no visible head, reduced things to a condition which I despair of describing. The circumlocution fashion prevailed, forms and fusses tormented our souls, and unnecessary strictness in one place was counterbalanced by unpardonable laxity in another. Here is a sample: I am dressing Sam Dammer's shoulder; and, having cleansed the wound, look about for some strips of adhesive plaster to hold on the little square of wet linen which is to cover the gunshot wound; the case is not in the tray; Frank, the sleepy, half-sick attendant, knows nothing of it; we rummage high and low; Sam is tired, and fumes; Frank dawdles and yawns; the men advise and laugh at the flurry; I feel like a boiling tea-kettle, with the lid ready to fly off and damage somebody.

"Go and borrow some from the next ward, and spend the rest of the day in finding ours," I finally command. A pause; then Frank scuffles back with the message: "Miss Peppercorn ain't got none, and says you ain't no business to lose your own duds and go borrowin' other folkses." I say nothing, for fear of saying too much, but fly to the surgery. Mr. Toddypestle informs me that I can't have anything without an order from the surgeon of my ward. Great heavens! where is he? and away I rush, up and down, here and there, till at last I find him, in a state of bliss over a complicated amputation, in the fourth story. I make my demand; he answers: “In five minutes,” and works away, with his head upside down, as he ties an artery, saws a bone, or does a little needle-work, with a visible relish and very sanguinary pair of hands. The five minutes grow to fifteen, and Frank appears, with the remark that, “Dammer wants to know what in thunder you are keeping him there with his finger on a wet rag for?” Dr. P. tears himself away long enough to scribble the order, with which I plunge downward to the surgery again, find the door locked, and, while hammering away on it, am told that two friends are waiting to see me in the hall. The matron being away, her parlor is locked, and there is nowhere to see my guests but in my own room, and no time to enjoy them till the plaster is found. I settle this matter, and circulate through the house to find Toddypestle, who has no right, to leave the surgery till night. He is discovered in the dead house, smoking a cigar; and very much the worse for his researches among the spirituous preparations that fill the surgery shelves. He is inclined to be gallant, and puts the finishing blow to the fire of my wrath; for the tea-kettle lid flies off, and driving him before me to his post, I fling down the order, take what I choose; and, leaving the absurd incapable kissing his hand to me, depart, feeling, as Grandma Riglesty is reported to have done, when she vainly sought for chips, in Bimleck Jackwood’s “shifless paster.”

I find Dammer a well acted charade of his own name, and, just as I get him done, struggling the while with a burning desire to clap an adhesive strip across his mouth, full of heaven-defying oaths, Frank takes up his boot to put it on, and exclaims:

“I’m blest ef here ain’t that case now! I recollect seeing it pitch in this mornin’, but forgot all about it, till my heel went smash inter it. Here, ma’am, ketch hold on it, and give the boys a sheet on’t all round, ‘gainst it tumbles inter t’other boot next time yer want it.”

If a look could annihilate, Francis Saucebox would have ceased to exist; but it couldn’t; therefore, he yet lives, to aggravate some unhappy woman’s soul, and wax fat in some equally congenial situation.

Now, while I’m freeing my mind, I should like to enter my protest against employing convalescents as attendants, instead of strong, properly trained, and cheerful men. How it may be in other places I cannot say; but here it was a source of constant trouble and confusion, these feeble, ignorant men trying to sweep, scrub, lift, and wait upon their sicker comrades. One, with a diseased heart, was expected to run up and down stairs, carry heavy trays, and move helpless men; he tried it, and grew rapidly worse than when he first came: and, when he was ordered out to march away to the convalescent hospital, fell, in a sort of fit, before he turned the corner, and was brought back to die. Another, hurt by a fall from his horse, endeavored to do his duty, but failed entirely, and the wrath of the ward master fell upon the nurse, who must either scrub the rooms herself, or take the lecture; for the boy looked stout and well, and the master never happened to see him turn white with pain, or hear him groan in his sleep when an involuntary motion strained his poor back. Constant complaints were being made of incompetent attendants, and some dozen women did double duty, and then were blamed for breaking down. If any hospital director fancies this a good and economical arrangement, allow one used up nurse to tell him it isn't, and beg him to spare the sisterhood, who sometimes, in their sympathy, forget that they are mortal, and run the risk of being made immortal, sooner than is agreeable to their partial friends.

Another of my few rambles took me to the Senate Chamber, hoping to hear and see if this large machine was run any better than some small ones I knew of. I was too late, and found the Speaker's chair occupied by a colored gentleman of ten; while two others were "on their legs," having a hot debate on the cornball question, as they gathered the waste paper strewn about the floor into bags; and several white members played leap-frog over the desks, a much wholesomer relaxation than some of the older Senators indulge in, I fancy. Finding the coast clear, I likewise gambolled up and down, from gallery to gallery; sat in Sumner's chair, and cudgelled an imaginary Brooks within an inch of his life; examined Wilson's books in the coolest possible manner; warmed my feet at one of the national registers; read people's names on scattered envelopes, and pocketed a castaway autograph or two; watched the somewhat unparliamentary proceedings going on about me, and wondered who in the world all the sedate gentlemen were, who kept popping out of odd doors here and there, like respectable Jacks-in-the-box. Then I wandered over the "palatial residence" of Mrs. Columbia, and examined its many beauties, though I can't say I thought her a tidy housekeeper, and didn't admire her taste in pictures, for the eye of this humble individual soon wearied of expiring patriots, who all appeared to be quitting their earthly tabernacles in convulsions, ruffled shirts, and a whirl of torn banners, bomb shells, and buff and blue arms and legs. The statuary also was massive and concrete, but rather wearying to examine; for the colossal ladies and gentlemen, carried no cards of introduction in face or figure; so, whether the meditative party in a kilt, with well-developed legs, shoes like army slippers, and a ponderous nose, was Columbus, Cato, or Cockelorum Tibby, the tragedian, was more than I could tell. Several robust ladies attracted me; but which was America and which Pocahontas was a mystery; for all affected much looseness of costume, dishevelment of hair, swords, arrows, lances, scales, and other ornaments quite passe with damsels of our day, whose effigies should go down to posterity armed with fans, crochet needles, riding whips, and parasols, with here and there one holding pen or pencil, rolling-pin or broom. The statue of Liberty I recognized at once, for it had no pedestal as yet, but stood flat in the mud, with Young America most symbolically making dirt pies, and chip forts, in its shadow. But high above the squabbling little throng and their petty plans, the sun shone full on Liberty's broad forehead, and, in her hand, some summer bird had built its nest. I accepted the good omen then, and, on the first of January, the Emancipation Act gave the statue a nobler and more enduring pedestal than any marble or granite ever carved and quarried by human bands.

One trip to Georgetown Heights, where cedars sighed overhead, dead leaves rustled underfoot, pleasant paths led up and down, and a brook wound like a silver snake by the blackened ruins of some French Minister's house, through the poor gardens of the black washerwomen who congregated there, and, passing the cemetery with a murmurous lullaby, rolled away to pay its little tribute to the river. This breezy run was the last I took; for, on the morrow, came rain and wind: and confinement soon proved a powerful reinforcement to the enemy, who was quietly preparing to spring a mine, and blow me five hundred miles from the position I had taken in what I called my Chickahominy Swamp.

Shut up in my room, with no voice, spirits, or books, that week was not a holiday, by any means. Finding meals a humbug, I stopped away altogether, trusting that if this sparrow was of any worth, the Lord would not let it fall to the ground. Like a flock of friendly ravens, my sister nurses fed me, not only with food for the body, but kind words for the mind; and soon, from being half starved, I found myself so beteaed and betoasted, petted and served, that I was quite "in the lap of luxury," in spite of cough, headache, a painful consciousness of my pleura, and a realizing sense of bones in the human frame. From the pleasant house on the hill, the home in the heart of Washington, and the Willard caravansary, came friends new and old, with bottles, baskets, carriages and invitations for the invalid; and daily our Florence Nightingale climbed the steep stairs, stealing a moment from her busy life, to watch over the stranger, of whom she was as thoughtfully tender as any mother. Long may she wave! Whatever others may think or say, Nurse Periwinkle is forever grateful; and among her relics of that Washington defeat, none is more valued than the little book which appeared on her pillow, one dreary day; for the D D. written in it means to her far more than Doctor of Divinity.

Being forbidden to meddle with fleshly arms and legs, I solaced myself by mending cotton ones, and, as I sat sewing at my window, watched the moving panorama that passed below; amusing myself with taking notes of the most striking figures in it. Long trains of army wagons kept up a perpetual rumble from morning till night; ambulances rattled to and fro with busy surgeons, nurses taking an airing, or convalescents going in parties to be fitted to artificial limbs. Strings of sorry looking horses passed, saying as plainly as dumb creatures could, “Why, in a city full of them, is there no horsepital for us?” Often a cart came by, with several rough coffins in it and no mourners following; barouches, with invalid officers, rolled round the corner, and carriage loads of pretty children, with black coachmen, footmen, and maids. The women who took their walks abroad, were so extinguished in three story bonnets, with overhanging balconies of flowers, that their charms were obscured; and all I can say of them is that they dressed in the worst possible taste, and walked like ducks.

The men did the picturesque, and did it so well that Washington looked like a mammoth masquerade. Spanish hats, scarlet lined riding cloaks, swords and sashes, high boots and bright spurs, beards and mustaches, which made plain faces comely, and comely faces heroic; these vanities of the flesh transformed our butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers into gallant riders of gaily caparisoned horses, much handsomer than themselves; and dozens of such figures were constantly prancing by, with private prickings of spurs, for the benefit of the perambulating flower-bed. Some of these gentlemen affected painfully tight uniforms, and little caps, kept on by some new law of gravitation, as they covered only the bridge of the nose, yet never fell off; the men looked like stuffed fowls, and rode as if the safety of the nation depended on their speed alone. The fattest, greyest officers dressed most, and ambled statelily along, with orderlies behind, trying to look as if they didn’t know the stout party in front, and doing much caracoling on their own account.

The mules were my especial delight; and an hour’s study of a constant succession of them introduced me to many of their characteristics; for six of these odd little beasts drew each army wagon, and went hopping like frogs through the stream of mud that gently rolled along the street. The coquettish mule had small feet, a nicely trimmed tassel of a tail, perked up ears, and seemed much given to little tosses of the head, affected skips and prances; and, if he wore the bells, or were bedizzened with a bit of finery, put on as many airs as any belle. The moral mule was a stout, hard-working creature, always tugging with all his might; often pulling away after the rest had stopped, laboring under the conscientious delusion that food for the entire army depended upon his private exertions. I respected this style of mule; and had I possessed a juicy cabbage, would have pressed it upon him, with thanks for his excellent example. The historical mule was a melo-dramatic quadruped, prone to startling humanity by erratic leaps, and wild plunges, much shaking of his stubborn head, and lashing out of his vicious heels; now and then falling flat and apparently dying a la Forrest: a gasp — a squirm — a flop, and so on, till the street was well blocked up, the drivers all swearing like demons in bad hats, and the chief actor's circulation decidedly quickened by every variety of kick, cuff jerk, and haul. When the last breath seemed to have left his body, and "Doctors were in vain," a sudden resurrection took place; and if ever a mule laughed with scornful triumph, that was the beast, as he leisurely rose, gave a comfortable shake, and calmly regarding the excited crowd seemed to say — "A hit! a decided hit! for the stupidest of animals has bamboozled a dozen men. Now, then! what are you stopping the way for?" The pathetic mule was, perhaps, the most interesting of all; for, though he always seemed to be the smallest, thinnest, weakest of the six, the postillion, with big boots, long-tailed coat, and heavy whip, was sure to bestride this one, who struggled feebly along, head down, coat muddy and rough, eye spiritless and sad, his very tail a mortified stump, and the whole beast a picture of meek misery, fit to touch a heart of stone. The jovial mule was a roly poly, happy-go-lucky little piece of horse-flesh, taking everything easily, from cudgeling to caressing; strolling along with a roguish twinkle of the eye, and, if the thing were possible, would have had his hands in his pockets, and whistled as he went. If there ever chanced to be an apple core, a stray turnip, or wisp of hay, in the gutter, this Mark Tapley was sure to find it, and none of his mates seemed to begrudge him his bite. I suspected this fellow was the peacemaker, confidant and friend of all the others, for he had a sort of "Cheer-up,-old-boy,-I'll-pull-you-through" look, which was exceedingly engaging.

Pigs also possessed attractions for me, never having had an opportunity of observing their graces of mind and manner, till I came to Washington, whose porcine citizens appeared to enjoy a larger liberty than many of its human ones. Stout, sedate looking pigs, hurried by each morning to their places of business, with a preoccupied air, and sonorous greeting to their friends. Genteel pigs, with an extra curl to their tails, promenaded in pairs, lunching here and there, like gentlemen of leisure. Rowdy pigs pushed the passers by off the side walk; tipsy pigs hiccoughed their version of "We wont go home till morning," from the gutter; and delicate young pigs tripped daintily through the mud, as if, like "Mrs. Peerybingle," they plumed themselves upon their ankles, and kept themselves particularly neat in point of stockings. Maternal pigs, with their interesting families, strolled by in the sun; and often the pink, baby-like squealers lay down for a nap, with a trust in Providence worthy of human imitation.

But more interesting than officers, ladies, mules, or pigs, were my colored brothers and sisters, because so unlike the respectable members of society I'd known in moral Boston.

Here was the genuine article — no, not the genuine article at all, we must go to Africa for that — but the sort of creatures generations of slavery have made them: obsequious, trickish, lazy and ignorant, yet kind-hearted, merry-tempered, quick to feel and accept the least token of the brotherly love which is slowly teaching the white hand to grasp the black, in this great struggle for the liberty of both the races.

Having been warned not to be too rampant on the subject of slavery, as secesh principles flourished even under the respectable nose of Father Abraham, I had endeavored to walk discreetly, and curb my unruly member; looking about me with all my eyes, the while, and saving up the result of my observations for future use. I had not been there a week before the neglected, devil-may care expression in many of the faces about me, seemed an urgent appeal to leave nursing white bodies, and take some care for these black souls. Much as the lazy boys and saucy girls tormented me, I liked them, and found that any show of interest or friendliness brought out the better traits which live in the most degraded and forsaken of us all. I liked their cheerfulness, for the dreariest old hag, who scrubbed all day in that pestilential steam, gossipped and grinned all the way out, when night set her free from drudgery. The girls romped with their dusky sweethearts, or tossed their babies, with the tender pride that makes mother-love a beautifier to the homeliest face. The men and boys sang and whistled all day long; and often, as I held my watch, the silence of the night was sweetly broken by some chorus from the street, full of real melody, whether the song was of heaven, or of hoe-cakes; and, as I listened, I felt that we never should doubt nor despair concerning a race which, through such griefs and wrongs, still clings to this good gift, and seems to solace with it the patient hearts that wait and watch and hope until the end.

I expected to have to defend myself from accusations of prejudice against color; but was surprised to find things just the other way, and daily shocked some neighbor by treating the blacks as I did the whites. The men would swear at the “darkies,” would put two gs into negro, and scoff at the idea of any good coming from such trash. The nurses were willing to be served by the colored people, but seldom thanked them, never praised, and scarcely recognized them in the street; whereat the blood of two generations of abolitionists waxed hot in my veins, and, at the first opportunity, proclaimed itself, and asserted the right of free speech as doggedly as the irrepressible Folsom herself.

Happening to catch up a funny little black baby, who was toddling about the nurses’ kitchen, one day, when I went down to make a mess for some of my men, a Virginia woman standing by elevated her most prominent features, with a sniff of disapprobation, exclaiming:

“Gracious, Miss P.! how can you? I’ve been here six months. and never so much as touched the little toad with a poker.”

“More shame for you, ma’am,” responded Miss P.; and, with the natural perversity of a Yankee, followed up the blow by kissing “the toad,” with ardor. His face was providentially as clean and shiny as if his mamma had just polished it up with a corner of her apron and a drop from the tea-kettle spout, like old Aunt Chloe, This rash act, and the anti-slavery lecture that followed, while one hand stirred gruel for sick America, and the other hugged baby Africa, did not produce the cheering result which I fondly expected; for my comrade henceforth regarded me as a dangerous fanatic, and my protege nearly came to his death by insisting on swarming up stairs to my room, on all occasions, and being walked on like a little black spider.

I waited for New Year’s day with more eagerness than I had ever known before; and, though it brought me no gift, I felt rich in the act of justice so tardily performed toward some of those about me. As the bells rung midnight, I electrified my room-mate by dancing out of bed, throwing up the window, and flapping my handkerchief, with a feeble cheer, in answer to the shout of a group of colored men in the street below. All night they tooted and tramped, fired crackers, sung “Glory, Hallelujah,” and took comfort, poor souls! in their own way. The sky was clear, the moon shone benignly, a mild wind blew across the river, and all good omens seemed to usher in the dawn of the day whose noontide cannot now be long in coming. If the colored people had taken hands and danced around the White House, with a few cheers for the much abused gentleman who has immortalized himself by one just act, no President could have had a finer levee, or one to be prouder of.

While these sights and sounds were going on without, curious scenes were passing within, and I was learning that one of the best methods of fitting oneself to be a nurse in a hospital, is to be a patient there; for then only can one wholly realize what the men suffer and sigh for; how acts of kindness touch and win; how much or little we are to those about us; and for the first time really see that in coming there we have taken our lives in our hands, and may have to pay dearly for a brief experience. Every one was very kind; the attendants of my ward often came up to report progress, to fill my wood box, or bring messages and presents from my boys. The nurses took many steps with those tired feet of theirs, and several came each evening, to chat over my fire and make things cozy for the night. The doctors paid daily visits, tapped at my lungs to see if pneumonia was within, left doses without names, and went away, leaving me as ignorant, and much more uncomfortable than when they came. Hours began to get confused; people looked odd; queer faces haunted the room, and the nights were one long fight with weariness and pain. Letters from home grew anxious; the doctors lifted their eyebrows, and nodded ominously; friends said “Don’t stay,” and an internal rebellion seconded the advice; but the three months were not out, and the idea of giving up so soon was proclaiming a defeat before I was fairly routed; so to all “Don’t stays” I opposed “I wills,” till, one fine morning, a gray-headed gentleman rose like a welcome ghost on my hearth; and, at the sight of him, my resolution melted away, my heart turned traitor to my boys, and, when he said, “Come home,” I answered, “Yes, father;” and so ended my career as an army nurse.

I never shall regret the going, though a sharp tussle with typhoid, ten dollars, and a wig, are all the visible results of the experiment; for one may live and learn much in a month. A good fit of illness proves the value of health; real danger tries one’s mettle; and self-sacrifice sweetens character. Let no one who sincerely desires to help the work on in this way, delay going through any fear; for the worth of life lies in the experiences that fill it, and this is one which cannot be forgotten. All that is best and bravest in the hearts of men and women, comes out in scenes like these; and, though a hospital is a rough school, its lessons are both stern and salutary; and the humblest of pupils there, in proportion to his faithfulness, learns a deeper faith in God and in himself. I, for one, would return tomorrow, on the “up-again,-and-take-another” principle, if I could; for the amount of pleasure and profit I got out of that month compensates for all the pangs; and, though a sadly womanish feeling, I take some satisfaction in the thought that, if I could not lay my head on the altar of my country, I have my hair; and that is more than handsome Helen did for her dead husband, when she sacrificed only the ends of her ringlets on his urn. Therefore, I close this little chapter of hospital experiences, with the regret that they were no better worth recording; and add the poetical gem with which I console myself for the untimely demise of “Nurse Periwinkle:”

Oh, lay her in a little pit,
With a marble stone to cover it;
And carve thereon a gruel spoon,
To show a “nuss” has died too soon.

CHAPTER VI
A POSTSCRIPT.

My Dear S.: — As inquiries like your own have come to me from various friendly readers of the Sketches, I will answer them en masse and in printed form, as a sort of postscript to what has gone before. One of these questions was, “Are there no services by hospital death-beds, or on Sundays?”

In most Hospitals I hope there are; in ours, the men died, and were carried away, with as little ceremony as on a battle-field. The first event of this kind which I witnessed was so very brief, and bare of anything like reverence, sorrow, or pious consolation, that I heartily agreed with the bluntly expressed opinion of a Maine man lying next his comrade, who died with no visible help near him, but a compassionate woman and a tender-hearted Irishman, who dropped upon his knees, and told his beads, with Catholic fervor, for the good of his Protestant brother’s parting soul:

“If, after gettin’ all the hard knocks, we are left to die this way, with nothing but a Paddy’s prayers to help us, I guess Christians are rather scarce round Washington.”

I thought so too; but though Miss Blank, one of my mates, anxious that souls should be ministered to, as well as bodies, spoke more than once to the Chaplain, nothing ever came of it. Unlike another Shepherd, whose earnest piety weekly purified the Senate Chamber, this man did not feed as well as fold his flock, nor make himself a human symbol of the Divine Samaritan, who never passes by on the other side.

I have since learned that our non-committal Chaplain had been a Professor in some Southern College; and, though he maintained that he had no secesh proclivities, I can testify that he seceded from his ministerial duties, I may say, skedaddled; for, being one of his own words, it is as appropriate as inelegant. He read Emerson, quoted Carlyle, and tried to be a Chaplain; but judging from his success, I am afraid he still hankered after the hominy pots of Rebeldom.

Occasionally, on a Sunday afternoon, such of the nurses, officers, attendants, and patients as could avail themselves of it, were gathered in the Ball Room, for an hour’s service, of which the singing was the better part. To me it seemed that if ever strong, wise, and loving words were needed, it was then; if ever mortal man had living texts before his eyes to illustrate and illuminate his thought, it was there; and if ever hearts were prompted to devoutest self-abnegation, it was in the work which brought us to anything but a Chapel of Ease. But some spiritual paralysis seemed to have befallen our pastor; for, though many faces turned toward him, full of the dumb hunger that often comes to men when suffering or danger brings then nearer to the heart of things, they were offered the chaff of divinity, and its wheat was left for less needy gleaners, who knew where to look. Even the fine old Bible stories, which may be made as lifelike as any history of our day, by a vivid fancy and pictorial diction, were robbed of all their charms by dry explanations and literal applications, instead of being useful and pleasant lessons to those men, whom weakness had rendered as docile as children in a father's hands.

I watched the listless countenances all about me, while a mild Daniel was moralizing in a den of utterly uninteresting lions; while Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego were leisurely passing through the fiery furnace, where, I sadly feared, some of us sincerely wished they had remained as permanencies; while the Temple of Solomon was laboriously erected, with minute descriptions of the process, and any quantity of bells and pomegranates on the raiment of the priests. Listless they were at the beginning, and listless at the end; but the instant some stirring old hymn was given out, sleepy eyes brightened, lounging figures sat erect, and many a poor lad rose up in his bed, or stretch an eager hand for the book, while all broke out with a heartiness that proved that somewhere at the core of even the most abandoned, there still glowed some remnant of the native piety that flows in music from the heart of every little child. Even the big rebel joined, and boomed away in a thunderous bass, singing —

"Salvation! let the echoes fly,"

as energetically as if he felt the need of a speedy execution of the command.

That was the pleasantest moment of the hour, for then it seemed a homelike and happy spot; the groups of men looking over one another's shoulders as they sang; the few silent figures in the beds; here and there a woman noiselessly performing some necessary duty, and singing as she worked; while in the arm chair standing in the midst, I placed, for my own satisfaction, the imaginary likeness of a certain faithful pastor, who took all outcasts by the hand, smote the devil in whatever guise he came, and comforted the indigent in spirit with the best wisdom of a great and tender heart, which still speaks to us from its Italian grave. With that addition, my picture was complete; and I often longed to take a veritable sketch of a Hospital Sunday, for, despite its drawbacks, consisting of continued labor, the want of proper books, the barren preaching that bore no fruit, this day was never like the other six.

True to their home training, our New England boys did their best to make it what it should be. With many, there was much reading of Testaments, humming over of favorite hymns, and looking at such books as I could cull from a miscellaneous library. Some lay idle, slept, or gossiped; yet, when I came to them for a quiet evening chat, they often talked freely and well of themselves; would blunder out some timid hope that their troubles might "do 'em good, and keep 'em stiddy;" would choke a little, as they said good night, and turned their faces to the wall to think of mother, wife, or home, these human ties seeming to be the most vital religion which they yet knew. I observed that some of them did not wear their caps on this day, though at other times they clung to them like Quakers; wearing them in bed, putting them on to read the paper, eat an apple, or write a letter, as if, like a new sort of Samson, their strength lay, not in their hair, but in their hats. Many read no novels, swore less, were more silent, orderly, and cheerful, as if the Lord were an invisible Wardmaster, who went his rounds but once a week, and must find all things at their best. I liked all this in the poor, rough boys, and could have found it in my heart to put down sponge and tea-pot, and preach a little sermon then and there, while homesickness and pain had made these natures soft, that some good seed might be cast therein, to blossom and bear fruit here or hereafter.

Regarding the admission of friends to nurse their sick, I can only say, it was not allowed at Hurly-burly House; though one indomitable parent took my ward by storm, and held her position, in spite of doctors, matron, and Nurse Periwinkle. Though it was against the rules, though the culprit was an acid, frost-bitten female, though the young man would have done quite as well without her anxious fussiness, and the whole room-full been much more comfortable, there was something so irresistible in this persistent devotion, that no one had the heart to oust her from her post. She slept on the floor, without uttering a complaint; bore jokes somewhat of the rudest; fared scantily, though her basket was daily filled with luxuries for her boy; and tended that petulant personage with a never-failing patience beautiful to see.

I feel a glow of moral rectitude in saying this of her; for, though a perfect pelican to her young, she pecked and cackled (I don't know that pelicans usually express their emotions in that manner,) most obstreperously, when others invaded her premises; and led me a weary life, with "George's tea-rusks," "George's foot bath," "George's measles," and "George's mother;" till after a sharp passage of arms and tongues with the matron, she wrathfully packed up her rusks, her son, and herself, and departed, in an ambulance, scolding to the very last.

This is the comic side of the matter. The serious one is harder to describe; for the presence, however brief, of relations and friends by the bedside of the dead or dying, is always a trial to the bystanders. They are not near enough to know how best to comfort, yet too near to turn their backs upon the sorrow that finds its only solace in listening to recitals of last words, breathed into nurse's ears, or receiving the tender legacies of love and longing bequeathed through them.

To me, the saddest sight I saw in that sad place, was the spectacle of a grey-haired father, sitting hour after hour by his son, dying from the poison of his wound. The old father, hale and hearty; the young son, past all help, though one could scarcely believe it; for the subtle fever, burning his strength away, flushed his cheeks with color, filled his eyes with lustre, and lent a mournful mockery of health to face and figure, making the poor lad comelier in death than in life. His bed was not in my ward; but I was often in and out, and for a day or two, the pair were much together, saying little, but looking much. The old man tried to busy himself with book or pen, that his presence might not be a burden; and once when he sat writing, to the anxious mother at home, doubtless, I saw the son's eyes fix upon his face, with a look of mingled resignation and regret, as if endeavoring to teach himself to say cheerfully the long good bye. And again, when the son slept, the father watched him as he had himself been watched; and though no feature of his grave countenance changed, the rough hand, smoothing the lock of hair upon the pillow, the bowed attitude of the grey head, were more pathetic than the loudest lamentations. The son died; and the father took home the pale relic of the life he gave, offering a little money to the nurse, as the only visible return it was in his power to make her; for though very grateful, he was poor. Of course, she did not take it, but found a richer compensation in the old man's earnest declaration:

"My boy couldn't have been better cared for if he'd been at home; and God will reward you for it, though I can't."

My own experiences of this sort began when my first man died. He had scarcely been removed, when his wife came in. Her eye went straight to the well-known bed; it was empty; and feeling, yet not believing the hard truth, she cried out, with a look I never shall forget:

"Why, where's Emanuel?"

I had never seen her before, did not know her relationship to the man whom I had only nursed for a day, and was about to tell her he was gone, when McGee, the tender-hearted Irishman before mentioned, brushed by me with a cheerful —”It's shifted to a better bed he is, Mrs. Connel. Come out, dear, till I show ye;" and, taking her gently by the arm, he led her to the matron, who broke the heavy tidings to the wife, and comforted the widow.

Another day, running up to my room for a breath of fresh air and a five minutes rest after a disagreeable task, I found a stout young woman sitting on my bed, wearing the miserable look which I had learned to know by that time. Seeing her, reminded me that I had heard of some one's dying in the night, and his sister's arriving in the morning. This must be she, I thought. I pitied her with all my heart. What could I say or do? Words always seem impertinent at such times; I did not know the man; the woman was neither interesting in herself nor graceful in her grief; yet, having known a sister's sorrow myself, I could have not leave her alone with her trouble in that strange place, without a word. So, feeling heart-sick, home-sick, and not knowing what else to do, I just put my arms about her, and began to cry in a very helpless but hearty way; for, as I seldom indulge in this moist luxury, I like to enjoy it with all my might, when I do.

It so happened I could not have done a better thing; for, though not a word was spoken, each felt the other's sympathy; and, in the silence, our handkerchiefs were more eloquent than words. She soon sobbed herself quiet; and leaving her on my bed, I went back to work, feeling much refreshed by the shower, though I'd forgotten to rest, and had washed my face instead of my hands. I mention this successful experience as a receipt proved and approved, for the use of any nurse who may find herself called upon to minister to these wounds of the heart. They will find it more efficacious than cups of tea, smelling-bottles, psalms, or sermons; for a friendly touch and a companionable cry, unite the consolations of all the rest for womankind; and, if genuine, will be found a sovereign cure for the first sharp pang so many suffer in these heavy times.

I am gratified to find that my little Sergeant has found favor in several quarters, and gladly respond to sundry calls for news of him, though my personal knowledge ended five months ago. Next to my good John — I hope the grass is green above him, far away there in Virginia! — I placed the Sergeant on my list of worthy boys; and many jovial chat have I enjoyed with the merry-hearted lad, who had a fancy for fun, when his poor arm was dressed. While Dr. P. poked and strapped, I brushed the remains of the Sergeant's brown mane — shorn sorely against his will — and gossiped with all my might, the boy making odd faces, exclamations, and appeals, when nerves got the better of nonsense, as they sometimes did:

"I'd rather laugh than cry, when I must sing out anyhow, so just say that bit from Dickens again, please, and I'll stand it like a man." He did; for "Mrs. Cluppins," "Chadband," and "Sam Weller," always helped him through; thereby causing me to lay another offering of love and admiration on the shrine of the god of my idolatry, though he does wear too much jewelry and talk slang.

The Sergeant also originated, I believe, the fashion of calling his neighbors by their afflictions instead of their names; and I was rather taken aback by hearing them bandy remarks of this sort, with perfect good humor and much enjoyment of the new game.

"Hallo, old Fits is off again!" "How are you, Rheumatiz?" "Will you trade apples, Ribs?" "I say, Miss P. may I give Typus a drink of this?" "Look here, No Toes, lend us a stamp, there's a good feller," etc. He himself was christened "Baby B.," because he tended his arm on a little pillow, and called it his infant.

Very fussy about his grub was Sergeant B., and much trotting of attendants was necessary when he partook of nourishment. Anything more irresistibly wheedlesome I never saw, and constantly found myself indulging him, like the most weak-minded parent, merely for the pleasure of seeing his blue eyes twinkle, his merry mouth break into a smile, and his one hand execute a jaunty little salute that was entirely captivating. I am afraid that Nurse P. damaged her dignity, frolicking with this persuasive young gentleman, though done for his well being. But "boys will be boys," is perfectly applicable to the case; for, in spite of years, sex and the "prunes-and-prisms" doctrine laid down for our use, I have a fellow feeling for lads, and always owed Fate a grudge because I wasn't a lord of creation instead of a lady.

Since I left, I have heard, from a reliable source, that my Sergeant has gone home; therefore, the small romance that budded the first day I saw him, has blossomed into its second chapter, and I now imagine "dearest Jane" filling my place, tending the wounds I tended, brushing the curly jungle I brushed, loving the excellent little youth I loved, and eventually walking altarward, with the Sergeant stumping gallantly at her side. If she doesn't do all this, and no end more, I'll never forgive her; and sincerely pray to the guardian saint of lovers, that "Baby B." may prosper in his wooing, and his name be long in the land.

One of the lively episodes of hospital life, is the frequent marching away of such as are well enough to rejoin their regiments, or betake themselves to some convalescent camp. The ward master comes to the door of each room that is to be thinned, reads off a list of names, bids their owners look sharp and be ready when called for; and, as he vanishes, the rooms fall into an indescribable state of topsy-turvyness, as the boys begin to black their boots, brighten spurs, if they have them, overhaul knapsacks, make presents; are fitted out with needfuls, and — well, why not? — kissed sometimes, as they say, good-bye; for in all human probability we shall never meet again, and a woman's heart yearns over anything that has clung to her for help and comfort. I never liked these breakings-up of my little household: though my short stay showed me but three. I was immensely gratified by the hand shakes I got, for their somewhat painful cordiality assured me that I had not tried in vain. The big Prussian rumbled out his unintelligible adieux, with a grateful face and a premonitory smooth of his yellow mustache, but got no farther, for some one else stepped up, with a large brown hand extended, and this recommendation of our very faulty establishment:

“We’re off, ma’am, and I’m powerful sorry, for I’d no idea a ‘orspittle was such a jolly place. Hope I’ll git another ball somewheres easy, so I’ll come back, and be took care on again. Mean, ain’t it?”

I didn’t think so, but the doctrine of inglorious ease was not the right one to preach up, so I tried to look shocked, failed signally, and consoled myself by giving him the fat pincushion he had admired as the “cutest little machine agoin.” Then they fell into line in front of the house, looking rather wan and feeble, some of them, but trying to step out smartly and march in good order, though half the knapsacks were carried by the guard, and several leaned on sticks instead of shouldering guns. All looked up and smiled, or waved their hands and touched their caps, as they passed under our windows down the long street, and so away, some to their homes in this world, and some to that in the next; and, for the rest of the day, I felt like Rachel mourning for her children, when I saw the empty beds and missed the familiar faces.

You ask if nurses are obliged to witness amputations and such matters, as a part of their duty? I think not, unless they wish; for the patient is under the effects of ether, and needs no care but such as the surgeons can best give. Our work begins afterward, when the poor soul comes to himself, sick, faint, and wandering; full of strange pains and confused visions, of disagreeable sensations and sights. Then we must sooth and sustain, tend and watch; preaching and practicing patience, till sleep and time have restored courage and self-control.

I witnessed several operations; for the height of my ambition was to go to the front after a battle, and feeling that the sooner I inured myself to trying sights, the more useful I should be. Several of my mates shrunk from such things; for though the spirit was wholly willing, the flesh was inconveniently weak. One funereal lady came to try her powers as a nurse; but, a brief conversation eliciting the facts that she fainted at the sight of blood, was afraid to watch alone, couldn’t possibly take care of delirious persons, was nervous about infections, and unable to bear much fatigue, she was mildly dismissed. I hope she found her sphere, but fancy a comfortable bandbox on a high shelf would best meet the requirements of her case.

Dr. Z. suggested that I should witness a dissection; but I never accepted his invitations, thinking that my nerves belonged to the living, not to the dead, and I had better finish my education as a nurse before I began that of a surgeon. But I never met the little man skipping through the hall, with oddly shaped cases in his hand, and an absorbed expression of countenance, without being sure that a select party of surgeons were at work in the dead house, which idea was a rather trying one, when I knew the subject was some person whom I had nursed and cared for.

But this must not lead any one to suppose that the surgeons were willfully hard or cruel, though one of them remorsefully confided to me that he feared his profession blunted his sensibilities, and perhaps, rendered him indifferent to the sight of pain.

I am inclined to think that in some cases it does; for, though a capital surgeon and a kindly man, Dr. P., through long acquaintance with many of the ills flesh is heir to, had acquired a somewhat trying habit of regarding a man and his wound as separate institutions, and seemed rather annoyed that the former should express any opinion upon the latter, or claim any right in it, while under his care. He had a way of twitching off a bandage, and giving a limb a comprehensive sort of clutch, which though no doubt entirely scientific, was rather startling than soothing, and highly objectionable as a means of preparing nerves for any fresh trial. He also expected the patient to assist in small operations, as he considered them, and to restrain all demonstrations during the process.

“Here, my man, just hold it this way, while I look into it a bit,” he said one day to Fitz G., putting a wounded arm into the keeping of a sound one, and proceeding to poke about among bits of bone and visible muscles, in a red and black chasm made by some infernal machine of the shot or shell description. Poor Fitz held on like a grim Death, ashamed to show fear before a woman, till it grew more than he could bear in silence; and, after a few smothered groans, he looked at me imploringly, as if he said, “I wouldn’t, ma’am, if I could help it,” and fainted quietly away.

Dr. P. looked up, gave a compassionate sort of cluck, and poked away more busily than ever, with a nod at me and a brief — ”Never mind; be so good as to hold this till I finish.”

I obeyed, cherishing the while a strong desire to insinuate a few of his own disagreeable knives and scissors into him, and see how he liked it. A very disrespectful and ridiculous fancy of course; for he was doing all that could be done, and the arm prospered finely in his hands. But the human mind is prone to prejudice; and though a personable man, speaking French like a born “Parley voo,” and whipping off legs like an animated guillotine, I must confess to a sense of relief when he was ordered elsewhere; and suspect that several of the men would have faced a rebel battery with less trepidation than they did Dr. P., when he came briskly in on his morning round.

As if to give us the pleasures of contrast, Dr. Z. succeeded him, who, I think, suffered more in giving pain than did his patients in enduring it; for he often paused to ask: “Do I hurt you?” and seeing his solicitude, the boys invariably answered: “Not much; go ahead, Doctor,” though the lips that uttered this amiable fib might be white with pain as they spoke. Over the dressing of some of the wounds, we used to carry on conversations upon subjects foreign to the work in hand, that the patient might forget himself in the charms of our discourse. Christmas eve was spent in this way; the Doctor strapping the little Sergeant’s arm, I holding the lamp, while all three laughed and talked, as if anywhere but in a hospital ward; except when the chat was broken by a long-drawn “Oh!” from “Baby B.,” an abrupt request from the Doctor to “Hold the lamp a little higher, please,” or an encouraging, “Most through, Sergeant,” from Nurse P.

The chief Surgeon, Dr. O., I was told, refused the higher salary, greater honor, and less labor, of an appointment to the Officer’s Hospital, round the corner, that he might serve the poor fellows at Hurly-burly House, or go to the front, working there day and night, among the horrors that succeed the glories of a battle. I liked that so much, that the quiet, brown-eyed Doctor was my especial admiration; and when my own turn came, had more faith in him than in all the rest put together, although he did advise me to go home, and authorize the consumption of blue pills.

Speaking of the surgeons reminds me that, having found all manner of fault, it becomes me to celebrate the redeeming feature of Hurly-burly House. I had been prepared by the accounts of others, to expect much humiliation of spirit from the surgeons, and to be treated by them like a door-mat, a worm, or any other meek and lowly article, whose mission it is to be put down and walked upon; nurses being considered as mere servants, receiving the lowest pay, and, it’s my private opinion, doing the hardest work of any part of the army, except the mules. Great, therefore, was my surprise, when I found myself treated with the utmost courtesy and kindness. Very soon my carefully prepared meekness was laid upon the shelf; and, going from one extreme to the other, I more than once expressed a difference of opinion regarding sundry messes it was my painful duty to administer.

As eight of us nurses chanced to be off duty at once, we had an excellent opportunity of trying the virtues of these gentlemen; and I am bound to say they stood the test admirably, as far as my personal observation went. Dr. O.’s stethoscope was unremitting in its attentions; Dr. S. brought his buttons into my room twice a day, with the regularity of a medical clock; while Dr. Z. filled my table with neat little bottles, which I never emptied, prescribed Browning, bedewed me with Cologne, and kept my fire going, as if, like the candles in St. Peter’s, it must never be permitted to die out. Waking, one cold night, with the certainty that my last spark had pined away and died, and consequently hours of coughing were in store for me, I was amazed to see a ruddy light dancing on the wall, a jolly blaze roaring up the chimney, and, down upon his knees before it, Dr. Z., whittling shavings. I ought to have risen up and thanked him on the spot; but, knowing that he was one of those who like to do good by stealth, I only peeped at him as if he were a friendly ghost; till, having made things as cozy as the most motherly of nurses could have done, he crept away, leaving me to feel, as somebody says, “as if angels were a watching of me in my sleep;” though that species of wild fowl do not usually descend in broadcloth and glasses. I afterwards discovered that he split the wood himself on that cool January midnight, and went about making or mending fires for the poor old ladies in their dismal dens; thus causing himself to be felt — a bright and shining light in more ways than one. I never thanked him as I ought; therefore, I publicly make a note of it, and further aggravate that modest M.D. by saying that if this was not being the best of doctors and the gentlest of gentlemen, I shall be happy to see any improvement upon it.

To such as wish to know where these scenes took place, I must respectfully decline to answer; for Hurly-burly House has ceased to exist as a hospital; so let it rest, with all its sins upon its head, — perhaps I should say chimney top. When the nurses felt ill, the doctors departed, and the patients got well, I believe the concern gently faded from existence, or was merged into some other and better establishment, where I hope the washing of three hundred sick people is done out of the house, the food is eatable, and mortal women are not expected to possess an angelic exemption from all wants, and the endurance of truck horses.

Since the appearance of these hasty Sketches, I have heard from several of my comrades at the Hospital; and their approval assures me that I have not let sympathy and fancy run away with me, as that lively team is apt to do when harnessed to a pen. As no two persons see the same thing with the same eyes, my view of hospital life must be taken through my glass, and held for what it is worth. Certainly, nothing was set down in malice, and to the serious-minded party who objected to a tone of levity in some portions of the Sketches, I can only say that it is a part of my religion to look well after the cheerfulnesses of life, and let the dismals shift for themselves; believing, with good Sir Thomas More, that it is wise to “be merrie in God.”

The next hospital I enter will, I hope, be one for the colored regiments, as they seem to be proving their right to the admiration and kind offices of their white relations, who owe them so large a debt, a little part of which I shall be so proud to pay.

Yours,

With a firm faith
In the good time coming,
TRIBULATION PERIWINKLE.

ON PICKET DUTY AND OTHER TALES

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ON PICKET DUTY.
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ON PICKET DUTY.

WHAT air you thinkin' of, Phil?

"My wife, Dick."

"So was I! Aint it odd how fellers fall to thinkin' of thar little women, when they get a quiet spell like this?"

"Fortunate for us that we do get it, and have such gentle bosom guests to keep us brave and honest through the trials and temptations of a life like ours."

October moonlight shone clearly on the solitary tree, draped with gray moss, scarred by lightning and warped by wind, looking like a venerable warrior, whose long campaign was nearly done; and underneath was posted the guard of four. Behind them twinkled many camp-fires on a distant plain, before them wound a road ploughed by the passage of an army, strewn with the relics of a rout. On the right, a sluggish river glided, like a serpent, stealthy, sinuous, and dark, into a seemingly impervious jungle; on the left, a Southern swamp filled the air with malarial damps, swarms of noisome life, and discordant sounds that robbed the hour of its repose. The men were friends as well as comrades, for though gathered from the four quarters of the Union, and dissimilar in education, character, and tastes, the same spirit animated all; the routine of camp life threw them much together, and mutual esteem soon grew into a bond of mutual good fellowship.

Thorn was a Massachusetts volunteer; a man who seemed too early old, too early embittered by some cross, for though grim of countenance, rough of speech, cold of manner, a keen observer would have soon discovered traces of a deeper, warmer nature hidden, behind the repellent front he turned upon the world. A true New Englander, thoughtful, acute, reticent, and opinionated; yet earnest withal, intensely patriotic, and often humorous, despite a touch of Puritan austerity.

Phil, the "romantic chap," as he was called, looked his character to the life. Slender, swarthy, melancholy eyed, and darkly bearded; with feminine features, mellow voice and, alternately languid or vivacious manners. A child of the South in nature as in aspect, ardent, impressible, and proud; fitfully aspiring and despairing; without the native energy which moulds character and ennobles life. Months of discipline and devotion had done much for him, and some deep experience was fast ripening the youth into a man.

Flint, the long-limbed lumberman, from the wilds of Maine, was a conscript who, when government demanded his money or his life, calculated the cost, and decided that the cash would be a dead loss and the claim might be repeated, whereas the conscript would get both pay and plunder out of government, while taking excellent care that government got precious little out of him. A shrewd, slow-spoken, self-reliant specimen, was Flint; yet something of the fresh flavor of the backwoods lingered in him still, as if Nature were loath to give him up, and left the mark of her motherly hand upon him, as she leaves it in a dry, pale lichen, on the bosom of the roughest stone.

Dick "hailed" from Illinois, and was a comely young fellow, full of dash and daring; rough and rowdy, generous and jolly, overflowing with spirits and ready for a free fight with all the world.

Silence followed the last words, while the friendly moon climbed up the sky. Each man's eye followed it, and each man's heart was busy with remembrances of other eyes and hearts that might be watching and wishing as theirs watched and wished. In the silence, each shaped for himself that vision of home that brightens so many camp-fires, haunts so many dreamers under canvas roofs, and keeps so many turbulent natures tender by memories which often are both solace and salvation.

Thorn paced to and fro, his rifle on his shoulder, vigilant and soldierly, however soft his heart might be. Phil leaned against the tree, one hand in the breast of his blue jacket, on the painted presentment of the face his fancy was picturing in the golden circle of the moon. Flint lounged on the sward, whistling softly as he whittled at a fallen bough. Dick was flat on his back, heels in air, cigar in mouth, and some hilarious notion in his mind, for suddenly he broke into a laugh.

"What is it, lad?" asked Thorn, pausing in his tramp, as if willing to be drawn from the disturbing thought that made his black brows lower and his mouth look grim.

"Thinkin' of my wife, and wishin' she was here, bless her heart! set me rememberin' how I see her fust, and so I roared, as I always do when it comes into my head."

"How was it? Come, reel off a yarn and let's hear houw yeou hitched teams," said Flint, always glad to get information concerning his neighbors, if it could be cheaply done.

"Tellin' how we found our wives wouldn't be a bad game, would it, Phil?"

"I'm agreeable; but let us have your romance first."

“Devilish little of that about me or any of my doin’s. I hate sentimental bosh as much as you hate slang, and should have been a bachelor to this day if I hadn’t seen Kitty jest as I did. You see, I’d been too busy larkin’ round to get time for marryin’, till a couple of years ago, when I did up the job double-quick, as I’d like to do this thunderin’ slow one, hang it all!”

“Halt a minute till I give a look, for this picket isn’t going to be driven in or taken while I’m on guard.”

Down his beat went Thorn, reconnoitring river, road, and swamp, as thoroughly as one pair of keen eyes could do it, and came back satisfied, but still growling like a faithful mastiff on the watch; performances which he repeated at intervals till his own turn came.

“I didn’t have to go out of my own State for a wife, you’d better believe,” began Dick, with a boast, as usual; “for we raise as fine a crop of girls thar as any State in or out of the Union, and don’t mind raisin’ Cain with any man who denies it. I was out on a gunnin’ tramp with Joe Partridge, a cousin of mine, — poor old chap! he fired his last shot at Gettysburg, and died game in a way he didn’t dream of the day we popped off the birds together. It ain’t right to joke that way; I won’t if I can help it; but a feller gets awfully kind of heathenish these times, don’t he?”

“Settle up them scores byme-by; fightin’ Christians scurse raound here. Fire away, Dick.”

“Well, we got as hungry as hounds half a dozen mile from home, and when a farm-house hove in sight, Joe said he’d ask for a bite and leave some of the plunder for pay. I was visitin’ Joe, didn’t know folks round, and backed out of the beggin’ part of the job; so he went ahead alone. We’d come up the woods behind the house, and while Joe was foragin’, I took are connoissance. The view was fust-rate, for the main part of it was a girl airin’ beds on the roof of a stoop. Now, jest about that time, havin’ a leisure spell, I’d begun to think of marryin’, and took a look at all the girls I met, with an eye to business. I s’pose every man has some sort of an idee or pattern of the wife he wants; pretty and plucky, good and gay was mine, but I’d never found it till I see Kitty; and as she didn’t see me, I had the advantage and took an extra long stare.”

“What was her good pints, hey?”

“Oh, well, she had a wide-awake pair of eyes, a bright, jolly sort of a face, lots of curly hair tumblin’ out of her net, a trig little figger, and a pair of the neatest feet and ankles that ever stepped. ‘Pretty,’ thinks I; ‘so far so good.’ The way she whacked the pillers, shooked the blankets, and pitched into the beds was a caution; specially one blunderin’ old featherbed that wouldn’t do nothin’ but sag round in a pig-headed sort of way, that would have made most girls get mad and give up. Kitty didn’t, but just wrastled with it like a good one, till she got it turned, banged, and spread to suit her; then she plumped down in the middle of it, with a sarcy little nod and chuckle to herself, that tickled me mightily. ‘Plucky,’ thinks I, ‘better ‘n’ better.’ Jest then an old woman came flyin’ out the back-door, callin’, ‘Kitty! Kitty! Squire Partridge’s son’s here, ‘long with a friend; been gunnin’, want luncheon, and I’m all in the suds; do come down and see to ‘em.’

“‘Where are they?’ says Kitty, scrambling up her hair and settlin’ her gown in a jiffy, as women have a knack of doin’, you know.

“‘Mr. Joe’s in the front entry; the other man’s somewheres round, Billy says, waitin’ till I send word whether they can stop. I darsn’t till I’d seen you, for I can’t do nothin’, I’m in such a mess,’ says the old lady.

“‘So am I, for I can’t get in except by the entry window, and he’ll see me,’ says Kitty, gigglin’ at the thoughts of Joe.

“‘Come down the ladder, there’s a dear. I’ll pull it round and keep it stiddy,’ says her mother.

“‘Oh, ma, don’t ask me!’ says Kitty, with a shiver. ‘I’m dreadfully scared of ladders since I broke my arm off this very one. It’s so high, it makes me dizzy jest to think of.’

“‘Well, then, I’ll do the best I can; but I wish them boys was to Jericho!’ says the old lady, with a groan, for she was fat and hot, had her gown pinned up, and was in a fluster generally. She was goin’ off rather huffy, when Kitty called out, —

“‘Stop, ma! I’ll come down and help you, only ketch me if I tumble.’

“She looked scared but stiddy, and I’ll bet it took as much grit for her to do it as for one of us to face a battery. It don’t seem much to tell of, but I wish I may be hit if it wasn’t a right down dutiful and clever thing to see done. When the old lady took her off at the bottom, with a good motherly hug, I found myself huggin’ my rifle like a fool, but whether I thought it was the ladder, or Kitty, I ain’t clear about. ‘Good,’ thinks I; ‘what more do you want?’

“A snug little property wouldn’t a ben bad, I reckon. Well she had it, old skin-flint, though I didn’t know or care about it then. What a jolly row she’d make if she knew I was tellin’ the ladder part of the story! She always does when I get to it, and makes believe cry, with her head in my breast-pocket, or any such handy place, till I take it out and swear I’ll never do so ag’in. Poor little Kit, I wonder what she’s doin’ now. Thinkin’ of me, I’ll bet.”

Dick paused, pitched his cap lower over his eyes, and smoked a minute with more energy than enjoyment, for his cigar was out and he did not perceive it.

“That’s not all, is it?” asked Thorn, taking a fatherly interest in the younger man’s love passages.

“Not quite. ‘Fore long, Joe whistled, and as I always take short cuts everywhar, I put in at the back-door, jest as Kitty come trottin’ out of the pantry with a big berry-pie in her hand. I startled her, she tripped over the sill and down she come; the dish flew one way, the pie flopped into her lap, the juice spatterin’ my boots and her clean gown. I thought she’d cry, scold, have hysterics, or some confounded thing or other; but she jest sat still a minute, then looked up at me with a great blue splosh on her face, and went off into the good-naturedest gale of laughin’ you ever heard in your life. That finished me. ‘Gay,’ thinks I; ‘go in and win.’ So I, did; made love hand over hand, while I stayed with Joe; pupposed a fortnight after, married her in three months, and there she is, a tip-top little woman, with a pair of stunnin’ boys in her arms!”

Out came a well-worn case, and Dick proudly displayed the likeness of a stout, much bejewelled young woman, with two staring infants on her knee. In his sight, the poor picture was a more perfect work of art than any of Sir Joshua’s baby-beauties, or Raphael’s Madonnas, and the little story needed no better sequel than the young father’s praises of his twins, the covert kiss he gave their mother when he turned as if to get a clearer light upon the face. Ashamed to show the tenderness that filled his honest heart, he hummed “Kingdom Coming,” while relighting his cigar, and presently began to talk again.

“Now, then, Flint, it’s your turn to keep guard, and Thorn’s to tell his romance. Come, don’t try to shirk; it does a man good to talk of such things, and we’re all mates here.”

“In some cases it don’t do any good to talk of such things; better let ‘em alone,” muttered Thorn, as he reluctantly sat down, while Flint as reluctantly departed.

With a glance and gesture of real affection, Phil laid his hand upon his comrade’s knee, saying, in his persuasive voice, “Old fellow, it *will* do you good, because I know you often long to speak of something that weighs upon you. You’ve kept us steady many a time, and done us no end of kindnesses; why be too proud to let us give our sympathy in return, if nothing more?”

Thorn’s big hand closed over the slender one upon his knee, and the mild expression, so rarely seen upon his face, passed over it as he replied, —

“I think I could tell you almost anything if you asked me that way, my boy. It isn’t that I’m too proud, — and you’re right about my sometimes wanting to free my mind, — but it’s because a man of forty don’t just like to open out to young fellows, if there is any danger of their laughing at him, though he may deserve it. I guess there isn’t now, and I’ll tell you how I found my wife.”

Dick sat up, and Phil drew nearer, for the earnestness that was in the man dignified his plain speech, and inspired an interest in his history, even before it was begun. Looking gravely at the river and never at his hearers, as if still a little shy of confidants, yet grateful for the relief of words, Thorn began abruptly, —

"I never hear the number eighty-four without clapping my hand to my left breast and missing my badge. You know I was on the police in New York, before the war, and that's about all you do know yet. One bitter cold night, I was going my rounds for the last time, when, as I turned a corner, I saw there was a trifle of work to be done. It was a bad part of the city, full of dirt and deviltry; one of the streets led to a ferry, and at the corner an old woman had an apple-stall. The poor soul had dropped asleep, worn out with the cold, and there were her goods left, with no one to watch 'em. Somebody was watching 'em, however; a girl, with a ragged shawl over her head, stood at the mouth of an alley close by, waiting for a chance to grab something. I'd seen her there when I went by before, and mistrusted she was up to some mischief; as I turned the corner, she put out her hand and cribbed an apple. She saw me the minute she did it, but neither dropped it nor ran, only stood stocks still with the apple in her hand till came up.

"'This won't do, my girl,' said I. I never could be harsh with 'em, poor things! She laid it back and looked up at me with a miserable sort of a smile, that made me put my hand in my pocket to fish for a ninepence before she spoke.

"'I know it won't,' she says. 'I didn't want to do it, it's so mean, but I'm awful hungry, sir.'

"'Better run home and get your supper then.'

"'I've got no home.'

"'Where do you live?'

"'In the street.'

"'Where do you sleep?'

"'Anywhere; last night in the lock-up, and I thought I'd get in there again, if I did that when you saw me. I like to go there, it's warm and safe.'

"'If I don't take you there, what will you do?'

"'Don't know. I want to go over there and dance again, as I used to; but being sick has made me ugly, so they won't have me, and no one else will take me because I have been there once.'

"I looked where she pointed, and thanked the Lord that they wouldn't take her. It was one of those low theatres that do so much damage to the like of her; there was a gambling den one side of it, an eating saloon the other, and at the door of it lounged a scamp I knew very well, looking like a big spider watching for a fly. I longed to fling my billy at him; but as I couldn't, I held on to the girl. I was new to the thing then, but though I'd heard about hunger and homelessness often enough, I'd never had this sort of thing, nor seen that look on a girl's face. A white, pinched face hers was, with frighted, tired-looking eyes, but so innocent; she wasn’t more than sixteen, had been pretty once I saw, looked sick and starved now, and seemed just the most helpless, hopeless little thing that ever was.

"‘You’d better come to the Station for to-night, and we’ll see to you to-morrow,’ says I.

"‘Thank you, sir,’ says she, looking as grateful as if I’d asked her home. I suppose I did speaks kind of fatherly. I ain’t ashamed to say I felt so, seeing what a child she was; nor to own that when she put her little hand in mine, it hurt me to feel how thin and cold it was. We passed the eating-house where the red lights made her face as rosy as it ought to have been; there was meat and pies in the window, and the poor thing stopped to look. It was too much for her; off came her shawl, and she said in that coaxing way of hers, —

"‘I wish you’d let me stop at the place close by and sell this; they’ll give a little for it, and I’ll get some supper. I’ve had nothing since yesterday morning, and maybe cold is easier to bear than hunger.’

"‘Have you nothing better than that to sell?” I says, not quite sure that she wasn’t all a humbug, like so many of ‘em. She seemed to see that, and looked up at me again with such innocent eyes, I couldn’t doubt her when she said, shivering with something beside the cold, —

"‘Nothing but myself.’ Then the tears came, and she laid her head down on my arm, sobbing, — ’Keep me! oh, do keep me safe somewhere!’“

Thorn choked here, steadied his voice with a resolute hem! but could only add one sentence more:

“That’s how I found my wife.”

“Come, don’t stop thar? I told the whole o’ mine, you do the same.
Whar did you take her? how’d it all come round?”

“Please tell us, Thorn.”

The gentler request was answered presently, very steadily, very quietly.

“I was always a soft-hearted fellow, though you wouldn’t think it now, and when that little girl asked me to keep her safe, I just did it. I took her to a good woman whom I knew, for I hadn’t any women belonging to me, nor any place but that to put her in. She stayed there till spring working for her keep, growing brighter, prettier, every day, and fonder of me I thought. If I believed in witchcraft, I shouldn’t think myself such a cursed fool as I do now, but I don’t believe in it, and to this day I can’t understand how I came to do it. To be sure I was a lonely man, without kith or kin, had never had a sweetheart in my life, or been much with women since my mother died. Maybe that’s why I was so bewitched with Mary, for she had little ways with her that took your fancy and made you love her whether you would or no. I found her father was an honest fellow enough, a fiddler in the some theatre, that he’d taken good care of Mary till he died, leaving precious little but advice for her to live on. She’d tried to get work, failed, spent all she had, got sick, and was going to the devil, as the poor souls can hardly help doing with so many ready to give them a shove. It’s no use trying to make a bad job better; so the long and short of it was, I thought she loved me; God knows I loved her, and I married her before the year was out.”

“Show us her picture; I know you’ve got one; all the fellows have, though half of ‘em won’t own up.”

“I’ve only got part of one. I once saved my little girl, and her picture once saved me.”

From an inner pocket Thorn produced a woman’s housewife, carefully untied it, though all its implements were missing but a little thimble and from one of its compartments took a flattened bullet and the remnants of a picture.

“I gave her that the first Christmas after I found her. She wasn’t as tidy about her clothes as I liked to see, and I thought if I gave her a handy thing like this, she’d be willing to sew. But she only made one shirt for me, and then got tired, so I keep it like an old fool, as I am. Yes, that’s the bit of lead that would have done for me, if Mary’s likeness hadn’t been just where it was.”

“You’ll like to show her this when you go home, won’t you?” said Dick, as he took up the bullet, while Phil examined the marred picture, and Thorn poised the little thimble on his big finger, with a sigh.

“How can I, when I don’t know where she is, and camp is all the home I’ve got?”

The words broke from him like a sudden cry, when some old wound is rudely touched. Both of the young men started, both laid back the relics they had taken up, and turned their eyes from Thorn’s face, across which swept a look of shame and sorrow, too significant to be misunderstood. Their silence assured him of their sympathy, and, as if that touch of friendlessness unlocked his heavy heart, he eased it by a full confession. When he spoke again, it was with the calmness of repressed emotion; and calmness more touching to his mates than the most passionate outbreak, the most pathetic lamentation; for the coarse camp-phrases seemed to drop from his vocabulary; more than once his softened voice grew tremulous, and to the words “my little girl,” there went a tenderness that proved how dear a place she still retained in that deep heart of his.

"Boys, I've gone so far; I may as well finish; and you'll see I'm not without some cause for my stern looks and ways; you'll pity me, and from you I'll take the comfort of it. It's only the old story, — I married her, worked for her, lived for her, and kept my little girl like a lady. I should have known that I was too old, too sober, for a young thing like that; the life she led before the pinch came just suited her. She liked to be admired, to dress and dance and make herself pretty for all the world to see; not to keep house for a quiet man like me. Idleness wasn't good for her, it bred discontent; then some of her old friends, who'd left her in her trouble, found her out when better times came round, and tried to get her back again. I was away all day, I didn't know how things were going, and she wasn't open with me, afraid, she said; I was so grave, and hated theatres so. She got courage, finally, to tell me that she wasn't happy; that she wanted to dance again, and asked me if she mightn't. I'd rather have had her ask me to put her in a fire, for I *did* hate theatres, and was bred to; others think they're no harm. I do; and knew it was a bad life for a girl like mine. It pampers vanity, and vanity is the Devil's help with such; so I said No, kindly at first, sharp and stern when she kept on teasing. That roused her spirit. 'I will go!' she said, one day. 'Not while you're my wife,' I answered back; and neither said any more, but she gave me a look I didn't think she could, and I resolved to take her away from temptation before worse came of it.

"I didn't tell her my plan; but I resigned my place, spent a week or more finding and fixing a little home for her out in the wholesome country, where she'd be safe from theatres and disreputable friends, and maybe learn to love me better when she saw how much she was to me. It was coming summer, and I made things look as home-like and as pretty as I could. She liked flowers, and I fixed a garden for her; she was fond of pets, and I got her a bird, a kitten, and a dog to play with her; she fancied gay colors and tasty little matters, so I filled her rooms with all the handsome things I could afford, and when it was done, I was as pleased as any boy, thinking what happy times we'd have together and how pleased she'd be. Boys, when I went to tell her and to take her to her little home, she was gone."

"Who with?"

"With those cursed friends of hers; a party of them left the city just then; she was wild to go; she had money now, and all her good looks back again. They teased and tempted her; I wasn't there to keep her, and she went, leaving a line behind to tell me that she loved the old life more than the new; that my house was a prison, and she hoped I'd let her go in peace. That almost killed me; but I managed to bear it, for I knew most of the fault was mine; but it was awful bitter to think I hadn't saved her, after all."

“Oh, Thorn! what did you do?”

“Went straight after her; found her dancing in Philadelphia, with paint on her cheeks, trinkets on her neck and arms, looking prettier than ever; but the innocent eyes were gone, and I couldn’t see my little girl in the bold, handsome woman twirling there before the footlights. She saw me, looked scared at first, then smiled, and danced on with her eyes upon me, as if she said, —

“‘See! I’m happy now; go away and let me be.’

“I couldn’t stand that, and got out somehow. People thought me mad, or drunk; I didn’t care, I only wanted to see her once in quiet and try to get her home. I couldn’t do it then nor afterwards by fair means, and I wouldn’t try force. I wrote to her, promised to forgive her, begged her to come back, or let me keep her honestly somewhere away from me. But she never answered, never came, and I have never tried again.”

“She wasn’t worthy of you, Thorn; you jest forgit her.”

“I wish I could! I wish I could!” in his voice quivered an almost passionate regret, and a great sob heaved his chest, as he turned his face away to hide the love and longing, still so tender and so strong.

“Don’t say that, Dick; such fidelity should make us charitable for its own sake. There is always time for penitence, always a certainty of pardon. Take heart, Thorn, you may not wait in vain, and she may yet return to you.”

“I know she will! I’ve dreamed of it, I’ve prayed for it; every battle I come out of safe makes me surer that I was kept for that, and when I’ve borne enough to atone for my part of the fault, I’ll be repaid for all my patience, all my pain, by finding her again. She knows how well I love her still, and if there comes a time when she is sick and poor and all alone again, then she’ll remember her old John, then she’ll come home and let me take her in.”

Hope shone in Thorn’s melancholy eyes, and long-suffering all-forgiving love beautified the rough, brown face, as he folded his arms and bent his gray head on his breast, as if the wanderer were already come.

The emotion which Dick scorned to show on his own account was freely manifested for another, as he sniffed audibly, and, boy-like, drew his sleeve across his eyes. But Phil, with the delicate perception of a finer nature, felt that the truest kindness he could show his friend was to distract his thoughts from himself, to spare him any comments, and lessen the embarrassment which would surely follow such unwonted confidence.

“Now I’ll relieve Flint, and he will give you a laugh. Come on Hiram and tell us about your Beulah.”

The gentleman addressed had performed his duty, by sitting on a fence and “righting up” his pockets, to beguile the tedium of his exile. Before his multitudinous possessions could be restored to their native sphere, Thorn was himself again, and on his feet.

“Stay where you are Phil; I like to tramp, it seems like old times, and I know you’re tired. Just forget all this I’ve been saying, and go on as before. Thank you, boys! thank you!” and with a grasp of the two hands extended to him, he strode away along the path already worn by his own restless feet.

“It’s done him good, and I’m glad of that; but I’d like to see the little baggage that bewitched the poor old boy, wouldn’t you, Phil?”

“Hush! here’s Flint.”

“What’s up naow? want me tew address the meetin’, hey? I’m willin’, only the laugh’s ruther ag’inst me, ef I tell that story; expect yeu’ll like it all the better fer that.” Flint coiled up his long limbs, put his hands in his pockets, chewed meditatively for a moment, and then began with his slowest drawl —

“Waal, sir, it’s pretty nigh ten year ago, I was damster daown tew Oldtaown, clos’t tew Banggore. My folks lived tew Bethel; there was only the old man, and Aunt Siloam, keepin’ house fer him, seein’ as I was the only chick he hed. I hedn’t heared from ‘em fer a long spell, when there come a letter sayin’ the old man was breakin’ up. He’d said it every spring fer a number er years, and I didn’t mind it no more’n the breakin’ up er the river; not so much jest then; fer the gret spring drive was comin’ on, and my hands was tew full to quit work all tew oncet. I sent word I’d be ‘long fore a gret while, and bymeby I went. I ought tew hev gone at fust; but they’d sung aout ‘Wolf!’ so often I wasn’t scared; an’ sure ‘nuff the wolf did come at last. Father hed been dead an’ berried a week when I got there, and aunt was so mad she wouldn’t write, nor scurcely speak tew me fer a consider’ble spell. I didn’t blame her a mite, and felt jest the wust kind; so I give in every way, and fetched her raound. Yeou see I hed a cousin who’d kind er took my place tew hum while I was off, an’ the old man hed left him a good slice er his money, an’ me the farm, hopin’ to keep me there. He’d never liked the lumberin’ bizness, an’ hankered arfter me a sight, I faound. Waal, seein’ haow ‘twas, I tried tew please him, late as it was; but ef there was ennything I did spleen ag’inst, it was farmin, ‘specially arfter the smart times I’d ben hevin, up Oldtaown way. Yeou don’t know nothin’ abaout it; but ef yeou want tew see high dewin’s, jest hitch onto a timber-drive an’ go it daown along them lakes and rivers, say from Kaumchenungamooth tew Punnobscot Bay. Guess yeou’d see a thing or tew, an’ find livin’ on a log come as handy as ef yeou was born a turtle.

“Waal, I stood it one summer; but it was the longest kind of a job. Come fall I turned contrary, darned the farm, and vaowed I’d go back tew loggin’. Aunt hed got fond er me by that time, and felt dreadful bad abaout my leavin’ on her.

Cousin Siah, as we called Josiah, didn’t cotton tew the old woman, though he did tew her cash; but we hitched along fust-rate. She was ‘tached tew the place, hated tew hev it let or sold, thought I’d go to everlastin’ rewin ef I took tew lumberin’ ag’in, an’ hevin’ a tidy little sum er money all her own, she took a notion tew buy me off. ‘Hiram,’ sez she, ‘ef yeou’ll stay tew hum, merry some smart gal, an’ kerry on the farm, I’ll leave yeou the hull er my fortin. Ef yeou don’t, I’ll leave every cent on’t tew Siah, though he ain’t done as waal by me as yeou hev. Come,’ sez she, ‘I’m breakin’ up like brother; I shan’t wurry any one a gret while, and ‘fore spring I dessay you’ll hev cause tew rejice that yeou done as Aunt Si counselled yeou.’

“Now, that idee kinder took me, seein’ I hedn’t no overpaourin’ love fer cousin; but I brewdid over it a spell ‘fore I ‘greed. Fin’lly, I said I’d dew it, as it warn’t a hard nor a bad trade; and begun to look raound fer Mis Flint, Jr. Aunt was dreadf’l pleased; but ‘mazin pertickler as tew who was goan tew stan’ in her shoes, when she was fetched up ag’inst the etarnal boom. There was a sight er lovely women-folks raound taown; but aunt she set her foot daown that Mis Flint must be smart, pious, an’ good-natered; harnsome she didn’t say nothin’ abaout, bein’ the humliest woman in the State er Maine. I hed my own calk’lations on that pint, an’ went sparkin’ two or three er the pootiest gals, all that winter. I warn’t in no hurry, fer merryin’ is an awful resky bizness; an’ I warn’t goan to be took in by nobuddy. Some haouw I couldn’t make up my mind which I’d hev, and kept dodgin’, all ready to slew raound, an’ hitch on tew ary one that seemed likeliest. ‘Long in March, aunt, she ketched cold, took tew her bed, got wuss, an’ told me tew hurry up, fer nary red should I hev, ef I warn’t safely merried ‘fore she stepped out. I thought that was ruther craoudin’ a feller; but I see she was goan sure, an’ I’d got intew a way er considerin’ the cash mine, so that it come hard to hear abaout givin’ on’t up. Off I went that evenin’ an’ asked Almiry Nash ef she’d hev me. No, she wouldn’t; I’d shilly-shallyed so long, she’d got tired er waitin’ and took tew keepin’ company with a doctor daown tew Bang-gore, where she’d ben visitin’ a spell. I didn’t find that as hard a rub to swaller, as I’d a thought I would, though Almiry was the richest, pootiest, and good-naterest of the lot. Aunt larfed waal, an’ told me tew try agin; so a couple er nights arfter, I spruced up, an’ went over to Car’line Miles’s; she was as smart as old cheese, an’ waal off intew the barg’in. I was just as sure she’d hev me, as I be that I’m gittin’ the rewmatiz a settin’ in this ma’sh. But that minx, Almiry, hed ben and let on abaout her own sarsy way er servin’ on me, an’ Car’line jest up an’ said she warn’t goan to hev annybuddy’s leavin’s; so daown I come ag’in.

“Things was gettin’ desper’t by that time; for aunt was failin’ rapid, an’ the story hed leaked aout some way, so the hull taown was gigglin’ over it. I thought

I’d better quit them parts; but aunt she showed me her will all done complete, ‘sceptin’ the fust name er the legatee. ‘There,’ sez she, ‘it all depends on yeou, whether that place is took by Hiram or Josiah. It’s easy done, an’ so it’s goan tew stan’ till the last minnit.’ That riled me consid’able, an’ I streaked off tew May Jane Simlin’s. She want very waal off, nor extra harnsome, but she was pious the wust kind, an’ dreadf’l clever to them she fancied. But I was daown on my luck agin; fer at the fust word I spoke of merryin’, she showed me the door, an’ give me to understan’ that she couldn’t think er hevin’ a man that warn’t a church-member, that hadn’t experienced religion, or even ben struck with conviction, an’ all the rest on’t. Ef anny one hed a wanted tew hev seen a walkin’ hornet’s nest, they could hev done it cheap that night, as I went hum. I jest stramed intew the kitchen, chucked my hat intew one corner, my coat intew ‘nother, kicked the cat, cussed the fire, drawed up a chair, and set scaoulin’ like sixty, bein’ tew mad for talkin’. The young woman that was nussin’ aunt, — Bewlah Blish, by name, — was a cookin’ grewel on the coals, and ‘peared tew understan’ the mess I was in; but she didn’t say nothin’, only blowed up the fire, fetched me a mug er cider, an’ went raound so kinder quiet, and sympathizin’, that I faound the wrinkles in my temper gettin’ smoothed aout ‘mazin’ quick; an’ ‘fore long I made a clean breast er the hull thing. Bewlah larfed, but I didn’t mind her doin’ on’t, for she sez, sez she, real sort o’ cunnin’, —

“‘Poor Hiram! they didn’t use yeou waal. Yeou ought to hev tried some er the poor an’ humly girls; they’d a’ been glad an’ grateful fer such a sweetheart as yeou be.’

“I was good-natered agin by that time, an’ I sez, larfin’ along with her, ‘Waal I’ve got three mittens, but I guess I might’s waal hev ‘nother, and that will make two pair complete. Say, Bewlah, will yeou hev me?’

“‘Yes, I will,’ sez she.

“‘Reelly?’ sez I.

“‘Solemn trew,’ sez she.

“Ef she’d up an’ slapped me in the face, I shouldn’t hev ben more throwed aback, fer I never mistrusted she cared two chips for me. I jest set an’ gawped; fer she was solemn trew, I see that with half an eye, an’ it kinder took my breath away. Bewlah drawed the grewel off the fire, wiped her hands, an’ stood lookin’ at me a minnet, then she sez, slow an’ quiet, but tremblin’ a little, as women hev a way er doin’, when they’ve consid’able steam aboard, —

“‘Hiram, other folks think lumberin’ has spilt yeou; I don’t; they call yeou rough an’ rewd; I know you’ve got a real kind heart fer them as knows haow tew find it. Them girls give yeou up so easy, ‘cause they never loved yeou, an’ yeou give them up ‘cause yeou only thought abaout their looks an’ money. I’m humly, an’ I’m poor; but I’ve loved yeou ever sence we went a-nuttin’ years ago, an’ yeou shook daown fer me, kerried my bag, and kissed me tew the gate, when all the others shunned me, ‘cause my father drank an’ I was shably dressed, ugly, an’ shy. Yeou asked me in sport, I answered in airnest; but I don’t expect nothin’ unless yeou mean as I mean. Like me, Hiram, or leave me, it won’t make no odds in my lovin’ er yeou, nor helpin’ er yeou, ef I kin.’

“‘Tain’t easy tew say haouw I felt, while she was goin’ on that way; but my idees was tumblin’ raound inside er me, as ef half a dozen dams was broke loose all tew oncet. One thing was ruther stiddier ‘n the rest, an’ that was that I liked Bewlah morn’n I knew. I begun tew see what kep me loopin’ tew hum so much, sence aunt was took daown; why I want in no hurry tew git them other gals, an’ haow I come tew pocket my mittens so easy arfter the fust rile was over. Bewlah was humly, poor in flesh, dreadful freckled, hed red hair, black eyes, an’ a gret mold side er her nose. But I’d got wonted tew her; she knowed my ways, was a fust rate housekeeper, real good-tempered, and pious without flingin’ on’t in yer face. She was a lonely creeter, — her folks bein’ all dead but one sister, who didn’t use her waal, an’ somehow I kinder yearned over her, as they say in Scripter. For all I set an’ gawped, I was coming raound fast, though I felt as I used tew, when I was goin’ to shoot the rapids, kinder breathless an’ oncertin, whether Id come aout right side up or not. Queer, warn’t it?”

“Love, Flint; that was a sure symptom of it.”

“Waal, guess ‘twas; anyway I jumped up all er a sudden, ketched Bewlah raound the neck, give her a hearty kiss, and sung aout, ‘I’ll dew it sure’s my name’s Hi Flint!’ The words was scurcely aout er my maouth, ‘fore daown come Dr. Parr. He’d ben up tew see aunt, an’ said she wouldn’t last the night threw, prob’ly. That give me a scarer the wust kind; an’ when I told doctor haow things was, he sez, kinder jokin’, —

“‘Better git merried right away, then. Parson Dill is tew come an’ see the old lady, an’ he’ll dew both jobs tew oncet.’

“‘Will yeou, Bewlah?’ sez I.

“‘Yes, Hiram, to ‘blige yeou,’ sez she.

“With that, I put it fer the parson and the license; got ‘em both, an’ was back in less’n half an haour, most tuckered aout with the flurry er the hull concern. Quick as I’d been, Bewlah hed faound time tew whip on her best gaoun, fix up her hair, and put a couple er white chrissanthymums intew her hank’chif pin. Fer the fust time in her life, she looked harnsome, — leastways I thought so, — with a pretty color in her cheeks, somethin’ brighter’n a larf shinin’ in her eyes, an’ her lips smilin’ an’ tremblin’, as she come to me an’ whispered so’s’t none er the rest could hear, —

"'Hiram, don't yeou dew it, ef yeou'd ruther not. I've stood it a gret while alone, an' I guess I can ag'in.'

"Never yeou mind what I said or done abaout that; but we was married ten minutes arfter, 'fore the kitchen fire, with Dr. Parr an' oaur hired man, fer witnesses; an' then we all went up tew aunt. She was goan fast, but she understood what I told her, hed strength tew fill up the hole in the will, an' to say, a-kissin' Bewlah, 'Yeou'll be a good wife, an' naouw yeou ain't a poor one.'

"I couldn't help givin' a peek tew the will, and there I see not Hiram Flint, nor Josiah Flint, but Bewlah Flint, wrote every which way, but as plain as the nose on yer face. 'It won't make no odds dear,' whispered my wife, peekin' over my shoulder. 'Guess it won't!' sez I, aout laoud; 'I'm glad on't, and it ain't a cent more'n yeou derserve.'

"That pleased aunt. 'Riz me, Hiram,' sez she; an' when I'd got her easy, she put her old arms raound my neck, an' tried to say, 'God bless you, dear — ,' but died a doin' of it; an' I ain't ashamed tew say I boo-hooed real hearty, when I laid her daown, fer she was dreadf'l good tew me, an' I don't forgit her in a hurry."

"How's Bewlah?" asked Dick, after the little tribute of respect all paid to Aunt Siloam's memory, by a momentary silence.

"Fust-rate! that harum scarum venter er mine was the best I ever made. She's done waal by me, hes Bewlah; ben a grand good haousekeeper, kin kerry on the farm better'n me, any time, an' is as dutif'l an' lovin' a wife as, — waal as annything that *is* extra dutif'l and lovin'."

"Got any boys to brag of?"

"We don't think much o' boys daown aour way; they're 'mazin resky stock to fetch up, — alluz breakin' baounds, gittin' intew the paound, and wurry your life aout somehaow 'nother. Gals naow doos waal; I got six o' the likeliest the is goin', every one on 'em is the very moral of Bewlah, — red hair, black eyes, quiet ways, an' a mold side the nose. Baby's ain't growed yet; but I expect tew see it in a consid'able state o' forrardness, when I git hum, an' wouldn't miss it fer the world."

The droll expressions of Flint's face, and the satisfied twang of his last words, were irresistable. Dick and Phil went off into a shout of laughter; and even Thorn's grave lips relapsed into a smile at the vision of six little Flints with their six little moles. As if the act were an established ceremony, the "paternal head" produced his pocket-book, selected a worn, black and white paper, which he spread in his broad palm, and displayed with the air of a connoisseur.

"There, thets Bewlah! we call it a cuttin'; but the proper name's a silly-hoot I b'leeve. I've got a harnsome big degarrytype tew hum but the heft on't makes it bad tew kerry raound, so I took this. I don't tote it abaout inside my shirt as some dew, — it aint my way; but I keep it in my puss long with my other valleu'bles, and guess I set as much stoxe by it as ef it was all painted up, and done off to keell."

The "silly-hoot" was examined with interest, and carefully stowed away again in the old brown wallet which was settled in its place with a satisfied slap, then Flint said briskly, —

"Naouw, Phil, yeou close this interestin' and instructive meeting; and be spry, fer time's most up."

"I haven't much to tell, but must begin with a confession which I have often longed but never dared to make before, because I am a coward."

"Sho! who's goan to b'leeve that o' a man who fit like a wild cat, wuz offered fer permotion on the field, and wuz reported tew headquarters arfter his fust scrimmage. Try ag'in, Phil."

"Physical courage is as plentiful as brass buttons, nowadays, but moral courage is a rarer virtue; and I'm lacking in it, as I'll prove. You think me a Virginian; I'm an Alabamian by birth, and was a reb three months ago."

This confession startled his hearers, as he knew it would, for he had kept his secret well. Thorn laid his hand involuntarily upon his rifle, Dick drew off a little, and Flint illustrated one of his own expressions, for he "gawped." Phil laughed that musical laugh of his, and looked up at them with his dark face waking into sudden life as he went on: —

"There's no treason in the camp, for I'm as fierce a Federalist as any of you now, and you may thank a woman for it. When Lee made his raid into Pennsylvania, I was a lieutenant in the — well, never mind what regiment, it hasn't signalized itself since, and I'd rather not hit my old neighbors when they are down. In one of the skirmishes during our retreat, I got a wound and was left for dead. A kind old Quaker found and took me home; but though I was too weak to talk, I had my senses by that time, and knew what went on about me. Everything was in confusion, even in that well-ordered place; no surgeon could be got at first, and a flock of frightened women thee'd and thou'd one another over me, but hadn't wit enough to see that I was bleeding to death. Among the faces that danced before my dizzy eyes was one that seemed familiar, probably because no cap surrounded it. I was glad to have it bending over me, to hear a steady voice say, 'Give me a bandage, quick!' and when none was instantly forthcoming to me, the young lady stripped up a little white apron she wore, and stanched the wound in my shoulder. I was not as badly hurt as I supposed, but so worn-out, and faint from loss of blood, they believed me to be dying, and so did I, when the old man took off his hat and said, —

"'Friend, if thee has anything to say, thee had better say it, for thee probably has not long to live.'

"I thought of my little sister, far away in Alabama, fancied she came to me, and muttered, 'Amy, kiss me, good-by.' The women sobbed at that; but the girl bent her sweet compassionate face to mine, and kissed me on the forehead. That was my wife."

"So you seceded from Secession right away, to pay for that lip-service, hey?"

"No, Thorn, not right away, — to my shame be it spoken. I'll tell you how it came about. Margaret was not old Bent's daughter, but a Virginia girl on a visit, and a long one it proved, for she couldn't go till things were quieter. While she waited, she helped take care of me; for the good souls petted me like a baby when they found that a Rebel could be a gentleman. I held my tongue, and behaved my best to prove my gratitude, you know. Of course, I loved Margaret very soon. How could I help it? She was the sweetest woman I had ever seen, tender, frank, and spirited; all I had ever dreamed of and longed for. I did not speak of this, nor hope for a return, because I knew she was a hearty Unionist, and thought she only tended me from pity. But suddenly she decided to go home, and when I ventured to wish she would stay longer, she would not listen, and said, 'I must not stay; I should have gone before.'"

"The words were nothing, but as she uttered them the color came up beautifully over all her face, and her eyes filled as they looked away from mine. Then I knew that she loved me, and my secret broke out half against my will. Margaret was forced to listen, for I would not let her go, but she seemed to harden herself against me, growing colder, stiller, statelier, as I went on, and when I said in my desperate way, —

"'You should love me, for we are bid to love our enemies,' she flashed an indignant look at me and said, —

"'I will not love what I cannot respect! Come to me a loyal man, and see what answer I shall give you.'

"Then she went away. It was the wisest thing she could have done, for absence did more to change me than an ocean of tears, a year of exhortations. Lying there, I missed her every hour of the day, recalled every gentle act, kind word, and fair example she had given me. I contrasted my own belief with hers, and found a new significance in the words honesty and honor, and, remembering her fidelity to principle, was ashamed of my own treason to God and to herself. Education, prejudice, and interest, are difficult things to overcome, and that was the hottest fight I ever passed through, for, as I tell you, I was a coward. But love and loyalty won the day, and, asking no quarter, the Rebel surrendered."

"Phil Beaufort, you're a brick!" cried Dick, with a sounding slap on his comrade’s shoulder.

“A brand snatched from the burnin’. Hallelujah!” chanted Flint, seesawing with excitement.

“Then you went to find your wife? How? Where?” asked Thorn, forgetting vigilance in interest.

“Friend Bent hated war so heartily that he would have nothing to do with paroles, exchanges, or any martial process whatever, but bade me go when and where I liked, remembering to do by others as I had been done by. Before I was well enough to go, however, I managed, by means of Copperhead influence and returned prisoners, to send a letter to my father and receive an answer. You can imagine what both contained; and so I found myself penniless, but not poor, an outcast, but not alone. Old Bent treated me like a prodigal son, and put money in my purse; his pretty daughters loved me for Margaret’s sake, and gave me a patriotic salute all round when I left them, the humblest, happiest man in Pennsylvania. Margaret once said to me that this was the time for deeds, not words; that no man should stand idle, but serve the good cause with head, heart, and hand, no matter in what rank; for in her eyes a private fighting for liberty was nobler than a dozen generals defending slavery. I remembered that, and, not having influential friends to get me a commission, enlisted in one of her own Virginia regiments, knowing that no act of mine would prove my sincerity like that. You should have seen her face when I walked in upon her, as she sat alone, busied with the army work, as I’d so often seen her sitting by my bed; it showed me all she had been suffering in silence, all I should have lost had I chosen darkness instead of light. She hoped and feared so much she could not speak, neither could I, but dropped my cloak, and showed her that, through love of her, I had become a soldier of the Flag. How I love the coarse blue uniform! for when she saw it, she came to me without a word and kept her promise in a month.”

“Thunder! what a harnsome woman!” exclaimed Flint, as Phil, opening the golden case that held his talisman, showed them the beautiful, beloved face of which be spoke.

“Yes! and a right noble woman too. I don’t deserve her, but I will. We parted on our wedding-day, for orders to be off came suddenly, and she would not let me go until I had given her my name to keep. We were married in the morning, and at noon I had to go. Other women wept as we marched through the town, but my brave Margaret kept her tears till we were gone, smiling, and waving her hand to me, — the hand that wore the wedding-ring, — till I was out of sight. That image of her is before me day and night, and day and night her last words are ringing in my ears, —

"'I give you freely, do your best. Better a true man's widow than a traitor's wife.'

"Boys, I've only stood on the right side for a month; I've only fought one battle, earned one honor; but I believe these poor achievements are an earnest of the long atonement I desire to make for five and twenty years of blind transgression. You say I fight well. Have I not cause to dare much? — for in owning many slaves, I too became a slave; in helping to make many freemen, I liberate myself. You wonder why I refused promotion. Have I any right to it yet? Are there not men who never sinned as I have done, and beside whose sacrifices mine look pitifully small? You tell me I have no ambition. I have the highest, for I desire to become God's noblest work, — an honest man, — living, to make Margaret happy, in a love that every hour grows worthier of her own, — dying, to make death proud to take me."

Phil had risen while he spoke, as if the enthusiasm of his mood lifted him into the truer manhood he aspired to attain. Straight and strong he stood up in the moonlight, his voice deepened by unwonted energy, his eye clear and steadfast, his whole face ennobled by the regenerating power of this late loyalty to country, wife, and self, and bright against the dark blue of his jacket shone the pictured face, the only medal he was proud to wear.

Ah, brave, brief moment, cancelling years of wrong! Ah, fair and fatal decoration, serving as a mark for a hidden foe! The sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness of the night, and with those hopeful words upon his lips, the young man sealed his purpose with his life.

THE KING OF CLUBS AND THE QUEEN OF HEARTS.

A STORY FOR YOUNG AMERICA.

FIVE and twenty ladies, all in a row, sat on one side of the hall, looking very much as if they felt like the little old woman who fell asleep on the king's highway and awoke with abbreviated drapery, for they were all arrayed in gray tunics and Turkish continuations, profusely adorned with many-colored trimmings. Five and twenty gentleman, all in a row, sat on the opposite side of the hall, looking somewhat subdued, as men are apt to do when they fancy they are in danger of making fools of themselves. They, also, were *en* costume, for all the dark ones had grown piratical in red shirts, the light ones nautical in blue; and a few boldly appeared in white, making up in starch and studs what they lost in color, while all were more or less Byronic as to collar.

On the platform appeared a pile of dumb-bells, a regiment of clubs, and a pyramid of bean-bags, and stirring nervously among them a foreign-looking gentleman, the new leader of a class lately formed by Dr. Thor Turner, whose mission it was to strengthen the world's spine, and convert it to a belief in air and exercise, by setting it to balancing its poles and spinning merrily, while enjoying the "Sun-cure" on a large scale. His advent formed an epoch in the history of the town; for it was a quiet old village, guiltless of bustle, fashion, or parade, where each man stood for what he was; and, being a sagacious set, every one's true value was pretty accurately known. It was a neighborly town, with gossip enough to stir the social atmosphere with small gusts of interest or wonder, yet do no harm. A sensible, free-and-easy town, for the wisest man in it wore the worst boots, and no one thought the less of his understanding; the belle of the village went shopping with a big sun-bonnet and tin pail, and no one found her beauty lessened; oddities of all sorts ambled peacefully about on their various hobbies, and no one suggested the expediency of a trip on the wooden horse upon which the chivalrous South is always eager to mount an irrepressible abolitionist. Restless people were soothed by the lullaby the river sang in its slow journey to the sea, old people found here a pleasant place to make ready to die in, young people to survey the world from, before taking their first flight, and strangers looked back upon it, as a quiet nook full of ancient legends and modern lights, which would keep its memory green when many a gayer spot was quite forgotten. Anything based upon common sense found favor with the inhabitants, and Dr. Turner's theories, being eminently so, were accepted at once and energetically carried out. A sort of heathen revival took place, for even the ministers and deacons turned Musclemen; old ladies tossed bean-bags till their caps were awry, and winter roses blossomed on their cheeks; school-children proved the worth of the old proverb, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," by getting their backs ready before the burdens came; pale girls grew blithe and strong swinging their dumb namesakes; and jolly lads marched to and fro embracing clubs as if longevity were corked up in those wooden bottles, and they all took "modest quenchers" by the way.

August Bopp, the new leader of the class, was a German possessing but a small stock of English, though a fine gynmast; and, being also a bashful man, the appointed moment had no sooner arrived than he found his carefully prepared sentences slipping away from his memory as the ice appears to do from under unhappy souls first mounted upon skates. An awful silence reigned; Mr. Bopp glanced nervously over his shoulder at the staring rows, more appalling in their stillness than if they had risen up and hooted at him, then piling up the bags for the seventh time, he gave himself a mental shake, and, with a crimson visage, was about to launch his first "Ladees und gentlemen," when the door opened, and a small, merry-faced figure appeared, looking quite at ease in the novel dress, as, with a comprehensive nod, it marched straight across the hall to its place among the weaker vessels.

A general glance of approbation followed from the gentlemen's side, a welcoming murmur ran along the ladies', and the fifty pairs of eyes changed their focus for a moment. Taking advantage of which, Mr. Bopp righted himself, and burst out with a decided, —

"Ladees und gentlemen: the time have arrived that we shall begin. Will the gentlemen serve the ladees to a wand, each one, then spread theirselves about the hall, and follow the motions I will make as I shall count."

Five minutes of chaos, then all fell into order, and nothing was heard but the leader's voice and the stir of many bodies moving simultaneously. An uninitiated observer would have thought himself in Bedlam; for as the evening wore on, the laws of society seemed given to the winds, and humanity gone mad. Bags flew in all directions, clubs hurtled through the air, and dumb-bells played a castinet accompaniment to peals of laughter that made better music than any band. Old and young gave themselves up to the universal merriment, and, setting dignity aside, played like happy-hearted children for an hour. Stout Dr. Quackenboss gasped twice round the hall on one toe; stately Mrs. Primmins ran like a girl of fifteen to get her pins home before her competitor; Tommy Inches, four feet three, trotted away with Deacon Stone on his shoulder, while Mr. Steepleton and Miss Maypole hopped together like a pair of lively young ostriches, and Ned Amandine, the village beau, blew arrows through a pop-gun, like a modern Cupid in pegtops instead of pinions.

The sprightly young lady whose entrance had been so opportune seemed a universal favorite, and was overwhelmed with invitations to “bag,” “hop,” and “blow” from the gentlemen who hovered about her, cheerfully distorting themselves to the verge of dislocation in order to win a glance of approbation from the merry black eyes which were the tapers where all these muscular moths singed their wings. Mr. Bopp had never seen such a little piece of earnestness before, and began to think the young lady must be training for a boat-race or the ring. Her dumb-bells flew about till a pair of white arms looked like the sails of a windmill; she hit out from the shoulder with a vigor that would have done execution had there been anything but empty air to “punish;” and the “one, two, three!” of the Zouave movement went off with a snap; while the color deepened from pink to scarlet in her cheeks, the black braids tumbled down upon her shoulders, and the clasp of her belt flew asunder; but her eye seldom left the leader’s face, and she followed every motion with an agility and precision quite inspiring. Mr. Bopp’s courage rose as he watched her, and a burning desire to excel took possession of him, till he felt as if his muscles were made of India-rubber, and his nerves of iron. He went into his work heart and soul, shaking a brown mane out of his eyes, issuing commands like general at the head of his troops, and keeping both interest and fun in full blast till people laughed who had not laughed heartily for years; lungs got their fill for once, unsuspected muscles were suddenly developed, and, when the clock struck ten, all were bubbling over with that innocent jollity which makes youth worth possessing, and its memory the sunshine of old age.

The last exercise was drawing to a close, and a large ring of respectable members of society were violently sitting down and rising up in a manner which would have scandalized Miss Wilhelmina Carolina Amelia S. Keggs to the last degree, when Mr. Bopp was seen to grow very pale, and drop in a manner which it was evident his pupils were not expected to follow.

At this unexpected performance, the gentlemen took advantage of their newly-acquired agility to fly over all obstacles and swarm on to the platform, while the ladies successfully lessened their unusual bloom by staring wildly at one another and suggesting awful impossibilities. The bustle subsided, as suddenly as it arose; and Mr. Bopp, rather damp about the head and dizzy about the eye, but quite composed, appeared, saying, with the broken English and appealing manner which caused all the ladies to pronounce him “a dear” on the spot, —

"I hope you will excoose me for making this lesson to be more short than it should; but I have exercise nine hours this day, and being just got well from a illness, I have not recover the strength I have lost. Next week I shall be able to take time by the hair, so that I will not have so much engagements in one day. I thank you for your kindness, and say good-efening."

After a round of applause, as a last vent for their spirits, the class dispersed, and Mr. Bopp was wrestling with a vicious pin as he put on his collar ("a sure sign he has no ma to see to his buttons, poor lamb!" thought Mrs. Fairbairn, watching him from afar); when the sprightly young lady, accompanied by a lad the masculine image of herself, appeared upon the platform, saying, with an aspect as cordial as her words, —

"Good-evening, Professor. Allow me to introduce my brother and myself, Dick and Dolly Ward, and ask you in my mother's name, to come home with us; for the tavern is not a cosy place, and after all this exertion you should be made comfortable. Please come, for Dr. Turner always stayed with us, and we promised to do the honors of the town to any gentleman he might send to supply his place."

"Of course we did; and mother is probably freezing her blessed nose off watching for us; so don't disappoint her, Bopp. It's all settled, the sleigh's at the door, and here's your coat; so, come on!"

Dick was a fine sample of young America in its best aspect, and would have said "How are you?" to Louis Napoleon if he had been at hand, and have done it so heartily that the great Frenchman would have found it hard to resist giving as frank an answer. Therefore no wonder that Mr. Bopp surrendered at once; for the young gentleman took possession of him bodily, and shook him into his coat with an amiable impetuosity which developed a sudden rent in the well-worn sleeve thereof, and caused an expression of dismay, to dawn upon the owner's countenance.

"Beg pardon; never mind; mother'll sew you up in two seconds, and your overcoat will hide the damage. Where is it? I'll get it, and then we'll be off."

Mr. Bopp colored distressfully, looked up, looked down, and then straight into the lad's face, saying simply, —

"Thank you; I haf no coat but one."

Dick opened his eyes, and was about opening his mouth also, for the exit of some blunderingly good-natured reply, when a warning poke from his sister restrained him, while Dolly, with the innocent hypocrisy which is as natural to some women as the art of tying bows, said, as she led the way out, —

"You see the worth of gymnastics, Dick, in this delightful indifference to cold. I sincerely hope we may reach a like enviable state of health, and look upon great-coats as effeminate, and mufflers a weakness of the flesh. Do you think we shall, Mr. Bopp?"

He shook his head with a perceptible shiver as the keen north wind smote him in the face, but answered, with a look half merry, half sad, —

"It is not choice, but what you call necessitee, with me; and I truly hope you may never haf to exercise to keep life in you when you haf sold your coat to pay a doctor's bill, or teach the art of laughing while your heart is heavy as one stone. You would not like that, I think, yet it is good, too; for small things make much happiness for me, and a kind word is often better than a rix dollar."

There was something in the young man's tone and manner which touched and won his hearers at once. Dolly secretly resolved to put an extra blanket on his bed, and shower kind words upon him, while Dick tucked him up in buffalo robes where he sat helplessly beaming down upon the red hood at his side.

A roaring fire shone out hospitably as they came, and glorified the pleasant room, dancing on ancient furniture and pictured walls till the jolly old portraits seemed to wink a visible welcome. A cheery-faced little woman, like an elder Dolly, in a widow's cap, stood on the threshold, with a friendly greeting for the stranger, which warmed him as no fine could have done.

If August Bopp had been an Englishman, he would have felt much, but said less on that account; if he had been an American, he would have tried to conceal his poverty, and impress the family with his past grandeur, present importance, or future prospects; being a German, he showed exactly what he was, with the childlike frankness of his race. Having had no dinner, he ate heartily of what was offered him; being cold, he basked in the generous warmth; being homesick and solitary, he enjoyed the genial influences that surrounded him, and told his story, sure of sympathy; for even in prosaic Yankeedom he had found it, as travellers find Alpine flowers among the snow.

It was a simple story of a laborious boyhood, being early left an orphan, with a little sister dependent on him, till an opening in America tempted him to leave her and come to try and earn a home for her and for himself. Sickness, misfortune, and disappointment had been his companions for a year; but he still worked, still hoped, and waited for the happy hour when little Ulla should come to him across the sea. This was all; yet as he told it, with the magical accompaniments of gesture, look, and tone, it seemed full of pathos and romance to his listeners, whose faces proved their interest more flatteringly than their words.

Mrs. Ward mended the torn coat with motherly zeal, and gave it many of those timely stitches which thrifty women love to sew. The twins devoted themselves to their guest, each in a characteristic manner. Dick, as host, offered every article of refreshment the house afforded, goaded the fire to a perpetual roar, and discussed gymnastics, with bursts of boyish admiration for the grace and skill of his new leader, whom he christened King of Clubs on the spot. Dolly made the stranger one of them at once by talking bad German, as an offset to his bad English, called him Professor in spite of all denials, and unconsciously symbolized his future bondage by giving him a tangled skein to hold for the furtherance of her mother's somewhat lengthened job.

The Cupid of the present day was undoubtedly "raised" in Connecticut; for the ingenuity and shrewdness of that small personage could have sprung from no other soil. In former times his stratagems were of the romantic order. Colin bleated forth his passion in rhyme, and cast sheep's eyes from among his flock, while Phyllis coquetted with her crook and stuck posies in his hat; royal Ferdinand and Miranda played at chess; Ivanhoe upset his fellow-men like ninepins for love of lackadaisical Rowena; and "sweet Moll" turned the pages while her lover, Milton, sang. But in our day the jolly little god, though still a heathen in the severe simplicity of his attire, has become modernized in his arts, and invented huskings, apple-bees, sleigh-rides, "drop-ins," gymnastics, and, among his finer snares, the putting on of skates, drawing of patterns, and holding skeins, — the last-named having superior advantages over the others, as all will testify who have enjoyed one of those hand-to-hand skirmishes.

August Bopp was three and twenty, imaginative, grateful, and heart-whole; therefore, when he found himself sitting opposite a blooming little damsel, with a head, bound by a pretty red snood, bent down before him, and very close to his own a pair of distracting hands, every finger of which had a hit to make, and made it, it is not to be denied that he felt himself entering upon a new and very agreeable experience. Where could he look but in the face opposite, sometimes so girlishly merry and sometimes so beautifully shy? It was a winning face, full of smooth curves, fresh colors, and sunshiny twinkles, — a face every one liked, for it was as changeful as an April day, and always pleasant, whether mischievous, mournful, or demure.

Like one watching a new picture, Mr. Bopp inspected every feature of the countenance so near his own; and, as his admiration "grew by what it fed on," he fell into a chronic state of stammer and blush; for the frank eyes were very kind, the smooth cheeks reflected a pretty shade of his own crimson, and the smiling lips seemed constantly suggesting, with mute eloquence, that they were made for kissing, while the expressive hands picked at the knots till the Professor felt like a very resigned fly in the web of a most enticing young spider.

If the King of Clubs saw a comely face, the Queen of Hearts saw what observing girls call a "good face;" and with a womanly respect for strength, the manliest attribute of man, she admired the broad shoulders and six feet one of her new master. This face was not handsome, for, true to his fatherland, the Professor had an eminent nose, a blonde beard, and a crop of “bonny brown hair” long enough to have been gathered into a ribbon, as in the days of Schiller and Jean Paul; but Dolly liked it, for its strength was tempered with gentleness; patience and courage gave it dignity, and the glance that met her own was both keen and kind.

The silk was wound at last, the coat repaired. Dick with difficulty concealed the growing stiffness of his shoulders, while Dolly turned up the lamp, which bluntly hinted bedtime, and Mrs. Ward successfully devoured six gapes behind her hand, but was detected in the seventh by Mr. Bopp, who glanced at the clock, stopped in the middle of a sentence, and, with a hurried “goot-night,” made for the door without the least idea whither he was going. Piloted by Dick, he was installed in the “best chamber,” where his waking dreams were enlivened by a great fire, and his sleeping ones by an endless succession of skeins, each rapturously concluded in the style of Sam Weller when folding carpets with the pretty maid.

“I tell you, Dolly, it won’t do, and I’m not going to have it.”

“Oh, indeed; and how will you help it, you absurd boy?”

“Why, if you don’t stop it, I’ll just say to Bopp, — ’Look here, my dear fellow; this sister of mine is a capital girl, but she will flirt and’“ —

“And it’s a family failing, Dick,” cut in Dolly.

“Not a bit of it. I shall say, ‘Take care of your heart, Bopp, for she has a bad habit of playing battle-door and shuttle-cock with these articles; and, though it may be very good fun for a time, it makes them ache when they get a last knock and are left to lie in a corner.’“

“What eloquence! But you’d never dare to try it on Mr. Bopp; and I shouldn’t like to predict what would happen to you if you did.”

“If you say ‘dare,’ I’ll do it the first minute I see him. As for consequences, I don’t care that for ‘em;” and Dick snapped his fingers with an aspect of much disdain. But something in his sister’s face suggested the wisdom of moderation, and moved him to say, less like a lord of creation, and more like a brother who privately adored his sister, but of course was not going to acknowledge such a weakness, —

“Well, but soberly, now, I wish you wouldn’t plague Bopp; for it’s evident to me that he is hit; and from the way you’ve gone on these two months, what else was to be expected? Now, as the head of the family, — you needn’t laugh, for I am, — I think I ought to interfere; and so I put it to you, — do you like him, and will you have him? or are you merely amusing yourself, as you have done ever since you were out of pinafores? If you like him, all serene. I'd rather have him for a brother than any one I know, for he's a regular trump though he *is* poor; but if you don't, I won't have the dear old fellow floored just because you like to see it done."

It may here be remarked that Dolly quite glowed to hear her brother praise Mr. Bopp, and that she indorsed every word with mental additions of double warmth; but Dick had begun all wrong, and, manlike, demanded her confidence before she had made up her mind to own she had any to bestow; therefore nothing came of it but vexation of spirit; for it is a well-known fact that, on some subjects, if boys will tease, girls will fib, and both maintain that it is right. So Dolly whetted her feminine weapon, and assumed a lofty superiority.

"Dear me! what a sudden spasm of virtue; and why, if it is such a sin, has not the 'head of the house' taken his sister to task before, instead of indulging in a like degeneracy, and causing several interesting persons to tear their hair, and bewail his forgetfulness, when they ought to have blessed their stars he was out of the way?"

Dick snowballed a dozing crow and looked nettled; for he had attained that age when "Tom Brown at Oxford" was the book of books, the twelfth chapter being the favorite, and five young ladies having already been endowed with the significant heliotrope flower; all of which facts Dolly had skilfully brought to mind, as a return-shot for his somewhat personal remarks.

"Bah! they were only girls, and it don't amount to anything among us young folks; but Bopp is a grown man, and you ought to respect him too much to play such pranks with him. Besides, he's a German, and more tender-hearted than we rough Yankees, as any one can see by the way he acts when you snub him. He is proud, too, for all his meekness, and waits till he's sure you like him before he says anything; and he'll need the patience of a family of Jobs at the rate you're going on, — a honey-pot one day and a pickle-jar the next. Do make up your mind, and say yes or no, right off, Dolly."

"Would you have me meet him at the door with a meek courtesy, and say, 'Oh, if you please, I'm ready to say Yes, thank you, if you'll be good enough to say, Will you'?"

"Don't be a goose, child; you know I mean nothing of the kind; only you girls never will do anything straight ahead if you can dodge and fuss and make a mess of it. Just tell me one thing: Do you, or don't you, like old Bopp?"

"What an elegant way to put it! Of course I like him well enough as a leader; he is clever, and sort of cunning, and I enjoy his funny ways; but what in the world should I do with a great yellow-haired laddie who could put me in his pocket, and yet is so meek that I should never find the heart to henpeck him?

You are welcome to him; and since you love him so much, there's no need of my troubling myself on his account; for with you for a friend, be can have no earthly wish ungratified."

"Don't try to be cutting, Dolly, because you look homely when you do, and it's a woman's business to be pretty, always. All I've got to say is, you will be in a nice state of mind if you damage Bopp; for every one likes him, and will be down upon you for a heartless little wretch; and I shan't blame them, I promise you."

"I wish the town wouldn't put its fingers in other people's pies, and you may tell it so, with my compliments; and all *I* have to say is, that you men have more liberty than you know what to do with, and we women haven't enough; so it's perfectly fair that we should show you the worth of the thing by taking it away now and then. I shall do exactly as I please; dance, walk, ride, and flirt, whenever and with whomever I see fit; and the whole town, with Mr. Dick Ward at their head, can't stop me if I choose to go on. Now, then, what next?" After which declaration of independence, Dolly folded her arms, wheeled about and faced her brother, a spirited statuette of Self Will, in a red hood and mittens.

Dick sternly asked, —

"Is that your firm decision, ma'am?"

"Yes."

"And you will not give up your nonsense?"

"No."

"You are quite sure you don't care for Bopp?"

"I could slap him with all my heart."

"Very good. I shall see that you don't get a chance."

"I wouldn't try a skirmish, for you'll get beaten, Dick."

"We'll prove that, ma'am."

"We will, sir."

And the belligerents loftily paced up the lawn, with their purpose so well expressed by outward signs, that Mrs. Ward knew, by the cock of Dick's hat and the decided tap of Dolly's heels, that a storm was brewing, before they entered the door.

This fraternal conversation took place some two months from the evening of Mr. Bopp's advent, as the twins were strolling home from school, which school must be briefly alluded to in order to explain the foregoing remarks. It was an excellent institution in all respects; for its presiding genius stood high in the townfolks' esteem, and might have served as an example to Dr. Watts' "busy bee," in the zeal with which he improved his "shining hours," and laid up honey against the winter, which many hoped would be long in coming. All manner of aids were provided for sprouting souls and bodies, diversions innumerable, and society, some members of which might have polished off Alcibiades *a la* Socrates, or entertained Plato with “æsthetic tea.” But, sad to relate, in spite of all these blessings, the students who resorted to this academy possessed an Adam-and-Eve-like proclivity for exactly what they hadn’t got and didn’t need; and, not contented with the pleasures provided, must needs play truant with that young scamp Eros, and turn the ancient town topsy-turvy with modern innovations, till scandalized spinsters predicted that the very babies would catch the fever, refuse their panada in jealous gloom, send billet-doux in their rattles, elope in wicker-carriages, and set up housekeeping in dolls’ houses, after the latest fashion.

Certain inflammable Southerners introduced the new game, and left such romantic legends of their loves behind them that their successors were fired with an ambition to do the like, and excel in all things, from cricket to captivation.

This state of things is not to be wondered at; for America, being renowned as a “fast” nation, has become a sort of hotbed, and seems to force humanity into early bloom. Therefore, past generations must not groan over the sprightly present, but sit in the chimney-corner and see boys and girls play the game which is too apt to end in a checkmate for one of the players. To many of the lookers-on, the new order of things was as good as a puppet-show; for, with the enthusiasm of youth, the actors performed their parts heartily, forgetting the audience in their own earnestness. Bless us! what revolutions went on under the round jackets, and what love-tokens lay in the pockets thereof. What plots and counterplots occupied the heads that wore the innocent-looking snoods, and what captives were taken in the many-colored nets that would come off and have to be taken care of. What romances blossomed like dandelions along the road to school, and what tales the river might have told if any one could have learned its musical speech. How certain gates were glorified by daily lingerings thereat, and what tender memories hung about dingy desks, old pens, and books illustrated with all manner of symbolical designs.

Let those laugh who will; older and wiser men and women might have taken lessons of these budding heroes and heroines; for here all was honest, sincere, and fresh; the old world had not taught them falsehood, self-interest, or mean ambitions. When they lost or won, they frankly grieved or rejoiced, and wore no masks except in play, and then got them off as soon as possible. If blue-eyed Lizzie frowned, or went home with Joe, Ned, with a wisdom older lovers would do well to imitate, went in for another game of foot-ball, gave the rejected apple to little Sally, and whistled “Glory Hallelujah,” instead of “Annie Laurie,” which was better than blowing a rival’s brains out, or glowering at womankind forever after. Or, when Tom put on Clara’s skates three successive days, and danced with her three successive evenings, leaving Kitty to freeze her feet in the one instance and fold her hands in the other, she just had a “good cry,” gave her mother an extra kiss, and waited till the recreant Tom returned to his allegiance, finding his little friend a sweetheart in nature as in name.

Dick and Dolly were foremost in the ranks, and expert in all the new amusements. Dick worshipped at many shrines, but most faithfully at that of a meek divinity, who returned charming answers to the ardent epistles which he left in her father’s garden wall, where, Pyramus and Thisbe-like, they often chatted through a chink; and Dolly was seldom seen without a staff of aids who would have “fought, bled, and died” for her as cheerfully as the Little Corporal’s Old Guard, though she paid them only in words; for her Waterloo had not yet come.

With the charming, perversity of her sex in such matters, no sooner had Dolly declared that she didn’t like Mr. Bopp, than she began to discover that she did; and so far from desiring “to slap him,” a tendency to regard him with peculiar good-will and tenderness developed itself, much to her own surprise; for with all her coquetry and seeming coldness, Dolly had a right womanly heart of her own, though she had never acknowledged the fact till August Bopp looked at her with so much love and longing in his honest eyes. Then she found a little fear mingling with her regard, felt a strong desire to be respected by him, discovered a certain something which she called conscience, restraining a reckless use of her power, and, soon after her lofty denial to Dick, was forced to own that Mr. Bopp had become her master in the finer species of gymnastics that came in with Adam and Eve, and have kept all creation turning somersets ever since. Of course these discoveries were unconfessed, even to that best bosom friend which any of us can have; yet her mother suspected them, and, with much anxiety, saw all, yet held her peace, knowing that her little daughter would, sooner or later, give her a fuller confidence than could be demanded; and remembering the happiest moments of her own happy past, when an older Dick wooed another Dolly, she left that flower, which never can be forced, to open at its own sweet will.

Meanwhile, Mr. Bopp, though carrying his heart upon his sleeve, believed his secret buried in the deepest gloom, and enjoyed all the delightful miseries lovers insist upon making for themselves. When Dolly was quiet and absent, he became pensive, the lesson dragged, and people fancied they were getting tired of the humbug; when Dolly was blithe and bland, he grew radiant, exercised within an inch of his life as a vent for his emotions, and people went home declaring gymnastics to be the crowning triumph of the age; and when Dolly was capricious, Mr. Bopp, became a bewildered weathercock, changing as the wind changed, and dire was the confusion occasioned thereby.

Like the sage fowl in the story, Dick said nothing, but “kept up a terrible thinking,” and, not having had experience enough to know that when a woman says No she is very apt to mean Yes, he took Dolly at her word. Believing it to be his duty to warn “Old Bopp,” he resolved to do it like a Roman brother, regardless of his own feelings or his sister’s wrath, quite unconscious that the motive power in the affair was a boyish love of ruling the young person who ruled every one else.

Matters stood thus, when the town was electrified by a general invitation to the annual jubilee at Jollyboys Hall, which this spring flowered into a masquerade, and filled the souls of old and young with visions of splendor, frolic, and fun. Being an amiable old town, it gave itself up, like a kind grandma, to the wishes of its children, let them put its knitting away, disturb its naps, keep its hands busy with vanities of the flesh, and its mind in a state of chaos for three mortal weeks. Young ladies were obscured by tarletan fogs, behind which they concocted angels’ wings, newspaper gowns, Minnehaha’s wampum, and Cinderella’s slippers. Inspired but incapable boys undertook designs that would have daunted a costumer of the first water, fell into sloughs of despond, and, emerging, settled down from peers and paladins into jovial tars, friar waterproofs, and officers in miscellaneous uniforms. Fathers laughed or grumbled at the whole thing and advanced pecuniary loans with good or ill grace, as the case might be; but the mothers, whose interest in their children’s pleasure is a sort of evergreen that no snows of time can kill, sewed spangles by the bushel, made wildernesses of tissue-paper blossom as the rose, kept tempers sweet, stomachs full, and domestic machinery working smoothly through it all, by that maternal magic which makes them the human providences of this naughty world.

“What shall I go as?” was the universal cry. Garrets were taken by storm, cherished relics were teased out of old ladies’ lavendered chests (happy she who saw them again!), hats were made into boots, gowns into doublets, cloaks into hose, Sunday bonnets despoiled of their plumage, silken cauliflowers sown broadcast over the land, and cocked-up caps erected in every style of architecture, while “Tag, Rag, and Bobtail” drove a smashing business, and everybody knew what everybody else was going to be, and solemnly vowed they didn’t — which transparent falsehood was the best joke of the whole.

Dolly allowed her mates to believe she was to be the Queen of Hearts, but privately laid hold of certain brocades worn by a trim grandmother half a century ago, and one evening burst upon her brother in a charming “Little Bo-Peep” costume, which, for the benefit of future distressed damsels, may be described as a “white silk skirt, scarlet overdress neatly bundled up behind,” as ancient ladies expressed it, blue hose with red clocks, high-heeled shoes with silver buckles, a nosegay in the tucker, and a fly-way hat perched in this case on the top of black curls, which gave additional archness to Dolly’s face as she entered, singing that famous ditty.

Dick surveyed her with approval, turning her about like a lay figure, and expressing his fraternal opinion that she was “the sauciest little turn-out he ever saw,” and then wet-blanketed the remarks by adding, “Of course you don’t call it a disguise, do you? and don’t flatter yourself that you won’t be known; for Dolly Ward is as plainly written in every curl, bow, and gimcrack, as if you wore a label on your back.”

“Then I shan’t wear it;” and off went the hat at one fell blow, as Dolly threw her crook in one corner, her posy in another, and sat down an image of despair.

“Now don’t be a goose, and rip everything to bits; just wear a domino over all, as Fan is going to, and then, when you’ve had fun enough, take it off and do the pretty. It will make two rigs, you see, and bother the boys to your heart’s content.”

“Dick, I insist upon kissing you for that brilliant suggestion; and then you may run and get me eight yards of cambric, just the color of Fan’s; but if you tell any one, I’ll keep her from dancing with you the whole evening;” with which bribe and threat Dolly embraced her brother, and shut the door in his face, while he, putting himself in good humor by imagining she was somebody else, departed on his muddy mission.

If the ghosts of the first settlers had taken their walks abroad on the eventful Friday night, they would have held up their shadowy hands at the scenes going on under their venerable noses; for strange figures flitted through the quiet streets, and instead of decorous slumber, there was decidedly, — ”A sound of revelry by night.”

Spurs clanked and swords rattled over the frosty ground, as if the British were about to make another flying call; hooded monks and nuns paced along, on carnal thoughts intent; ancient ladies and bewigged gentlemen seemed hurrying to enjoy a social cup of tea, and groan over the tax; barrels staggered and stuck through narrow ways, as if temperance were still among the lost arts, while bears, apes, imps, and elves pattered or sparkled by, as if a second Walpurgis Night had come, and all were bound for Blocksberg.

“Hooray for the Rooster!” shouted young Ireland, encamped on the sidewalk to see the show, as Mephistopheles’ red cock’s feather skimmed up the stairs, and he left a pink domino at the ladies’ dressing-room door, with the brief warning, “Now cut your own capers and leave me to mine,” adding, as he paused a moment at the great door, —

“By Jove! isn’t it a jolly sight, though?”

And so it was; for a mammoth boot stood sentinel at the entrance; a Bedouin Arab leaned on his spear in one corner, looking as if ready to say, —

“Fly to the desert, fly with me,”

to the pretty Jewess on his arm; a stately Hamlet, with irreproachable legs, settled his plumage in another, still undecided to which Ophelia he would first address “The honey of his music vows.”

Bluff King Hal’s representative was waltzing in a way that would have filled that stout potentate with respectful admiration, while Queen Katherine flirted with a Fire Zouave. Alcipades whisked Mother Goose about the room till the old lady’s conical hat tottered on her head, and the Union held fast to a very little Mac. Flocks of friars, black, white, and gray, pervaded the hall, with flocks of ballet girls, intended to represent peasants, but failing for lack of drapery; morning and evening stars rose or set, as partners willed; lively red demons harassed meek nuns, and knights of the Leopard, the Lion or Griffin, flashed by, looking heroically uncomfortable, in their gilded cages; court ladies promenaded with Jack tars, and dukes danced with dairy-maids, while Brother Jonathan whittled, Aunt Dinah jabbered, Ingomar flourished his club, and every one felt warmly enthusiastic and vigorously jolly.

“Ach himmel! Das ist wunder schon!” murmured a tall, gray monk, looking in, and quite unconscious that he spoke aloud.

“Hullo, Bopp! I thought you weren’t coming,” cried Mephistopheles in an emphatic whisper.

“Ah, I guess you! yes, you are well done. I should like to be a Faust for you, but I haf no time, no purse for a dress, so I throw this on, and run up for a hour or two. Where is — who is all these people? Do you know them?”

“The one with the Pope, Fra Diavolo; the telegraph, and two knights asking her to dance, is Dolly, if that’s what you want to know. Go in and keep it up, Bopp, while you can; I am off for Fan;” and Mephistopheles departed over the banisters with a weird agility that delighted the beholders; while the gray friar stole into a corner and watched the pink domino for half an hour, at the end of which time his regards were somewhat confused by discovering that there were two pink damsels so like that he could not tell which was the one pointed out by Dick and which the new-comer.

“She thinks I will not know her, but I shall go now and find out for myself;” and, starting into sudden activity, the gray brother strode up to the nearest pink lady, bowed, and offered his arm. With a haughty little gesture of denial to several others, she accepted it, and they joined the circle of many-colored promenaders that eddied round the hall. As they went, Mr. Bopp scrutinized his companion, but saw only a slender figure shrouded from head to foot, and the tip of a white glove resting on his arm.

"I will speak; then her voice will betray her," he thought, forgetting that his own was undisguisable.

"Madame, permit me that I fan you, it is so greatly warm."

A fan was surrendered with a bow, and the masked face turned fully toward his own, while the hood trembled as if its wearer laughed silently.

"Ah, it is you, — I know the eyes, the step, the laugh. Miss Dolly, did you think you could hide from me?"

"I did not wish to," was the whispered answer.

"Did you think I would come?"

"I hoped so."

"Then you are not displease with me?"

"No; I am very glad; I wanted you."

The pink head drooped a little nearer, and another white glove went to meet its mate upon his arm with a pretty, confiding gesture. Mr. Bopp instantly fell into a state of bliss, — the lights, music, gay surroundings, and, more than all, this unwonted demonstration, put the crowning glory to the moment; and, fired with the hopeful omen, he allowed his love to silence his prudence, and lead him to do, then and there, the very thing he had often resolved never to do at all.

"Ah, Miss Dolly, if you knew how much, how very much you haf enlarged my happiness, and made this efening shine for me, you would more often be a little friendly, for this winter has been all summer to me, since I knew you and your kind home, and now I haf no sorrow but that after the next lesson I come no more unless you gif me leaf. See now I must say this even here, when so much people are about us, because I cannot stop it; and you will forgif me that I cannot wait any longer."

"Mr. Bopp, please don't, please stop!" began the pink domino in a hurried whisper. But Mr. Bopp was not to be stopped. He had dammed up the stream so long, that now it rushed on fast, full, and uncontrollable; for, leading her into one of the curtained recesses near by, he sat down beside her, and, still plying the fan, went on impetuously, —

"I feel to say that I lofe you, and tho' I try to kill it, my love will not die, because it is more strong than my will, more dear than my pride, for I haf much, and I do not ask you to be meine Frau till I can gif you more than my heart and my poor name. But hear now; I will work, and save, and wait a many years if at the end you will take all I haf and say, 'August, I lofe you.' Do not laugh at me because I say this in such poor words; you are my heart’s dearest, and I must tell it or never come again. Speak to me one kind yes, and I will thank Gott in himmel for so much joy.”

The pink domino had listened to this rapid speech with averted head, and, when it ended, started up, saying eagerly, “You are mistaken, sir, I am not Dolly;” but as she spoke her words were belied, for the hasty movement displaced her mask, and Mr. Bopp saw Dolly’s eyes, a lock of dark hair, and a pair of burning cheeks, before the screen was readjusted. With redoubled earnestness he held her back, whispering, —

“Do not go mitout the little word, Yes, or No; it is not much to say.”

“Well then, No!”

“You mean it? Dolly! truly mean it?”

“Yes, let me go at once, sir.”

Mr. Bopp stood up, saying slowly, — ”Yes, go now; they told me you had no heart; I beliefe it, and thank you for that No;” then bowed, and walked straight out of the hall, while the pink domino broke into a fit of laughter, saying to herself, —

“I’ve done it! I’ve done it! but what a piece of work there’ll be to-morrow.”

“Dick, who was that tall creature Fan was parading with last night? No one knew, and he vanished before the masks were taken off,” asked Dolly, as she and her brother lounged in opposite corners of the sofa the morning after the masquerade, “talking it over.”

“That was old Bopp, Mrs. Peep.”

“Gracious me! why, he said he wasn’t coming.”

“People sometimes say what they don’t mean, as you may have discovered.”

“But why didn’t he come and speak to a body, Dick?”

“Better employed, I suppose.”

“Now don’t be cross, dear, but tell me all about it, for I don’t understand how you allowed him to monopolize Fan so.”

“Oh, don’t bother, I’m sleepy.”

“No you’re not; you look wicked; I know you’ve been in mischief, and I insist upon hearing all about it, so come and ‘fess’ this instant.”

Dolly proceeded to enforce her command by pulling away his pillow and dragging her brother into a sitting posture in spite of his laughing resistance and evident desire to exhaust her patience; for Dick excelled in teasing, and kept his sister in a fidget from morning till night, with occasional fits of penitence and petting which lasted till next time. Therefore, though dying to ‘fess,’ he was undecided as to the best method of executing that task in the manner most aggravating to his listener and most agreeable to himself, and sat regarding her with twinkling eyes, and his curly pate in a high state of rumple, trying to appear innocently meek, but failing signally.

"Now, then, up and tell," commanded Dolly.

"Well, if you won't take my head off till I'm done, I'll tell you the best joke of the season. Are you sure the pink domino with Bopp wasn't yourself, — for she looked and acted very like you?"

"Of course I am. I didn't even know he was there, and think it very rude and ungentlemanly in him not to come and speak to me. You know it was Fan, so do go on."

"But it wasn't, for she changed her mind and wore a black domino; I saw her put it on myself. Her Cousin Jack came unexpectedly, and she thought if she altered her dress and went with him, you wouldn't know her."

"Who could it have been, Dick?"

"That's the mystery, for, do you know, Bopp proposed to her."

"He didn't!" and Dolly flew up with a startled look that, to adopt a phrase from his own vocabulary, was "nuts" to her brother.

"Yes he did; I heard him."

"When, where, and how?"

"In one of these flirtation boxes; they dropped the curtain, but I heard him do it, on my honor I did."

"Persons of honor don't listen at curtains and key-holes. What did they say?"

"Oh, if it wasn't honorable to listen, it isn't to hear; so I won't tell, though I could not help knowing it."

"Mercy! don't stop now, or I shall die with curiosity. I dare say I should have done the same; no one minds at such a place, you know. But I don't see the joke yet," said Dolly dismally.

"I do," and Dick went off into a shout.

"You idiotic boy, take that pillow out of your mouth, and tell me the whole thing, — what he said, what she said, and what they both did. It was all fun of course, but I'd like to hear about it."

"It may have been fun on her part, but it was solemn earnest on his, for he went it strong I assure you. I'd no idea the old fellow was so sly, for he appeared smashed with you, you know, and there he was finishing up with this unknown lady. I wish you could have heard him go on, with tears in his eyes" —

"How do you know if you didn't see him?"

"Oh, well, that's only a figure of speech; I thought so from his voice. He was ever so tender, and took to Dutch when English was too cool for him. It was really touching, for I never heard a fellow do it before; and, upon my word, I should think it was rather a tough job to say that sort of thing to a pretty woman, mask or no mask."

"What did she say?" asked Dolly, with her hands pressed tight together, and a curious little quiver of the lips.

"She said, No, as short as pie-crust; and when he rushed out with his heart broken all to bits apparently, she just burst out laughing, and went and polked at a two-forty pace for half an hour."

Dora unclasped her hands, took a long breath, and cried out, —

"She was a wicked, heartless hussy! and if I know her, I'll never speak to her again; for if he was really in earnest, she ought to be killed for laughing at him."

"So ought you, then, for making fun of poor Fisher when he went down on his knees behind the huckleberry bushes last summer. He was earnest enough, for he looked as black-and-blue as his berries when he got home. Your theory is all right, ma'am, but your practice is all bosh."

"Hold your tongue about that silly thing. Boys in college think they know everything, can do everything, have everything, and only need beckon, and all womankind will come and adore. It made a man of him, and he'll thank me for taking the sentimental nonsense and conceit out of him. You will need just such a lesson at the rate you go on, and I hope Fan will give it to you."

"When the lecture is over, I'll go on with the joke, if you want to know it."

"Isn't this enough?"

"Oh, bless you, no! the cream of it is to come. What would you give to know who the lady was?"

"Five dollars, down, this minute."

"Very good, hand 'em over, and I'll tell you."

"Truly, Dick?"

"Yes, and prove it."

Dolly produced her purse, and, bill in hand, sat waiting for the disclosure. Dick rose with a melo-dramatic bow, —

"Lo, it was I."

"That's a great fib, for I saw you flying about the whole evening."

"You saw my dress, but I was not in it."

"Oh! oh! who *did* I keep going to, then? and what *did* I do to make a fool of myself, I wonder?"

Purse and bill dropped out of Dolly's hand, and she looked at her brother with a distracted expression of countenance. Dick rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"Here's a jolly state of things. Now I'll tell you the whole story. I never thought of doing it till I saw Bopp and told him who you were; but on my way for Fan I wondered if he'd get puzzled between you two; and then a grand idea popped into my head to puzzle him myself, for I can take you off to the life. Fan didn't want me to, but I made her, so she lent me hoops and gown and the pink domino, and if ever I thanked my stars I wasn't tall, I did then, for the things fitted capitally as to length, tho' I kept splitting something down the back, and scattering hooks and eyes in all directions. I wish you could have heard Jack roar while they rigged me. He had no dress, so I lent him mine, till just before the masks were taken off, when we cut home and changed. He told me how you kept running to him to tie up your slippers, find your fan, and tell him funny things, thinking it was me. I never enjoyed anything so much in my life."

"Go on," said Dolly in a breathless sort of voice, and the deluded boy obeyed.

"I knew Bopp, and hovered near till he came to find out who I was. I took you off in style, and it deceived him, for I'm only an inch or two taller than you, and kept my head down in the lackadaisical way you girls do; I whispered, so my voice didn't betray me; and was very clinging, and sweet, and fluttery, and that blessed old goose was sure it was you. I thought it was all over once, for when he came the heavy in the recess, I got a bit flustered, he was so serious about it, my mask slipped, but I caught it, so he only saw my eyes and forehead, which are just like yours, and that finished him, for I've no doubt I looked as red and silly as you would have done in a like fix."

"Why did you say No?" and Dolly looked as stern as fate.

"What else should I say? You told me you wouldn't have him, and I thought it would save you the bother of saying it, and him the pain of asking twice. I told him some time ago that you were a born flirt; he said he knew it; so I was surprised to hear him go on at such a rate, but supposed that I was too amiable, and that misled him. Poor old Bopp, I kept thinking of him all night, as he looked when he said, 'They told me you had no heart, now I believe it, and I thank you for that No.' It was rather a hard joke for him, but it's over now, and he won't have to do it again. You said I wouldn't dare tell him about you; didn't I? and haven't I won the" —

The rest of the sentence went spinning dizzily through Dick's head, as a sudden tingling sensation pervaded his left ear, followed by a similar smart in the right; and, for a moment, chaos seemed to have come again. Whatever Dolly did was thoroughly done: when she danced, the soles of her shoes attested the fact; when she flirted, it was warm work while it lasted; and when she was angry, it thundered, lightened, and blew great guns till the shower came, and the whole affair ended in a rainbow. Therefore, being outwitted, disappointed, mortified, and hurt, her first impulse was to find a vent for these conflicting emotions, and possessing skillful hands, she left them to avenge the wrong done her heart, which they did so faithfully, that if ever a young gentleman's ears were vigorously and completely boxed, Dick was that young individual. As the thunder-clap ceased, the gale began and blew steadily for several minutes.

"You think it a joke, do you? I tell you, it's a wicked, cruel thing; you've told a lie; you've broken August's heart, and made me so angry that I'll never forgive you as long as I live. What do you know about my feelings? and how dare you take it upon yourself to answer for me? You think because we are the same age that I am no older than you, but you're mistaken, for a boy of eighteen *is* a boy, a girl is often a woman, with a woman's hopes and plans; you don't understand this any more than you do August's love for me, which you listened to and laughed at. I said I didn't like him, and I didn't find out till afterward that I did; then I was afraid to tell you lest you'd twit me with it. But now I care for no one, and I say I do like him, — yes, I love him with all my heart and soul and might and I'd die this minute if I could undo the harm you've done, and see him happy. I know I've been selfish, vain, and thoughtless, but I am not now; I hoped he'd love me, hoped he'd see I cared for him, that I'd done trifling, and didn't mind if he *was* poor, for I'd enough for both; that I longed to make his life pleasant after all his troubles; that I'd send for the little sister he loves so well, and never let him suffer any more; for he is so good, so patient, so generous, and dear to me, I cannot do enough for him. Now it's all spoilt; now I can never tell him this, never comfort him in any way, never be happy again all my life, and you have done it."

As Dolly stood before her brother, pouring out her words with glittering eyes, impetuous voice, and face pale with passionate emotion, he was scared; for as his scattered wits returned to him, he felt that he had been playing with edge tools, and had cut and slashed in rather a promiscuous manner. Dazed and dizzy, he sat staring at the excited figure before him, forgetting the indignity he had received, the mistake he had made, the damage he had done, in simple wonder at the revolutions going on under his astonished eyes. When Dolly stopped for breath, he muttered with a contrite look, —

"I'm very sorry, — it was only fun; and I thought it would help you both, for how the deuce should I know you liked the man when you said you hated him?"

"I never said that, and if I'd wanted advice I should have gone to mother. You men go blundering off with half an idea in your heads, and never see your stupidity till you have made a mess that can't be mended; we women don't work so, but save people's feelings, and are called hypocrites for our pains. I never meant to tell you, but I will now, to show you how I've been serving you, while you've been harming me: every one of those notes from Fan which you admire so much, answer so carefully, and wear out in your pocket, though copied by her, were written by me.”

“The devil they were!” Up flew Dick, and clapping his hand on the left breast-pocket, out came a dozen pink notes tied up with a blue ribbon, and much the worse for wear. He hastily turned them over as Dolly went on.

“Yes, I did it, for she didn’t know how to answer your notes, and came to me. I didn’t laugh at them, or make fun of her, but helped her silly little wits, and made you a happy boy for three months, though you teased me day and night, for I loved you, and hadn’t the heart to spoil your pleasure.”

“You’ve done it now with a vengeance, and you’re a pair of deceitful minxes. I’ve *paid* you off. I’ll give Fan one more note that will keep her eyes red for a month; and I’ll never love or trust a girl again as long as I live, — never! never!”

Red with wrath, Dick flung the treasured packet into the fire, punched it well down among the coals, flung away the poker, and turned about with a look and gesture which would have been comically tragic if they had not been decidedly pathetic, for, in spite of his years, a very tender heart beat under the blue jacket, and it was grievously wounded at the perfidy of the gentle little divinity whom he worshipped with daily increasing ardor. His eyes filled, but he winked resolutely; his lips trembled, but he bit them hard; his hands doubled themselves up, but he remembered his adversary was a woman; and, as a last effort to preserve his masculine dignity, he began to whistle.

As if the inconsistencies of womankind were to be shown him as rapidly as possible, at this moment the shower came on, for, taking him tenderly about the neck, Dolly fell to weeping so infectiously, that, after standing rigidly erect till a great tear dropped off the end of his nose, ignominiously announcing that it was no go, Dick gave in, and laying his head on Dolly’s shoulder, the twins quenched their anger, washed away their malice, and soothed their sorrow by one of those natural processes, so kindly provided for poor humanity, and so often despised as a weakness when it might prove a better strength than any pride.

Dick cleared up first, with no sign of the tempest but a slight mist through which his native sunshine glimmered pensively.

“Don’t dear, don’t cry so; it will make you sick, and won’t do any good, for things will come right, or I’ll make ‘em, and we’ll be comfortable all round.”

“No, we never can be as we were, and it’s all my fault. I’ve betrayed Fan’s confidence, I’ve spoiled your little romance, I’ve been a thoughtless, wicked girl, I’ve lost August; and, oh, dear me, I wish I was dead!” with which funereal climax Dolly cried so despairingly that, like the youngest Miss Pecksniff, she was indeed “a gushing creature.”

“Oh, come now, don’t be dismal, and blame yourself for every trouble under the sun. Sit down and talk it over, and see what can be done. Poor old girl, I forgave you the notes, and say I *was* wrong to meddle with Bopp. I got you into the scrape, and I'll get you out if the sky don't fall, or Bopp blow his brains out, like a second Werther, before to-morrow."

Dick drew the animated fountain to the wide chair, where they had sat together since they were born, wiped her eyes, laid her wet cheek against his own, and patted her back, with an idea that it was soothing to babies, and why not to girls?

"I wish mother was at home," sighed Dolly, longing for that port which was always a haven of refuge in domestic squalls like this.

"Write, and tell her not to stay till Saturday."

"No; it would spoil her visit, and you know she deferred it to help us through this dreadful masquerade. But I don't know what to do."

"Why, bless your heart, it's simple enough. I'll tell Bopp, beg his pardon, say 'Dolly's willing,' and there you are all taut and ship-shape again."

"I wouldn't for the world, Dick. It would be very hard for you, very awkward for me, and do no good in the end; for August is so proud he'd never forgive you for such a trick, would never believe that I 'had a heart' after all you've said and I've done; and I should only hear with my own ears that he thanked me for that No. Oh, why can't people know when they are in love, and not go heels over head before they are ready!"

"Well, if that don't suit, I'll let it alone, for that is all I can suggest; and if you like your woman's way better, try it, only you'll have to fly round, because to-morrow is the last night, you know."

"I shan't go, Dick."

"Why not? we are going to give him the rose-wood set of things, have speeches, cheers for the King of Clubs, and no end of fun."

"I can't help it; there would be no fun for me, and I couldn't look him in the face after all this."

"Oh, pooh! yes, you could, or it will be the first time you dared not do damage with those wicked eyes of yours."

"It is the first time I ever loved any one." Dolly's voice was so low, and her head drooped so much, that this brief confession was apparently put away in Dick's pocket, and being an exceedingly novel one, filled that inflammable youth with a desire to deposit a similar one in the other pocket, which, being emptied of its accustomed contents, left a somewhat aching void in itself and the heart underneath. After a moment's silence, he said, —

"Well, if you won't go, you can settle it when he comes here, though I think we should all do better to confess coming home in the dark."

"He won't come here again, Dick."

"Won't he! that shows you don't know Bopp as well as I. He'll come to say good-by, to thank mother for her kindness, and you and me for the little things we've done for him (I wish I'd left the last undone!), and go away like a gentleman, as he is, — see if he don't."

"Do you think so? Then I must see him."

"I'm sure he will, for we men don't bear malice and sulk and bawl when we come to grief this way, but stand up and take it without winking, like the young Spartan brick when the fox was digging into him, you know."

"Then, of course, you'll forgive Fan."

"I'll be hanged if I do," growled Dick.

"Ah ha! your theory is very good, sir, but your practice is bosh," quoted Dolly, with a gleam of the old mischief in her face.

Dick took a sudden turn through the room, burst out laughing, and came back, saying heartily, —

"I'll own up; it is mean to feel so, and I'll think about forgiving you both; but she may stop up the hole in the wall, for she won't get any more letters just yet; and you may devote your epistolary powers to A. Bopp in future. Well, what is it? free your mind, and have done with it; but don't make your nose red, or take the starch out of my collar with any more salt water, if you please."

"No, I won't; and I only want to say that, as you owe the explanation to us both, perhaps it would be best for you to tell August your part of the thing as you come home to-morrow, and then leave the rest to fate. I can't let him go away thinking me such a heartless creature, and once gone it will be too late to mend the matter. Can you do this without getting me into another scrape, do you think?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, and I call that sensible. I'll fix it capitally, — go down on my knees in the mud, if it is necessary; treat you like eggs for fear of another smash-up; and bring him home in such a tip-top state, you'll only have to nod and find yourself Mrs. B. any day you like. Now let's kiss and be friends, and then go pitch into that pie for luncheon."

So they did, and an hour afterward were rioting in the garret under pretence of putting grandma's things away; for at eighteen, in spite of love and mischief, boys and girls have a spell to exorcise blue devils, and a happy faculty of forgetting that "the world is hollow, and their dolls stuffed with saw-dust."

Dick was right, for on the following evening, after the lesson, Mr. Bopp did go home with him, "to say good-by, like a gentleman as he was." Dolly got over the first greeting in the dusky hall, and as her guest passed on to the parlor, she popped her head out to ask anxiously, —

“Did you say anything, Dick?”

“I couldn’t; something has happened to him; he’ll tell you about it. I’m going to see to the horse, so take your time, and do what you like,” with which vague information Dick vanished, and Dolly wished herself anywhere but where she was.

Mr. Bopp sat before the fire, looking so haggard and worn out that the girl’s conscience pricked her sorely for her part in the change, but plucking up her courage, she stirred briskly among the tea-cups, asking, —

“What shall I give you, sir?”

“Thank you, I haf no care to eat.”

Something in his spiritless mien and sorrowful voice made Dolly’s eyes fill; but knowing she must depend upon herself now, and make the best of her position, she said kindly, yet nervously, —

“You look tired; let me do something for you if I can; shall I sing for you a little? you once said music rested you.”

“You are kind; I could like that I think. Excoose me if I am dull, I haf — yes, a little air if you please.”

More and more disturbed by his absent, troubled manner, Dolly began a German song he had taught her, but before the first line was sung he stopped her with an imploring —

“For Gott sake not that! I cannot hear it this night; it was the last I sung her in the Vaterland.”

“Mr. Bopp, what is it? Dick says you have a trouble; tell me, and let us help you if we can. Are you ill, in want, or has any one wronged or injured you in any way? Oh, let me help you!”

Tears had been streaming down Mr. Bopp’s cheeks, but as she spoke he checked them, and tried to answer steadily, —

“No, I am not ill; I haf no wants now, and no one has hurt me but in kindness; yet I haf so great a grief, I could not bear it all alone, and so I came to ask a little sympathy from your good Mutter, who has been kind to me as if I was a son. She is not here, and I thought I would stop back my grief; but that moosic was too much; you pity me, and so I tell you. See, now! when I find things go bright with me, and haf a hope of much work, I take the little store I saved, I send it to my friend Carl Hoffman, who is coming from my home, and say, ‘Bring Ulla to me now, for I can make life go well to her, and I am hungry till I haf her in my arms again.’ I tell no one, for I am bold to think that one day I come here with her in my hand, to let her thank you in her so sweet way for all you haf done for me. Well, I watch the wind, I count the days, I haf no rest for joy; and when Carl comes, I fly to him. He gifs me back my store, he falls upon my neck and does not speak, then I know my little Kind will never come, for she has gone to Himmel before I could make a home for her on earth. Oh, my Ulla! it is hard to bear;” and, with a rain of bitter tears, poor Mr. Bopp covered up his face and laid it down on his empty plate, as if he never cared to lift it up again.

Then Dolly forgot herself in her great sympathy, and, going to him, she touched the bent head with a soothing hand; let her tears flow to comfort his; and whispered in her tenderest voice, —

“Dear Mr. Bopp, I wish I could heal this sorrow, but as I cannot, let me bear it with you; let me tell you how we loved the little child, and longed to see her; how we should have rejoiced to know you had so dear a friend to make your life happy in this strange land; how we shall grieve for your great loss, and long to prove our respect and love for you. I cannot say this as I ought, but, oh, be comforted, for you will see the child again, and, remembering that she waits for you, you will be glad to go when God calls you to meet your Ulla in that other Fatherland.”

“Ah, I will go now! I haf no wish to stay, for all my life is black to me. If I had found that other little friend to fill her place, I should not grieve so much, because she is weller there above than I could make her here; but no; I wait for that other one; I save all my heart for her; I send it, but it comes back to me; then I know my hope is dead, and I am all alone in the strange land.”

There was neither bitterness nor reproach in these broken words, only a patient sorrow, a regretful pain, as if he saw the two lost loves before him and uttered over them an irrepressible lament. It was too much for Dolly and with sudden resolution she spoke out fast and low, —

“Mr. Bopp, that was a mistake. It was not I you saw at the masque; it was Dick. He played a cruel trick; he insulted you and wronged me by that deceit, and I find it very hard to pardon him.”

“What! what is that!” and Mr. Bopp looked up with tears still shining in his beard, and intense surprise in every feature of his face.

Dolly turned scarlet, and her heart beat fast as she repeated with an unsteady voice, —

“It was Dick, not I.”

A cloud swept over Mr. Bopp’s face, and he knit his brows a moment as if Dolly had not been far from right when she said “he never would forgive the joke.” Presently, he spoke in a tone she had never heard before, — cold and quiet, — and in his eye she thought she read contempt for her brother and herself, —

“I see now, and I say no more but this; it was not kind when I so trusted you. Yet it is well, for you and Richart are so one, I haf no doubt he spoke your wish.”

Here was a desperate state of things. Dolly had done her best, yet he did not, or would not, understand, and, before she could restrain them, the words slipped over her tongue, —

“No! Dick and I never agree.”

Mr. Bopp started, swept three spoons and a tea-cup off the table as he turned, for something in the hasty whisper reassured him. The color sprang up to his cheek, the old warmth to his eye, the old erectness to his figure, and the eager accent to his voice. He rose, drew Dolly nearer, took her face between his hands, and bending, fixed on her a look tender yet masterful, as he said with an earnestness that stirred her as words had never done before, —

“Dollee, *he* said No! do *you* say, Yes?”

She could not speak, but her heart stood up in her eyes and answered him so eloquently that he was satisfied.

“Thank the Lord, it’s all right!” thought Dick, as, peeping in at the window ten minutes later, be saw Dolly enthroned upon Mr. Bopp’s knee, both her hands in his, and an expression in her April countenance which proved that she found it natural and pleasant to be sitting there, with her head on the kind heart that loved her; to hear herself called “*meine leibchen;*” to know that she alone could comfort him for little Ulla’s loss, and fill her empty place.

“They make a very pretty landscape, but too much honey isn’t good for ‘em, so I’ll go in, and we’ll eat, drink, and be merry, in honor of the night.”

He rattled the latch and tramped on the mat to warn them of his approach, and appeared just as Dolly was skimming into a chair, and Mr. Bopp picking up the spoons, which he dropped again to meet Dick, with a face “clear shining after rain;” and kissing him on both cheeks after the fashion of his country, he said, pointing to Dolly, —

“See, it is all fine again. I forgif you, and leave all blame to that bad spirit, Mephistopheles, who has much pranks like that, but never pays one for their pain, as you haf me. Heart’s dearest, come and say a friendly word to Richart, then we will haf a little health, — Long life and happiness to the King of Clubs and the Queen of Hearts.”

“Yes, August, and as he’s to be a farmer, we’ll add another, — ’Wiser wits and better manners to the Knave of Spades.’“

THE CROSS ON THE OLD CHURCH TOWER.

UP the dark stairs that led to his poor home strode a gloomy-faced young man with despair in his heart and these words on his lips: —

“I will struggle and suffer no longer; my last hope has failed, and life, become a burden, I will rid myself of at once.”

As he muttered his stern purpose, he flung wide the door and was about to enter, but paused upon the threshold; for a glance told him that he had unconsciously passed his own apartment and come up higher, till he found himself in a room poorer but more cheerful than his own.

Sunshine streamed in through the one small window, where a caged bird was blithely singing, and a few flowers blossomed in the light. But blither than the bird’s song, sweeter than the flowers, was the little voice and wan face of a child, who lay upon a bed placed where the warmest sunbeams fell.

The face turned smiling on the pillow, and the voice said pleasantly, —

“Come in, sir, Bess will soon be back if you will wait.”

“I want nothing of Bess. Who is she and who are you?” asked the intruder pausing as he was about to go.

“She is my sister, sir, and I’m ‘poor Jamie’ as they call me. But indeed, I am not to be pitied, for I am a happy child, though it may not seem so.”

“Why do you lie there? are you sick?”

“No, I am not sick, though I shall never leave my bed again. See, this is why;” and, folding back the covering, the child showed his little withered limbs.

“How long have you lain here, my poor boy?” asked the stranger, touched and interested in spite of himself.

“Three years, sir.”

“And yet you are happy! What in Heaven’s name have you to render you contented, child?”

“Come sit beside me, and I’ll tell you, sir; that is, if you please I should love to talk with you, for it’s lonely here when Bess is gone.”

Something in the child’s winning voice, and the influence of the cheerful room, calmed the young man’s troubled spirit and seemed to lighten his despair. He sat down at the bedside looking gloomily upon the child, who lay smiling placidly as with skilful hands he carved small figures from the bits of wood scattered round him on the coverlid.

“What have you to make you happy, Jamie? Tell me your secret, for I need the knowledge very much," said his new friend earnestly.

"First of all I have dear Bess," and the child's voice lingered lovingly upon the name; "she is so good, so very good to me, no one can tell how much we love each other. All day, she sits beside my bed singing to ease my pain, or reading while I work; she gives me flowers and birds, and all the sunshine that comes in to us, and sits there in the shadow that I may be warm and glad. She waits on me all day; but when I wake at night, I always see her sewing busily, and know it is for me, — my good kind Bess!

"Then I have my work, sir, to amuse me; and it helps a little too, for kind children always buy my toys, when Bess tells them of the little boy who carved them lying here at home while they play out among the grass and flowers where he can never be."

"What else, Jamie?" and the listener's face grew softer as the cheerful voice went on.

"I have my bird, sir, and my roses, I have books, and best of all, I have the cross on the old church tower. I can see it from my pillow and it shines there all day long, so bright and beautiful, while the white doves coo upon the roof below. I love it dearly."

The young man looked out through the narrow window and saw, rising high above the house-tops, like a finger pointing heavenward, the old gray tower and the gleaming cross. The city's din was far below, and through the summer air the faint coo of the doves and the flutter of their wings came down, like peaceful country sounds.

"Why do you love it, Jamie?" he asked, looking at the thoughtful face that lit up eagerly as the boy replied, —

"Because it does me so much good, sir. Bess told me long ago about the blessed Jesus who bore so much for us, and I longed to be as like him as a little child could grow. So when my pain was very sharp, I looked up there, and, thinking of the things he suffered, tried so hard to bear it that I often could; but sometimes when it was too bad, instead of fretting Bess, I'd cry softly, looking up there all the time and asking him to help me be a patient child. I think he did; and now it seems so like a friend to me, I love it better every day. I watch the sun climb up along the roofs in the morning, creeping higher and higher till it shines upon the cross and turns it into gold. Then through the day I watch the sunshine fade away till all the red goes from the sky, and for a little while I cannot see it through the dark. But the moon comes, and I love it better then; for lying awake through the long nights, I see the cross so high and bright with stars all shining round it, and I feel still and happy in my heart as when Bess sings to me in the twilight."

“But when there is no moon, or clouds hide it from you, what then, Jamie?” asked the young man, wondering if there were no cloud to darken the cheerful child’s content.

“I wait till it is clear again, and feel that it is there, although I cannot see it, sir. I hope it never will be taken down, for the light upon the cross seems like that I see in dear Bessie’s eyes when she holds me in her arms and calls me her ‘patient Jamie.’ She never knows I try to bear my troubles for her sake, as she bears hunger and cold for mine. So you see, sir, how many things I have to make me a happy child.”

“I would gladly lie down on your pillow to be half as light of heart as you are, little Jamie, for I have lost my faith in everything and with it all my happiness;” and the heavy shadow which had lifted for a while fell back darker than before upon the anxious face beside the bed.

“If I were well and strong like you, sir, I think I should be so thankful nothing could trouble me;” and with a sigh the boy glanced at the vigorous frame and energetic countenance of his new friend, wondering at the despondent look he wore.

“If you were poor, so poor you had no means wherewith to get a crust of bread, nor a shelter for the night; if you were worn-out with suffering and labor, soured by disappointment and haunted by ambitious hopes never to be realized, what would you do, Jamie?” suddenly asked the young man, prompted by the desire that every human heart has felt for sympathy and counsel, even from the little creature before him ignorant and inexperienced as he was.

But the child, wiser in his innocence than many an older counsellor, pointed upward, saying with a look of perfect trust, —

“I should look up to the cross upon the tower and think of what Bess told me about God, who feeds the birds and clothes the flowers, and I should wait patiently, feeling sure he would remember me.”

The young man leaned his head upon his folded arms and nothing stirred in the room, but the wind that stole in through the roses to fan the placid face upon the pillow.

“Are you weary waiting for me, Jamie dear? I could not come before;” and as her eager voice broke the silence, Sister Bess came hastening in.

The stranger, looking up, saw a young girl regarding him from Jamie’s close embrace, with a face whose only beauty was the light her brother spoke of, that beamed warm and bright from her mild countenance and made the poor room fairer for its presence.

“This is Bess, my Bess, sir,” cried the boy, “and she will thank you for your kindness in sitting here so long with me.”

“I am the person who lodges just below you; I mistook this room for my own; pardon me, and let me come again, for Jamie has already done me good,” replied the stranger as he rose to go.

“Bess, dear, will you bring me a cup of water?” Jamie said; and as she hastened away, he beckoned his friend nearer, saying with a timid wistful look, —

“Forgive me, if it’s wrong, but I wish you would let me give you this; it’s very little, but it may help some; and I think you’ll take it to please ‘poor Jamie.’ Won’t you, sir?” and as he spoke, the child offered a bright coin, the proceeds of his work.

Tears sprung into the proud man’s eyes; he held the little wasted hand fast in his own a moment, saying seriously, —

“I *will* take it, Jamie, as a loan wherewith to begin anew the life I was about to fling away as readily as I do this;” and with a quick motion he sent a vial whirling down into the street. “I’ll try the world once more in a humbler spirit, and have faith in *you*, at least, my little Providence.”

With an altered purpose in his heart, and a brave smile on his lips, the young man went away, leaving the child with another happy memory, to watch the cross upon the old church tower.

It was mid-winter; and in the gloomy house reigned suffering and want. Sister Bess worked steadily to earn the dear daily bread so many pray for and so many need. Jamie lay upon his bed, carving with feeble hands the toys which would have found far readier purchasers, could they have told the touching story of the frail boy lying meekly in the shadow of the solemn change which daily drew more near.

Cheerful and patient always, poverty and pain seemed to have no power to darken his bright spirit; for God’s blessed charity had gifted him with that inward strength and peace it so often brings to those who seem to human eyes most heavily afflicted.

Secret tears fell sometimes on his pillow, and whispered prayers went up; but Bess never knew it, and like a ray of sunshine, the boy’s tranquil presence lit up that poor home; and amid the darkest hours of their adversity, the little rushlight of his childish faith never wavered nor went out.

Below them lived the young man, no stranger now, but a true friend, whose generous pity would not let them suffer any want he could supply. Hunger and cold were hard teachers, but he learned their lessons bravely, and though his frame grew gaunt and his eye hollow, yet, at heart, he felt a better, happier man for the stern discipline that taught him the beauty of self-denial and the blessedness of loving his neighbor *better* than himself.

The child’s influence remained unchanged, and when anxiety or disappointment burdened him, the young man sat at Jamie’s bedside listening to the boy’s unconscious teaching, and receiving fresh hope and courage from the childish words and the wan face, always cheerful and serene.

With this example constantly before him, he struggled on, feeling that if the world were cold and dark, he had within himself one true affection to warm and brighten his hard life.

“Give me joy, Jamie! Give me joy, Bess! the book sells well, and we shall yet be rich and famous,” cried the young author as he burst into the quiet room one wintry night with snow-flakes glittering in his hair, and his face aglow with the keen air which had no chill in it to him now.

Bess looked up to smile a welcome, and Jamie tried to cry “Hurrah;” but the feeble voice faltered and failed, and he could only wave his hand and cling fast to his friend, whispering, brokenly, —

“I’m glad, oh, very glad; for now you need not rob yourself for us. I know you have, Walter; I have seen it in your poor thin face and these old clothes. It never would have been so, but for Bess and me.”

“Hush, Jamie, and lie here upon my arm and rest; for you are very tired with your work, — I know by this hot hand and shortened breath. Are you easy now? Then listen; for I’ve brave news to tell you, and never say again I do too much for you, — the cause of my success.”

“I, Walter,” cried the boy; “what do you mean?”

Looking down upon the wondering face uplifted to his own, the young man answered with deep feeling, —

“Six months ago I came into this room a desperate and despairing man, weary of life, because I knew not how to use it, and eager to quit the struggle because I had not learned to conquer fortune by energy and patience. You kept me, Jamie, till the reckless mood was passed, and by the beauty of your life showed me what mine should be. Your courage shamed my cowardice; your faith rebuked my fears; your lot made my own seem bright again. I, a man with youth, health, and the world before me, was about to fling away the life which you, a helpless little child, made useful, good, and happy, by the power of your own brave will. I felt how weak, how wicked I had been, and was not ashamed to learn of you the lesson you so unconsciously were teaching. God bless you, Jamie, for the work you did that day.”

“Did I do so much?” asked the boy with innocent wonder; “I never knew it, and always thought you had grown happier and kinder because I had learned to love you more. I’m very glad if I did anything for you, who do so much for us. But tell me of the book; you never would before.”

With a kindling eye Walter replied, —

"I would not tell you till all was sure; now, listen. I wrote a story, Jamie, — a story of our lives, weaving in few fancies of my own and leaving you unchanged, — the little counsellor and good angel of the ambitious man's hard life. I painted no fictitious sorrows. What I had seen and keenly felt I could truly tell, — your cheerful patience, Bess's faithful love, my struggles, hopes, and fears. This book, unlike the others, was not rejected; for the simple truth, told by an earnest pen, touched and interested. It was accepted, and has been kindly welcomed, thanks to you, Jamie; for many buy it to learn more of you, to weep and smile over artless words of yours, and forget their pity in their reverence and love for the child who taught the man to be, not what he is, but what, with God's help, he will yet become."

"They are very kind, and so are you, Walter, and I shall be proud to have you rich and great, though I may not be here to see it."

"You will, Jamie, you must; for it will be nothing without you;" and as he spoke, the young man held the thin hand closer in his own and looked more tenderly into the face upon his arm.

The boy's eyes shone with a feverish light, a scarlet flush burned on his hollow cheek, and the breath came slowly from his parted lips, but over his whole countenance there lay a beautiful serenity which filled his friend with hope and fear.

"Walter bid Bess put away that tiresome work; she has sat at it all day long, never stirring but to wait on me;" and as he spoke, a troubled look flitted across the boy's calm face.

"I shall soon be done, Jamie, and I must not think of rest till then, for there is neither food nor fuel for the morrow. Sleep, yourself, dear, and dream of pleasant things; I am not very tired."

And Bess bent closer to her work, trying to sing a little song, that they might not guess how near the tears were to her aching eyes.

From beneath his pillow Jamie drew a bit of bread, whispering to his friend as he displayed it, —

"Give it to Bess; I saved it for her till you came, for she will not take it from me, and she has eaten nothing all this day."

"And you, Jamie?" asked Walter, struck by the sharpened features of the boy, and the hungry look which for a moment glistened in his eye.

"I don't need much, you know, for I don't work like Bess; but yet she gives me all. Oh, how can I bear to see her working so for me, and I lying idle here!"

As he spoke, Jamie clasped his hands before his face, and through his slender fingers streamed such tears as children seldom shed.

It was so rare a thing for him to weep that it filled Walter with dismay and a keener sense of his own powerlessness. Ho could bear any privation for himself alone, but he could not see them suffer. He had nothing to offer them; for though there was seeming wealth in store for him, he was now miserably poor. He stood a moment, looking from brother to sister, both so dear to him, and both so plainly showing how hard a struggle life had been to them.

With a bitter exclamation, the young man turned away and went out into the night, muttering to himself, —

“They shall not suffer; I will beg or steal first.”

And with some vague purpose stirring within him, he went swiftly on until he reached a great thoroughfare, nearly deserted now, but echoing occasionally to a quick step as some one hurried home to his warm fireside.

“A little money, sir, for a sick child and a starving woman;” and with outstretched hand Walter arrested an old man. But he only wrapped his furs still closer and passed on, saying sternly, —

“I have nothing for vagrants. Go to work, young man.”

A woman poorly clad in widow’s weeds passed at that moment, and, as the beggar fell back from the rich man’s path, she dropped a bit of silver in his hand, saying with true womanly compassion, —

“Heaven help you! it is all I have to give.”

“I’ll beg no more,” muttered Walter, as he turned away burning with shame and indignation; “I’ll *take* from the rich what the poor so freely *give*. God pardon me; I see no other way, and they must not starve.”

With a vague sense of guilt already upon him, he stole into a more unfrequented street and slunk into the shadow of a doorway to wait for coming steps and nerve himself for his first evil deed.

Glancing up to chide the moonlight for betraying him, he started; for there, above the snow-clad roofs, rose the cross upon the tower. Hastily he averted his eyes, as if they had rested on the mild, reproachful countenance of a friend.

Far up in the wintry sky the bright symbol shone, and from it seemed to fall a radiance, warmer than the moonlight, clearer than the starlight, showing to that tempted heart the darkness of the yet uncommitted wrong.

That familiar sight recalled the past; he thought of Jamie, and seemed to hear again the childish words, uttered long ago, “God will remember us.”

Steps came and went along the lonely street, but the dark figure in the shadow never stirred, only stood there with bent head, accepting the silent rebuke that shone down upon it, and murmuring, softly, —

“God remember little Jamie, and forgive me that my love for him led me astray.”

As Walter raised his hand to dash away the drops that rose at the memory of the boy, his eye fell on the ring he always wore for his dead mother's sake. He had hoped to see it one day on Bess's hand, but now a generous thought banished all others and with the energy of an honest purpose be hastened to sell the ring, purchase a little food and fuel, and borrowing a warm covering of a kindly neighbor, he went back to dispense these comforts with a satisfaction he had little thought to feel.

The one lamp burned low; a few dying embers lay upon the earth, and no sound broke the silence but the steady rustle of Bess's needle, and the echo of Jamie's hollow cough.

"Wrap it around Bess; she has given me her cloak, and needs it more than I, — these coverings do very well;" and as he spoke, Jamie put away the blanket Walter offered, and suppressing a shiver, hid his purple hands beneath the old, thin cloak.

"Here is bread, Jamie; eat for Heaven's sake, no need to save it now;" and Walter pressed it on the boy, but he only took a little, saying he had not much need of food and loved to see them eat far better.

So in the cheery blaze of the rekindled fire, Bess and Walter broke their long fast, and never saw how eagerly Jamie gathered up the scattered crumbs, nor heard him murmur softly, as he watched them with loving eyes, —

"There will be no cold nor hunger up in heaven, but enough for all, — enough for all."

"Walter, you'll be kind to Bess when I am not here?" he whispered earnestly, as his friend came to draw his bed within the ruddy circle of the firelight gleaming on the floor.

"I will, Jamie, kinder than a brother," was the quick reply. "But why ask me that with such a wistful face?"

The boy did not answer, but turned on his pillow and kissed his sister's shadow as it flitted by.

Gray dawn was in the sky before they spoke again. Bess slept the deep, dreamless sleep of utter weariness, her head pillowed on her arms. Walter sat beside the bed, lost in sweet and bitter musings, silent and motionless, fancying the boy slept. But a low voice broke the silence, whispering feebly.

"Walter, will you take me in your strong arms and lay me on my little couch beside the window? I should love to see the cross again, and it is nearly day."

So light, so very light, the burden seemed, Walter turned his face aside lest the boy should see the sorrowful emotion painted there, and with a close embrace he laid him tenderly down to watch the first ray climbing up the old gray tower.

"The frost lies so thickly on the window-panes that you cannot see it, even when the light comes, Jamie," said his friend, vainly trying to gratify the boy's wish.

"The sun will melt it soon, and I can wait, — I can wait, Walter; it's but a little while;" and Jamie, with a patient smile, turned his face to the dim window and lay silent.

Higher and higher crept the sunshine till it shone through the frostwork on the boy's bright head; his bird awoke and carolled blithely, but he never stirred.

"Asleep at last, poor, tired little Jamie; I'll not wake him till the day is warmer;" and Walter, folding the coverings closer over the quiet figure, sat beside it, waiting till it should wake.

"Jamie dear, look up, and see how beautifully your last rose has blossomed in the night when least we looked for it;" and Bess came smiling in with the one white rose, so fragrant but so frail.

Jamie did not turn to greet her, for all frost had melted from the boy's life now; another flower had blossomed in the early dawn, and though the patient face upon the pillow was bathed in sunshine, little Jamie was not there to see it gleaming on the cross. God had remembered him.

Spring showers had made the small mound green, and scattered flowers in the churchyard. Sister Bess sat in the silent room alone, working still, but pausing often to wipe away the tears that fell upon a letter on her knee.

Steps came springing up the narrow stairs and Walter entered with a beaming face, to show the first rich earnings of his pen, and ask her to rest from her long labor in the shelter of his love.

"Dear Bess, what troubles you? Let me share your sorrow and try to lighten it," he cried with anxious tenderness, sitting beside her on the little couch where Jamie fell asleep.

In the frank face smiling on her, the girl's innocent eyes read nothing but the friendly interest of a brother, and remembering his care and kindness, she forgot her womanly timidity in her great longing for sympathy, and freely told him all.

Told him of the lover she left years ago to cling to Jamie, and how this lover went across the sea hoping to increase his little fortune that the helpless brother might be sheltered for love of her. How misfortune followed him, and when she looked to welcome back a prosperous man, there came a letter saying that all was lost and he must begin the world anew and win a home to offer her before he claimed the heart so faithful to him all these years.

"He writes so tenderly and bears his disappointment bravely for my sake; but it is very hard to see our happiness deferred again when such a little sum would give us to each other."

As she ceased, Bess looked for comfort into the countenance of her companion, never seeing through her tears how pale it was with sudden grief, how stern with repressed emotion. She only saw the friend whom Jamie loved and that tie drew her toward him as to an elder brother to whom she turned for help, unconscious then how great his own need was.

"I never knew of this before, Bess; you kept your secret well" he said, trying to seem unchanged.

The color deepened in her cheek; but she answered simply, "I never spoke of it, for words could do no good, and Jamie grieved silently about it, for he thought it a great sacrifice, though I looked on it as a sacred duty, and he often wearied himself to show in many loving ways how freshly he remembered it. My grateful little Jamie."

And her eyes wandered to the green tree-tops tossing in the wind, whose shadows flickered pleasantly above the child.

"Let me think a little, Bess, before I counsel you. Keep a good heart and rest assured that I will help you if I can," said Walter, trying to speak hopefully.

"But you come to tell me something; at least, I fancied I saw some good tidings in your face just now. Forgive my selfish grief, and see how gladly I will sympathize with any joy of yours."

"It is nothing, Bess, another time will do as well," he answered, eager to be gone lest he should betray what must be kept most closely now.

"It never will be told, Bess, — never in this world," he sighed bitterly as he went back to his own room which never in his darkest hours had seemed so dreary; for now the bright hope of his life was gone.

"I have it in my power to make them happy," he mused as he sat alone, "but I cannot do it, for in this separation lies my only hope. He may die or may grow weary, and then to whom will Bess turn for comfort but to me? I will work on, earn riches and a name, and if that hour should come, then in her desolation I will offer all to Bess and surely she will listen and accept. Yet it were a generous thing to make her happiness at once, forgetful of my own. How shall I bear to see her waiting patiently, while youth and hope are fading slowly, and know that I might end her weary trial and join two faithful hearts? Oh, Jamie, I wish to Heaven I were asleep with you, freed from the temptations that beset me. It is so easy to perceive the right, so hard to do it."

The sound of that familiar name, uttered despairingly, aloud, fell with a sweet and solemn music upon Walter's ear. A flood of tender memories swept away the present, and brought back the past. He thought of that short life, so full of pain and yet of patience, of the sunny nature which no cloud could overshadow, and the simple trust which was its strength and guide.

He thought of that last night and saw now with clearer eyes the sacrifices and the trials silently borne for love of Bess.

The beautiful example of the child rebuked the passion of he man, and through the magic of affection strengthened generous impulses and banished selfish hopes.

"I promised to be kind to Bess, and with God's help I will keep my vow. Teach me to bear my pain, to look for help where you found it, little Jamie;" and as he spoke, the young man gazed up at the shining cross, striving to see in it not merely an object of the dead boy's love, but a symbol of consolation, hope, and faith.

"It is a noble thing to see an honest man cleave his own heart in twain to fling away the baser part of it."

These words came to Walter's mind and fixed the resolution wavering there, and as his glance wandered from the gray tower to the churchyard full of summer stillness, he said within himself, —

"This is the hardest struggle of my life, but I will conquer and come out from the conflict master of myself at least, and like Jamie, try to wait until the sunshine comes again, even if it only shine upon me, dead like him."

It was no light task to leave the airy castles built by love and hope, and go back cheerfully to the solitude of a life whose only happiness for a time was in the memory of the past. But through the weeks that bore one lover home, the other struggled to subdue his passion, and be as generous in his sorrow as he would have been in his joy.

It was no easy conquest; but he won the hardest of all victories, that of self, and found in the place of banished pride and bitterness a patient strength, and the one desire to be indeed more generous than a brother to gentle Bess. He had truly, "cleft his heart in twain and flung away the baser part."

A few days before the absent lover came, Walter went to Bess, and, with a countenance whose pale serenity touched her deeply, he laid his gift before her, saying, —

"I owe this all to Jamie; and the best use I can make of it is to secure your happiness, as I promised him I'd try to do. Take it and God bless you, Sister Bess."

"And you, Walter, what will your future be if I take this and go away to enjoy it as you would have me?" Bess asked, with an earnestness that awoke his wonder.

"I shall work, Bess, and in that find content and consolation for the loss of you and Jamie. Do not think of me; this money will do me far more good in your hands than my own. Believe me it is best to be so, therefore do not hesitate."

Bess took it, for she had learned the cause of Walter's restless wanderings and strange avoidance of herself of late, and she judged wisely that the generous nature should be gratified, and the hard-won victory rewarded by the full accomplishment of its unselfish end. Few words expressed her joyful thanks, but from that time Walter felt that he held as dear a place as Jamie in her grateful heart, and was content.

Summer flowers were blooming when Bess went from the old home a happy wife, leaving her faithful friend alone in the little room where Jamie lived and died.

Years passed, and Walter’s pen had won for him an honored name. Poverty and care were no longer his companions; many homes were open to him, many hearts would gladly welcome him, but he still lingered in the gloomy house, a serious, solitary man, for his heart lay beneath the daisies of a child’s grave.

But his life was rich in noble aims and charitable deeds, and with his strong nature softened by the sharp discipline of sorrow, and sweetened by the presence of a generous love, he was content to dwell alone with the memory of little Jamie, in the shadow of “the cross upon the tower.”

THE DEATH OF JOHN.

This is not a tale, but a true history. — ED.

FROM "HOSPITAL SKETCHES."

HARDLY was I settled again, when the inevitable bowl appeared, and its bearer delivered a message I had expected, yet dreaded to receive: —

"John is going, ma'am, and wants to see you, if you can come."

"The moment this boy is asleep; tell him so, and let me know if I am in danger of being too late."

My Ganymede departed, and while I quieted poor Shaw, I thought of John. He came in a day or two after the others; and, one evening, when I entered my "pathetic room," I found a lately emptied bed occupied by a large, fair man, with a fine face, and the serenest eyes I ever met. One of the earlier comers had often spoken of a friend, who had remained behind, that those apparently worse wounded than himself might reach a shelter first. It seemed a David and Jonathan sort of friendship. The man fretted for his mate, and was never tired of praising John, — his courage, sobriety, self-denial, and unfailing kindliness of heart; always winding up with, "He's an out an' out fine feller, ma'am; you see if he ain't."

I had some curiosity to behold this piece of excellence, and when he came, watched him for a night or two, before I made friends with him; for, to tell the truth, I was a little afraid of the stately looking man, whose bed had to be lengthened to accommodate his commanding stature; who seldom spoke, uttered no complaint, asked no sympathy, but tranquilly observed what went on about him; and, as he lay high upon his pillows, no picture of dying statesman or warrior was ever fuller of real dignity than this Virginia blacksmith. A most attractive face he had, framed in brown hair and beard, comely featured and full of vigor, as yet unsubdued by pain; thoughtful and often beautifully mild while watching the afflictions of others, as if entirely forgetful of his own. His mouth was grave and firm, with plenty of will and courage in its lines, but a smile could make it as sweet as any woman's; and his eyes were child's eyes, looking one fairly in the face with a clear, straightforward glance, which promised well for such as placed their faith in him. He seemed to cling to life, as if it were rich in duties and delights, and he had learned the secret of content. The only time I saw his composure disturbed was when my surgeon brought another to examine John, who scrutinized their faces with an anxious look, asking of the elder, — ”Do you think I shall pull through, sir?” “I hope so, my man.” And, as the two passed on, John’s eye still followed them, with an intentness which would have won a clearer answer from them, had they seen it. A momentary shadow flitted over his face; then came the usual serenity, as if, in that brief eclipse, he had acknowledged the existence of some hard possibility, and, asking nothing, yet hoping all things, left the issue in God’s hands, with that submission which is true piety.

The next night, as I went my rounds with Dr. P., I happened to ask which man in the room probably suffered most; and, to my great surprise, he glanced at John: —

“Every breath he draws is like a stab; for the ball pierced the left lung, broke a rib, and did no end of damage here and there; so the poor lad can find neither forgetfulness nor ease, because he must lie on his wounded back or suffocate. It will be a hard struggle and a long one, for he possesses great vitality; but even his temperate life can’t save him; I wish it could.”

“You don’t mean he must die, Doctor?”

“Bless you, there’s not the slightest hope for him; and you’d better tell him so before long; women have a way of doing such things comfortably, so I leave it to you. He won’t last more than a day or two, at furthest.”

I could have sat down on the spot and cried heartily, if I had not learned the wisdom of bottling up one’s tears for leisure moments. Such an end seemed very hard for such a man, when half a dozen worn-out, worthless bodies round him were gathering up the remnants of wasted lives, to linger on for years perhaps, burdens to others, daily reproaches to themselves. The army needed men like John, — earnest, brave, and faithful; fighting for liberty and justice with both heart and hand, true soldiers of the Lord. I could not give him up so soon, or think with any patience of so excellent a nature robbed of its fulfilment, and blundered into eternity by the rashness or stupidity of those at whose hands so many lives may be required. It was an easy thing for Dr. P. to say, “Tell him he must die,” but a cruelly hard thing to do, and by no means as “comfortable” as he politely suggested. I had not the heart to do it then, and privately indulged the hope that some change for the better might take place, in spite of gloomy prophecies, so, rendering my task unnecessary. A few minutes later, as I came in again with fresh rollers, I saw John sitting erect, with no one to support him, while the surgeon dressed his back. I had never hitherto seen it done; for, having simpler wounds to attend to, and knowing the fidelity of the attendant, I had left John to him, thinking it might be more agreeable and safe; for both strength and experience were needed in his case. I had forgotten that the strong man might long for the gentler tendance of a woman’s hands, the sympathetic magnetism of a woman’s presence, as well as the feebler souls about him. The Doctor’s words caused me to reproach myself with neglect, not of any real duty perhaps, but of those little cares and kindnesses that solace homesick spirits, and make the heavy hours pass easier. John looked lonely and forsaken just then, as he sat with bent head, hands folded on his knee, and no outward sign of suffering, till, looking nearer, I saw great tears roll down and drop upon the floor. It was a new sight there; for though I had seen many suffer, some swore, some groaned, most endured silently, but none wept. Yet it did not seem weak, only very touching, and straightway my fear vanished, my heart opened wide and took him in, as, gathering the bent head in my arms, as freely as if he had been a little child, I said, — ”Let me help you bear it, John.”

Never, on any human countenance, have I seen so swift and beautiful a look of gratitude, surprise, and comfort, as that which answered me more eloquently than the whispered, —

“Thank you ma’am; this is right good! this is what I wanted!”

“Then why not ask for it before?”

“I didn’t like to be a trouble; you seemed so busy, and I could manage to get on alone.”

“You shall not want it any more, John.”

Nor did he; for now I understood the wistful look that sometimes followed me, as I went out, after a brief pause beside his bed, or merely a passing nod, while busied with those who seemed to need me more than he, because more urgent in their demands; now I knew that to him, as to so many, I was the poor substitute for mother, wife, or sister, and in his eyes no stranger, but a friend who hitherto had seemed neglectful; for, in his modesty, he had never guessed the truth. This was changed now; and, through the tedious operation of probing, bathing, and dressing his wounds, he leaned against me, holding my hand fast, and, if pain wrung further tears from him, no one saw them fall but me. When he was laid down again, I hovered about him, in a remorseful state of mind that would not let me rest, till I had bathed his face, brushed his “bonny brown hair,” set all things smooth about him, and laid a knot of heath and heliotrope on his clean pillow. While doing this, he watched me with the satisfied expression I so linked to see; and when I offered the little nosegay, held it carefully in his great hand, smoothed a ruffled leaf or two, surveyed and smelt it with an air of genuine delight, and lay contentedly regarding the glimmer of the sunshine on the green. Although the manliest man among my forty, he said, “Yes, ma’am,” like a little boy; received suggestions for his comfort with the quick smile that brightened his whole face; and now and then, as I stood tidying the table by his bed, I felt him softly touch my gown, as if to assure himself that I was there. Anything more natural and frank I never saw, and found this brave John as bashful as brave, yet full of excellences and fine aspirations, which, having no power to express themselves in words, seemed to have bloomed into his character and made him what he was.

After that night, an hour of each evening that remained to him was devoted to his ease or pleasure. He could not talk much, for breath was precious, and he spoke in whispers; but from occasional conversations, I gleaned scraps of private history which only added to the affection and respect I felt for him. Once he asked me to write a letter, and, as I settled pen and paper, I said, with an irrepressible glimmer of feminine curiosity, “Shall it be addressed to wife, or mother, John?”

“Neither, ma’am; I’ve got no wife, and will write to mother myself when I get better. Did you think I was married because of this?” he asked, touching a plain ring he wore, and often turned thoughtfully on his finger when he lay alone.

“Partly that, but more from a settled sort of look you have, — a look which young men seldom get until they marry.”

“I don’t know that; but I’m not so very young, ma’am; thirty in May and have been what you might call settled this ten years; for mother’s a widow; I’m the oldest child she has, and it wouldn’t do for me to marry until Lizzie has a home of her own, and Laurie’s learned his trade; for we’re not rich, and I must be father to the children, and husband to the dear old woman, if I can.”

“No doubt but you are both, John; yet how came you to go to war, if you felt so? Wasn’t enlisting as bad as marrying?”

“No, ma’am, not as I see it, for one is helping my neighbor, the other pleasing myself. I went because I couldn’t help it. I didn’t want the glory or the pay; I wanted the right thing done, and people kept saying the men who were in earnest ought to flight. I was in earnest, the Lord knows! but I held off as long as I could, not knowing which was my duty; mother saw the case, gave me her ring to keep me steady, and said ‘Go;’ so I went.”

A short story and a simple one, but the man and the mother were portrayed better than pages of fine writing could have done it.

“Do you ever regret that you came, when you lie here suffering so much?”

“Never ma’am; I haven’t helped a great deal, but I’ve shown I was willing to give my life, and perhaps I’ve got to; but I don’t blame anybody, and if it was to do over again, I’d do it. I’m a little sorry I wasn’t wounded in front; it looks cowardly to be hit in the back, but I obeyed orders, and it doesn’t matter in the end, I know.”

Poor John! it did not matter now, except that a shot in front might have spared the long agony in store for him. He seemed to read the thought that troubled me, as he spoke so hopefully when there was no hope, for he suddenly added, —

“This is my first battle; do they think it’s going to be my last?”

“I’m afraid they do, John.”

It was the hardest question I had ever been called upon to answer; doubly hard with those clear eyes fixed on mine, forcing a truthful answer by their own truth. He seemed a little startled at first, pondered over the fateful fact a moment, then shook his head, with a glance at the broad chest and muscular limbs stretched out before him: —

“I’m not afraid, but it’s difficult to believe all at once. I’m so strong it don’t seem possible for such a little wound to kill me.”

Merry Mercutio’s dying words glanced through my memory as he spoke: — ”‘Tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but ‘tis enough.” And John would have said the same, could he have seen the ominous black holes between his shoulders, he never had; and, seeing the ghastly sights about him, could not believe his own wound more fatal than these, for all the suffering it caused him.

“Shall I write to your mother, now?” I asked, thinking that these sudden tidings might change all plans and purposes; but they did not; for the man received the order of the Divine Commander to march, with the same unquestioning obedience with which the soldier had received that of the human one, doubtless remembering that the first led him to life, and the last to death.

“No, ma’am; to Laurie just the same; he’ll break it to her best, and
I’ll add a line to her myself when you get done.”

So I wrote the letter which he dictated, finding it better than any I had sent; for, though here and there a little ungrammatical or inelegant, each sentence came to me briefly worded, but most expressive; full of excellent counsel to the boy, tenderly “bequeathing mother and Lizzie” to his care, and bidding him good-by in words the sadder for their simplicity. He added a few lines with steady hand, and, as I sealed it, said, with a patient sort of sigh, “I hope the answer will come in time for me to see it;” then, turning away his face, laid the flowers against his lips, as if to hide some quiver of emotion at the thought of such a sudden sundering of all the dear home-ties.

These things had happened two days before; now John was dying, and the letter had not come. I had been summoned to many death-beds in my life, but to none that made my heart ache as it did then, since my mother called me to watch the departure of a spirit akin to this in its gentleness and patient strength. As I went in, John stretched out both hands, —

“I knew you’d come! I guess I’m moving on, ma’am.”

He was; and so rapidly that, even while he spoke, over his face I saw the gray veil falling that no human hand can lift. I sat down by him, wiped the drops from his forehead, stirred the air about him with the slow wave of a fan, and waited to help him die. He stood in sore need of help, — and I could do so little; for, as the doctor had foretold, the strong body rebelled against death, and fought every inch of the way, forcing him to draw each breath with a spasm, and clench his hands with an imploring look, as if he asked, "How long must I endure this, and be still?" For hours he suffered dumbly, without a moment's respite, or a moment's murmuring; his limbs grew cold, his face damp, his lips white, and, again and again, he tore the covering off his breast, as if the lightest weight added to his agony; yet through it all, his eyes never lost their perfect serenity, and the man's soul seemed to sit therein, undaunted by the ills that vexed his flesh.

One by one the men woke, and round the room appeared a circle of pale faces and watchful eyes, full of awe and pity; for, though a stranger, John was beloved by all. Each man there had wondered at his patience, respected his piety, admired his fortitude, and now lamented his hard death; for the influence of an upright nature had made itself deeply felt, even in one little week. Presently, the Jonathan who so loved this comely David came creeping from his bed for a last look and word. The kind soul was full of trouble, as the choke in his voice, the grasp of his hand betrayed; but there were no tears, and the farewell of the friends was the more touching for its brevity.

"Old boy, how are you?" faltered the one.

"Most through, thank heaven!" whispered the other.

"Can I say or do anything for you anywheres?"

"Take my things home, and tell them that I did my best."

"I will! I will!"

"Good-by, Ned."

"Good-by, John, good-by!"

They kissed each other, tenderly as women, and so parted; for poor Ned could not stay to see his comrade die. For a little while, there was no sound in the room but the drip of water from a stump or two, and John's distressful gasps, as he slowly breathed his life away. I thought him nearly gone, and had just laid down the fan, believing its help to be no longer needed, when suddenly he rose up in his bed, and cried out with a bitter cry that broke the silence, sharply startling every one with its agonized appeal, —

"For God's sake, give me air!"

It was the only cry pain or death had wrung from him, the only boon he had asked; and none of us could grant it, for all the airs that blew were useless now.

Dan flung up the window. The first red streak of dawn was warming the gray east, a herald of the coming sun. John saw it, and with the love of light which lingers in us to the end, seemed to read in it a sign of hope of help, for, over his whole face there broke that mysterious expression, brighter than any smile, which often comes to eyes that look their last. He laid himself gently down; and, stretching out his strong right arm, as if to grasp and bring the blessed air to his lips in a fuller flow, lapsed into a merciful unconsciousness, which assured us that for him suffering was forever past. He died then; for, though the heavy breaths still tore their way up for a little longer, they were but the waves of an ebbing tide that beat unfelt against the wreck, which an immortal voyager had deserted with a smile. He never spoke again, but to the end held my hand close, so close that when he was asleep at last, I could not draw it away. Dan helped me, warning me as he did so, that it was unsafe for dead and living flesh to lie so long together; but though my hand was strangely cold and stiff, and four white marks remained across its back, even when warmth and color had returned elsewhere, I could not but be glad that, through its touch, the presence of human sympathy, perhaps, had lightened that hard hour.

When they had made him ready for the grave, John lay in state for half an hour, a thing which seldom happened in that busy place; but a universal sentiment of reverence and affection seemed to fill the hearts of all who had known or heard of him; and when the rumor of his death went through the house, always astir, many came to see him, and I felt a tender sort of pride in my lost patient; for he looked a most heroic figure, lying there stately and still as the statue of some young knight asleep upon his tomb. The lovely expression which so often beautifies dead faces soon replaced the marks of pain, and I longed for those who loved him best to see him when half an hour's acquaintance with Death had made them friends. As we stood looking at him, the ward master handed me a letter, saying it had been forgotten the night before. It was John's letter, come just an hour too late to gladden the eyes that had longed and looked for it so eagerly; yet he had it; for, after I had cut some brown locks for his mother, and taken off the ring to send her, telling how well the talisman had done its work, I kissed this good son for her sake, and laid the letter in his hand, still folded as when I drew my own away, feeling that its place was there, and making myself happy with the thought, even in his solitary place in the "Government Lot," he would not be without some token of the love which makes life beautiful and outlives death. Then I left him, glad to have known so genuine a man, and carrying with me an enduring memory of the brave Virginia blacksmith, as he lay serenely waiting for the dawn of that long day which knows no night.

MORNING-GLORIES, AND OTHER STORIES

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A CHRISTMAS SONG

Cold and wintry is the sky,
Bitter winds go whistling by,
Orchard boughs are bare and dry,
Yet here stands a faithful tree.
Household fairies kind and dear,
With loving magic none need fear,
Bade it rise and blossom here,
Little friends, for you and me.

Come and gather as they fall,
Shining gifts for great and small;
Santa Claus remembers all
When he comes with goodies piled.
Corn and candy, apples red,
Sugar horses, gingerbread,
Babies who are never fed,
Are handing here for every child.

Shake the boughs and down they come,
Better fruit than peach or plum,
‘T is our little harvest home;
For though frosts the flowers kill,
Though birds depart and squirrels sleep,
Though snows may gather cold and deep,
Little folks their sunshine keep,
And mother-love makes summer still.

Gathered in a smiling ring,
Lightly dance and gayly sing,
Still at heart remembering
The sweet story all should know,
Of the little Child whose birth
Has made this day throughout the earth
A festival for childish mirth,

Since the first Christmas long ago.

MORNING-GLORIES

“What’s that?” — and Daisy sat up in her little bed to listen; for she had never heard a sound like it before.

It was very early, and the house was still. The sun was just rising, and the morning-glories at the window were turning their blue and purple cups to catch the welcome light. The sky was full of rosy clouds; dew shone like diamonds on the waving grass, and the birds were singing as they only sing at dawn. But softer, sweeter than any bird-voice was the delicate music which Daisy heard. So airy and gay was the sound, it seemed impossible to lie still with that fairy dancing-tune echoing through the room. Out of bed scrambled Daisy, her sleepy eyes opening wider and wider with surprise and pleasure as she listened and wondered.

“Where is it?” she said, popping her head out of the window. The morning-glories only danced lightly on their stems, the robins chirped shrilly in the garden below, and the wind gave Daisy a kiss; but none of them answered her, and still the lovely music sounded close beside her.

“It’s a new kind of bird, perhaps; or maybe it’s a fairy hidden somewhere. Oh, if it *is* how splendid it will be!” cried Daisy; and she began to look carefully in all the colored cups, under the leaves of the woodbine, and in the wren’s nest close by. There was neither fairy nor bird to be seen; and Daisy stood wondering, when a voice cried out from below:

“Why, little nightcap, what brings you out of your bed so early?”

“O Aunt Wee! do you hear it — that pretty music playing somewhere near! I can’t find it; but I think it’s a fairy, don’t you?” said Daisy, looking down at the young lady standing in the garden with her hands full of roses.

Aunt Wee listened, smiled, and shook her head.

“Don’t you remember you said last night that you thought the world a very stupid, grown-up place, because there were no giants and fairies in it now? Well, perhaps there *are* fairies, and they are going to show themselves to you, if you watch well.”

Daisy clapped her hands, and danced about on her little bare feet; for, of all things in the world, she most wanted to see a fairy.

“What must I do to find them, Aunt Wee?” she cried, popping out her head again with her cap half off, and her curly hair blowing in the wind.

“Why, you see, they frolic all night, and go to sleep at dawn; so we must get up very early, if we want to catch the elves awake. They are such delicate, fly-away little things, and we are so big and clumsy, we shall have to look carefully, and perhaps hunt a long time before we find even one," replied Aunt Wee, very gravely.

"Mamma says I'm quick at finding things; and you know all about fairies, so I guess we'll catch one. Can't we begin now? It's very early, and this music has waked me up; so I don't want to sleep any more. Will you begin to hunt now?"

"But you don't like to get up early, or to walk in the fields; and, if we mean to catch a fairy, we must be up and out by sunrise every fair morning till we get one. Can you do this, lazy Daisy?" And Aunt Wee smiled to herself as if something pleased her very much.

"Oh! I will, truly, get up, and not fret a bit, if you'll only help me look. Please come now to dress me, and see if you can find what makes the music."

Daisy was very much in earnest, and in such a hurry to be off that she could hardly stand still to have her hair brushed, and thought there were a great many unnecessary buttons and strings on her clothes that day. Usually she lay late, got up slowly and fretted at every thing as little girls are apt to do when they have had too much sleep. She wasn't a rosy, stout Daisy; but had been ill, and had fallen into a way of thinking she couldn't do anything but lie about, reading fairy-tales, and being petted by every one. Mamma and papa had tried all sorts of things to amuse and do her good; for she was their only little daughter, and they loved her very dearly. But nothing pleased her long; and she lounged about, pale and fretful, till Aunt Laura came. Daisy called her "Wee" when she was a baby, and couldn't talk plainly; and she still used the name because it suited the cheery little aunt so well.

"I don't see anything, and the music has stopped. I think some elf just came to wake you up, and then flew away; so we won't waste any more time in looking here," said Wee, as she finished dressing Daisy, who flew about like a Will-o'-the-wisp all the while.

"Do you think it will come again to-morrow?" asked Daisy anxiously.

"I dare say you'll hear it, if you wake in time. Now get your hat, and we will see what we can find down by the brook. I saw a great many fireflies there last night, and fancy there was a ball; so we may find some drowsy elf among the buttercups and clover."

Away rushed Daisy for her hat, and soon was walking gayly down the green lane, looking about her as if she had never been there before; for every thing seemed wonderfully fresh and lovely.

"How pink the clouds are, and how the dew twinkles in the grass! I never saw it so before," she said.

"Because by the time you are up the pretty pink clouds are gone, and the thirsty grass has drank the dew, or the sun has drawn it up to fall again at night for the flowers' evening bath," replied Wee, watching the soft color that began to touch Daisy's pale cheeks.

"I think we'd better look under that cobweb spread like a tent over the white clovers. A fairy would be very likely to creep in there and sleep."

Daisy knelt down and peeped carefully; but all she saw was a little brown spider, who looked very much surprised to see visitors so early.

"I don't like spiders," said Daisy, much disappointed.

"There are things about spiders as interesting to hear as fairy tales," said Wee. "This is Mrs. Epeira Diadema; and she is a respectable, industrious little neighbor. She spreads her tent, but sits under a leaf near by, waiting for her breakfast. She wraps her eggs in a soft silken bag, and hides them in some safe chink, where they lie till spring. The eggs are prettily carved and ornamented, and so hard that the baby spiders have to force their way out by biting the shell open and poking their little heads through. The mother dies as soon as her eggs are safely placed, and the spiderlings have to take care of themselves."

"How do you know about it, Aunt Wee? You talk as if Mrs. Eppyra — or whatever her name is — had told you herself. Did she?" asked Daisy, feeling more interested in the brown spider.

"No; I read it in a book, and saw pictures of the eggs, web, and family. I had a live one in a bottle; and she spun silken ladders all up and down, and a little room to sleep in. She ate worms and bugs, and was very amiable and interesting till she fell ill and died."

"I should like to see the book; and have a spider-bottle, so I could take care of the poor little orphans when they are born. Good-by, ma'am. I shall call again; for you are 'most as good as a fairy there in your pretty tent, with a white clover for your bed."

Daisy walked on a few steps, and then stopped to say:

"What does that bird mean by calling 'Hurry up, hurry up?' He keeps flying before us, and looking back as if he wanted to show me something."

"Let me hear what he says. I may be able to understand him, or the bob-o-link that swings on the alder by the brook."

Wee listened a moment, while the birds twittered and chirped with all their hearts. Presently Wee sang in a tone very like the bob-o-link's:

"Daisy and Wee,
Come here, and see
What a dainty feast is spread:

Down in the grass
Where fairies pass,
Here are berries ripe and red.
“All wet with dew,
They wait for you:
Come hither, and eat your fill,
While I gayly sing,
In my airy swing,
And the sun climbs up the hill.”

“Did he really say that?” cried Daisy, watching the bob-o-link, who sat swaying up and down on the green bough, and nodding his white-capped head at her in the most friendly manner.

“Perhaps I didn’t translate it rightly; for it is very hard to put bird-notes into our language, because we haven’t words soft and sweet enough. But I really think there are berries over there, and we will see if what he says is true,” said Wee.

Over the wall they went, and there, on a sunny bank, found a bed of the reddest, ripest berries ever seen.

“Thank you, thank you, for telling me to hurry up, and showing me such a splendid feast,” said Daisy, with her mouth full, as she nodded back at the birds. “These are so much sweeter than those we buy. I’d carry some home to mamma, if I only had a basket.”

“You can pick this great leaf full, while I make you a basket,” said Wee.

Daisy soon filled the leaf, and then sat watching her aunt plait a pretty basket of rushes. While she waited she looked about, and kept finding something curious or pleasant to interest and amuse her. First she saw a tiny rainbow in a dewdrop that hung on a blade of grass; then she watched a frisky calf come down to drink on the other side of the brook, and laughed to see him scamper away with his tail in the air. Close by grew a pitcher-plant; and a yellow butterfly sat on the edge, bathing its feet, Daisy said. Presently she discovered a little ground bird sitting on her nest, and peeping anxiously, as if undecided whether to fly away or trust her.

“I won’t hurt you, little mother. Don’t be afraid,” whispered the child; and, as if it understood, the bird settled down on her nest with a comfortable chirp, while its mate hopped up to give her a nice plump worm for breakfast.

“I love birds. Tell me something about them, Aunt Wee. You must know many things; for they like you, and come when you call.”

“Once upon a time,” began Wee, while her fingers flew and the pretty basket grew, “there was a great snow-storm, and all the country was covered with a thick white quilt. It froze a little, so one could walk over it, and I went out for a run. Oh, so cold it was, with a sharp wind, and no sun or any thing green to make it pleasant! I went far away over the fields, and sat down to rest. While I sat there, a little bird came by, and stopped to rest also.

“‘How do you do?’ said I.

“‘Chick-a-dee-dee,’ said he.

“‘A cold day,’ said I.

“‘Chick-a-dee-dee,’ said he.

“‘Aren’t you afraid of starving, now the ground is covered and the trees are bare?’

“‘Chick-a-dee-dee, ma’am, chick-a-dee-dee!’“ answered the bird in the same cheerful tone. And it sounded as if he said, ‘I shall be cared for. I’m not afraid.’

“‘What will you eat? There’s nothing here or for miles round. I really think you’ll starve, birdie,’ said I.

“Then he laughed, and gave me a merry look as he lit on a tall, dry weed near by. He shook it hard with his little bill; when down fell a shower of seeds, and there was dinner all ready on a snow-white cloth. All the while he ate he kept looking up at me with his quick, bright eyes; and, when he had done, he said, as plainly as a bird could say it:

“‘Cold winds may blow,
And snows may fall,
But well we know
God cares for all.’“

“I like that little story, and shall always think of it when I hear the chick-a-dee-dee.” Daisy sat a moment with a thoughtful look in her eyes; then she said slowly, as if sorry for the words:

“It isn’t a stupid, grown-up world. It’s a very pleasant, young world; and I like it a great deal better this morning than I did last night.”

“I’m glad of that; and, even if we don’t find our fairy to-day, you will have found some sunshine, Daisy, and that is almost as good. Now put in the berries, and we’ll go on.”

How they hunted! They climbed trees to peep into squirrel-holes and birds'-nests; they chased bees and butterflies to ask for news of the elves; they waded in the brook, hoping to catch a water-sprite; they ran after thistle-down, fancying a fairy might be astride; they searched the flowers and ferns, questioned sun and wind, listened to robin and thrush; but no one could tell them any thing of the little people, though all had gay and charming bits of news about themselves. And Daisy thought the world got younger and happier every minute.

When they came in to breakfast, papa and mamma looked at Daisy, and then nodded with a smile at Aunt Wee; for, though Daisy's frock was soiled, her boots wet, and her hair tumbled, her cheeks were rosy, eyes bright, and voice so cheerful that they thought it better music than any in the summer world without.

“Hunting fairies is a pleasant play, isn't it, Daisy?” said papa, as he tasted the berries, and admired the green basket.

“Oh, yes! and we are going again to-morrow. Aunt Wee says we must try seven days at least. I like it, and mean to keep on till I really find my fairy.”

“I think you will find something better than ‘little vanishers,’ dear,” said mamma, filling up the bowl of bread and milk which Daisy was fast emptying; for she certainly *had* found an appetite.

“There it is again!” cried Daisy, flying out of bed the next morning still earlier than the day before. Yes, there it was, the fairy music, as blithe and sweet as ever; and the morning-glories rung their delicate bells as if keeping time. Daisy felt rather sleepy, but remembered her promise to Aunt Wee, and splashed into her tub, singing the bob-o-link's song as she bathed.

“Where shall we go to-day?” she asked, as they went out into the garden.

“I think we'd better try a new place; so we'll go to the farmyard; and, while we feed the hens, I'll listen to their chat, and perhaps can learn something from it,” replied Wee soberly.

“Do hens know about fairies? I thought they were very dull things, and didn't care for any thing but eating corn and laying eggs,” said Daisy, surprised.

“Oh, dear, no! they are very sensible creatures, and see a deal of the world in their daily walks. Hunting for insects gives them an excellent chance to see fairies, if there are any. Here is some corn for the biddies; and, after we have fed them, we will look for eggs, and so may find a brownie or two.”

Such a clatter as there was when they came to the barnyard; for every thing was just awake, and in the best spirits. Ducks were paddling off to the pond; geese to the meadow; and meek gray guinea-hens tripping away to hunt bugs in the garden. A splendid cock stood on the wall, and crowed so loud and clear that all the neighboring chanticleers replied. The motherly hens clucked and scratched with their busy broods about them, or sat and scolded in the coops because the chicks would gad abroad. Doves cooed on the sunny roof, and smoothed their gleaming feathers. Daisy’s donkey nibbled a thistle by the wall, and a stately peacock marched before the door with all his plumage spread. It made Daisy laugh to see the airs the fowls put on as she scattered corn, and threw meal and water to the chicks. Some pushed and gobbled; some stood meekly outside the crowd, and got what they could; others seized a mouthful, and ran away to eat it in a corner. The chicks got into the pan entirely, and tumbled one over the other in their hurry to eat; but the mammas saw that none went hungry. And the polite cock waited upon them in the most gentlemanly manner, making queer little clucks and gurgles as if he said:

“Allow me, madam, to offer you this kernel;” or, “Here, my dear, try that bit.” And sometimes he pecked a little, with a loud quaver, evidently saying, “Come, come, children, behave yourselves, and don’t eat like pigs.”

“What is she saying?” asked Daisy, pointing to an old gray hen in a black turban, who was walking about alone, muttering to herself, as hens often do in their promenades.

“She says a cat has made a nest, and hatched three kits up on the loft, near her own nest; and she doesn’t like it, because their mewing annoys her,” said Wee, after listening a minute.

“How nice! let’s go and find them. But do you learn anything about the fairies from the hen’s chat?”

“No: they have been so busy setting, they have had no time for picnics yet. But they will let us know, if they discover any.”

In the barn, the cows were being milked; and Daisy had a mugful of it, warm and sweet, out of the foaming pail.

“We’ll take some to Mrs. Purr; for, I dare say, she doesn’t like to leave the kits long, and will enjoy a sip of something comfortable,” said Wee, as Daisy climbed the ladder, and went rustling over the hay to a corner, whence came a joyful “Mew!” What a charming sight it was, to be sure! a snow-white cat lying in a cosy nest, and, by her, three snow-white kits, wagging three very small gray tails.

“There never was any thing so lovely!” cried Daisy, as she sat with the three downy balls in her lap, while the mamma gratefully lapped the new milk from Aunt Wee’s cup.

“Are they better than fairies?”

“Almost: for I know about pussies, and can cuddle them; but I couldn’t a fairy, you know, and they might be afraid of me. These dears are not afraid, and I shall have such fun with them as they grow up. What *shall* we name them, auntie?”

“Snowball, Patpaw, and Wagtail would do, I think,” said Wee, stroking the cat, who rubbed against her, purring very loud.

“Yes: I like those names for my pets. But what is Mrs. Purr saying, with her mouth up to your ear?” asked Daisy, who firmly believed that Aunt Wee knew every thing.

“She tells me that when she went on a grasshopper hunt the other day, as she ran through the meadow, she saw some lovely creatures all in blue, with gauze wings, flying about over the river, and sitting in the water-lilies. She thinks they may be fairies, and advises us to go and look.”

“So we will to-morrow,” said Daisy. “Ask her, please, if I may take the kits into the house, if I’ll be very careful and give them a nice big bed to sleep in.”

“She says you may; but she must go too, else the kits will cry,” said Wee, after listening to Pussy’s purr a minute.

Much pleased with her new pets, Daisy took them in her apron, and, followed by their confiding mamma, marched to the house, and established them in the old cradle which used to be hers. Pussy got in also; and, when they were settled on a soft cushion, Daisy rocked them gently to and fro. At first Mrs. Purr opened her yellow eyes, and looked rather anxious: but, as nothing uncomfortable happened, she composed herself, and soon quite liked the motion; for she fell asleep, and made a pretty picture as she lay with her downy white babies on her downy white breast.

When the sun rose next morning, he saw Daisy and Wee floating down the river in their boat. “Bless me! here’s company,” said the sun, and began at once to make them welcome in his most charming manner. He set the waves to sparkling with a sudden shimmer; he shot long rays of light through the dark hemlocks, till they looked like fairy trees; he touched Daisy’s hair and it turned to gold; he chased away the shadows that lurked among the hills; he drew up the misty curtain that hovered over the river; and, with the warmth of his kisses, waked the sleeping lilies.

“Look, look, Aunt Wee! how they open, one by one, as the light shines on them! We shan’t have to wait any longer; for they get up with the sun, as you do.” As she spoke, Daisy caught a half-open lily, and drew it up, fragrant and dripping, fresh from its sleep.

“They look like a fleet of fairy ships, anchored in this quiet harbor, with sails half furled, and crews asleep. See the little sailors, in their yellow jackets, lifting up their heads as the wind blows its whistle, like a boatswain, to ‘pipe all hands.’“

Daisy laughed at Aunt Wee’s fancy, and stirred up the crew of the Water-sprite, as she called her flower, till the white sails were all set, and it was ready for a summer voyage.

"It is time we saw the fairies in blue, unless old Madam Purr deceived us. I hope we *shall* find one; for, though I enjoy every thing we see, I do want my elf too."

"What is that?" cried Wee; and Daisy flew up so quickly that the boat rocked like a cradle. A slender creature, in a blue dress, with gauzy wings, darted by, and vanished among the rushes that nodded by the bank.

"Go nearer, — softly! softly! — and maybe it will fly out again. I really think it was a fairy; for I never saw any thing like it before," whispered Daisy, much excited.

Wee rowed in among the green rushes and purple water-weeds, and out flew half-a-dozen of the blue-bodied creatures. They didn't seem afraid, but skimmed about the boat, as if curious to see what it was; and Daisy sat, and stared with all her might. Presently one of the lovely things lit on the lily in her hand, and she held her breath to watch it. A little shadow of disappointment passed over her face as she looked; but it was gone at once, and her voice was full of delight as she said softly:

"It's not a fairy, Aunt Wee; but it is very beautiful, with its slender blue body, its lacy wings, and bright eyes. What name does it have?"

"We call it a dragon-fly; and it could tell you a pretty little story about itself, could you understand it. In May the tiny eggs are dropped on the water, and sink to the bottom, where little creatures are born, — ugly, brown things, with six legs and no wings. They feed on water-insects, and for a long time swim about in this state. When ready, they climb up the stem of some plant, and sit in the sun till the ugly brown shells drop away, and the lovely winged creatures appear. They grow in an hour to be perfect dragon-flies, and float away to lead happy lives in the sunshine by the river."

As if only waiting till the story was done, the dragon-fly flew off with a whirr, and darted to and fro, hunting for its breakfast, glittering splendidly as it flashed among the leaves or darted close above the water. Daisy forgot her disappointment in a minute, and went fishing for lilies; while the turtles came up to sun themselves on the rocks, the merry little tadpoles wiggled in the shallow places, and a wild duck paddled by with a brood of ducklings following in her wake.

"Oh, dear! it rains; and we can't go fairy-hunting at all," said Daisy next morning, as the patter on the window-pane woke her up, and Aunt Wee came in to dress her.

"Yes, we can, dear; jump up, and see what a funny place I'll take you to."

Daisy thought the rain would be a capital excuse for lying in bed; for she still liked to cuddle and drowse in her cosey, warm nest. But she was curious to know where the curious place was; so she got up and followed.

“Why, Aunt Wee, this is the garret; and there isn’t any thing nice or funny here,” she said, as they climbed the stairs, and came into the big attic, filled with all manner of old things.

“Isn’t there? We’ll soon see.” And so they did: for Aunt Wee began to play; and presently Daisy was shouting with fun as she sat on an old saddle, with a hair-covered trunk for a horse, a big old-fashioned bonnet on her head, and a red silk petticoat for a habit. Then they went to sea in a great chest, and got wrecked on a desert island, where they built a fort with boxes and bags, hunted bears with rusty guns, and had to eat dried berries, herbs and nuts; for no other food could be found. Aunt Wee got an old fiddle, and had a dancing-school, where Daisy capered till she was tired. So they rummaged out some dusty books, and looked at pictures so quietly that a little mouse came out of a drawer and peeped about, thinking no one was there.

“Let’s find the nest, since we don’t find any fairy,” said Wee; and, opening the drawer, she turned over the things till she came to a pair of old velvet shoes; and there in the toe of one, nicely cuddled under a bit of flannel, lay four pink mites, which woke up, and stretched their tiny legs, and squeaked such small squeaks one could hardly hear them.

“How cunning they are! I wish they would let me put them with the kits, and have a nursery full of babies. Wouldn’t it be nice to see them all grow up?” said Daisy.

“I’m afraid they wouldn’t grow up, if Mrs. Purr lived with them,” began Wee, but got no further; for just then the cat bounced into the drawer, and ate up the mouselings in four mouthfuls. Daisy screamed; the mother-mouse gave a doleful squeak, and ran into a hole; and Aunt Wee tried to save the little ones. But it was too late: Purr had got her breakfast, and sat washing her face after it, as if she had enjoyed it.

“Never mind, Daisy: she would have caught them by and by, and it’s as well to have them taken care of before they do any harm. There is the bell: don’t cry, but come and tell papa what a fine romp we’ve had.”

“It doesn’t rain, but it’s dreadfully wet; so we’ll go to the dairy, and see if any sprites are hiding there,” said Wee next day; and to the dairy they went.

A pleasant place it was, — so clean and cool, and as full of sweet odors as if the ghosts of buttercups and clover still haunted the milk which they had helped to make. Dolly was churning, and Polly was making up butter in nice little pats. Both were very kind, and let Daisy peep everywhere. All round on white shelves stood the shining pans, full of milk; the stone floor was wet; and a stream of water ran along a narrow bed through the room, and in it stood jars of butter, pots of cream, and cans of milk. The window was open, and hop-vines shook their green bells before it. The birds sang outside, and maids sang inside, as the churn and the wooden spatters kept time:

“Brindle and Bess,
White-star and Jess —
Come, butter, come!
Eat cowslips fine,
Red columbine; —
Come, butter, come!
Grasses green and tall,
Clover, best of all, —
Come, butter, come!
And give every night
Milk sweet and white —
Come, butter, come!
Make the churn go,
See the lumps grow! —
Come, butter, come!”

Daisy sang also, and turned the handle till she was tired; then she helped Polly with the butter, and made four little pats, — one stamped with a star for papa, one with a rose for mamma, a strawberry for Aunt Wee, and a cow for herself. She skimmed a pitcher of cream with a shallow shell, and liked the work so much she asked to have a little pan of milk put by for her to take care of every day. Dolly promised, and gave her a small shell and a low shelf all to herself. When she went in, she carried her pretty pats in one hand, the cream-pot in the other, and entered the breakfast room looking as brisk and rosy as a little milkmaid.

It was a lovely morning when Daisy was next roused by the fairy music, and the ponies were standing at the door. “Are we going far?” she asked, as Wee put on her riding-skirt, and tied back her hair.

“Up to the mountain-top: it’s only a mile; and we shall have time, if we ride fast,” answered Wee.

Away they went, through the green lane, over the bridge, and up the steep hillside where the sheep fed and colts frisked as they passed by. Higher and higher climbed Dandy and Prance, the ponies; and gayer and gayer grew Daisy and Wee, as the fresh air blew over them, and the morning-red glowed on their faces. When they reached the top, they sat on a tall stone, and looked down into the valley on either side.

"This seems like a place to find giants, not fairies, it is so high and big and splendid up here," said Daisy, as her eye roamed over river, forest, town, and hill.

"There are giants here; and I brought you up to see them," answered Wee.

"Mercy, me! where are they?" cried Daisy, looking very curious and rather frightened.

"There is one of them." And Wee pointed to the waterfall that went dashing and foaming down into the valley. "That giant turns the wheels of all the mills you see. Some of them grind grain for our bread, some help to spin cloth for our clothes, some make paper, and others saw trees into boards. That is a beautiful and busy giant, Daisy."

"So it is, and some day we'll go and see it work. Show me the others: I like your giants 'most as well as those in the fairy-books."

"On this side you'll see another, called Steam. He is a very strong fellow; for, with the help of gunpowder, he will break the granite mountain in pieces, and carry it away. He works in the other mills, and takes heavy loads of stone, cloth, paper, and wood all over the country. Then, on the right of us is a third giant, called Electricity. He runs along those wires, and carries messages from one end of the world to the other. He goes under the sea and through the air; he brings news to every one; runs day and night, yet never tires; and often helps sick people with his lively magic."

"I like him best, I think; for he is more like a real, wonderful giant. Is there any on that side of us?" asked Daisy, turning round to look behind her.

"Yes: the best and most powerful of all lives in that big house with the bell on the roof," said Wee, smiling.

"Why, that's only the schoolhouse."

"Education is a long word, dear; but you know what it means, and, as you grow older, you will see what wonders it can work. It is a noble giant; for in this country rich and poor are helped by it, and no one need suffer for it unless they choose. It works more wonders than any other: it changes little children into wise, good men and women, who rule the world, and make happy homes everywhere; it helps write books, sing songs, paint pictures, do good deeds, and beautify the world. Love and respect it, my little Daisy, and be glad that you live now when such giants lend a hand to dwarfs like us."

Daisy sat still a long time, looking all about her on the mountain-top; and, when she rode away, she carried a new thought in her mind, which she never forgot.

"This is the last day of the seven, and no fairies have been found. Do you think I *ever* shall see one?" said Daisy, on the Sunday morning that ended her week's hunt.

"Not the kind you think of, for there are none such, Daisy; but you have found two better and more beautiful ones than any fanciful sprites," said Wee.

"Have I? Where are they? What are their names?"

Aunt Wee drew her to the glass, and said, as she pointed to Daisy's face:

"Here they are, and their names are Health and Happiness. There are many ways of losing them, and they are hard to catch when once lost. I wanted you to keep both, and tried to show you how. A happy, healthful hour in the morning sweetens and brightens the whole day; and there is no fairy-book half so wonderful as the lovely world all about us, if we only know how to read it."

"Then all these mornings we were hunting after health and happiness, instead of fairies, were we?"

"Yes: haven't you enjoyed it, and don't you think you have caught my fairies?"

Daisy looked from a little picture of herself, which Wee had drawn some time ago, to her image in the glass. One was dull and sad, pale and cross; the other, rosy, gay, and smiling, — the likeness of a happy, hearty little girl, wide-awake and in good tune. She understood the kind joke; and, turning, kissed Aunt Wee, as she said, gratefully:

"I think I have caught your elves, and I'll try to keep them all my life. But tell me one thing: was the music that woke me all a joke too?"

"No, dear: here it is, and now it is your own; for you have learned to wake and listen to it."

Daisy looked, and saw Aunt Wee lean from the window, and take out of a hollow nook, in the old tree close by, a little box. She set it on the table, touched a spring, and the airy music sounded more beautiful than ever.

"Is it mine, all mine?" cried Daisy.

"Yes: I hid it while I tried my little plan, and now you shall have it for your own. See, here is the best elf I can give you, and she will dance whenever you call her."

Wee pushed a golden pin, and up sprang a tiny figure, all crimson and gold, with shining wings, and a garland on its dainty head. Softly played the hidden music, and airily danced the little sylph till the silvery chime died away; then, folding her delicate arms, she sank from sight, leaving Daisy breathless with delight.

THE ROSE FAMILY

CHAPTER I.

ONCE upon a time there lived in Fairyland a family who, as is the custom, bore the name of the flower which was their care. There was the Papa, the mamma, and four little daughters, Bhish, Brier, Moss, and Eglantine, — or Tina, as her playmates called her, for she was a baby-elf still lying in her green cradle, and had not vet learned to use her crauzv little winces as her sisters did. Their home was in a rose-tree, among whose flowers they found all that elves could need. In some they slept with the petals drooping like crimson curtains over them to shield from wind and rain; in others they laid their gossamer garments, making them fresh and fragrant with the perfume of the leaves between which they were folded. On the slender branches hung their harps, — we call them cobwebs, and hear no sound, but to the delicate senses of the fairy folk there came airy melodies as the wind swept by. A broad-leaved plantain grew at the rose-tree's root, and there they spread their dainty meals; — little loaves of flower-dust and honey, fresh dew in red-brimmed moss-cups, a single berry pret- tily sliced on a lesser leaf, and eaten in acorn-cups, with cream from the milk-weed, and sugar from the red-clover blossom, whose deep cells the bees can never wholly rifle.

Papa Rose went daily to Court, for he was connected with the royal families of York and Lancaster, and, being a wise and virtuous elf, was the Queen's prime minister. The mamma, whom her neighbors called ** bonny litde madam," as slie came from Scotland, remained at home among the roses, for, like mortal mothers, she had many duties to perform that home might be always beautiful to those she loved. Blush, Brier, and Moss, after a morn- ing romp with Tina, tlew away to the fairy school, where they learned all manner of })leasant things which human children never know; such as the history of flowers, the language of insects, the large utterance of trees, and the sweet gossip of the wind. All day each was busied with some useful task; for elves are not foolish little gad-abouts, as we have been taught to think them, but people very like ourselves in the cares and troubles that come to them, only infinitely smaller than we, with microscopic joys and afllictions to match. Thus the Rose family helped rule the kingdom, kept house, studied, and played all day, and at night enjoyed themselves together like mortal families till the evening red faded and the dew began to fall.

So lived the Roses, till the watchful mother saw that a little fault had sprung up, like a harmful weed, in the garden of small virtues which she had planted in the natures of her elder daughters. Moss was gentle and kind, but sadly indolent, and as fond of play as the idlest butterfly that ever flew; Brier, though a merry, generous- hearted elf, was passionate and wilful \ while little Blush, the fairest of them all, was vain of the bloom on her delicate cheek, the blue of her smiling eyes, the gold of her shining hair, and the grace of her airy shape. Long did the mother \xy to cure these troublesome faults, and ear- nestly did the little ones promise to be good — O, very good! — when she spoke to them. But though they wept and sighed, resolved and promised, they did not heartily try; so nothing came of it. At last the papa said to their troubled mamma, as they sat talking in the moonlight of the naughty little daugliters sleeping all about them : “ My love, there is no way left but to send them to the good fair)’, Star, who is gentle and wise, and will make them what we desire.”

“Yes, it shall be as you say, dear friend,” replied Mad- am Rose, hiding her face in a cobweb handkercliief, for it was very hard to part wiili all tliree. Eut being a most excellent mamma, and remembering how wisely and well the learned Star had tauirht manv a small sinner, she agreed to the papa’s decision without a bit of scolding or fuss, though she wept so bitterly all night that the rose where she slept was wet as with rain.

Next morning, when the young elves woke and learned what was to happen, great was the lamentation, and their papa had to carry them sobbing from their mother’s anns into the car, drawn by a span of white butterflies, which waited to take them away. Till they were out of sight they waved their cowslip hats, looking backward through their tears to the pleasant home they left behind; for on the topmost twig still stood the dear mamma, lifting Tina in her arms that she might kiss her little hand to them, and in her babv voice re-echo their farewells.

he wise Star lived on an enchanted island, weaving wonderful spells, helping the moon rule the sea, the dew to do its silent work, the wind to cany nged seeds to desolate spots, and sending sun or shower to help them thrive. The pupils sent her were taught by love, not fear, and none had proved too wild or wilful for her gentle rule.

“How beautiful! “ cried the young Roses, as they alighted near the lake upon whose bosom floated the fair)’ palace underneath a rainbow arch. The island was encircled with a garland of white lilies, blue water- weeds, and cardinal-flowers that glowed among the reeds like spires of flame. Dragon-flics with gleaming bodies darted to and fro, gold and silver fish glittered under- neath the ripples as they kissed the shore, all the air was cool and still, and over palace, lake, and island a sunny silence seemed to brood, as if some spell secured to Star the studious calm she loved.

Ringing a harebell, whose chime echoed far across the lake. Papa Rose seated his little daughters in a great white lily, having embraced them tenderly, and, setting the flower afloat, watched it till it anchored at the palace-steps. He had sent a message by the earliest breeze that blew, for in Fairyland the winds are postmen; so Star knew who was coming, and why they were sent. Twinkling off” the drops that filled his eyes as the three little figures vanished. Papa Rose turned toward home, feeling as many human fathers have felt when they have left their children behind them.

The elves found Star waiting for them, and loved her even before she spoke. A most benignant-looking spirit she seemed, clothed in mist, with a clearly shining star upon her forehead and a winning smile upon her lips. With one glance of her magically gifted eye, she saw into the hearts before her, felt how best to teach them, and began her lesson without more delay. Calling them about her, she said, as she caressed them with the friendliest look : “ My little elves, I have such faith in the love you bear your mother, that I shall use no other spell, and trust to that alone. You left her weeping at your loss; yet it is in your power to change her tears to smiles, and make home happy, by remembering what I tell you now. Each is to work alone, with no help but the talisman I give, and the desire to become what we would have you. In each of these three drops of water from this magic fountain you will always see your mothers face as in a glass. Let no naughtiness dim their brightness, no selfish thought or unkind feeling bring a shadow to the face you love, but so live that it may always smile; and when this is done, your lesson is learned, your separation ended. Fear nothing, but drink, and whenever you may wake hold fast your talisman and heartily begin your task.”

Wondering, yet obedient, the three received the shining drops, drank of the golden water, and sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN moss awoke, she found herself in a sunshiny meadow, where daisies and buttercups nodded in the grass, blithe winds blew, birds sang, and butterflies, like winged flowers, fluttered everywhere. Here, among the roots of an ancient oak, with a mossy threshold, and vines overhanging her door, lived Madam Mouse, with her three little sons, Squeak, Nibble, and Scamper. She was the kindest and best of Quakerish mice, and hers would have been the happiest home in the field, if the excellent father-mouse had not laid asleep in a neighboring grove, with a drooping fern at his head and a cheerful dandelion at his feet. It was to this household that Moss was welcomed on her awakening. Squeak, Nibble, and Scamper opened their beady eyes wide with delight on seeing the beautiful elf, and their mother gave a feast in honor of the guest; for fairies make famous whatever family they visit.

“Now listen to me, dearest child, while I tell you about our neighbors here,” said Madam Mouse, as they sat together under the vine, while the little ones played hide-and-seek in the grass, and the sun set over the hill. “ Up above there lives Skip, the squirrel, and a merry fellow he is, though he has neither wife nor family to keep him brisk and jolly. But who knows what may fall out, and who can tell why the acorns that grow on the tree where Miss Nimble Whisk lives are so much sweeter than ours? Yes, yes, I fancy we shall have a wedding this year. Next, under the brakes, lives Spin, the spider, as quiet and busy an insect as ever wove a web. Then among the buttercups there at your side Chirp the cricket, keeps house with his noisy wife and daughters, who sing half the night, when they should be asleep. Down by the rock, where the columbines grow, Light-heart, the lark, has her nest. We are a gay neighborhood, that you may believe; for when our work is done, we dance and sing in the twilight, or ramble over the field in search of adventures.”

*’ And what am I to do here, where all are so busy? “ asked lazy Moss, fearing some task was in store for her.

“You must help each one in their work, for you will find no pleasure with us unless you daily do some healthful task to koc’j vou 1ki]>‘)V and show vou the beauty of industry. Fie I do not pout and toss your head in that disrespectful manner, else I shall send you away to stay with neighbor Toad, who has grown so stout through indolence that she can only sit blinking all day in the sun; and that would not be so pleasant, I fancy, for she lives in a hole, and might gobble you up if no worm or fly was at hand. Think well of what I tell you, and please your worthy parents by doing what they desire. Now come away to bed; we must be up with the sun, for on Saturtlay all good housewives have much to do.”

Thinking her hostess a very prosy mouse, and resolving to enjoy herself in her own way, Moss followed Nibble into a tidy little chamber hollowed out among the gnarled roots of the oak, carpeted with moss, hung witli deep-red leaves, and furnished with a sumptuous thistle-down bed, in which the elf soon fell asleep to the lullaby a mosquito sang outside the cobweb curtains gathered round her.

She was awakened by the young mice dancing over her bed, tapping her cheek with their little paws, and lifdng her hair to peep at her blooming face, for they thought her ver}’ lovely.

“Go away and leave me in peace! I am very tired, and shall not rise yet,” she cried, as they unfurled her wings and tried to make her follow them.

“Mamma will give you no breakfast if you do not come when we call; she is \ery punctual, and has waited five minutes already.”

“I shall come when I like; so drop the curtain and let me alone,” was all Moss answered, settling her tiny night- cap and drawing the nuillein-leaf blanket more cosily over her shoulders.

‘‘ Oh! oh : what a lazy thing! Come and tell mamma tliat she says she won’t,” cried the mice, frisking away through the winding galleries, squeaking shrilly as they ran.

“Bless me, what a stir they make,” thought Moss, and, instead of getting up, lay dreaming about it till the sun was high. Then she went to seek her breakfast, but not a morsel remained, and she would have fared ill had she not found a cluster of strawberries, on which she made a dainty meal. As slic ate she looked about her, thinking what a busy place she was in, for Skip was at work in the oak. Spin wove away at his leafy loom, Lightheart was singing her morning song in the clouds, Chirp was hop- ping over the field to his work, and, close by, Scamper and Squeak were pulling an oak-leaf laden with seeds, their little tails twined about the stem, and were trotting stoutly along, while Nibble ran behind to steady the load. All were up and at work, the air was filled with a busy hum, and the meadow seemed like a great hive full of industrious bees. Moss alone was idle, and, though ashamed of her indolence, it was too pleasant, swaying to and fro on a tall fern, basking in the sun, and listening to the song of the grass as it waved in the wind, to rise and labor with the rest; so till noon she lay dreaming the dreams that fairies love.

When the sun grew hot, she gladly hastened to the cool oak chamlers, eager to eat and drink of the good things she had seen stored there; for Madam Mouse was a thrifty housewife. But, as before, the table was cleared; Nibble was eating the last berry, Scam|>er and Squeak were washing their faces, as their tidy mother had taught them to do, and she was giving a tliirscy bee the only drop of honey that remained.

“Am I to have no dinner?” asked Moss, knowing that she deserved none, yet hoping to get a great deal, as lazy people are apt to do.

With a pert whisk of the tail Squeak cried out : “ Ah, ha! did n’t we tell you mamma would not feed a lazy elf] When you are good, she will give whatever you ask, and you will be plump and happy like us.”

“Hush 1” said his mother, “ or I must put your little tail in the crack, that a pinch or two may teach you to govern your tongue, my son. No, Moss, you will find no food here unless you obey me, for I cannot take care of an indolent elf, who has no desire to do her duty and earn her bread, like the rest of us.”

“I shall not work,” said Moss, sullenly.

“Then go and live in your own idle fashion till you tire of it; then come back, and I ‘11 show you a surer way to be happy and good.”

“I shall find my own too pleasant for that, I fancy,” answered Moss, getting naughtier and naughtier the more she gave way to her dislike for industry.

Tiie little mice were so astonished at her daring to speak in that way to their mamma, that they tum!:)led down in a heap, and, passing by them with a saucy nod, Moss Hew away to the river-side, where a hospitable liz- ard gave her some dinner, and entertained her till one of the bal)y lizards fell into a ditch and broke his leg. Fearing that she should be asked to stay and watch with him. Moss slipped away, and, sitting in a river-lily, laughed and sung with the water-beetles and the merr)’ west-wind till the motion of the waves lulled her to sleep.

A dew-dro]) falling on her Hice roused her, and, look- ing up, she found the moon in the sky, and herself on the bank, where the breeze had laid her when the lilies wished to draw their curtains. The night was mild, the stars’ friendly eyes watched over her, and she felt no fear; so, pillowing her head on a daisy, and pulling a thick leaf over her, she thought to herself, “ This is as fine a bed as one need desire, and I shall not soon go back to tiresome Madam Mouse while I get on so well alone.”

As she spoke, a sudden gust blew away her coverlet, a bat caught her up as he swept by, and, before she could recover from her fright, bore her away to his nest, in an ivy-covered wall.

“I am cousin to the Mouse family, therefore it is quite proper that you . pay me a visit; but as I am a bachelor, and my house is not such as best pleases young ladies, I shall take you to Neighbor Moth’s ball, close by. Give me your hand, and remember that, though I present my friends Monsieur Firefly and Professor Beetle, you must dance with me first.”

So said the bat, in his disagreeable voice, as he dung to tlie wall with his leathery wings. Moss was mortally afraid of him, had no desire to go to a ball, and was ready to cry with dismay at the troubles she had brought on herself; but Flit would take no denial, and skimmed away wiih her so fast that her poor little wings ached with the flight.

In a dell not far away Moss saw lights glancing, heard music sounding, and presently found herself in the midst of a party of night-loving insects and reptiles. Not a re- spectable ball in the least, for the wildest merriment prevailed. Mosquitoes, dorbugs, and frogs piped, drummed, and trumpeted like mad; katydids in green gauze, and grasshoppers from the opera, llew about in a most indec- orous manner; lirellies whisked sober millers here and there, till their gowns were burnt and torn; glowworms and long-legged spiders flirted sadly under the mush- rooms; and Lady Moth was as giddy as the rest, for a dissipated butterfly in scarlet and gold was there, and such an honor had not been done her balls for an age.

Pretty Moss made a great stir when Flit presented her; Major Butterfly left Lady Moth to fold his bright wings at her side; Monsieur Firefly was charmed with her grace; and Professor Beetle, forgetting his mourning suit, droned compliments into her ear, and danced till his horny eyes swam dizzily in his head. Moss was dragged to and fro till she was ready to faint with weariness and fear; but the nimble-footed spiders bid her dance on, the music played faster and faster, the friendly moon went dovn, and often did poor Moss long to be safe in her cosey bed in the oaken chamber, with kind Madam Mouse to watch over her sleep.

Suddenly, just when the revel was gayest, an owl darted into their midst, and bore Flit struggling away. In an instant the music stopped, the dancers vanished, and the dell was deserted by all but Moss, who, trem- bling with affright, crept into an empty snail-shell, and lay shivering there till dawn.

When daylight came, she timidly stole out, and flew away to rest in the sunshine among the purple morning- glories that half covered a cottage-wall. Believing that her troubles were over, she slept sweetly till she woke to find herself a prisoner in the flower, which, closing with the heat, now held her fast. Vainly she called for help, and beat upon the walls, which narrowed rapidly, while the sun shone hotter and hotter, and the air grew more close each moment. “ Xow I must die,” she thought, ** and never see mv home auain. O dear mamma! for- give me, and good by! “ Clasping her hands together on her little bosom in despair, she felt the long-neglected talisman, and eagerly drew it out for a last look at the face she never thought to see again. Very sadly it looked back at her, and the reproachful tenderness that filled the loving eyes so wrung her heart with sorrow and remorse, that, with a bitter cry, she sank down, and lay there like one dead.

A breath of fresh air, sweeping through her prison, recalled her to life; and the first sound she heard was a cheerful voice that said : “ It is no bee caught in the morning-glory cup, but the loveliest fairy ever seen. She is not dead, grandmother, for she moves her tiny wings. What can I do for you, dear little creature 1 I am so large, I fear to hurt you with the gentlest touch. Lie here, and get your breath again, but do not be afraid of me, because I love your race, and often hear wonder- stories of you from the humming-birds th«*t live among my flowers.”

Lifting her dim eyes, Moss saw a child’s pitying face above her; but she could only smile her thanks and kiss the small hand where she lay. Placing the elf on a vine- leaf that fluttered in the wind, the child went back to her wheel, for no bee was busier than she; and as she spun, she sang like any bird, because the blind old grandmother, knitting in the sun, loved to hear her cheery voice above the music of the wheel.

“O flower at my window, \Vliy blossom you so fair, Wiih your jTceii and purjile cup

L’j>lurncd to >un and air? ‘ I bloom, blithesome iJessie,

To cheer your childish heart; The world is full of labor, And this shall be my part.* Whirl, busy wheel, faster,

Spin, little thread, spin;

The sun shines fair without,

And we are gay within.

** O robin in the tree-top,

AVilh sunshine on your breast, Why brood you so patiently Above vour liidden nest? * I brood, blithesome Bessie, And sing my humble song, That the world may have more music From my little ones erelong.* Whirl, busy wheel, faster. Spin, little thread, spin, The sun shines fair without. And we are gay within.

balmy wind of summer, O silver-singing brook,

Why rustle through the branches?

\Vhy shimmer in your nook? *I llutlcr, blithesome IJessie,

Like a blessing far and wide;

1 scatter bloom and verdure

\Vhere’er my footsteps glide.* Whirl, bu.sy wheel, faster.

Spin, lillle thread, s})in. The sun sliines (;\ir without.

And we are gay within.

**0 brook and breeze and blossom. Ami robin on the tree, Vou make a joy of duly,

A priiifc- of iiitiiiiUy; Teach nie to work a.5 l)rulic!v.

With a willing hand and heart : The world is full of labor. And I must do my part.

Whirl, busy wheel, faster. Spin, little thread, spin, The sun shines fair without. And we are gay within

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“Yes,” sighed the elf, as she Hstened, “ it is as Madam Mouse said, — there is no real pleasure in idleness. I will no longer think of selfish ease alone, but try to gather resolution from all I have suffered, and begin my task for love of dear mamma.”

So anxious was she to be gone, that, scarcely staying to thank the friendly child, Moss hurried away, fearing some fresh misfortune would befall her unless she fell to work at once. With many tears she owned her fault, asking to be made a diligent and happy elf. Madam Mouse received her kindly, and did not lecture her, for all she said was, “ Now you are my good child again, and I am pleased with you.”

“What shall I do first?” asked Moss, springing out of bed when the little mice called her next morning at d;i\vn.

“Come and welcome the sun with me, for I bear him good-morrows from all in the field,” s:ii<l the lark, as she rose from her nest. •

“Are you never tired of this long flight?” asked the elf, as they floated up through rosy clouds to the blue a])ove.

“No, for I can never lly high enough, nor pour forth my happiness loud enough, I am so weak and small. But thougli I never reach the sun, I carry back with me blithe memories of things above here to gladden my whole day.” And with a gush of unspeakable joy falling from her little throat, Lightheart soared far out of sight, then dropped into her nest, leaving musical echoes behind.

“Ah! that was fine! and I ‘11 go again to-morrow,” cried Moss. “ What next, IMother Mouse \ “

“Come to the river and bring up water for the day,” said Nibble, always interested in the eating and drinking .part of the housekeeping.

Away they all raced, eager to see which would fill their green pitcher first, for they used the leaves of a plant called Forefathers’ Cup, and Mrs. Mouse had rows of them in her cool cellar, as we keep wine-casks in our own.

The more Moss did, the more she liked it, and all day long she worked like a busy ant, helping Skip store acorns, shaking down ripe grains from the wheat-ears for madam’s small harvesting, tripping over the field with Chirp to see the sick and poor; for he was a minister, as all might see by his black coat and the charitable zeal with which he hurried to and fro, preaching a cheerful sermon as he worked. At night she went with Spin to spread his webs on the grass, that the dew might fall and the moon shine on them till they were bleached to a silvery whiteness, and thus made fit for fairy-cloth.

Thus working with each of her friends, little Moss soon learned many a useful thing, and for every trial and temptation found a solace in her fairy talisman. All in the field loved her and tried to make her happy; for they saw how patiently she tried to do well, and how eagerly she longed to see her home again.

Mamma Mouse had many a gay feast in her pleasant rooms; for when rain fell without, Flash the firefly and Glimmer the glowworm lent their light; Skip came down to crack nuts and jokes, Spin told stories as endless as his webs. Chirp sang psalms as heartily as Martin Luther, whom he very much resembled, being lively, stout, and zealous, while Moss and the young mice played games and romped till their heads spun round.

So the summer days passed in the

“Books and work and healthful play”

manner which is best for all of us; and when at length the face in the magic-mirror always smiled upon her, Moss knew her task was done, and joyfully waited her summons home.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Brier awoke from her long sleep, she looked with wondering eyes about her, for she was no longer in the fairy palace, but alone in a deep forest. Squirrels skipped from tree to tree, birds came fearlessly to bathe in the clear pool at her feet, wood-tlowers nod- ded on their stems, and all the air was filled with the pleasant murmur of the pines. At first Brier only won- dered how she came there, then she called her sisters loud and long; and when nothing but a naughty echo mimicked her, she grew ver)’ angr}’ and threw herself down weeping and fretting because she was sent away to live alone in the great wood.

As she lay sobbing, with her cheek against the grass, a soft voice said beside her : “ Little Brier, do not weep so passionately; you are not to stay alone, for the forest is full of friends who will gladly try to make it pleasant for you. Come with me; I have a softer bed and little feast prepared for you above there.”

Brier looked up to find a mild-eyed dove waving its white wings beside her, as it cooed these gentle words; and, before the fairy could answer, came other little voices from the tree above her head, calling : “ Come up 1 come up, mamma! and bring the wonderful elf. We cannot fly and we cannot wait; come soon, else we shall fall out with trying to see.”

With that Brier heard a flapping of wings, a rustling of leaves, and saw two small heads peering over the edge of a nest, with eyes full of eager delight Up flew the mother clove and up flew Brier to where little Flutter and Coo lay in their downy cradle, and the gentle papa sat by with a ripe berr)’ in his bill to offer the guest.

“Here she is,” said the dove. “ Vou must try to make your home very happy to dear Brier, for she has left a far ‘lovelier one to stay with us a little. Be ver)’ tender with iier, that she may not grieve for her sisters, and may look back with pleasure on her visit here.”

“O, that we will, mamma, if she will only be our little friend, and love us as we love her,” cried the young doves, putting up their bills to kiss her; and hopping joyfully on their unsteady pink legs.

“Xow, my darlings,” said the mother, after they had supped and talked quite gayly for a while, *’papa and I must go and see neighbor Linnet, for she is very ill, and Ave are afraid little Twitter mav suffer for food. There- fore we will leave you to play together, and soon be back again.”

The doves flew away, and presently their comfortable cooing sounded through the wood. Brier was her gen- tlest self now; so she told Flutter and Coo her merriest tales, taught them elfin games, and danced on a leaf be- fore them till they quite stared with wonder. As the sun set they said, “Good night”; for these birds never fret- ted when bed-time came, never cried to have the lamp left, nor had any fear of goblins, but tucked their little heads under their wings and fell asleep without trou- bling mamma by a single pout. Brier often did all these naughty things, but she never told the doves so, only sat in the twilight on a bending bough, and sang them a fairy

LULLABY.
Now the day is done,
Now the shepherd sun Drives his white tlocks from the sky;
Now the flowers rest
On their niDiher’s breast. Hushed by her low lullaby.
“Now the tjlow\vorms glance.
Now the fireflies dance. Under fern-bout:hs ijrcen and hitrh :
Antl the western breeze To the forest trees Clianls a tuneful lullaby.
** Now ‘mi’ I .-]ia’lij\v> .loop
Falls blessed .-.Iccp, Like dew from the summer skv :
And the whcjle earth dreams,
In the moon’s soft beams. While nijht breathes a lullaby.
“Now, birdlings, rest,
In your wind-rocked nest, Unscared by the owl’s shrill cry;
For with folded wings
Little Brier swings, And singeth your lullaby.”

In this gentle family lived the elf, and for a time all went well, for those about her were so lovely in their manners, so unselfish, kind, and patient, she had no cause for anger, wilfulness, or discontent, but seemed to be a perfect fairy, and was much beloved by all in the wood. By and by she began to get tired of this quiet life, to forget to look often at her bosom monitor, and cross feelings soon brought unkind words. The doves grieved over this and tried to help her, but the little fault was not easy to be cured, and nothing but trying very hard, very patiently on Brier’s own part, could ever change it

One day, when Papa Dove was gone to market in a distant barlcy-field, and Mamma was rocking Twitter Linnet to sleep, Flutter and Coo sat coscyly in the nest watching the dragon-flies play among he water-weeds below.

‘* Ah, if we could only fly, what merr}’ games Ave would have down there! It seems as if 1 could not stay up here another day, I so long to see a little of the world, which looks so fine from this high place,” sighed Flutter.

“Yes,” answered Coo; “ I, too, long to use my wings, for they seem large and strong enough. But mamma will not teach us yet, so we must wait till she thinks best. I hope it will be soon, for at night I dream of such far flights into the sky that I awake feeling as if I should spring out of the nest for joy.”

“We shall not have to wait long, little sister,” said Flutter, “ for last night, when I woke to stretch my legs a bit, I heard papa say that, as soon as Neighbor Linnet was on the wing again, our flying lessons would begin; and that will be soon, I fancy, for she sat on a sunny twig a whole hour to-day.”

“I can teach you to fly without waiting at all,” said Brier, looking out from the leaf behind which she had gone to sulk. “ Hop forth to the edge of the nest, spread your wings, give a small leap, and all will go well with you.”

“Mamma bade us wait for her, and I am afraid some mischief will happen if we disobey,” answered Coo, as Brier unfurled her shining wings and smiled again.

“Might we not try?” asked Flutter, eagerly. “ I long so to sit on the moss by the pool, and peck a seed or a bug or two for myself Let us just fly down, and surprise mamma by sitting all in a row on that pretty green mound. I think we might without harm.”

** I dare not, because we promised. It is such a long, long way, and we might easily fall on the stones. Do not go. Flutter; do not tempt her, dear Brier. Just think, if she break a leg or a wing, how sad it will be! “

“I ‘m not afraid! “ cried Flutter, hopping out of the nest. *’ Come hither, Brier, and show me how to use these fine wings of mine as gracefully as you do your own.”

“See now, I spread them thus, lift up my feet, and float away like a thistle-down “; and away went Brier, high over the tree-tops, then down in \rj circles, till she rippled with her little foot the surface of the pool.

“Yes, yes, that looks very charming, but is not so easy as one might suppose,” said Flutter, skipping timidly up and down with much flapping of her half-grown wings. “ I cannot lift this heavy body of mine, for I am a sadly fat bird, though I never knew it till now. Can you not help one a bit, dear Brier] “

“I shall not help you at all, if you do not obey me at once,” answered the elf, with a frown. “ You said you were not afraid, but I do not believe it; else you would soar boldly away, and not stand twittering and trembling here. Come and help me, Coo; if you fly first, she will 4 be ashamed not to follow, and then we will have gay times in the air.”

“No, I cannot, and it is not kind of you to take poor Flutter away, for we cannot fly at once, as you fairies do. Come back, sister, and let us play safely here. O, do! it is so wrong to disobey mamma.”

Cut Flutter and Brier would not listen to good little Coo, and still stayed out on the bough. The elf floated and flew, soared up and swooped down, but the timid bird could not gain courage to follow. Then Brier grew anin’, and savin’’ ‘* I shall wait no lonLTcr, flv awav at once, you foolish thing I “ she thrust her off tlie branch. Poor Flutter spread her feeble wings, but they could not uphold her, and, with a ciy of affright, she fell heavily to the ground, aiid lay ([uite still, as if slie were dead.

Coo, forgetting her fear, flew to the edge of the nest, and called her mother in a louder tone than had ever passed her little bill before, while Brier bent over the motionless dove, and tried to recall it to life. But the soft eyes were closed, the white bosom ruffled and bruised.

“Oh! what shall I do?” cried the terrified elf “I never meant to hurt her like this, and how shall I make her better before the mamma comes back? “

“Go and hide yourself in the darkest nook of the wood, and never hope to be forgiven for a thing like this. Go away before her mother comes, for this sight will surely break her heart,” chirped a wren, hastening down from her nest near bv.

“Yes indeed, you had best fly away at once, for now not even a gnat will be friends with you, but all of us will fear you, for you are not what we thought you; so go away, and leave us in peace, naughty Brier 1 “

A dragon-fly spoke, and all about her, from pool and grass, and trees and air, echoed voices, calling, “ Go away, go away, naughty Brier! “

“I will go away to my own lovely home, for I hate this gloomy forest, and I will never come among you again, unkind and uncivil creatures that you are! “ cried Brier, forgetting everything in her passion; and, without another look at Flutter, another word to Coo, she darted away with a whirr like that of an angr)-humming-bird, when he finds no honev in a flower.

A long way flew Brier, till her wings were tired and her breatli quite gone, she went so fast; then she paused in a lonely part of the wood, and sat down on a pebble to rest. She would not think yet, for she was still in a naugluy mood, and when one begins to remember the unkind things one has done, one begins to get sorr)’ for them, and longs to be forgiven. In order that she might forget the sad accident which she had caused, the elf hummed a song as she sat; but it sounded harsh and out of tune, because she was so herself; so she stopped sing- ing, and amused herself by watching an ant village near by. Very busy were the inhabitants of Emmetv’ille, run- ning up and down the streets; some with loads of food, some with grains of sand from their underground houses others doing errands which none but ants would have to do. Being a fairy, Brier could understand their language, and heard them singing and talking as they worked, and very funny were some of the songs and sayings. Close by her seat rose a neat litde mound, and one most indus- trious ant was tugging away with load after load of sand from within; up he would come with a big grain, lay it nicely outside, take a breath of fresh air, and huriy back again in such haste that he often tumbled head over heels down his little hole. Brier liked this busy one, for he sang as he worked, and had a very plcxsant expression of countenance. As he paused to settle a large grain of yellow sand on the top of the mound, as an ornament to the front door, Brier said : “ Mr. Emmet, why are you in such haste? and why do you never stop to rest or talk with your neighbors \ “

The ant made her a little bow, and answered, gayly : “ I am about to be married, and wish to get my house in fine order as soon as I can; therefore I work with all my might, and sing meanwhile, for I am the happiest fellow in all the town, and shall have a grand wedding to-mor- row. Ha I ha I Come and see us then, if you will.”

With that he gave a little skip for joy, lost his footing, and rolled down the mound, laughing as he went, till he fell against a big black ant, who was walking by in a ver)’ stately manner. When the red ant came tumbling over his back, he grew dreadfully angry, and cried out in a rough voice : “ What! what! is this the way you play tricks on respectable persons, you unmannerly mite 1 Wait a bit, and see what comes of such pranks.”

“Indeed, indeed, sir, it was only an accident, and upon my word it shall never happen again,” began the red ant, very humbly, as he gathered himself up with a great many bows.

But the black ant was in such a towering rage he would not listen, nor understand, but fell upon poor little Mr. Emmet, and beat and bit and dragged him here and there most unmercifully. Brier besought him to let go, and all the ant people came running to see, but dared not help, because the black ant was far bigger and stronger than they, and belonged to a very fierce tribe, which had destroyed their village more than once. So they ran away again as fast as they came; and when the black fellow had vented his rage, he went on his way, leaving the Emmet quite dead on the ground. Brier was very much grieved and shocked at such a display of tem- per, and cried over the departed ant very tenderly, as she laid him in the litde house he would never want any more. She set uj) the handsome yellow grain as a monu- ment, and sent a message to the unhappy ant-bride, tell- ing how it happened, for she could not go to see her, — no, that would be altogether too sad.

Then she sorrowfully went on her way, thinking of poor Flutter, wondering if she, too, were dead, and feeling as if she herself were no better than the brutal black ant who had destroyed so much happiness in his blind anger. Full of these dismal feelings, she flew aimlessly here and there till nightfall; then, homesick, cold, and weary, she crept into a pine-tree, longing to be safe again between downy Flutter and Coo, with Mamma Dove’s sheltering wings folded over her head. As she sat sighing and shivering in the gloomy tree, there arose a great noise below her, and, peeping down, she saw a badly built nest, full of young crowlets, all fighting for a bit of car- rion their father had just given them. Such shrill cawing and pecking and beating of wings Brier had never seen. Each crov/let wanted all, and none would stop to settle the matter amicably, but all fought and screamed till feathers flew, the nest rocked, and more than one eye was nearly pecked out. None succeeded in getting the morsel, for in the skirmish it fell to the ground and was lost. A crow near by flew down, gobbled it up, and gave them a scolding for being so silly.

All this frightened Brier so much, that when the cro\v< lets fell to reproaching each other, and began a fresh quarrel, she flew away as if some fearful thing was after her, and never stopped till a wide marsh lay before her. It was quite dark now, and a heavy dew began to fall; but the elf had nowhere to go, and sat weeping under- neath a dilapidated mushroom, wondering what would become of her. Presendy a brilliant light came dancing over the marsh, and a voice cried out : ** Come hither! come hither! I will show you a safe, warm place. Trust to me, and follow.”

(jiadly Brier obeyed, and hastened after the friendly light, which flitted hither and thither, now gleaming briLhtly, now flickering like a dim cancilo in tlic wind. The tired fairy followed till her wings gave out, and she was forced to ask if they were not nearly at the journey’s end. Then the false lii:rht vanished with a mockincr laugh, and Brier fluttered down upon the damp moss, where she lay faint with weariness and fear. The tempt- ing Will-o’-the-wisp danced round her again, evil-eyed snakes looked out from their coverts, strange plants nodded in their sleep, noisome vapors filled the air, and hoarse-voiced frogs came hopping up to touch the shud- dering elf with their clammy fingers, and bid her come and play with them among the green pools of the fen.

“O go away, and leave me to die in peace! “ cried Brier. “ Do not hurt me, for I am a lost, unhappy elf, who has no friend in the wide world to save her now.”

“Do not fear, poor little creature! for we will befriend you, though we are but small and weak,” whispered sweet voices from the moss. “ Lie here and rest till moniing; nothing shall harm you, for we will guard youi sleep, and send you happy dreams.”

“Who are you? “ asked Brier, already soothed by the gentle tones and fragrant breath that surrounded her. “ May I trust you \ I have been once deceived, and am very miserable.”

“Yes, we know that, and we pity you; now rest your weary little head in the shadow of our leaves, and tell us how we can best comfort you.”

Brier felt the soft touch of some flowery sprite as a drop of honey came upon her lips, and her head was pillowed on some gentle bosom. So friendly were the words, the acts, of these unknown beings, she was touched and won at once. Lying there, she presently began to weep repentant tears, and sobbed out : ‘* Ah, the only comfort I can know is to be able to undo the naughty thing which I have done. Can you show me how I shall make the doves forgive and love me as they did?”

“Dear little Brier, there is but one way to reach what you desire,” whispered the sweet voices in her ear. “ Go humbly back and ask to be forgiven; then show that your penitence is sincere by keeping a careful guard upon tongue and temper. It needs but little knowledge to tell us that gentleness wins its way everywhere, and patience is the sweetest virtue which mortal, elf, or flower can possess.”

“Do not listen to these weak and foolish words,” cried other voices above Brier’s head, while a bitter odor filled the air. “ Look up and listen to us, for we will show a better way to be happy. Do not go back nor humble yourself to any one. Go on and look for pleasure everywhere; for life was not given to be wasted in uprooting harmless little passions such as yours. Heed our words, and ask no pardon of the silly doves, who will but despise you for your weak submission.”

“.It is a brave, a beautiful thing to say, * Forgive me, I have done wrong; I will amend,’ “ breathed the other voices from the moss. “ O listen to us, and conquer the small passions while you may, lest they become your masters, and rule you like a slave. Go back, dear elf, and with a single word wipe out the bitterness of your regret, atone for the unkind deed, and let it be a lesson that shall serve you all your life.”

Wondering and perplexed lay Brier, listening to the unseen spirits that warned and tempted her. First she thought to obey the selfish ones, and try to be good no longer, because it was so hard. But the unhappy hours she had spent, the sad sights she had seen, the fright, the weariness, and want she had suffered, showed her that happiness would not come without self-control. Next she bent to hearken to the gentler voices, and tender thoughts began to come, good resolutions sprung up, and meek desires seemed to comfort her as she received and welcomed them. Then for the first time did she see a faint light glimmering on the moss; she thought it was a glowworm, and put out her tiny hands to warm them at his lamp; but no worm, no firefly, nor even a stray moonbeam did she find. As she moved, the golden shadow followed, and soon she found that it was shining brightest on her own breast. It was the talisman, and as she drew it out, through all the gloom her moth- er's face smiled on her with the look that always softened little Brier's heart, and helped her to repent even in her naughtiest hours. It did so then; for, laying down her wet cheek on the dear face in the magic drop, she cried out, through her tears : “ O dear mamma! I will be good, I will be good! Speak no more to me, bad spir* its, for I must not listen; and you, friendly voices, wliis- per your wise warnings in my ear, that I may do my duty, may be forgiven for my fault, and be again a gentle little Brier.”

As the words left her lips, her heavy eyelids closed, a warm wind breathed across her lips like a good-night kiss, and through the clouds the moon shone out like a motherly face watching over the lonely elf all night long.

When she woke, her first thought was to see who the good and evil counsellors had been. A tall, flame-col- ored marsh-lily rang its bells about her; its leaves stained with dark spots, its bitter breath filling all the air. Turn- ing from the savage-looking flower, with its noisy jangle, she found beside her a cluster of white violets blooming freshly even in that unlovely spot, and lifting their meek faces to the light with an innocent serenity that rebuked her as no words of theirs had done. She kissed and thanked them gratefully, and flew away a wiser, better elf for that night in the dreary fen.

Flutter Dove lay on her bed of feathers in the shadow of the ferns, for every bird in the wood had helped to make it soft for her : even the baby-birds had plucked a billful of down from their breasts or a cherished feather from among the few their little tails possessed. The bruised wing was still folded, but the ruffled bosom was white and smooth as ever, and Flutter's eyes shone again as she cooed to Twitter Linnet who sat beside her, or looked up to answer her sister, who stood on the bough above showering sweet names and merry songs upon her, for Coo could not come down to play with -her. Mamma Dove tripped about on her rosy feet, bringing seeds, worms, or water from the pool where the Papa was making bubbles shine and ripples flow, while he bathed his wings and dipped his head quite out of sight.

Suddenly a weary little figure stood before them; its robe was soiled and torn, its tiny feet bleeding, its face stained with tears, and ver)- sad. At first they did not know it, till, kneeling beside Flutter, it said, ver)- hum- bly : “ It is I, bad, passionate I'rier. I have learned a lesson, and will tr)' most patiently to be all that you would have me. Will you forgive and take me back aain]

Then Flutter waved her one wing for joy, and Coo nearly fell off the bough in her delight, the kind mother- bird folded the penitent elf beneath her wings, and the father came hurrying from the pool to bid her be assured that they forgave and loved her better than before.

“Now diat is riiht beautiful! But I fear I could not so soon have pardoned such a thing, and been so glad to welcome that Brier Rose back,” said neighbor Wren to Glance the dragon-fly, as they watched the doves.

“Yes indeed, it would be a fine matter if all in the wood followed their generous example, and learned to be as charitable to the faults of others. I for one will say a friendly word to the elf, for I was ver} sharp with her when Flutter fell, and have been somewhat troubled at heart ever since.”

As he spoke Glance darted away to bid his neighbors greet Brier without reproof or coldness, while Madam Wren sent her daughter Jenny to see if she could be of use to Madam Dove. Cock Robin soon followed with the ripest berr}’ he could find, and all in the forest were kind to the elf, for the sake of the doves who had suf fered most, but forgave so readily.

Poor Brier had not thought to be so tenderly received, and it did her more good than a hundred scoldings. Every one was so kind, it almost broke her heart to remember all the unirentle thinc:s she had said and done to them; and when Papa Dove had brought her new gar- ments from Silverthread the spider, when mamma had bathed and bound up her wounded feet, and little Coo had gathered her cosily into the nest, she])ut her arms about her neck and fell asleep, resolving to bo the very opposite of all she had been, till the past was ([uite forgotten and the good Star fully jatisfied.

She kept her promise; for, like many a child, she only needed to be shown how sad and unlovelv her own fault looked in others, to grow glad and eager to be good. Often quick words rose to her lips and anger burned in her heart, for it takes many efforts, many failures, to make a real success; but when the gust of passion had passed by, she asked pardon, and tried still harder to subdue her bosom sin. Vs’henever she found herself getting very bad, she thought of the dead ant, the quarrelsome crow- lets, the night in the fen, and all the misery she had brought upon herself That helped her, and with each day the face in the talisman shone clearer and smiled sweeter on the now gentle-tempered Brier.

CHAPTER IV.

BLUSH opened her eyes in a garden, and looked delightedly about her, thinking within herself, “ I cannot fail to be happy in such a blooming place as this; I will choose the finest flower for my palace, and live here like a queen.”

All through the garden she went, but was not satisfied till she came to the Crown-imperial. It had no perfume, but was dressed in scarlet and gold, and in each cup there lay a drop which was not dew, but a part of the flower, and these Blush made her mirrors. Here she lived and soon found friends among the tulips growing close by. Her days she spent in arranging gay gar- ments, looking in her glasses, and flying about to be admired by the flowers, many of whom flattered the vain elf, that she might stay with them, for fairies are dearly beloved by flowers. The wiser blossoms warned her of her folly in thus wasting her life, and none pitied her more sincerely than Mignonette, who lived in a sunny corner among the pansies and blue larkspurs. She. often ventured to remind Blush that time was going and noth- ing had been done; but the elf only looked scornfully down on the sad-colored plant, bade her take care of herself, and floated away to the tulips, who clad her in purple and gold.

One morning a busy breeze came through the garden, proclaiming that a messenger from Fairyland was on his way, and bidding them prepare to greet him. Then ever)’ flower spread her colored leaves, opened her cells, and put on her dew-drop ornaments, till each glittered in the sun. Soon they saw the Honey-king approaching, for he had been to Elf-land with his tribute of sweets to the Queen, and brought her message back.

“See! “ cried the Rose, “ see his velvet cloak, the golden bands on his breast, the gleam of his wings, and hear his deej) voice as he sings on his way. Ah, if he would but come to me, I should be the happiest flower that ever bloomed.”

On came the royal bee humming as he flew, and each flower trembled with exi)ectation as they watched and waited. He hovered above the rose a moment, but ?Iignonette’s breath was sweeter than hers. Away to the sad-colored blossom he flew, and, standing beside her, delivered his message.

“I am bidden to tell you that the elves are coming to choose one among you to be the summer queen; and when autumn comes, and they return to lay you in your winter beds, if she has ruled wisely and well, they will bear her away to bloom in Fair}’land for- ever.”

When the flowers heard this, great were the rejoicings, for this was the highest honor that could be done them, and each hoped to gain it. The sun shone and the dey fell alike on all, and they who used these good gifts aright grew daily in strength and beauty. Now Blush had nothing to do with the matter, and should have helped the flowers instead of thinking only of herself But she was so vain she hoped to be chosen the queen, both because of her beauty and her birth, and all day long she flew busily here and there, preparing the finest suit, that she might outshine all about her. This was not kind, and the plants disliked her more and more, for she took away their dew to bathe in, broke off their fair- est leaves for her robes, powdered her hair with their golden pollen, and gave them no peace for their own affairs.

“Can you not tell me how I may wash away all traces of the sun from my face \ It is not as fair as it used to be, and will soon be as brown as ugly Minnie’s, if I can- not freshen its bloom.”

She spoke to the tulips, who had ceased to be her friends when thev found she was trvinL(to outdo them in splendor; but they hid their dislike under smiling faces, and replied : *’ Down by t!ie wall yonder grows a j)lant with violet llowers; go and bathe in their dew, pretty Blush, and see how fair you ‘11 become.’’

If Blush had studied fairy lore instead of her own lovely face, she would have known that the violet fiowers grew on the deadly nightshade, which would only blight and destroy. But she knew nothing of it, and, hastening away, bathed in the poisonous dew, then flew home, and to sleep, that she might be fresh for the morrow.

With the first peep of day Blush was before her mirror, to see if the change had been wrought. But she started with dismay, for a colorless face, with dim eyes, white lips, and faded hair, looked back at her. She thought the morning mist had blurred her glass, and tried another, but in each it was the same, and then she saw the cruel loss which had befallen her. Full of grief and indignation, she flew to reproach the tulips, but they answered, scornfully : “ Foolish thing! when we told you to bathe in the flowers yonder, we meant the purple jessamine, not the evil nightshade. We thought an elf who gave herself such airs knew ever}’thing, and think you justly punished for your vanity. Now that you are not fit to be seen, you had better hide yourself till the elves are gone,” — and the cruel tulips turned laughing away.

Poor little Blush knew they s[)oke falsely, and went sadly away to hide herself behind a burdock-leaf that grew near the fountain in a lonely corner, for she wished to see, yet not be seen.

With the first rays of the sun came the fair)’ troop, some on rosy clouds, some on the morning wind, some on their own fleet wings. Each flower heart beat fast as the shin- ing band alighted and passed along the blooming terraces. On it went by the stately Lily, who grew pale with grief when she saw that the wands were not lowered before her, and with an imi)loring voice she cried : “ Are not my leaves stainless as snow? Am I not stately and fair \ Why am I not chosen queen \ “

But the elves replied, as they pointed to a cluster of heart’s-ease, dying for want of sun and air in the shadow of Lily’s broad leaves : “In your white bosom lies a haughty heart, careless of all things but itself. We cannot crown you till you have learned the beauty of humility.”

Blushing with anger, the Rose demanded, as they passed her by : “ Do you not see me? Am I not the queen of flowers, royal and sweet \ Give me the crown : it is my right.”

But soft hands put the thorny branches back, and the elfin voices whispered : “ Passion makes no flower fair, however royal be its birth. Rule yourself, wilful Rose, then you may wisely govern others.”

Now when neither of the rival beauties were chosen, no other plant dared speak, but waited in wondering silence while the elves passed all the flowers that pos- sessed a single chann, until they reached the nook where Mignonette was rocking a baby butterfly to sleep upon her breast. Here every wand fell, and amid an as- tonished hush the fairies proclaimed her the summer queen.

Now when Blush saw this she could not bear it; the thought that the ugly brown flower, whom she had de- spised, was to reign over all the garden, to have a court, ministers, and maids of honor, to be visited by ambassa- dors from other courts, to receive gifts, and in the autumn to be carried in state to Fair\-land, was too much for the disappointed elf, because with vanity comes envy, and she could not endure that any one should be more praised or honored than herself As all the fair}’ harps began to tinkle, the flower-bells to ring, and the coronation fes- tival opened with great splendor. Blush cried out : “ I will not stay to see this; if I cannot be lovely, I will die and be forgotten “; and, flying up to the foun- tain’s brim, she plunged deep into the cold, dark water dashing there. She hoped to die at once, for fairies do not receive their magic wands till they are grown, and many things have power to hurt them before that time. But to her great surprise, the waves divided without harming or even wetting her a drop, and she sank safely to the bottom, where lived a solitary . water-sprite, who looked much amazed when the elf came floating into her blue chamber, as she sat in a shell singing the song the fountain repeated to the flowers above.

The sprite was very kind to Blush, and glad to have a friend, for she was very lonely; and they fell to talking quite as if they had known one another a long time.

“I cannot understand why I was not drowned in coming hither,” said the elf, when she had told her troubles.

** Vou must have some fairy charm about you, and that made the water harmless,” answered tlie sj)rite.

Then Blush remembered her talisman, and looked at it, longing to feel her mother’s arms about her, and hear her gentle voice comforting her sorrow. Like Moss and Brier, she had forgotten to look often at it and be guided by its smiles or tears. Now it was a most consoling thought, that, though she was so plain, her mother would still love her, still wait and hope to see her, and have no rej)roach for her if she were only good. Now it seemed time to begin her task, and, having no beaut}’ to fill her little head with vain fancies, her heart woke up from its long sleep and bade her live for bet- ter things.

“Kind sprite, can you help me to be humble, gener- ous, and tmly useful] I desire to do well, but I have spent my days in foolish play, and now I cannot tell how it is best to cure my vanity,” she said, with tears in her dim eyes*

“Live for others, Blush; forget yourself, and care for the beauty of a simple, earnest heart more than for love- liness of face or grace of form. Nothing can change or take this charm away; and I will help you Xo obtain it, if you really care for it.”

“I do, I do; try me, and see if I am not sincere.”

The sprite believed her, and till twilight fell amused the elf in her own charming manner, — teaching her to understand the liquid music of the waves, the strange language of the fishes, tliat glided to and fro above them like golden birds in a blue sky; telling her sweet stories of a water-spirit’s life in river, lake, and sea; rocking her in a rosy shell; feeding her on delicate food; and leading her up and down the weedy bottom of the marble basin, where little red crabs, water-spiders, sea-anemones, and odd shell-fish enjoyed themselves among the pebbles and coral branches lying here and there.

So busy was Blush that she did forget herself, for the first time in many days, — forgot her loss, her unhappi- ness, and began to smile again : for though the sprite was a curious creature, with lone:, rrcen hair, and little fins upon her shoul.lers where the elf had wings, — though she wore no clothes, and her tiny hands were damp and cold, — she had such friendly ways with her, such loving eyes, and a voice so like the ripple of quiet waves upon the shore, that Blush grew very fond of her.

When the stars c!lme out in the evening sky, arid all the dwellers in the fountain crept into their watery beds, the sprite wrapped herself in a cloak of mist, and bade Blush come with her. Up they went, and with delight the elf breathed long breaths of the balmy upper air, and warmed herself in the golden heart of a rose, where the noonday heat still lingered.

“Now,” said the sprite, “ you shall see my work, and bear a share, in it. Take a part of my dew-mantle about you, and fly to every flower in this long bed, brush away the dust of day, and bathe it in the drops that will continually gather on the edge of your cloak. Forget none, but. refresh all, and, if any have received a hurt, touch it with this balm of moonlight, which is a sovereign cure for such wounds. I shall work on the upper terrace until dawn; but if you tire of this labor, you can leave it, only I can never befriend you any more, unless you are in earnest.” And with that, the sprite floated away.

This was a hard task for Blush, because she knew that the care given to the plants made them grow fair and strong, and now it seemed as if she were giving her own loveliness away; besides, she was sure that sleepless nights, and days spent in the damp fountain, would not give her back her beauty. Long she stood with the dew-mantle in her hand, unable to decide, and at length stooped to lay it down, when from her bosom dropped the talisman,?.\\<\ lay shining on the grass. The face was so sorrowful, that, with a last sigh of selfish vanity, she folded herself in the chilly cloak, and saw, as she put it back into her bosom, that the mother’s face was smiling on her now.

Then she fell to work, and washed every flower in the plot, though it must be owned that she scrubbed the naughty tulips till their cheeks glowed like fire, and they cried out. She could not forgive and love them yet, and as they did not know her in her misty cloak, she enjoyed that part of her work, and left such a big dew-drop in each cup, they thought there must have been a shower while they slept. Queen Minnie was more gently tended, for every leaf glistened, and the air was full of fragrance when the elf had done. Now that she had begun to care for others, she remembered the good counsel Mignonette had often given, and how scornfully she had received it; therefore she was anxious to atone for her unkindness and did her careful work unseen in the stillness of the night.

Till dawn they worked, then back into the fountain for another quiet day, for the water-sprite could not bear the sun, and Blush would not leave her new-found friend. In this way a long time passed; Blush never looked into a mirror, tried heartily to forget that she had been so fair, endeavored to be self-denying, humble, and happy in the unseen work to which she gave her nights. Soon she found she could rejoice in the beauty of others without an envious feeling, and tended many a plant that once had been unkind to her so tenderly, that they wondered at her forgiving spirit, and longed to see her as she once had been. Night after night, when she came stealing to them, thinking them asleep, some one of them would be awake, and waiting for her with a drop of freshest honey, a breath of odor, or a loving kiss, to show their friendli- ness, and Blush would dance for joy, saying, as she went on with her daintv task : —

“Ah, this is better than to be a vain and selfish elf, unloved by any I I can be glad that I am ugly, if pity makes me friends like these. \<\\dX more can I do for you, dear flower? Let me bend this leaf, that the sun may not scorch you to-morrow; let me smooth away this fold in your petal, and be sure I will bring dew enough next time to bathe you from your tallest stamen to your lowest leaf.”

While busied with these generous cares for others, Blush was unconscious that her beauty was returning, that the sprite, the waves, the winds, the plants, all lent their help to give her back the charms she had lost four- fold greater than before. Now the loyeliness came from within, brightening her face until it seemed a little sun, shininc: even in the darksome fountain. No one told her this, till the sprite could not keep the secret any longer, and bade Blush look into the mirrors of the crown im- perial, where they had been busied late into the dawn. The elf believed she slíould behold the faded face she had last seen there, but smiled and looked bravely in, there to behold a sweeter face than any glass ever had retlected before. She knew it was her own, was glad to be a’ain her winsome self, but now the vanity was so well cured, that, instead of looking proudly about her, she s])read her hands before her face, and would not lift it up until the sprite placed her on the green tuft of leaves that crowned the (lower, and sot all liie scarlet bells to ringing, that the other plants might wake and rejoice with Blush. \’ery soon the garden was alive with blooming faces and gay voices, as birds and blossoms joined in the song the happy fairy sang, while the sun climbed up the rosy sky, and on her bosom shone the talisman, undarkened by a single shadow.

“O lesson well and wisely taught,
Stay with me to the last, That all my life may better be
For the trial that is past O vanity, mislead no more!
Sleep, little passions, long! Wake, happy heart, and dance again
To the music of my song!

*’ O summer days, flit fast away, And bring the blithesome hour When we three wanderers shall meet Safe in our household flower! O dear mamma, lament no more I
Smile on us as we come, Your grief has been our puniihment.
Your love lias led us home.”

Mamina Rose Swit alone longing for the merr}’ voices tliat used to make the evening hour such a pleasant time. The Papa was teaching Tina- to lly among the aspen-trees near by, and as the Mamma watched the only child now left lier, tears dropped slowly down her cheeks, and she sighed : “ When will they come \ Ah, if they knew how 1 pine for them, they would not linger long away from mc.”

As the words left her 11{)S there came a litde rustle, and there before Ikt, as if thev had risen at her wish, stood Inush, Drier, and Moss, widi a star shining on each forehead, while smiles and tears made rainbows on their happy faces. Gathered close to their mothers bosom, they were too full of joy for words, till the dear Papa came flying like the wind with Tina, whose locks were all blown about her face, and little garments sadly rufiled with his speed. But when she saw who waited for her, she fluttered from one to the other, eager to wel- come them back, and show that she could flv as well as they. Then, l)’ing in their mother’s arms, they told all their wanderings, and the hope each cherished that the good Star’s lessons had been so well learned that they could never be forgotten.

“But tell me, dearest children, what was the talisman Star gave to helo and comfort vou? I loncj to see the wondrous charm which has given me back my darlings so beautiful and good,” .said Mamma Rose, as she kissed rhe bloominc: faces clustering about her own.

Blush, Brier, ami Moss drew doser still; and, folding (heir arms more teiidurly about her, whispered, as they showed the ma’ic (lrc;),s glittering in their littli: bosoms; “ Sec, dear mamma, bure lius the talisman; for the strong, sweet siJtll that conquered passion, vanity, and indoknce, and led us safely home, was our great love for you.”

SHADOW-CHILDREN

Ned, Polly, and Will sat on the steps one sun-shiny morning, doing nothing, except wish they had something pleasant to do.

"Something new, something never heard of before, — wouldn't that be jolly?" said Ned, with a great yawn.

"It must be an amusing play, and one that we don't get tired of very soon," added Polly gravely.

"And something that didn't be wrong, else mamma wouldn't like it," said little Will, who was very good for a small boy.

As no one could suggest any thing to suit, they all sat silent a few minutes. Suddenly Ned said, rather crossly, "I wish my shadow wouldn't mock me. Every time I stretch or gape it does the same, and I don't like it."

"Poor thing, it can't help that: it has to do just what you do, and be your slave all day. I'm glad I ain't a shadow," said Polly.

"I try to run away from mine sometimes, but I can't ever. It will come after me; and in the night it scares me, if it gets big and black," said Will, looking behind him.

"Wouldn't it be fun to see shadows going about alone, and doing things like people?" asked Polly.

"I just wish they would. I'd like to see ours cut capers; that would be a jolly new game, wouldn't it?" said Ned.

No one had time to speak; for suddenly the three little shadows on the sunny wall behind them stood up straight, and began to bow.

"Mercy, me!" cried Polly, staring at them.

"By Jove, that's odd!" said Ned, looking queer.

"Are they alive?" asked Will, a little frightened.

"Don't be alarmed: they won't hurt you," said a soft voice. "To-day is midsummer-day, and whoever wishes a wish can have it till midnight. You want to see your shadows by themselves; and you can, if you promise to follow them as they have followed you so long. They will not get you into harm; so you may safely try it, if you like. Do you agree for the day to do as they do, and so have your wish?"

"Yes, we promise," answered the children.

"Tell no one till night, and be faithful shadows to the shadows."

The voice was silent, but with more funny little bows the shadows began to move off in different directions. The children knew their own: for Ned's was the tallest, and had its hands in its pockets; Polly's had a frock on, and two bows where its hair was tied up; while Will's was a plump little shadow in a blouse, with a curly head and a pug nose. Each child went after its shadow, laughing, and enjoying the fun.

Ned's master went straight to the shed, took down a basket, and marched away to the garden, where it began to move its hands as if busily picking peas. Ned stopped laughing when he saw that, and looked rather ashamed; for he remembered that his mother had asked him to do that little job for her, and he had answered, —

"Oh, bother the old peas! I'm busy, and I can't."

"Who told you about this?" he asked, beginning to work.

The shadow shook its head, and pointed first to Ned's new jacket, then to a set of nice garden tools near by, and then seemed to blow a kiss from its shadowy fingers towards mamma, who was just passing the open gate.

"Oh! you mean that she does lots for me; so I ought to do what I can for her, and love her dearly," said Ned, getting a pleasanter face every minute.

The shadow nodded, and worked away as busily as the bees, tumbling heels over head in the great yellow squash blossoms, and getting as dusty as little millers. Somehow Ned rather liked the work, with such an odd comrade near by; for, though the shadow didn't really help a bit, it seemed to try, and set an excellent example. When the basket was full, the shadow took one handle, and Ned the other; and they carried it in.

"Thank you, dear. I was afraid we should have to give up our peas to-day: I'm so busy, I can't stop," said mamma, looking surprised and pleased.

Ned couldn't stop to talk; for the shadow ran away to the woodpile, and began to chop with all its might.

"Well, I suppose I must; but I never saw such a fellow for work as this shadow is. He isn't a bit like me, though he's been with me so long," said Ned, swinging the real hatchet in time with the shadowy one.

Polly's new mistress went to the dining-room, and fell to washing up the breakfast cups. Polly hated that work, and sulkily began to rattle the spoons and knock the things about. But the shadow wouldn't allow that; and Polly had to do just what it did, though she grumbled all the while.

"She doesn't splash a bit, or make any clatter; so I guess she's a tidy creature," said Polly. "How long she does rub each spoon and glass. We never shall get done. What a fuss she makes with the napkins, laying them all even in the drawer. And now she's at the salt-cellars, doing them just as mamma likes. I wish she'd live here, and do my work for me. Why, what's that?" And Polly stopped fretting to listen; for she seemed to hear the sound of singing, — so sweet, and yet so very faint she could catch no words, and only make out a cheerful little tune.

"Do you hear any one singing, mamma?" she asked.

"No: I wish I did." And mamma sighed; for baby was poorly, piles of sewing lay waiting for her, Biddy was turning things topsy-turvy in the kitchen for want of a word from the mistress, and Polly was looking sullen.

The little girl didn't say any more, but worked quietly and watched the shadow, feeling sure the faint song came from it. Presently she began to hum the tune she caught by snatches; and, before she knew it, she was singing away like a blackbird. Baby stopped crying, and mamma said, smiling:

"Now I hear somebody singing, and it's the music I like best in the world."

That pleased Polly; but, a minute after, she stopped smiling, for the shadow went and took baby, or seemed to, and Polly really did. Now, baby was heavy, and cross with its teeth; and Polly didn't feel like tending it one bit. Mamma hurried away to the kitchen; and Polly walked up and down the room with poor baby hanging over her arm, crying dismally, with a pin in its back, a wet bib under its chin, and nothing cold and hard to bite with its hot, aching gums, where the little teeth were trying to come through.

"Do stop, you naughty, fretty baby. I'm tired of your screaming, and it's high time you went to sleep. Bless me! what's Miss Shadow doing with *her* baby?" said Polly.

Miss Shadow took out the big pin and laid it away, put on a dry bib, and gave *her* baby a nice ivory ring to bite; then began to dance up and down the room, till the shadowy baby clapped its hands and kicked delightedly. Polly laughed, and did the same, feeling sorry she had been so pettish. Presently both babies grew quiet, went to sleep, and were laid in the cradle.

"Now, I hope we shall rest a little," said Polly, stretching her arms.

But, no: down sat the shadow, and began to sew, making her needle fly like a real little seamstress.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Polly. "I promised to hem those handkerchiefs for Ned, and so I must; but I do think handkerchiefs are the most pokey things in the world to sew. I dare say you think you can sew faster than I can. Just wait a bit, and see what I can do, miss," she said to the shadow.

It took some time to find her thimble and needles and spools, for Polly wasn't a very neat little girl; but she got settled at last, and stitched away as if bent on beating her dumb friend.

Little Will's shadow went up to the nursery, and stopped before a basin of water. "Oh! ah! ain't this drefful?" cried Will, with a shiver; for he knew he'd got to have his face washed, because he wouldn't have it done properly when he got up, but ran away. Now, Will was a good child; but this one thing was his great trouble, and sometimes he couldn't bear it. Jane was so rough. She let soap get in his eyes, and water run down his neck, and she pinched his nose when she wiped him, and brushed his hair so hard that really it *was* dreadful; and even a bigger boy would have found it hard to bear. He shivered and sighed: but Jane came in; and, when he saw that the shadow stood still and took the scrubbing like a little hero, he tried to do the same, and succeeded so well that Jane actually patted his head and called him "a deary;" which was something new, for old Nurse Jane was always very busy and rather cross.

Feeling that nothing worse could possibly happen to him, Will ran after his shadow, as it flitted away into the barn, and began to feed the chickens.

"There, now! I forgetted all about my chickeys, and the shadow 'membered 'em; and I'm glad of it," said Will, scattering dabs of meal and water to the chirping, downy little creatures who pecked and fluttered at his feet. Little shadow hunted for eggs, drove the turkeys out of the garden, and picked a basket of chips: then it went to play with Sammy, a neighbor's child; for, being a small shadow, it hadn't many jobs to do, and plenty of active play was good for it.

Sammy was a rough little boy and rather selfish: so, when they played ball, he wanted to throw all the time; and, when Will objected, he grew angry and struck him. The blow didn't hurt Will's cheek much, but it did his little feelings; and he lifted his hand to strike back, when he saw his shadow go and kiss Sammy's shadow. All his anger was gone in a minute, and he just put his arm round Sammy's neck and kissed him. This kiss for a blow made him so ashamed that he began to cry, and couldn't be comforted till he had given Will his best marble and a ride on his pony.

About an hour before dinner, the three shadows and the children met in the garden, and had a grand game of play, after they had told each other what they had been doing since they parted. Now, the shadows didn't forget baby even then, but got out the wagon, and Miss Baby, all fresh from her nap, sat among her pillows like a queen, while Ned was horse, Polly footman, and Will driver; and in this way she travelled all round the garden and barn, up the lane and down to the brook, where she was much delighted with the water sparkling along and the fine splash of the stones they threw in.

When the dinner-bell rang, mamma saw four clean, rosy faces and four smooth heads at the table; for the shadow-children made themselves neat, without being told. Every one was merry and hungry and good-natured. Even poor baby forgot her teeth, and played a regular rub-a-dub with her spoon on her mug, and tried to tell about the fine things she saw on her drive. The children said nothing about the new play, and no one observed the queer actions of their shadows but themselves. They saw that there was no gobbling, or stretching over, or spilling of things, among the shadows; but that they waited to be helped, served others first, and ate tidily, which was a great improvement upon the usual state of things.

It was Saturday afternoon: the day was fine, and mamma told them they could go for a holiday frolic in the woods. “Don’t go to the pond, and be home early,” she said.

“Yes, mamma; we’ll remember,” they answered, as they scampered away to get ready.

“We shall go through the village, and Mary King will be looking out; so I shall wear my best hat. Mamma won’t see me, if I slip down the back way; and I do so want Mary to know that my hat is prettier than hers,” said Polly, up in her little room.

Now Polly was rather vain, and liked to prink; so she got out the new hat, and spent some time in smoothing her braids and putting on her blue ribbons. But when all was ready, and the boys getting impatient, she found her shadow, with a sun-bonnet on, standing by the door, as if to prevent her going out.

“You tiresome thing! do you mean that I mustn’t wear my hat, but that old bonnet?” asked Polly.

The shadow nodded and beckoned, and patted its head, as if it was all right.

“I wish I hadn’t promised to do as you do; then I could do as I like, and not make a fright of myself,” said Polly, rather sulkily, as she put away the hat, and tied on the old bonnet with a jerk.

Once out in the lovely sunshine, she soon forgot the little disappointment; and, as they didn’t go through the village, but by a green lane, where she found some big blackberries, she was quite contented. Polly had a basket to hold fruit or flowers, Ned his jackknife, and Will a long stick on which he rode, fancying that this sort of horse would help his short legs along; so they picked, whittled, and trotted their way to the wood, finding all manner of interesting things on the road.

The wood was full of pleasant sights and sounds; for wild roses bloomed all along the path, ferns and scarlet berries filled the little dells, squirrels chattered, birds sang, and pines whispered musically overhead.

“I’m going to stop here and rest, and make a wreath of these pretty wild roses for baby: it’s her birthday, and it will please mamma,” said Polly, sitting down on a mound of moss, with a lapful of flowers.

“I’m going to cut a fishing-pole, and will be back in a minute.” And Ned went crashing into the thickest part of the wood.

“I shall see where that rabbit went to, and maybe I’ll find some berries,” said

Will, trotting down the path the wild rabbit had gone.

The sound of the boys' steps died away, and Polly was wondering how it would seem to live all alone in the wood, when a little girl came trudging by, with a great pail of berries on her arm. She was a poor child: her feet were bare, her gown was ragged, she wore an old shawl over her head, and walked as if lame. Polly sat behind the ferns, and the child did not see her till Polly called out. The sudden sound startled her; and she dropped her pail, spilling the berries all over the path. The little girl began to cry, and Polly to laugh, saying, in a scornful tone:

"How silly to cry for a few berries!"

"I've been all day picking 'em," said the girl; "and I'm so tired and hungry; 'cause I didn't dare to go home till my pail was full, — mother scolds if I do, — and now they're all spoilt. Oh, dear! dear me!" And she cried so hard that great tears fell on the moss.

Polly was sorry now, and sat looking at her till she saw her shadow down on its knees, picking up the berries; then it seemed to fold its little handkerchief round the girl's bruised foot, and give her something from its pocket. Polly jumped up and imitated the kind shadow, even to giving the great piece of gingerbread she had brought for fear she should be hungry.

"Take this," she said gently. "I'm sorry I frightened you. Here are the berries all picked up, and none the worse for falling in the grass. If you'll take them to the white house on the hill, my mamma will buy them, and then your mother won't scold you."

"Oh, thank you, miss! It's ever so good. I'll take the berries to your mother, and bring her more whenever she likes," said the child gratefully, as she walked away munching the gingerbread, and smiling till there were little rainbows in her tears.

Meanwhile Ned had poked about in the bushes, looking for a good pole. Presently he saw a willow down by the pond, and thought that would give him a nice, smooth pole. He forgot his promise, and down he went to the pond; where he cut his stick, and was whittling the end, when he saw a boat by the shore. It was untied, and oars lay in it, as if waiting for some one to come and row out.

"I'll just take a little pull across, and get those cardinal-flowers for Polly," he said; and went to the boat.

He got in, and was about to push off, when he saw his shadow standing on the shore.

"Don't be a fool; get in, and come along," he said to it, remembering his promise now, but deciding to break it, and ask pardon afterwards.

But the shadow shook its head; pointed to the swift stream that ran between the banks, the rocks and mud on the opposite side, and the leaky boat itself.

"I ain't afraid: mamma won't mind, if I tell her I'm sorry; and it will be such fun to row alone. Be a good fellow, and let me go," said Ned, beckoning.

But the shadow would not stir, and Ned was obliged to mind. He did so very reluctantly, and scolded the shadow well as he went back to Polly; though all the time he felt he was doing right, and knew he should be glad afterwards.

Will trotted after the rabbit, but didn't find it; he found a bird's-nest instead with four little birds in it. He had an empty cage at home, and longed for something to put in it; for kittens didn't like it, and caterpillars and beetlebugs got away. He chose the biggest bird, and, holding him carefully, walked away to find Polly. The poor mother-bird chirped and fluttered in great distress; but Will kept on till his little shadow came before him, and tried to make him turn back.

"No, no, I want him," said Will. "I won't hurt him, and his mother has three left: she won't mind if I take one."

Here the mother-bird chirped so loud it was impossible to help seeing that she *did* care very much; and the shadow stamped its foot and waved its hand, as if ordering the young robber to carry back the baby-bird. Will stood still, and thought a minute; but his little heart was a very kind one, and he soon turned about, saying pleasantly:

"Yes, it *is* naughty, and I won't do it. I'll ask mamma to get me a canary, and will let this birdie stay with his brothers."

The shadow patted him on the shoulder, and seemed to be delighted as Will put the bird in the nest and walked on, feeling much happier than if he had kept it. A bush of purple berries grew by the path, and Will stopped to pick some. He didn't know what they were, and mamma had often told him never to eat strange things. But they smelt so good, and looked so nice, he couldn't resist, and lifted one to his mouth, when little shadow motioned for him to stop.

"Oh, dear! you don't let me do any thing I want to," sighed Will. "I shall ask Polly if I tarn't eat these; and, if she says I may, I shall, so now."

He ran off to ask Polly; but she said they were poisonous, and begged him to throw them away.

"Good little shadow, to keep me safe!" cried Will. "I like you; and I'll mind better next time, 'cause you are always right."

The shadow seemed to like this, and bobbed about so comically it made Will laugh till his eyes were full of tears. Ned came back, and they went on, having grand times in the wood. They found plenty of berries to fill the basket; they swung down on slender birches, and got rolls of white bark for canoes; they saw all sorts of wild-wood insects and birds; and frolicked till they were tired. As they crossed a field, a cow suddenly put down her head and ran at them, as if she was afraid they meant to hurt her calf. All turned, and ran as fast as they could toward the wall; but poor Will in his fright tumbled down, and lay screaming. Ned and Polly had reached the wall, and, looking back, saw that their shadows had not followed. Ned's stood before Will, brandishing his pole; and Polly's was flapping a shadowy sun-bonnet with all its might. As soon as they saw that, back they went, — Ned to threaten till he broke his pole, and Polly to flap till the strings came off. As if anxious to do its part, the bonnet flew up in the air, and coming down lit on the cross cow's head; which so astonished her that she ran away as hard as she could pelt.

"Wasn't that funny?" said Will, when they had tumbled over the wall, and lay laughing in the grass on the safe side.

"I'm glad I wore the old bonnet; for I suppose my best hat would have gone just the same," said Polly thankfully.

"The calf doesn't know its own mother with that thing on," laughed Ned.

"How brave and kind you were to come back and save me! I'd have been deaded if you hadn't," said Will, looking at his brother and sister with his little face full of grateful admiration.

They turned towards home after this flurry, feeling quite like heroes. When they came to the corner where two roads met, Ned proposed they should take the river-road; for, though the longest, it was much the pleasantest.

"We shan't be home at supper-time," said Polly. "You won't be able to do your jobs, Ned, nor I mine, and Will's chickens will have to go to bed hungry."

"Never mind: it's a holiday, so let's enjoy it, and not bother," answered Ned.

"We promised mamma we'd come home early," said Will.

They stood looking at the two roads, — one sandy, hot, and hilly; the other green and cool and level, along the river-side. They all chose the pleasant path, and walked on till Ned cried out, "Why, where are our shadows?"

They looked behind, before, and on either side; but nowhere could they see them.

"They were with us at the corner," said Will.

"Let's run back, and try to find them," said Polly.

"No, let 'em go: I'm tired of minding mine, and don't care if I never see it again," said Ned.

"Don't say so; for I remember hearing about a man who sold his shadow, and then got into lots of trouble because he had none. We promised to follow them, and we must," said Polly.

"I wish," began Ned in a pet; but Polly clapped her hand over his mouth, saying:

"Pray, don't wish now; for it may come to pass as the man's wish in the fairy tale did, and the black pudding flew up and stuck tight to his wife's nose."

This made Ned laugh, and they all turned back to the corner. Looking up the hilly road, they saw the three shadows trudging along, as if bent on getting home in good time. Without saying a word, the children followed; and, when they got to the garden gate, they all said at once:

"Aren't you glad you came?"

Under the elm-tree stood a pretty tea-table, covered with bread and butter, custards, and berries, and in the middle a fine cake with sugar-roses on the top; and mamma and baby, all nicely dressed, were waiting to welcome them to the birthday feast. Polly crowned the little queen, Ned gave her a willow whistle he had made, and Will some pretty, bright pebbles he had found; and Miss Baby was as happy as a bird, with her treasures.

A pleasant supper-time; then the small duties for each one; and then the go-to-bed frolic. The nursery was a big room, and in the evening a bright wood fire always burned there for baby. Mamma sat before it, softly rubbing baby's little rosy limbs before she went to bed, singing and telling stories meanwhile to the three children who pranced about in their long nightgowns. This evening they had a gay time; for the shadows amused them by all sorts of antics, and kept them laughing till they were tired. As they sat resting on the big sofa, they heard a soft, sweet voice singing. It wasn't mamma; for she was only talking to baby, and this voice sang a real song. Presently they saw mamma's shadow on the wall, and found it was the shadow-mother singing to the shadow-children. They listened intently, and this is what they heard:

"Little shadows, little shadows,
Dancing on the chamber wall,
While I sit beside the hearthstone
Where the red flames rise and fall.
Caps and nightgowns, caps and nightgowns,
My three antic shadows wear;
And no sound they make in playing,
For the six small feet are bare.

"Dancing gayly, dancing gayly,
To and fro all together,
Like a family of daisies
Blown about in windy weather;
Nimble fairies, nimble fairies,
Playing pranks in the warm glow,

While I sing the nursery ditties
Childish phantoms love and know.

"Now what happens, now what happens?
One small shadow's tumbled down:
I can see it on the carpet,
Softly rubbing its hurt crown.
No one whimpers, no one whimpers;
A brave-hearted sprite is this:
See! the others offer comfort
In a silent, shadowy kiss.

"Hush! they're creeping; hush! they're creeping,
Up about my rocking-chair:
I can feel their loving fingers
Clasp my neck and touch my hair.
Little shadows, little shadows,
Take me captive, hold me tight,
As they climb and cling and whisper,
'Mother dear, good night! good night!'"

As the song ended, the real children, as well as the shadows, lovingly kissed mamma, and said "Good-night;" then went away into their rooms, said their prayers, and nestled down into their beds. Ned slept alone in the room next that which Polly and Will had; and, after lying quiet a little while, he called out softly:

"I say, Polly, are you asleep?"

"No: I'm thinking what a queer day we've had," answered Polly.

"It's been a good day, and I'm glad we tried our wish; for the shadows showed us, as well as they could, what we ought to do and be. I shan't forget it, shall you?" said Ned.

"No: I'm much obliged for the lesson."

"So is I," called out Will, in a very earnest, but rather a sleepy, little voice.

"I wonder what mamma will say, when we tell her about it," said Ned.

"And I wonder if our shadows will come back to us at midnight, and follow us as they used to do," added Polly.

“I shall be very careful where I lead my shadow; ‘cause he’s a good little one, and set me a righter zarmple than ever I did him,” said Will, and then dropped asleep.

The others agreed with him, and resolved that their shadows should not be ashamed of them. All were fast asleep; and no one but the moon saw the shadows come stealing back at midnight, and, having danced about the little beds, vanish as the clock struck twelve.

POPPY’S PRANKS

She wasn’t a wilfully naughty child, this harum-scarum Poppy, but very thoughtless and very curious. She wanted to see every thing, do every thing, and go every where: she feared nothing, and so was continually getting into scrapes.

Her pranks began early; for, when she was about four, her mamma one day gave her a pair of green shoes with bright buttons. Poppy thought there never was any thing so splendid, and immediately wanted to go to walk. But mamma was busy, and Poppy couldn’t go alone any farther than the garden. She showed her shoes to the servants, the cat, the doves, and the flowers; and then opened the gate that the people in the street might see the trim little feet she was so proud of. Now Poppy had been forbidden to go out; but, when she saw Kitty Allen, her neighbor, playing ball down the street, she forgot every thing but the desire to show her new shoes; and away she went marching primly along as vain as a little peacock, as she watched the bright buttons twinkle, and heard the charming creak. Kitty saw her coming; and, being an ill-natured little girl, took no notice, but called out to her brother Jack:

“Ain’t some folks grand? If I couldn’t have red shoes for my best, I wouldn’t have any, would you?”

They both laughed, and this hurt Poppy’s feelings dreadfully. She tossed her head, and tried to turn up her nose; but, it was so very small, it couldn’t be very scornful. She said nothing, but walked gravely by, as if she was going on an errand, and hadn’t heard a word. Round the corner she went, thinking she would wait till Kitty was gone; as she didn’t like to pass again, fearing Jack might say something equally trying. An organ-man with a monkey was playing near by; and Poppy was soon so busy listening to the music, and watching the sad-looking monkey, that she forgot home, shoes, and Kitty altogether.

She followed the man a long way; and, when she turned to go back, she took the wrong street, and found herself by the park. Being fond of dandelions, Poppy went in, and gathered her hands full, enjoying herself immensely; for Betsy, the maid, never let her play in the pond, or roll down the hill, or make dirt-pies, and now she did all these things, besides playing with strange children and talking with any one she pleased. If she had not had her luncheon just before she started, she would have been very hungry; for dinner-time came, without her knowing it.

By three o’clock, she began to think it was time to go home, and boldly started off to find it. But poor little Poppy didn’t know the way, and went all wrong. She was very tired now, and hot and hungry, and wanted to see mamma, and wondered why she didn’t come to the brown house with the white garden-gate. On and on she went, up streets and down, amusing herself with looking in the shop-windows, and sitting to rest on doorsteps. Once she asked a pleasant-faced little girl to show her the way home; but, as she didn’t know in what street it was, and said her father’s name was “papa,” the girl couldn’t help her: so she gave her a bun and went away. Poppy ate her bun, and began to wonder what would become of her; for night was coming on, and there didn’t seem to be any prospect of finding mamma or home or bed. Her courage was all gone now; and, coming to a quiet place, she sat down on some high steps, and cried till her little “hankchif,” as she called it, was all wet.

Nobody minded her: and she felt very forlorn till a big black dog came by, and seemed to understand the matter entirely; for he smelt of her face, licked her hands, and then lay down by her with such a friendly look in his brown eyes that Poppy was quite comforted. She told him her story, patted his big head; and then, being fairly tired out, laid her wet cheek on his soft back, and fell fast asleep.

It was quite dark when she woke; but a lamp was lighted near by, and standing under it was a man ringing a great bell. Poppy sat up, and wondered if anybody’s supper was ready. The man had a paper; and, when people stopped at the sound of the bell, he read in a loud voice:

“Lost! a little girl, four years old; curly brown hair, blue eyes; had on a white frock and green shoes; calls herself Poppy.”

He got no farther; for a little voice cried out of the dark, in a tone of surprise:

“Why, dats me!”

The people all turned to look; and the big man put his bell in his pocket, took her up very kindly, and said he’d carry her home.

“Is it far away?” asked Poppy, with a little sob.

“Yes, my dear; but I am going to give you some supper fust, along of my little girl. I live close by; and, when we’ve had a bite, we’ll go find your ma.”

Poppy was so tired and hungry, she was glad to find herself taken care of, and let the man do as he liked. He took her to a funny little house, and his wife gave her bread and molasses on a new tin plate with letters all round the edge. Poppy thought it very fine, and enjoyed her supper, though the man’s little girl stared at her all the time with eyes as blue as her mug.

While she ate, the man sent word to her father that she was found; and, when both papa and mamma came hurrying in all out of breath with joy, there sat Miss Poppy talking merrily, with her face well daubed with molasses, her gown torn, her hands very dirty, and her shoes — ah, the pretty new shoes! — all spoiled with mud and dust, scratched, and half worn out, the buttons dull, and the color quite gone. No one cared for it that night; for little runaway was kissed and petted, and taken home to her own cosey bed as tenderly as if she had done nothing naughty, and never frightened her parents out of their wits in her life.

But the next day, — dear me! what a sad time it was, to be sure! When Poppy woke up, there hung the spoilt shoes over the mantle-piece; and, as soon as she was dressed, papa came in with a long cord, one end of which he tied round Poppy's waist, and the other to the arm of the sofa.

"I'm very sorry to have to tie you up, like a little dog; but I must, or you will forget, and run away again, and make mamma ill."

Then he went away without his morning kiss, and Poppy was so very unhappy she could hardly eat her breakfast. She felt better by and by, and tried to play; but the cord kept pulling her back. She couldn't get to the window; and, when she heard mamma passing the door, she tried to run and meet her, but had to stop halfway, for the cord jerked her over. Cousin Fanny came up, but Poppy was so ashamed to be tied that she crept under the sofa and hid. All day she was a prisoner, and was a very miserable little girl; but at night she was untied, and, when mamma took her in her lap for the first time that day, Poppy held her fast, and sobbed very penitently —

"O mamma! I dreffull sorry I runned away. Fordive me one time more, and I never will adain;" and she never did.

Two or three years after this, Poppy went to live in the country, and tried some new pranks. One day she went with her sister Nelly to see a man plough, for that sort of thing was new to her. While the man worked, she saw him take out a piece of something brown, and bite off a bit.

"What's that?" asked Poppy.

"Tobaccer," said the man.

"Is it nice?" asked Poppy.

"Prime," said the man.

"Could you let me taste it?" asked curious Poppy.

"It will make you sick," said the man, laughing.

"It doesn't make *you* sick. I'd like to try," said Poppy, nothing daunted.

He gave her a piece; and Poppy ate it, though it didn't taste good at all. She did it because Cy, her favorite playfellow, told her she'd die if she did, and tried to frighten her.

"You darsn't eat any more," he said.

"Yes, I dare. See if I don't." And Poppy took another piece, just to show how brave she was. Silly little Poppy!

"I ain't sick, and I shan't die, so now."

And Poppy pranced about as briskly as ever. But the man shook his head, Nelly watched her anxiously, and Cy kept saying:

“Ain’t you sick yet, say?”

For a little while Poppy felt all right; but presently she grew rather pale, and began to look rather pensive. She stopped running, and walked slower and slower, while her eyes got dizzy, and her hands and feet very cold.

“Ain’t you sick now, say?” repeated Cy; and Poppy tried to answer, “Oh, dear! no;” but a dreadful feeling came over her, and she could only shake her head, and hold on to Nelly.

“Better lay down a spell,” said the man, looking a little troubled.

“I don’t wish to dirty my clean frock,” said Poppy faintly, as she glanced over the wide-ploughed field, and longed for a bit of grass to drop on. She kept on bravely for another turn; but suddenly stopped, and, quite regardless of the clean pink gown, dropped down in a furrow, looking so white and queer that Nelly began to cry. Poppy lay a minute, then turned to Cy, and said very solemnly:

“Cy, run home, and tell my mother I’m dying.”

Away rushed Cy in a great fright, and burst upon Poppy’s mamma, exclaiming breathlessly:

“O ma’am! Poppy’s been and ate a lot of tobacco; and she’s sick, layin’ in the field; and she says ‘Come quick, ‘cause she’s dyin.’“

“Mercy on us! what will happen to that child next?” cried poor mamma, who was used to Poppy’s mishaps. Papa was away, and there was no carriage to bring Poppy home in; so mamma took the little wheelbarrow, and trundled away to get the suffering Poppy.

She couldn’t speak when they got to her; and, only stopping to give the man a lecture, mamma picked up her silly little girl, and the procession moved off. First came Cy, as grave as a sexton; then the wheelbarrow with Poppy, white and limp and speechless, all in a bunch; then mamma, looking amused, anxious and angry; then Nelly, weeping as if her tender heart was entirely broken; while the man watched them, with a grin, saying to himself:

“Twarn’t my fault. The child was a reg’lar fool to swaller it.”

Poppy was dreadfully sick all night, but next day was ready for more adventures and experiments. She swung on the garret stairs, and tumbled down, nearly breaking her neck. She rubbed her eyes with red peppers, to see if it *really* would make them smart, as Cy said; and was led home quite blind and roaring with pain. She got into the pigsty to catch a young piggy, and was taken out in a sad state of dirt. She slipped into the brook, and was half drowned; broke a window and her own head, swinging a little flat-iron on a string; dropped baby in the coal-hod; buried her doll, and spoilt her; cut off a bit of her finger, chopping wood; and broke a tooth, trying to turn heels over head on a haycock.

These are only a few of her pranks, but one was nearly her last.

She wanted to go bare-footed, as the little country boys and girls did; but mamma wasn’t willing, and Poppy was much afflicted.

“It doesn’t hurt Cy, and it won’t hurt me, just for a little while,” she said.

“Say no more, Poppy. I never wish to see you barefooted,” replied mamma.

“Well, you needn’t: I’ll go and do it in the barn,” muttered Poppy, as she walked away.

Into the barn she went, and played country girl to her heart’s content, in spite of Nelly’s warnings. Nelly never got into scrapes, being a highly virtuous young lady; but she enjoyed Poppy’s pranks, and wept over her misfortunes with sisterly fidelity.

“Now I’ll be a bear, and jump at you as you go by,” said Poppy, when they were tired of playing steam-engine with the old winnowing machine. So she got up on a beam; and Nelly, with a peck measure on her head for a hat, and a stick for a gun, went bear-hunting, and banged away at the swallows, the barrels, and the hencoops, till the bear was ready to eat her. Presently, with a loud roar, the bear leaped; but Nelly wasn’t eaten that time, for Poppy cried out with pain:

“Oh! I jumped on a pitchfork, and it’s in my foot! Take it out! take it out!”

Poor little foot! There was a deep purple hole in the sole, and the blood came, and Poppy fainted away, and Nelly screamed, and mamma ran, and the neighbors rushed in, and there was *such* a flurry. Poppy was soon herself again, and lay on the sofa, with Nelly and Cy to amuse her.

“What did the doctor say to mamma in the other room about me?” whispered Poppy, feeling very important at having such a bustle made on her account. Nelly sniffed, but said nothing; Cy, however, spoke up briskly:

“He says you might have lockjaw.”

“Is that bad?” asked Poppy gravely.

“Oh, ain’t it, though! Your mouth shuts up, and you can’t open it; and you have fits and die.”

“Always?” said Poppy, looking scared, and feeling of her mouth.

“‘Most always, I guess. That’s why your ma cried, and Nelly keeps kissin’ you.”

Cy felt sorry, but rather enjoyed the excitement, and was sure, that, if any one ever *could* escape dying, it would be Poppy, for she always “came alive” again after her worst mishaps. She looked very solemn for a few minutes, and kept opening and shutting her mouth to see if it wasn’t stiff. Presently she said, in a serious tone and with a pensive air:

“Nelly, I’ll give you my bead-ring: I shan’t want it any more. And Cy may have the little horse: he lost his tail; but I put on the lamb’s tail, and he is as good as ever. I wish to give away my things 'fore I die; and, Nelly, won't you bring me the scissors?"

"What for?" said Nelly, sniffing more than ever.

"To cut off my hair for mamma. She'll want it, and I like to cut things."

Nelly got the scissors; and Poppy cut away all she could reach, giving directions about her property while she snipped.

"I wish papa to have my pictures and my piece of poetry I made. Give baby my dolly and the quacking duck. Tell Billy, if he wants my collection of bright buttons, he can have 'em; and give Hattie the yellow plaster dog, with my love."

Here mamma came in with a poultice, and couldn't help laughing, though tears stood in her eyes, as she saw Poppy's cropped head and heard her last wishes.

"I don't think I shall lose my little girl yet, so we won't talk of it. But Poppy must keep quiet, and let Nelly wait on her for a few days."

"Are fits bad, mamma? and does it hurt much to die?" asked Poppy thoughtfully.

"If people are good while they live, it is not hard to die, dear," said mamma, with a kiss; and Poppy hugged her, saying softly:

"Then I'll be very good; so I won't mind, if the jawlock does come."

And Poppy *was* good, — oh, dreadfully good! for a week. Quite an angel was Poppy; so meek and gentle, so generous and obedient, you really wouldn't have known her. She loved everybody, forgave her playmates all their sins against her, let Nelly take such of her precious treasures as she liked, and pensively hoped baby would remember her when she was gone. She hopped about with a crutch, and felt as if she was an object of public interest; for all the old ladies sent to know how she was, the children looked at her with respectful awe as one set apart and doomed to fits, and Cy continually begged to know if her mouth was stiff.

Poppy didn't die, though she got all ready for it; and felt rather disappointed when the foot healed, the jaws remained as active as ever, and the fits didn't come. I think it did her good; for she never forgot that week, and, though she was near dying several times after, she never was so fit to go as she was then.

"Burney's making jelly: let's go and get our scrapings," said Poppy to Nellie once, when mamma was away.

But Burney was busy and cross, and cooks are not as patient as mothers; so when the children appeared, each armed with a spoon, and demanded their usual feast, she wouldn't hear of it, and ordered them off.

"But we only want the scrapings of the pan, Burney: mamma always lets us have them, when we help her make jelly; don't she, Nelly?" said Poppy, trying to explain the case.

"Yes; and makes us our little potful too," added Nelly, persuasively.

"I don't want your help; so be off. Your ma can fuss with your pot, if she chooses. I've no time."

"*I* think Burney's the crossest woman in the world. It's mean to eat all the scrapings herself; isn't it Nelly?" said Poppy, very loud, as the cook shut the door in their faces. "Never mind: I know how to pay her," she added, in a whisper, as they sat on the stairs bewailing their wrongs. "She'll put her old jelly in the big closet, and lock the door; but we can climb the plum tree, and get in at the window, when she takes her nap."

"Should we dare to eat any?" asked Nelly, timid, but longing for the forbidden fruit.

"*I* should; just as much as ever I like. It's mamma's jelly, and she won't mind. I don't care for old cross Burney," said Poppy, sliding down the banisters by way of soothing her ruffled spirit.

So when Burney went to her room after dinner, the two rogues climbed in at the window; and, each taking a jar, sat on the shelf, dipping in their fingers and revelling rapturously. But Burney wasn't asleep, and, hearing a noise below, crept down to see what mischief was going on. Pausing in the entry to listen, she heard whispering, clattering of glasses, and smacking of lips in the big closet; and in a moment knew that her jelly was lost. She tried the door with her key; but sly Poppy had bolted it on the inside, and, feeling quite safe, defied Burney from among the jelly-pots, entirely reckless of consequences. Short-sighted Poppy! she forgot Cy; but Burney didn't, and sent him to climb in at the window, and undo the door. Feeling hurt that the young ladies hadn't asked him to the feast, Cy hardened his heart against them, and delivered them up to the enemy, regardless of Poppy's threats and Nelly's prayers.

"Poppy proposed it, she broke the jar, and I didn't eat *much*. O Burney! don't hurt her, please, but let me 'splain it to mamma when she comes," sobbed Nelly, as Burney seized Poppy, and gave her a good shaking.

"You go wash your face, Miss Nelly, and leave this naughty, naughty child to me," said Burney; and took Poppy, kicking and screaming, into the little library, where she — oh, dreadful to relate! — gave her a good spanking, and locked her up.

Mamma never whipped, and Poppy was in a great rage at such an indignity. The minute she was left alone, she looked about to see how she could be revenged. A solar lamp stood on the table; and Poppy coolly tipped it over, with a fine smash, calling out to Burney that she'd have to pay for it, that mamma would be very angry, and that she, Poppy, was going to spoil every thing in the room. But Burney was gone, and no one came near her. She kicked the paint off the door, rattled the latch, called Burney a “pig,” and Cy “a badder boy than the man who smothered the little princes in the Tower.” Poppy was very fond of that story, and often played it with Nelly and the dolls. Having relieved her feelings in this way, Poppy rested, and then set about amusing herself. Observing that the spilt oil made the table shine, she took her handkerchief and polished up the furniture, as she had seen the maids do.

“Now, that looks nice; and I know mamma will be pleased ‘cause I’m so tidy,” she said, surveying her work with pride, when she had thoroughly greased every table, chair, picture-frame, book-back, and ornament in the room. Plenty of oil still remained; and Poppy finished off by oiling her hair, till it shone finely, and smelt — dear me, how it did smell! If she had been a young whale, it couldn’t have been worse. Poppy wasn’t particular about smells; but she got some in her mouth, and didn’t like the taste. There was no water to wash in; and her hands, face, and pinafore were in a high state of grease. She was rather lonely too; for, though mamma had got home, she didn’t come to let Poppy out: so the young rebel thought it was about time to surrender. She could write pretty well, and was fond of sending penitent notes to mamma, after being naughty: for mamma always answered them so kindly, and was so forgiving, that Poppy’s naughtiest mood was conquered by them sooner than by any punishment; and Poppy kept the notes carefully in a little cover, even after she was grown up. There was pen, ink, and paper in the room; so, after various trials, Poppy wrote her note: —

“Dear Mamma.

“i am sorry i Took bernys gelli. i have braked The
lamP. The oyl maks A bad smel. i tHink i wil Bee
sik iF i stay HeRe anny More. i LoVe yoU — your
Trying To Bee GooD

popy.”

When she had finished, she lowered her note by a string, and bobbed it up and down before the parlor window till Nelly saw and took it in. Every one laughed over it; for, besides the bad spelling and the funny periods, it was covered with oil-spots, blots, and tear marks; for Poppy got tender-hearted toward the end, and cried a few very repentant tears when she said, “I love you; your trying-to-be-good Poppy.”

Mamma went up at once, and ordered no further punishment, but a thorough scrubbing; which Poppy underwent very meekly, though Betsey put soap in her eyes, pulled her hair, and scolded all the time. They were not allowed any jelly for a long while; and Cy teased Poppy about her hair-oil till the joke was quite worn out, and even cross Burney was satisfied with the atonement.

When Poppy was eight, she got so very wild that no one could manage her but mamma, and she was ill; so Poppy was sent away to grandpa's for a visit. Now, grandpa was a very stately old gentleman, and every one treated him with great respect; but Poppy wasn't at all afraid, and asked all manner of impolite questions.

"Grandpa, why don't you have any hair on the top of your head?" — "O grandpa! you *do* snore *so* loud when you take naps!" — "What makes you turn out your feet so, when you walk?" and such things.

If grandpa hadn't been the best-natured old gentleman in the world, he wouldn't have liked this: but he only laughed at Poppy, especially when she spoke of his legs; for he was rather proud of them, and always wore long black silk stockings, and told every one that the legs were so handsome an artist put them in a picture of General Washington; which was quite true, as any one may see when they look at the famous picture in Boston.

Well, Poppy behaved herself respectably for a day or two; but the house was rather dull, she missed Nelly, wanted to run in the street, and longed to see mamma. She amused herself as well as she could with picture-books, patchwork, and the old cat; but, not being a quiet, proper, little Rosamond sort of a child, she got tired of hemming neat pocket-handkerchiefs, and putting her needle carefully away when she had done. She wanted to romp and shout, and slide down the banisters, and riot about; so, when she couldn't be quiet another minute, she went up into a great empty room at the top of the house, and cut up all sorts of capers. Her great delight was to lean out of the window as far as she could, and look at the people in the street, with her head upside down. It was very dangerous, for a fall would have killed her; but the danger was the fun, and Poppy hung out till her hands touched the ledge below, and her face was as red as any real poppy's.

She was enjoying herself in this way one day, when an old gentleman, who lived near, came home to dinner, and saw her.

"What in the world is that hanging out of the colonel's upper window?" said he, putting on his spectacles. "Bless my soul! that child will kill herself. Hallo, there! little girl; get in this minute!" he called to Poppy, flourishing his hat to make her see him.

"What for?" answered Poppy, staring at him without moving an inch.

"You'll fall, and break your neck!" screamed the old gentleman.

“Oh, no, I shan’t!” returned Poppy, much flattered by his interest, and hanging out still further.

“Stop that, instantly, or I’ll go in and inform the colonel!” roared the old gentleman, getting angry.

“I don’t care,” shouted Poppy; and she didn’t, for she knew grandpa wasn’t at home.

“Little gipsy! I’ll settle her,” muttered the old man, bustling up to the steps, and ringing the bell, as if the house was on fire.

No one was in but the servants; and, when he’d told old Emily what the matter was, she went up to “settle” Poppy. But Poppy was already settled, demurely playing with her doll, and looking quite innocent. Emily scolded; and Poppy promised never to do it again, if she might stay and play in the big room. Being busy about dinner, Emily was glad to be rid of her, and left her, to go and tell the old gentleman it was all right.

“Ain’t they crosspatches?” said Poppy to her doll. “Never mind, dear: *you* shall hang out, if I can’t. I guess the old man won’t order you in, any way.”

Full of this idea, Poppy took her long-suffering dolly, and, tying a string to her neck, danced her out of the window. Now this dolly had been through a great deal. Her head had been cut off (and put on again); she had been washed, buried, burnt, torn, soiled, and banged about till she was a mournful object. Poppy loved her very much; for she was two feet tall, and had once been very handsome: so her trials only endeared her to her little mamma. Away she went, skipping and prancing like mad, — a funny sight, for Poppy had taken off her clothes, and she hadn’t a hair on her head.

Poppy went to another window of the room for this performance, because in the opposite house lived five or six children, and she thought they would enjoy the fun.

So they did, and so did the other people; for it was a boarding-house, and all the people were at home for dinner. They came to the windows, and looked and laughed at dolly’s capers, and Poppy was in high feather at the success of her entertainment.

All of a sudden she saw grandpa coming down the street, hands behind his back, feet turned out, gold-headed cane under his arm, and the handsome legs in the black silk stockings marching along in the most stately manner. Poppy whisked dolly in before grandpa saw her, and dodged down as he went by. This made the people laugh again, and grandpa wondered what the joke was. The minute he went in out flew dolly, dancing more frantically than ever; and the children shouted so loud that grandpa went to see what the matter was. The street was empty; yet there stood the people, staring out and laughing. Yes; they were actually looking and laughing at *his* house; and he didn't see what there was to laugh at in that highly respectable mansion.

He didn't like it; and, clapping on his hat, he went out to learn what the matter was. He looked over at the house, up at the sky, down at the ground, and through the street; but nothing funny appeared, for Poppy and dolly were hidden again, and the old gentleman was puzzled. He went in and sat down to watch, feeling rather disturbed. Presently the fun began again: the children clapped their hands, the people laughed, and every one looked over at the house, in what he thought a very impertinent way. This made him angry; and out he rushed a second time, saying, as he marched across the street:

"If those saucy young fellows are making game of me, I'll soon stop it."

Up to the door he went, gave a great pull at the bell, and, when the servant came, he demanded why every one was laughing at his house. One of the young men came and told him, and asked him to come in and see the fun. Poppy didn't see grandpa go in, for she hid, and when she looked out he was gone: so she boldly began the dancing; but, in the midst of a lively caper, dolly went bounce into the garden below, for the string fell from Poppy's hand when she suddenly saw grandpa at the window opposite, laughing as heartily as any one at her prank.

She stared at him in a great fright, and looked so amazed that every one enjoyed that joke better than the other; and poor Poppy didn't hear the last of it for a long time.

Her next performance was to fall into the pond on the Common. She was driving hoop down the hill, and went so fast she couldn't stop herself; so splashed into the water, hoop and all. How dreadful it was to feel the cold waves go over her head, shutting out the sun and air! The ground was gone, and she could find no place for her feet, and could only struggle and choke, and go down, down, with a loud roaring sound in her ears. That would have been the end of Poppy, if a little black boy hadn't jumped in and pulled her out. She was sick and dizzy, and looked like a drowned kitten; but a kind lady took her home in a carriage. After that mishap grandpa thought he wouldn't keep her any longer, for fear she should come to some worse harm. So Miss Poppy was sent home, much to her delight and much to mamma's also; for no matter where she went, or how naughty she was, mamma was always glad to see the little wanderer back, and to forgive and forget all Poppy's pranks.

WHAT THE SWALLOWS DID

A man lay on a pile of new-made hay, in a great barn, looking up at the swallows who darted and twittered above him. He envied the cheerful little creatures; for he wasn't a happy man, though he had many friends, much money, and the beautiful gift of writing songs that everybody loved to sing. He had lost his wife and little child, and would not be comforted; but lived alone, and went about with such a gloomy face that no one liked to speak to him. He took no notice of friends and neighbors; neither used his money for himself nor others; found no beauty in the world, no happiness anywhere; and wrote such sad songs it made one's heart ache to sing them.

As he lay alone on the sweet-smelling hay, with the afternoon sunshine streaming in, and the busy birds chirping overhead, he said sadly to himself:

"Happy swallows, I wish I were one of you; for you have no pains nor sorrows, and your cares are very light. All summer you live gayly together; and, when winter comes, you fly away to the lovely South, unseparated still."

"Neighbors, do you hear what that lazy creature down there is saying?" cried a swallow, peeping over the edge of her nest, and addressing several others who sat on a beam near by.

"We hear, Mrs. Skim; and quite agree with you that he knows very little about us and our affairs," answered one of the swallows with a shrill chirp, like a scornful laugh. "We work harder than he does any day. Did he build his own house, I should like to know? Does he get his daily bread for himself? How many of his neighbors does he help? How much of the world does he see, and who is the happier for his being alive?"

"Cares indeed!" cried another; "I wish he'd undertake to feed and teach my brood. Much he knows about the anxieties of a parent." And the little mother bustled away to get supper for the young ones, whose bills were always gaping wide.

"Sorrows we have, too," softly said the fourth swallow. "He would not envy *me,* if he knew how my nest fell, and all my children were killed; how my dear husband was shot, and my old mother died of fatigue on our spring journey from the South."

"Dear neighbor Dart, he *would* envy you, if he knew how patiently you bear your troubles; how tenderly you help us with our little ones; how cheerfully you serve your friends; how faithfully you love your lost mate; and how trustfully you wait to meet him again in a lovelier country than the South."

As Skim spoke, she leaned down from her nest to kiss her neighbor; and, as the little beaks met, the other birds gave a grateful and approving murmur, for Neighbor Dart was much beloved by all the inhabitants of Twittertown.

"I, for my part, don't envy *him*," said Gossip Wing, who was fond of speaking her mind. "Men and women call themselves superior beings; but, upon my word, I think they are vastly inferior to us. Now, look at that man, and see how he wastes his life. There never was any one with a better chance for doing good, and being happy; and yet he mopes and dawdles his time away most shamefully."

"Ah! he has had a great sorrow, and it is hard to be gay with a heavy heart, an empty home; so don't be too severe, Sister Wing." And the white tie of the little widow's cap was stirred by a long sigh as Mrs. Dart glanced up at the nook where her nest once stood.

"No, my dear, I won't; but really I do get out of patience when I see so much real misery which that man might help, if he'd only forget himself a little. It's my opinion he'd be much happier than he now is, wandering about with a dismal face and a sour temper."

"I quite agree with you; and I dare say he'd thank any one for telling him how he may find comfort. Poor soul! I wish he could understand me; for I sympathize with him, and would gladly help him if I could."

And, as she spoke, kind-hearted Widow Dart skimmed by him with a friendly chirp, which did comfort him; for, being a poet, he *could* understand them, and lay listening, well pleased while the little gossips chattered on together.

"I am so tied at home just now, that I know nothing of what is going on, except the bits of news Skim brings me; so I enjoy your chat immensely. I'm interested in your views on this subject, and beg you'll tell me what you'd have that man do to better himself," said Mrs. Skim, settling herself on her eggs with an attentive air.

"Well, my dear, I'll tell you; for I've seen a deal of the world, and any one is welcome to my experience," replied Mrs. Wing, in an important manner; for she was proud of her "views," and very fond of talking. "In my daily flights about the place, I see a great deal of poverty and trouble, and often wish I could lend a hand. Now, this man has plenty of money and time; and he might do more good than I can tell, if he'd only set about it. Because he is what they call a poet is no reason he should go moaning up and down, as if he had nothing to do but make songs. We sing, but we work also; and are wise enough to see the necessity of both, thank goodness!"

"Yes, indeed, we do," cried all the birds in a chorus; for several more had stopped to hear what was going on.

“Now, what I say is this,” continued Mrs. Wing impressively. “If I were that man, I’d make myself useful at once. There is poor little Will getting more and more lame every day, because his mother can’t send him where he can be cured. A trifle of that man’s money would do it, and he ought to give it. Old Father Winter is half starved, alone there in his miserable hovel; and no one thinks of the good old man. Why don’t that lazy creature take him home, and care for him, the little while he has to live? Pretty Nell is working day and night, to support her father, and is too proud to ask help, though her health and courage are going fast. The man might make hers the gayest heart alive, by a little help. There in a lonely garret lives a young man studying his life away, longing for books and a teacher. The man has a library full, and might keep the poor boy from despair by a little help and a friendly word. He mourns for his own lost baby: I advise him to adopt the orphan whom nobody will own, and who lies wailing all day untended on the poor-house floor. Yes: if he wants to forget sorrow and find peace, let him fill his empty heart and home with such as these, and life won’t seem dark to him any more.”

“Dear me! how well you express yourself, Mrs. Wing; it’s quite a pleasure to hear you; and I heartily wish some persons could hear you, it would do ‘em a deal of good,” said Mrs. Skim; while her husband gave an approving nod as he dived off the beam, and vanished through the open doors.

“I know it would comfort that man to do these things; for I have tried the same cure in my small way, and found great satisfaction in it,” began little Madame Dart, in her soft voice; but Mrs. Wing broke in, saying with a pious expression of countenance:

“I flew into church one day, and sat on the organ enjoying the music; for every one was singing, and I joined in, though I didn’t know the air. Opposite me were two great tablets with golden letters on them. I can read a little, thanks to my friend, the learned raven; and so I spelt out some of the words. One was, ‘Love thy neighbor;’ and as I sat there, looking down on the people, I wondered how they could see those words week after week, and yet pay so little heed to them. Goodness knows, *I* don’t consider myself a perfect bird; far from it; for I know I am a poor, erring fowl; but I believe I may say I *do* love my neighbor, though I *am* ‘an inferior creature.’“ And Mrs. Wing bridled up, as if she resented the phrase immensely.

“Indeed you do, gossip,” cried Dart and Skim; for Wing was an excellent bird, in spite of the good opinion she had of herself.

“Thank you: well, then, such being the known fact, I may give advice on the subject as one having authority; and, if it were possible, I’d give that man a bit of my mind.”

"You have, madam, you have; and I shall not forget it. Thank you, neighbors, and good night," said the man, as he left the barn, with the first smile on his face which it had worn for many days.

"Mercy on us! I do believe the creature heard every thing we said," cried Mrs. Wing, nearly tumbling off the beam, in her surprise.

"He certainly did; so I'm glad I was guarded in my remarks," replied Mrs. Skim, laughing at her neighbor's dismay.

"Dear me! dear me! what did I say?" cried Mrs. Wing, in a great twitter.

"You spoke with more than your usual bluntness, and some of your expressions were rather strong, I must confess; but I don't think any harm will come of it. We are of too little consequence for our criticisms or opinions to annoy him," said Mrs. Dart consolingly.

"I don't know that, ma'am," returned Mrs. Wing, sharply: for she was much ruffled and out of temper. "A cat may look at a king; and a bird may teach a man, if the bird is the wisest. He may destroy my nest, and take my life; but I feel that I have done my duty, and shall meet affliction with a firmness which will be an example to that indolent, ungrateful man."

In spite of her boasted firmness, Mrs. Wing dropped her voice, and peeped over the beam, to be sure the man was gone before she called him names; and then flew away, to discover what he meant to do about it.

For several days, there was much excitement in Twittertown; for news of what had happened flew from nest to nest, and every bird was anxious to know what revenge the man would take for the impertinent remarks which had been made about him.

Mrs. Wing was in a dreadful state of mind, expecting an assault, and the destruction of her entire family. Every one blamed her. Her husband lectured; the young birds chirped, "Chatterbox, chatterbox," as she passed; and her best friends were a little cool. All this made her very meek for a time; and she scarcely opened her bill, except to eat.

A guard was set day and night, to see if any danger approached; and a row of swallows might be seen on the ridgepole at all hours. If any one entered the barn, dozens of little black heads peeped cautiously over the edges of the nests, and there was much flying to and fro with reports and rumors; for all the birds in the town soon knew that something had happened.

The day after the imprudent conversation, a chimney-swallow came to call on Mrs. Wing; and, the moment she was seated on the beam, she began:

"My dear creature, I feel for you in your trying position, — indeed I do, and came over at once to warn you of your danger."

"Mercy on us! what is coming?" cried Mrs. Wing, covering her brood with trembling wings, and looking quite wild with alarm.

"Be calm, my friend, and bear with firmness the consequences of your folly," replied Mrs. Sooty-back, who didn't like Mrs. Wing, because she prided herself on her family, and rather looked down on chimney-swallows. "You know, ma'am, I live at the great house, and am in the way of seeing and hearing all that goes on there. No fire is lighted in the study now; but my landlord still sits on the hearth, and I can overhear every word he says. Last evening, after my darlings were asleep, and my husband gone out, I went down and sat on the andiron, as I often do; for the fireplace is full of oak boughs, and I can peep out unseen. My landlord sat there, looking a trifle more cheerful than usual, and I heard him say, in a very decided tone:

"'I'll catch them, one and all, and keep them here; that is better than pulling the place down, as I planned at first. Those swallows little know what they have done; but I'll show them I don't forget.'"

On hearing this a general wail arose, and Mrs. Wing fainted entirely away. Madam Sooty-back was quite satisfied with the effect she had produced, and departed, saying loftily:

"I'm sorry for you, Mrs. Wing, and forgive your rude speech about my being related to chimney-sweeps. One can't expect good manners from persons brought up in mud houses, and entirely shut out from good society. If I hear any thing more, I'll let you know."

Away she flew; and poor Mrs. Wing would have had another fit, if they hadn't tickled her with a feather, and fanned her so violently that she was nearly blown off her nest by the breeze they raised.

"What shall we do?" she cried.

"Nothing, but wait. I dare say, Mrs. Sooty-back is mistaken; at any rate, we can't get away without leaving our children, for they can't fly yet. Let us wait, and see what happens. If the worst comes, we shall have done our duty, and will all die together."

As no one could suggest any thing better, Mrs. Dart's advice was taken, and they waited. On the afternoon of the same day, Dr. Banks, a sand-swallow, who lived in a subterranean village over by the great sand-bank, looked in to see Mrs. Wing, and cheered her by the following bit of news:

"The man was down at the poor-house to-day, and took away little Nan, the orphan baby. I saw him carry her to Will's mother, and heard him ask her to take care of it for a time. He paid her well, and she seemed glad to do it; for Will needs help, and now he can have it. An excellent arrangement, I think. Bless me, ma'am! what's the matter? Your pulse is altogether too fast, and you look feverish."

No wonder the doctor looked surprised; for Mrs. Wing suddenly gave a skip, and flapped her wings, with a shrill chirp, exclaiming, as she looked about her triumphantly:

"Now, who was right? Who has done good, not harm, by what you call 'gossip'? Who has been a martyr, and patiently borne all kinds of blame, injustice, and disrespect? Yes, indeed! the man saw the sense of my words; he took my advice; he will show his gratitude by some good turn yet; and, if half a dozen poor souls are helped, it will be my doing, and mine alone."

Here she had to stop for breath; and her neighbors all looked at one another, feeling undecided whether to own they were wrong, or to put Mrs. Wing down. Every one twittered and chirped, and made a great noise; but no one would give up, and all went to roost in a great state of uncertainty. But, the next day, it became evident that Mrs. Wing was right; for Major Bumble-bee came buzzing in to tell them that old Daddy Winter's hut was empty, and his white head had been seen in the sunny porch of the great house.

After this the swallows gave in; and, as no harm came to them, they had a jubilee in honor of the occasion. Mrs. Wing was president, and received a vote of thanks for the good she had done, and the credit she had bestowed upon the town by her wisdom and courage. She was much elated by all this; but her fright had been of service, and she bore her honors more meekly than one would have supposed. To be sure, she cut Mrs. Sooty-back when they met; assumed an injured air, when some of her neighbors passed her; and said, "I told you so," a dozen times a day to her husband, who got so many curtain lectures that he took to sleeping on the highest rafter, pretending that the children's noise disturbed him.

All sorts of charming things happened after that, and such a fine summer never was known before; for not only did the birds rejoice, but people also. A good spirit seemed to haunt the town, leaving help and happiness wherever it passed. Some unseen hand scattered crumbs over the barn floor, and left food at many doors. No dog or boy or gun marred the tranquillity of the birds, insects, and flowers who lived on the great estate. No want, care, or suffering, that love or money could prevent, befell the poor folk whose cottages stood near the old house. Sunshine and peace seemed to reign there; for its gloomy master was a changed man now, and the happiness he earned for himself, by giving it to others, flowed out in beautiful, blithe songs, and went singing away into the world, making him friends, and bringing him honor in high places as well as low.

He did not forget the wife and little child whom he had loved so well; but he mourned no longer, for cheerful daisies grew above their graves, and he knew that he should meet them in the lovely land where death can never come. So, while he waited for that happy time to come, he made his life a cheery song, — as every one may do, if they will; and went about dropping kind words and deeds as silently and sweetly as the sky drops sunshine and dew. Every one was his friend, but his favorites were the swallows. Every day he went to see them, carrying grain and crumbs, hearing their chat, sharing their joys and sorrows, and never tiring of their small friendship; for to them, he thought, he owed all the content now his.

When autumn leaves were red, and autumn winds blew cold, the inhabitants of Twittertown prepared for their journey to the South. They lingered longer than usual this year, feeling sorry to leave their friend. But the fields were bare, the frosts began to pinch, and the young ones longed to see the world; so they must go. The day they started, the whole flock flew to the great house, to say good-by. Some dived and darted round and round it, some hopped to and fro on the sere lawn, some perched on the chimney-tops, and some clung to the window ledges; all twittering a loving farewell.

Chirp, Dart, and Wing peeped everywhere, and everywhere found something to rejoice over. In a cosey room, by a bright fire, sat Daddy Winter and Nell's old father, telling stories of their youth, and basking in the comfortable warmth. In the study, surrounded by the books he loved, was the poor young man, happy as a king now, and learning many things which no book could teach him; for he had found a friend. Then, down below was Will's mother, working like a bee; for she was housekeeper, and enjoyed her tasks as much as any mother-bird enjoys filling the little mouths of her brood. Close by was pretty Nell, prettier than ever now; for her heavy care was gone, and she sung as she sewed, thinking of the old father, whom nothing could trouble any more.

But the pleasantest sight the three gossips saw was the man with Baby Nan on his arm and Will at his side, playing in the once dreary nursery. How they laughed and danced! for Will was up from his bed at last, and hopped nimbly on his crutches, knowing that soon even they would be unneeded. Little Nan was as plump and rosy as a baby should be, and babbled like a brook, as the man went to and fro, cradling her in his strong arms, feeling as if his own little daughter had come back when he heard the baby voice call him father.

"Ah, how sweet it is!" cried Mrs. Dart, glad to see that he had found comfort for his grief.

"Yes; indeed: it does one's heart good to see such a happy family," added Mrs. Skim, who was a very motherly bird.

"I don't wish to boast; but I *will* say that I am satisfied with my summer's work, and go South feeling that I leave an enviable reputation behind me." And

Mrs. Wing plumed herself with an air of immense importance, as she nodded and bridled from her perch on the window-sill.

The man saw the three, and hastened to feed them for the last time, knowing that they were about to go. Gratefully they ate, and chirped their thanks; and then, as they flew away, the little gossips heard their friend singing his good-by:

“Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,
Starting on your autumn flight,
Pause a moment at my window,
Twitter softly your good-night;
For the summer days are over,
All your duties are well done,
And the happy homes you builded
Have grown empty, one by one.

“Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,
Are you ready for your flight?
Are all the feather cloaks completed?
Are the little caps all right?
Are the young wings strong and steady
For the journey through the sky?
Come again in early spring-time;
And till then, good-by, good-by!”

LITTLE GULLIVER

Up in the light-house tower lived Davy, with Old Dan the keeper. Most little boys would have found it very lonely; but Davy had three friends, and was as happy as the day was long. One of Davy's friends was the great lamp, which was lighted at sunset, and burnt all night, to guide the ships into the harbor. To Dan it was only a lamp; but to the boy it seemed a living thing, and he loved and tended it faithfully. Every day he helped Dan clear the big wick, polish the brass work, and wash the glass lantern which protected the flame. Every evening he went up to see it lighted, and always fell asleep, thinking, "No matter how dark or wild the night, my good Shine will save the ships that pass, and burn till morning."

Davy's second friend was Nep, the Newfoundland, who was washed ashore from a wreck, and had never left the island since. Nep was rough and big, but had such a loyal and loving heart that no one could look in his soft brown eyes and not trust him. He followed Davy's steps all day, slept at his feet all night, and more than once had saved his life when Davy fell among the rocks, or got caught by the rising tide.

But the dearest friend of all was a sea-gull. Davy found him, with a broken wing, and nursed him carefully till he was well; then let him go, though he was very fond of "Little Gulliver," as he called him in fun. But the bird never forgot the boy, and came daily to talk with him, telling all manner of wild stories about his wanderings by land and sea, and whiling away many an hour that otherwise would have been very lonely.

Old Dan was Davy's uncle, — a grim, gray man, who said little, did his work faithfully, and was both father and mother to Davy, who had no parents, and no friends beyond the island. That was his world; and he led a quiet life among his playfellows, — the winds and waves. He seldom went to the main land, three miles away; for he was happier at home. He watched the sea-anemones open below the water, looking like fairy-plants, brilliant and strange. He found curious and pretty shells, and sometimes more valuable treasures, washed up from some wreck. He saw little yellow crabs, ugly lobsters, and queer horse-shoes with their stiff tails. Sometimes a whale or a shark swam by, and often sleek black seals came up to bask on the warm rocks. He gathered lovely sea-weeds of all kinds, from tiny red cobwebs to great scalloped leaves of kelp, longer than himself. He heard the waves dash and roar unceasingly; the winds howl or sigh over the island; and the gulls scream shrilly as they dipped and dived, or sailed away to follow the ships that came and went from all parts of the world.

With Nep and Gulliver he roamed about his small kingdom, never tired of its wonders; or, if storms raged, he sat up in the tower, safe and dry, watching the tumult of sea and sky. Often in long winter nights he lay awake, listening to the wind and rain, that made the tower rock with their violence; but he never was afraid, for Nep nestled at his feet, Dan sat close by, and overhead the great lamp shone far out into the night, to cheer and guide all wanderers on the sea.

Close by the tower hung the fog-bell, which, being wound up, would ring all night, warningly. One day Dan found that something among the chains was broken; and, having vainly tried to mend it, he decided to go to the town, and get what was needed. He went once a week, usually, and left Davy behind; for in the daytime there was nothing to do, and the boy was not afraid to stay.

“A heavy fog is blowing up: we shall want the bell to-night, and I must be off at once. I shall be back before dark, of course; so take care of yourself, boy,” said Dan.

Away went the little boat; and the fog shut down over it, as if a misty wall had parted Davy from his uncle. As it was dull weather, he sat and read for an hour or two; then fell asleep, and forgot everything till Nep’s cold nose on his hand waked him up. It was nearly dark; and, hoping to find Dan had come, he ran down to the landing-place. But no boat was there, and the fog was thicker than ever.

Dan never had been gone so long before, and Davy was afraid something had happened to him. For a few minutes he was in great trouble; then he cheered up, and took courage.

“It is sunset by the clock; so I’ll light the lamp, and, if Dan is lost in the fog, it will guide him home,” said Davy.

Up he went, and soon the great star shone out above the black-topped lighthouse, glimmering through the fog, as if eager to be seen. Davy had his supper, but no Dan came. He waited hour after hour, and waited all in vain. The fog thickened, till the lamp was hardly seen; and no bell rung to warn the ships of the dangerous rocks. Poor Davy could not sleep, but all night long wandered from the tower to the door, watching, calling, and wondering; but Dan did not come.

At sunrise he put out the light, and, having trimmed it for the next night, ate a little breakfast, and roved about the island hoping to see some sign of Dan. The sun drew up the fog at last; and he could see the blue bay, the distant town, and a few fishing-boats going out to sea. But nowhere was the island-boat with gray Old Dan in it; and Davy’s heart grew heavier and heavier, as the day passed, and still no one came. In the afternoon Gulliver appeared: to him Davy told his trouble, and the three friends took counsel together.

“There is no other boat; and I couldn’t row so far, if there was: so I can’t go to find Dan,” said David sorrowfully.

“I’d gladly swim to town, if I could; but it’s impossible to do it, with wind and tide against me. I’ve howled all day, hoping some one would hear me; but no one does, and I’m discouraged,” said Nep, with an anxious expression.

“I can do something for you; and I will, with all my heart. I’ll fly to town, if I don’t see him in the bay, and try to learn what has become of Dan. Then I’ll come and tell you, and we will see what is to be done next. Cheer up, Davy dear: I’ll bring you tidings, if any can be had.” With these cheerful words, away sailed Gulliver, leaving Nep and his master to watch and wait again.

The wind blew hard, and the broken wing was not quite well yet, else Gulliver would have been able to steer clear of a boat that came swiftly by. A sudden gust drove the gull so violently against the sail that he dropped breathless into the boat; and a little girl caught him, before he could recover himself.

“Oh, what a lovely bird! See his black cap, his white breast, dove-colored wings, red legs and bill, and soft, bright eyes. I wanted a gull; and I’ll keep this one, for I don’t think he is much hurt.”

Poor Gulliver struggled, pecked and screamed; but little Dora held him fast, and shut him in a basket till they reached the shore. Then she put him in a lobster pot, — a large wooden thing, something like a cage, — and left him on the lawn, where he could catch glimpses of the sea, and watch the light-house tower, as he sat alone in this dreadful prison. If Dora had known the truth, she would have let him go, and done her best to help him; but she could not understand his speech, as Davy did, for very few people have the power of talking with birds, beasts, insects, and plants. To her, his prayers and cries were only harsh screams; and, when he sat silent, with drooping head and ruffled feathers, she thought he was sleepy: but he was mourning for Davy, and wondering what his little friend would do.

For three long days and nights he was a prisoner, and suffered much. The house was full of happy people, but no one took pity upon him. Ladies and gentlemen talked learnedly about him; boys poked and pulled him; little girls admired him, and begged his wings for their hats, if he died. Cats prowled about his cage; dogs barked at him; hens cackled over him; and a shrill canary jeered at him from the pretty pagoda in which it hung, high above danger. In the evening there was music; and the poor bird’s heart ached as the sweet sounds came to him, reminding him of the airier melodies he loved. Through the stillness of the night, he heard the waves break on the shore; the wind came singing up from the sea; the moon shone kindly on him, and he saw the water-fairies dancing on the sand. But for three days no one spoke a friendly word to him, and he pined away with a broken heart.

On the fourth night, when all was quiet, little Gulliver saw a black shadow steal across the lawn, and heard a soft voice say to him:

“Poor bird, you’ll die, if yer stays here; so I’se gwine to let yer go. Specs little missy’ll scold dreffle; but Moppet’ll take de scoldin for yer. Hi, dere! you is peart nuff now, kase you’s in a hurry to go; but jes wait till I gits de knots out of de string dat ties de door, and den away you flies.”

“But, dear, kind Moppet, won’t you be hurt for doing this? Why do you care so much for me? I can only thank you, and fly away.”

As Gulliver spoke, he looked up at the little black face bent over him, and saw tears in the child’s sad eyes; but she smiled at him, and shook her fuzzy head, as she whispered kindly:

“I don’t want no tanks, birdie: I loves to let you go, kase you’s a slave, like I was once; and it’s a dreffle hard ting, I knows. I got away, and I means you shall. I’se watched you, deary, all dese days; and I tried to come ‘fore, but dey didn’t give me no chance.”

“Do you live here? I never see you playing with the other children,” said the gull, as Moppet’s nimble fingers picked away at the knots.

“Yes: I lives here, and helps de cook. You didn’t see me, kase I never plays; de chilen don’t like me.”

“Why not?” asked Gulliver, wondering.

“I’se black,” said Moppet, with a sob.

“But that’s silly in them,” cried the bird, who had never heard of such a thing. “Color makes no difference; the peeps are gray, the seals black, and the crabs yellow; but we don’t care, and are all friends. It is very unkind to treat you so. Haven’t you any friends to love you, dear?”

“Nobody in de world keres fer me. Dey sold me way from my mammy when I was a baby, and I’se knocked roun eber since. De oder chilen has folks to lub an kere fer em, but Moppet’s got no friends;” and here the black eyes grew so dim with tears that the poor child couldn’t see that the last knot was out.

Gulliver saw it, and, pushing up the door, flew from his prison with a glad cry; and, hopping into Moppet’s hand, looked into the little dark face with such grateful confidence that it cleared at once, and the brightest smile it had worn for months broke over it as the bird nestled its soft head against her cheek, saying gently:

“I’m your friend, dear; I love you, and I never shall forget what you have done for me to-night. How can I thank you before I go?”

For a minute, Moppet could only hug the bird, and cry; for these were the first kind words she had heard for a long time, and they went straight to her lonely little heart.

“O my deary! I’se paid by dem words, and I don’t want no tanks. Jes lub me, and come sometimes to see me ef you can, it’s so hard livin’ in dis yere place. I don’t tink I’ll bar it long. I wish I was a bird to fly away, or a oyster safe in de mud, and free to do as I’s a mind.”

“I wish you could go and live with Davy on the island; he is so kind, so happy, and as free as the wind. Can’t you get away, Moppet?” whispered Gulliver, longing to help this poor, friendless little soul. He told her all his story; and they agreed that he should fly at once to the island, and see if Dan was there; if not, he was to come back, and Moppet would try to get some one to help find him. When this was done, Davy and Dan were to take Moppet, if they could, and make her happy on the island. Full of hope and joy, Gulliver said good-by, and spread his wings; but, alas for the poor bird! he was too weak to fly. For three days he had hardly eaten any thing, had found no salt water to bathe in, and had sat moping in the cage till his strength was all gone.

“What shall I do? what shall I do?” he cried, fluttering his feeble wings, and running to and fro in despair.

“Hush, birdie, I’ll take kere ob you till you’s fit to fly. I knows a nice, quiet little cove down yonder, where no one goes; and dare you kin stay till you’s better. I’ll come and feed you, and you kin paddle, and rest, and try your wings, safe and free, honey.”

As Moppet spoke, she took Gulliver in her arms, and stole away in the dim light, over the hill, down to the lonely spot where nothing went but the winds and waves, the gulls, and little Moppet, when hard words and blows made heart and body ache. Here she left the bird, and, with a loving “Good-night,” crept home to her bed in the garret, feeling as rich as a queen, and much happier; for she had done a kind thing, and made a friend.

Next day, a great storm came: the wind blew a hurricane, the rain poured, and the sea thundered on the coast. If he had been well, Gulliver wouldn’t have minded at all; but, being sick and sad, he spent an anxious day, sitting in a cranny of the rock, thinking of Davy and Moppet. It was so rough, even in the cove, that he could neither swim nor fly, so feeble was he; and could find no food but such trifles as he could pick up among the rocks. At nightfall the storm raged fiercer than ever, and he gave up seeing Moppet; for he was sure she wouldn’t come through the pelting rain just to feed him. So he put his head under his wing, and tried to sleep; but he was so wet and weak, so hungry and anxious, no sleep came.

“What has happened to Davy alone on the island all this while? He will fall ill with loneliness and trouble; the lamp won’t be lighted, the ships will be wrecked, and many people will suffer. O Dan, Dan, if we could only find you, how happy we should be!"

As Gulliver spoke, a voice cried through the darkness:

"Is you dere, honey?" and Moppet came climbing over the rocks, with a basket full of such bits as she could get. "Poor birdie, is you starvin'? Here, jes go at dis, and joy yourself. Dere's fish and tings I tink you'd like. How is you now, dear?"

"Better, Moppet; but, it's so stormy, I can't get to Davy; and I worry about him," began Gulliver, pecking away at his supper: but he stopped suddenly, for a faint sound came up from below, as if some one called, "Help, help!"

"Hi! what's dat?" said Moppet, listening.

"Davy, Davy!" called the voice.

"It's Dan. Hurrah, we've found him!" and Gulliver dived off the rock so reckless that he went splash into the water. But that didn't matter to him; and he paddled away, like a little steamer with all the engines in full blast. Down by the sea-side, between two stones, lay Dan, so bruised and hurt he couldn't move, and so faint with hunger and pain he could hardly speak. As soon as Gulliver called, Moppet scrambled down, and fed the poor man with her scraps, brought him rain-water from a crevice near by, and bound up his wounded head with her little apron. Then Dan told them how his boat had been run down by a ship in the fog; how he was hurt, and cast ashore in the lonely cove; how he had lain there half dead, for no one heard his shouts, and he couldn't move; how the storm brought him back to life, when he was almost gone, and the sound of Moppet's voice told him help was near.

How glad they all were then! Moppet danced for joy; Gulliver screamed and flapped his wings; and Dan smiled, in spite of pain, to think he should see Davy again. He couldn't understand Gulliver; but Moppet told him all the story, and, when he heard it, he was more troubled for the boy than for himself.

"What will he do? He may get killed or scared, or try to come ashore. Is the lamp alight?" he cried, trying to move, and falling back with a moan of pain.

Gulliver flew up to the highest rock, and looked out across the dark sea. Yes, there it was, — the steady star shining through the storm, and saying plainly, "All is well."

"Thank heaven! if the lamp is burning, Davy is alive. Now, how shall I get to him?" said Dan.

"Never you fret, massa: Moppet'll see to dat. You jes lay still till I comes. Dere's folks in de house as'll tend to you, ef I tells em who and where you is."

Off she ran, and soon came back with help. Dan was taken to the house, and carefully tended; Moppet wasn't scolded for being out so late; and, in the flurry, no one thought of the gull. Next morning, the cage was found blown over, and every one fancied the bird had flown away. Dora was already tired of him; so he was soon forgotten by all but Moppet.

In the morning it was clear; and Gulliver flew gladly to the tower where Davy still watched and waited, with a pale face and heavy heart, for the three days had been very hard to bear, and, but for Nep and Shine, he would have lost his courage entirely. Gulliver flew straight into his bosom, and, sitting there, told his adventures; while Davy laughed and cried, and Nep stood by, wagging his tail for joy, while his eyes were full of sympathy. The three had a very happy hour together, and then came a boat to carry Davy ashore, while another keeper took charge of the light till Dan was well.

Nobody ever knew the best part of the story but Moppet, Davy, and Gulliver. Other people didn’t dream that the boy’s pet gull had any thing to do with the finding of the man, or the good fortune that came to Moppet. While Dan lay sick, she tended him, like a loving little daughter; and, when he was well, he took her for his own. He did not mind the black skin: he only saw the loneliness of the child, the tender heart, the innocent, white soul; and he was as glad to be a friend to her as if she had been as blithe and pretty as Dora.

It was a happy day when Dan and Davy, Moppet, Gulliver, and Nep sailed away to the island; for that was still to be their home, with stout young Ben to help.

The sun was setting; and they floated through waves as rosy as the rosy sky. A fresh wind filled the sail, and ruffled Gulliver’s white breast as he sat on the mast-head crooning a cheery song to himself. Dan held the tiller, and Davy lay at his feet, with Nep bolt upright beside him; but the happiest face of all was Moppet’s. Kneeling at the bow, she leaned forward, with her lips apart, her fuzzy hair blown back, and her eyes fixed on the island which was to be her home. Like a little black figure-head of Hope, she leaned and looked, as the boat flew on, bearing her away from the old life into the new.

As the sun sunk, out shone the lamp with sudden brightness, as if the island bade them welcome. Dan furled the sail; and, drifting with the tide, they floated in, till the waves broke softly on the shore, and left them safe at home.

THE WHALE’S STORY

Freddy sat thinking on the seat under the trees. It was a wide, white seat, about four feet long, sloping from the sides to the middle, something like a swing; and was not only comfortable but curious, for it was made of a whale’s bone. Freddy often sat there, and thought about it for he was very much interested in it, and nobody could tell him any thing of it, except that it had been there a long time.

“Poor old whale, I wonder how you got here, where you came from, and if you were a good and happy creature while you lived,” said Freddy, patting the old bone with his little hand.

It gave a great creak; and a sudden gust of air stirred the trees, as if some monster groaned and sighed. Then Freddy heard a strange voice, very loud, yet cracked and queer, as if some one tried to talk with a broken jaw.

“Freddy ahoy!” called the big voice. “I’ll tell you all about it; for you are the only person who ever pitied me, or cared to know any thing about me.”

“Why, can you talk?” asked Freddy, very much astonished and a little frightened.

“Of course I can, for this is a part of my jaw-bone. I should talk better if my whole mouth was here; but I’m afraid my voice would then be so loud you wouldn’t be able to hear it. I don’t think any one but you would understand me, any way. It isn’t every one that can, you know; but you are a thoughtful little chap, with a lively fancy as well as a kind heart, so you shall hear my story.”

“Thank you, I should like it very much, if you would please to speak a little lower, and not sigh; for your voice almost stuns me, and your breath nearly blows me away,” said Freddy.

“I’ll try: but it’s hard to suit my tone to such a mite, or to help groaning when I think of my sad fate; though I deserve it, perhaps,” said the bone, more gently.

“Were you a naughty whale?” asked Freddy.

“I was proud, very proud, and foolish; and so I suffered for it. I dare say you know a good deal about us. I see you reading often, and you seem a sensible child.”

“No: I haven’t read about you yet, and I only know that you are the biggest fish there is,” replied Freddy.

The bone creaked and shook, as if it was laughing, and said in a tone that showed it hadn’t got over its pride yet:

“You’re wrong there, my dear; we are not fishes at all, though stupid mortals have called us so for a long time. We can’t live without air; we have warm, red blood; and we don’t lay eggs, — so we are *not* fishes. We certainly *are* the biggest creatures in the sea and out of it. Why, bless you! some of us are nearly a hundred feet long; our tails alone are fifteen or twenty feet wide; the biggest of us weigh five hundred thousand pounds, and have in them the fat, bone, and muscle of a thousand cattle. The lower jaw of one of my family made an arch large enough for a man on horseback to ride under easily, and my cousins of the sperm-family usually yield eighty barrels of oil.”

“Gracious me, what monsters you are!” cried Freddy, taking a long breath, while his eyes got bigger and bigger as he listened.

“Ah! you may well say so; we are a very wonderful and interesting family. All our branches are famous in one way or another. Fin-backs, sperms, and rights are the largest; then come the norwhals, the dolphins, and porpoises, — which last, I dare say, you’ve seen.”

“Yes: but tell me about the big ones, please. Which were you?” cried Freddy.

“I was a Right whale, from Greenland. The Sperms live in warm places; but to us the torrid zone is like a sea of fire, and we don’t pass it. Our cousins do; and go to the East Indies by way of the North Pole, which is more than your famous Parrys and Franklins could do.”

“I don’t know about that; but I’d like to hear what you eat, and how you live, and why you came here,” said Freddy, who thought the whale rather inclined to boast.

“Well, we haven’t got any teeth, — our branch of the family; and we live on creatures so small, that you could only see them with a microscope. Yes, you may stare; but it’s true, my dear. The roofs of our mouths are made of whalebone, in broad pieces from six to eight feet long, arranged one against the other; so they make an immense sieve. The tongue, which makes about five barrels of oil, lies below, like a cushion of white satin. When we want to feed, we rush through the water, which is full of the little things we eat, and catch them in our sieve, spurting the water through two holes in our heads. Then we collect the food with our tongue, and swallow it; for, though we are so big, our throats are small. We roam about in the ocean, leaping and floating, feeding and spouting, flying from our enemies, or fighting bravely to defend our young ones.”

“Have you got any enemies? I shouldn’t think you could have, you are so large,” said Freddy.

“But we have, and many too, — three who attack us in the water, and several more that men use against us. The killer, the sword-fish, and the thrasher trouble us at home. The killer fastens to us, and won’t be shaken off till he has worried us to death; the sword-fish stabs us with his sword; and the thrasher whips us to death with his own slender, but strong and heavy body. Then, men harpoon us, shoot or entrap us; and make us into oil and candles and seats, and stiffening for gowns and umbrellas," said the bone, in a tone of scorn.

Freddy laughed at the idea, and asked, "How about candles? I know about oil and seats and umbrellas; but I thought candles were made of wax."

"I can't say much on that point: I only know that, when a sperm whale is killed, they make oil out of the fat part as they do of ours; but the Sperms have a sort of cistern in their heads, full of stuff like cream, and rose-colored. They cut a hole in the skull, and dip it out; and sometimes get sixteen or twenty barrels. This is made into what you call spermaceti candles. *We* don't have any such nonsense about us; but the Sperms always were a light-headed set."

Here the bone laughed, in a cracked sort of roar, which sent Freddy flying off the seat on to the grass, where he stayed, laughing also, though he didn't see any joke.

"I beg your pardon, child. It isn't often that I laugh; for I've a heavy heart somewhere, and have known trouble enough to make me as sad as the sea is sometimes."

"Tell me about your troubles; I pity you very much, and like to hear you talk," said Freddy, kindly.

"Unfortunately we are very easily killed, in spite of our size; and have various afflictions besides death. We grow blind; our jaws are deformed sometimes; our tails, with which we swim, get hurt; and we have dyspepsia."

Freddy shouted at that; for he knew what dyspepsia was, because at the seaside there were many sickly people who were always groaning about that disease.

"It's no laughing matter, I assure you," said the whale's bone. "We suffer a great deal, and get thin and weak and miserable. I've sometimes thought that's the reason we are blue."

"Perhaps, as you have no teeth, you don't chew your food enough, and so have dyspepsia, like an old gentleman I know," said Freddy.

"That's not the reason; my cousins, the Sperms, have teeth, and dyspepsia also."

"Are they blue?"

"No, black and white. But I was going to tell you my troubles. My father was harpooned when I was very young, and I remember how bravely he died. The Rights usually run away when they see a whaler coming; not from cowardice, — oh, dear, no! — but discretion. The Sperms stay and fight, and are killed off very fast; for they are a very headstrong family. We fight when we can't help it; and my father died like a hero. They chased him five hours before they stuck him; he tried to get away, and dragged three or four boats and sixteen hundred fathoms of line from eight in the morning till four at night. Then they got out another line, and he towed the ship itself for more than an hour. There were fifteen harpoons in him: he chewed up a boat, pitched several men overboard, and damaged the vessel, before they killed him. Ah! he was a father to be proud of.”

Freddy sat respectfully silent for a few minutes, as the old bone seemed to feel a great deal on the subject. Presently he went on again:

“The Sperms live in herds; but the Rights go in pairs, and are very fond of one another. My wife was a charming creature, and we were very happy, till one sad day, when she was playing with our child, — a sweet little whaleling only twelve feet long, and weighing but a ton, — my son was harpooned. His mamma, instead of flying, wrapped her fins round him, and dived as far as the line allowed. Then she came up, and dashed at the boats in great rage and anguish, entirely regardless of the danger she was in. The men struck my son, in order to get her, and they soon succeeded; but even then, in spite of her suffering, she did not try to escape, but clung to little Spouter till both were killed. Alas! alas!”

Here the poor bone creaked so dismally, Freddy feared it would tumble to pieces, and bring the story to an end too soon.

“Don’t think of those sorrowful things,” he said; “tell me how you came to be here. Were you harpooned?”

“Not I; for I’ve been very careful all my life to keep out of the way of danger: I’m not like one of my relations, who attacked a ship, gave it such a dreadful blow that he made a great hole, the water rushed in, and the vessel was wrecked. But he paid dearly for that prank; for a few months afterward another ship harpooned him very easily, finding two spears still in him, and a wound in his head. I forgot to mention, that the Sperms have fine ivory teeth, and make ambergris, — a sort of stuff that smells very nice, and costs a great deal. I give you these little facts about my family, as you seem interested, and it’s always well to improve the minds of young people.”

“You are very kind; but will you be good enough to tell about yourself?” said Freddy again; for the bone seemed to avoid that part of the story, as if he didn’t want to tell it.

“Well, if I must, I must; but I’m sorry to confess what a fool I’ve been. You know what coral is, don’t you?”

“No,” said Freddy, wondering why it asked.

“Then I must tell you, I suppose. There is a bit in the house there, — that rough, white, stony stuff on the table in the parlor. It’s full of little holes, you know. Well, those holes are the front doors of hundreds of little polypes, or coral worms, who build the great branches of coral, and live there. They are of various shapes and colors, — some like stars; some fine as a thread, and blue or yellow; others like snails and tiny lobsters. Some people say the real coral-makers are shaped like little oblong bags of jelly, closed at one end, the other open, with six or eight little feelers, like a star, all around it. The other creatures are boarders or visitors: these are the real workers, and, when they sit in their cells and put out their feelers, they make all manner of lovely colors under the water, — crimson, green, orange, and violet. But if they are taken up or touched, the coral people go in doors, and the beautiful hues disappear. They say there are many coral reefs and islands built by these industrious people, in the South Seas; but I can't go there to see, and I am contented with those I find in the northern latitudes. I knew such a community of coral builders, and used to watch them long ago, when they began to work. It was a charming spot, down under the sea; for all manner of lovely plants grew there; splendid fishes sailed to and fro; wonderful shells lay about; crimson and yellow prawns, long, gliding green worms, and purple sea-urchins, were there. When I asked the polypes what they were doing, and they answered, 'Building an island,' I laughed at them; for the idea that these tiny, soft atoms could make any thing was ridiculous. 'You may roar; but you'll see that we are right, if you live long enough,' said they. 'Our family have built thousands of islands and long reefs, that the sea can't get over, strong as it is.' That amused me immensely; but I wouldn't believe it, and laughed more than ever."

"It does seem very strange," said Freddy, looking at the branch of coral which he had brought out to examine.

"Doesn't it? and isn't it hard to believe? I used to go, now and then, to see how the little fellows got on, and always found them hard at it. For a long while there was only a little plant without leaves, growing slowly taller and taller; for they always build upward toward the light. By and by, the small shrub was a tree: flying-fish roosted in its branches; sea-cows lay under its shadow; and thousands of jolly little polypes lived and worked in its white chambers. I was glad to see them getting on so well; but still I didn't believe in the island story, and used to joke them about their ambition. They were very good-natured, and only answered me, 'Wait a little longer, Friend Right.' I had my own affairs to attend to; so, for years at a time, I forgot the coral-workers, and spent most of my life up Greenland way, for warm climates don't agree with my constitution. When I came back, after a long absence, I was astonished to see the tree grown into a large umbrella-shaped thing, rising above the water. Sea-weed had washed up and clung there; sea-birds had made nests there; land-birds and the winds had carried seeds there, which had sprung up; trunks of trees had been cast there by the sea; lizards, insects, and little animals came with the trees, and were the first inhabitants; and, behold! it *was* an island."

"What did you say then?" asked Freddy.

"I was angry, and didn't want to own that I was wrong; so I insisted that it wasn't a real island, without people on it. 'Wait a little longer,' answered the polypes; and went on, building broader and broader foundations. I flounced away in a rage, and didn't go back for a great while. I hoped something would happen to the coral builders and their island; but I was so curious that I couldn't keep away, and, on going back there, I found a settlement of fishermen, and the beginning of a thriving town. Now I should have been in a towering passion at this, if in my travels I hadn't discovered a race of little creatures as much smaller than polypes as a mouse is smaller than an elephant. I heard two learned men talking about diatoms, as they sailed to Labrador; and I listened. They said these people lived in both salt and fresh water, and were found in all parts of the world. They were a glassy shell, holding a soft, golden-yellow substance, and that they were so countless that banks were made of them, and that a town here in these United States was founded on them. They were the food of many little sea-animals, who, in turn, fed us big creatures, and were very interesting and wonderful. I saved up this story; and, when the polypes asked if they hadn't done what they intended, I told them I didn't think it so very remarkable, for the tiny diatoms made cities, and were far more astonishing animals than they. I thought that would silence them; but they just turned round, and informed me that my diatoms were plants, not animals, — so my story was all humbug. Then I *was* mad; and couldn't get over the fact that these little rascals had done what we, the kings of the sea, couldn't do. I wasn't content with being the biggest creature there: I wanted to be the most skilful also. I didn't remember that every thing has its own place and use, and should be happy in doing the work for which it was made. I fretted over the matter a long while, and at last decided to make an island myself."

"How could you?" asked Freddy.

"I had my plans; and thought them very wise ones. I was so bent on outdoing the polypes that I didn't much care what happened; and so I went to work in my clumsy way. I couldn't pile up stones, or build millions of cells; so I just made an island of myself. I swam up into the harbor yonder one night; covered my back with sea-weed; and lay still on the top of the water. In the morning the gulls came to see what it was, and pecked away at the weeds, telling me very soon that they knew what I was after, and that I couldn't gull them. All the people on shore turned out to see the wonder also; for a fisherman had carried the tidings, and every one was wild to behold the new island. After staring and chattering a long while, boats came off to examine the mystery. Loads of scientific gentlemen worked away at me with microscopes, hammers, acids, and all sorts of tests, to decide what I was; and kept up such a fire of long words that I was ‘most dead. They couldn’t make up their minds; and meanwhile news of the strange thing spread, and every sort of person came to see me. The gulls kept telling them the joke; but they didn’t understand, and I got on capitally. Every night I dined and fed and frolicked till dawn; then put on my sea-weeds, and lay still to be stared at. I wanted some one to come and live on me; then I should be equal to the island of the polypes. But no one came, and I was beginning to be tired of fooling people, when I was fooled myself. An old sailor came to visit me: he had been a whaler, and he soon guessed the secret. But he said nothing till he was safely out of danger; then he got all ready, and one day, as I lay placidly in the sun, a horrible harpoon came flying through the air, and sunk deep into my back. I forgot every thing but the pain, and dived for my life. Alas! the tide was low; the harbor-bar couldn’t be passed; and I found hundreds of boats chasing me, till I was driven ashore down there on the flats. Big and strong as we are, once out of water, and we are perfectly helpless. I was soon despatched; and my bones left to whiten on the sand. This was long ago; and, one by one, all my relics have been carried off or washed away. My jaw-bone has been used as a seat here, till it’s worn out; but I couldn’t crumble away till I’d told some one my story. Remember, child, pride goeth before a fall.”

Then, with a great creak, the bone tumbled to pieces; and found a peaceful grave in the long green grass.

GOLDFIN AND SILVERTAIL

Little Bessie lay in a rocky nook,
Alone, beside the sea,
Where the sound of ever-rolling waves
To her ear came pleasantly.
Her face was dark with a gloomy frown,
  Tears on her hot cheek lay;
  For a willful, unkind little girl
  She had been that livelong day;
  And had stolen here, to the quiet shore,
  To sigh and sob alone,
  And to wonder how and why and where
  Her happiness all had flown.
  As thus she lay, with half-closed eyes,
  Low voices reached her ear,
  And laughter gay that seemed to flow
  Like ripples sweet and clear.
  She looked above, she looked below
  And saw with wondering glee
  Two little mermaids on the rocks,
  Both singing merrily.
  One combed her long and shining hair,
  All wreathed with sea-weed bright;
  The other caught the falling spray
  That leaped into the light.
  Friendly and fair both faces seemed,
  With smiling lips and eyes,
  And little arms and bosoms white
  As sea-foam when it flies.
  But Bessie wondered more and more,
  And Bessie's cheek grew pale;
  For both the mermaids bore below
  A graceful little tail, —
  One, bright with silver scales, that shone
  In every fin and fold;
  The other, brighter, stranger still,

All glittering with gold.
“Come hither, little mermaids, pray,”
Cried Bessie, from her nook,
“I will not touch or trouble you, —
I only want to look.”
The startled mermaids glanced at her,
And whispered long and low;
At last, one to the other said,
“Dear Goldfin, let us go.”
Then, gliding from their rocky seat,
And floating through the sea,
They reached the nook where Bessie lay,
And looked up smilingly:
“Now, ask of us whate’er you will,
We’ll surely grant it thee,”
Bright Goldfin said unto the child,
Who watched them silently.
And Bessie answered with delight,
“You seem so blithe and gay,
And I’m so sad and lonely here,
Make me a mermaid, pray.”
“Ah! Choose again: that is not wise,”
Cried Goldfin, earnestly;
“I have no spell to change your heart,
And sadder it may be.
Our home is strange and wild to you;
Think what you leave behind, —
Sunshine and home, and, best of all,
A mother, dear and kind.”
But Bessie only frowned and cried,
“You gave the choice to me.
I’m tired of sun and home and all,
So a mermaid I will be.”
Then bitter, salt sea-drops they gave,
From out a hollow shell;
And garlands fair upon her head,
They laid, with song and spell.
A cloud arose, like sudden mist;
And, when it passed, the child

Found herself, by drop and garland
Changed to a mermaid wild.
With timid haste she glided down
Into the cold, cold, sea;
And bid her playmates show here where
Her future home would be.
Down deep into the ocean went
The mermaids, one and all,
O’er many a wondrous hill and dale,
Through may a coral hall.
The child’s heart in the mermaid’s form
Beat fast with sudden fear;
For all was gloomy, strange, and dim
Beneath the waters clear.
She missed the blessed air of heaven;
She missed the cheerful light,
She feared the monsters weird, who looked
From caverns dark as night;
Her food was now sea-apples cold,
And bitter spray she drank;
Her bed was made on barren rocks,
Of sea-mist, rough and dank;
Strange creatures floated far and near,
Or crawled upon the sand;
And soon she longed with all her heart
For the green, summery land.
Here Bessie lived; but daily grew
More restless than before,
And sighed to be a child again, —
Safe on the pleasant shore.
She often rose up to the light,
A human voice to hear;
And look upon her happy home, —
That now seemed very dear.
And children, wandering on the sands,
Saw, rising from the sea,
A little hand that beckoned them,
As if imploringly.
They often saw a wistful face

Look through the spray and foam;
And heard a sobbing voice that cried,
“O mother! take me home.”
So, drearily, poor Bessie lived,
Till to a merman old,
She one day went, when most forlorn,
And all her sorrow told.
“If you would find your happiness,’
The merman answering said,
“Forget yourself, and patiently
Cheer others’ grief instead.
Watch well the lives of your two friends,
The simple difference see;
And you will need no other help, —
No other spell from me.”
Then Bessie watched with heedful eyes,
Wondering more and more,
That she had never cared to mark
That difference before;
For Silvertail, though fair to see,
Was willful, rude, and wild.
“Ah! yes,” sighed Bessie, while she looked,
“As I was, when a child.”
She led an idle, selfish life,
Darkened by discontent;
And left a shadow or a tear
Behind, where’er she went.
But Goldfin, with her loving heart,
So cheerful and serene,
Left smiles, kind words, and happy thoughts
Where she had been.
No little fish but came to her
To heal its wounded fin;
No monster grim but opened wide
His cave to let her in.
The rough waves grew more mild to her,
Through cruel to great ships;
The sea-gulls stooped in their wild flights,
To kiss her smiling lips.

She helped the coral builders small
To shape their little cells,
And in the diver’s dangerous path
Laid heaps of pearly shells;
She guided well the fisher boats
Through many a stormy gale,
And lured away the angry winds
From many a tattered sail;
She scattered pebbles on the beach,
And sea-weed on the sands,
To gladden children’s longing eyes,
And fill their little hands.
These things she did with patient care,
Forgetful of herself,
Till in the sea she was more loved
Than mermaid, sprite, or elf;
While all the joy to others given
Came back unconsciously,
To cheer and brighten her own life,
Wherever she might be.
“Ah! now I know why I am sad,”
Cried Bessie at the sight,
“When I am good, as Goldfin is,
My heart will be as light.”
And henceforth Bessie daily grew
More cheerful and content:
In generous acts and friendly words
Her happy days were spent.
No longer lonely seemed the sea,
So full of friends it grew;
Nor longer gloomy, for the sun
Shone through the waters blue.
No more she wept beside the shore,
But floated daily there;
And hung gay garlands on the rocks,
That once were brown and bare,
Softly singing, as she looked
With dim eyes through the foam:
“When I have learned my lesson well,

I may be taken home.
Till I can rule my heart aright,
And conquer my own will,
I’ll wait and work and hope and try.
Dear mother, love me still.”
As thus the little mermaid cried,
There came a sudden gleam;
A cold drop fell upon her cheek,
And chased away the dream.
With wondering eyes did Bessie gaze
About on every side, —
The rocks whereon the mermaids sat
Were covered by the tide;
The great waves, with a solemn sound,
Came rolling slowly on;
The fresh winds played among her hair;
And all the dream was gone.
But Bessie long remembered it:
The lesson did not fail;
And all her life she followed well
Goldfin, not Silvertail.

A STRANGE ISLAND

One day I lay rocking in my boat, reading a very famous book, which all children know and love, and the name of which I'll tell you by and by. So busily was I reading, that I never minded the tide; and presently discovered that I was floating out to sea, with neither sail nor oar. At first I was very much frightened; for there was no one in sight on land or sea, and I didn't know where I might drift to. But the water was calm, the sky clear, and the wind blew balmily; so I waited for what should happen.

Presently I saw a speck on the sea, and eagerly watched it; for it drew rapidly near, and seemed to be going my way. When it came closer, I was much amazed; for, of all the queer boats I ever saw, this was the queerest. It was a great wooden bowl, very cracked and old; and in it sat three gray-headed little gentlemen with spectacles, all reading busily, and letting the boat go where it pleased. Now, right in their way was a rock; and I called out, "Sir, sir, take care."

But my call came too late: crash went the bowl, out came the bottom, and down plumped all the little gentlemen into the sea. I tried not to laugh, as the books, wigs, and spectacles flew about; and, urging my boat nearer, I managed to fish them up, dripping and sneezing, and looking like drowned kittens. When the flurry was over, and they had got their breath, I asked who they were, and where they were going.

"We are from Gotham, ma'am," said the fattest one wiping a very wet face on a very wet handkerchief. "We were going to that island yonder. We have often tried, but never got there: it's always so, and I begin to think the thing can't be done."

I looked where he pointed; and, sure enough, there was an island where I had never seen one before. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. Yes: there it was — a little island, with trees and people on it, for I saw smoke coming out of the chimney of a queerly-shaped house on the shore.

"What is the name of it?" I asked.

The little old gentleman put his finger on his lips, and said, with a mysterious nod:

"I couldn't tell you, ma'am. It's a secret; but, if you manage to land there, you will soon know."

The other old men nodded at the same time; and then all went to reading again, with the water still dropping off the ends of their noses. This made me very curious; and, as the tide drifted us nearer and nearer, I looked well about me, and saw several things that filled me with a strong desire to land on the island. The odd house, I found, was built like a high-heeled shoe; and at every window I saw children's heads. Some were eating broth; some were crying; and some had nightcaps on. I caught sight of a distracted old lady flying about, with a ladle in one hand, and a rod in the other; but the house was so full of children (even up to the sky-light, — out of which they popped their heads, and nodded at me) that I couldn't see much of the mamma of this large family: one seldom can, you know.

I had hardly got over my surprise at this queer sight, when I saw a cow fly up through the air, over the new moon that hung there, and come down and disappear in the woods. I really didn't know what to make of this, but had no time to ask the old men what it meant; for a cat, playing a fiddle, was seen on the shore. A little dog stood by, listening and laughing; while a dish and a spoon ran away over the beach with all their might. If the boat had not floated up to the land, I think I should have swam there — I was so anxious to see what was going on; for there was a great racket on the island, and such a remarkable collection of creatures, it was impossible to help staring.

As soon as we landed, three other gentlemen came to welcome the ones I had saved, and seemed very glad to see them. They appeared to have just landed from a tub in which was a drum, rub-a-dub-dubbing all by itself. One of the new men had a white frock on, and carried a large knife; the second had dough on his hands, flour on his coat, and a hot-looking face; the third was very greasy, had a bundle of candles under his arm, and a ball of wicking half out of his pocket. The six shook hands, and walked away together, talking about a fair; and left me to take care of myself.

I walked on through a pleasant meadow, where a pretty little girl was looking sadly up at a row of sheep's tails hung on a tree. I also saw a little boy in blue, asleep by a hay-cock; and another boy taking aim at a cock-sparrow, who clapped his wings and flew away. Presently I saw two more little girls: one sat by a fire warming her toes; and, when I asked what her name was, she said pleasantly:

"Pony Flinders, ma'am."

The other one sat on a tuft of grass, eating some thing that looked very nice; but, all of a sudden, she dropped her bowl, and ran away, looking very much frightened.

"What's the matter with her?" I asked of a gay young frog who came tripping along with his hat under his arm.

“Miss Muffit is a fashionable lady, and afraid of spiders, madam; also of frogs.” And he puffed himself angrily up, till his eyes quite goggled in his head.

“And, pray, who are you, sir?” I asked, staring at his white vest, green coat, and fine cravat.

“Excuse me, if I don’t give my name, ma’am. My false friend, the rat, got me into a sad scrape once; and Rowley insists upon it that a duck destroyed me, which is all gammon, ma’am, — all gammon.”

With that, the frog skipped away; and I turned into a narrow lane, which seemed to lead toward some music. I had not gone far, when I heard the rumbling of a wheelbarrow, and saw a little man wheeling a little woman along. The little man looked very hot and tired; but the little woman looked very nice, in a smart bonnet and shawl, and kept looking at a new gold ring on her finger, as she rode along under her little umbrella. I was wondering who they were, when down went the wheelbarrow; and the little lady screamed so dismally that I ran away, lest I should get into trouble, being a stranger.

Turning a corner, I came upon a very charming scene, and slipped into a quiet nook to see what was going on. It was evidently a wedding; and I was just in time to see it, for the procession was passing at that moment. First came a splendid cock-a-doodle, all in black and gold, like a herald, blowing his trumpet, and marching with a very dignified step. Then came a rook, in black, like a minister, with spectacles and white cravat. A lark and bullfinch followed — friends, I suppose; and then the bride and bridegroom. Miss Wren was evidently a Quakeress; for she wore a sober dress, and a little white veil, through which her bright eyes shone. The bridegroom was a military man, in his scarlet uniform — a plump, bold-looking bird, very happy and proud just then. A goldfinch gave away the bride, and a linnet was bridemaid. The ceremony was very fine; and, as soon as it was over, the blackbird, thrush and nightingale burst out in a lovely song.

A splendid dinner followed, at which was nearly every bird that flies; so you may imagine the music there was. They had currant-pie in abundance; and cherry-wine, which excited a cuckoo so much, that he became quite rude, and so far forgot himself as to pull the bride about. This made the groom so angry that he begged his friend, the sparrow, to bring his bow and arrow, and punish the ruffian. But, alas! Sparrow had also taken a drop too much: he aimed wrong, and, with a dreadful cry, Mr. Robin sank dying into the arms of his wife, little Jane.

It was too much for me; and, taking advantage of the confusion that followed, I left the tragical scene as fast as possible.

A little farther on, I was shocked to see a goose dragging an old man down some steps that led to a little house.

"Dear me! What's the matter here?" I cried.

"He won't say his prayers," screamed the goose.

"But perhaps he was never taught," said I.

"It's never too late to learn: he's had his chance; he won't be pious and good, so away with him. Don't interfere, whatever you do: hold your tongue, and go about your business," scolded the goose who certainly had a dreadful temper.

I dared say no more; and, when the poor old man had been driven away by this foul proceeding, I went up the steps and peeped in; for I heard some one crying, and thought the cross bird, perhaps, had hurt someone else. A little old woman stood there, wringing her hands in great distress; while a small dog was barking at her with all his might.

"Bless me! The fashions have got even here," thought I; for the old woman was dressed in the latest style — or, rather, she had overdone it sadly; for her gown was nearly up to her knees, and she was nearly as ridiculous an object as some of the young ladies I had seen at home. She had a respectable bonnet on, however, instead of a straw saucer; and her hair was neatly put under a cap — not made into a knob on the top of her head.

"My dear soul, what's the trouble?" said I, quite touched by her tears.

"Lud a mercy, ma'am! I've been to market with my butter and eggs — for the price of both is so high, one can soon get rich now-a-days — and, being tired, I stopped to rest a bit, but fell asleep by the road. Somebody — I think it's a rogue of a peddler who sold me wooden nutmegs, and a clock that wouldn't go, and some pans that came to bits the first time I used them — somebody cut my new gown and petticoat off all round, in the shameful way you see. I thought I never should get home; for I was such a fright, I actually didn't know myself. But, thinks I, my doggy will know me; and then I shall be sure I'm I, and not some boldfaced creature in short skirts. But, oh, ma'am! Doggy don't know me; and I ain't myself, and I don't know what to do."

"He's a foolish little beast; so don't mind him, but have a cup of tea, and go to bed. You can make your gown decent tomorrow; and, if I see the tricksy peddler, I'll give him a scolding."

This seemed to comfort the old woman; though doggy still barked.

"My next neighbor has a dog who never behaves in this way," she said, as she put her teapot on the coals. "He's a remarkable beast; and you'd better stop to see him as you pass, ma'am. He's always up to some funny prank or other."

I said I would; and, as I went by the next house, I took a look in at the window. The closet was empty, I observed; but the dog sat smoking a pipe, looking as grave as a judge.

"Where is your mistress?" asked I.

"Gone for some tripe," answered the dog, politely taking the pipe out of his mouth, and adding, "I hope the smoke doesn't annoy you."

"I don't approve of smoking," said I.

"Sorry to hear it," said the dog, coolly.

I was going to lecture him on this bad habit; but I saw his mistress coming with a dish in her hand, and, fearing she might think me rude to peep in at her windows, I walked on, wondering what we were coming to when even four-legged puppies smoked.

At the door of the next little house, I saw a market-wagon loaded with vegetables, and a smart young pig just driving it away. I had heard of this interesting family, and took a look as I passed by. A second tidy pig sat blowing the fire; and a third was eating roast-beef, as if he had just come in from his work. The fourth, I was grieved to see, looked very sulky; for it was evident he had been naughty, and so lost his dinner. The little pig was at the door, crying to get in; and it was sweet to see how kindly the others let him in, wiped his tears, tied on his bib, and brought him his bread and milk. I was very glad to see these young orphans doing so well, and I knew my friends at home would enjoy hearing from them.

A loud scream made me jump; and the sudden splash of water made me run along, without stopping to pick up a boy and girl who came tumbling down the hill with an empty pail, bumping their heads as they rolled.

Smelling something nice, and feeling hungry, I stepped into a large room near by — a sort of eating-house, I fancy; for various parties seemed to be enjoying themselves in their different ways. A small boy sat near the door, eating a large pie; and he gave me a fine plum which he had just pulled out. At one table was a fat gentleman cutting another pie, which had a dark crust, through which appeared the heads of a flock of birds, all singing gayly.

"There's no end to the improvements in cooking, and no accounting for tastes," I added, looking at a handsomely dressed lady, who sat near, eating bread and honey.

As I passed this party, I saw behind the lady's chair a maid, with a clothespin in her hand, and no nose. She sobbingly told me a bird had nipped it off; and I gave her a bit of court-plaster, which I fortunately had in my pocket.

Another couple were dividing their meat in a queer way; for one took all the fat, and the other all the lean. The next people were odder still; for the man looked rather guilty, and seemed to be hiding a three-peck measure under his chair, while he waited for his wife to bring on some cold barley-pudding, which, to my surprise, she was frying herself. I also saw a queer moonstruck-looking man inquiring the way to Norridge; and another man making wry faces over some plum-pudding, with which he had burnt his mouth, because his friend came down too soon.

I ordered pease-porridge hot, and they brought it cold; but I didn't wait for any thing else, being in a hurry to see all there was to be seen on this strange island. Feeling refreshed, I strolled on, passing a jolly old gentleman smoking and drinking while three fiddlers played before him. As I turned into a road that led toward a hill, a little boy, riding a dapple-gray pony, and an old lady on a white horse, with bells ringing somewhere, trotted by me, followed by a little girl, who wished to know where she could buy a penny bun. I told her the best were at Newmarch's, in Bedford Street, and she ran on, much pleased; but I'm afraid she never found that best of bake-shops. I was going quietly along, when the sound of another horse coming made me look round; and there I saw a dreadful sight — a wild horse, tearing over the ground, with fiery eyes and streaming tail. On his back sat a crazy man, beating him with a broom; a crazy woman was behind him, with her bonnet on wrong side before, holding one crazy child in her lap, while another stood on the horse; a third was hanging on by one foot, and all were howling at the top of their voices as they rushed by. I scrambled over the wall to get out of the way, and there I saw more curious sights. Two blind men were sitting on the grass, trying to see two lame men who were hobbling along as hard as they could; and, near by, a bull was fighting a bee in the most violent manner. This rather alarmed me; and I scrambled back into the road again, just as a very fine lady jumped over a barberry-bush near by, and a gentleman went flying after, with a ring in one hand and a stick in the other.

"What very odd people they have here!" I thought.

Close by was a tidy little house under the hill, and in it a tidy little woman who sold things to eat. Being rather hungry, in spite of my porridge, I bought a baked apple and a cranberry-pie; for she said they were good, and I found she told the truth. As I sat eating my pie, some dogs began to bark; and by came a troop of beggars, some in rags, and some in old velvet gowns. A drunken grenadier was with them, who wanted a pot of beer; but as he had no money, the old woman sent him about his business.

On my way up the hill, I saw a little boy crying over a dead pig, and his sister, who seemed to be dead also. I asked his name, and he sobbed out, "Johnny Pringle, ma'am," and went on crying so hard I could do nothing to comfort him. While I stood talking to him, a sudden gust of wind blew up the road, and down came the bough of a tree; and, to my surprise, a cradle with a baby in it also. The baby screamed dreadfully, and I didn't know how to quiet it; so I ran back to the old woman, and left it with her, asking if that was the way babies were taken care of there.

"Bless you, my dear! It's ma is making patty-cakes; and put it up there to be out of the way of Tom Tinker's dog. I'll soon hush it up," said the old woman; and, trotting it on her knee, she began to sing:

Hey! My kitten, my kitten,
Hey! My kitten, any deary.

Feeling that the child was in good hands, I hurried away, for I saw something was going on upon the hill-top. When I got to the hill-top, I was shocked to find some people tossing an old woman in a blanket. I begged them to stop; but one of the men, who, I found, was a Welchman, by the name of Taffy, told me the old lady liked it.

"But why does she like it?" I asked in great surprise.

"Tom, the piper's son, will tell you: it's my turn to toss now," said the man.

"Why, you see, ma'am," said Tom, "she is one of those dreadfully nice old women, who are always fussing and scrubbing, and worrying people to death, with everlastingly cleaning house. Now and then we get so tired out with her that we propose to her to clean the sky itself. She likes that; and, as this is the only way we can get her up, we toss till she sticks somewhere, and then leave her to sweep cobwebs till she is ready to come back and behave herself."

"Well, that is the oddest thing I ever heard. I know just such an old lady, and when I go home I'll try your plan. It seems to me that you have a great many queer old ladies on this island," I said to another man, whom they called Peter, and who stood eating pumpkin all the time.

"Well, we do have rather a nice collection; but you haven't seen the best of all. We expect her every minute; and Margery Daw is to let us know the minute she lights on the island," replied Peter, with his mouth full.

"Lights?" said I, "you speak as if she flew."

"She rides on a bird. Hurrah! The old sweeper has lit. Now the cobwebs will fly. Don't hurry back," shouted the man; and a faint, far-off voice answered, "I shall be back again by and by."

The people folded up the blanket, looking much relieved; and I was examining a very odd house which was built by an ancient king called Boggen, when Margery Daw, a dirty little girl, came up the hill, screaming, at the top of her voice:

"She's come! She's come!"

Every one looked up; and I saw a large white bird slowly flying over the island. On its back sat the nicest old woman that ever was seen: all the others were nothing compared to her. She had a pointed hat on over her cap, a red cloak, high-heeled shoes, and a crutch in her hand. She smiled and nodded as the bird approached; and every one ran and nodded, and screamed, "Welcome! Welcome, mother!"

As soon as she touched the ground, she was so surrounded that I could only see the top of her hat; for hundreds and hundreds of little children suddenly appeared, like a great flock of birds, — rosy, happy, pretty children; but all looked unreal, and among them I saw some who looked like little people I had known long ago.

"Who are they?" I asked of a bonny lass, who was sitting on a cushion, eating strawberries and cream.

"They are the phantoms of all the little people who ever read and loved our mother's songs," said the maid.

"What did she write?" I asked, feeling very queer, and as if I was going to remember something.

"Songs that are immortal; and you have them in your hand," replied the bonny maid, smiling at my stupidity.

I looked; and there, on the cover of the book I had been reading so busily when the tide carried me away, I saw the words "Mother Goose's Melodies." I was so delighted that I had seen her I gave a shout, and tried to get near enough to hug and kiss the dear old soul, as the swarm of children were doing; but my cry woke me, and I was so sorry to find it all a dream!

PEEP! PEEP! PEEP!

Oh! merry is the life
Of a beach-bird free,
Dwelling by the side
Of the sounding sea, —
Where the little children
Chase us as we go;
Where the pretty shells
Murmur sweet and low;
Where the old folk sit,
Basking in ths sun;
Where the fisher-folk
Rest when work is done.

Peep! Peep! Peep! “ we say,
  Tripping to and fro
  On the pebbly shore,
  Where the ripples flow.
  Oh 3 merry is the life
  Of a beach-bird free,
  Building our nest*
  the sounding sea,
  Seeking daily food,
  And feeding with care
  The dear little ones
  Safely hidden there,
  Teaching them to fly
  Boldly o’er the sea, —
  On the weak wings they
  Flutter timidly.

  “Peep! Peep! Peep!” we say,
  Brooding there on high, —
  Sea-weed beneath us.
  Above us the sky.

Oh! happy is the life
Of a bcach-bird free,
Playing our blithe games
By the sounding sea.
High o’er the billows.
In gay flocks we sail,
Kissed by the cool spray,
Ruffled by the gale,
Watching the great ships
As onward they glide,
Like white-winged birda,
O’er the restless tide.
“Peep! Peep! Peep!” we say,
Dancing in the sun,
Where no harm can reach
From storm, dog, or gun.

Oh! merry is the life
Of a bcach-bird free;
Few griefs molest us
By the sounding sea.
If rude winds destroy
Our nests built with care,
Patiently we work
The loss to repair;
If chilled by the gust,
Or wet by the rain,
“We do not fret, but
Wait for sun again.
“Peep! Peep! Peep 1” we
Where’er we may be;
Which means, little child,
“Hurrah for the sea!”

FANCY’S FRIEND

It was a wagon, shaped like a great square basket, on low wheels, and drawn by a stout donkey. There was one seat, on which Miss Fairbairn the governess sat; and all round her, leaning over the edge of the basket, were children, with little wooden shovels and baskets in their hands, going down to play on the beach. Away they went, over the common, through the stony lane, out upon the wide, smooth sands. All the children but one immediately fell to digging holes, and making ponds, castles, or forts. They did this every day, and were never tired of it; but little Fancy made new games for herself, and seldom dug in the sand. She had a garden of sea-weed, which the waves watered every day: she had a palace of pretty shells, where she kept all sorts of little water-creatures as fairy tenants; she had friends and playmates among the gulls and peeps, and learned curious things by watching crabs, horse-shoes, and jelly-fishes; and every day she looked for a mermaid.

It was of no use to tell her that there were no mermaids: Fancy firmly believed in them, and was sure she would see one some day. The other children called the seals mermaids; and were contented with the queer, shiny creatures who played in the water, lay on the rocks, and peeped at them with soft, bright eyes as they sailed by. Fancy was not satisfied with seals, — they were not pretty and graceful enough for her, — and she waited and watched for a real mermaid. On this day she took a breezy run with the beach-birds along the shore; she planted a pretty red weed in her garden; and let out the water-beetles and snails who had passed the night in her palace. Then she went to a rock that stood near the quiet nook where she played alone, and sat there looking for a mermaid as the tide came in; for it brought her many curious things, and it might perhaps bring a mermaid.

As she looked across the waves that came tumbling one over the other, she saw something that was neither boat nor buoy nor seal. It was a queer-looking thing, with a wild head, a long waving tail, and something like arms that seemed to paddle it along. The waves tumbled it about, so Fancy could not see very well: but, the longer she looked, the surer she was that this curious thing was a mermaid; and she waited eagerly for it to reach the shore. Nearer and nearer it came, till a great wave threw it upon the sand; and Fancy saw that it was only a long piece of kelp, torn up by the roots. She was very much disappointed; but, all of a sudden, her face cleared up, she clapped her hands, and began to dance round the kelp, saying:

"I'll make a mermaid myself, since none will come to me."

Away she ran, higher up the beach, and, after thinking a minute, began her work. Choosing a smooth, hard place, she drew with a stick the outline of her mermaid; then she made the hair of the brown marsh-grass growing near by, arranging it in long locks on either side the face, which was made of her prettiest pink and white shells, — for she pulled down her palace to get them. The eyes were two gray pebbles; the neck and arms of larger, white shells; and the dress of sea-weed, — red, green, purple, and yellow; very splendid, for Fancy emptied her garden to dress her mermaid.

"People say that mermaids always have tails; and I might make one out of this great leaf of kelp. But it isn't pretty, and I don't like it; for I want mine to be beautiful: so I won't have any tail," said Fancy, and put two slender white shells for feet, at the lower edge of the fringed skirt. She laid a wreath of little star-fish across the brown hair, a belt of small orange-crabs round the waist, buttoned the dress with violet snail-shells, and hung a tiny white pebble, like a pearl, in either ear.

"Now she must have a glass and a comb in her hand, as the song says, and then she will be done," said Fancy, looking about her, well pleased.

Presently she found the skeleton of a little fish, and his backbone made an excellent comb; while a transparent jelly-fish served for a glass, with a frame of cockle-shells round it. Placing these in the hands of her mermaid, and some red coral bracelets on her wrists, Fancy pronounced her done; and danced about her, singing:

"My pretty little mermaid,
Oh! come, and play with me:
I'll love you, I'll welcome you;
And happy we shall be."

Now, while she had been working, the tide had crept higher and higher; and, as she sung, one wave ran up and wet her feet.

"Oh, what a pity I didn't put her farther up!" cried Fancy; "the tide will wash her all away; and I meant to keep her fresh, and show her to Aunt Fiction. My poor mermaid! — I shall lose her; but perhaps she will be happier in the sea: so I will let her go."

Mounting her rock, Fancy waited to see her work destroyed. But the sea seemed to pity her; and wave after wave came up, without doing any harm. At last one broke quite over the mermaid, and Fancy thought that would be the end of her. But, no: instead of scattering shells, stones, and weeds, the waves lifted the whole figure, without displacing any thing, and gently bore it back into the sea.

"Good by! good by!" cried Fancy, as the little figure floated away; then, as it disappeared, she put her hands before her face, — for she loved her mermaid, and had given all her treasures to adorn her; and now to lose her so soon seemed hard, — and Fancy's eyes were full of tears. Another great wave came rolling in; but she did not look up to see it break, and, a minute after, she heard steps tripping toward her over the sand. Still she did not stir; for, just then, none of her playmates could take the place of her new friend, and she didn't want to see them.

"Fancy! Fancy!" called a breezy voice, sweeter than any she had ever heard. But she did not raise her head, nor care to know who called. The steps came quite close; and the touch of a cold, wet hand fell on her own. Then she looked up, and saw a strange little girl standing by her, who smiled, showing teeth like little pearls, and said, in the breezy voice:

"You wanted me to play with you, so I came."

"Who are you?" asked Fancy, wondering where she had seen the child before.

"I'm your mermaid," said the child.

"But the water carried her away," cried Fancy.

"The waves only carried me out for the sea to give me life, and then brought me back to you," answered the new comer.

"But are you really a mermaid?" asked Fancy, beginning to smile and believe.

"I am really the one you made: look, and see if I'm not;" and the little creature turned slowly round, that Fancy might be sure it was her own work.

She certainly was very like the figure that once lay on the sand, — only she was not now made of stones and shells. There was the long brown hair blowing about her face, with a wreath of starry shells in it. Her eyes were gray, her cheeks and lips rosy, her neck and arms white; and from under her striped dress peeped little bare feet. She had pearls in her ears, coral bracelets, a golden belt, and a glass and comb in her hands.

"Yes," said Fancy, drawing near, "you *are* my little mermaid; but how does it happen that you come to me at last?"

"Dear friend," answered the water-child, "you believed in me, watched and waited long for me, shaped the image of the thing you wanted out of your dearest treasures, and promised to love and welcome me. I could not help coming; and the sea, that is as fond of you as you are of it, helped me to grant your wish."

"Oh, I'm glad, I'm glad! Dear little mermaid, what is your name?" cried Fancy, kissing the cool cheek of her new friend, and putting her arms about her neck.

“Call me by my German cousin’s pretty name, — Lorelei,” answered the mermaid, kissing back as warmly as she could.

“Will you come home and live with me, dear Lorelei?” asked Fancy, still holding her fast.

“If you will promise to tell no one who and what I am, I will stay with you as long as you love and believe in me. As soon as you betray me, or lose your faith and fondness, I shall vanish, never to come back again,” answered Lorelei.

“I promise: but won’t people wonder who you are? and, if they ask me, what shall I say?” said Fancy.

“Tell them you found me on the shore; and leave the rest to me. But you must not expect other people to like and believe in me as you do. They will say hard things of me; will blame you for loving me; and try to part us. Can you bear this, and keep your promise faithfully?”

“I think I can. But why won’t they like you?” said Fancy, looking troubled.

“Because they are not like you, dear,” answered the mermaid, with salt tears in her soft eyes. “They have not your power of seeing beauty in all things, of enjoying invisible delights, and living in a world of your own. Your Aunt Fiction will like me; but your Uncle Fact won’t. He will want to know all about me; will think I’m a little vagabond; and want me to be sent away somewhere, to be made like other children. I shall keep out of his way as much as I can; for I’m afraid of him.”

“I’ll take care of you, Lorelei dear; and no one shall trouble you. I hear Miss Fairbairn calling; so I must go. Give me your hand, and don’t be afraid.”

Hand in hand the two went toward the other children, who stopped digging, and stared at the new child. Miss Fairbairn, who was very wise and good, but rather prim, stared too, and said, with surprise:

“Why, my dear, where did you find that queer child?”

“Down on the beach. Isn’t she pretty?” answered Fancy, feeling very proud of her new friend.

“She hasn’t got any shoes on; so she’s a beggar, and we mustn’t play with her,” said one boy, who had been taught that to be poor was a very dreadful thing.

“What pretty earrings and bracelets she’s got!” said a little girl, who thought a great deal of her dress.

“She doesn’t look as if she knew much,” said another child, who was kept studying so hard that she never had time to dig and run, and make dirt-pies, till she fell ill, and had to be sent to the sea-side.

“What’s your name? and who are your parents?” asked Miss Fairbairn.

"I've got no parents; and my name is Lorelei," answered the mermaiden.

"You mean Luly; mind your pronunciation, child," said Miss Fairbairn, who corrected every one she met in something or other. "Where do you live?"

"I haven't got any home now," said Lorelei, smiling at the lady's tone.

"Yes, you have: my home is yours; and you are going to stay with me always," cried Fancy, heartily. "She is my little sister, Miss Fairbairn: I found her; and I'm going to keep her, and make her happy."

"Your uncle won't like it, my dear." And Miss Fairbairn shook her head gravely.

"Aunt will; and Uncle won't mind, if I learn my lessons well, and remember the multiplication table all right. He was going to give me some money, so I might learn to keep accounts; but I'll tell him to keep the money, and let me have Lorelei instead."

"Oh, how silly!" cried the boy who didn't like bare feet.

"No, she isn't; for, if she's kind to the girl, maybe she'll get some of her pretty things," said the vain little girl.

"Keeping accounts is a very useful and important thing. I keep mine; and mamma says I have great arth-met-i-cal talent," added the pale child, who studied too much.

"Come, children; it's time for dinner. Fancy, you can take the girl to the house; and your uncle will do what he thinks best about letting you keep her," said Miss Fairbairn, piling them into the basket-wagon.

Fancy kept Lorelei close beside her; and as soon as they reached the great hotel, where they all were staying with mothers and fathers, uncles or aunts, she took her to kind Aunt Fiction, who was interested at once in the friendless child so mysteriously found. She was satisfied with the little she could discover, and promised to keep her, — for a time, at least.

"We can imagine all kinds of romantic things about her; and, by and by, some interesting story may be found out concerning her. I can make her useful in many ways; and she shall stay."

As Aunt Fiction laid her hand on the mermaid's head, as if claiming her for her own, Uncle Fact came stalking in, with his note-book in his hand, and his spectacles on his nose. Now, though they were married, these two persons were very unlike. Aunt Fiction was a graceful, picturesque woman; who told stories charmingly, wrote poetry and novels, was very much beloved by young folks, and was the friend of some of the most famous people in the world. Uncle Fact was a grim, grave, decided man; whom it was impossible to bend or change. He was very useful to every one; knew an immense deal; and was always taking notes of things he saw and heard, to be put in a great encyclopaedia he was making. He didn't like romance, loved the truth, and wanted to get to the bottom of every thing. He was always trying to make little Fancy more sober, well-behaved, and learned; for she was a freakish, dreamy, yet very lovable and charming child. Aunt Fiction petted her to her heart's content, and might have done her harm, if Uncle Fact had not had a hand in her education; for the lessons of both were necessary to her, as to all of us.

"Well, well, well! who is this?" he said briskly, as he turned his keen eyes and powerful glasses on the new comer.

Aunt Fiction told him all the children had said; but he answered impatiently:

"Tut, tut! my dear: I want the facts of the case. You are apt to exaggerate; and Fancy is not to be relied on. If the child isn't a fool, she must know more about herself than she pretends. Now, answer truly, Luly, where did you come from?"

But the little mermaid only shook her head, and answered as before, "Fancy found me on the beach, and wants me to stay with her. I'll do her no harm: please, let me stay."

"She has evidently been washed ashore from some wreck, and has forgotten all about herself. Her wonderful beauty, her accent, and these ornaments show that she is some foreign child," said Aunt Fiction, pointing to the earrings.

"Nonsense! my dear: those are white pebbles, not pearls; and, if you examine them, you will find that those bracelets are the ones you gave Fancy as a reward for so well remembering the facts I told her about coral," said the uncle, who had turned Lorelei round and round, pinched her cheek, felt her hair, and examined her frock through the glasses which nothing escaped.

"She may stay, and be my little playmate, mayn't she? I'll take care of her; and we shall be very happy together," cried Fancy eagerly.

"One can't be sure of that till one has tried. You say you will take care of her: have you got any money to pay her board, and buy her clothes?" asked her uncle.

"No; but I thought you'd help me," answered Fancy wistfully.

"Never say you'll do a thing till you are sure you can," said Uncle Fact, as he took notes of the affair, thinking they might be useful by and by. "I've no objection to your keeping the girl, if, after making inquiries about her, she proves to be a clever child. She can stay awhile; and, when we go back to town, I'll put her in one of our charity schools, where she can be taught to earn her living. Can you read, Luly?"

"No," said the mermaid, opening her eyes.

"Can you write and cipher?"

"What is that?" asked Lorelei innocently.

"Dear me! what ignorance!" cried Uncle Fact.

"Can you sew, or tend babies?" asked Aunt Fiction gently.

"I can do nothing but play and sing, and comb my hair."

"I see! I see! — some hand-organ man's girl. Well, I'm glad you keep your hair smooth, — that's more than Fancy does," said Uncle Fact.

"Let us hear you sing," whispered his little niece; and, in a voice as musical as the sound of ripples breaking on the shore, Lorelei sung a little song that made Fancy dance with delight, charmed Aunt Fiction, and softened Uncle Fact's hard face in spite of himself.

"Very well, very well, indeed: you have a good voice. I'll see that you have proper teaching; and, by and by, you can get your living by giving singing-lessons," he said, turning over the leaves of his book, to look for the name of a skilful teacher; for he had lists of every useful person, place, and thing under the sun.

Lorelei laughed at the idea; and Fancy thought singing for gold, not love, a hard way to get one's living.

Inquiries were made; but nothing more was discovered, and neither of the children would speak: so the strange child lived with Fancy, and made her very happy. The other children didn't care much about her; for with them she was shy and cold, because she knew, if the truth was told, they would not believe in her. Fancy had always played a good deal by herself, because she never found a mate to suit her; now she had one, and they enjoyed each other very much. Lorelei taught her many things besides new games; and Aunt Fiction was charmed with the pretty stories Fancy repeated to her, while Uncle Fact was astonished at the knowledge of marine plants and animals which she gained without any books. Lorelei taught her to swim, like a fish; and the two played such wonderful pranks in the water that people used to come down to the beach when they bathed. In return, Fancy tried to teach her friend to read and write and sew; but Lorelei couldn't learn much, though she loved her little teacher dearly, and every evening sung her to sleep with beautiful lullabies.

There was a great deal of talk about the curious stranger; for her ways were odd, and no one knew what to make of her. She would eat nothing but fruit and shell-fish, and drink nothing but salt water. She didn't like tight clothes; but would have run about in a loose, green robe, with bare feet and flying hair, if Uncle Fact would have allowed it. Morning, noon, and night, she plunged into the sea, — no matter what the weather might be; and she would sleep on no bed but one stuffed with dried sea-weed. She made lovely chains of shells; found splendid bits of coral; and dived where no one else dared, to bring up wonderful plants and mosses. People offered money for these things; but she gave them all to Fancy and Aunt Fiction, of whom she was very fond. It was curious to see the sort of people who liked both Fancy and her friend, — poets, artists; delicate, thoughtful children; and a few old people, who had kept their hearts young in spite of care and time and trouble. Dashing young gentlemen, fine young ladies, worldly-minded and money-loving men and women, and artificial, unchildlike children, the two friends avoided carefully; and these persons either made fun of them, neglected them entirely, or seemed to be unconscious that they were alive. The others they knew at a glance; for their faces warmed and brightened when the children came, they listened to their songs and stories, joined in their plays, and found rest and refreshment in their sweet society.

"This will do for a time; as Fancy is getting strong, and not entirely wasting her days, thanks to me! But our holiday is nearly over; and, as soon as I get back to town, I'll take that child to the Ragged Refuge, and see what they can make of her," said Uncle Fact, who was never quite satisfied about Lorelei; because he could find out so little concerning her. He was walking over the beach as he said this, after a hard day's work on his encyclopaedia. He sat down on a rock in a quiet place; and, instead of enjoying the lovely sunset, he fell to studying the course of the clouds, the state of the tide, and the temperature of the air, till the sound of voices made him peep over the rock. Fancy and her friend were playing there, and the old gentleman waited to see what they were about. Both were sitting with their little bare feet in the water; Lorelei was stringing pearls, and Fancy plaiting a crown of pretty green rushes.

"I wish I could go home, and get you a string of finer pearls than these," said Lorelei; "but it is too far away, and I cannot swim now as I used to do."

"I must look into this. The girl evidently knows all about herself, and can tell, if she chooses," muttered Uncle Fact, getting rather excited over this discovery.

"Never mind the pearls: I'd rather have you, dear," said Fancy lovingly. "Tell me a story while we work, or sing me a song; and I'll give you my crown."

"I'll sing you a little song that has got what your uncle calls a moral to it," said Lorelei, laughing mischievously. Then, in her breezy little voice, she sang the story of —

THE ROCK AND THE BUBBLE.

Oh! a bare, brown rock
Stood up in the sea,
The waves at its feet
Dancing merrily.

A little bubble
Came sailing by,
And thus to the rock
Did it gayly cry, —

“Ho! clumsy brown stone,
Quick, make way for me:
I’m the fairest thing
That floats on the sea.

“See my rainbow-robe,
See my crown of light,
My glittering form,
So airy and bright.

“O’er the waters blue,
I’m floating away,
To dance by the shore
With the foam and spray.

“Now, make way, make way;
For the waves are strong,
And their rippling feet
Bear me fast along.”

But the great rock stood
Straight up in the sea:
It looked gravely down,
And said pleasantly, —

“Little friend, you must
Go some other way;
For I have not stirred
This many a long day.

“Great billows have dashed,

And angry winds blown;
But my sturdy form
Is not overthrown.

“Nothing can stir me
In the air or sea;
Then, how can I move,
Little friend, for thee?”

Then the waves all laughed,
In their voices sweet;
And the sea-birds looked,
From their rocky seat,

At the bubble gay,
Who angrily cried,
While its round cheek glowed
With a foolish pride, —

“You *shall* move for me;
And you shall not mock
At the words I say,
You ugly, rough rock!

“Be silent, wild birds!
Why stare you so?
Stop laughing, rude waves,
And help me to go!

“For I am the queen
Of the ocean here,
And this cruel stone
Cannot make me fear.”

Dashing fiercely up,
With a scornful word,

Foolish bubble broke;
But rock never stirred.

Then said the sea-birds,
Sitting in their nests,
To the little ones
Leaning on their breasts, —

“Be not like Bubble,
Headstrong, rude, and vain,
Seeking by violence
Your object to gain;

“But be like the rock,
Steadfast, true, and strong,
Yet cheerful and kind,
And firm against wrong.

“Heed, little birdlings,
And wiser you’ll be
For the lesson learned
To-day by the sea.”

“Well, to be sure the song *has* got a moral, if that silly Fancy only sees it,” said Uncle Fact, popping up his bald head again as the song ended.

“I thank you: that’s a good little song for me. But, Lorelei, are you sorry you came to be my friend?” cried Fancy; for, as she bent to lay the crown on the other’s head, she saw that she was looking wistfully down into the water that kissed her feet.

“Not yet: while you love me, I am happy, and never regret that I ceased to be a mermaid for your sake,” answered Lorelei, laying her soft cheek against her friend’s.

“How happy I was the day my play-mermaid changed to a real one!” said Fancy. “I often want to tell people all about that wonderful thing, and let them know who you really are: then they’d love you as I do, instead of calling you a little vagabond.”

"Few would believe our story; and those that did would wonder at me, — not love me as you do. They would put me in a cage, and make a show of me; and I should be so miserable I should die. So don't tell who I am, will you?" said Lorelei earnestly.

"Never," cried Fancy, clinging to her. "But, my deary, what will you do when uncle sends you away from me, as he means to do as soon as we go home? I can see you sometimes; but we cannot be always together, and there is no ocean for you to enjoy in the city."

"I shall bear it, if I can, for your sake; if I cannot, I shall come back here, and wait till you come again next year."

"No, no! I will not be parted from you; and, if uncle takes you away, I'll come here, and be a mermaid with you," cried Fancy.

The little friends threw their arms about each other, and were so full of their own feelings that they never saw Uncle Fact's tall shadow flit across them, as he stole away over the soft sand. Poor old gentleman! he was in a sad state of mind, and didn't know what to do; for in all his long life he had never been so puzzled before.

"A mermaid indeed!" he muttered. "I always thought that child was a fool, and now I'm sure of it. She thinks she is a mermaid, and has made Fancy believe it. I've told my wife a dozen times that she let Fancy read too many fairy tales and wonder-books. Her head is full of nonsense, and she is just ready to believe any ridiculous story that is told her. Now, what on earth shall I do? If I put Luly in an asylum, Fancy will break her heart, and very likely they will both run away. If I leave them together, Luly will soon make Fancy as crazy as she is herself, and I shall be mortified by having a niece who insists that her playmate is a mermaid. Bless my soul! how absurd it all is!"

Aunt Fiction had gone to town to see her publishers about a novel she had written, and he didn't like to tell the queer story to any one else; so Uncle Fact thought it over, and decided to settle the matter at once. When the children came in, he sent Fancy to wait for him in the library, while he talked alone with Lorelei. He did his best; but he could do nothing with her, — she danced and laughed, and told the same tale as before, till the old gentleman confessed that he had heard their talk on the rocks: then she grew very sad, and owned that she *was* a mermaid. This made him angry, and he wouldn't believe it for an instant; but told her it was impossible, and she must say something else.

Lorelei could say nothing else, and wept bitterly when he would not listen; so he locked her up and went to Fancy, who felt as if something dreadful was going to happen when she saw his face. He told her all he knew, and insisted that Lorelei was foolish or naughty to persist in such a ridiculous story.

"But, uncle, I really did make a mermaid; and she really did come alive, for I saw the figure float away, and then Lorelei appeared," said Fancy, very earnestly.

"It's very likely you made a figure, and called it a mermaid: it would be just the sort of thing you'd do," said her uncle. "But it is impossible that any coming alive took place, and I won't hear any such nonsense. You didn't see this girl come out of the water; for she says you never looked up, till she touched you. She was a real child, who came over the beach from somewhere; and you fancied she looked like your figure, and believed the silly tale she told you. It is my belief that she is a sly, bad child; and the sooner she is sent away the better for you."

Uncle Fact was so angry and talked so loud, that Fancy felt frightened and bewildered; and began to think he might be right about the mermaid part, though she hated to give up the little romance.

"If I agree that she *is* a real child, won't you let her stay, uncle?" she said, forgetting that, if she lost her faith, her friend was lost also.

"Ah! then you have begun to come to your senses, have you? and are ready to own that you don't believe in mermaids and such rubbish?" cried Uncle Fact, stopping in his tramp up and down the room.

"Why, if you say there never were and never can be any, I suppose I *must* give up my fancy; but I'm sorry," sighed the child.

"That's my sensible girl! Now, think a minute, my dear, and you will also own that it is best to give up the child as well as the mermaid," said her uncle briskly.

"Oh! no: we love one another; and she is good, and I can't give her up," cried Fancy.

"Answer me a few questions; and I'll prove that she isn't good, that you don't love her, and that you *can* give her up," said Uncle Fact, and numbered off the questions on his fingers as he spoke.

"Didn't Luly want you to deceive us, and every one else, about who she was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you like to be with her better than with your aunt or myself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hadn't you rather hear her songs and stories than learn your lessons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't it wrong to deceive people, to love strangers more than those who are a father and mother to you, and to like silly tales better than useful lessons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Then, don't you see, that, if Luly makes you do these wrong and ungrateful things, she is not a good child, nor a fit playmate for you?"

Fancy didn't answer; for she couldn't feel that it was so, though he made it seem so. When Uncle Fact talked in that way, she always got confused and gave up; for she didn't know how to argue. He was right in a certain way; but she felt as if she was right also in another way, though she could not prove it: so she hung her head, and let her tears drop on the carpet one by one.

Uncle Fact didn't mean to be unkind, but he did mean to have his own way; and, when he saw the little girl's sad face, he took her on his knee, and said, more mildly:

"Do you remember the story about the German Lorelei, who sung so sweetly, and lured people to death in the Rhine?"

"Yes, uncle; and I like it," answered Fancy, looking up.

"Well, my dear, your Lorelei will lead you into trouble, if you follow her. Suppose she is what you think her, — a mermaid: it is her delight to draw people into the water, where, of course, they drown. If she is what I think her, — a sly, bad child, who sees that you are very simple, and who means to get taken care of without doing any thing useful, — she will spoil you in a worse way than if you followed her into the sea. I've got no little daughter of my own, and I want to keep you as safe and happy as if you were mine. I don't like this girl, and I want you to give her up for my sake. Will you, Fancy?"

While her uncle said these things, all the beauty seemed to fall away from her friend, all the sweetness from their love, and all her faith in the little dream which had made her so happy. Mermaids became treacherous, unlovely, unreal creatures; and Lorelei seemed like a naughty, selfish child, who deceived her, and made her do wrong things. Her uncle had been very kind to her all her life; and she loved him, was grateful, and wanted to show that she was, by pleasing him. But her heart clung to the friend she had made, trusted, and loved; and it seemed impossible to give up the shadow, even though the substance was gone. She put her hands before her face for a moment; then laid her arms about the old man's neck, and whispered, with a little sob:

"I'll give her up; but you'll be kind to her, because I was fond of her once."

As the last word left Fancy's lips, a long, sad cry sounded through the room; Lorelei sprung in, gave her one kiss, and was seen to run swiftly toward the beach, wringing her hands. Fancy flew after; but, when she reached the shore, there was nothing to be seen but the scattered pebbles, shells, and weeds that made the mock mermaid, floating away on a receding wave.

"Do you believe now?" cried Fancy, weeping bitterly, as she pointed to the wreck of her friend, and turned reproachfully toward Uncle Fact, who had followed in great astonishment.

The old gentleman looked well about him; then shook his head, and answered decidedly:

“No, my dear, I don’t. It’s an odd affair; but, I’ve no doubt, it will be cleared up in a natural way sometime or other.”

But there he was mistaken; for this mystery never *was* cleared up. Other people soon forgot it, and Fancy never spoke of it; yet she made very few friends, and, though she learned to love and value Uncle Fact as well as Aunt Fiction, she could not forget her dearest playmate. Year after year she came back to the sea-side; and the first thing she always did was to visit the place where she used to play, and stretch her arms toward the sea, crying tenderly:

“O my little friend! come back to me!”

But Lorelei never came again.

THE NAUTILUS

A FAIRY B0AT-SONG.

LAUNCH our bout from the yellow sand,
Say farewell to the blooming Unci,
l’url airy wings, fold the mantles blue,
Drink one last cup of honey dew;
For we must leave our fairy home
On a moonlight voyage through the foam.
Spread the silken sail
To the summer gale,
Low singing across the sea;
Float away, float awav,
Through foam and spray,
As if o’er a flowery lea!
Oh! fear no storm nor cloudy frown,
Though mightier ships than ours go down:
Our helmsman laughs at the wildest gale,
As he drops anchor and furls his sail;
For I-Ic who guides the sparrow’s wing,
Whose love upholds the frailest thing,
Has given a spell.
To protect the shell
Through the waves’ tumultuous flow.
When temp est-tost,
Unwrecked, unlost,
It sinks to calmer depths below.

Watch, dear males, by the fading light,
The mariner small who steers aright,
Hy compass and chart unseen, yet true.
And ferries over an elfin crew,
With tiny rudder and sail and oar,
Voyaging safely from shore to shore;
While the mermaids fair,

With their shining hair.
Glide up from their ocean home.
“Come away, come away! “
The sea-sprites say,
As they beckon through the foam.

O evening star! serene and still,
Guard us with magic care from ill!
O summer moon! like herald bright.
Guide us alone; thy path of liht!
O friendiy waves! bear on your breast
Ellin wanderers to their rest!
See, how low and dim,
On the ocean’s rim,
Lies the shore we left behind;
Farewell! Farewell!
Let the echo swell,
Bear it home on your wings, sweet wind!

FAIRY FIRE-FLY

O Firefly! I have caught you fast:
Don’t flutter in a rage;
But shine for me a little while
Here in this dainty Cage.
Why are you wandering so late,
With your small lamp alight,
When bird and bee and butterfly
Are sleeping through the night?
Come, tell to me a fairy tale;
Amuse me while you stay;
And, when it’s time to go to bed,
You shall safely fly away.
firefly,
I’ll tell my own sad story, child.
Here shining in your net;
And, though I fly away so soon,
I pray you, don’t forget • —
I was a lovely fairy once,
Blithe as an early lark;
And in my little bosom shone
A beautiful, bright spark :
That was my elfin spirit, dear;
And, while I lived aright,
It wis to me a guiding star.
To lead me to the light.

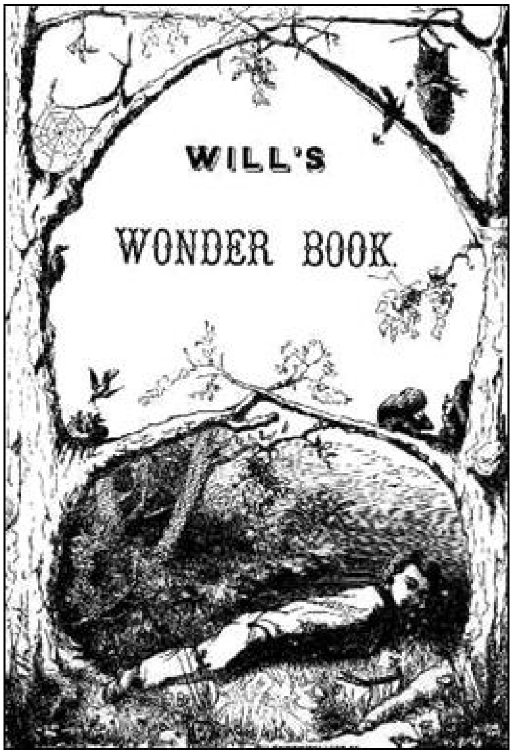
I should have loved the blessfed sun,
And tried to follow him;
But, no, I turned my face away,
And my bright spark grew dim.
My daily duties were not done;
I did not tend the flowers;
I d’d not help the honcy-l.ec*
Improve their shining hours;
No baby butterfly I taught

To spread its tender wing;
No young bird ever learned of mo
The airy songs we sing.
I left my playmates, one and all.
So innocent, so gay, —
I would not listen to their words,
But coldly turned away.
All day I slept, with folded wings,
Lulled by the singing brook,
Where tall ferns made a shady tent,
And guarded my still nook.
But, when the stars came out, I woke;
I loved the meadows damp;
I liked to hear the cricket sing;
To watch the glow-worm’s lamp,
The round-eyed owl, and beetle fierce,
The hungry, buzzing gnat,
The giddy moth, the croaking frog,
And stealthy-winged bat.
These were the friends I freely chos*
These, and the primrose pale;
I did not even seek to know
A star or nightingale.
I turned away from lovely things,
I revelled in the dark,
And day by day more faintly shone
My precious bosom-spark,
Until, at last, it came to be
This feeble, fitful light,
And my dim eyes no power had
To see, except by night.
My fairy form passed quite away;
Alas! I’d gladly die,
For ‘tis my punishment to be
A wandering firefly.
Ah! now I long for all I’ve lost:
My mates arc flown away;
The birds and bees I pine to sec,
But cannot seek by day.

I haunt the flowers all the night,
Hoping a home to win, —
The doors are shut: all arc asleep :
I knock; none let me in.
I’m tired of the friends I made;
I hate the teasing gnat,
The hooting owl, the cricket shrill,
The beetle, and the bat.
My only mates axe the poor moth3;
They seek and love the light,
Though they, like me, sleep all day long,
And only fly by nighL
Once they were butterflies, you know,
And floated in the sun;
But they are doomed to expiate
The wrongs which they have done,
By madty longing for the shine
That blinds their feeble eye.
Yet draws them, like a dreadful spell,
To flutter, burn, and die.
O little child I be warned in time;
Guard well your bosom spark.
Else it will slowly fade away,
And leave you in the dark.
Feed it with all things fair and good i
Then gloomy clouds may roll,
But cannot shadow in your life,
Tis sunshine of the soul.

WILL'S WONDER BOOK

This rare collection of nature stories was first printed in *Merry's Museum* magazine in 1868.


WILL'S
WONDER BOOK.

The original frontispiece

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WILL'S WONDER BOOK.

WILL’S WONDER-BOOK.

I JUST wish I had another story as good as that,” exclaimed Will, as he turned the last page of “Gulliver’s Travels.”

“I dare say I can find you something as interesting, and more profitable, perhaps,” said grandma, looking down at the young gentleman lying in the grass at her feet.

“I know what you’ll advise, — ‘Sandford and Merton,’ ‘ Harry and Lucy,’ or the ‘ Sequel to Frank.’ I’m tired to death of ‘em all, ‘specially that prig of a Harry, with his everlasting barometer. I like ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ ‘Swiss Family,’ and ‘Gulliver,’ — all about queer places, and people, and the way they live,” answered Will, with his boots higher than his head.

“I could tell you about places, and creatures as curious and interesting as the Liliputians, whom you like so much, if you cared to hear of them,” replied grandma, placidly.

“Can you? Where are they?” asked Will, surprised.

“You are lying on one of them; and there is another just behind Polly.”

“Hullo!” cried Will, rolling over to look, while Polly stared about her, with a wild expression.

“Yes; there are two wonderful cities, full of busy, brave, and accomplished little people, about whom you know nothing; though you see them every day,” added grandma, nodding wisely.

“I know what she means! I see ‘em!” cried Polly, who “sat on a tuffit, like Miss Muffit,” — not eating curds and whey, but making a pepelum for her doll Seraphina.

“An ant-hill and the beehive are all I see,” said Will, following Polly’s quick eyes. “We know about them, of course.”

“Do you? Tell me how much?”

“Well, ants live in the ground, and get in sugar-buckets, and bite; and bees make wax and honey, and buzz, and sting like fury,” replied Will, briskly.

“And how do they make their houses, and live, and work, and raise their little ones?” asked grandma.

“Oh, they — that is, I believe — well — really, I don’t know,” was Will’s rather unsatisfactory answer.

“Shall I tell you?”

“If you please, grandma; “ and, feeling somewhat abashed by his failure, Will meekly composed himself to listen, chewing grass meantime, like a ruminating calf.

“Tell about the bees first. I found out quickest; and I always liked bees, ever since I was a mite of a girl, and used to say about the ‘ Little biddy bee,’ and ‘ How skittly she builds her cell,’“ said Polly, — sewing away like a matron of forty with a large family to provide for, instead of a ten-year-older, with only one doll, a cat, and canary, dependent upon her.

“We’ll try a bit, and see how you like it;” so, settling her knitting, grandma began. “If we could enter that little door, we should find a city full of busy inhabitants, — a kingdom which has been prettily described by a certain famous William, who knew more about them than our Will, though he uses the word ‘ king,’ instead of queen, to suit the character who speaks : —

“‘They have a king, and officers of sorts;
Some, like magistrates, correct at home;
Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad,
Others, like soldiers, armed in their stings,
Make raid upon the summer’s velvet buds;
Which pillage, they, with merry march,
Bring home to the tent-royal of their emperor;
Who, busied in his majesty, surveys
The singing masons, building roofs of gold;
The civil citizens kneading up the honey;
The poor mechanic-porters crowding in
Their heavy burdens at the narrow gate;
The sad-eyed justice, with his surly hum,
Delivering o’er to executors pale,
The lazy, yawning drone.’“

“Why, do they do all those things really?” asked Will, looking at the hive, as if interested already.

“Yes; there are workers of all kinds, and each does his part faithfully. When put into a new hive, the bees at once begin to lay the foundation of their combs, which they prepare with astonishing quickness. Then, they make the wonderful little cells; which, being six-sided, waste no room. They are of thin wax, polished and smoothed by the bees’ jaws, and finished with a ring round the edge, for strength, like the threshold of a door. The combs are generally arranged with streets between, so the bees can go up and down : they are just wide enough for two bees to pass one another. They often have cross-streets, which are covered. They stop up all cracks in the hive with what is called bee- glue, which they collect from poplars, willows, and other trees. If a snail, or any creature too large for them to manage, gets in, they seal it up in a thick covering of glue; and so keep the air pure, and render the invader harmless.

"You know how they get the honey, by running their long tongues into flowers. This honey goes into a little bag, or stomach, which they fill, and empty into the cells, the mouths of which are closed up with waxen lids. Some honey-pots are left without covers, for food in bad weather; but they never touch these when the weather is fine, and fresh food can be got."

"Dear me! — think of living among hundreds of honey-pots, and not touching them! I shouldn't make a good bee," said Polly, thinking of the lumps of sugar that daily tempted her in the china- closet.

"They are taught obedience, and are not gluttons," replied grandma, with a little shake of the head, which Polly understood perfectly well.

"Please, go on, ma'am," said Seraphina's little mother, pricking her fingers, and puckering the pepelum, in her flurry.

"The queen-bee is larger than the others, and lays all the eggs, — many thousands, sometimes. These eggs are laid in the cells, and, a day or two after, the grubs are born, — little worms, rolled up in rings. The common bees turn nurses, and take care of the babies with the greatest tenderness, feeding and tending them for about six days, — when they are fully grown. Then they shut them up, to keep them safe; and they line the walls of the cells with silken tapestry, in which they undergo the last change. When they first come out winged insects, they are very weak; but, in a few hours, they become strong enough to fly off and go to work."

"Don't you wish our babies grew up, and got useful, as quick as that? What lots of trouble it would save," said Will, — who, boylike, didn't see the charms of " little squallers," as he called very young men and women.

"Mothers and grandmas would lose a deal of pleasure, if they did," said the old lady, who had petted both children ever since they were born. " Well, my dears, these little friends of ours are loyal to death, and cling to their queen through everything. If she happens to die, all work stops till a new queen appears. If she is taken away, they follow, if they can, and will not leave her. A man tried the experiment of cutting off a queen-bee's wing, and keeping her where the rest could follow. They gathered round her; and, as she could not fly away, they preferred to stay and starve, rather than quit her. For five days, they lived without food, but not one left her; and, at last, all lay dead, with the dear queen still in their midst."

"They rallied round the flag like good ones, didn't they? I like 'em for that;"

and Will sat up, to watch a burly brown bee hard at work in a dandelion close by.

"I heard of a man who had the power of charming bees, so that they obeyed him, and never hurt him in the least. They would swarm all over his head and shoulders quite harmlessly, and let him do what he liked. He played general with them, arranging them on a table, in regiments and battalions, where they waited till he uttered the word of command, when they began to march, rank and file, like regular soldiers. He taught his Liliputians politeness also, for none ever stung the people who came to see the curious show."

"I'd like to have seen that! — it must have been fun. Wonder if I could do it?" said Will, eyeing the beehive, wistfully.

"I advise you not to try, till you learn the charm. There are various kinds of bees, you know. Polly would like the poppy-bee, who makes her nest in the ground, burrowing down about three inches. At the bottom, she makes a large, round hole, and lines it splendidly with the scarlet leaves of the wild poppy. She cuts and fits the pretty tapestry, till it is thick and soft and warm, then partly fills the cell with honey, lays an egg, folds down the red blankets, and closes up the hole, so it cannot be distinguished; and there, in its rosy cradle, with food to eat, and a safe nook to rest in, she leaves her baby-bee to take care of itself."

"How cunning! I'll line Phena's cradle with red flannel right away," cried Polly, who did like the poppy-bee.

"The leaf-cutting bee makes her cells of green leaves, shaping them like thimbles. These little jars she half fills with a rose-colored paste of honey and pollen from thistles, lays her eggs, and covers the pots with round leaf-lids, that fit exactly. The mason-bee makes its nest of mud or mortar. It looks like a bit of dirt, sticking to a wall, but has little cells within. The mother-bee does all the work, sticking little grains of sand and earth together with her own glue. The carpenter-bee bores holes in posts, and makes her cells of sawdust and glue. The carding-bees live in holes, among stones and roots, making nests of moss, lined with wax, to keep the wet out, with a long gallery by which to enter. They find a bit of moss, and several bees place themselves in a row, with their backs toward the nest; then the foremost lays hold of the moss and pulls it up with her jaws, drives it with her fore-feet under her body as far toward the next as possible. The second does the same; and in this way, tiny heaps of prepared moss are got to the nest by the file of four or five, and others weave it into shape."

"They must look as if they were playing leap-frog. Here, old fellow, give us a back!" cried Will, with a laugh, and a leap over the brown bee still tumbling about in the dandelion.

L. M. ALCOTT.

II.

TELL about the ants, grandma. I’ve looked into a beehive, and seen the busy folks at work; but I never saw the inside of an ant’s house,” said Polly, as Will lay down again.

“It is a city, my dear, full of little houses, or cells, streets, bridges, galleries, and gates, built of earth, rushes, grass, and tiny twigs, in the most wonderful manner. There are many roads leading up to the air, and on fine days, the gates stand open; at night, the sentinels shut them, also in rainy weather; and so keep all safe and snug. In the lower rooms, they keep their young when it is cold; but whenever the sun shines, the faithful nurses carry the ant-babies up to the warm, light rooms above, just as our babies are taken out in sunny weather.”

“Really? “ cried Will.

“Yes, really; and many other things do these interesting creatures do very like us. The mother-ant has pretty gauze wings at first, and flies about in the open air very gaily for a time. But when the little ones are born, she pulls off her fine wings, stays at home, and takes care of her family, like a wise and faithful mother. She can’t take all the care, because she often has several thousand children; so, a great many nurses are needed; and Mrs. Ant is more fortunate than we often are in getting good ones. So devoted are the attendants, that they guard the eggs, from the time they are laid till the perfect ant flies away. They put the eggs in heaps in the cells, moving them to warm or cool places, as they think best, and often brood over them in damp weather. When the little grubs are hatched, they feed, wash, and tend them carefully. Not a very easy task, you may see, to take care of four or five thousand babies at once.”

“I hope they don’t all cry at once,” said Will. “ Wouldn’t there be a racket, if they did?”

“No; they are good babies, and don’t worry; because their nurses give them simple food, plenty of exercise, and don’t spoil them as we spoil our babies,” answered grandma, shaking her head, for she thought the old ways best.

“What do they eat and do?” asked Polly, forgetting to read, in her interest in the ant-lings.

“The nurses feed them, at first, with a sweetish fluid from their own bodies, and afterward with various things, putting the food into the little mouths, as birds feed their young. If any one disturbs the nests, these devoted nurses think only of saving the young, and may be seen running away with the tiny white eggs, or grubs, in their mouths. I read of a faithful nurse who got cut in two during some accident which happened to the nest; and so bent on saving her little charges was she, that the half of the body on which the head remained actually carried ten eggs to a place of safety before it died."

"Well, that ant was a regular brick! " cried Will. " You don't like slang, grandma; but I must say ' brick ' this once, for no other word is good enough for that plucky little nurse."

"I hope Betsy would do as much for us, if our house tumbled down," began Polly, soberly; but went off into a giggle, at the idea of old Betsy's head trotting away with the baby.

"Let me tell you one more thing about the nurseries, and then we will go on to the battles and language and games of our friends," said grandma, watching the two attentive faces before her with the kind old eyes that twinkled behind her glasses. " After a while, the grubs spin themselves into cocoons, and stay there till they are perfect ants. When it is time for them to come out of their yellow cradles, the nurses help unfold the silken covers, as mamma undoes baby from his blankets, and take the young ones up from their long naps. They wash and brush them, spread their wings, lead them through the winding streets, as if teaching them to walk; and when they are strong enough, the nurses follow them to the plants outside, feed them for the last time, kiss, and say good-by. And as the young ones fly away, the faithful creatures linger, as if they found it hard to part from the nurselings they have loved so well."

"Polly's crying! " said Will.

"No I ain't," returned Polly, winking more than was necessary; for she was rather touched by the tenderness of the little creatures whom she had never known, or cared to know, till now.

"I shan't walk on ant-hills any more," she said, with a small sniff.

Will said nothing, but lay leaning over the busy workers in the grass, thinking of the happy little homes below, and privately determining that he never would disturb his small neighbors again.

"I forgot to tell you," continued grandma, " that there were three sorts of ants, — the males, the females, and the neuters. The first two are kings and queens, and live in state; the others are the workers and soldiers. The first have no wings; but the workers have strong legs and feelers, for building, pulling, and running errands. The soldiers have large, sharp jaws for biting, and stings, also; beside little poison-bags, from which they throw a venomous fluid when attacked. Each sort do their parts, and all goes smoothly. The fathers soon die, or fly away; the mothers lay the eggs, and oversee the housekeeping; the workers take care of the babies, build, find food, and wait on the queen; while the soldiers guard the gates, defend the city, and inarch out to fight the neighboring tribes when wars occur."

"Tell about the battles. I like that part," said Will, like a true boy.

"They are very brave; for these little fellows will attack ants much larger than themselves, and fight gallantly, till they win or die. When they once take hold, they will be torn limb from limb before they let go; and after a battle, the victors may be seen with their enemies' heads fastened to their feelers, or legs, for they can't get them off; and, proud as they may be of them, they must be very inconvenient. To these brave and bustling mites, a foot of ground is a territory worth fighting for; the body of a beetle, a cargo of straws, or a drop of honey, are possessions of great value. The males and females don't fight; but the neuters have great battles with their neighbors, and sometimes with each other. Idle ants are driven out of the city, and have their heads cut off before the people, as a warning. But the famous battles are between different communities of the same species. Rival cities, like the Rome and Carthage you read of, Will, send out their armies to settle some dispute; and one may see them meet half-way on a battle-field of two or three feet square. Led by their generals, some seize each other in their powerful jaws; some make prisoners, who are afterward used as slaves in the cities of their enemies; others, joined together by legs or jaws, in long strings, pull and drag in opposite directions, till one side gets stronger than the other, when the chain breaks, and all fight again, two and two. These battles last for days, and at night, each army retires to its own city, only to march out again with fresh courage in the morning. So they keep it up, till one side yields, or a rain quenches the feud, when they go home, and forget all about the quarrel."

"I'd like to see an ant-battle, if it was a good lively one, and the generals didn't get the men into scrapes," said Will, who sometimes read the newspapers.

"I pity the poor ant-slaves, and hope they got away after a while," added Polly, who had given a dollar to the Freedmen's Aid Society.

"British and American ants don't make slaves, the books say, and I am glad of it," replied grandma. " One curious thing I must tell you; and that is, that the ants not only have slaves, but cows, or rather another species of insect, from which the ants get a sweet fluid, of which they are very fond. I don't know whether all ants do this; but Huber tells us that some ants haunt the trees where the aphides go to get sweet sap, and as fast as the little tubes on the bodies of the aphides are full of honey, the ants draw it out, and carry it home for their young, as we do milk."

"Well, that's the funniest thing I've heard yet Cows, with wings; and ants going a milking, up trees! “ Will lay back in the grass, and shouted; and Polly’s eyes were rounder than ever with wonders at the discoveries she was making.

“Laugh away, my dear, but it is true; and ants often have their own cows, and guard them, and build walls round them, as we fence in our pastures. Certain beetles are kept by German ants, who have droves of these yellow cattle, and take good care of them,” added grandma.

“It sounds like a fairy story,” said Polly, with a long breath. “ Do the ants talk, and have schools, and do everything else, as we do?”

“Not everything, as we do; but they talk somewhat as the deaf and dumb do, with their feelers or hands. Careful observers say, that when the ants want to warn others, they run and strike sharply against them. If one finds something good to eat, it hurries to the others, and waves its antennae, as if to say,’ Come, and taste it.’

If the military ants wish to give the order to march, they touch each other on the trunk and forehead. In a fight, if two friends mistake and attack one another, they soon beg pardon by caressing each other. When the queen walks through the city, her people show their joy by tapping her lightly, dancing on their hind-legs before her, and carrying her on their feelers; and when two meet, after being long parted, they seem to shake hands, kiss, and embrace most affectionately.”

“Little dears!” exclaimed Polly; and down she went, to watch the small people, some of whom had climbed up the tall grass- blades, as if to listen, and be sure that grandma made no mistakes in telling their history.

III.

WHAT will you tell us about today, grandma?” said Will, as the three sat, as usual, under the elms, just before tea.

“Well, I don’t know,” began the old lady; but, before she got any farther, accident suggested a subject; for, as if Polly really was Miss Muffit, “ a big black spider “ suddenly “ sat down beside her,” and caused her to tumble off her grassy seat, with a loud “ Ugh! take the horrid thing away; I hate ‘em!”

“I’ll scrunch him;” and Will lifted his bat for the fatal blow, when grandma whisked the poor thing into her handkerchief, and took him out of danger. “ Wait till I tell you something about him, and his relations; then we’ll see about killing him.”

So, Polly settled herself again, after carefully tucking up her skirts; and Will laid down his bat, feeling sure he should want it directly.

“In the first place, spiders have four, six, eight, or ten eyes — “ “ That’s the reason they see, and cut away before you can get a good hit at them,” interrupted Will, glad to know that his failure on several occasions had not been entirely owing to his own want of skill.

“Then they are little silk factories, and spin away, all within themselves. The silk is made from the juices of their food, prepared in a sort of laboratory they have; then, it passes to a silk reservoir, ready for use; and, when the creature wants a thread, it comes through the four or six tubes, or spinnerets, as they are called. There are many smaller tubes; and threads of all sizes are made, to suit the want of the worker. These threads are finer than any human skill can make, and they are used for the divisions of the micrometer, an astronomical instrument; though some wise observer says it takes four millions of the threads to make one as thick as a hair.

“In some spiders, the threads are so strong, that small birds, as well as insects, are hung up by them; and Brazilian spiders roll up leaves for nests, and suspend them by cords of their own making. The Bird-Catcher spider is a very large one; its body is as big as a twenty-five-cent piece, covered with black and yellow hair; and its long, strong legs are as stout as a bird’s quills. They make nests in hollow trees, in rocky crevices, and under dead leaves. In South America, they are still larger, being able, Dampier says, to cover eight or ten inches by spreading their legs; and their claws are so strong, that they are often used for toothpicks, and are considered good for toothache. This sort doesn’t spin webs to catch its food, but hides, and springs on its prey, killing it with one sharp bite.”

“Oh, dear! I hope we don’t have that kind here,” cried Polly, curling up her feet, and looking anxiously at the imprisoned spider; for grandma had pinned the handkerchief against the tree.

“No; we have small ones of that species, but they are rare; and don’t hurt people, I believe. In Florida, there is a sort of spider which is eaten by the Indians; and some one tells a funny story of having preserved a bottle-full in whiskey, to study, when one of the chiefs paid him a visit, and ate up the spiders, with great relish, thanking him for the treat.”

“What a treat! — ’ pickled spiders!’ Was there ever such a mess?” and Will turned up his nose in high disgust.

“As a contrast to these rather disagreeable fellows, there is the Golden Lactrodecta. She is a regular little fairy, delicate and pretty, and looking as if made of glass and gold. Her eyes and claws are black; a dark orange stripe runs down her back, and her body looks as if she wore black lace over her yellow-satin gown.”

“How nice she must look,” said Polly, admiringly; for she liked fine clothes, as most little girls do.

“This spider is very nimble and small, and not very common. Her tiny, brilliant web, spun between grass-blades, waves to and fro, shimmering in the sunshine; and there she sits, like a little queen, in her golden suit, daintily eating the midges and gnats with which her table is spread. But, as soon as she dies, all her beauty fades; and, in an hour, she is only a tiny, dull, black speck. There is another little member of the spider family, which you will like to hear about. I won’t give you the long name, but tell you how bravely she goes to sea. She appears toward autumn, when the leaves begin to fall, and is seen on rivers and running streams, at night and morning. She places herself on a fallen leaf, which she bends up with strong cables, in such a skilful way, that no wind upsets it. In this she floats away, catching insects as her boat sails with the tide. She is just the color of the leaf, and one must look closely to see her; for she is very quick, and it is so difficult to catch her, that some people think, that, like the gossamer spider, she can float away on the wind. At the point of the leaf, she spins a little tent to sleep in, and here she keeps a silken ball, full of tiny, yellow eggs. One seldom sees all this, but it is a curious sight; and one can't help wondering what becomes of the solitary little sailor, sailing down the stream to some new country, with her babies rocked by the gentle swaying of her leafy boat."

"I'd like to see that ship, and its rigging, and crew," said Will, who felt his respect for spiders much increased by this nautical fact.

"I had a spider once, who lived in a corner of my room, and I used to amuse my friends with her. If I went toward her with my hand up, as if to brush her away, she would whirl and vibrate, faster and faster, till you no longer saw her, and would fancy she had dropped. Then, if we stepped back, she would slowly reappear, looking as if nothing had happened. My servant was much troubled because I left her there, and often threatened to sweep her down. So, I put her in a glass (my spider, I mean, not my girl), and painted a web and spider in the corner, and told Jane to make it tidy there, if she could. She joyfully whisked her broom, and looked bewildered when neither web nor spider fell, and couldn't understand the joke, till she had felt the walls."

"What became of the old spinner?" asked Will, after he had enjoyed grandma's trick.

"I kept her under a glass, and watched her. She was a very common, drab spider, with white spots and long legs. She glued her eggs together in a silky bag, and always carried them about in her mouth. She didn't eat much, but hung from the top of the glass, swinging to and fro, as if getting her little ones to sleep. At the end of two weeks, she hung the bag by a strong thread, and, dropping to the bottom, lay there, waiting her fate. Soon, two or three hundred little spiders came sliding down, and, pouncing on the poor mother, ate her up. Then, they turned and ate each other; though I put in gnats, and bugs, and flies, for them. Such little cannibals, I never saw; for they went on, till there were but five spiderlings left. These moulted, and ate up their skins; and then went at each other again. I was so angry at them, that I put a big one in, who finished them; and that was the end of this bloodthirsty family. I couldn't understand the cause of this seeming cruelty to each other; but, as so many are born at once, it is probably well for us that few live. One thing is to be said in praise of them; the mother is the most faithful of parents, and never ceases to watch and guard the ball of eggs. She holds it under her with four legs, and fights stoutly with the others; and, when the battle is over, she carefully examines her treasure, often spinning a new cover, and then takes it in her mouth again, to watch and wait with untiring patience, till her undutiful little ones are born."

“Poor Mrs. Spider! If I had one, I’d take her out before the bad children ate her up; and I’d keep her all safe, and pet her with fat worms and nice flies,” cried Polly, warmly.

“I thought you hated spiders,” said grandma, with a sly smile.

“I don’t now, only the big, fierce ones. I didn’t know they were so pretty and sensible; and I’m going to have a spider-bottle, and see them spin, and eat, and all the other queer things they do.”

“Isn’t there a kind that makes people fly about, and dance like mad, when they bite them?” asked Will, wishing to show off a little for Polly’s benefit.

“Yes, the Tarantula; the bite isn’t poisonous, and the spider can be tamed till it eats out of the hand of its keeper. The story goes, that when a person is bitten, they grow sick, and sad, and weak, till music is made for them, when they dance wildly till they are cured. I believe there is no truth in it; but a story is told of a man who hired a girl, at Naples, to try the effect of a bite. She agreed; and, after a bottle, with the spider in it, had been applied to her arm, and a sharp prick assured her that she was bitten, she sat a little while, looking pale and wild, then suddenly she flew up, and danced frantically, till she could skip no longer; when she sank down, declaring she had never been so badly bitten before, and was afraid she would not recover. Then the man showed the bottle, and told her that there was no spider in it, but that he had pinched her arm; and all the rest was her own imagination or cunning.”

“That was a good joke! But, why don’t people make things out of spider-silk, as they do out of cocoon-silk? “ asked Polly.

“People have tried, and, I dare say, will succeed some day, since greater wonders have been wrought. A Monsieur Bon made a few pairs of gloves and stockings; but they cost so much, he could not go on. It was found, that two hundred and eighty spiders did not yield more silk than one industrious silk-worm; so the experiment was given up.”

“Yes; in my ‘ Gulliver,’ I read how he went to a place where a spider-man told him he would soon have spiders trained to spin silk of all colors, for he was going to feed them on food that would make them do it,” cried Will, firmly believing that Gulliver was a most reliable authority.

“Miracles as curious as any in fairy tales sometimes come to pass; so, we may yet wear spider-silk, and teach them to spin for us as industriously as they do for themselves. Now, what shall we do with our prisoner?” asked grandma.

“Let him go,” said Will, at once.

“I want a look at it first, just to see if it’s one of the pretty ones,” added Polly, peeping carefully into the handkerchief, hoping to find the lady in black lace and gold-colored satin.

A big black fellow darted out, ran straight up grandma’s arm, and hid in the rough bark of the elm, after he had paused an instant on her white cap to wiggle his long legs, as if waving an adieu with a polite but inaudible —

“Thank you, ma’am; thank you.”

IV.

I'VE got him! Isn't he a fat one?" cried Will, slowly opening his hand, to show the plump, black cricket he had just caught.

"Don't hurt him. I like crickets; they make such a pretty noise, and have such queer, stiff tails," said Polly, looking at the little head which peeped through her brother's fingers.

"That reminds me of one of your funny mistakes when you were a little girl," said grandma, smiling. " You came to me one day, with your eyes staring, and told me that the cook kept a big, black spider, with a stiff tail, in her closet. I went to see the wonder, and found it was an old-fashioned iron spider, for cooking."

"That's just like Polly! she's so stupid. I guess if you told her to bring you a cricket, she'd go and get one of these fat fellows; wouldn't you, Poll?" asked Will, who never could resist teasing his sister.

"Yes, I should, if she did it now; for I want to know about them," returned Polly, trying to look at him with dignified indifference.

"Are they interesting chaps, grandma?" said Will, holding his prisoner fast, in spite of his struggles.

room, very tired. But I did not get my rest very soon; for, just as I was about to put out my candle, something bounced on my head. I looked in the glass, and beheld an immense brown cricket, promenading over my night-cap. He looked so home-like, I was very glad to see him; but, as I didn't care about his prancing round the room to disturb my sleep, I tried to catch him. That didn't suit Mr. Cricket; and he gave a great leap to the clock, and stared at me with his big eyes quite reproachfully. I made a rush at him, and he skipped into the wood-basket, turning heels over head as he went. I was determined to have him; so I rummaged among the pine cones after him; when, bang! up he came against my very nose, and was off like a shot. I hunted him all over the room; while that lively insect leaped and chirped derisively, till I got him in the window-curtain, and shut him up in a little drawer, to amuse himself with postage-stamps and guide-books. The jolly old soul took it very coolly, and chirped away with all his might; while I went to sleep, very much exhausted with my gymnastics. I forgot him till several days after, and then ran to the drawer, expecting to find the brown ballet-dancer dead; but he popped up his head as brisk as ever, gave a skip and a chirp, and vanished as gaily as if nothing had happened. I quite missed him, and hoped he’d come again; but he never did.”

“I heard papa talking about some of the old Greek fellows, who made songs to grasshoppers, and thought a great deal of them,” said Will, when they had laughed at grandma’s midnight dance.

“Yes, they called them cicada; and loved and honored the little things for their gay music. Some wore golden grasshoppers in their hair; and the image of a cicada, sitting on a harp, was an emblem of music, which is accounted for in this way: Two musicians were trying which could play best; and one of these chirpers flew to the harp of Eunomus, and supplied the place of a broken string so well, that he won the prize. I remember part of a pretty little song, by one of the ‘ old Greek fellows,’ as you say, Will, about the cicada: —

“‘Happy creature! what below
Can more happy live than thou?
Sipping, on the dewy lawn,
The fragrant nectar of the dawn;
Little tales thou lov’st to sing,
Tales of mirth — an insect-king.
Thine the treasures of the field;
All to thee the seasons yield;
Cares nor pains to thee belong,
Thou alone art ever young;
Rich in spirits, health thy feast,
Thou’rt a demi-god, at least.’

“There is one sort of locust which is called ‘ the little fiddler,’ because it draws one leg over the other, like a fiddle-bow, they say. Another sort is called the nightingale of the fairies, for it sings when other insects sleep; and its lively tune would do for an elfin dance.”

“Dear me! How I should like to see a fairy ball,” said Polly. “ I read about one once; and they had fireflies for lamps, and crickets for pipers, and moths and mosquitoes danced; and they had a splendid time. Do glowworms and fireflies really have fire in them, like lanterns, grandma?”

“One of these bright creatures is called the ‘ lantern-fly;’ and is so brilliant, that in South America, the Indians tie a few to a stick, and use it as a torch, when travelling. The light is in the head of this firefly, but the glowworms have it in the body; and it only shows when they are moving. Some are so brilliant, that people read and work by their light; and ladies wear them in little gauze bags, sewed on their dresses, to glitter as they walk in the soft darkness of southern nights. These insects always have their small lamps trimmed and ready; yet can hide the light in a minute, if any enemy approaches. They are very useful too, in killing the gnats, which fill the houses in the West-India Islands; and the natives catch the pretty creatures for that purpose, enjoying their light while they devour the gnats, and make themselves both useful and agreeable."

"I shall try that dodge tonight, when the sheets come," said Will, as the tea-bell rang.

V.

WHAT sort of a bean is this?” asked Polly, showing her grandmother a long, round, brown thing in the palm of her hand.

“That is a chrysalis; not a bean, dear,” replied the old lady. “ A butterfly of some sort is folded up in that little dark shell; and when the time comes, it will break out, and fly away.”

“Will it be a silk-making butterfly? “ asked Polly, examining it curiously.

“No : I think it is a common moth, and will never make any silk. The mulberry-tree moth is the fellow for silk.”

“Tell us about him,” said Will. “ I’ve got some cocoons; but I don’t see how they can ever be used.”

“The caterpillars weave their yellow shrouds in a very curious way; not going round and round with the thread, but backward and forward, in one place after another; so that the silk of the inner cocoon can be wound off by the yard, without turning the little ball over. The threads come through two holes in the head of the caterpillar, and are fastened together in one by a sort of glue which comes with them. These threads are gold-colored, and very, very fine; and when many of them are put together, it is the best sort for weaving. It takes the caterpillars three or four days to make the cocoons; and before the chrysalides turn to moths, and eat their way out, the cocoons are put in an oven, or hot water, which kills the creatures. Then, the flossy covering is opened at one end, the fine, inner cocoon slipped out, and unwound by very skilful workers, who put them in hot water, and reel off the silk of twenty or thirty cocoons at a time. A good-sized cocoon gives about three hundred yards of filament, as they call it; some, even six hundred. These fine threads are made strong enough to use, and woven into many useful and pretty things.”

“What kind of looking moth is the silk moth?” asked Will.

“It is about an inch long, pale yellow, with dark streaks, wide wings, and short trunk. The eggs are about the size of mustard- seed; and the young worms are born in a few days, if kept in a warm place. They do nothing but eat, and shed their skins, which they do four times before the caterpillar is fully grown. In about thirty-two days, it begins to spin, then turns to a chrysalis, and in a few weeks comes out a moth, if not killed. They have to be taken great care of, for they are very tender; and cold easily kills them, or bad air, or not enough food. They have many diseases also; and silk-feeders have anxious times till the cocoons are safely spun. I was reading a pleasant account of the Italian silk-farms, the other day; and I will tell you about it. There are many mulberry-trees in Lombardy; and the people import silkworms from Japan, in the egg, and hatch them at home. The eggs are gummed on sheets of paper, and sold by the quire, and called “ egg-letters.” The person who writes the account, says he saw a farmhouse where the people were all busy with “ egg-letters.” Some worms were already grown; and the girls were bringing baskets of clean, fresh leaves for the yellow caterpillars, who crawled in and out, eating with a rustle which could be heard, — all hard at work, getting the little silk factories inside of them into good order. In one place were some newly-hatched grubs, about as big as needles, curled up, and sharp at both ends. The farmer’s wife said they needed as much care as babies, and had to be coaxed to eat, for many died, because they were too young to find their way to their food. She showed also some silk freshly unwound. A long lock of soft, golden hair it seemed, tied with a blue ribbon, and very pretty. This person next went to see the mulberry-trees, with flocks of children at work on them, laughing and shouting, and stripping the leaves like a whirlwind.”

“That must be fun. I wish we had silk-farms and factories here,” said Will.

“We do. The silk crop of the United States is very large; for our worms can often be fed in the open air, and so are healthier than the European worms. The Middle and Southern States are the best places. Dr. Franklin was interested in a silk-factory in Pennsylvania; and a Mrs. Wright, of Columbia, made a piece of silk, sixty yards long, from cocoons of her own raising, which was used for a dress for the Queen of England. The first silk coat and stockings made in New England, were worn in 1747, by the governor, Mr. Law; and in 1660, Charles I. wore a coronation robe made by Virginia silk-worms.”

“Who first used these little fellows? “ asked Will.

“The Chinese, I believe. The Greeks and Romans used silk for a long time, before they knew much about its manufacture; for the Romans conquered many nations, and carried home many treasures. When the Chinese peasants all wore silk, it was still so rare and costly at Rome, that one of the emperors would not allow the empress a robe of it. The Hindoos had a wild sort of silk-worm which could not be tamed; so they set guards to keep bats away by night, and birds by day, while the worms spun on the trees they had chosen. This kind made a coarse, dark silk, which could be worn many years, without any sign of wearing out. Many of our common caterpillars spin silky threads, as you know, for you often see their nests in the orchard. The caterpillar of the gold-tail moth wraps its eggs in hair from its own body. When the little ones come out, they cover the leaves, and feed, side by side, till they are ready to spin a wide-spreading, silken tent, with rooms enough to shelter them all from enemies and bad weather. So dainty are they, that they have carpets of silk under their feet; and in this nice little home they live merrily together till spring, when they go away and live alone till chrysalis-time comes. Caterpillars, in some places, migrate like swallows; and I remember seeing in a paper, some years ago, an account of an army of caterpillars marching through a swamp, over the bridge, in such quantities, that people were afraid to pass till they were gone.”

“I like butterflies better than ‘ pussy-pillars,’ as I used to call them; so I shall keep my chrysalis, and see if it won’t turn out a pretty blue or yellow butterfly,” said Polly, holding it carefully in her warm little hand.

“In a pretty French story, I read about a lady who used to hatch the silk-worms, by wearing them folded in flannel, in her bosom; for she was poor, and could not afford to lose any of the precious little creatures.”

“I don’t like them well enough for that; but I do wish I had a easeful of lovely butterflies, like that lady whom we saw the other day,” said Polly.

“I’d get you pecks, if grandma didn’t think it was wrong to put pins through ‘em, and drop camphor on their heads to kill ‘em,” said Will.

“I will give you a book full of beautifully-painted butterflies, with stories of them, and pretty bits of poetry. Won’t that satisfy you?” asked the old lady, who hated cruelty to the humblest thing that lives.

“Oh, yes! that is splendid; and I’m ever so much obliged! “ cried Polly, who knew the book, and had often longed to own it.

She ran to get it; and for an hour, two curly heads bent over the pages, enjoying the wonders of butterfly life, and talking learnedly of the “ Purple Emperor,” “ Peacock,” “Bufftip,” “ Painted Lady,” “Blue Adonis,” and the “Lace Wing,” and “Death’s Head Moths.” When they came to the end, Will said, decidedly, —

“The next book I buy will be ‘The Butterfly Hunters.’“

VI.

“WE have each got something for you to tell about, grandma,” said Polly, one evening, showing a downy little mole which she had taken from her cat.

“Mine’s a striped squirrel,” added Will, displaying his with the pride of a young hunter.

“Poor little fellow! some cruel boy shot him for sport, I suppose,” said grandma, smoothing the soft fur on its breast where the shot went in.

Will looked as if he knew the “ cruel boy,” but didn’t mean to betray him, for he said, hastily, — “ Did you ever see a flying squirrel, ma’am?”

“Yes; it was dead, but very curious; and I should have liked to see it fly. It had large black eyes, round ears, and a tapering tail, with the hair disposed flatwise along the sides. The upper part of the body was light-brown; underneath, it was white. A hairy sort of membrane spreads along the sides of the body, and goes down to the toes on its fore and hind legs. This it spreads when flying, or leaping rather, for it keeps them up as the air lifts a kite. They can’t stay up long, so they take care to start from high trees, and when they fall, cling to the lower branches. These leaps are from twelve to fourteen feet, my old book says; and when several go at once, they look like leaves blown about by the wind. When not flying, this membrane is folded up at the sides, and the creature looks much like other squirrels, except its queer tail.

“This sort, live in hollow trees, where they sleep by day, and come out toward night, very lively and busy. They live in flocks, several on one tree, which they seldom quit for the ground, always running along the branches. They have three or four little ones at a time, and store up food like other squirrels. They are easily tamed, and being fond of warmth, like to creep up people’s sleeves or into their pockets.”

“Our gray one used to do that. Tell about that kind, please,” said Will; who didn’t seem in any hurry to talk of his striped one.

“That kind come from northern climates, and they move from place to place. It is said, in Lapland, when on one of their marches they come to a river, they get pieces of bark and launch them, and, sitting in these queer boats, put up their bushy tails for sails, and cross in that way. If a storm rises, the poor little sailors are wrecked, and the people find many dead ones washed ashore. These they rejoice over, and sell their skins. Here, in parts of North America, they do mischief sometimes among the corn, by climbing up and eating the sweet kernels. Once there was a sort of law in Maryland, that every person was to bring four squirrels every year, and to be sure of it, the heads were given to the appointed person. In this way, many thousand squirrels were killed."

"I'd like to live in Maryland," muttered Will; trying to make the dead creature sit up on a leaf, with its tail spread like the gray sailors.

"They are so active, that they are very difficult to shoot, and the best marksmen find it hard to hit them," added grandma; who hated guns, and always expected to see Will brought home in little bits, when he went out with his. "Black squirrels are said to swim great distances, using their tails as rudders. But the striped sort does not take to the water, I believe. They, like the common squirrel, gather food for winter, and carry grain home in their cheek-pouches."

"Yes; this one has got an acorn in one of its cheeks," cried Will, showing it.

"If you had found its hole, you would have found a very curious little grainery. They have many galleries, and several doors, so that when pursued they can pop in easily. There are many rooms, in each of which they put a different sort of food, — acorns in one, corn in another, nuts in a third; and so on. In winter, they live here, sleeping much, but sometimes waking, and feasting sumptuously in spite of bad weather. Fine days, they come out a little, but stay at home a good deal, as we do, and keep warm till spring. They are very fond of their young, and when the mother wishes to carry them about, she rolls each up in a ball, tail out, and takes them in her mouth, as a cat does her kittens. There used to be a family in this old elm, and I enjoyed seeing the good little mother feed and take care of her three lively babies. The cat killed the old one, and brought the tail to show me. I was very sorry; but, being an animal, puss knew no better; so I did not scold her."

Something in this speech made Will look uneasy, as he asked, anxiously, " Do the little ones starve, if the mother gets killed?"

"If they are very young, I suppose they do," began grandma; but Will cried eagerly, " This one's baby was running round with her, and getting acorns; so, I guess it won't die."

"You killed the mother, then?"

"Well, I didn't think; it was only for fun. I'm sorry, and I won't skin it, but make it a first-rate grave," stammered Will; looking ashamed of himself, for he did think now, and saw that his fun was pain and sorrow, death and helplessness, to poor Mrs. Squirrel and her little family.

"Don't look sober at him, he's sorry, and won't do it any more. Tell me if my mole is as nice as he looks?" said Polly; wishing to relieve Will.

Grandma smiled again, and took the plump, velvety mole in her hand.

“Yes; he’s a busy little fellow, and does a deal of hard work with these strong fore-feet and snout. Its eyes are so small that it is sometimes thought they have none, but they have; see, here they are, tiny but bright, and half hidden in the thick fur. They hear wonderfully quick, and don’t need eyes much, living as they do in the dark. They make arches of earth under ground, with pillars and partitions, weaving in grass and roots, and beating the dirt well to make it solid enough to keep out water. Under the main arch they make a mound, and spread a soft bed of leaves for the little ones, who lie high and dry, no matter how damp the weather. Many paths and galleries branch from the nest, and along these the moles run in and out, getting food, and attending to their affairs. In summer, they like meadows to burrow in, the earth being soft. They dig with their paws, and push the dirt up to get it out of the way, which makes what are called ‘ molehills.’ They come out at night to hunt for worms, which they skin in a queer way before eating, and enjoy, as much as the owls enjoy eating the fat moles themselves. They are very affectionate, go in pairs, and don’t care for any society beyond their family. In their dark little houses, they live happily together, with plenty to eat, and few enemies to disturb them; for they shut up the doors when they like, and revel down below, unless water or a spade comes to trouble them.”

“How do you catch them?” asked Will.

“The cat will tell you,” answered the old lady, slyly.

“No; that isn’t fair! I won’t try it, if you’ll tell, grandma.”

“Well, Dr. Darwin says, the best way is, to go early in the day, when the moles are working, and turn up one of their hills with a spade, then pour water into the hole, and out pops little moley in such a great fright, that he may be easily caught. When first taken, it squeaks shrilly, and fights with teeth and claws, for though gentle at home, they can be very fierce abroad, and often have battles with strange moles. A viper, a toad, and a mole were put in a cage, and the mole at once killed the two other prisoners.”

“Smart little thing! I thought moles were a sort of mouse; they look like mice,” said Polly, smoothing the velvet coat of her new acquaintance, while pussy sat purring with all her might, hoping to recover her lost supper.

“No; I believe they belong to the rat family, as they gnaw, and moles do not.”

“What opera tune do young mice sing to their mothers?” broke in Will. “‘ Hear me, Norma (gnaw, ma).’ Now, go on about mice, the field kind; we know house-mice, don’t we, puss?”

“Field-mice have holes in the ground, and lay up nuts and corn. These holes are often divided into two apartments; one is a living- room, the other a dining-room, quite genteel and proper. As they have eight or ten little ones at once, it is a very sensible arrangement, for Mrs. Mouse could never get her meals with so many children under her feet. The nest of the harvest-mouse is very curious, for it is made of grass and straw, plaited together, perfectly round, and about as big as a cricket-ball. The door of the one I saw was so well hidden, that no one could find it; and the nest was so firm and round, that it rolled across a table without breaking or spilling the eight ‘ little blind mice ‘ inside. This nest was found in an English wheat-field, hanging to a thistle. These mice use these nests in summer, and in winter live in the corn- ricks where they are carried at harvest-time.”

“I like mice when they don’t hop quick, and scare me. I wish I had a tame one to play with, they are so soft and cunning,” said Polly.

“I read once about a Scotchman, who trained two mice to spin cotton. The machinery was arranged, so that each of these common mice could twist and reel one hundred or more threads a day; and to do this, the tiny little fellows had each to run over ten miles a day, in their tiny tread-mill. A half-penny worth of oatmeal fed one for a month, and at this rate, each mousie earned about six shillings a year.”

As grandma paused, the children thanked her, and marched soberly away to the garden, to bury the mole and squirrel in the greenest of graves, — a proceeding which much disgusted and disappointed the cat.

VII.

IN August, grandma and the children went to the sea-side, for a visit, and there Will found many new and curious things to examine and talk about. Polly collected pretty shells and sea-weed; Will shot peeps and gulls, studied ships and light-houses; and both splashed, scrambled, and frolicked till they were as stout, lively, and brown as the little fisher-children of the bay.

Grandma used to sit in a comfortable cranny of the rocks, knitting or reading, while the young folks played; and when they grew tired of climbing about, they brought their new-found treasures to her, and rested, while she told stories about them.

“I’ve got a live snail. I picked him off a rock, and wanted to see his horns; but he shut himself up in a great hurry, and I can’t make him come out,” said Will, tapping at the little brown door which Mr. Snail had shut in his face.

“Put him in that pool of water, and let him alone; then he will pop his head out, and you can watch him at your ease,” said grandma, moving Polly’s fleet of clam-shells to make room for the snail.

"Has he got any eyes? How does he walk? Can't he ever take his shell off?" asked Will, lying down on the warm rock, to enjoy his luncheon as luxuriously as possible.

"Yes; he has eyes at the ends of his two longest horns. They look like two black dots; but they are regular eyes, and the snail can move them to and fro, or draw them out of sight, as it likes. Under the two smaller horns is its mouth; and though it seems too soft to bite anything, yet it has eight teeth, and chews leaves, and even bites bits off its own shell with them."

"Is it true that they can mend their shells? I trod on one once, and father said the snail would mend it if I let it be," said Polly, who was making paper sailors to man her pretty white boats.

"They have a slimy substance which hardens when exposed to the air, and with this they mend their broken shells. Even when they seemed crushed to pieces, they can repair the damage, though you can see the places which they mend, for the new shell is fresher than the old; so, the little patches show. They can't grow an entirely fresh shell, however, for the experiment was tried, and failed. Swammerdom carefully took off a shell, and hoped the snail would make a new one. The poor thing tried, but died of cold before it was half done."

"Are these little ones the baby-snails? " asked Will, fishing up some tiny white shells from the pool.

"I think so. The old ones lay eggs as big as small peas, and put them under a clod of earth, or in some cool, moist place. From these eggs are hatched little snails, with their houses all ready on their backs. That sort is the garden-snail. I don't know about the sea-snails, but fancy they are a good deal alike. This kind do harm among the plants, spoiling fruit and young leaves. Another sort are very large, and used to be eaten in Rome. They had snaileries, called Cochlearia, where these creatures were kept, and fed on bran and wine, and when fat enough, boiled or fried, and considered great delicacies."

"Don't believe I should like the slimy things. I'm afraid my big one is dead; it don't stir," said Will, poking the snail, who appeared to have shut up his house for the season.

"Don't be impatient; he'll come when he is ready. No fear of his being dead; for snails can bear a good deal, if all the stories are true. My old book gives two anecdotes, which may interest you. One is of a man, who kept some snails for fifteen years, and then gave them to his little son to play with, supposing that of course the creatures were dead long ago. The boy put them in a basin of water, and left them there. Next day, he came running to tell his father that the shells were walking about the sides of the bowl. M. Simon could not believe it; but, as they lived in the city, he knew the boy could not have found any other snails; and, strange as it seemed, there were the old ones, promenading round the basin, as lively as possible, after their fifteen years’ nap.

They were kept and shown as great curiosities; and if the tale was true, they certainly were remarkable snails. Another person was making a shell-tower for an ornament; and finding her pretty pebbles and sea-shells gave out, she went into the garden, and got a handful of snails. In order to kill them before sticking them on the tower, she poured boiling water over them, and set the bowl away with her other things, to be ready to finish the work next day. But, when she went to the place in the morning, instead of being dead, the snails were out of the basin, sticking all about the table, some examining the tower, and others actually eating the paste that they were to be stuck on with. Having a kind heart, the lady picked them all up, and carried them back to the garden, finishing her work with less pretty shells, rather than be cruel enough to boil the poor snails over again.”

“Tell about the little seal we saw down on the wharf. The man keeps him in a great cask, and feeds him with fish; and he’s very funny, with no ears, and big eyes, and only two flippers, or feet. I poked him, and he made a queer noise, and dived out of sight. But presently, he popped his head up, and winked at us, and wiggled his nose, as he wanted more fish. I asked the man lots of questions; but he only said he caught little Jack in the bay.

As Polly stopped for breath, grandpa replied, “ The common seal is called the sea-calf, and inhabit all the European seas. They are very large, some of them, with round heads, pretty black eyes, and no visible ears. The front legs :<re very short, and the back ones are only used in swimming, being close to the tail. They live on fish; in summer, going on shore a good deal, but taking to the sea in winter. They swim and dive very swiftly, and are hunted for their skins and oil. The Greenlanders could hardly get on without them, they are so useful in many ways. The flesh serves for food; the fat makes oil for lamps, fires, and cooking; the fibres of the sinews are used for thread; the skins for carpets, clothes, tents, and boat-coverings; and of the bones, they make tools of all sorts.”

“How do they hunt them?” asked Will, with his mouth full.

“The men go at night to the caves where the seals live in great numbers. Armed with torches, they row in as far as they can, and getting into good places, begin to shout all at once. This wakes and frightens the seals, who rush out as fast as they can, and in the confusion are easily killed by striking them on the nose, where a slight blow soon finishes them.

“The Ursine seals live in the neighborhood of Kamtchatka. They are very large and fierce, and fight bravely before they can be taken. They live in families, and are very affectionate. The cubs are as playful as puppies, and have mock-fights; while the parents look on with pleasure, caressing those who win. They make a loud noise when angry; low like a cow, when happy; and wail dismally if sick or wounded. Some kinds are easily tamed, and will learn to love and follow a master, like dogs. I saw one once who went creeping about the house when it liked to get out of its tub. It would kiss its keeper with a funny little smack, sigh and shed tears when he left it, and play several tricks if ordered. It fell ill, and its pretty eyes were very pathetic as they followed us about, seeming to ask help. We could do nothing for it, and it died; but my friend kept its skin, which was as soft as velvet.

"I shall enjoy seeing Jack more than ever, now I know something about him. I'm afraid he's homesick, for he sighs and looks as if he wanted his mother. I shall ask the man to let him go; and if he won't, I'll get papa to buy Jack, and then we'll let him swim away."

Will was so interested in Polly's plan about the seal, that he forgot to look at his snail, till grandma told him the little gentleman was out; and there he was, sure enough, moving his horns about, and creeping slowly toward a clam-shell, as if anxious to get aboard, and sail home to his native pool.

VIII.

NO more pleasant out-of- door talks now,” said Will, dolefully, as he looked at the frostbitten garden, and listened to the wild November rain.

“We can remember the pleasant things, and read about them, for grandma says she will lend us the books and explain the pictures,” returned Polly, who sat rocking cosily in her little chair before the fire, enjoying the bright blaze as much as the plump pussy dozing in her lap.

“I’d rather see and hear about live things. I wish birds and bugs and animals didn’t fly away, or go to sleep all winter; for it don’t leave us any queer or interesting things to examine and talk about. Can’t you think of some nice live animal or insect to tell of, grandma? I feel like hearing stories, and so does Polly.”

As Will spoke, grandma put down her book, and answered, kindly, “ All animals don’t migrate or sleep. I see two interesting ones in the room now.”

The children stared about them, but did not guess what she meant.

“Is it the flies on the window-pane, and the mice in the wall? “ asked Will.

“No; it’s two larger creatures.”

“She means us!” cried Polly, thinking she had got it.

“I said animals; you are human beings. Don’t you find Puss and Snap interesting? “ said grandma, pointing to the dog, curled up under the sofa, and Mrs. Mouser, purring luxuriously on her little mistress’s knee.

“But we know all about them.”

“Not everything about their relations; for your pets are rather stupid, commonplace specimens. I read some pleasant anecdotes about cats and dogs, the other day, which will show you how faithful, wise, and affectionate these dumb creatures are.”

“We should like that,” said both the children, as Polly put down the cat’s-cradle she was making, and Will spread himself on the rug, with Snap at his side.

“Which shall I tell first?”

“Cats for Polly, dogs for me; and tell Polly’s first,” said Will, for, in learning to be kind to helpless creatures, he had learned to be kind to every one, and that is true politeness.

“At a certain convent in Paris, the cook used to divide the dinner into a dozen plates, and the brothers would come and get their portions. One day, while the cook went to ring the bell in the hall to call them, some one stole one of the bits of meat. This happened several times; and the cook, at last, resolved to watch in the kitchen, and see who did it. While he stayed in the room, no one came, and, the meat was all safe. So, he decided to stay always, and had a whistle to call the brothers. But the sly thief was not cheated in this way; and soon after, while Mr. Cook was guarding the dinner, the door-bell rang, and he had to go. Nobody was at the door, and he ran back in a rage, to find one plate empty again. Next day, when the bell rang, instead of answering it, the cook hid in a closet, and a minute after the bell had sounded, in at the window bounded the big cat, and whisked out again with her prize. Anxious to see how she managed the bell, the cook posted himself at a side-window, from which he could see the door. In France, many of the bells are attached to ropes, such as we have inside our houses. Pussy ran and caught the string in her paws, took a good swing which jingled the bell, and then scampered away to get her meat. The monks were so amused at her cunning, that they ordered an extra dish to be set for her every day.”

“Well, that’s funny; but if remarkable cats do such things, I’m glad mine is stupid,” said Polly, stroking her pet, who purred louder than ever, as if she quite agreed with her.

“The other story I read was of an English cat, whose master taught her to catch birds and bring them to him without hurting them; for he kept many in cages, to study their ways before he killed and stuffed them. This cat formed a friendship with a little dog in the house, and used to invite him to dine with her whenever she had anything nice. The dog was a naughty little fellow, always getting into disgrace, and being whipped. The switch used on these occasions was kept in a corner of the kitchen; and this stick used to vanish so mysteriously that the master could not understand it. There were no children about; the servants disliked the dog, and would not have so befriended him; yet stick after stick disappeared, apparently without hands. At last, it was discovered that the affectionate old cat carried it off in her mouth, rather than let her little friend be whipped.”

“Three cheers for pussy! “ cried Polly; and her own cat took the compliment to herself, moving her tail with a stately air, and opening her yellow eyes like a pair of little moons.

“My other story is about a dog, and was written by a famous Dr. Brown. He was walking in a London street, when something gently pulled him by the leg; and looking down, he saw a dirty, shabby little terrier, who watched him with imploring eyes, and began to beg. The kind gentleman patted the poor thing, and went on; but the gentle nip came again, and again the intelligent eyes seemed imploring something, and the muddy little paws begged eagerly. The man stopped, and looked at the dog, trying to see what he wanted. This seemed to satisfy the terrier, who ran off in a hurry, stopping now and then to look back, and bark, as if saying, ‘ Come on; oh, do come on!’ Dr. Brown followed, till they came to the back gate of an old empty house. Here, the dog ran under the gate, and barked on the other side, as if inviting his new friend in. The gate was locked, too high to climb over, and the gentleman was about to give it up, when the dog’s voice was heard at another part of the wall, whining eagerly. Dr. Brown followed the sound, and found a broken place where he could squeeze through. Little Nip (as he was afterward named), was delighted at this, and ran frisking to a shed, where stood an old coach-body, without wheels. Looking in, Dr. Brown saw a fine pointer, with five puppies, the poor mother half-starved, and full of anxiety about her little ones, who were howling with hunger. A sad sight, for it was evident that the mother dared not leave her family long enough to find food for herself, and there was no one to feed and comfort her. Good little Nip had done his best; but, as he had no home or master of his own, he could not help much, and so had gone to find better friends for the starving family. Of course, the kind man took them all home; and you can imagine how happy the poor mother was when she was well fed, and her yelping children fast asleep in a warm bed. Being a valuable dog, who had probably been lost, she and her puppies were sold after a time; but Nip was kept by Dr. Brown, and for sixteen years, was a good, happy, and faithful little friend.”

“By George! I like that! “ cried Will, so loud that Snap jumped up with a bark, as if he said, “ So do I.” “ Now, old fellow, you just remember that story; and whenever you find any poor, hurt, or hungry dogs, you let me know, and we’ll see to ‘em,” added Will; and Snap listened with so much intelligence in his soft brown eyes, that it seemed as if he understood what was said to him; for he wagged his tail, and licked his master’s face, in a grateful and approving manner.

“Since we began our talks this summer, I have set up a scrap- book,” said grandma, “ in which I put all the anecdotes about birds, insects, and animals, that I find in the papers; and many of the things I have told you came from that. I think it would be a good plan for you to help me fill my book, by writing down all the little discoveries you make about the habits of creatures, and saving any accounts of them you may come across, and the stories about them others tell you. In this way, we shall make a pleasant book, which we shall enjoy reading, and showing to our friends."

"I'd like that," said Polly; " for now I've got fond of watching bugs and flies, and all sorts of creatures I used to hate; and I see so many new and pretty things about them, that I want other children to know how nice they are."

"The fellows at our school often tell jolly stories about their dogs and pets, that I like to hear; so, I'll get them to help me, and when we go hunting and fishing, we'll remember about the creatures we see, and write it down," added Will, pleased with the new idea.

"I think I will take for you a new little paper, called ' Our Dumb Animals,' which is got up by some wise and charitable gentlemen, who hope to help the poor creatures who cannot help themselves, by lessening the wrongs done them through ignorance, carelessness, or cruelty. In this excellent paper, we shall find many touching stories and interesting facts for our scrap-book, and can lend it, besides," said grandma, glad to see that her simple little experiment had done some good to the children. For now, Will shot no more song-birds, never stoned frogs, drowned cats, or whipped his pony ; and Polly neither screamed at spiders, nor ran away from toads ; but found something beautiful or interesting in all these little neighbors, and was learning the sweetest charity toward whatever was ugly, weak, or friendless.

"What will we call the scraps when we get all the pages full?" asked Polly.

"As he will probably do most toward filling it," said grandma, "we will call it' Will's Wonder-Book.'"

Another day I will tell you about my visit to a Zoological Garden.

IX.

BEING alone in London, yet wishing to celebrate the day, I decided to pay my respects to the lions at the Zoological Gardens. A lovely place it was, and I enjoyed myself immensely; for Mayday in England is just what it should be, mild, sunny, flowery, and springlike. As I walked along the well-kept paths, between white and rosy hawthorn hedges, I kept coming upon new and curious sights; for the birds and beasts are so skilfully arranged, that it is more like travelling through a strange and pleasant country than visiting a menagerie.

The first thing I saw, was a great American bison ; and I was so glad to meet with any one from home, that I'd have patted him with pleasure, if he had shown any cordiality toward me. He didn't, however, but stared savagely with his fiery eyes, and put down his immense head with a sullen snort, as if he'd have tossed me with great satisfaction. I did not blame him, for the poor fellow was homesick, doubtless, for his own wide prairies and the free life he had lost. So I threw him some fresh clover, and went on to the pelicans.

I never knew before what handsome birds they were; not graceful, but with such snowy plumage, tinged with pale pink and faint yellow. They had just had their bath, and stood arranging their feathers with their great bills, uttering a queer cry now and then, and nodding to one another sociably. When fed, they gobbled up the fish, never stopping to swallow it, till the pouches under their bills were full; then they leisurely emptied them, and seemed to enjoy their lunch with the grave deliberation of regular Englishmen.

Being in a hurry to see the lions, I went on to the long row of cages, and there found a splendid sight. Six lions and lionesses, in three or four different cages, sitting or standing in dignified attitudes, and eyeing the spectators with a mild expression in their fine eyes. One lioness was ill and lay on her bed, looking very pensive, while her mate moved restlessly about her, evidently anxious to do something for her, and much afflicted by her suffering. I liked this lion very much, for, though the biggest, he was very gentle, and had a noble face.

The tigers were rushing about, as tigers usually are; some creeping noiselessly to and fro, some leaping up and down, and some washing their faces with their velvet paws. All looked and acted so like cats, that I wasn't at all surprised to hear one of them purr when the keeper scratched her head. It was a very loud and large purr, but no fireside pussy could have done it better, and every one laughed at the sound.

There were pretty spotted leopards, panthers, and smaller varieties of the same species. I sat watching them a long time, longing to let some of the wild things out for a good run, they seemed so unhappy, barred in those small dens.

Suddenly, the lions began to roar, the tigers to snarl, and all to get very much excited about something, sniffing at the openings, thrusting their paws through the bars, and lashing their tails impatiently. I couldn't imagine what the trouble was, till, far down the line, I saw a man with a barrow full of lumps of raw meat. This was their dinner; and, as they were fed but once a day, they were ravenous. Such roars and howls and cries as arose, while the man went slowly down the line, gave one a good idea of the sounds to be heard in Indian forests and jungles. The lions behaved best, for they only paced up and down, with an occasional cry; but the tigers were quite frantic, for they tumbled one over the other, shook the cages, and tried to reach the bystanders just out of reach behind the bar that kept us at a safe distance. One lady had a fright, for the wind blew the end of her shawl within reach of a tiger's great claw, and he clutched it, trying to drag her nearer. The shawl came off, and the poor lady ran away screaming, as if a whole family of wild beasts were after her.

When the lumps of meat were thrown in, it was curious to see how differently the animals behaved. The tigers snarled and fought and tore, and got so savage, I was very grateful that they were safely shut up. In a few minutes, nothing but white bones remained; and then they howled for more. One little leopard was better bred than the others, for he went up on a shelf in the cage, and ate his dinner in a quiet proper manner, which was an example to the rest.

The lions ate in dignified silence, all but my favorite, who carried his share to his sick mate, and, by every gentle means in his power, tried to make her eat. She was too ill, however, and turned away with a plaintive moan which seemed to grieve him sadly. He wouldn’t touch his dinner, but lay down near her, with the lump between his paws, as if guarding it for her; and there I left him, patiently waiting, in spite of his hunger, till his mate could share it with him. As I took a last look at his fine old face, I named him Douglas, and walked away, humming to myself the lines of the ballad, —

“Douglas, Douglas, Tender and true.”
As a contrast to the wild beasts,

I went to see the monkeys, who lived in a fine large house, all to themselves. Here was every variety, from the great ugly chimpanzee, to the funny little fellows who played like boys and cut up all sorts of capers. A mamma sat tending her baby, and looking so like a little old woman, that I laughed till the grey monkey with the blue nose scolded at me. He was a cross old party, and sat huddled up in the straw, scowling at every one, like an ill-tempered old bachelor. Half a dozen little ones teased him capitally by dropping bits of bread, nut-shells, and straws down on him from above, as they climbed about the perches or swung by their tails. One poor little chap had lost the curly end of his tail, — I’m afraid the grey one bit it off, — and kept trying to swing like the others, forgetting that the strong curly end was what he held on with. He would run up the bare boughs, and give a jump, expecting to catch and swing, but the lame tail wouldn’t hold him, and down he’d go, bounce on to the straw. At first, he’d sit and stare about him, as if much amazed to find himself there; then he’d scratch his little round head, and begin to scold violently, which seemed to delight the other monkeys; and finally, he’d examine his poor little tail, and appear to understand the misfortune which had befallen him. The funny expression of his face was irresistible, and I enjoyed seeing him very much, and gave him a bun to comfort him when I went away.

The snake-house came next, and I went in, on my way to visit the rhinoceros family. I rather like snakes, since I had a tame green one, who lived under the doorstep, and would come out and play with me on sunny days. These snakes I found very interesting, only they got under their blankets and wouldn’t come out, and I wasn’t allowed to poke them; so I missed seeing several of the most curious. An ugly cobra laid and blinked at me through the glass, looking quite as dangerous as he was. There were big and little snakes, — black, brown, and speckled, lively and lazy, pretty and plain ones, — but I liked the great boa best.

When I came to his cage, I didn’t see anything but the branch of a tree, such as

I had seen in other cages, for the snakes to wind up and down. “ Where is he, I wonder? I hope he hasn’t got out,” I said to myself, thinking of a story I read once of a person in a menagerie, who turned suddenly and saw a great boa gliding toward him. As I stood, wondering if the big worm could be under the little flat blanket before me, the branch began to move all at once, and with a start, I saw a limb swing down to stare at me with the boa’s glittering eyes. He was so exactly the color of the bare bough, and lay so still, I had not seen him till he came to take a look at me. A very villainous-looking reptile he was, and I felt grateful that I didn’t live in a country where such unpleasant neighbors might pop in upon you unexpectedly. He was kind enough to take a promenade, and show me his size, which seemed immense, as he stretched himself, and then knotted his rough, greyish body into a great loop, with the fiery-eyed head in the middle. He was not one of the largest kind, but I was quite satisfied, and left him to his dinner of rabbits, which I hadn’t the heart to stay and see him devour alive.

I was walking toward the camel’s pagoda, when, all of a sudden, a long, dark, curling thing came over my shoulder, and I felt warm breath in my face. “ It’s the boa!” I thought, and gave a skip which carried me into the hedge, where I stuck, much to the amusement of some children riding on the elephant whose trunk had frightened me. He had politely tried to tell me to clear the way, which I certainly had done with all speed. Picking myself out of the hedge, I walked beside him, examining his clumsy feet, and peering up at his small intelligent eye. I’m very sure he winked at me, as if enjoying the joke, and kept poking his trunk into my pocket, hoping to find something eatable.

I felt as if I had got into a foreign country, as I looked about me, and saw elephants and camels walking among the trees; flocks of snow-white cranes stalking over the grass, on their long scarlet legs; striped zebras racing in their paddock; queer kangaroos hopping about, with little ones in their pouches; pretty antelopes chasing one another; and, in an immense wire-covered aviary, all sorts of brilliant birds were flying about, as gaily as if at home.

One of the curiosities was a sea-cow, who lived in a tank of salt water, and came at the keeper’s call to kiss him, and flounder on its flippers along the margin of the tank after a fish. It was very like a seal, only much larger, and had four fins instead of two. Its eyes were lovely, so dark and soft and liquid; but its mouth was not pretty, and I declined one of the damp kisses which it was ready to dispense at word of command.

The great polar bear lived next door, and spent his time splashing in and out of a pool of water, or sitting on a block of ice, panting, as if the mild spring day was blazing midsummer. He looked very unhappy, and I thought it a pity that they didn’t invent a big refrigerator for him.

These are not half of the wonderful creatures I saw, but I have not room to tell more; only I advise all who can, to pay a visit to the Zoological Gardens, when they go to London, for it is one of the most interesting sights in that fine old city.

Our next story shall be about a wonderful monkey.

X.

BRYANT had a monkey which his sailor brother had brought him from “ that land of wonders,” the island of Java. Its name was Jacko, and it was of the short-tailed species. Some monkeys have no tails; others have short, and others long tails. To distinguish these, the no-tailed monkey is commonly called an ape; the one with a short tail, a baboon; and the long-tailed one, a monkey. So, you see, that when “ The monkey married the baboon’s sister,” he did not go out of the family, but took his cousin as his wife; and, if we may credit the rhyme, was exceedingly fond of her, though his way of showing it was rather boisterous. Now, you must know that the monkey is not a quadruped, like other animals; nor is he two-legged and two-handed, like man; but his feet are all hands, though his fingers are not all thumbs, as we sometimes say of those of a clumsy boy, for he uses them very dexterously; and his long tail serves as a sort of fifth hand.

There are many varieties of the monkey-tribe. Those of the Old World are not at all like those of the New. In South America, there is a kind called the Howler, that often terrifies the traveller with his frightful noise. Another, called the Spider monkey, hooks his tail to the branch of a tree, and drops down upon you, like a great black spider, swinging from his web. Then, there is the Weeper monkey, with its plaintive cry, like that of a human being; and the Capuchin monkey, with an ashy-pale face, and a black crown, like a monk’s cowl. In Africa, there is the King monkey, whose head is covered with long flowing hair, like a wig; and the Variegated monkey, who, by the way, is a notorious gamb’ler (gam- boiler) and blackleg; with brown body, green head, and yellow cheeks; and the Diana monkey, with a white crescent on its forehead. The Negro monkey, with soft and silky black hair, is a native of Java, and is hunted for his fur by the inhabitants.

Jacko, as I have said, was born in the wonderful land of Java. He was rather a wild young monkey, and, I dare say, had run away from home, unbeknown to his mother, when he was caught by a sailor, who had leave to go ashore, and impressed as a seaman on board the vessel of which Bryant’s brother was mate. Poor little Jacko! When he found himself chained to the deck, the laughing-stock of the jolly tars, I don’t doubt he repented of his naughtiness, and resolved never to do so again, if he could once get back to his beautiful forest home. He behaved pretty well on the passage, except when John Chinaman attempted to come up from below, for a little fresh air. At sight of his pig-tail, which I suppose Jacko considered an encroachment upon monkey’s rights, he would fly into a tearing passion. Once or twice too, he got loose, and running up aloft, slyly let go a rope.

Then down rattled the heavy sail, and up sprang the sailors at the command of the mate, to make all right again; and there sat Jacko on a spar, as demurely as if he had nothing to do with the mischief. It was late in autumn when Jacko landed in America, and that winter he suffered much from the cold. He had never seen the snow before, and it made him melancholy. Bryant was very kind to him, and gave him a warm bed; but he sat most of the time, crouched in a little closet, close by the kitchen-fire, and was the most homesick-looking monkey you ever saw. When the spring came, he recovered his spirits; and the pranks he played then kept the whole household in commotion. He would snap his chain, and scamper to the top of a great elm- tree that stood in the yard; and up after him would go Bryant and his brothers, to the detriment of their pantaloons, and the discomfort of their good mother, who had them to patch; and just as they reached the limb where Jacko sat, off he would jump to the next tree, and grin and chatter, as much as to say, “ Don’t you wish you could?”

Bryant’s father had a fine orchard, and was very proud of his fruit. He often used to lead us children from tree to tree, carefully picking for us the handsomest apples; but no sooner were our backs turned, than Jacko, who had watched the performance, would mount the tree, and shake down a golden shower of the precious fruit.

One day, the family was startled by a terrible noise, like the falling of a chimney. They rushed upstairs, and opened the door leading to the garret, when down tumbled boxes, barrels, everything movable, and much that till then had been thought immovable. When at length a passage was cleared, Jacko, the author of all the confusion, was discovered, making his escape through the window to the great pippin-tree by which he had entered. It seemed as if he had been seized with a sudden spirit of enquiry. The cradle was rocking in a corner of the garret, as it had not rocked since Bryant was a baby. Round and round buzzed the great spinning-wheel, as it had not worked since the days when the yarn for his little socks was spun. The farmer's seed-corn was shelled and ground and sifted, by the nimble jaws and paws of the monkey-miller; and the house-mother's hops and sage and sweet-marjoram mingled their odors in a promiscuous heap upon the floor. All the almanacs, from the first number of the " Old Farmer's," gave evidence of recent consultation; newspapers had been opened, and their contents literally devoured. But what seemed to have been the special object of his spite, or fancy (for his friends have never been able to determine whether he was moved to their destruction by his disapproval of the political articles therein contained, or his hunger for literary food), was two bound volumes of the New-England Galaxy, a paper printed in Boston, many years ago.

How long it took to bring order out of Jacko's chaos, and how much longer to catch him after one of his escapades, I cannot stop to tell; but this is a specimen of the wild life of Bryant's monkey for two years. Then he was seized with a sudden illness. He did not seem to suffer violent pain; but he would not eat, and turned upon his friends, who strove to comfort him, a helpless, and sorrowful, pleading look, whose pathos touched their hearts for the poor little prisoner. Then he died, and was buried tenderly at the foot of the great apple-tree, where he had frolicked so gaily; but, as Bryant patted the last sod on the little fellow's grave, he told his brother that he never wanted another pet of that kind; for he had been thinking, during Jacko's illness, that it was rather a cruel thing to take a merry little monkey from its free, playful life in the tropics, and bring him in chains to our bleak northern clime.

"Mischievous as a monkey," is a proverb everywhere; and the monkey never belies the proverb. Another friend of mine had one, whose favorite exploit was, with one blow of his long arm, to sweep the mantle clear of all its ornaments; and when bust, and bronze, and Bohemian-ware lay in fragments at her feet, and she turned to chastise the malicious imp, he would turn the tables upon her, by winding her up in his chain; and there, as if encircled by the coils of an anaconda, she would have to stand, till some member of the family came to her relief. Yet, with all his wickedness, the monkey, of all animals, most closely resembles man; and I have heard the great naturalist of Cambridge say, that he could not suppress a shudder at the sense of horrible relationship he felt, when a young monkey, at the Jardin des Plantes, put his arm about his neck. The same gentleman tells the following anecdote, which shows the wonderful instinct of these imitative little animals: — He had been amusing himself with a game of ball with the monkey, who promptly returned the professor’s pitch, when the latter quickly substituted for the ball a small cocoa-nut. The monkey paused, held it to his ear and shook it, and detecting the cheat, threw it with all his might to the ground; and having thus cracked the shell, eagerly drank up its milky contents.

JIMMY JUMPER.

SOME time ago, my friend, Miss Wideawake, and I made a charming visit at a country-seat named Elmhill. We spent the daytime with the grown- people of the house, but as soon as tea was over, we went to the library with the children, and played games and told stories.

Miss Wideawake's stories were delightful, at least, the children thought so; and I am going to write out some of them for the readers of the " Museum." I must, however, skip the questions and exclamations of her young listeners; nor can I tell how Geordie nearly broke his neck in trying to climb like an opossum; or how Harry spoiled the jackstraws, making a nest like a swan; or how Nellie screamed like a cockatoo, or how Maggie chattered like a magpie. All this — the spice, as one may say — must be left out, or Uncle Robert will certainly say, " Too long;" and toss the manuscript into his waste-basket. Even now, I fancy him looking it over, and thinking, " Why can't people come to the point at once?"

So, without further explanations, I will give my friend's account of her Jimmy Jumper.

"When I was with my grandparents in Tasmania," said Miss Wideawake, — "Tasmania is an island, lying southeast of the southern extremity of Australia, — when I was in Tasmania, I had an opossum named Jimmy Jumper. I never saw an American opossum; but the Tasmanian is a pretty creature, growing somewhat larger than a very large cat, — dark-gray, black, dark-brown, or golden-brown in color, with delicate ears, brilliantly dark eyes, a nose and whiskers shaped like those of a mouse, and a peculiarly pleasing expression of face. The female cannot spare her fore- paws to hold her baby opossum as human mothers hold their darling infants, so she has a pouch into which she puts it as soon as it is born; and in this soft, warm cradle it lies at ease, eating and sleeping until it has acquired some size and strength, when it grows curious about the world it has entered, and pops up its head in a manner very funny to see. By-and-by, it desires to feel the sunshine and to nibble the fresh grass, when it hops out; but if tired, hungry, or frightened, it returns to its resting-place until it is too large for the cozy nest. Possy has a wonderful tail, long, strong, and able to cling so tightly that the owner can swing his whole weight by it and even when shot in this position, he will remain hanging a minute before dropping to the ground.

"It seems almost cruel to kill the merry creatures, but people do very often; sometimes for their fur, which makes handsome rugs, sometimes for their fat little bodies which are fed to dogs, and sometimes because of their naughty pranks with the farmers' crops. Moonlight nights are dangerous for possy, for then the hunters can see him as he comes out of his house, — usually a hole in a tall tree, a peppermint-tree, if he can find one, — and frolics like a squirrel among the branches, or runs down to feast upon the grass and herbs below. Great is his glee when the corn fills its kernels with sweet milk, but a field of wheat-stacks, carefully bound, and placed in long rows like soldiers at a review, drives him almost frantic with pleasure. He proclaims the discovery to his kindred, and invites all the kangaroos in the neighborhood to partake of the banquet. Soon the fun grows furious. The tricksy creatures unbind the sheaves and let down the nodding heads, they chase each other over and through the fallen grain, they nibble here and there, wasting much more than they consume, and leaving traces of their revelry all over the once well-ordered field.

"Grandpapa, who was one of the neatest of farmers, always looked displeased when opossums were mentioned; and often sent Tom, one of the farm-servants, to shoot them. Neither of them told me about it, however, for I could not bear the thought of their being killed; and so, when I asked, ' What is to be the game tonight, Tom?' he answered,' Devils, miss,' and passed gravely cm.

"I didn't care for the devils; indeed, I rather liked to have them put out of the way; for though they are a species of opossum, they are ferocious animals, always prowling about at night after sheep and poultry; and I feared for my pets among the flocks and in the fowl-yard. I, therefore, slept quietly through the hunts, which I certainly should not have done, had I seen in fancy my sprightly favorites cut down in the midst of their merry gambols. Then Tom really shot or trapped a good many devils, and showed me their skins; also native cats, which were mischievous when alive, and good for nothing after they were dead. He killed a wolf, too, now and then; so that I suspected nothing until I was enlightened by a present of a baby-opossum.

"'You see, I couldn't help it,' said Tom, in an apologetic way; 'I really couldn't. The doe, she was scatterin' the wheat like mad, and bitin' it, and jumpin' on it, and it wa'nt in human nature, leastways in farmer nature, not to raise my gun and pull the trigger.

She dropped dead, miss. She never know'd what hurt her; and I jest took this little feller out of her pouch and brought it to you.'

"'Poor little mother! poor little orphan!' I said, sorrowfully; 'but I thank you, Tom, ever so much. I suppose they ought to be killed, at least some of them, for they are very destructive to the grain; and I walked slowly away to ask if I might keep my treasure.

"'Yes, if you choose,' replied grandpapa; ' but, mark my words, you will wish the rascal dead in a week.'

"'I am afraid he will be more troublesome than amusing,' said grandmamma, with a faint sigh.

"'Ye'll be main glad to git red on't,' said the carpenter, who made the cage.

"I was very indignant at these repeated warnings. It seemed so hard-hearted to say such things about a baby-possy, particularly about one who had just lost his mother; but I listened in silence, resolved to admire and love my pet enough for the whole family put together, and fancied myself triumphantly receiving the acknowledgments of the different members when they should become convinced of his many excellences, — an expectation which, by the way, was never fulfilled.

"Possy was about as large as a red squirrel when he came to me. He had grayish-brown fur, and a sweet winning face. I called him ' Jimmy Jumper,' in anticipation of his future activity, and found no occasion to change his name. He passed the day in a bed of wool and hay, but at dusk, he awoke, ready for supper and fun. He ate neatly enough to shame some little boys and girls at the family table, for he took the bread out of his sweetened milk, held it in his forepaws, which were furnished with long, slender toes, and swallowed quietly, as if he had been trained to good manners all his life. Soon I added parsley, nuts, and grass to his bill of fare, with sugar for dessert, of which he was extremely fond.

"After a time, Jimmy learned to open the door of his cage. I was proud of this accomplishment, and secretly vexed because nobody appeared as pleased as myself. ' Poor, dear little fellow,' I said; ' if you were a cockatoo, or a kangaroo, or Dog Floss, or Puss Silvertail, there would be fuss enough made over you; but, never mind, you shall have everything that a possy can have while you belong to me.'

"So I put a small table in the hall, on which I laid my pet's supper, and every day I fastened a fresh acacia-bush beside, as a reminder of his native woods.

This proved most acceptable to Jimmy, who cantered into the house, scrambled up the tree, hooked his tail round an upper branch, and while swinging lightly to and fro took his food from the dish, and swallowed it, head downward. I used to fear he would choke; but when I remonstrated with him on the impropriety of his position, and tried to set him right, he gave me so decidedly to understand, that he knew his own business best, that I afterward kept my anxiety to myself.

"After supper, Jimmy's season of activity began; and such activity! The large, well-lighted sitting-room appeared to him much the best place for his pranks, and if he were shut out, away he scampered to the veranda, and popped in through an open window. If that resource failed him, back he came, and raced up the wall to the top of the door, calling and scolding, and ready to dart through if it were left ajar for a moment. This accomplished, how his eyes glittered! how innocent and unconscious he looked while plotting his small mischief! how he brushed his whiskers with his forepaw, or observed his tail until his plans were formed! and then, how he dashed ahead, minding nothing and nobody! Scud, scud, across the piano, scattering the music-sheets as he ran; up the bookcase in a twinkling, for a view of the situation, dangling by his tail from the long hook put up for a bird-cage; down to the floor with a thump, to play at hide-and-seek in my skirts; up the back of my chair, to pull my braids, or tickle my ear with a half nibble; then pounce upon the table, eager for that fun of all fun, the upsetting of my work-basket, that he might see the spools roll about, and watch me as I pursued and captured the runaways. Nothing but a thunder-storm could keep him quiet at night. That was effectual. No matter how fully bent upon mischief he might be, the first distant peal, the first flash of lightning, sent him to his favorite hiding-place, a game-bag which usually hung in the hall. There, with his head thrust quite into a corner, and nothing visible from the outside but his overhanging tail, he remained, silent and motionless, until long after the shower had passed by.

"These antics, although vastly amusing at first, were, I must confess, rather wearisome after a time. I fondly hoped that increasing age might make my pet more careful, more considerate, less dangerous to the little conveniences and ornaments scattered about the rooms; but I hoped in vain. He continued just as giddy- headed, just as fleet-footed, and just as merry as ever, while his greater size made him much more destructive. Then, his habit of hooking himself to anything which would support him, and dropping unexpectedly on or in whatever happened to be beneath, was uncomfortable, to say the least. Sometimes he frightened a guest by a sudden descent to his head; sometimes he set Silvertail to growling and spitting by an equally familiar greeting; once he nearly terrified me out of my senses by bouncing upon me at night, after my nerves had been shaken by the death of a favorite dog from the bite of a snake; once he splashed into a great bowl of lemonade; and once he upset a dressing-glass and broke it to pieces.

"Jimmy tried that game once too often, and the occasion was this. Some English people of distinction, named Drayton, were visiting our next neighbor, and grandmamma invited them to a grand dinner which was fixed for seven o'clock in the evening. The whole house was put in gala trim; and I obtained permission to wear my very best dress, a blue silk, with pretty trimmings. Jimmy had his supper in his cage, which was fastened securely, as it was supposed; and the weather being warm, the doors and windows were left open, that the slight breeze which was stirring might find its way through the rooms.

"I meant to dress very early, that I might have plenty of time to decorate the table with cut flowers, but just as I was going to my room for that purpose, Tom brought me his cap full of young quails. The tiny, downy, brown things were so lovely, that I lingered over them longer than I was aware; and when I entered the dining-room with my blossoms, I found that I must make all possible haste. In my hurry, I dropped my handkerchief, and as I stooped to recover it, a light breeze came puff, puff, and sent it quite under the sideboard. I reached farther and farther, and finally almost lay down on the floor in my eagerness to seize it:. Before I could rise, bump, thump, and a great blow fell upon my back. I thought my spine was broken. I imagined a horrid snake had darted upon me; but in a moment, I perceived that Jimmy had escaped from his cage, run up the sideboard, curled his tail round the stem of a tall glass dish of preserves, and let himself down on me, bringing his anticipated support with him. Over went the dish, breaking into fragments in the fall; away scampered Jimmy, with a gleeful chuckle aggravating to hear; and down poured the sweetmeats, flooding my skirt, running round my waist, trickling over my neck, and staining my lace sleeves with great splashes of crimson.

"I screamed; and the whole household rushed in, with uplifted hands, eyes wide open, and every variety of outcry and question. Dear, gentle grandmamma, flushed and worried, came as near me as her holiday garments would permit, asking anxiously, 'Are you hurt, my darling? My love, are you cut?'

"Dear, irritable grandpapa danced up and down the room, calling, ' Put him out! Catch him! Kill the rascal!'

"Tom and John, and Betsy and Clerie, following the master's commands, made vigorous dashes at the rogue, who raced across the sideboard, darted up the wall, and finally dashed through the open window to his cage, on which he perched himself, chuckling and laughing, and apparently challenging the entire family to a trial of speed.

“In the midst of the commotion, the guests arrived. My grand parents went to receive them; and I, gathering up my soiled skirts, fled to my chamber. After my blue silk, my wardrobe offered nothing more showy than a plain white muslin; but when I had placed in my hair a cluster of the richly-scented white-fringed stars of the peppermint-tree, which happened to be in blossom, and tied a blue sash round my waist, I was surprised to find myself less self-conscious, more free, more at ease, and, therefore, in more really lady-like trim than when arrayed in the unlucky garments which had been so unexpectedly spoiled. So, I recovered my spirits, and went to the drawing-room, not only contented, but happy.

“The introductions were over, and I was just seating myself beside a pretty girl of my own age, when there was a skirr and chuckle and behold, my pet was on my shoulder, greedily catching at the long, narrow peppermint leaves intermingled with the snowy blossoms which adorned my braids.

“‘The rascal!’ exclaimed grandpapa, his anger rising again at sight of the offender; whereupon, grandmamma gave a lively account of the recent disaster, not omitting my discomfiture at the ruin of my finest dress, or the sentence passed upon the merry, teasing rogue, who was to be shot the next morning, so soon as he should be fairly asleep.

“Tears filled my eyes at this mournful prospect for my poor favorite, which Mr. Drayton saw, and he at once declared that he should be only too happy to accept possy as a gift for his five- years’ old son, who would be delighted with this addition to his little menagerie.

“The evening passed charmingly. The dinner was excellent, the conversation was animated, Miss Drayton sang sweetly; and when our guests departed, they took Jimmy with them. I never saw him again, but I learned that he lived comfortably with his new friends until he was killed by a strange dog belonging to a neighboring hunter.”

AUNT JO'S SCRAP-BAG VOLUME 1

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Alcott, 1886

PREFACE.

As grandmothers rummage their piece-bags and bundles in search of gay odds and ends to make gifts with which to fill the little stockings that hang all in a row on Christmas Eve, so I have gathered together some stories, old and new, to amuse the large family that has so rapidly and beautifully grown up about me.

I hope that when they promenade in night-caps and gowns to rifle the plump stockings, the little ‘dears’ will utter an ‘Oh!’ of pleasure, and give a prance of satisfaction, as they pull out this small gift from Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag.

Christmas Holidays,
1871-72.

MY BOYS.

Feeling that I have been unusually fortunate in my knowledge of a choice and pleasing variety of this least appreciated portion of the human race, I have a fancy to record some of my experiences, hoping that it may awaken an interest in other minds, and cause other people to cultivate the delightful, but too often neglected boys, who now run to waste, so to speak.

I have often wondered what they thought of the peculiar treatment they receive, even at the hands of their nearest friends. While they are rosy, roly-poly little fellows they are petted and praised, adorned and adored, till it is a miracle that they are not utterly ruined. But the moment they outgrow their babyhood their trials begin, and they are regarded as nuisances till they are twenty-one, when they are again received into favor.

Yet that very time of neglect is the period when they most need all manner of helps, and ought to have them. I like boys and oysters raw; so, though good manners are always pleasing, I don't mind the rough outside burr which repels most people, and perhaps that is the reason why the burrs open and let me see the soft lining and taste the sweet nut hidden inside.

My first well-beloved boy was a certain Frank, to whom I clung at the age of seven with a devotion which I fear he did not appreciate. There were six girls in the house, but I would have nothing to say to them, preferring to tag after Frank, and perfectly happy when he allowed me to play with him. I regret to say that the small youth was something of a tyrant, and one of his favorite amusements was trying to make me cry by slapping my hands with books, hoop-sticks, shoes, anything that came along capable of giving a good stinging blow. I believe I endured these marks of friendship with the fortitude of a young Indian, and felt fully repaid for a blistered palm by hearing Frank tell the other boys, 'She's a brave little thing, and you can't make her cry.'

My chief joy was in romping with him in the long galleries of a piano manufactory behind our house. What bliss it was to mount one of the cars on which the workmen rolled heavy loads from room to room, and to go thundering down the inclined plains, regardless of the crash that usually awaited us at the bottom! If I could have played foot-ball on the Common with my Frank and Billy Babcock, life could have offered me no greater joy at that period. As the prejudices of society forbid this sport, I revenged myself by driving hoop all around the mall without stopping, which the boys could *not* do.

I can remember certain happy evenings, when we snuggled in sofa corners and planned tricks and ate stolen goodies, and sometimes Frank would put his curly head in my lap and let me stroke it when he was tired. What the girls did I don't recollect; their domestic plays were not to my taste, and the only figure that stands out from the dimness of the past is that jolly boy with a twinkling eye. This memory would be quite radiant but for one sad thing — a deed that cut me to the soul then, and which I have never quite forgiven in all these years.

On one occasion I did something very naughty, and when called up for judgment fled to the dining-room, locked the door, and from my stronghold defied the whole world. I could have made my own terms, for it was near dinner time and the family must eat; but, alas for the treachery of the human heart! Frank betrayed me. He climbed in at the window, unlocked the door, and delivered me up to the foe. Nay, he even defended the base act, and helped bear the struggling culprit to imprisonment. That nearly broke my heart, for I believed *he* would stand by me as staunchly as I always stood by him. It was a sad blow, and I couldn't love or trust him any more. Peanuts and candy, ginger-snaps and car-rides were unavailing; even foot-ball could not reunite the broken friendship, and to this day I recollect the pang that entered my little heart when I lost my faith in the loyalty of my first boy.

The second attachment was of quite a different sort, and had a happier ending. At the mature age of ten, I left home for my first visit to a family of gay and kindly people in — well why not say right out? — Providence. There were no children, and at first I did not mind this, as every one petted me, especially one of the young men named Christopher. So kind and patient, yet so merry was this good Christy that I took him for my private and particular boy, and loved him dearly; for he got me out of innumerable scrapes, and never was tired of amusing the restless little girl who kept the family in a fever of anxiety by her pranks. *He* never laughed at her mishaps and mistakes, never played tricks upon her like a certain William, who composed the most trying nicknames, and wickedly goaded the wild visitor into all manner of naughtiness. Christy stood up for her through everything; let her ride the cows, feed the pigs, bang on the piano, and race all over the spice mill, feasting on cinnamon and cloves; brought her down from housetops and fished her out of brooks; never scolded, and never seemed tired of the troublesome friendship of little Torment.

In a week I had exhausted every amusement and was desperately homesick. It has always been my opinion that I should have been speedily restored to the bosom of my family but for Christy, and but for him I should assuredly have run away before the second week was out. He kept me, and in the hour of my disgrace stood by me like a man and a brother.

One afternoon, inspired by a spirit of benevolence, enthusiastic but short-sighted, I collected several poor children in the barn, and regaled them on cake and figs, helping myself freely to the treasures of the pantry without asking leave, meaning to explain afterward. Being discovered before the supplies were entirely exhausted, the patience of the long-suffering matron gave out, and I was ordered up to the garret to reflect upon my sins, and the pleasing prospect of being sent home with the character of the worst child ever known.

My sufferings were deep as I sat upon a fuzzy little trunk all alone in the dull garret, thinking how hard it was to do right, and wondering why I was scolded for feeding the poor when we were expressly bidden to do so. I felt myself an outcast, and bewailed the disgrace I had brought upon my family. Nobody could possibly love such a bad child; and if the mice were to come and eat me then and there — à la Bishop Hatto — it would only be a relief to my friends. At this dark moment I heard Christy say below, ‘She meant it kindly, so I wouldn’t mind, Fanny;’ and then up came my boy full of sympathy and comfort. Seeing the tragic expression of my face, he said not a word, but, sitting down in an old chair, took me on his knee and held me close and quietly, letting the action speak for itself. It did most eloquently; for the kind arm seemed to take me back from that dreadful exile, and the friendly face to assure me without words that I had not sinned beyond forgiveness.

I had not shed a tear before, but now I cried tempestuously, and clung to him like a shipwrecked little mariner in a storm. Neither spoke, but he held me fast and let me cry myself to sleep; for, when the shower was over, a pensive peace fell upon me, and the dim old garret seemed not a prison, but a haven of refuge, since my boy came to share it with me. How long I slept I don’t know, but it must have been an hour, at least; yet my good Christy never stirred, only waited patiently till I woke up in the twilight, and was not afraid because he was there. He took me down as meek as a mouse, and kept me by him all that trying evening, screening me from jokes, rebukes, and sober looks; and when I went to bed he came up to kiss me, and to assure me that this awful circumstance should not be reported at home. This took a load off my heart, and I remember fervently thanking him, and telling him I never would forget it.

I never have, though he died long ago, and others have probably forgotten all about the naughty prank. I often longed to ask him how he knew the surest way to win a child’s heart by the patience, sympathy, and tender little acts that have kept his memory green for nearly thirty years.

Cy was a comrade after my own heart, and for a summer or two we kept the neighbourhood in a ferment by our adventures and hair-breadth escapes. I think I never knew a boy so full of mischief, and my opportunities of judging have been manifold. He did not get into scrapes himself, but possessed a splendid talent for deluding others into them, and then morally remarking, ‘There, I told you so!’ His way of saying ‘You dars’nt do this or that’ was like fire to powder; and why I still live in the possession of all my limbs and senses is a miracle to those who know my youthful friendship with Cy. It was he who incited me to jump off of the highest beam in the barn, to be borne home on a board with a pair of sprained ankles. It was he who dared me to rub my eyes with red peppers, and then sympathisingly led me home blind and roaring with pain. It was he who solemnly assured me that all the little pigs would die in agony if their tails were not cut off, and won me to hold thirteen little squealers while the operation was performed. Those thirteen innocent pink tails haunt me yet, and the memory of that deed has given me a truly Jewish aversion to pork.

I did not know him long, but he was a kindred soul, and must have a place in my list of boys. He is a big, brown man now, and, having done his part in the war, is at work on his farm. We meet sometimes, and though we try to be dignified and proper, it is quite impossible; there is a sly twinkle in Cy’s eye that upsets my gravity, and we always burst out laughing at the memory of our early frolics.

My Augustus! oh, my Augustus! my first little lover, and the most romantic of my boys. At fifteen I met this charming youth, and thought I had found my fate. It was at a spelling school in a little country town where I, as a stranger and visitor from the city, was an object of interest. Painfully conscious of this fact, I sat in a corner trying to look easy and elegant, with a large red bow under my chin, and a carnelian ring in full view. Among the boys and girls who frolicked about me, I saw one lad of seventeen with ‘large blue eyes, a noble brow, and a beautiful straight nose,’ as I described him in a letter to my sister. This attractive youth had a certain air of refinement and ease of manner that the others lacked; and when I found he was the minister’s son, I felt that I might admire him without loss of dignity. ‘Imagine my sensations,’ as Miss Burney’s Evelina says, when this boy came and talked to me, a little bashfully at first, but soon quite freely, and invited me to a huckleberry party next day. I had observed that he was one of the best spellers. I also observed that his language was quite elegant; he even quoted Byron, and rolled his eyes in a most engaging manner, not to mention that he asked who gave me my ring, and said he depended on escorting me to the berry pasture.

‘Dear me, how interesting it was! and when I found myself, next day, sitting under a tree in the sunny field (full of boys and girls, all more or less lovering), with the amiable Augustus at my feet, gallantly supplying me with bushes to strip while we talked about books and poetry, I really felt as if I had got into a novel, and enjoyed it immensely. I believe a dim idea that Gus was sentimental hovered in my mind, but I would not encourage it, though I laughed in my sleeve when he was spouting Latin for my benefit, and was uncertain whether to box his ears or simper later in the day, when he languished over the gate, and said he thought chestnut hair the loveliest in the world.

Poor, dear boy! how innocent and soft-hearted and full of splendid dreams he was, and what deliciously romantic times we had floating on the pond, while the frogs sung to his accordion, as he tried to say unutterable things with his honest blue eyes. It makes me shiver now to think of the mosquitoes and the damp; but it was Pauline and Claude Melnotte then, and when I went home we promised to be true to one another, and write every week during the year he was away at school.

We parted — not in tears by any means; that sort of nonsense comes later, when the romance is less childish — but quite jolly and comfortable, and I hastened to pour forth the thrilling tale to my faithful sister, who approved of the match, being a perfect ‘mush of sentiment’ herself.

I fear it was not a very ardent flame, however, for Gus did not write every week, and I did not care a bit; nevertheless, I kept his picture and gave it a sentimental sigh when I happened to think of it, while he sent messages now and then, and devoted himself to his studies like an ambitious boy as he was. I hardly expected to see him again, but soon after the year was out, to my great surprise, he called. I was so fluttered by the appearance of his card that I rather lost my head, and did such a silly thing that it makes me laugh even now. He liked chestnut hair, and, pulling out my combs, I rushed down, theatrically dishevelled, hoping to impress my lover with my ardour and my charms.

I expected to find little Gus; but, to my great confusion, a tall being with a beaver in his hand rose to meet me, looking so big and handsome and generally imposing that I could not recover myself for several minutes, and mentally wailed for my combs, feeling like an untidy simpleton.

I don’t know whether he thought me a little cracked or not, but he was very friendly and pleasant, and told me his plans, and hoped I would make another visit, and smoothed his beaver, and let me see his tail-coat, and behaved himself like a dear, conceited, clever boy. He did not allude to our love-passages, being shy, and I blessed him for it; for really, I don’t know what rash thing I might have done under the exciting circumstances. Just as he was going, however, he forgot his cherished hat for a minute, put out both hands, and said heartily, with his old boyish laugh, —

‘Now you will come, and we’ll go boating and berrying, and all the rest of it again, won’t we?’

The blue eyes were full of fun and feeling, too, I fancied, as I blushingly retired behind my locks and gave the promise. But I never went, and never saw my little lover any more, for in a few weeks he was dead of a fever, brought on by too much study, — and so ended the sad history of my fourth boy.

After this, for many years, I was a boyless being; but was so busy I did not feel my destitute condition till I went to the hospital during the war, and found my little sergeant. His story has been told elsewhere, but the sequel to it is a pleasant one, for Baby B. still writes to me now and then, asks advice about his future, and gladdens me with good news of his success as a business man in Kansas.

As if to atone for the former dearth, a sudden shower of most superior boys fell upon me, after I recovered from my campaign. Some of the very best sort it was my fortune to know and like — real gentlemen, yet boys still — and jolly times they had, stirring up the quiet old town with their energetic society.

There was W., a stout, amiable youth, who would stand in the middle of a strawberry patch with his hands in his pockets and let us feed him luxuriously. B., a delightful scapegrace, who came once a week to confess his sins, beat his breast in despair, vow awful vows of repentance, and then cheerfully depart to break every one of them in the next twenty-four hours. S., the gentle-hearted giant; J., the dandy; sober, sensible B.; and E., the young knight without reproach or fear.

But my especial boy of the batch was A. — proud and cold and shy to other people, sad and serious sometimes when his good heart and tender conscience showed him his short-comings, but so grateful for sympathy and a kind word.

I could not get at him as easily as I could the other lads, but, thanks to Dickens, I found him out at last.

We played Dolphus and Sophy Tetterby in the ‘Haunted Man,’ at one of the school festivals; and during the rehearsals I discovered that my Dolphus was — permit the expression, oh, well-bred readers! — a trump. What fun we had to be sure, acting the droll and pathetic scenes together, with a swarm of little Tetterbys skirmishing about us! From that time he has been my Dolphus and I his Sophy, and my yellow-haired laddie don’t forget me, though he has a younger Sophy now, and some small Tetterbys of his own. He writes just the same affectionate letters as he used to do, though I, less faithful, am too busy to answer them.

But the best and dearest of all my flock was my Polish boy, Ladislas Wisniewski — two hiccoughs and a sneeze will give you the name perfectly. Six years ago, as I went down to my early breakfast at our Pension in Vevey, I saw that a stranger had arrived. He was a tall youth, of eighteen or twenty, with a thin, intelligent face, and the charmingly polite manners of a foreigner. As the other boarders came in, one by one, they left the door open, and a draught of cold autumn air blew in from the stone corridor, making the new-comer cough, shiver, and cast wistful glances towards the warm corner by the stove. My place was there, and the heat often oppressed me, so I was glad of an opportunity to move.

A word to Madame Vodoz effected the change; and at dinner I was rewarded by a grateful smile from the poor fellow, as he nestled into his warm seat, after a pause of surprise and a flush of pleasure at the small kindness from a stranger. We were too far apart to talk much, but, as he filled his glass, the Pole bowed to me, and said low in French —

‘I drink the good health to Mademoiselle.’

I returned the wish, but he shook his head with a sudden shadow on his face, as if the words meant more than mere compliment to him.

‘That boy is sick and needs care. I must see to him,’ said I to myself, as I met him in the afternoon, and observed the military look of his blue and white suit, as he touched his cap and smiled pleasantly. I have a weakness for brave boys in blue, and having discovered that he had been in the late Polish Revolution, my heart warmed to him at once.

That evening he came to me in the salon, and expressed his thanks in the prettiest broken English I ever heard. So simple, frank, and grateful was he that a few words of interest won his little story from him, and in half an hour we were friends. With his fellow-students he had fought through the last outbreak, and suffered imprisonment and hardship rather than submit, had lost many friends, his fortune and his health, and at twenty, lonely, poor, and ill, was trying bravely to cure the malady which seemed fatal.

‘If I recover myself of this affair in the chest, I teach the music to acquire my bread in this so hospitable country. At Paris, my friends, all two, find a refuge, and I go to them in spring if I die not here. Yes, it is solitary, and my memories are not gay, but I have my work, and the good God remains always to me, so I content myself with much hope, and I wait.’

Such genuine piety and courage increased my respect and regard immensely, and a few minutes later he added to both by one of the little acts that show character better than words.

He told me about the massacre, when five hundred Poles were shot down by Cossacks in the market-place, merely because they sung their national hymn.

‘Play me that forbidden air,’ I said, wishing to judge of his skill, for I had heard him practising softly in the afternoon.

He rose willingly, then glanced about the room and gave a little shrug which made me ask what he wanted.

‘I look to see if the Baron is here. He is Russian, and to him my national air will not be pleasing.’

‘Then play it. He dare not forbid it here, and I should rather enjoy that little insult to your bitter enemy,’ said I, feeling very indignant with everything Russian just then.

‘Ah, mademoiselle, it is true we are enemies, but we are also gentlemen,’ returned the boy, proving that *he* at least was one.

I thanked him for his lesson in politeness, and as the Baron was not there he played the beautiful hymn, singing it enthusiastically in spite of the danger to his weak lungs. A true musician evidently, for, as he sung his pale face glowed, his eyes shone, and his lost vigor seemed restored to him.

From that evening we were fast friends; for the memory of certain dear lads at home made my heart open to this lonely boy, who gave me in return the most grateful affection and service. He begged me to call him ‘Varjo,’ as his mother did. He constituted himself my escort, errand-boy, French teacher, and private musician, making those weeks indefinitely pleasant by his winning ways, his charming little confidences, and faithful friendship.

We had much fun over our lessons, for I helped him about his English. With a great interest in free America, and an intense longing to hear about our war, the barrier of an unknown tongue did not long stand between us.

Beginning with my bad French and his broken English, we got on capitally; but he outdid me entirely, making astonishing progress, though he often slapped his forehead with the despairing exclamation, —

‘I am imbecile! I never can will shall to have learn this beast of English!’

But he did, and in a month had added a new language to the five he already possessed.

His music was the delight of the house; and he often gave us little concerts with the help of Madame Teiblin, a German St. Cecilia, with a cropped head and a gentlemanly sack, cravat, and collar. Both were enthusiasts, and the longer they played the more inspired they got. The piano vibrated, the stools creaked, the candles danced in their sockets, and every one sat mute while the four white hands chased one another up and down the keys, and the two fine faces beamed with such ecstasy that we almost expected to see instrument and performers disappear in a musical whirlwind.

Lake Leman will never seem so lovely again as when Laddie and I roamed about its shores, floated on its bosom, or laid splendid plans for the future in the sunny garden of the old chateau. I tried it again last year, but the charm was gone, for I missed my boy with his fun, his music, and the frank, fresh affection he gave his ‘little mamma,’ as he insisted on calling the lofty spinster who loved him like half-a-dozen grandmothers rolled into one.

December roses blossomed in the gardens then, and Laddie never failed to have a posy ready for me at dinner. Few evenings passed without ‘confidences’ in my corner of the salon, and I still have a pile of merry little notes which I used to find tucked under my door. He called them chapters of a great history we were to write together, and being a ‘*polisson*’ he illustrated it with droll pictures, and a funny mixture of French and English romance.

It was very pleasant, but like all pleasant things in this world of change it soon came to an end. When I left for Italy we jokingly agreed to meet in Paris the next May, but neither really felt that we should ever meet again, for Laddie hardly expected to outlive the winter, and I felt sure I should soon be forgotten. As he kissed my hand there were tears in my boy’s eyes, and a choke in the voice that tried to say cheerfully —

‘*Bon voyage*, dear and good little mamma. I do not say adieu, but *au revoir*.’

Then the carriage rolled away, the wistful face vanished, and nothing remained to me but the memory of Laddie, and a little stain on my glove where a drop had fallen.

As I drew near Paris six months later, and found myself wishing that I might meet Varjo in the great, gay city, and wondering if there was any chance of my doing it, I never dreamed of seeing him so soon; but, as I made my way among the crowd of passengers that poured through the station, feeling tired, bewildered, and homesick, I suddenly saw a blue and white cap wave wildly in the air, then Laddie’s beaming face appeared, and Laddie’s eager hands grasped mine so cordially that I began to laugh at once, and felt that Paris was almost as good as home.

‘Ah, ha! behold the little mamma, who did not think to see again her bad son! Yes, I am greatly glad that I make the fine surprise for you as you come all weary to this place of noise. Give to me the billets, for I am still mademoiselle’s servant and go to find the coffers.’

He got my trunks, put me into a carriage, and as we rolled merrily away I asked how he chanced to meet me so unexpectedly. Knowing where I intended to stay, he had called occasionally till I notified Madame D. of the day and hour of my arrival, and then he had come to ‘make the fine surprise.’ He enjoyed the joke like a true boy, and I was glad to see how well he looked, and how gay he seemed.

‘You are better?’ I said.

‘I truly hope so. The winter was good to me and I cough less. It is a small hope, but I do not enlarge my fear by a sad face. I yet work and save a little purse, so that I may not be a heaviness to those who have the charity to finish me if I fall back and yet die.'

I would not hear of that, and told him he looked as well and happy as if he had found a fortune.

He laughed, and answered with his fine bow, 'I have. Behold, you come to make the fête for me. I find also here my friends Joseph and Napoleon. Poor as mouses of the church, as you say, but brave boys, and we work together with much gaiety.'

When I asked if he had leisure to be my guide about Paris, for my time was short and I wanted to see *everything*; he pranced, and told me he had promised himself a holiday, and had planned many excursions the most wonderful, charming, and gay. Then, having settled me at Madame's, he went blithely away to what I afterwards discovered were very poor lodgings, across the river.

Next day began the pleasantest fortnight in all my year of travel. Laddie appeared early, elegant to behold, in a new hat and buff gloves, and was immensely amused because the servant informed me that my big son had arrived.

I believe the first thing a woman does in Paris is to buy a new bonnet. I did, or rather stood by and let 'my son' do it in the best of French, only whispering when he proposed gorgeous *chapeaus* full of flowers and feathers, that I could not afford it.

'Ah! we must make our economies, must we? See, then, this modest, pearl-colored one, with the crape rose. Yes, we will have that, and be most elegant for the Sunday promenade.'

I fear I should have bought a pea-green hat with a yellow plume if he had urged it, so wheedlesome and droll were his ways and words. His good taste saved me, however, and the modest one was sent home for the morrow, when we were to meet Joseph and Napoleon and go to the concert in the Tuileries garden.

Then we set off on our day of sight-seeing, and Laddie proved himself an excellent guide. We had a charming trip about the enchanted city, a gay lunch at a café, and a first brief glimpse of the Louvre. At dinner-time I found a posy at my place; and afterward Laddie came and spent the evening in my little salon, playing to me, and having what he called 'babblings and pleasantries.' I found that he was translating 'Vanity Fair' into Polish, and intended to sell it at home. He convulsed me with his struggles to put cockney English and slang into good Polish, for he had saved up a list of words for me to explain to him. Hay-stack and bean-pot were among them, I remember; and when he had mastered the meanings he fell upon the sofa exhausted.

Other days like this followed, and we led a happy life together: for my twelve years’ seniority made our adventures quite proper, and I fearlessly went anywhere on the arm of my big son. Not to theatres or balls, however, for heated rooms were bad for Laddie, but pleasant trips out of the city in the bright spring weather, quiet strolls in the gardens, moonlight concerts in the Champs Elysées; or, best of all, long talks with music in the little red salon, with the gas turned low, and the ever-changing scenes of the Rue de Rivoli under the balcony.

Never were pleasures more cheaply purchased or more thoroughly enjoyed, for our hearts were as light as our purses, and our ‘little economies’ gave zest to our amusements.

Joseph and Napoleon sometimes joined us, and I felt in my element with the three invalid soldier boys, for Napoleon still limped with a wound received in the war, Joseph had never recovered from his two years’ imprisonment in an Austrian dungeon, and Laddie’s loyalty might yet cost him his life.

Thanks to them, I discovered a joke played upon me by my ‘*polisson*’. He told me to call him ‘ma drogha,’ saying it meant ‘my friend,’ in Polish. I innocently did so, and he seemed to find great pleasure in it, for his eyes always laughed when I said it. Using it one day before the other lads, I saw a queer twinkle in their eyes, and suspecting mischief, demanded the real meaning of the words. Laddie tried to silence them, but the joke was too good to keep, and I found to my dismay that I had been calling him ‘my darling’ in the tenderest manner.

How the three rascals shouted, and what a vain struggle it was to try and preserve my dignity when Laddie clasped his hands and begged pardon, explaining that jokes were necessary to his health, and he never meant me to know the full baseness of this ‘pleasantrie!’ I revenged myself by giving him some bad English for his translation, and telling him of it just as I left Paris.

It was not all fun with my boy, however; he had his troubles, and in spite of his cheerfulness he knew what heartache was. Walking in the quaint garden of the Luxembourg one day, he confided to me the little romance of his life. A very touching little romance as he told it, with eloquent eyes and voice and frequent pauses for breath. I cannot give his words, but the simple facts were these: —

He had grown up with a pretty cousin, and at eighteen was desperately in love with her. She returned his affection, but they could not be happy, for her father wished her to marry a richer man. In Poland, to marry without the consent of parents is to incur lasting disgrace; so Leonore obeyed, and the young pair parted. This had been a heavy sorrow to Laddie, and he rushed into the war, hoping to end his trouble.

‘Do you ever hear from your cousin?’ I asked, as he walked beside me, looking sadly down the green aisles where kings and queens had loved and parted years ago.

‘I only know that she suffers still, for she remembers. Her husband submits to the Russians, and I despise him as I have no English to tell;’ and he clenched his hands with the flash of the eye and sudden kindling of the whole face that made him handsome.

He showed me a faded little picture, and when I tried to comfort him, he laid his head down on the pedestal of one of the marble queens who guard the walk, as if he never cared to lift it up again.

But he was all right in a minute, and bravely put away his sorrow with the little picture. He never spoke of it again, and I saw no more shadows on his face till we came to say good-bye.

‘You have been so kind to me, I wish I had something beautiful to give you, Laddie,’ I said, feeling that it would be hard to get on without my boy.

‘This time it is for always; so, as a parting souvenir, give to me the sweet English good-bye.’

As he said this, with a despairing sort of look, as if he could not spare even so humble a friend as myself, my heart was quite rent within me, and, regardless of several prim English ladies, I drew down his tall head and kissed him tenderly, feeling that in this world there were no more meetings for us. Then I ran away and buried myself in an empty railway carriage, hugging the little cologne bottle he had given me.

He promised to write, and for five years he has kept his word, sending me from Paris and Poland cheery, bright letters in English, at my desire, so that he might not forget. Here is one as a specimen.

‘My Dear and Good Friend, — What do you think of me that I do not write so long time? Excuse me, my good mamma, for I was so busy in these days I could not do this pleasant thing. I write English without the fear that you laugh at it, because I know it is more agreeable to read the own language, and I think you are not excepted of this rule. It is good of me, for the expressions of love and regard, made with faults, take the funny appearance; they are *ridicule*, and instead to go to the heart, they make the laugh. Never mind, I do it.

‘You cannot imagine yourself how *stupide* is Paris when you are gone. I fly to my work, and make no more fêtes, — it is too sad alone. I tie myself to my table and my Vanity (not of mine, for I am not vain, am I?). I wish some chapters to finish themselfs *vite*, that I send them to Pologne and know the end. I have a little question to ask you (of Vanity as always). I cannot translate this, no one of *dictionnaires* makes me the words, and I think it is *jargon de prison*, this little period. Behold: —

Mopy, is that your snum?

Nubble your dad and gully the dog, &c.

‘So funny things I cannot explain myself, so I send to you, and you reply sooner than without it, for you have so kind interest in my work you do not stay to wait. So this is a little hook for you to make you write some words to your son who likes it so much and is fond of you.

‘My doctor tells me my lungs are soon to be re-established; so you may imagine yourself how glad I am, and of more courage in my future. You may one day see your Varjo in Amerique, if I study commerce as I wish. So then the last time of seeing ourselves is *not* the last. Is that to please you? I suppose the grand *histoire* is finished, *n’est ce pas*? You will then send it to me care of M. Gryhomski Austriche, and he will give to me in clandestine way at Varsovie, otherwise it will be confiscated at the frontier by the stupide Russians.

‘Now we are dispersed in two sides of world far apart, for soon I go home to Pologne and am no more “*juif errant*.” It is now time I work at my life in some useful way, and I do it.

‘As I am your *grand fils*, it is proper that I make you my compliment of happy Christmas and New Year, is it not? I wish for you so many as they may fulfil long human life. May this year bring you more and more good hearts to love you (the only real happiness in the hard life), and may I be as now, yours for always,

‘Varjo.’

A year ago he sent me his photograph and a few lines. I acknowledged the receipt of it, but since then not a word has come, and I begin to fear that my boy is dead. Others have appeared to take his place, but they don’t suit, and I keep his corner always ready for him if he lives. If he is dead, I am glad to have known so sweet and brave a character, for it does one good to see even as short-lived and obscure a hero as my Polish boy, whose dead December rose embalms for me the memory of Varjo, the last and dearest of my boys.

It is hardly necessary to add, for the satisfaction of inquisitive little women, that Laddie was the original of Laurie, as far as a pale pen-and-ink sketch could embody a living, loving boy.

TESSA’S SURPRISES.

I.

Little Tessa sat alone by the fire, waiting for her father to come home from work. The children were fast asleep, all four in the big bed behind the curtain; the wind blew hard outside, and the snow beat on the window-panes; the room was large, and the fire so small and feeble that it didn’t half warm the little bare toes peeping out of the old shoes on the hearth.

Tessa’s father was an Italian plaster-worker, very poor, but kind and honest. The mother had died not long ago, and left twelve-year old Tessa to take care of the little children. She tried to be very wise and motherly, and worked for them like any little woman; but it was so hard to keep the small bodies warm and fed, and the small souls good and happy, that poor Tessa was often at her wits’ end. She always waited for her father, no matter how tired she was, so that he might find his supper warm, a bit of fire, and a loving little face to welcome him. Tessa thought over her troubles at these quiet times, and made her plans; for her father left things to her a good deal, and she had no friends but Tommo, the harp-boy upstairs, and the lively cricket who lived in the chimney. To-night her face was very sober, and her pretty brown eyes very thoughtful as she stared at the fire and knit her brows, as if perplexed. She was not thinking of her old shoes, nor the empty closet, nor the boys’ ragged clothes just then. No; she had a fine plan in her good little head, and was trying to discover how she could carry it out.

You see, Christmas was coming in a week; and she had set her heart on putting something in the children’s stockings, as the mother used to do, for while she lived things were comfortable. Now Tessa had not a penny in the world, and didn’t know how to get one, for all the father’s earnings had to go for food, fire, and rent.

‘If there were only fairies, ah! how heavenly that would be; for then I should tell them all I wish, and, pop! behold the fine things in my lap!’ said Tessa to herself. ‘I must earn the money; there is no one to give it to me, and I cannot beg. But what can I do, so small and stupid and shy as I am? I *must* find some way to give the little ones a nice Christmas. I *must*! I *must*!’ and Tessa pulled her long hair, as if that would help her think.

But it didn’t, and her heart got heavier and heavier; for it did seem hard that in a great city full of fine things, there should be none for poor Nono, Sep, and little Speranza. Just as Tessa’s tears began to tumble off her eyelashes on to her brown cheeks, the cricket began to chirp. Of course, he didn’t say a word; but it really did seem as if he had answered her question almost as well as a fairy; for, before he had piped a dozen shrill notes, an idea popped into Tessa’s head — such a truly splendid idea that she clapped her hands and burst out laughing. ‘I’ll do it! I’ll do it! if father will let me,’ she said to herself, smiling and nodding at the fire. ‘Tommo will like to have me go with him and sing, while he plays his harp in the streets. I know many songs, and may get money if I am not frightened; for people throw pennies to other little girls who only play the tambourine. Yes, I will try; and then, if I do well, the little ones shall have a Merry Christmas.’

So full of her plan was Tessa that she ran upstairs at once, and asked Tommo if he would take her with him on the morrow. Her friend was delighted, for he thought Tessa’s songs very sweet, and was sure she would get money if she tried.

‘But see, then, it is cold in the streets; the wind bites, and the snow freezes one’s fingers. The day is very long, people are cross, and at night one is ready to die with weariness. Thou art so small, Tessa, I am afraid it will go badly with thee,’ said Tommo, who was a merry, black-eyed boy of fourteen, with the kindest heart in the world under his old jacket.

‘I do not mind cold and wet, and cross people, if I can get the pennies,’ answered Tessa, feeling very brave with such a friend to help her. She thanked Tommo, and ran away to get ready, for she felt sure her father would not refuse her anything. She sewed up the holes in her shoes as well as she could, for she had much of that sort of cobbling to do; she mended her only gown, and laid ready the old hood and shawl which had been her mother’s. Then she washed out little Ranza’s frock and put it to dry, because she would not be able to do it the next day. She set the table and got things ready for breakfast, for Tommo went out early, and must not be kept waiting for her. She longed to make the beds and dress the children over night, she was in such a hurry to have all in order; but, as that could not be, she sat down again, and tried over all the songs she knew. Six pretty ones were chosen; and she sang away with all her heart in a fresh little voice so sweetly that the children smiled in their sleep, and her father’s tired face brightened as he entered, for Tessa was his cheery cricket on the hearth. When she had told her plan, Peter Benari shook his head, and thought it would never do; but Tessa begged so hard, he consented at last that she should try it for one week, and sent her to bed the happiest little girl in New York.

Next morning the sun shone, but the cold wind blew, and the snow lay thick in the streets. As soon as her father was gone, Tessa flew about and put everything in nice order, telling the children she was going out for the day, and they were to mind Tommo’s mother, who would see about the fire and the dinner; for the good woman loved Tessa, and entered into her little plans with all her heart.

Nono and Giuseppe, or Sep, as they called him, wondered what she was going away for, and little Ranza cried at being left; but Tessa told them they would know all about it in a week, and have a fine time if they were good; so they kissed her all round and let her go.

Poor Tessa's heart beat fast as she trudged away with Tommo, who slung his harp over his shoulder, and gave her his hand. It was rather a dirty hand, but so kind that Tessa clung to it, and kept looking up at the friendly brown face for encouragement.

'We go first to the *café*, where many French and Italians eat the breakfast. They like my music, and often give me sips of hot coffee, which I like much. You too shall have the sips, and perhaps the pennies, for these people are greatly kind,' said Tommo, leading her into a large smoky place where many people sat at little tables, eating and drinking. 'See, now, have no fear; give them "Bella Monica;" that is merry and will make the laugh,' whispered Tommo, tuning his harp.

For a moment Tessa felt so frightened that she wanted to run away; but she remembered the empty stockings at home, and the fine plan, and she resolved *not* to give it up. One fat old Frenchman nodded to her, and it seemed to help her very much; for she began to sing before she thought, and that was the hardest part of it. Her voice trembled, and her cheeks grew redder and redder as she went on; but she kept her eyes fixed on her old shoes, and so got through without breaking down, which was very nice. The people laughed, for the song *was* merry; and the fat man smiled and nodded again. This gave her courage to try another, and she sung better and better each time; for Tommo played his best, and kept whispering to her, 'Yes; we go well; this is fine. They will give the money and the blessed coffee.'

So they did; for, when the little concert was over, several men put pennies in the cap Tessa offered, and the fat man took her on his knee, and ordered a mug of coffee, and some bread and butter for them both. This quite won her heart; and when they left the *café,* she kissed her hand to the old Frenchman, and said to her friend, 'How kind they are! I like this very much; and now it is not hard.'

But Tommo shook his curly head, and answered, soberly, 'Yes, I took you there first, for they love music, and are of our country; but up among the great houses we shall not always do well. The people there are busy or hard or idle, and care nothing for harps and songs. Do not skip and laugh too soon; for the day is long, and we have but twelve pennies yet.'

Tessa walked more quietly, and rubbed her cold hands, feeling that the world was a very big place, and wondering how the children got on at home without the little mother. Till noon they did not earn much, for every one seemed in a hurry, and the noise of many sleigh-bells drowned the music. Slowly they made their way up to the great squares where the big houses were, with fine ladies and pretty children at the windows. Here Tessa sung all her best songs, and Tommo played as fast as his fingers could fly; but it was too cold to have the windows open, so the pretty children could not listen long, and the ladies tossed out a little money, and soon went back to their own affairs.

All the afternoon the two friends wandered about, singing and playing, and gathering up their small harvest. At dusk they went home, Tessa so hoarse she could hardly speak, and so tired she fell asleep over her supper. But she had made half a dollar, for Tommo divided the money fairly, and she felt rich with her share. The other days were very much like this; sometimes they made more, sometimes less, but Tommo always ‘went halves;’ and Tessa kept on, in spite of cold and weariness, for her plans grew as her earnings increased, and now she hoped to get useful things, instead of candy and toys alone.

On the day before Christmas she made herself as tidy as she could, for she hoped to earn a good deal. She tied a bright scarlet handkerchief over the old hood, and the brilliant color set off her brown cheeks and bright eyes, as well as the pretty black braids of her hair. Tommo’s mother lent her a pair of boots so big that they turned up at the toes, but there were no holes in them, and Tessa felt quite elegant in whole boots. Her hands were covered with chilblains, for she had no mittens; but she put them under her shawl, and scuffled merrily away in her big boots, feeling so glad that the week was over, and nearly three dollars safe in her pocket. How gay the streets were that day! how brisk every one was, and how bright the faces looked, as people trotted about with big baskets, holly-wreaths, and young evergreens going to blossom into splendid Christmas trees!

‘If I could have a tree for the children, I’d never want anything again. But I can’t; so I’ll fill the socks all full, and be happy,’ said Tessa, as she looked wistfully into the gay stores, and saw the heavy baskets go by.

‘Who knows what may happen if we do well?’ returned Tommo, nodding wisely, for he had a plan as well as Tessa, and kept chuckling over it as he trudged through the mud. They did *not* do well somehow, for every one seemed so full of their own affairs they could not stop to listen, even to ‘Bella Monica,’ but bustled away to spend their money in turkeys, toys, and trees. In the afternoon it began to rain, and poor Tessa’s heart to fail her; for the big boots tired her feet, the cold wind made her hands ache, and the rain spoilt the fine red handkerchief. Even Tommo looked sober, and didn’t whistle as he walked, for he also was disappointed, and his plan looked rather doubtful, the pennies came in so slowly.

‘We’ll try one more street, and then go home, thou art so tired, little one.

Come; let me wipe thy face, and give me thy hand here in my jacket pocket; there it will be as warm as any kitten;’ and kind Tommo brushed away the drops which were not *all* rain from Tessa’s cheeks, tucked the poor hand into his ragged pocket, and led her carefully along the slippery streets, for the boots nearly tripped her up.

II.

At the first house, a cross old gentleman flapped his newspaper at them; at the second, a young gentleman and lady were so busy talking that they never turned their heads, and at the third, a servant came out and told them to go away, because some one was sick. At the fourth, some people let them sing all their songs and gave nothing. The next three houses were empty; and the last of all showed not a single face as they looked up anxiously. It was so cold, so dark and discouraging, that Tessa couldn’t help one sob; and, as he glanced down at the little red nose and wet figure beside him, Tommo gave his harp an angry thump, and said something very fierce in Italian. They were just going to turn away; but they didn’t, for that angry thump happened to be the best thing they could have done. All of a sudden a little head appeared at the window, as if the sound had brought it; then another and another, till there were five, of all heights and colors, and five eager faces peeped out, smiling and nodding to the two below.

‘Sing, Tessa; sing! Quick! quick!’ cried Tommo, twanging away with all his might, and showing his white teeth, as he smiled back at the little gentle-folk.

Bless us! How Tessa did tune up at that! She chirped away like a real bird, forgetting all about the tears on her cheeks, the ache in her hands, and the heaviness at her heart. The children laughed, and clapped their hands, and cried ‘More! more! Sing another, little girl! Please do!’ And away they went again, piping and playing, till Tessa’s breath was gone, and Tommo’s stout fingers tingled well.

‘Mamma says, come to the door; it’s too muddy to throw the money into the street!’ cried out a kindly child’s voice as Tessa held up the old cap, with beseeching eyes.

Up the wide stone steps went the street musicians, and the whole flock came running down to give a handful of silver, and ask all sorts of questions. Tessa felt so grateful that, without waiting for Tommo, she sang her sweetest little song all alone. It was about a lost lamb, and her heart was in the song; therefore she sang it well, so well that a pretty young lady came down to listen, and stood watching the bright-eyed girl, who looked about her as she sang, evidently enjoying the light and warmth of the fine hall, and the sight of the lovely children with their gay dresses, shining hair, and dainty little shoes.

‘You have a charming voice, child. Who taught you to sing?’ asked the young lady kindly.

‘My mother. She is dead now; but I do not forget,’ answered Tessa, in her pretty broken English.

‘I wish she could sing at our tree, since Bella is ill,’ cried one of the children peeping through the banisters.

‘She is not fair enough for the angel, and too large to go up in the tree. But she sings sweetly, and looks as if she would like to see a tree,’ said the young lady.

‘Oh, so much!’ exclaimed Tessa; adding eagerly, ‘my sister Ranza is small and pretty as a baby-angel. She could sit up in the fine tree, and I could sing for her from under the table.’

‘Sit down and warm yourself, and tell me about Ranza,’ said the kind elder sister, who liked the confiding little girl, in spite of her shabby clothes.

So Tessa sat down and dried the big boots over the furnace, and told her story, while Tommo stood modestly in the background, and the children listened with faces full of interest.

‘O Rose! let us see the little girl; and if she will do, let us have her, and Tessa can learn our song, and it will be splendid!’ cried the biggest boy, who sat astride of a chair, and stared at the harp with round eyes.

‘I’ll ask mamma,’ said Rose; and away she went into the dining-room close by. As the door opened, Tessa saw what looked to her like a fairy feast, — all silver mugs and flowery plates and oranges and nuts and rosy wine in tall glass pitchers, and smoking dishes that smelt so deliciously she could not restrain a little sniff of satisfaction.

‘Are you hungry?’ asked the boy, in a grand tone.

‘Yes, sir,’ meekly answered Tessa.

‘I say, mamma; she wants something to eat. Can I give her an orange?’ called the boy, prancing away into the splendid room, quite like a fairy prince, Tessa thought.

A plump motherly lady came out and looked at Tessa, asked a few questions, and then told her to come to-morrow with Ranza, and they would see what could be done. Tessa clapped her hands for joy, — she didn’t mind the chilblains now, — and Tommo played a lively march, he was so pleased.

‘Will you come, too, and bring your harp? You shall be paid, and shall have something from the tree, likewise,’ said the motherly lady, who liked what Tessa gratefully told about his kindness to her.

‘Ah, yes; I shall come with much gladness, and play as never in my life before,’ cried Tommo, with a flourish of the old cap that made the children laugh.

‘Give these to your brothers,’ said the fairy prince, stuffing nuts and oranges into Tessa’s hands.

‘And these to the little girl,’ added one of the young princesses, flying out of the dining-room with cakes and rosy apples for Ranza.

Tessa didn’t know what to say; but her eyes were full, and she just took the mother’s white hand in both her little grimy ones, and kissed it many times in her pretty Italian fashion. The lady understood her, and stroked her cheek softly, saying to her elder daughter, ‘We must take care of this good little creature. Freddy, bring me your mittens; these poor hands must be covered. Alice, get your play-hood; this handkerchief is all wet; and, Maud, bring the old chinchilla tippet.’

The children ran, and in a minute there were lovely blue mittens on the red hands, a warm hood over the black braids, and a soft ‘pussy’ round the sore throat.

‘Ah! so kind, so very kind! I have no way to say “thank you;” but Ranza shall be for you a heavenly angel, and I will sing my heart out for your tree!’ cried Tessa, folding the mittens as if she would say a prayer of thankfulness if she knew how.

Then they went away, and the pretty children called after them, ‘Come again, Tessa! come again, Tommo!’ Now the rain didn’t seem dismal, the wind cold, nor the way long, as they bought their gifts and hurried home, for kind words and the sweet magic of charity had changed all the world to them.

I think the good spirits who fly about on Christmas Eve, to help the loving fillers of little stockings, smiled very kindly on Tessa as she brooded joyfully over the small store of presents that seemed so magnificent to her. All the goodies were divided evenly into three parts and stowed away in father’s three big socks, which hung against the curtain. With her three dollars, she had got a pair of shoes for Nono, a knit cap for Sep, and a pair of white stockings for Ranza; to her she also gave the new hood; to Nono the mittens; and to Sep the tippet.

‘Now the dear boys can go out, and my Ranza will be ready for the lady to see, in her nice new things,’ said Tessa, quite sighing with pleasure to see how well the gifts looked pinned up beside the bulging socks, which wouldn’t hold them all. The little mother kept nothing for herself but the pleasure of giving everything away; yet, I think, she was both richer and happier than if she had kept them all. Her father laughed as he had not done since the mother died, when he saw how comically the old curtain had broken out into boots and hoods, stockings and tippets.

‘I wish I had a gold gown and a silver hat for thee, my Tessa, thou art so good. May the saints bless and keep thee always!’ said Peter Benari tenderly, as he held his little daughter close, and gave her the good-night kiss.

Tessa felt very rich as she crept under the faded counterpane, feeling as if she had received a lovely gift, and fell happily asleep with chubby Ranza in her arms, and the two rough black heads peeping out at the foot of the bed. She dreamed wonderful dreams that night, and woke in the morning to find real wonders before her eyes. She got up early, to see if the socks were all right, and there she found the most astonishing sight. Four socks, instead of three; and by the fourth, pinned out quite elegantly was a little dress, evidently meant for her — a warm, woollen dress, all made, and actually with bright buttons on it. It nearly took her breath away; so did the new boots on the floor, and the funny long stocking like a grey sausage, with a wooden doll staring out at the top, as if she said, politely, ‘A Merry Christmas, ma’am!’ Tessa screamed and danced in her delight, and up tumbled all the children to scream and dance with her, making a regular carnival on a small scale. Everybody hugged and kissed everybody else, offered sucks of orange, bites of cake, and exchanges of candy; every one tried on the new things, and pranced about in them like a flock of peacocks. Ranza skipped to and fro airily, dressed in her white socks and the red hood; the boys promenaded in their little shirts, one with his creaking new shoes and mittens, the other in his gay cap and fine tippet; and Tessa put her dress straight on, feeling that her father’s ‘gold gown’ was not all a joke. In her long stocking she found all sorts of treasures; for Tommo had stuffed it full of queer things, and his mother had made gingerbread into every imaginable shape, from fat pigs to full omnibuses.

Dear me! What happy little souls they were that morning; and when they were quiet again, how like a fairy tale did Tessa’s story sound to them. Ranza was quite ready to be an angel; and the boys promised to be marvellously good, if they were only allowed to see the tree at the ‘palace,’ as they called the great house.

Little Ranza was accepted with delight by the kind lady and her children, and Tessa learned the song quite easily. The boys *were* asked; and, after a happy day, the young Italians all returned, to play their parts at the fine Christmas party. Mamma and Miss Rose drilled them all; and when the folding-doors flew open, one rapturous ‘Oh!’ arose from the crowd of children gathered to the festival. I assure you, it was splendid; the great tree glittering with lights and gifts; and, on her invisible perch, up among the green boughs, sat the little golden-haired angel, all in white, with downy wings, a shining crown on her head, and the most serene satisfaction in her blue eyes, as she stretched her chubby arms to those below, and smiled her baby smile at them. Before any one could speak, a voice, as fresh and sweet as a lark’s, sang the Christmas Carol so blithely that every one stood still to hear, and then clapped till the little angel shook on her perch, and cried out, ‘Be ‘till, or me’ll fall!’ How they laughed at that; and what fun they had talking to Ranza, while Miss Rose stripped the tree, for the angel could not resist temptation, and amused herself by eating all the bonbons she could reach, till she was taken down, to dance about like a fairy in a white frock and red shoes. Tessa and her friends had many presents; the boys were perfect lambs, Tommo played for the little folks to dance, and every one said something friendly to the strangers, so that they did not feel shy, in spite of shabby clothes. It was a happy night: and all their lives they remembered it as something too beautiful and bright to be quite true. Before they went home, the kind mamma told Tessa she should be her friend, and gave her a motherly kiss, which warmed the child’s heart and seemed to set a seal upon that promise. It was faithfully kept, for the rich lady had been touched by Tessa’s patient struggles and sacrifices; and for many years, thanks to her benevolence, there was no end to Tessa’s Surprises.

BUZZ.

I live high up in a city house all alone. My room is a cosy little place, though there is nothing very splendid in it, — only my pictures and books, my flowers and my little friend. When I began to live there, I was very busy and therefore very happy; but by-and-by, when my hurry was over and I had more time to myself, I often felt lonely. When I ate my meals I used to wish for a pleasant companion to eat with me; and when I sat by the fire of evenings, I thought how much more social it would be if some one sat opposite. I had many friends and callers through the day, but the evenings were often rather dull; for I couldn't read much, and didn't care to go out in the stormy weather.

I was wishing for a cheerful friend one night, when all of a sudden I found one; for, sitting on my hand, I saw a plump, jolly-looking fly. He sat quietly staring at me, with a mild little hum, as if to say, —

'How are you? You wanted a friend, and here I am. Will you have me?'

Of course I would, for I liked him directly, he was so cheery and confiding, and seemed as glad to see me as I was to see him. All his mates were dead and gone, and he was alone, like myself. So I waggled one finger, by way of welcome, fearing to shake my hand, lest he should tumble off and feel hurt at my reception. He seemed to understand me, and buzzed again, evidently saying, —

'Thank you, ma'am. I should like to stay in your warm room, and amuse you for my board. I won't disturb you, but do my best to be a good little friend.'

So the bargain was struck, and he stopped to tea. I found that his manners had been neglected; for he was inclined to walk over the butter, drink out of the cream-pot, and put his fingers in the jelly. A few taps with my spoon taught him to behave with more propriety, and he sipped a drop of milk from the waiter with a crumb of sugar, as a well-bred fly should do.

On account of his fine voice, I named him Buzz, and we soon got on excellently together. He seemed to like his new quarters, and, after exploring every corner of the room, he chose his favourite haunts and began to enjoy himself. I always knew where he was, for he kept up a constant song, humming and buzzing, like a little kettle getting ready to boil.

On sunny days, he amused himself by bumping his head against the window, and watching what went on outside. It would have given me a headache, but he seemed to enjoy it immensely. Up in my hanging basket of ivy he made his bower, and sat there on the moss basking in the sunshine, as luxuriously as any gentleman in his conservatory. He was interested in the plants, and examined them daily with great care, walking over the ivy leaves, grubbing under the moss, and poking his head into the unfolding hyacinth buds to see how they got on.

The pictures, also, seemed to attract his attention, for he spent much time skating over the glasses and studying the designs. Sometimes I would find him staring at my Madonna, as if he said, ‘What in the world are all those topsy-turvy children about?’ Then he’d sit in the middle of a brook, in a water-color sketch by Vautin, as if bathing his feet, or seem to be eating the cherry which one little duck politely offers another little duck, in Oscar Pletch’s Summer Party. He frequently kissed my mother’s portrait, and sat on my father’s bald head, as if trying to get out some of the wisdom stored up there, like honey in an ill-thatched bee-hive. My bronze Mercury rather puzzled him, for he could not understand why the young gentleman didn’t fly off when he had four wings and seemed in such a hurry.

I’m afraid he was a trifle vain, for he sat before the glass a great deal, and I often saw him cleaning his proboscis, and twiddling his feelers, and I know he was ‘prinking,’ as we say. The books pleased him, too, and he used to run them over, as if trying to choose which he would read, and never seemed able to decide. He would have nothing to say to the fat French Dictionary, or my English Plays, but liked Goethe and Schiller, Emerson and Browning, as well as I did. Carlyle didn’t suit him, and Richter evidently made his head ache. But Jean Ingelow’s Poems delighted him, and so did her ‘Stories told to a Child.’ ‘Fairy Bells’ he often listened to, and was very fond of the pictures in a photograph book of foreign places and great people.

He frequently promenaded on the piazza of a little Swiss chalet, standing on the mantel-piece, and thought it a charming residence for a single gentleman like himself. The closet delighted him extremely, and he buzzed in the most joyful manner when he got among the provisions, — for we kept house together. Such revels as he had in the sugar-bowl; such feasts of gingerbread and grapes; such long sips of milk, and sly peeps into every uncovered box and dish! Once I’m afraid he took too much cider, for I found him lying on his back, kicking and humming like a crazy top, and he was very queer all the rest of that day; so I kept the bottle corked after that. But his favorite nook was among the ferns in the vase which a Parian dancing-girl carried. She stood just over the stove on one little toe, rattling some castanets, which made no sound, and never getting a step farther for all her prancing. This was a warm and pretty retreat for Buzz, and there he spent much of his time, swinging on the ferns, sleeping snugly in the vase, or warming his feet in the hot air that blew up, like a south wind, from the stove.

I don't believe there was a happier fly in Boston than my friend Buzz, and I grew fonder and fonder of him every day; for he never got into mischief, but sung his cheery song, no matter what the weather was, and made himself agreeable. Then he was so interested in all I did, it was delightful to have him round. When I wrote he came and walked about over my paper to see that it was right, peeped into my ink-stand, and ran after my pen. He never made silly or sharp criticisms on my stories, but appeared to admire them very much; so I am sure he was a good judge. When I sewed, he sat in my basket, or played hide-and-seek in the folds of my work, talking away all the while in the most sociable manner. He often flew up all of a sudden, and danced about in the air, as if he was in such a jolly mood he couldn't keep still, and wanted me to come and play with him. But, alas! I had no wings, and could only sit stupidly still, and laugh at his pranks. That was his exercise, for he never went out, and only took a sniff of air now and then when I opened the windows.

Well, little Buzz and I lived together many weeks, and never got tired of one another, which is saying a good deal. At Christmas I went home for a week and left my room to take care of itself. I put the hyacinths into the closet to be warm, and dropped the curtain, so the frost should not nip my ivy; but I forgot Buzz. I really would have taken him with me, or carried him down to a neighbour's room to be taken care of while I was away, but I never thought of him in the hurry of getting my presents and myself ready. Off I went without even saying 'good-bye,' and never thought of my little friend till Freddy, my small nephew, said to me one evening at dusk, —

'Aunt Jo, tell me a story.'

So I began to tell him about Buzz, and all of a sudden I cried out, —

'Mercy on me! I'm afraid he'll die of cold while I'm gone.'

It troubled me a good deal, and I wanted to know how the poor little fellow was so much that I would have gone to see if I had not been so far away. But it would be rather silly to hurry away twenty miles to look after one fly: so I finished my visit, and then went back to my room, hoping to find Buzz alive and well in spite of the cold.

Alas, no! my little friend was gone. There he lay on his back on the mantel-piece, his legs meekly folded, and his wings stiff and still. He had evidently gone to the warm place, and been surprised when the heat died out and left him to freeze. My poor little Buzz had sung his last song, danced his last dance, and gone where the good flies go. I was very sorry and buried him among the ivy roots, where the moss lay green above him, the sun shone warmly on him, and the bitter cold could never come. I miss him very much; when I sit writing, I miss his cheerful voice and busy wings; at meals there is no tiny little body to drink up spilt drops and eat the crumbs: in the evenings, when I sit alone, I want him more than ever, and every day, as I water my plants, I say, softly, —

‘Grow green, ivy, lie lightly, moss, shine warmly, sun, and make his last bed pleasant to my little friend.’

THE CHILDREN'S JOKE.

'"You can't do this" and "you mustn't do that," from morning to night. Try it yourself and see how you'd like it,' muttered Harry, as he flung down his hat in sulky obedience to his father's command to give up a swim in the river and keep himself cool with a book that warm summer evening.

'Of course I should like to mind my parents. Good children always do,' began Mr. Fairbairn, entirely forgetting the pranks of his boyhood, as people are apt to.

'Glad I didn't know you then. Must have been a regular prig,' growled Harry under his breath.

'Silence, sir! go to your room, and don't let me see you till tea-time. You must be taught respect as well as obedience,' and Mr. Fairbairn gave the table a rap that caused his son to retire precipitately.

On the stairs he met his sister Kitty looking as cross as himself.

'What's the matter with you?' he asked, pausing a minute, for misery loves company.

'Mamma will make me dress up in a stiff clean frock, and have my hair curled over again just because some one *may* come. I want to play in the garden, and I can't all fussed up this way. I do hate company and clothes and manners, don't you?' answered Kitty, with a spiteful pull at her sash.

'I hate being ordered round everlastingly, and badgered from morning till night. I'd just like to be let alone,' and Harry went on his way to captivity with a grim shake of the head and a very strong desire to run away from home altogether.

'So would I, mamma is so fussy. I never have any peace of my life,' sighed Kitty, feeling that her lot was a hard one.

The martyr in brown linen went up, and the other martyr in white cambric went down, both looking as they felt, rebellious and unhappy. Yet a stranger seeing them and their home would have thought they had everything heart could desire. All the comforts that money could buy, and all the beauty that taste could give seemed gathered round them. Papa and mamma loved the two little people dearly, and no real care or sorrow came to trouble the lives that would have been all sunshine but for one thing. With the best intentions in the world, Mr. and Mrs. Fairbairn were spoiling their children by constant fault-finding, too many rules and too little sympathy with the active young souls and bodies under their care. As Harry said, they were ordered about, corrected and fussed over from morning till night, and were getting so tired of it that the most desperate ideas began to enter their heads.

Now, in the house was a quiet old maiden aunt, who saw the mischief brewing, and tried to cure it by suggesting more liberty and less ‘nagging,’ as the boys call it. But Mr. and Mrs. F. always silenced her by saying, —

‘My dear Betsey, you never had a family, so how *can* you know anything about the proper management of children?’

They quite forgot that sister Betsey had brought up a flock of motherless brothers and sisters, and done it wisely and well, though she never got any thanks or praise for it, and never expected any for doing her duty faithfully. If it had not been for aunty, Harry and Kitty would have long ago carried out their favorite plan, and have run away together, like Roland and Maybird. She kept them from this foolish prank by all sorts of unsuspected means, and was their refuge in troublous times. For all her quiet ways, aunty was full of fun as well as sympathy and patience, and she smoothed the thorny road to virtue with the innocent and kindly little arts that make some people as useful and beloved as good fairy godmothers were once upon a time.

As they sat at tea that evening papa and mamma were most affable and lively; but the children’s spirits were depressed by a long day of restraint, and they sat like well-bred mutes, languidly eating their supper.

‘It’s the warm weather. They need something bracing. I’ll give them a dose of iron mixture to-morrow,’ said mamma.

‘I’ve taken enough now to make a cooking-stove,’ groaned Kitty, who hated being dosed.

‘If you’d let me go swimming every night I’d be all right,’ added Harry.

‘Not another word on that point. I will *not* let you do it, for you will get drowned as sure as you try,’ said mamma, who was so timid she had panics the minute her boy was out of sight.

‘Aunt Betsey let her boys go, and they never came to grief,’ began Harry.

‘Aunt Betsey’s ideas and mine differ. Children are not brought up now as they were in her day,’ answered mamma with a superior air.

‘I just wish they were. Jolly good times *her* boys had.’

‘Yes, and girls too, playing anything they liked, and not rigged up and plagued with company,’ cried Kitty, with sudden interest.

‘What do you mean by that?’ asked papa good-naturedly; for somehow his youth returned to him for a minute, and seemed very pleasant.

The children could not explain very well, but Harry said slowly, —

‘If you were to be in our places for a day you’d see what we mean.’

‘Wouldn’t it be worth your while to try the experiment?’ said Aunt Betsey, with a smile.

Papa and mamma laughed at the idea, but looked sober when aunty added, —

‘Why not put yourselves in their places for a day and see how you like it? I think you would understand the case better than any one could describe it, and perhaps do both yourselves and the children a lasting service.’

‘Upon my word, that’s a droll idea! What do you say to it, mamma?’ and papa looked much amused.

‘I am willing to try it if you are, just for the fun of the thing, but I don’t think it will do any good;’ and mamma shook her head as if Aunt Betsey’s plan was a wild one.

The children sat quiet, speechless with surprise at this singular proposal, but as its full richness dawned upon them, they skipped in their chairs and clapped their hands delightedly.

‘How do you propose to carry out this new educational frolic?’ asked papa, beginning to feel some curiosity as to the part he was to play.

‘Merely let the children do as they like for one day and have full power over you. Let them plan your duties and pleasures, order your food, fix your hours, and punish or reward you as they think proper. You must promise entire obedience, and keep the agreement till night.’

‘Good! good! Oh, won’t it be fun!’ cried Harry and Kitty, applauding enthusiastically; while papa and mamma looked rather sober as the plan was developed before them.

‘To-morrow is a holiday for us all, and we might celebrate it by this funny experiment. It will amuse us and do no harm, at any rate,’ added aunty, quite in love with her new scheme.

‘Very well, we will. Come, mamma, let us promise, and see what these rogues will do for us. Playing father and mother is no joke, mind you; but you will have an easier time of it than we do, for *we* shall behave ourselves,’ said papa, with a virtuous expression.

Mamma agreed, and the supper ended merrily, for every one was full of curiosity as to the success of the new play. Harry and Kitty went to bed early, that they might be ready for the exciting labors of the next day. Aunt Betsey paid each a short visit before they slept, and it is supposed that she laid out the order of performances, and told each what to do; for the little people would never have thought of so many sly things if left to themselves.

At seven the next morning, as mamma was in her dressing-room, just putting on her cool, easy wrapper, in came Kitty with a solemn face, though her eyes danced with fun, as she said, —

‘Careless, untidy girl! Put on a clean dress, do up your hair properly, and go and practise half an hour before breakfast.’

At first mamma looked as if inclined to refuse, but Kitty was firm; and, with a sigh, mamma rustled into a stiff, scratchy, French print, took her hair out of the comfortable net, and braided it carefully up; then, instead of reading in her arm-chair, she was led to the parlor and set to learning a hard piece of music.

‘Can’t I have my early cup of tea and my roll?’ she asked.

‘Eating between meals is a very bad habit, and I can’t allow it,’ said Kitty, in the tone her mother often used to her. ‘I shall have a mug of new milk and a roll, because grown people need more nourishment than children;’ and sitting down, she ate her early lunch with a relish, while poor mamma played away, feeling quite out of tune herself.

Harry found papa enjoying the last delightful doze that makes bed so fascinating of a morning. As if half afraid to try the experiment, the boy slowly approached and gave the sleeper a sudden, hard shake, saying briskly, —

‘Come, come, come, lazy-bones! Get up, get up!’

Papa started as if an earthquake had roused him, and stared at Harry, astonished for a minute, then he remembered, and upset Harry’s gravity by whining out, —

‘Come, you let me alone. It isn’t time yet, and I am *so* tired.’

Harry took the joke, and assuming the stern air of his father on such occasions, said impressively, —

‘You have been called, and now if you are not down in fifteen minutes you won’t have any breakfast. Not a morsel, sir, not a morsel;’ and, coolly pocketing his father’s watch, he retired, to giggle all the way downstairs.

When the breakfast bell rang, mamma hurried into the dining-room, longing for her tea. But Kitty sat behind the urn, and said gravely, —

‘Go back, and enter the room properly. Will you never learn to behave like a lady?’

Mamma looked impatient at the delay, and having re-entered in her most elegant manner, sat down, and passed her plate for fresh trout and muffins.

‘No fish or hot bread for you, my dear. Eat your good oatmeal porridge and milk; that is the proper food for children.’

‘Can’t I have some tea?’ cried mamma, in despair, for without it she felt quite lost.

‘Certainly not. *I* never was allowed tea when a little girl, and couldn’t think of giving it to you,’ said Kitty, filling a large cup for herself, and sipping the forbidden draught with a relish.

Poor mamma quite groaned at this hard fate, but meekly obeyed, and ate the detested porridge, understanding Kitty’s dislike to it at last.

Harry, sitting in his father's chair, read the paper, and ate everything he could lay his hands on, with a funny assumption of his father's morning manner. Aunt Betsey looked on much amused, and now and then nodded to the children as if she thought things were going nicely.

Breakfast was half over when papa came in, and was about to take Harry's place when his son said, trying vainly to look grave as he showed the watch, —

'What did I tell you, sir? You are late again, sir. No breakfast, sir. I'm sorry, but this habit *must* be broken up. Not a word; it's your own fault, and you must bear the penalty.'

'Come, now, that's hard on a fellow! I'm awful hungry. Can't I have just a bite of something?' asked papa, quite taken aback at this stern decree.

'I said not a morsel, and I shall keep my word. Go to your morning duties and let this be a lesson to you.'

Papa cast a look at Aunt Betsey, that was both comic and pathetic, and departed without a word; but he felt a sudden sympathy with his son, who had often been sent fasting from the table for some small offence.

Now it was that he appreciated aunty's kind heart, and felt quite fond of her, for in a few minutes she came to him, as he raked the gravel walk (Harry's duty every day), and slipping a nice, warm, well-buttered muffin into his hand, said, in her motherly way, —

'My dear, do try and please your father. He is right about late rising, but I can't bear to see you starve.'

'Betsey, you are an angel!' and turning his back to the house, papa bolted the muffin with grateful rapidity, inquiring with a laugh, 'Do you think those rogues will keep it up in this vigorous style all day?'

'I trust so; it isn't a bit overdone. Hope you like it!' and Aunt Betsey walked away, looking as if *she* enjoyed it extremely.

'Now put on your hat and draw baby up and down the avenue for half an hour. Don't go on the grass, or you will wet your feet; and don't play with baby, I want her to go to sleep; and don't talk to papa, or he will neglect his work,' said Kitty, as they rose from table.

Now, it was a warm morning and baby was heavy and the avenue was dull, and mamma much preferred to stay in the house and sew the trimming on to a new and pretty dress.

'Must I really? Kitty you are a hard-hearted mamma to make me do it,' and Mrs. Fairbairn hoped her play-parent would relent.

But she did not, and only answered with a meaning look.

'*I* have to do it every day, and *you* don't let me off.'

Mamma said no more, but put on her hat and trundled away with fretful baby, thinking to find her fellow-sufferer and have a laugh over the joke. She was disappointed, however, for Harry called papa away to weed the lettuce-bed, and then shut him up in the study to get his lessons, while he mounted the pony and trotted away to town to buy a new fishing-rod and otherwise enjoy himself.

When mamma came in, hot and tired, she was met by Kitty with a bottle in one hand and a spoon in the other.

‘Here is your iron mixture, dear. Now take it like a good girl.’

‘I won’t!’ and mamma looked quite stubborn.

‘Then aunty will hold your hands and I shall make you.’

‘But I don’t like it; I don’t need it,’ cried mamma.

‘Neither do I, but you give it to me all the same. I’m sure you need strengthening more than I do, you have so many “trials,”‘ and Kitty looked very sly as she quoted one of the words often on her mother’s lips.

‘You’d better mind, Carrie; it can’t hurt you, and you know you promised entire obedience. Set a good example,’ said aunty.

‘But I never thought these little chits would do so well. Ugh, how disagreeable it is!’ And mamma took her dose with a wry face, feeling that Aunt Betsey was siding with the wrong party.

‘Now sit down and hem these towels till dinner-time. I have so much to do I don’t know which way to turn,’ continued Kitty, much elated with her success.

Rest of any sort was welcome, so mamma sewed busily till callers came. They happened to be some little friends of Kitty’s, and she went to them in the parlor, telling mamma to go up to nurse and have her hair brushed and her dress changed, and then come and see the guests. While she was away Kitty told the girls the joke they were having, and begged them to help her carry it out. They agreed, being ready for fun and not at all afraid of Mrs. Fairbairn. So when she came in they all began to kiss and cuddle and praise and pass her round as if she was a doll, to her great discomfort and the great amusement of the little girls.

While this was going on in the drawing-room, Harry was tutoring his father in the study, and putting that poor gentleman through a course of questions that nearly drove him distracted; for Harry got out the hardest books he could find, and selected the most puzzling subjects. A dusty old history was rummaged out also, and classical researches followed, in which papa’s memory played him false more than once, calling forth rebukes from his severe young tutor. But he came to open disgrace over his mathematics, for he had no head for figures, and, not being a business man, had not troubled himself about the matter; so Harry, who was in fine practice, utterly routed him in mental arithmetic by giving him regular puzzlers, and when he got stuck offered no help, but shook his head and called him a stupid fellow.

The dinner-bell released the exhausted student, and he gladly took his son’s place, looking as if he had been hard at work. He was faint with hunger, but was helped last, being ‘only a boy,’ and then checked every five minutes for eating too fast. Mamma was very meek, and only looked wistfully at the pie when told in her own words that pastry was bad for children.

Any attempts at conversation were promptly quenched by the worn-out old saying, ‘Children should be seen, not heard,’ while Harry and Kitty chattered all dinner-time, and enjoyed it to their hearts’ content, especially the frequent pecks at their great children, who, to be even with them, imitated all their tricks as well as they could.

‘Don’t whistle at table, papa;’ ‘keep your hands still mamma;’ ‘wait till you are helped, sir;’ ‘tuck your napkin well in, and don’t spill your soup, Caroline.’

Aunt Betsey laughed till her eyes were full, and they had a jolly time, though the little people had the best of it, for the others obeyed them in spite of their dislike to the new rules.

‘Now you may play for two hours,’ was the gracious order issued as they rose from table.

Mamma fell upon a sofa exhausted, and papa hurried to read his paper in the shady garden.

Usually these hours of apparent freedom were spoilt by constant calls, — not to run, not to play this or that, or frequent calls to do errands. The children had mercy, however, and left them in peace; which was a wise move on the whole, for the poor souls found rest so agreeable they privately resolved to let the children alone in their play-hours.

‘Can I go over and see Mr. Hammond?’ asked papa, wishing to use up the last half-hour of his time by a neighbourly call.

‘No; I don’t like Tommy Hammond, so I don’t wish you to play with his father,’ said Harry, with a sly twinkle of the eye, as he turned the tables on his papa.

Mr. Fairbairn gave a low whistle and retired to the barn, where Harry followed him, and ordered the man to harness up old Bill.

‘Going to drive, sir?’ asked papa, respectfully.

‘Don’t ask questions,’ was all the answer he got.

Old Bill was put into the best buggy and driven to the hall door. Papa followed, and mamma sprang up from her nap, ready for her afternoon drive.

‘Can’t I go?’ she asked, as Kitty came down in her new hat and gloves.

‘No; there isn’t room.’

‘Why not have the carryall, and let us go, too, we like it so much,’ said papa, in the pleading tone Harry often used.

Kitty was about to consent, for she loved mamma, and found it hard to cross her so. But Harry was made of sterner stuff; his wrongs still burned within him, and he said impatiently —

‘We can’t be troubled with you. The buggy is nicest and lightest, and we want to talk over our affairs. You, my son, can help John turn the hay on the lawn, and Caroline can amuse baby, or help Jane with the preserves. Little girls should be domestic.’

‘Oh, thunder!’ growled papa.

‘Aunt Betsey taught you that speech, you saucy boy,’ cried mamma, as the children drove off in high glee, leaving their parents to the distasteful tasks set them.

Mrs. Fairbairn wanted to read, but baby was fretful, and there was no Kitty to turn him over to, so she spent her afternoon amusing the small tyrant, while papa made hay in the sun and didn’t like it.

Just at tea-time the children came home, full of the charms of their drive, but did not take the trouble to tell much about it to the stay-at-home people. Bread and milk was all they allowed their victims, while they revelled in marmalade and cake, fruit and tea.

‘I expect company this evening, but I don’t wish you to sit up, Caroline; you are too young, and late hours are bad for your eyes. Go to bed, and don’t forget to brush your hair and teeth well, five minutes for each; cold cream your hands, fold your ribbons, hang up your clothes, put out your boots to be cleaned, and put in the mosquito bars; I will come and take away the light when I am dressed.’

Kitty delivered this dread command with effect, for she had heard and cried over it too often not to have it quite by heart.

‘But I can’t go to bed at half-past seven o’clock of a summer night! I’m not sleepy, and this is just the pleasantest time of the whole day,’ said mamma, thinking her bargain a hard one.

‘Go up directly, my daughter, and don’t discuss the matter; I know what is best for you,’ and Kitty sent social, wide-awake mamma to bed, there to lie thinking soberly till Mrs. Kit came for the lamp.

‘Have you had a happy day, love?’ she asked, bending over the pillow, as her mother used to do.

‘No, ma’am.’

‘Then it was your own fault, my child. Obey your parents in all things, and you will be both good and happy.’

‘That depends’ — began mamma, but stopped short, remembering that to-morrow she would be on the other side, and anything she might say now would be quoted against her.

But Kitty understood, and her heart melted as she hugged her mother and said in her own caressing way —

‘Poor little mamma! did she have a hard time? and didn’t she like being a good girl and minding her parents?’

Mamma laughed also, and held Kitty close, but all she said was —

‘Good-night, dear; don’t be troubled: it will be all right to-morrow.’

‘I hope so,’ and with a hearty kiss, Kitty went thoughtfully downstairs to meet several little friends whom she had asked to spend the evening with her.

As the ladies left the room, papa leaned back and prepared to smoke a cigar, feeling that he needed the comfort of it after this trying day. But Harry was down upon him at once.

‘A very bad habit — can’t allow it. Throw that dirty thing away, and go and get your Latin lesson for to-morrow. The study is quiet, and we want this room.’

‘But I am tired. I can’t study at night. Let me off till to-morrow, please, sir!’ begged papa, who had not looked at Latin since he left school.

‘Not a word, sir! I shall listen to no excuses, and shall *not* let you neglect your education on any account,’ and Harry slapped the table *à la* papa in the most impressive manner.

Mr. Fairbairn went away into the dull study and made believe do his lesson, but he really smoked and meditated.

The young folks had a grand revel, and kept it up till ten o’clock, while mamma lay awake, longing to go down and see what they were about, and papa shortly fell asleep, quite exhausted by the society of a Latin Grammar.

‘Idle boy, is this the way you study?’ said Harry, audaciously tweaking him by the ear.

‘No, it’s the way you do;’ and feeling that his day of bondage was over, papa cast off his allegiance, tucked a child under each arm, and marched upstairs with them, kicking and screaming. Setting them down at the nursery door, he said, shaking his finger at them in an awful manner, —

‘Wait a bit, you rascals, and see what you will get to-morrow.’

With this dark threat he vanished into his own room, and a minute after a great burst of laughter set their fears at rest.

‘It was a fair bargain, so I’m not afraid,’ said Harry stoutly.

‘He kissed us good-night though he did glower at us, so I guess it was only fun,’ added Kitty.

‘Hasn’t it been a funny day?’ asked Harry.

‘Don’t think I quite like it, everything is so turned round,’ said Kitty.

‘Guess *they* didn’t like it very well. Hear ‘em talking in there;’ and Harry held up his finger, for a steady murmur of conversation had followed the laughter in papa and mamma’s room.

‘I wonder if our joke will do any good?’ said Kitty thoughtfully.

‘Wait and see,’ answered Aunt Betsey, popping her night-capped head out of her room with a nod and a smile that sent them to bed full of hope for the future.

DANDELION.

Down by the sea lived Ben the fisherman, with his wife, and little son, who was called Dandelion, because he wore yellow pinafores, and had curly, yellow hair, that covered his head with a golden fuzz. A very happy family, for Ben was kind and industrious, Hetty, his wife, a cheerful, busy creature, and Dandelion the jolliest three-year-old baby who ever made sand-pies and paddled on the beach.

But one day a great trouble came to them. Ben and his fellow-fishermen sailed blithely away as usual, and Hetty watched the fleet of white-winged boats out of the bay, thinking how pretty they looked with the sunshine on them; while Dandelion stood clapping his chubby hands, and saying, as he always did, ‘Daddy tummin’ soon.’ But Daddy did not come soon that time; for a great storm arose, and when some of the boats came scudding home at nightfall, Ben’s was not among them. All night the gale raged, and in the morning, Ben’s boat lay empty and broken on the shore. His mates shook their heads when they saw the wreck, and drew their rough hands over their eyes; for Ben was a good seaman, and they knew he never would desert his boat alive. They looked for him far and wide, but could hear nothing of him, and felt sure that he had perished in the storm. They tried to comfort poor Hetty, but she would not be comforted. Her heart seemed broken; and if it had not been for her baby, her neighbours feared that she would have gone to join Ben in his grave under the sea. Dandelion didn’t understand why every one was so sad, and why his father stayed away so long; but he never lost his cheerfulness, never gave up hoping, or stopped saying, with a contented smile, ‘Daddy tummin’ soon.’ The sunshiny little face was Hetty’s only comfort. The sight of the fuzzy yellow head, bobbing round the house, alone made it endurable; and the touch of the loving baby hands kept her from the despair which made her long to end her sorrow in the sea.

People don’t believe in fairies now-a-days; nevertheless, good spirits still exist, and help us in our times of trouble, better even than the little people we used to read about. One of these household spirits is called Love, and it took the shape of Dandelion to comfort poor Hetty. Another is called Labor: a beautiful, happy spirit this is, and it did its part so well that there was little time for bitter thoughts or vain regrets; for Hetty’s spinning-wheel must go, in order to earn bread for Dandelion, whose mouth was always ready for food, like a hungry bird’s. Busily hummed the wheel: and, as it flew, it seemed to catch an echo of the baby’s cheerful song, saying, over and over, ‘Daddy tummin’ soon,’ till Hetty stopped crying as she worked, and listened to the cheerful whirr. ‘Yes, I shall see my good Ben again, if I wait patiently. Baby takes comfort in saying that, and I will, too; though the poor dear will get tired of it soon,’ she said.

But Dandelion didn’t get tired. He firmly believed what he said, and nothing could change his mind. He had been much troubled at seeing the boat laid up on the beach all broken and dismantled, but his little mind couldn’t take in the idea of shipwreck and death; so, after thinking it over, he decided that Daddy was waiting somewhere for a new boat to be sent to bring him home. This idea was so strong that the child gathered together his store of toy-boats, — for he had many, as they were his favourite plaything, — and launched them, one after another, telling them to find his father, and bring him home.

As Dandelion was not allowed to play on the beach, except at low tide, the little boats sailed safely away on the receding waves, and the child was sure that some of them would get safely into the distant port where Daddy was waiting. All the boats were launched at last, all sailed bravely away; but none came back, and little Dandy was much disappointed. He babbled about it to himself; told the peeps and the horse-shoes, the snails and the lobsters, of his trouble; begged the gulls to fly away and find Daddy; and every windy night when the sea dashed on the shore and the shutters rattled, he would want the lamp put in the window, as it used to be when they expected Ben, and tried to make home look cheerful, even before he got there.

Hetty used to humour the child, though it made her heart ache to know that the light shone in vain. At such times Dandy would prance about the room in his little shirt, and talk about Daddy as happily as if long months had not passed without bringing him back. When fairly in his big, old-fashioned cradle, the boy would lie, looking more like a dandelion than ever, in his yellow flannel night-gown, playing with his toes, or rocking himself to and fro, calling the cradle his boat, and blithely telling his mother that he was sailing ‘far way to find Daddy.’ When tired of play, he lay still and asked her to sing to him. She had no heart for the gay old sea-songs she used to sing for lullabies; so she sung hymns in her soft, motherly voice, till the blue eyes closed and the golden head lay still, looking so pretty, with the circle of bright hair above the rosy face. ‘My little saint,’ Hetty called him; and though she often wept sadly as she watched him, the bitterness of her grief passed away, and a patient hope came to her; for the child’s firm faith impressed her deeply, the pious music of the sweet old hymns comforted her sore heart, and daily labor kept her cheerful in spite of herself. The neighbours wondered at the change that came over her, but she could not explain it; and no one knew that the three good spirits called Love, Labor, and Hope, were working their pleasant miracles.

Six long months went by, and no one ever thought of seeing Ben again, — no one but his little son, who still watched for him here, and his wife, who waited to meet him hereafter.

One bright spring day something happened. The house was as tidy as ever; the wheel hummed briskly as Hetty sung softly to herself with a cheerful face, though there were white hairs among the brown, and her eyes had a thoughtful, absent look at times. Dandelion, more chubby and cheery than ever, sat at her feet, with the sunshine making a golden glory of his yellow hair, as he tried his new boat in the tub of water his mother kept for her little sailor, or tugged away with his fat fingers at a big needle which he was trying to pull through a bit of cloth intended for a sail. The faithful little soul had not forgotten his father, but had come to the conclusion that the reason his boats never prospered was because they hadn't large enough sails; so he was intent on rigging a new boat lately given him, with a sail that could not fail to waft Ben safely home. With his mouth puckered up, his downy eyebrows knit, and both hands pulling at the big needle, he was so wrapped in his work that he did not mind the stopping of the wheel when Hetty fell into a reverie, thinking of the happy time when she and Ben should meet again. Sitting so, neither heard a step come softly over the sand; neither saw an eager, brown face peer in at the door; and neither knew for a minute, that Ben was watching them, with a love and longing in his heart that made him tremble like a woman.

Dandelion saw him first; for, as he pulled the thread through with a triumphant jerk, the small sailmaker lost his balance, tumbled over, and lay staring up at the tall man with his blue eyes so wide open, they looked as if they would never shut again. All of a sudden, he shouted, with a joyful shout, 'Daddy's tummin'!' and the next instant, vanished, ship and all, in the arms of the man who wore the rough jacket. Over went the spinning-wheel, as Hetty vanished likewise; and for a time there was nothing but sobbing and kissing, clinging, and thanking Heaven for its kindness to them. When they grew quieter, and Ben got into his old chair, with his wife on one knee and his boy on the other, he told them how he was wrecked in the gale, picked up by an outward-bound ship, and only able to get back after months of sickness and delay.

'My boaty fetched him,' said Dandelion, feeling that every thing had turned out just as he expected.

'So it did, my precious; leastways, your faith helped, I haven't a doubt,' cried Hetty, hugging the curly headed prophet close, as she told Ben all that had happened.

Ben didn't say much, but a few great tears rolled down the rough blue jacket, as he looked from the queer sail with its two big stitches to the little son, whose love, he firmly believed, had kept him safe through many dangers and brought him home at last.

When the fine new boat was built, no one thought it strange that Ben named it ‘Dandelion;’ no one laughed at the little sail which always hung over the fire-place in the small house: and long years after, when Ben was an old man, and sat by the door with his grand-children on his knee, the story which always pleased them best was that which ended with the funny words, ‘Daddy tummin’ soon.’

MADAM CLUCK AND HER FAMILY.

There never was a prouder mamma than Madam Cluck when she led forth her family of eight downy little chicks. Chanticleer, Strut, Snowball, Speckle, Peep, Peck, Downy, and Blot were their names; and no sooner were they out of the shell than they began to chirp and scratch as gaily as if the big world in which they suddenly found themselves was made for their especial benefit. It was a fine brood; but poor Madam Cluck had bad luck with her chicks, for they were her first, and she didn't know how to manage them. Old Aunt Cockletop told her that she didn't, and predicted that 'those poor dears would come to bad ends.'

Aunt Cockletop was right, as you will see, when I have told the sad history of this unfortunate family. The tragedy began with Chanty, who was the boldest little cockadoodle who ever tried to crow. Before he had a feather to his bit of a tail, Chanty began to fight, and soon was known as the most quarrelsome chick in the farm-yard. Having pecked his brothers and sisters, he tried to do the same to his playmates, the ducklings, goslings, and young turkeys, and was so disagreeable that all the fowls hated him. One day, a pair of bantams arrived, — pretty little white birds, with red crests and nice yellow feet. Chanty thought he could beat Mr. Bantam easily, he was so small, and invited him to fight. Mr. B. declined. Then Chanty called him a coward, and gave Mrs. B. a peck, which so enraged her spouse that he flew at Chanty like a gamecock, and a dreadful fight followed, which ended in Chanty's utter defeat, for he died from his wounds.

Downy and Snowball soon followed; for the two sweet little things would swing on the burdock-leaves that grew over the brook. Sitting side by side, the plump sisters were placidly swaying up and down over the clear brown water rippling below, when — ah! sad to relate — the stem broke, and down went leaf, chickens and all, to a watery death.

'I'm the most unlucky hen ever hatched!' groaned poor Madam Cluck; and it did seem so, for the very next week, Speckle, the best and prettiest of the brood, went to walk with Aunt Cockletop, 'grasshoppering' they called it, in the great field across the road. What a nice time Speckle did have, to be sure; for the grasshoppers were lively and fat, and aunt was in an unusually amiable mood.

'Never run away from anything, but face danger and conquer it, like a brave chick,' said the old biddy, as she went clucking through the grass, with her gray turban wagging in the wind. Speckle had hopped away from a toad with a startled chirp, which caused aunt to utter that remark. The words had hardly left her beak, when a shadow above made her look up, give one loud croak of alarm, and then scuttle away, as fast as legs and wings could carry her.

Little Speckle, remembering the advice, and unconscious of the danger, stood her ground as a great hawk came circling nearer and nearer, till, with a sudden dart he pounced on the poor chicken, and bore it away chirping dismally,

‘Aunty told me not to run. Oh, dear! oh, dear! What shall I do?’

It was a dreadful blow to Mrs. Cluck; and Aunt Cockletop didn’t show herself for a whole day after that story was known, for every fowl in the yard twitted her with the difference between her preaching and her practice.

Strut, the other son, was the vainest chick ever seen; and the great aim of his life was to crow louder than any other cock in the neighbourhood. He was at it from morning till night, and everyone was tired to death of hearing his shrill, small voice making funny attempts to produce hoarse little crows, as he sat on the wall and stretched his yellow neck, till his throat quite ached with the effort.

‘Ah! if I could only fly to the highest beam in the barn, and give a splendid crow that everyone could hear, I should be perfectly happy,’ said this silly little fowl, as he stared up at the loft where the old cock often sat.

So he tried every day to fly and crow, and at last managed to get up; then how he did strut and rustle his feathers, while his playmates sat below and watched him.

‘You’ll fall and get hurt,’ said his sister Blot.

‘Hold your tongue, you ugly little thing, and don’t talk to me. I’m going to crow, and can’t be interrupted by any silly bit of a hen. Be quiet, down there, and hear if I can’t do it as well as daddy.’

The chicks stopped scratching and peeping, and sat in a row to hear Strut crow. Perching himself on the beam, he tried his best, but only a droll ‘cock-a-doodle-doo’ came of it, and all the chicks laughed. That made Strut mad, and he resolved to crow, even if he killed himself doing it. He gave an angry cluck, flapped his wings, and tried again. Alas, alas, for poor Strut! he leaned so far forward in his frantic effort to get a big crow out, that he toppled over and fell bump on the hard barn-floor, killing himself instantly.

For some time after this, Mrs. Cluck kept her three remaining little ones close to her side, watching over them with maternal care, till they were heartily tired of her anxious cluckings. Peep and Peck were always together, being very fond of one another. Peep was a most inquisitive chicken, poking her head into every nook and corner, and never satisfied till she had seen all there was to see. Peck was a glutton, eating everything she could find, and often making herself ill by gobbling too fast, and forgetting to eat a little gravel to help digest her food.

‘Don’t go out of the barn, children. I’m going to lay an egg, and can’t look after you just now,’ said their mother one day.

‘Yes, ma’am,’ chirped the chickens; and then as she went rustling into the hay-mow, they began to run about and enjoy themselves with all their might. Peep found a little hole into the meal-room, and slipped in, full of joy at the sight of the bags, boxes, and bins. ‘I’ll eat all I want, and then I’ll call Peck,’ she said; and having taken a taste of every thing, she was about to leave, when she heard the stableman coming, and in her fright couldn’t find the hole, so flew into the meal-bin and hid herself. Sam never saw her, but shut down the cover of the bin as he passed, and left poor Peep to die. No one knew what had become of her till some days later, when she was found dead in the meal, with her poor little claws sticking straight up as if imploring help. Peck meanwhile got into mischief also; for, in her hunt for something good to eat, she strayed into the sheep-shed, and finding some salt, ate as much as she liked, not knowing that salt is bad for hens. Having taken all she wanted, she ran back to the barn, and was innocently catching gnats when her mamma came out of the hay-mow with a loud. ‘Cut-cut-cut-ca-dar-cut!’

‘Where is Peep?’ asked Mrs. Cluck.

‘Don’t know, ma. She’ — there Peck stopped suddenly, rolled up her eyes, and began to stagger about as if she was tipsy.

‘Mercy on us! What’s the matter with the chick?’ cried Mrs. Cluck, in great alarm.

‘Fits, ma’am,’ answered Doctor Drake, who just then waddled by.

‘Oh! what can I do?’ screamed the distracted hen.

‘Nothing, ma’am; it’s fatal.’ And the doctor waddled on to visit Dame Partlet’s son, who was ill of the pip.

‘My child, my child! don’t flap and stagger so! Let me hold you! Taste this mint-leaf! Have a drop of water! What shall I do?’

As poor Mrs. Cluck sighed and sobbed, her unhappy child went scuffling about on her back, gasping and rolling up her eyes in great anguish, for she had eaten too much of the fatal salt, and there was no help for her. When all was over they buried the dead chicken under a currant bush, covered the little grave with chickweed, and the bereaved parent wore a black string round her leg for a month.

Blot, ‘the last of that bright band,’ needed no mourning for she was as black as a crow. This was the reason why her mother never had loved her as much as she did the others, who were all white, gray, or yellow. Poor little Blot had been much neglected by every one; but now her lonely mamma discovered how good and affectionate a chicken she was, for Blot was a great comfort to her, never running away or disobeying in any way, but always close to her side, ready to creep under her wing, or bring her a plump bug when the poor biddy’s appetite failed her. They were very happy together till Thanksgiving drew near, when a dreadful pestilence seemed to sweep through the farm-yard; for turkeys, hens, ducks, and geese fell a prey to it, and were seen by their surviving relatives featherless, pale, and stiff, borne away to some unknown place whence no fowl returned. Blot was waked one night by a great cackling and fluttering in the hen-house, and peeping down from her perch saw a great hand glide along the roost, clutch her beloved mother by the leg, and pull her off, screaming dolefully, ‘Good-by, good-by, my darling child!’

Aunt Cockletop pecked and croaked fiercely; but, tough as she was, the old biddy did not escape, and many another amiable hen and gallant cockadoodle fell a victim to that mysterious hand. In the morning few remained, and Blot felt that she was a forlorn orphan, a thought which caused her to sit with her head under her wing for several hours, brooding over her sad lot, and longing to join her family in some safe and happy land, where fowls live in peace. She had her wish very soon, for one day, when the first snowflakes began to flutter out of the cold gray sky, Blot saw a little kitten mewing pitifully as it sat under the fence.

‘What is the matter, dear?’ asked kind Blot.

‘I’m lost, and I can’t find my way home,’ answered the kitten, shivering with cold. ‘I live at the red farm-house over the hill, only I don’t know which road to take.’

‘I’ll show you. Come at once, for night is coming on, and the snow will soon be too deep for us,’ said Blot.

So away they went, as fast as their small legs could carry them; but it was a long way, and dusk came on before the red farm-house appeared.

‘Now I’m safe; thank you very much. Won’t you come in, and stay all night? My mother will be glad to see you,’ said the kit rubbing her soft white face against Blot’s little black breast.

‘It’s against the rule to stay out all night, and I promised to be in early; so, good-by, dear.’ And off trotted Blot along the snowy road, hoping to get home before the hen-house door was shut. Faster and faster fell the snow darker and darker grew the night, and colder and colder became poor Blot’s little feet as she waded through the drifts. The firelight was shining out into the gloom, as the half-frozen chicken came into the yard, to find all doors shut, and no shelter left for her but the bough of a leafless tree. Too stiff and weak to fly up, she crept as close as possible to the bright glow which shone across the door-step, and with a shiver put her little head under her wing, trying to forget hunger, weariness, and the bitter cold, and wait patiently for morning. But when morning came, little Blot lay frozen stiff under a coverlet of snow: and the tender-hearted children sighed as they dug a grave for the last of the unfortunate family of the Clucks.

A CURIOUS CALL.

I have often wondered what the various statues standing about the city think of all day, and what criticisms they would make upon us and our doings, if they could speak. I frequently stop and stare at them, wondering if they don’t feel lonely; if they wouldn’t be glad of a nod as we go by; and I always long to offer my umbrella to shield their uncovered heads on a rainy day, especially to good Ben Franklin, when the snow lies white on his benevolent forehead. I was always fond of this old gentleman; and one of my favourite stories when a little girl, was that of his early life, and the time when he was so poor he walked about Philadelphia with a roll of bread under each arm, eating a third as he went. I never pass without giving him a respectful look, and wishing he could know how grateful I am for all he had done in the printing line; for, without types and presses, where would the books be?

Well, I never imagined that he understood why the tall woman in the big bonnet stared at him; but he did, and he liked it, and managed to let me know it in a very curious manner, as you shall hear.

As I look out, the first thing I see is the great gilt eagle on the City-Hall dome. There he sits, with open wings, all day long, looking down on the people, who must appear like ants scampering busily to and fro about an ant-hill. The sun shines on him splendidly in the morning; the gay flag waves and rustles in the wind above him sometimes; and the moonlight turns him to silver when she comes glittering up the sky. When it rains he never shakes his feathers; snow beats on him without disturbing his stately repose; and he never puts his head under his wing at night, but keeps guard in darkness as in day, like a faithful sentinel. I like the big, lonely bird, call him my particular fowl, and often wish he’d turn his head and speak to me. One night he did actually do it, or seemed to; for I’ve never been able to decide whether I dreamed what I’m going to tell you, or whether it really happened.

It was a stormy night! and, as I drew down my curtain, I said to myself, after peering through the driving snow to catch a glimpse of my neighbour, ‘Poor Goldy! he’ll have a rough time of it. I hope this northeaster won’t blow him off his perch.’ Then I sat down by my fire, took my knitting, and began to meditate. I’m sure I didn’t fall asleep; but I can’t prove it, so we’ll say no more about it. All at once there came a tap at my door, as I thought; and I said ‘Come in,’ just as Mr. Poe did when that unpleasant raven paid him a call. No one came, so I went to see who it was. Not a sign of a human soul in the long hall, only little Jessie, the poodle, asleep on her mat. Down I sat; but in a minute the tap came again; this time so loud that I knew it was at the window, and went to open it, thinking that one of my doves wanted to come in perhaps. Up went the sash, and in bounced something so big and so bright that it dazzled and scared me.

‘Don’t be frightened, ma’am; it’s only me,’ said a hoarse voice. So I collected my wits, rubbed my eyes, and looked at my visitor. It was the gold eagle off the City Hall! I don’t expect to be believed; but I wish you’d been here to see, for I give you my word, it was a sight to behold. How he ever got in at such a small window I can’t tell; but there he was, strutting majestically up and down the room, his golden plumage rustling, and his keen eyes flashing as he walked. I really didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t imagine what he came for; I had my doubts about the propriety of offering him a chair; and he was so much bigger than I expected that I was afraid he might fly away with me, as the roc did with Sindbad: so I did nothing but sidle to the door, ready to whisk out, if my strange guest appeared to be peckishly inclined. My respectful silence seemed to suit him; for, after a turn or two, he paused, nodded gravely, and said affably, ‘Good-evening, ma’am. I stepped over to bring you old Ben’s respects, and to see how you were getting on.’

‘I’m very much obliged, sir. May I inquire who Mr. Old-Ben is? I’m afraid I haven’t the honour of his acquaintance.’

‘Yes, you have; it’s Ben Franklin, of City-Hall yard. You know him; and he wished me to thank you for your interest in him.’

‘Dear me! how very odd! Will you sit down, sir?’

‘Never sit! I’ll perch here;’ and the great fowl took his accustomed attitude just in front of the fire, looking so very splendid that I couldn’t keep my eyes off of him.

‘Ah! you often do that. Never mind; I rather like it,’ said the eagle, graciously, as he turned his brilliant eye upon me. I was rather abashed; but being very curious, I ventured to ask a few questions, as he seemed in a friendly mood.

‘Being a woman, sir, I’m naturally of an inquiring turn; and I must confess that I have a strong desire to know how it happens that you take your walks abroad, when you are supposed to be permanently engaged at home?’

He shrugged his shoulders, and actually winked at me, as he replied, ‘That’s all people know of what goes on under, or rather over, their noses. Bless you, ma’am! I leave my roost every night, and enjoy myself in all sorts of larks. Excuse the expression; but, being ornithological, it is more proper for me than for some people who use it.’

‘What a gay old bird!’ thought I, feeling quite at home after that. ‘Please tell me what you do, when the shades of evening prevail, and you go out for a frolic?’

‘I am a gentleman; therefore I behave myself,’ returned the eagle; with a stately air. ‘I must confess, I smoke a great deal: but that’s not my fault, it’s the fault of the chimneys. They keep it up all day, and I have to take it; just as you poor ladies have to take cigar smoke, whether you like it or not. My amusements are of a wholesome kind. I usually begin by taking a long flight down the harbour, for a look at the lighthouses, the islands, the shipping, and the sea. My friends, the gulls, bring their reports to me; for they are the harbour-police, and I take notes of their doings. The school-ship is an object of interest to me, and I often perch on the mast-head, to see how the lads are getting on. Then I take a turn over the city, gossip with the weathercocks, pay my compliments to the bells, inspect the fire-alarm, and pick up information by listening at the telegraph wires. People often talk about “a little bird” who spreads news; but they don’t know how that figure of speech originated. It is the sparrows sitting on the wires, who receive the electric shock, and, being hollow-boned, the news go straight to their heads; they then fly about, chirping it on the housetops, and the air carries it everywhere. That’s the way rumours rise and news spread.’

‘If you’ll allow, I’ll make a note of that interesting fact,’ said I, wondering if I might believe him. He appeared to fall into a reverie while I jotted down the sparrow story, and it occurred to me that perhaps I ought to offer my distinguished guest some refreshment; but, when I modestly alluded to it, he said, with an aldermanic air, ‘No, thank you; I’ve just dined at the Parker House.’

Now, I really could *not* swallow that; and so plainly betrayed my incredulity, that the eagle explained. ‘The savoury smells which rise to my nostrils from that excellent hotel, with an occasional sniff from the Tremont, are quite sufficient to satisfy my appetite; for, having no stomach, I don’t need much food, and I drink nothing but water.’

‘I wish others would follow your example in that latter habit,’ said I, respectfully, for I was beginning to see that there was something in my bird, though he *was* hollow. ‘Will you allow me to ask if the other statues in the city fly by night?’

‘They promenade in the parks; and occasionally have social gatherings, when they discuss politics, education, medicine, or any of the subjects in which they are interested. Ah! we have grand times when you are all asleep. It quite repays me for being obliged to make an owl of myself.’

‘Do the statues come from the shops to these parties?’ I asked, resolving to take a late walk the next moonlight night.

‘Sometimes; but they get lazy and delicate, living in close, warm places. We laugh at cold and bad weather, and are so strong and hearty that I shouldn’t be surprised if I saw Webster and Everett flying round the Common on the new-fashioned velocipedes, for they believed in exercise. Goethe and Schiller often step over from De Vries’s window, to flirt with the goddesses, who come down from their niches on Horticultural Hall. Nice, robust young women are Pomona and Flora. If your niminy-piminy girls could see them run, they would stop tilting through the streets, and learn that the true Grecian Bend is the line of beauty always found in straight shoulders, well-opened chest, and an upright figure, firmly planted on active feet.’

‘In your rambles don’t you find a great deal of misery?’ said I, to change the subject, for he was evidently old-fashioned in his notions.

‘Many sad sights!’ And he shook his head with a sigh; then added, briskly, ‘But there is a deal of charity in our city, and it does its work beautifully. By the by, I heard of a very sweet charity the other day, — a church whose Sunday school is open to all the poor children who will come; and there, in pleasant rooms, with books, pictures, kindly teachers, and a fatherly minister to welcome them, the poor little creatures find refreshment for their hungry souls. I like that; it’s a lovely illustration of the text, “Suffer little children to come unto me;” and *I* call it practical Christianity.’

He did like it, my benevolent old bird; for he rustled his great wings, as if he wanted to clap them, if there had only been room; and every feather shone as if a clearer light than that of my little fire had fallen on it as he spoke.

‘You are a literary woman, hey?’ he said suddenly, as if he’d got a new idea, and was going to pounce upon me with it.

‘Ahem! I do a little in that line,’ I answered, with a modest cough.

‘Then tell people about that place; write some stories for the children; go and help teach them; do something, and make others do what they can to increase the sabbath sunshine that brightens one day in the week for the poor babies who live in shady places.’

‘I should be glad to do my best; and, if I’d known before’ — I began.

‘You might have known, if you’d looked about you. People are so wrapt up in their own affairs they don’t do half they might. Now, then, hand me a bit of paper, and I’ll give you the address, so you won’t have any excuse for forgetting what I tell you.’

‘Mercy on us; what will he do next?’ thought I, as he tweaked a feather out of his breast, gave the nib a peck, and then coolly wrote these words on the card I handed him: ‘*Church of the Disciples. Knock and it shall be opened!*’ There it was, in letters of gold; and, while I looked at it, feeling reproached that I hadn’t known it sooner, my friend, — he didn’t seem a stranger any more, — said in a business-like tone, as he put back his pen, ‘Now I must be off. Old Ben reads an article on the “Abuses of the Press at the present day,” and I must be there to report.’

‘It must be very interesting. I suppose you don’t allow mortals at your meetings?’ said I, burning to go, in spite of the storm.

‘No, ma’am. We meet on the Common; and, in the present state of the weather, I don’t think flesh and blood would stand it. Bronze, marble, and wood are sterner stuff, and can defy the elements.’

‘Good evening; pray, call again,’ I said, hospitably.

‘I will; your eyrie suits me: but don’t expect me to call in the daytime. I’m on duty then, and can’t take my eye off my charge. The city needs a deal of watching, my dear. Bless me! it’s striking eight. Your watch is seven minutes slow by the Old South. Good-night, good-night!’

And as I opened the window, the great bird soared away like a flash of light through the storm, leaving me so astonished at the whole performance that I haven’t got over it yet.

TILLY’S CHRISTMAS.

‘I’m so glad to-morrow is Christmas, because I’m going to have lots of presents.’

‘So am I glad, though I don’t expect any presents but a pair of mittens.’

‘And so am I; but I shan’t have any presents at all.’

As the three little girls trudged home from school they said these things, and as Tilly spoke, both the others looked at her with pity and some surprise, for she spoke cheerfully, and they wondered how she could be happy when she was so poor she could have no presents on Christmas.

‘Don’t you wish you could find a purse full of money right here in the path?’ said Kate, the child who was going to have ‘lots of presents.’

‘Oh, don’t I, if I could keep it honestly!’ and Tilly’s eyes shone at the very thought.

‘What would you buy?’ asked Bessy, rubbing her cold hands, and longing for her mittens.

‘I’d buy a pair of large, warm blankets, a load of wood, a shawl for mother, and a pair of shoes for me; and if there was enough left, I’d give Bessy a new hat, and then she needn’t wear Ben’s old felt one,’ answered Tilly.

The girls laughed at that; but Bessy pulled the funny hat over her ears, and said she was much obliged but she’d rather have candy.

‘Let’s look, and maybe we *can* find a purse. People are always going about with money at Christmas time, and some one may lose it here,’ said Kate.

So, as they went along the snowy road, they looked about them, half in earnest, half in fun. Suddenly Tilly sprang forward, exclaiming, —

‘I see it! I’ve found it!’

The others followed, but all stopped disappointed; for it wasn’t a purse, it was only a little bird. It lay upon the snow with its wings spread and feebly fluttering, as if too weak to fly. Its little feet were benumbed with cold; its once bright eyes were dull with pain, and instead of a blithe song, it could only utter a faint chirp, now and then, as if crying for help.

‘Nothing but a stupid old robin; how provoking!’ cried Kate, sitting down to rest.

‘I shan’t touch it. I found one once, and took care of it, and the ungrateful thing flew away the minute it was well,’ said Bessy, creeping under Kate’s shawl, and putting her hands under her chin to warm them.

‘Poor little birdie! How pitiful he looks, and how glad he must be to see some one coming to help him! I’ll take him up gently, and carry him home to mother. Don’t be frightened, dear, I’m your friend;’ and Tilly knelt down in the snow, stretching her hand to the bird, with the tenderest pity in her face.

Kate and Bessy laughed.

‘Don’t stop for that thing; it’s getting late and cold: let’s go on and look for the purse,’ they said moving away.

‘You wouldn’t leave it to die!’ cried Tilly. ‘I’d rather have the bird than the money, so I shan’t look any more. The purse wouldn’t be mine, and I should only be tempted to keep it; but this poor thing will thank and love me, and I’m *so* glad I came in time.’

Gently lifting the bird, Tilly felt its tiny cold claws cling to her hand, and saw its dim eyes brighten as it nestled down with a grateful chirp.

‘Now I’ve got a Christmas present after all,’ she said, smiling, as they walked on. ‘I always wanted a bird, and this one will be such a pretty pet for me.’

‘He’ll fly away the first chance he gets, and die anyhow; so you’d better not waste your time over him,’ said Bessy.

‘He can’t pay you for taking care of him, and my mother says it isn’t worth while to help folks that can’t help us,’ added Kate.

‘My mother says, “Do as you’d be done by;” and I’m sure I’d like any one to help me if I was dying of cold and hunger. “Love your neighbour as yourself,” is another of her sayings. This bird is my little neighbour, and I’ll love him and care for him, as I often wish our rich neighbour would love and care for us,’ answered Tilly, breathing her warm breath over the benumbed bird, who looked up at her with confiding eyes, quick to feel and know a friend.

‘What a funny girl you are,’ said Kate; ‘caring for that silly bird, and talking about loving your neighbour in that sober way. Mr. King don’t care a bit for you, and never will, though he knows how poor you are; so I don’t think your plan amounts to much.’

‘I believe it, though; and shall do my part, any way. Good-night. I hope you’ll have a merry Christmas, and lots of pretty things,’ answered Tilly, as they parted.

Her eyes were full, and she felt so poor as she went on alone toward the little old house where she lived. It would have been so pleasant to know that she was going to have some of the pretty things all children love to find in their full stockings on Christmas morning. And pleasanter still to have been able to give her mother something nice. So many comforts were needed, and there was no hope of getting them; for they could barely get food and fire.

‘Never mind, birdie, we’ll make the best of what we have, and be merry in spite of every thing. *You* shall have a happy Christmas, any way; and I know

God won’t forget us if every one else does.’

She stopped a minute to wipe her eyes, and lean her cheek against the bird’s soft breast, finding great comfort in the little creature, though it could only love her, nothing more.

‘See, mother, what a nice present I’ve found,’ she cried, going in with a cheery face that was like sunshine in the dark room.

‘I’m glad of that, dearie; for I haven’t been able to get my little girl anything but a rosy apple. Poor bird! Give it some of your warm bread and milk.’

‘Why, mother, what a big bowlful! I’m afraid you gave me all the milk,’ said Tilly, smiling over the nice, steaming supper that stood ready for her.

‘I’ve had plenty, dear. Sit down and dry your wet feet, and put the bird in my basket on this warm flannel.’

Tilly peeped into the closet and saw nothing there but dry bread.

‘Mother’s given me all the milk, and is going without her tea, ‘cause she knows I’m hungry. Now I’ll surprise her, and she shall have a good supper too. She is going to split wood, and I’ll fix it while she’s gone.’

So Tilly put down the old tea-pot, carefully poured out a part of the milk, and from her pocket produced a great, plummy bun, that one of the school-children had given her, and she had saved for her mother. A slice of the dry bread was nicely toasted, and the bit of butter set by for her put on it. When her mother came in there was the table drawn up in a warm place, a hot cup of tea ready, and Tilly and birdie waiting for her.

Such a poor little supper, and yet such a happy one; for love, charity, and contentment were guests there, and that Christmas eve was a blither one than that up at the great house, where lights shone, fires blazed, a great tree glittered, and music sounded, as the children danced and played.

‘We must go to bed early, for we’ve only wood enough to last over to-morrow. I shall be paid for my work the day after, and then we can get some,’ said Tilly’s mother, as they sat by the fire.

‘If my bird was only a fairy bird, and would give us three wishes, how nice it would be! Poor dear, he can’t give me any thing; but it’s no matter,’ answered Tilly, looking at the robin, who lay in the basket with his head under his wing, a mere little feathery bunch.

‘He can give you one thing, Tilly, — the pleasure of doing good. That is one of the sweetest things in life; and the poor can enjoy it as well as the rich.’

As her mother spoke, with her tired hand softly stroking her little daughter’s hair, Tilly suddenly started and pointed to the window, saying, in a frightened whisper, —

‘I saw a face, — a man’s face, looking in! It’s gone now; but I truly saw it.’

‘Some traveller attracted by the light perhaps. I’ll go and see.’ And Tilly’s mother went to the door.

No one was there. The wind blew cold, the stars shone, the snow lay white on field and wood, and the Christmas moon was glittering in the sky.

‘What sort of a face was it?’ asked Tilly’s mother, coming back.

‘A pleasant sort of face, I think; but I was so startled I don’t quite know what it was like. I wish we had a curtain there,’ said Tilly.

‘I like to have our light shine out in the evening, for the road is dark and lonely just here, and the twinkle of our lamp is pleasant to people’s eyes as they go by. We can do so little for our neighbours, I am glad to cheer the way for them. Now put these poor old shoes to dry, and go to bed, dearie; I’ll come soon.’

Tilly went, taking her bird with her to sleep in his basket near by, lest he should be lonely in the night.

Soon the little house was dark and still, and no one saw the Christmas spirits at their work that night.

When Tilly opened the door next morning, she gave a loud cry, clapped her hands, and then stood still; quite speechless with wonder and delight. There, before the door, lay a great pile of wood, all ready to burn, a big bundle and a basket, with a lovely nosegay of winter roses, holly, and evergreen tied to the handle.

‘Oh, mother! did the fairies do it?’ cried Tilly, pale with her happiness, as she seized the basket, while her mother took in the bundle.

‘Yes, dear, the best and dearest fairy in the world, called “Charity.” She walks abroad at Christmas time, does beautiful deeds like this, and does not stay to be thanked,’ answered her mother with full eyes, as she undid the parcel.

There they were, — the warm, thick blankets, the comfortable shawls, the new shoes, and, best of all, a pretty winter hat for Bessy. The basket was full of good things to eat, and on the flowers lay a paper, saying, —

‘For the little girl who loves her neighbour as herself.’

‘Mother, I really think my bird is a fairy bird, and all these splendid things come from him,’ said Tilly, laughing and crying with joy.

It really did seem so, for as she spoke, the robin flew to the table, hopped to the nosegay, and perching among the roses, began to chirp with all his little might. The sun streamed in on flowers, bird, and happy child, and no one saw a shadow glide away from the window; no one ever knew that Mr. King had seen and heard the little girls the night before, or dreamed that the rich neighbour had learned a lesson from the poor neighbour.

And Tilly’s bird *was* a fairy bird; for by her love and tenderness to the helpless thing, she brought good gifts to herself, happiness to the unknown giver of them, and a faithful little friend who did not fly away, but stayed with her till the snow was gone, making summer for her in the winter-time.

MY LITTLE GENTLEMAN.

No one would have thought of calling him so, this ragged, barefooted, freckle-faced Jack, who spent his days carrying market-baskets for the butcher, or clean clothes for Mrs. Quinn, selling chips, or grubbing in the ash-heaps for cinders. But he was honestly earning his living, doing his duty as well as he knew how, and serving those poorer and more helpless than himself, and that is being a gentleman in the best sense of that fine old word. He had no home but Mrs. Quinn’s garret; and for this he paid by carrying the bundles and getting the cinders for her fire. Food and clothes he picked up as he could; and his only friend was little Nanny. Her mother had been kind to him when the death of his father left him all alone in the world; and when she, too, passed away, the boy tried to show his gratitude by comforting the little girl, who thought there was no one in the world like her Jack.

Old Mrs. Quinn took care of her, waiting till she was strong enough to work for herself; but Nanny had been sick, and still sat about, a pale, little shadow of her former self, with a white film slowly coming over her pretty blue eyes. This was Jack’s great trouble, and he couldn’t whistle it away as he did his own worries; for he was a cheery lad, and when the baskets were heavy, the way long, the weather bitter cold, his poor clothes in rags, or his stomach empty, he just whistled, and somehow things seemed to get right. But the day he carried Nanny the first dandelions, and she felt of them, instead of looking at them, as she said, with such pathetic patience in her little face, ‘I don’t see ‘em; but I know they’re pretty, and I like ‘em lots,’ Jack felt as if the blithe spring sunshine was all spoiled; and when he tried to cheer himself up with a good whistle, his lips trembled so they wouldn’t pucker.

‘The poor dear’s eyes could be cured, I ain’t a doubt; but it would take a sight of money, and who’s agoing to pay it?’ said Mrs. Quinn, scrubbing away at her tub.

‘How much money?’ asked Jack.

‘A hundred dollars, I dare say. Dr. Wilkinson’s cook told me once that he done something to a lady’s eyes, and asked a thousand dollars for it.’

Jack sighed a long, hopeless sigh, and went away to fill the water-pails; but he remembered the doctor’s name, and began to wonder how many years it would take to earn a hundred dollars.

Nanny was very patient; but, by and by, Mrs. Quinn began to talk about sending her to some almshouse, for she was too poor to be burdened with a helpless child. The fear of this nearly broke Jack's heart; and he went about with such an anxious face that it was a mercy Nanny did not see it. Jack was only twelve, but he had a hard load to carry just then; for the thought of his little friend, doomed to lifelong darkness for want of a little money, tempted him to steal more than once, and gave him the first fierce, bitter feeling against those better off than he. When he carried nice dinners to the great houses and saw the plenty that prevailed there, he couldn't help feeling that it wasn't fair for some to have so much, and others so little. When he saw pretty children playing in the park, or driving with their mothers, so gay, so well cared for, so tenderly loved, the poor boy's eyes would fill to think of poor little Nanny, with no friend in the world but himself, and he so powerless to help her.

When he one day mustered courage to ring at the great doctor's bell, begging to see him a minute, and the servant answered, gruffly, as he shut the door, 'Go along! he can't be bothered with the like of you!' Jack clenched his hands hard as he went down the steps, and said to himself, with a most unboyish tone, 'I'll get the money somehow, and *make* him let me in!'

He did get it, and in a most unexpected way; but he never forgot the desperate feeling that came to him that day, and all his life long he was very tender to people who were tempted in their times of trouble, and yielded, as he was saved from doing, by what seemed an accident.

Some days after his attempt at the doctor's, as he was grubbing in a newly-deposited ash-heap, with the bitter feeling very bad, and the trouble very heavy, he found a dirty old pocket-book, and put it in his bosom without stopping to examine it; for many boys and girls were scratching, like a brood of chickens, all round him, and the pickings were unusually good, so no time must be lost. 'Findings is havings' was one of the laws of the ash-heap haunters; and no one thought of disputing another's right to the spoons and knives that occasionally found their way into the ash-barrels; while bottles, old shoes, rags, and paper, were regular articles of traffic among them. Jack got a good basketful that day; and when the hurry was over sat down to rest and clear the dirt off his face with an old silk duster which he had picked out of the rubbish, thinking Mrs. Quinn might wash it up for a handkerchief. But he didn't wipe his dirty face that day; for, with the rag, out tumbled a pocket-book; and on opening it he saw — money. Yes; a roll of bills with two figures on all of them, — three tens and one twenty. It took his breath away for a minute; then he hugged the old book tight in both his grimy hands, and rocked to and fro all in a heap among the oyster-shells and rusty tin kettles, saying to himself, with tears running down his cheeks, 'O Nanny! O Nanny! now I can do it!'

I don’t think a basket of cinders ever travelled at such a rate before as Mrs. Quinn’s did that day; for Jack tore home at a great pace, and burst into the room, waving the old duster, and shouting, ‘Hooray! I’ve got it! I’ve got it!’

It is no wonder Mrs. Quinn thought he had lost his wits; for he looked like a wild boy, with his face all streaked with tears and red ashes, as he danced a double-shuffle till he was breathless, then showered the money into Nanny’s lap, and hugged her with another ‘Hooray!’ which ended in a choke. When they got him quiet and heard the story, Mrs. Quinn rather damped his joy, by telling him the money wasn’t his, and he ought to advertise it.

‘But I want it for Nanny!’ cried Jack; ‘and how can I ever find who owns it, when there was ever so many barrels emptied in that heap, and no one knows where they came from?’

‘It’s very like you won’t find the owner, and you can do as you please; but it’s honest to try, I’m thinking, for some poor girl may have lost her earnin’s this way, and we wouldn’t like that ourselves,’ said Mrs. Quinn, turning over the shabby pocket-book, and carefully searching for some clue to its owner.

Nanny looked very sober, and Jack grabbed up the money as if it were too precious to lose. But he wasn’t comfortable about it; and after a hard fight with himself he consented to let Mrs. Quinn ask their policeman what they should do. He was a kindly man; and when he heard the story, said he’d do what was right, and if he couldn’t find an owner, Jack should have the fifty dollars back.

How hard it was to wait! how Jack thought and dreamed of his money, day and night! How Nanny ran to the door to listen when a heavy step came up the stairs! and how wistfully the poor darkened eyes turned to the light which they longed to see again.

Honest John Floyd did his duty, but he didn’t find the owner; so the old purse came back at last, and now Jack could keep it with a clear conscience. Nanny was asleep when it happened; and as they sat counting the dingy bills, Mrs. Quinn said to the boy, ‘Jack, you’d better keep this for yourself. I doubt if it’s enough to do the child any good; and you need clothes and shoes, and a heap of things, let alone the books you hanker after so much. It ain’t likely you’ll ever find another wallet. It’s all luck about Nanny’s eyes; and maybe you are only throwing away a chance you’ll never have again.’

Jack leaned his head on his arms and stared at the money, all spread out there, and looking so magnificent to him that it seemed as if it could buy half the world. He did need clothes; his hearty boy’s appetite did long for better food; and, oh! how splendid it would be to go and buy the books he had wanted so long, — the books that would give him a taste of the knowledge which was more enticing to his wide-awake young mind than clothes and food to his poor little body. It wasn’t an easy thing to do; but he was so used to making small sacrifices that the great one was less hard; and when he had brooded over the money a few minutes in thoughtful silence, his eye went from the precious bits of paper to the dear little face in the trundle-bed, and he said, with a decided nod, ‘I’ll give Nanny the chance, and work for my things, or go without ‘em.’

Mrs. Quinn was a matter-of-fact body; but her hard old face softened when he said that, and she kissed him good-night almost as gently as if she’d been his mother.

Next day, Jack presented himself at Dr. Wilkinson’s door, with the money in one hand and Nanny in the other, saying boldly to the gruff servant, ‘I want to see the doctor. I can pay; so you’d better let me in.’

I’m afraid cross Thomas would have shut the door in the boy’s face again, if it had not been for the little blind girl, who looked up at him so imploringly that he couldn’t resist the mute appeal.

‘The doctor’s going out; but maybe he’ll see you a minute;’ and with that he led them into a room where stood a tall man putting on his gloves.

Jack was a modest boy; but he was so afraid that Nanny would lose her chance, that he forgot himself, and told the little story as fast as he could — told it well, too, I fancy; for the doctor listened attentively, his eye going from the boy’s eager, flushed face, to the pale patient one beside him, as if the two little figures, shabby though they were, illustrated the story better than the finest artist could have done. When Jack ended, the doctor sat Nanny on his knee, gently lifted up the half-shut eyelids, and after examining the film a minute, stroked her pretty hair, and said so kindly that she nestled her little hand confidingly into his, ‘I think I can help you, my dear. Tell me where you live, and I’ll attend to it at once, for it’s high time something was done.’

Jack told him, adding, with a manly air, as he showed the money, ‘I can pay you, sir, if fifty dollars is enough.’

‘Quite enough,’ said the doctor, with a droll smile.

‘If it isn’t, I’ll work for the rest, if you’ll trust me. Please save Nanny’s eyes, and I’ll do any thing to pay you!’ cried Jack, getting red and choky in his earnestness.

The doctor stopped smiling, and held out his hand in a grave, respectful way, as he said, ‘I’ll trust you, my boy. We’ll cure Nanny first; and you and I will settle the bill afterward.’

Jack liked that; it was a gentlemanly way of doing things, and he showed his satisfaction by smiling all over his face, and giving the big, white hand a hearty shake with both his rough ones.

The doctor was a busy man; but he kept them some time, for there were no children in the fine house, and it seemed pleasant to have a little girl sit on his knee and a bright boy stand beside his chair; and when, at last, they went away, they looked as if he had given them some magic medicine, which made them forget every trouble they had ever known.

Next day the kind man came to give Nanny her chance. She had no doubt, and very little fear, but looked up at him so confidingly when all was ready, that he stooped down and kissed her softly before he touched her eyes.

‘Let Jack hold my hands; then I’ll be still, and not mind if it hurts me,’ she said. So Jack, pale with anxiety, knelt down before her, and kept the little hands steadily in his all through the minutes that seemed so long to him.

‘What do you see, my child?’ asked the doctor, when he had done something to both eyes with a quick, skilful hand.

Nanny leaned forward, with the film all gone, and answered, with a little cry of joy, that went to the hearts of those who heard it, ‘Jack’s face! I see it! oh, I see it!’

Only a freckled, round face, with wet eyes and tightly-set lips; but to Nanny it was as beautiful as the face of an angel; and when she was laid away with bandaged eyes to rest, it haunted all her dreams, for it was the face of the little friend who loved her best.

Nanny’s chance was *not* a failure; and when she saw the next dandelions he brought her, all the sunshine came back into the world brighter than ever for Jack. Well might it seem so; for his fifty dollars bought him many things that money seldom buys. The doctor wouldn’t take it at first; but when Jack said, in the manful tone the doctor liked although it made him smile, ‘It was a bargain, sir. I wish to pay my debts; and I shan’t feel happy if Nanny don’t have it *all* for her eyes. Please do! I’d rather,’ — then he took it; and Nanny did have it, not only for her eyes, but in clothes and food and care, many times over; for it was invested in a bank that pays good interest on every mite so given.

Jack discovered that fifty dollars was far less than most people would have had to pay, and begged earnestly to be allowed to work for the rest. The doctor agreed to this, and Jack became his errand-boy, serving with a willingness that made a pleasure of duty; soon finding that many comforts quietly got into his life; that much help was given without words; and that the days of hunger and rags, heavy burdens and dusty ash-heaps, were gone by for ever.

The happiest hours of Jack’s day were spent in the doctor’s chaise, when he made his round of visits; for while he waited, the boy studied or read, and while they drove hither and thither, the doctor talked with him, finding an eager mind as well as a tender heart and a brave spirit under the rough jacket of his little serving-man. But he never called him that; for remembering the cheerfulness, self-denial, honesty, and loyalty to those he loved, shown by the boy, the good doctor proved his respect for the virtues all men should covet, wherever they are found, and always spoke of Jack with a smile, as ‘My Little Gentleman.’

BACK WINDOWS.

As I sit working at my back window, I look out on a long row of other people’s back windows; and it is quite impossible for me to help seeing and being interested in my neighbours. There are a good many children in those houses; and though I don’t know one of their names, I know them a great deal better than they think I do. I never spoke a word to any of them, and never expect to do so; yet I have my likes and dislikes among them, and could tell them things that they have said and done, which would astonish them very much, I assure you.

First, the babies, — for there are three: the aristocratic baby, the happy-go-lucky baby, and the forlorn baby. The aristocratic baby lives in a fine, well-furnished room, has a pretty little mamma, who wears white gowns, and pink ribbons in her cap; likewise, a fond young papa, who evidently thinks *this* the most wonderful baby in Boston. There is a stout, motherly lady, who is the grandma, I fancy, for she is always hovering about ‘the dear’ with cups, blankets, or a gorgeous red worsted bird to amuse it. Baby is a plump, rosy, sweet-faced little creature, always smiling and kissing its hand to the world in general. In its pretty white frocks, with its own little pink or blue ribbons, and its young mamma proudly holding it up to see and be seen, my aristocratic neighbour has an easy life of it, and is evidently one of the little lilies who do nothing but blossom in the sunshine.

The happy-go-lucky baby is just able to toddle; and I seldom pull up my curtain in the morning without seeing him at his window in his yellow flannel night-gown, taking a look at the weather. No matter whether it rains or shines, there he is, smiling and nodding, and looking so merry, that it is evident he has plenty of sunshine bottled up in his own little heart for private use. I depend on seeing him, and feel as if the world was not right until this golden little sun rises to shine upon me. He don’t seem to have any one to take care of him, but trots about all day, and takes care of himself. Sometimes he is up in the chambers with the girl, while she makes beds, and he helps; then he takes a stroll into the parlour, and spins the gay curtain-tassels to his heart’s content; next, he dives into the kitchen (I hope he does not tumble downstairs, but I dare say he wouldn’t mind if he did), and he gets pushed about by all the busy women, as they ‘fly round.’ I rather think it gets too hot for him there about dinner-time; for he often comes out into the yard for a walk at noon, and seems to find endless wonders and delights in the ash barrel, the water-but, two old flower-pots, and a little grass plat, in which he plants a choice variety of articles, in the firm faith they will come up in full bloom. I hope the big spoon and his own red shoe *will* sprout and appear before any trouble is made about their mysterious disappearance. At night I see a little shadow bobbing about on the curtain, and watch it, till with a parting glimpse at a sleepy face at the window, my small sun sets, and I leave him to his dreams.

The forlorn baby roars all day, and I don't blame him; for he is trotted, shaken, spanked, and scolded by a very cross nurse, who treats him like a meal bag. I pity that little neighbour, and don't believe he will stand it long; for I see him double up his tiny fists, and spar away at nothing, as if getting ready for a good tussle with the world by and by, if he lives to try it.

Then the boys, — bless their buttons! — how amusing they are. One young man, aged about ten, keeps hens; and the trials of that boy are really pathetic. The biddies get out every day or two, and fly away all over the neighbourhood, like feathers when you shake a pillow. They cackle and crow, and get up on sheds and fences, and trot down the streets, all at once, and that poor fellow spins round after them like a distracted top. One by one he gets them and comes lugging them back, upside down, in the most undignified attitude, and shuts them up, and hammers away, and thinks they are all safe, and sits down to rest, when a triumphant crow from some neighbouring shed tells him that that rascally black rooster is out again for another promenade. I'm not blood-thirsty; but I really do long for Thanksgiving that my neighbour Henry may find rest for the sole of his foot; for, not till his poultry are safely eaten will he ever know where they are.

Another boy has a circus about once a week, and tries to break his neck jumping through hoops, hanging to a rope by his heels, turning somersaults in the air, and frightening his mother out of her wits by his pranks. I suspect that he has been to see Leotard, and I admire his energy, for he is never discouraged; and, after tumbling flat, half-a-dozen times, he merely rubs his elbows and knees, and then up and takes another.

There is a good, domestic boy, who brushes and curls his three little sisters' hair every morning, and must do it very gently, for they seem to like it; and I often see them watch at the back gate for him, and clap their hands, and run to meet him, sure of being welcomed as little sisters like to be met by the big brothers whom they love. I respect that virtuous boy.

The naughty boy is very funny; and the running fight he keeps up with the cross cook is as good as a farce. He *is* a torment, but I think she could tame him, if she took the right way. The other day she wouldn't let him in because she had washed up her kitchen and his boots were muddy. He wiped them on the grass, but that wouldn't do; and, after going at her with his head down, like a battering ram, he gave it up, or seemed to; for, the minute she locked the door behind her and came out to take in her clothes, that sly dog whipped up one of the low windows, scrambled in, and danced a hornpipe all over the kitchen, while the fat cook scolded and fumbled for her key, for *she* couldn't follow through the window. Of course he was off upstairs by the time she got in; but I'm afraid he had a shaking, for I saw him glowering fiercely as he came out later with a basket, going some 'confounded errand.' Occasionally his father brings him out and whips him for some extra bad offence, during which performance he howls dismally; but when he is left sitting despondently and miraculously on an old chair without any seat, he soon cheers up, boos at a strange cat, whistles to his dog, — who is just like him, — or falls back on that standing cure for all the ills that boys are heir to, and whittles vigorously. I know I ought to frown upon this reprehensible young person, and morally close my eyes to his pranks; but I really can't do it, and am afraid I find this little black sheep the most interesting of the flock.

The girls have tea-parties, make calls, and play mother, of course; and the sisters of the good boy have capital times up in a big nursery, with such large dollies that I can hardly tell which are the babies and which the mammas. One little girl plays about at home with a dirty face, tumbled hair, and an old pinafore on. She won't be made tidy, and I see her kick and cry when they try to make her neat. Now and then there is a great dressing and curling; and then I see her prancing away in her light boots, smart hat, and pretty dress, looking as fresh as a daisy. But I don't admire her; for I've been behind the scenes, you see, and I know that she likes to be fine rather than neat.

So is the girl who torments her kitty, slaps her sister, and runs away when her mother tells her not to go out of the yard. But the house-wifely little girl who tends the baby, washes the cups, and goes to school early with a sunshiny face and kiss all round, *she*, now, is a neighbour worth having, and I'd put a good mark against her name if I knew it.

I don't know as it would be proper for me to mention the grown-up people over the way. They go on very much as the children do; for there is the lazy, dandified man, who gets up late, and drinks; the cross man, who swears at the shed-door when it won't shut; the fatherly man, who sits among his children every evening, and the cheery old man up in the attic, who has a flower in his window, and looks out at the world with very much the same serene smile as my orange-coloured baby.

The women, too, keep house, make calls, and play mother; and some don't do it well either. The forlorn baby's mamma never seems to cuddle and comfort him; and some day, when the little fist lies cold and quiet, I’m afraid she’ll wish she had. Then the naughty boy’s mother. I’m very sure, if she put her arms round him sometimes, and smoothed that rough head of his, and spoke to him as only mothers can speak, that it would tame him far better than the scoldings and thrashings: for I know there is a true boy’s heart, warm and tender, somewhere under the jacket that gets dusted so often. As for the fine lady who lets her children do as they can, while she trims her bonnet, or makes panniers, I wouldn’t be introduced to her on any account. But as some might think it was unjustifiable curiosity on my part to see these things, and an actionable offence to speak of them, I won’t mention them.

I sometimes wonder if the kind spirits who feel an interest in mortals ever take a look at us on the shady side which we don’t show the world, seeing the trouble, vanities, and sins which we think no one knows. If they love, pity, or condemn us? What records they keep, and what rewards they prepare for those who are so busy with their work and play that they forget who may be watching their back windows with clearer eyes and truer charity than any inquisitive old lady with a pen in her hand?

LITTLE MARIE OF LEHON.

‘Here comes our pretty little girl,’ I said to Kate, as we sat resting on the seat beside the footpath that leads from Dinan on the hill to Lehon in the valley.

Yes, there she was, trotting toward us in her round cap, blue woollen gown, white apron, and wooden shoes. On her head was a loaf of buckwheat bread as big as a small wheel, in one hand a basket full of green stuff, while the other led an old goat, who seemed in no hurry to get home. We had often seen this rosy, bright-eyed child, had nodded to her, but never spoken, for she looked rather shy, and always seemed in haste. Now the sight of the goat reminded us of an excuse for addressing her, and as she was about to pass with the respectful little curtsey of the country, my friend said in French: —

‘Stay please. I want to speak to you.’ She stopped at once and stood looking at us under her long eyelashes in a timid yet confiding way, very pretty to see.

‘We want to drink goat’s milk every morning: can you let us have it, little one?’

‘Oh, yes, mademoiselle! Nannette gives fine milk, and no one has yet engaged her,’ answered the child, her whole face brightening at the prospect.

‘What name have you?’

‘Marie Rosier, mademoiselle.’

‘And you live at Lehon?’

‘Yes, mademoiselle.’

‘Have you parents?’

‘Truly, yes, of the best. My father has a loom, my mother works in the field and mill with brother Yvon, and I go to school and care for Nannette and nurse little Bebe.’

‘What school?’

‘At the convent, mademoiselle. The good sisters teach us the catechism, also to write and read and sew. I like it much,’ and Marie glanced at the little prayer in her apron pocket, as if proud to show she could read it.

‘What age have you?’

‘Ten years, mademoiselle.’

‘You are young to do so much, for we often see you in the market buying and selling, and sometimes digging in your garden there below, and bringing water from the river. Do you love work as well as school?’

‘Ah, no; but mademoiselle knows it is necessary to work: every one does, and

I’m glad to do my part. Yvon works much harder than I, and the father sits all day at his loom, yet he is sick and suffers much. Yes, I am truly glad to help,’ and little Marie settled the big loaf as if quite ready to bear her share of the burdens.

‘Shall we go and see your father about the goat? and if he agrees will you bring the milk fresh and warm every morning?’ I asked, thinking that a sight of that blooming face would brighten our days for us.

‘Oh, yes! I always do it for the ladies, and you will find the milk quite fresh and warm, hey, Nannette?’ and Marie laughed as she pulled the goat from the hedge where she was nibbling the young leaves.

We followed the child as she went clattering down the stony path, and soon came into the narrow street bounded on one side by the row of low, stone houses, and on the other by the green wet meadow full of willows, and the rapid mill-stream. All along this side of the road sat women and children, stripping the bark from willow twigs to be used in basket-making. A busy sight and a cheerful one; for the women gossiped in their high, clear voices, the children sang and laughed, and the babies crept about as freely as young lambs.

We found Marie’s home a very poor one. Only two rooms in the little hut, the lower one with its earthen floor, beds in the wall, smoky fire, and single window where the loom stood. At it sat a pale, dark man who stopped work as we entered, and seemed glad to rest while we talked to him, or rather while Kate did, for I could not understand his odd French, and preferred to watch Marie during the making of the bargain.

Yvon, a stout lad of twelve, was cutting up brush with an old sickle, and little Bebe, looking like a Dutch doll in her tiny round cap, tight blue gown, and bits of sabots, clung to Marie as she got the supper.

I wondered what the children at home would have said to such a supper. A few cabbage leaves made the soup, and this, with the dry black bread and a sip of sour wine, was all they had. There were no plates or bowls, but little hollow places in the heavy wooden table near the edge, and into these fixed cups Marie ladled the soup, giving each a wooden spoon from a queer rack in the middle; the kettle stood at one end, the big loaf lay at the other, and all stood round eating out of their little troughs, with Nannette and a rough dog close by to receive any crusts that might be left.

Presently the mother came in, a true Breton woman; rosy and robust, neat and cheery, though her poor clothes were patched all over, her hands more rough and worn with hard work than any I ever saw, and the fine hair under her picturesque cap gray at thirty with much care.

I saw then where Marie got the brightness that seemed to shine in every feature of her little face, for the mother’s coming was like a ray of sunshine in that dark place, and she had a friendly word and look for every one.

Our little arrangement was soon made, and we left them all smiling and nodding as if the few francs we were to pay would be a fortune to them.

Early next morning we were wakened by Françoise, the maid, who came up to announce that the goat’s milk had arrived. Then we heard a queer, quick, tapping sound on the stairs, and to our great amusement, Nannette walked into the room, straight up to my bedside, and stood there looking at me with her mild yellow eyes as if she was quite used to seeing night-caps. Marie followed with a pretty little bowl in her hand, and said, laughing at our surprise, ‘See, dear mademoiselle; in this way I make sure that the milk is quite fresh and warm;’ and kneeling down, she milked the bowl full in a twinkling, while Nannette quietly chewed her cud and sniffed at a plate of rolls on the table.

The warm draught was delicious, and we drank each our portion with much merriment.

‘It is our custom,’ said Françoise; who stood by with her arms folded, and looked on in a lofty manner.

‘What had you for your own breakfast?’ I asked, as I caught Marie’s eye hungrily fixed on the rolls and some tempting little cakes of chocolate left from our lunch the day before.

‘My good bread, as usual, mademoiselle, also sorrel salad and — and water,’ answered Marie, as if trying to make the most of her scanty meal.

‘Will you eat the rolls and put the chocolate in your pocket to nibble at school? You must be tired with this long walk so early.’

She hesitated, but could not resist; and said in a low tone, as she held the bread in her hand without eating it, —

‘Would mademoiselle be angry if I took it to Bebe? She has never tasted the beautiful white bread, and it would please her much.’

I emptied the plate into her basket, tucked in the chocolate, and added a gay picture for baby, which unexpected treasures caused Marie to clasp her hands and turn quite red with delight.

After that she came daily, and we had merry times with old Nannette and her little mistress, whom we soon learned to love, so busy, blithe, and grateful was she.

We soon found a new way to employ her, for the boy who drove our donkey did not suit us, and we got the donkey-woman to let us have Marie in the afternoon when her lessons were done. She liked that, and so did we; for she seemed to understand the nature of donkeys, and could manage them without so much beating and shouting as the boy thought necessary. Such pleasant drives as we had, we two big women in the droll wagon, drawn by the little gray donkey that looked as if made of an old trunk, so rusty and rough was he as he went trotting along, his long ears wagging, and his small hoofs clattering over the fine hard road, while Marie sat on the shaft with a long whip, talking and laughing, and giving Andrè a poke now and then, crying ‘E! E! houp la!’ to make him go.

We found her a capital little guide and story-teller, for her grandmother had told her all the tales and legends of the neighbourhood, and it was very pleasant to hear her repeat them in pretty peasant French, as we sat among the ruins, while Kate sketched, I took notes, and Marie held the big parasol over us.

Some of these stones were charming; at least as *she* told them, with her little face changing from gay to sad as she gesticulated most dramatically.

The romance of ‘Gilles de Bretagne’ was one of her favourites. How he carried off his child-wife when she was only twelve, how he was imprisoned and poisoned, and at last left to starve in a dungeon, and would stand at his window crying, ‘Bread, bread; for the love of God!’ yet no one dared to give him any, till a poor peasant woman went in the night and gave him half her black loaf. Not once, but every night for six months, though she robbed her children to do it. And when he was dying, it was she who took a priest to him, that he might confess through the bars of his cell.

‘So good, ah, so good, this poor woman! It is beautiful to hear of that, mademoiselle!’ little Marie would say, with her black eyes full and her lips trembling.

But the story she liked best of all was about the peasant girl and her grandmother.

‘See then, dear ladies, it was in this way. In the time of the great war many poor people were shot because it was feared they would burn the chateaus. In one of these so sad parties being driven to St. Malo to be shot, was this young girl. Only fifteen, dear ladies, behold how young is this! and see the brave thing she did! With her went the old grandmother whom she loved next the good God. They went slowly, she was so old, and one of the officers who guarded them had pity on the pretty girl, and said to her as they were a little apart from the rest, “Come, you are young, and can run. I will save you; it is a pity so fine a little girl should be shot.”

‘Then she was glad and thanked him much, saying, “And the grandmother also? You will save her with me?” “It is impossible,” says the officer. “She is too old to run. I can save but one, and her life is nearly over; let her go, and do you fly into the next wood. I will not betray you, and when we come up with the gang it will be too late to find you.”

‘Then the great temptation of Satan came to this girl. She had no wish to suffer, but she could not leave the good old grandmere to die alone. She wept, she prayed, and the saints gave her courage.

'"No, I will not go," she said; and in the morning at St. Malo she was shot with the old mother in her arms.'

'Could you do that for your grandmere?' I once asked, as she stopped for breath, because this tale always excited her. She crossed herself devoutly, and answered with fire in her eyes, and a resolute gesture of her little brown hands,—

'I should try, mademoiselle.'

I think she would, and succeed, too, for she was a brave and tender-hearted child, as she soon after proved.

A long drought parched the whole country that summer, and the gardens suffered much, especially the little plats in Lehon, for most of them were on the steep hillside behind the huts; and unless it rained, water had to be carried up from the stream below. The cabbages and onions on which these poor people depend, when fresh salads are gone, were dying in the baked earth, and a hard winter was before them if this little store failed.

The priests prayed for rain in the churches, and long processions streamed out of the gates to visit the old stone cross called the 'Croix de Saint Esprit,' and, kneeling there in crowds, the people implored the blessing of rain to save their harvest. We felt great pity for them, but liked little Marie's way of praying best.

She did not come one morning, but sent her brother, who only laughed, and said Marie had hurt her foot, when we inquired for her. Anxious to know if she was really ill, we went to see her in the afternoon, and heard a pretty little story of practical Christianity.

Marie lay asleep on her mother's bed in the wall, and her father, sitting by her, told the tale in a low voice, pausing now and then to look at her, as if his little daughter had done something to be proud of.

It seems that in the village there was an old woman frightfully disfigured by fire, and not quite sane as the people thought. She was harmless, but never showed herself by day, and only came out at night to work in her garden or take the air. Many of the ignorant peasants feared her, however; for the country abounds in fairy legends, and strange tales of ghosts and goblins. But the more charitable left bread at her door, and took in return the hose she knit or the thread she spun.

During the drought it was observed that *her* garden, though the steepest and stoniest, was never dry; *her* cabbages flourished when her neighbours' withered, and *her* onions stood up green and tall as if some special rain-spirit watched over them. People wondered and shook their heads, but could not explain it, for

Mother Lobineau was too infirm to carry much water up the steep path, and who would help her unless some of her own goblin friends did it?

This idea was suggested by the story of a peasant returning late at night, who had seen something white flitting to and fro in the garden-patch, and when he called to it saw it vanish most mysteriously. This made quite a stir in the town; others watched also, saw the white phantom in the starlight, and could not tell where it went when it vanished behind the chestnut trees on the hill, till one man, braver than the rest, hid himself behind these trees and discovered the mystery. The sprite was Marie, in her little shift, who stepped out of the window of the loft where she slept on to a bough of the tree, and thence to the hill, for the house was built so close against the bank that it was 'but a step from garret to garden,' as they say in Morlaix.

In trying to escape from this inquisitive neighbour, Marie hurt her foot, but was caught, and confessed that it was she who went at night to water poor Mother Lobineau's cabbages; because if they failed the old woman might starve, and no one else remembered her destitute and helpless state.

The good-hearted people were much touched by this silent sermon on loving one's neighbour as one's self, and Marie was called the 'little saint,' and tended carefully by all the good women. Just as the story ended, she woke up, and at first seemed inclined to hide under the bedclothes. But we had her out in a minute, and presently she was laughing over her good deed, with a true child's enjoyment of a bit of roguery, saying in her simple way, —

'Yes; it was so droll to go running about *en chemise*, like the girl in the tale of the 'Midsummer Eve,' where she pulls the Saint Johns-wort flower, and has her wish to hear all the creatures talk. I liked it much, and Yvon slept so like the dormouse that he never heard me creep in and out. It was hard to bring much water, but the poor cabbages were *so* glad, and Mother Lobineau felt that all had not forgotten her.

We took care that little Saint Marie was not forgotten, but quite well, and all ready for her confirmation when the day came. This is a pretty sight, and for her sake we went to the old church of St. Sauveur to see it. It was a bright spring day, and the gardens were full of early flowers, the quaint streets gay with proud fathers and mothers in holiday dress, and flocks of strangers pausing to see the long procession of little girls with white caps and veils, gloves and gowns, prayer-books and rosaries, winding through the sunny square into the shadowy church with chanting and candles, garlands and crosses.

The old priest was too ill to perform the service, but the young one who took his place announced, after it was over, that if they would pass the house the good old man would bless them from his balcony. That was the best of all, and a sweet sight, as the feeble fatherly old priest leaned from his easy-chair to stretch his trembling hands over the little flock so like a bed of snowdrops, while the bright eyes and rosy faces looked reverently up at him, and the fresh voices chanted the responses as the curly heads under the long veils bowed and passed by.

We learned afterwards that our Marie had been called in and praised for her secret charity — a great honour, because the good priest was much beloved by all his flock, and took a most paternal interest in the little ones.

That was almost the last we saw of our little friend, for we left Dinan soon after, bidding the Lehon family good-bye, and leaving certain warm souvenirs for winter-time. Marie cried and clung to us at parting, then smiled like an April day, and waved her hand as we went away, never expecting to see her any more.

But the next morning, just as we were stepping on board the steamer to go down the Rance to St. Malo, we saw a little white cap come bobbing through the market-place, down the steep street, and presently Marie appeared with two great bunches of pale yellow primroses and wild blue hyacinths in one hand, while the other held her sabots, that she might run the faster. Rosy and smiling and breathless with haste she came racing up to us, crying, —

‘Behold my souvenir for the dear ladies. I do not cry now. No; I am glad the day is so fine. *Bon voyage! bon voyage!*’

We thanked and kissed and left her on the shore, bravely trying not to cry, as she waved her wooden shoes and kissed her hand till we were out of sight, and had nothing but the soft colours and sweet breath of our nosegays to remind us of Little Marie of Lehon.

MY MAY-DAY AMONG CURIOUS BIRDS AND BEASTS.

Being alone in London, yet wishing to celebrate the day, I decided to pay my respects to the lions at the Zoological Gardens. A lovely place it was, and I enjoyed myself immensely; for May-day in England is just what it should be, mild, sunny, flowery, and spring-like. As I walked along the well-kept paths, between white and rosy hawthorn hedges, I kept coming upon new and curious sights; for the birds and beasts are so skilfully arranged that it is more like travelling through a strange and pleasant country than visiting a menagerie.

The first thing I saw was a great American bison; and I was so glad to meet with any one from home, that I'd have patted him with pleasure if he had shown any cordiality toward me. He didn't, however, but stared savagely with his fiery eyes, and put down his immense head with a sullen snort, as if he'd have tossed me with great satisfaction. I did not blame him, for the poor fellow was homesick, doubtless, for his own wide prairies and the free life he had lost. So I threw him some fresh clover, and went on to the pelicans.

I never knew before what handsome birds they were; not graceful, but with such snowy plumage, tinged with pale pink and faint yellow. They had just had their bath, and stood arranging their feathers with their great bills, uttering a queer cry now and then, and nodding to one another sociably. When fed, they gobbled up the fish, never stopping to swallow it till the pouches under their bills were full; then they leisurely emptied them, and seemed to enjoy their lunch with the grave deliberation of regular Englishmen.

Being in a hurry to see the lions, I went on to the long row of cages, and there found a splendid sight. Six lions and lionesses, in three or four different cages, sitting or standing in dignified attitudes, and eyeing the spectators with a mild expression in their fine eyes. One lioness was ill, and lay on her bed, looking very pensive, while her mate moved restlessly about her, evidently anxious to do something for her, and much afflicted by her suffering. I liked this lion very much, for, though the biggest, he was very gentle, and had a noble face.

The tigers were rushing about, as tigers usually are; some creeping noiselessly to and fro, some leaping up and down, and some washing their faces with their velvet paws. All looked and acted so like cats that I wasn't at all surprised to hear one of them purr when the keeper scratched her head. It was a very loud and large purr, but no fireside pussy could have done it better, and every one laughed at the sound.

There were pretty spotted leopards, panthers, and smaller varieties of the same species. I sat watching them a long time, longing to let some of the wild things out for a good run, they seemed so unhappy barred in those small dens.

Suddenly the lions began to roar, the tigers to snarl, and all to get very much excited about something, sniffing at the openings, thrusting their paws through the bars, and lashing their tails impatiently. I couldn’t imagine what the trouble was, till, far down the line, I saw a man with a barrowful of lumps of raw meat. This was their dinner, and as they were fed but once a day they were ravenous. Such roars and howls and cries as arose while the man went slowly down the line, gave one a good idea of the sounds to be heard in Indian forests and jungles. The lions behaved best, for they only paced up and down, with an occasional cry; but the tigers were quite frantic; for they tumbled one over the other, shook the cages, and tried to reach the bystanders, just out of reach behind the bar that kept us at a safe distance. One lady had a fright, for the wind blew the end of her shawl within reach of a tiger’s great claw, and he clutched it, trying to drag her nearer. The shawl came off, and the poor lady ran away screaming, as if a whole family of wild beasts were after her.

When the lumps of meat were thrown in, it was curious to see how differently the animals behaved. The tigers snarled and fought and tore and got so savage I was very grateful that they were safely shut up. In a few minutes, nothing but white bones remained, and then they howled for more. One little leopard was better bred than the others, for he went up on a shelf in the cage, and ate his dinner in a quiet, proper manner, which was an example to the rest. The lions ate in dignified silence, all but my favourite, who carried his share to his sick mate, and by every gentle means in his power tried to make her eat. She was too ill, however, and turned away with a plaintive moan which seemed to grieve him sadly. He wouldn’t touch his dinner, but lay down near her, with the lump between his paws, as if guarding it for her; and there I left him patiently waiting, in spite of his hunger, till his mate could share it with him. As I took a last look at his fine old face, I named him Douglas, and walked away, humming to myself the lines of the ballad, —

Douglas, Douglas,
Tender and true.

As a contrast to the wild beasts, I went to see the monkeys, who lived in a fine large house all to themselves. Here was every variety, from the great ugly chimpanzee to the funny little fellows who played like boys, and cut up all sorts of capers. A mamma sat tending her baby, and looking so like a little old woman that I laughed till the gray monkey with the blue nose scolded at me. He was a cross old party, and sat huddled up in the straw, scowling at every one, like an ill-tempered old bachelor. Half-a-dozen little ones teased him capitally by dropping bits of bread, nut-shells, and straws down on him from above, as they climbed about the perches, or swung by their tails. One poor little chap had lost the curly end of his tail, — I'm afraid the gray one bit it off, — and kept trying to swing like the others, forgetting that the strong, curly end was what he held on with. He would run up the bare boughs, and give a jump, expecting to catch and swing, but the lame tail wouldn't hold him, and down he'd go, bounce on to the straw. At first he'd sit and stare about him, as if much amazed to find himself there; then he'd scratch his little round head and begin to scold violently, which seemed to delight the other monkeys; and, finally, he'd examine his poor little tail, and appear to understand the misfortune which had befallen him. The funny expression of his face was irresistible, and I enjoyed seeing him very much, and gave him a bun to comfort him when I went away.

The snake-house came next, and I went in, on my way to visit the rhinoceros family. I rather like snakes, since I had a tame green one, who lived under the door-step, and would come out and play with me on sunny days. These snakes I found very interesting, only they got under their blankets and wouldn't come out, and I wasn't allowed to poke them; so I missed seeing several of the most curious. An ugly cobra laid and blinked at me through the glass, looking quite as dangerous as he was. There were big and little snakes, — black, brown, and speckled, lively and lazy, pretty and plain ones, — but I liked the great boa best.

When I came to his cage, I didn't see anything but the branch of a tree, such as I had seen in other cages, for the snakes to wind up and down. 'Where is he, I wonder? I hope he hasn't got out,' I said to myself, thinking of a story I read once of a person in a menagerie, who turned suddenly and saw a great boa gliding towards him. As I stood wondering if the big worm could be under the little flat blanket before me, the branch began to move all at once, and with a start, I saw a limb swing down to stare at me with the boa's glittering eyes. He was so exactly the colour of the bare bough, and lay so still, I had not seen him till he came to take a look at me. A very villainous-looking reptile he was, and I felt grateful that I didn't live in a country where such unpleasant neighbours might pop in upon you unexpectedly. He was kind enough to take a promenade and show me his size, which seemed immense, as he stretched himself, and then knotted his rough grayish body into a great loop, with the fiery-eyed head in the middle. He was not one of the largest kind, but I was quite satisfied, and left him to his dinner of rabbits, which I hadn't the heart to stay and see him devour alive.

I was walking toward the camel’s pagoda, when, all of a sudden, a long, dark, curling thing came over my shoulder, and I felt warm breath in my face. ‘It’s the boa;’ I thought, and gave a skip which carried me into the hedge, where I stuck, much to the amusement of some children riding on the elephant whose trunk had frightened me. He had politely tried to tell me to clear the way, which I certainly had done with all speed. Picking myself out of the hedge I walked beside him, examining his clumsy feet and peering up at his small, intelligent eye. I’m very sure he winked at me, as if enjoying the joke, and kept poking his trunk into my pocket, hoping to find something eatable.

I felt as if I had got into a foreign country as I looked about me and saw elephants and camels walking among the trees; flocks of snow-white cranes stalking over the grass, on their long scarlet legs; striped Zebras racing in their paddock; queer kangaroos hopping about, with little ones in their pouches; pretty antelopes chasing one another; and, in an immense wire-covered aviary, all sorts of brilliant birds were flying about as gaily as if at home.

One of the curiosities was a sea-cow, who lived in a tank of salt water, and came at the keeper’s call to kiss him, and flounder on its flippers along the margin of the tank after a fish. It was very like a seal, only much larger, and had four fins instead of two. Its eyes were lovely, so dark and soft and liquid; but its mouth was not pretty, and I declined one of the damp kisses which it was ready to dispense at word of command.

The great polar bear lived next door, and spent his time splashing in and out of a pool of water, or sitting on a block of ice, panting, as if the mild spring day was blazing midsummer. He looked very unhappy, and I thought it a pity that they didn’t invent a big refrigerator for him.

These are not half of the wonderful creatures I saw, but I have not room to tell more; only I advise all who can to pay a visit to the Zoological Gardens when they go to London, for it is one of the most interesting sights in that fine old city.

OUR LITTLE NEWSBOY.

Hurrying to catch a certain car at a certain corner late one stormy night, I was suddenly arrested by the sight of a queer-looking bundle lying in a door-way.

‘Bless my heart, it’s a child! O John! I’m afraid he’s frozen!’ I exclaimed to my brother, as we both bent over the bundle.

Such a little fellow as he was, in the big, ragged coat; such a tired, baby face, under the fuzzy cap; such a purple, little hand, still holding fast a few papers; such a pathetic sight altogether was the boy, lying on the stone step, with the snow drifting over him, that it was impossible to go by.

‘He is asleep; but he’ll freeze, if left so long. Here! wake up, my boy, and go home, as fast as you can,’ cried John, with a gentle shake, and a very gentle voice; for the memory of a dear little lad, safely tucked up at home, made him fatherly kind to the small vagabond.

The moment he was touched, the boy tumbled up, and, before he was half awake, began his usual cry, with an eye to business.

‘Paper, sir? “Herald!” “Transkip!” Last’ — a great gape swallowed up the ‘last edition,’ and he stood blinking at us like a very chilly young owl.

‘I’ll buy ‘em all if you’ll go home, my little chap; it’s high time you were abed,’ said John, whisking the damp papers into one pocket, and his purse out of another, as he spoke.

‘All of ‘em? — why there’s six!’ croaked the boy, for he was as hoarse as a raven.

‘Never mind, I can kindle the fire with ‘em. Put that in your pocket; and trot home, my man, as fast as possible.’

‘Where do you live?’ I asked, picking up the fifty cents that fell from the little fingers, too benumbed to hold it.

‘Mills Court, out of Hanover. Cold, ain’t it?’ said the boy, blowing on his purple hands, and hopping feebly from one leg to the other, to take the stiffness out.

‘He can’t go all that way in this storm — such a mite, and so used up with cold and sleep, John.’

‘Of course he can’t; we’ll put him in a car,’ began John; when the boy wheezed out, —

‘No; I’ve got ter wait for Sam. He’ll be along as soon’s the theatre’s done. He said he would; and so I’m waitin’.’

‘Who is Sam?’ I asked.

‘He’s the feller I lives with. I ain’t got any folks, and he takes care o’ me.’

‘Nice care, indeed; leaving a baby like you to wait for him here such a night as this,’ I said crossly.

‘Oh, he’s good to me Sam is, though he does knock me round sometimes, when I ain’t spry. The big feller shoves me back, you see; and I gets cold, and can’t sing out loud; so I don’t sell my papers, and has to work ‘em off late.’

‘Hear the child talk! One would think he was sixteen, instead of six,’ I said, half laughing.

‘I’m most ten. Hi! ain’t that a oner?’ cried the boy, as a gust of sleet slapped him in the face, when he peeped to see if Sam was coming. ‘Hullo! the lights is out! Why, the play’s done, and the folks gone, and Sam’s forgot me.’

It was very evident that Sam *had* forgotten his little *protégé*; and a strong desire to shake Sam possessed me.

‘No use waitin’ any longer; and now my papers is sold, I ain’t afraid to go home,’ said the boy, stepping down like a little old man with the rheumatism, and preparing to trudge away through the storm.

‘Stop a bit, my little Casabianca; a car will be along in fifteen minutes; and while waiting you can warm yourself over there,’ said John, with the purple hand in his.

‘My name’s Jack Hill, not Cassy Banks, please, sir,’ said the little party, with dignity.

‘Have you had your supper, Mr. Hill?’ asked John, laughing.

‘I had some peanuts, and two sucks of Joe’s orange; but it warn’t very fillin’,’ he said, gravely.

‘I should think not. Here! one stew; and be quick, please,’ cried John, as we sat down in a warm corner of the confectioner’s opposite.

While little Jack shovelled in the hot oysters, with his eyes shutting up now and then in spite of himself, we looked at him and thought again of little Rosy-face at home safe in his warm nest, with mother-love watching over him. Nodding towards the ragged, grimy, forlorn, little creature, dropping asleep over his supper like a tired baby, I said, —

‘Can you imagine our Freddy out alone at this hour, trying to ‘work off’ his papers, because afraid to go home till he has?’

‘I’d rather not try,’ answered brother John, winking hard, as he stroked the little head beside him, which, by the bye, looked very like a ragged, yellow door-mat. I *think* brother John winked hard, but I can’t be sure, for I know I did; and for a minute there seemed to be a dozen little newsboys dancing before my eyes.

‘There goes our car; and it’s the last,’ said John, looking at me.

‘Let it go, but don’t leave the boy;’ and I frowned at John for hinting at such a thing.

‘Here is his car. Now, my lad, bolt your last oyster, and come on.’

‘Good-night, ma’am! thankee, sir!’ croaked the grateful little voice, as the child was caught up in John’s strong hands and set down on the car-step.

With a word to the conductor, and a small business transaction, we left Jack coiled up in a corner to finish his nap as tranquilly as if it wasn’t midnight, and a ‘knocking-round’ might not await him at his journey’s end.

We didn’t mind the storm much as we plodded home; and when I told the story to Rosy-face, next day, his interest quite reconciled me to the sniffs and sneezes of a bad cold.

‘If I saw that poor little boy, Aunt Jo, I’d love him lots!’ said Freddy, with a world of pity in his beautiful child’s eyes.

And, believing that others also would be kind to little Jack, and such as he, I tell the story.

When busy fathers hurry home at night, I hope they’ll buy their papers of the small boys, who get ‘shoved back;’ the feeble ones, who grow hoarse, and can’t ‘sing out;’ the shabby ones, who evidently have only forgetful Sams to care for them; and the hungry-looking ones, who don’t get what is ‘fillin’.’ For love of the little sons and daughters safe at home, say a kind word, buy a paper, even if you don’t want it; and never pass by, leaving them to sleep forgotten in the streets at midnight, with no pillow but a stone, no coverlet but the pitiless snow, and not even a tender-hearted robin to drop leaves over them.

PATTY'S PATCHWORK.

'I perfectly hate it! and something dreadful ought to be done to the woman who invented it,' said Patty, in a pet, sending a shower of gay pieces flying over the carpet as if a small whirlwind and a rainbow had got into a quarrel.

Puss did not agree with Patty, for, after a surprised hop when the flurry came, she calmly laid herself down on a red square, purring comfortably and winking her yellow eyes, as if she thanked the little girl for the bright bed that set off her white fur so prettily. This cool performance made Patty laugh, and say more pleasantly —

'Well, it *is* tiresome, isn't it, Aunt Pen?'

'Sometimes; but we all have to make patchwork, my dear, and do the best we can with the pieces given us.'

'Do we?' and Patty opened her eyes in great astonishment at this new idea.

'Our lives are patchwork, and it depends on us a good deal how the bright and dark bits get put together so that the whole is neat, pretty, and useful when it is done,' said Aunt Pen soberly.

'Deary me, now she is going to preach,' thought Patty; but she rather liked Aunt Pen's preachments, for a good deal of fun got mixed up with the moralising; and she was so good herself that children could never say in their naughty little minds, 'You are just as bad as we, so you needn't talk to us, ma'am.'

'I gave you that patchwork to see what you would make of it, and it is as good as a diary to me, for I can tell by the different squares how you felt when you made them,' continued Aunt Pen, with a twinkle in her eye as she glanced at the many-coloured bits on the carpet.

'Can you truly? just try and see,' and Patty looked interested at once.

Pointing with the yard-measure, Aunt Pen said, tapping a certain dingy, puckered, brown and purple square —

'That is a bad day; don't it look so?'

'Well, it was, I do declare! for that was the Monday piece, when everything went wrong and I didn't care how my work looked,' cried Patty, surprised at Aunt Pen's skill in reading the calico diary.

'This pretty pink and white one so neatly sewed is a good day; this funny mixture of red, blue, and yellow with the big stitches is a merry day; that one with spots on it is one that got cried over; this with the gay flowers is a day full of good little plans and resolutions; and that one made of dainty bits, all stars and dots and tiny leaves, is the one you made when you were thinking about the dear new baby there at home.'

'Why, Aunt Pen, you are a fairy! How *did* you know? they truly are just as you say, as near as I can remember. I rather like that sort of patchwork,' and Patty sat down upon the floor to collect, examine, and arrange her discarded work with a new interest in it.

'I see what is going on, and I have queer plays in my mind just as you little folks do. Suppose you make this a moral bed-quilt, as some people make album quilts. See how much patience, perseverance, good nature, and industry you can put into it. Every bit will have a lesson or a story, and when you lie under it you will find it a real comforter,' said Aunt Pen, who wanted to amuse the child and teach her something better even than the good old-fashioned accomplishment of needlework.

'I don't see how I can put that sort of thing into it,' answered Patty, as she gently lifted puss into her lap, instead of twitching the red bit roughly from under her.

'There goes a nice little piece of kindness this very minute,' laughed Aunt Pen, pointing to the cat and the red square.

Patty laughed also, and looked pleased as she stroked Mother Bunch, while she said thoughtfully —

'I see what you mean now. I am making two kinds of patchwork at the same time; and this that I see is to remind me of the other kind that I don't see.'

'Every task, no matter how small or homely, that gets well and cheerfully done, is a fine thing; and the sooner we learn to use up the dark and bright bits (the pleasures and pains, the cares and duties) into a cheerful, useful life, the sooner we become real comforters, and every one likes to cuddle about us. Don't you see, deary?'

'That's what you are, Aunt Pen;' and Patty put up her hand to hold fast by that other strong, kind, helpful hand that did so much, yet never was tired, cold, or empty.

Aunt Pen took the chubby little one in both her own, and said, smiling, yet with meaning in her eyes, as she tapped the small fore-finger, rough with impatient and unskilful sewing —

'Shall we try and see what a nice little comforter we can make this month, while you wait to be called home to see mamma and the dear new baby?'

'Yes, I'd like to try;' and Patty gave Aunt Pen's hand a hearty shake, for she wanted to be good, and rather thought the new fancy would lend a charm to the task which we all find rather tiresome and hard.

So the bargain was made, and the patch Patty sewed that day was beautiful to behold; for she was in a delightfully moral state of mind, and felt quite sure that she was going to become a model for all children to follow, if they could. The next day her ardour had cooled a little, and being in a hurry to go out to play, she slighted her work, thinking no one would know. But the third day she got so angry with her patch that she tore it in two, and declared it was all nonsense to fuss about being good and thorough and all the rest of it.

Aunt Pen did not say much, but made her mend and finish her patch and add it to the pile. After she went to bed that night Patty thought of it, and wished she could do it over, it looked so badly. But as it could not be, she had a penitent fit, and resolved to keep her temper while she sewed, at any rate, for mamma was to see the little quilt when it was done, and would want to know all about it.

Of course she did not devote herself to being good *all* the time, but spent her days in lessons, play, mischief, and fun, like any other lively, ten-year-older. But somehow, whenever the sewing-hour came, she remembered that talk; and as she worked she fell into the way of wondering whether Aunt Pen could guess from the patches what sort of days she had passed. She wanted to try and see, but Aunt Pen refused to read any more calico till the quilt was done: then, she said in a queer, solemn way, she should make the good and bad days appear in a remarkable manner.

This puzzled Patty very much, and she quite ached to know what the joke would be; meantime the pile grew steadily, and every day, good or bad, added to that other work called Patty’s life. She did not think much about that part of it, but unconsciously the quiet sewing-time had its influence on her, and that little ‘conscience hour,’ as she sometimes called it, helped her very much.

One day she said to herself as she took up her work, ‘Now I’ll puzzle Aunt Pen. She thinks my naughty tricks get into the patches; but I’ll make this very nicely and have it gay, and then I don’t see how she will ever guess what I did this morning.’

Now you must know that Tweedle-dee, the canary, was let out every day to fly about the room and enjoy himself. Mother Bunch never tried to catch him, though he often hopped temptingly near her. He was a droll little bird, and Patty liked to watch his promenades, for he did funny things. That day he made her laugh by trying to fly away with a shawl, picking up the fringe with which to line the nest he was always trying to build. It was so heavy he tumbled on his back and lay kicking and pulling, but had to give it up and content himself with a bit of thread.

Patty was forbidden to chase or touch him at these times, but always felt a strong desire to have just one grab at him and see how he felt. That day, being alone in the dining-room, she found it impossible to resist; and when Tweedle-dee came tripping pertly over the table-cloth, cocking his head on one side with shrill chirps and little prancings, she caught him, and for a minute held him fast in spite of his wrathful pecking.

She put her thimble on his head, laughing to see how funny he looked, and just then he slipped out of her hand. She clutched at him, missed him, but alas, alas! he left his little tail behind him. Every feather in his blessed little tail, I do assure you; and there sat Patty with the yellow plumes in her hand and dismay in her face. Poor Tweedle-dee retired to his cage much afflicted, and sung no more that day, but Patty hid the lost tail and never said a word about it.

‘Aunt Pen is so near-sighted she won’t mind, and maybe he will have another tail pretty soon, or she will think he is moulting. If she asks of course I shall tell her.’

Patty settled it in that way, forgetting that the slide was open and Aunt Pen in the kitchen. So she made a neat blue and buff patch, and put it away, meaning to puzzle aunty when the reading-time came. But Patty got the worst of it, as you will see by-and-bye.

Another day she strolled into the store-room and saw a large tray of fresh buns standing there. Now, it was against the rule to eat between meals, and new hot bread or cake was especially forbidden. Patty remembered both these things, but could not resist temptation. One plump, brown bun, with a lovely plum right in the middle, was so fascinating it was impossible to let it alone; so Patty whipped it into her pocket, ran to the garden, and hiding behind the big lilac-bush, ate it in a great hurry. It was just out of the oven, and so hot it burned her throat, and lay like a live coal in her little stomach after it was down, making her very uncomfortable for several hours.

‘Why do you keep sighing?’ asked Aunt Pen, as Patty sat down to her work.

‘I don’t feel very well.’

‘You have eaten something that disagrees with you. Did you eat hot biscuits for breakfast?’

‘No, ma’am, I never do,’ and Patty gave another little gasp, for the bun lay very heavily on both stomach and conscience just then.

‘A drop or two of ammonia will set you right,’ and Aunt Pen gave her some. It did set the stomach right, but the conscience still worried her, for she could not make up her mind to ‘fess’ the sly, greedy thing she had done.

‘Put a white patch in the middle of those green ones,’ said Aunt Pen, as Patty sat soberly sewing her daily square.

‘Why?’ asked the little girl, for aunty seldom interfered in her arrangement of the quilt.

‘It will look pretty, and match the other three squares that are going at the corners of that middle piece.’

‘Well, I will,’ and Patty sewed away, wondering at this sudden interest in her work, and why Aunt Pen laughed to herself as she put away the ammonia bottle.

These are two of the naughty little things that got worked into the quilt; but there were good ones also, and Aunt Pen’s sharp eyes saw them all.

At the window of a house opposite, Patty often saw a little girl who sat there playing with an old doll or a torn book. She never seemed to run about or go out, and Patty often wondered if she was sick, she looked so thin and sober, and was so quiet. Patty began by making faces at her for fun, but the little girl only smiled back, and nodded so good-naturedly that Patty was ashamed of herself.

‘Is that girl over there poor?’ she asked suddenly as she watched her one day.

‘Very poor: her mother takes in sewing, and the child is lame,’ answered Aunt Pen, without looking up from the letter she was writing.

‘Her doll is nothing but an old shawl tied round with a string, and she don’t seem to have but one book. Wonder if she’d like to have me come and play with her,’ said Patty to herself, as she stood her own big doll in the window, and nodded back at the girl, who bobbed up and down in her chair with delight at this agreeable prospect.

‘You can go and see her some day if you like,’ said Aunt Pen, scribbling away.

Patty said no more then, but later in the afternoon she remembered this permission, and resolved to try if aunty would find out her good doings as well as her bad ones. So, tucking Blanch Augusta Arabella Maud under one arm, her best picture-book under the other, and gathering a little nosegay of her own flowers, she slipped across the road, knocked, and marched boldly upstairs.

Mrs. Brown, the sewing-woman, was out, and no one there but Lizzie in her chair at the window, looking lonely and forlorn.

‘How do you do? My name is Patty, and I live over there, and I’ve come to play with you,’ said one child in a friendly tone.

‘How do you do? My name is Lizzie, and I’m very glad to see you. What a lovely doll!’ returned the other child gratefully; and then the ceremony of introduction was over, and they began to play as if they had known each other for ever so long.

To poor Lizzie it seemed as if a little fairy had suddenly appeared to brighten the dismal room with flowers and smiles and pretty things; while Patty felt her pity and good-will increase as she saw Lizzie’s crippled feet, and watched her thin face brighten and glow with interest and delight over book and doll and posy. ‘It felt good,’ as Patty said afterwards; ‘sort of warm and comfortable in my heart, and I liked it ever so much.’ She stayed an hour, making sunshine in a shady place, and then ran home, wondering if Aunt Pen would find that out.

She found her sitting with her hands before her, and such a sad look in her face that Patty ran to her, saying anxiously —

‘What’s the matter, aunty? Are you sick?’

‘No dear; but I have sorrowful news for you. Come, sit in my lap and let me tell you as gently as I can.’

‘Mamma is dead!’ Cried Patty with a look of terror in her rosy face.

‘No, thank God! but the dear, new baby only stayed a week, and we shall never see her in this world.’

With a cry of sorrow Patty threw herself into the arms outstretched to her, and on Aunt Pen’s loving bosom sobbed away the first bitterness of her grief and disappointment.

‘Oh, I wanted a little sister so much, and I was going to be so fond of her, and was so glad she came, and now I can’t see or have her even for a day! I’m *so* disappointed I don’t think I *can* bear it,’ sobbed Patty.

‘Think of poor mamma, and bear it bravely for her sake,’ whispered Aunt Pen, wiping away her own and Patty’s tears.

‘Oh, dear me! there’s the pretty quilt I was going to make for baby, and now it isn’t any use, and I can’t bear to finish it;’ and Patty broke out afresh at the thought of so much love’s labour lost.

‘Mamma will love to see it, so I wouldn’t give it up. Work is the best cure for sorrow; and I think you never will be sorry you tried it. Let us put a bright bit of submission with this dark trouble, and work both into your little life as patiently as we can, deary.’

Patty put up her trembling lips, and kissed Aunt Pen, grateful for the tender sympathy and the helpful words. ‘I’ll try,’ was all she said; and then they sat talking quietly together about the dear, dead baby, who only stayed long enough to make a place in every one’s heart, and leave them aching when she went.

Patty did try to bear her first trouble bravely, and got on very well after the first day or two, except when the sewing-hour came. Then the sight of the pretty patchwork recalled the memory of the cradle it was meant to cover, and reminded her that it was empty now. Many quiet tears dropped on Patty’s work; and sometimes she had to put it down and sob, for she had longed so for a little sister, it was very hard to give her up, and put away all the loving plans she had made for the happy time when baby came. A great many tender little thoughts and feelings got sewed into the gay squares; and if a small stain showed here and there, I think they only added to its beauty in the eyes of those who knew what made them. Aunt Pen never suggested picking out certain puckered bits and grimy stitches, for she knew that just there the little fingers trembled, and the blue eyes got dim as they touched and saw the delicate, flowery bits left from baby’s gowns.

Lizzie was full of sympathy, and came hopping over on her crutches with her only treasure, a black rabbit, to console her friend. But of all the comfort given, Mother Bunch’s share was the greatest and best; for that very first sad day, as Patty wandered about the house disconsolately, puss came hurrying to meet her, and in her dumb way begged her mistress to follow and see the fine surprise prepared for her — four plump kits as white as snow, with four gray tails all wagging in a row, as they laid on their proud mamma’s downy breast, while she purred over them, with her yellow eyes full of supreme content.

It was in the barn, and Patty lay for an hour with her head close to Mother Bunch, and her hands softly touching the charming little Bunches, who squeaked and tumbled and sprawled about with their dim eyes blinking, their tiny pink paws fumbling, and their dear gray tails waggling in the sweetest way. Such a comfort as they were to Patty no words could tell, and nothing will ever convince me that Mrs. Bunch did not know all about baby, and so lay herself out to cheer up her little mistress like a motherly loving old puss, as she was.

As Patty lay on the rug that evening while Aunt Pen sung softly in the twilight, a small, white figure came pattering over the straw carpet, and dropped a soft, warm ball down by Patty’s cheek, saying, as plainly as a loud, confiding purr could say it —

‘There, my dear, this is a lonely time for you, I know, so I’ve brought my best and prettiest darling to comfort you;’ and with that Mother Bunch sat down and washed her face, while Patty cuddled little Snowdrop, and forgot to cry about baby.

Soon after this came a great happiness to Patty in the shape of a letter from mamma, saying she must have her little girl back a week earlier than they had planned.

‘I’m sorry to leave you, aunty, but it is *so* nice to be wanted, and I’m all mamma has now, you know, so I must hurry and finish my work to surprise her with. How shall we finish it off? There ought to be something regularly splendid to go all round,’ said Patty, in a great bustle, as she laid out her pieces, and found that only a few more were needed to complete the ‘moral bed-quilt.’

‘I must try and find something. We will put this white star, with the blue round it, in the middle, for it is the neatest and prettiest piece, in spite of the stains. I will sew in this part, and you may finish putting the long strips together,’ said Aunt Pen, rummaging her bags and bundles for something fine to end off with.

‘I know! I’ve got something!’ and away hurried Lizzie, who was there, and much interested in the work.

She came hopping back again, presently, with a roll in her hand, which she proudly spread out, saying —

‘There! mother gave me that ever so long ago, but I never had any quilt to use it for, and now it’s just what you want. You can’t buy such chintz now-a-days, and I’m *so* glad I had it for you.’

‘It’s regularly splendid!’ cried Patty, in a rapture; and so it was, for the pink and white was all covered with animals, and the blue was full of birds and butterflies and bees flying about as naturally as possible. Really lovely were the little figures and the clear, soft colours, and Aunt Pen clapped her hands, while Patty hugged her friend, and declared that the quilt was perfect now.

Mrs. Brown begged to be allowed to quilt it when the patches were all nicely put together, and Patty was glad to have her, for that part of the work was beyond her skill. It did not come home till the morning Patty left, and Aunt Pen packed it up without ever unrolling it.

‘We will look at it together when we show it to mamma,’ she said: and Patty was in such a hurry to be off that she made no objection.

A pleasant journey, a great deal of hugging and kissing, some tears and tender laments for baby, and then it was time to show the quilt, which mamma said was just what she wanted to throw over her feet as she lay on the sofa.

If there *were* any fairies, Patty would have been sure they had done something to her bed-cover, for when she proudly unrolled it, what do you think she saw?

Right in the middle of the white star, which was the centre-piece, delicately drawn with indelible ink, was a smiling little cherub, all head and wings, and under it these lines —

‘While sister dear lies asleep,
Baby careful watch will keep.’

Then in each of the four gay squares that were at the corners of the strip that framed the star, was a white bit bearing other pictures and couplets that both pleased and abashed Patty as she saw and read them.

In one was seen a remarkably fine bun, with the lines —

‘Who stole the hot bun
And got burnt well?
Go ask the lilac bush,
Guess it can tell.’

In the next was a plump, tailless bird, who seemed to be saying mournfully —

‘My little tail, my little tail!
This bitter loss I still bewail;
But rather ne’er have tail again
Than Patty should deceive Aunt Pen.’

The third was less embarrassing, for it was a pretty bunch of flowers so daintily drawn one could almost think they smelt them, and these lines were underneath —

‘Every flower to others given,
Blossoms fair and sweet in heaven.’

The fourth was a picture of a curly-haired child sewing, with some very large tears rolling down her cheeks and tumbling off her lap like marbles, while some tiny sprites were catching and flying away with them as if they were very precious —

‘Every tender drop that fell,
Loving spirits caught and kept;
And Patty’s sorrows lighter grew,
For the gentle tears she wept.’

‘Oh, aunty! what does it all mean?’ cried Patty, who had looked both pleased and ashamed as she glanced from one picture to the other.

‘It means, dear, that the goods and bads got into the bed-quilt in spite of you, and there they are to tell their own story. The bun and the lost tail, the posy you took to poor Lizzie, and the trouble you bore so sweetly. It is just so with our lives, though we don’t see it quite as clearly as this. Invisible hands paint our faults and virtues, and by-and-bye we have to see them, so we must be careful that they are good and lovely, and we are not ashamed to let the eyes that love us best read there the history of our lives.’

As Aunt Pen spoke, and Patty listened with a thoughtful face, mamma softly drew the pictured coverlet over her, and whispered, as she held her little daughter close —

‘My Patty will remember this; and if all her years tell as good a story as this month, I shall not fear to read the record, and she will be in truth my little comforter.’

AUNT JO'S SCRAP-BAG VOLUME 2

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PREFACE.

There is a sort of fate about writing books of travel which it is impossible to escape. It is vain to declare that no inducement will bribe one to do it, that there is nothing new to tell, and that nobody wants to read the worn-out story: sooner or later the deed is done, and not till the book is safely shelved does peace descend upon the victim of this mysterious doom.

The only way in which this affliction may be lightened to a long-suffering public is to make the work as cheerful and as short as possible. With this hope the undersigned bore has abstained from giving the dimensions of any church, the population of any city, or description of famous places, as far as in her lay; but confined herself to the personal haps and mishaps, adventures and experiences, of her wanderers.

To explain the undue prominence given to Miss Lavinia, it should be stated that she is an old and intimate friend of the compiler of this frivolous work; and therefore her views on all subjects, though less valuable, were easier to obtain than those of the younger and more interesting shawl-strappists.

L. M. A.

November 1872.

OFF.

‘On the first day of February we three will sail from Boston for Messina, in the little fruit-ship “Wasp.” We shall probably be a month going, unless we cross in a gale as I did, splitting sails every night, and standing on our heads most of the way,’ said Amanda, folding up her maps with an air of calm decision.

‘Hurrah! what fun!’ cried Matilda, waving a half-finished dressing-case over her head.

But Lavinia, with one sepulchral groan, fell flat upon her bed, and lay there, dumb with the horrors of such a voyage.

‘Just the thing for you, my poor old dear. Think of the balmy airs of Sicily, the oranges, the flowers. Then a delicious month or two at Sorrento, with no east winds, no slush, no spring cleaning. We shall be as merry as grigs, and get as buxom as dairy-maids in a month,’ said the sprightly Amanda.

‘You promised to go, and if you back out we are lost, for we *must* have a duenna. You can lie round in Europe just as well as here, and I have no doubt it will do you a world of good,’ added Matilda.

‘I shall keep my word; but you will bury me in the Atlantic, so make up your minds to it. Do you suppose that I, a poor, used-up old invalid, who can’t look at a sail-boat without a qualm, can survive thirty days of standing on my head, and thirty nights of sail-splitting, as we go slamming and lurching across two or three awful oceans?’ demanded Lavinia, with the energy of despair.

Before anyone could reply, Amanda’s little Mercury appeared with a note.

‘The “Wasp” will *not* take passengers, and no other fruit-ship sails this spring,’ read Amanda.

‘Oh dear!’ sighed Matilda.

‘Saved!’ cried Lavinia.

‘Be calm: we shall go, sooner or later, if I buy a ship and sail her myself;’ with which indomitable remark Amanda went forth to grapple with and conquer untoward circumstances.

A month of plans, vicissitudes, and suspense followed, during which Amanda strove manfully; Matilda suffered agonies of hope and fear; and Lavinia remained a passive shuttlecock, waiting to be tossed wherever Fate’s battledore chose to send her.

‘Exactly two weeks from to-day, we sail with a party of friends in the French steamer “Lafayette,” from New York for Brest. Will you be ready?’ demanded

Amanda, after a protracted wrestle with aforesaid adverse circumstances.

‘But that is exactly what we didn’t mean to do. It’s expensive and fashionable; France and not Italy, north and not south.’

‘That’s because I’m in the party. If you take a Jonah nothing will go well. Leave me behind, and you will have a charming trip,’ said Lavinia, who had an oyster-like objection to being torn from her bed.

‘No matter, we are going, live or die, sink or swim; and I shall expect to meet you, all booted and spurred and fit for the fight, April first,’ said the unwavering Amanda.

‘A most appropriate day for three lone women to start off on a wild-goose chase after health and pleasure,’ groaned Lavinia from among her pillows.

‘Very well, then; I leave you now, and shall expect to meet on the appointed day?’

‘If I’m spared,’ answered the sufferer.

‘I’ll bring her, never fear,’ added the sanguine Mat, as she rattled the trays out of an immense trunk.

How they ever did it no one knows; but in a week everything was ready, and the sisters had nothing left to do but to sit and receive the presents that showered upon them from all quarters. How kind everyone was, to be sure! Six fine dressing-cases arrived, and were hung upon the walls; four smelling-bottles — one for each nostril; bed-socks, rigolettes, afghans, lunch-baskets, pocket-flasks, guide-books, needle-cases, bouquets in stacks, and a great cake with their names on top in red and blue letters three inches long.

Friendly fingers sewed for them; even the gentlemen of the house — and there were eight — had a ‘bee,’ and hemmed handkerchiefs for Mat, marked towels; and one noble being actually took off his coat and packed the trunks in layers of mosaic-work wonderful to behold. A supper celebrated the last evening; and even the doleful Lavinia, touched by such kindness, emerged from her slough of despond and electrified the ball by dancing a jig with great spirit and grace.

Devoted beings were up at dawn to share the early breakfast, lug trunks, fly up and down with last messages, cheer heartily as the carriage drove off, and then adjourn *en masse* to the station, there to shake hands all round once more, and wave and wring handkerchiefs as the train at last bore the jocund Mat and the resigned Lavinia toward the trysting-place and Amanda.

All along the route more friends kept bursting into the cars as they stopped at different places; more gifts, more hand-shakes and kisses, more good wishes and kind prophecies, till at last in a chaos of smiles, tears, smelling-bottles, luncheon, cloaks, books, and foot-warmers, the travellers left the last friendly face behind and steamed away to New York.

‘How de-licious this is!’ cried the untravelled Matilda, as they stepped upon the deck of the ‘Lafayette,’ and she sniffed the shippy fragrance that caused Lavinia to gasp and answer darkly, —

‘Wait till to-morrow.’

While Mat surveyed the steamer under the care of Devoted Being No. 10, who appeared to see them off, Lavinia arranged the stateroom, stowing away all useless gear and laying forth dressing-gowns, slippers, pocket-handkerchiefs, with an anguished smile. *She* had crossed the ocean twice, and was a wiser, sadder woman for it. At eight she turned in, and ten minutes later Amanda came aboard with a flock of gay friends. But no temptations of the flesh could lure the wary spinster from her den; for the night was rough and cold, and the steamer a Babel of confusion.

‘It’s perfectly delightful! I wish you’d been there, Livy. We had supper, and songs, and funny stories, and all sorts of larks. There are quantities of nice people aboard, and we shall have a perfectly splendid trip. I shall be up bright and early, put on my scarlet stockings, my new boots, and pretty sea-suit, and go in for a jolly day,’ said the ardent Matilda, as she came skipping down at midnight and fell asleep full of rosy visions of the joys of a

Life on the ocean wave.

‘Deluded child!’ sighed Lavinia, closing her dizzy eyes upon the swaying garments on the wall, and feebly wishing she had hung herself along with them.

In the gray dawn she was awakened by sounds of woe, and peering forth beheld the festive Matilda with one red stocking on and one off, her blonde locks wildly dishevelled, her face of a pale green, and her hands clasping lemons, cologne, and salts, as she lay with her brow upon the cool marble of the toilet-table.

‘How do you like it, dear?’ asked the unfeeling Lavinia.

‘Oh, what is it? I feel as if I was dying. If somebody would only stop the swing *one* minute. Is it sea-sickness? It’s awful, but it will do me good. Oh, yes! I hope so. I’ve tried everything, and feel worse and worse. Hold me! save me! Oh, I wish I hadn’t come!’

‘Shipmates ahoy! how are you, my loves?’ and Amanda appeared, rosy, calm, and gay, with her pea-jacket on, skirts close reefed, hat well to windward, and everything taut and ship-shape; for she was a fine sailor, and never missed a meal.

Wails greeted her, and faint inquiries as to the state of things in the upper world.

‘Blowing a gale; rain, hail, and snow, — very dirty weather; and we are flying off the coast in fine style,’ was the cheerful reply.

‘Have we split any sails?’ asked Lavinia, not daring to open her eyes.

‘Dozens, I dare say. Shipping seas every five minutes. All the passengers ill but me, and every prospect of a north-easter all the way over,’ continued the lively Amanda, lurching briskly about the passage with her hands in her pockets.

Matilda dropped her lemons and her bottles to wring her hands, and Lavinia softly murmured —

‘Lord, what fools we mortals be,
That we ever go to sea!’

‘Breakfast, ladies?’ cried the pretty French stewardess, prancing in with tea-cups, bowls of gruel, and piles of toast balanced in some miraculous manner all over her arms.

‘Oh, take it away! I shall never eat again,’ moaned Matilda, clinging frantically to the marble, as the water-pitcher went down the middle with a hair-brush, and all the boots and shoes had a grand promenade round the room.

‘Don’t speak to me; don’t look at me; don’t even *think* of me for three days at least. Go and enjoy yourself, and leave us to our doom;’ with which tragical remark Lavinia drew her curtains, and was seen no more.

Great heavens, what a week that was! Rain, wind, fog; creak, pitch, toss; noise, smells, cold. Broken sleep by day, woe in every variety by night; food and drink a delusion and a snare; society an affliction; life a burden; death a far-off blessing not to be had at any price. Slowly, slowly the victims emerge from the lower depths of gloom, feebly smile, faintly joke, pick fearfully but wistfully at once-rejected dishes; talk about getting up, but don’t do it; read a little, look at their sallow countenances in hand-glasses, and speculate upon the good effects of travel upon the constitution. Then they suddenly become daring, gay, and social; rise, adorn themselves, pervade the cabins, sniff the odours of engine and kitchen without qualms, play games, go to table; and, just as the voyage is over, begin to enjoy it.

Alas for poor Lavinia! no such resurrection was possible for her. Long after Mat had bravely donned the scarlet hose, cocked up her beaver and gone forth to festive scenes, her shipmate remained below in chrysalis state, fed by faithful Marie, visited by the ever-cheerful Amanda, and enlivened by notes and messages from fellow-sufferers in far-off cells.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Walmars, jun., called, and had private theatricals in the passage. Dried-ginger parties were held about the invalid’s berth, poems were composed, and conundrums circulated. A little newspaper was concocted, replete with wit and spirit, by these secluded ladies, and called the ‘Sherald,’ to distinguish it from the ‘Herald,’ got up by sundry gentlemen whose shining hours were devoted to flirtation, cards, and wine.

‘Perfect gentlemen, I assure you, my dear; for, drunk or sober, they wear yellow kids from morning till night, smoke the best cigars, and dance divinely,’ as Mrs. Twaddle said, sitting erect in the saloon, shrouded in fur and velvet, with five diamond-rings well displayed, as she recounted the diseases she had enjoyed, and did the honours of a remarkable work-basket, containing eight different sorts of scissors.

‘We shall be in to-morrow, so you’d better be digging up the treasures you have buried, you old magpie,’ said Mat, appearing to the pensive Livy on the eleventh day.

‘The sun is out; come on deck, and help us get up the last edition of our paper. How will this do? Query — If steamers are named the “Asia,” the “Russia,” and the “Scotia,” why not call one the “Nausea?”‘ added Amanda, popping her head into the den. Lavinia threw a pillow at her, but the undaunted joker continued —

‘Also this: Financial — This being a feminine paper, gold is no longer at Pa, but at Ma.’

‘Good! Add this: Argument in favour of the Superiority of Women — The sluggard was *not* told to go to his uncle.’

‘Thank you,’ and Amanda departed to twine with her forty-third bosom friend, while Lavinia disinterred, from holes and corners of her berth, money, nuts, and raisins; books, biscuits, and literary efforts much the worse for deluges of soap and daubs of butter.

The cry of ‘Land!’ on the morrow caused passengers unseen before to appear like worms after a shower; all heroically did up their back hair, put on their best suits, and walked forth with the delusive hope that no one would know how ill they had been.

A French Marquis, with a sickly little son, whose diet of fried potatoes and sour wine accounted for his having the temper of a young fiend, appeared, and were made much of by dear, title-loving Americans.

A Spanish opera-singer, stout, saffron-coloured, and imperious, likewise emerged from obscurity, with a meek little husband, who waited on her like a servant, and a big bald parrot, who swore like a trooper.

Several nuns languished in corners of the saloon, surveying the vanities of life with interest, and telling their beads devoutly when they saw anyone looking at them.

A mysterious lady in green velvet with many diamonds, and a shabby, speechless companion, sailed about the ship, regardless of the rumours told of her — deserted husbands, stolen jewellery, lovers waiting on the other side, and many equally pleasant little tales.

The gentlemen with orange gloves and copper-coloured noses got themselves up in the most superb style, though few were going to land at Brest, and took tender farewells of such ladies as did, each professing desolation and despair at the termination of a twelve days' flirtation.

'I am not fond of dirt, but I could kneel down and kiss this mud, so grateful am I to feel solid ground under my feet, after leading the life of a fly for so long,' said Lavinia with emotion, as the three trudged up the wharf at Brest into a sort of barn which served for a custom-house.

'Now let each sit upon her luggage and clamour till some one comes and examines it, else it will get whisked away heaven only knows where,' ordered Amanda, who was the leader in right of her knowledge of tongues.

Each perched accordingly on her one big trunk, and tried to 'clamour.' But nothing came of it save loss of time and temper, for no one paid the slightest heed to them; and it was maddening to see trunk after trunk passed and sent off, followed by its rejoicing owner. Especially hard to bear was the sight of the green-velvet sinner, who, with a smile or two, won the sternest official to pass her five trunks without turning a key, and sailed away with a scornful glance at the virtuous Three planted on their property and feebly beckoning for help.

'I shall bear this no longer. Mat, sit there and guard the small things, while you and I, Livy, charge boldly among these imbeciles and drag them to their duty;' and Amanda marched away to clutch a cockaded victim by the shoulder with an awe-inspiring countenance.

Lavinia picked out a feeble, gray officer, and dogged him like an Indian, smiling affably, and pointing to her luggage with a persistent mildness that nearly drove the poor man mad.

No matter where he went, or what he did; no matter how thick the crowd about him, or how loud the din; still, like a relentless ghost, that mild old lady was ever at his side, mutely pointing and affably smiling. Of course he gave in, lifted one tray, saw much flannel, nearly blew his venerable nose off sniffing at one suspicious bottle, and slamming down the lid, scrawled a mysterious cross, bowed and fled.

Proudly returning to Amanda, the victorious one found her friend in a high state of indignation; for no officer there would touch her trunk because some American Express had put little leaden stamps here and there for some unknown purpose. Not even in her best French could the irate lady make the thick-headed men understand that it was not a high crime against the nation to undo a strap till some superior officer arrived to take the responsibility of so rash a step.

If they had comprehended the dire threats, the personal remarks, and unmitigated scorn of those three fair travellers, the blue-coated imbeciles would have been reduced to submission. Fortunately the great man came in time to save them from utter rout; for the ladies were just trying to decide whether to go and leave the luggage to its fate, or to haul it forth and depart *vi et armis*, when a stout old party came, saw, said, ‘It is nothing; pass the trunk; a thousand pardons, Madame,’ and peace was restored.

Instantly the porters, who till then had stood back, eyeing the innocent, black ark, as if it was an infernal machine liable to explode at a touch, threw themselves upon it, bore it forth, and heaving it atop of an omnibus, returned to demand vast sums for having waited so long.

Then was Amanda sublime; then did her comrades for the first time learn the magnitude of her powers, and realise the treasure they possessed. Stowing Matilda and the smaller traps in the bus, and saying to Lavinia, ‘Stand by me,’ this dauntless maid faced one dozen blue-bloused, black-bearded, vociferous, demonstrative Frenchmen; and, calmly offering the proper sum, refused to add one sou more.

Vainly the drivers perjured themselves in behalf of the porters; vainly the guard looked on, with imposing uniforms, and impertinent observations; vainly Mat cried imploringly, ‘Pay anything, and let us get off before there is a mob’ — still the indomitable Amanda held forth the honest franc; and, when no one would take it, laid it on the post, and entering the omnibus, drove calmly away.

‘What should we do without you?’ sighed Lavinia, with fervent gratitude.

‘Be cheated right and left, and never know it, dear,’ responded Amanda, preparing for another fight with the omnibus-driver.

And she had it; for, unwarned by the fate of the porters, this short-sighted man insisted on carrying the ladies to a dirty little hotel to dine, though expressly ordered to go at once to the station. Nothing would induce them to alight, though the landlord came out in person and begged them to do so; and, after a protracted struggle and a drive all over the town, they finally reached the depôt.

Here another demand for double fare was promptly quenched by an appeal to the *chef de station*, who, finding that Mademoiselle was wide awake, crushed the driver and saw justice done.

Exhausted but triumphant, the three at length found themselves rolling slowly towards Morlaix through a green and blooming country, so unlike the New England they had left behind, that they rejoiced like butterflies in the sunshine.

BRITTANY.

After a late dinner, at which their appetites were pretty effectually taken away by seeing dishes of snails passed round and eaten like nuts, with large pins to pick out the squirming meat; a night's rest somewhat disturbed by the incessant clatter of *sabots* in the market-place, and a breakfast rendered merry by being served by a *garçon* whom Dickens would have immortalised, our travellers went on to Caulnes-Dinan.

Here began their adventures, properly speaking. They were obliged to drive fourteen miles to Dinan in a ram-shackle carriage drawn by three fierce little horses, with their tails done up in braided chignons, and driven by a humpback. This elegant equipage was likewise occupied by a sleepy old priest, who smoked his pipe without stopping the whole way; also by a large, loquacious, beery man, who talked incessantly, informing the company that he was a friend of Victor Hugo, a child of nature aged sixty, and obliged to drink much ale because it went to his head and gave him commercial ideas.

If it had given him no others it would have done well; but, after each draught, and he took many, this child of nature became so friendly that even the free and easy Americans were abashed. Matilda quailed before the languishing glances he gave her, and tied her head up like a bundle in a thick veil. The scandalised Lavinia, informing him that she did not understand French, assumed the demeanour of a griffin, and glared stonily into space, when she was not dislocating her neck trying to see if the top-heavy luggage had not tumbled off behind.

Poor Amanda was thus left a prey to the beery one; for, having at first courteously responded to his paternal remarks and expressed an interest in the state of France, she could not drop the conversation all at once, even when the friend of Victor Hugo became so disagreeable that it is to be hoped the poet has not many such. He recited poems, he sung songs, he made tender confidences, and finished by pressing the hand of Mademoiselle to his lips. On being told that such demonstrations were not permitted to strangers in America, he beat his breast and cried out, 'My God, so beautiful and so cold! You do not comprehend that I am but a child. Pardon, and smile again I conjure you.'

But Mademoiselle would not smile; and, folding her hands in her cloak, appeared to slumber. Whereat the gray-headed infant groaned pathetically, cast his eyes heavenward, and drank more ale, muttering to himself, and shaking his head as if his emotions could not be entirely suppressed.

These proceedings caused Lavinia to keep her eye on him, being prepared for any outbreak, from a bullet all round to proposals to both her charges at once.

With this smouldering bomb-shell inside, and the firm conviction that one if not all the trunks were lying in the dust some miles behind, it may be inferred that duenna Livy did not enjoy that break-neck drive, lurching and bumping up hill and down, with nothing between them and destruction apparently but the little humpback, who drove recklessly.

In this style they rattled up to the Porte de Brest, feeling that they had reached Dinan ‘only by the grace of God,’ as the beery man expressed it, when he bowed and vanished, still oppressed with the gloomy discovery that American women did not appreciate him.

While Amanda made inquiries at an office, and Matilda had raptures over the massive archway crowned with yellow flowers, Lavinia was edified by a new example of woman’s right to labour.

Close by was a clean, rosy old woman, whose unusual occupation attracted our spinster’s attention. Whisking off the wheels of a *diligence*, the old lady greased them one by one, and put them on again with the skill and speed of a regular blacksmith, and then began to pile many parcels into a *char* apparently waiting for them.

She was a brisk, cheery old soul, with the colour of a winter-apple in her face, plenty of fire in her quick black eyes, and a mouthful of fine teeth, though she must have been sixty. She was dressed in the costume of the place: a linen cap with several sharp gables to it, a gay kerchief over her shoulders, a blue woollen gown short enough to display a pair of sturdy feet and legs in neat shoes with bunches of ribbons on the instep and black hose. A gray apron, with pockets and a bib, finished her off; making a very sensible as well as picturesque costume.

She was still hard at it when a big boy appeared, and began to heave the trunks into another *char*; but gave out at the second, which was large. Instantly the brisk old woman put him aside, hoisted in the big boxes without help, and, catching up the shafts of the heavily laden cart, trotted away with it at a pace which caused the Americans (who prided themselves on their muscle) to stare after her in blank amazement.

When next seen she was toiling up a steep street, still ahead of the lazy boy, who slowly followed with the lighter load. It did not suit Lavinia’s ideas of the fitness of things to have an old woman trundle three heavy trunks while she herself carried nothing but a parasol, and she would certainly have lent a hand if the vigorous creature had not gone at such a pace that it was impossible to overtake her till she backed her cart up before a door in most scientific style, and with a bow, a smile, and a courteous wave of the hand, informed them that ‘here the ladies would behold the excellent Madame C.’

They did behold and also receive a most cordial welcome from the good lady, who not only embraced them with effusion, but turned her house upside down for their accommodation, merely because they came recommended to her hospitality by a former lodger who had won her kind old heart.

While she purred over them, the luggage was being bumped upstairs, the old woman shouldering trunk after trunk, and trudging up two steep flights in the most marvellous way. But best of all was her surprise and gratitude on receiving a larger fee than usual, for the ladies were much interested in this dear old Hercules in a cap of seven gables.

When she had blessed them all round, and trotted briskly away with her carts, Madame C. informed the new-comers that the worthy soul was a widow with many children, whom she brought up excellently, supporting them by acting as porter at the hotel. Her strength was wonderful, and she was very proud of it — finding no work too hard, yet always neat, cheery, and active; asking no help, and literally earning her daily bread by the sweat of her brow. The ladies often saw her afterward, always trotting and tugging, smiling and content, as if some unseen hands kept well greased the wheels of her own diligence, which carried such a heavy load and never broke down.

Miss Lavinia being interested in Woman’s Rights and Wrongs, was much impressed by the new revelations of the capabilities of her sex, and soon ceased to be surprised at any demonstration of feminine strength, skill, and independence, for everywhere the women took the lead.

They not only kept house, reared children, and knit every imaginable garment the human frame can wear, but kept the shops and the markets, tilled the gardens, cleaned the streets, and bought and sold cattle, leaving the men free to enjoy the only pursuits they seemed inclined to follow — breaking horses, mending roads, and getting drunk.

The markets seemed entirely in the hands of the women, and lively scenes they presented to unaccustomed eyes, especially the pig-market, held every week, in the square before Madame C.’s house. At dawn the squealing began, and was kept up till sunset. The carts came in from all the neighbouring hamlets, with tubs full of infant pigs, over which the women watched with maternal care till they were safely deposited among the rows of tubs that stood along the walk facing Anne of Bretaigne’s grey old tower, and the pleasant promenade which was once the *fosse* about the city walls.

Here Madame would seat herself and knit briskly till a purchaser applied, when she would drop her work, dive among the pink innocents, and hold one up by its unhappy leg, undisturbed by its doleful cries, while she settled its price with a blue-gowned, white-capped neighbour as sharp-witted and shrill-tongued as herself. If the bargain was struck, they slapped their hands together in a peculiar way, and the new owner clapped her purchase into a meal-bag, slung it over her shoulder, and departed with her squirming, squealing treasure as calmly as a Boston lady with a satchel full of ribbons and gloves.

More mature pigs came to market on their own legs, and very long, feeble legs they were, for a more unsightly beast than a Breton pig was never seen out of a toy Noah's ark. Tall, thin, high-backed, and sharp-nosed, these porcine victims tottered to their doom, with dismal wailings, and not a vestige of spirit till the trials and excitement of the day goaded them to rebellion, when their antics furnished fun for the public. Miss Livy observed that the women could manage the pigs when men failed entirely. The latter hustled, lugged, or lashed, unmercifully and unsuccessfully; the former, with that fine tact which helps them to lead nobler animals than pigs, would soothe, sympathise, coax, and gently beguile the poor beasts, or devise ways of mitigating their bewilderment and woe, which did honour to the sex, and triumphantly illustrated the power of moral suasion.

One amiable lady, who had purchased two small pigs and a coop full of fowls, attempted to carry them all on one donkey. But the piggies rebelled lustily in the bags, the ducks remonstrated against their unquiet neighbours, and the donkey indignantly refused to stir a step till the unseemly uproar was calmed. But the Bretonne was equal to the occasion; for, after a pause of meditation, she solved the problem by tying the bags round the necks of the pigs, so that they could enjoy the prospect. This appeased them at once, and produced a general lull; for when the pigs stopped squealing, the ducks stopped quacking, the donkey ceased his bray, and the party moved on in dignified silence, with the youthful pigs, one black, one white, serenely regarding life from their bags.

Another time, a woman leading a newly-bought cow came through the square, where the noise alarmed the beast so much that she became unruly, and pranced in a most dangerous manner. Miss Livy hung out of the window, breathless with interest, and ready to fly with brandy and bandages at a minute's notice, for it seemed inevitable that the woman would be tossed up among the lindens before the cow was conquered. The few men who were lounging about stood with their hands in their pockets, watching the struggle without offering to help, till the cow scooped the lady up on her horns, ready for a toss. Livy shrieked, but Madame just held on, kicking so vigorously that the cow was glad to set her down, when, instead of fainting, she coolly informed the men, who, seeing her danger, had approached, that she ‘could arrange her cow for herself, and did not want any help,’ which she proved by tying a big blue handkerchief over the animal’s eyes, producing instant docility, and then she was led away by her flushed but triumphant mistress, who calmly settled her cap, and took a pinch of snuff to refresh herself, after a scuffle which would have annihilated most women.

When Madame C.’s wood was put in, the new-comers were interested in watching the job, for it was done in a truly Bretonesque manner. It arrived in several odd carts, each drawn by four great horses, with two men to each team; and as the carts were clumsy, the horses wild, and the men stupid, the square presented a lively spectacle. At one time there were three carts, twelve horses, and six men, all in a snarl, while a dozen women stood at their doors and gave advice. One was washing a lettuce, another dressing her baby, a third twirling her distaff, and a fourth with her little bowl of soup, which she ate in public while gesticulating so frantically that her *sabots* clattered on the stones.

The horses had a free fight, and the men swore and shouted in vain, till the lady with the baby suddenly went to the rescue. Planting the naked cherub on the door-step, this energetic matron charged in among the rampant animals, and by some magic touch untangled the teams, quieted the most fractious, a big grey brute, prancing like a mad elephant; then returned to her baby, who was placidly eating dirt, and with a polite ‘*Voilà, messieurs!*’ she whipped little Jean into his shirt, while the men sat down to smoke.

It took two deliberate men nearly a week to split the gnarled logs, and one brisk woman carried them into the cellar and piled them neatly. The men stopped about once an hour to smoke, drink cider, or rest. The woman worked steadily from morning till night, only pausing at noon for a bit of bread and the soup good Coste sent out to her. The men got two francs a day, the woman half a franc; and as nothing was taken out of it for wine or tobacco, her ten cents probably went further than their forty.

This same capable lady used to come to market with a baby on one arm, a basket of fruit on the other, leading a pig, driving a donkey, and surrounded by sheep, while her head bore a pannier of vegetables, and her hands spun busily with a distaff. How she ever got on with these trifling incumbrances was a mystery; but there she was, busy, placid, and smiling, in the midst of the crowd, and at night went home with her shopping well content.

The washerwomen were among the happiest of these happy souls, and nowhere were seen prettier pictures than they made, clustered round the fountains or tanks by the way, scrubbing, slapping, singing, and gossiping, as they washed or spread their linen on the green hedges and daisied grass in the bright spring weather. One envied the cheery faces under the queer caps, the stout arms that scrubbed all day, and were not too tired to carry home some chubby Jean or little Marie when night came; and, most of all, the contented hearts in the broad bosoms under the white kerchiefs, for no complaint did one hear from these hard-working, happy women. The same brave spirit seems to possess them now as that which carried them heroically to their fate in the Revolution, when hundreds of mothers and children were shot at Nantes and died without a murmur.

But of all the friends the strangers made among them they liked old Mère Oudon best — a shrivelled leaf of a woman, who at ninety-two still supported her old husband of ninety-eight. He was nearly helpless, and lay in bed most of the time, smoking, while she peeled willows at a sou a day, trudged up and down with herbs, cresses, or any little thing she could find to sell. Very proud was she of her ‘master,’ his great age, his senses still quite perfect, and most of all his strength, for now and then the old tyrant left his bed to beat her, which token of conjugal regard she seemed to enjoy as a relic of early days, and a proof that he would long be spared to her.

She kept him exquisitely neat, and if anyone gave her a plate of food, a little snuff, or any small comfort for her patient old age, she took it straight to the ‘master,’ and found a double happiness in giving and seeing him enjoy it.

She had but one eye, her amiable husband having put out the other once on a time as she was leading him home tipsy from market. The kind soul bore no malice, and always made light of it when forced to tell how the affliction befell her.

‘My Yvon was so gay in his young days, truly, yes, a fine man, and now most beautiful to see in his clean bed, with the new pipe that Mademoiselle sent him. Come, then, and behold him, my superb master, who at ninety-eight has still this strength so wonderful.’

The ladies never cared to see him more than once, but often met the truly beautiful old wife as she toiled to and fro, finding her faithful love more wonderful than his strength, and feeling sure that when she lies at last on her ‘clean bed,’ some good angel will repay these ninety-two hard years with the youth and beauty, happiness and rest, which nothing can destroy.

Not only did the women manage the affairs of this world, but had more influence than men with the good powers of heaven. A long drought parched France that year, and even fertile Brittany suffered. More than once processions of women, led by priests, poured through the gates to go to the Croix du Saint Esprit and pray for rain.

‘Why don’t the men go also?’ Miss Livy asked.

‘Ah! they pray to the Virgin, and she listens best to women,’ was the answer.

She certainly seemed to do so, for gracious showers soon fell, and the little gardens bloomed freshly where the mothers’ hard hands had planted cabbages, onions, and potatoes to feed the children through the long winter.

Nor were these the only tasks the women did. The good ladies had a hospital, and a neater, cheerier place was never seen; few invalids, but many old people sitting in the sunny gardens, or at work in the clean rooms. La Garaye is in ruins now, but the memory of its gentle lady still lives, and is preserved in this benevolent institution for the sick, the old, and poor.

A school for girls was kept by the good nuns, and the streets at certain hours were full of little damsels, with round caps on their braided hair, queer long gowns of blue, white aprons and handkerchiefs, who went clattering by in their wooden shoes, bobbing little curtsies to their friends, and readily answering any questions inquisitive strangers asked them. They learned to read, write, sew, and say the catechism. Also to sing; for, often as the ladies passed the little chapel of Our Lady, a chorus of sweet young voices came to us, making the flowery garden behind the church of St. Sauveur a favourite resting-place.

In endeavouring to account for the freedom of the women here, it was decided that it was owing to Anne of Brittany, the ‘gentle and generous Duchesse,’ to whom her husband Louis XII. allowed the uncontrolled government of the duchy. Relics of the ‘*fière Bretonne*,’ as Louis called her, are still treasured everywhere, and it was pleasant to know not only that she was an accomplished woman, writing tender letters in Latin verse to her husband, but also a wise and just Princess to her people, ‘showing herself by spirit and independence to be the most worthy of all her race to wear the ducal crown.’ So three cheers for good Duchesse Anne, and long life to the hardy, happy women of Brittany!

While Miss Lavinia was making these observations and moralizing upon them, the younger ladies were enjoying discoveries and experiences more to their tastes.

They had not been in the house half a day before Madame C. informed them that ‘Mademoiselle, the so charming miss whom they beheld at dinner, was to be married very soon; and they should have the rapture of witnessing a wedding the most beautiful.’

They welcomed the prospect with pleasure, for Dinan is not a whirl of gaiety at the best of times: and that spring the drought, rumours of war, and fears of small-pox, cast a shadow upon the sunny little town. So they surveyed Mademoiselle Pelagie with interest, and longed to behold the happy man who was to be blessed with the hand of this little, yellow-faced girl, with red eyes, dirty hands, and a frizzled crop, so like a wig they never could make up their minds that it was not.

Madame, the mamma, a buxom, comely widow, who breakfasted in black moire, with a diadem of glossy braids on her sleek head, and many jet ornaments rattling and glistening about her person, informed them, with voluble affability, of the whole affair.

‘My brother, M. le Président, had arranged the marriage. Pelagie was twenty, and beautiful, as you behold. It was time to establish her. *Mon Dieu!* yes; though my heart is lacerated to lose my angel, I consent. I conduct her to a ball, that she may be seen by the young man whose parents desire that he should espouse my infant. He beholds her. He says: “Great heavens, I adore her! My father, I consent.” He is presented to me; we converse. She regards him with the angelic modesty of a young girl, but speaks not. I approve, the parents meet, it is arranged, and Jules is betrothed to my Pelagie. They have not met since; but next week he comes for the marriage, and he will be permitted to address her in my presence. Ah, yes! your customs are not as ours, and to us seem of a deplorable freedom. Pardon that I say it.’

On inquiring how Pelagie regarded her future lord, they found that she thought very little about him, but was absorbed in her *trousseau*, which she proudly displayed. To those accustomed to see and hear of American outfits, with their lavish profusion and extravagant elegance, poor little Pelagie’s modest stores were not at all imposing. Half a dozen pretty dresses from Paris; several amazing hats, all rosebuds, lace, and blue ribbon; a good deal of embroidery; and a few prophetic caps, — completed the outfit.

One treasure, however, she was never tired of displaying, — a gift from Jules, — a camels’-hair shawl, in a black walnut case, on which was carved the Clomadoc arms. A set of pearls were also from the bridegroom; but the shawl was her pride, for married women alone could wear such, and she seemed to think this right of more importance than any the wedding-ring could confer upon her.

To the young ladies, both of whom had known many of the romantic experiences which befall comely American girls, the idea of marrying a man whom they had only seen twice seemed horrible; and to have but one week of courtship, and that in Mamma’s presence, was simply an insult and a wrong which they would not bear to think of.

But Pelagie seemed quite content, and brooded over her finery like a true Frenchwoman, showing very little interest in her Jules, and only anxious for the time to come when she could wear her shawl and be addressed as Madame.

While waiting for the grand event, the girls amused themselves with Gaston, the brother of the bride-elect. He was a languid, good-looking youth of three-and-twenty, who assumed *blasé* airs and attitudinized for their benefit. Sometimes he was lost in fits of Byronic gloom, when he frowned over his coffee, sighed gustily, and clutched his brow, regardless of the curls, usually in ambrosial order. The damsels, instead of being impressed by this display of inward agony, only laughed at him, and soon rallied him out of his heroics. Then he would try another plan, and become all devotion, presenting green tulips, ancient coins, early fruit, or sketches of his own, so very small that the design was quite obscure. If these delicate attentions failed to touch the stony hearts of the blonde Americans, he would air his entire wardrobe, appearing before them one day in full Breton costume of white cloth, embroidered in gay silks, buckled shoes, and hat adorned with streaming ribbons and flowers. Quite Arcadian was Gaston in this attire; and very effective on the croquet ground, where sundry English families disported themselves on certain afternoons. Another time he would get himself up like a Parisian dandy bound for a ride in the Bois de Boulogne; and, mounting with much difficulty a rampant horse, he would caracole about the Place St. Louis, to the great delight of the natives.

But this proved a failure; for one of the fair but cruel strangers donned hat and habit, and entirely eclipsed his glories by galloping about the country like an Amazon. The only time Gaston played escort she was nearly the death of him, for he seldom did more than amble a mile or two, and a hard trot of some six or eight miles reduced our Adonis to such a state of exhaustion that he fell into his mother’s arms on dismounting, and was borne away to bed with much lamentation.

After that he contented himself with coming to show himself in full dress whenever he went to a party; and, as that was nearly every other evening, they soon got accustomed to hearing a tap at their door, and beholding the comely youth in all the bravery of glossy broadcloth, a lavish shirt-bosom, miraculous tie, primrose gloves, varnished shoes, and curls and moustache anointed and perfumed in the most exquisite style. He would bow and say ‘*Bon soir*,’ then stand to be admired, with the artless satisfaction of a child; after which he would smile complacently, wave his crush hat, and depart with a flourish.

Dear, dandified, vain Gaston! His great desire was to go to Paris, and when the war came he had his wish; but found sterner work to do than to dress and dance and languish at the feet of ladies. I hope it made a man of him, and fancy it did; for the French fight well and suffer bravely for the country they love in their melodramatic fashion.

As the day approached for the advent of the bridegroom, great excitement prevailed in the quiet household. Madame C. and her handmaid, dear old Marie, cackled and bustled like a pair of important hens. Madame F., the widow, lived at the milliner's, so to speak, and had several dress rehearsals for her own satisfaction. Gaston mounted guard over his sister, lest some enamoured man should rend her from them ere her Jules could secure the prize. And Pelagie placidly ate and slept, kept her hair in crimping-pins from morning till night, wore out her old clothes, and whiled away the time munching *bonbons* and displaying her shawl.

'Mercy on us! I should feel like a lamb being fattened for the sacrifice if I were in her place,' cried one of the freeborn American citizenesses, with an air of unmitigated scorn for French ways of conducting this interesting ceremony.

'I should feel like a galley-slave,' said the other. 'For she can't go anywhere without Gaston or Mamma at her elbow. Only yesterday she went into a shop alone, while Gaston waited at the door. And when she told it at home as a great exploit all the ladies shrieked with horror at the idea, and Mamma said, wringing her hands: "*Mon Dieu!* but they will think thou art a married woman, for it is inconceivable that any girl should do so bold a thing." And Pelagie wept, and implored them not to tell Jules, lest he should discard her.'

Here the Americans all groaned over the pathetic absurdity of the whole affair, and wondered with unrighteous glee what the decorous ladies below would say to some of their pranks at home. But, fearing that M. le Président might feel it his duty to eject them from the town as dangerous persons, they shrouded their past sins in the most discreet silence, and assumed their primmest demeanour in public.

'He has come! Look quick, girls!' cried Lavinia, as a carriage stopped at the door, and a rushing sound, as of many agitated skirts, was heard in the hall. Three heads peeped from the window of the blue parlour, and three pairs of curious eyes were rewarded by a sight of the bridegroom, as he alighted.

Such a little man! Such a fierce moustache! Such a dignified strut! And such an imposing uniform as he wore! For Jules Gustave Adolphe Marie Clomadoc was a colonel in some regiment stationed at Boulogne. Out he skipped; in he marched; and, peeping over the banisters, they saw him salute Madame F. with a stately kiss on the hand, then escort her up to her *salon*, bowing loftily, and twisting his tawny moustache with an air that gave him the effect of being six feet in height, and broad in proportion.

How he greeted his *fiancée* they knew not, but the murmur of voices came from the room in steady flow for hours, and Gaston flew in and out with an air of immense importance.

At dinner the strangers were proudly presented to M. le Colonel, and received affable bows from the little man, who flattered himself that he could talk English, and insisted on speaking an unknown tongue, evidently wondering at their stupidity in not understanding their own language.

He escorted Madame down, sat between her and Pelagie, but talked only to her; while the girl sat silent and ate her dinner with an appetite which no emotion could diminish. It was very funny to see the small warrior do his wooing of the daughter through the mother; and the buxom widow played her part so well that an unenlightened observer would have said *she* was the bride-elect. She smiled, she sighed, she discoursed, she coquetted, and now and then plucked out her handkerchief and wept at the thought of losing the angel, who was placidly gnawing bones and wiping up the gravy on her plate with bits of bread.

Jules responded with spirit, talked, jested, quoted poetry, paid compliments right and left, and now and then passed the salt, filled a glass, or offered a napkin to his *fiancée* with a French shrug and a tender glance.

After dinner Madame F. begged him to recite one of his poems; for it appeared this all-accomplished man was beloved of the muse, and twanged the lyre as well as wielded the sword. With much persuasion and many modest apologies, Jules at length consented, took his place upon the rug, thrust one hand into his bosom, turned up his eyes, and, in a tremendous voice, declaimed a pensive poem of some twenty stanzas, called ‘Adieu to my past.’

The poet’s friends listened with rapt countenances and frequent bursts of emotion or applause; but the Americans suffered agonies, for the whole thing was so absurdly melodramatic that it was with great difficulty they kept themselves from explosions of laughter. When the little man dropped his voice to a hoarse whisper, in bidding adieu to the lost loves of his youth, tender-hearted old C. sobbed in her napkin; while Livy only saved herself from hysterics by drinking a glass of water, and Pelagie ate sugar, with her round eyes fixed on her lover’s face, without the slightest expression whatever.

When the poet mourned his blighted hopes, and asked wildly of all the elements if he should live or die, Gaston cast reproachful glances at the alien charmer who had nipped his passion in the bud; and when Jules gave a sudden start, slapped his brow, and declared that he would live for his country, old Marie choked in her coffee, while Madame F. clapped her fat hands, and cried: ‘It is sublime!’

The poem closed there, and the providential appearance of their donkeys gave the ladies an excuse for retiring to their room, where they laughed till they could laugh no more.

Each meal was as good as a play, and every glimpse they had of the little pair gave fresh food for mirth. Everything was so formal and polite, so utterly unlike the free-and-easy customs of their native land, that they were kept in alternate states of indignation and amusement the whole time. Jules never was alone with his Pelagie for an instant; such a breach of etiquette would have shocked the entire town. In the walks and drives which the family took together, Madame was always at the Colonel's side; while Gaston escorted his sister, looking as if he was fast reaching a state of mind when he would give her away without a pang. Many guests came and went, much kissing and bowing, prancing and rustling, went on, up and down stairs. Stately old gentlemen called, papers were signed, fortunes discussed, and gifts displayed. Pelagie went much to mass; also to the barber's and the bath. Agitated milliners flew in and out. A great load of trunks arrived from Nantes, where Madame formerly lived; and the day before the wedding a whole carriage full of Clomadocs appeared, and Babel seemed to have come again.

A great supper was given that evening, and the Three were banished to their own rooms; where, however, they fared sumptuously, for Madame C. and good old Marie ate with them, having no place left them but the kitchen. Madame C. was much hurt that she had not been asked to the wedding. It seemed the least Madame F. could do after taking possession of the house, and turning its rightful owner out of every room but the attic. Madame C. was a gentlewoman; and though a meek old soul, this rudeness hurt her very much. She said nothing; but Marie fumed and scolded fiercely, and proposed that the neglected ones should all go away on the wedding-day, and make a *fête* for themselves somewhere. So they decided to drive to Dinare, enjoy the fine views of the sea and St. Malo, dine, and return at dusk, leaving the house free for the wedding festivities.

The day was fine, and the ladies were graciously invited to behold the bride before she left for church. She looked as much like a fashion-plate as it was possible for a living girl to look; and they dutifully kissed her on both cheeks, paid their compliments and retired, thanking their stars that they were not in her place.

Mamma was gorgeous to behold, in royal purple and black lace. Gaston was so glossy and beruffled and begemmed, that they gazed with awe upon the French Adonis. But the bridegroom was a sight for gods and men. In full regimentals with a big sword, so many orders that there was hardly room for them on his little breast, and a cocked hat, with a forest of feathers, in which he extinguished himself at intervals. How his tiny boots shone, his tawny moustache bristled with importance, and his golden epaulets glittered as he shrugged and pranced! His honoured papa and mamma were both tall, portly people, beside whom the manikin looked like a child. Livy quite longed to see Madame Clomadoc take little Jules on her knee, and amuse him with *bonbons* when he got impatient at the delay of the carriage.

The Three peeped out of windows, and over the banisters, and got fine glimpses of the splendours below. Flocks of elegant ladies went sailing up the narrow stairs. Gentlemen with orders, dandies wonderful to behold, and a few children (to play with the bridegroom, as Livy wickedly said), adorned the hall and *salon*. Every one talked at the top of his or her voice. Shrieks of rapture, groans of despair, greeted a fine toilette or a torn glove. Peals of laughter from the gentlemen, and shrill cries from the infants, echoed through the once peaceful halls. As Françoise said 'It was truly divine.'

At eleven, every one trooped into the carriages again. How they ever got so many full-dressed people into one carriage is a mystery to this day. But in they piled, regardless of trains, corpulency, or height; and coach after coach lumbered away to the church.

The bride's carriage could not be got very near the door. So she tripped out to it, leaning on her uncle's arm, while the devoted Gaston bore her train. Mamma sailed after in a purple cloud; and when two young damsels, in arsenic green, were packed in, away they went, leaving the bridegroom to follow.

Then came the catastrophe! Stout papa and mamma were safely in; a friend of Jules, some six feet high, shut himself up like a jack-knife; and with a farewell wave of the cocked hat, the small bridegroom skipped in after them. The coachman cracked his whip, intending to dash under the arched gateway in fine style. But alas! the harness was old, the big horses clumsy, and the road half paved. The traces gave way, the beasts reared, the big coach lurched, and dismal wails arose. Out burst the fierce little hero of the day, and the tall friend followed by instalments.

Great was the excitement as the natives gathered about the carriage with offers of help, murmurs of sympathy, and unseemly mirth on the part of the boys. Jules did the swearing; and never were heard such big oaths as fell from the lips of this irate little man. It really seemed as if he would explode with wrath. He dashed the impressive cocked hat upon the stones, laid his hand upon his sword, tore his hair, and clutched his moustache in paroxysms of despair.

His bride was gone, waiting in agitated suspense for him. No other coach could be had, as the resources of the town had been exhausted. The harness was in a desperate state, the men at their wit's end how to mend it, and time flying fast. *Maire* and priest were waiting, the whole effect of the wedding was being ruined by this delay, and 'ten thousand devils' seemed to possess the awkward coachman.

During the flurry, Papa Clomadoc appeared to slumber tranquilly in the recesses of the carriage. Mamma endeavoured to soothe her boy with cries of ‘Tranquillize yourself, my cherished son. It is nothing.’ ‘Come, then, and reassure papa.’ ‘Inhale the odour of my vinaigrette. It will compose your lacerated nerves, my angel.’

But the angel wouldn’t come, and continued to dance and swear, and slap his hat about until the damages were repaired, when he flung himself, exhausted, into the carriage, and was borne away to his bride.

‘A lively prospect for poor Pelagie.’ ‘What a little fiend he is!’ ‘Spinsters for ever!’

With these remarks, the ladies ordered their own equipage, an infant omnibus, much in vogue in Dinan, where retired army officers, English or Scotch, drive about with their little families of eighteen or twenty. One Colonel Newcome, a grave-looking man, used to come to church in a bus of this sort, with nine daughters and four sons, like a patriarch. The strangers thought it was a boarding-school, till he presented the entire flock, with paternal pride, as ‘my treasures.’

Madame C., in a large Leghorn bonnet, trembling with yellow bows, led the way with an air of lofty indifference as to what became of her house that day. Marie bore a big basket, full of cold fowls, salad, and wines; she also was in a new spring hat of purple, which made her rosy old face look like a china aster. Lavinia reposed upon the other seat; and the infants insisted on sharing the driver’s seat, up aloft, that they might enjoy the prospect, which freak caused Flabeau’s boy to beam and blush till his youthful countenance was a deep scarlet.

They had a pleasant day; for good old Madame soon recovered her temper, and beguiled the time with lively tales of her mother’s trials during the Revolution.

Marie concocted spiced drinks, salad that was a thing to dream of, not to tell, and produced such edible treasures that her big basket seemed bottomless.

The frisky damsels explored ruins, ran races on the hard beach, sniffed the salt breezes, and astonished the natives by swarming up and down ‘precipices,’ as they called the rocks.

That was a fatal day for Flabeau’s boy (they never knew his name); for, as if the wedding had flown to his head, he lost his youthful heart to one of the lively damsels who invaded his perch. Such tender glances as his China-blue eyes cast upon her; such grins of joy as he gave when she spoke to him; such feats of agility as he performed, leaping down to gather flowers, or hurling himself over thorny hedges, to point out a *dolmen* or a *menhir* (they never could remember which was which). Alas, alas! for Flabeau’s boy! Deeply was he wounded that day by the unconscious charmer, who would as soon have thought of inspiring love in the bosom of the broken-nosed saint by the wayside as in the heart that beat under the blue blouse.

I regret to say that ‘the infants,’ as Madame C. always called Miss Livy’s charges, behaved themselves with less decorum than could have been wished. But the proud consciousness that *they* never could be disposed of as Pelagie had been had such an exhilarating effect upon them that they frisked like the lambs in the field.

One drove the bus in a retired spot and astonished the stout horses by the way in which she bowled them along the fine, hard road. The other sang college songs, to the intense delight of the old ladies, who admired the ‘*chants Amériques* so gay,’ and to the horror of their duenna, who knew what they meant. A shower came up, and they *would* remain outside; so the boy put up a leathern hood, and they sat inside in such a merry mood that the silent youth suddenly caught the infection, and burst forth into a Breton melody, which he continued to drone till they got home.

The house was a blaze of light when they arrived, and Françoise, the maid, came flying out to report sundry breakages and mishaps. How the salad had precipitated itself downstairs, dish and all. How Monsieur Gaston was so gay, so inconceivably gay, that he could hardly stand, and insisted on kissing her clandestinely. That Mademoiselle Pelagie had wept much because her veil was torn; and Madame F. had made a fresh toilette, ravishing to behold. Would the dear ladies survey the party, still at table? Regard them from the little window in the garden, and see if it is not truly a spectacle the most superb!

They did regard them, and saw the bride at the head of the table, eating steadily through the dessert; the bridegroom reciting poems with tremendous effect; Gaston almost invisible behind a barricade of bottles; and Madame F., in violet velvet, diamonds, plumes, and lace, more sleek and buxom than ever. The ladies all talked at once, and the gentlemen drank healths every five minutes. A very French and festive scene it was; for the room was small, and twenty mortals were stowed therein. One fat lady sat in the fireplace, Papa Clomadoc leaned his heavy head upon the sideboard, and the plump shoulders of Madame F. were half out of the front window. ‘But it was genteel. Oh! I assure you, yes,’ as Françoise said.

How long they kept it up the weary trio did not wait to see, but retired to their beds, and slumbered peacefully, waking only when Gaston was borne up to his room, chanting the ‘Marseillaise’ at the top of his voice.

Next day M. and Madame Clomadoc, Jr., made calls, and Pelagie had the joy of wearing her shawl. For three days she astonished the natives by promenading with her lord in a fresh toilette each day. On the fourth they all piled into a big carriage, and went away to make a round of visits, before the young people settled down at Boulogne.

The Americans never thought to hear any more of Pelagie; but, as dear old Madame C. wrote to them several times after they left, the little story may be finished here, though the sequel did not actually come till a year later.

Many were the sage predictions of the Three as to the success of this marriage — Amanda approving of that style of thing, Matilda objecting fiercely to the entire affair, and Lavinia firmly believing in the good old doctrine of love as your only firm basis for so solemn a bargain.

Wagers were laid that the fiery little Colonel would shoot some one in a jealous fit, or that Pelagie would elope, or both charcoal themselves to death, as the best way out of the predicament. But none of them guessed how tragically it would really end.

Late in the following spring came a letter from Madame C., telling them that Jules had gone to the war, and been shot in his first battle; that Pelagie was with her mother again, comforting herself for her loss with a still smaller Jules, who never saw his father, and, it is to be hoped, did not resemble him. So little Pelagie's brief romance ended; and one would fancy that the experiences of that year would make her quite content to remain under mamma's wing, with no lord and master but the little son, to whom she was a very tender mother.

Pleasant days those were in quaint old Dinan; for spring's soft magic glorified earth and sky, and a delicious sense of rest and freedom gave a charm to that quiet life. Legends of romance and chivalry hung about the ruins of castle and *château*, as green and golden as the ivy and bright wall-flowers that tapestried the crumbling walls, and waved like banners from the turret tops. Lovely walks into woods, starred with pale primroses, and fragrant with wild hyacinths; down green lanes, leading to quaint cottages, or over wide meadows full of pink-tipped daisies and dear familiar buttercups, the same all the world over.

Sometimes they took gay donkey-drives to visit a solemn dolmen in a gloomy pine-wood, with mistletoe hanging from the trees, and the ghosts of ancient Druids haunting the spot. The cavalcade on such occasions was an imposing spectacle. Matilda being fond of horses likewise affected donkeys (or thought she did, till she tried to drive one), and usually went first in a small vehicle like a chair on wheels, drawn by an animal who looked about the size of a mouse, when the stately Mat in full array, yellow parasol, long whip, camp-stool, and sketch-book, sat bolt upright on her perch, driving in the most approved manner.

The small beast, after much whipping, would break into a trot, and go pattering over the hard, white road, with his long ears wagging, and his tiny hoofs raising a great dust for the benefit of the other turnout just behind.

In a double chair sat Lavinia, bundled up as usual, and the amiable Amanda, both flushed with constant pokings and thrashings of their steed. A venerable ass, so like an old whity-brown hair trunk as to his body, and Nick Bottom’s mask as to his head, that he was a constant source of mirth to the ladies. Mild and venerable as he looked, however, he was a most incorrigible beast, and it took two immortal souls, and four arms, to get the ancient donkey along.

Vain all the appeals to his conscience, pity, or pride: nothing but a sharp poke among his ribs, a steady shower of blows on his fuzzy old back, and frequent ‘yanks’ of the reins produced any effect. It was impossible to turn out for anything, and the ladies resigned themselves to the ignominy of sitting still, in the middle of the road, and letting other carriages drive over or round them.

On rare occasions the beast would bolt into the ditch as a vehicle drew near; but usually he paused abruptly, put his head down, and apparently went to sleep.

Matilda got on better, because little Bernard Du Guesclin, as she named her mouse, was so very small, that she could take him up, and turn him round bodily, when other means failed, or pull him half into the chair if danger threatened in front. He was a sprightly little fellow, and had not yet lost all the ardour of youth, or developed the fiendish obstinacy of his kind; so he frequently ran little races — now and then pranced, and was not quite dead to the emotion of gratitude in return for bits of bread.

Truly, yes; the fair Mat with her five feet seven inches, and little Bernard, whose longest ear, when most erect, did not reach much above her waist, were a sweet pair of friends, and caused her mates great amusement.

‘I must have some one to play with, for I can’t improve my mind *all* the time as ‘Mandy does, or cuddle and doze like Livy. I’ve had experience with young donkeys of all sorts, and I give you my word little Bernie is much better fun than some I’ve known with shorter ears and fewer legs.’

Thus Matilda, regardless of the jeers of her friends, when they proposed having the small beast into the *salon* to beguile the tedium of a rainy day.

As the summer came on, picnics were introduced, and gay parties would pile into and on to Flabeau’s small omnibus, and drive off to Hunandaye, Coétquën, La Bellière, Guingamp, or some other unpronounceable but most charming spot, for a day of sunshine and merrymaking.

The hospitable English came out strong on these occasions, with ‘‘ampers of ‘am-sandwiches, bottled porter and so on, don’t you know?’ all in fine style.

Even the stout doctor donned his knickerbockers and grey hose, unfurled his Japanese umbrella, and, with a pretty niece on either arm, disported himself like a boy.

But pleasantest of all were the daily strolls through the little town and its environs, getting glimpses of Breton manners and customs.

The houses were usually composed of one room, where, near the open fire, and fixed against the wall, stands the bedstead or *lit clos*, of old oak, shut in by carved sliding panels, often bearing an inscription or some sacred symbol. The mattresses and feather-beds are so piled up, that there is hardly room to creep in. Before it is the big chest containing the family wardrobe, answering the double purpose of a seat and a step by which to ascend the lofty bed. Cupboards on each side often have wide shelves, where the children sleep. Settles and a long table complete the furniture; the latter often has little wells hollowed out in the top to hold the soup instead of plates. Over the table, suspended by pulleys, are two indispensable articles in a Breton house, — a large round basket to cover the bread, and a wooden frame to hold the spoons. Festoons of sausages, hams, candles, onions, horse-shoes, harness, and tools, all hang from the ceiling. The floor is of beaten earth. One narrow window lets in the light. There are no out-houses, and pigs and poultry mingle freely with the family.

The gardens are well kept, and produce quantities of fruit and vegetables. The chief food of the poorer class is bread or porridge of buckwheat, with cabbage soup, made by pouring hot water over cabbage leaves and adding a bit of butter.

They are a home-loving people, and pine like the Swiss, if forced to leave their native land. They are brave soldiers and good sailors. ‘Their vices,’ as a Breton writer says, ‘are avarice, contempt for women, and drunkenness; their virtues, love of home and country, resignation to the will of God, loyalty to each other, and hospitality.’ Their motto is, ‘En tout chemin loyauté.’

They are very superstitious, and some of their customs are curious. At New Year pieces of bread and butter are thrown into the fountains, and from the way in which they swim the future is foretold. If the buttered side turns under, it forebodes death; if two pieces adhere together, it is a sign of sickness; and if a piece floats properly, it is an assurance of long life and prosperity.

Girls throw pins into the fountain of Saloun to tell, by their manner of sinking, when they will be married. If the pin goes down head-foremost, there is little hope; but, if the point goes first, it is a sure sign of being married that year.

Their veneration for healing-springs is very great, and, though at times forbidden by the Church, is still felt. Pounded snails, worn in a bag on the neck, is believed to be a cure for fever; and a certain holy bell rung over the head, a cure for head-ache. ‘If we believe in that last remedy, what a ceaseless tingling that bell would keep up in America!' said Lavinia, when these facts were mentioned to her.

In some towns they have, in the cemetery, a bone-house or reliquary. It is the custom, after a certain time, to dig up the bones of the dead, and preserve the skulls in little square boxes like bird-houses, with a heart-shaped opening, to show the relic within. The names and dates of the deceased are inscribed outside.

Saint Ives or Yves is a favourite saint, and images of him are in all churches and over many doors. He was one of the remarkable characters of the thirteenth century. He studied law in Paris, and devoted his talents to defending the poor; hence, he was called 'the poor man's advocate:' and so great is the confidence placed in his justice, that, even now, when a debtor falsely denies his debt, a peasant will pay twenty *sous* for a mass to St. Ives, sure that the Saint will cause the faithless creditor to die within the year or pay up.

His truthfulness was such that he was called 'St. Yves de vérité.' He was the special patron of lawyers, but he does not seem to be their model.

The early monks taught the people to work, and their motto was 'The Cross and the plough, labour and prayer.' They introduced apples, now the principal fruit of Brittany. Much cider is made and drank; and in old times they got their wine from France in exchange for wax and honey, as they were famous bee-keepers. Great fields of buck-wheat still afford food for the 'yellow-breeched philosophers,' and in many cottage gardens a row of queerly shaped hives stand in sunny nooks.

These monks were the model farmers of those days, and their abbeys were fine farms. One had twenty piggeries, of three hundred pigs each, in its forests. The monks also reared sheep and horses, and bred fish in their ponds.

Many were also brewers, weavers, carpenters, and so on. Evidently they lived up to their motto and laboured quite as much as they prayed, and doubtless were saved by works as well as by faith.

The little Place Du Guesclin, with a stumpy statue of the famous knight in the middle and chestnut trees all around, was a favourite resting-place of the ladies — especially when the weekly fair was held and booths of all sorts were raised at one end. Here Amanda bought a remarkable jack-knife, which would cut nothing but her fingers: Matilda speculated in curious kinds of cake; one sort being made into gigantic jumbles so light that they did excellently for grace-hoops; another sort being used by these vandals as catch-alls, so deep and tough were they. Lavinia examined the various fabrics, and got bits of linen as samples, also queer earthen pots and pans impossible to carry away.

The church of St. Sauveur, a dim and ancient little place with Du Guesclin's heart buried by the side of his wife, was another haunt. The castle, now a prison, contained the arm-chair in which Duchess Anne sat, and the dungeons where were crammed two thousand English prisoners of war in the last century. The view from the platform of the keep was magnificent, extending to Mont Dol and the distant sea.

The sunny promenade on the *fosse*, that goes half round the town, was very charming, with the old grey walls on one side, and, on the other, the green valley with its luxuriant gardens, and leafy lanes, winding up to the ruined *château*, or the undulating hills with picturesque windmills whirling on the heights.

On the other side of the town, from the high gardens of the church, one looked down into the deeper valley of the Rance, with the airy viaduct striding from hill to hill, and the old part of the town nestling at its base.

Soft and summery, fertile and reposeful, was the scene; and the busy peasants at their work added to the charm. Pretty English children with Breton nurses, each in the costume of her native town, played under the lindens all abloom with odorous flowers and alive with bees. Workmen came to these green places to eat the black bread and drink the thin wine that was all their dinner. Invalids strolled here after their baths at the little house in the rose-garden below. Pretty girls walked there in the twilight with long-haired lovers in knee breeches and round hats. Nuns in their grey gowns went to and fro from hospital and the insane asylum or charity school; and the beautiful old priest sometimes went feebly by, smiling paternally on his flock, who rose and uncovered reverently as he passed.

Flowers were everywhere, — in the gardens of the rich, at the windows of the poor. The stalls in the market were gay with plumy lilacs, splendid tulips, roses of every shade, and hyacinths heavy with odour. All along the borders of the river waved the blossoming grass; every green bank about the mills at Lehon was yellow with dandelions, and the sunny heads of little children welcoming the flower of the poor. Even the neglected churchyard of the ruined abbey, where the tombs of the stately Beaumanoirs still stand, was bright with cheerful daisies and blue-eyed forget-me-nots.

The willows in the valley were covered with fragrant tassels, and the old women and children sat all day on door-stones and by the wayside stripping the long, white wands for basket-making. Flax fields were blooming in the meadows, and acres of buckwheat, with its rosy stems and snowy blossoms, whitened the uplands with a fair prophecy of bread for all.

So, garlanded about with early flowers and painted in spring’s softest, freshest colours, Brittany remains for ever a pleasant picture in the memory of those who have been welcomed to its hospitable homes, and found friends among its brave and loyal people.

FRANCE.

‘Girls, I have had a scintillation in the night: listen and approve!’ said Amanda, coming into the room where her comrades sat upon the floor, in the first stages of despair, at the impossibility of getting the accumulated rubbish of three months’ travel into a couple of immense trunks.

‘Blessed girl! you always bring a ray of light just at the darkest moment,’ returned Lavinia, with a sigh of relief, while Matilda looked over a barricade of sketch-books bristling with paint-brushes, and added anxiously, —

‘If you *could* suggest how I am to work this miracle, you will be a public benefactor.’

‘Behold the amendment I propose,’ began Amanda, perching herself on one of the arks. ‘We have decided to travel slowly and comfortably through France to Switzerland, stopping where we like, and staying as long as we please at any place we fancy, being as free as air, and having all the world before us where to choose, as it were.’

‘The route you have laid out is a charming one, and I don’t see how you can improve it,’ said Lavinia, who, though she was supposed to be the matron, guide, and protector of the younger girls, was in reality nothing but a dummy, used for Mrs. Grundy’s sake, and let the girls do just as they pleased, only claiming the right to groan and moan as much as she liked when neuralgia, her familiar demon, claimed her for its own.

‘One improvement remains to be made. Are these trunks a burden, a vexation of spirit, a curse?’ demanded Amanda, tapping one with her carefully cherished finger-tips.

‘They are! they are!’ groaned the others, regarding the monsters with abhorrence.

‘Then let us get rid of them, and set out with no luggage but a few necessaries in a shawl-strap.’

‘We will! we will!’ returned the chorus.

‘Shall we burn up our rubbish, or give it away?’ asked Lavinia, who liked energetic measures, and was ready to cast her garments to the four winds of heaven, to save herself from the agonies of packing.

‘*I* shall never give up my pictures, nor my boots!’ cried Matilda, gathering her idols to her breast in a promiscuous heap.

‘Be calm and listen,’ returned the scintillator. ‘Pack away all but the merest necessaries, and we will send the trunk by express to Lyons. Then with our travelling-bags and bundles, we can follow at our leisure.’

‘‘Tis well! ‘tis well!’ replied the chorus, and they all returned to their packing, which was performed in the most characteristic manner.

Amanda never seemed to have any clothes, yet was always well and appropriately dressed; so it did not take her long to lay a few garments, a book or two, a box of Roman-coin lockets, scarabæ brooches, and cinque-cento rings, likewise a swell hat and habit, into her vast trunk; then lock and label it in the most business-like and thorough manner.

Matilda found much difficulty in reconciling paint-pots and silk gowns, blue hats and statuary, French boots and Yankee notions. But order was at length produced from chaos, and the young lady refreshed her weary soul by painting large red M’s all over the trunk to mark it for her own.

Miss Lavinia packed and repacked four or five times, forgetting needfuls, which, of course, were always at the very bottom. At the fifth plunge into the depths her patience gave out, and with a vow to be a slave no longer to her treacherous memory, she tumbled every thing in, performed a solemn jig on the lid till it locked, then pasted large, but illegible placards in every available spot, and rested from her labours with every nerve in a throbbing condition.

Shawl-straps of the largest, strongest sort were next procured, and the three bundles made up with much discussion and merriment.

Into Amanda’s went a volume of Shakspeare of great size and weight, but as indispensable as a tooth-brush to its owner; toilette-articles tied up in a handkerchief, a few necessary garments, and much paper, — for Amanda was inspired with poetic fire at unexpected moments, also had five hundred bosom friends, in answering whose epistolary gushings much stationery was consumed. A pistol, a massive crust of bread, and an oval box containing all the dainty appliances for the culture, preservation, and ornamentation of the finger-nails, made up her store.

Matilda’s bundle consisted of sketch-books, a trifle of haberdashery, a curling-stick that was always tumbling out at inopportune moments, yards of blue ribbon, and a camp-stool strapped outside in company with a Japanese umbrella, a gift from the stout doctor, destined to be cursed in many languages by the unhappy beings into whose backs, eyes, and stomachs it was poked before its wanderings ended.

Lavinia confined herself to a choice collection of bottles and pill-boxes, fur boots, a grey cloud, and several French novels, — the solace of wakeful nights.

A scarlet army blanket, with U. S. in big black letters on it, enveloped her travelling medicine-chest, and lent a cheerful air to the sombre spinster, whose black attire and hoarse voice made the *sobriquet* of Raven most appropriate.

With these imposing bundles in one hand, little pouches slung over the shoulder, plain travelling-suits, subdued hats, and resolute but benign countenances, our three errant damsels set forth one bright June day, to wander through France at their own sweet will. Not a fear assailed them; for all men were civil, all women friendly, and the world wore its sunniest aspect. Not a doubt perplexed them; for the gifted Amanda spoke many tongues, understood all sorts of money, could grapple successfully with Murray and Bradshaw, and never got into the wrong corporation when she traced a route with unerring accuracy through the mysteries of an Indicator. No lord and master, in the shape of brother, spouse, or courier, ordered their outgoings and incomings; but liberty the most entire was theirs, and they enjoyed it heartily. Wisely and well too; for, though off the grand route, they behaved themselves in public as decorously as if the eyes of all prim Boston were upon them, and proved by their triumphant success, that the unprotected might go where they liked, if they conducted themselves with the courtesy and discretion of gentlewomen.

How pleasant were the early sail down the Ranee from Dinan to St. Malo, the comfortable breakfast in the flowery little court of Hôtel Franklin, and the stroll afterward about the quaint old town, looking at the churches, buying fruit, and stoutly resisting the temptations of antique jewelry displayed in the dingy shops! Lavinia never forgave herself, however, for not securing a remarkable watch, and Amanda sighed months afterward for a Breton collar and cross of charming antiquity and ugliness.

Matilda boldly planted her camp-stool, unfurled her umbrella, and, undaunted by the crowd of round-capped, blue-bloused, wooden-shoed children about her, began to draw the church.

‘I intend to study architecture, and to sketch *all* the cathedrals we see,’ said the ardent art-student, struggling manfully with the unruly umbrella, the unsavoury odours from the gutter, and the garrulous crowd leaning over her shoulder, peering under her hat-brim, and examining all her belongings with a confiding freedom rather embarrassing.

‘Do you know what impertinent things these little scamps are saying to you?’ asked Amanda, pausing in a lecture on surface drainage which she was delivering to Lavinia, who was vainly struggling to cram a fat wine bottle, a cabbage leaf of strawberries, and some remarkable cakes into the lunch-basket.

‘No: I don’t; and that is the advantage of not knowing any language but my own,’ complacently replied Matilda, who considered all study but that of art as time wasted, and made her small store of French answer admirably by talking very loud and fast, and saying, '*Oui, oui, oui,*' on all occasions with much gesticulation, and bows and smiles of great suavity and sweetness.

'Clear out this rabble, or come back to the hotel and wait for the bus. We shall have the whole town round us soon, and I can't stand it,' said Amanda, who had no romantic admiration for the Great Unwashed.

'You think I can't do it? *Voilà!*' and, rising suddenly to an unexpected height, Matilda waved the umbrella like a *bâton*, cried '*Allez!*' in a stern voice, and the children fled like chaff before the wind.

'You see how little is needed, so don't vex me with learning your old verbs any more!' and Matilda closed her book with an air of calm satisfaction.

'Come home and rest. It is so warm here I am fairly melted,' prayed Lavinia, who had been longing for summer, and of course was not suited when she got it.

'Now, do remember one thing: don't let us be gregarious. We never know who we may pick up if we talk to people; and stray acquaintances are sad bores sometimes. Granny is such a cross old dear she won't say a word to any one if she can help it; but you, Mat, can't be trusted if we meet any one who talks English. So be on your guard, or the peace of this party is lost,' said Amanda, impressively.

'We are not likely to meet any but natives in this wilderness; so don't excite yourself, Mandy, dear,' replied Matilda, who, being of a social turn and an attractive presence, was continually making friends, to the great annoyance of her more prudent comrades.

In the flowery courtyard sat the group that one meets everywhere on the Continent, — even in the wilds of Brittany. The father and mother stout, tired, and rather subdued by the newness of things; the son, Young America personified, loud, important, and inquisitive; the daughter, pretty, affected, and over-dressed; all on the lookout for adventures and titles, fellow-countrymen to impress, and foreigners eager to get the better of them.

Seeing the peril from afar, Amanda buried herself in Murray, to read up the tomb of Chateaubriand, the tides, population, and any other useful bit of history; for Amanda was a thrifty soul, and

'Gathered honey all the day
From every opening flower.'

Lavinia, finding the court damp, shrouded herself in the grey cloud, put her feet on the red bundle, and fortified herself with a Turner's pill.

But Matilda, guileless girl, roamed to and fro, patted the horses at the gate, picked flowers that no French hand would have dared to touch, and studied the effect of light and shade on the red head of the *garçon*, who gazed sentimentally at ‘the blonde “Mees,”‘ as he artlessly watered the wine for dinner.

The Americans had their eye upon her, and felt that, though the others might be forbidding English women, this one could be made to talk. So they pounced upon their prey, to the dismay of her mates, and proceeded to ask fifty questions to the minute. Poor Mat, glad to hear the sound of her native tongue, fell into the snare, and grew more confiding every moment.

‘She is telling the family history,’ whispered Lavinia, in a tone of despair.

‘Now they are asking where we came from,’ added Amanda, casting down her book in agony.

‘Wink at her,’ sighed Lavinia.

‘Call to her,’ groaned Amanda, as they heard their treasured secret betrayed, and the enemy clamouring for further information about this charming trip.

‘Matilda, bring me my shawl,’ commanded the Dowager.

‘Come and see if you don’t think we had better go direct to Tours,’ said the wary Amanda, hoping to put the enemy off the track.

The victim came, and vials of wrath were poured upon her head in one unceasing flow till the omnibus started, and the ladies were appeased by finding that the enemy did not follow.

‘Promise that you won’t talk to any but natives, or I decline to lead this expedition,’ said Amanda firmly.

‘I promise,’ returned Mat, with penitent meekness.

‘Now we’ve got her!’ croaked the Raven; ‘for she will have to learn French or hold her tongue.’

‘The language of the eye remains to me, and I am a proficient in that, ma’am,’ said Mat, roused by these efforts to deny her the right of free speech.

‘You are welcome to it, dear;’ and Amanda departed to buy tickets and despatch the trunks, with secret misgivings that they would never be found again.

‘Now we are fairly started, with no more weighing of luggage, fussing over checks, or packing of traps to afflict us. What a heavenly sense of freedom it gives one, to have nothing but an independent shawl-strap!’ said Matilda, as they settled themselves in a vacant car, and stowed away the bundles.

What a jolly day that was, to be sure! Whether it was the air, the good coffee, or the liberty, certain it is that three merrier maids never travelled from St. Malo to Le Mans on a summer’s day. Even the Raven forgot her woes, and became so exhilarated that she smashed her bromide bottle out of the window, declaring herself cured, and tried to sing ‘Hail Columbia,’ in a voice like an asthmatic bagpipe.

Mat amused herself and her comrades by picking up the different articles that kept tumbling down on her head from her badly built bundle; while Amanda scintillated to such an extent that the others laughed themselves into hysterics, and lay exhausted, prone upon the seats.

They ate, drank, sung, gossiped, slept, read, and revelled, till another passenger got in, when propriety clothed them as with a garment, and the mirthful damsels became three studious statues.

The new-comer was a little priest; so rosy and young that they called him the ‘Reverend Boy.’ He seemed rather dismayed at first; but, finding the ladies silent and demure, he took heart, and read diligently in a dingy little prayer-book, stealing shy glances now and then from under his broad-brimmed hat at Amanda’s white hands, or Matilda’s yellow locks, as if these vanities of the flesh had not quite lost their charms for him. By and by he fell asleep, and leaned in his corner, making quite a pretty picture; for the ugly hat was off, his boyish face as placid as a child’s, his buckled shoes and neat black-stockinged legs stretched comfortably out, his plump hands folded over the dingy book, and the little bands lay peacefully on his breast.

He was quite at their mercy now; so the three women looked as much as they liked, wondering if the poor dear boy was satisfied with the life he had chosen, and getting tenderly pitiful over the losses he might learn to regret when it was too late. His dreams seemed to be pleasant ones, however; for once he laughed a blithe, boyish laugh, good to hear; and when he woke, he rubbed his blue eyes and stared about, smiling like a newly roused baby.

He got out all too soon, was joined by several other clerical youths, and disappeared with much touching of big beavers, and wafting of cassocks.

Innocent, reverend little boy! I wonder what became of him, and hope his sleep is as quiet now as then, — his awakening as happy as it seemed that summer day.

Six o’clock saw our damsels at Le Mans; and, after dinner, a sunset walk took them to the grand old cathedral, where they wandered till moonrise. Pure Gothic of the twelfth century, rich in stained glass, carved screens, tombs of kings and queens, dim little chapels, where devout souls told their beads before shadowy pictures of saints and martyrs, while over all the wonderful arches seemed to soar, one above the other, light and graceful as the natural curves of drooping branches, or the rise and fall of some great fountain.

‘We shall not see anything finer than this, I’m sure. It’s a perfect revelation to me,’ said Matilda, in a calm rapture at the beauty all about her.

‘This is a pious-feeling church, and I could say my prayers here with all my soul; for it seems as if the religion of centuries had got built into it,’ added Lavinia, thinking of the ugly imitations at home.

‘You will both turn Catholic before we get through,’ prophesied Amanda, retiring to study the tomb of Berengaria, Cœur de Lion’s wife.

The square before the hotel was gay with a market, many soldiers lounging about, and flocks of people eating ices before the *cafés*. The ladies enjoyed it from the balcony, and then slumbered peacefully in a great room with three alcoves, much muslin drapery, and a bowl and pitcher like a good-sized cup and saucer.

Another look at the cathedral in the early morning, and then away to Tours, which place they found a big, clean, handsome city, all astir for the *Fête-Dieu*.

‘We will stay over Sunday and see it,’ was the general vote as the trio headed for the great church, and, catching sight of it, they subsided into a seat by the fountain opposite, and sat looking silently at the magnificent pile.

How strangely impressive and eloquent it was! The evening red touched its grey towers with a mellow light, like sunshine on a venerable head. Lower down, flights of rooks circled round the fretted niches, quaint windows, and grotesque gargoyles, while the great steps below swarmed with priests and soldiers, gay strangers and black-robed nuns, children and beggars.

For an hour our pilgrims sat and studied the wonderful *façade*, or walked round the outside, examining the rich carvings that covered every inch of the walls. Twilight fell before they had thought of entering, and feeling that they had seen enough for that night, they went thoughtfully home to dream of solemn shadows and saintly faces, for the cathedral haunted them still.

Next day was spent in viewing Charlemagne’s Tower, and seeing the grand procession in honour of the day. The streets were hung with garlands, gay tapestries and banners, strewn with fresh boughs, and lined with people in festival array. As the procession passed, women ran out and scattered rose-leaves before it, and one young mother set her blooming baby on a heap of greenery in the middle of the street, leaving it there, that the Holy Ghost under its canopy might pass over it. A pretty sight, the rosy little creature smiling in the sunshine as it sat playing with its own blue shoes, while the golden pageant went by; the chanting priests stepping carefully, and looking down with sudden benignity in their tired faces as the holy shadow fell on the bright head, making baby blessed, and saved for ever in its pious mother’s eyes.

A great band played finely, scarlet soldiers followed, then the banners of patron saints were borne by children. Saint Agnes and her lamb led a troop of pretty little girls carrying tall white lilies, filling the air with their sweetness. Mary, Our Mother, was followed by many orphans with black ribbons crossed over the young hearts that had lost so much. Saint Martin led the charity boys in purple suits of just the colour of the mantle he was dividing with the beggar on the banner. A pleasant emblem of the charitable cloak that covers so many.

Priests in full splendour paced solemnly along with censers swinging, candles flickering, sweet-voiced boys singing, and hundreds kneeling as they passed. Most impressive figures, unless one caught a glimpse of something comically human to disturb the effect of the heavenly pageant. Lavinia had an eye for the ludicrous and though she dropped a tear over the orphans, and with difficulty resisted a strong desire to catch and kiss the pretty baby, she scandalized her neighbours by laughing outright the next minute. A particularly portly, pious-looking priest, who was marching with superb dignity, and chanting like a devout bumble-bee, suddenly mislaid his temper, and injured the effect by boxing a charity boy’s ears with his gilded missal, and then capped the climax by taking a pinch of snuff with a sonorous satisfaction that convulsed the heretic.

The afternoon was spent in the church, wandering to and fro, each alone to study and enjoy in her own way. Matilda lost her head entirely, and had silent raptures over the old pictures. Amanda said her prayers, looked up her dates, and imparted her facts in a proper and decorous manner, while Lavinia went up and down, finding for herself little pictures not painted by hands, and reading histories more interesting to her than those of saints and martyrs.

In one dim chapel, with a single candle lighting up the divine sorrow of the Mater Dolorosa, knelt a woman in deep black, weeping and praying all alone. In another flowery nook dedicated to the Infant Jesus, a peasant girl was telling her beads over the baby asleep in her lap; her sunburnt face refined and beautiful by the tenderness of mother-love. In a third chapel a pale, wasted old man sat propped in a chair, while his rosy old wife prayed heartily to St. Gratien, the patron saint of the church, for the recovery of her John Anderson. And most striking of all was a dark, handsome young man, well-dressed and elegant, who was waiting at the door of a confessional with some great trouble in his face, as he muttered and crossed himself, while his haggard eyes were fixed on the benignant figure of St. Francis, as if asking himself if it were possible for him also to put away the pleasant sins and follies of the world, and lead a life like that which embalms the memory of that good man.

‘If we don’t go away to-morrow we never shall, for this church will bewitch us, and make it impossible to leave,’ said Amanda, when at length they tore themselves away.

‘I give up trying to sketch cathedrals. It can’t be done, and seems impious to try,’ said Matilda, quite exhausted by something deeper than pleasure.

‘I think the “Reminiscences of a Rook” would make a capital story. They are long-lived birds, and could tell tales of the past that would entirely eclipse our modern rubbish,’ said Lavinia, taking a last look at the solemn towers, and the shadowy birds that had haunted them for ages.

The ladies agreed to be off early in the morning, that they might reach Amboise in time for the eleven o’clock breakfast. Amanda was to pay the bill, and to make certain enquiries at the office; Mat to fly out and do a trifle of shopping; while Lavinia packed up the bundles and mounted guard over them. They separated, but in half-an-hour all met again, not in their room according to agreement, but before the cathedral, which all had decided not to revisit on any account.

Matilda was there first, and as each of the others came stealing round the corner, she greeted them with a laugh, in which all joined after the first surprise was over.

‘I told you it would bewitch us,’ said Amanda; and then all took a farewell look, which lasted so long that they had to rush back to the hotel in most unseemly haste.

‘Now to fresh *châteaux* and churches new,’ sang Lavinia, as they rolled away on the fourth stage of their summer journey. A very short stage it was, and soon they were in an entirely new scene, for Amboise was a little, old-time village on the banks of the Loire, looking as if it had been asleep for a hundred years. The Lion d’Or was a quaint place, so like the inns described in French novels, that one kept expecting to see some of Dumas’ heroes come dashing up, all boots, plumes, and pistols, with a love-letter for some court beauty in the castle on the hill beyond.

Queer galleries and stairs led up outside the house to the rooms above. The *salle-à-manger* was across a court, and every dish came from a kitchen round the corner. The *garçon*, a beaming, ubiquitous creature, trotted perpetually, diving down steps, darting into dark corners, or skipping up ladders, producing needfuls from most unexpected places. The bread came from the stable, soup from the cellar, coffee out of a meal-chest, and napkins from the housetop, apparently, for Adolphe went up among the weather-cocks to get them.

‘No one knows us, no one can speak a word of English, and if we happen to die here it will never be known. How romantic and nice it is!’ exclaimed Mat, in good spirits, for the people treated the ladies as if they were duchesses in disguise, and the young women liked it.

‘I’m not so sure that the romance is all it looks. We should be in a sweet quandary if anything happened to our sheet-anchor here. Just remember, in any danger, save Amanda first, then she will save us. But if she is lost, all is lost,’ replied Lavinia, darkly, for she always took tragical views of life when her bones ached.

Up the hill they went after breakfast; and balm was found for the old lady’s woes in the sight of many Angora cats, of great size and beauty. White as snow, with tails like plumes, and mild, yellow eyes, were these charmers. At every window sat one; on every door-step sprawled a bunch of down; and frequently the eye of the tabby-loving spinster was gladdened by the touching spectacle of a blonde mamma in the bosom of her young family.

‘If I could only carry it, I’d have one of those dears, no matter what it cost!’ cried Lavinia, more captivated by a live cat than by all the dead Huguenots that Catherine de Medicis hung over the castle walls on a certain memorable occasion.

‘Well, you can’t, so come on and improve your mind with some good, useful history,’ said Amanda, leading them forward. ‘You *must* remember that Charles VII. was born here in 1470 — that Anne of Brittany married him for her first husband, and that he bumped his head against a low door in the garden here above, as he was running through to play bowls with his Anne, and it killed him.’

‘Which? the bump or the bowls?’ asked Mat, who liked to have things clearly stated.

‘Don’t be frivolous, child. Here Margaret of Anjou and her son were reconciled to Warwick. Abd-el Kader and his family were kept prisoners here, and in the garden is a tomb with a crescent on it; likewise a “pleached walk,” and a winding drive inside the great tower, up which lords and ladies used to ride straight into the hall,’ continued the sage Amanda, who yearned to enlighten the darkness of her careless friends.

A brisk old woman did the honours of the castle, showing them mouldy chapels, sepulchral halls, rickety stairs, grubby cells, and pitch-dark passages, till even the romantic Matilda was glad to see the light of day, and repose in the pleasant gardens while removing the cobwebs from her countenance and the dust from her raiment.

A lovely view gladdened their eyes as they stood on the balcony whence the amiable Catherine surveyed the walls hung thick, and the river choked up with the dead. Below, the broad Loire rolled slowly by between its green banks. Little boys, in the costume of Cupid, were riding great horses in to bathe after the day’s work. The grey roofs of the town nestled to the hillside, and far away stretched the summer landscape, full of vague suggestions of new scenes and pleasures to the pilgrims.

‘We start for Chenonceaux at seven in the morning; so, ladies, I beg that you will be ready punctually,’ was the command issued by Amanda, as they went to their rooms, after a festive dinner of what Lavinia called ‘earth-worms and cacti,’ not being fond of stewed brains, baked eels, or thistles and pigweed chopped up in oil.

Such a droll night as the wanderers spent! No locks on the doors and no bells. Stairs leading straight up the gallery from the courtyard, carts going and coming, soft footsteps stealing up and down, whispers that sounded suspicious (though they were only orders to kill chickens and pick salad for the morrow), and a ghostly whistle that disturbed Lavinia so much, she at last draped herself in the green coverlet, and went boldly forth upon the balcony to see what it meant.

She intended to demand silence in French that would strike terror to the soul of the bravest native. But when she saw that poor, dear, hard-worked *garçon* blacking boots by the light of the moon, her heart melted with pity; and, resolving to give him an extra fee, she silently retired to her stone-floored bower, and fell asleep in a stuffy little bed, whose orange curtains filled her dreams with volcanic eruptions and conflagrations of the most lurid description.

At seven, an open carriage with a stout pair of horses and a sleepy driver rolled out of the court-yard of the Lion d’Or. Within it sat three ladies, who gazed at one another with cheerful countenances, and surveyed the world with an air of bland content, beautiful to behold.

‘I am fairly faint with happiness,’ sighed Matilda, as they drove through fields scarlet with poppies, starred with daisies, or yellow with buttercups, while birds piped gaily, and trees wore their early green.

‘You did not eat any breakfast. That accounts for it. Have a crust, do,’ said Amanda, who seldom stirred without a good, sweet crust or two; for they were easy to carry, wholesome to chew, and always ready at a moment’s notice.

‘Let us save our “entusymusy” till we get to the *château*, and enjoy this lovely drive in a peaceful manner,’ said Lavinia, still a little sleepy after her adventures in the glimpses of the moon.

So, for an hour or two, they rolled along the smooth road, luxuriating in the summer sights and sounds about them; the wayside cottages, with women working in the gardens; villages clustered round some tiny, picturesque church; windmills whirling on the distant hill-tops; vineyards full of peasants tying up the young vines, or trudging by with baskets on their backs, heaped with green cuttings for the goats at home. Old men, breaking stone by the roadside, touched their red caps to the pilgrims, jolly boys shouted at them from the cherry trees, and little children peeped from behind the rose-bushes blooming everywhere.

Soon, glimpses of the winding Cher began to appear, then an avenue of stately trees, and then, standing directly in the river, rose the lovely *château* built for Diane de Poictiers by her royal lover. Leaving the carriage at the lodge, our sight-seers crossed the moat, and, led by a wooden-faced girl with a lisp, entered the famous pleasure-house, which its present owner (a pensive man in black velvet, who played fitfully on a French-horn in a pepper-pot tower) is carefully restoring to its former splendour.

The great picture-gallery was the chief attraction; and beginning with Diane herself — a tall, simpering baggage, with a bow, hounds, crescent, and a blue sash for drapery — they were led through a rapid review of all sorts of worthies and unworthies, relics and rubbish, without end. Portraits are always interesting. Even Lavinia, who ‘had no soul for Art,’ as Mat said, looked with real pleasure at a bass-relief of Agnes of Sorel, and pictures of Montaigne, Rabelais, Ninon d’Enclos, Madame de Sévigné, and miniatures of La Fayette and Ben Franklin. The latter gentleman looked rather out of place in such society; but, perhaps, his good old face preached the Dianes and Ninons a silent sermon. His plain suit certainly was a relief to the eye, wearied with periwigged sages and bejewelled sinners.

Here was the little theatre where Rousseau’s plays were acted. Here were the gilded chairs in which kings had sat, swords heroes had held, books philosophers had pored over, mirrors that had reflected famous beauties, and painted walls that had looked down on royal revels long ago.

The old kitchen had a fireplace big enough for a dozen cooks to have spoiled gallons of broth in, queer pots and pans, and a handy little window, out of which they could fish at any moment, for the river ran below.

The chapel, chambers, balconies, and terraces were all being repaired; for, thanks to George Sand’s grandmother, who owned the place in the time of the Revolution, it was spared out of respect to her, and is still a charming relic of the past.

The ladies went down the mossy steps, leading from the gallery to the further shore, and, lying under the oaks, whiled away the noon-time by re-peopling the spot with the shapes that used to inhabit it. A very happy hour it was, dreaming there by the little river, with the scent of new-mown hay in the fresh wind, and before them the airy towers and gables of the old *château* rising from the stream like a vision of departed splendour, love, and romance.

Having seen every thing, and bought photographs *ad libitum* of the wooden-faced lisper, who cheated awfully, the pilgrims drove away, satiated with relics, royalty, and ‘*regardez*.’

Another night in the stony-hearted, orange-coloured rooms, with the sleepless *garçon* sweeping and murmuring outside like a Banshee, while the hens roosted sociably in the gallery, the horses seemed to be champing directly under the bed, and the dead Huguenots bumping down upon the roof from the castle-walls. Another curious meal wafted from the bowels of the earth and cooled by all the airs that blow, — then the shawl-straps were girded anew, the carriage (a half-grown omnibus with the jaundice) mounted, the farewell bows and adieux received, and forth rumbled the duchesses *en route* for Blois.

‘My heart is rent at leaving that lovely *château*,’ said Mat, as they crossed the bridge.

‘I mourn the earth-worms, the cacti, and the tireless “gossoon,”‘ added Amanda, who appreciated French cookery and had enjoyed confidences with Adolphe.

‘The cats, the cats, the cats! I could die happy if I had one,’ murmured Lavinia; and with these laments they left the town behind them.

Any thing hotter than Blois, with its half dried-up river, dusty boulevards, and baked streets, can hardly be imagined. But these indomitable women ‘did’ the church and the castle without flinching. The former was pronounced a failure, but the latter was entirely satisfactory. The Emperor was having it restored in the most splendid manner. The interior seemed rather fresh and gay when contrasted with the time-worn exterior, but the stamped leathern hangings, tiled floors, emblazoned beams, and carved fireplaces were quite correct. Dragons and crowns, porcupines and salamanders, monograms and flowers, shone everywhere in a maze of scarlet and gold, brown and silver, purple and white.

Here the historical Amanda revelled, and quenched the meek old guide with a burst of information which caused him to stare humbly at ‘the mad English.’

‘*Regardez*, my dears, the chamber and oratory of Catherine de Medicis, who here plotted the death of the Duc de Guise. This is the cabinet of her son, Henri III., where he gave the daggers to the gentlemen who were to rid him of his enemy, the hero of the barricades. This is the Salle des Gardes, where Guise was leaning on the chimney-piece when summoned to the king. This is the little room at the entrance of which he was set upon in the act of lifting the drapery, and stabbed with forty wounds.’

‘Oh! how horrid!’ gasped Matilda, staring about as if she saw the sanguinary gentlemen approaching.

‘So interesting! Do go on!’ cried Lavinia, who was fond of woe, and enjoyed horrors.

‘This is the hall where the body lay for two hours, covered with a cloak and a cross of straw on the breast,’ cut in Amanda, as the guide opened his mouth. ‘Here the king came to look upon the corpse of the once mighty Henri le Balafré, and spurned it with his foot, saying, I shall not translate it for you, Mat, — ”*Je ne le croyais pas aussi grand*” and then ordered it to be burnt, and the ashes cast into the river. Remember the date, I implore you, December 23, 1588.’

As Amanda paused for breath the little man took the word, and rattled off a jumble of facts and fictions about the window from which Marie de Medicis lowered herself when imprisoned here by her dutiful son, Louis XIII.

‘I wish the entire lot had been tossed out after her, for I do think kings and queens are a set of rascals,’ cried Mat, scandalized by the royal iniquities to which she had been listening, till the hair stood erect upon her innocent head.

The Salle des États was being prepared for the trial of the men who had lately attempted the Emperor’s life, and a most theatrical display of justice was to be presented to the public. The richly carved stair-case, with Francis the First’s salamanders squirming up and down it, was a relic worth seeing; but the parched pilgrims found the little pots of clotted cream quite as interesting, and much more refreshing, when they were served up at lunch (the pots, not the pilgrims), each covered with a fresh vine-leaf, and delicately flavoured with butter-cups and clover.

Amanda won the favour of the stately *garçon* by praising them warmly, and he kept bringing in fresh relays, and urging her to eat a third, a fourth, with a persuasive dignity hard to resist.

‘But yes, Mademoiselle, one more, for nowhere else can *crême de St. Gervais* be achieved. They are desired, ardently desired, in Paris; but, alas! it is impossible to convey them so far, such is their exquisite delicacy.’

How many the appreciative ladies consumed, the muse saith not; but the susceptible heart of the great *garçon* was deeply touched, and it was with difficulty that they finally escaped from his attentions.

On being presented with a cast-off camp-stool, and a pair of old boots to dispose of, he instantly appropriated them as graceful souvenirs, and clasping his hands, declared with effusion that he would seat his infant upon the so-useful stool, and offer the charming boots to Madame my wife, who would weep for joy at this touching *tableau*.

With this melodramatic valedictory, he suffered the guests to depart, and the last they saw of him, he was still waving a dirty napkin as he stood at the gate, big, bland, and devoted to the end, though the drops stood thick upon his manly brow, and the sun glared fiercely on his uncovered head.

‘I shall write an article on *garçons* when I get home,’ said Lavinia, who was always planning great works and never executing them. ‘We have known such a nice variety, and all have been so good to us that we owe them a tribute. You remember the dear, tow-headed one at Morlaix, who insisted on handing us dishes of snails, and papers of pins with which to pick out the repulsive delicacy?’

‘Yes, and the gloomy one with black linen sleeves who glowered at us, sighed gustily in our ears, and anointed us with gravy as he waited at table,’ added Amanda.

‘Don’t forget the dark one with languid, Spanish eyes and curly hair, on the boat going down the Rance. How picturesque and polite he was, to be sure, as he kept picking up our beer-bottles when they rolled about the deck!’ put in Mat, who had the dark youth safely in her sketch-book, with eyes as big and black as blots.

‘The solemn one at Tours, who squirted seltzer-water out of window at the beggars, without a smile, was very funny. So was the little one with grubby hands, who tottered under the big dishes, but insisted on carrying the heaviest.’

‘The fast-trotter at Amboise won my heart, he was so supernaturally lively, and so full of hurried amiability. A very dear *garçon* indeed.’

‘Be sure you remember the superb being at Brest, whose eyes threatened to fall out of his head at exciting moments. Also, Flabot’s chubby boy who adored Mat, and languished at her, over the onions, like a Cupid in a blue blouse.’

‘I will do justice to everyone,’ and Lavinia took copious notes on the spot.

Orleans was a prim, tidy town, and after taking a look at the fine statue of the Maid, and laughing at some funny little soldiers drumming wildly in the *Place*, our travellers went on to Bourges.

‘This, now, is a nice, dingy old place, and we will take our walks abroad directly, for it looks like rain, and we must make the most of our time and money,’ said Amanda;

‘For, though on pleasure she was bent,
She had a frugal mind.’

Forth they went, as soon as dinner was over, and found the waters all abroad also; for every man was playing away with a hose, every woman scrubbing her door-steps, and the children gaily playing leap-frog in the puddles.

‘Nasty, damp place!’ croaked the Raven, obscuring her disgusted countenance behind the inevitable grey cloud, and gathering her garments about her, as they hopped painfully over the wet stones, for sidewalks there were none.

‘I find it refreshing after the dust and heat. Please detach Mat from that shop window, and come on, or we shall see nothing before dark,’ replied the ever amiable Amanda.

Matilda *would* glue herself to every jeweller’s window, and remain fascinated by the richness there displayed, till led away by force. On this occasion, however, her mania led to good results; for, at the ninth window, as her keepers were about to drag her away, a ring of peculiar antiquity caught their eyes simultaneously, and, to Mat’s amazement, both plunged into the little shop, clamouring to see it. A pale emerald, surrounded by diamond chippings set in silver, with a wide gold band cut in a leafy pattern, composed this gem of price.

‘A Francis First ring, sold by a noble but impoverished family, and only a hundred francs, Madame,’ said the man, politely anxious to cheat the fair foreigners out of four times its value.

‘Can’t afford it,’ and Lavinia retired. But the shrewd Amanda, with inimitable shrugs and pensive sighs, regretted that it was so costly. ‘A sweet ring; but, alas! forty francs is all I have to give.’

The man was desolated to think that eighty francs was the lowest he was permitted to receive. Would Madame call again, and perhaps it might be arranged?

Ah, no! Madame is forced to depart early, to return no more.

Mon Dieu! how afflicting! In that case, sixty would be possible for so rare a relic.

Madame is *abîmé,* but it is not to be. Forty is the utmost; therefore *Merci*, and *Bonjour*.

‘Hold! Where shall it be sent?’ cries the man, giving in, but not confessing it, with awkward frankness.

A thousand thanks! Madame will pay for it at once; and laying down the money, she sweetly bows herself away, with the ring upon her finger.

‘What a people!’ ejaculated Lavinia, who always felt like a fly in a cobweb when she attempted to deal with the French, in her blunt, confiding way.

‘It is great fun,’ answered Amanda, flashing her ring with satisfaction after the skirmish. ‘Will Madame kindly direct me to the house of Jacques Cœur?’ she added, addressing an old woman clattering by in *sabots*.

‘Allez toujours à droit en vous appuyant sur la gauche,’ replied the native, beaming and bowing till the streamers of her cap waved in the wind.

They followed these directions, but failed to find the place, and applied to another old woman eating soup on her door-step.

‘Suivez le chemin droit en tombant à gauche’ was the reply, with a wave of the spoon to all the points of the compass.

‘Great heavens, what a language!’ cried Lavinia, who had been vainly endeavouring to ‘support’ herself, as she ‘fell’ in every direction over and into the full gutters.

The house was found at last, an ancient, mysterious place, with a very curious window, carved to look as if the shutters were half open, and from behind one peeped a man’s head, from the other a woman’s, both so life-like that it quite startled the strangers. Murray informed the observers that these servants are supposed to be looking anxiously for their master’s return, Jacques having suddenly disappeared, after lending much money to the king, who took that mediæval way of paying his debts.

Service was being held in the church, and the ladies went in to rest and listen, for the music was fine. Much red and white drapery gave the sanctuary the appearance of a gay drawing-room, and the profane Lavinia compared the officiating clergy to a set of red furniture. The biggest priest was the sofa, four deacons the arm-chairs, and three little boys the foot-stools, all upholstered in crimson silk, and neatly covered with lace tidies.

As if to rebuke her frivolity, a lovely fresh voice from the hidden choir suddenly soared up like a lark, singing so wonderfully that a great stillness fell on the listeners, and while it lasted the tawdry church and its mummery were quite forgotten, as the ear led the heart up that ladder of sweet sounds to heaven. Even when the others joined in, one could still hear that child-voice soaring and singing far above the rest, as if some little angel were playing with the echoes among the arches of the roof.

A proud native informed the strangers that it was a poor boy whose exquisite voice was the pride of the town, and would in time make his fortune. As the choir-boys came racing down stairs after service, pulling off their dingy robes as they ran, Lavinia tried to pick out the little angel, but gave it up in despair, for a more uninteresting set of bullet-headed, copper-coloured sprigs she never saw.

Rain drove the wanderers back to the hotel, and there they made a night of it. Ordering a fire in the largest of the three stuffy little cells which they occupied, they set about being comfortable, for it had turned chilly, and a furious wind disported itself in and out through numberless crevices. Lavinia was inspired to mull some wine, and brewed a mild jorum that cheered, but did not inebriate. Amanda produced her Shakspeare, and read aloud while the simmering and sipping went on. Matilda sketched the noble commander as she lay upon the sofa, with her Egyptian profile in fine relief, and her aristocratic red slippers gracefully visible. A large grey cat of a social turn joined the party, and added much to the domesticity of the scene by sitting on the hearth in a cosy bunch and purring blissfully.

‘Now it is your turn to propose something for the general amusement, Mandy,’ said Mat, when the beakers were drained dry and the Montagues and Capulets comfortably buried.

‘Let us attend to the culture of our nails,’ replied Amanda, producing her *polissoir*, powder, and knife.

Three cups of tepid water were produced, and the company sat eagerly soaking their finger tips for a time, after which much pruning and polishing went on, to the great bewilderment of Puss, who poked her own paws into the cups, as if trying to test the advantages of this remarkable American custom.

‘What *would* our blessed mother say if she saw us now?’ said Mat, proudly examining ten pointed pink nails at the tips of her long fingers.

‘People told us we should get demoralised if we came abroad, and this is the first step on the downward road,’ returned Lavinia, shaking her head over her own backslidings.

‘No: it’s the second step. We ate calves’ brains for dinner, and what I’m sure were frogs’ legs with mushrooms. You know we vowed we wouldn’t touch their horrid messes, but I really begin to like them,’ confessed Mat, who had pronounced every dish at dinner ‘De-licious!’

‘Ha! I will write a poem!’ cried Amanda, and leaping from the sofa she grasped her pen, flung open her portfolio, and in a few brief moments produced these inspired stanzas.

THE DOWNWARD ROAD.

Two Yankee maids of simple mien,
And earnest, high endeavour,
Come sailing to the land of France,
To escape the winter weather.
When first they reached that vicious shore
They scorned the native ways,
Refused to eat the native grub,
Or ride in native shays.
‘Oh, for the puddings of our home!
Oh, for some simple food!
These horrid, greasy, unknown things,
How can you think them good?’
Thus to Amanda did they say,
An uncomplaining maid,
Who ate in peace and answered not
Until one day they said —

How *can* you eat this garbage vile
Against all nature’s laws?
How *can* you eat your nails in points,
Until they look like claws?’

Then patiently Amanda said,
‘My loves, just wait a while,
The time will come you will not think
The nails or victuals vile.’
A month has passed, and now we see
That prophecy fulfilled;
The ardour of those carping maids
Is most completely chilled.
Matilda was the first to fall,
Lured by the dark gossoon,
In awful dishes one by one
She dipped her timid spoon.
She promised for one little week
To let her nails grow long,
But added in a saving clause
She thought it very wrong.
Thus did she take the fatal plunge,
Did compromise with sin,
Then all was lost; from that day forth
French ways were sure to win.
Lavinia followed in her train,
And ran the self-same road,
Ate sweet-bread first, then chopped-up brains,
Eels, mushrooms, pickled toad.
She cries, ‘How flat the home *cuisine*
After this luscious food!
Puddings and brutal joints of meat,
That once we fancied good!’
And now in all their leisure hours
One resource never fails,

Morning and noon and night they sit
And polish up their nails.
Then if in one short fatal month

A change like this appears,
Oh, what will be the next result
When they have stayed for years?

Tremendous applause greeted this masterly effort, and other poems were produced with the rapidity of genius by Amanda and Lavinia, each writing the alternate verse, *à la* Beaumont and Fletcher, which gave a peculiar charm to these effusions.

When Matilda was called upon for a festive suggestion, she promptly replied, with a graceful yawn: —

‘Let’s go to bed.’

The meeting, therefore, broke up, and the younger ladies retired to their cells in good order. But the Raven, excited by the jocund hour, continued to rustle and patter about the warm room in a state of inexpressible hilarity, most exasperating to the others, who desired to sleep. Not content with upsetting the fire-irons occasionally, singing to the cat, and slamming the furniture about, this restless bird kept appearing first at one cell door with a conundrum, then at the other with a joke, or insisted on telling funny stories in her den, till the exhausted victims implored her to take an opium pill and subside before they became furious. She obeyed, and after a few relapses into wandering and joking, finally slumbered.

Then occurred the one thrilling adventure of this happy journey. In the darkest hour before dawn Mat awoke, heard a suspicious noise in the middle room, and asked if Lavinia was on the rampage again. No reply, and, listening, a low, rasping, rustling sound was heard.

‘Thieves, of course. Our watches and purses are on the table, and Lavinia has probably forgotten to lock the door. I must attend to this.’ And up rose the dauntless Matilda, who feared neither man nor ghost.

Grasping her dagger, hitherto used as a paper cutter, but always eager to be steeped in the gore of brigands, robbers, or beasts of prey, she crept to the door and peeped in. The pale glow of the fire showed her a dark figure crouching in the opposite door-way. The click of a pistol caught her ear, but dodging quickly, the heroic girl cried sternly from the shelter of Lavinia’s bed-curtain, —

‘Come out, or I’ll fire!’

‘Mio Dio! is it only you?’ answered a familiar voice, as Amanda, shrouded in a waterproof, sprang up and lit a match.

‘What are you prowling about for?’ demanded Mat.

‘To blow your brains out, apparently,’ answered Mandy, lowering her arms. ‘Why are you abroad?’

‘To stab you, I fancy,’ and Mat sheathed her dagger balked of its prey.

‘I heard a noise.’

‘So did I.’

‘Let’s see what it is,’ and lighting a candle, the fair Amazons looked boldly about the shadowy room.

Lavinia lay wrapt in slumber, with only the end of her sarcastic nose visible beyond the misty cloud that enveloped her venerable countenance. The outer door was fast, and the shutters closed. No booted feet appeared below the curtains, no living eyes rolled awfully in the portrait of the salmon-coloured saint upon the wall. Yet the rustling and rasping went on, and with one impulse the defenders of sleeping innocence made for the table in the corner.

There was the midnight robber at his fell work! — the big cat peacefully gnawing the cold chicken, and knocking about the treasured crusts dragged from the luncheon-basket carefully packed for an early start.

‘Wake and behold the ruin your pet has made!’

‘We might be murdered or carried off a dozen times over without her knowing it. Here’s a nice duenna!’

And the indignant ladies shook, pinched, and shouted till the hapless sleeper opened one eye, and wrathfully demanded what the matter was.

They told her with eloquent brevity, but instead of praising their prowess, and thanking them with fervour, the ungrateful woman shut her eye again, merely saying with drowsy irascibility, —

‘You told me to go to sleep, and I went; next time fight it out among yourselves, but don’t wake me.’

‘Throw the cat out of window and go to bed, Mat,’ and Amanda uncocked her pistol with the resignation of one who had learned not to expect gratitude in this world.

‘Touch a hair of that dear creature and I’ll raise the house!’ cried Lavinia, roused at once.

Puss, who had viewed the fray sitting bolt upright on the table, now settled the vexed question by skipping into Lavinia’s arms, feeling with the instinct of her race that her surest refuge was there. Mat retired in silent disgust, and the Raven fell asleep soothed by the grateful purring of her furry friend.

‘Last night’s experiences have given me a longing for adventures,’ said Mat, as they journeyed on next morning.

‘I’ve had quite enough of that sort,’ growled Lavinia.

‘Let us read our papers, and wait for time to send us something in the way of a lark,’ and Amanda obscured herself in a grove of damp newspapers.

Lavinia also took one and read bits aloud to Mat, who was mending her gloves, bright yellow, four-buttoned, and very dirty.

‘Translate as you go along — I do so hate that gabble,’ begged Mat, who would *not* improve her mind.

So Lavinia gave her a free translation which convulsed Amanda behind her paper. Coming to this passage, ‘Plusieurs faits graves sont arrivés,’ the reader rendered it, ‘Several made graves have arrived,’ adding, ‘Dear me, what singular customs the French have, to be sure!’ A little farther on she read, ‘Un portrait de feu Monsieur mon père,’ adding, ‘A fire portrait means a poker sketch, I suppose.’

Here a smothered giggle from Amanda caused the old lady to say ‘Bless you!’ thinking the dear girl had sneezed.

‘I must have some blue cotton to mend my dress with. Remind me to get some at Moulins. By the way, how do you ask for it in French?’ said Mat, surveying a rent in her skirts.

‘Oh, just go in and say, “Avez-vous le fils bleu?”‘ replied Lavinia, with a superior air.

‘A blue son! My precious granny, what will you say next?’ murmured Amanda, faint with suppressed laughter.

‘What are you muttering about?’ asked Granny, sharply.

‘Trying to recall those fine lines in “Wilhelm Meister;” don’t you remember? “Wer nie sein Brod mit Thränen ass,”‘ replied Amanda, polite even at the last gasp.

‘I read my Goethe in decent English, and don’t know anything about training asses,’ returned Lavinia, severely.

That was too much! Amanda cast her paper down, and had her laugh out, as the only means of saving herself from suffocation. The others gazed upon her in blank amazement, till she found breath enough to enlighten them, when such peals of merriment arose, that the guard popped his head in to see if he had not unwittingly shipped a load of lunatics.

‘That was splendid! But now we must sober down, for a gorgeous being is about to get in,’ said Amanda, as they stopped at a station.

The gorgeous being entered, and found three demure ladies rapt in newspapers. They apparently saw nothing but the words before them; yet every one of them knew that the handsome young man had bowed in the most superior manner; also, that he was dressed in brown velvet, long gaiters, buttoned to the knee, a ravishing blue tie, buff gloves, and pouch and powder-horn slung over his shoulder. Also, that a servant with two dogs and a gun had touched his hat and said, ‘Oui, monsieur le comte,’ as he shut the door.

A slight thrill pervaded the statues as this fact was made known, and each began to wonder how the elegant aristocrat would behave. To say that he stared, feebly expresses the fixity of his noble gaze, as it rested in turn upon the three faces opposite. When satisfied, he also produced a paper and began to read. But Matilda caught a big, black eye peering over the sheet more than once, as she peered over the top of her own.

‘I don’t like him. Remember, we don’t speak French,’ whispered the discreet Amanda.

‘I can swear that I don’t,’ said Lavinia, with an irrepressible smile, as she remembered the ‘blue son.’

‘The language of the eye is not forbidden me, and I can’t sit baking under a newspaper all the way,’ returned Matilda, whose blond curls had evidently met with the great creature’s approval.

A slight pucker about the Comte’s lips caused a thrill of horror to pervade the ladies, as Amanda murmured under her breath, —

‘He may understand English!’

‘Then we are lost!’ returned the tragic Raven.

‘Wish he did. I really pine for a little attention. It gives such a relish to life,’ said Matilda, thinking regretfully of the devoted beings left behind.

The prudent Amanda and the stern Lavinia steeled their hearts, and iced their countenances to the comely gentleman. But the social Matilda could not refrain from responding to his polite advances, with a modest ‘Merci, Monsieur,’ as he drew the curtain for her, a smile when he picked up the unruly curling-stick, and her best bow as he offered his paper with a soft glance of the black eyes.

In vain Amanda tried to appal her with awful frowns; in vain Lavinia trod warningly upon her foot: she paid no heed, and left them no hope but the saving remembrance that she couldn’t talk French.

‘If the man don’t get out soon, I’ll tie her up in my shawl, and tell him she is mad,’ resolved Lavinia, whose spinster soul was always scandalised at the faintest approach to a flirtation.

‘If the man does speak English, Mat will have it all her own way,’ thought Amanda, remembering the vow imposed upon the reckless girl.

Alas, alas for the anxious twain! The man did *not* get out soon, the man *did* speak English, and in ten minutes Matilda was off, like a colt without a halter. The anguish of her keepers added zest to the fun, and finding that the gentleman evidently thought her the lady of the party (owing to the yellow gloves, smartest hat, and irreproachable boots), and the others in sober gray and black, were maid and duenna, this reprehensible girl kept up the joke, put on airs, and enjoyed that flirtatious hour to her heart’s content.

As if to punish the others for their distrust, and to reward Mat’s interest in him, M. le Comte devoted himself to Mademoiselle, telling her about his hunting, his estate, and finished by inviting her and her party to call and view his *château*, if they ever paused at the town, which had the honour of being his summer residence. Mat responded to all these courtesies with confiding sweetness, and when at length he was desolated at being obliged to tear himself away, she

‘Gave sigh for sigh,’

as he retired with a superb bow, a gallant ‘Bon voyage, mesdames,’ and a wicked twinkle of the black eyes as they rested on the faces of the frozen ladies.

‘I got rather the best of the joke in that little affair: didn’t I?’ said Mat, gayly, as the brown velvet Adonis vanished.

‘You are a disgrace to your party and your nation,’ sternly responded Amanda.

Lavinia spoke not, but shook her little sister till the hat flew off her head, and she had only breath enough left to declare with unquenched ardour that she would do it again the very next chance she got.

Lectures, laughter, and longings for ‘my Comte’ beguiled the remainder of the way, and *Moulang* (as Mat pronounced Moulins) was reached after a pleasant trip through a green country, picturesque with the white cattle of Berri. There was not much to see, but the town was so quaint and quiet, that Amanda was seized with one of her remarkable projects.

‘Let us find a little house somewhere and stay a week or two. I fain would rest and ruminate among the white cows for a while; have a little washing done, and slowly prepare to emerge into the world again. Lyons is our next point, and there we must bid adieu to freedom and shawl-straps.’

‘Very well, dear,’ responded Lavinia, with resignation, having learned that the best way to curb these aberrations of genius was to give in, and let circumstances prove their impracticability.

So Amanda inquired of the landlady if such a rustic cot could be found. Whereupon the dingy little woman clasped her dingy little hands, and declared that she had exactly the charming retreat desired. Truly yes, and she would at once make her toilette, order out the carriage, and display this lovely villa to the dear ladies.

With many misgivings the three squeezed themselves into a square clothes-basket on wheels, drawn by an immense, bony, white horse, driven by a striped boy, and adorned by Madame, in a towering bonnet, laden with amazing fruit, flowers, and vegetables. Lavinia counted three tomatoes, a bunch of grapes, poppies and pansies, wheat ears and blackberry-vines, a red, red rose, and one small lettuce, with glass dewdrops and green grubs lavishly sprinkled over it. A truly superb *chapeau* and a memorable one.

Away they trundled through stony streets, dusty roads, waste grounds, marshy meadows, and tumbled-down pleasure-gardens, till the clothes-basket turned down a lane, and the bony horse stopped at length before a door in a high red wall.

'Behold!' cried madame, leading them with much clanking of keys, into a cabbage-garden. A small tool-house stood among the garden-stuff, with brick floors, very dirty windows, and the atmosphere of a tomb. Bags of seed, wheel-barrows, onions, and dust cumbered the ground. Empty bottles stood on the old table, cigar ends lay thick upon the hearth, and a trifle of gay crockery adorned the mantel-piece.

'See, then, here is a *salon*, so cool, so calm. Above is a room with beds, and around the garden where the ladies can sit all day. A maid can achieve the breakfast here, and my carriage can come for them to dine at the hotel. Is it not charmingly arranged?

'It is simply awful,' said Mat, aghast at the prospect.

'Settle it as you like, dear, only I'm afraid I couldn't stay *very* long on account of the dampness,' observed Lavinia, cheerfully, as she put a hoe-handle under her feet and wiped the blue mould from a three-legged chair.

'It won't do, so I'll tell her you are an invalid and very particular,' said Amanda, with another inspiration, as she led the landlady forth to break the blow tenderly.

'My neuralgia is useful if it isn't ornamental; and what a comfort that is!' said Lavinia, as she lightly threw a large cockroach out of window, dodged a wasp, and crushed a fat spider.

And so it was in many ways. If the party wanted a car to themselves, Granny was ordered to lie down and groan dismally, which caused other travellers to shun the poor invalid. If rooms did not suit, suffering Madame *must* have sun or perish. Late lunches, easy carriages, extra blankets, every sort of comfort was for her, whether she wanted them or not.

'Shall I be sick or well?' was always the first question when an invitation came, for 'my sister's delicate health' was the standing excuse when parties palled, or best gowns were not get-at-able.

While Amanda conferred with the hostess among the cabbages, Mat discovered that the picturesque white cattle in the field close by were extremely fierce and unsocial; that there was no house in sight, and the venerable horse and shay would never sustain many trips to and fro to dinner at the hotel. Lavinia poked about the house, and soon satisfied herself that it abounded in every species of what Fanny Kemble calls 'entomological inconvenience,' and an atmosphere admirably calculated to introduce cholera to the inhabitants of Moulins.

'It is all settled; let us return,' said Amanda, appearing at last with an air of triumph, having appeased the old lady by eating green currants, and admiring an earwiggy arbour, commanding a fine view of a marsh where frogs were piping and cool mists rising as the sun set.

The chickens were tough at dinner, the wine bitter, the bread sour, but no one reproached Amanda as the cause of this change. And when the hostess bowed them out, next day, without a smile, they drove away, conscious only of deep gratitude that they were saved from leaving their bones to moulder among the cabbages of Moulins.

'Now we return to civilisation, good clothes, and Christian food,' said Lavinia, as they surveyed their fine rooms at the Grand Hotel, Lyons.

'Likewise letters and luggage,' added Amanda, as the maid brought in a bundle of letters, and two porters came bumping up with the trunks.

'Well, I've enjoyed the trip immensely, though nothing very remarkable has happened,' said Mat, diving into her private ark with satisfaction.

'I should like to wander in the wilderness for years, if I could hear from my family at intervals,' said Lavinia, briskly breaking open the plump, travel-worn letters.

'Then you consider our trip a success?' asked Amanda, pausing in the act of removing the dust from her noble countenance.

'A perfect success! We have done what we planned, had no mishaps, seen and enjoyed much, quarrelled not at all, laughed a great deal, and been altogether festive, thanks to you. I shall hang my shawl-strap on the castle wall as a trophy of the prowess of my Amanda, and the success of the last Declaration of American Independence,' replied Lavinia.

'I, also,' said Mat, opening her bundle for the one hundreth and last time.

'You do me proud; I humbly thank you,' and with a superb curtsy the commander-in-chief modestly retired behind the towel.

SWITZERLAND.

‘My children, listen to the words of wisdom ere it is too late,’ began Lavinia, as the three sat about in dressing-gowns after a busy day in Geneva.

‘We listen, go on, Granny,’ replied the irreverent girls.

‘If we stay here a week longer, we are ruined. Firstly, this Metropole is an expensive hotel; also noisy and full of fashionable people, whom I hate. Secondly, the allurements of the jewellers’ shops are too much for us, and we had better flee before we spend all our money. Thirdly, if war does break out along the Rhine, as rumour now predicts, Geneva will be crammed with people whose plans, like ours, are upset; therefore we had better skip across the lake, and secure a comfortable place for ourselves at Vevey or Montreaux, for we shall probably have to winter there.’

‘Hear, hear! we will do it, and if Italy doesn’t get over her revolution in time for us to go to Rome, we must content ourselves with some nook in this refuge for all wanderers on the face of the continent,’ said Amanda.

‘But I like Geneva so much. It’s such fun to watch the splendid waiters file in at dinner, looking like young gentlemen ready for a ball; the house is so gay, and the shops! — never did I dream of such richness before. Do stay another week and buy a few more things,’ prayed Matilda, who spent most of her time gloating over the jewelry, and tempting her sister to buy all manner of useless gauds.

‘No: we will go to-morrow. I know of several good *pensions* at Vevey, so we are sure of getting in somewhere. Pack at once, and let us flee,’ returned Lavinia, who, having bought a watch, a ring, and a locket, felt that it was time to go.

And go they did, settling for a month at Bex, a little town up the valley of the Rhone, remarkable for its heat, its dirt, its lovely scenery, and the remarkable perfection to which its inhabitants had brought the *goître*, nearly every one being blessed with an unsightly bunch upon the neck, which they decorated with ribbons and proudly displayed to the disgusted traveller.

Here in the rambling old Hôtel des Bains, with its balconies, gardens, and little rooms, the wanderers reposed for a time. A Polish countess, with her lover, daughter, and governess, conferred distinction upon the house. An old Hungarian count, who laboured under the delusion that he descended in a direct line from Zenobia, also adorned the scene. An artist with two pretty boys, named Alfred Constable Landseer Reynolds and Allston West Cuyp Vandyke, afforded Matilda much satisfaction.

English mammas with prim daughters of thirty or so still tied to their apron-strings were to be found, of course, for they are everywhere; also wandering French folk raving about the war one minute and tearing their hair over bad coffee the next.

Amanda read newspapers and talked politics with the old count; while Lavinia, with a paper bag of apricots under one arm and a volume of Disraeli’s novels under the other, spent her shining hours wandering from balcony to garden, enjoying the heat, which gave her a short respite from her woes.

While here Matilda, in company with a kindred soul, made the ascent of Mount St. Bernard with the pleasing accompaniments of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning. But the irrepressible Americans went on in spite of warnings from more prudent travellers who stopped half-way. With one mule and a guide for escort, the two enthusiasts waded swollen streams with ice-cold water up to their knees, climbed slippery roads, faced what seemed a whirlwind at that height, and, undaunted by the uproar of the elements, pressed on to the Hospice, to the great admiration of Moritz, the guide, who told them he had seldom taken men up in such a storm, never ladies.

At the Hospice the dripping lasses found a hospitable welcome from the handsome monk who does the honours there. Being provided with dry garments, and having much fun over the tall Matilda draped in skirts of many colours in the attempt to get any long enough, they were fed and warmed by the engaging monk, who entertained them as they sat about a roaring fire while the storm raged without, with thrilling tales of the travellers they had saved, the wild adventures they had known in the dreadful winter time, and the gifts bestowed upon them by grateful travellers or generous guests.

The Prince of Wales had sent them a piano, and many fine pictures ornamented the walls from famous persons. An old English lady who spends her summers up there seemed much amused at the prank of the girls, and evidently wondered what their guardians were about.

A merry and memorable evening; and when, on going to their cells, they found the beds nicely warmed, Matilda exclaimed, —

‘This is the most delightful of the romantic and the comfortable I ever saw. Alps and warming-pans taken “jintly” are delicious!’

At five next morning they were wakened by the chanting of the invisible brotherhood, and went down to the chapel for mass. On going out for a clamber on the rocks, seven or eight great dogs came baying and leaping about them, licking their hands and smelling their garments to see if they were hurt. Looking into their bright, benevolent eyes, one could well believe the wonderful tales told of their courage and sagacity. Though so powerful and large they were gentle as kittens, and the dog-loving girls were proud to receive and return the caresses of these four-footed heroes.

Leaving a grateful *souvenir* in the box intended to receive whatever guests choose to leave, the girls descended in the morning sunshine, finding it a very different experience from the ascent. All was clear and calm now, — beautiful and grand; and only pausing at M. to send back a fine engraving to the comely priest, who had made a deep impression on their romantic hearts, the *enfants* returned to their anxious friends, mildewed, rumpled, and weary, but full of enthusiastic delight over their successful ascent of St. Bernard.

War broke out, and Alexandre, the all-accomplished head-waiter, dropped his napkin, shouldered his gun, and marched away, leaving the Hôtel des Bains desolate. Being pretty thoroughly baked, and very weary of the little town, our trio departed to Vevey, and settled down in the best *pension* that ever received the weary traveller.

Standing in its own pretty grounds, and looking out upon the lake, Pension Paradis deserves its name. Clean and cosy within, a good table, a kindly hostess, and the jolliest old host ever seen! what more could the human heart desire?

Vevey was swarming with refugees. Don Carlos, or the Duke de Madrid, as he was called, was there with his Duchess and court, plotting heaven knows what up at his villa, with the grave, shabby men who haunted the town.

Queen Isabella reigned at one hotel, and Spanish grandees pervaded the place. There were several at Pension Paradis, and no one guessed what great creatures they were till a *fête* day arrived, and the grim, gray men blossomed out into counts, marquises, and generals covered with orders, stars, and crosses splendid to behold.

One particularly silent, shabby little man with a shaven head and fine black eyes, who was never seen to smile, became an object of interest on that occasion by appearing in a gorgeous uniform with a great gilt grasshopper hanging down his back from a broad green ribbon. Who was he? What did the grasshopper mean? Where did he go to in a fine carriage, and what was he plotting with the other Carlists, who dodged in and out of his room at all hours?

No one ever knew, and all the artful questions put to the young Spaniard, who played croquet with the girls, were unavailing. Nothing was discovered, except that little Mirandola had a title, and might be sent back to Spain any day to lose his life or liberty in some rash plot, which circumstance made the black-eyed boy doubly interesting to the free-born Americans. Lavinia bewailed his hard lot, Amanda taught him whist and told his fortune, and Matilda put him in her sketch-book done in the blackest India-ink. It is also to be recorded that the doomed little Don was never seen to laugh but once, and that was when the girls taught him the classical game of Muggins. The name struck him; he went about saying it to himself, and on the first occasion of his being 'mugginsed,' he was so tickled that he indulged in a hearty boy's laugh; but immediately recovered himself, and never smiled again, as if in penance for so forgetting his dignity.

A bashful Russian, who wore remarkably fine broadcloth and had perfect manners, was likewise received into the good graces of the ladies, who taught him English, called him 'the Baron' in private, and covered him with confusion in public by making him talk at table.

But the most amusing of all the family was Madame A., a handsome widow from Lyons, with two ugly children and a stout old mamma, who wore orange stockings and a curious edifice of black lace encircled with large purple asters. The widow had married an Italian artist, who was mortally jealous of his wife, whose blonde beauty attracted much attention at Rome. In some quarrel with a model the husband was stabbed, and the handsome widow left in peace.

A tall, fair lady, with a profile like Marie Antoinette; she dressed in white with violet ribbons, and wore much ancient jewelry. A loud-voiced, energetic woman, who bewailed the sack of her house at Lyons, scolded her children, and cursed the Germans with equal volubility and spirit. When silent she was the picture of a patrician beauty; but, alas! her voice destroyed the charm, and her manners — great heavens, what things that woman did! Picking her pearly teeth with a hair-pin, and knocking her darlings into their chairs with one sweep of her elbow when they annoyed her at table, were the least of the horrors she perpetrated.

But she talked well, devoted herself to her family, and took misfortune bravely; so much may be pardoned her.

Her infants were only remarkable for their ugliness and curious costumes. The little girl usually wore soiled silk gowns, and had her hair tied up with bits of twine. The boy appeared in a suit of yellow calico spotted with black, looking very much like a canary bird who had fallen into an inkstand. On festival occasions he wore white cloth raiment, with red ribbons stuck here and there, and high red boots.

But, on the whole, the old mamma was the queerest of the set; for she spent most of her time lumbering up and down stairs, which amusement kept the orange hose constantly before the public. When not disporting herself in this way, she dozed in the *salon*, or consumed much food at table with a devotion that caused her to suck her fingers, on every one of which shone an antique ring of price. Her head-gear was a perpetual puzzle to the observing Lavinia, who could never discover whether it was a cap, a bonnet, or a natural production, for it was never off. Madame walked out in it, wore it all day, and very likely slept in it. At least Lavinia firmly believed so, and often beguiled the watches of the night, imagining the old soul placidly slumbering with the perennial asters encircling her aged brow like a halo.

One other party there was who much amused the rest of the household. An American lady with a sickly daughter, who would have been pretty but for her affectation and sentimentality. The girl was engaged to a fierce, dissipated little Russian, who presented her with a big bouquet every morning, followed her about all day like a dog, and glared wrathfully at any man who cast an eye upon the languishing damsel in white muslin and flowing curls 'bedropt with pearls,' as a romantic lady expressed it.

It was evident that the Russian without any vowels in his name was going to marry Mademoiselle for her money, and the weak Mamma was full of satisfaction at the prospect. To others it seemed a doubtful bargain, and much pity was felt for the feeble girl doomed to go to Russia with a husband who had 'tyrant' written in every line of his bad, *blasé* little face and figure. French polish could not hide the brute, nor any quantity of flowers conceal the chain by which he was leading his new serf away to bondage in St. Petersburg.

Into the midst of this select society came a countryman of our three, — a jocund youth fresh from Algiers, with relics, adventures, and tales that utterly eclipsed the 'Arabian Nights.' Festive times followed, for the 'Peri' (the pet name of aforesaid youth) gave them the fruits of his long wanderings, sung whole operas heard in Paris, danced ballets seen in Berlin, recounted perils among the Moors, served up gossip from the four corners of the globe, and conversed with each member of the household in his or her own language.

A cheerful comrade was the 'Peri,' and a great addition to the party, who now spent most of their time sitting about the town, eating grapes, and listening to the pranks of this sprightly M.D., who seemed to be studying his profession by wandering over Europe with a guitar *à la troubadour*.

Sounding the lungs of a veiled princess in Morocco was the least of his adventures, and the treasures he had collected supplied Lavinia with materials for unlimited romances: cuff-buttons made from bits of marble picked up among the ruins of Carthage; diamond crescents and ear-rings bought in Toledo, so antique and splendid that relic-loving Amanda raved about them; photographs of the *belles* of Constantinople, Moorish coins and pipes, bits of curious Indian embroidery; and, best of all, the power of telling how each thing was found in so graphic a manner that Eastern bazaars, ruins, and palaces seemed to rise before the listeners as in the time of the magic story-tellers. But all too soon he packed his knapsack, and promising to bring each of his friends the nose or ear of one of the shattered saints from the great cathedral at Strasbourg, the ‘Peri’ vanished from Paradis, and left them all lamenting.

The little flurry in Italy ending peacefully, our travellers after much discussion resolved to cross the Alps and spend the winter in Rome, if possible. So with tragic farewells from those they left behind them, who, hoping to keep them longer, predicted all manner of misfortunes, the three strong-minded ladies rumbled away in the *coupé* of a diligence to Brieg.

A lovely day’s journey up the valley of the Rhone, and a short night’s rest in the queer little town at the foot of the mountains.

Before light the next morning they were called, and, after a hurried breakfast in a stony hall, went shivering out into the darkness, and, stumbling through the narrow street, came to the starting-point. Lanterns were dancing about the square, two great diligences loomed up before them, horses were tramping, men shouting, and eager travellers scrambling for places. In the dimly lighted office, people were clamouring for tickets, scolding at the delay, or grimly biding their time in corners, with one eye asleep, and the other sharply watching the conductor.

‘Isn’t it romantic?’ cried Matilda, wide awake, and in a twitter of excitement.

‘It is frightfully cold; and I don’t see how we are going, for both those caravans are brimful,’ croaked Lavinia, chafing her purple nose, and wishing it had occurred to her to buy a muff before going to sunny Italy.

‘I have got through tickets, and some one is bound to see us over these snow-banks, so “trust in Providence and the other man,” and we shall come out right, I assure you,’ replied the energetic Amanda, who had conferred with a spectral being in the darkness, and blindly put her faith in him.

Away lumbered one diligence after the other, the first drawn by seven horses, the second by five, while the carrier’s little cart with one brought up the rear. But still three muffled ladies sat upon a cool stone in the dark square, waiting for the spectre to keep his promise.

He did like a man; for suddenly the doors of an old stable flew open, and out rattled a comfortable carriage with a pair of stout little horses jingling their bells, and a brisk driver, whose voice was pleasant, as he touched his hat and invited the ladies to enter, assuring them that they would soon overtake and pass the heavy diligences before them.

‘Never again will I doubt you, my Amanda,’ cried the Raven, packing herself into the dowager’s corner with a grateful heart.

‘I hope the top of this carriage opens, for I *must* see *everything,*’ cried Matilda, prancing about on the front seat in a chaos of wraps, books, bottles, and lunch-baskets.

‘Of course it does, and when there is anything to see we will see it. It is dark and cold now, so we’d better all go to sleep again.’

With which sage remark, Amanda burrowed into her cloaks and slumbered. But not the other two. Matilda stuck her head out of one window, uttering little cries of wonder and delight at all she saw; while Livy watched the solemn stars pale one by one as the sky brightened, and felt as if she were climbing up, out of a dark valley of weariness and pain, into a new world full of grand repose.

Slowly winding higher and higher through the damp pine forest, softly stirring in the morning wind, they saw the sky warm from its cold gray to a rosy glow, making ready for the sun to rise as they never saw it rise before.

‘Full many a glorious morning have I seen,
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,’

but never more wonderfully than on that day. Long after the distant peaks flamed in the ruddy light, they rode in shadow; but turning suddenly round a corner, the sun came dazzling through a great gorge, startling them with the splendour it brought.

Down went the carriage-top, and standing bolt upright, three pairs of eager eyes drank in the grandeur and the beauty that makes the crossing of the Simplon an experience to live for ever in the memory. Peak after peak of the Bernese Oberland rose behind them, silver white against a wonderful blue sky. Before them Monte Rosa, touched with the morning red, and all around great glaciers glittering in the sunshine, awful gorges with torrents thundering from the heights above, relics of land-slides and avalanches still visible in uprooted trees, boulders tumbled here and there, and ruins of shepherds’ huts in solitary nooks where sheep now feed.

The road crept in and out, over frail bridges, spanning chasms that made one dizzy to look into, through tunnels of solid rock, or galleries with windows over which poured waterfalls from the treacherous glaciers above. This road is a miracle in itself, for all nature seems to protest against it, and the elements never tire of trying to destroy it. Only a Napoleon would have had the audacity to dream of such a path, and it is truly a royal road into a lovely land.

Passing the diligences the little carriage went rapidly on, and soon the three were almost alone. Out leaped Lavinia and Matilda, and walked along the level way that curved round a great gorge.

‘Go on and let me be. It is all so magnificent it almost takes my breath away. I must just sit a minute, like a passive bucket, and let it pour into me,' said Lavinia, in a solemn tone.

Mat understood; for her own heart and soul were full, and with a silent kiss of sympathy, walked on, leaving her sister to enjoy that early mass in a grander cathedral than any built with hands.

In spite of the sunshine it was very cold, and when the three met again their noses looked like the eldest Miss Pecksniff's, 'as if Aurora had nipped and tweaked it with her rosy fingers.' Subsiding into their places with pale, excited faces, they went silently on for a long time, with no sound but the chime of the bells on the horses who were covered with a light hoar-frost. Wrapped up to their eyes, like Egyptian women, sat Livy and Amanda; while Matilda, having tried to sketch Monte Rosa, and given it up, made a capital caricature of them as they ate cold chicken, and drank wine, in a primitive manner, out of the bottle.

It was a sudden descent from the sublime to the ridiculous; but the feeble human mind cannot bear too much glory at once, and is saved by the claims of the prosaic body, that will get tired and hungry even atop of the everlasting hills. So the enthusiasts picked their chicken bones, sipped their wine, and felt less exhausted and hysterical. A good laugh over the carrier's little boy, who sniffed the banquet afar off, and came running to offer a handful of pale Alpine flowers, with wistful glances at the lunch, did them more good still: for the little chap caught and bolted the morsels they gave him with such dexterous rapidity, it was as good as juggling.

Refuges and the Hospice came in sight one after the other, and while waiting to change horses one had time to wonder how the people living there managed to be such a stolid, dirty, thriftless-looking set. Mountaineers should be intelligent, active, and hardy; but these men were a most ungainly crew, and Lavinia's theories got a sad blow.

A bad dinner at Simplon would have been an affliction at any other time; but with the Valley of Gondo for dessert, no one cared for other food. Following the wild stream that had worn its way between the immense cliffs, they drove rapidly down towards Italy, feeling that this was a fit gateway to the promised land.

At Iselle, on the frontier, they enacted a little farce for the benefit of the custom-house officers. Lavinia and Amanda had old passports, and had been told they would be needed. Mat had none, so she was ordered to try the *rôle* of maid. Before they arrived, she took out her ear-rings, tied up her curls under a dingy veil, put on a waterproof, and tried to assume the demure air of an Abigail.

When they alighted, she was left to guard the wraps in the carriage while the others went with the luggage, expecting to have much trouble; for all manner of hindrances had been predicted owing to the unsettled state of the country. Nothing could be simpler, however; no passports were demanded, a very careless search of luggage, and it was all over. So Matilda threw off her disguise, and ascended the diligence in her own character, for here, alas! they left the cozy little carriage with the affable driver and the jingling bells.

Only two places could be found in the crowded diligences, and great was the fuss till Amanda was invited up aloft by a friendly gentleman who had a perch behind, large enough for two. There they discussed theology and politics to their hearts' content, and at parting the worthy man cut his book in two, and gave Amanda half that she might refresh herself with a portion of some delightfully dry work on Druidical Remains, Protoplasm, or the state of the church before the flood.

The force of contrast makes the charm of this entry into Italy; for, after the grandeur of the Alps and the gloomy wildness of Gondo, the smiling scene is doubly lovely as one drives down to Domo d'Ossola. Weariness, hunger, and sleep were quite forgotten; and when our travellers came to Lago Maggiore, glimmering in the moonlight, they could only sigh for happiness, and look and look and look.

'Victory has perched upon our banners so far, I am sure, for never was a trip more delightful. It is not every stranger who is fortunate enough to see sunrise, noonday, sunset, and moonlight in crossing the Alps,' said Matilda, as she fell into her bed quite exhausted by the excitement of the day.

'I feel a richer, better woman for it, and don't believe I shall ever see anything more satisfactory if I stay in Italy ten years,' responded Lavinia, wrapping the red army-blanket

'Like a martial cloak around her.'

'Wait till the spell of Rome is upon you, and then see what you will feel, my Granny' predicted Amanda, who *had* felt the spell, and had not yet escaped from it.

'Don't believe it will suit me half so well,' persisted Livy, who would prefer nature to art, much to Amanda's disgust.

'We shall see,' observed Amanda, with the exasperating mildness of superior knowledge.

'We shall!' and Livy tied her cap in a hard knot as if to settle the matter.

ITALY.

Sleep as deep, dreamless, and refreshing as if the beneficent spirit of Carlo Borromeo still haunted the enchanted lake, prepared the three for a day of calm delights. The morning was spent floating over the lake in a luxuriously cushioned boat with a gay awning and a picturesque rower, to visit Isola Bella. Everyone knows what a little Paradise has been made to blossom on that rock; so raptures over the flowers, the marbles, the panniers of lovely fruit, and the dirty, pretty children who offered them, are unnecessary.

In the afternoon, having despatched the luggage to Florence, our travellers sailed away to Luini, catching last glimpses of Monte Rosa, and enjoying the glories of an Italian sunset on an Italian lake. At Luini the girls caused much excitement by insisting on sitting up with the driver instead of sharing the *coupé* with their decorous duenna. ‘We *must* see the lovely views and the moonlight,’ said Amanda, and up she went.

‘To sit aloft with a brigandish driver dressed in a scarlet and black uniform, with a curly horn slung over his shoulder, and to go tearing up hill and down with four frisky horses, is irresistible,’ and up skipped Matilda.

‘You will both catch your death of cold, if you don’t break your necks, so it will be well to have some one to nurse or bury you,’ and Lavinia, finding commands and entreaties vain, entered the *coupé* with mournful dignity.

With a toot of the horn, and cheers from the crowd, which the girls gracefully acknowledged, away rumbled the diligence, with at least two very happy occupants. How lovely it was! First, the soft twilight wrapping everything in mysterious shadow, and then the slow uprising of a glorious full moon, touching the commonest object with its magical light. Cries of rapture from the girls atop were answered by exclamations from Livy, hanging half out of the *coupé* regardless of night air, or raps on the head from overhanging boughs, as they went climbing up woody hills, or dashing down steep roads that wound so sharply round corners, it was a wonder the airy passengers did not fly off at every lurch. Rattling into quiet little towns with a grand ‘tootle-te-too’ of the horn was an especial delight, and to see the people gather so quickly that they seemed to spring from the ground. A moment’s chatter, a drink for the horses, a soft ‘Felice notte,’ another toot, and away thundered the diligence for miles more of moonlight, summer air, and the ecstasy of rapid motion.

What that dear, brown driver with the red vest, the bobtailed, buttony coat, and the big yellow tassels dancing from his hat brim, thought of those two American damsels we shall never know. But it may be imagined that, after his first bewilderment, he enjoyed himself; for Amanda aired her Italian and asked many questions. Matilda invited him to perform national airs on all occasions, and both admired him as openly as if he had been a pretty child.

Lavinia always cherished a dark suspicion that she narrowly escaped destruction on that eventful night; for, judging from the frequent melody, and the speed of the horses, she was sure that either Amanda tooted and Matilda drove, or that both so bewildered the brigand that he lost his head. However, it was all so delightful that even Granny felt the charm, and was sure that if they did upset in some romantic spot, a Doctor Antonio would spring up as quickly as a mushroom, and mend their bones, marry one of her giddy charges, and end the affair in the most appropriate manner.

Nothing happened, fortunately, and by nine o’clock they were safely at Lugano, and, tearing themselves from the dear brigand, were taken possession of by a shadowy being, who fed them in a marble hall with statues ten feet high glaring at them as they ate, then led them to a bower which had pale green doors, a red carpet, blue walls, and yellow bed covers, — all so gay it was like sleeping in a rainbow.

As if another lovely lake under the windows, and moonlight *ad libitum*, was not enough, they had music also. Lavinia scorned the idea of sleep, and went prowling about the rooms, hanging over the balconies, and doing the romantic in a style that was a disgrace to her years. She it was who made the superb discovery that the music they heard came from across the way, and that by opening a closet window they could look into a theatre and see the stage.

All rushed at once and beheld an opera in full blast, heartily enjoying the unusual advantages of their position; for not only could they hear the warblers, but see them when the curtain was down. What a thing it was to see Donna Anna do up her black hair, Don Giovanni dance a jig, and stately Ottavio imbibe refreshment out of a black bottle, and the ghostly Commander prance like a Punchinello as they got him into position.

The others soon succumbed to sleep; but, till long after midnight, old Livy wandered like a ghost from the front balcony, with the lovely lake, to the closet window and its dramatic joys, feeling that no moment of that memorable night should be lost, for what other traveller could boast that she ever went to the opera wrapped in a yellow bedquilt?

On the morrow a few pictures of Luini before breakfast, and then more sailing over lakes, and more driving in festive diligences to Menaggio, where a boat like a market waggon without wheels bore them genteelly to Cadenabbia, and a week of repose on the banks of Lago Como.

Their palace did not ‘lift its marble walls to eternal summer’ by any means; for it rained much, and was so cold that some took to their beds for warmth, stone floors looking like castile-soap not being just the thing for rheumatism. Hand-organs, dancing-bears, two hotels, one villa, no road but the lake, and an insinuating boatman with one eye who lay in wait among the willows, and popped out to grab a passenger when anyone ventured forth, are all that remains in the memory regarding Cadenabbia.

A few extracts from Lavinia’s note-book may be found useful at this point, both as a speedy way of getting our travellers to Rome, and for the bold criticisms on famous places and pictures which they contain: —

‘Milan. — Cathedral like a big wedding-cake. “Last Supper” in the barracks — did not “thrill;” tried to, but couldn’t, as the picture is so dim it can hardly be seen. Ambrosian Library. — Lock of L. Borgia’s hair; tea-coloured and coarse. Don’t believe in it a bit. Jolly old books, but couldn’t touch ‘em. Fine window to Dante. Saw cathedral illuminated; very theatrical, and much howling of people over the deputies from Rome. Don’t know why they illuminated or why they howled; didn’t ask. Men here handsome, but rude. Women wear veils and no bonnets, — fat and ugly. Gloves very good. — Arch of Peace. — More peace and less arch would be better for Italy.

‘Raphael’s Marriage of the Virgin. — Stiff and stupid. Can’t like Raphael. Dear, pious, simple, old Fra Angelico suits me better.

‘To the Public Garden with A.; saw a black ostrich with long pink legs, who pranced and looked so like an opera dancer that we sat on the fence and shrieked with laughter.

‘Pavia. — To the Certosa to see the old Carthusian Convent founded in 1396; cloisters, gardens, and twenty-four little dwellings, with chapel, bedroom, parlour, and yard for each monk, who is never to speak, and comes out but once a week. A nice way for lazy men to spend their lives when there is so much work to be done for the Lord and his poor! Wanted to shake them all round, though they did look well in their gowns and cowls gliding about the dim cloisters and church. Perhaps they are kept for that purpose.

‘Parma. — Dome of church frescoed by Correggio. All heaven upsidedown; fat angels turning somersaults, saints like butchers, and martyrs simpering feebly. Like C.’s babies much better. Heaven can’t be painted, and they’d better not try. Madonna, by Girolamo, was lovely. Room of the Abbess, with rosy children peeping through the lattice, very charming. Madonna della Scodella — the boy Christ very charming. The old Farnese Theatre most interesting; got a scrap of canvas from a mouldy scene. Dead old place is Parma.

‘Bologna. — Drove in a pelting rain to the Academy, and saw many pictures. A Pietà, by Guido, was very striking. The desolate mother, with her dead son on her knees, haunted me long afterwards. St. Jerome and the infant Christ, by Elizabeth Sirani, I liked. Raphael won’t suit yet. Sad for me, but I cannot admire Madonnas with faces like fashion-plates, or dropsical babies with no baby sweetness about them.

‘Florence. — Bought furs. Nice climate to bring invalids into. Always did think Italy a humbug, and I begin to see I was right. Acres of pictures. Like about six out of the lot. Can’t bear the Venus, or Titian’s famous hussy hanging over it. Like his portraits much. Busts of Roman emperors great fun. Such bad heads! The Julias, Faustinas, and Agrippinas, with hair dressed like a big sponge on the brow, were so comical I was never tired of looking at them. I see now where the present bedlamite style of coiffure comes from.

‘The philosophers, &c., were very interesting. Cicero so like Wendell Phillips that I could hardly help clapping my hands and saying, “Hear! hear!”

‘Gave A. a sad blow by saying the Campanile looked like an inlaid work-box. Did not admire it half so much as I did a magnificent stone pine. Best of all, saw in the old Monastery of St. Marco many works of Fra Angelico. I love his pictures, for he put his pious heart into them, and one sees and feels it, and I don’t care if his saints do have six joints to their fingers and impossible noses. A very dear picture of “Providenza,” — poor monks at an empty table and angels bringing bread.

‘Angelico’s picture of heaven was more to my mind than any I have seen. No stern, avenging God, no silly Madonna, but happy souls playing like children, or singing and piping with devout energy.

‘Relics of Savonarola, — his cell, bust, beads, hair-cloth shirt, and a bit of wood from the pile on which they burnt him. I like relics of one man who really lived, worked, and suffered, better than armies of angels, or acres of gods and goddesses.

‘Pleasant drives. Saw artists, Casa Guidi windows, and a model baby house with dolly’s name on the door, and steps modelled by hands that have made famous statues. “Papa’s baby house” was best of all his works to me. A nice little earthquake and a trifle of snow to enhance the charms of this sweet spot.

‘Visited Parker’s grave, and was afflicted to find it in such an unlovely, crowded cemetery. It does not matter after all: his best monument is in the hearts that love him and the souls he fed. As I stood there a little brown bird hopped among the vines that covered the grave, pecked its breakfast from a dry seed-pod, perched on the head-stone with a grateful twitter, as grace after meat, and flew away, leaving me comforted by the little sermon it had preached.'

'I don't wish to hurt your feelings, dear, but if this is Rome I must say it is a very nasty place,' began Lavinia, as they went stumbling through the mud and confusion of a big, unfinished station on their arrival at the eternal city.

'People of sense don't judge a place at ten o'clock of a pitch-dark, rainy night, especially if they are hungry, tired, and, excuse me, love, rather cross,' returned Amanda, severely, as they piled into a carriage and drove to Piazzi di Spagna.

'I see a divine fountain! A splendid palace! Now it's a statue of some sort! I do believe that dark figure was a monk! I know I shall like it in spite of everything,' cried Matilda excitedly, flattening her nose against the window.

She had been much disappointed at not being able to enter Rome by daylight, so that she might clasp her hands and cry aloud, half-stifled with the overpowering emotions of the moment, 'Roma! Roma! the eternal city, bursts upon my view!' That was the proper thing to do, and it was a blow to make so commonplace and ignoble an entry into the city of her dreams.

Early next morning, Livy was roused from slumber by cries of delight, and, starting up, beheld her artist sister wrapped in a dressing-gown, with dishevelled hair, staring out of the window, and murmuring incoherently, —

'Spanish Steps, that's where the models sit. Propaganda, famous Jesuit school. Hope I shall see the little students in their funny hats and gowns. That's the great monument thing put up to settle the Immaculate Conception fuss. Very fine, but the apostles look desperately tired of holding it up. Dear old houses! Heavens! there's a *trattoria* man with somebody's breakfast on his head! Don't see any costumes. Where are the sheepskin suits? the red skirts and white head-cloths? Girl with flowers. Oh, how lovely! Mercy on us, there's an officer staring up here, and I never saw him!'

In came the blond head, and the blue dressing-gown vanished from the eyes of the handsome soldier who had been attitudinizing with his high boots, gray and scarlet cloak, jingling sword, and becoming *barrette* cap, for the especial benefit of the enraptured stranger.

'Livy, it is just superb! Get up and come out at once. It is clouding up, and I must have one look or lose my mind,' said Matilda, flying about with unusual energy.

'You will have to get used to rain if you stay here long, my child,' returned the Raven.

And she was right. It poured steadily for two months, with occasional flurries of snow, also thunder, likewise hurricanes, the tramontàna, the sirocco, and all the other charming features of an Italian winter. That nothing might be wanting, a nice little inundation was got up for their benefit, December 28th.

Sitting peacefully at breakfast on the morning of that day, in their cosey apartment, with a fire of cones and olive-wood cheerily burning on the hearth, Jokerella, the big cat, purring on the rug, the little coffee-pot proudly perched among bread and butter, eggs and fruit, while the ladies, in dressing-gowns and slippers, lounged luxuriously in arm-chairs, one red, one blue, one yellow; they (the ladies, not the chairs) were started by Agrippina, the maid, who burst into the room like a bomb-shell, announcing, all in one breath, that the Tiber had risen, inundated the whole city, and instant death was to be the doom of all.

Rushing to the window to see if the flood had quite covered the steps, and cut off all retreat, the friends were comforted to observe no signs of water, except that half-frozen in the basin of the fountain above which leaned their favourite old Triton, with an icicle on the end of his nose.

‘I must go and attend to this. The poor will suffer; we may be able to help,’ said Livy, forgetting her bones, and beginning to scramble on her fur boots as if the safety of the city depended on her.

The others followed suit, and leaving Jokerella to ravage the table, they hurried forth to see what Father Tiber was up to. A most reprehensible prank, apparently, for the lower parts of the city were under water, and many of the great streets already as full of boats as Venice.

The Corso was a deep and rapid stream, and the shopkeepers were disconsolately paddling about, trying to rescue their property.

‘Our dresses, our beautiful new dresses, where are they now!’ wailed the girls, surveying Mazzoni’s grand store, with water up to the balcony, where many milliners wrung their hands, lamenting.

The Piazza del Popolo was a lake, with the four stone lions just visible, and still spouting water, though it was a drug in the market. In at the open gate rolled a muddy stream, bearing hay-stacks, brushwood, and drowned animals along the Corso. People stood on their balconies wondering what they should do, many breakfastless; for how could the *trattoria* boys safely waft their coffee-pots across such canals of water? Carriages splashed about in shallower parts with agitated loads, hurrying to drier quarters; many were coming down ladders into boats, and crowds stood waiting their turn with bundles of valuables in their hands.

The soldiers were out in full force, working gallantly to save life and property; making rafts, carrying people on their backs, and going through the inundated streets with boat-loads of food for the hungry, shut up in their ill-provided houses. Usually at such times the priests did this work; but now they stood idly looking on, and saying it was a judgment on the people for their treatment of the Pope. The people were troubled because the priests refused to pray for them: but otherwise they snapped their fingers at the sullen old gentlemen in the Vatican; and the brisk, brave troops worked for the city quite as well (the heretics thought better) than the snuffy priests.

In the Ghetto the disaster was truly terrible, for the flood came so suddenly that the whole quarter was under water in an hour. The scene was pitiful; for here the Jews live packed like sardines in a box, and being washed out with no warning, were utterly destitute. In one street a man and woman were seen wading up to their waists in water, pushing an old mattress before them, on which were three little children, all they had saved.

Later in the day, as boats of provisions came along, women and children swarmed at the windows, crying, ‘Bread! bread!’ and their wants could not be supplied in spite of the care of the city authorities. One old woman who had lost everything besought the rescuers to bring her a little snuff for the love of heaven; which was very characteristic of the race. One poor man, in trying to save a sick wife and his little ones in a cart, upset them, and the babies were drowned at their own door. Comedy and tragedy side by side.

Outside the city, houses were carried off, people lost, and bridges swept away, so sudden and violent was the flood. The heavy rains and warm winds melted the snow on the mountains, and swelled the river till it rose higher than at any time since 1805.

Many strangers, who came to Rome for the Christmas holidays, sat in their fine apartments without food, fire, light, or company, till taken off in boats or supplied by hoisting stores in at the windows.

‘We can hold out some time, as we live on a hill, and Pina has laid in provisions for several days. But if the flood lasts, we shall come to want; for the wood-yards are under water, the railroads down, and the peasants can’t get into the city to bring supplies, unless the donkeys swim,’ said Amanda, reviewing the situation.

‘Never mind; it’s so exciting; only we must not forget that we engaged to go and see the Roastpig Aurora to-day,’ answered Matilda, who insisted on pronouncing Rospigliosi in that improper manner.

‘I like this infinitely better than any of your picturesque refrigerators, and it thrills me more to watch one of those dear, dirty soldiers save women and babies than to see a dozen “Dying Gladiators” gasping for centuries in immortal marble,’ added Lavinia, who had shocked her artistic friends by sniffing at the famous statue, and wishing the man would die and done with it, and not lie squirming there.

‘Come away, Mat: she has no soul for art, and it is all in vain to try and breathe one into her,’ said Amanda, with the calm pity of one who had read up every great picture, studied up every famous statue, and knew what to admire, when to thrill, and just where the various emotions should come in.

So they left the outcast perched on a wall, waving her muff at them, and calling out, ‘Nater for ever!’ to the great horror of an English lady, who would have seen all Rome upset without any unseemly excitement.

That night the gas gave out, and mysterious orders were left at houses for lamps to be kept burning till morning. Thieves abounded, and the ladies prepared their arms — one pistol, one dagger, and a large umbrella — then slept peacefully, undisturbed by the commotion in the kitchen, where cats, live chickens, and Pina’s five grandmothers, all lived together, rent free.

Amanda’s last prediction was, that they would find themselves gently floating out at the Porta Pia about midnight. Mat wailed for a submerged gallery in which she had hoped to ice herself on the morrow, and Livy indulged the sinful hope that the Pope would get his pontifical petticoats very wet, be a little drowned, and terribly scared by the flood, because he spoilt the Christmas festivities, and shut up all the cardinals’ red coaches.

Next day the water began to abate, and people made up their minds that the end of the world was not yet. Gentlemen paid visits on the backs of stout soldiers, ladies went shopping in boats, and family dinners were handed in at two-story windows without causing any remark, so quickly do people adapt themselves to the inevitable.

Hardly had the watery excitement subsided when a new event set the city in an uproar.

The King was not expected till the tenth of January; but the kind soul could not wait, and, as soon as the road was passable, he came with 300,000 francs in his hands to see what he could do for his poor Romans. He arrived at 4 a.m., and though unexpected, the news flew through the city, and a crowd turned out with torches to escort him to the Quirinal.

Again did the explosive Pina burst in upon her mistresses with the news, this time in tears of joy, for the people began to think the King would never come, and therefore were especially touched by this prompt visit in the midst of their trouble. The handsome damsel was a spectacle herself, so dramatic was she as she shook her fist at the Pope, and cheered for the King, with a ladle in one hand, an artichoke in the other, her fine eyes flashing, and her mellow voice trembling, while she talked regardless of the *polenta* going to destruction in the frying-pan.

On went the bonnets, out flew the ladies, and rushed up to the Quirinal, where stood a great crowd waiting eagerly for a sight of the King.

There was a great bustle among the officials, and splendid creatures, in new uniforms, ran about in all directions. Grand carriages arrived, bringing the high and mighty, gaping but loyal, to greet their lord. General Marmora — a thin, shabby, energetic man — was everywhere; for the new order of things seemed a little hitchy. Dorias and Colonnas gladdened plebeian eyes, and the people cheered every thing, from the Commander-in-Chief to somebody's breakfast, borne through the crowd by a stately 'Jeames' in livery, who graciously acknowledged the homage.

For one mortal hour our ladies stood in a pelting rain, and then retired, feeling that the sacrifice of their best hats was all that could reasonably be expected of free-born Americans. They consoled themselves by putting out Pina's fine Italian banner (made in secret, and kept ready for her King, for the *padrona* was *papalino*), and supporting it by two little American flags, the stars and stripes of which much perplexed the boys and donkeys disporting themselves in the Piazza Barberini.

But the excitement was so infectious that the girls could not resist another run after royalty; so, while Livy consoled herself with the fire and the cat, they took a carriage and chased the King till they caught him at the Capitol. They had a fine view of him as he came down the long steps, almost alone, and at the peril of his life, through a mass of people cheering frantically, and whitening the streets with waving handkerchiefs.

The enthusiastic damsels mounted up beside the driver, and hurrahed with all their hearts and voices, as well they might, for it certainly was a sight to see. The courage of the King, in trusting himself in a city full of enemies, touched the people quite as much as the kindly motive that brought him there, and kept him sacred in their eyes.

The girls had a second view of him on the balcony of the Quirinal; for the populace clamoured so for another sight of 'Il Rè,' that the Pope's best velvet hangings were hastily spread, and Victor Emmanuel came out and bowed to his people, 'who stood on their heads with joy,' as Amanda expressed it.

He was in citizen's dress, and looked like a stout, brown, soldierly man, not so ugly as the pictures of him, but not an Apollo by any means.

Hating ceremony and splendour, he would not have the fine apartments prepared for him, but chose a plain room, saying, 'Keep the finery for my son, if you like; I prefer this.'

He drove through the Ghetto, and all the desolated parts of the city, to see with his own eyes the ruin made; and then desired the city fathers to give to the poor the money they had set apart to make a splendid welcome for him.

He only spent one day, and returned to Florence at night. All Rome was at the station to see him off: ladies with carriages full of flowers, troops of soldiers, and throngs of poor people blessing him like a saint; for this kingly sympathy of his had won all hearts.

'When he does make his grand entry, we will decorate our balcony, and have our six windows packed with loyal Yankees who will hurrah their best for "the honest man," as they call Victor Emmanuel — and that is high praise for a king.'

So said the three, and while waiting for the event (which did not occur in their day, however,) they indulged in all the pastimes modern Rome afforded. They shivered through endless galleries, getting 'cricks' in their necks staring at frescoes, and injuring their optic nerves poring over pictures so old that often nothing was visible but a mahogany-coloured leg, an oily face, or the dim outline of a green saint in a whirlwind of pink angels.

They grubbed in catacombs and came up mouldy. They picnicked in the tomb of Cæcelia Metella, flirted in the palace of the Cæsars — not in the classical manner, however, — got cold by moonlight in the Colosseum, and went sketching in the Baths of Caracalla, which last amusement generally ended in the gentlemen and ladies drawing each other, and returning delighted with the study of art in 'dear Rome.'

They went to fancy parties, where artists got themselves up like their own statues and pictures, and set mediæval fashions which it was a pity the rest of the world did not follow. They drank much social tea with titled beings, as thick as blackberries, and, better still, men and women who had earned noble names for themselves with pencil, pen, or chisel. They paid visits in palaces where the horses lived in the basement, rich foreigners on the first floor, artists next, and princes in the attic.

They went to the hunt, and saw scarlet coats, fine horses, bad riding, many hounds, and no foxes.

As a change they got up game parties *à la* Little Athens in their own small *salon*, introduced the Potatoe Pantomime, had charades, and enacted the immortal Jarley's waxworks on one of the Seven Hills.

A true Yankee breakfast of fish-balls, johnny-cake, and dip-toast, was given in their honour, and its delights much enhanced by its being eaten in a lovely room with reeds and rushes on the pale-green walls, shell-shaped chairs, and coral mirror-frames. What a thing it was to consume those familiar viands in a famous palace, with Guido's Cenci downstairs, a great sculptor next door, three lovely boys as waiters, and 'Titian T.' to head the feast, and follow it up with dates from the Nile, and Egyptian sketches that caused the company to vote a speedy adjournment to the land 'of corkendills' and pyramids.

These and many other joys they tasted, and when all else palled upon them they drove on the Campagna and were happy.

It is sad to be obliged to record that these quiet drives were the especial delight of the unsocial Lavinia, whose ill-regulated mind soon wearied of swell society, classical remains, and artistic revelry. Ancient Rome would have suited her excellently, she thought; but modern Rome was such a chaos of frivolity and fanaticism, poverty and splendour, dirt and devilry, dead grandeur and living ignorance, that she felt as if shut up in a magnificent tomb, the bad air of which was poisoning both body and soul.

Her only consolation was the new freedom, that seemed to blow over Rome like a wholesome wind. Old residents lamented the loss of the priestly pageants, *fêtes*, and ceremonies; but this republican spinster preferred to see Rome guarded by her own troops, and governed by her own King, who ordered streets to be cleaned, fountains filled, schools opened, and all good institutions made possible, rather than any amount of Papal purple covering poverty, ignorance, and superstition. Better than the sight of all the red coaches that ever rumbled was the spectacle of many boys quitting the Jesuit college and demanding admittance into the free schools; and sweeter than the music of all the silver trumpets that ever blew were the voices of happy men and women singing once forbidden songs of liberty in the streets of Rome.

These sentiments, and others equally unfashionable, were only breathed into the ear of sister Matilda when the two retired to the Campagna to confide to one another the secrets of their souls — a process necessary about once a week; for after visiting studios, going to parties, and telling polite fibs about everything they saw, it was impossible to exist without finding a vent of some sort. Once out among the aqueducts, Matilda could freely own that she thought genius a rare article in the studios, where she expected to learn so much; and Lavinia could make the awful avowal that parties at which the order of performance was gossip, tea, music — then music, tea, and gossip, all together — were not her idea of intellectual society. Their criticisms on pictures and statues cannot be recorded without covering their humble names with infamy; and why the sky did not fall upon, or the stones rise up and smite these Vandals, is a mystery to this day.

They did enjoy much in their own improper manner, but poor Amanda's sufferings can better be imagined than described. So when Lavinia, early in

March, proposed to flee to the mountains before they became quite demoralized, and learned to steal and stab, as well as lie and lounge, she readily assented, and they retired to Albano.

‘The decline and fall of the Roman Empire was nothing to this, and never have I seen such unappreciative women as you two,’ sighed Amanda, as they rolled away from Numero Due Piazza Barberini, leaving Agrippina sobbing at the top of the stairs and the *padrona* bobbing little curtsies at the bottom.

‘I am sure the Cenci will haunt me all my days, and so will many other famous things,’ said Matilda, while her eye roved fondly from a very brown Capuchin monk to a squad of Bersaglieri trotting by with jaunty cocks’ feathers dancing in the wind, muskets gleaming, and trim boots skipping through the mud with martial regularity.

‘When I get the contents of my head sorted out, I shall doubtless rejoice that I have seen Rome; but just now all that I can clearly recall are the three facts that the Pope had a fit, our dear man Romeo got very tipsy one night, and that we went to see the Sistine Chapel the day the eclipse made it as dark as a pocket. Yes,’ continued Lavinia, with an air of decision, ‘I *am* glad to have seen this classical cesspool, and still more glad to have got out of it alive,’ she added, sniffing the air from the mountains, as if the odour of sanctity which pervaded the holy city did not suit her.

It blew great guns up at Albano, and the society consisted chiefly of donkeys. But the ladies enjoyed themselves nevertheless, and felt better and better every day; for early hours, much exercise, and no æsthetic tea, soon set them up after the dissipation of the winter.

Three pleasing events diversified their stay. The first happened the day after they arrived. The girls went forth early to look about them, and to see if they could find a little apartment where all could be more comfortable than in the breezy rooms at the hotel. Following the grassy road that winds down the valley below the viaduct, they came to a lovely garden, and, finding the gate open, went in. A queer old villa was perched on the hill above, and a manly form was observed to be leaning from a balcony, as if enjoying the fine view from the height.

‘I fancied that house was empty, or we wouldn’t have come in. Never mind: we won’t go back now; and if any one comes after us, we will apologize and say we lost our way going to Ajaccio,’ said Amanda, as they went calmly forward among the posy-beds that lay blooming on the hill-side.

It was well they prepared themselves, for the manly form suddenly disappeared from the balcony, and a moment afterwards came swiftly towards them through the shrubs.

A comely young gentleman, who greeted them with Italian grace, accepted their apology smiling, and begged them to walk in his garden whenever they liked. It was always open, he said, and the peasants often used that path, admiring but never hurting a leaf. Hearing that they were in search of an apartment, he instantly begged them to come up and look at some rooms in the villa. His father was a refugee from France, and desired to let a part of his house. Come and behold these delightful rooms.

So charming was the interest he took in the errant damsels that they could not resist, and after rolling up their eyes at one another to express their enjoyment of the adventure, they graciously followed the handsome youth into the villa.

With confiding hospitality he took them everywhere — into his mother's room, the kitchen, and nursery. In the latter place they found two small boys, who bore such a striking resemblance to Napoleon I. that the girls spoke of it, and were enraptured at the reply they received.

'Truly yes: we belong to the family. My mother is a Buonaparte, my father Count — — '

'Here's richness and romance!' 'What will Livy say?' whispered the girls to one another, as their guide left them in the *salon* and went to find his father.

'She will scold us for coming here,' said Amanda, remembering her own lectures on the proprieties.

'Yes; but she will forgive us the minute we say Napoleon, for that bad little man is one of her heroes,' added Mat, pretending to be admiring the view, while she privately examined a lady in a bower below — a stout, dark lady, with all the family traits so strongly marked that there could be no doubt of the young man's assertion.

Presently he came back with an affable old gentleman, who evidently had an eye to the main chance; for, in spite of his elegance and affability, he asked a great price for his rooms, and felt that any untitled stranger should be glad to pay well for the honour of living under the roof of a Buonaparte.

Amanda left the decision to her invisible duenna, and with a profusion of compliments and thanks, they got away, being gallantly escorted to the gate by the young count, who filled their hands with flowers, and gazed pensively after them, as if he found the society of two bright American girls very agreeable after that of his lofty parents, or the peasantry of the town.

Home they ran and bounced in upon Livy, blooming and breathless, to pour out their tale, and suggest an immediate departure to the blissful spot where counts and crocuses flourished with Italian luxuriance.

But after the first excitement had subsided, Lavinia put a wet blanket on the entire plan by declaring that she would never board with any grasping old patrician, who would charge for every bow, and fall back on his ancestors if he was found cheating. She would go and look at the place, but not enter it, nor be beholden to the resident Apollo for so much as a dandelion.

So the mourning damsels led the griffin over the viaduct, through the dirty little town, by the villa on its least attractive side. Up at the window were the two little Napoleonic heads, with big, black eyes, strong chins, and dark hair streaked across wide, olive-coloured foreheads. A vision of papa was visible in the garden pruning a vine with gloves on his aristocratic hands, and a shabby velvet coat on his highly connected back. Also, afar off on the balcony — oh, sight to touch a maiden’s heart! — was the young count gazing wistfully towards Albano. He did not see the charmers as they crept down the rough road close to the garden wall, and went sadly home, along the blooming path, to the ‘Tomb of the Four Thimbles,’ as Livy irreverently called the ruin which has an ornament at each of its corners like a gigantic thimble of stone.

A note in Amanda’s most elegant French, declining the apartments in the name of Madame Duenna, closed the door of this Eden upon the wandering peris, who entered never more. Now and then, as they went clattering by on their donkeys to Lake Nemi, or some other picturesque spot,

They saw again the crocus bloom,
And, leaning from that lofty room,
Sir Launcelot with face of gloom
Look down to Camelot.
Up flew their veils and floated wide,
But Livy pinned them to her side,
‘The curse has come upon us!’ cried
The ladies of Shalott.

The second adventure befell Amanda alone, and in this wise.

Going one day to Rome, on business, she found herself shut up in a car with a gorgeous officer and a meek young man, who read papers all the way. The tall soldier, in his gray and silver uniform, with a furred, frogged, and braided jacket, not to mention the high boots or the becoming cap, was so very polite to the lone lady that she could not remain dumb without positive rudeness. So Amanda conversed in her most charming manner, finding inspiration doubtless in the dark eyes and musical voice of her handsome *vis-à-vis*, for the officers from Turin are things of beauty and joys for ever to those who love to look on manly men.

Among other things, the two had a little joke about the Baron Rothschild, who rode about Albano on a tiny donkey with two servants behind him; also the Baroness, a painfully plain woman, with an ugly dog the image of herself.

When they arrived at Rome, however, their joke was turned against them, by the discovery that the meek man was the Baron's secretary, who would doubtless repeat their chat at head-quarters. To see the handsome man slap his brow, and then laugh like a boy at the fun, was worth a longer journey, Amanda thought, as he put her into a carriage, gave her his best martial salute, and went clanking away about his own affairs.

Amanda returned at 4 p.m., and her emotions may be imagined when the dark face of her officer peered in at the car window, and the melodious voice asked if he might be permitted to enter. Of course he might; and, as no secretary now spoilt the *tête-à-tête*, Mars became delightfully confidential, and poured his woes into the sympathising bosom of Amanda.

It had been a great affliction to him that his regiment was quartered at Albano for some months. *Mio Dio!* so dull was it, life had already become a burden; but now, if the Signorina was to be there, if she permitted him to make himself known to her party, what joys were in store for him. The Signorina loved to ride. Behold he had superb horses languishing in the stables, that henceforth were dedicated to her use. His fellow officers were gentlemen of good family, brave as lions, and dying of *ennui*; if they might be presented to the ladies, life would be worth having, and Albano a paradise, &c.

To all this devotion the prudent Amanda listened with pleasure, but promised nothing till Signore Mars had made the acquaintance of certain American gentleman and married ladies, then it would be possible to enjoy the delights of which he spoke. The Colonel vowed he would instantly devote himself to this task, and thus they came to the lonely little station at Albano.

Amanda had ordered the carriage to meet her; but it was not there, and she was forced to wait till all her fellow-passengers were gone. All but the gallant officer, who decorously remained outside, marching to and fro as if on guard, till his servant came with his horse. Then he begged to be allowed to see why the carriage did not come, and Amanda consented, for night was falling, and two miles of mud lay between her and home.

Away dashed the servant, but his master did not follow: standing in the doorway, he declared that he must remain as the Signorina's protector, for no trains were due for hours; the dépôt man was gone, and it was too late for any lady to stay there alone. Again Amanda gratefully consented, wondering what would be the end of her adventure; and again the stately Colonel resumed his march outside, singing as he tramped, and evidently enjoying the escort duty that gave him so good an opportunity of displaying not only his gallantry, but his fine voice and handsome figure.

Down rattled the carriage at last, accompanied, to Amanda’s dismay, by three of the Colonel’s friends, who had evidently received a hint of the affair, and had come to have a hand in it.

With much bowing of the gentlemen, and much prancing of their fine horses, Amanda was handed to her seat, and went lumbering back to the hotel with her splendid escort careering about her, to the great edification of the town.

When the rescued damsel told the tale to her mates, Matilda tore her hair and lamented that she had not been there. Even the stern Livy had no lecture for the erring lamb, but was as full of interest as either of the girls, for anything in the shape of a soldier was dear to her heart.

When the ladies rode forth next day, three elegant St. Georges in full rig saluted as these modern Unas ambled by on their meek donkeys — a performance punctually executed ever afterward whenever the three blue veils appeared. Much curvetting went on before the hotel door; much clanking of spurs and sabres was heard in the little lane on to which the apartment of the ladies looked, and splendid officers seemed to spring up like violets in secluded spots where maidens love to stroll.

It was all very nice; and the girls were beginning to feel that the charms of Albano rivalled those of Rome, when a sad blow upset their castles in the air, and desolated the knights over the way.

The highly respectable Americans who were to serve as the link between the soldiers and the ladies decidedly declined the office, objecting to the martial gentleman as being altogether too dangerous to bring into the dove-cot. So the poor dears sighed in vain, and the longing damsels never rode the fine horses that were temptingly paraded before them on all occasions.

They did their best; but it was soon evident to Lavinia that in some unguarded moment the impetuous Mat would yield to the spell and go gambading away for a ride *sans* duenna, *sans* habit, *sans* propriety, *sans* everything. Amanda likewise seemed losing her head, and permitted the dark-eyed Colonel to talk to her when they met; only a moment — but what a perilous moment it was! — when this six-foot Mars leaned over a green hedge and talked about the weather in the softest Italian that ever melted a woman’s heart.

‘I’m going to Venice next week; so you may as well make up your minds to it, girls. I *cannot* bear this awful responsibility any longer; for I am very sure you will both be off to Turin with those handsome rascals if we stay much longer. My mind is made up, and I won’t hear a word.’

Thus Lavinia, with a stern countenance; for the romantic old lady felt the charm as much as the girls did, and decided that discretion was the better part of valour for the whole party.

‘I should never dare to go home and tell my honoured parents that Mat had run away with a man as handsome as Jove, and as poor as Job. Amanda’s indignant relatives would rise up and stone me if I let her canter into matrimony with the fascinating Colonel, who may have a wife and ten children in Turin, for all we know. They *must* be torn away at once, or my character as duenna is lost for ever.’

Having made up her mind, Livy steeled her heart to all appeals, and wrote letters, packed trunks, and watched her little flock like a vigilant sheep-dog.

How she would ever have got them through that last week is very uncertain, if a providential picnic had not helped her.

A fair was held in the town, and a delightful surprise-party was got up among the artists of Rome. Twenty-five came driving over in a big carriage, with four gaily decorated horses, postilions, hampers of lunch, flutes and horns, and much jollity bottled up for the occasion.

A very festive spectacle they made as they drove through the narrow streets with flowers and streamers in their hats, singing and joking in true artistic style.

They meant to have lunched in the open air; but, as it was cloudy, decided to spread the feast at the hotel. Such a delightful revel as followed! A scene from the ‘Decameron,’ modernised, would give some idea of it; for after the banquet all adjourned to the gardens of the Doria Villa, and there disported themselves as merrily as if all the plagues of life were quite forgotten, and death itself among the lost arts. Flirting and dancing, charades and singing, stories and statues, poems and pictures, gossip and gambols, absorbed the hours as pleasantly as in the olden time. And if the costumes were not as picturesque as those in Vedder’s fine picture, the ladies were as lovely, the gentlemen as gallant, and all much better behaved than those of Boccaccio’s party.

A few drops of rain quenched the fun at its height, and sent the revellers home as fast as four horses could take them, leaving the town gaping after them, and our ladies much enlivened by the delights of the day.

This third and last event pleasantly ended their sojourn at Albano; for a day or two later they vanished, leaving the dear officers disconsolate till the next batch of travelling ladies came to comfort their despair.

A week was spent in Venice, floating about all day from one delightful old church to another, or paying visits to Titians and Tintorettos; buying little turtles, photographs, or Venetian glass; eating candied fruit and seeing the doves fed in the square of San Marco; visiting shops full of dusty antiquities, or searching the stalls on the Rialto for Moor’s-head rings; being rowed to the Lido by Giacomo in a red sash; and lulled to sleep at night by the songs of a chorus that floated under the windows in the moonlight.

Lavinia never could get used to seeing the butcher, the baker, and the postman go their rounds in boats. Matilda was in bliss, with a gondola all to herself, where she sat surrounded with water-colours, trying to paint everything she saw; for here the energy she had lost at Rome seemed to return to her. Amanda haunted a certain shop, trying to make the man take a reasonable sum for a very ancient and ugly bit of jewellery, which she called ‘a sprigalario,’ for want of a better name; and after each failure she went off to compose herself with a visit to the Doges.

Of course they all saw the Bridge of Sighs and the dungeons below, with their many horrors; likewise a Mass at St. Mark’s, where the Patriarch was a fat old soul in red silk, even to his shoes and holy pocket-handkerchief; and the service appeared to consist in six purple priests dressing and undressing him like an old doll, while a dozen white-gowned boys droned up in a gold cock-loft, and many beggars whined on the dirty floor below.

Do other travellers eat locusts, I wonder, as ours did one sunny day, sitting on church steps, and discover that the food of the Apostle was not the insect whose ‘zeeing’ foretells hot weather; but the long, dry pods of the locust-tree, sweet to the taste, but rather ‘dry fodder,’ as the impious Livy remarked after choking herself with a quarter of a yard of it.

When the week was up Mat implored to be left behind with Angela, the maid, and Brio, a big poodle possessed of the devil. But she was torn away, and only consoled by the promise of many new gloves, with as many buttons as she pleased, when they got to Munich.

‘The lakes are the proper entrance into Italy, and Venice a lovely exit. One soon tires of it, and is ready to leave, which is an excellent arrangement, though I should prefer to depart in some more cheerful vehicle than a hearse,’ observed Lavinia, as they left the long, black gondola at the steps of the station.

‘Haven’t you a sigh for those lovely lakes, a tear for Albano, a pang of regret for Rome?’ asked Amanda, hoping to wring one moan for Italy from the old lady.

‘Not a sigh, not a tear, not a regret. I find I like them all better the farther I get from them, and by the time I am at home I may be able to say “I adore them,” but I doubt it,’ returned the incorrigible Livy, and from that moment Amanda regarded her Granny as one dead to all the dear delusions of antiquity.

LONDON.

‘From this moment I cease to be the commander-in-chief. Livy adores England, can speak the language, understands the money, and knows all about London; so *she* shall be leader, and I will repose after my long labour.’ With this remark Amanda retired from office covered with glory, and her mates voted to erect a statue in her honour as a token of their undying gratitude.

Lavinia took the lead from the moment they landed at St. Catherine’s Warf; and though somewhat demoralized by a rough passage of eighteen hours from Antwerp, was equal to the occasion. She did love England, and thought London the most delightful city in the world, next to Boston. Its mud and fog were dear to her; its beef and beer were nectar and ambrosia, after the continental slops and messes; its steady-going, respectable citizens, beautiful in her eyes, and the words ‘home’ and’ comfort’ were not an idle mockery here.

Therefore the old lady joyfully sniffed the smoky air, gazed with tenderness on the grimy houses, and cast herself, metaphorically speaking, into the arms of a stout, ruddy-faced porter, as if at last she had found a man and a brother.

Nobly did the burly Briton repay her confidence and earn the shilling which in England makes all things possible. He bore them to the station, got tickets, checked luggage, put the ladies in a first-class compartment, gave them all necessary directions about the hotel they were after, and when the bell rang touched his cap with a smile upon his dear, red face, which caused Lavinia to add a sixpence to the shilling she gave him with a mental blessing.

‘This is truly a decent country. See how well one is cared for, how civil everybody is, how honest, how manly,’ began Livy, as she mounted her hobby, and prepared for a canter over the prejudices of her friend; for Amanda detested England because she knew nothing of it.

‘The cabman cheated us, asking double fares,’ replied the dear girl, wrapping herself in many cloaks and refusing to admire the fog.

‘Not at all,’ cried Livy; ‘the trunks were immense, and you’ll find we shall have to pay extra for them everywhere. It is the same as having them weighed and paying for the pounds, only this saves much time and trouble. Look at the handsome guard in his silver-plated harness. How much nicer he is than a gabbling Italian, or a Frenchman who compliments you one minute and behaves like a brute the next! It does my soul good to see the clean, rosy faces, and hear good English instead of gibberish.’

‘Never in my life have I seen such tall, fine-looking men, only they are all fair, which isn’t my style,’ observed Matilda, with a secret sigh for the dark-eyed heroes from Turin.

Thus conversing, they soon came to the G — — Hotel just at the end of the railway, and without going out of the station found themselves settled in comfortable rooms.

‘Regard, if you please, these toilette arrangements — two sorts of bath-pan, two cans of cold water, one of hot, two big pitchers, much soap, and six towels about the size of table-cloths. I call that an improvement on the continental cup, saucer, and napkin accommodation,’ said Lavinia, proudly displaying a wash-stand that looked like a dinner-table laid for a dozen, such was the display of glass, china, and napery.

‘The English certainly are a clean people,’ replied Amanda, softening a little as she remembered her fruitless efforts to find a bath-pan in Brittany, where the people said the drought was caused by the English using so much water.

‘They need more appliances for cleanliness than any other race, because they live in such a dirty country,’ began Matilda, removing the soot from her face in flakes.

What more she might have said is unknown; for Livy closed her mouth with a big sponge, and all retired to repose after the trials of the past night.

‘Now, my dears, you shall have food fit for Christian women to eat. No weak soup, no sour wine, no veal stewed with raisins, nor greasy salad made of all the weeds that grow. Beef that will make you feel like giants, and beer that will cheer the cockles of your hearts; not to mention cheese which will make you wink, and bread with a little round button atop of the loaf like the grand Panjandrum in the old story.’

Thus Lavinia enthusiastically, as she led her flock of two into the eating-room at luncheon time. Being seated at a little table by one of the great windows, the old lady continued to sing the praises of Britannia while wafting for the repast.

‘Isn’t this better than a stone-floored *café* with nine clocks all wrong, seven mirrors all cracked, much drapery all dirty, a flock of *garçons* who fly about like lunatics, and food which I shudder to think of? Look at this lofty room; this grave thick carpet; that cheerful coal-fire; these neat little tables; these large, clean windows; these quiet, ministerial waiters, who seem to take a paternal interest in your wants, and best of all in this simple, wholesome, well-cooked food.’

Here the arrival of a glorified beefsteak and a shining pint-pot of foaming ale give an appropriate finish to Livy’s lecture. She fell upon her lunch like a famished woman, and was speechless till much meat had vanished, and the ale was low in the pot.

‘It *is* good,’ admitted Amanda, who took to her beer like a born Englishwoman, and swallowed some of her prejudices with her delicious beef.

‘It’s such a comfort to know that I am not eating a calf’s brains or a pig’s feet, that I can enjoy it with a free mind, and the sight of those two beautiful old gentlemen gives it an added relish,’ said Matilda, who had been watching a pair of hale old fellows eat their lunch in a solid, leisurely way that would have been impossible to an American.

‘It is so restful to see people take things calmly, and not bolt their meals, or rush about like runaway steam-engines. It is this moderation that keeps Englishmen so hearty, jolly, and long-lived. They don’t tear themselves to pieces as we do, but take time for rest, exercise, food, and recreation, like sensible people as they are. It is like reposing on a feather-bed to live here, and my tired nerves rejoice in it,’ said Lavinia, eating bread and cheese as if that was her mission in life.

‘A slight amount of haste will be advisable, my Granny, unless we intend to spend all our substance on these restful comforts of yours. This hotel is delightfully cosy, but expensive; so the quicker we go into lodgings the better for us,’ suggested the thrifty Amanda, seeing that Livy was too infatuated to care for cost.

‘I’ll go the first thing to-morrow and look at the rooms Mrs. Blank recommended to us. This afternoon we will rest and write letters, unless some one comes to call,’ said Livy, leading her girls to the reading-room, where sleep-inviting chairs, tables supplied with writing-materials, and groves of newspapers, wooed the stranger to repose.

Hardly were they seated, however, than Jeames brought in the card of a friend who had been told when they would arrive, and hastened at once to meet them. How pleasant is the first familiar face one sees in a strange land! Doubly pleasant was Mr. C.’s, because he brought hospitable invitations from other friends, kind welcomes, and tickets to several of the art exhibitions then open.

Hardly had he gone, after a half-hour’s chat, than another card was handed, and the name it bore caused a slight flutter in the dove-cot. A friend of Miss Livy’s, in Boston, had sent orders to his brother in London to devote himself to the wandering ladies when they came. They had never met; the poor man didn’t care to have his quiet invaded by strange women, and to do the honours of London is no small task: yet this heroic gentleman obeyed orders without a murmur; and, leaving his artistic seclusion, shouldered his burden with the silent courage of a Spartan.

A grave, dark, little man, with fine eyes, quiet manners, and a straight-forward way with him that suited blunt Livy excellently. How he dared to face the three unknown women so calmly, listen to their impossible suggestions so politely, and offer himself as a slave so cheerfully, will for ever remain a mystery to those grateful souls.

His first service was to pack them into a cab and bear them safely to the bankers for letters and money; and this he followed up by several weeks of servitude, which must have been worse than Egyptian bondage.

Two more large ladies joined the party after they were settled in lodgings at Kensington; but, undaunted by the fact, this long-suffering man escorted the whole five to galleries and theatres, trips into the city, and picnics in the country; went shopping with them, lugged parcels, ran errands, paid bills, and was in fact the sheet-anchor of the whole party. Imagine the emotions of one shy man when called upon to lead a flock of somewhat imposing ladies everywhere; to have two cabs full on all occasions; to be obliged to support the invalids to follow the caprices of the giddy, to gratify the demands of the curious, and to hear the gabble of the whole five day after day.

Bürger’s Brave Man was a coward compared to him; for he not only gave his days, but his evenings also, joining in endless games of whist, drinking much weak tea, and listening to any amount of twaddle on all subjects.

The society was not such as intelligent men enjoy, being composed of two Egyptian boys and three fussy old ladies. One of them was immensely stout, wore a bright green cap, with half-a-pint of scarlet cherries bobbing on her brow. She talked on all subjects, and handed round an album full of her own poems on all occasions. The second must have been a sister of ‘Mr. T.’s Aunt,’ so grim and incoherent was she. Sitting in the corner, she stared at the world around her with an utterly expressionless countenance, and when least expected broke out with some startling remark, such as, ‘If that fence had been painted green we should get to heaven sooner,’ or ‘Before I had fits my memory was as good as anybody’s, but my daughter married a clergyman, and took it with her.’

The third antiquity was the hostess, a buxom lady, much given to gay attire and reminiscences of past glory, ‘Before me ‘usband went into public life.’ The strangers innocently supposed the departed Mr. K. to have been an M.P. at least, and were rather taken aback on learning that he had been a pawnbroker.

The Egyptian youths were handsome, dark lads, with melodious voices, lustrous eyes, and such fiery tempers that one never knew whether they were going to pass the bread or stab one with the carving-knife.

As a slight mitigation of this slow society, the Russian from Pension Paradis appeared with his broadcloth more resplendent than ever. The ladies had seen him in Rome; but the fever scared him away, and he was now fleeing from another lodging-house, where the hostess evidently intended to marry him to her daughter, in the MacStinger fashion.

In this varied circle did the devoted being afore-mentioned pass many hours after the day's hard labour was happily over, and when anyone pitied him for leading the life of a galley-slave, he hid his anguish and answered with a smile, —

'My brother told me to do it, and I never disobey Tom. In fact, I find I rather like it.'

That last fib was truly sublime, and the name of Cassabianca pales before that of one who obeyed fraternal commands to the letter, and tried to love his duty, heavy as it was. If, as has been sometimes predicted, England had gone under just then, it might truly have been said, —

Though prince and peer and poet rare
Were sunk among the piles,
The noblest man who perished there
Was faithful W. N — — s.

The sight-seeing fever raged fiercely at first, and the flock of Americans went from Windsor Castle to the Tower of London, from Westminster Abbey to Madame Taussaud's Waxwork Show, with a vigour that appalled the natives. They would visit two or three galleries in the morning, lunch at Dolly's (the dark little chop-house which Johnson, Goldsmith, and the other worthies used to frequent in the good old times), go to Richmond in the afternoon and dine at the 'Star and Garter,' or to Greenwich and eat 'white baits fish,' as the Russian called that celebrated dish, and finish off the evening at some theatre, getting home at midnight, in a procession of two cabs and a hansom.

When the first excitement was over, Lavinia and Matilda took a turn at society, having friends in London. Amanda could not conquer her prejudices sufficiently to accompany them, and, falling back on the climate as her excuse, stayed at home and improved her mind.

'I feel now like girls in novels. You are the Duchess of Devonshire and I am Lady Maud Plantagenet, going to a ball at Buckingham Palace. I know that I was made to sit in the lap of luxury: it agrees with me so well,' said Matilda, as the two rolled away to Aubrey House in a brougham, all lamps, glass, and satin. Her long blue train lay piled up before her, the light flashed on her best Roman earrings, her curls were in their most picturesque array, and — crowning joy of all — cream-coloured gloves, with six buttons, covered her arms, and filled her soul with happiness, because they were so elegant and cost so little, being bought in Rome just after the flood.

Dowager Livy responded gravely from the depths of her silver-grey silk, enlivened with pink azaleas, —

'My child, thank your stars that you are a free-born Yankee, and have no great name or state to keep up. Buckingham Palace is all very well, and I shouldn't mind calling on Mrs. Guelph, or Saxe Coburg, whichever it is, but I much prefer to be going to the house of a Radical M.P., who is lending a hand to all good works. Mrs. T. is a far more interesting woman to me than Victoria, for her life is spent in helping her fellow-creatures. I consider her a model Englishwoman — simple, sincere, and accomplished; full of good sense, intelligence, and energy. Her house is open to all, friend and stranger, black and white, rich and poor. Great men and earnest women meet there; Mazzini and Frances Power Cobbe, John Bright and Jean Ingelow, Rossetti the poet, and Elizabeth Garrett the brave little doctor. Though wealthy and living in an historical mansion, the host is the most unassuming man in it, and the hostess the simplest dressed lady. Their money goes in other ways, and the chief ornament of that lovely spot is a school, where poor girls may get an education. Mrs. T. gave a piece of her own garden for it, and teaches there herself, aided by her friends, who serve the poor girls like mothers and sisters, and help to lift them up from the slough of despond in which so many sink. That beats anything you'll find in Buckingham Palace, sister Mat.'

'If they want a drawing-teacher I'll offer myself, for I think that is regularly splendid,' said Matilda warmly, as Livy paused for breath after her harangue.

With these new ideas in her head, Lady Maud enjoyed her party, while the Duchess revelled in radicals to her heart's content; for Aubrey House was their head-quarters, and all were out in full force. It was cheering to our spinster to find that things had moved a good deal since a former visit, five or six years before, when Mill had carried into the House of Commons a Woman's Rights petition that filled both arms. People laughed then, and the stout-hearted women laughed also, but said, 'Our next petition shall be so big it will have to go in a wheel-barrow.' Now the same people talked over the question soberly, and began to think something besides fun might come of it. The pioneers rejoiced over several hard-won battles, and the scoffers came to see that the truest glory was won by those who did the hard work, and stood by a good cause when most unpopular; not by those who kept out of the field till the fight was over, and then came in to wave the flags and beat the drums over victories they had not helped to win.

'It seems to me that these Englishwomen make less noise and do more work than we Americans. I shouldn't dare to say so in public; but their quiet, orderly ways suits me better than the more demonstrative performances of my friends at home. Slow coaches as we call them, I should not be surprised if they got the suffrage before we did, as the tortoise won in the fable,' was Lavinia's secret thought as they drove away, after a very charming evening.

Perhaps the fact that reforms of all sorts had been poured into her ears till her head was like a hive of bees, may account for this unpatriotic thought. Or it may be the pleasant effect of the healthful aspect of these English workers. Old or young, all seemed to have cheerful, well-balanced minds, in strong, healthy bodies. No one complained of her nerves, or let them unconsciously put a sharp edge to her tongue, give a blue tinge to the world, or sour the milk of human kindness in her heart. Less quick and bright, perhaps, than the ladies over the sea, but more womanly, and full of a quiet tenacity of purpose better than eloquence.

Miss Livy's tastes being of a peculiar sort, and pictures having palled upon her to such a degree that she couldn't even look at an ornamental sign-board without disgust, she often left her more artistic friends and went forth on excursions of her own. As she never used either map or guide book, it was a wonder how she found her way; and the infants were often on the point of sending for the city crier, if there is such a functionary, to find the lost duenna. But old Livy always turned up at last, mud to the eyes, tired out, and more deeply impressed than ever with the charms of London.

One day she set forth to hear Spurgeon. Being told that Lambeth was a wretched quarter of the city, that the Tabernacle was two or three miles away, and very difficult to enter when found, only added zest to the thing, and she departed, sure of finding adventures, if not Spurgeon.

If an omnibus conductor had not befriended her, she would probably have found herself at Hampstead or Chelsea, for London busses are as bewildering as London streets. Thanks to this amiable man, who evidently felt that the stranger in his gates needed all his care, the old lady safely reached the Elephant and Castle, and was dismissed with a moss rose-bud from the lips of her friend, a reassuring pat on the shoulder, and a paternal ''Ere yer are, my dear,' which unexpected attentions caused her to depart with speed.

There certainly was need of a Tabernacle in that quarter, for the poverty and wickedness were very dreadful. Boys not yet in their teens staggered by half-tipsy, or lounged at the doors of gin-shops. Bonnetless girls roamed about singing and squabbling. Forlorn babies played in the gutter, and men and women in every stage of raggedness and degradation marred the beauty of that fair Sunday morning.

Crowds were swarming into the Tabernacle: but, thanks to the order a friend had given her, Miss Livy was handed to a comfortable seat, with a haggard

Magdalen on one side and a palsy-stricken old man on the other. Staring about her, she saw an immense building with two galleries extending round three sides, and a double sort of platform behind and below the pulpit, which was a little pen lifted high that all might see and hear.

Every seat, aisle, window-ledge, step, and door-way, was packed with a strange congregation; all nations, all colours, all ages, and nearly all bearing the sad marks of poverty or sin. They all sung, cried out if anything affected or pleased them in the sermon, and listened with interest to the plain yet fervent words of the man who has gathered together this flock of black sheep and is so faithful a shepherd to them.

Every one knows how Spurgeon looks in pictures, but in the pulpit he reminded Livy of Martin Luther. A square, florid face, stout figure, a fine keen eye, and a natural, decided manner, very impressive. A strong, clear voice of much dramatic power, and a way of walking the pulpit like Father Taylor.

His sermon was on ‘Small Temptations,’ and he illustrated it by facts and examples taken from real life, pointing out several of his congregation, and calling them by name, which original proceeding seemed to find favour with his people. He used no notes, but talked rather than preached; and leaning over the railing, urged, argued, prayed, and sang with a hearty eloquence, very effective, and decidedly refreshing after High Church mummery abroad, and drowsy Unitarianism at home. Now and then he stopped to give directions for the comfort of his flock in a free and easy manner, which called up irresistible smiles on the faces of strangers.

‘Mrs. Flacker, you’d better take that child into the ante-room: he’s tired.’ ‘Come this way, friends: there’s plenty of room.’ ‘Open all the windows, Manning: it’s very warm.’ And when a sad sort of cry interrupted him, he looked down at an old woman shaking with epilepsy, and mildly remarked, ‘Don’t be troubled, brethren: our sister is subject to fits,’ and preached tranquilly on.

For two hours he held that great gathering, in spite of heat, discomfort, and other afflictions of the flesh, and ended by saying, in a paternal way, —

‘Now remember what I’ve said through the week, and next Sunday show me that I haven’t talked in vain.’

He read a list of meetings for every night in the week. One especially struck Livy, as it was for mothers to meet and talk over with him the best ways of teaching and training their children. Spurgeon evidently does not spare his own time and strength; and whatever his creed may be, he is a good Christian in loving his neighbour *better* than himself, and doing the work his hand finds to do with all his might.

‘That is a better church than most of those I enter where respectable saints have the best seats, and there is no place for sinners,' said Livy when she got home. 'Spurgeon's congregation preached more eloquently to me than he did. The Magdalen cried as if her heart was broken, and I am sure those tears washed some of her sins away. The feeble old man looked as if he had found a staff for his trembling hands to lay hold upon, and the forlorn souls all about me, for a time at least, laid down their burdens and found rest and comfort in their Father's house. It did me more good than the preaching of all the bishops in London, or the finest pageant at St. Paul's; and I am truly glad I went, though the saucy conductor did smirk at me over the rosebud.'

In contrast to this serious expedition, the old lady had a very jolly one not long afterward. A certain congenial Professor asked her one day what person, place, or thing in London she most desired to see.

Clasping her hands with the energy of deep emotion, she replied, —

'The home of the immortal Sairy Gamp. Long ago I made a vow, if I ever came to London I'd visit that spot. Let me keep my vow.'

'You shall!' responded the Professor with a responsive ardour, which caused Livy to dive into her waterproof without another word.

Away they went in a pouring rain, and what people thought of the damp but enthusiastic couple who pervaded the city that day I can't say; I only know a merrier pair of pilgrims never visited those grimy shrines. They met several old friends, and passed several familiar spots by the way. Major Bagstock and Cousin Phenix stared at them from a club-house window. Tigg Montague's cab dashed by them in Regent Street, more gorgeous than ever. The brothers Cheeryble went trotting cityward arm in arm, with a smile and ha'penny for all the beggars they met; and the Micawber family passed them in a bus, going, I suppose, to accompany the blighted Wilkins to gaol.

In a certain grimly genteel street they paused to stare up at a row of grimly respectable houses; for, though the name wasn't on any of the doors, they were sure Mr. Dombey still lived there. A rough dog lay on one of the doorsteps, and a curtain fluttered at an open upper window. Poor Di was growling in his sleep, and above there little Paul was watching for the golden water on the wall, while faithful Florence sung to him, and Susan Nipper put away derisive sniffs and winks in closets and behind doors for the benefit of 'them Pipchinses.'

Coming to a poorer part of the city, they met Tiny Tim tapping along on his little crutch, passed Toby Veck at a windy street-corner, and saw all the little Tetterbys playing in the mud.

'Come down this street, and take a glimpse at St. Giles's, the worst part of London,' said the Professor; and, following, Livy saw misery enough in five minutes to make her heart ache for the day. A policeman kept near them, saying it wasn’t safe to go far there alone.

Vice, poverty, dirt, and suffering reigned supreme within a stone’s throw of one of the great thoroughfares, and made Alsatia dangerous ground for respectable feet. Here, too, they saw familiar phantoms: poor Jo, perpetually moving on; and little Oliver led by Nancy, with a shawl over her head and a black eye; Bill Sykes, lounging in a doorway, looking more ruffianly than ever; and the Artful Dodger, who kept his eye on them as two hopeful ‘plants’ with profitable pockets ready for him.

They soon had enough of this, and hurried on along High Holborn, till they came to Kingsgate Street, so like the description that I am sure Dickens must have been there and taken notes. They knew the house in a moment: there were the two dingy windows over the bird-shop; the checked curtains were drawn, but of course the bottomless bandboxes, the wooden pippins, green umbrella, and portrait of Miss Harris were all behind them. It seemed so real that they quite expected to see a red, snuffy old face appear, and to hear a drowsy voice exclaim: ‘Drat that bell: I’m a coming. Don’t tell me it’s Mrs. Wilkins, without even a pincushion prepared.’

While Livy stood gazing in silent satisfaction (merely regretting that the name on the door was Pendergast, not Sweedle-pipes), the Professor turned to a woman, and asked with admirable gravity, ‘Can you tell me where Mrs. Gamp lives?’

‘What’s her business?’ demanded the matron, with interest.

‘A nurse, ma’am.’

‘Is she a little fat woman?’

‘Fat, decidedly, and old,’ returned the Professor, without a smile on his somewhat cherubic countenance.

‘Well, she lives No. 5, round the corner.’

On receiving this unexpected reply, they looked at one another in comic dismay; but would certainly have gone to No. 5, and taken a look at the modern Sairy, if the woman hadn’t called out as they moved on —

‘I b’lieve that nuss’s name is Britiain, not Gamp; but you can ask.’

Murmuring a hasty ‘thank you,’ they fled precipitately round the corner, and there enjoyed a glorious laugh under an umbrella, to the great amazement of all beholders.

Being on a Dickens pilgrimage, they went to Furnival’s Inn, where he wrote ‘Pickwick’ in a three-story room, and read it to the old porter. The same old porter told them all about it, and quite revelled in the remembrance. It did one’s heart good to see the stiff, dried-up old fellow thaw and glow with the recollection of the handsome young man who was kind to him long ago, before the world had found him out.

‘Did you think the book would be famous when he read it to you in 1834, as you say?’ asked the Professor, beaming at him in a way that would have melted the heart of the stiff-tailed lion of the Northumberlands, if he’d possessed such an organ.

‘O dear, yes, sir; I felt sure it would be summat good, it made me laugh so. *He* didn’t think much of it; but I know a good thing when I see it;’ and the old man gave an important nod, as if all the credit of the blessed ‘Pickwick’ belonged to him. ‘He married Miss Hogarth while livin’ here; and you can see the room, if you like,’ he added, with a burst of hospitality, as the almighty sixpence touched his palm.

Up they went, over the worn stairs; and, finding the door locked, solemnly touched the brass knob, read the name ‘Ed Peck’ on the plate, and wiped their feet on a very dirty mat. It was ridiculous, of course; but hero-worship is not the worst of modern follies, and when one’s hero has won from the world some of its heartiest smiles and tears, one may be forgiven for a little sentiment in a dark entry.

Next they went to the Saracen’s Head, where Mr. Squeers stopped when in London. The odd old place looked as if it hadn’t changed a particle. There was the wooden gallery outside, where the chamber-maids stood to see the coach off; the archway under which poor Nicholas drove that cold morning; the office, or bar, where the miserable little boys shivered while they took alternate sips out of one mug, and bolted hunches of bread and butter as Squeers ‘nagged’ them in private and talked to them like a father in public. Livy was tempted to bring away a little porter-pot hanging outside the door, as a trophy; but fearing Squeers’s squint eye was upon her, she refrained, and took a muddy pebble instead.

They took a peep at the Temple and its garden. The fountain was not playing, but it looked very pleasant, nevertheless; and as they stood there the sun came out, as if anxious that they should see it at its best. It was all very well to know that Shakespeare’s ‘Twelfth Night’ was played in Middle Temple Hall, that the York and Lancaster roses grew here, that Dr. Johnson lived No. 1 Inner Temple Lane, and that Goldsmith died No. 2 Brick Court, Middle Temple; these actual events and people seemed far less real than the scenes between Pendennis and Fanny, John Westlock and little Ruth Pinch. For their sakes Livy went to see the place; and for their sakes she still remembers that green spot in the heart of London, with the June sunshine falling on it as it fell that day.

The pilgrimage ended with a breathless climb up the Monument, whence they got a fine view of London, and better still of Todgerses. Livy found the house by instinct; and saw Cherry Pecksniff, now a sharp-nosed old woman, sitting at the back window. A gaunt, anxious-looking lady, in a massive bonnet, crossed the yard, with a basket in her hand; and the Professor said at once, ‘That’s Mrs. Todgers, and the amount of gravy single gentlemen eat is still weighing heavy on her mind.’ As if to make the thing quite perfect, they discovered fitful glimpses of a tousled-looking boy, cleaning knives or boots, in a cellar-kitchen; and all the lawyers in London couldn’t have argued them out of their firm belief that it was young Bailey, undergoing his daily torment in company with the black beetles and the mouldy bottles.

That nothing might be wanting to finish off the rainy-day ramble in an appropriate manner, when Livy’s companion asked what she’d have for lunch, she boldly replied, —

‘Weal pie and a pot of porter.’

As she was not fond of either, it was a sure proof of the sincerity of her regard for the persons who have made them immortal. They went into an eating-house, and ordered the lunch, finding themselves objects of interest to the other guests. But, though a walking doormat in point of mud, and somewhat flushed and excited by the hustling, climbing, and adoring, it is certain there wasn’t a happier spinster in this ‘Piljin Projess of a wale,’ than the one who partook of ‘weal pie’ in memory of Sam Weller, and drank ‘a modest quencher’ to the health of Dick Swiveller at the end of that delightful Dickens day.

Much might be written about the domestic pleasures of English people, but as the compiler of this interesting work believes in the sacredness of private life, and has a holy horror of the dreadful people who outrage hospitality by basely reporting all they have seen and heard, she will practise what she preaches, and firmly resist the temptation to describe the delights of country strolls with poets, cosey five-o’clock teas in famous drawing-rooms, and interviews with persons whose names are household words.

This virtuous reticence leaves the best untold, and brings the story of two of our travellers to a speedy end. Matilda decided to remain and study art, spending her days copying Turner at the National Gallery, and her evenings in the society of the eight agreeable gentlemen who adorned the house where she abode.

Amanda hurried home with friends to enjoy a festive summer among the verdant plains of Cape Cod. With deep regret did her mates bid her adieu, and nothing but the certainty of soon embracing her again would have reconciled Livy to the parting; for in Amanda she had found that rare and precious treasure, a friend.

‘Addio, my beloved Granny; take care of your dear bones and come home soon,’ said Amanda, in the little back entry, while her luggage was being precipitated downstairs.

‘Heaven bless and keep you safe, my own Possum. I shall not stay long because I can’t possibly get on without you,’ moaned Livy, clinging to the departing treasure as Diogenes might have clung to his honest man, if he ever found him; for, with better luck than the old philosopher, Livy had searched long years for a friend to her mind, and got one at last.

‘Don’t be sentimental, girls’ said Matilda, with tears in her eyes, as she hugged her Mandy, and bore her to the cab.

‘Rome and Raphael for ever!’ cried Amanda, as a cheerful parting salute.

‘London and Turner!’ shouted Matilda with her answering war-cry.

‘Boston and Emerson!’ sobbed Lavinia, true to her idols even in the deepest woe.

Then three damp pocket-handkerchiefs waved wildly till the dingy cab with the dear Egyptian nose at the window, and the little bath-pan clattering frantically up aloft, vanished round the corner, leaving a void behind that all Europe could not fill.

A few weeks later Livy followed, leaving Mat to enjoy the liberty with which American girls may be trusted when they have a purpose or a profession to keep them steady. And so ended the travels of the trio, travels which had filled a year with valuable experiences, memorable days, and that culture which a larger knowledge of the world, our fellow-men, and ourselves gives to the fortunate souls to whom this pleasure is permitted.

One point was satisfactorily proved by the successful issue of this partnership; for, in spite of many prophecies to the contrary, three women, utterly unlike in every respect, had lived happily together for twelve long months, had travelled unprotected safely over land and sea, had experienced two revolutions, an earthquake, an eclipse, and a flood, yet met with no loss, no mishap, no quarrel, and no disappointment worth mentioning.

With this triumphant statement as a moral to our tale, we would respectfully advise all timid sisters now lingering doubtfully on the shore, to strap up their bundles in light marching order, and push boldly off. They will need no protector but their own courage, no guide but their own good sense and Yankee wit, and no interpreter, if that woman’s best gift, the tongue, has a little French polish on it.

Dear Amandas, Matildas, and Lavinias, why delay? Wait on no man, but take your little store and invest it in something far better than Paris finery, Geneva jewellery, or Roman relics. Bring home empty trunks, if you will, but heads full of new and larger ideas, hearts richer in the sympathy that makes the whole world kin, hands readier to help on the great work God gives humanity, and souls elevated by the wonders of art and the diviner miracles of Nature.

Leave *ennui* and discontent, frivolity and feebleness, among the ruins of the Old World, and bring home to the New the grace, the culture, and the health which will make American women what now they just fail of being, the bravest, brightest, happiest, and handsomest women in the world.

AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG VOLUME 3

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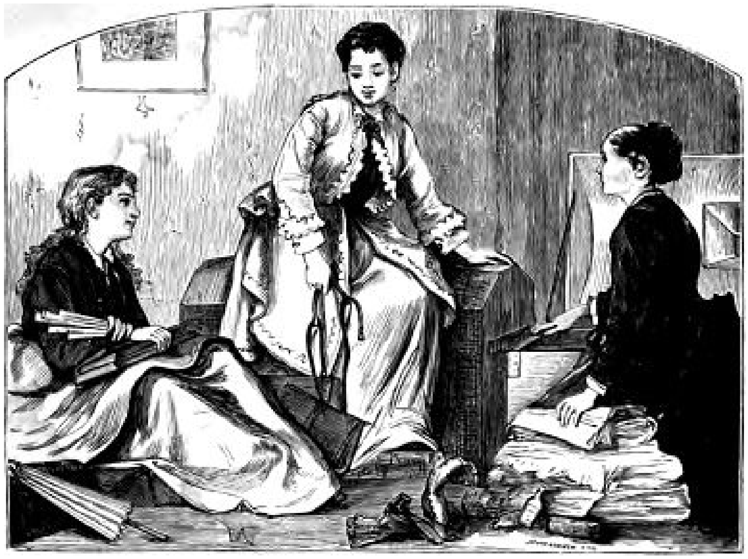

CUPID AND CHOW-CHOW

Mama began it by calling her rosy, dimpled, year-old baby Cupid, and as he grew up the name became more and more appropriate, for the pretty boy loved everyone, everyone loved him, and he made those about him feel fond of one another, like a regular little god of love. Especially beautiful and attractive did he look as he pranced on the doorsteps one afternoon while waiting the arrival of a little cousin. Our Cupid's costume was modernized out of regard to the prejudices of society, and instead of wings, bandage, bow and arrow, he was gorgeous to behold in small buckled shoes, purple silk hose, black velvet knickerbockers, and jacket with a lace collar, which, with his yellow hair cut straight across the forehead, and falling in long, curling love-locks behind, made him look like an old picture of a young cavalier.

It was impossible for the little sprig to help being a trifle vain when everyone praised his comeliness, and every mirror showed him a rosy face, with big blue eyes, smiling lips, white teeth, a cunning nose, and a dimple in the chin, not to mention the golden mane that hung about his neck.

Yes, Cupid was vain; and as he waited, he pranced, arranged the dear buckled shoes in the first position, practised his best bow, felt of his dimple, and smiled affably as he pictured to himself the pleasure and surprise of the little cousin when he embraced her in the ardent yet gentle way which made his greetings particularly agreeable to those who liked such tender demonstrations.

Cupid had made up his mind to love Chow-chow very much, both because she was his cousin, and because she must be interesting if all papa's stories of her were true. Her very name was pleasing to him, for it suggested Indian sweetmeats, though papa said it was given to her because she was such a mixture of sweet and sour that one never knew whether he would get his tongue bitten out by a hot bit of ginger, or find a candied plum melting in his mouth when he tried that little jar of Chow-chow.

"I know I shall like her, and of course she will like me lots 'cause everybody does," thought Cupid, settling his love-locks and surveying his purple legs like a contented young peacock.

Just then a carriage drove up the avenue, stopped at the foot of the steps, and out skipped a tall, brown man, a small, pale lady, and a child, who whisked away to the pond so rapidly that no one could see what she was like. A great kissing and hand-shaking went on between the papas and the mammas, and Cupid came in for a large share, but did not enjoy it as much as usual, for the little girl had fled and he must get at her. So the instant Aunt Susan let him go he ran after the truant, quite panting with eagerness and all aglow with amiable intentions, for he was a hospitable little soul, and he loved to do the honors of his pleasant home like a gentleman. A little figure, dressed in a brown linen frock, with dusty boots below it, and above it a head of wild black hair, tied up with a large scarlet bow, stood by the pond throwing atones at the swans, who ruffled their feathers in stately anger at such treatment. Suddenly a pair of velvet arms embraced her, and half turning she looked up into a rosy, smiling face, with two red lips suggestively puckered for a hearty kiss.

Chow-chow's black eyes sparkled, and her little brown face flushed red as her ribbon as she tried to push the boy away with a shrill scream.

"Don't be frightened. I'm Cupid. I must kiss you. I truly must. I always do when people come, and I like you very much."

With this soothing remark, the velvet arm pressed her firmly, and the lips gave her several soft kisses, which owing to her struggles, lit upon her nose, chin, top-knot, and ear; for, having begun, Cupid did not know when to leave off.

But Chow-chow's wrath was great, her vengeance swift, and getting one hand free she flung the gravel it held full in the flushed and smiling face of this bold boy who had dared kiss her without leave. Poor Cupid fell back blinded and heartbroken at such a return for his warm welcome, and while he stood trying to clear his smarting eyes, a fierce little voice said close-by,-

"Does it hurt?"

"Oh! Dreadfully!"

"I'm glad of it."

"Then you don't love me?"

"I hate you!"

"I don't see why."

"I don't like to be hugged and kissed. I don't let anybody but papa and mamma do it, ever-so, now!"

"But I'm your cousin, and you must love me. Won't you please?" besought Cupid, with one eye open and a great tear on his nose.

"I'll see about it. I don't like crying boys," returned the heard-hearted damsel.

"Well, you made me; but I forgive you," and Cupid magnanimously put out his hand for a friendly shake. But Chow-chow was off like a startled deer, and vanished into the house, singing at the top of her voice a nursery rhyme to this effect,-

"And she bids you to come in,
With a dimple in her chin,

Billy boy, Billy boy”

When Cupid, with red eyes and a sad countenance, made his appearance, he found Chow-chow on her father’s knee eating cake, while the elders talked. She had told the story, and now from the safe stronghold of papa’s arms condescended to smile upon the conquered youth.

Cupid went to mamma, and in one long whisper told his woes; then sat upon the cushion at her feet, and soon forgot them all in the mingled joys of eating macaroons and giving Chow-chow smile for smile across the hearth-rug.

“I predict we shall be much amused and edified by the progress of the friendship just begun,” said Cupid’s papa, a quiet man, who loved children and observed them with affectionate interest.

“And I predict a hard time of it for your young man, if he attempts to tame my strong-minded little woman here. Her mother’s ideas are peculiar, and she wants to bring Chow-chow up according to the new lights, - with contempt for dress and all frivolous pursuits; to make her hardy, independent, and quite above caring for such trifles as love, domestic life, or the feminine accomplishments we used to find so charming.”

As Chow-chow’s papa spoke, he looked from the child in her ugly gray frock, thick boots, and mop of hair tied up in a style neither pretty nor becoming, to his wife in her plain dress with her knob of hair, decided mouth, sarcastic nose, and restless eyes that seemed always on the watch to find some new wrong and protest against it.

“Now, George, how can you misrepresent my views and principles so? But it’s no use trying to convince or out-talk you. We never get a chance, and our only hope is to bring up our girls so that they may not be put down as we are,” returned Mrs. Susan, with a decided air.

“Show us how you are going to defend your sex and conquer ours, Chow-chow; give us your views generally. Now, then, who is in favor of the Elective Franchise?” said Uncle George, with a twinkle of the eye.

Up went Aunt Susan’s hand, and to the great amusement of all up went Chow-chow’s also and, scrambling to her feet on papa’s knee, she burst into a harangue which convulsed her hearers, for in it the child’s voice made queer work with the long words, and the red bow wagged belligerently as she laid down the law with energy, and defined her views, closing with a stamp of her foot”‘This is our platform: Free speech, free love, free-soil, free every thing; anti Woman’s Puckerage for ever!”

Even Aunt Susan had to laugh at that burst, for it was delivered with such vigor that the speaker would have fallen on her nose if she had not been sustained by a strong arm.

Cupid laughed because the rest did, and then turned his big eyes full of wonder on his mother, asking what it all meant.

"Only fun, my dear."

"Now, Ellen, that's very wrong. Why don't you explain this great subject to him, and prepare him to take a nobler part in the coming struggle than those who have come before him have done?" said Mrs. Susan, with a stern look at her husband, who was petting the little daughter, who evidently loved him best.

"I don't care to disturb his happy childhood with quarrels beyond his comprehension. I shall teach him to be as good and just a man as his father, and feel quite sure that no woman will suffer wrong at his hands," returned Mrs. Ellen, smiling at Cupid's papa, who nodded back as if they quite understood one another.

"We never did agree and we never shall so I will say no more; but we shall see what a good effect my girl's strength of character will have upon your boy, who has been petted and spoiled by too much tenderness."

So Aunt Susan settled the matter; and as the days went on, the elder people fell into the way of observing how the little pair got on together and were much amused by the vicissitudes of that nursery romance.

In the beginning Chow-chow rode over Cupid rough-shod quite trampled upon him in fact; and he bore it, because he wanted her to like him, and had been taught that the utmost courtesy was due a guest. But when he got no reward for his long-suffering patience he was sometimes tempted to rebel, and probably would have done so if he had not had mamma to comfort and sustain him. Chow-chow was very quick at spying out the weaknesses of her friends and alarmingly frank in proclaiming her discoveries; so poor Cupid's little faults were seen and proclaimed very soon and life made a burden to him, until he found out the best way of silencing his tormentor was by mending the faults.

"My papa says you are a dandy-prat, and you are," said Chow-chow, one day when the desire to improve her race was very strong upon her.

"What is a dandy prat?" asked Cupid, looking troubled at the new accusation.

"I asked him, and he said a vain fellow; and you are vain,-so now!"

"Am I?" and Cupid stopped to think it over.

"Yes; you're horrid vain of your hair, and your velvet clothes, and the dimple in your chin. I know it 'cause you always look in the glass when you're dressed up, and keep feeling of that ugly hole in your chin, and I see you brush your hair ever so much." Poor Cupid colored up with shame, and turned his back to the mirror, as the sharp-tongued young monitor went on:- "My mamma said if you were her boy she'd cut off your curls, put you in a plain suit, and stick some court-plaster over that place till you forgot all about it."

Chow-chow expected an explosion of grief or anger after that last slap; but to her amazement the boy walked out of the room without a word. Going up to his mother as she sat busy with a letter, he asked in a very earnest voice,-

"Mamma, am I vain?"

"I'm afraid you are a little, my dear," answered mamma, deep in her letter.

With a sad but resolute face, Cupid went back to Chow-chow, bearing a pair of shears in one hand and a bit of court-plaster in the other.

"You may cut my hair off, if you want to. I ain't going to be a dandy-prat anymore," he said, offering the fatal shears with the calmness of a hero.

Chow-chow was much surprised, but charmed with the idea of shearing this meek sheep, so she snipped and slashed until the golden locks lay shining on the floor, and Cupid's head looked as if rats had been gnawing on his hair.

"Do you like me better now?" he asked, looking in her eyes as his only mirror, and seeing there the most approving glance they had ever vouchsafed him.

"Yes, I do; girl-boys are hateful."

He might have retorted, "So are boy-girls," but he was a gentleman, so he only smiled and held up his chin for her to cover the offending dimple, which she did with half a square of black plaster.

"I shall never wear my velvet clothes any more unless mamma makes me, and I don't think she will when I tell her about it, 'cause she likes to have me cure my faults," said Cupid when the sacrifice was complete, and even stern Chow-chow was touched by the sweetness with which he bore the rebuke, the courage with which he began the atonement for his little folly. When he appeared at dinner, great was the out-cry; and when the story was told, great was the effect produced. Aunt Susan said with satisfaction,-

"You see what an excellent effect my girl's Spartan training has on her, and how fine her influence is on your effeminate boy."

Uncle George laughed heartily, but whispered something to Chow-chow that made her look ashamed and cast repentant glances at her victim. Cupid's papa shook hands with the boy and said, smiling, "I am rather proud of my 'dandy-prat,' after all."

But mamma grieved for the lost glory of her little Absalom, and found it hard to pardon naughty Chow-chow, until Cupid looked up at her with a grave, clear look which even the big patch could not spoil, and said manfully,-

"You know, I was vain, mamma, but I won't be any more, and you'll be glad, because you love me better than my hair, don't you?"

Then she hugged the cropped head close, and kissed the hidden dimple without a word of reproach; but she laid the yellow locks away as if she did love them after all, and often followed the little lad in the rough gray suit, as if his sacrifice had only made him more beautiful in her eyes.

Chow-chow was quite affable for some days after this prank, and treated her slave with more gentleness, evidently feeling that, though belonging to an inferior race, he deserved a trifle of regard for his obedience to her teachings. But her love of power grew by what it fed on and soon brought fresh woe to faithful Cupid, who adored her, though she frowned upon his little passion and gave him no hope.

"You are a 'fraid-cat," asserted her majesty, one afternoon as they played in the stable, and Cupid declined to be kicked by the horse Chow-chow was teasing.

"No, I ain't; but I don't like to be hurt, and it's wrong to fret Charley, and I won't poke him with my hoe."

"Well, it isn't wrong to turn this thing, but you don't dare to put your finger on that wheel and let me pinch it a little bit," added Chow-chow, pointing to some sort of hay-cutting machine that stood nearby.

"What for?" asked Cupid, who did object to being hurt in any way.

"To show you ain't a 'fraid cat. I know you are. I'm not, see there," and Chow-chow gave her own finger a very gentle squeeze.

"I can bear it harder than that," and devoted Cupid laid his plump finger between two wheels, bent on proving his courage at all costs.

Chow-chow gave a brisk turn to the handle, slipped in doing so, and brought the whole weight of the cruel cogs on the tender little finger, crushing the top quite flat. Blood flowed, Chow-chow stopped aghast; and Cupid, with one cry of pain, caught and reversed the handle, drew out the poor finger, walked unsteadily in to mamma, saying, with dizzy eyes and white lips, "She didn't mean to do it," and then fainted quite away in a little heap at her feet.

The doctor came flying, shook his head over the wound, and drew out a case of dreadful instruments that made even strong-minded Aunt Susan turn away her head, and bound up the little hand that might never be whole and strong again. Chow-chow stood by quite white and still until it was all over and Cupid asleep in his mother a arms; then she dived under the sofa and sobbed there, refusing to be comforted until her father came home. What that misguided man said to her no one ever knew, but when Cupid was propped up on the couch at tea-time, Chow-chow begged piteously to be allowed to feed him.

The be wounded hero, with his arm in a sling, permitted her to minister to him; and she did it so gently, so patiently, that her father said low to Mrs. Ellen,-

"I have hopes of her yet, for all the woman is not taken out of her, in spite of the new lights."

When they parted for the evening, Cupid, who had often sued for a good-night kiss and sued in vain, was charmed to see the red top-knot bending over him, and to hear Chow-chow whisper, with a penitent kiss, “I truly didn’t mean to, Coopy.”

The well arm held her fast as the martyr whispered back, “Just say I ain’t a ‘fraid-cat, and I don’t mind smashing my finger.”

Chow-chow said it that night and thought it next day and for many following days, for each morning, when the doctor came to dress the “smashed” finger, she insisted on being by as a sort of penance. She forced herself to watch the bright instruments without shivering, she ran for warm water, she begged to spread the salve on the bandage, to hold the smelling-bottle, and to pick all the lint that was used. And while she performed these small labors of love, she learned a little lesson that did her more good than many of mamma’s lectures. For Cupid showed her the difference between the rash daring that runs foolish risks, and the steady courage that bears pain without complaint. Every day the same scene took place; Chow-chow would watch for and announce the doctor; would bustle out the salve-box, bandage, and basin, set the chair, and call Cupid from his book with a new gentleness in her voice.

The boy would answer at once, take his place, and submit the poor swollen hand to the ten minutes torture of little probes and scissors, caustic and bathing, without a word, a tear, or a sound of suffering. He only turned his head away, grew white about the lips, damp on the forehead, and when it was all over would lean against his mother for a minute, faint and still.

Then Chow-chow would press her bands together with a sigh of mingled pity, admiration, and remorse, and when the boy looked up to say stoutly, “It didn’t hurt very much,” she would put his sling on for him, and run before to settle the pillows, carry him the little glass of wine and water he was to take, and hover round him until he was quite himself again, when she would subside close by, and pick lint or hem sails while he read aloud to her from one of his dear books.

“It is a good lesson in surgery and nursing for her. I intend to have her study medicine if she shoes any fondness for it,” said Aunt Susan.

“It is a good lesson in true courage, and I am glad to have her learn it early,” added uncle George, who now called Cupid “trump” instead of a “dandy-prat.”

“It is a good lesson in loving and serving others for love’s sake, as all women must learn to do soon or late,” said gentle Mrs. Ellen.

“It is teaching them both how to bear and forbear, to teach and help, and comfort one another, and take the pains and pleasures of life as they should do together,” concluded Cupid’s papa, watching the little couple with the wise kind eyes that saw a pretty story in their daily lives.

Slowly the finger healed, and to every one's surprise was not much disfigured which Cupid insisted was entirely owing to Chow-chow's superior skill in spreading salve and picking lint. Before this time, however, Chow-chow, touched by his brave patience, his generous refusal to blame her for the mishap, and his faithful affection, had in a tender moment confessed to her little lover that she did "like him a great deal," and consented to go and live in the old swan-house on the island in the pond as soon as he was well enough.

But no sooner had she enraptured him by these promises than she dashed his joy by adding certain worldly conditions which she had heard discussed by her mamma and her friends.

"But we can't be married until we have a lot of money. Nobody does, and we must have ever so much to buy things with."

"Yes, but papa said he'd give us some little furniture to put in our house, and mamma will let us have as much cake and milk-tea as we want, and I shall be very fond of you, and what's the use of money?" asked the enamoured Cupid, who believed in love in a cottage, or swan-house rather.

"I shan't marry a poor boy, so now!" was the mercenary Chow-chow's decision.

"Well, I'll see how much I've got; but I should think you would like me just as well without," and Cupid went away to inspect his property with as much anxiety as any man preparing for matrimony.

But Cupid's finances were in a bad state, for he spent his pocket-money as fast as he got it, and had lavished gifts upon his sweetheart with princely prodigality. So he punched a hole in his savings-bank and counted his small hoard, much afflicted to find it only amounted to seventy-eight cents, and a button put in for fun. Bent on winning his mistress no sacrifice seemed too great, so he sold his livestock, consisting of one lame hen, a rabbit, and a choice collection of caterpillars. But though he drove sharp bargains, these sales only brought him in a dollar or two. Then he went about among his friends, and begged and borrowed small sums, telling no one his secret lest they should laugh at him, but pleading for a temporary accommodation so earnestly and prettily that no one could refuse.

When he had strained every nerve and tried every wile, he counted up his gains and found that he had four dollars and a half. That seemed a fortune to the innocent; and, getting it all in bright pennies, he placed it in a new red purse, and with pardonable pride laid his offering at Chow-chow's feet.

But alas for love's labor lost! The cruel fair crushed all his hopes by saying coldly,-

"That isn't half enough. We ought to have ten dollars, and I won't like you until you get it."

"O Chow-chow! I tried so hard; do play it's enough," pleaded poor Cupid.

"No, I shan't. I don't care much for the old swan-house now, and you ain't half so pretty as you used to be."

"You made me cut my hair off, and now you don't love me 'cause I'm ugly," cried the afflicted little swain, indignant at such injustice.

But Chow-chow was in a naughty mood, so she swung on the gate, and would not relent in spite of prayers and blandishments.

"I'll get some more money somehow, if you will wait. Will you, please?"

"I'll see 'bout it."

And with that awful uncertainty weighing upon his soul, poor Cupid went away to wrestle with circumstances. Feeling that matters had now reached a serious point, he confided his anxieties to mamma; and she, finding that it was impossible to laugh or reason him out of his untimely passion, comforted him by promising to buy at high prices all the nose-gays he could gather out of his own little garden.

"But it will take a long time to make ten dollars that way. Don't you think Chow-chow might come now, when it is all warm and pleasant, and not stop until summer is gone, and no birds and flowers and nice things to play with? It's so hard to wait," sighed Cupid, holding his cropped head in his hands, and looking the image of childish despair.

"So it is, and I think Chow-chow is a little goose not to go at once and enjoy young love's dream without wasting precious time trying to make money. Tell her papa said so, and he ought to know," added Uncle George, under his breath, for he had tried it, and found that it did not work well.

Cupid did tell her, but little madam had got the whim into her perverse head and the more she was urged to give in, the more decided she grew. So Cupid accepted his fate like a man, and delved away in his garden, watering his pinks, weeding his mignonette, and begging his roses to bloom as fast and fair as they could, so that he might be happy before the summer was gone. Rather a pathetic little lover, mamma thought, as she watched him tugging away with the lame hand, or saw him come beaming in with his posies to receive the precious money that was to buy a return for his loyal love.

Tender-hearted, Mrs. Ellen tried to soften Chow-chow and teach her sundry feminine arts against the time she went to housekeeping on the island, for Mrs. Susan was so busy hearing lectures, reading reports, and attending to the education of other people's children that her own ran wild. In her good moods, Chow-chow took kindly to the new lessons, and began to hem a table-cloth for the domestic board at which she was to preside; also swept and dusted now and then, and once cooked a remarkable mess, which she called “Coopy’s favorite pudding,” and intended to surprise him with it soon after the wedding. But these virtuous efforts soon flagged, the table-cloth was not finished, the duster was converted into a fly-killer, and her dolls lay unheeded in corners after a few attempts at dressing and nursing had ended in ennui.

How long matters would have gone on in this unsatisfactory way no one knows; but a rainy day came, and the experiences it gave the little pair brought things to a crisis.

The morning was devoted to pasting pictures and playing horse all over the house, with frequent pauses for refreshment and an occasional squabble. After dinner, as the mammas sat sewing and the papas talking or reading in one room, the children played in the other, quite unconscious that they were affording both amusement and instruction to their elders.

“Let’s play house,” suggested Cupid, who was of a domestic turn, and thought a little rehearsal would not be amiss.

“Well, I will,” consented Chow-chow, who was rather subdued by the violent exercises of the morning.

So a palatial mansion was made of chairs, the dolls’ furniture arranged, the stores laid in, and housekeeping begun.

“Now, you must go off to your business while I tend to my work,” said Chow-chow, after they had breakfasted off a seed-cake and sugar and water tea in the bosom of their family.

Cupid obediently put on papa’s hat, took a large book under his arm, and went away to look at pictures behind curtains, while Mrs. C bestirred herself at home in a most energetic manner, spanking her nine dolls until their cries rent the air, rattling her dishes with perilous activity, and going to market with the coal-hod for her purchases.

Mr. Cupid returned to dinner rather early, and was scolded for so doing, but pacified his spouse by praising her dessert,-a sandwich of sliced apple, bread, and salt, which he ate like a martyr.

A ride on the rocking-horse with his entire family about him filled the soul of Mr. Cupid with joy, though the trip was rendered a little fatiguing by his having to dismount frequently to pick up the various darlings as they fell out of his pockets or their mother’s arms as she sat behind him on a .

“Isn’t this beautiful?” he asked, as they swung to and fro,-Mrs. Cupid leaning her head on his shoulder, and dear little Claribel Maud peeping out of his breast-pocket, while little Walter Hornblower and Rosie Ruth, the twins, sat up between the horse’s ears, their china faces beaming in a way to fill a father’s heart with pride.

"It will be much nicer if the horse runs away and we all go smash. I'll pull out his tail, then he'll rear, and we must tumble off," proposed the restless Mrs. C., whose dramatic soul delighted in tragic adventures.

So the little papa's happy moment was speedily banished as he dutifully precipitated himself and blooming family upon the floor, to be gathered up and doctored with chalk and ink, and plasters of paper stuck all over their faces.

When this excitement subsided, it was evening, and Mrs. Cupid bundled her children off to bed, saying,-

"Now, you must go to your club, and I am going to my lecture."

"But I thought you'd sew now and let me read to you, and have our little candles burn, and be all cosey, like papa and mamma," answered Cupid, who already felt the discomfort of a strong-minded wife.

"My papa and mamma don't do so. He always goes to the club, and smokes and reads papers and plays chess, and mamma goes to Woman's Puckerage meetings,-so I must."

"Let me go, too; I never saw a Puckerage lecture, and I'd like to," said Cupid, who felt that a walk arm-in-arm with his idol would make any sort of meeting endurable.

"No, you can't! Papa never goes; he says they are all gabble and nonsense, and mamma says his club is all smoke and slang, and the never go together."

Chow-chow locked the door, and the little pair went their separate ways, while the older pair in the other room laughed at the joke, yet felt that Cupid's plan was the best, and wondered how Ellen and her husband managed to get on so well.

Chow-chow's lecture did not seem to be very interesting, for she was soon at home again. But Mr. Cupid, after smoking a lamp-lighter with his feet up, fell to reading a story that interested him, and forgot to go home until he finished it. Then, to his great surprise, he was told that it was morning, that he had been out all night, and couldn't have any breakfast. This ruffled him, and he told madam she was a bad wife, and he wouldn't love her if she did not instantly give him his share of the little pie presented by cook, as a bribe to keep them out of the kitchen.

Mrs. C. sternly refused, and locked up the pie, declaring that she hated housekeeping and wouldn't live with him anymore, which threat she made good by quitting the house, vowing not to speak to him again that day, but to play alone, free and happy.

The deserted husband sat down among his infants with despair in his soul, while the spirited wife, in an immense bonnet, pranced about the room, waving the key of the pie-closet and rejoicing in her freedom. Yes, it was truly pathetic to see poor Mr. Cupid’s efforts at housekeeping and baby-tending; for, feeling that they had a double claim upon him now, he tried to do his duty by his children. But he soon gave it up, piled them all into one bed, and covered them with a black cloth, saying mournfully, “I’ll play they all died of mumps, then I can sell the house and go away. I can’t bear to stay here when she is gone.”

The house was sold, the dead infants buried under the sofa, and then the forsaken man was a homeless wanderer. He tried in many ways to amuse himself. He travelled to China on the tailless horse, went to California in a balloon, and sailed around the world on a raft made of two chairs and the hearth-brush. But these wanderings always ended near the ruins of his home, and he always sat down for a moment to watch the erratic movements of his wife.

That sprightly lady fared better than he, for her inventive fancy kept her supplied with interesting plays, though a secret sense of remorse for her naughtiness weighed upon her spirits at times. She had a concert, and sang surprising medleys, with drum accompaniments. She rode five horses in a circus, and jumped over chairs and foot-stools in the most approved manner. She had a fair, a fire, and a shipwreck; hunted lions, fished for crocodiles, and played be a monkey in a style that would have charmed Darwin.

But somehow none of these festive games had their usual relish. There was no ardent admirer to applaud her music, no two-legged horse to help her circus with wild prancings and life-like neighs, no devoted friend and defender to save her from the perils of flood and fire, no comrade to hunt with her, no fellow-monkey to skip from perch to perch with social jabberings, as they cracked their cocoa-nuts among imaginary palms. All was dull and tiresome.

A strong sense of loneliness fell upon her, and for the first time she appreciated her faithful little friend. Then the pie weighed upon her conscience; there it was, wasting its sweetness in the closet, and no one ate it. She had not the face to devour it alone; she could not make up her mind to give it to Cupid; and after her fierce renunciation of him, how could she ask him to forgive her? Gradually her spirits declined, and about the time that the other wanderer got back from his last trip she sat down to consider her position.

Hearing no noise in the other room, Uncle George peeped in and saw the divided pair stting in opposite corners, looking askance at each other, evidently feeling that a wide gulf lay between them, and longing to cross it, yet not quite knowing how. A solemn and yet a comical sight, so Uncle George beckoned the others to come and look.

“My boy will give in first. See how beseechingly he looks at the little witch!” whispered Mrs. Ellen, laughing softly.

“No, he won’t; she hurt his feelings very much by leaving him, and he won’t relent until she goes back; then he’ll forgive and forget like a man,” said Cupid’s papa.

“I hope my girl will remain true to her principles,” began Aunt Susan.

“She’ll be a miserable baby if she does,” muttered Uncle George.

“I was going to say that, finding she has done wrong, I hope she will have the courage to say so, hard as it is, and so expiate her fault and try to do better,” added Aunt Susan, fast and low, with a soft look in her eyes, as she watched the little girl sitting alone, while so much honest affection was waiting for her close by, if pride would let her take it.

Somehow Uncle George’s arm went round her waist when she said that, and he gave a quick nod, as if something pleased him very much.

“Shall I speak, and help the dears bridge over their little trouble?” asked Mrs. Ellen, pretending not to see the older children making up their differences behind her.

“No; let them work it out for themselves. I’m curious to see how they will manage,” said papa, hoping that his boy’s first little love would prosper in spite of thorns among the roses.

So they waited, and presently the affair was settled in a way no one expected. As if she could not bear the silence any longer, Chow-chow suddenly bustled up, saying to herself,-

“I haven’t played a lecture. I always like that, and here’s a nice place.”

Pulling out the drawers of a secretary like steps, she slowly mounted to the wide ledge atop, and began the droll preachment her father had taught her in ridicule of mamma’s hobby.

“Do stop her, George; it’s so absurd,” whispered Mrs. Susan.

“Glad you think so, my dear,” laughed Uncle George.

“There is some sense in it, and I have no doubt the real and true will come to pass when we women learn how far to go, and how to fit ourselves for the new duties by doing the old ones well,” said Mrs. Ellen, who found good in all things, and kept herself so womanly sweet and strong that no one could deny her any right she chose to claim.

“She is like so many of those who mount your hobby, Susan, and ride away into confusions of all sorts, leaving empty homes behind them. The happy, womanly women will have the most influence after all, and do the most to help the bitter, sour, discontented ones. They need help, God knows, and I shall be glad to lend a hand toward giving them their rights in all things.”

As papa spoke, Chow-chow, who had caught sight of the peeping faces, and was excited thereby, burst into a tremendous harangue, waving her hands, stamping her feet, and dancing about on her perch as if her wrongs had upset her wits. All of a suddent the whole secretary lurched forward, out fell the drawers, open flew the doors, down went Chow-chow with a screech, and the marble slab came sliding after, as if to silence the irrepressible little orator forever. How he did it no one knew, but before the top fell Cupid was under it, received it on his shoulders, and held it up with all his might, while Chow-chow scrambled out from the ruins with no hurt but a bump on the forehead. Papa had his boy out in a twinkling, and both mammas fell upon their rescued darlings with equal alarm and tenderness; for Mrs. Susan got her little girl in her arms before Mr. George could reach her, and Chow-chow clung there, sobbing away her fright and pain as if the maternal purring was a new and pleasant solace.

“I’ll never play that nasty old puckerage anymore,” she declared, feeling of the purple lump on her brow.

“Nor I either, in that way,” whispered her mamma, with a look that made Chow-chow ask curiously,-

“Why, did you hurt yourself too?”

“I am afraid I did.”

“Be sure that your platform is all right before you try again, Poppet, else it will let you down when you least expact it, and damage your best friends as well as yourself,” said Mr. George, setting up the fallen rostrum.

“I’m not going to have any platform; I’m going to be good and play with Coopy, if he’ll let me,” added the penitent Chow-chow, glancing with shy, wet eyes at Cupid, who stood near with a torn jacket and a bruise on the already wounded hand.

His only answer was to draw her out of her mother’s arms, embrace her warmly, and seat her beside him on the little bench he loved to share with her. This ready and eloquent forgiveness touched Chow-chow’s heart, and the lofty top-knot went down upon Cupid’s shoulder as if the little fortress lowered its colors in token of entire surrender. Cupid’s only sign of triumph was a gently pat on the wild, black head, and a nod towards the spectators as he said, smiling all over his chubby face,-

“Every thing is nice and happy now, and we don’t mind the bumps.”

“Let us sheer off, we are only in the way,” said Mr. George, and the elders retired, but found it impossible to resist occasional peeps at the little pair, as the reconciliation went on.

“O Coopy! I was so bad, I don’t think you can love me anymore,” began the repentant one with a sob.

“Oh yes I can; and just as soon as I get money enough, we’ll go and live in the swan-house, won’t we?” returned the faithful lover, making the most of this melting mood.

"I'll go right away tomorrow, I don't care about the money. I like the nice bright pennies, and we don't need much, and I've got my new saucepan to begin with," cried Chow-chow in a burst of generosity, for, like a true woman, though she demanded impossibilities at first, yet when her heart was won she asked nothing but love, and was content with a saucepan.

"O Goody! and I've got my drum," returned the enraptured Cupid, as ready as the immortal Tradles to go to housekeeping with a toasting fork and a bird-cage, or some such useful trifles.

"But I was bad about the pie," cried Chow-chow as her sins kept rising before her; and, burning to make atonement for this one, she ran to the closet, tore out the pie, and, thrusting it into Cupid's hands, said in a tone of heroic resolution, "There, you eat it all, and I won't taste a bit."

"No, you eat it all, I'd like to see you. I don't care for it, truly, 'cause I love you more than million pies," protested Cupid, offering back the treasure in a somewhat ruinous state after its various vicissitudes.

"Then give me a tiny bit, and you have the rest," said Chow-chow, bent on self-chastisement.

"The fairest way is to cut it 'zactly in halves, and each have a piece. Mamma says that's the right thing to do always." And Cupid, producing a jack-knive, proceeded to settle the matter with masculine justice.

So side by side they devoured the little bone of contention, chattering amicably about their plans; and as the last crumb vanished, Cupid said persuasively, as if the league was not quite perfect without that childish ceremony,-

"Now let's kiss and be friends, and never quarrel any more."

As the rosy mouths met in a kiss of peace, the sound was echoed from the other room, for Mr. George's eyes made the same proposal, and his wife answered it as tenderly as Chow-chow did Cupid. Not a word was said, for grown people do not "'fess" and forgive with the sweet frankness of children; but both felt that the future would be happier than the past, thanks to the lesson they had learned from the little romance of Cupid and Chow-chow.

HUCKLEBERRY.

COMING home late one night, my eye was caught by the sight of a spotted dog sitting under a lamp all alone, and, as I passed, I said to him, —

“Go home, little doggie I It is too late for you to be out, and you ‘11 get rheumatism if you stay there.”

Alas for the poor fellow I he had no home to go to; and, evidently feeling that I had invited him to share mine by a friendly remark, he came pattering afler us down the street, and when we reached our door stood wagging his tail, as if to say, —

“Thank you; yes, I should be most grateful if you’d allow me to He on your door-mat till morning.”

His handsome, wistihl eyes, and the insinuating wag of his thin tail, expressed this as plainly as any words could have done, and it grieved me much to see that I had awakened hopes whicli I coiild not fulfil I explained to him how it was; that this was not my house, and I really could not take him into my room; that there were five cats downstairs, and several old ladies upstairs; one snarly, fat poodle on the first floor; and half-a-dozen young men about the house, ready for mischief at all hours of the day or night. Such being the case, it was evidently no home for a strange doggie, so like a huckleberry pudding in appearance that I named him Huckleberry on the spot.

He seemed to understand it, for he stopped wagging and retired from the steps; but he was bitterly disappointed; and when I had gently closed the door, apologizing as I did so, he gave one disconsolate howl, and went to sit under the lamp again, as if that little circle of light made the dull November night less cold and lonely.

A day or two afterward, as I stood looking at the ruins of the great fire, a spotted dog lying on the edge of a smoking cellar attracted my atten« tion.

“Faithful fellow 1 he is still watching his master’s property, I dare say, though every thing is ashes. How beautifull that is! ‘ I thought to myself, and went a little nearer to enjoy the touching spectacle.

As I approached, doggie looked up, and I knew him at once by the queer black patch on his left eye, and he knew me, for he sat up and began to beat the ground with his tail by way of welcome.

“Why, Huckleberry, is it you? Was your master burned out? and don’t you know where he is gone?” I asked.

Now, I am very stupid about learning languages, and nearly died of German; but the language of animals I understand without any grammar or dictionary; and I defy any one to read it better than myself. So, when Huckleberry gave a bark, I knew it meant, “Yes, ma’am;” and when he came fawning about my very muddy boots, he added this touching remark as plainly as if he had said it in the most elegant English: —

“Dear woman, I ‘m homeless, friendless, and forlorn; pity me, and I will be a faithful servant to you, on the word of an honest, grateful dog!”

It was very hard to say no, but I tried to soften my refusal by offering him some nice little cakes which I was intending to give my boys that evening; for when they come home from college Saturday night, we always have a jubilee in honor of the class of ‘76, to which I belong.

Doggie evidently needed them more than the lads, and gobbled up the whole dozen with a rapidity that made me wish I had a beefsteak or two in my pocket. While he was finishing the last one, I slipped away, and devoutly hoped I should see the poor, dear thing no more, for it rent my heart to leave him out in the cold; yet what could I do with him in my one room?

A week or two passed, and I forgot my spotted friend in the absorbing task of getting Christmas presents ready. Every one else seemed to have forgotten him, too; for, late one snowy afternoon, as I hurried home, quite worn out with trying to shop among a mob of other women as busy and as impatient as myself, I saw a sight that made the tears come to my eyes in spite of the snow-flakes roosting on my lashes.

On the upper step of a church, close to the door, as if waiting for it to open to him, lay poor Huckleberry, dirty, thin, and evidently worn out with the hardships of his lot. Tired of asking for admittance at men’s doors, he had gone to God’s house, and no one had turned him away. If he had lain there all that stormy night, I think by morning he would have been safe in the little lower heaven which I am sure awaits the faithful, brave, and good among animals, when their long and often unacknowledged service is over in this world.

That mute reproach went to my heart, for now it seemed as if this small charity had been sent to me especially, and that I had neglected it till it was nearly too late. Huckleberry seemed to feel as if it was no use to appeal to human kindness any more, for he made no sign of recognition, and lay quite still, as if waiting till his dumb prayer for help was heard and answered by Him who sees the sparrow’s fall.

Up the steps I went, and, putting down my parcels, patted the head that seemed almost too tired to be lifted up, and with remorseful tenderness I said, —

“My poor dear, come home with me. I truly mean it now. Forgive me, and let me show you that in charitable Boston not even a dog need gtarvel”

He didn’t believe me. He was tired of false hopes, worn out with following people home to find the doors shut in his face, and seemed to have made up his mind to stay in the only refuge left him.

I wondered as I watched him if he had ever seen that door open, and, remembering the light, the waiTuth, the music, and the quiet figures moving in and out, had thought it was a better world, and so, when every other hope failed, came back to wait for a chance to creep in and lie humbly in some corner, feeling safe and happy.

I shall never know, for I had not time to ask about it, and he was too tired to talk. Feeling that my duty was very plainly to give poor doggie a lift, I coaxed him home with great difficulty, and he slowly followed, looking so incredulous and amazed that I felt bound to redeem the character of the human race in his eyes.

Once in my room, with a plate of cold meat before him and a warm rug placed at his disposal. Huckleberry gave in, believed, rejoiced, and was so grateful that he stopped now and then, even when bolting lumps of cold steak, to look at me and wag his tail with a whine of thanks.

Dear thing! how dirty, lean, and ugly he wael with one lame foot, a torn ear, and a bit of old rope round his neck where the collar should have been. Never mind; I loved him, and went on petting him with a reckless disregard of consequences and fleas. I had no more idea what I should do with him than if he had been an elephant; but remembering the blessed society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, I felt that I could fall back on them when all other hopes failed.

So, while Huckleberry lay on the. rug, roasting first one side and then the other, with his nose on a bone, just to make him feel sure it wasn’t all a dream, I sat staring at him and planning a future for him such as few dogs enjoy. He seemed to feel this, for he gurgled and grunted in his sleep, woke up now and then with a start, and stared back at me with eyes full of doggish loyalty as he whacked the floor with his grateful tail.

“One of our fellows shall take him!” I decided; and, having picked out the most tender-hearted boy among my large and choice collection, I wrote to this victim an alluring epistle, offering him a lovely carriage-dog whom I had been so fortunate as to find. Would he like to have the first look at him and become his owner free of cost?

This being finished and sent to the post, I ordered a big tub of hot water to be ready early in the morning for my dog’s bath, and heartily wished I could &.tten him up over night, as at present he was not an inviting animal.

Then I retired to my bed, leaving Huckleberry asleep on the rug. Bless my heart, how he did snore! and when a very loud one woke him up, he seemed to feel that it was necessary for him to come and put his cold nose on my face, or paw at the pil-low, till I flew up, thinking it was robbers. Then he would apologize in the most contrite manner, and explain that he only came to see if I was all right, and to express his thanks all over again.

After which he returned to his rug with a sigh of satisfaction, and fell asleep much quicker than I could.

In the morning he was escorted to the shed for his bath, to the great amusement of the servants, and the fierce indignation of the cats. All vq spit and glared from the various elevated refuges to which they had flown on his entrance; and one black kit made darts at him, looking like a little demon in her wrath.

Huckleberry behaved like a dog of good manners and temper, and, after vainly trying to appease the irate pussies, took no notice of them, being absorbed in his own afflictions.

He did not like th bath, but bore it like a hero» and let me scrub him till he was as clean as a very spotted bow-wow could be. He even submitted to the indignity of a little blanket pinned about his neck like an old woman, and trotted meekly upstairs after me, leaving the men and maids in fits of laughter, and the cats curling their whiskers with scorn at the whole proceeding.

Leaving my wash to dry, I flew out and bought a fine red collar for him; then I devoted the rest of my day to fussing over him, that he might be as presentable as possible.

Charley did not come till the next day, and the agonies I went through, meantime, with that blessed dog, “no mortal creeter knows,” as Mrs. Gamp would say.

I ‘m afraid I gave him too much meat, or else joy flew to his head and made him wild, for he devel- 8 D

oped such a flow of spirits that I felt as if I had an unchained whirlwind in my room. He bounced to the window every time a cart went by; growled at every dog he saw; barked at every one who entered the room; drank out of my pitcher; worried the rosettes off my slippers; upset my work-basket, the fire-irons, and two bottles in his artless play; scratched the paint off the door trying to get out, and, when he got to the yard, chased all the cats till they fled over the walls in every direction.

When exhausted with these little amusements, he would come and try to lick my face, put his paws in my lap, and languish at me with his fine eyes; and when I told him I couldn’t have it, he cast himself at my feet and squirmed rapturously.

He was a gi-eat plague, but I was fond of him, and when Charley came was sorry that he must leave me. But he had been on the rampage all that second night, for I put him in the hall to sleep, and he had scratched and howled at every door till I let him in to save him from the shower of boots hurled at him by the young gentlemen whose slumbers he had disturbed; so it was high time he went.

Charley laughed at him, but, when I had told the story, the good lad took pity on him and led him away after I had kissed and bade him be a good dog. He didn’t seem satisfied, but consented to go to please me, and trotted round the comer, looking so neat and respectable it did my heart good to see him.

“Now he is settled, and what a comfort that is I ‘* I said to myself as I restored my devastated home to order.

But he wasn’t: oh, dear, no; for in two days back he came, all his own naughty self, and I found him boldly erect upon the steps waiting for me. He had run away and come home to his first friend, sure of a welcome.

It was very flattering, but also inconvenient; so he was restored to his master after a scoldinc: and a patting which probably spoilt the effect of the lecture.

Three times did that dear deluded dog come back, and three times was he bundled home again. Then Charley shut him up in an old shed, and kept him there except when he led him out by a chain for an airing.

But Huckleberry’s grateful passion could not be restrained, and cost him his life in the end. He amused his leisure hours scratching and burrowing at the foundation stones of the shed wall, and, being loosely built, a big one fell on him in some way, hurting him so badly that there was no cure for his broken bones.

A note from Charley came to me, saying, “ If you want to say good-by to poor old Huckleberry, come out and do it, for IVe got to kill him, he is so hurt.”

Of course I went, and there I found him lying on a soft bed of hay, with his wounds bound up, and tender-hearted Charley watching over him. How glad he was to see his “ missis I” How hard he tried to come and meet me! and how satisfied he looked when I bent down to stroke him, and let him feebly lick my hand as much as he liked!

He could hardly breathe for pain, and his eyes were already dim, but his dear old tail wagged to the last; and when I had said the tenderest good-by I knew, he laid down his head with a sigh that seemed to say, —

“Now I ‘m content, and can die in peace. I ‘ve thanked her, and she is sorry for me, so it’s all right.

You may put me out of pain as soon as. you like. Master Charley; I ‘m ready.”

It was soon done. I heard a shot, saw my lad go into the garden with a pick-axe and a spade, and then I knew that doggie was ready for his grave. We wrapped him in a bit of cheerful red carpet, and when a bed had been delved out for him, we laid the little bundle in, covered it up, and left the winter snow to spread a soft white pall over poor Huckleberry’s last home.

NELLY’S HOSPITAL.

NELLY sat beside her mother picking lint; but •*” while her fingers flew, her eyes often looked wistfully out into the meadow, golden with buttercups, and bright with sunshine. Presently she said rather bashfully, but very earnestly, Mamma, I want to tell you a little plan I ‘ve made, if you ‘11 please not laugh.”

*’ I think I can safely promise that, my dear,” said her mother, putting down her work that she might listen quite respectfully.

Nelly looked pleased, and went on confidingly, “ Since brother Will came home with his lame foot, and I Ve helped you tend him, I ‘ve heard a great deal about hospitals, and liked it very much. Today I said I wanted to go and be a nurse, like Aunt Mercy; but Will laughed, and told me I ‘d better begin by nursing sick birds and butterflies and pussies before I tried to take care of men. I did not like to be made fan of, but I ‘ve been thinking that it would be very pleasant to have a little hospital all my own, and be a nurse in it, because, if I took pains, so many pretty creatures might be made well, perhaps. Could I, mamma?”

Her mother wanted to smile at the idea, but did not, for Nelly looked up with her heart and eyes so full of tender compassion, both for the unknown men for whom her little hands had done their best, and for the smaller sufferers nearer home, that she stroked the shining head, and answered readily: “Yes, Nelly, it will be a proper charity for such a young Samaritan, and you may learn much if you are in earnest. You must study how to feed and nurse your little patients, else your pity will do no good, and your hospital become a prison. 1 will help you, and Tony shall be your surgeon.”

“O mamma, how good you always are to me! Indeed, I am in truly earnest; I will learn, I will be kind, and may I go now and begin?”

“You may, but tell me first where will you have your hospital? “

“In my room, mamma; it is so snug and sunny, and I never should forget it there,” said Nelly.

Yon must not forget it anywhere. I think that plan will not do. How would you like to find caterpillars walking in your bed, to hear sick pussies mewing in the night, to have beetles clinging to your clothes, or see mice, bugs, and birds tumbling downstairs whenever the door was open? “ said her mother.

Nelly laughed at that, thought a minute, then clapped her hands, and cried: ‘‘ Let us have the old summer-house! My doves only use the upper part, and it would be so like Frank in the story-book. Please say yes again, mamma."

Her mother did say yes, and, snatching up her hat, Nelly ran to find Tony, the gardener's son, a pleasant lad of twelve, who was Nelly's favorite playmate. Tony pronounced the plan a "jolly'* one, and, leaving his work, followed his young mistress to the summer-house, for she could not wait one minute.

"What must we do first?" she asked, as they stood looking in at the dim, dusty room, full of garden tools, bags of seeds, old flower-pots, and watering-cans.

"Clear out the rubbish, miss," answered Tony.

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** Here it goes, then," and Nelly began bundling every thing out in such haste that she broke two flower-pots, scattered all the squash-seeds, and brought a pile of rakes and hoes clattering down about her ears.

"Just wait a bit, and let me take the lead, miss. You hand me things, I 'U pile 'em in the barrow and wheel 'em off to the bam; then it will save time, and be finished up tidy."

Nelly did as he advised, and very soon nothing but dust remained.

"What next?" she asked, not knowing in the least.

"I '11 sweep up, while you see if Polly can come and scrub the room out. It ought to be done before you stay here, let alone the patients."

"So it had," said Nelly, looking very wise all of a sudden. "Will says the wards — that means the rooms, Tony — are scrubbed every day or two, and kept very clean, and well venti — something — I

can't say it; but it means having a plenty of air come in. I can clean windows while Polly mops, and then we shall soon be done."

Away she ran, feeling very busy and important. 8»

Polly came, and very soon the room looked like another place. The four latticed windows were set wide open, so the sunshine came dancing through the vines that gi'ew outside, and curious roses peeped in to see what frolic was afoot. The walls shone white again, for not a spider dared to stay; the wide seat which encircled the room was dustless now, the floor as nice as willing hands could make it; and the south wind blew away all musty odors with its fraQ:rant breath.

"How fine it looks!" cried Nelly, dancing on the doorstep, lest a footprint should mar the still damp floor.

"I 'd almost like to fall sick for the sake of staying here," said Tony, admiringly. " Now, what sort of beds are you going to have, miss? "

"I suppose it won't do to put butterflies and toads and worms into beds like the real soldiers where Will was?" answered Nelly, looking anxious.

Tony could hardly help shouting at the idea; but rather than trouble his little mistress, he said very soberly: “I’m afraid they wouldn’t lay easy, not being used to it. Tucking up a butterfly would about kill him; the worms would be apt to get lost among the bedclothes; and the toads would tumble out the first thing.”

“I shall have to ask mamma about it. What will you do while I ‘m gone? “ said Nelly, unwilling that a moment should be lost.

*’ I ‘11 make frames for nettings to the window, else the doves will come in and eat up the sick people.”

“I think they will know that it is a hospital, and be too kind to hurt or frighten their neighbors,” began Nelly; but, as she spoke, a plump white dove walked in, looked about with its red-ringed eyes, and quietly pecked up a tiny bug that had just ventured out from the crack where it had taken refuge when the deluge came.

** Yes, we must have the nettings. I ‘11 ask mamma for some lace,” said Nelly, when she saw that; and, taking her pet dove on her shoulder, told it about her hospital as she went toward the house; for, loving all little creatures as she did, it grieved her to have any harm befall even the least or plainest of them. She had a sweet child-fancy that her playmates understood her language as she did theirs, and that birds, flowers, animals, and insects felt for her the same affection which she felt for them. Love al- ways makes friends, and nothing seemed to fear the gentle child; but welcomed her like a little sun who shone alike on all, and never suffered an eclipse.

She was gone some time, and when she came back her mind was full of new plans, one hand full of rushes, the other of books, while over her head floated the lace, and a bright green ribbon hung across her arm.

‘Mamma says that the best beds will be little baskets, boxes, cages, and any sort of thing that suits the patient; for each will need different care and food and medicine. I have not baskets enough; so, as I cannot have pretty white beds, I am going to braid pretty green nests for my patients, and, while I do it, mamma thought you ‘d read to me the pages she has marked, so that we may begin right.’*

“Yes, miss; I like that. But what is the ribbon for? “ asked Tony.

“Oh, that’s for you. Will says that if you are to be an army surgeon, you must have a green band on your arm; so I got this to tie on when we play hospital.”

Tony Jet her decorate the sleeve of his gray jacket, and, when the nettings were done, the welcome books were opened and enjoyed. It was a happy time, sitting in the sunshine, with leaves pleasantly astir all about them, doves cooing overhead, and flowers sweetly gossiping together through the summer afternoon. Nelly wove her smooth, green rushes, Tony pored over his pages, and both found something better than fairy legends in the family histories of insects, birds, and beasts. All manner of wonders appeared, and were explained to them, till Nelly felt as if a new world had been given her, so full of beauty, interest, and pleasure that she never could be tired of studying it. Many of these things were not strange to Tony, because, born among plants, he had grown up with them as if they were brothers and sisters, and the sturdy, brown-faced boy had learned many lessons which no poet or philosopher could have taught him, unless he had become as childlike as himself and studied from the same great book.

When the baskets were done, the marked pages all read, and the sun began to draw his rosy curtains round him before smiling “Good-night,” Nelly ranged the green beds’ round the room, Tooy put in the screens, and the hospital was ready The little nurse was so excited that she could hardly eat her supper, and directly afterwards ran up to tell Will how well she had succeeded with the first part of her enterprise. Now brother Will was a brave young oflScer, who had fought stoutly and done his duty like a man. But, when lying weak and wounded at home, the cheeiful courage which had led him safely through many dangers seemed to have deserted him, and he was oflen gloomy, sad, or fretful, because he longed to be at his post again, and time passed very slowly. This troubled his mother, and made Nelly wonder why he found lying in a pleasant room so much harder than fighting battles or mak* ing weary marches. Any thing that interested and amused him was very welcome, and when Nelly, climbing on the arm of his sofa, told her plans, mishaps, and successes, he laughed out more heartily than he had done for many a day, and his thin face began to twinkle with fun as it used to do so long ago. That pleased Nelly, and she chatted like any affectionate little magpie, till Will was really interested; for when one is ill, small things amuse.

‘Do you expect your patients to come to you, Nelly?” he asked.

* No, I shall go and look for them. I often see poor things suffering in the garden, and the woods, and always feel as if they ought to be taken care o as people are.”

‘ You won’t like to carry insane bugs, lame toads, and convulsive kittens in your hands, and they would not stay on a stretcher if you had one. You should have an ambulance, and be a branch of the Sanitary Commission,” said Will.

Nelly had often heard the words, but did not quite understand what they meant. So Will told her of that great and never-failing charity, to which thousands owe their lives; and the child listened with lips apart, eyes often full, and so much love and admiration in her heart that she could find no words in which to tell it. When her brother paused, she said earnestly: “Yes, I will be a Sanitary. This little cart of mine shall be my ambulance, and I ‘11 never let my water-barrels go empty, never drive too fast, or be rough with my poor passengers, like gome of the men you tell about. Does this look like an ambulance, Will? “

‘Not a bit; but it shall, if you and mamma like to help me. I want four long bits of cane, a square of wbite cloth, some pieces of thin wood, and the gum-pot,” said Will, sitting up to examine the little cart, feeling like a boy again, as he took out his knife and began to whittle.

Upstairs and downstairs ran Nelly till all necessary materials were collected, and almost breathlessly she watched her brother arch the canes over the cart, cover them with the cloth, and fit in an upper shelf of small compartments, each lined with cotton wool to serve as beds for wounded insects, lest they should hurt one another or jostle out. The lower part was left free for any larger creatures which Nelly might find. Among her toys she had a tiny cask which only needed a peg to be water-tight: this was filled and fitted in before, because, as the small sufferers needed no seats, there was no place for it behind, and, as Nelly was both horse and driver, it was more convenient in front. On each side of it stood a box of stores. In one were minute rollers, as bandages are called, a few bottles not yet filled, and a wee doll’s jar of cold-cream, because Nelly could not feel that her outfit was complete without a medicine-chest. The other box was foil of crumbs, bits of sugar, bird-seed, and grains of wheat and corn, lest any famished stranger shoald die for want of food before she got it home. Then raamma painted “ U. S. San. Com.” in bright letters on the cover, and Nelly received her charitable plaything with a long sigh of satisfaction.

“Nine o’clock already! Bless me, what a short evening this has been!” exclaimed Will, as Nelly came to give him her good-night kiss.

“And such a happy one,” she answered. “ Thank you very, very much, dear Will. I only wish my little ambulance was big enough for you to go in, — I ‘d so like to give you the first ride.”

“Nothing I should like better if it were possible, though I Ve a prejudice against ambulances in general. But, as I cannot ride, I ‘11 try and hop out to your hospital to-morrow, and see how you get on,” — which was a great deal for Captain Will to say, because he had been too listless to leave his sofa for several days.

That promise sent Nelly happily away to bed, only stopping to pop her head out of the window to see if it was likely to be a fair day to-morrow, and to tell Tony about the new plan as he passed below.

•* Where shall you go to look for your first load of sick folks, miss? “ he asked.

AU round the garden first, then through the grove, and home across the brook. Do you think I can find any patients so?” said Nelly.

“I know you wilL Good-night, miss,” and Tony walked away with a merry look on his face, that Nelly would not have underatood if she had seen it.

Up rose the sun bright and early, and up rose Nui*se Nelly almost as early and as bright. Breakfast was taken in a great hurry, and before the dew was ofT the grass this branch of the S. C. was all astir. Papa, mamma, big brother and baby sister, men and maids, all looked out to see the funny little ambulance depart, and nowhere in all the summer fields was there a happier child than Nelly, as she went smiling down the garden path, where tall flowers kissed her as she passed, and every blithe bird seemed singing a “Good speed.”

“How I wonder what I shall find first,” she thought, looking sharply on all sides as she went* Crickets chirped, grasshoppers leaped, ants worked busily at their subterranean houses, spiders spun shining webs from twig to twig, bees were coming for their bags of gold, and butterflies had just begun their holiday. A large white one alighted on the top of the ambulance, walked over the inscription as if spelling it letter by letter, then floated away from flower to flower, like one carrying the good news far and wide.

“Now every one will know about the hospital, and be glad to see me coming,’’ thought Nelly. And indeed it seemed so, for just then a blackbird, sitting on the garden wall, burst out with a song full of musical joy, Nelly’s kitten came running after to stare at the wagon and rub her soft side against it, a bright-eyed toad looked out from his cool bower among the lily-leaves, and at that minute Nelly found her first patient. In one of the dewy cobwebs hanging from a shrub near by, sat a fat black and yellow spider, watching a fly whose delicate wings were just caught in the net. The poor fly buzzed pitifully, and struggled so hard that the whole web shook; but the more he struggled, the more he entangled himself, and the fierce spider was preparing to descend that it might weave a shroud about its prey, when a little finger broke the threads and lifted the fly safely into the palm of a hand, where he lay faintly humming his thanks.

Nell5 had heard much about contrabands, knew who they were, and was very much interested in them; so, when she freed the poor black fly, she played he was her contraband,’and felt glad that her first patient was one that needed help so much. Carefully brushing away as much of the web as she could, she left small Pompey, as she named him, to free his own legs, lest her clumsy fingers should hurt him; then she laid him in one of the soft beds with a grain or two of sugar if he needed refreshment, and bade him rest and recover from his fright, remembering that he was at liberty to fly away whenever he liked, because she had no wish to make a slave of him.

Feeling very happy over this new friend, Nelly went on singing softly as she walked, and presently she found a pretty caterpillar dressed in brown fur, although the day was warm. He lay so still she thought him dead, till he rolled himself into a ball as she touched him.

*’ I think you are either faint from the heat of this thick coat of yours, or that you are going to make a cocoon of yourself Mr. Fuzz,” said Nelly. Now I want to see you turn into a butterfly, so I shall take you, and if you get lively again I will let you go. I shall play that you have given out on a march, as the soldiers sometimes do, and been lefl behind for the sanitary people to see to.”

In went sulky Mr. Fuzz, and on trundled the ambulance till a golden-green rose-beetle was discovered, lying on his back kicking as if in a fit.

“Dear me, what shall I do for him?” thought Nelly. “ He acts as baby did when she was so ill, and mamma put her in a waim bath. I haven’t got my little tub here, or any hot water, and I ‘m afraid the beetle would not like it if I had. Perhaps he has pain in his stomach; I ‘11 turn him over, and pat his back, as nurse does baby’s when she cries for pain like that.”

She set the beetle on his legs, and did her best to comfort him; but he was evidently in great distress, for he could not walk, and instead of lifting his emerald overcoat, and spreading the wings that lay underneath, he turned over again, and kicked more violently than before. Not knowing what to do, Nelly put him into one of her soft nests for Tony to cure if possible. She found no more patients in the garden except a dead bee, which she wrapped in a leaf, and took home to bury. When she came to the grove, it was so green and cool she longed to sit and listen to the whisper of the pines, and watch the larch-tassels wave in the wind. But, recollecting her charitable errand, she went rustling along the pleasant path till she came to another patient, over which she stood considering several minutes before she could decide whether it was best to take it to her hospital, because it was a little gray snake, with a bruised tail. She knew it would not hurt her, yet she Was afraid of it; she thought it pretty, yet could not like it; she pitied its pain, yet shrunk from helping it, for it had a fiery eye, and a sharp quivering tongue, that looked as if longing to bite. “ He is a rebel, I wonder if I ought to be good to him,” thought Nelly, watching the reptile writhe with pain. “ Will said there were sick rebels in his hospital, and one was very kind to him. It says, too, in my little book,’ Love your enemies.’ I think snakes are mine, but I guess I ‘11 try and love him because God made him. Some boy will kill him if I leave him here, and then perhaps his mother will be very sad about it. Come, poor worm, I wish to help you, so be patient, and don’t frighten me.”

Then Nelly laid her little handkerchief on the ground, and with a stick gently lifted the wounded snake upon it, and, folding it together, laid it in the ambulance. She was thoughtful after that, and so busy puzzling her young head about the duty of loving those who hate us, and being kind to those who are disagreeable or unkind, that she went through the rest of the wood quite forgetful of her work. A soft ‘* Queek, queek!” made her look up and listen. The sound came from the long meadow grass, and, bending it carefully back, she found a half-fledged bird, with one wing trailing on the ground, and its eyes dim with pain or hunger.

“You darling thing, did you fall out of your nest and hurt your wing?” cried Nelly, looking up into the single tree that stood near by. No nest was to be seen, no parent-birds hovered overhead, and little Robin could only tell its troubles in that mournful “ Queek, queek, queek 1”

Nelly ran to get both her chests, and, sitting down beside the bird, tried to feed it. To her great joy it ate crumb after crumb as if it were half starved, and soon fluttered nearer with a con- fiding fearlessness that made her very proud. Soon Baby Robin seemed quite comfortable, his eye brightened, he “queeked” no more, and but for the drooping wing would have been himself again. With one of her bandages Nelly bound both wings closely to his sides for fear he should hurt himself by trying to fly; and though he seemed amazed at her proceedings, he behaved very well, only staring at her, and ruffling up his few feathers in a funny way that made her laugh. Then she had to discover some way of accommodating her two larger patients, so that neither should hurt nor alarm the other. A bright thought came to her after much pondering. Carefully lifting the handkerchief, she pinned the two ends to the roof of the cart, and there swung little Forked-tongue, while Rob lay easily below.

By this time Nelly began to wonder how it hap-j pened that she found so many more injured things than ever before. But it never entered her innocent head that Tony had searched the wood and meadow before she was up, and laid most of these creatures ready to her hands, that she might not be disappointed. She had not yet lost her faith in fairies, so she fancied they too belonged to her small sisterhood, and presently it did really seem impossible to doubt that the good folk had been at work.

Coming to the bridge that crossed the brook, she stopped a moment to watch the water ripple over the bright pebbles, the ferns bend down to drink, and the funny tadpoles frolic in quieter nooks where the sun shone, and the dragon-flies swung among the rushes. When Nelly turned to go on, her blue eyes opened wide, and the handle of the ambulance dropped with a noise that caused a stout frog to skip into the water heels over head. Directly in the middle of the bridge was a pretty green tent, made of two tall burdock leaves. The stems were stuck into cracks between the boards, the tips were pinned together with a thorn, and one great buttercup nodded in the doorway like a sleepy sentinel. Nelly stared and smiled, listened, and looked about on every side. Nothing was seen but the quiet meadow and the shady grove, nothing was heard but the babble of the brook and the cheery music of the bobolinks.

“Yes,” said Nelly softly to herself, “ that is a fairy tent, and in it I may find a baby elf sick with whooping-cough or scarlet fever. How splendid it would 4 be! only I could never nurse such a dainty thing.”

Stooping eagerly, she peeped over the buttercup’s drowsy head, and saw what seemed a tiny cock of hay. She had no time to feel disappointed, for the haycock began to stir, and, looking nearer, she beheld two silvery-gray mites, who wagged wee tails, and stretched themselves as if they had just waked up. Nelly knew that they were young field-mice, and rejoiced over them, feeling rather relieved that no fairy had appeared, though she still believed them to have had a hand in the matter.

“I shall call the mice my Babes in the Wood, because they are lost and covered up with leaves,” said Kelly, as she laid them in her snuggest bed, where they nestled close together, and fell fast asleep again.

Being very anxious to get home, that she might tell her adventures, and show how great was the need of a sanitary commission in that reon, Nelly marched proudly up the avenue, and, having displayed her load, hurried to the hospital where another applicant was waiting for her. On the step of the door lay a large turtle, with one claw gone, and on his back was pasted a bit of paper with his name, <* Commodore Waddle, F. S. N.” Nelly knew this was a joke of Will’s, but welcomed the ancient mariner, and called Tony to help her get him in.

All that morning they were very busy settling the new-comers, for both people and books had to be consulted before they could decide what diet and treatment was best for each. The winged contraband had taken Nelly at her word, and flown away on the journey home. Little Rob was put in a large cage, where he could use his legs, yet not injure his lame wing. Forked-tongue lay under a wire cover, on sprigs of fennel, for the gardener said that snakes were fond of it. The Babes in the Wood were put to bed in one of the rush baskets, under a cotton-wool coverlet. Greenback, the beetle, found ease for his unknown aches in the warm heart of a rose, where he sunned himself all day. The Commodore was made happy in a tub of water, grass, and stones, and Mr. Fuzz was put in a well-ventilated glass box to decide whether he would be a cocoon or not.

Tony had not been idle while his mistress was away, and he showed her the hospital garden he had made close by, in which were cabbage, nettle and mignonette plants for the butterflies, flowering herbs for the bees, chickweed and hemp for the birds, catnip for the pussies, and plenty of room left for whatever other patients might need. In the afternoon, while Nelly did her task at lint-pickings talking busily to Will as she worked, and interesting him in her aflairs, Tony cleared a pretty spot in the grove for the burying-ground, and made ready some small bits of slate on which to write the names of those who died. He did not have it ready an hour too soon, for at sunset two little graves were needed, and Nurse Nelly shed tender tears for her first losses as she laid the motherless mice in one smooth hoU low, and the gray-coated rebel in the other. She had learned to care for him already, and, when she found him dead, was very glad she had been kind to him, hoping that he knew it, and died happier in her hospital than all alone in the shadowy wood.

The rest of Nelly’s patients prospered, and of the many added afterward few died, because of Tony’s skilful treatment and her own faithful care. Every morning when the day proved fair the little ambulance went out upon its charitable errand; every afternoon Nelly worked for the human sufferers whom she loved; and every evening brother Will read aloud to her from useful books, showed her wonders with his microscope, or prescribed remedies for the patients, whom he soon knew by name and took much interest in. It was Nelly’s holiday; but, though she studied no lessons, she learned much, and unconsciously made her pretty play both an example and a rebuke for others.

At first it seemed a childish pastime, and people laughed. But there was something in the familiar words “ Sanitary,” “ hospital,” and “ ambulance” that made them pleasant sounds to many ears. As reports of Nelly’s work went through the neighborhood, other children came to see and copy her design. Rough lads looked ashamed when in her wards they found harmless creatures hurt by them, and going out they said among themselves, “We won’t stone birds, chase butterflies, and drown the girls’ little oats any more, though we won’t tell them so.” And most of the lads kept their word so well that people said there never had been so many birds before as all that summer haunted wood and field. Tender-hearted playmates brought their pets to be cured; even busy fathers, had a friendly word for the smdU charity, which reminded them so sweetly of the greet one which should never be forgotten; lonely mothers sometimes looked out with wet eyes as the little ambulance went by, recalling thoughts of absent sons who might be journeying painfully to some far-off hospital, where brave women waited to tend them with hands as willing’, hearts as tender, as those the gentle child gave to her self-appointed task.

At home the charm worked also. No more idle days for Nelly, or fretful ones for Will, because the little sister would not neglect the helpless creatures so dependent upon her, and the big brother wsus ashamed to complain after watching the patience of these lesser sufferers, and merrily said he would try to bear his own wound as quietly and bravely as the ** Commodore “ bore his. Nelly never knew how much good she had done Captain Will till he went away again in the early autumn. Then he thanked her for it, and though she cried for joy and sorrow she never forgot it, because he left something behind him which always pleasantly reminded her of the double success her little hospital had won.

When Will was gone, and she had prayed softly in her heart that God would keep him safe and bring him home again, she dried her tears and went away to find comfort in the place where he had spent so many happy hours with her. She had not been there before that day, and when she reached the door she stood quite still and wanted very much to cry again, for something beautiful had happened. She had often asked Will for a motto for her hospital, and he had promised to find her one. She thought he had forgotten it; but even in the huiTy of that busy day he had found time to do more than keep his word, while Nelly sat indoors, lovingly brightening the tarnished buttons on the blue coat that had seen so many battles.

Above the roof, where the doves cooed in the sun, now rustled a white flag with the golden “ S. C.” shining on it as the west wind tossed it to and fro. Below, on the smooth panel of the door, a skilful pencil had drawn two arching ferns, in whose soft shadow, poised upon a mushroom, stood a little figure of Nurse Nelly, and underneath it another of Dr. Tony bottling medicine, with spectacles upon his nose. Both hands of the miniature Nelly were outstretched, as if beckoning to a train of insects, birds, and beasts, which was so long that it not only circled round the lower rim of this fine sketch, but dwindled in the distance to mere dots and lines. Such merry conceits as one found there I A mouse bringing the tail it had lost in some cruel trap, a dor-bug with a shade over its eyes, an inyalid butterfly carried in a tiny litter by long-legged spiders, a fat frog with gouty feet hopping upon crutches, Jenny Wren sobbing in a nice handkerchief as she brought poor dear dead Cock Robin to be restored to life. Rabbits, lambs, cats, calves, and turtles, all came trooping up to be healed by the benevolent little maid who welcomed them t!o heartily.

Nelly laughed at these comical mites till the tears ran down her cheeks, and thought she never could be tired of looking at them. But presently she saw four lines clearly printed underneath her picture, and her childish face grew sweetly serious as she read the words of a great poet, which Will had made both compliment and motto: —

“He prajeth best who loveth best All things, both gat and small; For the dear God who loveth us. He made and loveth all.”

GRANDMA’S TEAM.

“IT ‘S no use, I can’t find a horse anywhere, for love or money. All are either sick or kept quiet to-day for fear of being sick. I declare I ‘d almost rather lose Major than disappoint mother,” said Farmer Jenks, coming in on Sunday morning from a fruitless visit to his neighbors.

It was in the height of the horse distemper, and hb own valuable beast stood in the stall, looking very interesting, with his legs in red flannel bandages, an old shawl round his neck, his body well covered by blankets, and a pensive expression in his *fine eyes as he coughed and groaned distressfully.

You see it was particularly unfortunate to have Major give out on Sunday, for grandma had been to church, rain or shine, every Sunday for twenty years, and it was the pride of her life to be able to say this. She was quite superstitious about it, and really 4» »

felt as if her wonderful health and strength were given her as a reward for her unfailing devotion.

A sincerely pious and good old lady was Grandma Jenks, and her entry into the church always made a little sensation, for she was eighty-five years old, yet hale and hearty, with no affliction but lame feet. So every Sunday, all the year round, her son or grandsons drove her down to service in the wide, low chaise, got expressly for her benefit, and all the week seemed brighter and better for the quiet hour spent in the big pew.

‘‘ If the steeple should fall, folks wouldnt miss it any more than they would old Mrs. Jenks from her comer,” was a saying among the people, and grandma felt as if she was not only a public character, but a public example for all to follow, for another saying in the town was, —

“Well, if old Mrs. Jenks can go to meeting, there’s no excuse for our staying at home.” “•

That pleased her, and so when the farmer came in with his bad news, she looked deeply disappointed, sat still a minute tapping her hymn-book, then took her two canes and got up, saying resolutely, —

A merciful man is merciful to his beast, so I

won’t have poor Major risk his life for me, but I shall walk.”

A general outcry followed, for grandma was very lame, church a mile away, and the roads muddy after the rain.

‘* You can’t do it mother, and you ‘11 be sick foi the winter if you try,” ciied Mrs. Jenks, in great trouble.

“No, dear; I guess the Lord will give me strength, since I’m going to His house,” answered the old lady, walking slowly to the door.

“Blest if I wouldn’ carry you myself if I only could, mother,” exclaimed the farmer, helping her down the steps with filial gentleness.

Here Ned and Charley, the boys, laughed, for grandma was very stout, and the idea of their father carrying her tickled them immensely.

“Boys, I ‘m ashamed of you I” said their mother, frowning at them. But grandma laughed too, and said pleasantly, —

“I won’t be a burden, Moses; give me your arm and I ‘11 step out as well as I can, and mebby some one may come along and give me a lift.”

So the door was locked and the family set o£

Bat it was hard work for the old lady, and soon she said she mast sit down and rest a spell. As they stood waiting for her, all looking anxioas, the boys suddenly had a bright idea, and, merely saying they had forgotten something, raced up the hill again.

“I ‘m afraid you won’t be able to do it, mother,” the farmer was just saying, when the sound of an approaching carriage made them all turn to look, hoping for a lift.

Nearer and nearer drew the rattle, and round the coiner came, not a horse’s head, but two felt hats on two boys’ heads, and Charley and Ned appeared, trotting briskly, with the chaise behind them.

“Here’s your team, grandma I Jump in, and we ‘11 get you to meeting in good time yet,” cried the lads, smiling and panting as they drew up close to the stone where the old lady sat.

“Boys, boys, it’s Sunday, and we can’t have any jokes or nonsense now,” began Mrs. Jenks, looking much scandalized.

“Well, I don’t know, wife. It’s a new thing, I allow, but considering the fix we are in, I ‘m not sure it isn’t a good plan. What do you think, mother?«“ asked the farmer, laughing, yet well pleased at the energy and good-will of his lads.

“If the boys behave themselves, and do it as a duty, not a frolic, and don’t upset me, I reckon I ‘11 let ‘em try, for I don’t believe I can get there any other way,” said grandma.

** You hoped the Lord would give you strength, and so He has, in this form. Use it, mother, and thank Him for it, since the children love you so well they would run their legs off to serve you,” said the farmer, soberly, as he helped the old lady in and folded the robes round her feet.

‘‘Steady, boys, no pranks, and stop behind the sheds. I can lend mother an arm there, and she can walk across the green. This turn-out is all very well, but we won’t make a show of it.”

Away went the chaise rolling gently down the hill, and the new span trotted well together, while the old lady sat calmly inside, frequently saying, —

“Don’t pull too hard, Ned. I’m afraid I’m very heavy for you to draw, Charley. Take it easy, dears; there’s time enough, time enough.”

“You’ll never hear the last of this, Moses; it will be a town joke for months to come,” said Mrs. Jenks, as she and her husband walked briskly after the triumphal car.

Don’t care if I do hear on’t for a considerable 8])ell. It’s nothing to be ashamed of, and I guess you’ll find that folks will agree with me, even if they do laugh,” answered the farmer, stoutly; and he was right.

Pausing behind the sheds, grandma was handed out, and the family went into church, a little late but quite decorously, and as if nothing funny had occurred* To be sure, Ned and Charley were very red and hot, and now and then stole looks at one another with a roguish twinkle of the eye; but a nudge from mother or a shake of the head from father kept them in good order, while dear old grandma couldn’t do enough to show her gratitude. She passed a fan, she handed peppermints in her hymn-book, and when Ned sneezed begged him to put her shawl over his shoulders.

After church the lads slipped away and harnessed themselves all ready for the homeward trip. But they had to wait, for grandma met some friends and stopped to “• reminiss,” as she called it, and her son did not hurry her, thinking it as well to have the coast clear before his new team appeared.

It was dull and cold behind the sheds, and the boys soon got impatient. Their harness was rather intricate, and they did not want to take it off, so they stood chafing and grumbling at the delay.

“You are nearest, so just hand out that blanket and put it over me; I ‘m as cold as a stone,” said Ned, who was leader.

“I want it myself, if I Ve got to wait here much longer,” grumbled Charley, sitting on the whiffletree, with his legs curled up.

“You ‘re a selfish pig! I ‘m sure I shall have the horse-cough to-morrow if you don’t cover me up.”

“Now you know why father is so particular about making us cover Major when we leave him standing. You never do it if you can help it, so how do you like it yourself? “

*’ Whether I like it or not, I ‘11 warm you when we get home, see if I don’t, old fellow.”

Up came the elders and away went the ponies, but they had a hard tug of it this time. Grandma was not a light weight, the road pretty steep in places, and the mud made heavy going. Such a puffing and panting, heaving and hauling, was never heard or seen there before. The farmer put his shoulder to the wheel, and even Mrs. Jenks tucked up her black silk skirts, and gave an occasional tug at one shaft.

Grandma bemoaned her cruelty, and begged to get out, but the lads wouldn’t give up, so with frequent stoppages, some iiTepressible laughter, and much persistent effort, the old lady was safely landed at the front door.

No sooner was she fairly down than she did what I fancy might have a good effect on four-legged steeds, if occasionally tried. She hugged both boys, patted and praised them, helped pull off their harness, and wiped their hot foreheads with her own best Sunday handkerchief, then led them in and fed them well.

The lads were in high feather at the success of their exploit, and each showed it in a different way. Charley laughed and talked about it, offered to trot grandma out any day, and rejoiced in the strength of his muscles, and his soundness in wind and limb.

But Ned sat silently eating his dinner, and when some one asked him if he remembered the text of the sermon, he answered in grandma’s words, A merciful man is merciful to his beast.”

“Well, I don’t care, that’s the only text I remem« ber, and I got a sermon out of it, any way,” he said, when the rest laughed at him, and asked what he was thinking about.

“I seem to know now how Major feels when we keep him waiting, when I don’t blanket him, and when I expect him to pull his heart out, with no time to get his breath. I ‘m going to beg his pardon after dinner, and tell him all about it.”

Charley stopped laughing when sober Ned said that, and he saw his father and mother nod to one another as if well pleased.

‘‘ I ‘11 go too, and tell the old fellow that I mean to uncheck him going up hill, to scotch the wheels so he can rest, and be ever so good to him if he ‘11 only get well.”

You might add that you mean to treat him like a horse and a brother, for you have turned pony yourself said his father, when Charley finished his virtuous remarks.

“And don’t forget to pet him a good deal, my dears, for horses like to be loved, and praised, and thanked, as well as boys, and we can’t do too much for the noble creatures who are so faithful and useful to us,” said Mrs. Jenks, quite touched by the new state of feeling.

It’s my opinion that this sickness among the horses will do a deal of good, by showing folks the great value of the beasts they abuse and neglect. Neighbor

Stone is fussing over his old Whitey as if he was a child, and yet I Ve seen that poor brute unmercifully beaten, and kept half starved. I told Stone that if he lost him it would be because kind treatment came too late; and Stone never got mad, but went and poured vinegar over a hot brick under Whitey’s nose till he ‘most sneezed his head ofL Stone has got a lesson this time, and so have some other folks.”

As the farmer spoke, he glanced at the boys, who remorsefully recalled the wrongs poor Major had suffered at their hands, not from cruelty, but thoughtlessness, and both resolved to treat him like a fiiend for evermore.

“Well,” said grandma, looking with tender pride at the ruddy faces on either side of her, I ‘m thankful to say that I’ve never missed a Sunday for twenty year, and I ‘ve been in all sorts of weather, and in all sorts of ways, even on an ox sled one time when the drifts were deep, but I never went better than to-day; so in this dish of tea I ‘m going to drink this toast: ‘Easy roads, light loads, and kind drivers to grandma’s team.’’

FAIRY PINAFORES.

AFTER Cinderella was married and settled, her god-mother looked about for some other clever bit of work to do, for she was not only the best, but the busiest little old lady that ever lived. Now the city was in a sad state, for all it looked so fine and seemed so gay. The old king was very lazy and sat all day in his great easy-chair, taking naps and reading newspapers, while the old queen sat opposite in her easy-chair, taking naps and knitting gold-thread stockings for her son. The prince was a fine young man, but rather wild, and fonder of running after pretty young ladies with small feet than of attending to the kingdom.

The wise god-mother knew that Cinderella would teach him better things by and by, but the old lady could not wait for that. So, after talking the matter over with her ancient cat, Silverwhisker, she put on her red cloak, her pointed hat and high-heeled shoes, took her cane and trotted away to carry out her plan. She was so fond of making people happy that it kept her brisk and young in spite of her years; and, for all I know, she may be trotting up and down the world this very day, red cloak, pointed hat, high-heeled shoes, and all.

In her drives about the city, she had been much grieved to see so many beggar-children, ragged, hungry, sick, and cold, with no friends to care for them, no homes to shelter them, and no one to teach, help, or comfort them. When Cinderella's troubles were well over, the good god-mother resolved to attend to this matter, and set about it in the following manner: —

She went into the poor streets, and whenever she found a homeless child she bade it come with her; and so motherly was her face, so kind her voice, that not one feared or refused. Soon she had gathered a hundred little boys and girls, — a sad sight, for some were lame, some blind, some deformed, many black and many ugly, all hungry, ragged, and forlorn, but all dear children in her sight, for the little hearts were not spoilt, and her fairy power could work all miracles.

When she had enough, she led them beyond the city gates into the beautiful country, and no one saw them go, for she made them invisible to other eyes. Wondering, yet contented, they trooped along, delighted with all they saw. The strong helped the weak; those who could see described the lovely sights to the blind; the hungry found berries all along the road; the sick gladly breathed the fresh air, and to none did the way seem long, for green grass was underneath their feet, blue sky overhead, and summer sunshine everywhere.

As they came out from a pleasant wood, a great shouting arose, when the god-mother pointed to a lovely place and told them that was home. She had but to wish for any thing and it was hers; so she had wished for a Children’s Home, and there it was. In a wide meadow stood a large, low house, with many blooming little gardens before it, and sunny fields behind it, full of pretty tame creatures, who came running as if to welcome and tell the children that their holiday had begun. In they went, and stood quite breathless with wonder and delight, all was so pleasant and so new. There were no stairs to tire little feet with climbing up, or to bump little heads with tumbling down, but four large rooms opening one into the other, with wide doors and sunny windows on every side.

In one stood a hundred clean white beds, with a hundred little, clean white caps and gowns ready for the night. Dark curtains made a comfortable twilight here, and through the room sounded a soft lullaby from an unseen instrument, so soothing that all the children gaped at once and began to nod like a field of poppies.

*’Yes, yes, that will work well, I see; but it is not yet time for bed,” said the god-mother, and, touching another spring, there instantly sounded a lively air, which would wake the soundest sleeper and make him skip gayly out of bed.

In the second room was a bath, so large that it looked like a shallow lake. A pretty marble child stood blowing bubbles in the middle, and pink and white shells, made of soap, lay along the brim. The pool was lined with soft sponges, and heaps of towels were scattered about, so that while the little folks splashed and romped they got finely washed and wiped before they knew it.

In the third room stood a long table, surrounded by low chairs, so no one could tip over. Two rows of bright silver porringers shone down the table; a fountain of milk played in the middle, and on a little railway, that ran round the table, went mimic cars loaded with bread, funny donkeys with panniers of berries on either side, and mall men and women carrying trays of seed-cakes, gingerbread, and all the goodies that children may safely eat. Thus every one got quickly and quietly served, and meals would be merry-makings, not scenes of noise and confusion, as is often the case where many little mouths are to be filled.

The fourth room was larger than any of the others, being meant for both work and play. The walls were all pictures, which often changed, showing birds, beasts, and flowers, every country, and the history of the world; so one could study many things, you see. The floor was marked out for games of all kinds, and quantities of toys lay ready for the little hands that till now had owned so few. On one side long windows opened into the gardens, and on the other were recesses full of books to study and to read.

At first, the poor children could only look and fidgh for happiness, finding it hard to believe that all this comfort could be meant for them. But the god-mother soon made them feel that this was home, for, gathering them tenderly about her, she said, —

“Dear little creatures, you have had no care, no love or happiness, all your short, sad lives; but now you are mine, and here you shall soon become the blithest, busiest children ever seen. Come, now, and splash in this fine pond; then we will have supper and play, and then to bed, for to-morrow will be a long holiday for all of us.”

As she spoke, the children’s rags vanished, and they sprang into the bath, eager to pick up the pretty shells and see the marble child, who, smiling, blew great bubbles that sailed away over their heads.

Great was the splashing and loud the laughter as the little people floated in the warm pool and romped among the towel-cocks, while the godmother, in a quiet corner, bathed the sick and bound up the hurts of those whom cruel hands had wounded.

As fast as the children were washed, they were surprised to find themselves clothed all in a minute in pretty, comfortable suits, that pleased their eyes, and yet were not too fine for play. Soon a ring of happy faces shone round the table. The fountain poured its milky stream into every porringer, the mimic cars left their freight at each place, the donkeys trotted, and the little market-men and women tripped busily up and down, while the god-mother went tapping about, putting on bibs, helping the shy ones, and feeding the babies who could not feed themselves. When all were satisfied, the fountain ceased to play, the engine let off steam, the donkeys kicked up their heels to empty the panniers, the bibs folded themselves up, the porringers each turned a somerset and came down clean, and all was ready for breakfast.

Then the children played for an hour in the lovely play-room, often stopping to wonder if they wouldn’t presently wake up and find it all a dream. Lest they should get quite wild with excitement, the god-mother soon led them to the great bedroom, and ordered on the caps and gowns, which as done before the children could wink. Then she taught them the little prayer all children love, and laid them in their cosey beds, with a good-night kisi 6 o for each. The lullaby-flute began to play, weary eyelids to close, and soon a hundred happy little souls iiy fast asleep in the Children’s Home.

For a long time the old lady let her family do nothing but enjoy themselves. Every morning they were led out into the meadow like a flock of lambs, there to frisk all day with their healthful playmates, sun and air, green grass, and exercise; for, being a wise woman, she left them to the magic of a better nurse than herself; and Nature, the dear god-mother of the world, did her work so well that soon no one would have known the rosy, happy troop for the forlorn little creatures who had come there.

Then the old lady was satisfied, and said to her-self, —

“Now they may work a little, else they will learn to love idleness. What shall I give them to do that will employ their hands, make them happy, and be of use to others? “

Now, like many other excellent old ladies, the god-mother had a pet idea, and it was pinafores. In her day all children wore them, were simply dressedj healthy, gay, and good. At the present time foolish mothers dressed their little ones like dolls, and the poor things were half-smothered with finery. At home there was a constant curling and brushing, tying of sashes and fussing with frills; abroad there was no fun, for hats, top-heavy with feathers, burdened their heads, fine cloaks and coats were to be taken care of, smart boots, in which they couldn’t run, were on their feet, and dainty little gloves prevented their ever making dear dirt-pies. Very cross and fretfiil were the poor little people made by all this, though they hardly knew what the matter was, and the foolish mammas wondered and sighed, sent for Dr. Camomile, and declared there were never seen such naughty children before.

* Put on pinafores, and let them romp at their ease, and you will mend all this,” said the godmother, who knew everybody.

But the fine ladies were shocked, and cried out: *’ My dear madam, it is impossible, for pinafores are entirely out of fashion,” and there it ended.

But the old lady never gave up her idea, and when she had successiully tried it with her large family, she felt sure that much of the health and happiness of children lay in big, sensible pinafores and plenty of fireedom.

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I ‘11 show them the worth of my idea,*’ she said, as she sat thinking, with her eyes on the blue flax-fields shining in the sun. These poor children shall help the rich ones, who never helped them, and we will astonish the city by the miracles we ‘11 work.”

With that she clapped her hands, and in a minute the room was filled with little looms and spinning-wheels, thimbles and needles, reels for winding thread, and all necessary tools for the manufacture of fairy pinafores. She could have wished for them already made, but she thought it better to teach the children some useful lessons, and keep them busy as well as happy.

Soon they were all at work, and no one was awkward or grew tired, for the wheels and looms were enchanted; so, though the boys and girls knew nothing of the matter when they began, they obeyed the old lady, who said, • —

“A good will Giveth skiU/’

and presently were spinning and weaving, reeling and sewing, as if they had done nothing else all their lives.

Many days they worked, with long play spellfl between, and at last there lay a hundred wonderful pinafores before their eyes. Each was white as snow, smooth as satin, and all along the hem there shone a child-name curiously woven in gold or silver thread. But the charm of these “pinnies,” as the children called them, was that they would never tear, get soiled, or wear out, but always remain as white and smooth and new as when first made, for they were woven of fairy flax. Another fine thing was that whoever wore one would grow gentle and good, for the friendly little weavers and spinners had put so much love and good-will into their work that it got into the pinafores and would never oome out, but shone in the golden border, and acted like a charm on the childish hearts the aprons covered.

Very happy were the little people as they saw the pile grow higher nd higher, for they knew what they were doing, and wondered who would wear each one.

“Now,” said the god-mother, “ which of my good children shall go to the city and sl our pinnies? “

‘‘ Send Babie, she is the best and has worked harder than all the rest,” answered the children; and little Barbara quite blushed to be so praised.

Yes, she shall go,’’ said the god-mother, as she began to lay the aprons in a little old-fashioned basket.

As soon as the children saw it, they gathered about it like a swarm of bees, exclaiming, —

“See I see! it is Red Riding-Hood’s little basket in which she carried the pot of butter. Dear grandma, where did you get it? “

“The excellent old lady whom the wolf ate up was a friend of mine, and after that sad affair I kept it to remember her by, my dears. It is an immortal basket, and all children love it, long to peep into it, and would give much to own it.”

“What am I to do?” asked Babie, as the godmother hung the basket on her arm.

“Go to the Royal Park, my dear, where all the young lords and ladies walk; stand by the great fountain, and when any children ask about the basket, tell them they may put in their hands and take what they find for a silver penny. They will gladly pay it, but each must kiss the penny and “ give it with a kind word, a friendly wish, before they take the pinnies. When all are sold, lay the silver pennies in the sunshine, and whatever hap- pens, be sure that it is what I wish. Go, now, and tell no one where you come from nor why you sell vour wares.”

Then Babie put on her little red cloak, took the basket on her arm, and went away toward the city, while her playmates called after her, —

‘‘ Good luck! good-by I Come home soon and tell us all about it!”

When she came to the great gate, she began to fear she could not get in, for, though she had often peeped between the bars and longed to play with the pretty children, the guard had always driven her away, saying it was no place for her. Now, however, when she came up, the tall sentinel was so busy looking at her basket that he only stood smiling to himself, as if some pleasant recollection was coming back to him, and said slowly, —

“TJpon my word, I think I must be asleep and dreaming, for there’s little Red Riding-Hood come again. The wolf is round the comer, I dare say, Run in, my dear, run in before he comes; and I’ll give the cowardly fellow the beating I ‘ve owed him ever since I was a boy.”

Babie laughed, and slipped through the gate so quickly that the guard rubbed his eyes, looked about him, and said, —

“Yes, yes, I thought I was asleep. Very odd that I should dream of the old fairy-tale I havenH read this twenty years.”

In a green nook near the great fountain, Babie placed herself looking like a pretty picture with her smiling face, bright eyes, and curly hair blowing in the wind. Presently little Princess Bess came running by to hide from her msdd, of whom she was sadly tired. When she saw Babie, she forgot every thing else, and cried out, —

“O the pretty basket! I must have it. Will you sell it, Httle girl? “

“No, my lady, for it isn’t mine; but if you like to pay a silver penny, you may put in your hand and take what you find.**

«Will it be the little pot of butter?” said the Princess, as she pulled out her purse.

‘ A much more useful and wonderful thing than that, my lady. Something that will never spoil nor wear out, but keep you always good and happy while you wear it,’’ answered Babie.

That’s splendid I Take the penny, lift the lid, and let me see, cried Bess.

“First kiss it, with a kind word, a friendly wish, please, my lady; for these are fairy wares, and can be had in no other way,” said Babie.

Princess Bess tossed her head at this, but she wanted the fairy gift, so she kissed the silver penny, said the word, and wished the wish; then in went her hand and out came the white pinafore, with a golden Bess shining all along the hem, and little crowns embroidered on the sleeves.

“O the pretty thing I Put it on, put it on before Primmins comes, else she won’t let me wear it,” cried the princess, throwing her hat and cloak on the grass, and hurrying on the pinafore.

She clapped her hands and danced about as if bewitched, for on each comer of the apron hung a tiny silver bell, which rang such a merry peal it made one dance and sing to hear it. Suddenly she stood quite still, while a soft look came into her face, as all the pride and wilfulness faded away. She touched the smooth, white pinafore, looked down at the golden name, listened to the fairy bells, and in that little pause seemed to become another child; for presently she put her arms round Babie's neck and kissed her, quite forgetting that one was a king's daughter and the other a beggar child.

"Dear little girl, thank you very much for my lovely pinny. Wait here till I call my playmates, that they too may buy your fairy wares."

Away she ran, and was soon back again with a troop of children so gayly dressed they looked like a flock of butterflies. The maids came with them, and all crowded about the wonderful basket, pushing and screaming, for these fine children had not fine manners. Babie was rather frightened, but Bess stood by her and rang her little bells, so that all stopped to listen. One by one each paid the penny, with the friendly word and wish, and then drew out the magic pinafore, which always showed the right name. The maids were so much interested when they learned that these aprons made their wearers good, that they gladly put them on; for, having gold and silver woven in them, the fine linen was not thought too plain for such noble little people to wear.

How they all changed as the pinnies went on! No more screaming, pushing, or fretting; only smiling faces, gentle voices, and the blithe ringing of the fairy bells. The poor maids almost cried for joy, they were so tired of running after naughty children; and every thing looked so gay that people stopped to peep at the pretty group in the Royal Park.

When the last apron was sold, Babie told them that something strange was going to happen, and they might see it if they liked. So they made a wide ring round a sunny spot where she had laid the hundred silver pennies. Presently from each coin sprang a little pair of wings; on one the kind word, on the other the friendly wish that had been uttered over them, and, lifted by their magic, the pennies rose into the air like a flock of birds, and flew away over the tree-tops, shining as they went.

All the children were so eager to see where they would alight that they ran after. No one stumbled, no one fell, though they followed through crowded streets and down among strange places where they had never been before. All the maids ran after the children, and the stately papas and mammas followed the maids, quite distracted by the strange behavior of their children and servants. A curious sight it was, and the city was amazed, but the pennies flew on till they came to a bleak and barren spot, where many poor children tried to play in the few pale rays of sunshine that crept between the tall roofs that stood so thickly crowded on every side. Here the pennies folded their wings and fell like a silver shower, to be welcomed by cries of joy and wonder by the ragged children.

The poor mothers and fathers left their work to go and see the sight, and were as much amazed to find a crowd of fine people as the fine people were to see them; for, though they had heard of each other, they had never met, and did not know how Bad was the contrast between them.

No one knew what to do at first, it was all so strange and new. But the magic that had got into the pinafores began to work, and soon Princess Bess was seen emptying her little purse among the poor children. The other boys and girls began at once to do the same, then the fine ladies felt their hearts grow pitiful, and they looked kindly at the poor, sad-faced women as they spoke friendly words and promised help. At sight of this, the lords and gentlemen were ashamed to be outdone by their wives ftnd children, and the heavy purses came out when the little ones failed, till all about the dreary place there was played a beautiful new game called “ give away.”

No one ever knew who did it, but, as the city clock struck noon, all the bells in all the steeples began to ring, and the tune they played was the same blithe one the little bells had chimed. Other wonders happened, for as the clear peal went sounding through the air the sun carae glancing through all manner of chinks never seen before, and shone warm and bright upon the rich and poor standing together like one family. The third wonder was that when the fine folk came to put their purses back into their pockets, they were fuller than beforci because for every bit of money given away there were two in its place, shining brighter than any gold, and marked with a little cross.

This was the beginning, but it would take a long time to tell all the good done by the fairy pinafores. Nobody guessed they were at the bottom of the changes which came about, but people thought some blessing had befallen the children, so blooming, good, and gay did they become. Busied with their own affairs, the older people would have forgotten the poor folk and th€ promises made them, if the children had not reminded them. Some little girl who wore a fairy pinny would climb into her mother’s lap and say, —

“Mamma, I ‘m tired of my dolls; I want to make some clothes for the ragged children we saw the day I bought my pretty pinafore. Will you show me how?”

Then the mother would kiss the little face she loved so well, and give the child her wish, finding much happiness in seeing the comfortable suits go on, and receiving the thanks of less fortunate women; for motherly hearts are the same under rags and silk. The boys, though small fellows, were never tired of playing the new game with silver pennies, and made their fathers play with them, till many men who began it to please the little lads went on for the love of charity.

Princess Bess ordered the Park gates to stand open for the poor as well as the rich, and soon one could hardly tell the difference; for the poor children were comfortably clothed, and the foolish mammas, finding their little sons and daughters grew rosy, strong, and happy in the plain pinafores.

grew wiser, and left off fretting them with useless finery, finding that their own innocent gayety and beauty were their sweetest ornaments, and learning that the good old fashion of simplicity was the best for all.

Things were prospering in this way when news of the fairy pinafores reached the old king. He seldom troubled himself about matters, but when he read accounts of the kind things his people were doing, he was so much interested that he forgot his nap, and the queen counted her stitches all amiss while listening. Cinderella and the Prince heard of it also, and felt quite reproached that they had forgotten every one but themselves. It was talked of at court, and everybody wished pinafores for their children; but the unknown child with the famous basket had vanished no one knew whither.

At last, after searching through the city, a sentinel was found who remembered seeing Babie come in fi-om the country. When the king heard this, he ordered his carriage, the old queen put by her work to go with him, and the Prince with Cinderella got into the famous pumpkin coach, for they too wished to see the wonderful child.

Away they drove, followed by their lords and ladies, through the wood, and there beyond they saw the Children’s Home. Full of curiosity, yet fearing to alarm the dwellers in that quiet place, every one alighted and went soflly toward the house.

Every thing was so still and pleasant, all were charmed, and felt as if a spell were falling on them. When the court gentlemen heard the song of the birds overhead, they felt ashamed of the foolish speeches they were making; when the fine ladies saw the flowers blooming in the little gardens, their gay dresses seemed less beautiful; the old king and queen felt quite young and lively all at once, and Cinderella and her Prince longed for another race, such as they had when the glass slipper was lost.

Presently they found a little lad reading in the sun, and. of him the king asked many questions. The child, forgetting that the god-mother wished to remain unknown, told all she had done, and bade them look in at the window, and see if what he said was not true. Every one peeped, and there they saw the children sitting at the looms and wheels motionless; for the dear old lady had fallen fast asleep, and no one stirred lest they should wake her.

Like a room full of breathing, smiling images they sat, and, as the heads came at the windows, all looked up and whispered, “Hush!” like a soft wind sighing through the place.

Cinderella, who dearly loved her god-mother, felt reproached that she had done so little while the good old lady had done so much, and, stepping in, she began to stitch away on one of the new set of pinafores which they were making. At that, the lively young Prince skipped in after her, and, whisking a small boy out of his seat before a loom, began to weave with all his might; for, as the old lady said, —

“A good will Giveth skill.”

“I’ll not be outdone by those children!” cried the king, and began briskly winding the thread which hung on blind Nanny’s outstretched hands.

“Neither will I, my dearl” returned the queen, and whipping on her spectacles she cut out a pinafore on the spot.

After that, of course, every one else came rushing iu, and soon all the wheels buzzed, looms jangled, reedles flew, and scissors snipped, while the children H

stood by smiling at the sight of the fine folks work« ing as if for their lives.

The noise woke the god-mother, who understood the matter at once, and was glad to see things in such good train. As she wished to say a word, she gave a smart tap with her staffj and every one stopped but the king, who was so busy winding his thread that he kept on till the skein was done, when he patted Nanny on the head, saying, in such a brisk tone his people hardly knew him for the lazy old king, —

“There, I feel better for that. We ‘11 do another presently, my fine little girl,” Then he nodded to the god-mother with twinkling eyes, for being a fairy he respected her very much. She nodded back at him, and said gravely, —

“Your majesty is very welcome, and I am glad you have waked up at last. Don’t fall asleep again, but go and make homes for all your poor, so that when you do fall asleep for the last time you will leave your son as happy a kingdom as you have found here. And you, my dear Cinderella, remember this: let your children be children while they may, and be sure they all wear pinafores.”

MAMMA’S PLOT.

“IT’S the meanest thing I ever heard of, and I won’t bear it!” cried Kitty, sitting down on her half-packed trunk, with a most rebellious expression.

“You must, my dear: it is the rule of the school, and you must submit. I’m very sorry, for I expected great comfort and pleasure from your little letters; but if madam has to read and correct them all, of course they will be compositions, and not particularly interesting,” said mamma, with a sigh, as she folded up the small garments as tenderly as if her little girl had been inside of them.

“I didn’t mind much about it when I read the rules, but now that I’m really going it seems like a prison; and I shall be just wild to tell you every thing. How can I, if that old lady has got to see what I write? I know I shan’t like the food, and I can’t ask you to send me any goodies without her knowing it. If I ‘m homesick, I shall want to tell you, and of course there will be lots of funny things you’d enjoy, but for this disgusting rule. I do declare I won’t go!” and Batty cast her new boots sternly on the floor.

“Yes, you will. Puss, because papa and I want you to. This is an excellent school; old-fashioned in some things, and I like it for that, though this rule is not a wise one, I fancy. You must do the best you can, and perhaps madam won’t be very particular about what you write to me, if you are a good child.”

“I know she will. I saw fussiness in her face. She’s sure to be strict and prim, and I shall be so miserable.” Here Kitty began to cry over her woes.

It was a habit of hers to have a great many troubles, and to be very much afflicted about trifles, for she had not a real trial in the world except her own fidgety little self. As she sat on her trunk, with all her possessions scattered about her, and one great tear on the end of her nose (she couldn’t squeeze out another to save her life), she was a very pathetic object; and mamma felt so tender about losing her that she could not make light of this grief, as she often did when Kitty wept over some trifle.

All of a sudden a bright idea came into her head, for mothers’ wits are usually sharper than other people’s where their children are concerned. Up she got, and hurrying to her desk pulled out a box of many-colored note-paper, with envelopes to match, saying, as she showed them, with a smile, —

“I’ve thought of a nice plan, a sort of joke between-us. Come here, and I’ll tell you about it.”

So Kitty wiped away her one tear, and ran to hear the new plan, full of curiosity and interest; for pretty papers are always attractive, and mamma looked as if the joke was going to be a funny one.

“I will fill your little portfolio with these, and for each color we will have a different meaning, which I shall understand. Let me see. When you are well and happy,use this pink paper; when you are homesick, take the blue; if you want goodies, use the green; and if you don’t feel well, take the violet. How do you like the idea. Puss? “

“It’s regularly splendid I I do love to have secrets, and this will be such a nice one, all private between our two selves. Mamma, you are a perfect dear, and I ‘11 send you a letter every week. It will be such fun to write it all prim and proper, and let madam see it, and then have it tell you all about me by the color.” 9 .

And Kitty danced about the room till the little blue bow on the top of her head stood straight up as if with excitement.

So the portfolio was fitted out in great style, and Kitty felt as proud as you please; for other girls didn’t have colored note-papers, much less private jokes with their mammas. The new arrangement made her quite willing to go; and all that day she kept looking at her mother with twinkling eyes, and the last thing she said, as the carriage drove away, was, —

“Don’t forget what pink, blue, green, and violet means, mamma.”

The first week was a hard one, for every thing was new, and the rules were rather strict. Kitty did her best for the honor of her family, but sometimes her woes did seem heavier than she could bear, especially French verbs, and getting up very early.

So when Saturday came, and the home letters were to be written, she longed to pour out her full heart to dear mamma, but did not dare to do it, for madam went about among the girls, suggesting, cor- recting, and overseeing their productions as if they were nothing but coinpositHms.

“Remember, my dears, these three rules when you are writing letters. Always put in something about your heavenly Father, the progress of your studies, and your duty to parents and teachers. None of these important points have been touched upon in your epistle. Miss Catherine; therefore, as it is much blotted, and badly spelled, 1 desire you to rewrite it, making these additions. Here is an excellent sample of the proper style;” and madam laid a model letter before poor Kitty, who muttered to herself, as she read it, —

“I might as well write a sermon, and done with it. Papa will laugh, and mamma won’t get one bit of news from it I ‘11 let her know how unhappy I am, any way.”

So Kitty took out her bluest paper (the homesick color, you know), and produced the following letter, which madam approved and sent: —

Mt dear Mamma, — With every sentiment which affection can suggest, I hasten to inform you that I am well, and trust you also and my honored father are enjoying that best of blesf’ ings, robust health.

I am endeavoring to prove by diligence and good conduct my gratitude for the advantages lyw offered me, and trust that mj progress may be a source of satisfaction to my parents and teachers, as well as profitable to myself in years to come.

Madam is most kind to me, and my schoolmates are agreeable and friendly young ladies. That I may merit their affection and respect is the sincere wish of my heart, for friendship adds a charm to life, and strengthens the most amiable sentiments of the youthful mind.

As Monday is your birthday, please accept this little picture as a token of my love, with best wishes for many happy returns of the day. May our heavenly Father, in his infinite goodness, long preserve you to us, and, when this earthly pilgrimage is over, may your landing be on that happy shore where naught but bliss can meet you, and where your virtues will receive the recompense which they deserve.

I deeire much to see you, but do not repine, since you deem it best to send me from you for a time. Our meeting will be the more delightful for this separation, and time soon flies when profitably employed.

Please give’my love to all, especially my papa, and believe me, dear mamma.

Tour ever dutiftU and affectionate daughter, Cathebinb Augusta Mubrt.

** It’s perfectly awful,” said Bdtty to herel as she read it over; and so it was, but madam was an old-fashioned lady, and had been brought up to honor her parents in the old-fashioned way. Letters like that were written in her youth, and she saw no occasion to change the style for what she called the modern slipshod mixture of gossip and slang.

The good lady never thought there might be a middle course, and that it was a better way to teach composition to let the children write their own natural little letters, with hints as to spelling, grammar, and other necessary matters, than to make them copy the Grandisonian style of her own youth.

Poor Kitty rebelled sadly, but submitted, and found her only comfort in the thought that mamma would find something in the letter besides what this disrespectful little person called “ madam’s old rubbish.”

Mamma did find it, and sent back such a tender reply that Kitty’s heart reproached her for causing so much anxiety, when things were not very bad after one got used to them.

So the next letter was a cheerful pink one, and though the contents were not a bit more interesting than the first one it gave great satisfaction.

A green one went next, for as Kitty’s spirits improved she felt the need of a few home goodies to sweeten her studies and enliven her play hours. As only sensible dainties came, and madam was propitiated by a particularly delicate cake, presented with all due respect, she made no objection to an occasional box from home.

Kitty therefore found herself a great favorite, and all the girls were very fond of her, especially when the “sweeties” arrived.

“I think your mother is perfectly splendid to send such nice things without your saying a word. I have to tease mine when I go home on a visit, and she always forgets, and I can’t remind her because the griffin sees my letters, and cuts out all requests for food, ‘ as if you were not properly supplied with the best in the market.’“

Fanny said that, — the wag and romp of the school, — and as she imitated the “griffin,” as she had naughtily named madam, there was a general giggle, in which Kitty was glad to join, for she did get goodies without “ saying a word,” and the idea tickled her immensely.

But she told her secret to no one, and, finding that the pink notes made mamma veiy happy, she tried not to think of her “ woes” when she sat down to write. This little bit of self-denial was its own reward; for, as the woes only existed in her own imagination, when she resolutely stopped thinking of them they vanished.

Plenty of work and play, young society, and the aftectionate desire to please her mother did for Kitty just what mamma had hoped. At home she was too much petted and pitied, as the youngest is apt to be; and so she had the “fidgets,” which are to little people what “nerves” are to the elders. Now she had no time to dawdle and bemoan herself: if she did, other girls went to the head of the class, led the games, and got the best marks.

So Kitty bestirred herself, and in three months was quite another child. Madam praised her, the girls loved her, mamma was both pleased and proud, and papa quite decided that Puss should have a little gold watch on her next birthday.

The pink paper was soon used up, since there was no call for any of the other colors, except an occasional green sheet; and a new stock was gladly sent by mamma, who was quite satisfied with the success of her little plot.

But mamma had been rather troubled about one thing, and that was the breaking of the rule. It had seemed a foolish one to her, a* 9 ae had taught Kitty how to escape it. That was a bad example, and so she wrote to madam and ‘fessed,” like an honest mamma as she was.

She did it so prettily and penitently that old madam was not angry; indeed, when the matter was sensibly and respectfully put before her, she saw the justice of it, forgave the little plot, and amazed her pupils by gradually omitting to watch over them as they wrote.

When saucy Fanny spoke of it, she answered that she trusted them to write only what was true and modest, and, finding that the times had changed a little since her young days, she meant to relax some of her rules.

That pleased the girls, and they proved their gratitude by honorably forbearing to put into their letters any thing disrespectful toward the dear old griflSn. Some of the most affectionate freely took their letters to her for correction; and when she had read a few, and laughed over them till her spectacles were dim, she quite depended on seeing them, and found what used to be a dull task now changed to a very pleasant amusement.

As a contrast to the model letter already in*

serted (and which I beg leave to state was really written from school by a little girl of twelve), I will only add one which Kitty wrote after the old rule was set aside: —

Mr DBAS LmiA Mamma, — Now that I can tell you eveiy thing, I will answer the questions jou asked in jour last, and please, please don’t think I am a vain thing because I seem to praise mjself. It is truly what people say and do, and I never should have told if you had not asked me.

Tou want to know if I am liked. Why, mamma, I’m a leading girl. Others fight to walk with me, and bribe me with their nice things to sit by them. I ‘m at the head most of the time, and try not to be grand about it; so I help the others, and am as kind and generous as I know how to be.

Madam is just as dear and clever as she can be, and I ‘m actually fond of her. Don’t tell, but I fancy I ‘m her favorite, for she lets me do ever so many things that she once forbid, and isn’t half so strict as she was.

I ‘m truly glad I came, for I do get on, and haven’t liad a woe this ever so long. Isn’t that nice? I ‘m homesick sometimes, and look at my blue paper, but I won’t use it; so I go and have a good run, or chatter French with madam, and get cheered up before I write.

1 miss you most at night, mamma dear, for then I have no one to tell my goods and bads to, and so get right. But not having you, I remember what you told me, that I always have Qod, and to him I open my heart as I never did before Prayers mean something to me now, and I say them so earnestly that eometimes I cry, and that makes me feel so fresh and strong, and ready to go on again.

I do try to be good, and don’t ask for any reward but to see you look proud and pleased when I come home. I’d give any thing if I could hug you now and then, because you don’t mind if I tumble your collar: madam does, and that spoils the fun of it. Kissing is a kind of inspiration, you know; and one doesn’t stop to think of clothes when one is so faH of love, it must spill over in kisses.

That sounds sentimental, but I ‘m not going to take it out, because you’ll understand what I mean, and won’t laugh. That’s the comfort of private letters, isn’t iti Now, good-by, my dearest mother. Lots of love to papa, and do both write soon to your own little Puss.

Just as Kitty was folding it up, madam came by; and quite mechanically held out her hand for it, as she used to do.

Kitty caught it back, and then blushed and looked distressed; for madam said gravely, as she remembered the new rule, —

“I beg your pardon, I forgot. Seal it up, my dear; I won’t ask to read your secrets any more.”

Kitty saw that she was hurt, and with.an impulsive gesture thrust the letter into madam’s hand, saying bravely, though she quaked a little at some of the things she had written, -

“Please read it. There are no secrets in it, only foolish things that mamma likes to know because they are about me. You ‘11 think I ‘m a vain goose, but I ‘d rather you did that than think I told tales, or did any thing sly.”

Thus urged, madam read the letter; and Kitty stood by, with cheeks much pinker than the paper, expecting a lecture when the last word came. But, to her great amazement, the old lady kissed her as she gave it back, and said, in a voice as gentle as if speaking to one of her own little daughters, lost long ago, —

“It is a good letter, my dear, and a true one. Give my regards to your mamma, and tell her that your suspicion about my favorite is quite corre Jt.”

KATE’S CHOICE.

“WELL, what do you think of her?”

“I think she’s a perfect dear, and not a bit stuck up with all her money.”

“A real little lady, and ever so pretty.”

“She kissed me lots, and don’t tell me to run away, so I love her.”

The group of brothers and sisters standing round the fire laughed as little May finished the chorus of praise with these crowning virtues.

Tall Alf asked the question, and seemed satisfied with the general approval of the new cousin just come from England to live with them. They had often heard of Kate, and rather prided themselves on the fact that she lived in a fine house, was very rich, and sent them charming presents. Now pity was added to the pride, for Kate was an orphan, and all her money could not buy back the parents she had lost. They had watched impatiently for her anival, had welcomed her cordially, and after a day spent in trying to make her feel at home they were comparing notes in the twilight, while Kate was having a quiet talk with mamma.

“I hope she will choose to live with us. You know she can go to any of the uncles she likes best,” said Alf.

“We are nearer her age than any of the other cousins, and papa is the oldest uncle, so I guess she will,” added Milly, the fourteen-year-old daugb* ter of the house.

** She said she liked America,” said quiet Frank.

“Wonder if she will ve us a lot of her money?** put in practical Fred, who was always in debt.

“Stop that!” commanded Alf. “Mind now, if you ever ask her for a penny I’ll shake you out of your jacket.”

“Hush! she’s coming,” cried Milly, and a dead silence followed the lively chatter.

A fresh-faced bright-eyed girl of fifteen came quietly in, glanced at the group on the rug, and paused as if doubtful whether she was wanted.

“Come on I” said Fred, encouragingly. 6* I

“Sballbein the way?”

“Oh! dear, no, we were only talking,” answered Milly, drawing her cousin nearer with an arm about her waist.

“It sounded like something pleasant,” said Kate, not exai.lly knowing what to say.

“We were talking about you,” began little May, when a poke from Frank made her stop to ask, “ What’s that for? We were talking about Kate, and we all said we liked her, so it’s no matter if I do tell.”

“You are very kind,” and Kate looked so pleased that the children forgave May’s awkward frankness.

‘“ Yes, and we hoped you ‘d like us and stay with us,” said Alf, in the lofty and polite manner which he thought became the young lord of the house.

“I am going to try all the uncles in turn, and then decide; papa wished it,” answered Kate, with a sudden tremble of the lips, for her father was the only parent she could remember, and had been unusually dear for that reason.

“Can you play billiards?” asked Fred, who had a horror of seeing girls cry.

** Yes, and I ‘11 teach you.”

“You had a pony-carriage at your house, didn’t you? “ added Frank, eager to help on the good work.

“At grandma’s, — I had no other home, you know,” answered Kate.

“What shall you buy first with your money?” asked May, who would ask improper questions.

“I’d buy a grandma if I could,” and Kate both smiled and sighed.

“How ftinnyl We’ve got one somewhere, but we don’t care much about her,” continued May, with the inconvenient candor of a child.

“Have you? Where is she? “ and Kate turned quickly, looking full of interest.

“Papa’s mother is very old, and lives ever so fai away in the country, so of course we don’t see much of her,” explained Alf.

“But papa writes sometimes, and mamma sends her things every Christmas. We don’t remember her much, because we never saw her but once, ever so long ago; but we do care for her, and May mustn’t say such rude things,” said Milly.

“I shall go and see her. I can’t get on without a grandmother,” and Kate smiled so brightly that the lads thought her prettier than even “Tell me more about her. Is she a dear old lady? “

“Don’t know. She is lame, and lives in the old house, and has a maid named Dolly, and — that’s all I can tell you about her,” and Milly looked a little vexed that she could say no more on the subject that seemed to interest her cousin so much.

Kate looked surprised, but said nothing, and stood looking at the fire as if turning the matter over in her mind, and trying to answer the question she was too polite to ask, — how could they live without a grandmother? Here the tea-bell rang, and the flock ran laughing downstairs; but, though she said no more, Kate remembered that conversation, and laid a plan in her resolute little mind which she carried out when the time came.

According to her father’s wish she lived for a while in the family of each of the four uncles before she decided with which she would make her home. All were anxious to have her, one because of her money, another because her great-grandfather had been a lord, a third hoped to secure her for his son, while the fourth and best family loved her for hei> self alone. They were worthy people, as the world goes, — busy, ambitious, and prosperous; and every one, old and young, was fond of bright, pretty, generous Kate. Each family was anxious to keep her, a little jealous of the rest, and very eager to know which she would choose.

But Kate surprised them all by saying decidedly when the time came, —

‘I must see grandma before I choose. Perhaps I ought to have visited her first, as she is the oldest. I think papa would wish me to do it. At any rate, I want to pay my duty to her before I settle anywhere, 80 please let me go.”

Some of the young cousins laughed at the idea, and her old-fashioned, respectful way of putting it, which contrasted strongly with their free-and-easy American speech. The uncles were surprised, but agreed to humor her whim, and Uncle George, the eldest, said softly, —

“I ought to have remembered that poor Anna was mother’s only daughter, and the old lady would naturally love to see the girl. But, my dear, it will be desperately dull. Only two old women and a quiet country town. No fun, no company, you won’t stay long.”

I shall not mind the dulness if grandma likes to have me there. I lived very quietly in England, and was never tired of it. Nursey can take care of me, and I think the sight of me will do the dear old lady good, because they tell me I am like mamma.”

Something in the earnest young face reminded Uncle George of the sister he had almost forgotten, and recalled his own youth so pleasantly that he said, with a caress of the curly head beside him, —

“So it would, I ‘m sure of it, and I ‘ve a great mind to go with you and ‘ pay my duty’ to mother, as you prettily express it.’’

“Oh, no, please don’t, sir; I want to surprise her, and have her all to myself for a little while. “Would you mind if I went quite alone with Nursey? You can come later.”

“Not a bit; you shall do as you like, and raake sunshine for the old lady as you have for us. I haven’t seen her for a year, but I know she is well and comfortable, and Dolly guards her like a dragon. Give her my love, Kitty, and tell her I send her something she will value a hundred times more than the very best tea, the finest cap, or the handsomest tubby that ever purred.”

So, in spite of the lamentations of her cousins, Kate went gayly away to find the grandma whom no one else seemed to value as she did.

You see, grandpa had been a farmer, and lived contentedly on the old place until he died; but his four sons wanted to be something better, so they went away one after the other to make their way in the world. All worked hard, got rich, lived splendidly, and forgot as far as possible the old life and the dull old place they came from. They were good sons in their way, and had each offered his mother a home with him if she cared to come. But grandma clung to the old home, the simple ways, and quiet life, and, thanking them gratefully, she had remained in the big farm-house, empty, lonely, and plain though it was, compared to the fine homes of her sons.

Little by little the busy men forgot the quiet, uncomplaining old mother, who spent her years thinking of them, longing to see and know their children, hoping they would one day remember how she loved them all, and how solitary her life must be.

Now and then they wrote or paid her a hasty visit, and all sent gifts of far less value to her than one loving look, one hour of dutiful, affectionate companionship.

** If you ever want me, send and 111 come. Or, if you ever need a home, remember the old place is here always open, and you are always welcome,** the good old lady said. But they never seemed to need her, and so seldom came that the old place evidently had no charm for them.

It was hard, but the sweet old woman bore it patiently, and lived her lonely life quietly and usefully, with her faithful maid Dolly to serve and love and support her.

Kate’s mother, her one daughter, had married young, gone to England, and, dying early, had left the child to its father and his family. Among them little Kate had grown up, knowing scarcely any thing of her American relations until she was left an orphan and went back to her mother’s people. She had been the pet of her English grandmother, and, finding all the aunts busy, fashionable women, had longed for the tender fostering she had known, and now felt as if only grandmothers could give.

With a flutter of hope and expectation, she approached the old house after the long journey was over. Leaving the luggage at the inn, and accompanied by faithful Nurse, Kate went up the village street, and, pausing at the gate, looked at the home where her mother had been born.

A large, old-fashioned farm-house, with a hospitable porch and tall trees in front, an orchard behind, and a capital hill for blackberries in summer, and coasting in winter, close by. All the upper windows were curtained, and made the house look as if it was half-asleep. At one of the lower windows sat a portly puss, blinking in the sun, and at the other appeared a cap, a regular grandmotherly old cap, with a little black bow perked up behind. Something in the lonely look of the house and the pensive droop of that cap made Katy hurry up the walk and tap eagerly at the antique knocker. A brisk little old woman peered out, as if startled at the sound, and Kate asked, smiling, ‘Does Madam Coverley live here?”

** She does, dear. Walk right in,’* and throwing wide the door, the maid trotted down a long, wide hall, and announced in a low tone to her mistress, — -** A nice, pretty little girl wants to see you, mum.*

“I shall love to see a young face. Who is it, Dolly?” asked a pleasant voice.

“Don’t know, mum.”

“Grandma must guess,” and Kate went straight up to the old lady with both hands out, for the first sight of that sweet old face won her heart.

Lifting her spectacles, grandma looked silently a minute, then opened her arms without a word, and in the long embrace that followed Kate felt assured that she was welcome to the home she wanted.

** So like my Anna! And this is her little girl? God” bless you, my darling! So good to come and see me!” said the old lady when she could speak.

“Why, grandma, I couldn’t get on without you, and as soon as I knew where to find you I was in a fidget to be off; but had to do my other visits first, because the uncles had planned it so. This is Dolly, I am sure, and that is my good nurse. Go and get my things, please, Nursey. I shall stay here until grandma sends me away.”

“That will never be, deary. Now tell me every thing. It is like an angel coming to see me all of a sudden. Sit close, and let me feel sure it isn’t one of the dreams I make to cheer myself when I ‘m lonesome.”

Kate sat on a little stool at grandma’s feet, and, leaning on her knee, told all her little story, while the old lady fed her hungry eyes with the sight of the fresh young face, listened to the music of a lovr ing voice, and felt the happy .certainty that some one had remembered her, as she longed to be remem* bered.

Such a happy day as Kate spent talking and listening, looking at her new home, which she found delightful, and being petted by the two old women, who would hardly let Nursey do any thing for hen Kate’s quick eyes read the truth of grandma’s lonely life very soon; her warm heart was full of tender pity, and she resolved to devote herself to making the happiness of the dear old lady’s few remaining 3’ear8, for at eighty one should have the prop of loving children, if ever.

To Dolly and madam it really did seem as if an angel had come, a singing, smiling, chattering sprite, who danced all over the old house, making blithe echoes in the silent room, and brightening every corner she entered.

Kate opened all the shutters and let in the sun, saying she must see which room she liked best before she settled. She played on the old piano, that wheezed and jangled, all out of tune; but no one minded, for the girlish voice was as sweet as a lark’s. She invaded Dolly’s sacred kitchen, and messed to her heart’s content, delighting the old soul by praises of her skill, and petitions to be taught all she knew. She pranced to and fro in the long hall, and got acquainted with the lives of painted ancestors hanging there in big wigs or short-waisted gowns. She took possession of grandma’s little parlor, and made it so cosey the old lady felt as if she was bewitched, for cushioned arm-chairs, fur foot-stools, soft rugs, and delicate warm shawls appeared like magic. Flowers bloomed in the deep, sunny window-seats, pictures of lovely places seemed to break out on the oaken walls, a dainty work-basket took its place near grandma’s quaint one, and, best of all, the little chair beside her own was seldom empty now.

The first thing in the morning a kiss waked her, and the beloved voice gave her a gay “ Good-morning, grandma dear!” All day Anna’s child hovered about her with willing hands and feet to serve her, loving heart to return her love, and the tender reverence which is the beautiful tribute the young should pay the old. In the twilight, the bright head always was at her knees; and, in either listening to the stories of the past or making lively plans for the future, Kate whiled away the time that used to be so sad.

Kate never found it lonely, seldom wished for other society, and grew every day more certain that here she could find the cherishing she needed, and do the good she hoped.

Dolly and Nurse got on capitally; each tried which could sing “Little Missy’s” praises loudest, and spoil her quickest by unquestioning obedience to every whim or wish. A happy family, and the dull November days went by so fast that Christmas was at hand before they knew it.

All the uncles had written to ask Kate to pass the holidays with them, feeling sure she must be longing for a change. But she had refused them all, saying she should stay with grandma, who could not go anywhere to join other people’s merry-makings, and must have one of her own at home. The uncles urged, the aunts advised, and the cousins teased; but Kate denied them all, yet offended no one, for she was inspired by a grand idea, and carried it out with help from Dolly and Nurse, unsuspected by grandma.

“We are going to have a little Christmas fun up here among ourselves, and you mustn’t know about it until we are ready. So just sit all cosey in your corner, and let me riot about as I like. I know you won’t mind, and I think you’ll say it is splendid when I ‘ve carried out *my plan,” said Kate, when the old lady wondered what she was thinking about so deeply, with her brows knit and her lips smiling.

“Very well, dear, do any thing you like, and I shall enjoy it, only don’t get tired, or try to do too much,” and with that grandma became deaf and blind to the mysteries that went on about her.

She was lame, and seldom left her own rooms; so Kate, with her devoted helpers, turned the house topsy-turvy, trimmed up hall and parlors and great dining-room with shining holly and evergreen, laid fires ready for kindling on the hearths that had been cold for years, and had beds made up all over the house.

What went on in the kitchen, only Dolly could tell; but such delicious odors as stole out made grandma sniff the air, and think of merry Christmas revels long ago. Up m her own room E[ato wrote lots of letters, and sent orders to the city that made Nursey hold up her hands. More letters came in reply, and Kate had a rapture over every one. Big bundles were left by the express, who came so often that the gates were opened and the lawn soon full of sleigh-tracks. The shops in the village were ravaged by Mistress Kate, who laid in stores of gay ribbon, toys, nuts, and all manner of queer things.

‘ I really think she’s lost her mind,” said the postmaster as she flew out of the office one day with a handful of letters.

“Pretty creterl I wouldn’t say a word against her, not for a mint of money. She’s so good to old Mrs. Coverley,” answered his fat wife, smiling as she watched Kate ride up the village street on an ox-sled.

If grandma had thought the girl out of her wits, no one could have blamed her, for on Christmas day she really did behave in the most singular manner.

You are going to church with me this morning, grandma. It’s all arranged. A close carriage is coming for us, the sleighing is lovely, the church all trimmed up, and I must have you see it. I shall wrap you in fhr, and we will go and say our prayers together, like good girls, won’t we?” said Kate, who was in a queer flutter, while her eyes shone, her lips were all smiles, and her feet kept dancing in spite of her.

“Anywhere you like, my darling. I’d start for Australia to-morrow, if you wanted me to go with you,” answered grandma, who obeyed Kate in all things, and seemed to think she could do no wrong.

So they went to church, and grandma did enjoy it; for she had many blessings to thank God for, chief among them the treasure of a dutiful, loving child. Kate tried to keep herself quiet, but the odd little flutter would not subside, and seemed to get worse and worse as time went on. It increased rapidly as they drove home, and, when grandma was safe in her little parlor again, Kate’s hands trembled 80 she could hardly tie the strings of the old lady’s state and festival cap.

*’ We must take a look at the big parlor. It is all trimmed up, and I ‘ve got my presents in there. Is it ready, Doll?” asked Kate, as the old servant appeared, looking so excited that grandma said, laughing, —

“We have been quiet so long, poor Dolly don’t know what to make of a little gayety.”

“]jOrd bless us, my dear mum! It’s all so beautiful and kinder surprisin,’ I feel as ef merrycles had come to pass agin,” answered Dolly, actually wiping away tears with her best white apron.

“Comis, grandma,” and Kate offered her arm. •*Don’t she look sweet and dear?” she added, smoothing the soft, silken shawl about the old lady’s shouldere, and kissing the placid old face that beamed at her from under the new cap.

“I always said madam was the finest old lady a-goin’, ef folks only knew it. Now, Missy, ef you don’t make haste, that parlor-door will bust open, and spoil the surprise; for they are just bilin’ over in there,” with which mysterious remark Dolly van-ished, giggling.

Across the hall they went, but at the door Kate paused, and said with a look grandma never forgot, — “ I hope I have done right. I hope you ‘11 like my present, and not find it too much for you. At any rate, remember I meant to please you and give you the thing you need and long for most, my dear old grandma.”

7 9

‘My good child, don’t be afraid. I shall like any thing yon do, and thank you for your thought of me. What a cuiious noise I I hope the fire hasn’t fallen down.”

Without another word, E[ate threw open the door and led grandma in. Only a step or two — for the old lady stopped short and stared about her, as if she didn’t know her own best parlor. No wonder she didn’t, for it was full of people, and such people! All her sons, their wives and children, rose as she came in, and turned to greet her with smiling feces. Uncle George went up and kbsed her, saying, with a choke in his voice, “A merry Christmas, mother l” and everybody echoed the words in a chorus of good-will that went straight to the heart.

Poor grandma could not bear it, and sat down in her big chair, trembling, and sobbing like a little child. Kate hung over her, fearing the surprise had been too much; but joy seldom kills, and presentl} the old lady was calm enough to look up and we • come them all by stretching out her feeble hands and saying, brokenly yet heartily, —

God bless you, my children! This is a merry Christmas, indeed! Now tell me all about it, and who everybody is; for I don’t know half the little ones.’’

Then Uncle George explained that it was Kate’s plan, and told how she had made every one agree to it, pleading so eloquently for grandma that all other plans were ven up. They had anived while she was at church, and had been with difficulty kept from bursting out before the time.

“Do you like your present?” whispered Kate, quite calm and happy now that the grand surprise was safely over.

Grandma answered with a silent kiss that said more than the warmest words, and then Kate put every one at ease by leading up the children, one by one, and introducing each with some lively speech. Everybody enjoyed this and got acquainted quickly; for grandma thought the children the most remarkable she had ever seen, and the little people soon made up their minds that an old lady who had such a very nice, big house, and such a dinner waiting for them (of course they had peeped everywhere), was a most desirable and charming grandma.

By the time the first raptures were over Dolly and Nurse and Betsey Jane (a girl hired for the occasion) had got dinner on the table; and the procession, headed by Madam proudly escorted by her eldest son, filed into the dining-room where such a party had not met for years.

It would be quite impossible to do justice to that dinner: pen and ink are not equal to it. I can only say that every one partook copiously of every thing; that they laughed and talked, told stories, and sang songs; and when no one could do any more, Uncle George proposed grandma’s health, which was drunk standing, and followed by three cheers. Then up got the old lady, quite rosy and young, excited and gay, and said in a clear strong voice,

‘I give you in return the best of grandchildren, little Kate.”

I give you my word the cheer they gave grandma was nothing to the shout that followed these words; for the old lady led ofiT with amazing vigor, and the boys roared so tremendously that the sedate tabby in the kitchen flew off her cushion, nearly frightened into a fit.

After that, the elders sat with grandma in the parlor, while the younger part of the flock trooped after Kate all over the house. Fires burned every- where, and th« long unused toys of their fathers were brought out fot their amusement. The big nursery was full of games, and here Nursey collected the little ones when the larger boys and girls were invited by Kate to go out and coast. Sleds had been provided, and until dusk they kept it up, the city girls getting as gay and rosy as Kate herself in this healthy sport, while the lads frolicked to their hearts’ content, building snow forts, pelting one another, and carousing generally without any policeman to interfere or any stupid old ladies to get upset, as at home in the park.

A cosey tea and a dance in the long hall followed, and they were just thinking what they would do next when Kate’s second surprise came.

There were two great fireplaces in the hall: up the chimney of one roared a jolly fire, but the other was closed by a tall fire-board. As they sat about, resting after a brisk contra dance, a queer rustling and tapping was heard behind this fire-board.

‘<Rats!” suggested the girls, jumping up into the chnirs.

“Let’s have’em out!” added the boys, making stnught for the spot, intent on fun.

But before they got there, a muffled voice cricd “Stand from under 1” and down went the board with a crash, out bounced Santa Glaus, startling the lads as much as the rumor of rats had the girls.

A jolly old saint he was, all in fur, with sleigh-bells jingling from his waist and the point of his high cap, big boots, a white beard, and a nose as red as if Jack Frost bad had a good tweak at it. Giving himself a shake that set all the bells ringing, he stepped out upon the hearth, saying in a half-grufl half-merry tone, —

“I call this a most inhospitable way to receive me! What do you mean by stopping up my favorite chimney? Never mind, I’ll forgive you, for this is an unusual occasion. Here, some of you fellows, lend a hand and help me out with my sack.’’

A dozen pair of hands had the great bag out in a minute, and, lugging it to the middle of the hall, left it beside St. Nick, while the boys fell back into the eager, laughing crowd that surrounded the newcomer.

“Where’s my girl? I want my B[ate,” said the saint, and when she went to him he took a base advantage of his years, and kissed her in spite of the beard.

That’s not fair,’* whispered Kate, as rosy as the holly-berries in her hair.

Can’t help it, — must have some reward for sticking in that horrid chimney so long,” answered Santa Claus, looking as roguish as any boy. Then he added aloud, “I’ve got something for everj’body, so make a big ring, and the good fairy will hand round the gifts.”

With that he dived into his bag and brought out treasure after treasure, some fine, some funny, many useful, and all appropriate, for the good fairy seemed to have guessed what each one wanted. Shouts of laughter greeted the droll remarks of the jolly saint, for he had a joke about every thing, and people were quite exhausted by the time the bottom of the sack was reached.

“• Now, then, a rousing good game of blind man’s buff, and then this little family must go to bed, for it’s past eleven.”

As he spoke, the saint cast off his cap and beard, fur coat, and big boots, and proceeded to dance a double shuffle with great vigor and skill; while the little ones, who had been thoroughly mystified, shouted, “Why, it’s Alf!” and fell upon him m masse as the best way of expressing their delight at his successful performance of that immortal part.

The game of blind man’s buff that followed was a “rouser” in every sense of the word, for the gentlemen joined, and the children flew about like a flock of chickens when hawks are abroad. Such peals of laughter, such shouts of fun, and such racing and scrambling that old hall had never seen before. Kate was so hunted that she finally took refuge behind grandma’s chair, and stood there looking at the lively scene, her face full of happiness as she remembered that it was her work.

The going to bed that night was the best joke of all; for, though Kate’s arrangements were peculiar, every one voted that they were capital. There were many rooms, but not enough for all to have one apiece. So the uncles and aunts had the four big chambers, all the boys were ordered into the great play-room, where beds were made on the floor, and a great fire blazing that the camping out might be as comfortable as possible. The nursery was devoted to the girls, and the little ones were sprinkled round wherever a snug corner was found.

How the riotous flock were ever got into their beds no one knows. The lads caroused until long past midnight, and no knocking on the walls of paternal boots, or whispered entreaties of maternal voices through key-holes, had any effect, for it was impossible to resist the present advantages for a grand Christmas rampage.

The girls giggled and gossiped, told secrets, and laid plans more quietly; while the small things tumbled into bed, and went to sleep at once, quite used up with the festivities of this remarkable day.

Grandma, down in her own cosey room, sat listening to the blithe noises with a smile on her face, for the past seemed to have come back again, and her own boys and girls to be frolicking above there, as they used to do forty years ago.

“It’s all so beautiful I can’t go to bed, Dolly, and lose any of it. They ‘11 go away to-morrow, and I may never see them any more,” she said, as Dolly tied on her night-cap and brought her slippers.

“Yes, you will, mum. That dear child has made it so pleasant they can’t keep away. You’ll see plenty of’em, if they carry out half the plans they have made. Mrs. George wants to come up and 7*

pass the summer here; Mr. Tom says he shall send his boys to school here, and every girl among them has promised Kate to make her a long visit. The thing is done, mum, and you ‘11 never be lonely any more.”

Thank God for that!” and grandma bent her head as if she had received a great blessing. * Dolly, I want to go and look at those children. It seems so like a dream to have them here, I must be sure of it,” said grandma, folding her wrapper about her, and getting up with great decision.

Massy on us, mum, you haven’t been up them stairs for months. The dears are all right, warm as toasts, and sleepin’ like dormice, I’ll warrant,’ answered Dolly, taken aback at this new whim of old madam’s.

But grandma would go, so Dolly gave her an arm, and together the two old friends hobbled up the wide stairs, and peeped in at the precious children. The lads looked like a camp of weary warriors reposing after a victory, and grandma went laughing away when she had taken a proud survey of this promising portion of the rising generation. The nursery i;i as like a little convent full of rosy nuns sleeping peacefully; while a pictured Saint Agnes, with her lamb, smiled on them from the wall, and the firelight flickered over the white figures and sweet faces, as if the sight were too fair to be lost in darkness. The little ones lay about promiscuously, looking like dissipated Cupids with sugar hearts and faded roses still clutched in their chubby hands.

“My darlings!” whispered grandma, lingering fondly over them to cover a pair of rosy feet, put back a pile of tumbled curls, or kiss a little mouth still smiling in its sleep.

But when she came to the coldest corner of the room, where Kate lay on the hardest mattress, under the thinnest quilt, the old lady’s eyes were full of tender tears; and, forgetting the stiff joints that bent so painfully, she knelt slowly down, and, putting her arms about the girl, blessed her in silence for the happiness she had given one old heart.

Kate woke at once, and started up, exclaiming with a smile, —

“Why, grandma, I was dreaming about an angel, and you look like one with your white gown and giivery hairl”

*’ No, dear, you are the angel in this house. How can I ever give you up? “ answered madam, holding fast the treasure that came to her so late.

‘ You never need to, grandma, for I have made my choice,”

THE MOSS PEOPLE

“Rain, rain, go away, Ck>me again another day.”O ANG little Marnie, as she stood at the window watching the drops patter on the pane, the elm-boughs toss in the wind, and the clover-blossoms lifl up their rosy faces to be washed. But the rain did not go away, and, finding that mamma had fallen asleep over her book, Mamie said to herself, -*

“I will go and play quietly with my fairy-land till mamma wakes up and cuts me some paper fairies to put in it.”

Mamie’s fairy-land was as pretty a plaything as any child could wish for, and, as every child can make one in the summer-time, let us tell what it was. The little girl firmly believed in elves, and was always wishing she could go to fairy-land. That rainy day, when she had longed for something to do, her mother said, —

“As you can’t go to fairy-land, why don’t you make one for yourself?”

Such a happy thought, and such a busy little girl as Marnie was, working away, forgetful of rain or loneliness! Mamma was so kind and helpful in suggesting ways and supplying means, that the new fairy-land really did seem to rise as if by enchantment.

A long, shallow box, filled with earth, which was covered with moss of all kinds, gathered by Marnie the day before; some green as grass, some soft as velvet, some full of red-brimmed cups, some feathery and tall, some pale and dry: marsh, rock, tree, and field had given their share, and out of this the little hands fashioned a dainty pleasure-ground for the elves. Ferns and spires of evergreen were the trees fencing in the garden, standing in groups or making shady avenues. Silver-white mushrooms with rosy lining stood here and there, like little tables, and mossy mounds or colored pebbles served for seats. Mamie’s china bowl was sunk deep in the moss, filled with water, on which floated pea-pod boats with rose-leaf sails. Acorn-cups, with blue and white comfits for eggs, were fastened in the trees.

and toy-birds brooded over their nests in the most natural manner. Dead butterflies, lady-bugs, and golden-green beetles from Mamie’s museum, hung here and there, as if alive. On a small mound stood a pretty Swiss chdlet, with some droll wooden men and women near it. One girl was churning, another rocking a mite of a baby, a man and his donkey were just going up the hill, and a family of wooden bears from Berne sat round a table eating dinner. A little marble hound with a golden chain about its neck guarded this child’s paradise, and nothing was wanted to make it quite perfect but some of the winged paper dolls with prettily painted faces that mamma made so nicely.

“I must wait till she wakes up,” said Mamie, with a patient sigh, as she drew her little chair before the table where the box stood, and, leaning her chin on her chubby hand, sat looking admiringly at her work.

The ruddy glow of the fire shone warmly over the green hills and dales of fairy-land, the soft patter of the rain sounded like tiny feet tripping to and fro, and all the motionless inhabitants of the garden seemed waiting for some spell to break their sleep. Mamie never knew how it happened, but, as she sat looking at the Swis cottage, she suddenly heard a rustling inside, and saw something pass before the open windows. She thought the chrysalis she had put in there had come to life, and waited, hoping to see a pretty butterfly pop its head out. But what a start she gave when suddenly the little door opened and a wee man came marching out. Yes, actually a living tiny man, dressed like a ‘hunter, in green from top to toe, with a silver horn slung over his shoulder and a bow in his hand.

Marnie held her breath lest she should blow him away, and peeped with all her eyes from behind the hemlock-boughs, wondering what would happen next. Up the steps ran the little man to the balcony that always hangs outside a Swiss chdlet, and lifting his horn to his lips blew a blast so soft and clear it sounded like the faint, far-off carol of a bird. Three times the fairy bugle sounded, and at the third blast, swarming up from the moss below, dropping from the ferns above, floating on the ripples of the mimic lake, and turning somersaults over the mushrooms, came hundreds of lovely little creatures.

all gay, all graceful, all in green. How they danced to and fro, airy as motes in a sunbeam! how they sung and shouted as they peeped everywhere! and how their tiny faces shone as they rejoiced over the pleasant land they had found I • For the same peal that brought the moss people from their beds woke up every inanimate thing in fairy-land.

The toy-birds began to sing, the buttefflies and lady-bugs fluttered gayly about, the white hound broke his chain and frisked away, the wooden maid began to churn, the mother set the cradle rocking, while the mite of a baby kicked up its wooden legs, and the man whipped the donkey, which gave such a natural bray Marnie couldn’t help laughing, it was so droll. Smoke rose from the Swiss cottage, as if fairy feasts were being cooked within; and the merry moss people, charmed with the pretty house, crowded it so full that every window showed half-a-dozen blight faces, the balcony quite creaked with the weight of them, and green caps came bobbing out at the chimney-top.

Dear me, what fun they did have! Mamie never saw such capital games before; and the best of it was, every one joined in them, — moss men and women, wee moss children, even moss grandfathers and mothers, as gray as the lichens from which they came. Delightful little folk they were, so lovely in f:icc), so quaint in dress, so blithe and brisk in spirit, so wonderful and bewitching altogether that Mar-nie longed to call her mother, but did not, lest a word should frighten them away.

Presently she caught the sound of delicate noises, and, listening intently, she discovered that they were talking of her.

*' Ha I ha I isn't this a fine pleasure-ground for us this rainy day I" cried one merry moss boy, as he paused to settle his pointed cap, after turning somersaults till he looked like a leaf blown about by the wind.

"Hush, Prance," whispered a pretty little moss girl, with a wreath of coral in her hair," you will wake the child if you shout so loud, and then she will no longer see and hear us, which would be a pity; for we amuse her, as one may guess by the smile on her face."

Now that surprised Mamie very much, for she was sure she was wide awake, and would have said so, if she had not remembered that it was not polite to contradict.

"What shall we do to thank this child for making us a pretty garden? " said Prance, skipping because he couldn't keep still.

"Let us put her baby-house in order," answered little Trip, who was a tidy body.

"So we will, and play in it afterward," cried all the moss children, whisking away to the corner of the nursery where Mamie's toys were tumbling about. Such busy, helpful little people as they were I and such wonders as they worked with their fairy fingers I Mamie forgot to be ashamed of the disorderly baby-house in her delight at the change they soon wrought.

The boys mended broken chairs and tables, pots and pans, trundled the small furniture to its proper place, and attended to the wooden cows and horses in the topsy-turvy barn. The little maids swept and dusted, put the doll's clothes in order, ran about the kitchen, washing cups and dishes, or rubbed up the mirrors in the drawing-room, which was a very fine apartment. Yes, indeed I for the curtains were of red damask, the sofa had real pillows, a tiny piano tinkled its six notes, and the centre-table held a vase of elegant wax-flowers, not to mention that there was a grate, gilt clock, two fine candlesticks, and portraits of all the dolls painted by mamma.

"There!" said Prance, when not a speck of dust remained: " now things look as they should, and I hope Miss Marnie will take the hint and keep her house tidy. Now what shall we play? "

"I Ve been thinking this would be a nice chance to try living like real people, as we have often wanted to. Let some be servants, some fine ladies and gentlemen, and all do as much like these persons in the house as we can."

As Trip spoke, all the moss children clapped their hands, and skipped about, crying, —

« We will I we will!" "

The dear little sprites had no idea that servants were not as nice parts to play as master and mistress; so one was Byelow the nurae, and put on a cap and shawl, and took some very young moss folk into the doll's nursery to play be the fine people's children. Another was cook, and clattered the pans about in the kitchen with a big apron on, and her little dress pinned up. A third was Dimity the maid, very smart indeed, and full of airs. A stoutish moss boy was coachman, and began to rub down the painted horses, anl furbish up the little caniages in the stable; while another with plump legs put powder on his head and played footman.

Prance and Trip took the hardest parts of all, for they said they would be master and mistress. There was no trouble about clothes, for some fashion-books lay on the table, and these queer little things only had to choose what costume they would have, when, lo and behold I there it was all made and on. Mar-nie didn't think them half so pretty in the fashionable finery as in their own simple green suits, and she laughed heartily at the funny mistakes they made in getting their furbelows and feathers properly arranged. Poor Prance quite gasped in his little broadcloath suit as he put on a tiny beaver, smoothed his gloves, and shouldered a doll's umbrella, saying so like Mamie's papa that she quite started, —

** Mrs. Prance, I wish to dine at three: don't be behind hand."

"Yes, dear," meekly answered Trip, who had whisked into an elegant morning-dress and cap, and nodded from the window as Mr. Prance went by to his office.

"What will you have for dinner, ma'am? " asked Skillet the took, popping her head into the parlor where madam was playing read a novel on the sofa.

"Mercy on us! I 'm sure I don't know;" and little Mrs. Prance ran down to see what there was in the pantry.

Mi\ Prance was evidently not a good provider; for all she could find was a pea which came out of one of the boats, some jelly, sugar, milk, and cake which Marnie had been playing with, and a whole dinner in wood, painted brilliantly and stuck on to the dishes.

"It's a rainy day, and no one is likely to come to dinner, so we will have a pease pudding with jelly, and warm up these dishes, for every thing is very high, — we must economize," said Mrs. Prance, shaking her head, just as mamma often did when she visited the kitchen.

"Very well, ma'am," returned Skillet, retiring into the closet to eat cake and jelly, and drink the milk as soon as her mistress left the room.

“It’s time to dress, I suppose, for some one may call. Get out my blue silk and lace head-dress, Dimity,” said Mrs. Prance, going up to her chamber, too busy about her toilet to mind the baby, who was crying in the nursery.

*’ Lace me’ tightly. I ‘m growing stout, I do believe, and my figure will be ruined if I allow it,” said madam; and Dimity squeezed her into such a tight dress that Trip got a pain in her side directly. “ I can bear it a little while, but I don’t see how ladies can do it all the time, — it’s dreadful!” she sighed, as Dimity piled her pretty hair in a ftizzy bunch on the top of her head, and hung jewels in her little ears, after putting costly bits of lace here and there, and poking her tiny feet into high-heeled boots that made her totter when she tried to walk. These and her train nearly tripped her up, for, if Dimity had not caught her, Mrs. Prance would have tumbled downstairs.

Hardly was she safe in the parlor when the bell rang, and Buttons showed in several very fashionable ladies, who sat down and began to talk about dress, servants, gentlemen, and the opera, so exactly like some of mamma’s callers that Mamie wondered where the sly little moss people could have been hidden to know how to imitate them so well. Aa Boon as one lady left, all the rest said sharp things about her; and when they got out, after saying good-by most tenderly, they all abused Mrs. Prance, who said to herself when alone, —

“Tiresome, ill-natured creatures, I can’t bear any of them; but I must return their calls as soon as my new bonnet comes from Paris.”

By the time the last gossip was gone, it was past two, and Mrs. Prance was dying for her dinner, being quite exhausted. Imagine her dismay when her husband arrived with two gentlemen to dine. She clasped her hands and flew into the kitchen, where she found Skillet fuming over the little stove, and scolding because it wasn’t a range like the one she used in her last place. Every thing was in confusion, and the prospect of dinner a gloomy one.

“We must have soup,” cried distracted Mrs. Prance.

‘ No meat to make it oi ma’am,” said Skillet, crossly.

*’ Boil two or three of these caraway-seeds in a pot of hot water, pepper it well, and add the leg of that fly to give it a relish, then call it by some French name, and it will be all right,” returned Mrs. Prance, who was suddenly inspired by this bright thought. “ Dissolve some of the jelly for wine, and send up those nuts and raisins for dessert. Do your best,. Skillet, and don’t keep us waiting.”

“I ‘d like to give you a week’s warning, ma’am, the place don’t suit me,” said the red-faced cook, with her arms akimbo.

’Don’t be impertinent. Skillet! You can go tomorrow, if you wish, but till then behave yourself’ and Mrs. Prance retired with dignity.

Dressing her tired countenance in smiles, she went to welcome her undesired guests, and thank them for “ this unexpected pleasure.” Mr. William Wisp and Mr. Robin Goodfellow were two very elegant little gentlemen, with ruffled shirt-fronts, eye-glasses, and curled-up mustaches, quite splendid to behol< They chatted with their host and hostess in the most affable manner, affecting not to see that Mr. Prance’s face grew more and more stern every minute, and that poor Mrs. Prance cast despairing glances at the clock, which plainly said ‘half-past three.”

It really was becoming awkward, when Buttons announced, “ Dinner, ma’am,” and the cloud lifted suddenly from the faces of all. Skillet had done 8

her best, fearing she wouldn’t get her wages if she didn’t; and the first course did very well.

Greasy warm water, flavored with pepper, was so like a French soup no one knew the difierence, and everybody took a few sips and pretended to like it; but to airy creatures, fed on sun and dew, it wasn’t nice, of course. There was no fish, for the tin ones melted in the frying-pan; and there was no time to get any more. The wooden leg of mutton got burnt in the oven, and the painted vegetables were not very satisfactory, though they looked quite fine. Mr. Prance frowned as he chipped away at the meat, and Mrs. Prance wanted to sob behind her napkin as he gave her a black look, saying sternly, —

“Mrs. P., your cook is unbearable. I desire that you will dismiss her at once.”

“I have, my dear,” meekly answered his wife; and then good-natured Mr.-Wisp struck in with a droll anecdote, while every one pecked at the painted feast, and was glad when the pudding came.

Here was another blow; for instead of leaving the pea in its skin, and sending it up a nice« round little pudding, Skillet had taken the skin off as if it was the cloth it was boiled in, and nothing remained but a mealy ruin. Mrs. Prance groaned, and then coughed to hide the sound of woe, and served out her dish with the calmness of despair. The jelly didn’t go round, the cook had eaten so much on the sly; and when the wine came, Mr. Prance looked disgusted, it was so weak. However, the nuts and raisins were all right; and after one sip of currant-water, in answer to the gentlemen when they drank her health, unhappy Mrs. Prance left the table, wishing that she never had been bom.

Trip was a clever little sprite, and entered into the spirit of her part so heartily that she really drgpped a tear or two as she sat alone in her fine drawing-room. Presently the gentlemen came to say good-by, for they were going to try Prance’s horses. Tired Mrs. Prance wished her husband would ask her to join%them, — a drive would be BO refreshing; but he only nodded grimly, and went away without a word. Mrs. Prance immediately took to her bed, for she was to have a party in the evening, and feared she never would live through it if she didn’t rest.

But very little repose did the poor lady get that afternoon, for the children acted as if possessed* Flibberty-Gibhet fell off his rocking-horse and broke the bridge of his nose. Midget set her little dress a-fire, and frightened every one out of their wits. Poppet ran out of the back gate, and was lost for a whole hour; while Weewee, the baby, had a fit, owing to Mrs. Byelow’s giving him a pickle when he cried for it. If poor, dear Mrs. Prance was hustled off her bed once that afternoon, she was a dozen times, and at last gave it up entirely, whipped the children all round, scolded every servant in the house, had a good cry and a strong cup. of tea, and felt better.

The gentlemen, meantime, had each lighted a tiny cigarette, made from one stolen from papa’s box, and had driven off in great style. Mr. Prance had the tin gig, with Silver-gray for a horse; Mr. Wisp took the straw chaise and ydlow Bill harnessed with red; Mr. Goodfellow chose the smart dog-cart with the creaking wheels, and black Jerry, who had lost his tail, but was a fine beast nevertheless. With their hats on one side, and puffing their cigars, the little gentlemen drove gayly round the squares in the carpet, till Prance proposed a race from one ‘nd of a long s«am to the other.

Away they went, with much cracking of whips, and crying out “Hi, yar!” looking like three distracted bugs skimming along at a great rate. Prance would have ceitainly won, i1 just as he passed Mr. Wisp, the wheel of the gig had not ran against a big knot in the seam, which upset Mr. Prance right in the way of Mr. Wisp, whose straw chaise turned over them all like an extinguisher, leaving nothing to be seen but yellow Bill’s legs sticking straight up in the air.

Mr. Goodfellow passed the wreck, but soon returned in alarm to pull the wounded from the ruins. Prance was only shaken, but poor Mr. Wisp was so much bruised he could not rise, and when they looked about for a carriage in which to get him home, not one of the three could be had, for two were smashed, and Jeni had galloped off with the dog-cart, never pausing till he had reached the barn. With much difficulty they lifted the groaning Wisp on to a visiting-card, which fortunately lay on the floor, and bore him away to the residence of Mr. Prauce.

The house had just subsided after the baby’s fit, when this arrival set it all in confusion again. Wisp was put into the best bed, where, after a drop of arnica had been applied to his bruises, and a doll’s smelling-bottle of hot water to his feet, he groaned himself to sleep.

Leaving his friend Robin to take care of him, Mr. and Mrs. Prance snatched a hasty cup of tea, and hurried to dress for their party.

Mr. Prance, I regret to say, was in a bad humor, for his dinner distressed him, his broken carriages annoyed him, and he didn’t feel at all like seeing company. He pulled the bell down ringing for hot water, told the footman he was a “blockhead” because his boots were not blacked to his mind, and asked his wife “why the dickens the buttons were always off his shirts? “

Mrs. Prance was likewise out of sorts, and nothing went well. The new pink lace dress was not becoming. Dimity didn’t dress her hair well, and she looked so pale and nervous that she was quite discouraged.

When master and mistress met at last in the lighted drawing-room, two crosser little faces were seldom seen. Trip threw herself into an arm-chair with a sigh, and put on her gloves in silence. Prance, who was a waggish moss boy, marched solemnly up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, and an air of offended dignity, that made Mamie shake with laughter.

“Mrs. Prance, you gave us a very bad dinner to-day, and I was much mortified. If you can’t manage better, madam, I shall give up housekeeping.”

“I sincerely wish you would, my dear, for what with servants, and children, and company, I am nearly worn out,” and Mrs. Prance sobbed behind her lace handkerchief.

“I thought when I married you that you were able to look after things properly,” said Mr. Prance, still marching up and down with a frown on his face.

“I never was taught to do any thing but look pretty,” sighed Mrs. Prance.

“Don’t be a goose, my dear.”

“You used to call me an angel.”

Here the bell rang. Mr. Prance took his hands out of his pockets, Mrs. Prance dried her tears, and both looked quite gay and beaming when the guests appeared.

Such dashing little beaux and belles as did arrive, dressed in the most astonishing style, — the ladies with bits of bouquets and fans, satin slippers, and trailing skirts. The gentlemen had stiff collars, gay ties, wee boots and gloves, and twirled their eyeglasses as if they had been going to parties all their lives. Every one simpered and chatted, laughed and flirted, looked at each other’s clothes, and whispered gossip round the room. Then a band of moss people, led by the green huntsman’s horn, struck up the blithest dancing tune ever heard, and the little company began to spin round in couples like a party of teetotums. It was not the airy, graceful gambols Mamie had admired in her fairyland, but it was the fashionable step, and therefore must be elegant. There seemed to be a good deal of romping, and the gentlemen twisted the ladies about till they looked quite flushed.

They kept up the dancing as hard as they could till supper-time, when every one ate as if exhausted. Where the supper came from, Marnie didn't know; but there it was, — ice, salad, cake, coffee, oysters, and wine, all complete, and the company made themselves uncomfortable eating all sorts of stuff at that late hour. After supper, several of the young ladies sang, opening their mouths very wide, and screaming small screams without any mtisic in them, while the Uttle piano tottered under the banging it received. Then Misses Moth, Cobweb, and Pease-blossom gave an air from the famous opera of Oberon and every one said, " How sweet! " as they patted their gloves together and tried to look as if they knew all about it.

After a good deal of noise, there was dancing again, and Mamie observed that the company got more and more excited. Some of the gentlemen were very silly, but the ladies did not seem to mind it. Poor Mr. and Mrs. Prance were so tired they could hardly keep their eyes open, and when at last their guests began to go they could scarcely hide their joy.

"Such a charming party I" ** Had a most delightful time!" said the people, bidding them goodnight; and then added as soon as the door was shut: "Wasn't it a miserable affair?" "Those Prances are very ordinary people, and I shall not go again," — quite in the regular way.

I 'm sorry to say that Mr. Prance was one of those 8* L

who had taken too much wine; and when Mrs. Prance fell into a chair exhausted, he sat down upon the fender and began to sing, —

•* Where the bee sucks, there suck I,"

in a sleepy voice, nodding like an owl.

This was very trying to Mrs. Prance's feelings: she lost her temper, and scolded him as well as she knew how. Marnie was quite fHghtened to hear the lecture she gave her naughty husband, who sat smiling and blinking till his little coat-tails took fire. • The instant a bright blaze shot up behind him as he skipped off the fender, Mrs. Prance stopped scolding, and ran to put the fire out like a devoted little wife. But, oh! sad to tell, her dress caught, and in a minute two blazes flew about the room like a pair of lively Will-o'-the-wisps. Every one screamed and ran, men and maids, Mr. Goodfellow and his patient, the children tumbled out of bed, and came scampering downstairs, and Wee wee roared in his cradle as loud as if he tried to call ‘' Fire I Fire!"

Marnie was so fiightened at the idea of those cunning, tricksy imps being burnt up, that she screamed also with all her might, and in a minnte every sign of the moss people vanished. She rubbed her eyes, but all was quiet, — nothing stirred in fairy-land; the doll's house was topsy-turvy as before, and all she saw were hundreds of motes dancing in the sunshine that now shone brightly on her face. Marnie was so sorry to lose her new playmates, that she would have cried about it if mamma had not waked up just then and asked what was the matter. When Marnie had told her all about it, she laughed at the funny dream, and then looked sober, as she said, with a kiss, —

“If these sly rogues are going to come and imitate us to amuse our little children, we must be careful what we do that we may set them a good example.’*

“You and papa are not so bad as Mr. and Mrs. Prance, though you do some of the things they did. But the droll little moss boys and girls set me a good example in one way, and I ‘m going to show them that I don’t forget it,” said Mamie, beginning to put her playthings in order.

“So am I,” added mamma, laughing again as she put away her novel and took up her sewing, thinking to herself that she really would attend more to the comfort of home, and not care so much for fashionable society.

So you see some good was done after all by the merry little phantoms of a dream, for Marnie and mamma did not forget the moss people.

WHAT FANNY HEARD.

SHE was lying on the rug, in the twilight, allalone, seeing pictures in the fire, and talking to herself.

It -hadn’t been a happy day, and Fanny felt a little sad, though she wouldn’t own that the reason was because she had been idle, disobedient, and wilful.

“Nobody cares for me or takes any pains to make me happy,” grumbled Fanny. “ Since mamma died, and papa went to England, I ‘ve been just as miserable as I could be. Cousin Mary is. so sober and strict and fussy, I don’t have a bit of fun, but study, sew, walk, go to bed and get up, like the hateful little story-book girls, who never do wrong or get tired of going on as regularly as a clock. Oh, dear I if I had some friends and playmates, this big, quiet house wouldn’t seem so dismal.”

Fanny laid her face on her arm and tried to cry; but not having any thing to cry for, she couldn’t squeeze out a single tear. Suddenlyshe heard a chime of delicate bells ringing sweetly in the room, and filling the air with perfume.

“Bless me, what’s that?” and Fanny popped up her head to see. But every thing was still and in its place, and when she spoke the bells ceased.

So she lay down again, and presently heard a sweet little voice say sorrowfully, —

“What an ungrateful child Fanny is to say she has no friends, when the house is full of them, if she would only learn to see them I Her good cousin took her home, and tries to be a mother to her, though she is feeble and fond of quiet. It was very kind of her to have a noisy, spoilt child always about; for, though it worries her, she never complains, but tries to make Fanny a gentle, helpful, happy child.”

The blue hyacinth standing in the window said this, and the lovely pink one answered warmly, —

“Yes, indeed I and I often wonder that Fanny doesn’t see this, and try to return some of the patient care by affectionate little acts, and grateful wordsi and cheerful looks. Why, she might make this house perfectly charming, if she chose: it was too lonely and still before, hut now a bright-faced, gentle little girl, with her merry ways, would delight us all.

“I bloom my best to please her, and send out my perfume to attract her, for I love her much, and want her to feel that I am her friend. But she takes no notice of me, she doesn’t care for my love, she is blind to my beauty, and gives no answer to my sweet invitation, though she longs for playmates all the time.”

With a soft sigh the flowers shook their delicate heads, and said no more. But before Fanny could speak, Goldy, the canary, gave a little skip on his perch, and cried out, in a shrill chirp, —

*' I quite agree with you, ladies: that child doesn't know how to enjoy her blessings, or recognize her friends when she sees them. Here I sit day after day, telling her in all sorts of ways how glad I am she is come; how fond I am of her, and how much I want to talk with her. I get quite excited sometimes, and sing till my throat aches, trying to make her understand all this; but she won't, and all I get for my pains is a pettish, 'Do stop screaming, you noisy bird,' and a cloth over the cage to keep me quiet. It's very hard;" and Goldy shook a littlo tear out of his round black eye. 'I love the sun, and air, and blithe company so dearly, and she won't let me have any of them.

"She promised to take care of me, but she doesn't, and I go hungry, thirsty, and untidy, while she mopes and wishes she had something pleasant to do.

"To-day, now, I 've had neither seed nor water; no sniff of fresh air, no fly about the room, not a bit of apple, not a kind word or look, but have sat in the dark, with the cover over my cage, because I tried to tell how glad I was to see the sun, in spite of my hunger and thirst, loneliness and homesickness. Ah, well! some day she may be kinder to me, and then I'll show her what a loving fliend I can be."

And with a last peck at the husks that lay in the cage, a last sad look about his gloomy house, Goldy put his head under his wing and tried to forget his troubles in sleep.

Fanny was going to start up and feed and pet him, with remorseful tenderness, when a new voice sounded behind her, and she waited to listen.

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It was the piano, and every thing it said went to a sort of tune, because it couldn't help being musical at all times.

"When first she came to stay, little Fanny used to play and sing like any lark, between the daylight and the dark, and our mistress loved it well. But now, I grieve to tell, she scarcely sings a note; no more the sweet songs float like spirits through the gloom, making gay the quiet room.

"I cannot tell how much her little fingers' touch ever thrills me with delight; how my keys, black and white, love to dance as she plays; how my pedal quick obeys, and bass and treble blend, to please our little friend.

"But now she sits apart, with discord in her heart, forgetting I am here with power to soothe and cheer; that she 'd better sing than sigh, better laugh than cry, for hearts get out of tune, and should be mended soon.

"Little Fanny, sing again, like a bird in spite of rain. Fill the house with music gay, make a concert of each day; and when others play on you, answer sweetly, as I do."

"Why,it's talking poetry, I do believe!" cried Fanny, as the last words went echoing through the room and died away.

"How any one can be lonely with us for friends is hard to understand," said another voice from the bookcase. •'Here we are, lots of us, rows of us, regiments of us; every sort of story book; here 'a fairy tales new and old; here's Robinson Crusoe and dear old Mother Goose, Mrs. Barbauld and Miss Edgeworth; here's German picture books and French fables, English games and American notions, of every kind. Come and read us, come and read us, and never say again you have no Mends, and nothing to do."

There was such a noise that no one heard Fanny laugh out, for each book was shouting its own title and making such a stir it sounded like a wind blowing dry leaves about.

"I don't wish to intrude myself for I'm not literary, nor musical, nor botanical; but I am domestic, and have an eye for all useful things," said a needle, in a sharp tone, as it sat bolt upright in Fanny's topsy-turvy basket, on the table.

"I am woman's friend, and with my help she does a deal of good, whiles away many long hours, and finds a good deal of quiet happiness in my society. Little girls don't care much for me until they have doll children to sew for; even then some of them neglect and abuse me, and don't learn to use me nicely. I know a young lady who hasn't a rag to her back; and yet her mamma takes no pains to clothe her, though a charming blue dress, and white apron, and nice little underclothes lie all ready cut out and basted.

"I pity that poor doll so much that I 'd gladly sew for her alone, if I could. I 'm afraid I should be thought rude, if I suggested to the mamma to sew instead of fretting, so I wouldn't say a word on any account; but I see more than people would believe, and judge accordingly."

After which pointed remarks, the needle actually winked at the thimble, and then sat stifier than ever in the unfinished blue gown.

Fanny was so ashamed that she turned her face toward the fire, just in time to see a brilliant spark-spirit standing in a cave of glowing coals. Waving its tiny hand, the spirit said, —

"Years ago a little girl lived hero, who made this the happiest home ever seen, by her gentle ways, her loving heart, her cheerful voice, and willing hands.

"Every one loved her, and she was always happy, for duty was pleasant. The world was bright, and she was never out of tune.

"She tended flowers in the window yonder, and grew as beautiful as they; she touched the old piano, and filled the house with music; she fed her little bird, and was as cheerful as he; she read and studied those books, growing wise and good and gay on the food they gave her; she sewed busily, clothing naked children as well as dolls, and many blessed her. She often lay where you lie now, not discontented and sad, but with a happy heart, a busy fancy, and the love of many friends to keep her always blithe.

“We loved her well, and we love you for her dear sake. If you would see her image, look up and try to imitate her.”

Rather startled at the serious manner of the sprite, Fanny lifted her eyes, and there hung the picture of her mother, when a little girl. She had often seen it before, but it never had seemed so beautiful and dear as now, when, looking at it with full eyes, little Fanny said softly to herself —

“O dear mamma, I will be like you, if I can: I ‘11 find friends where you found them; I ‘11 make home happy as you did; I’ll try to be loved for your sake, and grow a useful, cheerful, good woman, like you.**

A MARINE MERRY-MAKING

“ARE you going to Mrs. Turtle’s this evening? “ asked a gay young Periwinkle of his friend Cockle, as they met on the sands.

“Well, I don’t know: what is to be done, and who will be there?” replied Cockle, rather languidly, for it had been a very gay season, and he was decidedly “ used up.”

“There will be no dancing, for the alderman doesn’t approve of it; but there is to be singing, tableaux, and a supper of course. It’s the last night of the season; and, as they are having a farewell hop up at the hotel, we thought we would get up some sort of fun among ourselves. Lovely Lily Crab will be there; the Lobsters, Barnacles, Horseshoes, and Sea-snails, besides the Mosquitoes, Fireflies, and Water-beetles. I hear there are also to bestrangers of distinction, a Flying-fish, a Water-shrew, and Mother Carey’s Chickens.”

“Hum, ha, well; maybe I’ll look in for an hour. I rather fancy Lily Crab; and the alderman gives capital suppers. I’m going to enjoy a weed; so ta-ta, till this evening.”

Young Cockle didn’t mean a cigar, but a nap under the sea-weed. Periwinkle took a weed also; and both were so much refreshed that they were among the first at the party.

The Turtles were a very aristocratic family, for they were both ancient and honorable. Their coat-of-arms was a globe resting on a turtle’s back; and so many of their ancestors had been aldermen, it was vain to try to count them. Even their dis-eases were aristocratic, for they always died of apoplexy or gout. Some people said it was because they were such high livers; but the turtles insisted that it was hereditary, and couldn’t be helped. They were very slow, and rather heavy, but intensely dignified and well-bred. They lived elegantly, gave fine parties, and had one son, who was considered a very eligible young Turtle. It was thought that he would marry the beautiful Lily Crab, the belle of the bay; but she flirted sadly with Oceanicus Lobster, and no one could tell which she would t&e.

The Turtles had chosen a fine, smooth place on the beach, with a pretty pool near by, for such of the guests as could not remain long out of water. A flat rock at one end was set apart as a stage for the tableaux; and at the other end the supper was spread. The alderman waddled importantly about before the company arrived, looking very portly and imposing; while his wife, in black velvet and gold ornaments, sat tranquilly by, and took a little rest before the labors of the evening began. Columbus, the son, was elegantly got up in a new suit of black, with a white tie, and a flower in his button-hole. The moon served for a chandelier; and a party of fireflies had promised to act as footlights when they were needed. The tide was coming in; and, instead of carriages, wave after wave rolled up and left its load at the Turtles' door.

The Barnacles and Mussels came first, for they seldom left home, and always got back again at an early hour. Miss Mosquito arrived, full of scandal and gossip, and kept up a perpetual hum in some one's ear, though everybody disliked, and tried to get rid of her. She was a vixenish spinster, thin, satirical, sharp-tongued, and so bad-tempoved that people said her name, which was Xantippe, suited her excellently. A modest little Water-shrew, in Quaker drab, came with the Beetles, who took their places near the pool, being unused to crowds. The Lobsters, always a peculiar family, came straggling in, one by one, in their usual awkward way, and were soon followed by the Periwinkles and Cockles. A party of Petrels came marching in with the Flying-fish, who looked, and doubtless felt, entirely out of his element. The bustle caused by the arrival of the distinguished strangers had just subsided, when Columbus Turtle and Oceanicus Lobster were seen to rush toward the door; young Cockle put his glass in his eye, and Periwinkle sighed. There was a stir among the ladies, and Miss Mosquito spitefully remarked to her Cousin Firefly, "Dear me I what a fuss they do make about those vulgar people I"

** Commodore Crab, Mrs. Crab, and Miss Crab!" announced the servant, and in they came. The commodore had taken part in many sea-fights, and was famous for never letting go when once he had 9 M

grappled with a foe. But he was rather shy in company, and so was madame; and often, when any one approached to speak to them, they both precipitately retreated backward, so retiring were the dispositions of this excellent couple. The commodore wore his orange uniform, and limped, having lost a leg in battle. Mrs. C. was elegantly attired in green, with red ornaments. But Miss Crab, — how shall I paint that lovely creature? She was in snowy white from head to foot, a perfect blonde, and carried in her hand an exquisite bouquet of rosy seaweed, the sight of which caused young Turtle to glare at young Lobster, for both had sent bouquets, and Lily had chosen his rival's. Now her parents wished the young lady to accept Columbus, for he was rich; but she loved him not, for she had given her heart to Oceanicus, who was poor. Still, having been fashionably brought up, she felt it was her duty to secure a fine establishment; and so she tried to like dull Columbus, while she flirted with sprightly Oceanicus. Matters had reached a crisis, and it was evident that something would be decided that very night, for both gentlemen haunted the fair Lily's steps, and scowled at one another tragically.

** I always thought there would be mischief there, for that girl’s behavior is scandalous. There was a ease very much like this at the hotel last year, and it ended in an elopement and a suicide,” buzzed Miss Mosquito in the ear of Madam Turtle, who drew herself up, as she replied, in her most dignified tone, glancing at her son, —

“I have no fears in that quarter: such affairs are conducted with propriety in our first families. Excuse me: I have a word for Mrs. Crab.”

“If that is a sample of the manners of ‘ our first families,’ I’m glad I don’t belong to ‘em,” scolded Miss Mosquito to herself “Ah, if I had my way, I’d soon spoil your beauty, miss,” she muttered, looking at Lily Crab. And so she would; for this spiteful creature used to delight in stinging the pretty girls up at the hotel, especially their poor dear noses, till they weren*t fit to be seen.

The Snails came late, as they always did; and one of them, on being introduced to the Shrew-mouse, began to complain of her servants, as fashionable ladies are apt to do when they get together.

“There never was such a perfect slave to a house as I am to mine,” she said. “ We see a great deal of company, and things must be in order; but they never are, though we keep ten servants. How do you manage, ma’am? You look quite plump and serene; and here am I worn to the bone, with my worries and cares.”

“I come from the brook over the hill, and we country people live much more simply than you city folks. I keep no servants at all, but do every thing myself, and bring up my eight children without help,” answered the Shrew-mouse, settling the folds of her white shawl with a tranquil air.

“Dear me! how remarkable! But, you see, an active life doesn’t suit me. You have always been used to that sort of thing, I dare say, and so get on very well. I was brought up differently.” And, with a cool stare, the handsome violet Snail moved slowly away, while the Shrew-mouse and the Beetles laughed among themselves.

“Pray, how came a person who does her own work to get into our set?” asked Madam Snail of a testy old Horse-shoe whom she much respected.

“Because she is a very charming person, and I advised Turtle to invite her,” replied the Horse-shocy in a tone as sharp as his taiL

“Dear me I what are we coming to? “ sighed the Snail, who, being yery conservatiye, disliked progress of all kinds.

My dear sir, I assure you, it’s a splendid investment, — perfectly safe, and very desirable,” said old Lobster to the alderman, whom he held by the button-hole in a comer.

** Are you the president of the bank?” asked old Turtle, with a sly twinkle of the eye.

“No, sir, not even a director; but I take an interest in it, and, if I had your means, I ‘d invest there, for the safest bank I know is that of my friends Oyster, Mussel, and Company,” replied Lobster, who was as deep an old party as ever swam.

111 think of it, and make inquiries, and, if it’s all satisfactory, I ‘11 take your advice, for 1 value your opinion, and have confidence in your judgment,” said Turtle, who considered Lobster an unprincipled speculator*

“Praise from you, sir, may well make me proud. Tou will certainly be re-elected, and remain an alderman to the day of your death, if the influence and vote of A. Lobster can keep you in place,” answered the other, who looked upon Turtle as a thick-headed, easy-going old gentleman, whom it would not be difficult to defraud of his money in some strictly business-like way.

It’s all right: he ‘11 nibble, and we shall float in spite of fate,” whispered Lobster to his friend Hercules Mussel, in a tone of exultation, for the &ct was the bank of Oyster, Mussel, and Company was in a very desperate state, though few suspected it.

Meantime Miss Lily was driving her lovers to despair, by being extremely amiable to both. She sat on a sea-green sofa, fanning herself with a tiny-coral fan, while the two gentlemen stood before her, trying to annoy each other and amuse her.

‘ Sad affair, that of Bessie Barnacle and young Cockle, wasn ‘t it? “ said Columbus,’ in his slow way, thinking it would please Lily to pity or condemn her former rival.

“What was it? I’ve been shut up for a week with a sad cold, and have heard nothing,” replied the young lady, fixing her large eyes on Columbus in a way that confused him dreadfully in his story.

“Why, yon know, she was all but engaged to Phillip Periwinkle, cousin to Tom who is here tonight; but just as the thing was considered settled.

Charley Cockle cat in, and they eloped. Her family insist that she was torn away; but I doubt it.”

“So do I. Any girl of sense would prefer a fine fellow like Charley, without a cent, to a noodle worth half a million, like Phil Periwinkle,” said Oceanicus, in a tone that made the blood of Columbus boill It was a most improper and ungentlemanly thing ta do, and no one but a low-bom puppy would have done it,” he answered grimly.

“Well, I should say Phil was the puppy, to take a beating so quietly. I consider it a spirited thing on Charley’s part, and I fancy Miss Lily agrees with me,” returned Oceanicus, with an insinuating smile and bow.

“Tou oughtn’t to ask me such naughty questions,** simpered lily behind her fan. “ It was dreadfully improper, and all that sort of thing, I know; but then it was so romantic, and I adore romance, — don’t you, Mr. Turtle?”

«Decidedly not that style of it. In good families such things are not allowed; but it is no more than I should expect of a Cockle,” remarked Colum-bus, with scorn.

** Now, really, my dear fellow, you ought not to be so severe, when your Cousin Theresa did the same thing, you know.”

As Oceanicus said this, he looked straight at young Turtle in the most impertinent manner. But for once Columbus was his match, for he sidd coolly, “ Old Barnacle vows he will have Cockle imprisoned, if he can find a fit place for such a young rascal, and I advised him to try a lobster-pot.’*

Now that was a direct insult, for Oceanicus had been caught in one not long ago, on his way home from a frolic, and would have been boiled if his friends had not gone to the rescue. It was considered a sad disgrace to die by boiling, or to be caught in any way; so the Lobster family hushed it up as carefully as the Turtles did Theresa’s runaway match. Oceanicus gave Columbus a look which he long remembered, but said nothing to him; and turning to Miss Crab, as if they were alone, he murmured regretfully, “My dear Lily, it must be dreadfully dull for you with no dancing. Won’t you let me bring you something to eat? I see they have begun supper at last.”

’ I was about to take Miss Crab down myself, said young Turtle, haughtily.

“ “Now don’t quarrel and be absurd about me. I am going to stay here, and you may each bring me something. I could fancy a shrimp, and a glass of briny,” said Miss Lily, hoping to soothe the angry gentlemen.

Both rushed away; but Oceanicus, who was always brisk, got back first, and whispered, as he handed the glass, “ Remember after the tableaux.**

“Oh, dear, no! I couldn’t think of it I” cried Miss Lily, with a little scream. “ Now you may hold my things, while I eat. Be careful not to break that, for I value it very much,” she added, as she handed Turtle the fan he had given her. “How sweet they are I 1 do so love flowers,” she went on taking a long snifl* at her bouquet before she gave it to Lobster to hold. Then, taking off her gloves, she coquettishly sipped her wine; and, holding the shrimp in one delicate claw, she daintily picked off its legs, putting them bit by bit into her mouth, till nothing but the tail remained, which Turtle kept as a love-token.

“My dear creature, how miserably you are looking: I’m afraid this gay season has been too much for you. People at your time of life should be 9*

careful of themselves,” said Miss Mosquito to Fanny Firefly, who was a universal favorite, being a bright, merry little lady.

"I'm very well, thank you, dear, and none the worse for my gayeties. If you can stand a dissipated season, I guess I can, for you are older than me, you know," returned Miss Fanny, sweetly, as she walked away with Tom Periwinkle, who shunned " Miss Skeet," as he called her, as if she had been a walking pest, — a flying one she certainly was.

"Poor girl! I'm sorry she is losing her good looks so fast, and getting so sharp and sour. She used to be rather pretty and amiable, but she is quite spoilt, and having neither money nor accomplishments she will soon be quite forgotten," said Xantippe, with a sigh that said plainly, " If she was like me, now, she 'd be every thing that was good and charming."

"How are the Horse-shoes getting on, Miss Mosquito? " asked Mrs. Turtle.

"I don't see much of them, they are not in my set, you know. People who rose from mud, and still have relations living there, are not the sort of persons with whom I care to associate," replied Xantippe, with a scornful perk of her long nose.

Now both the Turtles and Lobsters had connections in Mudville, and so of course were offended by that speech. Old Mrs. Lobster turned as red as if she had been boiled; but Mrs. Turtle never forgot herself, and changed the subject by saying politely, " We are going to have supper early on account of the tableaux: as you are going to act, won't you step down with me and have some refreshment before the rush begins?"

"Thank you, I 'm going to supper at the hotel by and by. I 'm rather delicate, you know, and I find the things I get there agree with me better than common suppers. I see Mrs. Barnacle is expecting me to come and amuse her, so I must fly. Pray take care and not excite yourself, my dear lady, for you know apoplexy is sadly fatal to your family. You, Mrs. Lobster, are happy in being free from that aristocratic complaint." And with these farewell stings. Miss Mosquito buzzed away, leaving the two old ladies to exclaim angrily, as they settled their cap-ribbons, " Xantippe gets quite unbearable. She is regularly blood-thirsty, and stabs right and left with her cruel tongue. Let us go and have a comfortable dish of tea, my dear; I 'm sure we needit.*'

It was very amusing to see the company at supper; the alderman trying to think of his guests before himself; the young ladies delicately picking at their food, and pretending to have no appetite afler taking a hearty tea at home; the young men eating every thing they could lay their hands on, and drinking more than was good for them. The old ladies were rather neglected, but made the best of it, and slipped a few trifles into their pockets for the dears at home; while their stout husbands stuffed till they were speechless.

After supper, there was singing; and the Petrels came out splendidly, for they were a glee club, and sung all sorts of sea-songs in fine style, particularly “A Life on the Ocean Wave,” and “Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep.” Miss Mosquito, in a shrill small voice, sang Tennyson’s “Blow, Bugle, blow;” and Mrs. Shrew-mouse gave a lullaby very sweetly. Old Lobster, who was a gay fellow still, warbled “ I know a bank,” which made Old Turtle laugh till they thought he would certainly go off in a fit; and, to Lily’s delight, young Lobster’s serenade entirely eclipsed young Turtle’s harcaroUe, After this, the Flying-Fish •performed some wonderful feats in the pool; and the Beetles were allowed as a special favor to show the young people the new GrasshoppcK-step which was all the rage.

Then came the tableaux. A row of fireflies made capital foot-lights; a thick cobweb was the curtain, and two spiders were engaged to work it. Monsieur Hyla, a tree-frog, piped sweetly between the pictures, and every thing went smoothly. The first was a scene from “ The Tempest.’* A venerable Horseshoe was Prospero, and his stiff tail was very efiec-tive as the magic wand. Lily Crab was Miranda, and looked lovely as she gazed admiringly at Oceani-cus, who played Ferdinand. A Hedgehog did Caliban; a Firefly was Ariel; and the picture was a great success everybody said but Columbus Turtle.

The alderman himself consented to appear in the next as the Ancient Mariner telling his story to the wedding guest. His face was wanting in expression, and he was rather stout for the haunted man; but as several members of his family had led seafaring lives, and died at fabulously great ages, he felt it was an appropriate part for him. Young Lobster was the detained guest, and was really fine in the longing look he gave at the bridal train just passing by.

Columbus was the bridegroom, and Lily the bride, and very sweet she looked under her veil; while Turtle was absolutely brilliant with momentary excitement.

The “Three Fishers” followed, and was the gem of the whole, for one of the Petrels chanted the words as the scenes were shown. First, the fishers were seen “ sailing out into the west” on the pool in large shells. A Jelly-fish, young Cockle, and Tom Periwinkle were the fishers, and the ladies applauded violently, as they rowed gallantly away. Then the three wives appeared up in the light-house tower, which was made by collecting the fireflies on the top of the rock, while the Shre.w-mouse, Miss Beetle, and Miss Snail, as the wives, looked anxiously out for the boats “ that would never come back to the land.” The gentlemen quite brought down the house at this, but the ladies thought it “just a trifle flat.” The last scene was really thrilling, for the “three corpses lay out on the shining sands,” and “ the women were weeping and wringing their hands “ most tragically. Young Jelly-fish was very ghostly, and the anguish of Mrs. Shrew-mouse so capitally acted it was evident she had known sor- row. “ The

Lily Maid of Astolat” followed, for that and the “ Fishers” are always favorites at the seaside. Of course Lily Crab was the maid, laid on a bed of splendid sea-weeds in the great rosy-lipped shell which was the boat. In the prow sat a toad, as the faithful old dwarf who steered her down to Camelot, and his ugliness made her beauty more dazzling. On the shore of the pool stood the handsomest Petrel, as King Arthur; another was Lancelot; and a pretty Miss Periwinkle was Guinevere. A good many of the company had not read “ Idyls of the King,” and hadn’t the least idea what it all meant; but they took care to look’ as if they did, and patted their hands with an approving, “Very sweet,” “ Quite exquisite;” “ Really, it does the young people a vast deal of credit;” “ Altogether commy la faut as old Mrs. Lobster said, trying to be elegant, though she was a very ordinary woman, who could do nothing but make salads, for her father kept a restaurant years ago.

The last one was the “ Corsair’s Bride.” Columbus was the stem papa, and Lily the lovely daughter, both in the Greek costume, and it is easy for one to imagine how becoming it must have been.

This was an acted tableau; for, as Haidee lay listlessly on her divan, thinking of the gallant being who had sung under her window one moonlight night, the same gallant being magnificently got up as a corsair burst into the room, followed by his band. Oceanicus looked as dark, fierce, and melodramatic as half-a-dozen Byrons, and quite electrified the audience by knocking down the stately papa, exclaiming, “ Tyrant, I defy thee! Ha! ha! she is mine!” and rushing fi*om the stage with Lily on his arm.

This thrilling display of tragic power produced round after round of tumultuous applause, and cries of “ Lob! Lob I” from all parts of the house. The curtain rose, but no one appeared except Columbus, still on the ground, having been half-stunned and wholly bewildered by the attack, that not having been planned beforehand. He lay staring blankly, and looking so forlorn that the wags who had pulled up the curtain dropped it, and raised him instead. Everybody laughed at him, and praised Oceanicus. The Lobsters quite glowed with pride; the young ladies declared it was “ perfectly thrilling;” and the young gentlemen vowed that “ Lob outdid himseli by Jove!”

By the time the excitement subsided, people began to wonder why the “ stars “ didn’t appear to receive their honors. But nowhere could they be found, and Mrs. Crab began to look anxious. Some one suggested that they might be strolling on the beach to cool and compose themselves. A careful search was made, but no trace of them was discovered, till an old Jelly-fish who was lying on the sand informed them that a young couple had sailed away not long before, and that he heard them say there would be just time to stop at the Rev. Dr. Cod’s before they caught the outward-bound steamer.

When this dreadful intelligence was carried back to the party, Mrs. Crab fainted dead away, and the Commodore stamped about, using very strong language. Miss Mosquito triumphantly exclaimed, “ I told you so;” and every one was much excited.

The party broke up at once, and as the last wave left the door Mrs. Turtle said with a long sigh, “ For my part, I ‘m glad the season’s over, that we are done with fashion and frivolity, and can go back to our simple, sensible ways, and live like respectable creatures.”

AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG VOLUME 4

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MY GIRLS.

ONCE upon a time I wrote a little account of some of the agreeable boys I had known, whereupon the damsels reproached me with partiality, and begged me to write about them. I owned the soft impeachment, and promised that I would not forget them if I could find any thing worth recording.

That was six years ago, and since then I have been studying girls whenever I had an opportunity, and have been both pleased and surprised to see how much they are doing for themselves now that their day has come.

Poor girls always had my sympathy and respect, for necessity soon makes brave women of them if they have any strength or talent in them; but the well-to-do girls usually seemed to me like pretty butterflies, leading easy, aimless lives when the world was full of work which ought to be done.

Making a call in New York, I got a little lesson, which caused me to change my opinion, and further investigation proved that the rising generation was wide awake, and bound to use the new freedom well. Several young girls, handsomely dressed, were in the room, and I thought, of course, that they belonged to the butterfly species; but on asking one of them what she was about now school was over, I was much amazed to hear her reply, “ I am reading law with my uncle.” Another said, “ I am studying medicine; “ a third, “ I devote myself to music,” and the fourth was giving time, money, and heart to some of the best charities of the great city.

So my pretty butterflies proved to be industrious bees, making real honey, and I shook hands with sincere respect, though they did wear jaunty hats; my good opinion being much increased by the fact that not one was silly enough to ask for an autograph.

Since then I have talked with many girls, finding nearly all intent on some noble end, and as some of them have already won the battle, it may be cheering to those still in the thick of the fight, or just putting on their armor, to hear how these sisters prospered in their different ways.

Several of them are girls no longer; but as they are still unmarried, I like to call them by their old name, because they are so young at heart, and have so beautifully fulfilled the promise of their youth, not only by doing, but being excellent and admirable women.

A is one in whom I take especial pride. Wellborn, pretty, and bright, she, after a year or two of society, felt the need of something more satisfactory, and, following her taste, decided to study medicine. Fortunately she had a father who did not think marriage the only thing a woman was created for, but was ready to help his daughter in the work she had chosen, merely desiring her to study as faithfully and thoroughly as a man, if she undertook the profession that she might be an honor to it. A was in earnest, and studied four years, visiting the hospitals of London, Paris, and Prussia; being able to command private lessons when the doors of public institutions were shut in her face because she was a woman. More study and work at home, and then she had the right to accept the post of resident physician in a hospital for women. Here she was so successful that her outside practice increased rapidly, and she left the hospital to devote herself to patients of all sorts, beloved and valued for the womanly sympathy and cheerfulness that went hand in hand with the physician's skill and courage.

When I see this woman, young still, yet so independent, successful, and contented, I am very proud of her; not only because she has her own house, with a little adopted daughter to make it home-like, her well-earned reputation, and a handsome income, but because she has so quietly and persistently carried out the plan of her life, undaunted by prejudice, hard work, or the solitary lot she chose. She may well be satisfied; for few women receive so much love and confidence, few mothers have so many children to care for, few physicians are more heartily welcomed and trusted, few men lead a freer, nobler life, than this happy woman, who lives for others and never thinks of any fame but that which is the best worth having, a place in the hearts of all who know her.

B is another of my successful girls; but her task has been a harder one than A's, because she was as poor as she was ambitious. B is an artist, loving beauty more than any thing else in the world; ready to go cold and hungry, shabby and lonely, if she can only see, study, and try to create the loveli- uess she worships. It was so even as a child; for flowers and fairies grew on her slate when she should have been doing sums, painted birds and butterflies perched on her book-covers, Flaxman's designs, and familiar faces appeared on the walls of her little room, and clay gods and goddesses were set upon the rough altar of her moulding board, to be toiled over and adored till they were smashed in the " divine despair " all true artists feel.

But winged things will fly sooner or later, and patient waiting, persistent effort, only give sweetness to the song and strength to the flight when the door of the cage opens at last. So, after years of hard work with pencil and crayon, plaster and clay, oil and water colors, the happy hour came for B when the dream of her life was realized; for one fine spring day, with a thousand dollars in her pocket and a little trunk holding more art materials than clothes, she sailed away, alone, but brave and beaming, for a year in England.

She knew now what she wanted and where to find it, and " a heavenly year " followed, though to many it wouli have seemed a very dull one. All day and every day but the seventh was spent in the National Gallery, copying Turner’s pictures in oil and water colors. So busy, so happy, so wrapt up iD delightsome work, that food and sleep seemed impertinencies, friends werG forgotten, pleasuring had no charms, society no claims, and life was one joyful progress from the blue Giudecca to the golden Sol de Yenezia, or the red glow of the old Temeraire. “Van Tromp entering the mouth of the Texel” was more interesting to her than any political event transpiring in the world without; ancient Rome eclipsed modern London, and the roar of a great city could not disturb the “ Datur Hora Quieti” which softly grew into beauty under her happy brush.

A spring-tide trip to Stratford, Warwick, and Kenilworth was the only holiday she allowed herself; and even this was turned to profit; for, lodging cheaply at the Shakespearian baker’s, she roamed about, portfolio in hand, booking every lovely bit she saw, regardless of sun or rain, and bringing away a pictorial diary of that week’s trip which charmed those who beheld it, and put money in her purse.

When the year was out, home came the artist, with half her little fortune still unspent, and the one trunk nearly as empty as it went, but there were two great boxes of pictures, and a golden saint in a coffin five feet long, which caused much interest at the Custom House, but was passed duty-free after its owner had displayed it with enthusiastic explana* tions of its charms.

“They are only attempts and studies, you know, and I dare say you’ll all laugh at them; but I feel that I can in time do something, so my year has not been wasted,” said the modest damsel, as she set forth her work, glorifying all the house with Venetian color, English verdure, and, what was better still, the sunshine of a happy heart.

But to B’s great surprise and delight, people did not laugh; they praised and bought, and ordered more, till, before she knew it, several thousand dollars were at her command, and the way clear to the artist-life she loved.

To some who watched her, the sweetest picture she created was the free art-school which B opened in a very humble way; giving her books, copies, casts, time, and teaching to all who cared to come. For with her, as with most who earn their good things, the generous desire to share them with others is so strong it is sure to blossom out in some way, Messing as it has been blessed. Slowly, but sure; success comes to the patient worker, and B, being again abroad for more lessons, paints one day a little still life study so well that her master says she “ does him honor,” and her mates advise her to send it to the Salon. Never dreaming that it will be accepted, B, for the joke of it, puts her study in a plain frame, and sends it, with the eight thousand others, only two thousand of which are received.

To her amazement the little picture is accepted,, hung “on the line” and noticed in the report. Nor is that all, the Committee asked leave to exhibit it at another place, and desired an autobiographical sketch of the artist. A more deeply gratified young woman it would be hard to find than B, as she now plans the studio she is to open soon, and the happy independent life she hopes to lead in it, for she has earned her place, and, after years of earnest labor, is about to enter in and joyfully possess it.

There was C, — alas, that I must write was! beautiful, gifted, young, and full of the lovely possibilities which give some girls such an indescribable charm. Placed where it would have been natural for her to have made herself a young queen of society, ske preferred something infinitely better, and so quietly devoted herself to the chosen work that very few guessed she had any I Lad known her for some years before I found it out, and then only by accident; but I never shal’l forget the impression it made upon me. I had called to get a book, and something led me to speak of the sad case of a poor girl lately made known to me, when C, with a sudden brightening of her whole face, said, warmly, “I wish I had known it, I could have helped her.”

“You? what can a happy creature like you know about such things? “ I answered, surprised.

“That is my work.” And in a few words which went to my heart, the beautiful girl, sitting in her own pretty room, told me how, for a long time, she and others had stepped out of their safe, sunshiny homes to help and save the most forlorn of our sister women. So quietly, so tenderly, that only those saved knew who did it, and such loyal silence kept, that, even among the friends, the names of these unfortunates were not given, that the after life might be untroubled by even a look of reproach or recognition.

“Do not speak of this,” she said. “Not that I am ashamed; but we are able to work better in a private way, and want no thanks for what we do.”

I kept silence till her share of the womanly labor of love, so delicately, dutifully done, was over. But I never saw that sweet face afterward without thinking how like an angel’s it must have seemed to those who sat in darkness till she came to lift them up.

Always simply dressed, this young sister of charity went about her chosen task when others of her age and position were at play; happy in it, and unconsciously preaching a little sermon by her lovely life. Another girl, who spent her days reading novels and eating confectionery, said to me, in speaking of C, — “Why doesn’t she dress more? She is rich enough, and so handsome I should think she would.”

Taking up the reports of several charities which lay on my table, I pointed to C's name among the generous givers, saying, —

"Perhaps that is the reason;" and my visitor went away with a new idea of economy in her frivolous head, a sincere respect for the beautiful girl who wore the plain suit and loved her neighbor better than herself.

A short life; but one so full of sweetness that all the bitter waters of the pitiless sea cannot wash its memory away, and I am sure that white soul won heaven sooner for the grateful prayers of those whom she had rescued from a blacker ocean.

D was one of a large family all taught at home, and all of a dramatic turn; so, with a witty father to write the plays, an indulgent mother to yield up her house to destruction, five boys and seven girls for the corps dramatique, it is not to be wondered at that D set her heart on being an actress.

Having had the honor to play the immortal Pilli- coddy on that famous stage, I know whereof I write, and what glorious times that little company of brothers and sisters had safe at home. But D burned for a larger field, and at length found a chance to appear on the real boards with several of her sisters. Being very small and youthful in appearance they played children's parts, fairies in spectacles and soubrettes in farce or vaudeville. Once D had a benefit, and it was a pretty sight to see the long list of familiar names on the bill; for the brothers and sisters all turned out and made a jolly play of " Parents and Guardians," as well as a memorable sensation in the " Imitations" which they gave.

One would think that the innocent little girls might have come to harm singing in the chorus of operas, dancing as peasants, or playing "Nan the good-for-nothing." But the small women were so b dignified, well-mannered, and intent on their duties that no harm befell them. Father and brothers watched over them; there were few temptations for girls who made " Mother" their confidante, and a happy home was a safe refuge from the unavoidable annoyances to which all actresses are exposed.

D tried the life, found it wanting, left it, and put her experiences into a clever little book, then turned to less pleasant but more profitable work. The father, holding a public office, was allowed two clerks; but, finding that his clear-headed daughter could do the work of both easily and well, gave her the place, and she earned her thousand a year, going to her daily duty looking like a school girl; while her brain was busy with figures and statistics which would have puzzled many older heads.

This she did for years, faithfully earning her salary, and meanwhile playing her part in the domestic drama; for real tragedy and comedy came into it as time went on; the sisters married or died, brothers won their way up, and more than one Infant Phenomenon appeared on the household stage.

But through all changes my good 1) was still 14 leading lady," and now, when the mother is gone, the other birds all flown, she remains in the once overflowing nest, the stay and comfort of her father, unspoiled by either poverty or wealth, unsaddened by much sorrow, unsoured by spinsterhood. A wise and witty little woman, and a happy one too, though the curly locks are turning gray; for the three Christian graces, faith, hope, and charity, abide with her to the end.

Of E I know too little to do justice to her success; but as it has been an unusual one, I cannot resist giving her a place here, although I never saw her, and much regret that now I never can, since she has gone to plead her own cause before the wise Judge of all.

Her story was told me by a friend, and made so strong an impression upon me that I wrote down the facts while they were fresh in my mind. A few words, added since her death, finish the too brief record of her brave life.

At fourteen, E began to read law with a legal friend. At eighteen she began to practise, and did so well that this friend offered her half his business, which was very large. But she preferred to stand alone, and in two years had a hundred cases of all sorts in different courts, and never lost one.

In a certain court-room, where she was the only woman present, her bearing was so full of dignity that every one treated her with respect. Her opponent, a shrewd old lawyer, made many sharp or impertinent remarks, hoping to anger her and make her damage her cause by some loss of self-control. But she merely looked at him with such a wise, calm smile, and answered with such unexpected wit and wisdom, that the man was worsted and young Portia won her suit, to the great satisfaction of the spectators, men though they were.

She used to say that her success was owing to hard work, — too hard, I fear, if she often studied eighteen hours a day. She asked no help or patronage, only fair play, and one cannot but regret that it ever was denied a creature who so womanfully proved her claim to it.

A friend says, " she was a royal girl, and did all her work in a royal way. She broke down suddenly, just as she had passed the last hostile outpost; just as she had begun to taste the ineffable sweetness of peace and rest, following a relative life-time of battle and toil."

But, short as her career has been, not one brave effort is wasted, since she has cleared the way for those who come after her, and proved that women have not only the right but the ability to sit upon the bench as well as stand at the bar of justice.

Last, but by no means least, is F, because her success is the most wonderful of all, since every thing was against her from the first, as you will see when I tell her little story.

Seven or eight years ago, a brave woman went down into Virginia with a friend, and built a school- house for the freed people, who were utterly forlorn; because, though the great gift of liberty was theirs, it was so new and strange they hardly understood how to use it. These good women showed them, and among the first twenty children who began the school, which now has hundreds of pupils, white as well as black, came little F.

Ignorant, ragged and wild, yet with such an earnest, resolute face that she attracted the attention of her teachers at once, and her eagerness to learn touched their hearts; for it was a hard fight with her to get an education, because she could only be spared now and then from corn-planting, pulling fodder, toting water, oyster-shucking or grubbing the new land.

She must have made good use of those “ odd days,” for she was among the first dozen who earned a pictorial pocket-handkerchief for learning the multiplication table, and a proud child was F when she bore home the prize. Rapidly the patient little fingers learned to write on the first slate she ever saw, and her whole heart went into the task of reading the books which opened a new world to her.

The instinct of progression was as strong in hei as the love of light in a plant, and when the stone was lifted away, she sprang up and grew vigorously.

At last the chance to go North and earn something, which all freed people desire, came to F; and in spite of many obstacles she made the most of it. At the very outset she had to fight for a place in the steamer, since the captain objected to her being admitted to the cabin on account of her color; though any lady could take her black maid in without any trouble. But the friend with whom she travelled insisted on F’s rights, and won them by declaring that if the child was condemned to pass the night on deck, she would pass it with her.

F watched the contest with breathless interest, as well she might; for this was her first glimpse of the world outside the narrow circle where her fourteen years had been spent. Poor little girl! there seemed to be no place for her anywhere; and I cannot help wondering what her thoughts were, as she sat alone in the night, shut out from among her kind for no fault but the color of her skin.

What could she think of “ white folks’“ religion, intelligence, and courtesy? Fortunately she had one staunch friend beside her to keep her faith in human justice alive, and win a little place for her among her fellow beings. The captain for very shame consented at last, and F felt that she was truly free when she stepped out of the lonely darkness of the night into the light and shelter of the cabin, a harmless little girl, asking only a place to lay her head.

That was the first experience, and it made a deep impression on her; but those that followed were pleasanter, for nowhere in the free North was she refused her share of room in God’s world.

I saw her in New York, and jeven before I learned her story I was attracted to the quiet, tidy, door-girl by the fact that she was always studying as she sat m the noisy hall of a great boarding-house, keeping her books under her chair and poring over them a*

every leisure moment. Kindly people, touched by her patient efforts, helped her along; and one of the prettiest sights I saw in the big city was a little white girl taking time from her own sports to sit on the stairs and hear F recite. I think Bijou Heron will never play a sweeter part than that, nor have a more enthusiastic admirer than F was when we went together to see the child-actress play “ The Little Treasure “ for charity.

To those who know F it seems as if a sort of miracle had been wrought, to change in so short a time a forlorn little Topsy into this intelligent, independent, ambitious girl, who not only supports and educates herself, but sends a part of her earnings home, and writes such good letters to her mates that they are read aloud in school. Here is a paragraph from one which was a part of the Christmas festival last year : —

“I have now seen what a great advantage it is to have an education. I begin to feel the good of the little I know, and I am trying hard every day to add more to it. Most every child up here from ten to twelve years old can read and write, colored as well as white. And if you were up here, I think you would be surprised to see such little bits of children going to school with their arms full of books. I do hope you will all learn as much as you can; for an Education is a great thing.”

I wonder how many white girls of sixteen would do any better, if as well, as this resolute F, bravely making her way against fate and fortune, toward the useful, happy womanhood we all desire. I know she will find friends, and I trust that if she ever knocks at the door of any college, asking her sisters to let her in, they will not disgrace themselves by turning their backs upon her; but prove themselves worthy of their blessings, by showing them Christian gentlewomen.

Here are my six girls; doctor, artist, philanthropist, actress, lawyer, and freed woman; only a few among the hundreds who work and win, and receive their reward, seen of men or only known to God. Perhaps some other girl reading of these may take heart again, and travel on cheered by their example; for the knowledge of what has been done often proves wonderfully inspiring to those who long to do, I felt this strongly when I went to a Woman’s Congress not long ago; for on the sta.e was a noble array of successful women, making the noblest use of their talents in discussing all the questions 2 which should interest and educate their sex. I to \a particularly proud of the senators from Massachusetts, and, looking about the crowded house to see how the audience stirred and glowed under their inspiring words, I saw a good omen for the future.

Down below were grown people, many women, and a few men; but up in the gallery, like a garland of flowers, a circle of girlish faces looked down eager-eyed; listening, with quick smiles and tears, to the wit or eloquence of those who spoke, dropping their school books to clap heartily when a good point was made, and learning better lessons in those three days than as many years of common teaching could give them.

It was close and crowded down below, dusty and dark; but up in the gallery the fresh October air blew in, mellow sunshine touched the young heads, there was plenty of room to stir, and each day the garland seemed to blossom fuller and brighter, showing how the interest grew. There they were, the future Mary Livermores, Ednah Cheneys, Julia Howes, Maria Mitchells, Lucy Stones, unconsciously getting ready to play their parts on the wider stage which those pioneers have made ready for them, before gentler critics, a wiser public, and more enthusiastic friends, Looking from the fine gray heads which adorned the shadowy platform, to the bright faces up aloft, I wanted to call out, —

“Look, listen, and learn, my girls; then, bringing your sunshine and fresh air, your youth and vigor, come down to fill nobly the places of these true women, and earn for yourselves the same success which will make their names long loved and honored In the land.”

LOST IN A LONDON FOG.

HE had been to tea with some friends in Shaftesbury Terrace, and were so busy with our gossip that the evening slipped away unperceived till the clock struck half-past ten. We were two lone ladies, and had meant to leave early, as we were strangers in London and had some way to drive; so our dismay on discovering the lateness of the hour may be imagined.

We had not engaged a carriage to come for us, knowing that a cab-stand was near by, and that a cab would be much cheaper than the snug broughams ladies usually secure for evening use.

Out flew the little maid to get us a cab, and we hurried on our wraps eager to be gone. But we waited and waited, for Mary Ann did not come, and we were beginning to think something had happened to her, when she came hurrying back to say that all the cabs were gone from the neighboring stand, and she had run to another, where, after some delay, she had secured a hansom.

Now it is not considered quite the thing for ladies fco go about in hansom cabs, without a gentleman to accompany them, especially in the evening; but being independent Americans, and impatient to relieve our weary hostess of our presence, we said nothing, but bundled in, gave the address, — 24 Colville Gardens, Bayswater, — and away we went.

A dense fog had come on, and nothing was visible but a short bit of muddy street, and lamps looming dimly through the mist. Our driver was as husky as if it had got into his throat, and the big, white horse looked absolutely ghostly as he went off at the breakneck pace which seems as natural to the London cab-horse as mud is to London streets.

“Isn’t it fun to go rattling round in this all-out-of- doors style, through a real London fog?” said my sister, who was now enjoying her first visit to this surprising city.

“That remains to be seen. For my part, I’d give a good deal to be shut up, dry and decent, in a four- wheeler, this is so very rowdy,” I returned, feeling much secret anxiety as to the propriety of our proceeding.

“You are sure you gave the man the right direction?” I asked, after we had driven through what seemed a wilderness of crescents, terraces, gardens and squares.

“Of course I did, and he answered,f All right, mum.’ Shall I ask him if it is all right? “ said M} who dearly liked to poke up the little door in the roof, which was our only means of communication with the burly, breezy cherub who sat up aloft to endanger the life of his fare.

“You may, for we have ridden long enough to go to St. Paul’s.”

Up went the little door, and M asked blandly, —

“Are you sure you are going right, driver?”

“No, mum, I ain’t,” was the cheering response breathed through the trap-door (as M called it) in a hoarse whisper.

“I told you where to go, and it is time we were there.”

“I’m new come to London, mum, and ain’t used to these parts yet,” — began the man.

“Good gracious! so are we; and I’m sure I can’t tell you any thing more than the name and number I have already given. You’d better ask the first policeman we meet,” cried I, with the foreboding fear heavier than before.

“All right, mum,” and down went the little door, and off rattled the cab.

My irrepressible sister burst out laughing at the absurdity of our position.

w Don’t laugh, M, for mercy’s sake! It’s no joke to be wandering about this great city at eleven o’clock at night in a thick fog, with a tipsy driver,” I croaked, with a warning pinch.

“He isn’t tipsy, only stupid, as we are, not to have engaged a carriage to come for us.”

“He is tipsy; I smelt gin in his breath, and he is half asleep up there, I’ve no doubt, for we have passed one, if not two policemen, I’m sure.”

“Nonsense! you wouldn’t know your own father in this mist. Let Jarvey alone and he will bring us safely home.”

u We shall see,” I answered, grimly, as a splash of mud lit upon my nose, and the cab gave a perilous lurch in cutting round a sharp corner.

Did any one ever find a policeman when he was wanted? I never did, though they are as thick as blackberries when they are not needed.

On and on we went, but not a felt helmet appeared, and never did escaping fugitive look more eagerly for the North Star than I did for a gleaming badge on a blue coat.

“There’s a station! I shall stop and ask, for I’m not going slamming and splashing about any longer Hi there, driver!” and I poked up the door with a vigor that would have startled the soundest jleeper.

“Ay, ay, mum,” came the wheezy whisper, more wheezy than ever.

“Stop at this station-house and hail some one. must get home, and you must ask the way.”

“All right, mum,” came back the hollow mockery conveyed in those exasperating words.

We did stop, and a star did appear, when I, with all the dignity I could muster, stated the case and asked for aid.

“Pleeseman X,” gave it civilly; but I greatly fear he did not believe that the muddy-faced woman with a croaky voice, and the blonde damsel with curls, long earrings and light gloves, were really respectable members of the glorious American Republic.

I felt this and I could not blame him; so, thanking him with a bow which would have done credit to the noblest of my Hancock and Quincy ancestors, we went on again.

Alas, alas, it was all go on and no stop; for although our driver had responded briskly, “ Ay, ay, sir,” to the policeman’s inquiry, “ Y”ou know your way now, don’t you?” he evidently did not know it, and the white horse went steadily up and down the long, wet streets, like a phantom steed in a honid dream.

Things really were becoming serious; midnight was approaching. I had not the remotest idea where we were, and the passers-by became more and more infrequent, lights vanished from windows, few cabs were seen and the world was evidently going to bed. The fog was rapidly extinguishing my voice, and anxiety quenching my courage. M’s curls hung limp and wild about her face, and even M’s spirits began to fail.

“I am afraid we are lost,” she whispered in my ear.

“Not a doubt of it.”

“The man must be tipsy, after all.”

“That is evident.”

“What will people think of us? “

“That we are tipsy also.”

“What shall we do? “

“Nothing but sit here and drift about till morning. The man has probably tumbled off; this dreadful horse is evidently wound up and won’t stop till he has run down; the fog is increasing, and nothing wili bring us to a halt but a collision with some other shipwrecked Yankee, as lost and miserable aa we are.”

2* a “Qh, L, don’t be sarcastic and grim now! Do -ixert yourself and land somewhere. Go to a hotel.

This horrid man must know where the Langham is.”

“I doubt if he knows any thing, and I am sure that eminently respectable house would refuse to admit such a pair of frights as we are, at this disreputable hour. No, we must go on till something happens to save us. We have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, and that is some comfort.”

M groaned, I laughed, the ghostly horse sneezed, and I think the driver snored.

When things are pretty comfortable I am apt to croak, but when every thing is tottering on the verge of annihilation I usually feel rather jolly. Such being the perversity of my fallen nature, I began to enjoy myself at this period, and nearly drove poor M out of her wits by awful or whimsical suggestions and pictures of our probable fate.

It was so very absurd that I really could not help seeing the funny side of the predicament, and M was the best fun of all, she looked so like a dilapidated Ophelia with her damp locks, a blue rigolette all awry, her white gloves tragically clasped, and her pale countenance bespattered with the mud that lay thick on the wooden boot and flew freely from thi wheels.

I had my laugh out and then tried to mend matters. What could we do? My first impulse was to stir up the sleeping wretch above, and this I did by energetically twitching the reins that hung loosely before our noses like the useless rudder of this lost ship.

“Young man, if you don’t wake up and take us to Colville Gardens as quickly as possible, I shall report you to-morrow. I’ve got your number, and I shall get my friend, Mr. Peter Taylor, of Aubrey House, to attend to the matter. He’s an M. P., and will see that you are fined for attempting to drive a cab when you know nothing of London.”

I fear that most of this impressive harangue wag lost, owing to the noise of the wheels and the feebleness of my nearly extinguished voice; but it had some effect, for though the man did not seem scared by the threatened wrath of an M. P., he did feel his weak point and try to excuse it, for he answered in a gruffy, apologetic tone, —

“Who’s a-goin’ to know any thing in such a blessed fog as this? Most cabbies wouldn’t try to drive at no price, but I’ll do my best, mum.”

“Very well. Do you know where we are now? I demanded.

“Blest if I do!”

He didn’t say “ blest” — quite the reverse; — but I forgave him, for he really did seem to be making an effort, having had his nap out. An impressive pause followed, then M had an inspiration.

“Look, there’s a respectable man just going into his house from that four-wheeled cab. Let us hail the whole concern, and get help of some sort.”

I gave the order, and, eager to be rid of us at any price, our man rattled us up to the door at which a gray-haired gentleman was settling with his driver.

Bent on clutching this spar of salvation, I burst out of our cab and hastened up to the astonished pair. What I said I don’t know, but vaguely remember jumbling into my appeal all the names of all the celebrated and respectable persons whom I knew on both sides of the water, for I felt that my appearance was entirely against me, and really expected to be told to go about my business.

John Bull, however, had pity upon me, and did his best for us, like a man and a brothei.

“Take this cab, madam; the driver knows what he is about, and will see you safely home. I’ll attend to the other fellow,” said the worthy man, politely ignoring my muddy visage and agitated manners.

Murmuring blessings on his head, we skipped into the respectable four-wheeler, and in a burst of confidence I offered Mr. Bull my purse to defray the expenses of our long drive.

“Rash woman, you ‘11 never see your money again!” cried M, hiding her Roman earrings and clutching her Etruscan locket, prepared for highway robbery if not murder.

I did see my purse again and my money, also; for that dear old gentleman paid our miserable cabby out of his own pocket (as I found afterwards), and with a final gruff “ All right!” the pale horse and his beery driver vanished in the mist. It is, and always will be my firm belief that it was a phantom cab, and that it is still revolving ceaselessly about London streets, appearing and disappearing through the fog, to be hailed now and then by some fated passenger, who is whisked to and fro, bewildered and forlorn, till rescued, when ghostly steed and phantom cab vanish darkly.

“Now you will be quite safe, ladies;” and the good old gentleman dismissed us with a paternal smile.

With a feeling of relief I fell back, exhausted by our tribulations.

“I know now how the wandering Jew felt,’r said M, after a period of repose.

“I don’t wish to croak, dear; but if this man does not stop soon, I shall begin to think we have gently stepped out of the frying-pan into the fire. Unless we were several miles out of our way, we ought to arrive somewhere,” I responded, flattening my nose against the pane, though I literally could not see one inch before that classical feature.

“Well, I’m so tired, I shall go to sleep, whatever happens, and you can wake me up when it is time to scream or run,” said M, settling herself for a doze.

I groaned dismally, and registered a vow to spend all my substance in future on the most elegant and respectable broughams procurable for money, with a gray-haired driver pledged to temperance, and a stalwart footman armed with a lantern, pistol, directory, and map of London.

All of a sudden the cab stopped; the driver, not being a fixture, descended, and coming to the window, said, civilly, —

“The fog is so thick, mum, I’m not quite sure if I’m right, but this is Colville Square.”

“Don’t know any such place. Colville Gardens is what we want. There’s a church at the end, and trees in the middle, and “ —

4tNo use, mum, describin' it, for I can't see a thing. But the Gardens can't be far off, so I '11 try again."

"We never shall find it, so we had better ask the man to take us at once to some station, work-house, ©r refuge till morning," remarked M, in such a tone of sleepy resignation that I shook her on the spot.

Another jaunt up and down, fog getting thicker, night later, one woman sleepier and the other crosser every minute, but still no haven hove in sight. Presently the cab stopped with a decided bump against the curb-stone, and the driver reappeared; saying, with respectful firmness, —

"My horse is beat out, and it's past my time fry? turning in, so if this ain't the place I shall have to give it up, mum"

"It is not the place," I answered, getting out with the calmness of despair.

"There's a light in that house and a woman looking out. Go and ask her where we are," suggested M, waking from her cloze.

Ready now for any desperate measure, I rushed ap the steps, tried vainly to read the number, but could not, and rang the bell with the firm determination to stay in that house till morning at any cost.

Steps came running down, the door flew open, and I was electrified at beholding the countenance of my own buxom landlady.

"My dear soul, where 'ave you been? " she cried, as I stood staring at her, dumb with surprise and relief.

"From the Crystal Palace to Greenwich, I believe. Come in, M, and ask the man what the fare is," I answered, dropping into a hall chair, and feeling as I imagine Robinson Crusoe did when he got home.

Of course that civil cabby cheated me abominably. I knew it at the time, but never protested; for I was so glad and grateful at landing safely I should have paid a pound if he had asked it.

Next day we were heroines, and at breakfast alternately thrilled and convulsed the other boarders by a recital of our adventures. But the "strong-minded Americans " got so well laughed at that they took great care never to ride in hansom cabs again, 01 get lost in the fog.

THE BOYS’ JOKE, AND WHO GOT THE BEST OF IT.

IT was the day before Christinas, and grandpa’s biff house was swarming with friends and rela- options, all brimful of spirits and bent on having a particularly good time. Dinner was over and a brief lull ensued, during which the old folks took naps, the younger ones sat chatting quietly, while the children enlivened the day by a quarrel.

It had been brewing for some time, and during that half hour the storm broke. You see, the boys felt injured because for a week at least the girls had been too busy to pay the slightest attentioa to them and their affairs, — and what’s the good of having sisters and cousins if they don’t make themselves useful and agreeable to a fellow? What, made it particularly hard to bear was the fact that there was a secret about it, and all they coulc1 discover was that they were to have no part in the fun. This added to their wrath, for they could have boine the temporary neglect, if the girls had been making something nice for them; but they were not, and the irate lads were coolly informed that they would never know the secret, or benefit by it in the *east.

Now this sort of thing was not to be borne, you know, and after affecting to scorn the whole concern, the boys were finally goaded to confess to one another that they were dying to learn what was going on, though no power on earth would make them own as much to the girls. It certainly was very tantalizing to the poor fellows penned up in the breakfast-room (to keep the house quiet for an hour) to see the girls prance in and out of the library with the most aggravating air of importance and delight; to watch mysterious parcels borne along; to hear cries of rapture, admiration, or alarm from the next room, and to know that fun of some sort was going on, and they not in it.

It snowed so they could not go out; all had played their parts manfully at dinner, and were just in the lazy mood when a man likes to be amused by the gentler half of the race (which they believe was created for that express purpose), and there, on the other side of th* ftdipg doors, were half-a-dozen sprightly damsels, laughing and chatting, without a thought or care for the brothers and cousins gaping and growling close by.

The arrival of a sleigh-load of girlish neighbors added to the excitement, and made the boys feel that something must be done to redress their wrongs.

“Let’s burst in on them and take a look, no matter if they do scold,” proposed

Tom, the scapegrace, ready for a raid.

“No, that won’t do; grandma said we were to let the girls alone, and we shall lose our presents if we don’t behave. You just lean up against the door, Joe, and if it flies open, why it is an accident, you know,” said Alf the wise.

So Joe, the fat cousin, backed up to the door like a young elephant, and leaned hard; but *t was locked, and nothing came of it but a creak from the door, and a groan from Joe.

“I’ll look through the keyhole, and tell what I see,” cried little Neddy; and no one forbade him, though, at any other time, big brother Frank would have cuffed his ears for daring to suggest such a prank.

“There’s something bright, and the girls are fussing round it. Kitty’s got a lot of red and blue ribbons in her hand, and Grace is up in a chair, and Nell — oh, it’s cake; a great dish full of the jolliest kinds, and bon-bons, and sugared fruit, just the sort I like. I say, knock the door down, some of you big fellows, and let’s have one grab!” cried Neddy, maddened by the sight of the forbidden sweeties.

“Be quiet, and take another peep; it’s rather interesting to hear what’s going on,” said Frank, reposing upon the sofa like the Great Mogul, as the boys called him.

Poor little Tantalus obediently applied his eye to the keyhole, but fell back with a blank face, saying in a despairing tone:

“They’ve plugged it up, and I can’t see a thing!”

“Serves you right; if you’d held your tongue they never would have known what you were about,” was Frank’s ungrateful answer.

A stifled giggle from the other side of the door caused a dead silence to pervade the breakfast-room for several minutes, while Neddy wriggled out of sight under the sofa as if to escape from the finger of scorn.

Suddenly Tom cried in a shrill whisper, “I’ve got it!” and pointed to a ventilator over the door.

A simultaneous rush of boys and chairs took place; but Tom claimed the rights of a discoverer, and, softly mounting an improvised ladder of tables and stools, he peered eagerly through the glass, while impatient hands plucked at his legs, and the pressure of the mob caused his perch to totter perilously.

The spectacle which he beheld would have touched the heart of any little girl, but to an unappreciative boy it possessed no charm, for it was only a doll’s Christmas tree. For weeks, the young mammas had been making pretty things for their wooden, wax, or porcelain darlings, and it was excellent practice, since many a pair of hands that scorned patchwork and towels, labored patiently over small gowns, trimmed gay hats, and wrought wonders in worsted, without a sigh.

It really was a most delightful little tree, set in an Indian jar, snowed over with flour, garlanded with alternate festoons of cranberries and pop-corn, and every bough laden with such treasures that if dolls could stare any harder than they do, they certainly would have opened their painted eyes with amazement and joy. Such “ darling” hats, and caps; such “sweet” gowns and cloaks; such “cunning” muffs and tippets! Dressing cases as perfect as grown-up ones, I assure you; mittens that must have been knit on darning-needles; shoes of colored kid fit for a doll’s Cinderella, and sets of brass and bead jewelry that glittered splendidly. Wee bottles of perfume for waxen noses; tiny horns of comfits; travelling bags, and shawl straps, evidently worked by the fairies; and underclothes which I modestly forbear to describe, merely saying that very few of the seams were puckered, and the trimmings “ perfectly lovely.”

At the moment when Peeping Tom’s profane eye beheld the innocent revel, the dolls were seated in a circle, their mammas standing behind them, while the happy little hostesses bestowed the gifts with appropriate remarks. It is needless to say that the dolls behaved beautifully, their cheeks glowing with pleasure as they returned thanks in voices so like those of their mothers that one couldn’t tell the difference.

The tree was soon stripped, and then the chatter began again, for every thing must be tried on at once, and more than one doll who came in shabby clothes bloomed out in gorgeous array, or was made tidy for the winter.

“I’m so glad to get a worked flannel petticoat for my Jemima. Mamma was saying only yesterday that she didn’t approve of show at the expense of comfort, and I knew she meant Jemmy, who hadn’t a thing on but her pink silk dress and earrings,” observed Mrs. Kitty, in a moral tone.

“Clementina has been suffering for shoes, though her feet don’t show with a train. I meant to have saved enough to buy her some, but what with limes and candy, and pencils, and fines for saying ‘awful,’ I do believe the poor thing would have gone barefooted all winter, if Nell hadn’t given her these beauties,” replied Mrs. Alice, proudly surveying her daughter’s feet in red kid boots of a somewhat triangular shape.

“I couldn’t make them fit very well, because the cotton is all coming out of her toes, and it was hard to measure,” explained Mrs. Nell, conscious that shoemaking was not her mission.

“They are just the thing; for I’m afraid my poor Clem is going to have the gout, young as she is. It is in our family, so it is well to be prepared,” answered Mrs. Alice, with the beautiful forethought of a maternal heart.

“These muffs are made out of our Tabby’s skin. I thought you’d like them as keepsakes, for we all loved her,” said Grace, with a pensive sigh, as she smoothed the white fur of a dear departed cat, feeling that black and violet bows would have been more suitable than red and blue for the decoration of these touching memorials.

u I wonder if there isn't a nice place somewhere for good cats when they die? I hope so: for I'm sure they have souls, though they may be little bits of ones," observed Kitty, who felt as if her name was a tie between herself and the pets she most adored.

"I wonder if they have ghosts," said Nell, as if she feared that Tabby's might appear.

A faint " Meou" seemed to float down to the startled girls from some upper region, and for an instant they stood staring about them. Then they laughed like a chime of bells, and accused little Lotty of pinching the kitten in her arms.

"I didn't; it was Tom up dere," protested the child, pointing to the ventilator, from which a round red face was staring at them, like a full moon.

Shrieks of indignation greeted the discovery, and a rain of small articles pelted the countenance of the foe, as it grinned derisively, while a jeering voice called out:

"I don't think much of your old secret. It wasn't worth the fuss you made about it, and I wouldn't have any if I couldn't do better than that."

"I'd like to see you get up any thing half as nice. You couldn't do it. Boys never invent new games, ibnt girls do. Papa says so, and he knows," •answered Nell.

"Pooh! We fellows could beat you as easy as not, if we cared to; so you needn't brag, miss. Men invent every thing in the world, 'specially ventilators, and you see how useful they are," returned Tom, glad that he had kept his place in spite of the maltreatment his extremities were undergoing.

"Boys are more curious than girls, anyway. We should never have done such a mean thing as to peek at you," cried Kitty, coming to the rescue, and hitting the enemy in his weakest spot.

"Oh, we only did it for fun. Give us a taste of your spread, and we '11 never say a word about it," returned the barefaced boy, with a wheedlesome air, and a tender glance toward the dainty tea-table set forth so temptingly just under his nose.

"Not a bit, unless you '11 say our tree is lovely and own that we are the cleverest at getting up new and nice things," said Kitty, sternly.

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"Never!" roared Tom; "we can beat you any day if we choose."

"Then do it, and we will own up; yes, and we will go halves in all the goodies we get off our big tree to-night," added Kitty, bound to stand by her sex and ready to wager a year's bon-bons in the defence of her position.

"By George, I'll do it if the fellows will agree! Honor bright now, and no dodging," said Tom, recklessly pledging himself and friends to any thing and every thing.

"Honor bright," chorused the girls in high glee.

"Only don't be a month about it; you boys are so slow," added Grace, in a superior tone, that ruffled the gentleman at the ventilator.

"We'll do it to-morrow; see if we don't," he cried out, rashly heaping difficulties upon his party.

"Then you'd better set about it at once, and leave us in peace," said Nell, tartly.

"I shall go, ma'am, when I please, and not one minute sooner" — began Tom, with immense dignity; but he did not keep his word; for the sudden withdrawal of his head, followed by a crash and howls oi mingled merriment, wrath, and pain, plainly proved that circumstances over which he had no control hastened his departure.

The ladies sat down to their afternoon tea, which was much enlivened by guessing what those " stupid boys " would do. The gentlemen, warned by Tom's downfall, contented themselves with racking their mighty minds to invent some new, striking, and appropriate entertainment which should cover their names with glory and demolish their opponents for ever more.

Perhaps it was too soon after dinner; perhaps the brightest wits of the party had been shaken by the fall, or the cold affected the inventive powers; for, rack as they would, those mighty minds refused to work.

"You ought to have given us more time; of course we can't get up any thing clever in one day and a half," grumbled Frank, much annoyed because all the rest looked to him and he had not an idea to offer.

"I wasn't going to have a parcel of girls crow over me. I'd blow myself up for a show before I'd let them do that," answered Tom, rubbing his bruised elbows with a grim and defiant glance toward the fatal ventilator, for he felt that he had got not only himself but his mates into a scrape.

"Don't worry, old fellows; time enough; sleep on it, and something capital will pop into somebody's noddle, see if it doesn't," counselled Alf, with a sage nod, as he went to discover who was sobbing in the hall.

Little Lotty sat on the fuzzy red mat, with a tortoise-shell kitten in her arms, her white pinafore full of candies, and her chubby face bedewed with tears.

"What's the matter, Toddlekins? " asked Alf, in such a sympathetic tone that the afflicted infant poured forth her woes in one breath, with the brown eyes flashing through their tears and a dramatic gesture of the small hands that told the tale better than her broken words.

“De naughty, naughty girls turned out my Torty ‘cause she hopped on de table and drinked de tea, and I corned too, and we is doing to have a kitmouse tee all ourselfs up in de nursery, so now!”

Alf laughed at her indignation, but dried her tears, and sent her away happy with a sprig of hemlock from the decorations of the hall. “ Virtue is its own reward” proved true in this case; for as Alf’went back to his mates he had an idea — such a superb one that it nearly took his breath away and caused him to break into a wild sort of jig, as he cried aloud — “ I’ve found it, boys; I’ve found it! “

“Where? What? How?” asked the others, clinging to him as if they were shipwrecked mariners, and he a rope thrown out to them.

The idea was evidently a good one, for it was received with great applause, and everybody was interested at once in helping Alf elaborate his plan.

“Won’t it be heaping coals of fire on their heads after the shabby way they have treated us?” said Tom, chuckling at the thought of the girls’ remorse when the touching surprise in store for them should be revealed.

“But how the dickens shall we get enough m ?” began Frank, rather inclined to throw cold water on the affair because he was not the originator of it.

“Hush!” shouted Alf; then added in a melodramatic whisper, “ If the girls hear that word we are lost. I’ve planned how to manage that, but it will take time, and we’d better begin at once, or there won’t be enough you-know-whats to go round. Come upstairs; we can talk safely there without a pack of girls listening at the keyhole, as I know they are this identical minute.”

Alf raised his voice at the last words, and the boys trooped off with derisive hoots; for a guilty rustle and a sudden outburst of conversation in the other room told them that their shot had hit somebody.

“I wish we hadn’t dared them to do it; for they will be sure to get up some dreadful surprise. I shall be expecting it every minute, and that will make me so nervous I shall not enjoy myself a bit.”

“I’m not afraid; they won’t invent any thing tonight, so we may as well clear up and be ready for our tree,” answered Kitty to Nell as they packed the dolls on the sofa to sleep while their mammas enjoyed themselves.

No need to tell about that evening, for every child knows what a Christmas tree is better than we can describe it, so we will skip into the next morning when the boys’ joke came off.

The young folks usually slept late after their unwonted revelry by night, but, strange to relate, the lads were early astir. In fact, Mary, the cook, saw several small ghosts whisking up the back-stairs when she went down to kindle her fire, and curious sounds were heard in attic and cellar, store-room and closets.

Something very exciting was going on, and the plders were evidently in it, for, though several mammas were heard to cry out when certain mysterious things were shown them, they never said a word, but looked up bits of gay ribbon without a murmur; while the papas enjoyed the fun and lent a hand in the most delightful manner.

When the girls came down to the late breakfast they found notes under their napkins, inviting them to a surprise party in the drying room at eleven a. m.

“I didn’t think they’d be so quick. Shall you da,re to go? “ whispered Nell to Kitty as they compared notes and tried to make out the device on the seal, which was evidently intended for an animal of some sort.

“We must go, for we promised. Of course it won’t amount to any thing, and we can keep our sweeties,” answered Kitty, lovingly eying the pretty box of French bon-bons which she had so rashly staked.

“You ‘11 be sorry if you don’t, for it is the com- pletest thing you ever saw, and no end of fun in it,” began Tom, assuming an ecstatic expression and smacking his lips.

“Hold your tongue and go to work, or we snail not be ready in time. We’ve got to trim all th« jigctmarees, hang the thingummies while they are fresh, and see that the basket of treasures arrives safely,” said Alf, with such mysterious nods and smiles that the girls were instantly consumed by an intense curiosity to know what “ thingummies “ and “jigamarees” were, while “treasures” had such a rich sound that they began to hope the boys were really going to atone for the past by some splendid piece of generosity.

“Come punctually at eleven and bring your boxes with you; they will be a good deal lighter when you come down again;” with which cheering remark Frank led off his men, leaving the girls to watch the clock with anxious, yet eager eyes.

Their wonder and suspense was much increased by the fact that Lotty was sent for and carried off by an escort of two. Listening at the foot of the backstairs they heard her little voice exclaim approv- iagly:

“Oh how funny! how berry nice! “ then the door dosed, and the girls heard no more.

As the clock struck, up marched seven young ladies, each with a bon-bon box under her arm and an eager sparkle in her eyes. As they paused at the door Tom’s voice was heard saying, “I wish they’d hurry up, for I’m tired of this business and have had scratching enough.”

“They are coming! Now mind, no scrambling till I give the word. Each fellow stand- in his place, keep the bows right side up and hold tight, or there will be a dreadful piece of work,” answered Alf, evidently giving last touches to the spectacle.

“They have borrowed Fred’s monkey and are going to scare us; I know they are by what Tom said : and I hear a queer noise — don’t you? “ whispered Nell, clutching Grace’s skirts.

“It cannot be any thing very bad or Lotty would cry. Steady, girls; I’m going to knock,” and Kitty gave a bold “ rat-tat-tat,” which caused a sensation within.

The door opened, and Frank made his best bow as he said, with a flourish:

“Enter, ladies, and join us in the interesting festival which we have prepared at your desire. Take a look first, and then I will explain this charming scene if it is not clear to you.”

No need to tell the girls to take a look; they had done that already; but it was evident that an ex 8*

planation would be necessary, for they were quite mystified by the “ charming scene;” and well they might be, for it was a curious one.

The middle of the room was adorned by a large tub, in which stood a small spruce tree hung with the oddest things that ever swung from a bough. Mice by their tails, bits of cheese, milk in small bottles, gay balls, loops of string, squares of red and blue flannel like little blankets, bundles of herbs tied with bright ribbons, and near the top hung a cage with several small wThite animals dancing about in it.

But funniest of all was the circle of boys around this remarkable tree, at the foot of which Lotty sat; for each held a cat or kitten in his arms decorated with a gorgeous bow; both boys and cats so absurdly solemn and ill at ease that after one look the girls burst into a gale of merriment.

“Glad you like it, ladies; we have done our best, and I flatter myself it is a pretty neat thing,” began showman Frank, with a gratified air, while the other boys with difficulty restrained their charges from escaping to their mistresses.

“It’s very funny, but what does it all mean?” asked Grace, wiping her eyes, and nodding to her own fat Jerry, whose yellow eyes appealed to her for aid.

“It is a Kitmouse tree, the first one ever known, prepared at great expense for this occasion, to prove that we can invent superior amusements, and entirely outdo other folks who shall be nameless.”

“It isn’t half so pretty as our tree was,” said Kitty, as Frank paused for breath.

“But think how much more pleasure it will give; for cats can enjoy and dolls can’t. These presents are useful and instructive; for we have not only food and drink, but catnip and cataplasms for the poor darlings, if they have catarrh or any other catastrophe of that sort; but here is a little catechism for the kits, and string for cats’ cradles when they have learned their lessons. Cataracts of milk will flow from these bottles for their refreshment, and a catalogue of delicacies will be furnished free to any lady wishing to repeat this performance at a future time.”

“Hurry up, and give Jerry a bite of something, or he ‘11 eat me,” cried Tom, who had been silently struggling with his puss while Frank delivered the speech, which he considered a masterpiece of wit.

* If the ladies will sit upon the window-seats 1

will give out the presents at once;” and Frank proceeded to do so, amid much merriment; for the kittens began at once to play with the balls, the cats to eat and drink, while the boys surveyed the scene with great satisfaction, and the girls applauded as the mice were handed round, one to each cat, as a delicate attention, though few were eaten.

The pussies behaved remarkably well, for the lads had wisely selected the most amiable ones they could find, and the six belonging to the house received them hospitably. Mother Bunch and her three kits did the honors, while Torty and Jerry tried to be polite, though aristocratic Torty arched her back at the half-starved little cat Neddy found in the street, and stout old Jerry growled to himself when Nell’s pretty white Snowball took his mouse away.

Such a frolic as they had, boys and girls, cats and kittens, altogether, one would have thought the house was coming down about their ears. The elders took a peep at them, but a very little of that sort of fun satisfied them and they soon left the youngsters to themselves.

“It’s almost one, and we are going coasting before dinner, so own up girls, and hand over the goodies,’1

said Alf at last, when alull came and every one stopped for breath after a lively game of tag, which caused the cats to seek refuge in every available nook and corner.

“I suppose we must; for it certainly was a bright idea, and we have had a capital time,” confessed honest Nell, sitting down in the clothes-basket, where Mother Bunch had collected her family when the romp began, and beginning to divide her candies.

“Stop a minute!” cried Kitty, with a twinkle in her black eyes; “ was not the agreement that you should invent something newer and nicer than our dolls’ affair?”

“Yes; and isn’t this ever so much better fun in every way than all that fuss for rag babies that don’t know or care any thing about it? “ cried Alf, as proud as a peacock of his success. u Of course it is,” admitted sly Kitty. * Wasn’t it clever of us to get it up, and haven’t we pleased you by treating your cats well? “

“I’m sure you have, and it was dear of you to do it.”

“Well, then, what’s the trouble? “ “ Only that you did not invent the thing all your* selves,” coolly answered Kitty.

“I should like to know who did!” cried the boys with one breath.

“Lotty. She put the idea into your heads with her funny word’ kitmouse.’ You never would have thought of it but for that. A girl helped you; and a very little one too; you had to call her in to make the cats mind, I’m sure, so you have lost your wager and we will keep our bon-bons, thank you.”

Kitty made a low courtesy and stood crunching a delicious strawberry drop as she triumphantly surveyed the astounded boys, who looked as much taken aback as Antonio and his friends when Portia out wits Shylock in the famous court scene.

“She’s got us there,” murmured Frank, with an approving nod to his clever young sister.

“Oh, come; that’s not fair; we had a right to take just a word that meant nothing till we made it. I don’t care for the sweet stuff, but I’m not going to own that we are beaten! “ cried Alf, in high dudgeon; for he had taken much credit to himself for this bright idea.

“You must own that a girl helped you. Do that fairly and I ‘11 go halves, as we promised; for you have made a good joke out of Lotty’s word,” said Kitty, who was generous as well as just, and felt that the poor lads deserved some reward for their labor.

“All right, if the other fellows agree,” returned Tom, helping himself to a handful of candy as he spoke; which cool performance had such a good effect upon the other boys that they all cried out,” We do! we do! “ while Alf, swinging Lotty to his shoulder, marched away, singing at the top of hu?oice, “ Now cheer, boys, cheer, With three times three, Our little Lot, And her kitmou*e tren t”

ROSES AND FORGET-ME-NOTS.

I.

ROSES.

IT was a cold November storm, and every thing looked forlorn. Even the pert sparrows were draggle-tailed and too much out of spirits to light for crumbs with the fat pigeons who tripped through the mud with their little red boots as if in haste to get Dack to their cosy home in the dove-cot.

But the most forlorn creature out that day was a small errand girl, with a bonnet-box on each arm, and both hands struggling to hold a big broken umbrella. A pair of worn-out boots let in the wet upon her tired feet; a thin cotton dress and an old shawl poorly protected her from the storm; and a faded hood covered her head.

The face that looked out from this hood was too pale and anxious for one so young; and when a sudden gust turned the old umbrella inside out with a crash, despair fell upon poor Lizzie, and she was so miserable she could have sat down in the rain and cried.

But there was no time for tears; so, dragging the dilapidated umbrella along, she spread her shawl over the bonnet-boxes and hurried down the broad street, eager to hide her misfortunes from a pretty young girl who stood at a window laughing at her.

She could not find the number of the house where one of the fine hats was to be left; and after hunting all down one side of the street, she crossed over, and came at last to the very house where the pretty girl lived. She was no longer to be seen; and, with a sigh of relief, Lizzie rang the bell, and was told to wait in the hall while Miss Belle tried the hat on.

Glad to rest, she warmed her feet, righted her umbrella, and then sat looking about her with eyes quick to see the beauty and the comfort that made the place so homelike and delightful. A small waiting-room opened from the hall, and in it stood many blooming plants, whose fragrance attracted Lizzie as irresistibly as if she had been a butterfly or bee.

Slipping in, she stood enjoying the lovely colors, sweet odors, and delicate shapes of these household spirits; for Lizzie loved flowers passionately; and just then they possessed a peculiar charm for her.

One particularly captivating little rose won he* heart, and made her long for it with a longing that became a temptation too strong to resist. It was so perfect; so like a rosy face smiling out from the green leaves, that Lizzie could not keep her hands off it, and having smelt, touched, and kissed it, sho suddenly broke the stem and hid it in her pocket. Then, frightened at what she had done, she crept back to her place in the hall, and sat there, burdened with remorse.

A servant came just then to lead her upstairs; for Miss Belle wished the hat altered, and must give directions. With her heart in a flutter, and pinker roses in her cheeks than the one in her pocket, Lizzie followed to a handsome room, where a pretty girl stood before a long mirror with the hat in her hand.

“Tell Madame Tifany that I don’t like it at all, for she hasn’t put in the blue plume mamma ordered • and I won’t have rose-buds, they are so common,” said the young lady, in a dissatisfied tone, as she itwirled the hat about.

“Yes, miss,” was all Lizzie could say; for shi considered that hat the loveliest thing a girl could possibly own.

“You had better ask your mamma about it, Miss Belle, before you give any orders. She will be up in a few moments, and the girl can wait,” put in a maid, who was sewing in the anteroom.

“I suppose I must; but I won’t have roses,” answered Belle, crossly. Then she glanced at Lizzie, and said more gently, “ You look very cold; come and sit by the fire while you wait.”

“I’m afraid I ‘11 wet the pretty rug, miss; my feet are sopping,” said Lizzie, gratefully, but timidly.

“So they are! Why didn’t you wear rubbei boots?”

“I haven’t got any.”

“I ‘11 give you mine, then, for I hate them; and as I never go out in wet weather, they are of no earthly use to me. Marie, bring them here; I shall be glad to get rid of them, and I’m sure they ‘11 be useful to you.”

“Oh, thank you, miss! I’d like ‘em ever so much, for I’m out in the rain half the time, and get bad colds because my boots are old,” said Lizzie, smiling brightly at the thought of the welcome gift.

“I should think your mother would get you warmer things,” began Belle, who found something rather interesting in the shabby girl, with shy bright eyes, and curly hair bursting out of the old hood.

“I haven’t got any mother,” said Lizzie, with a pathetic glance at her poor clothes.

“I’m so sorry! Have you brothers and sisters? “ asked Belle, hoping to find something pleasant to talk about; for she was a kind little soul.

“No, miss; I’ve got no folks at all.”

“Oh, dear; how sad! Why, who takes care of you? “ cried Belle, looking quite distressed.

“No one; I take care of myself. I work for Madame, and she pays me a dollar a week. I stay with Mrs. Brown, and chore round to pay for my keep. My dollar don’t get many clothes, so I can’t be as neat as I’d like.” And the forlorn look came back to poor Lizzie’s face.

Belle said nothing, but sat among the sofa cushions, where she had thrown herself, looking soberly at this other girl, no older than she was, who took care of herself and was all alone in the world. It was a new idea to Belle, who was loved and petted as an only child is apt to be. She often saw beggars and pitied them, but knew very little about theii wants and lives; so it was like turning a new page in her happy life to be brought so near to poverty as this chance meeting with the milliner’s girl.

“Aren’t you afraid and lonely and unhappy?” she said, slowly, trying to understand and put herself in Lizzie’s place.

“Yes; but it’s no use. I can’t help it, and may be things will get better by and by, and I ‘11 have my wish,” answered Lizzie, more hopefully, because Belle’s pity warmed her heart and made her troubles seem lighter.

“What is your wish?” asked Belle, hoping mamma wouldn’t come just yet, for she was getting interested in the stranger.

“To have a nice little room, and make flowers, like a French girl I know. It’s such pretty work, and she gets lots of money, for every one likes her flowers. She shows me how, sometimes, and I can do leaves first-rate; but” —

There Lizzie stopped suddenly, and the color rushed up to her forehead; for she remembered the little rose in her pocket and it weighed upon her conscience like a stone.

Before Belle could ask what was the matter, Marie came in with a tray of cake and fruit, saying:

“Here.’s your lunch, Miss Belle.”

“Put it down, please; I’m not ready for it yet.”

And Belle shook her head as she glanced at Lizzie, who was staring hard at the fire with such a troubled face that Belle could not bear to see it.

Jumping out of her nest of cushions, she heaped a plate with good things, and going to Lizzie, offered it, saying, with a gentle courtesy that made the act doubly sweet:

“Please have some; you must be tired of waiting.”

But Lizzie could not take it; she could only cover her face and cry; for this kindness rent her heart and made the stolen flower a burden too heavy to be borne.

“Oh, don’t cry so! Are you sick? Have I been rude? Tell me all about it; and if I can’t do any thing, mamma can,” said Belle, surprised and troubled.

“No; I’m not sick; I’m bad, and I can’t bear it when you are so good to me,” sobbed Lizzie, quite overcome with penitence; and taking out the crumpled rose, she confessed her fault with many tears.

“Don’t feel so much about such a little thing as that,” began Belle, warmly; then checked herself, and added, more soberly, “ It was wrong to tak? it without leave; but it’s all right now, and I ‘11 give you as many roses as you want, for I know you are a good girl.”

“Thank you. I didn’t want it only because it was pretty, but I wanted to copy it. I can’t get any for myself, and so I can’t do my make-believe ones well. Madame won’t even lend me the old ones in the store, and Estelle has none to spare for me, because I can’t pay her for teaching me. She gives me bits of muslin and wire and things, and shows me now and then. But I know if I had a real flower I could copy it; so she’d see I did know something, for I try real hard. I’m so tired of slopping round the streets, I’d do any thing to earn my living some other way.”

Lizzie had poured out her trouble rapidly; and the little story was quite affecting when one saw the tears on her cheeks, the poor clothes, and the thin hands that held the stolen rose. Belle was much touched, and, in her impetuous way, set about mending matters as fast as possible.

“Put on those boots and that pair of dry stock* ings right away. Then tuck as much cake and fruit into your pocket as it will hold. I’m going te get you some flowers, and see if mamma is too busy to attend to me,”

With a nod and a smile, Belle flew about the room a minute; then vanished, leaving Lizzie to her comfortable task, feeling as if fairies still haunted the world as in the good old times.

When Belle came back with a handful of roses, she found Lizzie absorbed in admiring contemplation of her new boots, as she ate sponge-cake in a blissful sort of waking-dream.

“Mamma can’t come; but I don’t care about the hat. It will do very well, and isn’t worth fussing about. There, will those be of any use to you? “ And she offered the nosegay with a much happier face than the one Lizzie first saw.

“Oh, miss, they’re just lovely! I’ll copy that pink rose as soon as ever I can, and when I’ve learned how to do ‘em tip-top, I’d like to bring you some, if you don’t mind,” answered Lizzie, smiling all over her face as she buried her nose luxuriously in the fragrant mass.

“I’d like it very much, for I should think you’d have to be very clever to make such pretty things. I really quite fancy those rose-buds in my hat, now I know that you’re going to learn how to make them. Put an orange in your pocket, and the flowers in water as soon as you can, so they’ll be fresh when you want them. Good by. Bring home our hats every time and tell me how you get on.”

With kind words like these, Belle dismissed Lizzie, who ran downstairs, feeling as rich as if she had found a fortune. Away to the next place she hurried, anxious to get her errands done and the precious posy safely into fresh water. But Mrs. Turretville was not at home, and the bonnet could not be left till paid for. So Lizzie turned to go “down the high steps, glad that she need not wait. She stopped one instant to take a delicious sniff at her flowers, and that ‘was the last happy moment that poor Lizzie knew for many weary months.

The new boots were large for her, the steps slippery with sleet, and down went the little errand girl, from top to bottom, till she landed in the gutter directly upon Mrs. Turretville’s costly bonnet.

“I’ve saved my posies, anyway,” sighed Lizzie, as she picked herself up, bruised, wet, and faint with pain; “ but, oh, my heart! won’t Madame scold when she sees that band-box smashed flat,” groaned the poor child, sitting on the curbstone tc get her breath and view the disaster.

4

The rain poured, the wind blew, the sparrowc on the park railing chirped derisively, and no one came along to help Lizzie out of her troubles. Slowly she gathered up her burdens; painfully she limped away in the big boots; and the last the naughty sparrows saw of her was a shabby little figure going round the corner, with a pale, tearful face held lovingly over the bright bouquet that was her one treasure and her only comfort in the moment which brought to her the great misfortune of her life.

II

FORGET-ME-NOTS.

“Oh, mamma, I am so relieved that the box has come at last! If it had not, I do believe I should have died of disappointment,” cried pretty Belle, five years later, on the morning before her eighteenth birthday.

“It would have been a serious disappointment, darling; for I had set my heart on your wearing my gift to-morrow night, and when the steamers kept coming in without my trunk from Paris, I was very anxious. I hope you will like it.”

“Dear mamma, I know I shall like it; youi taste is so good and you know what suits me so well. Make haste, Marie; I’m dying to see it,” said Belle, dancing about the great trunk, as the maid carefully unfolded tissue papers and muslin wrappers.

A young girl’s first ball-dress is a grand affair, — m her eyes, at least; and Belle soon stopped dancing, to stand with clasped hands, eager eyes and parted lips before the snowy pile of illusion that was at last daintily lifted out upon the bed. Then, as Marie displayed its loveliness, little cries of delight were heard, and when the whole delicate dress was arranged to the best effect she threw herself upon her mother’s neck and actually cried with pleasure.

“Mamma, it is too lovely! and you are very kind to do so much for me. How shall I ever thank you?”

“By putting it right on to see if it fits; and when you wear it look your happiest, that I may bo proud of my pretty daughter.”

Mamma got no further, for Marie uttered a French shriek, wrung her hands, and then began to burrow wildly in the trunk and among the papers, crying distractedly:

“Great heavens, maclame! the wreath has been forgotten! What an affliction! Mademoiselle’s enchanting toilette is destroyed without the wreath, and nowhere do I find it.”

In vain they searched; in vain Marie wailed and Belle declared it must be somewhere; no wreath appeared. It was duly set down in the bill, and a fine sum charged for a head-dress to match the dainty forget-me-nots that looped the fleecy skirts and ornamented the bosom of the dress. It had evidently been forgotten; and mamma despatched Marie at once to try and match the flowers, for Belle would not hear of any other decoration for her beautiful blonde hair.

The dress fitted to a charm, and was pronounced by all beholders the loveliest thing ever seen. Nothing was wanted but the wreath to make it quite perfect, and when Marie returned, after a long search, with no forget-me-nots, Belle was in despair.

“Wear natural ones,” suggested a sympathizing friend, But another hunt among greenhouses was as fruitless as that among the milliners’ rooms. No forget- me-nots could be found, and Marie fell exhausted into a chair, desolated at what she felt to be an aw ful calamity.

“Let me have the carriage, and I ‘11 ransack the city till I find some,” cried Belle, growing more resolute with each failure.

Mamma was deep in preparations for the ball, and could not help her afflicted daughter, though she was much disappointed at the mishap. So Belle drove off, resolved to have her flowers whether there were any or not.

Any one who has ever tried to match a ribbon, find a certain fabric, or get any thing done in a hurry, knows what a wearisome task it sometimes is, and can imagine Belle’s state of mind after repeated disappointments. She was about to give up in despair, when some one suggested that perhaps the Frenchwoman, Estelle Valnor, might make the desired wreath, if there was time.

Away drove Belle, and, on entering the roon\ gave a sigh of satisfaction, for a whole boxful of th(loveliest forget-me-nots stood upon the table. As fast as possible, she told her tale and demanded the flowers, no matter what the price might be. Imagine her feelings when the Frenchwoman, with a shrug, announced that it was impossible to give mademoiselle a single spray. All were engaged to trim a bridesmaid’s dress, and must be sent away at once.

It really was too bad! and Belle lost her tempet entirely, for no persuasion or bribes would win a spray from Estelle. The provoking part of it was that the wedding would not come off for several days, and there was time enough to make more flowers for that dress, since Belle only wanted a few for her hair. Neither would Estelle make her any, as her hands were full, and so small an order was not worth deranging one’s self for; but observing Belle’s sorrowful face, she said, affably :

“Mademoiselle may, perhaps, find the flowers she desires at Miss Berton’s. She has been helping me with these garlands, and may have some left. Here is her address.”

Belle took the card with thanks, and hurried away with a last hope faintly stirring in her girlish heart, for Belle had an unusually ardent wish to look her best at this party, since Somebody was to be there, and Somebody considered forget-me-nots the sweetest flowers in the world. Mamma knew this, and tha kiss Belle gave her when the dress came had a more tender meaning than gratified vanity or daughterly love.

Up many stairs she climbed, and came at last to a little room, very poor but very neat, where, at the one window, sat a young girl, with crutches by her side and her lap full of flower-leaves and petals. She rose slowly as Belle came in, and then stood looking at her, with such a wistful expression in her shy, bright eyes, that Belle’s anxious face cleared involuntarily, and her voice lost its impatient tone.

As she spoke, she glanced about the room, hoping to see some blue blossoms awaiting her. But none appeared; and she was about to despond again, when the girl said, gently:

“I have none by me now, but I may be able to find you some.”

“Thank you very much; but I have been everywhere in vain. Still, if you do get any, please send them to me as soon as possible. Here is my card.”

Miss Berton glanced at it, then cast a quick look at the sweet, anxious face before her, and smiled so brightly that Belle smiled also, and asked, wonderingly:

“What is it? What do you see? “ “ I see the dear young lady who was so kind to me long ago. You don’t remember me, and ncvet knew my name; but I never have forgotten you all these years. I always hoped I could do something to show how grateful I was, and now I can, for >ou shall have your flowers if I sit up all night to make them.”

But Belle still shook her head and watched the smiling face before her with wondering eyes, till the girl added, with sudden color in her cheeks:

“Ah, you’ve done so many kind things in your life, you don’t remember the little errand girl from Madame Tifany’s who stole a rose in your hall, and how you gave her rubber boots and cake and flowers, and were so good to her she couldn’t forget it il she lived to be a hundred.”

“But you are so changed,” began Belle, who did faintly recollect that little incident in her happy life.

“Yes, I had a fall and hurt myself so that I shall always be lame.”

And Lizzie went on to tell how Madame had dismissed her in a rage; how she lay ill till Mrs. Brown sent her to the hospital; and how for a year she had suffered much alone, in that great house of pain, before one of the kind visitors had befriended her.

While hearing the story of the five years, that had been so full of pleasure, ease and love for herself, Belle forgot her errand, and, sitting beside Lizzie, listened with pitying eyes to all she told ol her endeavors to support herself by the delicate handiwork she loved.

“I’m very happy now,” ended Lizzie, looking about the little bare room with a face full of the sweetest content. “I get nearly work enough to pay my way, and Estelle sends me some when she has more than she can do. I’ve learned to do it nicely, and it is so pleasant to sit here and make flowers instead of trudging about in the wet with other people’s hats. Though I do sometimes wish I was able to trudge, one gets on so slowly with crutches.”

A little sigh followed the words, and Belle put her own plump hand on the delicate one that held the crutch, saying, in her cordial young voice:

“I’ll come and take you to drive sometimes, for you are too pale, and you ‘11 get ill sitting here at work day after day. Please let me; I’d love to; for I feel so idle and wicked when I see busy people like you that I reproach myself for neglecting my duty and having more than my share of happiness.”

Lizzie thanked her with a look, and then said, in a tone of interest that was delightful to hear:

“Tell about the wreath you want; I should so love to do it for you, if I can.”

Belle had forgotten all about it in listening to this sad little story of a girl’s life. Now she felt half ashamed to talk of so frivolous a matter till she remembered that it would help Lizzie; and, resolving to pay for it as never garland was paid for before, eho entered upon the subject with renewed interest.

fc You shall have the flowers in time for your ball to-morrow night. I wTill engage to make a wreath that will please you, only it may take longer than I think. Don’t be troubled if I don’t send it till evening; it will surely come in time. I can work fast, and this will be the happiest job I ever did,” said Lizzie, beginning to lay out mysterious little tools and bend delicate wires.

“You are altogether too grateful for the little I have done. It makes me feel ashamed to think I did not find you out before and do something better worth thanks.”

“Ah, it wasn’t the boots or the cake or the roses, dear Miss Belle. It was the kind looks, the gentle words, the way it was done, that went right to my heart, and did me more good than a million of money. I never stole a pin after that day, for the little rose wouldn’t let me forget how you forgave me so sweetly. 1 sometimes think it kept me from greater temptations, for I was a poor, forlorn child, with ne one to keep me good.”

Pretty Belle looked prettier than ever as she listened, and a bright tear stood in either eye like a drop of dew on a blue flower. It touched her very much to learn that her little act of childish charity had been so sweet and helpful to this lonely girl, and now lived so freshly in her grateful memory. It showed her, suddenly, how precious little deeds of love and sympathy are; how strong to bless, how easy to perform, how comfortable to recall. Her heart was very full and tender just then, and the lesson sunk deep into it never to be forgotten.

She sat a long; time watching flowers bud and o o blossom under Lizzie’s skilful fingers, and then hurried home to tell all her glad news to mamma.

If the next day had not been full of most delightfully exciting events, Belle might have felt some anxiety about her wreath, for hour after hour went by and nothing arrived from Lizzie.

Evening came, and all was ready. Belle was dressed, and looked so lovely that mamma declared she needed nothing more. But Marie insisted that the grand effect would be ruined without the garland among the sunshiny hair. Belle had tim?

now to be anxious, and waited with growing impatience for the finishing touch to her charming toilette.

“I must be downstairs to receive, and can’t wait another moment; so put in the blue pompon and let me go,” she said at last, with a sigh of disappointment, for the desire to look beautiful that night in Somebody’s eyes had increased four-fold.

With a tragic gesture, Marie was about to adjust the pompon when the quick tap of a crutch came down the hall, and Lizzie hurried in, flushed and breathless, but smiling happily as she uncovered the box she carried with a look of proud satisfaction.

A general “Ah!” of admiration arose as Belle, mamma, and Marie surveyed the lovely wreath that lay before them; and when it was carefully arranged on the bright head that was to wear it, Belle blushed with pleasure. Mamma said: “ It is more beautiful than any Paris could have sent us;” and Marie clasped her hands theatrically, sighing, with her head on one side:

“Truly, yes; mademoiselle is now adorable!”

“I am so glad you like it. I did my very best and worked all night, but I had to beg one spray from Estelle, or, with all my haste, I could not have finished in time,” said Lizzie, refreshing her weary eyes with a long, affectionate gaze at the pretty figure before her.

A fold of the airy skirt was caught on one of the blue clusters, and Lizzie knelt down to arrange it as she spoke. Belle leaned toward her and said softly: “ Money alone can’t pay you for this kindness; so tell me how I can best serve you. This is the happiest night of my life, and I want to make every one feel glad also.”

“Then don’t talk of paying me, but promise that I may make the flowers you wear on your wedding- day,” whispered Lizzie, kissing the kind hand held out to help her rise, for on it she saw a brilliant ring, and in the blooming, blushing face bent over her she read the tender little story that Somebody had told Belle that day.

“So you shall! and I’11 keep this wreath all my life for your sake, dear,” answered Belle, as her full heart bubbled over with pitying affection for the poor girl who would never make a bridal garland for herself.

Belle kept her word, even when she was in a happy home of her own; for out of the dead roses bloomed a friendship that brightened Lizzie’s life; and long after the blue garland was faded Belle remembered the helpful little lesson that taught her to read the faces poverty touches with a pathetio eloquence, which says to those who look, “ Forget* me-iiOt,”

OLD MAJOR.

“MAMMA, don’t let them kill him! He isn’t doing any harm, and he’s old and weak, and hasn’t any one to be good to him but Posy and me!” cried little Ned, bursting into his mother’s room, red and breathless with anxiety and haste.

“Kill whom, dear? Sit down and tell me all about it.”

“I canH sit down, and I must be quick, for they may do it while I’m gone. I left Posy to watch him, and she is going to scream with all her might the minute she sees them coming back! “ cried Ned, hovering restlessly about the doorway, as if expecting the call that was to summon him to the rescue.

“Mercy on us! what is it, child? “

“A dear old horse, mamma, who has been hobbling round the road for a week. I’ve seen him driven away from all the neighbors, so Posy and I give him clover and pat him; and to-day we found him at our bars, looking over at us playing in the field. I wanted him to come in, but Mr. White came along and drove him off, and said he was to be killed because he had no master, and was a nuisance. Don’t let him do it! “

“But, Neddy, I cannot take him in, as I did the lame chicken, and the cat without a tail. He is too big, and eats too much, and we have no barn. Mr. White can find his master, perhaps, or use him for light work.”

Mamma got no further, for Ned said again, —

“No, he can’t. He says the poor old thing is of no use but to boil up. And his master won’t be found, because he has gone away, and left Major to take care of himself. Mr. White knew the man, and says he had Major more than eighteen years, and he was a good horse, and now he’s left to die all alone. Wouldn’t I like to pound that man?”

“It was cruel, Neddy, and we must see what we can do.”

So mamma put down her work and followed her boy, who raced before her to tell Posy it would be u all right” now.

Mrs. West found her small daughter perched on a stone wall, patting the head of an old white horse, who looked more like a skeleton than a living animal. Ned gave a whoop as he came, and the poor beast hastily hobbled across the road, pressing himself into a nook full of blackberry vines and thorny barberry bushes, as if trying to get out of sight and escape tormentors.

“That’s the way he does when any one comes, because the boys plague him, and people drive him about till he doesn’t know what to do. Isn’t it a pity to see him so, mamma?” said tender-hearted Ned, as he pulled a big handful of clover from his father’s field close by.

Indeed, it was sad, for the poor thing had evidently been a fine horse once; one could see that by his intelligent eye, the way he pricked up his ears, and the sorrowful sort of dignity with which he looked about him, as if asking a little compassion in memory of his long faithfulness.

“See his poor legs all swelled up, and the bones in his back, and the burrs the bad boys put in his mane, and the dusty grass he has to eat. Look! he knows me, and isn’t afraid, because I’m good to him,” said Ned, patting old Major, who gratefully ate fresh clover from the friendly little hand.

“Yes, and he lets me stroke his nose, mamma It’s as soft as velvet, and his big eyes don’t frighten me a bit, they are so gentle. Oh, if we could only put him in our field, and keep him till he dies, I should be so happy! “ said Posy, with such a wheedlesome arm about mamma’s neck, that it was very hard to deny her any thing.

“If you will let me have Major, I won’t ask for any other birthday present,” cried Ned, with a sudden burst of generosity, inspired, perhaps, by the confiding way in which the poor beast rubbed his gray head against the boy’s shoulder.

“Why, Neddy, do you really mean that? I was going to give you something you want very much. Shall I take you at your word, and give you a worn-out old horse instead?” asked mamma, surprised, yet pleased at the offer.

Ned looked at her, then at old Major, and wavered; for he guessed that the other gift was the little wheelbarrow he had begged for so long, — the dear green 0ne, with the delicious creak and rumble O ‘

to it. He had seen it at the store, and tried it, and longed for it, and planned to trundle every thing in it, from Posy to a load of hay. Yes, it must be his, and Major must be left to his fate.

Just as he decided this, however, Posy gave a cry that told him Mr. White was coming. Major pressed further into the prickly hedge, with a patient sort of sigh, and a look that went to Ned’s heart, for it seemed to say, —

“Good by, little friend. Don’t give up any thing for me. I’m not worth it, for I can only love you in return.”

Mr. White was very near, but Major was safe; for, with a sudden red in his freckled cheeks, Ned put his arm on the poor beast’s drooping neck, and said, manfully, —

“I choose him, mamma; and now he’s mine, I’d like to see anybody touch him!”

It was a pretty sight, — the generous little lad befriending the old horse, and loving him for pure pity’s sake, in the sweet childish way we so soon forget.

Posy clapped her hands, mamma smiled, with a bright look at her boy, while

Mr. White threw over his arm the halter, with which he was about to lead Major to his doom, and hastened to say, —

“I don’t want to hurt the poor critter, ma’am, but he’s no mortal use, and folks complain of his being in the way; so I thought the kindest thing was to put him out of his misery.”

“Does he suffer, do you think? for if so, it would be no kindness to keep him alive,” said mamma.

“Well, no, I don’t suppose he suffers except for food and a little care; but if he can’t have’em, it will go hard with him,” answered Mr. White, wondering if the old fellow had any work in him still.

“He never should have been left in this forlorn way. Those who had had his youth and strength should have cared for him in his age;” and Mrs. West looked indignant.

“So they should, ma’am; but Miller was a mean man, and when he moved, he just left the old horse to live or die, though he told me, himself, that Major had served him well, for nigh on to twenty years. What do you calculate to do about it, ma’am? “ asked Mr. White, in a hurry to be off.

“I’ll show-you, sir. Ned, let down the bars, and lead old Major in. That shall be his home while he lives, for so faithful a servant has earned his rest, and he shall have it.”

Something in the ring of mamma’s voice and the gesture of her hand made Ned’s eyes kindle, and Mr. White walk away, saying, affably, —

“All right, ma’am; I haven’t a word to saj against it.”

But somehow Mr. White’s big barn did not look as handsome to him as usual when he remembered that his neighbor, who had no barn at all, had taken ii. the friendless horse.

It was difficult to make Major enter the field; for he had been turned out of so many, driven away from so many lawns, and even begrudged the scanty pickings of the roadside, that he could not understand the invitation given him to enter and take possession of a great, green field, with apple trees for shade, and a brook babbling through the middle of it.

When at last he ventured over the bars, it was both sad and funny to see how hard he tried to enjoy himself and express his delight.

First, he sniffed the air, then he nibbled the sweet grass, took a long look about him, and astonished the children by lying down with a groan, and trying to roll. He could not do it, however, so lay still with his head stretched out, gently flapping his tail as if to say, —

“It’s all right, my dears. I’m not very strong, and joy upsets me; but I’m quite comfortable, bless you!”

“Isn’t it nice to see him, all safe and happy mamma? “ sighed Posy, folding her hands in childish satisfaction, while Ned sat down beside his horse, and began to take the burrs out of his mane, “Very nice, only don’t kill him with kindness, and be careful not to get hurt,” answered mamma, as she went back to her work, feeling as if she had bought an elephant, and didn’t know what to do with him.

Later in the day a sudden shower came up, and mamma looked about to be sure her little people *bte under cover, for they played out all day long, if possible. No chickens could the maternal hen find to gather under her wings, and so went clucking anxiously about till Sally, the cook, said, with a laugh, —

“Ned’s down in the pastur’, mum, holding an umberella over that old horse, and he’s got a waterproof on him, too. Calvin see it, and ‘most died a-laughing.”

Mamma laughed too, but asked if Ned had on his rubber boots and coat.

“Yes, mum, I see him start all in his wet-weather rig, but I never mistrusted what the dear was up to till Calvin told me. Posy wanted to go, but I wouldn’t let her, so she went to the upper win

dow, where she can see the critter under his umberella.”

Mamma went up to find her little girl surveying the droll prospect with solemn satisfaction; for there in the field, under the apple tree, stood Major, blanketed with the old waterproof, while his new master held an umbrella over his aged head with a patient devotion that would have endeared him to the heart of good Mr. Bergh.

Fortunately the shower was soon over, and Ned came in to dry himself, quite unconscious of any thing funny in his proceedings. Mamma kept perfectly sober while she proposed to build a rough shed for Major out of some boards on the place. Ned was full of interest at once; and with some help from Calvin, the corner under the apple tree was so sheltered that there would be no need of the umbrella hereafter.

So Major lived in clover, and was a happy horse; for Cockletop, the lame chicken, and Bobtail, the cat, welcomed him to their refuge, and soon became fast friends. Cockle chased grasshoppers or pecked about him with meditative clucks as he fed; while Bob rubbed against his legs, slept in his shed, and nibbled catnip socially as often as his constitution needed it But Major loved the children best, and thev took good care of him, though some of their kind attentions might have proved fatal if the wise old beast had not been more prudent than they. It was pleasant to see him watch for them, with ears cocked at the first sound of the little voices, his dim eyes brightening at sight of the round faces peeping over the wall, and feeble limbs stirred into sudden activity by the beckoning of a childish hand.

The neighbors laughed at Ned, yet liked him all the better for the lesson in kindness he had taught them; and a time came when even Mr. White showed his respect for old Major.

All that summer Neddy’s horse took his rest m the green meadow, but it was evident that he was failing fast, and that his “ good time “ came too late. Mamma prepared the children for the end as well as she could, and would have spared them the sorrow of parting by having Major killed quietly, if Ned had not begged so hard to let his horse die naturally; for age was the only disease, and Major seemed to suffer little pain, though he daily grew more weak, and lame, and blind.

One morning when the children went to carry him a soft, warm mash for breakfast, they found him dead; not in the shed, where they had left him warmly covered, but at the low place in the wall Where they always got over to visit him.

There he lay, with head outstretched, as if his last d 3sire had been to get as near them as possible, his last breath spent in thanking them. They liked to think that he crept there to say good by, and took great comfort in the memory of all they had done for him.

They cried over him tenderly, even while they agreed that it was better for him to die; and then they covered him with green boughs, after Ned had smoothed his coat for the last time, and Posy cut a lock from his mane to make mourning rings of.

Calvin said he would attend to the funeral, and went off to dig the grave in a lonely place behind the sand-bank. Ned declared that he could not have his horse dragged away and tumbled into a hole, but must see him buried in a proper manner; and mamma, with the utmost kindness, said she would provide all that was needed.

The hour was set at four in the afternoon, and the two little mourners, provided with large handkerchiefs, Ned, with a black bow on his arm, and Posy in a crape veil, went to drop a last tear over theii departed friend.

At the appointed time Calvin appeared, followed by Mr. White, with a drag drawn by black Bill. This delicate attention touched Neddy; for it might have been bay Kitty, and that would have marred the solemnity of the scene.

As the funeral train passed the house on its way down the lane, mamma, with another crape veil on, came out and joined the procession, so full of sympathy that the children felt deeply grateful.

The October woods were gay with red and yellow leaves, that rustled softly as they went through the wood; and when they came to the grave, Ned thanked Calvin for choosing such a pretty place. A pine sighed overhead, late asters waved beside it, and poor Major's last bed was made soft with hemlock boughs.

When he was laid in it, mamma bade them leave the old waterproof that had served for a pall still about him, and then they showered in bright leaves till nothing was visible but a glimpse of the dear white tail.

The earth was thrown in, green sods heaped over it, and then the men departed, feeling that the mourners would like to linger a little while.

As he left, Mr. White said, with the same gravity which he had preserved all through the scene, —

"You are welcome to the use of the team and my time, ma'am. I don't wish any pay for 'em; in fact, I should feel more comfortable to do this job for old Major quite free and hearty."

Mamma thanked him, and when he was gone, Ned proposed that they should sing a hymn, and Posy added, " They always sing,1 Sister, thou art mild and lovely' at funerals, you know."

Mamma with difficulty kept sober at this idea but suggested the song about " Good old Charlie " as more appropriate. So it was sung with great feeling, and then Posy said, as she "wiped her weeping eyes," —

"Now, Ned, show mamma our eppytap."

"She means eppytarf," explained Ned, with a superior air, as he produced a board, on which he had printed with India ink the following words, —

"Here lies dear old Major. He was a good horse when he was young. But people were not kind to him when he was old. "We made him as happy as we could. He loved us, and we mourn for him. Amen."

Ned's knowledge of epitaphs was very slight, so he asked mamma if this one would do; and she answered warmly, —

"It is a very good one; for it has what many lack, — the merit of being true. Put it up, dear, and I'll make a wreath to hang on the gravestone."

Much gratified, Ned planted the board at the head of the grave, Posy gathered the brightest leaves, and mamma made a lovely garland in which to frame the " eppytap."

Then they left old Major to his rest, feeling sure that somewhere there must be a lower heaven for the souls of brave and faithful animals when their unrewarded work is done.

Many children went to see that lonely grave, but not one of them disturbed a leaf, or laughed at the little epitaph that preached them a sermon from the text, —

"Blessed are the merciful."

WHAT THE GIRLS DID.

“I’M so disappointed that I can’t go; but papa says he can’t afford it this summer. You know we lost a good deal by the great fire, so we must all give up something;” and Nelly gave a sigh, as if her sacrifice was not an easy one.

“I’m sorry, too, for I depend on hearing all about your adventures every summer. It is almost as good as going myself. What a pity Newport is such an expensive place,” answered Kitty Fisher, Nelly’s bosom friend.

“I dare say papa could manage to let me go for a week or so; but my outfit would cost so much I dare not ask him. One must dress there, you know, and I haven’t had a new thing this summer,” said Nelly.

“I’m sure your old things as you call them, are nice enough for any place. I should think I was made, if I had such a lovely wardrobe; “ and Kitty’s eye roved round the pretty room where several gowns and hats were strewn as if for a survey.

“Ah, my dear, you don’t know how quickly fashionable women spy out make-shifts, and despise you for them. All the girls I should meet at Newport would remember those clothes and I shouldn’t enjoy myself a bit. No, I must stay at home, or slip away to Aunt Becky’s, up in New Hampshire, where no one minds your clothes, and the plainer they are the better. It is as dull as tombs up there, and I long for the sea, so it seems as if I coulcVnt give up my trip.”

“Why not go to a cheaper place?” asked Kitty, aiding, with sudden excitent, “ Now look here! This is just the thing, and 1 can go too, so you won’t be lonely.

“Mary Nelson wrote me the other day, begging I’d come down to Oceana, and stay with her. It’s a nice, quiet place, with a beach all to ourselves, lighthouse, rocks, fishing, boats, and all sorts of agreeable things. Not a bit fashionable, and every one wears old clothes and enjoys him or her self in a sensible way.”

“What’s board theve? “

“Ten a week, with bath-house, boats, and an old carriage thrown in “

Who is there?”

“Several teachers resting, a family or two of children, and a lot of boys camping out on the Point.”

“And old clothes really will do?”

“Mary says she lives in her boating-dress, and went to an evening party in a white morning-gown. I’d quite decided to go and have a nice free time, after you were off; but now you come with me, and for once see what fun we poor folks can have without any fuss or feathers.”

“I will. Papa wants me to go somewhere, and will not think my expenses down there are extrava gant. I ‘11 pack to-day, and to-morrow we will be off.”

Next day they ivere off, to be heartily welcomed by Mary, and speedily made at home by Marm Wolsey, as the old lady who kept the house was called. It was a delightfully quiet, pleasant place, with big rooms plainly furnished, but clean and full of fresh sea breezes day and night. Being founded on a rock, the boats were moored almost at the door, the bath-house was close by, on a smooth bench, and the lighthouse twinkled cheerfully, through fog or moonlight, just over the Point.

Such pleasant times as the girls had; taking early diDS in the sea, lying in hammocks on the airy piazza through the hot hours, rowing, fishing, scrambling over the rocks, or sitting in shady nooks, working and reading.

No one thought of clothes; and when Nelly timidly put on a delicate silk one day, she was told finery was not allowed, and a merry resolution was passed that no one should “ dress up “ under penalty of a fine. So flannel boating suits were all the fashion; and Miss Phelps would have rejoiced at the sight of half-a-dozen rosy-faced girls skipping about the rocks in a costume as simple and sensible as the one she recommends.

Of course the campers on the Point soon discovered the mermaids in the Cove, and, by a series of those remarkable accidents which usually occur at such times, got acquainted without much ceremony.

Then the fun increased amazingly, and the old house saw gay doings; for the lads had bonfires, concerts by moonlight on the rocks, and picnics in every available cove, grove, and sea-weedy nook the place could boast.

The mothers of the flocks of riotous children were matrons to the girls; and the shy teachers came out amazingly wheu they found that the three friends were not fashionable city ladies, but lively girls, bent on having an agreeable and sociable time.

Nelly particularly enjoyed all this, and daily wondered why she felt so much better than at Newport, forgetting that there her time was spent in dressing by day, and dancing in hot rooms half the night, with no exercise but a drive or a genteel sail, with some one to do the rowing for her.

“It is the air and the quiet, I fancy,” she said one day, when a month had nearly gone. “I’m getting so brown papa won’t know me, and so fat I have to let out all my things. I do believe I’ve grown several inches across the shoulders with all this rowing and tramping about in a loose suit.”

“Just so much health laid up for next winter. I wish I could afford to bring down a dozen pale girls every season, and let them do what you have been doing for a month or two. Poor girls, I mean, who lose their health by hard work, not by harmful play,” said Mary, who knew something about the dark side of life, having been a governess for years, with little brothers and sisters to care for, and an invalid mother.

“It is so cheap here I should think most any one could afford to come “ said Nelly, feeling a virtuous 5*

satisfaction in the thought of the money she had saved by this economical trip.

“Ah, what seems cheap to you would be far beyond the means of many a poor girl who only makes three or four dollars a week. I’ve often wondered why rich people don’t do little things of that sort more. It must be so pleasant to give health and happiness at such small cost to themselves.”

“If papa were as well off as he was before the fire I could do something of that sort, and I’d like to j but now I can do nothing,” and Nelly felt rather uncomfortable at the memory of the seventeen easy years she had passed without ever thinking of such things.

“Girls, I’ve got an idea, and you must give me your advice at once,” cried Kitty, bouncing in with her hat half off and her eyes full of fun.

“Tell on. What is it? “ asked Nelly, ready for any thing.

“Well, you know the boys have been very polite to us in many ways; they break camp in two days, and we ought to give them a farewell of some sort, to show that we are grateful for their civility. Don’t you think so? “

“Of course! What shall we do? “

u We have had picnics and water parties, and sings and dances in our parlor, so we must get up something new.”

“Have a masquerade; it’s such fun to fix up dresses,” said Nelly, who rather longed to show some of her neglected splendor.

“We might borrow the old barn, to have a grand time. There’s no hay in it, so we could light it up splendidly,” added Kitty, seizing upon the idea with delight.

“How about supper?” asked prudent Mary, remembering the appetites of a dozen hearty lads sharpened by sea air and exercise.

“I’ll pay for the supper. I’ve saved so much by my cheap trip, I can spare twenty dollars as well as not,” cried Nelly, bound to have the thing, done handsomely if at all.

“Bless you, child, it needn’t cost half that! Don’t go and be extravagant, for we can have cake of Marm Wolsey, and make lemonade ourselves; it won’t cost much, and the boys will be just as well off as if we had a grand spread.”

“You let me manage that part of the affair. I have ordered suppers at home, and I know what is proper I will go up to town by the first boat to-m :»i row, and be back in time to help about dresses, and trimming up the barn. Marm will lend us sheets, and with green boughs, flowers, and candles, we can make a lovely room for our little party. I ‘11 bring down some colored candles, and get some old-fashioned dresses at home, and do any errands for you.”

Here Nelly stopped for breath, and the others fell to discussing what they would “go as.” Their fellow-boarders were taken into the secret, and in an hour Marm Wolsey’s whole establishment was in a fbrment. Notes of invitation were dispatched’ and replies on birch-bark came pouring in with most agreeable promptitude.

The campers accepted to a man, and were soon seen ravaging the little town for red flannel and fisherman’s toggery, or shouting with laughter in their tents as they fabricated horse-hair beards, Indian wampum and Roman armor.

Next morning Nelly departed, charged with sun dry very important commissions, and the rest fell to work decorating the barn and overhauling their wardrobes, while good-natured Marm “ het the big oven “ and made cake till the air smelt as if a gale from the Spice Islands had blown over the Point.

At four, the boat came in; but no one saw Nelly arrive, for the whole flock had gone over the rocka to get hemlock boughs in the grove.

When Mary and Kitty returned, they ran to the big room where they held their confabulations, and there found Nelly looking over a bundle of old brocades. Something odd in her face and manner made them both say at once, —

“What’s the matter? Has any thing gone wrong? “

“I’m afraid you will think so, when I tell you that I have ordered no supper, got no pretty candles or flowers, and only spent two dollars of my money,” said Nelly, looking both amused and anxious.

“Lost your purse? “ cried Kitty. « No.”

“Thought better of it, like a wise child,” said Mary.

“I brought something down that you didn’t ask for, and may be sorry to have; but I couldn’t help it. Look out there and see if that isn’t better than bon-bons or finery.”

Nelly pointed to a rock not far from the window, and both her friends stared in surprise; for all they saw was a strange girl sitting there, gazing out over the sea with an expression of wordless delight in her tired, white face and hungry eyes.

“Who is it? “ whispered Mary.

“My little seamstress,” answered Nelly. “ I went to get her to fix my dress, and found her looking sc pale and used up my heart ached. All the while she was fitting me, and I was telling her about our fun down here, she kept saying with a little gasp as if for fresh air, —

“4 How beautiful it must be, Miss Nelly! I’m so glad you are enjoying so much and look so well.’

“Then what you once said, Mary, came into my head, and my money burnt in my pocket till I broke out all of a sudden, saying, —

“‘ Wouldn’t you like to go down with me for a week and get rested and freshened up a little, Jane?’

“Girls, if I had asked her to go straight to heaven, or do any lovely thing, she could not have looked more amazed, delighted, and touched.

“4 O, Miss Nelly, you are too good. I’m afraid I ought not to leave work. It seems almost too splendid to believe.’

“I wouldn’t hear a word, for my heart was set on doing it when I saw how she longed to go. So I said she could help us with our dresses, and I must have her come on that account if no other.

* Then she said she had nothing fit to wear, and I was so glad to be able to tell her that none of us wore nice clothes, and hers were quite fit. I just made her put on her bonnet, brought her .wvay in the twinkling of an eye, and there she is enjoying rest, fresh air, sunshine and her first view of the sea.”

“Nelly, you are an angel!” and Kitty hugged her on the spot, while Mary beamed at her with tears in her eyes, as she said, quietly, —

“I did not think my little sermon would be so soon and beautifully taken to heart. The sight of that poor child, sitting there so happy, is better than the most splendid supper you could have ordered. I shall always love and honor you for this, dear.”

Nelly’s face was a pretty mixture of smiles and tears, as her friends kissed and praised her. Then she said, brightly, —

“Now we will have nothing but our cake and lemonade, and make up in good spirits for the supper we have lost. Flowers will do for favois, and tallow candles will help the moon light up our ‘ hall.’ See my Bo-Peep dress; and here are lots of things for you. To-morrow Jane will help us, and we will be splendiferous.”

Three happy faces bent over the old brocades three busy tongues chattered gaily of trains and flounces, and three pairs of friendly eyes peeped often at the quiet figure on the rocks, finding greater satisfaction in that sweet little tableau than in any they could plan.

Merry times they had next day, for Jane’s skilful fingers worked wonders, and gratitude inspired her with all manner of brilliant ideas. She was introduced as a friend; any deficiencies in her wardrobe were quietly supplied by Nelly, and she proved herself an invaluable ally, enjoying every minute of the precious time.

Nothing could have been prettier in its way than the old barn, draped with sails and sheets, with flags and pennons from the boats, great peonies and green boughs for decorations. Candles and lanterns twinkled their best, and the great doors at both ends stood wide open, letting in floods of moonlight, fresh air and lovely glimpses of the sea.

The neighbors all came to “ peek,” and the hearty laughter of the big brown fishermen clustered round the door was good to hear, as the comical, quaint, or charming figures entered the room. Tow-headed children roosted on the beams, women in calico gowns sat staring in the stalls, while babies slept placidly in the hay-racks, and one meek cow surveyed the scene with astonished eyes.

Powhattan, St. George, Brother Jonathan, Capt. Outtle, Garibaldi and other noble beings came from the camp, to find Bo-Peep in a ravishing little costume, with a Quakeress, Sairey Gamp, Dolly Yar- clen and a host of other delightful ladies ready to receive them.

What happy hours followed, with the promenades, and plays, and homely yet delightful surroundings. The barn was so cool, so spacious, and every thing was so free and simple, that every one “ went in and enjoyed himself like a man,” as Capt. Kyd gracefully remarked to Mary Nelson, who was capitally and cheaply got up as the Press, dressed in newspapers, with a little telegraph, posts, wires and all, on her head.

Fruit, cake and lemonade was all the feast, spread on the big rock in front of the barn, and no one complained; for moonlight, youth and happy hearts lent their magic to the scene.

“Never had such a good time in my life,” was the general verdict when the party broke up at eleven, and the gallant guests departed, to return the compliment by a charming serenade an hour later.

H

“Now that just puts the last touch to it. So romantic and delicious!” sighed Nelly, listening luxuriously to the melodious strains of that college favorite, “Juanita.”

“Il’s all like a beautiful dream to me,” sighed Jane, who was peeping through the blinds with the other pretty white ghosts, and enjoying the whole thing to her heart’s core.

Kitty’ threw out some flowers, and when each youth had stuck a relic in his button-hole, the sailor hats disappeared, leaving only the musical assurance that “ Her bright smile haunts me still,” to echo over the rocks and die away in the lapping of the tide upon the shore.

A quiet week followed, and the girls spent it teaching Jane to row and swim, taking her to drive in the old wagon, and making her “ have a good time.”

She was so blissfully happy and improved so much that Nelly had serious thoughts of applying to hei father for more money, so that Jane might stay longer. But though she said not a word about her little charity, the truth crept out, and several of the ladies quietly made up a handsome sum for Jane.

They gave it to Nelly, asking her to use it and say nothing of them, lest it should annoy the little seamstress. So Nelly, when her own time was up had the pleasure of telling Jane she was to stay some weeks longer, and of slipping into her hand the means so kindly provided for her.

She had no words in which to thank these friends, but her happy face did it as she bade them good-by, when they left her smiling, with wet eyes, among the roses in the lane.

“Our visit has been a success, though it wasn’t Newport, hey, Nelly? “ said Kitty, as they rumbled away in the big omnibus.

“Oh, yes! I’ve had a lovely time, and mean to come next summer and bring another Jane, to go halves with me; it gives such a relish to one’s fun somehow,” answered Nelly, contentedly tying on her last year’s hat.

“Old clothes, wholesome pleasures and a char-’ itable deed are all the magic that has made your month so happy and so helpful,” said Mary, putting an affectionate arm about the shoulders in the now faded jacket.

“And good friends; don’t forget to add that,” answered Nelly, with a grateful kiss.

LITTLE NEIGHBORS.

TWITTER THE FIRST.

MAMMA, I do wish I had a nice, new play Can’t you make me one? “ said Bertie, pensively surveying the soles of his shoes, as he lay flat on his back with his heels in the air.

“No, dear, I couldn’t possibly stop now, for I must write my letters, or they won’t be in time, and papa will be disappointed.”

“Then I wish I had somebody to play with me! A jolly little chap who would amuse me and make me laugh,” continued Bertie, and, dropping his legs, he lay for a moment, looking as if he really did need a playmate very much.

“Tweet! tweet!” said a little voice, in such a brisk tone that the boy stared about him eager to see who spoke.

One pane of the long window that opened on the balcony was fixed like a door, so that the room might be ventilated. This pane stood open, and perched upon its threshold was a sparrow peering in with an inquisitive air, and a bold “Teet! tweet!” as if he said, —

“Here’s a little friend all ready to play with you.”

“Oh, mamma, see the canning bird! He wants to come in! Don’t stir, and may be he ‘11 hop down and eat the crumbs of my luncheon on the table. It’s Cocky Twitters; I know him by his tail, with only two feathers in it, and his twinkling eye, and his little fat body,” cried Bertie, lying as still as a statue, and looking with delight at the new-comer.

You see Bertie lived near a square where many English sparrows had their homes, and all winter the kind child fed his little neighbors. Day after day he strewed crumbs in the balcony, and day after day the birds came to peck them gratefully, or to fly away with the big bits to their nests. So they learned to know and love and trust each other, and the passers-by often saw a pretty sight up in the sunny balcony where the delicate boy stood with his feathered friends about him; some at his feet, some on his shoulders, some boldly stealing crumbs from his basket, and the more timid hopping about on the wide balustrade, catching such stray mouthfuls as reached them.

Bertie was fond of his birds, and had names foi some of them, but his favorite was Cocky Twitters, a bold, saucy, droll fellow, who was always whisking about as if he had every thing in the bird-world to attend to. He fought like a little game-cock if any other sparrow troubled him, but he was good to the weak and timid ones, and never failed to carry a nice crumb or two to his old papa, who had something the matter with his wing, and seldom went far from the little brown house stuck like a wasp’s nest on one of the trees.

Cocky had often thought about coming in to call, but never had found the courage to really do it, so Bertie was enchanted when, after a good deal of tweeting, much perking up of his smooth head, and many a sidelong twinkle of his little black eye, Cocky actually hopped down upon the table.

Mamma sat motionless, smiling at her little guest, and Bertie hardly dared to wink as he watched his pet’s pranks.

Cocky had evidently made up his mind to have a right good time, and see, taste, examine, and enjoy all he found in this new world. So he paraded about the table, ate a bit of cake, pecked at an apple, and drank prettily out of Bertie’s silver mug; then he wiped his bill quite properly, took a look at little neighbors. 119

the books, peeped into the inkstand, draggled his tail in the gum-pot, examined mamma’s work-basket, and took a sniff at the flowers. After that he strolled over the carpet with such a funny swagger of his thin legs, such an important roll of his fat, little body, and such an impudent cock of his head, that Bertie burst out laughing, which made Cocky flit away to the to]) of the clock, where he sat and twit tered as if he was laughing too.

“I wish I could keep him a few days, he is so jolly! Couldn’t I put him in Dickey’s cage, and feed and be good to him, mamma?”

“He would never trust you again if you did.”

“But I should ‘splain it to him, and tell him it was only a visit.”

“He wouldn’t like it, and I think you will enjoy him more when he makes visits of his own accord. He would be the maddest little bird that ever flew if you shut him up; but leave him free, and every day it will be a pleasure to open the pane and see him come in confidingly. He is tired of this warm room already, and trying to get out. Show him the way, and let him go.”

“I ‘11 have one good feel of him anyhow, but I won’t hurt him,” said Bertie, yielding the point, but bound to get a little fun out of bis fat friend before he went.

So he danced about after Cocky, who was so bewildered he could not find his own little door, and bounced against all the wrong panes till he was dizzy, and fell down in a corner. Then Bertie softly grabbed him and though he pecked fiercely, Bertie got a “good feel” of the soft, warm mite. Then he let him go, and Cocky sat on the balustrade and chirped till all his friends came to see what the fuss was about.

“Oh, I do wish I could understand what they say. He’s telling them all about his visit, and they look so cunning, sitting round listening and asking questions. You know French and German; don’t you know bird-talk too, mamma? “ asked Bertie, turning round, after he had stood with his nose against the glass till it was as cold as a little icicle.

“No, dear, I am sorry to say I don’t.”

“I thought mammas knew every thing,” said Ber- Me, in a disappointed tone.

“They ought to if they expect to answer all the questions their children ask them,” answered mamma, with a sigh, for Bertie had an inquiring mind and often puzzled his parents sorely.

“I suppose you haven’t got time to learn it?* was the next remark.

“Decidedly not. But you have, so you’d better begin at once, and let me go on with my work.”

“I don’t know how to begin.”

“You must ask some wiser person than I am about that,” answered mamma, scratching away at a great rate.

“I know what I ‘11 do!” said Bertie, after meditating deeply for a few minutes; and, putting on his cap and coat, he went out upon the balcony.

Mamma thought he had gone to consult Cocky, and forgot all about him for a time. But Bertie had another plan in his head, and went resolutely up to one of the windows of the next house. It opened on the same balcony, and only a low bar separated the houses, so Bertie often promenaded up and down the whole length, and more ihan once had peeped under the half-drawn curta:n at the gray-headed gentleman who always seen ed to be too busy with his books to see his little neighbor.

Bertie had heard Professor Parpatharges Patterson called a very learned man, who could read seven languages, so he thought he would call ar d inquire if bird language was among the seven. He peeped 6

first, and there was Mr. P. reading away with hia big spectacles on, and some dreadfully wise old book held close to his nose. As he did not look up, Bertie tapped softly, but Mr. P. did not hear. Then this resolute young person pushed up the window, walked coolly in, and stood close to the student’s side. But Mr. P. did not see him till the remarkable appearance of a small blue mitten right in the middle of Plato’s Republic, caused the Professor to start and stare at it with such a funny expression of bewilderment that Bertie could not help laughing.

The blithe sound seemed to wake the man out of a dream, for, falling back in his chair, he sat blinking at the child like a surprised owl.

“Please, sir, I knocked, but you didn’t hear, so I came in,” said Bertie, with an engaging smile, as he respectfully pulled off his cap and looked up at the big spectacles with bright, confiding eyes.

“What did you wish, boy?” asked the Professor, in a solemn, yet not ungentle, tone.

“I wanted to know if you would tell me how I iould learn bird-talk.”

“What?” and the man stared at the child hai ler than ever.

“Perhaps I’d better sit down and ‘splain all about it,” remarked Bertie, feeling that the subject was too important to be hastily discussed.

“Take a seat, boy;” and the Professor waved his hand vaguely, as if he did not know much about any chair but his own old one, with the stuffing bursting out, and ink spots everywhere.

As all the chairs had books and papers piled up in them, Bertie, with great presence of mind, sat down upon an immense dictionary that lay near by, and with a hand on either knee, thus briefly explained himself:

“My mamma said that you were very wise, and could read seven langwitches, so I thought you would please tell me what Cocky Twitters says.”

“Is Twitters a bird or a boy?” asked the Professor, as if bewildered by what seemed a very simple affair to innocent Bertie.

At this question, the boy burst forth into an eager recital of his acquaintance with the sparrows, giving a little bounce on the fat dictionary now and then when he got excited, while his rosy face shone with an eagerness that was irresistible.

The Professor listened as if to a language which o o he had almost forgotten, while the ghost of a smile began to flicker over his lips, and peer out from be

hind his glasses, as if somewhere about him there was a heart that tried to welcome the little guest, who came tapping at the long-closed door.

When Bertie ended, out of breath, Mr. P. said, slowly, while he looked about as if to find something he had lost, — “I understand now, but I’m afraid I’ve forgotten all I ever knew about birds, — and boys too,” he added, with an odd twinkle ol’ the glasses.

“Couldn’t you reccomember if you tried hard, sir?”

“I don’t think I could.”

Bertie gave a great sigh, and cast a reproachful glance upon the Professor, which said as plainly as words, “You must have been a very idle man to live among books till you are gray, and not know a simple thing like this.”

I think Mr. P. understood that look, and felt ashamed of his sad ignorance; for he rose up and went walking about the room, poking into corners and peering up at the books that lined the walls, till he found a large volume, and brought it to Bertie, who still sat despondently upon the dictionary.

“Perhaps this will help us. It tells much about birds, and the tales are all true.”

Bertie caught the book in his arms, laid it open on his knees, aud with one delighted “ Oh! “ at the first peep, became entirely absorbed in the gay pictures.

With an air of relief, the Professor retired to his chair, and sat watching him very much as he had watched Cocky Twitters. A pretty little pic- tire he made; for a ray of sunshine crept in to shine on his bright head like a playmate come to find him; his downy brows were knit, and his rosy mouth pursed up at times with the mingled exertions of mind and body, for the book was both beautiful and heavy. His eyes feasted on the pages; and now and then he laughed out with delight, as he found a bird he knew, or gave a satisfied nod, and trotted his foot to express his satisfaction at some unusually splendid one. Once he tried to cross his tired legs, but they were too short, and the book went down with a bang that made him glance at his host in alarm.

But while he studied Audubon’s birds, the Professor had studied mamma’s boy, and found he could “ reccomember” some of the traits belonging to that species of wild-fowl. As he looked, the smile had been playing hide-and-go-seek among his wrinkles, getting less ghostly every minute, and when the book fell, it came boldly out and sat upon his face so pleasantly, that Bertie ceased to be afraid.

“Put it on the table, boy,” said Mr. P., beckoning with an inky finger.

Bertie lugged his treasure thither, and leaning both elbows on it, began to brood again. It really did seem as if the Professor wanted to have a good “ feel” of the boy as the boy did of Cocky, for presently the inky finger softly stroked the yellow head, then touched the round, red cheek, and put a little curl back behind the ear. Then the spectacles took a long look all over the little figure, from the striped stockings to the fur collar on the small coat, and something about it, a certain chubbiness of outline and softness of exterior perhaps, seemed to be so attractive, that, all of a sudden, two large hands hovered over Bertie, gently clutched him, and set him on the Professor’s knee.

If Mr. P. felt any doubts as to how his guest would take this liberty, they were speedily set at rest, for Bertie only gave one wiggle to settle himself, and, turning a page, said affably, —

“Now, tell me all about ‘em.”

And Professor Parpatharges Patterson actually did tell him story after story out of that charming book, till the sound of a bell made the truant jump down in a great hurry, saying, —

“Mamma wants me, and I must go, but I’D come again soon, and may be, if we study hard, we shall learn bird-talk after all.”

Mr. P. shook his head; but Bertie would not give up yet, and added encouragingly, —

“Mamma says people are never too old to learn, and papa says Latin makes all the other langwitches easy; I see lots of Latin books, and you read ‘em, so I’m sure, if you listen to my sparrows, when I feed ‘em, you can understand some of their talk.”

“I ‘11 try, and let you know how I get on,” said Mr. P., laughing as if he didn’t know how very well, but couldn’t help making the attempt.

“I’m very much obliged to you, sir, and I shall be glad to pay you for your trouble. I ‘ve got two dollars in my tin bank, and I ‘11 smash it, and get ‘em out, if that will be enough,” said Bertie, suddenly remembering to have heard that Mr. P. was not rich.

“No, boy, I don’t want your pennies, you shall pay in some other way, if I succeed,” answered the Professor, with a touched sort of look about the spectacles.

“I’ve had a very nice time. Good day, sir,” and Bertie held out his hand, as he made his best bow.

“Good day, boy. Come again.”

I think there must have been some magic about that blue mitten, or the warm little hand inside, for, as he held it quite buried up in his own big one, Mr. P. suddenly stooped down, and said, in a queer, bashful sort of tone, —

“Suppose you pay with kisses, if you have any to spare.”

“I’ve got hundreds; I always keep’em ready, because mamma needs so many,” and Bertie held up his *-osy mouth, as if this sort of coin best suited the treasury of a loving heart.

Considering that the Professor had not kissed any one for twenty years at least, he did it very well, and, when Bertie was gone, stood looking down at the corpulent old dictionary, as if he still saw a bright-eyed little figure sitting on it, and considered that a great improvement upon the dust that usually lay there.

twitter the second.

Mamma was right; for Cocky, finding himself well treated at his first visit, called again, and being feasted on sugar, fruit, and cake, and allowed to go when he liked, was entirely won. From that time he was the friend of the family, and called as regularly as the postman. He knew his own little door, and if it was shut he tapped with his bill till some one opened it, when he came bustling in, chirping a gay “ How are you? “ and waggling his ragged tail in the most friendly manner. Weather made no difference to him; in fact rainy days were his favorite times for calling. His little coat was waterproof, he needed no umbrella, and often came hopping in, with snow-flakes on his back, as jolly as you please.

I don’t know what Bertie would have done without this sociable little neighbor, for it was a stormy winter and he could not go out much; other children were at school; even mamma’s inventive powers gave out sometimes, and toys grew tiresome. But Cocky never did, and such games as the two had together it would have done your heart good to see, for the boy was so gentle that the bird soon grew 6* i very tame and learned to love and trust with the sweetest confidence. A jollier sparrow never hopped; and after a good lunch with Bertie, both drinking out of one mug, both pecking at the same apple, and sharing the same cake, Cocky was ready for play. He would hide somewhere and Bertie would hunt for him, guided now and then by a faint “ Tweet” till the little gray bunch was found in some sly nook and came bouncing out with a whisk and <» chirp.

When Bertie sat at lessons, Cocky would roost on his shoulder, hop over the open page with his head on one side as if reading it, peer into the inkstand inquisitively, or settle himself among the flowers that stood in the middle of the table, like a little teacher ready to hear the lessons when they were learned.

And sometimes when Bertie lay asleep, tired with books or play, Cocky would circle round him with soft flight, and perch on his pillow, waiting silently till his playmate woke, “ like an angel guarding the dear in his sleep,” as old nurse said, watching the pretty sight.

Professor Parpatharges Patterson was right also; for he apparently did try to understand a bird-talk.”

and did succeed; for a few days after Bertie’s call a letter came flying in at the open pane just at twilight, very much as if Cocky had brought it himself. It was written on robin’s-egg-colored paper, and bore the title, “ Life and Adventures of Cockj Twitters, Esq.”

Mamma began to laugh as she glanced over it, and Bertie screamed with delight when a funny sketch appeared of an egg with a very small but brisk little bird hopping out of it without a feather on him. It was very funny, and when mamma read Cocky’s thoughts and feelings on first beholding the world, it was so droll, and Bertie was so tickled, that he rolled on the floor and kicked up his heels.

Mr. P. must have tried very hard to “ reccomem- ber “ the accomplishments and gayety of his youth, for the sketch was so good and the first chapter of this bird-book so merry that mamma put it in a little portfolio and showed it to all her friends, for no one ever dreamed that the studious old Professor had it in him to do such a clever thing.

Bertie wanted to rush right in and thank him that very night, but mamma said he had better wait till morning and then play a little joke in return for the Professor’s. So next day, when Mr. P. pulled up the curtain of his study window, there hung a lovely posy of flowers and a little card with “ Bertie Norton’s compliments and thanks “ on it.

That pleased the old man; and all that day the roses filled his room with their sweet breath, mutely talking to him of a happy time when his little daughter used to put nosegays on his table, and dance about him like a blooming rose escaped from its stem. For years no one had thought to scatter flowers among the wise books out of which the poor man tried to gather forgetfulness, if not happiness. No one guessed that he had a lonely heart as well as a learned head, and no childish hand had clung to his till the blue mitten rested there, unconsciously leading him from his sad solitude to the sweet society of a little neighbor.

Bertie soon called again, and this time Mr. P. heard, saw, and welcomed him at once. A cushion lay on the fat dictionary, the bird-book was all ready, the eyes behind the big spectacles beamed with satisfaction as the boy climbed on his knee, and the inky hands held the chubby guest more eagerly and carefully than the most precious old book ever printed.

After that second call the new friendship flourished wonderfully, and the boy became to the Professor what Cocky was to Bertie, a merry, innocent visitor, whose pretty plays and pranks cheered the dull days, whose love and confidence warmed his heart, whose presence grew more and more precious since its unconscious power made sunshine for the lonely man.

Such good times as they had! Such nice chats and stories, such laughs at very small jokes, such plans for summer, such fun feeding the sparrows, who soon learned to come to both windows fearlessly, and such splendid chapters as were added to “ C. Twitter’s Life and Adventures,” with designs that half killed mamma with laughing.

The people in the house were much amused with the change in the Professor, and for a time could not understand what was going on up in that once quiet room. For the sound of little feet trotting about was heard, also a cheery child’s voice, and now and then a loud bang as if a pile of books had tumbled down, followed by shouts of merriment, for Mr. P. could laugh capitally after a little practice.

Stout Mrs. Bouncer, the landlady, went up one day to see what was going on, and was so surprised at the spectacle that met her eyes she could hardly believe her senses.

In the middle of the room was a house built of the precious books which the maid had been forbidden to touch, and in the middle of this barricade sat Bertie reading “ iEsop’s Fables “ aloud. The table which used to be filled with Greek and Hebrew volumes, learned treatises, and intricate problems was now bestrewn with gay pictures, and Mr. P., with his spectacles pushed back, his cuffs turned up, and a towel tied round him, was busily pasting these brilliant designs into a scrap-book bound in parchment and ornamented with brass clasps.

The Professor evidently had made up his mind that the faded pages were much improved by the gay pictures, and sat smiling over his work as he saw a dead language blossom into flowers, and heard it sing from the throats of golden orioles and soaring larks.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Bouncer to herself, and then added aloud, after a long stare, " Do yen want any thing sir? "

"Nothing, thank you, ma'am, unless you happen to have a couple of apples in the house. Good, big, red ones, if you please," answered Mr. P., so briskly that she couldn't help laughing, as she said, —

"I '11 send 'em right up, sir, and a fresh jumble or «o for the little boy."

"Thank you, ma'am, thank yon. We fellows have been hard at it for an hour, and we are as hungry as bears; hey, Bertie? "

"I'm fond of jumbles," was the young student's suggestive reply, as he peeped over the walls with a nod and a smile.

"Bless my heart, what has come to the Professor! " thought Mrs. Bouncer, as she hastened away, while Mr. P. waved his paste brush and Bertie kissed his hand to her.

The neighbors said the same when they saw the two playmates walking out together, as they often did in fine weather. Five old ladies, who sat all clay at their different windows watching their neighbors, were so astonished at the sudden appearance of the Professor, hand-in-hand with a yellow-haired little laddie, that they could hardly believe their spectacles. When they saw him drawing Bertie round the square on his sled Racer, they lifted their ten old hands in utter amazement, and when they beheld him actually snowballing, and being snowballed by, that mite of a boy, they really thought the sky must be going to fall.

Mamma heartily enjoyed all this; for through her doctor she had learned much about Mr. P, and both admired and pitied him, and was very glad tha Bertie had so wise and kind a playmate. She saw that they did each other good, and in many delicate ways helped the boy to serve, amuse and repay the man who made him so happy.

Cocky also approved of the new friend, and called occasionally to express his views on education. He was very affable, but never allowed Mr. P. to take the same liberties that Bertie did, and after a general survey, would light upon the bald pate of a plaster Homer, whence he watched the boys at play, with deep interest. Mr. P. was immensely flattered by Cocky's visits, and made his " Life " so interesting and droll, that Bertie really believed that the man and bird did it between them.

"I owe a great deal to Mr. Twitters, and I hope I shall discover a way to show my gratitude," said the Professor more than once, and he did, as you will see. It was a very happy winter, in spite of rain and snow, and as spring came on, the three friends had fine times in the park. Bertie fed his birds there now; and they, remembering how he had kept them alive through the bitter weather, seemed to love him more than ever. They flocked round him as soon as he appeared, chirping, fluttering, pecking, and hopping so fearlessly and gayly, that people often came to see the pretty sight, and “ Bertie’s birds “ were one of the lions of the neighborhood.

Cocky was very busy and important about this time. His tail-feathers had grown again, he seemed to have put on a new drab waistcoat, and his head was so sleek that Bertie was sure he used pomade. When he called at the balcony, he often brought another sparrow with him, — a plump, downy bird, with a bright eye, a Quakerish dress, and very gentle manners.

“Mamma says Cocky is going to be married, and that pretty one is his little sweetheart. Won’t it be nice? I wonder if he will ask us to the wedding, and where he will live!” said Bertie, standing still in the park, staring up at the nests stuck on the elm boughs, now green with tender leaves and noisy with happy birds.

“I don’t think he will ask us, and I very much fear that there won’t be room in that brown nest for the old papa and the young folks also,” answered Mr. P., staring as hard as Bertie did.

“Then we must ask the mayor to have a new house put up for Cocky. Don’t you think he would if I wrote him a nice letter and showed him your book? He’d see what a brave good bird my Twitters is, and give him a nice house, I’m sure,” said Bertie earnestly, for he would believe that Cocky had really done all the fine and funny things recounted in that remarkable book.

“Leave it to me, boy. I will see what can be done about a mansion for Cocky to begin housekeeping in;” and Mr. P. gave a knowing nod, as if he had a new idea.

So Bertie said no more, and, soon after this conversation, went to Plymouth, on a visit with mamma. May-day was coming, and Bertie wanted to hang baskets on the doors of young and old neighbors; chief among the latter his dear Mr. P.

Nowhere in New England do May-flowers grow so large and rosy, or bloom so early and so sweet as in Plymouth, and Bertie gathered a great hamper full of the best, made up in nosegays, garlands, and baskets. Then they came home, and all along the way people smSed and peeped and smiled at the odorous load which the boy guarded so carefully and rejoiced over so much.

Very early next morning, Bertie and mamma set out to hang the May-baskets on a dozen doors. The five old ladies each had one, and were immensely pleased at being remembered; for Bertie had discovered that hearts can be young in spite of gray hair, and proposed doing this all himself. Then there was a sick lady who used to look out at the child as he played, with a sad, white face and wistful eyes; two pretty little girls came next, and had raptures in their night-gowns, when the baskets were brought up to them in bed.

Down in a back street was a lame boy who made hockey-sticks; a blind woman who knit the blue mittens, and several children who never had a flower except the dusty dandelions in the park. One can easily imagine how happy these bits of spring made them, and how they welcomed the sweet things with their woody fragrance and rosy faces.

When the last was given, mamma proposed a little walk over the bridge, for it was a lovely day, and she seemed in no haste about breakfast.

Bertie was very hungry before they got back, and was quite ready to go in the back way, directly to the dining-room, where his bread and milk was waiting for him. Right in the middle of breakfast, Mary, the girl, gave mamma a card, on which was written two words: “ All ready! “

Why mamma should laugh when she read it, and why Mary should say, in a whisper, “ It’s just lovely, ma’am,” and then run out of the room giggling, Bertie could not understand.

“Can’t I know, mamma? “ he asked, feeling sure that some joke or secret was afoot.

“Yes, dear, all in good time. Go now and see if Mr. Patterson has found the May-flowers you hung on his window.”

Away went Bertie to the balcony, found the posy gone, and the room empty; so he turned about and was going back, when all of a sudden he saw something that nearly took his breath away with surprise and delight.

Now you must know that the house on the other side of Bertie’s jutted out a little, and the niche thus made was covered with a woodbine that climbed up from the grass-plot below. All summer this vine rustled its green leaves above that end of the balcony; in the autumn it hung crimson streamers there, and through the winter the sparrows loved to cuddle down among the twisted stems, sunning, their backs in the sheltered corner and pressing their downy breasts against the warm bricks- Bertie used to hang great shells full of plants there, and called it his garden, but now something even more delightful and ornamental than ivy or flame-colored nasturtiums met his eye.

Up among the budding sprays stood a charming little house, with a wide piazza all round it; a white house, with cunning windows and a tiny porch, where the door stood hospitably open, with the owner’s name painted on it.

When Bertie read “ C. Twitters,” he had to hold on to the railing, lest he should tumble over, so pleased was he with this delightful surprise. As it nothing was wanting to make it quite perfect, Cocky himself came flying up to say “ Good morning;” and after a long survey of the new house went to examine it. He walked all round the piazza, sat upon the chimney to see if that was all right, popped his head into the porch, appeared to read the name on the door, and to understand all about it, for with one shrill chirp, he walked in and took possession at once.

Then Bertie danced for joy and called out, “Oh, mamma, come and see! He likes it; he’s gone lr and I’m sure he means to live there!”

Mamma came, and so did Mr. P., both pretend mg to be much amazed at Cocky’s daring to build a house so near without asking leave.

But Bertie was not deceived a bit, and hugged them both on the spot, with many thanks for this charming joke, while Cocky sat at his door and twittered, like a grateful, happy little bird, as he was.

That was only the beginning of it; for the interesting things that happened after this May-day were too many to tell. Cocky was married at once, and went to house-keeping in his new villa. Mrs. Twitters evidently liked it extremely, and began to bring in her straw furniture and feather-beds, like a busy little house-wife. Papa Twitters came too; though they had a hard job to get him there, he was so lame with rheumatism. But the vine helped the poor old dear; for after he had got safely across the street, he hopped up the woodbine, little by little, till he got to the porch, and there sat down to rest.

He did not stay long, however, for, like a wise bird, he felt that the young folks would do better alone, and after a nice visit, he returned to the brown nest in the park, where his children called every day and never forgot to take the old papa a crumb of comfort.

Cocky made an excellent husband, and often brought his wife to call on Bertie, who, when I e warm days came, sat much in the balcony, always ready for a chat, a game, or a song. All the other birds were chirping gayly, so he joined the chorus; and his favorite was that merry ballad beginning, —

“A little cock-sparrow, Sat up in a tree, And whistled, and whistled, And thus whistled he.”

While Bertie and Cocky sang, mamma smiled over her work within, and a gray head often popped out of Mr. P.’s window, as if he loved to listen nnd to learn still more of the sweet, new language his little neighbors taught him.

MARJORIE'S THREE GIFTS.

MARJORIE sat on the door-step, shelling peas quite unconscious what a pretty picture she made, with the roses peeping at her through the lattice work of the porch, the wind playing hide-and- seek in her curly hair, while the sunshine with its silent magic changed her faded gingham to a golden gown, and shimmered on the bright tin pan as if it were a silver shield. Old Rover lay at her feet, the white kitten purred on her shoulder, and friendly robins hopped about her in the grass, chirping " A happy birthday, Marjorie!"

But the little maid neither saw nor heard, for her eyes were fixed on the green pods, and her thoughts were far away. She was recalling the fairy-tale granny told her last night, and wishing with all her heart that such things happened nowadays. For in this story, as a poor girl like herself sat spinning before the door, a Brownie came by, and gave the child a good-luck penny; then a fairy passed, and left a talisman which would keep her always happy; and last of all, the prince rolled up in his chariot, and took her away to reign with him over a lovely kingdom, as a reward for her many kindnesses to others.

When Marjorie imagined this part of the story, it was impossible to help giving one little sigh, and for a minute she forgot her work, so busy was she thinking what beautiful presents she would give to all the poor children in her realm when they had birthdays. Five impatient young peas took this opportunity to escape from the half-open pod in her hand and skip down the steps, to be immediately gobbled up by an audacious robin, who gave thanks in such a shrill chirp that Maijorie woke up, laughed* and fell to work again. She was just finishing, when a voice called out from the lane, —

"Hi, there! come here a minute, child!" and looking up, she saw a little old man in a queer little carriage drawn by a fat little pony.

Running down to the gate, Marjorie dropped a curtsy, saying pleasantly, —

"What did you wish, sir? "

"Just undo that check-rein for me. I am lame, and Jack wants to drink at your brook," answered 7 j the old man, nodding at her till his spectacles danced on his nose.

Marjorie was rather afraid of the fat pony, who tossed his head, whisked his tail, and stamped his feet as if he was of a peppery temper. But she liked to be useful, and just then felt as if there were few things she could not do if she tried, because it was her birthday. So she proudly let down the rein, and when Jack went splashing into the brook, she stood on the bridge, waiting to check him up again after he had drunk his fill of the clear, cool water.

The old gentleman sat in his place, looking up at the little girl, who was smiling to herself as she watched the blue dragon-flies dance among the ferns, a blackbird tilt on the alder-boughs, and listened to the babble of the brook.

“How old are you, child?” asked the old man, as if he rather envied the rosy creature her youth and health.

“Twelve to-day, sir;” and Marjorie stood up straight and tall, as if mindful of her years.

“Had any presents?” asked the old man, peering up with an odd smile.

“One, sir, — here it is;” and she pulled out oi her pocket a tin savings-bank in the shape of a sirable family mansion, painted red, with a given door and black chimney. Proudly displaying it on the rude railing of the bridge, she added, witn a happy face, —

“Granny gave it to me, and all the money in it is going to be mine.”

“How much have you got?” asked the old gentleman, who appeared to like to sit there in the middle of the brook, while Jack bathed bis feet and leisurely gurgled and sneezed.

“Not a penny yet, but I’m going to earn some,” answered Marjorie, patting the little bank with an air of resolution pretty to see.

“How will you do it?” continued the inquisitive old man.

‘‘Oh, I’m going to pick berries and dig dandelions, and weed, and drive cows, and do chores. It is vacation, and I can work all the time, and earn ever so much.”

“But vacation is play-time, — how about that? “

“Why, that sort of work is play, and I get bits of fun all along. I always have a good swing when I go for the cows, and pick flowers with the dandelions. Weeding isn’t so nice, but berrying is very pleasant, and we have good times all together.”

“What shall you do with your money when yon get it?”

“Oh, lots of things! Buy books and clothes for school, and, if 1 get a great deal, give some to granny. I’d love to do that, for she takes care of me, and I’d be so proud to help her!”

“Good little lass! “ said the old gentleman, as he put his hand in his pocket. “ Would you now? “ he added, apparently addressing himself to a large frog who sat upon a stone, looking so wise and grandfatherly that it really did seem quite proper to consult him. At all events, he gave his opinion in the most decided manner, for, with a loud croak, he turned an undignified somersault into the brook, splashing up the water at a great rate. “Well, perhaps it wouldn’t be best on the whole. Industry is a good teacher, and money cannot buy happiness, as I know to my sorrow.”

The old gentleman still seemed to be talking to the frog, and as he spoke he took his hand out of his pocket with less in it than he had at first intended.

“What a very queer person! “ thought Marjorie, for she had not heard a word, and wondered what he was thinking about down there.

Jack walked out of the brook just then, and she ran to check him up; not an easy task for little hands, as he preferred to nibble the grass on the bank. But she did it cleverly, smoothed the ruffled mane, and, dropping another curtsy, stood aside to let the little carriage pass.

“Thank you, child — thank you. Here is something for your bank, and good luck to it.”

As he spoke, the old man laid a bright gold dollar in her hand, patted the rosy cheek, and vanished in a cloud of dust, leaving Marjorie so astonished at the grandeur of the gift, that she stood looking at it as if it had been a fortune. It was to her; and visions of pink calico gowns, new grammars, and fresh hat-ribbons danced through her head in delightful confusion, as her eyes rested on the shining coin in her palm.

Then, with a solemn air, she invested her first money by popping it down the chimney of the scarlet mansion, and peeping in with one eye to see if it landed safely on the ground-floor. This done, she took a long breath, and looked over the railing, to be sure it was not all a dream. No; the wheel marks were still there, the brown water was not yet ilear, and, if a witness was needed, there sat the big ‘rog again, looking so like the old gentleman, with tis bottle-green coat, speckled trousers, and twink- mg eyes, that Marjorie burst out laughing, and slapped her hands, saying aloud, —

“I’ll play he was the Brownie, and this is the *ood-luck penny he gave me. Oh, what fun!” and away she skipped, rattling the dear new bank like a Castanet.

When she had told granny all about it, she got knife and basket, and went out to dig dandelions; for the desire to increase her fortune was so strong, she could not rest a minute. Up and down she went, so busily peering and digging, that she never lifted up her eyes till something like a great white bird skimmed by so low she could not help seeing it. A pleasant laugh sounded behind her as she started up, and, looking round, she nearly sat down again in sheer surprise, for there close by was a slender little lady, comfortably established under a big umbrella.

“If there were any fairies, I’d be sure that was one,” thought Marjorie, staring with all her might, for her mind was still full of the old story; and curious things do happen on birthdays, as every one knows.

It really did seem rather elfish to look up suddenly and see a lovely lady all in white, with shining hair and a wand in her hand, sitting under what looked very like a large yellow mushroom in the middle of a meadow, where, till now, nothing but cows and grasshoppers had been seen. Before Marjorie could decide the question, the pleasant laugh came again, and the stranger said, pointing to the white thing that was still fluttering over the grass like a little cloud, —

“Would you kindly catch my hat for me, before it blows quite away? “

Down went basket and knife, and away ran Mai- jorie, entirely satisfied now that there was no magic about the new-comer; for if she had been an elf, couldn’t she have got her hat without any help from a mortal child? Presently, however, it did begin to seem as if that hat was bewitched, for it led the nimble-footed Marjorie such a chase that the cows stopped feeding to look on in placid wonder; the grasshoppers vainly tried to keep up, and every ox- eye daisy did its best to catch the runaway, but failed entirely, for the wind liked a game of romps, and had it that day. As she ran, Marjorie heard the lady singing, like the princess in the story oi the Goose-Girl, —

“Blow, breezes, blow! Let Curdkin’s hat go1 Blow, breezes, blow! Let him after it go! O’er hills, dales and rocks, Away be it whirled, Till the silvery locks Are all combed and curled/*

This made her laugh so that she tumbled into a clover-bed, and lay there a minute to get her breath. Just then, as if the playful wind repented of its frolic, the long veil fastened to the hat caught in a blackberry-vine near by, and held the truant fast till Marjorie secured it.

“Now come and see what I am doing,” said the lady, when she had thanked the child.

Marjorie drew near confidingly, and looked down at the wide-spread book before her. She gave a start, and laughed out with surprise and delight; for there was a lovely picture of her own little home, and her own little self on the door-step, all so delicate, and beautiful, and true, it seemed as if done by magic.

“Oh, how pretty! There is Rover, and Kitty and the robins, and me! How could you ever do it, ma’am?” said Marjorie, with a wondering glance at the long paint-brush, which had wrought what seemed a miracle to her childish eyes.

“I ‘11 show you presently; but tell me, first, if it looks quite right and natural to you. Children sometimes spy out faults that no one else can see,” answered the lady, evidently pleased with the artless praise her work received.

“It looks just like our house, only more beautiful. Perhaps that is because I know how shabby it really is. That moss looks lovely on the shingles, but the roof leaks. The porch is broken, only the roses hide the place; and my gown is all faded, though it once was as bright as you have made it. I wish the house and every thing would stay pretty forever as they will in the picture.”

While Maijorie spoke, the lady had been adding more color to the sketch, and when she looked up, something warmer and brighter than sunshine shone in her face, as she said, so cheerily, it was like a bird’s song to hear her, —

“It can’t be summer alwnvs, dear, but we can make fair weather for ourselves if we try. Th<» 7*

moss, the roses, and soft shadows show the little house and the little girl at their best, and that is what we all should do; for it is amazing how lovely common things become, if one only knows how to look at them.”

“I wish J”did,” said Marjorie, half to herself, remembering how often she was discontented, and how hard it was to get on, sometimes.

“So do I/’ said the lady, in her happy voice. “Just believe that there is a sunny side to every thing, and try to find it, and you will be surprised to see how bright the world will seem, and how cheerful you will be able to keep your little self.”

“I guess granny has found that out, for she never frets. I do, but I’m going to stop it, because I’m twelve to-day, and that is too old for such things,” said Maijorie, recollecting the good resolutions she had made that morning when she woke.

“I am twice twelve, and not entirely cured yet; but I try, and don’t mean to wear blue spectacles if I can help it,” answered the lady, laughing so blithely that Maijorie was sure she would not have to try much longer. “Birthdays were made for presents, and I should like to give you one. Would it please you to have this little picture?” she added, lifting it cut of the book.

“Truly my own? Oh, yes, indeed!” cried Marjorie, coloring with pleasure, for she had never owned so beautiful a thing before.

“Then you shall have it, dear. Hang it where you can see it often, and when you look, remember that it is the sunny side of home, and help to keep it so.”

Marjorie had nothing but a kiss to offer by way of thanks, as the lovely sketch was put into her hand; but the giver seemed quite satisfied, for it was a very grateful little kiss. Then the child took up her basket and went away, not dancing and singing now, but slowly and silently; for this gift made her thoughtful as well as glad. As she climbed the wall, she looked back to nod good-by to the pretty lady; but the meadow was empty, and all she saw was the grass blowing in the wind.

“Now, deary, run out and play, for birthdays come but once a year, and we must make them as merry as we can,” said granny, as she settled herself for her afternoon nap, when the Saturday clean ing was all done, and the little house as neat as wax.

So Maijorie put on a white apron in honor of the occasion, and, taking Kitty in her arms, went out to enjoy herself. Three swings on the gate seemed tc be a good way of beginning the festivities; but she only got two, for when the gate creaked back the second time, it stayed shut, and Marjorie hung over the pickets, arrested by the sound of music.

“It’s soldiers,” she said, as the fife and drum drew nearer, and flags were seen waving over the barberry-bushes at the corner.

“No; it’s a picnic,” she added in a moment; for she saw hats with wreaths about them bobbing up and down, as a gayly-trimmed hay-cart full of children came rumbling down the lane.

“What a nice time they are going to have!” thought Marjorie, sadly contrasting that merrymaking with the quiet party she was having all by herself.

Suddenly her face shone, and Kitty was waved over, her head like a banner, as she flew out of the gate, crying, rapturously, —

“It’s Billy! and I know he’s come for me!”

It certainly was Billy, proudly driving the old horse, and beaming at his little friend from the bower of flags and chestnut-boughs, where he sat in state, with a crown of daisies on his sailor-hat and a spray of blooming sweetbrier in his hand. Wav*

ing his rustic sceptre, he led off the shout of “ Happy birthday, Marjorie!” which was set up as the wagon stopped at the gate, and the green boughs suddenly blossomed with familiar faces, all smiling on the little damsel, who stood in the lane quite overpowered with delight.

“It’s a s’prise party! “ cried one small lad, tumbling out behind.

“We are going up the mountain to have fun!” added a chorus of voices, as a dozen hands beckoned wildly.

“We got it up on purpose for you, so tie your hat and come away,” said a pretty girl, leaning down to kiss Maijorie, who had dropped Kitty, and stood ready for any splendid enterprise.

A word to granny, and away went the happy child, sitting up beside Billy, under the flags that waved over a happier load than any royal chariot ever bore.

It would be vain to try and tell all the plays and pleasures of happy children on a Saturday afternoon, but we may briefly say that Maijorie found a mossy stone all ready for her throne, and Billy crowned her with a garland like his own. That a fine banquet was spread, and eaten with a relisb many a Lord Mayor’s feast has lacked. Then now the whole court danced and played together afterward! The lords climbed trees and turned somersaults, the ladies gathered flowers and told secrets under the sweetfern-bushes, the queen lost her shoe jumping over the waterfall, and the king paddled into the pool below and rescued it. A happy little kingdom, full of summer sunshine, innocent delights, and loyal hearts; for love ruled, and the only war that disturbed the peaceful land was waged by the mosquitoes as night came on.

Marjorie stood on her throne watching the sunset while her maids of honor packed up the remains of the banquet, and her knights prepared the chariot. All the sky was gold and purple, all the world bathed in a soft, red light, and the little girl was very happy as she looked down at the subjects who had served her so faithfully that day.

"Have you had a good time, Marjy?" asked King William; who stood below, with his royal nose on a level with her majesty's two dusty little shoes.

"Oh, Billy, it has been just splendid! But I don't see why you should all be so kind to me," answered Marjorie, with such a look of innocent wonder, that Billy laughed to see it.

"Because you are so sweet and good, we can't help loving you, — that's why," he said, as if this simple fact was reason enough.

"I'm going to be the best girl that ever was, and love everybody in the world," cried the child, stretching out her arms as if ready, in the fulness of her happy heart, to embrace all creation.

"Don't turn into an angel and fly away just yet, but come home, or granny will never lend you to us any more."

With that, Billy jumped her down, and away they ran, to ride gayly back through the twilight, singing like a flock of nightingales.

As she went to bed that night, Marjorie looked at the red bank, the pretty picture, and the daisy crown, saying to herself, —

"It has been a very nice birthday, and I am something like the girl in the story, after all, for the old man gave me a good-luck penny, the kind lady told me how to keep happy, and Billy came for me like the prince. The girl didn't go back to the poor house again, but I'm glad I did, for my granny isn't a cross one, and my little home is the dearest in the world."

Then she tied her night-cap, said her prayers- and fell asleep; but the moon, looking in to kiss the blooming face upon the pillow, knew that three good spirits had come to help little Marjorie from that day forth, and their names were Industry Cheerfulness, and Love.

PATTY’S PLACE.

I.

HOW SHE FOUND IT.

PATTY stood at one of the windows of the Asylum, looking thoughtfully down into the yard, where twenty girls were playing.

All had cropped heads, all wore brown gowns and blue aprons, and all were orphans like herself. Some were pretty and some plain, some rosy and gay, some pale and feeble, but all seemed happy and having a good time in spite of many drawbacks.

More than once one of them nodded and beckoned to Patty, but she shook her head decidedly, and still stood, listlessly watching them, and thinking to herself with a child’s impatient spirit, —

“Oh, if some one would only come and take me away! I’m so tired of living here I don’t think I can bear it much longer.”

Poor Patty might well wish for a change; for she had been in the Asylum ever since she could remember; but though every one was kind to her, she was heartily tired of the place, and longed to find a home as many of the girls did.

The children were nursed and taught until old enough to help themselves, then were adopted by people or went out to service. Now and then some forlorn child was claimed by relatives who had discovered it, and once the relatives of a little girl proved to be rich and generous people, who came for Katy in a fine carriage, treated all the other girls in honor of the happy day, and from time to time let Katy visit them with hands full of gifts for her former playmates and friends.

This event had made a great stir in the Asylum, and the children were never tired of talking it over and telling it to new comers as a modern sort of fairy tale. For a time, each hoped to be claimed in the same way, and stories of what they would do when their turn came was one of the favorite amusements of the house.

By and by Katy ceased to come, and gradually new girls took the place of those that left, and her good fortune was forgotten by all but Patty. To her it always remained a splendid possibility, and she comforted her loneliness by visions of the day when her “folks “ would come for her, and bear her away to a future of luxury and pleasure, rest and love.

But no one came, and year after year Patty worked and waited, saw others chosen and herself left to the many duties and few pleasures of her dull life. The reason why she was not taken was because of her pale face, her short figure, with one shoulder higher than the other, and her shy ways. She was not ill now, but looked so, and was a sober, quiet little woman at thirteen.

People who came for pets chose the pretty little ones; and those who wanted servants took the tall, strong, merry-faced girls, who spoke up brightly and promised to learn and do any thing required of them.

The good matron often recommended Patty as a neat, capable, gentle little person, but no one seemed to want her, and after every failure her heart grew heavier and her face sadder, for the thought of spending her life there was unbearable.

Nobody guessed what a world of hopes and thoughts and feelings was hidden under that blue pinafore, what dreams the solitary child enjoyed, or what a hungry, aspiring young soul lived in that crooked little body.

But God knew; and when the time came He remembered Patty and sent her the help best fitted for her needs. Sometimes, when we least expect it, a small cross proves a lovely crown, a seemingly unimportant event becomes a life-long experience, or a stranger changes into a friend.

It happened so now; for as Patty said aloud with a great sigh,” I don’t think I can bear it any longer!” a hand touched her shoulder, and a voice said, gently, —

“Bear what, my child? “

The touch was so light and the voice so kind that Patty answered before she had time to feel shy.

“Living here, ma’am, and never being chosen out like the other girls are.”

“Tell me all about it, dear. I’m waiting for a friend, and I’d like to hear your troubles,” sitting down in the window-seat and drawing Patty beside her.

She was not young, nor pretty, nor finely dressed, only a gray-haired woman in plain black; but her face was so motherly, her eyes so cheerful, and her voice so soothing, that Patty felt at ease in a minute, and nestled up to her as she told her little woes in a few simple words.

“You don’t know any thing about your parents? n asked the lady.

“No, ma’am; I was left here a baby without even a name pinned to me, and no one has come to find me. But I shouldn’t wonder if they did yet, so I keep ready all the time and learn as hard as I can, so they won’t be ashamed of me, for I guess my folks is respectable,” and Patty lifted her head with an air of pride that made the lady ask, with a smile, — “ What makes you think so? “ “ Well, I heard the matron tell a lady who chose Nelly Brian that she always thought I came of high folks because I was so different from the others, and my ways was nice, and my feet so small, — see if they ain’t,” — and, slipping them out of the rough shoes she wore, Patty held up two slender little feet with the arched insteps that tell of good birth.

Miss Murry laughed right out at the innocent vanity of the poor child, and said, heartily, “ They are small, and so are your hands in spite of work, and your hair is fine, and your eyes are soft and clear, and you are a good child I’m sure, which is best of all.”

Pleased and touched by the praise that is so pleasant to us all, yet half ashamed of herself, Patty blushed and smiled, put on her shoes, and said, with unusual animation, —

“I’m pretty good, I believe, and I know I’d be much better if I only could get out. I do so long to see trees and grass, and sit in the sun and hear birds. I ‘d work real hard and be happy if I could live in the country.”

“What can you do? “ asked Miss Murry, stroking the smooth head and looking down into the wistful eyes fixed upon her.

Modestly, but with a flutter of hope at her heart, Patty told over her domestic accomplishments, a good list for a thirteen-year-older, but Patty had been drilling so long she was unusually clever at all sorts of house-work as well as needle-work.

As she ended, she asked, timidly, —

“Did you come for a girl, ma’am? “

“My sister did; but she has found one she likes, and is going to take her on trial,” was the answer that made the light fade out of Patty’s eyes and the hope die in her heart.

“Who is it, please? “

“Lizzie Brown, a tall, nice-looking girl of fourteen.”

“You won’t like her I know, for Lizzie is a real there Patty stopped short, turned red, and looked down, as if ashamed to meet the keen, kind eyes fixed on her.

“A real what? “

“Please, ma’am, don’t ask; it was mean of me to say that, and I mustn’t go on. Lizzie can’t help being good with you, and I am glad she’s got a chance to go away.”

Miss Murry asked no more questions; but she liked the little glimpse of character, and tried to brighten Patty’s face again by talking of something she liked.

“Suppose your ‘ folks,’ as you say, never come for you, and you never find your fortune, as some girls do, can’t you make friends and fortune for yourself? “

“How can I?” questioned Patty, wonderingly.

“By taking cheerfully whatever comes, by being helpful and affectionate to all, and wasting no time in dreaming about what may happen, but bravely making each day a comfort and a pleasure to yourself and others. Can you do that?”

“I can try, ma’am,” answered Patty, meekly.

“1 wish you would; and when I come again you can tell me how you get on. I think you will succeed; and when you do, you will have found a fine fortune, and be sure of friends. Now I must go} cheer up, deary, your turn must come some day.’“ With a kiss that won Patty’s heart, Miss Murry went away, casting more than one look of pity at the little figure in the window-seat, sobbing, with a blue pinafore over its face.

This disappointment was doubly hard to Patty; because Lizzie was not a good girl, and deserved nothing, and Patty had taken a great fancy to the lady who spoke so kindly to her.

For a week after this she went about her work with a sad face, and all her day-dreams were of living with Miss Murry in the country.

Monday afternoon, as she stood sprinkling clothes, one of the girls burst in, saying, all in a breath, —

“Somebody’s come for you, and you are to go right up to the parlor. It’s Mrs. Murry, and she’s brought Liz back, ‘cause she told fibs, and was lazy, and Liz is as mad as hops, for it is a real nice place, with cows, and pigs, and children; and the work ain’t hard and she wanted to stay. Do hurry, and don’t stand staring at me that way.”

“It can’t be me — no one ever wants me — it ‘a some mistake “ — stammered Patty, so startled and excited, she did not know what to say or do.

“No, it isn’t Mrs. Murry won’t have any one but you, and the matron says you are to come right up. Go along; I ‘11 finish here. I’m so glad you have got a chance at last; “ and with a good-natured hug, the girl pushed Patty out of the kitchen.

In a few minutes Patty came flying back, all in a twitter of delight, to report that she was going at once, and must say good-by all round. Every one was pleased, and when the flurry was over, the carriage drove away with the happiest little girl ever seen inside, for at last some one did want her, and Patty had found a place.

II

HOW SHE FILLED IT.

For a year Patty lived with the Murrys, industrious, docile, and faithful, but not yet happy, because she had not found all she expected. They were kind to her, as far as plenty of food and not too much work went. They clothed her comfortably, let her go to church, and did not scold her very often. But no one showed that they loved her, no one praised her efforts, no one seemed 8

to think that she had any hope or wish beyond her daily work, and no one saw in the shy, quiet little maid-servant, a lonely, tender-hearted girl longing for a crumb of the love so freely given to the children of the house.

The Murrys were busy people; the farm was large, and the master and his eldest son were hard at it all summer. Mrs. Murry was a brisk, smart housewife, who “ flew round “ herself, and expected others to do likewise. Pretty Ella, the daughter, was about Patty’s age, and busy with her school, her little pleasures, and all the bright plans young girls love and live in. Two or three small lads rioted about the house, making much work, and doing very little.

One of these boys was lame, and this fact seemed to establish a sort of friendly understanding between him and Patty, for he was the only one who ever expressed any regard for her. She was very good to him, always ready to help him, always patient with his fretfulness, and always quick to understand his sensitive nature.

‘ She’s only a servant, a charity girl who works for her board, and wears my old duds. She’s good enough in her place, but of course she can’t expect to be like one of us,” Ella said to a young friend once, and Patty heard her.

“Only a servant” — that was the hard part, and it never occurred to any one to make it softer; so Patty plodded on, still hoping and dreaming about friends and fortune.

If it had not been for Miss Murry I fear the child would not have got on at all. But Aunt Jane never forgot her, though she lived twenty miles away, and seldom came to the farm. She wrote once a month, and always put in a little note to Patty, which she expected to have answered.

So Patty wrote a neat reply, very stiff and short at first; but after a time she quite poured out her heart to this one friend who sent her encouraging o o words, cheered her with praise now and then, and made her anxious to be all Miss Jane seemed to expect. No one took much notice of this correspondence, for Aunt Jane was odd, and Patty used to post her replies herself, being kindly provided with stamps by her friend.

This was Patty’s anchor in her little sea of troubles, and she clung to it, hoping that some time, when she had earned such a beautiful reward, she would go and live with Miss Murry.

Christmas was coming, and great fun was ex pected; for the family were to pass the day before a Aunt Jane’s, and bring her homo for the dinner and dance next day. For a week beforehand, Mrs. Murry flew round with more than her accustomed speed, and Patty trotted from morning till night, lending a hand at all the least agreeable jobs. Ella did the light, pretty work, and spent much time over her new dress, and the gifts Ptie was making for the boys.

Every thing was done at last, and Mrs. Murry declared that she should drop if she, ha4 another thing to do but go to Jane’s and rest.

Patty had lived on the hope of going wJth them; but nothing was said about it, and they all trooped gayly away to the station, leaving her to take care of the house, and see that the cat did not touch one of the dozen pies stored away in the pantry.

Patty kept up bravely till they were gone; then she sat down like Cinderella, and cried, and cried until she couldn’t cry any more, for it did seem as if she never was to have any fun, and no fairy godmother came to help her. The shower did her good, and she went about her work with a meek, patient face that would have touched a heart q(stone.

All the morning she finished up the odd jobs left her to do, and in the afternoon, as the only approach to a holiday she dared venture, she sat at the parlor window and watched other people go to and fro, intent on merry-makings in which she had no part.

One pleasant little task she had, and that was arranging gifts for the small boys. Miss Jane had given her a bit of money now and then, and out of her meagre store the affectionate child had made presents for the lads; poor ones, but full of good-will and the desire to win some in return.

The evening was very long, for the family did not return as early as they expected to do, so Patty got out her treasure-box, and, sitting on the warm kitchen hearth, tried to amuse herself, while the wind howled outside and snow fell fast.

There we must leave her for a little while, quite unconscious of the happy surprise that was being prepared for her.

When Aunt Jane welcomed the family, her first word, as she emerged from a chaos of small boys’ arms and legs, was “ Why, where is Patty? “

“At home, of course; where should she be 9 * auswered Mrs. Murry.

“Here with you. I said ‘ all come’’ in my letter didn’t you understand it? “

“Goodness, Jane, you didn’t mean bring hef too, I hope.”

“Yes, I did, and I’m so disappointed I’d go and get her if I had time.”

Miss Jane knit her brows and looked vexed, as Ella laughed at the idea of a servant’s going pleasuring with the family.

“It can’t be helped now, so we ‘11 say no more, and make it up to Patty to-morrow, if we can.” And Aunt Jane smiled her own pleasant smile, and kissed the little lads all round, as if to sweeten her temper as soon as possible.

They had a capital time, and no one observed that Aunty now and then led the talk to Patty, asked a question about her, caught up every little hint dropped by the boys concerning her patience and kindness, and when Mrs. Murry said, as she sat resting, with a cushion at her back, a stool at her feet, and a cup of tea steaming deliciously under her nose, —

“Afraid to leave her there in charge? Oh, dear no! I’ve entire confidence in her, and she is equal to taking care of the house for a week if need be On the whole, Jane, I consider her a pretty promising girl. She isn’t very quick, but she is faithful, steady, and honest as daylight.”

“High praise from you, Maria; I hope she knows your good opinion of her.”

“No, indeed; it don’t do to pamper up a girl’s pride by praising her. I say, ‘Very well, Patty,’ when I’m satisfied, and that’s enough.”

“Ah, but you wouldn’t be satisfied if George only said, ‘ Very well, Maria,’ when you had done your very best to please him in some way.”

“That’s a different thing,” began Mrs. Muny, but Miss Jane shook her head, and Ella said, laughing, —

It’s no use to try and convince Aunty on that point, she has taken a fancy to Pat, and won’t see any fault in her. She’s a good child enough; but I can’t get any thing out of her, she is so odd and shy.”

“I can; she’s first rate, and takes care of me better than any one else,” said Harry, the lame boy, with sudden warmth, for Patty had quite won his selfish little heart by many services.

“She ‘11 make mother a nice helper as she grows up, and I consider it a good speculation. In four years she ‘11 be eighteen, and if she goes on doing so well, I shan’t begrudge her wages,” added Mr. Murry, who sat near by, with a small son on each knee.

“She’d be quite pretty if she was straight, and plump, and jolly. But she is as sober as a deacon, and when her work is done, sits in a corner, watching us with her big eyes, as shy and mute as a mouse,” said Ned, the big brother, lounging on the sofa.

“A dull, steady-going girl, just fitted for a servant, and no more,” concluded Mrs. Murry, setting down her cup as if the subject was ended.

“You are quite mistaken, and I ‘11 prove it!” and up jumped Aunt Jane so energetically, that the boys laughed and the elders looked annoyed. Pulling out a portfolio, Aunt Jane untied a little bundle of letters, saying impressively, —

“Now listen, all of you, and see what has been going on under Patty’s blue pinafore this year.”

Then Miss Jane read the little letters one by one, and it was curious to see how the faces of the listeners woke up, grew attentive first, then touched, then self-reproachful, and finally how full of interest, and respect, and something very like affection for little Patty.

These letters were pathetic to read, as Aunty read them to listeners who could supply much that the writer generously left unsaid, and the involuntary comments of the hearers proved the truth of Patty’s words.

“Does she envy me because I’m ‘ pretty and gay, and have a good time?’ I never thought how hard it must be for her to see me have all the fun, and she all the work. She’s a girl like me, though she does grub; and I might have done more for her than give her my old clothes, and let her help dress me when I go to a party,” said Ella, hastily, as Aunt Jane laid down one letter in which poor Patty told of many “good times and she not in ‘em.”

“Sakes alive, if I’d known the child wanted me to kiss her now and then, as I do the rest, I’d have done it in a minute,” said Mrs. Murry, with sud den softness in her sharp eyes, as Aunt Jane read this little bit, —

“I am grateful, but, oh! I’m so lonely, and it’s so hard not to have any mother like the children. If Mrs. Murry would only kiss me good-night sometimes, it would do me more good than pretty clothes or nice victuals.”

“I’ve been thinking I’d let her go to school a 8* L

spell, ever since I heard her showing Boh how to do his lessons. But mother didn’t think she could spare her,” broke in Mr. Murry, apologetically.

“If Ella would help a little, I guess I could. Anyway, we might try a while, since she is so eager to learn,” added his wife, anxious not to seem unjust to sister Jane.

“Well, Joe laughed at her as well as me, when the boys hunched up their shoulders the way she does,” cried conscience-stricken Bob, as he heard a sad little paragraph about her crooked figure, and learned that it came from lugging heavy babies at the Asylum.

“I cuffed ‘em both for it, and I have always liked Patty,” said Harry, in a moral tone, which moved Ned to say, —

“You’d be a selfish little rascal if you didn’t, when she slaves so for you and gets no thanks for it. Now that I know how it tires her poor little back to carry wood and water, I shall do it of course. If she’d only told me, I’d have done it all the time.”

And so it went on till the letters were done, and they knew Patty as she was, and each felt sorry that he or she had not found her out before. Aunt Jane freed her mind upon the subject, and they talked it over till quite an enthusiastic state of feeling set in, and Patty was in danger of being killed with kindness.

It is astonishing how generous and kind peo pie are when once waked up to a duty, a charity or a wrong. Now, every one was eager to repair past neglect, and if Aunt Jane had not wisely restrained them, the young folks would have done something absurd.

They laid many nice little plans to surprise Patty, and each privately resolved not only to give her a Christmas gift, but, what was better, to turn over a new leaf for the new year.

All the way home they talked over their various projects, and the boys kept bouncing into Aunt Jane's seat, to ask advice about their funny ideas.

"It must have been rather lonesome for the poor little soul all day. I declare I wish we'd taken her along," said Mrs. Murry, as they approached the house, through the softly-falling snow.

"She's got a jolly good fire all ready for us, and that, 's a mercy, for I'm half frozen," said Harry, hopping up the step.

"Don't you think if I touch up my blue merina it would fit Patty, and make a nice dress for tomorrow, with one of my white aprons? " whispered Ella, as she helped Aunt Jane out of the sleigh.

"Hope the child isn't sick or scared; it's two hours later than I expected to be at home," added Mr. Murry, stepping up to peep in at the kitchen window, for no one came to open the door, and no light but the blaze of the fire shone out.

"Come softly and look in; it's a pretty little sight, if it is in a kitchen," he whispered, beckoning to the rest.

Quietly creeping to the two low windows, they all looked in, and no one said a word, for the lonely little figure was both pretty and pathetic, when they remembered the letters lately read. Flat on the old rug lay Patty fast asleep; one arm pillowed her head, and in the other lay Puss in a cosy bunch, as if she had crept there to be sociable, since there was no one else to share Patty's long vigil. A row of slippers, large and small, stood warming on the hearth, two little nightgowns hung over a chair, the tea-pot stood in a warm nook, and through the open door they could see the lamp burning brightly in the sitting-room, the table ready, and all things in order.

"Faithful little creature! She's thought of every blessed thing, and I '11 go right in and wake her up with a good kiss! " cried Mrs. Murry, making a dart at the door.

But Aunt Jane drew her back, begging her not to frighten the child by any sudden demonstrations. So they all went softly in, so softly that tired Patty did not wake, even though Puss pricked up her ears and opened her moony eyes with a lazy purr.

“Look here,” whispered Bob, pointing to the poor little gifts half tumbling out of Patty’s apron. She had been pinning names on them when she fell asleep, and so her secret was known too soon.

No one laughed at the presents, and Ella covered them up with a look of tender pity at the few humble treasures in Patty’s box, remembering as she laid back what she had once called “ rubbish,” how full her own boxes were of the pretty things girls love, and how easy it would have been to add to Patty’s store.

No one exactly knew how to wake up the sleeper, for she was something more than a servant in their eyes now. Aunt Jane settled the matter by stooping down and taking Patty in her arms. The big eyes opened at once and stared up at the face above them for a moment, then a smile so bright, so glacL shone all over the child’s face that it was transfigured, as Patty clung to Aunt Jane, crying joyously, —

“Is it really you? I was so afraid you wouldn’t come that I cried myself to sleep about it.”

Never had any of them seen such love and happiness in Patty’s face before, heard such a glad, tender sound in her voice, or guessed what an ardent soul lay in her quiet body.

She was herself again in a minute, and, jumping up, slipped away to see that every thing was ready, should any one want supper after the cold drive.

They all went to bed so soon that there was no time to let out the secret, and though Patty was surprised at the kind good-nights all said to her, she thought it was because Miss Jane brought a warmer atmosphere with her.

Patty’s surprises began early next day, for the first thing she saw on opening her eyes was a pair of new stockings hanging at the foot of her bed, crammed full of gifts, and several parcels lying on the table.

Didn’t she have a good time opening the delightful bundles? Didn’t she laugh and cry at the droll things the boys gave, the comfortable and pretty things the elders sent? And wasn’t she a happy child when she tried to say her prayers and couldn’t find words beautiful enough to express her gratitude for so much kindness?

A new Patty went down stairs that morning, — a bright-faced girl with smiles on the mouth that used to be so sad and silent, confidence in the timid eyes, and the magic of the heartiest good-will to make her step light, her hand skilful, her labor a joy, and service no burden.

“They do care for me, after all, and I never will complain again,” she thought, with a glad flutter at her heart, and sudden color in her cheeks, as every one welcomed her with a friendly “ Merry Christmas, Patty! “

It was a merry Christmas, and when the bountiful dinner was spread and Patty stood ready to wait, you can imagine her feelings as Mr. Murry pointed to a seat near Miss Jane and said, in a fatherly tone that made his bluff voice sweet, —

“Sit down and enjoy it with us, my girl; nobody has more right to it, and we are all one family today.”

Patty could not eat much, her heart was so full J

but it was a splendid feast to her, and when healths were drank she was overwhelmed by the honor Ilarry did her, for he bounced up and exclaimed, —

“Now we must drink ‘ Our Patty, long life and good luck to her!’“

That really was too much, and she fairly ran away to hide her blushes in the kitchen roller, and work off her excitement washing dishes.

More surprises came that evening; when she went to put on her clean calico she found the pretty blue dress and white apron laid ready on her bed “ with Ella’s love.”

“It’s like a fairy story, and keeps getting nicer and nicer since the godmother came,” whispered Patty, as she shyly looked up at Aunt Jane, when passing ice-cream at the party several hours later.

“Christmas is the time for all sorts of pleasant miracles, for the good fairies fly about just then, and give good-luck pennies to the faithful workers who have earned them,” answered Miss Jane, smiling back at her little handmaid, who looked so neat and blithe in her new suit and happy face.

Patty thought nothing farther in the way of bliss cculd happen to her that night, but it did when Ned, anxious to atone for his past neglect, pranced up to her, as a final contra-dance was forming, and said heartily, —

“Come, Patty, every one is to dance this, even Harry and the cat,” and before she could collect her wits enough to say “ No,” she was leading ofl and flying down the middle with the young master in great style.

That was the crowning honor; for she was a girl with all a girl’s innocent hopes, fears, desires and delights, and it had been rather hard to stand by while all the young neighbors were frolicking together.

When every one was gone, the tired children asleep, and the elders on their way up to bed, Mrs. Murry suddenly remembered she had not covered the kitchen fire. Aunt Jane said she would do it, and went down so softly that she did not disturb faithful Patty, who had gone to see that all was safe.

Aunt Jane stopped to watch the little figure standing on the hearth alone, looking into the- embers with thoughtful eyes. If Patty could avt seen her future there, she would have found a long life spent in glad service to those she loved and who loved her. Not a splendid future, but a useful.

happy one; “only a servant,” yet a good and faitl fill woman, blessed with the confidence, respect and affection of those who knew her genuine worth.

As a smile broke over Patty's face, Miss Jane said, with an arm round the little blue-gowned figure, — "What are you dreaming and smiling about, deary? The friends that are to come for you some day, with a fine fortune in their pockets?"

"No, ma'am, I feel as if I'd found my folks, and I don't want any finer fortune than the love they've given me to-day. I'm trying to think how I can deserve it, and smiling because it's so beautiful and I'm so happy," answered Patty, looking up at her first friend with full eyes and a glad, grateful glance that made her lovely.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN OMNIBUS.

IT WAS born in Springfield, — excuse me if I don’t mention how many years ago, for my memory is a little treacherous on some points, and it does not matter in the least. I was a gay young ‘bus, with a long, red body, yellow wheels, and a picture of Washington on each side. Beautiful portraits, I assure you, with powdered hair, massive nose, and a cataract of shirt-frill inundating his buff vest. His coat and eyes were wonderfully blue, and he stared at the world in general with superb dignity, no matter how much mud might temporarily obscure his noble countenance.

Yes, I was an omnibus to be proud of; for my yellow wheels rumbled sonorously as they rolled my cushions were soft, my springs elastic, and my varnish shone with a brilliancy which caused the human eye to wink as it regarded me.

Joe Quimby first mounted my lofty perch, fout fine gray horses drew me from obscurity, and Bill Buffum hung gayly on behind as conductor; for in my early days there were no straps to jerk, and passengers did not plunge in and out in the undignified way they do now.

How well I remember my first trip, one bright spring day! I was to run between Roxbury and Boston, and we set out in great style, and an admiring crowd to see us olf. That was the beginning of a long and varied career, — a useful one too, I hope; for never did an omnibus desire to do its duty more sincerely than I did. My heart yearned over every one whom I saw plodding along in the dust; my door opened hospitably to rich and poor, and no hand beckoned to me in vain. Can every one say as much?

For years I trundled to and fro punctually at my appointed hours, and many curious things I saw — many interesting people I carried. Of course, I had my favorites, and though I did my duty faithfully to all, there were certain persons whom I loved to carry, whom I watched for and received into my capacious bosom with delight.

Several portly old gentlemen rode down to their business every day for years, and I felt myself honored by such eminently respectable passengers. Nice, motherly women, with little baskets, daily went to market; for in earlier days housewives attended to these matters and were notable managers. Gay young fellows would come swarming up beside Joe, and crack jokes all the way into town, amusing me immensely.

But my especial pets were the young girls, — for we had girls then, — blithe, bonny creatures, with health on theii cheeks, modesty in their bright eyes, and the indescribable charm of real maidenliness about them. So simply dressed, so quiet in manner, so unconscious of display, and so full of innocent gayety, that the crustiest passenger could not help softening as they came in. Bless their dear hearts! what would they say if they could see the little fashion- plates school-girls are now? The seven-story hats with jet daggers, steel arrows, and gilt horse-shoes on the sides, peacocks' tails in front, and quantities of impossible flowers tumbling off behind. The jewelry, the frills and bows, the frizzled hair and high-heeled boots, and, worst of all, the pale faces, tired eyes, and ungirlish manners.

Well, well, I must not scold the poor dears, for they are only what the times make them, — fast and loud, frivolous and feeble. All are not spoilt, thank heaven; for now and then, a fresh, modest face goes by, and then one sees how lovely girlhood may be.

I saw many little romances, and some small tragedies, in my early days, and learned to take such interest in human beings, that I have never been able to become a mere machine.

When one of my worthy old gentlemen dropped away, and I saw him no more, I mourned for him like a friend. When one of my housewifely women came in with a black bonnet on, and no little lad or lass clinging to her hand, I creaked my sympathy for her loss, and tried not to jolt the poor mother whose heart was so heavy. When one of my pretty girls entered, blushing and smiling, with a lover close behind, I was as pleased and proud as if she had been my own, and every black button that studded my red cushion twinkled with satisfaction.

I had many warm friends among the boys who were allowed to "hang on behind," for I never gave a dangerous lurch when they were there, and never pinched their fingers in the door. No, I gave a jolly rumble when the steps were full; and I kept the father of his country beaming so benignly at them that they learned to love his old face, to watch for it, and to cheer it as we went by.

I was a patriotic 'bus; so you may imagine my feelings when, after years of faithful service on that route, I was taken off and sent to the paint-shop, where a simpering damsel, with lilies in her hair, replaced G. Washington's honored countenance. I was re-christened "The Naiad Queen," which disgusted me extremely, and kept to carry picnic parties to a certain lake.

Earlier in my life I should have enjoyed the fun; but I was now a middle-aged 'bus, and felt as if I wanted more serious work to do. However, I resigned myself and soon found that the change did me good; for in the city I was in danger of getting grimy with mud, battered with banging over stones, and used up with the late hours, noise and excitement * of town life.

Now I found great refreshment in carrying loads gay young people into the country for a day of sunshine, green grass, and healthful pleasure. What jolly parties they were, to be sure! Such laughing and singing, feasting and frolicking; such baskets of flowers and fresh boughs as they carried home*

and, better still, such blooming cheeks, happy eyes, and hearts bubbling over with the innocent gayety of youth! They soon seemed as fond of me as I was of them, for they welcomed me with shouts when 1 came, played games and had banquets inside of me when sun or rain made shelter pleasant, trimmed me up with wreaths as we went home in triumph, and gave three rousing cheers for the old ‘bus when we parted. That was a happy time, and it furnished many a pleasant memory for duller days.

After several seasons of picnicking, I was taken to an asylum for the deaf, dumb, and blind, and daily took a dozen or so out for an airing. You can easily imagine this was a great contrast to my last place; for now, instead of rollicking parties of boys and girls, I took a sad load of affliction; and it grieved me much to know that while some of the poor little creatures could see nothing of the beauty round them, the others could hear none of the sweet summer sounds, and had no power to express their happiness in blithe laughter or the gay chatter one so loves to hear.

JBut it did me good; for, seeing them so patient with their great troubles, I was ashamed to grumble about my small ones. I was now getting to be an elderly ‘bus, with twinges of rheumatism in my axletrees, many cracks like wrinkles on my once smooth paint, and an asthmatic creak to the hinges of the door that used to swing so smartly to and fro-. Yes, I was evidently getting old, for I began to think over my past, to recall the many passengers I had carried, the crusty or jolly coachmen I had known, the various horses who had tugged me over stony streets or dusty roads, and the narrow escapes I had had in the course of my career.

Presently I found plenty of time for such reminiscences, for I was put away in an old stable and left there undisturbed a long, long time. At first, I enjoyed the rest and quiet; but I was of a social turn, and soon longed for the stirring life I had left. I had no friends but a few gray hens, who roosted on my pole, laid eggs in the musty straw on my floor, and came hopping gravely down my steps with important “ cut, cut, ka da cuts!” when their duty was done. I respected these worthy fowls, and had many a gossip with them; but their views were very limited, and I soon tired of their domestic chat.

Chanticleer was coachman now, as in the days >f Partlet and the nuts; but he never drove out, 9 M

only flew up to my roof when he crowed, and sax there, in his black and yellow suit, like a diligence- driver sounding his horn. Interesting broods oi chickens were hatched inside, and took their first look at life from my dingy windows. I felt a grand fatherly fondness for the downy things, and liked to have them chirping and scratching about me, takkg small flights from my steps, and giving funny little crows in imitation of their splendid papa.

Sundry cats called often, for rats and mice haunted the stable, and these gray-coated huntsmen had many an exciting chase among my moth-eaten cushions, over the lofts, and round the grain-bags.

“Here I shall end my days,” I thought, and resigned myself to obscurity. But I was mistaken; for just as I was falling out of one long doze into another, a terrible commotion among the cats, hens, and mice woke me up, and I found myself trundling oif to the paint-shop again.

I emerged from that fragrant place in a new scarlet coat, trimmed with black and ornamented with a startling picture of a salmon-colored Mazeppa, airily dressed in chains and a blue sheet, hanging by one foot to the back of a coal-black steed with red nostrils and a tempestuous tail, who was wildij careering over a range of pea-green mountains on four impossible legs. It was much admired; but I preferred George Washington, like the loyal ‘bus tha4- I am.

I found I was to live in the suburbs and cam people to and from the station of a new railway, which, with the town, seemed to have sprung up like mushrooms. Well, I bumped passengers about the half-finished streets; but I did not like it, for every thing had changed much during my retirement. Everybody seemed in a tearing hurry now, — the men to be rich, the women to be fine; the boys and girls couldn’t wait to grow up, but flirted before they were in their teens; and the very babies scrambled out of their cradles as if each was bent on toddling farther and faster than its neighbor. M) old head quite spun round at the whirl every thin was in, and my old wheels knew no rest, for the now coachman drove like Jehu.

It is my private opinion that I should soon have fallen to pieces if a grand smash had not settled the matter for me. A gay young fellow undertook to drive, one dark night, and upset his load in a ditch, fortunately breaking no bones but mine. So I was sent to a carriage factory for repairs; but, appar ently, my injuries were past cure, for I was left on a bit of waste land behind the factory, to go to ruin at leisure.

“This is the end of all things,” I said, with a Bigh, as year after year went by and I stood there alone, covered with wintry snow or blistered by summer sunshine. But how mistaken I was! for just when all seemed most sad and solitary, the happiest experience of my life came to me, and all the world was brightened for me by the coming of my dearest friends.

One chilly spring night, when rain was falling, and the wind sighed dismally over the flats, I was waked from a nap by voices and the rustling of straw inside my still strong body.

"Some tramp," I thought, with a yawn, for I had often taken lodgers for a night, rent free. But the sounds I now heard were the voices of children, and I listened with interest to the little creatures chirping and nestling in there like the chickens 1 told you of.

"It's as nice as a house, Hans, and so warm I '11 soon be dry," said one of the homeless birds who had taken shelter in my bosom.

"It's nicer than a house, Gretchen, because we can push it about if we like. I wish we could stay here always; I'm so tired of the streets," sighed another young voice.

"And I'm so hungry; I do wish mother would come," cried a very tired baby voice, with a sob.

"Hush, go to sleep, my Lina! I '11 wake you if mother brings us bread, and if not you will feel no disappointment, dear."

Then the elder sister seemed to wrap the little one close, and out of my bosom came a soft lullaby, as one child gave the other all she had, — love and care.

"In the shed yonder I saw a piece of carpet; I shall go and bring it to cover us, then you will not shiver so, dear Gretchen," said the boy; and out into the rainy darkness he went, whistling to keep his spirits up and hide his hunger.

Soon he came hurrying back with the rude coverlet, and another voice was heard, saying, in the tone that only mothers use, —

"Here is supper, dear children. Eat all; I have no wish for any more. People were very good to me, and there is enough for every one."

Then, with cries of joy, the hungry birds wen fed, the motherly wings folded over them, and U1 seemed to sleep in the poor nest they had found.

All night the rain pattered on ray old roof, but not a drop went through; all night the chilly wind crept round ray windows, and breathed in at every broken pane, but the old carpet kept the sleepers warm, and weariness was a sure lullaby. How pleased and proud I felt that I could still be useful, and how eagerly I waited for day to see yet more of my new tenants! I knew they would go soon and leave me to my loneliness, so I longed to see and hear all I could.

The first words the mother said, as she sat upon the step in the warm April sun, pleased me immensely, for they were of me.

"Yes, Hans, it will be well to stay here a day at least, if we may, for Lina is worn out and poor Gretchen so tired she can go no more. You shall guard them while they sleep, and I will go again for food, and may get work. It is better out here in the sun than in some poor place in the city, and I like it well, this friendly old carriage that sheltered us when most we needed it."

So the poor woman trudged away, like a true mother-bird, to find food for the ever-hungry brood, and Hans, a stout lad of twelve, set about doing his part manfully.

When he heard the workmen stirring in the great factory, he took courage, and, going in, told his sad tale of the little tired sisters sleeping in the old omnibus, the mother seeking work, the father lately dead, and he (the young lad) left to guard and help the family. He asked for nothing but leave to use the bit of carpet, and for any little job whereby he might earn a penny.

The good fellows had fatherly hearts under their rough jackets, and lent a helping hand with the readiness the poor so often show in lightening one another’s burdens. Each did what he could; and when the mother came back, she found the children fed and warmed, cheered by kind words and the promise of help.

Ah! it was a happy day for me when the Schmidts came wandering by and found my door ajar! A yet happier one for them, since the workmen and their master befriended the poor souls so well that in a week the houseless family had a home, and work whereby to earn their bread.

They had taken a fancy to me, and I was their home; for they were a hardy set and loved the sun and air. Clever Hans and his mother made me as neat and cosy as possible, stowing away their few possessions as if on shipboard. The shed was given to mother Schmidt for a wash-house, and a gypsy fire built on the ground, with an old kettle slung over it, in which to boil the clothes she washed for such of the men as had no wives. Hans and Gretchen soon found work selling chips and shavings from the factory, and bringing home the broken food they begged by the way. Baby Lina was a universal pet, and many a sixpence found its way into her little hand from the pockets of the kindly men, who took it out in kisses, or the pretty songs she sang them.

All that summer my family prospered, and I was a happy old ‘bus. A proud one, too; for the dear people loved me well, and, in return for the shelter I gave them, they beautified me by all the humble means in their power. Some one gave Gretchen a few scarlet beans, and these she planted among the dandelions and green grass that had grown about my wheels. The gay runners climbed fast, and when they reached the roofj Hans made a trellis ol old barrel hoops, over which they spread their broad leaves and bright flowers till Lina had a green little bower up aloft, where she sat, as happy as a queen, with the poor toys which her baby fancj changed to playthings of the loveliest sort.

Mother Schmidt washed and ironed busily all day in her shed, cooked the soup over her gypsy fire, and when the daily work was done sat in the shadow of the old omnibus with her children round her, a grateful and contented woman. If any one asked her what she would do when our bitter winter came, the smile on her placid face grew graver, but did not vanish, as she laid her worn hands together and answered, with simple faith, —

“The good Gott who gave us this home and raised up these friends will not forget us, for He has such as we in His especial charge.”

She was right; for the master of the great factory was a kind man, and something in the honest, hardworking family interested him so much that he could not let them suffer, but took such friendly thought for them that he wrought one of the pleasant miracles which keep a rich man’s memory green in grateful hearts, though the world may never know of it.

When autumn came and the pretty bower began to fade, the old omnibus to be cold at night, and the shed too gusty even for the hardy German laundress, a great surprise was planned and gayly carried out. On the master’s birthday the men had 9*

a holiday, and bade the Schmidts be ready to take part in the festival, for all the factory people were to have a dinner in one of the long rooms.

A jovial time they had; and when the last bone had been polished off, the last health drunk, and three rousing cheers for the master given with a will, the great joke took place. First the Schmidts were told to go and see what had been left for them in the ‘bus, and off they ran, little dreaming what was to come. I knew all about it, and was in a great twitter, for I bore a grand part in it.

The dear unsuspecting family piled in, and were so busy having raptures over certain bundles of warm clothes found there that they did not mind what went on without. A dozen of the stoutest men quietly harnessed themselves to the rope fastened to my pole, and at a signal trotted away with me at a great pace, while the rest, with their wives and children, came laughing and shouting after.

Imagine the amazement of the good Schmidts at this sudden start, their emotions during that triumphal progress, and their unspeakable surprise and joy when their carriage stopped at the door of a tidy little house in a lane not far away, and they were handed out to find the master waiting to welcome them home.

Dear heart, how beautiful it all was! I cannot describe it, but I would not have missed it for the world, because it was one of the scenes that do everybody so much good and leave such a pleasant memory behind.

That was my last trip, for the joyful agitation of that day was too much for me, and no sooner was I safely landed in the field behind the little house than one of my old wheels fell all to pieces, and I should have tumbled over, like a decrepit old creature, if the men had not propped me up. But I did not care; my travelling days were past, and I was quite content to stand there under the apple-trees, watching my family safe and busy in their new home.

I was not forgotten, I assure you; for Germans have much sentiment, and they still loved the old omnibus that sheltered them when most forlorn. Even when Hans was a worker in the factory he found time to mend me up and keep me tidy; pretty Gretchen, in spite of much help given to the hard-working mother, never forgot to plant some common flower to beautify and cheer her old friend; and little Lina, bless her heart! made me her baby- house. She played there day after day, a tiny matron, with her dolls, her kitten and her bits of furniture, as happy a child as ever sang “ Bye-low” to a dirty-faced rag-darling. She is my greatest comfort and delight; and the proudest moment of my life was when Hans painted her little name on ray door and gave me to her for her own.

Here my story ends; for nothing now remains to me but to crumble slowly to ruin and go where the good ‘busses go; very slowly, I am sure, for my little mistress takes great care of me, and I shall never suffer from rough usage any more. I am quite happy and contented as I stand here under the trees that scatter their white petals on my rusty roof each spring; and well I may be, for after my busy life I am at rest; the sun shines kindly on me, the grass grows greenly round me, good friends cherish me in my old age, and a little child nestlee in my heart, keeping it tender to the last.

RED TULIPS.

“PLEASE, ma’am, will you give me one on them red tulips? “

The eager voice woke Helen from her reverie, and, looking up, she saw a little colored girl holding on to the iron railing with one hand, while the other pointed to a bed of splendid red and yellow tulips waving in the sunshine.

“I can’t give you one, child, for they don’t belong to me,” answered Helen, arrested by the wistful face, over which her words brought a shadow of disappointment.

“I thought maybe you lived in this house, or knew the folks, and I do want one of them flowers dreadful bad,” said the girl, regarding the gay tulips with a look of intense desire.

“I wish I could give you one, but it would be stealing, you know. Perhaps if you go and ask, the owner may let you have one, there are so many.”

And having offered all the consolation in he?

power, Helen went on, busy with a certain disap pointment of her own, which just then weighed very heavily on her girlish heart.

Half an hour later, as she came down the street on the opposite side, she saw the same girl sitting on a door-step, still gazing at the tulips with hopeless admiration.

The child looked up as she approached, and recognizing the pretty young lady who had spoken kindly to her, smiled and nodded so confidingly, that Helen could not resist stopping to say, —

“Did you ask over there? “

“Yes, ma’am, but the girl said, 1 No,’ and told mo to clear out; so I come over here to set and look at the pretties, since I can’t have none,” she answered with a patient sigh.

“You shall have some!” cried Helen, remembering how easily she could gratify the innocent longing of the poor child, and feeling a curious sympathy with all disappointed people. “ Come with me, dear; there is a flower shop round the corner, and you shall have a posy of some sort.”

Such wonder, gratitude and delight shone in Betty’s face, that Helen felt rejoiced for her small kindness. As they walked, she questioned her about herself, and quite won her heart by the friendly interest expressed in Betty’s mother, Betty’s kitten, and Betty’s affairs generally.

When they came to the flower shop little Bet fell as if she had got into a fairy tale; and when Helen gave her a pot with a blue hyacinth and a rosy tulip blooming prettily together, she felt as if a lovely fairy had granted all her wishes in the good old way.

“It’s just splendid! and I don’t know how to thank you, miss. But mother takes in washing, and she ‘11 love to do yours, and plait the ruffles elegant — ‘cause you done this for me!” cried Betty, embracing the flower-pot with one hand, and squeezing Miss Helen’s with the other.

Helen promised to come and see her new friend, and when they parted, kept turning round to watch the little figure trotting up the hill, often pausing to turn, and show her a beaming black face, all smiles and delight, as Betty threw her kisses and hugged the dear red tulip like a treasure of great price.

When she vanished, Helen said to herself, with a smile and a sigh, —

“There, I feel better for that little job; and it is a comfort to know that some one has got what she wants, though it is not I.”

Some weeks later, when Helen was preparing to go into the country for the summer, and wanted certain delicate muslins done up, she remembered what Betty had said about her mother, and had a fancy to see how the child and her flowers prospered.

She found them in a small, poor room, hot and close, and full of wash-tubs and flat-irons. The mother was busy at her work, and Betty sat by the one window, listlessly picking out ruffles.

When she saw the face at the door, she jumped up and clapped her hands, crying, delightedly, “ O mammy, it’s my lady; my dear, pretty lady truly come at last!”

Such a welcome made friends of the three at once, and Mrs. Simms gladly undertook the work Helen offered.

“And how are the posies?” asked the young lady, as she rose to go.

“Only leaves now, miss; but I take real good care of ‘em, and mammy says they will blow again next spring,” answered Betty, showing her poor little garden, which consisted of the hyacinth, tulip, and one stout dandelion, blooming bravely in an old teapot.

“That ill be a long time to wait, won’t it? “

“Yes’m; but I go and take peeks at them flowers in the shop, and once the man gave me a pink that hadn’t no stem. Maybe he will again, and so I ‘11 get along,” said Betty, softly touching her cheerful dandelion as if it were a friend.

“I wish you would come and see my garden, little Betty. You should pick as many flowers as you liked, and play there all day long. I suppose your mother couldn’t spare you for a visit, could she?”

Betty’s face shone at the blissful thought, then the smile faded, and she shook her head, saying, steadily, “ No, miss, I guess she couldn’t, for she gets so tired, I like to help her by carrying home the clothes. Some day, maybe, I can come.”

Something in the patient little face touched Helen, and made her feel as if she had been tco busy thinking of her own burden to help others bear theirs. She longed to do something, but did not know how till Mrs. Simms showed her the way, by flaying, as she stroked the frizzly little head that leaned against her, —

N

“Betty thinks a heap of flowers, and ‘pears tc git lots of comfort out of ‘em. She’s a good child, and some day we are going to see the country, soon as ever we can afford it.”

“Meantime the country must come to you,” said Helen, with a happy thought shining in her face. “ If you are willing, I will make a nice little plan with Betty, so she can have a posy all the time. I shall come in town twice a week to take my German lessons, and if Betty will be at the corner of the Park, by the deer, every Wednesday and Saturday morning at ten o’clock, I’ll have a nice nosegay for her.”

If she had proposed to present the child with all the sweeties in Copeland’s delightful shop, it would not have given greater joy. Betty could only dance a jig of rapture among the wash-tubs, and Mrs. Simms thank Helen with tears in her eyes.

“Ain’t she just like a good fairy, mammy?” said Betty, settling down in an empty clothes-basket to brood over the joyful prospects.

“No, honey, she’s an angel,” answered mammy, folding her tired hands for a moment’s rest, when hei guest had goue.

Helen heard both question and answer, and sighed to herself, “ I wish somebody else thought so.”

When the first Wednesday came, Betty was at the trysting-place half an hour too soon, and had time to tell the mild-eyed deer all about it, befoj <• Miss Helen came.

That meeting was a pretty sight, though only a fawn and an old apple-woman saw it. Helen waH half-hidden behind a great nosegay of June roses, lilies of the valley, sweet jonquils and narcissus, sprays of tender green, and white lilac plumes. Betty gave one cry of rapture, as she clutched it in both hands, trembling with delight, for never had she dreamed of owning such a treasure as this.

“All for me! all for me!” she said, as if it was hard to believe. “ Oh, what will mammy say?”

“Run home and see. Never mind thanks. Get your posy into water as soon as you can, and come again Saturday,” said Helen, as she went on, with a nod and a smile, while Betty raced home to fill every cup and plate they owned, and make a garden of the poor little room, where mammy worked all day.

All through the summer, rain or shine, these two friends kept tryst, and though Helen seemed no nearer getting her wish, this little flower-mission of hers helped her to wait.

Strangers watched the pretty girl with her nosegays, and felt refreshed by the winsome sight. Friends joked her about her black Flora, and would- be lovers pleaded in vain for one bud from her bouquets.

She found real happiness in this small duty, and did it faithfully for its own sake, little dreaming that some one was tracking her by the flowers she left behind her in the byways of her life.

For, seeing how much these fragrant messengers were to Betty and her mother, Helen fell into the way of taking flowers to others also, and never went to town without a handful to leave here and there, by some sick-bed, in a child’s hand, on a needle-woman’s table, or dropped in the gutter, for dear, dirty babies to find and crow over.

And, all unconsciously, these glimpses of poverty, pain, neglect, and loneliness, taught her lessons she had never learned before, — a sweeter language than German, a nobler music than any Herr Pedal- strum could give her, and a more winning charm than either youth or beauty could confer, — for the gay girl was discovering that life was not all a summer day, and she was something better than a butterfly.

When autumn came, and she returned to her city home, her young friends discovered that Helen’s quiet season had improved her wonderfully, for behind the belle, they found a tender-hearted woman.

She took up her old life where she laid it down, apparently; but to those who knew her best, there was a difference now, for, in many unsuspected ways, pretty Helen was unconsciously fitting herself for the happiness that was coming to her very soon.

Betty helped to bring it, though she never guessed that her measles were a blessing to her dear lady. When Dr. Strong, finding a hot-house bouquet beside her bed, very naturally asked where it came from, Betty told all about Miss Helen, from the time of the red tulips to the fine tea-roses in her hand.

“She has lots of bunches like these sent to her, and she gives ‘em to us poor folks. This one was for her to take to a’splendid ball, but she kept it all fresh, and came herself to fetch it to me. Ain’t she kind?”

“Very, to you; but rather cruel to the gentlemen who hope to see her wear their gifts, for one evening at least,” answered the doctor, examining the bouquet, with an odd smile.

“Oh, she does keep some, when they are from folks she likes. I was there one day when some violets come in with a- book, and she wouldn’t give me one. But

I didn’t care a mite, for I had two great posies, all red geranium and pinks, instead.”

“She likes violets, then? “ and the doctor gently patted Betty’s head, as if he had grown suddenly fond of her.

“I guess she does, for when I went the next week, that very bunch was in the vase on her table, all dead and yeller, and she wouldn’t let me fling it away, when I wanted to put in a rose from the bush she gave me.”

“You are a grateful little girl, my dear, and a very observing child. Now keep warm and quiet, and we ‘11 have you trotting off to Miss Helen’s in a week or so.”

The doctor stole a sprig of rose geranium out of Betty’s last bouquet, and went away, looking as if he had found something even sweeter than that in the dingy room where his patient lay.

Next day Miss Helen had fresh violets in the vase on her table, and fresh roses blooming on her cheeks. Dr. Strong advised her not to visit Betty, as there was fever in the neighborhood, but kindly called every lay or two, to let Helen know how her little friend was getting on.

After one of these calls, the doctor went away, saying to himself, with an air of tender pride and satisfaction, —

“I was mistaken, and judged too hastily last yeai. Helen is not what I thought her, a frivolous, fashionable beauty, but a sweet, sensible girl, who is tired of that empty life, and quietly tries to make it beautiful and useful in the best and truest way. I hope I read the blue eyes right; and I think I may venture to say now what I dared not say last year.”

After that same visit, Helen sat thinking to herself, with a face full of happiness and humility, — ‘ He finds me improved, so I have not waited in rfain, and I believe that I shall not be disappointed after all.”

It is evident that the doctor did venture, and that Helen was not disappointed; for, on the first day of June, Betty and her mother, all in their best, went ta a certain church, and were shown to the best a«s;t im the gallery, where several other humble friend? were gathered to see their dear Miss Helen married.

Betty was in high feather, with a pink dress, blue sack, yellow ribbons in her hat, and lighted up the seat like an animated rainbow. Full of delight and importance, was Miss Betty, for she had been in the midst of the festive preparations, and told glowing tales to her interested listeners, while they wafted for the bride.

When the music sounded, Betty held her breath, and rolled up her eyes in a pious rapture. When a general stir announced the grand arrival, she leaned so far over the gallery, that she would have gone head first if her mother had not caught her striped legs, and when the misty, white figure passed up the aisle, Betty audibly remarked, —

“If she had wings she’d look like an out-and-out angel, wouldn’t she, mammy? “

She sat like a little ebony statue all through the service; but she had something on her mind, and the moment the bridal couple turned to go out, Betty was off, scrambling down stairs, dodging under people’s arms, hopping over ladies’ skirts, and steadily making her way to the carriage waiting foi the happy pair.

The door had just closed, and Dr. Strong was about to draw down the curtain, when a little black face, with a yellow hat surrounding it like a glory, appeared at the window, an arm was thrust in offering a bunch of flowers, and a breathless voice cried, resolutely, —

“Oh, please, do let me give ‘em to my lady! They bloomed a-purpose for her, and she must have ‘em.”

Those outside saw a sweet face bend to kiss the little black one, but they did not see what happened afterward, for Helen, remembering a year ago, said smiling, —

“Patient waiters are no losers. The. poor child has red tulips all her own at last! “

“And I have mine,” answered the happy doctor, gently kissing his young wife, as the carriage rolled away, leaving Betty to retire in triumph.

A HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

CERTAIN fine old lady was seventy-thiee on the 8th of October. The day was always celebrated with splendor by her children and grandchildren; but on this occasion they felt that something unusually interesting and festive should be done, because grandma had lately been so very ill that no one thought she would ever see another birthday. It pleased God to spare her, however, and here she was, almost as well and,gay as ever.

Some families do not celebrate these days, and so miss a great deal of pleasure, I think. But the people of whom I write always made a great deal of such occasions, and often got up very funny amusements, as you will see.

As grandma was not very strong, some quiet fun must be devised this t;me, and the surprises sprinkled along through the day, lest they should be too much for her if they burst upon her at once.

The morning was fine and clear, and the first thing that happened was the appearance of two little ghosts, “all in white,” who came prancing into the old lady’s room, while she lay placidly watching the sun rise, and thinking of the many years she had seen.

“A happy birthday, gramma! “ cried the little ghosts, scrambling up to kiss the smiling old face in the ruffled night-cap.

There was a great laughing, and cuddling, and nestling among the pillows, before the small arms and legs subsided, and two round, rosy faces appeared, listening attentively to the stories grandma told them till it was time to dress.

Now you must know that there were only two grandchildren in this family, but they were equal to half a dozen, being lively, droll little chaps, full of all manner of pranks, and considered by their relatives the most remarkable boys alive.

These two fellows were quite bursting with the great secrets of the day, and had to rush out as soon as breakfast was done, in order to keep from “ letting the cat out of the bag.”

A fine dinner was cooked, and grandma’s favorite niece came to eat it with her, bringing a bag full of goodies, and a heart full of love and kind wishes, to the old lady.

All the afternoon, friends and presents kept com. ing, and Madam, in her best gown and most imposing cap, sat in state to receive them. A poet came with some lovely flowers; the doctor brought a fine picture; one neighbor sent her a basket of grapes; another took her a drive; and some poor children, whom grandma had clothed and helped, sent her some nuts they had picked all themselves, while their grateful mother brought a bottle of cream and a dozen eggs.

It was very pleasant, and the bright autumn day was a little harvest time for the old lady, who had sowed love and charity broadcast with no thought of any reward.

The tea-table was ornamented with a splendid cake, white as snow outside, but rich and plummy inside, with a gay posy stuck atop of the little Mont Blanc. Mrs. Trot, the housekeeper, made and presented it, and it was so pretty all voted not to cut it till evening, for the table was full of other good things.

Grandma's tea was extra strong, and tasted unusually nice with Mrs. Hosy's rich cream in it. She felt that she needed this refreshment to prepare her for the grand surprise to come; for the family gifts were not yet given.

The boys vanished directly after tea, and shouts of laughter were heard from Aunt Tribulation's room. What larks as they had up there no one knew; but every one was sure they were preparing some fun in honor of the occasion.

Grandma was not allowed to go into the study, and much tacking and rummaging went on for a time. Then all the lamps were collected there, leaving grandma and grandpa to sit in the parlor, talking tenderly together by the soft glimmer of fire-light, as they used to do forty years ago.

Presently something scarlet and gold, feathery and strange, flitted by the door and vanished in the study. Queer little yells and the sound of dancing feet were heard. Then there was a hunt for the cat; next, Mrs. Trot was called from the kitchen, and all but the boys came to escort grandma to the scene of glory.

Leaning on grandpa's arm, she marched first; then came Mrs. Coobiddy, the mother of the boys, bearing Aunt Carmine's picture; for this auntie was over the water and could not come, so, at grandma's desire, hr portrait wras borne in the procession.

Aunt Trib followed, escorted by Thomas Pib, the great cat, with his best red bow on. Mrs. Trot and Belinda, the little maid, brought up the rear. A. music-box in the hall played the " Grand March " from u Norma; " and, with great dignity, all filed into the study to behold an imposing spectacle.

A fire burned brightly on the hearth, making tho old-fashioned andirons shine like gold. All the lamps illuminated the room, which was trimmed with scarlet and yellow leaves. An arch of red woodbine, evergreen and ferns from the White Mountains was made over the recess which held the journals, letters and books of the family; for their name was Penn, and they all wrote so much that blots were found everywhere about the house, and a flock of geese lived in the back yard, all ready to have their quills tweaked out at a minute's notice.

Before this recess stood a great arm-chair, in which the father of grandma had been laid, a newborn baby, and nearly smothered by being sat upon by the fat nurse. This thrilling fact gave it a peculiar interest to the boys; for, if great-grandpa hao been smashed, where would they have been?

In front of this ancient seat stood a round tabli loaded with gifts, and on each sidi stood an Indiai chief in full costume, bearing lighted Chinese lanterns on the ends of their spears, and war-clubs on their shoulders.

The arranging of these costumes had caused much labor and fun; for the splendid crowns, a foot high, were made of hen’s feathers, carefully collected and sewed on to paper by Aunt Trib; the red shirts were fringed and bedecked with odd devices; leather leggings went above the warriors’ knees, and all the family breast-pins were stuck about them.

Daggers, hatchets, clubs, and spears were made by the lads themselves, and red army blankets hung gracefully from their shoulders. They had planned to paint their faces blue and red, like the Feejee Islanders at Barnum’s show; but Mrs. Coobiddy would not consent to have her handsome boys disfigure themselves; so the only paint they wore was nature’s red in their cheeks, and heaven’s blue in their eyes, as they stood by grandma’s throne, smiling like a pair of very mild and happy little chiefs.

It really was a fine sight, I assure you, and grandma was quite overcome by the spectacle. So she was introduced to her gifts as quickly as possible, to divert her mind from the tender thought that all these fond and foolish adornments were to please her.

Every gift had a poem attached, and as the presents were of every description, the verses possessed an agreeable variety. Here are a few as a sample. A small tea-kettle was one gift, and this pleasing verse seemed to be bubbling out of its spout: —

“A little kettle, fat and fair, To sit on grandma’s stove, To simmer softly, and to sing A song of Freddie’s love.”

Another was this brief warning tucked into a match-box: —

“On this you scratch Your little match. When the spark flies Look out for your eyes! When the lucifer goes Look out for your nose! Little Jack gives you this With a birthday kiss.”

rather sentimental, from Mrs. Goo” Within doth lie A silken tie, Your dress to deck; Soft and warm As daughter’s arm Round mother’s neck.”

A third was biddy: —

Mr. Pib presented a mouse-trap all set; and in order to explain his poem, I must relate an incident in his varied career.

Pib had long been one of the family, and was much respected and beloved by them all. In fact, he was so petted and stuffed that he grew as fat and big as a small dog, and so clumsy that he could no longer catch the mice who dodged about among the dishes in the kitchen closets.

In vain had Mrs. Trot shut him up there; in vain had Aunt Trib told him it was his duty to clear the cupboards of such small deer. Poor fat Pib only bounced about, broke the china, rattled down the pans, to come out with empty paws, while the saucy mice squeaked scornfully, and pranced about under his very nose.

One day Trib saw Pib catch a squirrel, and having eaten it he brought the tail to her as a trophy of his skill. This displeased his mistress, and she gave him away, after a good scolding for killing squirrels and letting mice, his lawful prey, go free.

Pib was so depressed that he went into the bag without a mew or a scratch, and was borne away to his new home in another part of the town.

But he had no intention of staying; and after a 10* o day under the sofa, passed in deep thought, and without food or drink, he made up hi? mind to go home. Slipping out, he travelled all night, and appeared next morning, joyfully waving his tail, and purring like a small organ.

Aunt Trib was glad to see him, and when he had explained that he really did do his best about the mice, she forgave him, and got the trap for him to give grandma, that she might no longer be annoyed by having her private stores nibbled at.

“Dear madam, with respect My offering I bring; The hooks all baited well, And ready for a spring. No more the cunning mice Your biscuits shall abuse, Nor put their babes to sleep Within your fur-lined shoes. The trap my work must do; Forgive your portly cat, For he, like you, has grown For lively work too fat. All larger, fiercer game I gallantly defy, And squirrel, rat and mole Beneath my paw shall die. So, with this solemn vow, T. Pib his gift presents, And sprawling at your feet Purrs forth his compliments.

Which he actually did, and then sat bolt upright on the rug, surveying the scene with the dignity of a judge and the gravity of an owl.

Such funny presents! A wood-box and a water- carrier; a blue and gold gruel-bowl, and a black silk apron; a new diary, and a pound of remarkably choice tea; a pretty letter on birch bark, sealed with a tiny red leaf; and a bust of the wisest man in America, were some of them.

How the dear old lady did enjoy it all, and how grateful she was for the smallest trifle! An old friend sent her a lock of her mother’s hair, and the sight of the little brown curl made her forget how white her own was, as she went back to the time when she last kissed that tender little mother fifty years ago.

Fearing that tears would follow the smiles too soon, Aunt Trib announced that the famous Indian chiefs, Chingchangpopocattepattle and Pockeyhockeyclutteryar, would now give a war-dance and other striking performances to represent Indian customs.

Then all sat round, and the warriors leaped into the middle of the room with a war-whoop that caused Mr. Pib to leave precipitately. It was a most exciting spectacle; for after the dance came a fight, and one chief tomahawked, scalped, and buried the other in the space of two minutes.

But the ladies mourned so for the blond little Pockeyhockeyclutteryar that he had to come alive and join in a hunting expedition, during which they shot all the chairs for buffaloes and deer, and came home to roast a sofa pillow over their fire, and feast thereupon with the relish of hungry hunters.

These exploits were brought to an end by the arrival of more friends, with more gifts, and the introduction of the birthday cake. This was cut by the queen of the fete, and the panting chiefs handed it round with much scuffling of big moccasins and tripping over disarranged blankets.

Then all filled their glasses with water, and drank the toast, “ Grandma, God bless her!” After which the entire company took hands and danced about the big chair, singing in chorus: —

“Long may she wave, and may we all Her dear face live to see, As bright and well at seventy-four As now at seventy-three.”

The clock struck ten, and every one went home, leaving the family to end the day as they began it.

round grandma’s bed, with good-night kisses and the sound of her last words in their ears : —

“It has been a beautiful and happy day, my dears, and if I never see another you may always remember that I thought this one my best and brightest birthday.”

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AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG VOLUME 5

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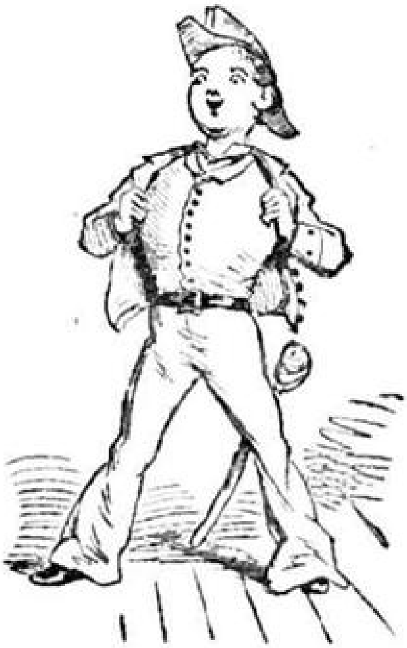

TOM TUCKER, MIDSHIPMITE.

I.

JIMMY’S CRUISE IN THE PINAFORE.

HOW HE SHIPPED.

A boy sat on a door-step in a despondent attitude, with his eyes fixed on a pair of very shabby shoes, and his elbows resting on his knees, as if to hide the big patches there. But it was not the fact that his toes were nearly out and his clothes dilapidated which brought the wrinkles to his forehead and the tears to his eyes, for he was used to that state of things, and bore it without complaint. The prospect was a dull one for a lively lad full of the spring longings which sunny April weather always brings. But it was not the narrow back-street where noisy children played and two or three dusty trees tried to bud without sunshine, that made him look so dismal. Nor was it the knowledge that a pile of vests was nearly ready for him to trudge away with before he could really rest after doing many errands to save mother’s weary feet.

No, it was a burden that lay very heavily on his heart, and made it impossible to even whistle as he waited. Above the sounds that filled the street he heard a patient moan from the room within; and no matter what object his eyes rested on, he saw with sorrowful distinctness a small white face turned wistfully toward the window, as if weary of the pillow where it had laid so long.

Merry little Kitty, who used to sing and dance from morning till night, was now so feeble and wasted that he could carry her about like a baby. All day she lay moaning softly, and her one comfort was when “brother” could come and sing to her. That night he could not sing; his heart was so full, because the doctor had said that the poor child must have country air as soon as possible, else she never would recover from the fever which left her such a sad little ghost of her former self. But, alas, there was no money for the trip, and mother was sewing day and night to earn enough for a week at least of blessed country air and quiet. Jimmy did his best to help, but could find very little to do, and the pennies came in so slowly he was almost in despair.

There was no father to lend a strong hand, and Mrs. Nelson was one of the “silent poor,” who cannot ask for charity, no matter how much they may need it. The twelve-year-old boy considered himself the man of the family, and manfully carried as many burdens as his young shoulders would bear; but this was a very heavy one, so it is no wonder that he looked sober. Holding his curly head in his hands, as if to keep it from flying asunder with the various plans working inside, he sat staring at the dusty bricks in a desperate frame of mind.

Warm days were coming, and every hour was precious, for poor Kitty pined in the close room, and all he could do was to bring her dandelions and bits of green grass from the Common when she begged to go in the fields and pick "pretties" for herself. He loved the little sister dearly, and, as he remembered her longing, his eyes filled, and he doubled up both fists with an air of determination, muttering to himself, —

"She *shall* go! I don't see any other way, and I'll do it!"

The plan which had been uppermost lately was this. His father had been a sailor, and Jimmy proposed to run away to sea as cabin boy. His wages were to be paid before he went, so mother and Kitty could be in the country while he was gone, and in a few months he would come sailing gayly home to find the child her rosy self again. A very boyish and impossible plan, but he meant it, and was in just the mood to carry it out, — for every other attempt to make money had failed.

"I'll do it as sure as my name is Jim Nelson. I'll take a look at the ships this very night, and go in the first one that will have me," he said, with a resolute nod of the head, though his heart sank within him at the thought. "I wonder which kind of captains pay boys best? I guess I'll try a steamer; they make short trips. I heard the cannon to-day, so one is in, and I'll try for a place before I go to bed."

Little did desperate Jimmy guess what ship he would really sail in, nor what a prosperous voyage he was about to make; for help was coming that very minute, as it generally does, sooner or later, to generous people who are very much in earnest.

First a shrill whistle was heard, at the sound of which he looked up quickly; then a rosy-faced girl of about his own age came skipping down the street, swinging her hat by one string; and, as Jimmy watched her approach, a smile began to soften the grim look he wore, for Willy Bryant was his best friend and neighbor, being full of courage, fun, and kindness. He nodded, and made room for her on the step, — the place she usually occupied at spare moments when they got lessons and recounted their scrapes to each other.

But to-night Willy seemed possessed of some unusually good piece of news which she chose to tell in her own lively fashion, for, instead of sitting down, she began to dance a sailor's hornpipe, singing gayly, "I'm little Buttercup, sweet little Buttercup," till her breath gave out.

"What makes you so jolly, Will?" asked Jimmy, as she dropped down beside him and fanned herself with the ill-used hat.

"Such fun — you'll never guess — just what we wanted — if your mother only will! You'll dance, too, when you know," panted the girl, smiling like a substantial sort of fairy come to bring good luck.

"Fire away, then. It will have to be extra nice to set me off. I don't feel a bit like jigs now," answered Jimmy, as the gloom obscured his face again, like a cloud over the sun.

"You know 'Pinafore'?" began Will, and getting a quick nod for an answer, she poured forth the following tale with great rapidity: "Well, some folks are going to get it up with children to do it, and they want any boys and girls that can sing to go and be looked at to-morrow, and the good ones will be picked out, and dressed up, and taught how to act, and have the nicest time that ever was. Some of our girls are going, and so am I, and you sing and must come, too, and have some fun. Won't it be jolly?"

"I guess it would; but I can't. Mother needs me every minute out of school," began Jimmy, with a shake of the head, having made up his mind some time ago that he must learn to do without fun.

"But we shall be paid for it," cried Will, clapping her hands with the double delight of telling the best part of her story, and seeing Jimmy's sober face clear suddenly as if the sun had burst forth with great brilliancy.

"Really? How much? Can I sing well enough?" and he clutched her arm excitedly, for this unexpected ray of hope dazzled him.

"Some of them will have ten dollars a week, and some more, — the real nice ones, like Lee, the singing boy, who is a wonder," answered Will, in the tone of one well informed on such points.

"Ten dollars!" gasped Jimmy, for the immensity of the sum took his breath away. "Could *I* get that? How long? Where do we go? Do they really want us fellows? Are you sure it's all true?"

"It was all in the paper, and Miss Pym, the teacher who boards at our house, told Ma about it. The folks advertised for school-children, sixty of 'em, and will really pay; and Ma said I could go and try, and all the money I get I'm going to put in a bank and have for my own. Don't you believe me now?"

Miss Pym and the newspapers settled the matter in Jimmy's mind, and made him more anxious than before about the other point.

"Do you think *I* would have any chance?" he asked, still holding Will, who seemed inclined for another dance.

"I know you would. Don't you do splendidly at school? And didn't they want you for a choir boy, only your mother couldn't spare you?" answered Will, decidedly; for Jimmy did love music, and had a sweet little pipe of his own, as she well knew.

"Mother will have to spare me now, if they pay like that. I can work all day and do without sleep to earn money this way. Oh, Will, I'm so glad you came, for I was just ready to run away to sea. There didn't seem anything else to do," whispered Jimmy in a choky sort of tone, as hopes and fears struggled together in his boyish mind.

“Run as fast as you like, and I’ll go too. We’ll sail in the ‘Pinafore,’ and come home with our pockets full of money.

“‘Sing, hey, the merry maiden and the tar!’“

burst out Will, who was so full of spirits she could not keep still another minute.

Jimmy joined in, and the fresh voices echoed through the street so pleasantly that Mrs. Peters stopped scolding her six squabbling children, while Kitty’s moaning changed to a feeble little sound of satisfaction, for “brother’s” lullabies were her chief comfort and delight.

“We shall lose school, you know, for we act in the afternoon, not the evening. I don’t care; but you will, you like to study so well. Miss Pym didn’t like it at first, but Ma said it would help the poor folks, and a little fun wouldn’t hurt the children. I thought of you right away, and if you don’t get as much money as I do, you shall have some of mine, so Kitty can go away soon.”

Will’s merry face grew very sweet and kind as she said that, and Jimmy was glad his mother called him just then, because he did not know how to thank this friend in need. When he came out with the parcel of vests he looked like a different boy, for Mrs. Nelson had told him to go and find out all about it, and had seemed as much dazzled by the prospect as he did, sewing was such weary work.

Their interview with Miss Pym was a most encouraging one, and it was soon settled that Jimmy should go with Will to try for a place on the morrow.

“And I’ll get it, too!” he said to himself, as he kissed Kitty’s thin cheek, full of the sweet hope that he might be the means of bringing back life and color to the little face he loved so well.

He was so excited he could not sleep, and beguiled the long hours by humming under his breath all the airs he knew belonging to the already popular opera. Next morning he flew about his work as if for a wager, and when Will came for him there was not a happier heart in all the city than the hopeful one that thumped under Jimmy’s threadbare best jacket.

Such a crowd of girls and boys as they found at the hall where they were told to apply for inspection; such a chirping and piping went on there, it sounded like a big cage full of larks and linnets; and by and by, when the trial was over, such a smiling troop of children as was left to be drilled by the energetic gentlemen who had the matter in hand. Among this happy band stood our Jimmy, chosen for his good voice, and Will, because of her bright face and lively, self-possessed manners. They could hardly wait to be dismissed, and it was a race home to see who should be first to tell the good news. Jimmy tried to be quiet on Kitty's account, but failed entirely; and it was a pleasant sight to see the boy run into his mother's arms, crying joyfully, —

"I'm in! I'm in! Ten dollars a week! Hurrah!"

"I can hardly believe it!" And weary Mrs. Nelson dropped her needle to indulge in a few moments of delightful repose.

"If it goes well they may want us for a month or six weeks," the man said. "Just think, maybe I'll get fifty or sixty dollars! and Baby will get well right off," cried Jimmy, in an arithmetical sort of rapture, as he leaned above Kitty, who tried to clap her little hands without quite knowing what the joy was all about.

HOW HE SAILED.

After that day Jimmy led a very happy life, for he loved music and enjoyed the daily drill with his mates, though it was long before he saw the inside of the theatre. Will knew a good deal about it, for an actor's family had boarded with her mother, and the little girl had been behind the scenes. But to Jimmy, who had only seen one fairy play, all was very strange when at last he went upon the stage; for the glittering world he expected was gone, and all was dusty, dark, and queer, with trap-doors underfoot, machinery overhead, and a wilderness of scenery jumbled together in the drollest way. He was all eyes and ears, and enjoyed himself immensely as he came and went, sung and acted, with the troop of lads who made up the sailor chorus. It was a real ship to him, in spite of painted cannon, shaky masts, and cabin doors that led nowhere. He longed to run up the rigging; but as that was forbidden, for fear of danger, he contented himself by obeying orders with nautical obedience, singing with all his might, and taking great satisfaction in his blue suit with the magical letters "H. M. S. Pinafore" round his cap.

Day by day all grew more and more interesting. His mother was never tired of hearing his adventures, he sung Kitty to sleep with the new songs, and the neighbors took such a friendly interest in his success that they called him Lord Nelson, and predicted that he would be as famous as his great namesake.

When the grand day came at last, and the crew of jolly young tars stood ready to burst forth with the opening chorus,

"We sail the ocean blue, Our saucy ship's a beauty; We're gallant men and true, And bound to do our duty!"

Jimmy hardly knew whether he stood on his head or his heels at first, for, in spite of many rehearsals, everything seemed changed. Instead of daylight, gas shone everywhere, the empty seats were full, the orchestra playing splendidly, and when the curtain rose, a sea of friendly faces welcomed them, and the pleasant sound of applause made the hearts under the blue jackets dance gayly.

How those boys did sing! how their eyes shone, and their feet kept time to the familiar strains! with what a relish they hitched up their trousers and lurched about, or saluted and cheered as the play demanded. With what interest they watched the microscopic midshipmite, listened to Rafe as his sweet voice melodiously told the story of his hapless love, and smiled on pretty Josephine, who was a regular bluebird without the scream.

“Ain’t this fun?” whispered Jimmy’s next neighbor, taking advantage of a general burst of laughter, as the inimitable little bumboat woman advertised her wares with captivating drollery.

“Right down jolly!” answered Jimmy, feeling that a series of somersaults across the stage would be an immense relief to the pent-up emotions of his boyish soul. For under all the natural excitement of the hour deep down lay the sweet certainty that he was earning health for Kitty, and it made his heart sing for joy more blithely than any jovial chorus to which he lent his happy voice.

But his bliss was not complete till the stately Sir Joseph, K. C. B., had come aboard, followed by “his sisters and his cousins and his aunts;” for among that flock of devoted relatives in white muslin and gay ribbons was Will. Standing in the front row, her bright face was good to see, for her black eyes sparkled, every hair on her head curled its best, her cherry bows streamed in the breeze, and her feet pranced irresistibly at the lively parts of the music. She longed to dance the hornpipe which the little Quaker aunt did so capitally, but, being denied that honor, distinguished herself by the comic vigor with which she “polished up the handle of the big front door,” and did the other “business” recorded by the gallant “ruler of the Queen’s Navee.”

She and Jimmy nodded to each other behind the Admiral’s august back, and while Captain Corcoran was singing to the moon, and Buttercup suffering the pangs of “Wemorse,” the young people had a gay time behind the scenes. Jimmy and Will sat upon a green baize bank to compare notes, while the relatives flew about like butterflies, and the sailors talked base-ball, jack-knives, and other congenial topics, when not envying Sir Joseph his cocked hat, and the Captain his epaulettes.

It was a very successful launch, and the merry little crew set sail with a fair wind and every prospect of a prosperous voyage. When the first performance was over, our two children left their fine feathers behind them, like Cinderella when the magic hour struck, and went gayly home, feeling much elated, for they knew they should go back to fresh triumphs, and were earning money by their voices like Jenny Lind and Mario. How they pitied other boys and girls who could not go in at that mysterious little door; how important they felt as parts of the spectacle about which every one was talking, and what millionnaires they considered themselves as they discussed their earnings and planned what to do with the prospective fortunes.

That was the beginning of many busy, happy weeks for both the children, — weeks which they long remembered with great pleasure, as did older and wiser people; for that merry, innocent little opera proved that theatres can be made the scenes of harmless amusement, and opened to a certain class of young people a new and profitable field for their talents. So popular did this small company become that the piece went on through the summer vacation, and was played in the morning as well as afternoon to satisfy the crowds who wished to see and hear it.

Never had the dear old Boston Museum, which so many of us have loved and haunted for years, seen such a pretty sight as one of those morning performances. It was the perfection of harmless merry-making, and the audience was as pleasant a spectacle as that upon the stage. Fathers and mothers stole an hour from their busy lives to come and be children with their children, irresistibly attracted and charmed by the innocent fun, the gay music that bewitched the ear one could hardly tell why, and the artless acting of those who are always playing parts, whether the nursery or the theatre is their stage.

The windows stood open, and sunshine and fresh air came in to join the revel. Babies crowed and prattled, mammas chatted together, old people found they had not forgotten how to laugh, and boys and girls rejoiced over the discovery of a new delight for holidays. It was good to be there, and in spite of all the discussion in papers and parlors, no harm came to the young mariners, but much careful training of various sorts, and well-earned wages that went into pockets which sorely needed a silver lining.

HOW THE VOYAGE ENDED.

So the good ship “Pinafore” sailed and sailed for many prosperous weeks, and when at last she came into port and dropped anchor for the season she was received with a salute of general approbation for the successful engagement out of which she came with her flags flying and not one of her gallant crew killed or wounded. Well pleased with their share of the glory, officers and men went ashore to spend their prize money with true sailor generosity, all eager to ship again for another cruise in the autumn.

But long before that time Able Seaman James Nelson had sent his family into the country, mother begging Will to take good care of her dear boy till he could join them, and Kitty throwing kisses as she smiled good-by, with cheeks already the rosier for the comforts “brother” had earned for her. Jimmy would not desert his ship while she floated, but managed to spend his Sundays out of town, often taking Will with him as first mate; and, thanks to her lively tongue, friends were soon made for the new-comers. Mrs. Nelson found plenty of sewing, Kitty grew strong and well in the fine air, and the farmer with whom they lived, seeing what a handy lad the boy was, offered him work and wages for the autumn, so all could be independent and together. With this comfortable prospect before him, Jimmy sang away like a contented blackbird, never tiring of his duty, for he was a general favorite, and Kitty literally strewed his way with flowers gathered by her own grateful little hands.

When the last day came, he was in such spirits that he was found doing double-shuffles in corners, hugging the midshipmite, who was a little girl of about Kitty's age, and treating his messmates to peanuts with a lavish hand. Will had her hornpipe, also, when the curtain was down, kissed every one of the other "sisters, cousins, and aunts," and joined lustily in the rousing farewell cheers given by the crew.

A few hours later, a cheerful-looking boy might have been seen trudging toward one of the railway-stations. A new hat, brave in blue streamers, was on his head; a red balloon struggled to escape from one hand; a shabby carpet-bag, stuffed full, was in the other; and a pair of shiny shoes creaked briskly, as if the feet inside were going on a very pleasant errand.

About this young traveller, who walked with a sailor-like roll and lurch, revolved a little girl chattering like a magpie, and occasionally breaking into song, as if she couldn't help it.

"Be sure you come next Saturday; it won't be half such fun if you don't go halves," said the boy, beaming at her as he hauled down the impatient balloon, which seemed inclined to break from its moorings

"'Yes, I know That is so!'"

hummed the girl with a skip to starboard, that she might bear a hand with the bag. "Keep some cherries for me, and don't forget to give Kit the doll I dressed for her."

"I shouldn't have been going myself if it hadn't been for you, Will. I never shall forget that," said Jimmy, whom intense satisfaction rendered rather more sedate than his friend.

"Running away to sea is great fun,
'With a tar that ploughs the water!'"

sung Will in spite of herself.

"'And a gallant captain's daughter,'"

echoed Jimmy, smiling across the carpet-bag. Then both joined in an irrepressible chorus of "Dash it! Dash it!" as a big man nearly upset them and a dog barked madly at the balloon.

Being safely landed in the train, Jimmy hung out of the window till the last minute, discussing his new prospects with Will, who stood on tiptoe outside, bubbling over with fun.

“I’ll teach you to make butter and cheese, and you shall be my dairy-woman, for I mean to be a farmer,” he said, just as the bell rang.

“All right, I’d like that ever so much.” And then the irrepressible madcap burst out, to the great amusement of the passengers, —

“‘For you might have been a Roosian, A Frenchman, Turk or Proosian, Or an Ital-i-an.’“

And Jimmy could not resist shouting back, as the train began to move, —

“‘But in spite of all temptations To belong to other nations, I’m an Amer-i-can.’“

Then he subsided, to think over the happy holiday before him and the rich cargo of comfort, independence, and pleasure he had brought home from his successful cruise in the “Pinafore.”

II.

TWO LITTLE TRAVELLERS.

The first of these true histories is about Annie Percival, — a very dear and lovely child, whose journey interested many other children, and is still remembered with gratitude by those whom she visited on a far-off island.

Annie was six when she sailed away to Fayal with her mother, grandmamma, and "little Aunt Ruth," as she called the young aunty who was still a school-girl. Very cunning was Annie's outfit, and her little trunk was a pretty as well as a curious sight, for everything was so small and complete it looked as if a doll was setting off for Europe. Such a wee dressing-case, with bits of combs and brushes for the curly head; such a cosey scarlet wrapper for the small woman to wear in her berth, with slippers to match when she trotted from state-room to state-room; such piles of tiny garments laid nicely in, and the owner's initials on the outside of the trunk; not to mention the key on a ribbon in her pocket, as grown up as you please.

I think the sight of that earnest, sunshiny face must have been very pleasant to all on board, no matter how seasick they might be, and the sound of the cheery little voice, as sweet as the chirp of a bird, especially when she sung the funny song about the "Owl and the pussy-cat in the pea-green boat," for she had charming ways, and was always making quaint, wise, or loving remarks.

Well, "they sailed and they sailed," and came at last to Fayal, where everything was so new and strange that Annie's big brown eyes could hardly spare time to sleep, so busy were they looking about. The donkeys amused her very much, so did the queer language and ways of the Portuguese people round her, especially the very droll names given to the hens of a young friend. The biddies seemed to speak the same dialect as at home, but evidently they understood Spanish also, and knew their own names, so it was fun to go and call Rio, Pico, Cappy, Clarissa, Whorfie, and poor Simonena, whose breast-bone grew out so that she could not eat and had to be killed.

But the thing which made the deepest impression on Annie was a visit to a charity-school at the old convent of San Antonio. It was kept by some kind ladies, and twenty-five girls were taught and cared for in the big, bare place, that looked rather gloomy and forlorn to people from happy Boston, where charitable institutions are on a noble scale, as everybody knows.

Annie watched all that went on with intelligent interest, and when they were shown into the play-room she was much amazed and afflicted to find that the children had nothing to play with but a heap of rags, out of which they made queer dolls, with ravelled twine for hair, faces rudely drawn on the cloth, and funny boots on the shapeless legs. No other toys appeared, but the girls sat on the floor of the great stone room, — for there was no furniture, — playing contentedly with their poor dolls, and smiling and nodding at "the little Americana," who gravely regarded this sad spectacle, wondering how they could get on without china and waxen babies, tea-sets, and pretty chairs and tables to keep house with.

The girls thought that she envied them their dolls, and presently one came shyly up to offer two of their best, leaving the teacher to explain in English their wish to be polite to their distinguished guest. Like the little gentlewoman she was, Annie graciously accepted the ugly bits of rag with answering nods and smiles, and carried them away with her as carefully as if they were of great beauty and value.

But when she was at home she expressed much concern and distress at the destitute condition of the children. Nothing but rags to play with seemed a peculiarly touching state of poverty to her childish mind, and being a generous creature she yearned to give of her abundance to "all the poor orphans who didn't have any nice dollies." She had several pets of her own, but not enough to go round even if she sacrificed them, so kind grandmamma, who had been doing things of this sort all her life, relieved the child's perplexity by promising to send twenty-five fine dolls to Fayal as soon as the party returned to Boston, where these necessaries of child-life are cheap and plenty.

Thus comforted, Annie felt that she could enjoy her dear Horta and Chica Pico Fatiera, particular darlings rechristened since her arrival. A bundle of gay bits of silk, cloth, and flannel, and a present of money for books, were sent out to the convent by the ladies. A treat of little cheeses for the girls to eat with their dry bread was added, much to Annie's satisfaction, and helped to keep alive her interest in the school of San Antonio.

After many pleasant adventures during the six months spent in the city, our party came sailing home again all the better for the trip, and Annie so full of tales to tell that it was a never-failing source of amusement to hear her hold forth to her younger brother in her pretty way, "splaining and 'scribing all about it."

Grandmamma's promise was faithfully kept, and Annie brooded blissfully over the twenty-five dolls till they were dressed, packed, and sent away to Fayal. A letter of thanks soon came back from the teacher, telling how surprised and delighted the girls were, and how they talked of Annie as if she were a sort of fairy princess who in return for two poor rag-babies sent a miraculous shower of splendid china ladies with gay gowns and smiling faces.

This childish charity was made memorable to all who knew of it by the fact that three months after she came home from that happy voyage Annie took the one from which there is no return. For this journey there was needed no preparation but a little white gown, a coverlet of flowers, and the casket where the treasure of many hearts was tenderly laid away. All alone, but not afraid, little Annie crossed the unknown sea that rolls between our world and the Islands of the Blest, to be welcomed there, I am sure, by spirits as innocent as her own, leaving behind her a very precious memory of her budding virtues and the relics of a short, sweet life.

Every one mourned for her, and all her small treasures were so carefully kept that they still exist. Poor Horta, in the pincushion arm-chair, seems waiting patiently for the little mamma to come again; the two rag-dolls lie side by side in grandma’s scrap-book, since there is now no happy voice to wake them into life; and far away in the convent of San Antonio the orphans carefully keep their pretty gifts in memory of the sweet giver. To them she is a saint now, not a fairy princess; for when they heard of her death they asked if they might pray for the soul of the dear little Americana, and the teacher said, “Pray rather for the poor mother who has lost so much.” So the grateful orphans prayed and the mother was comforted, for now another little daughter lies in her arms and kisses away the lonely pain at her heart.

The second small traveller I want to tell about lived in the same city as the first, and her name was Maggie Woods. Her father was an Englishman who came to America to try his fortune, but did not find it; for, when Maggie was three months old, the great Chicago fire destroyed their home; soon after, the mother died; then the father was drowned, and Maggie was left all alone in a strange country.

She had a good aunt in England, however, who took great pains to discover the child after the death of the parents, and sent for her to come home and be cared for. It was no easy matter to get a five-years’ child across the Atlantic, for the aunt could not come to fetch her, and no one whom she knew was going over. But Maggie had found friends in Chicago; the American consul at Manchester was interested in the case, and every one was glad to help the forlorn baby, who was too young to understand the pathos of her story.

After letters had gone to and fro, it was decided to send the child to England in charge of the captain of a steamer, trusting to the kindness of all fellow-travellers to help her on her way.

The friends in Chicago bestirred themselves to get her ready, and then it was that Annie’s mother found that she could do something which would have delighted her darling, had she been here to know of it. Laid tenderly away were many small garments belonging to the other little pilgrim, whose journeying was so soon ended; and from among all these precious things Mrs. Percival carefully chose a comfortable outfit for that cold March voyage.

The little gray gown went, and the red hood, the warm socks, and the cosey wraps no longer needed by the quiet sleeper under the snow. Perhaps something of her loving nature lingered about the clothes, and helped to keep the orphan warm and safe, for Annie's great delight was to pet and help all who needed comfort and protection.

When all was ready, Maggie's small effects were packed in a light basket, so that she could carry it herself if need be. A card briefly telling the story was fastened on the corner, and a similar paper recommending her to the protection of all kind people, was sewed to the bosom of her frock. Then, not in the least realizing what lay before her, the child was consigned to the conductor of the train to be forwarded to persons in New York who would see her safely on board the steamer.

I should dearly like to have seen the little maid and the big basket as they set out on that long trip as tranquilly as if for a day's visit; and it is a comfort to know that before the train started, the persons who took her there had interested a motherly lady in the young traveller, who promised to watch over her while their ways were the same.

All went well, and Maggie was safely delivered to the New York friends, who forwarded her to the steamer, well supplied with toys and comforts for the voyage, and placed in charge of captain and stewardess. She sailed on the 3d of March, and on the 12th landed at Liverpool, after a pleasant trip, during which she was the pet of all on board.

The aunt welcomed her joyfully, and the same day the child reached her new home, the Commercial Inn, Compstall, after a journey of over four thousand miles. The consul and owners of the steamer wanted to see the adventurous young lady who had come so far alone, and neighbors and strangers made quite a lion of her, for all kindly hearts were interested, and the protective charity which had guided and guarded her in two hemispheres and across the wide sea, made all men fathers, all women mothers, to the little one till she was safe.

Her picture lies before me as I write, — a pretty child standing in a chair, with a basket of toys on the table before her; curly hair pushed back from the face, pensive eyes, and a pair of stout little feet crossed one over the other as if glad to rest. I wish I could put the photograph into the story, because the small heroine is an interesting one, and still lives with the good aunt, who is very fond and proud of her, and writes pleasant accounts of her progress to the friends in America.

So ends the journey of my second small traveller, and when I think of her safe and happy in a good home, I always fancy that (if such things may be) in the land which is lovelier than even beautiful old England, Maggie’s mother watches over little Annie.

III.

A JOLLY FOURTH.

Door-step parties were the fashion that year, and it was while a dozen young folks sat chatting on Annie Hadwin’s steps in the twilight that they laid the plan which turned out such a grand success in the end.

“For my part, I am glad we are to be put on a short allowance of gunpowder, and that crackers are forbidden, they are such a nuisance, burning holes in clothes, frightening horses, and setting houses afire,” said sober Fred from the gate, where he and several other fellows were roosting socially together.

“It won’t seem a bit like a regular Fourth without the salutes three times during the day. They are afraid the old cannon will kick, and blow off some other fellow’s arm, as it did last year,” added Elly Dickens, the beau of the party, as he pulled down his neat wristbands, hoping Maud admired the new cuff-buttons in them.

“What shall we do in the evening, since the ball is given up? Just because the old folks are too tired to enjoy dancing, we can’t have any, and I think it is too bad,” said pretty Belle, impatiently, for she danced like a fairy and was never tired.

“The authorities didn’t dare to stop our races in the morning. There would have been an insurrection if they had,” called out long Herbert from the grass, where he lay at the feet of black-eyed Julia.

“We *must* do something to finish off with. Come, somebody suggest a new, nice, safe, and jolly plan for the evening,” cried Grace, who liked fun, and had just slipped a little toad into Jack Spratt’s pocket as a pleasant surprise when he felt for his handkerchief.

“Let us offer a prize for the brightest idea. Five minutes for meditation, then all suggest a plan, and the best one shall be adopted,” proposed Annie, glad to give a lively turn to her party.

All agreed, and sudden silence followed the chatter, broken now and then by an exclamation of “I’ve got it! No, I haven’t,” which produced a laugh at the impetuous party.

“Time’s up,” announced Fred, looking at “the turnip,” as his big old-fashioned watch was called. Every one had a proposal more or less original, and much discussion followed; but it was finally decided that Herbert’s idea of floating about in boats to enjoy the fireworks on the hill would be romantic, reposeful, and on the whole satisfactory.

“Each boat might have a colored lantern; that would look pretty, and then there would be no danger of running into our neighbors in the dark,” said Annie, who was a little timid on the water in a wherry.

“Why not have lots, and make a regular ‘feast of lanterns,’ as they do in China? I was reading about it the other day, and can show you how to do it. Won’t it be gay?” And Fred the bookworm nearly tumbled off his perch, as an excited gesture emptied his pockets of the library books which served as ballast.

“Yes! yes!” cried the other lads, with various demonstrations of delight as the new fancy grew upon their lively minds.

“Fred and Annie must have the prize, for their idea is the most brilliant one. Nan can give the flag to the winner of the race, and ‘Deacon’ can lead the boats, for *I* think it would be fine to have a procession on the river. Fireworks are an old story, so let us surprise the town by something regularly splendid,” proposed Elly, fired in his turn with a bright idea.

“We will! we will!” cried the rest, and at once plunged into the affair with all the ardor of their years.

“Let us dress up,” said Julia, who liked theatricals.

“In different characters,” added Maud, thinking how well her long yellow hair would look as a mermaid.

“And all sing as we go under the bridges,” put in Annie, who adored music.

“What a pity the boats can’t dance, it would be so lovely to see them waltzing round like fireflies!” said Belle, still longing for the ball.

“A lot of fellows are coming up to spend the day with us, and we ought to have some sort of a picnic; city folks think so much of such things,” said Herbert the hospitable, for his house and barn were the favorite resorts of all his mates, and three gentle little sisters always came into his plans if possible.

“I’ve got two girl cousins coming, and they would like it, I guess. I should any way, for Jack will go tagging after Grace and leave me to take care of them. Let’s have a picnic, by all means,” said lazy Fred, who thought all girls but one great plagues.

“I shouldn’t wonder if all our people liked that plan, and we might have a town picnic as we did once before. Let every one ask his or her mother, and see if we can’t do it,” suggested Annie, eager for a whole day of merry-making.

The door-step party was late in breaking up that night; and if half the plans proposed had been carried out, that town would have been considered a large lunatic asylum. Wiser heads remodelled the wild plans, however, and more skilful hands lent their aid, so that only the possible was attempted, though the older folks had bright ideas as well as the boys and girls, and gave the finishing touches to the affair.

The Fourth was a fine day, with a fresh air, cloudless sky, and no dust. The town was early astir, though neither sunrise cannon nor the Antiques and Horribles disturbed the dawn with their clamor. The bells rang merrily, and at eight all flocked to the Town Hall to hear the Declaration of Independence read by the good and great man of the town, whose own wise and noble words go echoing round the world, teaching the same lesson of justice, truth, and courage as that immortal protest. An Ode by the master of the revels was sung, then every one shouted America with hearty good-will, and before the echoes had fairly died away, the crowd streamed forth to the river-side; for these energetic people were bound to make a day of it.

At nine the races began, and both green banks of the stream were lined with gay groups eagerly watching “our boys” as they swept by in wherries, paddled in canoes, or splashed and tumbled in and out of their tubs amid shouts of laughter from the spectators. The older fellows did the scientific, and their prizes were duly awarded by the judges. But our young party had their share of fun, and Fred and Herbert, who were chums in everything, won the race for the little flag yearly given to the lads for any success on the river. Then the weary heroes loaded the big dory with a cargo of girls, and with the banner blowing gayly in the wind, rowed away to the wide meadow, where seven oaks cast shade enough to shelter a large picnic. And a large one they had, for the mammas took kindly to the children’s suggestion, agreeing to club together in a social lunch, each contributing her stores, her family, and her guests, all being happy together in the free and easy way so pleasant and possible in summer weather.

A merry company they were, and it was a comfortable sight to see the tired fathers lying in the shade, while the housewives forgot their cares for a day, the young folks made table-setting and dishwashing a joke by doing it together, and the children frolicked to their hearts’ content. Even the babies were trundled to the party by proud mammas and took naps in their carriages, or held receptions for admiring friends and neighbors with infantile dignity.

A social, sensible time, and when sunset came all turned homeward to make ready for the evening festivities. It was vaguely rumored that the pretty rustic bridge was to be illuminated, for the older people had taken up the idea and had *their* surprises ready as well as the young folks. A band was stationed by the river-side, a pretty villa on the hill blazed out with lines of light, and elms and apple-trees bore red and golden lanterns, like glorified fruit. The clerk of the weather was evidently interested in this novel entertainment, for the evening was windless, dark, and cool, so the arch of light that spanned the shadowy river shone splendidly. Fireworks soared up from the hill-top beyond, fireflies lent their dancing sparks to illuminate the meadows, and the three bridges were laden with the crowds, who greeted each new surprise with cries of admiration.

Higher up the stream, where two branches met about a rocky island, elves seemed gathering for a summer revel.

From all the landings that lined either shore brilliant boats glided to the rendezvous; some hung with luminous globes of blue and silver, some with lanterns fiery-red, flower-shaped, golden, green, or variegated, as if a rainbow were festooned about the viewless masts. Up and down they flashed, stealing out from dusky nooks and floating in their own radiance, as they went to join the procession that wound about the island like a splendid sea-serpent uncoiling itself from sleep and darkness.

“Isn’t it beautiful?” cried even the soberest of the townsfolk, as all turned their backs on the shining bridge and bursting rockets to admire the new spectacle, which was finer than its most enthusiastic advocate expected. All felt proud of their success as they looked, and even the children forgot to shout while watching the pretty pageant that presently came floating by, with music, light, and half-seen figures so charming, grotesque, or romantic that the illusion was complete.

First, a boat so covered with green boughs and twinkling yellow sparks that it looked like a floating island by starlight or a cage of singing-birds, for music came from within and fresh voices, led by Annie, sang sweetly as it sailed along. Then a gondola of lovely Venetian ladies, rowed by the handsome artist, who was the pride of the town. Next a canoe holding three dusky Indians, complete in war-paint, wampum, and tomahawks, paddled before the brilliant barge in which Cleopatra sat among red cushions, fanned by two pretty maids. Julia’s black eyes sparkled as she glanced about her, feeling very queen-like with a golden crown on her head, all the jewelry she could muster on her neck and arms, and grandmother’s yellow brocade shining in the light. Belle and Grace waved their peacock fans like two comely little Egyptian damsels, and the many-colored lanterns made a pretty picture of the whole.

A boatful of jolly little tars followed, with Tom Brown, Jr., as skipper. Then a party of fairies in white, with silver wings and wands, and lanterns like moon and stars.

Lou Pope, as Lady of the Lake, rowed her own boat, with Jack for a droll little Harper, twanging his zitter for want of a better instrument.

A black craft hung with lurid red lanterns and manned by a crew of ferocious pirates in scarlet shirts, dark beards, and an imposing display of pistols and cutlasses in their belts, not to mention the well-known skull and cross-bones on the flag flying at the masthead, produced a tremendous effect as the crew clashed their arms and roared the blood-thirstiest song they could find. All the boys cheered that, and all the horses pranced as the pirates fired off their pistols, causing timid ladies to shriek, and prudent drivers to retire from the bridges with their carriage-loads of company.

A Chinese junk (or what was intended to look like one, but really resembled a mud-scow), with a party of Mandarins, rich in fans, umbrellas, and pigtails, taking tea on board in a blaze of fantastic lanterns, delighted the children.

Then a long low boat came sliding by softly, lighted with pale blue lamps, and on a white couch lay “Elaine,” the letter in her hand, the golden hair streaming to her knees, and at her feet the dwarf sorrowfully rowing her down to Camelot. Every one recognized that, for the master of the revels got it up as no one else could; and Maud laughed to herself as the floating tableau went under the bridge, and she heard people rushing to the other side, waiting eagerly to see the “lily maid” appear and glide away, followed by applause, as one of the prettiest sights seen that night.

There were eighty boats in all, and as the glittering train wound along the curves of the river smooth and dark as a mirror, the effect was truly beautiful, especially when they all congregated below the illuminated bridge, making an island of many-colored light. An enchanted island it seemed to lookers-on, for music and laughter came from it, and a strange mixture of picturesque faces and figures flitted to and fro.

Elaine sat up and ate bonbons with the faithful dwarf; Ellen Douglas ducked the Harper; the Chinamen invited Cleopatra to tea; the mermaids pelted the pirates with water-lilies; the gallant gondolier talked art with the Venetian ladies; and the jolly little tars danced hornpipes, regardless of danger; while the three Indians, Fred, Herbert, and Elly, whooped and tomahawked right and left as if on the war-path.

A regular Midsummer Night’s Dream frolic, which every one enjoyed heartily, while the band played patriotic airs, the pretty villa shone like a fairy palace, and the sky was full of dazzling meteors, falling stars, and long-tailed comets, as the rockets whizzed and blazed from the hill-tops.

Just as the fun was at its height the hurried clang of a bell startled the merry-makers, and a cry of “Fire!” came from the town, causing a general stampede. “Post-office all afire! Men wanted!” shouted a breathless boy, racing through the crowd toward the river. Then great was the scampering, for shops stood thickly all about the post-office, and distracted merchants hastily collected their goods, while the firemen smashed windows, ran up and down ladders, broke in doors, and poured streams of water with generous impartiality over everybody and everything in the neighborhood, and the boys flew about, as if this unexpected display of fireworks suited them exactly.

Such noble exertions could not fail of success, and the fire was happily extinguished before the river was pumped dry. Then every one went home, and, feeling the need of refreshment after their labors, had supper all over again, to the great delight of the young folks, who considered this a most appropriate finish to an exciting day.

But the merriest party of all was the one gathered on Fred’s piazza to eat cake and talk over the fun. Such a droll group as they were. The Indians were sadly dilapidated as to feathers and paint, beside being muddy to the knees, having landed in hot haste. Poor Cleopatra had been drenched by the hose, but though very damp still sparkled with unextinguishable gayety. Elaine had tied herself up in a big shawl, having lost her hat overboard. Jack and Grace wore one waterproof, and Annie was hoarse with leading her choir of birds on the floating island. Also several of the pirates wore their beards twisted round behind for the sake of convenience in eating.

All were wet, warm, and weary, but all rejoiced over the success of the day’s delights, and it was unanimously agreed that this had been the jolliest Fourth they had ever known.

IV.

SEVEN BLACK CATS.

They all came uninvited, they all led eventful lives, and all died tragical deaths; so out of the long list of cats whom I have loved and lost, these seven are the most interesting and memorable.

I have no prejudice against color, but it so happened that our pussies were usually gray or maltese. One white one, who *would* live in the coal-bin, was a failure, and we never repeated the experiment. Black cats had not been offered us, so we had no experience of them till number one came to us in this wise.

Sitting at my window, I saw a very handsome puss come walking down the street in the most composed and dignified manner. I watched him with interest, wondering where he was going.

Pausing now and then, he examined the houses as he passed, as if looking for a particular number, till, coming to our gate, he pushed it open, and walked in. Straight up to the door he came, and finding it shut sat down to wait till some one opened it for him.

Much amused, I went at once, and he came directly in, after a long stare at me, and a few wavings of his plumy tail. It was evidently the right place, and, following me into the parlor, he perched himself on the rug, blinked at the fire, looked round the room, washed his face, and then, lying down in a comfortable sprawl, he burst into a cheerful purr, as if to say, —

“It’s all right; the place suits me, and I’m going to stay.”

His coolness amused me very much, and his beauty made me glad to keep him. He was not a common cat, but, as we afterward discovered, a Russian puss. His fur was very long, black, and glossy as satin; his tail like a graceful plume, and his eyes as round and yellow as two little moons. His paws were very dainty, and white socks and gloves, with a neat collar and shirt-bosom, gave him the appearance of an elegant young beau, in full evening dress. His face was white, with black hair parted in the middle; and whiskers, fiercely curled up at the end, gave him a martial look.

Every one admired him, and a vainer puss never caught a mouse. If he saw us looking at him, he instantly took an attitude; gazed pensively at the fire, as if unconscious of our praises; crouched like a tiger about to spring, and glared, and beat the floor with his tail; or lay luxuriously outstretched, rolling up his yellow eyes with a sentimental expression that was very funny.

We named him the Czar, and no tyrannical emperor of Russia ever carried greater desolation and terror to the souls of his serfs, than this royal cat did to the hearts and homes of the rats and mice over whom he ruled.

The dear little mice who used to come out to play so confidingly in my room, live in my best bonnet-box, and bring up their interesting young families in the storeroom, now fell an easy prey to the Czar, who made nothing of catching half a dozen a day.

Brazen-faced old rats, gray in sin, who used to walk boldly in and out of the front door, ravage our closets, and racket about the walls by night, now paused in their revels, and felt that their day was over. Czar did not know what fear was, and flew at the biggest, fiercest rat that dared to show his long tail on the premises. He fought many a gallant fight, and slew his thousands, always bringing his dead foe to display him to us, and receive our thanks.

It was sometimes rather startling to find a large rat reposing in the middle of your parlor; not always agreeable to have an excited cat bounce into your lap, lugging a half-dead rat in his mouth; or to have visitors received by the Czar, tossing a mouse on the door-steps, like a playful child with its cup and ball.

He was not fond of petting, but allowed one or two honored beings to cuddle him. My work-basket was his favorite bed, for a certain fat cushion suited him for a pillow, and, having coolly pulled out all the pins, the rascal would lay his handsome head on the red mound, and wink at me with an irresistibly saucy expression that made it impossible to scold.

All summer we enjoyed his pranks and admired his manly virtues; but in the winter we lost him, for, alas! he found his victor in the end, and fell a victim to his own rash daring.

One morning after a heavy snow-fall, Czar went out to take a turn up and down the path. As he sat with his back to the gate, meditatively watching some doves on the shed-roof, a big bull-dog entered the yard, and basely attacked him in the rear. Taken by surprise, the dear fellow did his best, and hit out bravely, till he was dragged into the deep snow where he could not fight, and there so cruelly maltreated that he would have been murdered outright, if I had not gone to the rescue.

Catching up a broom, I belabored the dog so energetically that he was forced to turn from the poor Czar to me. What would have become of me I don’t know, for the dog was in a rage, and evidently meditating a grab at my ankles, when his master appeared and ordered him off.

Never was a boy better scolded than that one, for I poured forth vials of wrath upon his head as I took up my bleeding pet, and pointed to his wounds as indignantly as Antony did to Cæsar’s.

The boy fled affrighted, and I bore my poor Czar in to die. All day he lay on his cushion, patient and quiet, with his torn neck tied up in a soft bandage, a saucer of cream close by, and an afflicted mistress to tend and stroke him with tender lamentations.

We had company in the evening, and my interesting patient was put into another room. Once, in the midst of conversation, I thought I heard a plaintive mew, but could not go to see, and soon forgot all about it; but when the guests left, my heart was rent by finding Czar stretched out before the door quite dead.

Feeling death approach, he had crept to say good-by, and with a farewell mew had died before the closed door, a brave and faithful cat to the end.

He was buried with great pomp, and before his grave was green, little Blot came to take his place, though she never filled it. Blot's career was a sad and brief one. Misfortune marked her for its own, and life was one too many for her.

I saw some boys pelting a wretched object with mud. I delivered a lecture on cruelty to animals, confiscated the victim, and, wrapping her in a newspaper, bore the muddy little beast away in triumph. Being washed and dried, she turned out a thin black kit, with dirty blue bows tied in her ears. As I don't approve of ear-rings, I took hers out, and tried to fatten her up, for she was a forlorn creature at first.

But Blot would not grow plump. Her early wrongs preyed upon her, and she remained a thin, timid, melancholy little cat all her days. I could not win her confidence. She had lost her faith in mankind, and I don't blame her. She always hid in corners, quaked when I touched her, took her food by stealth, and sat in a forlorn bunch in cold nooks, down cellar or behind the gate, mewing despondently to herself, as if her woes must find a vent. She would *not* be easy and comfortable. No cushion could allure, no soft beguilements win her to purr, no dainty fare fill out her rusty coat, no warmth or kindness banish the scared look from her sad green eyes, no ball or spool lure her to play, or cause her to wag her mortified thin tail with joy.

Poor, dear little Blot! She was a pathetic spectacle, and her end was quite in keeping with the rest of her hard fate. Trying one day to make her come and be cuddled, she retreated to the hearth, and when I pursued her, meaning to catch and pet her, she took a distracted skip right into a bed of hot coals. One wild howl, and another still more distracted skip brought her out again, to writhe in agony with four burnt paws and a singed skin.

"We must put the little sufferer out of her pain," said a strong-minded friend; and quenched little Blot's life and suffering together in a pail of water.

I laid her out sweetly in a nice box, with a doll's blanket folded round her, and, bidding the poor dear a long farewell, confided her to old MacCarty for burial. He was my sexton, and I could trust him to inter my darlings decently, and not toss them disrespectfully into a dirt-cart or over a bridge.

My dear Mother Bunch was an entire contrast to Blot. Such a fat, cosey old mamma you never saw, and her first appearance was so funny, I never think of her without laughing.

In our back kitchen was an old sideboard, with two little doors in the lower part. Some bits of carpet were kept there, but we never expected to let that small mansion till, opening the door one day, I found Mrs. Bunch and her young family comfortably settled.

I had never seen this mild black cat before, and I fancy no one had ever seen her three roly-poly, jet-black kits. Such a confiding puss I never met, for when I started back, surprised, Mrs. Bunch merely looked at me with an insinuating purr, and began to pick at my carpet, as if to say, —

“The house suited me; I’ll take it, and pay rent by allowing you to admire and pet my lovely babies.”

I never thought of turning her out, and there she remained for some months, with her children growing up around her, all as fat and funny, black and amiable, as herself.

Three jollier kits were never born, and a more devoted mother never lived. I put her name on the door of her house, and they lived on most comfortably together, even after they grew too big for their accommodations, and tails and legs hung out after the family had retired.

I really did hope they would escape the doom that seemed to pursue my cats, but they did not, for all came to grief in different ways. Cuddle Bunch had a fit, and fell out of the window, killing herself instantly. Othello, her brother, was shot by a bad boy, who fired pistols at all the cats in the neighborhood, as good practice for future gunning expeditions.

Little Purr was caught in a trap, set for a woodchuck, and so hurt she had to be gently chloroformed out of life. Mother Bunch still remained, and often used to go and sit sadly under the tree where her infants were buried, — an afflicted, yet resigned parent.

Her health declined, but we never had the heart to send her away, and it wouldn’t have done any good if we had tried. We did it once, and it was a dead failure. At one time the four cats were so wearing that my honored father, who did not appreciate the dears, resolved to clear the house of the whole family; so he packed them in a basket, and carried them “over the hills and far away,” like the “Babes in the Wood.” Coming to a lonely spot, he let them out, and returned home, much relieved in mind. Judge of his amazement when the first thing he saw was Mrs. Bunch and her children, sitting on the steps resting after their run home.

We all laughed at the old gentleman so that he left them in peace, and even when the mamma alone remained, feeble and useless, her bereavement made her sacred.

When we shut up the house, and went to the city for the winter, we gave Mother Bunch to the care of a kind neighbor, who promised to guard her faithfully. Returning in the spring, one of my first questions was, —

“How is old Pussy?”

Great was my anguish when my neighbor told me that she was no more. It seems the dear thing pined for her old home, and kept returning to it in spite of age or bad weather.

Several times she was taken back when she ran away, but at last they were tired of fussing over her, and let her go. A storm came on, and when they went to see what had become of her, they found her frozen, in the old sideboard, where I first discovered her with her kits about her.

As a delicate attention to me, Mrs. Bunch’s skin was preserved, and presented when the tale was told. I kept it some time, but the next Christmas I made it into muffs for several dolls, who were sent me to dress; and very nice little muffs the pretty black fur made, lined with cherry silk, and finished off with tiny tassels.

I loved the dear old puss, but I knew the moths would get her skin if I kept it, and preferred to rejoice the hearts of several small friends with dolls in full winter costume. I am sure Mrs. Bunch would have agreed with me, and not felt that I treated her remains with disrespect.

The last of my cats was the blackest of all, and such a wild thing we called him the Imp. He tumbled into the garret one day through a broken scuttle, and took possession of the house from that time forth, acting as if bewitched.

He got into the furnace pipes, but could not get out, and kept me up one whole night, giving him air and light, food and comfort, through a little hole in the floor, while waiting for a carpenter to come and saw him out.

He got a sad pinch in his tail, which made it crooked forever after. He fell into the soft-soap barrel, and was fished out a deplorable spectacle. He was half strangled by a fine collar we put on him, and was found hanging by it on a peg.

People sat down on him, for he would lie in chairs. No one loved him much, for he was not amiable in temper, but bit and scratched if touched, worried the bows off our slippers in his play, and if we did not attend to him at once, he complained in the most tremendous bass growl I ever heard.

He was not beautiful, but very impressive; being big, without a white hair on him. One eye was blue and one green, and the green one was always half shut, as if he was winking at you, which gave him a rowdy air comical to see. Then he swaggered in his walk, never turned out for any one, and if offended fell into rages fit to daunt the bravest soul.

Yes, the Imp was truly an awful animal; and when a mischievous cousin of ours told us he wanted a black cat, without a single white hair on it, to win a wager with, we at once offered ours.

It seems that sailors are so superstitious they will not sail in a ship with a black cat; and this rogue of a cousin was going to send puss off on a voyage, unknown to any one but the friend who took him, and when the trip was safely over, he was to be produced as a triumphant proof of the folly of the nautical superstition.

So the Imp was delivered to his new master, and sailed away packed up in an old fishing-basket, with his head poked out of a hole in the cover.

We waited anxiously to hear how the joke ended; but unfortunately the passage was very rough, his guardian too ill to keep him safe and quiet, so the irrepressible fellow escaped from prison, and betrayed himself by growling dismally, as he went lurching across the deck to the great dismay of the sailors.

They chased, caught, and tossed the poor Imp overboard without loss of time. And when the joke came out, they had the best of it, for the weather happened to improve, and the rest of the voyage was prosperous. So, of course, they laid it all to the loss of the cat, and were more fixed in their belief than ever.

We were sorry that poor old Imp met so sad a fate, but did not mourn him long, for he had not won our hearts as some of our other pets had.

He was the last of the seven black cats, and we never had another; for I really did feel as if there was something uncanny about them after my tragical experiences with Czar, Blot, Mother Bunch’s family, and the martyred Imp.

V.

ROSA’S TALE.

“Now, I believe every one has had a Christmas present and a good time. Nobody has been forgotten, not even the cat,” said Mrs. Ward to her daughter, as she looked at Pobbylinda, purring on the rug, with a new ribbon round her neck and the remains of a chicken bone between her paws.

It was very late, for the Christmas-tree was stripped, the little folks abed, the baskets and bundles left at poor neighbors’ doors, and everything ready for the happy day which would begin as the clock struck twelve. They were resting after their labors, while the yule log burned down; but the mother’s words reminded Belinda of one good friend who had received no gift that night.

“We’ve forgotten Rosa! Her mistress is away, but she *shall* have a present nevertheless. Late as it is, she will like some apples and cake and a Merry Christmas from the family.”

Belinda jumped up as she spoke, and, having collected such remnants of the feast as a horse would relish, she put on her hood, lighted a lantern, and trotted off to the barn.

As she opened the door of the loose box in which Rosa was kept, she saw her eyes shining in the dark as she lifted her head with a startled air. Then, recognizing a friend, she rose and came rustling through the straw to greet her late visitor. She was evidently much pleased with the attention, and rubbed her nose against Miss Belinda gratefully, but seemed rather dainty, and poked over the contents of the basket, as if a little suspicious, though apples were her favorite treat.

Knowing that she would enjoy the little feast more if she had company while she ate it, for Rosa was a very social beast, Miss Belinda hung up the lantern, and, sitting down on an inverted bucket, watched her as she munched contentedly.

“Now really,” said Miss Belinda, when telling her story afterwards, “I am not sure whether I took a nap and dreamed what follows, or whether it actually happened, for strange things do occur at Christmas time, as every one knows.

“As I sat there the town clock struck twelve, and the sound reminded me of the legend which affirms that all dumb animals are endowed with speech for one hour after midnight on Christmas eve, in memory of the animals about the manger when the blessed Child was born.

“‘I wish the pretty fancy was a fact, and our Rosa could speak, if only for an hour, because I am sure she has an interesting history, and I long to know it.’

“I said this aloud, and to my utter amazement the bay mare stopped eating, fixed her intelligent eyes upon my face, and answered in a language I understood perfectly well, —

“‘You shall know it, for whether the legend is true or not I feel as if I could confide in you and tell you all I feel. I was lying awake listening to the fun in the house, thinking of my dear mistress over the sea and feeling very sad, for I heard you say I was to be sold. That nearly broke my heart, for no one has ever been so kind to me as Miss Merry, and nowhere shall I be taken care of, nursed, and loved as I have been since she bought me. I know I am getting old, and stiff in the knees, and my forefoot is lame, and sometimes I’m cross when my shoulder aches; but I do try to be a patient, grateful beast. I’ve got fat with good living, my work is not hard, I dearly love to carry those who have done so much for me, and I’ll tug for them till I die in harness, if they will only keep me.’

“I was so astonished at this address that I tumbled off the pail, and sat among the straw staring up at Rosa, as dumb as if I had lost the power she had gained. She seemed to enjoy my surprise, and added to it by letting me hear a genuine *horse laugh*, hearty, shrill, and clear, as she shook her pretty head, and went on talking rapidly in the language which I now perceived to be a mixture of English and the peculiar dialect of the horse-country Gulliver visited.

“‘Thank you for remembering me to-night, and in return for the goodies you bring I’ll tell my story as fast as I can, for I have often longed to recount the trials and triumphs of my life. Miss Merry came last Christmas eve to bring me sugar, and I wanted to speak, but it was too early and I could not say a word, though my heart was full.’

“Rosa paused an instant, and her fine eyes dimmed as if with tender tears at the recollection of the happy year which had followed the day she was bought from the drudgery of a livery-stable to be a lady’s pet. I stroked her neck as she stooped to sniff affectionately at my hood, and said eagerly, —

“‘Tell away, dear, I’m full of interest, and understand every word you say.’

“Thus encouraged, Rosa threw up her head, and began with an air of pride which plainly proved, what we had always suspected, that she belonged to a good family.

“‘My father was a famous racer, and I am very like him; the same color, spirit, and grace, and but for the cruelty of man I might have been as renowned as he. I was a very happy colt, petted by my master, tamed by love, and never struck a blow while he lived. I gained one race for him, and promised so well that when he died I brought a great price. I mourned for him, but was glad to be sent to my new owner’s racing-stable and made much of, for people predicted that I should be another Goldsmith Maid or Flora Temple. Ah, how ambitious and proud I was in those days! Vain of my good blood, my speed, and my beauty; for indeed I *was* handsome then, though you may find it hard to believe now.' And Rosa sighed regretfully as she stole a look at me, and took the attitude which showed to advantage the fine lines about her head and neck.

"'I do not find it hard, for we have always said you had splendid points about you. Miss Merry saw them, though you were a skeleton, when she bought you; so did the skilful Cornish blacksmith when he shod you. And it is easy to see that you belong to a good family by the way you hold your head without a check-rein and carry your tail like a plume,' I said, with a look of admiration which comforted her as much as if she had been a *passée* belle.

"'I must hurry over this part of my story, because, though brilliant, it was very brief, and ended in a way which made it the bitterest portion of my life,' continued Rosa. 'I won several races, and great fame was predicted for me. You may guess how high my reputation was when I tell you that before my last fatal trial thousands were bet on me, and my rival trembled in his shoes. I was full of spirit, eager to show my speed and sure of success. Alas, how little I knew of the wickedness of human nature then, how dearly I bought the knowledge, and how it has changed my whole life! You do not know much about such matters, of course, and I won't digress to tell you all the tricks of the trade; only beware of jockeys and never bet.

"'I was kept carefully out of every one's way for weeks, and only taken out for exercise by my trainer. Poor Bill! I was fond of him, and he was so good to me that I never have forgotten him, though he broke his neck years ago. A few nights before the great race, as I was getting a good sleep, carefully tucked away in my roomy stall, some one stole in and gave me a warm mash. It was dark, I was half awake, and I ate it like a fool, though I knew by instinct that it was not Bill who fed it to me. I was a confiding creature then, and as all sorts of queer things had been done to prepare me I thought it was all right. But it was not, and that deceit has caused me to be suspicious about my food ever since, for the mash was dosed in some way; it made me very ill, and my enemies nearly triumphed, thanks to this cowardly trick.

"'Bill worked over me day and night, that I might be fit to run. I did my best to seem well and gay, but there was not time for me to regain my lost strength and spirit, and pride alone kept me up. "I'll win for my master if I die in doing it," I said to myself, and when the hour came pranced to my place trying to look as well as ever, though my heart was very heavy and I trembled with excitement. "Courage, my lass, and we'll beat in spite of their black tricks," whispered Bill, as he sprung to his place.

“‘I lost the first heat, but won the second, and the sound of the cheering gave me strength to walk away without staggering, though my legs shook under me. What a splendid minute that was when, encouraged and refreshed by my faithful Bill, I came on the track again! I knew my enemies began to fear, for I had borne myself so bravely they fancied I was quite well, and now, excited by that first success, I was mad with impatience to be off and cover myself with glory.’

“Rosa looked as if the ‘splendid minute’ had come again, for she arched her neck, opened wide her red nostrils, and pawed the straw with one little foot, while her eyes shone with sudden fire, and her ears were pricked up as if to catch again the shouts she heard that day.

“‘I wish I had been there to see you!’ I exclaimed, quite carried away by her ardor.

“‘I wish you had, for I won, I won! The big black horse did his best, but I had vowed to win or die, and I kept my word, for I beat him by a head, and then dropped as if dead. I might as well have died then, people thought, for the poison, the exertion, and the fall ruined me for a racer. My master cared no more for me, and would have had me shot if Bill had not saved my life. I was pronounced good for nothing, and he bought me cheap. I was lame and useless for a long time, but his patient care did wonders, and just as I was able to be of use to him he was killed.

“‘A gentleman in want of a saddle-horse purchased me because my easy gait and quiet temper suited him; for I was meek enough now, and my size fitted me to carry his delicate daughter.

“‘For more than a year I served little Miss Alice, rejoicing to see how rosy her pale cheeks became, how upright her feeble figure grew, thanks to the hours spent with me; for my canter rocked her as gently as if she were in a cradle, and fresh air was the medicine she needed. She often said she owed her life to me, and I liked to think so, for she made *my* life a very easy one.

“‘But somehow my good times never lasted long, and when Miss Alice went West I was sold. I had been so well treated that I *looked* as handsome and gay as ever, though my shoulder never was strong again, and I often had despondent moods, longing for the excitement of the race-course with the instinct of my kind; so I was glad when, attracted by my spirit and beauty, a young army officer bought me and I went to the war. Ah! you never guessed that, did you? Yes, I did my part gallantly and saved my master’s life more than once. You have observed how martial music delights me, but you don’t know that it is because it reminds me of the proudest hour of my life. I’ve told you about the saddest; let me relate this also, and give me a pat for the brave action which won my master his promotion, though I got no praise for my part of the achievement.

"'In one of the hottest battles my captain was ordered to lead his men to a most perilous exploit. They hesitated, so did he; for it must cost many lives, and, brave as they were, they paused an instant. But *I* settled the point, for I was wild with the sound of drums, the smell of powder, the excitement of the hour, and, finding myself sharply reined in, I rebelled, took the bit between my teeth, and dashed straight away into the midst of the fight, spite of all my rider could do. The men thought their captain led them on, and with a cheer they followed, carrying all before them.

"'What happened just after that I never could remember, except that I got a wound here in my neck and a cut on my flank; the scar is there still, and I'm proud of it, though buyers always consider it a blemish. But when the battle was won my master was promoted on the field, and I carried him up to the general as he sat among his officers under the torn flags.

"'Both of us were weary and wounded, both were full of pride at what we had done; but *he* got all the praise and the honor, *I* only a careless word and a better supper than usual.

"'I thought no one knew what I had done, and resented the ingratitude of your race; for it was the horse, not the man, who led that forlorn hope, and I did think I should have a rosette at least, when others got stars and bars for far less dangerous deeds. Never mind, my master knew the truth, and thanked me for my help by keeping me always with him till the sad day when he was shot in a skirmish, and lay for hours with none to watch and mourn over him but his faithful horse.

"'Then I knew how much he loved and thanked me, for his hand stroked me while it had the strength, his eye turned to me till it grew too dim for seeing, and when help came, among the last words he whispered to a comrade were these, "Be kind to Rosa and send her safely home; she has earned her rest."

"'I *had* earned it, but I did not get it, for when I was sent home the old mother's heart was broken at the loss of her son, and she did not live long to cherish me. Then my hard times began, for my next owner was a fast young man, who ill used me in many ways, till the spirit of my father rose within me, and I gave my brutal master a grand runaway and smash-up.

"'To tame me down, I was sold for a car horse; and that almost killed me, for it was dreadful drudgery to tug, day after day, over the hard pavement with heavy loads behind me, uncongenial companions beside me, and no affection to cheer my life.

"'I have often longed to ask why Mr. Bergh does not try to prevent such crowds from piling into those cars; and now I beg you to do what you can to stop such an unmerciful abuse.

"'In snow-storms it was awful, and more than one of my mates dropped dead with overwork and discouragement. I used to wish I could do the same, for my poor feet, badly shod, became so lame I could hardly walk at times, and the constant strain on the up grades brought back the old trouble in my shoulder worse than ever.

"'Why they did not kill me I don't know, for I was a miserable creature then; but there must be something attractive about me, I fancy, for people always seem to think me worth saving. What can it be, ma'am?'

"'Now, Rosa, don't be affected; you know you are a very engaging little animal, and if you live to be forty will still have certain pretty ways about you, that win the hearts of women, if not of men. *They* see your weak points, and take a money view of the case; but *we* sympathize with your afflictions, are amused with your coquettish airs, and like your affectionate nature. Now hurry up and finish, for I find it a trifle cold out here.'

"I laughed as I spoke, for Rosa eyed me with a sidelong glance and gently waved the docked tail, which was her delight; for the sly thing liked to be flattered and was as fond of compliments as a girl.

"'Many thanks. I will come now to the most interesting portion of my narrative. As I was saying, instead of knocking me on the head I was packed off to New Hampshire, and had a fine rest among the green hills, with a dozen or so of weary friends. It was during this holiday that I acquired the love of nature which Miss Merry detected and liked in me, when she found me ready to study sunsets with her, to admire new landscapes, and enjoy bright summer weather.

"'In the autumn a livery-stable keeper bought me, and through the winter fed me up till I was quite presentable in the spring. It was a small town, but through the summer many city people visited there, so I was kept on the trot while the season lasted, because ladies could drive me. You, Miss Belinda, were one of the ladies, and I never shall forget, though I have long ago forgiven it, how you laughed at my queer gait the day you hired me.

"'My tender feet and stiff knees made me tread very gingerly, and amble along with short mincing steps, which contrasted oddly, I know, with my proudly waving tail and high-carried head. You liked me nevertheless, because I didn't rattle you down the steep hills, was not afraid of locomotives, and stood patiently while you gathered flowers and enjoyed the lovely prospects.

"'I have always felt a regard for you since you did not whip me, and admired my eyes, which, I may say without vanity, have always been considered unusually fine. But no one ever won my whole heart like Miss Merry, and I never shall forget the happy day when she came to the stable to order a saddle-horse. Her cheery voice made me prick up my ears, and when she said, after looking at several showy beasts, "No, they don't suit me. This one now has the right air; can I ride her?" my heart danced within me and I looked round with a whinny of delight. She understood my welcome, and came right up to me, patted me, peered into my face, rubbed my nose, and looked at my feet with an air of interest and sympathy, that made me feel as if I'd like to carry her round the world.

"'Ah, what rides we had after that! What happy hours trotting gayly through the green woods, galloping over the breezy hills, or pacing slowly along quiet lanes, where I often lunched luxuriously on clover-tops, while Miss Merry took a sketch of some picturesque bit with me in the foreground.

"'I liked that, and we had long chats at such times, for she seemed to understand me perfectly. She was never frightened when I danced for pleasure on the soft turf, never chid me when I snatched a bite from the young trees as we passed through sylvan ways, never thought it a trouble to let me wet my tired feet in babbling brooks, or to dismount and take out the stones that plagued me.

"'Then how well she rode! So firm yet light a seat, so steady a hand, so agile a foot to spring on and off, and such infectious spirits, that no matter how despondent or cross I might be, in five minutes I felt gay and young again when dear Miss Merry was on my back.'

"Here Rosa gave a frisk that sent the straw flying, and made me shrink into a corner, while she pranced about the box with a neigh which waked the big brown colt next door, and set poor Buttercup to lowing for her calf, the loss of which she had forgotten for a little while in sleep.

"'Ah, Miss Merry never ran away from me! She knew my heels were to be trusted, and she let me caper as I would, glad to see me lively. Never mind, Miss Belinda, come out and I'll be sober, as befits my years,' laughed Rosa, composing herself, and adding, so like a woman that I could not help smiling in the dark, —

"'When I say "years" I beg you to understand that I am *not* as old as that base man declared, but just in the prime of life for a horse. Hard usage has made me seem old before my time, and I am good for years of service yet.'

"'Few people have been through as much as you have, Rosa, and you certainly *have* earned the right to rest,' I said consolingly, for her little whims and vanities amused me much.

"'You know what happened next,' she continued; 'but I must seize this opportunity to express my thanks for all the kindness I've received since Miss Merry bought me, in spite of the ridicule and dissuasion of all her friends.

"'I know I didn't look like a good bargain, for I *was* very thin and lame and shabby; but she saw and loved the willing spirit in me, pitied my hard lot, and felt that it would be a good deed to buy me even if she never got much work out of me.

"'I shall always remember that, and whatever happens to me hereafter, I never shall be as proud again as I was the day she put my new saddle and bridle on, and I was led out, sleek, plump, and handsome, with blue rosettes at my ears, my tail cut in the English style, and on my back Miss Merry in her London hat and habit, all ready to head a cavalcade of eighteen horsemen and horsewomen. *We* were the most perfect pair of all, and when the troop caracoled down the wide street six abreast, *my* head was the highest, *my* rider the straightest, and *our* two hearts the friendliest in all the goodly company.

"'Nor is it pride and love alone that binds me to her, it is gratitude as well, for did not she often bathe my feet herself, rub me down, water me, blanket me, and daily come to see me when I was here alone for weeks in the winter time? Didn't she study horses' feet and shoes, that I might be cured if possible? Didn't she write to the famous friend of my race for advice, and drive me seven miles to get a good smith to shoe me well? Have not my poor contracted feet grown much better, thanks to the weeks of rest without shoes which she gave me? Am I not fat and handsome, and, barring the stiff knees, a very presentable horse? If I am, it is all owing to her; and for that reason I want to live and die in her service.

"'*She* doesn't want to sell me, and only bade you do it because you didn't want the care of me while she is gone. Dear Miss Belinda, please keep me! I'll eat as little as I can. I won't ask for a new blanket, though your old army one is very thin and shabby. I'll trot for you all winter, and try not to show it if I am lame. I'll do anything a horse can, no matter how humble, to earn my living, only don't, pray don't send me away among strangers who have neither interest nor pity for me!'

"Rosa had spoken rapidly, feeling that her plea must be made now or never, for before another Christmas she might be far away and speech of no use to win her wish. I was much touched, though she was only a horse; for she was looking earnestly at me as she spoke, and made the last words very eloquent by preparing to bend her stiff knees and lie down at my feet. I stopped her, and answered, with an arm about her neck and her soft nose in my hand, —

"'You shall *not* be sold, Rosa! you shall go and board at Mr. Town's great stable, where you will have pleasant society among the eighty horses who usually pass the winter there. Your shoes shall be taken off, and you shall rest till March at least. The best care will be taken of you, dear, and I will come and see you; and in the spring you shall return to us, even if Miss Merry is not here to welcome you.'

"'Thanks, many, many thanks! But I wish I could do something to earn my board. I hate to be idle, though rest *is* delicious. Is there nothing I can do to repay you, Miss Belinda? Please answer quickly, for I know the hour is almost over,' cried Rosa, stamping with anxiety; for, like all her sex, she wanted the last word.

"'Yes, you can,' I cried, as a sudden idea popped into my head. 'I'll write down what you have told me, and send the little story to a certain paper I know of, and the money I get for it will pay your board. So rest in peace, my dear; you *will* have earned your living, and may feel that your debt is paid.'

"Before she could reply the clock struck one, and a long sigh of satisfaction was all the response in her power. But we understood each other now, and, cutting a lock from her mane for Miss Merry, I gave Rosa a farewell caress and went away, wondering if I had made it all up, or if she had really broken a year's silence and freed her mind.

"However that may be, here is the tale, and the sequel to it is, that the bay mare has really gone to board at a first-class stable," concluded Miss Belinda. "I call occasionally and leave my card in the shape of an apple, finding Madam Rosa living like an independent lady, with her large box and private yard on the sunny side of the barn, a kind ostler to wait upon her, and much genteel society from the city when she is inclined for company.

"What more could any reasonable horse desire?"

VI.

LUNCH.

“Sister Jerusha, it really does wear upon me to see those dear boys eat such bad pies and stuff day after day when they ought to have good wholesome things for lunch. I actually ache to go and give each one of ‘em a nice piece of bread-and-butter or one of our big cookies,” said kind Miss Mehitable Plummer, taking up her knitting after a long look at the swarm of boys pouring out of the grammar school opposite, to lark about the yard, sit on the posts, or dive into a dingy little shop close by, where piles of greasy tarts and cakes lay in the window. They would not have allured any but hungry school-boys, and ought to have been labelled Dyspepsia and Headache, so unwholesome were they.

Miss Jerusha looked up from her seventeenth patchwork quilt, and answered, with a sympathetic glance over the way, —

“If we had enough to go round I’d do it myself, and save these poor deluded dears from the bilious turns that will surely take them down before vacation comes. That fat boy is as yellow as a lemon now, and no wonder, for I’ve seen him eat half a dozen dreadful turnovers for one lunch.”

Both old ladies shook their heads and sighed, for they led a very quiet life in the narrow house that stood end to the street, squeezed in between two stores, looking as out of place as the good spinsters would have done among the merry lads opposite. Sitting at the front windows day after day, the old ladies had learned to enjoy watching the boys, who came and went, like bees to a hive, month by month. They had their favorites, and beguiled many a long hour speculating on the looks, manners, and probable station of the lads. One lame boy was Miss Jerusha’s pet, though she never spoke to him, and a tall bright-faced fellow, who rather lorded it over the rest, quite won Miss Hetty’s old heart by helping her across the street on a slippery day. They longed to mend some of the shabby clothes, to cheer up the dull discouraged ones, advise the sickly, reprove the rude, and, most of all, feed those who persisted in buying lunch at the dirty bake-shop over the way.

The good souls were famous cooks, and had many books full of all manner of nice receipts, which they seldom used, as they lived simply and saw little company. A certain kind of molasses cookie made by their honored mother, — a renowned housewife in her time, — and eaten by the sisters as children, had a peculiar charm for them. A tin box was always kept full, though they only now and then nibbled one, and preferred to give them away to poor children, as they trotted to market each day. Many a time had Miss Hetty felt sorely tempted to treat the boys, but was a little timid, for they were rough fellows, and she regarded them much as a benevolent tabby would a party of frisky puppies.

To-day the box was full of fresh cookies, crisp, brown, and sweet; their spicy odor pervaded the room, and the china-closet door stood suggestively open. Miss Hetty’s spectacles turned that way, then went back to the busy scene in the street, as if trying to get courage for the deed. Something happened just then which decided her, and sealed the doom of the bilious tarts and their maker.

Several of the younger lads were playing marbles on the sidewalk, for Hop Scotch, Leap Frog, and friendly scuffles were going on in the yard, and no quiet spot could be found. The fat boy sat on a post near by, and, having eaten his last turnover, fell to teasing the small fellows peacefully playing at his feet. One was the shabby lame boy, who hopped to and fro with his crutch, munching a dry cracker, with now and then a trip to the pump to wash it down. He seldom brought any lunch, and seemed to enjoy this poor treat so much that the big bright-faced chap tossed him a red apple as he came out of the yard to get his hat, thrown there by the mate he had been playfully thrashing.

The lame child eyed the pretty apple lovingly, and was preparing to take the first delicious bite, when the fat youth with a dexterous kick sent it flying into the middle of the street, where a passing wheel crushed it down into the mud.

“It’s a shame! He *shall* have something good! The scamp!” And with this somewhat confused exclamation Miss Hetty threw down her work, ran to the closet, then darted to the front door, embracing the tin box, as if the house was on fire and that contained her dearest treasures.

“Sakes alive, what *is* the matter with sister?” ejaculated Miss Jerusha, going to the window just in time to see the fat boy tumble off the post as the tall lad came to the rescue, while the cripple went hopping across the street in answer to a kindly quavering voice that called out to him, —

“Come here, boy, and get a cookie, — a dozen if you want ‘em.”

“Sister’s done it at last!” And, inspired by this heroic example, Miss Jerusha threw up the window, saying, as she beckoned to the avenger, —

“You too, because you stood by that poor little boy. Come right over and help yourself.”

Charley Howe laughed at the indignant old ladies, but, being a gentleman, took off his hat and ran across to thank them for their interest in the fray. Several other lads followed as irresistibly as flies to a honey-pot, for the tin box was suggestive of cake, and they waited for no invitation.

Miss Hetty was truly a noble yet a droll sight, as she stood there, a trim little old lady, with her cap-strings flying in the wind, her rosy old face shining with good-will, as she dealt out cookies with a lavish hand, and a kind word to all.

"Here's a nice big one for you, my dear. I don't know your name, but I do your face, and I like to see a big boy stand up for the little ones," she said, beaming at Charley as he came up.

"Thank you, ma'am. That's a splendid one. We don't get anything so nice over there." And Charley gratefully bolted the cake in three mouthfuls, having given away his own lunch.

"No, indeed! One of these is worth a dozen of those nasty pies. I hate to see you eating them, and I don't believe your mothers know how bad they are," said Miss Hetty, diving for another handful into the depths of the box, which was half empty already.

"Wish you'd teach old Peck how you make 'em. We'd be glad enough to buy these and let the cockroach pies alone," said Charley, accepting another and enjoying the fun, for half the fellows were watching the scene from over the way.

"Cockroach pies! You don't mean to say?" cried Miss Hetty, nearly dropping her load in her horror at the idea, for she had heard of fricasseed frogs and roasted locusts, and thought a new delicacy had been found.

"We find 'em in the apple-sauce sometimes, and nails and bits of barrel in the cake, so some of us don't patronize Peck," replied Charley; and little Briggs the cripple added eagerly, —

"I never do; my mother won't let me."

"He never has any money, that's why," bawled Dickson, the fat boy, dodging behind the fence as he spoke.

"Never you mind, sonny, you come here every day, and *I'll* see that you have a good lunch. Apples too, *red ones*, if you like them, with your cake," answered Miss Hetty, patting his head and sending an indignant glance across the street.

"Cry-baby! Molly-coddle! Grandma's darling!" jeered Dickson, and then fled, for Charley fired a ball at him with such good aim it narrowly escaped his nose.

"That boy will have the jaundice as sure as fate, and he deserves it," said Miss Hetty, sternly, as she dropped the lid on the now empty box; for while she was talking the free-and-easy young gentlemen had been helping themselves.

"Thank you very much, ma'am, for my cookie. I won't forget to call to-morrow." And little Briggs shook hands with as innocent a face as if his jacket pocket was not bulging in a most suspicious manner.

"You'll get your death a cold, Hetty," called Miss Jerusha, and, taking the hint, Charley promptly ended the visit.

"Sheer off, fellows. We are no end obliged, ma'am, and I'll see that Briggs isn't put upon by sneaks."

Then the boys ran off, and the old lady retired to her parlor to sink into her easy-chair, as much excited by this little feat as if she had led a forlorn hope to storm a battery.

“I’ll fill both those big tins to-morrow, and treat every one of the small boys, if I’m spared,” she panted, with a decided nod, as she settled her cap and composed her neat black skirts, with which the wind had taken liberties, as she stood on the steps.

“I’m not sure it isn’t our duty to make and sell good, wholesome lunches to those boys. We can afford to do it cheap, and it wouldn’t be much trouble. Just put the long table across the front entry for half an hour every day, and let them come and get a bun, a cookie, or a buttered biscuit. It could be done, sister,” said Miss Jerusha, longing to distinguish herself in some way also.

“It *shall* be done, sister!” And Miss Hetty made up her mind at that moment to devote some of her time and skill to rescuing those blessed boys from the unprincipled Peck and his cockroach pies.

It was pleasant, as well as droll, to see how heartily the good souls threw themselves into the new enterprise, how bravely they kept each other up when courage showed signs of failing, and how rapidly they became convinced that it was a duty to provide better food for the future defenders and rulers of their native land.

“You can’t expect the dears to study with clear heads if they are not fed properly, and half the women in the world never think that what goes into children’s stomachs affects their brains,” declared Miss Hetty, as she rolled out vast sheets of dough next day, emphasizing her remarks with vigorous flourishes of the rolling-pin.

“Our blessed mother understood how to feed a family. Fourteen stout boys and girls, all alive and well, and you and I as smart at seventy one and two, as most folks at forty. Good, plain victuals and plenty of ‘em is the secret of firm health,” responded Miss Jerusha, rattling a pan of buns briskly into the oven.

“We’d better make some Brighton Rock. It is gone out of fashion, but our brothers used to be dreadful fond of it, and boys are about alike all the world over. Ma’s *resate* never fails, and it will be a new treat for the little dears.”

“S’pose we have an extra can of milk left and give ‘em a good mugful? Some of those poor things look as if they never got a drop. Peck sells beer, and milk is a deal better. Shall we, sister?”

“We’ll try it, Jerushy. In for a penny, in for a pound.”

And upon that principle the old ladies did the thing handsomely, deferring the great event till Monday, that all might be in apple-pie order. They said nothing of it when the lads came on Friday morning, and all Saturday, which was a holiday at school, was a very busy one with them.

"Hullo! Miss Hetty *has* done it now, hasn't she? Look at that, old Peck, and tremble!" exclaimed Charley to his mates, as he came down the street on Monday morning, and espied a neat little sign on the sisters' door, setting forth the agreeable fact that certain delectable articles of food and drink could be had within at reasonable prices during recess.

No caps were at the windows, but behind the drawn curtains two beaming old faces were peeping out to see how the boys took the great announcement. Whoever remembers Hawthorne's half-comic, half-pathetic description of poor Hepsibah Pyncheon's hopes and fears, when arranging her gingerbread wares in the little shop, can understand something of the excitement of the sisters that day, as the time drew near when the first attempt was to be made.

"Who will set the door open?" said Miss Hetty when the fateful moment came, and boys began to pour out into the yard.

"I will!" And, nerving herself to the task, Miss Jerusha marched boldly round the table, set wide the door, and then, as the first joyful whoop from the boys told that the feast was in view, she whisked back into the parlor panic-stricken.

"There they come, — hundreds of them, I should think by the sound!" she whispered, as the tramp of feet came nearer, and the clamor of voices exclaiming, —

"What bully buns!" "Ain't those cookies rousers?" "New stuff too, looks first-rate." "I told you it wasn't a joke." "Wonder how Peck likes it?" "Dickson sha'n't come in." "You go first, Charley." "Here's a cent for you, Briggs; come on and trade like the rest of us."

"I'm so flurried I couldn't make change to save my life," gasped Miss Jerusha from behind the sofa, whither she had fled.

"It is *my* turn now. Be calm, and we shall soon get used to it."

Bracing herself to meet the merry chaff of the boys, as new and trying to the old lady as real danger would have been, Miss Hetty stepped forth into the hall to be greeted by a cheer, and then a chorus of demands for everything so temptingly set forth upon her table. Intrenched behind a barricade of buns, she dealt out her wares with rapidly increasing speed and skill, for as fast as one relay of lads were satisfied another came up, till the table was bare, the milk-can ran dry, and nothing was left to tell the tale but an empty water-pail and a pile of five-cent pieces.

"I hope I didn't cheat any one, but I was flurried, sister, they were so very noisy and so hungry. Bless their dear hearts; they are full now, I trust." And Miss Hetty looked over her glasses at the crumby countenances opposite, meeting many nods and smiles in return, as her late customers enthusiastically recommended her establishment to the patronage of those who had preferred Peck’s questionable dainties.

“The Brighton Rock was a success; we must have a good store for to-morrow, and more milk. Briggs drank it like a baby, and your nice boy proposed my health like a little gentleman, as he is,” replied Miss Jerusha, who had ventured out before it was too late, and done the honors of the can with great dignity, in spite of some inward trepidation at the astonishing feats performed with the mug.

“Peck’s nose is out of joint, if I may use so vulgar an expression, and *our* lunch a triumphant success. Boys know what is good, and we need not fear to lose their custom as long as we can supply them. I shall order a barrel of flour at once, and heat up the big oven. We have put our hand to the work and must not turn back, for our honor is pledged now.”

With which lofty remark Miss Hetty closed the door, trying to look utterly unconscious of the anxious Peck, who was flattening his nose against his dingy window-pane to survey his rivals over piles of unsold pastry.

The little venture *was* a success, and all that winter the old ladies did their part faithfully, finding the task more to their taste than everlasting patchwork and knitting, and receiving a fair profit on their outlay, being shrewd managers, and rich in old-fashioned thrift, energy, and industry.

The boys revelled in wholesome fare, and soon learned to love “the Aunties,” as they were called, while such of the parents as took an interest in the matter showed their approval in many ways most gratifying to the old ladies.

The final triumph, however, was the closing of Peck’s shop for want of custom, for few besides the boys patronized him. None mourned for him, and Dickson proved the truth of Miss Hetty’s prophecy by actually having a bilious fever in the spring.

But a new surprise awaited the boys; for when they came flocking back after the summer vacation, there stood the little shop, brave in new paint and fittings, full of all the old goodies, and over the door a smart sign, “Plummer & Co.”

“By Jove, the Aunties are bound to cover themselves with glory. Let’s go in and hear all about it. Behave now, you fellows, or I’ll see about it afterward,” commanded Charley, as he paused to peer in through the clean windows at the tempting display.

In they trooped, and, tapping on the counter, stood ready to greet the old ladies as usual, but to their great surprise a pretty young woman appeared, and smilingly asked what they would have.

“We want the Aunties, if you please. Isn’t this their shop?” said little Briggs, bitterly disappointed at not finding his good friends.

“You will find them over there at home as usual. Yes, this is their shop, and I’m their niece. My husband is the Co., and we run the shop for the aunts. I hope you’ll patronize us, gentlemen.”

“We will! we will! Three cheers for Plummer & Co.!” cried Charley, leading off three rousers, that made the little shop ring again, and brought two caps to the opposite windows, as two cheery old faces smiled and nodded, full of satisfaction at the revolution so successfully planned and carried out.

VII.

A BRIGHT IDEA.

"No answer to my advertisement, mamma, and I must sit with idle hands for another day," said Clara with a despondent sigh, as the postman passed the door.

"You needn't do that, child, when I'm suffering for a new cap, and no one can suit me so well as you, if you have the spirits to do it," answered her mother from the sofa, where she spent most of her time bewailing her hard lot.

"Plenty of spirits, mamma, and what is still more necessary, plenty of materials; so I'll toss you up 'a love of a cap' before you know it."

And putting her own disappointment out of sight, pretty Clara fell to work with such good-will that even poor, fretful Mrs. Barlow cheered up in spite of herself.

"What a mercy it is that when everything else is swept away in this dreadful failure I still have you, dear, and no dishonest banker can rob me of my best treasure," she said fondly, as she watched her daughter with tearful eyes.

"No one shall part us, mamma; and if I can only get something to do we can be independent and happy in spite of our losses; for now the first shock and worry is over, I find a curious sort of excitement in being poor and having to work for my living. I was so tired of pleasure and idleness I really quite long to work at something, if I could only find it."

But though Clara spoke cheerfully, she had a heavy heart; for during the month which had followed the discovery that they were nearly penniless, she had been through a great deal for a tenderly nurtured girl of three-and-twenty. Leaving a luxurious home for two plainly furnished rooms, and trying to sustain her mother with hopeful plans, had kept her busy for a time; but now she had nothing to do but wait for replies to her modest advertisements as governess, copyist, or reader.

"I do wish I'd been taught a trade, mamma, or some useful art by which I could earn our bread now. Rich people ought to remember that money takes to itself wings, and so prepare their children to face poverty bravely. If half the sums spent on my music and dress had been used in giving me a single handicraft, what a blessing it would be to us now!" she said, thoughtfully, as she sewed with rapid fingers, unconsciously displaying the delicate skill of one to whom dress was an art and a pleasure.

"If you were not so proud we might accept Cousin John's offer and be quite comfortable," returned her mother, in a reproachful tone.

“No; we should soon feel that we were a burden, and that would be worse than living on bread and water. Let us try to help ourselves first, and then, if we fail, we cannot be accused of indolence. I know papa would wish it, so please let me try.”

“As you like; *I* shall not be a burden to any one long.” And Mrs. Barlow looked about for her handkerchief.

But Clara prevented the impending shower by skilfully turning the poor lady’s thoughts to the new cap which was ready to try on.

“Isn’t it pretty? Just the soft effect that is so becoming to your dear, pale face. Take a good look at it, and tell me whether you’ll have pale pink bows or lavender.”

“It is very nice, child; you always suit me, you’ve such charming taste. I’ll have lavender, for though it’s not so becoming as pink, it is more appropriate to our fallen fortunes,” answered her mother, smiling in spite of herself, as she studied effects in the mirror.

“No, let us have it pink, for I want my pretty mother to look her best, though no one sees her but me, and I’m so glad to know that I *can* make caps well if I can’t do anything else,” said Clara, rummaging in a box for the desired shade.

“No one ever suited me so well, and if you were not a lady, you might make a fortune as a milliner, for you have the taste of a Frenchwoman,” said Mrs. Barlow, adding, as she took her cap off, “Don’t you remember how offended Madame Pigat was when she found out that you altered all her caps before I wore them, and how she took some of your hints and got all the credit of them?”

“Yes, mamma,” was all Clara answered, and then sat working so silently that it was evident her thoughts were as busy as her hands. Presently she said, “I must go down to our big box for the ribbon, there is none here that I like,” and, taking a bunch of keys, she went slowly away.

In the large parlor below stood several trunks and cases belonging to Mrs. Barlow, and left there for her convenience, as the room was unlet.

Clara opened several of these, and rapidly turned over their contents, as if looking for something beside pale pink ribbon. Whatever it was she appeared to find it, for, dropping the last lid with a decided bang, she stood a moment looking about the large drawing-room with such brightening eyes it was evident that they saw some invisible beauty there; then a smile broke over her face, and she ran up stairs to waken her mother from a brief doze, by crying joyfully, as she waved a curl of gay ribbon over her head, —

“I’ve got it, mamma, I’ve got it!”

“Bless the child! what have you got, — a letter?” cried Mrs. Barlow, starting up.

“No; but something better still, — a new way to get a living. I’ll be a milliner, and you shall have as many caps as you like. Now don’t laugh, but listen; for it is a splendid idea, and you shall have all the credit of it, because you suggested it.”

“I’ve materials enough,” she continued, “to begin with; for when all else went, they left us our finery, you know, and now we can live on it instead of wearing it. Yes, I’ll make caps and sell them, and that will be both easier and pleasanter than to go out teaching and leave you here alone.”

“But how *can* you sell them?” asked her mother, half bewildered by the eagerness with which the new plan was unfolded.

“That’s the best of all, and I only thought of it when I was among the boxes. Why not take the room below and lay out all our fine things temptingly, instead of selling them one by one as if we were ashamed of it?

“As I stood there just now, I saw it all. Mrs. Smith would be glad to let the room, and I could take it for a month, just to try how my plan works; and if it *does* go well, why can I not make a living as well as Madame?”

“But, child, what will people say?”

“That I’m an honest girl, and lend me a hand, if they are friends worth having.”

Mrs. Barlow was not convinced, and declared she would hide herself if any one came; but after much discussion consented to let the trial be made, though predicting utter failure, as she retired to her sofa to bewail the sad necessity for such a step.

Clara worked busily for several days to carry into execution her plan; then she sent some notes to a dozen friends, modestly informing them that her “opening” would take place on a certain day.

“Curiosity will bring them, if nothing else,” she said, trying to seem quite cool and gay, though her heart fluttered with anxiety as she arranged her little stock in the front parlor.

In the bay-window was her flower-stand, where the white azaleas, red geraniums, and gay nasturtiums seemed to have bloomed their loveliest to help the gentle mistress who had tended them so faithfully, even when misfortune’s frost had nipped her own bright roses. Overhead swung a pair of canaries in their garlanded cage, singing with all their might, as if, like the London ‘prentice-boys in old times, they cried, “What do you lack? Come buy, come buy!”

On a long table in the middle of the room, a dozen delicate caps and head-dresses were set forth. On another lay garlands of French flowers bought for pretty Clara’s own adornment. Several dainty ball-dresses, imported for the gay winter she had expected to pass, hung over chairs and couch, also a velvet mantle Mrs. Barlow wished to sell, while some old lace, well-chosen ribbons, and various elegant trifles gave color and grace to the room.

Clara's first customer was Mrs. Tower, — a stout florid lady, full of the good-will and the real kindliness which is so sweet in times of trouble.

"My dear girl, how are you, and how is mamma? Now this is charming. Such a capital idea, and just what is needed; a quiet place, where one can come and be made pretty without all the world's knowing how we do it." And greeting Clara even more cordially than of old, the good lady trotted about, admiring everything, just as she used to do when she visited the girl in her former home to see and exclaim over any fresh arrival of Paris finery.

"I'll take this mantle off your hands with pleasure, for I intended to import one, and this saves me so much trouble. Put it up for me, dear, at the price mamma paid for it, not a cent less, because it has never been worn, and I've no duties to pay on it, so it is a good bargain for me."

Then, before Clara could thank her, she turned to the head-gear, and fell into raptures over a delicate affair, all blonde and forget-me-nots.

"Such a sweet thing! I *must* have it before any one else snaps it up. Try it on, love, and give it a touch if it doesn't fit."

Clara knew it would be vain to remonstrate, for Mrs. Tower had not a particle of taste, and insisted on wearing blue, with the complexion of a lobster. On it went, and even the wearer could not fail to see that something was amiss.

"It's not the fault of the cap, dear. I always was a fright, and my dreadful color spoils whatever I put on, so I have things handsome, and give up any attempt at beauty," she said, shaking her head at herself in the glass.

"You need not do that, and I'll show you what I mean, if you will give me leave; for, with your fine figure and eyes, you can't help being an elegant woman. See, now, how I'll make even this cap becoming." And Clara laid the delicate flowers among the blonde behind, where the effect was unmarred by the over-red cheeks, and nothing but a soft ruche lay over the dark hair in front.

"There, isn't that better?" she asked, with her own blooming face so full of interest it was a pleasure to see her.

"Infinitely better; really becoming, and just what I want with my new silver-gray satin. Dear me, what a thing taste is!" And Mrs. Tower regarded herself with feminine satisfaction in her really fine eyes.

Here a new arrival interrupted them, and Clara went to meet several girls belonging to what had lately been her own set. The young ladies did not quite know how to behave; for, though it seemed perfectly natural to be talking over matters of dress with Clara, there was an air of proud humility about her that made them feel ill at ease, till Nellie, a lively, warm-hearted creature, broke the ice by saying, with a little quiver in her gay voice, —

"It's no use, girls; we've either got to laugh or cry, and I think, on the whole, it would be best for all parties to laugh, and then go on just as we used to do;" which she did so infectiously that the rest joined, and then began to chatter as freely as of old.

"I speak for the opal silk, Clara, for papa has promised me a Worth dress, and I was green with envy when this came," cried Nellie, secretly wishing she wore caps, that she might buy up the whole dozen.

"You would be green with disgust if I let you have it, for no brunette could wear that most trying of colors, and I was rash to order it. You are very good, dear Nell, but I won't let you sacrifice yourself to friendship in that heroic style," answered Clara, with a grateful kiss.

"But the others are blue and lilac, both more trying than anything with a shade of pink in it. If you won't let me have this, you must invent me the most becoming thing ever seen; for the most effective dress I had last winter was the gold-colored one with the wreath of laburnums, which you chose for me," persisted Nellie, bound to help in some way.

"I bespeak something sweet for New Year's Day. You know my style," said another young lady, privately resolving to buy the opal dress, when the rest had gone.

"Consider yourself engaged to get up my bridesmaids' costumes, for I never shall forget what a lovely effect those pale green dresses produced at Alice's wedding. She looked like a lily among its leaves, some one said, and you suggested them, I remember," added a third damsel, with the dignity of a bride-elect.

So it went on, each doing what she could to help, not with condolence, but approbation, and the substantial aid that is so easy to accept when gilded by kind words and cheery sympathy.

A hard winter, but a successful one; and when spring came, and all her patrons were fitted out for mountains, seaside, or springs, Clara folded her weary hands content. But Mrs. Barlow saw with anxiety how pale the girl's cheeks had grown, how wistfully she eyed the green grass in the park, and how soon the smile died on the lips that tried to say cheerfully, —

"No, mamma, dear, I dare not spend in a summer trip the little sum I have laid by for the hard times that may come. I shall do very well, but I can't help remembering the happy voyage we meant to make this year, and how much good it would do *you*."

Watching the unselfish life of her daughter had taught Mrs. Barlow to forget her own regrets, inspired her with a desire to do her part, and made her ashamed of her past indolence.

Happening to mention her maternal anxieties to Mrs. Tower, that good lady suggested a plan by which the seemingly impossible became a fact, and Mrs. Barlow had the pleasure of surprising Clara with a “bright idea,” as the girl had once surprised her.

“Come, dear, bestir yourself, for we must sail in ten days to pass our summer in or near Paris. I’ve got commissions enough to pay our way, and we can unite business and pleasure in the most charming manner.”

Clara could only clasp her hands and listen, as her mother unfolded her plan, telling how she was to get Maud’s trousseau, all Mrs. Tower’s winter costumes, and a long list of smaller commissions from friends and patrons who had learned to trust and value the taste and judgment of the young *modiste*.

So Clara had her summer trip, and came home bright and blooming in the early autumn, ready to take up her pretty trade again, quite unconscious that, while trying to make others beautiful, she was making her own life a very lovely one.

VIII.

HOW THEY CAMPED OUT.

"It looks so much like snow I think it would be wiser to put off your sleighing party, Gwen," said Mrs. Arnold, looking anxiously out at the heavy sky and streets still drifted by the last winter storm.

"Not before night, mamma; we don't mind its being cloudy, we like it, because the sun makes the snow so dazzling when we get out of town. "We can't give it up now, for here comes Patrick with the boys." And Gwen ran down to welcome the big sleigh, which just then drove up with four jolly lads skirmishing about inside.

"Come on!" called Mark, her brother, knocking his friends right and left, to make room for the four girls who were to complete the party.

"What do you think of the weather, Patrick?" asked Mrs. Arnold from the window, still undecided about the wisdom of letting her flock go off alone, papa having been called away after the plan was made.

"Faith, ma'm, it's an illigant day barring the wind, that's a thrifle could to the nose. I'll have me eye on the childer, ma'm, and there'll be no throuble at all, at all," replied the old coachman, lifting a round red face out of his muffler, and patting little Gus on the shoulder, as he sat proudly on the high seat holding the whip.

"Be careful, dears, and come home early."

With which parting caution mamma shut the window, and watched the young folks drive gayly away, little dreaming what would happen before they got back.

The wind was more than a "thrifle could," for when they got out of the city it blew across the open country in bitter blasts, and made the eight little noses almost as red as old Pat's, who had been up all night at a wake, and was still heavy-headed with too much whiskey, though no one suspected it.

The lads enjoyed themselves immensely snowballing one another; for the drifts were still fresh enough to furnish soft snow, and Mark, Bob, and Tony had many a friendly tussle in it as they went up hills, or paused to breathe the horses after a swift trot along a level bit of road. Little Gus helped drive till his hands were benumbed in spite of the new red mittens, and he had to descend among the girls, who were cuddled cosily under the warm robes, telling secrets, eating candy, and laughing at the older boys' pranks.

Sixteen-year-old Gwendoline was matron of the party, and kept excellent order among the girls; for Ruth and Alice were nearly her own age, and Rita a most obedient younger sister.

“I say, Gwen, we are going to stop at the old house on the way home and get some nuts for this evening. Papa said we might, and some of the big Baldwins too. I’ve got baskets, and while we fellows fill them you girls can look round the house,” said Mark, when the exhausted young gentlemen returned to their seats.

“That will be nice. I want to get some books, and Rita has been very anxious about one of her dolls, which she is sure was left in the nursery closet. If we are going to stop we ought to be turning back, Pat, for it is beginning to snow and will be dark early,” answered Gwen, suddenly realizing that great flakes were fast whitening the roads and the wind had risen to a gale.

“Shure and I will, miss dear, as soon as iver I can; but it’s round a good bit we must go, for I couldn’t be turning here widout upsettin’ the whole of yez, it’s that drifted. Rest aisy, and I’ll fetch up at the ould place in half an hour, plaze the powers,” said Pat, who had lost his way and wouldn’t own it, being stupid with a sup or two he had privately taken on the way, to keep the chill out of his bones he said.

On they went again, with the wind at their backs, caring little for the snow that now fell fast, or the gathering twilight, since they were going toward home they thought. It was a very long half-hour before Pat brought them to the country-house, which was shut up for the winter. With difficulty they ploughed their way up to the steps, and scrambled on to the piazza, where they danced about to warm their feet till Mark unlocked the door and let them in, leaving Pat to enjoy a doze on his seat.

“Make haste, boys; it is cold and dark here, and we must get home. Mamma will be so anxious, and it really is going to be a bad storm,” said Gwen, whose spirits were damped by the gloom of the old house, and who felt her responsibility, having promised to be home early.

Off went the boys to attic and cellar, being obliged to light the lantern left here for the use of whoever came now and then to inspect the premises. The girls, having found books and doll, sat upon the rolled-up carpets, or peeped about at the once gay and hospitable rooms, now looking very empty and desolate with piled-up furniture, shuttered windows, and fireless hearths.

“If we were going to stay long I’d have a fire in the library. Papa often does when he comes out, to keep the books from moulding,” began Gwen, but was interrupted by a shout from without, and, running to the door, saw Pat picking himself out of a drift while the horses were galloping down the avenue at full speed.

“Be jabbers, them villains give a jump when that fallin’ branch struck ‘em, and out I wint, bein’ tuk unknownst, just thinkin’ of me poor cousin Mike. May his bed above be aisy the day! Whist now, miss dear! I'll fetch 'em back in a jiffy. Stop still till I come, and kape them b'ys quite."

With a blow to settle his hat, Patrick trotted gallantly away into the storm, and the girls went in to tell the exciting news to the lads, who came whooping back from their search, with baskets of nuts and apples.

"Here's a go!" cried Mark. "Old Pat will run half-way to town before he catches the horses, and we are in for an hour or two at least."

"Then do make a fire, for we shall die of cold if we have to wait long," begged Gwen, rubbing Rita's cold hands, and looking anxiously at little Gus, who was about making up his mind to roar.

"So we will, and be jolly till the blunderbuss gets back. Camp down, girls, and you fellows, come and hold the lantern while I get wood and stuff. It is so confoundedly dark, I shall break my neck down the shed steps." And Mark led the way to the library, where the carpet still remained, and comfortable chairs and sofas invited the chilly visitors to rest.

"How can you light your fire when you get the wood?" asked Ruth, a practical damsel, who looked well after her own creature comforts and was longing for a warm supper.

"Papa hides the matches in a tin box, so the rats won't get at them. Here they are, and two or three bits of candle for the sticks on the chimney-piece, if he forgets to have the lantern trimmed. Now we will light up, and look cosey when the boys come back."

And producing the box from under a sofa-cushion, Gwen cheered the hearts of all by lighting two candles, rolling up the chairs, and making ready to be comfortable. Thoughtful Alice went to see if Pat was returning, and found a buffalo-robe lying on the steps. Returning with this, she reported that there was no sign of the runaways, and advised making ready for a long stay.

"How mamma will worry!" thought Gwen, but made light of the affair, because she saw Rita looked timid, and Gus shivered till his teeth chattered.

"We will have a nice time, and play we are shipwrecked people or Arctic explorers. Here comes Dr. Kane and the sailors with supplies of wood, so we can thaw our pemmican and warm our feet. Gus shall be the little Esquimaux boy, all dressed in fur, as he is in the picture we have at home," she said, wrapping the child in the robe, and putting her own sealskin cap on his head to divert his mind.

"Here we are! Now for a jolly blaze, boys; and if Pat doesn't come back we can have our fun here instead of at home," cried Mark, well pleased with the adventure, as were his mates.

So they fell to work, and soon a bright fire was lighting up the room with its cheerful shine, and the children gathered about it, quite careless of the storm raging without, and sure that Pat would come in time.

"I'm hungry," complained Gus as soon as he was warm.

"So am I," added Rita from the rug, where the two little ones sat toasting themselves.

"Eat an apple," said Mark.

"They are so hard and cold I don't like them," began Gus.

"Roast some!" cried Ruth.

"And crack nuts," suggested Alice.

"Pity we can't cook something in real camp style; it would be such fun," said Tony, who had spent weeks on Monadnock, living upon the supplies he and his party tugged up the mountain on their backs.

"We shall not have time for anything but what we have. Put down your apples and crack away, or we shall be obliged to leave them," advised Gwen, coming back from an observation at the front door with an anxious line on her forehead; for the storm was rapidly increasing, and there was no sign of Pat or the horses.

The rest were in high glee, and an hour or two slipped quickly away as they enjoyed the impromptu feast and played games. Gus recalled them to the discomforts of their situation by saying with a yawn and a whimper, —

"I'm so sleepy! I want my own bed and mamma."

"So do I!" echoed Rita, who had been nodding for some time, and longed to lie down and sleep comfortably anywhere.

"Almost eight o'clock! By Jove, that old Pat *is* taking his time, I think. Wonder if he has got into trouble? We can't do anything, and may as well keep quiet here," said Mark, looking at his watch and beginning to understand that the joke was rather a serious one.

"Better make a night of it and all go to sleep. Pat can wake us up when he comes. The cold makes a fellow *so* drowsy." And Bob gave a stretch that nearly rent him asunder.

"I will let the children nap on the sofa. They are so tired of waiting, and may as well amuse themselves in that way as in fretting. Come, Gus and Rita, each take a pillow, and I'll cover you up with my shawl."

Gwen made the little ones comfortable, and they were off in five minutes. The others kept up bravely till nine o'clock, then the bits of candles were burnt out, the stories all told, nuts and apples had lost their charm, and weariness and hunger caused spirits to fail perceptibly.

"I've eaten five Baldwins, and yet I want more. Something filling and good. Can't we catch a rat and roast him?" proposed Bob, who was a hearty lad and was ravenous by this time.

“Isn’t there anything in the house?” asked Ruth, who dared not eat nuts for fear of indigestion.

“Not a thing that I know of except a few pickles in the storeroom; we had so many, mamma left some here,” answered Gwen, resolving to provision the house before she left it another autumn.

“Pickles alone are rather sour feed. If we only had a biscuit now, they wouldn’t be bad for a relish,” said Tony, with the air of a man who had known what it was to live on burnt bean-soup and rye flapjacks for a week.

“I saw a keg of soft-soap in the shed. How would that go with the pickles?” suggested Bob, who felt equal to the biggest and acidest cucumber ever grown.

“Mamma knew an old lady who actually did eat soft-soap and cream for her complexion,” put in Alice, whose own fresh face looked as if she had tried the same distasteful remedy with success.

The boys laughed, and Mark, who felt that hospitality required him to do something for his guests, said briskly, —

“Let us go on a foraging expedition while the lamp holds out to burn, for the old lantern is almost gone and then we are done for. Come on, Bob; your sharp nose will smell out food if there is any.”

“Don’t set the house afire, and bring more wood when you come, for we must have light of some kind in this poky place,” called Gwen, with a sigh, wishing every one of them were safely at home and abed.

A great tramping of boots, slamming of doors, and shouting of voices followed the departure of the boys, as well as a crash, a howl, and then a roar of laughter, as Bob fell down the cellar stairs, having opened the door in search of food and poked his nose in too far. Presently they came back, very dusty, cobwebby, and cold, but triumphantly bearing a droll collection of trophies. Mark had a piece of board and the lantern, Tony a big wooden box and a tin pail, Bob fondly embraced a pickle jar and a tumbler of jelly which had been forgotten on a high shelf in the storeroom.

“Meal, pickles, jam, and boards. What a mess, and what are we to do with it all?” cried the girls, much amused at the result of the expedition.

“Can any of you make a hoe cake?” demanded Mark.

“No, indeed! I can make caramels and cocoanut-cakes,” said Ruth, proudly.

“I can make good toast and tea,” added Alice.

“I can’t cook anything,” confessed Gwen, who was unusually accomplished in French, German, and music.

“Girls aren’t worth much in the hour of need. Take hold, Tony, you are the chap for me.” And Mark disrespectfully turned his back on the young ladies, who could only sit and watch the lads work.

“He can’t do it without water,” whispered Ruth.

“Or salt,” answered Alice.

“Or a pan to bake it in,” added Gwen; and then all smiled at the dilemma they foresaw.

But Tony was equal to the occasion, and calmly went on with his task, while Mark arranged the fire and Bob opened the pickles. First the new cook filled the pail with snow till enough was melted to wet the meal; this mixture was stirred with a pine stick till thick enough, then spread on the board and set up before the bed of coals to brown.

“It never will bake in the world.” “He can’t turn it, so it won’t be done on both sides.” “Won’t be fit to eat any way!” And with these dark hints the girls consoled themselves for their want of skill.

But the cake did bake a nice brown, Tony did turn it neatly with his jack-knife and the stick, and when it was done cut it into bits, added jelly, and passed it round on an old atlas; and every one said, —

“It really does taste good!”

Two more were baked, and eaten with pickles for a change, then all were satisfied, and after a vote of thanks to Tony they began to think of sleep.

“Pat has gone home and told them we are all right, and mamma knows we can manage here well enough for one night, so don’t worry, Gwen, but take a nap, and I’ll lie on the rug and see to the fire.”

Mark’s happy-go-lucky way of taking things did not convince his sister; but as she could do nothing, she submitted and made her friends as comfortable as she could.

All had plenty of wraps, so the girls nestled into the three large chairs, Bob and Tony rolled themselves up in the robe, with their feet to the fire, and were soon snoring like weary hunters. Mark pillowed his head on a log, and was sound asleep in ten minutes in spite of his promise to be sentinel.

Gwen’s chair was the least easy of the three, and she could not forget herself like the rest, but sat wide awake, watching the blaze, counting the hours, and wondering why no one came to them.

The wind blew fiercely, the snow beat against the blinds, rats scuttled about the walls, and now and then a branch fell upon the roof with a crash. Weary, yet excited, the poor girl imagined all sorts of mishaps to Pat and the horses, recalled various ghost stories she had heard, and wondered if it was on such a night as this that a neighbor’s house had been robbed. So nervous did she get at last that she covered up her face and resolutely began to count a thousand, feeling that anything was better than having to wake Mark and own she was frightened.

Before she knew it she fell into a drowse and dreamed that they were all cast away on an iceberg and a polar bear was coming up to devour Gus, who innocently called to the big white dog and waited to caress him.

"A bear! a bear! oh, boys, save him!" murmured Gwen in her sleep, and the sound of her own distressed voice waked her.

The fire was nearly out, for she had slept longer than she knew, the room was full of shadows, and the storm seemed to have died away. In the silence which now reigned, unbroken even by a snore, Gwen heard a sound that made her start and tremble. Some one was coming softly up the back stairs. All the outer doors were locked, she was sure; all the boys lay in their places, for she could see and count the three long figures and little Gus in a bunch on the sofa. The girls had not stirred, and this was no rat's scamper, but a slow and careful tread, stealing nearer and nearer to the study door, left ajar when the last load of wood was brought in.

"Pat would knock or ring, and papa would speak, so that we might not be scared. I want to scream, but I won't till I see that it really is some one," thought Gwen, while her heart beat fast and her eyes were fixed on the door, straining to see through the gloom.

The steps drew nearer, paused on the threshold, and then a head appeared as the door noiselessly swung wider open. A man's head in a fur cap, but it was neither papa nor Pat nor Uncle Ed. Poor Gwen would have called out then, but her voice was gone, and she could only lie back, looking, mute and motionless. A tiny spire of flame sprung up and flickered for a moment on the tall dark figure in the doorway, a big man with a beard, and in his hand something that glittered. Was it a pistol or a dagger or a dark lantern? thought the girl, as the glimmer died away, and the shadows returned to terrify her.

The man seemed to look about him keenly for a moment, then vanished, and the steps went down the hall to the front door, which was opened from within and some one admitted quietly. Whispers were heard, and then feet approached again, accompanied by a gleam of light.

"Now I must scream!" thought Gwen; and scream she did with all her might, as two men entered, one carrying a lantern, the other a bright tin can.

"Boys! Robbers! Fire! Tramps! Oh, do wake up!" cried Gwen, frantically pulling Mark by the hair, and Bob and Tony by the legs, as the quickest way of rousing them.

Then there was a scene! The boys sprung up and rubbed their eyes, the girls hid theirs and began to shriek, while the burglars laughed aloud, and poor Gwen, quite worn out, fainted away on the rug. It was all over in a minute, however; for Mark had his wits about him, and his first glance at the man with the lantern allayed his fears.

"Hullo, Uncle Ed! We are all right. Got tired of waiting for you, so we went to sleep."

"Stop screaming, girls, and quiet those children! Poor little Gwen is badly frightened. Get some snow, Tom, while I pick her up," commanded the uncle, and order was soon established.

The boys were all right at once, and Ruth and Alice devoted themselves to the children, who were very cross and sleepy in spite of their fright. Gwen was herself in a moment, and so ashamed of her scare that she was glad there was no more light to betray her pale cheeks.

"I should have known you, uncle, at once, but to see a strange man startled me, and he didn't speak, and I thought that can was a pistol," stammered Gwen, when she had collected her wits a little.

"Why, that's my old friend and captain, Tom May. Don't you remember him, child? He thought you were all asleep, so crept out to tell me and let me in."

"How did he get in himself?" asked Gwen, glad to turn the conversation.

"Found the shed door open, and surprised the camp by a flank movement. You wouldn't do for picket duty, boys," laughed Captain Tom, enjoying the dismay of the lads.

"Oh, thunder! I forgot to bolt it when we first went for the wood. Had to open it, the place was so plaguy dark," muttered Bob, much disgusted.

"Where's Pat?" asked Tony, with great presence of mind, feeling anxious to shift all blame to his broad shoulders.

Uncle Ed shook the snow from his hair and clothes, and, poking up the fire, leisurely sat down and took Gus on his knee before he replied, — "Serve out the grog, Tom, while I spin my yarn."

Round went the can of hot coffee, and a few sips brightened up the young folks immensely, so that they listened with great interest to the tale of Pat's mishaps.

"The scamp was half-seas over when he started, and deserves all he got. In the first place he lost his way, then tumbled overboard, and let the horses go. He floundered after them a mile or two, then lost his bearings in the storm, pitched into a ditch, broke his head, and lay there till found. The fellows carried him to a house off the road, and there he is in a nice state; for, being his countrymen, they dosed him with whiskey till he was 'quite and aisy,' and went to sleep, forgetting all about you, the horses, and his distracted mistress at home. The animals were stopped at the cross-roads, and there we found them after a lively cruise round the country. Then we hunted up Pat; but what with the blow and too many drops of 'the crayther,' his head was in a muddle, and we could get nothing out of him. So we went home again, and then your mother remembered that you had mentioned stopping here, and we fitted out a new craft and set sail, prepared for a long voyage. Your father was away, so Tom volunteered, and here we are.”

“A jolly lark! now let us go home and go to bed,” proposed Mark, with a gape.

“Isn’t it most morning?” asked Tony, who had been sleeping like a dormouse.

“Just eleven. Now pack up and let us be off. The storm is over, the moon coming out, and we shall find a good supper waiting for the loved and lost. Bear a hand, Tom, and ship this little duffer, for he’s off again.”

Uncle Ed put Gus into the captain’s arms, and, taking Rita himself, led the way to the sleigh which stood at the door. In they all bundled, and after making the house safe, off they went, feeling that they had had a pretty good time on the whole.

“I will learn cooking and courage, before I try camping out again,” resolved Gwen, as she went jingling homeward; and she kept her word.

IX.

MY LITTLE SCHOOL-GIRL.

The first time that I saw her was one autumn morning as I rode to town in a horse-car. It was early, and my only fellow-passenger was a crusty old gentleman, who sat in a corner, reading his paper; so when the car stopped, I glanced out to see who came next, hoping it would be a pleasanter person. No one appeared for a minute, and the car stood still, while both driver and conductor looked in the same direction without a sign of impatience. I looked also, but all I could see was a little girl running across the park, as girls of twelve or thirteen seldom run nowadays, if any one can see them.

"Are you waiting for her?" I asked of the pleasant-faced conductor, who stood with his hand on the bell, and a good-natured smile in his eyes.

"Yes, ma'am, we always stop for little missy," he answered; and just then up she came, all rosy and breathless with her run.

"Thank you very much. I'm late to-day, and was afraid I should miss my car," she said, as he helped her in with a fatherly air that was pleasant to see.

Taking a corner seat, she smoothed the curly locks, disturbed by the wind, put on her gloves, and settled her books in her lap, then modestly glanced from the old gentleman in the opposite corner to the lady near by. Such a bright little face as I saw under the brown hat-rim, happy blue eyes, dimples in the ruddy cheeks, and the innocent expression which makes a young girl so sweet an object to old eyes.

The crusty gentleman evidently agreed with me, for he peeped over the top of the paper at his pleasant little neighbor as she sat studying a lesson, and cheering herself with occasional sniffs at a posy of mignonette in her button-hole.

When the old gentleman caught my eye, he dived out of sight with a loud "Hem!" but he was peeping again directly, for there was something irresistibly attractive about the unconscious lassie opposite; and one could no more help looking at her than at a lovely flower or a playful kitten.

Presently she shut her book with a decided pat, and an air of relief that amused me. She saw the half-smile I could not repress, seemed to understand my sympathy, and said with a laugh, —

"It *was* a hard lesson, but I've got it!"

So we began to talk about school and lessons, and I soon discovered that the girl was a clever scholar, whose only drawback was, as she confided to me, a "love of fun."

We were just getting quite friendly, when several young men got in, one of whom stared at the pretty child till even she observed it, and showed that she did by the color that came and went in her cheeks. It annoyed me as much as if she had been my own little daughter, for I like modesty, and have often been troubled by the forward manners of schoolgirls, who seem to enjoy being looked at. So I helped this one out of her little trouble by making room between the old gentleman and myself, and motioning her to come and sit there.

She understood at once, thanked me with a look, and nestled into the safe place so gratefully, that the old gentleman glared over his spectacles at the rude person who had disturbed the serenity of the child.

Then we rumbled along again, the car getting fuller and fuller as we got down town. Presently an Irishwoman, with a baby, got in, and before I could offer my seat, my little school-girl was out of hers, with a polite —

“Please take it, ma’am; I can stand perfectly well.”

It was prettily done, and I valued the small courtesy all the more, because it evidently cost the bashful creature an effort to stand up alone in a car full of strangers; especially as she could not reach the strap to steady herself, and found it difficult to stand comfortably.

Then it was that the crusty man showed how he appreciated my girl’s good manners, for he hooked his cane in the strap, and gave it to her, saying, with a smile that lighted up his rough face like sunshine, —

“Hold on to that, my dear.”

“Ah,” thought I, “how little we can judge from appearances! This grim old soul is a gentleman, after all.”

Turning her face towards us, the girl held on to the stout cane, and swayed easily to and fro as we bumped over the rails. The Irishwoman’s baby, a sickly little thing, was attracted by the flowers, and put out a small hand to touch them, with a wistful look at the bright face above.

“Will baby have some?” said my girl, and made the little creature happy with some gay red leaves.

“Bless your heart, honey, it’s fond he is of the like o’ them, and seldom he gets any,” said the mother, gratefully, as she settled baby’s dirty hood, and wrapped the old shawl round his feet.

Baby stared hard at the giver of posies, but his honest blue eyes gave no offence, and soon the two were so friendly that baby boldly clutched at the bright buttons on her sack, and crowed with delight when he got one, while we all smiled at the pretty play, and were sorry when the little lady, with a bow and a smile to us, got out at the church corner.

“Now, I shall probably never see that child again, yet what a pleasant picture she leaves in my memory!” I thought to myself, as I caught a last glimpse of the brown hat going round the corner.

But I did see her again many times that winter; for not long after, as I passed down a certain street near my winter quarters, I came upon a flock of girls, eating their luncheon as they walked to and fro on the sunny side, — pretty, merry creatures, all laughing and chattering at once, as they tossed apples from hand to hand, munched candy, or compared cookies. I went slowly, to enjoy the sight, as I do when I meet a party of sparrows on the Common, and was wondering what would become of so many budding women, when, all of a sudden, I saw *my* little school-girl.

Yes, I knew her in a minute, for she wore the same brown hat, and the rosy face was sparkling with fun, as she told secrets with a chosen friend, while eating a wholesome slice of bread-and-butter as only a hungry school-girl could.

She did not recognize me, but I took a good look at her as I went by, longing to know what the particular secret was that ended in such a gale of laughter.

After that, I often saw my girl as I took my walks abroad, and one day could not resist speaking to her when I met her alone; for usually her mates clustered round her like bees about their queen, which pleased me, since it showed how much they loved the sunshiny child.

I had a paper of grapes in my hand, and when I saw her coming, whisked out a handsome bunch, all ready to offer, for I had made up my mind to speak this time. She was reading a paper, but looked up to give me the inside of the walk.

Before her eyes could fall again, I held out the grapes and said, just as I had heard her say more than once to a schoolmate at lunch-time, “Let’s go halves.”

She understood at once, laughed, and took the bunch, saying with twinkling eyes, —

“Oh, thank you! they are beauties!”

Then, as we went on to the corner together, I told her why I did it, and recalled the car-ride.

“I’d forgotten all about that, but my conductor is very kind, and always waits for me,” she said, evidently surprised that a stranger should take an interest in her small self.

I did not have half time enough with her, for a bell rang, and away she skipped, looking back to nod and smile at the queer lady who had taken a fancy to her.

A few days afterward a fine nosegay of flowers was left at the door for me, and when I asked the servant who sent them he answered, —

“A little girl asked if a lame lady didn’t live here, and when I said yes, she told me to give you these, and say the grapes were very nice.”

I knew at once who it was, and enjoyed the funny message immensely; for when one leads a quiet life, little things interest and amuse.

Christmas was close by, and I planned a return for the flowers, of a sort, that I fancied my young friend would appreciate.

I knew that Christmas week would be a holiday, so, the day before it began, I went to the school just before recess, and left a frosted plum cake, directed to “Miss Goldilocks, from she knows who.”

At first I did not know how to address my nice white parcel, for I never had heard the child’s name. But after thinking over the matter, I remembered that she was the only girl there with yellow curls hanging down her back, so I decided to risk the cake with the above direction.

The maid who took it in (for my girl went to a private school) smiled, and said at once she knew who I meant. I left my cake, and strolled round the corner to the house of a friend, there to wait and watch for the success of my joke, for the girls always went that way at recess.

Presently the little hats began to go bobbing by, the silent street to echo with laughter, and the sidewalk to bloom with gay gowns, for the girls were all out in winter colors now.

From behind a curtain I peeped at them, and saw, with great satisfaction, that nearly all had bits of my cake in their hands, and were talking it over with the most flattering interest. My particular little girl, with a friend on each arm, passed so near me that I could see the happy look in her eyes, and hear her say, with a toss of the bright hair, —

“Mother will plan it for me, and I can get it done by New Year. Won’t it be fun to hang it on the door some day, and then run?”

I fancied that she meant to make something for me, and waited with patience, wondering how this odd frolic with my little school-girl would end.

New Year’s Day came and passed, but no gift hung on my door; so I made up my mind it was all a mistake, and, being pretty busy about that time, thought no more of the matter till some weeks later, as I came into town one day after a visit in the country.

I am fond of observing faces, and seldom forget one if anything has particularly attracted my attention to it. So this morning, as I rode along, I looked at the conductor, as there was no one else to observe, and he had a pleasant sort of face. Somehow, it looked familiar, and after thinking idly about it for a minute, I remembered where I had seen it before.

He was the man who waited for “little missy,” and I at once began to hope that she would come again, for I wanted to ask about the holidays, remembering how “fond of fun” she was.

When we came to the South End Square, where I met her first, I looked out, expecting to see the little figure running down the wide path again, and quite willing to wait for it a long time if necessary. But no one was to be seen but two boys and a dog. The car did not stop, and though the conductor looked out that way, his hand was not on the strap, and no smile on his face.

“Don’t you wait for the little girl now?” I asked, feeling disappointed at not seeing my pretty friend again.

“I wish I could, ma’am,” answered the man, understanding at once, though of course he did not remember me.

“New rules, perhaps?” I added, as he did not explain, but stood fingering his punch, and never minding an old lady, wildly waving her bag at him from the sidewalk.

“No, ma’am; but it’s no use waiting for little missy any more, because” — here he leaned in and said, very low, — ”she is dead;” then turned sharply round, rung the bell, put the old lady in and shut the door.

How grieved I was to have that pleasant friendship end so sadly, for I had planned many small surprises for my girl, and now I could do no more, could never know all about her, never see the sunny face again, or win another word from lips that seemed made for smiling.

Only a little school-girl, yet how many friends she seemed to have, making them unconsciously by her gentle manners, generous actions, and innocent light-heartedness. I could not bear to think what home must be without her, for I am sure I was right in believing her a good, sweet child, because real character shows itself in little things, and the heart that always keeps in tune makes its music heard everywhere.

The busy man of the horse-car found time to miss her, the schoolmates evidently mourned their queen, for when I met them they walked quietly, talked low, and several wore black bows upon the sleeve; while I, although I never knew her name, or learned a single fact about her, felt the sweetness of her happy nature, and have not yet forgotten my little school-girl.

X.

WHAT A SHOVEL DID.

As my friend stood by the window, watching the “soft falling snow,” I saw him smile, — a thoughtful yet a very happy smile, and, anxious to know what brought it, I asked, —

“What do you see out there?”

“Myself,” was the answer that made me stare in surprise, as I joined him and looked curiously into the street.

All I saw was a man shovelling snow; and, thoroughly puzzled, I turned to Richard, demanding an explanation. He laughed, and answered readily, —

“While we wait for Kate and the children, I’ll tell you a little adventure of mine. It may be useful to you some day.

“Fifteen years ago, on a Sunday morning like this, I stood at the window of a fireless, shabby little room, without one cent in my pocket, and no prospect of getting one.

“I had gone supperless to bed, and spent the long night asking, ‘What shall I do?’ and, receiving no reply but that which is so hard for eager youth to accept, ‘Wait and trust.’

“I was alone in the world, with no fortune but my own talent, and even that I was beginning to doubt, because it brought no money. For a year I had worked and hoped, with a brave spirit; had written my life into poems and tales; tried a play; turned critic and reviewed books; offered my pen and time to any one who would employ them, and now was ready for the hardest literary work, and the poorest pay, for starvation stared me in the face.

“All my ventures failed, and my paper boats freighted with so many high hopes, went down one after another, leaving me to despair. The last wreck lay on my table then, — a novel, worn with much journeying to and fro, on which I had staked my last chance, and lost it.

“As I stood there at my window, cold and hungry, solitary and despairing, I said to myself, in a desperate mood, —

“‘It is all a mistake; I have no talent, and there is no room in the world for me, so the quicker I get out of it the better.’

“Just then a little chap came from a gate opposite, with a shovel on his shoulder, and trudged away, whistling shrilly, to look for a job. I watched him out of sight, thinking bitterly, —

“‘Now look at the injustice of it! Here am I, a young man full of brains, starving because no one will give me a chance; and there is that ignorant little fellow making a living with an old shovel!'"

A voice seemed to answer me, saying, —

"'Why don't you do the same? If brains don't pay, try muscles, and thank God that you have health.'

"Of course it was only my own pluck and common sense; but I declare to you I was as much struck by the new idea as if a strange voice *had* actually spoken; and I answered, heartily, —

"'As I live I *will* try it! and not give up while there is any honest work for these hands to do.'

"With sudden energy I put on my shabbiest clothes, — and they were *very* shabby, of course, added an old cap and rough comforter, as disguise, and stole down to the shed where I had seen a shovel. It was early, and the house was very quiet, for the other lodgers were hard workers all the week, and took their rest Sunday morning.

"Unseen by the sleepy girl making her fires, I got the shovel and stole away by the back gate, feeling like a boy out on a frolic. It was bitter cold, and a heavy snow-storm had raged all night. The streets were full of drifts, and the city looked as if dead, for no one was stirring yet but milkmen, and other poor fellows like me, seeking for an early job.

"I made my way to the West End, and was trying to decide at which of the tall houses to apply first, when the door of one opened, and a pretty housemaid appeared, broom in hand.

"At sight of the snowy wilderness she looked dismayed, and with a few unavailing strokes of her broom at the drift on the steps, was about to go in, when her eye fell on me.

"My shovel explained my mission, and she beckoned with an imperious wave of her duster to the shabby man opposite. I ploughed across, and received in silence the order to —

"'Clear them steps and sidewalk, and sweep 'em nice, for our folks always go to church, rain or shine.'

"Then leaving her broom outside, the maid slammed the door with a shiver, and I fell to work manfully. It was a heavy job, and my hands, unused to any heavier tool than a pen, were soon blistered; but I tugged away, and presently found myself much stimulated by the critical and approving glances bestowed upon me by the pretty girl, taking breakfast in the basement with a buxom cook and a friend, who had evidently dropped in on her way home from early Mass.

"I was a young fellow, and in spite of my late despair, the fun of the thing tickled me immensely, and I laughed behind my old tippet, as I shovelled and swept with a vigor that caused the stout cook to smile upon me.

"When the job was done, and I went to the lower door for my well-earned pay, the maid said, with condescension, as she glanced coquettishly at my ruddy face and eyes that twinkled under the old cap, I suspect, —

"'You can wait here while I run up, and get the money, if master is awake.'

"'Ye haven't the heart of a woman, Mary, to kape the poor crater out there when it's kilt wid the could he is,' said the buxom cook; adding, in a motherly tone, 'Come in wid yez, my man, and set till the fire, for it's bitter weather the day.'

"'Faix an' it is, ma'm, thankin' ye kindly,' I answered, with a fine brogue, for as a lad I had played the Irishman with success.

"The good soul warmed to me at once, and, filling a mug with coffee, gave it to me with a hearty —

"'A hot sup will do you no harrum, me b'y, and sure in the blessid Christmas time that's just fore-ninst us, the master won't begrudge ye a breakfast; so take a biscuit and a sassage, for it's like ye haven't had a mouthful betwixt your lips the day.'

"'That I will,' said I; 'and it's good luck and a long life to ye I'm drinkin' in this illegint coffee.'

"'Bless the b'y! but it's a grateful heart he has, and a blue eye as like my Pat as two pays,' cried the cook, regarding me with increasing favor, as I bolted the breakfast which I should have been too proud to accept from any hand less humble.

"Here the guest asked a question concerning Pat, and instantly the mother gushed into praises of her boy, telling in a few picturesque words, as only an Irishwoman could do it, how Pat had come to 'Ameriky' first when things went hard with them in the 'ould country,' and how good he was in sending home his wages till she could join him.

"How she came, but could not find her 'b'y, because of the loss of the letter with his address, and how for a year she waited and watched, sure that he would find her at last. How the saints had an eye on him, and one happy day answered her prayers in a way that she considered 'aquil to any merrycle ever seen.' For, looking up from her work, who should she see, in a fine livery, sitting on the box of a fine carriage at the master's door, but 'her own b'y, like a king in his glory.'

"'Arrah, ye should have seen me go up thim steps, Katy, and my Pat come off that box like an angel flyin', and the way he tuk me in his arms, never mindin' his illigint coat, and me all dirt a-blackin' me range. Ah'r, but I was a happy crayter that day!'

"Here the good soul stopped to wipe away the tears that were shining on her fat cheeks, and Mary appeared with a dollar, ‘for master said it was a tough job and well done.’

“‘May his bed be aisy above, darlin’, and many thanks, and the compliments of the sayson to ye, ladies.’

“With which grateful farewell I trudged away, well pleased at the success of my first attempt. Refreshed and cheered by the kindness of my humble hostess, I took heart, and worked away at my next job with redoubled energy, and by the time the first bells rang for church, I had three dollars in my pocket. My blood danced in my veins, and all my despair seemed shovelled away with the snow I had cleared from other people’s paths.

“My back ached, and my palms were sore, but heart and soul were in tune again, and hurrying home, I dressed and went to church, feeling that a special thanksgiving was due for the lesson I had learned.

“Christmas garlands hung upon the walls, Christmas music rolled through the church, and Christmas sermon, prayer, and psalm cheered the hearts of all. But the shabby young man in the back seat found such beauty and comfort in the service of that day that he never forgot it, for it was the turning-point of his life.”

My friend fell silent for a minute, and I sat, contrasting that past of his, with the happy present, for he was a prosperous man now, with an honored name, a comfortable fortune, and best of all, a noble wife, and some brave lads to follow in his footsteps.

Presently I could not resist asking, —

“Did you go on shovelling, Dick?”

“Not long, for there was no need of it, thanks to Pat’s mother,” he answered smiling.

“Come, I *must* have all the story, for I know it has a sequel!”

“A very happy one. Yes, I owe to that kind soul and her little story, the turn that Fortune gave her wheel. Nay, rather say, the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. For when I went home that day, I sat down and made a simple tale from the hint she gave, and something of her own humor and pathos must have got into it, for it was accepted, and more stories solicited, to my great surprise.

“I wrote it to please myself, for I was in a happy mood; and though my room was cold, the sun shone; though my closet was bare, honest money was in my pocket, and I felt as rich as a king.

“I remember I laughed at myself as I posted the manuscript on Monday morning, called it infatuation, and thought no more of it for days, being busy with my new friend, the shovel.

“Snow was gone, but coal remained, and I put in tons of it with a will, for this active labor was the tonic my overwrought nerves needed, and my spirits rose wonderfully, as muscles earned the daily bread that brains had failed to win.

"Ah! but they brought me something better than bread, dearer than fame; and to that old shovel I owe the happiness of my life! The very day I got the letter accepting the little story, I was gaily putting in my last ton of coal, for I felt that now I might take up the pen again, since in a kitchen I had discovered the magic that wins listeners.

"Bless my heart! how I worked and how I whistled, I was so happy, and felt so lifted above all doubt and fear by the knowledge that my talent was *not* a failure, and the fact that my own strong arms could keep the wolf from the door!

"I was so busy that I had not observed a lady watching me from the window. She had opened it to feed the hungry sparrows, and my whistle caught her ear, for it was an air she knew, and had heard a certain young man sing before he dropped out of her circle, and left her wondering sadly what had befallen him.

"All this I learned afterward; then I unconsciously piped away till my job was done, wiped my hot face, and went in to get my money. To my surprise I was told to 'go into the dining room, and missis would attend to it.'

"I went and found myself face to face, not with 'missis,' but the woman I had loved hopelessly but faithfully all that hard year, since I had gone away to fight my battle alone.

"For a moment I believed she did not know me, in my shabby suit and besmirched face. But she did, and with a world of feeling in her own sweet face, she offered me, not money, but her hand, saying in a voice that made my heart leap up, —

"'Richard, I was afraid you had gone down as so many disappointed young men go when their ambitious hopes fail; but I am so glad, so proud to see in your face that you still work and wait, like a brave and honest man. I *must* speak to you!'

"What could I do after that but hold the white hand fast in both my grimy ones, while I told my little story, and the hope that had come at last. Heaven knows I told it very badly, for those tender eyes were upon me all the time, so full of unspoken love and pity, admiration and respect, that I felt like one in a glorified dream, and forgot I was a coal-heaver.

"That was the last of it, though, and the next time I came to see my Kate it was with clean hands, that carried her, as a first love-token, the little tale which was the foundation-stone of this happy home."

He stopped there, and his face brightened beautifully, for the sound of little feet approached, and childish voices cried eagerly, —

"Papa! papa! the snow has come! May we go and shovel off the steps?"

"Yes, my lads, and mind you do it well; for some day you may have to earn your breakfast," answered Dick, as three fine boys came prancing in, full of delight at the first snow-fall.

"These fellows have a passion for shovelling which they inherit from their father," he added, with a twinkle of the eye that told Mrs. Kate what we had been talking about.

It was sweet to see with what tender pride she took the hand he stretched out to her, and holding it in both her own, said, with her eyes upon her boys, —

"I hope they *will* inherit not only their father's respect for honest work, but the genius that can see and paint truth and beauty in the humble things of this world."

XI.

CLAMS: A GHOST STORY.

"I haven't a room in the house, ma'am, but if you don't mind going down to the cottage, and coming up here to your meals, I can accommodate you, and would be glad to," said Mrs. Grant, in answer to my demand for board.

"Where is the cottage?" and I looked about me, feeling ready to accept anything in the way of shelter, after the long, hot journey from broiling Boston, to breezy York Harbor.

"Right down there, just a step, you see. It's all in order, and next week it will be full, for many folks prefer it because of the quiet."

At the end of a precipitous path, which offered every facility for accidents of all sorts, from a sprained ankle to a broken neck, stood the cottage, a little white building with a pretty woodbine over the porch, gay flowers in the garden, and the blue Atlantic rolling up at the foot of the cliff.

"A regular 'Cottage by the Sea.' It will suit me exactly if I can have that front upper room. I don't mind being alone, so have my trunk taken down, please, and I'll get ready for tea," said I, congratulating myself on my good luck. Alas, how little I knew what a night of terror I was to pass in that picturesque abode!

An hour later, refreshed by my tea and invigorated by the delicious coolness, I plunged recklessly into the gayeties of the season, and accepted two invitations for the evening, — one to a stroll on Sunset Hill, the other to a clam-bake on the beach.

The stroll came first, and while my friend paused at one of the fishily-fragrant houses by the way, to interview her washerwoman, I went on to the hill-top, where a nautical old gentleman with a spy-glass, welcomed me with the amiable remark, —

"Pretty likely place for a prospeck."

Entering into a conversation with this ancient mariner, I asked if he knew any legend or stories concerning the old houses all about us.

"Sights of 'em; but it aint allers the *old* places as has the most stories concernin' 'em. Why, that cottage down yonder aint more 'n fifty year old, and they say there's been a lot of ghosts seen there, owin' to a man's killin' of himself in the back bedroom."

"What, that house at the end of the lane?" I asked, with sudden interest.

"Jes' so; nice place, but lonesome and dampish. Ghosts and toadstools is apt to locate in houses of that sort," placidly responded the venerable tar.

The dampness scared me more than the goblins, for I never saw a ghost yet, but I had been haunted by rheumatism, and found it a hard fiend to exorcise.

"I've taken a room there, so I'm rather interested in knowing what company I'm to have."

"Took a room, hev you? Wal, I dare say you won't be troubled. Some folks have a knack of seeing sperrits, and then agin some hasn't. My wife is uncommon powerful that way, but I aint; my sight's dreadful poor for that sort of critter."

There was such a sly twinkle in the starboard eye of the old fellow as he spoke, that I laughed outright, and asked, sociably, —

"Has she ever seen the ghosts of the cottage? I think *I* have rather a knack that way, and I'd like to know what to expect."

"No, her sort is the rappin' kind. Down yonder the only ghost I take much stock in is old Bezee Tucker's. He killed himself in the back bedroom, and some folks say they've heard him groanin' there nights, and a drippin' sound; he bled to death, you know. It was kep' quiet at the time, and is forgotten now by all but a few old chaps like me. Bezee was allers civil to the ladies, so I guess he won't bother you, ma'am;" and the old fellow laughed.

"If he does, I'll let you know;" and with that I departed, for my friend called to me that the beach party was clamoring for our company.

In the delights of that festive hour, I forgot the croaking of the ancient mariner, for I was about to taste a clam for the first time in my life, and it was a most absorbing moment. Perched about on the rocks like hungry penguins, we watched the jovial cooks with breathless interest, as they struggled with refractory frying-pans, fish that stubbornly refused to brown, steaming seaweed and hot stones.

A certain captivating little Margie waited upon me so prettily that I should have been tempted to try a sea porcupine unskinned if she had offered it, so irresistible was her chirping way of saying, "Oh, here's a perfectly lovely one! Do take him by his little black head and eat him quick."

So beguiled, I indulged recklessly in clams, served hot between two shells, little dreaming what a price I was to pay for that marine banquet.

We kept up till late, and then I was left at my own door by my friend, who informed me that York was a very primitive, safe place, where people slept with unlocked doors, and nothing ever went amiss o'nights.

I said nothing of the ghosts, being ashamed to own that I quaked a little at the idea of the "back bedroom," as I shut out the friendly faces and bolted myself in.

A lamp and matches stood in the hall, and lighting the lamp, I whisked up stairs with suspicious rapidity, locked my door and retired to bed, firmly refusing to own even to myself that I had ever heard the name of Bezee Tucker.

Being very tired, I soon fell asleep; but fried potatoes and a dozen or two of hot clams are not viands best fitted to insure quiet repose, so a fit of nightmare brought me to a realizing sense of my indiscretion.

From a chaos of wild dreams was finally evolved a gigantic clam, whose mission it was to devour me as I had devoured its relatives. The sharp shells gaped before me, a solemn voice said, “Take her by her little head and eat her quick.” Retribution was at hand, and, with a despairing effort to escape by diving, I bumped my head smartly against the wall, and woke up feeling as if there was an earthquake under the bed.

Collecting my scattered wits, I tried to compose myself to slumber again; but alas! that fatal feast had murdered sleep, and I vainly tried to lull my wakeful senses with the rustle of woodbine leaves about the window, and the breaking waves upon the beach.

In one of the pauses between the ebb and flow of the waves, I heard a curious sound in the house, — a muffled sort of moan, coming at regular intervals. And, as I sat up to make out where it was, another sound caught my attentive ear. Drip, drip, drip, went something out in the hall, and in an instant the tale told me on Sunset Hill came back with unpleasant vividness.

“Nonsense! it is raining, and the roof leaks,” I said to myself, while a disagreeable thrill went through me, and fancy, aided by indigestion, began to people the house with uncanny inmates.

No rain had fallen for weeks, and peeping through my curtain I saw the big, bright stars shining in a cloudless sky; so that explanation failed, and still the drip, drip, drip went on. Likewise the moaning, so distinctly now that it was evident the little back bedroom was next the chamber in which I was quaking at that identical moment.

“Some one is sleeping there,” I said, and then recollected that all the rooms were locked, and all the keys but mine in Mrs. Grant’s pocket up at the house.

“Well, let the goblins enjoy themselves; I won’t disturb them if they let me alone. Some of the ladies thought me brave to dare to sleep here, and it will never do to own I was scared by a foolish story and an odd sound.”

So down I lay, and said the multiplication table industriously for several minutes, trying to turn a deaf ear to the outer world, and curb my unruly thoughts. But it was a failure, and, when I found myself saying over and over “Four times twelve is twenty-four,” I gave up affecting courage, and went in for a good honest scare.

As a cheerful subject for midnight meditation I kept thinking of B. Tucker, in spite of every effort to abstain. In vain I recalled the fact that the departed gentleman was “allers civil to the ladies.” I still was in mortal fear lest he might think it necessary to come and apologize in person for “bothering” me.

Presently a clock struck three, and I involuntarily gave a groan that beat the ghost’s all hollow, so full of anguish was I at the thought of several hours of weary waiting in such awesome suspense.

I was not sure at what time the daylight would appear, and bitterly regretted not gathering useful information about sunrise, tides, and such things, instead of listening to the foolish gossip of Uncle Peter on the hill-top.

Minute after minute dragged slowly on, and I was just thinking that I should be obliged to shout “Fire!” as the only means of relief in my power, when a stealthy step under the window gave me a new sensation.

This was a start, not a scare, for the new visitor was a human foe, and I had little fear of such, being possessed of good lungs, strong arms, and a Roman dagger nearly as big as a carving-knife. That step broke the spell, and, creeping noiselessly to the window, I peeped out to see a dark figure coming up the stem of the tall tree close by, hand over hand, like a sailor or a monkey.

“Two can play at that game, my friend; you scare me, and I’ll scare you;” and with an actual sense of relief in breaking the oppressive silence, I suddenly flung up the curtain, and, leaning out, brandished my dagger with what I intended to be an awe-inspiring screech, but, owing to the flutter of my breath, the effort ended in a curious mixture of howl and bray.

A most effective sound nevertheless; for the rascal dropped as if shot, and, with one upward glance at the white figure dimly seen in the starlight, fled as if a legion of goblins were at his heels.

“What next?” thought I, wondering whether tragedy or comedy would close this eventful night.

I sat and waited, chilly, but valiant, while the weird sounds went on within, and silence reigned without, till the cheerful crow of the punctual “cockadoo,” as Margie called him, announced the dawn and laid the ghosts. A red glow in the east banished my last fear, and, wrapping the drapery of my couch about me, I soon lay down to quiet slumber, quite worn out.

The sun shining in my face waked me; a bell ringing spasmodically warned me to hurry, and a childish voice calling out, “Bet-fast is most weady, Miss Wee,” assured me that sweet little spirits haunted the cottage as well as ghostly ones.

As I left my room to join Margie, who was waiting in the porch, and looking like a rosy morning-glory half-way up the woodbine trellis, I saw two things which caused me to feel that the horrors of the night were not all imaginary.

Just outside the back bedroom door was a damp place, as if that part of the floor had been newly washed; and when, goaded by curiosity, I peeped through the keyhole of the haunted chamber, my eye distinctly saw an open razor lying on a dusty table.

My vision was limited to that one object, but it was quite enough, and I went up the hill brooding darkly over the secret hidden in my breast. I longed to tell some one, but was ashamed, and, when asked why so pale and absent-minded, I answered, with a gloomy smile, —

"It is the clams."

All day I hid my sufferings pretty well, but as night approached, and I thought of another lonely vigil in the haunted cottage, my heart began to fail, and, when we sat telling stories in the dusk, a brilliant idea came into my head.

I would relate my ghost story, and rouse the curiosity of the listeners to such a pitch that some of them would offer to share my quarters, in hopes of seeing the spirit of the restless Tucker.

Cheered by this delusive fancy, when my turn came I made a thrilling tale of the night's adventures, and, having worked my audience up to a flattering state of excitement, paused for applause.

It came in a most unexpected form, however, for Mrs. Grant burst out laughing, and the two boys, Johnny and Joe, rolled off the piazza in convulsions of merriment.

Much disgusted at this unseemly demonstration, I demanded the cause of it, and involuntarily joined in the general shout when Mrs. Grant demolished my ghost by informing me that Bezee Tucker lived, died in, and haunted the tumble-down house at the *other* end of the lane.

"Then who or what made those mysterious noises?" I asked, relieved but rather nettled at the downfall of my romance.

"My brother Seth," replied Mrs. Grant, still laughing. "I thought you might be afraid to be there all alone, so he slipped into the bedroom, and I forgot to tell you. He's a powerful snorer, and that's one of the awful sounds. The other was the dripping of salt water; for you wanted some, and the girl got it in a leaky pail. Seth wiped up the slops when he came out early in the morning."

I said nothing about the keyhole view of the harmless razor, but, feeling that I did deserve some credit for my heroic reception of the burglar, I mildly asked if it was the custom in York for men as well as turkeys to roost in trees.

An explosion from the boys extinguished my last hope of glory, for as soon as he could speak Joe answered, unable to resist the joke, though telling it betrayed his own transgressions.

"Johnny planned to be up awful early, and pick the last cherries off that tree. I wanted to get ahead of him, so I sneaked down before light to humbug him, for I was going a-fishing, and we have to be off by four.”

“Did you get your cherries?” I asked, bound to have some of the laugh on my side.

“Guess I didn’t,” grumbled Joe, rubbing his knees, while Johnny added, with an exulting chuckle, —

“He got a horrid scare and a right good scraping, for he didn’t know any one was down there. Couldn’t go fishing either, he was so lame, and I had the cherries after all. Served him right, didn’t it?”

No answer was necessary, for the two lads indulged in a friendly scuffle among the hay-cocks, while Mrs. Grant went off to repeat the tale in the kitchen, whence the sound of a muffled roar soon assured me that Seth was enjoying the joke as well as the rest of us.

XII.

KITTY’S CATTLE SHOW.

Little Kitty was an orphan, and she lived in the poor-house, where she ran errands, tended babies, and was everybody’s servant. A droll, happy-hearted child, who did her best to be good, and was never tired of hoping that something pleasant would happen.

She had often heard of Cattle Shows, but had never been to one, though she lived in a town where there was one every year.

As October came, and people began to get ready for the show, Kitty was seized with a strong desire to go, and asked endless questions about it of old Sam, who lived in the house.

“Did you say anybody could go in for nothing if they took something to show?” she asked.

“Yes; and them that has the best fruit, or cows, or butter, or whatever it is, they gets a premium,” said Sam, chopping away.

“What’s a primmynum?” asked Kitty, forgetting to pick up chips, in her interest.

“It’s money; some gets a lot, and some only a dollar, or so.”

“I wish I had something nice to show, but I don’t own anything but puss,” and the little girl stroked the plump, white kitten that was frisking all over her.

“Better send her; she’s pretty enough to fetch a prize anywheres,” said Sam, who was fond of both Kittys.

“Do they have cats there?” asked the child, soberly.

“Ought to, if they don’t, for, if cats aint cattle, I don’t see what they be,” and old Sam laughed, as if he had made a joke.

“I mean to take her and see the show, any way, for that will be splendid, even if she don’t get any money! O, puss, will you go, and behave well, and get a primmynum for me, so I can buy a book of stories?” cried Kitty, upsetting her basket in her sudden skip at the fine plan.

Puss turned a somersault, raced after a chicken, and then rushed up her mistress’ back, and, perching demurely on her shoulder, peeped into her face, as if asking if pranks like these wouldn’t win a prize anywhere.

“You are going to take Mr. Green’s hens for him; can’t I go with you? I won’t be any trouble, and I do so want to see the fun,” added Kitty, after thinking over her plan a few minutes.

Now, Sam meant to take her, but had not told her so yet, and now, being a waggish old fellow, he thought he would let her take her cat, for the joke of it, so he said soberly, —

“Yes, I’ll tuck you in somewheres, and you’d better put puss into the blackbird’s old cage, else she will get scared, and run away. You stand it among the chicken-coops, and folks will admire her, I aint a doubt.”

Innocent little Kitty was in raptures at the prospect, though the people in the house laughed at her. But she firmly believed it was all right, and made her preparations with solemn care.

The old cage was scrubbed till the wires shone, then she trimmed it up with evergreen, and put a bed of scarlet leaves for snowy puss to lie on. Puss was washed, and combed, and decked with a blue bow on the grand day, and, when she had been persuaded to enter her pretty prison, the effect was charming.

A happier little lass was seldom seen than Kitty when, dressed in her clean, blue check frock, and the old hat, with a faded ribbon, she rode away with Sam; and behind, among the hen-coops, was Miss Puss, much excited by the clucking and fluttering of her fellow-travellers.

When the show grounds were reached, Kitty thought the bustle and the noise quite as interesting as the cattle; and when, after putting his poultry in its place, Sam led her up into the great hall where the fruit and flowers were, she began to imagine that the fairy tales were coming true.

While she stood staring at some very astonishing worsted-work pictures, a lady, who was arranging fruit near by, upset a basket of fine peaches, and they rolled away under tables and chairs.

“I’ll pick ‘em up, ma’am,” cried Kitty, who loved to be useful; and down she went on her hands and knees, and carefully picked up every runaway.

“What is your name, my obliging little girl?” asked the lady, as she brushed up the last yellow peach.

“Kitty; and I live at the poor-house; and I never saw a Cattle Show before, ‘cause I didn’t have any thing to bring,” said the child, feeling as important with her cat as a whole agricultural society.

“What did you bring, — patchwork?”

“O, no, ma’am, a lovely cat, and she is down stairs with the hens, — all white, with blue eyes and a blue bow,” cried Kitty.

“I want to see her,” said a little girl, popping her head up from behind the table, where she had bashfully hidden from the stranger.

The lady consented, and the children went away together.

While they were gone, Sam came to find his little friend, and the kind lady, amused at the cat story, asked about the child.

“She aint no friends but me and the kitten, so I thought I’d give the poor little soul a bit of pleasure. The quarter I'll get for fetching Green's hens will get Kitty some dinner, and a book maybe, or something to remember Cattle Show by. Shouldn't wonder if I earned a trifle more doing chores round to-day; if so, I shall give it to her for a premium, 'cause I fetched the cat for fun, and wouldn't like to disappoint the child."

As Sam laughed, and rubbed his rough hands over the joke of surprising Kitty, the lady looked at his kind old face, and resolved to give him a pleasure, too, and of the sort he liked.

She was rich and generous, and, when her little girl came back, begging her to buy the lovely kitten, she said she would, and put five dollars into Sam's hands, telling him that was Kitty's premium, to be used in buying clothes and comforts for the motherless child.

Kitty was quite willing to sell puss, for five dollars seemed a splendid fortune to her. Such a happy day as that was, for she saw everything, had a good dinner, bought "Babes in the Wood" of a peddler, and, best of all, made friends.

Miss Puss was brought up by her new mistress, and put on a table among the flowers, where the pretty cage and the plump, tricksy kitten attracted much attention, for the story was told, and the little girl's droll contribution much laughed over.

But the poor-house people didn't laugh, for they were so surprised and delighted at this unexpected success that they were never tired of talking about Kitty's Cattle Show.

XIII.

WHAT BECOMES OF THE PINS.

Miss Ellen was making a new pincushion, and a very pretty one it promised to be, for she had much taste, and spent half her time embroidering chair-covers, crocheting tidies, and all sorts of dainty trifles. Her room was full of them; and she often declared that she did wish some one would invent a new sort of fancy-work, since she had tried all the old kinds till she was tired of them. Painting china, carving wood, button-holing butterflies and daisies onto Turkish towelling, and making peacock-feather trimming, amused her for a time; but as she was not very successful she soon gave up trying these branches, and wondered if she would not take a little plain sewing for a change.

The old cushion stood on her table beside the new one; which was ready for its trimming of lace and ribbon. A row of delicate new pins also lay waiting to adorn the red satin mound, and in the old blue one still remained several pins that had evidently seen hard service.

Miss Ellen was putting a dozen needles into her book, having just picked them out of the old cushion, and, as she quilted them through the flannel leaves, she said half aloud, —

“It is very evident where the needles go, but I really do wish I knew what becomes of the pins.”

“I can tell you,” answered a small, sharp voice, as a long brass pin tried to straighten itself up in the middle of a faded blue cornflower, evidently prepared to address the meeting.

Miss Ellen stared much surprised, for she had used this big pin a good deal lately, but never heard it speak before. As she looked at it she saw for the first time that its head had a tiny face, with silvery hair, two merry eyes, and a wee mouth out of which came the metallic little voice that pierced her ear, small as it was.

“Dear me!” she said; then added politely, “if you can tell I should be very happy to hear, for it has long been a great mystery, and no one could explain it.”

The old pin tried to sit erect, and the merry eye twinkled as it went on like a garrulous creature, glad to talk after long silence: —

“Men make many wonderful discoveries, my dear, but they have never found that out, and never will, because we belong to women, and only a feminine ear can hear us, a feminine mind understand our mission, or sympathize with our trials, experiences, and triumphs. For we have all these as well as human beings, and there really is not much difference between us when we come to look into the matter."

This was such a curious statement that Miss Ellen forgot her work to listen intently, and all the needles fixed their eyes on the audacious pin. Not a whit abashed it thus continued: —

"I am called 'Granny' among my friends, because I have had a long and eventful life. I am hearty and well, however, in spite of this crick in my back, and hope to serve you a good while yet, for you seem to appreciate me, stout and ordinary as I look.

"Yes, my dear, pins and people *are* alike, and that rusty darning-needle need not stare so rudely, for I shall prove what I say. We are divided into classes by birth and constitution, and each can do much in its own sphere. I am a shawl pin, and it would be foolish in me to aspire to the duties of those dainty lace pins made to fasten a collar. I am contented with my lot, however, and, being of a strong make and enterprising spirit, have had many adventures, some perils, and great satisfactions since I left the factory long ago. I well remember how eagerly I looked about me when the paper in which I lived, with some hundreds of relations, was hung up in a shop window, to display our glittering ranks and tempt people to buy. At last a purchaser came, a dashing young lady who bought us with several other fancy articles, and carried us away in a smart little bag, humming and talking to herself, in what I thought a very curious way.

"When we were taken out I was all in a flutter to see where I was and what would happen next. There were so many of us, I could hardly hope to go first, for I was in the third row, and most people take us in order. But Cora was a hasty, careless soul, and pulled us out at random, so I soon found myself stuck up in a big untidy cushion, with every sort of pin you can imagine. Such a gay and giddy set I never saw, and really, my dear, their ways and conversation were quite startling to an ignorant young thing like me. Pearl, coral, diamond, jet, gold, and silver heads, were all around me as well as vulgar brass knobs, jaunty black pins, good for nothing as they snap at the least strain, and my own relations, looking eminently neat and respectable among this theatrical rabble. For I will not disguise from you, Miss Ellen, that my first mistress was an actress, and my life a very gay one at the beginning. Merry, kind, and careless was the pretty Cora, and I am bound to confess I enjoyed myself immensely, for I was taken by chance with half a dozen friends to pin up the folds of her velvet train and mantle, in a fairy spectacle where she played the queen. It was very splendid, and, snugly settled among the soft folds, I saw it all, and probably felt that I too had my part; humble as it was, it was faithfully performed, and I never once deserted my post for six weeks.

"Among the elves who went flitting about with silvery wings and spangled robes was one dear child who was the good genius of the queen, and was always fluttering near her, so I could not help seeing and loving the dear creature. She danced and sung, came out of flowers, swung down from trees, popped up from the lower regions, and finally, when all the queen's troubles are over, flew away on a golden cloud, smiling through a blaze of red light, and dropping roses as she vanished.

"When the play ended, I used to see her in an old dress, a thin shawl, and shabby hat, go limping home with a tired-looking woman who dressed the girls.

"I thought a good deal about 'Little Viola,' as they called her, — though her real name was Sally, I believe, — and one dreadful night I played a heroic part, and thrill now when I remember it."

"Go on, please, I long to know," said Miss Ellen, dropping the needle-book into her lap, and leaning forward to listen better.

"One evening the theatre took fire," continued the old pin impressively. "I don't know how, but all of a sudden there was a great uproar, smoke, flames, water pouring, people running frantically about, and such a wild panic I lost my small wits for a time. When I recovered them, I found Cora was leaning from a high window, with something wrapped closely in the velvet mantle that I pinned upon the left shoulder just under a paste buckle that only sparkled while *I* did all the work.

"A little golden head lay close by me, and a white face looked up from the crimson folds, but the sweet eyes were shut, the lips were drawn with pain, a horrible odor of burnt clothes came up to me, and the small hand that clutched Cora's neck was all blistered with the cruel fire which would have devoured the child if my brave mistress had not rescued her at the risk of her own life. *She* could have escaped at first, but she heard Sally cry to her through the blinding smoke, and went to find and rescue her. I dimly recalled that, and pressed closer to the white shoulder, full of pride and affection for the kind soul whom I had often thought too gay and giddy to care for anything but pleasure.

"Now she was calling to the people in the street to put up a ladder, and, as she leaned and called, I could see the crowds far down, the smoke and flame bursting out below, and hear the hiss of water as it fell upon the blazing walls. It was a most exciting moment, as we hung there, watching the gallant men fix the long ladder, and one come climbing up till we could see his brave face, and hear him shout cheerily, —

"'Swing from the window-sill, I'll catch you.'

"But Cora answered, as she showed the little yellow head that shone in the red glare, —

"'No, save the child first!'

"'Drop her then, and be quick: it's hot work here,' and the man held up his arms with a laugh, as the flames licked out below as if to eat away the frail support he stood on.

"All in one breathless moment, Cora had torn off the mantle, wrapped the child in it, bound her girdle about it, and finding the gaudy band would not tie, caught out the first pin that came to hand, and fastened it. *I* was that pin; and I felt that the child's life almost depended upon me, for as the precious bundle dropped into the man's hands he caught it by the cloak, and, putting it on his shoulder, went swiftly down. The belt strained, the velvet tore, I felt myself bending with the weight, and expected every minute to see the child slip, and fall on the stones below. But I held fast, I drove my point deeply in, I twisted myself round so that even the bend should be a help, and I called to the man, 'Hold tight, I'm trying my best, but what can one pin do!'

"Of course he did not hear me, but I really believe my desperate efforts were of some use; for, we got safely down, and were hurried away to the hospital where other poor souls had already gone.

"The good nurse who undid that scorched, drenched, and pitiful bundle, stuck me in her shawl, and resting there, I saw the poor child laid in a little bed, her burns skilfully cared for, and her scattered senses restored by tender words and motherly kisses. How glad I was to hear that she would live, and still more rejoiced to learn next day that Cora was near by, badly burned but not in danger, and anxious to see the child she had saved.

"Nurse Benson took the little thing in her arms to visit my poor mistress, and I went too. But alas! I never should have known the gay and blooming girl of the day before. Her face and hands were terribly burnt, and she would never again be able to play the lovely queen on any stage, for her fresh beauty was forever lost.

"Hard days for all of us; I took my share of trouble with the rest, though I only suffered from the strain to my back. Nurse Benson straightened me out and kept me in use, so I saw much of pain and patience in that great house, because the little gray shawl which I fastened covered a tender heart, and on that motherly bosom many aching heads found rest, many weary creatures breathed their last, and more than one unhappy soul learned to submit.

"Among these last was poor Cora, for it was very hard to give up beauty, health, and the life she loved, so soon. Yet I do not think she ever regretted the sacrifice when she saw the grateful child well and safe, for little Sally was her best comforter, and through the long weeks she lay there half blind and suffering, the daily visit of the little one cheered her more than anything else.

The poor mother was lost in the great fire, and Cora adopted the orphan as her own, and surely she had a right to what she had so dearly bought.

"They went away together at last, one quite well and strong again, the other a sad wreck, but a better woman for the trial, I think, and she carried comfort with her. Poor little Sally led her, a faithful guide, a tender nurse, a devoted daughter to her all her life."

Here the pin paused, out of breath, and Miss Ellen shook a bright drop off the lace that lay in her lap, as she said in a tone of real interest, —

"What happened next? How long did you stay in the hospital?"

"I stayed a year, for Nurse used me one day to pin up a print at the foot of a poor man's bed, and he took such comfort in it they let it hang till he died. A lovely picture of a person who held out his arms to all the suffering and oppressed, and they gathered about him to be comforted and saved. The forlorn soul had led a wicked life, and now lay dying a long and painful death, but something in that divine face taught him to hope for pardon, and when no eye but mine saw him in the lonely nights he wept, and prayed, and struggled to repent. I think he was forgiven, for when at last he lay dead a smile was on his lips that never had been there before. Then the print was taken down, and I was used to pin up a bundle of red flannel by one of the women, and for months I lay in a dark chest, meditating on the lessons I had already learned.

"Suddenly I was taken out, and when a queer round pin-ball of the flannel had been made by a nice old lady, I was stuck in it with a party of fat needles, and a few of my own race, all with stout bodies and big heads.

"'The dear boy is clumsy with his fingers, and needs strong things to use,' said the old lady, as she held the tomato cushion in both hands and kissed it before she put it into a soldier's 'comfort bag.'

"'Now I shall have a lively time!' I thought, and looked gaily about me, for I liked adventures, and felt that I was sure of them now.

"I cannot begin to tell you all I went through with that boy, for he was brave as a lion and got many hard knocks. We marched, and camped, and fought, and suffered, but we *never* ran away, and when at last a Minie ball came smashing through the red cushion (which Dick often carried in his pocket as a sort of charm to keep him safe, for men seldom use pins), I nearly lost my head, for the stuffing flew out, and we were all knocked about in a dreadful way. The cushion and the old wallet together saved Dick's life, however, for the ball did not reach his brave heart, and the last I saw of him as I fell out of the hasty hand that felt for a wound was a soft look in the brave bright eyes, as he said to himself with a smile, —

"'Dear old mother hasn't lost her boy yet, thank God!'

"A colored lad picked me up, as I lay shining on the grass, and pins being scarce in those parts, gave me to his mammy, who kept me to fasten her turban. Quite a new scene I found, for in the old cabin were a dozen children and their mothers making ready to go North. The men were all away fighting or serving the army, so mammy led the little troop, and they marched off one day following the gay turban like a banner, for she had a valiant soul, and was bound to find safety and freedom for her children at all risks.

"In my many wanderings to and fro, I never made so strange a journey as that one, but I enjoyed it, full of danger, weariness and privation as it was; and every morning when mammy put on the red and yellow handkerchief I was proud to sit aloft on that good gray head, and lead the forlorn little army toward a land of liberty.

"We got there at last, and she fell to work over a washtub to earn the bread for the hungry mouths. I had stood by her through all those weary weeks, and did not want to leave her now, but went off pinning a paper round some clean clothes on a Saturday morning.

"'Now I wonder what will come next!' I thought, as Thomas Jefferson, or 'Jeff,' as they called him, went whistling away with the parcel through the streets.

"Crossing the park, he spied a lovely butterfly which had strayed in from the country; caught and pinned it on his hat to please little Dinah when he got home. The pretty creature soon writhed its delicate life away, but its beauty attracted the eye of a pale girl hurrying along with a roll of work under her arm.

"'Will you sell me that?' she asked, and Jeff gladly consented, wondering what she would do with it. So did I, but when we got to her room I soon saw, for she pinned the impaled butterfly against a bit of blue paper, and painted it so well that its golden wings seemed to quiver as they did in life. A very poor place it was, but full of lovely things, and I grew artistic with just looking about me at the pictures on the walls, the flowers blooming on plates and panels, birds and insects kept for copies, and gay bits of stuff used as back-grounds.

"But more beautiful than anything she made was the girl's quiet, busy life alone in the big city; for, she was hoping to be an artist, and worked day and night to compass her desire. So poor, but so happy, I used to wonder why no one helped her and kept her from such hard, yet patient, waiting. But no one did, and I could watch her toiling away as I held the butterfly against the wall, feeling as if it was a symbol of herself, beating her delicate wings in that close place till her heart was broken, by the cruel fate that held her there when she should have been out in the free sunshine. But she found a good customer for her pretty work, in a rich lady who had nothing to do but amuse herself, and spent much time and money in fancy-work.

"I know all about it; for, one day an order came from the great store where her designs were often bought, and she was very happy painting some purple pansies upon velvet, and she copied her yellow butterfly to float above them.

"The poor insect was very dry, and crumbled at a touch, so my task there was done, and as my mistress rolled up the packet, she took me to fasten it securely, singing as she did so, for every penny was precious.

"We all went together to the rich lady, and she embroidered the flowers on a screen very like that one yonder. I thought she would throw me away, I was so battered now, but she took a fancy to use me in various ways about her canvas work, and I lived with her all winter. A kind lady, my dear, but I often wished I could suggest to her better ways of spending her life than everlasting fancy-work. She never seemed to see the wants of those about her, never lent an ear to the poor, or found delight in giving of her abundance to those who had little, to brighten their lives; but sighed because she had nothing to do when the world was full of work, and she blessed with so many good gifts to use and to enjoy. I hope she will see her mistake some day, and not waste all her life on trifles, else she will regret it sadly by and by."

Here the pin paused with a keen glance at Miss Ellen, who had suddenly begun to sew with a bright color in her cheeks, for the purple pansies were on the screen that stood before her fire-place, and she recognized the portrait of herself in that last description. But she did not fancy being lectured by a pin, so she asked with a smile as she plaited up her lace, —

"That is all very interesting, but you have not yet told me what becomes of the pins, Granny."

"Pins, like people, shape their own lives, in a great measure, my dear, and go to their reward when they are used up. The good ones sink into the earth and turn to silver, to come forth again in a new and precious form. The bad ones crumble away to nothing in cracks and dust heaps, with no hope of salvation, unless some human hand lifts them up and gives them a chance to try again. Some are lazy, and slip out of sight to escape service, some are too sharp, and prick and scratch wherever they are. Others are poor, weak things, who bend up and lose their heads as soon as they are used. Some obtrude themselves on all occasions, and some are never to be found in times of need. All have the choice to wear out or to rust out. I chose the former, and have had a useful, happy life so far. I'm not as straight as I once was, but I'm bright still, my point is sharp, my head firm, and age has not weakened me much, I hope, but made me wiser, better, and more contented to do my duty wherever I am, than when I left my native paper long ago."

Before Miss Ellen could express her respect for the worthy old pin, a dismal groan was heard from the blue cushion, and a small voice croaked aloud, —

"Alas, alas, I chose to rust out, and here I am, a miserable, worthless thing, whom no one can use or care for. Lift the ruffle, and behold a sad contrast to the faithful, honest, happy Granny, who has told us such a varied tale."

"Bless me, what possesses everything to-day!" exclaimed Miss Ellen, looking under the frill of the old cushion to see who was speaking now. There to be sure she found a pin hidden away, and so rusty that she could hardly pull it out. But it came creaking forth at the third tug, and when it was set up beside Granny, she cried out in her cheery way, —

"Try Dr. Emery, he can cure most cases of rust, and it is never too late to mend, neighbor."

"Too late for me!" sighed the new comer. "The rust of idleness has eaten into my vitals while I lay in my silken bed, and my chance is gone forever. I was bright, and strong, and sharp once, but I feared work and worry, and I hid, growing duller, dimmer, and more useless every day. I am good for nothing, throw me away, and let the black pins mourn for a wasted life."

"No," said Miss Ellen, "you are not useless, for you two shall sit together in my new cushion, a warning to me, as well as to the other pins, to choose the right way in time, and wear out with doing our duty, rather than rust out as so many do. Thank you, Granny, for your little lecture. I will not forget it, but go at once and find that poor girl, and help her all I can. Rest here, you good old soul, and teach these little things to follow your example."

As she spoke, Miss Ellen set the two pins in the middle of the red satin cushion, stuck the smaller pins round them, and hastened to put on her shawl lest something should prevent her from going.

"Take me with you; I'm not tired, I love to work! use me, dear mistress, and let me help in the good work!" cried Granny, with a lively skip that sent her out upon the bureau.

So Miss Ellen pinned her shawl with the old pin instead of the fine brooch she had in her hand, and they went gaily away together, leaving the rusty one to bemoan itself, and all the little ones to privately resolve that they would not hide away from care and labor, but take their share bravely and have a good record to show when they went, at last where the good pins go.

THE END.

AUNT JO’S SCRAP-BAG VOLUME 6

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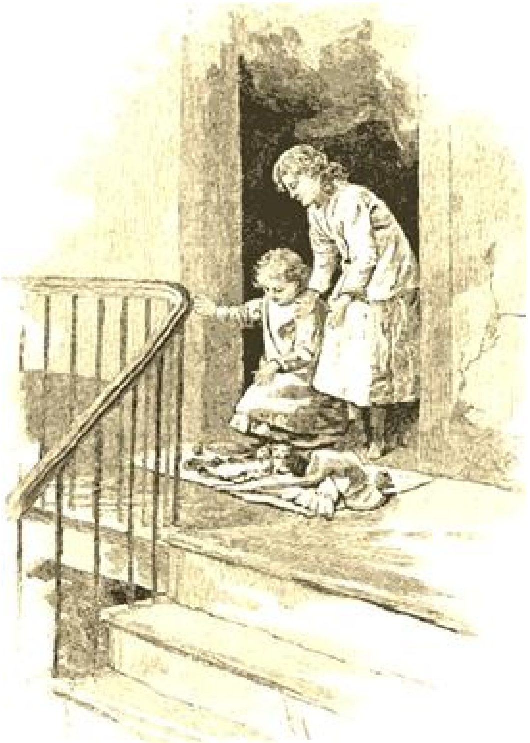

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

Dolly opened the door, and started back with a cry of astonishment at the lovely spectacle before her.

I.

AN OLD-FASHIONED THANKSGIVING.

Sixty years ago, up among the New Hampshire hills, lived Farmer Bassett, with a house full of sturdy sons and daughters growing up about him. They were poor in money, but rich in land and love, for the wide acres of wood, corn, and pasture land fed, warmed, and clothed the flock, while mutual patience, affection, and courage made the old farm-house a very happy home.

November had come; the crops were in, and barn, buttery, and bin were overflowing with the harvest that rewarded the summer's hard work. The big kitchen was a jolly place just now, for in the great fireplace roared a cheerful fire; on the walls hung garlands of dried apples, onions, and corn; up aloft from the beams shone crook-necked squashes, juicy hams, and dried venison — for in those days deer still haunted the deep forests, and hunters flourished. Savory smells were in the air; on the crane hung steaming kettles, and down among the red embers copper sauce-pans simmered, all suggestive of some approaching feast.

A white-headed baby lay in the old blue cradle that had rocked seven other babies, now and then lifting his head to look out, like a round, full moon, then subsided to kick and crow contentedly, and suck the rosy apple he had no teeth to bite. Two small boys sat on the wooden settle shelling corn for popping, and picking out the biggest nuts from the goodly store their own hands had gathered in October. Four young girls stood at the long dresser, busily chopping meat, pounding spice, and slicing apples; and the tongues of Tilly, Prue, Roxy, and Rhody went as fast as their hands. Farmer Bassett, and Eph, the oldest boy, were "chorin' 'round" outside, for Thanksgiving was at hand, and all must be in order for that time-honored day.

To and fro, from table to hearth, bustled buxom Mrs. Bassett, flushed and floury, but busy and blithe as the queen bee of this busy little hive should be.

"I do like to begin seasonable and have things to my mind. Thanksgivin' dinners can't be drove, and it does take a sight of victuals to fill all these hungry stomicks," said the good woman, as she gave a vigorous stir to the great kettle of cider apple-sauce, and cast a glance of housewifely pride at the fine array of pies set forth on the buttery shelves.

"Only one more day and then it will be time to eat. I didn't take but one bowl of hasty pudding this morning, so I shall have plenty of room when the nice things come," confided Seth to Sol, as he cracked a large hazel-nut as easily as a squirrel.

“No need of my starvin’ beforehand. *I always* have room enough, and I’d like to have Thanksgiving every day,” answered Solomon, gloating like a young ogre over the little pig that lay near by, ready for roasting.

“Sakes alive, I don’t, boys! It’s a marcy it don’t come but once a year. I should be worn to a thread-paper with all this extra work atop of my winter weavin’ and spinnin’,” laughed their mother, as she plunged her plump arms into the long bread-trough and began to knead the dough as if a famine was at hand.

Tilly, the oldest girl, a red-cheeked, black-eyed lass of fourteen, was grinding briskly at the mortar, for spices were costly, and not a grain must be wasted. Prue kept time with the chopper, and the twins sliced away at the apples till their little brown arms ached, for all knew how to work, and did so now with a will.

“I think it’s real fun to have Thanksgiving at home. I’m sorry Gran’ma is sick, so we can’t go there as usual, but I like to mess ‘round here, don’t you, girls?” asked Tilly, pausing to take a sniff at the spicy pestle.

“It will be kind of lonesome with only our own folks.” “I like to see all the cousins and aunts, and have games, and sing,” cried the twins, who were regular little romps, and could run, swim, coast and shout as well as their brothers.

“I don’t care a mite for all that. It will be so nice to eat dinner together, warm and comfortable at home,” said quiet Prue, who loved her own cozy nooks like a cat.

“Come, girls, fly ‘round and get your chores done, so we can clear away for dinner jest as soon as I clap my bread into the oven,” called Mrs. Bassett presently, as she rounded off the last loaf of brown bread which was to feed the hungry mouths that seldom tasted any other.

“Here’s a man comin’ up the hill, lively!” “Guess it’s Gad Hopkins. Pa told him to bring a dezzen oranges, if they warn’t too high!” shouted Sol and Seth, running to the door, while the girls smacked their lips at the thought of this rare treat, and Baby threw his apple overboard, as if getting ready for a new cargo.

But all were doomed to disappointment, for it was not Gad, with the much-desired fruit. It was a stranger, who threw himself off his horse and hurried up to Mr. Bassett in the yard, with some brief message that made the farmer drop his ax and look so sober that his wife guessed at once some bad news had come; and crying, “Mother’s wuss! I know she is!” out ran the good woman, forgetful of the flour on her arms and the oven waiting for its most important batch.

The man said old Mr. Chadwick, down to Keene, stopped him as he passed, and told him to tell Mrs. Bassett her mother was failin’ fast, and she’d better come to-day. He knew no more, and having delivered his errand he rode away, saying it looked like snow and he must be jogging, or he wouldn’t get home till night.

"We must go right off, Eldad. Hitch up, and I'll be ready in less'n no time," said Mrs. Bassett, wasting not a minute in tears and lamentations, but pulling off her apron as she went in, with her mind in a sad jumble of bread, anxiety, turkey, sorrow, haste, and cider apple-sauce.

A few words told the story, and the children left their work to help her get ready, mingling their grief for "Gran'ma" with regrets for the lost dinner.

"I'm dreadful sorry, dears, but it can't be helped. I couldn't cook nor eat no way, now, and if that blessed woman gets better sudden, as she has before, we'll have cause for thanksgivin', and I'll give you a dinner you won't forget in a hurry," said Mrs. Bassett, as she tied on her brown silk pumpkin-hood, with a sob for the good old mother who had made it for her.

Not a child complained after that, but ran about helpfully, bringing moccasins, heating the footstone, and getting ready for a long drive, because Gran'ma lived twenty miles away, and there were no railroads in those parts to whisk people to and fro like magic. By the time the old yellow sleigh was at the door, the bread was in the oven, and Mrs. Bassett was waiting, with her camlet cloak on, and the baby done up like a small bale of blankets.

"Now, Eph, you must look after the cattle like a man, and keep up the fires, for there's a storm brewin', and neither the children nor dumb critters must suffer," said Mr. Bassett, as he turned up the collar of his rough coat and put on his blue mittens, while the old mare shook her bells as if she preferred a trip to Keene to hauling wood all day.

"Tilly, put extry comfortables on the beds to-night, the wind is so searchin' up chamber. Have the baked beans and Injun-puddin' for dinner, and whatever you do, don't let the boys git at the mince-pies, or you'll have them down sick. I shall come back the minute I can leave Mother. Pa will come to-morrer, anyway, so keep snug and be good. I depend on you, my darter; use your jedgment, and don't let nothin' happen while Mother's away."

"Yes'm, yes'm — good-bye, good-bye!" called the children, as Mrs. Bassett was packed into the sleigh and driven away, leaving a stream of directions behind her.

Eph, the sixteen-year-old boy, immediately put on his biggest boots, assumed a sober, responsible manner, and surveyed his little responsibilities with a paternal air, drolly like his father's. Tilly tied on her mother's bunch of keys, rolled up the sleeves of her homespun gown, and began to order about the younger girls. They soon forgot poor Granny, and found it great fun to keep house all alone, for Mother seldom left home, but ruled her family in the good old-fashioned way. There were no servants, for the little daughters were Mrs.

Bassett’s only maids, and the stout boys helped their father, all working happily together with no wages but love; learning in the best manner the use of the heads and hands with which they were to make their own way in the world.

The few flakes that caused the farmer to predict bad weather soon increased to a regular snow-storm, with gusts of wind, for up among the hills winter came early and lingered long. But the children were busy, gay, and warm in-doors, and never minded the rising gale nor the whirling white storm outside.

Tilly got them a good dinner, and when it was over the two elder girls went to their spinning, for in the kitchen stood the big and little wheels, and baskets of wool-rolls, ready to be twisted into yarn for the winter’s knitting, and each day brought its stint of work to the daughters, who hoped to be as thrifty as their mother.

Eph kept up a glorious fire, and superintended the small boys, who popped corn and whittled boats on the hearth; while Roxy and Rhody dressed corn-cob dolls in the settle corner, and Bose, the brindled mastiff, lay on the braided mat, luxuriously warming his old legs. Thus employed, they made a pretty picture, these rosy boys and girls, in their homespun suits, with the rustic toys or tasks which most children nowadays would find very poor or tiresome.

Tilly and Prue sang, as they stepped to and fro, drawing out the smoothly twisted threads to the musical hum of the great spinning-wheels. The little girls chattered like magpies over their dolls and the new bed-spread they were planning to make, all white dimity stars on a blue calico ground, as a Christmas present to Ma. The boys roared at Eph’s jokes, and had rough and tumble games over Bose, who didn’t mind them in the least; and so the afternoon wore pleasantly away.

At sunset the boys went out to feed the cattle, bring in heaps of wood, and lock up for the night, as the lonely farm-house seldom had visitors after dark. The girls got the simple supper of brown bread and milk, baked apples, and a doughnut all ‘round as a treat. Then they sat before the fire, the sisters knitting, the brothers with books or games, for Eph loved reading, and Sol and Seth never failed to play a few games of Morris with barley corns, on the little board they had made themselves at one corner of the dresser.

“Read out a piece,” said Tilly, from Mother’s chair, where she sat in state, finishing off the sixth woolen sock she had knit that month.

“It’s the old history book, but here’s a bit you may like, since it’s about our folks,” answered Eph, turning the yellow page to look at a picture of two quaintly dressed children in some ancient castle.

“Yes, read that. I always like to hear about the Lady Matildy I was named for, and Lord Bassett, Pa’s great-great-great-grandpa. He’s only a farmer now, but it’s nice to know that we were somebody two or three hundred years ago,” said Tilly, bridling and tossing her curly head as she fancied the Lady Matilda might have done.

“Don’t read the queer words, ‘cause we don’t understand ‘em. Tell it,” commanded Roxy, from the cradle, where she was drowsily cuddled with Rhody.

“Well, a long time ago, when Charles the First was in prison, Lord Bassett was a true friend to him,” began Eph, plunging into his story without delay. “The lord had some papers that would have hung a lot of people if the king’s enemies got hold of ‘em, so when he heard one day, all of a sudden, that soldiers were at the castle-gate to carry him off, he had just time to call his girl to him, and say: ‘I may be going to my death, but I won’t betray my master. There is no time to burn the papers, and I can not take them with me; they are hidden in the old leathern chair where I sit. No one knows this but you, and you must guard them till I come or send you a safe messenger to take them away. Promise me to be brave and silent, and I can go without fear.’ You see, he wasn’t afraid to die, but he *was* to seem a traitor. Lady Matildy promised solemnly, and the words were hardly out of her mouth when the men came in, and her father was carried away a prisoner and sent off to the Tower.

“But she didn’t cry; she just called her brother, and sat down in that chair, with her head leaning back on those papers, like a queen, and waited while the soldiers hunted the house over for ‘em: wasn’t that a smart girl?” cried Tilly, beaming with pride, for she was named for this ancestress, and knew the story by heart.

“I reckon she was scared, though, when the men came swearin’ in and asked her if she knew anything about it. The boy did his part then, for *he* didn’t know, and fired up and stood before his sister; and he says, says he, as bold as a lion: ‘If my lord had told us where the papers be, we would die before we would betray him. But we are children and know nothing, and it is cowardly of you to try to fright us with oaths and drawn swords!’“

As Eph quoted from the book, Seth planted himself before Tilly, with the long poker in his hand, saying, as he flourished it valiantly:

“Why didn’t the boy take his father’s sword and lay about him? I would, if any one was ha’sh to Tilly.”

“You bantam! He was only a bit of a boy, and couldn’t do anything. Sit down and hear the rest of it,” commanded Tilly, with a pat on the yellow head, and a private resolve that Seth should have the largest piece of pie at dinner next day, as reward for his chivalry.

“Well, the men went off after turning the castle out of window, but they said they should come again; so faithful Matildy was full of trouble, and hardly dared to leave the room where the chair stood. All day she sat there, and at night her sleep was so full of fear about it, that she often got up and went to see that all was safe. The servants thought the fright had hurt her wits, and let her be, but Rupert, the boy, stood by her and never was afraid of her queer ways. She was ‘a pious maid,’ the book says, and often spent the long evenings reading the Bible, with her brother by her, all alone in the great room, with no one to help her bear her secret, and no good news of her father. At last, word came that the king was dead and his friends banished out of England. Then the poor children were in a sad plight, for they had no mother, and the servants all ran away, leaving only one faithful old man to help them.”

“But the father did come?” cried Roxy, eagerly.

“You’ll see,” continued Eph, half telling, half reading.

“Matilda was sure he would, so she sat on in the big chair, guarding the papers, and no one could get her away, till one day a man came with her father’s ring and told her to give up the secret. She knew the ring, but would not tell until she had asked many questions, so as to be very sure, and while the man answered all about her father and the king, she looked at him sharply. Then she stood up and said, in a tremble, for there was something strange about the man: ‘Sir, I doubt you in spite of the ring, and I will not answer till you pull off the false beard you wear, that I may see your face and know if you are my father’s friend or foe.’ Off came the disguise, and Matilda found it was my lord himself, come to take them with him out of England. He was very proud of that faithful girl, I guess, for the old chair still stands in the castle, and the name keeps in the family, Pa says, even over here, where some of the Bassetts came along with the Pilgrims.”

“Our Tilly would have been as brave, I know, and she looks like the old picter down to Grandma’s, don’t she, Eph?” cried Prue, who admired her bold, bright sister very much.

“Well, I think you’d do the settin’ part best, Prue, you are so patient. Till would fight like a wild cat, but she can’t hold her tongue worth a cent,” answered Eph; whereat Tilly pulled his hair, and the story ended with a general frolic.

When the moon-faced clock behind the door struck nine, Tilly tucked up the children under the “extry comfortables,” and having kissed them all around, as Mother did, crept into her own nest, never minding the little drifts of snow that sifted in upon her coverlet between the shingles of the roof, nor the storm that raged without.

As if he felt the need of unusual vigilance, old Bose lay down on the mat before the door, and pussy had the warm hearth all to herself. If any late wanderer had looked in at midnight, he would have seen the fire blazing up again, and in the cheerful glow the old cat blinking her yellow eyes, as she sat bolt upright beside the spinning-wheel, like some sort of household goblin, guarding the children while they slept.

When they woke, like early birds, it still snowed, but up the little Bassetts jumped, broke the ice in their pitchers, and went down with cheeks glowing like winter apples, after a brisk scrub and scramble into their clothes. Eph was off to the barn, and Tilly soon had a great kettle of mush ready, which, with milk warm from the cows, made a wholesome breakfast for the seven hearty children.

“Now about dinner,” said the young housekeeper, as the pewter spoons stopped clattering, and the earthen bowls stood empty.

“Ma said, have what we liked, but she didn’t expect us to have a real Thanksgiving dinner, because she won’t be here to cook it, and we don’t know how,” began Prue, doubtfully.

“I can roast a turkey and make a pudding as well as anybody, I guess. The pies are all ready, and if we can’t boil vegetables and so on, we don’t deserve any dinner,” cried Tilly, burning to distinguish herself, and bound to enjoy to the utmost her brief authority.

“Yes, yes!” cried all the boys, “let’s have a dinner anyway; Ma won’t care, and the good victuals will spoil if they ain’t eaten right up.”

“Pa is coming to-night, so we won’t have dinner till late; that will be real genteel and give us plenty of time,” added Tilly, suddenly realizing the novelty of the task she had undertaken.

“Did you ever roast a turkey?” asked Roxy, with an air of deep interest.

“Should you darst to try?” said Rhody, in an awe-stricken tone.

“You will see what I can do. Ma said I was to use my jedgment about things, and I’m going to. All you children have got to do is to keep out of the way, and let Prue and me work. Eph, I wish you’d put a fire in the best room, so the little ones can play in there. We shall want the settin’-room for the table, and I won’t have ‘em pickin’ ‘round when we get things fixed,” commanded Tilly, bound to make her short reign a brilliant one.

“I don’t know about that. Ma didn’t tell us to,” began cautious Eph, who felt that this invasion of the sacred best parlor was a daring step.

“Don’t we always do it Sundays and Thanksgivings? Wouldn’t Ma wish the children kept safe and warm anyhow? Can I get up a nice dinner with four rascals under my feet all the time? Come, now, if you want roast turkey and onions, plum-puddin’ and mince-pie, you’ll have to do as I tell you, and be lively about it.”

Tilly spoke with such spirit, and her last suggestion was so irresistible, that

Eph gave in, and, laughing good-naturedly, tramped away to heat up the best room, devoutly hoping that nothing serious would happen to punish such audacity.

The young folks delightedly trooped in to destroy the order of that prim apartment with housekeeping under the black horse-hair sofa, “horseback riders” on the arms of the best rocking-chair, and an Indian war-dance all over the well-waxed furniture. Eph, finding the society of the peaceful sheep and cows more to his mind than that of two excited sisters, lingered over his chores in the barn as long as possible, and left the girls in peace.

Now Tilly and Prue were in their glory, and as soon as the breakfast things were out of the way, they prepared for a grand cooking-time. They were handy girls, though they had never heard of a cooking-school, never touched a piano, and knew nothing of embroidery beyond the samplers which hung framed in the parlor; one ornamented with a pink mourner under a blue weeping-willow, the other with this pleasing verse, each word being done in a different color, which gave the effect of a distracted rainbow:

“This sampler neat was worked by me, In my twelfth year, Prudence B.”

Both rolled up their sleeves, put on their largest aprons, and got out all the spoons, dishes, pots, and pans they could find, “so as to have everything handy,” as Prue said.

“Now, sister, we’ll have dinner at five; Pa will be here by that time if he is coming to-night, and be so surprised to find us all ready, for he won’t have had any very nice victuals if Gran’ma is so sick,” said Tilly importantly. “I shall give the children a piece at noon” (Tilly meant luncheon); “doughnuts and cheese, with apple-pie and cider will please ‘em. There’s beans for Eph; he likes cold pork, so we won’t stop to warm it up, for there’s lots to do, and I don’t mind saying to you I’m dreadful dubersome about the turkey.”

“It’s all ready but the stuffing, and roasting is as easy as can be. I can baste first rate. Ma always likes to have me, I’m so patient and stiddy, she says,” answered Prue, for the responsibility of this great undertaking did not rest upon her, so she took a cheerful view of things.

“I know, but it’s the stuffin’ that troubles me,” said Tilly, rubbing her round elbows as she eyed the immense fowl laid out on a platter before her. “I don’t know how much I want, nor what sort of yarbs to put in, and he’s so awful big, I’m kind of afraid of him.”

“I ain’t! I fed him all summer, and he never gobbled at *me*. I feel real mean to be thinking of gobbling him, poor old chap,” laughed Prue, patting her departed pet with an air of mingled affection and appetite.

“Well, I’ll get the puddin’ off my mind fust, for it ought to bile all day. Put the big kettle on, and see that the spit is clean, while I get ready."

Prue obediently tugged away at the crane, with its black hooks, from which hung the iron tea-kettle and three-legged pot; then she settled the long spit in the grooves made for it in the tall andirons, and put the dripping-pan underneath, for in those days meat was roasted as it should be, not baked in ovens.

Meantime Tilly attacked the plum-pudding. She felt pretty sure of coming out right, here, for she had seen her mother do it so many times, it looked very easy. So in went suet and fruit; all sorts of spice, to be sure she got the right ones, and brandy instead of wine. But she forgot both sugar and salt, and tied it in the cloth so tightly that it had no room to swell, so it would come out as heavy as lead and as hard as a cannon-ball, if the bag did not burst and spoil it all. Happily unconscious of these mistakes, Tilly popped it into the pot, and proudly watched it bobbing about before she put the cover on and left it to its fate.

"I can't remember what flavorin' Ma puts in," she said, when she had got her bread well soaked for the stuffing. "Sage and onions and apple-sauce go with goose, but I can't feel sure of anything but pepper and salt for a turkey."

"Ma puts in some kind of mint, I know, but I forget whether it is spearmint, peppermint, or penny-royal," answered Prue, in a tone of doubt, but trying to show her knowledge of "yarbs," or, at least, of their names.

"Seems to me it's sweet marjoram or summer savory. I guess we'll put both in, and then we are sure to be right. The best is up garret; you run and get some, while I mash the bread," commanded Tilly, diving into the mess.

Away trotted Prue, but in her haste she got catnip and wormwood, for the garret was darkish, and Prue's little nose was so full of the smell of the onions she had been peeling, that everything smelt of them. Eager to be of use, she pounded up the herbs and scattered the mixture with a liberal hand into the bowl.

"It doesn't smell just right, but I suppose it will when it is cooked," said Tilly, as she filled the empty stomach, that seemed aching for food, and sewed it up with the blue yarn, which happened to be handy. She forgot to tie down his legs and wings, but she set him by till his hour came, well satisfied with her work.

"Shall we roast the little pig, too? I think he'd look nice with a necklace of sausages, as Ma fixed one last Christmas," asked Prue, elated with their success.

"I couldn't do it. I loved that little pig, and cried when he was killed. I should feel as if I was roasting the baby," answered Tilly, glancing toward the buttery where piggy hung, looking so pink and pretty it certainly did seem cruel to eat him.

It took a long time to get all the vegetables ready, for, as the cellar was full, the girls thought they would have every sort. Eph helped, and by noon all was ready for cooking, and the cranberry-sauce, a good deal scorched, was cooling in the lean-to.

Luncheon was a lively meal, and doughnuts and cheese vanished in such quantities that Tilly feared no one would have an appetite for her sumptuous dinner. The boys assured her they would be starving by five o’clock, and Sol mourned bitterly over the little pig that was not to be served up.

“Now you all go and coast, while Prue and I set the table and get out the best chiny,” said Tilly, bent on having her dinner look well, no matter what its other failings might be.

Out came the rough sleds, on went the round hoods, old hats, red cloaks, and moccasins, and away trudged the four younger Bassetts, to disport themselves in the snow, and try the ice down by the old mill, where the great wheel turned and splashed so merrily in the summer-time.

Eph took his fiddle and scraped away to his heart’s content in the parlor, while the girls, after a short rest, set the table and made all ready to dish up the dinner when that exciting moment came. It was not at all the sort of table we see now, but would look very plain and countrified to us, with its green-handled knives and two-pronged steel forks; its red-and-white china, and pewter platters, scoured till they shone, with mugs and spoons to match, and a brown jug for the cider. The cloth was coarse, but white as snow, and the little maids had seen the blue-eyed flax grow, out of which their mother wove the linen they had watched and watered while it bleached in the green meadow. They had no napkins and little silver; but the best tankard and Ma’s few wedding spoons were set forth in state. Nuts and apples at the corners gave an air, and the place of honor was left in the middle for the oranges yet to come.

“Don’t it look beautiful?” said Prue, when they paused to admire the general effect.

“Pretty nice, I think. I wish Ma could see how well we can do it,” began Tilly, when a loud howling startled both girls, and sent them flying to the window. The short afternoon had passed so quickly that twilight had come before they knew it, and now, as they looked out through the gathering dusk, they saw four small black figures tearing up the road, to come bursting in, all screaming at once: “The bear, the bear! Eph, get the gun! He’s coming, he’s coming!”

Eph had dropped his fiddle, and got down his gun before the girls could calm the children enough to tell their story, which they did in a somewhat incoherent manner. “Down in the holler, coastin’, we heard a growl,” began Sol, with his eyes as big as saucers. “I see him fust lookin’ over the wall,” roared Seth, eager to get his share of honor.

“Awful big and shaggy,” quavered Roxy, clinging to Tilly, while Rhody hid in Prue’s skirts, and piped out: “His great paws kept clawing at us, and I was so scared my legs would hardly go.”

“We ran away as fast as we could go, and he come growling after us. He’s awful hungry, and he’ll eat every one of us if he gets in,” continued Sol, looking about him for a safe retreat.

“Oh, Eph, don’t let him eat us,” cried both little girls, flying up stairs to hide under their mother’s bed, as their surest shelter.

“No danger of that, you little geese. I’ll shoot him as soon as he comes. Get out of the way, boys,” and Eph raised the window to get good aim.

“There he is! Fire away, and don’t miss!” cried Seth, hastily following Sol, who had climbed to the top of the dresser as a good perch from which to view the approaching fray.

Prue retired to the hearth as if bent on dying at her post rather than desert the turkey, now “browning beautiful,” as she expressed it. But Tilly boldly stood at the open window, ready to lend a hand if the enemy proved too much for Eph.

All had seen bears, but none had ever come so near before, and even brave Eph felt that the big brown beast slowly trotting up the door-yard was an unusually formidable specimen. He was growling horribly, and stopped now and then as if to rest and shake himself.

“Get the ax, Tilly, and if I should miss, stand ready to keep him off while I load again,” said Eph, anxious to kill his first bear in style and alone; a girl’s help didn’t count.

Tilly flew for the ax, and was at her brother’s side by the time the bear was near enough to be dangerous. He stood on his hind legs, and seemed to sniff with relish the savory odors that poured out of the window.

“Fire, Eph!” cried Tilly, firmly.

“Wait till he rears again. I’ll get a better shot, then,” answered the boy, while Prue covered her ears to shut out the bang, and the small boys cheered from their dusty refuge up among the pumpkins.

But a very singular thing happened next, and all who saw it stood amazed, for suddenly Tilly threw down the ax, flung open the door, and ran straight into the arms of the bear, who stood erect to receive her, while his growlings changed to a loud “Haw, haw!” that startled the children more than the report of a gun.

“It’s Gad Hopkins, tryin’ to fool us!” cried Eph, much disgusted at the loss of his prey, for these hardy boys loved to hunt, and prided themselves on the number of wild animals and birds they could shoot in a year.

“Oh, Gad, how could you scare us so?” laughed Tilly, still held fast in one shaggy arm of the bear, while the other drew a dozen oranges from some deep pocket in the buffalo-skin coat, and fired them into the kitchen with such good aim that Eph ducked, Prue screamed, and Sol and Seth came down much quicker than they went up.

"Wal, you see I got upsot over yonder, and the old horse went home while I was floundering in a drift, so I tied on the buffalers to tote 'em easy, and come along till I see the children playin' in the holler. I jest meant to give 'em a little scare, but they run like partridges, and I kep' up the joke to see how Eph would like this sort of company," and Gad haw-hawed again.

"You'd have had a warm welcome if we hadn't found you out. I'd have put a bullet through you in a jiffy, old chap," said Eph, coming out to shake hands with the young giant, who was only a year or two older than himself.

"Come in and set up to dinner with us. Prue and I have done it all ourselves, and Pa will be along soon, I reckon," cried Tilly, trying to escape.

"Couldn't, no ways. My folks will think I'm dead ef I don't get along home, sence the horse and sleigh have gone ahead empty. I've done my arrant and had my joke; now I want my pay, Tilly," and Gad took a hearty kiss from the rosy cheeks of his "little sweetheart," as he called her. His own cheeks tingled with the smart slap she gave him as she ran away, calling out that she hated bears and would bring her ax next time.

"I ain't afeared; your sharp eyes found me out; and ef you run into a bear's arms you must expect a hug," answered Gad, as he pushed back the robe and settled his fur cap more becomingly.

"I should have known you in a minute if I hadn't been asleep when the girls squalled. You did it well, though, and I advise you not to try it again in a hurry, or you'll get shot," said Eph, as they parted, he rather crestfallen and Gad in high glee.

"My sakes alive — the turkey is burnt one side, and the kettles have biled over so the pies I put to warm are all ashes!" scolded Tilly, as the flurry subsided and she remembered her dinner.

"Well, I can't help it. I couldn't think of victuals when I expected to be eaten alive myself, could I?" pleaded poor Prue, who had tumbled into the cradle when the rain of oranges began.

Tilly laughed, and all the rest joined in, so good humor was restored, and the spirits of the younger ones were revived by sucks from the one orange which passed from hand to hand with great rapidity, while the older girls dished up the dinner. They were just struggling to get the pudding out of the cloth when Roxy called out, "Here's Pa!"

"There's folks with him," added Rhody.

"Lots of 'em! I see two big sleighs chock full," shouted Seth, peering through the dusk.

"It looks like a semintary. Guess Gramma's dead and come up to be buried here," said Sol in a solemn tone. This startling suggestion made Tilly, Prue, and Eph hasten to look out, full of dismay at such an ending of their festival.

"If that is a funeral, the mourners are uncommon jolly," said Eph, drily, as merry voices and loud laughter broke the white silence without.

"I see Aunt Cinthy, and Cousin Hetty — and there's Mose and Amos. I do declare, Pa's bringin' 'em all home to have some fun here," cried Prue, as she recognized one familiar face after another.

"Oh, my patience! Ain't I glad I got dinner, and don't I hope it will turn out good!" exclaimed Tilly, while the twins pranced with delight, and the small boys roared:

"Hooray for Pa! Hooray for Thanksgivin'!"

The cheer was answered heartily, and in came Father, Mother, Baby, aunts and cousins, all in great spirits, and all much surprised to find such a festive welcome awaiting them.

"Ain't Gran'ma dead at all?" asked Sol, in the midst of the kissing and hand-shaking.

"Bless your heart, no! It was all a mistake of old Mr. Chadwick's. He's as deaf as an adder, and when Mrs. Brooks told him Mother was mendin' fast, and she wanted me to come down to-day, certain sure, he got the message all wrong, and give it to the fust person passin' in such a way as to scare me 'most to death, and send us down in a hurry. Mother was sittin' up as chirk as you please, and dreadful sorry you didn't all come."

"So, to keep the house quiet for her, and give you a taste of the fun, your Pa fetched us all up to spend the evenin', and we are goin' to have a jolly time on't, to jedge by the looks of things," said Aunt Cinthy, briskly finishing the tale when Mrs. Bassett paused for want of breath.

"What in the world put it into your head we was comin', and set you to gettin' up such a supper?" asked Mr. Bassett, looking about him, well pleased and much surprised at the plentiful table.

Tilly modestly began to tell, but the others broke in and sang her praises in a sort of chorus, in which bears, pigs, pies, and oranges were oddly mixed. Great satisfaction was expressed by all, and Tilly and Prue were so elated by the commendation of Ma and the aunts, that they set forth their dinner, sure everything was perfect.

But when the eating began, which it did the moment wraps were off, then their pride got a fall; for the first person who tasted the stuffing (it was big Cousin Mose, and that made it harder to bear) nearly choked over the bitter morsel.

"Tilly Bassett, whatever made you put wormwood and catnip in your stuffin'?" demanded Ma, trying not to be severe, for all the rest were laughing, and Tilly looked ready to cry.

"I did it," said Prue, nobly taking all the blame, which caused Pa to kiss her on the spot, and declare that it didn't do a might of harm, for the turkey was all right.

"I never see onions cooked better. All the vegetables is well done, and the dinner a credit to you, my dears," declared Aunt Cinthy, with her mouth full of the fragrant vegetable she praised.

The pudding was an utter failure, in spite of the blazing brandy in which it lay — as hard and heavy as one of the stone balls on Squire Dunkin's great gate. It was speedily whisked out of sight, and all fell upon the pies, which were perfect. But Tilly and Prue were much depressed, and didn't recover their spirits till the dinner was over and the evening fun well under way.

"Blind-man's buff," "Hunt the slipper," "Come, Philander," and other lively games soon set every one bubbling over with jollity, and when Eph struck up "Money Musk" on his fiddle, old and young fell into their places for a dance. All down the long kitchen they stood, Mr. and Mrs. Bassett at the top, the twins at the bottom, and then away they went, heeling and toeing, cutting pigeon-wings, and taking their steps in a way that would convulse modern children with their new-fangled romps called dancing. Mose and Tilly covered themselves with glory by the vigor with which they kept it up, till fat Aunt Cinthy fell into a chair, breathlessly declaring that a very little of such exercise was enough for a woman of her "heft."

Apples and cider, chat and singing, finished the evening, and after a grand kissing all round, the guests drove away in the clear moonlight which came just in time to cheer their long drive.

When the jingle of the last bell had died away, Mr. Bassett said soberly, as they stood together on the hearth: "Children, we have special cause to be thankful that the sorrow we expected was changed into joy, so we'll read a chapter 'fore we go to bed, and give thanks where thanks is due."

Then Tilly set out the light-stand with the big Bible on it, and a candle on each side, and all sat quietly in the fire-light, smiling as they listened with happy hearts to the sweet old words that fit all times and seasons so beautifully.

When the good-nights were over, and the children in bed, Prue put her arm around Tilly and whispered tenderly, for she felt her shake, and was sure she was crying:

"Don't mind about the old stuffin' and puddin', deary — nobody cared, and Ma said we really did do surprisin' well for such young girls."

The laughter Tilly was trying to smother broke out then, and was so infectious, Prue could not help joining her, even before she knew the cause of the merriment.

“I was mad about the mistakes, but don’t care enough to cry. I’m laughing to think how Gad fooled Eph and I found him out. I thought Mose and Amos would have died over it when I told them, it was so funny,” explained Tilly, when she got her breath.

“I was so scared that when the first orange hit me, I thought it was a bullet, and scrabbled into the cradle as fast as I could. It was real mean to frighten the little ones so,” laughed Prue, as Tilly gave a growl.

Here a smart rap on the wall of the next room caused a sudden lull in the fun, and Mrs. Bassett’s voice was heard, saying warningly, “Girls, go to sleep immediate, or you’ll wake the baby.”

“Yes’m,” answered two meek voices, and after a few irrepressible giggles, silence reigned, broken only by an occasional snore from the boys, or the soft scurry of mice in the buttery, taking their part in this old-fashioned Thanksgiving.

II.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

It was a small room, with nothing in it but a bed, two chairs, and a big chest. A few little gowns hung on the wall, and the only picture was the wintry sky, sparkling with stars, framed by the uncurtained window. But the moon, pausing to peep, saw something pretty and heard something pleasant. Two heads in little round nightcaps lay on one pillow, two pairs of wide-awake blue eyes stared up at the light, and two tongues were going like mill clappers.

"I'm so glad we got our shirts done in time! It seemed as if we never should, and I don't think six cents is half enough for a great red flannel thing with four button-holes — do you?" said one little voice, rather wearily.

"No; but then we each made four, and fifty cents is a good deal of money. Are you sorry we didn't keep our quarters for ourselves?" asked the other voice, with an under-tone of regret in it.

"Yes, I am, till I think how pleased the children will be with our tree, for they don't expect anything, and will be so surprised. I wish we had more toys to put on it, for it looks so small and mean with only three or four things."

"It won't hold any more, so I wouldn't worry about it. The toys are very red and yellow, and I guess the babies won't know how cheap they are, but like them as much as if they cost heaps of money."

This was a cheery voice, and as it spoke the four blue eyes turned toward the chest under the window, and the kind moon did her best to light up the tiny tree standing there. A very pitiful little tree it was — only a branch of hemlock in an old flower-pot, propped up with bits of coal, and hung with a few penny toys earned by the patient fingers of the elder sisters, that the little ones should not be disappointed.

But in spite of the magical moonlight the broken branch, with its scanty supply of fruit, looked pathetically poor, and one pair of eyes filled slowly with tears, while the other pair lost their happy look, as if a cloud had come over the sunshine.

"Are you crying, Dolly?"

"Not much, Polly."

"What makes you, dear?"

"I didn't know how poor we were till I saw the tree, and then I couldn't help it," sobbed the elder sister, for at twelve she already knew something of the cares of poverty, and missed the happiness that seemed to vanish out of all their lives when father died.

“It’s dreadful! I never thought we’d have to earn our tree, and only be able to get a broken branch, after all, with nothing on it but three sticks of candy, two squeaking dogs, a red cow, and an ugly bird with one feather in its tail;” and overcome by a sudden sense of destitution, Polly sobbed even more despairingly than Dolly.

“Hush, dear; we must cry softly, or mother will hear, and come up, and then we shall have to tell. You know we said we wouldn’t seem to mind not having any Christmas, she felt so sorry about it.”

“I *must* cry, but I’ll be quiet.”

So the two heads went under the pillow for a few minutes, and not a sound betrayed them as the little sisters cried softly in one another’s arms, lest mother should discover that they were no longer careless children, but brave young creatures trying to bear their share of the burden cheerfully.

When the shower was over, the faces came out shining like roses after rain, and the voices went on again as before.

“Don’t you wish there really was a Santa Claus, who knew what we wanted, and would come and put two silver half-dollars in our stockings, so we could go and see *Puss in Boots* at the Museum to-morrow afternoon?”

“Yes, indeed; but we didn’t hang up any stockings, you know, because mother had nothing to put in them. It does seem as if rich people might think of poor people now and then. Such little bits of things would make us happy, and it couldn’t be much trouble to take two small girls to the play, and give them candy now and then.”

“*I* shall when I’m rich, like Mr. Chrome and Miss Kent. I shall go round every Christmas with a big basket of goodies, and give *all* the poor children some.”

“P’r’aps if we sew ever so many flannel shirts we may be rich by-and-by. I should give mother a new bonnet first of all, for I heard Miss Kent say no lady would wear such a shabby one. Mrs. Smith said fine bonnets didn’t make real ladies. I like her best, but I do want a locket like Miss Kent’s.”

“I should give mother some new rubbers, and then I should buy a white apron, with frills like Miss Kent’s, and bring home nice bunches of grapes and good things to eat, as Mr. Chrome does. I often smell them, but he never gives *me* any; he only says, ‘Hullo, chick!’ and I’d rather have oranges any time.”

“It will take us a long while to get rich, I’m afraid. It makes me tired to think of it. I guess we’d better go to sleep now, dear.”

“Good-night, Dolly.”

“Good-night, Polly.”

Two soft kisses were heard, a nestling sound followed, and presently the little sisters lay fast asleep cheek against cheek, on the pillow wet with their tears, never dreaming what was going to happen to them to-morrow.

Now Miss Kent's room was next to theirs, and as she sat sewing she could hear the children's talk, for they soon forgot to whisper. At first she smiled, then she looked sober, and when the prattle ceased she said to herself, as she glanced about her pleasant chamber:

"Poor little things! they think I'm rich, and envy me, when I'm only a milliner earning my living. I ought to have taken more notice of them, for their mother has a hard time, I fancy, but never complains. I'm sorry they heard what I said, and if I knew how to do it without offending her, I'd trim a nice bonnet for a Christmas gift, for she *is* a lady, in spite of her old clothes. I can give the children some of the things they want anyhow, and I will. The idea of those mites making a fortune out of shirts at six cents apiece!"

Miss Kent laughed at the innocent delusion, but sympathized with her little neighbors, for she knew all about hard times. She had good wages now, but spent them on herself, and liked to be fine rather than neat. Still, she was a good-hearted girl, and what she had overheard set her to thinking soberly, then to acting kindly, as we shall see.

"If I hadn't spent all my money on my dress for the party to-morrow night, I'd give each of them a half-dollar. As I can not, I'll hunt up the other things they wanted, for it's a shame they shouldn't have a bit of Christmas, when they tried so hard to please the little ones."

As she spoke she stirred about her room, and soon had a white apron, an old carnelian heart on a fresh blue ribbon, and two papers of bonbons ready. As no stockings were hung up, she laid a clean towel on the floor before the door, and spread forth the small gifts to look their best.

Miss Kent was so busy that she did not hear a step come quietly up stairs, and Mr. Chrome, the artist, peeped at her through the balusters, wondering what she was about. He soon saw, and watched her with pleasure, thinking that she never looked prettier than now.

Presently she caught him at it, and hastened to explain, telling what she had heard, and how she was trying to atone for her past neglect of these young neighbors. Then she said good-night, and both went into their rooms, she to sleep happily, and he to smoke as usual.

But his eye kept turning to some of the "nice little bundles" that lay on his table, as if the story he had heard suggested how he might follow Miss Kent's example. I rather think he would not have disturbed himself if he had not heard the story told in such a soft voice, with a pair of bright eyes full of pity looking into his, for little girls were not particularly interesting to him, and he was usually too tired to notice the industrious creatures toiling up and down stairs on various errands, or sewing at the long red seams.

Now that he knew something of their small troubles, he felt as if it would please Miss Kent, and be a good joke, to do his share of the pretty work she had begun.

So presently he jumped up, and, opening his parcels, took out two oranges and two bunches of grapes, then he looked up two silver half-dollars, and stealing into the hall, laid the fruit upon the towel, and the money atop of the oranges. This addition improved the display very much, and Mr. Chrome was stealing back, well pleased, when his eye fell on Miss Kent's door, and he said to himself, "She too shall have a little surprise, for she is a dear, kind-hearted soul."

In his room was a prettily painted plate, and this he filled with green and purple grapes, tucked a sentimental note underneath, and leaving it on her threshold, crept away as stealthily as a burglar.

The house was very quiet when Mrs. Smith, the landlady, came up to turn off the gas. "Well, upon my word, here's fine doings, to be sure!" she said, when she saw the state of the upper hall. "Now I wouldn't have thought it of Miss Kent, she is such a giddy girl, nor of Mr. Chrome, he is so busy with his own affairs. I meant to give those children each a cake to-morrow, they are such good little things. I'll run down and get them now, as my contribution to this fine set out."

Away trotted Mrs. Smith to her pantry, and picked out a couple of tempting cakes, shaped like hearts and full of plums. There was a goodly array of pies on the shelves, and she took two of them, saying, as she climbed the stairs again, "They remembered the children, so I'll remember them, and have my share of the fun."

So up went the pies, for Mrs. Smith had not much to give, and her spirit was generous, though her pastry was not of the best. It looked very droll to see pies sitting about on the thresholds of closed doors, but the cakes were quite elegant, and filled up the corners of the towel handsomely, for the apron lay in the middle, with the oranges right and left, like two sentinels in yellow uniforms.

It was very late when the flicker of a candle came up stairs, and a pale lady, with a sweet sad face, appeared, bringing a pair of red and a pair of blue mittens for her Dolly and Polly. Poor Mrs. Blake did have a hard time, for she stood all day in a great store that she might earn bread for the poor children who staid at home and took care of one another. Her heart was very heavy that night, because it was the first Christmas she had ever known without gifts and festivity of some sort. But Petkin, the youngest child, had been ill, times were very hard, the little mouths gaped for food like the bills of hungry birds, and there was no tender mate to help fill them.

If any elves had been hovering about the dingy hall just then, they would have seen the mother's tired face brighten beautifully when she discovered the gifts, and found that her little girls had been so kindly remembered. Something more brilliant than the mock diamonds in Miss Kent's best earrings fell and glittered on the dusty floor as Mrs. Blake added the mittens to the other things, and went to her lonely room again, smiling as she thought how she could thank them all in a sweet and simple way.

Her windows were full of flowers, for the delicate tastes of the poor lady found great comfort in their beauty. "I have nothing else to give, and these will show how grateful I am," she said, as she rejoiced that the scarlet geraniums were so full of gay clusters, the white chrysanthemum stars were all out, and the pink roses at their loveliest.

They slept now, dreaming of a sunny morrow as they sat safely sheltered from the bitter cold. But that night was their last, for a gentle hand cut them all, and soon three pretty nosegays stood in a glass, waiting for dawn, to be laid at three doors, with a few grateful words which would surprise and delight the receivers, for flowers were rare in those hard-working lives, and kind deeds often come back to the givers in fairer shapes than they go.

Now one would think that there had been gifts enough, and no more could possibly arrive, since all had added his or her mite except Betsey, the maid, who was off on a holiday, and the babies fast asleep in their trundle-bed, with nothing to give but love and kisses. Nobody dreamed that the old cat would take it into her head that her kittens were in danger, because Mrs. Smith had said she thought they were nearly old enough to be given away. But she must have understood, for when all was dark and still, the anxious mother went patting up stairs to the children's door, meaning to hide her babies under their bed, sure they would save them from destruction. Mrs. Blake had shut the door, however, so poor Puss was disappointed; but finding a soft, clean spot among a variety of curious articles, she laid her kits there, and kept them warm all night, with her head pillowed on the blue mittens.

In the cold morning Dolly and Polly got up and scrambled into their clothes, not with joyful haste to see what their stockings held, for they had none, but because they had the little ones to dress while mother got the breakfast.

Dolly opened the door, and started back with a cry of astonishment at the lovely spectacle before her. The other people had taken in their gifts, so nothing destroyed the magnificent effect of the treasures so curiously collected in the night. Puss had left her kits asleep, and gone down to get her own breakfast, and there, in the middle of the ruffled apron, as if in a dainty cradle, lay the two Maltese darlings, with white bibs and boots on, and white tips to the tiny tails curled round their little noses in the sweetest way.

Polly and Dolly could only clasp their hands and look in rapturous silence for a minute; then they went down on their knees and revelled in the unexpected richness before them.

"I do believe there *is* a Santa Claus, and that he heard us, for here is everything we wanted," said Dolly, holding the carnelian heart in one hand and the plummy one in the other.

"It must have been some kind of a fairy, for we didn't mention kittens, but we wanted one, and here are two darlings," cried Polly, almost purring with delight as the downy bunches unrolled and gaped till their bits of pink tongues were visible.

"Mrs. Smith was one fairy, I guess, and Miss Kent was another, for that is her apron. I shouldn't wonder if Mr. Chrome gave us the oranges and the money: men always have lots, and his name is on this bit of paper," said Dolly.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad! Now we shall have a Christmas like other people, and I'll never say again that rich folks don't remember poor folks. Come and show all our treasures to mother and the babies; they must have some," answered Polly, feeling that the world was all right, and life not half as hard as she thought it last night.

Shrieks of delight greeted the sisters, and all that morning there was joy and feasting in Mrs. Blake's room, and in the afternoon Dolly and Polly went to the Museum, and actually saw *Puss in Boots*; for their mother insisted on their going, having discovered how the hard-earned quarters had been spent. This was such unhoped-for bliss that they could hardly believe it, and kept smiling at one another so brightly that people wondered who the happy little girls in shabby cloaks could be who clapped their new mittens so heartily, and laughed till it was better than music to hear them.

This was a very remarkable Christmas-day, and they long remembered it; for while they were absorbed in the fortunes of the Marquis of Carabas and the funny cat, who tucked his tail in his belt, washed his face so awkwardly, and didn't know how to purr, strange things were happening at home, and more surprises were in store for our little friends. You see, when people once begin to do kindnesses, it is so easy and pleasant they find it hard to leave off; and sometimes it beautifies them so that they find they love one another very much — as Mr. Chrome and Miss Kent did, though we have nothing to do with that except to tell how they made the poor little tree grow and blossom.

They were very jolly at dinner, and talked a good deal about the Blakes, who ate in their own rooms. Miss Kent told what the children said, and it touched the soft spot in all their hearts to hear about the red shirts, though they laughed at

Polly's lament over the bird with only one feather in its tail.

"I'd give them a better tree if I had any place to put it, and knew how to trim it up," said Mr. Chrome, with a sudden burst of generosity, which so pleased Miss Kent that her eyes shone like Christmas candles.

"Put it in the back parlor. All the Browns are away for a week, and we'll help you trim it — won't we, my dear?" cried Mrs. Smith, warmly; for she saw that he was in a sociable mood, and thought it a pity that the Blakes should not profit by it.

"Yes, indeed; I should like it of all things, and it needn't cost much, for I have some skill in trimmings, as you know." And Miss Kent looked so gay and pretty as she spoke that Mr. Chrome made up his mind that millinery must be a delightful occupation.

"Come on then, ladies, and we'll have a little frolic. I'm a lonely old bachelor, with nowhere to go to-day, and I'd like some fun."

They had it, I assure you; for they all fell to work as busy as bees, flying and buzzing about with much laughter as they worked their pleasant miracle. Mr. Chrome acted more like the father of a large family than a crusty bachelor, Miss Kent's skillful fingers flew as they never did before, and Mrs. Smith trotted up and down as briskly as if she were sixteen instead of being a stout old woman of sixty.

The children were so full of the play, and telling all about it, that they forgot their tree till after supper; but when they went to look for it they found it gone, and in its place a great paper hand with one finger pointing down stairs, and on it these mysterious words in red ink:

"Look in the Browns' back parlor!"

At the door of that interesting apartment they found their mother with Will and Petkin, for another hand had suddenly appeared to them pointing up. The door flew open quite as if it were a fairy play, and they went in to find a pretty tree planted in a red box on the centre table, lighted with candles, hung with gilded nuts, red apples, gay bonbons, and a gift for each.

Mr. Chrome was hidden behind one folding-door, and fat Mrs. Smith squeezed behind the other, and they both thought it a great improvement upon the old-fashioned Santa Claus to have Miss Kent, in the white dress she made for the party, with Mrs. Blake's roses in her hair, step forward as the children gazed in silent rapture, and with a few sweet words welcome them to the little surprise their friends had made.

There were many Christmas trees in the city that night, but none which gave such hearty pleasure as the one which so magically took the place of the broken branch and its few poor toys. They were all there, however, and Dolly and Polly were immensely pleased to see that of all her gifts Petkin chose the forlorn bird to carry to bed with her, the one yellow feather being just to her taste.

Mrs. Blake put on her neat bonnet, and was so gratified that Miss Kent thought it the most successful one she ever trimmed. She was well paid for it by the thanks of one neighbor and the admiration of another; for when she went to her party Mr. Chrome went with her, and said something on the way which made her heart dance more lightly than her feet that night.

Good Mrs. Smith felt that her house had covered itself with glory by this event, and Dolly and Polly declared that it was the most perfect and delightful surprise party ever seen.

It was all over by nine o'clock, and with good-night kisses for every one the little girls climbed up to bed laden with treasures and too happy for many words. But as they tied their round caps Dolly said, thoughtfully:

"On the whole, I think it's rather nice to be poor when people are kind to you."

"Well, I'd *rather* be rich; but if I can't be, it is very good fun to have Christmas trees like this one," answered truthful Polly, never guessing that they had planted the seed from which the little pine-tree grew so quickly and beautifully.

When the moon came to look in at the window on her nightly round, two smiling faces lay on the pillow, which was no longer wet with tears, but rather knobby with the mine of riches hidden underneath, — first fruits of the neighborly friendship which flourished in that house until another and a merrier Christmas came.

III.

THE DOLLS' JOURNEY FROM MINNESOTA TO MAINE.

Mr. Plum lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A.

There were six little Plums, all girls, varying in ages from fourteen to seven, and named Kate, Lucy, Susy, Lizzy, Marjory and Maggie. There was no mamma, but Mrs. Gibbs, the housekeeper, was a kind old soul, and papa did everything he could to make the small daughters good and happy.

One stormy Saturday afternoon the children were all together in the school-room, and papa busy at his desk in the library, with the door open because he liked to hear the pleasant voices and catch glimpses of the droll plays that went on there.

Kate lay on the sofa reading "The Daisy Chain" for the fourth time. Susy, Lucy and Lizzie were having a select tea party in their own recess, the entrance to which was barricaded with chairs to keep out the "babies," as they called the little ones, who were much offended at being excluded and sat up in the cushioned window-seat pensively watching the rain.

"If it had only waited till to-morrow we should have had time for our journey; now we can't go till next Saturday. Flora is so disappointed she would cry if I had not taught her to behave," said Maggie with a sigh, as she surveyed the doll on her knee in its new summer suit.

"So is Dora. Just see how sweet she looks with her hat and cape on and her travelling-bag all ready. Couldn't we play travel in the house? It is such a pity to wait when the children are in such a hurry to go," answered Marjory, settling the tiny bag that held Dora's nightcap and gown as well as the morsels of cake that were to serve for her lunch.

"No," said Maggie decidedly, "we can't do it, because there is no room for carriages, and boats, and railroads, and hotels, and accidents. It is a long journey from Minnesota to Maine, and we couldn't get it all into one room I'm sure."

"I don't think papa would mind our coming into the library, if we didn't ring the car bells very loud or scream much when the accidents happen," said Marjory, who hated to give up the plan they had been cherishing all the week.

"What is it, little ones? Come and tell me what is the matter," called Mr. Plum, hearing his name and the magic word "railroad," for he was the president of one and had his hands full just then.

Down jumped the little girls and ran to perch on either arm of his chair, pouring out their small tribulations as freely as if he had been the most sympathizing of mothers.

"We planned to take a long, long journey round the garden with our dolls to-day, and play go to Maine and see Aunt Maria. You know she asked us, and we looked out the way on the map and got all ready, and now it rains and we are dreadfully disappointed," said Maggie, while Marjory sighed as she looked at the red D. worked on the inch square travelling-bag.

"As you can't go, why not send the dolls to make aunty a visit, and she will send them back when they get homesick," proposed Mr. Plum, smiling, as if a sudden idea had popped into his head.

"Really?" cried Maggie.

"How could we?" asked Marjory.

"They could go and come by mail, and tell you all about their adventures when they got back," said papa.

Both children were speechless for a moment, then as the full splendor of this proposition dawned upon them they clapped their hands, crying eagerly:

"We will! we will! Let's do it at once."

"What? where? who?" asked Susy, Lucy and Lizzie, forgetting their tea party to run and see what was going on.

They were told, and in their turn exclaimed so loudly that Kate came to join in the fun.

After a great deal of talking and laughing, the dolls were prepared for the long journey. They were common wooden-headed dollies, a hand long, with stuffed bodies and stout legs ornamented with very small feet in red and blue boots. Dora was a blonde and Flora a brunette, otherwise they were just alike and nearly new. Usually when people go travelling they put on their hats and cloaks, but these pilgrims, by papa's advice, left all encumbrances behind them, for they were to travel in a peculiar way, and blue gingham dresses were chosen for the expedition.

"It is possible that they may never come back. Accidents will happen you know. Are you prepared for that?" asked Mr. Plum, pausing with the brown paper spread out before him.

"I am," answered Maggie firmly, as she laid Flora on the table, her black eyes staring as if rather alarmed at this sudden start.

Marjory hesitated a moment, clasping Dora to her bosom with a face full of maternal anxiety. But Susy, Lucy and Lizzie cried: "Let her go, do let her go, and if she is lost papa will give you a new doll."

"Good-by, my darling dear. Have a splendid time, and be sure you come back to me," whispered Marjory, with a tender farewell kiss as she gave up her child.

All stood watching silently while papa tied the dolls back to back with the ribbon Kate pulled from her neck, then folded them carefully in strong brown paper, leaving their heads out that they might see the world as they went along. Being carefully fastened up with several turns of cord, Mr. Plum directed the precious parcel to "Miss Maria Plum, Portland, Maine. With care." Then it was weighed, stamped, and pronounced ready for the post.

"I shall write and tell aunty they are coming, because she will want to be prepared for such distinguished visitors," said papa, taking up his pen with a glance at the six excited little faces round him.

Silence reigned while the letter was written, and as he sealed it up Mr. Plum said solemnly, with his hand on the parcel:

"For the last time, shall they go?"

"Yes!" answered the Spartan mothers with one voice, while the other sisters danced round them, and Kate patted the curly heads approvingly.

"Going, going, gone!" answered papa as he whisked on his coat and hat, and slammed the door behind him.

The children clustered at the window to see him set out on this momentous errand, and he often looked back waving his umbrella at them, till he vanished round the corner, with a reassuring pat on the pocket out of which dear Do and Flo popped their heads for a last look at their sweet home.

"Now let us take out poor old Lucinda and Rose Augusta to play with. I know their feelings were hurt at our leaving them for the new dolls," said Maggie, rummaging in the baby-house, whither Margery soon followed her to reinstate the old darlings in the place of the departed new ones.

"Safely off," reported Mr. Plum, when he came into tea, "and we may expect to hear from them in a week or two. Parcels go more slowly than letters, and this is Aunty's busy season, so wait patiently and see what will happen."

"We will," said the little girls; and they did, but week after week went by and nothing was heard of the wanderers.

We, however, can follow them and learn much that their anxious mothers never knew.

As soon as Flora and Dora recovered from the bewilderment occasioned by the confusion of the post office, they found themselves in one of the many leathern mail bags rumbling Eastward. As it was perfectly dark they could not see their companions, so listened to the whispering and rustling that went on about them. The newspapers all talked politics, and some of them used such bad language that the dolls would have covered their ears, if their hands had not been tied down. The letters were better behaved and more interesting, for they told one another the news they carried, because nothing is private in America, and even gummed envelopes cannot keep gossip from leaking out.

“It is very interesting, but I should enjoy it more if I was not grinding my nose against the rough side of this leather bag,” whispered Dora, who lay undermost just then.

“So should I, if a heavy book was not pinching my toes. I’ve tried to kick it away, but it won’t stir, and keeps droning on about reports and tariffs and such dull things,” answered Flora, with a groan.

“Do you like travelling?” asked Dora, presently, when the letters and papers fell asleep, lulled by the motion of the cars.

“Not yet, but I shall when I can look about me. This bundle near by says the mails are often sorted in the cars, and in that way we shall see something of the world, I hope,” answered Flora, cheering up, for, like her mamma, she was of an enquiring turn.

The dolls took a nap of some hours, and were roused by a general tumbling out on a long shelf, where many other parcels lay, and lively men sent letters and papers flying here and there as if a whirlwind was blowing. A long box lay beside the dolls who stood nearly erect leaning against a pile of papers. Several holes were cut in the lid, and out of one of them was thrust a little black nose, as if trying to get air.

“Dear me! what can be in it?” said Flora, who was nearest.

“I’m a poor little alligator, going to a boy in Chicago, if you please, and I want my mother,” sobbed a voice from the box, and there was a rap on the lid as of an agitated tail.

“Mercy on us! I hope we shall not have to travel with the monster,” whispered Dora, trying to see over her shoulder.

“I’m not afraid. He can’t be very dreadful, for the box is not any longer than we are. Natural history is very useful; I’ve heard mamma say so, and I shall talk with him while we rest here,” answered Flo, nodding toward the eye which now took the place of the nose.

So the little alligator told her something of his home on the banks of a great river, where he was just learning to play happily with his brothers and sisters, when he was caught and sent away to pine in captivity.

The dolls comforted him as well as they could, and a pair of baby’s shoes travelling in an envelope sympathized with him, while a shabby bundle directed to “Michael Dolan, at Mrs. Judy Quin’s, next door to Mr. Pat Murphy, Boston, North street,” told them to “Whisht and slape quite till they came forninst the place.”

“Such low people!” whispered Do to Flo, and both stood primly silent till they were tumbled into another mail bag, and went rattling on again with a new set of companions.

"I hope that poor baby will go safely and the boy be good to him," said Flora, for the little alligator went with the live stock in some other way.

"Thank goodness he didn't go with us! I shall dream about that black nose and winking eye, I'm sure. The dangers of travelling are great, but we are safe and comfortable now, I think," and Dora settled down in a cozy corner of the bag, wondering when they should reach Chicago.

"I like adventures and hope we shall have some," answered Flora, briskly, little dreaming how soon her wish was to be granted.

A few hours later there come a bump, a crash, a cry, and then all the mail bags rolled one over the other with the car down an embankment into a river.

"Now we are dead!" shrieked the poor dolls, clinging together as they heard the splash of water, the shouting of men, the splintering of wood, and the hiss of steam.

"Don't be frightened, ladies, mail bags are always looked after," said a large envelope with an official seal and the name of a Senator on it.

"Any bones broken, dear madam?" asked a jaunty pink letter, with a scent of musk about it, evidently a love-letter.

"I think one foot is hurt, and my clothes are dripping," sighed Dora, faintly.

"Water won't hurt calico," called out a magazine full of fashion plates, adding dolefully, as its gay colors began to run, "I shall be in a nice mess if I ever get out of this. People will wear odd fashions if they follow me this time."

"Hope they will telegraph news of this accident in time for the evening papers," said a dingy sheet called the "Barahoo Thunderbolt," as it lay atop of the heap in its yellow wrapper.

"Be calm, my friends, and wait with fortitude for death or deliverance, as I do." With which philosophic remark "The St. Louis Cosmos" folded the pages which for the first time since the paper was started, were not dry.

Here the water rose over the topmost letter and a moist silence prevailed till a sudden jerk fished up the bag, and before the dolls could recover their wits they were spread out on the floor of a mail car to dry, while several busy men sorted and saved such papers and letters as still held together.

"Now we shall see something," said Flora, feeling the warm air blow over her as they spun along, for a slight accident like this did not delay the energetic Westerners a moment longer than absolutely necessary.

"I can't see you, dear, but I hope you look better than I do, for the yellow of my hair has washed into my eyes and the red of my cheeks is quite gone, I'm sure," answered Dora, as her wet dress flopped in the breeze and the broken foot sticking up showed her that her blue boots were ruined.

“I don’t care a bit how I look. It’s great fun now we are safe. Pop up your head and see the wide prairie flying past. I do hope that poor baby got away and swam home to his mother. The upset into the river was quite to his taste, I fancy,” said Flora, who was much excited by her adventure and eager for more.

Presently one of the men set the dolls up in the corner of a window to dry, and there they stood viewing the fine landscape with one eye while the other watched the scene of devastation within. Everything was in great confusion after the accident, so it is not strange that the dolls were not missed when they slowly slid lower and lower till a sudden lurch of the car sent them out of the window to roll into a green field where cows were feeding and children picking strawberries.

“This is the end of us! Here we shall lie and mould forgotten by everybody,” said Dora, who always took a tragical view of things.

“Not a bit of it! I see cows eating toward us and they may give us a lift. I’ve heard of their tossing people up, though I don’t know just how it’s done. If they don’t, we are in the path and some of those children are sure to find us,” answered Flora cheerfully, though she stood on her head with a bunch of burrs pricking her nose.

She was right. A bright-eyed little German girl presently came trotting along the path with a great basket full of berries on her head arranged in pretty pottles ready for the market. Seeing the red cow sniffing at a brown paper parcel she drove her away, picked it up and peeped in at the open end.

The sight of two dolls in such a place made her feel as if fairies had dropped them there for her. She could not read the direction and hurried home to show her treasure to her brothers and sisters of whom there were eight.

“What will become of us now!” exclaimed Dora, as eager hands slipped them out of the wrapper and smoothed their damp skirts in a room that seemed swarming with boys and girls of all sizes.

“Don’t worry, we shall get on nicely, I’m sure, and learn German of these young persons. It is a great relief to be able to stretch one’s limbs and stand up, isn’t it?” answered Flora, undismayed by anything that had happened as yet.

“Yes, dear, I love you but I *am* tired of being tied to you all day. I hope we shall live through this noise and get a little rest, but I give up the idea of ever seeing Portland,” answered Dora, staring with all her blue eyes at the display of musical instruments about the room, and longing to stop her ears, for several of the children were playing on the violin, flute, horn or harp. They were street musicians, and even the baby seemed to be getting ready to take part in the concert, for he sat on the floor beside an immense bass horn taller than himself, with his rosy lips at the mouth piece and his cheeks puffed out in vain attempts to make a “boom! boom!” as brother Fritz did.

Flora was delighted, and gave skips on her red boots in time to the lively tooting of the boys, while the girls gazed at the lovely dolls and jabbered away with their yellow braids quivering with excitement.

The wrapper was laid aside till a neighbor who read English came in to translate it. Meantime they enjoyed the new toys immensely, and even despondent Dora was cheered up by the admiration she received; while they in their turn were deeply interested in the pretty dolls’ furniture some of the children made.

Beds, tables and chairs covered the long bench, and round it sat the neat-handed little maidens gluing, tacking and trimming, while they sang and chatted at their work as busy and happy as a hive of bees.

All day the boys went about the streets playing, and in the evening trooped off to the beer gardens to play again, for they lived in Chicago, and the dolls had got so far on their way to Aunt Maria, as they soon discovered.

For nearly two months they lived happily with Minna, Gretchen and Nanerl, then they set out on their travels again, and this was the way it happened. A little girl came to order a set of furniture for her new baby-house, and seeing two shabby dolls reposing in a fine bed she asked about them. Her mamma spoke German so Minna told how they were found, and showed the old wrapper, saying that they always meant to send the dolls on their way but grew so fond of them they kept putting it off.

“I am going as far as New York very soon and will take them along if you like, for I think little Miss Maria Plum must have been expecting her dolls all this time. Shall I?” asked the mamma, as she read the address and saw the dash under “With care,” as if the dollies were of great importance to some one.

“Ja, ja,” answered Minna, glad to oblige a lady who bought two whole sets of their best furniture and paid for it at once.

So again the dolls were put in their brown paper cover and sent away with farewell kisses.

“This now is genteel and just suits me,” said Dora, as they drove along with little Clara to the handsome house where she was staying.

“I have a feeling that she is a spoilt child, and we shall not be as happy with her as with the dear Poppleheimers. We shall see,” answered Flora, wisely, for Clara had soon tossed the dolls into a corner and was fretting because mamma would not buy her the big horn to blow on.

The party started for New York in a day or two, and to the delight of Flo and Do they were left out of the trunks for Clara to play with on the way, her own waxen Blanche Marie Annabel being too delicate to be used.

"Oh my patience, this is worse than tumbling about in a mail-bag," groaned Dora, after hours of great suffering, for Clara treated the poor dolls as if they had no feeling.

She amused herself with knocking their heads together, shutting them in the window with their poor legs hanging out, swinging them by one arm, and drawing lines with a pencil all over their faces till they looked as if tattooed by savages. Even brave Flora was worn out and longed for rest, finding her only comfort in saying, "I told you so," when Clara banged them about, or dropped them on the dusty floor to be trampled on by passing feet.

There they were left, and would have been swept away if a little dog had not found them as the passengers were leaving the car and carried them after his master, trotting soberly along with the bundle in his mouth, for fortunately Clara had put them into the paper before she left them, so they were still together in the trials of the journey.

"Hullo, Jip, what have you got?" asked the young man as the little dog jumped up on the carriage seat and laid his load on his master's knee, panting and wagging his tail as if he had done something to be praised for.

"Dolls, I declare! What can a bachelor do with the poor things? Wonder who Maria Plum is? Midge will like a look at them before we send them along;" and into the young man's pocket they went, trembling with fear of the dog, but very grateful for being rescued from destruction.

Jip kept his eye on them, and gave an occasional poke with his cold nose to be sure they were there as they drove through the bustling streets of New York to a great house with an inscription over the door.

"I do hope Midge will be a nicer girl than Clara. Children ought to be taught to be kind to dumb dolls as well as dumb animals," said Dora, as the young man ran up the steps and hurried along a wide hall.

"I almost wish we were at home with our own kind little mothers," began Flo, for even her spirits were depressed by bad treatment, but just then a door opened and she cried out in amazement, "Bless my heart, this man has more children than even Mr. Poppleheimer!"

She might well think so, for all down both sides of the long room stood little white beds with a small pale face on every pillow. All the eyes that were open brightened when Jip and his master came in, and several thin hands were outstretched to meet them.

"I've been good, Doctor, let me pat him first," cried one childish voice.

"Did you bring me a flower, please?" asked another feeble one.

"I know he's got something nice for us, I see a bundle in his pocket," and a little fellow who sat up among his pillows gave a joyful cough as he could not shout.

"Two dollies for Midge to play with. Jip found them, but I think the little girl they are going to will lend them for a few days. We shall not need them longer I'm afraid," added the young man to a rosy faced nurse who came along with a bottle in her hand.

"Dear no, the poor child is very low to-day. But she will love to look at the babies if she isn't strong enough to hold 'em," said the woman, leading the way to a corner where the palest of all the pale faces lay smiling on the pillow, and the thinnest of the thin hands were feebly put up to greet the Doctor.

"So nice!" she whispered when the dolls were laid beside her, while Jip proudly beat his tail on the floor to let her know that she owed the welcome gift to him.

For an hour Flo and Do lay on the arm of poor Midge who never moved except to touch them now and then with a tender little finger, or to kiss them softly, saying, "Dear babies, it is very nice not to be all alone. Are you comfy, darlings?" till she fell asleep still smiling.

"Sister, do you think this can be the Heaven we hear people talk about? It is so still and white, and may be these children are angels," whispered Dora, looking at the sweet face turned toward her with the long lashes lying on the colorless cheek, and the arms outstretched like wings.

"No, dear, it is a hospital, I heard that man say so, and those are sick children come to be cured. It is a sweet place, I think, and this child much nicer than that horrid Clara," answered Flo, who was quicker to hear, see and understand what went on than Dora.

"I love to lie here safe and warm, but there doesn't seem to be much breath to rock me," said Do, who lay nearest the little bosom that very slowly rose and fell with the feeble flutter of the heart below.

"Hush, we may disturb her," and lively Flo controlled her curiosity, contenting herself with looking at the other children and listening to their quiet voices, for pain seemed to have hushed them all.

For a week the dolls lay in Midge's bed, and though their breasts were full of saw-dust and their heads were only wood, the sweet patience of the little creature seemed to waken something like a heart in them, and set them thinking, for dolls don't live in vain, I am firmly persuaded.

All day she tended them till the small hands could no longer hold them, and through the weary nights she tried to murmur bits of lullabies lest the dollies would not be able to sleep because of the crying or the moans some of the poor babies could not repress. She often sent one or the other to cheer up some little neighbor, and in this way Do and Flo became small sisters of charity, welcomed eagerly, reluctantly returned, and loved by all, although they never uttered a word and their dingy faces could not express the emotion that stirred their saw-dust bosoms.

When Saturday night came they were laid in their usual place on Midge’s arm. She was too weak to kiss them now, and nurse laid their battered cheeks against the lips that whispered faintly, “Be sure you send ‘em to the little girl, and tell her — tell her — all about it.” Then she turned her cheek to the pillow with a little sigh and lay so still the dolls thought she had gone to sleep.

She had, but the sweet eyes did not open in the morning, and there was no breath in the little breast to rock the dolls any more.

“I knew she was an angel, and now she has flown away,” said Dora softly, as they watched the white image carried out in the weeping nurse’s arms, with the early sunshine turning all the pretty hair to gold.

“I think that is what they call dying, sister. It is a much lovelier way to end than as we do in the dust bin or rag-bag. I wonder if there is a little Heaven anywhere for good dolls?” answered Flora, with what looked like a tear on her cheek; but it was only a drop from the violets sent by the kind Doctor last night.

“I hope so, for I think the souls of little children might miss us if they loved us as dear Midge did,” whispered Dora, trying to kiss the blue flower in her hand, for the child had shared her last gift with these friends.

“Why didn’t you let her take them along, poor motherless baby?” asked the doctor when he saw the dolls lying as she had left them.

“I promised her they should go to the girl they were sent to, and please, I’d like to keep my word to the little darling,” answered Nurse with a sob.

“You shall,” said the Doctor, and put them in his breast pocket with the faded violets, for everybody loved the pauper child sent to die in a hospital, because Christian charity makes every man and woman father and mother to these little ones.

All day the dolls went about in the busy Doctor’s pocket, and I think the violets did them good, for the soft perfume clung to them long afterward like the memory of a lovely life, as short and sweet as that of the flowers.

In the evening they were folded up in a fresh paper and re-directed carefully. The Doctor wrote a little note telling why he had kept them, and was just about to put on some stamps when a friend came in who was going to Boston in the morning.

“Anything to take along, Fred?” asked the newcomer.

“This parcel, if you will. I have a feeling that I’d rather not have it knock about in a mail-bag,” and the Doctor told him why.

It was pleasant to see how carefully the traveller put away the parcel after that, and to hear him say that he was going through Boston to the mountains for his holiday, and would deliver it in Portland to Miss Plum herself.

"Now there is some chance of our getting there," said Flora, as they set off next day in a new Russia leather bag.

On the way they overheard a long chat between some New York and Boston ladies which impressed them very much. Flora liked to hear the fashionable gossip about clothes and people and art and theatres, but Dora preferred the learned conversation of the young Boston ladies, who seemed to know a little of everything, or think they did.

"I hope Mamma will give me an entirely new wardrobe when I get home; and we will have dolls' weddings and balls, and a play, and be as fine and fashionable as those ladies down there," said Flora, after listening a while.

"You have got your head full of dressy ideas and high life, sister. I don't care for such things, but mean to cultivate my mind as fast as I can. That girl says she is in college, and named over more studies than I can count. I do wish we were to stop and see a little of the refined society of Boston," answered Dora, primly.

"Pooh!" said Flo, "don't you try to be intellectual, for you are only a wooden-headed doll. I mean to be a real Westerner, and just enjoy myself as I please, without caring what other folks do or think. Boston is no better than the rest of the world, I guess."

Groans from every article in the bag greeted this disrespectful speech, and an avalanche of Boston papers fell upon the audacious doll. But Flo was undaunted, and shouted from underneath the pile: "I don't care! Minnesota forever!" till her breath gave out.

Dora was so mortified that she never said a word till they were let out in a room at the Parker House. Here she admired everything, and read all the evening in a volume of Emerson's Poems from the bag, for Mr. Mt. Vernon Beacon was a Boston man, and never went anywhere without a wise book or two in his pocket.

Flo turned up her nose at all she saw, and devoted herself to a long chat with the smart bag which came from New York and was full of gossip.

The next afternoon they really got to Portland, and as soon as Mr. Beacon had made his toilet he set out to find little Miss Plum. When the parlor door opened to admit her he was much embarrassed, for, advancing with a paternal smile and the dolls extended to the expected child, he found himself face to face with a pretty young lady, who looked as if she thought him a little mad.

A few words explained the errand, however, and when she read the note Aunt Maria's bright eyes were full of tears as she said, hugging the dilapidated dolls:

"I'll write the story of their travels, and send the dear old things back to the children as soon as possible."

And so she did with Mr. Beacon's help, for he decided to try the air of Portland, and spent his vacation there. The dolls were re-painted and re-dressed till they were more beautiful than ever, and their clothes fine enough to suit even Flo.

They were a good while doing this, and when all was ready, Aunt Maria took it into her head to run out to St. Paul and surprise the children. By a singular coincidence Mr. Beacon had railroad business in that direction, so they set off together, with two splendid dolls done up in a gay box.

All that was ever known about that journey was that these travellers stopped at the hospital in New York, and went on better friends than before after hearing from the good Doctor all the pathetic story of little Midge.

The young Plums had long ago given up the hope of ever seeing Do and Flo again, for they started in June and it was early in September when Aunt Maria appeared before them without the least warning, accompanied by a pleasant gentleman from Boston.

Six kisses had hardly resounded from Aunty's blooming cheeks when a most attractive box was produced from the Russia leather bag, and the wandering dolls restored to the arms of their enraptured mammas.

A small volume neatly written and adorned with a few pictures of the most exciting incidents of the trip also appeared.

"Every one writes or prints a book in Boston, you know, so we did both," said Aunt Maria, laughing, as she handed over the remarkable history which she had composed and Mr. Beacon illustrated.

It was read with intense interest, and was as true as most stories are nowadays.

"Nothing more delightful can happen now!" exclaimed the children, as they laid by the precious work and enthroned the travelled dolls in the place of honor on the roof of the baby-house.

But something much more delightful did happen; for at Thanksgiving time there was a wedding at the Plums'. Not a doll's wedding, as Flo had planned, but a real one, for the gentleman from Boston actually married Aunt Maria.

There were six bridesmaids, all in blue, and Flora and Dora, in the loveliest of new pink gowns, were set aloft among the roses on the wedding-cake, their proper place as everyone said, for there never would have been any marriage at all but for this Doll's Journey From Minnesota to Maine.

IV.

MORNING-GLORIES.

"What's that?" — and Daisy sat up in her little bed to listen; for she had never heard a sound like it before.

It was very early, and the house was still. The sun was just rising, and the morning-glories at the window were turning their blue and purple cups to catch the welcome light. The sky was full of rosy clouds; dew shone like diamonds on the waving grass, and the birds were singing as they only sing at dawn. But softer, sweeter than any bird-voice was the delicate music which Daisy heard. So airy and gay was the sound, it seemed impossible to lie still with that fairy dancing-tune echoing through the room. Out of bed scrambled Daisy, her sleepy eyes opening wider and wider with surprise and pleasure as she listened and wondered.

"Where is it?" she said, popping her head out of the window. The morning-glories only danced lightly on their stems, the robins chirped shrilly in the garden below, and the wind gave Daisy a kiss; but none of them answered her, and still the lovely music sounded close beside her.

"It's a new kind of bird, perhaps; or maybe it's a fairy hidden somewhere. Oh, if it *is* how splendid it will be!" cried Daisy; and she began to look carefully in all the colored cups, under the leaves of the woodbine, and in the wren's nest close by. There was neither fairy nor bird to be seen; and Daisy stood wondering, when a voice cried out from below:

"Why, little nightcap, what brings you out of your bed so early?"

"O Aunt Wee! do you hear it — that pretty music playing somewhere near! I can't find it; but I think it's a fairy, don't you?" said Daisy, looking down at the young lady standing in the garden with her hands full of roses.

Aunt Wee listened, smiled, and shook her head.

"Don't you remember you said last night that you thought the world a very stupid, grown-up place, because there were no giants and fairies in it now? Well, perhaps there *are* fairies, and they are going to show themselves to you, if you watch well."

Daisy clapped her hands, and danced about on her little bare feet; for, of all things in the world, she most wanted to see a fairy.

"What must I do to find them, Aunt Wee?" she cried, popping out her head again with her cap half off, and her curly hair blowing in the wind.

"Why, you see, they frolic all night, and go to sleep at dawn; so we must get up very early, if we want to catch the elves awake. They are such delicate, fly-away little things, and we are so big and clumsy, we shall have to look carefully, and perhaps hunt a long time before we find even one," replied Aunt Wee, very gravely.

"Mamma says I'm quick at finding things; and you know all about fairies, so I guess we'll catch one. Can't we begin now? It's very early, and this music has waked me up; so I don't want to sleep any more. Will you begin to hunt now?"

"But you don't like to get up early, or to walk in the fields; and, if we mean to catch a fairy, we must be up and out by sunrise every fair morning till we get one. Can you do this, lazy Daisy?" And Aunt Wee smiled to herself as if something pleased her very much.

"Oh! I will, truly, get up, and not fret a bit, if you'll only help me look. Please come now to dress me, and see if you can find what makes the music."

Daisy was very much in earnest, and in such a hurry to be off that she could hardly stand still to have her hair brushed, and thought there were a great many unnecessary buttons and strings on her clothes that day. Usually she lay late, got up slowly and fretted at every thing as little girls are apt to do when they have had too much sleep. She wasn't a rosy, stout Daisy; but had been ill, and had fallen into a way of thinking she couldn't do anything but lie about, reading fairy-tales, and being petted by every one. Mamma and papa had tried all sorts of things to amuse and do her good; for she was their only little daughter, and they loved her very dearly. But nothing pleased her long; and she lounged about, pale and fretful, till Aunt Laura came. Daisy called her "Wee" when she was a baby, and couldn't talk plainly; and she still used the name because it suited the cheery little aunt so well.

"I don't see anything, and the music has stopped. I think some elf just came to wake you up, and then flew away; so we won't waste any more time in looking here," said Wee, as she finished dressing Daisy, who flew about like a Will-o'-the-wisp all the while.

"Do you think it will come again to-morrow?" asked Daisy anxiously.

"I dare say you'll hear it, if you wake in time. Now get your hat, and we will see what we can find down by the brook. I saw a great many fireflies there last night, and fancy there was a ball; so we may find some drowsy elf among the buttercups and clover."

Away rushed Daisy for her hat, and soon was walking gayly down the green lane, looking about her as if she had never been there before; for every thing seemed wonderfully fresh and lovely.

"How pink the clouds are, and how the dew twinkles in the grass! I never saw it so before," she said.

"Because by the time you are up the pretty pink clouds are gone, and the thirsty grass has drank the dew, or the sun has drawn it up to fall again at night for the flowers' evening bath," replied Wee, watching the soft color that began to touch Daisy's pale cheeks.

"I think we'd better look under that cobweb spread like a tent over the white clovers. A fairy would be very likely to creep in there and sleep."

Daisy knelt down and peeped carefully; but all she saw was a little brown spider, who looked very much surprised to see visitors so early.

"I don't like spiders," said Daisy, much disappointed.

"There are things about spiders as interesting to hear as fairy tales," said Wee. "This is Mrs. Epeira Diadema; and she is a respectable, industrious little neighbor. She spreads her tent, but sits under a leaf near by, waiting for her breakfast. She wraps her eggs in a soft silken bag, and hides them in some safe chink, where they lie till spring. The eggs are prettily carved and ornamented, and so hard that the baby spiders have to force their way out by biting the shell open and poking their little heads through. The mother dies as soon as her eggs are safely placed, and the spiderlings have to take care of themselves."

"How do you know about it, Aunt Wee? You talk as if Mrs. Eppyra — or whatever her name is — had told you herself. Did she?" asked Daisy, feeling more interested in the brown spider.

"No; I read it in a book, and saw pictures of the eggs, web, and family. I had a live one in a bottle; and she spun silken ladders all up and down, and a little room to sleep in. She ate worms and bugs, and was very amiable and interesting till she fell ill and died."

"I should like to see the book; and have a spider-bottle, so I could take care of the poor little orphans when they are born. Good-by, ma'am. I shall call again; for you are 'most as good as a fairy there in your pretty tent, with a white clover for your bed."

Daisy walked on a few steps, and then stopped to say:

"What does that bird mean by calling 'Hurry up, hurry up?' He keeps flying before us, and looking back as if he wanted to show me something."

"Let me hear what he says. I may be able to understand him, or the bob-o-link that swings on the alder by the brook."

Wee listened a moment, while the birds twittered and chirped with all their hearts. Presently Wee sang in a tone very like the bob-o-link's:

"Daisy and Wee, Come here, and see What a dainty feast is spread: Down in the grass Where fairies pass, Here are berries ripe and red.

"All wet with dew, They wait for you: Come hither, and eat your fill, While I gayly sing, In my airy swing, And the sun climbs up the hill."

“Did he really say that?” cried Daisy, watching the bob-o-link, who sat swaying up and down on the green bough, and nodding his white-capped head at her in the most friendly manner.

“Perhaps I didn’t translate it rightly; for it is very hard to put bird-notes into our language, because we haven’t words soft and sweet enough. But I really think there are berries over there, and we will see if what he says is true,” said Wee.

Over the wall they went, and there, on a sunny bank, found a bed of the reddest, ripest berries ever seen.

“Thank you, thank you, for telling me to hurry up, and showing me such a splendid feast,” said Daisy, with her mouth full, as she nodded back at the birds. “These are so much sweeter than those we buy. I’d carry some home to mamma, if I only had a basket.”

“You can pick this great leaf full, while I make you a basket,” said Wee.

Daisy soon filled the leaf, and then sat watching her aunt plait a pretty basket of rushes. While she waited she looked about, and kept finding something curious or pleasant to interest and amuse her. First she saw a tiny rainbow in a dewdrop that hung on a blade of grass; then she watched a frisky calf come down to drink on the other side of the brook, and laughed to see him scamper away with his tail in the air. Close by grew a pitcher-plant; and a yellow butterfly sat on the edge, bathing its feet, Daisy said. Presently she discovered a little ground bird sitting on her nest, and peeping anxiously, as if undecided whether to fly away or trust her.

“I won’t hurt you, little mother. Don’t be afraid,” whispered the child; and, as if it understood, the bird settled down on her nest with a comfortable chirp, while its mate hopped up to give her a nice plump worm for breakfast.

“I love birds. Tell me something about them, Aunt Wee. You must know many things; for they like you, and come when you call.”

“Once upon a time,” began Wee, while her fingers flew and the pretty basket grew, “there was a great snow-storm, and all the country was covered with a thick white quilt. It froze a little, so one could walk over it, and I went out for a run. Oh, so cold it was, with a sharp wind, and no sun or any thing green to make it pleasant! I went far away over the fields, and sat down to rest. While I sat there, a little bird came by, and stopped to rest also.

“‘How do you do?’ said I.

“‘Chick-a-dee-dee,’ said he.

“‘A cold day,’ said I.

“‘Chick-a-dee-dee,’ said he.

“‘Aren’t you afraid of starving, now the ground is covered and the trees are bare?’

“‘Chick-a-dee-dee, ma’am, chick-a-dee-dee!’“ answered the bird in the same cheerful tone. And it sounded as if he said, ‘I shall be cared for. I’m not afraid.’

“‘What will you eat? There’s nothing here or for miles round. I really think you’ll starve, birdie,’ said I.

“Then he laughed, and gave me a merry look as he lit on a tall, dry weed near by. He shook it hard with his little bill; when down fell a shower of seeds, and there was dinner all ready on a snow-white cloth. All the while he ate he kept looking up at me with his quick, bright eyes; and, when he had done, he said, as plainly as a bird could say it:

“‘Cold winds may blow, And snows may fall, But well we know God cares for all.’“

“I like that little story, and shall always think of it when I hear the chick-a-dee-dee.” Daisy sat a moment with a thoughtful look in her eyes; then she said slowly, as if sorry for the words:

“It isn’t a stupid, grown-up world. It’s a very pleasant, young world; and I like it a great deal better this morning than I did last night.”

“I’m glad of that; and, even if we don’t find our fairy to-day, you will have found some sunshine, Daisy, and that is almost as good. Now put in the berries, and we’ll go on.”

How they hunted! They climbed trees to peep into squirrel-holes and birds’-nests; they chased bees and butterflies to ask for news of the elves; they waded in the brook, hoping to catch a water-sprite; they ran after thistle-down, fancying a fairy might be astride; they searched the flowers and ferns, questioned sun and wind, listened to robin and thrush; but no one could tell them any thing of the little people, though all had gay and charming bits of news about themselves. And Daisy thought the world got younger and happier every minute.

When they came in to breakfast, papa and mamma looked at Daisy, and then nodded with a smile at Aunt Wee; for, though Daisy’s frock was soiled, her boots wet, and her hair tumbled, her cheeks were rosy, eyes bright, and voice so cheerful that they thought it better music than any in the summer world without.

“Hunting fairies is a pleasant play, isn’t it, Daisy?” said papa, as he tasted the berries, and admired the green basket.

“Oh, yes! and we are going again to-morrow. Aunt Wee says we must try seven days at least. I like it, and mean to keep on till I really find my fairy.”

“I think you will find something better than ‘little vanishers,’ dear,” said mamma, filling up the bowl of bread and milk which Daisy was fast emptying; for she certainly *had* found an appetite.

“There it is again!” cried Daisy, flying out of bed the next morning still earlier than the day before. Yes, there it was, the fairy music, as blithe and sweet as ever; and the morning-glories rung their delicate bells as if keeping time. Daisy felt rather sleepy, but remembered her promise to Aunt Wee, and splashed into her tub, singing the bob-o-link's song as she bathed.

"Where shall we go to-day?" she asked, as they went out into the garden.

"I think we'd better try a new place; so we'll go to the farmyard; and, while we feed the hens, I'll listen to their chat, and perhaps can learn something from it," replied Wee soberly.

"Do hens know about fairies? I thought they were very dull things, and didn't care for any thing but eating corn and laying eggs," said Daisy, surprised.

"Oh, dear, no! they are very sensible creatures, and see a deal of the world in their daily walks. Hunting for insects gives them an excellent chance to see fairies, if there are any. Here is some corn for the biddies; and, after we have fed them, we will look for eggs, and so may find a brownie or two."

Such a clatter as there was when they came to the barnyard; for every thing was just awake, and in the best spirits. Ducks were paddling off to the pond; geese to the meadow; and meek gray guinea-hens tripping away to hunt bugs in the garden. A splendid cock stood on the wall, and crowed so loud and clear that all the neighboring chanticleers replied. The motherly hens clucked and scratched with their busy broods about them, or sat and scolded in the coops because the chicks would gad abroad. Doves cooed on the sunny roof, and smoothed their gleaming feathers. Daisy's donkey nibbled a thistle by the wall, and a stately peacock marched before the door with all his plumage spread. It made Daisy laugh to see the airs the fowls put on as she scattered corn, and threw meal and water to the chicks. Some pushed and gobbled; some stood meekly outside the crowd, and got what they could; others seized a mouthful, and ran away to eat it in a corner. The chicks got into the pan entirely, and tumbled one over the other in their hurry to eat; but the mammas saw that none went hungry. And the polite cock waited upon them in the most gentlemanly manner, making queer little clucks and gurgles as if he said:

"Allow me, madam, to offer you this kernel;" or, "Here, my dear, try that bit." And sometimes he pecked a little, with a loud quaver, evidently saying, "Come, come, children, behave yourselves, and don't eat like pigs."

"What is she saying?" asked Daisy, pointing to an old gray hen in a black turban, who was walking about alone, muttering to herself, as hens often do in their promenades.

"She says a cat has made a nest, and hatched three kits up on the loft, near her own nest; and she doesn't like it, because their mewing annoys her," said Wee, after listening a minute.

"How nice! let's go and find them. But do you learn anything about the fairies from the hen's chat?"

"No: they have been so busy setting, they have had no time for picnics yet. But they will let us know, if they discover any."

In the barn, the cows were being milked; and Daisy had a mugful of it, warm and sweet, out of the foaming pail.

"We'll take some to Mrs. Purr; for, I dare say, she doesn't like to leave the kits long, and will enjoy a sip of something comfortable," said Wee, as Daisy climbed the ladder, and went rustling over the hay to a corner, whence came a joyful "Mew!" What a charming sight it was, to be sure! a snow-white cat lying in a cosy nest, and, by her, three snow-white kits, wagging three very small gray tails.

"There never was any thing so lovely!" cried Daisy, as she sat with the three downy balls in her lap, while the mamma gratefully lapped the new milk from Aunt Wee's cup.

"Are they better than fairies?"

"Almost: for I know about pussies, and can cuddle them; but I couldn't a fairy, you know, and they might be afraid of me. These dears are not afraid, and I shall have such fun with them as they grow up. What *shall* we name them, auntie?"

"Snowball, Patpaw, and Wagtail would do, I think," said Wee, stroking the cat, who rubbed against her, purring very loud.

"Yes: I like those names for my pets. But what is Mrs. Purr saying, with her mouth up to your ear?" asked Daisy, who firmly believed that Aunt Wee knew every thing.

"She tells me that when she went on a grasshopper hunt the other day, as she ran through the meadow, she saw some lovely creatures all in blue, with gauze wings, flying about over the river, and sitting in the water-lilies. She thinks they may be fairies, and advises us to go and look."

"So we will to-morrow," said Daisy. "Ask her, please, if I may take the kits into the house, if I'll be very careful and give them a nice big bed to sleep in."

"She says you may; but she must go too, else the kits will cry," said Wee, after listening to Pussy's purr a minute.

Much pleased with her new pets, Daisy took them in her apron, and, followed by their confiding mamma, marched to the house, and established them in the old cradle which used to be hers. Pussy got in also; and, when they were settled on a soft cushion, Daisy rocked them gently to and fro. At first Mrs. Purr opened her yellow eyes, and looked rather anxious: but, as nothing uncomfortable happened, she composed herself, and soon quite liked the motion; for she fell asleep, and made a pretty picture as she lay with her downy white babies on her downy white breast.

When the sun rose next morning, he saw Daisy and Wee floating down the river in their boat. “Bless me! here’s company,” said the sun, and began at once to make them welcome in his most charming manner. He set the waves to sparkling with a sudden shimmer; he shot long rays of light through the dark hemlocks, till they looked like fairy trees; he touched Daisy’s hair and it turned to gold; he chased away the shadows that lurked among the hills; he drew up the misty curtain that hovered over the river; and, with the warmth of his kisses, waked the sleeping lilies.

“Look, look, Aunt Wee! how they open, one by one, as the light shines on them! We shan’t have to wait any longer; for they get up with the sun, as you do.” As she spoke, Daisy caught a half-open lily, and drew it up, fragrant and dripping, fresh from its sleep.

“They look like a fleet of fairy ships, anchored in this quiet harbor, with sails half furled, and crews asleep. See the little sailors, in their yellow jackets, lifting up their heads as the wind blows its whistle, like a boatswain, to ‘pipe all hands.’“

Daisy laughed at Aunt Wee’s fancy, and stirred up the crew of the Water-sprite, as she called her flower, till the white sails were all set, and it was ready for a summer voyage.

“It is time we saw the fairies in blue, unless old Madam Purr deceived us. I hope we *shall* find one; for, though I enjoy every thing we see, I do want my elf too.”

“What is that?” cried Wee; and Daisy flew up so quickly that the boat rocked like a cradle. A slender creature, in a blue dress, with gauzy wings, darted by, and vanished among the rushes that nodded by the bank.

“Go nearer, — softly! softly! — and maybe it will fly out again. I really think it was a fairy; for I never saw any thing like it before,” whispered Daisy, much excited.

Wee rowed in among the green rushes and purple water-weeds, and out flew half-a-dozen of the blue-bodied creatures. They didn’t seem afraid, but skimmed about the boat, as if curious to see what it was; and Daisy sat, and stared with all her might. Presently one of the lovely things lit on the lily in her hand, and she held her breath to watch it. A little shadow of disappointment passed over her face as she looked; but it was gone at once, and her voice was full of delight as she said softly:

“It’s not a fairy, Aunt Wee; but it is very beautiful, with its slender blue body, its lacy wings, and bright eyes. What name does it have?”

“We call it a dragon-fly; and it could tell you a pretty little story about itself, could you understand it. In May the tiny eggs are dropped on the water, and sink to the bottom, where little creatures are born, — ugly, brown things, with six legs and no wings. They feed on water-insects, and for a long time swim about in this state. When ready, they climb up the stem of some plant, and sit in the sun till the ugly brown shells drop away, and the lovely winged creatures appear. They grow in an hour to be perfect dragon-flies, and float away to lead happy lives in the sunshine by the river."

As if only waiting till the story was done, the dragon-fly flew off with a whirr, and darted to and fro, hunting for its breakfast, glittering splendidly as it flashed among the leaves or darted close above the water. Daisy forgot her disappointment in a minute, and went fishing for lilies; while the turtles came up to sun themselves on the rocks, the merry little tadpoles wiggled in the shallow places, and a wild duck paddled by with a brood of ducklings following in her wake.

"Oh, dear! it rains; and we can't go fairy-hunting at all," said Daisy next morning, as the patter on the window-pane woke her up, and Aunt Wee came in to dress her.

"Yes, we can, dear; jump up, and see what a funny place I'll take you to."

Daisy thought the rain would be a capital excuse for lying in bed; for she still liked to cuddle and drowse in her cosey, warm nest. But she was curious to know where the curious place was; so she got up and followed.

"Why, Aunt Wee, this is the garret; and there isn't any thing nice or funny here," she said, as they climbed the stairs, and came into the big attic, filled with all manner of old things.

"Isn't there? We'll soon see." And so they did: for Aunt Wee began to play; and presently Daisy was shouting with fun as she sat on an old saddle, with a hair-covered trunk for a horse, a big old-fashioned bonnet on her head, and a red silk petticoat for a habit. Then they went to sea in a great chest, and got wrecked on a desert island, where they built a fort with boxes and bags, hunted bears with rusty guns, and had to eat dried berries, herbs and nuts; for no other food could be found. Aunt Wee got an old fiddle, and had a dancing-school, where Daisy capered till she was tired. So they rummaged out some dusty books, and looked at pictures so quietly that a little mouse came out of a drawer and peeped about, thinking no one was there.

"Let's find the nest, since we don't find any fairy," said Wee; and, opening the drawer, she turned over the things till she came to a pair of old velvet shoes; and there in the toe of one, nicely cuddled under a bit of flannel, lay four pink mites, which woke up, and stretched their tiny legs, and squeaked such small squeaks one could hardly hear them.

"How cunning they are! I wish they would let me put them with the kits, and have a nursery full of babies. Wouldn't it be nice to see them all grow up?" said Daisy.

"I'm afraid they wouldn't grow up, if Mrs. Purr lived with them," began Wee, but got no further; for just then the cat bounced into the drawer, and ate up the mouselings in four mouthfuls. Daisy screamed; the mother-mouse gave a doleful squeak, and ran into a hole; and Aunt Wee tried to save the little ones. But it was too late: Purr had got her breakfast, and sat washing her face after it, as if she had enjoyed it.

"Never mind, Daisy: she would have caught them by and by, and it's as well to have them taken care of before they do any harm. There is the bell: don't cry, but come and tell papa what a fine romp we've had."

"It doesn't rain, but it's dreadfully wet; so we'll go to the dairy, and see if any sprites are hiding there," said Wee next day; and to the dairy they went.

A pleasant place it was, — so clean and cool, and as full of sweet odors as if the ghosts of buttercups and clover still haunted the milk which they had helped to make. Dolly was churning, and Polly was making up butter in nice little pats. Both were very kind, and let Daisy peep everywhere. All round on white shelves stood the shining pans, full of milk; the stone floor was wet; and a stream of water ran along a narrow bed through the room, and in it stood jars of butter, pots of cream, and cans of milk. The window was open, and hop-vines shook their green bells before it. The birds sang outside, and maids sang inside, as the churn and the wooden spatters kept time:

"Brindle and Bess, White-star and Jess — Come, butter, come! Eat cowslips fine, Red columbine — Come, butter, come! Grasses green and tall, Clover, best of all, — Come, butter, come! And give every night Milk sweet and white — Come, butter, come! Make the churn go, See the lumps grow! — Come, butter, come!"

Daisy sang also, and turned the handle till she was tired; then she helped Polly with the butter, and made four little pats, — one stamped with a star for papa, one with a rose for mamma, a strawberry for Aunt Wee, and a cow for herself. She skimmed a pitcher of cream with a shallow shell, and liked the work so much she asked to have a little pan of milk put by for her to take care of every day. Dolly promised, and gave her a small shell and a low shelf all to herself. When she went in, she carried her pretty pats in one hand, the cream-pot in the other, and entered the breakfast room looking as brisk and rosy as a little milkmaid.

It was a lovely morning when Daisy was next roused by the fairy music, and the ponies were standing at the door. “Are we going far?” she asked, as Wee put on her riding-skirt, and tied back her hair.

“Up to the mountain-top: it’s only a mile; and we shall have time, if we ride fast,” answered Wee.

Away they went, through the green lane, over the bridge, and up the steep hillside where the sheep fed and colts frisked as they passed by. Higher and higher climbed Dandy and Prance, the ponies; and gayer and gayer grew Daisy and Wee, as the fresh air blew over them, and the morning-red glowed on their faces. When they reached the top, they sat on a tall stone, and looked down into the valley on either side.

“This seems like a place to find giants, not fairies, it is so high and big and splendid up here,” said Daisy, as her eye roamed over river, forest, town, and hill.

“There are giants here; and I brought you up to see them,” answered Wee.

“Mercy, me! where are they?” cried Daisy, looking very curious and rather frightened.

“There is one of them.” And Wee pointed to the waterfall that went dashing and foaming down into the valley. “That giant turns the wheels of all the mills you see. Some of them grind grain for our bread, some help to spin cloth for our clothes, some make paper, and others saw trees into boards. That is a beautiful and busy giant, Daisy.”

“So it is, and some day we’ll go and see it work. Show me the others: I like your giants ‘most as well as those in the fairy-books.”

“On this side you’ll see another, called Steam. He is a very strong fellow; for, with the help of gunpowder, he will break the granite mountain in pieces, and carry it away. He works in the other mills, and takes heavy loads of stone, cloth, paper, and wood all over the country. Then, on the right of us is a third giant, called Electricity. He runs along those wires, and carries messages from one end of the world to the other. He goes under the sea and through the air; he brings news to every one; runs day and night, yet never tires; and often helps sick people with his lively magic.”

“I like him best, I think; for he is more like a real, wonderful giant. Is there any on that side of us?” asked Daisy, turning round to look behind her.

“Yes: the best and most powerful of all lives in that big house with the bell on the roof,” said Wee, smiling.

“Why, that’s only the schoolhouse.”

“Education is a long word, dear; but you know what it means, and, as you grow older, you will see what wonders it can work. It is a noble giant; for in this country rich and poor are helped by it, and no one need suffer for it unless they choose. It works more wonders than any other: it changes little children into wise, good men and women, who rule the world, and make happy homes everywhere; it helps write books, sing songs, paint pictures, do good deeds, and beautify the world. Love and respect it, my little Daisy, and be glad that you live now when such giants lend a hand to dwarfs like us.”

Daisy sat still a long time, looking all about her on the mountain-top; and, when she rode away, she carried a new thought in her mind, which she never forgot.

“This is the last day of the seven, and no fairies have been found. Do you think I *ever* shall see one?” said Daisy, on the Sunday morning that ended her week’s hunt.

“Not the kind you think of, for there are none such, Daisy; but you have found two better and more beautiful ones than any fanciful sprites,” said Wee.

“Have I? Where are they? What are their names?”

Aunt Wee drew her to the glass, and said, as she pointed to Daisy’s face:

“Here they are, and their names are Health and Happiness. There are many ways of losing them, and they are hard to catch when once lost. I wanted you to keep both, and tried to show you how. A happy, healthful hour in the morning sweetens and brightens the whole day; and there is no fairy-book half so wonderful as the lovely world all about us, if we only know how to read it.”

“Then all these mornings we were hunting after health and happiness, instead of fairies, were we?”

“Yes: haven’t you enjoyed it, and don’t you think you have caught my fairies?”

Daisy looked from a little picture of herself, which Wee had drawn some time ago, to her image in the glass. One was dull and sad, pale and cross; the other, rosy, gay, and smiling, — the likeness of a happy, hearty little girl, wide-awake and in good tune. She understood the kind joke; and, turning, kissed Aunt Wee, as she said, gratefully:

“I think I have caught your elves, and I’ll try to keep them all my life. But tell me one thing: was the music that woke me all a joke too?”

“No, dear: here it is, and now it is your own; for you have learned to wake and listen to it.”

Daisy looked, and saw Aunt Wee lean from the window, and take out of a hollow nook, in the old tree close by, a little box. She set it on the table, touched a spring, and the airy music sounded more beautiful than ever.

“Is it mine, all mine?” cried Daisy.

“Yes: I hid it while I tried my little plan, and now you shall have it for your own. See, here is the best elf I can give you, and she will dance whenever you call her.”

Wee pushed a golden pin, and up sprang a tiny figure, all crimson and gold, with shining wings, and a garland on its dainty head. Softly played the hidden music, and airily danced the little sylph till the silvery chime died away; then, folding her delicate arms, she sank from sight, leaving Daisy breathless with delight.

V.

SHADOW-CHILDREN.

Ned, Polly, and Will sat on the steps one sun-shiny morning, doing nothing, except wish they had something pleasant to do.

“Something new, something never heard of before, — wouldn’t that be jolly?” said Ned, with a great yawn.

“It must be an amusing play, and one that we don’t get tired of very soon,” added Polly gravely.

“And something that didn’t be wrong, else mamma wouldn’t like it,” said little Will, who was very good for a small boy.

As no one could suggest any thing to suit, they all sat silent a few minutes. Suddenly Ned said, rather crossly, “I wish my shadow wouldn’t mock me. Every time I stretch or gape it does the same, and I don’t like it.”

“Poor thing, it can’t help that: it has to do just what you do, and be your slave all day. I’m glad I ain’t a shadow,” said Polly.

“I try to run away from mine sometimes, but I can’t ever. It will come after me; and in the night it scares me, if it gets big and black,” said Will, looking behind him.

“Wouldn’t it be fun to see shadows going about alone, and doing things like people?” asked Polly.

“I just wish they would. I’d like to see ours cut capers; that would be a jolly new game, wouldn’t it?” said Ned.

No one had time to speak; for suddenly the three little shadows on the sunny wall behind them stood up straight, and began to bow.

“Mercy, me!” cried Polly, staring at them.

“By Jove, that’s odd!” said Ned, looking queer.

“Are they alive?” asked Will, a little frightened.

“Don’t be alarmed: they won’t hurt you,” said a soft voice. “To-day is midsummer-day, and whoever wishes a wish can have it till midnight. You want to see your shadows by themselves; and you can, if you promise to follow them as they have followed you so long. They will not get you into harm; so you may safely try it, if you like. Do you agree for the day to do as they do, and so have your wish?”

“Yes, we promise,” answered the children.

“Tell no one till night, and be faithful shadows to the shadows.”

The voice was silent, but with more funny little bows the shadows began to move off in different directions. The children knew their own: for Ned's was the tallest, and had its hands in its pockets; Polly's had a frock on, and two bows where its hair was tied up; while Will's was a plump little shadow in a blouse, with a curly head and a pug nose. Each child went after its shadow, laughing, and enjoying the fun.

Ned's master went straight to the shed, took down a basket, and marched away to the garden, where it began to move its hands as if busily picking peas. Ned stopped laughing when he saw that, and looked rather ashamed; for he remembered that his mother had asked him to do that little job for her, and he had answered, —

"Oh, bother the old peas! I'm busy, and I can't."

"Who told you about this?" he asked, beginning to work.

The shadow shook its head, and pointed first to Ned's new jacket, then to a set of nice garden tools near by, and then seemed to blow a kiss from its shadowy fingers towards mamma, who was just passing the open gate.

"Oh! you mean that she does lots for me; so I ought to do what I can for her, and love her dearly," said Ned, getting a pleasanter face every minute.

The shadow nodded, and worked away as busily as the bees, tumbling heels over head in the great yellow squash blossoms, and getting as dusty as little millers. Somehow Ned rather liked the work, with such an odd comrade near by; for, though the shadow didn't really help a bit, it seemed to try, and set an excellent example. When the basket was full, the shadow took one handle, and Ned the other; and they carried it in.

"Thank you, dear. I was afraid we should have to give up our peas to-day: I'm so busy, I can't stop," said mamma, looking surprised and pleased.

Ned couldn't stop to talk; for the shadow ran away to the woodpile, and began to chop with all its might.

"Well, I suppose I must; but I never saw such a fellow for work as this shadow is. He isn't a bit like me, though he's been with me so long," said Ned, swinging the real hatchet in time with the shadowy one.

Polly's new mistress went to the dining-room, and fell to washing up the breakfast cups. Polly hated that work, and sulkily began to rattle the spoons and knock the things about. But the shadow wouldn't allow that; and Polly had to do just what it did, though she grumbled all the while.

"She doesn't splash a bit, or make any clatter; so I guess she's a tidy creature," said Polly. "How long she does rub each spoon and glass. We never shall get done. What a fuss she makes with the napkins, laying them all even in the drawer. And now she's at the salt-cellars, doing them just as mamma likes. I wish she'd live here, and do my work for me. Why, what's that?" And Polly stopped fretting to listen; for she seemed to hear the sound of singing, — so sweet, and yet so very faint she could catch no words, and only make out a cheerful little tune.

"Do you hear any one singing, mamma?" she asked.

"No: I wish I did." And mamma sighed; for baby was poorly, piles of sewing lay waiting for her, Biddy was turning things topsy-turvy in the kitchen for want of a word from the mistress, and Polly was looking sullen.

The little girl didn't say any more, but worked quietly and watched the shadow, feeling sure the faint song came from it. Presently she began to hum the tune she caught by snatches; and, before she knew it, she was singing away like a blackbird. Baby stopped crying, and mamma said, smiling:

"Now I hear somebody singing, and it's the music I like best in the world."

That pleased Polly; but, a minute after, she stopped smiling, for the shadow went and took baby, or seemed to, and Polly really did. Now, baby was heavy, and cross with its teeth; and Polly didn't feel like tending it one bit. Mamma hurried away to the kitchen; and Polly walked up and down the room with poor baby hanging over her arm, crying dismally, with a pin in its back, a wet bib under its chin, and nothing cold and hard to bite with its hot, aching gums, where the little teeth were trying to come through.

"Do stop, you naughty, fretty baby. I'm tired of your screaming, and it's high time you went to sleep. Bless me! what's Miss Shadow doing with *her* baby?" said Polly.

Miss Shadow took out the big pin and laid it away, put on a dry bib, and gave *her* baby a nice ivory ring to bite; then began to dance up and down the room, till the shadowy baby clapped its hands and kicked delightedly. Polly laughed, and did the same, feeling sorry she had been so pettish. Presently both babies grew quiet, went to sleep, and were laid in the cradle.

"Now, I hope we shall rest a little," said Polly, stretching her arms.

But, no: down sat the shadow, and began to sew, making her needle fly like a real little seamstress.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Polly. "I promised to hem those handkerchiefs for Ned, and so I must; but I do think handkerchiefs are the most pokey things in the world to sew. I dare say you think you can sew faster than I can. Just wait a bit, and see what I can do, miss," she said to the shadow.

It took some time to find her thimble and needles and spools, for Polly wasn't a very neat little girl; but she got settled at last, and stitched away as if bent on beating her dumb friend.

Little Will's shadow went up to the nursery, and stopped before a basin of water. "Oh! ah! ain't this dreffull?" cried Will, with a shiver; for he knew he'd got to have his face washed, because he wouldn’t have it done properly when he got up, but ran away. Now, Will was a good child; but this one thing was his great trouble, and sometimes he couldn’t bear it. Jane was so rough. She let soap get in his eyes, and water run down his neck, and she pinched his nose when she wiped him, and brushed his hair so hard that really it *was* dreadful; and even a bigger boy would have found it hard to bear. He shivered and sighed: but Jane came in; and, when he saw that the shadow stood still and took the scrubbing like a little hero, he tried to do the same, and succeeded so well that Jane actually patted his head and called him “a deary;” which was something new, for old Nurse Jane was always very busy and rather cross.

Feeling that nothing worse could possibly happen to him, Will ran after his shadow, as it flitted away into the barn, and began to feed the chickens.

“There, now! I forgetted all about my chickeys, and the shadow ‘membered ‘em; and I’m glad of it,” said Will, scattering dabs of meal and water to the chirping, downy little creatures who pecked and fluttered at his feet. Little shadow hunted for eggs, drove the turkeys out of the garden, and picked a basket of chips: then it went to play with Sammy, a neighbor’s child; for, being a small shadow, it hadn’t many jobs to do, and plenty of active play was good for it.

Sammy was a rough little boy and rather selfish: so, when they played ball, he wanted to throw all the time; and, when Will objected, he grew angry and struck him. The blow didn’t hurt Will’s cheek much, but it did his little feelings; and he lifted his hand to strike back, when he saw his shadow go and kiss Sammy’s shadow. All his anger was gone in a minute, and he just put his arm round Sammy’s neck and kissed him. This kiss for a blow made him so ashamed that he began to cry, and couldn’t be comforted till he had given Will his best marble and a ride on his pony.

About an hour before dinner, the three shadows and the children met in the garden, and had a grand game of play, after they had told each other what they had been doing since they parted. Now, the shadows didn’t forget baby even then, but got out the wagon, and Miss Baby, all fresh from her nap, sat among her pillows like a queen, while Ned was horse, Polly footman, and Will driver; and in this way she travelled all round the garden and barn, up the lane and down to the brook, where she was much delighted with the water sparkling along and the fine splash of the stones they threw in.

When the dinner-bell rang, mamma saw four clean, rosy faces and four smooth heads at the table; for the shadow-children made themselves neat, without being told. Every one was merry and hungry and good-natured. Even poor baby forgot her teeth, and played a regular rub-a-dub with her spoon on her mug, and tried to tell about the fine things she saw on her drive. The children said nothing about the new play, and no one observed the queer actions of their shadows but themselves. They saw that there was no gobbling, or stretching over, or spilling of things, among the shadows; but that they waited to be helped, served others first, and ate tidily, which was a great improvement upon the usual state of things.

It was Saturday afternoon: the day was fine, and mamma told them they could go for a holiday frolic in the woods. “Don’t go to the pond, and be home early,” she said.

“Yes, mamma; we’ll remember,” they answered, as they scampered away to get ready.

“We shall go through the village, and Mary King will be looking out; so I shall wear my best hat. Mamma won’t see me, if I slip down the back way; and I do so want Mary to know that my hat is prettier than hers,” said Polly, up in her little room.

Now Polly was rather vain, and liked to prink; so she got out the new hat, and spent some time in smoothing her braids and putting on her blue ribbons. But when all was ready, and the boys getting impatient, she found her shadow, with a sun-bonnet on, standing by the door, as if to prevent her going out.

“You tiresome thing! do you mean that I mustn’t wear my hat, but that old bonnet?” asked Polly.

The shadow nodded and beckoned, and patted its head, as if it was all right.

“I wish I hadn’t promised to do as you do; then I could do as I like, and not make a fright of myself,” said Polly, rather sulkily, as she put away the hat, and tied on the old bonnet with a jerk.

Once out in the lovely sunshine, she soon forgot the little disappointment; and, as they didn’t go through the village, but by a green lane, where she found some big blackberries, she was quite contented. Polly had a basket to hold fruit or flowers, Ned his jackknife, and Will a long stick on which he rode, fancying that this sort of horse would help his short legs along; so they picked, whittled, and trotted their way to the wood, finding all manner of interesting things on the road.

The wood was full of pleasant sights and sounds; for wild roses bloomed all along the path, ferns and scarlet berries filled the little dells, squirrels chattered, birds sang, and pines whispered musically overhead.

“I’m going to stop here and rest, and make a wreath of these pretty wild roses for baby: it’s her birthday, and it will please mamma,” said Polly, sitting down on a mound of moss, with a lapful of flowers.

“I’m going to cut a fishing-pole, and will be back in a minute.” And Ned went crashing into the thickest part of the wood.

“I shall see where that rabbit went to, and maybe I’ll find some berries,” said Will, trotting down the path the wild rabbit had gone.

The sound of the boys’ steps died away, and Polly was wondering how it would seem to live all alone in the wood, when a little girl came trudging by, with a great pail of berries on her arm. She was a poor child: her feet were bare, her gown was ragged, she wore an old shawl over her head, and walked as if lame. Polly sat behind the ferns, and the child did not see her till Polly called out. The sudden sound startled her; and she dropped her pail, spilling the berries all over the path. The little girl began to cry, and Polly to laugh, saying, in a scornful tone:

“How silly to cry for a few berries!”

“I’ve been all day picking ‘em,” said the girl; “and I’m so tired and hungry; ‘cause I didn’t dare to go home till my pail was full, — mother scolds if I do, — and now they’re all spoilt. Oh, dear! dear me!” And she cried so hard that great tears fell on the moss.

Polly was sorry now, and sat looking at her till she saw her shadow down on its knees, picking up the berries; then it seemed to fold its little handkerchief round the girl’s bruised foot, and give her something from its pocket. Polly jumped up and imitated the kind shadow, even to giving the great piece of gingerbread she had brought for fear she should be hungry.

“Take this,” she said gently. “I’m sorry I frightened you. Here are the berries all picked up, and none the worse for falling in the grass. If you’ll take them to the white house on the hill, my mamma will buy them, and then your mother won’t scold you.”

“Oh, thank you, miss! It’s ever so good. I’ll take the berries to your mother, and bring her more whenever she likes,” said the child gratefully, as she walked away munching the gingerbread, and smiling till there were little rainbows in her tears.

Meanwhile Ned had poked about in the bushes, looking for a good pole. Presently he saw a willow down by the pond, and thought that would give him a nice, smooth pole. He forgot his promise, and down he went to the pond; where he cut his stick, and was whittling the end, when he saw a boat by the shore. It was untied, and oars lay in it, as if waiting for some one to come and row out.

“I’ll just take a little pull across, and get those cardinal-flowers for Polly,” he said; and went to the boat.

He got in, and was about to push off, when he saw his shadow standing on the shore.

“Don’t be a fool; get in, and come along,” he said to it, remembering his promise now, but deciding to break it, and ask pardon afterwards.

But the shadow shook its head; pointed to the swift stream that ran between the banks, the rocks and mud on the opposite side, and the leaky boat itself.

"I ain't afraid: mamma won't mind, if I tell her I'm sorry; and it will be such fun to row alone. Be a good fellow, and let me go," said Ned, beckoning.

But the shadow would not stir, and Ned was obliged to mind. He did so very reluctantly, and scolded the shadow well as he went back to Polly; though all the time he felt he was doing right, and knew he should be glad afterwards.

Will trotted after the rabbit, but didn't find it; he found a bird's-nest instead with four little birds in it. He had an empty cage at home, and longed for something to put in it; for kittens didn't like it, and caterpillars and beetlebugs got away. He chose the biggest bird, and, holding him carefully, walked away to find Polly. The poor mother-bird chirped and fluttered in great distress; but Will kept on till his little shadow came before him, and tried to make him turn back.

"No, no, I want him," said Will. "I won't hurt him, and his mother has three left: she won't mind if I take one."

Here the mother-bird chirped so loud it was impossible to help seeing that she *did* care very much; and the shadow stamped its foot and waved its hand, as if ordering the young robber to carry back the baby-bird. Will stood still, and thought a minute; but his little heart was a very kind one, and he soon turned about, saying pleasantly:

"Yes, it *is* naughty, and I won't do it. I'll ask mamma to get me a canary, and will let this birdie stay with his brothers."

The shadow patted him on the shoulder, and seemed to be delighted as Will put the bird in the nest and walked on, feeling much happier than if he had kept it. A bush of purple berries grew by the path, and Will stopped to pick some. He didn't know what they were, and mamma had often told him never to eat strange things. But they smelt so good, and looked so nice, he couldn't resist, and lifted one to his mouth, when little shadow motioned for him to stop.

"Oh, dear! you don't let me do any thing I want to," sighed Will. "I shall ask Polly if I tarn't eat these; and, if she says I may, I shall, so now."

He ran off to ask Polly; but she said they were poisonous, and begged him to throw them away.

"Good little shadow, to keep me safe!" cried Will. "I like you; and I'll mind better next time, 'cause you are always right."

The shadow seemed to like this, and bobbed about so comically it made Will laugh till his eyes were full of tears. Ned came back, and they went on, having grand times in the wood. They found plenty of berries to fill the basket; they swung down on slender birches, and got rolls of white bark for canoes; they saw all sorts of wild-wood insects and birds; and frolicked till they were tired. As they crossed a field, a cow suddenly put down her head and ran at them, as if she was afraid they meant to hurt her calf. All turned, and ran as fast as they could toward the wall; but poor Will in his fright tumbled down, and lay screaming. Ned and Polly had reached the wall, and, looking back, saw that their shadows had not followed. Ned's stood before Will, brandishing his pole; and Polly's was flapping a shadowy sun-bonnet with all its might. As soon as they saw that, back they went, — Ned to threaten till he broke his pole, and Polly to flap till the strings came off. As if anxious to do its part, the bonnet flew up in the air, and coming down lit on the cross cow's head; which so astonished her that she ran away as hard as she could pelt.

"Wasn't that funny?" said Will, when they had tumbled over the wall, and lay laughing in the grass on the safe side.

"I'm glad I wore the old bonnet; for I suppose my best hat would have gone just the same," said Polly thankfully.

"The calf doesn't know its own mother with that thing on," laughed Ned.

"How brave and kind you were to come back and save me! I'd have been deaded if you hadn't," said Will, looking at his brother and sister with his little face full of grateful admiration.

They turned towards home after this flurry, feeling quite like heroes. When they came to the corner where two roads met, Ned proposed they should take the river-road; for, though the longest, it was much the pleasantest.

"We shan't be home at supper-time," said Polly. "You won't be able to do your jobs, Ned, nor I mine, and Will's chickens will have to go to bed hungry."

"Never mind: it's a holiday, so let's enjoy it, and not bother," answered Ned.

"We promised mamma we'd come home early," said Will.

They stood looking at the two roads, — one sandy, hot, and hilly; the other green and cool and level, along the river-side. They all chose the pleasant path, and walked on till Ned cried out, "Why, where are our shadows?"

They looked behind, before, and on either side; but nowhere could they see them.

"They were with us at the corner," said Will.

"Let's run back, and try to find them," said Polly.

"No, let 'em go: I'm tired of minding mine, and don't care if I never see it again," said Ned.

"Don't say so; for I remember hearing about a man who sold his shadow, and then got into lots of trouble because he had none. We promised to follow them, and we must," said Polly.

"I wish," began Ned in a pet; but Polly clapped her hand over his mouth, saying:

"Pray, don't wish now; for it may come to pass as the man's wish in the fairy tale did, and the black pudding flew up and stuck tight to his wife's nose."

This made Ned laugh, and they all turned back to the corner. Looking up the hilly road, they saw the three shadows trudging along, as if bent on getting home in good time. Without saying a word, the children followed; and, when they got to the garden gate, they all said at once:

"Aren't you glad you came?"

Under the elm-tree stood a pretty tea-table, covered with bread and butter, custards, and berries, and in the middle a fine cake with sugar-roses on the top; and mamma and baby, all nicely dressed, were waiting to welcome them to the birthday feast. Polly crowned the little queen, Ned gave her a willow whistle he had made, and Will some pretty, bright pebbles he had found; and Miss Baby was as happy as a bird, with her treasures.

A pleasant supper-time; then the small duties for each one; and then the go-to-bed frolic. The nursery was a big room, and in the evening a bright wood fire always burned there for baby. Mamma sat before it, softly rubbing baby's little rosy limbs before she went to bed, singing and telling stories meanwhile to the three children who pranced about in their long nightgowns. This evening they had a gay time; for the shadows amused them by all sorts of antics, and kept them laughing till they were tired. As they sat resting on the big sofa, they heard a soft, sweet voice singing. It wasn't mamma; for she was only talking to baby, and this voice sang a real song. Presently they saw mamma's shadow on the wall, and found it was the shadow-mother singing to the shadow-children. They listened intently, and this is what they heard:

"Little shadows, little shadows, Dancing on the chamber wall, While I sit beside the hearthstone Where the red flames rise and fall. Caps and nightgowns, caps and nightgowns, My three antic shadows wear; And no sound they make in playing, For the six small feet are bare.

"Dancing gayly, dancing gayly, To and fro all together, Like a family of daisies Blown about in windy weather; Nimble fairies, nimble fairies, Playing pranks in the warm glow, While I sing the nursery ditties Childish phantoms love and know.

"Now what happens, now what happens? One small shadow's tumbled down: I can see it on the carpet, Softly rubbing its hurt crown. No one whimpers, no one whimpers; A brave-hearted sprite is this: See! the others offer comfort In a silent, shadowy kiss.

"Hush! they're creeping; hush! they're creeping, Up about my rocking-chair: I can feel their loving fingers Clasp my neck and touch my hair. Little shadows, little shadows, Take me captive, hold me tight, As they climb and cling and whisper, ‘Mother dear, good night! good night!’“

As the song ended, the real children, as well as the shadows, lovingly kissed mamma, and said “Good-night;” then went away into their rooms, said their prayers, and nestled down into their beds. Ned slept alone in the room next that which Polly and Will had; and, after lying quiet a little while, he called out softly:

“I say, Polly, are you asleep?”

“No: I’m thinking what a queer day we’ve had,” answered Polly.

“It’s been a good day, and I’m glad we tried our wish; for the shadows showed us, as well as they could, what we ought to do and be. I shan’t forget it, shall you?” said Ned.

“No: I’m much obliged for the lesson.”

“So is I,” called out Will, in a very earnest, but rather a sleepy, little voice.

“I wonder what mamma will say, when we tell her about it,” said Ned.

“And I wonder if our shadows will come back to us at midnight, and follow us as they used to do,” added Polly.

“I shall be very careful where I lead my shadow; ‘cause he’s a good little one, and set me a righter zarmple than ever I did him,” said Will, and then dropped asleep.

The others agreed with him, and resolved that their shadows should not be ashamed of them. All were fast asleep; and no one but the moon saw the shadows come stealing back at midnight, and, having danced about the little beds, vanish as the clock struck twelve.

VI.

POPPY’S PRANKS.

She wasn’t a wilfully naughty child, this harum-scarum Poppy, but very thoughtless and very curious. She wanted to see every thing, do every thing, and go every where: she feared nothing, and so was continually getting into scrapes.

Her pranks began early; for, when she was about four, her mamma one day gave her a pair of green shoes with bright buttons. Poppy thought there never was any thing so splendid, and immediately wanted to go to walk. But mamma was busy, and Poppy couldn’t go alone any farther than the garden. She showed her shoes to the servants, the cat, the doves, and the flowers; and then opened the gate that the people in the street might see the trim little feet she was so proud of. Now Poppy had been forbidden to go out; but, when she saw Kitty Allen, her neighbor, playing ball down the street, she forgot every thing but the desire to show her new shoes; and away she went marching primly along as vain as a little peacock, as she watched the bright buttons twinkle, and heard the charming creak. Kitty saw her coming; and, being an ill-natured little girl, took no notice, but called out to her brother Jack:

“Ain’t some folks grand? If I couldn’t have red shoes for my best, I wouldn’t have any, would you?”

They both laughed, and this hurt Poppy’s feelings dreadfully. She tossed her head, and tried to turn up her nose; but, it was so very small, it couldn’t be very scornful. She said nothing, but walked gravely by, as if she was going on an errand, and hadn’t heard a word. Round the corner she went, thinking she would wait till Kitty was gone; as she didn’t like to pass again, fearing Jack might say something equally trying. An organ-man with a monkey was playing near by; and Poppy was soon so busy listening to the music, and watching the sad-looking monkey, that she forgot home, shoes, and Kitty altogether.

She followed the man a long way; and, when she turned to go back, she took the wrong street, and found herself by the park. Being fond of dandelions, Poppy went in, and gathered her hands full, enjoying herself immensely; for Betsy, the maid, never let her play in the pond, or roll down the hill, or make dirt-pies, and now she did all these things, besides playing with strange children and talking with any one she pleased. If she had not had her luncheon just before she started, she would have been very hungry; for dinner-time came, without her knowing it.

By three o’clock, she began to think it was time to go home, and boldly started off to find it. But poor little Poppy didn’t know the way, and went all wrong. She was very tired now, and hot and hungry, and wanted to see mamma, and wondered why she didn't come to the brown house with the white garden-gate. On and on she went, up streets and down, amusing herself with looking in the shop-windows, and sitting to rest on doorsteps. Once she asked a pleasant-faced little girl to show her the way home; but, as she didn't know in what street it was, and said her father's name was "papa," the girl couldn't help her: so she gave her a bun and went away. Poppy ate her bun, and began to wonder what would become of her; for night was coming on, and there didn't seem to be any prospect of finding mamma or home or bed. Her courage was all gone now; and, coming to a quiet place, she sat down on some high steps, and cried till her little "hankchif," as she called it, was all wet.

Nobody minded her: and she felt very forlorn till a big black dog came by, and seemed to understand the matter entirely; for he smelt of her face, licked her hands, and then lay down by her with such a friendly look in his brown eyes that Poppy was quite comforted. She told him her story, patted his big head; and then, being fairly tired out, laid her wet cheek on his soft back, and fell fast asleep.

It was quite dark when she woke; but a lamp was lighted near by, and standing under it was a man ringing a great bell. Poppy sat up, and wondered if anybody's supper was ready. The man had a paper; and, when people stopped at the sound of the bell, he read in a loud voice:

"Lost! a little girl, four years old; curly brown hair, blue eyes; had on a white frock and green shoes; calls herself Poppy."

He got no farther; for a little voice cried out of the dark, in a tone of surprise:

"Why, dats me!"

The people all turned to look; and the big man put his bell in his pocket, took her up very kindly, and said he'd carry her home.

"Is it far away?" asked Poppy, with a little sob.

"Yes, my dear; but I am going to give you some supper fust, along of my little girl. I live close by; and, when we've had a bite, we'll go find your ma."

Poppy was so tired and hungry, she was glad to find herself taken care of, and let the man do as he liked. He took her to a funny little house, and his wife gave her bread and molasses on a new tin plate with letters all round the edge. Poppy thought it very fine, and enjoyed her supper, though the man's little girl stared at her all the time with eyes as blue as her mug.

While she ate, the man sent word to her father that she was found; and, when both papa and mamma came hurrying in all out of breath with joy, there sat Miss Poppy talking merrily, with her face well daubed with molasses, her gown torn, her hands very dirty, and her shoes — ah, the pretty new shoes! — all spoiled with mud and dust, scratched, and half worn out, the buttons dull, and the color quite gone. No one cared for it that night; for little runaway was kissed and petted, and taken home to her own cosey bed as tenderly as if she had done nothing naughty, and never frightened her parents out of their wits in her life.

But the next day, — dear me! what a sad time it was, to be sure! When Poppy woke up, there hung the spoilt shoes over the mantle-piece; and, as soon as she was dressed, papa came in with a long cord, one end of which he tied round Poppy's waist, and the other to the arm of the sofa.

"I'm very sorry to have to tie you up, like a little dog; but I must, or you will forget, and run away again, and make mamma ill."

Then he went away without his morning kiss, and Poppy was so very unhappy she could hardly eat her breakfast. She felt better by and by, and tried to play; but the cord kept pulling her back. She couldn't get to the window; and, when she heard mamma passing the door, she tried to run and meet her, but had to stop halfway, for the cord jerked her over. Cousin Fanny came up, but Poppy was so ashamed to be tied that she crept under the sofa and hid. All day she was a prisoner, and was a very miserable little girl; but at night she was untied, and, when mamma took her in her lap for the first time that day, Poppy held her fast, and sobbed very penitently —

"O mamma! I drefful sorry I runned away. Fordive me one time more, and I never will adain;" and she never did.

Two or three years after this, Poppy went to live in the country, and tried some new pranks. One day she went with her sister Nelly to see a man plough, for that sort of thing was new to her. While the man worked, she saw him take out a piece of something brown, and bite off a bit.

"What's that?" asked Poppy.

"Tobaccer," said the man.

"Is it nice?" asked Poppy.

"Prime," said the man.

"Could you let me taste it?" asked curious Poppy.

"It will make you sick," said the man, laughing.

"It doesn't make *you* sick. I'd like to try," said Poppy, nothing daunted.

He gave her a piece; and Poppy ate it, though it didn't taste good at all. She did it because Cy, her favorite playfellow, told her she'd die if she did, and tried to frighten her.

"You darsn't eat any more," he said.

"Yes, I dare. See if I don't." And Poppy took another piece, just to show how brave she was. Silly little Poppy!

"I ain't sick, and I shan't die, so now."

And Poppy pranced about as briskly as ever. But the man shook his head, Nelly watched her anxiously, and Cy kept saying:

“Ain’t you sick yet, say?”

For a little while Poppy felt all right; but presently she grew rather pale, and began to look rather pensive. She stopped running, and walked slower and slower, while her eyes got dizzy, and her hands and feet very cold.

“Ain’t you sick now, say?” repeated Cy; and Poppy tried to answer, “Oh, dear! no;” but a dreadful feeling came over her, and she could only shake her head, and hold on to Nelly.

“Better lay down a spell,” said the man, looking a little troubled.

“I don’t wish to dirty my clean frock,” said Poppy faintly, as she glanced over the wide-ploughed field, and longed for a bit of grass to drop on. She kept on bravely for another turn; but suddenly stopped, and, quite regardless of the clean pink gown, dropped down in a furrow, looking so white and queer that Nelly began to cry. Poppy lay a minute, then turned to Cy, and said very solemnly:

“Cy, run home, and tell my mother I’m dying.”

Away rushed Cy in a great fright, and burst upon Poppy’s mamma, exclaiming breathlessly:

“O ma’am! Poppy’s been and ate a lot of tobacco; and she’s sick, layin’ in the field; and she says ‘Come quick, ‘cause she’s dyin.’“

“Mercy on us! what will happen to that child next?” cried poor mamma, who was used to Poppy’s mishaps. Papa was away, and there was no carriage to bring Poppy home in; so mamma took the little wheelbarrow, and trundled away to get the suffering Poppy.

She couldn’t speak when they got to her; and, only stopping to give the man a lecture, mamma picked up her silly little girl, and the procession moved off. First came Cy, as grave as a sexton; then the wheelbarrow with Poppy, white and limp and speechless, all in a bunch; then mamma, looking amused, anxious and angry; then Nelly, weeping as if her tender heart was entirely broken; while the man watched them, with a grin, saying to himself:

“Twarn’t my fault. The child was a reg’lar fool to swaller it.”

Poppy was dreadfully sick all night, but next day was ready for more adventures and experiments. She swung on the garret stairs, and tumbled down, nearly breaking her neck. She rubbed her eyes with red peppers, to see if it *really* would make them smart, as Cy said; and was led home quite blind and roaring with pain. She got into the pigsty to catch a young piggy, and was taken out in a sad state of dirt. She slipped into the brook, and was half drowned; broke a window and her own head, swinging a little flat-iron on a string; dropped baby in the coal-hod; buried her doll, and spoilt her; cut off a bit of her finger, chopping wood; and broke a tooth, trying to turn heels over head on a haycock. These are only a few of her pranks, but one was nearly her last.

She wanted to go bare-footed, as the little country boys and girls did; but mamma wasn't willing, and Poppy was much afflicted.

"It doesn't hurt Cy, and it won't hurt me, just for a little while," she said.

"Say no more, Poppy. I never wish to see you barefooted," replied mamma.

"Well, you needn't: I'll go and do it in the barn," muttered Poppy, as she walked away.

Into the barn she went, and played country girl to her heart's content, in spite of Nelly's warnings. Nelly never got into scrapes, being a highly virtuous young lady; but she enjoyed Poppy's pranks, and wept over her misfortunes with sisterly fidelity.

"Now I'll be a bear, and jump at you as you go by," said Poppy, when they were tired of playing steam-engine with the old winnowing machine. So she got up on a beam; and Nelly, with a peck measure on her head for a hat, and a stick for a gun, went bear-hunting, and banged away at the swallows, the barrels, and the hencoops, till the bear was ready to eat her. Presently, with a loud roar, the bear leaped; but Nelly wasn't eaten that time, for Poppy cried out with pain:

"Oh! I jumped on a pitchfork, and it's in my foot! Take it out! take it out!"

Poor little foot! There was a deep purple hole in the sole, and the blood came, and Poppy fainted away, and Nelly screamed, and mamma ran, and the neighbors rushed in, and there was *such* a flurry. Poppy was soon herself again, and lay on the sofa, with Nelly and Cy to amuse her.

"What did the doctor say to mamma in the other room about me?" whispered Poppy, feeling very important at having such a bustle made on her account. Nelly sniffed, but said nothing; Cy, however, spoke up briskly:

"He says you might have lockjaw."

"Is that bad?" asked Poppy gravely.

"Oh, ain't it, though! Your mouth shuts up, and you can't open it; and you have fits and die."

"Always?" said Poppy, looking scared, and feeling of her mouth.

"'Most always, I guess. That's why your ma cried, and Nelly keeps kissin' you."

Cy felt sorry, but rather enjoyed the excitement, and was sure, that, if any one ever *could* escape dying, it would be Poppy, for she always "came alive" again after her worst mishaps. She looked very solemn for a few minutes, and kept opening and shutting her mouth to see if it wasn't stiff. Presently she said, in a serious tone and with a pensive air:

"Nelly, I'll give you my bead-ring: I shan't want it any more. And Cy may have the little horse: he lost his tail; but I put on the lamb’s tail, and he is as good as ever. I wish to give away my things ‘fore I die; and, Nelly, won’t you bring me the scissors?”

“What for?” said Nelly, sniffing more than ever.

“To cut off my hair for mamma. She’ll want it, and I like to cut things.”

Nelly got the scissors; and Poppy cut away all she could reach, giving directions about her property while she snipped.

“I wish papa to have my pictures and my piece of poetry I made. Give baby my dolly and the quacking duck. Tell Billy, if he wants my collection of bright buttons, he can have ‘em; and give Hattie the yellow plaster dog, with my love.”

Here mamma came in with a poultice, and couldn’t help laughing, though tears stood in her eyes, as she saw Poppy’s cropped head and heard her last wishes.

“I don’t think I shall lose my little girl yet, so we won’t talk of it. But Poppy must keep quiet, and let Nelly wait on her for a few days.”

“Are fits bad, mamma? and does it hurt much to die?” asked Poppy thoughtfully.

“If people are good while they live, it is not hard to die, dear,” said mamma, with a kiss; and Poppy hugged her, saying softly:

“Then I’ll be very good; so I won’t mind, if the jawlock does come.”

And Poppy *was* good, — oh, dreadfully good! for a week. Quite an angel was Poppy; so meek and gentle, so generous and obedient, you really wouldn’t have known her. She loved everybody, forgave her playmates all their sins against her, let Nelly take such of her precious treasures as she liked, and pensively hoped baby would remember her when she was gone. She hopped about with a crutch, and felt as if she was an object of public interest; for all the old ladies sent to know how she was, the children looked at her with respectful awe as one set apart and doomed to fits, and Cy continually begged to know if her mouth was stiff.

Poppy didn’t die, though she got all ready for it; and felt rather disappointed when the foot healed, the jaws remained as active as ever, and the fits didn’t come. I think it did her good; for she never forgot that week, and, though she was near dying several times after, she never was so fit to go as she was then.

“Burney’s making jelly: let’s go and get our scrapings,” said Poppy to Nellie once, when mamma was away.

But Burney was busy and cross, and cooks are not as patient as mothers; so when the children appeared, each armed with a spoon, and demanded their usual feast, she wouldn’t hear of it, and ordered them off.

“But we only want the scrapings of the pan, Burney: mamma always lets us have them, when we help her make jelly; don’t she, Nelly?” said Poppy, trying to explain the case.

“Yes; and makes us our little potful too,” added Nelly, persuasively.

“I don’t want your help; so be off. Your ma can fuss with your pot, if she chooses. I’ve no time.”

“*I* think Burney’s the crossest woman in the world. It’s mean to eat all the scrapings herself; isn’t it Nelly?” said Poppy, very loud, as the cook shut the door in their faces. “Never mind: I know how to pay her,” she added, in a whisper, as they sat on the stairs bewailing their wrongs. “She’ll put her old jelly in the big closet, and lock the door; but we can climb the plum tree, and get in at the window, when she takes her nap.”

“Should we dare to eat any?” asked Nelly, timid, but longing for the forbidden fruit.

“*I* should; just as much as ever I like. It’s mamma’s jelly, and she won’t mind. I don’t care for old cross Burney,” said Poppy, sliding down the banisters by way of soothing her ruffled spirit.

So when Burney went to her room after dinner, the two rogues climbed in at the window; and, each taking a jar, sat on the shelf, dipping in their fingers and revelling rapturously. But Burney wasn’t asleep, and, hearing a noise below, crept down to see what mischief was going on. Pausing in the entry to listen, she heard whispering, clattering of glasses, and smacking of lips in the big closet; and in a moment knew that her jelly was lost. She tried the door with her key; but sly Poppy had bolted it on the inside, and, feeling quite safe, defied Burney from among the jelly-pots, entirely reckless of consequences. Short-sighted Poppy! she forgot Cy; but Burney didn’t, and sent him to climb in at the window, and undo the door. Feeling hurt that the young ladies hadn’t asked him to the feast, Cy hardened his heart against them, and delivered them up to the enemy, regardless of Poppy’s threats and Nelly’s prayers.

“Poppy proposed it, she broke the jar, and I didn’t eat *much*. O Burney! don’t hurt her, please, but let me ‘splain it to mamma when she comes,” sobbed Nelly, as Burney seized Poppy, and gave her a good shaking.

“You go wash your face, Miss Nelly, and leave this naughty, naughty child to me,” said Burney; and took Poppy, kicking and screaming, into the little library, where she — oh, dreadful to relate! — gave her a good spanking, and locked her up.

Mamma never whipped, and Poppy was in a great rage at such an indignity. The minute she was left alone, she looked about to see how she could be revenged. A solar lamp stood on the table; and Poppy coolly tipped it over, with a fine smash, calling out to Burney that she’d have to pay for it, that mamma would be very angry, and that she, Poppy, was going to spoil every thing in the room. But Burney was gone, and no one came near her. She kicked the paint off the door, rattled the latch, called Burney a "pig," and Cy "a badder boy than the man who smothered the little princes in the Tower." Poppy was very fond of that story, and often played it with Nelly and the dolls. Having relieved her feelings in this way, Poppy rested, and then set about amusing herself. Observing that the spilt oil made the table shine, she took her handkerchief and polished up the furniture, as she had seen the maids do.

"Now, that looks nice; and I know mamma will be pleased 'cause I'm so tidy," she said, surveying her work with pride, when she had thoroughly greased every table, chair, picture-frame, book-back, and ornament in the room. Plenty of oil still remained; and Poppy finished off by oiling her hair, till it shone finely, and smelt — dear me, how it did smell! If she had been a young whale, it couldn't have been worse. Poppy wasn't particular about smells; but she got some in her mouth, and didn't like the taste. There was no water to wash in; and her hands, face, and pinafore were in a high state of grease. She was rather lonely too; for, though mamma had got home, she didn't come to let Poppy out: so the young rebel thought it was about time to surrender. She could write pretty well, and was fond of sending penitent notes to mamma, after being naughty: for mamma always answered them so kindly, and was so forgiving, that Poppy's naughtiest mood was conquered by them sooner than by any punishment; and Poppy kept the notes carefully in a little cover, even after she was grown up. There was pen, ink, and paper in the room; so, after various trials, Poppy wrote her note: —

"dear Mamma.

"i am sorry i Took bernys gelli. i have braked The lamP. The oyl maks A bad smel. i tHink i wil Bee sik iF i stay HeRe anny More. i LoVe yoU — your Trying To Bee GooD

popy."

When she had finished, she lowered her note by a string, and bobbed it up and down before the parlor window till Nelly saw and took it in. Every one laughed over it; for, besides the bad spelling and the funny periods, it was covered with oil-spots, blots, and tear marks; for Poppy got tender-hearted toward the end, and cried a few very repentant tears when she said, "I love you; your trying-to-be-good Poppy."

Mamma went up at once, and ordered no further punishment, but a thorough scrubbing; which Poppy underwent very meekly, though Betsey put soap in her eyes, pulled her hair, and scolded all the time. They were not allowed any jelly for a long while; and Cy teased Poppy about her hair-oil till the joke was quite worn out, and even cross Burney was satisfied with the atonement.

When Poppy was eight, she got so very wild that no one could manage her but mamma, and she was ill; so Poppy was sent away to grandpa's for a visit. Now, grandpa was a very stately old gentleman, and every one treated him with great respect; but Poppy wasn't at all afraid, and asked all manner of impolite questions.

"Grandpa, why don't you have any hair on the top of your head?" — "O grandpa! you *do* snore *so* loud when you take naps!" — "What makes you turn out your feet so, when you walk?" and such things.

If grandpa hadn't been the best-natured old gentleman in the world, he wouldn't have liked this: but he only laughed at Poppy, especially when she spoke of his legs; for he was rather proud of them, and always wore long black silk stockings, and told every one that the legs were so handsome an artist put them in a picture of General Washington; which was quite true, as any one may see when they look at the famous picture in Boston.

Well, Poppy behaved herself respectably for a day or two; but the house was rather dull, she missed Nelly, wanted to run in the street, and longed to see mamma. She amused herself as well as she could with picture-books, patchwork, and the old cat; but, not being a quiet, proper, little Rosamond sort of a child, she got tired of hemming neat pocket-handkerchiefs, and putting her needle carefully away when she had done. She wanted to romp and shout, and slide down the banisters, and riot about; so, when she couldn't be quiet another minute, she went up into a great empty room at the top of the house, and cut up all sorts of capers. Her great delight was to lean out of the window as far as she could, and look at the people in the street, with her head upside down. It was very dangerous, for a fall would have killed her; but the danger was the fun, and Poppy hung out till her hands touched the ledge below, and her face was as red as any real poppy's.

She was enjoying herself in this way one day, when an old gentleman, who lived near, came home to dinner, and saw her.

"What in the world is that hanging out of the colonel's upper window?" said he, putting on his spectacles. "Bless my soul! that child will kill herself. Hallo, there! little girl; get in this minute!" he called to Poppy, flourishing his hat to make her see him.

"What for?" answered Poppy, staring at him without moving an inch.

"You'll fall, and break your neck!" screamed the old gentleman.

"Oh, no, I shan't!" returned Poppy, much flattered by his interest, and hanging out still further.

"Stop that, instantly, or I'll go in and inform the colonel!" roared the old gentleman, getting angry.

“I don’t care,” shouted Poppy; and she didn’t, for she knew grandpa wasn’t at home.

“Little gipsy! I’ll settle her,” muttered the old man, bustling up to the steps, and ringing the bell, as if the house was on fire.

No one was in but the servants; and, when he’d told old Emily what the matter was, she went up to “settle” Poppy. But Poppy was already settled, demurely playing with her doll, and looking quite innocent. Emily scolded; and Poppy promised never to do it again, if she might stay and play in the big room. Being busy about dinner, Emily was glad to be rid of her, and left her, to go and tell the old gentleman it was all right.

“Ain’t they crosspatches?” said Poppy to her doll. “Never mind, dear: *you* shall hang out, if I can’t. I guess the old man won’t order you in, any way.”

Full of this idea, Poppy took her long-suffering dolly, and, tying a string to her neck, danced her out of the window. Now this dolly had been through a great deal. Her head had been cut off (and put on again); she had been washed, buried, burnt, torn, soiled, and banged about till she was a mournful object. Poppy loved her very much; for she was two feet tall, and had once been very handsome: so her trials only endeared her to her little mamma. Away she went, skipping and prancing like mad, — a funny sight, for Poppy had taken off her clothes, and she hadn’t a hair on her head.

Poppy went to another window of the room for this performance, because in the opposite house lived five or six children, and she thought they would enjoy the fun.

So they did, and so did the other people; for it was a boarding-house, and all the people were at home for dinner. They came to the windows, and looked and laughed at dolly’s capers, and Poppy was in high feather at the success of her entertainment.

All of a sudden she saw grandpa coming down the street, hands behind his back, feet turned out, gold-headed cane under his arm, and the handsome legs in the black silk stockings marching along in the most stately manner. Poppy whisked dolly in before grandpa saw her, and dodged down as he went by. This made the people laugh again, and grandpa wondered what the joke was. The minute he went in out flew dolly, dancing more frantically than ever; and the children shouted so loud that grandpa went to see what the matter was. The street was empty; yet there stood the people, staring out and laughing. Yes; they were actually looking and laughing at *his* house; and he didn’t see what there was to laugh at in that highly respectable mansion.

He didn’t like it; and, clapping on his hat, he went out to learn what the matter was. He looked over at the house, up at the sky, down at the ground, and through the street; but nothing funny appeared, for Poppy and dolly were hidden again, and the old gentleman was puzzled. He went in and sat down to watch, feeling rather disturbed. Presently the fun began again: the children clapped their hands, the people laughed, and every one looked over at the house, in what he thought a very impertinent way. This made him angry; and out he rushed a second time, saying, as he marched across the street:

“If those saucy young fellows are making game of me, I’ll soon stop it.”

Up to the door he went, gave a great pull at the bell, and, when the servant came, he demanded why every one was laughing at his house. One of the young men came and told him, and asked him to come in and see the fun. Poppy didn’t see grandpa go in, for she hid, and when she looked out he was gone: so she boldly began the dancing; but, in the midst of a lively caper, dolly went bounce into the garden below, for the string fell from Poppy’s hand when she suddenly saw grandpa at the window opposite, laughing as heartily as any one at her prank.

She stared at him in a great fright, and looked so amazed that every one enjoyed that joke better than the other; and poor Poppy didn’t hear the last of it for a long time.

Her next performance was to fall into the pond on the Common. She was driving hoop down the hill, and went so fast she couldn’t stop herself; so splashed into the water, hoop and all. How dreadful it was to feel the cold waves go over her head, shutting out the sun and air! The ground was gone, and she could find no place for her feet, and could only struggle and choke, and go down, down, with a loud roaring sound in her ears. That would have been the end of Poppy, if a little black boy hadn’t jumped in and pulled her out. She was sick and dizzy, and looked like a drowned kitten; but a kind lady took her home in a carriage. After that mishap grandpa thought he wouldn’t keep her any longer, for fear she should come to some worse harm. So Miss Poppy was sent home, much to her delight and much to mamma’s also; for no matter where she went, or how naughty she was, mamma was always glad to see the little wanderer back, and to forgive and forget all Poppy’s pranks.

VII.

WHAT THE SWALLOWS DID.

A man lay on a pile of new-made hay, in a great barn, looking up at the swallows who darted and twittered above him. He envied the cheerful little creatures; for he wasn’t a happy man, though he had many friends, much money, and the beautiful gift of writing songs that everybody loved to sing. He had lost his wife and little child, and would not be comforted; but lived alone, and went about with such a gloomy face that no one liked to speak to him. He took no notice of friends and neighbors; neither used his money for himself nor others; found no beauty in the world, no happiness anywhere; and wrote such sad songs it made one’s heart ache to sing them.

As he lay alone on the sweet-smelling hay, with the afternoon sunshine streaming in, and the busy birds chirping overhead, he said sadly to himself:

“Happy swallows, I wish I were one of you; for you have no pains nor sorrows, and your cares are very light. All summer you live gayly together; and, when winter comes, you fly away to the lovely South, unseparated still.”

“Neighbors, do you hear what that lazy creature down there is saying?” cried a swallow, peeping over the edge of her nest, and addressing several others who sat on a beam near by.

“We hear, Mrs. Skim; and quite agree with you that he knows very little about us and our affairs,” answered one of the swallows with a shrill chirp, like a scornful laugh. “We work harder than he does any day. Did he build his own house, I should like to know? Does he get his daily bread for himself? How many of his neighbors does he help? How much of the world does he see, and who is the happier for his being alive?”

“Cares indeed!” cried another; “I wish he’d undertake to feed and teach my brood. Much he knows about the anxieties of a parent.” And the little mother bustled away to get supper for the young ones, whose bills were always gaping wide.

“Sorrows we have, too,” softly said the fourth swallow. “He would not envy *me*, if he knew how my nest fell, and all my children were killed; how my dear husband was shot, and my old mother died of fatigue on our spring journey from the South.”

“Dear neighbor Dart, he *would* envy you, if he knew how patiently you bear your troubles; how tenderly you help us with our little ones; how cheerfully you serve your friends; how faithfully you love your lost mate; and how trustfully you wait to meet him again in a lovelier country than the South."

As Skim spoke, she leaned down from her nest to kiss her neighbor; and, as the little beaks met, the other birds gave a grateful and approving murmur, for Neighbor Dart was much beloved by all the inhabitants of Twittertown.

"I, for my part, don't envy *him*," said Gossip Wing, who was fond of speaking her mind. "Men and women call themselves superior beings; but, upon my word, I think they are vastly inferior to us. Now, look at that man, and see how he wastes his life. There never was any one with a better chance for doing good, and being happy; and yet he mopes and dawdles his time away most shamefully."

"Ah! he has had a great sorrow, and it is hard to be gay with a heavy heart, an empty home; so don't be too severe, Sister Wing." And the white tie of the little widow's cap was stirred by a long sigh as Mrs. Dart glanced up at the nook where her nest once stood.

"No, my dear, I won't; but really I do get out of patience when I see so much real misery which that man might help, if he'd only forget himself a little. It's my opinion he'd be much happier than he now is, wandering about with a dismal face and a sour temper."

"I quite agree with you; and I dare say he'd thank any one for telling him how he may find comfort. Poor soul! I wish he could understand me; for I sympathize with him, and would gladly help him if I could."

And, as she spoke, kind-hearted Widow Dart skimmed by him with a friendly chirp, which did comfort him; for, being a poet, he *could* understand them, and lay listening, well pleased while the little gossips chattered on together.

"I am so tied at home just now, that I know nothing of what is going on, except the bits of news Skim brings me; so I enjoy your chat immensely. I'm interested in your views on this subject, and beg you'll tell me what you'd have that man do to better himself," said Mrs. Skim, settling herself on her eggs with an attentive air.

"Well, my dear, I'll tell you; for I've seen a deal of the world, and any one is welcome to my experience," replied Mrs. Wing, in an important manner; for she was proud of her "views," and very fond of talking. "In my daily flights about the place, I see a great deal of poverty and trouble, and often wish I could lend a hand. Now, this man has plenty of money and time; and he might do more good than I can tell, if he'd only set about it. Because he is what they call a poet is no reason he should go moaning up and down, as if he had nothing to do but make songs. We sing, but we work also; and are wise enough to see the necessity of both, thank goodness!"

"Yes, indeed, we do," cried all the birds in a chorus; for several more had stopped to hear what was going on.

"Now, what I say is this," continued Mrs. Wing impressively. "If I were that man, I'd make myself useful at once. There is poor little Will getting more and more lame every day, because his mother can't send him where he can be cured. A trifle of that man's money would do it, and he ought to give it. Old Father Winter is half starved, alone there in his miserable hovel; and no one thinks of the good old man. Why don't that lazy creature take him home, and care for him, the little while he has to live? Pretty Nell is working day and night, to support her father, and is too proud to ask help, though her health and courage are going fast. The man might make hers the gayest heart alive, by a little help. There in a lonely garret lives a young man studying his life away, longing for books and a teacher. The man has a library full, and might keep the poor boy from despair by a little help and a friendly word. He mourns for his own lost baby: I advise him to adopt the orphan whom nobody will own, and who lies wailing all day untended on the poor-house floor. Yes: if he wants to forget sorrow and find peace, let him fill his empty heart and home with such as these, and life won't seem dark to him any more."

"Dear me! how well you express yourself, Mrs. Wing; it's quite a pleasure to hear you; and I heartily wish some persons could hear you, it would do 'em a deal of good," said Mrs. Skim; while her husband gave an approving nod as he dived off the beam, and vanished through the open doors.

"I know it would comfort that man to do these things; for I have tried the same cure in my small way, and found great satisfaction in it," began little Madame Dart, in her soft voice; but Mrs. Wing broke in, saying with a pious expression of countenance:

"I flew into church one day, and sat on the organ enjoying the music; for every one was singing, and I joined in, though I didn't know the air. Opposite me were two great tablets with golden letters on them. I can read a little, thanks to my friend, the learned raven; and so I spelt out some of the words. One was, 'Love thy neighbor;' and as I sat there, looking down on the people, I wondered how they could see those words week after week, and yet pay so little heed to them. Goodness knows, *I* don't consider myself a perfect bird; far from it; for I know I am a poor, erring fowl; but I believe I may say I *do* love my neighbor, though I *am* 'an inferior creature.'" And Mrs. Wing bridled up, as if she resented the phrase immensely.

"Indeed you do, gossip," cried Dart and Skim; for Wing was an excellent bird, in spite of the good opinion she had of herself.

"Thank you: well, then, such being the known fact, I may give advice on the subject as one having authority; and, if it were possible, I'd give that man a bit of my mind."

"You have, madam, you have; and I shall not forget it. Thank you, neighbors, and good night," said the man, as he left the barn, with the first smile on his face which it had worn for many days.

"Mercy on us! I do believe the creature heard every thing we said," cried Mrs. Wing, nearly tumbling off the beam, in her surprise.

"He certainly did; so I'm glad I was guarded in my remarks," replied Mrs. Skim, laughing at her neighbor's dismay.

"Dear me! dear me! what did I say?" cried Mrs. Wing, in a great twitter.

"You spoke with more than your usual bluntness, and some of your expressions were rather strong, I must confess; but I don't think any harm will come of it. We are of too little consequence for our criticisms or opinions to annoy him," said Mrs. Dart consolingly.

"I don't know that, ma'am," returned Mrs. Wing, sharply: for she was much ruffled and out of temper. "A cat may look at a king; and a bird may teach a man, if the bird is the wisest. He may destroy my nest, and take my life; but I feel that I have done my duty, and shall meet affliction with a firmness which will be an example to that indolent, ungrateful man."

In spite of her boasted firmness, Mrs. Wing dropped her voice, and peeped over the beam, to be sure the man was gone before she called him names; and then flew away, to discover what he meant to do about it.

For several days, there was much excitement in Twittertown; for news of what had happened flew from nest to nest, and every bird was anxious to know what revenge the man would take for the impertinent remarks which had been made about him.

Mrs. Wing was in a dreadful state of mind, expecting an assault, and the destruction of her entire family. Every one blamed her. Her husband lectured; the young birds chirped, "Chatterbox, chatterbox," as she passed; and her best friends were a little cool. All this made her very meek for a time; and she scarcely opened her bill, except to eat.

A guard was set day and night, to see if any danger approached; and a row of swallows might be seen on the ridgepole at all hours. If any one entered the barn, dozens of little black heads peeped cautiously over the edges of the nests, and there was much flying to and fro with reports and rumors; for all the birds in the town soon knew that something had happened.

The day after the imprudent conversation, a chimney-swallow came to call on Mrs. Wing; and, the moment she was seated on the beam, she began:

"My dear creature, I feel for you in your trying position, — indeed I do, and came over at once to warn you of your danger."

"Mercy on us! what is coming?" cried Mrs. Wing, covering her brood with trembling wings, and looking quite wild with alarm.

"Be calm, my friend, and bear with firmness the consequences of your folly," replied Mrs. Sooty-back, who didn't like Mrs. Wing, because she prided herself on her family, and rather looked down on chimney-swallows. "You know, ma'am, I live at the great house, and am in the way of seeing and hearing all that goes on there. No fire is lighted in the study now; but my landlord still sits on the hearth, and I can overhear every word he says. Last evening, after my darlings were asleep, and my husband gone out, I went down and sat on the andiron, as I often do; for the fireplace is full of oak boughs, and I can peep out unseen. My landlord sat there, looking a trifle more cheerful than usual, and I heard him say, in a very decided tone:

"'I'll catch them, one and all, and keep them here; that is better than pulling the place down, as I planned at first. Those swallows little know what they have done; but I'll show them I don't forget.'"

On hearing this a general wail arose, and Mrs. Wing fainted entirely away. Madam Sooty-back was quite satisfied with the effect she had produced, and departed, saying loftily:

"I'm sorry for you, Mrs. Wing, and forgive your rude speech about my being related to chimney-sweeps. One can't expect good manners from persons brought up in mud houses, and entirely shut out from good society. If I hear any thing more, I'll let you know."

Away she flew; and poor Mrs. Wing would have had another fit, if they hadn't tickled her with a feather, and fanned her so violently that she was nearly blown off her nest by the breeze they raised.

"What shall we do?" she cried.

"Nothing, but wait. I dare say, Mrs. Sooty-back is mistaken; at any rate, we can't get away without leaving our children, for they can't fly yet. Let us wait, and see what happens. If the worst comes, we shall have done our duty, and will all die together."

As no one could suggest any thing better, Mrs. Dart's advice was taken, and they waited. On the afternoon of the same day, Dr. Banks, a sand-swallow, who lived in a subterranean village over by the great sand-bank, looked in to see Mrs. Wing, and cheered her by the following bit of news:

"The man was down at the poor-house to-day, and took away little Nan, the orphan baby. I saw him carry her to Will's mother, and heard him ask her to take care of it for a time. He paid her well, and she seemed glad to do it; for Will needs help, and now he can have it. An excellent arrangement, I think. Bless me, ma'am! what's the matter? Your pulse is altogether too fast, and you look feverish."

No wonder the doctor looked surprised; for Mrs. Wing suddenly gave a skip, and flapped her wings, with a shrill chirp, exclaiming, as she looked about her triumphantly:

"Now, who was right? Who has done good, not harm, by what you call 'gossip'? Who has been a martyr, and patiently borne all kinds of blame, injustice, and disrespect? Yes, indeed! the man saw the sense of my words; he took my advice; he will show his gratitude by some good turn yet; and, if half a dozen poor souls are helped, it will be my doing, and mine alone."

Here she had to stop for breath; and her neighbors all looked at one another, feeling undecided whether to own they were wrong, or to put Mrs. Wing down. Every one twittered and chirped, and made a great noise; but no one would give up, and all went to roost in a great state of uncertainty. But, the next day, it became evident that Mrs. Wing was right; for Major Bumble-bee came buzzing in to tell them that old Daddy Winter's hut was empty, and his white head had been seen in the sunny porch of the great house.

After this the swallows gave in; and, as no harm came to them, they had a jubilee in honor of the occasion. Mrs. Wing was president, and received a vote of thanks for the good she had done, and the credit she had bestowed upon the town by her wisdom and courage. She was much elated by all this; but her fright had been of service, and she bore her honors more meekly than one would have supposed. To be sure, she cut Mrs. Sooty-back when they met; assumed an injured air, when some of her neighbors passed her; and said, "I told you so," a dozen times a day to her husband, who got so many curtain lectures that he took to sleeping on the highest rafter, pretending that the children's noise disturbed him.

All sorts of charming things happened after that, and such a fine summer never was known before; for not only did the birds rejoice, but people also. A good spirit seemed to haunt the town, leaving help and happiness wherever it passed. Some unseen hand scattered crumbs over the barn floor, and left food at many doors. No dog or boy or gun marred the tranquillity of the birds, insects, and flowers who lived on the great estate. No want, care, or suffering, that love or money could prevent, befell the poor folk whose cottages stood near the old house. Sunshine and peace seemed to reign there; for its gloomy master was a changed man now, and the happiness he earned for himself, by giving it to others, flowed out in beautiful, blithe songs, and went singing away into the world, making him friends, and bringing him honor in high places as well as low.

He did not forget the wife and little child whom he had loved so well; but he mourned no longer, for cheerful daisies grew above their graves, and he knew that he should meet them in the lovely land where death can never come. So, while he waited for that happy time to come, he made his life a cheery song, — as every one may do, if they will; and went about dropping kind words and deeds as silently and sweetly as the sky drops sunshine and dew. Every one was his friend, but his favorites were the swallows. Every day he went to see them, carrying grain and crumbs, hearing their chat, sharing their joys and sorrows, and never tiring of their small friendship; for to them, he thought, he owed all the content now his.

When autumn leaves were red, and autumn winds blew cold, the inhabitants of Twittertown prepared for their journey to the South. They lingered longer than usual this year, feeling sorry to leave their friend. But the fields were bare, the frosts began to pinch, and the young ones longed to see the world; so they must go. The day they started, the whole flock flew to the great house, to say good-by. Some dived and darted round and round it, some hopped to and fro on the sere lawn, some perched on the chimney-tops, and some clung to the window ledges; all twittering a loving farewell.

Chirp, Dart, and Wing peeped everywhere, and everywhere found something to rejoice over. In a cosey room, by a bright fire, sat Daddy Winter and Nell’s old father, telling stories of their youth, and basking in the comfortable warmth. In the study, surrounded by the books he loved, was the poor young man, happy as a king now, and learning many things which no book could teach him; for he had found a friend. Then, down below was Will’s mother, working like a bee; for she was housekeeper, and enjoyed her tasks as much as any mother-bird enjoys filling the little mouths of her brood. Close by was pretty Nell, prettier than ever now; for her heavy care was gone, and she sung as she sewed, thinking of the old father, whom nothing could trouble any more.

But the pleasantest sight the three gossips saw was the man with Baby Nan on his arm and Will at his side, playing in the once dreary nursery. How they laughed and danced! for Will was up from his bed at last, and hopped nimbly on his crutches, knowing that soon even they would be unneeded. Little Nan was as plump and rosy as a baby should be, and babbled like a brook, as the man went to and fro, cradling her in his strong arms, feeling as if his own little daughter had come back when he heard the baby voice call him father.

“Ah, how sweet it is!” cried Mrs. Dart, glad to see that he had found comfort for his grief.

“Yes; indeed: it does one’s heart good to see such a happy family,” added Mrs. Skim, who was a very motherly bird.

“I don’t wish to boast; but I *will* say that I am satisfied with my summer’s work, and go South feeling that I leave an enviable reputation behind me.” And Mrs. Wing plumed herself with an air of immense importance, as she nodded and bridled from her perch on the window-sill.

The man saw the three, and hastened to feed them for the last time, knowing that they were about to go. Gratefully they ate, and chirped their thanks; and then, as they flew away, the little gossips heard their friend singing his good-by:

“Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow, Starting on your autumn flight, Pause a moment at my window, Twitter softly your good-night; For the summer days are over, All your duties are well done, And the happy homes you builded Have grown empty, one by one.

“Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow, Are you ready for your flight? Are all the feather cloaks completed? Are the little caps all right? Are the young wings strong and steady For the journey through the sky? Come again in early spring-time; And till then, good-by, good-by!”

VIII.

LITTLE GULLIVER.

Up in the light-house tower lived Davy, with Old Dan the keeper. Most little boys would have found it very lonely; but Davy had three friends, and was as happy as the day was long. One of Davy's friends was the great lamp, which was lighted at sunset, and burnt all night, to guide the ships into the harbor. To Dan it was only a lamp; but to the boy it seemed a living thing, and he loved and tended it faithfully. Every day he helped Dan clear the big wick, polish the brass work, and wash the glass lantern which protected the flame. Every evening he went up to see it lighted, and always fell asleep, thinking, "No matter how dark or wild the night, my good Shine will save the ships that pass, and burn till morning."

Davy's second friend was Nep, the Newfoundland, who was washed ashore from a wreck, and had never left the island since. Nep was rough and big, but had such a loyal and loving heart that no one could look in his soft brown eyes and not trust him. He followed Davy's steps all day, slept at his feet all night, and more than once had saved his life when Davy fell among the rocks, or got caught by the rising tide.

But the dearest friend of all was a sea-gull. Davy found him, with a broken wing, and nursed him carefully till he was well; then let him go, though he was very fond of "Little Gulliver," as he called him in fun. But the bird never forgot the boy, and came daily to talk with him, telling all manner of wild stories about his wanderings by land and sea, and whiling away many an hour that otherwise would have been very lonely.

Old Dan was Davy's uncle, — a grim, gray man, who said little, did his work faithfully, and was both father and mother to Davy, who had no parents, and no friends beyond the island. That was his world; and he led a quiet life among his playfellows, — the winds and waves. He seldom went to the main land, three miles away; for he was happier at home. He watched the sea-anemones open below the water, looking like fairy-plants, brilliant and strange. He found curious and pretty shells, and sometimes more valuable treasures, washed up from some wreck. He saw little yellow crabs, ugly lobsters, and queer horse-shoes with their stiff tails. Sometimes a whale or a shark swam by, and often sleek black seals came up to bask on the warm rocks. He gathered lovely sea-weeds of all kinds, from tiny red cobwebs to great scalloped leaves of kelp, longer than himself. He heard the waves dash and roar unceasingly; the winds howl or sigh over the island; and the gulls scream shrilly as they dipped and dived, or sailed away to follow the ships that came and went from all parts of the world.

With Nep and Gulliver he roamed about his small kingdom, never tired of its wonders; or, if storms raged, he sat up in the tower, safe and dry, watching the tumult of sea and sky. Often in long winter nights he lay awake, listening to the wind and rain, that made the tower rock with their violence; but he never was afraid, for Nep nestled at his feet, Dan sat close by, and overhead the great lamp shone far out into the night, to cheer and guide all wanderers on the sea.

Close by the tower hung the fog-bell, which, being wound up, would ring all night, warningly. One day Dan found that something among the chains was broken; and, having vainly tried to mend it, he decided to go to the town, and get what was needed. He went once a week, usually, and left Davy behind; for in the daytime there was nothing to do, and the boy was not afraid to stay.

“A heavy fog is blowing up: we shall want the bell to-night, and I must be off at once. I shall be back before dark, of course; so take care of yourself, boy,” said Dan.

Away went the little boat; and the fog shut down over it, as if a misty wall had parted Davy from his uncle. As it was dull weather, he sat and read for an hour or two; then fell asleep, and forgot everything till Nep’s cold nose on his hand waked him up. It was nearly dark; and, hoping to find Dan had come, he ran down to the landing-place. But no boat was there, and the fog was thicker than ever.

Dan never had been gone so long before, and Davy was afraid something had happened to him. For a few minutes he was in great trouble; then he cheered up, and took courage.

“It is sunset by the clock; so I’ll light the lamp, and, if Dan is lost in the fog, it will guide him home,” said Davy.

Up he went, and soon the great star shone out above the black-topped lighthouse, glimmering through the fog, as if eager to be seen. Davy had his supper, but no Dan came. He waited hour after hour, and waited all in vain. The fog thickened, till the lamp was hardly seen; and no bell rung to warn the ships of the dangerous rocks. Poor Davy could not sleep, but all night long wandered from the tower to the door, watching, calling, and wondering; but Dan did not come.

At sunrise he put out the light, and, having trimmed it for the next night, ate a little breakfast, and roved about the island hoping to see some sign of Dan. The sun drew up the fog at last; and he could see the blue bay, the distant town, and a few fishing-boats going out to sea. But nowhere was the island-boat with gray Old Dan in it; and Davy’s heart grew heavier and heavier, as the day passed, and still no one came. In the afternoon Gulliver appeared: to him Davy told his trouble, and the three friends took counsel together.

"There is no other boat; and I couldn't row so far, if there was: so I can't go to find Dan," said David sorrowfully.

"I'd gladly swim to town, if I could; but it's impossible to do it, with wind and tide against me. I've howled all day, hoping some one would hear me; but no one does, and I'm discouraged," said Nep, with an anxious expression.

"I can do something for you; and I will, with all my heart. I'll fly to town, if I don't see him in the bay, and try to learn what has become of Dan. Then I'll come and tell you, and we will see what is to be done next. Cheer up, Davy dear: I'll bring you tidings, if any can be had." With these cheerful words, away sailed Gulliver, leaving Nep and his master to watch and wait again.

The wind blew hard, and the broken wing was not quite well yet, else Gulliver would have been able to steer clear of a boat that came swiftly by. A sudden gust drove the gull so violently against the sail that he dropped breathless into the boat; and a little girl caught him, before he could recover himself.

"Oh, what a lovely bird! See his black cap, his white breast, dove-colored wings, red legs and bill, and soft, bright eyes. I wanted a gull; and I'll keep this one, for I don't think he is much hurt."

Poor Gulliver struggled, pecked and screamed; but little Dora held him fast, and shut him in a basket till they reached the shore. Then she put him in a lobster pot, — a large wooden thing, something like a cage, — and left him on the lawn, where he could catch glimpses of the sea, and watch the light-house tower, as he sat alone in this dreadful prison. If Dora had known the truth, she would have let him go, and done her best to help him; but she could not understand his speech, as Davy did, for very few people have the power of talking with birds, beasts, insects, and plants. To her, his prayers and cries were only harsh screams; and, when he sat silent, with drooping head and ruffled feathers, she thought he was sleepy: but he was mourning for Davy, and wondering what his little friend would do.

For three long days and nights he was a prisoner, and suffered much. The house was full of happy people, but no one took pity upon him. Ladies and gentlemen talked learnedly about him; boys poked and pulled him; little girls admired him, and begged his wings for their hats, if he died. Cats prowled about his cage; dogs barked at him; hens cackled over him; and a shrill canary jeered at him from the pretty pagoda in which it hung, high above danger. In the evening there was music; and the poor bird's heart ached as the sweet sounds came to him, reminding him of the airier melodies he loved. Through the stillness of the night, he heard the waves break on the shore; the wind came singing up from the sea; the moon shone kindly on him, and he saw the water-fairies dancing on the sand. But for three days no one spoke a friendly word to him, and he pined away with a broken heart.

On the fourth night, when all was quiet, little Gulliver saw a black shadow steal across the lawn, and heard a soft voice say to him:

"Poor bird, you'll die, if yer stays here; so I'se gwine to let yer go. Specs little missy'll scold dreffle; but Moppet'll take de scoldin for yer. Hi, dere! you is peart nuff now, kase you's in a hurry to go; but jes wait till I gits de knots out of de string dat ties de door, and den away you flies."

"But, dear, kind Moppet, won't you be hurt for doing this? Why do you care so much for me? I can only thank you, and fly away."

As Gulliver spoke, he looked up at the little black face bent over him, and saw tears in the child's sad eyes; but she smiled at him, and shook her fuzzy head, as she whispered kindly:

"I don't want no tanks, birdie: I loves to let you go, kase you's a slave, like I was once; and it's a dreffle hard ting, I knows. I got away, and I means you shall. I'se watched you, deary, all dese days; and I tried to come 'fore, but dey didn't give me no chance."

"Do you live here? I never see you playing with the other children," said the gull, as Moppet's nimble fingers picked away at the knots.

"Yes: I lives here, and helps de cook. You didn't see me, kase I never plays; de chilen don't like me."

"Why not?" asked Gulliver, wondering.

"I'se black," said Moppet, with a sob.

"But that's silly in them," cried the bird, who had never heard of such a thing. "Color makes no difference; the peeps are gray, the seals black, and the crabs yellow; but we don't care, and are all friends. It is very unkind to treat you so. Haven't you any friends to love you, dear?"

"Nobody in de world keres fer me. Dey sold me way from my mammy when I was a baby, and I'se knocked roun eber since. De oder chilen has folks to lub an kere fer em, but Moppet's got no friends;" and here the black eyes grew so dim with tears that the poor child couldn't see that the last knot was out.

Gulliver saw it, and, pushing up the door, flew from his prison with a glad cry; and, hopping into Moppet's hand, looked into the little dark face with such grateful confidence that it cleared at once, and the brightest smile it had worn for months broke over it as the bird nestled its soft head against her cheek, saying gently:

"I'm your friend, dear; I love you, and I never shall forget what you have done for me to-night. How can I thank you before I go?"

For a minute, Moppet could only hug the bird, and cry; for these were the first kind words she had heard for a long time, and they went straight to her lonely little heart.

"O my deary! I'se paid by dem words, and I don't want no tanks. Jes lub me, and come sometimes to see me ef you can, it's so hard livin' in dis yere place. I don't tink I'll bar it long. I wish I was a bird to fly away, or a oyster safe in de mud, and free to do as I's a mind."

"I wish you could go and live with Davy on the island; he is so kind, so happy, and as free as the wind. Can't you get away, Moppet?" whispered Gulliver, longing to help this poor, friendless little soul. He told her all his story; and they agreed that he should fly at once to the island, and see if Dan was there; if not, he was to come back, and Moppet would try to get some one to help find him. When this was done, Davy and Dan were to take Moppet, if they could, and make her happy on the island. Full of hope and joy, Gulliver said good-by, and spread his wings; but, alas for the poor bird! he was too weak to fly. For three days he had hardly eaten any thing, had found no salt water to bathe in, and had sat moping in the cage till his strength was all gone.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" he cried, fluttering his feeble wings, and running to and fro in despair.

"Hush, birdie, I'll take kere ob you till you's fit to fly. I knows a nice, quiet little cove down yonder, where no one goes; and dare you kin stay till you's better. I'll come and feed you, and you kin paddle, and rest, and try your wings, safe and free, honey."

As Moppet spoke, she took Gulliver in her arms, and stole away in the dim light, over the hill, down to the lonely spot where nothing went but the winds and waves, the gulls, and little Moppet, when hard words and blows made heart and body ache. Here she left the bird, and, with a loving "Good-night," crept home to her bed in the garret, feeling as rich as a queen, and much happier; for she had done a kind thing, and made a friend.

Next day, a great storm came: the wind blew a hurricane, the rain poured, and the sea thundered on the coast. If he had been well, Gulliver wouldn't have minded at all; but, being sick and sad, he spent an anxious day, sitting in a cranny of the rock, thinking of Davy and Moppet. It was so rough, even in the cove, that he could neither swim nor fly, so feeble was he; and could find no food but such trifles as he could pick up among the rocks. At nightfall the storm raged fiercer than ever, and he gave up seeing Moppet; for he was sure she wouldn't come through the pelting rain just to feed him. So he put his head under his wing, and tried to sleep; but he was so wet and weak, so hungry and anxious, no sleep came.

"What has happened to Davy alone on the island all this while? He will fall ill with loneliness and trouble; the lamp won't be lighted, the ships will be wrecked, and many people will suffer. O Dan, Dan, if we could only find you, how happy we should be!"

As Gulliver spoke, a voice cried through the darkness:

"Is you dere, honey?" and Moppet came climbing over the rocks, with a basket full of such bits as she could get. "Poor birdie, is you starvin'? Here, jes go at dis, and joy yourself. Dere's fish and tings I tink you'd like. How is you now, dear?"

"Better, Moppet; but, it's so stormy, I can't get to Davy; and I worry about him," began Gulliver, pecking away at his supper: but he stopped suddenly, for a faint sound came up from below, as if some one called, "Help, help!"

"Hi! what's dat?" said Moppet, listening.

"Davy, Davy!" called the voice.

"It's Dan. Hurrah, we've found him!" and Gulliver dived off the rock so reckless that he went splash into the water. But that didn't matter to him; and he paddled away, like a little steamer with all the engines in full blast. Down by the sea-side, between two stones, lay Dan, so bruised and hurt he couldn't move, and so faint with hunger and pain he could hardly speak. As soon as Gulliver called, Moppet scrambled down, and fed the poor man with her scraps, brought him rain-water from a crevice near by, and bound up his wounded head with her little apron. Then Dan told them how his boat had been run down by a ship in the fog; how he was hurt, and cast ashore in the lonely cove; how he had lain there half dead, for no one heard his shouts, and he couldn't move; how the storm brought him back to life, when he was almost gone, and the sound of Moppet's voice told him help was near.

How glad they all were then! Moppet danced for joy; Gulliver screamed and flapped his wings; and Dan smiled, in spite of pain, to think he should see Davy again. He couldn't understand Gulliver; but Moppet told him all the story, and, when he heard it, he was more troubled for the boy than for himself.

"What will he do? He may get killed or scared, or try to come ashore. Is the lamp alight?" he cried, trying to move, and falling back with a moan of pain.

Gulliver flew up to the highest rock, and looked out across the dark sea. Yes, there it was, — the steady star shining through the storm, and saying plainly, "All is well."

"Thank heaven! if the lamp is burning, Davy is alive. Now, how shall I get to him?" said Dan.

"Never you fret, massa: Moppet'll see to dat. You jes lay still till I comes. Dere's folks in de house as'll tend to you, ef I tells em who and where you is."

Off she ran, and soon came back with help. Dan was taken to the house, and carefully tended; Moppet wasn't scolded for being out so late; and, in the flurry, no one thought of the gull. Next morning, the cage was found blown over, and every one fancied the bird had flown away. Dora was already tired of him; so he was soon forgotten by all but Moppet.

In the morning it was clear; and Gulliver flew gladly to the tower where Davy still watched and waited, with a pale face and heavy heart, for the three days had been very hard to bear, and, but for Nep and Shine, he would have lost his courage entirely. Gulliver flew straight into his bosom, and, sitting there, told his adventures; while Davy laughed and cried, and Nep stood by, wagging his tail for joy, while his eyes were full of sympathy. The three had a very happy hour together, and then came a boat to carry Davy ashore, while another keeper took charge of the light till Dan was well.

Nobody ever knew the best part of the story but Moppet, Davy, and Gulliver. Other people didn't dream that the boy's pet gull had any thing to do with the finding of the man, or the good fortune that came to Moppet. While Dan lay sick, she tended him, like a loving little daughter; and, when he was well, he took her for his own. He did not mind the black skin: he only saw the loneliness of the child, the tender heart, the innocent, white soul; and he was as glad to be a friend to her as if she had been as blithe and pretty as Dora.

It was a happy day when Dan and Davy, Moppet, Gulliver, and Nep sailed away to the island; for that was still to be their home, with stout young Ben to help.

The sun was setting; and they floated through waves as rosy as the rosy sky. A fresh wind filled the sail, and ruffled Gulliver's white breast as he sat on the mast-head crooning a cheery song to himself. Dan held the tiller, and Davy lay at his feet, with Nep bolt upright beside him; but the happiest face of all was Moppet's. Kneeling at the bow, she leaned forward, with her lips apart, her fuzzy hair blown back, and her eyes fixed on the island which was to be her home. Like a little black figure-head of Hope, she leaned and looked, as the boat flew on, bearing her away from the old life into the new.

As the sun sunk, out shone the lamp with sudden brightness, as if the island bade them welcome. Dan furled the sail; and, drifting with the tide, they floated in, till the waves broke softly on the shore, and left them safe at home.

IX.

THE WHALE’S STORY.

Freddy sat thinking on the seat under the trees. It was a wide, white seat, about four feet long, sloping from the sides to the middle, something like a swing; and was not only comfortable but curious, for it was made of a whale’s bone. Freddy often sat there, and thought about it for he was very much interested in it, and nobody could tell him any thing of it, except that it had been there a long time.

“Poor old whale, I wonder how you got here, where you came from, and if you were a good and happy creature while you lived,” said Freddy, patting the old bone with his little hand.

It gave a great creak; and a sudden gust of air stirred the trees, as if some monster groaned and sighed. Then Freddy heard a strange voice, very loud, yet cracked and queer, as if some one tried to talk with a broken jaw.

“Freddy ahoy!” called the big voice. “I’ll tell you all about it; for you are the only person who ever pitied me, or cared to know any thing about me.”

“Why, can you talk?” asked Freddy, very much astonished and a little frightened.

“Of course I can, for this is a part of my jaw-bone. I should talk better if my whole mouth was here; but I’m afraid my voice would then be so loud you wouldn’t be able to hear it. I don’t think any one but you would understand me, any way. It isn’t every one that can, you know; but you are a thoughtful little chap, with a lively fancy as well as a kind heart, so you shall hear my story.”

“Thank you, I should like it very much, if you would please to speak a little lower, and not sigh; for your voice almost stuns me, and your breath nearly blows me away,” said Freddy.

“I’ll try: but it’s hard to suit my tone to such a mite, or to help groaning when I think of my sad fate; though I deserve it, perhaps,” said the bone, more gently.

“Were you a naughty whale?” asked Freddy.

“I was proud, very proud, and foolish; and so I suffered for it. I dare say you know a good deal about us. I see you reading often, and you seem a sensible child.”

“No: I haven’t read about you yet, and I only know that you are the biggest fish there is,” replied Freddy.

The bone creaked and shook, as if it was laughing, and said in a tone that showed it hadn’t got over its pride yet:

“You’re wrong there, my dear; we are not fishes at all, though stupid mortals have called us so for a long time. We can’t live without air; we have warm, red blood; and we don’t lay eggs, — so we are *not* fishes. We certainly *are* the biggest creatures in the sea and out of it. Why, bless you! some of us are nearly a hundred feet long; our tails alone are fifteen or twenty feet wide; the biggest of us weigh five hundred thousand pounds, and have in them the fat, bone, and muscle of a thousand cattle. The lower jaw of one of my family made an arch large enough for a man on horseback to ride under easily, and my cousins of the sperm-family usually yield eighty barrels of oil.”

“Gracious me, what monsters you are!” cried Freddy, taking a long breath, while his eyes got bigger and bigger as he listened.

“Ah! you may well say so; we are a very wonderful and interesting family. All our branches are famous in one way or another. Fin-backs, sperms, and rights are the largest; then come the norwhals, the dolphins, and porpoises, — which last, I dare say, you’ve seen.”

“Yes: but tell me about the big ones, please. Which were you?” cried Freddy.

“I was a Right whale, from Greenland. The Sperms live in warm places; but to us the torrid zone is like a sea of fire, and we don’t pass it. Our cousins do; and go to the East Indies by way of the North Pole, which is more than your famous Parrys and Franklins could do.”

“I don’t know about that; but I’d like to hear what you eat, and how you live, and why you came here,” said Freddy, who thought the whale rather inclined to boast.

“Well, we haven’t got any teeth, — our branch of the family; and we live on creatures so small, that you could only see them with a microscope. Yes, you may stare; but it’s true, my dear. The roofs of our mouths are made of whalebone, in broad pieces from six to eight feet long, arranged one against the other; so they make an immense sieve. The tongue, which makes about five barrels of oil, lies below, like a cushion of white satin. When we want to feed, we rush through the water, which is full of the little things we eat, and catch them in our sieve, spurting the water through two holes in our heads. Then we collect the food with our tongue, and swallow it; for, though we are so big, our throats are small. We roam about in the ocean, leaping and floating, feeding and spouting, flying from our enemies, or fighting bravely to defend our young ones.”

“Have you got any enemies? I shouldn’t think you could have, you are so large,” said Freddy.

“But we have, and many too, — three who attack us in the water, and several more that men use against us. The killer, the sword-fish, and the thrasher trouble us at home. The killer fastens to us, and won’t be shaken off till he has worried us to death; the sword-fish stabs us with his sword; and the thrasher whips us to death with his own slender, but strong and heavy body. Then, men harpoon us, shoot or entrap us; and make us into oil and candles and seats, and stiffening for gowns and umbrellas," said the bone, in a tone of scorn.

Freddy laughed at the idea, and asked, "How about candles? I know about oil and seats and umbrellas; but I thought candles were made of wax."

"I can't say much on that point: I only know that, when a sperm whale is killed, they make oil out of the fat part as they do of ours; but the Sperms have a sort of cistern in their heads, full of stuff like cream, and rose-colored. They cut a hole in the skull, and dip it out; and sometimes get sixteen or twenty barrels. This is made into what you call spermaceti candles. *We* don't have any such nonsense about us; but the Sperms always were a light-headed set."

Here the bone laughed, in a cracked sort of roar, which sent Freddy flying off the seat on to the grass, where he stayed, laughing also, though he didn't see any joke.

"I beg your pardon, child. It isn't often that I laugh; for I've a heavy heart somewhere, and have known trouble enough to make me as sad as the sea is sometimes."

"Tell me about your troubles; I pity you very much, and like to hear you talk," said Freddy, kindly.

"Unfortunately we are very easily killed, in spite of our size; and have various afflictions besides death. We grow blind; our jaws are deformed sometimes; our tails, with which we swim, get hurt; and we have dyspepsia."

Freddy shouted at that; for he knew what dyspepsia was, because at the sea-side there were many sickly people who were always groaning about that disease.

"It's no laughing matter, I assure you," said the whale's bone. "We suffer a great deal, and get thin and weak and miserable. I've sometimes thought that's the reason we are blue."

"Perhaps, as you have no teeth, you don't chew your food enough, and so have dyspepsia, like an old gentleman I know," said Freddy.

"That's not the reason; my cousins, the Sperms, have teeth, and dyspepsia also."

"Are they blue?"

"No, black and white. But I was going to tell you my troubles. My father was harpooned when I was very young, and I remember how bravely he died. The Rights usually run away when they see a whaler coming; not from cowardice, — oh, dear, no! — but discretion. The Sperms stay and fight, and are killed off very fast; for they are a very headstrong family. We fight when we can't help it; and my father died like a hero. They chased him five hours before they stuck him; he tried to get away, and dragged three or four boats and sixteen hundred fathoms of line from eight in the morning till four at night. Then they got out another line, and he towed the ship itself for more than an hour. There were fifteen harpoons in him: he chewed up a boat, pitched several men overboard, and damaged the vessel, before they killed him. Ah! he was a father to be proud of."

Freddy sat respectfully silent for a few minutes, as the old bone seemed to feel a great deal on the subject. Presently he went on again:

"The Sperms live in herds; but the Rights go in pairs, and are very fond of one another. My wife was a charming creature, and we were very happy, till one sad day, when she was playing with our child, — a sweet little whaleling only twelve feet long, and weighing but a ton, — my son was harpooned. His mamma, instead of flying, wrapped her fins round him, and dived as far as the line allowed. Then she came up, and dashed at the boats in great rage and anguish, entirely regardless of the danger she was in. The men struck my son, in order to get her, and they soon succeeded; but even then, in spite of her suffering, she did not try to escape, but clung to little Spouter till both were killed. Alas! alas!"

Here the poor bone creaked so dismally, Freddy feared it would tumble to pieces, and bring the story to an end too soon.

"Don't think of those sorrowful things," he said; "tell me how you came to be here. Were you harpooned?"

"Not I; for I've been very careful all my life to keep out of the way of danger: I'm not like one of my relations, who attacked a ship, gave it such a dreadful blow that he made a great hole, the water rushed in, and the vessel was wrecked. But he paid dearly for that prank; for a few months afterward another ship harpooned him very easily, finding two spears still in him, and a wound in his head. I forgot to mention, that the Sperms have fine ivory teeth, and make ambergris, — a sort of stuff that smells very nice, and costs a great deal. I give you these little facts about my family, as you seem interested, and it's always well to improve the minds of young people."

"You are very kind; but will you be good enough to tell about yourself?" said Freddy again; for the bone seemed to avoid that part of the story, as if he didn't want to tell it.

"Well, if I must, I must; but I'm sorry to confess what a fool I've been. You know what coral is, don't you?"

"No," said Freddy, wondering why it asked.

"Then I must tell you, I suppose. There is a bit in the house there, — that rough, white, stony stuff on the table in the parlor. It's full of little holes, you know. Well, those holes are the front doors of hundreds of little polypes, or coral worms, who build the great branches of coral, and live there. They are of various shapes and colors, — some like stars; some fine as a thread, and blue or yellow; others like snails and tiny lobsters. Some people say the real coral-makers are shaped like little oblong bags of jelly, closed at one end, the other open, with six or eight little feelers, like a star, all around it. The other creatures are boarders or visitors: these are the real workers, and, when they sit in their cells and put out their feelers, they make all manner of lovely colors under the water, — crimson, green, orange, and violet. But if they are taken up or touched, the coral people go in doors, and the beautiful hues disappear. They say there are many coral reefs and islands built by these industrious people, in the South Seas; but I can't go there to see, and I am contented with those I find in the northern latitudes. I knew such a community of coral builders, and used to watch them long ago, when they began to work. It was a charming spot, down under the sea; for all manner of lovely plants grew there; splendid fishes sailed to and fro; wonderful shells lay about; crimson and yellow prawns, long, gliding green worms, and purple sea-urchins, were there. When I asked the polypes what they were doing, and they answered, 'Building an island,' I laughed at them; for the idea that these tiny, soft atoms could make any thing was ridiculous. 'You may roar; but you'll see that we are right, if you live long enough,' said they. 'Our family have built thousands of islands and long reefs, that the sea can't get over, strong as it is.' That amused me immensely; but I wouldn't believe it, and laughed more than ever."

"It does seem very strange," said Freddy, looking at the branch of coral which he had brought out to examine.

"Doesn't it? and isn't it hard to believe? I used to go, now and then, to see how the little fellows got on, and always found them hard at it. For a long while there was only a little plant without leaves, growing slowly taller and taller; for they always build upward toward the light. By and by, the small shrub was a tree: flying-fish roosted in its branches; sea-cows lay under its shadow; and thousands of jolly little polypes lived and worked in its white chambers. I was glad to see them getting on so well; but still I didn't believe in the island story, and used to joke them about their ambition. They were very good-natured, and only answered me, 'Wait a little longer, Friend Right.' I had my own affairs to attend to; so, for years at a time, I forgot the coral-workers, and spent most of my life up Greenland way, for warm climates don't agree with my constitution. When I came back, after a long absence, I was astonished to see the tree grown into a large umbrella-shaped thing, rising above the water. Sea-weed had washed up and clung there; sea-birds had made nests there; land-birds and the winds had carried seeds there, which had sprung up; trunks of trees had been cast there by the sea; lizards, insects, and little animals came with the trees, and were the first inhabitants; and, behold! it *was* an island."

"What did you say then?" asked Freddy.

"I was angry, and didn't want to own that I was wrong; so I insisted that it wasn't a real island, without people on it. 'Wait a little longer,' answered the polypes; and went on, building broader and broader foundations. I flounced away in a rage, and didn't go back for a great while. I hoped something would happen to the coral builders and their island; but I was so curious that I couldn't keep away, and, on going back there, I found a settlement of fishermen, and the beginning of a thriving town. Now I should have been in a towering passion at this, if in my travels I hadn't discovered a race of little creatures as much smaller than polypes as a mouse is smaller than an elephant. I heard two learned men talking about diatoms, as they sailed to Labrador; and I listened. They said these people lived in both salt and fresh water, and were found in all parts of the world. They were a glassy shell, holding a soft, golden-yellow substance, and that they were so countless that banks were made of them, and that a town here in these United States was founded on them. They were the food of many little sea-animals, who, in turn, fed us big creatures, and were very interesting and wonderful. I saved up this story; and, when the polypes asked if they hadn't done what they intended, I told them I didn't think it so very remarkable, for the tiny diatoms made cities, and were far more astonishing animals than they. I thought that would silence them; but they just turned round, and informed me that my diatoms were plants, not animals, — so my story was all humbug. Then I *was* mad; and couldn't get over the fact that these little rascals had done what we, the kings of the sea, couldn't do. I wasn't content with being the biggest creature there: I wanted to be the most skilful also. I didn't remember that every thing has its own place and use, and should be happy in doing the work for which it was made. I fretted over the matter a long while, and at last decided to make an island myself."

"How could you?" asked Freddy.

"I had my plans; and thought them very wise ones. I was so bent on outdoing the polypes that I didn't much care what happened; and so I went to work in my clumsy way. I couldn't pile up stones, or build millions of cells; so I just made an island of myself. I swam up into the harbor yonder one night; covered my back with sea-weed; and lay still on the top of the water. In the morning the gulls came to see what it was, and pecked away at the weeds, telling me very soon that they knew what I was after, and that I couldn't gull them. All the people on shore turned out to see the wonder also; for a fisherman had carried the tidings, and every one was wild to behold the new island. After staring and chattering a long while, boats came off to examine the mystery. Loads of scientific gentlemen worked away at me with microscopes, hammers, acids, and all sorts of tests, to decide what I was; and kept up such a fire of long words that I was ‘most dead. They couldn’t make up their minds; and meanwhile news of the strange thing spread, and every sort of person came to see me. The gulls kept telling them the joke; but they didn’t understand, and I got on capitally. Every night I dined and fed and frolicked till dawn; then put on my sea-weeds, and lay still to be stared at. I wanted some one to come and live on me; then I should be equal to the island of the polypes. But no one came, and I was beginning to be tired of fooling people, when I was fooled myself. An old sailor came to visit me: he had been a whaler, and he soon guessed the secret. But he said nothing till he was safely out of danger; then he got all ready, and one day, as I lay placidly in the sun, a horrible harpoon came flying through the air, and sunk deep into my back. I forgot every thing but the pain, and dived for my life. Alas! the tide was low; the harbor-bar couldn’t be passed; and I found hundreds of boats chasing me, till I was driven ashore down there on the flats. Big and strong as we are, once out of water, and we are perfectly helpless. I was soon despatched; and my bones left to whiten on the sand. This was long ago; and, one by one, all my relics have been carried off or washed away. My jaw-bone has been used as a seat here, till it’s worn out; but I couldn’t crumble away till I’d told some one my story. Remember, child, pride goeth before a fall.”

Then, with a great creak, the bone tumbled to pieces; and found a peaceful grave in the long green grass.

X.

A STRANGE ISLAND.

One day I lay rocking in my boat, reading a very famous book, which all children know and love; and the name of which I'll tell you by and by. So busily was I reading, that I never minded the tide; and presently discovered that I was floating out to sea, with neither sail nor oar. At first I was very much frightened; for there was no one in sight on land or sea, and I didn't know where I might drift to. But the water was calm, the sky clear, and the wind blew balmily; so I waited for what should happen.

Presently I saw a speck on the sea, and eagerly watched it; for it drew rapidly near, and seemed to be going my way. When it came closer, I was much amazed; for, of all the queer boats I ever saw, this was the queerest. It was a great wooden bowl, very cracked and old; and in it sat three gray-headed little gentlemen with spectacles, all reading busily, and letting the boat go where it pleased. Now, right in their way was a rock; and I called out, "Sir, sir, take care."

But my call came too late: crash went the bowl, out came the bottom, and down plumped all the little gentlemen into the sea. I tried not to laugh, as the books, wigs, and spectacles flew about; and, urging my boat nearer, I managed to fish them up, dripping and sneezing, and looking like drowned kittens. When the flurry was over, and they had got their breath, I asked who they were, and where they were going.

"We are from Gotham, ma'am," said the fattest one, wiping a very wet face on a very wet handkerchief. "We were going to that island yonder. We have often tried, but never got there: it's always so, and I begin to think the thing can't be done."

I looked where he pointed; and, sure enough, there was an island where I had never seen one before. I rubbed my eyes, and looked again. Yes: there it was, — a little island, with trees and people on it; for I saw smoke coming out of the chimney of a queerly-shaped house on the shore.

"What is the name of it?" I asked.

The little old gentleman put his finger on his lips, and said, with a mysterious nod:

"I couldn't tell you, ma'am. It's a secret; but, if you manage to land there, you will soon know."

The other old men nodded at the same time; and then all went to reading again, with the water still dropping off the ends of their noses. This made me very curious; and, as the tide drifted us nearer and nearer, I looked well about me, and saw several things that filled me with a strong desire to land on the island. The odd house, I found, was built like a high-heeled shoe; and at every window I saw children's heads. Some were eating broth; some were crying; and some had nightcaps on. I caught sight of a distracted old lady flying about, with a ladle in one hand, and a rod in the other; but the house was so full of children (even up to the skylight, — out of which they popped their heads, and nodded at me) that I couldn't see much of the mamma of this large family: one seldom can, you know.

I had hardly got over my surprise at this queer sight, when I saw a cow fly up through the air, over the new moon that hung there, and come down and disappear in the woods. I really didn't know what to make of this, but had no time to ask the old men what it meant; for a cat, playing a fiddle, was seen on the shore. A little dog stood by, listening and laughing; while a dish and a spoon ran away over the beach with all their might. If the boat had not floated up to the land, I think I should have swam there, — I was so anxious to see what was going on; for there was a great racket on the island, and such a remarkable collection of creatures, it was impossible to help staring.

As soon as we landed, three other gentlemen came to welcome the ones I had saved, and seemed very glad to see them. They appeared to have just landed from a tub in which was a drum, rub-a-dub-dubbing all by itself. One of the new men had a white frock on, and carried a large knife; the second had dough on his hands, flour on his coat, and a hot-looking face; the third was very greasy, had a bundle of candles under his arm, and a ball of wicking half out of his pocket. The six shook hands, and walked away together, talking about a fair; and left me to take care of myself.

I walked on through a pleasant meadow, where a pretty little girl was looking sadly up at a row of sheep's tails hung on a tree. I also saw a little boy in blue, asleep by a haycock; and another boy taking aim at a cock-sparrow, who clapped his wings and flew away. Presently I saw two more little girls: one sat by a fire warming her toes; and, when I asked what her name was, she said pleasantly:

"Polly Flinders, ma'am."

The other one sat on a tuft of grass, eating something that looked very nice; but, all of a sudden, she dropped her bowl, and ran away, looking very much frightened.

"What's the matter with her?" I asked of a gay young frog who came tripping along with his hat under his arm.

"Miss Muffit is a fashionable lady, and afraid of spiders, madam; also of frogs." And he puffed himself angrily up, till his eyes quite goggled in his head.

“And, pray, who are you, sir?” I asked, staring at his white vest, green coat, and fine cravat.

“Excuse me, if I don’t give my name, ma’am. My false friend, the rat, got me into a sad scrape once; and Rowley insists upon it that a duck destroyed me, which is all gammon, ma’am, — all gammon.”

With that, the frog skipped away; and I turned into a narrow lane, which seemed to lead toward some music. I had not gone far, when I heard the rumbling of a wheelbarrow, and saw a little man wheeling a little woman along. The little man looked very hot and tired; but the little woman looked very nice, in a smart bonnet and shawl, and kept looking at a new gold ring on her finger, as she rode along under her little umbrella. I was wondering who they were, when down went the wheelbarrow; and the little lady screamed so dismally that I ran away, lest I should get into trouble, — being a stranger.

Turning a corner, I came upon a very charming scene, and slipped into a quiet nook to see what was going on. It was evidently a wedding; and I was just in time to see it, for the procession was passing at that moment. First came a splendid cock-a-doodle, all in black and gold, like a herald, blowing his trumpet, and marching with a very dignified step. Then came a rook, in black, like a minister, with spectacles and white cravat. A lark and bullfinch followed, — friends, I suppose; and then the bride and bridegroom. Miss Wren was evidently a Quakeress; for she wore a sober dress, and a little white veil, through which her bright eyes shone. The bridegroom was a military man, in his scarlet uniform, — a plump, bold-looking bird, very happy and proud just then. A goldfinch gave away the bride, and a linnet was bridesmaid. The ceremony was very fine; and, as soon as it was over, the blackbird, thrush and nightingale burst out in a lovely song.

A splendid dinner followed, at which was nearly every bird that flies; so you may imagine the music there was. They had currant-pie in abundance; and cherry-wine, which excited a cuckoo so much, that he became quite rude, and so far forgot himself as to pull the bride about. This made the groom so angry that he begged his friend, the sparrow, to bring his bow and arrow, and punish the ruffian. But, alas! Sparrow had also taken a drop too much: he aimed wrong, and, with a dreadful cry, Mr. Robin sank dying into the arms of his wife, little Jane.

It was too much for me; and, taking advantage of the confusion that followed, I left the tragical scene as fast as possible.

A little farther on, I was shocked to see a goose dragging an old man down some steps that led to a little house.

“Dear me! what’s the matter here?” I cried.

"He won't say his prayers," screamed the goose.

"But perhaps he was never taught," said I.

"It's never too late to learn: he's had his chance; he won't be pious and good, so away with him. Don't interfere, whatever you do: hold your tongue, and go about your business," scolded the goose, who certainly had a dreadful temper.

I dared say no more; and, when the poor old man had been driven away by this foul proceeding, I went up the steps and peeped in; for I heard some one crying, and thought the cross bird, perhaps, had hurt some one else. A little old woman stood there, wringing her hands in great distress; while a small dog was barking at her with all his might.

"Bless me! the fashions have got even here," thought I; for the old woman was dressed in the latest style, — or, rather, she had overdone it sadly; for her gown was nearly up to her knees, and she was nearly as ridiculous an object as some of the young ladies I had seen at home. She had a respectable bonnet on, however, instead of a straw saucer; and her hair was neatly put under a cap, — not made into a knob on the top of her head.

"My dear soul, what's the trouble?" said I, quite touched by her tears.

"Lud a mercy, ma'am! I've been to market with my butter and eggs, — for the price of both is so high, one can soon get rich nowadays, — and, being tired, I stopped to rest a bit, but fell asleep by the road. Somebody — I think it's a rogue of a peddler who sold me wooden nutmegs, and a clock that wouldn't go, and some pans that came to bits the first time I used them — somebody cut my new gown and petticoat off all round, in the shameful way you see. I thought I never should get home; for I was such a fright, I actually didn't know myself. But, thinks I, my doggy will know me; and then I shall be sure I'm I, and not some boldfaced creature in short skirts. But, oh, ma'am! doggy *don't* know me; and I ain't myself, and I don't know what to do."

"He's a foolish little beast; so don't mind him, but have a cup of tea, and go to bed. You can make your gown decent to-morrow; and, if I see the tricksy peddler, I'll give him a scolding."

This seemed to comfort the old woman; though doggy still barked.

"My next neighbor has a dog who never behaves in this way," she said, as she put her teapot on the coals. "He's a remarkable beast; and you'd better stop to see him as you pass, ma'am. He's always up to some funny prank or other."

I said I would; and, as I went by the next house, I took a look in at the window. The closet was empty, I observed; but the dog sat smoking a pipe, looking as grave as a judge.

"Where is your mistress?" asked I.

"Gone for some tripe," answered the dog, politely taking the pipe out of his mouth, and adding, “I hope the smoke doesn’t annoy you.”

“I don’t approve of smoking,” said I.

“Sorry to hear it,” said the dog, coolly.

I was going to lecture him on this bad habit; but I saw his mistress coming with a dish in her hand, and, fearing she might think me rude to peep in at her windows, I walked on, wondering what we were coming to when even four-legged puppies smoked.

At the door of the next little house, I saw a market-wagon loaded with vegetables, and a smart young pig just driving it away. I had heard of this interesting family, and took a look as I passed by. A second tidy pig sat blowing the fire; and a third was eating roast-beef, as if he had just come in from his work. The fourth, I was grieved to see, looked very sulky; for it was evident he had been naughty, and so lost his dinner. The little pig was at the door, crying to get in; and it was sweet to see how kindly the others let him in, wiped his tears, tied on his bib, and brought him his bread and milk. I was very glad to see these young orphans doing so well, and I knew my friends at home would enjoy hearing from them.

A loud scream made me jump; and the sudden splash of water made me run along, without stopping to pick up a boy and girl who came tumbling down the hill, with an empty pail, bumping their heads as they rolled. Smelling something nice, and feeling hungry, I stepped into a large room near by, — a sort of eating-house, I fancy; for various parties seemed to be enjoying themselves in their different ways. A small boy sat near the door, eating a large pie; and he gave me a fine plum which he had just pulled out. At one table was a fat gentleman cutting another pie, which had a dark crust, through which appeared the heads of a flock of birds, all singing gayly.

“There’s no end to the improvements in cooking, and no accounting for tastes,” I added, looking at a handsomely-dressed lady, who sat near, eating bread and honey.

As I passed this party, I saw behind the lady’s chair a maid, with a clothes-pin in her hand, and no nose. She sobbingly told me a bird had nipped it off; and I gave her a bit of court-plaster, which I fortunately had in my pocket.

Another couple were dividing their meat in a queer way; for one took all the fat, and the other all the lean. The next people were odder still; for the man looked rather guilty, and seemed to be hiding a three-peck measure under his chair, while he waited for his wife to bring on some cold barley-pudding, which, to my surprise, she was frying herself. I also saw a queer moonstruck-looking man inquiring the way to Norridge; and another man making wry faces over some plum-pudding, with which he had burnt his mouth, because his friend came down too soon.

I ordered pease-porridge hot, and they brought it cold; but I didn't wait for any thing else, being in a hurry to see all there was to be seen on this strange island. Feeling refreshed, I strolled on, passing a jolly old gentleman smoking and drinking, while three fiddlers played before him. As I turned into a road that led toward a hill, a little boy, riding a dapple-gray pony, and an old lady on a white horse, with bells ringing somewhere, trotted by me, followed by a little girl, who wished to know where she could buy a penny bun. I told her the best were at Newmarch's, in Bedford Street, and she ran on, much pleased; but I'm afraid she never found that best of bake-shops. I was going quietly along, when the sound of another horse coming made me look round; and there I saw a dreadful sight, — a wild horse, tearing over the ground, with fiery eyes and streaming tail. On his back sat a crazy man, beating him with a broom; a crazy woman was behind him, with her bonnet on wrong side before, holding one crazy child in her lap, while another stood on the horse; a third was hanging on by one foot, and all were howling at the top of their voices as they rushed by. I scrambled over the wall to get out of the way, and there I saw more curious sights. Two blind men were sitting on the grass, trying to see two lame men who were hobbling along as hard as they could; and, near by, a bull was fighting a bee in the most violent manner. This rather alarmed me; and I scrambled back into the road again, just as a very fine lady jumped over a barberry-bush near by, and a gentleman went flying after, with a ring in one hand and a stick in the other.

"What very odd people they have here!" I thought. Close by was a tidy little house under the hill, and in it a tidy little woman who sold things to eat. Being rather hungry, in spite of my porridge, I bought a baked apple and a cranberry-pie; for she said they were good, and I found she told the truth. As I sat eating my pie, some dogs began to bark; and by came a troop of beggars, some in rags, and some in old velvet gowns. A drunken grenadier was with them, who wanted a pot of beer; but as he had no money, the old woman sent him about his business.

On my way up the hill, I saw a little boy crying over a dead pig, and his sister, who seemed to be dead also. I asked his name, and he sobbed out, "Johnny Pringle, ma'am;" and went on crying so hard I could do nothing to comfort him. While I stood talking to him, a sudden gust of wind blew up the road, and down came the bough of a tree; and, to my surprise, a cradle with a baby in it also. The baby screamed dreadfully, and I didn't know how to quiet it; so I ran back to the old woman, and left it with her, asking if that was the way babies were taken care of there.

"Bless you, my dear! its ma is making patty-cakes; and put it up there to be out of the way of Tom Tinker’s dog. I’ll soon hush it up,” said the old woman; and, trotting it on her knee, she began to sing:

“Hey! my kitten, my kitten, Hey! my kitten, my deary.”

Feeling that the child was in good hands, I hurried away, for I saw something was going on upon the hill-top. When I got to the hill-top, I was shocked to find some people tossing an old woman in a blanket. I begged them to stop; but one of the men, who, I found, was a Welchman, by the name of Taffy, told me the old lady liked it.

“But why does she like it?” I asked in great surprise.

“Tom, the piper’s son, will tell you: it’s my turn to toss now,” said the man.

“Why, you see, ma’am,” said Tom, “she is one of those dreadfully nice old women, who are always fussing and scrubbing, and worrying people to death, with everlastingly cleaning house. Now and then we get so tired out with her that we propose to her to clean the sky itself. She likes that; and, as this is the only way we can get her up, we toss till she sticks somewhere, and then leave her to sweep cobwebs till she is ready to come back and behave herself.”

“Well, that is the oddest thing I ever heard. I know just such an old lady, and when I go home I’ll try your plan. It seems to me that you have a great many queer old ladies on this island,” I said to another man, whom they called Peter, and who stood eating pumpkin all the time.

“Well, we do have rather a nice collection; but you haven’t seen the best of all. We expect her every minute; and Margery Daw is to let us know the minute she lights on the island,” replied Peter, with his mouth full.

“Lights?” said I, “you speak as if she flew.”

“She rides on a bird. Hurrah! the old sweeper has lit. Now the cobwebs will fly. Don’t hurry back,” shouted the man; and a faint, far-off voice answered, “I shall be back again by and by.”

The people folded up the blanket, looking much relieved; and I was examining a very odd house which was built by an ancient king called Boggen, when Margery Daw, a dirty little girl, came up the hill, screaming, at the top of her voice:

“She’s come! she’s come!”

Every one looked up; and I saw a large white bird slowly flying over the island. On its back sat the nicest old woman that ever was seen: all the others were nothing compared to her. She had a pointed hat on over her cap, a red cloak, high-heeled shoes, and a crutch in her hand. She smiled and nodded as the bird approached; and every one ran and nodded, and screamed, “Welcome! welcome, mother!”

As soon as she touched the ground, she was so surrounded that I could only see the top of her hat; for hundreds and hundreds of little children suddenly appeared, like a great flock of birds, — rosy, happy, pretty children; but all looked unreal, and among them I saw some who looked like little people I had known long ago.

"Who are they?" I asked of a bonny lass, who was sitting on a cushion, eating strawberries and cream.

"They are the phantoms of all the little people who ever read and loved our mother's songs," said the maid.

"What did she write?" I asked, feeling very queer, and as if I was going to remember something.

"Songs that are immortal; and you have them in your hand," replied the bonny maid, smiling at my stupidity.

I looked; and there, on the cover of the book I had been reading so busily when the tide carried me away, I saw the words "Mother Goose's Melodies." I was so delighted that I had seen her I gave a shout, and tried to get near enough to hug and kiss the dear old soul, as the swarm of children were doing; but my cry woke me, and I was *so* sorry to find it all a dream!

XI.

FANCY’S FRIEND.

It was a wagon, shaped like a great square basket, on low wheels, and drawn by a stout donkey. There was one seat, on which Miss Fairbairn the governess sat; and all round her, leaning over the edge of the basket, were children, with little wooden shovels and baskets in their hands, going down to play on the beach. Away they went, over the common, through the stony lane, out upon the wide, smooth sands. All the children but one immediately fell to digging holes, and making ponds, castles, or forts. They did this every day, and were never tired of it; but little Fancy made new games for herself, and seldom dug in the sand. She had a garden of sea-weed, which the waves watered every day: she had a palace of pretty shells, where she kept all sorts of little water-creatures as fairy tenants; she had friends and playmates among the gulls and peeps, and learned curious things by watching crabs, horse-shoes, and jelly-fishes; and every day she looked for a mermaid.

It was of no use to tell her that there were no mermaids: Fancy firmly believed in them, and was sure she would see one some day. The other children called the seals mermaids; and were contented with the queer, shiny creatures who played in the water, lay on the rocks, and peeped at them with soft, bright eyes as they sailed by. Fancy was not satisfied with seals, — they were not pretty and graceful enough for her, — and she waited and watched for a real mermaid. On this day she took a breezy run with the beach-birds along the shore; she planted a pretty red weed in her garden; and let out the water-beetles and snails who had passed the night in her palace. Then she went to a rock that stood near the quiet nook where she played alone, and sat there looking for a mermaid as the tide came in; for it brought her many curious things, and it might perhaps bring a mermaid.

As she looked across the waves that came tumbling one over the other, she saw something that was neither boat nor buoy nor seal. It was a queer-looking thing, with a wild head, a long waving tail, and something like arms that seemed to paddle it along. The waves tumbled it about, so Fancy could not see very well: but, the longer she looked, the surer she was that this curious thing was a mermaid; and she waited eagerly for it to reach the shore. Nearer and nearer it came, till a great wave threw it upon the sand; and Fancy saw that it was only a long piece of kelp, torn up by the roots. She was very much disappointed; but, all of a sudden, her face cleared up, she clapped her hands, and began to dance round the kelp, saying:

"I'll make a mermaid myself, since none will come to me."

Away she ran, higher up the beach, and, after thinking a minute, began her work. Choosing a smooth, hard place, she drew with a stick the outline of her mermaid; then she made the hair of the brown marsh-grass growing near by, arranging it in long locks on either side the face, which was made of her prettiest pink and white shells, — for she pulled down her palace to get them. The eyes were two gray pebbles; the neck and arms of larger, white shells; and the dress of sea-weed, — red, green, purple, and yellow; very splendid, for Fancy emptied her garden to dress her mermaid.

"People say that mermaids always have tails; and I might make one out of this great leaf of kelp. But it isn't pretty, and I don't like it; for I want mine to be beautiful: so I won't have any tail," said Fancy, and put two slender white shells for feet, at the lower edge of the fringed skirt. She laid a wreath of little star-fish across the brown hair, a belt of small orange-crabs round the waist, buttoned the dress with violet snail-shells, and hung a tiny white pebble, like a pearl, in either ear.

"Now she must have a glass and a comb in her hand, as the song says, and then she will be done," said Fancy, looking about her, well pleased.

Presently she found the skeleton of a little fish, and his backbone made an excellent comb; while a transparent jelly-fish served for a glass, with a frame of cockle-shells round it. Placing these in the hands of her mermaid, and some red coral bracelets on her wrists, Fancy pronounced her done; and danced about her, singing:

"My pretty little mermaid, Oh! come, and play with me: I'll love you, I'll welcome you; And happy we shall be."

Now, while she had been working, the tide had crept higher and higher; and, as she sung, one wave ran up and wet her feet.

"Oh, what a pity I didn't put her farther up!" cried Fancy; "the tide will wash her all away; and I meant to keep her fresh, and show her to Aunt Fiction. My poor mermaid! — I shall lose her; but perhaps she will be happier in the sea: so I will let her go."

Mounting her rock, Fancy waited to see her work destroyed. But the sea seemed to pity her; and wave after wave came up, without doing any harm. At last one broke quite over the mermaid, and Fancy thought that would be the end of her. But, no: instead of scattering shells, stones, and weeds, the waves lifted the whole figure, without displacing any thing, and gently bore it back into the sea.

"Good by! good by!" cried Fancy, as the little figure floated away; then, as it disappeared, she put her hands before her face, — for she loved her mermaid, and had given all her treasures to adorn her; and now to lose her so soon seemed hard, — and Fancy's eyes were full of tears. Another great wave came rolling in; but she did not look up to see it break, and, a minute after, she heard steps tripping toward her over the sand. Still she did not stir; for, just then, none of her playmates could take the place of her new friend, and she didn't want to see them.

"Fancy! Fancy!" called a breezy voice, sweeter than any she had ever heard. But she did not raise her head, nor care to know who called. The steps came quite close; and the touch of a cold, wet hand fell on her own. Then she looked up, and saw a strange little girl standing by her, who smiled, showing teeth like little pearls, and said, in the breezy voice:

"You wanted me to play with you, so I came."

"Who are you?" asked Fancy, wondering where she had seen the child before.

"I'm your mermaid," said the child.

"But the water carried her away," cried Fancy.

"The waves only carried me out for the sea to give me life, and then brought me back to you," answered the newcomer.

"But are you really a mermaid?" asked Fancy, beginning to smile and believe.

"I am really the one you made: look, and see if I'm not;" and the little creature turned slowly round, that Fancy might be sure it was her own work.

She certainly was very like the figure that once lay on the sand, — only she was not now made of stones and shells. There was the long brown hair blowing about her face, with a wreath of starry shells in it. Her eyes were gray, her cheeks and lips rosy, her neck and arms white; and from under her striped dress peeped little bare feet. She had pearls in her ears, coral bracelets, a golden belt, and a glass and comb in her hands.

"Yes," said Fancy, drawing near, "you *are* my little mermaid; but how does it happen that you come to me at last?"

"Dear friend," answered the water-child, "you believed in me, watched and waited long for me, shaped the image of the thing you wanted out of your dearest treasures, and promised to love and welcome me. I could not help coming; and the sea, that is as fond of you as you are of it, helped me to grant your wish."

"Oh, I'm glad, I'm glad! Dear little mermaid, what is your name?" cried Fancy, kissing the cool cheek of her new friend, and putting her arms about her neck.

"Call me by my German cousin's pretty name, — Lorelei," answered the mermaid, kissing back as warmly as she could.

“Will you come home and live with me, dear Lorelei?” asked Fancy, still holding her fast.

“If you will promise to tell no one who and what I am, I will stay with you as long as you love and believe in me. As soon as you betray me, or lose your faith and fondness, I shall vanish, never to come back again,” answered Lorelei.

“I promise: but won’t people wonder who you are? and, if they ask me, what shall I say?” said Fancy.

“Tell them you found me on the shore; and leave the rest to me. But you must not expect other people to like and believe in me as you do. They will say hard things of me; will blame you for loving me; and try to part us. Can you bear this, and keep your promise faithfully?”

“I think I can. But why won’t they like you?” said Fancy, looking troubled.

“Because they are not like you, dear,” answered the mermaid, with salt tears in her soft eyes. “They have not your power of seeing beauty in all things, of enjoying invisible delights, and living in a world of your own. Your Aunt Fiction will like me; but your Uncle Fact won’t. He will want to know all about me; will think I’m a little vagabond; and want me to be sent away somewhere, to be made like other children. I shall keep out of his way as much as I can; for I’m afraid of him.”

“I’ll take care of you, Lorelei dear; and no one shall trouble you. I hear Miss Fairbairn calling; so I must go. Give me your hand, and don’t be afraid.”

Hand in hand the two went toward the other children, who stopped digging, and stared at the new child. Miss Fairbairn, who was very wise and good, but rather prim, stared too, and said, with surprise:

“Why, my dear, where did you find that queer child?”

“Down on the beach. Isn’t she pretty?” answered Fancy, feeling very proud of her new friend.

“She hasn’t got any shoes on; so she’s a beggar, and we mustn’t play with her,” said one boy, who had been taught that to be poor was a very dreadful thing.

“What pretty earrings and bracelets she’s got!” said a little girl, who thought a great deal of her dress.

“She doesn’t look as if she knew much,” said another child, who was kept studying so hard that she never had time to dig and run, and make dirt-pies, till she fell ill, and had to be sent to the sea-side.

“What’s your name? and who are your parents?” asked Miss Fairbairn.

“I’ve got no parents; and my name is Lorelei,” answered the mermaiden.

“You mean Luly; mind your pronunciation, child,” said Miss Fairbairn, who corrected every one she met in something or other. “Where do you live?”

"I haven't got any home now," said Lorelei, smiling at the lady's tone.

"Yes, you have: my home is yours; and you are going to stay with me always," cried Fancy, heartily. "She is my little sister, Miss Fairbairn: I found her; and I'm going to keep her, and make her happy."

"Your uncle won't like it, my dear." And Miss Fairbairn shook her head gravely.

"Aunt will; and Uncle won't mind, if I learn my lessons well, and remember the multiplication table all right. He was going to give me some money, so I might learn to keep accounts; but I'll tell him to keep the money, and let me have Lorelei instead."

"Oh, how silly!" cried the boy who didn't like bare feet.

"No, she isn't; for, if she's kind to the girl, maybe she'll get some of her pretty things," said the vain little girl.

"Keeping accounts is a very useful and important thing. I keep mine; and mamma says I have great arth-met-i-cal talent," added the pale child, who studied too much.

"Come, children; it's time for dinner. Fancy, you can take the girl to the house; and your uncle will do what he thinks best about letting you keep her," said Miss Fairbairn, piling them into the basket-wagon.

Fancy kept Lorelei close beside her; and as soon as they reached the great hotel, where they all were staying with mothers and fathers, uncles or aunts, she took her to kind Aunt Fiction, who was interested at once in the friendless child so mysteriously found. She was satisfied with the little she could discover, and promised to keep her, — for a time, at least.

"We can imagine all kinds of romantic things about her; and, by and by, some interesting story may be found out concerning her. I can make her useful in many ways; and she shall stay."

As Aunt Fiction laid her hand on the mermaid's head, as if claiming her for her own, Uncle Fact came stalking in, with his note-book in his hand, and his spectacles on his nose. Now, though they were married, these two persons were very unlike. Aunt Fiction was a graceful, picturesque woman; who told stories charmingly, wrote poetry and novels, was very much beloved by young folks, and was the friend of some of the most famous people in the world. Uncle Fact was a grim, grave, decided man; whom it was impossible to bend or change. He was very useful to every one; knew an immense deal; and was always taking notes of things he saw and heard, to be put in a great encyclopædia he was making. He didn't like romance, loved the truth, and wanted to get to the bottom of every thing. He was always trying to make little Fancy more sober, well-behaved, and learned; for she was a freakish, dreamy, yet very lovable and charming child. Aunt Fiction petted her to her heart's content, and might have done her harm, if Uncle Fact had not had a hand in her education; for the lessons of both were necessary to her, as to all of us.

"Well, well, well! who is this?" he said briskly, as he turned his keen eyes and powerful glasses on the newcomer.

Aunt Fiction told him all the children had said; but he answered impatiently:

"Tut, tut! my dear: I want the facts of the case. You are apt to exaggerate; and Fancy is not to be relied on. If the child isn't a fool, she must know more about herself than she pretends. Now, answer truly, Luly, where did you come from?"

But the little mermaid only shook her head, and answered as before, "Fancy found me on the beach, and wants me to stay with her. I'll do her no harm: please, let me stay."

"She has evidently been washed ashore from some wreck, and has forgotten all about herself. Her wonderful beauty, her accent, and these ornaments show that she is some foreign child," said Aunt Fiction, pointing to the earrings.

"Nonsense! my dear: those are white pebbles, not pearls; and, if you examine them, you will find that those bracelets are the ones you gave Fancy as a reward for so well remembering the facts I told her about coral," said the uncle, who had turned Lorelei round and round, pinched her cheek, felt her hair, and examined her frock through the glasses which nothing escaped.

"She may stay, and be my little playmate, mayn't she? I'll take care of her; and we shall be very happy together," cried Fancy eagerly.

"One can't be sure of that till one has tried. You say you will take care of her: have you got any money to pay her board, and buy her clothes?" asked her uncle.

"No; but I thought you'd help me," answered Fancy wistfully.

"Never say you'll do a thing till you are sure you can," said Uncle Fact, as he took notes of the affair, thinking they might be useful by and by. "I've no objection to your keeping the girl, if, after making inquiries about her, she proves to be a clever child. She can stay awhile; and, when we go back to town, I'll put her in one of our charity schools, where she can be taught to earn her living. Can you read, Luly?"

"No," said the mermaid, opening her eyes.

"Can you write and cipher?"

"What is that?" asked Lorelei innocently.

"Dear me! what ignorance!" cried Uncle Fact.

"Can you sew, or tend babies?" asked Aunt Fiction gently.

"I can do nothing but play and sing, and comb my hair."

"I see! I see! — some hand-organ man's girl. Well, I'm glad you keep your hair smooth, — that’s more than Fancy does,” said Uncle Fact.

“Let us hear you sing,” whispered his little niece; and, in a voice as musical as the sound of ripples breaking on the shore, Lorelei sung a little song that made Fancy dance with delight, charmed Aunt Fiction, and softened Uncle Fact’s hard face in spite of himself.

“Very well, very well, indeed: you have a good voice. I’ll see that you have proper teaching; and, by and by, you can get your living by giving singing-lessons,” he said, turning over the leaves of his book, to look for the name of a skilful teacher; for he had lists of every useful person, place, and thing under the sun.

Lorelei laughed at the idea; and Fancy thought singing for gold, not love, a hard way to get one’s living.

Inquiries were made; but nothing more was discovered, and neither of the children would speak: so the strange child lived with Fancy, and made her very happy. The other children didn’t care much about her; for with them she was shy and cold, because she knew, if the truth was told, they would not believe in her. Fancy had always played a good deal by herself, because she never found a mate to suit her; now she had one, and they enjoyed each other very much. Lorelei taught her many things besides new games; and Aunt Fiction was charmed with the pretty stories Fancy repeated to her, while Uncle Fact was astonished at the knowledge of marine plants and animals which she gained without any books. Lorelei taught her to swim, like a fish; and the two played such wonderful pranks in the water that people used to come down to the beach when they bathed. In return, Fancy tried to teach her friend to read and write and sew; but Lorelei couldn’t learn much, though she loved her little teacher dearly, and every evening sung her to sleep with beautiful lullabies.

There was a great deal of talk about the curious stranger; for her ways were odd, and no one knew what to make of her. She would eat nothing but fruit and shell-fish, and drink nothing but salt water. She didn’t like tight clothes; but would have run about in a loose, green robe, with bare feet and flying hair, if Uncle Fact would have allowed it. Morning, noon, and night, she plunged into the sea, — no matter what the weather might be; and she would sleep on no bed but one stuffed with dried sea-weed. She made lovely chains of shells; found splendid bits of coral; and dived where no one else dared, to bring up wonderful plants and mosses. People offered money for these things; but she gave them all to Fancy and Aunt Fiction, of whom she was very fond. It was curious to see the sort of people who liked both Fancy and her friend, — poets, artists; delicate, thoughtful children; and a few old people, who had kept their hearts young in spite of care and time and trouble. Dashing young gentlemen, fine young ladies, worldly-minded and money-loving men and women, and artificial, unchildlike children, the two friends avoided carefully; and these persons either made fun of them, neglected them entirely, or seemed to be unconscious that they were alive. The others they knew at a glance; for their faces warmed and brightened when the children came, they listened to their songs and stories, joined in their plays, and found rest and refreshment in their sweet society.

"This will do for a time; as Fancy is getting strong, and not entirely wasting her days, thanks to me! But our holiday is nearly over; and, as soon as I get back to town, I'll take that child to the Ragged Refuge, and see what they can make of her," said Uncle Fact, who was never quite satisfied about Lorelei; because he could find out so little concerning her. He was walking over the beach as he said this, after a hard day's work on his encyclopædia. He sat down on a rock in a quiet place; and, instead of enjoying the lovely sunset, he fell to studying the course of the clouds, the state of the tide, and the temperature of the air, till the sound of voices made him peep over the rock. Fancy and her friend were playing there, and the old gentleman waited to see what they were about. Both were sitting with their little bare feet in the water; Lorelei was stringing pearls, and Fancy plaiting a crown of pretty green rushes.

"I wish I could go home, and get you a string of finer pearls than these," said Lorelei; "but it is too far away, and I cannot swim now as I used to do."

"I must look into this. The girl evidently knows all about herself, and can tell, if she chooses," muttered Uncle Fact, getting rather excited over this discovery.

"Never mind the pearls: I'd rather have you, dear," said Fancy lovingly. "Tell me a story while we work, or sing me a song; and I'll give you my crown."

"I'll sing you a little song that has got what your uncle calls a moral to it," said Lorelei, laughing mischievously. Then, in her breezy little voice, she sang the story of —

THE ROCK AND THE BUBBLE.

Oh! a bare, brown rock Stood up in the sea, The waves at its feet Dancing merrily.

A little bubble Came sailing by, And thus to the rock Did it gayly cry, —

"Ho! clumsy brown stone, Quick, make way for me: I'm the fairest thing That floats on the sea.

"See my rainbow-robe, See my crown of light, My glittering form, So airy and bright.

"O'er the waters blue, I'm floating away, To dance by the shore With the foam and spray.

"Now, make way, make way; For the waves are strong, And their rippling feet Bear me fast along."

But the great rock stood Straight up in the sea: It looked gravely down, And said pleasantly, —

“Little friend, you must Go some other way; For I have not stirred This many a long day.

“Great billows have dashed, And angry winds blown; But my sturdy form Is not overthrown.

“Nothing can stir me In the air or sea; Then, how can I move, Little friend, for thee?”

Then the waves all laughed, In their voices sweet; And the sea-birds looked, From their rocky seat,

At the bubble gay, Who angrily cried, While its round cheek glowed With a foolish pride, —

“You *shall* move for me; And you shall not mock At the words I say, You ugly, rough rock!

“Be silent, wild birds! Why stare you so? Stop laughing, rude waves, And help me to go!

“For I am the queen Of the ocean here, And this cruel stone Cannot make me fear.”

Dashing fiercely up, With a scornful word, Foolish bubble broke; But rock never stirred.

Then said the sea-birds, Sitting in their nests, To the little ones Leaning on their breasts, —

“Be not like Bubble, Headstrong, rude, and vain, Seeking by violence Your object to gain;

“But be like the rock, Steadfast, true, and strong, Yet cheerful and kind, And firm against wrong.

“Heed, little birdlings, And wiser you’ll be For the lesson learned To-day by the sea.”

“Well, to be sure the song *has* got a moral, if that silly Fancy only sees it,” said Uncle Fact, popping up his bald head again as the song ended.

“I thank you: that’s a good little song for me. But, Lorelei, are you sorry you came to be my friend?” cried Fancy; for, as she bent to lay the crown on the other’s head, she saw that she was looking wistfully down into the water that kissed her feet.

“Not yet: while you love me, I am happy, and never regret that I ceased to be a mermaid for your sake,” answered Lorelei, laying her soft cheek against her friend’s.

"How happy I was the day my play-mermaid changed to a real one!" said Fancy. "I often want to tell people all about that wonderful thing, and let them know who you really are: then they'd love you as I do, instead of calling you a little vagabond."

"Few would believe our story; and those that did would wonder at me, — not love me as you do. They would put me in a cage, and make a show of me; and I should be so miserable I should die. So don't tell who I am, will you?" said Lorelei earnestly.

"Never," cried Fancy, clinging to her. "But, my deary, what will you do when uncle sends you away from me, as he means to do as soon as we go home? I can see you sometimes; but we cannot be always together, and there is no ocean for you to enjoy in the city."

"I shall bear it, if I can, for your sake; if I cannot, I shall come back here, and wait till you come again next year."

"No, no! I will not be parted from you; and, if uncle takes you away, I'll come here, and be a mermaid with you," cried Fancy.

The little friends threw their arms about each other, and were so full of their own feelings that they never saw Uncle Fact's tall shadow flit across them, as he stole away over the soft sand. Poor old gentleman! he was in a sad state of mind, and didn't know what to do; for in all his long life he had never been so puzzled before.

"A mermaid indeed!" he muttered. "I always thought that child was a fool, and now I'm sure of it. She thinks she is a mermaid, and has made Fancy believe it. I've told my wife a dozen times that she let Fancy read too many fairy tales and wonder-books. Her head is full of nonsense, and she is just ready to believe any ridiculous story that is told her. Now, what on earth shall I do? If I put Luly in an asylum, Fancy will break her heart, and very likely they will both run away. If I leave them together, Luly will soon make Fancy as crazy as she is herself, and I shall be mortified by having a niece who insists that her playmate is a mermaid. Bless my soul! how absurd it all is!"

Aunt Fiction had gone to town to see her publishers about a novel she had written, and he didn't like to tell the queer story to any one else; so Uncle Fact thought it over, and decided to settle the matter at once. When the children came in, he sent Fancy to wait for him in the library, while he talked alone with Lorelei. He did his best; but he could do nothing with her, — she danced and laughed, and told the same tale as before, till the old gentleman confessed that he had heard their talk on the rocks: then she grew very sad, and owned that she *was* a mermaid. This made him angry, and he wouldn't believe it for an instant; but told her it was impossible, and she must say something else.

Lorelei could say nothing else, and wept bitterly when he would not listen; so he locked her up and went to Fancy, who felt as if something dreadful was going to happen when she saw his face. He told her all he knew, and insisted that Lorelei was foolish or naughty to persist in such a ridiculous story.

"But, uncle, I really did make a mermaid; and she really did come alive, for I saw the figure float away, and then Lorelei appeared," said Fancy, very earnestly.

"It's very likely you made a figure, and called it a mermaid: it would be just the sort of thing you'd do," said her uncle. "But it is impossible that any coming alive took place, and I won't hear any such nonsense. You didn't see this girl come out of the water; for she says you never looked up, till she touched you. She was a real child, who came over the beach from somewhere; and you fancied she looked like your figure, and believed the silly tale she told you. It is my belief that she is a sly, bad child; and the sooner she is sent away the better for you."

Uncle Fact was so angry and talked so loud, that Fancy felt frightened and bewildered; and began to think he might be right about the mermaid part, though she hated to give up the little romance.

"If I agree that she *is* a real child, won't you let her stay, uncle?" she said, forgetting that, if she lost her faith, her friend was lost also.

"Ah! then you have begun to come to your senses, have you? and are ready to own that you don't believe in mermaids and such rubbish?" cried Uncle Fact, stopping in his tramp up and down the room.

"Why, if you say there never were and never can be any, I suppose I *must* give up my fancy; but I'm sorry," sighed the child.

"That's my sensible girl! Now, think a minute, my dear, and you will also own that it is best to give up the child as well as the mermaid," said her uncle briskly.

"Oh! no: we love one another; and she is good, and I can't give her up," cried Fancy.

"Answer me a few questions; and I'll prove that she isn't good, that you don't love her, and that you *can* give her up," said Uncle Fact, and numbered off the questions on his fingers as he spoke.

"Didn't Luly want you to deceive us, and every one else, about who she was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't you like to be with her better than with your aunt or myself?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hadn't you rather hear her songs and stories than learn your lessons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't it wrong to deceive people, to love strangers more than those who are a father and mother to you, and to like silly tales better than useful lessons?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well. Then, don’t you see, that, if Luly makes you do these wrong and ungrateful things, she is not a good child, nor a fit playmate for you?”

Fancy didn’t answer; for she couldn’t feel that it was so, though he made it seem so. When Uncle Fact talked in that way, she always got confused and gave up; for she didn’t know how to argue. He was right in a certain way; but she felt as if she was right also in another way, though she could not prove it: so she hung her head, and let her tears drop on the carpet one by one.

Uncle Fact didn’t mean to be unkind, but he did mean to have his own way; and, when he saw the little girl’s sad face, he took her on his knee, and said, more mildly:

“Do you remember the story about the German Lorelei, who sung so sweetly, and lured people to death in the Rhine?”

“Yes, uncle; and I like it,” answered Fancy, looking up.

“Well, my dear, your Lorelei will lead you into trouble, if you follow her. Suppose she is what you think her, — a mermaid: it is her delight to draw people into the water, where, of course, they drown. If she is what I think her, — a sly, bad child, who sees that you are very simple, and who means to get taken care of without doing any thing useful, — she will spoil you in a worse way than if you followed her into the sea. I’ve got no little daughter of my own, and I want to keep you as safe and happy as if you were mine. I don’t like this girl, and I want you to give her up for my sake. Will you, Fancy?”

While her uncle said these things, all the beauty seemed to fall away from her friend, all the sweetness from their love, and all her faith in the little dream which had made her so happy. Mermaids became treacherous, unlovely, unreal creatures; and Lorelei seemed like a naughty, selfish child, who deceived her, and made her do wrong things. Her uncle had been very kind to her all her life; and she loved him, was grateful, and wanted to show that she was, by pleasing him. But her heart clung to the friend she had made, trusted, and loved; and it seemed impossible to give up the shadow, even though the substance was gone. She put her hands before her face for a moment; then laid her arms about the old man’s neck, and whispered, with a little sob:

“I’ll give her up; but you’ll be kind to her, because I was fond of her once.”

As the last word left Fancy’s lips, a long, sad cry sounded through the room; Lorelei sprung in, gave her one kiss, and was seen to run swiftly toward the beach, wringing her hands. Fancy flew after; but, when she reached the shore, there was nothing to be seen but the scattered pebbles, shells, and weeds that made the mock mermaid, floating away on a receding wave.

“Do you believe now?” cried Fancy, weeping bitterly, as she pointed to the wreck of her friend, and turned reproachfully toward Uncle Fact, who had followed in great astonishment.

The old gentleman looked well about him; then shook his head, and answered decidedly:

“No, my dear, I *don’t*. It’s an odd affair; but, I’ve no doubt, it will be cleared up in a natural way sometime or other.”

But there he was mistaken; for this mystery never *was* cleared up. Other people soon forgot it, and Fancy never spoke of it; yet she made very few friends, and, though she learned to love and value Uncle Fact as well as Aunt Fiction, she could not forget her dearest playmate. Year after year she came back to the sea-side; and the first thing she always did was to visit the place where she used to play, and stretch her arms toward the sea, crying tenderly:

“O my little friend! come back to me!”

But Lorelei never came again.

THE END.

TRANSCENDENTAL WILD OATS.

A CHAPTER FROM AN UNWRITTEN ROMANCE.

On the first day of June, 184 — , a large wagon, drawn by a small horse and containing a motley load, went lumbering over certain New England hills, with the pleasing accompaniments of wind, rain, and hail. A serene man with a serene child upon his knee was driving, or rather being driven, for the small horse had it all his own way. A brown boy with a William Penn style of countenance sat beside him, firmly embracing a bust of Socrates. Behind them was an energetic-looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth, and eyes brimful of hope and courage. A baby reposed upon her lap, a mirror leaned against her knee, and a basket of provisions danced about at her feet, as she struggled with a large, unruly umbrella. Two blue-eyed little girls, with hands full of childish treasures, sat under one old shawl, chatting happily together.

In front of this lively party stalked a tall, sharp-featured man, in a long blue cloak; and a fourth small girl trudged along beside him through the mud as if she rather enjoyed it.

The wind whistled over the bleak hills; the rain fell in a despondent drizzle, and twilight began to fall. But the calm man gazed as tranquilly into the fog as if he beheld a radiant bow of promise spanning the gray sky. The cheery woman tried to cover every one but herself with the big umbrella. The brown boy pillowed his head on the bald pate of Socrates and slumbered peacefully. The little girls sang lullabies to their dolls in soft, maternal murmurs. The sharp-nosed pedestrian marched steadily on, with the blue cloak streaming out behind him like a banner; and the lively infant splashed through the puddles with a duck-like satisfaction pleasant to behold.

Thus these modern pilgrims journeyed hopefully out of the old world, to found a new one in the wilderness.

The editors of “The Transcendental Tripod” had received from Messrs. Lion & Lamb (two of the aforesaid pilgrims) a communication from which the following statement is an extract: —

“We have made arrangements with the proprietor of an estate of about a hundred acres which liberates this tract from human ownership. Here we shall prosecute our effort to initiate a Family in harmony with the primitive instincts of man.

“Ordinary secular farming is not our object. Fruit, grain, pulse, herbs, flax, and other vegetable products, receiving assiduous attention, will afford ample manual occupation, and chaste supplies for the bodily needs. It is intended to adorn the pastures with orchards, and to supersede the labor of cattle by the spade and the pruning-knife.

“Consecrated to human freedom, the land awaits the sober culture of devoted men. Beginning with small pecuniary means, this enterprise must be rooted in a reliance on the succors of an ever-bounteous Providence, whose vital affinities being secured by this union with uncorrupted field and unworldly persons, the cares and injuries of a life of gain are avoided.

“The inner nature of each member of the Family is at no time neglected. Our plan contemplates all such disciplines, cultures, and habits as evidently conduce to the purifying of the inmates.

“Pledged to the spirit alone, the founders anticipate no hasty or numerous addition to their numbers. The kingdom of peace is entered only through the gates of self-denial; and felicity is the test and the reward of loyalty to the unswerving law of Love.”

This prospective Eden at present consisted of an old red farm-house, a dilapidated barn, many acres of meadow-land, and a grove. Ten ancient apple-trees were all the “chaste supply” which the place offered as yet; but, in the firm belief that plenteous orchards were soon to be evoked from their inner consciousness, these sanguine founders had christened their domain Fruitlands.

Here Timon Lion intended to found a colony of Latter Day Saints, who, under his patriarchal sway, should regenerate the world and glorify his name for ever. Here Abel Lamb, with the devoutest faith in the high ideal which was to him a living truth, desired to plant a Paradise, where Beauty, Virtue, Justice, and Love might live happily together, without the possibility of a serpent entering in. And here his wife, unconverted but faithful to the end, hoped, after many wanderings over the face of the earth, to find rest for herself and a home for her children.

“There is our new abode,” announced the enthusiast, smiling with a satisfaction quite undamped by the drops dripping from his hat-brim, as they turned at length into a cart-path that wound along a steep hillside into a barren-looking valley.

“A little difficult of access,” observed his practical wife, as she endeavored to keep her various household gods from going overboard with every lurch of the laden ark.

“Like all good things. But those who earnestly desire and patiently seek will soon find us,” placidly responded the philosopher from the mud, through which he was now endeavoring to pilot the much-enduring horse.

"Truth lies at the bottom of a well, Sister Hope," said Brother Timon, pausing to detach his small comrade from a gate, whereon she was perched for a clearer gaze into futurity.

"That's the reason we so seldom get at it, I suppose," replied Mrs. Hope, making a vain clutch at the mirror, which a sudden jolt sent flying out of her hands.

"We want no false reflections here," said Timon, with a grim smile, as he crunched the fragments under foot in his onward march.

Sister Hope held her peace, and looked wistfully through the mist at her promised home. The old red house with a hospitable glimmer at its windows cheered her eyes; and, considering the weather, was a fitter refuge than the sylvan bowers some of the more ardent souls might have preferred.

The new-comers were welcomed by one of the elect precious, — a regenerate farmer, whose idea of reform consisted chiefly in wearing white cotton raiment and shoes of untanned leather. This costume, with a snowy beard, gave him a venerable, and at the same time a somewhat bridal appearance.

The goods and chattels of the Society not having arrived, the weary family reposed before the fire on blocks of wood, while Brother Moses White regaled them with roasted potatoes, brown bread and water, in two plates, a tin pan, and one mug; his table service being limited. But, having cast the forms and vanities of a depraved world behind them, the elders welcomed hardship with the enthusiasm of new pioneers, and the children heartily enjoyed this foretaste of what they believed was to be a sort of perpetual picnic.

During the progress of this frugal meal, two more brothers appeared. One a dark, melancholy man, clad in homespun, whose peculiar mission was to turn his name hind part before and use as few words as possible. The other was a bland, bearded Englishman, who expected to be saved by eating uncooked food and going without clothes. He had not yet adopted the primitive costume, however; but contented himself with meditatively chewing dry beans out of a basket.

"Every meal should be a sacrament, and the vessels used should be beautiful and symbolical," observed Brother Lamb, mildly, righting the tin pan slipping about on his knees. "I priced a silver service when in town, but it was too costly; so I got some graceful cups and vases of Britannia ware."

"Hardest things in the world to keep bright. Will whiting be allowed in the community?" inquired Sister Hope, with a housewife's interest in labor-saving institutions.

"Such trivial questions will be discussed at a more fitting time," answered Brother Timon, sharply, as he burnt his fingers with a very hot potato. "Neither sugar, molasses, milk, butter, cheese, nor flesh are to be used among us, for nothing is to be admitted which has caused wrong or death to man or beast.”

“Our garments are to be linen till we learn to raise our own cotton or some substitute for woollen fabrics,” added Brother Abel, blissfully basking in an imaginary future as warm and brilliant as the generous fire before him.

“Haou abaout shoes?” asked Brother Moses, surveying his own with interest.

“We must yield that point till we can manufacture an innocent substitute for leather. Bark, wood, or some durable fabric will be invented in time. Meanwhile, those who desire to carry out our idea to the fullest extent can go barefooted,” said Lion, who liked extreme measures.

“I never will, nor let my girls,” murmured rebellious Sister Hope, under her breath.

“Haou do you cattle’ate to treat the ten-acre lot? Ef things ain’t ‘tended to right smart, we shan’t hev no crops,” observed the practical patriarch in cotton.

“We shall spade it,” replied Abel, in such perfect good faith that Moses said no more, though he indulged in a shake of the head as he glanced at hands that had held nothing heavier than a pen for years. He was a paternal old soul and regarded the younger men as promising boys on a new sort of lark.

“What shall we do for lamps, if we cannot use any animal substance? I do hope light of some sort is to be thrown upon the enterprise,” said Mrs. Lamb, with anxiety, for in those days kerosene and camphene were not, and gas unknown in the wilderness.

“We shall go without till we have discovered some vegetable oil or wax to serve us,” replied Brother Timon, in a decided tone, which caused Sister Hope to resolve that her private lamp should be always trimmed, if not burning.

“Each member is to perform the work for which experience, strength, and taste best fit him,” continued Dictator Lion. “Thus drudgery and disorder will be avoided and harmony prevail. We shall rise at dawn, begin the day by bathing, followed by music, and then a chaste repast of fruit and bread. Each one finds congenial occupation till the meridian meal; when some deep-searching conversation gives rest to the body and development to the mind. Healthful labor again engages us till the last meal, when we assemble in social communion, prolonged till sunset, when we retire to sweet repose, ready for the next day’s activity.”

“What part of the work do you incline to yourself?” asked Sister Hope, with a humorous glimmer in her keen eyes.

“I shall wait till it is made clear to me. Being in preference to doing is the great aim, and this comes to us rather by a resigned willingness than a wilful activity, which is a check to all divine growth,” responded Brother Timon.

“I thought so.” And Mrs. Lamb sighed audibly, for during the year he had spent in her family Brother Timon had so faithfully carried out his idea of “being, not doing,” that she had found his “divine growth” both an expensive and unsatisfactory process.

Here her husband struck into the conversation, his face shining with the light and joy of the splendid dreams and high ideals hovering before him.

“In these steps of reform, we do not rely so much on scientific reasoning or physiological skill as on the spirit’s dictates. The greater part of man’s duty consists in leaving alone much that he now does. Shall I stimulate with tea, coffee, or wine? No. Shall I consume flesh? Not if I value health. Shall I subjugate cattle? Shall I claim property in any created thing? Shall I trade? Shall I adopt a form of religion? Shall I interest myself in politics? To how many of these questions — could we ask them deeply enough and could they be heard as having relation to our eternal welfare — would the response be ‘Abstain’?”

A mild snore seemed to echo the last word of Abel’s rhapsody, for Brother Moses had succumbed to mundane slumber and sat nodding like a massive ghost. Forest Absalom, the silent man, and John Pease, the English member, now departed to the barn; and Mrs. Lamb led her flock to a temporary fold, leaving the founders of the “Consociate Family” to build castles in the air till the fire went out and the symposium ended in smoke.

The furniture arrived next day, and was soon bestowed; for the principal property of the community consisted in books. To this rare library was devoted the best room in the house, and the few busts and pictures that still survived many flittings were added to beautify the sanctuary, for here the family was to meet for amusement, instruction, and worship.

Any housewife can imagine the emotions of Sister Hope, when she took possession of a large, dilapidated kitchen, containing an old stove and the peculiar stores out of which food was to be evolved for her little family of eleven. Cakes of maple sugar, dried peas and beans, barley and hominy, meal of all sorts, potatoes, and dried fruit. No milk, butter, cheese, tea, or meat, appeared. Even salt was considered a useless luxury and spice entirely forbidden by these lovers of Spartan simplicity. A ten years’ experience of vegetarian vagaries had been good training for this new freak, and her sense of the ludicrous supported her through many trying scenes.

Unleavened bread, porridge, and water for breakfast; bread, vegetables, and water for dinner; bread, fruit, and water for supper was the bill of fare ordained by the elders. No tea-pot profaned that sacred stove, no gory steak cried aloud for vengeance from her chaste gridiron; and only a brave woman’s taste, time, and temper were sacrificed on that domestic altar.

The vexed question of light was settled by buying a quantity of bayberry wax for candles; and, on discovering that no one knew how to make them, pine-knots were introduced, to be used when absolutely necessary. Being summer, the evenings were not long, and the weary fraternity found it no great hardship to retire with the birds. The inner light was sufficient for most of them. But Mrs. Lamb rebelled. Evening was the only time she had to herself, and while the tired feet rested the skilful hands mended torn frocks and little stockings, or anxious heart forgot its burden in a book.

So “mother’s lamp” burned steadily, while the philosophers built a new heaven and earth by moonlight; and through all the metaphysical mists and philanthropic pyrotechnics of that period Sister Hope played her own little game of “throwing light,” and none but the moths were the worse for it.

Such farming probably was never seen before since Adam delved. The band of brothers began by spading garden and field; but a few days of it lessened their ardor amazingly. Blistered hands and aching backs suggested the expediency of permitting the use of cattle till the workers were better fitted for noble toil by a summer of the new life.

Brother Moses brought a yoke of oxen from his farm, — at least, the philosophers thought so till it was discovered that one of the animals was a cow; and Moses confessed that he “must be let down easy, for he couldn’t live on garden sarse entirely.”

Great was Dictator Lion’s indignation at this lapse from virtue. But time pressed, the work must be done; so the meek cow was permitted to wear the yoke and the recreant brother continued to enjoy forbidden draughts in the barn, which dark proceeding caused the children to regard him as one set apart for destruction.

The sowing was equally peculiar, for, owing to some mistake, the three brethren, who devoted themselves to this graceful task, found when about half through the job that each had been sowing a different sort of grain in the same field; a mistake which caused much perplexity, as it could not be remedied; but, after a long consultation and a good deal of laughter, it was decided to say nothing and see what would come of it.

The garden was planted with a generous supply of useful roots and herbs; but, as manure was not allowed to profane the virgin soil, few of these vegetable treasures ever came up. Purslane reigned supreme, and the disappointed planters ate it philosophically, deciding that Nature knew what was best for them, and would generously supply their needs, if they could only learn to digest her “sallets” and wild roots.

The orchard was laid out, a little grafting done, new trees and vines set, regardless of the unfit season and entire ignorance of the husbandmen, who honestly believed that in the autumn they would reap a bounteous harvest.

Slowly things got into order, and rapidly rumors of the new experiment went abroad, causing many strange spirits to flock thither, for in those days communities were the fashion and transcendentalism raged wildly. Some came to look on and laugh, some to be supported in poetic idleness, a few to believe sincerely and work heartily. Each member was allowed to mount his favorite hobby and ride it to his heart’s content. Very queer were some of the riders, and very rampant some of the hobbies.

One youth, believing that language was of little consequence if the spirit was only right, startled new-comers by blandly greeting them with “good-morning, damn you,” and other remarks of an equally mixed order. A second irrepressible being held that all the emotions of the soul should be freely expressed, and illustrated his theory by antics that would have sent him to a lunatic asylum, if, as an unregenerate wag said, he had not already been in one. When his spirit soared, he climbed trees and shouted; when doubt assailed him, he lay upon the floor and groaned lamentably. At joyful periods, he raced, leaped, and sang; when sad, he wept aloud; and when a great thought burst upon him in the watches of the night, he crowed like a jocund cockerel, to the great delight of the children and the great annoyance of the elders. One musical brother fiddled whenever so moved, sang sentimentally to the four little girls, and put a music-box on the wall when he hoed corn.

Brother Pease ground away at his uncooked food, or browsed over the farm on sorrel, mint, green fruit, and new vegetables. Occasionally he took his walks abroad, airily attired in an unbleached cotton *poncho*, which was the nearest approach to the primeval costume he was allowed to indulge in. At midsummer he retired to the wilderness, to try his plan where the woodchucks were without prejudices and huckleberry-bushes were hospitably full. A sunstroke unfortunately spoilt his plan, and he returned to semi-civilization a sadder and wiser man.

Forest Absalom preserved his Pythagorean silence, cultivated his fine dark locks, and worked like a beaver, setting an excellent example of brotherly love, justice, and fidelity by his upright life. He it was who helped overworked Sister Hope with her heavy washes, kneaded the endless succession of batches of bread, watched over the children, and did the many tasks left undone by the brethren, who were so busy discussing and defining great duties that they forgot to perform the small ones.

Moses White placidly plodded about, “chorin’ raound,” as he called it, looking like an old-time patriarch, with his silver hair and flowing beard, and saving the community from many a mishap by his thrift and Yankee shrewdness.

Brother Lion domineered over the whole concern; for, having put the most money into the speculation, he was resolved to make it pay, — as if any thing founded on an ideal basis could be expected to do so by any but enthusiasts.

Abel Lamb simply revelled in the Newness, firmly believing that his dream was to be beautifully realized, and in time not only little Fruitlands, but the whole earth, be turned into a Happy Valley. He worked with every muscle of his body, for *he* was in deadly earnest. He taught with his whole head and heart; planned and sacrificed, preached and prophesied, with a soul full of the purest aspirations, most unselfish purposes, and desires for a life devoted to God and man, too high and tender to bear the rough usage of this world.

It was a little remarkable that only one woman ever joined this community. Mrs. Lamb merely followed wheresoever her husband led, — ”as ballast for his balloon,” as she said, in her bright way.

Miss Jane Gage was a stout lady of mature years, sentimental, amiable, and lazy. She wrote verses copiously, and had vague yearnings and graspings after the unknown, which led her to believe herself fitted for a higher sphere than any she had yet adorned.

Having been a teacher, she was set to instructing the children in the common branches. Each adult member took a turn at the infants; and, as each taught in his own way, the result was a chronic state of chaos in the minds of these much-afflicted innocents.

Sleep, food, and poetic musings were the desires of dear Jane’s life, and she shirked all duties as clogs upon her spirit’s wings. Any thought of lending a hand with the domestic drudgery never occurred to her; and when to the question, “Are there any beasts of burden on the place?” Mrs. Lamb answered, with a face that told its own tale, “Only one woman!” the buxom Jane took no shame to herself, but laughed at the joke, and let the stout-hearted sister tug on alone.

Unfortunately, the poor lady hankered after the flesh-pots, and endeavored to stay herself with private sips of milk, crackers, and cheese, and on one dire occasion she partook of fish at a neighbor’s table.

One of the children reported this sad lapse from virtue, and poor Jane was publicly reprimanded by Timon.

“I only took a little bit of the tail,” sobbed the penitent poetess.

“Yes, but the whole fish had to be tortured and slain that you might tempt your carnal appetite with that one taste of the tail. Know ye not, consumers of flesh meat, that ye are nourishing the wolf and tiger in your bosoms?”

At this awful question and the peal of laughter which arose from some of the younger brethren, tickled by the ludicrous contrast between the stout sinner, the stern judge, and the naughty satisfaction of the young detective, poor Jane fled from the room to pack her trunk, and return to a world where fishes' tails were not forbidden fruit.

Transcendental wild oats were sown broadcast that year, and the fame thereof has not yet ceased in the land; for, futile as this crop seemed to outsiders, it bore an invisible harvest, worth much to those who planted in earnest. As none of the members of this particular community have ever recounted their experiences before, a few of them may not be amiss, since the interest in these attempts has never died out and Fruitlands was the most ideal of all these castles in Spain.

A new dress was invented, since cotton, silk, and wool were forbidden as the product of slave-labor, worm-slaughter, and sheep-robbery. Tunics and trowsers of brown linen were the only wear. The women's skirts were longer, and their straw hat-brims wider than the men's, and this was the only difference. Some persecution lent a charm to the costume, and the long-haired, linen-clad reformers quite enjoyed the mild martyrdom they endured when they left home.

Money was abjured, as the root of all evil. The produce of the land was to supply most of their wants, or be exchanged for the few things they could not grow. This idea had its inconveniences; but self-denial was the fashion, and it was surprising how many things one can do without. When they desired to travel, they walked, if possible, begged the loan of a vehicle, or boldly entered car or coach, and, stating their principles to the officials, took the consequences. Usually their dress, their earnest frankness, and gentle resolution won them a passage; but now and then they met with hard usage, and had the satisfaction of suffering for their principles.

On one of these penniless pilgrimages they took passage on a boat, and, when fare was demanded, artlessly offered to talk, instead of pay. As the boat was well under way and they actually had not a cent, there was no help for it. So Brothers Lion and Lamb held forth to the assembled passengers in their most eloquent style. There must have been something effective in this conversation, for the listeners were moved to take up a contribution for these inspired lunatics, who preached peace on earth and good-will to man so earnestly, with empty pockets. A goodly sum was collected; but when the captain presented it the reformers proved that they were consistent even in their madness, for not a penny would they accept, saying, with a look at the group about them, whose indifference or contempt had changed to interest and respect, "You see how well we get on without money;" and so went serenely on their way, with their linen blouses flapping airily in the cold October wind.

They preached vegetarianism everywhere and resisted all temptations of the flesh, contentedly eating apples and bread at well-spread tables, and much afflicting hospitable hostesses by denouncing their food and taking away their appetites, discussing the “horrors of shambles,” the “incorporation of the brute in man,” and “on elegant abstinence the sign of a pure soul.” But, when the perplexed or offended ladies asked what they should eat, they got in reply a bill of fare consisting of “bowls of sunrise for breakfast,” “solar seeds of the sphere,” “dishes from Plutarch’s chaste table,” and other viands equally hard to find in any modern market.

Reform conventions of all sorts were haunted by these brethren, who said many wise things and did many foolish ones. Unfortunately, these wanderings interfered with their harvest at home; but the rule was to do what the spirit moved, so they left their crops to Providence and went a-reaping in wider and, let us hope, more fruitful fields than their own.

Luckily, the earthly providence who watched over Abel Lamb was at hand to glean the scanty crop yielded by the “uncorrupted land,” which, “consecrated to human freedom,” had received “the sober culture of devout men.”

About the time the grain was ready to house, some call of the Oversoul wafted all the men away. An easterly storm was coming up and the yellow stacks were sure to be ruined. Then Sister Hope gathered her forces. Three little girls, one boy (Timon’s son), and herself, harnessed to clothes-baskets and Russia-linen sheets, were the only teams she could command; but with these poor appliances the indomitable woman got in the grain and saved food for her young, with the instinct and energy of a mother-bird with a brood of hungry nestlings to feed.

This attempt at regeneration had its tragic as well as comic side, though the world only saw the former.

With the first frosts, the butterflies, who had sunned themselves in the new light through the summer, took flight, leaving the few bees to see what honey they had stored for winter use. Precious little appeared beyond the satisfaction of a few months of holy living.

At first it seemed as if a chance to try holy dying also was to be offered them. Timon, much disgusted with the failure of the scheme, decided to retire to the Shakers, who seemed to be the only successful community going.

“What is to become of us?” asked Mrs. Hope, for Abel was heart-broken at the bursting of his lovely bubble.

“You can stay here, if you like, till a tenant is found. No more wood must be cut, however, and no more corn ground. All I have must be sold to pay the debts of the concern, as the responsibility rests with me,” was the cheering reply.

“Who is to pay us for what we have lost? I gave all I had, — furniture, time, strength, six months of my children’s lives, — and all are wasted. Abel gave himself body and soul, and is almost wrecked by hard work and disappointment. Are we to have no return for this, but leave to starve and freeze in an old house, with winter at hand, no money, and hardly a friend left, for this wild scheme has alienated nearly all we had. You talk much about justice. Let us have a little, since there is nothing else left.”

But the woman’s appeal met with no reply but the old one: “It was an experiment. We all risked something, and must bear our losses as we can.”

With this cold comfort, Timon departed with his son, and was absorbed into the Shaker brotherhood, where he soon found that the order of things was reversed, and it was all work and no play.

Then the tragedy began for the forsaken little family. Desolation and despair fell upon Abel. As his wife said, his new beliefs had alienated many friends. Some thought him mad, some unprincipled. Even the most kindly thought him a visionary, whom it was useless to help till he took more practical views of life. All stood aloof, saying: “Let him work out his own ideas, and see what they are worth.”

He had tried, but it was a failure. The world was not ready for Utopia yet, and those who attempted to found it only got laughed at for their pains. In other days, men could sell all and give to the poor, lead lives devoted to holiness and high thought, and, after the persecution was over, find themselves honored as saints or martyrs. But in modern times these things are out of fashion. To live for one’s principles, at all costs, is a dangerous speculation; and the failure of an ideal, no matter how humane and noble, is harder for the world to forgive and forget than bank robbery or the grand swindles of corrupt politicians.

Deep waters now for Abel, and for a time there seemed no passage through. Strength and spirits were exhausted by hard work and too much thought. Courage failed when, looking about for help, he saw no sympathizing face, no hand outstretched to help him, no voice to say cheerily, —

“We all make mistakes, and it takes many experiences to shape a life. Try again, and let us help you.”

Every door was closed, every eye averted, every heart cold, and no way open whereby he might earn bread for his children. His principles would not permit him to do many things that others did; and in the few fields where conscience would allow him to work, who would employ a man who had flown in the face of society, as he had done?

Then this dreamer, whose dream was the life of his life, resolved to carry out his idea to the bitter end. There seemed no place for him here, — no work, no friend. To go begging conditions was as ignoble as to go begging money. Better perish of want than sell one’s soul for the sustenance of his body. Silently he lay down upon his bed, turned his face to the wall, and waited with pathetic patience for death to cut the knot which he could not untie. Days and nights went by, and neither food nor water passed his lips. Soul and body were dumbly struggling together, and no word of complaint betrayed what either suffered.

His wife, when tears and prayers were unavailing, sat down to wait the end with a mysterious awe and submission; for in this entire resignation of all things there was an eloquent significance to her who knew him as no other human being did.

"Leave all to God," was his belief; and in this crisis the loving soul clung to this faith, sure that the All-wise Father would not desert this child who tried to live so near to Him. Gathering her children about her, she waited the issue of the tragedy that was being enacted in that solitary room, while the first snow fell outside, untrodden by the footprints of a single friend.

But the strong angels who sustain and teach perplexed and troubled souls came and went, leaving no trace without, but working miracles within. For, when all other sentiments had faded into dimness, all other hopes died utterly; when the bitterness of death was nearly over, when body was past any pang of hunger or thirst, and soul stood ready to depart, the love that outlives all else refused to die. Head had bowed to defeat, hand had grown weary with too heavy tasks, but heart could not grow cold to those who lived in its tender depths, even when death touched it.

"My faithful wife, my little girls, — they have not forsaken me, they are mine by ties that none can break. What right have I to leave them alone? What right to escape from the burden and the sorrow I have helped to bring? This duty remains to me, and I must do it manfully. For their sakes, the world will forgive me in time; for their sakes, God will sustain me now."

Too feeble to rise, Abel groped for the food that always lay within his reach, and in the darkness and solitude of that memorable night ate and drank what was to him the bread and wine of a new communion, a new dedication of heart and life to the duties that were left him when the dreams fled.

In the early dawn, when that sad wife crept fearfully to see what change had come to the patient face on the pillow, she found it smiling at her, saw a wasted hand outstretched to her, and heard a feeble voice cry bravely, "Hope!"

What passed in that little room is not to be recorded except in the hearts of those who suffered and endured much for love's sake. Enough for us to know that soon the wan shadow of a man came forth, leaning on the arm that never failed him, to be welcomed and cherished by the children, who never forgot the experiences of that time.

"Hope" was the watchword now; and, while the last logs blazed on the hearth, the last bread and apples covered the table, the new commander, with recovered courage, said to her husband, —

“Leave all to God — and me. He has done his part; now I will do mine.”

“But we have no money, dear.”

“Yes, we have. I sold all we could spare, and have enough to take us away from this snow-bank.”

“Where can we go?”

“I have engaged four rooms at our good neighbor, Lovejoy’s. There we can live cheaply till spring. Then for new plans and a home of our own, please God.”

“But, Hope, your little store won’t last long, and we have no friends.”

“I can sew and you can chop wood. Lovejoy offers you the same pay as he gives his other men; my old friend, Mrs. Truman, will send me all the work I want; and my blessed brother stands by us to the end. Cheer up, dear heart, for while there is work and love in the world we shall not suffer.”

“And while I have my good angel Hope, I shall not despair, even if I wait another thirty years before I step beyond the circle of the sacred little world in which I still have a place to fill.”

So one bleak December day, with their few possessions piled on an ox-sled, the rosy children perched atop, and the parents trudging arm in arm behind, the exiles left their Eden and faced the world again.

“Ah, me! my happy dream. How much I leave behind that never can be mine again,” said Abel, looking back at the lost Paradise, lying white and chill in its shroud of snow.

“Yes, dear; but how much we bring away,” answered brave-hearted Hope, glancing from husband to children.

“Poor Fruitlands! The name was as great a failure as the rest!” continued Abel, with a sigh, as a frostbitten apple fell from a leafless bough at his feet.

But the sigh changed to a smile as his wife added, in a half-tender, half-satirical tone, —

“Don’t you think Apple Slump would be a better name for it, dear?”

PROVERB STORIES

OR

KITTY’S CLASS DAY AND OTHER STORIES

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KITTY’S CLASS DAY

“A stitch in time saves nine.”

“O Pris, Pris, I’m really going! Here’s the invitation — rough paper — Chapel — spreads — Lyceum Hall — everything splendid; and Jack to take care of me!”

As Kitty burst into the room and performed a rapturous *pas seul*, waving the cards over her head, sister Priscilla looked up from her work with a smile of satisfaction on her quiet face.

“Who invites you, dear?”

“Why, Jack, of course, — dear old cousin Jack. Nobody else ever thinks of me, or cares whether I have a bit of pleasure now and then. Isn’t he kind? Mayn’t I go? and, O Pris, what *shall* I wear?”

Kitty paused suddenly, as if the last all-important question had a solemnizing effect upon both mind and body.

“Why, your white muslin, silk sacque, and new hat, of course,” began Pris with an air of surprise. But Kitty broke in impetuously, —

“I’ll never wear that old muslin again; it’s full of darns, up to my knees, and all out of fashion. So is my sacque; and as for my hat, though it does well enough here, it would be absurd for Class Day.”

“You don’t expect an entirely new suit for this occasion, — do you?” asked Pris, anxiously.

“Yes, I do, and I’ll tell you how I mean to get it. I’ve planned everything; for, though I hardly dreamed of going, I amused myself by thinking how I could manage if I *did* get invited.”

“Let us hear.” And Pris took up her work with an air of resignation.

“First, my dress,” began Kitty, perching herself on the arm of the sofa, and entering into the subject with enthusiasm. “I’ve got the ten dollars grandpa sent me, and with eight of it I’m going to buy Lizzie King’s organdie muslin. She got it in Paris; but her aunt providentially — no, unfortunately — died; so she can’t wear it, and wants to get rid of it. She is bigger than I am, you know; so there is enough for a little mantle or sacque, for it isn’t made up. The skirt is cut off and gored, with a splendid train — ”

“My dear, you don’t mean you are going to wear one of those absurd, new-fashioned dresses?” exclaimed Pris, lifting hands and eyes.

"I do! Nothing would induce me to go to Class Day without a train.
It's been the desire of my heart to have one, and now I *will*, if
I never have another gown to my back!" returned Kitty, with immense
decision.

Pris shook her head, and said, "Go on!" as if prepared for any extravagance after that.

"We can make it ourselves," continued Kitty, "and trim it with the same. It's white with blue stripes and daisies in the stripes; the loveliest thing you ever saw, and can't be got here. So simple, yet distingué, I know you'll like it. Next, my bonnet," — here the solemnity of Kitty's face and manner was charming to behold. "I shall make it out of one of my new illusion undersleeves. I've never worn them; and the puffed part will be a plenty for a little fly-away bonnet of the latest style. I've got blue ribbons to tie it with, and have only to look up some daisies for the inside. With my extra two dollars I shall buy my gloves, and pay my fares, — and there I am, all complete."

She looked so happy, so pretty, and full of girlish satisfaction, that sister Pris couldn't bear to disturb the little plan, much as she disapproved of it. They were poor, and every penny had to be counted. There were plenty of neighbors to gossip and criticise, and plenty of friends to make disagreeable remarks on any unusual extravagance. Pris saw things with the prudent eyes of thirty, but Kitty with the romantic eyes of seventeen; and the elder sister, in the kindness of her heart, had no wish to sadden life to those bright young eyes, or deny the child a harmless pleasure. She sewed thoughtfully for a minute, then looked up, saying, with the smile that always assured Kitty the day was won, —

"Get your things together, and we will see what can be done. But remember, dear, that it is both bad taste and bad economy for poor people to try to ape the rich."

"You're a perfect angel, Pris; so don't moralize. I'll run and get the dress, and we'll begin at once, for there is much to do, and only two days to do it in." And Kitty skipped away, singing "Lauriger Horatius," at the top of her voice.

Priscilla soon found that the girl's head was completely turned by the advice and example of certain fashionable young neighbors. It was in vain for Pris to remonstrate and warn.

"Just this once let me do as others do, and thoroughly enjoy myself." pleaded Kitty; and Pris yielded, saying to herself, "She shall have her wish, and if she learns a lesson, neither time nor money will be lost."

So they snipped and sewed, and planned and pieced, going through all the alternations of despair and triumph, worry and satisfaction, which women undergo when a new suit is under way. Company kept coming, for news of Kitty's expedition had flown abroad, and her young friends must just run in to hear about it, and ask what she was going to wear; while Kitty was so glad and proud to tell, and show, and enjoy her little triumph that many half hours were wasted, and the second day found much still to do.

The lovely muslin didn't hold out, and Kitty sacrificed the waist to the train, for a train she must have or the whole thing would be an utter failure. A little sacque was eked out, however, and when the frills were on, it was "ravishing," as Kitty said, with a sigh of mingled delight and fatigue. The gored skirt was a fearful job, as any one who has ever plunged into the mysteries will testify; and before the facing, even experienced Pris quailed.

The bonnet also was a trial, for when the lace was on, it was discovered that the ribbons didn't match the dress. Here was a catastrophe! Kitty frantically rummaged the house, the shops, the stores of her friends, and rummaged in vain. There was no time to send to the city, and despair was about to fall on Kitty, when Pris rescued her by quietly making one of the small sacrifices which were easy to her because her life was spent for others. Some one suggested a strip of blue illusion, — and that could be got; but, alas! Kitty had no money, for the gloves were already bought. Pris heard the lamentations, and giving up fresh ribbons for herself, pulled her sister out of a slough of despond with two yards of "heavenly tulle."

"Now the daisies; and oh, dear me, not one can I find in this poverty-stricken town," sighed Kitty, prinking at the glass, and fervently hoping that nothing would happen to her complexion over night.

"I see plenty just like those on your dress," answered Pris, nodding toward the meadow full of young whiteweed.

"Pris, you're a treasure! I'll wear real ones; they keep well, I know, and are so common I can refresh my bonnet anywhere. It's a splendid idea."

Away rushed Kitty to return with an apron full of American daisies. A pretty cluster was soon fastened just over the left-hand frizzle of bright hair, and the little bonnet was complete.

"Now, Pris, tell me how I look," cried Kitty, as she swept into the room late that afternoon in full gala costume.

It would have been impossible for the primmest, the sourest, or the most sensible creature in the world to say that it wasn't a pretty sight. The long train, the big chignon, the apology for a bonnet, were all ridiculous, — no one could deny that, — but youth, beauty, and a happy heart made even those absurdities charming. The erect young figure gave an air to the crisp folds of the delicate dress; the bright eyes and fresh cheeks under the lace rosette made one forget its size; and the rippling brown hair won admiration in spite of the ugly bunch which disfigured the girl’s head. The little jacket set “divinely,” the new gloves were as immaculate as white kids could be, and to crown all, Lizzie King, in a burst of generosity, lent Kitty the blue and white Paris sunshade which she couldn’t use herself.

“Now I could die content; I’m perfect in all respects, and I know Jack won’t be ashamed of me. I really owe it to him to look my best, you know, and that’s why I’m so particular,” said Kitty, in an apologetic tone, as she began to lay away her finery.

“I hope you will enjoy every minute of the time, deary. Don’t forget to finish running up the facing; I’ve basted it carefully, and would do it if my head didn’t ache so, I really can’t hold it up any longer,” answered Pris, who had worked like a disinterested bee, while Kitty had flown about like a distracted butterfly.

“Go and lie down, you dear, kind soul, and don’t think of my nonsense again,” said Kitty, feeling remorseful, till Pris was comfortably asleep, when she went to her room and revelled in her finery till bedtime. So absorbed was she in learning to manage her train gracefully, that she forgot the facing till very late. Then, being worn out with work and worry, she did, what girls are too apt to do, stuck a pin here and there, and, trusting to Priscilla’s careful bastings, left it as it was, retiring to dream of a certain Horace Fletcher, whose aristocratic elegance had made a deep impression upon her during the few evenings she had seen him.

Nothing could have been lovelier than the morning, and few hearts happier than Kitty’s, as she arrayed herself with the utmost care, and waited in solemn state for the carriage; for muslin trains and dewy roads were incompatible, and one luxury brought another.

“My goodness, where did she get that stylish suit?” whispered Miss Smith to Miss Jones, as Kitty floated into the station with all sail set, finding it impossible to resist the temptation to astonish certain young ladies who had snubbed her in times past, which snubs had rankled, and were now avenged.

“I looked everywhere for a muslin for to-day and couldn’t find any I liked, so I was forced to wear my mauve silk,” observed Miss Smith, complacently settling the silvery folds of her dress.

“It’s very pretty, but one ruins a silk at Class Day, you know. I thought this organdie would be more comfortable and appropriate this warm day. A friend brought it from Paris, and it’s like one the Princess of Wales wore at the great flower-show this year,” returned Kitty, with the air of a young lady who had all her dresses from Paris, and was intimately acquainted with the royal family.

“Those girls” were entirely extinguished by this stroke, and hadn’t a word to say for themselves, while Kitty casually mentioned Horace Fletcher, Lyceum Hall, and Cousin Jack, for *they* had only a little Freshman brother to boast of, and were *not* going to Lyceum Hall.

As she stepped out of the cars at Cambridge, Jack opened his honest blue eyes and indulged in a low whistle of astonishment: for if there was anything he especially hated, it was the trains, chignons and tiny bonnets then in fashion. He was very fond of Kitty, and prided himself on being able to show his friends a girl who was charming, and yet not over-dressed.

"She has made a regular guy of herself; I won't tell her so, and the dear little soul shall have a jolly time in spite of her fuss and feathers. But I do wish she had let her hair alone and worn that pretty hat of hers."

As this thought passed through Jack's mind he smiled and bowed and made his way among the crowd, whispering as he drew his cousin's arm through his own, —

"Why, Kitty, you're got up regardless of expense, aren't you? I'm so glad you came, we'll have a rousing good time, and you shall see all the fun."

"Oh, thank you, Jack! Do I look nice, really? I tried to be a credit to you and Pris, and I did have such a job of it. I'll make you laugh over it some time. A carriage for me? Bless us, how fine we are!" and Kitty stepped in, feeling that only one thing more was needed to make her cup overflow. That one thing was speedily vouchsafed, for before her skirts were smoothly settled, Jack called out, in his hearty way, —

"How are you, Fletcher? If you are bound for Chapel I'll take you up."

"Thanks; good-morning, Miss Heath."

It was all done in an instant, and the next thing Kitty knew she was rolling away with the elegant Horace sitting opposite. How little it takes to make a young girl happy! A pretty dress, sunshine, and somebody opposite, and they are blest. Kitty's face glowed and dimpled with pleasure as she glanced about her, especially when *she*, sitting in state with two gentlemen all to herself, passed "those girls" walking in the dust with a beardless boy; she felt that she could forgive past slights, and did so with a magnanimous smile and bow.

Both Jack and Fletcher had graduated the year before, but still took an interest in their old haunts, and patronized the fellows who were not yet through the mill, at least the Seniors and Juniors; of Sophs and Freshs they were sublimely unconscious. Greeted by frequent slaps on the shoulder, and hearty "How are you, old fellows," they piloted Kitty to a seat in the chapel. An excellent place, but the girl's satisfaction was marred by Fletcher's desertion, and she could not see anything attractive about the dashing young lady in the pink bonnet to whom he devoted himself, “because she was a stranger,” Kitty said.

Everybody knows what goes on in the Chapel, after the fight and scramble are over. The rustle and buzz, the music, the oratory and the poem, during which the men cheer and the girls simper; the professors yawn, and the poet’s friends pronounce him a second Longfellow. Then the closing flourishes, the grand crush, and general scattering.

Then the fun really begins, as far as the young folks are concerned. *They* don’t mind swarming up and down stairs in a solid phalanx; they can enjoy half a dozen courses of salad, ice and strawberries, with stout gentlemen crushing their feet, anxious mammas sticking sharp elbows into their sides, and absent-minded tutors walking over them. They can flirt vigorously in a torrid atmosphere of dinner, dust, and din; can smile with hot coffee running down their backs, small avalanches of ice-cream descending upon their best bonnets, and sandwiches, butter-side down, reposing on their delicate silks. They know that it is a costly rapture, but they carefully refrain from thinking of the morrow, and energetically illustrate the Yankee maxim which bids us enjoy ourselves in our early bloom.

Kitty did have “a rousing good time;” for Jack was devoted, taking her everywhere, showing her everything, feeding and fanning her, and festooning her train with untiring patience. How many forcible expressions he mentally indulged in as he walked on that unlucky train we will not record; he smiled and skipped and talked of treading on flowers in a way that would have charmed Kitty, if some one else had not been hovering about “The Daisy,” as Fletcher called her.

After he returned, she neglected Jack, who took it coolly, and was never in the way unless she wanted him. For the first time in her life, Kitty deliberately flirted. The little coquetries, which are as natural to a gay young girl as her laughter, were all in full play, and had she gone no further no harm would have been done. But, excited by the example of those about her, Kitty tried to enact the fashionable young lady, and, like most novices, she overdid the part. Quite forgetting her cousin, she tossed her head, twirled her fan, gave affected little shrieks at college jokes, and talked college slang in a way that convulsed Fletcher, who enjoyed the fun immensely.

Jack saw it all, shook his head and said nothing; but his face grew rather sober as he watched Kitty, flushed, dishevelled, and breathless, whirling round Lyceum Hall, on the arm of Fletcher, who danced divinely, as all the girls agreed. Jack had proposed going, but Kitty had frowned, so he fell back, leaving her to listen and laugh, blush and shrink a little at her partner’s flowery compliments and admiring glances.

“If she stands that long she’s not the girl I took her for,” thought Jack, beginning to lose patience. “She doesn’t look like my little Kitty, and somehow I don’t feel half so fond and proud of her as usual. I know one thing, *my* daughters shall never be seen knocking about in that style.”

As if the thought suggested the act, Jack suddenly assumed an air of paternal authority, and, arresting his cousin as she was about to begin again, he said, in a tone she had never heard before, —

“I promised Pris to take care of you, so I shall carry you off to rest, and put yourself to rights after this game of romps. I advise you to do the same, Fletcher, or give your friend in the pink bonnet a turn.”

Kitty took Jack’s arm pettishly, but glanced over her shoulder with such an inviting smile that Fletcher followed, feeling very much like a top, in danger of tumbling down the instant he stopped spinning. As she came out Kitty’s face cleared, and, assuming her sprightliest air, she spread her plumage and prepared to descend with effect, for a party of uninvited *peris* stood at the gate of this Paradise casting longing glances at the forbidden splendors within. Slowly, that all might see her, Kitty sailed down, with Horace, the debonair, in her wake, and was just thinking to herself, “Those girls won’t get over this very soon, I fancy,” when all in one moment she heard Fletcher exclaim, wrathfully, “Hang the flounces!” she saw a very glossy black hat come skipping down the steps, felt a violent twitch backward, and, to save herself from a fall, sat down on the lower step with most undignified haste.

It was impossible for the bystanders to help laughing, for there was Fletcher hopping wildly about, with one foot nicely caught in a muslin loop, and there sat Kitty longing to run away and hide herself, yet perfectly helpless, while every one tittered. Miss Jones and Miss Smith laughed shrilly, and the despised little Freshman completed her mortification, by a feeble joke about Kitty Heath’s new man-trap. It was only an instant, but it seemed an hour before Fletcher freed her, and snatching up the dusty beaver, left her with a flushed countenance and an abrupt bow.

If it hadn’t been for Jack, Kitty would have burst into tears then and there, so terrible was the sense of humiliation which oppressed her. For his sake she controlled herself, and, bundling up her torn train, set her teeth, stared straight before her, and let him lead her in dead silence to a friend’s room near by. There he locked the door, and began to comfort her by making light of the little mishap. But Kitty cried so tragically, that he was at his wit’s end, till the ludicrous side of the affair struck her, and she began to laugh hysterically. With a vague idea that vigorous treatment was best for that feminine ailment, Jack was about to empty the contents of an ice-pitcher over her, when she arrested him, by exclaiming, incoherently, —

“Oh, don’t! — it was so funny! — how can you laugh, you cruel boy? — I’m disgraced, forever — take me home to Pris, oh, take me home to Pris!”

“I will, my dear, I will; but first let me right you up a bit; you look as if you had been hazed, upon my life you do;” and Jack laughed in spite of himself at the wretched little object before him, for dust, dancing, and the downfall produced a ruinous spectacle.

That broke Kitty’s heart; and, spreading her hands before her face, she was about to cry again, when the sad sight which met her eyes dispelled the gathering tears. The new gloves were both split up the middle and very dirty with clutching at the steps as she went down.

“Never mind, you can wash them,” said Jack, soothingly.

“I paid a dollar and a half for them, and they can’t be washed,” groaned Kitty.

“Oh, hang the gloves! I meant your hands,” cried Jack, trying to keep sober.

“No matter for my hands, I mourn my gloves. But I won’t cry any more, for my head aches now so I can hardly see.” And Kitty threw off her bonnet, as if even that airy trifle hurt her.

Seeing how pale she looked, Jack tenderly suggested a rest on the old sofa, and a wet handkerchief on her hot forehead, while he got the good landlady to send her up a cup of tea. As Kitty rose to comply she glanced at her dress, and, clasping her hands, exclaimed, tragically, — ”The facing, the fatal facing! That made all the mischief, for if I’d sewed it last night it wouldn’t have ripped to-day; if it hadn’t ripped Fletcher wouldn’t have got his foot in it, I shouldn’t have made an object of myself, he wouldn’t have gone off in a rage, and — who knows what might have happened?”

“Bless the what’s-its-name if it has settled him,” cried Jack. “He is a contemptible fellow not to stay and help you out of the scrape he got you into. Follow his lead and don’t trouble yourself about him.”

“Well, he *was* rather absurd to-day, I allow; but he *has* got handsome eyes and hands, and he *does* dance like an angel,” sighed Kitty, as she pinned up the treacherous loop which had brought destruction to her little castle in the air.

“Handsome eyes, white hands, and angelic feet don’t make a man. Wait till you can do better, Kit.”

With an odd, grave look, that rather startled Kitty, Jack vanished, to return presently with a comfortable cup of tea and a motherly old lady to help repair damages and soothe her by the foolish little purrings and pattings so grateful to female nerves after a flurry.

“I’ll come back and take you out to see the dance round the tree when you’ve had a bit of a rest,” said Jack, vibrating between door and sofa as if it wasn’t easy to get away.

"Oh, I couldn't," cried Kitty, with a shudder at the bare idea of meeting any one. "I can't be seen again to-night; let me stay here till my train goes."

"I thought it had gone, already," said Jack, with an irrepressible twinkle of the eye that glanced at the draggled dress sweeping the floor.

"How *can* you joke about it!" and the girl's reproachful eyes filled with tears of shame. "I know I've been very silly, Jack, but I've had my punishment, and I don't need any more. To feel that you despise me is worse than all the rest."

She ended with a little sob, and turned her face away to hide the trembling of her lips. At that, Jack flushed up, his eyes shone, and he stooped suddenly as if to make some impetuous reply. But, remembering the old lady (who, by the by, was discreetly looking out of the window), he put his hands in his pockets and strolled out of the room.

"I've lost them both by this day's folly," thought Kitty, as Mrs. Brown departed with the teacup. "I don't care for Fletcher, for I dare say he didn't mean half he said, and I was only flattered because he is rich and handsome and the girls glorify him. But I shall miss Jack, for I've known and loved him all my life. How good he's been to me to-day! so patient, careful, and kind, though he must have been ashamed of me. I know he didn't like my dress; but he never said a word and stood by me through everything. Oh, I wish I'd minded Pris! then he would have respected me, at least; I wonder if he ever will, again?"

Following a sudden impulse, Kitty sprang up, locked the door, and then proceeded to destroy all her little vanities as far as possible. She smoothed out her crimps with a wet and ruthless hand; fastened up her pretty hair in the simple way Jack liked; gave her once cherished bonnet a spiteful shake, as she put it on, and utterly extinguished it with a big blue veil. She looped up her dress, leaving no vestige of the now hateful train, and did herself up uncompromisingly in the Quakerish gray shawl Pris had insisted on her taking for the evening. Then she surveyed herself with pensive satisfaction, saying, in the tone of one bent on resolutely mortifying the flesh, —

"Neat but not gaudy; I'm a fright, but I deserve it, and it's better than being a peacock."

Kitty had time to feel a little friendless and forlorn, sitting there alone as twilight fell, and amused herself by wondering if Fletcher would come to inquire about her, or show any further interest in her; yet when the sound of a manly tramp approached, she trembled lest it should be the victim of the fatal facing. The door opened, and with a sigh of relief she saw Jack come in, bearing a pair of new gloves in one hand and a great bouquet of June roses in the other.

"How good of you to bring me these! They are more refreshing than oceans of tea. You know what I like, Jack; thank you very much" cried Kitty, sniffing at her roses with grateful rapture.

"And you know what I like," returned Jack, with an approving glance at the altered figure before him.

"I'll never do so any more," murmured Kitty, wondering why she felt bashful all of a sudden, when it was only cousin Jack.

"Now put on your gloves, dear, and come out and hear the music: your train doesn't go for two hours yet, and you mustn't mope here all that time," said Jack, offering his second gift.

"How did you know my size?" asked Kitty, putting on the gloves in a hurry; for though Jack had called her "dear" for years, the little word had a new sound to-night.

"I guessed, — no, I didn't, I had the old ones with me; they are no good now, are they?" and too honest to lie, Jack tried to speak carelessly, though he turned red in the dusk, well knowing that the dirty little gloves were folded away in his left breast-pocket at that identical moment.

"Oh, dear, no! these fit nicely. I'm ready, if you don't mind going with such a fright," said Kitty, forgetting her dread of seeing people in her desire to get away from that room, because for the first time in her life she wasn't at ease with Jack.

"I think I like the little gray moth better than the fine butterfly," returned Jack, who, in spite of his invitation, seemed to find "moping" rather pleasant.

"You are a rainy-day friend, and he isn't," said Kitty, softly, as she drew him away.

Jack's only answer was to lay his hand on the little white glove resting so confidingly on his arm, and, keeping it there, they roamed away into the summer twilight.

Something had happened to the evening and the place, for both seemed suddenly endowed with uncommon beauty and interest. The dingy old houses might have been fairy palaces, for anything they saw to the contrary; the dusty walks, the trampled grass, were regular Elysian fields to them, and the music was the music of the spheres, though they found themselves "Right in the middle of the boom, jing, jing." For both had made a little discovery, — no, not a little one, the greatest and sweetest man and woman can make. In the sharp twinge of jealousy which the sight of Kitty's flirtation with Fletcher gave him, and the delight he found in her after conduct, Jack discovered how much he loved her. In the shame, gratitude, and half sweet, half bitter emotion that filled her heart, Kitty felt that to her Jack would never be "only cousin Jack" any more. All the vanity, coquetry, selfishness, and ill-temper of the day seemed magnified to heinous sins, for now her only thought was, "seeing these faults, he *can't* care for me. Oh, I wish I was a better girl!"

She did not say “for his sake,” but in the new humility, the ardent wish to be all that a woman should be, little Kitty proved how true her love was, and might have said with Portia, —

”For myself alone, I would not be
Ambitious in my wish; but, for you,
I would be trebled twenty times myself;
A thousand times more fair,
Ten thousand times more rich.”

All about them other pairs were wandering under the patriarchal elms, enjoying music, starlight, balmy winds, and all the luxuries of the season. If the band had played

”Oh, there’s nothing half so sweet in life
As love’s young dream — ”

it is my private opinion that it would have suited the audience to a T. Being principally composed of elderly gentlemen with large families, they had not that fine sense of the fitness of things so charming to see, and tooted and banged away with waltzes and marches, quite regardless of the flocks of Romeos and Juliets philandering all about them.

Under cover of a popular medley, Kitty overheard Fletcher quizzing her for the amusement of Miss Pinkbonnet, who was evidently making up for lost time. It was feeble wit, but it put the finishing stroke to Kitty’s vanity, and she dropped a tear in her blue tissue retreat, and clung to Jack, feeling that she had never valued him half enough. She hoped he didn’t hear the gossip going on at the other side of the tree near which they stood; but he did, for his hand involuntarily doubled itself up into a very dangerous-looking fist, and he darted such fiery glances at the speaker, that, if the thing had been possible. Fletcher’s ambrosial curls would have been scorched off his head.

“Never mind, and don’t get angry, Jack. They are right about one thing, — the daisies in my bonnet *were* real, and I *couldn’t* afford any others. I don’t care much, only Pris worked so hard to get me ready I hate to have my things made fun of.”

“He isn’t worth a thrashing, so we’ll let it pass this time,” said Jack, irefully, yet privately resolving to have it out with Fletcher by and by.

“Why, Kitty, I thought the real daisies the prettiest things about your dress. Don’t throw them away. I’ll wear them just to show that noodle that I prefer nature to art;” and Jack gallantly stuck the faded posy in his button-hole, while

Kitty treasured up the hint so kindly given for future use.

If a clock with great want of tact hadn't insisted on telling them that it was getting late, Kitty never would have got home, for both the young people felt inclined to loiter about arm in arm through the sweet summer night forever.

Jack had meant to say something before she went, and was immensely surprised to find the chance lost for the present. He wanted to go home with her and free his mind; but a neighborly old gentleman having been engaged as escort, there would have been very little satisfaction in a travelling trio; so he gave it up. He was very silent as they walked to the station with Dr. Dodd trudging behind them. Kitty thought he was tired, perhaps glad to be rid of her, and meekly accepted her fate. But as the train approached, she gave his hand an impulsive squeeze, and said very gratefully, —

"Jack, I can't thank you enough for your kindness to your silly little cousin; but I never shall forget it, and if I ever can return it in any way, I will with all my heart."

Jack looked down at the young face almost pathetic now with weariness, humility, and pain, yet very sweet, with that new shyness in the loving eyes, and, stooping suddenly, he kissed it, whispering in a tone that made the girl's heart flutter, —

"I'll tell you how you may return it 'with all your heart,' by and by.
Good-night, my Kitty."

"Have you had a good time, dear?" asked Pris, as her sister appeared an hour later.

"Don't I look as if I had?" and, throwing off her wraps, Kitty revolved slowly before her that she might behold every portion of the wreck. "My gown is all dust, crumple, and rags, my bonnet perfectly limp and flat, and my gloves are ruined; I've broken Lizzie's parasol, made a spectacle of myself, and wasted money, time, and temper; yet my Class Day isn't a failure, for Jack is the dearest boy in the world, and I'm very, very happy!"

Pris looked at her a minute, then opened her arms without a word, and
Kitty forgot all her little troubles in one great joy.

When Miss Smith and Miss Jones called a few days after to tell her that Mr. Fletcher was going abroad, the amiable creatures were entirely routed by finding Jack there in a most unmistakable situation. He blandly wished Horace "bon voyage," and regretted that he wouldn't be there to the wedding in October. Kitty devoted herself to blushing beautifully, and darning many rents in a short daisy muslin skirt, “which I intend to wear a great deal, because Jack likes it, and so do I,” she said, with a demure look at her lover, who laughed as if that was the best joke of the season.

AUNT KIPP

"Children and fools speak the truth."

I

"What's that sigh for, Polly dear?" "I'm tired, mother, tired of working and waiting. If I'm ever going to have any fun, I want it *now* while I can enjoy it."

"You shouldn't wait another hour if I could have my way; but you know how helpless I am;" and poor Mrs. Snow sighed dolefully, as she glanced about the dingy room and pretty Mary turning her faded gown for the second time.

"If Aunt Kipp would give us the money she is always talking about, instead of waiting till she dies, we should be *so* comfortable. She is a dreadful bore, for she lives in such terror of dropping dead with her heart-complaint that she doesn't take any pleasure in life herself or let any one else; so the sooner she goes the better for all of us," said Polly, in a desperate tone; for things looked very black to her just then.

"My dear, don't say that," began her mother, mildly shocked; but a bluff little voice broke in with the forcible remark, —

"She's everlastingly telling me never to put off till to-morrow what can be done to-day; next time she comes I'll remind her of that, and ask her, if she is going to die, why she doesn't do it?"

"Toady! you're a wicked, disrespectful boy; never let me hear you say such a thing again about your dear Aunt Kipp."

"She isn't dear! You know we all hate her, and you are more afraid of her than you are of spiders, — so now."

The young personage whose proper name had been corrupted into Toady, was a small boy of ten or eleven, apple-cheeked, round-eyed, and curly-headed; arrayed in well-worn, gray knickerbockers, profusely adorned with paint, glue, and shreds of cotton. Perched on a high stool, at an isolated table in a state of chaos, he was absorbed in making a boat, entirely oblivious of the racking toothache which had been his excuse for staying from school. As cool, saucy, hard-handed, and soft-hearted a little specimen of young America was Toady as you would care to see; a tyrant at home, a rebel at school, a sworn foe to law, order, and Aunt Kipp. This young person was regarded as a reprobate by all but his mother, sister, and sister's sweetheart, Van Bahr Lamb. Having been, through much anguish of flesh and spirit, taught that lying was a deadly sin, Toady rushed to the other extreme, and bolted out the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, at all times and places, with a startling abruptness that brought wrath and dismay upon his friends and relatives.

"It's wicked to fib; you've whipped that into me and you can't rub it out," he was wont to say, with vivid recollection of the past tingling in the chubby portions of his frame.

"Mind your chips, Toady, and take care what you say to Aunt Kipp, or you'll be as poor as a little rat all the days of your life," said Polly, warningly.

"I don't want her old money, and I'll tell her so if she bothers me about it. I shall go into business with Van and take care of the whole lot; so don't you preach, Polly," returned Toady, with as much dignity as was compatible with a great dab of glue on the end of his snub nose.

"Mother, did aunt say anything about coming this week?" asked Polly, after a pause of intense thought over a breadth with three darns, two spots, and a burn.

"Yes; she wrote that she was too feeble to come at present, as she had such dreadful palpitations she didn't dare stir from her room. So we are quite safe for the next week at least, and — bless my soul, there she is now!"

Mrs. Snow clasped her hands with a gesture of dismay, and sat as if transfixed by the spectacle of a ponderous lady, in an awe-inspiring bonnet, who came walking slowly down the street. Polly gave a groan, and pulled a bright ribbon from her hair. Toady muttered, "Oh, bother!" and vainly attempted to polish up his countenance with a fragmentary pocket-handkerchief.

"Nothing but salt fish for dinner," wailed Mrs. Snow, as the shadow of the coming event fell upon her.

"Van will make a fool of himself, and ruin everything," sighed Polly, glancing at the ring on her finger.

"I know she'll kiss me; she never *will* let a fellow alone," growled Toady, scowling darkly.

The garden gate clashed, dust flew from the door-mat, a heavy step echoed in the hall, an imperious voice called "Sophy!" and Aunt Kipp entered with a flourish of trumpets, for Toady blew a blast through his fingers which made the bows totter on her bonnet.

"My dear aunt, I'm very glad to see you," murmured Mrs. Snow, advancing with a smile of welcome; for though as weak as water gruel, she was as kind-hearted a little woman as ever lived.

"What a fib that was!" said Toady, *sotto voce*.

"We were just saying we were afraid you wouldn't" — began Mary, when a warning, "Mind now, Polly," caused her to stop short and busy herself with the newcomer’s bag and umbrella.

“I changed my mind. Theodore, come and kiss me,” answered Aunt Kipp, briefly.

“Yes’m,” was the plaintive reply, and, closing his eyes, Toady awaited his fate with fortitude.

But the dreaded salute did not come, for Aunt Kipp exclaimed in alarm, —

“Mercy on us! has the boy got the plague?”

“No’m, it’s paint, and dirt, and glue, and it *won’t* come off,” said Toady, stroking his variegated countenance with grateful admiration for the stains that saved him.

“Go and wash this moment, sir. Thank Heaven, *I’ve* got no boys,” cried Aunt Kipp. as if boys were some virulent disease which she had narrowly escaped.

With a hasty peck at the lips of her two elder relatives, the old lady seated herself, and slowly removed the awful bonnet, which in shape and hue much resembled a hearse hung with black crape.

“I’m glad you are better,” said Mary, reverently receiving the funereal head-gear.

“I’m *not* better,” cut in Aunt Kipp. “I’m worse, much worse; my days are numbered; I stand on the brink of the tomb, and may drop at any moment.”

Toady’s face was a study, as he glanced up at the old lady’s florid countenance, down at the floor, as if in search of the above-mentioned “brink,” and looked unaffectedly anxious to see her drop. “Why don’t you, then?” was on his lips; but a frown from Polly restrained him, and he sat himself down on the rug to contemplate the corpulent victim.

“Have a cup of tea, aunt?” said Mrs. Snow.

“I will.”

“Lie down and rest a little,” suggested Polly.

“I won’t.”

“Can we do anything for you?” said both.

“Take my things away, and have dinner early.”

Both departed to perform these behests, and, leaning back in her chair, Aunt Kipp reposed.

“I say, what’s a bore?” asked Toady from the rug, where he sat rocking meditatively to and fro, holding on by his shoe-strings.

“It’s a kind of a pig, very fierce, and folks are afraid of ‘em,” said
Aunt Kipp, whose knowledge of Natural History was limited.

“Good for Polly! so you are!” sung out the boy, with the hearty child’s laugh so pleasant to most ears.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the old lady, irefully poking at him with her umbrella.

"Why, Polly said you were a bore," explained Toady, with artless frankness. "You *are* fat, you know, and fierce sometimes, and folks are afraid of you. Good, wasn't it?"

"Very! Mary is a nice, grateful, respectful, loving niece, and I shan't forget her, she may depend on that," and Aunt Kipp laughed grimly.

"May she? well, that's jolly now. She was afraid you wouldn't give her the money; so I'll tell her it's all right;" and innocent Toady nodded approvingly.

"Oh, she expects some of my money, does she?"

"Course she does; ain't you always saying you'll remember us in your will, because father was your favorite nephew, and all that? I'll tell you a secret, if you won't let Polly know I spoke first. You'll find it out to-night, for you 'd see Van and she were sweethearts in a minute."

"Sweethearts?" cried Aunt Kipp, turning red in the face.

"Yes'm. Van settled it last week, and Polly's been so happy ever since. Mother likes it, and *I* like it, for I'm fond of Van, though I do call him Baa-baa, because he looks like a sheep. We all like it, and we 'd all say so, if we were not afraid of you. Mother and Polly, I mean; of course we men don't mind, but we don't want a fuss. You won't make one, will you, now?"

Anything more expressive of brotherly good-will, persuasive frankness, and a placid consciousness of having "fixed it," than Toady's dirty little face, it would be hard to find. Aunt Kipp eyed him so fiercely that even before she spoke a dim suspicion that something was wrong began to dawn on his too-confiding soul.

"*I* don't like it, and I'll put a stop to it. I won't have any ridiculous baa-baas in my family. If Mary counts on my money to begin housekeeping with, she'll find herself mistaken; for not one penny shall she have, married or single, and you may tell her so."

Toady was so taken aback by this explosion that he let go his shoe-strings, fell over with a crash, and lay flat, with shovel and tongs spread upon him like a pall. In rushed Mrs. Snow and Polly, to find the boy's spirits quite quenched, for once, and Aunt Kipp in a towering passion. It all came out in one overwhelming flood of words, and Toady fled from the storm to wander round the house, a prey to the deepest remorse. The meekness of that boy at dinner-time was so angelic that Mrs. Snow would have feared speedy translation for him, if she had not been very angry. Polly's red eyes, and Aunt Kipp's griffinesque expression of countenance, weighed upon his soul so heavily, that even roly-poly pudding failed to assuage his trouble, and, taking his mother into the china-closet, he anxiously inquired “if it was all up with Polly?”

“I’m afraid so, for aunt vows she will make a new will to-morrow, and leave every penny to the Charitable Rag-bag Society,” sighed Mrs. Snow.

“I didn’t mean to do it, I truly didn’t! I thought I’d just ‘give her a hint,’ as you say. She looked all right, and laughed when I told her about being a bore, and I thought she liked it. If she was a man, I’d thrash her for making Polly cry;” and Toady shook his fist at Aunt Kipp’s umbrella, which was an immense relief to his perturbed spirit.

“Bless the boy! I do believe he would!” cried Mrs. Snow, watching the little turkey-cock with maternal pride. “You can’t do that: so just be careful and not make any more mischief, dear.”

“I’ll try, mother; but I’m always getting into scrapes with Aunt Kipp. She’s worse than measles, any day, — such an old aggrawater! Van’s coming this afternoon, won’t he make her pleasant again?”

“Oh, dear, no! He will probably make things ten times worse, he’s so bashful and queer. I’m afraid our last chance is gone, deary, and we must rub along as we have done.”

One sniff of emotion burst from Toady, and for a moment he laid his head in the knife-tray, overcome with disappointment and regret. But scorning to yield to unmanly tears, he was soon himself again. Thrusting his beloved jackknife, with three blades and a file, into Polly’s hand, he whispered, brokenly, —

“Keep it forever ‘n’ ever; I’m awful sorry!” Then, feeling that the magnitude of this sacrifice atoned for everything, he went to watch for Van, — the forlorn hope to which he now clung.

II

“Sophy, I’m surprised at your want of judgment. Do you really mean to let your girl marry this Lamb? Why, the man’s a fool!” began Aunt Kipp, after dinner, by way of opening a pleasant conversation with her relatives.

“Dear me, aunt! how can you know that, when you never saw him?” mildly returned Mrs. Snow.

“I’ve heard of him, and that’s enough for me. I’ve a deal of penetration in judging character, and I tell you Van Bahr Lamb is a fool.”

The amiable old lady thought this would rouse Polly, against whom her anger still burned hotly. But Polly also possessed penetration; and, well knowing that contradiction would delight Aunt Kipp, she completely took the wind out of her sails, by coolly remarking, —

"I like fools."

"Bless my heart! what does the girl mean?" ejaculated Aunt Kipp.

"Just what I say. If Van is a fool, I prefer simpletons to wiseacres. I know he is shy and awkward, and does absurd things now and then. But I also know that he has the kindest heart that ever was; is unselfish, faithful and loving; that he took good care of his old parents till they died, and never thought of himself while they needed him. He loves me dearly; will wait for me a dozen years, if I say so, and work all his days to make me happy. He's a help and comfort to mother, a good friend to Toady, and I love and respect and am proud of him, though you do say he is a fool," cried Polly heartily.

"And you insist on marrying him?" demanded Aunt Kipp.

"Yes, I do."

"Then I wish a carriage immediately," was the somewhat irrelevant reply.

"Why, aunt, you don't mean to go so soon?" cried Mrs. Snow, with a reproachful glance at the rebellious Polly.

"Far from it. I wish to see Judge Banks about altering my will," was the awful answer.

Polly's face fell; her mother gave a despairing sigh; Toady, who had hovered about the door, uttered a suppressed whistle of dismay; and Mrs. Kipp looked about her with vengeful satisfaction.

"Get the big carryall and old Bob, so the boy can drive, and all of you come; the trip will do you good."

It was like Aunt Kipp to invite her poor relations to go and "nip their own noses off," as she elegantly expressed it. It was a party of pleasure that just suited her, for all the fun was on her side. She grew affable at once, was quite pressing in her invitation, regretted that Sophy was too busy to go, praised Polly's hat; and professed herself quite satisfied with "that dear boy" for a driver. The "dear boy" distorted his young countenance frightfully behind her back, but found a balm for every wound in the delight of being commander of the expedition.

The big carryall appeared, and, with much creaking and swaying Mrs. Kipp was got into the back seat, where the big bonnet gloomed like a thunder-cloud. Polly, in a high state of indignation, which only made her look ten times prettier, sat in front with Toady, who was a sight to see as he drove off with his short legs planted against the boot, his elbows squared, and the big whip scientifically cracking now and then. Away they went, leaving poor Mrs. Snow to bewail herself dismally after she had smiled and nodded them out of sight.

"Don't go over any bridges or railroad crossings or by any saw-mills," said the old lady, as if the town could be suddenly remodelled to suit her taste.

“Yes’m,” returned Toady, with a crack which would have done honor to a French postilion.

It was a fine day, and the young people would have enjoyed the ride in spite of the breakers ahead, if Aunt Kipp hadn’t entertained the girl with a glowing account of the splendors of her own wedding, and aggravated the boy by frequent pokes and directions in the art of driving, of which she was of course, profoundly ignorant. Polly couldn’t restrain a tear or two, in thinking of her own poor little prospects, and Toady was goaded to desperation.

“I’ll give her a regular shaking up; it’ll make her hold her tongue and do her good,” he said to himself, as a stony hill sloped temptingly before him.

A sly chuck, and some mysterious manoeuvre with the reins, and Bob started off at a brisk trot, as if he objected to the old lady as much as her mischievous little nephew.

“Hold him in! Keep a taut rein! Lord ‘a mercy, he’s running away!” shrieked Aunt Kipp, or tried to shriek, for the bouncing and bumping jerked the words out of her mouth with ludicrous incoherency.

“I am holding him, but he *will* go,” said Toady, with a wicked triumph in his eye as he glanced back at Polly.

The next minute the words were quite true; for, as he spoke, two or three distracted hens flew squalling over the wall and scattered about, under, over, and before the horse, as only distracted hens could do. It was too much for Bob’s nerves; and, taking matters into his own hands, or feet, rather, he broke into a run, and rattled the old lady over the stones with a velocity which left her speechless.

Polly laughed, and Toady chuckled, as they caught glimpses of the awful bonnet vibrating wildly in the background, and felt the frantic clutchings of the old lady’s hands. But both grew sober as a shrill car-whistle sounded not far off; and Bob, as if possessed by an evil spirit, turned suddenly into the road that led to the railroad crossing.

“That will do, Toady; now pull up, for we can’t get over in time,” said Polly, glancing anxiously toward the rapidly approaching puffs of white smoke.

“I can’t, Polly, — I really can’t,” cried the boy, tugging with all his might, and beginning to look scared.

Polly lent her aid; but Bob scarcely seemed to feel it, for he had been a racer once, and when his blood was up he was hard to handle. His own good sense might have checked him, if Aunt Kipp hadn’t unfortunately recovered her voice at this crisis, and uttered a succession of the shrillest screams that ever saluted mortal ears. With a snort and a bound Bob dashed straight on toward the crossing, as the train appeared round the bend.

"Let me out! Let me out! Jump! Jump!" shrieked Aunt Kipp, thrusting her head out of the window, while she fumbled madly for the door-handle.

"O Toady, save us! save us!" gasped Polly, losing her presence of mind, and dropping the reins to cling to her brother, with a woman's instinctive faith in the stronger sex.

But Toady held on manfully, though his arms were nearly pulled off, for "Never say die," was his motto, and the plucky little lad wouldn't show fear before the women.

"Don't howl; we'll do it! Hi, Bob!" and with a savage slash of the whip, an exciting cry, a terrible reeling and rattling, they *did* do it; for Bob cleared the track at a breakneck pace, just in time for the train to sweep swiftly by behind them.

Aunt Kipp dropped in a heap, Polly looked up at her brother, with a look which he never forgot; and Toady tried to say, stoutly, "It's all right!" with lips that were white and dry in spite of himself.

"We shall smash up at the bridge," he muttered, as they tore through the town, where every one obligingly shouted, waved their hats, and danced about on the sidewalks, doing nothing but add to Bob's fright and the party's danger. But Toady was wrong, — they did not smash up at the bridge; for, before they reached the perilous spot, one man had the sense to fly straight at the horse's head and hold on till the momentary check enabled others to lend a hand.

The instant they were safe, Polly, like a regular heroine, threw herself into the arms of her dishevelled preserver, who of course was Van, and would have refreshed herself with hysterics if the sight of Toady hadn't steadied her. The boy sat as stiff and rigid as a wooden figure till they took the reins from him; then all the strength seemed to go out of him, and he leaned against his sister, as white and trembling as she, whispering with an irrepressible sob, —

"O Polly, wasn't it horrid? Tell mother I stood by you like a man. Do tell her that!"

If any one had had time or heart to laugh, they certainly would have done it when, after much groping, heaving, and hoisting. Mrs. Kipp was extricated and restored to consciousness; for a more ludicrously deplorable spectacle was seldom seen. Quite unhurt, though much shaken, the old lady insisted on believing herself to be dying, and kept the town in a ferment till three doctors had pronounced her perfectly well able to go home. Then the perversity of her nature induced her to comply, that she might have the satisfaction of dying on the way, and proving herself in the right.

Unfortunately she did not expire, but, having safely arrived, went to bed in high dudgeon, and led Polly and her mother a sad life of it for two weary days. Having heard of Toady's gallant behavior, she solemnly ordered him up to receive her blessing. But the sight of Aunt Kipp's rubicund visage, surrounded by the stiff frills of an immense nightcap, caused the irreverent boy to explode with laughter in his handkerchief, and to be hustled away by his mother before Aunt Kipp discovered the true cause of his convulsed appearance.

"Ah! poor dear, his feelings are too much for him. He sees my doom in my face, and is overcome by what you refuse to believe. I shan't forget that boy's devotion. Now leave me to the meditations befitting these solemn hours."

Mrs. Snow retired, and Aunt Kipp tried to sleep; but the murmur of voices, and the sound of stifled laughter in the next room disturbed her repose.

"They are rejoicing over my approaching end, knowing that I haven't changed my will. Mercenary creatures, don't exult too soon! there's time yet," she muttered; and presently, unable to control her curiosity, she crept out of bed to listen and peep through the keyhole.

Van Bahr Lamb did look rather like a sheep. He had a blond curly head, a long face, pale, mild eyes, a plaintive voice, and a general expression of innocent timidity strongly suggestive of animated mutton. But Baa-baa was a "trump," as Toady emphatically declared, and though every one laughed at him, every one liked him, and that is more than can be said of many saints and sages. He adored Polly, was dutifully kind to her mother, and had stood by T. Snow, Jr., in many an hour of tribulation with fraternal fidelity. Though he had long blushed, sighed, and cast sheep's eyes at the idol of his affections, only till lately had he dared to bleat forth his passion. Polly loved him because she couldn't help it; but she was proud, and wouldn't marry till Aunt Kipp's money was hers, or at least a sure prospect of it; and now even the prospect of a prospect was destroyed by that irrepressible Toady. They were talking of this as the old lady suspected, and of course the following conversation afforded her intense satisfaction.

"It's a shame to torment us as she does, knowing how poor we are and how happy a little of her money would make us. I'm tired of being a slave to a cruel old woman just because she's rich. If it was not for mother, I declare I'd wash my hands of her entirely, and do the best I could for myself."

"Hooray for Polly! I always said let her money go and be jolly without it," cried Toady, who, in his character of wounded hero, reposed with a lordly air on the sofa, enjoying the fragrance of the opodeldoc with which his strained wrists were bandaged.

"It's on your account, children, that I bear with aunt's temper as I do. I don't want anything for myself, but I really think she owes it to your dear father, who was devoted to her while he lived, to provide for his children when he couldn't;"

after which remarkably spirited speech for her, Mrs. Snow dropped a tear, and stitched away on a small trouser-leg which was suffering from a complicated compound fracture.

"Don't you worry about me, mother; I'll take care of myself and you too," remarked Toady, with the cheery belief in impossibilities which makes youth so charming.

"Now, Van, tell us what to do, for things have come to such a pass that we must either break away altogether or be galley-slaves as long as Aunt Kipp lives," said Polly, who was a good deal excited about the matter.

"Well, really, my dear, I don't know," hesitated Van, who did know what *he* wanted, but thought it might be selfish to urge it. "Have you tried to soften your aunt's heart?" he asked, after a moment's meditation.

"Good gracious, Van, she hasn't got any," cried Polly, who firmly believed it.

"It's hossified," thoughtfully remarked Toady, quite unconscious of any approach to a joke till every one giggled.

"You've had hossification enough for one while, my lad," laughed Van. "Well, Polly, if the old lady has no heart you'd better let her go, for people without hearts are not worth much."

"That's a beautiful remark, Van, and a wise one. I just wish she could hear you make it, for she called you a fool," said Polly, irefully.

"Did she? Well, I don't mind, I'm used to it," returned Van, placidly; and so he was, for Polly called him a goose every day of her life, and he enjoyed it immensely.

"Then you think, dear, if we stopped worrying about aunt and her money, and worked instead of waiting, that we shouldn't be any poorer and might be a great deal happier than we are now?" asked Polly, making a pretty little tableau as she put her hand through Van's arm and looked up at him with as much love, respect, and reliance as if he had been six feet tall, with the face of an Apollo and the manners of a Chesterfield.

"Yes, my dear, I do, for it has troubled me a good deal to see you so badgered by that very uncomfortable old lady. Independence is a very nice thing, and poverty isn't half as bad as this sort of slavery. But you are not going to be poor, nor worry about anything. We'll just be married and take mother and Toady home and be as jolly as grigs, and never think of Mrs. K. again, — unless she loses her fortune, or gets sick, or comes to grief in any way. We'd lend her a hand then, wouldn't we, Polly?" and Van's mild face was pleasant to behold as he made the kindly proposition.

"Well, we'd think of it," said Polly, trying not to relent, but feeling that she was going very fast.

"Let's do it!" cried Toady, fired with the thought of privy conspiracy and rebellion. "Mother would be so comfortable with Polly, and I'd help Van in the store, when I've learned that confounded multiplication table," he added with a groan; "and if Aunt Kipp comes a visiting, we'll just say 'Not at home,' and let her trot off again."

"It sounds very nice, but aunt will be dreadfully offended and I don't wish to be ungrateful," said Mrs. Snow, brightening visibly.

"There's no ingratitude about it," cried Van. "She might have done everything to make you love, and respect, and admire her, and been a happy, useful, motherly, old soul; but she didn't choose to, and now she must take the consequences. No one cares for her, because she cares for nobody; her money's the plague of her life, and not a single heart will ache when she dies."

"Poor Aunt Kipp!" said Polly, softly.

Mrs. Snow echoed the words, and for a moment all thought pitifully of the woman whose life had given so little happiness, whose age had won so little reverence, and whose death would cause so little regret. Even Toady had a kind thought for her, as he broke the silence, saying soberly, —

"You'd better put tails on my jackets, mother; then the next time we get run away with, Aunt Kipp will have something to hold on by."

It was impossible to help laughing at the recollection of the old lady clutching at the boy till he had hardly a button left, and at the paternal air with which he now proposed a much-desired change of costume, as if intent on Aunt Kipp's future accommodation.

Under cover of the laugh, the old lady stole back to bed, wide awake, and with subjects enough to meditate upon now. The shaking up had certainly done her good, for somehow the few virtues she possessed came to the surface, and the mental shower-bath just received had produced a salutary change. Polly wouldn't have doubted her aunt's possession of a heart, if she could have known the pain and loneliness that made it ache, as the old woman crept away; and Toady wouldn't have laughed if he had seen the tears on the face, between the big frills, as Aunt Kipp laid it on the pillow, muttering, drearily, —

"I might have been a happy, useful woman, but I didn't choose to, and now it's too late."

It *was* too late to be all she might have been, for the work of seventy selfish years couldn't be undone in a minute. But with regret, rose the sincere wish to earn a little love before the end came, and the old perversity gave a relish to the reformation, for even while she resolved to do the just and generous thing, she said to herself, —

"They say I've got no heart; I'll show 'em that I have: they don't want my money; I'll *make* 'em take it: they turn their backs on me; I'll just render myself so useful and agreeable that they can't do without me."

III

Aunt Kipp sat bolt upright in the parlor, hemming a small handkerchief, adorned with a red ship, surrounded by a border of green monkeys. Toady suspected that this elegant article of dress was intended for him, and yearned to possess it; so, taking advantage of his mother's and Polly's absence, he strolled into the room, and, seating himself on a high, hard chair, folded his hands, crossed his legs, and asked for a story with the thirsting-for-knowledge air which little boys wear in the moral story-books.

Now Aunt Kipp had one soft place in her heart, though it *was* partially ossified, as she very truly declared, and Toady was enshrined therein. She thought there never was such a child, and loved him as she had done his father before him, though the rack wouldn't have forced her to confess it. She scolded, snubbed, and predicted he'd come to a bad end in public; but she forgave his naughtiest pranks, always brought him something when she came, and privately intended to make his future comfortable with half of her fortune. There was a dash and daring, a generosity and integrity, about the little fellow, that charmed her. Sophy was weak and low-spirited, Polly pretty and headstrong, and Aunt Kipp didn't think much of either of them; but Toady defied, distracted, and delighted her, and to Toady she clung, as the one sunshiny thing in her sour, selfish old age.

When he made his demure request, she looked at him, and her eyes began to twinkle, for the child's purpose was plainly seen in the loving glances cast upon the pictorial pocket-handkerchief.

"A story? Yes, I'll tell you one about a little boy who had a kind old — ahem! — grandma. She was rich, and hadn't made up her mind who she'd leave her money to. She was fond of the boy, — a deal fonder than he deserved, — for he was as mischievous a monkey as any that ever lived in a tree, with a curly tail. He put pepper in her snuff-box," — here Toady turned scarlett, — "he cut up her bestt frisette to make a mane for his rocking-horse," — Toady opened his mouth impulsively, but shut it again without betraying himself — "he repeated rude things to her, and called her 'an old aggrewater,'" — here Toady wriggled in his chair, and gave a little gasp.

"If you are tired I won't go on," observed Aunt Kipp, mildly.

"I'm not tired, 'm; it's a very interesting story," replied Toady, with a gravity that nearly upset the old lady.

"Well, in spite of all this, that kind, good, forgiving grandma left that bad boy twenty thousand dollars when she died. What do you think of that?" asked Aunt

Kipp, pausing suddenly with her sharp eye on him.

"I — I think she was a regular dear," cried Toady, holding on to the chair with both hands, as if that climax rather took him off his legs.

"And what did the boy do about it?" continued Aunt Kipp, curiously.

"He bought a velocipede, and gave his sister half, and paid his mother's rent, and put a splendid marble cherakin over the old lady, and had a jolly good time, and — "

"What in the world is a cherakin?" laughed Aunt Kipp, as Toady paused for breath.

"Why, don't you know? It's a angel crying, or pointing up, or flapping his wings. They have them over graves; and I'll give you the biggest one I can find when you die. But I'm not in a *very* great hurry to have you."

"Thankee, dear; I'm in no hurry, myself. But, Toady, the boy did wrong in giving his sister half; she didn't deserve *any*; and the grandma left word she wasn't to have a penny of it."

"Really?" cried the boy, with a troubled face.

"Yes, really. If he gave her any he lost it all; the old lady said so. Now what do you think?" asked Aunt Kipp, who found it impossible to pardon Polly, — perhaps because she was young, and pretty, and much beloved.

Toady's eyes kindled, and his red cheeks grew redder still, as he cried out defiantly, —

"I think she was a selfish pig, — don't you?"

"No, I don't, sir; and I'm sure that little boy wasn't such a fool as to lose the money. He minded his grandma's wishes, and kept it all."

"No, he didn't," roared Toady, tumbling off his chair in great excitement. "He just threw it out a winder, and smashed the old cherakin all to bits."

Aunt Kipp dropped her work with a shrill squeak, for she thought the boy was dangerous, as he stood before her, sparring away at nothing as the only vent for his indignation.

"It isn't an interesting story," he cried; "and I won't hear any more; and I won't have your money if I mayn't go halves with Polly; and I'll work to earn more than that, and we'll all be jolly together, and you may give your twenty thousand to the old rag-bags, and so I tell you, Aunt Kipp."

"Why, Toady, my boy, what's the matter?" cried a mild voice at the door, as young Lamb came trotting up to the rescue.

"Never you mind, Baa-baa; I shan't do it; and it's a mean shame Polly can't have half; then she could marry you and be so happy," blubbered Toady, running to try to hide his tears of disappointment in the coat-skirts of his friend.

"Mr. Lamb, I suppose you *are* that misguided young man?" said Aunt Kipp, as if it was a personal insult to herself.

"Van Bahr Lamb, ma'am, if you please. Yes, thank you," murmured Baa-Baa, bowing, blushing, and rumpling his curly fleece in bashful trepidation.

"Don't thank me," cried the old lady. "I'm not going to give you anything, — far from it. I object to you altogether. What business have you to come courting my niece?"

"Because I love her, ma'am," returned Van, with unexpected spirit.

"No, you don't; you want her money, or rather my money. She depends on it; but you'll both be disappointed, for she won't have a penny of it," cried Aunt Kipp, who, in spite of her good resolutions, found it impossible to be amiable all at once.

"I'm glad of it!" burst out Van, indignant at her accusation. "I didn't want Polly for the money; I always doubted if she got it; and I never wished her to make herself a slave to anybody. I've got enough for all, if we're careful; and when my share of the Van Bahr property comes, we shall live in clover."

"What's that? What property are you talking of?" demanded Aunt Kipp, pricking up her ears.

"The great Van Bahr estate, ma'am. There has been a long lawsuit about it, but it's nearly settled, and there isn't much doubt that we shall get it. I am the last of our branch, and my share will be a large one."

"Oh, indeed! I wish you joy," said Aunt Kipp, with sudden affability; for she adored wealth, like a few other persons in the world. "But suppose you don't get it, how then?"

"Then I shall try to be contented with my salary of two thousand, and make Polly as happy as I can. Money doesn't *always* make people happy or agreeable, I find." And Van looked at Aunt Kipp in a way that would have made her hair stand erect if she had possessed any. She stared at him a moment, then, obeying one of the odd whims that made an irascible weathercock of her, she said, abruptly, —

"If you had capital should you go into business for yourself, Mr. Lambkin?"

"Yes, ma'am, at once," replied Van, promptly.

"Suppose you lost the Van Bahr money, and some one offered you a tidy little sum to start with, would you take it?"

"It would depend upon who made the offer, ma'am," said Van, looking more like a sheep than ever, as he stood staring in blank surprise.

"Suppose it was me, wouldn't you take it?" asked Aunt Kipp, blandly, for the new fancy pleased her.

"No, thank you, ma'am," said Van, decidedly.

"And why not, pray?" cried the old lady, with a shrillness that made him jump, and Toady back to the door precipitately.

"Because, if you'll excuse my speaking plainly, I think you owe anything you may have to spare to your niece, Mrs. Snow;" and, having freed his mind, Van joined Toady, ready to fly if necessary.

"You're an idiot, sir," began Aunt Kipp, in a rage again.

"Thank you, ma'am." And Van actually laughed and bowed in return for the compliment.

"Hold your tongue, sir," snapped the old lady. "You're a fool and Sophy is another. She's no strength of mind, no sense about anything; and would make ducks and drakes of my money in less than no time if I gave it to her, as I've thought of doing."

"Mrs. Kipp, you forget who you are speaking to. Mrs. Snow's sons love and respect her if you don't, and they won't hear anything untrue or unkind said of a good woman, a devoted mother, and an almost friendless widow."

Van wasn't a dignified man at all, but as he said that with a sudden flash of his mild eyes, there was something in his face and manner that daunted Aunt Kipp more than the small fist belligerently shaken at her from behind the sofa. The poor old soul was cross, and worried, and ashamed of herself, and being as feeble-minded as Sophy in many respects, she suddenly burst into tears, and, covering her face with the gay handkerchief, cried as if bent on floating the red ship in a sea of salt water without delay.

"I'm a poor, lonely, abused old woman," she moaned, with a green monkey at each eye. "No one loves me, or minds me, or thanks me when I want to help 'em. My money's only a worryment and a burden, and I don't know what to do with it, for people I don't want to leave it to ought to have it, and people I do like won't take it. Oh, deary me, what *shall* I do! what shall I do!"

"Shall I tell you, ma'am?" asked Van, gently, for, though she was a very provoking old lady, he pitied and wished to help her.

A nod and a gurgle seemed to give consent, and, boldly advancing, Van said, with blush and a stammer, but a very hearty voice, —

"I think, ma'am, if you'd do the right thing with your money you'd be at ease and find it saved a deal of worry all round. Give it to Mrs. Snow; she deserves it, poor lady, for she's had a hard time, and done her duty faithfully. Don't wait till you are — that is, till you — well, till you in point of fact die, ma'am. Give it now, and enjoy the happiness it will make. Give it kindly, let them see you're glad to do it, and I am sure you'll find them grateful; I'm sure you won't be lonely any more, or feel that you are not loved and thanked. Try it, ma'am, just try it," cried Van, getting excited by the picture he drew. "And I give you my word I'll do my best to respect and love you like a son, ma'am."

He knew that he was promising a great deal, but for Polly's sake he felt that he could make even that Herculean effort. Aunt Kipp was surprised and touched; but the contrary old lady couldn't make up her mind to yield so soon, and wouldn't have done it if Toady hadn't taken her by storm. Having a truly masculine horror of tears, a very tender heart under his tailless jacket, and being much "tumbled up and down in his own mind" by the events of the week, the poor little lad felt nerved to attempt any novel enterprise, even that of voluntarily embracing Aunt Kipp. First a grimy little hand came on her shoulder, as she sat sniffing behind the handkerchief; then, peeping out, she saw an apple-cheeked face very near her own, with eyes full of pity, penitence, and affection; and then she heard a choky little voice say earnestly, —

"Don't cry, aunty; I'm sorry I was rude. Please be good to Mother and Polly, and I'll love and take care of you, and stand by you all my life. Yes, I'll — I'll *kiss* you, I will, by George!" And with one promiscuous plunge the Spartan boy cast himself into her arms.

That finished Aunt Kipp; she hugged him dose, and cried out with a salute that went off like a pistol-shot, —

"Oh, my dear, my dear! this is better than a dozen cherakins!"

When Toady emerged, somewhat flushed and tumbled, Mrs. Snow, Polly, and Van were looking on with faces full of wonder, doubt, and satisfaction. To be an object of interest was agreeable to Aunt Kipp; and, as her old heart was really softened, she met them with a gracious smile, and extended the olive-branch generally.

"Sophy, I shall give my money to *you* at once and entirely, only asking that you'll let me stay with you when Polly's gone. I'll do my best to be agreeable, and you'll bear with me because I'm a cranky, solitary old woman, and I loved your husband."

Mrs. Snow hugged her on the spot, and gushed, of course, murmuring thanks, welcomes, and promises in one grateful burst.

"Polly, I forgive you; I consent to your marriage, and will provide your wedding finery. Mr. Lamb, you are not a fool, but a very excellent young man. I thank you for saving my life, and I wish you well with all my heart. You needn't say anything. I'm far from strong, and all this agitation is shortening my life."

Polly and Van shook her hand heartily, and beamed upon each other like a pair of infatuated turtle-doves with good prospects.

“Toady, you are as near an angel as a boy can be. Put a name to whatever you most wish for in the world, and it’s yours,” said Aunt Kipp, dramatically waving the rest away.

With his short legs wide apart, his hands behind him, and his rosy face as round and radiant as a rising sun, Toady stood before the fire surveying the scene with the air of a man who has successfully carried through a difficult and dangerous undertaking, and wasn’t proud. His face brightened, then fell, as he heaved a sigh, and answered, with a shake of his curly head, —

“You can’t give me what I want most. There are three things, and I’ve got to wait for them all.”

“Gracious me, what are they?” cried the old lady, good-naturedly, for she felt better already.

“A mustache, a beaver, *and* a sweetheart,” answered Toady, with his eyes fixed wistfully on Baa-baa, who possessed all these blessings, and was particularly enjoying the latter at that moment.

How Aunt Kipp did laugh at this early budding of romance in her pet! And all the rest joined her, for Toady’s sentimental air was irresistible.

“You precocious chick! I dare say you will have them all before we know where we are. Never mind, deary; you shall have my little watch, and the silver-headed cane with a *boar’s* head on it,” answered the old lady, in high good-humor. “You needn’t blush, dear; I don’t bear malice; so let’s forget and forgive. I shall settle things to-morrow, and have a free mind. You are welcome to my money, and I hope I shall live to see you all enjoy it.”

So she did; for she lived to see Sophy plump, cheery, and care-free; Polly surrounded by a flock of Lambkins; Van in possession of a generous slice of the Van Bahr fortune; Toady revelling in the objects of his desire; and, best of all, she lived to find that it is never too late to make oneself useful, happy, and beloved.

PSYCHE’S ART

“Handsome is that handsome does.”

I

Once upon a time there raged in a certain city one of those fashionable epidemics which occasionally attack our youthful population. It wasn’t the music mania, nor gymnastic convulsions, nor that wide-spread malady, croquet. Neither was it one of the new dances which, like a tarantula-bite, set every one a twirling, nor stage madness, nor yet that American lecturing influenza which yearly sweeps over the land. No, it was a new disease called the Art fever, and it attacked the young women of the community with great violence.

Nothing but time could cure it, and it ran its course to the dismay, amusement, or edification of the beholders, for its victims did all manner of queer things in their delirium. They begged potteries for clay, drove Italian plaster-corkers out of their wits with unexecutable orders got neuralgia and rheumatism sketching perched on fences and trees like artistic hens, and caused a rise in the price of bread, paper, and charcoal, by their ardor in crayoning. They covered canvas with the expedition of scene-painters, had classes, lectures, receptions, and exhibitions, made models of each other, and rendered their walls hideous with bad likenesses of all their friends. Their conversation ceased to be intelligible to the uninitiated, and they prattled prettily of “chiaro oscuro, French sauce, refraction of the angle of the eye, seventh spinus process, depth and juiciness of color, tender touch, and a good tone.” Even in dress the artistic disorder was visible; some cast aside crinoline altogether, and stalked about with a severe simplicity of outline worthy of Flaxman. Others flushed themselves with scarlet, that no landscape which they adorned should be without some touch of Turner’s favorite tint. Some were *blue* in every sense of the word, and the heads of all were adorned with classic braids, curls tied Hebe-wise, or hair dressed a la hurricane.

It was found impossible to keep them safe at home, and, as the fever grew, these harmless maniacs invaded the sacred retreats where artists of the other sex did congregate, startling those anchorites with visions of large-eyed damsels bearing portfolios in hands delicately begrimed with crayon, chalk, and clay, gliding through the corridors hitherto haunted only by shabby paletots, shadowy hats, and cigar smoke. This irruption was borne with manly fortitude, not to say cheerfulness, for studio doors stood hospitably open as the fair invaders passed, and studies from life were generously offered them in glimpses of picturesque gentlemen posed before easels, brooding over master-pieces in "a divine despair," or attitudinizing upon couches as if exhausted by the soarings of genius.

An atmosphere of romance began to pervade the old buildings when the girls came, and nature and art took turns. There were peepings and whisperings, much stifled laughter and whisking in and out; not to mention the accidental rencontres, small services, and eye telegrams, which somewhat lightened the severe studies of all parties.

Half a dozen young victims of this malady met daily in one of the cells of a great art beehive called "Raphael's Rooms," and devoted their shining hours to modelling fancy heads, gossiping the while; for the poor things found the road to fame rather dull and dusty without such verbal sprinklings.

"Psyche Dean, you've had an adventure! I see it in your face; so tell it at once, for we are stupid as owls here to-day," cried one of the sisterhood, as a bright-eyed girl entered with some precipitation.

"I dropped my portfolio, and a man picked it up, that's all." replied Psyche, hurrying on her gray linen pinafore.

"That won't do; I know something interesting happened, for you've been blushing, and you look brisker than usual this morning," said the first speaker, polishing off the massive nose of her Homer.

"It wasn't anything," began Psyche a little reluctantly. "I was coming up in a hurry when I ran against a man coming down in a hurry. My portfolio slipped, and my papers went flying all about the landing. Of course we both laughed and begged pardon, and I began to pick them up, but he wouldn't let me; so I held the book while he collected the sketches. I saw him glance at them as he did so, and that made me blush, for they are wretched things, you know."

"Not a bit of it; they are capital, and you are a regular genius, as we all agree," cut in the Homeric Miss Cutter.

"Never tell people they are geniuses unless you wish to spoil them," returned Psyche severely. "Well, when the portfolio was put to rights I was going on, but he fell to picking up a little bunch of violets I had dropped; you know I always wear a posy into town to give me inspiration. I didn't care for the dusty flowers, and told him so, and hurried away before any one came. At the top of the stairs I peeped over the railing, and there he was, gathering up every one of those half-dead violets as carefully as if they had been tea-roses."

"Psyche Dean, you have met your fate this day!" exclaimed a third damsel, with straw-colored tresses, and a good deal of weedy shrubbery in her hat, which gave an Ophelia-like expression to her sentimental countenance.

Psyche frowned and shook her head, as if half sorry she had told her little story.

“Was he handsome?” asked Miss Larkins, the believer in fate.

“I didn’t particularly observe.”

“It was the red-headed man, whom we call Titian: he’s always on the stairs.”

“No, it wasn’t; his hair was brown and curly,” cried Psyche, innocently falling into the trap.

“Like Peerybingle’s baby when its cap was taken off,” quoted Miss Dickenson, who pined to drop the last two letters of her name.

“Was it Murillo, the black-eyed one?” asked the fair Cutter, for the girls had a name for all the attitudinizers and promenaders whom they oftenest met.

“No, he had gray eyes, and very fine ones they were too,” answered Psyche, adding, as if to herself, “he looked as I imagine Michael Angelo might have looked when young.”

“Had he a broken nose, like the great Mike?” asked an irreverent damsel.

“If he had, no one would mind it, for his head is splendid; he took his hat off, so I had a fine view. He isn’t handsome, but he’ll *do* something,” said Psyche, prophetically, as she recalled the strong, ambitious face which she had often observed, but never mentioned before.

“Well, dear, considering that you didn’t ‘particularly look’ at the man, you’ve given us a very good idea of his appearance. We’ll call him Michael Angelo, and he shall be your idol. I prefer stout old Rembrandt myself, and Larkie adores that dandified Raphael,” said the lively Cutter, slapping away at Homer’s bald pate energetically, as she spoke.

“Raphael is a dear, but Rubens is more to my taste now,” returned Miss Larkins. “He was in the hall yesterday talking with Sir Joshua, who had his inevitable umbrella, like a true Englishman. Just as I came up, the umbrella fell right before me. I started back; Sir Joshua laughed, but Rubens said, ‘Deuce take it!’ and caught up the umbrella, giving me a never-to-be-forgotten look. It was perfectly thrilling.”

“Which, — the umbrella, the speech, or the look?” asked Psyche, who was not sentimental.

“Ah, you have no soul for art in nature, and nature in art,” sighed the amber-tressed Larkins. “I have, for I feed upon a glance, a tint, a curve, with exquisite delight. Rubens is adorable (*as a study*); that lustrous eye, that night of hair, that sumptuous cheek, are perfect. He only needs a cloak, lace collar, and slouching hat to be the genuine thing."

"This isn't the genuine thing by any means. What *does* it need?" said Psyche, looking with a despondent air at the head on her stand.

Many would have pronounced it a clever thing; the nose was strictly Greek, the chin curved upward gracefully, the mouth was sweetly haughty, the brow classically smooth and low, and the breezy hair well done. But something was wanting; Psyche felt that, and could have taken her Venus by the dimpled shoulders, and given her a hearty shake, if that would have put strength and spirit into the lifeless face.

"Now *I* am perfectly satisfied with my Apollo, though you all insist that it is the image of Theodore Smythe. He says so himself, and assures me it will make a sensation when we exhibit," remarked Miss Larkins, complacently caressing the ambrosial locks of her Smythified Phebus.

"What shall you do if it does not?" asked Miss Cutter, with elegance.

"I shall feel that I have mistaken my sphere, shall drop my tools, veil my bust, and cast myself into the arms of Nature, since Art rejects me;" replied Miss Larkins, with a tragic gesture and an expression which strongly suggested that in her eyes nature meant Theodore.

"She must have capacious arms if she is to receive all Art's rejected admirers. Shall I be one of them?"

Psyche put the question to herself as she turned to work, but somehow ambitious aspirations were not in a flourishing condition that morning; her heart was not in tune, and head and hands sympathized. Nothing went well, for certain neglected home-duties had dogged her into town, and now worried her more than dust, or heat, or the ceaseless clatter of tongues. Tom, Dick, and Harry's unmended hose persisted in dancing a spectral jig before her mental eye, mother's querulous complaints spoilt the song she hummed to cheer herself, and little May's wistful face put the goddess of beauty entirely out of countenance.

"It's no use; I can't work till the clay is wet again. Where is Giovanni?" she asked, throwing down her tools with a petulant gesture and a dejected air.

"He is probably playing truant in the empty upper rooms, as usual. I can't wait for him any longer, so I'm doing his work myself," answered Miss Dickenson, who was tenderly winding a wet bandage round her Juno's face, one side of which was so much plumper than the other that it looked as if the Queen of Olympus was being hydropathically treated for a severe fit of ague.

“I’ll go and find the little scamp; a run will do me good; so will a breath of air and a view of the park from the upper windows.”

Doffing her apron, Psyche strolled away up an unfrequented staircase to the empty apartments, which seemed to be too high even for the lovers of High Art. On the western side they were shady and cool, and, leaning from one of the windows, Psyche watched the feathery tree-tops ruffled by the balmy wind, that brought spring odors from the hills, lying green and sunny far away. Silence and solitude were such pleasant companions that the girl forgot herself, till a shrill whistle disturbed her day-dreams, and reminded her what she came for. Following the sound she found the little Italian errand-boy busily uncovering a clay model which stood in the middle of a scantily furnished room near by.

“He is not here; come and look; it is greatly beautiful,” cried Giovanni, beckoning with an air of importance.

Psyche did look and speedily forgot both her errand and herself. It was the figure of a man, standing erect, and looking straight before him with a wonderfully lifelike expression. It was neither a mythological nor a historical character, Psyche thought, and was glad of it, being tired to death of gods and heroes. She soon ceased to wonder what it was, feeling only the indescribable charm of something higher than beauty. Small as her knowledge was, she could see and enjoy the power visible in every part of it; the accurate anatomy of the vigorous limbs, the grace of the pose, the strength and spirit in the countenance, clay though it was. A majestic figure, but the spell lay in the face, which, while it suggested the divine, was full of human truth and tenderness, for pain and passion seemed to have passed over it, and a humility half pathetic, a courage half heroic seemed to have been born from some great loss or woe.

How long she stood there Psyche did not know. Giovanni went away unseen, to fill his water-pail, and in the silence she just stood and looked. Her eyes kindled, her color rose, despondency and discontent vanished, and her soul was in her face, for she loved beauty passionately, and all that was best and truest in her did honor to the genius of the unknown worker.

“If I could do a thing like that, I’d die happy!” she exclaimed impetuously, as a feeling of despair came over her at the thought of her own poor attempts.

“Who did it, Giovanni?” she asked, still looking up at the grand face with unsatisfied eyes.

“Paul Gage.”

It was not the boy’s voice, and, with a start, Psyche turned to see her Michael Angelo, standing in the doorway, attentively observing her. Being too full of artless admiration to think of herself just yet, she neither blushed nor apologized, but looked straight at him, saying heartily, —

“You have done a wonderful piece of work, and I envy you more than I can tell!”

The enthusiasm in her face, the frankness of her manner, seemed to please him, for there was no affectation about either. He gave her a keen, kind glance out of the “fine gray eyes,” a little bow, and a grateful smile, saying quietly, — ”Then my Adam is not a failure in spite of his fall?”

Psyche turned from the sculptor to his model with increased admiration in her face, and earnestness in her voice, as she exclaimed delighted, —

“Adam! I might have known it was he. O sir, you have indeed succeeded, for you have given that figure the power and pathos of the first man who sinned and suffered, and began again.”

“Then I am satisfied.” That was all he said, but the look he gave his work was a very eloquent one, for it betrayed that he had paid the price of success in patience and privation, labor and hope.

“What can one do to learn your secret?” asked the girl wistfully, for there was nothing in the man’s manner to disturb her self-forgetful mood, but much to foster it, because to the solitary worker this confiding guest was as welcome as the doves who often hopped in at his window.

“Work and wait, and meantime feed heart, soul, and imagination with the best food one can get,” he answered slowly, finding it impossible to give a receipt for genius.

“I can work and wait a long time to gain my end; but I don’t know where to find the food you speak of?” she answered, looking at him like a hungry child.

“I wish I could tell you, but each needs different fare, and each must look for it in different places.”

The kindly tone and the sympathizing look, as well as the lines in his forehead, and a few gray hairs among the brown, gave Psyche courage to say more.

“I love beauty so much that I not only want to possess it myself, but to gain the power of seeing it in all things, and the art of reproducing it with truth. I have tried very hard to do it, but something is wanting; and in spite of my intense desire I never get on.”

As she spoke the girl’s eyes filled and fell in spite of herself, and turning a little with sudden shamefacedness she saw, lying on the table beside her among other scraps in manuscript and print, the well-known lines, —

”I slept, and dreamed that life was beauty;

I woke, and found that life was duty.
Was thy dream then a shadowy lie?
Toil on, sad heart, courageously,
And thou shall find thy dream to be
A noonday light and truth to thee."

She knew them at a glance, had read them many times, but now they came home to her with sudden force, and, seeing that his eye had followed hers, she said in her impulsive fashion. —

"Is doing one's duty a good way to feed heart, soul, and imagination?"

As if he had caught a glimpse of what was going on in her mind, Paul answered emphatically, —

"Excellent; for if one is good, one is happy, and if happy, one can work well. Moulding character is the highest sort of sculpture, and all of us should learn that art before we touch clay or marble."

He spoke with the energy of a man who believed what he said, and did his best to be worthy of the rich gift bestowed upon him. The sight of her violets in a glass of water, and Giovanni staring at her with round eyes, suddenly recalled Psyche to a sense of the proprieties which she had been innocently outraging for the last ten minutes. A sort of panic seized her; she blushed deeply, retreated precipitately to the door, and vanished, murmuring thanks and apologies as she went.

"Did you find him? I thought you had forgotten," said Miss Dickenson, now hard at work.

"Yes, I found him. No, I shall not forget," returned Psyche, thinking of Gage, not Giovanni.

She stood before her work eying it intently for several minutes; then, with an expression of great contempt for the whole thing, she suddenly tilted her cherished Venus on to the floor, gave the classical face a finishing crunch, and put on her hat in a decisive manner, saying briefly to the dismayed damsels, —

"Good-by, girls; I shan't come any more, for I'm going to work at home hereafter."

II

The prospect of pursuing artistic studies at home was not brilliant, as one may imagine when I mention that Psyche's father was a painfully prosaic man, wrapt in flannel, so to speak; for his woollen mills left him no time for anything but sleep, food, and newspapers. Mrs. Dean was one of those exasperating women who pervade their mansions like a domestic steam-engine one week and take to their sofas the next, absorbed by fidgets and foot-stoves, shawls and lamentations. There were three riotous and robust young brothers, whom it is unnecessary to describe except by stating that they were *boys* in the broadest sense of that delightful word. There was a feeble little sister, whose patient, suffering face demanded constant love and care to mitigate the weariness of a life of pain. And last, but not least by any means, there were two Irish ladies, who, with the best intentions imaginable, produced a universal state of topsy-turviness when left to themselves for a moment.

But being very much in earnest about doing her duty, not because it *was* her duty, but as a means toward an end, Psyche fell to work with a will, hoping to serve both masters at once. So she might have done, perhaps, if flesh and blood had been as plastic as clay, but the live models were so exacting in their demands upon her time and strength, that the poor statues went to the wall. Sculpture and sewing, calls and crayons, Ruskin and receipt-books, didn't work well together, and poor Psyche found duties and desires desperately antagonistic. Take a day as a sample.

"The washing and ironing are well over, thank goodness, mother quiet, the boys out of the way, and May comfortable, so I'll indulge myself in a blissful day after my own heart," Psyche said, as she shut herself into her little studio, and prepared to enjoy a few hours of hard study and happy day-dreams.

With a book on her lap, and her own round white arm going through all manner of queer evolutions, she was placidly repeating, "Deltoides, Biceps, Triceps, Pronator, Supinator, Palmanis, Flexor carpi ulnaris — "

"Here's Flexis what-you-call-ums for you," interrupted a voice, which began in a shrill falsetto and ended in a gruff bass, as a flushed, dusty, long-legged boy burst in, with a bleeding hand obligingly extended for inspection.

"Mercy on us, Harry! what have you done to yourself now? Split your fingers with a cricket-ball again?" cried Psyche, as her arms went up and her book went down.

"I just thrashed one of the fellows because he got mad and said father was going to fail."

"O Harry, is he?"

"Of course he isn't! It's hard times for every one, but father will pull through all right. No use to try and explain it all; girls can't understand business; so you just tie me up, and don't worry," was the characteristic reply of the young man, who, being three years her junior, of course treated the weaker vessel with lordly condescension.

"What a dreadful wound! I hope nothing is broken, for I haven't studied the hand much yet, and may do mischief doing it up," said Psyche, examining the great grimy paw with tender solicitude.

“Much good your biceps, and deltoids, and things do you, if you can’t right up a little cut like that,” squeaked the ungrateful hero.

“I’m not going to be a surgeon, thank heaven; I intend to make perfect hands and arms, not mend damaged ones,” retorted Psyche, in a dignified tone, somewhat marred by a great piece of court-plaster on her tongue.

“I should say a surgeon could improve *that* perfect thing, if he didn’t die a-laughing before he began,” growled Harry, pointing with a scornful grin at a clay arm humpy with muscles, all carefully developed in the wrong places.

“Don’t sneer, Hal, for you don’t know anything about it. Wait a few years and see if you’re not proud of me.”

“Sculp away and do something, then I’ll hurrah for your mud-pies like a good one;” with which cheering promise the youth left, having effectually disturbed his sister’s peaceful mood.

Anxious thoughts of her father rendered “biceps, deltoids, and things” uninteresting, and hoping to compose her mind, she took up The Old Painters and went on with the story of Claude Lorraine. She had just reached the tender scene where, —

“Calista gazed with enthusiasm, while she looked like a being of heaven rather than earth. ‘My friend,’ she cried, ‘I read in thy picture thy immortality!’ As she spoke, her head sunk upon his bosom, and it was several moments before Claude perceived that he supported a lifeless form.”

“How sweet!” said Psyche, with a romantic sigh.

“Faith, and swate it is, thin!” echoed Katy, whose red head had just appeared round the half opened door. “It’s gingy-bread I’m making the day, miss, and will I be puttin’ purlash or sallyrathis into it, if ye plase?”

“Purlash, by all means,” returned the girl, keeping her countenance, fearing to enrage Katy by a laugh; for the angry passions of the red-haired one rose more quickly than her bread.

As she departed with alacrity to add a spoonful of starch and a pinch of whiting to her cake, Psyche, feeling better for her story and her smile, put on her bib and paper cap and fell to work on the deformed arm. An hour of bliss, then came a ring at the door-bell, followed by Biddy to announce callers, and add that as “the mistress was in her bed, miss must go and take care of ‘em.” Whereat “miss” cast down her tools in despair, threw her cap one way, her bib another, and went in to her guests with anything but a rapturous welcome.

Dinner being accomplished after much rushing up and down stairs with trays and messages for Mrs. Dean, Psyche fled again to her studio, ordering no one to approach under pain of a scolding. All went well till, going in search of something, she found her little sister sitting on the floor with her cheek against the studio door.

"I didn't mean to be naughty, Sy, but mother is asleep, and the boys all gone, so I just came to be near you; it's so lonely everywhere," she said, apologetically, as she lifted up the heavy head that always ached.

"The boys are very thoughtless. Come in and stay with me; you are such a mouse you won't disturb me. Wouldn't you like to play be a model and let me draw your arm, and tell you all about the nice little bones and muscles?" asked Psyche, who had the fever very strong upon her just then.

May didn't look as if the proposed amusement overwhelmed her with delight, but meekly consented to be perched upon a high stool with one arm propped up by a dropsical plaster cherub, while Psyche drew busily, feeling that duty and pleasure were being delightfully combined.

"Can't you hold your arm still, child? It shakes so I can't get it right," she said, rather impatiently.

"No, it will tremble 'cause it's weak. I try hard, Sy, but there doesn't seem to be much strongness in me lately."

"That's better; keep it so a few minutes and I'll be done," cried the artist, forgetting that a few minutes may seem ages.

"My arm is so thin you can see the bunches nicely, — can't you?"

"Yes, dear."

Psyche glanced up at the wasted limb, and when she drew again there was a blur before her eyes for a minute.

"I wish I was as fat as this white boy; but I get thinner every day somehow, and pretty soon there won't be any of me left but my little bones," said the child, looking at the winged cherub with sorrowful envy.

"Don't, my darling; don't say that," cried Psyche, dropping her work with a sudden pang at her heart. "I'm a sinful, selfish girl to keep you here! you're weak for want of air; come out and see the chickens, and pick dandelions, and have a good romp with the boys."

The weak arms were strong enough to clasp Psyche's neck, and the tired face brightened beautifully as the child exclaimed, with grateful delight, —

"Oh, I'd like it very much! I wanted to go dreadfully; but everybody is so busy all the time. I don't want to play, Sy; but just to lie on the grass with my head in your lap while you tell stories and draw me pretty things as you used to."

The studio was deserted all that afternoon, for Psyche sat in the orchard drawing squirrels on the wall, pert robins hopping by, buttercups and mosses, elves and angels; while May lay contentedly enjoying sun and air, sisterly care, and the "pretty things" she loved so well. Psyche did not find the task a hard one; for this time her heart was in it, and if she needed any reward she surely found it; for the little face on her knee lost its weary look, and the peace and beauty of nature soothed her own troubled spirit, cheered her heart, and did her more good than hours of solitary study.

Finding, much to her own surprise, that her fancy was teeming with lovely conceits, she did hope for a quiet evening. But mother wanted a bit of gossip, father must have his papers read to him, the boys had lessons and rips and grievances to be attended to, May's lullaby could not be forgotten, and the maids had to be looked after, lest burly "cousins" should be hidden in the boiler, or lucifer matches among the shavings. So Psyche's day ended, leaving her very tired, rather discouraged, and almost heart-sick with the shadow of a coming sorrow.

All summer she did her best, but accomplished very little, as she thought; yet this was the teaching she most needed, and in time she came to see it. In the autumn May died, whispering, with her arms about her sister's neck, —

"You make me so happy, Sy, I wouldn't mind the pain if I could stay a little longer. But if I can't, good-by, dear, good-by."

Her last look and word and kiss were all for Psyche, who felt then with grateful tears that her summer had not been wasted; for the smile upon the little dead face was more to her than any marble perfection her hands could have carved.

In the solemn pause which death makes in every family, Psyche said, with the sweet self-forgetfulness of a strong yet tender nature, —

"I must not think of myself, but try to comfort them;" and with this resolution she gave herself heart and soul to duty, never thinking of reward.

A busy, anxious, humdrum winter, for, as Harry said, "it was hard times for every one." Mr. Dean grew gray with the weight of business cares about which he never spoke; Mrs. Dean, laboring under the delusion that an invalid was a necessary appendage to the family, installed herself in the place the child's death left vacant, and the boys needed much comforting, for the poor lads never knew how much they loved "the baby" till the little chair stood empty. All turned to Sy for help and consolation, and her strength seemed to increase with the demand upon it. Patience and cheerfulness, courage and skill came at her call like good fairies who had bided their time. Housekeeping ceased to be hateful, and peace reigned in parlor and kitchen while Mrs. Dean, shrouded in shawls, read Hahnemann's Lesser Writings on her sofa. Mr. Dean sometimes forgot his mills when a bright face came to meet him, a gentle hand smoothed the wrinkles out of his anxious forehead, and a daughterly heart sympathized with all his cares. The boys found home very pleasant with Sy always there ready to "lend a hand," whether it was to make fancy ties, help conjugate "a confounded verb," pull candy, or sing sweetly in the twilight when all thought of little May and grew quiet.

The studio door remained locked till her brothers begged Psyche to open it and make a bust of the child. A flush of joy swept over her face at the request, and her patient eyes grew bright and eager, as a thirsty traveller's might at the sight or sound of water. Then it faded as she shook her head, saying with a regretful sigh, "I'm afraid I've lost the little skill I ever had."

But she tried, and with great wonder and delight discovered that she could work as she had never done before. She thought the newly found power lay in her longing to see the little face again; for it grew like magic under her loving hands, while every tender memory, sweet thought, and devout hope she had ever cherished, seemed to lend their aid. But when it was done and welcomed with tears and smiles, and praise more precious than any the world could give, then Psyche said within herself, like one who saw light at last, —

"He was right; doing one's duty *is* the way to feed heart, soul, and imagination; for if one is good, one is happy, and if happy, one can work well."

III

"She broke her head and went home to come no more," was Giovanni's somewhat startling answer when Paul asked about Psyche, finding that he no longer met her on the stairs or in the halls. He understood what the boy meant, and with an approving nod turned to his work again, saying, "I like that! If there is any power in her, she has taken the right way to find it out, I suspect."

How she prospered he never asked; for, though he met her more than once that year, the interviews were brief ones in street, concert-room, or picture-gallery, and she carefully avoided speaking of herself. But, possessing the gifted eyes which can look below the surface of things, he detected in the girl's face something better than beauty, though each time he saw it, it looked older and more thoughtful, often anxious and sad.

"She is getting on," he said to himself with a cordial satisfaction which gave his manner a friendliness as grateful to Psyche as his wise reticence.

Adam was finished at last, proved a genuine success, and Paul heartily enjoyed the well-earned reward for years of honest work. One blithe May morning, he slipped early into the art-gallery, where the statue now stood, to look at his creation with paternal pride. He was quite alone with the stately figure that shone white against the purple draperies and seemed to offer him a voiceless welcome from its marble lips. He gave it one loving look, and then forgot it, for at the feet of his Adam lay a handful of wild violets, with the dew still on them. A sudden smile broke over his face as he took them up, with the thought, "She has been here and found my work good."

For several moments he stood thoughtfully turning the flowers to and fro in his hands; then, as if deciding some question within himself, he said, still smiling, —

“It is just a year since she went home; she must have accomplished something in that time; I’ll take the violets as a sign that I may go and ask her what.”

He knew she lived just out of the city, between the river and the mills, and as he left the streets behind him, he found more violets blooming all along the way like flowery guides to lead him right. Greener grew the road, balmier blew the wind, and blither sang the birds, as he went on, enjoying his holiday with the zest of a boy, until he reached a most attractive little path winding away across the fields. The gate swung invitingly open, and all the ground before it was blue with violets. Still following their guidance he took the narrow path, till, coming to a mossy stone beside a brook, he sat down to listen to the blackbirds singing deliciously in the willows over head. Close by the stone, half hidden in the grass lay a little book, and, taking it up he found it was a pocket-diary. No name appeared on the fly-leaf, and, turning the pages to find some clue to its owner, he read here and there enough to give him glimpses into an innocent and earnest heart which seemed to be learning some hard lesson patiently. Only near the end did he find the clue in words of his own, spoken long ago, and a name. Then, though longing intensely to know more, he shut the little book and went on, showing by his altered face that the simple record of a girl’s life had touched him deeply.

Soon an old house appeared nestling to the hillside with the river shining in the low green meadows just before it.

“She lives there,” he said, with as much certainty as if the pansies by the door-stone spelt her name, and, knocking, he asked for Psyche.

“She’s gone to town, but I expect her home every minute. Ask the gentleman to walk in and wait, Katy,” cried a voice from above, where the whisk of skirts was followed by the appearance of an inquiring eye over the banisters.

The gentleman did walk in, and while he waited looked about him. The room, though very simply furnished, had a good deal of beauty in it, for the pictures were few and well chosen, the books such as never grow old, the music lying on the well-worn piano of the sort which is never out of fashion, and standing somewhat apart was one small statue in a recess full of flowers. Lovely in its simple grace and truth was the figure of a child looking upward as if watching the airy flight of some butterfly which had evidently escaped from the chrysalis still lying in the little hand.

Paul was looking at it with approving eyes when Mrs. Dean appeared with his card in her hand, three shawls on her shoulders, and in her face a somewhat startled expression, as if she expected some novel demonstration from the man whose genius her daughter so much admired.

"I hope Miss Psyche is well," began Paul, with great discrimination if not originality.

The delightfully commonplace remark tranquillized Mrs. Dean at once, and, taking off the upper shawl with a fussy gesture, she settled herself for a chat.

"Yes, thank heaven, Sy is well. I don't know what would become of us if she wasn't. It has been a hard and sorrowful year for us with Mr. Dean's business embarrassments, my feeble health, and May's death. I don't know that you were aware of our loss, sir;" and unaffected maternal grief gave sudden dignity to the faded, fretful face of the speaker.

Paul murmured his regrets, understanding better now the pathetic words on a certain tear-stained page of the little book still in his pocket.

"Poor dear, she suffered everything, and it came very hard upon Sy, for the child wasn't happy with any one else, and almost lived in her arms," continued Mrs. Dean, dropping the second shawl to get her handkerchief.

"Miss Psyche has not had much time for art-studies this year, I suppose?" said Paul, hoping to arrest the shower, natural as it was.

"How could she with two invalids, the housekeeping, her father and the boys to attend to? No, she gave that up last spring, and though it was a great disappointment to her at the time, she has got over it now, I hope," added her mother, remembering as she spoke that Psyche even now went about the house sometimes pale and silent, with a hungry look in her eyes.

"I am glad to hear it," though a little shadow passed over his face as Paul spoke, for he was too true an artist to believe that any work could be as happy as that which he loved and lived for. "I thought there was much promise in Miss Psyche, and I sincerely believe that time will prove me a true prophet," he said, with mingled regret and hope in his voice, as he glanced about the room, which betrayed the tastes still cherished by the girl.

"I'm afraid ambition isn't good for women; I mean the sort that makes them known by coming before the public in any way. But Sy deserves some reward, I'm sure, and I know she'll have it, for a better daughter never lived."

Here the third shawl was cast off, as if the thought of Psyche, or the presence of a genial guest had touched Mrs. Dean's chilly nature with a comfortable warmth.

Further conversation was interrupted by the avalanche of boys which came tumbling down the front stairs, as Tom, Dick, and Harry shouted in a sort of chorus, —

"Sy, my balloon has got away; lend us a hand at catching him!"

"Sy, I want a lot of paste made, right off."

"Sy, I've split my jacket down the back; come sew me up, there's a dear!"

On beholding a stranger the young gentlemen suddenly lost their voices, found their manners, and with nods and grins took themselves away as quietly as could be expected of six clumping boots and an unlimited quantity of animal spirits in a high state of effervescence. As they trooped off, an unmistakable odor of burnt milk pervaded the air, and the crash of china, followed by an Irish wail, caused Mrs. Dean to clap on her three shawls again and excuse herself in visible trepidation.

Paul laughed quietly to himself, then turned sober and said, "Poor Psyche!" with a sympathetic sigh. He roamed about the room impatiently till the sound of voices drew him to the window to behold the girl coming up the walk with her tired old father leaning on one arm, the other loaded with baskets and bundles, and her hands occupied by a remarkably ugly turtle.

"Here we are!" cried a cheery voice, as they entered without observing the new-comer. "I've done all my errands and had a lovely time. There is Tom's gunpowder, Dick's fishhooks, and one of Professor Gazzy's famous turtles for Harry. Here are your bundles, mother dear, and, best of all, here's father home in time for a good rest before dinner. I went to the mill and got him."

Psyche spoke as if she had brought a treasure; and so she had, for though Mr. Dean's face usually was about as expressive as the turtle's, it woke and warmed with the affection which his daughter had fostered till no amount of flannel could extinguish it. His big hand patted her cheek very gently as he said, in a tone of fatherly love and pride, —

"My little Sy never forgets old father, does she?"

"Good gracious me, my dear, there's such a mess in the kitchen! Katy's burnt up the pudding, put castor-oil instead of olive in the salad, smashed the best meat-dish, and here's Mr. Gage come to dinner," cried Mrs. Dean in accents of despair as she tied up her head in a fourth shawl.

"Oh, I'm so glad; I'll go in and see him a few minutes, and then I'll come and attend to everything; so don't worry, mother."

"How did you find me out?" asked Psyche as she shook hands with her guest and stood looking up at him with all the old confiding frankness in her face and manner.

"The violets showed me the way."

She glanced at the posy in his button-hole and smiled.

"Yes, I gave them to Adam, but I didn't think you would guess. I enjoyed your work for an hour to-day, and I have no words strong enough to express my admiration."

"There is no need of any. Tell me about yourself: what have you been doing all this year?" he asked, watching with genuine satisfaction the serene and sunny face before him, for discontent, anxiety, and sadness were no longer visible there.

"I've been working and waiting," she began.

"And succeeding, if I may believe what I see and hear and read," he said, with an expressive little wave of the book as he laid it down before her.

"My diary! I didn't know I had lost it. Where did you find it?"

"By the brook where I stopped to rest. The moment I saw your name I shut it up. Forgive me, but I can't ask pardon for reading a few pages of that little gospel of patience, love, and self-denial."

She gave him a reproachful look, and hurried the telltale book out of sight as she said, with a momentary shadow on her face, —

"It has been a hard task; but I think I have learned it, and am just beginning to find that my dream *is* 'a noonday light and truth,' to me."

"Then you do not relinquish your hopes, and lay down your tools?" he asked, with some eagerness.

"Never! I thought at first that I could not serve two masters, but in trying to be faithful to one I find I am nearer and dearer to the other. My cares and duties are growing lighter every day (or I have learned to bear them better), and when my leisure does come I shall know how to use it, for my head is full of ambitious plans, and I feel that I can do something *now*."

All the old enthusiasm shone in her eyes, and a sense of power betrayed itself in voice and gesture as she spoke.

"I believe it," he said heartily. "You have learned the secret, as that proves."

Psyche looked at the childish image as he pointed to it, and into her face there came a motherly expression that made it very sweet.

"That little sister was so dear to me I could not fail to make her lovely, for I put my heart into my work. The year has gone, but I don't regret it, though this is all I have done."

"You forget your three wishes; I think the year has granted them."

"What were they?"

"To possess beauty in yourself, the power of seeing it in all things, and the art of reproducing it with truth."

She colored deeply under the glance which accompanied the threefold compliment, and answered with grateful humility, —

"You are very kind to say so; I wish I could believe it." Then, as if anxious to forget herself, she added rather abruptly, —

"I hear you think of giving your Adam a mate, — have you begun yet?"

"Yes, my design is finished, all but the face."

"I should think you could image Eve's beauty, since you have succeeded so well with Adam's."

"The features perhaps, but not the expression. That is the charm of feminine faces, a charm so subtile that few can catch and keep it. I want a truly womanly face, one that shall be sweet and strong without being either weak or hard. A hopeful, loving, earnest face with a tender touch of motherliness in it, and perhaps the shadow of a grief that has softened but not saddened it."

"It will be hard to find a face like that."

"I don't expect to find it in perfection; but one sometimes sees faces which suggest all this, and in rare moments give glimpses of a lovely possibility."

"I sincerely hope you will find one then," said Psyche, thinking of the dinner.

"Thank you; *I* think I have."

Now, in order that every one may be suited, we will stop here, and leave our readers to finish the story as they like. Those who prefer the good old fashion may believe that the hero and heroine fell in love, were married, and lived happily ever afterward. But those who can conceive of a world outside of a wedding-ring may believe that the friends remained faithful friends all their lives, while Paul won fame and fortune, and Psyche grew beautiful with the beauty of a serene and sunny nature, happy in duties which became pleasures, rich in the art which made life lovely to herself and others, and brought rewards in time.

A COUNTRY CHRISTMAS

"A handful of good life is worth a bushel of learning."

"Dear Emily, — I have a brilliant idea, and at once hasten to share it with you. Three weeks ago I came up here to the wilds of Vermont to visit my old aunt, also to get a little quiet and distance in which to survey certain new prospects which have opened before me, and to decide whether I will marry a millionnaire and become a queen of society, or remain 'the charming Miss Vaughan' and wait till the conquering hero comes.

"Aunt Plumy begs me to stay over Christmas, and I have consented, as I always dread the formal dinner with which my guardian celebrates the day.

"My brilliant idea is this. I'm going to make it a real old-fashioned frolic, and won't you come and help me? You will enjoy it immensely I am sure, for Aunt is a character. Cousin Saul worth seeing, and Ruth a far prettier girl than any of the city rose-buds coming out this season. Bring Leonard Randal along with you to take notes for his new books; then it will be fresher and truer than the last, clever as it was.

"The air is delicious up here, society amusing, this old farmhouse full of treasures, and your bosom friend pining to embrace you. Just telegraph yes or no, and we will expect you on Tuesday.

"Ever yours,

"SOPHIE VAUGHAN."

"They will both come, for they are as tired of city life and as fond of change as I am," said the writer of the above, as she folded her letter and went to get it posted without delay.

Aunt Plumy was in the great kitchen making pies; a jolly old soul, with a face as ruddy as a winter apple, a cheery voice, and the kindest heart that ever beat under a gingham gown. Pretty Ruth was chopping the mince, and singing so gaily as she worked that the four-and-twenty immortal blackbirds could not have put more music into a pie than she did. Saul was piling wood into the big oven, and Sophie paused a moment on the threshold to look at him, for she always enjoyed the sight of this stalwart cousin, whom she likened to a Norse viking, with his fair hair and beard, keen blue eyes, and six feet of manly height, with shoulders that looked broad and strong enough to bear any burden.

His back was toward her, but he saw her first, and turned his flushed face to meet her, with the sudden lighting up it always showed when she approached.

"I've done it, Aunt; and now I want Saul to post the letter, so we can get a speedy answer."

"Just as soon as I can hitch up, cousin;" and Saul pitched in his last log, looking ready to put a girdle round the earth in less than forty minutes.

"Well, dear, I ain't the least mite of objection, as long as it pleases you. I guess we can stan' it ef your city folks can. I presume to say things will look kind of sing'lar to 'em, but I s'pose that's what they come for. Idle folks do dreadful queer things to amuse 'em;" and Aunt Plumy leaned on the rolling-pin to smile and nod with a shrewd twinkle of her eye, as if she enjoyed the prospect as much as Sophie did.

"I shall be afraid of 'em, but I'll try not to make you ashamed of me," said Ruth, who loved her charming cousin even more than she admired her.

"No fear of that, dear. They will be the awkward ones, and you must set them at ease by just being your simple selves, and treating them as if they were everyday people. Nell is very nice and jolly when she drops her city ways, as she must here. She will enter into the spirit of the fun at once, and I know you'll all like her. Mr. Randal is rather the worse for too much praise and petting, as successful people are apt to be, so a little plain talk and rough work will do him good. He is a true gentleman in spite of his airs and elegance, and he will take it all in good part, if you treat him like a man and not a lion."

"I'll see to him," said Saul, who had listened with great interest to the latter part of Sophie's speech, evidently suspecting a lover, and enjoying the idea of supplying him with a liberal amount of "plain talk and rough work."

"I'll keep 'em busy if that's what they need, for there will be a sight to do, and we can't get help easy up here. Our darters don't hire out much. Work to home till they marry, and don't go gaddin' 'round gettin' their heads full of foolish notions, and forgettin' all the useful things their mothers taught 'em."

Aunt Plumy glanced at Ruth as she spoke, and a sudden color in the girl's cheeks proved that the words hit certain ambitious fancies of this pretty daughter of the house of Basset.

"They shall do their parts and not be a trouble; I'll see to that, for you certainly are the dearest aunt in the world to let me take possession of you and yours in this way," cried Sophie, embracing the old lady with warmth.

Saul wished the embrace could be returned by proxy, as his mother's hands were too floury to do more than hover affectionately round the delicate face that looked so fresh and young beside her wrinkled one. As it could not be done, he fled temptation and "hitched up" without delay.

The three women laid their heads together in his absence, and Sophie's plan grew apace, for Ruth longed to see a real novelist and a fine lady, and Aunt

Plumy, having plans of her own to further, said “Yes, dear,” to every suggestion.

Great was the arranging and adorning that went on that day in the old farmhouse, for Sophie wanted her friends to enjoy this taste of country pleasures, and knew just what additions would be indispensable to their comfort; what simple ornaments would be in keeping with the rustic stage on which she meant to play the part of prima donna.

Next day a telegram arrived accepting the invitation, for both the lady and the lion. They would arrive that afternoon, as little preparation was needed for this impromptu journey, the novelty of which was its chief charm to these *blasé* people.

Saul wanted to get out the double sleigh and span, for he prided himself on his horses, and a fall of snow came most opportunely to beautify the landscape and add a new pleasure to Christmas festivities.

But Sophie declared that the old yellow sleigh, with Punch, the farm-horse, must be used, as she wished everything to be in keeping; and Saul obeyed, thinking he had never seen anything prettier than his cousin when she appeared in his mother’s old-fashioned camlet cloak and blue silk pumpkin hood. He looked remarkably well himself in his fur coat, with hair and beard brushed till they shone like spun gold, a fresh color in his cheek, and the sparkle of amusement in his eyes, while excitement gave his usually grave face the animation it needed to be handsome.

Away they jogged in the creaking old sleigh, leaving Ruth to make herself pretty, with a fluttering heart, and Aunt Plumy to dish up a late dinner fit to tempt the most fastidious appetite.

“She has not come for us, and there is not even a stage to take us up. There must be some mistake,” said Emily Herrick, as she looked about the shabby little station where they were set down.

“That is the never-to-be-forgotten face of our fair friend, but the bonnet of her grandmother, if my eyes do not deceive me,” answered Randal, turning to survey the couple approaching in the rear.

“Sophie Vaughan, what do you mean by making such a guy of yourself?” exclaimed Emily, as she kissed the smiling face in the hood and stared at the quaint cloak.

“I’m dressed for my part, and I intend to keep it up. This is our host, my cousin, Saul Basset. Come to the sleigh at once, he will see to your luggage,” said Sophie, painfully conscious of the antiquity of her array as her eyes rested on Emily’s pretty hat and mantle, and the masculine elegance of Randal’s wraps.

They were hardly tucked in when Saul appeared with a valise in one hand and a large trunk on his shoulder, swinging both on to a wood-sled that stood near by as easily as if they had been hand-bags.

"That is your hero, is it? Well, he looks it, calm and comely, taciturn and tall," said Emily, in a tone of approbation.

"He should have been named Samson or Goliath; though I believe it was the small man who slung things about and turned out the hero in the end," added Randal, surveying the performance with interest and a touch of envy, for much pen work had made his own hands as delicate as a woman's.

"Saul doesn't live in a glass house, so stones won't hurt him. Remember sarcasm is forbidden and sincerity the order of the day. You are country folks now, and it will do you good to try their simple, honest ways for a few days."

Sophie had no time to say more, for Saul came up and drove off with the brief remark that the baggage would "be along right away."

Being hungry, cold and tired, the guests were rather silent during the short drive, but Aunt Plumy's hospitable welcome, and the savory fumes of the dinner awaiting them, thawed the ice and won their hearts at once.

"Isn't it nice? Aren't you glad you came?" asked Sophie, as she led her friends into the parlor, which she had redeemed from its primness by putting bright chintz curtains to the windows, hemlock boughs over the old portraits, a china bowl of flowers on the table, and a splendid fire on the wide hearth.

"It is perfectly jolly, and this is the way I begin to enjoy myself," answered Emily, sitting down upon the home-made rug, whose red flannel roses bloomed in a blue list basket.

"If I may add a little smoke to your glorious fire, it will be quite perfect. Won't Samson join me?" asked Randal, waiting for permission, cigar-case in hand.

"He has no small vices, but you may indulge yours," answered Sophie, from the depths of a grandmotherly chair.

Emily glanced up at her friend as if she caught a new tone in her voice, then turned to the fire again with a wise little nod, as if confiding some secret to the reflection of herself in the bright brass andiron.

"His Delilah does not take this form. I wait with interest to discover if he has one. What a daisy the sister is. Does she ever speak?" asked Randal, trying to lounge on the haircloth sofa, where he was slipping uncomfortably about.

"Oh yes, and sings like a bird. You shall hear her when she gets over her shyness. But no trifling, mind you, for it is a jealously guarded daisy and not to be picked by any idle hand," said Sophie warningly, as she recalled Ruth's blushes and Randal's compliments at dinner.

"I should expect to be annihilated by the big brother if I attempted any but the 'sincerest' admiration and respect. Have no fears on that score, but tell us what is to follow this superb dinner. An apple bee, spinning match, husking party, or primitive pastime of some sort, I have no doubt."

"As you are new to our ways I am going to let you rest this evening. We will sit about the fire and tell stories. Aunt is a master hand at that, and Saul has reminiscences of the war that are well worth hearing if we can only get him to tell them."

"Ah, he was there, was he?"

"Yes, all through it, and is Major Basset, though he likes his plain name best. He fought splendidly and had several wounds, though only a mere boy when he earned his scars and bars. I'm very proud of him for that," and Sophie looked so as she glanced at the photograph of a stripling in uniform set in the place of honor on the high mantel-piece.

"We must stir him up and hear these martial memories. I want some new incidents, and shall book all I can get, if I may."

Here Randal was interrupted by Saul himself, who came in with an armful of wood for the fire.

"Anything more I can do for you, cousin?" he asked, surveying the scene with a rather wistful look.

"Only come and sit with us and talk over war times with Mr. Randal."

"When I've foddered the cattle and done my chores I'd be pleased to. What regiment were you in?" asked Saul, looking down from his lofty height upon the slender gentleman, who answered briefly, —

"In none. I was abroad at the time."

"Sick?"

"No, busy with a novel."

"Took four years to write it?"

"I was obliged to travel and study before I could finish it. These things take more time to work up than outsiders would believe."

"Seems to me our war was a finer story than any you could find in Europe, and the best way to study it would be to fight it out. If you want heroes and heroines you'd have found plenty of 'em there."

"I have no doubt of it, and shall be glad to atone for my seeming neglect of them by hearing about your own exploits. Major."

Randal hoped to turn the conversation gracefully, but Saul was not to be caught, and left the room, saying, with a gleam of fun in his eye, —

"I can't stop now; heroes can wait, pigs can't."

The girls laughed at this sudden descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, and Randal joined them, feeling his condescension had not been unobserved.

As if drawn by the merry sound Aunt Plumy appeared, and being established in the rocking-chair fell to talking as easily as if she had known her guests for years.

“Laugh away, young folks, that’s better for digestion than any of the messes people use. Are you troubled with dyspepsy, dear? You didn’t seem to take your vittles very hearty, so I mistrusted you was delicate,” she said, looking at Emily, whose pale cheeks and weary eyes told the story of late hours and a gay life.

“I haven’t eaten so much for years, I assure you, Mrs. Basset; but it was impossible to taste all your good things. I am not dyspeptic, thank you, but a little seedy and tired, for I’ve been working rather hard lately.”

“Be you a teacher? or have you a ‘perfessun,’ as they call a trade nowadays?” asked the old lady in a tone of kindly interest, which prevented a laugh at the idea of Emily’s being anything but a beauty and a belle. The others kept their countenances with difficulty, and she answered demurely, —

“I have no trade as yet, but I dare say I should be happier if I had.”

“Not a doubt on’t, my dear.”

“What would you recommend, ma’am?”

“I should say dressmakin’ was rather in your line, ain’t it? Your clothes is dreadful tasty, and do you credit if you made ‘em yourself.” and Aunt Plumy surveyed with feminine interest the simple elegance of the travelling dress which was the masterpiece of a French modiste.

“No, ma’am, I don’t make my own things, I’m too lazy. It takes so much time and trouble to select them that I have only strength left to wear them.”

“Housekeepin’ used to be the favorite perfessun in my day. It ain’t fashionable now, but it needs a sight of trainin’ to be perfect in all that’s required, and I’ve an idee it would be a sight healthier and usefuller than the paintin’ and music and fancy work young women do nowadays.”

“But every one wants some beauty in their lives, and each one has a different sphere to fill, if one can only find it.”

“‘Pears to me there’s no call for so much art when nater is full of beauty for them that can see and love it. As for ‘spears’ and so on, I’ve a notion if each of us did up our own little chores smart and thorough we needn’t go wanderin’ round to set the world to rights. That’s the Lord’s job, and I presume to say He can do it without any advice of ourn.”

Something in the homely but true words seemed to rebuke the three listeners for wasted lives, and for a moment there was no sound but the crackle of the fire, the brisk click of the old lady’s knitting needles, and Ruth’s voice singing overhead as she made ready to join the party below.

“To judge by that sweet sound you have done one of your ‘chores’ very beautifully, Mrs. Basset, and in spite of the follies of our day, succeeded in keeping one girl healthy, happy and unspoiled,” said Emily, looking up into the peaceful old face with her own lovely one full of respect and envy.

"I do hope so, for she's my ewe lamb, the last of four dear little girls; all the rest are in the burying ground 'side of father. I don't expect to keep her long, and don't ought to regret when I lose her, for Saul is the best of sons; but daughters is more to mothers somehow, and I always yearn over girls that is left without a broodin' wing to keep 'em safe and warm in this world of tribulation."

Aunt Plumy laid her hand on Sophie's head as she spoke, with such a motherly look that both girls drew nearer, and Randal resolved to put her in a book without delay.

Presently Saul returned with little Ruth hanging on his arm and shyly nestling near him as he took the three-cornered leathern chair in the chimney nook, while she sat on a stool close by.

"Now the circle is complete and the picture perfect. Don't light the lamps yet, please, but talk away and let me make a mental study of you. I seldom find so charming a scene to paint," said Randal, beginning to enjoy himself immensely, with a true artist's taste for novelty and effect.

"Tell us about your book, for we have been reading it as it comes out in the magazine, and are much exercised about how it's going to end," began Saul, gallantly throwing himself into the breach, for a momentary embarrassment fell upon the women at the idea of sitting for their portraits before they were ready.

"Do you really read my poor serial up here, and do me the honor to like it?" asked the novelist, both flattered and amused, for his work was of the aesthetic sort, microscopic studies of character, and careful pictures of modern life.

"Sakes alive, why shouldn't we?" cried Aunt Plumy. "We have some eddication, though we ain't very genteel. We've got a town libry, kep up by the women mostly, with fairs and tea parties and so on. We have all the magazines reg'lar, and Saul reads out the pieces while Ruth sews and I knit, my eyes bein' poor. Our winter is long and evenins would be kinder lonesome if we didn't have novils and newspapers to cheer 'em up."

"I am very glad I can help to beguile them for you. Now tell me what you honestly think of my work? Criticism is always valuable, and I should really like yours, Mrs. Basset," said Randal, wondering what the good woman would make of the delicate analysis and worldly wisdom on which he prided himself.

Short work, as Aunt Plumy soon showed him, for she rather enjoyed freeing her mind at all times, and decidedly resented the insinuation that country folk could not appreciate light literature as well as city people.

"I ain't no great of a jedge about anything but nat'ralness of books, and it really does seem as if some of your men and women was dreadful uncomfortable creaters. 'Pears to me it ain't wise to be always pickin' ourselves to pieces and pryin’ into things that ought to come gradual by way of experience and the visitations of Providence. Flowers won’t blow worth a cent ef you pull ‘em open. Better wait and see what they can do alone. I do relish the smart sayins, the odd ways of furrin parts, and the sarcastic slaps at folkses weak spots. But massy knows, we can’t live on spice-cake and Charlotte Ruche, and I do feel as if books was more sustainin’ ef they was full of every-day people and things, like good bread and butter. Them that goes to the heart and ain’t soon forgotten is the kind I hanker for. Mis Terry’s books now, and Mis Stowe’s, and Dickens’s Christmas pieces, — them is real sweet and cheerin’, to my mind.”

As the blunt old lady paused it was evident she had produced a sensation, for Saul smiled at the fire, Ruth looked dismayed at this assault upon one of her idols, and the young ladies were both astonished and amused at the keenness of the new critic who dared express what they had often felt. Randal, however, was quite composed and laughed good-naturedly, though secretly feeling as if a pail of cold water had been poured over him.

“Many thanks, madam; you have discovered my weak point with surprising accuracy. But you see I cannot help ‘picking folks to pieces,’ as you have expressed it; that is my gift, and it has its attractions, as the sale of my books will testify. People like the ‘spice-bread,’ and as that is the only sort my oven will bake, I must keep on in order to make my living.”

“So rumsellers say, but it ain’t a good trade to foller, and I’d chop wood ‘fore I’d earn my livin’ harmin’ my feller man. ‘Pears to me I’d let my oven cool a spell, and hunt up some homely, happy folks to write about; folks that don’t borrer trouble and go lookin’ for holes in their neighbors’ coats, but take their lives brave and cheerful; and rememberin’ we are all human, have pity on the weak, and try to be as full of mercy, patience and lovin’ kindness as Him who made us. That sort of a book would do a heap of good; be real warmin’ and strengthening and make them that read it love the man that wrote it, and remember him when he was dead and gone.”

“I wish I could!” and Randal meant what he said, for he was as tired of his own style as a watch-maker might be of the magnifying glass through which he strains his eyes all day. He knew that the heart was left out of his work, and that both mind and soul were growing morbid with dwelling on the faulty, absurd and metaphysical phases of life and character. He often threw down his pen and vowed he would write no more; but he loved ease and the books brought money readily; he was accustomed to the stimulant of praise and missed it as the toper misses his wine, so that which had once been a pleasure to himself and others was fast becoming a burden and a disappointment.

The brief pause which followed his involuntary betrayal of discontent was broken by Ruth, who exclaimed, with a girlish enthusiasm that overpowered girlish bashfulness, —

“*I* think all the novels are splendid! I hope you will write hundreds more, and I shall live to read ‘em.”

“Bravo, my gentle champion! I promise that I will write one more at least, and have a heroine in it whom your mother will both admire and love,” answered Randal, surprised to find how grateful he was for the girl’s approval, and how rapidly his trained fancy began to paint the background on which he hoped to copy this fresh, human daisy.

Abashed by her involuntary outburst, Ruth tried to efface herself behind Saul’s broad shoulder, and he brought the conversation back to its starting-point by saying in a tone of the most sincere interest, —

“Speaking of the serial, I am very anxious to know how your hero comes out. He is a fine fellow, and I can’t decide whether he is going to spoil his life marrying that silly woman, or do something grand and generous, and not be made a fool of.”

“Upon my soul, I don’t know myself. It is very hard to find new finales. Can’t you suggest something, Major? then I shall not be obliged to leave my story without an end, as people complain I am rather fond of doing.”

“Well, no, I don’t think I’ve anything to offer. Seems to me it isn’t the sensational exploits that show the hero best, but some great sacrifice quietly made by a common sort of man who is noble without knowing it. I saw a good many such during the war, and often wish I could write them down, for it is surprising how much courage, goodness and real piety is stowed away in common folks ready to show when the right time comes.”

“Tell us one of them, and I’ll bless you for a hint. No one knows the anguish of an author’s spirit when he can’t ring down the curtain on an effective tableau,” said Randal, with a glance at his friends to ask their aid in eliciting an anecdote or reminiscence.

“Tell about the splendid fellow who held the bridge, like Horatius, till help came up. That was a thrilling story, I assure you,” answered Sophie, with an inviting smile.

But Saul would not be his own hero, and said briefly:

“Any man can be brave when the battle-fever is on him, and it only takes a little physical courage to dash ahead.” He paused a moment, with his eyes on the snowy landscape without, where twilight was deepening; then, as if constrained by the memory that winter scene evoked, he slowly continued, —

“One of the bravest things I ever knew was done by a poor fellow who has been a hero to me ever since, though I only met him that night. It was after one of the big battles of that last winter, and I was knocked over with a broken leg and two or three bullets here and there. Night was coming on, snow falling, and a sharp wind blew over the field where a lot of us lay, dead and alive, waiting for the ambulance to come and pick us up. There was skirmishing going on not far off, and our prospects were rather poor between frost and fire. I was calculating how I'd manage, when I found two poor chaps close by who were worse off, so I braced up and did what I could for them. One had an arm blown away, and kept up a dreadful groaning. The other was shot bad, and bleeding to death for want of help, but never complained. He was nearest, and I liked his pluck, for he spoke cheerful and made me ashamed to growl. Such times make dreadful brutes of men if they haven't something to hold on to, and all three of us were most wild with pain and cold and hunger, for we'd fought all day fasting, when we heard a rumble in the road below, and saw lanterns bobbing round. That meant life to us, and we all tried to holler; two of us were pretty faint, but I managed a good yell, and they heard it.

"'Room for one more. Hard luck, old boys, but we are full and must save the worst wounded first. Take a drink, and hold on till we come back,' says one of them with the stretcher.

"'Here's the one to go,' I says, pointin' out my man, for I saw by the light that he was hard hit.

"'No, that one. He's got more chances than I, or this one; he's young and got a mother; I'll wait,' said the good feller, touchin' my arm, for he 'd heard me mutterin' to myself about this dear old lady. We always want mother when we are down, you know."

Saul's eyes turned to the beloved face with a glance of tenderest affection, and Aunt Plumy answered with a dismal groan at the recollection of his need that night, and her absence.

"Well, to be short, the groaning chap was taken, and my man left. I was mad, but there was no time for talk, and the selfish one went off and left that poor feller to run his one chance. I had my rifle, and guessed I could hobble up to use it if need be; so we settled back to wait without much hope of help, everything being in a muddle. And wait we did till morning, for that ambulance did not come back till next day, when most of us were past needing it.

"I'll never forget that night. I dream it all over again as plain as if it was real. Snow, cold, darkness, hunger, thirst, pain, and all round us cries and cursing growing less and less, till at last only the wind went moaning over that meadow. It was awful! so lonesome, helpless, and seemingly God-forsaken. Hour after hour we lay there side by side under one coat, waiting to be saved or die, for the wind grew strong and we grew weak."

Saul drew a long breath, and held his hands to the fire as if he felt again the sharp suffering of that night.

“And the man?” asked Emily, softly, as if reluctant to break the silence.

“He *was* a man! In times like that men talk like brothers and show what they are. Lying there, slowly freezing, Joe Cummings told me about his wife and babies, his old folks waiting for him, all depending on him, yet all ready to give him up when he was needed. A plain man, but honest and true, and loving as a woman; I soon saw that as he went on talking, half to me and half to himself, for sometimes he wandered a little toward the end. I’ve read books, heard sermons, and seen good folks, but nothing ever came so close or did me so much good as seeing this man die. He had one chance and gave it cheerfully. He longed for those he loved, and let ‘em go with a good-by they couldn’t hear. He suffered all the pains we most shrink from without a murmur, and kept my heart warm while his own was growing cold. It’s no use trying to tell that part of it; but I heard prayers that night that meant something, and I saw how faith could hold a soul up when everything was gone but God.”

Saul stopped there with a sudden huskiness in his deep voice, and when he went on it was in the tone of one who speaks of a dear friend.

“Joe grew still by and by, and I thought he was asleep, for I felt his breath when I tucked him up, and his hand held on to mine. The cold sort of numbed me, and I dropped off, too weak and stupid to think or feel. I never should have waked up if it hadn’t been for Joe. When I came to, it was morning, and I thought I was dead, for all I could see was that great field of white mounds, like graves, and a splendid sky above. Then I looked for Joe, remembering; but he had put my coat back over me, and lay stiff and still under the snow that covered him like a shroud, all except his face. A bit of my cape had blown over it, and when I took it off and the sun shone on his dead face, I declare to you it was so full of heavenly peace I felt as if that common man had been glorified by God’s light, and rewarded by God’s ‘Well done.’ That’s all.”

No one spoke for a moment, while the women wiped their eyes, and Saul dropped his as if to hide something softer than tears.

“It was very noble, very touching. And you? how did you get off at last?” asked Randal, with real admiration and respect in his usually languid face.

“Crawled off,” answered Saul, relapsing into his former brevity of speech.

“Why not before, and save yourself all that misery?”

“Couldn’t leave Joe.”

“Ah, I see; there were two heroes that night.”

“Dozens, I’ve no doubt. Those were times that made heroes of men, and women, too.”

“Tell us more;” begged Emily, looking up with an expression none of her admirers ever brought to her face by their softest compliments or wiliest gossip.

“I’ve done my part. It’s Mr. Randal’s turn now;” and Saul drew himself out of the ruddy circle of firelight, as if ashamed of the prominent part he was playing.

Sophie and her friend had often heard Randal talk, for he was an accomplished *raconteur*, but that night he exerted himself, and was unusually brilliant and entertaining, as if upon his mettle. The Bassets were charmed. They sat late and were very merry, for Aunt Plumy got up a little supper for them, and her cider was as exhilarating as champagne. When they parted for the night and Sophie kissed her aunt, Emily did the same, saying heartily, —

“It seems as if I’d known you all my life, and this is certainly the most enchanting old place that ever was.”

“Glad you like it, dear. But it ain’t all fun, as you’ll find out to-morrow when you go to work, for Sophie says you must,” answered Mrs. Basset, as her guests trooped away, rashly promising to like everything.

They found it difficult to keep their word when they were called at half past six next morning. Their rooms were warm, however, and they managed to scramble down in time for breakfast, guided by the fragrance of coffee and Aunt Plumy’s shrill voice singing the good old hymn —

”Lord, in the morning Thou shalt hear
My voice ascending high.”

An open fire blazed on the hearth, for the cooking was done in the lean-to, and the spacious, sunny kitchen was kept in all its old-fashioned perfection, with the wooden settle in a warm nook, the tall clock behind the door, copper and pewter utensils shining on the dresser, old china in the corner closet and a little spinning wheel rescued from the garret by Sophie to adorn the deep window, full of scarlet geraniums, Christmas roses, and white chrysanthemums.

The young lady, in a checked apron and mob-cap, greeted her friends with a dish of buckwheats in one hand, and a pair of cheeks that proved she had been learning to fry these delectable cakes.

“You do ‘keep it up’ in earnest, upon my word; and very becoming it is, dear. But won’t you ruin your complexion and roughen your hands if you do so much of this new fancy-work?” asked Emily, much amazed at this novel freak.

“I like it, and really believe I’ve found my proper sphere at last. Domestic life seems so pleasant to me that I feel as if I’d better keep it up for the rest of my life,” answered Sophie, making a pretty picture of herself as she cut great slices of brown bread, with the early sunshine touching her happy face.

“The charming Miss Vaughan in the role of a farmer’s wife. I find it difficult to imagine, and shrink from the thought of the wide-spread dismay such a fate will produce among her adorers,” added Randal, as he basked in the glow of the hospitable fire.

“She might do worse; but come to breakfast and do honor to my handiwork,” said Sophie, thinking of her worn-out millionnaire, and rather nettled by the satiric smile on Randal’s lips.

“What an appetite early rising gives one. I feel equal to almost anything, so let me help wash cups,” said Emily, with unusual energy, when the hearty meal was over and Sophie began to pick up the dishes as if it was her usual work.

Ruth went to the window to water the flowers, and Randal followed to make himself agreeable, remembering her defence of him last night. He was used to admiration from feminine eyes, and flattery from soft lips, but found something new and charming in the innocent delight which showed itself at his approach in blushes more eloquent than words, and shy glances from eyes full of hero-worship.

“I hope you are going to spare me a posy for to-morrow night, since I can be fine in no other way to do honor to the dance Miss Sophie proposes for us,” he said, leaning in the bay window to look down on the little girl, with the devoted air he usually wore for pretty women.

“Anything you like! I should be so glad to have you wear my flowers. There will be enough for all, and I’ve nothing else to give to people who have made me as happy as cousin Sophie and you,” answered Ruth, half drowning her great calla as she spoke with grateful warmth.

“You must make her happy by accepting the invitation to go home with her which I heard given last night. A peep at the world would do you good, and be a pleasant change, I think.”

“Oh, very pleasant! but would it do me good?” and Ruth looked up with sudden seriousness in her blue eyes, as a child questions an elder, eager, yet wistful.

“Why not?” asked Randal, wondering at the hesitation.

“I might grow discontented with things here if I saw splendid houses and fine people. I am very happy now, and it would break my heart to lose that happiness, or ever learn to be ashamed of home.”

“But don’t you long for more pleasure, new scenes and other friends than these?” asked the man, touched by the little creature’s loyalty to the things she knew and loved.

“Very often, but mother says when I’m ready they will come, so I wait and try not to be impatient.” But Ruth’s eyes looked out over the green leaves as if the longing was very strong within her to see more of the unknown world lying beyond the mountains that hemmed her in.

"It is natural for birds to hop out of the nest, so I shall expect to see you over there before long, and ask you how you enjoy your first flight," said Randal, in a paternal tone that had a curious effect on Ruth.

To his surprise, she laughed, then blushed like one of her own roses, and answered with a demure dignity that was very pretty to see.

"I intend to hop soon, but it won't be a very long flight or very far from mother. She can't spare me, and nobody in the world can fill her place to me."

"Bless the child, does she think I'm going to make love to her," thought Randal, much amused, but quite mistaken. Wiser women had thought so when he assumed the caressing air with which he beguiled them into the little revelations of character he liked to use, as the south wind makes flowers open their hearts to give up their odor, then leaves them to carry it elsewhere, the more welcome for the stolen sweetness.

"Perhaps you are right. The maternal wing is a safe shelter for confiding little souls like you, Miss Ruth. You will be as comfortable here as your flowers in this sunny window," he said, carelessly pinching geranium leaves, and ruffling the roses till the pink petals of the largest fluttered to the floor.

As if she instinctively felt and resented something in the man which his act symbolized, the girl answered quietly, as she went on with her work, "Yes, if the frost does not touch me, or careless people spoil me too soon."

Before Randal could reply Aunt Plumy approached like a maternal hen who sees her chicken in danger.

"Saul is goin' to haul wood after he's done his chores, mebbe you'd like to go along? The view is good, the roads well broke, and the day uncommon fine."

"Thanks; it will be delightful, I dare say," politely responded the lion, with a secret shudder at the idea of a rural promenade at 8 A.M. in the winter.

"Come on, then; we'll feed the stock, and then I'll show you how to yoke oxen," said Saul, with a twinkle in his eye as he led the way, when his new aide had muffled himself up as if for a polar voyage.

"Now, that's too bad of Saul! He did it on purpose, just to please you, Sophie," cried Ruth presently, and the girls ran to the window to behold Randal bravely following his host with a pail of pigs' food in each hand, and an expression of resigned disgust upon his aristocratic face.

"To what base uses may we come," quoted Emily, as they all nodded and smiled upon the victim as he looked back from the barn-yard, where he was clamorously welcomed by his new charges.

"It is rather a shock at first, but it will do him good, and Saul won't be too hard upon him, I'm sure," said Sophie, going back to her work, while Ruth turned her best buds to the sun that they might be ready for a peace-offering to-morrow.

There was a merry clatter in the big kitchen for an hour; then Aunt Plumy and her daughter shut themselves up in the pantry to perform some culinary rites, and the young ladies went to inspect certain antique costumes laid forth in Sophie's room.

"You see, Em, I thought it would be appropriate to the house and season to have an old-fashioned dance. Aunt has quantities of ancient finery stowed away, for great-grandfather Basset was a fine old gentleman and his family lived in state. Take your choice of the crimson, blue or silver-gray damask. Ruth is to wear the worked muslin and quilted white satin skirt, with that coquettish hat."

"Being dark, I'll take the red and trim it up with this fine lace. You must wear the blue and primrose, with the distracting high-heeled shoes. Have you any suits for the men?" asked Emily, throwing herself at once into the all-absorbing matter of costume.

"A claret velvet coat and vest, silk stockings, cocked hat and snuff-box for Randal. Nothing large enough for Saul, so he must wear his uniform. Won't Aunt Plumy be superb in this plum-colored satin and immense cap?"

A delightful morning was spent in adapting the faded finery of the past to the blooming beauty of the present, and time and tongues flew till the toot of a horn called them down to dinner.

The girls were amazed to see Randal come whistling up the road with his trousers tucked into his boots, blue mittens on his hands, and an unusual amount of energy in his whole figure, as he drove the oxen, while Saul laughed at his vain attempts to guide the bewildered beasts.

"It's immense! The view from the hill is well worth seeing, for the snow glorifies the landscape and reminds one of Switzerland. I'm going to make a sketch of it this afternoon; better come and enjoy the delicious freshness, young ladies."

Randal was eating with such an appetite that he did not see the glances the girls exchanged as they promised to go.

"Bring home some more winter-green, I want things to be real nice, and we haven't enough for the kitchen," said Ruth, dimpling with girlish delight as she imagined herself dancing under the green garlands in her grandmother's wedding gown.

It was very lovely on the hill, for far as the eye could reach lay the wintry landscape sparkling with the brief beauty of sunshine on virgin snow. Pines sighed overhead, hardy birds flitted to and fro, and in all the trodden spots rose the little spires of evergreen ready for its Christmas duty. Deeper in the wood sounded the measured ring of axes, the crash of falling trees, while the red shirts of the men added color to the scene, and a fresh wind brought the aromatic breath of newly cloven hemlock and pine.

“How beautiful it is! I never knew before what winter woods were like. Did you, Sophie?” asked Emily, sitting on a stump to enjoy the novel pleasure at her ease.

“I’ve found out lately; Saul lets me come as often as I like, and this fine air seems to make a new creature of me,” answered Sophie, looking about her with sparkling eyes, as if this was a kingdom where she reigned supreme.

“Something is making a new creature of you, that is very evident. I haven’t yet discovered whether it is the air or some magic herb among that green stuff you are gathering so diligently;” and Emily laughed to see the color deepen beautifully in her friend’s half-averted face.

“Scarlet is the only wear just now, I find. If we are lost like babes in the woods there are plenty of redbreasts to cover us with leaves,” and Randal joined Emily’s laugh, with a glance at Saul, who had just pulled his coat off.

“You wanted to see this tree go down, so stand from under and I’ll show you how it’s done,” said the farmer, taking up his axe, not unwilling to gratify his guests and display his manly accomplishments at the same time.

It was a fine sight, the stalwart man swinging his axe with magnificent strength and skill, each blow sending a thrill through the stately tree, till its heart was reached and it tottered to its fall. Never pausing for breath Saul shook his yellow mane out of his eyes, and hewed away, while the drops stood on his forehead and his arm ached, as bent on distinguishing himself as if he had been a knight tilting against his rival for his lady’s favor.

“I don’t know which to admire most, the man or his muscle. One doesn’t often see such vigor, size and comeliness in these degenerate days,” said Randal, mentally booking the fine figure in the red shirt.

“I think we have discovered a rough diamond. I only wonder if Sophie is going to try and polish it,” answered Emily, glancing at her friend, who stood a little apart, watching the rise and fall of the axe as intently as if her fate depended on it.

Down rushed the tree at last, and, leaving them to examine a crow’s nest in its branches, Saul went off to his men, as if he found the praises of his prowess rather too much for him.

Randal fell to sketching, the girls to their garland-making, and for a little while the sunny woodland nook was full of lively chat and pleasant laughter, for the air exhilarated them all like wine. Suddenly a man came running from the wood, pale and anxious, saying, as he hastened by for help, “Blasted tree fell on him! Bleed to death before the doctor comes!”

“Who? who?” cried the startled trio.

But the man ran on, with some breathless reply, in which only a name was audible — ”Basset.”

“The deuce it is!” and Randal dropped his pencil, while the girls sprang up in dismay. Then, with one impulse, they hastened to the distant group, half visible behind the fallen trees and corded wood.

Sophie was there first, and forcing her way through the little crowd of men, saw a red-shirted figure on the ground, crushed and bleeding, and threw herself down beside it with a cry that pierced the hearts of those who heard it.

In the act she saw it was not Saul, and covered her bewildered face as if to hide its joy. A strong arm lifted her, and the familiar voice said cheeringly, —

“I’m all right, dear. Poor Bruce is hurt, but we’ve sent for help.
Better go right home and forget all about it.”

“Yes, I will, if I can do nothing;” and Sophie meekly returned to her friends who stood outside the circle over which Saul’s head towered, assuring them of his safety.

Hoping they had not seen her agitation, she led Emily away, leaving Randal to give what aid he could and bring them news of the poor wood-chopper’s state.

Aunt Plumy produced the “camphire” the moment she saw Sophie’s pale face, and made her lie down, while the brave old lady trudged briskly off with bandages and brandy to the scene of action. On her return she brought comfortable news of the man, so the little flurry blew over and was forgotten by all but Sophie, who remained pale and quiet all the evening, tying evergreen as if her life depended on it.

“A good night’s sleep will set her up. She ain’t used to such things, dear child, and needs cossetin’,” said Aunt Plumy, purring over her until she was in her bed, with a hot stone at her feet and a bowl of herb tea to quiet her nerves.

An hour later when Emily went up, she peeped in to see if Sophie was sleeping nicely, and was surprised to find the invalid wrapped in a dressing-gown writing busily.

“Last will and testament, or sudden inspiration, dear? How are you? faint or feverish, delirious or in the dumps! Saul looks so anxious, and Mrs. Basset hushes us all up so, I came to bed, leaving Randal to entertain Ruth.”

As she spoke Emily saw the papers disappear in a portfolio, and Sophie rose with a yawn.

"I was writing letters, but I'm sleepy now. Quite over my foolish fright, thank you. Go and get your beauty sleep that you may dazzle the natives to-morrow."

"So glad, good night;" and Emily went away, saying to herself,
"Something is going on, and I must find out what it is before I leave.
Sophie can't blind *me*."

But Sophie did all the next day, being delightfully gay at the dinner, and devoting herself to the young minister who was invited to meet the distinguished novelist, and evidently being afraid of him, gladly basked in the smiles of his charming neighbor. A dashing sleigh-ride occupied the afternoon, and then great was the fun and excitement over the costumes.

Aunt Plumy laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks as the girls compressed her into the plum-colored gown with its short waist, leg-of-mutton sleeves, and narrow skirt. But a worked scarf hid all deficiencies, and the towering cap struck awe into the soul of the most frivolous observer.

"Keep an eye on me, girls, for I shall certainly split somewheres or lose my head-piece off when I'm trottin' round. What would my blessed mother say if she could see me rigged out in her best things?" and with a smile and a sigh the old lady departed to look after "the boys," and see that the supper was all right.

Three prettier damsels never tripped down the wide staircase than the brilliant brunette in crimson brocade, the pensive blonde in blue, or the rosy little bride in old muslin and white satin.

A gallant court gentleman met them in the hall with a superb bow, and escorted them to the parlor, where Grandma Basset's ghost was discovered dancing with a modern major in full uniform.

Mutual admiration and many compliments followed, till other ancient ladies and gentlemen arrived in all manner of queer costumes, and the old house seemed to wake from its humdrum quietude to sudden music and merriment, as if a past generation had returned to keep its Christmas there.

The village fiddler soon struck up the good old tunes, and then the strangers saw dancing that filled them with mingled mirth and envy; it was so droll, yet so hearty. The young men, unusually awkward in their grandfathers' knee-breeches, flapping vests, and swallow-tail coats, footed it bravely with the buxom girls who were the prettier for their quaintness, and danced with such vigor that their high combs stood awry, their furbelows waved wildly, and their cheeks were as red as their breast-knots, or hose.

It was impossible to stand still, and one after the other the city folk yielded to the spell, Randal leading off with Ruth, Sophie swept away by Saul, and Emily being taken possession of by a young giant of eighteen, who spun her around with a boyish impetuosity that took her breath away. Even Aunt Plumy was discovered jigging it alone in the pantry, as if the music was too much for her, and the plates and glasses jingled gaily on the shelves in time to Money Musk and Fishers' Hornpipe.

A pause came at last, however, and fans fluttered, heated brows were wiped, jokes were made, lovers exchanged confidences, and every nook and corner held a man and maid carrying on the sweet game which is never out of fashion. There was a glitter of gold lace in the back entry, and a train of blue and primrose shone in the dim light. There was a richer crimson than that of the geraniums in the deep window, and a dainty shoe tapped the bare floor impatiently as the brilliant black eyes looked everywhere for the court gentleman, while their owner listened to the gruff prattle of an enamored boy. But in the upper hall walked a little white ghost as if waiting for some shadowy companion, and when a dark form appeared ran to take its arm, saying, in a tone of soft satisfaction, —

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come!"

"Why did you leave me, Ruth?" answered a manly voice in a tone of surprise, though the small hand slipping from the velvet coat-sleeve was replaced as if it was pleasant to feel it there.

A pause, and then the other voice answered demurely, —

"Because I was afraid my head would be turned by the fine things you were saying."

"It is impossible to help saying what one feels to such an artless little creature as you are. It does me good to admire anything so fresh and sweet, and won't harm you."

"It might if — "

"If what, my daisy?"

"I believed it," and a laugh seemed to finish the broken sentence better than the words.

"You may, Ruth, for I do sincerely admire the most genuine girl I have seen for a long time. And walking here with you in your bridal white I was just asking myself if I should not be a happier man with a home of my own and a little wife hanging on my arm than drifting about the world as I do now with only myself to care for."

"I know you would!" and Ruth spoke so earnestly that Randal was both touched and startled, fearing he had ventured too far in a mood of unwonted sentiment, born of the romance of the hour and the sweet frankness of his companion.

"Then you don't think it would be rash for some sweet woman to take me in hand and make me happy, since fame is a failure?"

"Oh, no; it would be easy work if she loved you. I know some one — if I only dared to tell her name."

"Upon my soul, this is cool," and Randal looked down, wondering if the audacious lady on his arm could be shy Ruth.

If he had seen the malicious merriment in her eyes he would have been more humiliated still, but they were modestly averted, and the face under the little hat was full of a soft agitation rather dangerous even to a man of the world.

"She is a captivating little creature, but it is too soon for anything but a mild flirtation. I must delay further innocent revelations or I shall do something rash."

While making this excellent resolution Randal had been pressing the hand upon his arm and gently pacing down the dimly lighted hall with the sound of music in his ears, Ruth's sweetest roses in his button-hole, and a loving little girl beside him, as he thought.

"You shall tell me by and by when we are in town. I am sure you will come, and meanwhile don't forget me."

"I am going in the spring, but I shall not be with Sophie," answered Ruth, in a whisper.

"With whom then? I shall long to see you."

"With my husband. I am to be married in May."

"The deuce you are!" escaped Randal, as he stopped short to stare at his companion, sure she was not in earnest.

But she was, for as he looked the sound of steps coming up the back stairs made her whole face flush and brighten with the unmistakable glow of happy love, and she completed Randal's astonishment by running into the arms of the young minister, saying with an irrepressible laugh, "Oh, John, why didn't you come before?"

The court gentleman was all right in a moment, and the coolest of the three as he offered his congratulations and gracefully retired, leaving the lovers to enjoy the tryst he had delayed. But as he went down stairs his brows were knit, and he slapped the broad railing smartly with his cocked hat as if some irritation must find vent in a more energetic way than merely saying, "Confound the little baggage!" under his breath.

Such an amazing supper came from Aunt Plumy's big pantry that the city guests could not eat for laughing at the queer dishes circulating through the rooms, and copiously partaken of by the hearty young folks.

Doughnuts and cheese, pie and pickles, cider and tea, baked beans and custards, cake and cold turkey, bread and butter, plum pudding and French bonbons, Sophie's contribution.

"May I offer you the native delicacies, and share your plate? Both are very good, but the china has run short, and after such vigorous exercise as you have had you must need refreshment. I'm sure I do!" said Randal, bowing before Emily with a great blue platter laden with two doughnuts, two wedges of pumpkin pie and two spoons.

The smile with which she welcomed him, the alacrity with which she made room beside her and seemed to enjoy the supper he brought, was so soothing to his ruffled spirit that he soon began to feel that there is no friend like an old friend, that it would not be difficult to name a sweet woman who would take him in hand and would make him happy if he cared to ask her, and he began to think he would by and by, it was so pleasant to sit in that green corner with waves of crimson brocade flowing over his feet, and a fine face softening beautifully under his eyes.

The supper was not romantic, but the situation was, and Emily found that pie ambrosial food eaten with the man she loved, whose eyes talked more eloquently than the tongue just then busy with a doughnut. Ruth kept away, but glanced at them as she served her company, and her own happy experience helped her to see that all was going well in that quarter. Saul and Sophie emerged from the back entry with shining countenances, but carefully avoided each other for the rest of the evening. No one observed this but Aunt Plumy from the recesses of her pantry, and she folded her hands as if well content, as she murmured fervently over a pan full of crullers, "Bless the dears! Now I can die happy."

Every one thought Sophie's old-fashioned dress immensely becoming, and several of his former men said to Saul with blunt admiration, "Major, you look to-night as you used to after we'd gained a big battle."

"I feel as if I had," answered the splendid Major, with eyes much brighter than his buttons, and a heart under them infinitely prouder than when he was promoted on the field of honor, for his Waterloo was won.

There was more dancing, followed by games, in which Aunt Plumy shone pre-eminent, for the supper was off her mind and she could enjoy herself. There were shouts of merriment as the blithe old lady twirled the platter, hunted the squirrel, and went to Jerusalem like a girl of sixteen; her cap in a ruinous condition, and every seam of the purple dress straining like sails in a gale. It was great fun, but at midnight it came to an end, and the young folks, still bubbling over with innocent jollity, went jingling away along the snowy hills, unanimously pronouncing Mrs. Basset's party the best of the season.

"Never had such a good time in my life!" exclaimed Sophie, as the family stood together in the kitchen where the candles among the wreaths were going out, and the floor was strewn with wrecks of past joy.

"I'm proper glad, dear. Now you all go to bed and lay as late as you like to-morrow. I'm so kinder worked up I couldn't sleep, so Saul and me will put things to rights without a mite of noise to disturb you;" and Aunt Plumy sent them off with a smile that was a benediction, Sophie thought.

"The dear old soul speaks as if midnight was an unheard-of hour for Christians to be up. What would she say if she knew how we seldom go to bed till dawn in the ball season? I'm so wide awake I've half a mind to pack a little. Randal must go at two, he says, and we shall want his escort," said Emily, as the girls laid away their brocades in the press in Sophie's room.

"I'm not going. Aunt can't spare me, and there is nothing to go for yet," answered Sophie, beginning to take the white chrysanthemums out of her pretty hair.

"My dear child, you will die of ennui up here. Very nice for a week or so, but frightful for a winter. We are going to be very gay, and cannot get on without you," cried Emily dismayed at the suggestion.

"You will have to, for I'm not coming. I am very happy here, and so tired of the frivolous life I lead in town, that I have decided to try a better one," and Sophie's mirror reflected a face full of the sweetest content.

"Have you lost your mind? experienced religion? or any other dreadful thing? You always were odd, but this last freak is the strangest of all. What will your guardian say, and the world?" added Emily in the awe-stricken tone of one who stood in fear of the omnipotent Mrs. Grundy.

"Guardy will be glad to be rid of me, and I don't care that for the world," cried Sophie, snapping her fingers with a joyful sort of recklessness which completed Emily's bewilderment.

"But Mr. Hammond? Are you going to throw away millions, lose your chance of making the best match in the city, and driving the girls of our set out of their wits with envy?"

Sophie laughed at her friend's despairing cry, and turning round said quietly, —

"I wrote to Mr. Hammond last night, and this evening received my reward for being an honest girl. Saul and I are to be married in the spring when Ruth is."

Emily fell prone upon the bed as if the announcement was too much for her, but was up again in an instant to declare with prophetic solemnity, —

"I knew something was going on, but hoped to get you away before you were lost. Sophie, you will repent. Be warned, and forget this sad delusion."

"Too late for that. The pang I suffered yesterday when I thought Saul was dead showed me how well I loved him. To-night he asked me to stay, and no power in the world can part us. Oh! Emily, it is all so sweet, so beautiful, that *everything* is possible, and I know I shall be happy in this dear old home, full of love and peace and honest hearts. I only hope you may find as true and tender a man to live for as my Saul."

Sophie's face was more eloquent than her fervent words, and Emily beautifully illustrated the inconsistency of her sex by suddenly embracing her friend, with the incoherent exclamation, "I think I have, dear! Your brave Saul is worth a dozen old Hammonds, and I do believe you are right."

It is unnecessary to tell how, as if drawn by the irresistible magic of sympathy, Ruth and her mother crept in one by one to join the midnight conference and add their smiles and tears, tender hopes and proud delight to the joys of that memorable hour. Nor how Saul, unable to sleep, mounted guard below, and meeting Randal prowling down to soothe his nerves with a surreptitious cigar found it impossible to help confiding to his attentive ear the happiness that would break bounds and overflow in unusual eloquence.

Peace fell upon the old house at last, and all slept as if some magic herb had touched their eyelids, bringing blissful dreams and a glad awakening.

"Can't we persuade you to come with us, Miss Sophie?" asked Randal next day, as they made their adieux.

"I'm under orders now, and dare not disobey my superior officer," answered Sophie, handing her Major his driving gloves, with a look which plainly showed that she had joined the great army of devoted women who enlist for life and ask no pay but love.

"I shall depend on being invited to your wedding, then, and yours, too, Miss Ruth," added Randal, shaking hands with "the little baggage," as if he had quite forgiven her mockery and forgotten his own brief lapse into sentiment.

Before she could reply Aunt Plumy said, in a tone of calm conviction, that made them all laugh, and some of them look conscious, —

"Spring is a good time for weddin's, and I shouldn't wonder ef there was quite a number."

"Nor I;" and Saul and Sophie smiled at one another as they saw how carefully Randal arranged Emily's wraps.

Then with kisses, thanks and all the good wishes that happy hearts could imagine, the guests drove away, to remember long and gratefully that pleasant country Christmas.

ON PICKET DUTY

"Better late than never."

"What air you thinkin' of, Phil?"

"My wife, Dick."

"So was I! Ain't it odd how fellers fall to thinkin' of thar little women, when they get a quiet spell like this?"

"Fortunate for us that we do get it, and have such memories to keep us brave and honest through the trials and temptations of a life like ours."

October moonlight shone clearly on the solitary tree, draped with gray moss, scarred by lightning and warped by wind, looking like a venerable warrior, whose long campaign was nearly done; and underneath was posted the guard of four. Behind them twinkled many camp-fires on a distant plain, before them wound a road ploughed by the passage of an army, strewn with the relics of a rout. On the right, a sluggish river glided, like a serpent, stealthy, sinuous, and dark, into a seemingly impervious jungle; on the left, a Southern swamp filled the air with malarial damps, swarms of noisome life, and discordant sounds that robbed the hour of its repose. The men were friends as well as comrades, for though gathered from the four quarters of the Union, and dissimilar in education, character, and tastes, the same spirit animated all; the routine of camp-life threw them much together, and mutual esteem soon grew into a bond of mutual good fellowship.

Thorn was a Massachusetts volunteer; a man who seemed too early old, too early embittered by some cross, for, though grim of countenance, rough of speech, cold of manner, a keen observer would have soon discovered traces of a deeper, warmer nature hidden behind the repellent front he turned upon the world. A true New Englander, thoughtful, acute, reticent, and opinionated; yet earnest withal, intensely patriotic, and often humorous, despite a touch of Puritan austerity.

Phil, the "romantic chap," as he was called, looked his character to the life. Slender, swarthy, melancholy-eyed, and darkly-bearded; with feminine features, mellow voice, and alternately languid or vivacious manners. A child of the South in nature as in aspect, ardent and proud; fitfully aspiring and despairing; without the native energy which moulds character and ennobles life. Months of discipline and devotion had done much for him, and some deep experience was fast ripening the youth into a man.

Flint, the long-limbed lumberman, from the wilds of Maine, was a conscript who, when government demanded his money or his life, calculated the cost, and decided that the cash would be a dead loss and the claim might be repeated, whereas the conscript would get both pay and plunder out of government, while taking excellent care that government got very little out of him. A shrewd, slow-spoken, self-reliant specimen, was Flint; yet something of the fresh flavor of the backwoods lingered in him still, as if Nature were loath to give him up, and left the mark of her motherly hand upon him, as she leaves it in a dry, pale lichen, on the bosom of the roughest stone.

Dick “hailed” from Illinois, and was a comely young fellow, full of dash and daring; rough and rowdy, generous and jolly, overflowing with spirits and ready for a free fight with all the world.

Silence followed the last words, while the friendly moon climbed up the sky. Each man’s eye followed it, and each man’s heart was busy with remembrances of other eyes and hearts that might be watching and wishing as theirs watched and wished. In the silence, each shaped for himself that vision of home that brightens so many camp-fires, haunts so many dreamers under canvas roofs, and keeps so many turbulent natures tender by memories which often are both solace and salvation.

Thorn paced to and fro, his rifle on his shoulder, vigilant and soldierly, however soft his heart might be. Phil leaned against the tree, one hand in the breast of his blue jacket, on the painted presentment of the face his fancy was picturing in the golden circle of the moon. Flint lounged on the sward, whistling softly as he whittled at a fallen bough. Dick was flat on his back, heels in air, cigar in mouth, and some hilarious notion in his mind, for suddenly he broke into a laugh.

“What is it, lad?” asked Thorn, pausing in his tramp, as if willing to be drawn from the disturbing thought that made his black brows lower and his mouth look grim.

“Thinkin’ of my wife, and wishin’ she was here, bless her heart! set me rememberin’ how I see her fust, and so I roared, as I always do when it comes into my head.”

“How was it? Come, reel off a yarn, and let’s hear houw yeou hitched teams,” said Flint, always glad to get information concerning his neighbors, if it could be cheaply done.

“Tellin’ how we found our wives wouldn’t be a bad game, would it,
Phil?”

“I’m agreeable; but let’s have your romance first.”

“Devilish little of that about me or any of my doin’s. I hate sentimental bosh as much as you hate slang, and should have been a bachelor to this day if I hadn’t seen Kitty jest as I did. You see, I’d been too busy larkin’ round to get time for marryin’, till a couple of years ago, when I did up the job double-quick, as I’d like to do this thunderin’ slow one, hang it all!”

“Halt a minute till I give a look, for this picket isn’t going to be driven in or taken while I’m on guard.”

Down his beat went Thorn, reconnoitring river, road, and swamp, as thoroughly as one pair of keen eyes could do it, and came back satisfied, but still growling like a faithful mastiff on the watch; performances which he repeated at intervals till his own turn came.

“I didn’t have to go out of my own State for a wife, you’d better believe,” began Dick, with a boast, as usual; “for we raise as fine a crop of girls thar as any State in or out of the Union, and don’t mind raisin’ Cain with any man who denies it. I was out on a gunnin’ tramp with Joe Partridge, a cousin of mine, — poor old chap! he fired his last shot at Gettysburg, and died game in a way he didn’t dream of the day we popped off the birds together. It ain’t right to joke that way; I won’t if I can help it; but a feller gets awfully kind of heathenish these times, don’t he?”

“Settle up them scores byme-by; fightin’ Christians is scurse raound here. Fire away, Dick.”

“Well, we got as hungry as hounds half a dozen mile from home, and when a farmhouse hove in sight, Joe said he ‘d ask for a bite, and leave some of the plunder for pay. I was visitin’ Joe, didn’t know folks round, and backed out of the beggin’ part of the job; so he went ahead alone. We’d come out of the woods behind the house, and while Joe was foragin’, I took a reconnoissance. The view was fust-rate, for the main part of it was a girl airin’ beds on the roof of a stoop. Now, jest about that time, havin’ a leisure spell, I’d begun to think of marryin’, and took a look at all the girls I met, with an eye to business. I s’pose every man has some sort of an idee or pattern of the wife he wants; pretty and plucky, good and gay was mine, but I’d never found it till I see Kitty; and as she didn’t see me, I had the advantage and took an extra long stare.”

“What was her good p’ints, hey?”

“Oh, well, she had a wide-awake pair of eyes, a bright, jolly sort of a face, lots of curly hair tumblin’ out of her net, a trig little figger, and a pair of the neatest feet and ankles that ever stepped. ‘Pretty,’ thinks I; ‘so far so good.’ The way she whacked the pillers, shook the blankets, and pitched into the beds was a caution; specially one blunderin’ old feather-bed that wouldn’t do nothin’ but sag round in a pigheaded sort of way, that would have made most girls get mad and give up. Kitty didn't, but just wrastled with it like a good one, till she got it turned, banged, and spread to suit her; then she plumped down in the middle of it, with a sarcy little nod and chuckle to herself, that tickled me mightily. 'Plucky,' thinks I, 'better 'n' better.' Jest then an old woman came flyin' out the back-door, callin', 'Kitty! Kitty! Squire Partridge's son's here, 'long with a friend; been gunnin', want luncheon, and I'm all in the suds; do come down and see to 'em.'

"'Where are they?' says Kitty, scrambling up her hair and settlin' her gown in a jiffy, as women have a knack of doin', you know.

"'Mr. Joe's in the front entry; the other man's somewheres round, Billy says, waitin' till I send word whether they can stop. I darsn't till I'd seen you, for I can't do nothin', I'm in such a mess,' says the old lady.

"'So am I, for I can't get in except by the entry window, and he'll see me,' says Kitty, gigglin' at the thoughts of Joe.

"'Come down the ladder, there's a dear. I'll pull it round and keep it stiddy,' says the mother.

"'Oh, ma, don't ask me!' says Kitty, with a shiver. 'I'm dreadfully scared of ladders since I broke my arm off this very one. It's so high, it makes me dizzy jest to think of.'

"'Well, then, I'll do the best I can; but I wish them boys was to Jericho!' says the old lady, with a groan, for she was fat and hot, had her gown pinned up, and was in a fluster generally. She was goin' off rather huffy, when Kitty called out, —

"'Stop, ma! I'll come down and help you, only ketch me if I tumble.'

"She looked scared but stiddy, and I'll bet it took as much grit for her to do it as for one of us to face a battery. It don't seem much to tell of, but I wish I may be hit if it wasn't a right down dutiful and clever thing to see done. When the old lady took her off at the bottom, with a good motherly hug, 'Good,' thinks I; 'what more do you want?'"

"A snug little property wouldn't a ben bad, I reckon," said Flint.

"Well, she had it, old skin-flint, though I didn't know or care about it then. What a jolly row she'd make if she knew I was tellin' the ladder part of the story! She always does when I get to it, and makes believe cry, with her head in my breast-pocket, or any such handy place, till I take it out and swear I'll never do so ag'in. Poor little Kit, I wonder what she's doin' now. Thinkin' of me, I'll bet."

Dick paused, pulled his cap lower over his eyes, and smoked a minute with more energy than enjoyment, for his cigar was out and he did not perceive it.

"That's not all, is it?" asked Thorn, taking a fatherly interest in the younger man’s love passages.

“Not quite. ‘Fore long, Joe whistled, and as I always take short cuts everywhar, I put in at the back-door, jest as Kitty come trottin’ out of the pantry with a big berry-pie in her hand. I startled her, she tripped over the sill and down she come; the dish flew one way, the pie flopped into her lap, the juice spatterin’ my boots and her clean gown. I thought she’d cry, scold, have hysterics, or some confounded thing or other; but she jest sat still a minute, then looked up at me with a great blue splash on her face, and went off into the good-naturedest gale of laughin’ you ever heard in your life. That finished me. ‘Gay,’ thinks I; ‘go in and win.’ So I did; made love hand over hand, while I stayed with Joe; pupposed a fortnight after, married her in three months, and there she is, a tiptop little woman, with a pair of stunnin’ boys in her arms!”

Out came a well-worn case, and Dick proudly displayed the likeness of a stout, much bejewelled young woman with two staring infants on her knee. In his sight, the poor picture was a more perfect work of art than any of Sir Joshua’s baby-beauties, or Raphael’s Madonnas, and the little story needed no better sequel than the young father’s praises of his twins, the covert kiss he gave their mother when he turned as if to get a clearer light upon the face. Ashamed to show the tenderness that filled his honest heart, he hummed “Kingdom Coming,” relit his cigar, and presently began to talk again.

“Now, then, Flint, it’s your turn to keep guard, and Thorn’s to tell his romance. Come, don’t try to shirk; it does a man good to talk of such things, and we’re all mates here.”

“In some cases it don’t do any good to talk of such things; better let ‘em alone,” muttered Thorn, as he reluctantly sat down, while Flint as reluctantly departed.

With a glance and gesture of real affection, Phil laid his hand upon his comrade’s knee, saying in his persuasive voice, “Old fellow, it *will* do you good, because I know you often long to speak of something that weighs upon you. You’ve kept us steady many a time, and done us no end of kindnesses; why be too proud to let us give our sympathy in return, if nothing more?”

Thorn’s big hand closed over the slender one upon his knee, and the mild expression, so rarely seen upon his face, passed over it as he replied, —

“I think I could tell you almost anything if you asked me that way, my boy. It isn’t that I am too proud, — and you’re right about my sometimes wanting to free my mind, — but it’s because a man of forty don’t just like to open out to young fellows, if there is any danger of their laughing at him, though he may deserve it. I guess there isn’t now, and I’ll tell you how I found my wife.”

Dick sat up, and Phil drew nearer, for the earnestness that was in the man dignified his plain speech, and inspired an interest in his history, even before it was begun. Looking gravely at the river and never at his hearers, as if still a little shy of confidants, yet grateful for the relief of words, Thorn began abruptly: —

"I never hear the number eighty-four without clapping my hand to my left breast and missing my badge. You know I was on the police in New York, before the war, and that's about all you do know yet. One bitter cold night I was going my rounds for the last time, when, as I turned a corner, I saw there was a trifle of work to be done. It was a bad part of the city, full of dirt and deviltry; one of the streets led to a ferry, and at the corner an old woman had an apple-stall. The poor soul had dropped asleep, worn out with the cold, and there were her goods left with no one to watch 'em. Somebody was watching 'em. however; a girl, with a ragged shawl over her head, stood at the mouth of an alley close by, waiting for a chance to grab something. I'd seen her there when I went by before, and mistrusted she was up to some mischief; as I turned the corner, she put out her hand and cribbed an apple. She saw me the minute she did it, but neither dropped it nor ran, only stood stock still with the apple in her hand till I came up.

"'This won't do, my girl,' said I. I never could be harsh with 'em, poor things! She laid it back and looked up at me with a miserable sort of a smile, that made me put my hand in my pocket to fish for a ninepence before she spoke.

"'I know it won't,' she says. 'I didn't want to do it, it's so mean, but I'm awful hungry, sir.'

"'Better run home and get your supper, then.'

"'I've got no home.'

"'Where do you live?'

"'In the street.'

"'Where do you sleep?'

"'Anywhere; last night in the lock-up, and I thought I'd get in there again, if I did that when you saw me. I like to go there, it's warm and safe.'

"'If I don't take you there, what will you do?'

"'Don't know. I could go over there and dance again as I used to, but being sick has made me ugly, so they won't have me, and no one else will take me because I have been there once.'

"I looked where she pointed, and thanked the Lord that they wouldn't take her. It was one of those low theatres that do so much damage to the like of her; there was a gambling place one side of it, an eating saloon the other. I was new to the work then, but though I'd heard about hunger and homelessness often enough, I'd never had this sort of thing, nor seen that look on a girl's face. A white, pinched face hers was, with frightened, tired-looking eyes, but so innocent! She wasn't more than sixteen, had been pretty once, I saw, looked sick and starved now, and seemed just the most helpless, hopeless little thing that ever was.

"'You 'd better come to the Station for to-night, and we'll see to you to-morrow,' says I.

"'Thank you, sir,' says she, looking as grateful as if I'd asked her home. I suppose I did speak kind of fatherly. I ain't ashamed to say I felt so, seeing what a child she was; nor to own that when she put her little hand in mine, it hurt me to feel how thin and cold it was. We passed the eating-house where the red lights made her face as rosy as it ought to have been; there was meat and pies in the window, and the poor thing stopped to look. It was too much for her; off came her shawl, and she said in that coaxing way of hers, —

"'I wish you'd let me stop at the place close by and sell this; they'll give a little for it, and I'll get some supper. I've had nothing since yesterday morning, and maybe cold is easier to bear than hunger.'

"'Have you nothing better than that to sell?' I says, not quite sure that she wasn't all a humbug, like so many of 'em. She seemed to see that, and looked up at me again with such innocent eyes, I couldn't doubt her when she said, shivering with something beside the cold, —

"'Nothing but myself.' Then the tears came, and she laid her head clown on my arm, sobbing, — 'Keep me! oh, do keep me safe somewhere!'"

Thorn choked here, steadied his voice with a resolute hem! but could only add one sentence more, —

"That's how I found my wife."

"Come, don't stop thar. I told the whole o' mine, you do the same.
Whar did you take her? how'd it all come round?"

"Please tell us, Thorn."

The gentler request was answered presently, very steadily, very quietly.

"I was always a soft-hearted fellow, though you wouldn't think it now, and when that little girl asked me to keep her safe, I just did it. I took her to a good woman whom I knew, for I hadn't any women folks belonging to me, nor any place but that to put her in. She stayed there till spring working for her keep, growing brighter, prettier, every day, and fonder of me, I thought. If I believed in witchcraft, I shouldn't think myself such a fool as I do now, but I don't believe in it, and to this day I can't understand how I came to do it. To be sure I was a lonely man, without kith or kin, had never had a sweetheart in my life, or been much with women since my mother died. Maybe that's why I was so bewitched with Mary, for she had little ways with her that took your fancy and made you love her whether you would or no. I found her father was an honest fellow enough, a fiddler in some theatre; that he'd taken good care of Mary till he died, leaving precious little but advice for her to live on. She'd tried to get work, failed, spent all she had, got sick, and was going to the bad, as the poor souls can hardly help doing with so many ready to give them a shove. It's no use trying to make a bad job better; so the long and short of it was, I thought she loved me; God knows I loved her! and I married her before the year was out."

"Show us her picture; I know you've got one; all the fellows have, though half of 'em won't own up."

"I've only got part of one. I once saved my little girl, and her picture once saved me."

From an inner pocket Thorn produced a woman's housewife, carefully untied it, though all its implements were missing but a little thimble, and from one of its compartments took a flattened bullet and the remnants of a picture.

"I gave her that the first Christmas after I found her. She wasn't as tidy about her clothes as I liked to see, and I thought if I gave her a handy thing like this, she'd be willing to sew. But she only made one shirt for me, and then got tired, so I keep it like an old fool, as I am. Yes, that's the bit of lead that would have done for me, if Mary's likeness hadn't been just where it was."

"You'll like to show her this when you go home, won't you?" said Dick, as he took up the bullet, while Phil examined the marred picture, and Thorn poised the little thimble on his big finger, with a sigh.

"How can I, when I don't know where she is, and camp is all the home
I've got!"

The words broke from him like a sudden groan, when some old wound is rudely touched. Both of the young men started, both laid back the relics they had taken up, and turned their eyes from Thorn's face, across which swept a look of shame and sorrow, too significant to be misunderstood. Their silence assured him of their sympathy, and, as if that touch of friendliness unlocked his heavy heart, he eased it by a full confession. When he spoke again, it was with the calmness of repressed emotion, a calmness more touching to his mates than the most passionate outbreak, the most pathetic lamentation; for the coarse camp-phrases seemed to drop from his vocabulary; more than once his softened voice grew tremulous, and to the words "my little girl," there went a tenderness that proved how dear a place she still retained in that deep heart of his.

"Boys, I've gone so far; I may as well finish; and you'll see I'm not without some cause for my stern looks and ways; you'll pity me, and from you I'll take the comfort of it. It's only the old story, — I married her, worked for her, lived for her, and kept my little girl like a lady. I should have known that I was too old and sober for a young thing like that, for the life she led before the pinch came just suited her. She liked to be admired, to dress and dance and make herself pretty for all the world to see; not to keep house for a quiet man like me. Idleness wasn't good for her, it bred discontent; then some of her old friends, who'd left her in her trouble, found her out when better times came round, and tried to get her back again. I was away all day, I didn't know how things were going, and she wasn't open with me, afraid she said; I was so grave, and hated theatres so. She got courage finally to tell me that she wasn't happy; that she wanted to dance again, and asked me if she mightn't. I'd rather have had her ask me to put her in a fire, for I *did* hate theatres, and was bred to; others think they're no harm. I do; and knew it was a bad life for a girl like mine. It pampers vanity, and vanity is the Devil's help with such; so I said No, kindly at first, sharp and stern when she kept on teasing. That roused her spirit. 'I will go!' she said, one day. 'Not while you are my wife,' I answered back; and neither said any more, but she gave me a look I didn't think she could, and I resolved to take her away from temptation before worse came of it.

"I didn't tell her my plan; but I resigned my place, spent a week or more finding and fixing a little home for her out in the wholesome country, where she'd be safe from theatres and disreputable friends, and maybe learn to love me better when she saw how much she was to me. It was coming summer, and I made things look as home-like and as pretty as I could. She liked flowers, and I fixed a garden for her; she was fond of pets, and I got her a bird, a kitten, and a dog to play with her; she fancied gay colors and tasty little matters, so I filled her rooms with all the handsome things I could afford, and when it was done, I was as pleased as any boy, thinking what happy times we'd have together and how pleased she'd be. Boys, when I went to tell her and to take her to her little home, she was gone."

"Who with?"

"With those cursed friends of her; a party of them left the city just then; she was wild to go; she had money now, and all her good looks back again. They teased and tempted her; I wasn't there to keep her, and she went, leaving a line behind to tell me that she loved the old life more than the new; that my house was a prison, and she hoped I'd let her go in peace. That almost killed me; but I managed to bear it, for I knew most of the fault was mine; but it was awful bitter to think I hadn't saved her, after all."

"Oh, Thorn! what did you do?"

"Went straight after her; found her dancing in Philadelphia, with paint on her cheeks, trinkets on her neck and arms, looking prettier than ever; but the innocent eyes were gone, and I couldn’t see my little girl in the bold, handsome woman twirling there before the footlights. She saw me, looked scared at first, then smiled, and danced on with her eyes upon me, as if she said, —

“‘See! I’m happy now; go away and let me be.’

“I couldn’t stand that, and got out somehow. People thought me mad, or drunk; I didn’t care, I only wanted to see her once in quiet and try to get her home. I couldn’t do it then nor afterwards by fair means, and I wouldn’t try force. I wrote to her, promised to forgive her, begged her to come back, or let me keep her honestly somewhere away from me. But she never answered, never came, and I have never tried again.”

“She wasn’t worthy of you, Thorn; you jest forgit her.”

“I wish I could! I wish I could!” In his voice quivered an almost passionate regret, and a great sob heaved his chest, as he turned his face away to hide the love and longing, still so tender and so strong.

“Don’t say that, Dick; such fidelity should make us charitable for its own sake. There is always time for penitence, always certainty of pardon. Take heart, Thorn, you may not wait in vain, and she may yet return to you.”

“I know she will! I’ve dreamed of it, I’ve prayed for it; every battle I come out of safe makes me surer that I was kept for that, and when I’ve borne enough to atone for my part of the fault, I’ll be repaid for all my patience, all my pain, by finding her again. She knows how well I love her still, and if there comes a time when she is sick and poor and all alone again, then she’ll remember her old John, then she’ll come home and let me take her in.”

Hope shone in Thorn’s melancholy eyes, and long-suffering, all-forgiving love beautified the rough, brown face, as he folded his arms and bent his gray head on his breast, as if the wanderer were already come.

The emotion which Dick scorned to show on his own account was freely manifested for another, as he sniffed audibly, and, boy-like, drew his sleeve across his eyes. But Phil, with the delicate perception of a finer nature, felt that the truest kindness he could show his friend was to distract his thoughts from himself, to spare him any comments, and lessen the embarrassment which would surely follow such unwonted confidence.

“Now I’ll relieve Flint, and he will give you a laugh. Come on, Hiram, and tell us about your Beulah.”

The gentleman addressed had performed his duty by sitting on a fence and “righting up” his pockets, to beguile the tedium of his exile. Before his multitudinous possessions could be restored to their native sphere, Thorn was himself again, and on his feet.

“Stay where you are, Phil; I like to tramp, it seems like old times, and I know you’re tired. Just forget all this I’ve been saying, and go on as before. Thank you, boys! thank you,” and with a grasp of the two hands extended to him, he strode away along the path already worn by his own restless feet.

“It’s done him good, and I’m glad of that; but I’d like to see the little baggage that bewitched the poor old boy, wouldn’t you, Phil?”

“Hush! here’s Flint.”

“What’s up naow? want me tew address the meetin’, hey? I’m willin’, only the laugh’s ruther ag’inst me, ef I tell that story; expect you’ll like it all the better fer that.” Flint coiled up his long limbs, put his hands in his pockets, chewed meditatively for a moment, and then began, with his slowest drawl: —

“Waal, sir, it’s pretty nigh ten year ago, I was damster daown tew Oldtaown, clos’t to Banggore. My folks lived tew Bethel; there was only the old man, and Aunt Siloam, keepin’ house fer him, seein’ as I was the only chick he hed. I hedn’t heared from ‘em fer a long spell, when there come a letter sayin’ the old man was breakin’ up. He’d said it every spring fer a number er years, and I didn’t mind it no more’n the breakin’ up er the river; not so much, jest then; fer the gret spring drive was comin’ on, and my hands was tew full to quit work all tew oncet. I sent word I’d be ‘long ‘fore a gret while, and byme-by I went. I ought tew hev gone at fust; but they’d sung aout ‘Wolf!’ so often I warn’t scared; an’ sure ‘nuff the wolf did come at last. Father hed been dead and berried a week when I got there, and aunt was so mad she wouldn’t write, nor scurcely speak tew me for a consider’ble spell. I didn’t blame her a mite, and felt jest the wust kind; so I give in every way, and fetched her raound. Yeou see I bed a cousin who’d kind er took my place tew hum while I was off, an’ the old man hed left him a good slice er his money, an’ me the farm, hopin’ to keep me there. He’d never liked the lumberin’ bizness, an’ hankered arfter me a sight, I faound. Waal, seem’ haow ‘twas, I tried tew please him, late as it was; but ef there was ennything I did spleen ag’inst it was farmin’, ‘specially arfter the smart times I’d ben hevin’, up Oldtaown way. Yeou don’t know nothin’ abaout it; but ef yeou want tew see high dewin’s, jest hitch onto a timber-drive an’ go it daown along them lakes and rivers, say from Kaumchenungamooth tew Punnobscot Bay. Guess yeou’d see a thing or tew, an’ find livin’ on a log come as handy as ef you was born a turtle.

“Waal, I stood it one summer; but it was the longest kind of a job. Come fall I turned contry, darned the farm, and vaowed I’d go back tew loggin’. Aunt hed got fond er me by that time, and felt dreadful bad abaout my leavin’ on her. Cousin Siah, as we called Josiah, didn’t cotton tew the old woman, though he did tew her cash; but we hitched along fust-rate. She was ‘tached tew the place, hated tew hev it let or sold, thought I’d go to everlastin’ rewin ef I took tew lumberin’ ag’in, an’ hevin’ a tidy little sum er money all her own, she took a notion tew buy me off. ‘Hiram,’ sez she, ‘ef yeou’ll stay to hum, merry some smart girl, an’ kerry on the farm, I’ll leave yeou the hull er my fortin. Ef yeou don’t, I’ll leave every cent on’t tew Siah, though he ain’t done as waal by me as yeou hev. Come,’ sez she, ‘I’m breakin’ up like brother; I shan’t wurry any one a gret while, and ‘fore spring I dessay you’ll hev cause tew rejice that yeou done as Aunt Si counselled yeou.’

“Now, that idee kinder took me, seem’ I hedn’t no overpaourin’ love fer cousin; but I brewdid over it a spell ‘fore I ‘greed. Fin’lly, I said I’d dew it, as it warn’t a hard nor a bad trade; and begun to look raound fer Mis Flint, Jr. Aunt was dreadf’l pleased; but ‘mazin’ pertickler as tew who was goin’ tew stan’ in her shoes, when she was fetched up ag’inst the etarnal boom. There was a sight er likely womenfolks raound taown; but aunt she set her foot daown that Mis Flint must be smart, pious, an’ good-natered; harnsome she didn’t say nothin’ abaout, bein’ the humliest woman in the State er Maine. I hed my own calk’lations on that p’int, an’ went sparkin’ two or three er the pootiest gals, all that winter. I warn’t in no hurry, fer merryin’ is an awful resky bizness; an’ I wan’t goan to be took in by nobuddy. Some haouw I couldn’t make up my mind which I’d hev, and kept dodgin’, all ready to slew raound, an’ hitch on tew ary one that seemed likeliest. ‘Long in March, aunt, she ketched cold, took tew her bed, got wuss, an’ told me tew hurry up, fer nary cent should I hev, ef I warn’t safely merried ‘fore she stepped out. I thought that was ruther craoudin’ a feller; but I see she was goan sure, an’ I’d got inter a way er considerin’ the cash mine, so that it come hard to hear abaout givin’ on ‘t up. Off I went that evenin’ an’ asked Almiry Nash ef she’d hev me. No, she wouldn’t; I’d shilly-shallyed so long, she’d got tired er waitin’ and took tew keepin’ company with a doctor daown ter Banggore, where she’d ben visitin’ a spell. I didn’t find that as hard a nub to swaller, as I’d a thought I would, though Almiry was the richest, pootiest, and good-naterest of the lot. Aunt larfed waal, an’ told me tew try ag’in; so a couple er nights arfter, I spruced up, an’ went over to Car’line Miles’s; she was as smart as old cheese, an’ waal off in tew the barg’in. I was just as sure she’d hev me, as I be that I’m gittin’ the rewmatiz a settin’ in this ma’sh. But that minx, Almiry, hed ben and let on abaout her own sarsy way er servin’ on me, an’ Car’line jest up an’ said she warn’t goan to hev annybuddy’s leavin’s; so daown I come ag’in.

“Things was gettin’ desper’t by that time; fer aunt was failin’ rapid, an’ the story hed leaked aout some way, so the hull taown was gigglin’ over it. I thought I’d better quit them parts; but aunt she showed me her will all done complete, ‘sceptin the fust name er the legatee. ‘There,’ sez she, ‘it all depends on yeou, whether that place is took by Hiram or Josiah. It’s easy done, an’ so it’s goan tew stan till the last minit.’ That riled me consid’able, an’ I streaked off tew May Jane Simlin’s. She wan’t very waal off, nor extra harnsome, but she was pious the worst kind, an’ dreadf’l clever to them she fancied. But I was daown on my luck ag’in; fer at the fust word I spoke of merryin’, she showed me the door, an’ give me to understan’ that she couldn’t think er hevin’ a man that warn’t a church-member, that hadn’t experienced religion, or even ben struck with conviction, an’ all the rest on’t. Ef anny one hed a wanted tew hev seen a walkin’ hornet’s nest, they could hev done it cheap that night, as I went hum. I jest bounced intew the kitchen, chucked my hat intew one corner, my coat intew ‘nother, kicked the cat, cussed the fire, drawed up a chair, and set scaoulin’ like sixty, bein’ tew mad fer talkin’. The young woman that was nussin’ aunt, — Bewlah Blish, by name, — was a cooking grewel on the coals, and ‘peared tew understan’ the mess I was in; but she didn’t say nothin’, only blowed up the fire, fetched me a mug er cider, an’ went raound so kinder quiet, and sympathizing that I found the wrinkles in my temper gettin’ smoothed aout ‘mazin’ quick; an’ fore long I made a clean breast er the hull thing. Bewlah larfed, but I didn’t mind her doin’ on’t, for she sez, sez she, real sort o’ cunnin’, —

“‘Poor Hiram! they didn’t use yeou waal. Yeou ought to hev tried some er the poor an’ humly girls; they’d a been glad an’ grateful fer such a sweetheart as yeou be.’

“I was good-natered ag’in by that time, an’ I sez, larfin’ along with her, ‘Waal, I’ve got three mittens, but I guess I might’s waal hev ‘nother, and that will make two pair complete. Say, Bewlah, will yeou hev me?’

“‘Yes, I will.’ sez she.

“‘Reelly?’ sez I.

“‘Solemn trew,’ sez she.

“Ef she’d up an’ slapped me in the face, I shouldn’t hev ben more throwed aback, fer I never mistrusted she cared two chips for me. I jest set an’ gawped; fer she was ‘solemn trew,’ I see that with half an eye, an’ it kinder took my breath away. Bewlah drawed the grewel off the fire, wiped her hands, an’ stood lookin’ at me a minnet, then she sez, slow an’ quiet, but tremblin’ a little, as women hev a way er doin’, when they’ve consid’able steam aboard, —

“‘Hiram, other folks think lumberin’ has spilt yeou; *I* don’t; they call you rough an’ rewd; *I* know you’ve got a real kind heart fer them as knows haow tew find it. Them girls give yeou up so easy, ‘cause they never loved yeou, an’ yeou give them up ‘cause you only thought abaout their looks an’ money. I’m humly, an’ I’m poor; but I’ve loved yeou ever sence we went a-nuttin’ years ago, an’ yeou shook daown fer me, kerried my bag, and kissed me tew the gate, when all the others shunned me, ‘cause my father drank an’ I was shabby dressed, ugly, an’ shy. Yeou asked me in sport, I answered in airnest; but I don’t expect nothin’ unless yeou mean as I mean. Like me, Hiram, or leave me, it won’t make no odds in my lovin’ of yeou, nor helpin’ of yeou, ef I kin.’

“‘Tain’t easy tew say haouw I felt, while she was goin’ on that way, but my idees was tumblin’ raound inside er me, as ef half a dozen dams was broke loose all tew oncet. One think was ruther stiddier ‘n the rest, an’ that was that I liked Bewlah more ‘n I knew. I begun tew see what kep’ me loafin’ tew hum so much, sence aunt was took daown; why I wan’t in no hurry tew git them other gals, an’ haow I come tew pocket my mittens so easy arfter the fust rile was over. Bewlah *was* humly, poor in flesh, dreadful freckled, hed red hair, black eyes, an’ a gret mold side of her nose. But I’d got wonted tew her; she knowed my ways, was a fust rate housekeeper, real good-tempered, and pious without flingin’ on’t in yer face. She was a lonely creeter, — her folks bein’ all dead but one sister, who didn’t use her waal, an’ somehow I kinder yearned over her, as they say in Scripter. For all I set an’ gawped, I was coming raound fast, though I felt as I used tew, when I was goin’ to shoot the rapids, kinder breathless an’ oncertin, whether I’d come aout right side up or not. Queer, warn’t it?”

“Love, Flint; that was a sure symptom of it.”

“Waal, guess ‘twas; anyway I jumped up all of a sudden, ketched Bewlah raound the neck, give her a hearty kiss, and sung aout, ‘I’ll dew it sure’s my name’s Hi Flint!’ The words was scarcely out of my maouth, ‘fore daown come Dr. Parr. He’ d ben up tew see aunt, an’ said she wouldn’t last the night threw, prob’ly. That give me a scare er the wust kind; an’ when I told doctor haow things was, he sez, kinder jokin’, —

“‘Better git merried right away, then. Parson Dill is tew come an’ see the old lady, an’ he’ll dew both jobs tew oncet.’

“‘Will yeou, Bewlah?’ sez I.

“‘Yes, Hiram, to ‘blige yeou,’ sez she.

“With that, I put it fer the license; got it, an’ was back in less ‘n half an haour, most tuckered aout with the flurry of the hull concern. Quick as I’d been, Bewlah hed faound time tew whip on her best gaoun, fix up her hair, and put a couple er white chrissanthymums intew her hand’chif pin. Fer the fust time in her life, she looked harnsome, — leastways *I* thought so, — with a pretty color in her cheeks, somethin’ brighter’n a larf shinin’ in her eyes, and her lips smilin’ an’ tremblin’, as she come to me an’ whispered so’s’t none er the rest could hear, —

“‘Hiram, don’t yeou dew it, ef yeou’d ruther not. I’ve stood it a gret while alone, an’ I guess I can ag’in.’

“Never yeou mind what I said or done abaout that; but we was merried ten minutes arfter, ‘fore the kitchen fire, with Dr. Parr an’ aour hired man, fer witnesses; an’ then we all went up tew aunt. She was goan fast, but she understood what I told her, hed strength tew fill up the hole in the will, an’ to say, a-kissin’ Bewlah, ‘Yeou’ll be a good wife, an’ naow yeou ain’t a poor one.’

“I couldn’t help givin’ a peek tew the will, and there I see not Hiram Flint nor Josiah Flint, but Bewlah Flint, wrote every which way, but as plain as the nose on yer face. ‘It won’t make no odds, dear,’ whispered my wife, peekin’ over my shoulder. ‘Guess it won’t!’ sez I, aout laoud; ‘I’m glad on’t, and it ain’t a cent more’n yeou derserve.’

“That pleased aunt. ‘Riz me, Hiram,’ sez she; an’ when I’d got her easy, she put her old arms raound my neck, an’ tried to say, ‘God bless you, dear — ,’ but died a doin’ of it; an’ I ain’t ashamed tew say I boohooed real hearty, when I laid her daown, fer she was dreadf’l good tew me, an’ I don’t forgit her in a hurry.”

“How’s Bewlah?” asked Dick, after the little tribute of respect all paid to Aunt Siloam’s memory, by a momentary silence.

“Fust-rate! that harum-scarum venter er mine was the best I ever made. She’s done waal by me, hes Bewlah; ben a grand good housekeeper, kin kerry on the farm better ‘n me, any time, an’ is as dutif’l an’ lovin’ a wife as, — waal, as annything that *is* extra dutif’l and lovin’.”

“Got any boys to brag of?”

“We don’t think much o’ boys daown aour way; they’re ‘mazin’ resky stock to fetch up, — alluz breakin’ baounds, gittin’ intew the paound, and wurryin’ your life aout somehaow ‘nother. Gals naow doos waal; I’ve got six o’ the likeliest the is goin’, every one on ‘em is the very moral of Bewlah, — red hair, black eyes, quiet ways, an’ a mold ‘side the nose. Baby’s ain’t growed yet; but I expect tew see it in a consid’able state o’ forrardness, when I git hum, an’ wouldn’t miss it fer the world.”

The droll expression of Flint’s face, and the satisfied twang of his last words, were irresistible. Dick and Phil went off into a shout of laughter; and even Thorn’s grave lips relapsed into a smile at the vision of six little Flints with their six little moles. As if the act were an established ceremony, the “paternal head” produced his pocket-book, selected a worn black-and-white paper, which he spread in his broad palm, and displayed with the air of a connoisseur.

“There, thet’s Bewlah! we call it a cuttin’; but the proper name’s a silly-hoot, I b’leeve. I’ve got a harnsome big degarrytype tew hum, but the heft on’t makes it bad tew kerry raound, so I took this. I don’t tote it abaout inside my shirt, as some dew, — it ain’t my way; but I keep it in my wallet long with my other valleu’bles, and guess I set as much store by it as ef it was all painted up, and done off to kill.”

The “silly-hoot” was examined with interest, and carefully stowed away again in the old brown wallet, which was settled in its place with a satisfied slap; then Flint said briskly, —

“Naouw, Phil, yeou close this interestin’ and instructive meeting; and be spry, fer time’s most up.”

“I haven’t much to tell, but must begin with a confession which I have often longed but never dared to make before, because I am a coward.”

“Sho! who’s goan to b’leeve that o’ a man who fit like a wild-cat, wuz offered permotion on the field, and reported tew headquarters arfter his fust scrimmage. Try ag’in, Phil.”

“Physical courage is as plentiful as brass buttons, nowadays, but moral courage is a rarer virtue; and I’m lacking in it, as I’ll prove. You think me a Virginian; I’m an Alabamian by birth, and was a Rebel three months ago.”

This confession startled his hearers, as he knew it would, for he had kept his secret well. Thorn laid his hand involuntarily upon his rifle, Dick drew off a little, and Flint illustrated one of his own expressions, for he “gawped.” Phil laughed that musical laugh of his, and looked up at them with his dark face waking into sudden life, as he went on: —

“There’s no treason in the camp, for I’m as fierce a Federalist as any of you now, and you may thank a woman for it. When Lee made his raid into Pennsylvania, I was a lieutenant in the — well, never mind what regiment, it hasn’t signalized itself since, and I’d rather not hit my old neighbors when they are down. In one of the skirmishes during our retreat, I got a wound and was left for dead. A kind old Quaker found and took me home; but though I was too weak to talk, I had my senses by that time, and knew what went on about me. Everything was in confusion, even in that well-ordered place: no surgeon could be got at first, and a flock of frightened women thee’d and thou’d one another over me, but hadn’t wit enough to see that I was bleeding to death. Among the faces that danced before my dizzy eyes was one that seemed familiar, probably because no cap surrounded it. I was glad to have it bending over me, to hear a steady voice say, ‘Give me a bandage, quick!’ and when none was instantly forthcoming to me, the young lady stripped up a little white apron she wore, and stanched the wound in my shoulder. I was not as badly hurt as I supposed, but so worn-out, and faint from loss of blood, they believed me to be dying, and so did I, when the old man took off his hat and said, —

“Friend, if thee has anything to say, thee had better say it, for thee probably has not long to live.’

“I thought of my little sister, far away in Alabama, fancied she came to me, and muttered, ‘Amy, kiss me good-by.’ The women sobbed at that; but the girl bent her sweet compassionate face to mine, and kissed me on the forehead. That was my wife.”

“So you seceded from Secession right away, to pay for that lip-service, hey?”

“No, Thorn, not right away, — to my shame be it spoken. I’ll tell you how it came about. Margaret was not old Bent’s daughter, but a Massachusetts girl on a visit, and a long one it proved, for she couldn’t go till things were quieter. While she waited, she helped take care of me; for the good souls petted me like a baby when they found that a Rebel could be a gentleman. I held my tongue, and behaved my best to prove my gratitude, you know. Of course, I loved Margaret very soon. How could I help it? She was the sweetest woman I had ever seen, tender, frank, and spirited; all I had ever dreamed of and longed for. I did not speak of this, nor hope for a return, because I knew she was a hearty Unionist, and thought she only tended me from pity. But suddenly she decided to go home, and when I ventured to wish she would stay longer, she would not listen, and said, ‘I must not stay; I should have gone before.’

“The words were nothing, but as she uttered them the color came up beautifully over all her face, and her eyes filled as they looked away from mine. Then I knew that she loved me, and my secret broke out against my will. Margaret was forced to listen, for I would not let her go, but she seemed to harden herself against me, growing colder, stiller, statelier, as I went on, and when I said in my desperate way, —

“‘You should love me, for we are bid to love our enemies,’ she flashed an indignant look at me and said, —

“‘I will not love what I cannot respect! Come to me a loyal man, and see what answer I shall give you.’

“Then she went away. It was the wisest thing she could have done, for absence did more to change me than an ocean of tears, a year of exhortations. Lying there, I missed her every hour of the day, recalled every gentle act, kind word, and fair example she had given me. I contrasted my own belief with hers, and found a new significance in the words honesty and honor, and, remembering her fidelity to principle, was ashamed of my own treason to God and to herself. Education, prejudice, and interest, are difficult things to overcome, and that was the hottest fight I ever passed through, for as I tell you, I was a coward. But love and loyalty won the day, and, asking no quarter, the Rebel surrendered.”

“Phil Beaufort, you’re a brick!” cried Dick, with a sounding slap on his comrade’s shoulder.

“A brand snatched from the burnin’. Hallelujah!” chanted Flint, seesawing with excitement.

“Then you went to find your wife? How? Where?” asked Thorn, forgetting vigilance in interest.

“Friend Bent hated war so heartily that he would have nothing to do with paroles, exchanges, or any martial process whatever, but bade me go when and where I liked, remembering to do by others as I had been done by. Before I was well enough to go, however, I managed, by means of Copperhead influence and returned prisoners, to send a letter to my father and receive an answer. You can imagine what both contained; and so I found myself penniless, but not poor, an outcast, but not alone. Old Bent treated me like a prodigal son, and put money in my purse; his pretty daughters loved me for Margaret’s sake, and gave me a patriotic salute all round when I left them, the humblest, happiest man in Pennsylvania. Margaret once said to me that this was the time for deeds, not words; that no man should stand idle, but serve the good cause with head, heart, and hand, no matter in what rank; for in her eyes a private fighting for liberty was nobler than a dozen generals defending slavery. I remembered that, and, not having influential friends to get me a commission, enlisted in one of her own Massachusetts regiments, knowing that no act of mine would prove my sincerity like that. You should have seen her face when I walked in upon her, as she sat alone, busied with the army work, as I’d so often seen her sitting by my bed; it showed me all she had been suffering in silence, all I should have lost had I chosen darkness instead of light. She hoped and feared so much she could not speak, neither could I, but dropped my cloak, and showed her that, through love of her, I had become a soldier of the Union. How I love the coarse blue uniform! for when she saw it, she came to me without a word and kept her promise in a month.”

“Thunder! what a harnsome woman!” exclaimed Flint, as Phil, opening the golden case that held his talisman, showed them the beautiful, beloved face of which he spoke.

“Yes! and a right noble woman too. I don’t deserve her, but I will. We parted on our wedding-day, for orders to be *off* came suddenly, and she would not let me go until I had given her my name to keep. We were married in the morning, and at noon I had to go. Other women wept as we marched through the city, but my brave Margaret kept her tears till we were gone, smiling and waving her hand to me, — the hand that wore the wedding-ring, — till I was out of sight. That image of her is before me day and night, and day and night her last words are ringing in my ears, —

“‘I give you freely, do your best. Better a true man’s widow than a traitor’s wife.’

“Boys, I’ve only stood on the right side for a month; I’ve only fought one battle, earned one honor; but I believe these poor achievements are an earnest of the long atonement I desire to make for five-and-twenty years of blind transgression. You say I fight well. Have I not cause to dare much? — for in owning many slaves, I too became a slave; in helping to make many freemen, I liberate myself. You wonder why I refused promotion. Have I any right to it yet? Are there not men who never sinned as I have done, and beside whose sacrifices mine look pitifully small? You tell me I have no ambition. I have the highest, for I desire to become God's noblest work, — an honest man, — living, to make Margaret happy in a love that every hour grows worthier of her own, — dying to make death proud to take me."

Phil had risen while he spoke, as if the enthusiasm of his mood lifted him into the truer manhood he aspired to attain. Straight and strong he stood up in the moonlight, his voice deepened by unwonted energy, his eye clear and steadfast, his whole face ennobled by the regenerating power of this late loyalty to country, wife, and self, and bright against the dark blue of his jacket shone the pictured face, the only medal he was proud to wear.

Ah, brave, brief moment, cancelling years of wrong! Ah, fair and fatal decoration, serving as a mark for a hidden foe! The sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness of the night, and with those hopeful words upon his lips, the young man sealed his purpose with his life.

THE BARON’S GLOVES;

OR,
AMY’S ROMANCE

“All is fair in love and war.”

I
HOW THEY WERE FOUND

“What a long sigh! Are you tired, Amy?”

“Yes, and disappointed as well. I never would have undertaken this journey if I had not thought it would be full of novelty, romance, and charming adventures.”

“Well, we have had several adventures.”

“Bah! losing one’s hat in the Rhine, getting left at a dirty little inn, and having our pockets picked, are not what I call adventures. I wish there were brigands in Germany — it needs something of that sort to enliven its stupidity.”

“How can you call Germany stupid when you have a scene like this before you?” said Helen, with a sigh of pleasure, as she looked from the balcony which overhangs the Rhine at the hotel of the “Three Kings” at Coblentz. Ehrenbreitstein towered opposite, the broad river glittered below, and a midsummer moon lent its enchantment to the landscape.

As she spoke, her companion half rose from the low chair where she lounged, and showed the pretty, piquant face of a young girl. She seemed in a half melancholy, half petulant mood; and traces of recent illness were visible in the languor of her movements and the pallor of her cheeks.

“Yes, it is lovely; but I want adventures and romance of some sort to make it quite perfect. I don’t care what, if something would only happen.”

“My dear, you are out of spirits and weary now, to-morrow you’ll be yourself again. Do not be ungrateful to uncle or unjust to yourself. Something pleasant will happen, I’ve no doubt. In fact, something *has* happened that you may make a little romance out of, perhaps, for lack of a more thrilling adventure.”

“What do you mean?” and Amy’s listless face brightened.

“Speak low; there are balconies all about us, and we may be overheard,” said Helen, drawing nearer after an upward glance.

“What is the beginning of a romance?” whispered Amy, eagerly.

“A pair of gloves. Just now, as I stood here, and you lay with your eyes shut, these dropped from the balcony overhead. Now amuse yourself by weaving a romance out of them and their owner."

Amy seized them, and stepping inside the window, examined them by the candle.

"A gentleman's gloves, scented with violets! Here's a little hole fretted by a ring on the third finger. Bless me! here are the initials, 'S.P.,' stamped on the inside, with a coat of arms below. What a fop to get up his gloves in this style! They are exquisite, though. Such a delicate color, so little soiled, and so prettily ornamented! Handsome hands wore these. I'd like to see the man."

Helen laughed at the girl's interest, and was satisfied if any trifle amused her *ennui*.

"I will send them back by the *kellner*, and in that way we may discover their owner," she said.

But Amy arrested her on the way to the door.

"I've a better plan; these waiters are so stupid you'll get nothing out of them. Here's the hotel book sent up for our names; let us look among the day's arrivals and see who 'S.P.' is. He came to-day, I'm sure, for the man said the rooms above were just taken, so we could not have them."

Opening the big book, Amy was soon intently poring over the long list of names, written in many hands and many languages.

"I've got it! Here he is — oh, Nell, he's a baron! Isn't that charming? 'Sigismund von Palsdorf, Dresden.' We *must* see him, for I know he's handsome, if he wears such distracting gloves."

"You'd better take them up yourself, then."

"You know I can't do that; but I shall ask the man a few questions, just to get an idea what sort of person the baron is. Then I shall change my mind and go down to dinner; shall look well about me, and if the baron is agreeable I shall make uncle return the gloves. He will thank us, and I can say I've known a real baron. That will be so nice when we go home. Now, don't be duennaish and say I'm silly, but let me do as I like, and come and dress."

Helen submitted, and when the gong pealed through the house, Major Erskine marched into the great *salle à manger*, with a comely niece on each arm. The long tables were crowded, and they had to run the gauntlet of many eyes as they made their way to the head of the upper table. Before she touched her soup, Amy glanced down the line of faces opposite, and finding none that answered the slight description elicited from the waiter, she leaned a little forward to examine those on her own side of the table. Some way down sat several gentlemen, and as she bent to observe them, one did the same, and she received an admiring glance from a pair of fine black eyes. Somewhat abashed, she busied herself with her soup: but the fancy had taken possession of her, and presently she whispered to Helen, —

“Do you see any signs of the baron?”

“On my left; look at the hands.”

Amy looked and saw a white, shapely hand with an antique ring on the third finger. Its owner’s face was averted, but as he conversed with animation, the hand was in full play, now emphasizing an opinion, now lifting a glass, or more frequently pulling at a blond beard which adorned the face of the unknown. Amy shook her head decidedly.

“I hate light men, and don’t think that is the baron, for the gloves are a size too small for those hands. Lean back and look some four or five seats lower down on the right. See what sort of person the dark man with the fine eyes is.”

Helen obeyed, but almost instantly bent to her plate again, smiling in spite of herself.

“That is an Englishman; he stares rudely, says ‘By Jove!’ and wears no jewelry or beard.”

“Now, I’m disappointed. Well, keep on the watch, and tell me if you make any discoveries, for I *will* find the baron.”

Being hungry, Amy devoted herself to her dinner, till dessert was on the table. She was languidly eating grapes, while Helen talked with the major, when the word “baron” caught her ear. The speakers sat at a table behind her, so that she could not see them without turning quite round, which was impossible; but she listened eagerly to the following scrap of chat: —

“Is the baron going on to-morrow?” asked a gay voice in French.

“Yes, he is bound for Baden-Baden. The season is at its height, and he must make his game while the ball is rolling, or it is all up with the open-handed Sigismund,” answered a rough voice.

“Won’t his father pardon the last escapade?” asked a third, with a laugh.

“No, and he is right. The duel was a bad affair, for the man almost died, and the baron barely managed to get out of the scrape through court influence. When is the wedding to be?”

“Never, Palsdorf says. There is everything but love in the bargain, and he swears he’ll not agree to it. I like that.”

“There is much nobleness in him, spite of his vagaries. He will sow his wild oats and make a grand man in time. By the by, if we are going to the fortress, we must be off. Give Sigismund the word; he is dining at the other table with Power,” said the gay voice.

“Take a look at the pretty English girl as you go by; it will do your eyes good, after the fat Frauleins we have seen of late,” added the rough one.

Three gentlemen rose, and as they passed Amy stole a glance at them; but seeing several pairs of eyes fixed on herself, she turned away blushing, with the not unpleasant consciousness that “the pretty English girl” was herself. Longing to see which Sigismund was, she ventured to look after the young men, who paused behind the man with the blond beard, and also touched the dark-eyed gentleman on the shoulder. All five went down the hall and stood talking near the door.

“Uncle, I wish to go,” said Amy, whose will was law to the amiable major. Up he rose, and Amy added, as she took his arm, “I’m seized with a longing to go to Baden-Baden and see a little gambling. You are not a wild young man, so you can be trusted there.”

“I hope so. Now you are a sensible little woman, and we’ll do our best to have a gay time. Wait an instant till I get my hat.”

While the major searched for the missing article the girls went on, and coming to the door, Amy tried to open it. The unwieldy foreign lock resisted her efforts, and she was just giving it an impatient little shake, when a voice said behind her, —

“Permit me, mademoiselle;” at the same moment a handsome hand turned the latch, the flash of a diamond shone before her, and the door opened.

“*Merci, monsieur*,” she murmured, turning as she went out; but Helen was close behind her, and no one else to be seen except the massive major in the rear.

“Did you see the baron?” she whispered eagerly, as they went up-stairs.

“No; where was he?”

“He opened the door for me. I knew him by his hand and ring. He was close to you.”

“I did not observe him, being busy gathering up my dress. I thought the person was a waiter, and never looked at him,” said Helen, with provoking indifference.

“How unfortunate! Uncle, you are going to see the fortress; we don’t care for it; but I want you to take these gloves and inquire for Baron Sigismund Palsdorf. He will be there with a party of gentlemen. You can easily manage it, men are so free and easy. Mind what he is like, and come home in time to tell me all about it.”

Away went the major, and the cousins sat on the balcony enjoying the lovely night, admiring the picturesque scene, and indulging in the flights of fancy all girls love, for Helen, in spite of her three-and-twenty years, was as romantic as Amy at eighteen. It was past eleven when the major came, and the only greeting he received was the breathless question, —

“Did you find him?”

“I found something much better than any baron, a courier. I’ve wanted one ever since we started; for two young ladies and their baggage are more than one man can do his duty by, Karl Hoffman had such excellent testimonials from persons I know, that I did not hesitate to engage him, and he comes to-morrow; so henceforth I've nothing to do but devote myself to you."

"How very provoking! Did you bring the gloves back?" asked Amy, still absorbed in the baron.

The major tossed them to her, and indulged in a hearty laugh at her girlish regrets; then bade them good-night, and went away to give orders for an early start next morning.

Tired of talking, the girls lay down in the two little white beds always found in German hotels, and Amy was soon continuing in sleep the romance she had begun awake. She dreamed that the baron proved to be the owner of the fine eyes; that he wooed and won her, and they were floating down the river to the chime of wedding-bells.

At this rapturous climax she woke to find the air full of music, and to see Helen standing tall and white in the moonlight that streamed in at the open window.

"Hush, hide behind the curtains and listen; it's a serenade," whispered Helen, as Amy stole to her side.

Shrouded in the drapery, they leaned and listened till the song ended, then Amy peeped; a dark group stood below; all were bareheaded, and now seemed whispering together. Presently a single voice rose, singing an exquisite little French canzonet, the refrain of which was a passionate repetition of the word "*Amie*." She thought she recognized the voice, and the sound of her own name uttered in such ardent tones made her heart beat and her color rise, for it seemed to signify that the serenade was for them. As the last melodious murmur ceased, there came a stifled laugh from below, and something fell into the balcony. Neither dared stir till the sound of departing feet reassured them; then creeping forward Amy drew in a lovely bouquet of myrtle, roses, and great German forget-me-nots, tied with a white ribbon and addressed in a dashing hand to *La belle Helène*.

"Upon my life, the romance has begun in earnest," laughed Helen, as she examined the flowers. "You are serenaded by some unknown nightingale, and I have flowers tossed up to me in the charming old style. Of course it is the baron, Amy."

"I hope so; but whoever it is, they are regular troubadours, and I'm delighted. I know the gloves will bring us fun of some kind. Do you take one and I'll take the other, and see who will find the baron first. Isn't it odd that they knew our names?"

"Amy, the writing on this card is very like that in the big book. I may be bewitched by this mid-summer moonlight, but it really is very like it. Come and see.”

The two charming heads bent over the card, looking all the more charming for the dishevelled curls and braids that hung about them as the girls laughed and whispered together in the softly brilliant light that filled the room.

“You are right; it is the same. The men who stared so at dinner are gay students perhaps, and ready for any prank. Don’t tell uncle, but let us see what will come of it. I begin to enjoy myself heartily now — don’t you?” said Amy, laying her glove carefully away.

“I enjoyed myself before, but I think ‘*La belle Helène*’ gives an added relish to life, *Amie*,” laughed Nell, putting her flowers in water; and then both went back to their pillows, to dream delightfully till morning.

II

KARL, THE COURIER

“Three days, at least, before we reach Baden. How tiresome it is that uncle won’t go faster!” said Amy, as she tied on her hat next morning, wondering as she did so if the baron would take the same boat.

“As adventures have begun, I feel assured that they will continue to cheer the way; so resign yourself and be ready for anything,” replied Helen, carefully arranging her bouquet in her travelling-basket.

A tap at the door, which stood half open, made both look up. A tall, brown, gentlemanly man, in a gray suit, with a leathern bag slung over his shoulder, stood there, hat in hand, and meeting Helen’s eyes, bowed respectfully, saying in good English, but with a strong German accent, —

“Ladies, the major desired me to tell you the carriage waits.”

“Why, who — ” began Amy, staring with her blue eyes full of wonder at the stranger.

He bowed again, and said, simply, —

“Karl Hoffman, at your service, mademoiselle.”

“The courier — oh, yes! I forgot all about it. Please take these things.”

Amy began to hand him her miscellaneous collection of bags, books, shawls and cushions.

“I’d no idea couriers were such decent creatures,” whispered Amy, as they followed him along the hall.

“Don’t you remember the raptures Mrs. Mortimer used to have over their Italian courier, and her funny description of him? ‘Beautiful to behold, with a night of hair, eyes full of an infinite tenderness, and a sumptuous cheek.’“

Both girls laughed, and Amy averred that Karl’s eyes danced with merriment as he glanced over his shoulder, as the silvery peal sounded behind him.

“Hush! he understands English; we must be careful,” said Helen, and neither spoke again till they reached the carriage.

Everything was ready, and as they drove away, the major, leaning luxuriously back, exclaimed, —

“Now I begin to enjoy travelling, for I’m no longer worried by the thought of luggage, time-tables, trains, and the everlasting perplexity of thalers, kreutzers, and pfenniges. This man is a treasure; everything is done in the best manner, and his knowledge of matters is really amazing.”

“He’s a very gentlemanly-looking person,” said Amy, eying a decidedly aristocratic foot through the front window of the carriage, for Karl sat up beside the driver.

“He *is* a gentleman, my dear. Many of these couriers are well born and educated, but, being poor, prefer this business to any other, as it gives them variety, and often pleasant society. I’ve had a long talk with Hoffman, and find him an excellent and accomplished fellow. He has lost his fortune, it seems, through no fault of his own, so being fond of a roving life, turned courier for a time, and we are fortunate to have secured him.”

“But one doesn’t know how to treat him,” said Helen. “I don’t like to address him as a servant, and yet it’s not pleasant to order a gentleman about.”

“Oh, it will be easy enough as we go on together. Just call him Hoffman, and behave as if you knew nothing about his past. He begged me not to mention it, but I thought you’d like the romance of the thing. Only don’t either of you run away with him, as Ponsonby’s daughter did with her courier, who wasn’t a gentleman, by the way.”

“Not handsome enough,” said Amy. “I don’t like blue eyes and black hair. His manners are nice, but he looks like a gipsy, with his brown face and black beard: doesn’t he, Nell?”

“Not at all. Gipsies haven’t that style of face; they are thin, sharp, and cunning in feature as in nature. Hoffman has large, well-moulded features, and a mild, manly expression, which gives one confidence in him.”

“He has a keen, wicked look in his blue eyes, as you will see, Nell. I mean mischievously, not malignantly wicked. He likes fun, I’m sure, for he laughed about the ‘sumptuous cheek’ till his own were red, though he dared not show it, and was as grave as an owl when we met uncle,” said Amy, smiling at the recollection.

“We shall go by boat to Biebrich, and then by rail to Heidelberg. We shall get in late to-morrow night, but can rest a day, and then on to Baden. Here we are; now make yourselves easy, as I do, and let Karl take care of everything.”

And putting his hands in his pockets, the major strolled about the boat, while the courier made matters comfortable for the day. So easily and well did he do his duty, that both girls enjoyed watching him after he had established them on the shady side of the boat, with camp-stools for their feet, cushions to lean on, books and bags laid commodiously at hand.

As they sailed up the lovely Rhine they grew more and more enthusiastic in their admiration and curiosity, and finding the meagre description of the guide-books very unsatisfactory, Amy begged her uncle to tell her all the legends of picturesque ruin, rock and river, as they passed.

“Bless me, child, I know nothing; but here’s Hoffman, a German born, who will tell you everything, I dare say. Karl, what’s that old castle up there? The young ladies want to know about it.”

Leaning on the railing, Hoffman told the story so well that he was kept explaining and describing for an hour, and when he went away to order lunch, Amy declared it was as pleasant as reading fairy tales to listen to his dramatic histories and legends.

At lunch the major was charmed to find his favorite wines and dishes without any need of consulting dictionary or phrase-book beforehand, or losing his temper in vain attempts to make himself understood.

On reaching Biebrich, tired and hungry, at nightfall, everything was ready for them, and all went to bed praising Karl, the courier, though Amy, with unusual prudence, added, —

“He is a new broom now; let us wait a little before we judge.”

All went well next day till nightfall, when a most untoward accident occurred, and Helen’s adventures began in earnest. The three occupied a *coupé*, and being weary with long sitting, Helen got out at one of the stations where the train paused for ten minutes. A rosy sunset tempted her to the end of the platform, and there she found, what nearly all foreign railway stations possess, a charming little garden.

Amy was very tired, rather cross, and passionately fond of flowers, so when an old woman offered to pull a nosegay for “the gracious lady,” Helen gladly waited for it, hoping to please the invalid. Twice the whistle warned her, and at last she ran back, but only in time to see the train move away, with her uncle gesticulating wildly to the guard, who shook his stupid German head, and refused to see the dismayed young lady imploring him to wait for her.

Just as the train was vanishing from the station, a man leaped from a second-class carriage at the risk of his neck, and hurried back to find Helen looking pale and bewildered, as well she might, left alone and moneyless at night in a strange town.

“Mademoiselle, it is I; rest easy; we can soon go on; a train passes in two hours, and we can telegraph to Heidelberg that they may not fear for you."

"Oh, Hoffman, how kind of you to stop for me! What should I have done without you, for uncle takes care of all the money, and I have only my watch."

Helen's usual self-possession rather failed her in the flurry of the moment, and she caught Karl's arm with a feminine little gesture of confidence very pleasant to see. Leading her to the waiting-room, he ordered supper, and put her into the care of the woman of the place, while he went to make inquiries and dispatch the telegram. In half an hour he returned, finding Helen refreshed and cheerful, though a trace of anxiety was still visible in her watchful eyes.

"All goes excellently, mademoiselle. I have sent word to several posts along the road that we are coming by the night train, so that Monsieur le Major will rest tranquil till we meet. It is best that I give you some money, lest such a mishap should again occur; it is not likely so soon; nevertheless, here is both gold and silver. With this, one can make one's way everywhere. Now, if mademoiselle will permit me to advise, she will rest for an hour, as we must travel till dawn. I will keep guard without and watch for the train."

He left her, and having made herself comfortable on one of the sofas, she lay watching the tall shadow pass and repass door and window, as Karl marched up and down the platform, with the tireless tramp of a sentinel on duty. A pleasant sense of security stole over her, and with a smile at Amy's enjoyment of the adventure when it was over, Helen fell asleep.

A far-off shriek half woke her, and starting up, she turned to meet the courier coming in to wake her. Up thundered the train, every carriage apparently full of sleepy passengers, and the guard in a state of sullen wrath at some delay, the consequences of which would fall heaviest on him.

From carriage to carriage hurried Karl and his charge, to be met with everywhere by the cry, "All full," in many languages, and with every aspect of inhospitality. One carriage only showed two places; the other seats were occupied by six students, who gallantly invited the lady to enter. But Helen shrunk back, saying, —

"Is there no other place?"

"None, mademoiselle; this, or remain till morning," said Karl.

"Where will you go if I take this place?"

"Among the luggage, — anywhere; it is nothing. But we must decide at once."

"Come with me; I'm afraid to be locked in here alone," said Helen, desperately.

"Mademoiselle forgets I am her courier."

"I do not forget that you are a gentleman. Pray come in; my uncle will thank you."

"I will," and with a sudden brightening of the eyes, a grateful glance, and an air of redoubled respect, Hoffman followed her into the carriage.

They were off at once, and the thing was done before Helen had time to feel anything but the relief which the protection of his presence afforded her.

The young gentlemen stared at the veiled lady and her grim escort, joked under their breath, and looked wistfully at the suppressed cigars, but behaved with exemplary politeness till sleep overpowered them, and one after the other dropped off asleep to dream of their respective Gretchens.

Helen could not sleep, and for hours sat studying the unconscious faces before her, the dim landscape flying past the windows, or forgot herself in reveries.

Hoffman remained motionless and silent, except when she addressed him, wakeful also, and assiduous in making the long night as easy as possible.

It was past midnight, and Helen's heavy eyelids were beginning to droop, when suddenly there came an awful crash, a pang of mortal fear, then utter oblivion.

As her senses returned she found herself lying in a painful position under what had been the roof of the car; something heavy weighed down her lower limbs, and her dizzy brain rung with a wild uproar of shrieks and groans, eager voices, the crash of wood and iron, and the shrill whistle of the engine, as it rushed away for help.

Through the darkness she heard the pant as of some one struggling desperately, then a cry close by her, followed by a strong voice exclaiming, in an agony of suspense, —

"My God, will no one come!"

"Hoffman, are you there?" cried Helen, groping in the gloom, with a thrill of joy at the sound of a familiar voice.

"Thank heaven, you are safe. Lie still. I will save you. Help is coming. Have no fear!" panted the voice, with an undertone of fervent gratitude in its breathless accents.

"What has happened? Where are the rest?"

"We have been thrown down an embankment. The lads are gone for help.
God only knows what harm is done."

Karl's voice died in a stifled groan, and Helen cried out in alarm, —

"Where are you? You are hurt?"

"Not much. I keep the ruins from falling in to crush us. Be quiet, they are coming."

A shout answered the faint halloo he gave as if to guide them to the spot, and a moment after, five of the students were swarming about the wreck, intent on saving the three whose lives were still in danger.

A lamp torn from some demolished carriage was held through an opening, and Helen saw a sight that made her blood chill in her veins. Across her feet, crushed and bleeding, lay the youngest of the students, and kneeling close beside him was Hoffman, supporting by main strength a mass of timber, which otherwise would fall and crush them all. His face was ghastly pale, his eyes haggard with pain and suspense, and great drops stood upon his forehead. But as she looked, he smiled with a cheery. —

“Bear up, dear lady, we shall soon be out of danger. Now, lads, work with a will; my strength is going fast.”

They did work like heroes, and even in her pain and peril, Helen admired the skill, energy, and courage of the young men, who, an hour ago, had seemed to have no ideas above pipes and beer. Soon Hoffman was free, the poor senseless youth lifted out, and then, as tenderly as if she were a child, they raised and set her down, faint but unhurt, in a wide meadow, already strewn with sad tokens of the wreck.

Karl was taken possession of as well as herself, forced to rest a moment, drink a cordial draught from some one’s flask, and be praised, embraced, and enthusiastically blessed by the impetuous youths.

“Where is the boy who was hurt? Bring him to me. I am strong now. I want to help. I have salts in my pocket, and I can bind up his wounds,” said Helen, soon herself again.

Karl and Helen soon brought back life and sense to the boy, and never had human face looked so lovely as did Helen’s to the anxious comrades when she looked up in the moonlight with a joyful smile, and softly whispered, —

“He is alive.”

For an hour terrible confusion reigned, then the panic subsided a little, and such of the carriages as were whole were made ready to carry away as many as possible; the rest must wait till a return train could be sent for them.

A struggle of course ensued, for every one wished to go on, and fear made many selfish. The wounded, the women and children, were taken, as far as possible, and the laden train moved away, leaving many anxious watchers behind.

Helen had refused to go, and had given her place to poor Conrad, thereby overwhelming his brother and comrades with gratitude. Two went on with the wounded lad; the rest remained, and chivalrously devoted themselves to Helen as a body-guard.

The moon shone clearly, the wide field was miles from any hamlet, and a desolate silence succeeded to the late uproar, as the band of waiters roamed about, longing for help and dawn.

"Mademoiselle, you shiver; the dew falls, and it is damp here; we must have a fire;" and Karl was away to a neighboring hedge, intent on warming his delicate charge if he felled a forest to do it.

The students rushed after him, and soon returned in triumph to build a glorious fire, which drew all forlorn wanderers to its hospitable circle. A motley assemblage; but mutual danger and discomfort produced mutual sympathy and good will, and a general atmosphere of friendship pervaded the party.

"Where is the brave Hoffman?" asked Wilhelm, the blond student, who, being in the Werther period of youth, was already madly in love with Helen, and sat at her feet catching cold in the most romantic manner.

"Behold me! The little ones cry for hunger, so I ransack the ruins and bring away my spoils. Eat, Kinder, eat and be patient."

As he spoke Karl appeared with an odd collection of baskets, bags, and bottles, and with a fatherly air that won all the mothers, he gave the children whatever first appeared, making them laugh in spite of weariness and hunger by the merry speeches which accompanied his gifts.

"You too need something. Here is your own basket with the lunch I ordered you. In a sad state of confusion, but still eatable. See, it is not bad," and he deftly spread on a napkin before Helen cold chicken, sandwiches, and fruit.

His care for the little ones as well as for herself touched her and her eyes filled, as she remembered that she owed her life to him, and recalled the sight of his face in the overturned car.

Her voice trembled a little as she thanked him, and the moonlight betrayed her wet eyes. He fancied she was worn out with excitement and fatigue, and anxious to cheer her spirits, he whispered to Wilhelm and his mates, —

"Sing, then, comrades, and while away this tedious night. It is hard for all to wait so long, and the babies need a lullaby."

The young men laughed and sang as only German students can sing, making the night musical with blithe drinking songs, tender love-lays, battle-hymns, and Volkslieder sweeter than any songs across the water.

Every heart was cheered and warmed by the magic of the music, the babies fell asleep, strangers grew friendly, fear changed to courage, and the most forlorn felt the romance of that bivouac under the summer sky.

Dawn was reddening the east when a welcome whistle broke up the camp. Every one hurried to the railway, but Helen paused to gather a handful of blue forget-me-nots, saying to Hoffman, who waited with her wraps on his arm, —

"It has been a happy night, in spite of the danger and discomfort. I shall not soon forget it; and take these as a souvenir.”

He smiled, standing bare-headed in the chilly wind, for his hat was lost, his coat torn, hair dishevelled, and one hand carelessly bound up in his handkerchief. Helen saw these marks of the night’s labors and perils for the first time, and as soon as they were seated desired to see his hand.

“It is nothing, — a scratch, a mere scratch, I give you my word, mademoiselle,” he began, but Wilhelm unceremoniously removed the handkerchief, showing a torn and bleeding hand which must have been exquisitely painful.

Helen turned pale, and with a reproachful glance skilfully bound it up again, saying, as she handed a silken scarf to Wilhelm, —

“Make of that a sling, please, and put the poor hand in it. Care must be taken, or harm will come of it.”

Hoffman submitted in bashful silence, as if surprised and touched by the young lady’s interest. She saw that, and added gratefully, —

“I do not forget that you saved my life, though you seem to have done so. My uncle will thank you better than I can.”

“I already have my reward, mademoiselle,” he returned, with a respectful inclination and a look she could neither understand nor forget.

III

AMY’S ADVENTURE

The excitement and suspense of the major and Amy can be imagined when news of the accident reached them. Their gratitude and relief were intense when Helen appeared next morning, with the faithful Hoffman still at his post, though no longer able to disguise the fact that he was suffering from his wound.

When the story had been told, Karl was put under the surgeon’s care, and all remained at Heidelberg for several days to rest and recover.

On the afternoon of the last day the major and young ladies drove off to the castle for a farewell view. Helen began to sketch the great stone lion’s head above the grand terrace, the major smoked and chatted with a party of English artists whom he had met, and Amy, with a little lad for a guide, explored the old castle to her heart’s content.

The sun set, and twilight began to fall when Helen put up her pencils, and the major set off to find Amy, who had been appearing and disappearing in every nook and cranny of the half-ruined castle.

Nowhere could he find her, and no voice answered when he called. The other visitors were gone, and the place seemed deserted, except by themselves and the old man who showed the ruins.

Becoming alarmed lest the girl had fallen somewhere, or lost her way among the vaults where the famous Tun lies, the major called out old Hans with his lantern, and searched high and low.

Amy’s hat, full of flowers and ferns, was found in the Lady’s Walk, as the little terrace is called, but no other trace appeared, and Helen hurried to and fro in great distress, fearing all manner of dangers.

Meanwhile Amy, having explored every other part of the castle, went to take another look at the Tun, the dwarf, and the vaults.

Now little Anderl, her guide, had a great fear of ghosts, and legions were said to haunt the ruins after nightfall, so when Amy rambled on deeper and deeper into the gloom the boy’s courage ebbed away with every step; yet he was ashamed to own his fear, seeing that she had none.

Amy wanted to see a certain cell, where a nun was said to have pined to death because she would not listen to the Margraf’s love. The legend pleased the romantic girl, and forgetful of waning daylight, gathering damps, and Anderl’s reluctant service, she ran on, up steps and down, delighted with little arched doors, rusty chains on the walls, glimpses of sky through shattered roofs, and all manner of mysterious nooks and corners. Coming at last to a narrow cell, with a stone table, and heavy bolts on the old door, she felt sure this was poor Elfrida’s prison, and called Anderl to come on with his candle, for the boy had lighted one, for his own comfort rather than hers. Her call was unanswered, and glancing back, she saw the candle placed on the ground, but no Anderl.

“Little coward, he has run away,” she said, laughing; and having satisfied her curiosity, turned to retrace her steps, — no easy task to one ignorant of the way, for vault after vault opened on both sides, and no path was discernible. In vain she tried to recall some landmark, the gloom had deepened and nothing was clear. On she hurried, but found no opening, and really frightened, stopped at last, calling the boy in a voice that woke a hundred echoes. But Anderl had fled home, thinking the lady would find her way back, and preferring to lose his kreutzers to seeing a ghost.

Poor Amy’s bewilderment and alarm increased with every moment’s delay, and hoping to come out somewhere, she ran on till a misstep jostled the candle from her hand and extinguished it.

Left in the dark, her courage deserted her, and she screamed desperately, like a lost child, and was fast getting into a state of frantic terror, when the sound of an approaching step reassured her.

Holding her breath, she heard a quick tread drawing nearer, as if guided by her cries, and, straining her eyes, she caught the outline of a man’s figure in the gloom.

A sensation of intense joy rushed over her, and she was about to spring forward, when she remembered that as she could speak no German how could she explain her plight to the stranger, if he understood neither French nor English?

Fear took possession of her at the thought of meeting some rough peasant, or some rollicking student, to whom she could make no intelligible appeal or explanation.

Crouching close against the wall, she stood mute till the figure was very near. She was in the shadow of an angle, and the man paused, as if looking for the person who called for help.

“Who is lost here?” said a clear voice, in German.

Amy shrunk closer to the wall, fearing to speak, for the voice was that of a young man, and a low laugh followed the words, as if the speaker found the situation amusing.

“Mortal, ghost or devil, I’ll find it,” exclaimed the voice, and stepping forward, a hand groped for and found her.

“Lottchen, is it thou? Little rogue, thou shalt pay dearly for leading me such a chase.”

As he spoke he drew the girl toward him, but with a faint cry, a vain effort to escape, Amy’s terror reached its climax, and spent with fatigue and excitement, she lost consciousness.

“Who the deuce is it, then? Lottchen never faints on a frolic. Some poor little girl lost in earnest. I must get her out of this gloomy place at once, and find her party afterward.”

Lifting the slight figure in his arms, the young man hurried on, and soon came out through a shattered gateway into the shrubbery which surrounds the base of the castle.

Laying her on the grass, he gently chafed her hands, eying the pale, pretty face meantime with the utmost solicitude.

At his first glimpse of it he had started, smiled and made a gesture of pleasure and surprise, then gave himself entirely to the task of recovering the poor girl whom he had frightened out of her senses.

Very soon she looked up with dizzy eyes, and clasping her hands imploringly, cried, in English, like a bewildered child, —

“I am lost! Oh, take me to my uncle.”

“I will, the moment you can walk. Upon my soul, I meant to help you when I followed; but as you did not answer, I fancied it was Lottchen, the keeper’s little girl. Pardon the fright I’ve caused you, and let me take you to your friends.”

The true English accent of the words, and the hearty tone of sincerity in the apology, reassured Amy at once, and, rising, she said, with a faint smile and a petulant tone, —

“I was very silly, but my guide ran away, my candle went out, I lost the path, and can speak no German; so I was afraid to answer you at first; and then I lost my wits altogether, for it’s rather startling to be clutched in the dark, sir.”

“Indeed it is. I was very thoughtless, but now let me atone for it. Where is your uncle, Miss Erskine?” asked the stranger, with respectful earnestness.

“You know my name?” cried Amy in her impulsive way.

“I have that happiness,” was the answer, with a smile.

“But I don’t know *you*, sir;” and she peered at him, trying to see his face in the darkness, for the copse was thick, and twilight had come on rapidly.

“Not yet; I live in hope. Shall we go? Your uncle will be uneasy.”

“Where are we?” asked Amy, glad to move on, for the interview was becoming too personal even for her, and the stranger’s manner fluttered her, though she enjoyed the romance of the adventure immensely.

“We are in the park which surrounds the castle. You were near the entrance to it from the vaults when you fainted.”

“I wish I had kept on a little longer, and not disgraced myself by such a panic.”

“Nay, that is a cruel wish, for then I should have lost the happiness of helping you.”

They had been walking side by side, but were forced to pause on reaching a broken flight of steps, for Amy could not see the way before her.

“Let me lead you; it is steep and dark, but better than going a long way round through the dew,” he said, offering his hand.

“Must we return by these dreadful vaults?” faltered Amy, shrinking back.

“It is the shortest and safest route, I assure you.”

“Are you sure you know the way?”

“Quite sure. I have lived here by the week together. Do you fear to trust me?”

“No; but it is so dark, and everything is so strange to me. Can we get down safely? I see nothing but a black pit.”

And Amy still hesitated, with an odd mixture of fear and coquetry.

“I brought you up in safety; shall I take you down again?” asked the stranger, with a smile flickering over his face.

Amy felt rather than saw it, and assuming an air of dignified displeasure, motioned him to proceed, which he did for three steps; then Amy slipped, and gladly caught at the arm extended to save her.

Without a word he took her hand and led her back through the labyrinth she had threaded in her bewilderment. A dim light filled the place, but with unerring steps her guide went on till they emerged into the courtyard.

Major Erskine’s voice was audible, giving directions to the keeper, and Helen’s figure visible as she groped among the shadows of the ruined chapel for her cousin.

“There are my friends. Now I am safe. Come and let them thank you,” cried Amy, in her frank, childlike warmth of manner.

“I want no thanks — forgive me — adieu,” and hastily kissing the little hand that had lain so confidingly in his, the stranger was gone.

Amy rushed at once to Helen, and when the lost lamb had been welcomed, chidden, and exulted over, they drove home, listening to the very brief account which Amy gave of her adventure.

“Naughty little gad-about, how could you go and terrify me so, wandering in vaults with mysterious strangers, like the Countess of Rudolstadt. You are as wet and dirty as if you had been digging a well, yet you look as if you liked it,” said Helen, as she led Amy into their room at the hotel.

“I do,” was the decided answer, as the girl pulled a handkerchief off her head, and began to examine the corners of it. Suddenly she uttered a cry and flew to the light, exclaiming, —

“Nell, Nell, look here! The same letters, ‘S.P.,’ the same coat of arms, the same perfume — it was the baron!”

“What? who? are you out of your mind?” said Helen, examining the large, fine cambric handkerchief, with its delicately stamped initials under the stag’s head, and three stars on a heart-shaped shield. “Where did you get it?” she added, as she inhaled the soft odor of violets shaken from its folds.

Amy blushed and answered shyly, “I didn’t tell you all that happened before uncle, but now I will. My hat was left behind, and when I recovered my wits after my fright, I found this tied over my head. Oh, Nell, it was very charming there in that romantic old park, and going through the vaults with him, and having my hand kissed at parting. No one ever did that before, and I like it.”

Amy glanced at her hand as she spoke, and stood staring as if struck dumb, for there on her forefinger shone a ring she had never seen before.

“Look! look! mine is gone, and this in its place! Oh, Nell, what shall I do?” she said, looking half frightened, half pleased.

Helen examined the ring and shook her head, for it was far more valuable than the little pearl one which it replaced. Two tiny hands of finest gold were linked together about a diamond of great brilliancy; and on the inside appeared again the initials, “S.P.”

“How did it happen?” she asked, rather sternly.

“Upon my word, I don’t know, unless he put it on while I was stupidly fainting. Rude man, to take advantage of me so. But, Nell, it is splendid, and what *shall* I do about it?”

“Tell uncle, find out the man and send back his things. It really is absurd, the manner in which German boys behave;” and Helen frowned, though she was strongly tempted to laugh at the whole thing.

“He was neither a German nor a boy, but an English gentleman, I’m sure,” began Amy, rather offended.

“But ‘S.P.’ is a baron, you know, unless there are two Richmonds in the field,” broke in Helen.

“I forgot that; never mind, it deepens the mystery; and after this performance, I’m prepared for any enormity. It’s my fate; I submit.” said Amy, tragically, as she waved her hand to and fro, pleased with the flash of the ring.

“Amy, I think on the whole I won’t speak to uncle. He is quick to take offence, especially where we are concerned. He doesn’t understand foreign ways, and may get into trouble. We will manage it quietly ourselves.”

“How, Nell?”

“Karl is discreet; we will merely say we found these things and wish to discover the owner. He may know this ‘S.P.’ and, having learned his address, we can send them back. The man will understand; and as we leave to-morrow, we shall be out of the way before he can play any new prank.”

“Have in Karl at once, for if I wear this lovely thing long I shall not be able to let it go at all. How dared the creature take such a liberty!” and Amy pulled off the ring with an expression of great scorn.

“Come into the *salon* and see what Karl says to the matter. Let me speak, or you will say too much. One must be prudent before — ”

She was going to say “servants,” but checked herself, and substituted “strangers,” remembering gratefully how much she owed this man.

Hoffman came, looking pale, and with his hand in a sling, but was as gravely devoted as ever, and listened to Helen’s brief story with serious attention.

“I will inquire, mademoiselle, and let you know at once. It is easy to find persons if one has a clue. May I see the handkerchief?”

Helen showed it. He glanced at the initials, and laid it down with a slight smile.

“The coat-of-arms is English, mademoiselle.”

“Are you sure?”

“Quite so; I understand heraldry.”

“But the initials stand for Sigismund Palsdorf, and we know he is a

German baron,” broke in Amy, forgetting prudence in eagerness.

“If mademoiselle knows the name and title of this gentleman it will not be hard to find him.”

“We only fancy it is the same because of the initials. I dare say it is a mistake, and the man is English. Inquire quietly, Hoffman, if you please, as this ring is of value, and I wish to restore it to its owner,” said Helen, rather sharply.

“I shall do so, mademoiselle,” and with his gentlemanly bow, the courier left the room.

“Bless me, what’s that?” cried Amy, a moment afterward, as a ringing laugh echoed through the corridor, — a laugh so full of hearty and infectious merriment that both girls smiled involuntarily, and Amy peeped out to see who the blithe personage might be.

An old gentleman was entering his room near by, and Karl was just about to descend the stairs. Both looked back at the girlish face peeping at them, but both were quite grave, and the peal of laughter remained a mystery, like all the rest of it.

Late in the evening Hoffman returned to report that a party of young Englishmen had visited the castle that afternoon, and had left by the evening train. One of them had been named Samuel Peters, and he, doubtless, was the owner of the ring.

A humorous expression lurked in the couriers eye as he made his report, and heard Amy exclaim, in a tone of disgust and comical despair, —

“Samuel Peters! That spoils all the romance and dims the beauty of the diamond. To think that a Peters should be the hero to whom I owe my safety, and a Samuel should leave me this token of regard!”

“Hush, Amy,” whispered Helen. “Thanks, Hoffman; we must wait now for chance to help us.”

IV

A POLISH EXILE

“Room for one here, sir,” said the guard, as the train stopped at Carlsruhe next day, on its way from Heidelberg to Baden.

The major put down his guide-book, Amy opened her eyes, and Helen removed her shawl from the opposite seat, as a young man, wrapped in a cloak, with a green shade over his eyes, and a general air of feebleness, got in and sank back with a sigh of weariness or pain. Evidently an invalid, for his face was thin and pale, his dark hair cropped short, and the ungloved hand attenuated and delicate as a woman’s. A sidelong glance from under the deep shade seemed to satisfy him regarding his neighbors, and drawing his cloak about him with a slight shiver, he leaned into the corner and seemed to forget that he was not alone.

Helen and Amy exchanged glances of compassionate interest, for women always pity invalids, especially if young, comely and of the opposite sex. The major took one look, shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his book. Presently a hollow cough gave Helen a pretext for discovering the nationality of the newcomer.

“Do the open windows inconvenience you, sir?” she asked, in English.

No answer; the question evidently unintelligible.

She repeated it in French, lightly touching his cloak to arrest his attention.

Instantly a smile broke over the handsome mouth, and in the purest French he assured her that the fresh air was most agreeable, and begged pardon for annoying them with his troublesome cough.

“Not an invalid, I hope, sir?” said the major, in his bluff yet kindly voice.

“They tell me I can have no other fate; that my malady is fatal; but I still hope and fight for my life; it is all I have to give my country now.”

A stifled sigh and a sad emphasis on the last word roused the sympathy of the girls, the interest of the major.

He took another survey, and said, with a tone of satisfaction, as he marked the martial carriage of the young man, and caught a fiery glance of the half-hidden eyes, —

“You are a soldier, sir?”

“I was; I am nothing now but an exile, for Poland is in chains.”

The words “Poland” and “exile” brought up all the pathetic stories of that unhappy country which the three listeners had ever heard, and won their interest at once.

“You were in the late revolution, perhaps?” asked the major, giving the unhappy outbreak the most respectful name he could use.

“From beginning to end.”

“Oh, tell us about it; we felt much sympathy for you, and longed to have you win,” cried Amy, with such genuine interest and pity in her tone, it was impossible to resist.

Pressing both hands upon his breast, the young man bent low, with a flush of feeling on his pale cheek, and answered eagerly, —

“Ah, you are kind; it is balm to my sore heart to hear words like these. I thank you, and tell you what you will. It is but little that I do, yet I give my life, and die a long death, instead of a quick, brave one with my comrades.”

“You are young to have borne a part in a revolution, sir,” said the major, who pricked up his ears like an old war-horse at the sound of battle.

"My friends and myself left the University at Varsovie, as volunteers; we did our part, and now all lie in their graves but three."

"You were wounded, it seems?"

"Many times. Exposure, privation, and sorrow will finish what the Russian bullets began. But it is well. I have no wish to see my country enslaved, and I can no longer help her."

"Let us hope that a happier future waits for you both. Poland loves liberty too well, and has suffered too much for it, to be kept long in captivity."

Helen spoke warmly, and the young man listened with a brightening face.

"It is a kind prophecy; I accept it, and take courage. God knows I need it," he added, low to himself.

"Are you bound for Italy?" said the major, in a most un-English fit of curiosity.

"For Geneva first, Italy later, unless Montreaux is mild enough for me to winter in. I go to satisfy my friends, but doubt if it avails."

"Where is Montreaux?" asked Amy.

"Near Clarens, where Rousseau wrote his Heloise, and Vevay, where so many English go to enjoy Chillon. The climate is divine for unfortunates like myself, and life more cheap there than in Italy."

Here the train stopped again, and Hoffman came to ask if the ladies desired anything.

At the sound of his voice the young Pole started, looked up, and exclaimed, with the vivacity of a foreigner, in German, —

"By my life, it is Karl! Behold me, old friend, and satisfy me that it is thyself by a handshake."

"Casimer! What wind blows thee hither, my boy, in such sad plight?" replied Hoffman, grasping the slender hand outstretched to him.

"I fly from an enemy for the first time in my life, and, like all cowards, shall be conquered in the end. I wrote thee I was better, but the wound in the breast reopened, and nothing but a miracle will save me. I go to Switzerland; and thou?"

"Where my master commands. I serve this gentleman, now."

"Hard changes for both, but with health thou art king of circumstances, while I? — Ah well, the good God knows best. Karl, go thou and buy me two of those pretty baskets of grapes; I will please myself by giving them to these pitying angels. Speak they German?"

"One, the elder; but they understand not this rattle of ours."

Karl disappeared, and Helen, who *had* understood the rapid dialogue, tried to seem as unconscious as Amy.

"Say a friendly word to me at times; I am so homesick and faint-hearted, my Hoffman. Thanks; they are almost worthy the lips that shall taste them."

Taking the two little osier baskets, laden with yellow and purple clusters, Casimer offered them, with a charming mixture of timidity and grace, to the girls, saying, like a grateful boy, —

"You give me kind words and good hopes; permit that I thank you in this poor way."

"I drink success to Poland." cried Helen, lifting a great, juicy grape to her lips, like a little purple goblet, hoping to hide her confusion under a playful air.

The grapes went round, and healths were drunk with much merriment, for in travelling on the Continent it is impossible for the gruffest, primmest person to long resist the frank courtesy and vivacious chat of foreigners.

The major was unusually social and inquisitive, and while the soldiers fought their battles over again the girls listened and took notes, with feminine wits on the alert to catch any personal revelations which might fall from the interesting stranger. The wrongs and sufferings of Poland were discussed so eloquently that both young ladies were moved to declare the most undying hatred of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, the most intense sympathy for "poor Pologne." All day they travelled together, and as Baden-Baden approached, they naturally fell to talking of the gay place.

"Uncle, I must try my fortune once. I've set my heart upon it, and so has Nell. We want to know how gamblers feel, and to taste the fascination of the game which draws people here from all parts of Europe," said Amy, in her half-pleading, half-imperious way.

"You may risk one napoleon each, as I foolishly promised you should, when I little thought you would ever have an opportunity to remind me of my promise. It's not an amusement for respectable Englishwomen, or men either. You will agree with me there, monsieur?" and the major glanced at the Pole, who replied, with his peculiar smile: —

"Surely, yes. It is great folly and waste of time and money; yet I have known one man who found some good in it, or, rather, brought good out of it. I have a friend who has a mania for giving. His own fortune was spent in helping needy students at the University, and poor professors. This displeased his father, and he refused supplies, except enough for his simple personal wants. Sigismund chafed at this, and being skilful at all games, as a gentleman may be in the way of amusement, he resolved to play with those whose money was wasted on frivolities, and give his winnings to his band of paupers."

"How did it succeed, this odd fancy?" asked Helen, with an interested face, while Amy pinched her arm at the word “Sigismund.”

“Excellently. My friend won often, and as his purpose became known it caused no unkind feeling, this unusual success, for fortune seemed to favor his kind object.”

“Wrong, nevertheless, to do evil that good may come of it,” said the major, morally.

“It may be so: but it is not for me to censure my benefactor. He has done much for my countrymen and myself, and is so truly noble I can see no fault in him.”

“What an odd name! Sigismund is German, is it not?” asked Amy, in the most artless tone of interest.

“Yes, mademoiselle, and Palsdorf is a true German; much courage, strength and intellect, with the gayety and simplicity of a boy. He hates slavery of all kinds, and will be free at all costs. He is a good son, but his father is tyrannical, and asks too much. Sigismund will not submit to sell himself, and so is in disgrace for a time.”

“Palsdorf! — was not that the name of the count or baron we heard them talking of at Coblentz?” said Helen to Amy, with a well-feigned air of uncertainty.

“Yes; I heard something of a duel and a broken betrothal, I think. The people seemed to consider the baron a wild young man, so it could not have been your friend, sir,” was Amy’s demure reply, glancing at Helen with mirthful eyes, as if to say, “How our baron haunts us!”

“It is the same, doubtless. Many consider him wild, because he is original, and dares act for himself. As it is well known, I may tell you the truth of the duel and the betrothal, if you care to hear a little romance.”

Casimer looked eager to defend his friend, and as the girls were longing to hear the romance, permission was given.

“In Germany, you know, the young people are often betrothed in childhood by the parents, and sometimes never meet till they are grown. Usually all goes well; but not always, for love cannot come at command. Sigismund was plighted, when a boy of fifteen, to his young cousin, and then sent away to the University till of age. On returning, he was to travel a year or two, and then marry. He gladly went away, and with increasing disquiet saw the time draw near when he must keep his troth-plight.”

“Hum! loved some one else. Very unfortunate to be sure,” said the major with a sigh.

“Not so; he only loved his liberty, and pretty Minna was less dear than a life of perfect freedom. He went back at the appointed time, saw his cousin, tried to do his duty and love her; found it impossible, and, discovering that Minna loved another, vowed he would never make her unhappiness as well as his own. The old baron stormed, but the young one was firm, and would not listen to a marriage without love; but pleaded for Minna, wished his rival success, and set out again on his travels."

"And the duel?" asked the major, who took less interest in love than war.

"That was as characteristic as the other act. A son of one high in office at Berlin circulated false reports of the cause of Palsdorf's refusal of the alliance — reports injurious to Minna. Sigismund settled the matter in the most effectual manner, by challenging and wounding the man. But for court influence it would have gone hardly with my friend. The storm, however, has blown over; Minna will be happy with her lover, and Sigismund with his liberty, till he tires of it."

"Is he handsome, this hero of yours?" said Amy, feeling the ring under her glove, for in spite of Helen's advice, she insisted on wearing it, that it might be at hand to return at any moment, should chance again bring the baron in their way.

"A true German of the old type; blond and blue-eyed, tall and strong. My hero in good truth — brave and loyal, tender and true," was the enthusiastic answer.

"I hate fair men," pouted Amy, under her breath, as the major asked some question about hotels.

"Take a new hero, then; nothing can be more romantic than that," whispered Helen, glancing at the pale, dark-haired figure wrapped in the military cloak opposite.

"I will, and leave the baron to you;" said Amy, with a stifled laugh.

"Hush! Here are Baden and Karl," replied Helen, thankful for the interruption.

All was bustle in a moment, and taking leave of them with an air of reluctance, the Pole walked away, leaving Amy looking after him wistfully, quite unconscious that she stood in everybody's way, and that her uncle was beckoning impatiently from the carriage door.

"Poor boy! I wish he had some one to take care of him." she sighed, half aloud.

"Mademoiselle, the major waits;" and Karl came up, hat in hand, just in time to hear her and glance after Casimer, with an odd expression.

V

LUDMILLA

"I wonder what that young man's name was. Did he mention it, Helen?" said the major, pausing in his march up and down the room, as if the question was suggested by the sight of the little baskets, which the girls had kept.

"No, uncle; but you can easily ask Hoffman," replied Helen.

"By the way, Karl, who was the Polish gentleman who came on with us?"

asked the major a moment afterward, as the courier came in with newspapers.

"Casimer Teblinski, sir."

"A baron?" asked Amy, who was decidedly a young lady of one idea just then.

"No, mademoiselle, but of a noble family, as the 'ski' denotes, for that is to Polish and Russian names what 'von' is to German and 'de' to French."

"I was rather interested in him. Where did you pick him up, Hoffman?" said the major.

"In Paris, where he was with fellow-exiles."

"He is what he seems, is he? — no impostor, or anything of that sort?
One is often deceived, you know."

"On my honor, sir, he is a gentleman, and as brave as he is accomplished and excellent."

"Will he die?" asked Amy, pathetically.

"With care he would recover, I think; but there is no one to nurse him, so the poor lad must take his chance and trust in heaven for help."

"How sad! I wish we were going his way, so that we might do something for him — at least give him the society of his friend."

Helen glanced at Hoffman, feeling that if he were not already engaged by them, he would devote himself to the invalid without any thought of payment.

"Perhaps we are. You want to see the Lake of Geneva, Chillon, and that neighborhood. Why not go now, instead of later?"

"Will you, uncle? That's capital! We need say nothing, but go on and help the poor boy, if we can."

Helen spoke like a matron of forty, and looked as full of maternal kindness as if the Pole were not out of his teens.

The courier bowed, the major laughed behind his paper, and Amy gave a sentimental sigh to the memory of the baron, in whom her interest was failing.

They only caught a glimpse of the Pole that evening at the Kursaal, but next morning they met, and he was invited to join their party for a little expedition.

The major was in fine spirits, and Helen assumed her maternal air toward both invalids, for the sound of that hollow cough always brought a shadow over her face, recalling the brother she had lost.

Amy was particularly merry and charming, and kept the whole party laughing at her comical efforts to learn Polish and teach English as they drove up the mountainside to the old Schloss.

"I'm not equal to mounting all those steps for a view I've seen a dozen times; but pray take care of the child, Nell, or she'll get lost again, as at Heidelberg," said the major, when they had roamed about the lower part of the place; for a cool seat in the courtyard and a glass of beer were more tempting than turrets and prospects to the stout gentleman.

“She shall not be lost; I am her body-guard. It is steep — permit that I lead you, mademoiselle;” Casimer offered his hand to Amy, and they began their winding way. As she took the hand, the girl blushed and half smiled, remembering the vaults and the baron.

“I like this better,” she said to herself, as they climbed step by step, often pausing to rest in the embrasures of the loopholes, where the sun glanced in, the balmy wind blew, and vines peeped from without, making a pretty picture of the girl, as she sat with rosy color on her usually pale cheeks, brown curls fluttering about her forehead, laughing lips, and bright eyes full of pleasant changes. Leaning opposite in the narrow stairway, Casimer had time to study the little tableau in many lights, and in spite of the dark glasses, to convey warm glances of admiration, of which, however, the young coquette seemed utterly unconscious.

Helen came leisurely after, and Hoffman followed with a telescope, wishing, as he went, that his countrywomen possessed such dainty feet as those going on before him, for which masculine iniquity he will be pardoned by all who have seen the foot of a German Fraulein.

It was worth the long ascent, that wide-spread landscape basking in the August glow.

Sitting on a fallen block of stone, while Casimer held a sun-umbrella over her, Amy had raptures at her ease; while Helen sketched and asked questions of Hoffman, who stood beside her, watching her progress with interest. Once when, after repeated efforts to catch a curious effect of light and shade, she uttered an impatient little exclamation, Karl made a gesture as if to take the pencil and show her, but seemed to recollect himself and drew back with a hasty “Pardon, mademoiselle.” Helen glanced up and saw the expression of his face, which plainly betrayed that for a moment the gentleman had forgotten he was a courier. She was glad of it, for it was a daily trial to her to order this man about; and following the womanly impulse, she smiled and offered the pencil, saying simply, —

“I felt sure you understood it; please show me.”

He did so, and a few masterly strokes gave the sketch what it needed. As he bent near her to do this Helen stole a glance at the grave, dark face, and suddenly a disturbed look dawned in the eyes fixed on the glossy black locks pushed off the courier’s forehead, for he had removed his hat when she spoke to him. He seemed to feel that something was amiss, shot a quick glance at her, returned the pencil and rose erect, with an almost defiant air, yet something of shame in his eye, as his lips moved as if to speak impetuously. But not a word did he utter, for Helen touched her forehead significantly, and said in a low tone, —

“I am an artist; let me recommend Vandyke brown, which is *not* affected by heat.”

Hoffman looked over his shoulder at the other pair, but Amy was making an ivy wreath for her hat, and the Pole pulling sprays for the absorbing work. Speaking rapidly, Karl said, with a peculiar blending of merriment, humility, and anxiety in his tone, —

“Mademoiselle, you are quick to discover my disguise; will you also be kind in concealing? I have enemies as well as friends, whom I desire to escape: I would earn my bread unknown; Monsieur le Major keeps my foolish secret; may I hope for equal goodness from yourself?”

“You may, I do not forget that I owe my life to you, nor that you are a gentleman. Trust me, I never will betray you.”

“Thanks, thanks! there will come a time when I may confess the truth and be myself, but not yet,” and his regretful tone was emphasized by an impatient gesture, as if concealment was irksome.

“Nell, come down to lunch; uncle is signalling as if he’d gone mad. No, monsieur, it is quite impossible; you cannot reach the harebells without risking too much; come away and forget that I wanted them.”

Amy led the way, and all went down more quietly than they came up, especially Helen and Hoffman. An excellent lunch waited on one of the tables in front of the old gateway, and having done justice to it, the major made himself comfortable with a cigar, bidding the girls keep near, for they must be off in half an hour. Hoffman went to see to the horses, Casimer strolled away with him, and the young ladies went to gather wild flowers at the foot of the tower.

“Not a harebell here; isn’t it provoking, when they grow in tufts up there, where one can’t reach them. Mercy, what’s that? Run, Nell, the old wall is coming down!”

Both had been grubbing in a damp nook, where ferns and mosses grew luxuriantly; the fall of a bit of stone and a rending sound above made them fly back to the path and look up.

Amy covered her eyes, and Helen grew pale, for part way down the crumbling tower, clinging like a bird to the thick ivy stems, hung Casimer, coolly gathering harebells from the clefts of the wall.

“Hush; don’t cry out or speak; it may startle him. Crazy boy! Let us see what he will do,” whispered Helen.

“He can’t go back, the vines are so torn and weak; and how will he get down the lower wall? for you see the ivy grows up from that ledge, and there is nothing below. How could he do it? I was only joking when I lamented that there were no knights now, ready to leap into a lion's den for a lady's glove," returned Amy, half angry.

In breathless silence they watched the climber till his cap was full of flowers, and taking it between his teeth, he rapidly swung down to the wide ledge, from which there appeared to be no way of escape but a reckless leap of many feet on to the turf below.

The girls stood in the shadow of an old gateway, unperceived, and waited anxiously what should follow.

Lightly folding and fastening the cap together, he dropped it down, and, leaning forward, tried to catch the top of a young birch rustling close by the wall. Twice he missed it; the first time he frowned, but the second he uttered an emphatic, "Deuce take it!"

Helen and Amy looked at each other with a mutual smile and exclamation, —

"He knows some English, then!"

There was time for no more — a violent rustle, a boyish laugh, and down swung the slender tree, with the young man clinging to the top.

As he landed safely, Helen cried, "Bravo!" and Amy rushed out, exclaiming reproachfully, yet admiringly, —

"How could you do it and frighten us so? I shall never express a wish before you again, for if I wanted the moon you'd rashly try to get it, I know."

"*Certainement*, mademoiselle," was the smiling reply. Casimer presented the flowers, as if the exploit was a mere trifle.

"Now I shall go and press them at once in uncle's guide-book. Come and help me, else you will be in mischief again." And Amy led the way to the major with her flowers and their giver.

Helen roamed into one of the ruined courts for a last look at a fountain which pleased her eye. A sort of cloister ran round the court, open on both sides, and standing in one of these arched nooks, she saw Hoffman and a young girl talking animatedly. The girl was pretty, well dressed, and seemed refusing something for which the other pleaded eagerly. His arm was about her, and she leaned affectionately upon him, with a white hand now and then caressing his face, which was full of sparkle and vivacity now. They seemed about to part as Helen looked, for the maiden standing on tiptoe, laughingly offered her blooming cheek, and as Karl kissed it warmly, he said in German, so audibly Helen heard every word, —

"Farewell, my Ludmilla. Keep silent and I shall soon be with you.

Embrace the little one, and do not let him forget me."

Both left the place as they spoke, each going a different way, and Helen slowly returned to her party, saying to herself in a troubled tone, —

"'Ludmilla' and 'the little one' are his wife and child, doubtless. I wonder if uncle knows that."

When Hoffman next appeared she could not resist looking at him; but the accustomed gravity was resumed, and nothing remained of the glow and brightness he had worn when with Ludmilla in the cloister.

VI

CHATEAU DE LA TOUR

Helen looked serious and Amy indignant when their uncle joined them, ready to set out by the afternoon train, all having dined and rested after the morning's excursion.

"Well, little girls, what's the matter now?" he asked, paternally, for the excellent man adored his nieces.

"Helen says it's not best to go on with the Pole, and is perfectly nonsensical, uncle," began Amy, petulantly, and not very coherently.

"Better be silly now than sorry by and by. I only suggested that, being interesting, and Amy romantic, she might find this young man too charming, if we see too much of him," said Helen.

"Bless my soul, what an idea!" cried the major. "Why, Nell, he's an invalid, a Catholic, and a foreigner, any one of which objections are enough to settle that matter. Little Amy isn't so foolish as to be in danger of losing her heart to a person so entirely out of the question as this poor lad, is she?"

"Of course not. *You* do me justice, uncle. Nell thinks she may pity and pet any one she likes because she is five years older than I, and entirely forgets that she is a great deal more attractive than a feeble thing like me. I should as soon think of losing my heart to Hoffman as to the Pole, even if he wasn't what he is. One may surely be kind to a dying man, without being accused of coquetry;" and Amy sobbed in the most heart-rending manner.

Helen comforted her by withdrawing all objections, and promising to leave the matter in the major's hands. But she shook her head privately when she saw the ill-disguised eagerness with which her cousin glanced up and down the platform after they were in the train, and she whispered to her uncle, unobserved, —

"Leave future meetings to chance, and don't ask the Pole in, if you can help it."

"Nonsense, my dear. You are as particular as your aunt. The lad amuses me, and you can't deny you like to nurse sick heroes," was all the answer she got, as the major, with true masculine perversity, put his head out of the window and hailed Casimer as he was passing with a bow.

"Here, Teblinski, my good fellow, don't desert us. We've always a spare seat for you, if you haven't pleasanter quarters."

With a flush of pleasure the young man came up, but hesitated to accept the invitation till Helen seconded it with a smile of welcome.

Amy was in an injured mood, and, shrouded in a great blue veil, pensively reclined in her corner as if indifferent to everything about her. But soon the cloud passed, and she emerged in a radiant state of good humor, which lasted unbroken until the journey ended.

For two days they went on together, a very happy party, for the major called in Hoffman to see his friend and describe the places through which they passed. An arrangement very agreeable to all, as Karl was a favorite, and every one missed him when away.

At Lausanne they waited while he crossed the lake to secure rooms at Vevay. On his return he reported that all the hotels and *pensions* were full, but that at La Tour he had secured rooms for a few weeks in a quaint old chateau on the banks of the lake.

"Count Severin is absent in Egypt, and the housekeeper has permission to let the apartments to transient visitors. The suite of rooms I speak of were engaged to a party who are detained by sickness — they are cheap, pleasant, and comfortable. A *salon* and four bed-rooms. I engaged them all, thinking that Teblinski might like a room there till he finds lodgings at Montreaux. We can enter at once, and I am sure the ladies will approve of the picturesque place."

"Well done, Hoffman; off we go without delay, for I really long to rest my old bones in something like a home, after this long trip," said the major, who always kept his little troop in light marching order.

The sail across that loveliest of lakes prepared the new-comers to be charmed with all they saw; and when, entering by the old stone gate, they were led into a large saloon, quaintly furnished and opening into a terrace-garden overhanging the water, with Chillon and the Alps in sight, Amy declared nothing could be more perfect, and Helen's face proved her satisfaction.

An English widow and two quiet old German professors on a vacation were the only inmates besides themselves and the buxom Swiss housekeeper and her maids.

It was late when our party arrived, and there was only time for a hasty survey of their rooms and a stroll in the garden before dinner.

The great chamber, with its shadowy bed, dark mirrors, ghostly wainscot-doors and narrow windows, had not been brightened for a long time by such a charming little apparition as Amy when she shook out her airy muslins, smoothed her curls, and assumed all manner of distracting devices for the captivation of mankind. Even Helen, though not much given to personal vanity, found herself putting flowers in her hair, and studying the effect of bracelets on her handsome arms, as if there was some especial need of looking her best on this occasion.

Both were certainly great ornaments to the drawing-room that evening, as the old professors agreed while they sat blinking at them, like a pair of benign owls. Casimer surprised them by his skill in music, for, though forbidden to sing on account of his weak lungs, he played as if inspired. Amy hovered about him like a moth; the major cultivated the acquaintance of the plump widow; and Helen stood at the window, enjoying the lovely night and music, till something happened which destroyed her pleasure in both.

The window was open, and, leaning from it, she was watching the lake, when the sound of a heavy sigh caught her ear. There was no moon, but through the starlight she saw a man's figure among the shrubs below, sitting with bent head and hidden face in the forlorn attitude of one shut out from the music, light, and gayety that reigned within.

"It is Karl," she thought, and was about to speak, when, as if startled by some sound she did not hear, he rose and vanished in the gloom of the garden.

"Poor man! he thought of his wife and child, perhaps, sitting here alone while all the rest make merry, with no care for him. Uncle must see to this;" and Helen fell into a reverie till Amy came to propose retiring.

"I meant to have seen where all these doors led, but was so busy dressing I had no time, so must leave it for my amusement to-morrow. Uncle says it's a very Radcliffian place. How like an angel that man did play!" chattered Amy, and lulled herself to sleep by humming the last air Casimer had given them.

Helen could not sleep, for the lonely figure in the garden haunted her, and she wearied herself with conjectures about Hoffman and his mystery. Hour after hour rung from the cuckoo-clock in the hall, but still she lay awake, watching the curious shadows in the room, and exciting herself with recalling the tales of German goblins with which the courier had amused them the day before.

"It is close and musty here, with all this old tapestry and stuff about; I'll open the other window," she thought; and, noiselessly slipping from Amy's side, she threw on wrapper and slippers, lighted her candle and tried to unbolt the tall, diamond-paned lattice. It was rusty and would not yield, and, giving it up, she glanced about to see whence air could be admitted. There were four doors in the room, all low and arched, with clumsy locks and heavy handles. One opened into a closet, one into the passage; the third was locked, but the fourth opened easily, and, lifting her light, she peeped into a small octagon room, full of all manner of curiosities. What they were she had no time to see, for her startled eyes were riveted on an object that turned her faint and cold with terror.

A heavy table stood in the middle of the room, and seated at it, with some kind of weapon before him, was a man who looked over his shoulder, with a ghastly face half hidden by hair and beard, and fierce black eyes as full of malignant menace as was the clinched hand holding the pistol. One instant Helen looked, the next flung to the door, bolted it and dropped into a chair, trembling in every limb. The noise did not wake Amy, and a moment's thought showed Helen the wisdom of keeping her in ignorance of this affair. She knew the major was close by, and possessing much courage, she resolved to wait a little before rousing the house.

Hardly had she collected herself, when steps were heard moving softly in the octagon room. Her light had gone out as she closed the door, and sitting close by in the dark, she heard the sound of some one breathing as he listened at the keyhole. Then a careful hand tried the door, so noiselessly that no sleeper would have been awakened; and as if to guard against a second surprise, the unknown person drew two bolts across the door and stole away.

"Safe for a time; but I'll not pass another night under this roof, unless this is satisfactorily cleared up," thought Helen, now feeling more angry than frightened.

The last hour that struck was three, and soon the summer dawn reddened the sky. Dressing herself, Helen sat by Amy, a sleepless guard, till she woke, smiling and rosy as a child. Saying nothing of her last night's alarm, Helen went down to breakfast a little paler than usual, but otherwise unchanged. The major never liked to be disturbed till he had broken his fast, and the moment they rose from the table he exclaimed, —

"Now, girls, come and see the mysteries of Udolpho."

"I'll say nothing, yet," thought Helen, feeling braver by daylight, yet troubled by her secret, for Hoffman might be a traitor, and this charming chateau a den of thieves. Such things had been, and she was in a mood to believe anything.

The upper story was a perfect museum of antique relics, very entertaining to examine. Having finished these, Hoffman, who acted as guide, led them into a little gloomy room containing a straw pallet, a stone table with a loaf and pitcher on it, and, kneeling before a crucifix, where the light from a single slit in the wall fell on him, was the figure of a monk. The waxen mask was life-like, the attitude effective, and the cell excellently arranged. Amy cried out when she first saw it, but a second glance reassured her, and she patted the bald head approvingly, as Karl explained. —

“Count Severin is an antiquarian, and amuses himself with things of this sort. In old times there really was a hermit here, and this is his effigy. Come down these narrow stairs, if you please, and see the rest of the mummery.”

Down they went, and the instant Helen looked about her, she burst into a hysterical laugh, for there sat her ruffian, exactly as she saw him, glaring over his shoulder with threatening eyes, and one hand on the pistol. They all looked at her, for she was pale, and her merriment unnatural; so, feeling she had excited curiosity, she gratified it by narrating her night’s adventure. Hoffman looked much concerned.

“Pardon, mademoiselle, the door should have been bolted on this side. It usually is, but that room being unused, it was forgotten. I remembered it, and having risen early, crept up to make sure that you did not come upon this ugly thing unexpectedly. But I was too late, it seems; you have suffered, to my sorrow.”

“Dear Nell, and that was why I found you so pale and cold and quiet, sitting by me when I woke, guarding me faithfully as you promised you would. How brave and kind you were!”

“Villain! I should much like to fire your own pistols at you for this prank of yours.”

And Casimer laughingly filliped the image on its absurdly aquiline nose.

“What in the name of common sense is this goblin here for?” demanded the major, testily.

“There is a legend that once the owner of the chateau amused himself by decoying travellers here, putting them to sleep in that room, and by various devices alluring them thither. Here, one step beyond the threshold of the door, was a trap, down which the unfortunates were precipitated to the dungeon at the bottom of the tower, there to die and be cast into the lake through a water-gate, still to be seen. Severin keeps this flattering likeness of the rascal, as he does the monk above, to amuse visitors by daylight, not at night, mademoiselle.”

And Hoffman looked wrathfully at the image, as if he would much enjoy sending it down the trap.

“How ridiculous! I shall not go about this place alone, for fear of lighting upon some horror of this sort. I’ve had enough; come away into the garden; it’s full of roses, and we may have as many as we like.”

As she spoke Amy involuntarily put out her hand for Casimer to lead her down the steep stone steps, and he pressed the little hand with a tender look which caused it to be hastily withdrawn.

“Here are your roses. Pretty flower; I know its meaning in English, for it is the same with us. To give a bud to a lady is to confess the beginning of love, a half open one tells of its growth, and a full-blown one is to declare one’s passion. Do you have that custom in your land, mademoiselle?”

He had gathered the three as he spoke, and held the bud separately while looking at his companion wistfully.

“No, we are not poetical, like your people, but it is a pretty fancy,” and Amy settled her bouquet with an absorbed expression, though inwardly wondering what he would do with his flowers.

He stood silent a moment, with a sudden flush sweeping across his face, then flung all three into the lake with a gesture that made the girl start, and muttered between his teeth:

“No, no; for me it is too late.”

She affected not to hear, but making up a second bouquet, she gave it to him, with no touch of coquetry in compassionate eyes or gentle voice.

“Make your room bright with these. When one is ill nothing is so cheering as the sight of flowers.”

Meantime the others had descended and gone their separate ways.

As Karl crossed the courtyard a little child ran to meet him with outstretched arms and a shout of satisfaction. He caught it up and carried it away on his shoulder, like one used to caress and be caressed by children.

Helen, waiting at the door of the tower while the major dusted his coat, saw this, and said, suddenly, directing his attention to man and child, —

“He seems fond of little people. I wonder if he has any of his own.”

“Hoffman? No, my dear; he’s not married; I asked him that when I engaged him.”

“And he said he was not?”

“Yes; he’s not more than five or six-and-twenty, and fond of a wandering life, so what should he want of a wife and a flock of bantlings?”

“He seems sad and sober sometimes, and I fancied he might have some domestic trouble to harass him. Don’t you think there is something peculiar about him?” asked Helen, remembering Hoffman’s hint that her uncle knew his wish to travel incognito, and wondering if he would throw any light upon the matter. But the major’s face was impenetrable and his answer unsatisfactory.

“Well, I don’t know. Every one has some worry or other, and as for being peculiar, all foreigners seem more or less so to us, they are so unreserved and demonstrative. I like Hoffman more and more every day, and shall be sorry when I part with him.”

“Ludmilla is his sister, then, or he didn’t tell uncle the truth. It is no concern of mine; but I wish I knew,” thought Helen anxiously, and then wondered why she should care.

A feeling of distrust had taken possession of her and she determined to be on the watch, for the unsuspicious major would be easily duped, and Helen trusted more to her own quick and keen eye than to his experience. She tried to show nothing of the change in her manner: but Hoffman perceived it, and bore it with a proud patience which often touched her heart, but never altered her purpose.

VII

AT FAULT

Four weeks went by so rapidly that every one refused to believe it when the major stated the fact at the breakfast-table, for all had enjoyed themselves so heartily that they had been unconscious of the lapse of time.

“You are not going away, uncle?” cried Amy, with a panic-stricken look.

“Next week, my dear; we must be off, for we’ve much to do yet, and I promised mamma to bring you back by the end of October.”

“Never mind Paris and the rest of it; this is pleasanter. I’d rather stay here — ”

There Amy checked herself and tried to hide her face behind her coffee-cup, for Casimer looked up in a way that made her heart flutter and her cheeks burn.

“Sorry for it, Amy; but go we must, so enjoy your last week with all your might, and come again next year.”

“It will never be again what it is now,” sighed Amy; and Casimer echoed the words “next year,” as if sadly wondering if the present year would not be his last.

Helen rose silently and went into the garden, for of late she had fallen into the way of reading and working in the little pavilion which stood in an angle of the wall, overlooking lake and mountains.

A seat at the opposite end of the walk was Amy’s haunt, for she liked the sun, and within a week or two something like constraint had existed between the cousins. Each seemed happier apart, and each was intent on her own affairs. Helen watched over Amy’s health, but no longer offered advice or asked confidence. She often looked anxious, and once or twice urged the major to go, as if conscious of some danger.

But the worthy man seemed to have been bewitched as well as the young folks, and was quite happy sitting by the plump, placid widow, or leisurely walking with her to the chapel on the hillside.

All seemed waiting for something to break up the party, and no one had the courage to do it. The major’s decision took every one by surprise, and Amy and Casimer looked as if they had fallen from the clouds.

The persistency with which the English lessons had gone on was amazing, for Amy usually tired of everything in a day or two. Now, however, she was a devoted teacher, and her pupil did her great credit by the rapidity with which he caught the language. It looked like pleasant play, sitting among the roses day after day, Amy affecting to embroider while she taught, Casimer marching to and fro on the wide, low wall, below which lay the lake, while he learned his lesson; then standing before her to recite, or lounging on the turf in frequent fits of idleness, both talking and laughing a great deal, and generally forgetting everything but the pleasure of being together. They wrote little notes as exercises — Amy in French, Casimer in English, and each corrected the other's.

All very well for a time; but as the notes increased the corrections decreased, and at last nothing was said of ungrammatical French or comical English and the little notes were exchanged in silence.

As Amy took her place that day she looked forlorn, and when her pupil came her only welcome was a reproachful —

"You are very late, sir."

"It is fifteen of minutes yet to ten clocks," was Casimer's reply, in his best English.

"Ten o'clock, and leave out 'of' before minutes. How many times must I tell you that?" said Amy, severely, to cover her first mistake.

"Ah, not many times; soon all goes to finish, and I have none person to make this charming English go in my so stupide head."

"What will you do then?"

"I *jeter* myself into the lake."

"Don't be foolish; I'm dull to-day, and want to be cheered up; suicide isn't a pleasant subject."

"Good! See here, then — a little *plaisanterie* — what you call joke. Can you will to see it?" and he laid a little pink cocked-hat note on her lap, looking like a mischievous boy as he did so.

"'Mon Casimer Teblinski;' I see no joke;" and Amy was about to tear it up, when he caught it from destruction, and holding it out of reach, said, laughing wickedly, —

"The 'mon' is one abbreviation of 'monsieur,' but you put no little — how do you say? — period at the end of him; it goes now in English — *My* Casimer Teblinski,' and that is of the most charming address."

Amy colored, but had her return shot ready.

"Don't exult; that was only an oversight, not a deliberate deception like that you put upon me. It was very wrong and rude, and I shall not forgive it."

"*Mon Dieu*! where have I gone in sinning! I am a *polisson,* as I say each day, but not a villain, I swear to you. Say to me that which I have made of wrong, and I will do penance."

"You told me '*Ma drogha*' was the Polish for 'My pupil,' and let me call you so a long time; I am wiser now," replied Amy, with great dignity.

"Who has said stupidities to you, that you doubt me?" and Casimer assumed an injured look, though his eyes danced with merriment.

"I heard Hoffman singing a Polish song to little Roserl, the burden of which was, '*Ma drogha, Ma drogha,*' and when I asked him to translate it, those two words meant, 'My darling.' How dare you, ungrateful creature that you are!"

As Amy spoke, half-confusedly, half-angrily, Casimer went down upon his knees, with folded hands and penitent face, exclaiming, in good English, —

"Be merciful to me a sinner. I was tempted, and I could not resist."

"Get up this instant, and stop laughing. Say your lesson, for this will be your last," was the stern reply, though Amy's face dimpled all over with suppressed merriment.

He rose meekly, but made such sad work with the verb "To love," that his teacher was glad to put an end to it, by proposing to read her French to him. It was "Thaddeus of Warsaw," a musty little translation which she had found in the house, and begun for her own amusement. Casimer read a little, seemed interested, and suggested that they read it together, so that he might correct her accent. Amy agreed, and they were in the heart of the sentimental romance, finding it more interesting than most modern readers, for the girl had an improved Thaddeus before her, and the Pole a fairer, kinder Mary Beaufort.

Dangerous times for both, but therein lay the charm; for, though Amy said to herself each night, "Sick, Catholic, and a foreigner, — it can never be," yet each morning she felt, with increasing force, how blank her day would be without him. And Casimer, honorably restraining every word of love, yet looked volumes, and in spite of the glasses, the girl felt the eloquence of the fine eyes they could not entirely conceal.

To-day, as she read, he listened with his head leaning on his hand, and though she never had read worse, he made no correction, but sat so motionless, she fancied at last that he had actually fallen asleep. Thinking to rouse him, she said, in French, —

"Poor Thaddeus! don't you pity him? — alone, poor, sick, and afraid to own his love."

"No, I hate him, the absurd imbecile, with his fine boots and plumes, and tragedy airs. He was not to be pitied, for he recovered health, he found a fortune, he won his Marie. His sufferings were nothing; there was no fatal blight on him, and he had time and power to conquer his misfortunes, while I — "

Casimer spoke with sudden passion, and pausing abruptly, turned his face away, as if to hide some emotion he was too proud to show.

Amy's heart ached, and her eyes filled, but her voice was sweet and steady, as she said, putting by the book, like one weary of it, —

"Are you suffering to-day? Can we do anything for you? Please let us, if we may."

"You give me all I can receive; no one can help my pain yet; but a time will come when something may be done for me; then I will speak." And, to her great surprise, he rose and left her, without another word.

She saw him no more till evening; then he looked excited, played stormily, and would sing in defiance of danger. The trouble in Amy's face seemed reflected in Helen's, though not a word had passed between them. She kept her eye on Casimer, with an intentness that worried Amy, and even when he was at the instrument Helen stood near him, as if fascinated, watching the slender hands chase one another up and down the keys with untiring strength and skill.

Suddenly she left the room and did not return. Amy was so nervous by that time, she could restrain herself no longer, and slipping out, found her cousin in their chamber, poring over a glove.

"Oh, Nell, what is it? You are so odd to-night I can't understand you. The music excites me, and I'm miserable, and I want to know what has happened," she said, tearfully.

"I've found him!" whispered Helen, eagerly, holding up the glove with a gesture of triumph.

"Who?" asked Amy, blinded by her tears.

"The baron."

"Where? — when?" cried the girl, amazed.

"Here, and now."

"Don't take my breath away; tell me quick, or I shall get hysterical."

"Casimer is Sigismund Palsdorf, and no more a Pole than I am," was Helen's answer.

Amy dropped in a heap on the floor, not fainting, but so amazed she had neither strength nor breath left. Sitting by her, Helen rapidly went on, —

"I had a feeling as if something was wrong, and began to watch. The feeling grew, but I discovered nothing till to-day. It will make you laugh, it was so unromantic. As I looked over uncle's things when the laundress brought them this afternoon, I found a collar that was not his. It was marked 'S.P.,' and I at once felt a great desire to know who owned it. The woman was waiting for her money, and I asked her. 'Monsieur Pologne,' she said, for his name is too much for her. She took it into his room, and that was the end of it."

"But it may be another name; the initials only a coincidence," faltered Amy, looking frightened.

"No, dear, it isn't; there is more to come. Little Roserl came crying through the hall an hour ago, and I asked what the trouble was. She showed me a prettily-bound prayer-book which she had taken from the Pole's room to play with, and had been ordered by her mother to carry back. I looked into it; no name, but the same coat-of-arms as the glove and the handkerchief. To-night as he played I examined his hands; they are peculiar, and some of the peculiarities have left traces on the glove. I am sure it is he, for on looking back many things confirm the idea. He says he is a *polisson*, a rogue, fond of jokes, and clever at playing them. The Germans are famous for masquerading and practical jokes; this is one, I am sure, and uncle will be terribly angry if he discovers it."

"But why all this concealment?" cried Amy. "Why play jokes on us? You look so worried I know you have not told me all you know or fear."

"I confess I do fear that these men are political plotters as well as exiles. There are many such, and they make tools of rich and ignorant foreigners to further their ends. Uncle is rich, generous, and unsuspicious; and I fear that while apparently serving and enjoying us they are using him."

"Heavens, it may be! and that would account for the change we see in him. I thought he was in love with the widow, but that may be only a cloak to hide darker designs. Karl brought us here, and I dare say it is a den of conspirators!" cried Amy, feeling as if she were getting more of an adventure than she had bargained for.

"Don't be alarmed! I am on the watch, and mean to demand an explanation from uncle, or take you away on my own responsibility, if I can."

Here a maid tapped to say that tea was served.

"We must go down, or some one will suspect trouble. Plead headache to excuse your paleness, and I'll keep people away. We will manage the affair and be off as soon as possible," said Helen, as Amy followed her, too bewildered to answer.

Casimer was not in the room, the major and Mrs. Cumberland were sipping tea side by side, and the professors roaming vaguely about. To leave Amy in peace, Helen engaged them both in a lively chat, and her cousin sat by the window trying to collect her thoughts. Some one was pacing up and down the garden, hatless, in the dew.

Amy forgot everything but the danger of such exposure to her reckless friend. His cloak and hat lay on a chair; she caught them up and glided unperceived from the long window.

"You are so imprudent I fear for you, and bring your things," said a timid voice, as the little white figure approached the tall black one, striding down the path tempestuously.

"You to think of me, forgetful of yourself! Little angel of kindness, why do you take such care of me?" cried Casimer, eagerly taking not only the cloak, but the hands that held it.

"I pitied you because you were ill and lonely. You do not deserve my pity, but I forgive that, and would not see you suffer," was the reproachful answer, as Amy turned away.

But he held her fast, saying earnestly, —

"What have I done? You are angry. Tell me my fault and I will amend."

"You have deceived me."

"How?"

"Will you own the truth?" and in her eagerness to set her fears at rest, Amy forgot Helen.

"I will."

She could not see his face, but his voice was steady and his manner earnest.

"Tell me, then, is not your true name Sigismund Palsdorf?"

He started, but answered instantly, —

"It is not."

"You are not the baron?" cried Amy.

"No; I will swear it if you wish."

"Who, then, are you?"

"Shall I confess?"

"Yes, I entreat you."

"Remember, you command me to speak."

"I do. Who are you?"

"Your lover."

The words were breathed into her ear as softly as ardently, but they startled her so much she could find no reply, and, throwing himself down before her, Casimer poured out his passion with an impetuosity that held her breathless.

"Yes, I love you, and I tell it, vain and dishonorable as it is in one like me. I try to hide it. I say 'it cannot be.' I plan to go away. But you keep me; you are angel-good to me; you take my heart, you care for me, teach me, pity me, and I can only love and die. I know it is folly; I ask nothing; I pray to God to bless you always, and I say, Go, go, before it is too late for you, as now for me!"

"Yes, I must go — it is all wrong. Forgive me. I have been very selfish. Oh, forget me and be happy," faltered Amy, feeling that her only safety was in flight.

"Go! go!" he cried, in a heart-broken tone, yet still kissed and clung to her hands till she tore them away and fled into the house.

Helen missed her soon after she went, but could not follow for several minutes; then went to their chamber and there found Amy drowned in tears, and terribly agitated.

Soon the story was told with sobs and moans, and despairing lamentations fit to touch a heart of stone.

“I do love him — oh, I do; but I didn’t know it till he was so unhappy, and now I’ve done this dreadful harm. He’ll die, and I can’t help him, see him, or be anything to him. Oh, I’ve been a wicked, wicked girl, and never can be happy any more.”

Angry, perplexed, and conscience-stricken, for what now seemed blind and unwise submission to the major, Helen devoted herself to calming Amy, and when at last the poor, broken-hearted little soul fell asleep in her arms, she pondered half the night upon the still unsolved enigma of the Baron Sigismund.

VIII

MORE MYSTERY

“Uncle, can I speak to you a moment?” said Helen, very gravely, as they left the breakfast-room next morning.

“Not now, my dear, I’m busy,” was the hasty reply, as the major shawled Mrs. Cumberland for an early promenade.

Helen knit her brows irefully, for this answer had been given her half a dozen times lately when she asked for an interview. It was evident he wished to avoid all lectures, remonstrances, and explanations; and it was also evident that he was in love with the widow.

“Lovers are worse than lunatics to manage, so it is vain to try to get any help from him,” sighed Helen, adding, as her uncle was gallantly leading his stout divinity away into the garden: “Amy has a bad headache, and I shall stay to take care of her, so we can’t join your party to Chillon, sir. We have been there once, so you needn’t postpone it for us.”

“Very well, my dear,” and the major walked away, looking much relieved.

As Helen was about to leave the *salon* Casimer appeared. A single glance at her face assured him that she knew all, and instantly assuming a confiding, persuasive air that was irresistible, he said, meekly, —

“Mademoiselle, I do not deserve a word from you, but it desolates me to know that I have grieved the little angel who is too dear to me. For her sake, pardon that I spoke my heart in spite of prudence, and permit me to send her this.”

Helen glanced from the flowers he held to his beseeching face, and her own softened. He looked so penitent and anxious, she had not the heart to reproach him.

“I will forgive you and carry your gift to Amy on one condition,” she said, gravely.

"Ah, you are kind! Name, then, the condition. I implore you, and I will agree."

"Tell me, then, on your honor as a gentleman, are you not Baron Palsdorf?"

"On my honor as a gentleman, I swear to you I am not."

"Are you, in truth, what you profess to be?"

"I am, in truth, Amy's lover, your devoted servant, and a most unhappy man, with but a little while to live. Believe this and pity me, dearest Mademoiselle Helène."

She did pity him, her eyes betrayed that, and her voice was very kind, as she said, —

"Pardon my doubts. I trust you now, and wish with all my heart that it was possible to make you happy. You know it is not, therefore I am sure you will be wise and generous, and spare Amy further grief by avoiding her for the little time we stay. Promise me this, Casimer."

"I may see her if I am dumb? Do not deny me this. I will not speak, but I must look at my little and dear angel when she is near."

He pleaded so ardently with lips and hands, and eager eyes, that Helen could not deny him, and when he had poured out his thanks she left him, feeling very tender toward the unhappy young lover, whose passion was so hopeless, yet so warm.

Amy was at breakfast in her room, sobbing and sipping, moaning and munching, for, though her grief was great, her appetite was good, and she was in no mood to see anything comical in cracking eggshells while she bewailed her broken heart, or in eating honey in the act of lamenting the bitterness of her fate.

Casimer would have become desperate had he seen her in the little blue wrapper, with her bright hair loose on her shoulders, and her pretty face wet with tears, as she dropped her spoon to seize his flowers, — three dewy roses, one a bud, one half and the other fully blown, making a fragrant record and avowal of the love which she must renounce.

"Oh, my dear boy! how can I give him up, when he is so fond, and I am all he has? Helen, uncle must let me write or go to mamma. She shall decide; I can't; and no one else has a right to part us," sobbed Amy, over her roses.

"Casimer will not marry, dear; he is too generous to ask such a sacrifice," began Helen, but Amy cried indignantly, —

"It is no sacrifice; I'm rich. What do I care for his poverty?"

"His religion!" hinted Helen, anxiously.

"It need not part us; we can believe what we will. He is good; why mind whether he is Catholic or Protestant?"

"But a Pole, Amy, so different in tastes, habits, character, and beliefs. It is a great risk to marry a foreigner; races are so unlike."

"I don't care if he is a Tartar, a Calmuck, or any of the other wild tribes; I love him, he loves me, and no one need object if I don't."

"But, dear, the great and sad objection still remains — his health. He just said he had but a little while to live."

Amy's angry eyes grew dim, but she answered, with soft earnestness, —

"So much the more need of me to make that little while happy. Think how much he has suffered and done for others; surely I may do something for him. Oh, Nell, can I let him die alone and in exile, when I have both heart and home to give him?"

Helen could say no more; she kissed and comforted the faithful little soul, feeling all the while such sympathy and tenderness that she wondered at herself, for with this interest in the love of another came a sad sense of loneliness, as if she was denied the sweet experience that every woman longs to know.

Amy never could remain long under a cloud, and seeing Helen's tears, began to cheer both her cousin and herself.

"Hoffman said he might live with care, don't you remember? and Hoffman knows the case better than we. Let us ask him if Casimer is worse. You do it; I can't without betraying myself."

"I will," and Helen felt grateful for any pretext to address a friendly word to Karl, who had looked sad of late, and had been less with them since the major became absorbed in Mrs. Cumberland.

Leaving Amy to compose herself, Helen went away to find Hoffman. It was never difficult, for he seemed to divine her wishes and appear uncalled the moment he was wanted. Hardly had she reached her favorite nook in the garden when he approached with letters, and asked with respectful anxiety, as she glanced at and threw them by with an impatient sigh, —

"Has mademoiselle any orders? Will the ladies drive, sail, or make a little expedition? It is fine, and mademoiselle looks as if the air would refresh her. Pardon that I make the suggestion."

"No, Hoffman, I don't like the air of this place, and intend to leave as soon as possible." And Helen knit her delicate dark brows with an expression of great determination. "Switzerland is the refuge of political exiles, and I hate plots and disguises; I feel oppressed by some mystery, and mean to solve or break away from it at once."

She stopped abruptly, longing to ask his help, yet withheld by a sudden sense of shyness in approaching the subject, though she had decided to speak to Karl of the Pole.

"Can I serve you, mademoiselle? If so, pray command me," he said, eagerly, coming a step nearer.

"You can, and I intend to ask your advice, for there can be nothing amiss in doing so, since you are a friend of Casimer's."

"I am both friend and confidant, mademoiselle," he answered, as if anxious to let her understand that he knew all, without the embarrassment of words. She looked up quickly, relieved, yet troubled.

"He has told you, then?"

"Everything, mademoiselle. Pardon me if this afflicts you; I am his only friend here, and the poor lad sorely needed comfort."

"He did. I am not annoyed; I am glad, for I know you will sustain him. Now I may speak freely, and be equally frank. Please tell me if he is indeed fatally ill?"

"It was thought so some months ago; now I hope. Happiness cures many ills, and since he has loved, he has improved. I always thought care would save him; he is worth it."

Hoffman paused, as if fearful of venturing too far; but Helen seemed to confide freely in him, and said, softly, —

"Ah, if it were only wise to let him be happy. It is so bitter to deny love."

"God knows it is!"

The exclamation broke from Hoffman as if an irrepressible impulse wrung it from him.

Helen started, and for a moment neither spoke. She collected herself soonest, and without turning, said, quietly, —

"I have been troubled by a strong impression that Casimer is not what he seems. Till he denied it on his honor I believed him to be Baron Palsdorf. Did he speak the truth when he said he was not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Then, Casimer Teblinski is his real name?"

No answer.

She turned sharply, and added, —

"For my cousin's sake, I must know the truth. Several curious coincidences make me strongly suspect that he is passing under an assumed name."

Not a word said Hoffman, but looked on the ground, as motionless and expressionless as a statue.

Helen lost patience, and in order to show how much she had discovered, rapidly told the story of the gloves, ring, handkerchief, prayer-book and collar, omitting all hint of the girlish romance they had woven about these things.

As she ended, Hoffman looked up with a curious expression, in which confusion, amusement, admiration and annoyance seemed to contend.

"Mademoiselle," he said, gravely, "I am about to prove to you that I feel honored by the confidence you place in me. I cannot break my word, but I will confess to you that Casimer does *not* bear his own name."

"I knew it!" said Helen, with a flash of triumph in her eyes. "He *is* the baron, and no Pole. You Germans love masquerades and jokes. This is one, but I must spoil it before it is played out."

"Pardon; mademoiselle is keen, but in this she is mistaken. Casimer is *not* the baron; he did fight for Poland, and his name is known and honored there. Of this I solemnly assure you."

She stood up and looked him straight in the face. He met her eye to eye, and never wavered till her own fell.

She mused a few minutes, entirely forgetful of herself in her eagerness to solve the mystery.

Hoffman stood so near that her dress touched him, and the wind blew her scarf against his hand; and as she thought he watched her while his eyes kindled, his color rose, and once he opened his lips to speak, but she moved at the instant, and exclaimed, —

"I have it!"

"Now for it," he muttered, as if preparing for some new surprise or attack.

"When uncle used to talk about the Polish revolution, there was, I remember a gallant young Pole who did something brave. The name just flashed on me, and it clears up my doubts. Stanislas Prakora — 'S.P.' — and Casimer is the man."

Helen spoke with an eager, bright face, as if sure of the truth now; but, to her surprise, Hoffman laughed, a short, irrepressible laugh, full of hearty but brief merriment. He sobered in a breath, and with an entire change of countenance said, in an embarrassed tone, —

"Pardon my rudeness; mademoiselle's acuteness threw me off my guard.
I can say nothing till released from my promise; but mademoiselle may
rest assured that Casimer Teblinski is as good and brave a man as
Stanislas Prakora."

Helen's eyes sparkled, for in this reluctant reply she read confirmation of her suspicion, and thought that Amy would rejoice to learn that her lover was a hero.

"You *are* exiles, but still hope and plot, and never relinquish your hearts' desire?"

"Never, mademoiselle!"

"You are in danger?"

“In daily peril of losing all we most love and long for,” answered Karl, with such passion that Helen found patriotism a lovely and inspiring thing.

“You have enemies?” she asked, unable to control her interest, and feeling the charm of these confidences.

“Alas! yes,” was the mournful reply, as Karl dropped his eyes to hide the curious expression of mirth which he could not banish from them.

“Can you not conquer them, or escape the danger they place you in?”

“We hope to conquer, we cannot escape.”

“This accounts for your disguise and Casimer’s false name?”

“Yes. We beg that mademoiselle will pardon us the anxiety and perplexity we have caused her, and hope that a time will soon arrive when we may be ourselves. I fear the romantic interest with which the ladies have honored us will be much lessened, but we shall still remain their most humble and devoted servants.”

Something in his tone nettled Helen, and she said sharply, —

“All this may be amusing to you, but it spoils my confidence in others to know they wear masks. Is your name also false?”

“I am Karl Hoffman, as surely as the sun shines, mademoiselle. Do not wound me by a doubt,” he said, eagerly.

“And nothing more?”

She smiled as she spoke, and glanced at his darkened skin with a shake of the head.

“I dare not answer that.”

“No matter; I hate titles, and value people for their own worth, not for their rank.”

Helen spoke impulsively, and, as if carried away by her words and manner, Hoffman caught her hand and pressed his lips to it ardently, dropped it, and was gone, as if fearing to trust himself a moment longer.

Helen stood where he left her, thinking, with a shy glance from her hand to the spot where he had stood, —

“It *is* pleasant to have one’s hand kissed, as Amy said. Poor Karl, his fate is almost as hard as Casimer’s.”

Some subtile power seemed to make the four young people shun one another carefully, though all longed to be together. The major appeared to share the secret disquiet that made the rest roam listlessly about, till little Roserl came to invite them to a *fête* in honor of the vintage. All were glad to go, hoping in the novelty and excitement to recover their composure.

The vineyard sloped up from the chateau, and on the hillside was a small plateau of level sward, shadowed by a venerable oak now hung with garlands, while underneath danced the chateau servants with their families, to the music of a pipe played by little Friedel. As the gentlefolk approached, the revel stopped, but the major, who was in an antic mood and disposed to be gracious, bade Friedel play on, and as Mrs. Cumberland refused his hand with a glance at her weeds, the major turned to the Count's buxom housekeeper, and besought her to waltz with him. She assented, and away they went as nimbly as the best. Amy laughed, but stopped to blush, as Casimer came up with an imploring glance, and whispered, —

"Is it possible that I may enjoy one divine waltz with you before I go?"

Amy gave him her hand with a glad assent, and Helen was left alone. Every one was dancing but herself and Hoffman, who stood near by, apparently unconscious of the fact. He glanced covertly at her, and saw that she was beating time with foot and hand, that her eyes shone, her lips smiled. He seemed to take courage at this, for, walking straight up to her, he said, as coolly as if a crown-prince, —

"Mademoiselle, may I have the honor?"

A flash of surprise passed over her face, but there was no anger, pride, or hesitation in her manner, as she leaned toward him with a quiet "Thanks, monsieur."

A look of triumph was in his eyes as he swept her away to dance, as she had never danced before, for a German waltz is full of life and spirit, wonderfully captivating to English girls, and German gentlemen make it a memorable experience when they please. As they circled round the rustic ball-room, Hoffman never took his eyes off Helen's, and, as if fascinated, she looked up at him, half conscious that he was reading her heart as she read his. He said not a word, but his face grew very tender, very beautiful in her sight, as she forgot everything except that he had saved her life and she loved him. When they paused, she was breathless and pale; he also; and seating her he went away to bring her a glass of wine. As her dizzy eyes grew clear, she saw a little case at her feet, and taking it up, opened it. A worn paper, containing some faded forget-me-nots and these words, fell out, —

"Gathered where Helen sat on the night of August 10th."

There was just time to restore its contents to the case, when Hoffman returned, saw it, and looked intensely annoyed as he asked, quickly, —

"Did you read the name on it?"

"I saw only the flowers;" and Helen colored beautifully as she spoke.

"And read *them*?" he asked, with a look she could not meet.

She was spared an answer, for just then a lad came up, saying, as he offered a note, —

"Monsieur Hoffman, madame, at the hotel, sends you this, and begs you to come at once."

As he impatiently opened it, the wind blew the paper into Helen's lap.
She restored it, and in the act, her quick eye caught the signature,
"Thine ever, Ludmilla."

A slight shadow passed over her face, leaving it very cold and quiet. Hoffman saw the change, and smiled, as if well pleased, but assuming suddenly his usual manner, said deferentially, —

"Will mademoiselle permit me to visit my friend for an hour? — she is expecting me."

"Go, then, we do not need you," was the brief reply, in a careless tone, as if his absence was a thing of no interest to any one.

"Thanks; I shall not be long away;" and giving her a glance that made her turn scarlet with anger at its undisguised admiration, he walked away, humming gayly to himself Goethe's lines, —

"Maiden's heart and city's wall
Were made to yield, were made to fall;
When we've held them each their day,
Soldier-like we march away."

IX
"S.P." AND THE BARON

Dinner was over, and the *salon* deserted by all but the two young ladies, who sat apart, apparently absorbed in novels, while each was privately longing for somebody to come, and with the charming inconsistency of the fair sex, planning to fly if certain somebodies *did* appear.

Steps approached; both buried themselves in their books; both held their breath and felt their hearts flutter as they never had done before at the step of mortal man. The door opened; neither looked up, yet each was conscious of mingled disappointment and relief when the major said, in a grave tone, "Girls, I've something to tell you."

"We know what it is, sir," returned Helen, coolly.

"I beg your pardon, but you don't, my dear, as I will prove in five minutes, if you will give me your attention."

The major looked as if braced up to some momentous undertaking; and planting himself before the two young ladies, dashed bravely into the subject.

"Girls, I've played a bold game, but I've won it, and will take the consequences.”

“They will fall heaviest on you, uncle,” said Helen, thinking he was about to declare his love for the widow.

The major laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and answered, stoutly, —

“I’ll bear them; but you are quite wrong, my dear, in your surmises, as you will soon see. Helen is my ward, and accountable to me alone. Amy’s mother gave her into my charge, and won’t reproach me for anything that has passed when I explain matters. As to the lads they must take care of themselves.”

Suddenly both girls colored, fluttered, and became intensely interested. The major’s eyes twinkled as he assumed a perfectly impassive expression, and rapidly delivered himself of the following thunderbolt, —

“Girls, you have been deceived, and the young men you love are impostors.”

“I thought so,” muttered Helen, grimly.

“Oh, uncle, don’t, don’t say that!” cried Amy, despairingly.

“It’s true, my dears; and the worst of it is, I knew the truth all the time. Now, don’t have hysterics, but listen and enjoy the joke as I do. At Coblentz, when you sat in the balcony, two young men overheard Amy sigh for adventures, and Helen advise making a romance out of the gloves one of the lads had dropped. They had seen you by day; both admired you, and being idle, gay young fellows, they resolved to devote their vacation to gratifying your wishes and enjoying themselves. We met at the Fortress; I knew one of them, and liked the other immensely; so when they confided their scheme to me I agreed to help them carry it out, as I had perfect confidence in both, and thought a little adventure or two would do you good.”

“Uncle, you were mad,” said Helen; and Amy added, tragically, —

“You don’t know what trouble has come of it.”

“Perhaps I was; that remains to be proved. I do know everything, and fail to see any trouble, so don’t cry, little girl,” briskly replied the inexplicable major. “Well, we had a merry time planning our prank. One of the lads insisted on playing courier, though I objected. He’d done it before, liked the part, and would have his way. The other couldn’t decide, being younger and more in love; so we left him to come into the comedy when he was ready. Karl did capitally, as you will allow; and I am much attached to him, for in all respects he has been true to his word. He began at Coblentz; the other, after doing the mysterious at Heidelberg, appeared as an exile, and made quick work with the prejudices of my well-beloved nieces — hey, Amy?”

“Go on; who are they?” cried both girls, breathlessly.

“Wait a bit; I’m not bound to expose the poor fellows to your scorn and anger. No; if you are going to be high and haughty, to forget their love, refuse to forgive their frolic, and rend their hearts with reproaches, better let them remain unknown.”

“No, no; we will forget and forgive, only speak!” was the command of both.

“You promise to be lenient and mild, to let them confess their motives, and to award a gentle penance for their sins?”

“Yes, we promise!”

“Then, come in, my lads, and plead for your lives.”

As he spoke the major threw open the door, and two gentlemen entered the room — one, slight and dark, with brilliant black eyes; the other tall and large, with blond hair and beard. Angry, bewildered, and shame-stricken as they were, feminine curiosity overpowered all other feelings for the moment, and the girls sat looking at the culprits with eager eyes, full of instant recognition; for though the disguise was off, and neither had seen them in their true characters but once, they felt no doubt, and involuntarily exclaimed, —

“Karl!”

“Casimer.”

“No, young ladies; the courier and exile are defunct, and from their ashes rise Baron Sigismund Palsdorf, my friend, and Sidney Power, my nephew. I give you one hour to settle the matter; then I shall return to bestow my blessing or to banish these scapegraces forever.”

And, having fired his last shot, the major prudently retreated, without waiting to see its effect.

It was tremendous, for it carried confusion into the fair enemy’s camp; and gave the besiegers a momentary advantage of which they were not slow to avail themselves.

For a moment the four remained mute and motionless: then Amy, like all timid things, took refuge in flight, and Sidney followed her into the garden, glad to see the allies separated. Helen, with the courage of her nature, tried to face and repulse the foe; but love was stronger than pride, maiden shame overcame anger, and, finding it vain to meet and bear down the steady, tender glance of the blue eyes fixed upon her, she dropped her head into her hands and sat before him, like one conquered but too proud to cry “Quarter.” Her lover watched her till she hid her face, then drew near, knelt down before her, and said, with an undertone of deep feeling below the mirthful malice of his words, —

“Mademoiselle, pardon me that I am a foolish baron, and dare to offer you the title that you hate. I have served you faithfully for a month, and, presumptuous as it is, I ask to be allowed to serve you all my life. Helen, say you forgive the deceit for love’s sake.”

“No; you are false and forsworn. How can I believe that anything is true?”

And Helen drew away the hand of which he had taken possession.

"Heart's dearest, you trusted me in spite of my disguise; trust me still, and I will prove that I am neither false nor forsworn. Catechise me, and see if I was not true in spite of all my seeming deception."

"You said your name was Karl Hoffman," began Helen, glad to gain a little time to calm herself before the momentous question came.

"It is; I have many, and my family choose to call me Sigismund," was the laughing answer.

"I'll never call you so; you shall be Karl, the courier, all your life to me," cried Helen, still unable to meet the ardent eyes before her.

"Good; I like that well; for it assures me that all my life I shall be something to you, my heart. What next?"

"When I asked if you were the baron, you denied it."

"Pardon! I simply said my name was Hoffman. You did not ask me point blank if I was the baron; had you done so, I think I should have confessed all, for it was very hard to restrain myself this morning."

"No, not yet; I have more questions;" and Helen warned him away, as it became evident that he no longer considered restraint necessary.

"Who is Ludmilla?" she said, sharply.

"My faith, that is superb!" exclaimed the baron, with a triumphant smile at her betrayal of jealousy. "How if she is a former love?" he asked, with a sly look at her changing face.

"It would cause me no surprise; I am prepared for anything."

"How if she is my dearest sister, for whom I sent, that she might welcome you and bring the greetings of my parents to their new daughter?"

"Is it, indeed, so?"

And Helen's eyes dimmed as the thought of parents, home and love filled her heart with tenderest gratitude, for she had long been an orphan.

"*Leibchen*, it is true; to-morrow you shall see how dear you already are to them, for I write often and they wait eagerly to receive you."

Helen felt herself going very fast, and made an effort to harden her heart, lest too easy victory should reward this audacious lover.

"I may not go; I also have friends, and in England we are not won in this wild way. I will yet prove you false; it will console me for being so duped if I can call you traitor. You said Casimer had fought in Poland."

"Crudest of women, he did, but under his own name, Sidney Power."

"Then, he was not the brave Stanislas? — and there is no charming Casimer?"

"Yes, there are both, — his and my friends, in Paris; true Poles, and when we go there you shall see them."

"But his illness was a ruse?"

"No; he was wounded in the war and has been ill since. Not of a fatal malady, I own; his cough misled you, and *he* has no scruples in fabling to any extent. I am not to bear the burden of his sins."

"Then, the romances he told us about your charity, your virtues, and — your love of liberty were false?" said Helen, with a keen glance, for these tales had done much to interest her in the unknown baron.

Sudden color rose to his forehead, and for the first time his eyes fell before hers, — not in shame, but with a modest man's annoyance at hearing himself praised.

"Sidney is enthusiastic in his friendship, and speaks too well for me. The facts are true, but he doubtless glorified the simplest by his way of telling it. Will you forgive my follies, and believe me when I promise to play and duel no more?"

"Yes."

She yielded her hand now, and her eyes were full of happiness, yet she added, wistfully, —

"And the betrothed, your cousin, Minna, — is she, in truth, not dear to you?"

"Very dear, but less so than another; for I could not learn of her in years what I learned in a day when I met you. Helen, this was begun in jest, — it ends in solemn earnest, for I love my liberty, and I have lost it, utterly and forever. Yet I am glad; look in my face and tell me you believe it."

He spoke now as seriously as fervently, and with no shadow on her own, Helen brushed back the blond hair and looked into her lover's face. Truth, tenderness, power, and candor were written there in characters that could not lie; and with her heart upon her lips, she answered, as he drew her close, —

"I do believe, do love you, Sigismund!" Meanwhile another scene was passing in the garden. Sidney, presuming upon his cousinship, took possession of Amy, bidding her "strike but hear him." Of course she listened with the usual accompaniment of tears and smiles, reproaches and exclamations, varied by cruel exultations and coquettish commands to go away and never dare approach her again.

"*Ma drogha*, listen and be appeased. Years ago you and I played together as babies, and our fond mammas vowed we should one day mate. When I was a youth of fourteen and you a mite of seven I went away to India with my father, and at our parting promised to come back and marry you. Being in a fret because you couldn't go also, you haughtily declined the honor, and when I offered a farewell kiss, struck me with this very little hand. Do you remember it?"

"Not I. Too young for such nonsense."

"I do, and I also remember that in my boyish way I resolved to keep my word sooner or later, and I've done it."

"We shall see, sir," cried Amy, strongly tempted to repeat her part of the childish scene as well as her cousin, but her hand was not free, and he got the kiss without the blow.

"For eleven years we never met. You forgot me, and 'Cousin Sidney' remained an empty name. I was in India till four years ago; since then I've been flying about Germany and fighting in Poland, where I nearly got my quietus."

"My dear boy, were you wounded?"

"Bless you, yes; and very proud of it I am. I'll show you my scars some day; but never mind that now. A while ago I went to England, seized with a sudden desire to find my wife."

"I admire your patience in waiting; so flattering to me, you know," was the sharp answer.

"It looks like neglect, I confess; but I'd heard reports of your flirtations, and twice of your being engaged, so I kept away till my work was done. Was it true?"

"I never flirt, Sidney, and I was only engaged a little bit once or twice. I didn't like it, and never mean to do so any more."

"I shall see that you don't flirt; but you are very much engaged now, so put on your ring and make no romances about any 'S.P.' but myself."

"I shall wait till you clear your character; I'm not going to care for a deceitful impostor. What made you think of this prank?"

"You did."

"I? How?"

"When in England I saw your picture, though you were many a mile away, and fell in love with it. Your mother told me much about you, and I saw she would not frown upon my suit. I begged her not to tell you I had come, but let me find you and make myself known when I liked. You were in Switzerland, and I went after you. At Coblentz I met Sigismund, and told him my case; he is full of romance, and when we overheard you in the balcony we were glad of the hint. Sigismund was with me when you came, and admired Helen immensely, so he was wild to have a part in the frolic. I let him begin, and followed you unseen to Heidelberg, meaning to personate an artist. Meeting you at the castle, I made a good beginning with the vaults and the ring, and meant to follow it up by acting the baron, you were so bent on finding him, but Sigismund forbade it. Turning over a trunk of things left there the year before, I came upon my old Polish uniform, and decided to be a Thaddeus."

"How well you did it! Wasn't it hard to act all the time?" asked Amy, wonderingly.

"Very hard with Helen, she is so keen, but not a bit so with you, for you are such a confiding soul any one could cheat you. I've betrayed myself a dozen times, and you never saw it. Ah, it was capital fun to play the forlorn exile, study English, and flirt with my cousin."

"It was very base. I should think you'd be devoured with remorse.
Aren't you sorry?"

"For one thing. I cropped my head lest you should know me. I was proud of my curls, but I sacrificed them all to you."

"Peacock! Did you think that one glimpse of your black eyes and fine hair would make such an impression that I should recognize you again?"

"I did, and for that reason disfigured my head, put on a mustache, and assumed hideous spectacles. Did you never suspect my disguise, Amy?"

"No. Helen used to say that she felt something was wrong, but I never did till the other night."

"Didn't I do that well? I give you my word it was all done on the spur of the minute. I meant to speak soon, but had not decided how, when you came out so sweetly with that confounded old cloak, of which I'd no more need than an African has of a blanket. Then a scene I'd read in a novel came into my head, and I just repeated it *con amore*. Was I very pathetic and tragical. Amy?"

"I thought so then. It strikes me as ridiculous now, and I can't help feeling sorry that I wasted so much pity on a man who — "

"Loves you with all his heart and soul. Did you cry and grieve over me, dear little tender thing? and do you think now that I am a heartless fellow, bent only on amusing myself at the expense of others? It's not so; and you shall see how true and good and steady I can be when I have any one to love and care for me. I've been alone so long it's new and beautiful to be petted, confided in, and looked up to by an angel like you."

He was in earnest now; she felt it, and her anger melted away like dew before the sun.

"Poor boy! You will go home with us now, and let us take care of you in quiet England. You'll play no more pranks, but go soberly to work and do something that shall make me proud to be your cousin, won't you?"

"If you'll change 'cousin' to 'wife' I'll be and do whatever you please. Amy, when I was a poor, dying, Catholic foreigner you loved me and would have married me in spite of everything. Now that I'm your well, rich, Protestant cousin, who adores you as that Pole never could, you turn cold and cruel. Is it because the romance is gone, or because your love was only a girl's fancy, after all?"

"You deceived me and I can't forget it; but I'll try," was the soft answer to his reproaches.

"Are you disappointed that I'm not a baron?"

"A little bit."

"Shall I be a count? They gave me a title in Poland, a barren honor, but all they had to offer, poor souls, in return for a little blood. Will you be Countess Zytomar and get laughed at for your pains, or plain Mrs. Power, with a good old English name?"

"Neither, thank you; it's only a girlish fancy, which will soon be forgotten. Does the baron love Helen?" asked Amy, abruptly.

"Desperately, and she?"

"I think he will be happy; she is not one to make confidantes, but I know by her tenderness with me, her sadness lately, and something in her way of brightening when he comes, that she thinks much of him and loves Karl Hoffman. How it will be with the baron I cannot say."

"No fear of him; he wins his way everywhere. I wish I were as fortunate;" and the gay young gentleman heaved an artful sigh and coughed the cough that always brought such pity to the girl's soft eyes.

She glanced at him as he leaned pensively on the low wall, looking down into the lake, with the level rays of sunshine on his comely face and figure. Something softer than pity stole into her eye, as she said, anxiously, —

"You are not really ill, Sidney?"

"I have been, and still need care, else I may have a relapse," was the reply of this treacherous youth, whose constitution was as sound as a bell.

Amy clasped her hands, as if in a transport of gratitude, exclaiming, fervently, —

"What a relief it is to know that you are not doomed to — "

She paused with a shiver, as if the word were too hard to utter, and Sidney turned to her with a beaming face, which changed to one of mingled pain and anger, as she added, with a wicked glance, —

"Wear spectacles."

"Amy, you've got no heart!" he cried, in a tone that banished her last doubt of his love and made her whisper tenderly, as she clung to his arm, —

"No, dear; I've given it all to you."

Punctual to the minute, Major Erskine marched into the *salon*, with Mrs.

Cumberland on his arm, exclaiming, as he eyed the four young people together again, —

"Now, ladies, is it to be 'Paradise Lost' or 'Regained' for the prisoners at the bar?"

At this point the astonished gentleman found himself taken possession of by four excited individuals, for the girls embraced and kissed him, the young men wrung his hand and thanked him, and all seemed bent on assuring him that they were intensely happy, grateful and affectionate.

From this assault he emerged flushed and breathless, but beaming with satisfaction, and saying paternally, —

"Bless you, my children, bless you. I hoped and worked for this, and to prove how well I practise what I preach, let me present to you — my wife."

As he drew forward the plump widow with a face full of smiles and tears, a second rush was made, and congratulations, salutes, exclamations and embraces were indulged in to every one's satisfaction.

As the excitement subsided the major said, simply, —

"We were married yesterday at Montreaux. Let me hope that you will prove as faithful as I have been, as happy as I am, as blest as I shall be. I loved this lady in my youth, have waited many years, and am rewarded at last, for love never comes too late."

The falter in his cheery voice, the dimness of his eyes, the smile on his lips, and the gesture with which he returned the pressure of the hand upon his arm, told the little romance of the good major's life more eloquently than pages of fine writing, and touched the hearts of those who loved him.

"I have been faithful for eleven years. Give me my reward soon, won't you, dear?" whispered Sidney.

"Don't marry me to-morrow, and if mamma is willing I'll think about it by and by," answered Amy.

"It is beautiful! let us go and do likewise," said Sigismund to his betrothed.

But Helen, anxious to turn the thoughts of all from emotions too deep for words, drew from her pocket a small pearl-colored object, which she gave to Amy with mock solemnity, as she said, turning to lay her hand again in her lover's, —

"Amy, our search is over. *You* may keep the gloves; *I* have the baron."

MY RED CAP

“He who serves well need not fear to ask his wages.”

I

It was under a blue cap that I first saw the honest face of Joe Collins. In the third year of the late war a Maine regiment was passing through Boston, on its way to Washington. The Common was all alive with troops and the spectators who clustered round them to say God-speed, as the brave fellows marched away to meet danger and death for our sakes.

Every one was eager to do something; and, as the men stood at ease, the people mingled freely with them, offering gifts, hearty grips of the hand, and hopeful prophecies of victory in the end. Irresistibly attracted, my boy Tom and I drew near, and soon, becoming excited by the scene, ravaged the fruit-stands in our neighborhood for tokens of our regard, mingling candy and congratulations, peanuts and prayers, apples and applause, in one enthusiastic jumble.

While Tom was off on his third raid, my attention was attracted by a man who stood a little apart, looking as if his thoughts were far away. All the men were fine, stalwart fellows, as Maine men usually are; but this one over-topped his comrades, standing straight and tall as a Norway pine, with a face full of the mingled shrewdness, sobriety, and self-possession of the typical New Englander. I liked the look of him; and, seeing that he seemed solitary, even in a crowd, I offered him my last apple with a word of interest. The keen blue eyes met mine gratefully, and the apple began to vanish in vigorous bites as we talked; for no one thought of ceremony at such a time.

“Where are you from?”

“Woolidge, ma’am.”

“Are you glad to go?”

“Wal, there’s two sides to that question. I calk’late to do my duty, and do it hearty: but it *is* rough on a feller leavin’ his folks, for good, maybe.”

There was a sudden huskiness in the man’s voice that was not apple-skins, though he tried to make believe that it was. I knew a word about home would comfort him, so I went on with my questions.

“It is very hard. Do you leave a family?”

“My old mother, a sick brother, — and Lucindy.”

The last word was uttered in a tone of intense regret, and his brown cheek reddened as he added hastily, to hide some embarrassment. —

"You see, Jim went last year, and got pretty well used up; so I felt as if I'd ought to take my turn now. Mother was a regular old hero about it and I dropped everything, and come off. Lucindy didn't think it was my duty; and that made it awful hard, I tell you."

"Wives are less patriotic than mothers," I began; but he would not hear Lucindy blamed, and said quickly, —

"She ain't my wife yet, but we calk'lated to be married in a month or so; and it was wus for her than for me, women lot so on not being disappointed. I *couldn't* shirk, and here I be. When I git to work, I shall be all right: the first wrench is the tryin' part."

Here he straightened his broad shoulders, and turned his face toward the flags fluttering far in front, as if no backward look should betray the longing of his heart for mother, home, and wife. I liked that little glimpse of character; and when Tom returned with empty hands, reporting that every stall was exhausted, I told him to find out what the man would like best, then run across the street and get it.

"I know without asking. Give us your purse, and I'll make him as happy as a king," said the boy, laughing, as he looked up admiringly at our tall friend, who looked down on him with an elder-brotherly air pleasant to see. While Tom was gone, I found out Joe's name and business, promised to write and tell his mother how finely the regiment went off, and was just expressing a hope that we might meet again, for I too was going to the war as nurse, when the order to "Fall in!" came rolling down the ranks, and the talk was over. Fearing Tom would miss our man in the confusion, I kept my eye on him till the boy came rushing up with a packet of tobacco in one hand and a good supply of cigars in the other. Not a romantic offering, certainly, but a very acceptable one, as Joe's face proved, as we scrambled these treasures into his pockets, all laughing at the flurry, while less fortunate comrades helped us, with an eye to a share of these fragrant luxuries by and by. There was just time for this, a hearty shake of the big hand, and a grateful "Good-by, ma'am;" then the word was given, and they were off. Bent on seeing the last of them, Tom and I took a short cut, and came out on the wide street down which so many troops marched that year; and, mounting some high steps, we watched for our man, as we already called him.

As the inspiring music, the grand tramp, drew near, the old thrill went through the crowd, the old cheer broke out. But it was a different scene now than in the first enthusiastic, hopeful days. Young men and ardent boys filled the ranks then, brave by instinct, burning with loyal zeal, and blissfully unconscious of all that lay before them. Now the blue coats were worn by mature men, some gray, all grave and resolute: husbands and fathers, with the memory of wives and children tugging at their heart-strings; homes left desolate behind them, and before them the grim certainty of danger, hardship, and perhaps the lifelong helplessness worse than death. Little of the glamour of romance about the war now: they saw it as it was, a long, hard task; and here were the men to do it well. Even the lookers-on were different now. Once all was wild enthusiasm and glad uproar; now men's lips were set, and women's smileless as they cheered; fewer handkerchiefs whitened the air, for wet eyes needed them; and sudden lulls, almost solemn in their stillness, followed the acclamations of the crowd. All watched with quickened breath and brave souls that living wave, blue below, and bright with a steely glitter above, as it flowed down the street and away to distant battle-fields already stained with precious blood.

"There he is! The outside man, and tallest of the lot. Give him a cheer, auntie: he sees us, and remembers!" cried Tom, nearly tumbling off his perch, as he waved his hat, and pointed out Joe Collins.

Yes, there he was, looking up, with a smile on his brave brown face, my little nosegay in his button-hole, a suspicious bulge in the pocket close by, and doubtless a comfortable quid in his mouth, to cheer the weary march. How like an old friend he looked, though we had only met fifteen minutes ago; how glad we were to be there to smile back at him, and send him on his way feeling that, even in a strange city, there was some one to say, "God bless you, Joe!" We watched the tallest blue cap till it vanished, and then went home in a glow of patriotism, — Tom to long for his turn to come, I to sew vigorously on the gray gown the new nurse burned to wear as soon as possible, and both of us to think and speak often of poor Joe Collins and his Lucindy. All this happened long ago; but it is well to recall those stirring times, — to keep fresh the memory of sacrifices made for us by men like these; to see to it that the debt we owe them is honestly, gladly paid; and, while we decorate the graves of those who died, to remember also those who still live to deserve our grateful care.

II

I never expected to see Joe again; but, six months later, we did meet in a Washington hospital one winter's night. A train of ambulances had left their sad freight at our door, and we were hurrying to get the poor fellows into much needed beds, after a week of hunger, cold, and unavoidable neglect. All forms of pain were in my ward that night, and all borne with the pathetic patience which was a daily marvel to those who saw it.

Trying to bring order out of chaos, I was rushing up and down the narrow aisle between the rows of rapidly filling beds, and, after brushing several times against a pair of the largest and muddiest boots I ever saw, I paused at last to inquire why they were impeding the passageway. I found they belonged to a very tall man who seemed to be already asleep or dead, so white and still and utterly worn out he looked as he lay there, without a coat, a great patch on his forehead, and the right arm rudely bundled up. Stooping to cover him, I saw that he was unconscious, and, whipping out my brandy-bottle and salts, soon brought him round, for it was only exhaustion.

"Can you eat?" I asked, as he said, "Thanky, ma'am," after a long draught of water and a dizzy stare.

"Eat! I'm starvin'!" he answered, with such a ravenous glance at a fat nurse who happened to be passing, that I trembled for her, and hastened to take a bowl of soup from her tray.

As I fed him, his gaunt, weather-beaten face had a familiar look; but so many such faces had passed before me that winter, I did not recall this one till the ward-master came to put up the cards with the new-comers' names above their beds. My man seemed absorbed in his food; but I naturally glanced at the card, and there was the name "Joseph Collins" to give me an additional interest in my new patient.

"Why, Joe! is it really you?" I exclaimed, pouring the last spoonful of soup down his throat so hastily that I choked him.

"All that's left of me. Wal, ain't this luck, now?" gasped Joe, as gratefully as if that hospital-cot was a bed of roses.

"What is the matter? A wound in the head and arm?" I asked, feeling sure that no slight affliction had brought Joe there.

"Right arm gone. Shot off as slick as a whistle. I tell you, it's a sing'lar kind of a feelin' to see a piece of your own body go flyin' away, with no prospect of ever coming back again," said Joe, trying to make light of one of the greatest misfortunes a man can suffer.

"That is bad, but it might have been worse. Keep up your spirits, Joe; and we will soon have you fitted out with a new arm almost as good as new."

"I guess it won't do much lumberin', so that trade is done for. I s'pose there's things left-handed fellers can do, and I must learn 'em as soon as possible, since my fightin' days are over," and Joe looked at his one arm with a sigh that was almost a groan, helplessness is such a trial to a manly man, — and he was eminently so.

"What can I do to comfort you most, Joe? I'll send my good Ben to help you to bed, and will be here myself when the surgeon goes his rounds. Is there anything else that would make you more easy?"

"If you could just drop a line to mother to let her know I'm alive, it would be a sight of comfort to both of us. I guess I'm in for a long spell of hospital, and I'd lay easier if I knew mother and Lucindy warn't frettin' about me."

He must have been suffering terribly, but he thought of the women who loved him before himself, and, busy as I was, I snatched a moment to send a few words of hope to the old mother. Then I left him "layin' easy," though the prospect of some months of wearing pain would have daunted most men. If I had needed anything to increase my regard for Joe, it would have been the courage with which he bore a very bad quarter of an hour with the surgeons; for his arm was in a dangerous state, the wound in the head feverish for want of care; and a heavy cold on the lungs suggested pneumonia as an added trial to his list of ills.

"He will have a hard time of it, but I think he will pull through, as he is a temperate fellow, with a splendid constitution," was the doctor's verdict, as he left us for the next man, who was past help, with a bullet through his lungs.

"I don'no as I hanker to live, and be a burden. If Jim was able to do for mother, I feel as if I wouldn't mind steppin' out now I'm so fur along. As he ain't, I s'pose I must brace up, and do the best I can," said Joe, as I wiped the drops from his forehead, and tried to look as if his prospect was a bright one.

"You will have Lucindy to help you, you know; and that will make things easier for all."

"Think so? 'Pears to me I couldn't ask her to take care of three invalids for my sake. She ain't no folks of her own, nor much means, and ought to marry a man who can make things easy for her. Guess I'll have to wait a spell longer before I say anything to Lucindy about marryin' now;" and a look of resolute resignation settled on Joe's haggard face as he gave up his dearest hope.

"I think Lucindy will have something to say, if she is like most women, and you will find the burdens much lighter, for sharing them between you. Don't worry about that, but get well, and go home as soon as you can."

"All right, ma'am;" and Joe proved himself a good soldier by obeying orders, and falling asleep like a tired child, as the first step toward recovery.

For two months I saw Joe daily, and learned to like him very much, he was so honest, genuine, and kind-hearted. So did his mates, for he made friends with them all by sharing such small luxuries as came to him, for he was a favorite; and, better still, he made sunshine in that sad place by the brave patience with which he bore his own troubles, the cheerful consolation he always gave to others. A droll fellow was Joe at times, for under his sobriety lay much humor; and I soon discovered that a visit from him was more efficacious than other cordials in cases of despondency and discontent. Roars of laughter sometimes greeted me as I went into his ward, and Joe's jokes were passed round as eagerly as the water-pitcher.

Yet he had much to try him, not only in the ills that vexed his flesh, but the cares that tried his spirit, and the future that lay before him, full of anxieties and responsibilities which seemed so heavy now when the strong right arm, that had cleared all obstacles away before, was gone. The letters I wrote for him, and those he received, told the little story very plainly; for he read them to me, and found much comfort in talking over his affairs, as most men do when illness makes them dependent on a woman. Jim was evidently sick and selfish. Lucindy, to judge from the photograph cherished so tenderly under Joe's pillow, was a pretty, weak sort of a girl, with little character or courage to help poor Joe with his burdens. The old mother was very like her son, and stood by him "like a hero," as he said, but was evidently failing, and begged him to come home as soon as he was able, that she might see him comfortably settled before she must leave him. Her courage sustained his, and the longing to see her hastened his departure as soon as it was safe to let him go; for Lucindy's letters were always of a dismal sort, and made him anxious to put his shoulder to the wheel.

"She always set consider'ble by me, mother did, bein' the oldest; and I wouldn't miss makin' her last days happy, not if it cost me all the arms and legs I've got," said Joe, as he awkwardly struggled into the big boots an hour after leave to go home was given him.

It was pleasant to see his comrades gather round him with such hearty adieus that his one hand must have tingled; to hear the good wishes and the thanks called after him by pale creatures in their beds; and to find tears in many eyes beside my own when he was gone, and nothing was left of him but the empty cot, the old gray wrapper, and the name upon the wall.

I kept that card among my other relics, and hoped to meet Joe again somewhere in the world. He sent me one or two letters, then I went home; the war ended soon after, time passed, and the little story of my Maine lumberman was laid away with many other experiences which made that part of my life a very memorable one.

III

Some years later, as I looked out of my window one dull November day, the only cheerful thing I saw was the red cap of a messenger who was examining the slate that hung on a wall opposite my hotel. A tall man with gray hair and beard, one arm, and a blue army-coat. I always salute, figuratively at least, when I see that familiar blue, especially if one sleeve of the coat is empty; so I watched the messenger with interest as he trudged away on some new errand, wishing he had a better day and a thicker pair of boots. He was an unusually large, well-made man, and reminded me of a fine building going to ruin before its time; for the broad shoulders were bent, there was a stiffness about the long legs suggestive of wounds or rheumatism, and the curly hair looked as if snow had fallen on it too soon. Sitting at work in my window, I fell into the way of watching my Red Cap, as I called him, with more interest than I did the fat doves on the roof opposite, or the pert sparrows hopping in the mud below. I liked the steady way in which he plodded on through fair weather or foul, as if intent on doing well the one small service he had found to do. I liked his cheerful whistle as he stood waiting for a job under the porch of the public building where his slate hung, watching the luxurious carriages roll by, and the well-to-do gentlemen who daily passed him to their comfortable homes, with a steady, patient sort of face, as if wondering at the inequalities of fortune, yet neither melancholy nor morose over the small share of prosperity which had fallen to his lot.

I often planned to give him a job, that I might see him nearer; but I had few errands, and little Bob, the hall-boy, depended on doing those: so the winter was nearly over before I found out that my Red Cap was an old friend.

A parcel came for me one day, and bidding the man wait for an answer, I sat down to write it, while the messenger stood just inside the door like a sentinel on duty. When I looked up to give my note and directions, I found the man staring at me with a beaming yet bashful face, as he nodded, saying heartily, —

“I mistrusted it was you, ma’am, soon’s I see the name on the bundle, and I guess I ain’t wrong. It’s a number of years sence we met, and you don’t remember Joe Collins as well as he does you, I reckon?”

“Why, how you have changed! I’ve been seeing you every day all winter, and never knew you,” I said, shaking hands with my old patient, and very glad to see him.

“Nigh on to twenty years makes consid’able of a change in folks, ‘specially if they have a pretty hard row to hoe.”

“Sit down and warm yourself while you tell me all about it; there is no hurry for this answer, and I’ll pay for your time.”

Joe laughed as if that was a good joke, and sat down as if the fire was quite as welcome as the friend.

“How are they all at home?” I asked, as he sat turning his cap round, not quite knowing where to begin.

“I haven’t got any home nor any folks neither;” and the melancholy words banished the brightness from his rough face like a cloud. “Mother died soon after I got back. Suddin’, but she was ready, and I was there, so she was happy. Jim lived a number of years, and was a sight of care, poor feller; but we managed to rub along, though we had to sell the farm: for I couldn’t do much with one arm, and doctor’s bills right along stiddy take a heap of money. He was as comfortable as he could be; and, when he was gone, it wasn't no great matter, for there was only me, and I don't mind roughin' it."

"But Lucindy, where was she?" I asked very naturally.

"Oh! she married another man long ago. Couldn't expect her to take me and my misfortins. She's doin' well, I hear, and that's a comfort anyway."

There was a look on Joe's face, a tone in Joe's voice as he spoke, that plainly showed how much he had needed comfort when left to bear his misfortunes all alone. But he made no complaint, uttered no reproach, and loyally excused Lucindy's desertion with a simple sort of dignity that made it impossible to express pity or condemnation.

"How came you here, Joe?" I asked, making a sudden leap from past to present.

"I had to scratch for a livin', and can't do much: so, after tryin' a number of things, I found this. My old wounds pester me a good deal, and rheumatism is bad winters; but, while my legs hold out, I can git on. A man can't set down and starve; so I keep waggin' as long as I can. When I can't do no more, I s'pose there's almshouse and hospital ready for me."

"That is a dismal prospect, Joe. There ought to be a comfortable place for such as you to spend your last days in. I am sure you have earned it."

"Wal, it does seem ruther hard on us when we've give all we had, and give it free and hearty, to be left to knock about in our old age. But there's so many poor folks to be took care of, we don't get much of a chance, for *we* ain't the beggin' sort," said Joe, with a wistful look at the wintry world outside, as if it would be better to lie quiet under the snow, than to drag out his last painful years, friendless and forgotten, in some refuge of the poor.

"Some kind people have been talking of a home for soldiers, and I hope the plan will be carried out. It will take time; but, if it comes to pass, you shall be one of the first men to enter that home, Joe, if I can get you there."

"That sounds mighty cheerin' and comfortable, thanky, ma'am. Idleness is dreadful tryin' to me, and I'd rather wear out than rust out; so I guess I can weather it a spell longer. But it will be pleasant to look forrard to a snug harbor bymeby. I feel a sight better just hearin' tell about it." He certainly looked so, faint as the hope was; for the melancholy eyes brightened as if they already saw a happier refuge in the future than almshouse, hospital, or grave, and, when he trudged away upon my errand, he went as briskly as if every step took him nearer to the promised home.

After that day it was all up with Bob, for I told my neighbors Joe's story, and we kept him trotting busily, adding little gifts, and taking the sort of interest in him that comforted the lonely fellow, and made him feel that he had not outlived his usefulness. I never looked out when he was at his post that he did not smile back at me; I never passed him in the street that the red cap was not touched with a military flourish; and, when any of us beckoned to him, no twinge of rheumatism was too sharp to keep him from hurrying to do our errands, as if he had Mercury's winged feet.

Now and then he came in for a chat, and always asked how the Soldiers' Home was prospering; expressing his opinion that "Boston was the charitablest city under the sun, and he was sure he and his mates would be took care of somehow."

When we parted in the spring, I told him things looked hopeful, bade him be ready for a good long rest as soon as the hospitable doors were open, and left him nodding cheerfully.

IV

But in the autumn I looked in vain for Joe. The slate was in its old place, and a messenger came and went on his beat; but a strange face was under the red cap, and this man had two arms and one eye. I asked for Collins, but the new-comer had only a vague idea that he was dead; and the same answer was given me at headquarters, though none of the busy people seemed to know when or where he died. So I mourned for Joe, and felt that it was very hard he could not have lived to enjoy the promised refuge; for, relying upon the charity that never fails, the Home was an actual fact now, just beginning its beneficent career. People were waking up to this duty, money was coming in, meetings were being held, and already a few poor fellows were in the refuge, feeling themselves no longer paupers, but invalid soldiers honorably supported by the State they had served. Talking it over one day with a friend, who spent her life working for the Associated Charities, she said, —

"By the way, there is a man boarding with one of my poor women, who ought to be got into the Home, if he will go. I don't know much about him, except that he was in the army, has been very ill with rheumatic fever, and is friendless. I asked Mrs. Flanagin how she managed to keep him, and she said she had help while he was sick, and now he is able to hobble about, he takes care of the children, so she is able to go out to work. He won't go to his own town, because there is nothing for him there but the almshouse, and he dreads a hospital; so struggles along, trying to earn his bread tending babies with his one arm. A sad case, and in your line; I wish you'd look into it."

"That sounds like my Joe, one arm and all. I'll go and see him; I've a weakness for soldiers, sick or well."

I went, and never shall forget the pathetic little tableau I saw as I opened Mrs. Flanagin's dingy door; for she was out, and no one heard my tap. The room was redolent of suds, and in a grove of damp clothes hung on lines sat a man with a crying baby laid across his lap, while he fed three small children standing at his knee with bread and molasses. How he managed with one arm to keep the baby from squirming on to the floor, the plate from upsetting, and to feed the hungry urchins who stood in a row with open mouths, like young birds, was past my comprehension. But he did, trotting baby gently, dealing out sweet morsels patiently, and whistling to himself, as if to beguile his labors cheerfully.

The broad back, the long legs, the faded coat, the low whistle were all familiar; and, dodging a wet sheet, I faced the man to find it was indeed my Joe! A mere shadow of his former self, after months of suffering that had crippled him for life, but brave and patient still; trying to help himself, and not ask aid though brought so low.

For an instant I could not speak to him, and, encumbered with baby, dish, spoon, and children, he could only stare at me with a sudden brightening of the altered face that made it full of welcome before a word was uttered.

“They told me you were dead, and I only heard of you by accident, not knowing I should find my old friend alive, but not well, I’m afraid?”

“There ain’t much left of me but bones and pain, ma’am. I’m powerful glad to see you all the same. Dust off a chair, Patsey, and let the lady set down. You go in the corner, and take turns lickin’ the dish, while I see company,” said Joe, disbanding his small troop, and shouldering the baby as if presenting arms in honor of his guest.

“Why didn’t you let me know how sick you were? And how came they to think you dead?” I asked, as he festooned the wet linen out of the way, and prepared to enjoy himself as best he could.

“I did send once, when things was at the wust; but you hadn’t got back, and then somehow I thought I was goin’ to be mustered out for good, and so wouldn’t trouble nobody. But my orders ain’t come yet, and I am doing the fust thing that come along. It ain’t much, but the good soul stood by me, and I ain’t ashamed to pay my debts this way, sence I can’t do it in no other;” and Joe cradled the chubby baby in his one arm as tenderly as if it had been his own, though little Biddy was not an inviting infant.

“That is very beautiful and right, Joe, and I honor you for it; but you were not meant to tend babies, so sing your last lullabies, and be ready to go to the Home as soon as I can get you there.”

“Really, ma’am? I used to lay and kind of dream about it when I couldn’t stir without yellin’ out; but I never thought it would ever come to happen. I see a piece in the paper describing it, and it sounded dreadful nice. Shouldn’t wonder if I found some of my mates there. They were a good lot, and deservin’ of all that could be done for ‘em,” said Joe, trotting the baby briskly, as if the prospect excited him, as well it might, for the change from that damp nursery to the comfortable quarters prepared for him would be like going from Purgatory to Paradise.

“I don’t wonder you don’t get well living in such a place, Joe. You should have gone home to Woolwich, and let your friends help you,” I said, feeling provoked with him for hiding himself.

“No, ma’am!” he answered, with a look I never shall forget, it was so full of mingled patience, pride, and pain. “I haven’t a relation in the world but a couple of poor old aunts, and they couldn’t do anything for me. As for asking help of folks I used to know, I couldn’t do it; and if you think I’d go to Lucindy, though she is wal off, you don’t know Joe Collins. I’d die fust! If she was poor and I rich, I’d do for her like a brother; but I couldn’t ask no favors of her, not if I begged my vittles in the street, or starved. I forgive, but I don’t forgit in a hurry; and the woman that stood by me when I was down is the woman I believe in, and can take my bread from without shame. Hooray for Biddy Flanagin! God bless her!” and, as if to find a vent for the emotion that filled his eyes with grateful tears, Joe led off the cheer, which the children shrilly echoed, and I joined heartily.

“I shall come for you in a few days; so cuddle the baby and make much of the children before you part. It won’t take you long to pack up, will it?” I asked, as we subsided with a general laugh.

“I reckon not as I don’t own any clothes but what I set in, except a couple of old shirts and them socks. My hat’s stoppin’ up the winder, and my old coat is my bed-cover. I’m awful shabby, ma’am, and that’s one reason I don’t go out more. I can hobble some, but I ain’t got used to bein’ a scarecrow yet,” and Joe glanced from the hose without heels that hung on the line to the ragged suit he wore, with a resigned expression that made me long to rush out and buy up half the contents of Oak Hall on the spot.

Curbing this wild impulse I presently departed with promises of speedy transportation for Joe, and unlimited oranges to assuage the pangs of parting for the young Flanagins, who escorted me to the door, while Joe waved the baby like a triumphal banner till I got round the corner.

There was such a beautiful absence of red tape about the new institution that it only needed a word in the right ear to set things going; and then, with a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, Joe Collins was taken up and safely landed in the Home he so much needed and so well deserved.

A happier man or a more grateful one it would be hard to find, and if a visitor wants an enthusiastic guide about the place, Joe is the one to take, for all is comfort, sunshine, and good-will to him; and he unconsciously shows how great the need of this refuge is, as he hobbles about on his lame feet, pointing out its beauties, conveniences, and delights with his one arm, while his face shines, and his voice quavers a little as he says gratefully, —

“The State don’t forget us, you see, and this is a Home wuth havin’.
Long life to it!”

WHAT THE BELLS SAW AND SAID

[Written in 1867.]

“Bells ring others to church, but go not in themselves.”

No one saw the spirits of the bells up there in the old steeple at midnight on Christmas Eve. Six quaint figures, each wrapped in a shadowy cloak and wearing a bell-shaped cap. All were gray-headed, for they were among the oldest bell-spirits of the city, and “the light of other days” shone in their thoughtful eyes. Silently they sat, looking down on the snow-covered roofs glittering in the moonlight, and the quiet streets deserted by all but the watchmen on their chilly rounds, and such poor souls as wandered shelterless in the winter night. Presently one of the spirits said, in a tone, which, low as it was, filled the belfry with reverberating echoes, —

“Well, brothers, are your reports ready of the year that now lies dying?”

All bowed their heads, and one of the oldest answered in a sonorous voice: —

“My report isn’t all I could wish. You know I look down on the commercial part of our city and have fine opportunities for seeing what goes on there. It’s my business to watch the business men, and upon my word I’m heartily ashamed of them sometimes. During the war they did nobly, giving their time and money, their sons and selves to the good cause, and I was proud of them. But now too many of them have fallen back into the old ways, and their motto seems to be, ‘Every one for himself, and the devil take the hindmost.’ Cheating, lying and stealing are hard words, and I don’t mean to apply them to *all* who swarm about below there like ants on an ant-hill — *they* have other names for these things, but I’m old-fashioned and use plain words. There’s a deal too much dishonesty in the world, and business seems to have become a game of hazard in which luck, not labor, wins the prize. When I was young, men were years making moderate fortunes, and were satisfied with them. They built them on sure foundations, knew how to enjoy them while they lived, and to leave a good name behind them when they died.

“Now it’s anything for money; health, happiness, honor, life itself, are flung down on that great gaming-table, and they forget everything else in the excitement of success or the desperation of defeat. Nobody seems satisfied either, for those who win have little time or taste to enjoy their prosperity, and those who lose have little courage or patience to support them in adversity. They don’t even fail as they used to. In my day when a merchant found himself embarrassed he didn’t ruin others in order to save himself, but honestly confessed the truth, gave up everything, and began again. But now-a-days after all manner of dishonorable shifts there comes a grand crash; many suffer, but by some hocus-pocus the merchant saves enough to retire upon and live comfortably here or abroad. It’s very evident that honor and honesty don’t mean now what they used to mean in the days of old May, Higginson and Lawrence.

“They preach below here, and very well too sometimes, for I often slide down the rope to peep and listen during service. But, bless you! they don’t seem to lay either sermon, psalm or prayer to heart, for while the minister is doing his best, the congregation, tired with the breathless hurry of the week, sleep peacefully, calculate their chances for the morrow, or wonder which of their neighbors will lose or win in the great game. Don’t tell me! I’ve seen them do it, and if I dared I’d have startled every soul of them with a rousing peal. Ah, they don’t dream whose eye is on them, they never guess what secrets the telegraph wires tell as the messages fly by, and little know what a report I give to the winds of heaven as I ring out above them morning, noon, and night.” And the old spirit shook his head till the tassel on his cap jangled like a little bell.

“There are some, however, whom I love and honor,” he said, in a benignant tone, “who honestly earn their bread, who deserve all the success that comes to them, and always keep a warm corner in their noble hearts for those less blest than they. These are the men who serve the city in times of peace, save it in times of war, deserve the highest honors in its gift, and leave behind them a record that keeps their memories green. For such an one we lately tolled a knell, my brothers; and as our united voices pealed over the city, in all grateful hearts, sweeter and more solemn than any chime, rung the words that made him so beloved, —

“‘Treat our dead boys tenderly, and send them home to me.’“

He ceased, and all the spirits reverently uncovered their gray heads as a strain of music floated up from the sleeping city and died among the stars.

“Like yours, my report is not satisfactory in all respects,” began the second spirit, who wore a very pointed cap and a finely ornamented cloak. But, though his dress was fresh and youthful, his face was old, and he had nodded several times during his brother’s speech. “My greatest affliction during the past year has been the terrible extravagance which prevails. My post, as you know, is at the court end of the city, and I see all the fashionable vices and follies. It is a marvel to me how so many of these immortal creatures, with such opportunities for usefulness, self-improvement and genuine happiness can be content to go round and round in one narrow circle of unprofitable and unsatisfactory pursuits. I do my best to warn them; Sunday after Sunday I chime in their ears the beautiful old hymns that sweetly chide or cheer the hearts that truly listen and believe; Sunday after Sunday I look down on them as they pass in, hoping to see that my words have not fallen upon deaf ears; and Sunday after Sunday they listen to words that should teach them much, yet seem to go by them like the wind. They are told to love their neighbor, yet too many hate him because he possesses more of this world's goods or honors than they: they are told that a rich man cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, yet they go on laying up perishable wealth, and though often warned that moth and rust will corrupt, they fail to believe it till the worm that destroys enters and mars their own chapel of ease. Being a spirit, I see below external splendor and find much poverty of heart and soul under the velvet and the ermine which should cover rich and royal natures. Our city saints walk abroad in threadbare suits, and under quiet bonnets shine the eyes that make sunshine in the shady places. Often as I watch the glittering procession passing to and fro below me. I wonder if, with all our progress, there is to-day as much real piety as in the times when our fathers, poorly clad, with weapon in one hand and Bible in the other, came weary distances to worship in the wilderness with fervent faith unquenched by danger, suffering and solitude.

"Yet in spite of my fault-finding I love my children, as I call them, for all are not butterflies. Many find wealth no temptation to forgetfulness of duty or hardness of heart. Many give freely of their abundance, pity the poor, comfort the afflicted, and make our city loved and honored in other lands as in our own. They have their cares, losses, and heartaches as well as the poor; it isn't all sunshine with them, and they learn, poor souls, that

"'Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary.'

"But I've hopes of them, and lately they have had a teacher so genial, so gifted, so well-beloved that all who listen to him must be better for the lessons of charity, good-will and cheerfulness which he brings home to them by the magic of tears and smiles. We know him, we love him, we always remember him as the year comes round, and the blithest song our brazen tongues utter is a Christmas carol to the Father of 'The Chimes!'"

As the spirit spoke his voice grew cheery, his old face shone, and in a burst of hearty enthusiasm he flung up his cap and cheered like a boy. So did the others, and as the fairy shout echoed through the belfry a troop of shadowy figures, with faces lovely or grotesque, tragical or gay, sailed by on the wings of the wintry wind and waved their hands to the spirits of the bells.

As the excitement subsided and the spirits reseated themselves, looking ten years younger for that burst, another spoke. A venerable brother in a dingy mantle, with a tuneful voice, and eyes that seemed to have grown sad with looking on much misery.

“He loves the poor, the man we’ve just hurrahed for, and he makes others love and remember them, bless him!” said the spirit. “I hope he’ll touch the hearts of those who listen to him here and beguile them to open their hands to my unhappy children over yonder. If I could set some of the forlorn souls in my parish beside the happier creatures who weep over imaginary woes as they are painted by his eloquent lips, that brilliant scene would be better than any sermon. Day and night I look down on lives as full of sin, self-sacrifice and suffering as any in those famous books. Day and night I try to comfort the poor by my cheery voice, and to make their wants known by proclaiming them with all my might. But people seem to be so intent on business, pleasure or home duties that they have no time to hear and answer my appeal. There’s a deal of charity in this good city, and when the people do wake up they work with a will; but I can’t help thinking that if some of the money lavished on luxuries was spent on necessaries for the poor, there would be fewer tragedies like that which ended yesterday. It’s a short story, easy to tell, though long and hard to live; listen to it.

“Down yonder in the garret of one of the squalid houses at the foot of my tower, a little girl has lived for a year, fighting silently and single-handed a good fight against poverty and sin. I saw her when she first came, a hopeful, cheerful, brave-hearted little soul, alone, yet not afraid. She used to sit all day sewing at her window, and her lamp burnt far into the night, for she was very poor, and all she earned would barely give her food and shelter. I watched her feed the doves, who seemed to be her only friends; she never forgot them, and daily gave them the few crumbs that fell from her meagre table. But there was no kind hand to feed and foster the little human dove, and so she starved.

“For a while she worked bravely, but the poor three dollars a week would not clothe and feed and warm her, though the things her busy fingers made sold for enough to keep her comfortably if she had received it. I saw the pretty color fade from her cheeks; her eyes grew hollow, her voice lost its cheery ring, her step its elasticity, and her face began to wear the haggard, anxious look that made its youth doubly pathetic. Her poor little gowns grew shabby, her shawl so thin she shivered when the pitiless wind smote her, and her feet were almost bare. Rain and snow beat on the patient little figure going to and fro, each morning with hope and courage faintly shining, each evening with the shadow of despair gathering darker round her. It was a hard time for all, desperately hard for her, and in her poverty, sin and pleasure tempted her. She resisted, but as another bitter winter came she feared that in her misery she might yield, for body and soul were weakened now by the long struggle. She knew not where to turn for help; there seemed to be no place for her at any safe and happy fireside; life’s hard aspect daunted her, and she turned to death, saying confidingly, ‘Take me while I’m innocent and not afraid to go.’

“I saw it all! I saw how she sold everything that would bring money and paid her little debts to the utmost penny; how she set her poor room in order for the last time; how she tenderly bade the doves good-by, and lay down on her bed to die. At nine o’clock last night as my bell rang over the city, I tried to tell what was going on in the garret where the light was dying out so fast. I cried to them with all my strength. —

“‘Kind souls, below there! a fellow-creature is perishing for lack of charity! Oh, help her before it is too late! Mothers, with little daughters on your knees, stretch out your hands and take her in! Happy women, in the safe shelter of home, think of her desolation! Rich men, who grind the faces of the poor, remember that this soul will one day be required of you! Dear Lord, let not this little sparrow fall to the ground! Help, Christian men and women, in the name of Him whose birthday blessed the world!’

“Ah me! I rang, and clashed, and cried in vain. The passers-by only said, as they hurried home, laden with Christmas cheer: ‘The old bell is merry to-night, as it should be at this blithe season, bless it!’

“As the clocks struck ten, the poor child lay down, saying, as she drank the last bitter draught life could give her, ‘It’s very cold, but soon I shall not feel it;’ and with her quiet eyes fixed on the cross that glimmered in the moonlight above me, she lay waiting for the sleep that needs no lullaby.

“As the clock struck eleven, pain and poverty for her were over. It was bitter cold, but she no longer felt it. She lay serenely sleeping, with tired heart and hands, at rest forever. As the clocks struck twelve, the dear Lord remembered her, and with fatherly hand led her into the home where there is room for all. To-day I rung her knell, and though my heart was heavy, yet my soul was glad; for in spite of all her human woe and weakness, I am sure that little girl will keep a joyful Christmas up in heaven.”

In the silence which the spirits for a moment kept, a breath of softer air than any from the snowy world below swept through the steeple and seemed to whisper, “Yes!”

“Avast there! fond as I am of salt water, I don’t like this kind,” cried the breezy voice of the fourth spirit, who had a tiny ship instead of a tassel on his cap, and who wiped his wet eyes with the sleeve of his rough blue cloak. “It won’t take me long to spin my yarn; for things are pretty taut and ship-shape aboard our craft. Captain Taylor is an experienced sailor, and has brought many a ship safely into port in spite of wind and tide, and the devil’s own whirlpools and hurricanes. If you want to see earnestness come aboard some Sunday when the Captain’s on the quarter-deck, and take an observation. No danger of falling asleep there, no more than there is up aloft, ‘when the stormy winds do blow.’ Consciences get raked fore and aft, sins are blown clean out of the water, false colors are hauled down and true ones run up to the masthead, and many an immortal soul is warned to steer off in time from the pirates, rocks and quicksands of temptation. He’s a regular revolving light, is the Captain, — a beacon always burning and saying plainly, ‘Here are life-boats, ready to put off in all weathers and bring the shipwrecked into quiet waters.’ He comes but seldom now, being laid up in the home dock, tranquilly waiting till his turn comes to go out with the tide and safely ride at anchor in the great harbor of the Lord. Our crew varies a good deal. Some of ‘em have rather rough voyages, and come into port pretty well battered; land-sharks fall foul of a good many, and do a deal of damage; but most of ‘em carry brave and tender hearts under the blue jackets, for their rough nurse, the sea, manages to keep something of the child alive in the grayest old tar that makes the world his picture-book. We try to supply ‘em with life-preservers while at sea, and make ‘em feel sure of a hearty welcome when ashore, and I believe the year ‘67 will sail away into eternity with a satisfactory cargo. Brother North-End made me pipe my eye; so I’ll make him laugh to pay for it, by telling a clerical joke I heard the other day. Bellows didn’t make it, though he might have done so, as he’s a connection of ours, and knows how to use his tongue as well as any of us. Speaking of the bells of a certain town, a reverend gentleman affirmed that each bell uttered an appropriate remark so plainly, that the words were audible to all. The Baptist bell cried, briskly, ‘Come up and be dipped! come up and be dipped!’ The Episcopal bell slowly said, ‘Apos-tol-ic suc-cess-ion! apos-tol-ic suc-cess-ion!’ The Orthodox bell solemnly pronounced, ‘Eternal damnation! eternal damnation!’ and the Methodist shouted, invitingly, ‘Room for all! room for all!’“

As the spirit imitated the various calls, as only a jovial bell-sprite could, the others gave him a chime of laughter, and vowed they would each adopt some tuneful summons, which should reach human ears and draw human feet more willingly to church.

“Faith, brother, you’ve kept your word and got the laugh out of us,” cried a stout, sleek spirit, with a kindly face, and a row of little saints round his cap and a rosary at his side. “It’s very well we are doing this year; the cathedral is full, the flock increasing, and the true faith holding its own entirely. Ye may shake your heads if you will and fear there’ll be trouble, but I doubt it. We’ve warm hearts of our own, and the best of us don’t forget that when we were starving, America — the saints bless the jewel! — sent us bread; when we were dying for lack of work, America opened her arms and took us in, and now helps us to build churches, homes and schools by giving us a share of the riches all men work for and win. It’s a generous nation ye are, and a brave one, and we showed our gratitude by fighting for ye in the day of trouble and giving ye our Phil, and many another broth of a boy. The land is wide enough for us both, and while we work and fight and grow together, each may learn something from the other. I’m free to confess that your religion looks a bit cold and hard to me, even here in the good city where each man may ride his own hobby to death, and hoot at his neighbors as much as he will. You seem to keep your piety shut up all the week in your bare, white churches, and only let it out on Sundays, just a trifle musty with disuse. You set your rich, warm and soft to the fore, and leave the poor shivering at the door. You give your people bare walls to look upon, commonplace music to listen to, dull sermons to put them asleep, and then wonder why they stay away, or take no interest when they come.

“We leave our doors open day and night; our lamps are always burning, and we may come into our Father’s house at any hour. We let rich and poor kneel together, all being equal there. With us abroad you’ll see prince and peasant side by side, school-boy and bishop, market-woman and noble lady, saint and sinner, praying to the Holy Mary, whose motherly arms are open to high and low. We make our churches inviting with immortal music, pictures by the world’s great masters, and rites that are splendid symbols of the faith we hold. Call it mummery if ye like, but let me ask you why so many of your sheep stray into our fold? It’s because they miss the warmth, the hearty, the maternal tenderness which all souls love and long for, and fail to find in your stern. Puritanical belief. By Saint Peter! I’ve seen many a lukewarm worshipper, who for years has nodded in your cushioned pews, wake and glow with something akin to genuine piety while kneeling on the stone pavement of one of our cathedrals, with Raphael’s angels before his eyes, with strains of magnificent music in his ears, and all about him, in shapes of power or beauty, the saints and martyrs who have saved the world, and whose presence inspires him to follow their divine example. It’s not complaining of ye I am, but just reminding ye that men are but children after all, and need more tempting to virtue than they do to vice, which last comes easy to ‘em since the Fall. Do your best in your own ways to get the poor souls into bliss, and good luck to ye. But remember, there’s room in the Holy Mother Church for all, and when your own priests send ye to the divil, come straight to us and we’ll take ye in.”

“A truly Catholic welcome, bull and all,” said the sixth spirit, who, in spite of his old-fashioned garments, had a youthful face, earnest, fearless eyes, and an energetic voice that woke the echoes with its vigorous tones. “I’ve a hopeful report, brothers, for the reforms of the day are wheeling into rank and marching on. The war isn’t over nor rebeldom conquered yet, but the Old Guard has been ‘up and at ‘em’ through the year. There has been some hard fighting, rivers of ink have flowed, and the Washington dawdlers have signalized themselves by a ‘masterly inactivity.’ The political campaign has been an anxious one; some of the leaders have deserted; some been mustered out; some have fallen gallantly, and as yet have received no monuments. But at the Grand Review the Cross of the Legion of Honor will surely shine on many a brave breast that won no decoration but its virtue here; for the world’s fanatics make heaven’s heroes, poets say.

“The flock of Nightingales that flew South during the ‘winter of our discontent’ are all at home again, some here and some in Heaven. But the music of their womanly heroism still lingers in the nation’s memory, and makes a tender minor-chord in the battle-hymn of freedom.

“The reform in literature isn’t as vigorous as I could wish; but a sharp attack of mental and moral dyspepsia will soon teach *our* people that French confectionery and the bad pastry of Wood, Bracdon, Yates & Co. is not the best diet for the rising generation.

“Speaking of the rising generation reminds me of the schools. They are doing well; they always are, and we are justly proud of them. There may be a slight tendency toward placing too much value upon book-learning; too little upon home culture. Our girls are acknowledged to be uncommonly pretty, witty and wise, but some of us wish they had more health and less excitement, more domestic accomplishments and fewer ologies and isms, and were contented with simple pleasures and the old-fashioned virtues, and not quite so fond of the fast, frivolous life that makes them old so soon. I am fond of our girls and boys. I love to ring for their christenings and marriages, to toll proudly for the brave lads in blue, and tenderly for the innocent creatures whose seats are empty under my old roof. I want to see them anxious to make Young America a model of virtue, strength and beauty, and I believe they will in time.

“There have been some important revivals in religion; for the world won’t stand still, and we must keep pace or be left behind to fossilize. A free nation must have a religion broad enough to embrace all mankind, deep enough to fathom and fill the human soul, high enough to reach the source of all love and wisdom, and pure enough to satisfy the wisest and the best. Alarm bells have been rung, anathemas pronounced, and Christians, forgetful of their creed, have abused one another heartily. But the truth always triumphs in the end, and whoever sincerely believes, works and waits for it, by whatever name he calls it, will surely find his own faith blessed to him in proportion to his charity for the faith of others.

"But look! — the first red streaks of dawn are in the East. Our vigil is over, and we must fly home to welcome in the holidays. Before we part, join with me, brothers, in resolving that through the coming year we will with all our hearts and tongues, —

"'Ring out the old, ring in the new,
Ring out the false, ring in the true;
Ring in the valiant man and free,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.'"

Then hand in hand the spirits of the bells floated away, singing in the hush of dawn the sweet song the stars sung over Bethlehem, — "Peace on earth, good will to men."

SPINNING-WHEEL STORIES.

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Grandma’s Story

“It is too bad to have our jolly vacation spoiled by this provoking storm. Didn’t mind it yesterday, because we could eat all the time; but here we are cooped up for a week, perhaps, and I’d like to know what we are to do,” growled Geoff, as he stood at the window looking gloomily at the bleak scene without. It certainly was discouraging; for the north wind howled, the air was dark with falling snow, and drifts were rising over fences, roads, and fields, as if to barricade the Christmas party in the great country house.

“We can bear it pleasantly, since it can’t be helped,” said gentle sister Mary, with a kind hand on his shoulder, and a face full of sympathy for his disappointment. “I’m sorry for the coasting, skating, and sleighing frolics we have lost; but if we must be shut up, I’m sure we couldn’t have a pleasanter prison or a kinder jailer. Don’t let grandma hear us complain, for she has made great exertions to have our visit a merry one, and it will trouble her if we are not gay and contented.”

“That’s easy for a parcel of girls, who only want to mull over the fire, and chatter, and drink tea; but it’s rough on us fellows, who come for the outside fun. House is well enough; but when you’ve seen it once, there’s an end. Eating is jolly, but you can’t stuff forever. We might dig, or snowball, if it didn’t blow a gale. Never saw such a beast of a storm!” — and Geoff flattened his nose against the window-pane and scowled at the elements.

A laugh made him turn around, and forget his woes to stare at the quaint little figure that stood curtseying in the door-way of the keeping-room, where a dozen young people were penned while the maids cleared up the remains of yesterday’s feast in the kitchen, the mothers were busy with the babies upstairs, and the fathers read papers in the best parlor; for this was a family gathering under the roof of the old homestead.

A rosy, dark-eyed face looked out from the faded green calash, a gayly flowered gown was looped up over a blue quilted petticoat, and a red camlet cloak hung down behind. A big reticule and a funny umbrella were held in either hand, and red hose and very high-heeled, pointed shoes covered a trim pair of feet.

“God bless you, merry gentlemen! May nothing you dismay; Here’s your ancient granny come To call, this Christmas day,”

sang Minnie, the lively member of the flock, as she bobbed little curtseys and smiled so infectiously that even cross Geoff cheered up.

“Where did you get that rigging?” “Isn’t it becoming?” “What queer stuff!” “Did grandma ever look so, I wonder?”

These and many other questions rained upon the wearer of the old costume, and she answered them as fast as she could.

“I went rummaging up garret for something to read, and found two chests of old duds. Thought I’d dress up and see how you liked me. Grandma said I might, and told me I looked like her when she was young. She was a beauty, you know; so I feel as proud as a peacock.” And Min danced away to stand before the portrait of a blooming girl in a short-waisted, white-satin gown and a pearl necklace, which hung opposite the companion portrait of an officer in an old-fashioned uniform.

“So you do. Wonder if I should look like grandpa if I got into his old toggery!” said Geoff, looking up at the handsome man with the queue and the high coat-collar.

“Go and try; the uniform is in the chest, and not much moth-eaten. Let’s have a jolly rummage, and see what we can find. *We* didn’t eat ourselves sick, so we will amuse these lazy invalids;” and Min glanced pityingly at several cousins who lay about on sofas or in easy chairs, pretending to read, but evidently suffering from too great devotion to the bountiful dinner and evening feast of yesterday.

Away went Min and Lotty, Geoff and Walt, glad of anything to beguile the stormy afternoon. Grandma smiled as she heard the tramp of feet overhead, the peals of laughter, and the bang of chest-lids, well knowing that a scene of dire confusion awaited her when the noisy frolic was done, but thankful for the stores of ancient finery which would keep the restless children happy for a day.

It was truly a noble garret, for it extended the whole length of the great square house, with windows at either end, and divided in the middle by a solid chimney. All around stood rows of chests, dilapidated furniture, and wardrobes full of old relics, while the walls were hung with many things for which modern tongues can find no names. In one corner was a book-case full of musty books and papers; in another, kitchen utensils and rusty weapons; the third was devoted to quilts hung on lines, and in the fourth stood a loom with a spinning-wheel beside it, both seemingly well cared for, as the dust lay lightly on them, and flax was still upon the distaff.

A glorious rummage followed the irruption of the Goths and Vandals into this quiet spot, and soon Geoff quite forgot the storm as he pranced about in the buff-and-blue coat, with a cocked hat on his head, and grandfather’s sword at his side. Lotty arrayed herself in a pumpkin hood and quilted cloak for warmth, while

Walt, the book-worm, went straight to the ancient library, and became absorbed in faded souvenirs, yellow newspapers, and almanacs of a century ago.

Having displayed themselves below and romped all over the house, the masqueraders grew tired at last, and early twilight warned them to leave before ghostly shadows began to haunt the garret.

"I mean to take this down and ask grandma to show me how it's done. I've heard her tell about spinning and weaving when she was a girl, and I know I can learn," said Minnie, who had fallen in love with the little wheel, and vainly tried to twist the flax into as smooth a thread as the one hanging from the distaff, as if shadowy fingers had lately spun it.

"Queen Victoria set the fashion in England, and we might do it here. Wouldn't it be fun to have a wheel in the parlor at home, and really use it; not keep it tied up with blue ribbons, as the other girls do!" cried Lotty, charmed with the new idea.

"Come, Geoff, take it down for us. You ought to do it out of gratitude for my cheering you up so nicely," said Min, leading the way.

"So I will. Here, Walt, give it a hoist, and come behind to pick up the pieces, for the old machine must be about a hundred, I guess."

Shouldering the wheel, Geoff carried it down; but no bits fell by the way, for the stout little wheel was all in order, kept so by loving hands that for more than eighty years had been spinning the mingled thread of a long and useful life.

Glorious fires were roaring up the wide chimneys in parlor and keeping-room, and old and young were gathering around them, while the storm beat on the window-panes, and the wintry wind howled as if angry at being shut out.

"See what we've stolen, grandma," cried Min, as the procession came in, rosy, dusty, gay, and eager.

"Bless the child! What possessed you to lug that old thing down?" asked Madam Shirley, much amused as the prize was placed before her, where she sat in her high-backed chair, — a right splendid old lady in her stately cap, black silk gown, and muslin apron, with a bunch of keys at her side, like a model housekeeper, as she was.

"You don't mind our playing with it, do you? And will you teach me to spin? I think it's such a pretty little thing, and I want to be like you in all ways, grandma dear," answered Min, sitting on the arm of the great chair, with her fresh cheek close to the wrinkled one where winter roses still bloomed.

"You wheedling gypsy! I'll teach you with all my heart, for it is pretty work, and I often wonder ladies don't keep it up. I did till I was too busy, and now I often take a turn at it when I'm tired of knitting. The hum is very soothing, and the thread much stronger than any we get nowadays."

As she spoke, the old lady dusted the wheel, and gave it a skilful turn or two, till the soft whir made pleasant music in the room.

“Is it really a hundred years old?” asked Geoff, drawing nearer with the others to watch the new work.

“Just about. It was one of my mother’s wedding presents, and she gave it to me when I was fifteen. Deary me, how well I remember that day!” and grandma seemed to fall a-dreaming as her eyes rested on the letters E. R. M. rudely cut in the wood, and below these were three others with something meant for a true lover’s knot between.

“Whose initials are these?” asked Min, scenting a romance with girlish quickness, for grandma was smiling as if her eyes read the title to some little story in those worn letters.

“Elizabeth Rachel Morgan, and Joel Manlius Shirley. Your blessed grandfather cut our names there the day I was sixteen, and put the flourish between to show what he wanted,” added the old lady, laughing as she made the wheel hum again.

“Tell about it, please do,” begged Min, remembering that grandma had been a beauty and a belle.

“It’s a long tale, my darling, and I couldn’t tell it now. Sometime when I’m teaching you to spin I’ll do it, maybe.”

But the girl was determined to have her story; and after tea, when the little ones were in bed, the elders playing whist in the parlor, and the young folks deciding what game to begin, Minnie sat down and tried to spin, sure that the familiar sound would lure grandma to give the lesson and tell the tale.

She was right, for the wheel had not gone around many times, when the tap of the cane was heard, and the old lady came rustling in, quite ready for a chat, now that three cups of her own good tea and a nap in the chimney corner had refreshed her.

“No, dear, that’s not the way; you need a dish of water to wet your fingers in, and you must draw the flax out slow and steady, else it runs to waste, and makes a poor thread. Fetch me that chair, and I’ll show you how, since you are bent on learning.”

Establishing herself in the straight-backed seat, a skilful tap of the foot set the wheel in swift and easy motion, and the gray thread twisted fine and evenly from the distaff.

“Isn’t it a pretty picture?” said Min to Lotty, as they watched the old lady work.

“Not so pretty as the one I used to see when my dear mother sat here, and I, a little child, at her knee. Ah, my dears, she could have told you stories all night long, and well worth hearing. I was never tired of them.”

“Please tell one now, grandma. We don’t know what to play, and it would be so nice to sit around the fire and hear it this stormy night,” suggested Min, artfully seizing the hint.

“Do! Do! We all love stories, and we’ll be as still as mice,” added Geoff, beckoning to the others as he took the big arm-chair, being the oldest grandson and leader of the flock.

Camping on the rug, or nestling in the sofa corner, the boys and girls all turned expectant faces toward grandma, who settled her cap-strings and smoothed her spotless apron, with an indulgent smile at her little audience.

“I don’t know which one to tell first.”

“The ghost story; that’s a splendid one, and most of the children never heard it,” said Walt.

“Have Indians and fighting in it. I like that kind,” added Geoff.

“No; tell a love story. They are *so* interesting,” said Lotty.

“I want the story about the initials first. I know it is very sentimental. So do begin with that, grandma,” begged Min.

“Well, dears, perhaps I’d better choose that one, for it has the battle of New Orleans, and wolves, and spinning, and sweethearts in it; so it will suit you all, I hope.”

“Oh, lovely! Do begin right away,” cried Minnie, as the clapping of hands showed how satisfactory the prospect was.

Grandma gave a loud “hem!” and began at once, while the little wheel hummed a soft accompaniment to her words.

GRANDMA’S STORY

“When I was fifteen, my mother gave me this wheel, and said: ‘Now, daughter Betsey, it is time for you to begin your wedding outfit, for I mistrust you’ll marry young.’ In those days girls spun and wove webs of fine linen and laid ‘em up in chests, with lavender and rosemary, for sheets and table-linen after they married. So I spun away, making all manner of fine plans in my silly head, for I was a pretty piece, they all said, and young as I was, two or three fine lads used to come evenings and sit staring at me while I worked.

“Among these, was my neighbor Joel Manlius Shirley, and I was fond of him; but he hadn’t much money, so I put on airs, and tried his patience very much. One day he came in and said: ‘Betsey, I’m going a-soldiering; they need men, and I’m off. Will you think of poor Joe when I’m gone?’

“I don’t know how I looked, but I felt as if I couldn’t bear it. Only I was too proud to show my trouble; so I laughed, and gave my wheel a twist, and said I was glad of it, since anything was better than hanging round at home.

“That hurt him; but he was always gentle to saucy Betsey, and taking out his knife, he cut those letters under mine, saying, with a look I never could forget:—

“‘That will remind you of me if you are likely to forget. Good-by; I’m going right away, and may never come back.’

“He kissed me, and was off before I could say a word, and then I cried till my flax was wet and my thread tangled, and my heart ‘most broken. Deary me, how well I remember that heavy day!”

Grandma smiled, but something shone in her old eyes very like a tear, and sentimental Lotty felt deeply interested at this point.

“Where does the fighting come in?” asked Geoff, who was of a military turn, as became the descendant of a soldier.

“I didn’t know or care much about the War of 1812, except as far as the safety of one man was concerned. Joe got on without any harm till the battle of New Orleans, when he was nearly killed behind the cotton-bale breastworks General Jackson built.”

“Yes, I know all about it. Jackson fought against twelve thousand, and lost only seven men. That was the last battle of the war, January 8, 1815. Three cheers for grandpa!” shouted Geoff, waving a tidy, as no hat was at hand.

The others echoed the hurrah, and grandma beamed with pride as she went on: “We couldn’t get news from the army very often in those troublous times, and Joe was gone two years before the war ended. After the great battle we had no news for a long spell, and we feared he was one of the seven men killed. Those were dreadful days for all of us. My honored mother was a pious soul, and so was Mrs. Shirley; and they kept up their hearts with hope and prayer; but I, poor thing, was young and weak, and I cried myself half blind, remembering how naughty I had been. I would spin no more, but set the wheel away, saying I should have no need of wedding gear, as I should never marry; and I wore black ribbon on my caps, and one of Joe's buttons strung about my neck, mourning dismally for my lost dear.

"So the winter ended, and the summer went, and no news came of Joe. All said he was dead, and we had prayers at church, and talked of setting up a stone in the grave-yard, and I thought my life was done; for I pined sadly, and felt as if I could never laugh again. But I did; for the Lord was very good to us, and out of danger and captivity delivered that dear boy."

Grandma spoke solemnly, and folded her hands in thanksgiving as she looked up at the picture of the handsome officer hanging on the wall before her. The elder children could just remember grandpa as a very old and feeble man, and it struck them as funny to speak of him as a "dear boy;" but they never smiled, and dutifully lifted their eyes to the queue and the high-collared coat, wondering if Joe was as rosy in real life as in the portrait.

"Well, that's the sentimental part; now comes the merry part, and that will suit the boys," said the old lady, briskly, as she spun away, — and went on in a lively tone: —

"One December day, as I sat by that very window, dreaming sorrowfully at my sewing work, while old Sally nodded over her knitting by the fire, I saw a man come creeping along by the fence and dodge behind the wood-pile. There were many bad folks 'round in those times; for war always leaves a sight of lazy rascals afloat, as well as poor fellows maimed and homeless.

"Mother had gone over to the sewing society at Mrs. Shirley's, and I was all alone; for Sally was so stiff with rheumatics she could scarce stir, and that was why I stayed to take care of her. The old musket always hung over the kitchen chimney-piece, loaded, and I knew how to fire it, for Joe had taught me. So away I went and got it down; for I saw the man popping up his head now and then to spy the land, and I felt sure he meant mischief. I knew Sally would only scream like a scared hen, so I let her sleep; and getting behind the shutter I pointed my gun, and waited to blaze away as soon as the enemy showed signs of attacking.

"Presently he came creeping up to the back door, and I heard him try the latch. All was fast, so I just slipped into the kitchen and stood behind the settle, for I was surer than ever he was a rascal since I'd seen him nearer. He was a tall man, dreadful shabby in an old coat and boots, a ragged hat over his eyes, and a great beard hiding the lower part of his face. He had a little bundle and a big stick in his hands, and limped as if foot-sore or lame.

"I was much afeard; but those were times that made heroes of men, and taught women to be brave for love of home and country. So I kept steady, with my eye on the window, and my finger on the trigger of the old gun, that hadn't been fired for years. Presently the man looked in, and I saw what a strange roll his great eyes had, for he was thin-faced and looked half-starved. If mother had been there, she'd have called him in and fed him well, but I dared not, and when he tried the window I aimed, but did not fire; for finding the button down he went away, and I dropped on the settle, shaking like a leaf. All was still, and in a minute I plucked up courage to go to look out a bit; but just as I reached the middle of the kitchen, the buttery door opened, and there stood the robber, with a carving knife in one hand and my best loaf of spice bread in the other. He said something, and made a rush at me; but I pulled the trigger, saw a flash, felt a blow, and fell somewhere, thinking, 'Now I'm dead!'"

Here grandma paused for breath, having spoken rapidly and acted out the scene dramatically, to the intense delight of the children, who sat like images of interest, staring at her with round eyes.

"But you weren't dead? What next?" cried Walt, eagerly.

"Bless you, no! I only fell into Joe's arms, and when I came to, there the dear fellow was, crying over me like a baby, while old Sally danced round us like a bedlamite, in spite of her rheumatics, shouting: 'Hosanna! Thanks and praise! He's come, he's come!'"

"Was he shot?" asked Geoff, anxious for a little bloodshed.

"No, dear; the old gun burst and hurt my hands, but not a mite of harm was done to Joe. I don't think I could tell all that happened for a spell, being quite dazed with joy and surprise; but by the time mother came home I was as peart as a wren, and Joe was at the table eating and drinking every mortal thing I could find in the house.

"He'd been kept a prisoner till exchanged, and had had a hard time getting home, with little money and a bad wound in the leg, besides being feeble with jail fever. But we didn't fret over past troubles, being so glad to get him back. How my blessed mother did laugh, when we told her the reception I gave the poor lad! But I said it served him right, since he came sneaking home like a thief, instead of marching in like a hero. Then he owned that he came there to get something to eat, being ashamed to go in upon his mother with all her company about her. So we fed and comforted him; and when we'd got our wits about us, I whipped away to Mrs. Shirley's and told my news, and every one of those twenty-five women went straight over to our house and burst in upon poor Joe, as he lay resting on the settle. That was my revenge for the scare he gave me, and a fine one it was; for the women chattered over him like a flock of magpies, and I sat in the corner and laughed at him. Ah, I was a sad puss in those days!"

The old lady's black eyes twinkled with fun, and the children laughed with her, till Walt caused a lull by asking: —

"Where do the wolves come in, grandma?"

"Right along, dear; I'm not likely to forget 'em, for they 'most cost me my life, to say nothing of my new slippers. There was great rejoicing over Joe, and every one wanted to do something to honor our hero; for he had done well, we found out, when the General heard his story. We had a great dinner, and Judge Mullikin gave a supper; but Major Belknap was bound to outshine the rest, so he invited all the young folks over to his house, nigh ten miles away, to a ball, and we all went. I made myself fine, you may believe, and wore a pair of blue kid slippers, with mother's best buckles to set 'em off. Joe had a new uniform, and was an elegant figure of a man, I do assure you. He couldn't dance, poor dear, being still very lame: but I was a proud girl when I marched into that ball-room, on the arm of my limping beau. The men cheered, and the ladies stood up in chairs to see him, and he was as red as my ribbons, and I could hardly keep from crying, as I held him up, — the floor being slippery as glass with the extra waxing it had got.

"I declared I wouldn't dance, because Joe couldn't; but he made me, saying he could see me better; so I footed it till two o'clock, soon forgetting all my sorrow and my good resolutions as well. I wanted to show Joe that I was as much a favorite as ever, though I'd lived like a widow for a year. Young folks will be giddy, and I hope these girls will take warning by me and behave better when their time comes. There mayn't be any wolves to sober 'em, but trouble of some sort always follows foolish actions; so be careful, my dears, and behave with propriety when you 'come out,' as you call it nowadays."

Grandma held up a warning forefinger at the girls, and shook her head impressively, feeling that the moral of her tale must be made clear before she went on. But the lassies blushed a little, and the lads looked all impatience, so the dear old lady introduced the wolves as quickly as she could.

"About half-past two, Joe and I drove off home with four fine hams in the bottom of the sleigh, sent by the Major to our mothers. It was a bitter-cold February night, with just light enough to see the road, and splendid sleighing; so we went along at a good pace, till we came to the great woods. They are all gone now, and the woollen mills stand there, but then they were a thick forest of pines, and for more than three miles the road led through them. In former days Indians had lurked there; bears and foxes were still shot, and occasionally wolves were seen, when cold weather drove them to seek food near the sheep-folds and barn-yards.

"Well, we were skimming along pleasantly enough, I rather sleepy, and Joe very careful of me, when, just as I was beginning to doze a bit with my head on his arm I felt him start. Old Buck, the horse, gave a jump that woke me up, and in a minute I knew what the trouble was, for from behind us came the howl of a wolf.

"'Just the night to bring 'em out,' muttered Joe, using the whip till Buck went at his quickest trot, with his ears down and every sign of hurry and worry about him.

"'Are you afraid of them?' I asked, for I'd never had a scare of this sort, though I'd heard other people tell of the fierceness of the brutes when hunger made them bold.

"'Not a bit, only I wish I had my gun along,' said Joe, looking over his shoulder anxiously.

"'Pity I hadn't brought mine — I do so well with it,' I said, and I laughed as I remembered how I aimed at Joe and hurt myself.

"'Are they chasing us?' I asked, standing up to look back along the white road, for we were just on the edge of the woods now.

"'Shouldn't wonder. If I had a better horse it would be a lively race; but Buck can't keep this pace long, and if he founders we are in a fix, for I can't run, and you can't fight. Betsey, there's more than one; hold tight and try to count 'em.'

"Something in Joe's voice told me plainer than words that we were in danger, and I wished we'd waited till the rest of our party came; but I was tired, and so we had started alone.

"Straining my eyes, I could see *three* black spots on the snow, and hear three howls as the wolves came galloping after us. I was a brave girl, but I'd never tried this kind of thing before, and in a minute all the wolf stories I'd ever heard came flying through my mind. I *was* mortally afeard, but I wouldn't show it, and turned to Joe, trying to laugh as I said: 'Only three as yet. Tell me just what to do, and I'll do it.'

"'Brave lass! I must see to Buck or he'll be down, for he's badly scared. You wait till the rascals are pretty close, then heave over one of these confounded hams to amuse 'em, while we make the most of their halt. They smell this meat, and that's what they are after,' said Joe, driving his best, for the poor old horse began to pant, and limp on his stiff legs.

"'Lucky for us we've got 'em,' says I, bound to be cool and gay; 'if we hadn't, they'd get fresh meat instead of smoked.'

"Joe laughed, but a long howl close by made me dive for a ham; for in the darkness of the woods the beasts had got closer, and now all I could see were several balls of fire not many yards away. Out went the ham, and a snarling sound showed that the wolves were busy eating it.

"'All right!' said Joe. 'Rest a bit, and have another ready. They'll soon finish that and want more. We must go easy, for Buck is nearly blown.'

"I prepared my ammunition, and, in what seemed five minutes, I heard the patter of feet behind us, and the fiery eyes were close by. Over went the second mouthful, and then the third, and the fourth; but they seemed more ravenous than ever, and each time were back sooner in greater numbers.

"We were nearly out of the woods when the last was gone, and if Buck had only had strength we should have been safe. But it was plain to see that he couldn't keep up much longer, for he was very old, though he'd been a fine horse in his prime.

"'This looks bad, little Betsey. Cover up in the robes, and hold fast to me. The beasts will begin to snatch presently, and I'll have to fight 'em off. Thank the powers, I've my arms left.'

"As he spoke, Joe pulled me close, and wrapped me up, then took the whip, ready to rap the first wolf that dared come near enough to be hit. We didn't wait long; up they raced, and began to leap and snarl in a way that made my heart stand still, at first. Then my temper rose, and catching up the hot brick I had for my feet, I fired it with such good aim that one sharp, black nose disappeared with a yelp of pain.

"'Hit 'em again, Betsey! Take the demijohn and bang 'em well. We are nearing Beaman's, and the brutes will soon drop off.'

"It was a lively scrimmage for a few minutes, as we both warmed to our work, Joe thrashing away with his whip on one side, and I on the other flourishing the demijohn in which we had carried some cider for the supper.

"But it was soon over, for in the fury of the fight Joe forgot the horse; poor Buck made a sudden bolt, upset the sleigh down a bank, and, breaking loose, tore back along the road with the wolves after him.

"'Run, Betsey! run for your life, and send Beaman's folks back! I'm done for — my leg's broken. Never mind. I'll crawl under the sleigh, and be all right till you come. The wolves will take a good while to pick poor Buck's bones.'

"Just waiting to see Joe safe, I ran as I never ran before, — and I was always light of foot. How I did it I don't know, for I'd forgot to put on my moccasins (we didn't have snow-boots, you know, in my young days), and there I was, tearing along that snowy road in my blue kid slippers like a crazy thing. It was nigh a mile, and my heart was 'most broke before I got there; but I kept my eye on the light in Hetty's winder and tugged along, blessing her for the guide and comfort that candle was. The last bit was down hill, or I couldn't have done it; for when I fell on the doorstep my voice was clean gone, and I could only lie and rap, rap, rap! till they came flying. I just got breath enough to gasp out and point: —

"'Joe — wolves — the big woods — go!' when my senses failed me, and I was carried in."

Here Madam Shirley leaned back in her chair quite used up, for she had been acting the scene to a breathless audience, and laying about her with her handkerchief so vigorously that her eyes snapped, her cheeks were red, and her dear old cap all awry.

"But Joe — did they eat him?" cried the boys in great excitement, while the girls held to one another, and the poor little wheel lay flat, upset by the blows of the imaginary demijohn, dealt to an equally imaginary wolf.

"Hardly, — since he lived to be your grandfather," laughed the old lady, in high feather at the success of her story.

"No, no, — we mean the horse;" shouted Geoff, while the others roared at the mistake.

"Yes, they did. Poor old Buck saved us, at the cost of his own life. His troubles were over, but mine were not; for when I came to, I saw Mr. Beaman, and my first thought and word was 'Joe?'"

"'Too late — they'd got him, so we turned back to tell you,' said that stupid man.

"I gave one cry and was going off again, when his wife shook me, and says, laughing: 'You little goose! He means the folks from the Major's. A lot came along and found Joe, and took him home, and soon's ever you're fit we'll send you along, too.'

"'I'm ready now,' says I, jumping up in a hurry. But I had to sit down again, for my feet were all cut and bleeding, and my slippers just rags. They fixed me up and off I went, to find mother in a sad taking. But Joe was all right; he hadn't broken his leg, but only sprained it badly, and being the wounded one he was laid up longer than I. We both got well, however, and the first time Joe went out he hobbled over to our house. I was spinning again then, and thought I might need my wedding outfit, after all — On the whole, I guess we'll end the story here; young folks wouldn't care for that part."

As grandma paused, the girls cried out with one voice: "Yes, we do! we like it best. You said you would. Tell about the wedding and all."

"Well, well, it isn't much. Joe came and sat by me, and, as we talked over our adventure, he cut that true lover's knot between the letters. I didn't seem to mind, and spun away till he pointed to it, saying, with the look that always made me meek as a lamb, ‘May it stand so, my little Betsey?’

“I said ‘Yes, Joe,’ and then — well, never mind that bit; — we were married in June, and I spun and wove my wedding things afterward. Dreadful slack, my mother thought, but I didn’t care. My wedding gown was white lutestring, full trimmed with old lace. Hair over a cushion with white roses, and the pearl necklace, just as you see up there. Joe wore his uniform, and I tied up his hair with a white satin ribbon. He looked beautiful, — and so did I.”

At this artless bit of vanity, the girls smiled, but all agreed that grandma was right, as they looked at the portraits with fresh interest.

“I call that a pretty good story,” said Walt, with the air of an accomplished critic.

“‘Specially the wolf part. I wanted that longer,” added Geoff.

“It was quite long enough for me, my dear, and I didn’t hear the last of it for years. Why, one of my wedding presents was four hams done up elegantly in white paper, with posies on ‘em, from the Major. He loved a joke, and never forgot how well we fought with the pigs’ legs that night. Joe gave me a new sleigh, the next Christmas, with two wolf-skin robes for it, — shot the beasts himself, and I kept those rugs till the moths ate the last bit. He kept the leavings of my slippers, and I have them still. Fetch ‘em, Minnie — you know where they are.”

Grandma pointed to the tall secretary that stood in a corner, and Minnie quickly took a box from one of the many drawers. All the heads clustered around grandma, and the faded, ragged shoes went from hand to hand, while questions rained upon the story-teller till she bade them go to bed.

Nothing but the promise of more tales would appease them; then, with thanks and kisses, the young folks trooped away, leaving the old lady to put the little wheel to rights, and sit thinking over her girlhood, in the fire-light.

Tabby’s Table Cloth

The storm kept on all night, and next morning the drifts were higher, the wind stronger, and the snow falling faster than ever. Through the day the children roved about the great house, amusing themselves as best they could; and, when evening came, they gathered around the fire again, eager for the promised story from grandmamma.

“I’ve a little cold,” said the old lady, “and am too hoarse for talking, my dears; but Aunt Elinor has looked up a parcel of old tales that I’ve told her at different times and which she has written down. You will like to hear her reading better than my dull way of telling them, and I can help Minnie and Lotty with their work, for I see they are bent on learning to spin.”

The young folk were well pleased with grandma’s proposal; for Aunt Nell was a favorite with all, being lively and kind and fond of children, and the only maiden aunt in the family. Now, she smilingly produced a faded old portfolio, and, turning over a little pile of manuscripts, said in her pleasant way: —

“Here are all sorts, picked up in my travels at home and abroad; and in order to suit all of you, I have put the names on slips of paper into this basket, and each can draw one in turn. Does that please my distinguished audience?”

“Yes, yes. Geoff’s the oldest, let him draw first,” cried the flock, fluttering like a flight of birds before they settle.

“Girls come first,” answered the boy, with a nod toward the eldest girl cousin.

Lotty put in her hand and, after some fumbling, drew out a paper on which was written, “*Tabby’s Table-cloth*.” “Is that a good one?” she asked, for Geoff looked disappointed.

“More fighting, though a girl is still the heroine,” answered Aunt Nell, searching for the manuscript.

“I think two revolutions will be enough for you, General,” added grandmamma, laughing.

“Do we beat in both?” asked the boy, brightening up at once.

“Yes.”

“All right, then. I vote for ‘Dolly’s Dish-cloth,’ or whatever it is; though I don’t see what it can possibly have to do with war,” he added.

“Ah, my dear, women have their part to play as well as men at such times, and do it bravely, though one does not hear so much about their courage. I’ve often wished some one would collect all that can be found about these neglected heroines, and put it in a book for us to read, admire, and emulate when our turn comes."

Grandma looked thoughtfully at the fire as she spoke, and Lotty said, with her eye on the portfolio: "Perhaps Aunt Nell will do it for us. Then history won't be so dry, and we can glorify our fore-mothers as well as fathers."

"I'll see what I can find. Now spin away, Minnie, and sit still, boys, — if you can."

Then, having settled grandma's foot-stool, and turned up the lamp, Aunt Nell read the tale of

TABBY'S TABLE-CLOTH.

On the 20th day of March, 1775, a little girl was trudging along a country road, with a basket of eggs on her arm. She seemed in a great hurry, and looked anxiously about her as she went; for those were stirring times, and Tabitha Tarbell lived in a town that took a famous part in the Revolution. She was a rosy-faced, bright-eyed lass of fourteen, full of vigor, courage, and patriotism, and just then much excited by the frequent rumors which reached Concord that the British were coming to destroy the stores sent there for safe keeping while the enemy occupied Boston. Tabby glowed with wrath at the idea, and (metaphorically speaking) shook her fist at august King George, being a stanch little Rebel, ready to fight and die for her country rather than submit to tyranny of any kind.

In nearly every house something valuable was hidden. Colonel Barrett had six barrels of powder; Ebenezer Hubbard, sixty-eight barrels of flour; axes, tents, and spades were at Daniel Cray's; and Captain David Brown had guns, cartridges, and musket balls. Cannon were hidden in the woods; fire-arms were being manufactured at Barrett's Mills; cartouch-boxes, belts, and holsters, at Reuben Brown's; saltpetre at Josiah Melvin's; and much oatmeal was prepared at Captain Timothy Wheeler's. A morning gun was fired, a guard of ten men patrolled the town at night, and the brave farmers were making ready for what they felt must come.

There were Tories in the town who gave the enemy all the information they could gather; therefore much caution was necessary in making plans, lest these enemies should betray them. Pass-words were adopted, secret signals used, and messages sent from house to house in all sorts of queer ways. Such a message lay hidden under the eggs in Tabby's basket, and the brave little girl was going on an important errand from her uncle, Captain David Brown, to Deacon Cyrus Hosmer, who lived at the other end of the town, by the South Bridge. She had been employed several times before in the same way, and had proved herself quick-witted, stout-hearted, and light-footed. Now, as she trotted along in her scarlet cloak and hood, she was wishing she could still further distinguish herself by some great act of heroism; for good Parson Emerson had patted her on the head and said, “Well done, child!” when he heard how she ran all the way to Captain Barrett’s, in the night, to warn him that Doctor Lee, the Tory, had been detected sending information of certain secret plans to the enemy.

“I would do more than that, though it was a fearsome run through the dark woods. Wouldn’t those two like to know all I know about the stores? But I wouldn’t tell ‘em, not if they drove a bayonet through me. I’m not afeard of ‘em;” and Tabby tossed her head defiantly, as she paused to shift her basket from one arm to the other.

But she evidently was “afeard” of something, for her ruddy cheeks turned pale and her heart gave a thump, as two men came in sight, and stopped suddenly on seeing her. They were strangers; and though nothing in their dress indicated it, the girl’s quick eye saw that they were soldiers; step and carriage betrayed it, and the rapidity with which these martial gentlemen changed into quiet travellers roused her suspicions at once. They exchanged a few whispered words; then they came on, swinging their stout sticks, one whistling, the other keeping a keen lookout along the lonely road before and behind them.

“My pretty lass, can you tell me where Mr. Daniel Bliss lives?” asked the younger, with a smile and a salute.

Tabby was sure now that they were British; for the voice was deep and full, the face a ruddy English face, and the man they wanted was a well-known Tory. But she showed no sign of alarm, beyond the modest color in her cheeks, and answered civilly: “Yes, sir, over yonder a piece.”

“Thanks, and a kiss for that,” said the young man, stooping to bestow his gift. But he got a smart box on the ear, and Tabby ran off in a fury of indignation.

With a laugh they went on, never dreaming that the little Rebel was going to turn spy herself, and get the better of them. She hurried away to Deacon Hosmer’s, and did her errand, adding thereto the news that strangers were in town. “We must know more of them,” said the Deacon. “Clap a different suit on her, wife, and send her with the eggs to Mrs. Bliss. We have all we want of them, and Tabby can look well about her, while she rests and gossips over there. Bliss must be looked after smartly, for he is a knave, and will do us harm.”

Away went Tabby in a blue cloak and hood, much pleased with her mission; and, coming to the Tory’s house about noon, smelt afar off a savory odor of roasting meat and baking pies.

Stepping softly to the back-door, she peeped through a small window, and saw Mrs. Bliss and her handmaid cooking away in the big kitchen, too busy to heed the little spy, who slipped around to the front of the house, to take a general survey before she went in. All she saw confirmed her suspicions; for in the keeping-room a table was set forth in great style, with the silver tankards, best china, and the fine damask table-cloth, which the housewife kept for holidays. Still another peep through the lilac bushes before the parlor windows showed her the two strangers closeted with Mr. Bliss, all talking earnestly, but in too low a tone for a word to reach even her sharp ears.

"I *will* know what they are at. I'm sure it is mischief, and I won't go back with only my walk for my pains," thought Tabby; and marching into the kitchen, she presented her eggs with a civil message from Madam Hosmer.

"They are mighty welcome, child. I've used a sight for my custards, and need more for the flip. We've company to dinner unexpected, and I'm much put about," said Mrs. Bliss, who seemed to be concerned about something besides the dinner, and in her flurry forgot to be surprised at the unusual gift; for the neighbors shunned them, and the poor woman had many anxieties on her husband's account, the family being divided, — one brother a Tory, and one a Rebel.

"Can I help, ma'am? I'm a master hand at beating eggs, Aunt Hitty says. I'm tired, and wouldn't mind sitting a bit if I'm not in the way," said Tabby, bound to discover something more before she left.

"But you be in the way. We don't want any help, so you'd better be steppin' along home, else suthin' besides eggs may git whipped. Tale-bearers ain't welcome here," said old Puah, the maid, a sour spinster, who sympathized with her master, and openly declared she hoped the British would put down the Yankee Rebels soon and sharply.

Mrs. Bliss was in the pantry, and heard nothing of this little passage of arms; for Tabby hotly resented the epithet of "tale-bearer," though she knew that the men in the parlor were not the only spies on the premises.

"When you are all drummed out of town and this house burnt to the ground, you may be glad of my help, and I wish you may get it. Good-day, old crab-apple," answered saucy Tabby; and catching up her basket, she marched out of the kitchen with her nose in the air.

But as she passed the front of the house, she could not resist another look at the fine dinner-table; for in those days few had time or heart for feasting, and the best napery and china seldom appeared. One window stood open, and as the girl leaned in, something moved under the long cloth that swept the floor. It was not the wind, for the March day was still and sunny, and in a minute out popped a gray cat's head, and puss came purring to meet the new-comer whose step had roused her from a nap.

"Where one tabby hides, another can. Can I dare to do it? What would become of me if found out? How wonderful it would be if I could hear what these men are plotting. I will!”

A sound in the next room decided her; and, thrusting the basket among the bushes, she leaped lightly in and vanished under the table, leaving puss calmly washing her face on the window-sill.

As soon as it was done Tabby’s heart began to flutter; but it was too late to retreat, for at that moment in bustled Mrs. Bliss, and the poor girl could only make herself as small as possible, quite hidden under the long folds that fell on all sides from the wide, old-fashioned table. She discovered nothing from the women’s chat, for it ran on sage-cheese, egg-nog, roast pork, and lamentations over a burnt pie. By the time dinner was served, and the guests called in to eat it, Tabby was calm enough to have all her wits about her, and pride gave her courage to be ready for the consequences, whatever they might be.

For a time the hungry gentlemen were too busy eating to talk much; but when Mrs. Bliss went out, and the flip came in, they were ready for business. The window was shut, whereat Tabby exulted that she was inside; the talkers drew closer together, and spoke so low that she could only catch a sentence now and then, which caused her to pull her hair with vexation; and they swore a good deal, to the great horror of the pious little maiden curled up at their feet. But she heard enough to prove that she was right; for these men were Captain Brown and Ensign De Bernicre, of the British army, come to learn where the supplies were stored and how well the town was defended. She heard Mr. Bliss tell them that some of the “Rebels,” as he called his neighbors, had sent him word that he should not leave the town alive, and he was in much fear for his life and property. She heard the Englishmen tell him that if he came with them they would protect him; for they were armed, and three of them together could surely get safely off, as no one knew the strangers had arrived but the slip of a girl who showed them the way. Here “the slip of a girl” nodded her head savagely, and hoped the speaker’s ear still tingled with the buffet she gave it.

Mr. Bliss gladly consented to this plan, and told them he would show them the road to Lexington, which was a shorter way to Boston than through Weston and Sudbury, the road they came.

“These people won’t fight, will they?” asked Ensign De Bernicre.

“There goes a man who will fight you to the death,” answered Mr. Bliss, pointing to his brother Tom, busy in a distant field.

The Ensign swore again, and gave a stamp that brought his heavy heel down on poor Tabby’s hand, as she leaned forward to catch every word. The cruel blow nearly forced a cry from her; but she bit her lips and never stirred, though faint with pain. When she could listen again, Mr. Bliss was telling all he knew about the hiding places of the powder, grain, and cannon the enemy wished to capture and destroy. He could not tell much, for the secrets had been well kept; but if he had known that our young Rebel was taking notes of his words under his own table, he might have been less ready to betray his neighbors. No one suspected a listener, however, and all Tabby could do was to scowl at three pairs of muddy boots, and wish she were a man that she might fight the wearers of them.

She very nearly had a chance to fight or fly; for just as they were preparing to leave the table, a sudden sneeze nearly undid her. She thought she was lost, and hid her face, expecting to be dragged out — to instant death, perhaps — by the wrathful men of war.

“What’s that?” exclaimed the Ensign, as a sudden pause followed that fatal sound.

“It came from under the table,” added Captain Brown, and a hand lifted a corner of the cloth.

A shiver went through Tabby, and she held her breath, with her eye upon that big, brown hand; but the next moment she could have laughed with joy, for pussy saved her. The cat had come to doze on her warm skirts, and when the cloth was raised, fancying she was to be fed by her master, puss rose and walked out purring loudly, tail erect, with its white tip waving like a flag of truce.

“‘Tis but the old cat, gentlemen. A good beast, and, fortunately for us, unable to report our conference,” said Mr. Bliss, with an air of relief, for he had started guiltily at the bare idea of an eavesdropper.

“She sneezed as if she were as great a snuff-taker as an old woman of whom we asked our way above here,” laughed the Ensign, as they all rose.

“And there she is now, coming along as if our grenadiers were after her!” exclaimed the Captain, as the sound of steps and a wailing voice came nearer and nearer.

Tabby took a long breath, and vowed that she would beg or buy the dear old cat that had saved her from destruction. Then she forgot her own danger in listening to the poor woman, who came in crying that her neighbors said she must leave town at once, or they would tar and feather her for showing spies the road to a Tory’s house.

“Well for me I came and heard their plots, or I might be sent off in like case,” thought the girl, feeling that the more perils she encountered, the greater heroine she would be.

Mr. Bliss comforted the old soul, bidding her stay there till the neighbors forgot her, and the officers gave her some money to pay for the costly service she had done them. Then they left the room, and after some delay the three men set off; but Tabby was compelled to stay in her hiding-place till the table was cleared, and the women deep in gossip, as they washed dishes in the kitchen. Then the little spy crept out softly, and raising the window with great care, ran away as fast as her stiff limbs would carry her.

By the time she reached the Deacon’s, however, and told her tale, the Tories were well on their way, Mr. Bliss having provided them with horses that his own flight might be the speedier.

So they escaped; but the warning was given, and Tabby received great praise for her hour under the table. The town’s-people hastened their preparations, and had time to remove the most valuable stores to neighboring towns; to mount their cannon and drill their minute-men; for these resolute farmers meant to resist oppression, and the world knows how well they did it when the hour came.

Such an early spring had not been known for years; and by the 19th of April fruit trees were in bloom, winter grain was up, and the stately elms that fringed the river and overarched the village streets were budding fast. It seemed a pity that such a lovely world should be disturbed by strife; but liberty was dearer than prosperity or peace, and the people leaped from their beds when young Dr. Prescott came, riding for his life, with the message Paul Revere brought from Boston in the night: —

“Arm! arm! the British are coming!”

Like an electric spark the news ran from house to house, and men made ready to fight, while the brave women bade them go, and did their best to guard the treasure confided to their keeping. A little later, word came that the British were at Lexington, and blood had been shed. Then the farmers shouldered their guns, with few words but stern faces, and by sunrise a hundred men stood ready, with good Parson Emerson at their head. More men were coming in from the neighboring towns, and all felt that the hour had arrived when patience ceased to be a virtue and rebellion was just.

Great was the excitement everywhere; but at Captain David Brown’s one little heart beat high with hope and fear, as Tabby stood at the door, looking across the river to the town, where drums were beating, bells ringing, and people hurrying to and fro.

“I can’t fight, but I *must* see,” she said; and catching up her cloak, she ran over the North Bridge, promising her aunt to return and bring her word as soon as the enemy appeared.

“What news? Are they coming?” called the people, from the Manse and the few houses that then stood along that road. But Tabby could only shake her head and run the faster, in her eagerness to see what was happening on that memorable day. When she reached the middle of the town she found that the little company had gone along the Lexington road to meet the enemy. Nothing daunted, she hurried in that direction and, climbing a high bank, waited to catch a glimpse of the British grenadiers, of whom she had heard so much.

About seven o’clock they came, the sun glittering on the arms of eight hundred English soldiers marching toward the hundred stout-hearted farmers, who waited till they were within a few rods of them.

“Let us stand our ground; and if we die, let us die here,” said brave Parson Emerson, still among his people, ready for anything but surrender.

“Nay,” said a cautious Lincoln man, “it will not do for us to *begin* the war.”

So they reluctantly fell back to the town, the British following slowly, being weary with their seven-mile march over the hills from Lexington. Coming to a little brown house perched on the hillside, one of the thirsty officers spied a well, with the bucket swinging at the end of the long pole. Running up the bank, he was about to drink, when a girl, who was crouching behind the well, sprang up, and with an energetic gesture, flung the water in his face, crying: —

“That’s the way we serve spies!”

Before Ensign De Bernicre — for it was he, acting as guide to the enemy — could clear his eyes and dry his drenched face, Tabby was gone over the hill with a laugh and a defiant gesture toward the red-coats below.

In high feather at this exploit, she darted about the town, watching the British at their work of destruction. They cut down and burnt the liberty pole, broke open sixty barrels of flour, flung five hundred pounds of balls into the mill-pond and wells, and set the court-house on fire. Other parties were ordered to different quarters of the town to ransack houses and destroy all the stores they found. Captain Parsons was sent to take possession of the North Bridge, and De Bernicre led the way, for he had taken notes on his former visit, and was a good guide. As they marched, a little scarlet figure went flying on before them, and vanished at the turn of the road. It was Tabby hastening home to warn her aunt.

“Quick child, whip on this gown and cap and hurry into bed. These prying fellows will surely have pity on a sick girl, and respect this room if no other,” said Mrs. Brown, briskly helping Tabby into a short night-gown and round cap, and tucking her well up when she was laid down, for between the plump feather-beds were hidden many muskets, the most precious of their stores. This had been planned beforehand, and Tabby was glad to rest and tell her tale while Aunty Brown put physic bottles and glasses on the table, set some evil-smelling herbs to simmer on the hearth, and, compromising with her conscience, concocted a nice little story to tell the invaders.

Presently they came, and it was well for Tabby that the ensign remained below to guard the doors while the men ransacked the house from garret to cellar; for he might have recognized the saucy girl who had twice maltreated him.

"These are feathers; lift the covers carefully or you'll be half smothered, they fly about so," said Mrs. Brown, as the men came to some casks of cartridges and flints, which she had artfully ripped up several pillows to conceal.

Quite deceived, the men gladly passed on, leaving the very things they most wanted to destroy. Coming to the bed-room, where more treasures of the same valuable sort were hidden in various nooks and corners, the dame held up her finger, saying, with an anxious glance toward Tabby: —

"Step softly, please. You wouldn't harm a poor, sick girl. The doctor thinks it is small-pox, and a fright might kill her. I keep the chamber as fresh as I can with yarbs, so I guess there isn't much danger of catching it."

The men reluctantly looked in, saw a flushed face on the pillow (for Tabby was red with running, and her black eyes wild with excitement), took a sniff at the wormwood and motherwort, and with a hasty glance into a closet or two where sundry clothes concealed hidden doors, hastily retired to report the danger and get away as soon as possible.

They would have been much disgusted at the trick played upon them if they had seen the sick girl fly out of bed and dance a jig of joy as they tramped away to Barrett's Mills. But soon Tabby had no heart for merriment, as she watched the minute-men gather by the bridge, saw the British march down on the other side, and when their first volley killed brave Isaac Davis and Abner Hosmer, of Acton, she heard Major Buttrick give the order, "Fire, fellow-soldiers; for God's sake, fire!"

For a little while shots rang, smoke rose, shouts were heard, and red and blue coats mingled in the struggle on the bridge. Then the British fell back, leaving two dead soldiers behind them. These were buried where they fell; and the bodies of the Acton men were sent home to their poor wives, Concord's first martyrs for liberty.

No need to tell more of the story of that day; all children know it, and many have made a pilgrimage to see the old monument set up where the English fell, and the bronze Minute-Man, standing on his granite pedestal to mark the spot where the brave Concord farmers fired the shot that made the old North Bridge immortal.

We must follow Tabby, and tell how she got her table-cloth. When the fight was over, the dead buried, the wounded cared for, and the prisoners exchanged, the Tories were punished. Dr. Lee was confined to his own farm, on penalty of being shot if he left it, and the property of Daniel Bliss was confiscated by government. Some things were sold at auction, and Captain Brown bought the fine cloth and gave it to Tabby, saying heartily: —

“There, my girl, that belongs to you, and you may well be proud of it; for, thanks to your quick wits and eyes and ears, we were not taken unawares, but sent the red-coats back faster than they came.”

And Tabby *was* proud of it, keeping it carefully, displaying it with immense satisfaction whenever she told the story, and spinning busily to make a set of napkins to go with it. It covered the table when her wedding supper was spread, was used at the christening of her first boy, and for many a Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner through the happy years of her married life.

Then it was preserved by her daughters, as a relic of their mother’s youth, and long after the old woman was gone, the well-worn cloth still appeared on great occasions, till it grew too thin for anything but careful keeping, to illustrate the story so proudly told by the grandchildren, who found it hard to believe that the feeble old lady of ninety could be the lively lass who played her little part in the Revolution with such spirit.

In 1861, Tabby’s table-cloth saw another war, and made an honorable end. When men were called for, Concord responded “Here!” and sent a goodly number, led by another brave Colonel Prescott. Barretts, Hosmers, Melvins, Browns, and Wheelers stood shoulder to shoulder, as their grandfathers stood that day to meet the British by the bridge. Mothers said, “Go my son,” as bravely as before, and sisters and sweethearts smiled with wet eyes as the boys in blue marched away again, cheered on by another noble Emerson. More than one of Tabby’s descendants went, some to fight, some to nurse; and for four long years the old town worked and waited, hoped and prayed, burying the dear dead boys sent home, nursing those who brought back honorable wounds, and sending more to man the breaches made by the awful battles that filled both North and South with a wilderness of graves.

The women knit and sewed Sundays as well as weekdays, to supply the call for clothes; the men emptied their pockets freely, glad to give; and the minister, after preaching like a Christian soldier, took off his coat and packed boxes of comforts like a tender father.

“More lint and bandages called for, and I do believe we’ve torn and picked up every old rag in the town,” said one busy lady to another, as several sat together making comfort-bags in the third year of the long struggle.

“I have cleared my garret of nearly everything in it, and only wish I had more to give,” answered one of the patriotic Barrett mothers.

“We can’t buy anything so soft and good as worn out sheets and table-cloths. New ones wont do, or I’d cut up every one of mine,” said a newly married Wheeler, sewing for dear life, as she remembered the many cousins gone to the war.

"I think I shall have to give our Revolutionary table-cloth. It's old enough, and soft as silk, and I'm sure my blessed grandmother would think that it couldn't make a better end," spoke up white-headed Madam Hubbard; for Tabby Tarbell had married one of that numerous and worthy race.

"Oh, you wouldn't cut up that famous cloth, would you?" cried the younger woman.

"Yes, I will. It's in rags, and when I'm gone no one will care for it. Folks don't seem to remember what the women did in those days, so it's no use keeping relics of 'em," answered the old lady, who would have owned herself mistaken if she could have looked forward to 1876, when the town celebrated its centennial, and proudly exhibited the little scissors with which Mrs. Barrett cut paper for cartridges, among other ancient trophies of that earlier day.

So the ancient cloth was carefully made into a boxful of the finest lint and softest squares to lay on wounds, and sent to one of the Concord women who had gone as a nurse.

"Here's a treasure!" she said, as she came to it among other comforts newly arrived from home. "Just what I want for my brave Rebel and poor little Johnny Bullard."

The "brave Rebel" was a Southern man who had fought well and was badly wounded in many ways, yet never complained; and in the midst of great suffering was always so courteous, patient, and courageous, that the men called him "our gentleman," and tried to show how much they respected so gallant a foe. John Bullard was an English drummer-boy, who had been through several battles, stoutly drumming away in spite of bullets and cannon-balls; cheering many a camp-fire with his voice, for he sang like a blackbird, and was always merry, always plucky, and so great a favorite in his regiment, that all mourned for "little Johnny" when his right arm was shot off at Gettysburg. It was thought he would die; but he pulled through the worst of it, and was slowly struggling back to health, still trying to be gay, and beginning to chirp feebly now and then, like a convalescent bird.

"Here, Johnny, is some splendid lint for this poor arm, and some of the softest compresses for Carrol's wound. He is asleep, so I'll begin with you, and while I work I'll amuse you with the story of the old table-cloth this lint came from," said Nurse Hunt, as she stood by the bed where the thin, white face smiled at her, though the boy dreaded the hard quarter of an hour he had to endure every day.

"Thanky, mum. We 'aven't 'ad a story for a good bit. I'm 'arty this mornin', and think I'll be hup by this day week, won't I?"

"I hope so. Now shut your eyes and listen; then you wont mind the twinges I give you, gentle as I try to be," answered the nurse, beginning her painful task.

Then she told the story of Tabby’s table-cloth, and the boy enjoyed it immensely, laughing out at the slapping and the throwing water in the ensign’s face, and openly rejoicing when the red-coats got the worst of it.

“As we’ve beaten all the rest of the world, I don’t mind our ‘aving bad luck that time. We har’ friends now, and I’ll fight for you, mum, like a British bull-dog, if I hever get the chance,” said Johnny, when the tale and dressing were ended.

“So you shall. I like to turn a brave enemy into a faithful friend, as I hope we shall yet be able to do with our Southern brothers. I admire their courage and their loyalty to what they believe to be right; and we are all suffering the punishment we deserve for waiting till this sad war came, instead of settling the trouble years ago, as we might have done if we had loved honesty and honor more than money and power.”

As she spoke, Miss Hunt turned to her other patient, and saw by the expression of his face that he had heard both the tale and the talk. He smiled, and said, “Good morning,” as usual, but when she stooped to lay a compress of the soft, wet damask on the angry wound in his breast, he whispered, with a grateful look: —

“You *have* changed one ‘Southern brother’ from an enemy into a friend. Whether I live or die, I never can forget how generous and kind you have all been to me.”

“Thank you! It is worth months of anxiety and care to hear such words. Let us shake hands, and do our best to make North and South as good friends as England and America now are,” said the nurse, offering her hand.

“Me, too! I’ve got one ‘and left, and I give it ye with all me ‘art. God bless ye, sir, and a lively getting hup for the two of us!” cried Johnny, stretching across the narrow space that divided the beds, with a beaming face and true English readiness to forgive a fallen foe when he had proved a brave one.

The three hands met in a warm shake, and the act was a little lesson more eloquent than words to the lookers-on; for the spirit of brotherhood that should bind us all together worked the miracle of linking these three by the frail threads spun a century ago.

So Tabby’s table-cloth did make a beautiful and useful end at last.

Eli’s Education

“My turn now,” said Walt, as they assembled again, after a busy day spent in snow-balling, statue-making, and tumbling in the drifts that still continued to rise on all sides.

“Here is just the story for you and Geoff. You are getting ready for college, after years of the best schooling, and it will do you good to hear how hard some boys have had to work to get a little learning,” said Grandma, glancing at the slip that Walt drew from the basket which Aunt Elinor held out to him, and from which Lotty had drawn the story of “Tabby’s Table Cloth.”

“This is a true tale, and the man became famous for his wisdom, as well as much loved and honored for his virtue, and interest in all good things,” added Aunt Elinor, as she began to read the story of

ELI’S EDUCATION.

Many years ago, a boy of sixteen sat in a little room in an old farm-house up among the Connecticut hills, writing busily in a book made of odd bits of paper stitched together, with a cover formed of two thin boards. The lid of a blue chest was his desk, the end of a tallow candle stuck into a potato was his lamp, a mixture of soot and vinegar his ink, and a quill from the gray goose his pen. A “Webster’s Spelling-book,” “Dilworth’s New Guide to the English Tongue,” “Daboll’s Arithmetic,” and the “American Preceptor,” stood on the chimney-piece over his head, with the “Assembly Catechism,” and New Testament, in the place of honor. This was his library; and now and then a borrowed “Pilgrim’s Progress,” “Fox’s Book of Martyrs,” or some stray volume, gladdened his heart; for he passionately loved books, and scoured the neighborhood for miles around to feed this steadily increasing hunger. Every penny he could earn or save went to buy a song or a story from the peddlers who occasionally climbed the hill to the solitary farm-house. When others took a noon-spell, he read under the trees or by the fire. He carried a book in his pocket, and studied as he went with the cows to and from the pasture, and sat late in his little room, ciphering on an old slate, or puzzling his young brain over some question which no one could answer for him.

His father had no patience with him, called him a shiftless dreamer, and threatened to burn the beloved books. But his mother defended him, for he was her youngest and the pride of her heart; so she let him scribble all over her floors before she scrubbed them up, dipped extra thick candles for his use, saved every scrap of paper to swell his little store, and firmly believed that he would turn out the great man of the family. His brothers joked about his queer ways, but in his sisters he found firm friends and tender comforters for all his woes. So he struggled along, working on the farm in summer and in a clock shop during the winter, with such brief spells of schooling as he could get between whiles, improving even these poor opportunities so well that he was letter-writer for all the young people in the neighborhood.

Now, he was writing in his journal very slowly, but very well, shaping his letters with unusual grace and freedom; for the wide snow-banks were his copy-books in winter, and on their white pages he had learned to sweep splendid capitals or link syllables handsomely together. This is what he wrote that night, with a sparkle in the blue eyes and a firm folding of the lips that made the boyish face resolute and manly.

"I am set in my own mind that I get learning. I see not how, but my will is strong, and mother hopes for to make a scholar of me. So, please God, we shall do it."

Then he shut the little book and put it carefully away in the blue chest, with pen and ink, as if they were very precious things; piously said his prayers, and was soon asleep under the homespun coverlet, dreaming splendid dreams, while a great bright star looked in at the low window, as if waiting to show him the road to fortune.

And God did please to help the patient lad; only the next evening came an opportunity he had never imagined. As he sat playing "Over the Hills and Far Away" on the fiddle that he had himself made out of maple-wood, with a bow strung from the tail of the old farm horse, a neighbor came in to talk over the fall pork and cider, and tell the news.

"Ef you want ter go over the hills and far away, Eli, here's the chance. I see a man down to Woodtick who was askin' ef I knew any likely young chap who'd like to git 'scribers for a pious book he wants to sell. He'd pay for the job when the names is got and the books give out. That's ruther in your line, boy, so I calk'lated your daddy would spare you, as you ain't much of a hand at shuckin' corn nor cartin' pummace."

"Haw! haw!" laughed the big brothers, Ambrose Vitruvius and Junius Solomon, as neighbor Terry spoke with a sly twinkle in his eye.

But the sisters, Miranda and Pamela, smiled for joy, while the good mother stopped her busy wheel to listen eagerly. Eli laid down his fiddle and came to the hearth where the others sat, with such a wide-awake expression on his usually thoughtful face that it was plain that he liked the idea.

"I'll do it, if father'll let me," he said, looking wistfully at the industrious man, who was shaving axe-handles for the winter wood-chopping, after his day's work was over.

"Wal, I can spare you for a week, mebby. It's not time for the clock shop yet, and sence you've heerd o' this, you won't do your chores right, so you may as wal see what you can make of peddlin'."

"Thank you, sir; I'll give you all I get, to pay for my time," began Eli, glowing with pleasure at the prospect of seeing a little of the world; for one of his most cherished dreams was to cross the blue hills that hemmed him in, and find what lay beyond.

"Guess I can afford to give you all you'll make this trip," answered his father, in a tone that made the brothers laugh again.

"Boys, don't pester Eli. Every one hasn't a call to farmin', and it's wal to foller the leadin's of Providence when they come along," said the mother, stroking the smooth, brown head at her knee; for Eli always went to her footstool with his sorrows and his joys.

So it was settled, and next day the boy, in his home-spun and home-made Sunday best, set off to see his employer and secure the job. He got it, and for three days trudged up and down the steep roads, calling at every house with a sample of his book, the Rev. John Flavel's treatise on "Keeping the Heart." Eli's winning face, modest manner, and earnest voice served him well, and he got many names; for books were scarce in those days, and a pious work was a treasure to many a good soul who found it difficult to keep the heart strong and cheerful in troublous times.

Then the books were to be delivered, and, anxious to save his small earnings, Eli hired no horse to transport his load, but borrowed a stout, green shawl from his mother, and, with his pack on his back, marched bravely away to finish his task. His wages were spent in a new prayer-book for his mother, smart handkerchief-pins for the faithful sisters, and a good store of paper for himself.

This trip was so successful that he was seized with a strong desire to try a more ambitious and extended one; for these glimpses of the world showed him how much he had to learn, and how pleasantly he could pick up knowledge in these flights.

"What be you a-brewdin' over now, boy? Gettin' ready for the clock shop? It's 'most time for winter work, and Terry says you do pretty wal at puttin' together," said the farmer, a day or two after the boy's return, as they sat at dinner, all helping themselves from the large pewter platter heaped with pork and vegetables.

"I was wishin' I could go South with Gad Upson. He's been twice with clocks and notions, and wants a mate. Hoadley fits him out and pays him a good share if he does well. Couldn't I go along? I hate that old shop, and I know I can do something better than put together the insides of cheap clocks."

Eli spoke eagerly, and gave his mother an imploring look which brought her to second the motion at once, her consent having been already won.

The brothers stared as if Eli had proposed to go up in a balloon, for to them the South seemed farther off than Africa does nowadays. The father had evidently been secretly prepared, for he showed no surprise, and merely paused a moment to look at his ambitious son with a glance in which amusement and reproach were mingled.

"When a hen finds she's hatched a duck's egg, it's no use for her to cackle; that ducklin' will take to the water in spite on her, and paddle off, nobody knows where. Go ahead, boy, and when you get enough of junketin' 'round the world, come home and fall to work."

"Then I *may* go?" cried Eli, upsetting his mug of cider in his excitement.

His father nodded, being too busy eating cabbage with a wide-bladed green-handled knife to speak just then. Eli, red and speechless with delight and gratitude, could only sit and beam at his family till a sob drew his attention to sister Pamela, whose pet he was.

"Don't, Pam, don't! I'll come back all right, and bring you news and all the pretty things I can. I *must* go; I feel as if I couldn't breathe, shut up here winters. I s'pose it's wicked, but I can't help it," whispered Eli, with his arm around his buxom eighteen-year old sister, who laid her head on his shoulder and held him tight.

"Daughter, it's sinful to repine at the ways of Providence. I see a leadin' plain in this, and ef *I* can be chirk when my dear boy is goin', 'pears to me you ought to keep a taut rein on your feelin's, and not spile his pleasure."

The good mother's eyes were full of tears as she spoke, but she caught up the end of her short gown and wiped them quickly away to smile on Eli, who thanked her with a loving look.

"It's so lonesome when he's not here. What will we do evenings without the fiddle, or Eli to read a piece in some of his books while we spin?" said poor Pam, ashamed of her grief, yet glad to hide her tears by affecting to settle the long wooden bodkin that held up her coils of brown hair.

"Obed Finch will be comin' along, I guess likely, and he'll read to you out uv Eli's book about keepin' the heart, and you'll find your'n gone 'fore you know it," said Junius Solomon, in a tone that made pretty Pam blush and run away, while the rest laughed at her confusion.

So it was settled, and when all was ready, the boy came home to show his equipment before he started. A very modest outfit, — only two tin trunks slung across the shoulders, filled with jewelry, combs, lace, essences, and small wares.

"I hate to have ye go, son, but it's better than to be mopin' to hum, gettin' desperut for books and rilin' father. We'll all be workin' for ye, so be chipper and do wal. Keep steddy, and don't disgrace your folks. The Lord bless ye, my dear boy, and hold ye in the holler of his hand!"

Her own rough hand was on his head as his mother spoke, with wet eyes, and the tall lad kissed her tenderly, whispering, with a choke in his throat: —

"Good-by, mammy dear; I'll remember."

Then he tramped away to join his mate, turning now and then to nod and smile and show a ruddy face full of happiness, while the family watched him out of sight with mingled hopes and doubts and fears.

Mails were slow in those days, but at length a letter came; and here it is, — a true copy of one written by a boy in 1820: —

Norfolk, Va., December 4th.

"Honored Parents: I write to inform you I am safe here and to work. Our business is profitable, and I am fast learning the Quirks and Turns of trade. We are going to the eastern shore of Va., calculating to be gone six weeks. The inhabitants are sociable and hospitable, and you need not fear I shall suffer, for I find many almost fathers and mothers among these good folks.

"Taking our trunks, we travel through the country, entering the houses of the rich and poor, offering our goods, and earning our wages by the sweat of our brows. How do you think we look? Like two Awkward, Homespun, Tugging Yankee peddlers? No, that is not the case. By people of breeding we are treated with politeness and gentility, and the low and vulgar we do not seek. For my part, I enjoy travelling more than I expected. Conversation with new folks, observing manners and customs, and seeing the world, does me great good.

"I never met a real gentleman till I came here. Their hospitality allows me to see and copy their fine ways of acting and speaking, and they put the most Bashful at ease. Gad likes the maids and stays in the kitchen most times. I get into the libraries and read when we put up nights, and the ladies are most kind to me everywhere.

"I'm so tall they can't believe I'm only sixteen. They aren't as pretty as our rosy-faced girls, but their ways are elegant, and so are their clothes, tell Pam.

"When I think how kind you were to let me come, I am full of gratitude. I made some verses, one day, as I waited in a hovel for the rain to hold up.

"To conduce to my own and parents' good, Was why I left my home; To make their cares and burdens less, And try to help them some. 'Twas my own choice to earn them cash, And get them free from debt; Before that I am twenty-one It shall be done, I bet. My parents they have done for me What I for them can never do, So if I serve them all I may, Sure God will help me through. My chief delight, therefore, shall be To earn them all I can, Not only now, but when that I At last am my own man.

"These are the genuine Sentiments of your son, who returns thanks for the many favors you have heaped upon him, and hopes to repay you by his best Endeavors. Accept this letter and the inclosed small sum as a token of his love and respect.

"Your dutiful son,

"Tell the girls to write.

Eli."

In reply to this, came a letter from the anxious mother, which shows not only the tender, pious nature of the good woman, but also how much need of education the boy had, and how well he was doing for himself: —

"Affectionate Son: We was very glad to receave your letter. I feal very anctious about you this winter, and how you are a doing. You cannot know a mother's concern for her boy wen he is fur away. Do not git into bad habbits. Take the Bible for your rule and guide to vartue. I pray for your prosperity in all spiritall and temporrall things, and leave you in the care of Him who gave you breath and will keep you safe.

"We are all well, and your father enjoys his helth better than last year. I visited Uncle Medad a spell last week. I am provided with a horse and shay to ride to meatin. Mr. Eben Welton took our cow and give us his old horse. Captain Stephen Harrington was excommunicated last Sabbath. Pamely goes away to learn dressmakin soon. I mistrust Mirandy will take up with Pennel Haskell; he is likely, and comes frequent. I wish you had been here a Christmas. We had a large company to dinner, and I got some wheat flower and made a fine chicken pye. Eli, I hope you attend meatin when you can. Do not trifle away the holy day in vane pleasures, but live to the glory of God, and in the fear of your parents. Father sold the white colt. He was too spirity, and upsat Ambrose and nigh broke his head. His nose is still black. Dear son: I miss you every time I set a platter in your place. Is your close warm and suffitient? Put your stockin round your throat if sore. Do you git good cyder to drink? Take the Pennyryal if you feal wimbly after a long spell of travil. The girls send love. No more now. Wright soon.

Your mother, Hannah Gardener."

"P. S. — Liddy Finch is married. Our pigs give us nine hunderd pound of prime pork."

Many such letters went to and fro that winter, and Eli faithfully reported all his adventures. For he had many, and once or twice was in danger of losing his life.

On one occasion, having parted from his mate for a day or two, wishing to try his luck alone, our young peddler found himself, late in the afternoon, approaching the Dismal Swamp. A tempest arose, adding to the loneliness and terror of the hour. The cypresses uprooted by the blast fell now and then across the road, endangering the poor boy’s head. A sluggish stream rolled through tangled junipers and beds of reeds, and the fen on either side was full of ugly creatures, lizards, snakes, and toads; while owls, scared by the storm, flew wildly about and hooted dismally. Just at the height of the tumult, Eli saw three men coming toward him, and gladly hastened to meet them, hoping to have their company or learn of them where he could find a shelter. But their bad faces daunted him, and he would have hurried by without speaking if they had not stopped him, roughly demanding his name and business.

The tall stripling was brave, but his youthful face showed him to be but a boy, and the consciousness of a well-filled purse in his pocket made him anxious to escape. So he answered briefly, and tried to go on. But two men held him, in spite of his struggles, while the third rifled his pockets, broke open his trunks, and took all that was of any value in the way of watches and jewelry. Then they left him, with a cruel joke about a good journey, and made off with their booty. It was the first time poor Eli had met with such a mishap, and as he stood in the rain looking at his wares scattered about the road, he felt inclined to throw himself into the creek, and forget his woes there among the frogs and snakes. But he had a stout heart, and soon decided to make the best of it, since nothing could be done to mend the matter. Gathering up his bedraggled laces, scattered scent-bottles, and dirty buttons, pins, and needles, he trudged sadly on, feeling that for him this was indeed a Dismal Swamp.

“I told you we’d better stick together, but you wanted to be so dre’dful smart, and go travellin’ off alone in them out’n the way places. Might ‘a’ known you’d get overhauled somers. I always did think you was a gump, Eli, and now I’m sure on’t,” was all the comfort Gad gave him when they met, and the direful tale was told.

“What shall I do now?” asked the poor lad. “My notions aren’t worth selling, and my money’s gone. I’ll have to pay Hoadley somehow.”

“You’d better foot it home and go to choppin’ punkins for the cows, or help your marm spin. I vow I never did see such a chap for gettin’ into a mess,” scolded Gad, who was a true Yankee, and made a successful trader, even in a small way.

“We’ll sleep on it,” said Eli, gently, and went to bed very low in his mind.

Perhaps a few tears wet his pillow as he lay awake, and the prayers his mother taught him were whispered in the silence of the night; for hope revived, comfort came, and in the morning his serene face and sensible plan proved to his irate friend that the “gump” had a wise head and a manly heart, after all.

“Gad, it is just the time for the new almanacs, and Allen wants men to sell ‘em. I thought it was small business before, but beggars mustn’t be choosers, so I’m going right off to offer for the job ‘round here. It will do for a start, and if I’m smart, Allen will give me a better chance maybe.”

“That’s a fust-rate plan. Go ahead, and I’ll say a good word for you. Allen knows me, and books is in your line, so I guess you’ll do wal if you keep out’n the mashes,” answered Gad, with great good will, having slept off his vexation.

The plan did go well, and for weeks the rosy-faced, gentle-voiced youth might have been seen mildly offering the new almanacs at doors and shops, and at street corners, with a wistful look in his blue eyes, and a courtesy of manner that attracted many customers and earned many a dollar. Several mates, envying his fine handwriting and pitying his hard luck, took lessons in penmanship of him and paid him fairly, whereat he rejoiced over the hours spent at home, flat on the kitchen floor, or flourishing splendid capitals on the snow-banks, when his nose was blue with cold and his hands half-frozen.

When the season for the yellow-covered almanacs was over, Eli, having won the confidence of his employer, was fitted out with more notions, and again set forth on his travels, armed, this time, and in company with his townsman. He prospered well, and all winter trudged to and fro, seemingly a common peddler, but really a student, making the world his book, and bent on learning all he could. Travel taught him geography and history, for he soon knew every corner of Virginia; looked longingly at the ancient walls of William and Mary College, where Jefferson and Monroe studied; where young George Washington received his surveyor’s commission, and in his later years served as Chancellor. In Yorktown, he heard all about the siege of 1781; saw Lord Cornwallis’s lodgings and the cave named for him; met pleasant people, whose fine speech and manners he carefully copied; read excellent books wherever he could find them, and observed, remembered, and stored away all that he saw, heard, and learned, to help and adorn his later life.

By spring he set out for home, having slowly saved enough to repay Hoadley for the lost goods. But as if Providence meant to teach him another lesson, and make him still more prudent, humble, and manly, a sad adventure befell him on his way.

While waiting for the coaster that was to take them home, he one day went in swimming with Gad; for this was one of the favorite pastimes of the Connecticut boys, who on Saturday nights congregated by the score at a pond called

Benson's Pot, and leaped from the spring-board like circus tumblers, turning somersaults into the deep water below.

It was too early for such sport now; the water was very cold, and poor Gad, taken with cramp, nearly drowned Eli by clinging to his legs as he went down. Freeing himself with difficulty, Eli tried to save his friend; but the current swept the helpless man away, and he was lost. Hurriedly dressing, Eli ran for aid, but found himself regarded with suspicion by those to whom he told his story; for he was a stranger in the place and certain peddlers who had gone before had left a bad name behind them.

To his horror, he was arrested, accused of murder, and would have been tried for his life, if Mr. Allen of Norfolk had not come to testify to his good character, and set him free. Poor Gad's body was found and buried, and after a month's delay, Eli set out again, alone, heavy-hearted, and very poor, for all his own little savings had been consumed by various expenses. Mr. Hoadley's money was untouched, but not increased, as he hoped to have it; and rather than borrow a penny of it, Eli landed barefooted. His boots were so old he threw them overboard, and spent his last dollar for a cheap pair of shoes to wear when he appeared at home, for they were not stout enough to stand travel. So, like Franklin with his rolls, the lad ate crackers and cheese as he trudged through the city, and set out for the far-away farm-house among the hills.

A long journey, but a pleasant one, in spite of his troubles; for spring made the world lovely, habit made walking no hardship, and all he had seen in his wanderings passed before him at will, like a panorama full of color and variety.

Letters had gone before, but it was a sad homecoming, and when all was told, Eli said: —

"Now, father, I'll go to work. I've had my wish and enjoyed it a sight; and would go again, but I feel as if I ought to work, as long as I can't pay for my time."

"That's hearty, son, and I'm obleeged to ye. Hear what mother's got to say, and then do whichever you prefer," answered the farmer, with a nod toward his wife, who, with the girls, seemed full of some pleasant news which they longed to tell.

"I've sold all the cloth we made last winter for a good sum, and father says you may hev the spendin' on't. It will be enough to pay your board down to Uncle Tillotson's while you study with him, so 's 't you kin be gettin' ready for college next year. I've sot my heart on't, and you musn't disapp'int me and the girls," said the good woman, with a face full of faith and pride in her boy, in spite of all mishaps.

"Oh, mammy, how good you be! It don't seem as if I ought to take it. But I *do* want to go!” cried Eli, catching her round the neck in an ecstasy of boyish delight and gratitude.

Here Miranda and Pamela appeared, bringing their homely gifts of warm hose, and new shirts made from wool and flax grown by the father, and spun and woven by the accomplished housewife.

A very happy youth was Eli when he again set off to the city, with his humble outfit and slender purse, though father still looked doubtful, and the brothers were more sure than ever that Eli was a fool to prefer dry books to country work and fun.

A busy year followed, Eli studying, as never boy studied before, with the excellent minister, who soon grew proud of his best pupil. Less preparation was needed in those days, and perhaps more love and industry went to the work; for necessity is a stern master, and poor boys often work wonders if the spark of greatness is there.

Eli had his wish in time, and went to college, mother and sisters making it possible by the sale of their handiwork; for the girls were famous spinners, and the mother the best weaver in the country around. How willingly they toiled for Eli! — rising early and sitting late, cheering their labor with loving talk of the dear lad’s progress, and an unfailing faith in his future success. Many a long ride did that good mother take to the city, miles away, with a great roll of cloth on the pillion behind her to sell, that she might pay her son’s college bills. Many a coveted pleasure did the faithful sisters give up that they might keep Eli well clothed, or send him some country dainty to cheer the studies which seemed to them painfully hard and mysteriously precious. Father began to take pride in the ugly duckling now, and brothers to brag of his great learning. Neighbors came in to hear his letters, and when vacation brought him home, the lads and lasses regarded him with a certain awe; for his manners were better, his language purer, than theirs, and the new life he led refined the country boy till he seemed a gentleman.

The second year he yielded to temptation, and got into debt. Being anxious to do credit to his family, of whom he was secretly a little ashamed about this time, he spent money on his clothes, conscious that he was a comely youth with a great love of beauty, and a longing for all that cultivates and embellishes character and life. An elegant gentleman astonished the hill folk that season, by appearing at the little church in a suit such as the greatest rustic dandy never imagined in his wildest dreams, — the tall white hat with rolling brim, Marseilles vest with watch-chain and seals festooned across it, the fine blue coat with its brass buttons, and the nankeen trousers strapped over boots so tight that it was torture to walk in them. Armed with a cane in the well-gloved hand, an imposing brooch in the frills of the linen shirt, Eli sauntered across the green, the observed of all observers, proudly hoping that the blue eyes of a certain sweet Lucinda were fixed admiringly upon him.

The boys were the first to recover from the shock, and promptly resented the transformation of their former butt into a city beau, by jeering openly and affecting great scorn of the envied splendor. The poor jackdaw, somewhat abashed at the effect of his plumes, tried to prove that he felt no superiority, by being very affable, which won the lasses, but failed to soften the hearts of the boys; and when he secured the belle of the village for the Thanksgiving drive and dance, the young men resolved that pride should have a fall.

Arrayed in all his finery, Eli drove pretty Lucinda in a smart borrowed wagon to the tavern where the dance was held. Full of the airs and graces he had learned at college, the once bashful, awkward Eli was the admired of all eyes, as he pranced down the long contra-dance in the agonizing boots, or played “threading the needle” without the least reluctance on the part of the blushing girls to pay the fine of a kiss when the players sung the old rhyme: —

“The needle’s eye no one can pass; The thread that runs so true — It has caught many a pretty lass, And now it has caught you.”

But his glory was short-lived; for some enemy maliciously drew out the linchpin from the smart wagon, and as they were gayly driving homeward over the hills, the downfall came, and out they both went, to the great damage of Eli’s city suit, and poor Lucinda’s simple finery.

Fortunately, no bones were broken, and picking themselves up, they sadly footed it home, hoping the mishap would remain unknown. But the rogues took care that Eli should not escape, and the whole neighborhood laughed over the joke; for the fine hat was ruined, and the costly coat split down the back, in the ignominious tumble.

Great was the humiliation of the poor student; for not only was he ridiculed, but Lucinda would not forgive him, and the blue eyes smiled upon another; worst of all, he had to confess his debts and borrow money of his father to pay them. He meekly bore the stern rebuke that came with the hard-earned dollars, but the sight of the tears his mother shed, even while she comforted him, filled him with remorse. He went back to his books, in a homespun suit, a sadder and a wiser boy, and fell to work as if resolved to wash out past errors and regain the confidence he had lost.

All that winter the wheels turned and the loom jangled, that the rolls of cloth might be increased; and never was the day too cold, the way too long, for the good mother’s pious pilgrimage.

That summer, a man came home to them, shabby enough as to his clothes, but so wonderfully improved in other ways, that not only did the women folk glow with tender pride, but father and brothers looked at him with respect, and owned at last there was something in Eli. “No vacation for me,” he said; “I must work to pay my debts; and as I am not of much use here, I’ll try my old plan, and peddle some money into my empty pockets.”

It was both comic and pathetic to see the shoulders that had worn the fine broadcloth burdened with a yoke, the hands that had worn kid gloves grasping the tin trunks, and the dapper feet trudging through dust and dew in cow-hide boots. But the face under the old straw hat was a manlier one than that which the tall beaver crowned, and the heart under the rough vest was far happier than when the gold chain glittered above it. He did so well that when he returned to college his debts were paid, and the family faith in Eli restored.

That was an eventful year; for one brother married, and one went off to seek his fortune, the father mortgaging his farm to give these sons a fair start in life. Eli was to be a minister, and the farmer left his fortunes in the hands of his wife, who, like many another good mother, was the making of the great man of the family, and was content with that knowledge, leaving him the glory.

The next year, Eli graduated with honor, and went home, to be received with great rejoicing, just twenty-one, and a free man. He had longed for this time, and planned a happy, studious life, preparing to preach the gospel in a little parsonage of his own. But suddenly all was changed; joy turned to sorrow, hope to doubt, and Eli was called to relinquish liberty for duty, — to give up his own dreams of a home, to keep a roof over the heads of the dear mother and the faithful sisters. His father died suddenly, leaving very little for the women folk besides the independence that lay in the skill of their own thrifty hands. The elder brothers could not offer much help, and Eli was the one to whom the poor souls turned in their hour of sorrow and anxiety.

“Go on, dear, and don’t pester yourself about us. We can find food and firin’ here as long as the old farm is ours. I guess we can manage to pay off the mortgage by-and-by. It don’t seem as if I *could* turn out, after livin’ here ever sense I was married, and poor father so fond on’t.”

The widow covered her face with her apron, and Eli put his arms about her, saying manfully, as he gave up all his fondest hopes for her dearer sake —

“Cheer up, mother, and trust to me. I should be a poor fellow if I allowed you and the girls to want, after all you’ve done for me. I can get a school, and earn instead of spend. Teaching and studying can go on together. I’m sure I shouldn’t prosper if I shirked my duty, and I won’t.” The three sad women clung to him, and the brothers, looking at his brave, bright face, felt that Eli was indeed a man to lean on and to love in times like this.

“Well,” thought the young philosopher, “the Lord knows what is best for me, and perhaps this is a part of my education. I’ll try to think so, and hope to get some good out of a hard job.”

In this spirit he set about teaching, and prospered wonderfully, for his own great love of learning made it an easy and delightful task to help others as he had longed to be helped. His innocent and tender nature made all children love him, and gave him a remarkable power over them; so when the first hard months were past, and his efforts began to bear fruit, he found that what had seemed an affliction was a blessing, and that teaching was his special gift. Filial duty sweetened the task, a submissive heart found happiness in self-sacrifice, and a wise soul showed him what a noble and lovely work it was to minister to little children, — for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

For years Eli taught, and his school grew famous; for he copied the fashions of other countries, invented new methods, and gave himself so entirely to his profession that he could not fail of success. The mortgage was paid off, and Eli made frequent pilgrimages to the dear old mother, whose staff and comfort he still was. The sisters married well, the brothers prospered, and at thirty, the schoolmaster found a nobler mate than pretty Lucinda, and soon had some little pupils of his very own to love and teach.

There his youth ends; but after the years of teaching he began to preach at last, not in one pulpit, but in many all over the land, diffusing good thoughts now as he had peddled small wares when a boy; still learning as he went, still loving books and studying mankind, still patient, pious, dutiful, and tender, a wise and beautiful old man, till, at eighty, Eli’s education ended.

Onawandah

"What in the world have *I* chosen?" exclaimed Geoff, as he drew out a manuscript in his turn and read the queer name.

"A story that will just suit you, I think. The hero is an Indian, and a brave one, as you will see. I learned the little tale from an old woman who lived in the valley of the Connecticut, which the Indians called the Long River of Pines."

With this very short preface, Aunt Elinor began to read, in her best manner, the story of

ONAWANDAH.

Long ago, — when hostile Indians haunted the great forests, and every settlement had its fort for the protection of the inhabitants, — in one of the towns on the Connecticut River, lived Parson Bain and his little son and daughter. The wife and mother was dead; but an old servant took care of them, and did her best to make Reuben and Eunice good children. Her direst threat, when they were naughty, was, "The Indians will come and fetch you, if you don't behave." So they grew up in great fear of the red men. Even the friendly Indians, who sometimes came for food or powder, were regarded with suspicion by the people. No man went to work without his gun near by. On Sundays, when they trudged to the rude meeting-house, all carried the trusty rifle on the shoulder; and while the pastor preached, a sentinel mounted guard at the door, to give warning if canoes came down the river or a dark face peered from the wood.

One autumn night, when the first heavy rains were falling and a cold wind whistled through the valley, a knock came at the minister's door, and, opening it, he found an Indian boy, ragged, hungry, and foot-sore, who begged for food and shelter. In his broken way, he told how he had fallen ill, and been left to die by enemies who had taken him from his own people, months before; how he had wandered for days till almost sinking; and that he had come now to ask for help, led by the hospitable light in the parsonage window.

"Send him away, master, or harm will come of it. He is a spy, and we shall all be scalped by the murdering Injuns who are waiting in the wood," said old Becky, harshly; while little Eunice hid in the old servant's ample skirts, and twelve-year-old Reuben laid his hand on his cross-bow, ready to defend his sister if need be.

But the good man drew the poor lad in, saying, with his friendly smile: "Shall not a Christian be as hospitable as a godless savage? Come in, child, and be fed:

you sorely need rest and shelter."

Leaving his face to express the gratitude he had no words to tell, the boy sat by the comfortable fire and ate like a famished wolf, while Becky muttered her forebodings and the children eyed the dark youth at a safe distance. Something in his pinched face, wounded foot, and eyes full of dumb pain and patience, touched the little girl's tender heart, and, yielding to a pitiful impulse, she brought her own basin of new milk and, setting it beside the stranger, ran to hide behind her father, suddenly remembering that this was one of the dreaded Indians.

"That was well done, little daughter. Thou shalt love thine enemies, and share thy bread with the needy. See, he is smiling; that pleased him, and he wishes us to be his friends."

But Eunice ventured no more that night, and quaked in her little bed at the thought of the strange boy sleeping on a blanket before the fire below. Reuben hid his fears better, and resolved to watch while others slept; but was off as soon as his curly head touched the pillow, and dreamed of tomahawks and war-whoops till morning.

Next day, neighbors came to see the waif, and one and all advised sending him away as soon as possible, since he was doubtless a spy, as Becky said, and would bring trouble of some sort.

"When he is well, he may go whithersoever he will; but while he is too lame to walk, weak with hunger, and worn out with weariness, I will harbor him. He cannot feign suffering and starvation like this. I shall do my duty, and leave the consequences to the Lord," answered the parson, with such pious firmness that the neighbors said no more.

But they kept a close watch upon Onawandah, when he went among them, silent and submissive, but with the proud air of a captive prince, and sometimes a fierce flash in his black eyes when the other lads taunted him with his red skin. He was very lame for weeks, and could only sit in the sun, weaving pretty baskets for Eunice, and shaping bows and arrows for Reuben. The children were soon his friends, for with them he was always gentle, trying in his soft language and expressive gestures to show his good-will and gratitude; for they defended him against their ruder playmates, and, following their father's example, trusted and cherished the homeless youth.

When he was able to walk, he taught the boy to shoot and trap the wild creatures of the wood, to find fish where others failed, and to guide himself in the wilderness by star and sun, wind and water. To Eunice he brought little offerings of bark and feathers; taught her to make moccasins of skin, belts of shells, or pouches gay with porcupine quills and colored grass. He would not work for old Becky, — who plainly showed her distrust, — saying: “A brave does not grind corn and bring wood; that is squaw’s work. Onawandah will hunt and fish and fight for you, but no more.” And even the request of the parson could not win obedience in this, though the boy would have died for the good man.

“We can not tame an eagle as we can a barnyard fowl. Let him remember only kindness of us, and so we turn a foe into a friend,” said Parson Bain, stroking the sleek, dark head, that always bowed before him, with a docile reverence shown to no other living creature.

Winter came, and the settlers fared hardly through the long months, when the drifts rose to the eaves of their low cabins, and the stores, carefully harvested, failed to supply even their simple wants. But the minister’s family never lacked wild meat, for Onawandah proved himself a better hunter than any man in the town; and the boy of sixteen led the way on his snow-shoes when they went to track a bear to its den, chase the deer for miles, or shoot the wolves that howled about their homes in the winter nights.

But he never joined in their games, and sat apart when the young folk made merry, as if he scorned such childish pastimes and longed to be a man in all things. Why he stayed when he was well again, no one could tell, unless he waited for spring to make his way to his own people. But Reuben and Eunice rejoiced to keep him; for while he taught them many things, he was their pupil also, learning English rapidly, and proving himself a very affectionate and devoted friend and servant, in his own quiet way.

“Be of good cheer, little daughter; I shall be gone but three days, and our brave Onawandah will guard you well,” said the parson, one April morning, as he mounted his horse to visit a distant settlement, where the bitter winter had brought sickness and death to more than one household.

The boy showed his white teeth in a bright smile as he stood beside the children, while Becky croaked, with a shake of the head: —

“I hope you mayn’t find you’ve warmed a viper in your bosom, master.”

Two days later, it seemed as if Becky was a true prophet, and that the confiding minister *had* been terribly deceived; for Onawandah went away to hunt, and that night the awful war-whoop woke the sleeping villagers, to find their houses burning, while the hidden Indians shot at them by the light of the fires kindled by dusky scouts. In terror and confusion the whites flew to the fort; and, while the men fought bravely, the women held blankets to catch arrows and bullets, or bound up the hurts of their defenders.

It was all over by daylight, and the red men sped away up the river, with several prisoners, and such booty as they could plunder from the deserted houses. Not till all fear of a return of their enemies was over, did the poor people venture to leave the fort and seek their ruined homes. Then it was discovered that Becky and the parson's children were gone, and great was the bewailing, for the good man was much beloved by all his flock.

Suddenly the smothered voice of Becky was heard by a party of visitors, calling dolefully: —

"I am here, betwixt the beds. Pull me out, neighbors, for I am half dead with fright and smothering."

The old woman was quickly extricated from her hiding-place, and with much energy declared that she had seen Onawandah, disguised with war-paint, among the Indians, and that he had torn away the children from her arms before she could fly from the house.

"He chose his time well, when they were defenceless, dear lambs! Spite of all my warnings, master trusted him, and this is the thanks we get. Oh, my poor master! How can I tell him this heavy news?"

There was no need to tell it; for, as Becky sat moaning and beating her breast on the fireless hearth, and the sympathizing neighbors stood about her, the sound of a horse's hoofs was heard, and the parson came down the hilly road like one riding for his life. He had seen the smoke afar off, guessed the sad truth, and hurried on, to find his home in ruins, and to learn by his first glance at the faces around him that his children were gone.

When he had heard all there was to tell, he sat down upon his door-stone with his head in his hands, praying for strength to bear a grief too deep for words. The wounded and weary men tried to comfort him with hope, and the women wept with him as they hugged their own babies closer to the hearts that ached for the lost children. Suddenly a stir went through the mournful group, as Onawandah came from the wood with a young deer upon his shoulders, and amazement in his face as he saw the desolation before him. Dropping his burden, he stood an instant looking with eyes that kindled fiercely; then he came bounding toward them, undaunted by the hatred, suspicion, and surprise plainly written on the countenances before him. He missed his playmates, and asked but one question: —

"The boy, the little squaw, — where gone?"

His answer was a rough one, for the men seized him and poured forth the tale, heaping reproaches upon him for such treachery and ingratitude. He bore it all in proud silence till they pointed to the poor father, whose dumb sorrow was more eloquent than all their wrath. Onawandah looked at him, and the fire died out of his eyes as if quenched by the tears he would not shed. Shaking off the hands that held him, he went to his good friend, saying with passionate earnestness: —

“Onawandah is *not* traitor! Onawandah remembers! Onawandah grateful! You believe?”

The poor parson looked up at him, and could not doubt his truth; for genuine love and sorrow ennobled the dark face, and he had never known the boy to lie.

“I believe and trust you still, but others will not. Go, you are no longer safe here, and I have no home to offer you,” said the parson, sadly, feeling that he cared for none, unless his children were restored to him.

“Onawandah has no fear. He goes; but he comes again to bring the boy, the little squaw.”

Few words, but they were so solemnly spoken that the most unbelieving were impressed; for the youth laid one hand on the gray head bowed before him, and lifted the other toward heaven, as if calling the Great Spirit to hear his vow.

A relenting murmur went through the crowd, but the boy paid no heed, as he turned away, and with no arms but his hunting knife and bow, no food but such as he could find, no guide but the sun by day, the stars by night, plunged into the pathless forest and was gone.

Then the people drew a long breath, and muttered to one another: —

“He will never do it, yet he is a brave lad for his years.”

“Only a shift to get off with a whole skin, I warrant you. These varlets are as cunning as foxes,” added Becky, sourly.

The parson alone believed and hoped, though weeks and months went by, and his children did not come.

Meantime, Reuben and Eunice were far away in an Indian camp, resting as best they could, after the long journey that followed that dreadful night. Their captors were not cruel to them, for Reuben was a stout fellow, and, thanks to Onawandah, could hold his own with the boys who would have tormented him if he had been feeble or cowardly. Eunice also was a hardy creature for her years, and when her first fright and fatigue were over, made herself useful in many ways among the squaws, who did not let the pretty child suffer greatly; though she was neglected, because they knew no better.

Life in a wigwam was not a life of ease, and fortunately the children were accustomed to simple habits and the hardships that all endured in those early times. But they mourned for home till their young faces were pathetic with the longing, and their pillows of dry leaves were often wet with tears in the night. Their clothes grew ragged, their hair unkempt, their faces tanned by sun and wind. Scanty food and exposure to all weathers tried the strength of their bodies, and uncertainty as to their fate saddened their spirits; yet they bore up bravely, and said their prayers faithfully, feeling sure that God would bring them home to father in His own good time.

One day, when Reuben was snaring birds in the wood, — for the Indians had no fear of such young children venturing to escape, — he heard the cry of a quail, and followed it deeper and deeper into the forest, till it ceased, and, with a sudden rustle, Onawandah rose up from the brakes, his finger on his lips to prevent any exclamation that might betray him to other ears and eyes.

"I come for you and little Laroka" (the name he gave Eunice, meaning "Wild Rose"). "I take you home. Not know me yet. Go and wait."

He spoke low and fast; but the joy in his face told how glad he was to find the boy after his long search, and Reuben clung to him, trying not to disgrace himself by crying like a girl, in his surprise and delight.

Lying hidden in the tall brakes they talked in whispers, while one told of the capture, and the other of a plan of escape; for, though a friendly tribe, these Indians were not Onawandah's people, and they must not suspect that he knew the children, else they might be separated at once.

"Little squaw betray me. You watch her. Tell her not to cry out, not speak me any time. When I say come, we go — fast — in the night. Not ready yet."

These were the orders Reuben received, and, when he could compose himself, he went back to the wigwams, leaving his friend in the wood, while he told the good news to Eunice, and prepared her for the part she must play.

Fear had taught her self-control, and the poor child stood the test well, working off her relief and rapture by pounding corn on the stone mortar till her little hands were blistered, and her arms ached for hours afterward.

Not till the next day did Onawandah make his appearance, and then he came limping into the village, weary, lame, and half starved, after his long wandering in the wilderness. He was kindly welcomed, and his story believed; for he told only the first part, and said nothing of his life among the white men. He hardly glanced at the children when they were pointed out to him by their captors, and scowled at poor Eunice, who forgot her part in her joy, and smiled as she met the dark eyes that till now had always looked kindly at her. A touch from Reuben warned her, and she was glad to hide her confusion by shaking her long hair over her face, as if afraid of the stranger.

Onawandah took no further notice of them, but seemed to be very lame with the old wound in his foot, which prevented his being obliged to hunt with the men. He was resting and slowly gathering strength for the hard task he had set himself, while he waited for a safe time to save the children. They understood, but the suspense proved too much for little Eunice, and she pined with impatience to be gone. She lost appetite and color, and cast such appealing glances at Onawandah, that he could not seem quite indifferent, and gave her a soft word now and then, or did such acts of kindness as he could perform unsuspected. When she lay awake at night thinking of home, a cricket would chirp outside the wigwam, and a hand slip in a leaf full of berries, or a bark-cup of fresh water for the feverish little mouth. Sometimes it was only a caress or a whisper of encouragement, that re-assured the childish heart, and sent her to sleep with a comfortable sense of love and protection, like a sheltering wing over a motherless bird.

Reuben stood it better, and entered heartily into the excitement of the plot; for he had grown tall and strong in these trying months, and felt that he must prove himself a man to sustain and defend his sister. Quietly he put away each day a bit of dried meat, a handful of parched corn, or a well-sharpened arrowhead, as provision for the journey; while Onawandah seemed to be amusing himself with making moccasins and a little vest of deer-skin for an Indian child about the age of Eunice.

At last, in the early autumn, all the men went off on the war-path, leaving only boys and women behind. Then Onawandah's eyes began to kindle, and Reuben's heart to beat fast, for both felt that their time for escape had come.

All was ready, and one moonless night the signal was given. A cricket chirped shrilly outside the tent where the children slept with one old squaw. A strong hand cut the skin beside their bed of fir-boughs, and two trembling creatures crept out to follow the tall shadow that flitted noiselessly before them into the darkness of the wood. Not a broken twig, a careless step, or a whispered word betrayed them, and they vanished as swiftly and silently as hunted deer flying for their lives.

Till dawn they hurried on, Onawandah carrying Eunice, whose strength soon failed, and Reuben manfully shouldering the hatchet and the pouch of food. At sunrise they hid in a thicket by a spring and rested, while waiting for the friendly night to come again. Then they pushed on, and fear gave wings to their feet, so that by another morning they were far enough away to venture to travel more slowly and sleep at night.

If the children had learned to love and trust the Indian boy in happier times, they adored him now, and came to regard him as an earthly Providence; so faithful, brave, and tender was he, — so forgetful of himself, so bent on saving them. He never seemed to sleep, ate the poorest morsels, or went without any food when provision failed; let no danger daunt him, no hardship wring complaint from him, but went on through the wild forest, led by guides invisible to them, till they began to hope that home was near.

Twice he saved their lives. Once, when he went in search of food, leaving Reuben to guard his sister, the children, being very hungry, ignorantly ate some poisonous berries which looked like wild cherries, and were deliciously sweet. The boy generously gave most of them to Eunice, and soon was terror-stricken to see her grow pale, and cold, and deathly ill. Not knowing what to do, he could only rub her hands and call wildly for Onawandah.

The name echoed through the silent wood, and, though far away, the keen ear of the Indian heard it, his fleet feet brought him back in time, and his knowledge of wild roots and herbs made it possible to save the child when no other help was at hand.

“Make fire. Keep warm. I soon come,” he said, after hearing the story and examining Eunice, who could only lift her eyes to him, full of childish confidence and patience.

Then he was off again, scouring the woods like a hound on the scent, searching everywhere for the precious little herb that would counteract the poison. Any one watching him would have thought him crazy, as he rushed hither and thither, tearing up the leaves, creeping on his hands and knees that it might not escape him, and when he found it, springing up with a cry that startled the birds, and carried hope to poor Reuben, who was trying to forget his own pain in his anxiety for Eunice, whom he thought dying.

“Eat, eat, while I make drink. All safe now,” cried Onawandah, as he came leaping toward them with his hands full of green leaves, and his dark face shining with joy.

The boy was soon relieved, but for hours they hung over the girl, who suffered sadly, till she grew unconscious and lay as if dead. Reuben’s courage failed then, and he cried bitterly, thinking how hard it would be to leave the dear little creature under the pines and go home alone to father. Even Onawandah lost hope for a while, and sat like a bronze statue of despair, with his eyes fixed on his Wild Rose, who seemed fading away too soon.

Suddenly he rose, stretched his arms to the west, where the sun was setting splendidly, and in his own musical language prayed to the Great Spirit. The Christian boy fell upon his knees, feeling that the only help was in the Father who saw and heard them even in the wilderness. Both were comforted, and when they turned to Eunice there was a faint tinge of color on the pale cheeks, as if the evening red kissed her; the look of pain was gone, and she slept quietly, without the moans that had made their hearts ache before.

“He hears! he hears!” cried Onawandah, and for the first time Reuben saw tears in his keen eyes, as the Indian boy turned his face to the sky, full of a gratitude that no words were sweet enough to tell.

All night Eunice lay peacefully sleeping, and the moon lighted Onawandah's lonely watch, for Reuben was worn out with suspense, and slept beside his sister.

In the morning she was safe, and great was the rejoicing; but for two days the little invalid was not allowed to continue the journey, much as they longed to hurry on. It was a pretty sight, the bed of hemlock boughs spread under a green tent of woven branches, and on the pillow of moss the pale child watching the flicker of sunshine through the leaves, listening to the babble of a brook close by, or sleeping tranquilly, lulled by the murmur of the pines. Patient, loving, and grateful, it was a pleasure to serve her, and both the lads were faithful nurses. Onawandah cooked birds for her to eat, and made a pleasant drink of the wild-raspberry leaves to quench her thirst. Reuben snared rabbits, that she might have nourishing food, and longed to shoot a deer for provision, that she might not suffer hunger again on their journey. This boyish desire led him deeper into the wood than it was wise for him to go alone, for it was near nightfall, and wild creatures haunted the forest in those days. The fire, which Onawandah kept constantly burning, guarded their little camp where Eunice lay; but Reuben, with no weapon but his bow and hunting knife, was beyond this protection when he at last gave up his vain hunt and turned homeward. Suddenly, the sound of stealthy steps startled him, but he could see nothing through the dusk at first, and hurried on, fearing that some treacherous Indian was following him. Then he remembered his sister, and resolved not to betray her resting-place if he could help it, for he had learned courage of Onawandah, and longed to be as brave and generous as his dusky hero.

So he paused to watch and wait, and soon saw the gleam of two fiery eyes, not behind, but above him, in a tree. Then he knew that it was an "Indian devil," as they called a species of fierce animal that lurked in the thickets and sprang on its prey like a small tiger.

"If I could only kill it alone, how proud Onawandah would be of me," thought Reuben, burning for the good opinion of his friend.

It would have been wiser to hurry on and give the beast no time to spring; but the boy was over bold, and, fitting an arrow to the string, aimed at the bright eye-ball and let fly. A sharp snarl showed that some harm was done, and, rather daunted by the savage sound, Reuben raced away, meaning to come back next day for the prize he hoped he had secured.

But soon he heard the creature bounding after him, and he uttered one ringing shout for help, feeling too late that he had been foolhardy. Fortunately, he was nearer camp than he thought. Onawandah heard him, and was there in time to receive the beast, as, mad with the pain of the wound, it sprung at Reuben. There was no time for words, and the boy could only watch in breathless interest and anxiety the fight which went on between the brute and the Indian.

It was sharp but short; for Onawandah had his knife, and as soon as he could get the snarling, struggling creature down, he killed it with a skilful stroke. But not before it had torn and bitten him more dangerously than he knew; for the dusk hid the wounds, and excitement kept him from feeling them at first. Reuben thanked him heartily, and accepted his few words of warning with grateful docility; then both hurried back to Eunice, who till next day knew nothing of her brother's danger.

Onawandah made light of his scratches, as he called them, got their supper, and sent Reuben early to bed, for to-morrow they were to start again.

Excited by his adventure, the boy slept lightly, and waking in the night, saw by the flicker of the fire Onawandah binding up a deep wound in his breast with wet moss and his own belt. A stifled groan betrayed how much he suffered; but when Reuben went to him, he would accept no help, said it was nothing, and sent him back to bed, preferring to endure the pain in stern silence, with true Indian pride and courage.

Next morning, they set out and pushed on as fast as Eunice's strength allowed. But it was evident that Onawandah suffered much, though he would not rest, forbade the children to speak of his wounds, and pressed on with feverish haste, as if he feared that his strength might not hold out. Reuben watched him anxiously, for there was a look in his face that troubled the boy and filled him with alarm, as well as with remorse and love. Eunice would not let him carry her as before, but trudged bravely behind him, though her feet ached and her breath often failed as she tried to keep up; and both children did all they could to comfort and sustain their friend, who seemed glad to give his life for them.

In three days they reached the river, and, as if Heaven helped them in their greatest need, found a canoe, left by some hunter, near the shore. In they sprang, and let the swift current bear them along, Eunice kneeling in the bow like a little figure-head of Hope, Reuben steering with his paddle, and Onawandah sitting with arms tightly folded over his breast, as if to control the sharp anguish of the neglected wound. He knew that it was past help now, and only cared to see the children safe; then, worn out but happy, he was proud to die, having paid his debt to the good parson, and proved that he was not a liar nor a traitor.

Hour after hour they floated down the great river, looking eagerly for signs of home, and when at last they entered the familiar valley, while the little girl cried for joy, and the boy paddled as he had never done before, Onawandah sat erect, with his haggard eyes fixed on the dim distance, and sang his death-song in a clear, strong voice, — though every breath was pain, — bent on dying like a brave, without complaint or fear.

At last they saw the smoke from the cabins on the hillside, and, hastily mooring the canoe, all sprang out, eager to be at home after their long and perilous wandering. But as his foot touched the land, Onawandah felt that he could do no more, and stretching his arms toward the parsonage, the windows of which glimmered as hospitably as they had done when he first saw them, he said, with a pathetic sort of triumph in his broken voice: “Go. I cannot. Tell the good father, Onawandah not lie, not forget. He keep his promise.”

Then he dropped upon the grass and lay as if dead, while Reuben, bidding Eunice keep watch, ran as fast as his tired legs could carry him to tell the tale and bring help.

The little girl did her part tenderly, carrying water in her hands to wet the white lips, tearing up her ragged skirt to lay fresh bandages on the wound that had been bleeding the brave boy’s life away, and, sitting by him, gathered his head into her arms, begging him to wait till father came.

But poor Onawandah had waited too long; now he could only look up into the dear, loving, little face bent over him, and whisper wistfully: “Wild Rose will remember Onawandah?” as the light went out of his eyes, and his last breath was a smile for her.

When the parson and his people came hurrying up full of wonder, joy, and good-will, they found Eunice weeping bitterly, and the Indian boy lying like a young warrior smiling at death.

“Ah, my neighbors, the savage has taught us a lesson we never can forget. Let us imitate his virtues, and do honor to his memory,” said the pastor, as he held his little daughter close and looked down at the pathetic figure at his feet, whose silence was more eloquent than any words.

All felt it, and even old Becky had a remorseful sigh for the boy who had kept his word so well and given back her darlings safe.

They buried him where he lay; and for years the lonely mound under the great oak was kept green by loving hands. Wild roses bloomed there, and the murmur of the Long River of Pines was a fit lullaby for faithful Onawandah.

Little Things

"That's the sort I like," said Geoff, as the story ended; "Onawandah was a trump, and I'd give a good deal to know such a fellow, and go hunting with him. Got any more like it, aunty?"

"Perhaps; but it is the girls' turn now, and here is a quiet little story that teaches the same lesson in a different way. It contains a hint which some of you would better take;" and Aunt Elinor glanced around the circle with a smile that set her hearers on the alert to see who was to be hit.

"Hope it isn't *very* moral," said Geoff, with a boyish dislike of being preached at.

"It won't harm you to listen, and take the moral to heart, my lad. Wild horses, gold mines, and sea scrapes, are not the only things worth reading about. If you ever do half so much good in the world as the people in this story did, I shall be proud of you," answered Aunt Elinor, so soberly that Geoff folded his hands, and tried to look meekly impressed.

"Is it true?" asked Min.

"Yes. I heard 'Abby' tell it herself, and saw the silk stocking, and the scar."

"That sounds *very* interesting. I do like to hear about good clothes and awful accidents," cried the girl, forgetting to spin, in her eagerness to listen.

They all laughed at her odd mixture of tastes, and then heard the story of

LITTLE THINGS.

Abigail sat reading "Rasselas" aloud to her father while he shaved, pausing now and then to explain a word or correct the girl's pronunciation; for this was a lesson, as well as a pleasure. The handsome man, in his nankin dressing-gown, ruffled shirt, black small-clothes, and silk stockings, stood before the tall, old-fashioned bureau, looking often from the reflection of his own ruddy face to the pale one beside him, with an expression of tender pride, which plainly showed how dear his young daughter was to him.

Abby was a slender girl of fifteen, in a short-waisted gingham gown, with a muslin tucker, dimity apron, and morocco shoes on a pair of small feet demurely crossed before her. A blue-eyed, brown-haired little creature, with a broad brow, and a sweet mouth, evidently both intelligent and affectionate; for she heartily enjoyed the story, and answered her father's approving glances with a face full of the loving reverence so beautiful to see.

Schools were not abundant in 1815; and, after learning to read, spell, sew, and cipher a little at some dame school, girls were left to pick up knowledge as they could; while the brothers went to college, or were apprenticed to some trade. But the few things they did study were well learned; so that Abby's reading was a pleasure to hear. She wrote a fine, clear hand, seldom misspelled a word, kept her own little account-book in good order, and already made her father's shirts, hemstitching the linen cambric ruffles with the daintiest skill, and turning out button-holes any one might be proud of. These accomplishments did not satisfy her, however, and she longed to know much more, — to do and be something great and good, — with the sincere longing of an earnest, thoughtful girl.

These morning talks with her father were precious half-hours to her; for they not only read and discussed well-chosen books, but Abby opened her heart freely, and received his wise counsels with a grateful docility which helped to make her after-life as benevolent and blessed as his.

"I don't wonder that Rasselas wanted to get out of the Happy Valley and see the world for himself. I often feel so, and long to go and have adventures, like the people I read about; to do something very splendid, and be brave and great and loved and honored," said Abby, as she closed the book, and looked out of the open window with wistful eyes; for the chestnut trees were rustling in the May sunshine, and spring was stirring in the girl's heart, as well as in the budding boughs and early flowers on the green bank below.

"Do not be in a hurry to leave your Happy Valley, my dear; but help to keep it so by doing your part well. The happiness of life depends very much on little things; and one can be brave and great and good while making small sacrifices and doing small duties faithfully and cheerfully," answered Mr. Lyon, with the look of one who practised what he preached.

"But *my* little things are so stupid and easy. Sewing, and learning to pickle and preserve, and going out to tea when I don't want to, and helping mother, are none of them romantic or exciting duties and sacrifices. If I could take care of poor people, or be a colonel in a splendid uniform, and march with drums and trumpets, — or even a fire-warden, and run to save lives and property, and be loved and thanked and trusted, as you are, I should be contented," continued Abby, kindling at the thought; for she considered her father the noblest of men, and glowed with pride when she saw him in his regimentals on great occasions, or when she helped him into the leathern cap and coat, and gave him the lantern, staff, and canvas bags he used, as fire-warden, long before steam-engines, hook and ladder companies, and electric alarms were dreamed of.

Mr. Lyon laughed as he washed his face at the queer, three-cornered stand, and then sat down to have his hair tied in a queue by his daughter, who prided herself on doing this as well as a barber.

"Ah, my girl, it's not the things that make the most noise and show that are the bravest and the best; but the everlasting patience, charity, and courage needed to bear our daily trials like good Christians." And the smile changed to a sigh, for the excellent man knew the value of these virtues, and their rarity.

"Yes, I know, sir; but it is so splendid to be a hero, and have the world ring with one's glory, like Washington and Lafayette, or Perry, Hull, and Lawrence," said Abby, winding the black ribbon so energetically that it nearly broke; for her head was full of the brave deeds performed in the wars of 1775 and 1812, the latter of which she well remembered.

"Easy, my dear, easy! — remember that it was the faithful doing of small things which fitted these men to do the grand deeds well, when the time came. Heroes are not made in a minute, and we never know what we may be called upon to live through. Train yourself now to be skilful, prompt, courageous, and kind; then when the duty or the danger comes, you will be prepared for it. 'Keep your spindle ready, and the Lord will send the flax,' as the old proverb says."

"I will, father, and remember the other saying that you like and live up to, 'Do right and leave the consequences to God,'" answered Abby, with her arm about his neck, and a soft cheek against his, feeling that with such an example before her she ought not to fail.

"That's my good girl! Come, now, begin at once. Here's a little thing to do, a very homely one, but useful, and some honor may be gained by doing it nicely; for, if you'll darn this bad rent in my new stocking, I'll give you five dollars."

As he spoke, Mr. Lyon handed her a heavy silk stocking with a great "barn-door" tear in the calf. He was rather proud of his handsome legs, and dressed them with care, importing hose of unusual fineness for state occasions; being one of the old-time gentlemen whose stately elegance added dignity to any scene.

Abby groaned as she examined the hole torn by a nail, for it was a very bad one, and she knew that if not well done, the costly stocking would be ruined. She hated to darn, infinitely preferring to read, or study Latin with her brother, instead of repairing old damask, muslin gowns, and the family hose. But she did it well, excelling her elder sister in this branch of needle-work; so she could not refuse, though the sacrifice of time and taste would have been almost impossible for any one but father.

"I'll try, sir, and you shall pay me with a kiss; five dollars is too much for such a little thing," she said, smiling at him as she put the stocking into the capacious pocket where girls kept housewife, scissors, thimble, pin-ball, and a bit of lovage or flag-root in those days.

"I'm not so sure that you'll find it an easy job; but remember Bruce and his spider, and don’t be conquered by the ‘little thing.’ Now I must be off. Good-by, my darling,” and Mr. Lyon’s dark eyes twinkled as he thought of the task he had set her; for it seemed as if nothing short of a miracle could restore his damaged stocking.

Abby forgot her heroics and ran to get his hat and cane, to receive his morning kiss, and answer the salute he always paused at the street corner to give her before he went away to the many cares and labors of his own busy day. But while she put her little room in order, dusted the parlor, and clapped laces for her mother, who, like most ladies long ago, did up her own caps and turbans, Abby was thinking over the late conversation, and wondering if strict attention to small affairs would really lead to something good or glorious in the end.

When her other duties were done, she resolutely sat down to the detested darn, although it would have been much pleasanter to help her sister cut out green satin leaves and quill up pink ribbon into roses for a garland to festoon the skirt of a new white dress.

Hour after hour she worked, slowly and carefully weaving the torn edges together, stitch by stitch, till her eyes ached and the delicate needle grew rusty in her warm hand. Her mother begged her to stop and rest, sister Catharine called her to come and see how well the garland looked, and a friend came to take her to drive. But she refused to stir, and kept at her weaving, as patiently as King Robert’s spider, picking out a bit that puckered, turning the corner with breathless care, and rapping it with her thimble on the wooden egg till it lay flat. Then she waited till an iron was heated, and pressed it nicely, finishing in time to put it on her father’s bureau, where he would see it when he dressed for dinner.

“Nearly four hours over that dreadful darn! But it’s done now, and hardly shows, so I do think I’ve earned my money. I shall buy that work-box I have wanted so long. The inlaid one, with nice velvet beds for the thimble, scissors, and bodkin, and a glass in the cover, and a little drawer for my silk-reels. Father will like that, and I shall be proud to show it.”

These agreeable thoughts were passing through Abby’s mind as she went into the front yard for a breath of air, after her long task was over. Tulips and hyacinths were blooming there, and, peeping through the bars of the gate, stood a little girl wistfully watching the gay blossoms and enjoying their perfume. Now, Abby was fond of her garden, and had been hurrying the early flowers, that they might be ready for her father’s birthday nosegay; so her first impulse was to feign that she did not see the child, for she did not want to give away a single tulip. But the morning talk was fresh in her memory, and presently she thought: —

“Here is a little thing I can do;” and ashamed of the selfish impulse, she gathered several of her finest flowers and offered them, saying cordially: —

"I think you would like these. Please take them, and by and by when there are more, you shall have prettier ones."

"Oh, thank you! I did want some for mamma. She is ill, and will be so pleased," was the grateful answer, given with a little courtesy, and a smile that made the wistful face a very happy one.

"Do you live near by?" asked Abby, seeing at once from the child's speech and manner that she was both well-bred and grateful.

"Just around the corner. We are English, and papa is dead. Mamma kept school in another place till she was too ill, and now I take care of her and the children as well as I can."

The little girl of twelve, in her black frock, with a face far too old and anxious for her years, was so innocently pathetic as she told the sad story, that Abby's tender heart was touched, and an impetuous desire to do something at once made her exclaim: —

"Wait a minute, and I'll send something better than flowers. Wouldn't your mother like some wine jelly? I helped make it, and have a glassful all my own."

"Indeed she would!" began the child, blushing with pleasure; for the poor lady needed just such delicacies, but thought only of the children's wants.

Waiting to hear no more, Abby ran in to get her offering, and came back beaming with benevolent good-will.

"As it is not far and you have that big basket, I'll go with you and help carry the things, if I may? My mother will let me, and my father will come and see you, I'm sure, if you'd like to have him. He takes care of everybody, and is the best and wisest man in all the world."

Lucy Mayhew accepted these kind offers with childish confidence, thinking the young lady a sort of angel in a coal-scuttle bonnet, and the two went chatting along, good friends at once; for Abby had most engaging manners, and her cheerful face won its way everywhere.

She found the English family a very interesting one, for the mother was a gentlewoman, and in sore straits now, — being unable to use her accomplishments any longer, and failing fast, with no friends to protect the four little children she must soon leave alone in a strange land.

"If *they* were only cared for, I could go in peace; but it breaks my heart to think of them in an asylum, when they need a home," said the poor lady, telling her greatest anxiety to this sympathetic young visitor; while Lucy regaled the noses of the eager little ones with delicious sniffs of the pink and blue hyacinths.

"Tell father all about it, and he'll know just what to do. He always does, and every one goes to him. May he come and see you, ma'am?" said Abby, longing to take them all home at once.

"He will be as welcome as an angel from Heaven, my child. I am failing very fast, and help and comfort are sorely needed," answered the grateful woman, with wet eyes and a heart too full for many thanks.

Abby's eyes were full also, and promising to "send father soon," she went away, little dreaming that the handful of flowers and a few kind words were the first links in a chain of events that brought a blessing into her own home.

She waited anxiously for her father's return, and blushed with pleasure as he said, after examining her morning's work: —

"Wonderfully well done, my dear! Your mother says she couldn't have done it better herself."

"I'm sorry that it shows at all; but it was impossible to hide that corner, and if you wear it on the inside of the leg, it won't be seen much," explained Abby, anxiously.

"It shows just enough for me to know where to point when I boast of my girl's patience and skill. People say I'm making a blue-stocking of you, because we read Johnson; but my black stocking will prove that I haven't spoiled you yet," said Mr. Lyon, pinching her cheek, as they went down to dinner arm in arm.

Literary ladies were looked upon with awe, and by many with disapproval, in those days; so Abby's studious tastes were criticised by the good cousins and aunts, who feared she might do something peculiar; though, years later, they were very proud of the fine letters she wrote, and the intellectual society which she had unconsciously fitted herself to enjoy and adorn.

Abby laughed at her father's joke, but said no more just then; for young people sat silent at table while their elders talked. She longed to tell about Lucy; and when dessert came, she drew her chair near to her father's, that she might pick the kernels from his walnuts and drop them into his wine, waiting till he said, as usual: "Now, little girl, let's take comfort." For both enjoyed the hour of rest he allowed himself in the middle of the day.

On this occasion he varied the remark by adding, as he took a bill from his pocket-book and gave it to her with a kiss: "Well-earned money, my dear, and most cheerfully paid."

"Thank you, sir! It seems a great deal for such a small job. But I *do* want it very much. May I tell you how I'd like to spend it, father?" cried Abby, beaming with the sweet delight of helping others.

"Yes, child; come and tell me. Something for sister, I suspect; or a new book, perhaps." And, drawing her to his knee, Mr. Lyon waited with a face full of benignant interest in her little confidences.

She told her story eagerly and well, exclaiming as she ended: "And now, I'm so glad, so very glad, I have this money, all my own, to spend for those dear little things! I know you'll help them; but it's so nice to be able to do my part, and giving away is such a pleasure."

"You are your father's own daughter in that, child. I must go and get my contribution ready, or I shall be left out," said Mrs. Lyon, hastening away to add one more charity to the many which made her quiet life so beautiful.

"I will go and see our neighbor this evening, and you shall come with me. You see, my girl, that the homely 'little job' is likely to be a large and pleasant one, and you have earned your part in it. Do the duty that comes first, and one never knows what beautiful experience it may blossom into. Use your earnings as you like, and God bless you, my dear."

So Abby had her part in the happy days that came to the Mayhews, and enjoyed it more than a dozen work-boxes; while her father was never tired of showing the handsome darn and telling the story of it.

Help and comfort were much needed around the corner; for very soon the poor lady died. But her confidence in the new friends raised up to her was not misplaced; and when all was over, and people asked, "What will become of the children?" Mr. Lyon answered the sad question by leading the four little orphans to his own house, and keeping them till good homes were found for the three youngest.

Lucy was heart-broken, and clung to Abby in her sorrow, as if nothing else could console her for all she had lost. No one had the heart to speak of sending her away at present; and, before long, the grateful little creature had won a place for herself which she never forfeited.

It was good for Abby to have a care of this sort, and her generous nature enjoyed it thoroughly, as she played elder sister in the sweetest way. It was her first real lesson in the charity that made her after-life so rich and beautiful; but then she little dreamed how well she was to be repaid for her small share in the good work which proved to be a blessing to them all.

Soon, preparations for sister Catharine's wedding produced a pleasant bustle in the house, and both the younger girls were as busy as bees, helping everywhere. Dressmakers ripped and stitched upstairs, visitors gossiped in the parlor, and cooks simmered and scolded in the kitchen; while notable Madam Lyon presided over the household, keeping the peace and gently bringing order out of chaos.

Abby had a new sprigged muslin frock, with a white sash, and her first pair of silk stockings, a present from her father. A bunch of pink roses gave the finishing touch, and she turned up her hair with a tortoise-shell comb in honor of the occasion.

All the relations — and there were many of them — came to the wedding, and the hospitable mansion was crowded with old and young. A fine breakfast was prepared, a line of carriages filled the quiet street, and troops of stately ladies and gentlemen came marching in; for the Lyons were a much-honored family.

The interesting moment arrived at last, the minister opened his book, the lovely bride entered with her groom, and a solemn silence fell upon the rustling crowd. Abby was much excited, and felt that she was about to disgrace herself by crying. Fortunately she stood near the door, and finding that a sob *would* come at thought of her dear sister going away forever, she slipped out and ran upstairs to hide her tears in the back bedroom, where she was put to accommodate guests.

As she opened the door, a puff of smoke made her catch her breath, then run to throw open the window before she turned to look for the fallen brand. A fire had been kindled in this room a short time before, and, to Abby's dismay, the sudden draught fanned the smouldering sparks which had crept from a fallen log to the mop-board and thence around the wooden mantel-piece. A suspicious crackling was heard, little tongues of flame darted from the cracks, and the air was full of smoke.

Abby's first impulse was to fly downstairs, screaming "Fire!" at the top of her voice; her second was to stand still and think what to do, — for an instant's recollection showed her what terror and confusion such a cry would produce in the crowded house, and how unseemly a panic would be at such a time.

"If I could only get at father! But I can't without scaring every one. What would he do? I've heard him tell about fires, and how to put them out; I know, — stop the draught first," and Abby shut the window. "Now water and wet blankets," and away she ran to the bath-room, and filling a pail, dashed the water over the burning wood. Then, pulling the blankets from off the bed, she wet them as well as she could, and hung them up before the fire-place, going to and fro for more water till the smoke ceased to pour out and the crackling stopped.

These energetic measures were taken just in time to prevent a serious fire, and when Abby dared to rest a moment, with her eyes on the chimney, fearing the treacherous blaze might burst out in a new place, she discovered that her clothes were wet, her face blackened, her hands blistered, and her breath gone.

"No matter," she thought, still too much elated with her success to feel the pain. "Father will be pleased, I know; for this is what he would call an emergency, and I've had my wits about me. I wish mother would come. Oh, dear! how queerly I feel — " and in the midst of her self-congratulation, poor little Abby fainted away, — slipping to the floor and lying there, like a new sort of Casabianca, faithful at her post.

Lucy found her very soon, having missed her and come to look for her the minute the service was over. Much frightened, she ran down again and tried to tell Mr. and Mrs. Lyon quietly. But her pale face alarmed every one, and when Abby came to herself, she was in her father’s arms, being carried from the scene of devastation to her mother’s room, where a crowd of anxious relatives received her like a conquering hero.

“Well done, my brave little fire-warden! I’m proud of you!” were the first words she heard; and they were more reviving than the burnt feathers under her nose, or the lavender-water plentifully sprinkled over her by her mother and sister.

With that hearty commendation, her father left her, to see that all was safe, and Abby found that another sort of courage was needed to support her through the next half-hour of trial; for her hands were badly burned, and each of the excellent relatives suggested a different remedy.

“Flour them!” cried Aunt Sally, fanning her violently.

“Goose-oil and cotton-batting,” suggested Aunt Patty.

“Nothing so good as lard,” pronounced Aunt Nabby.

“I always use dry starch or a piece of salt pork,” added cousin Lucretia.

“Butter them!” commanded grandma. “That’s what I did when my Joseph fell into the boiler and came out with his blessed little legs the color of lobsters. Butter them, Dolly.”

That settled the vexed question, and Abby’s hands were well buttered, while a hearty laugh composed the spirits of the agitated party; for the contrast between grandma’s words and her splendid appearance, as she sat erect in the big arm-chair issuing commands like a general, in silver-gray satin and an imposing turban, was very funny.

Then Abby was left to repose, with Lucy and old Nurse beside her, while the rest went down to eat the wedding feast and see the happy pair off in a chaise, with the portmanteau slung underneath, on their quiet honey-moon trip to Pomfret.

When the bustle was all over, Abby found herself a heroine in her small circle of admiring friends and neighbors, who praised and petted her as if she had saved the city from destruction. She needed comfort very much; for one hand was so seriously injured that it never entirely recovered from the deep burn, which contracted two of her finger-tips. This was a great sorrow to the poor girl; for she could no longer play on her piano, and was forced to content herself with singing like a lark when all joined in the sweet old ballads forgotten now.

It was a misfortune, but it had its happy side; for, during the long months when she was partially helpless, books were her solace, and she studied many things which other duties or pleasures would have crowded out, if “Abby’s poor hand” had not been an excuse for such liberty and indulgence. It did not make her selfish, however, for while regretting her uselessness, she unexpectedly found work to do that made her own life happy by cheering that of another.

Lucy proved to be a most intelligent child; and when Abby asked what return she could make for all the little girl’s loving service during her trouble, she discovered that help about lessons would be the favor most desired. Lucy’s too early cares had kept her from learning much, and now that she had leisure, weak eyes forbade study, and she longed vainly to get on as her new friend did; for Abby was her model in all things, — looked up to with admiration, love, and wonder.

“Father, I’ve been thinking that I might read Lucy’s lessons to her and hear her recite. Then she wouldn’t grieve about being backward, and I can be eyes to her as she is hands to me. I can’t sew or work now, but I can teach the little I know. May I, sir?” asked Abby, one morning, after reading a paper in the *Spectator*, and having a pleasant talk about it during the happy half-hour.

“A capital plan, daughter, if you are sure you can keep on. To begin and then fail would leave the child worse off for the hope and disappointment. It will be tiresome to go on day after day, so think well before you propose it,” answered her father, much pleased with the idea.

“I *can* do it, and I *will*! If I get tired, I’ll look at you and mother, — always so faithful to what you undertake, — and remember my motto,” cried Abby, anxious to follow the example set her in the daily life of these good parents.

A hearty hand-shake rewarded her, and she set about the new task with a resolute purpose to succeed. It was hard at first to go back to her early lessons and read them over and over again to eager Lucy, who did her best to understand, remember, and recite. But good-will and gratitude worked wonders; and day after day, week after week, month after month, the teaching went on, to the great surprise and satisfaction of those who watched this labor of love. Both learned much, and a very strong, sweet friendship grew up, which lasted till the young girls became old women.

For nearly two years the daily lessons were continued; then Lucy was ready and able to go to school, and Abby free from the duty that had grown a pleasure. Sister Catherine being gone, she was the young lady of the house now, and began to go to a few parties, where she distinguished herself by her graceful dancing, and sprightly though modest manners. She had grown strong and rosy with the exercise her sensible mother prescribed and her energetic father encouraged, taking long walks with her to Roxbury and Dorchester on holidays, over bridges and around the common before breakfast each morning, till the pale little girl was a tall and blooming creature, full of life and spirit, — not exactly beautiful, but with a sweet, intelligent face, and the frank, cordial ways that are so charming. Her brother Sam was very proud of her, and liked to see her surrounded by his friends at the merry-makings to which he escorted her; for she talked as well as she danced, and the older gentlemen enjoyed a good chat with Miss Abby as much as the younger ones did the elaborate pigeon-wings and pirouettes then in vogue.

Among the older men was one whom Abby much admired; for he had fought, travelled, and studied more than most men of his age, and earned the honors he wore so modestly. She was never tired of asking him questions when they met, and he never seemed tired of giving long, interesting replies; so they often sat and talked while others danced, and Abby never guessed that he was studying her bright face and innocent heart as eagerly as she listened to his agreeable conversation and stirring adventures.

Presently he came to the house with brother Sam, who shared Abby's regard for him; and there, while the young men amused themselves, or paid their respects to the elders, one of them was still watching the tall girl with the crown of brown hair, as she sat by her father, poured the tea for Madam, laughed with her brother, or made bashful Lucy share their pleasures; always so busy, dutiful, and winning, that the visitor pronounced Mr. Lyon's the most delightful house in Boston. He heard all the little tales of Abby's youth from Sam, and Lucy added her tribute with the eloquence of a grateful heart; he saw how loved and trusted she was, and he soon longed to know how she would answer the question he desired to ask her. Having received permission from Papa, in the decorous old style, he only waited for an opportunity to discover if charming Abigail would consent to change her name from Lyon to Lamb; and, as if her lesson was to be quite complete, a little thing decided her fate and made a very happy woman of the good girl.

On Abby's seventeenth birthday, there was to be a party in her honor, at the hospitable family mansion, to which all her friends were invited; and, when she came down early to see that all was in order, she found one impatient guest had already arrived.

It was not alone the consciousness that the new pink taffeta gown and the wreath of white roses were very becoming which made her blush so prettily as she thanked her friend for the fine nosegay he brought her, but something in his face, though he only wished her many happy returns in a hearty way, and then added, laughing, as the last button flew off the glove he was awkwardly trying to fasten, —

"It is evident that you didn't sew on these buttons, Miss Abby. I've observed that Sam's never come off, and he says you always keep them in order."

"Let me put one on for you. It will take but a moment, and you'll be so uncomfortable without it," said Abby, glad to find employment for her eyes.

A minute afterward she was sorry she had offered; for he accepted the little service with thanks, and stood watching while she sat down at her work-table and began to sew. She was very sensitive about her hand, yet ashamed of being so; for the scar was inside and the drawn fingers showed very little, as it is natural to half close them. She hoped he had never seen it, and tried to hide it as she worked. But this, or some new consciousness, made her usually nimble fingers lose their skill, and she knotted the silk, split the button, and dropped her thimble, growing angry with herself for being so silly and getting so red and flurried.

"I'm afraid I'm giving you a deal of trouble," said the gentleman, who was watching the white hand with great interest.

"No; it is I who am foolish about my burnt hands," answered Abby, in her frank, impetuous way. "See how ugly it is!" And she held it out, as if to punish herself for the girlish feeling she despised.

The answer to this little outburst made her forget everything but the sweetest pleasure and surprise; for, kissing the scarred palm with tender respect, her lover said: —

"To me it is the finest and the dearest hand in the world. I know the brave story, and I've seen the good this generous hand is never tired of doing. I want it for my own. Will you give it to me, dear?"

Abby must have answered, "Yes;" for she wore a new ring under her glove that night, and danced as if there were wings on the heels of her pink shoes.

Whether the button ever got sewed on or not, no one knows; but that bit of needlework was even more successful than the other small job; for in due time there was a second wedding, without a fire, and Abby went away to a happy home of her own, leaving sister Lucy to fill her place and be the most loving and faithful of daughters to her benefactors while they lived.

Long years afterward, when she had children and grandchildren about her, listening to the true old stories that are the best, Abby used to say, with her own cheerful laugh: —

"My father and mother taught me many useful lessons, but none more valuable than those I learned that year; and I may honestly say that patience, perseverance, courage, friendship, and love, came out of that silk stocking. So let me give you this bit of advice: Don't despise little things, my dears!"

The Banner of Beaumanior

Larks were singing in the clear sky over Dinan, the hill-sides were white with hosts of blooming cherry-trees, and the valley golden with willow blossoms. The gray tower of the good Duchess Anne was hung with garlands of ivy and gay with tufts of fragrant wallflowers, and along the fosse the shadows deepened daily as the young leaves thickened on the interlacing branches overhead. Women sang while they beat their clothes by the pool; wooden shoes clattered to and fro as the girls brought water from the fountain in Place St. Louis; men, with their long hair, embroidered jackets, and baggy breeches, drank cider at the inn doors; and the great Breton horses shook their high collars till the bells rang again, as they passed along the roads that wound between wide fields of colza, buckwheat, and clover.

Up at the chateau, which stood near the ruins of the ancient castle, the great banner streamed in the wind, showing, as its folds blew out, the device and motto of the Beaumanoir — two clasped hands and the legend, “*En tout chemin loyauté*.” In the courtyard, hounds brayed, horses pranced, and servants hurried about; for the count was going to hunt the wild boar. Presently, away they went, with the merry music of horns, the clatter of hoofs, and the blithe ring of voices, till the pleasant clamor died away in the distant woods, where mistletoe clung to the great oaks, and menhirs and dolmens, mysterious relics of the Druids, were to be seen.

From one of the windows of the chateau-tower a boy’s face looked out, full of eager longing, — a fine, strong face, but sullen now, with black brows, dark, restless eyes, and lips set, as if rebellious thoughts were stirring in his mind. He watched the gay cavalcade disappear, until a sunny silence settled over the landscape, broken only by the larks and the sound of a girl’s voice singing. As he listened, the frown smoothed itself from his brow, and his eye brightened when it rested on a blue-gowned, white-capped figure, sprinkling webs of linen, spread to bleach in the green meadow by the river Rance.

“If I may not hunt, I’ll away to Yvonne and take a holiday. She can tell better tales than any in this weary book, the bane of my life!”

As he spoke, the boy struck a volume that lay on the wide ledge, with a petulant energy that sent it fluttering down into the court-yard below. Half-ashamed and half-amused, young Gaston peeped to see if this random shot had hit any one. But all was quiet and deserted now; so, with a boyish laugh and a daring glance at the dangerous descent, he said to the doves cooing on the roof overhead: “Here’s a fine pretext for escape. Being locked in, how can I get my lesson unless I fetch the book? Tell no tales of the time I linger, and you shall be well fed, my pretty birds.”

Then swinging himself out as if it were no new feat, he climbed boldly down through the ivy that half hid the carved flowers and figures which made a ladder for his agile feet.

The moment he touched ground, he raced away like a hound in full scent to the meadow, where he was welcomed by a rosy, brown-eyed lass, whose white teeth shone as she laughed to see him leap the moat, dodge behind the wall, and come bounding toward her, his hair streaming in the wind, and his face full of boyish satisfaction in this escapade.

“The old tale,” he panted, as he threw himself down upon the grass and flung the recovered book beside him. “This dreary Latin drives me mad, and I will *not* waste such days as this poring over dull pages like a priest, when I should be hunting like a knight and gentleman.”

“Nay, dear Gaston, but you ought, for obedience is the first duty of the knight, and honor of the gentleman,” answered the girl, in a soft, reproachful tone, which seemed to touch the lad, as the voice of a master tames a high-mettled horse.

“Had Father Nevin trusted to my honor, I would not have run away; but he locked me in, like a monk in a cell, and that I will not bear. Just one hour, Yvonne, one little hour of freedom, then I will go back, else there will be no sport for me to-morrow,” said the lad, recklessly pulling up the bluets that starred the grass about him.

“Ah, if I were set to such a task, I would so gladly learn it, that I might be a fitter friend for you,” said the girl, reverently turning the pages of the book she could not read.

“No need of that; I like you as you are, and by my faith, I doubt your great willingness, for when I last played tutor and left you to spell out the pretty legend of St. Coventin and his little fish, I found you fast asleep with the blessed book upon the floor,” laughed Gaston, turning the tables on his mentor, with great satisfaction.

The girl laughed also as she retorted, “My tutor should not have left me to play with his dogs. I bore my penance better than you, and did not run away. Come now, we’ll be merry. Will you talk, or shall I sing, while you rest this hot head, and dream of horse and hound and spearing the wild boar?” added Yvonne, smoothing the locks of hair scattered on the grass, with a touch as gentle as if the hand were that of a lady, and not that of a peasant, rough with hard work.

“Since I may not play a man’s part yet, amuse me like a boy, with the old tales your mother used to tell, when we watched the fagots blaze in the winter nights. It is long since I have heard one, and I am never tired hearing of the deeds I mean to match, if not outdo, some day.

“Let me think a bit till I remember your favorites, and do you listen to the bees above there in the willow, setting you a good example, idle boy,” said Yvonne, spreading a coarse apron for his head, while she sat beside him racking her brain for tales to beguile this truant hour.

Her father was the count’s forester, and when the countess had died some sixteen years before, leaving a month-old boy, good dame Gillian had taken the motherless baby, and nursed and reared him with her little girl, so faithfully and tenderly that the count never could forget the loyal service. As babies, the two slept in one cradle; as children they played and quarrelled together; and as boy and girl they defended, comforted, and amused each other. But time brought inevitable changes, and both felt that the hour of separation was near; for, while Yvonne went on leading the peasant life to which she was born, Gaston was receiving the education befitting a young count. The chaplain taught him to read and write, with lessons in sacred history, and a little Latin; of the forester he learned woodcraft; and his father taught him horsemanship and the use of arms, accomplishments considered all-important in those days.

Gaston cared nothing for books, except such as told tales of chivalry; but dearly loved athletic sports, and at sixteen rode the most fiery horse without a fall, handled a sword admirably, could kill a boar at the first shot, and longed ardently for war, that he might prove himself a man. A brave, high-spirited, generous boy, with a very tender spot in his heart for the good woman who had been a mother to him, and his little foster-sister, whose idol he was. For days he seemed to forget these humble friends, and led the gay, active life of his age and rank; but if wounded in the chase, worried by the chaplain, disappointed in any plan, or in disgrace for any prank, he turned instinctively to Dame Gillian and Yvonne, sure of help and comfort for mind and body.

Companionship with him had refined the girl, and given her glimpses of a world into which she could never enter, yet where she could follow with eager eyes and high hopes the fortunes of this dear Gaston, who was both her prince and brother. Her influence over him was great, for she was of a calm and patient nature, as well as brave and prudent beyond her years. His will was law; yet in seeming to obey, she often led him, and he thanked her for the courage with which she helped him to control his fiery temper and strong will. Now, as she glanced at him she saw that he was already growing more tranquil, under the soothing influences of the murmuring river, the soft flicker of the sunshine, and a blessed sense of freedom.

So, while she twisted her distaff, she told the stirring tales of warriors, saints, and fairies, whom all Breton peasants honor, love, and fear. But best of all was the tale of Gaston's own ancestor, Jean de Beaumanoir, "the hero of Ploërmel, where, when sorely wounded and parched with thirst, he cried for water, and Geoffrey du Bois answered, like a grim old warrior as he was, 'Drink thy blood, Beaumanoir, and the thirst will pass;' and he drank, and the battle madness seized him, and he slew ten men, winning the fight against great odds, to his everlasting glory."

"Ah, those were the times to live in! If they could only come again, I would be a second Jean!"

Gaston sprung to his feet as he spoke, all aglow with the warlike ardor of his race, and Yvonne looked up at him, sure that he would prove himself a worthy descendant of the great baron and his wife, the daughter of the brave Du Guesclin.

"But you shall not be treacherously killed, as he was; for I will save you, as the peasant woman saved poor Giles de Bretagne when starving in the tower, or fight for you, as Jeanne d'Arc fought for her lord," answered Yvonne, dropping her distaff to stretch out her hand to him; for she, too, was on her feet.

Gaston took the faithful hand, and pointing to the white banner floating over the ruins of the old castle, said heartily: "We will always stand by one another, and be true to the motto of our house till death."

"We will!" answered the girl, and both kept the promise loyally, as we shall see.

Just at that moment the sound of hoofs made the young enthusiasts start and look toward the road that wound through the valley to the hill. An old man on a slowly pacing mule was all they saw, but the change that came over both was comical in its suddenness; for the gallant knight turned to a truant school-boy, daunted by the sight of his tutor, while the rival of the Maid of Orleans grew pale with dismay.

"I am lost if he spy me, for my father vowed I should not hunt again unless I did my task. He will see me if I run, and where can I hide till he has past?" whispered Gaston, ashamed of his panic, yet unwilling to pay the penalty of his prank.

But quick-witted Yvonne saved him; for lifting one end of the long web of linen, she showed a hollow whence some great stone had been removed, and Gaston slipped into the green nest, over which the linen lay smoothly when replaced.

On came the chaplain, glancing sharply about him, being of an austere and suspicious nature. He saw nothing, however, but the peasant girl in her quaint cap and wooden sabots, singing to herself as she leaned against a tree, with her earthen jug in her hand. The mule paused in the light shadow of the willows, to crop a mouthful of grass before climbing the hill, and the chaplain seemed glad to rest a moment, for the day was warm and the road dusty.

“Come hither, child, and give me a draught of water,” he called, and the girl ran to fill her pitcher, offering it with a low reverence.

“Thanks, daughter! A fine day for the bleaching, but over warm for much travel. Go to your work, child; I will tarry a moment in the shade before I return to my hard task of sharpening a dull youth’s wit,” said the old man when he had drunk; and with a frowning glance at the room where he had left his prisoner, he drew a breviary from his pocket and began to read, while the mule browsed along the road-side.

Yvonne went to sprinkling the neglected linen, wondering with mingled anxiety and girlish merriment how Gaston fared. The sun shone hotly on the dry cloth, and as she approached the boy’s hiding-place, a stir would have betrayed him had the chaplain’s eyes been lifted.

“Sprinkle me quickly; I am stifling in this hole,” whispered an imploring voice.

“Drink thy blood, Beaumanoir, and the thirst will pass,” quoted Yvonne, taking a naughty satisfaction in the ignominious captivity of the wilful boy. A long sigh was the only answer he gave, and taking pity on him, she made a little hollow in the linen where she knew his head lay, and poured in water till a choking sound assured her Gaston had enough. The chaplain looked up, but the girl coughed loudly, as she went to refill her jug, with such a demure face that he suspected nothing, and presently ambled away to seek his refractory pupil.

The moment he disappeared, a small earthquake seemed to take place under the linen, for it flew up violently, and a pair of long legs waved joyfully in the air as Gaston burst into a ringing laugh, which Yvonne echoed heartily. Then, springing up, he said, throwing back his wet hair and shaking his finger at her: “You dared not betray me, but you nearly drowned me, wicked girl. I cannot stop for vengeance now; but I’ll toss you into the river some day, and leave you to get out as you can.”

Then he was off as quickly as he came, eager to reach his prison again before the chaplain came to hear the unlearned lesson. Yvonne watched him till he climbed safely in at the high window and disappeared with a wave of the hand, when she, too, went back to her work, little dreaming what brave parts both were to play in dangers and captivities of which these youthful pranks and perils were but a foreshadowing.

Two years later, in the month of March, 1793, the insurrection broke out in Vendée, and Gaston had his wish; for the old count had been an officer of the king’s household, and hastened to prove his loyalty. Yvonne’s heart beat high with pride as she saw her foster-brother ride gallantly away beside his father, with a hundred armed vassals behind them, and the white banner fluttering above their heads in the fresh wind.

She longed to go with him; but her part was to watch and wait, to hope and pray, till the hour came when she, like many another woman in those days, could prove herself as brave as a man, and freely risk her life for those she loved.

Four months later the heavy tidings reached them that the old count was killed and Gaston taken prisoner. Great was the lamentation among the old men, women, and children left behind; but they had little time for sorrow, for a band of the marauding Vendeans burned the chateau, and laid waste the Abbey.

“Now, mother, I must up and away to find and rescue Gaston. I promised, and if he lives, it shall be done. Let me go; you are safe now, and there is no rest for me till I know how he fares,” said Yvonne, when the raid was over, and the frightened peasants ventured to return from the neighboring forests, whither they had hastily fled for protection.

“Go, my girl, and bring me news of our young lord. May you lead him safely home again to rule over us,” answered Dame Gillian, devoted still, — for her husband was reported dead with his master, yet she let her daughter go without a murmur, feeling that no sacrifice was too great.

So Yvonne set out, taking with her Gaston’s pet dove and the little sum of money carefully hoarded for her marriage portion. The pretty winged creature, frightened by the destruction of its home, had flown to her for refuge, and she had cherished it for its master’s sake. Now, when it would not leave her, but came circling around her head a league away from Dinan, she accepted the good omen, and made the bird the companion of her perilous journey.

There is no room to tell all the dangers, disappointments, and fatigues endured before she found Gaston; but after being often misled by false rumors, she at last discovered that he was a prisoner in Fort Penthièvre. His own reckless courage had brought him there; for in one of the many skirmishes in which he had taken part, he ventured too far away from his men, and was captured after fighting desperately to cut his way out. Now, alone in his cell, he raged like a caged eagle, feeling that there was no hope of escape; for the fort stood on a plateau of precipitous rock washed on two sides by the sea. He had heard of the massacre of the royalist emigrants who landed there, and tried to prepare himself for a like fate, hoping to die as bravely as young Sombreuil, who was shot with twenty others on what was afterward named the “*Champ des Martyrs*.” His last words, when ordered by the executioner to kneel, were, “I do it; but one knee I bend for my God, the other for my king.”

Day after day Gaston looked down from his narrow window, past which the gulls flew screaming, and watched the fishers at their work, the women gathering sea-weed on the shore, and the white sails flitting across the bay of Quiberon. Bitterly did he regret the wilfulness which brought him there, well knowing that if he had obeyed orders he would now be free to find his father’s body and avenge his death.

“Oh, for one day of liberty, one hope of escape, one friend to cheer this dreadful solitude!” he cried, when weeks had passed and he seemed utterly forgotten.

As he spoke, he shook the heavy bars with impotent strength, then bent his head as if to hide even from himself the few hot tears wrung from him by captivity and despair.

Standing so, with eyes too dim for seeing, something brushed against his hair, and a bird lit on the narrow ledge. He thought it was a gull, and paid no heed; but in a moment a soft coo started him, and looking up, he saw a white dove struggling to get in.

“Blanchette!” he cried, and the pretty creature flew to his hand, pecking at his lips in the old caressing way he knew so well.

“My faithful bird, God bless thee!” exclaimed the poor lad, holding the dove close against his cheek to hide the trembling of his lip, — so touched, so glad was he to find in his dreary prison even a dumb friend and comforter.

But Blanchette had her part to play, and presently fluttered back to the window ledge, cooing loudly as she pecked at something underneath her wing.

Then Gaston remembered how he used to send messages to Yvonne by this carrier-dove, and with a thrill of joy looked for the token, hardly daring to hope that any would be found. Yes! there, tied carefully among the white feathers, was a tiny roll of paper, with these words rudely written on it: —

“Be ready; help will come. Y.”

“The brave girl! the loyal heart! I might have known she would keep her promise, and come to save me;” and Gaston dropped on his knees in gratitude.

Blanchette meantime tripped about the cell on her little rosy feet, ate a few crumbs of the hard bread, dipped her beak in the jug of water, dressed her feathers daintily, then flew to the bars and called him. He had nothing to send back by this sure messenger but a lock of hair, and this he tied with the same thread, in place of the note. Then kissing the bird he bade it go, watching the silver wings flash in the sunshine as it flew away, carrying joy with it and leaving hope behind.

After that the little courier came often unperceived, carrying letters to and fro; for Yvonne sent bits of paper, and Gaston wrote his answers with his blood and a quill from Blanchette's wing. He thus learned how Yvonne was living in a fisher's hut on the beach, and working for his rescue as well as she dared. Every day she might be seen gathering sea-weed on the rocks or twirling her distaff at the door of the dilapidated hut, not as a young girl, but as an old woman; for she had stained her fair skin, put on ragged clothes, and hidden her fresh face under the pent-house cap worn by the women of Quiberon. Her neighbors thought her a poor soul left desolate by the war, and let her live unmolested. So she worked on secretly and steadily, playing her part well, and biding her time till the long hempen rope was made, the sharp file procured unsuspected, and a boat ready to receive the fugitives.

Her plan was perilously simple, but the only one possible; for Gaston was well guarded, and out of that lofty cell it seemed that no prisoner could escape without wings. A bird and a woman lent him those wings, and his daring flight was a nine days' wonder at the fort. Only a youth accustomed to feats of agility and strength could have safely made that dangerous escape along the face of the cliff that rose straight up from the shore. But Gaston was well trained, and the boyish pranks that used to bring him into dire disgrace now helped to save his life.

Thus, when the order came, written in the rude hand he had taught Yvonne long ago, "Pull up the thread which Blanchette will bring at midnight. Watch for a light in the bay. Then come down, and St. Barbe protect you," he was ready; for the tiny file of watch-spring, brought by the bird, had secretly done its work, and several bars were loose. He knew that the attempt might cost him his life, but was willing to gain liberty even at that price; for imprisonment seemed worse than death to his impatient spirit. The jailer went his last round, the great bell struck the appointed hour, and Gaston stood at the window, straining his eyes to catch the first ray of the promised light, when the soft whir of wings gladdened his ear, and Blanchette arrived, looking scared and wet and weary, for rain fell, the wind blew fitfully, and the poor bird was unused to such wild work as this. But obedient to its training, it flew to its master; and no angel could have been more welcome than the storm-beaten little creature as it nestled in his bosom, while he untangled the lengths of strong thread wound about one of its feet.

He knew what to do, and tying a bit of the broken bar to one end, as a weight, he let it down, praying that no cruel gust would break or blow it away. In a moment a quick jerk at the thread bade him pull again. A cord came up, and when that was firmly secured, a second jerk was the signal for the last and most important haul. Up came the stout rope, knotted here and there to add safety and strength to the hands and feet that were to climb down that frail ladder, unless some cruel fate dashed the poor boy dead upon the rocks below. The rope was made fast to an iron staple inside, the bars were torn away, and Gaston crept through the narrow opening to perch on the ledge without, while Blanchette flew down to tell Yvonne he was coming.

The moment the distant spark appeared, he bestirred himself, set his teeth, and boldly began the dangerous descent. Rain blinded him, the wind beat him against the rock, bruising hands and knees, and the way seemed endless, as he climbed slowly down, clinging with the clutch of a drowning man, and blessing Yvonne for the knots that kept him from slipping when the gusts blew him to and fro. More than once he thought it was all over; but the good rope held fast, and strength and courage nerved heart and limbs. One greater than St. Barbe upheld him, and he dropped at last, breathless and bleeding, beside the faithful Yvonne.

There was no time for words, only a grasp of the hand, a sigh of gratitude, and they were away to the boat that tossed on the wild water with a single rower in his place.

“It is our Hoël. I found him looking for you. He is true as steel. In, in, and off, or you are lost!” whispered Yvonne, flinging a cloak about Gaston, thrusting a purse, a sword, and a flask into his hand, and holding the boat while he leaped in.

“But you?” he cried; “I cannot leave you in peril, after all you have dared and done for me.”

“No one suspects me; I am safe. Go to my mother; she will hide you, and I will follow soon.”

Waiting for no further speech, she pushed the boat off, and watched it vanish in the darkness; then went away to give thanks, and rest after her long work and excitement.

Gaston reached home safely, and Dame Gillian concealed him in the ruins of the Abbey, till anxiety for Yvonne drove him out to seek and rescue in his turn. For she did not come, and when a returning soldier brought word that she had been arrested in her flight, and sent to Nantes, Gaston could not rest, but disguising himself as a peasant, went to find her, accompanied by faithful Hoël, who loved Yvonne, and would gladly die for her and his young master. Their hearts sunk when they discovered that she was in the Boufflay, an old fortress, once a royal residence, and now a prison, crowded with unfortunate and innocent creatures, arrested on the slightest pretexts, and guillotined or drowned by the infamous Carrier. Hundreds of men and women were there, suffering terribly, and among them was Yvonne, brave still, but with no hope of escape; for few were saved, and then only by some lucky accident. Like a sister of mercy she went among the poor souls crowded together in the great halls, hungry, cold, sick, and despairing, and they clung to her as if she were some strong, sweet saint who could deliver them or teach them how to die.

After some weeks of this terrible life, her name was called one morning, on the list for that day's execution, and she rose to join the sad procession setting forth.

"Which is it to be?" she asked, as she passed one of the men who guarded them, a rough fellow, whose face was half hidden by a shaggy beard.

"You will be drowned; we have no time to waste on women;" was the brutal answer; but as the words passed his lips, a slip of paper was pressed into her hand, and these words breathed into her ear by a familiar voice: "I am here!"

It was Gaston, in the midst of enemies, bent on saving her at the risk of his life, remembering all he owed her, and the motto of his race. The shock of this discovery nearly betrayed them both, and turned her so white that the woman next her put her arm about her, saying sweetly: —

"Courage, my sister; it is soon over."

"I fear nothing now!" cried Yvonne, and went on to take her place in the cart, looking so serene and happy that those about her thought her already fit for heaven.

No need to repeat the dreadful history of the Noyades; it is enough to say that in the confusion of the moment Yvonne found opportunity to read and destroy the little paper, which said briefly: —

"When you are flung into the river, call my name and float. I shall be near."

She understood, and being placed with a crowd of wretched women on the old vessel which lay in the river Loire, she employed every moment in loosening the rope that tied her hands, and keeping her eye on the tall, bearded man who moved about seeming to do his work, while his blood boiled with suppressed wrath, and his heart ached with unavailing pity. It was dusk before the end came for Yvonne, and she was all unnerved by the sad sights she had been forced to see; but when rude hands seized her, she made ready for the plunge, sure that Gaston would "be near." He was, for in the darkness and uproar, he could leap after her unseen, and while she floated, he cut the rope, then swam down the river with her hand upon his shoulder till they dared to land. Both were nearly spent with the excitement and exertion of that dreadful hour; but Hoël waited for them on the shore and helped Gaston carry poor Yvonne into a deserted house, where they gave her fire, food, dry garments, and the gladdest welcome one human creature ever gave to another.

Being a robust peasant, the girl came safely through hardships that would have killed or crazed a frailer creature; and she was soon able to rejoice with the brave fellows over this escape, so audaciously planned and so boldly carried out. They dared stay but a few hours, and before dawn were hastening through the least frequented ways toward home, finding safety in the distracted state of the country, which made fugitives no unusual sight, and refugees plentiful. One more adventure, and that a happy one, completed their joy, and turned their flight into a triumphant march.

Pausing in the depths of the great forest of Hunaudaye to rest, the two young men went to find food, leaving Yvonne to tend the fire and make ready to cook the venison they hoped to bring. It was nightfall, and another day would see them in Dinan, they hoped; but the lads had consented to pause for the girl's sake, for she was worn out with their rapid flight. They were talking of their adventures in high spirits, when Gaston laid his hand on Hoël's mouth and pointed to a green slope before them. An early moon gave light enough to show them a dark form moving quickly into the coppice, and something like the antlers of a stag showed above the tall brakes before they vanished. "Slip around and drive him this way. I never miss my aim, and we will sup royally to-night," whispered Gaston, glad to use the arms with which they had provided themselves.

Hoël slipped away, and presently a rustle in the wood betrayed the cautious approach of the deer. But he was off before a shot could be fired, and the disappointed hunters followed long and far, resolved not to go back empty-handed. They had to give it up, however, and were partially consoled by a rabbit, which Hoël flung over his shoulder, while Gaston, forgetting caution, began to sing an old song the women of Brittany love so well: —

"Quand vous étiez, captif, Bertrand, fils de Bretagne, Tous les fuseaux tournaient aussi dans la campagne."

He got no further, for the stanza was finished by a voice that had often joined in the ballad, when Dame Gillian sang it to the children, as she spun: —

"Chaque femme apporte son écheveau de lin; Ce fut votre rançon, Messire du Guesclin."

Both paused, thinking that some spirit of the wood mocked them; but a loud laugh, and a familiar "Holo! holo!" made Hoël cry, "The forester!" while Gaston dashed headlong into the thicket whence the sound came, there to find the jolly forester, indeed, with a slain deer by his side, waiting to receive them with open arms.

"I taught you to stalk the deer, and spear the boar, not to hunt your fellow-creatures, my lord. But I forgive you, for it was well done, and I had a hard run to escape," he said, still laughing.

“But how came you here?” cried both the youths, in great excitement; for the good man was supposed to be dead, with his old master.

“A long tale, for which I have a short and happy answer. Come home to supper with me, and I’ll show you a sight that will gladden hearts and eyes,” he answered, shouldering his load and leading the way to a deserted hermitage, which had served many a fugitive for a shelter. As they went, Gaston poured out his story, and told how Yvonne was waiting for them in the wood.

“Brave lads! and here is your reward,” answered the forester, pushing open the door and pointing to the figure of a man, with a pale face and bandaged head, lying asleep beside the fire.

It was the count, sorely wounded, but alive, thanks to his devoted follower, who had saved him when the fight was over; and after weeks of concealment, suffering, and anxiety, had brought him so far toward home.

No need to tell of the happy meeting that night, nor of the glad return; for, though the chateau was in ruins and lives were still in danger, they all were together, and the trials they had passed through only made the ties of love and loyalty between high and low more true and tender. Good Dame Gillian housed them all, and nursed her master back to health. Yvonne and Hoël had a gay wedding in the course of time, and Gaston went to the wars again. A new chateau rose on the ruins of the old, and when the young lord took possession, he replaced the banner that was lost with one of fair linen, spun and woven by the two women who had been so faithful to him and his, but added a white dove above the clasped hands and golden legend, never so true as now, —

“En tout chemin loyauté.”

Jerseys or the Girl’s Ghost

“Well, what do you think of her? She has only been here a day, but it doesn’t take *us* long to make up our minds,” said Nelly Blake, the leader of the school, as a party of girls stood chatting round the register one cold November morning.

“I like her, she looks so fresh and pleasant, and so strong. I just wanted to go and lean up against her, when my back ached yesterday,” answered Maud, a pale girl wrapped in a shawl.

“I’m afraid she’s very energetic, and I do hate to be hurried,” sighed plump Cordelia, lounging in an easy chair.

“I know she is, for Biddy says she asked for a pail of cold water at six this morning, and she’s out walking now. Just think how horrid,” cried Kitty with a shiver.

“I wonder what she does for her complexion. Never saw such a lovely color. Real roses and cream,” said Julia, shutting one eye to survey the freckles on her nose, with a gloomy frown.

“I longed to ask what sort of braces she wears, to keep her so straight. I mean to by and by; she looks as if she wouldn’t snub a body;” and Sally vainly tried to square her own round shoulders, bent with much poring over books, for she was the bright girl of the school.

“She wears French corsets, of course. Nothing else gives one such a fine figure,” answered Maud, dropping the shawl to look with pride at her own wasp-like waist and stiff back.

“Couldn’t move about so easily and gracefully if she wore a strait-jacket like you. She’s not a bit of a fashion plate, but a splendid woman, just natural and hearty and sweet. I feel as if I shouldn’t slouch and poke so much if I had her to brace me up,” cried Sally, in her enthusiastic way.

“I know one thing, girls, and that is, *she* can wear a jersey and have it set elegantly, and *we* can’t,” said Kitty, laboring with her own, which would wrinkle and twist, in spite of many hidden pins.

“Yes, I looked at it all breakfast time, and forgot my second cup of coffee, so my head aches as if it would split. Never saw anything fit so splendidly in my life,” answered Nelly, turning to the mirror, which reflected a fine assortment of many colored jerseys; for all the girls were out in their fall suits, and not one of the new jackets set like Miss Orne’s, the teacher who had arrived to take Madame’s place while that excellent old lady was laid up with a rheumatic fever.

"They are pretty and convenient, but I'm afraid they will be a trial to some of us. Maud and Nelly look the best, but they have to keep stiff and still, or the wrinkles come. Kit has no peace in hers, and poor Cordy looks more like a meal bag than ever, while I am a perfect spectacle, with my round shoulders and long thin arms. 'A jersey on a bean-pole' describes me; but let us be in the fashion or die," laughed Sally, exaggerating her own defects by poking her head forward and blinking through her glasses in a funny way.

There was a laugh and then a pause, broken in a moment by Maud, who said, in a tone of apprehension:

"I do hope Miss Orne isn't full of the new notions about clothes and food and exercise and rights and rubbish of that sort. Mamma hates such ideas, and so do I."

"I hope she *is* full of good, wise notions about health and work and study. It is just what we need in this school. Madame is old and lets things go, and the other teachers only care to get through and have an easy time. We ought to be a great deal better, brisker, and wiser than we are, and I'm ready for a good stirring up if any one will give it to us," declared Sally, who was a very independent girl and had read as well as studied much.

"You Massachusetts girls are always raving about self-culture, and ready for queer new ways. I'm contented with the old ones, and want to be let alone and finished off easily," said Nelly, the pretty New Yorker.

"Well, I go with Sally, and want to get all I can in the way of health, learning, and manners while I'm here; and I'm real glad Miss Orne has come, for Madame's old-fashioned, niminy priminy ways did fret me dreadfully. Miss Orne is more like our folks out West, — spry and strong and smart, see if she isn't," said Julia, with a decided nod of her auburn head.

"There she is now! Girls, she's running! actually trotting up the avenue — not like a hen, but a boy — with her elbows down and her head up. Do come and see!" cried Kitty, dancing about at the window as if she longed to go and do likewise.

All ran in time to see a tall young lady come up the wide path at a good pace, looking as fresh and blithe as the goddess of health, as she smiled and nodded at them, so like a girl that all returned her salute with equal cordiality.

"She gives a new sort of interest to the old treadmill, doesn't she?" said Nelly, as they scattered to their places at the stroke of nine, feeling unusually anxious to appear well before the new teacher.

While they pull down their jerseys and take up their books, we will briefly state that Madame Stein's select boarding-school had for many years received six girls at a time, and finished them off in the old style. Plenty of French, German, music, painting, dancing, and deportment turned out well-bred, accomplished, and amiable young ladies, ready for fashionable society, easy lives, and entire dependence on other people. Dainty and delicate creatures usually, for, as in most schools of this sort, minds and manners were much cultivated, but bodies rather neglected. Heads and backs ached, dyspepsia was a common ailment, and poorlies of all sorts afflicted the dear girls, who ought not to have known what “nerves” meant, and should have had no bottles in their closets holding wine and iron, cough mixtures, soothing drops and cod-liver oil for weak lungs. Gymnastics had once flourished, but the fashion had gone by, and a short walk each day was all the exercise they took, though they might have had glorious romps in the old coach-house and bowling-alley in bad weather, and lovely rambles about the spacious grounds; for the house was in the suburbs, and had once been a fine country mansion. Some of the liveliest girls did race down the avenue now and then, when Madame was away, and one irrepressible creature had actually slid down the wide balusters, to the horror of the entire household.

In cold weather all grew lazy and cuddled under blankets and around registers, like so many warmth-loving pussies, — poor Madame’s rheumatism making her enjoy a hot-house temperature and indulge the girls in luxurious habits. Now she had been obliged to give up entirely and take to her bed, saying, with the resignation of an indolent nature: —

“If Anna Orne takes charge of the school I shall feel no anxiety. *She* is equal to anything.”

She certainly looked so as she came into the school-room ready for her day’s work, with lungs full of fresh air, brain stimulated by sound sleep, wholesome exercise, and a simple breakfast, and a mind much interested in the task before her. The girls’ eyes followed her as she took her place, involuntarily attracted by the unusual spectacle of a robust woman. Everything about her seemed so fresh, harmonious, and happy, that it was a pleasure to see the brilliant color in her cheeks, the thick coils of glossy hair on her spirited head, the flash of white teeth as she spoke, and the clear, bright glance of eyes both keen and kind. But the most admiring glances were on the dark-blue jersey that showed such fine curves of the broad shoulders, round waist, and plump arms, without a wrinkle to mar its smooth perfection.

Girls are quick to see what is genuine, to respect what is strong, and to love what is beautiful; so before that day was over, Miss Orne had charmed them all; for they felt that she was not only able to teach but to help and amuse them.

After tea the other teachers went to their rooms, glad to be free from the chatter of half a dozen lively tongues; but Miss Orne remained in the drawing-room, and set the girls to dancing till they were tired, then gathered them round the long table to do what they liked till prayer-time. Some had novels, others did fancy-work or lounged, and all wondered what the new teacher would do next.

Six pairs of curious eyes were fixed upon her, as she sat sewing on some queer bits of crash, and six lively fancies vainly tried to guess what the articles were, for no one was rude enough to ask. Presently she tried on a pair of mittens, and surveyed them with satisfaction, saying as she caught Kitty staring with uncontrollable interest: —

“These are my beautifiers, and I never like to be without them.”

“Are they to keep your hands white?” asked Maud, who spent a good deal of time in caring for her own. “I wear old kid gloves at night after cold-creaming mine.”

“I wear these for five minutes night and morning, for a good rub, after dipping them in cold water. Thanks to these rough friends, I seldom feel the cold, get a good color, and keep well,” answered Miss Orne, polishing up her smooth cheek till it looked like a rosy apple.

“I’d like the color, but not the crash. Must it be so rough, and with *cold* water?” asked Maud, who often privately rubbed her pale face with a bit of red flannel, rouge being forbidden except for theatricals.

“Best so; but there are other ways to get a color. Run up and down the avenue three or four times a day, eat no pastry, and go to bed early,” said Miss Orne, whose sharp eye had spied out the little weaknesses of the girls, and whose kind heart longed to help them at once.

“It makes my back ache to run, and Madame says we are too old now.”

“Never too old to care for one’s health, my dear. Better run now than lie on a sofa by and by, with a back that never stops aching.”

“Do you cure your headaches in that way?” asked Nelly, rubbing her forehead wearily.

“I never have them;” and Miss Orne’s bright eyes were full of pity for all pain.

“What do you do to help it?” cried Nelly, who firmly believed that it was inevitable.

“I give my brain plenty of rest, air, and good food. I never know I have any nerves, except in the enjoyment they give me, for I have learned how to use them. I was not brought up to believe that I was born an invalid, and was taught to understand the beautiful machinery God gave me, and to keep it religiously in order.”

Miss Orne spoke so seriously that there was a brief pause in which the girls were wishing that some one had taught them this lesson and made them as strong and lovely as their new teacher.

“If crash mittens would make my jersey set like yours I’d have a pair at once,” said Cordy, sadly eyeing the buttons on her own, which seemed in danger of flying off if their plump wearer moved too quickly.

“Brisk runs are what you want, and less confectionery, sleep, and lounging in easy chairs;” began Miss Orne, all ready to prescribe for these poor girls, the most important part of whose education had been so neglected.

“Why, how did you know?” said Cordy, blushing, as she bounced out of her luxurious seat and whisked into her pocket the paper of chocolate creams she was seldom without.

Her round eyes and artless surprise set the others to laughing, and gave Sally courage to ask what she wanted, then and there.

“Miss Orne, I wish you would show us how to be strong and hearty, for I do think girls are a feeble set now-a-days. We certainly need stirring up, and I hope you will kindly do it. Please begin with me, then the others will see that I mean what I say.”

Miss Orne looked up at the tall, overgrown girl who stood before her, with broad forehead, near-sighted eyes, and narrow chest of a student; not at all what a girl of seventeen should be, physically, though a clear mind and a brave spirit shone in her clever face and sounded in her resolute voice.

“I shall very gladly do what I can for you, my dear. It is very simple, and I am sure that a few months of my sort of training will help you much; for you are just the kind of girl who should have a strong body, to keep pace with a very active brain,” answered Miss Orne, taking Sally’s thin, inky fingers in her own, with a friendly pressure that showed her good will.

“Madame says violent exercise is not good for girls, so we gave up gymnastics long ago,” said Maud, in her languid voice, wishing that Sally would not suggest disagreeable things.

“One does not need clubs, dumb bells, and bars for my style of exercise. Let me show you;” and rising, Miss Orne went through a series of energetic but graceful evolutions, which put every muscle in play without great exertion.

“That looks easy enough,” began Nelly.

“Try it,” answered Miss Orne, with a sparkle of fun in her blue eyes.

They did try, — to the great astonishment of the solemn portraits on the wall, unused to seeing such antics in that dignified apartment. But some of the girls were out of breath in five minutes; others could not lift their arms over their heads; Maud and Nelly broke several bones in their corsets, trying to stoop; and Kitty tumbled down, in her efforts to touch her toes without bending her knees. Sally got on the best of all, being long of limb, easy in her clothes, and full of enthusiasm.

“Pretty well for beginners,” said Miss Orne, as they paused at last, flushed and merry. “Do that regularly every day, and you will soon gain a few inches across the chest and fill out the new jerseys with firm, elastic figures.”

“Like yours,” added Sally, with a face full of such honest admiration that it could not offend.

Seeing that she had made one convert, and knowing that girls, like sheep, are sure to follow a leader, Miss Orne said no more then, but waited for the leaven to work. The others called it one of Sally’s notions, but were interested to see how she would get on, and had great fun, when they went to bed, watching her faithful efforts to imitate her teacher’s rapid and effective motions.

“The wind-mill is going!” cried Kitty, as several of them sat on the bed, laughing at the long arms swinging about.

“That is the hygienic elbow-exercise, and that the Orne Quickstep, a mixture of the grasshopper’s skip and the water-bug’s slide,” added Julia, humming a tune in time to the stamp of the other’s foot.

“We will call these the Jersey Jymnastics, and spell the last with a J, my dear,” said Nelly; and the name was received with as much applause as the young ladies dared to give it at that hour.

“Laugh on, but see if you don’t all follow my example sooner or later, when I become a model of grace, strength, and beauty,” retorted Sally, as she turned them out and went to bed, tingling all over with a delicious glow that sent the blood from her hot head to warm her cold feet, and bring her the sound, refreshing sleep she so much needed.

This was the beginning of a new order of things, for Miss Orne carried her energy into other matters besides gymnastics, and no one dared oppose her when Madame shut her ears to all complaints, saying, “Obey her in everything, and don’t trouble me.”

Pitchers of fresh milk took the place of tea and coffee; cake and pie were rarely seen, but better bread, plain puddings, and plenty of fruit.

Rooms were cooled off, feather beds sent up garret, and thick curtains abolished. Sun and air streamed in, and great cans of water appeared suggestively at doors in the morning. Earlier hours were kept, and brisk walks taken by nearly all the girls; for Miss Orne baited her hook cleverly, and always had some pleasant project to make the wintry expeditions inviting. There were games in the parlor instead of novels, and fancy-work in the evening; shorter lessons, and longer talks on the many useful subjects that are best learned from the lips of a true teacher. A cooking class was started, not to make fancy dishes, but the plain, substantial ones all housewives should understand. Several girls swept their own rooms, and liked it after they saw Miss Orne do hers in a becoming dust-cap; and these same pioneers, headed by Sally, boldly coasted on the hill, swung clubs in the coach-house, and played tag in the bowling-alley rainy days.

It took time to work these much-needed changes, but young people like novelty; the old routine had grown tiresome, and Miss Orne made things so lively and pleasant it was impossible to resist her wishes. Sally did begin to straighten up, after a month or two of regular training; Maud outgrew both corsets and backache; Nelly got a fresh color; Kitty found her thin arms developing visible muscles; and Julia considered herself a Von Hillern, after walking ten miles without fatigue.

But dear, fat Cordy was the most successful of all; and rejoiced greatly over the loss of a few pounds when she gave up over-eating, long naps, and lazy habits. Exercise became a sort of mania with her, and she was continually trudging off for a constitutional, or trotting up and down the halls when bad weather prevented the daily tramp. It was the desire of her soul to grow thin, and such was her ardor that Miss Orne had to check her sometimes, lest she should overdo the matter.

“All this is easy and pleasant now, because it is new,” she said, “and there is no one to criticise our simple, sensible ways; but when you go away I am afraid you will undo the good I have tried to do you. People will ridicule you, fashion will condemn, and frivolous pleasures make our wholesome ones seem hard. Can you be steadfast, and keep on?”

“We will!” cried all the girls; but the older ones looked a little anxious, as they thought of going home to introduce the new ways alone.

Miss Orne shook her head, earnestly wishing that she could impress the important lesson indelibly upon them; and very soon something happened which had that effect.

April came, and the snowdrops and crocuses were up in the garden beds. Madame was able to sit at her window, peering out like a dormouse waking from its winter sleep; and much did the good lady wonder at the blooming faces turned up to nod and smile at her, the lively steps that tripped about the house, and the amazing spectacle of *her* young ladies racing round the lawn as if they liked it. No one knew how Miss Orne reconciled her to this new style of deportment; but she made no complaint, — only shook her impressive cap when the girls came beaming in to pay little visits, full of happy chat about their affairs. They seemed to take a real interest in their studies now, to be very happy; and all looked so well that the wise old lady said to herself: —

“Looks are everything with women, and I have never been able to show such a bouquet of blooming creatures at my breaking up as I shall this year. I will let well enough alone, and if fault is found, dear Anna’s shoulders are broad enough to bear it.”

Things were in this promising state, and all were busily preparing for the May fête, at which time this class of girls would graduate, when the mysterious events occurred to which we have alluded.

They were gathered — the girls, not the events — round the table one night, discussing, with the deep interest befitting such an important topic, what they should wear on examination day.

“*I* think white silk jerseys and pink or blue skirts would be lovely; so pretty and so appropriate for the J. J. Club, and so nice for us to do our exercises in. Miss Orne wants us to show how well we go together, and of course we want to please her;” said Nelly taking the lead as usual in matters of taste.

“Of course!” cried all the girls, with an alacrity which plainly showed how entirely the new friend had won their hearts.

“I wouldn’t have believed that six months could make such a difference in one’s figure and feelings,” said Maud, surveying her waist with calm satisfaction, though it was no longer slender, but in perfect proportion to the rest of her youthful shape.

“I’ve had to let out every dress, and it’s a mercy I’m going home, for I shouldn’t be decent if I kept on at this rate;” and Julia took a long breath, proud of her broad chest, expanded by plenty of exercise, and loose clothing.

“I take mine in, and don’t have to worry about my buttons flying off, *à la* Clara Peggotty. I’m *so* pleased I want to be training all the time, for I’m not half thin enough yet,” said Cordy, jumping up for a trot round the room, that not a moment might be lost.

“Come, Sally, you ought to join in the jubilee, for you have done wonders, and will be as straight as a ramrod in a little while. Why so sober to-night? Is it because our dear Miss Orne leaves us to sit with Madame?” asked Nelly, missing the gayest voice of the six, and observing her friend’s troubled face.

“I’m making up my mind whether I’d better tell you something or not. Don’t want to scare the servants, trouble Madame, or vex Miss Orne; for I know *she* wouldn’t believe a word of it, though I saw it with my own eyes,” answered Sally, in such a mysterious tone that the girls with one voice cried, —

“Tell us, this minute!”

“I will; and perhaps some of you can explain the matter.”

As she spoke, Sally rose and stood on the rug with her hands behind her, looking rather wild and queer; for her short hair was in a toss, her eyes shone large behind her round glasses, and her voice sank to a whisper as she made this startling announcement: —

“I’ve seen a ghost!”

A general shiver pervaded the listeners, and Cordy poked her head under the sofa pillows with a faint cry, while the rest involuntarily drew nearer to one another.

“Where?” demanded Julia, the bravest of the party.

“On the top of the house.”

“Good gracious! When, Sally?” “What did it look like?” “Don’t scare us for fun,” — cried the girls, undecided whether to take this startling story in jest or earnest.

“Listen, and I’ll tell you all about it,” answered Sally, holding up her finger impressively.

“Night before last I sat till eleven, studying. Against the rules, I know; but I forgot, and when I was through I opened my window to air the room. It was bright moonlight, so I took a stroll along the top of the piazza, and coming back with my eyes on the sky I naturally saw the roof of the main house from my wing. I couldn’t have been asleep, could I? yet, I solemnly declare I saw a white figure with a veil over its head roaming to and fro as quietly as a shadow. I looked and looked, then I called softly, but it never answered, and suddenly it was gone.”

“What did you do? quavered Cordy, in a smothered voice from under the pillow.

“Went straight in, took my lamp and marched up to the cupola. Not a sign of any one, all locked and the floor dusty, for we never go there now, you know. I didn’t like it, but just said, ‘Sally, go to bed; it’s an optical illusion and serves you right for studying against the rule.’ That was the first time.”

“Mercy on us! Did you see it again?” cried Maud, getting hold of Julia’s strong arm for protection.

“Yes, in the bowling-alley at midnight,” whispered Sally.

“Do shut the door, Kit, and don’t keep clutching at me in that scary way; it’s very unpleasant,” said Nelly, glancing nervously over her shoulder as the six pairs of wide-opened eyes were fixed on Sally.

“I got up to shut my window last night, and saw a light in the alley. A dim one, but bright enough to show me the same white thing going up and down, with the veil as before. I’ll confess I was nervous then, for you know there *is* a story that in old times the man who lived here wouldn’t let his daughter marry the lover she wanted, and she pined away and died, and said she’d haunt the cruel father, and she did. Old Mrs. Foster told me all about it when I first came, and Madame asked me not to repeat it, so I never did. I don’t believe in ghosts, mind you, but what on earth is it, trailing about in that ridiculous way?”

Sally spoke nervously and looked excited, for in spite of courage and common sense she *was* worried to account for the apparition.

"How long did it stay?" asked Julia, with her arm round Maud, who was trembling and pale.

"A good fifteen minutes by my watch, then vanished, light and all, as suddenly as before. I didn't go to look after it that time, but if I see it again I'll hunt till I find out what it is. Who will go with me?"

No one volunteered, and Cordy emerged long enough to say imploringly: —

"Do tell Miss Orne, or get the police;" then dived out of sight again, and lay quaking like an ostrich with its head in the sand.

"I won't! Miss Orne would think I was a fool, and the police don't arrest ghosts. I'll do it myself, and Julia will help me, I know. She is the bravest of you, and hasn't developed her biceps for nothing," said Sally, bent on keeping all the glory of the capture to themselves if possible.

Flattered by the compliment to her arms, Julia did not decline the invitation, but made a very sensible suggestion, which was a great relief to the timid, till Sally added a new fancy to haunt them.

"Perhaps it is one of the servants moon-struck or love-lorn. Myra looks sentimental, and is always singing: —

"I'm waiting, waiting, darling, Morning, night, and noon; Oh, meet me by the river When softly shines the moon."

"It's not Myra; I asked her, and she turned pale at the mere idea of going anywhere alone after dark, and said cook had seen a banshee gliding down the Lady's Walk one night, when she got up for camphor, having the face-ache. I said no more, not wanting to scare them; ignorant people are so superstitious."

Sally paused, and the girls all tried not to look "scared" or "superstitious," but did not succeed very well.

"What are you going to do?" asked Nelly, in a respectful tone, as Julia and Sally stood side by side, like Horatius and Herminius waiting for a Spurius Lartius to join them.

"Watch, like cats for a mouse, and pounce as soon as possible. All promise to say nothing; then we can't be laughed at if it turns out some silly thing, as it probably will," answered Sally.

"We promise!" solemnly answered the girls, feeling deeply impressed with the thrilling interest of the moment.

"Very well; now don't talk about it or think about it till we report, or no one will sleep a wink," said Sally, walking off with her ally as coolly as if, after frightening them out of their wits, they could forget the matter at word of command.

The oath of silence was well kept, but lessons suffered, and so did sleep, for the excitement was great, especially in the morning, when the watchers reported the events of the night, and in the evening, when they took turns to go on guard. There was much whisking of dressing-gowns up and down the corridor of the west wing, where our six roomed, as the girls flew to ask questions early each day, or scurried to bed, glancing behind them for the banshee as they went.

Miss Orne observed the whispers, nods, and eager confabulations, but said nothing, for Madame had confided to her that the young ladies were planning a farewell gift for her. So she was blind and deaf, and smiled at the important airs of her girlish admirers.

Three or four days passed, and no sign of the ghost appeared. The boldest openly scoffed at the false alarm, and the most timid began to recover from their fright.

Sally and Julia looked rather foolish as they answered, “no news,” morning after morning, to the inquiries which were rapidly losing the breathless eagerness so flattering to the watchers.

“You dreamed it, Sally. Go to sleep, and don’t do it again,” said Nelly, on the fifth day, as she made her evening call and found the girls yawning and cross for want of rest.

“She has exercised too much, and produced a morbid state of the brain,” laughed Maud.

“I just wish she wouldn’t scare me out of my senses for nothing,” grumbled Cordy; “I used to sleep like a dormouse, and now I dream dreadfully and wake up tired out. Come along, Kit, and let the old ghosts carry off these silly creatures.”

“My regards to the Woman in White *when* you see her again, dear,” added Kitty, as the four went off to laugh at the whole thing, though they carefully locked their doors and took a peep out of window before going to sleep.

“We may as well give it up and have a good rest. I’m worn out, and so are you, if you’d own it,” said Julia, throwing herself down for a nap before midnight.

“I shall *not* give it up till I’m satisfied. Sleep away, I’ll read awhile and call you if anything comes,” answered Sally, bound to prove the truth of her story if she waited all summer.

Julia was soon off, and the lonely watcher sat reading till past eleven; then put out her light and went to take a turn on the flat roof of the piazza that ran round the house, for the night was mild and the stars companionable. As she turned to come back, her sharp eye caught sight of something moving on the house-top as before, and soon, clear against the soft gloom of the sky, appeared the white figure flitting to and fro.

A long look, and then Sally made a rush at Julia, shaking her violently as she said in an excited whisper:

"Come! she is there. Quick! upstairs to the cupola; I have the candle and the key."

Carried away by the other's vehemence Julia mutely obeyed, trembling, but afraid to resist; and noiseless as two shadows, they crept up the stairs, arriving just in time to see the ghost vanish over the edge of the roof, as if it had dissolved into thin air. Julia dropped down in a heap, desperately frightened, but Sally pulled her up and led her back to their room, saying, when she got there, with grim satisfaction, "Did I dream it all? Now I hope they will believe me."

"What was it? Oh, what could it be?" whimpered Julia, quite demoralized by the spectacle.

"I begin to believe in ghosts, for no human being could fly off in that way, with nothing to walk on. I shall speak to Miss Orne to-morrow; I've had enough of this sort of fun," said Sally, going to the window, with a strong desire to shut and lock it.

But she paused with her hand raised, as if turned to stone, for as she spoke the white figure went slowly by. Julia dived into the closet, with one spring. Sally, however, was on her mettle now, and, holding her breath, leaned out to watch. With soundless steps the veiled thing went along the roof, and paused at the further end.

Never waiting for her comrade, Sally quietly stepped out and followed, leaving Julia to quake with fear and listen for an alarm.

None came, and in a few minutes, that seemed like hours, Sally returned, looking much excited; but was sternly silent, and, to all the other's eager questions she would only give this mysterious reply: —

"I know all, but cannot tell till morning. Go to sleep."

Believing her friend offended at her base desertion at the crisis of the affair, Julia curbed her curiosity and soon forgot it in sleep. Sally slept also, feeling like a hero reposing after a hard-won battle.

She was up betimes and ready to receive her early visitors with an air of triumph, which silenced every jeer and convinced the most skeptical that she had something sensational to tell at last.

When the girls had perched themselves on any available article of furniture, they waited with respectful eagerness, while Sally retired to the hall for a moment, and Julia rolled her eyes, with her finger on her lips, looking as if she could tell much if she dared.

Sally returned somewhat flushed, but very sober, and in a few dramatic words related the adventures of the night, up to the point where she left Julia quivering ignominiously in the closet, and, like Horatius, faced the foe alone.

"I followed till the ghost entered a window."

"Which?" demanded five awestruck voices at once.

"The last."

"Ours?" whispered Kitty, pale as her collar, while Cordy, her room-mate, sat aghast.

"As it turned to shut the window the veil fell back and I saw the face." Sally spoke in a whisper and added, with a sudden start, "I see it now!"

Every girl sprang or tumbled off her perch as if an electric shock had moved them, and stared about them as Nelly cried wildly, "Where? oh, where?"

"There!" and Sally pointed at the palest face in the room, while her own reddened with the mirth she was vainly trying to suppress.

"Cordy?"

A general shriek of amazement and incredulity followed the question, while Sally laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks at the dumb dismay of the innocent ghost.

As soon as she could be heard she quickly explained: "Yes, it was Cordy, walking in her sleep. She wore her white flannel wrapper, and a cloud round her head, and took her exercise over the roofs at midnight, so that no time might be lost. I don't wonder she is tired in the morning, after such dangerous gymnastics as these."

"But she couldn't vanish in that strange way off the house-top without breaking her neck," said Julia, much relieved, but still mystified.

"She didn't fly nor fall, but went down the ladder left by the painters. Look at the soles of her felt slippers, if you doubt me, and see the red paint from the roof. We couldn't open the cupola windows, you remember, but this morning I took a stroll and looked up and saw how she did it asleep, though she never would dare to do it awake. Somnambulists do dreadfully dangerous things, you know," said Sally, as if her experience of those peculiar people had been vast and varied.

"How could I? It's horrid to think of. Why did you let me, Kit?" cried Cordy, uncertain whether to be proud or ashamed of her exploit.

"Never dreamed of *your* doing such a silly thing, and never waked up. Sleep-walkers are always quiet, and if I had seen you I'd have been too scared to know you. I'll tie you to the bed-post after this, and not let you scare the whole house," answered Kitty, regarding it all as a fine joke.

"What did I do when I got in?" asked Cordy, curiously.

"Took off your things and went to bed as if glad to get back. I didn't dare to wake you, and kept the fun all to myself till this morning. Thought I ought to have a good laugh for my pains since I did all the work," answered Sally, in high glee at the success of her efforts.

"I did want to get as thin as I could before I went home, the boys plague me so; and I suppose it wore upon me and set me to walking at night. I'm very sorry, and I never will again if I can help it. Please forgive me, and don't tell any one but Miss Orne; it was so silly," begged poor Cordy, tearfully.

All promised and comforted her, and praised Sally, and plagued Julia, and had a delightfully noisy and exciting half hour before the breakfast bell rang.

Miss Orne wondered what made the young faces so gay and the laughter so frequent, as mysterious hints and significant nods went on around the table; but as soon as possible she was borne into the school-room and told the thrilling tale.

Her interest and surprise were very flattering, and when the subject had been well discussed she promised to prevent any further escapades of this sort, and advised Cordy to try the Banting method for the few remaining weeks of her stay.

"I'll try anything that will keep me from acting ghost and making every one afraid of me," said Cordy, secretly wondering why she had not broken her neck in her nocturnal gymnastics.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Miss Orne?" asked Maud, — who did, in spite of the comic explanation of this one.

"Not the old-fashioned sort, but there is a modern kind that we are all afraid of more or less," answered Miss Orne, with a half-playful, half-serious look at the girls around her.

"Do tell about them, please," begged Kitty, while the rest looked both surprised and interested.

"There is one which I am very anxious to keep you from fearing. Women are especially haunted by it, and it prevents them from doing, being, and thinking all that they might and ought. 'What will people say?' is the name of this formidable ghost; and it does much harm, for few of us have the courage to live up to what we know to be right in all things. You are soon to go away to begin your lives in earnest, and I do hope that whatever I have been able to teach you about the care of minds and bodies will not be forgotten or neglected because it may not be the fashion outside our little world."

"*I* never will forget, or be afraid of that ghost, Miss Orne," cried Sally, quick to understand and accept the warning so opportunely given.

"I have great faith in *you*, dear, because you have proved yourself so brave in facing phantoms more easily laid. But this is a hard one to meet and vanquish; so watch well, stand firm, and let these jerseys that you are so fond of cover not only healthy young bodies but happy hearts, both helping you to be sweet, wise, and useful women in the years to come. Dear girls, promise me this, and I shall feel that our winter has not been wasted, and that our spring is full of lovely promise for a splendid summer."

As she spoke, with her own beautiful face bright with hope and tenderness, Miss Orne opened her arms and gathered them all in, to seal their promise with grateful kisses more eloquent than words.

Long after their school days were over, the six girls kept the white jerseys they wore at the breaking-up festival, as relics of the J. J.; and long after they were scattered far apart, they remembered the lessons which helped them to be what their good friend hoped — healthy, happy, and useful women.

The Little House In The Garden

"I think we little ones ought to have a story all to ourselves now," said one of the smaller lads, as they gathered round the fire with unabated interest.

"So do I, and I've got a little tale that will just suit you, I fancy. The older boys and girls can go and play games if they don't care to hear," answered Aunt Elinor, producing the well-worn portfolio.

"Thanks, we will try a bit, and if it is very namby pamby we can run," said Geoff, catching sight of the name of the first chapter. Aunt Elinor smiled and began to read about

THE LITTLE HOUSE IN THE GARDEN

I. Bears.

A brown bear was the first tenant; in fact, it was built for him, and this is the way it happened: —

A man and his wife were driving through the woods up among the mountains, and hearing a queer sound looked about them till they spied two baby bears in a tree.

"Those must be the cubs of the old bear that was killed last week," said Mr. Hitchcock, much interested all at once.

"Poor little things! how will they get on without their mother? They look half scared to death, and cry like real babies," said the kind woman.

"They will starve if we don't take care of them. I'll shake them down; you catch them in your shawl and we'll see what we can do for them."

So Mr. Hitchcock climbed up the tree, to the great dismay of the two orphans, who growled funny little growls and crept as far out on the branch as they dared.

"Shake easy, John, or they will fall and be killed," cried the wife, holding out her shawl for this new kind of fruit to fall into.

Down they came, one after the other, and at first were too frightened to fight; so Mr. Hitchcock got them into the wagon safely bundled up, and Mrs. Hitchcock soothed their alarm by gentle pattings and motherly words, till they ceased to struggle, and cuddled down to sleep like two confiding puppies, for they were not much bigger.

Mr. Hitchcock kept the hotel that stood at the foot of the king of the mountains, and in summer the house was full of people; so he was glad of any new attraction, and the little bears were the delight of many children. At first, Tom and Jerry trotted and tumbled about like frolicsome puppies, and led easy lives, — petted, fed and admired, till they grew so big and bold that, like other young creatures, their pranks made mischief as well as fun.

Tom would steal all the good things he could lay his paws on in kitchen or dining-room, and cook declared she couldn't have the rascal loose; for whole pans of milk vanished, sheets of ginger-bread were found in his den under the back steps, and nearly every day he was seen scrambling off with booty of some sort, while the fat cook waddled after, scolding and shaking the poker at him, to the great amusement of the boarders on the piazza. People bore with him a long time; but when he took a lively trot down the middle of the long dinner-table one day, after eating all he liked, and smashing right and left as he scampered off, with a terrible clatter of silver, glass, and china, his angry master declared he wouldn't have such doings, and chained him to a post on the lawn. Here he tugged and growled dismally, while good little Jerry frisked gayly about, trying to understand what it all meant.

But presently *his* besetting sin got *him* into trouble likewise. He loved to climb, and was never happier than when scrambling up the rough posts of the back piazza to bask in the sun on the roof above, peeping down with his sharp little eyes at the children, who could not follow. He roosted in trees like a fat brown bird, and came tumbling down unexpectedly on lovers who sought quiet nooks to be romantic in. He explored the chimneys and threw into them any trifle he happened to find, — being a rogue, and fond of stealing hats, balls, dolls, or any small article that came in his way. But the fun he liked best was to climb in at the chamber windows and doze on the soft beds; for Jerry was a luxurious fellow and scorned the straw of his own den. This habit annoyed people much, and the poor bear often came bundling out of windows, with old gentlemen whacking him with canes, or ladies throwing water after him.

One evening, when there was a dance and every one was busy down stairs, Jerry took a walk on the roof, and being sleepy, looked about for a cosey bed to take a nap in. Two brothers occupied one of these rooms, and both were Jerry's good friends, especially the younger. Georgie was fast asleep, as his dancing days had not yet begun, and Charlie was waltzing away down stairs; so Jerry crept into bed and nestled down beside his playmate, who was too sleepy to do anything but roll over, thinking the big brother had come to bed.

By and by Charlie did come up, late and tired, and having forgotten a lamp, undressed in the moonlight, observing nothing till about to step into bed; then, finding something rolled up in the clothes, thought it a joke of the other boys, caught up a racket and began to bang away at the suspicious bundle. A scene of wild confusion followed, for Jerry growled and clawed and couldn't get out; Georgie woke, and thinking his bed-fellow was his brother being abused by some frolicsome mate, held on to Jerry, defending him bravely, till a rent in the sheet allowed a shaggy head to appear, so close to his own that the poor child was painfully reminded of Red Riding Hood's false grandmother. Charlie was speechless with laughter at this discovery, and while Jerry bounced about the bed snarling and hugging pillows as he tried to get free, terrified Georgie rushed down the hall screaming, "The wolf! the wolf!" till he took refuge in his mother's room.

Out popped night-capped heads, anxious voices cried, "Is it fire?" and in a moment the house was astir. The panic might have been serious if Jerry had not come galloping down stairs, hotly pursued by Charlie in his night-gown, still belaboring the poor beast, and howling, "He was in my bed! He scared George! I'll thrash him!"

Then the alarmed ladies and gentlemen laughed and grew calm, while the boys all turned out and hunted Jerry up stairs and down, till he was captured and ignominiously lugged away to be tied in the barn.

That prank sealed his fate, and he went to join his brother in captivity. Here they lived for a year, and went to housekeeping in a den in the bank, with a trough for their food, and a high, knotted pole to climb on. They had many visitors, and learned a few tricks, but were not happy bears; for they longed to be free, and the older they grew, the more they sighed for the great forest where they were born.

The second summer something happened that parted them forever. Among the children that year were Fred and Fan Howard, two jolly young persons of twelve and fourteen. Of course the bears were very interesting, and Fred tried their tempers by tormenting them, while Fan won their hearts with cake and nuts, candy and caresses. Tom was Fred's favorite, and Jerry was Fan's. Tom was very intelligent, and covered himself with glory by various exploits. One was taking off the boards which roofed the den, so that the sun should dry the dampness after a rain; and he carefully replaced them at night. Any dog who approached the trough got his ears smartly boxed, and meddlesome boys were hugged till they howled for mercy. He danced in a way to convulse the soberest, and Fred taught him to shoulder arms in such a funny imitation of a stout old soldier of the town that the children rolled on the grass in fits of laughter when the cap was on, and the wooden gun flourished at word of command by the clumsy hero.

Jerry had no accomplishments, but his sweet temper made many friends. He let the doves eat with him, the kittens frolic all over his broad back, and was never rough with the small people who timidly offered the buns he took so gently from their little hands. But he pined in captivity, refused his food, and lay in his den all day, or climbed to the top of the pole and sat there looking off to the cool, dark forest, with such a pensive air that Fan said it made her heart ache to see him. Just before the season ended, Jerry disappeared. No one could imagine how the chain broke, but gone he was, and never came back, to Fan's satisfaction and Tom's great sorrow. He mourned for his brother, and Mr. Hitchcock began to talk of killing him; for it would not do to let two bears loose in the neighborhood, as they sometimes killed sheep and did much harm.

"I wish my father would buy him," said Fred, "I've always wanted a menagerie, and a tame bear would be a capital beginning."

"I'll ask him, for I hate to have the poor old fellow killed," answered Fan. She not only begged papa to buy Tom, but confessed that she filed Jerry's chain and helped him to escape.

"I know it was wrong, but I couldn't see him suffer," she said. "Now if you buy Tom I'll give you my five dollars to help, and Mr. Hitchcock will forgive me and be glad to get rid of both the bears."

After some consultation Tom *was* bought, and orders were sent to have a house built for him in a sunny corner of the garden, with strong rings to chain him to, and a good lock on the door to keep him in. When he was settled in these new quarters he held daily receptions for some weeks. Young and old came to see him, and Fred showed off his menagerie with the pride of a budding Barnum. A bare spot was soon worn on the grass where Tom's parade ground was, and at all hours the poor fellow might be seen dancing and drilling, or sitting at his door, thoughtfully surveying the curious crowd, and privately wishing he never had been born.

Here he lived for another year, getting so big that he could hardly turn round in his house, and so cross that Fred began to be a little afraid of him after several hugs much too close to be safe or agreeable. One morning the door of the house was found broken off, and Tom gone. Fred was rather relieved; but his father was anxious, and ordered out the boys of the neighborhood to find the runaway, lest he should alarm people or do some harm. It was an easy matter to trace him, for more than one terrified woman had seen the big, brown beast sniffing round her back premises after food; a whole schoolful of children had been startled out of their wits by a bear's head at the window; and one old farmer was in a towering rage over the damage done to his bee-hives and garden patch by "the pesky critter, afore he took to the woods."

After a long tramp poor Tom was found rolled up in a sunny nook, resting after a glorious frolic. He went home without much reluctance, but from that time it was hard to keep him. Bolts and bars, chains and ropes were of little use; for when the longing came, off he went, on one occasion carrying the house on his back, like a snail, till he tipped it over and broke loose. Fred was quite worn out with his pranks, and tried to sell or give him away; but nobody would buy or accept such a troublesome pet. Even tender hearted Fan gave him up, when he frightened a little child into a fit and killed some sheep, in his last holiday.

It was decided that he must be killed, and a party of men, armed with guns, set out to carry the sentence into effect. Fred went also to see that all was properly done, and Fanny called after him with tears in her eyes: —

“Say good by for me, and kill him as kindly as you can.”

This time Tom had been gone a week and had evidently made up his mind to be a free bear; for he had wandered far into the deepest wood and made a den for himself among the rocks. Here they found him, but could not persuade him to come out, and no bold Putnam was in the troop, to creep in and conquer him there.

“Bullets will reach him if we can’t, so blaze away, boys, and finish him off. We have fooled away time enough, and I want to get home to supper,” said the leader of the hunt, after many attempts had been made to lure or drive Tom from his shelter.

So they “blazed away,” and growls of pain proved that some of the bullets had hit. But Tom would not budge, and having used up their ammunition, the disappointed hunters went home resolving to bring dogs next day and finish the job. They were spared the trouble, however, for when Fred looked from his window in the morning he saw that Tom had returned, and ran down to welcome the rebel back. But one look at the poor beast showed him that he had only come home to die; for he was covered with wounds and lay moaning on his bed of straw, looking as pathetic as a bear could, his shaggy coat full of burrs, his head and breast full of shot, and one paw apparently broken.

Fanny cried over him, and Fred was quite bowed down with remorse; but nothing could be done, and soon, with a vain effort to lick the hands that stroked him, poor Tom lifted his great paw for a farewell shake, and died, with his great head on his master’s knee, in token of forgiveness. As if to atone for their seeming cruelty, Fanny hung the little house with black while Tom lay in state, and Fred, resisting all temptations to keep his fine skin, buried him like a warrior “with his martial cloak around him,” in the green woods he loved so well.

II. Boys.

The next tenants of the little house were three riotous lads, — for Fred’s family moved away, — and the new comers took possession one fine spring day with great rejoicing over this ready-made plaything. They were queer fellows, of eleven, twelve, and fourteen; for, having read the “Boys’ Froissart” and other warlike works, they were quite carried away by these stirring tales, and each boy was a hero. Harry, the eldest, was Henry of Navarre, and wore a white plume on every occasion. Ned was the Black Prince, and clanked in tin armor, while little Billy was William Tell and William Wallace by turns.

Tom’s deserted mansion underwent astonishing changes about this time. Bows and arrows hung on its walls; battle-axes, lances, and guns stood in the corners; helmets, shields, and all manner of strange weapons adorned the rafters; cannon peeped from its port-holes; a drawbridge swung over the moat that soon surrounded it; the flags of all nations waved from its roof, and the small house was by turns an armory, a fort, a castle, a robber’s cave, a warrior’s tomb, a wigwam, and the Bastile.

The neighbors were both amused and scandalized by the pranks of these dramatic young persons; for they enacted with much spirit and skill all the historical events which pleased their fancy, and speedily enlisted other boys to join in the new plays. At one time, painted and be-feathered Indians whooped about the garden, tomahawking the unhappy settlers in the most dreadful manner. At another, Achilles, radiant in a tin helmet and boiler-cover shield, dragged Hector at the tail of his chariot (the wheel-barrow), drawn by two antic and antique steeds, who upset both victor and vanquished before the fun was over. Tell shot bushels of apples off the head of the stuffed suit of clothes that acted his son, Cœur de Leon and Saladin hacked blocks and cut cushions *à la* Walter Scott, and tournaments of great splendor were held on the grass, in which knights from all ages, climes, and races, tilted gallantly, while fair dames of tender years sat upon the wood-pile to play Queens of Beauty and award the prize of valor.

Nor were more modern heroes forgotten. Napoleon crossed the Alps (a muck heap, high fence, and prickly hedge), with intrepid courage. Wellington won many a Waterloo in the melon patch, and Washington glorified every corner of the garden by his heroic exploits. Grant smoked sweet-fern cigars at the fall of Richmond; Sherman marched victoriously to Georgia through the corn and round the tomato bed, and Phil Sheridan electrified the neighborhood by tearing down the road on a much-enduring donkey, stung to unusual agility by matches tied to his tail.

It grew to be an almost daily question among the young people, “What are the Morton boys at now?” for these interesting youths were much admired by their mates, who eagerly manned the fences to behold the revels, when scouts brought word of a new play going on. Mrs. Morton believed in making boys happy at home, and so allowed them entire liberty in the great garden, as it was safer than river, streets, or ball-ground, where a very mixed crowd was to be found. Here they were under her own eye, and the safe, sweet tie between them still held fast; for she was never too busy to bind up their wounds after a fray, wave her handkerchief when cheers told of victory, rummage her stores for costumes, or join in their eager study of favorite heroes when rain put an end to their out-of-door fun.

So the summer was a lively one, and though the vegetables suffered some damage, a good crop of healthy, happy hours was harvested, and all were satisfied. The little house looked much the worse for the raids made upon it, but still stood firm with the stars and stripes waving over it, and peace seemed to reign one October afternoon as the boys lay under the trees eating apples and planning what to play next.

"Bobby wants to be a knight of the Round Table. We might take him in and have fun with the rites, and make him keep a vigil and all that," proposed William Wallace, anxious to admit his chosen friend to the inner circle of the brotherhood.

"He's such a little chap he'd be scared and howl. I don't vote for that," said the Black Prince, rather scornfully, as he lay with his kingly legs in the air, and his royal mouth full of apple.

"I do!" declared Henry of Navarre, always generous, and amiable. "Bob is a plucky little chap, and will do anything we put him to. He's poor and the other fellows look down on him, so that's another reason why we ought to take him in and stand by him. Let's give him a good trial, and if he's brave, we'll have him."

"So we will! Let's do it now; he's over there waiting to be asked in. *He* doesn't go poking his nose where he isn't wanted, as some folks do," cried Billy, who had often been snubbed by the big boys in his efforts at knightly feats.

A whistle brought Bobby, with a beaming face, for he burned to join the fun, but held back because he was not a gentleman's son. A sturdy, honest little soul was Bobby, true as steel, brave as a lion, and loyal as an old-time vassal to his young lord, kind Billy, who always told him all the plans, explained the mysteries, and shared the goodies when feasts were spread.

Now he stood leaning against one of the posts of the little house whither the boys had adjourned, and listened bashfully while Harry told him what he must do to join the heroes of the Round Table. He did not understand half of it, but was ready for any trial, and took the comical oath administered to him with the utmost solemnity.

"You must stay here locked in for some hours, and watch your armor. That's the vigil young knights had to keep before they could fight. You mustn't be scared at any noises you hear, or anything you see, or sing out for help, even if you stay here till dark. You'll be a coward if you do, and never have a sword."

"I promise truly; hope to die if I don't!" answered Bobby, fixing his blue eyes on the speaker, and holding his curly head erect with the air of one ready to face any peril; for the desire of his soul was to own a sword, like Billy, and clash it on warlike occasions.

Then a suit of armor was piled up on the red box, which was by turns altar, table, tomb, and executioner's block. Banners were hung over it, the place darkened, two candles lighted, and after certain rites which cannot be divulged, the little knight was left to his vigil with the door locked.

The boys howled outside, smote on the roof, fired a cannon, and taunted the prisoner with derisive epithets to stir him to wrath. But no cry answered them, no hint of weariness, fear, or anger betrayed him, and after a half-hour of this sort of fun, they left him to the greater trial of silence, solitude, and uncertainty.

The short afternoon was soon gone, and the tea bell rang before the vigil had lasted long enough.

"He won't know what time it is; let's leave him till after supper, and then march out with torches and bring him in to a good feed. Mother won't mind, and Hetty likes to stuff fellows," proposed Harry, and all being hungry, the first part of the plan was carried out at once.

But before tea was over, the unusual clang of the fire bells drove all thought of Bobby out of the boys' minds, as they raced away to the exciting scene, to take their share in the shouting, running, and tumbling about in every one's way.

The great hotel was burning, and till midnight the town was in an uproar. No lives were lost, but much property, and nothing else was thought of till dawn. A heavy shower did good service, and about one o'clock, people began to go home tired out. Mrs. Morton and other ladies were too busy giving shelter to the people from the hotel, and making coffee for the firemen, to send their boys to bed. In fact, they could not catch them; for the youngsters were wild with excitement, and pervaded the place like will-o'-the-wisps, running errands, lugging furniture, splashing about with water, and howling till they were as hoarse as crows.

"This is the battle of Beauvais, and we've set the city a-fire by flinging pitch-pots over the walls," croaked Harry to Ned as they bumped against each other, one carrying a great coffee-pot and the other a feather-bed.

"No, it's the fall of Troy, and I'm Æneas lugging off the old man," panted Ned, staggering away with the heavy load on his back.

At last the flurry was over, and our three lads, very dirty, wet, and tired, went to bed and to sleep, and never once thought of poor Bobby, till next morning. Then Harry suddenly rose up, with an exclamation that effectually roused both his brothers.

"By St. Dennis, we've left that boy there all night!"

"He wouldn't be such a fool as to stay; that old lock's broken easy enough," said Ned, looking troubled, in spite of his words.

"Yes, he would! He promised, and he'll keep his word like a true knight. It rained and was cold, and no one knew where he was. Oh dear, I hope he isn't dead," cried Billy, tumbling out of bed and into his clothes as fast as he could.

The others laughed, but dressed with unusual speed, and flew to the garden house, to find the lock unbroken, and all as still inside as when they left it. Looking very anxious, Harry opened the door and all peeped in. There, at his post before the altar, lay the little knight fast asleep. Rain had soaked his clothes, the chilly night air made his lips and hands purple with cold, and the trials of those long hours left the round cheeks rather pale. But he still guarded his arms, and at the first sound was awake and ready to defend them, though somewhat shaky with sleep and stiffness.

The penitent boys poured forth apologies, in which fire, remorse, and breakfast were oddly mixed. Bobby forgave them like a gentleman, only saying, with a laugh and a shiver, "Guess I'd better go home, ma'll be worried about me. If I'd known being out all night and getting wet was part of the business, I'd 'a' left word and brought a blanket. Be I a Round Table now? Shall I have a sword, and train with the rest? I didn't holler once, and wasn't much scared, for all the bells, and the dark, and the rain."

"You've won your spurs, and we'll knight you just as soon as we get time. You're a brave fellow, and I'm proud to have you one of my men. Please don't say much about this; we'll make it all right, and we're awfully sorry," answered Harry, while Ned put his own jacket over the wet shoulders, and Billy beamed at him, feeling that his friend's exploit outdid any of his own.

Bobby marched away as proudly as if he already saw the banners waving over him, and felt the accolade that made him a true knight. But that happy moment was delayed for some time, because the cold caught in that shower threatened a fit of sickness; and the boys' play looked as if it might end in sad earnest.

Harry and his brothers confessed all to mamma, listened with humility to her lecture on true knighthood, and did penance by serving Bobby like real brothers-in-arms, while he was ill. As soon as the hardy boy was all right again, they took solemn counsel together how they should reward him, and atone for their carelessness. Many plans were discussed, but none seemed fine enough for this occasion till Billy had a bright idea.

"Let's buy Bob some hens. He wants some dreadfully, and we ought to do something grand after treating him so badly, and nearly killing him."

"Who's got any money? I haven't; but it's a good idea," responded Ned, vainly groping in all his pockets for a cent to head the subscription with.

"Mamma would lend us some, and we could work to pay for it," began Billy.

“No, I’ve a better plan,” interrupted Harry with authority. “We ought to make a sacrifice and suffer for our sins. We will have an auction and sell our arms. The boys want them, and will pay well. My lords and gentlemen, what say ye?”

“We will!” responded the loyal subjects of King Henry.

“Winter is coming, and we can’t use them,” said Billy, innocently.

“And by next spring we shall be too old for such games,” added Ned.

“‘Tis well! Ho! call hither my men. Bring out the suits of mail; sound the trumpets, and set on!” thundered Harry, striking an attitude, and issuing his commands with royal brevity.

A funny scene ensued; for while Billy ran to collect the boys, Ned dismantled the armory, and Hal disposed of the weapons in the most effective manner, on trees, fences, and grass, where the bidders could examine and choose at their ease. Their mates had always admired and coveted these war-like treasures, for some were real, and others ingenious imitations; so they gladly came at sound of the hunter’s horn which was blown when Robin Hood wanted his merry men.

Harry was auctioneer, and rattled off the most amazing medley of nonsense in praise of the articles, which he rapidly knocked down to the highest bidder. The competition was lively, for the boys laughed so much they hardly knew what they were doing, and made the rashest offers; but they all knew what the money was to be used for, so they paid their bills handsomely, and marched off with cross-bows, old guns, rusty swords, and tin armor, quite contented with their bargains.

Seven dollars was realized by the sale, and a fine rooster and several hens solemnly presented to Bobby, who was overwhelmed by this unexpected atonement, and immediately established his fowls in the wood-shed, where they happily resided through the winter, and laid eggs with such gratifying rapidity that he earned quite a little fortune, and insisted on saying that his vigil had not only made a knight of him, but a millionnaire.

III. Babies.

The little house stood empty till spring; then a great stir went on in the garden, getting it ready for a new occupant. It was mended, painted red, fitted up with a small table and chairs, and a swing. Sunflowers stood sentinel at the door, vines ran over it, and little beds of flowers were planted on either side. Paths were dug all round the lawn, and a baby-carriage was rolled up and down to harden them. The neighbors wondered what was coming next, and one June day they found out; for a procession appeared, escorting the new tenant to the red mansion, with great rejoicing among the boys.

First came Billy blowing the horn, then Ned waving their best banner, then Hal drawing the baby wagon, in which, as on a throne, sat the little cousin who had come to spend the summer, and rule over them like a small, sweet tyrant. A very sprightly damsel was four-year-old Queenie, blue-eyed, plump, and rosy, with a cloud of yellow curls, chubby arms that embraced every one, and a pair of stout legs that trotted all day. She surveyed her kingdom with cries of delight, and took possession of "mine tottage" at once, beginning housekeeping by a tumble out of the swing, a header into the red chest, and a pinch in the leaf of the table. But she won great praise from the boys by making light of these mishaps, and came up smiling, with a bump on her brow, a scratch on her pug nose, and a bruise on one fat finger, and turned out tea for the gentlemen as if she had done it all her life; for the table was set, and all manner of tiny cakes and rolls stood ready to welcome her.

This was only the beginning of tea parties; for very soon a flock of lovely little friends came to play with Queenie, and such pretty revels went on it seemed as if fairies had taken possession of the small house. Dolls had picnics, kittens went a-visiting, tin carts rattled up and down, gay balloons flew about, pigmy soldiers toddled round the paths in paper caps, and best of all, rosy little girls danced on the grass, picked the flowers, chased butterflies, and sang as blithely as the birds. Queenie took the lead in these frolics, and got into no end of scrapes by her love of exploration, — often leading her small friends into the strawberry-bed, down the road, over the wall, or to some neighbor's house, coolly demanding "a dint a water and dingerbed for all us ones."

Guards were set, bars and locks put up, orders given, and punishments inflicted, but all in vain; the dauntless baby always managed to escape, and after anxious hunts and domestic flurries, would be found up a tree, under the big rhubarb leaves, in a hen house, or calmly strolling to town without her hat. All sorts of people took her to drive at her request, and brought her back just as her agitated relatives were flying to the river in despair. Once she departed with a flock of sheep, and was returned so dirty no one knew her till she was scrubbed. Another time, she passed the morning in the pig-pen, having fallen over the fence; and finding pleasant society in a dozen young piggies, stayed to play with them till discovered among the straw, surrounded by her new friends, one of whom slept sweetly in her arms.

"We must tie her up," said Mrs. Morton, quite worn out with her pranks.

So a strong cord was put round Queenie's waist, and fastened to one of the rings in the little house where Tom used to be chained. At first she raged and tugged, then submitted, and played about as if she didn't care; but she laid plans in her naughty little mind, and carried them out, to the great dismay of Bessie, the maid.

"I want to tut drass," she said in her most persuasive tones.

So Bessie gave her the rusty scissors she was allowed to use, and let her play make hay till her toy wagon was full.

“I want a dint a water, pease,” was the next request, and Bessie went in to get it. She was delayed a few moments, and when she came out no sign of Queenie remained but a pile of yellow hair cut off in a hurry, and the end of the cord. Slyboots was gone, scissors and all.

Then there was racing and calling, scolding and wailing, but no Queenie was to be seen anywhere on the premises. Poor Bessie ran one way, Aunt Morton another, and Billy, who happened to be at home, poked into all the nooks and corners for the runaway.

An hour passed, and things began to look serious, when Harry came in much excited, and laughing so he could hardly speak.

“Where *do* you think that dreadful baby has turned up? Over at Pat Floyd’s. He found her in the water pipes. You know a lot of those big ones are lying in the back street ready to use as soon as the place is dug. Well, that little rascal crept in, and then couldn’t turn round, so she went on till she came out by Pat’s house, and nearly scared him out of his wits. The pipes were not joined, so she had light and air, but I guess she had a hard road to travel. Such a hot, dirty, tired baby you never saw. Mrs. Floyd is washing her up. You’d better go and get her, Bess.”

Bess went and returned with naughty Queenie, looking as if rats had gnawed her curls off, and the sand of the great desert had been ground into her hands and knees, — not to mention the iron rust that ruined her pretty pink frock, or the crown of her hat rubbed to rags.

“I wasn’t frighted. You said Dod be’d all wound, so I goed wite alon, and Mis Foyd gived me a nice cold tater, and a tootie, and the bid dord washed my hands wif his wed tun.”

That was Queenie’s account of the matter, but she behaved so well after it that her friends suspected the perilous prank had made a good impression upon her.

To keep her at home she was set to farming, and the little house was a barn. In it lived a rocking horse, several wooden cows, woolly sheep, cats and dogs, as well as a queer collection of carts and carriages, tools and baskets. Every day the busy little farmer dug and hoed, planted and watered her “dardin,” made hay, harvested vegetables, picked fruit, or took care of animals, — pausing now and then to ride her horse, drive out in her phaeton, or go to an imaginary fire with the engine Billy had made for her.

The little friends came to help her, and the flower-beds soon looked as if an earthquake had upheaved them; for things were planted upside down, holes dug, stones piled, and potatoes laid about as if expected to dig themselves. But cheeks bloomed like roses, small hands got brown, and busy feet trotted firmly about the paths, while the red barn echoed with the gayest laughter all day long.

On Queenie’s fifth birthday, in September, she had a gipsy party, and all the small neighbors came to it. A tent was pitched, three tall poles held up a kettle over a “truly fire” that made the water really boil, and supper was spread on the grass. The little girls wore red and blue petticoats, gay shawls or cloaks, bright handkerchiefs on their heads, and as many beads and breastpins as they liked. Some had tamborines, and shook them as they danced; one carried a dolly in the hood of her cloak like a true gypsy, and all sung, skipping hand in hand round the fire.

The mammas looked on and helped about supper, and Bess sat in the tent like an old woman, and told pleasant fortunes, as she looked in the palms of the soft little hands the children showed her.

They had a charming time, and all remembered it well; for that night, when the fun was over, every one in bed, and the world asleep, a great storm came on; the wind blew a gale and chimney tops flew off, blinds banged, trees were broken, apples whisked from the boughs by the bushel, and much mischief was done. But worst of all, the dear little house blew away! The roof went in one direction, the boards in another, the poor horse lay heels up, and the rest of the animals were scattered far and wide over the garden.

Great was the lamentation next morning, when the children saw the ruin. The boys felt that it was past mending, and gave it up; while Queenie consoled herself for the devastation of her farm by the childish belief that a crop of new cats and dogs, cows and horses, would come up in the spring from the seed sowed broadcast by the storm.

So that was the sad end of the little house in the garden.

Daisy’s Jewel-Box, and How She Filled It

“Plenty of time for another. Let the little folks go to bed, now they’ve had their story, and please go on, auntie,” cried Min, when all had listened with more interest than they would confess to the children’s tale.

So the small people trotted off, much against their will, and this most obliging of aunts drew forth another manuscript, saying, as she glanced at several of her elder nieces, brave in the new trinkets Santa Claus had sent them: —

“This is a story with a moral to it, which the girls will understand; the boys can take naps while I read, for it won’t interest them.”

“If it shows up the girls we shall like it,” answered Geoff, and composed himself to hear and enjoy

DAISY’S JEWEL-BOX, AND HOW SHE FILLED IT.

“It would be perfectly splendid, and just what I long for, but I don’t see how I *can* go with nothing fit to wear,” said Daisy, looking up from the letter in her hand, with a face full of girlish eagerness and anxiety.

Mrs. Field set every fear at rest with a reassuring smile, as she quietly made one of the sacrifices mothers think so small, when made for the dear creatures for whom they live.

“You shall go, dear; I have a little sum put by for an emergency. Twenty-five dollars will do a good deal, when tastes are simple and we do our own dressmaking.”

“But mother, that was for your cloak. You need it so much I can’t bear to have you give it up,” said sober little Jane, the home-girl, who never cared for visiting like her gay elder sister.

“Hush, dear; I can do very well with a shawl over my old sack. Don’t say a word to spoil Daisy’s pleasure. She needs a change after this dull autumn, and must be neat and nice.”

Janey said no more, and fell to thinking what she had to offer Daisy; for both took great pride in the pretty girl, who was the queen among her young friends.

Daisy heard, but was so busy re-reading the letter that she took no notice then, though she recalled the words later.

“Come and pass the holidays with us. We all want to see you, and Laura begs you will not disappoint her.”

This was the invitation that came from Laura’s mother; for the two girls had struck up a great friendship during the summer the city family passed in the little country town where Daisy lived. She had ardently hoped that Laura would not forget the charming plan, and now the cordial message came, just when the season would be gayest in town.

"I suppose I must have the everlasting white muslin for a party dress, as that is the cheapest thing a girl can wear. A nun's-veiling is what I long for, but I'm afraid we can't afford it," she said with a sigh, coming back from visions of city delights to the all-important question of dress.

"Yes, you can, and new ribbons, gloves, and slippers as well. You are so small it doesn't take much, and we can make it right up ourselves. So run and collect all your little finery, while I go and do the shopping at once."

"You dearest of mothers! how you always manage to give me what I want, and smooth all my worries away. I'll be as good as gold, and bring you the best present I can find."

Daisy's grateful kiss warmed the dear woman's heart, and made her forget how shabby the old sack was, as she trudged away to spend the money carefully hoarded for the much needed cloak.

Needles and fingers flew, and two days before Christmas, Daisy set out for the enchanted city, feeling very rich with the pretty new dress in her trunk, and five dollars for pocket money. It seemed a large sum to the country girl, and she planned to spend it all in gifts for mother and Janey, whose tired faces rather haunted her after she had caught the last glimpse of them.

Her reception was a warm one, for all the Vaughns were interested in the blooming little creature they had found among the hills, and did their best to make her visit a pleasant one. The first day she was in a delightful sort of maze, things were so splendid, gay and new; the second she felt awkward and countrified, and wished she had not come. A letter from her mother on Christmas morning did her good, and gave her courage to bear the little trials that afflicted her.

"My clothes do look dowdy beside Laura's elegant costumes, though they did seem very nice at home; but my hair isn't red, and that's a comfort," she said to herself, as she dressed for the party that evening.

She could not help smiling at the bonny figure she saw in the long mirror, and wishing mother and Janey could see the work of their hands in all its glory; for the simple white dress was most becoming, and her kind host had supplied her with lovely flowers for bosom and bouquet.

But the smile died as she took up her one ornament, an antique necklace, given her by an old aunt. At home it was considered a very rare and beautiful thing, and Daisy had been rather proud of her rococo chain till she saw Laura's collection of trinkets, the variety and brilliancy of which dazzled her eyes, and woke a burning desire to possess treasures of the same sort. It was some consolation to find that the most striking were not very expensive, and after poring over them with deep interest, Daisy privately resolved to buy as many as her five dollars would compass. These new ornaments could be worn during her visit, and serve as gifts when she went home; so the extravagance would not be so great as it seemed.

This purpose comforted her, as she put on the old necklace, which looked very dingy beside the Rhinestones that flashed, the silver bangles that clashed, and the gilded butterflies, spiders, arrows, flowers, and daggers that shone on the young girls whom she met that evening. Their fine dresses she could not hope to imitate, but a pin and a pair of bracelets were possible, and she resolved to have them, if she had to borrow money to get home with.

Her head was quite turned by this desire for the cheap trinkets which attract all feminine eyes now-a-days, and when, among the pretty things that came to her from the Christmas tree that night, she received a blue plush jewel-box, she felt that it was almost a duty to fill it as soon as possible.

“Isn’t it a beauty? I never had one, and it is just what I wanted,” said Daisy, delightedly lifting the tray full of satin beds for pretty things, and pulling out the little drawer underneath, where the giver’s card lay.

“I told papa a work-box or a fan would be better; but he liked this and would buy it,” explained Laura, who knew how useless it was to her friend.

“It was very kind of him, and I prefer it to either of those. I’ve nothing but my old chain and a shabby little pin to put in it now, but I’ll fill it in time,” answered Daisy, whose eyes seemed to behold the unbought treasures already reposing on the dainty cushion.

“Real jewels are the best, my dear, for their worth and beauty are never lost. The tinsel girls wear now is poor stuff, and money is thrown away in buying it,” said Mrs. Vaughn, who overheard them and guessed the temptation which beset the little country girl.

Daisy looked conscious, but answered, with a smile, and a hand on her necklace, “This old thing wouldn’t look well in my pretty box, so I’ll leave it empty till I can afford something better.”

“But that antique chain is worth many mock diamonds; for it is genuine, and its age adds to its value. Lovers of such things would pay a good price for that and keep it carefully. So don’t be ashamed of it, my dear, — though this pretty throat needs no ornament,” added Mrs. Vaughn, hoping the girl would not forget the little lesson she was trying to give her.

Daisy did not, but when she went to bed, set the jewel-box on the table where it would meet her eyes the first thing in the morning, and then fell asleep trying to decide that she would buy no baubles, since there were better things to spend her money on.

Nothing more was said; but as the two girls went about the gay street on various pleasant errands, Daisy never could pass the jewellers' windows without stopping to gloat over the trays full of enchanting ornaments. More than once, when alone, she went in to inquire the prices of these much coveted trifles, and their cheapness made the temptation harder to resist. Certain things had a sort of fascination for her, and seemed to haunt her in an uncanny way, giving her no peace till she would decide to buy them. A golden rose with a diamond drop of dew on its leaves got into her very dreams; an enamelled butterfly flew before her as she walked, and a pair of silver bangles rattled in her ear like goblin castanets.

"I shall not be safe till I spend that money, so I might as well decide on something and be at peace," said poor Daisy, after some days of this girlish struggle; "I needn't buy anything for mother and Janey, for I can share my nice and useful presents with them; but I should like to be able to show the girls my lovely jewel-box with something pretty in it, and I will! Laura needn't know anything about it, for I'm sure she'd think it silly, and so would her mother. I'll slip in now and buy that rose; it's only three dollars, and the other two will get one porte-bonheur, or the dear butterfly."

Making her way through the crowd that always stood before the brilliant window, Daisy went in and demanded the rose; then, rather scared by this reckless act she paused, and decided to look farther before buying anything else. With a pleasant little flutter of the heart as the pretty trinket was done up, she put her hand into her pocket to pay for it, and all the color died out of her cheeks when she found no purse there. In vain she pulled out handkerchief, keys, and pincushion; no sign of money was found but a ten-cent piece which had fallen out at some time. She looked so pale and dismayed that the shopman guessed her misfortune before she told it, but all the comfort he offered was the useless information that the crowded corner was a great place for pick-pockets.

There was nothing to be done but to return the rose and go sadly home, feeling that fate was very cruel to snatch away this long-coveted happiness when so nearly won. Like the milk-maid who upset her pail while planning which ribbons would become her best, poor Daisy's dreams of splendor came to a sudden end; for instead of a golden rose, she was left with only ten cents, — and not even a purse to put it in.

She went home angry, disappointed, and ashamed, but too proud to complain, though not able to keep the loss to herself; for it was a sad affair, and her face betrayed her in spite of her efforts to be gay.

“I know you were staring at the French diamonds in that corner store. I never can get you by there without a regular tug,” cried Laura, when the tale was very briefly told.

“I can’t help it; I’m perfectly fascinated by those foolish things, and I know I should have bought some; so it is well that I’ve lost my money, perhaps,” answered Daisy, looking so innocently penitent and so frankly disappointed that Mr. Vaughn said kindly: —

“So it is, for now I have a chance to complete my Christmas present. I was not sure it would suit so I gave it empty. Please use this in buying some of the ‘fascinating things’ you like so well.”

A bright ten-dollar gold piece was slipped into Daisy’s hand, and she was obliged to keep it, in spite of all her protestations that she could live without trinkets, and did not need it as her ticket home was already bought. Mrs. Vaughn added a nice little purse, and Laura advised her to keep the lone ten-cent piece for a good-luck penny.

“Now I can do it with a free mind, and fill my box as Mr. Vaughn wishes me to. Won’t it be fun?” thought Daisy, as she skipped up-stairs after dinner, with a load of care lifted from her spirits.

Laura was taking a music lesson, so her guest went to the sewing-room to mend the facing of her dress, which some one had stepped on while she stood in that fatal crowd. A seamstress was there, sewing as if for a wager, and while Daisy stitched her braid she wondered if there was any need of such haste; for the young woman’s fingers flew, a feverish color was in her cheeks, and now and then she sighed as if tired or worried.

“Let me help, if you are in a hurry, Miss White. I can sew fast, and know something of dressmaking. Please let me. I’d love to do anything for Mrs. Vaughn, she is so kind to me,” said Daisy, when her small job was done, lingering to make the offer, though an interesting book was waiting in her room.

“Thank you, I guess I can get through by dark. I do want to finish, for my mother is sick, and needs me as well as the money,” answered the needle-woman, pausing to give the girl a grateful smile, then stitching away faster than ever.

“Then I must help. Give me that sleeve to sew up, and rest a little. You look dreadfully tired, and you’ve been working all day,” insisted Daisy.

“That’s real kind, and it would be a great help, if you really like it,” answered Miss White, with a sigh of relief as she handed over the sleeve, and saw how heartily and helpfully Daisy fell to work.

Of course they talked, for the friendly act opened both hearts, and did both girls good. As the younger listened to the little story of love and labor, the gold piece burned in her pocket, and tinsel trinkets looked very poor beside the sacrifices so sweetly made by this good daughter for the feeble mother whose comfort and support she was.

“Our landlord has raised the rent, but I can’t move now, for the cold and the worry would kill ma; so I’m tugging away to pay the extra money, else he will turn us out, I’m afraid.”

“Why don’t you tell Mrs. Vaughn? She helps every one, and loves to do it.”

“So she does, bless her! She has done a deal for us, and that’s why I can’t ask for more. I won’t beg while I can work, but worry wears on me, and if I break down what *will* become of mother?”

Poor Mary shook the tears out of her eyes, for daylight was going, and she had no time to cry; but Daisy stopped to wonder how it would seem to be in her place, “tugging away” day after day to keep a roof over mother. It made her heart ache to think of it, and sent her hand to her pocket with a joyful sense of power; for alms-giving was a new pleasure, and Daisy felt very rich.

“I’ve had a present to-day, and I’d love dearly to share it with you if you wouldn’t mind. I shall only waste it, so do let me send it to your mother in any shape you like,” she said in a timid, but very earnest way.

“Oh, Miss Field! I couldn’t do it! you are too kind; I never thought of hinting” — began Mary, quite overcome by this unexpected proposal.

Daisy settled the matter by running away to the study, where Mr. Vaughn was napping, to ask him if he would give her two fives for the gold piece.

“Ah! the fascination is at work, I see; and we can’t wait till Monday to buy the pretty things. Girls will be girls, and must sow their innocent wild oats I suppose. Here, my dear, beware of pick-pockets, and good luck to the shopping,” said the old gentleman, as he put two crisp bills into her hands, with a laugh.

“Pick-pockets wont get this, and I *know* my shopping will prosper now,” answered Daisy, in such a happy tone that Mr. Vaughn wondered what plan was in the girl’s head to make her look so sweet and glad.

She went slowly up-stairs looking at the two bills, which did not seem half so precious as when in the shape of gold.

“I wonder if it would be very extravagant to give her all of it. I shall do some silly thing if I keep it. Her boots were very thin, and she coughs, and if she is sick it will be dreadful. Suppose I give her five for herself, and five for her mother. I’d love to feel rich and generous for once in my life, and give real help.”

The house was very still, and Daisy paused at the head of the stairs to settle the point, little dreaming that Mrs. Vaughn had heard the talk in the sewing-room, and saw her as she stood thoughtfully staring at the two bits of paper in her hand.

"I shouldn't feel ashamed if Mrs. Vaughn found me out in this, but I should never dare to let her see my bangles and pins, if I got them. I know she thinks them silly, especially so for me. She said she hoped I'd set a good example to Laura, in the way of simplicity and industry. I liked that, and so will mother. But then, my jewel-box! All empty, and such a pretty thing. Oh dear, I wish I could be wise and silly at the same time."

Daisy sighed, and took a few more steps, then smiled, pulled out her purse, and taking the ten-cent piece tossed it up, saying, "Heads, Mary; tails, myself."

Up flew the bright little coin, and down it came with the goddess of liberty uppermost.

"That settles it; she shall have the ten, and I'll be content with the old chain for all my jewelry," said Daisy aloud; and looking much relieved she skipped away, leaving the unsuspected observer to smile at her girlish mode of deciding the question, and to rejoice over the generous nature unspoiled as yet.

She watched her young guest with new interest during the next few days; for certain fine plans were in her mind, and every trifle helped the decision for or against.

Mary White went smiling home that night to rejoice with her feeble mother over the help that came so opportunely and so kindly.

Daisy looked as if her shopping *had* prospered wonderfully though the old necklace was the only ornament she wore; and those who saw her happy face at the merry-making thought that she needed no other. She danced as if her feet were as light as her heart, and enjoyed that party more than the first; for no envy spoiled her pleasure, and a secret content brightened all the world to her.

But the next day she discovered that temptation still had power over her, and she nearly spoiled her first self-conquest by the fall which is very apt to come after a triumph, to show us how hard it is to stand fast, even when small Apollyons get in our way.

She broke the clasp of the necklace, and Mrs. Vaughn directed her to a person who mended such things. The man examined it with interest, and asked its history. Daisy very willingly told all she knew, inquiring if it was really valuable.

"I'd give twenty-five dollars for it any time. I've been trying to get one to go with a pair of earrings I picked up, and this is just what I want. Of course you don't care to sell it, miss?" he asked, glancing at Daisy's simple dress and rather excited face, for his offer almost took her breath away.

She was not sufficiently worldly-wise to see that the jeweller wanted it enough to give more for it, and to make a good bargain for herself. Twenty-five dollars seemed a vast sum, and she only paused to collect her wits, before she answered eagerly: —

“Yes, I *should* like to sell it; I’ve had it so long I’m tired of it, and it’s all out of fashion. Mrs. Vaughn told me some people would be glad to get it, because it is genuine. Do you really think it is worth twenty-five dollars?”

“It’s old, and I shall have to tinker it up; but it matches the earrings so well I am willing to pay a good price for it. Will you take the money now, miss, or think it over and call again?” asked the man, more respectfully, after hearing Mrs. Vaughn’s name.

“I’ll take it now, if you please, sir. I shall leave town in a day or two, and may not have time to call again,” said Daisy, taking a half-regretful look at the chain, as the man counted out the money.

Holding it fast, she went away feeling that this unexpected fortune was a reward for the good use she had made of her gold piece.

“Now I can buy some really valuable ornament, and wear it without being ashamed. What shall it be? No tinsel for me this time;” and she walked by the attractive shop window with an air of lofty indifference, for she really was getting over her first craze for that sort of thing.

Feeling as if she possessed the power to buy real diamonds, Daisy turned toward the great jewellers, pausing now and then to look for some pretty gift for Janey, bought with her own money.

“What can I get for mother? She never will own that she needs anything, and goes shabby so I can be nice. I could get some of those fine, thick stockings, hers are all darns, — but they might not fit. Flannel is useful, but it isn’t a pretty present. What *does* she need most?”

As Daisy stopped before a great window, full of all manner of comfortable garments, her eye fell on a fur-lined cloak marked “$25.” It seemed to answer her question like a voice, and as she looked at it she heard again the words, —

“But, mother, that money was for your cloak, and you need it very much.”

“Hush, dear, don’t say a word to spoil Daisy’s pleasure. I can do very well with a shawl over the old sack.”

“How could I forget that! What a selfish girl I am, to be thinking of jewelry, when that dear, good mother hasn’t a cloak to her back. Daisy Field, I’m ashamed of you! Go in and buy that nice, warm one at once, and don’t let me hear of that ridiculous box again.”

After this little burst of remorse and self-reproach, Daisy took another look; and prudence suggested asking the advice of some more experienced shopper than herself, before making so important a purchase. As if the fates were interested in settling the matter at once, while she stood undecided, Mary White came down the street with a parcel of work in her hands.

“Just the person! The Vaughns needn’t know anything about it; and Mary is a good judge.”

It was pleasant to see the two faces brighten as the girls met; rather comical to watch the deep interest with which one listened and the other explained; and beautiful to hear the grateful eagerness in Mary’s voice, as she answered cordially: —

“Indeed I will! You’ve been so kind to my mother, there’s nothing I wouldn’t be glad to do for yours.”

So in they went, and after due consideration, the cloak was bought and ordered home, — both girls feeling that it was a little ceremony full of love and good will; for Mary’s time was money, yet she gave it gladly, and Daisy’s purse was left empty of all but the good-luck penny, which was to bring still greater happiness in unsuspected ways.

Another secret was put away in the empty jewel-box, and the cloak hidden in Daisy’s trunk; for she felt shy of telling her little business transactions, lest the Vaughns should consider her extravagant. But the thought of mother’s surprise and pleasure warmed her heart, and made the last days of her visit the happiest. Being a mortal girl she did give a sigh as she tied a bit of black velvet round her white throat, instead of the necklace, which seemed really a treasure, now it was gone; and she looked with great disfavor at the shabby little pin, worn where she had fondly hoped to see the golden rose. She put a real one in its place, and never knew that her own fresh, happy face was as lovely; for the thought of the two mothers made comfortable by her was better than all the pearls and diamonds that fell from the lips of the good girl in the fairy tale.

“Let me help you pack your trunk; I love to cram things in, and dance on the lid when it won’t shut,” said Laura, joining her friend next day, just as she had got the cloak-box well hidden under a layer of clothes.

“Thank you, I’m almost done, and rather like to fuss over my own things in my own way. You won’t mind if I give this pretty box of handkerchiefs to mother, will you, dear? I have so many things, I must go halves with some one. The muslin apron and box of bonbons are for Janey, because she can’t wear the gloves, and this lovely *jabot* is too old for her,” said Daisy, surveying her new possessions with girlish satisfaction.

“Do what you like with your own. Mamma has a box of presents for your people. She is packing it now, but I don’t believe you can get it in; your trunk is so much fuller than when you came. This must go in a safe place, or your heart will break,” and Laura took up the jewel-box, adding with a laugh, as she opened it, “you haven’t filled it, after all! What did you do with papa’s gold piece?”

“That’s a secret. I’ll tell some day, but not yet,” said Daisy, diving into her trunk to hide the color in her cheeks.

"Sly thing! I know you've got silver spiders and filagree racquets, and Rhinestone moons and stars stowed away somewhere and won't confess it. I wanted to fill this box, but mamma said you'd do it better yourself, so I let it alone; but I was afraid you'd think I was a selfish pig, to have a pin for every day in the month and never give you one," said Laura, as she looked at the single tarnished brooch reposing on the satin cushion. "Where's your chain?" she added, before Daisy could speak.

"It is safe enough. I'm tired of it, and don't care if I never see it again." And Daisy packed away, and laughed as she smoothed the white dress in its tray, remembering that it was paid for by the sale of the old necklace.

"Give it to me, then. I like it immensely; it's so odd. I'll exchange for anything of mine you choose. Will you?" asked Laura, who seemed bent on asking inconvenient questions.

"I shall have to tell, or she will think me very ungrateful," — and Daisy felt a pang of regret even then, for Laura's offer was a generous one.

"Like G. W., 'I cannot tell a lie;' so I must 'fess' that I sold the old thing, and spent the money for something I wanted very much, — not jewelry, but something to give away."

Daisy was spared further confessions by the entrance of Mrs. Vaughn, with a box in her hand.

"I have room for something more. Give me that, Laura, it will just fit in;" and taking the little casket, she added, "Mary White wants to try on your dress, dear. Go at once; I will help Daisy."

Laura went, and her mother stood looking down at the kneeling girl with an expression of affectionate satisfaction which would have puzzled Daisy, had she seen it.

"Has the visit been a pleasant one, my dear?"

"Oh, very! I can't thank you enough for the good it has done me. I hope I can pay a little of the debt next summer, if you come our way again," cried Daisy, looking up with a face full of gratitude.

"We shall probably go to Europe for the summer. Laura is a good age for it now, and we shall all enjoy it."

"How splendid! We shall miss you dreadfully, but I'm glad you are going, and I hope Laura will find time to write me now and then. I shall want to know how she likes the 'foreign parts' we've talked about so much."

"You *shall* know. We won't forget you, my dear," and with a caressing touch on the smiling yet wistful face upturned to hers, Mrs. Vaughn went away to pack the empty jewel-box, leaving Daisy to drop a few irrepressible tears on the new gown, over the downfall of her summer hopes, and the longings all girls feel for that enchanted world that lies beyond the sea.

"We shall see you before we go, so we won't gush now," said Laura, as she bade her friend good-by, adding in a whisper, "Some folks can have secrets as well as other folks, and be as sly. So don't think you have all the fun to yourself, you dear, good, generous darling."

Daisy looked bewildered, and Mrs. Vaughn added to her surprise by kissing her very warmly as she said:

"I wanted to find a good friend for my spoiled girl, and I think I have succeeded."

There was no time for explanation, and all the way home Daisy kept wondering what they meant. But she forgot everything when she saw the dear faces beaming at the door, and ran straight into her mother's arms, while Janey hugged the trunk till her turn came for something better.

When the first raptures were over, out came the cloak; and Daisy was well repaid for her little trials and sacrifices when she was folded in it as her mother held her close, and thanked her as mothers only can. Sitting in its soft shelter, she told all about it, and coming to the end said, as she took up the jewel-box, unpacked with the other generous gifts: —

"I haven't a thing to put in it, but I shall value it because it taught me a lesson which I hope I never shall forget. See what a pretty thing it is;" and opening it, Daisy gave a cry of surprise and joy, for there lay the golden rose, with Laura's name and "Sub rosa" on a slip of paper.

"The dear thing! she knew I wanted it, and that is what she meant by 'secrets.' I'll write and tell her mine to-morrow."

"Here is something more," said Janey, who had been lifting the tray while her sister examined the long-desired flower.

A pair of real gold bangles shone before her delighted eyes, and a card in Mr. Vaughn's handwriting bore these words: "Handcuffs for the thief who stole the pocketbook."

Daisy hardly had time to laugh gayly at the old gentleman's joke, when Janey cried out, as she opened the little drawer, "Here's another!"

It was a note from Mrs. Vaughn, but all thought it the greatest treasure of the three, for it said briefly, —

"Dear Daisy, — Mary told me some of your secrets, and I found out the others. Forgive me and go to Europe with Laura, in May. Your visit was a little test. You stood it well, and we want to know more of you. The little box is not quite empty, but the best jewels are the self-denial, sweet charity, and good sense you put in yourself.

“Your friend, A. V.”

Daisy could not speak, and her mother looked into the box with eyes full of tender tears, while Janey danced about them, clashing the bangles like a happy little bayadere, till her sister found her voice again.

Pointing to a great, bright tear that shone on the blue velvet, she said, with her cheek against her mother’s: “I always wanted a real diamond, and there’s a more precious one than any I could buy. Now I’m sure my jewel-box *is* full.”

Corny’s Catamount

Two boys sat on the bars, one whittling, the other whistling, — not for want of thought by any means, for his brow was knit in an anxious frown, and he paused now and then to thump the rail, with an impatient exclamation. The other lad appeared to be absorbed in shaping an arrow from the slender stick in his hand, but he watched his neighbor with a grin, saying a few words occasionally which seemed to add to his irritation, though they were in a sympathizing tone.

“Oh, well, if a chap can’t do a thing he can’t; and he’d better give up and say, ‘Beat.’“

“But I won’t give up, and I never say ‘Beat.’ I’m not going to be laughed out of it, and I’ll do what I said I would, if it takes all summer, Chris Warner.”

“You’ll have to be pretty spry, then, for there’s only two more days to August,” replied the whittler, shutting one eye to look along his arrow and see if it was true.

“I intend to be spry, and if you won’t go and blab, I’ll tell you a plan I made last night.”

“Guess you can trust me. I’ve heard about a dozen plans now, and never told one of ‘em.”

“They all failed, so there was nothing to tell. But this one is *not* going to fail, if I die for it. I feel that it’s best to tell some one, because it is really dangerous; and if anything *should* happen to me, as is very likely, it would save time and trouble.”

“Don’t seem to feel anxious a mite. But I’ll stand ready to pick up the pieces, if you come to grief.”

“Now, Chris, it’s mean of you to keep on making fun when I’m in dead earnest; and this may be the last thing you can do for me.”

“Wait till I get out my handkerchief; if you’re going to be affectin’ I may want it. Granite’s cheap up here; just mention what you’d like on your tombstone and I’ll see that it’s done, if it takes my last cent.”

The big boy in the blue overalls spoke with such a comical drawl that the slender city lad could not help laughing, and with a slap that nearly sent his neighbor off his perch, Corny said good-naturedly:

“Come now, stop joking and lend a hand, and I’ll do anything I can for you. I’ve set my heart on shooting a wildcat, and I know I can if I once get a good chance. Mother won’t let me go off far enough, so of course I don’t do it, and then you all jeer at me. To-morrow we are going up the mountain, and I'm set on trying again, for Abner says the big woods are the place to find the 'varmint'. Now you hold your tongue, and let me slip away when I think we've hit the right spot. I'm not a bit afraid, and while the rest go poking to the top, I'll plunge into the woods and see what I can do."

"All right. Better take old Buff; he'll bring you home when you get lost, and keep puss from clawing you. You won't like that part of the fun as much as you expect to, maybe," said Chris, with a sly twinkle of the eye, as he glanced at Corny and then away to the vast forest that stretched far up the mighty mountain's side.

"No, I don't want any help, and Buff will betray me by barking; I prefer to go alone. I shall take some lunch and plenty of shot, and have a glorious time, even if I don't meet that confounded beast. I will keep dashing in and out of the woods as we go; then no one will miss me for a while, and when they do you just say, 'Oh, he's all right; he'll be along directly,' and go ahead, and let me alone."

Corny spoke so confidently, and looked so pleased with his plan, that honest Chris could not bear to tell him how much danger he would run in that pathless forest, where older hunters than he had been lost.

"Don't feel as if I cared to tell any lies about it, and I don't advise your goin'; but if you're mad for catamounts, I s'pose I must humor you and say nothing. Only bear in mind, Abner and I will be along, and if you get into a scrape jest give a yell and we'll come."

"No fear of that; I've tramped round all summer, and know my way like an Indian. Keep the girls quiet, and let me have a good lark. I'll turn up all right by sundown; so don't worry. Not a word to mother, mind, or she won't let me go. I'll make things straight with her after the fun is over."

"That ain't just square; but it's not my funeral, so I won't meddle. Hope you'll have first rate sport, and bag a brace of cats. One thing you mind, don't get too nigh before you fire; and keep out of sight of the critters as much as you can."

Chris spoke in a deep whisper, looking so excited and impressed by the reckless courage of his mate that Corny felt himself a Leatherstocking, and went off to tea with his finger on his lips, full of boyish faith in his own powers. If he had seen Chris dart behind the barn, and there roll upon the grass in convulsions of laughter, he would have been both surprised and hurt.

No deacon could have been more sober, however, than Chris when they met next morning, while the party of summer boarders at the old farm-house were in a pleasant bustle of preparation for the long expected day on the mountain. Three merry girls, a pair of small boys, two amiable mammas, Chris and Corny, made up the party, with Abner to drive the big wagon drawn by Milk and Molasses, the yellow span.

“All aboard!” shouted our young Nimrod, in a hurry to be off, as the lunch-basket was handed up, and the small boys packed in the most uncomfortable corners, regardless of their arms and legs.

Away they rattled with a parting cheer, and peace fell upon the farm-house for a few hours, to the great contentment of the good people left behind. Corny’s mother was one of them, and her last words were, — ”A pleasant day, dear. I wish you’d leave that gun at home; I’m so afraid you’ll get hurt with it.’

“No fun without it. Don’t worry, mammy; I’m old enough to take care of myself.”

“I’ll see to him, ma’am,” called Chris, as he hung on behind, and waved his old straw hat, with a steady, reliable sort of look, that made the anxious lady feel more comfortable.

“We are going to walk up, and leave the horses to rest; so I can choose my time. See, I’ve got a bottle of cold tea in this pocket, and a lot of grub in the other. No danger of my starving, is there?” whispered Corny, as he leaned over to Chris, who sat, apparently, on nothing, with his long legs dangling into space.

“Shouldn’t wonder if you needed every mite of it. Hunting is mighty hard work on a hot day, and this is going to be a blazer,” answered Chris, pulling his big straw hat lower over his eyes.

As we intend to follow Corny’s adventures, we need not pause to describe the drive, which was a merry one; with girls chattering, mammas holding on to excited small boys, in danger of flying out at every jolt, Abner joking till every one roared, Corny’s dangerous evolutions with the beloved gun, and the gymnastic feats Chris performed, jumping off to pick flowers for the ladies, and getting on again while Milk and Molasses tore up and down the rough road as if they enjoyed it.

About ten o’clock they reached the foot of the mountain; and after a short rest at the hotel, began the three-mile ascent in high spirits. Abner was to follow later with the wagon, to bring the party down; so Chris was guide, as he knew the way well, and often came with people. The girls and younger boys hurried on, full of eagerness to reach the top. The ladies went more slowly, enjoying the grand beauty of the scene, while Chris carried the lunch-basket, and Corny lingered in the rear, waiting for a good chance to “plunge.”

He wanted to be off before Abner came, as he well knew that wise man and mighty hunter would never let him go alone.

“The very next path I see, I’ll dive in and run; Chris can’t leave the rest to follow, and if I once get a good start, they won’t catch me in a hurry,” thought the boy, longing to be free and alone in the wild woods that tempted him on either hand.

Just as he was tightening his belt to be ready for the run, Mrs. Barker, the stout lady, called him; and being a well-bred lad, he hastened at once to see what she wanted, feeling that he was the only gentleman in the party.

"Give me your arm, dear; I'm getting very tired, and fear I can't hold out to the top, without a little help," said the poor lady, red and panting with the heat, and steepness of the road.

"Certainly ma'am," answered Corny, obeying at once, and inwardly resolving to deposit his fair burden on the first fallen log they came to, and make his escape.

But Mrs. Barker got on bravely, with the support of his strong arm, and chatted away so delightfully that Corny would really have enjoyed the walk, if his soul had not been yearning for catamounts. He did his best, but when they passed opening after opening into the green recesses of the wood, and the granite boulders grew more and more plentiful, his patience gave out, and he began to plan what he could say to excuse himself. Chris was behind, apparently deaf and blind to his calls and imploring glances, though he grinned cheerfully when poor Corny looked round and beckoned, as well as he could, with a gun on one arm and a stout lady on the other.

"The hardest part is coming now, and we'd better rest a moment. Here's a nice rock, and the last spring we are likely to see till we get to the top. Come on, Chris, and give us the dipper. Mrs. Barker wants a drink, and so do I," called the young hunter, driven to despair at last.

Up came Chris, and while he rummaged in the well-packed basket, Corny slipped into the wood, leaving the good lady with her thanks half spoken, sitting on a warm stone beside a muddy little pool. A loud laugh followed him, as he scrambled through the tall ferns and went plunging down the steep mountain side, eager to reach the lower woods.

"Let him laugh; it will be my turn when I go home, with a fine cat over my shoulder," thought Corny, tearing along, heedless of falls, scratches, and bruised knees.

At length he paused for breath, and looked about him well satisfied, for the spot was lonely and lovely enough to suit any hunter. The tallest pines he ever saw sighed far overhead; the ground was ankle deep in moss, and gay with scarlet bunch-berries; every fallen log was veiled by sweet-scented Linnea, green vines or nodding brakes; while hidden brooks sang musically, and the air was full of the soft flutter of leaves, the whir of wings, the sound of birds gossiping sweetly in the safe shelter of the forest, where human feet so seldom came.

“I’ll rest a bit, and then go along down, keeping a look out for puss by the way,” thought Corny, feeling safe and free, and very happy, for he had his own way, at last, and a whole day to lead the life he loved.

So he bathed his hot face, took a cool drink, and lay on the moss, staring up into the green gloom of the pines, blissfully dreaming of the joys of a hunter’s life, — till a peculiar cry startled him to his feet, and sent him creeping warily toward the sound. Whether it was a new kind of bird, or a fox, or a bear, he did not know, but fondly hoped it was a wildcat; though he was well aware that the latter creature sleeps by day, and prowls by night. Abner said they purred and snarled and gave a mewing sort of cry; but which it was now he could not tell, having unfortunately been half asleep.

On he went, looking up into the trees for a furry bunch, behind every log, and in every rocky hole, longing and hoping to discover his heart’s desire. But a hawk was all he saw above, an ugly snake was the only living thing he found among the logs, and a fat woodchuck’s hind legs vanished down the most attractive hole. He shot at all three and missed them, so pushed on, pretending that he did not care for such small game.

“Now this is what I call fun,” he said to himself, tramping gayly along, and at that moment went splash into a mud-hole concealed under the grass. He sunk up to his knees, and with great difficulty got out by clinging to the tussocks that grew near. In his struggles the lunch was lost, for the bottle broke and the pocket where the sandwiches were stored was full of mud. A woful spectacle was the trim lad as he emerged from the slough, black and dripping in front, well spattered behind, hatless, and one shoe gone, having been carelessly left unlaced in the ardor of the chase.

“Here’s a mess!” thought poor Corny, surveying himself with great disgust and feeling very helpless, as well as tired, hungry, and mad. “Luckily, my powder is dry and my gun safe; so my fun isn’t spoiled, though I do look like a wallowing pig. I’ve heard of mud baths, but I never took one before, and I’ll be shot if I do again.”

So he washed as well as he could, hoping the sun would dry him, picked out a few bits of bread unspoiled by the general wreck, and trudged on with less ardor, though by no means discouraged yet.

“I’m too high for any game but birds, and those I don’t want. I’ll go slap down, and come out in the valley. Abner said any brook would show the way, and this rascal that led me into a scrape shall lead me out,” he said, as he followed the little stream that went tumbling over the stones, that increased as the ground sloped toward the deep ravine, where a waterfall shone like silver in the sun.

"I'll take a bath if the pool is big enough, and that will set me up. Shouldn't wonder if I'd got poisoned a bit with some of these vines I've been tearing through. My hands smart like fury, and I guess the mosquitoes have about eaten my face up. Never saw such clouds of stingers before," said Corny, looking at his scratched hands, and rubbing his hot face in great discomfort, — for it was the gnat that drove the lion mad, you remember.

It was easy to say, "I'll follow the brook," but not so easy to do it; for the frolicsome stream went headlong over rocks, crept under fallen logs, and now and then hid itself so cleverly that one had to look and listen carefully to recover the trail. It was long past noon when Corny came out near the waterfall, so tired and hungry that he heartily wished himself back among the party, who had lunched well and were now probably driving gayly homeward to a good supper.

No chance for a bath appeared, so he washed his burning face and took a rest, enjoying the splendid view far over valley and intervale through the gap in the mountain range. He was desperately tired with these hours of rough travel, and very hungry; but would not own it, and sat considering what to do next, for he saw by the sun that the afternoon was half over. There was time to go back the way he had come, and by following the path down the hill he could reach the hotel and get supper and a bed, or be driven home. That was the wise thing to do, but his pride rebelled against returning empty-handed after all his plans and boasts of great exploits.

"I won't go home, to be laughed at by Chris and Abner. I'll shoot something, if I stay all night. Who cares for hunger and mosquito bites? Not I. Hunters can bear more than that, I guess. The next live thing I see I'll shoot it, and make a fire and have a jolly supper. Now which way will I go, — up or down? A pretty hard prospect, either way."

The sight of an eagle soaring above him seemed to answer his question, and fill him with new strength and ardor. To shoot the king of birds and take him home in triumph would cover the hunter with glory. It should be done! And away he went, climbing, tumbling, leaping from rock to rock, toward the place where the eagle had alighted. More cuts and bruises, more vain shots, and all the reward of his eager struggles was a single feather that floated down as the great bird soared serenely away, leaving the boy exhausted and disappointed in a wilderness of granite boulders, with no sign of a path to show the way out.

As he leaned breathless and weary against the crag where he had fondly hoped to find the eagle's nest, he realized for the first time what a fool-hardy thing he had done. Here he was, alone, without a guide, in this wild region where there was neither food nor shelter, and night coming on. Utterly used up, he could not get home now if he had known the way; and suddenly all the tales he had ever heard of men lost in the mountains came into his head. If he had not been weak with hunger he would have felt better able to bear it; but his legs trembled under him, his head ached with the glare of the sun, and a queer faintness came over him now and then; for the city lad was unused to such violent exercise, plucky as he was.

"The only thing to do now is to get down to the valley, if I can, before dark. Abner said there was an old cabin, where the hunters used to sleep, somewhere round that way. I can try for it, and perhaps shoot something on the way. May break my bones, but I can't sit and starve up here, and I was a fool to come. I'll keep the feather anyway, to prove that I really saw an eagle; that's better than nothing."

Still bravely trying to affect the indifference to danger and fatigue which hunters are always described as possessing in such a remarkable degree, Corny slung the useless gun on his back and began the steep descent, discovering now the perils he had been too eager to see before. He was a good climber, but was stiff with weariness, and his hands already sore with scratches and poison; so he went slowly, feeling quite unfit for such hard work. Coming to the ravine, he found the only road was down its precipitous side to the valley, that looked so safe and pleasant now. Stunted pines grew in the fissures of the rocks, and their strong roots helped the clinging hands and feet as the boy painfully climbed, slipped, and swung along, fearing every minute to come to some impassable barrier in the dangerous path.

But he got on wonderfully well, and was feeling much encouraged, when his foot slipped, the root he held gave way, and down he went, rolling and bumping to his death on the rocks below, he thought, as a crash came, and he knew no more.

"Wonder if I'm dead?" was the first idea that occurred to him as he opened his eyes and saw a brilliant sky above him, all purple, gold, and red.

He seemed floating in the air, for he swayed to and fro on a soft bed, a pleasant murmur reached his ear, and when he looked down he saw what looked like clouds, misty and white, below him. He lay a few minutes drowsily musing, for the fall had stunned him; then, as he moved his hand something pricked it, and he felt pine-needles in the fingers that closed over them.

"Caught in a tree, by Jupiter!" and all visions of heaven vanished in a breath, as he sat up and stared about him, wide awake now, and conscious of many aching bones.

Yes, there he lay among the branches of one of the sturdy pines, into which he had fallen on his way down the precipice. Blessed little tree! set there to save a life, and teach a lesson to a wilful young heart that never forgot that hour.

Holding fast, lest a rash motion should set him bounding further down, like a living ball, Corny took an observation as rapidly as possible, for the red light was fading, and the mist rising from the valley. All he could see was a narrow ledge where the tree stood, and anxious to reach a safer bed for the night, he climbed cautiously down to drop on the rock, so full of gratitude for safety that he could only lie quite still for a little while, thinking of mother, and trying not to cry.

He was much shaken by the fall, his flesh bruised, his clothes torn, and his spirit cowed; for hunger, weariness, pain, and danger, showed him what a very feeble creature he was, after all. He could do no more till morning, and resigned himself to a night on the mountain side, glad to be there alive, though doubtful what daylight would show him. Too tired to move, he lay watching the western sky, where the sun set gloriously behind the purple hills. All below was wrapped in mist, and not a sound reached him but the sigh of the pine, and the murmur of the waterfall.

"This is a first-class scrape. What a fool I was not to go back when I could, instead of blundering down here where no one can get at me, and as like as not I can't get out alone! Gun smashed in that confounded fall, so I can't even fire a shot to call help. Nothing to eat or drink, and very likely a day or so to spend here till I'm found, if I ever am. Chris said, 'Yell, if you want us.' Much good that would do now! I'll try, though." And getting up on his weary legs, Corny shouted till he was hoarse; but echo alone answered him, and after a few efforts he gave it up, trying to accept the situation like a man. As if kind Nature took pity on the poor boy, the little ledge was soft with lichens and thin grass, and here and there grew a sprig of checkerberry, sown by the wind, sheltered by the tree, and nourished by the moisture that trickled down the rock from some hidden spring. Eagerly Corny ate the sweet leaves to stay the pangs of hunger that gnawed him, and finished his meal with grass and pine-needles, calling himself a calf, and wishing his pasture were wider.

"The fellows we read about always come to grief in a place where they can shoot a bird, catch a fish, or knock over some handy beast for supper," he said, talking to himself for company. "Even the old chap lost in the bush in Australia had a savage with him who dug a hole in a tree, and pulled out a nice fat worm to eat. I'm not lucky enough even to find a sassafras bush to chew, or a bird's egg to suck. My poor gun is broken, or I might bang away at a hawk, and cook him for supper, if the bog didn't spoil my matches as it did my lunch. Oh, well! I'll pull through, I guess, and when it's all over, it will be a jolly good story to tell."

Then, hoping to forget his woes in sleep, he nestled under the low-growing branches of the pine, and lay blinking drowsily at the twilight world outside. A dream came, and he saw the old farm-house in sad confusion, caused by his absence, — the women crying, the men sober, all anxious, and all making ready to come and look for him. So vivid was it that he woke himself by crying out, “Here I am!” and nearly went over the ledge, stretching out his arms to Abner.

The start and the scare made it hard to go to sleep again, and he sat looking at the solemn sky, full of stars that seemed watching over him alone there, like a poor, lost child on the great mountain’s stony breast. He had never seen the world at that hour before, and it made a deep impression on him; for it was a vast, wild scene, full of gloomy shadows below, unknown dangers around, and a new sense of utter littleness and helplessness, which taught the boy human dependence upon Heavenly love as no words, even from his mother’s tender lips, could have done. Thoughts of the suffering his wilfulness had given her wrung a few penitent tears from him, which he was not ashamed to shed, since only the kind stars saw them, and better still, he resolved to own the fault, to atone for it, and to learn wisdom from this lesson, which might yet prove to be a very bitter one.

He felt better after this little breakdown, and presently his thoughts were turned from conscience to catamounts again; for sounds in the woods below led him to believe that the much-desired animal was on the prowl. His excited fancy painted dozens of them not far away, waiting to be shot, and there he was, cooped up on that narrow ledge, with a broken gun, unable even to get a look at them. He felt that it was a just punishment, and after the first regret tried to comfort himself with the fact that he was much safer where he was than alone in the forest at that hour, for various nocturnal voices suggested restless and dangerous neighbors.

Presently his wakeful eyes saw lights twinkling far off on the opposite side of the ravine, and he imagined he heard shouts and shots. But the splash of the waterfall, and the rush of the night wind deadened the sounds to his ear, and drowned his own reply.

“They are looking for me, and will never think of this strange place. I can’t make them hear, and must wait till morning. Poor Chris will get an awful scolding for letting me go. Don’t believe he told a word till he had to. I’ll make it up to him. Chris is a capital fellow, and I just wish I had him here to make things jolly,” thought the lonely lad.

But soon the lights vanished, the sounds died away, and the silence of midnight brooded over the hills, seldom broken except by the soft cry of an owl, the rustle of the pine, or a louder gust of wind as it grew strong and cold. Corny kept awake as long as he could, fearing to dream and fall; but by-and-by he dropped off, and slept soundly till the chill of dawn waked him.

At any other time he would have heartily enjoyed the splendor of the eastern sky, as the red glow spread and brightened, till the sun came dazzling through the gorge, making the wild solitude beautiful and grand.

Now, however, he would have given it all for a hot beefsteak and a cup of coffee, as he wet his lips with a few drops of ice-cold water, and browsed over his small pasture till not a green spire remained. He was stiff, and full of pain, but daylight and the hope of escape cheered him up, and gave him coolness and courage to see how best he could accomplish his end.

The wind soon blew away the mist and let him see that the dry bed of a stream lay just below. To reach it he must leap, at risk of his bones, or find some means to swing down ten or twelve feet. Once there, it was pretty certain that by following the rough road he would come into the valley, from whence he could easily find his way home. Much elated at this unexpected good fortune, he took the strap that had slung his gun, the leathern belt about his waist, and the strong cords of his pouch, and knotting them together, made a rope long enough to let him drop within two or three feet of the stones below. This he fastened firmly round the trunk of the pine, and finished his preparations by tying his handkerchief to one of the branches, that it might serve as a guide for him, a signal for others, and a trophy of his grand fall.

Then putting a little sprig of the evergreen tree in his jacket, with a grateful thought of all it had done for him, he swung himself off and landed safely below, not minding a few extra bumps after his late exploits at tumbling.

Feeling like a prisoner set free, he hurried as fast as bare feet and stiff legs would carry him along the bed of the stream, coming at last into the welcome shelter of the woods, which seemed more beautiful than ever, after the bleak region of granite in which he had been all night.

Anxious to report himself alive, and relieve his mother’s anxiety, he pressed on till he struck the path, and soon saw, not far away, the old cabin Abner had spoken of. Just before this happy moment he had heard a shot fired somewhere in the forest, and as he hurried toward the sound he saw an animal dart into the hut, as if for shelter.

Whether it was a rabbit, woodchuck or dog, he had not seen, as a turn in the path prevented a clear view; and hoping it was old Buff looking for him, he ran in, to find himself face to face with a catamount at last.

There she was, the big, fierce cat, crouched in a corner, with fiery eyes, growling and spitting at sight of an enemy, but too badly wounded to fight, as the blood that dripped from her neck, and the tremble of her limbs plainly showed.

"Now's my chance! Don't care who shot her, I'll kill her, and have her too, if I pay my last dollar," thought Corny; and catching up a stout bit of timber fallen from the old roof, he struck one quick blow, which finished poor puss, who gave up the ghost with a savage snarl, and a vain effort to pounce on him.

This splendid piece of good luck atoned for all the boy had gone through, and only waiting to be sure the beast was quite dead and past clawing, he flung his prize over his shoulder, and with renewed strength and spirit trudged along the woodland road toward home, proudly imagining his triumphal entry upon the scene of suspense and alarm.

"Wish I didn't look so like a scare-crow; but perhaps my rags will add to the effect. Won't the girls laugh at my swelled face, and scream at the cat. Poor mammy will mourn over me and coddle me up as if I'd been to the wars. Hope some house isn't very far off, for I don't believe I can lug this brute much farther, I'm so starved and shaky."

Just as he paused to take breath and shift his burden from one shoulder to the other, a loud shout startled him, and a moment after, several men came bursting through the wood, cheering like lunatics as they approached.

It was Abner, Chris, and some of the neighbors, setting out again on their search, after a night of vain wandering. Corny could have hugged them all and cried like a girl; but pride kept him steady, though his face showed his joy as he nodded his hatless head with a cool —

"Hullo!"

Chris burst into his ringing laugh, and danced a wild sort of jig round his mate, as the only way in which he could fitly express his relief; for he had been so bowed down with remorse at his imprudence in letting Corny go that no one could find the heart to blame him, and all night the poor lad had rushed up and down seeking, calling, hoping, and fearing, till he was about used up, and looked nearly as dilapidated as Corny.

The tale was soon told, and received with the most flattering signs of interest, wonder, sympathy, and admiration.

"Why in thunder didn't you tell me? — and I'd a got up a hunt wuth havin', — not go stramashing off alone on a wild goose chase like this. Never did see such a chap as you be for gittin' inter scrapes, — and out of 'em too, I'm bound to own," growled Abner.

"That isn't a wild goose, is it?" proudly demanded Corny, pointing to the cat, which now lay on the ground, while he leaned against a tree to hide his weariness; for he felt ready to drop, now all the excitement was over.

"No it ain't, and I congratulate you on a good job. Where did you shoot her?"

asked Abner, stooping to examine the creature.

"Didn't shoot her; broke my gun when I took that header down the mountain. I hit her a rap with a club, in the cabin where I found her," answered Corny, heartily wishing he need not share the prize with any one. But he was honest, and added at once, "Some one else had put a bullet into her; I only finished her off."

"Chris did it; he fired a spell back and see the critter run, but we was too keen after you to stop for any other game. Guess you've had enough of catamounts for one spell, hey?" and Abner laughed as he looked at poor Corny, who was a more sorry spectacle than he knew, — ragged and rough, hatless and shoeless, his face red and swelled with the poisoning and bites, his eyes heavy with weariness, and in his mouth a bit of wild-cherry bark which he chewed ravenously.

"No, I haven't! I want this one, and will buy it if Chris will let me. I said I'd kill one, and I did, and want to keep the skin; for I ought to have something to show after all this knocking about and turning somersaults half a mile long," answered Corny stoutly, as he tried to shoulder his load again.

"Here, give me the varmint, and you hang on to Chris, my boy, or we'll have to cart you home. You've done first-rate, and now you want a good meal of vittles to set you up. Right about face, neighbors, and home we go, to the tune of Hail Columby."

As Abner spoke, the procession set forth. The tall, jolly man, with the dead animal at his back, went first; then Corny, trying not to lean on the arm Chris put round him, but very glad of the support; next the good farmers, all talking at once; while old Buff soberly brought up the rear, with his eye on the wildcat, well knowing that he would have a fine feast when the handsome skin was off.

In this order they reached home, and Corny tumbled into his mother's arms, to be no more seen for some hours. What went on in her room, no one knows; but when at last the hero emerged, refreshed by sleep and food, clad in clean clothes, his wounds bound up, and plantain-leaves dipped in cream spread upon his afflicted countenance, he received the praises and congratulations showered upon him very meekly. He made no more boasts of skill and courage that summer, set out on no more wild hunts, and gave up his own wishes so cheerfully that it was evident something had worked a helpful change in wilful Corny.

He liked to tell the story of that day and night when his friends were recounting adventures by sea and land; but he never said much about the hours on the ledge, always owned that Chris shot the beast, and usually ended by sagely advising his hearers to let their mothers know, when they went off on a lark of that kind. Those who knew and loved him best observed that he was fonder than ever of nibbling checkerberry leaves, that he didn’t mind being laughed at for liking to wear a bit of pine in his buttonhole, and that the skin of the catamount so hardly won lay before his study table till the moths ate it up.

The Cooking Class

A young girl in a little cap and a big apron sat poring over a cook-book, with a face full of the deepest anxiety. She had the kitchen to herself, for mamma was out for the day, cook was off duty, and Edith could mess to her heart’s content. She belonged to a cooking-class, the members of which were to have a lunch at two P. M. with the girl next door; and now the all absorbing question was, what to make. Turning the pages of the well-used book, she talked to herself as the various receipts met her eye.

“Lobster-salad and chicken-croquettes I’ve had, and neither were very good. Now I want to distinguish myself by something very nice. I’d try a meat-porcupine or a mutton-duck if there was time; but they are fussy, and ought to be rehearsed before given to the class. Bavarian cream needs berries and whipped cream, and I *won’t* tire my arms beating eggs. Apricots *à la* Neige is an easy thing and wholesome, but the girls won’t like it, I know, as well as some rich thing that will make them ill, as Carrie’s plum-pudding did. A little meat dish is best for lunch. I’d try sweetbreads and bacon, if I didn’t hate to burn my face and scent my clothes, frying. Birds are elegant; let me see if I can do larded grouse. No, I don’t like to touch that cold, fat stuff. How mortified Ella was, when she had birds on toast and forgot to draw them. I shouldn’t make such a blunder as that, I do hope. Potted pigeons — the very thing! Had that in our last lesson, but the girls are all crazy about puff-paste, so they won’t try pigeons. Why didn’t I think of it at once? — for we’ve got them in the house, and don’t want them to-day, mamma being called away. All ready too; so nice! I do detest to pick and clean birds. ‘Simmer from one to three hours.’ Plenty of time. I’ll do it! I’ll do it! La, la, la!”

And away skipped Edith in high spirits, for she did not love to cook, yet wished to stand well with the class, some members of which were very ambitious, and now and then succeeded with an elaborate dish, more by good luck than skill.

Six plump birds were laid out on a platter, with their legs folded in the most pathetic manner; these Edith bore away in triumph to the kitchen, and opening the book before her went to work energetically, resigning herself to frying the pork and cutting up the onion, which she had overlooked when hastily reading the receipt. In time they were stuffed, the legs tied down to the tails, the birds browned in the stew-pan, and put to simmer with a pinch of herbs.

"Now I can clear up, and rest a bit. If I ever have to work for a living I *won't* be a cook," said Edith, with a sigh of weariness as she washed her dishes, wondering how there could be so many; for no careless Irish girl would have made a greater clutter over this small job than the young lady who had not yet learned one of the most important things that a cook should know.

The bell rang just as she got done, and was planning to lie and rest on the dining-room sofa till it was time to take up her pigeons.

"Tell whoever it is that I'm engaged," she whispered, as the maid passed, on her way to the door.

"It's your cousin, miss, from the country, and she has a trunk with her. Of course she's to come in?" asked Maria, coming back in a moment.

"Oh, dear me! I forgot all about Patty. Mamma said any day this week, and this is the most inconvenient one of the seven. Of course, she must come in. Go and tell her I'll be there in a minute," answered Edith, too well bred not to give even an unwelcome guest a kindly greeting.

Whisking off cap and apron, and taking a last look at the birds, just beginning to send forth a savory steam, she went to meet her cousin.

Patty was a rosy, country lass of sixteen, plainly dressed and rather shy, but a sweet, sensible little body, with a fresh, rustic air which marked her for a field-flower at once.

"How do you do, dear? so sorry mamma is away; called to a sick friend in a hurry. But I'm here and glad to see you. I've an engagement at two, and you shall go with me. It's only a lunch close by, just a party of girls; I'll tell you about it upstairs."

Chatting away, Edith led Patty up to the pretty room ready for her, and soon both were laughing over a lively account of the exploits of the cooking-class. Suddenly, in the midst of the cream-pie which had been her great success, and nearly the death of all who partook thereof, Edith paused, sniffed the air like a hound, and crying tragically, "They are burning! They are burning!" rushed down stairs as if the house was on fire.

Much alarmed, Patty hurried after her, guided to the kitchen by the sound of lamentation. There she found Edith hanging over a stew-pan, with anguish in her face and despair in her voice, as she breathlessly explained the cause of her flight.

"My pigeons! Are they burnt? Do smell and tell me? After all my trouble I shall be heart-broken if they are spoilt."

Both pretty noses sniffed and sniffed again as the girls bent over the pan, regardless of the steam which was ruining their crimps and reddening their noses. Reluctantly, Patty owned that a slight flavor of scorch did pervade the air, but suggested that a touch more seasoning would conceal the sad fact.

"I'll try it. Did you ever do any? Do you love to cook? Don't you want to make something to carry? It would please the girls, and make up for my burnt mess," said Edith, as she skimmed the broth and added pepper and salt with a lavish hand: —

"I don't know anything about pigeons, except to feed and pet them. We don't eat ours. I can cook plain dishes, and make all kinds of bread. Would biscuit or tea-cake do?"

Patty looked so pleased at the idea of contributing to the feast, that Edith could not bear to tell her that hot biscuit and tea-cake were not just the thing for a city lunch. She accepted the offer, and Patty fell to work so neatly and skilfully that, by the time the pigeons were done, two pans full of delicious little biscuit were baked, and, folded in a nice napkin, lay ready to carry off in the porcelain plate with a wreath of roses painted on it.

In spite of all her flavoring, the burnt odor and taste still lingered round Edith's dish; but fondly hoping no one would perceive it, she dressed hastily, gave Patty a touch here and there, and set forth at the appointed time to Augusta's lunch.

Six girls belonged to this class, and the rule was for each to bring her contribution and set it on the table prepared to receive them all; then, when the number was complete, the covers were raised, the dishes examined, eaten (if possible), and pronounced upon, the prize being awarded to the best. The girl at whose house the lunch was given provided the prize, and they were often both pretty and valuable.

On this occasion a splendid bouquet of Jaqueminot roses in a lovely vase ornamented the middle of the table, and the eyes of all rested admiringly upon it, as the seven girls gathered round, after depositing their dishes.

Patty had been kindly welcomed, and soon forgot her shyness in wonder at the handsome dresses, graceful manners, and lively gossip of the girls. A pleasant, merry set, all wearing the uniform of the class, dainty white aprons and coquettish caps with many-colored ribbons, like stage maid-servants. At the sound of a silver bell, each took her place before the covered dish which bore her name, and when Augusta said, "Ladies, we will begin," off went napkins, silver covers, white paper, or whatever hid the contribution from longing eyes. A moment of deep silence, while quick glances took in the prospect, and then a unanimous explosion of laughter followed; for six platters of potted pigeons stood upon the board, with nothing but the flowers to break the ludicrous monotony of the scene.

How they laughed! for a time they could do nothing else, because if one tried to explain she broke down and joined in the gale of merriment again quite helplessly. One or two got hysterical and cried as well as laughed, and all made such a noise that Augusta’s mamma peeped in to see what was the matter. Six agitated hands pointed to the comical sight on the table, which looked as if a flight of potted pigeons had alighted there, and six breathless voices cried in a chorus: “Isn’t it funny? Don’t tell!”

Much amused, the good lady retired to enjoy the joke alone, while the exhausted girls wiped their eyes and began to talk, all at once. Such a clatter! but out of it all Patty evolved the fact that each meant to surprise the rest, — and they certainly had.

“I tried puff-paste,” said Augusta, fanning her hot face.

“So did I,” cried the others.

“And it was a dead failure.”

“So was mine,” echoed the voices.

“Then I thought I’d do the other dish we had that day — ”

“Just what I did.”

“Feeling sure you would all try the pastry, and perhaps get on better than I.”

“Exactly our case,” and a fresh laugh ended this general confession.

“Now we must eat our pigeons, as we have nothing else, and it is against the rule to add from outside stores. I propose that we each pass our dish round; then we can all criticise it, and so get some good out of this very funny lunch.”

Augusta’s plan was carried out; and all being hungry after their unusual exertions, the girls fell upon the unfortunate birds like so many famished creatures. The first one went very well, but when the dishes were passed again, each taster looked at it anxiously; for none were very good, there was nothing to fall back upon, and variety is the spice of life, as every one knows.

“Oh, for a slice of bread,” sighed one damsel.

“Why didn’t we think of it?” asked another.

“I did, but we always have so much cake I thought it was foolish to lay in rolls,” exclaimed Augusta, rather mortified at the neglect.

“I expected to have to taste six pies, and one doesn’t want bread with pastry, you know.”

As Edith spoke she suddenly remembered Patty’s biscuit, which had been left on the side-table by their modest maker, as there seemed to be no room for them.

Rejoicing now over the rather despised dish, Edith ran to get it, saying as she set it in the middle, with a flourish: —

“My cousin’s contribution. She came so late we only had time for that. So glad I took the liberty of bringing her and them.”

A murmur of welcome greeted the much-desired addition to the feast, which would have been a decided failure without it, and the pretty plate went briskly round, till nothing was left but the painted roses in it. With this help the best of the potted pigeons were eaten, while a lively discussion went on about what they would have next time.

“Let us each tell our dish, and not change. We shall never learn if we don’t keep to one thing till we do it well. I will choose mince-pie, and bring a good one, if it takes me all the week to do it,” said Edith, heroically taking the hardest thing she could think of, to encourage the others.

Fired by this noble example, each girl pledged herself to do or die, and a fine list of rich dishes was made out by these ambitious young cooks. Then a vote of thanks to Patty was passed, her biscuit unanimously pronounced the most successful contribution, and the vase presented to the delighted girl, whose blushes were nearly as deep as the color of the flowers behind which she tried to hide them.

Soon after this ceremony the party broke up, and Edith went home to tell the merry story, proudly adding that the country cousin had won the prize.

“You rash child, to undertake mince-pie. It is one of the hardest things to make, and about the most unwholesome when eaten. Read the receipt and see what you have pledged yourself to do, my dear,” said her mother, much amused at the haps and mishaps of the cooking-class.

Edith opened her book and started bravely off at “Puff-paste;” but by the time she had come to the end of the three pages devoted to directions for the making of that indigestible delicacy, her face was very sober, and when she read aloud the following receipt for the mince-meat, despair slowly settled upon her like a cloud.

One cup chopped meat; 1-1/2 cups raisins; 1-1/2 cups currants; 1-1/2 cups brown sugar; 1-1/3 cups molasses; 3 cups chopped apples; 1 cup meat liquor; 2 teaspoonfuls salt; 2 teaspoonfuls cinnamon; 1/2 teaspoonful mace; 1/2 teaspoonful powdered cloves; 1 lemon, grated; 1/4 piece citron, sliced; 1/2 cup brandy; 1/4 cup wine; 3 teaspoonfuls rosewater.

“Oh me, what a job! I shall have to work at it every day till next Saturday, for the paste alone will take all the wits I’ve got. I *was* rash, but I spoke without thinking, and wanted to do something really fine. We can’t be shown about things, so I must blunder along as well as I can,” groaned Edith.

“I can help about the measuring and weighing, and chopping. I always help mother at Thanksgiving time, and she makes splendid pies. We only have mince then, as she thinks it’s bad for us,” said Patty, full of sympathy and good will.

“What are you to take to the lunch?” asked Edith’s mother, smiling at her daughter’s mournful face, bent over the fatal book full of dainty messes, that tempted the unwary learner to her doom.

“Only coffee. I can’t make fancy things, but my coffee is always good. They said they wanted it, so I offered.”

“I will have my pills and powders ready, for if you all go on at this rate you will need a dose of some sort after your lunch. Give your orders, Edith, and devote your mind to the task. I wish you good luck and good digestion, my dears.”

With that the mamma left the girls to cheer one another, and lay plans for a daily lesson till the perfect pie was made.

They certainly did their best, for they began on Monday, and each morning through the week went to the mighty task with daily increasing courage and skill. They certainly needed the former, for even good-natured Nancy got tired of having “the young ladies messing round so much,” and looked cross as the girls appeared in the kitchen.

Edith’s brothers laughed at the various failures which appeared at table, and dear mamma was tired of tasting pastry and mince-meat in all stages of progression. But the undaunted damsels kept on till Saturday came, and a very superior pie stood ready to be offered for the inspection of the class.

“I never want to see another,” said Edith, as the girls dressed together, weary, but well satisfied with their labor; for the pie had been praised by all beholders, and the fragrance of Patty’s coffee filled the house, as it stood ready to be poured, hot and clear, into the best silver pot, at the last moment.

“Well, I feel as if I’d lived in a spice mill this week, or a pastry-cook’s kitchen; and I am glad we are done. Your brothers won’t get any pie for a long while I guess, if it depends on you,” laughed Patty, putting on the new ribbons her cousin had given her.

“When Florence’s brothers were here last night, I heard those rascals making all sorts of fun of us, and Alf said we ought to let them come to lunch. I scorned the idea, and made their mouths water telling about the good things we were going to have,” said Edith, exulting over the severe remarks she had made to these gluttonous young men, who adored pie, yet jeered at unfortunate cooks.

Florence, the lunch-giver of the week, had made her table pretty with a posy at each place, put the necessary roll in each artistically folded napkin, and hung the prize from the gas burner, — a large blue satin bag full of the most delicious bonbons money could buy. There was some delay about beginning, as one distracted cook sent word that her potato-puffs *wouldn’t* brown, and begged them to wait for her. So they adjourned to the parlor, and talked till the flushed, but triumphant Ella arrived with the puffs in fine order.

When all was ready, and the covers raised, another surprise awaited them; not a merry one, like the last, but a very serious affair, which produced domestic warfare in two houses at least. On each dish lay a card bearing a new name for these carefully prepared delicacies. The mince-pie was re-christened “Nightmare,” veal cutlets “Dyspepsia,” escalloped lobster “Fits,” lemon sherbet “Colic,” coffee “Palpitation,” and so on, even to the pretty sack of confectionery which was labelled “Toothache.”

Great was the indignation of the insulted cooks, and a general cry of “Who did it?” arose. The poor maid who waited on them declared with tears that not a soul had been in, and she herself only absent five minutes getting the ice-water. Florence felt that her guests had been outraged, and promised to find out the wretch, and punish him or her in the most terrible manner. So the irate young ladies ate their lunch before it cooled, but forgot to criticise the dishes, so full were they of wonder at this daring deed. They were just beginning to calm down, when a loud sneeze caused a general rush toward the sofa that stood in a recess of the dining room. A small boy, nearly suffocated with suppressed laughter, and dust, was dragged forth and put on trial without a moment’s delay. Florence was judge, the others jury, and the unhappy youth being penned in a corner, was ordered to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on penalty of a sound whipping with the big Japanese war-fan that hung on the wall over his head.

Vainly trying to suppress his giggles, Phil faced the seven ladies like a man, and told as little as possible, delighting to torment them, like a true boy.

“Do you know who put those cards there?”

“Don’t you wish *you* did?”

“Phil Gordon, answer at once.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Was it Alf? He’s at home Saturdays, and it’s just like a horrid Harvard Soph to plague us so.”

“It was — not.”

“Did you see it done?”

“I did.”

“Man, or woman? Mary fibs, and may have been bribed.”

“Man,” with a chuckle of great glee.

“Do I know him?”

“Oh, don’t you!”

“Edith’s brother Rex?”

“No, ma’am.”

“Do be a good boy, and tell us. We won’t scold, though it was a very, very rude thing to do.”

“What will you give me?”

“Do you need to be bribed to do your duty?”

“Well, I guess it’s no fun to hide in that stuffy place, and smell nice grub, and see you tuck away without offering a fellow a taste. Give me a good go at the lunch, and I’ll see what I can do for you.”

“Boys are such pigs! Shall we, girls?”

“Yes, we *must* know.”

“Then go and stuff, you bad boy, but we shall stand guard over you till you tell us who wrote and put those insulting cards here.”

Florence let out the prisoner, and stood by him while he ate, in a surprisingly short time, the best of everything on the table, well knowing that such a rare chance would not soon be his again.

“Now give me some of that candy, and I’ll tell,” demanded the young Shylock, bound to make the best of his power while it lasted.

“Did you ever see such a little torment? I can’t give the nice bonbons, because we haven’t decided who is to have them.”

“Never mind. Pick out a few and get rid of him,” cried the girls, hovering round their prey, and longing to shake the truth out of him.

A handful of sweeties were reluctantly bestowed, and then all waited for the name of the evil-doer with breathless interest.

“Well,” began Phil, with exasperating slowness, “Alf wrote the cards, and gave me half a dollar to put ‘em round. Made a nice thing of it, haven’t I?” and before one of the girls could catch him he had bolted from the room, with one hand full of candy, the other of mince-pie, and his face shining with the triumphant glee of a small boy who has teased seven big girls, and got the better of them.

What went on just after that is not recorded, though Phil peeped in at the windows, hooted through the slide, and beat a tattoo on the various doors. The opportune arrival of his mother sent him whooping down the street, and the distressed damsels finished their lunch with what appetite they could.

Edith got the prize, for her pie was pronounced a grand success, and partaken of so copiously that several young ladies had reason to think it well named “Nightmare” by the derisive Alfred. Emboldened by her success, Edith invited them all to her house on the next Saturday, and suggested that she and her cousin provide the lunch, as they had some new dishes to offer, not down in the receipt-book they had been studying all winter.

As the ardor of the young cooks was somewhat damped by various failures, and the discovery that good cooking is an art not easily learned, anything in the way of novelty was welcome; and the girls gladly accepted the invitation, feeling a sense of relief at the thought of not having any dish to worry about, though not one of them owned that she was tired of “messing,” as the disrespectful boys called it.

It was unanimously decided to wither with silent scorn the audacious Alfred and his ally, Rex, while Phil was to be snubbed by his sister till he had begged pardon for his share of the evil deed. Then, having sweetened their tongues and tempers with the delicious bonbons, the girls departed, feeling that the next lunch would be an event of unusual interest.

The idea of it originated in a dinner which Patty got one day, when Nancy, who wanted a holiday, was unexpectedly called away to the funeral of a cousin, — the fifth relative who had died in a year, such was the mortality in the jovial old creature’s family. Edith’s mother was very busy with a dressmaker, and gladly accepted the offer the girls made to get dinner alone.

“No fancy dishes, if you please; the boys come in as hungry as hunters, and want a good solid meal; so get something wholesome and plain, and plenty of it,” was the much-relieved lady’s only suggestion, as she retired to the sewing-room and left the girls to keep house in their own way.

“Now, Edie, you be the mistress and give your orders, and I’ll be cook. Only have things that go well together, — not all baked or all boiled, because there isn’t room enough on the range, you know;” said Patty, putting on a big apron with an air of great satisfaction; for she loved to cook, and was tired of doing nothing.

“I’ll watch all you do, and learn; so that the next time Nancy goes off in a hurry, I can take her place, and not have to give the boys what they hate, — a picked-up dinner,” answered Edith, pleased with her part, yet a little mortified to find how few plain things she could make well.

“What do the boys like?” asked Patty, longing to please them, for they all were very kind to her.

“Roast beef, and custard pudding, with two or three kinds of vegetables. Can we do all that?”

“Yes, indeed. I’ll make the pudding right away, and have it baked before the meat goes in. I can cook as many vegetables as you please, and soup too.”

So the order was given and all went well, if one might judge by the sounds of merriment in the kitchen. Patty made her best gingerbread, and cooked some apples with sugar and spice for tea, and at the stroke of two had a nice dinner smoking on the table, to the great contentment of the hungry boys, who did eat like hunters, and advised mamma to send old Nancy away and keep Patty for cook; which complimentary but rash proposal pleased their cousin very much.

“Now this is useful cookery, and well done, though it looks so simple. Any girl can learn how and be independent of servants, if need be. Drop your class, Edith, and take a few lessons of Patty. That would suit me better than French affairs, that are neither economical nor wholesome."

"I will, mamma, for I'm tired of creaming butter, larding things, and beating eggs. These dishes are not so elegant, but we must have them; so I may as well learn, if Pat will teach me."

"With pleasure, all I know. Mother thinks it a very important part of a girl's education; for if you can't keep servants you can do your own work well, and if you are rich you are not so dependent as an ignorant lady is. All kinds of useful sewing and housework come first with us, and the accomplishments afterward, as time and money allow."

"That sort of thing turns out the kind of girl I like, and so does every sensible fellow. Good luck to you, cousin, and my best thanks for a capital dinner and a wise little lecture for dessert."

Rex made his best bow as he left the table, and Patty colored high with pleasure at the praise of the tall collegian.

Out of this, and the talk the ladies had afterward, grew the lunch which Edith proposed, and to the preparation of which went much thought and care; for the girls meant to have many samples of country fare, so that various tastes might be pleased. The plan gradually grew as they worked, and a little surprise was added, which was a great success.

When Saturday came the younger boys were all packed off for a holiday in the country, that the coast might be clear.

"No hiding under sofas in my house, no meddling with my dinner, if you please, gentlemen," said Edith, as she saw the small brothers safely off, and fell to work with Patty and the maid to arrange the dining-room to suit the feast about to be spread there.

As antique furniture is the fashion now-a-days, it was easy to collect all the old tables, chairs, china, and ornaments in the house, and make a pleasant place of the sunny room where a tall clock always stood; and damask hangings a century old added much to the effect. A massive mahogany table was set forth with ancient silver, glass, china, and all sorts of queer old salt-cellars, pepper-pots, pickle-dishes, knives, and spoons. High-backed chairs stood round it, and the guests were received by a very pretty old lady in plum-colored satin, with a muslin pelerine, and a large lace cap most becoming to the rosy face it surrounded. A fat watch ticked in the wide belt, mitts covered the plump hands, and a reticule hung at the side. Madam's daughter, in a very short-waisted pink silk gown, muslin apron, and frill, was even prettier than her mother, for her dark, curly hair hung on her shoulders, and a little cap was stuck on the top, with long pink streamers. Her mitts went to the elbow, and a pink sash was tied in a large bow behind. Black satin shoes covered her feet, and a necklace of gold beads was round her throat.

Great was the pleasure this little surprise gave the girls, and gay was the chatter that went on as they were welcomed by the hostesses, who constantly forgot their parts. Madam frisked now and then, and "Pretty Peggy" was so anxious about dinner that she was not as devoted to her company as a well-bred young lady should be. But no one minded, and when the bell rang, all gathered about the table eager to see what the feast was to be.

"Ladies, we have endeavored to give you a taste of some of the good old dishes rather out of fashion now," said Madam, standing at her place, with a napkin pinned over the purple dress, and a twinkle in the blue eyes under the wide cap-frills. "We thought it would be well to introduce some of them to the class and to our family cooks, who either scorn the plain dishes, or don't know how to cook them *well*. There is a variety, and we hope all will find something to enjoy. Peggy, uncover, and let us begin."

At first the girls looked a little disappointed, for the dishes were not very new to them; but when they tasted a real "boiled dinner," and found how good it was; also baked beans, neither hard, greasy, nor burnt; beefsteak, tender, juicy, and well flavored; potatoes, mealy in spite of the season; Indian pudding, made as few modern cooks know how to do it; brown bread, with home-made butter; and pumpkin-pie that cut like wedges of vegetable gold, — they changed their minds, and began to eat with appetites that would have destroyed their reputations as delicate young ladies, if they had been seen. Tea in egg-shell cups, election-cake and cream-cheese with fruit ended the dinner; and as they sat admiring the tiny old spoons, the crisp cake, and the little cheeses like snow-balls, Edith said, in reply to various compliments paid her: —

"Let us give honor where honor is due. Patty suggested this, and did most of the cooking; so thank her, and borrow her receipt-book. It's very funny, ever so old, copied and tried by her grandmother, and full of directions for making quantities of nice things, from pie like this to a safe, sure wash for the complexion. May-dew, rose-leaves, and lavender, — doesn't that sound lovely?"

"Let me copy it," cried several girls afflicted with freckles, or sallow with too much coffee and confectionery.

"Yes, indeed. But I was going to say, as we have no prize to-day, we have prepared a little souvenir of our old-fashioned dinner for each of you. Bring them, daughter; I hope the ladies will pardon the homeliness of the offering, and make use of the hint that accompanies each."

As Edith spoke, with a comical mingling of the merry girl and the stately old lady she was trying to personate, Patty brought from the side-board, where it had stood covered up, a silver salver on which lay five dainty little loaves of bread; on the top of each appeared a receipt for making the same, nicely written on colored cards, and held in place by a silver scarf-pin.

“How cunning!” “What lovely pins!” “I’ll take the hint and learn to make good bread at once.” “It smells as sweet as a nut, and isn’t hard or heavy a bit.” “Such a pretty idea, and so clever of you to carry it out so well.”

These remarks went on as the little loaves went round, each girl finding her pin well suited to her pet fancy or foible; for all were different, and all very pretty, whether the design was a palette, a skate, a pen, a racquet, a fan, a feather, a bar of music, or a daisy.

Seeing that her dinner was a success in spite of its homeliness, Edith added the last surprise, which had also been one to Patty and herself when it arrived, just in time to be carried out. She forgot to be Madam now, and said with a face full of mingled merriment and satisfaction, as she pushed her cap askew and pulled off her mitts:

“Girls, the best joke of all is, that Rex and Alf sent the pins, and made Phil bring them with a most humble apology for their impertinence last week. A meeker boy I never saw, and for that we may thank Floy; but I think the dinner Pat and I got the other day won Rex’s heart, so that he made Alf eat humble pie in this agreeable manner. We won’t say anything about it, but all wear our pins and show the boys that we can forgive and forget as “sweet girls” should, though we do cook and have ideas of our own beyond looking pretty and minding our older brothers.”

“We will!” cried the chorus with one voice, and Florence added: —

“I also propose that when we have learned to make something beside ‘kickshaws,’ as the boys call our fancy dishes, we have a dinner like this, and invite those rascals to it; which will be heaping coals of fire on their heads, and stopping their mouths forevermore from making jokes about our cooking-class.”

The Hare and the Tortoise

Tramp, tramp, tramp! that was the boys going down stairs in a hurry.

Bump, bump! that was the bicycle being zigzagged through the hall.

Bang! that was the front door slamming behind both boys and bicycle, leaving the house quiet for a time, though the sound of voices outside suggested that a lively discussion was going on.

The bicycle fever had reached Perryville, and raged all summer. Now the town was very like a once tranquil pool infested with the long-legged water bugs that go skating over its surface in all directions; for wheels of every kind darted to and fro, startling horses, running over small children, and pitching their riders headlong in the liveliest manner. Men left their business to see the lads try new wheels, women grew skilful in the binding of wounds and the mending of sorely rent garments, gay girls begged for rides, standing on the little step behind, and boys clamored for bicycles that they might join the army of martyrs to the last craze.

Sidney West was the proud possessor of the best wheel in town, and displayed his treasure with immense satisfaction before the admiring eyes of his mates. He had learned to ride in a city rink, and flattered himself that he knew all there was to learn, except those feats which only professional gymnasts acquire. He mounted with skilful agility, rode with as much grace as the tread-mill movements of the legs permit, and managed to guide his tall steed without much danger to himself or others. The occasional headers he took, and the bruises which kept his manly limbs in a chronic state of mourning he did not mention; but concealed his stiffness heroically, and bound his younger brother to eternal silence by the bribe of occasional rides on the old wheel.

Hugh was a loyal lad, and regarded his big brother as the most remarkable fellow in the world; so he forgave Sid's domineering ways, was a willing slave, a devoted admirer, and a faithful imitator of all the masculine virtues, airs, and graces of this elder brother. On one point only did they disagree, and that was Sid's refusal to give Hugh the old wheel when the new one came. Hugh had fondly hoped it would be his, hints to that effect having been dropped when Sid wanted an errand done, and for weeks the younger boy had waited and labored patiently, sure that his reward would be the small bicycle on which he could proudly take his place as a member of the newly formed club; with them to set forth, in the blue uniform, with horns blowing, badges glittering, and legs flying, for a long spin, — to return after dark, a mysterious line of tall shadows, “with lanterns dimly burning,” and warning whistles sounding as they went.

Great, therefore, was his disappointment and wrath when he discovered that Sid had agreed to sell the wheel to another fellow, if it suited him, leaving poor Hugh the only boy of his set without a machine. Much as he loved Sid, he could not forgive this underhand and mercenary transaction. It seemed so unbrotherly to requite such long and willing service, to dash such ardent hopes, to betray such blind confidence, for filthy lucre; and when the deed was done, to laugh, and ride gayly away on the splendid British Challenge, the desire of all hearts and eyes.

This morning Hugh had freely vented his outraged feelings, and Sid had tried to make light of the affair, though quite conscious that he had been both unkind and unfair. A bicycle tournament was to take place in the city, twenty miles away, and the members of the club were going. Sid, wishing to distinguish himself, intended to ride thither, and was preparing for the long trip with great care. Hugh was wild to go, but having spent his pocket-money and been forbidden to borrow, he could not take the cars as the others had done; no horse was to be had, and their own stud consisted of an old donkey, who would have been hopeless even with the inducement offered in the immortal ditty, —

“If I had a donkey what wouldn’t go, Do you think I’d whip him? Oh, no, no! I’d take him to Jarley’s Wax-work Show.”

Therefore poor Hugh was in a desperate state of mind as he sat on the gate-post watching Sid make his pet’s toilet, till every plated handle, rod, screw, and axle shone like silver.

“I know I could have ridden the Star if you hadn’t let Joe have it. I do think it was right down mean of you; so does Aunt Ruth, and father too, — only he wont say so, because men always stand by one another, and snub boys.”

This was strong language for gentle Hugh, but he felt that he must vent his anguish in some way or cry like a girl; and that disgrace must be avoided, even if he failed in respect to his elders.

Sid was whistling softly as he oiled and rubbed, but he was not feeling as easy as he looked, and heartily wished that he had not committed himself to Joe, for it would have been pleasant to take “the little chap,” as he called the fourteen-year-older, along with him, and do the honors of the rink on this great occasion. Now it was too late; so he affected a careless air, and added insult to injury by answering his brother’s reproaches in the joking spirit which is peculiarly exasperating at such moments.

“Children shouldn’t play with matches, nor small boys with bicycles. I don’t want to commit murder, and I certainly should if I let you try to ride twenty miles when you can’t go one without nearly breaking your neck, or your knees,” and Sid glanced with a smile at the neat darns which ornamented his brother’s trousers over those portions of his long legs.

“How’s a fellow going to learn if he isn’t allowed to try? Might as well tell me to keep away from the water till I can swim. You give me a chance and see if I can’t ride as well as some older fellows who have been pitched round pretty lively before *they* dared to try a twenty-mile spin,” answered Hugh, clapping both hands on his knees to hide the tell-tale darns.

“If Joe doesn’t want it, you can use the old wheel till I decide what to do with it. I suppose a man has a right to sell his own property if he likes,” said Sid, rather nettled at the allusion to his own tribulations in times past.

“Of course he has; but if he’s promised to give a thing he ought to do it, and not sneak out of the bargain after he’s got lots of work done to pay for it. That’s what makes me mad; for I believed you and depended on it, and it hurts me more to have you deceive me than it would to lose ten bicycles;” and Hugh choked a little at the thought, in spite of his attempt to look sternly indignant.

“You are welcome to your opinion, but I wouldn’t cry about it. Play with chaps of your own size and don’t hanker after men’s property. Take the cars, if you want to go so much, and stop bothering me,” retorted Sid, getting cross because he was in the wrong and wouldn’t own it.

“You know I can’t! No money, and mustn’t borrow. What’s the use of twitting a fellow like that?” and Hugh with great difficulty refrained from knocking off the new helmet-hat which was close to his foot as Sid bent to inspect the shining hub of the cherished wheel.

“Take Sancho, then; you might arrive before the fun was all over, if you carried whips and pins and crackers enough to keep the old boy going; you’d be a nice span.”

This allusion to the useless donkey was cruel, but Hugh held on to the last remnant of his temper, and made a wild proposal in the despair of the moment.

“Don’t be a donkey yourself. See here, why can’t we ride and tie? I’ve tried this wheel, and got on tip-top. You’d be along to see to me, and we’d take turns. Do, Sid! I want to go awfully, and if you only will I won’t say another word about Joe.”

But Sid only burst out laughing at the plan, in the most heartless manner.

“No, thank you. I don’t mean to walk a step when I can ride; or lend my new wheel to a chap who can hardly keep right side up on the old one. It looks like a jolly plan to you, I dare say, but *I* don’t see it, young man.”

“I hope *I* sha’n’t be a selfish brute when I’m seventeen. I’ll have a bicycle yet, — A, No. 1, — and then you’ll see how I’ll lend it, like a gentleman, and not insult other fellows because they happen to be two or three years younger."

"Keep cool, my son, and don't call names. If you are such a smart lad, why don't you walk, since wheels and horses and donkey fail. It's *only* twenty miles, — nothing to speak of, you know."

"Well, I could do it if I liked. I've walked eighteen, and wasn't half so tired as you were. Any one can get over the ground on a bicycle, but it takes strength and courage to keep it up on foot."

"Better try it."

"I will, some day."

"Don't crow too loud, my little rooster; you are not cock of the walk yet."

"If I was, I wouldn't hit a fellow when he's down;" and fearing he should kick over the tall bicycle that stood so temptingly near him, Hugh walked away, trying to whistle, though his lips were more inclined to tremble than to pucker.

"Just bring my lunch, will you? Auntie is putting it up; I must be off," called Sid, so used to giving orders that he did so even at this unpropitious moment.

"Get it yourself. I'm not going to slave for you any longer, old tyrant," growled Hugh; for the trodden worm turned at last, as worms will.

This was open revolt, and Sid felt that things were in a bad way, but would not stop to mend them then.

"Whew! here's a tempest in a teapot. Well, it is too bad; but I can't help it now. I'll make it all right to-morrow, and bring him round with a nice account of the fun. Hullo, Bemis! going to town?" he called, as a neighbor came spinning noiselessly by.

"Part way, and take the cars at Lawton. It's hard riding over the hills, and a bother to steer a wheel through the streets. Come on, if you're ready."

"All right;" and springing up, Sid was off, forgetting all about the lunch.

Hugh, dodging behind the lilac-bushes, heard what passed, and the moment they were gone ran to the gate to watch them out of sight with longing eyes, then turned away, listlessly wondering how he should spend the holiday his brother was going to enjoy so much.

At that moment Aunt Ruth hurried to the door, waving the leathern pouch well stored with cake and sandwiches, cold coffee and pie.

"Sid's forgotten his bag. Run, call, stop him!" she cried, trotting down the walk with her cap-strings waving wildly in the fresh October wind.

For an instant Hugh hesitated, thinking sullenly, "Serves him right. I won't run after him;" then his kind heart got the better of his bad humor, and catching up the bag he raced down the road at his best pace, eager to heap coals of fire on Sid's proud head, — to say nothing of his own desire to see more of the riders.

"They will have to go slowly up the long hill, and I'll catch them then," he thought as he tore over the ground, for he was a good runner and prided himself on his strong legs.

Unfortunately for his amiable intentions, the boys had taken a short cut to avoid the hill, and were out of sight down a lane where Hugh never dreamed they would dare to go, so mounted.

“Well, they have done well to get over the hill at this rate. Guess they won’t keep it up long,” panted Hugh, stopping short when he saw no signs of the riders.

The road stretched invitingly before him, the race had restored his spirits, and curiosity to see what had become of his friends lured him to the hill-top, where temptation sat waiting for him. Up he trudged, finding the fresh air, the sunny sky, the path strewn with red and yellow leaves, and the sense of freedom so pleasant that when he reached the highest point and saw the world all before him, as it were, a daring project seemed to flash upon him, nearly taking his breath away with its manifold delights.

“Sid said, ‘Walk,’ and why not? — at least to Lawton, and take the cars from there, as Bemis means to do. Wouldn’t the old fellows be surprised to see me turn up at the rink? It’s quarter past eight now, and the fun begins at three; I could get there easy enough, and by Jupiter, I will! Got lunch all here, and money enough to pay this car-fare, I guess. If I haven’t, I’ll go a little further and take a horse-car. What a lark! here goes,” — and with a whoop of boyish delight at breaking bounds, away went Hugh down the long hill, like a colt escaped from its pasture.

The others were just ahead, but the windings of the road hid them from him; so all went on, unconscious of each other’s proximity. Hugh’s run gave him a good start, and he got over the ground famously for five or six miles; then he went more slowly, thinking he had plenty of time to catch a certain train. But he had no watch, and when he reached Lawton he had the pleasure of seeing the cars go out at one end of the station as he hurried in at the other.

“I won’t give it up, but just go on and do it afoot. That will be something to brag of when the other chaps tell big stories. I’ll see how fast I can go, for I’m not tired, and can eat on the way. Much obliged to Sid for a nice lunch.”

And chuckling over this piece of good luck, Hugh set out again, only pausing for a good drink at the town-pump. The thirteen miles did not seem very long when he thought of them, but as he walked them they appeared to grow longer and longer, till he felt as if he must have travelled about fifty. He was in good practice, and fortunately had on easy shoes; but he was in such a hurry to make good time that he allowed himself no rest, and jogged on, up hill and down, with the resolute air of one walking for a wager. There we will leave him, and see what had befallen Sid; for his adventures were more exciting than Hugh's, though all seemed plain sailing when he started.

At Lawton he had parted from his friend and gone on alone, having laid in a store of gingerbread from a baker's cart, and paused to eat, drink, and rest by a wayside brook. A few miles further he passed a party of girls playing lawn tennis, and as he slowly rolled along regarding them from his lofty perch, one suddenly exclaimed: —

"Why, it's our neighbor, Sidney West! How did *he* come here?" and waving her racquet, Alice ran across the lawn to find out.

Very willing to stop and display his new uniform, which was extremely becoming, Sid dismounted, doffed his helmet, and smiled upon the damsels, leaning over the hedge like a knight of old.

"Come in and play a game, and have some lunch. You will have plenty of time, and some of us are going to the rink by and by. Do, we want a boy to help us, for Maurice is too lazy, and Jack has hurt his hand with that stupid base ball," said Alice, beckoning persuasively, while the other girls nodded and smiled hopefully.

Thus allured, the youthful Ulysses hearkened to the voice of the little Circe in a round hat, and entered the enchanted grove, to forget the passage of time as he disported himself among the nymphs. He was not changed to a beast, as in the immortal story, though the three young gentlemen did lie about the lawn in somewhat grovelling attitudes; and Alice waved her racquet as if it were a wand, while her friends handed glasses of lemonade to the recumbent heroes during pauses in the game.

While thus blissfully engaged, time slipped away, and Hugh passed him in the race, quite unconscious that his brother was reposing in the tent that looked so inviting as the dusty, tired boy plodded by, counting every mile-stone with increasing satisfaction.

"If I get to Uncle Tim's by one o'clock, I shall have done very well. Four miles an hour is a fair pace, and only one stop. I'll telegraph to auntie as soon as I arrive; but she won't worry, she's used to having us turn up all right when we get ready," thought Hugh, grateful that no over-anxious mamma was fretting about his long absence. The boys had no mother, and Aunt Ruth was an easy old lady who let them do as they liked, to their great contentment.

As he neared his journey's end our traveller's spirits rose, and the blisters on his heels were forgotten in the dramatic scene his fancy painted, when Sid should discover him at Uncle Tim's, or calmly seated at the rink. Whistling gayly, he was passing through a wooded bit of road when the sound of voices made him look back to see a carriage full of girls approaching, escorted by a bicycle rider, whose long blue legs looked strangely familiar.

Anxious to keep his secret till the last moment, also conscious that he was not in company trim, Hugh dived into the wood, out of sight, while the gay party went by, returning to the road as soon as they were hidden by a bend.

"If Sid hadn't been so mean, I should have been with him, and had some of the fun. I don't feel like forgiving him in a hurry for making me foot it, like a tramp, while he is having such a splendid time."

If Hugh could have known what was to happen very soon after he had muttered these words to himself, as he wiped his hot face, and took the last sip of the coffee to quench his thirst, he would have been sorry he uttered them, and have forgiven his brother everything.

While he was slowly toiling up the last long hill, Sid was coasting down on the other side, eager to display his courage and skill before the girls, — being of an age when boys begin to wish to please and astonish the gentler creatures whom they have hitherto treated with indifference or contempt. It was a foolish thing to do, for the road was rough, with steep banks on either side, and a sharp turn at the end; but Sid rolled gayly along, with an occasional bump, till a snake ran across the road, making the horse shy, the girls scream, the rider turn to see what was the matter, and in doing so lose his balance just when a large stone needed to be avoided. Over went Sid, down rattled the wheel, up rose a cloud of dust, and sudden silence fell upon the girls at sight of this disaster. They expected their gallant escort would spring up and laugh over his accident; but when he remained flat upon his back, where he had alighted after a somersault, with the bicycle spread over him like a pall, they were alarmed, and flew to the rescue.

A cut on the forehead was bleeding, and the blow had evidently stunned him for a moment. Luckily, a house was near, and a man seeing the accident hastened to offer more efficient help than any the girls had wit enough to give in the first flurry, as all four only flapped wildly at Sid with their handkerchiefs, and exclaimed excitedly, —

"What shall we do? Is he dead? Run for water. Call somebody, quick."

"Don't be scat, gals; it takes a sight of thumpin' to break a boy's head. He ain't hurt much; kinder dazed for a minute. I'll hist up this pesky mashine and set him on his legs, if he hain't damaged 'em."

With these cheering words, the farmer cleared away the ruins, and propped the fallen rider against a tree; which treatment had such a good effect that Sid was himself in a moment, and much disgusted to find what a scrape he was in.

"This is nothing, a mere bump; quite right, thanks. Let us go on at once; so sorry to alarm you, ladies." He began his polite speech bravely, but ended with a feeble smile and a clutch at the tree, suddenly turning sick and dizzy again.

"You come along a me. I'll tinker you and your whirligig up, young man. No use sayin' go ahead, for the thing is broke, and you want to keep quiet for a spell. Drive along, gals, I'll see to him; and my old woman can nuss him better 'n a dozen flutterin' young things scat half to death."

Taking matters into his own hands, the farmer had boy and bicycle under his roof in five minutes; and with vain offers of help, many regrets, and promises to let his Uncle Tim know where he was, in case he did not arrive, the girls reluctantly drove away, leaving no sign of the catastrophe except the trampled road, and a dead snake.

Peace was hardly restored when Hugh came down the hill, little dreaming what had happened, and for the second time passed his brother, who just then was lying on a sofa in the farm-house, while a kind old woman adorned his brow with a large black plaster, suggesting brown paper steeped in vinegar, for the various bruises on his arms and legs.

"Some one killed the snake and made a great fuss about it, I should say," thought Hugh, observing the signs of disorder in the dust; but, resisting a boy's interest in such affairs, he stoutly tramped on, sniffing the whiffs of sea air that now and then saluted his nose, telling him that he was nearing his much-desired goal.

Presently the spires of the city came in sight, to his great satisfaction, and only the long bridge and a street or two lay between him and Uncle Tim's easy chair, into which he soon hoped to cast himself.

Half-way across the bridge a farm-wagon passed, with a bicycle laid carefully on the barrels of vegetables going to market. Hugh gazed affectionately at it, longing to borrow it for one brief, delicious spin to the bridge end. Had he known that it was Sid's broken wheel, going to be repaired without loss of time, thanks to the good farmer's trip to town, he would have paused to have a hearty laugh, in spite of his vow not to stop till his journey was over.

Just as Hugh turned into the side street where Uncle Tim lived, a horse-car went by, in one corner of which sat a pale youth, with a battered hat drawn low over his eyes, who handed out his ticket with the left hand, and frowned when the car jolted, as if the jar hurt him. Had he looked out of the window, he would have seen a very dusty boy, with a pouch over his shoulder, walking smartly down the street where his relation lived. But Sid carefully turned his head aside, fearing to be recognized; for he was on his way to a certain club to which Bemis belonged, preferring his sympathy and hospitality to the humiliation of having his mishap told at home by Uncle Tim, who would be sure to take Hugh's part, and exult over the downfall of the proud. Well for him that he avoided that comfortable mansion; for on the door-steps stood Hugh, beaming with satisfaction as the clock struck one, proclaiming that he had done his twenty miles in a little less than five hours.

"Not bad for a 'little chap,' even though he is 'a donkey,'" chuckled the boy, dusting his shoes, wiping his red face, and touching himself up as well as he could, in order to present as fresh and unwearied an aspect as possible, when he burst upon his astonished brother's sight.

In he marched when the door opened, to find his uncle and two rosy cousins just sitting down to dinner. Always glad to see the lads, they gave him a cordial welcome, and asked for his brother.

"Hasn't he come yet?" cried Hugh, surprised, yet glad to be the first on the field.

Nothing had been seen of him, and Hugh at once told his tale, to the great delight of his jolly uncle, and the admiring wonder of Meg and May, the rosy young cousins. They all enjoyed the exploit immensely, and at once insisted that the pedestrian should be refreshed by a bath, a copious meal, and a good rest in the big chair, where he repeated his story by particular request.

"You deserve a bicycle, and you shall have one, as sure as my name is Timothy West. I like pluck and perseverance, and you've got both; so come on, my boy, and name the wheel you like best. Sid needs a little taking down, as you lads say, and this will give it to him, I fancy. I'm a younger brother myself, and I know what their trials are."

As his uncle made these agreeable remarks, Hugh looked as if *his* trials were all over; for his face shone with soap and satisfaction, his hunger was quenched by a splendid dinner, his tired feet luxuriated in a pair of vast slippers, and the blissful certainty of owning a first-class bicycle filled his cup to overflowing. Words could hardly express his gratitude, and nothing but the hope of meeting Sid with this glorious news would have torn him from the reposeful Paradise where he longed to linger. Pluck and perseverance, with cold cream on the blistered heels, got him into his shoes again, and he rode away in a horse-car, as in a triumphal chariot, to find his brother.

"I won't brag, but I do feel immensely tickled at this day's work. Wonder how he got on. Did it in two or three hours, I suppose, and is parading round with those swell club fellows at the rink. I'll slip in and let him find me, as if I wasn't a bit proud of what I've done, and didn't care two pins for anybody's praise."

With this plan in his head, Hugh enjoyed the afternoon very much; keeping a sharp lookout for Sid, even while astonishing feats were being performed before his admiring eyes. But nowhere did he see his brother; for he was searching for a blue uniform and a helmet with a certain badge on it, while Sid in a borrowed hat and coat sat in a corner looking on, whenever a splitting headache and the pain in his bones allowed him to see and enjoy the exploits in which he had hoped to join.

Not until it was over did the brothers meet, as they went out, and then the expression on Sid’s face was so comical that Hugh laughed till the crowd about them stared, wondering what the joke could be.

“How in the world did *you* get here?” asked the elder boy, giving his hat a sudden pull to hide the plaster.

“Walked, as you advised me to.”

Words cannot express the pleasure that answer gave Hugh, or the exultation he vainly tried to repress, as his eyes twinkled and a grin of real boyish fun shone upon his sunburnt countenance.

“You expect me to believe that, do you?”

“Just as you please. I started to catch you with your bag, and when I missed you, thought I might as well keep on. Got in about one, had dinner at uncle’s, and been enjoying these high jinks ever since.”

“Very well, for a beginning. Keep it up and you’ll be a Rowell by and by. What do you suppose father will say to you, small boy?”

“Not much. Uncle will make that all right. *He* thought it was a plucky thing to do, and so did the girls. When did you get in?” asked Hugh, rather nettled at Sid’s want of enthusiasm, though it was evident he was much impressed by the “small boy’s” prank.

“I took it easy after Bemis left me. Had a game of tennis at the Blanchards’ as I came along, dinner at the club, and strolled up here with the fellows. Got a headache, and don’t feel up to much.”

As Sid spoke and Hugh’s keen eye took in the various signs of distress which betrayed a hint of the truth, the grin changed to a hearty “Ha! ha!” as he smote his knees exclaiming gleefully, “You’ve come to grief! I know it, I see it. Own up, and don’t shirk, for I’ll find it out somehow, as sure as you live.”

“Don’t make such a row in the street. Get aboard this car and I’ll tell you, for you’ll give me no peace till I do,” answered Sid, well knowing that Alice would never keep the secret.

To say that it was “nuts” to Hugh faintly expresses the interest he took in the story which was extracted bit by bit from the reluctant sufferer; but after a very pardonable crow over the mishaps of his oppressor, he yielded to the sympathy he felt for his brother, and was very good to him.

This touched Sid, and filled him with remorse for past unkindness; for one sees one’s faults very plainly, and is not ashamed to own it, when one is walking through the Valley of Humiliation.

“Look here, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” he said, as they left the car, and Hugh offered an arm, with a friendly air pleasant to see. “I’ll give you the old wheel, and let Joe get another where he can. It’s small for him, and I doubt if he wants it, any way. I do think you were a plucky fellow to tramp your twenty miles in good time, and not bear malice either, so let’s say ‘Done,’ and forgive and forget.”

“Much obliged, but uncle is going to give me a new one; so Joe needn’t be disappointed. I know how hard that is, and am glad to keep him from it, for he’s poor and can’t afford a new one.”

That answer was Hugh’s only revenge for his own trials, and Sid felt it, though he merely said, with a hearty slap on the shoulder, —

“Glad to hear it. Uncle is a trump, and so are you. We’ll take the last train home, and I’ll pay your fare.”

“Thank you. Poor old man, you did get a bump, didn’t you?” exclaimed Hugh, as they took off their hats in the hall, and the patch appeared in all its gloomy length and breadth.

“Head will be all right in a day or two, but I stove in my helmet, and ground a hole in both knees of my new shorts. Had to borrow a fit-out of Bemis, and leave my rags behind. We needn’t mention any more than is necessary to the girls; I hate to be fussed over,” answered Sid, trying to speak carelessly.

Hugh had to stop and have another laugh, remembering the taunts his own mishaps had called forth; but he did not retaliate, and Sid never forgot it. Their stay was a short one, and Hugh was the hero of the hour, quite eclipsing his brother, who usually took the first place, but now very meekly played second fiddle, conscious that he was not an imposing figure, in a coat much too big for him, with a patch on his forehead, a purple bruise on one cheek, and a general air of dilapidation very trying to the usually spruce youth.

When they left, Uncle Tim patted Hugh on the head, — a liberty the boy would have resented if the delightful old gentleman had not followed it up by saying, with a reckless generosity worthy of record, —

“Choose your bicycle, my boy, and send the bill to me.” Then turning to Sid he added, in a tone that made the pale face redden suddenly, “And do you remember that the tortoise beat the hare in the old fable we all know.”

“That is the last of the stories, for our holiday is over, and to-morrow we must go home. We have had a splendid time, and thank you and auntie so much, dear grandma,” said Min, expressing the feeling of all the children, as they stood about the fire when the bicycle tale ended.

"I'm so glad, my darlings, and please God we'll all meet here again next year, well and happy and ready for more fun," answered the old lady, with arms and lap full of loving little people.

"Auntie deserves a vote of thanks, and I rise to propose it," said Geoff; and it was passed with great applause.

"Many thanks. If the odds and ends in my portfolio have given you pleasure or done you any good, my fondest wishes are gratified," answered Aunt Elinor, laughing, yet well pleased. "I tucked a moral in, as we hide pills in jelly, and I hope you didn't find them hard to swallow."

"Very easy and nice. I intend to look after little things faithfully, and tell the girls how to make their jerseys fit," said Min.

"I'm going to fill my jewel-box as Daisy did, and learn to cook," added Lotty.

"Eli is the boy for me, and I won't forget to be kind to *my* small chap," said Walt, stroking his younger brother's head with unusual kindness.

"Well, I'm rather mixed in my heroes, but I'll take the best of Corny, Onawandah, and the banner fellow for my share," cried Geoff.

The little people proclaimed their favorites; but as all spoke together, only a comical mixture of doves, bears, babies, table-cloths and blue hose reached the ear. Then came the good-night kisses, the patter of departing feet, and silence fell upon the room. The little wheel was still, the chairs stood empty, the old portraits looked sadly down, the fire died out, and the Spinning-Wheel Stories were done.

LULU’S LIBRARY SERIES 1

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A CHRISTMAS DREAM, AND HOW IT CAME TRUE.

"I'm so tired of Christmas I wish there never would be another one!" exclaimed a discontented-looking little girl, as she sat idly watching her mother arrange a pile of gifts two days before they were to be given.

"Why, Effie, what a dreadful thing to say! You are as bad as old Scrooge; and I'm afraid something will happen to you, as it did to him, if you don't care for dear Christmas," answered mamma, almost dropping the silver horn she was filling with delicious candies.

"Who was Scrooge? What happened to him?" asked Effie, with a glimmer of interest in her listless face, as she picked out the sourest lemon-drop she could find; for nothing sweet suited her just then.

"He was one of Dickens's best people, and you can read the charming story some day. He hated Christmas until a strange dream showed him how dear and beautiful it was, and made a better man of him."

"I shall read it; for I like dreams, and have a great many curious ones myself. But they don't keep me from being tired of Christmas," said Effie, poking discontentedly among the sweeties for something worth eating.

"Why are you tired of what should be the happiest time of all the year?" asked mamma, anxiously.

"Perhaps I shouldn't be if I had something new. But it is always the same, and there isn't any more surprise about it. I always find heaps of goodies in my stocking. Don't like some of them, and soon get tired of those I do like. We always have a great dinner, and I eat too much, and feel ill next day. Then there is a Christmas tree somewhere, with a doll on top, or a stupid old Santa Claus, and children dancing and screaming over bonbons and toys that break, and shiny things that are of no use. Really, mamma, I've had so many Christmases all alike that I don't think I *can* bear another one." And Effie laid herself flat on the sofa, as if the mere idea was too much for her.

Her mother laughed at her despair, but was sorry to see her little girl so discontented, when she had everything to make her happy, and had known but ten Christmas days.

"Suppose we don't give you *any* presents at all, — how would that suit you?" asked mamma, anxious to please her spoiled child.

"I should like one large and splendid one, and one dear little one, to remember some very nice person by," said Effie, who was a fanciful little body, full of odd whims and notions, which her friends loved to gratify, regardless of time, trouble, or money; for she was the last of three little girls, and very dear to all the family.

"Well, my darling, I will see what I can do to please you, and not say a word until all is ready. If I could only get a new idea to start with!" And mamma went on tying up her pretty bundles with a thoughtful face, while Effie strolled to the window to watch the rain that kept her in-doors and made her dismal.

"Seems to me poor children have better times than rich ones. I can't go out, and there is a girl about my age splashing along, without any maid to fuss about rubbers and cloaks and umbrellas and colds. I wish I was a beggar-girl."

"Would you like to be hungry, cold, and ragged, to beg all day, and sleep on an ash-heap at night?" asked mamma, wondering what would come next.

"Cinderella did, and had a nice time in the end. This girl out here has a basket of scraps on her arm, and a big old shawl all round her, and doesn't seem to care a bit, though the water runs out of the toes of her boots. She goes paddling along, laughing at the rain, and eating a cold potato as if it tasted nicer than the chicken and ice-cream I had for dinner. Yes, I do think poor children are happier than rich ones."

"So do I, sometimes. At the Orphan Asylum today I saw two dozen merry little souls who have no parents, no home, and no hope of Christmas beyond a stick of candy or a cake. I wish you had been there to see how happy they were, playing with the old toys some richer children had sent them."

"You may give them all mine; I'm so tired of them I never want to see them again," said Effie, turning from the window to the pretty baby-house full of everything a child's heart could desire.

"I will, and let you begin again with something you will not tire of, if I can only find it." And mamma knit her brows trying to discover some grand surprise for this child who didn't care for Christmas.

Nothing more was said then; and wandering off to the library, Effie found "A Christmas Carol," and curling herself up in the sofa corner, read it all before tea. Some of it she did not understand; but she laughed and cried over many parts of the charming story, and felt better without knowing why.

All the evening she thought of poor Tiny Tim, Mrs. Cratchit with the pudding, and the stout old gentleman who danced so gayly that "his legs twinkled in the air." Presently bedtime arrived.

"Come, now, and toast your feet," said Effie's nurse, "while I do your pretty hair and tell stories."

"I'll have a fairy tale to-night, a very interesting one," commanded Effie, as she put on her blue silk wrapper and little fur-lined slippers to sit before the fire and have her long curls brushed.

So Nursey told her best tales; and when at last the child lay down under her lace curtains, her head was full of a curious jumble of Christmas elves, poor children, snow-storms, sugarplums, and surprises. So it is no wonder that she dreamed all night; and this was the dream, which she never quite forgot.

She found herself sitting on a stone, in the middle of a great field, all alone. The snow was falling fast, a bitter wind whistled by, and night was coming on. She felt hungry, cold, and tired, and did not know where to go nor what to do.

"I wanted to be a beggar-girl, and now I am one; but I don't like it, and wish somebody would come and take care of me. I don't know who I am, and I think I must be lost," thought Effie, with the curious interest one takes in one's self in dreams.

But the more she thought about it, the more bewildered she felt. Faster fell the snow, colder blew the wind, darker grew the night; and poor Effie made up her mind that she was quite forgotten and left to freeze alone. The tears were chilled on her cheeks, her feet felt like icicles, and her heart died within her, so hungry, frightened, and forlorn was she. Laying her head on her knees, she gave herself up for lost, and sat there with the great flakes fast turning her to a little white mound, when suddenly the sound of music reached her, and starting up, she looked and listened with all her eyes and ears.

Far away a dim light shone, and a voice was heard singing. She tried to run toward the welcome glimmer, but could not stir, and stood like a small statue of expectation while the light drew nearer, and the sweet words of the song grew clearer.

  From our happy home
  Through the world we roam
One week in all the year,
  Making winter spring
  With the joy we bring,
For Christmas-tide is here.

  Now the eastern star
  Shines from afar
To light the poorest home;
  Hearts warmer grow,
  Gifts freely flow,
For Christmas-tide has come.

Now gay trees rise
Before young eyes,
Abloom with tempting cheer;
Blithe voices sing,
And blithe bells ring,
For Christmas-tide is here.

Oh, happy chime,
Oh, blessed time,
That draws us all so near!
”Welcome, dear day,”
All creatures say,
For Christmas-tide is here.

A child’s voice sang, a child’s hand carried the little candle; and in the circle of soft light it shed, Effie saw a pretty child coming to her through the night and snow. A rosy, smiling creature, wrapped in white fur, with a wreath of green and scarlet holly on its shining hair, the magic candle in one hand, and the other outstretched as if to shower gifts and warmly press all other hands.

Effie forgot to speak as this bright vision came nearer, leaving no trace of footsteps in the snow, only lighting the way with its little candle, and filling the air with the music of its song.

“Dear child, you are lost, and I have come to find you,” said the stranger, taking Effie’s cold hands in his, with a smile like sunshine, while every holly berry glowed like a little fire.

“Do you know me?” asked Effie, feeling no fear, but a great gladness, at his coming.

“I know all children, and go to find them; for this is my holiday, and I gather them from all parts of the world to be merry with me once a year.”

“Are you an angel?” asked Effie, looking for the wings.

“No; I am a Christmas spirit, and live with my mates in a pleasant place, getting ready for our holiday, when we are let out to roam about the world, helping make this a happy time for all who will let us in. Will you come and see how we work?”

“I will go anywhere with you. Don’t leave me again,” cried Effie, gladly.

“First I will make you comfortable. That is what we love to do. You are cold, and you shall be warm, hungry, and I will feed you; sorrowful, and I will make you gay.”

With a wave of his candle all three miracles were wrought, — for the snow-flakes turned to a white fur cloak and hood on Effie’s head and shoulders, a bowl of hot soup came sailing to her lips, and vanished when she had eagerly drunk the last drop; and suddenly the dismal field changed to a new world so full of wonders that all her troubles were forgotten in a minute.

Bells were ringing so merrily that it was hard to keep from dancing. Green garlands hung on the walls, and every tree was a Christmas tree full of toys, and blazing with candles that never went out.

In one place many little spirits sewed like mad on warm clothes, turning off work faster than any sewing-machine ever invented, and great piles were made ready to be sent to poor people. Other busy creatures packed money into purses, and wrote checks which they sent flying away on the wind, — a lovely kind of snow-storm to fall into a world below full of poverty.

Older and graver spirits were looking over piles of little books, in which the records of the past year were kept, telling how different people had spent it, and what sort of gifts they deserved. Some got peace, some disappointment, some remorse and sorrow, some great joy and hope. The rich had generous thoughts sent them; the poor, gratitude and contentment. Children had more love and duty to parents; and parents renewed patience, wisdom, and satisfaction for and in their children. No one was forgotten.

“Please tell me what splendid place this is?” asked Effie, as soon as she could collect her wits after the first look at all these astonishing things.

“This is the Christmas world; and here we work all the year round, never tired of getting ready for the happy day. See, these are the saints just setting off; for some have far to go, and the children must not be disappointed.”

As he spoke the spirit pointed to four gates, out of which four great sleighs were just driving, laden with toys, while a jolly old Santa Claus sat in the middle of each, drawing on his mittens and tucking up his wraps for a long cold drive.

“Why, I thought there was only one Santa Claus, and even he was a humbug,” cried Effie, astonished at the sight.

“Never give up your faith in the sweet old stones, even after you come to see that they are only the pleasant shadow of a lovely truth.”

Just then the sleighs went off with a great jingling of bells and pattering of reindeer hoofs, while all the spirits gave a cheer that was heard in the lower world, where people said, “Hear the stars sing.”

“I never will say there isn’t any Santa Claus again. Now, show me more.”

“You will like to see this place, I think, and may learn something here perhaps”

The spirit smiled as he led the way to a little door, through which Effie peeped into a world of dolls. Baby-houses were in full blast, with dolls of all sorts going on like live people. Waxen ladies sat in their parlors elegantly dressed; black dolls cooked in the kitchens; nurses walked out with the bits of dollies; and the streets were full of tin soldiers marching, wooden horses prancing, express wagons rumbling, and little men hurrying to and fro. Shops were there, and tiny people buying legs of mutton, pounds of tea, mites of clothes, and everything dolls use or wear or want.

But presently she saw that in some ways the dolls improved upon the manners and customs of human beings, and she watched eagerly to learn why they did these things. A fine Paris doll driving in her carriage took up a black worsted Dinah who was hobbling along with a basket of clean clothes, and carried her to her journey's end, as if it were the proper thing to do. Another interesting china lady took off her comfortable red cloak and put it round a poor wooden creature done up in a paper shift, and so badly painted that its face would have sent some babies into fits.

"Seems to me I once knew a rich girl who didn't give her things to poor girls. I wish I could remember who she was, and tell her to be as kind as that china doll," said Effie, much touched at the sweet way the pretty creature wrapped up the poor fright, and then ran off in her little gray gown to buy a shiny fowl stuck on a wooden platter for her invalid mother's dinner.

"We recall these things to people's minds by dreams. I think the girl you speak of won't forget this one." And the spirit smiled, as if he enjoyed some joke which she did not see.

A little bell rang as she looked, and away scampered the children into the red-and-green school-house with the roof that lifted up, so one could see how nicely they sat at their desks with mites of books, or drew on the inch-square blackboards with crumbs of chalk.

"They know their lessons very well, and are as still as mice. We make a great racket at our school, and get bad marks every day. I shall tell the girls they had better mind what they do, or their dolls will be better scholars than they are," said Effie, much impressed, as she peeped in and saw no rod in the hand of the little mistress, who looked up and shook her head at the intruder, as if begging her to go away before the order of the school was disturbed.

Effie retired at once, but could not resist one look in at the window of a fine mansion, where the family were at dinner, the children behaved so well at table, and never grumbled a bit when their mamma said they could not have any more fruit.

"Now, show me something else," she said, as they came again to the low door that led out of Doll-land.

"You have seen how we prepare for Christmas; let me show you where we love best to send our good and happy gifts," answered the spirit, giving her his hand again.

"I know. I've seen ever so many," began Effie, thinking of her own Christmases.

"No, you have never seen what I will show you. Come away, and remember what you see to-night."

Like a flash that bright world vanished, and Effie found herself in a part of the city she had never seen before. It was far away from the gayer places, where every store was brilliant with lights and full of pretty things, and every house wore a festival air, while people hurried to and fro with merry greetings. It was down among the dingy streets where the poor lived, and where there was no making ready for Christmas.

Hungry women looked in at the shabby shops, longing to buy meat and bread, but empty pockets forbade. Tipsy men drank up their wages in the bar- rooms; and in many cold dark chambers little children huddled under the thin blankets, trying to forget their misery in sleep.

No nice dinners filled the air with savory smells, no gay trees dropped toys and bonbons into eager hands, no little stockings hung in rows beside the chimney-piece ready to be filled, no happy sounds of music, gay voices, and dancing feet were heard; and there were no signs of Christmas anywhere.

"Don't they have any in this place?" asked Effie, shivering, as she held fast the spirit's hand, following where he led her.

"We come to bring it. Let me show you our best workers." And the spirit pointed to some sweet-faced men and women who came stealing into the poor houses, working such beautiful miracles that Effie could only stand and watch.

Some slipped money into the empty pockets, and sent the happy mothers to buy all the comforts they needed; others led the drunken men out of temptation, and took them home to find safer pleasures there. Fires were kindled on cold hearths, tables spread as if by magic, and warm clothes wrapped round shivering limbs. Flowers suddenly bloomed in the chambers of the sick; old people found themselves remembered; sad hearts were consoled by a tender word, and wicked ones softened by the story of Him who forgave all sin.

But the sweetest work was for the children; and Effie held her breath to watch these human fairies hang up and fill the little stockings without which a child's Christmas is not perfect, putting in things that once she would have thought very humble presents, but which now seemed beautiful and precious because these poor babies had nothing.

“That is so beautiful! I wish I could make merry Christmases as these good people do, and be loved and thanked as they are,” said Effie, softly, as she watched the busy men and women do their work and steal away without thinking of any reward but their own satisfaction.

“You can if you will. I have shown you the way. Try it, and see how happy your own holiday will be hereafter.”

As he spoke, the spirit seemed to put his arms about her, and vanished with a kiss.

“Oh, stay and show me more!” cried Effie, trying to hold him fast.

“Darling, wake up, and tell me why you are smiling in your sleep,” said a voice in her ear; and opening her eyes, there was mamma bending over her, and morning sunshine streaming into the room.

“Are they all gone? Did you hear the bells? Wasn’t it splendid?” she asked, rubbing her eyes, and looking about her for the pretty child who was so real and sweet.

“You have been dreaming at a great rate, — talking in your sleep, laughing, and clapping your hands as if you were cheering some one. Tell me what was so splendid,” said mamma, smoothing the tumbled hair and lifting up the sleepy head.

Then, while she was being dressed, Effie told her dream, and Nursey thought it very wonderful; but mamma smiled to see how curiously things the child had thought, read, heard, and seen through the day were mixed up in her sleep.

“The spirit said I could work lovely miracles if I tried; but I don’t know how to begin, for I have no magic candle to make feasts appear, and light up groves of Christmas trees, as he did,” said Effie, sorrowfully.

“Yes, you have. We will do it! we will do it!” And clapping her hands, mamma suddenly began to dance all over the room as if she had lost her wits.

“How? how? You must tell me, mamma,” cried Effie, dancing after her, and ready to believe anything possible when she remembered the adventures of the past night.

“I’ve got it! I’ve got it! — the new idea. A splendid one, if I can only carry it out!” And mamma waltzed the little girl round till her curls flew wildly in the air, while Nursey laughed as if she would die.

“Tell me! tell me!” shrieked Effie. “No, no; it is a surprise, — a grand surprise for Christmas day!” sung mamma, evidently charmed with her happy thought. “Now, come to breakfast; for we must work like bees if we want to play spirits tomorrow. You and Nursey will go out shopping, and get heaps of things, while I arrange matters behind the scenes.”

They were running downstairs as mamma spoke, and Effie called out breathlessly, —

“It won’t be a surprise; for I know you are going to ask some poor children here, and have a tree or something. It won’t be like my dream; for they had ever so many trees, and more children than we can find anywhere.”

“There will be no tree, no party, no dinner, in this house at all, and no presents for you. Won’t that be a surprise?” And mamma laughed at Effie’s bewildered face.

“Do it. I shall like it, I think; and I won’t ask any questions, so it will all burst upon me when the time comes,” she said; and she ate her breakfast thoughtfully, for this really would be a new sort of Christmas.

All that morning Effie trotted after Nursey in and out of shops, buying dozens of barking dogs, woolly lambs, and squeaking birds; tiny tea-sets, gay picture-books, mittens and hoods, dolls and candy. Parcel after parcel was sent home; but when Effie returned she saw no trace of them, though she peeped everywhere. Nursey chuckled, but wouldn’t give a hint, and went out again in the afternoon with a long list of more things to buy; while Effie wandered forlornly about the house, missing the usual merry stir that went before the Christmas dinner and the evening fun.

As for mamma, she was quite invisible all day, and came in at night so tired that she could only lie on the sofa to rest, smiling as if some very pleasant thought made her happy in spite of weariness.

“Is the surprise going on all right?” asked Effie, anxiously; for it seemed an immense time to wait till another evening came.

“Beautifully! better than I expected; for several of my good friends are helping, or I couldn’t have done it as I wish. I know you will like it, dear, and long remember this new way of making Christmas merry.”

Mamma gave her a very tender kiss, and Effie went to bed.

* * * * *

The next day was a very strange one; for when she woke there was no stocking to examine, no pile of gifts under her napkin, no one said “Merry Christmas!” to her, and the dinner was just as usual to her. Mamma vanished again, and Nursey kept wiping her eyes and saying: “The dear things! It’s the prettiest idea I ever heard of. No one but your blessed ma could have done it.”

“Do stop, Nursey, or I shall go crazy because I don’t know the secret!” cried Effie, more than once; and she kept her eye on the clock, for at seven in the evening the surprise was to come off.

The longed-for hour arrived at last, and the child was too excited to ask questions when Nurse put on her cloak and hood, led her to the carriage, and they drove away, leaving their house the one dark and silent one in the row.

"I feel like the girls in the fairy tales who are led off to strange places and see fine things," said Effie, in a whisper, as they jingled through the gay streets.

"Ah, my deary, it *is* like a fairy tale, I do assure you, and you *will* see finer things than most children will tonight. Steady, now, and do just as I tell you, and don't say one word whatever you see," answered Nursey, quite quivering with excitement as she patted a large box in her lap, and nodded and laughed with twinkling eyes.

They drove into a dark yard, and Effie was led through a back door to a little room, where Nurse coolly proceeded to take off not only her cloak and hood, but her dress and shoes also. Effie stared and bit her lips, but kept still until out of the box came a little white fur coat and boots, a wreath of holly leaves and berries, and a candle with a frill of gold paper round it. A long "Oh!" escaped her then; and when she was dressed and saw herself in the glass, she started back, exclaiming, "Why, Nursey, I look like the spirit in my dream!"

"So you do; and that's the part you are to play, my pretty! Now whist, while I blind your eyes and put you in your place."

"Shall I be afraid?" whispered Effie, full of wonder; for as they went out she heard the sound of many voices, the tramp of many feet, and, in spite of the bandage, was sure a great light shone upon her when she stopped.

"You needn't be; I shall stand close by, and your ma will be there."

After the handkerchief was tied about her eyes, Nurse led Effie up some steps, and placed her on a high platform, where something like leaves touched her head, and the soft snap of lamps seemed to fill the air.

Music began as soon as Nurse clapped her hands, the voices outside sounded nearer, and the tramp was evidently coming up the stairs.

"Now, my precious, look and see how you and your dear ma have made a merry Christmas for them that needed it!"

Off went the bandage; and for a minute Effie really did think she was asleep again, for she actually stood in "a grove of Christmas trees," all gay and shining as in her vision. Twelve on a side, in two rows down the room, stood the little pines, each on its low table; and behind Effie a taller one rose to the roof, hung with wreaths of popcorn, apples, oranges, horns of candy, and cakes of all sorts, from sugary hearts to gingerbread Jumbos. On the smaller trees she saw many of her own discarded toys and those Nursey bought, as well as heaps that seemed to have rained down straight from that delightful Christmas country where she felt as if she was again.

"How splendid! Who is it for? What is that noise? Where is mamma?" cried Effie, pale with pleasure and surprise, as she stood looking down the brilliant little street from her high place.

Before Nurse could answer, the doors at the lower end flew open, and in marched twenty-four little blue-gowned orphan girls, singing sweetly, until amazement changed the song to cries of joy and wonder as the shining spectacle appeared. While they stood staring with round eyes at the wilderness of pretty things about them, mamma stepped up beside Effie, and holding her hand fast to give her courage, told the story of the dream in a few simple words, ending in this way: —

"So my little girl wanted to be a Christmas spirit too, and make this a happy day for those who had not as many pleasures and comforts as she has. She likes surprises, and we planned this for you all. She shall play the good fairy, and give each of you something from this tree, after which every one will find her own name on a small tree, and can go to enjoy it in her own way. March by, my dears, and let us fill your hands."

Nobody told them to do it, but all the hands were clapped heartily before a single child stirred; then one by one they came to look up wonderingly at the pretty giver of the feast as she leaned down to offer them great yellow oranges, red apples, bunches of grapes, bonbons, and cakes, till all were gone, and a double row of smiling faces turned toward her as the children filed back to their places in the orderly way they had been taught.

Then each was led to her own tree by the good ladies who had helped mamma with all their hearts; and the happy hubbub that arose would have satisfied even Santa Claus himself, — shrieks of joy, dances of delight, laughter and tears (for some tender little things could not bear so much pleasure at once, and sobbed with mouths full of candy and hands full of toys). How they ran to show one another the new treasures! how they peeped and tasted, pulled and pinched, until the air was full of queer noises, the floor covered with papers, and the little trees left bare of all but candles!

"I don't think heaven can be any gooder than this," sighed one small girl, as she looked about her in a blissful maze, holding her full apron with one hand, while she luxuriously carried sugar-plums to her mouth with the other.

"Is that a truly angel up there?" asked another, fascinated by the little white figure with the wreath on its shining hair, who in some mysterious way had been the cause of all this merry-making.

"I wish I dared to go and kiss her for this splendid party," said a lame child, leaning on her crutch, as she stood near the steps, wondering how it seemed to sit in a mother’s lap, as Effie was doing, while she watched the happy scene before her.

Effie heard her, and remembering Tiny Tim, ran down and put her arms about the pale child, kissing the wistful face, as she said sweetly, “You may; but mamma deserves the thanks. She did it all; I only dreamed about it.”

Lame Katy felt as if “a truly angel” was embracing her, and could only stammer out her thanks, while the other children ran to see the pretty spirit, and touch her soft dress, until she stood in a crowd of blue gowns laughing as they held up their gifts for her to see and admire.

Mamma leaned down and whispered one word to the older girls; and suddenly they all took hands to dance round Effie, singing as they skipped.

It was a pretty sight, and the ladies found it hard to break up the happy revel; but it was late for small people, and too much fun is a mistake. So the girls fell into line, and marched before Effie and mamma again, to say goodnight with such grateful little faces that the eyes of those who looked grew dim with tears. Mamma kissed every one; and many a hungry childish heart felt as if the touch of those tender lips was their best gift. Effie shook so many small hands that her own tingled; and when Katy came she pressed a small doll into Effie’s hand, whispering, “You didn’t have a single present, and we had lots. Do keep that; it’s the prettiest thing I got.”

“I will,” answered Effie, and held it fast until the last smiling face was gone, the surprise all over, and she safe in her own bed, too tired and happy for anything but sleep.

“Mamma, it was a beautiful surprise, and I thank you so much! I don’t see how you did it; but I like it best of all the Christmases I ever had, and mean to make one every year. I had my splendid big present, and here is the dear little one to keep for love of poor Katy; so even that part of my wish came true.”

And Effie fell asleep with a happy smile on her lips, her one humble gift still in her hand, and a new love for Christmas in her heart that never changed through a long life spent in doing good.

[Illustration: “Hollo, what do you want?” he asked, staring at her.]

THE CANDY COUNTRY.

"I shall take mamma's red sun-umbrella, it is so warm, and none of the children at school will have one like it," said Lily, one day, as she went through the hall.

"The wind is very high; I'm afraid you'll be blown away if you carry that big thing," called Nurse from the window, as the red umbrella went bobbing down the garden walk with a small girl under it.

"I wish it would; I always wanted to go up in a balloon," answered Lily, as she struggled out of the gate.

She got on very well till she came to the bridge and stopped to look over the railing at the water running by so fast, and the turtles sunning themselves on the rocks. Lily was fond of throwing stones at them; it was so funny to watch them tumble, heels over head, splash into the water. Now, when she saw three big fellows close by, she stooped for a stone, and just at that minute a gale of wind nearly took the umbrella out of her hand. She clutched it fast; and away she went like a thistle-down, right up in the air, over river and hill, houses and trees, faster and faster, till her head spun round, her breath was all gone, and she had to let go. The dear red umbrella flew away like a leaf; and Lily fell down, down, till she went crash into a tree which grew in such a curious place that she forgot her fright as she sat looking about her, wondering what part of the world it could be.

The tree looked as if made of glass or colored sugar; for she could see through the red cherries, the green leaves, and the brown branches. An agreeable smell met her nose; and she said at once, as any child would, "I smell candy!" She picked a cherry and ate it. Oh, how good it was! — all sugar and no stone. The next discovery was such a delightful one that she nearly fell off her perch; for by touching her tongue here and there, she found that the whole tree was made of candy. Think what fun to sit and break off twigs of barley sugar, candied cherries, and leaves that tasted like peppermint and sassafras!

Lily rocked and ate till she finished the top of the little tree; then she climbed down and strolled along, making more surprising and agreeable discoveries as she went.

What looked like snow under her feet was white sugar; the rocks were lumps of chocolate, the flowers of all colors and tastes; and every sort of fruit grew on these delightful trees. Little white houses soon appeared; and here lived the dainty candy-people, all made of the best sugar, and painted to look like real people.

Dear little men and women, looking as if they had stepped off of wedding cakes and bonbons, went about in their gay sugar clothes, laughing and talking in the sweetest voices. Bits of babies rocked in open-work cradles, and sugar boys and girls played with sugar toys in the most natural way. Carriages rolled along the jujube streets, drawn by the red and yellow barley horses we all love so well; cows fed in the green fields, and sugar birds sang in the trees.

Lily listened, and in a moment she understood what the song said, —

”Sweet! Sweet!
Come, come and eat,
Dear little girls
With yellow curls;
For here you’ll find
Sweets to your mind.
On every tree
Sugar-plums you’ll see;
In every dell
Grows the caramel.
Over every wall
Gum-drops fall;
Molasses flows
Where our river goes
Under your feet
Lies sugar sweet;
Over your head
Grow almonds red.
Our lily and rose
Are not for the nose;
Our flowers we pluck
To eat or suck
And, oh! what bliss
When two friends kiss,
For they honey sip
From lip to lip!
And all you meet,
In house or street,
At work or play,
Sweethearts are they.
So, little dear,

Pray feel no fear;
Go where you will;
Eat, eat your fill.
Here is a feast
From west to east;
And you can say,
Ere you go away,
’At last I stand
In dear Candy-land,
And no more can stuff;
For once I’ve enough.’
Sweet! Sweet!
Tweet! Tweet!
Tweedle-dee!
Tweedle-dee!”

“That is the most interesting song I ever heard,” said Lily, clapping her sticky hands and dancing along toward a fine palace of white cream candy, with pillars of striped peppermint stick, and a roof of frosting that made it look like the Milan Cathedral.

“I’ll live here, and eat candy all day long, with no tiresome school or patchwork to spoil my fun,” said Lily.

So she ran up the chocolate steps into the pretty rooms, where all the chairs and tables were of different colored candies, and the beds of spun sugar. A fountain of lemonade supplied drink; and floors of ice-cream that never melted kept people and things from sticking together, as they would have done had it been warm.

For a long while Lily was quite happy, going about tasting so many different kinds of sweeties, talking to the little people, who were very amiable, and finding out curious things about them and their country.

The babies were made of plain sugar, but the grown people had different flavors. The young ladies were flavored with violet, rose, and orange; the gentlemen were apt to have cordials of some sort inside of them, as she found when she ate one now and then slyly, and got her tongue bitten by the hot, strong taste as a punishment The old people tasted of peppermint, clove, and such comfortable things, good for pain; but the old maids had lemon, hoarhound, flag-root, and all sorts of sour, bitter things in them, and did not get eaten much. Lily soon learned to know the characters of her new friends by a single taste, and some she never touched but once. The dear babies melted in her mouth, and the delicately flavored young ladies she was very fond of. Dr. Ginger was called to her more than once when so much candy made her teeth ache, and she found him a very hot- tempered little man; but he stopped the pain, so she was glad to see him.

A lime-drop boy and a little pink checker-berry girl were her favorite playmates; and they had fine times making mud-pies by scraping the chocolate rocks and mixing this dust with honey from the wells near by. These they could eat; and Lily thought this much better than throwing away the pies, as she had to do at home. They had candy-pulls very often, and made swings of long loops of molasses candy, and bird's-nests with almond eggs, out of which came birds who sang sweetly. They played football with big bull's-eyes, sailed in sugar boats on lakes of syrup, fished in rivers of molasses, and rode the barley horses all over the country.

Lily discovered that it never rained, but snowed white sugar. There was no sun, as it would have been too hot; but a large yellow lozenge made a nice moon, and red and white comfits were the stars.

The people all lived on sugar, and never quarrelled. No one was ill; and if any got broken, as sometimes happened with such brittle creatures, they just stuck the parts together and were all right again. The way they grew old was to get thinner and thinner till there was danger of their vanishing. Then the friends of the old person put him in a neat coffin, and carried him to the great golden urn which stood in their largest temple, always full of a certain fine syrup; and here he was dipped and dipped till he was stout and strong again, and went home to enjoy himself for a long time as good as new.

This was very interesting to Lily, and she went to many funerals. But the weddings were better still; for the lovely white brides were so sweet Lily longed to eat them. The feasts were delicious; and everybody went in their best clothes, and danced at the ball till they got so warm half-a-dozen would stick together and have to be taken to the ice-cream room to cool off. Then the little pair would drive away in a fine carriage with white horses to a new palace in some other part of the country, and Lily would have another pleasant place to visit.

But by and by, when she had seen everything, and eaten so much sweet stuff that at last she longed for plain bread and butter, she began to get cross, as children always do when they live on candy; and the little people wished she would go away, for they were afraid of her. No wonder, when she would catch up a dear sugar baby and eat him, or break some respectable old grandmamma all into bits because she reproved her for naughty ways. Lily calmly sat down on the biggest church, crushing it flat, and even tried to poke the moon out of the sky in a pet one day. The king ordered her to go home; but she said, “I won't!”

and bit his head off, crown and all.

Such a wail went up at this awful deed that she ran away out of the city, fearing some one would put poison in her candy, since she had no other food.

"I suppose I shall get somewhere if I keep walking; and I can't starve, though I hate the sight of this horrid stuff," she said to herself, as she hurried over the mountains of Gibraltar Rock that divided the city of Saccharissa from the great desert of brown sugar that lay beyond.

Lily marched bravely on for a long time, and saw at last a great smoke in the sky, smelt a spicy smell, and felt a hot wind blowing toward her.

"I wonder if there are sugar savages here, roasting and eating some poor traveller like me," she said, thinking of Robinson Crusoe and other wanderers in strange lands.

She crept carefully along till she saw a settlement of little huts very like mushrooms, for they were made of cookies set on lumps of the brown sugar; and queer people, looking as if made of gingerbread, were working very busily round several stoves which seemed to bake at a great rate.

"I'll creep nearer and see what sort of people they are before I show myself," said Lily, going into a grove of spice-trees, and sitting down on a stone which proved to be the plummy sort of cake we used to call Brighton Rock.

Presently one of the tallest men came striding toward the trees with a pan, evidently after spice; and before she could run, he saw Lily.

"Hollo, what do you want?" he asked, staring at her with his black currant eyes, while he briskly picked the bark off a cinnamon-tree.

"I'm travelling, and would like to know what place this is, if you please," answered Lily, very politely, being a little frightened.

"Cake-land. Where do you come from?" asked the gingerbread man, in a crisp tone of voice.

"I was blown into the Candy country, and have been there a long time; but I got tired of it, and ran away to find something better."

"Sensible child!" and the man smiled till Lily thought his cheeks would crumble. "You'll get on better here with us Brownies than with the lazy Bonbons, who never work and are all for show. They won't own us, though we are all related through our grandparents Sugar and Molasses. We are busy folks; so they turn up their noses and don't speak when we meet at parties. Poor creatures, silly and sweet and unsubstantial! I pity 'em."

"Could I make you a visit? I'd like to see how you live, and what you do. I'm sure it must be interesting," said Lily, picking herself up after a tumble, having eaten nearly all the stone, she was so hungry.

"I know you will. Come on! I can talk while I work." And the funny gingerbread man trotted off toward his kitchen, full of pans, rolling- pins, and molasses jugs.

"Sit down. I shall be at leisure as soon as this batch is baked. There are still some wise people down below who like gingerbread, and I have my hands full," he said, dashing about, stirring, rolling out, and slapping the brown dough into pans, which he whisked into the oven and out again so fast that Lily knew there must be magic about it somewhere.

Every now and then he threw her a delicious cooky warm from the oven. She liked the queer fellow, and presently began to talk, being very curious about this country.

"What is your name, sir?"

"Ginger Snap."

Lily thought it a good one; for he was very quick, and she fancied he could be short and sharp if he liked.

"Where does all this cake go to?" she asked, after watching the other kitchens full of workers, who were all of different kinds of cake, and each set of cooks made its own sort.

"I'll show you by and by," answered Snap, beginning to pile up the heaps of gingerbread on a little car that ran along a track leading to some unknown storeroom, Lily thought.

"Don't you get tired of doing this all the time?"

"Yes; but I want to be promoted, and I never shall be till I've done my best, and won the prize here."

"Oh, tell me about it! What is the prize, and how are you promoted? Is this a cooking-school?"

"Yes; the prize for best gingerbread is a cake of condensed yeast. That puts a soul into me, and I begin to rise till I am able to go over the hills yonder into the blessed land of bread, and be one of the happy creatures who are always wholesome, always needed, and without which the world below would be in a bad way."

"Bless me! that is the queerest thing I've heard yet. But I don't wonder you want to go; I'm tired of sweets myself, and long for a good piece of bread, though I used to want cake and candy at home."

"Ah, my dear, you'll learn a good deal here; and you are lucky not to have got into the clutches of Giant Dyspepsia, who always gets people if they eat too much of such rubbish and scorn wholesome bread. I leave my ginger behind when I go, and get white and round and beautiful, as you will see. The

Gingerbread family have never been as foolish as some of the other cakes. Wedding is the worst; such extravagance in the way of wine and spice and fruit I never saw, and such a mess to eat when it's done! I don't wonder people get sick; serves 'em right." And Snap flung down a pan with such a bang that it made Lily jump.

"Sponge cake isn't bad, is it? Mamma lets me eat it, but I like frosted pound better," she said, looking over to the next kitchen, where piles of that sort of cake were being iced.

"Poor stuff. No substance. Ladies' fingers will do for babies, but pound has too much butter ever to be healthy. Let it alone, and eat cookies or seed-cakes, my dear. Now, come along; I'm ready." And Snap trundled away his car-load at a great pace.

Lily ran behind to pick up whatever fell, and looked about her as she went, for this was certainly a very queer country. Lakes of eggs all beaten up, and hot springs of saleratus foamed here and there ready for use. The earth was brown sugar or ground spice; and the only fruits were raisins, dried currants, citron, and lemon peel. It was a very busy place; for every one cooked all the time, and never failed and never seemed tired, though they got so hot that they only wore sheets of paper for clothes. There were piles of it to put over the cake, so that it shouldn't burn; and they made cook's white caps and aprons of it, and looked very nice. A large clock made of a flat pancake, with cloves to mark the hours and two toothpicks for hands, showed them how long to bake things; and in one place an ice wall was built round a lake of butter, which they cut in lumps as they wanted it.

"Here we are. Now, stand away while I pitch 'em down," said Snap, stopping at last before a hole in the ground where a dumbwaiter hung ready, with a name over it.

There were many holes all round, and many waiters, each with its name; and Lily was amazed when she read "Weber," "Copeland," "Dooling," and others, which she knew very well.

Over Snap's place was the name "Newmarch;" and Lily said, "Why, that's where mamma gets her hard gingerbread, and Weber's is where we go for ice-cream. Do *you* make cake for them?"

"Yes, but no one knows it. It's one of the secrets of the trade. We cook for all the confectioners, and people think the good things come out of the cellars under their saloons. Good joke, isn't it?" And Snap laughed till a crack came in his neck and made him cough.

Lily was so surprised she sat down on a warm queen's cake that happened to be near, and watched Snap send down load after load of gingerbread to be eaten by children, who would have liked it much better if they had only known where it came from, as she did.

As she sat, the clatter of many spoons, the smell of many dinners, and the sound of many voices calling, “One vanilla, two strawberries, and a Charlotte Russe,” “Three stews, cup coffee, dry toast,” “Roast chicken and apple without,” came up the next hole, which was marked “Copeland.”

“Dear me! it seems as if I was there,” said Lily, longing to hop down, but afraid of the bump at the other end.

“I’m done. Come along, I’ll ride you back,” called Snap, tossing the last cooky after the dumb-waiter as it went slowly out of sight with its spicy load.

“I wish you’d teach me to cook. It looks great fun, and mamma wants me to learn; only our cook hates to have me mess round, and is so cross that I don’t like to try at home,” said Lily, as she went trundling back.

“Better wait till you get to Bread-land, and learn to make that. It’s a great art, and worth knowing. Don’t waste your time on cake, though plain gingerbread isn’t bad to have in the house. I’ll teach you that in a jiffy, if the clock doesn’t strike my hour too soon,” answered Snap, helping her down.

“What hour?”

“Why, of my freedom. I never know when I’ve done my task till I’m called by the chimes and go to get my soul,” said Snap, turning his currant eyes anxiously to the clock.

“I hope you *will* have time.” And Lily fell to work with all her might, after Snap had put on her a paper apron and a cap like his.

It was not hard; for when she was going to make a mistake a spark flew out of the fire and burnt her in time to remind her to look at the receipt, which was a sheet of gingerbread in a frame of pie-crust hung up before her, with the directions written while it was soft and baked in. The third sheet she made came out of the oven spicy, light, and brown; and Snap, giving it one poke, said, “That’s all right. Now you know. Here’s your reward”

He handed her a receipt-book made of thin sheets of sugar-gingerbread held together by a gelatine binding, with her name stamped on the back, and each leaf crimped with a cake-cutter in the most elegant manner.

Lily was charmed with it, but had no time to read all it contained; for just then the clock began to strike, and a chime of bells to ring, —

”Gingerbread,
Go to the head.
Your task is done;
A soul is won.

Take it and go
Where muffins grow,
Where sweet loaves rise
To the very skies,
And biscuits fair
Perfume the air.
Away, away!
Make no delay;
In the sea of flour
Plunge this hour.
Safe in your breast
Let the yeast-cake rest,
Till you rise in joy,
A white bread boy!”

“Ha, ha! I’m free! I’m free!” cried Snap, catching up the silver-covered square that seemed to fall from heaven; and running to a great white sea of flour, he went in head first, holding the yeast-cake clasped to his breast as if his life depended on it.

Lily watched breathlessly, while a curious working and bubbling went on, as if Snap was tumbling about down there like a small earthquake. The other cake-folk stood round the shore with her; for it was a great event, and all were glad that the dear fellow was promoted so soon. Suddenly a cry was heard, and up rose a beautiful white figure on the farther side of the sea. It moved its hand, as if saying “Good-by,” and ran over the hills so fast they had only time to see how plump and fair he was, with a little knob on the top of his head like a crown.

“He’s gone to the happy land, and we shall miss him; but we’ll follow his example and soon find him again,” said a gentle Sponge cake, with a sigh, as all went back to their work; while Lily hurried after Snap, eager to see the new country, which was the best of all.

A delicious odor of fresh bread blew up from the valley as she stood on the hill-top and looked down on the peaceful scene below. Fields of yellow grain waved in the breeze; hop-vines grew from tree to tree; and many windmills whirled their white sails as they ground the different grains into fresh, sweet meal, for the loaves of bread that built the houses like bricks and paved the streets, or in many shapes formed the people, furniture, and animals. A river of milk flowed through the peaceful land, and fountains of yeast rose and fell with a pleasant foam and fizz. The ground was a mixture of many meals, and the paths were golden Indian, which gave a very gay look to the scene. Buckwheat flowers bloomed on their rosy stems, and tall corn-stalks rustled their leaves in the warm air that came from the ovens hidden in the hillsides; for bread needs a slow fire, and an obliging volcano did the baking here.

"What a lovely place!" cried Lily, feeling the charm of the homelike landscape, in spite of the funny plump people moving about.

Two of these figures came running to meet her as she slowly walked down the yellow path from the hill. One was a golden boy, with a beaming face; the other a little girl in a shiny brown cloak, who looked as if she would taste very nice. They each put a warm hand into Lily's, and the boy said, —

"We are glad to see you. Muffin told us you were coming."

"Thank you. Who is Muffin?" asked Lily, feeling as if she had seen both these little people before, and liked them.

"He was Ginger Snap once, but he's a Muffin now. We begin in that way, and work up to the perfect loaf by degrees. My name is Johnny Cake, and she's Sally Lunn. You know us; so come on and have a race."

Lily burst out laughing at the idea of playing with these old friends of hers; and all three ran away as fast as they could tear, down the hill, over a bridge, into the middle of the village, where they stopped, panting, and sat down on some very soft rolls to rest.

"What do you all do *here*?" asked Lily, when she got her breath again.

"We farm, we study, we bake, we brew, and are as merry as grigs all day long. It's school-time now, and we must go; will you come?" said Sally, jumping up as if she liked it.

"Our schools are not like yours; we only study two things, — grain and yeast. I think you'll like it. We have yeast to-day, and the experiments are very jolly," added Johnny, trotting off to a tall brown tower of rye and Indian bread, where the school was kept.

Lily never liked to go to school, but she was ashamed to own it; so she went along with Sally, and was so amused with all she saw that she was glad she came. The brown loaf was hollow, and had no roof; and when she asked why they used a ruin, Sally told her to wait and see why they chose strong walls and plenty of room overhead. All round was a circle of very small biscuits like cushions, and on these the Bread-children sat. A square loaf in the middle was the teacher's desk, and on it lay an ear of wheat, with several bottles of yeast well corked up. The teacher was a pleasant, plump lady from Vienna, very wise, and so famous for her good bread that she was a Professor of Grainology.

When all were seated, she began with the wheat ear, and told them all about it in such an interesting way that Lily felt as if she had never known anything about the bread she ate before. The experiments with the yeast were quite exciting, — for Fraulein Pretzel showed them how it would work till it blew the cork out, and go fizzing up to the sky if it was kept too long; how it would turn sour or flat, and spoil the bread if care was not taken to use it just at the right moment; and how too much would cause the loaf to rise till there was no substance to it.

The children were very bright; for they were fed on the best kinds of oatmeal and Graham bread, with very little white bread or hot cakes to spoil their young stomachs. Hearty, happy boys and girls they were, and their yeasty souls were very lively in them; for they danced and sung, and seemed as bright and gay as if acidity, heaviness, and mould were quite unknown.

Lily was very happy with them, and when school was done went home with Sally and ate the best bread and milk for dinner that she ever tasted. In the afternoon Johnny took her to the cornfield, and showed her how they kept the growing ears free from mildew and worms. Then she went to the bakehouse; and here she found her old friend Muffin hard at work making Parker House rolls, for he was such a good cook he was set to work at once on the lighter kinds of bread.

“Well, isn’t this better than Candy-land or Saccharissa?” he asked, as he rolled and folded his bits of dough with a dab of butter tucked inside.

“Ever so much!” cried Lily. “I feel better already, and mean to learn all I can. Mamma will be so pleased if I can make good bread when I go home. She is rather old-fashioned, and likes me to be a nice housekeeper. I didn’t think bread interesting then, but I do now; and Johnny’s mother is going to teach me to make Indian cakes to-morrow.”

“Glad to hear it. Learn all you can, and tell other people how to make healthy bodies and happy souls by eating good plain food. Not like this, though these rolls are better than cake. I have to work my way up to the perfect loaf, you know; and then, oh, then, I’m a happy thing.”

“What happens then? Do you go on to some other wonderful place?” asked Lily, as Muffin paused with a smile on his face.

“Yes; I am eaten by some wise, good human being, and become a part of him or her. That is immortality and heaven; for I may nourish a poet and help him sing, or feed a good woman who makes the world better for being in it, or be crumbed into the golden porringer of a baby prince who is to rule a kingdom. Isn’t that a noble way to live, and an end worth working for?” asked Muffin, in a tone that made Lily feel as if some sort of fine yeast had got into her, and was setting her brain to work with new thoughts.

“Yes, it is. I suppose all common things are made for that purpose, if we only knew it; and people should be glad to do anything to help the world along, even making good bread in a kitchen,” answered Lily, in a sober way that showed that her little mind was already digesting the new food it had got.

She stayed in Bread-land a long time, and enjoyed and learned a great deal that she never forgot. But at last, when she had made the perfect loaf, she wanted to go home, that her mother might see and taste it.

“I’ve put a good deal of myself into it, and I’d love to think I had given her strength or pleasure by my work,” she said, as she and Sally stood looking at the handsome loaf.

“You can go whenever you like; just take the bread in your hands and wish three times, and you’ll be wherever you say. I’m sorry to have you go, but I don’t wonder you want to see your mother. Don’t forget what you have learned, and you will always be glad you came to us,” said Sally, kissing her good-by.

“Where is Muffin? I can’t go without seeing him, my dear old friend,” answered Lily, looking round for him.

“He is here,” said Sally, touching the loaf. “He was ready to go, and chose to pass into your bread rather than any other; for he said he loved you and would be glad to help feed so good a little girl.”

“How kind of him! I must be careful to grow wise and excellent, else he will be disappointed and have died in vain,” said Lily, touched by his devotion.

Then, bidding them all farewell, she hugged her loaf close, wished three times to be in her own home, and like a flash she was there.

Whether her friends believed the wonderful tale of her adventures I cannot tell; but I know that she was a nice little housekeeper from that day, and made such good bread that other girls came to learn of her. She also grew from a sickly, fretful child into a fine, strong woman, because she ate very little cake and candy, except at Christmas time, when the oldest and the wisest love to make a short visit to Candy-land.

[Illustration: As soon as he was alone, Jocko … jumped on his back.]

NAUGHTY JOCKO.

"A music-man! a music-man! Run quick, and see if he has got a monkey on his organ," cried little Neddy, running to the window in a great hurry one day.

Yes; there was the monkey in his blue and red suit, with a funny little cap, and the long tail trailing behind. But he didn't seem to be a lively monkey; for he sat in a bunch, with his sad face turned anxiously to his master, who kept pulling the chain to make him dance. The stiff collar had made his neck sore; and when the man twitched, the poor thing moaned and put up his little hand to hold the chain. He tried to dance, but was so weak he could only hop a few steps, and stop panting for breath. The cruel man wouldn't let him rest till Neddy called out, —

"Don't hurt him; let him come up here and get this cake, and rest while you play. I've got some pennies for you."

So poor Jocko climbed slowly up the trellis, and sat on the window-ledge trying to eat; but he was so tired he went to sleep, and when the man pulled to wake him up, he slipped and fell, and lay as if he were dead. Neddy and his aunt ran down to see if he was killed. The cross man scolded and shook him; but he never moved, and the man said, —

"He is dead. I don't want him. I will sell him to some one to stuff."

"No; his heart beats a little. Leave him here a few days, and we will take care of him; and if he gets well, perhaps we will buy him," said Aunt Jane, who liked to nurse even a sick monkey.

The man said he was going on for a week through the towns near by, and would call and see about it when he came back. Then he went away; and Neddy and aunty put Jocko in a nice basket, and carried him in. The minute the door was shut and he felt safe, the sly fellow peeped out with one eye, and seeing only the kind little boy began to chatter and kick off the shawl; for he was not much hurt, only tired and hungry, and dreadfully afraid of the cruel man who beat and starved him.

Neddy was delighted, and thought it very funny, and helped his aunt take off the stiff collar and put some salve on the sore neck. Then they got milk and cake; and when he had eaten a good dinner, Jocko curled himself up and slept till the next day. He was quite lively in the morning; for when Aunt Jane went to call Neddy, Jocko was not in his basket, and looking round the room for him, she saw the little black thing lying on the boy's pillow, with his arm round Neddy's neck like a queer baby.

"My patience! I can't allow that," said the old lady, and went to pull Jocko out. But he slipped away like an eel, and crept chattering and burrowing down to the bottom of the bed, holding on to Neddy's toes, till he waked up, howling that crabs were nipping him.

Then they had a great frolic; and Jocko climbed all over the bed, up on the tall wardrobe, and the shelf over the door, where the image of an angel stood. He patted it, and hugged it, and looked so very funny with his ugly black face by the pretty white one, that Neddy rolled on the floor, and Aunt Jane laughed till her glasses flew off. By and by he came down, and had a nice breakfast, and let them tie a red ribbon over the bandage on his neck. He liked the gay color, and kept going to look in the glass, and grin and chatter at his own image, which he evidently admired.

"Now, he shall go to walk with me, and all the children shall see my new pet," said Neddy, as he marched off with Jock on his shoulder.

Every one laughed at the funny little fellow with his twinkling eyes, brown hands, and long tail, and Neddy felt very grand till they got to the store; then troubles began. He put Jocko on a table near the door, and told him to stay there while he did his errands. Now, close by was the place where the candy was kept, and Jocko loved sweeties like any girl; so he hopped along, and began to eat whatever he liked. Some boys tried to stop him; and then he got angry at them for pulling his tail, and threw handfuls of sugarplums at them. That was great fun; and the more they laughed and scrambled and poked at him, the faster he showered chocolates, caramels, and peppermints over them, till it looked as if it had rained candy. The man was busy with Neddy at the other end of the store; but when he heard the noise, both ran to see what was the matter. Neither of them could stop naughty Jocko, who liked this game, and ran up on the high shelves among the toys. Then down came little tubs and dolls' stoves, tin trumpets and cradles, while boxes of leaden soldiers and whole villages flew through the air, smash, bang, rattle, bump, all over the floor. The man scolded, Neddy cried, the boys shouted, and there was a lively time in that shop till a good slapping with a long stick made Jock tumble into a tub of water where some curious fishes lived, and then they caught him.

Neddy was much ashamed, and told the man his aunt would pay for all the broken things. Then he took his naughty pet, and started to go home and tie him up, for it was plain this monkey was not to be trusted. But as soon as they got out, Jocko ran up a tree and dropped on to a load of hay passing underneath. Here he danced and pranced, and had a fine time, throwing off the man's coat and rake, and eating some of the dinner tied up in a cloth. The crusts of bread and the bones he threw at the horse; this new kind of whip frightened the horse, and he ran away down a steep hill, and upset the hay and broke the cart. Oh, such a time! It was worse than the candy scrape; for the man swore, and the horse was hurt, and people said the monkey ought to be shot, he did so much mischief. Jocko didn't care a bit; he sat high up in a tree, and chattered and scolded, and swung by his tail, and was so droll that people couldn't help laughing at him. Poor Neddy cried again, and went home to tell his troubles to Aunt Jane, fearing that it would take all the money in his bank to pay for the damage the bad monkey had done in one hour.

As soon as he was alone Jocko came skipping along, and jumped on his back, and peeped at him, and patted his cheeks, and was so cunning and good Neddy couldn't whip him; but he shut him up in a closet to punish him.

Jocko was tired; so he went to sleep, and all was quiet till dinner-time. They were ready for the pudding, and Neddy had saved a place for a good plateful, as he liked snow-pudding, when shrieks were heard in the kitchen, and Mary the maid rushed in to say, —

"Oh, ma'am, that horrid beast has spoilt the pudding, and is scaring Katy out of her life!"

They all ran; and there sat that naughty monkey on the table, throwing the nice white snow all over poor cook, till her face looked as if she was ready to be shaved. His own face looked the same, for he had eaten all he wanted while the pudding stood cooling in the pantry. He had crept out of a window in the closet, and had a fine rummage among the sugar-buckets, butter-boxes, and milk-pans.

Kate wailed, and Mary scolded; but Aunt Jane and grandpa laughed, and Neddy chased Jock into the garden with the broom. They had to eat bread and jelly for dessert, and it took the girls a long time to clear up the mess the rascal made.

"We will put his collar and chain on again, and keep him tied up all the time till the man comes," said Aunt Jane.

"But I can't catch him," sighed Neddy, watching the little imp whisk about in the garden among the currant-bushes, chasing hens and tossing green apples round in high glee.

"Sit quietly down somewhere and wait till he is tired; then he will come to you, and you can hold him fast," said Aunt Jane.

So Neddy waited; and though he was much worried at his new pet's naughtiness, he enjoyed his pranks like a boy.

Grandpa took naps in the afternoon on the piazza, and he was dozing comfortably when Jocko swung down from the grape-vine by his long tail, and tickled the old gentleman on the nose with a straw. Grandpa sneezed, and opened one eye to brush away the fly as he supposed. Then he went to sleep again, and

Jocko dropped a caterpillar on his bald head; this made him open the other eye to see what that soft, creepy thing could be. Neddy couldn't help laughing, for he often wanted to do just such things, but never dared, because grandpa was a very stern old gentleman, and no one took liberties with him. Jocko wasn't afraid, however; and presently he crept to the table, stole the glasses lying there, put them on, and taking up the paper held it before him, chattering as if he were reading it, as he had seen people do. Neddy laughed out loud at this, and clapped his hands, Jocko looked so like a little old man, in spite of the tail curled up behind. This time grandpa opened both eyes at once, and stared as if he saw a hobgoblin before him; then he snatched off the spectacles, and caught up his cane, crying angrily, —

"You rascal, how dare you!"

But Jocko tossed the paper in his face, and with one jump lighted on the back of old Tom, the big yellow cat, who lay asleep close by. Scared half out of his wits, Tom spit and bounced; but Jocko held fast to his collar, and had a fine race round the garden, while the girls laughed at the funny sight, and Neddy shouted, "It's a circus; and there's the monkey and the pony." Even grandpa smiled, especially when puss dashed up a tree, and Jock tumbled off. He chased him, and they had a great battle; but Tom's claws were sharp, and the monkey got a scratch on the nose, and ran crying to Neddy for comfort.

"Now, you naughty fellow, I'll chain you up, and stop these dreadful tricks. But you are great fun, and I can't whip you," said the boy; for he knew what it was to enjoy a holiday, and poor Jocko had not had one for a long time.

Jocko ate some lunch, took a nap in the grass, and then was ready for more frolics. Neddy had fastened him to a tree in the garden, so that he could enjoy the sun and air, and catch grasshoppers if he liked. But Jocko wanted something more; and presently Neddy, who was reading in his hammock on the piazza, heard a great cackling among the hens, and looked up to see the monkey swinging by his tail from a bough, holding the great cock-a- doodle by his splendid tail, while all the twenty hens clucked and cackled with wrath and fear at such a dreadful prank.

"Now, that's too bad; I *will* slap him this time," said Neddy, running to save his handsome bird from destruction. But before he got there poor cocky had pulled his fine tail-feathers all out in his struggles, and when set free was so frightened and mortified that he ran away and hid in the bushes, and the hens went to comfort him.

Neddy gave Jocko a good whipping, and left him looking as meek as a baby, all cuddled up in a little bunch, with his head in his hands as if crying for his naughtiness. But he wasn't sorry. Oh, dear, no! for in half an hour he had picked every one of the sweet peas Aunt Jane was so fond of, thrown all the tomatoes over the fence, and let the parrot out of his cage. The sight of Polly walking into the parlor with a polite "How are you, ma'am?" sent Aunt Jane to see what was going on. Neddy was fast asleep in the hammock, worn out with his cares; and Jocko, having unhooked his chain, was sitting on the chimney-top of a neighbor's house, eating corn.

"We shall not live to the end of the week if this sort of thing goes on. I don't know what to do with the little beast; he's as bad as an elephant to take care of," said the poor lady, in despair, as she saw Jocko throw his corncob down on the minister's hat as that stately gentleman went by.

As none of them could catch him, Miss Jane let him alone till Neddy waked up and could go and find some of the big boys to help him.

Jocko soon left the roof, and skipped in at a window that stood open. It was little Nelly Brown's play-room, and she had left her pet doll Maud Mabel Rose Matilda very ill in the best bed, while she went down to get a poppy leaf to rub the darling's cheeks with, because she had a high fever. Jocko took a fancy to the pretty bed, and after turning the play-house topsy-turvy, he pulled poor Maud Mabel Rose Matilda out by her flaxen hair, and stuffing her into the water-pitcher upside down, got into the bed, drew the lace curtains, and prepared to doze deliciously under the pink silk bed-cover.

Up came Nelly, and went at once to the dear invalid, saying in her motherly little voice, —

"Now, my darling child, lie quite still, and I won't hurt you one bit."

But when she drew the curtain, instead of the lovely yellow-haired doll in her ruffled nightcap, she saw an ugly little black face staring at her, and a tiny hand holding the sheet fast. Nelly gave one scream, and flew downstairs into the parlor where the Sewing-circle was at work, frightening twenty-five excellent ladies by her cries, as she clung to her mother, wailing, —

"A bogie! a bogie! I saw him, all black; and he snarled at me, and my dolly is gone! What shall I do? oh, what shall I do?"

There was great confusion, for all the ladies talked at once; and it so happened that none of them knew anything about the monkey, therefore they all agreed that Nelly was a foolish child, and had made a fuss about nothing. She cried dismally, and kept saying to her mother, —

"Go and see; it's in my dolly's bed, — I found it there, and darling Maudie is gone."

"We *will* go and see," said Mrs. Moses Merryweather, — a stout old lady, who kept her six girls in such good order that *they* would never have dared to cry if ten monkeys had popped out at them.

Miss Hetty Bumpus, a tall thin maiden lady, with a sharp eye and pointed nose, went with her; but at the door that led to the dining-room both stopped short, and after one look came flying back, calling out together, —

“Mrs. Brown, your supper is spoilt! a dreadful beast has ruined it all!”

Then twenty-five excited ladies flew across the hall to behold Jocko sitting on the great cake in the middle of the table, his feet bathed in cream from the overturned pitcher, while all around lay the ruins of custards, tarts, biscuits, and sauce, not to mention nice napkins made into hay-cocks, spoons, knives, and forks, on the floor, and the best silver teapot in the fireplace.

While Nelly told her tale and the ladies questioned and comforted her, this bad monkey had skipped downstairs and had a delightful party all by himself. He was just scraping the jelly out of a tart when they disturbed him; and knowing that more slaps were in store for him if he stayed, he at once walked calmly down the ravaged table, and vanished out of the window carrying the silver tea-strainer with him to play with.

The ladies had no supper that night; and poor Mrs. Brown sent a note to Aunt Jane, telling her the sad story, and adding that Nelly was quite ill with the fright and the loss of dear Maud Mabel Rose Matilda, drowned in the water-pitcher and forever spoilt.

“John shall go after that man to-morrow, and bring him back to carry this terrible monkey away. I can’t live with him a week; he will cost me a fortune, and wear us all out,” said Aunt Jane, when Jocko was safely shut up in the cellar, after six boys had chased him all over the neighborhood before they caught him.

Neddy was quite willing to let him go; but John was saved his journey, for in the morning poor Jocko was found dead in a trap, where his inquisitive head had been poked to see what the cheese tasted like.

So he was buried by the river, and every one felt much relieved; for the man never came back, thinking Jocko dead when he left him. But he had not lived in vain; for after this day of trial, mischievous Neddy behaved much better, and Aunt Jane could always calm his prankish spirit by saying, as her finger pointed to a little collar and chain hanging on the wall, —

“If you want to act like naughty Jocko, say so, and I’ll tie you up. One monkey is enough for this family.”

[Illustration: Kitty laughed, and began to dance…. Such twirlings and skippings as she made.]

THE SKIPPING SHOES.

Once there was a little girl, named Kitty, who never wanted to do what people asked her. She said “I won’t” and “I can’t,” and did not run at once pleasantly, as obliging children do.

One day her mother gave her a pair of new shoes; and after a fuss about putting them on, Kitty said, as she lay kicking on the floor, —

“I wish these were seven-leagued boots, like Jack the Giant Killer’s, then it would be easy to run errands all the time. Now, I hate to keep trotting, and I don’t like new shoes, and I won’t stir a step.”

Just as she said that, the shoes gave a skip, and set her on her feet so suddenly that it scared all the naughtiness out of her. She stood looking at these curious shoes; and the bright buttons on them seemed to wink at her like eyes, while the heels tapped on the floor a sort of tune. Before she dared to stir, her mother called from the next room, —

“Kitty, run and tell the cook to make a pie for dinner; I forgot it.”

“I don’t want to,” began Kitty, with a whine as usual.

But the words were hardly out of her mouth when the shoes gave one jump, and took her downstairs, through the hall, and landed her at the kitchen door. Her breath was nearly gone; but she gave the message, and turned round, trying to see if the shoes would let her walk at all. They went nicely till she wanted to turn into the china-closet where the cake was. She was forbidden to touch it, but loved to take a bit when she could. Now she found that her feet were fixed fast to the floor, and could not be moved till her father said, as he passed the window close by, —

“You will have time to go to the post-office before school and get my letters.”

“I can’t,” began Kitty; but she found she could, for away went the shoes, out of the house at one bound, and trotted down the street so fast that the maid who ran after her with her hat could not catch her.

“I can’t stop!” cried Kitty; and she did not till the shoes took her straight into the office.

“What’s the hurry to-day?” asked the man, as he saw her without any hat, all rosy and breathless, and her face puckered up as if she did not know whether to laugh or to cry.

“I won’t tell any one about these dreadful shoes, and I’ll take them off as soon as I get home. I hope they will go back slowly, or people will think I’m crazy,” said Kitty to herself, as she took the letters and went away.

The shoes walked nicely along till she came to the bridge; and there she wanted to stop and watch some boys in a boat, forgetting school and her father’s letters. But the shoes wouldn’t stop, though she tried to make them, and held on to the railing as hard as she could. Her feet went on; and when she sat down they still dragged her along so steadily that she had to go, and she got up feeling that there was something very strange about these shoes. The minute she gave up, all went smoothly, and she got home in good time.

“I won’t wear these horrid things another minute,” said Kitty, sitting on the doorstep and trying to unbutton the shoes.

But not a button could she stir, though she got red and angry struggling to do it.

“Time for school; run away, little girl,” called mamma from upstairs, as the clock struck nine.

“I won’t!” said Kitty, crossly.

But she did; for those magic shoes danced her off, and landed her at her desk in five minutes.

“Well, I’m not late; that’s one comfort,” she thought, wishing she had come pleasantly, and not been whisked away without any luncheon.

Her legs were so tired with the long skips that she was glad to sit still; and that pleased the teacher, for generally she was fussing about all lesson time. But at recess she got into trouble again; for one of the children knocked down the house of corn-cobs she had built, and made her angry.

“Now, I’ll kick yours down, and see how you like it, Dolly.”

Up went her foot, but it didn’t come down; it stayed in the air, and there she stood looking as if she were going to dance. The children laughed to see her, and she could do nothing till she said to Dolly in a great hurry, —

“Never mind; if you didn’t mean to, I’ll forgive you.”

Then the foot went down, and Kitty felt so glad about it that she tried to be pleasant, fearing some new caper of those dreadful shoes. She began to see how they worked, and thought she would try if she had any power over them. So, when one of the children wanted his ball, which had bounced over the hedge, she said kindly, — ”Perhaps I can get it for you, Willy.”

And over she jumped as lightly as if she too were an india-rubber ball.

“How could you do it?” cried the boys, much surprised; for not one of them dared try such a high leap.

Kitty laughed, and began to dance, feeling pleased and proud to find there was a good side to the shoes after all. Such twirlings and skippings as she made, such pretty steps and airy little bounds it was pretty to see; for it seemed as if her feet were bewitched, and went of themselves. The little girls were charmed, and tried to imitate her, but no one could, and they stood in a circle watching her dance till the bell rang, then all rushed in to tell about it.

Kitty said it was her new shoes, and never told how queerly they acted, hoping to have good times now. But she was mistaken.

On the way home she wanted to stop and see her friend Bell's new doll, but at the gate her feet stuck fast, and she had to give up her wishes and go straight on, as mamma had told her always to do.

"Run and pick a nice little dish of strawberries for dinner," said her sister, as she went in.

"I'm too ti — " There was no time to finish, for the shoes landed her in the middle of the strawberry bed at one jump.

"I might as well be a grasshopper if I'm to skip round like this," she said, forgetting to feel tired out there in the pleasant garden, with the robins picking berries close by, and a cool wind lifting the leaves to show here the reddest and ripest ones hid.

The little dish was soon filled, and she wanted to stay and eat a few, warm and sweet from the vines; but the bell rang, and away she went, over the wood-pile, across the piazza, and into the dining-room before the berry in her mouth was half eaten.

"How this child does rush about to-day!" said her mother. "It is so delightful to have such a quick little errand-girl that I shall get her to carry some bundles to my poor people this afternoon.

"Oh, dear me! I do hate to lug those old clothes and bottles and baskets of cold victuals round. Must I do it?" sighed Kitty, dismally, while the shoes tapped on the floor under the table, as if to remind her that she must, whether she liked it or not.

"It would be right and kind, and would please me very much. But you may do as you choose about it. I am very tired, and some one must go; for the little Bryan baby is sick and needs what I send," said mamma, looking disappointed.

Kitty sat very still and sober for some time, and no one spoke to her. She was making up her mind whether she would go pleasantly or be whisked about like a grasshopper against her will. When dinner was over, she said in a cheerful voice, —

"I'll go, mamma; and when all the errands are done, may I come back through Fairyland, as we call the little grove where the tall ferns grow?"

"Yes, dear; when you oblige me, I am happy to please you."

"I'm glad I decided to be good; now I shall have a lovely time," said Kitty to herself, as she trotted away with a basket in one hand, a bundle in the other, and some money in her pocket for a poor old woman who needed help.

The shoes went quietly along, and seemed to know just where to stop. The sick baby's mother thanked her for the soft little nightgowns; the lame girl smiled when she saw the books; the hungry children gathered round the basket of food, like young birds eager to be fed; and the old woman gave her a beautiful pink shell that her sailor son brought home from sea.

When all the errands were done Kitty skipped away to Fairyland, feeling very happy, as people always do when they have done kind things. It was a lovely place; for the ferns made green arches tall enough for little girls to sit under, and the ground was covered with pretty green moss and wood- flowers. Birds flew about in the pines, squirrels chattered in the oaks, butterflies floated here and there, and from the pond near by came the croak of frogs sunning their green backs on the mossy stones.

"I wonder if the shoes will let me stop and rest; it is so cool here, and I'm so tired," said Kitty, as she came to a cosey nook at the foot of a tree.

The words were hardly out of her mouth when her feet folded under her, and there she sat on a cushion of moss, like the queen of the wood on her throne. Something lighted with a bump close by her; and looking down she saw a large black cricket with a stiff tail, staring at her curiously.

"Bless my heart! I thought you were some relation of my cousin Grasshopper's. You came down the hill with long leaps just like him; so I stopped to say, How d' ye do," said the cricket, in its creaky voice.

"I'm not a grasshopper; but I have on fairy shoes to-day, and so do many things that I never did before," answered Kitty, much surprised to be able to understand what the cricket said.

"It is midsummer day, and fairies can play whatever pranks they like. If you didn't have those shoes on, you couldn't understand what I say. Hark, and hear those squirrels talk, and the birds, and the ants down here. Make the most of this chance; for at sunset your shoes will stop skipping, and the fun all be over."

While the cricket talked Kitty did hear all sorts of little voices, singing, laughing, chatting in the gayest way, and understood every word they said. The squirrels called to one another as they raced about, —

"Here's a nut, there's a nut;
  Hide it quick away,
In a hole, under leaves,
  To eat some winter day.
Acorns sweet are plenty,
  We will have them all:

Skip and scamper lively
Till the last ones fall.”

The birds were singing softly, —

”Rock a bye, babies,
Your cradle hangs high;
Soft down your pillow,
Your curtain the sky.
Father will feed you,
While mother will sing,
And shelter our darlings
With her warm wing.”

And the ants were saying to one another as they hurried in and out of their little houses, —

”Work, neighbor, work!
Do not stop to play;
Wander far and wide,
Gather all you may.

We are never like
Idle butterflies,
But like the busy bees,
Industrious and wise.”

“Ants always were dreadfully good, but butterflies are ever so much prettier,” said Kitty, listening to the little voices with wonder and pleasure.

”Hello! hello!
Come down below, —
It’s lovely and cool
Out here in the pool;
On a lily-pad float
For a nice green boat.
Here we sit and sing
In a pleasant ring;
Or leap frog play,
In the jolliest way.

Our games have begun,
Come join in the fun."

"Dear me! what could I do over there in the mud with the queer green frogs?" laughed Kitty, as this song was croaked at her.

"No, no, come and fly
Through the sunny sky,
Or honey sip
From the rose's lip,
Or dance in the air,
Like spirits fair.
Come away, come away;
'Tis our holiday."

A cloud of lovely yellow butterflies flew up from a wild-rose bush, and went dancing away higher and higher, till they vanished in the light beyond the wood.

"That is better than leap-frog. I wish my skipping shoes would let me fly up somewhere, instead of carrying me on errands and where I ought to go all the time," said Kitty, watching the pretty things glitter as they flew.

Just at that minute a clock struck, and away went the shoes over the pool, the hill, the road, till they pranced in at the gate as the tea-bell rang. Kitty amused the family by telling what she had done and seen; but no one believed the Fairyland part, and her father said, laughing, —

"Go on, my dear, making up little stories, and by and by you may be as famous as Hans Christian Andersen, whose books you like so well."

"The sun will soon set, and then my fun will be over; so I must skip while I can," thought Kitty, and went waltzing round the lawn so prettily that all the family came to see her.

"She dances so well that she shall go to dancing-school," said her mother, pleased with the pretty antics of her little girl.

Kitty was delighted to hear that; for she had longed to go, and went on skipping as hard as she could, that she might learn some of the graceful steps the shoes took before the day was done.

"Come, dear, stop now, and run up to your bath and bed. It has been a long hot day, and you are tired; so get to sleep early, for Nursey wants to go out," said her mother, as the sun went down behind the hills with a last bright glimmer, like the wink of a great sleepy eye.

"Oh, please, a few minutes more," began Kitty, but was off like a flash; for the shoes trotted her upstairs so fast that she ran against old Nursey, and down she went, splashing the water all over the floor, and scolding in such a funny way that it made Kitty laugh so that she could hardly pick her up again.

By the time she was ready to undress the sun was quite gone, and the shoes she took off were common ones again, for midsummer day was over. But Kitty never forgot the little lessons she had learned: she tried to run willingly when spoken to; she remembered the pretty steps and danced like a fairy; and best of all, she always loved the innocent and interesting little creatures in the woods and fields, and whenever she was told she might go to play with them, she hurried away almost as quickly as if she still wore the skipping shoes.

[Illustration: So Cocky was brought in, and petted.]

COCKYLOO.

In the barnyard a gray hen sat on her nest, feeling very happy because it was time for her eggs to hatch, and she hoped to have a fine brood of chickens. Presently crack, crack, went the shells, “Peep, peep!” cried the chicks; “Cluck, cluck!” called the hen; and out came ten downy little things one after the other, all ready to run and eat and scratch, — for chickens are not like babies, and don’t have to be tended at all.

There were eight little hens and two little cockerels, one black and one as white as snow, with yellow legs, bright eyes, and a tiny red comb on his head. This was Cockyloo, the good chick; but the black one was named Peck, and was a quarrelsome bad fowl, as we shall see.

Mrs. Partlet, the mamma, was very proud of her fine family; for the eight little daughters were all white and very pretty. She led them out into the farmyard, clucking and scratching busily; for all were hungry, and ran chirping round her to pick up the worms and seeds she found for them. Cocky soon began to help take care of his sisters; and when a nice corn or a fat bug was found, he would step back and let little Downy or Snowball have it. But Peck would run and push them away, and gobble up the food greedily. He chased them away from the pan where the meal was, and picked the down off their necks if they tried to get their share. His mother scolded him when the little ones ran to hide under her wings; but he didn’t care, and was very naughty. Cocky began to crow when he was very young, and had such a fine voice that people liked to hear his loud, clear “Cock-a-doodle-doo!” early in the morning; for he woke before the sun was up, and began his song. Peck used to grumble at being roused at dawn, for he was lazy; but the hens bustled up, and were glad to get out of the hen-house.

The father cock had been killed by a dog; so they made Cocky king of the farmyard, and Peck was very jealous of him.

“I came out of the shell first, and I am the oldest; so I ought to be king,” he said.

“But we don’t like you, because you are selfish, cross, and lazy. We want Cocky; he is so lively, kind, and brave. He will make a splendid bird, and *he* must be our king,” answered the hens; and Peck had to mind, or they would have pulled every feather out of his little tail.

He resolved to do some harm to his good brother, and plagued him all he could. One day, when Cocky was swinging with three of his sisters on a bush that hung over the brook, Peck asked a stupid donkey feeding near to come and put his heavy foot on the bush. He did it, and crack went the branch, splash went the poor chicks into the water, and all were drowned but Cocky, who flew across and was saved. Poor little Hop, Chirp, and Downy went floating down the brook like balls of white foam, and were never seen again. All the hens mourned for them, and put a black feather in their heads to show how sorry they were. Mamma Partlet was heart-broken to lose three darlings at once; but Cocky comforted her, and never told how it happened, because he was ashamed to have people know what a bad bird Peck was.

A butterfly saw it all, and he told Granny Cockletop about it; and the hens were so angry that they turned Peck out of the barnyard, and he had to go and live in the woods alone. He said he didn't care; but he did, and was very unhappy, and used to go and peep into the pleasant field where the fowls scratched and talked together. He dared not show himself, for they would have driven him out. But kind Cocky saw him, and would run with some nice bit and creep through the fence into the wood, saying, — "Poor brother, I'm sorry for you, and I'll come and play with you, and tell you the news."

Now in this wood lived a fox, and he had been planning to eat Peck as soon as he was fat; for he missed the good corn and meal he used to have, and grew very thin living on grasshoppers and berries. While he waited the sly fellow made friends with Peck, though the bird knew that foxes ate hens.

"I'm not afraid, and I don't believe old Granny Cockletop's tales. I can take care of myself, I guess," he said, and went on playing with the fox, who got him to tell all about the hen-house, — how the door was fastened, and where the plump chickens roosted, and what time they went to bed, — so that he could creep in and steal a good supper by and by. Silly Peck never guessed what harm he was doing, and only laughed when Cocky said, —

"You will be sorry if you play with the fox. He is a bad fellow; so be careful and sleep on a high branch, and keep out of his way, as I do."

Cocky was fat and large, and the fox longed to eat him, but never could, because he wisely ran home whenever he saw the rogue hiding in the wood. This made Peck angry, for he wanted his brother to stay and play; and so one day, when Cocky ran off in the midst of a nice game, Peck said to the fox, —

"See here, if you want to catch that fellow, I'll tell you how to do it. He has promised to bring me some food to-night, when all the rest are at roost. He will hide and not get shut up; then, when those cross old biddies are asleep, he will cluck softly, and I am to go in and eat all I want out of the pan. You hide on the top of the hen-house; and while he talks to me, you can pounce on him. Then I shall be the only cock here, and they will have to make me king."

“All right,” said the fox, much pleased with the plan, and very glad that Peck had a chance to get fatter.

So when it was night, Peck crept through the broken paling and waited till he heard the signal. Now, good Cocky had saved up nice bits from his own dinner, and put them in a paper hidden under a bush. He spread them all out in the barnyard and called; and Peck came in a great hurry to eat them, never stopping to say, “Thank you.”

Cocky stood by talking pleasantly till a little shower came up.

“Peck, dear, put this nice thick paper over you; then you will be dry, and can go on eating. I’ll step under that burdock leaf and wait till you are done,” said Cocky; and Peck was too busy gobbling up the food to remember anything else.

Now the fox had just crept up on the hen-house roof; and when he peeped down, there was just light enough to see a white thing bobbing about.

“Ah, ha! that’s Cockyloo; now for a good supper!” And with a jump he seized Peck by the head before he could explain the mistake.

One squawk, and the naughty bird was dead; but though the paper fell off, and the fox saw what he had done, it was too late, and he began to eat Peck up, while Cocky flew into a tree and crowed so loud that the farmer ran with his gun and shot the fox before he could squeeze through the hole in the fence with the fowl in his mouth.

After that the hens felt safe, for there were no more foxes; and when they heard about Peck they did not mourn at all, but liked Cocky better than ever, and lived happily together, with nothing to trouble them.

King Cockyloo grew to be a splendid bird, — pure white, with a tall red comb on his head, long spurs on his yellow legs, many fine feathers in his tail, and eyes that shone like diamonds. His crow was so loud that it could be heard all over the neighborhood, and people used to say, “Hark! hear Farmer Hunt’s cock crow. Isn’t it a sweet sound to wake us in the dawn?” All the other cocks used to answer him, and there was a fine matinee concert every day.

He was a good brother, and led his five little sisters all about the field, feeding, guarding, and amusing them; for mamma was lame now, and could not stir far from the yard. It was a pretty sight to see Cocky run home with a worm in his bill or a nice berry, and give it to his mother, who was very proud of her handsome son. Even old Granny Cockletop, who scolded about everything, liked him; and often said, as the hens sat scuffling in the dust, —

“A fine bird, my dears, a very fine bird, and I know he will do something remarkable before he dies.”

She was right for once; and this is what he did.

One day the farmer had to go away and stay all night, leaving the old lady alone with two boys. They were not afraid; for they had a gun, and quite longed for a chance to fire it. Now it happened that the farmer had a good deal of money in the house, and some bad men knew it; so they waited for him to go away that they might steal it. Cocky was picking about in the field when he heard voices behind the wall, and peeping through a hole saw two shabby men hiding there.

"At twelve, to-night, when all are asleep, we will creep in at the kitchen window and steal the money. You shall watch on the outside and whistle if any one comes along while I'm looking for the box where the farmer keeps it," said one man.

"You needn't be afraid; there is no dog, and no one to wake the family, so we are quite safe," said the other man; and then they both went to sleep till night came.

Cocky was much troubled, and didn't know what to do. He could not tell the old lady about it; for he could only cackle and crow, and she would not understand that language. So he went about all day looking very sober, and would not chase grasshoppers, play hide-and-seek under the big burdock leaves, or hunt the cricket with his sisters. At sunset he did not go into the hen-house with the rest, but flew up to the shed roof over the kitchen, and sat there in the cold ready to scare the robbers with a loud crow, as he could do nothing else.

At midnight the men came creeping along; one stopped outside, and the other went in. Presently he handed a basket of silver out, and went back for the money. Just as he came creeping along with the box, Cocky gave a loud, long crow, that frightened the robbers and woke the boys. The man with the basket ran away in such a hurry that he tumbled into a well; the other was going to get out of the window, when Cocky flew down and picked at his eyes and flapped his wings in his face, so that he turned to run some other way, and met the boys, who fired at him and shot him in the legs. The old lady popped her head out of the upper window and rang the dinner-bell, and called "Fire! fire!" so loud that it roused the neighbors, who came running to see what the trouble could be.

They fished one man out of the well and picked up the wounded one, and carried them both off to prison.

"Who caught them?" asked the people.

"We did," cried the boys, very proud of what they had done; "but we shouldn't have waked if our good Cocky had not crowed, and scared the rascals. He deserves half the praise, for this is the second time he has caught a thief."

So Cocky was brought in, and petted, and called a fine fellow; and his family were so proud of him they clucked about it for weeks afterward.

When the robbers were tried, it was found that they were the men who had robbed the bank, and taken a great deal of money; so every one was glad to have them shut up for twenty years. It made a great stir, and people would go to see Cocky and tell how he helped catch the men; and he was so brave and handsome, they said at last, —

“We want a new weather-cock on our court-house, and instead of an arrow let us have a cock; and he shall look like this fine fellow.”

“Yes, yes,” cried the young folks, much pleased; for they thought Cocky ought to be remembered in some way.

So a picture was taken, and Cocky stood very still, with his bright eye on the man; then one like it was made of brass, and put high up on the court- house, where all could see the splendid bird shining like gold, and twirling about to tell which way the wind was. The children were never tired of admiring him; and all the hens and chickens went in a procession one moonlight night to see it, — yes, even Mamma Partlet and Granny Cockletop, though one was lame and the other very old, so full of pride were they in the great honor done King Cockyloo.

This was not the end of his good deeds; and the last was the best of all, though it cost him his life. He ruled for some years, and kept his kingdom in good order; for no one would kill him, when many of the other fowls were taken for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. But he did die at last; and even then he was good and brave, as you shall hear.

One of the boys wanted to smoke a pipe, and went behind the hen-house, so nobody should see him do such a silly thing. He thought he heard his father coming, and hid the pipe under the house. Some straw and dry leaves lay about, and took fire, setting the place in a blaze; for the boy ran away when he saw the mischief he had done, and the fire got to burning nicely before the cries of the poor hens called people to help. The door was locked, and could not be opened, because the key was in the pocket of the naughty boy; so the farmer got an axe and chopped down the wall, letting the poor biddies fly out, squawking and smoking.

“Where is Cocky?” cried the other boy, as he counted the hens and missed the king of the farmyard.

“Burnt up, I’m afraid,” said the farmer, who was throwing water on the flames.

Alas! yes, he was: for when the fire was out they found good old Cocky sitting on a nest, with his wide wings spread over some little chicks whose mother had left them. They were too small to run away, and sat chirping sadly till Cocky covered and kept them safe, though the smoke choked *him* to death.

Every one was very sorry; and the children gave the good bird a fine funeral, and buried him in the middle of the field, with a green mound over him, and a white stone, on which was written, —

Here lies the bravest cock that ever crew:
We mourn for him with sorrow true.
Now nevermore at dawn his music shall we hear,
Waking the world like trumpet shrill and clear.
The hens all hang their heads, the chickens sadly peep;
The boys look sober, and the girls all weep.
Good-by, dear Cocky: sleep and rest,
With grass and daisies on your faithful breast;
And when you wake, brave bird, so good and true,
Clap your white wings and crow, “Cock-a-doodle-doo.”

[Illustration: The lion walked awhile to rest himself.]

ROSY'S JOURNEY.

Rosy was a nice little girl who lived with her mother in a small house in the woods. They were very poor, for the father had gone away to dig gold, and did not come back; so they had to work hard to get food to eat and clothes to wear. The mother spun yarn when she was able, for she was often sick, and Rosy did all she could to help. She milked the red cow and fed the hens; dug the garden, and went to town to sell the yarn and the eggs.

She was very good and sweet, and every one loved her; but the neighbors were all poor, and could do little to help the child. So, when at last the mother died, the cow and hens and house had to be sold to pay the doctor and the debts. Then Rosy was left all alone, with no mother, no home, and no money to buy clothes and dinners with.

"What will you do?" said the people, who were very sorry for her.

"I will go and find my father," answered Rosy, bravely.

"But he is far away, and you don't know just where he is, up among the mountains. Stay with us and spin on your little wheel, and we will buy the yarn, and take care of you, dear little girl," said the kind people.

"No, I must go; for mother told me to, and my father will be glad to have me. I'm not afraid, for every one is good to me," said Rosy, gratefully.

Then the people gave her a warm red cloak, and a basket with a little loaf and bottle of milk in it, and some pennies to buy more to eat when the bread was gone. They all kissed her, and wished her good luck; and she trotted away through the wood to find her father.

For some days she got on very well; for the wood-cutters were kind, and let her sleep in their huts, and gave her things to eat. But by and by she came to lonely places, where there were no houses; and then she was afraid, and used to climb up in the trees to sleep, and had to eat berries and leaves, like the Children in the Wood.

She made a fire at night, so wild beasts would not come near her; and if she met other travellers, she was so young and innocent no one had the heart to hurt her. She was kind to everything she met; so all little creatures were friends to her, as we shall see.

One day, as she was resting by a river, she saw a tiny fish on the bank, nearly dead for want of water.

"Poor thing! go and be happy again," she said, softly taking him up, and dropping him into the nice cool river.

“Thank you, dear child; I’ll not forget, but will help you some day,” said the fish, when he had taken a good drink, and felt better.

“Why, how can a tiny fish help such a great girl as I am?” laughed Rosy.

“Wait and see,” answered the fish, as he swam away with a flap of his little tail.

Rosy went on her way, and forgot all about it. But she never forgot to be kind; and soon after, as she was looking in the grass for strawberries, she found a field-mouse with a broken leg.

“Help me to my nest, or my babies will starve,” cried the poor thing.

“Yes, I will; and bring these berries so that you can keep still till your leg is better, and have something to eat.”

Rosy took the mouse carefully in her little hand, and tied up the broken leg with a leaf of spearmint and a blade of grass. Then she carried her to the nest under the roots of an old tree, where four baby mice were squeaking sadly for their mother. She made a bed of thistledown for the sick mouse, and put close within reach all the berries and seeds she could find, and brought an acorn-cup of water from the spring, so they could be comfortable.

“Good little Rosy, I shall pay you for all this kindness some day,” said the mouse, when she was done.

“I’m afraid you are not big enough to do much,” answered Rosy, as she ran off to go on her journey.

“Wait and see,” called the mouse; and all the little ones squeaked, as if they said the same.

Some time after, as Rosy lay up in a tree, waiting for the sun to rise, she heard a great buzzing close by, and saw a fly caught in a cobweb that went from one twig to another. The big spider was trying to spin him all up, and the poor fly was struggling to get away before his legs and wings were helpless.

Rosy put up her finger and pulled down the web, and the spider ran away at once to hide under the leaves. But the happy fly sat on Rosy’s hand, cleaning his wings, and buzzing so loud for joy that it sounded like a little trumpet.

“You’ve saved my life, and I’ll save yours, if I can,” said the fly, twinkling his bright eye at Rosy.

“You silly thing, you can’t help me,” answered Rosy, climbing down, while the fly buzzed away, saying, like the mouse and fish, —

“Wait and see; wait and see.”

Rosy trudged on and on, till at last she came to the sea. The mountains were on the other side; but how should she get over the wide water? No ships were there, and she had no money to hire one if there had been any; so she sat on the shore, very tired and sad, and cried a few big tears as salt as the sea.

"Hullo!" called a bubbly sort of voice close by; and the fish popped up his head. Rosy ran to see what he wanted.

"I've come to help you over the water," said the fish.

"How can you, when I want a ship, and some one to show me the way?" answered Rosy.

"I shall just call my friend the whale, and he will take you over better than a ship, because he won't get wrecked. Don't mind if he spouts and flounces about a good deal, he is only playing; so you needn't be frightened."

Down dived the little fish, and Rosy waited to see what would happen; for she didn't believe such a tiny thing could really bring a whale to help her.

Presently what looked like a small island came floating through the sea; and turning round, so that its tail touched the shore, the whale said, in a roaring voice that made her jump, —

"Come aboard, little girl, and hold on tight. I'll carry you wherever you like."

It was rather a slippery bridge, and Rosy was rather scared at this big, strange boat; but she got safely over, and held on fast; then, with a roll and a plunge, off went the whale, spouting two fountains, while his tail steered him like the rudder of a ship.

Rosy liked it, and looked down into the deep sea, where all sorts of queer and lovely things were to be seen. Great fishes came and looked at her; dolphins played near to amuse her; the pretty nautilus sailed by in its transparent boat; and porpoises made her laugh with their rough play. Mermaids brought her pearls and red coral to wear, sea-apples to eat, and at night sung her to sleep with their sweet lullabies.

So she had a very pleasant voyage, and ran on shore with many thanks to the good whale, who gave a splendid spout, and swam away.

Then Rosy travelled along till she came to a desert. Hundreds of miles of hot sand, with no trees or brooks or houses.

"I never can go that way," she said; "I should starve, and soon be worn out walking in that hot sand. What *shall* I do?"

”Quee, quee!
Wait and see:
You were good to me;
So here I come,
From my little home,
To help you willingly,"

said a friendly voice; and there was the mouse, looking at her with its bright eyes full of gratitude.

"Why, you dear little thing, I'm very glad to see you; but I'm sure you can't help me across this desert," said Rosy, stroking its soft back.

"That's easy enough," answered the mouse, rubbing its paws briskly. "I'll just call my friend the lion; he lives here, and he'll take you across with pleasure."

"Oh, I'm afraid he'd rather eat me. How dare you call that fierce beast?" cried Rosy, much surprised.

"I gnawed him out of a net once, and he promised to help me. He is a noble animal, and he will keep his word."

Then the mouse sang, in its shrill little voice, —

"O lion, grand,
Come over the sand,
And help me now, I pray!
Here's a little lass,
Who wants to pass;
Please carry her on her way."

In a moment a loud roar was heard, and a splendid yellow lion, with fiery eyes and a long mane, came bounding over the sand to meet them.

"What can I do for you, tiny friend?" he said, looking at the mouse, who was not a bit frightened, though Rosy hid behind a rock, expecting every moment to be eaten.

Mousie told him, and the good lion said pleasantly, —

"I'll take the child along. Come on, my dear; sit on my back and hold fast to my mane, for I'm a swift horse, and you might fall off."

Then he crouched down like a great cat, and Rosy climbed up, for he was so kind she could not fear him; and away they went, racing over the sand till her hair whistled in the wind. As soon as she got her breath, she thought it great fun to go flying along, while other lions and tigers rolled their fierce eyes at her, but dared not touch her; for this lion was king of all, and she was quite safe. They met a train of camels with loads on their backs; and the people travelling with them wondered what queer thing was riding that fine lion. It looked like a very large monkey in a red cloak, but went so fast they never saw that it was a little girl.

"How glad I am that I was kind to the mouse; for if the good little creature had not helped me, I never could have crossed this desert," said Rosy, as the lion walked awhile to rest himself.

"And if the mouse had not gnawed me out of the net I never should have come at her call. You see, little people can conquer big ones, and make them gentle and friendly by kindness," answered the lion.

Then away they went again, faster than ever, till they came to the green country. Rosy thanked the good beast, and he ran back, for if any one saw him, they would try to catch him.

"Now I have only to climb up these mountains and find father," thought Rosy, as she saw the great hills before her, with many steep roads winding up to the top, and far, far away rose the smoke from the huts where the men lived and dug for gold. She started off bravely, but took the wrong road, and after climbing a long while found the path ended in rocks over which she could not go. She was very tired and hungry; for her food was gone, and there were no houses in this wild place. Night was coming on, and it was so cold she was afraid she would freeze before morning, but dared not go on lest she should fall down some steep hole and be killed. Much discouraged, she lay down on the moss and cried a little; then she tried to sleep, but something kept buzzing in her ear, and looking carefully she saw a fly prancing about on the moss, as if anxious to make her listen to his song, —

  ”Rosy, my dear,
  Don't cry, — I'm here
To help you all I can.
  I'm only a fly,
  But you'll see that I
Will keep my word like a man."

Rosy couldn't help laughing to hear the brisk little fellow talk as if he could do great things; but she was very glad to see him and hear his cheerful song, so she held out her finger, and while he sat there told him all her troubles.

"Bless your heart! my friend the eagle will carry you right up the mountains and leave you at your father's door," cried the fly; and he was off with a flirt of his gauzy wings, for he meant what he said.

Rosy was ready for her new horse, and not at all afraid after the whale and the lion; so when a great eagle swooped down and alighted near her, she just looked at his sharp claws, big eyes, and crooked beak as coolly as if he had been a cock-robin.

He liked her courage, and said kindly in his rough voice, —

"Hop up, little girl, and sit among my feathers. Hold me fast round the neck, or you may grow dizzy and get a fall."

Rosy nestled down among the thick gray feathers, and put both arms round his neck; and whiz they went, up, up, up, higher and higher, till the trees looked like grass, they were so far below. At first it was very cold, and Rosy cuddled deeper into her feather bed; then, as they came nearer to the sun, it grew warm, and she peeped out to see the huts standing in a green spot on the top of the mountain.

"Here we are. You'll find all the men are down in the mine at this time. They won't come up till morning; so you will have to wait for your father. Good-by; good luck, my dear." And the eagle soared away, higher still, to his nest among the clouds.

It was night now, but fires were burning in all the houses; so Rosy went from hut to hut trying to find her father's, that she might rest while she waited: at last in one the picture of a pretty little girl hung on the wall, and under it was written, "My Rosy." Then she knew that this was the right place; and she ate some supper, put on more wood, and went to bed, for she wanted to be fresh when her father came in the morning.

While she slept a storm came on, — thunder rolled and lightning flashed, the wind blew a gale, and rain poured, — but Rosy never waked till dawn, when she heard men shouting outside, —

"Run, run! The river is rising! We shall all be drowned!"

Rosy ran out to see what was the matter, though the wind nearly blew her away; she found that so much rain had made the river overflow till it began to wash the banks away.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" cried Rosy, watching the men rush about like ants, getting their bags of gold ready to carry off before the water swept them away, if it became a flood.

As if in answer to her cry, Rosy heard a voice say close by, —

"Splash, dash!
Rumble and crash!
Here come the beavers gay;
See what they do,
Rosy, for you,
Because you helped *me* one day."

And there in the water was the little fish swimming about, while an army of beavers began to pile up earth and stones in a high bank to keep the river back. How they worked, digging and heaping with teeth and claws, and beating the earth hard with their queer tails like shovels! Rosy and the men watched them work, glad to be safe, while the storm cleared up; and by the time the dam was made, all danger was over. Rosy looked into the faces of the rough men, hoping her father was there, and was just going to ask about him, when a great shouting rose again, and all began to run to the pit hole, saying, —

“The sand has fallen in! The poor fellows will be smothered! How can we get them out? how can we get them out?”

Rosy ran too, feeling as if her heart would break; for her father was down in the mine, and would die soon if air did not come to him. The men dug as hard as they could; but it was a long job, and they feared they would not be in time.

Suddenly hundreds of moles came scampering along, and began to burrow down through the earth, making many holes for air to go in; for they know how to build galleries through the ground better than men can. Every one was so surprised they stopped to look on; for the dirt flew like rain as the busy little fellows scratched and bored as if making an underground railway.

“What does it mean?” said the men. “They work faster than we can, and better; but who sent them? Is this strange little girl a fairy?”

Before Rosy could speak, all heard a shrill, small voice singing, —

”They come at my call;
And though they are small,
They’ll dig the passage clear:
I never forget;
We’ll save them yet,
For love of Rosy dear.”

Then all saw a little gray mouse sitting on a stone, waving her tail about, and pointing with her tiny paw to show the moles where to dig.

The men laughed; and Rosy was telling them who she was, when a cry came from the pit, and they saw that the way was clear so they could pull the buried men up. In a minute they got ropes, and soon had ten poor fellows safe on the ground; pale and dirty, but all alive, and all shouting as if they were crazy, —

“Tom’s got it! Tom’s got it! Hooray for Tom!”

“What is it?” cried the others; and then they saw Tom come up with the biggest lump of gold ever found in the mountains.

Every one was glad of Tom’s luck; for he was a good man, and had worked a long time, and been sick, and couldn’t go back to his wife and child. When he saw Rosy, he dropped the lump, and caught her up, saying, —

“My little girl! she’s better than a million pounds of gold.”

Then Rosy was very happy, and went back to the hut, and had a lovely time telling her father all about her troubles and her travels. He cried when he heard that the poor mother was dead before she could have any of the good things the gold would buy them.

“We will go away and be happy together in the pleasantest home I can find, and never part any more, my darling,” said the father, kissing Rosy as she sat on his knee with her arms round his neck.

She was just going to say something very sweet to comfort him, when a fly lit on her arm and buzzed very loud, —

”Don’t drive me away,
But hear what I say:
Bad men want the gold;
They will steal it to-night,
And you must take flight;
So be quiet and busy and bold.”

“I was afraid some one would take my lump away. I’ll pack up at once, and we will creep off while the men are busy at work; though I’m afraid we can’t go fast enough to be safe, if they miss us and come after,” said Tom, bundling his gold into a bag and looking very sober; for some of the miners were wild fellows, and might kill him for the sake of that great lump.

But the fly sang again, —

”Slip away with me,
And you will see
What a wise little thing am I;
For the road I show
No man can know,
Since it’s up in the pathless sky.”

Then they followed Buzz to a quiet nook in the wood; and there were the eagle and his mate waiting to fly away with them so fast and so far that no one could follow. Rosy and the bag of gold were put on the mother eagle; Tom sat astride the king bird; and away they flew to a great city, where the little girl and her father lived happily together all their lives.

[Illustration: Poor Billy dangling from a bough, high above the ground.]

HOW THEY RAN AWAY.

Two little boys sat on the fence whittling arrows one fine day. Said one little boy to the other little boy, —

“Let’s do something jolly.”

“All right. What will we do?”

“Run off to the woods and be hunters.”

“What can we hunt?”

“Bears and foxes”

“Mullin says there ain’t any round here.”

“Well, we can shoot squirrels and snare wood-chucks.”

“Haven’t got any guns and trap.”

“We’ve got our bows, and I found an old trap behind the barn.”

“What will we eat?”

“Here’s our lunch; and when that’s gone we can roast the squirrels and cook the fish on a stick. I know how.”

“Where will you get the fire?”

“Got matches in my pocket.”

“I’ve got a lot of things we could use. Let’s see.”

And as if satisfied at last, cautious Billy displayed his treasures, while bold Tommy did the same.

Besides the two knives there were strings, nails, matches, a piece of putty, fish-hooks, and two very dirty handkerchiefs.

“There, sir, that’s a first-rate fit-out for hunters; and with the jolly basket of lunch Mrs. Mullin gave us, we can get on tip-top for two or three days,” said Tommy, eager to be off.

“Where shall we sleep?” asked Billy, who liked to be comfortable both night and day.

“Oh, up in trees or on beds of leaves, like the fellows in our books. If you are afraid, stay at home; I’m going to have no end of a good time.” And Tommy crammed the things back into his pockets as if there were no time to lose.

“Pooh! I ain’t afraid. Come on!” And jumping down Billy caught up his rod, rather ashamed of his many questions.

No one was looking at them, and they might have walked quietly off; but that the “running away” might be all right, both raced down the road, tumbled over a wall, and dashed into the woods as if a whole tribe of wild Indians were after them.

"Do you know the way?" panted Billy, when at last they stopped for breath.

"Yes, it winds right up the mountain; but we'd better not keep to it, or some one will see us and take us back. We are going to be *real* hunters and have adventures; so we must get lost, and find our way by the sun and the stars," answered Tommy, who had read so many Boys' Books his little head was a jumble of Texan Rangers, African Explorers, and Buffalo Bills; and he burned to outdo them all.

"What will our mothers say if we really get lost?" asked Billy, always ready with a question.

"Mine won't fuss. She lets me do what I like."

That was true; for Tommy's poor mamma was tired of trying to keep the lively little fellow in order, and had got used to seeing him come out of all his scrapes without much harm.

"Mine will be scared; she's always afraid I'm going to get hurt, so I'm careful. But I guess I'll risk it, and have some fun to tell about when we go home," said Billy, trudging after Captain Tommy, who always took the lead.

These eleven-year-old boys were staying with their mothers at a farm-house up among the mountains; and having got tired of the tame bears, the big barn, the trout brook, the thirty colts at pasture, and the society of the few little girls and younger boys at the hotel near by, these fine fellows longed to break loose and "rough it in the bush," as the hunters did in their favorite stories.

Away they went, deeper and deeper into the great forest that covered the side of the mountain. A pleasant place that August day; for it was cool and green, with many brooks splashing over the rocks, or lying in brown pools under the ferns. Squirrels chattered and raced in the tall pines; now and then a gray rabbit skipped out of sight among the brakes, or a strange bird flew by. Here and there blackberries grew in the open places, sassafras bushes were plentiful, and black-birch bark was ready for chewing.

"Don't you call this nice?" asked Tommy, pausing at last in a little dell where a noisy brook came tumbling down the mountain side, and the pines sung overhead.

"Yes; but I'm awful hungry. Let's rest and eat our lunch," said Billy, sitting down on a cushion of moss.

"You always want to be stuffing and resting," answered sturdy Tommy, who liked to be moving all the time.

He took the fishing-basket, which hung over his shoulder by a strap, and opened it carefully; for good Mrs. Mullin had packed a nice lunch of bread and butter, cake and peaches, with a bottle of milk, and two large pickles slipped in on the sly to please the boys.

Tommy's face grew very sober as he looked in, for all he saw was a box of worms for bait and an old jacket.

"By George! we've got the wrong basket. This is Mullin's, and he's gone off with our prog. Won't he be mad?"

"Not as mad as I am. Why didn't you look? You are always in such a hurry to start. What *shall* we do now without anything to eat?" whined Billy; for losing his lunch was a dreadful blow to him.

"We shall have to catch some fish and eat blackberries. Which will you do, old cry-baby?" said Tommy, laughing at the other boy's dismal face.

"I'll fish; I'm so tired I can't go scratching round after berries. I don't love 'em, either." And Billy began to fix his line and bait his hook.

"Lucky we got the worms; you can eat 'em if you can't wait for fish," said Tommy, bustling about to empty the basket and pile up their few possessions in a heap. "There's a quiet pool below here, you go and fish there. I'll pick the berries, and then show you how to get dinner in the woods. This is our camp; so fly round and do your best."

Then Tommy ran off to a place near by where he had seen the berries, while Billy found a comfortable nook by the pool, and sat scowling at the water so crossly, it was a wonder any trout came to his hook. But the fat worms tempted several small ones, and he cheered up at the prospect of food. Tommy whistled while he picked, and in half an hour came back with two quarts of nice berries and an armful of dry sticks for the fire.

"We'll have a jolly dinner, after all," he said, as the flames went crackling up, and the dry leaves made a pleasant smell.

"Got four, but don't see how we'll ever cook 'em; no frying-pan," grumbled Billy, throwing down the four little trout, which he had half cleaned.

"Don't want any. Broil 'em on the coals, or toast 'em on a forked stick. I'll show you how," said cheerful Tommy, whittling away, and feeding his fire as much like a real hunter as a small boy could be.

While he worked, Billy ate berries and sighed for bread and butter. At last, after much trouble, two of the trout were half cooked and eagerly eaten by the hungry boys. But they were very different from the nice brown ones Mrs. Mullin gave them; for in spite of Tommy's struggles they would fall in the ashes, and there was no salt to eat with them. By the time the last were toasted, the young hunters were so hungry they could have eaten anything, and not a berry was left.

"I set the trap down there, for I saw a hole among the vines, and I shouldn't wonder if we got a rabbit or something,” said Tommy, when the last bone was polished. “You go and catch some more fish, and I’ll see if I have caught any old chap as he went home to dinner.”

Off ran Tommy; and the other boy went slowly back to the brook, wishing with all his might he was at home eating sweet corn and berry pie.

The trout had evidently gone to their dinners, for not one bite did poor Billy get; and he was just falling asleep when a loud shout gave him such a fright that he tumbled into the brook up to his knees.

“I’ve got him! Come and see! He’s a bouncer,” roared Tommy, from the berry bushes some way off.

Billy scrambled out, and went as fast as his wet boots would let him, to see what the prize was. He found Tommy dancing wildly round a fat gray animal, who was fighting to get his paws out of the trap, and making a queer noise as he struggled about.

“What is it?” asked Billy, getting behind a tree as fast as possible, for the thing looked fierce, and he was very timid.

“A raccoon, I guess, or a big woodchuck. Won’t his fur make a fine cap? I guess the other fellows will wish they’d come with us.” said Tommy, prancing to and fro, without the least idea what to do with the creature.

“He’ll bite. We’d better run away and wait till he’s dead,” said Billy.

“Wish he’d got his head in, then I could carry him off; but he does look savage, so we’ll have to leave him awhile, and get him when we come back. But he’s a real beauty.” And Tommy looked proudly at the bunch of gray fur scuffling in the sand.

“Can we ever eat him?” asked hungry Billy, ready for a fried crocodile if he could get it.

“If he’s a raccoon, we can; but I don’t know about woodchucks. The fellows in my books don’t seem to have caught any. He’s nice and fat; we might try him when he’s dead,” said Tommy, who cared more for the skin to show than the best meal ever cooked.

The sound of a gun echoing through the wood gave Tommy a good idea, —

“Let’s find the man and get him to shoot this chap; then we needn’t wait, but skin him right away, and eat him too.”

Off they went to the camp; and catching up their things, the two hunters hurried away in the direction of the sound, feeling glad to know that some one was near them, for two or three hours of wood life made them a little homesick.

They ran and scrambled, and listened and called; but not until they had gone a long way up the mountain did they find the man, resting in an old hut left by the lumbermen. The remains of his dinner were spread on the floor, and he lay smoking, and reading a newspaper, while his dog dozed at his feet, close to a well-filled game-bag.

He looked surprised when two dirty, wet little boys suddenly appeared before him, — one grinning cheerfully, the other looking very dismal and scared as the dog growled and glared at them as if they were two rabbits.

“Hollo!” said the man

“Hollo!” answered Tommy.

“Who are you?” asked the man.

“Hunters,” said Tommy.

“Had good luck?” And the man laughed.

“First-rate. Got a raccoon in our trap, and we want you to come and shoot him,” answered Tommy, proudly.

“Sure?” said the man, looking interested as well as amused.

“No, but I think so.”

“What’s he like?”

Tommy described him, and was much disappointed when the man lay down again, saying, with another laugh, —

“It’s a woodchuck; he’s no good.”

“But I want the skin.”

“Then don’t shoot him, let him die; that’s better for the skin,” said the man, who was tired and didn’t want to stop for such poor game.

All this time Billy had been staring hard at the sandwiches and bread and cheese on the floor, and sniffing at them, as the dog sniffed at him.

“Want some grub?” asked the man, seeing the hungry look.

“I just do! We left our lunch, and I’ve only had two little trout and some old berries since breakfast,” answered Billy, with tears in his eyes and a hand on his stomach.

“Eat away then; I’m done, and don’t want the stuff.” And the man took up his paper as if glad to be let alone.

It was lucky that the dog had been fed, for in ten minutes nothing was left but the napkin; and the boys sat picking up the crumbs, much refreshed, but ready for more.

“Better be going home, my lads; it’s pretty cold on the mountain after sunset, and you are a long way from town,” said the man, who had peeped at them over his paper now and then, and saw, in spite of the dirt and rips, that they were not farmer boys.

“We don’t live in town; we are at Mullin’s, in the valley. No hurry; we know the way, and we want to have some sport first. You seem to have done well,” answered Tommy, looking enviously from the gun to the game-bag, out of which hung a rabbit’s head and a squirrel’s tail.

“Pretty fair; but I want a shot at the bear. People tell me there is one up here, and I’m after him; for he kills the sheep, and might hurt some of the young folks round here,” said the man, loading his gun with a very sober air; for he wanted to get rid of the boys and send them home.

Billy looked alarmed; but Tommy’s brown face beamed with joy as he said eagerly, —

“I hope you’ll get him. I’d rather shoot a bear than any other animal but a lion. We don’t have those here, and bears are scarce. Mullin said he hadn’t heard of one for a long time; so this must be a young one, for they killed the big one two years ago.”

That was true, and the man knew it. He did not really expect or want to meet a bear, but thought the idea of one would send the little fellows home at once. Finding one of them was unscared, he laughed, and said with a nod to Tommy, —

“If I had time I’d take *you* along, and show you how to hunt; but this fat friend of yours couldn’t rough it with us, and we can’t leave him alone; so go ahead your own way. Only I wouldn’t climb any higher, for among the rocks you are sure to get hurt or lost.”

“Oh, I say, let’s go! Such fun, Billy! I know you’ll like it. A real gun and dog and hunter! Come on, and don’t be a molly-coddle,” cried Tommy, wild to go.

“I won’t! I’m tired, and I’m going home; you can go after your old bears if you want to. I don’t think much of hunting anyway, and wish I hadn’t come,” growled Billy, very cross at being left out, yet with no desire to scramble any more.

“Can’t stop. Good-by. Get along home, and some day I’ll come and take you out with me, little Leatherstocking,” said the man, striding off with the dear gun and dog and bag, leaving Billy to wonder what he meant by that queer name, and Tommy to console himself with the promise made him.

“Let’s go and see how old Chucky gets on,” he said good-naturedly, when the man vanished.

“Not till I’m rested. I can get a good nap on this pile of hay; then we’ll go home before it’s late,” answered lazy Billy, settling himself on the rough bed the lumbermen had used.

“I just wish I had a boy with some go in him; you ain’t much better than a girl,” sighed Tommy, walking off to a pine-tree where some squirrels seemed to be having a party, they chattered and raced up and down at such a rate.

He tried his bow and shot all his arrows many times in vain, for the lively creatures gave him no chance. He had better luck with a brown bird who sat in a bush and was hit full in the breast with the sharpest arrow. The poor thing fluttered and fell, and its blood wet the green leaves as it lay dying on the grass. Tommy was much pleased at first; but as he stood watching its bright eye grow dim and its pretty brown wings stop fluttering, he felt sorry that its happy little life was so cruelly ended, and ashamed that his thoughtless fun had given so much pain.

"I'll never shoot another bird except hawks after chickens, and I won't brag about this one. It was so tame, and trusted me, I was very mean to kill it."

As he thought this, Tommy smoothed the ruffled feathers of the dead thrush, and, making a little grave under the pine, buried it wrapped in green leaves, and left it there where its mate could sing over it, and no rude hands disturb its rest.

"I'll tell mamma and she will understand: but I *won't* tell Billy. He is such a greedy old chap he'll say I ought to have kept the poor bird to eat," thought Tommy, as he went back to the hut, and sat there, restringing his bow, till Billy woke up, much more amiable for his sleep.

They tried to find the woodchuck, but lost their way, and wandered deeper into the great forest till they came to a rocky place and could go no farther. They climbed up and tumbled down, turned back and went round, looked at the sun and knew it was late, chewed sassafras bark and checkerberry leaves for supper, and grew more and more worried and tired as hour after hour went by and they saw no end to woods and rocks. Once or twice they heard the hunter's gun far away, and called and tried to find him.

Tommy scolded Billy for not going with the man, who knew his way and was probably safe in the valley when the last faint shot came up to them. Billy cried, and reproached Tommy for proposing to run away; and both felt very homesick for their mothers and their good safe beds at Farmer Mullin's.

The sun set, and found them in a dreary place full of rocks and blasted trees half-way up the mountain. They were so tired they could hardly walk, and longed to lie down anywhere to sleep; but, remembering the hunter's story of the bear, they were afraid to do it, till Tommy suggested climbing a tree, after making a fire at the foot of it to scare away the bear, lest he climb too and get them.

But, alas! the matches were left in their first camp; so they decided to take turns to sleep and watch, since it was plain that they must spend the night there. Billy went up first, and creeping into a good notch of the bare tree tried to sleep, while brave Tommy, armed with a big stick, marched to and fro below. Every few minutes a trembling voice would call from above, "Is anything coming?" and an anxious voice would answer from below, "Not yet. Hurry up and go to sleep! I want my turn."

At last Billy began to snore, and then Tommy felt so lonely he couldn’t bear it; so he climbed to a lower branch, and sat nodding and trying to keep watch, till he too fell fast asleep, and the early moon saw the poor boys roosting there like two little owls.

A loud cry, a scrambling overhead, and then a great shaking and howling waked Tommy so suddenly that he lost his wits for a moment and did not know where he was.

“The bear! the bear! don’t let him get me! Tommy, Tommy, come and make him let go,” cried Billy, filling the quiet night with dismal howls.

Tommy looked up, expecting to behold a large bear eating his unhappy friend; but the moonlight showed him nothing but poor Billy dangling from a bough, high above the ground, caught by his belt when he fell. He had been dreaming of bears, and rolled off his perch; so there he hung, kicking and wailing, half awake, and so scared it was long before Tommy could make him believe that he was quite safe.

How to get him down was the next question. The branch was not strong enough to bear Tommy, though he climbed up and tried to unhook poor Billy. The belt was firmly twisted at the back, and Billy could not reach to undo it, nor could he get his legs round the branch to pull himself up. There seemed no way but to unbuckle the belt and drop. That he was afraid to try; for the ground was hard, and the fall a high one. Fortunately both belt and buckle were strong; so he hung safely, though very uncomfortably, while Tommy racked his boyish brain to find a way to help him.

Billy had just declared that he should be cut in two very soon if something was not done for him, and Tommy was in despair, when they thought they heard a far-off shout, and both answered it till their throats were nearly split with screaming.

“I seem to see a light moving round down that way,” cried Billy from his hook, pointing toward the valley.

“They are looking for us, but they won’t hear us. I’ll run and holler louder, and bring ‘em up here,” answered Tommy, glad to do anything that would put an end to this dreadful state of things.

“Don’t leave me! I may fall and be killed! The bear might come! Don’t go! don’t go!” wailed Billy, longing to drop, but afraid.

“I won’t go far, and I’ll come back as quick as I can. You are safe up there. Hold on, and we’ll soon get you down,” answered Tommy, rushing away helter-skelter, never minding where he went, and too much excited to care for any damage.

The moon was bright on the blasted trees; but when he came down among the green pines, it grew dark, and he often stumbled and fell. Never minding bumps and bruises, he scrambled over rocks, leaped fallen trunks, floundered through brooks, and climbed down steep places, till, with a reckless jump, he went heels over head into a deep hole, and lay there for a moment stunned by the fall. It was an old bear-trap, long unused, and fortunately well carpeted with dead leaves, or poor Tommy would have broken his bones.

When he came to himself he was so used up that he lay still for some time in a sort of daze, too tired to know or care about anything, only dimly conscious that somebody was lost in a tree or a well, and that, on the whole, running away was not all fun.

By and by the sound of a gun roused him; and remembering poor Billy, he tried to get out of the pit, — for the moon showed him where he was. But it was too deep, and he was too stiff with weariness and the fall to be very nimble. So he shouted, and whistled, and raged about very like a little bear caught in the pit.

It is very difficult to find a lost person on these great mountains, and many wander for hours not far from help, bewildered by the thick woods, the deep ravines, and precipices which shut them in. Some have lost their lives; and as Tommy lay on the leaves used up by his various struggles, he thought of all the stories he had lately heard at the farm, and began to wonder how it would feel to starve to death down there, and to wish poor Billy could come to share his prison, that they might die together, like the Babes in the Wood, or better still the Boy Scouts lost on the prairies in that thrilling story, “Bill Boomerang, the Wild Hunter of the West.”

“I guess mother is worried this time, because I never stayed out all night before, and I never will again without leave. It’s rather good fun, though, if they only find me. I ain’t afraid, and it isn’t very cold. I always wanted to sleep out, and now I’m doing it. Wish poor Billy was safely down and in this good bed with me. Won’t he be scared all alone there? Maybe the belt will break and he get hurt bumping down. Sorry now I left him, he’s such a ‘fraid-cat. There’s the gun again! Guess it’s that man after us. Hi! hollo! Here I am! Whoop! Hurrah! Hi! hi! hi!”

Tommy’s meditations ended in a series of yells as loud as his shrill little voice could make them, and he thought some one answered. But it must have been an echo, for no one came; and after another rampage round his prison, the poor boy nestled down among the leaves, and went fast asleep because there was nothing else to do.

So there they were, the two young hunters, lost at midnight on the mountain, — one hanging like an apple on the old tree, and the other sound asleep in a bear-pit. Their distracted mothers meantime were weeping and wringing their hands at the farm, while all the men in the neighborhood were out looking for the lost boys. The hunter on his return to the hotel had reported meeting the runaways and his effort to send them home in good season; so people knew where to look, and, led by the man and dog, up the mountain went Mr. Mullin with his troop. It was a mild night, and the moon shone high and clear; so the hunt was, on the whole, rather easy and pleasant at first, and lanterns flashed through the dark forest like fireflies, the lonely cliffs seemed alive with men, and voices echoed in places where usually only the brooks babbled and the hawks screamed. But as time went on, and no sign of the boys appeared, the men grew anxious, and began to fear some serious harm had come to the runaways.

“I can’t go home without them little shavers no way, ‘specially Tommy,” said Mr. Mullin, as they stopped to rest after a hard climb through the blasted grove. “He’s a boy after my own heart, spry as a chipmunk, smart as a young cockerel, and as full of mischief as a monkey. He ain’t afraid of anything, and I shouldn’t be a mite surprised to find him enjoyin’ himself first-rate, and as cool as a coocumber.”

“The fat boy won’t take it so easily, I fancy. If it hadn’t been for him I’d have kept the lively fellow with me, and shown him how to hunt. Sorry now I didn’t take them both home,” said the man with the gun, seeing his mistake too late, as people often do.

“Maybe they’ve fell down a precipice and got killed, like Moses Warner, when he was lost,” suggested a tall fellow, who had shouted himself hoarse.

“Hush up, and come on! The dog is barkin’ yonder, and he may have found ‘em,” said the farmer, hurrying toward the place where the hound was baying at something in a tree.

It was poor Billy, hanging there still, half unconscious with weariness and fear. The belt had slipped up under his arms, so he could breathe easily; and there he was, looking like a queer sort of cone on the blasted pine.

“Wal, I never!” exclaimed the farmer, as the tall lad climbed up, and, unhooking Billy, handed him down like a young bird, into the arms held up to catch him.

“He’s all right, only scared out of his wits. Come along and look for the other one. I’ll warrant he went for help, and may be half-way home by this time,” said the hunter, who didn’t take much interest in the fat boy.

Tommy’s hat lay on the ground; and showing it to the dog, his master told him to find the boy. The good hound sniffed about, and then set off with his nose to the ground, following the zigzag track Tommy had taken in his hurry. The hunter and several of the men went after him, leaving the farmer with the others to take care of Billy.

Presently the dog came to the bear-pit, and began to bark again.

“He’s got him!” cried the men, much relieved; and rushing on soon saw the good beast looking down at a little white object in one corner of the dark hole.

It was Tommy’s face in the moonlight, for the rest of him was covered up with leaves. The little round face seemed very quiet; and for a moment the men stood quite still, fearing that the fall might have done the boy some harm. Then the hunter leaped down, and gently touched the brown cheek. It was warm, and a soft snore from the pug nose made the man call out, much relieved, —

“He’s all right. Wake up here, little chap; you are wanted at home. Had hunting enough for this time?”

As he spoke, Tommy opened his eyes, gave a stretch, and said, “Hollo, Billy,” as calmly as if in his own bed at home. Then the rustle of the leaves, the moonlight in his face, and the sight of several men staring down at him startled him wide awake.

“Did you shoot the big bear?” he asked, looking up at the hunter with a grin.

“No; but I caught a little one, and here he is,” answered the man, giving Tommy a roll in the leaves, much pleased because he did not whine or make a fuss.

“Got lost, didn’t we? Oh, I say, where’s Billy? I left him up a tree like a coon, and he wouldn’t come down,” laughed Tommy, kicking off his brown bed-clothes, and quite ready to get up now.

They all laughed with him; and presently, when the story was told, they pulled the boy out of the pit, and went back to join the other wanderer, who was now sitting up eating the bread and butter Mrs. Mullin sent for their very late supper.

The men roared again, as the two boys told their various tribulations; and when they had been refreshed, the party started for home, blowing the tin horns, and firing shot after shot to let the scattered searchers know that the lost children were found. Billy was very quiet, and gladly rode on the various broad backs offered for his use, but Tommy stoutly refused to be carried, and with an occasional “boost” over a very rough place, walked all the way down on his own sturdy legs. He was the hero of the adventure, and was never tired of relating how he caught the woodchuck, cooked the fish, slid down the big rock, and went to bed in the old bear-pit. But in his own little mind he resolved to wait till he was older before he tried to be a hunter; and though he caught several woodchucks that summer, he never shot another harmless little bird.

[Illustration: A wasp flew out and stung her lips.]

THE FAIRY BOX.

“I wish I had a magic bracelet like Rosamond’s, that would prick me when I was going to do wrong,” said little May, as she put down the story she had been reading.

There was no one else in the room, but she heard a sweet voice sing these words close to her ear: —

”Now hark, little May,
  If you want to do right,
Under your pillow
  Just look every night.
If you have been good
  All through the day,
A gift you will find,
  Useful or gay;
But if you have been
  Cross, selfish, or wild,
A bad thing will come
  For the naughty child.
So try, little dear,
  And soon you will see
How easy and sweet
  To grow good it will be.”

May was very much surprised at this, and looked everywhere to see who spoke, but could find no one.

“I guess I dreamed it; but my eyes are wide open, and I can’t make up poetry, asleep or awake.”

As she said that, some one laughed; and the same voice sang again, —

”Ha, ha, you can’t see,
  Although I am here;
But listen to what
  I say in your ear.
Tell no one of this.
  Because, if you do,

My fun will be spoilt,
And so will yours too.
But if you are good,
And patient, and gay,
A real fairy will come
To see little May."

"Oh, how splendid that will be! I'll try hard, and be as good as an angel if I can only get one peep at a live fairy. I always said there were such people, and now I shall know how they look," cried the little girl, so pleased that she danced all about the room, clapping her hands.

Something bright darted out of the window from among the flowers that stood there, and no more songs were heard; so May knew that the elf had gone.

"I've got a fine secret all to myself, and I'll keep it carefully. I wonder what present will come to-night," she said, thinking this a very interesting play.

She was very good all day, and made no fuss about going to bed, though usually she fretted, and wanted to play, and called for water, and plagued poor Nursey in many ways. She got safely into her little nest, and then was in such a hurry to see what was under her pillow that she forgot, and called out crossly, —

"Do hurry and go away. Don't wait to hang up my clothes, you slow old thing! Go, go!"

That hurt Nurse's feelings, and she went away without her good-night kiss. But May didn't care, and felt under her pillow the minute the door was shut. A lamp was always left burning; so she could see the little gold box she drew out.

"How pretty! I hope there is some candy in it," she said, opening it very carefully.

Oh, dear! what *do* you think happened? A wasp flew out and stung her lips; then both wasp and box vanished, and May was left to cry alone, with a sharp pain in the lips that said the unkind words.

"What a dreadful present! I don't like that spiteful fairy who sends such horrid things," she sobbed.

Then she lay still and thought about it; for she dared not call any one, because nobody must guess the secret. She knew in her own little heart that the cross words hurt Nursey as the sting did her lips, and she felt sorry. At once the smart got better, and by the time she had resolved to ask the good old woman to forgive her, it was all gone.

Next morning she kissed Nursey and begged pardon, and tried hard to be good till tea-time; then she ran to see what nice things they were going to have to eat, though she had often been told not to go into the dining- room. No one was there; and on the table stood a dish of delicious little cakes, all white like snowballs.

"I must have just a taste, and I'll tell mamma afterward," she said; and before she knew it one little cake was eaten all up.

"Nobody will miss it, and I can have another at tea. Now, a lump of sugar and a sip of cream before mamma comes, I so like to pick round."

Having done one wrong thing, May felt like going on; so she nibbled and meddled with all sorts of forbidden things till she heard a step, then she ran away; and by and by, when the bell rang, came in with the rest as prim and proper as if she did not know how to play pranks. No one missed the cake, and her mother gave her another, saying, —

"There, dear, is a nice plummy one for my good child."

May turned red, and wanted to tell what she had done, but was ashamed because there was company; and people thought she blushed like a modest little girl at being praised.

But when she went to bed she was almost afraid to look under the pillow, knowing that she had done wrong. At last she slowly drew out the box, and slowly opened it, expecting something to fly at her. All she saw was a tiny black bag, that began at once to grow larger, till it was big enough to hold her two hands. Then it tied itself tight round her wrists, as if to keep these meddlesome hands out of mischief.

"Well, this is very queer, but not so dreadful as the wasp. I hope no one will see it when I'm asleep. I do wish I'd let those cakes and things alone," sighed May, looking at the black bag, and vainly trying to get her hands free.

She cried herself to sleep, and when she woke the bag was gone. No one had seen it; but she told her mamma about the cake, and promised not to do so any more.

"Now this shall be a *truly* good day, every bit of it," she said, as she skipped away, feeling as light as a feather after she had confessed her little sins.

But, alas! it is so easy to forget and do wrong, that May spoilt her day before dinner by going to the river and playing with the boats, in spite of many orders not to do it. She did not tell of it, and went to a party in the afternoon, where she was so merry she never remembered the naughty thing till she was in bed and opened the fairy box. A little chain appeared, which in a flash grew long and large, and fastened round her ankles as if she were a prisoner. May liked to tumble about, and was much disgusted to be chained in this way; but there was no help for it, so she lay very still and had plenty of time to be sorry.

"It is a good punishment for me, and I deserve it. I won't cry, but I will — I *will* remember." And May said her prayers very soberly, really meaning to keep her word this time.

All the next day she was very careful to keep her lips from cross words, her hands from forbidden things, and her feet from going wrong. Nothing spoilt this day, she watched so well; and when mamma gave the good-night kiss, she said, —

"What shall I give my good little daughter, who has been gentle, obedient, and busy all day?"

"I want a white kitty, with blue eyes, and a pink ribbon on its neck," answered May.

"I'll try and find one. Now go to bed, deary, and happy dreams!" said mamma, with many kisses on the rosy cheeks, and the smile that was a reward.

May was so busy thinking about the kitty and the good day that she forgot the box till she heard a little "Mew, mew!" under her pillow.

"Mercy me! what's that?" And she popped up her head to see.

Out came the box; off flew the lid, and there, on a red cushion, lay a white kit about two inches long. May couldn't believe that it was alive till it jumped out of its nest, stretched itself, and grew all at once just the right size to play with and be pretty. Its eyes were blue, its tail like a white plume, and a sweet pink bow was on its neck. It danced all over the bed, ran up the curtains, hid under the clothes, nipped May's toes, licked her face, patted her nose with its soft paw, and winked at her in such a funny way that she laughed for joy at having such a dear kitty. Presently, as if it knew that bed was the place to lie quiet in, puss cuddled down in a little bunch and purred May to sleep.

"I suppose that darling kit will be gone like all the other things," said
May, as she waked up and looked round for her first pretty gift.

No; there was the lovely thing sitting in the sun among the flower-pots, washing her face and getting ready for play. What a fine frolic they had; and how surprised every one was to see just the pussy May wanted! They supposed it came as kitties often come; and May never told them it was a fairy present, because she had promised not to. She was so happy with little puss that she was good all day; and when she went to bed she thought, —

"I wish I had a dog to play with darling Snowdrop, and run with me when I go to walk."

"Bow, wow, wow!" came from under the pillow; and out of the box trotted a curly black dog, with long ears, a silver collar, and such bright, kind eyes May was not a bit afraid of him, but loved him at once, and named him Floss, he was so soft and silky. Pussy liked him too; and when May was sleepy they both snuggled down in the same basket like two good babies, and went to by-low.

"Well, I never! What shall we find next?" said Nurse, when she saw the dog in the morning.

"Perhaps it will be an elephant, to fill the whole house, and scare you out of your wits," laughed May, dancing about with Snowdrop chasing her bare toes, while Floss shook and growled over her shoes as if they were rats.

"If your cousin John wants to give you any more animals, I wish he'd send a pony to take you to school, and save my old legs the pain of trotting after you," said Nurse; for May did have a rich cousin who was very fond of her, and often gave her nice things.

"Perhaps he will," laughed May, much tickled with the idea that it was a fairy, and not Cousin John, who sent the cunning little creatures to her.

But she didn't get the pony that night; for in the afternoon her mother told her not to sit on the lawn, because it was damp, and May did not mind, being busy with a nice story. So when she took up her box, a loud sneeze seemed to blow the lid off, and all she saw was a bit of red flannel.

"What is this for?" she asked, much disappointed; and as if to answer, the strip of flannel wrapped itself round her neck.

"There! my throat *is* sore, and I *am* hoarse. I wonder how that fairy knew I sat on the damp grass. I'm so sorry; for I did want a pony, and might have had it if I'd only minded," said May, angry with herself for spoiling all her fun.

It *was* spoilt; for she had such a cold next day she couldn't go out at all, but had to take medicine and keep by the fire, while the other children had a lovely picnic.

"I won't wish for anything to-night; I don't deserve a present, I was so disobedient. But I *have* tried to be patient," said May, feeling for the box.

The fairy had not forgotten her, and there was a beautiful picture-book, full of new, nice stories printed in colored ink.

"How splendid to read to-morrow while I'm shut up!" she said, and went to sleep very happily.

All the next day she enjoyed the pretty pictures and funny tales, and never complained or fretted at all, but was so much better the doctor said she could go out to-morrow, if it was fine.

"Now I will wish for the pony," said May, in her bed. But there was nothing in the box except a little red-silk rope, like a halter. She did not know what to do with it that night, but she did the next morning; for just as she was dressed her brother called from the garden, —

"May, look out and see what we found in the stable. None of us can catch him, so do come and see if you can; your name is on the card tied to his mane."

May looked, and there was a snow-white pony racing about the yard as if he was having a fine frolic. Then she knew the halter was for him, and ran down to catch him. The minute she appeared, the pony went to her and put his nose in her hand, neighing, as if he said, —

“This is my little mistress; I will mind her and serve her well.”

May was delighted, and very proud when the pony let her put on the saddle and bridle that lay in the barn all ready to use. She jumped up and rode gayly down the road; and Will and mamma and all the maids and Floss and Snowdrop ran to see the pretty sight. The children at school were much excited when she came trotting up, and all wanted to ride Prince. He was very gentle, and every one had a ride; but May had the best fun, for she could go every day for long trots by the carriage when mamma and Will drove out. A blue habit and a hat with a long feather were bought that afternoon; and May was so happy and contented at night that she said to herself as she lay in bed, —

“I’ll wish for something for Will now, and see if I get it. I don’t want any more presents yet; I’ve had my share, and I’d love to give away to other people who have no fairy box.”

So she wished for a nice boat, and in the box lay a key with the name “Water Lily” on it. She guessed what it meant, and in the morning told her brother to come to the river and see what she had for him. There lay a pretty green and white boat, with cushioned seats, a sail all spread, and at the mast-head a little flag flying in the wind, with the words “Water Lily” on it in gold letters.

Will was so surprised and pleased to find that it was his, he turned heels over head on the grass, kissed May, and skipped into his boat, crying, “All aboard!” as if eager to try it at once.

May followed, and they sailed away down the lovely river, white with real lilies, while the blackbirds sang in the green meadows on either side, and boys and girls stopped on the bridges to see them pass.

After that May kept on trying to be good, and wishing for things for herself and other people, till she forgot how to be naughty, and was the sweetest little girl in the world. Then there was no need of fairies to help her; and one night the box was not under the pillow.

“Well, I’ve had my share of pretty things, and must learn to do without. I’m glad I tried; for now it is easy to be good, and I don’t need to be rewarded,” said May, as she fell asleep, quite happy and contented, though she did wish she could have seen the fairy just once.

Next morning the first thing she saw was a beautiful bracelet, shining on the table; and while she stood admiring it, she heard the little voice sing, —

”Here is the bracelet
  For good little May
To wear on her arm
  By night and by day.
When it shines like the sun,
  All’s going well;
But when you are bad,
  A sharp prick will tell.
Farewell, little girl,
  For now we must part.
Make a fairy-box, dear,
  Of your own happy heart;
And take out for all
  Sweet gifts every day,
Till all the year round
  Is like beautiful May.”

As the last words were sung, right before her eyes she saw a tiny creature swinging on the rose that stood there in a vase, — a lovely elf, with wings like a butterfly, a gauzy dress, and a star on her forehead. She smiled, and waved her hand as she slowly rose and fluttered away into the sunshine, till she vanished from sight, leaving May with the magic bracelet on her arm, and the happy thought that at last she had *really* seen a fairy.

[Illustration: Johnny leaned forward to enjoy the long-desired “peek.”]

A HOLE IN THE WALL.

PART I.

If any one had asked Johnny Morris who were his best friends, he would have answered, —

“The sun and the wind, next to mother.”

Johnny lived in a little court that led off from one of the busiest streets in the city, — a noisy street, where horse-car bells tinkled and omnibuses rumbled all day long, going and coming from several great depots near by. The court was a dull place, with only two or three shabby houses in it, and a high blank wall at the end.

The people who hurried by were too busy to do more than to glance at the lame boy who sat in the sunshine against the wall, or to guess that there was a picture-gallery and a circulating-library in the court. But Johnny had both, and took such comfort in them that he never could be grateful enough to the wind that brought him his books and pictures, nor to the sun that made it possible for him to enjoy them in the open air, far more than richer folk enjoy their fine galleries and libraries.

A bad fall, some months before the time this story begins, did something to Johnny’s back which made his poor legs nearly useless, and changed the lively, rosy boy into a pale cripple. His mother took in fine washing, and worked hard to pay doctors’ bills and feed and clothe her boy, who could no longer run errands, help with the heavy tubs, or go to school. He could only pick out laces for her to iron, lie on his bed in pain for hours, and, each fair day, hobble out to sit in a little old chair between the water-butt and the leaky tin boiler in which he kept his library.

But he was a happy boy, in spite of poverty and pain; and the day a great gust came blowing fragments of a gay placard and a dusty newspaper down the court to his feet, was the beginning of good fortune for patient Johnny. There was a theatre in the street beyond, and other pictured bits found their way to him; for the frolicsome wind liked to whisk the papers around the corner, and chase them here and there till they settled under the chair or flew wildly over the wall.

Faces, animals, people, and big letters, all came to cheer the boy, who was never tired of collecting these waifs and strays; cutting out the big pictures to paste on the wall with the leavings of mother's starch, and the smaller in the scrap-book he made out of stout brown wrappers or newspapers, when he had read the latter carefully. Soon it was a very gay wall; for mother helped, standing on a chair, to put the large pictures up, when Johnny had covered all the space he could reach. The books were laid carefully away in the boiler, after being smoothly ironed out and named to suit Johnny's fancy by pasting letters on the back. This was the circulating library; for not only did the papers whisk about the court to begin with, but the books they afterward made went the rounds among the neighbors till they were worn out.

The old cobbler next door enjoyed reading the anecdotes on Sunday when he could not work; the pale seamstress upstairs liked to look over advertisements of the fine things which she longed for; and Patsey Flynn, the newsboy, who went by each day to sell his papers at the station, often paused to look at the play-bills, — for he adored the theatre, and entertained Johnny with descriptions of the splendors there to be beheld, till he felt as if he had really been, and had known all the famous actors, from Humpty Dumpty to the great Salvini.

Now and then a flock of dirty children would stray into the court and ask to see the "pretty picters." Then Johnny was a proud and happy boy; for, armed with a clothes-pole, he pointed out and explained the beauties of his gallery, feeling that he was a public benefactor when the poor babies thanked him warmly, and promised to come again and bring all the nice papers they could pick up.

These were Johnny's pleasures: but he had two sorrows, — one, a very real one, his aching back; and the other, a boyish longing to climb the wall and see what was on the other side, for it seemed a most wonderful and delightful place to the poor child, shut up in that dismal court, with no playmates and few comforts.

He amused himself with imagining how it looked over there, and nearly every night added some new charm to this unseen country, when his mother told him fairy tales to get him to sleep. He peopled it with the dear old characters all children know and love. The white cat that sat on the wall was Puss in Boots to him, or Whittington's good friend. Blue-beard's wives were hidden in the house of whose upper windows the boy could just catch glimpses. Red Riding-hood met the wolf in the grove of chestnuts that rustled over there; and Jack's Beanstalk grew up just such a wall as that, he was sure.

But the story he liked best was the "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood;" for he was sure some lovely creature lived in that garden, and he longed to get in to find and play with her. He actually planted a bean in a bit of damp earth behind the water-barrel, and watched it grow, hoping for as strong a ladder as Jack’s. But the vine grew very slowly, and Johnny was so impatient that he promised Patsey his best book “for his ownty-donty,” if he would climb up and report what was to be seen in that enchanted garden.

“Faix, and I will, thin.” And up went good-natured Pat, after laying an old board over the hogshead to stand on; for there were spikes all along the top of the wall, and only cats and sparrows could walk there.

Alas for Johnny’s eager hopes, and alas for Pat’s Sunday best! The board broke, and splash went the climber, with a wild Irish howl that startled Johnny half out of his wits and brought both Mrs. Morris and the cobbler to the rescue.

After this sad event Pat kept away for a time in high dudgeon, and Johnny was more lonely than ever. But he was a cheery little soul, so he was grateful for what joys he had, and worked away at his wall, — for the March winds had brought him many treasures, and after April rains were over, May sunshine made the court warm enough for him to be out nearly all day.

“I’m so sorry Pat is mad, ‘cause he saw this piece and told me about it, and he’d like to help me put up these pictures,” said Johnny to himself, one breezy morning, as he sat examining a big poster which the wind had sent flying into his lap a few minutes before.

The play was “Monte Cristo,” and the pictures represented the hero getting out of prison by making holes in the wall, among other remarkable performances.

“This is a jolly red one! Now, where will I put it to show best and not spoil the other beauties?”

As he spoke, Johnny turned his chair around and surveyed his gallery with as much pride and satisfaction as if it held all the wonders of art.

It really *was* quite splendid; for every sort of picture shone in the sun, — simpering ladies, tragic scenes, circus parades, labels from tin cans, rosy tomatoes, yellow peaches, and purple plums, funny advertisements, and gay bills of all kinds. None were perfect, but they were arranged with care; and the effect was very fine, Johnny thought.

Presently his eyes wandered from these treasures to the budding bushes that nodded so tantalizingly over the wall. A grape-vine ran along the top, trying to hide the sharp spikes; lilacs tossed their purple plumes above it, and several tall chestnuts rose over all, making green tents with their broad leaves, where spires of blossom began to show like candles on a mammoth Christmas tree. Sparrows were chirping gayly everywhere; the white cat, with a fresh blue bow, basked on the coping of the wall, and from the depths of the enchanted garden came a sweet voice singing, —

”And she bids you to come in,
With a dimple in your chin,
Billy boy, Billy boy.”

Johnny smiled as he listened, and put his finger to the little dent in his own chin, wishing the singer would finish this pleasing song. But she never did, though he often heard that, as well as other childish ditties, sung in the same gay voice, with bursts of laughter and the sound of lively feet tripping up and down the boarded walks. Johnny longed intensely to know who the singer was; for her music cheered his solitude, and the mysterious sounds he heard in the garden increased his wonder and his longing day by day.

Sometimes a man’s voice called, “Fay, where are you?” and Johnny was sure “Fay” was short for Fairy. Another voice was often heard talking in a strange, soft language, full of exclamations and pretty sounds. A little dog barked, and answered to the name Pippo. Canaries carolled, and some elfish bird scolded, screamed, and laughed so like a human being, that Johnny felt sure that magic of some sort was at work next door.

A delicious fragrance was now wafted over the wall as of flowers, and the poor boy imagined untold loveliness behind that cruel wall, as he tended the dandelions his mother brought him from the Common, when she had time to stop and gather them; for he loved flowers dearly, and tried to make them out of colored paper, since he could have no sweeter sort.

Now and then a soft, rushing sound excited his curiosity to such a pitch that once he hobbled painfully up the court till he could see into the trees; and once his eager eyes caught glimpses of a little creature, all blue and white and gold, who peeped out from the green fans, and nodded, and tried to toss him a cluster of the chestnut flowers. He stretched his hands to her with speechless delight, forgetting his crutches, and would have fallen if he had not caught by the shutter of a window so quickly that he gave the poor back a sad wrench; and when he could look up again, the fairy had vanished, and nothing was to be seen but the leaves dancing in the wind.

Johnny dared not try this again for fear of a fall, and every step cost him a pang; but he never forgot it, and was thinking of it as he sat staring at the wall on that memorable May day.

“How I *should* like to peek in and see just how it all really looks! It sounds and smells so summery and nice in there. I know it must be splendid. I say, Pussy, can’t you tell a feller what you see?”

Johnny laughed as he spoke, and the white cat purred politely; for she liked the boy who never threw stones at her, nor disturbed her naps. But Puss could not describe the beauties of the happy hunting-ground below; and, to console himself for the disappointment, Johnny went back to his new picture.

"Now, if this man in the play dug his way out through a wall ten feet thick with a rusty nail and a broken knife, I don't see why I couldn't pick away one brick and get a peek. It's all quiet in there now; here's a good place, and nobody will know, if I stick a picture over the hole. And I'll try it, I declare I will!"

Fired with the idea of acting Monte Cristo on a small scale, Johnny caught up the old scissors in his lap, and began to dig out the mortar around a brick already loose, and crumbling at the corners. His mother smiled at his energy, then sighed and said, as she clapped her laces with a heavy heart, —

"Ah, poor dear, if he only had his health he'd make his way in the world. But now he's like to find a blank wall before him while he lives, and none to help him over."

Puss, in her white boots, sat aloft and looked on, wise as the cat in the story, but offered no advice. The toad who lived behind the water-barrel hopped under the few leaves of the struggling bean, like Jack waiting to climb; and just then the noon bells began to ring as if they sang clear and loud, —

"Turn again, Whittington, Lord Mayor of London."

So, cheered by his friends, Johnny scraped and dug vigorously till the old brick fell out, showing another behind it. Only pausing to take breath, he caught up his crutch and gave two or three hearty pokes, which soon cleared the way and let the sunshine stream through, while the wind tossed the lilacs like triumphal banners, and the jolly sparrows chirped, —

"Hail, the conquering hero comes!"

Rather scared by his unexpected success, the boy sat silent for a moment to see what would happen. But all was still; and presently, with a beating heart, Johnny leaned forward to enjoy the long-desired "peek." He could not see much; but that little increased his curiosity and delight, for it seemed like looking into fairy-land, after the dust and noise and dingy houses of the court.

A bed of splendid tulips tossed their gay garments in the middle of a grass-plot; a strange and brilliant bird sat dressing its feathers on a golden cage; a little white dog dozed in the sun; and on a red carpet under the trees lay the Princess, fast asleep.

"It's all right," said Johnny, with a long sigh of pleasure; "that's the Sleeping Beauty, sure enough. There's the blue gown, the white fur-cloak sweeping round, the pretty hair, and — yes — there's the old nurse, spinning and nodding, just as she did in the picture-book mother got me when I cried because I couldn't go to see the play."

This last discovery really did bewilder Johnny, and make him believe that fairy tales *might* be true, after all, for how could he know that the strange woman was an Italian servant, in her native dress, with a distaff in her hand? After pausing a moment, to rub his eyes, he took another look, and made fresh discoveries by twisting his head about. A basket of oranges stood near the Princess, a striped curtain hung from a limb of the tree to keep the wind off, and several books fluttered their pictured leaves temptingly before Johnny's longing eyes.

"Oh, if I could only go in and eat 'em and read 'em and speak to 'em and see all the splendid things!" thought the poor boy, as he looked from one delight to another, and felt shut out from all. "I can't go and wake her like the Prince did, but I do wish she'd get up and do something, now I *can* see. I daren't throw a stone, it might hit some one, or holler, it might scare her. Pussy won't help, and the sparrows are too busy scolding one another. I know! I'll fly a kite over, and that will please her any way. Don't believe she has kites; girls never do."

Eager to carry out his plan, Johnny tied a long string to his gayest poster, and then fastening it to the pole with which he sometimes fished in the water-cask, held it up to catch the fresh breezes blowing down the court. His good friend, the wind, soon caught the idea, and with a strong breath sent the red paper whisking over the wall, to hang a moment on the trees and then drop among the tulips, where its frantic struggles to escape waked the dog, and set him to racing and barking, as Johnny hurriedly let the string go, and put his eye to his peep-hole.

The eyes of the Princess were wide open now, and she clapped her hands when Pippo brought the gay picture for her to see; while the old woman, with a long yawn, went away, carrying her distaff, like a gun, over her shoulder.

"She likes it! I'm so glad. Wish I had some more to send over. This will come off, I'll poke it through, and maybe she will see it."

Very much excited, Johnny recklessly tore from the wall his most cherished picture, a gay flower-piece, just put up; and folding it, he thrust it through the hole and waited to see what followed.

Nothing but a rustle, a bark, and a queer croak from the splendid bird, which set the canaries to trilling sweetly.

"She don't see, maybe she will hear," said Johnny. And he began to whistle like a mocking-bird; for this was his one accomplishment, and he was proud of it.

Presently he heard a funny burst of laughter from the parrot, and then the voice said, —

"No, Polly, you can't sing like that bird. I wonder where he is? Among the bushes over there, I think. Come, Pippo, let us go and find him."

"Now she's coming!" And Johnny grew red in the face trying to give his best trills and chirrups.

Nearer and nearer came the steps, the lilacs rustled as if shaken, and presently the roll of paper vanished. A pause, and then the little voice exclaimed, in a tone of great surprise, —

"Why, there's a hole! I never saw it before. Oh! I can see the street. How nice! how nice!"

"She likes the hole! I wonder if she will like me?" And, emboldened by these various successes, Johnny took another peep. This was the most delicious one of all; for he looked right into a great blue eye, with glimpses of golden hair above, a little round nose in the middle, and red lips below. It was like a flash of sunshine, and Johnny winked, as if dazzled; for the eye sparkled, the nose sniffed daintily, and the pretty mouth broke into a laugh as the voice cried out delightedly, —

"I see some one! Who are you? Come and tell me!"

"I'm Johnny Morris," answered the boy, quite trembling with pleasure.

"Did you make this nice hole?"

"I just poked a brick, and it fell out."

"Papa won't mind. Is that your bird?"

"No; it's me. I whistled."

"It's very pretty. Do it again," commanded the voice, as if used to give orders.

Johnny obeyed; and when he paused, out of breath, a small hand came through the hole, grasping as many lilies of the valley as it could hold, and the Princess graciously expressed her pleasure by saying, —

"I like it; you shall do it again, by and by. Here are some flowers for you. Now we will talk. Are you a nice boy?"

This was a poser; and Johnny answered meekly, with his nose luxuriously buried in the lovely flowers, —

"Not very, — I'm lame; I can't play like other fellers."

"*Porverino*!" sighed the little voice, full of pity; and, in a moment, three red-and-yellow tulips fell at Johnny's feet, making him feel as if he really had slipped into fairy-land through that delightful hole.

"Oh, thank you! Aren't they just elegant? I never see such beauties," stammered the poor boy, grasping his treasures as if he feared they might vanish away.

"You shall have as many as you like. Nanna will scold, but papa won't mind. Tell me more. What do you do over there?" asked the child, eagerly.

"Nothing but paste pictures and make books, when I don't ache too bad. I used to help mother; but I got hurt, and I can't do much now," answered the boy, ashamed to mention how many laces he patiently picked or clapped, since it was all he could do to help.

"If you like pictures, you shall come and see mine some day. I do a great many. Papa shows me how. His are splendid. Do you draw or paint yours?"

"I only cut 'em out of papers, and stick 'em on this wall or put 'em in scrap-books. I can't draw, and I haven't got no paints," answered Johnny.

"You should say 'haven't any paints.' I will come and see you some day; and if I like you, I will let you have my old paint-box. Do you want it?"

"Guess I do!"

"I think I *shall* like you; so I'll bring it when I come. Do you ache much?"

"Awfully, sometimes. Have to lay down all day, and can't do a thing."

"Do you cry?"

"No! I'm too big for that. I whistle."

"I *know* I shall like you, because you are brave!" cried the impetuous voice, with its pretty accent; and then an orange came tumbling through the hole, as if the new acquaintance longed to do something to help the "ache."

"Isn't that a rouser! I do love 'em, but mother can't afford 'em often."
And Johnny took one delicious taste on the spot.

"Then I shall give you many. We have loads at home, much finer than these.
Ah, you should see our garden there!"

"Where do you live?" Johnny ventured to ask; for there was a homesick sound to the voice as it said those last words.

"In Rome. Here we only stay a year, while papa arranges his affairs; then we go back, and I am happy."

"I should think you'd be happy in there. It looks real splendid to me, and
I've been longing to see it ever since I could come out."

"It's a dull place to me. I like better to be where it's always warm, and people are more beautiful than here. Are *you* beautiful?"

"What queer questions she does ask!" And poor Johnny was so perplexed he could only stammer, with a laugh, —

"I guess not. Boys don't care for looks."

"Peep, and let me see. I like pretty persons," commanded the voice.

"Don't she order round?" thought Johnny, as he obeyed. But he liked it, and showed such a smiling face at the peep-hole, that Princess Fay was pleased to say, after a long look at him, —

"No, you are not beautiful; but your eyes are bright, and you look pleasant, so I don't mind the freckles on your nose and the whiteness of your face. I think you are good. I am sorry for you, and I shall lend you a book to read when the pain comes."

"I couldn't wait for that if I had a book. I do *love* so to read!" And Johnny laughed out from sheer delight at the thought of a new book; for he seldom got one, being too poor to buy them, and too helpless to enjoy the free libraries of the city.

"Then you shall have it *now*." And there was another quick rush in the garden, followed by the appearance of a fat little book, slowly pushed through the hole in the wall.

"This is the only one that will pass. You will like Hans Andersen's fairy tales, I know. Keep it as long as you please. I have many more."

"You're so good! I wish I had something for you," said the boy, quite overcome by this sweet friendliness.

"Let me see one of *your* books. They will be new to me. I'm tired of all mine."

Quick as a flash, off went the cover of the old boiler, and out came half- a-dozen of Johnny's best works, to be crammed through the wall, with the earnest request, —

"Keep 'em all; they're not good for much, but they're the best I've got. I'll do some prettier ones as soon as I can find more nice pictures and pieces."

"They look very interesting. I thank you. I shall go and read them now, and then come and talk again. Addio, Giovanni."

"Good-by, Miss."

Thus ended the first interview of little Pyramus and Thisbe through the hole in the wall, while puss sat up above and played moonshine with her yellow eyes.

PART II.

After that day a new life began for Johnny, and he flourished like a poor little plant that has struggled out of some dark corner into the sunshine. All sorts of delightful things happened, and good times really seemed to have come. The mysterious papa made no objection to the liberties taken with his wall, being busy with his own affairs, and glad to have his little girl happy. Old Nanna, being more careful, came to see the new neighbors, and was disarmed at once by the affliction of the boy and the gentle manners of the mother. She brought all the curtains of the house for Mrs. Morris to do up, and in her pretty broken English praised Johnny's gallery and library, promising to bring Fay to see him some day.

Meantime the little people prattled daily together, and all manner of things came and went between them. Flowers, fruit, books, and bonbons kept Johnny in a state of bliss, and inspired him with such brilliant inventions that the Princess never knew what agreeable surprise would come next. Astonishing kites flew over the wall, and tissue balloons exploded in the flower-beds. All the birds of the air seemed to live in that court; for the boy whistled and piped till he was hoarse, because she liked it. The last of the long-hoarded cents came out of his tin bank to buy paper and pictures for the gay little books he made for her. His side of the wall was ravaged that hers might be adorned; and, as the last offering his grateful heart could give, he poked the toad through the hole, to live among the lilies and eat the flies that began to buzz about her Highness when she came to give her orders to her devoted subjects.

She always called the lad Giovanni, because she thought it a prettier name than John; and she was never tired of telling stories, asking questions, and making plans. The favorite one was what they would do when Johnny came to see her, as she had been promised he should when papa was not too busy to let them enjoy the charms of the studio; for Fay was a true artist's child, and thought nothing so lovely as pictures. Johnny thought so, too, and dreamed of the happy day when he should go and see the wonders his little friend described so well.

"I think it will be to-morrow; for papa has a lazy fit coming on, and then he always plays with me and lets me rummage where I like, while he goes out or smokes in the garden. So be ready; and if he says you can come, I will have the flag up early and you can hurry."

These agreeable remarks were breathed into Johnny's willing ear about a fortnight after the acquaintance began; and he hastened to promise, adding soberly, a minute after, —

“Mother says she’s afraid it will be too much for me to go around and up steps, and see new things; for I get tired so easy, and then the pain comes on. But I don’t care how I ache if I can only see the pictures — and you.”

“Won’t you ever be any better? Nanna thinks you might.”

“So does mother, if we had money to go away in the country, and eat nice things; and have doctors. But we can’t; so it’s no use worrying.” And Johnny gave a great sigh.

“I wish papa was rich, then he would give you money. He works hard to make enough to go back to Italy, so I cannot ask him; but perhaps I can sell *my* pictures also, and get a little. Papa’s friends often offer me sweets for kisses; I will have money instead, and that will help. Yes, I shall do it.” And Fay clapped her hands decidedly.

“Don’t you mind about it. I’m going to learn to mend shoes. Mr. Pegget says he’ll teach me. That doesn’t need legs, and he gets enough to live on very well.”

“It isn’t pretty work. Nanna can teach you to braid straw as she did at home; that is easy and nice, and the baskets sell very well, she says. I shall speak to her about it, and you can try to-morrow when you come.”

“I will. Do you really think I *can* come, then?” And Johnny stood up to try his legs; for he dreaded the long walk, as it seemed to him.

“I will go at once and ask papa.”

Away flew Fay, and soon came back with a glad “Yes!” that sent Johnny hobbling in to tell his mother, and beg her to mend the elbows of his only jacket; for, suddenly, his old clothes looked so shabby he feared to show himself to the neighbors he so longed to see.

“Hurrah! I’m really going to-morrow. And you, too, mammy dear,” cried the boy, waving his crutch so vigorously that he slipped and fell.

“Never mind; I’m used to it. Pull me up, and I’ll rest while we talk about it,” he said cheerily, as his mother helped him to the bed, where he forgot his pain in thinking of the delights in store for him.

Next day, the flag was flying from the wall, and Fay early at the hole, but no Johnny came; and when Nanna went to see what kept him, she returned with the sad news that the poor boy was suffering much, and would not be able to stir for some days.

“Let me go and see him,” begged Fay, imploringly.

“Cara mia, it is no place for you. So dark, so damp, so poor, it is enough to break the heart,” said Nanna, decidedly.

“If papa was here, he would let me go. I shall not play; I shall sit here and make some plans for my poor boy."

Nanna left her indignant little mistress, and went to cook a nice bowl of soup for Johnny; while Fay concocted a fine plan, and, what was more remarkable, carried it out.

For a week it rained, for a week Johnny lay in pain, and for a week Fay worked quietly at her little easel in the corner of the studio, while her father put the last touches to his fine picture, too busy to take much notice of the child. On Saturday the sun shone, Johnny was better, and the great picture was done. So were the small ones; for as her father sat resting after his work, Fay went to him, with a tired but happy face, and, putting several drawings into his hand, told her cherished plan.

"Papa, you said you would pay me a dollar for every good copy I made of the cast you gave me. I tried very hard, and here are three. I want some money very, very much. Could you pay for these?"

"They are excellent," said the artist, after carefully looking at them. "You *have* tried, my good child, and here are your well-earned dollars. What do you want them for?"

"To help my boy. I want him to come in here and see the pictures, and let Nanna teach him to plait baskets; and he can rest, and you will like him, and he might get well if he had some money, and I have three quarters the friends gave me instead of bonbons. Would that be enough to send poor Giovanni into the country and have doctors?"

No wonder Fay's papa was bewildered by this queer jumble, because, being absorbed in his work, he had never heard half the child had told him, and had forgotten all about Johnny. Now he listened with half an ear, studying the effect of sunshine upon his picture meantime, while Fay told him the little story, and begged to know how much money it would take to make Johnny's back well.

"Bless your sweet soul, my darling, it would need more than I can spare or you earn in a year. By and by, when I am at leisure, we will see what can be done," answered papa, smoking comfortably, as he lay on the sofa in the large studio at the top of the house.

"You say that about a great many things, papa. 'By and by' won't be long enough to do all you promise then. I like *now* much better, and poor Giovanni needs the country more than you need cigars or I new frocks," said Fay, stroking her father's tired forehead and looking at him with an imploring face.

"My dear, I cannot give up my cigar, for in this soothing smoke I find inspiration, and though you are a little angel, you must be clothed; so wait a bit, and we will attend to the boy — later." He was going to say "by and by" again, but paused just in time, with a laugh.

"Then *I* shall take him to the country all myself. I cannot wait for this hateful 'by and by.' I know how I shall do it, and at once. Now, now!" cried Fay, losing patience; and with an indignant glance at the lazy papa, who seemed going to sleep, she dashed out of the room, down many stairs, through the kitchen, startling Nanna and scattering the salad as if a whirlwind had gone by, and never paused for breath till she stood before the garden wall with a little hatchet in her hand.

"This shall be the country for him till I get enough money to send him away. I will show what *I* can do. He pulled out two bricks. *I* will beat down the wall, and he *shall* come in at once," panted Fay; and she gave a great blow at the bricks, bent on having her will without delay, — for she was an impetuous little creature, full of love and pity for the poor boy pining for the fresh air and sunshine, of which she had so much.

Bang, bang, went the little hatchet, and down came one brick after another, till the hole was large enough for Fay to thrust her head through; and being breathless by that time, she paused to rest and take a look at Johnny's court.

Meanwhile Nanna, having collected her lettuce leaves and her wits, went to see what the child was about; and finding her at work like a little fury, the old woman hurried up to tell "the Signor," Fay's papa, that his little daughter was about to destroy the garden and bury herself under the ruins of the wall. This report, delivered with groans and wringing of the hands, roused the artist and sent him to the rescue, as he well knew that his angel was a very energetic one, and capable of great destruction.

When he arrived, he beheld a cloud of dust, a pile of bricks among the lilies, and the feet of his child sticking out of a large hole in the wall, while her head and shoulders were on the other side. Much amused, yet fearful that the stone coping might come down on her, he pulled her back with the assurance that he would listen and help her now immediately, if there was such need of haste.

But he grew sober when he saw Fay's face; for it was bathed in tears, her hands were bleeding, and dust covered her from head to foot.

"My darling, what afflicts you? Tell papa, and he will do anything you wish."

"No, you will forget, you will say 'Wait;' and now that I have seen it all, I cannot stop till I get him out of that dreadful place. Look, look, and see if it is not sad to live there all in pain and darkness, and so poor."

As she spoke, Fay urged her father toward the hole; and to please her he looked, seeing the dull court, the noisy street beyond, and close by the low room, where Johnny's mother worked all day, while the poor boy's pale face was dimly seen as he lay on his bed waiting for deliverance.

"Well, well, it *is* a pitiful case; and easily mended, since Fay is so eager about it. Hope the lad is all she says, and nothing catching about his illness. Nanna can tell me.”

Then he drew back his head, and leading Fay to the seat, took her on his knee, all flushed, dirty, and tearful as she was, soothing her by saying tenderly, —

“Now let me hear all about it, and be sure I’ll not forget. What shall I do to please you, dear, before you pull down the house about my ears?”

Then Fay told her tale all over again; and being no longer busy, her father found it very touching, with the dear, grimy little face looking into his, and the wounded hands clasped beseechingly as she pleaded for poor Johnny.

“God bless your tender heart, child; you shall have him in here to-morrow, and we will see what can be done for those pathetic legs of his. But listen, Fay, I have an easier way to do it than yours, and a grand surprise for the boy. Time is short, but it can be done; and to show you that I am in earnest, I will go this instant and begin the work. Come and wash your face while I get on my boots, and then we will go together.”

At these words Fay threw her arms about papa’s neck and gave him many grateful kisses, stopping in the midst to ask, —

“Truly, *now*?”

“See if it is not so.” And putting her down, papa went off with great strides, while she ran laughing after him, all her doubts set at rest by this agreeable energy on his part.

If Johnny had not been asleep in the back room, he would have seen strange and pleasant sights that afternoon and evening; for something went on in the court that delighted his mother, amused the artist, and made Fay the happiest child in Boston. No one was to tell till the next day, that Johnny’s surprise might be quite perfect, and Mrs. Morris sat up till eleven to get his old clothes in order; for Fay’s papa had been to see her, and became interested in the boy, as no one could help being when they saw his patient little face.

So hammers rang, trowels scraped, shovels dug, and wonderful changes were made, while Fay danced about in the moonlight, like Puck intent upon some pretty prank, and papa quoted *Snout*, [Footnote: A character in Shakspeare’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”] the tinker’s parting words, as appropriate to the hour, —

”Thus have I, wall, my part dischargèd so;
And, being done, thus wall away doth go.”

PART III.

A lovely Sunday morning dawned without a cloud; and even in the dingy court the May sunshine shone warmly, and the spring breezes blew freshly from green fields far away. Johnny begged to go out; and being much better, his mother consented, helping him to dress with such a bright face and eager hands that the boy said innocently, —

“How glad you are when I get over a bad turn! I don’t know what you’d do if I ever got well.”

“My poor dear, I begin to think you *will* pick up, now the good weather has come and you have got a little friend to play with. God bless her!”

Why his mother should suddenly hug him tight, and then brush his hair so carefully, with tears in her eyes, he did not understand; but was in such a hurry to get out, he could only give her a good kiss, and hobble away to see how his gallery fared after the rain, and to take a joyful “peek” at the enchanted garden.

Mrs. Morris kept close behind him, and it was well she did; for he nearly tumbled down, so great was his surprise when he beheld the old familiar wall after the good fairies Love and Pity had worked their pretty miracle in the moonlight.

The ragged hole had changed to a little arched door, painted red. On either side stood a green tub, with a tall oleander in full bloom; from the arch above hung a great bunch of gay flowers; and before the threshold lay a letter directed to “Signor Giovanni Morris,” in a childish hand. As soon as he recovered from the agreeable shock of this splendid transformation scene, Johnny sank into his chair, where a soft cushion had been placed, and read his note, with little sighs of rapture at the charming prospect opening before him.

DEAR GIOVANNI, — Papa has made this nice gate, so you can come in when you like and not be tired. We are to have two keys, and no one else can open it. A little bell is to ring when we pull the cord, and we can run and see what we want. The paint is wet. Papa did it, and the men put up the door last night. I helped them, and did not go in my bed till ten. It was very nice to do it so. I hope you will like it. Come in as soon as you can; I am all ready.

Your friend, FAY.

“Mother, she must be a real fairy to do all that, mustn’t she?” said Johnny, leaning back to look at the dear door behind which lay such happiness for him.

"Yes, my sonny, she is the right sort of good fairy, and I just wish I could do her washing for love the rest of her blessed little life," answered Mrs. Morris, in a burst of grateful ardor.

"You shall! you shall! Do come in! I cannot wait another minute!" cried an eager little voice as the red door flew open; and there stood Fay, looking very like a happy elf in her fresh white frock, a wreath of spring flowers on her pretty hair, and a tall green wand in her hand, while the brilliant bird sat on her shoulder, and the little white dog danced about her feet.

”So she bids you to come in,
With a dimple in your chin,
Billy boy, Billy boy,"

sung the child, remembering how Johnny liked that song; and waving her wand, she went slowly backward as the boy, with a shining face, passed under the blooming arch into a new world, full of sunshine, liberty, and sweet companionship.

Neither Johnny nor his mother ever forgot that happy day, for it was the beginning of help and hope to both just when life seemed hardest and the future looked darkest.

Papa kept out of sight, but enjoyed peeps at the little party as they sat under the chestnuts, Nanna and Fay doing the honors of the garden to their guests with Italian grace and skill, while the poor mother folded her tired hands with unutterable content, and the boy looked like a happy soul in heaven.

Sabbath silence, broken only by the chime of bells and the feet of church-goers, brooded over the city; sunshine made golden shadows on the grass; the sweet wind brought spring odors from the woods; and every flower seemed to nod and beckon, as if welcoming the new playmate to their lovely home.

While the women talked together, Fay led Johnny up and down her little world, showing all her favorite nooks, making him rest often on the seats that stood all about, and amusing him immensely by relating the various fanciful plays with which she beguiled her loneliness.

"Now we can have much nicer ones; for you will tell me yours, and we can do great things," she said, when she had displayed her big rocking-horse, her grotto full of ferns, her mimic sea, where a fleet of toy boats lay at anchor in the basin of an old fountain, her fairy-land under the lilacs, with paper elves sitting among the leaves, her swing, that tossed one high up among the green boughs, and the basket of white kittens, where Topaz, the yellow-eyed cat, now purred with maternal pride. Books were piled on the rustic table, and all the pictures Fay thought worthy to be seen.

Here also appeared a nice lunch, before the visitors could remember it was noon and tear themselves away. Such enchanted grapes and oranges Johnny never ate before; such delightful little tarts and Italian messes of various sorts; even the bread and butter seemed glorified because served in a plate trimmed with leaves and cut in dainty bits. Coffee that perfumed the air put heart into poor Mrs. Morris, who half starved herself that the boy might be fed; and he drank milk till Nanna said, laughing, as she refilled the pitcher, —

"He takes more than both the blessed lambs we used to feed for Saint Agnes in the convent at home. And he is truly welcome, the dear child, to the best we have; for he is as innocent and helpless as they."

"What does she mean?" whispered Johnny to Fay, rather abashed at having forgotten his manners in the satisfaction which three mugfuls of good milk had given him.

So, sitting in the big rustic chair beside him, Fay told the pretty story of the lambs who are dedicated to Saint Agnes, with ribbons tied to their snowy wool, and then raised with care till their fleeces are shorn to make garments for the Pope. A fit tale for the day, the child thought, and went on to tell about the wonders of Rome till Johnny's head was filled with a splendid confusion of new ideas, in which Saint Peter's and apple-tarts, holy lambs and red doors, ancient images and dear little girls, were delightfully mixed. It all seemed like a fairy tale, and nothing was too wonderful or lovely to happen on that memorable day.

So when Fay's papa at last appeared, finding it impossible to keep away from the happy little party any longer, Johnny decided at once that the handsome man in the velvet coat was the king of the enchanted land, and gazed at him with reverence and awe. A most gracious king he proved to be; for after talking pleasantly to Mrs. Morris, and joking Fay on storming the walls, he proposed to carry Johnny off, and catching him up, strode away with the astonished boy on his shoulder, while the little girl danced before to open doors and clear the way.

Johnny thought he couldn't be surprised any more; but when he had mounted many stairs and found himself in a great room with a glass roof, full of rich curtains, strange armor, pretty things, and pictures everywhere, he just sat in the big chair where he was placed, and stared in silent delight.

"This is papa's studio, and that the famous picture, and here is where I work; and isn't it pleasant? and aren't you glad to see it?" said Fay, skipping about to do the honors of the place.

"I don't believe heaven is beautifuller," answered Johnny, in a low tone, as his eyes went from the green tree-tops peeping in at the windows to the great sunny picture of a Roman garden, with pretty children at play among the crumbling statues and fountains.

"I'm glad you like it, for we mean to have you come here a great deal. I sit to papa very often, and get *so* tired; and you can talk to me, and then you can see me draw and model in clay, and then we'll go in the garden, and Nanna will show you how to make baskets, and *then* we'll play."

Johnny nodded and beamed at this charming prospect, and for an hour explored the mysteries of the studio, with Fay for a guide and papa for an amused spectator. He liked the boy more and more, and was glad Fay had so harmless a playmate to expend her energies and compassion upon. He assented to every plan proposed, and really hoped to be able to help these poor neighbors; for he had a kind heart, and loved his little daughter even more than his art.

When at last Mrs. Morris found courage to call Johnny away, he went without a word, and lay down in the dingy room, his face still shining with the happy thoughts that filled his mind, hungry for just such pleasures, and never fed before.

After that day everything went smoothly, and both children blossomed like the flowers in that pleasant garden, where the magic of love and pity, fresh air and sunshine, soon worked miracles. Fay learned patience and gentleness from Johnny; he grew daily stronger on the better food Nanna gave him, and the exercise he was tempted to take; and both spent very happy days working and playing, sometimes under the trees, where the pretty baskets were made, or in the studio, where both pairs of small hands modelled graceful things in clay, or daubed amazing pictures with the artist's old brushes and discarded canvases.

Mrs. Morris washed everything washable in the house, and did up Fay's frocks so daintily that she looked more like an elf than ever when her head shone out from the fluted frills, like the yellow middle of a daisy with its white petals all spread.

As he watched the children playing together, the artist, having no great work in hand, made several pretty sketches of them, and then had a fine idea of painting the garden scene where Fay first talked to Johnny. It pleased his fancy, and the little people sat for him nicely; so he made a charming thing of it, putting in the cat, dog, bird, and toad as the various characters in Shakspeare's lovely play, while the flowers were the elves, peeping and listening in all manner of merry, pretty ways.

He called it "Little Pyramus and Thisbe," and it so pleased a certain rich lady that she paid a large price for it; and then, discovering that it told a true story, she generously added enough to send Johnny and his mother to the country, when Fay and her father were ready to go.

But it was to a lovelier land than the boy had ever read of in his fairy books, and to a happier life than mending shoes in the dingy court. In the autumn they all sailed gayly away together, to live for years in sunny Italy, where Johnny grew tall and strong, and learned to paint with a kind master and a faithful young friend, who always rejoiced that she found and delivered him, thanks to the wonderful hole in the wall.

[Illustration: She got too lazy to care for anything but sleeping and eating.]

THE PIGGY GIRL.

"I won't be washed! I won't be washed!" screamed little Betty, kicking and slapping the maid who undressed her one night.

"You'd better go and live with the pigs, dirty child," said Maria, scrubbing away at two very grubby hands.

"I wish I could! I love to be dirty, — I *will* be dirty!" roared
Betty, throwing the sponge out of the window and the soap under the table.

Maria could do nothing with her; so she bundled her into bed half wiped, telling her to go to sleep right away.

"I won't! I'll go and live with Mrs. Gleason's pigs, and have nothing to do but eat and sleep, and roll in the dirt, and never, never be washed any more," said Betty to herself.

She lay thinking about it and blinking at the moon for a while; then she got up very softly, and crept down the back stairs, through the garden, to the sty where two nice little pigs were fast asleep among the straw in their small house. They only grunted when Betty crept into a corner, laughing at the fun it would be to play piggy and live here with no Maria to wash her and no careful mamma to keep saying, —

"Put on a clean apron, dear!"

Next morning she was waked up by hearing Mrs. Gleason pour milk into the trough. She lay very still till the woman was gone; then she crept out and drank all she wanted, and took the best bits of cold potato and bread for her breakfast, and the lazy pigs did not get up till she was done. While they ate and rooted in the dirt, Betty slept as long as she liked, with no school, no errands, no patchwork to do. She liked it, and kept hidden till night; then she went home, and opened the little window in the store closet, and got in and took as many good things to eat and carry away as she liked. She had a fine walk in her nightgown, and saw the flowers asleep, heard the little birds chirp in the nest, and watched the fireflies and moths at their pretty play. No one saw her but the cats; and they played with her, and hopped at her toes, in the moonlight, and had great fun.

When she was tired she went to sleep with the pigs, and dozed all the next day, only coming out to eat and drink when the milk was brought and the cold bits; for Mrs. Gleason took good care of her pigs, and gave them clean straw often, and kept them as nice as she could.

Betty lived in this queer way a long time, and soon looked more like a pig than a little girl; for her nightgown got dirty, her hair was never combed, her face was never washed, and she loved to dig in the mud till her hands looked like paws. She never talked, but began to grunt as the pigs did, and burrowed into the straw to sleep, and squealed when they crowded her, and quarrelled over the food, eating with her nose in the trough like a real pig. At first she used to play about at night, and steal things to eat; and people set traps to catch the thief in their gardens, and the cook in her own house scolded about the rats that carried off the cake and pies out of her pantry. But by and by she got too lazy and fat to care for anything but sleeping and eating, and never left the sty. She went on her hands and knees now, and began to wonder if a little tail wouldn't grow and her nose change to a snout.

All summer she played be a pig, and thought it good fun; but when the autumn came it was cold, and she longed for her nice warm flannel nightgown, and got tired of cold victuals, and began to wish she had a fire to sit by and good buckwheat cakes to eat. She was ashamed to go home, and wondered what she should do after this silly frolic. She asked the pigs how they managed in winter; but they only grunted, and she could not remember what became of them, for the sty was always empty in cold weather.

One dreadful night she found out. She was smuggled down between the great fat piggies to keep warm; but her toes were cold, and she was trying to pull the straw over them when she heard Mr. Gleason say to his boy, —

"We must kill those pigs to-morrow. They are fat enough; so come and help me sharpen the big knife."

"Oh, dear, what will become of *me*?" thought Betty, as she heard the grindstone go round and round as the knife got sharper and sharper. "I look so like a pig they will kill me too, and make me into sausages if I don't run away. I'm tired of playing piggy, and I'd rather be washed a hundred times a day than be put in a pork barrel."

So she lay trembling till morning; then she ran through the garden and found the back door open. It was very early, and no one saw her, for the cook was in the shed getting wood to make her fire; so Betty slipped upstairs to the nursery and was going to whisk into bed, when she saw in the glass an ugly black creature, all rags and dirt, with rumpled hair, and a little round nose covered with mud.

"Can it be me?" she said. "How horrid I am!" And she could not spoil her nice white bed, but hopped into the bathtub and had a good scrubbing. Next she got a clean nightgown, and brushed her hair, and cut her long nails, and looked like a tidy little girl again.

Then she lay down in her cosey crib with the pink cover and the lace curtains, and fell fast asleep, glad to have clean sheets, soft blankets, and her own little pillow once more.

* * * * *

“Come, darling, wake up and see the new frock I have got for you, and the nice ruffled apron. It’s Thanksgiving day, and all the cousins are coming to dinner,” said her mamma, with a soft kiss on the rosy cheek.

Betty started up, screaming, —

“Don’t kill me! Oh, please don’t! I’m not a truly pig, I’m a little girl; and if you’ll let me run home, I’ll never fret when I’m washed again.”

“What is the dear child afraid of?” said mamma, cuddling her close, and laughing to see Betty stare wildly about for the fat pigs and the stuffy sty.

She told her mother all about the queer time she had had, and was much surprised to hear mamma say, —

“It was all a dream, dear; you have been safely asleep in your little bed ever since you slapped poor Maria last night.”

“Well, I’m glad I dreamed it, for it has made me love to be clean. Come, Maria, soap and scrub as much as you like, I won’t kick and scream ever any more,” cried Betty, skipping about, glad to be safe in her pleasant home and no longer a dirty, lazy piggy girl.

LULU’S LIBRARY SERIES 2

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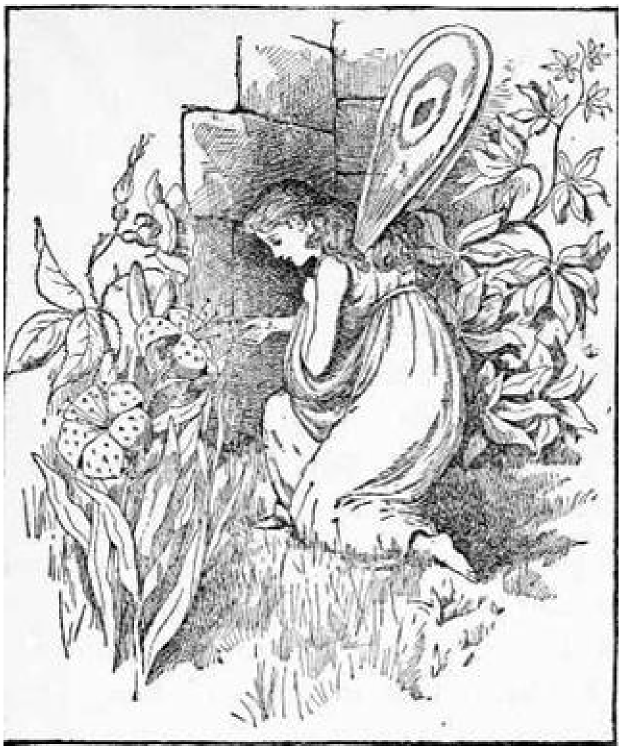
PREFACE.

Most of these stories were written at sixteen for my younger sisters and their playmates, the little Emersons and Channings, and appeared some years later under the name of “Flower Fables.” With some additions they are now republished for the amusement of those children’s children by their old friend,

L. M. ALCOTT.
June, 1887.



Instead of dying in her cell, the fairy had made it beautiful.

THE FROST KING AND HOW THE FAIRIES CONQUERED HIM.

The Queen sat upon her throne, and all the fairies from the four kingdoms were gathered for a grand council. A very important question was to be decided, and the bravest, wisest elves were met to see what could be done. The Frost King made war upon the flowers; and it was a great grief to Queen Blossom and her subjects to see their darlings die year after year, instead of enjoying one long summer, as they might have done but for him. She had sent messengers with splendid gifts, and had begged him to stop this dreadful war, which made autumn so sad and left the fields strewn with dead flowers. But he sent back the gifts, sternly refused her prayers, and went on with his cruel work; because he was a tyrant, and loved to destroy innocent things.

"My subjects, we will try once more," said the Queen, "if any one can propose a plan that will touch his hard heart and make him kind to the dear flowers."

Then there was a great rustling of wings and murmuring of voices; for all the elves were much excited, and each wanted to propose something. The Queen listened, but none of the plans seemed wise, and she was sadly perplexed, when her favorite maid of honor, the lovely Star, came and knelt before her, saying, while her face shone and her voice trembled with the earnestness of her words, "Dear Queen, let me go alone to the Frost King and try what love will do. We have sent presents and prayers by messengers who feared and hated him, and he would not receive them; but we have not tried to make him love us, nor shown him how beautiful his land might be, by patiently changing that dreary place, and teaching his people to plant flowers, not to kill them. I am not afraid; let me go and try my plan, for love is very powerful, and I know he has a heart if we can only find it."

"You may go, dear Star," answered the Queen, "and see if you can conquer him. But if any harm happens to you, we will come with our whole army and fight this cruel King till he is conquered."

At these brave words all the elves cheered, and General Sun, the great warrior, waved his sword as if longing to go to battle at once. They gathered about Star, — some to praise and caress her, some to warn her of the dangers of her task, others to tell her the way, and every one to wish her success; for fairies are gentle little creatures, and believe heartily in the power of love.

Star wished to go at once; so they wrapped her in a warm cloak of down from a swan's breast, gave her a bag of the seeds of all their sweetest flowers, and with kisses and tears went to the gates of Fairyland to say good-by.

Smiling bravely she flew away toward the North, where the frost spirits lived. Soon the wind grew cold, the sunshine faded, and snow began to fall, making Star shiver under her soft cloak. Presently she saw the King's palace. Pillars of ice held up the roof fringed with icicles, which would have sparkled splendidly if there had been any sun. But all was dark and cold, and not a green leaf rustled, or bird sang in the wide plains, white with snow, that stretched as far as the eye could see. Before the doors stood the guard, frozen to their places, who lifted their sharp spears and let Star go in when she said she was a messenger from the Queen.

Walls of ice carved with strange figures were round her, long icicles hung from the roof, and carpets of snow covered the floor. On a throne hung with gray mist sat the King; a crown of crystals was on his white hair, and his mantle was covered with silver frost-work. His eyes were cold, his face stern, and a smile never moved his hard lips. He frowned as he saw the fairy, and drew his cloak closer, as if afraid the light of her bright face might soften his heart.

Then Star told her errand, and in her gentle voice begged him to be kind. She described the sorrow of both elves and children when his frost killed all the flowers; she painted a bright picture of a world where it was always summer, and asked him to let her show how lovely flowers made any spot, by planting some in his bleak fields.

But he only scowled and ordered her away, saying harshly, "I will do as I please; and if your Queen does not leave me in peace, I will go to war and freeze every fairy to death."

Star tried to say more, but he was so angry that he called his people and bid them shut her up till she would own that he was right and promise to let him kill all the flowers he liked.

"I never will do that," said Star, as the Frost people led her away to a dark little cell, and left her alone.

She was cold and tired and very sad because the King would not listen to her, but her heart was brave, and instead of crying she began to sing. Soon the light of her own eyes, that shone like stars, made a little glimmer in the dark, and she saw that the floor of her cell was of earth; and presently she heard the tinkle of water as it dripped drop by drop down from the snow above. Then she smiled, so that it seemed as if a ray of light had crept in.

"Here is earth and water, I will make the sunshine, and soon by my fairy power I will have a garden even in Frostland." As she spoke she pulled out the seeds and fell to work, still singing, still smiling, still sure that in time she would do the hard task she had set herself. First she gathered the drops in her warm hands and moistened the hard earth; then she loosened it and planted her seeds along the walls; and then, sitting in the middle of the narrow room, she waved her wand and chanted the fairy spell that works the pretty miracle of turning seeds to flowers.

“Sleep, little seed,
Deep in your bed,
While winter snow
Lies overhead.
Wake, little sprout,
And drink the rain,
Till sunshine calls
You to rise again.
Strike deep, young root,
In the earth below;
Unfold, pale leaves,
Begin to grow.
Baby bud, dance
In the warm sun;
Bloom, sweet rose,
Life has begun.”

As she sung, the light grew stronger, the air warmer, and the drops fell like dew, till up came rows of little green vines and plants, growing like the magic beanstalk all over the walls and all round the room, making the once dark place look like a bower. Moss spread like a carpet underfoot, and a silvery white mushroom sprung up under Star, as if she were the queen of this pretty place.

Soon the Frost spirits heard the music and went to see who dared sing in that gloomy prison. They were much surprised when they peeped, to see that instead of dying in her cell, the fairy had made it beautiful, and sat there singing while her flowers bloomed in spite of all their power.

They hurried to the King and bade him come and see. He went, and when he saw the lovely place he could not spoil it till he had watched Star at her work, and tried to see what magic did such wonders. For now the dark walls were hung with morning-glories, ringing their many-colored bells, the floor was green with soft moss, the water-drops made music as they fell, and rows of flowers nodded from their beds as if talking together in a sweet language of their own. Star sat on her throne still singing and smiling, till the once dark place was as bright as if a little sun shone there.

“I am strong, but I cannot do that,” said the King. “I love power, and perhaps if I watch I shall learn some of her magic skill to use as I please. I will let her live, but keep her a prisoner, and do as I please about killing other flowers.”

So he left her there, and often stole down to peep, and wonder at her cheerfulness and courage; for she never complained or cried, though she longed for home, and found it very hard to be brave and patient.

Meantime the Queen waited and waited for Star to come, and when a long time passed she sent a messenger to learn where she was. He brought back the sad tidings that she was a prisoner, and the King would not let her go. Then there was great weeping and wailing in Fairyland, for every one loved gentle Star. They feared she would be frozen to death if they left her in the cruel King’s power, and resolved to go to war as he would not set her free.

General Sun ordered out the army, and there was a great blowing of trumpets, beating of drums, and flying of flags as the little soldiers came marching from the four quarters of the kingdom. The earth elves were on foot, in green suits, with acorn cups for helmets and spear grass for lances. The water sprites were in blue armor made of dragon-fly scales, and they drew shells full of tiny bubbles that were shot like cannon-balls, upsetting their small enemies by the dozen. The fire imps wore red, and carried torches to burn, and little guns to shoot bullets of brimstone from, which killed by their dreadful smell. The air spirits were the finest of all; for they were in golden armor, and carried arrows of light, which they shot from tiny rainbows. These came first, and General Sun was splendid to behold as he led them shining and flashing before the Queen, whose great banner of purple and gold streamed over their heads, while the trumpets blew, the people cheered, and the elfin soldiers marched bravely away to fight the Frost King and bring Star home.

The Queen followed in her chariot drawn by white butterflies, with her maids, and her body guard of the tallest elves in Fairyland. They lived in the pine-trees, and were fine strong fellows, with little cones on their heads, pine needles for swords, and the handsome russet scales for chain armor. Their shields were of sweet-smelling gum, like amber; but no one could approach the Queen when they made a wall about her, for whoever touched these shields stuck fast, and were killed with the sharp swords.

Away streamed the army like a wandering rainbow, and by and by reached the land of frost and snow. The King had been warned that they were coming, and made ready by building a fort of ice, laying in piles of snow-balls, and arming his subjects with sharp icicles. All the cold winds that blow wailed like bagpipes, hailstones drummed on the frozen ground, and banners of mist floated over the towers of the palace. General Fog, in a suit of silver, stood ready to meet the enemy, with an army of snow men behind him, and the Frost King looked down from the walls to direct the fight.

On came the fairy folk, making the icy world sparkle so brilliantly with their light that the King was half-blinded and hid his eyes. The elves shivered as the cold wind touched them, but courage kept them warm, and the Queen, well wrapped in down, stood up in her chariot, boldly demanding Star at the hands of the King.

“I will not give her up,” he answered, scowling like a thunder-cloud, though in his heart he wondered more and more how the brave fairy had lived so long away from such lovely friends as these.

“Then I proclaim war upon your country; and if Star is dead we will show no mercy. Sound the trumpets and set on!” cried the Queen, waving her hand to the General, while every sword flashed out, and an elfin cheer rung like music in the air.

Ordering the rest to halt, General Sun led the air spirits to battle first, well knowing that nothing could stand long before a charge of that brilliant troop. General Fog did his best, but was driven back against his will; for his snow men melted away as the arrows of light struck them, and he could not stand before the other general, whose shield was a golden sun, without feeling himself dissolve like mist at noon.

They were forced to take refuge in the fort, where the King himself was ordering showers of snow-balls to be shot among the fairy troops. Many were wounded, and carried from the field to the tent where the Queen and her maids tended them, and by their soft magic soon made them fit to fight again.

“Now, a grand attack. Bring up the sappers and miners, Captain Rock. Major Flash, surround the walls and melt them as fast as possible, while the archers shall go on shooting,” commanded General Sun.

Then a company of moles began to dig under the fort; the fire imps banged away at the walls with their cannon, and held their flaming torches close till the blocks of ice began to melt; the air spirits flew high above and shot their golden arrows down at the Frost people, who fled away to hide in the darkest corners, dazzled and daunted by these brave and brilliant enemies.

It was a hard battle, and the fairies were obliged to rest, after killing General Fog, destroying the fort, and forcing the King to take refuge in the palace. Among the prisoners taken was one who told them where Star was, and all she had done in her little cell. Then they rejoiced, and the Queen said, “Let us follow her example, for these prisoners say the King is changed since she came; that he goes to peep at her lovely bower, and does not spoil it, but talks kindly to her, and seems as if his hard heart might be melting a little. We will not fight any more, but try Star's gentle way, and besiege the King till he surrenders; so we shall win a friend, not kill an enemy."

"We will; we will!" cried all the elves; for they did not love to fight, though brave as little lions to defend their country and their Queen. They all took counsel together, and the Frost people were surprised next day to see the army busily at work making a great garden round the palace instead of trying to destroy it. Creeping to the holes in the walls they watched what went on, and wondered more and more; for the elves worked hard, and their magic helped them to do in a day what it would have taken years for mortals to do.

First the moles dug up the ground, then the Queen's guard sowed pine seeds, and in an hour a green wall fenced in the garden where the earth fairies planted seeds of all the flowers that grow. The fire imps warmed the air, and drove away every chilly wind, every gray cloud or flake of snow that dared come near this enchanted spot. The water sprites gathered drops from the melting ice palace and watered the budding beds, after the imps had taken the chill off, while the air spirits made sunshine overhead by flying to and fro with tireless wings, till a golden curtain was woven that shut out the cold sky and made summer for the flowers.

The Queen and her maids helped, for they fashioned birds, bees, and butterflies with magic skill, and gave them life to sing, buzz, and flutter in the new world, growing so fast where once all was bare and cold and dark.

Slowly the ice palace melted; for warm airs stole through the pines, and soon the walls were thin as glass, the towers vanished like frost-work in the sun, and block after block flowed away in little rills as if glad to escape from prison. The King and his subjects felt that they were conquered; for the ice seemed to melt from them also, and their hearts began to beat, their cold faces to soften as if they wanted to smile if they knew how, and they loved to watch and wonder at the sweet miracles the elves were working all about them.

The King tried not to give up, for he was very proud, and had ruled so long it was hard to submit; but his power was gone, his palace crumbling about him, his people longing to join the enemy, and there was nothing for him to do but lay down his crown or fly away to the far North and live with the bears and icebergs in that frozen world. He would have done this but for Star. All the while the battle and the siege were going on, she lived in her little cell, knowing nothing about it, but hoping and waiting, sure that help would come. Every time the King visited her he seemed kinder, and liked more and more to listen to her songs or the stories she told him of life in Fairyland, and the joy of being merciful. So she knew that the seeds she sowed in his heart were beginning to grow like those planted in the cell, and she watched over them as carefully.

One day her loveliest roses bloomed, and she was singing for joy as the pink flowers filled the cell with their sweet breath, when the King came hurrying down to her and falling at her feet begged her to save his life. She wondered what he meant, and he told her of the battle, and how the elves were conquering him by love; for the palace was nearly gone, a great garden lay blossoming all about it, and he had nowhere to go unless she would be his friend and ask her people to forgive and pity him.

Then Star felt that she had done her task, and laying her hands on his white head, she melted the last frost from his old heart by saying in her tender voice, "Do not fear my people; they will welcome you and give you a home if you will promise to hurt no more flowers, but always be as gentle as you are now. Come with me, and let us teach you how beautiful sunshine and love and happy work can make you."

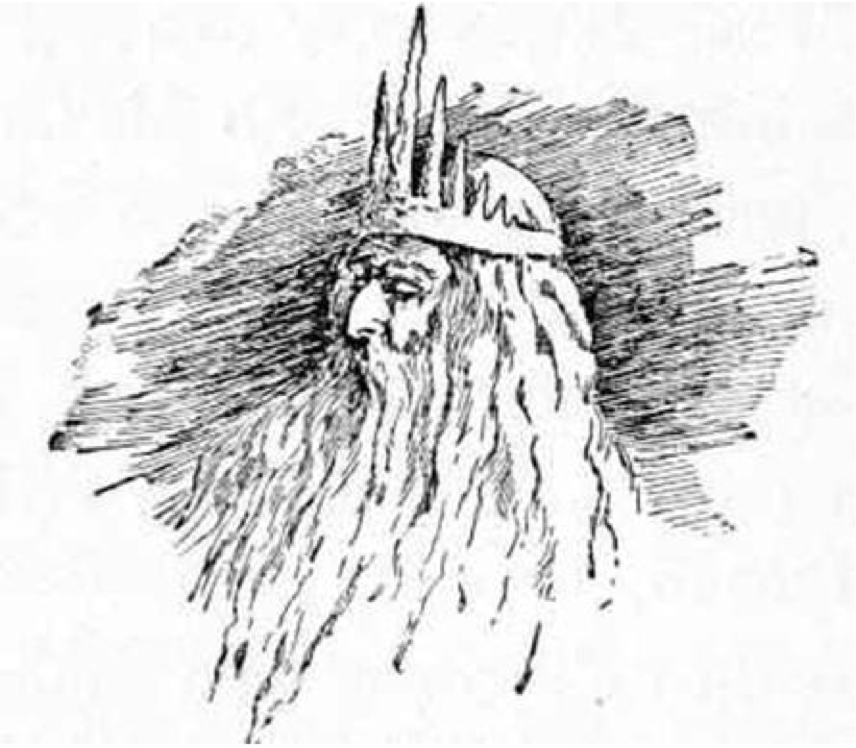
The King promised, and Star led him up to the light again, where his people waited to know what was to become of them.

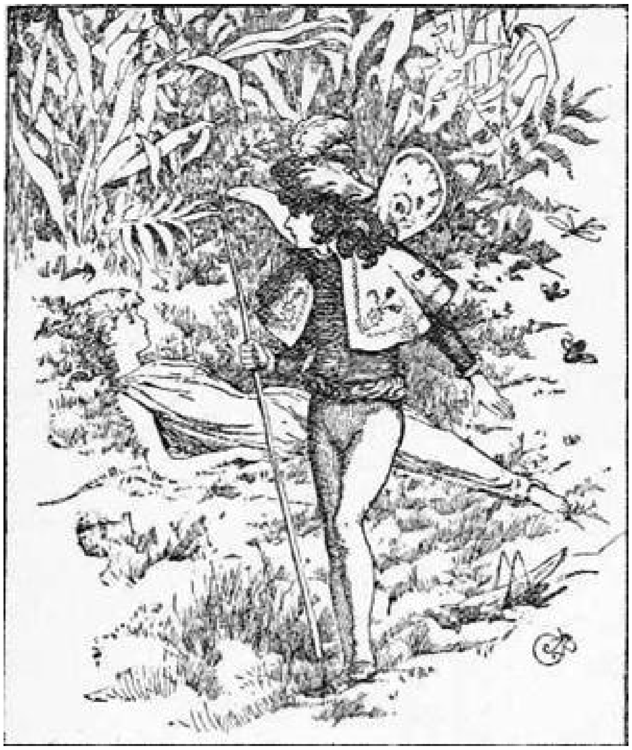
"Follow me, follow me, and do not be afraid," called Star, dancing before them, — so glad to be free that she longed to fly away. Everything was changed; for as they came up from the cell the ruins of the palace melted into a quiet lake, and under the archway of the pines they passed into a new and lovely world of sunshine, flowers, and happy elves. A great cry went up when Star was seen leading the King, with his few subjects behind him, and every one flew to welcome the dear fairy and the captives she brought.

"I am your prisoner, and I submit, for I have no kingdom now," said the King, as he bowed before the Queen.

"These are the only chains you shall wear, and *this* is your new kingdom," answered the Queen, as her maids hung wreaths of flowers on the King's arms and put a green crown on his head, while all the fairies gathered round to welcome him to the lovely garden where he was to reign beloved and happy, with no frost to spoil the long summer he had learned to love.

There was a great feast that day, and then the elfin army marched home again, well pleased with the battle they had fought, though all said that it was Star who had conquered the Frost-King.




On a bed of moss lay Lilybell fast asleep. — Page 37.

LILYBELL AND THISTLEDOWN, OR THE FAIRY SLEEPING BEAUTY.

Once upon a time two little fairies went out into the world to seek their fortune. Thistledown wore a green suit, a purple cloak, a gay feather in his cap, and was as handsome an elf as one could wish to see. But he was not loved in Fairyland; for, like the flower whose name and colors he wore, many faults like sharp prickles were hidden under his fine clothes. He was idle, selfish, and cruel, and cared for nothing but his own pleasure and comfort, as we shall see.

His little friend Lilybell was very different, for she was so kind and good every one loved her. She spent her time trying to undo the mischief naughty Thistle did, and that was why she followed him now, because she was afraid he would get into trouble and need some one to help him.

Side by side they flew over hill and dale till they came to a pleasant garden.

“I am tired and hungry,” said Thistle; “let us rest here and see what fun is going on.”

“Now, dear Thistle, be kind and gentle, and make friends among these flowers. See how they spread their leaves for our beds, and offer us their honey to eat, and their dew to bathe in. It would be very wrong to treat them badly after such a welcome as this,” answered Lilybell, as she lay down to sleep in the deep cup of one of her own flowers, as if in a little bed hung with white curtains.

Thistle laughed and flew off to find the tulips, for he liked splendid flowers and lived like a king. First he robbed the violets of their honey, and shook the blue-bells roughly to get all their dew for his bath. Then he ruffled many leaves before his bed suited him, and after a short nap was up and away having what he called fun. He chased the butterflies and hurt them with the sharp thorn he carried for a sword; he broke the cobwebs laid to bleach on the grass for fairy cloth; he pushed the little birds out of the nest and killed them; he stole pollen from the busy bees, and laughed to see them patiently begin to fill their little bags again. At last he came to a lovely rose-tree with one open flower and a little bud.

“Why are you so slow about blooming, baby rose? You are too old to be rocked in your green cradle any longer. Come out and play with me,” said Thistle, as he perched on the tree ready for more mischief.

“No, my little bud is not strong enough to meet the sun and air yet,” answered the rose-mother, bending over her baby, while all her red leaves trembled with fear, for the wind had told her the harm this cruel fairy had been doing in the garden.

"You silly flower, to wait so long. See how quickly I will make the ugly green bud a pretty pink rose," cried Thistle, as he pulled open the folded bud so rudely that the little leaves fell all broken on the ground.

"It was my first and only one, and I was so fond and proud of it! Now you have killed it, cruel fairy, and I am all alone," sobbed the mother, while her tears fell like rain on the poor bud fading in the hot sun.

Thistle was ashamed of himself, but he would not say he was sorry, and flew away to hunt a white moth, till clouds began to gather and a shower came on. Then he hurried back to the tulips for shelter, sure they would take him in because he had praised their gay colors, and they were vain flowers. But when he came all wet and cold begging to be covered, they laughed and shook their broad leaves till the drops fell on him faster than the rain and beat him down.

"Go away, naughty fairy! we know you now, and won't let you in, for you bring trouble wherever you go. You needn't come to us for a new cloak when the shower has spoilt that one," they cried.

"I don't care, the daisies will be glad to take pity on so splendid an elf as I am," said Thistle, as he flew down to the humble flowers in the grass.

But all the rosy leaves were tightly closed and he knocked in vain, for the daisies had heard of his pranks, and would not risk spoiling their seeds by opening to such a naughty fellow.

He tried the buttercups and dandelions, the violets and mignonette, the lilies and the honeysuckles, but all shut their doors against him and told him to go away.

"Now I have no friends and must die of cold. If I had only minded Lilybell I might be safe and warm as she is somewhere," sighed Thistle, as he stood shivering in the rain.

"I have no little bud to shelter now, and you can come in here," said a soft voice above him; and looking up, Thistle saw that he was under the rose-tree where the dead bud hung broken on its stem.

Grieved and ashamed, the fairy gladly crept in among the warm red leaves, and the rose-mother held him close to her gentle bosom where no rain or chilly wind could reach him. But when she thought he was asleep she sighed so sadly over her lost baby that Thistle found no rest, and dreamed only sad dreams.

Soon the sun shone again and Lilybell came to find her friend; but he was ashamed to meet her and stole away. When the flowers told Lily all the harm Thistle had done she was very sorrowful, and tried to comfort them. She cured the hurt birds and butterflies, helped the bees he had robbed, and watered the poor rose till more buds came to bloom on her stem. Then when all were well and happy again she went to find Thistle, leaving the garden full of grateful friends.

Meantime, Thistle had been playing more pranks, and got into trouble. A kind bee invited him to dinner one day, and the fairy liked the pretty home in the hive; for the floors were of white wax, the walls of golden honey-comb, and the air sweet with the breath of flowers. It was a busy place; some got the food and stored it up in the little cells; some were the house-maids, and kept all exquisitely neat; some took care of the eggs and fed the young bees like good nurses; and others waited on the Queen.

“Will you stay and work with us? No one is idle here, and it is a happier life than playing all day,” said Buzz, the friendly bee.

“I hate to work,” answered lazy Thistle, and would not do anything at all.

Then they told him he must go; that made him angry, and he went to some of the bees whom he had made discontented by his fine tales of an idle life, and said to them, —

“Let us feast and be jolly; winter is far off and there is no need to work in the summer time. Come and make merry, while those busy fellows are away, and the nurses watching the babies in the cells.”

Then he led the drones to the hive, like a band of robbers; first they fastened the Queen into her royal room, so she could do nothing but buzz angrily; next they drove the poor house-keepers away, and frightened the little bees into fits as they went rioting through the waxen halls, pulling down the honey-comb, and stealing the bee-bread carefully put away in the neat cells for winter time. They stayed as long as they dared, and flew off before the workers came home to find their pretty hive in ruins.

“That was fine fun,” said Thistle, as he went to hide in a great forest where he thought the angry bees could not find him.

Here he soon made friends with a gay dragon-fly, and they had splendid games skimming over the lake or swinging on the ferns that grew about it. For a while Thistle was good, and might have had a happy time if he had not quarrelled with his friend about a little fish that the cruel elf pricked with his sword till it nearly died. Gauzy-wing thought that very cruel, and said he would tell the Brownies who ruled over everything in the wood.

“I’m not afraid,” answered Thistle; “they can’t hurt me.”

But he *was* afraid, and as soon as the dragon-fly was asleep that night, he got an ugly spider to come and spin webs all round the poor thing till it could stir neither leg nor wing.

Then leaving it to starve, Thistle flew out of the wood, sure that the Brownies would not catch him.

But they did, for they knew all that happened in their kingdom; and when he stopped to rest in a wild morning-glory-bell, they sent word by the wind that he was to be kept a prisoner till they came. So the purple leaves closed round the sleeping fairy, and he woke to find himself held fast. Then he knew how poor Gauzy-wing felt, and wished he had not been so unkind. But it was too late, for soon the Brownies came, and tying his wings with a strong blade of grass said as they led him away, —

“You do so much harm we are going to keep you a prisoner till you repent, for no one can live in this beautiful world unless he is kind and good. Here you will have time to think over your naughtiness, and learn to be a better elf.”

So they shut him up in a great rock where there was no light but one little ray through a crack that let air into his narrow cell, and there poor Thistle sat alone longing to be free, and sobbing over all the pleasant things he had lost. By and by he stopped crying, and said to himself, —

“Perhaps if I am patient and cheerful, even in this dark place, the Brownies will let me out.” So he began to sing, and the more he sang the better he felt, for the ray of sunshine seemed to grow brighter, the days shorter, and his sorrow easier to bear, because he was trying to take his punishment bravely and be good.

Lilybell was looking for him all this time, tracing him by the harm he did, and stopping to comfort those whom he hurt; so she never found him till she had helped the bees put the hive in order, set free poor Gauzy-wing, and nursed the hurt fish till it was well again. Then she went on looking for him, and wondering where he was. She never would have guessed if he had not sung so much, for the birds loved to hear him, and often perched on the rocks to listen and learn the fairy songs. Columbines sprung up there in the sunshine and danced on their slender stems as they peeped in at him with rosy faces, while green moss went creeping up the sides of the rock as if eager to join in the music.

As Lilybell came to this pleasant place, she wondered if there was a fairy party going on, for the birds were singing, the flowers dancing, and the old rock looked very gay. When they saw her, the birds stopped, and the columbines stood so still that she heard a voice singing sadly, —

“Bright shines the summer sun,
Soft is the summer air,
Gayly the wood-birds sing,
Flowers are blooming fair.
But deep in the dark, cold rock
All alone must I dwell,

Longing for you, dear friend,
Lilybell, Lilybell!”

“Where are you?” cried the other fairy, flying up among the columbines; for she could see no opening in the rock, and wondered where the voice came from. No one replied, for Thistle did not hear her, so she sang her answer to his call, —

“Through sunshine and shower
I have looked for you long,
Guided by bird and flower,
And now by your song,
Thistledown! Thistledown!
O’er wood, hill, and dell
Hither to comfort you
Comes Lilybell.”

Then through the narrow opening two arms were stretched out to her, and all the columbines danced for joy that Thistle was found.

Lilybell made her home there, and did all she could to cheer the poor prisoner, glad to see that he was sorry for his naughtiness, and really trying to be good. But he pined so to come out that she could not bear it, and said she would go and ask the Brownies what he could do to be free.

Thistle waited and waited, but she did not come back, and he cried and called so pitifully that the Brownies came at last and took him out, saying, —

“Lilybell is safe, but she is in a magic sleep, and will not wake till you bring us a golden wand from the earth elves, a cloak of sunshine from the air spirits, and a crown of diamonds from the water fairies. It is a hard task, for you have no friends to help you along. But if you love Lilybell enough to be patient, brave, and kind, you may succeed, and she will wake to reward you when you bring the fairy gifts.”

As they said this, the Brownies led him to a green tent made of tall ferns, and inside on a bed of moss lay Lilybell fast asleep, like the Beauty in the dear old story.

“I will do it,” said Thistle, and spreading the wings that had been idle so long, he was off like a humming-bird.

“Flowers know most about the earth elves, so I will ask them,” he thought, and began to ask every clover and buttercup, wood-violet, and wayside dandelion that he met. But no one would answer him; all shrunk away and drew their curtains close, remembering his rough treatment before.

“I will go to the rose; I think she is a friend, for she forgave me, and took me in when the rest left me in the cold,” said Thistle, much discouraged, and half afraid to ask anything of the flower he had hurt so much.

But when he came to the garden the rose-mother welcomed him kindly, and proudly showed the family of little buds that now grew on her stem.

“I will trust and help you for Lilybell’s sake,” she said. “Look up, my darlings, and show the friend how rosy your little faces are growing; you need not be afraid now.”

But the buds leaned closer to their mother, and would only peep at Thistle, for they remembered the little sister whom he had killed, and they feared him.

“Ah,” he sadly thought, “if I had only been kind like Lily, they would all love and trust me, and be glad to help me. How beautiful goodness is! I must try to prove to them that I *am* sorry; then they will believe me, and show me how to find the crown.”

So, at night when the flowers were asleep, he watered them; sung lullabies to the restless young birds, and tucked the butterflies up under the leaves where no dew could spoil their lovely wings. He rocked the baby-buds to sleep when they grew impatient before it was time to blossom; he kept grubs from harming the delicate leaves of the flowers, and brought cool winds to refresh them when the sun was hot.

The rose was always good to him, and when the other plants wondered who did so many kind things, she said to them, —

“It is Thistle, and he is so changed I am sure we may trust him. He hides by day for no one is friendly, but by night he works or sits alone, and sobs and sighs so sadly I cannot sleep for pity.”

Then they all answered, “We will love and help him for Lilybell’s sake.”

So they called him to come and be friends, and he was very happy to be forgiven. But he did not forget his task, and when he told them what it was, they called Downy-back, the mole, and bid him show Thistle where the earth elves lived. Thanking the kind flowers, Thistle followed the mole deep into the ground, along the road he knew so well, till they saw a light before them.

“There they are; now you can go on alone, and good luck to you,” said Downy-back, as he scampered away, — for he liked the dark best.

Thistle came to a great hall made of jewels that shone like the sun, and here many spirits were dancing like fireflies to the music of silver bells.

One of these came and asked why he was there, and when he told her, Sparkle said, “You must work for us if you want to earn the golden wand.”

“What must I do?” asked Thistle.

“Many things,” answered Sparkle; “some of us watch over the roots of the flowers and keep them warm and safe; others gather drops and make springs that gush up among the rocks, where people drink the fresh water and are glad; others dig for jewels, make good-luck pennies, and help miners find gold and silver hidden in dark places. Can you be happy here, and do all these things faithfully?”

“Yes, for love of Lily I can do anything,” said Thistle bravely, and fell to work at once with all his heart.

It was hard and dull for the gay fairy, who loved light and air, to live in the earth like a mole; and often he was very sad and tired, and longed to fly away to rest. But he never did, and at last Sparkle said, “You have done enough. Here is the golden wand, and as many jewels as you like.”

But Thistle cared only for the wand, and hurried up to the sunshine as fast as he could climb, eager to show the Brownies how well he had kept his word.

They were very glad to see him back and told him to rest a little. But he could not wait, and with a look at Lily, still fast asleep, he flew away to find the air spirits.

No one seemed to know where they lived, and Thistle was in despair till he remembered hearing Buzz speak of them when he first met him.

“I dare not go to the hive, for the bees might kill me, I did so much harm. Perhaps if I first show them I am sorry, they will forgive me as the flowers did,” he said.

So he went into a field of clover and worked busily till he had filled two blue-bells full of the sweetest honey. These he left at the door of the hive when no one saw him, and then hid in the apple-tree close by.

The bees were much pleased and surprised; for every day two little blue jars stood at the door, full of honey so fresh and sweet that it was kept for the Queen and the royal babies.

“It is some good elf, who knows how much trouble we have had this summer, and wants to help us fill our cells before the frost comes. If we catch the kind fellow we will thank him well,” said the bees gratefully.

“Ah, ha! we shall be friends again, I think, if I keep on,” laughed Thistle, much cheered as he sat among the leaves.

After this he not only left the pretty honey-pots, but flew far and wide for all the flowering herbs bees love to suck, and nearly broke his back lugging berries from the wood, or great bags of pollen for their bread, till he was as dusty as a little miller. He helped the ants with their heavy loads, the field-mice with their small harvesting, and chased flies from the patient cows feeding in the fields. No one saw him, but all loved “Nimble Nobody” as they called the invisible friend who did so many kindly things.

At last they caught him, as he was wrapping a lizard who had chills in a warm mullein-leaf blanket.

"Why, it is naughty Thistle!" cried the bees, ready to sting him to death.

"No, no," chirped an old cricket, who had kept the secret. "It is the good fellow who has done so much to make us all happy and comfortable. Put up your stings and shake hands, before he flies away to hide from you again."

The bees could hardly believe this at first, but finding it true were glad to make up the quarrel and be friends. When they heard what Thistle wanted, they consented at once, and sent Buzz to show him the way to Cloudland, where the air spirits lived.

It seemed a lovely place, for the sky was gold and purple overhead, silver mist hung like curtains from the rainbow arches, and white clouds were piled up like downy cushions for the spirits to sleep on. But they were very busy flying to and fro like motes in a sunbeam, some polishing the stars that they might shine well at night, some drawing up water from rivers and lakes, to shower it down again in rain or dew; others sent messages by the winds that kept coming and going like telegraph-boys, with news from all parts of the world; and others were weaving light into a shining stuff to hang on dark walls, wrap about budding plants, and clothe all spirits of the airy world.

"These are the ones I want," said Thistle, and asked for the mantle of sunshine.

"You must earn it first, and help us work," answered the weavers.

Thistle willingly went with them and shared their lovely tasks; but most of all he liked to shake sweet dreams from the dreamland tree down upon little people in their beds, to send strong, bright rays suddenly into dark rooms, dancing on the walls and cheering sick or sad eyes. Sometimes he went riding to the earth on a raindrop, like a little water-cart man, and sprinkled the dusty road or gave some thirsty plant a good drink. He helped the winds carry messages, and blow flower-seeds into lonely places to spring and blossom there, a pleasant surprise for all who might find them.

It was a busy and a happy life, and he liked it; for fairies love light, air, and motion, and he was learning to live for good and helpful things. Sooner than he expected the golden cloak was won, and he shot like a falling star to the forest with his prize.

"One more trial and she will wake," said the Brownies, well pleased.

"This I shall not like, for I am not a water elf, but I'll do my best," answered Thistle, and roamed away into the wood, following a brook till he came to the lake where he used to play with Gauzy-wing. As he stood wondering how to find the nixies, he heard a faint cry for help, and presently found a little frog with a broken leg, lying on the moss.

"I tried to jump too far, when a cruel child was going to tread on me, and fell among the stones; I long for the water, but can drag myself no farther," sighed the frog, his bright eyes dim with pain.

Thistle did not like to touch the cold thing, but remembering his own unkindness to the dragon-fly, he helped the poor froggie to a fallen oak-leaf, and then tugged it by its stout stem to the waterside where he could bathe the hurt leg and bring cool draughts in an acorn cup.

"Alas! I cannot swim, and I am very tired of this bed," cried poor Hop after a day or two, during which Thistle fed and nursed him tenderly.

"I'll pull a lily-pad to the shore, and when you are on it we can sail about wherever we please, without tiring you," and away went the elf to find the green boat.

After that they floated all day, and anchored at night, and Hop got well so fast that soon he could dive off and paddle a bit with his hands, or float, using his well leg to steer with. Thistle had talked about the water sprites, but Hop was rather a dull fellow, and lived in the mud, so he could tell him nothing. One day, however, a little fish popped up his head and said, —

"I know, and for kind Lilybell's sake I'll show you where they live."

Then Thistle left grateful Hop to his family, and folding his wings plunged into the lake after the silvery fish, who darted deeper and deeper till they stood in a curious palace made of rosy coral at the bottom of the sea. Gay shells made the floors and ornamented the walls. Lovely sea-weeds grew from the white sand, and heaps of pearls lay everywhere. The water sprites in their blue robes floated here and there, or slept in beds of foam, rocked by the motion of the waves.

They gathered round the stranger, bringing all sorts of treasures for him. But he did not care for these, and told them what he wanted. Then little Pearl, the gentlest of the sprites, said:

"You must help the coral-workers till the branches of their tree reach the air; because we want a new island, and that is the way we begin them. It is very dull work, but we cannot give you the crown till that is done."

Thistle was ready to begin at once, and hastened away to the coral-tree, where hundreds of little creatures were building cell upon cell, till the white tree rose tall and wide, spreading through the blue water. It *was* very dull, and the poor fairy never could lose his fear of the strange monsters that swam to and fro, staring at him with big eyes, or opening their great mouths as if to swallow him. There was no sun, — only a dim light, and the sky seemed full of storm, when the waves rolled overhead, and wrecks came floating down. The sea-flowers had no sweetness; the only birds were flying-fish and Mother Carey's chickens, as the stormy petrels are called. Thistle pined for light and air, but kept patiently at work, and his only pleasure was now and then to float with Pearl on the waves that rippled to the shore, and get a breath of warm air from the lovely earth he longed to see again.

At last the great tree rose above the sea, and the long task was done; for now the waves would wash weeds over the branches, gulls would bring earth and sticks to make their nests, and by and by an island would be formed where men might land or wild birds live in peace.

"Now you can go. Here is the crown of water-drops, changed to diamonds, that will always lie cool and bright on your Lily's head. Good-by, good-by," said Pearl, as she gave the reward and waved her hand to Thistle, who shook the foam off his wings and flew away in the sunshine, like a happy butterfly just out of its cell.

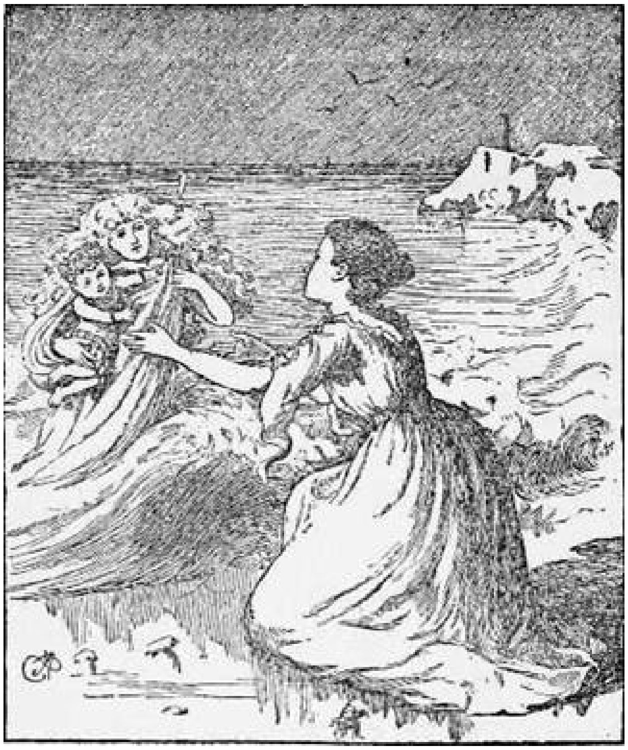
When he came to the wood the Brownies hastened to meet him, and he saw that they had made the place beautiful with wreaths from tree to tree; birds were singing their sweetest on every bough; the brook was laughing as it hurried by to tell the good news wherever it went; and the flowers, all in their best, were dancing with impatience to welcome him home.

Lilybell lay with the cloak of sunshine folded round her, and the golden wand in her hand, waiting for the crown and the kiss that should wake her from this long sleep. Thistle gave them both; and when her eyes opened and she stretched out her arms to him, he was the happiest fairy in the world. The Brownies told all he had done, and how at last he had learned to be gentle, true, and brave, after many trials and troubles.

"You shall have the crown, for you have worked so hard you deserve it, and I will have a wreath of flowers," said Lily, so glad and proud she cared for nothing else.

"Keep your crown, for here are friends coming to bring Thistle his rewards," said the Brownies, as they pointed to a troop of earth spirits rising from among the mossy roots of an old tree. Sparkle brought a golden wand like the one he had earned for Lily, and while she was giving it, down through the air came the sky spirits, with the mantle of sunshine as their gift. Hardly had they folded it round happy Thistle, when the sound of music, like drops falling in time and tune, was heard, and along the brook in their boats of rosy shells came the water sprites with the crown.

As they put it on his head all took hands and danced about the two elves, shouting in their soft voices, "Thistledown and Lilybell! Long live our King and Queen!"



Suddenly a great wave came rolling in. — Page 64.

RIPPLE, THE WATER SPRITE.

Down in the deep sea lived Ripple, a happy little water sprite. She lived in a palace of red coral, with gardens of sea-flowers all round it, the waves like a blue sky above it, and white sand full of jewels for its floor. Ripple and her mates had gay times playing with the sea-urchins, chasing flying-fish, rocking in the shells, and weaving many-colored sea-weed into delicate clothes to wear.

But the pastime Ripple loved best was to rise to the light and air, and float on the waves that rocked her softly in the sunshine, while the gulls stooped to tell her news of the great world they saw in their long flights. She liked to watch little children playing on the shore, and when they ran into the sea she caught them in her arms and held them up and kissed them, though they saw and felt only the cool water and the white foam.

Ripple had one sorrow; for when tempests came and the waves rolled overhead like black clouds, ships were often wrecked, and those whom the angry sea drowned came floating down, pale and cold, to the home of the water sprites, who mourned over them, and laid them in graves of white sea-sand, where jewels shone like flowers.

One day a little child sank down from the storm above to the quiet that was never broken, far below. Its pretty eyes were closed as if asleep, its long hair hung about the pale face like wet weeds, and the little hands still held the shells they had been gathering when the cruel waves swept it away. The tender-hearted sprites cried salt tears over it, and wrapped it in their softest sheets, finding it so lovely and so sad they could not bury it out of sight. While they sung their lullabies Ripple heard through the roar of wind and water a bitter cry that seemed to call her. Floating up through foam and spray she saw a woman standing on the beach with her arms outstretched, imploring the cruel sea to give her back her little child.

Ripple longed so much to comfort the poor mother that power was given her to show herself, and to make her soft language understood. A slender creature, in a robe as white as foam, with eyes as blue as the sea, and a murmuring voice that made music like falling drops of water, bent over the weeping woman and told her that the child was cared for far below all storms, and promised to keep the little grave beautiful with sea-flowers, and safe from any harm. But the mother could not be comforted, and still cried bitterly, —

“Give him back to me alive and laughing, or I cannot live. Dear sprite, have you no charm to make the little darling breathe again? Oh, find one, find one, or let me lie beside him in the hungry sea."

"I will look far and wide and see if I can help you. Watch by the shore, and I will come again with the little child if there is any power in land or sea to make him live," cried Ripple, so eager to do this happy thing that she sprang into the ocean and vanished like a bubble.

She hurried to the Queen in her palace of pearls and told her all the sad story.

"Dear Ripple, you cannot keep your promise, for there is no power in my kingdom to work this spell. The only thing that could do it would be a flame from the sun to warm the little body into life, and you could never reach the fire spirits' home far, far away."

"But I *will*!" cried Ripple, bravely. "If you had seen the poor mother's tears and heard her cries you would feel as I do, and never let her watch in vain. Tell me where I must go; and I will not be afraid of anything if I can only make the little child live again."

"Far away beside the sun live the fire spirits; but I cannot tell the road, for it is through the air and no water sprite could live to reach it. Dear Ripple, do not go, for if any harm comes to you I shall lose my sweetest subject," said the Queen, — and all the others begged her to stay safely at home.

But Ripple would not break her promise, and they had to let her go. So the sprites built a tomb of delicate, bright shells, where the child might lie till she came to make him live again; and with a brave good-by Ripple floated away on her long journey to the sky.

"I will go round the world till I find a road to the sun. Some kind friend will help me, for I have no wings and cannot float through the blue air as through the sea," she said, as she came to the other side of the ocean and saw a lovely land before her. Grass was green on all the hills, flowers were budding, young leaves danced upon the trees, and birds were singing everywhere.

"Why are you all so gay?" asked Ripple, wondering.

"Spring is coming! Spring is coming! and all the earth is glad," sang the lark, as the music poured from its little throat.

"Shall I see her?" asked Ripple, eagerly.

"You will meet her soon. The sunshine told us she was near, and we are hurrying to be up and dressed to welcome her back," answered a blue-eyed violet, dancing on her stem for joy.

"I will ask her how to reach the fire spirits. She travels over the earth every year, and perhaps can show me the way," said Ripple, as she went on.

Soon a beautiful child came dancing over the hills, rosy as dawn, with hair like sunshine, a voice like the balmy wind, and her robe full of seeds, little leaves, dewdrops, and budding flowers, which she scattered far and wide, till the earth smiled back at the smiling sky.

“Dear Spring, will you help a poor little sprite, who is looking for the fire spirits’ home?” cried Ripple, — and told her tale so eagerly that the child stopped to hear.

“Alas, I cannot tell you,” answered Spring, “but my elder sister Summer is coming behind me, and she may know. I long to help, so I will give you this breeze, that will carry you over land and sea and never tire. I wish I could do more, but the world is calling me, and I must go.”

“Many thanks, kind Spring,” cried Ripple, as she floated away on the breeze. “Say a kind word to the poor mother waiting on the shore, and tell her I do not forget.”

Then the lovely season flew on with her sunshine and song, and Ripple went swiftly over hill and dale till she came to the place where Summer lived. Here the sun shone warmly on early fruit and ripening grain; the wind blew freshly over sweet hay-fields and rustled the thick branches of the trees. Heavy dews and soft showers refreshed the growing things, and long bright days brought beauty to the world.

“Now I must look for Summer,” said Ripple, as she sailed along.

“I am here,” said a voice, and she saw a beautiful woman floating by, in green robes, with a golden crown on her hair, and her arms full of splendid flowers.

Ripple told her story again, but Summer said with a sigh of pity, —

“I cannot show you the way, but my brother Autumn may know. I, too, will give you a gift to help you along, good little creature. This sunbeam will be a lamp to light your way, for you may have a gloomy journey yet.”

Then Summer went on, leaving all green and golden behind her, and Ripple flew away to look for Autumn. Soon the fields were yellow with corn and grain; purple grapes hung on the vines; nuts rattled down among the dead leaves, and frost made the trees gay with lovely colors. A handsome hunter, in a russet suit, came striding over the hills, with his hounds about him, while he made music on his silver horn, and all the echoes answered him.

This was Autumn, but he was no wiser than his sisters, and seeing the little sprite’s disappointment he kindly said, —

“Ask Winter; he knows the fire spirits well, for when he comes they fly down to kindle fires on the hearths where people gather to keep warm. Take this red leaf, and when you meet his chilly winds wrap it round you, else you will be frozen to death. A safe journey and a happy end;” and with a shrill blast on his horn Autumn hurried away, with his hounds leaping after him.

“Shall I ever get there?” sighed poor Ripple, as the never-tiring breeze flew on, till the sky grew dark and cold winds began to blow. Then she folded the warm red leaf about her like a cloak, and looked sadly down at the dead flowers and frozen fields, not knowing that Winter spread a soft blanket of snow over them, so they could lie safely asleep till Spring woke them again.

Presently, riding on the north wind, Winter came rushing by, with a sparkling crown of ice on his white hair, and a cloak of frost-work, from which he scattered snow-flakes far and wide.

"What do you want with me, pretty thing? Do not be afraid; I am warm at heart, though rude and cold outside," said Winter, with a smile that made his pleasant face glow in the frosty air.

When Ripple told what she was looking for, he nodded and pointed to the gloomy sky.

"Far away up there is the palace, and the only road is through cloud and mist and strange places full of danger. It is too hard a task for you, and the fire spirits are wild, hot-tempered things who may kill you. Come back with me, and do not try."

"I cannot go back, now that I have found the way. Surely the spirits will not hurt me when I tell why I have come; and if they do give me the spark I shall be the happiest sprite in all the big sea. Tell the poor mother I will keep my word; and be kind to her, she is so sad."

"You brave little creature! I think you will succeed. Take this snowflake, that will never melt, and good luck to you," cried Winter, as the north wind carried him away, leaving the air full of snow.

"Now, dear Breeze, fly straight up till we reach our journey's end. Sunbeam shall light the way; Redleaf shall keep me warm, and Snowflake lie here beside me till I need it. Good-by to land and sea; now away, up to the sun!"

When Ripple first began her airy journey, heavy clouds lay piled like hills about her, and a cold mist filled the air. Higher and higher they went, and darker grew the air, while a stormy wind tossed the little traveller to and fro as if on the angry sea.

"Shall I ever see the beautiful world again?" sighed Ripple. "It is indeed a dreadful road, and but for the seasons' gifts I should have died. Fly fast, dear wind, and bring me to the sunshine again."

Soon the clouds were left behind, the mist rolled away, and she came up among the stars. With wondering eyes she looked at the bright worlds that once seemed dim and distant when she saw them from the sea. Now they moved around her, some shining with a soft light, some with many-colored rings, some pale and cold, while others burned with a red glare.

Ripple would gladly have stayed to watch them, for she fancied voices called;

faces smiled at her, and each star made music as it shone in the wide sky. But higher up, still nearer to the sun, she saw a far-off light that glittered like a crimson flame, and made a fiery glow. “The spirits must be there,” she said, and hurried on, eager to reach her journey’s end.

Up she flew till straight before her lay a broad path that led to a golden arch, behind which she could see lovely creatures moving to and fro. As she drew nearer, the air grew so hot that the red leaf shrivelled up, and Ripple would have died if she had not quickly unfolded the snowflake and wrapped herself in that cool cloak. Then she could safely pass under the tall arch into a strange place, where the walls were of orange, blue, and purple flames, that made beautiful figures as they flickered to and fro. Here the fire spirits lived, and Ripple saw with wonder their crowns of flame, their flashing eyes, the sparks that popped from their lips as they spoke, and how in each one’s bosom burned a little flame that never wavered or went out.

She had time to see no more, for the wild things came dancing round her; and their hot breath would have burned her if she had not pulled the snow-cloak over her head and begged them not to touch her, but to take her to the Queen.

Through halls of many-colored fire they led her to a spirit more brilliant than the rest; for a crown of yellow flames waved on her head, and under the transparent violet of her robe the light in her breast shone like a star.

Then Ripple told how she had been round the world to find them, and, thanks to the seasons, had come at last to ask the magic spark that would make the little child live again.

“We cannot give it,” said the Queen; “for each of us must take something from our bosom-fires to make up this flame, and this we do not like to do; because the brighter these souls of ours burn, the lovelier we are.”

“Dear, warm-hearted spirits, do not send me away without it after this long, hard journey,” cried Ripple, clasping her hands. “I am sure if you do this kind thing your souls will shine the brighter; for every good act makes us beautiful. Give me the spark and I will do anything I can for you.”

As she spoke, the cloak fell back a little, and the Queen saw the chain of jewels Ripple wore.

“If you will give me those lovely blue stones that shine like water I will give a little of my bosom-fire for the child; because you are a brave sprite, and it is hard to be cruel to you.”

Gladly Ripple gave her the necklace; but, alas! as soon as the Queen’s hand touched it the jewels melted like snow, and fell in bright drops to the ground. Then the Queen’s eyes flashed, and the spirits gathered angrily about Ripple, while sparks showered from their lips as they spoke angrily to her.

"I have many finer ones at home, and if you will give me the flame I will bring all I can gather in the sea, and each shall have a necklace to remember the kind deed you have done," she said gently, as they hovered about her, looking ready to burn her up in their wrath.

"We will do it," said the Queen; "but if the jewels you bring melt like these, we shall keep you a prisoner here. Promise to come back, or we shall send lightning to find and kill you, even at the bottom of the sea."

Ripple promised, and each spirit gave a spark, till the golden flame was made, and put into a crystal vase, where it shone like a splendid star.

"Remember! remember!" cried the fierce imps as they led her to the arch and left her to travel back through mist and cloud till far below she saw the beautiful blue sea.

Gladly she plunged into the cool waves and sunk to her home, where her friends hastened joyfully to welcome her.

"Now come," they said, "dear, brave Ripple, and finish the good work you have begun." They gathered round the tomb, where like a marble image lay the little child. Ripple placed the flame on his breast and watched it sparkle there while the color came slowly back to the pale face, light to the dim eyes, and breath through the cold lips, till the child woke from his long sleep and looked up smiling as he called his mother.

Then the spirits sang for joy, and dressed him in pretty clothes of woven sea-weed, put chains of shells on his neck and a wreath of water-flowers on his head.

"Now you shall see your mother who has waited so long, dear child," said Ripple, taking him in her arms and feeling that all her weariness was not in vain.

On the shore the poor woman still sat, watching and waiting patiently, as she had done all that weary year. Suddenly a great wave came rolling in, and on it, lifted high by arms as white as foam, sat the child waving his hands as he cried to her, "I am coming, mother, and I have such lovely things to show you from the bottom of the sea!"

Then the wave broke gently on the shore and left the child safe in his happy mother's arms.

"O faithful Ripple, what can I do to thank you? I wish I had some splendid thing, but I have only this little chain of pearls. They are the tears I shed, and the sea changed them so that I might offer them to you," said the woman, when she could speak for joy.

Ripple took the pretty chain and floated away, ready for her new task, while the child danced gayly on the sand, and the mother smiled like sunshine on the happy sprite who had done so much for her.

Far and wide in all the caves of the sea did Ripple look for jewels, and when she had long necklaces of all the brightest, she flew away again on the tireless breeze to the fire palace in the sky.

The spirits welcomed her warmly as she poured out her treasures at the feet of the Queen. But when the hot hands touched the jewels, they melted and fell like drops of colored dew. Ripple was filled with fear, for she could not live in that fiery place, and begged for some other task to save her life.

“No, no,” cried the spirits fiercely. “You have not kept your promise and you must stay. Fling off this cold cloak and swim in the fire-fountains till you get a soul like ours, and can help us brighten our bosom sparks again.”

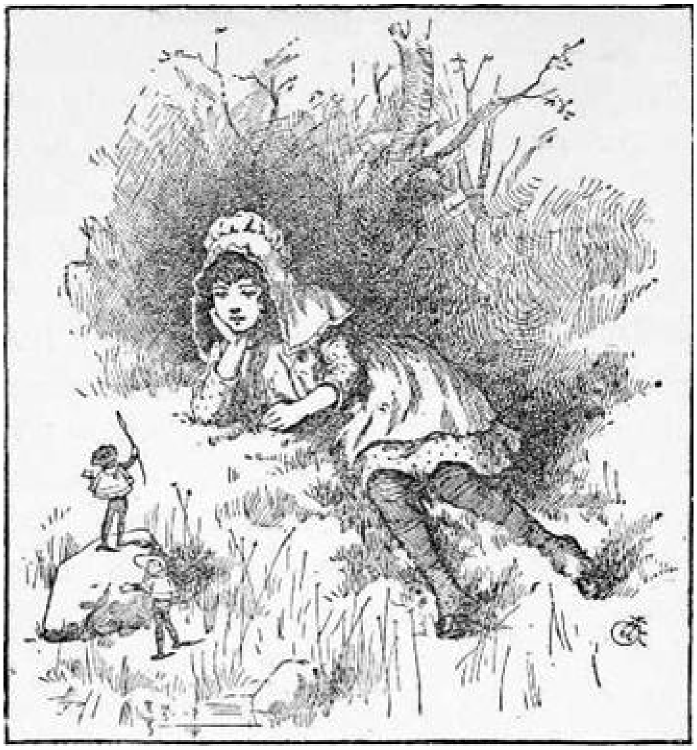
Ripple sank down in despair and felt that she must die; but even then was glad to give her life for the little child’s. The spirits gathered about her, but as they began to pull the cloak away, underneath they saw the chain of pearls shining with a soft light, that only brightened as they put their hands upon it.

“Oh, give us this!” they cried; “it is finer than the others, and does not melt. Give us this and you may go free.”

Ripple gladly gave it, and, safe under the cloak, told them how the pearls they so proudly divided to wear were tears which, but for them, would still be flowing. This pleased the spirits, for they had warm hearts as well as hot tempers, and they said, smiling, — ”Since we may not kiss you, and you cannot live with us, we will show our love for you by giving you a pleasant journey home. Come out and see the bright path we have made.”

They led her to the gate and there she saw a splendid rainbow arching from the sky to the sea, its lovely colors shining in the sun.

Then with thanks and good-by, happy little Ripple flew back along that lovely road, and every wave in the great ocean danced for joy to welcome her home.



Eva watched their pretty play. — Page 69.

EVA'S VISIT TO FAIRYLAND.

A little girl lay on the grass down by the brook wondering what the brown water said as it went babbling over the stones. As she listened she heard another kind of music that seemed to come nearer and nearer, till round the corner floated a beautiful boat filled with elves, who danced on the broad green leaves of the lily of the valley, while the white bells of the tall stem that was the mast rung loud and sweet.

A flat rock, covered with moss, stood in the middle of the brook, and here the boat was anchored for the elves to rest a little. Eva watched them at their pretty play, as they flew about or lay fanning themselves and drinking from the red-brimmed cups on the rocks. Wild strawberries grew in the grass close by, and Eva threw some of the ripest to the fairy folk; for honey and dew seemed a poor sort of lunch to the child. Then the elves saw her, and nodded and smiled and called, but their soft voices could not reach her. So, after whispering among themselves, two of them flew to the brookside, and perching on a buttercup said close to Eva's ear, —

"We have come to thank you for your berries, and to ask if we can do anything for you, because this is our holiday and we can become visible to you."

"Oh, let me go to fairyland! I have longed so to see and know all about you dear little people; and never would believe it is true that there are no fairies left," cried Eva, so glad to find that she was right.

"We should not dare to take some children, they would do so much harm; but you believe in us, you love all the sweet things in the world, and never hurt innocent creatures, or tread on flowers, or let ugly passions come into your happy little heart. You shall go with us and see how we live."

But as the elves spoke, Eva looked very sad and said, —

"How can I go? I am so big I should sink that pretty ship with one finger, and I have no wings."

The elves laughed and touched her with their soft hands, saying, —

"You cannot hurt us now. Look in the water and see what we have done."

Eva looked and saw a tiny child standing under a tall blue violet. It was herself, but so small she seemed an elf in a white pinafore and little pink sun-bonnet. She clapped her hands and skipped for joy, and laughed at the cunning picture; but suddenly she grew sober again, as she looked from the shore to the rock.

"But now I am so wee I cannot step over, and you cannot lift me, I am sure."

"Give us each a hand and do not be afraid," said the elves, and whisked her across like dandelion down.

The elves were very glad to see her, and touched and peeped and asked questions as if they had never had a mortal child to play with before. Eva was so small she could dance with them now, and eat what they ate, and sing their pretty songs. She found that flower-honey and dewdrops were very nice, and that it was fine fun to tilt on a blade of grass, to slide down a smooth bulrush-stem, or rock in the cup of a flower. She learned new and merry games, found out what the brook said, saw a cowslip blossom, and had a lovely time till the captain of the ship blew a long sweet blast on a honeysuckle horn, and all the elves went aboard and set sail for home.

"Now I shall find the way to Fairyland and can go again whenever I like," thought Eva, as she floated away.

But the sly little people did not mean that she should know, for only now and then can a child go to that lovely place. So they set the bells to chiming softly, and all sung lullabies till Eva fell fast asleep, and knew nothing of the journey till she woke in Fairyland.

It seemed to be sunset; for the sky was red, the flowers all dreaming behind their green curtains, the birds tucked up in their nests, and there was no sound but the whisper of the wind that softly sang, "Good-night, good-night."

"We all go early to bed unless the moon shines. We are tired, so come and let us make you cosey till to-morrow," said the elves, showing her a dainty bed with white rose-leaves for sheets, a red rose-leaf for coverlet, and two plump little mushrooms for pillows. Cobweb curtains hung over it, a glow-worm was the candle, and a lily-of-the-valley cup made a nice night-cap, while a tiny gown of woven thistle-down lay ready to be put on.

Eva quickly undressed and slipped into the pretty bed, where she lay looking at the red light till sleep kissed her eyelids, and a lovely dream floated through her mind till morning came.

As soon as the sun peeped over the hills the elves were up and away to the lake, where they all dipped and splashed and floated and frolicked till the air was full of sparkling drops and the water white with foam. Then they wiped on soft cobweb towels, which they spread on the grass to dry, while they combed their pretty hair and put on fresh gowns of flower-leaves. After that came breakfast, all sitting about in parties to eat fruit and cakes of pollen, while their drink was fresh dew.

"Now, Eva, you see that we are not idle, foolish creatures, but have many things to do, many lessons to learn, and a heaven of our own to hope for," said the elves when they had all sung together; while the wind, who was the housemaid there, cleared the tables by blowing everything away at one breath. “First of all come to our hospital, — for here we bring all the sick and hurt things cruel or careless people have harmed. In your world children often torment and kill poor birds and worms and flies, and pick flowers to throw away, and chase butterflies till their poor wings are broken. All these we care for, and our magic makes them live again. Come and see.”

Eva followed to a cool, quiet place, where on soft beds lay many wounded things. Rose, the fairy nurse, was binding up the leg of a fly as he lay in a cobweb hammock and feebly buzzed his thanks. In another place an ugly worm was being put together after a cruel boy had cut him in two. Eva thought the elves were good to do such work, and went on to a humming-bird which lay in a bed of honeysuckles, with the quick colors very dim on its little breast and bright wings very still.

“I was shot with an air-gun, and my poor head still aches with the dreadful blow,” sighed the poor bird, trying to sip a little honey with his long beak.

“I’m nearly well,” chirped a cricket, whose stiff tail had been pulled off by a naughty child and nicely put on again by a very skilful elf.

He looked so cheerful and lively as he hopped about on his bed of dried grass, with his black eyes twinkling, and a bandage of bindweed holding his tail firmly in place till it was well, that Eva laughed aloud, and at the pleasant sound all the sick things smiled and seemed better.

Rows of pale flowers stood in one place, and elves watered them, or tied up broken leaves, or let in the sunshine to cure their pains, — for these delicate invalids needed much care; and Mignonette was the name of the nurse who watched over them, like a little Sister of Charity, with her gray gown and sweet face.

“You have seen enough. Come to school now, and see where we are taught all that fairies must know,” said Trip, the elf who was guiding her about.

In a pleasant place they found the child elves sitting on pink daisies with their books of leaves in their hands, while the teacher was a Jack-in-the-pulpit, who asked questions, and was very wise. Eva nodded to the little ones, and they smiled at the stranger as they rustled their books and pretended to study busily.

A class in arithmetic was going on, and Eva listened to questions that none but elves would care to know.

“Twinkle, if there were fifteen seeds on a dandelion, and the wind blew ten away, how many would be left?”

“Five.”

“Bud, if a rose opens three leaves one day, two the next, and seven the next, how many in all?”

“Eleven.”

“Daisy, if a silk-worm spins one yard of fairy cloth in an hour, how many can he spin in a day?”

“Twelve, if he isn’t lazy,” answered the little elf, fluttering her wings, as if anxious to be done.

“Now we will read,” said Jack, and a new class flew to the long leaf, where they stood in a row, with open books, ready to begin.

“You may read ‘The Flower’s Lesson’ to-day, and be careful not to sing-song, Poppy,” said the teacher, passing a dainty book to Eva that she might follow the story.

“Once there was a rose who had two little buds. One was happy and contented, but the other always wanted something.

“‘I wish the elves would bring me a star instead of dew every night. The drop is soon gone, but a star would shine splendidly, and I should be finer than all the other flowers,’ said the naughty bud one night.

“‘But you need the dew to live, and the moon needs the stars up there to light the world. Don’t fret, sister, but be sure it is best to take what is sent, and be glad,’ answered the good bud.

“‘I won’t have the dew, and if I cannot get a star I will take a firefly to shine on my breast,’ said the other, shaking off a fresh drop that had just fallen on her, and folding her leaves round the bright fly.

“‘Foolish child!’ cried the rose-mother; ‘let the fly go, before he harms you. It is better to be sweet and fair than to shine with a beauty not your own. Be wise, dear, before it is too late.’

“But the silly bud only held the firefly closer, till in its struggles it tore her leaves and flew away. When the hot sun came up the poor bud hung all faded on her stem, longing for a cool drop to drink. Her sister was strong and fresh, and danced gayly in the wind, opening her red petals to the sun.

“‘Now I must die. Oh, why was I vain and silly?’ sobbed the poor bud, fainting in the heat.

“Then the mother leaned over her, and from her bosom, where she had hidden it, the dew-drop fell on the thirsty bud, and while she drank it eagerly the rose drew her closer, whispering, ‘Little darling, learn to be contented with what heaven sends, and make yourself lovely by being good.’“

“I shall remember that story,” said Eva when the elves shut their books and flew back to the daisy seats.

“Would you like to hear them sing?” asked Trip.

“Very much,” said Eva, and in the little song they gave her she got another lesson to carry home.

“I shine,” says the sun,
“To give the world light,”
“I glimmer,” adds the moon,
“To beautify the night.”
“I ripple,” says the brook,
“I whisper,” sighs the breeze,
“I patter,” laughs the rain,
“We rustle,” call the trees
“We dance,” nod the daisies,
“I twinkle,” shines the star,
“We sing,” chant the birds,
“How happy we all are!”
“I smile,” cries the child,
Gentle, good, and gay;
The sweetest thing of all,
The sunshine of each day.

“I shall sing that to myself and try to do my part,” said Eva, as the elves got out their paints and brushes of butterfly-down, and using large white leaves for paper, learned to imitate the colors of every flower.

“Why do they do this?” asked Eva, for she saw no pictures anywhere.

“We keep the flowers fresh, for in the world below they have trials with the hot sun that fades, the mould that spots, grubs that gnaw, and frost that kills. We melt bits of rainbow in our paint-pots, and when it is needed we brighten the soft color on Anemone’s cheeks, deepen the blue of Violet’s eyes, or polish up the cowslips till they shine like cups of gold. We redden the autumn leaves, and put the purple bloom on the grapes. We made the budding birches a soft green, color maple keys, and hang brown tassels on the alder twigs. We repair the dim spots on butterflies’ wings, paint the blue-bird like the sky, give Robin his red vest, and turn the yellow bird to a flash of sunshine. Oh, we are artists, and hereafter you will see our pictures everywhere.”

“How lovely!” said Eva. “I often wondered who kept all these delicate things so beautiful and gay. But where are we going now?” she added, as the elves led her away from the school.

“Come and see where we learn to ride,” they answered, smiling as if they enjoyed this part of their education.

In a little dell where the ground was covered with the softest moss Eva found the fairy riding-school and gymnasium. The horses were all kinds of winged and swift-footed things, and the race-ground was a smooth path round the highest moss mound. Groups of elves lay on the ground, swung on the grass-blades, or sat in the wood flowers, that stood all about.

In one place the mothers and fathers were teaching their little ones to fly. The baby elves sat in a row on the branch of a birch-tree, fluttering their small wings and nestling close together, timid yet longing to launch boldly out into the air and float as the others did. The parents were very patient, and one by one the babies took little flights, getting braver and braver each time.

One very timid elf would not stir, so the sly papa and mamma put it on a leaf, and each taking a side, they rode the dear about for a few minutes, till she was used to the motion; then they dropped the leaf, and the little elf finding herself falling spread her wings and flew away to a tall bush, to the great delight of all who saw it.

But the riding was very funny, and Eva soon forgot everything else in watching the gay creatures mount their various horses and fly or gallop round the ring while the teacher — a small fellow in a gay cap and green suit — stood on the moss-mound, cracking a long whip and telling them how to ride in the best fairy fashion.

Several lady elves learned to mount butterflies gracefully and float where they liked, sitting firmly when the winged horses alighted on the flowers. The boy elves preferred field-mice, who went very swiftly round and round, with saddles of woven grass and reins of yellow bindweed, which looked well on the little gray creatures, who twinkled their bright eyes and whisked their long tails as if they liked it.

But the best fun of all was when the leaping began; and Eva quite trembled lest some sad accident should happen; for grasshoppers were led out, and the gallant elves leaped over the highest flower-tops without falling off.

It was very funny to see the queer hoppers skip with their long legs, and when Puck, the riding-master, mounted, and led a dozen of his pupils a race round the track, all the rest of the elves laughed aloud and clapped their hands in great glee; for Puck was a famous fairy, and his pranks were endless.

Eva was shouting with the rest as the green horses came hopping by, when Puck caught her up before him, and away they raced so swiftly that her hair whistled in the wind and her breath was nearly gone. A tremendous leap took them high over the little hill and landed Eva in a tall dandelion, where she lay laughing and panting as if on a little yellow sofa, while Trip and her mates fanned her and smoothed her pretty hair.

“That was splendid!” she cried. “I wish I was a real fairy, and always lived in this lovely place. Everything will seem so ugly and big and coarse when I go home I shall never be happy again."

"Oh, yes, you will," answered Trip, "for after this visit you will be able to hear and see and know what others never do, and that will make you happy and good. You believed in us, and we reward all who love what we love, and enjoy the beautiful world they live in as we do."

"Thank you," said Eva. "If I can know what the birds sing and the brook, and talk with the flowers, and see faces in the sky, and hear music in the wind, I won't mind being a child, even if people call me queer."

"You shall understand many lovely things and be able to put them into tales and songs that all will read and sing and thank you for," said Moonbeam, a sweet, thoughtful elf, who stole quietly about, and was always singing like a soft wind.

"Oh, that is what I always wanted to do," cried Eva, "for I love my song-books best, and never find new ones enough. Show me more, dear elves, so that I can have many fine tales to tell when I am old enough to write."

"Come, then, and see our sweetest sight. We cannot show it to every one, but your eyes will be able to see through the veil, and you will understand the meaning of our flower-heaven."

So Moonlight led her away from all the rest, along a little winding path that went higher and higher till they stood on a hilltop.

"Look up and follow me," said the elf, and touching Eva's shoulders with her wand, a pair of wings shot out, and away she floated after her guide toward what looked like a white cloud sailing in the blue sky.

When they alighted a soft mist was round them, and through it Eva saw a golden glimmer like sunshine.

"Look, but do not speak," said Moonlight, beckoning her along.

Soon the mist passed away and nothing but a thin veil of gossamer like a silken cobweb hung between them and the world beyond. "Can you see through it?" whispered the elf anxiously.

Eva nodded, and then forgot everything to look with all her eyes into a lovely land of flowers; for the walls were of white lilies, the trees were rose-trees, the ground blue violets, and the birds the little yellow canary-plant, whose blossoms are like birds on the wing. Columbines sounded their red horns, and the air was filled with delicate voices, unlike any ever heard before, because it was the sweet breath of flowers set to music.

But what surprised Eva most was the sight of a common dandelion, a tuft of clover, a faded mignonette-plant, with several other humble flowers, set in a little plot by themselves as if newly come, and about them gathered a crowd of beautiful spirits, so bright, so small, so perfect that Eva could hardly see them, and winked as if dazzled by the sunshine of this garden among the clouds.

“Who are they? and why do they care for those poor flowers?” whispered Eva, forgetting that she must not speak.

Before Moonlight could answer, all grew dim for a moment, as if a cold breath had passed beyond the curtain and chilled the delicate world within.

“Hush! mortal voices must not be heard here,” answered the elf with a warning look.

“These lovely creatures are the spirits of flowers who did some good deed when they bloomed on earth, and their reward is to live here forever where there is no frost, no rain, no stormy wind to hurt them. Those poor plants have just come, for their work is done, and their souls will soon be set free from the shapes that hold them. You will see how beautiful they have made themselves when out of the common flowers come souls like the perfect ones who are welcoming them.

“That dandelion lived in the room of a poor little sick girl who had no other toy, no other playmate. She watched and loved it as she lay on her bed, for she was never well, and the good flower, instead of fading without sunshine in that dreary room, bloomed its best, till it shone like a little sun. The child died with it in her hand, and when she no longer needed it, we saved it from being thrown away and brought it here to live forever.

“The clover grew in a prison-yard, and a bad boy shut up there watched it as the only green thing that made him think of the fields at home where his mother was waiting and hoping he would come back to her. Clover did her best to keep good thoughts in his mind and he loved her, and tried to repent, and when he was told he might go, he meant to take his flower with him but forgot it in his hurry to get home. We did not forget, for the wind that goes everywhere had told us the little story, and we brought brave Clover out of prison to this flower-heaven.

“Mignonette lived in a splendid garden, but no one minded her, for she is only a little brown thing and hid in a corner, happy with her share of sunshine and rain, and her daily task of blossoming green and strong. People admired the other fine flowers and praised their perfume, never knowing that the sweetest breath of all came from the nook where Mignonette modestly hid behind the roses. No one ever praised her, or came to watch her, and the gardener took no care of her. But the bees found her out and came every day to sip her sweet honey, the butterflies loved her better than the proud roses, and the wind always stopped for a kiss as it flew by. When autumn came and all the other plants were done blossoming, and stood bare and faded, there was modest Mignonette still green and fresh, still with a blossom or two, and still smiling contentedly with a bosom full of ripened seeds, — her summer work well done, her happy heart ready for the winter sleep.

"But we said, 'No frost shall touch our brave flower; she shall not be neglected another year, but come to live loved and honored in the eternal summer that shines here.' Now look."

Eva brushed away the tears that had filled her eyes as she listened to these little histories, and looking eagerly, saw how from the dandelion, set free by the spells the spirits sang, there rose, light as down, a little golden soul, in the delicate shape the others wore. One in pale rose came from the clover, and a third in soft green with dusky wings; but a bright face flew out of the mignonette. Then the others took hands and floated round the new-comers in an airy dance, singing so joyfully that Eva clapped her hands crying, "Happy souls! I will go home and try to be as good as they were; then I may be as happy when I go away to my heaven."

The sound of her voice made all dark, and she would have been frightened if the elf had not taken her hand and led her back to the edge of the cloud, saying as they flew down to Fairyland — "See, the sun is setting; we must take you home before this midsummer day ends, and with it our power to make ourselves known."

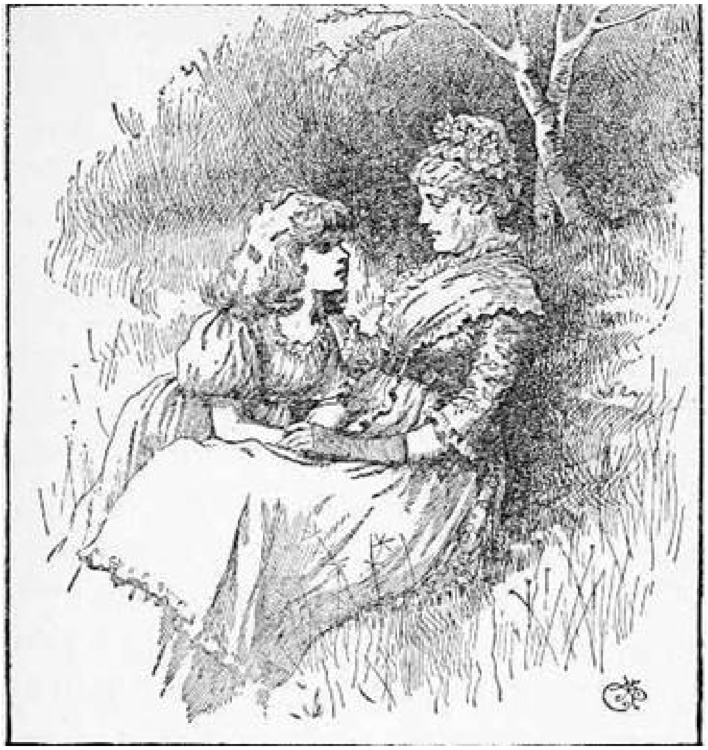
Eva had so much to tell that she was ready to go; but a new surprise waited for her, and she saw a fairy spectacle as she came again before the palace.

Banners of gay tulip-leaves were blowing in the wind from the lances of reeds held by a troop of elves mounted on mice; a car made of a curled green leaf with checkerberry wheels and cushions of pink mushrooms stood ready for her, and Trip as maid of honor helped her in. Lady elves on butterflies flew behind, and the Queen's trumpeters marched before making music on their horns. All the people of Elfland lined the way, throwing flowers, waving their hands, and calling, "Farewell, little Eva! Come again! Do not forget us!" till she was out of sight.

"How sweet and kind you are to me. What can I do to thank you?" said Eva to Trip, who sat beside her as they rolled along, — a gay and lovely sight, if any but fairy eyes could have seen it.

"Remember all you have seen and heard. Love the good and beautiful things you will find everywhere, and be always a happy child at heart," answered Trip with a kiss.

Before Eva could speak the sun set and in a moment every elf was invisible, all the pretty show was gone, and the child stood alone by the brook. But she never forgot her visit to Fairyland, and as she grew up she seemed to be a sort of elf herself, happy, gay, and good, with the power of making every one love her as she went singing and smiling through the world. She wrote songs that people loved to sing, told tales children delighted to read, and found so much wisdom, beauty, and music everywhere, that it was very plain she understood the sweet language of bird and flower, wind and water, and remembered all the lessons the elves taught her.



Sunshine was a sweet creature, and a great comfort to her mother. — Page 92.

SUNSHINE, AND HER BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

Once upon a time there was a very wise old spirit called Mother Nature, who lived in a beautiful place, and had a large family of children, whom she found it rather hard to manage. When they obeyed her, all went well; but when they played pranks or quarrelled, everything was in confusion, and all sorts of trouble came.

Sunshine, the eldest girl, was a sweet creature, always good, and a great comfort to her mother at all seasons. So were South and West Winds nice little girls; but Lightning, Thunder's twin sister, was very naughty, and liked to do mischief. Snow, the fourth daughter, was a cold, quiet spirit, fond of covering up the world with the nice white sheets she kept folded away in the sky. Rain was always crying, East Wind sulking, Thunder and Hail scolding and growling, and North Wind, the biggest of the boys, went roaring and blustering about so fiercely that every one ran before him, though his wholesome breath freshened the world, and blew away much rubbish, which his gentle sisters could not manage as they kept house.

"Now, my dears, I'm very tired and going to take a nap, so be good children; do your tasks nicely, and wake me in March," said Mother Nature, one November day, when her summer work was over, and her time for rest had come.

"Yes, mamma," said Sunshine, as she tucked her up with a kiss. "I will do my best to keep the girls busy and the boys in order. Have a good sleep, and I'll call you in time for the spring work."

Then the old lady tied her night-cap over her ears, and dozed off quite comfortably, while her good daughter, after a last smile at the frosty world, went to her spinning, that there might be plenty of sunshine for the next summer.

"It's my turn now, and I'll cry as much as I like, for mother isn't here to stop me, and Sunny can't," said Rain; and down came floods of tears, while his brother, East Wind, began to blow till every one shivered, and coughs and colds and fog and mud made the world a dismal place. Sunny begged them to stop and give her a chance now and then, but they would not; and everybody said what a dreadful month November was that year.

Fortunately it was soon time for North Wind and his favorite sister Snow to come back from Iceland; and the moment the older brother's loud voice was heard, Rain and East ran and hid, for they were rather afraid of him.

"Ha, what a mess those rascals have made! Never mind, we'll soon have it all nice and tidy for Christmas," said North, as he dried up the mud, blew away the fog, and got the world ready for Snow to cover with her beautiful down quilt. In a day or two it looked like a fairy world, and Sunshine peeped out to do her part, making the ice on the trees glitter like diamonds, the snowy drifts shine like silver, and fill the blue sky full of light.

Then every one rejoiced, bells jingled merrily, children coasted and snow-balled; Christmas trees began to grow, and all faces to glow as they never do at any other time.

"The holydays shall be pleasant if I can only keep those bad boys in a good humor," said Sunny; and to make sure of them she fed Rain and East Wind on plum-cake with poppy-seeds in it, so they slept like dormice till the New Year was born.

Snow had her frolics, and no one minded, because she was so pretty; and North was so amiable just then that the white storms only made fine sleighing, and the fresh air kept cheeks rosy, eyes sparkling, lips laughing, and hearts happy as they should be at that blessed season.

Sunshine was so pleased that she came out to see the fun, and smiled so warmly that a January thaw set in.

"Dear me, I forgot that I must not be too generous at this season, or it makes trouble; for, though people enjoy my pleasant days, they leave off their furs and get cold. I'll go back to my spinning and only smile through the window; then no harm will be done."

Thunder and Lightning had been in Italy all this time, and they too got into mischief. Their mother had shut the twins up in a volcano to keep them out of the way till summer, when they were useful. Down there they found playmates to suit them, and had fine times rumbling and boiling, and sending out hot lava and showers of ashes to scare the people who lived near by. Growing tired of this, they at last planned to get up an earthquake and escape. So they kicked and shook the world like children tumbling about under the bed-clothes; and the fire roared, and Thunder growled, and Lightning flew about trying to get the lid of the volcano off. At last she did, and out they all burst with such a dreadful noise that the poor people thought the end of the world had come. Towns fell down, hills moved, the sea came up on the shore, ashes and stones covered up a whole city, and destruction and despair were everywhere.

"There! wasn't that a fine frolic? Mother won't dare to shut us up again, I fancy, when she sees what a piece of work we make for her," said naughty Lightning, dashing about to peep through the smoke at the sad scene below.

"Grand fun! but if Sunshine wakes mother we shall wish we had not done it.

Let's run away to Africa and hide till this is all forgotten," answered Thunder, rather ashamed of such a dreadful prank.

So they flew off, leaving great sorrow behind them; but Sunshine did not wake mamma, though West Wind came home from Italy to tell her all about it. There was trouble here also, for Rain and East Wind had waked up, and were very angry to find they had been dosed with poppy-seeds.

"Now we'll pay Sunny for that, and turn everything topsy-turvy," they said; and calling Hail, they went to work.

Rain emptied all his water-buckets till the rivers rose and flooded the towns; the snow on the hills melted and covered the fields, washed away the railroads, carried off houses, and drowned many poor animals; Hail pelted with his stones, and East Wind blew cold and shrill till there was no comfort anywhere.

Poor Sunny was at her wits' end with all these troubles; but she would not wake her mother, and tried to manage her unruly brothers alone. West helped her, for while Sunny shone, and shone so sweetly that Rain had to stop crying, West tugged at the weather-cocks till she made East give way, and let her blow for a while. He was out of breath and had to yield; so the "bad spell of weather" was over, and the poor, half-drowned people could get dry and fish their furniture out of the flood, and moor their floating houses at last. Sunny kept on smiling till she dried up the ground. West sent fresh gales to help her, and by March things looked much better.

"Now do be good children, and let us get ready for the spring-cleaning before mother wakes. I don't know what she *will* say to the boys, but I've done my best, and I hope she will be pleased with me," said Sunshine, when at last she sat down to rest a moment, tired out.

All the brothers and sisters except the naughty twins, gathered about her, and promised to be very good, for they loved her and were sorry for their pranks. Each tried to help her, and March was a very busy month, for all the winds blew in turn; even gentle South from far away came home to do her part. Snow folded up her down quilts and packed them away; Rain dropped a few quiet showers to swell the buds and green the grass, and Sunny began to shake out the golden webs of light she had been spinning all winter. Every one worked so well that April found that part of the world in fine order; and when South Wind blew open the first hyacinths, Mother Nature smelt them, began to rub her eyes and wake up.

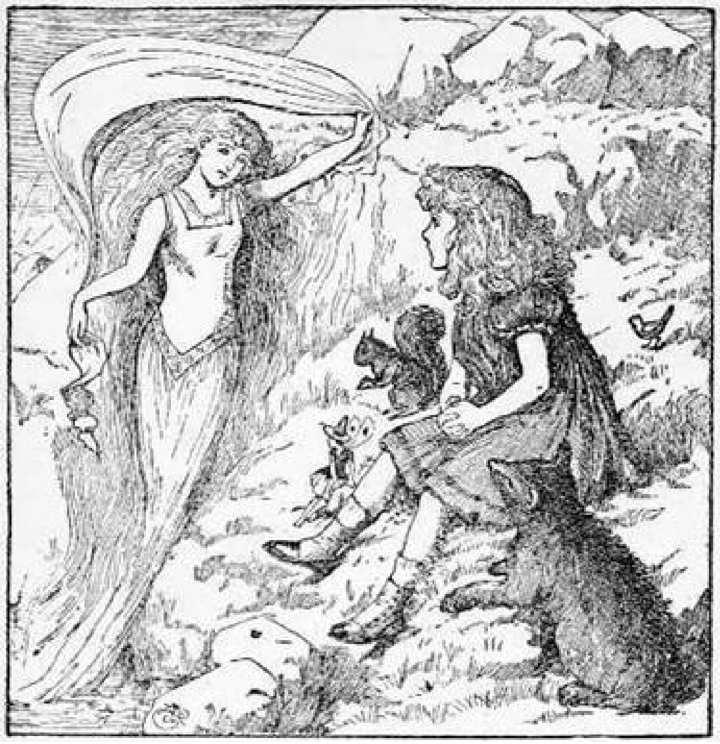
"Bless me, how I've slept. Why didn't you rouse me sooner, dear? Ah, my good child, I see you've tried to do my work and get all ready for me," said the old lady, throwing away her night-cap, and peeping out of window at the spring world budding everywhere.

Then sitting in her mother’s lap, Sunny told her trials and tribulations. At some Mamma Nature laughed, at others she frowned; and when it came to the earthquake and the flood, she looked very sober, saying, as she stroked her daughter’s bright hair, —

“My darling, I can’t explain these things to you, and I don’t always understand why they happen; but you know we have only to obey the King’s orders and leave the rest to him. He will punish my naughty children if he sees fit, and reward my good ones; so I shall leave them to him, and go cheerfully on with my own work. That is the only way to keep our lovely world in order and be happy. Now, call your brothers and sisters and we will have our spring frolic together.”

They all came, and had a merry time; for as every one knows, April has every kind of weather; so each had a turn to show what he or she could do, and by May-day things were in fine trim, though East would nip the May queen’s little nose, and all Sunny’s efforts could only coax out a few hardy dandelions for the eager hands to pick.

But the children were happy, for spring had come; Mother Nature was awake again, and now all would be well with the world.



Before her was the spirit, so beautiful and smiling, May could only clasp her hands and look. — Page 116.

THE FAIRY SPRING.

One summer morning a party of little wood-people were talking together about something which interested them very much. The fruit-fairy was eating her breakfast as she swung on a long spray of the raspberry-vines that waved in the wind; a blue-bird was taking his bath in the pool below, looking as if a bit of the sky had fallen into the water as he splashed and shook the drops from his wings; Skip, the squirrel, was resting on the mossy wall, after clearing out his hole of last year's nuts, to be ready for a new supply; Spin, the spider, was busily spreading her webs to bleach, and Brownie, the little bear, was warming his fuzzy back in the sunshine, for his den was rather dark and cold.

"It is such a pity that no one understands what the brook is trying to tell them. If they only knew about the fairy spring as we do, this is just the day to set out and find it," said Iris, the elf, as she took the last sip of raspberry shrub from the pretty red cup, and wiped her lips on a napkin Spin had made for her.

"Ah, if they only did! how glad I should be to show them the way," answered the blue-bird, as he dried his feathers on a mossy stone, while the caddis-worms all popped their heads out of sight in their little stone houses for fear he might eat them up.

"I have called every child I see, and done my best to lead them up the mountain; but they won't come, and I cannot make them understand the sweet words the brook keeps singing. How dull human creatures are! Even Brownie knows this song, though he is a dear, clumsy thing, always going to sleep when he is not eating," said Skip, with a twinkle in his bright eye; for he and the little bear were good friends, though one was so brisk and the other so big and awkward.

"Of course I do; I've heard it ever since I was born, and the first long walk I took was up the mountain to find the wonderful spring. I drank of it, and have been the happiest creature alive ever since," answered Brownie, with a comfortable roll on the green grass.

"I am too busy to go, but my cousin Velvetback often comes down and tells me about the splendid life he leads up there, where no foot ever treads on him, no hand ever breaks his webs, and everything is so still and bright that he always is in a hurry to get home again. When my weaving and bleaching are all done I am going up to see for myself;" and Spin shook off the tiny drops of dew which shone like diamonds on her largest web.

“There is one child who comes every day to look at the brook and listen to its babble as it runs under the little bridge over there. I think *she* will soon hear what it says, and then we will lead her along higher and higher till she finds the spring, and is able to tell every one the happy secret,” said Iris, shaking out her many-colored robe before she skimmed away to float over the pool, so like a glittering dragon-fly few guessed that she was a fairy.

“Yes, she is a sweet child,” said the blue-bird, hopping to the wall to look along the lane to see if she was coming. “She never throws pebbles in the water to disturb the minnows, nor breaks the ferns only to let them die, nor troubles us as we work and play as most children do. She leans there and watches us as if she loved us, and sings to herself as if she were half a bird. I like her, and I hope she will be the first to find the spring.”

“So do I,” said Skip, going to sit by his friend and watch for the child, while Brownie peeped through a chink in the wall that she might not be frightened at sight of him, small as he was.

“She is coming! she is coming!” called Iris, who had flown to the railing of the rustic bridge, and danced for joy as a little figure came slowly down the winding lane.

A pretty child, with hair like sunshine, eyes blue as the sky, cheeks like the wild roses nodding to her on either side of the way, and a voice as sweet as the babbling brook she loved to sing with. May was never happier than when alone in the woods; and every morning, with her cup, and a little roll of bread in her basket, she wandered away to some of her favorite nooks, to feast on berries, play with the flowers, talk to the birds, and make friends with all the harmless wood-creatures who soon knew and welcomed her.

She had often wondered what the brook sang, and tried to catch the words it seemed to be calling to her. But she never quite understood till this day, for when she came to the bridge and saw her friends — blue-bird, squirrel, and dragon-fly — waiting for her, she smiled, and waved her hand to them, and just at that moment she heard the song of the brook quite plainly, —

“I am calling, I am calling,
As I ripple, run, and sing,
Come up higher, come up higher,
Come and find the fairy spring.
Who will listen, who will listen
To the wonders I can tell,
Of a palace built of sunshine,
Where the sweetest spirits dwell? —

Singing winds, and magic waters,
Golden shadows, silver rain,
Spells that make the sad heart happy,
Sleep that cures the deepest pain.
Cheeks that bloom like summer roses,
Smiling lips and eyes that shine,
Come to those who climb the mountain,
Find and taste the fairy wine.
I am calling, I am calling,
As I ripple, run, and sing;
Who will listen, who will listen,
To the story of the spring?"

"Where is it; oh, where is it?" cried May, when the song ended; for she longed to see this lovely place and enjoy these beautiful things.

"Go up higher, go up higher,
Far beyond the waterfall.
Follow Echo up the mountain,
She will answer to your call.
Bird and butterfly and blossom,
All will help to show the way;
Lose no time, the day is going,
Find the spring, dear little May,"

sung the brook; and the child was enchanted to hear the sweet voice talking to her of this pleasant journey.

"Yes, I will go at once. I am ready, and have no fear, for the woods are full of friends, and I long to see the mountain top; it must be so lovely up there," she said, looking through the green arches where the brook came dancing down over the rocks, far away to the gray peak, hidden in clouds.

There lay the fairy spring, and she was going to find it. No one would miss her, for she often played all day in the forest and went home with the lambs at night. The brook said, "Make haste!" so away she went over the wall, with Skip leaping before her, as if to show the safest stones to set her little feet on. Iris waved the raspberry-sprays, to attract her with the ripe fruit, and when the basket was nearly full, Blue-bird flew from tree to tree to lead her on further into the wood. Brownie dodged behind the rocks and fallen logs, waiting for his turn to come, as he had a fine surprise for the little traveller by and by.

It was a lovely road, and May went happily on, with thick moss underneath, shady boughs overhead, flowers to nod and smile at her, and friends to guard, guide, and amuse her. Every ant stopped work to see her pass; every mosquito piped his little song in her ear; birds leaned out of their nests to bid her good-day, and the bright-eyed snakes, fearing to alarm her, hid under the leaves. But lovely butterflies flew round her in clouds; and she looked like a pretty one herself, with her blue gown and sunny hair blowing in the wind.

So she came at last to the waterfall. Here the brook took a long leap over some high rocks, to fall foaming into a basin fringed with ferns; out of which it flowed again, to run faster than ever down to join the river rolling through the valley, to flow at last into the mighty ocean and learn a grander song.

"I never can get up there without wings," said May, as she looked at the high rocks with a tangle of vines all over them. Then she remembered what the brook told her, and called out, —

"Echo, are you here?"

"Here!" answered an airy voice.

"How can I climb up?"

"Climb up."

"Yes; but can I get through the vines?"

"Through the vines."

"It is very high, but I can try it."

"Try it, try it," answered the voice so clearly that May could not doubt what to do.

"Well, if I'm brave I shall be helped."

"Be helped," answered Echo.

"Now I'm coming, and I hope I shall find you, sweet Echo."

"Find sweet Echo," sung the voice; and when May laughed, a softer laugh answered her so gayly that she forgot her fear in eagerness to see this new friend, hiding above the waterfall.

Up she went, and as if fairy hands cleared the way for her, the tangled vines made a green ladder for her feet, while every time she stopped for breath and called, as she peeped into the shadowy nooks or looked at the dashing water, "Are you here?" the mocking voice always answered from above, —

"Here!"

So she climbed safely up and sat to rest at the top, looking down the valley where the brook danced and sparkled as if glad to see her on her way. The air blew freshly, and the sun shone more warmly here, for the trees were not so thick, and lovely glimpses of far-off hills and plains, like pictures set in green frames, made one eager to go on and see more.

Skip and Blue-bird kept her company, so she did not feel lonely, and followed these sure guides higher and higher, till she came out among the great bare cliffs, where rocks lay piled as if giants had been throwing them about in their rough play.

“Oh, how large the world is! and what a little thing I am!” said May, as she looked out over miles of country so far below that the towns looked like toy villages, and people like ants at work. A strong wind blew, all was very still, for no bird sang, and no flowers bloomed; only green moss grew on the rocks, and tiny pines no longer than her finger carpeted the narrow bits of ground here and there. An eagle flew high overhead, and great white clouds sailed by, so near that May could feel their damp breath as they passed.

The child felt a little fear, all was so vast and strange and wonderful; and she seemed so weak and small that for a moment she half wished she had not come. She was hungry and tired, but her basket was empty, and no water appeared. She sighed, and looked from the mountain top, hidden in mist, to the sunny valley where mother was, and a tear was about to fall, when Iris came floating to her like a blue and silver butterfly, and alighting on her hand let May see her lovely little face, and hear her small voice as she smiled and sung, —

“Have no fear,
Friends are here,
To help you on your way.
The mountain’s breast
Will give you rest,
And we a feast, dear May.
Here at your feet
Is honey sweet,
And water fresh to sip.
Fruit I bring
On Blue-bird’s wing,
And nuts sends merry Skip.
Rough and wild,
To you, dear child,
Seems the lonely mountain way;
But have no fear,
For friends are near,
To guard and guide, sweet May.”

Then at the tap of the fairy’s wand up gushed fresh water from the rock; Blue-bird dropped a long stalk of grass strung with raspberries like red beads; Skip scattered his best nuts; and Brownie came lumbering up with a great piece of honey-comb, folded in vine-leaves. He had found a wild-bees' nest, and this was his surprise. He was so small and gentle, and his little eyes twinkled so kindly, that May could not be afraid, and gladly sat down on the crisp moss to eat and drink with her friends about her.

It was a merry lunch, for all told tales, and each amused the little pilgrim in his or her pretty way. The bird let her hold him on her hand and admire his lovely blue plumes. Skip chattered and pranced till there seemed to be a dozen squirrels there instead of one. Brownie stood on his head, tried to dance, and was so funny in his clumsy attempts to outdo the others that May laughed till many echoes joined in her merriment. Iris told her splendid stories of the fairy spring, and begged her to go on, for no one ever had so good a chance as she to find out the secret and see the spirit who lived on the mountain top.

"I am strong and brave now, and will not turn back. Come with me, dear creatures, and help me over these great rocks, for I have no wings," said May, trudging on again, much refreshed by her rest.

"I'll carry you like a feather, my dear; step up and hold fast, and see me climb," cried Brownie, glad to be of use.

So May sat on his fuzzy back as on a soft cushion, and his strong legs and sharp claws carried him finely over the rough, steep places, while Blue-bird and Skip went beside her, and Iris flew in front to show the way. It was a very hard journey, and poor fat Brownie panted and puffed, and often stopped to rest. But May was so surprised and charmed with the lovely clouds all about her that she never thought of being tired. She forgot the world below, and soon the mist hid it from her, and she was in a world of sunshine, sky, and white clouds floating about like ships in a sea of blue air. She seemed to be riding on them when one wrapped her in its soft arms; and more than once a tiny cloud came and sat in her lap, like a downy lamb, which melted when she tried to hold it.

"Now we are nearly there, and Velvet comes to meet us. These fine fellows are the only creatures who live up here, and these tiny star-flowers the only green things that grow," said Iris, at last, when all the clouds were underneath, and the sky overhead was purple and gold, as the sun was going down.

Velvet ran nimbly to give May a silver thread which would lead her straight to the spring; and the path before her was carpeted with the pretty white stars, that seemed to smile at her as if glad to welcome her. She was so eager that she forgot her weariness, and hurried on till she came at last to the mountain top, and there like a beautiful blue eye looking up to heaven lay the fairy spring.

May ran to look into it, thinking she would see only the rock below and the clouds above; but to her wonder there was a lovely palace reflected in the clear water, and shining as if made of silver, with crystal bells chiming with a sound like water-drops set to music.

"Oh, how beautiful! Is it real? Who lives there? Can I go to it?" cried May, longing to sink down and find herself in that charming palace, and know to whom it belonged.

"You cannot go till you have drunk of the water and slept by the spring; then the spirit will appear, and you will know the secret," answered Iris, filling a pearly shell that lay on the brim of the spring.

"Must I stay here all alone? I shall be cold and afraid so far from my own little bed and my dear mother," said May, looking anxiously about her, for the sky was growing dim and night coming on.

"We will stay with you, and no harm can come to you, for the spirit will be here while you sleep. Drink and dream, and in the morning you will be in a new world."

While Iris spoke Brownie had piled up a bed of star-flowers in a little crevice of the rock; Velvet had spun a silken curtain over it to keep the dew off; Blue-bird perched on the tallest stone to keep watch; and when May had drunk a cup of the fairy water, and lay down, with Skip rolled up for a pillow, and Brownie at her feet for a warm rug, Iris waved her wand and sung a lullaby so sweet that the child was in dreamland at once.

When she woke it was day, but she had no time to see the rosy sky, the mist rolling away, or the sunshine dazzling down upon the world, for there before her rising from the spring, was the spirit, so beautiful and smiling, May could only clasp her hands and look. As softly as a cloud the spirit floated toward her, and with a kiss as cool as a dew-drop, she said in a voice like a fresh wind, —

"Dear child, you are the first to come and find me. Welcome to the mountain and the secret of the spring. It is this: whoever climbs up and drinks this water will leave all pain and weariness behind, and grow healthy in body, happy in heart, and learn to see and love all the simple wholesome things that help to keep us good and gay. Do you feel tired now, or lonely, or afraid? Has the charm begun to work?"

"Yes," cried May, "I think it has, for I feel so happy, light, and well, I could fly like a bird. It is so lovely here I could stay all my life if I only had mamma to enjoy it with me."

"She will come, and many others. Little children often are wiser than grown people, and lead them up without knowing it. Look and see what you have done by this longing of yours for the mountain top, and the brave journey that brought you here."

Then the spirit touched May's eyes, and looking down she saw the little path by which she had come grow wider and smoother, till it wound round and round the mountain like a broad white ribbon, and up this pleasant path came many people. Some were pale and sad; some lame, some ill; some were children in their mothers' arms; some old and bent, but were climbing eagerly up toward the fairy spring, — sure of help and health when they arrived.

"Can you cure them all?" asked May, delighted to see what hope and comfort her journey had given others.

"Not all; but every one will be the better for coming, even the oldest, the saddest, and the sickest; for my four servants, Sunshine, Fresh-air, Water, and Rest, can work miracles, as you will see. Souls and bodies need their help, and they never fail to do good if people will only come to them and believe in their power."

"I am so glad, for mamma is often ill, and loves to come to the hills and rest. Shall I see her soon? Can I go and tell her all I have learned, or must I stay till she comes?" asked May, longing to run and skip, she felt so well with the fairy water bubbling in her veins.

"Go and tell the news, and lead the others up. You will not see me, but I am here; and my servants will do their work faithfully, for all who are patient and brave. Farewell, dear child, no harm will come to you, and your friends are waiting to help you down. But do not forget when you are in the valley, or you will never find the fairy spring again."

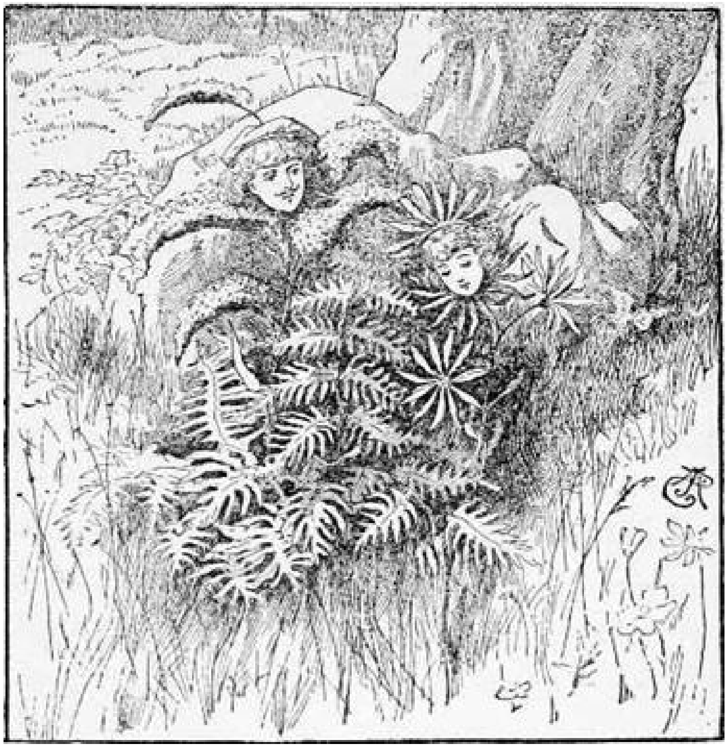
Then the spirit vanished like mist, and May ran away, singing like a bird, and skipping like a little goat, so proud and happy she felt as if she could fly like a thistle-down. The path seemed very easy now, and her feet were never tired. Her good friends joined her by the way, and they had a merry journey back to the valley. There May thanked them and hastened to tell all she had seen and heard and done. Few believed her; most people said, "The child fell asleep and dreamed it." A few invalids looked up and sighed to be there, but had no courage to climb so far. A poet said he would go at once, and set off; so did a man who had lost his wife and little children, and was very sad. May's mother believed every word, and went hand in hand with the happy child along the path that grew wider and smoother with every pair of feet that passed.

The wood-creatures nodded at May, and rejoiced to see the party go; but there was no need of them now, so they kept out of sight, and only the child and the poet saw them. Every one enjoyed the journey, for each hour they felt better; and when at last they reached the spring, and May filled her little cup for them to drink the sweet water, every one tasted and believed, for health and happiness came to them with a single draught.

The sad man smiled, and said he felt so near to heaven and his lost children up there that he should stay. The poet began to sing the loveliest songs he ever made, and pale mamma looked like a rose, as she lay on the star-flowers, breathing the pure air, and basking in the sunshine. May was the spirit of the spring for them, and washed away the tears, the wrinkles, and the lines of pain with the blessed water, while the old mountain did its best to welcome them with mild air, cloud pictures, and the peace that lies above the world.

That was the beginning of the great cure; for when this party came down all so beautifully changed, every one began to hurry away to try their fortune also. Soon the wide road wound round and round, and up it journeyed pilgrims from all parts of the world, till the spirit and her servants had hundreds of visitors each day. People tried to build a great house up there, and make money out of the spring; but every building put up blew away, the water vanished, and no one was cured till the mountain top was free again to all.

Then the spring gushed up more freshly than before; the little star-flowers bloomed again, and all who came felt the beauty of the quiet place, and were healed of all their troubles by the magic of the hills where the spirit of health still lives to welcome and bless whoever go to find her.



Golden-rod heard the soft sigh, and whispered, “What troubles you, sweet neighbor?” — Page 133.

QUEEN ASTER.

For many seasons the Golden-rods had reigned over the meadow, and no one thought of choosing a king from any other family, for they were strong and handsome, and loved to rule.

But one autumn something happened which caused great excitement among the flowers. It was proposed to have a queen, and such a thing had never been heard of before. It began among the Asters; for some of them grew outside the wall beside the road, and saw and heard what went on in the great world. These sturdy plants told the news to their relations inside; and so the Asters were unusually wise and energetic flowers, from the little white stars in the grass to the tall sprays tossing their purple plumes above the mossy wall.

“Things are moving in the great world, and it is time we made a change in our little one,” said one of the roadside Asters, after a long talk with a wandering wind. “Matters are not going well in the meadow; for the Golden-rods rule, and they care only for money and power, as their name shows. Now, *we* are descended from the stars, and are both wise and good, and our tribe is even larger than the Golden-rod tribe; so it is but fair that we should take our turn at governing. It will soon be time to choose, and I propose our stately cousin, Violet Aster, for queen this year. Whoever agrees with me, say Aye.”

Quite a shout went up from all the Asters; and the late Clovers and Buttercups joined in it, for they were honest, sensible flowers, and liked fair play. To their great delight the Pitcher-plant, or Forefathers’ Cup, said “Aye” most decidedly, and that impressed all the other plants; for this fine family came over in the “Mayflower,” and was much honored everywhere.

But the proud Cardinals by the brook blushed with shame at the idea of a queen; the Fringed Gentians shut their blue eyes that they might not see the bold Asters; and Clematis fainted away in the grass, she was so shocked. The Golden-rods laughed scornfully, and were much amused at the suggestion to put them off the throne where they had ruled so long.

“Let those discontented Asters try it,” they said. “No one will vote for that foolish Violet, and things will go on as they always have done; so, dear friends, don’t be troubled, but help us elect our handsome cousin who was born in the palace this year.”

In the middle of the meadow stood a beautiful maple, and at its foot lay a large rock overgrown by a wild grape-vine. All kinds of flowers sprung up here; and this autumn a tall spray of Golden-rod and a lovely violet Aster grew almost side by side, with only a screen of ferns between them. This was called the palace; and seeing their cousin there made the Asters feel that their turn had come, and many of the other flowers agreed with them that a change of rulers ought to be made for the good of the kingdom.

So when the day came to choose, there was great excitement as the wind went about collecting the votes. The Golden-rods, Cardinals, Gentians, Clematis, and Bitter-sweet voted for the Prince, as they called the handsome fellow by the rock. All the Asters, Buttercups, Clovers, and Pitcher-plants voted for Violet; and to the surprise of the meadow the Maple dropped a leaf, and the Rock gave a bit of lichen for her also. They seldom took part in the affairs of the flower people, — the tree living so high above them, busy with its own music, and the rock being so old that it seemed lost in meditation most of the time; but they liked the idea of a queen (for one was a poet, the other a philosopher), and both believed in gentle Violet.

Their votes won the day, and with loud rejoicing by her friends she was proclaimed queen of the meadow and welcomed to her throne.

“We will never go to Court or notice her in any way,” cried the haughty Cardinals, red with anger.

“Nor we! Dreadful, unfeminine creature! Let us turn our backs and be grateful that the brook flows between us,” added the Gentians, shaking their fringes as if the mere idea soiled them.

Clematis hid her face among the vine leaves, feeling that the palace was no longer a fit home for a delicate, high-born flower like herself. All the Golden-rods raged at this dreadful disappointment, and said many untrue and disrespectful things of Violet. The Prince tossed his yellow head behind the screen, and laughed as if he did not mind, saying carelessly, —

“Let her try; she never can do it, and will soon be glad to give up and let me take my proper place.”

So the meadow was divided: one half turned its back on the new queen; the other half loved, admired, and believed in her; and all waited to see how the experiment would succeed. The wise Asters helped her with advice; the Pitcher-plant refreshed her with the history of the brave Puritans who loved liberty and justice and suffered to win them; the honest Clovers sweetened life with their sincere friendship, and the cheerful Buttercups brightened her days with kindly words and deeds. But her best help came from the rock and the tree, — for when she needed strength she leaned her delicate head against the rough breast of the rock, and courage seemed to come to her from the wise old stone that had borne the storms of a hundred years; when her heart was heavy with care or wounded by unkindness, she looked up to the beautiful tree, always full of soft music, always pointing heavenward, and was comforted by these glimpses of a world above her.

The first thing she did was to banish the evil snakes from her kingdom; for they lured the innocent birds to death, and filled many a happy nest with grief. Then she stopped the bees from getting tipsy on the wild grapes and going about stupid, lazy, and cross, a disgrace to their family and a terror to the flowers. She ordered the field-mice to nibble all the stems of the clusters before they were ripe; so they fell and withered, and did no harm. The vine was very angry, and the bees and wasps scolded and stung; but the Queen was not afraid, and all her good subjects thanked her. The Pitcher-plant offered pure water from its green and russet cups to the busy workers, and the wise bees were heartily glad to see the Grape-vine saloon shut up.

The next task was to stop the red and black ants from constantly fighting; for they were always at war, to the great dismay of more peaceful insects. She bade each tribe keep in its own country, and if any dispute came up, to bring it to her, and she would decide it fairly. This was a hard task; for the ants loved to fight, and would go on struggling after their bodies were separated from their heads, so fierce were they. But she made them friends at last, and every one was glad.

Another reform was to purify the news that came to the meadow. The wind was telegraph-messenger; but the birds were reporters, and some of them very bad ones. The larks brought tidings from the clouds, and were always welcome; the thrushes from the wood, and all loved to hear their pretty romances; the robins had domestic news, and the lively wrens bits of gossip and witty jokes to relate. But the magpies made much mischief with their ill-natured tattle and evil tales, and the crows criticised and condemned every one who did not believe and do just as they did; so the magpies were forbidden to go gossiping about the meadow, and the gloomy black crows were ordered off the fence where they liked to sit cawing dismally for hours at a time.

Every one felt safe and comfortable when this was done, except the Cardinals, who liked to hear their splendid dresses and fine feasts talked about, and the Golden-rods, who were so used to living in public that they missed the excitement, as well as the scandal of the magpies and the political and religious arguments and quarrels of the crows.

A hospital for sick and homeless creatures was opened under the big burdock leaves; and there several belated butterflies were tucked up in their silken hammocks to sleep till spring, a sad lady-bug who had lost all her children found comfort in her loneliness, and many crippled ants sat talking over their battles, like old soldiers, in the sunshine.

It took a long time to do all this, and it was a hard task, for the rich and powerful flowers gave no help. But the Asters worked bravely, so did the Clovers and Buttercups; and the Pitcher-plant kept open house with the old-fashioned hospitality one so seldom sees now-a-days. Everything seemed to prosper, and the meadow grew more beautiful day by day. Safe from their enemies the snakes, birds came to build in all the trees and bushes, singing their gratitude so sweetly that there was always music in the air. Sunshine and shower seemed to love to freshen the thirsty flowers and keep the grass green, till every plant grew strong and fair, and passers-by stopped to look, saying with a smile, —

"What a pretty little spot this is!"

The wind carried tidings of these things to other colonies, and brought back messages of praise and good-will from other rulers, glad to know that the experiment worked so well.

This made a deep impression on the Golden-rods and their friends, for they could not deny that Violet had succeeded better than any one dared to hope; and the proud flowers began to see that they would have to give in, own they were wrong, and become loyal subjects of this wise and gentle queen.

"We shall have to go to Court if ambassadors keep coming with such gifts and honors to her Majesty; for they wonder not to see us there, and will tell that we are sulking at home instead of shining as *we* only can," said the Cardinals, longing to display their red velvet robes at the feasts which Violet was obliged to give in the palace when kings came to visit her.

"Our time will soon be over, and I'm afraid we must humble ourselves or lose all the gayety of the season. It is hard to see the good old ways changed; but if they must be, we can only gracefully submit," answered the Gentians, smoothing their delicate blue fringes, eager to be again the belles of the ball.

Clematis astonished every one by suddenly beginning to climb the maple-tree and shake her silvery tassels like a canopy over the Queen's head.

"I cannot live so near her and not begin to grow. Since I must cling to something, I choose the noblest I can find, and look up, not down, forevermore," she said; for like many weak and timid creatures, she was easily guided, and it was well for her that Violet's example had been a brave one.

Prince Golden-rod had found it impossible to turn his back entirely upon her Majesty, for he was a gentleman with a really noble heart under his yellow cloak; so he was among the first to see, admire, and love the modest faithful flower who grew so near him. He could not help hearing her words of comfort or reproof to those who came to her for advice. He saw the daily acts of charity which no one else discovered; he knew how many trials came to her, and how bravely she bore them; how humbly she asked help, and how sweetly she confessed her shortcomings to the wise rock and the stately tree.

"She has done more than ever we did to make the kingdom beautiful and safe and happy, and I'll be the first to own it, to thank her and offer my allegiance," he said to himself, and waited for a chance.

One night when the September moon was shining over the meadow, and the air was balmy with the last breath of summer, the Prince ventured to serenade the Queen on his wind-harp. He knew she was awake; for he had peeped through the ferns and seen her looking at the stars with her violet eyes full of dew, as if something troubled her. So he sung his sweetest song, and her Majesty leaned nearer to hear it; for she much longed to be friends with the gallant Prince, and only waited for him to speak to own how dear he was to her, because both were born in the palace and grew up together very happily till coronation time came.

As he ended she sighed, wondering how long it would be before he told her what she knew was in his heart.

Golden-rod heard the soft sigh, and being in a tender mood, forgot his pride, pushed away the screen, and whispered, while his face shone and his voice showed how much he felt, —

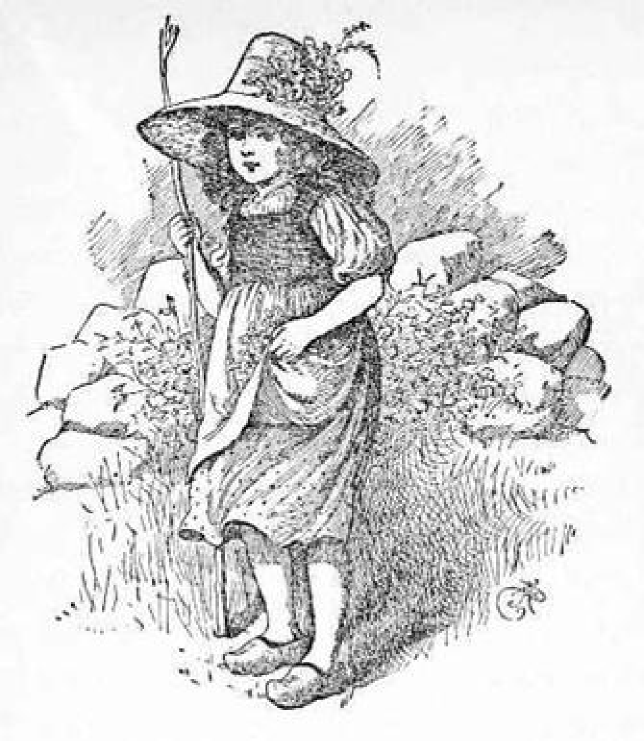
"What troubles you, sweet neighbor? Forget and forgive my unkindness, and let me help you if I can, — I dare not say as Prince Consort, though I love you dearly; but as a friend and faithful subject, for I confess that you are fitter to rule than I."

As he spoke the leaves that hid Violet's golden heart opened wide and let him see how glad she was, as she bent her stately head and answered softly, —

"There is room upon the throne for two: share it with me as King, and let us rule together; for it is lonely without love, and each needs the other."

What the Prince answered only the moon knows; but when morning came all the meadow was surprised and rejoiced to see the gold and purple flowers standing side by side, while the maple showered its rosy leaves over them, and the old rock waved his crown of vine-leaves as he said, —

"This is as it should be; love and strength going hand in hand, and justice making the earth glad."



Betty always wore a brown frock, a big brown hat, and, being out in the sun a great deal, her face was as brown as a berry. — Page 135.

THE BROWNIE AND THE PRINCESS.

She was not a real Brownie, but a little girl named Betty, who lived with her father in a cottage near a great forest. They were poor; so Betty always wore a brown frock, a big brown hat, and, being out in the sun a great deal, her face was as brown as a berry, though very pretty with its rosy cheeks, dark eyes, and curly hair blowing in the wind. She was a lively little creature, and having no neighbors she made friends with the birds and flowers, rabbits and squirrels, and had fine frolics with them, for they knew and loved her dearly. Many people drove through the beautiful wood, which was not far from the King’s palace; and when they saw the little girl dancing with the daisies in the meadow, chasing squirrels up the trees, splashing in the brook, or sitting under her big hat like an elf under a mushroom, they would say, “There is the Brownie.”

Betty was wild and shy, and always tried to hide if any one called to her; and it was funny to see her vanish in a hollow tree, drop down in the tall grass, or skip away into the ferns like a timid rabbit. She was afraid of the fine lords and ladies, who laughed at her and called her names, but never thought to bring a book or a toy or say a kind word to the lonely little girl.

Her father took care of the deer in the King’s park and was away all day, leaving Betty to sweep the little house, bake the brown bread, and milk Daisy the white cow, who lived in the shed behind the cottage and was Betty’s dearest friend. They had no pasture for her to feed in; so, when the work was done, Betty would take her knitting and drive Daisy along the road where she could eat the grass on either side till she had had enough and lay down to rest under some shady tree. While the cow chewed her cud and took naps, the little girl would have fine games among her playmates, the wood creatures, or lie watching the clouds, or swing on the branches of the trees, or sail leaf boats in the brook. She was happy; but she longed for some one to talk to, and tried vainly to learn what the birds sang all day long. There were a great many about the cottage, for no one troubled them, and they were so tame they would eat out of her hand and sit on her head. A stork family lived on the roof, swallows built their clay nests under the eaves, and wrens chirped in their little homes among the red and white roses that climbed up to peep in at Betty’s window. Wood-pigeons came to pick up the grain she scattered for them, larks went singing up from the grass close by, and nightingales sang her to sleep.

“If I only knew what they said, we could have such happy times together. How can I ever learn?” sighed Betty, as she was driving Daisy home one day at sunset.

She was in the wood, and as she spoke she saw a great gray owl fluttering on the ground as if he was hurt. She ran at once to see what ailed the bird, and was not afraid, though his round eyes stared at her, and he snapped his hooked beak as if very angry.

“Poor thing! its leg is broken,” she said, wondering how she could help it.

“No, it isn’t; it’s my wing. I leaned out of my nest up there to watch a field mouse, and a ray of sunshine dazzled me so I tumbled down. Pick me up, child, and put me back, and I shall be all right.”

Betty was so surprised to hear the owl speak that she did not stir; and thinking she was frightened at his cross tone, the gray bird said more gently, with a blink of its yellow eyes and a wise nod, —

“I shouldn’t speak to every one, nor trust any other child; but I know you never hurt anything. I’ve watched you a long time, and I like you; so I’m going to reward you by giving you the last wish you made, whatever it is. I can: I’m a wizard, and I know all sorts of magic charms. Put me in my nest, tell me your wish, and you shall have it.”

“Oh, thank you!” cried Betty, joyfully. “I wished to understand what birds say.”

“Dear me, that’s a wish that may make trouble; but I’ll grant it if you won’t tell any one how you learned the secret. I can’t have people coming to me, and my neighbors won’t want their gossip heard by many ears. They won’t mind you, and it will amuse you, poor thing!” said the owl, after a pause.

Betty promised, and, holding the fat bird carefully in her arm, she climbed up the old oak and put him safely in his hole, where he settled himself with a great ruffling of feathers and a hoot of pleasure at being home again.

“Now, pull the tallest bit of down off my right ear and put it in your own; then you will hear what the birds say. Good-night; I’m used up and want to rest,” said the owl, with a gape.

“Thank you,” said Betty, and ran after Daisy, who was slowly eating her way home.

The bit of down lay snugly in Betty’s ear, and in a moment she heard many sweet voices called to one another, — ”Good-night!” “Happy dreams!” “A bright to-morrow;” “Lie still, my darlings;” “Hush, my birdie, sleep till day,” — and all sorts of pretty things, as the wood-birds were going to bed with the sun. When she came to the cottage the papa stork was standing on one leg, while the mamma tucked the little ones under her wings, scolding now and then as a red bill or a long leg popped out. The doves were cooing tenderly in the pine that rustled near by, the swallows skimming over the ground to catch and bring their babies a few more gnats for supper, and the wrens were twittering among the roses like the little gossips they were.

"Now I shall know what they all are saying," cried Betty, trying to hear the different voices; for there were so many going at once it was difficult to understand the sweet new language.

So she milked Daisy, set the table, and made ready for her father, who was often late, then took her bowl of bread and milk and sat on the door-step listening with all her might. She always strewed crumbs for the wrens, and they flew down to eat without fear. To-night they came, and as they pecked they talked, and Betty understood every word.

"Here's a fine soft bit, my love," said the papa, as he hopped briskly about, with his bright eye on the little girl. "Have a good supper while I feed the children. The child never forgets us, and saves me many a long journey by giving us these nice crumbs. I wish we could do something for her."

"So do I, and quite tire my wits trying to make some plan to give her pleasure. I often wonder why the little Princess up at the palace has so much and our dear Betty so little. A few of the books and toys that lie about up there would make this child so happy. It is a pity no one thinks of it;" and the kind Mamma Wren sighed as she ate a nice bit close to Betty's bare foot.

"If she was not so shy and would let people speak to her, I think she would soon make friends, she is so pretty and gay," answered the papa, coming back for another load for the hungry babies in the nest.

"The Princess has heard of her and wants to see her. I heard the maids talking about it to-day when I went to call on Cousin Tomtit in the palace garden. They said her Highness was to drive through the pine wood early to-morrow morning to breathe the fresh air, and hoped to see the Brownie and the pretty white cow. Now, if Betty only knew it, she might gather a posy of cowslips, and when the little lady comes give them to her. That would please her very much and bring Betty some pretty gift; for her Highness is generous, though sadly spoilt, I'm afraid."

This fine plan of Mamma Wren's pleased Betty so much that she clapped her hands and startled the birds away.

"I'll do it! I'll do it!" she cried. "I always wanted to see the little Princess father has told me about. She is ill, and cannot run and play as I do, so I should love to please her, and the cowslips are all out. I'll go early and get a hat full, and not run away if she comes."

Betty was so full of this delightful plan that she went early to bed, but did not forget to lean out of her window and peep through the roses into the nest where

Mamma Wren brooded over her babies while the papa roosted near by with his head under his wing.

“Good-night, dear birds; thank you very much,” whispered Betty; but they did not mind her, and only twittered sleepily as if a dream disturbed them.

“Up, up, little maid;
Day has begun.
Welcome with us
Our father, the sun!”

sang the larks, as they rose from the grass and waked Betty with their sweet voices.

“Tweet, tweet, it is morning;
Please get up, mamma.
Do bring us some breakfast,
Our dearest papa,”

twittered the young wrens, with their mouths wide open.

“Click, clack, here’s another day;
Stretch our wings and fly away
Over the wood and over the hills,
Seeking food for our babies’ bills;”

and away went the storks with their long legs trailing out behind, while the little ones popped up their heads and stared at the sun.

“Cluck! cluck!
Here’s good luck:
Old yellow-legs
Has laid two eggs,
All fresh and sweet,
For our girl to eat,”

cackled the gray hens, picking about the shed where the cock stood crowing loudly.

“Coo! coo! coo!
Come, bathe in the dew;
For the rosy dawn shines

Through our beautiful pines.
So kiss, every one,
For a new day’s begun,”

called the doves softly to one another as they billed and cooed and tripped about on their little pink feet.

Betty looked and listened at her window, and was so happy she kissed the roses nodding at her, then ran down to make the porridge, singing like a bird herself. When her father had gone away to work she made haste to milk Daisy, sweep the floor, and make all tidy for the day before she went to wait for the Princess.

“Now, you eat your breakfast here while I get the cowslips; for this is a pretty place to be in, and I want you to look very nice when the fine people come,” said Betty, as she left the cow to feed in a little shady nook by the road where the grass was green and an old oak made pleasant shade.

The cowslips were all open and as yellow as gold, so Betty made a great nosegay of some and a splendid cowslip-ball of the rest; then she put them in her hat, well sprinkled with water, and sat on a fallen log knitting busily, while Daisy lay down to chew her cud, with a green wreath of oak leaves round her neck for full dress.

They did not have to wait long. Soon the tramp of horses was heard, and along the wood-road came the white ponies tossing their heads, the pretty carriage with coachman and footman in blue and silver coats, and inside the little Princess, with white plumes waving from her hat as she sat by her nurse, wrapt in a soft silken cloak, for the summer air seemed cold to her.

“Oh, there’s the Brownie and her pretty white cow! Tell her not to run away, I want to see her and hear her sing,” cried the little Princess, eagerly, as they came nearer.

Betty was rather scared, but did not run away; for the nurse was a kind-looking old woman in a high peasant cap, who smiled and nodded at her with a motherly look, and seemed much pleased when she held up the cowslips, saying,—

“Will the little lady have them?”

“Oh yes, I wanted some; I never had a cowslip ball before. How pretty it is! Thank you, Brownie,” cried the Princess, with both hands full of flowers as she laughed with pleasure.

“I picked them all for you. I have so many, and I heard you cried for some,” said Betty, very glad that she had not run away and spoiled the little lady’s drive.

“How did you know?” asked the Princess, staring at her.

“The birds told me,” said Betty.

“Oh yes! brownies are fairies, and understand bird-talk; I forgot that. I know what parrots say, but not my other birds. Could you tell me?” asked the Princess, leaning down very earnestly, for any new thing pleased her.

“I think so, if tame ones sing like the wild ones,” answered Betty, proud to know more than the fine child did.

“Come to the palace and tell me; come now, I can’t wait! My canary sings all day, but I never understand a word, and I must. Tell her to come, Nurse,” commanded the Princess, who always had her own way.

“Can you?” asked the old woman. “We will bring you back at night. Her Highness has a fancy to see you, and she will pay you for coming.”

“I can’t leave Daisy; we have no field to put her in, and if I shut her up in the shed all day she will be hungry and call for me,” answered Betty, longing to go, but not liking to leave her dear cow to suffer.

“Put her in that field till you come back; I give you leave. All this land is mine, so no one will blame you. Do it!” said the Princess, waving her hand to the footman, who jumped down and had Daisy in the great clover-field before Betty could say a word.

“She will like that; and now I can go if you don’t mind my old gown and hat, — I have no other clothes,” she said, as the cow began to eat, and the footman opened the carriage door for her.

“I like it. Come in. — Now, go home at once,” said the Princess; and there was poor little Betty rolling away in the grand carriage, feeling as if it was all a fairy tale.

The Princess asked a great many questions, and liked her new friend more and more; for she had never spoken to a poor child before, or known how they live. Betty was excited by this fine adventure, and was so gay and charming in her little ways that the old nurse soon forgot to watch lest she should do or say something amiss.

When they drove up to the great marble palace shining in the sun, with green lawns and terraces and blooming gardens all about it, Betty could only hold her breath and look with all her eyes as she was led through splendid halls and up wide stairs into a room full of pretty things, where six gayly dressed maids sewed and chattered together.

The Princess went away to rest, but Betty was told to stay there and be dressed before she went to play with her Highness. The room was full of closets and chests and boxes and baskets, and as the doors opened and the covers flew off, Betty saw piles of pretty frocks, hats, cloaks, and all manner of dainty things for little girls to wear. Never had she dreamed of such splendid clothes, all lace and ribbons, silk and velvet. Hats with flowers and feathers, pretty pink and blue shoes with gold and silver buckles, silk stockings like cobwebs, and muslin and linen petticoats and nightgowns and little caps all embroidered as if by fairy fingers.

She could only stand and look like one in a dream while the maids very kindly took away her poor brown dress and hat, and after much gossip over what looked best, at last put on a rosy muslin frock, a straw hat with roses in it, and some neat shoes and stockings. Then when her hair was smoothed in thick brown curls, they told her to look in the tall mirror and tell what she saw there.

"Oh, what a pretty little girl!" cried Betty, smiling and nodding at the other child, who smiled and nodded back at her. She did not know herself, never having had any glass but a quiet pool in the wood or the brook in the meadow.

The maids laughed, and then she saw who it was, and laughed with them, and danced and courtesied and was very merry till a bell rang and she was ordered to go to her Highness.

It was a lovely room, all hung with blue silk and lace, with a silver bed, and chairs and couches of blue damask, pictures on the walls, flowers in all the windows, and golden cages full of birds. A white cat slept on its cushion, a tiny dog ran about with a golden collar hung with bells, and books and toys were heaped on the tables. The Princess was scolding her nurse because she wanted her to rest longer after the drive; but when Betty came in looking so pretty and gay, the frown changed to a smile, and she cried, —

"How nice you look! Not like a Brownie now; but I hope you have not forgotten about the birds."

"No," said Betty; "let me listen a minute and I'll tell you what they say."

So both were silent, and the maid and nurse kept as still as mice while the canary sang his shrill, sweet song, and Betty's face grew sad as she heard it.

"He says he is tired of his cage and longs to be free among the other birds; for a tree is a better home than a golden palace, and a crumb in the wood sweeter than all the sugar in his silver cup. 'Let me go! let me go! or my heart will break!' That is what he says, and the bulfinch sings the same song; so do the love birds and the beautiful gay one whom I don't know."

"What does Polly say? I understand him when he talks, but not when he scolds and chatters to himself as he is doing now," said the Princess, looking much surprised at what she heard; for she thought her birds must be happy in such fine cages.

Betty listened to the great red and green and blue parrot, who sat on a perch wagging his head and chuckling to himself as if he were enjoying some good joke. Presently Betty blushed and laughed, and looked both troubled and amused at what she heard; for the bird was gabbling away and nodding his head at her in a very funny manner.

“What does he say?” asked the Princess, impatiently.

“Please don’t ask. You will not like it. I couldn’t tell,” said Betty, still laughing and blushing.

“You *must* tell, or I’ll have Polly’s neck wrung. I *will* know every word, and I won’t be angry with *you*, no matter what that saucy bird says,” commanded the Princess.

“He says this,” began Betty, not liking to obey, but afraid poor Polly would be hurt if she did not: “‘Now here’s a new pet for her Highness to torment. Nice, pretty little girl! Pity she came, to be made much of for a day or two and then thrown away or knocked about like an old doll. She thinks it all very fine here, poor thing! But if she knew all I know she would run away and never come back; for a crosser, more spoilt child than her Highness never lived.’“

Betty dared not go on, for the Princess looked angry; and the maid went to slap the parrot, who gave a queer laugh and snapped at her fingers, squalling out, —

“She is! she is! and you all say it behind her back. *I* know your sly ways. You praise and pet her, and pretend that she is the sweetest darling in the world, when you know that this nice, rosy, good little girl out of the wood is worth a dozen silly, tyrannical princesses. Ha! ha! I’m not afraid to speak the truth, am I, Betty?”

Betty was frightened, but could not help laughing when the naughty bird winked at her as he hung upside down, with his hooked beak wide open and his splendid wings flapping.

“Tell me! tell me!” cried the Princess, forgetting her anger in curiosity.

Betty had to tell, and was very glad when Bonnibelle laughed also, and seemed to enjoy the truth told in this funny way.

“Tell him you know what he says, and ask him, since he is so wise, what I shall do to be as good as you are,” said the Princess, who really had a kind little heart and knew that she was petted far too much.

Betty told the parrot she understood his language, and he was so surprised that he got on his perch at once and stared at her, as he said eagerly, —

“Don’t let me be punished for telling truth, there’s a dear child. I can’t take it back, and since you ask my advice, I think the best thing you can do for her Highness is to let her change places with you and learn to be contented and useful and happy. Tell her so, with my compliments.”

Betty found this a hard message to give; but it pleased Bonnibelle, for she clapped her hands and cried, —

"I'll ask mamma. Would you like to do it, Brownie, and be a princess?"

"No, thank you," said Betty; "I couldn't leave my father and Daisy, and I'm not fit to live in a palace. It's very splendid, but I think I love the little house and the wood and my birds better."

The nurse and the maid held up their hands, amazed at such a fancy; but Bonnibelle seemed to understand, and said kindly, —

"Yes; I think it is very dull here, and much pleasanter in the fields to do as one likes. May I come and play with you, and learn to be like you, dear Betty?"

She looked a little sad as she spoke, and Betty pitied her; so she smiled and answered gladly, —

"Yes, that will be lovely. Come and stay with me, and I will show you all my playmates, and you shall milk Daisy, and feed the hens, and see the rabbits and the tame fawn, and run in the daisy field, and pull cowslips, and eat bread and milk out of my best blue bowl."

"Yes, and have a little brown gown and a big hat like yours, and wooden shoes that clatter, and learn how to knit, and climb trees, and what the birds say!" added Bonnibelle, so charmed at the plan that she jumped off the couch and began to skip about as she had not done for days before.

"Now come and see my toys, and choose any you like; for I'm fond of you, dear, because you tell me new things and are not like the silly little lords and ladies who come to see me, and only quarrel and strut about like peacocks till I'm tired of them."

Bonnibelle put her arm round Betty, and led her away to a long hall so full of playthings that it looked like a splendid toy-shop. Dolls by the dozen were there, — dolls that talked and sang and walked and went to sleep, fine dolls, funny dolls, big and little doll queens and babies, dolls of all nations. Never was there such a glorious party of these dear creatures seen before; and Betty had no eyes for anything else, being a real little girl, full of love for dollies, and never yet had she owned one.

"Take as many as you like," said Bonnibelle. "I'm tired of them."

It nearly took Betty's breath away to think that she might have a dozen dolls if she chose. But she wisely decided that one was enough, and picked out a darling baby-doll in its pretty cradle, with blue eyes shut, and flaxen curls under the dainty cap. It would fill her motherly little soul with joy to have this lovely thing to lie in her arms by day, sleep by her side at night, and live with her in the lonely cottage; for baby could say "Mamma" quite naturally, and Betty felt that she would never be tired of hearing the voice call her by that sweet name.

It was hard to tear herself from the cradle to see the other treasures; but she went to and fro with Bonnibelle, admiring all she saw, till Nurse came to tell them that lunch was ready and her Highness must play no more.

Betty hardly knew how to behave when she found herself sitting at a fine table with a footman behind her chair and all sorts of curious glass and china and silver things before her. But she watched what Bonnibelle did, and so got on pretty well, and ate peaches and cream and cake and dainty white rolls and bonbons with a good appetite. She would not touch the little birds in the silver dish, though they smelt very nice, but said sadly, —

“No, thank you, sir; I couldn’t eat my friends.”

The footman tried not to laugh; but the Princess pushed away her own plate with a frown, saying, —

“Neither will I. Give me some apricot jelly and a bit of angel cake. Now that I know more about birds and what they think of me, I shall be careful how I treat them. Don’t bring any more to my table.”

After lunch the children went to the library, where all the best picture-books ever printed were ranged on the shelves, and cosey little chairs stood about where one could sit and read delicious fairy tales all day long. Betty skipped for joy when her new friend picked out a pile of the gayest and best for her to take home; and then they went to the music-room, where a band played beautifully and the Princess danced with her master in a stately way that Betty thought very stupid.

“Now you must dance. I’ve heard how finely you do it; for some lords and ladies saw you dancing with the daisies, and said it was the prettiest ballet they ever looked at. You *must*! No, please do, dear Betty,” said Bonnibelle, commanding at first; then, remembering what the parrot said, she spoke more gently.

“I cannot here before these people. I don’t know any steps, and need flowers to dance with me,” said Betty.

“Then come on the terrace; there are plenty of flowers in the garden, and I am tired of this,” answered Bonnibelle, going through one of the long windows to the wide marble walk where Betty had been longing to go.

Several peacocks were sitting on the steps, and they at once spread their splendid tails and began to strut before the children, making a harsh noise as they tossed the crowns of shining feathers on their heads.

“What do they say?” asked the Princess.

“‘Here comes the vain little creature who thinks her fine clothes handsomer than ours, and likes to show them off to poorer people and put on proud airs. We don’t admire her; for we know how silly she is, for all her fine feathers.’“

“I won’t listen to any more rude words from these bad birds, and I won’t praise their splendid tails as I meant to. Go along, you vain things! no one wants you here," cried Betty, chasing the peacocks off the terrace, while the Princess laughed to see them drop their gorgeous trains and go scurrying away with loud squawks of fear.

"It was true. I *am* vain and silly; but no one ever dared to tell me so, and I shall try to do better now I see how foolish those birds look and how sweet you are," she said, when Betty came skipping back to her.

"I'll make a peacock dance for you. See how well I do it!" and Betty began to prance, with her full pink skirt held up, and her head tossed, and her toes turned out, so like the birds that old Nurse and the maid, who had followed, began to laugh as well as Bonnibelle.

It was very funny; and when she had imitated the vain strutting and fluttering of the peacocks, Betty suddenly dropped her skirt, and went hurrying away, flapping her arms like wings and squawking dismally.

She wanted to please the Princess and make her forget the rude things she had been forced to tell; so when she came running back she was glad to find her very merry, and anxious for more fun.

"Now I'll do the tulip dance," said Betty, and began to bow and courtesy to a bed full of splendid flowers, all gold and scarlet, white and purple; and the tulips seemed to bow and courtesy back again like stately lords and ladies at a ball. Such dainty steps, such graceful sweeps and elegant wavings of the arms one never saw before; for Betty imitated the tall blossoms waving in the wind, and danced a prettier minuet with them than any ever seen at court.

"It is wonderful!" said the maid.

"Bless the dear! she must be a real fairy to do all that," said the old nurse.

"Dance again! oh, please dance again, it is so pretty!" cried the Princess, clapping her hands as Betty rose from her farewell courtesy and came smiling toward her.

"I'll give you the wind dance; that is very gay, and this fine floor is so smooth I feel as if my feet had wings."

With that Betty began to flutter to and fro like a leaf blown by the wind; now she went down the terrace as if swept by a strong gust, now she stood still, swaying a little in the soft breath of air, then off she spun as if caught in a storm, eddying round and round till she looked like a stray rose-leaf whisked over the ground. Sometimes she whirled close to the Princess, then blew up against the stout old nurse, but was gone before she could be caught. Once she went down the marble steps at a bound and came flying over the railing as if in truth she did have wings on her nimble feet. Then the gale seemed to die away, and slowly the leaf floated to the ground at Bonnibelle's feet, to lie there rosy, breathless, and tired.

Bonnibelle clapped her hands again; but before she could tell half her delight, a beautiful lady came from the window, where she had seen the pretty ballet. Two little pages carried her long train of silvery silk; two ladies walked beside her, one holding a rose-colored parasol over her head, the other with a fan and cushion; jewels shone on her white hands and neck and in her hair, and she was very splendid, for this was the Queen. But her face was sweet and lovely, her voice very soft, and her smile so kind that Betty was not afraid, and made her best courtesy prettily.

When the red damask cushion was laid on one of the carved stone seats, and the pages had dropped the train, and the maids had shut the parasol and handed the golden fan, they stepped back, and only the Queen and nurse and little girls were left together.

"Does the new toy please you, darling?" asked the shining lady, as Bonnibelle ran to climb into her lap and pour out a long story of the pleasant time she had been having with the Brownie. "Indeed I think she is a fairy, to make you so rosy, gay, and satisfied."

"Who taught you to dance so wonderfully, child?" asked the Queen, when she had kissed her little daughter, glad to see her look so unlike the sad, cross, or listless creature she usually found.

"The wind, Lady Queen," answered Betty, smiling.

"And where did you get the fine tales you tell?"

"From the birds, Lady Queen."

"And what do you do to have such rosy cheeks?"

"Eat brown bread and milk, Lady Queen."

"And how is it that a lonely child like you is so happy and good?"

"My father takes care of me, and my mother in heaven keeps me good, Lady Queen."

When Betty said that, the Queen put out her hand and drew the little girl closer, as if her tender heart pitied the motherless child and longed to help if she only knew how.

Just then the sound of horses' feet was heard in the great courtyard below, trumpets sounded, and every one knew that the king had come home from hunting. Presently, with a jingling of spurs and trampling of boots, he came along the terrace with some of his lords behind him.

Every one began to bow except the Queen, who sat still with the Princess on her knee, for Bonnibelle did not run to meet her father as Betty always did when he came home. Betty thought she would be afraid of the King, and so she would perhaps, if he had worn his crown and ermine cloak and jewels everywhere; but now he was dressed very like her father, in hunter's green, with a silver horn over his shoulder, and no sign of splendor about him but the feather in his hat and the great ring that glittered when he pulled off his glove to kiss the Queen's hand; so Betty smiled and bobbed her little courtesy, looking boldly up in his face.

He liked that, and knew her, for he had often seen her when he rode through the wood.

"Come hither, Brownie, I have a story you will like to hear," he said, sitting down beside the Queen and beckoning to Betty with a friendly nod.

She went and stood at his knee, eager to hear, while all the lords and ladies bent forward to listen, for it was plain that something had happened beside the killing of a stag that day.

"I was hunting in the great oak wood two hours ago, and had knelt down to aim at a splendid stag," began the King, stroking Betty's brown head, "when a wild boar, very fierce and large, burst out of the ferns behind me just as I fired at the deer. I had only my dagger left to use, but I sprang up to face him, when a root tripped my foot, and there I lay quite helpless, as the furious old fellow rushed at me. I think this little maid here would have been Queen Bonnibelle to-morrow if a brave woodman had not darted from behind a tree and with one blow of his axe killed the beast as he bent his head to gore me. It was your father, Brownie, and I owe my life to him."

As the King ended, a murmur rose, and all the lords and ladies looked as if they would like to give a cheer; but the Queen turned pale and old Nurse ran to fan her, while Bonnibelle put out her arms to her father, crying, —

"No, I will never be a queen if you die, dear papa!"

The King took her on one knee and set Betty on the other, saying gayly, —

"Now what shall we do for this brave man who saved me?"

"Give him a palace to live in, and millions of money," said the Princess, who could think of nothing better.

"I offered him a house and money, but he wanted neither, for he loved his little cottage and had no need of gold, he said. Think again, little maids, and find something he *will* like," said the King, looking at Betty.

"A nice field for Daisy is all he wants, Lord King," she answered boldly; for the handsome brown face with the kind eyes was very like her father's, she thought.

"He shall have it. Now wish three wishes for yourself, my child, and I will grant them if I can."

Betty showed all her little white teeth as she laughed for joy at this splendid offer. Then she said slowly, —

"I have but one wish now, for the Princess has given me a dear doll and many books; so I am the happiest creature in all the kingdom, and have no wants."

"Contented little lass! Who of us can say the same?" said the King, looking at the people round him, who dropped their eyes and looked foolish, for they were always asking favors of the good King. "Well, now let us know the one thing I can do to please brave woodman John's little daughter."

"Please let the Princess come and play with me," said Betty, eagerly.

The lords looked horrified, and the ladies as if they would faint away at the mere idea of such a dreadful thing. But the Queen nodded, Bonnibelle cried, "Oh, do!" and the King laughed as he asked in a surprised tone, —

"But why not come and play with her here? What is there at the cottage that we have not at the palace?"

"Many things, Lord King," answered Betty. "She is tired of the palace and everything in it, she says, and longs to run about in the wood, and be well and gay and busy all day long, as I am. She wants to bake and milk and sweep and knit, and hear the wind blow, and dance with the daisies, and talk with my birds, and dream happy dreams, and love to be alive, as I do."

"Upon my word, here's a bold Brownie! But she is right, I think; and if my Princess can get a pair of cheeks like these down at the cottage, she shall go as often as she likes," said the King, amused at Betty's free words, and struck by the contrast between the two faces before him, one like a pale garden lily and the other like a fresh wild rose.

Then Bonnibelle burst out and told all the story of the day, talking as she had never talked before; and every one listened, amazed to see how lively and sweet her Highness could be, and wondered what had made such a sudden change. But the old nurse went about, saying in a whisper, —

"She is a real Brownie, I know it; for no mortal child would be so bold and bright, and do what she has done, — bewitched both King and Queen, and made her Highness a new child."

So all looked at Betty with great respect; and when at last the talk was over and the King rose to go, with a kiss for each little girl, every one bowed and made way for the Brownie, as if she too were a Princess.

But Betty was not proud; for she remembered the peacocks as she walked hand in hand with Bonnibelle after the royal papa and mamma over the terrace to the great hall, where the feast was spread and music sounding splendidly.

"You shall sit by me and have my golden cup," said Bonnibelle, when the silver horns were still, and all waited for the King to hand the Queen to her place.

"No, I must go home. It is sunset; Daisy must be milked, and father's supper ready when he comes. Let me run away and get my old clothes; these are too fine to wear in the cottage," answered Betty, longing to stay, but so faithful to her duty that even the King's command could not keep her.

"Tell her to stay, papa; I want her," cried Bonnibelle, going to the great gilded chair where her father sat.

"Stay, child," said the King, with a wave of the hand where the great jewel shone like a star.

But Betty shook her head and answered sweetly, —

"Please do not make me, dear Lord King. Daisy needs me, and father will miss me sadly if I do not run to meet him when he comes home."

Then the King smiled, and said heartily, —

"Good child! we will not keep you. Woodman John gave me my life, and I will not take away the comfort of his. Run home, little Brownie, and God bless you!"

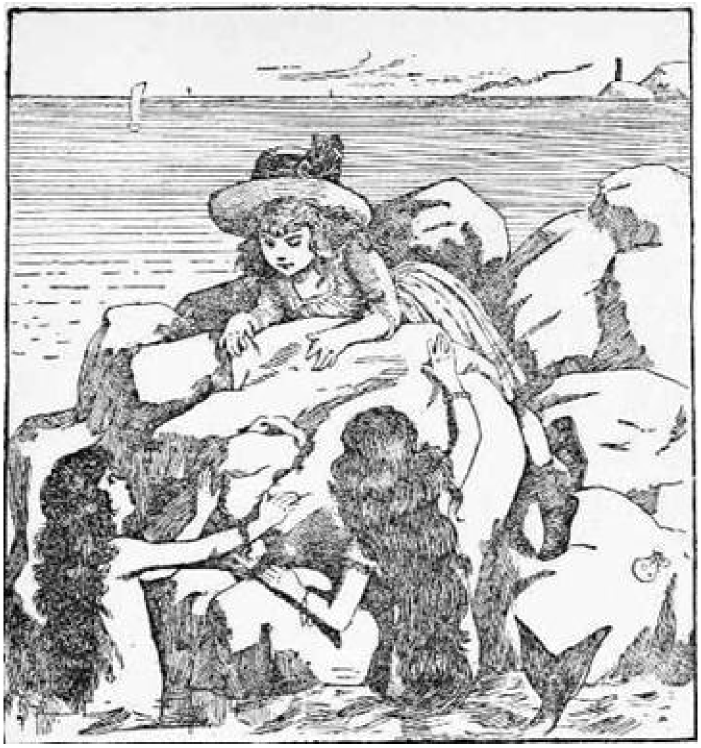
Betty tripped upstairs, and put on her old frock and hat, took one of the finest books and the dear doll, leaving the rest to be sent next day, and then tried to slip away by some back door; but there were so many halls and steps she got lost, and came at last into the great hall again. All were eating now; and the meat and wine and spicy pies and piles of fruit smelt very nice, and Betty would have only brown bread and milk for supper; but she did not stay, and no one but the pages saw her as she ran down the steps to the courtyard, like Cinderella hurrying from the hall when the clock struck twelve and all her fine clothes vanished.

She had a very happy walk through the cool green wood, however, and a happy hour telling her father all about this wonderful day; but the happiest time of all was when she went to bed in her little room, with the darling baby fast asleep on her arm, and the wrens talking together among the roses of how much good their wise Brownie would do the Princess in the days to come.

Then Betty fell asleep and dreamed such lovely dreams of the moon with a sweet face like the Queen's smiling at her, of her father looking as proud and handsome as the King, with his axe on his shoulder and the great boar dead at his feet; and Bonnibelle, rosy, gay, and strong, working and playing with her like a little sister in the cottage, while all the birds sang gayly: —

"Bonnibelle! Bonnibelle!
Listen, listen, while we tell
A sweet secret all may know,
How a little child may grow
Like a happy wayside flower,
Warmed by sun, fed by shower,
Rocked by wind, loved by elf,

Quite forgetful of itself;
Full of honey for the bee,
Beautiful for all to see,
Nodding to the passers-by,
Smiling at the summer sky,
Sweetening all the balmy air,
Happy, innocent, and fair.
Flowers like these blossom may
In a palace garden gay;
Lilies tall or roses red,
For a royal hand or head.
But be they low, or be they high,
Under the soft leaves must lie
A true little heart of gold,
Never proud or hard or cold,
But brave and tender, just and free,
Whether it queen or beggar be;
Else its beauty is in vain,
And never will it bloom again.
This the secret we would tell,
Bonnibelle! Bonnibelle!”



Nelly spied two pretty little creatures floating to and fro on the rocking waves.
— Page 175.

MERMAIDS.

"I wish I were a sea-gull or a fish or a mermaid; then I could swim as much as I like, and not have to stay on this stupid dry land all day," said Nelly, as she sat frowning and punching holes in the sand one summer morning, while the waves came murmuring up on the beach, and a fresh wind sang its pleasant song.

The little girl loved to bathe so well that she wanted to be in the water all the time, and had been forbidden to go into the sea for a day or two because she had a cold. So she was in a pet, and ran away from her playmates to sit and sulk in a lonely spot among the rocks. She had been watching the gulls fly and float, with their white wings shining as they dipped down or soared away in the sunshine. As she wished her wish a very large one swept down upon the sand before her, and startled her by saying in a hoarse tone, as she stared at its bright eyes, the red ring round its neck, and the little tuft on its head, —

"I am the King of the gulls, and I can grant any one of your wishes. Which will you be, — a fish, a bird, or a mermaid?"

"People say there are no mermaids," stammered Nelly.

"There are; only mortals cannot see them unless I give the power. Be quick! I don't like the sand. Choose, and let me be off!" commanded the Great Gull, with an impatient flutter of its wide wings.

"Then I'll be a mermaid, please. I always wanted to see one, and it must be very nice to live always in the water."

"Done!" said the gull, and was gone like a flash.

Nelly rubbed her eyes, and looked about her rather scared; but nothing had happened to her yet, and she was just going to complain that the bird had cheated her, when the sound of soft voices made her climb the rock behind her to see who was singing down there.

She nearly fell off again when she spied two pretty little creatures floating to and fro on the rocking waves. Both had long brown hair, green eyes as clear as crystal, pale faces, and the sweetest voices Nelly had ever heard. But the strange thing was that each little body ended in a shining tail, — one all golden, the other all silver scales. Their little breasts and arms were white as foam, and they wore bracelets of pearls, strings of rosy shells about their necks, and garlands of gay sea-weed in their hair. They were singing as they rocked, and throwing bubbles to and fro as if playing ball. They saw Nelly in a moment, and tossing a great rainbow-colored bubble toward her, cried gayly, —

"Come and play, little friend. We know you, and have often tried to make you see us when you float and dive so bravely in our sea."

"I long to come; but it is so deep there and the waves are so rough that I should be dashed on the rocks," answered Nelly, charmed to see real mermaids at last, and eager to go to them.

"We came for you. The King-gull told us to call you. Slip off your clothes and spring down to us; then we will change you, and you can have your wish," said the mermaids, holding up their arms to her.

"My mother said I must not go into the sea," began Nelly, sadly.

"What is a mother?" asked one little sea-maid, while the other laughed as if the word amused her.

"Why, don't you know? Don't you have fathers and mothers down there?" cried Nelly, so surprised that she forgot her wish for a moment.

"No; we are born of the moon and the sea, and we have no other parents," said Goldfin, the shining one.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Nelly. "Who takes care of you, and where do you live? Without fathers and mothers you cannot have any home."

"We take care of ourselves. All the sea is our home, and we do as we please. Come, come, and see how gay it is!" called Silver-tail, the other mermaid, tossing bubbles like a juggler till the air was full of them as they sailed away on the wind.

Now, if Nelly had not been angry with her good mamma just then, and ready for any disobedience, she would never have been so naughty, or have gone to play with such strange friends. She was very curious to see how they lived, and be able to relate her adventures when she came back, as she was sure she would, all safe and sound. So she dropped her clothes on the rock and splashed into the green pool below, glad to show off her fine swimming. But Goldfin and Silver-tail caught her and bade her drink the spray they held in their hands.

"Sea water is salt and bitter; I don't like it," said Nelly, holding back.

"Then you cannot be like us. Drink, and in a moment see what will happen!" cried Goldfin.

Nelly swallowed the cold drops and caught her breath, for a dreadful pain shot through her from her head to her feet, while the mermaids chanted some strange words and waved their hands over her. It was gone in an instant, and she felt like a cork floating on the water. She wondered, till glancing down she saw that her little white legs were changed to a fish's tail of many colors, which gently steered her along as the waves rippled against her breast.

"Now I am a mermaid," she cried, and looked into the pool to see if her eyes were green, her face pale, and her hair like curly brown sea-weed.

No; she had her child’s face still, with rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and yellow curls. She was not disappointed, however, for she thought it a prettier face than the moony ones of her new playmates; so she laughed and said gayly, —

“Now you will play with me and love me, won’t you?”

“What is love?” asked Silver-tail, staring at her.

“Why, when people love they put their arms round one another and kiss, and feel happy in their hearts,” answered Nelly, trying to explain the beautiful word.

“How do you kiss?” asked Goldfin, curiously.

Nelly put an arm round the neck of each, and softly kissed them on their cold wet lips.

“Don’t you like it? Is it sweet?” she asked.

“I feel that you are warmer than I, but I think oysters taste better,” said one; and the other added, —

“Mermaids have no hearts, so that does not make us happier.”

“No hearts?” cried Nelly, in dismay. “Can’t you love? Don’t you know about souls and being good, and all that?”

“No,” laughed the mermaids, shaking their heads till the drops flew about like pearls. “We have no souls, and don’t trouble about being good. We sing and swim and eat and sleep; is not that enough to make us happy?”

“Dear me, how queer they are!” thought Nelly, half afraid, yet very anxious to go with them and see more of this curious sea-life of which they had spoken. “Don’t you care about me at all, and don’t you want me to stay with you a little while?” she asked, wondering how she should get on with creatures who could not love her.

“Oh yes, we like you as a new playmate, and are glad you came to see us. You shall have our bracelets to wear, and we will show you all kinds of pretty things down below, if you are not afraid to come,” answered the mermaids, dressing her in their garlands and necklaces, and smiling at her so sweetly that she was ready to follow as they swam away with her far out on the great billows that tossed them to and fro but could not drown or harm them now.

Nelly enjoyed it very much, and wondered why the fishermen in their boats did not try to catch them, till she learned that mermaids were invisible and were never caught. This made her feel very safe, and after a fine game of play she let her friends take her by the hand and sink down to the new world below. She expected to find it very gay and splendid, with sea-coral trees growing everywhere, palaces of pearl, and the ground covered with jewels; but it was dim and quiet. Great weeds fanned to and fro as the water stirred them; shells lay about on the sand, and queer creatures crawled or swam everywhere.

The green sea-water was the sky, and ships cast their shadows like clouds over the twilight world below. Several gray-bearded old mermen sat meditating in nooks among the rocks, and a few mermaids lay asleep in the great oyster-shells that opened to receive them and their beds of sea-weed. A soft murmur was in the air like the sound one hears in shells, and nowhere did Nelly see any toys or food or fun of any sort.

“Is this the way you live?” she asked, trying not to show how disappointed she was.

“Isn’t it lovely?” answered Goldfin. “This is my bed, and you shall have the shell between Silver-tail and me. See! it is lined with mother-of-pearl, and has a soft cushion of our best sea-weeds to lie on.”

“Are you hungry?” asked Silver-tail. “Come and have some shrimps for dinner, — I know a fine place for them, — or oysters if you like them better.”

Nelly was ready to eat anything, the sea air had given her such a fine appetite; so they swam away to gather the pretty pink shrimps in scallop shells, as little girls gather strawberries in baskets; then they sat down to eat them, and Nelly longed for bread and butter, but dared not say so. She was so surprised at all she saw, that this queer, cold lunch was soon forgotten in the wonderful tales the mermaids told her, as they cracked snails and ate them like nuts, or pulled the green sea-apples tasting like pickled limes from the vines that climbed up the rocks.

“You don’t seem to have a very large family, or have the others gone to a party somewhere?” asked Nelly, rather tired of the quiet.

“No; there never are many of us. A new brood will be out soon, and then there will be some little mer-babies to play with. We will show you the Wonder-tree, if you are done eating, and tell you all about it,” answered Silver-tail, floating away with a wave of the hand.

Nelly and Goldfin followed to a lonely place, where a tall plant grew up from the sand till its branches reached the air above and spread out like floating weeds covered with little pods like those we often snap under our feet as they lie dry upon the beach.

“Only a few of these will bloom; for there never are many mermaids in the sea, you know. It takes long for the tree to reach the light, and it cannot blossom unless the full moon shines on it at midnight; then these buds open, and the water-babies swim away to grow up like us,” said Silver-tail.

“Without any nurses to take care of them, or mothers to pet them?” asked Nelly, thinking of the pretty baby at home with whom she was so fond of playing.

“They take care of themselves, and when there are too many in one place the old mermen send away some to another ocean; so we get on quietly, and there is room for all," said Goldfin, contentedly.

"And when you die, what happens?" asked Nelly, much interested in these queer creatures.

"Oh, we grow older and grayer and sit still in a corner till we turn to stone and help make these rocks. I've been told by Barnacle, the old one yonder, that people sometimes find marks of our hands or heads or fins in the stone, and are very much puzzled to know what kind of fish or animal made the prints; that is one of our jokes;" and both the mermaids laughed as if they enjoyed bewildering the wits of the people who were so much wiser than they.

"Well, I think it is much nicer to be buried under grass and flowers when our souls have flown away to heaven," said Nelly, beginning to be glad she was not a "truly" mermaid.

"What is heaven?" asked Silver-tail, stupidly.

"You would not understand if I tried to tell you. I can only say it is a lovely place where we go when we die, and the angels don't puzzle over us at all, but love us and are glad to see us come," said Nelly, soberly.

Both little maids stared at her with their green eyes as if they wanted to understand, but gave it up, and with a whisk of their shining tails darted away, calling to her, —

"Come and play with the crabs; it's great fun."

Nelly was rather afraid of crabs, they nipped her toes so when she went among them; but having no feet now, she felt braver, and was soon having a gay time chasing them over the rocks, and laughing to see them go scrambling sidewise into their holes. The green lobsters amused her very much by the queer way they hitched along, with their great claws ready to grasp and hold whatever they wanted. It was funny to see them wipe their bulging eyes with their feelers and roll them about on all sides. The hermit crabs in their shells were curious, and the great snails popping out their horns; the sea-spiders were very ugly, and she shook with fear when the horrible Octopus went by, with his eight long arms waving about like snakes and his hooked beak snapping.

"Show me something pretty," she begged; "I don't like these ugly things. Haven't you any flowers or birds or animals here to play with?"

"Oh yes, here are our sea anemones, yellow, red, and white, all blooming in their beds; and these lovely plants of every color which you call weeds. Then there are the coral trees, far away, which we will show you some day, and the sponges on the rocks, and many other curious things," answered Goldfin, leading Nelly up and down to see the only flowers they had. Then Silver-tail said, —

"She will like the nautilus boats and the flying fish, and a ride on the dolphins and whales. Come and let her see that we have birds and animals as well as she."

Up they went; and when Nelly saw the lovely red and blue creatures like a fleet of fairy boats floating over the waves, she clapped her hands and cried, —

“We have nothing so beautiful on the land! How delicate and fair they are! Won’t the wind tear them to pieces and the storms wreck them?”

“Watch and see!” answered the mermaids, well pleased at her delight; and as a gust blew by every silken sail was furled, the lovely colors vanished, and the fairy boats sank out of sight safely to the bottom of the sea.

“Our sailors can’t do that,” said Nelly; “and when our ships go down they never come up again.”

Just then some fish flew over their heads and splashed down again, while the gulls snapped at them in vain.

“Those are our birds, and here are our horses. People call them porpoises, but we call them dolphins, and have many a fine gallop on their backs,” said Goldfin, as a school of great creatures came gambolling by.

Up sprang the mermaids, and went swiftly dashing through the water with high leaps now and then, as their sea-horses reared and plunged, tossing their tails and waving their fins as if they enjoyed the frolic. Nelly did, and wished to ride longer; but a whale appeared, and her playmates went to climb on his back and hear the news from the North Sea. It was like a moving island, and they sat under the fountain as he spouted water and rolled about lazily basking in the sun after his cold voyage.

“Don’t we have good times?” asked Silver-tail, when they slid down the slippery sides of the monster and climbed up again as if coasting.

“Splendid! I like to be a mermaid and have no lessons to study, no work to sew, no nurse to scold me, and no mamma to forbid my swimming as much as I choose,” said naughty Nelly; but as she spoke and looked toward the land now far away, a little pain went through her heart to remind her that she was not a real mermaid, and still had a conscience, though she would not listen to it.

They played all the afternoon, had an oyster supper, and went early to bed to get a good nap before midnight, because the moon was full and they hoped the Wonder-tree would bloom before morning.

Nelly liked the quiet now; and the soft song of the sea lulled her to sleep, to dream of sailing in a nautilus boat till a dreadful cuttle-fish came after her and she woke in a fright, wondering to find herself lying on a bed of wet weeds in a great shell.

“Come away; it is time, and a lovely night,” called the mermaids, and with several new friends they all hurried up to watch the buds open when the moon kissed them.

The sea shone like silver; the stars seemed to float there as well as in the sky, and the wind blew off the shore bringing the sweet smell of hay-fields and gardens. All the sea people sang as they lay rocking on the quiet waves, and Nelly felt as if this were the strangest, loveliest dream she had ever dreamed.

By and by the moon shone full upon the Wonder-tree, and one by one out popped the water-babies, looking like polliwogs, only they had little faces and arms instead of fins. Lively mites they were, swimming away at once in a shoal like minnows, while the older mermaids welcomed them and gave them pretty names as the tiny things came to peep at them and dart between the hands that tried to grasp them. Till dawn they kept in the moonlight, growing fast as they learned to use their little tails and talk in small, sweet voices; but when day came they all sank down to the bottom of the sea, and went to sleep in the shell cradles made ready for them. That was all the care they needed, and after that they had no nursing, but did what they liked, and let the older ones play with them like dolls.

Nelly had several pets, and tried to make them love and mind her; but the queer little creatures laughed in her face when she talked to them, darted away when she wanted to kiss them, and stood on their heads and waggled their bits of tails when she told them to be good. So she let them alone, and amused herself as well as she could with other things; but soon she grew very tired of this strange, idle life, and began to long for some of the dear old plays and people and places she used to like so much.

Every one was kind to her; but nobody seemed to love her, to care when she was good, or wish to make her better when she was selfish or angry. She felt hungry for something all the time, and often sad, though she hardly knew why. She dreamed about her mother, and sometimes woke up feeling for baby, who used to creep into her bed and kiss her eyes open in the morning. But now it was only a water-baby, who would squirm away like a little eel and leave her to think about home and wonder if they missed her there.

“I can’t go back, so I must forget,” she said, and tried to do it; but it was very hard, and she half wished she was a real mermaid with no heart at all.

“Show me something new; I’m tired of all these plays and sights and toys,” she said one day, as she and her two playmates sat stringing little silver and rosy shells for necklaces.

“We are never tired,” said Goldfin.

“You haven’t any minds, and don’t think much or care to know things. I do, and I want to learn a little or make some one happy if I can,” said Nelly, soberly, as she looked about the curious world she lived in and saw what a dim, cold, quiet place it was, with the old mermen turning to stone in their nooks, the lazy mermaids rocking in their shells or combing their hair, and the young ones playing like so many stupid little fishes in the sun.

"We can't go to the South Sea yet, and we have nothing more to show you unless a great storm comes up," said Silver-tail.

"Perhaps she would like a wreck; there is a new one not far off," proposed Goldfin. "A big ship went over a small one, and it sank very soon. One of Mother Carey's chickens told me about it this morning, and I thought we might go and see it before it is all spoiled. Things that men make never last very long in our sea."

"Yes, let us go; I long to see and touch something my people made. Your world is wonderful, but I begin to think my own is the best, for me at least," said Nelly, as they left their pearls and swam away to the wreck, which lay down among the rocks, fast going to pieces. "Where are the people?" she asked, as they were about to float in at the broken windows and doors. She was very much afraid that she might see some poor drowned creature, and it would trouble *her*, though the mermaids might not care.

"Little Chick said they were all saved. It was a fruit-ship, and there were only a few passengers. One lady and child and some men went away in the boats to the shore, but left everything else behind."

"I'm so glad!" cried Nelly, feeling her heart warm in her breast at the good news about the mother and little child.

The ship had been loaded with oranges, and the sand was covered with boxes of them broken open, and letting the fruit float to the top of the water. Much was spoiled, but some was still good, and Nelly told the mermaids to taste and see if oranges were not better than salt sea-apples. They did not like them, but played ball with the golden things till Nelly proposed that they should toss some on the shore for the fishermen's children. That suited them; and soon the beach was covered with oranges, and the poor little people were running and screaming with delight to pick up this splendid feast.

"I wish there were some pretty things to give them; but there are only the sailors' bags of clothes all wet, and those are not nice," said Nelly, enjoying this game very much; for she was homesick and longed to hear human voices and see faces like her own. She wanted to do something for some one, and be loved a little. So she peeped all about the ship, and at last, in one cabin better than the others, she found the toys and clothes of the little child and its mother. She was very glad of that, and, knowing how children love their own things and cry when they are lost, she gathered up all that were not spoiled, and made Goldfin and Silver-tail help her carry them to the shore, where people had gathered to save whatever came from the wreck.

There was great rejoicing when these small treasures came ashore, and they were carried to the house where the lady and the child were. This pleased Nelly very much, and even the lazy mermaids found the new game pleasant; so they went on floating things to the beach, even the heavy bags with the poor sailors' clothes, wet books, and boxes, which otherwise would have been lost. No one could see Goldfin and Silver-tail, but now and then some child would cry out, when Nelly lingered to look and listen through the foam and spray, —

"Oh, I saw a face over there, — a dear little face, very pretty but sad, and a hand waved at me! Could it be a mermaid?"

Then some older person would say, —

"Nonsense, child! there are no mermaids. It is only the reflection of your own face in the water. Come away, or the tide will catch you."

If Nelly had not been partly human this could not have happened; and though no one believed in her, she took comfort in the thought that she was not all a fish, and loved to linger where she could see the children at play long after Goldfin and Silver-tail had grown tired of them and gone back to their own affairs.

The longer she stayed the more sad she grew; for the land seemed pleasanter now than the sea, — the green, dry, warm land, with the flowers and trees, birds and lambs, and dear people to love and care for her. Even school looked like a happy place; and when she thought of her own home, where mother and Baby were, her heart was so full of longing for them that her tears dropped into the sea, and she held out her arms, crying sadly, —

"Oh, mamma, dear mamma, forgive me, love me, and help me to come back to you!"

No one answered, no one came; and poor Nelly sank sobbing down to cry herself to sleep in her pearl-lined bed, with no good-night kiss to comfort her.

Every day she longed more and more to go home, and grew more and more tired of the sea and all in it. The mermaids could not amuse her nor understand her sorrow; so she went to wise old Barnacle and asked him what she should do to be a child again.

"No one but the King of the gulls can change you, my Periwinkle," said the merman, kindly. "You must wait and watch for him patiently. He is not seen very often; so it may be years before he comes again. Meantime be happy with us, and don't fret for that very dry land in which we see no beauty."

This comforted Nelly a good deal, and she spent half her time floating on the waves, calling the gulls, feeding them, and making them her friends, so that they might be sure to tell her when the King came. Other kind things she did, trying to be good; for *she* knew, though even the wise old merman did not, that naughty people *cannot* be happy. She gathered all the curious shells she could find, and strewed them on the beach for the children playing there. She popped the cross crabs and lobsters into the nets let down for them, and helped the fishermen to many a good load for market. She sat and sang among the rocks where lonely people could hear the faint sweet music and enjoy it. She watched over the little people when they went bathing, and loved to catch and kiss the rosy babies as they splashed about, and send quiet ripples to refresh the sick ones when their nurses dipped them in the wholesome sea.

She was good to all the wounded fishes who got hurt by the many enemies that haunt the great ocean, and tried to teach the cruel sharks, the ugly octopus, and the lazy snails to be kinder and more industrious. They did not mind her; but it kept her busy, and made her heart tender to try to help all who came near her, and every night when she went to her lonely bed she said hopefully, —

“Perhaps to-morrow the King will come and let me go home. When I do, mamma must find a better Nelly than the naughty, wilful one who ran away.”

She supposed her mother would think her drowned when the clothes were found on the rock, and often mourned over the sorrow she had given those at home. But she cheered herself with imagining the joy her wonderful return would bring, and could hardly wait for that happy time.

The mermaids were soon going far away to the South Sea for the winter, and begged her to come with them, telling how lovely everything was there, — all about the pearl-divers, the Spice Islands, the coral trees, and the many wonders of that summer world. But Nelly no longer cared for any place but the pretty cottage on the cliff that overlooked the sea, and she was not tempted by any of the fine tales they told.

“No; I’d rather live here all alone where I can see my own people and home, even if I wait years and years before the King comes. I know now what a silly child I was to leave everything that I was made to use and enjoy, and try to be a creature without any soul. I don’t care if my heart does ache; I’d rather be as I am than like you, without any love in you or any wish to be good and wise and happy as we are.”

Goldfin and Silver-tail thought her very ungrateful after she said that, and left her alone. But she did not care; for Father Barnacle was to stay and “stone up,” as they called their queer way of dying. So when all had gone she was very kind to the old merman, who never stirred out of his nook, but sat meditating on the hundred years of his life and wondering what would become of the rock he was slowly to grow a part of.

Nelly did not want him to die yet; so she brought him nice things to eat, sang to him, and asked so many questions that he was forced to keep awake and answer them. Oh, such wonderful stories as he told her! Such interesting histories of sea flowers, fishes, and monsters, such wise lessons in tides and stars, and the mysteries of the great ocean! Nelly would sit on a conch shell and listen for hours, never tired of these new fairy tales.

But she did not forget to watch for the Great Gull, and every day floated near the shore, beckoning every white-winged bird that flew by and asking for tidings of the King. At last he came! Nelly was lying on the waves idly singing to herself, with one hand held up for her pet sandpiper to light upon, when, instead of little Peep, a great silvery bird perched there, and looking up she saw the fiery eye, the red ring about the neck, the crest on the head, and with a joyful splash she cried out, —

“He’s come! he’s come! Oh, dear King, give me another wish, a better wish, and let me be a little girl again.”

“Done!” said the Great Gull, waving his wings over her. “Will you be contented now?”

“I will! I will!” answered Nelly, eagerly.

“Never wilful and disobedient?”

“Never, never!”

“Sure you won’t want to be a bird, a fish, or a mermaid again?”

“Yes, yes; for nothing is so lovely as to be a child.”

“Good!” and suddenly clutching her in his strong claws the gull flew high up in the air as if he were going to take her to his nest and eat her like a fish.

Poor Nelly was sadly frightened; but before she could catch her breath to ask what was to happen, the King said, in a loud voice, “Remember!” and let her drop.

She expected to be dashed on the rocks below, and thought that was to be her punishment, perhaps; but to her great surprise she floated down like a feather, and found herself lying on the sand in her own shape and the very clothes she wore when she went away. She lay a moment enjoying the comfort of being warm and dry, and feeling the dear earth under her.

“Why, darling, how long you have been asleep!” said a voice close by; and starting up Nelly saw her mother stooping over her, while Baby was creeping nearer to laugh and crow as he peeped into her face to see if she was awake.

“Oh, mamma, dear mamma, I am so glad to have you again! I was very naughty, but I’ve learned a lesson, and I’m going to be your good child now,” cried Nelly, holding her mother tight with many kisses.

“Bless the dear! she has been dreaming, and wakes up in a lovely mood,” said mamma, laughing.

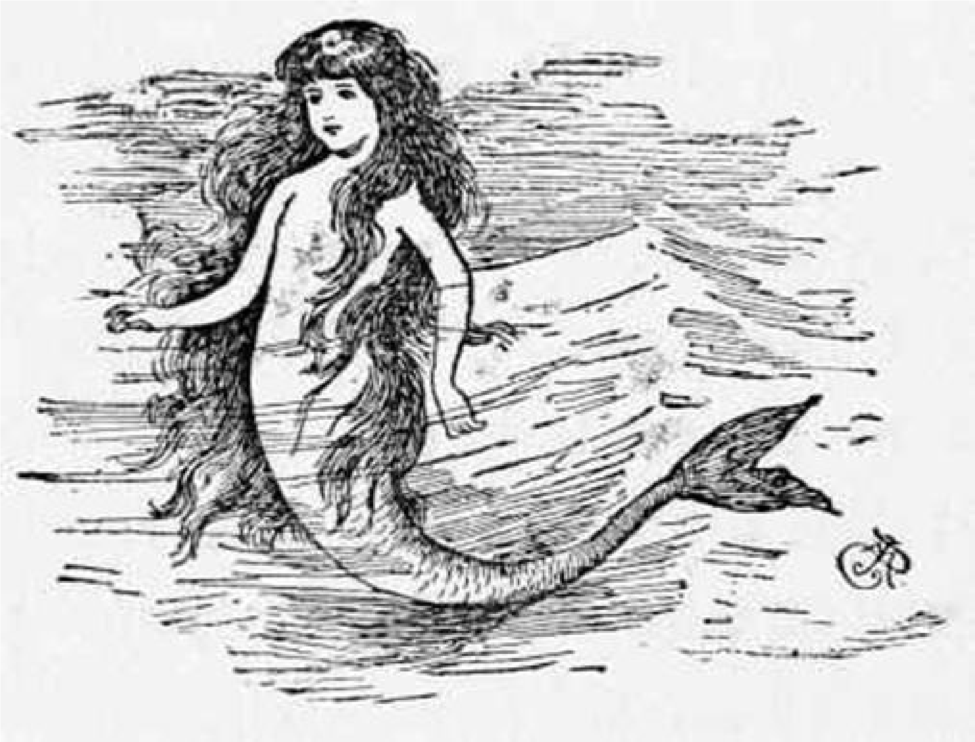
“Didn’t you think I was drowned? How long have I been away?” asked Nelly, looking about her as if bewildered.

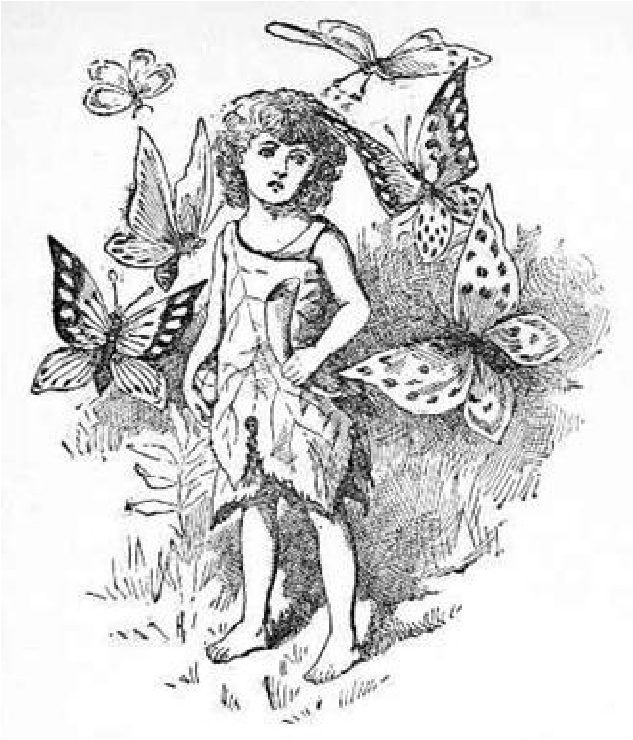
“About an hour. I was not troubled, for I knew you would not break your promise, dear.”

“Then it *was* a dream, and I haven’t been a mermaid?” said Nelly.

“I hope not; for I like my little girl just as she is. Tell me the dream while I smooth away these tangles before we go home.”

So, sitting on her mother’s knee, while Baby dug holes in the sand, Nelly told her adventures as well as she could; for now it all seemed dim and far away, and nothing remained clear in her mind but the thought that it was indeed a lovely and a happy thing to be a little child with a heart to feel, a mother to love, and a home to live in till we go to find that other one, fairer than any on the earth or in the sea.





Bud admired them very much, and felt very glad and proud when they lighted all over her, till she looked like one great butterfly with wings of every color. — Page 215.

LITTLE BUD.

“The naughty cuckoo has been here while we were gone, and left this great blue egg among our little white ones,” said the linnet to her mate as they came back from their breakfast one day and found the nest full.

“It is not a cuckoo’s egg, my dear,” answered the father bird, shaking his head, “some fairy must have put it here, and we must take care of it or they may be angry and do harm to our little ones by and by. Sit carefully on it, and see what will follow.”

So Mamma Linnet sat patiently on the five eggs for many days more, and then out came her four small children and began to chirp for food. But the big blue egg still lay there, and no sound of a little bill pecking inside was heard.

“Shall we throw it out of the nest and make room for our babies?” asked the mother, finding her nursery very crowded.

“Not yet,” said the careful papa, standing on one leg to rest, being very tired of bringing worms for his family. “Wait two more days, and then if the egg does not break, we will push it out.”

He was a wise bird, and they were always glad that they waited; for on the seventh day the blue egg suddenly flew open, and there lay the smallest, prettiest little girl ever seen, — three inches long, but rosy, gay, and lively as she popped up her curly head and looked about her as if much surprised to find herself in a nest swinging on the branch of a tree.

“Who are you?” asked the father linnet, while all the young ones stared at her with their big eyes, and opened their beaks as if to eat her up.

“I’m little Bud,” answered the tiny creature, smiling at them so sweetly it was impossible to help loving her at once.

“Where do you come from?” said the mother.

“I don’t know.”

“Are you a fairy?”

“No; for I have no wand.”

“A new kind of bird?”

“I have no feathers or wings.”

“A human child?”

“I think not; for I have no parents.”

“Bless the dear! what can she be? and what shall we do with her?” cried both the birds, much amazed at this new child of theirs.

Bud did not seem to be troubled at all, but lay rocking in her blue cradle and laughing at the young linnets who peeped curiously over the edge of it.

“She must have something to eat,” said the papa, flying off.

“And some clothes,” added the mamma, bustling about.

But when a nice, fat worm was brought, Bud covered her face and cried with a shiver, —

“No, no! I cannot eat that ugly thing.”

“Get a strawberry,” said the mamma; and she tried to wrap the largest, softest feather that lined her nest round the naked little maid.

But Bud kicked her small legs out of it at once, and stood up, saying with a laugh, —

“I’m not a bird; I cannot wear feathers. Give me a pretty green leaf for a gown, and let me look about this big world where I find myself all at once.”

So the linnet pulled a leaf and pecked two holes for Bud’s arms, and put it on like a pinafore; for she never had dressed a baby and did not know how, her own children being born with down coats which soon changed to gray feathers. Bud looked very pretty in her green dress as she sat on the edge of the nest staring about with her blue eyes and clapping her hands when the papa came flying home with a sweet wild berry in his bill for her breakfast. She ate it like an apple, and drank a drop of dew that had fallen in the night; then she began to sing so sweetly that all the neighbors came to see what sort of bird Dame Linnet had hatched.

Such a twittering and fluttering as went on while they talked the matter over, asked many questions, and admired the pretty little creature who only knew her name and nothing more!

“Shall you keep her?” asked the robin, as he puffed out his red waistcoat and looked very wise.

“We dare not send her away,” said the linnets.

“She will be a great deal of care,” said the wren.

“You never can teach her to fly, and what will you do when your own children are gone?” asked the wood dove, who was very tender-hearted.

“You will have to make a new frock every day, and that will be so much work,” said the yellow-bird, who was very proud of her own gay gown and black velvet hood.

“I think some bad elf put her here to bring you trouble. I’d push her out of the nest and let her take care of herself,” advised the woodpecker, wondering if the plump child would be as good to eat as the worms he hammered out of the trees.

“No, no!” cried the brown thrush; “she is too pretty to bring harm. Keep her till you see what she can do, and perhaps she may be a good sprite after all.”

"She sings almost as well as I do, and I shall like to add her songs to the many I already know," said the blackbird, who had lovely concerts in the meadow all by himself.

"Yes, we will wait a little; and if we cannot decide, by and by we will ask your advice, neighbors," said the linnets, beginning to feel rather proud of the curious stranger, since her coming made such a stir in the wood.

The birds flew away; and Bud settled down as one of the family, making herself so pleasant that all loved her and willingly crowded together to make room for her in the nest. The mother brooded over her at night, and made her fresh gowns every day when the old ones withered up; the father brought her dew to wash in and to drink, and flew far and wide to find ripe berries for her to eat; while the young birds were never tired of hearing her sing, watching her dance on the edge of the nest, or learning the pretty plays she taught them. Every one was very kind and waited patiently to see what would come. But when at last the little birds flew away, the parents wanted to go with them, and did not like to leave Bud all alone.

"I'm not afraid," she said, "for now I am strong enough to take care of myself. All the birds know me, and I shall not be lonely. Carry me down to the grass below, and let me run about and find my own food and clothes as your children do. I won't forget you, but you need not trouble about me any more."

So Papa Linnet took her on his back, as often before, and flew down to the softest place below, and there they left her with a tender good-by; for they had to watch over their young ones, who were trying their wings and wandering far and wide.

"I shall be taken care of as the flowers are," said Bud, when she found herself sitting on a pebble beside the path that went through the pleasant wood, full of happy little creatures busy with their work or play.

"I wish I were a bird, then I could fly about and see the world; or a fairy, then I could do splendid things; or even a flower for some one to love and carry away. I wonder what I was made for, and what I can do, — such a little thing in this great world! I'm sure I don't know; but I can be happy and kind, and try to help all I see, then I shall make friends and not feel lonely very long."

As she said this, brave Bud looked about her to see whom she could help first, and spied an ant tugging a large white bundle along. It looked as if he were taking clothes to some fairy washerwoman; but the bundle was an egg, and the ant-nurse was bringing it up from the nest to lie awhile in the warm sun to grow.

He told Bud all about it when she offered to help, and very gladly let her watch this egg while he and the other nurses went down for many more. Soon they lay all about in the quiet corner where the sun shone on them, and Bud went to and fro, turning them, and keeping guard over them lest some hungry bird should snap them up.

"Now I'm useful," she said, quite happy in her new work, though she was only a nursery-maid, and had no wages but the thanks of the busy ants. By and by the eggs were carried down, and she was free to go on her travels again. The grass was like a forest to her, the mounds of moss were high hills, a little brook a great river, and a patch of sand a desert to be crossed.

"First, I will dress myself nicely," said Bud; and coming to a wild rosebush she gathered up several of the fallen leaves, and tried to fasten them together with the thorns. But her little hands could not manage the pretty pink skirt, and the thorns pricked her tender flesh as she folded the leaves over her bosom; so she was about to give up in despair and put on the faded green one again, when a wood-spider, who sat in his hole near by, said kindly, —

"Come here, little lady! I can spin and weave, and I'll sew your dress for you with pleasure. I saw you helping my neighbors the ants; so I will help you."

Bud was very glad of this kind offer, and watched the spider at his work as he sewed the pink leaves together with his silver thread as neatly as a seamstress, put a line of embroidery all round the hem, and twisted a silken cord to tie it at the waist.

"Oh, how pretty you are!" cried the spider when the dress was on. "You must have a veil to keep the sun out of your eyes. Here is my last web;" and he threw the shining gauze over her head, making her look like a little bride under the silvery veil.

Bud thanked him very much, and went happily on till she came to a party of columbines dancing in the wind. They thought she was the spirit of a rose come to visit them, and lowered their scarlet horns to offer her the honey in the tower ends.

She was just wondering where she should find some dinner, and here was a delicious feast all ready for her, thanks to the pretty dress which made the columbines think her a flower. She threw up her veil and told them her story, which they thought very interesting and rather sad.

"Stay and live with us, little darling!" they cried. "You are too delicate to go about all alone. The wind will blow you away, some foot will crush you, or some cruel wasp kill you with its sting. Live here, and we will be your friends, and feed and care for you."

"You are very kind, and your home is very pleasant; but I must go on. I feel sure that I have something to do, that somewhere I shall find my place, and sometime have a pair of wings, and be either a bird or a fairy," answered Bud, as she rested by the rock round which the flowers grew.

“Here comes our good friend Honey-bag, the bee. He is very wise; perhaps he can tell you where you should go and what you are,” said the columbines, nodding joyfully as the brown velvet bee came buzzing along, for he was their postman and brought the daily news.

Eagerly they told him all about their little guest, and asked him if he had heard anything of a featherless bird, a strayed elf, or a human changeling hidden in a blue egg.

The bee said he once heard a humming-bird tell about some little creatures who were neither children nor fairies, because they were made out of the fancies in people’s heads. These poor mites never could be real boys and girls; but if they tried very hard, and were very good, wings would grow and they would be elves at last.

“I will, I will!” cried Bud. “I know I am one of those creatures, and I want to be a fairy and find my home by and by. How shall I do it?”

“I think you have begun very well; for I’ve heard of you from several friends as I came through the wood, and all say good words of you. Go on, and I am sure you will find your wings at last. See! I will do my part, and give you something to eat as you travel along.”

As the kind bee spoke he began to mix the yellow pollen and honey he had gathered, and soon handed Bud a nice little loaf of bee-bread to carry with her. She folded it up in white violet leaves, like a sweet-scented napkin, and with a horn of honey from the columbines set out again with many thanks and full of hope and courage.

Presently a cloud of gay butterflies came flocking round her, crying out, —

“Here’s a rose! I smell honey! Come and taste! No, it is an elf! Dance with us, little dear!”

Bud admired them very much, and felt very glad and proud when they lighted all over her, till she looked like one great butterfly with wings of every color.

“I cannot play with you because I am not an elf; but if you will carry me on my way toward Fairyland I will give you my honey and my bread, for I go very slowly and want to get along as quickly as I can,” said Bud, thinking that these pretty insects might help her.

The butterflies were idle things and hated to work, but they wanted the dainty loaf and the flower sweets; so they said they would try to carry Bud and save her tired little feet. They held tightly to her belt, her hair, her frock, and all flew up at once, lifting her a little way above the ground and carrying her along in a cloud of blue and yellow, red and brown wings fluttering as they went. It was hard work, and soon the smaller ones let go; so Bud began to fall, and they were forced to lay her down on the grass while they rested and ate the bee-bread every crumb.

"Take me a little farther, and then you shall have the honey," said wise Bud, who was anxious to get on, and saw that the lazy flies would leave her as soon as her provisions were gone.

"Up again!" cried the great black and golden one; and away they went, all tugging stoutly. But though the tiny maid was as light as a feather, they had little strength in either legs or wings, and soon dropped her bump in the dusty path below.

"Thanks! Here's the horn; now let me rest and get over my fall," said Bud, making up her mind that her own feet were safest, after all.

The butterflies flew away, and the small traveller sat up to see where she was. A dismal groaning caught her ear; and close by she saw a rusty old beetle feebly trying to dig a hole in the sand.

"What is the matter?" asked Bud.

"It is time to die, and I want to bury myself; but I'm so weak I'm afraid I shall not get my grave ready in time, and then I shall be eaten up by some bird, or crushed by some giant's foot," answered the beetle, kicking and shovelling away as hard as he could.

"But if you were dead you would not know it," said Bud.

"Stupid child! if I'm killed in that way I cannot live again; but if I bury myself and lie asleep till spring, I come up a grub or a young beetle, I don't know which, but I am sure of some change. So I want a good grave to rest in; for dying is only a sleep before we wake up in another shape."

"I'm glad of that!" cried Bud. "I'll help you dig, and I'll cover you nicely, and hope you will be some pretty insect by and by."

So she threw off her veil, and worked busily with a little wooden shovel till a deep grave was made. The old beetle tumbled in with a gruff "Thank you, child," and died quite comfortably, with the warm sand over him. Bud piled little stones above the place, and left him to his long sleep, happy to be able to help, and full of wonder as to whether she too would have to die before her change came.

The sun was going down now; for the butterfly party and the beetle's funeral had taken a long time, and twilight was coming on.

"I must find a place to sleep," said Bud, rather anxiously; for this was her first night alone, and she began to miss Mother Linnet's warm wings brooding over her.

But she kept up her courage and trudged on till she was so tired she was forced to stop and rest on a bank where a glow-worm had just lighted its little lamp.

"Can I stay here under this big leaf?" she asked, glad to see the friendly light and bathe her tired feet in the dewy grass.

"You cannot go much farther, for the marsh is close by, and I see you have no wings, so you never could get on," answered the worm, turning his green lamp full upon the weary little wanderer.

Bud told her story, and was just going to ask if there was anything to eat, for she was sadly hungry, when some very sweet voices called down to her from a tall bush over her head, —

"Come to us, dear! We are the marsh-honeysuckles, cousins of the columbines you met to-day. Here is supper, with a bed, and a warm welcome for the good little creature Honey-bag the bee told us about."

Bud put up her arms to a great cluster of white flowers bending down to her, and in a moment lay in a delicious place, full of sweetest fragrance, while the honeysuckles fed and petted and rocked her to sleep before she could half thank them for their kindness.

There was time for a good nap and a lovely dream before a harsh voice waked her up, and she heard a bat talking as it hung near by, with its leathery wings over its eyes to shut out the light of the glow-worm still strolling about on the bank.

"Yes, the poor little boy wandered into the bog and was nearly drowned," said the bat. "It was that naughty Willy Wisp playing tricks again, and leading people out of the right path to splash into the mud. I've scolded him many a time, but he *will* do it; for he loves to make the woodmen and the children think he is the light in their cottage windows till they fall into the marsh, and then he hides and leaves them to get out as they can."

"What a wicked fellow!" cried Bud, rubbing her eyes and sitting up to listen.

"Of course he wouldn't mind you, for he knows you hate light, and he likes to teaze you by flashing his lantern in your eyes," said the glow-worm.

"Yes, I do hate light of all kinds, and wish it were always night," scolded the bat.

"I don't! I love sunshine and stars and fireflies and glow-worms and all the bright things; so perhaps if *I* went and talked to Willy Wisp he would stop playing these naughty pranks," said Bud, much interested, and feeling that this would be a very good work to do for the dear children.

"You couldn't keep him out of mischief unless you told stories all night. He loves tales dearly, but won't stay still and listen unless they are always new and *very* charming," said the bat, peeping out with one eye to see who the stranger might be.

"I know hundreds! for I was born of a fancy, and my head is full of lovely ones, and I sing such merry songs all the birds used to listen to me for hours. If I could only reach this Willy Wisp I think I could amuse him till the people got safely home," said Bud.

"Come and try; I'll carry you," said the bat, shutting his wings and looking like a black mouse as he crept nearer for Bud to mount.

"No, no; stay with us, and don't go to that dismal marsh full of ugly things and bad air," cried the honeysuckles, trying to hold her fast with soft, sticky hands.

But Bud was eager to do all the good she might, and bravely mounted her new horse, singing as she flew away, —

"On the bat's back I do fly
After summer, merrily."

"She won't do it," said the glow-worm, putting out his lamp as he went to bed.

"Alas, no! Poor little thing! she will die over there, and never be a fairy," sighed the flowers, looking like sad white ghosts in the dim light.

A cloud of fireflies danced over the marsh, where frogs croaked, mosquitoes hummed, and tall yellow lilies rang their freckled bells. The air was damp and hot; a white mist rose from the water that glimmered between the forests of reeds and the islands of bog moss, and sleek muskrats and bright-eyed snakes glided about, while wild ducks slept with their heads under their wings in quiet corners.

A strange, shadowy place, and Bud's heart died within her as she thought of staying here alone. But she did want to see if she could make the bad Willy behave better and not lead poor people into danger; so she held fast while the bat skimmed to and fro looking for the naughty fellow. Soon he came dancing toward them, — a dark little body with a big head like a round lantern, all shining with the light inside.

"What have you brought me, old Leather-wing? — a pretty bride to cheer up the marsh, or an elf to dance at my ball to-night?" he said, looking at Bud with delight as she sat on the dusky bat, with her pink dress and silvery veil glimmering in the brightness, that now shone over her like moonlight.

"No; it is a famous story-teller, come to amuse you when you are tired of whisking about and doing mischief. Be very polite or I will take her away again," answered the bat, setting Bud down on a small green island among the bulrushes and tall marsh moss.

"Let us hear one. Stop croaking, Speckle-back, and do you ladies quit dancing while I listen. Go along, Leather-wing; she shall stay till to-morrow and see what she can do," said Willy Wisp, seating himself near Bud, while the frogs grew still and the fireflies settled on the leaves like little lamps, making the island as light as day.

"It is late now; so when you hear the clock strike twelve you can stop and go to sleep, for the people will all be safe at home and Willy can do no harm. I'll come again soon. Good-night."

And away skimmed the bat, glad to find the darkest part of the marsh and hunt gnats for supper.

Bud immediately began to tell the story of "The Merry Cockchafer," and it proved so very interesting that soon a circle of frogs surrounded the island, laughing with their great mouths and winking their bright eyes as they listened. The wild ducks woke up and came to hear also; a water-snake glided nearer, with his neighbor the muskrat; while the fireflies grew so thick on the reeds and moss that everything sparkled, and Willy Wisp nodded his bright head joyfully as he sat like a king with his court about him.

Just in the most exciting place, when the Cockchafer and the Stag-beetle were going to fight a duel about the lovely white Moth, the clock struck twelve, and Bud, who was very tired, stopped short, saying, —

"I will finish to-morrow at twilight. The last part is the best, for the Lady-bug and the wicked Grasshopper do terrible things in it."

They all begged eagerly for the end, but Bud was hoarse and must go to sleep; so every one went away to talk about this new and charming creature who had come to make the long nights pleasant. Willy Wisp went zigzagging to and fro, trying to imagine what would come next, and Bud laid her head on a bulrush pillow to dream of stars till morning.

She was rather troubled, when daylight came, to find herself a prisoner; for deep water was all round her island, and there was no way of escaping. She asked a pretty white duck to take her to a larger place, for here there was nothing to eat but the soft green buds of the sweet flag and the little sour balls of the wild-cranberry vines.

"I'm not a steamer, and I don't carry passengers," answered the duck, paddling away; for he wanted Bud to stay and tell more tales.

So there she had to live for many days, watching the long-legged herons as they stalked about fishing in the pools, seeing how the rats built their curious houses, the frogs leaped and dived, the snakes glided to and fro, and the ducklings ate flies all day long. She talked with the yellow lilies, learned the song of the whispering reeds, and climbed up the tall stems of the bulrushes to look out over the marsh and long to be on the firm ground again. The bat forgot to come and see her, and Willy grew so fond of her stories that he would sit for hours while she told them; so no one came to harm, and Bud felt that she was really doing a good thing all alone there in the dreary bog. Every one loved her and wanted her to stay; but by and by the summer was over, the fireflies died, and Willy Wisp grew pale and lazy and fell asleep easier each night, as if he too were ready to fade away till hot weather should make him lively and bright again.

"Now I might go if I could find any friend to help me," said Bud, when the wild ducks said good-by and the herons stalked away.

"I will help you," said a water-snake, popping his head up with a kinder look than one would fancy such fiery eyes could wear.

"You!" said Bud, much surprised; for she had never liked the snake very well, though she had always been kind to him.

"I am your friend if you will have me. No one cares for me, I am so ugly and have had a bad name ever since the world began; but I hope when I shed my skin I may be handsomer or change to something better, so I try to be a good snake and do what I can to make my neighbors happy."

"Poor thing! I hope you will be a pretty green adder, and live among the flowers like one I once knew. It must be hard to be contented here, and you are very kind to want to help me," said Bud, laying her little warm hand on the ugly head of the snake, who had crept up to bask in the sun.

That pleased Forked-tongue very much; for no one ever petted him, and his eyes shone like jewels as he coiled his slender body nearer Bud's feet, and lifted up his head to answer her.

"You want to go away and you shall. We shall all miss you sadly, but it will soon be cold and you need stay no longer; so I will ask my friend Sleek to gnaw these strong rushes till they fall and make bridges across the pools. You can go safely over them and find some warm, pretty place to live in till the summer comes again."

"That is a fine plan! Thank you, dear friend; let us do it at once while Willy is asleep and no one sees us," cried Bud.

So Sleek the muskrat came and made a road for her from one tuft of grass to another till she was safely on the land. Then she bade these ugly but kind friends good-by, and gladly ran about the pleasant field where autumn flowers were going to seed and dead leaves falling fast. She feasted on wild grapes, dried berries, and apples fallen from the trees since the harvest was carried in. Everything was getting ready for winter, and Bud was glad to make herself a warm suit of mullein clothes, with a little hood of thistle-down. She was fitting beechnut shells on her tiny feet for shoes when a withered plant near by called out to her, —

"Are you going far, that you put on new clothes and stout boots, little stranger?"

"I must travel till I find my own country, no matter how far away it is. Can I do any errand for you?” asked Bud, kindly.

“Yes; will you carry these seeds of mine to the great meadow over there? All my friends are there, and I long to be at home again. Some one picked me last spring and dropped me here. But I did not die; I took root and bloomed here, and must always stay unless some one will take my seeds back. Then I shall come up in my own place next spring and be a happy flower again.”

“I will do it,” said Bud; “but I thought the wind took your seeds about for you.”

“Some are too heavy. Pine seeds, maple keys, thistle and dandelion down, and many others blow about; but some of us grow from our roots, and some, like me, come from seeds kept in little bags. I’m called Shepherd’s-purse, and I’m a humble weed; but I love my own people and long to see them again.”

“You shall!” cried Bud; and gathering the three-cornered bags she took them carefully away to the meadow where other plants like this one were glad to hear of their lost friend and to watch over the gift she sent them.

Remembering how pleasant and comfortable it was to find various flowers blooming along the roadside like hospitable inns for tiny travellers like herself, good Bud spent several days in planting roots and seeds beside the path that led through the meadow.

“Now children, birds, butterflies, and fairies will be glad to find these pretty things blooming here, though they will never know who planted them,” she said, when the last task was done.

The frost had come, and nuts were rattling down, leaves turning brown, and cold winds beginning to blow; so poor Bud looked about as she went through a wood to find some safe, warm place to sleep in, for a time at least, because she felt sure that when the snow came she would die, so small and delicate and friendless was the dear little thing. When she came to a great oak she sat down on an acorn cup, and tried to break the hard shell of an acorn that she might nibble a bit for her dinner. She could not do it, and sat thinking sadly what would become of her, when a sweet acorn without its shell dropped into her lap, and, looking up, she saw a gray squirrel peeping at her from a branch above her head. She smiled, and thanked him, and he came down with a whisk to sit opposite and look at her with his fine tail over his head like an umbrella.

“I know you, little maid, and I’m glad you came here, for I can show you a charming house for the winter. I heard you tell a field-mouse how lonely you were, and I saw tears dropping just now as you sat here thinking you had not a friend in the world,” said Dart, as he nodded at her and kindly cracked a chestnut to follow the acorn if she needed more.

“Every one is very kind to me, but every one seems to go to sleep when autumn comes; so I felt alone and sad, and expected to die in the snow. But if I can find a cosey place to live in till spring I shall be very glad, and will do anything I can to pay for it," answered Bud, much comforted by her good dinner and a kind word.

"If you will help me get in my nuts and acorns and moss and leaves for winter food and bedding, I will let you use the Kobolds' house till they come. They are jolly little fellows, and they will allow you to stay, and teach you to spin; for they spin all winter, and make lovely cloth for the elves out of silkweed and thistle-down. Here is their house. I hide it and take care of it while they are gone, and get it ready for them in the autumn, as they come with the first snow."

While Dart spoke he had been clearing away a pile of dead leaves at the foot of the old oak, and soon Bud saw an arched doorway leading into the hollow trunk, where the roots made different chambers, and all was dry and warm and cosey as a little house. She went in and looked about, well pleased at what she saw, and very glad of such a comfortable home. She hoped the Kobolds would let her stay, and set to work at once to help Dart get ready for them; for the sky looked dark with snow, and a cold wind rustled through the wood.

In one room they stored nuts and acorns, rose and holly berries, a dried apple or two, and many pine cones to burn; for Dart showed her a little fireplace, and told her the Kobolds kept themselves very warm and jolly at their work. In another room they spread moss and dry grass for beds, and there the seven little men would sleep like dormice. The empty cocoon of a caterpillar still hung in one corner, and Bud said that should be her hammock with a curtain made of woven yellow bindweed hung before the nook. They swept the floor with fir-needle brooms, and spread a carpet of red oak leaves, which gave a very gay air to the place. Then Dart left Bud to fill a row of acorn cups with water from a spring near by, while he ran off to nibble splinters from the pitch pines to make torches for the Kobolds, who worked in the evening and needed light.

Bud was as happy as a little girl with a new baby-house, and looked like a tiny doll herself as she bustled to and fro, filling her tubs, dusting her pretty rooms, and getting ready for the seven strangers, like Snowdrop and the dwarfs in the dear old fairy tale. All was ready in two days, and Dart had time to lay up his own stores before the snow came. Bud watched over the heaps of nuts he piled lest his sly neighbors should steal them while he ran up and down tucking them away in holes about the oak-tree. This helped him much, and he was very fond of her; and together they got up a nice surprise for the Kobolds by putting in new beds for them made of chestnut burrs, which rocked on their outside prickles like cradles, and were lined with down as soft as silk.

"That will tickle them," said Dart; "and when they know that you thought of it, they will like you as much as I do. Now rest a bit, and be ready to welcome them, for I'm sure they will come to-day. I'll run to the tree-top and look out for them, so you can light the fire when I give the word."

Dart whisked away, and Bud stood in the doorway, with a warm mat of hemlock sprigs under her feet, and a garland of evergreen overhead; for she had trimmed up the arch, and stuck bits of gay holly all about to welcome the little men. Soon snow-flakes began to flutter down, and Bud rejoiced that she had a nice, warm home to stay in, instead of freezing to death like a lost bird. Suddenly Dart called from the tree-top, "They are coming!" and hurried down to rub two sticks together till a spark flew out and set the pine cone on the hearth ablaze. "Run to the door and courtesy when you see them," he said, fanning the fire with his bushy tail, in a great state of excitement.

Bud peeped out and was just going to say, "I see nothing but snow," when she saw that what looked like a party of flakes blowing up to the door was really the seven Kobolds loaded with great piles of white silkweed for their spinning. She dropped her best courtesy, smiled her sweetest smile, and called out, "Welcome home, my masters!" like a little maidservant, as she led the way to the large room, now bright and warm with the fire roaring up the chimney made by a hole in the old roots.

"Ha, ha! Neighbor Dart, you have done well this time, and we are satisfied with you. Now just store away our packs while we go for our wheels, and then we will have supper. But first, tell us who this pretty person is, if you please?" said the oldest of the Kobolds, while the others stood nodding and looking at Bud as if she pleased them well.

"Your new housekeeper, gentlemen," answered Dart, and in a few words told them all about his friend, — how she had helped get ready for them, what fine tales and songs she knew, and how much good she had done and still hoped to do while waiting for her wings to grow.

"Good, very good! She shall stay with us, and we will take care of her till spring. Then we will see what happens;" and they all smiled and nodded harder than ever, as if they knew something charming but would not tell it yet.

Then they clapped on their funny pointed hats, and trotted away before Bud could thank them half enough. While they were gone Dart showed her how to put a row of chestnuts on the hearth to roast, and how to set the table, which was a dry mushroom propped up on four legs in the middle of the room, with little toadstools to sit on. Acorn cups full of berries and water, and grains of wheat and barley were arranged on it, with a place for the chestnuts when they were done, and some preserved apple on an oak-leaf platter. Several torches were lighted and stuck in holes at the four corners of the table, and then all was ready, and

Bud put on a little white apron made of her torn veil, and waited like a neat cook to dish up supper when her masters arrived.

Presently they came, each lugging a tiny spinning-wheel on his back; for they hid them in a cave among the rocks all summer, and got them out when the time for their winter work was come again. Dart helped them settle down a bit, and then left them to eat and rest; while Bud waited on them so nicely they wondered how they ever got on without a maid before. She was not at all afraid of them now; for they were jolly little fellows, with fat bodies, thin legs, rosy faces, and sharp eyes. All were dressed in white down suits, and wore droll pointed hats made of some seed pod, and boots of magic stuff which carried them great distances as if blown by the wind.

They liked their supper very much, and ate and drank and chatted pleasantly till all were done; then they sat round the fire and smoked sweet fern in Indian pipes till Bud had cleared away.

“Now come and sing to us,” they said; and the youngest Kobold politely set a stool in the warmest corner for her.

So Bud sang all her gayest songs to their great delight, and told her adventures; and all were very cosey till it was time to sleep. The little men were charmed with their new beds, and pulling poppy-pod nightcaps over their heads tumbled in with drowsy good-nights, leaving Bud to cover up the fire, shut the front door, and put out the lights. Soon she was in her own soft hammock; and nothing broke the silence but the sigh of the wind, the tap of falling snow-flakes on dry leaves outside, and seven little snores inside, as the tired Kobolds dreamed cosily in their new beds.

Bud was up early next day, and had everything ready when the little men came out to breakfast. After it they set their wheels whirling, and all day long they spun busily till many skeins of shining silk were ready to be woven into elfin cloth. Bud soon learned, and they made her a wheel; so she could work with them. They seldom spoke, and never ate nor stopped till night; then the wheels stood still, and the spinners went out for a run while Bud got supper.

In the evening they went coasting if it was moonlight, or owl-hunting, and had gay times in the wood, whisking Bud with them, or sliding down hillocks of snow on their sleds of bark, while Dart looked on, well wrapped up in his gray fur coat.

But stormy nights they sat at home, and told stories and played games, and were very merry, and Bud learned many wise and interesting things; for the Kobolds knew all kinds of fairies, nixies, goblins, and spirits, and had been in many lands.

It was very pleasant; but when the last month of winter came Bud began to be so sleepy she could not keep her eyes open, and sat nodding as she spun, gaping instead of singing, and was often found dreaming in her bed when she should have been up and at work. She was much troubled about it, but could not help it; and the Kobolds only laughed, slyly felt of her shoulders, and told her to sleep away, for their work was nearly done and they did not need her.

One morning Bud did not wake up at all, and when the little men peeped at her there she lay rolled up in her hammock very like a chrysalis in its shell.

“All right,” laughed the imps, nodding at one another; “let her sleep while the wings grow, and in May she will wake up to a prettier surprise than the one she gave us.”

So they finished their work, packed up the silk, and as soon as the snow was gone they hid their wheels, had a farewell feast with Dart, and departed, begging him to watch over Bud, and have their house ready for them next year.

Day after day the grass grew greener, the buds larger, the air warmer, and the world more beautiful as spring flew over it; but Bud still lay asleep in her little bed, and the faithful squirrel went every morning to see that she was safe. May came at last, and the pink flowers under the leaves pushed out their rosy faces; birds sang among the green bushes, and the sun shone brightly as the little wood creatures ventured out one by one for another happy summer.

Then Bud woke from her long sleep, stretched her small arms and legs like a baby after its nap, looked about her to see where she was, and sprang up, fearing it was too late to get the Kobolds’ breakfast. But the house was empty, the fire was out, the wheels gone, and nothing to be seen but a lovely white silk dress lying on the table with her name woven in tiny buds all over it. While she was looking at it with delight, Dart came in, and skipped for joy to see her awake again and prettier than ever; for while she slept she had grown very beautiful. Her winter gown was withered up, and fell off as she got out of bed, leaving her all ready for the new silver-white gown, which she gladly put on.

“Pull away my old hood that lies there on my shoulders, and let me tie my pretty dress with this fine belt,” said Bud, feeling something on her back.

Dart’s black eyes sparkled as he answered with a gay whisk, —

“Shake yourself and see what happens. But don’t go till I have time to admire the splendid princess ready for Fairyland.”

Bud shook; and, lo! a pair of blue and silver wings unfolded from her little shoulders, and there she stood, a shining creature, gay as a butterfly, delicate as an elf, lovely as a happy child; while Dart waved his tail like a banner as he cried joyfully, —

“The Kobolds said it would be so because you tried so hard to be and do good! Now you can go home and lead a happy life in Fairyland.”

Bud could only clap her hands and laugh for joy, and try to see the beautiful wings she had worked and waited for so long.

“Thank you very much for all your kindness to me, dear Dart; I will come again and see you and the little men if I can. Now I must go and try to fly before I set out for home,” she said, and hastened to the door, where wood violets were watching for her with eager blue eyes, while the robins, wrens, and linnets sang to welcome her.

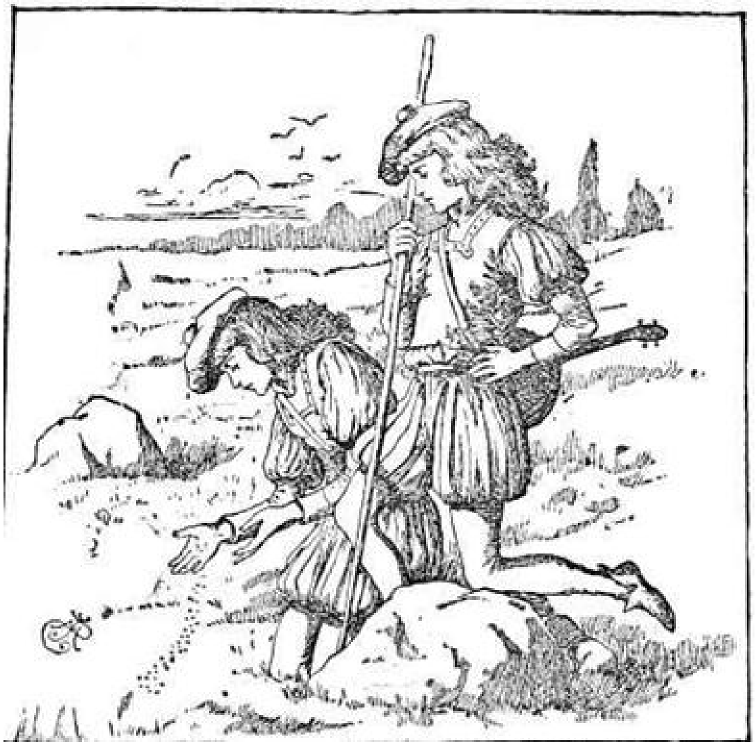
There was no need to learn how to fly; the lovely wings lifted her lightly up, and away she went like a new-born butterfly glittering in the sunshine. It was so delightful that she could hardly bear to come down to the earth again; so she perched on a high branch of the old oak and took a peep at Dart’s home before she said good-by to him.

“How shall I find my way to Fairyland?” she asked, eager to be off, for the longing was stronger than ever in her heart.

“I have come to show you the road,” answered a shrill small voice, as a splendid humming-bird lit on the branch beside her, its breast sparkling like a jewel, and its long bill full of honey, while its quivering wings made the softest music.

“I am ready! Good-by, dear friends! good-by, great world! I love you, but I must go to my own people,” cried Bud, and with a flash of the blue and silver wings she was gone.

But for many a winter’s night her story was told by the Kobolds as they spun around their fire; and for many a long day did bird and bee, beetle, ant, and flower, love and remember little Bud.



So they chose a sunny spot on a lonely moor, where the earth was rich, and a brook kept it moist, and there they planted the seeds and tended them carefully. — Page 257.

THE FLOWER’S STORY.

Marion had been ill, and was still so weak that she had to lie on her bed many hours each day trying to sleep and rest. One winter afternoon when the snow fell quietly outside and the room was very still, with Nurse dozing in her chair, the kitten purring on the rug, and nothing new or pretty to look at but a bunch of pansies in a glass beside the bed, Marion said to herself with a sigh, —

“If I only had some one to tell me a story I should be able to get through this long day without fretting. But Mamma is away, Nurse is tired, and I know all my books by heart; so what can I do, since I’m too tired to play with my dolls?”

No one answered this important question; and Marion sighed again as she turned to look at the other side of the room, hoping to discover some help or amusement in that direction. The queer ladies on the great Japanese fan over the glass stared at her with their small eyes, but seemed too busy drinking tea out of red and yellow teapots to take any interest in the pale little girl on the bed. The pins sat primly in the blue satin cushion as usual; but neither the pearl fly, the golden rose-headed one, nor the funny mourning brooch Nurse was so fond of, — with hair in it, and a picture of a fat baby at the back, — could amuse Marion now. The dolls lay piled up in the cradle, with their poor arms and legs sticking out in all directions, sadly neglected by their little mamma; while the dear books upon the shelves had been read so often lately that they had nothing new and pleasant to offer now.

“Oh dear! I wish the birds on the wall-paper or the children in the pictures hanging round my room could sing and talk to me. I’ve been so good and patient I really think some one *ought* to take pity on a poor little sick girl and do something to please her,” said Marion, with a third sigh, heavier than the others.

It made such a breeze that it blew one of the flowers out of the glass. Marion took it up and looked at it, ready for any playmate, even a ladies’-delight.

It was a very pretty one, and showed such a smiling face among its dark and bright petals that the child felt as if she had found a friend, and kissed it softly, being rather tender-hearted just then as well as lonely.

To her great surprise the flower nodded at her, and then a faint, sweet voice said, as she still held it close to her face, —

“Now I can speak, and am very glad to come and amuse you; for we have been pitying you very much, because we also are lonely and homesick so far from our own people.”

“Why, you dear little thing, how lovely it is to hear you talk and see you smile at me! Please tell me all about yourself. I’m fond of flowers, and was so pleased when one of my schoolmates sent me this pretty nosegay of pansies,” said Marion, charmed with this surprise.

“I have no story; for I was born in a green-house, and have lived in a little flower-pot all my life, with many sisters, who are carried away when they bloom, and never come back again. We only sat for a few hours in a shop before we were pinned in paper, and brought here by a dreadful boy, who left us at your door. We were much pleased to find ourselves in this pretty vase of fresh water in a quiet, warm room, with a gentle mistress to look at us. Now, if you want a story about our people, I will tell you an old one that all our family know and like very much.”

“Do!” cried Marion; and then, with kitty asleep on her arm, she lay and listened with the deepest interest to this little history of —

THE PRINCES AND THE PANSIES:

A FAIRY TALE.

Once upon a time there was a King who had two little sons, named Purple and Plush because they always wore mourning for their mother, who died when they were born. The King would not wear purple, which is the proper color for royal sorrow. He was a very selfish man, and cared only for his own comfort; so he lived in his splendid rooms, and amused himself among his books, quite lazy and contented in his green velvet dressing-gown and red cap, sleeping a great deal, reading, and drinking wine so that he might forget the loss of his beautiful queen.

He did not care about his little sons, and left them to the nurses and then the tutors, as they grew up from babies to pretty boys, so sweet and wise and good that people said the spirit of their dead mother must watch over them; and perhaps it did. They were always together, always busy, always kind and gentle, but rather sad, because their father did not love them; and all the affection of the many friends they made could not make up for the loss of father and mother love.

His subjects wanted the King to marry again, so that the court might be gay with feasts and balls and splendid games as it used to be; but he was too selfish and lazy to disturb himself, till a certain beautiful lady came to see him. She was a widow, with two little daughters, named Primrose and Daffodil because they always wore yellow gowns. Their mother was the Princess Jonquil, and dressed in cloth of gold. She was very proud, and wished to be queen; so she put on a purple velvet cloak, and made the little girls wear purple hats to look as if they mourned like the rest of the kingdom, and went to court to marry the King. They were all so pretty and charming that every one admired and welcomed them; and while the Princess played chess and read poetry to amuse his Majesty, the children played together and tried to be friends.

But Primrose and Daffodil were vain and selfish and wilful; and the little Princes soon found that they expected to have their own way about everything, and flew into sad passions if any one dared to reprove them. So the little boys were more unhappy than ever when they were told that their father was to marry the Princess, and these disagreeable girls were to be their half-sisters.

There was a splendid wedding, and the bells rang, and the trumpets sounded, and every one feasted and danced; for the fountains were filled with wine, and tables were spread in the market-place, so that all the poor people could have a good time as well as the rich. The new Queen was very anxious to please her subjects, and made things so gay that at first every one praised her; and the King gladly let her rule, as it left him quiet with his books and bottles. Now the little girls were prouder than ever, and shone like the sun in their fine new gowns. But the Princes would not change their purple velvet suits, though they put on gold belts and set jonquils in their caps in honor of the Queen. They tried to enjoy the gayety, but soon found that they were neglected by every one; for people saw who was to have the power, and hastened to pet and flatter the young Princesses in order to please their mother. She showed how she meant to rule the first time she took the throne; for the King was not there, and she sat alone in her cloth-of-gold robes very splendid to see. She put her daughters one at each side on the green satin chairs set for the Princes, and ordered the poor boys to share her footstool between them.

Some people were very angry at this, and told the King. But he only said: “Don’t trouble me. Her Majesty will do as she thinks best; and my sons will obey her as if they were her own.” So nothing could be done; and the gentle boys sat at the Queen’s feet, while the vain little girls rustled and smiled and tossed their heads on the high seats where they did not belong.

This was the beginning of sad times for the Princes; for the new mother wanted them out of the way that she might reign when the King died. She dared not send them away so soon; but she ordered them to live quietly with their tutors and servants in a lonely part of the palace, and never allowed them to come to the feasts, the hunting-parties, or any of the splendid shows with which she amused the people. Since their father did not object, the boys obeyed, and amused themselves by working among the flowers with old Adam, the gardener, who taught them many curious, useful, and beautiful things about trees and plants. They also learned to play and sing, and often sat in the summer evenings making music with their little lutes sweeter than that of the nightingales in the rose-bushes, or the court concerts, where the bad Queen and the proud Princesses sat in all their splendor. The boys studied and grew wise with the teachers, who loved them; but as time went by they began to long for more freedom and pleasure, when the horns blew and all the great people rode away to hunt the deer or fly their falcons. They begged the Queen to let them see their father; but when she saw what handsome, tall lads they were growing she was more anxious than ever to get rid of them, and in the night she sent her soldiers to take them to the tower, where they were shut up in a high room, with only bread and water to live on, — no books, no friends, no freedom; for no one knew where they were, because the Queen told the father that they had run away, and when he had sent some people to look for them he troubled himself no more about the matter.

So they lived for a year all alone in the tower; but they were not very unhappy, for the sun smiled in at them, birds built nests in the ivy that covered the gray walls, and the wind sang them to sleep as it roared or whispered round their high room. They loved and cheered each other, and kept up their courage till one day no bread and water was put in at the little wicket of the door. For three days no food came, and then they knew that the wicked Queen meant to starve them to death. People thought them lost; and all but the few who were faithful forgot the Princes and obeyed the Queen, who now ruled over them like a tyrant, while her daughters grew more proud and selfish every day, and the old King slept most of the time, careless of everything but his ease.

“Now, brother, we must escape, for it is plain that no one will help us; so we will help ourselves,” said Purple bravely, resolving not to starve to death to please a cruel stepmother.

“We will,” cried Plush; “but how can we get out of this high tower with no ladder?”

“We will make one. I’ve often planned it all, but thought it our duty to obey. Now it is right to take care of ourselves, and try to reach our father if we can. Let us braid ropes of the straw of our beds, the blankets and sheets, and as many of our clothes as we can spare. All these will not make a ladder long enough to reach the ground; but it will carry us down to where the ivy branches are strong, and from there we can climb safely to the bottom. We will go by night and find good old Adam. He will feed and help us and tell us what to do.”

“A splendid plan! Let us set to work while our strength holds out or it will be too late,” answered Plush, who was very white and weak with hunger.

Busily flew the fingers, and soon long coils of cord were made; while the poor lads chewed leaves and drank the rain to keep themselves alive. At last they had enough to reach a long way down; and when night came Purple made his brother go first, — for he was an hour younger, and rather lighter, and he wanted to be sure he was safe before he escaped himself. Down climbed Plush, while the other lad leaned out, with his hands on the frail ladder, holding his breath till the dark figure was out of sight in the gloom, and a soft whistle told him that all was safe with the dear boy. Then he followed, and Plush caught him in his arms as he came climbing down; while all the little birds sat silent in their nests among the ivy, and not a stout branch broke under the clinging hands and feet, — for birds and plants loved them, and were faithful friends, as we shall see.

In the darkness the Princes found their way to Adam’s house in the great garden, and were welcomed joyfully; for the old man thought them dead. When he heard their story he told them that they could never reach their father, and that they were in danger of their lives if they tried to do so; for the Queen was very cruel and powerful, and would not let them live if she could help it.

"Go away till you are grown, my dear little masters; then come back as men and take the kingdom that belongs to you."

"But how can we live? What can we do, since we have no money or friends to help us?" asked the boys, as they rested after a good supper.

"Here are your lutes," said old Adam; "I took care of them for you; and you can go singing through the world, and so earn money for your bread. I will give you some magic seeds which my father left me, saying that they would not grow unless royal hands planted them, when they would bring fortune to the happy owner for whom they bloomed. I taught you how to garden; so when you are safely out of the kingdom sow the seed in some wild spot, and see if the story is true. I have nothing else to give you but bread and wine and all good wishes, my dear wronged Princes. God be with you, and bring you safely home again to reign over us long and happily."

The brothers thanked him heartily, and at dawn stole out of the city with their lutes at their backs, wallets of food at their sides, and each wrapped in a russet mantle made out of Adam's old cloak. Freedom and fresh air soon gave them back their strength and courage, and when they were at a safe distance from home they began to sing and play in the villages as they travelled along. With their faded suits, bonny faces, and gentle manners, they were a charming pair of young troubadours, and every one was glad to listen to the sweet music they made. Rich people threw silver into the caps they held up when the songs were done, and poor people gladly gave them food and beds since they had no money to give. In this way they got on very pleasantly through the winter, for in that country there was no snow; and the lads grew strong and brave trudging over hill and dale, with no enemies but wind and rain to fear, and leaving many friends behind them. They liked the free life, though it was hard; but they never forgot that they were princes, even when their purple suits were in rags and the russet cloaks worn out. Nothing mean or selfish, cruel or unjust, ever disturbed the peace of their honest hearts and clean consciences; and many generous acts, gentle words, and brave thoughts made the beggar lads kings of themselves at least, and very rich in the blessings of those whom they so kindly helped and comforted.

When spring came they were far from home, and felt that it was time to try the fairy flowers. So they chose a sunny spot on a lonely moor, where the earth was rich, and a brook kept it moist, and no one cared what they did, and there they planted the seeds and tended them carefully. While waiting for the blossoms they built a hut of green branches, and lived on wild berries, the rabbits they snared, the fish they caught, and the black bread they bought of an old woman who came to look for herbs. They had saved a little money, and when that was gone one of them would wander off for a few days singing some more into the bag, while the other watched over the bed of tender plants fast growing green and strong.

They wondered what the magic flowers would be, and often feared that they would never bloom, it was so long before any buds appeared.

"If no flowers come we shall know that we are not the right gardeners, though we *are* royal," said Purple, as he watered the bed one day.

"Then we will go on singing till we get round the world, brother. By that time we shall be men and can fight for our kingdom," answered Plush, weeding busily in among the low plants that spread far and wide with large tightly folded buds on all of them.

"Our old neighbor, the herb-woman, is very curious about this plot of ours, and wants to know what we are going to raise here. I told her we did not know, but when the flowers came she might see them, because she is very wise and this may be some new herb which will cure the sick. That would be a pleasant thing to do, even if we never made a fortune."

"Indeed it would! I'd rather make people happy than be a king, and so would you, brother."

As the boys spoke a very sweet perfume filled the air, and all the leaves rustled softly as if the south wind stirred them. Then everything was still again, and the larks twittered high above their heads as if they were telling some good news to the beautiful blue world far above the clouds.

Next morning, when the Princes went to their garden, lo! it was all in bloom, and lay there like a gold and purple carpet fit for a king. The flowers were pansies, but such as were never seen before; for these were very large and all alike, looking like little faces, half sad, half cheerful, as the yellow and the dark leaves framed them in. They were very sweet, and as they nodded in the wind seemed to be whispering something to one another so interesting that the lads longed to know the pretty story they were telling.

"What can we do with them, and how can they bring us good luck?" said the elder brother, looking seriously down at the lovely things.

"Enjoy them first, then sell them in little posies, and so make money; for they are the finest ever seen, and people will be glad to buy them," answered the younger, as he began to gather the great beauties at his feet.

"So we can, and keep the seed, and go on planting and selling till we are rich. It is slow work, but we learned to be patient in the tower, and will wait to see what fortune heart's-ease is to bring us," said Prince Purple, going down on his knees before a group of lovely flowers, who bent as if glad to be gathered by such gentle hands.

"Heyday! what have we here? Surely you are fairy gardeners, my sons, to bring such splendid blossoms out of this wild moor," said a cracked voice behind them, as the old herb-woman came hobbling up with her apron full of mushrooms and her basket of sweet-smelling roots and leaves.

"Only pansies, mother, for the market," answered Plush, looking up with a smile.

"See how sweet they are! You shall have the first because you are so kind to us," added Purple, offering her a bunch of them as gallantly as if he were kneeling to a queen instead of an old woman as brown and wrinkled as a withered leaf.

"Good lads! I'll be still kinder and read the story these fine flowers are trying to tell," she said, as her eyes shone and her skinny hands turned the pansies to and fro. "I can read all plants, and so I learn many strange things. See if you understand this sad tale, for this is what is written on these flowers, and it must be true, for they cannot lie."

The Princes drew nearer and watched curiously as a trembling finger pointed out the different parts while the old woman spoke, glancing into their tell-tale faces now and then.

"There are five leaves. This great golden one sits alone on her green seat at the top. These two smaller yellow ones, with a touch of purple in them, sit on either side; but these two purple ones have only one seat between them, though they are the handsomest of all. Now look here in the middle, and see this little image like a man in a green gown and a red cap hiding away in the warmest, safest place with a bag of seeds which will ripen by-and-by if he will let the sun in. Come now, do you see any meaning to that, my sons?" asked the old soul, with a sharp look at the boys, who blushed and smiled and sighed, but could not speak, for here was their own sad story truly told in the magic flower.

The herb-woman nodded wisely, but only said in a kind tone, as she put the posy in her bosom, —

"Heart's-ease won't grow for every one, but all the world wants it and will pay well for it; so sell your pansies, lads, and earn a fortune worth having. I'll be in the market-place when you come, and say a good word for you, though you don't need it with such bonny faces and gentle ways of your own."

Then she went away, and the wondering Princes made haste to pick all the flowers that were in bloom, tying the bunches up with sweet-scented grass, and laying them in baskets of green rushes which they had made. A pretty sight it was; for the little pansy faces seemed to smile up at whoever looked, the sweet breath called out, “Come and buy us!” and the dew sparkled on the leaves like diamonds on the gold and purple robes of some queen.

When the Princes came to the town they stood in the market-place and cried their wares like the other people with fruit and vegetables; but their faces were so noble, their voices so clear, their flowers so large and beautiful, that in spite of their poor clothes and humble work every one who saw and heard them felt that there was something strange and interesting about the fine boys who called so sweetly, —

“Heart’s-ease! here’s fresh heart’s-ease! Who’ll buy? Who’ll buy?”

All who passed were charmed with the great pansies, for the like had never been seen in that country; so the baskets were soon empty, and more than one bit of gold shone among the copper and silver coins in their pockets, because the rich as well as the poor hastened to buy heart’s-ease. Much pleased with their day’s work, the lads went gayly home to water the bed and rejoice over the buds that were thicker than ever. After that they sold flowers all summer long; for the magic pansies kept on blooming till the frost came, and every one who bought them discovered that they really did bring comfort and happy thoughts, and this made high and low eager to get them. Doctors sent for them for the sick; sad people ordered many to cheer them up; even bad people loved them because the bright faces, half grave, half gay, never reproached them, but smiled so pleasantly, that they woke better feelings in the evil minds. Far and wide flew the fame of this new herb, as they called it; and kings and queens begged for the seed, since they especially needed heart’s-ease. Several plants even reached the lazy King as he sat in his luxurious room drinking his wine, studying, and sleeping; and the sight of the flowers woke him up, for his beautiful dead wife’s name was Pansy, and he began to wonder where his sons could be and to ask about them.

The Queen also needed the wonderful herb, for she was troubled by the disorder of her kingdom. Her subjects did not love her, and grew tired of being taxed to pay for her splendor. They began to rebel, especially the poor, of whom she took no care, but left them to starve and suffer while she enjoyed herself. Even the rich and noble people became discontented and wanted to be still richer and nobler, and quarrelled among themselves, and hinted that she had killed or banished the Princes, who ought to be ruling, and would now do it better than she did.

Primrose and Daffodil had sent for the magic flowers because they wanted everything new and pretty that they heard of, no matter what it cost. When the lovely things arrived in beautiful china urns, the young Princesses were charmed with them and forbade any one else to have them.

"These are our colors, and these flowers shall be our royal badge, and no one must wear them under pain of death," they said; and they put their servants as well as themselves into new suits of purple velvet and gold, very splendid to see, with pansies everywhere, — on carriages and clothes, banners and furniture, — very proud of the graceful coat-of-arms.

But they, like their mother, soon found that the name meant something more than a pretty flower; for *pensée* is the French for "a thought," and into their careless minds came thoughts of all the harm they had done, as if the breath of the new-fashioned violet reproached them, while the sweet little faces recalled the sad ones of the banished boys whose places they had unjustly taken.

So all were ill at ease, and the spell of the flower began to work at home as well as abroad, helping to make things ready for the wanderers when they should return.

Meantime the Princes were travelling round the world, learning much and growing wise and good as well as tall and brave, and handsomer than ever. In the winter time they sang and played, and no Christmas feast was merry without the lute-players, no peasant's wedding quite perfect till they came, and often in palaces they made music for lords and ladies to dance by, and were generously paid. But what they liked better was to sing in prisons, hospitals, or poor places, where they not only gave pleasure but money, and then stole away without stopping to be thanked, so happy to be able to help the sad and sick and suffering.

In summer they rested in some pleasant spot, and planted the magic seed which would grow in any soil and was admired everywhere. So they went on their way busily and happily, leaving music and flowers behind them, and making the world brighter and better by sweet sounds and happy thoughts, till they were called "The Blessed Boys," and were waited for and welcomed and loved east and west and north and south.

Summers and winters passed, and they were tall youths when they came again to their father's kingdom in their journey round the world. But though old and wise enough now to rule, and sure to be gladly received by the discontented people, they found that they no longer felt bitter and angry with those who had wronged them. Time had taught them to forgive and forget; their peaceful, happy life made war distasteful, and they loved freedom so well that they had no heart to force others to obey.

"We reign over a larger and lovelier kingdom than this, our subjects love us dearly, and we are not tied to a throne, but are as free as the wind; let us be content with this, and ask for nothing more," said Prince Purple to his brother, as they looked down on the familiar city while resting on a hill outside the gates.

"I don't care to be shut up in a palace and obliged to live by rule any more. But if what we heard is true, there is plenty of work to do for the poor here, and we have saved so much we can at least begin to help those who suffer most. No one need know us, and we can be at work while waiting for our father to remember and recall us," answered Plush, who was as princely yet as delicate as the soft silken stuff he loved to wear.

So they disguised themselves as young Brothers of Mercy in black hoods and gowns, and went into the city looking about them for a home. Old Adam was still alive, but very poor now; for the Queen had sent him away when the Princes escaped, and the King had forgotten him. The boys found him out and told him who they were, and lived with him, making the old man very happy, proud, and comfortable. All day they went about among the poor, helping them in many ways; for the money they had earned never seemed to give out, no matter how generous they were. Heart's-ease sprang up where they walked, as if the magic seeds fell out of their pockets unseen; and soon they could be traced all over the city by happy faces, and the pots of pansies in humble windows where no flowers would ever grow before. No one knew them by any name but that of "The Brothers;" and many sick, sad souls blessed them for the good they did so quietly.

Before long, tidings of these wonderful young men reached the palace, where the old King now lay ill, and the Queen lived in fear of her life, for the people hated her and might break out at any moment. She sent for the Brothers; and they came at once, hoping to do some good. Nobody recognized the pretty Princes in the tall young monks, half hidden in their hoods and gowns; but comfort and courage seemed to come with them, for the sick King grew stronger when they prayed or sang beside him, and the sad Queen took heart, and confessed her sins to them, begging them to tell her what to do, since selfish splendor brought neither happiness, love, nor honor.

"Repent, and undo the wrong you have done," answered one Brother, boldly.

"But the Princes are lost or dead, and my people hate me," sighed the poor Queen.

"God has taken better care of the motherless boys than you did, and they will come back when it is time. Do you pity and help your people. Make them love and trust you; then you will be safe and happy, and your kingdom glorious," said the other Brother in his gentle voice.

"I will, I will!" cried the Queen, while repentant tears fell on her cloth-of-gold mantle, which was not dimmed by the salt drops, but seemed to shine the brighter for them.

Then she took counsel with the Brothers; and while Plush nursed and cheered the old father, Purple helped his stepmother to win the confidence of her people by giving bread and money generously, building better houses for them, making wiser laws, and ruling with mercy and justice, till peace came back and the danger of rebellion was over, — for kindness conquers all things.

The Princesses at first objected to these changes, and were angry with the new-comers for preaching self-denial, humility, and simplicity; but the monks made them so beautiful by their persuasive words and lovely lives that soon these royal girls, as well as all their ladies, began to see how selfish and frivolous their days had been and to long for better things.

It took time to teach them to freely put away their fine clothes, forget their luxurious habits, and heartily enjoy good books, wise society, real charity, and all the sweet, simple duties, pleasures, and lessons which make life happy and death peaceful when it comes to kings as well as beggars.

Slowly the beautiful work went on. The old father seemed to wake up and wonder why he had been wasting time in dreams. It was too late now for him to rule; he had not strength enough, and he vainly longed for his brave boys. The Queen sat alone on the throne, forgiven and loved, and might have been happy if the thought of the lost Princes had not haunted her till she was so full of remorse and sorrow she resolved to go into a convent and do penance for her sins. But who should reign in her place? The King was too old and feeble, the Princesses too young, and the rightful heirs were lost or dead.

“Now is the time!” said Purple. “We are needed, and must enter into our kingdom before some usurper comes to take it.”

“I am ready, brother; and we both are fitter to rule as princes for having learned to work, wait, and be happy as beggars,” answered Plush.

There was to be a grand council of all the wise men, great lords, and good people to decide about a new king; for the Queen wanted to abdicate, being tired of her splendor. When all were gathered together, and the beautiful ladies looked down from the gallery at the knights in armor, the gray-headed ministers, and the sturdy citizens, every one was glad to see the beloved Brothers come in and stand humbly at the lower end of the council board. They were welcome everywhere; for though so young, they seemed to understand the hearts of people better than the old men who studied books all their long lives. After much debate the Queen said, as she left the great golden chair empty, —

“Let us leave it to our good friends who have helped us so much, and taught us to see what is needed on a throne. Dear Brothers, come up hither, and tell us who shall sit here, for I am not worthy.”

Without a word the two young monks went to the high place, and, standing on either side of the Queen, dropped off their disguises. There, brave in purple velvet suits, with the golden heads and handsome faces of the royal boys, older and graver, but still the same, — there were the lost Princes, come to their own at last!

People were so startled that for a moment no one spoke or stirred; all stood up and stared silently while Purple said, with a smile and gesture that won their hearts, —

“We are ready to take our rightful places, if you need us, glad to forget the past, forgive our wrongs, and try to make the future happier for all. We have been prisoners, beggars, gardeners, minstrels, and monks in our long wanderings. Now we are princes again, more fit to rule because of the hard lessons we have learned; while time and poverty and pain have taught us the value of patience, justice, courage, and mercy.”

As he ended a great shout greeted them, and the Queen fell at their feet praying for pardon; while Primrose and Daffodil hid their faces, remembering the cruel things they had said and done. There could be no doubt that the Princes were welcome home and well beloved, for soon all over the city flew the glad news. Bells rang, bonfires blazed, people danced and sang, and feasts were spread in palaces and cottages in honor of the Blessed Boys.

The old King was startled wide awake, and so delighted that he got straight out of his bed, cured of all his ills but age, as if by magic. The Queen smiled again, and felt that she was forgiven; penitent Primrose and Daffodil grew as sweet and gay as the flowers they were named for, and the Princes fell in love with them in the good old fairy-tale fashion. Everything was all right now, and the kingdom soon looked like a great garden of pansies; for the chosen flower blossomed everywhere, and rich and poor loved it.

Before long two splendid weddings were seen at court, and a new throne was made, — a double one, for on it sat the twin kings with their young wives beside them. The old King abdicated at once; and the Queen was so tired of reigning that she gladly devoted herself to her husband, both enjoying the happiness of their children, who ruled long and well over Pansyland, — for they gave that name to their country out of gratitude to the flower that brought them friends and fortune, wisdom and heart’s-ease.

“That is a pleasant story, and I shall remember it,” said Marion, as the teller leaned down to refresh itself with a sip of water after the long tale.

“Remember also what it means, my dear,” said the flower in its sweet voice. “Learn to rule yourself; make your own little kingdom a peaceful, happy one, and find nothing too humble to teach you a lesson, — not even a Ladies’-

Delight.”

LULU’S LIBRARY SERIES 3

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RECOLLECTIONS OF MY CHILDHOOD.

One of my earliest memories is of playing with books in my father`s study, — building towers and bridges of the dictionaries, looking at pictures, pretending to read, and scribbling on blank pages whenever pen or pencil could be found. Many of these first attempts at authorship still exist; and I often wonder if these childish plays did not influence my after-life, since books have been my greatest comfort, castle-building a a never-failing delight, and scribbling a very profitable amusement.

Another very vivid recollection is of the day when running after my hoop I fell into the Frog Pond and was rescued by a black boy, becoming a friend to the colored race then and there, though my mother always declared that I was an abolitionist at the age of three.

During the Garrison riot in Boston the portrait of George Thompson was hidden under a bed in our house for safe keeping; and I am told that I used to go and comfort "The good man who helped poor slaves" in his captivity. However that may be, the conversion was genuine; and my greatest pride is in the fact that I have lived to know the great men and women who did so much for the cause, and that I had a very small share in the war which put an end to a great wrong.

Being born on the birthday of Columbus, I seem to have something of my patron saint`s spirit of adventure, and running away was one of delights of my childhood. Many a social lunch have I shared with hospitable Irish beggar children, as we ate our crusts, cold potatoes, and salt fish on voyages of discovery among the ash heaps of the waste land that then lay where the Albany station now stands.

Many an impromptu picnic have I had on the dear old Common, with strange boys, pretty babies, and friendly dogs, who always seemed to feel that this reckless young person needed looking after.

On one occasion the town-crier found me fast asleep at nine o`clock at night, on a doorstop in Bedford Street, with my head pillowed on the curly breast of a big Newfoundland, who was with difficulty persuaded to release the weary little wanderer who had sobbed herself to sleep there.

I often smile as I pass that door, and never forget to give a grateful pat to every big dog I meet, for never have I slept more soundly than on that dusty step, nor found a better friend than the noble animal who watched over the lost baby so faithfully.

My father`s school was the only one I ever went to; and when this was broken up because he introduced methods now all the fashion, our lessons went on at home, for he was always sure of four little pupils who firmly believed in their teacher, though they have not done him all the credit he deserved.

I never liked arithmatic or grammar, and dodged these branches on all occasions; but reading, composition, history, and geography I enjoyed, as well as the stories read to us with a skill which made the dullest charming and useful.

“Pilgrim`s Progress,” Krummacher`s “Parables,” Miss Edgeworth, and the best of the dear old fairy tales made that hour the pleasantest of our day. On Sundays we had a simple service of Bible stories, hymns, and conversation about the state of our little consciences and the conduct of our childish lives which will never be forgotten.

Walks each morning round the Common while in the city, and long tramps over hill and dale when our home was in the country, were a part of our education, as well as every sort of housework, for which I have always been very grateful, since such knowledge makes one independent in these days of domestic tribulation with the help who are too often only hindrances.

Needle-work began early; and at ten my skillful sister made a linen shirt beautifully, while at twelve I set up as a dolls` dressmaker, with my sign out, and wonderful models in my window. All the children employed me; and my turbans were the rage at one time, to the great dismay of the neighbor`s hens, who were hotly hunted down that I might tweak out their downiest features to adorn the dolls` head-gear.

Active exercise was my delight from the time when a child of six I drove my hoop around the Common without stopping, to the days when I did my twenty miles in five hours and went to a party in the evening.

I always thought I must have been a deer or a horse in some former state, because it was a such a joy to run. No boy could be my friend until I had beaten him in a race, and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences, and be a tomboy.

My wise mother, anxious to give me a strong body to support a lively brain, turned me loose in the country and let me run wild, learning of Nature what no books can teach, and being led, as those who truly love her seldom fail to be,

“Through Nature up to Nature`s God.”

I remember running over the hills just at dawn one summer morning, and pausing to rest in the silent woods, saw, though an arch of trees, the sun rise over river, hill, and wide green meadows as I never saw it before.

Something born of the lovely hour, a happy mood, and the unfolding aspirations of a child`s soul seemed to bring me very near to God; and in the hush of that morning hour I always felt that I “got religion,” as the phrase goes.

A new and vital sense of His presence, tender and sustaining as a father`s arms, came to me then, never to change through forty years of life`s vicissitudes, but to grow stronger for the sharp discipline of poverty and pain, sorrow and success.

Those Concord days were the happiest of my life, for we had charming playmates in the little Emersons, Channings, Hawthornes, and Goodwins, with the illustrious parents and their friends to enjoy our pranks and share our excursions.

Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement, and we dramatized the fairy tales in great style. Our giant came tumbling off a loft when Jack cut down the squash-vine running up a ladder to represent that immortal bean. Cinderella rolled away in a vast pumpkin; and a long black pudding was lowered by invisible hands to fasten itself on the nose of the woman who wasted her three wishes.

Little pilgrims journeyed over the hills with script and staff, and cockle-shells in their hats; elves held their pretty revels among the pines, and "Peter Wilkins`" flying ladies came swinging down on the birch tree-tops. Lords and ladies haunted the garden, and mermaids splashed in the bath-house of woven willows over the brook.

People wondered at our frolics, but enjoyed them; and droll stories are still told of the adventures of those days. Mr.Emerson and Margaret Fuller were visiting my parents one afternoon; and the conversation having turned to the ever-interesting subject of education, Miss Fuller said, —

"Well, Mr. Alcott, you have been able to carry out your methods in your own family, and I should like to see your model children."

She did in a few moments, — for as the guests stood on the doorsteps, a wild uproar approached, and round the corner of the house came a wheel-barrow holding baby May arrayed as a queen; I was the horse, bitted and bridled, and driven by my elder sister Anna, while Lizzie played dog and barked as loud as her gentle voice permitted.

All were shouting, and wild with fun, which, however, came to a sudden end as we espied the stately group before us, for my foot tripped, and down we all went in a laughing heap, while my mother put a climax to the joke by saying with a dramatic wave of the hand, —

"Here are the model children, Miss Fuller!"

My sentimental period began at fifteen, when I fell to writing romances, poems, a "heart journal," and dreaming dreams of a splendid future.

Browsing over Mr. Emerson`s library, I found "Goethe`s Correspondence with a Child," and was at once fired with the desire to be a second Bettine, making my father`s friend my Goethe. So I wrote letters to him, but was wise enough never to send them, left wild flowers on the doorsteps of my “Master,” sung Mignon`s song in very bad German under his window, and was fond of wandering by moonlight, or sitting in a cherry-tree at midnight till the owls scared me to bed.

The girlish folly did not last long, and the letters were burned years ago; but Goethe is still my favorite author, and Emerson remained my beloved “Master” while he lived, doing more for me, as for many another young soul, than he ever knew, by the simple beauty of his life, the truth and wisdom of his books, the example of a good great man untempted and unspoiled by the world which he made nobler while in it, and left the richer when he went.

The trials of life began about this time, and my happy childhood ended. Money is never plentiful in a philosopher`s house; and even the maternal pelican could not supply all our wants on the small income which was freely shared with every needy soul who asked for help.

Fugitive slaves were sheltered under our roof; and my first pupil was a very black George Washington whom I taught to write on the hearth with charcoal, his big fingers finding pen and pencil unmanageable.

Motherless girls seeking protection were guarded among us; hungry travellers sent on to our door to be fed and warmed; and if the philosopher happened to own two coats, the best went to a needy brother, for these were practical Christians who had the most perfect faith in Providence, and never found it betrayed.

In those days the prophets were not honored in their own land, and Concord had not yet discovered her great men. It was a sort of refuge for reformers of all sorts, whom the good natives regarded as lunatics, harmless but amusing.

My father went away to hold his classes and conversations, and we women folk began to feel that we also might do something. So one gloomy November day we decided to move to Boston and try our fate again after some years in the wilderness.

My father`s prospect was as a philopher`s ever is in a money-making world; my mother`s friends offered her a good salary as their missionary to the poor; and my sister and I hoped to teach. It was an anxious council; and always preferring action to discussion, I took a brisk run over the hill and then settled down for “a good think” in my favorite retreat.

It was an old cart-wheel, half hidden in grass under the locusts where I used to sit to wrestle with my sums, and usually forget them scribbling verses or fairy tales on my slate instead. Perched on the hub, I surveyed the prospect and found it rather gloomy, with leafless trees, sere grass, leaden sky, and frosty air; but the hopeful heart of fifteen beat warmly under the old red shawl, visions of success gave the gray clouds a silver lining, and I said defiantly, as I shook my fist at fate embodied in a crow cawing dismally on a fence near by, —

“I will do something by-and-by. Don`t care what, teach, sew, act, write, anything to help the family; and I`ll be rich and famous and happy before I die, see if I won`t!”

Startled by this audacious outburst, the crow flew away; but the old wheel creaked as if it began to turn at that moment, stirred by the intensive desire of an ambitious girl to work for those she loved and find some reward when the duty was done.

I did not mind the omen then, and returned to the house cold but resolute. I think I began to shoulder my burden then and there, for when the free country life ended, the wild colt soon learned to tug in harness, only breaking loose now and then for a taste of beloved liberty.

My sisters and I had cherished fine dreams of a home in the city; but when we found ourselves in a small house at the South End with not a tree in sight, only a back yard to play in, and no money to buy any of the splendors before use, we all rebelled and longed for the country again.

Anna soon found little pupils, and trudged away each morning to her daily task, pausing at the corner to wave her hand to me in answer to my salute with the duster. My father went to his classes at his room down down, mother to her all-absorbing poor, the little girls to school, and I was left to keep house, feeling like a caged sea-gull as I washed dishes and cooked in the basement kitchen, where my prospect was limited to a procession of muddy boots.

Good drill, but very hard; and my only consolation was the evening reunion when all met with such varied reports of the day`s adventures, we could not fail to find both amusement and instruction.

Father brought news of the upper world, and the wise, good people who adorned it; mother, usually much dilapidated because she would give away her clothes, with sad tales of suffering and sin from the darker side of life; gentle Anna a modest account of her success as a teacher, for even at seventeen her sweet nature won all her knew her, and her patience quelled the most rebellious pupil.

My reports were usually a mixture of the tragic and the comic; and the children poured their small joys and woes into the family bosom, where comfort and sympathy were always to be found.

Then we youngsters adjourned to the kitchen for our fun, which usually consisted of writing, dressing, and acting a series of remarkable plays. In one I remember I took five parts and Anna four, with lightning changes of costume, and characters varying from a Greek prince in silver armor to a murderer in chains.

It was good training for memory and fingers, for we recited pages without a fault, and made every sort of property from a harp to a fairy`s spangled wings. Later we acted Shakespeare; and Hamlet was my favorite hero, played with a gloomy glare and a tragic stalk which I have never seen surpassed.

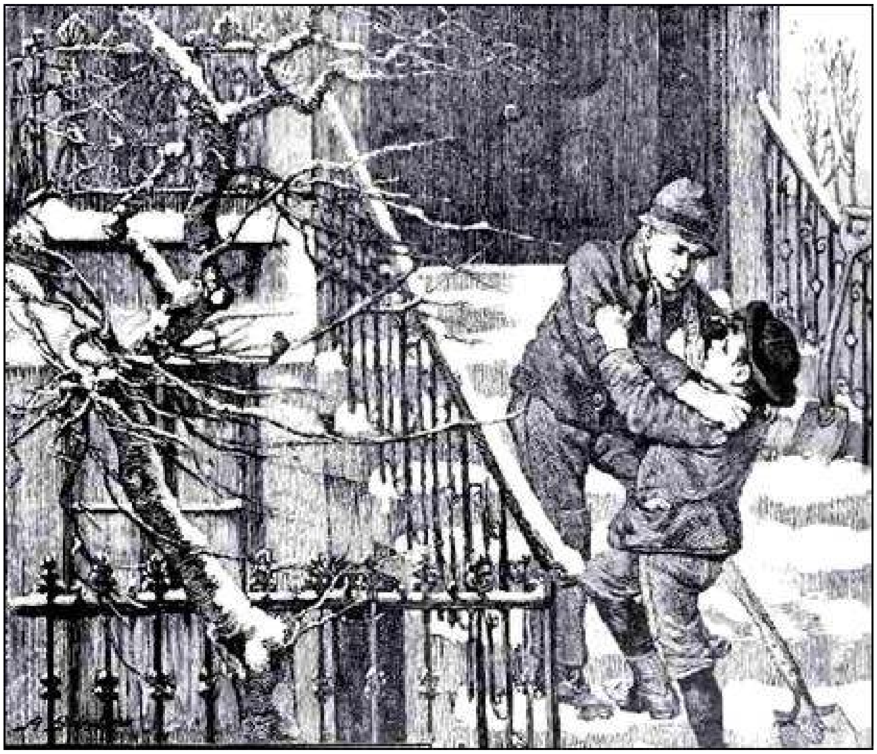
But we were now beginning to play our parts on a real stage, and to know something of the pathetic side of life, with its hard facts, irksome duties, many temptations, and the daily sacrifice of self. Fortunately we had the truest, tenderest of guides and guards, and so learned the sweet uses of adversity, the value of honest work, the beautiful law of compensation which gives more than it takes, and the real significance of life.

At sixteen I began to teach twenty pupils, and for ten years learned to know and love children. The story-writing went on all the while with the usual trials of beginners. Fairy tales told the Emersons made the first printed book, and “Hospital Sketches” the first successful one.

Every experience went into the cauldron to come out as froth, or evaporate in smoke, till time and suffering strengthened and clarified the mixture of truth and fancy, and a wholesome drought for children began to flow pleasantly and profitably.

So the omen proved a true one, and the wheel of fortune turned slowly, till the girl of fifteen found herself a woman of fifty, with her prophetic dream beautifully realized, her duty done, her reward far greater than she deserved.

A CHRISTMAS TURKEY AND HOW IT CAME.



The original illustration that accompanied this story when it first appeared in print in Harper's Young People, December 1885

"I KNOW we couldn't do it."

"I say we could, if we all helped."

"How can we?"

"I've planned lots of ways, only you mustn't laugh at them, and you mustn't say a word to mother. I want it to be all a surprise."

"She'll find us out."

"No, she won't, if we tell her we won't get into mischief.'

"Fire away, then, and let's hear your fine plans."

"We must talk softly, or we shall wake father. He's got a headache."

A curious change came over the faces of the two hoys as their sister lowered her voice, with a nod toward a half- opened door. They looked sad and ashamed, and Kitty sighed as she spoke, for all knew that father's headaches always began by his coming home stupid or cross, with only a part of his wages, and mother always cried when she thought they did not see her, and after the long sleep father looked as if he didn't like to meet their eyes, but went off early.

"What shall I do?" cried Sammy, while Tom sat turning this plan over in his mind.

“Take the old shovel and clear sidewalks The snow came on purpose to help you.”“

“It’s awful hard work, and the shovel’s half gone,” began Sammy, who preferred to spend his holiday coasting on an old food tray.

“Don’t growl, or you won’t get any dinner,” said Tom, making up his mind to lug baskets for the good of the family like the manly lad he was.

“I,” continued Kitty, ‘have taken the hardest part of all, because after my work is done and the babies safely settled, I’m going to beg for the leavings of the holly and pine swept out of the church down below, and make some wreaths and sell them.”

“If you can,” put in Tommy, who had tried to sell pencils and failed to make a fortune.

“Not in the street?” cried Sam, looking alarmed.

Yes, at the corner of the Park. I’m bound to make some money and don’t see any other way I shall put on an old hood and shawl, and no one will know me. Don’t care if they do.” And Kitty tried to mean what she said, but in her heart she felt that it would be a trial to her pride if any of her schoolmates should happen to recognize her.

“Don’t believe you’ll do it!”

“See if I don’t. I will have a good dinner one day in the year!”

“Well, it doesn’t seem right for us to do it. Father ought to take care of us, and we only buy some presents with the little bit we earn. He never gives us anything now.” And Tommy scowled at the bedroom door with a strong sense of injury struggling with the natural sense of affection he felt in his boyish heart.

“Hush!” cried Kitty. “Don’t blame him. Mother says we never must forget he’s our father. I try not to, but when she cries, it’s hard to feel as I ought.” And a sob made the little girl stop short as she poked the fire to hide the trouble in the face that should have been all smiles.

For a moment the room was very still, as the snow beat on the window and the firelight flickered over the six shabby little boots put up on the stove hearth to dry.

Tommy’s cheerful voice broke the silence, saying stoutly, “Well, if I’ve got to work all day, I guess I’ll go to bed early. Don’t fret, Kit. We’ll help all we can and have a good time. See if we don’t.”

“I’ll go out real early and shovel like fury. Maybe I’ll get a dollar. Would that buy a turkey?” asked Sammy with the air of a millionaire.

“No, dear, one big enough for us would cost two dollars, I’m afraid. Perhaps we’ll have one sent us. We belong to the church, though folks don’t know how poor we are now, and we can’t beg.” And Kitty bustled about, clearing up, rather exercised in her mind about going and asking for the much desired fowl.

Soon all three were fast asleep, and nothing but the whir of the machine broke the quiet that fell upon the house. Then from the inner room, a man came and sat over the fire with his head in his hands and his eyes fixed on the ragged little boots left to dry. He had heard the children’s talk, and his heart was very heavy as he looked about the shabby room that used to be so neat and pleasant. What he thought, no one knows; what he did we shall see by-and-by. But the sorrow and shame and tender silence of his children worked a miracle that night more lasting and lovely than the white beauty which the snow wrought upon the sleeping city.

Bright and early the boys were away to their work, while Kitty sang as she dressed her little sisters, put the house in order, and made her mother smile at the mysterious hints she gave of something splendid that was going to happen. Father was gone, and though all rather dreaded evening, nothing was said, but each worked with a will, feeling that Christmas should be merry in spite of poverty and care.

All day Tommy lugged fat turkeys, roasts of beef, and every sort of vegetable for other peoples good dinners on the morrow, wondering meanwhile where his own was coming from. Mr. Brisket had an army of boys trudging here and there and was too busy to notice any particular lad till the hurry was over and only a few belated buyers remained to be served. It was late, but the stores kept open. Although so tired he could hardly stand, brave Tommy held on when the other boys left hoping to earn a trifle more by extra work He sat down on a barrel to rest during a leisure moment, and presently his weary head nodded sideways into a basket of cranberries, where he slept quietly till the sound of gruff voices roused him.

It was Mr. Brisket scolding because one dinner had been forgotten.

“I told that rascal Beals to be sure to carry it, for the old gentleman will be in a rage if it doesn’t come and take away his business. Every boy gone, and I can’t leave the store, nor you either, Pat, with all the clearing up to do.”

“Here’s a boy, sir, sleeping amongst the cranberries. Bad luck to him!” answered Pat, with a shake that set poor Tom on his legs wide awake at once.

“Good luck to him. you mean. Here, what’s-your-name. You take this basket to that number, and I’ll make it worth your while,” said Mr. Brisket, much relieved by this unexpected help.

“All right, sir,” said Tommy, and off he trudged as briskly as his tired legs would let him, cheering the long cold walk with visions of a turkey with which his employer might reward him. There were still piles of them, and Pat wanted to have one for his family.

His brilliant dreams were disappointed, however. Since Mr. Brisket naturally supposed Tom's father would attend to that part of the dinner, he generously heaped a basket with vegetables, rosy apples, and a quart of cranberries.

There, if you ain't too tired, you can take one more load to that number, and a merry Christmas to you!" said the stout man, handing over his gift with the promised dollar.

"Thank you, sir, good night," answered Tom, shouldering his last load with a grateful smile and trying not to look longingly at the poultry. He had set his heart on at least a skinny bird as a surprise to Kitty.

Sammy's adventures that day had been more varied and his efforts more successful than Tom's, for Sammy was a most engaging little fellow, and no one could look into his blue eyes without wanting to pat his curly, yellow head with one hand while the other gave him something. The cares of life had not lessened his confidence in people, and only the most abandoned ruffians had the heart to deceive or disappoint him. His very tribulations usually led to something pleasant, and whatever happened, sunshiny Sam came right side up, lucky and laughing.

Undaunted by the drifts or the cold wind, he marched off with the remains of the old shovel to seek his fortune and found it at the third house he called. The first two sidewalks were easy jobs, and he pocketed his dimes with a growing conviction that this was his chosen work. The third sidewalk was a fine, long one, since the house stood on the corner and two pavements must be cleared.

"It ought to be fifty cents, but perhaps they won't give me so much, I'm such a young one. I'll show cm I can work, though, like a man.' And Sammy rang the bell with the energy of a telegraph boy.

But before the bell could be answered, a big boy rushed up, exclaiming roughly, "Get out of this! I'm going to have the job. You can't do it. Start, now, or I'll chuck you into a snow bank.'

"I won't!' answered Sammy, indignant at the brutal tone and unjust claim."I got here first, and it's my job. You let me alone. I ain't afraid of you or your snow banks either."

The big boy wasted no time in words, for steps were heard inside, but after a brief scuffle, hauled Sammy, fighting bravely all the way, down the steps, and tumbled him into a deep drift. Then he ran up the steps and respectfully asked for the job when a neat maid opened the door. He would have got it if Sam had not roared out, as he floundered in the drift, "I came first. He knocked me down cause I'm the smallest. Please let me do it. Please!"

Before another word could be said, a little old lady appeared in the hall, trying to look stern and failing entirely, because she was the picture of a dear, fat, cozy grandma.

“Send that bad, big boy away, Maria, and call in the poor little fellow. I saw the whole thing, and I shall have the job if he can do it.”

The bully slunk away, and Sammy came panting up the steps, white with snow, a great bruise on his forehead, and a beaming smile on his face, looking so like a jolly little Santa Claus who had taken a “header” out of his sleigh that the maid laughed. The old lady exclaimed, “Bless the boy! He’s dreadfully twelve cents apiece, I shall be glad. Girls never can cam as much money as boys somehow/’ sighed Kitty, surveying the thin wreaths tied up with carpet ravellings and vainly puzzling her young wits over a sad problem.

“I’ll give you some of my money if you don’t get a dollar,- then we’ll be even. Men always take care of women, you know, and ought to,” cried Sammy, setting a fine example to his father if he had only been there to profit by it.

With thanks, Kitty left him to rest on the old sofa, while the happy babies swarmed over him. After putting on a shabby hood and shawl, she slipped away to stand at the Park gate, modestly offering her little wares to the passersby. A nice old gentleman bought two, and his wife scolded him for getting such bad ones, but the money gave more happiness than any other he spent that day. A child took a ten-cent bunch of holly with its red berries, and there Kitty’s market ended. It was very cold, people were in a hurry, bolder hucksters pressed before the timid little girl, and the balloon man told her to “clear out.”

Hoping for better luck, she tried several other places, but the short afternoon was soon over, the streets began to thin, and the keen wind chilled her to the bone. Her heart was very heavy to think that in all the rich, merry city, where Christmas gifts passed her in every hand, there were none for the dear babies and boys at home, and the Christmas dinner was a failure.

“I must go and get supper anyway, and I’ll hang these up in our own rooms, as I can’t sell them,” said Kitty, wiping a very big tear from her cold cheek and turning to go away.

A smaller, shabbier girl than herself stood near, looking at the bunch of holly with wistful eyes. And glad to do to others as she wished someone would do to her, Kitty offered the only thing she had to give, saying kindly, “You may have it,- merry

Christmas!” and ran away before the delighted child could thank her.

I am very sure that one of the angels who fly about at this season of the year saw the little act, made a note of it, and in about fifteen minutes rewarded Kitty for her sweet remembrance of the golden rule.

As she went sadly homeward, Kitty looked up at some of the big houses where every window shone with the festivities of Christmas Eve, and more than one tear fell, for the little girl found life pretty hard just then.

There don’t seem to be any wreaths at these windows. Perhaps they’d buy mine. I can’t bear to go home with so little for my share,” she said, stopping before one of the biggest and brightest of these homes, where the sound of music was heard and many little heads peeped from behind the curtains as if watching for someone.

Kitty was just going up the steps to make another trial when two small boys came racing ‘round the corner, slipped on the icy pavement, and both went down with a crash that would have broken older bones. One was up in a minute, laughing, the other lay squirming and howling, “Oh, my knee! My knee!” till Kitty ran and picked him up with the motherly consolations she had learned to give.

“It’s broken,- I know it is,” wailed the small sufferer as Kitty carried him up the steps while his friend wildly rang the doorbell.

It was like going into something out of a dream, for the house was all astir with a children’s Christmas party. Servants flew about with smiling faces, open doors gave ravishing glimpses of a feast in one room and a splendid tree in another, while a crowd of little faces peered over the balusters in the hall above, eager to come down and enjoy the glories prepared for them.

A pretty, young girl came to meet Kitty and listened to her story of the accident, which proved to be less severe than it at first appeared. Bertie, the injured party, forgot his anguish at sight of the tree and hopped upstairs so nimbly that everyone laughed.

“He said his leg was broken, but I guess he’s all right,” said Kitty, reluctantly turning from this happy scene to go out into the night again.

“Would you like to see our tree before the children come down?” asked the pretty girl, seeing the wistful look in the child’s eyes and the shine of half-dried tears on her cheek.

“Oh, yes, I never saw anything so lovely. I’d like to tell the babies all about it,” and Kitty’s face beamed at the prospect.

“How many babies are there?” asked the girl as she led the way into the brilliant room. Kitty told her, adding several other facts, since the friendly atmosphere seemed to make them friends at once.

“I will buy your wreaths, for we haven’t any,” said the girl in silk, as Kitty told how she was just coming to offer them when the boys fell.

It was pleasant to see how carefully the little hostess laid away the shabby garlands and slipped a half-dollar into Kitty’s hand; prettier still, to watch the sly way in which she tucked some bonbons, a red ball, a blue whip, two china dolls, two pairs of little mittens, and some gilded nuts into an empty box for “the babies”; and prettiest of all, to see the smiles and tears make daylight in Kitty’s face as she tried to tell her thanks for this beautiful surprise.

The world was all right when she got into the street again and ran home with the precious box hugged close, feeling that at last she had something to make a merry Christmas of.

Shrieks of joy greeted her, for Sammy’s nice old lady had sent a basketful of pies, nuts and raisins, oranges and cake, and — oh, happy Sammy! — a sled, all for love of the blue eyes that twinkled so merrily when he told her about the food tray for sliding. Piled upon his red car of triumph, Dilly and Dot were being dragged about while the other treasures were set forth on the table.

“I must show mine,” cried Kitty. “We’ll look at them tonight and have them tomorrow. And amid more cries of rapture her box was unpacked; her money added to the pile in the middle of the table where Sammy had laid his handsome contribution toward the turkey.

“I’m afraid I ought to keep my money for shoes. I’ve walked the soles off these today and can’t go to school barefooted,” he said, bravely trying to put the temptation of skates behind him.

‘We’ve got a good dinner without a turkey, and perhaps we’d better not get it,” added Kitty with a sigh as she surveyed the table and remembered the blue knit hood marked seventy-five cents that she saw in a shop window.

“Oh, we must have a turkey! We worked so hard for it, and it’s so Christmasy,” cried Sam, who always felt that pleasant things ought to happen.

“Must have turty,” echoed the babies as they eyed the dolls tenderly.

“You shall have a turkey, and there he is,” said an unexpected voice, as a noble bird was placed upon the table and lay there Sticking up his legs as if enjoying the surprise immensely.

It was Father’s voice, and there stood Father, neither cross nor depressed, but looking as he used to look, kind and happy. Beside him stood Mother, smiling as they had not seen her smile for months. It was not because the work was well paid for, and more promised, but because she had received a gift that made the world bright, a home happy again — Father’s promise to drink no more:

“I’ve been working today as well as you, and you may keep your money for yourselves. There are shoes for all; and never again, please God, shall my children be ashamed of me or want a dinner for Christmas Day.”

As Father said this with a choke in his voice, and Mother’s head went down on his shoulder to hide the happy tears that wet her cheeks, the children didn’t know whether to laugh or cry, till Kitty, with the instinct of a loving heart, settled the question by saying, as she held out her hands, “We haven’t any tree, so let’s dance around our goodies and be merry."

Then the tired feet in the old shoes forgot their weariness, and five happy little souls skipped gaily around the table, where, in the midst of all the treasures earned and given, Father's Christmas turkey proudly lay in state.

THE BLIND LARK.

HIGH up in an old house, full of poor people, lived Lizzie, with her mother and baby Billy. The street was a narrow, noisy place, where carts rumbled and dirty children played; where the sun seldom shone, the fresh wind seldom blew, and the white snow of winter was turned at once to black mud. One bare room was Lizzie's home, and out of it she seldom went, for she was a prisoner. We all pity the poor princesses who were shut up in towers by bad fairies, the men and women in jails, and the little birds in cages, but Lizzie was a sadder prisoner than any of these.

The prince always comes to the captive princess, the jail doors open in time, and the birds find some kind hand to set them free; but there seemed no hope of escape for this poor child. Only nine years old, and condemned to life-long helplessness, loneliness, and darkness — for she was blind.

She could dimly remember the blue sky, green earth, and beautiful sun; for the light went out when she was six, and the cruel fever left her a pale little shadow to haunt that room ever since. The father was dead, the mother worked hard for daily bread, they had no friends, and the good fairies seemed to have forgotten them. Still, like the larks one sees in Brittany, the eyes of which cruel boys put out, that they may sing the sweeter, Lizzie made music in her cage, singing to baby; and when he slept, she sat by the window listening to the noise below for company, crooning to herself till she, too, fell asleep and forgot the long, long days that had no play, no school, no change for her such as other children know.

Every morning Mother gave them their porridge, locked the door, and went away to work, leaving something for the children's dinner, and Lizzie to take care of herself and Billy till night. There was no other way, for both were too helpless to be trusted elsewhere, and there was no one to look after them. But Lizzie knew her way about the room, and could find the bed, the window, and the table where the bread and milk stood. There was seldom any fire in the stove, and the window was barred, so the little prisoners were safe, and day after day they lived together a sad, solitary, unchildlike life that makes one's heart ache to think of.

Lizzie watched over Billy like a faithful little mother, and Billy did his best to bear his trials, and comfort sister, like a man. He was not a rosy, rollicking fellow, like most year-old boys, but pale and thin and quiet, with a pathetic look in his big blue eyes, as if he said, “Something is wrong; will some one kindly put it right for us?” But he seldom complained unless in pain, and would lie for hours on the old bed, watching the flies, which were his only other playmates, stretching out his little hands to the few rays of sunshine that crept in now and then, as if longing for them, like a flower in a cellar. When Lizzie sung, he hummed softly; and when he was hungry, cold, or tired, he called “Lib! Lib!” meaning “Lizzie,” and nestled up to her, forgetting all his baby woes in her tender arms.

Seeing her so fond and faithful, the poor neighbors loved as well as pitied her, and did what they could for the afflicted child. The busy women would pause at the locked door to ask if all was right; the dirty children brought her dandelions from the park, and the rough workmen of the factory opposite, with a kind word would toss an apple or a cake through the open window. They had learned to look for the little wistful face behind the bars, and loved to listen to the childish voice which caught and imitated the songs they sung and whistled, like a sweet echo. They called her “the blind lark,” and, though she never knew it, many were the better for the pity they gave her.

Baby slept a great deal, for life offered him few pleasures, and, like a small philosopher, he wisely tried to forget the troubles which he could not cure; so Lizzie had nothing to do but sing, and try to imagine how the world looked. She had no one to tell her, and the few memories grew dimmer and dimmer each year. She did not know how to work or to play, never having been taught, and Mother was too tired at night to do anything but get supper and go to bed.

“The child will be an idiot soon, if she does not die,” people said; and it seemed as if this would be the fate of the poor little girl, since no one came to save her during those three weary years. She often said, “I’m of some use. I take care of Billy, and I couldn’t live without him.”

But even this duty and delight was taken from her, for that cold spring nipped the poor little flower, and one day Billy shut his blue eyes with a patient sigh and left her all alone.

Then Lizzie’s heart seemed broken, and people thought she would soon follow him, now that her one care and comfort was gone. All day she laid with her cheek on Billy’s pillow, holding the battered tin cup and a little worn-out shoe, and it was pitiful to hear her sing the old lullabies as if baby still could hear them.

“It will be a mercy if the poor thing doesn’t live; blind folks are no use and a sight of trouble,” said one woman to another as they gossiped in the hall after calling on the child during her mother’s absence, for the door was left unlocked since she was ill.

“Yes, Mrs. Davis would get on nicely if she hadn’t such a burden. Thank Heaven, my children aren’t blind,” answered the other, hugging her baby closer as she went away.

Lizzie heard them, and hoped with all her sad little soul that death would set her free, since she was of no use in the world. To go and be with Billy was all her desire now, and she was on her way to him, growing daily weaker and more content to be dreaming of dear baby well and happy, waiting for her somewhere in a lovely place called Heaven.

The summer vacation came, and hundreds of eager children were hurrying away to the mountains and seashore for two months of healthful pleasure. Even the dirty children in the lane felt the approach of berry-time, and rejoiced in their freedom from cold as they swarmed like flies about the corner grocery where over-ripe fruit was thrown out for them to scramble over.

Lizzie heard about good times when some of these young neighbors were chosen to go on the poor children's picnics, and came back with big sandwiches buttoned up in their jackets; pickles, peanuts, and buns in their pockets; hands full of faded flowers, and hearts brimming over with childish delight at a day in the woods. She listened with a faint smile, enjoyed the "woodsy" smell of the green things, and wondered if they had nice picnics in Heaven, being sorry that Billy had missed them here. But she did not seem to care much, or hope for any pleasure for herself except to see baby again.

I think there were few sadder sights in that great city than this innocent prisoner waiting so patiently to be set free. Would it be by the gentle angel of death, or one of the human angels who keep these little sparrows from falling to the ground?

One hot August day, when not a breath came into the room, and the dust and noise and evil smells were almost unendurable, poor Lizzie lay on her bed singing feebly to herself about "the beautiful blue sea." She was trying to get to sleep that she might dream of a cool place, and her voice was growing fainter and fainter, when suddenly it seemed as if the dream had come, for a sweet odor was near, something damp and fresh touched her feverish cheek, and a kind voice said in her ear:

"Here is the little bird I've been following. Will you have some flowers, dear?"

"Is it Heaven? Where's Billy?" murmured Lizzie, groping about her, half awake.

"Not yet. I'm not Billy, but a friend who carries flowers to little children who can not go and get them. Don't be afraid, but let me sit and tell you about it," answered the voice, as a gentle hand took hers.

"I thought, may be, I'd died, and I was glad, for I do want to see Billy so much. He's baby, you know." And the clinging hands held the kind one fast till it filled them with a great bunch of roses that seemed to bring all summer into the close, hot room with their sweetness.

"Oh, how nice! how nice! I never had such a lot. They're bigger 'n' better 'n dandelions, aren't they? What a good lady you must be to go 'round giving folks posies like these!" cried Lizzie, trying to realize the astonishing fact.

Then, while the new friend fanned her, she lay luxuriating in her roses, and listening to the sweet story of the Flower Mission which, like many other pleasant things, she knew nothing of in her prison. Presently she told her own little tale, never guessing how pathetic it was, till, lifting her hand to touch the new face, she found it wet with tears.

"Are you sorry for me?" she asked. "Folks are very kind, but I'm a burden, you know, and I'd better die and go to Billy; I was some use to him, but I never can be to any one else. I heard 'em say so, and poor [illustration omitted] Mother would do better if I wasn't here."

"My child, I know a little blind girl who is no burden but a great help to her mother, and a happy, useful creature, as you might be if you were taught and helped as she was," went on the voice, sounding more than ever like a good fairy's as it told fresh wonders till Lizzie was sure it must be all a dream.

"Who taught her? Could I do it? Where's the place?" she asked, sitting erect in her eagerness, like a bird that hears a hand at the door of its cage.

Then, with the comfortable arm around her, the roses stirring with the flutter of her heart, and the sightless eyes looking up as if they could see the face of the deliverer, Lizzie heard the wonderful story of the House Beautiful standing white and spacious on the hill, with the blue sea before it, the fresh wind always blowing, the green gardens and parks all about, and, inside, music, happy voices, shining faces, busy hands, and year after year the patient teaching by those who dedicate themselves to this noble and tender task.

"It must be better 'n Heaven!" cried Lizzie, as she heard of work and play, health and happiness, love and companionship,usefulness and independence, — all the dear rights and simple joys young creatures hunger for, and perish, soul and body, without.

It was too much for her little mind to grasp at once, and she lay as if in a blissful dream long after the kind visitor had gone, promising to come again and to find some way for Lizzie to enter into that lovely place where darkness is changed to light.

That visit was like magic medicine, and the child grew better at once, for hope was born in her heart. The heavy gloom seemed to lift, discomforts were easier to bear, and solitude was peopled now with troops of happy children living in that wonderful place where blindness was not a burden. She told it all to her mother, and the poor woman tried to believe it, but said, sadly:

“Don’t set your heart on it, child. It’s easy to promise and to forget. Rich folks don’t trouble themselves about poor folks if they can help it.”

But Lizzie’s faith never wavered, though the roses faded as day after day went by and no one came. The mere thought that it was possible to teach blind people to work and study and play seemed to give her strength and courage. She got up and sat at the window again, singing to herself as she watched and waited, with the dead flowers carefully arranged in Billy’s mug, and a hopeful smile on the little white face behind the bars.

Every one was glad she was better, and nodded to one another as they heard the soft crooning, like a dove’s coo, in the pauses of the harsher noises that filled the street. The workmen tossed her sweeties and whistled their gayest airs, the children brought their dilapidated toys to amuse her, and one woman came every day to put her baby in Lizzie’s lap, it was such a pleasure to her to feel the soft little body in the loving arms that longed for Billy.

Poor Mother went to her work in better spirits, and the long, hot days were less oppressive as she thought, while she scrubbed, of Lizzie up again; for she loved her helpless burden, heavy though she found it.

When Saturday came around, it rained hard, and no one expected “the flower lady.” Even Lizzie said, with a patient sigh and a hopeful smile:

“I don’t believe she’ll come; but, may be, it will clear up, and then I guess she will.”

It did not clear up, but the flower lady came, and as the child sat listening to the welcome sound of her steps, her quick ear caught the tread of two pairs of feet, the whisper of two voices, and presently two persons came in to fill her hands with midsummer flowers.

“This is Minna, the little girl I told you of. She wanted to see you very much, so we paddled away like a pair of ducks, and here we are,” said Miss Grace gayly; and as she spoke Lizzie felt soft fingers glide over her face, and a pair of childish lips find and kiss her own. The groping touch, the hearty kiss, made the blind children friends at once, and, dropping her flowers, Lizzie hugged the new-comer, trembling with excitement and delight. Then they talked, and how the tongues went as one asked questions and the other answered them, while Miss Grace sat by enjoying the happiness of those who do not forget the poor, but seek them out to save and bless.

Minna had been for a year a pupil in the happy school, where she was taught to see with her hands, as one might say; and the tales she told of the good times there made Lizzie cry eagerly:

“Can I go? Oh, can I go?”

“Alas, no, not yet,” answered Miss Grace sadly, “I find that children under ten can not be taken, and there is no place for the little ones unless kind people care for them.”

Lizzie gave a wail, and hid her face in the pillow, feeling as if she could not bear the dreadful disappointment.

Minna comforted her, and Miss Grace went on to say that generous people were trying to get another school for the small children, that all the blind children were working hard to help on the plan, that money was coming in, and soon they hoped to have a pleasant place for every child who needed help.

Lizzie’s tears stopped falling as she listened, for hope was not quite gone.

“I’ll not be ten till next June, and I don’t see how I can wait ‘most a year. Will the little school be ready ‘fore then?” she asked.

“I fear not, dear, but I will see that the long waiting is made as easy as possible, and perhaps you can help us in some way,” answered Miss Grace, anxious to atone for her mistake in speaking about the school before she had made sure that Lizzie could go.

“Oh, I’d love to help; only I can’t do anything,” sighed the child.

“You can sing, and that is a lovely way to help. I heard of ‘the blind lark,’ as they call you, and when I came to find her, your little voice led me straight to the door of the cage. That door I mean to open and let you hop out into the sunshine; then, when you are well and strong, I hope you will help us get the home for other little children who else must wait years before they find the light. Will you?”

As Miss Grace spoke, it was beautiful to see the clouds lift from Lizzie’s wondering face, till it shone with the sweetest beauty any face can wear, the happiness of helping others. She forgot her own disappointment in the new hope that came, and held on to the bed-post as if the splendid plan were almost too much for her.

“Could I help that way?” she cried. “Would anybody care to hear me sing? Oh, how I’d love to do anything for the poor little ones who will have to wait.”

“You shall. I’m sure the hardest heart would be touched by your singing, if you look as you do now. We need something new for our fair and concert, and by that time you will be ready,” said Miss Grace, almost afraid she had said too much; for the child looked so frail, it seemed as if even joy would hurt her.

Fortunately her mother came in just then, and, while the lady talked to her, Minna’s childish chatter soothed Lizzie so well that when they left she stood at the window smiling down at them and singing like the happiest bobolink that ever tilted on a willow branch in spring-time.

All the promises were kept, and soon a new life began for Lizzie. A better room and well-paid work were found for Mrs. Davis. Minna came as often as she could to cheer up her little friend, and, best of all, Miss Grace taught her to sing, that by and by the little voice might plead with its pathetic music for others less blest than she. So the winter months went by, and Lizzie grew like mayflowers underneath the snow, getting ready to look up, sweet and rosy, when spring set her free and called her to be glad. She counted the months and weeks, and when the time dwindled to days, she could hardly sleep or eat for thinking of the happy hour when she could go to be a pupil in the school where miracles were worked.

Her birthday was in June, and, thanks to Miss Grace, her coming was celebrated by one of the pretty festivals of the school, called Daisy Day. Lizzie knew nothing of this surprise, and when her friends led her up the long flight of steps she looked like a happy little soul climbing to the gates of Heaven.

Mr. Constantine, the ruler of this small kingdom, was a man whose fatherly heart had room for every suffering child in the world, and it rejoiced over every one who came, though the great house was overflowing and many waited as Lizzie had done.

He welcomed her so kindly that the strange place seemed like home at once, and Minna led her away to the little mates who proudly showed her their small possessions and filled her hands with the treasures children love, while pouring into her ears delightful tales of the study, work, and play that made their lives so happy.

Lizzie was bewildered, and held fast to Minna, whose motherly care of her was sweet to see. Kind teachers explained rules and duties with the patience that soothes fear and wins love, and soon Lizzie began to feel that she was a “truly pupil” in this wonderful school where the blind could read, sew, study, sing, run, and play. Boys raced along the galleries and up and down the stairs as boldly as if all had eyes. Girls swept and dusted like tidy housewives; little fellows hammered and sawed in the workshop and never hurt themselves; small girls sewed on pretty work as busy as bees, and in the schoolroom lessons went on as if both teachers and pupils were blessed with eyes.

Lizzie could not understand it, and was content to sit and listen wherever she was placed, while her little fingers fumbled at the new objects near her, and her hungry mind opened like a flower to the sun. She had no tasks that day, and in the afternoon was led away with a flock of children, all chattering like magpies, on the grand expedition. Every year, when the fields were white with daisies, these poor little souls were let loose among them to enjoy the holy day of this child’s flower. Ah, but wasn’t it a pretty sight to see the meeting between them, when the meadows were reached and the children scattered far and wide with cries of joy as they ran and rolled in the white sea, or filled their eager hands, or softly felt for the dear daisies and kissed them like old friends! The flowers seemed to enjoy it, too, as they danced and nodded, while the wind rippled the long grass like waves of a green sea, and the sun smiled as if he said:

"Here's the sort of thing I like to see. Why don't I find more of it?"

Lizzie's face looked like a daisy, it was so full of light as she stood looking up with the wide brim of her new hat like the white petals all round it. She did not run nor shout, but went slowly wading through the grass, feeling the flowers touch her hands, yet picking none, for it was happiness enough to know that they were there. Presently she sat down and let them tap her cheeks and rustle about her ears as though telling secrets that made her smile. Then, as if weary with so much happiness, she lay back and let the daisies hide her with their pretty coverlet.

Miss Grace was watching over her, but left her alone, and by and by, like a lark from its nest in the grass, the blind girl sent up her little voice, singing so sweetly that the children gathered around to hear, while they made chains and tied up their nosegays.

This was Lizzie's first concert, and no little prima donna was ever more pelted with flowers than she; for when she had sung all her songs, new and old, a daisy crown was put upon her head, a tall flower for a scepter in her hand, and all the boys and girls danced around her as if she had been Queen of the May.

A little feast came out of the baskets, that they might be empty for the harvest to be carried home, and, while they ate, stories were told and shouts of laughter filled the air, for all were as merry as if there was no darkness, pain, or want in the world. Then they had games, and Lizzie was taught to play, for till now she never knew what a good romp meant. Her cheeks grew rosy, her sad little face waked up, she ran and tumbled with the rest, and actually screamed, to Minna's great delight.

Two or three of the children could see a little, and these were very helpful in taking care of the little ones. Miss Grace found them playing some game with Lizzie, and observed that all but she were blindfolded. When she asked why, one whispered, "We thought we should play fairer if we were all alike." And another added, "It seems somehow as if we were proud if we see better than the rest."

Lizzie was much touched by this sweet spirit, and a little later showed that she had already learned one lesson in the school, when she gathered about her some who had never seen, and told them what she could remember of green fields and daisy-balls before the light went out forever.

"Surely my little lark was worth saving, if only for this one happy day," thought Miss Grace, as she watched the awakened look in the blind faces, all leaning toward the speaker, whose childish story pleased them well.

In all her long and useful life, Lizzie never forgot that Daisy Day, for it seemed as if she were born anew, and, like a butterfly, had left the dark chrysalis all behind her then. It was the first page of the beautiful book just opening before the eyes of her little mind, — a lovely page, illustrated with flowers, kind faces, sunshine, and happy hopes. The new life was so full, so free, she soon fell into her place and enjoyed it all. People worked there so heartily, so helpfully, it was no wonder things went as if by magic, and the poor little creatures who came in so afflicted went out in some years independent people, ready to help themselves and often to benefit others.

There is no need to tell all Lizzie learned and enjoyed that summer, nor how proud her mother was when she heard her read in the curious books, making eyes of the little fingers that felt their way along so fast, when she saw the neat stitches she set, the pretty clay things she modeled, the tidy way she washed dishes, swept and dusted, and helped keep her room in order. But the poor woman’s heart was too full for words when she heard the child sing, — not as before, in the dreary room, sad, soft lullabies to Billy, — but beautiful, gay songs, with flutes and violins to lift and carry the little voice along on waves of music.

Lizzie really had a great gift, but she was never happier than when they all sang together, or when she sat quietly listening to the band as they practiced for the autumn concert. She was to have a part in it, and the thought that she could help to earn money for the Kindergarten made the shy child bold and glad to do her part. Many people knew her now, for she was very pretty, with the healthful roses in her cheeks, curly yellow hair, and great blue eyes that seemed to see. Her mates and teachers were proud of her, for, though she was not as quick as some of the pupils, her sweet temper, grateful heart, and friendly little ways made her very dear to all, aside from the musical talent she possessed.

Every one was busy over the fair and the concert; and fingers flew, tongues chattered, feet trotted, and hearts beat fast with hope and fear as the time drew near, for all were eager to secure a home for the poor children still waiting in darkness. It was a charity which appealed to all hearts when it was known; but, in this busy world of ours, people have so many cares of their own that they are apt to forget the wants of others unless something brings these needs very clearly before their eyes. Much money was needed, and many ways had been tried to add to the growing fund, that all might be well done.

“We wish to interest children in this charity for children, so that they may gladly give a part of their abundance to these poor little souls who have nothing. I think Lizzie will sing some of the pennies out of their pockets, which would otherwise go for bonbons. Let us try; so make her neat and pretty, and we'll have a special song for her."

Mr. Constantine said this, and Miss Grace carried out his wish so well that, when the time came, the little prima donna did her part better even than they had hoped.

The sun shone splendidly on the opening day of the fair, and cars and carriages came rolling out from the city, full of friendly people with plump purses and the sympathetic interest we all take in such things when we take time to see, admire, and reproach ourselves that we do so little for them.

There were many children, and when they had bought the pretty handiwork of the blind needle-women, eaten cake and ices, wondered at the strange maps and books, twirled the big globe in the hall, and tried to understand how so many blind people could be so busy and so happy, they all were seated at last to hear the music, full of expectation, for "the pretty little girl was going to sing."

It was a charming concert, and every one enjoyed it, though many eyes grew dim as they wandered from the tall youths blowing the horns so sweetly, to the small ones chirping away like so many sparrows, for the blind faces made the sight pathetic, and such music touched the hearts as no other music can.

"Now she's coming!" whispered the eager children, as a little girl climbed up the steps and stood before them, waiting to begin.

A slender little creature, in a blue gown, with sunshine falling on her pretty hair, a pleading look in the soft eyes that had no sign of blindness but their steadfastness, and a smile on the lips that trembled at first, for Lizzie's heart beat fast, and only the thought, "I'm helping the poor little ones," gave her courage for her task.

But, when the flutes and violins began to play like a whispering wind, she forgot the crowd before her, and, lifting up her face, sang in clear sweet tones

The Blind Lark's Song.

WE are sitting in the shadow
Of a long and lonely night,
Waiting till some gentle angel
Comes to lead us to the light.
For we know there is a magic
That can give eyes to the blind.
Oh, well-filled hands, be generous!
Oh, pitying hearts, be kind!

Help stumbling feet that wander,
To find the upward way;
Teach hands that now lie idle
The joys of work and play.
Let pity, love, and patience
Our tender teachers be,
That, though the eyes be blinded,
The little souls may see.

Your world is large and beautiful,
Our prison dim and small;
We stand and wait, imploring —
“Is there not room for all?
Give us our children’s garden,
Where we may safely bloom,
Forgetting in God’s sunshine
Our lot of grief and gloom.”

A little voice comes singing,
Oh, listen to its song!
A little child is pleading
For those who suffer wrong.
Grant them the patient magic
That gives eyes to the blind!
Oh, well-filled hands, be generous!
Oh, pitying hearts, be kind!

It was a very simple little song, but it proved wonderfully effective, for Lizzie was so carried away by her own feeling that as she sang the last lines she stretched out her hands imploringly, and two great tears rolled down her cheeks. For a minute many hands were too busy fumbling for handkerchiefs to clap, but the children were quick to answer that gesture and those tears, and one impetuous little lad tossed a small purse containing his last ten cents at Lizzie’s feet, the first contribution won by her innocent appeal. Then there was great applause, and many of the flowers just bought were thrown to the little Lark, who was obliged to come back and sing again and again, smiling brightly as she dropped pretty curtsies, and sang song after song with all the added sweetness of a grateful heart.

Hidden behind the organ, Miss Grace and Mr. Constantine shook hands joyfully, for this was the sort of interest they wanted, and they knew that while the children clapped and threw flowers, the wet-eyed mothers were thinking, self-reproachfully, “I must help this lovely charity,” and the stout old gentlemen who pounded with their canes were resolving to go home and write some generous checks, which would be money invested in God’s savings-bank.

It was a very happy time for all, and made strangers friends in the sweet way which teaches heart to speak to heart. When the concert was over, Lizzie felt many hands press hers and leave something there, many childish lips kiss her own, with promises to “help about the Kindergarten,” and her ears were full of kind voices thanking and praising her for doing her part so well. Still later, when all were gone, she proudly put the rolls of bills into Mr. Constantine’s hand, and, throwing her arms about Miss Grace’s neck, said, trembling with earnestness, “I’m not a burden any more, and I can truly help! How can I ever thank you both for making me so happy?”

One can fancy what their answer was and how Lizzie helped; for, long after the Kindergarten was filled with pale little flowers blooming slowly as she had done, the Blind Lark went on singing pennies out of pockets, and sweetly reminding people not to forget this noble charity.

THE SILVER PARTY

“Such a long morning! Seems as if dinner-time would never come!” sighed Tony, as he wandered into the dining-room for a third pick at the nuts and raisins to beguile his weariness with a little mischief.

It was Thanksgiving Day. All the family were at church, all the servants busy preparing for the great dinner, and so poor Tony, who had a cold, had not only to stay at home, but to amuse himself while the rest said their prayers, made calls, or took a brisk walk to get an appetite. If he had been allowed in the kitchen, he would have been quite happy; but cook was busy and cross, and rapped him on the head with a poker when he ventured near the door. Peeping through the slide was also forbidden, and John, the man, bribed him with an orange to keep out of the way rill the table was set.

That was now done. The dining-room was empty and quiet, and poor Tony lay down on the sofa to eat his nuts and admire the fine sight before him. All the best damask, china, glass, and silver was set forth with great care. A basket of flowers hung from the chandelier, and the sideboard was beautiful to behold with piled-up fruit, dishes of cake, and many-colored finger-bowls and glasses.

“That’s all very nice, but the eating part is what I care for. Don’t believe I’ll get my share to-day, because mamma found out about this horrid cold. A fellow can’t help sneezing, though he can hide a sore throat. Oh hum! nearly two more hours to wait;” and with a long sigh Tony closed his eyes for a luxurious yawn.

When he opened them, the strange sight he beheld kept him staring without a thought of sleep. The big soup-ladle stood straight up at the head of the table with a face plainly to be seen in the bright bowl. It was a very heavy, handsome old ladle, so the face was old, but round and jolly; and the long handle stood very erect, like a tall thin gentleman with a big head.

“Well, upon my word that’s queer!” said Tony, sitting up also, and wondering what would happen next.

To his great amazement the ladle began to address the assembled forks and spoons in a silvery tone very pleasant to hear: —

“Ladies and gentlemen, at this festive season it is proper that we should

enjoy ourselves. As we shall be tired after dinner, we will at once begin our sporrs by a grand promenade. Take parrners and fall in!”

At these words a general uprising took place; and before Tony could get his breath a long procession of forks and spoons stood ready. The finger- bowls struck up an airy tune as if invisible wet fingers were making music on their rims, and led by the stately ladle like a drum-major, the grand march began. The forks were the gentlemen, tall, slender, and with a fine curve to their backs; the spoons were the ladies, with full skirts, and the scallops on the handles stood up like silver combs; the large ones were the mammas, the teaspoons were the young ladies, and the little salts the children. It was sweet to see the small things walk at the end of the procession, wirh the two silver rests for the carving knife and fork trotting behind like pet dogs. The mustard-spoon and pickle-fork went together, and quarrelled all the way, both being hot-tempered and sharp-tongued. The steel knives looked on, for this was a very aristocratic party, and only the silver people could join in it.

“Here’s fun!” thought Tony, staring with all his might, and so much interested in this remarkable state of things that he forgot hunger and time altogether.

Round and round went the glittering train, to the soft music of the many-toned finger-bowls, till three turns about the long oval table had been made; then all fell into line for a contra-dance, as in the good old times before every one took to spinning like tops. Grandpa Ladle led off with his oldest daughter, Madam Gravy Ladle, and the little salts stood at the bottom prancing like real children impatient for their turn. When it came, they went down the middle in fine style, with a cling! clang! that made Tony’s legs quiver with a longing to join in.

It was beautiful to see the older ones twirl round in a stately way, with bows and courtesies at the end, while the teaspoons and small forks romped a good deal, and Mr. Pickle and Miss Mustard kept every one laughing at their smart speeches. The silver butter-knife, who was an invalid, having broken her back and been mended, lay in the rack and smiled sweetly down upon her friends, while the little Cupid on the lid of the butter-dish pirouetted on one toe in the most delightful manner.

When every one had gone through the dance, the napkins were arranged as sofas and the spoons rested, while the polite forks brought sprigs of celery to fan them with. The little salts got into grandpa’s lap; and the silver dogs lay down panting, for they had frisked with the children. They all talked; and Tony could not help wondering if real ladies said such things when rhey put thetr heads together and nodded and whispered, for some of the remarks were so personal that he was much confused. Fortunately they took no notice of him, so he listened and learned something in this queer way.

“‘I have been in this family a hundred years,” began the soup-ladle; “and it seems to me that each generation is worst than the lay. My first master was punctual to a minute, and madam was always down beforehand to sec that all was ready. Now master comes at all hours; mistress lets the servants do as they like; and the manners of the children are very bad. Sad state of things, very sad!”

“Dear me, yes!” sighed one of the large spoons; “we don’t see such nice housekeeping now as we did when we were young. Girls were taught all about it then; but now it is all books or parties, and few of them know a skimmer from a gridiron.”

“Well, I’m sure the poor things are much happier than if they were messing about in kitchens as girls used to do in your day. It is much better for them to be dancing, skating, and studying than wasting their young lives darning and preserving, and sitting by their mammas as prim as dishes. I prefer the present way of doing things, though the girls in this family do sit up too lare, and wear too high heels to their boots.”

The mustard-spoon spoke in a pert tone, and the pickle-fork answered sharply, —

“I agree with you, cousin. The boys also sit up too late. I’m tired of being waked to fish out olives or pickles for those fellows when they come in from the theatre or some dance; and as for that Tony, he is a real pig, — cats everything he can lay hands on, and is the torment of the maid’s life.”

“Yes,” cried one little salt-spoon, “we saw him steal cake out of the sideboard, and he never told when his mother scolded Norah.”

“So mean!” added the other; and both the round faces were so full of disgust that Tony fell flat and shut his eyes as if asleep to hide his confusion. Some one laughed; but he dared not look, and lay blushing and listening to remarks which plainly proved how careful we should be of our acts and words even when alone, for who knows what apparently dumb thing may be watching us.

“I have observed that Mr. Murry reads the paper at table instead of talking to his family; that Mrs. Murry worries about the servants; the girls gossip and giggle; the boys eat, and plague one another, and that small child Nelly teases for all she sees, and is never quiet till she gets the sugar-bowl,” said Grandpa Ladle, in a tone of regret. “Now, useful and pleasant chat at table would make meals delightful, instead of being scenes of confusion and discomfort.”

“I bite their tongues when I get a chance, hoping to make them witty or to check unkind words; but they only sputter, and get a lecture from Aunt Maria, who is a sour old spinster, always criticising her neighbors.”

As the mustard-spoon spoke, the teaspoons laughed as if they thought her rather like Aunt Maria in that respect.

“I gave the baby a fit of colic to teach her to let pickles alone, but no one thanked me,” said the pickle-fork.

“Perhaps if we keep ourselves so bright that those who use us can see their faces in us we shall be able to help them a little; for no one likes to see an ugly face or a dull spoon. The art of changing frowns to smiles is never old-fashioned; and lovely manners smooth away the little worries of life beautifully.” A silvery voice spoke, and all looked respectfully at Madam Gravy Ladle, who was a very fine old spoon, with a coat of arms on it, and a polish that all envied.

“People can’t always be remembering how old and valuable and bright they are. Here in America we just go ahead and make manners and money for ourselves. I don’t stop to ask what dish I’m going to help to; I just pitch in and take all I can hold, and don’t care a bit whether I shine or not. My grandfather was a kitchen spoon; but I’m smarter than he was, thanks to my plating, and look and feel as good as any one, though I haven’t got stags’ heads and big letters on my handle.”

No one answered these impertinent remarks of the sauce-spoon, for all knew that she was nor pure silver, and was only used on occasions when many spoons were needed. Tony was ashamed to hear her talk in that rude way to the fine old silver he was so proud of, and resolved he’d give the saucy spoon a good rap when he helped himself to the cranberry.

An impressive silence lasted till a lively fork exclaimed, as the clock struck, “Every one is coasting out-of-doors. Why not have our share of the fun insider It is very fashionable this winter, and ladies and gentlemen of the best families do it, I assure you.”

“We will!” cried the other forks; and as the dowagers did not object, all fell to work to arrange the table for this agreeable sport. Tony sat up to see how they would manage, and was astonished at the ingenuity of the silver people. With a great clinking and rattling they ran to and fro; dragging the stiff white mats about; the largest they leaned up against the tall caster, and laid the rest in a long slope to the edge of the table, where a pile of napkins made a nice snowdrift to tumble into.

SILVER PITCHERS: AND INDEPENDENCE

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Alcott, 1885

SILVER PITCHERS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT BEGAN.

“We can do nothing about it except show our displeasure in some proper manner,” said Portia, in her most dignified tone.

“*I* should like to cut them all dead for a year to come; and I’m not sure that I won’t!” cried Pauline, fiercely.

“We *ought* to make it impossible for such a thing to happen again, and I think we *might*,” added Priscilla, so decidedly that the others looked at her in surprise.

The three friends sat by the fire “talking things over,” as girls love to do. Pretty creatures, all of them, as they nestled together on the lounge in dressing-gowns and slippers, with unbound hair, eyes still bright with excitement, and tongues that still wagged briskly.

Usually the chat was of dresses, compliments, and all the little adventures that befall gay girls at a merry-making. But to-night something of uncommon interest absorbed the three, and kept them talking earnestly long after they should have been asleep.

Handsome Portia looked out from her blonde locks with a disgusted expression, as she sipped the chocolate thoughtful mamma had left inside the fender. Rosy-faced Pauline sat staring indignantly at the fire; while in gentle Priscilla’s soft eyes the shadow of a real sorrow seemed to mingle with the light of a strong determination.

Yes, something had happened at this Thanksgiving festival which much offended the three friends, and demanded grave consideration on their part; for the “Sweet P’s,” as Portia, Pris, and Polly were called, were the belles of the town. One ruled by right of beauty and position, one by the power of a character so sweet and strong that its influence was widely felt, and one by the wit and winsomeness of a high yet generous spirit.

It had been an unusually pleasant evening, for after the quilting bee in the afternoon good Squire Allen had given a bountiful supper, and all the young folks of the town had joined in the old-fashioned games, which made the roof ring with hearty merriment.

All would have gone well if some one had not privately introduced something stronger than the cider provided by the Squire, — a mysterious and potent something, which caused several of the young men to betray that they were decidedly the worse for their libations.

That was serious enough; but the crowning iniquity was the putting of brandy into the coffee, which it was considered decorous for the young girls to prefer instead of cider.

Who the reprobates were remained a dead secret, for the young men laughed off the dreadful deed as a joke, and the Squire apologized in the handsomest manner.

But the girls felt much aggrieved and would not be appeased, though the elders indulgently said, “Young men will be young men,” even while they shook their heads over the pranks played and the nonsense spoken under the influence of the wine that had been so slyly drank.

Now what should be done about it? The “Sweet P’s” knew that their mates would look to them for guidance at this crisis, for they were the leaders in all things. So they must decide on some line of conduct for all to adopt, as the best way of showing their disapproval of such practical jokes.

When Pris spoke, the others looked at her with surprise; for there was a new expression in her face, and both asked wonderingly, “How?”

“There are several ways, and we must decide which is the best. One is to refuse invitations to the sociable next week.”

“But I’ve just got a lovely new dress expressly for it!” cried Portia, tragically.

“Then we might decline providing any supper,” began Pris.

“That wouldn’t prevent the boys from providing it, and I never could get through the night without a morsel of something!” exclaimed Polly, who loved to see devoted beings bending before her, with offerings of ice, or struggling manfully to steer a glass of lemonade through a tumultuous sea of silk and broadcloth, feeling well repaid by a word or smile from her when they landed safely.

“True, and it *would* be rather rude and resentful; for I am sure they will be models of deportment next time,” and gentle Pris showed signs of relenting, though that foolish joke bad cost her more than either of the others.

For a moment all sat gazing thoughtfully at the fire, trying to devise some awful retribution for the sinners, no part of which should fall upon themselves. Suddenly Polly clapped her hands, crying with a triumphant air, —

“I’ve got it, girls! I’ve got it!”

“What? How? Tell us quick!”

“We *will* refuse to go to the first sociable, and that will make a tremendous impression, for half the nice girls will follow our lead, and the boys will be in despair. Every one will ask why we are not there; and what can those poor wretches say but the truth? Won’t that be a bitter pill for my lords and gentlemen?”

“It will certainly be one to us,” said Portia, thinking of the “heavenly blue dress” with a pang.

“Wait a bit; our turn will come at the next sociable. To this we can go with escorts of our own choosing, or none at all, for they are free and easy affairs, you know. So we need be under no obligation to any of those sinners, and can trample upon them as much as we please.”

“But how about the games, the walks home, and all the pleasant little services the young men of our set like to offer and we to receive?” asked Portia, who had grown up with these “boys,” as Polly called them, and found it hard to turn her back on the playmates who had now become friends or lovers.

“Bless me! I forgot that the feud might last more than one evening. Give me an idea, Pris,” and Polly’s triumph ended suddenly.

“I will,” answered Pris, soberly; “for at this informal sociable we can institute a new order of things. It will make a talk, but I think we have a right to do it, and I’m sure it will have a good effect, if we only hold out, and don’t mind being laughed at. Let us refuse to associate with the young men whom we know to be what is called ‘gay,’ and accept as friends those of whose good habits we are sure. If they complain, as of course they will, we can say their own misconduct made it necessary, and there we have them.”

“But, Pris, who ever heard of such an idea? People will say all sorts of things about us!” said Portia, rather startled at the proposition.

“Let them! I say it’s a grand plan, and I’ll stand by you, Pris, through thick and thin!” cried Polly, who enjoyed the revolutionary spirit of the thing.

“We can but try it, and give the young men a lesson; for, girls, matters are coming to a pass, when it is our *duty* to do something. I cannot think it is right for us to sit silent and see these fine fellows getting into bad habits because no one dares or cares to speak out, though we gossip and complain in private.”

“Do you want us to begin a crusade?” asked Portia, uneasily.

“Yes, in the only way we girls can do it. We can’t preach and pray in streets and bar-rooms, but we may at home, and in our own little world show that we want to use our influence for good. I know that you two can do any thing you choose with the young people in this town, and it is just that set who most need the sort of help you can give, if you will.”

“You have more influence than both of us put together; so don’t be modest, Pris, but tell us what to do, and I’ll do it, even if I’m hooted at,” cried warm-hearted Polly, won at once.

"You must do as you think right; but *I* have made up my mind to protest against wine-drinking in every way I can. I know it will cost me much, for I have nothing to depend upon but the good opinion of my friends; nevertheless, I shall do what seems my duty, and I may be able to save some other girl from the heart-aches I have known."

"You won't lose our good opinion, you dear little saint! Just tell us how to begin and we will follow our leader," cried both Portia and Polly, fired with emulation by their friend's quiet resolution.

Pris looked from one to the other, and, seeing real love and confidence in their faces, was moved to deepen the impression she had made, by telling them the sad secret of her life. Pressing her hands tightly together, and drooping her head, she answered in words that were the more pathetic for their brevity, —

"Dear girls, don't think me rash or sentimental, for I *know* what I am trying to do, and you will understand my earnestness better when I tell you that a terrible experience taught me to dread this appetite more than death. It killed my father, broke mother's heart, and left me all alone."

As she paused, poor Pris hid her face and shrank away, as if by this confession she had forfeited her place in the respect of her mates. But the girlish hearts only clung the closer to her, and proved the sincerity of their affection by sympathetic tears and tender words, as Portia and Polly held her fast, making a prettier group than the marble nymphs on the mantelpiece; for the Christian graces quite outdid the heathen ones.

Polly spoke first, and spoke cheerfully, feeling, with the instinct of a fine nature, that Priscilla's grief was too sacred to be talked about, and that they could best show their appreciation of her confidence by proving themselves ready to save others from a sorrow like hers.

"Let us be a little society of three, and do what we can. I shall begin at home, and watch over brother Ned; for lately he has been growing away from me somehow, and I'm afraid he is beginning to be 'gay.' I shall get teased unmercifully; but I won't mind if I keep him safe."

"I have no one at home to watch over but papa, and he is in no danger, of course; so I shall show Charley Lord that I am not pleased with him," said Portia, little dreaming where her work was to be done.

"And you will set about reforming that delightful scapegrace, Phil Butler?" added Polly, peeping archly into the still drooping face of Pris.

"I have lost my right to do it, for I told him to-night that love and respect must go together in my heart," and Pris wiped her wet eyes with a hand that no longer wore a ring.

Portia and Polly looked at one another in dismay, for by this act Pris proved how thoroughly in earnest she was.

Neither had any words of comfort for so great a trouble, and sat silently caressing her, till Pris looked up, with her own serene smile again, and said, as if to change the current of their thoughts, —

“We must have a badge for the members of our new society, so let us each wear one of these tiny silver pitchers. I’ve lost the mate to mine, but Portia has a pair just like them. You can divide, then we are all provided for.”

Portia ran to her jewel-case, caught up a pair of delicate filigree ear-rings, hastily divided a narrow velvet ribbon into three parts, attached to each a silver pitcher, and, as the friends smilingly put on these badges, they pledged their loyalty to the new league by a silent good-night kiss.

CHAPTER II.

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

Great was the astonishment of their “set” when it was known that the “Sweet P’s” had refused all invitations to the opening sociable.

The young men were in despair, the gossips talked themselves hoarse discussing the affair, and the girls exulted; for, as Polly predicted, the effect of their first step was “tremendous.”

When the evening came, however, by one accord they met in Portia’s room, to support each other through that trying period. They affected to be quite firm and cheerful; but one after the other broke down, and sadly confessed that the sacrifice to principle was harder than they expected. What added to their anguish was the fact that the Judge’s house stood just opposite the town-hall, and every attempt to keep away from certain windows proved a dead failure.

“It is *so* trying to see those girls go in with their dresses bundled up, and not even know what they wear,” mourned Portia, watching shrouded figures trip up the steps that led to the paradise from which she had exiled herself.

“They must be having a capital time, for every one seems to have gone. I wonder who Phil took,” sighed Pris, when at length the carriages ceased to roll.

“Girls! I wish to be true to my vow, but if you don’t hold me I shall certainly rush over there and join in the fun, for that music is too much for me,” cried Polly, desperately, as the singing began.

It was an endless evening to the three pretty pioneers, though they went early to bed, and heroically tried to sleep with that distracting music in their ears. Slumber came at last, but as the clocks were striking twelve a little ghost emerged from Portia’s room, and gliding to the hall window vanished among the heavy damask curtains.

Presently another little ghost appeared from the same quarter, and stealing softly to the same window was about to vanish in the same capacious draperies, when a stifled cry was heard, and Portia, the second sprite, exclaimed in an astonished whisper, —

“Why, Pris, are you here, too? I saw Polly creep away from me, and came to take her back. How dare you go wandering about and startling me out of my wits in this way?”

“I was only looking to see if it was all over,” quavered Pris, meekly, emerging from the right-hand curtain.

“So was I!” laughed Polly, bouncing out from the left-hand one.

There was a sound of soft merriment in that shadowy hall for a moment, and then the spirits took a look at the world outside, for the moon was shining brightly. Yes, the fun was evidently over, for the lamps were being extinguished, and several young men stood on the steps exchanging last words. One wore a cloak theatrically thrown over the shoulder, and Polly knew him at once.

“That’s Ned! I *must* hear what they are saying. Keep quiet and I’ll listen,” she whispered, rolling herself in the dark folds of the curtain and opening the window a crack, so that a frosty breeze could blow freely into her left ear.

“You’ll get your death,” murmured Portia, shivering in her quilted wrapper.

“O, never mind!” cried Pris, who recognized the tallest man in the group, and was wild to catch a word from “poor Phil.”

“They think they’ve done a fine thing; but, bless their little hearts, we’ll show that we can do without them by not asking them to the next sociable, or taking notice of them if they go. That will bring them round without fail,” said one masculine voice, with a jolly laugh.

“Many thanks for letting us know your plots, Mr. Lord. Now we can arrange a nice little surprise for *you*,” and Portia made a scornful courtesy in the dark.

“Faith! I don’t blame the girls much, for that was a confoundedly ungentlemanly trick of yours, and I’ll thank you not to lay any of the blame of it on me; I’ve got as much as I can carry without that,” said the tall figure, stalking away alone.

“I’m *so* glad to know that Phil had nothing to do with it!” breathed Pris, gratefully.

“Come on, Charley! I must get home as soon as possible, or Polly will be down on me, for she has taken a new tack lately, and holds forth on the error of my ways like a granny.”

“Won’t I give Ned an extra lecture for that speech, the rascal!” and Polly shook a small fist at him as her brother passed under the window, blissfully unconscious of the avenging angels up aloft.

“‘Tis well; let us away and take sweet counsel how we may annihilate them,” added Polly, melodramatically, as the three ghosts vanished from the glimpses of the moon.

Every one turned out to the sociables, for they were town affairs, and early hours, simple suppers, and games of all sorts, made it possible for old and young to enjoy them together.

On the night of the second one there was a goodly gathering, for the public rebuke administered to the young men had made a stir, and everybody was curious to see what the consequences would be when the parties met.

There was a sensation, therefore, when a whisper went round that the "Sweet P's" had come, and a general smile of wonder and amusement appeared when the girls entered, Portia on the arm of her father, Polly gallantly escorted by her twelve-year-old brother Will, and Pris beside Belinda Chamberlain, whose five feet seven made her a capital cavalier.

"Outwitted!" laughed Charley Lord, taking the joke at once as he saw Portia's gray-headed squire.

"I *knew* Polly was plotting mischief, she has been so quiet lately," muttered Ned, eying his little brother with lofty scorn.

Phil said nothing, but he gave a sigh of relief on seeing that Pris had chosen an escort of whom it was impossible to be jealous.

The Judge seldom honored these gatherings, but Portia ruled papa, and when she explained the peculiar state of things, he had heroically left his easy chair to cast himself into the breach.

Master Will was in high feather at his sudden promotion, and bore himself gallantly, though almost as much absorbed by his wristbands as Mr. Toots; for Polly had got him up regardless of expense, with a gay tie, new gloves, and, O, crowning splendor! a red carnation in his button-hole.

Buxom Belinda was delighted with the chance to play cavalier, and so get her fair share of all the fun going, for usually she stood in a corner smiling at an unappreciative world, like a patient sunflower.

The faces of the young men were a study as the games began, and the three girls joined in them with the partners they had chosen.

"The Judge is evidently on his mettle, but he can't stand that sort of thing long, even to please Portia; and then her Majesty will have to give in, or condescend to some one out of our set," thought Charley Lord, longing already to be taken into favor again.

"Polly will have to come and ask me to lead, if she wants to sing her favorite songs; for I'll be hanged if I do it till she has humbled herself by asking," said Ned, feeling sure that his sister would soon relent.

"If it was any one but Belinda, I don't think I could stand it," exclaimed Phil, as he watched his lost sweetheart with wistful eyes; for, though he submitted to the sentence which he knew he deserved, he could not relinquish so much excellence without deep regret.

But the young men underrated the spirit of the girls, and overrated their own strength. The "Sweet P's" went on enjoying themselves, apparently quite indifferent to the neglect of their once devoted friends. But to the outcasts it was perfectly maddening to see stately Portia promenading with stout Major Quackenboss, who put his best foot foremost with the air of a conquering hero; also to behold sweet Pris playing games with her little pupils in a way that filled their small souls with rapture. But the most aggravating spectacle of all was captivating Polly, chatting gayly with young Farmer Brown, who was evidently losing both head and heart in the light of her smiles.

"It's no use, boys; I *must* have one turn with Portia, and you may hang me for a traitor immediately afterward," cried Charley at last, recklessly casting both pride and promise to the winds.

"O, very well; if you are going to give in, we may as well all eat humble pie 'together,'" and Ned imitated his weak-minded friend, glad of an excuse to claim the leadership of the little choir who led off the weekly "sing."

Phil dared not follow their example as far as Pris was concerned, but made his most elegant bow to Belinda, and begged to have the honor of seeing her home. His chagrin may be imagined when the lofty wall-flower replied, with a significant emphasis that made his face burn, —

"No, thank you. I need a very *steady* escort, for I shouldn't take a fall into a snow-bank as lightly as Pris did not long ago."

Charley met with a like fate at Portia's hands, for she outraged established etiquette by coldly declining his meek invitation to promenade, and two minutes later graciously accepting that of an unfashionable young man, who was known to belong to a temperance lodge.

But Ned's repulse was the most crushing of all, for in reply to his condescending hint, —

"I suppose people won't be satisfied unless we give them our favorites, hey, Polly?" he received a verbal box on the ear in the sharp answer, —

"We don't want *you*, for I intend to lead myself, and introduce a new set of songs which won't be at all to your taste."

Then, to his utter amazement and confusion, Miss Polly began to sing one of the good old temperance songs, the burden whereof was, —

"O, that will be joyful, joyful, joyful, O, that will be joyful, When young men drink no more!"

It was taken up all over the hall, and the chorus rang out with an energy that caused sundry young men to turn red and dodge behind any capacious back they could find, for every one understood Polly's motive, and looked approvingly upon her as she stood singing, with an occasional quiver in the voice that usually was as clear and sweet as a blackbird's.

This unexpected manœuvre on the part of the fair enemy produced direful perplexity and dismay in the opposing camp, whither the discomfited trio fled with tidings of their defeat. None of them dared try again in that quarter, but endeavored to console themselves by flirting wildly with such girls as still remained available, for, sad to relate, many of the most eligible took courage and followed the example of the “Sweet P’s.” This fact cast added gloom over the hapless gentlemen of the offending set, and caused them to fear that a social revolution would follow what they had considered merely a girlish freak.

“Shouldn’t wonder if they got up a praying-band after this,” groaned Ned, preparing himself for the strongest measures.

“Portia had better lead off, then, for the first time I indulged too freely in the ‘rosy’ was at her father’s house,” added Charley, laying all the blame of his expulsion from Eden upon Eve, like a true Adam.

“Look here, boys, we ought to thank, not blame them, for they want to help us, I’m sure, and some of us need help, God knows!” sighed Phil, with a look and tone that made his comrades forget their pique in sudden self-reproach; for not one of them could deny his words, or help feeling that the prayers of such innocent souls would avail much.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT PORTIA DID.

"I know your head aches, mamma, so lie here and rest while I sit in my little chair and amuse you till papa comes in."

As Portia bent to arrange the sofa-cushions comfortably, the tiny silver pitcher hanging at her neck swung forward and caught her mother's eye.

"Is it the latest fashion to wear odd ear-rings instead of lockets?" she asked, touching the delicate trinket with an amused smile.

"No, mamma, it is something better than a fashion; it is the badge of a temperance league that Pris, Polly, and I have lately made," answered Portia, wondering how her mother would take it.

"Dear little girls! God bless and help you in your good work!" was the quick reply, that both surprised and touched her by its fervency.

"Then you don't mind, or think us silly to try and do even a very little towards curing this great evil?" she asked, with a sweet seriousness that was new and most becoming to her.

"My child, I feel as if it was a special providence," began her mother, then checked herself and added more quietly, "Tell me all about this league, dear, unless it is a secret."

"I have no secrets from you, mother," and nestling into her low chair Portia told her story, ending with an earnestness that showed how much she had the new plan at heart.

"So you see Polly is trying to keep Ned safe, and Pris prays for Phil; not in vain, I think, for he has been very good lately, they tell me. But *I* have neither brother nor lover to help, and I cannot go out to find any one, because I am only a girl. Now what *can* I do, mamma, for I truly want to do my share?"

The mother lay silent for a moment, then, as if yielding to an irresistible impulse, drew her daughter nearer, and whispered with lips that trembled as they spoke, —

"You can help your father, dear."

"Mamma, what can you mean?" cried Portia, in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Listen patiently, child, or I shall regret that your confidence inspired me with courage to give you mine. Never think for one moment that I accuse my husband of any thing like drunkenness. He has always taken his wine like a gentleman, and never more than was good for him till of late. For this there are many excuses; he is growing old, his life is less active than it was, many of the pleasures he once enjoyed fail now, and he has fallen into ways that harm his health."

"I know, mamma; he doesn't care for company as he used to, or business, either, but seems quite contented to sit among his papers half the morning, and doze over the fire half the evening. I've wondered at it, for he is not really old, and looks as hale and handsome as ever," said Portia, feeling that something hovered on her mother's lips which she found it hard to utter.

"You are right; it is *not* age alone that makes him so unlike his once cheerful, active self; it is — bend lower, dear, and never breathe to any one what I tell you now, only that you may help me save your father's life, perhaps."

Startled by the almost solemn earnestness of these words, Portia laid her head upon the pillow, and twilight wrapt the room in its soft gloom, as if to shut out all the world, while the mother told the daughter the danger that threatened him whom they both so loved and honored.

"Papa has fallen into the way of taking more wine after dinner than is good for him. He does not know how the habit is growing upon him, and is hurt if I hint at such a thing. But Dr. Hall warned me of the danger after papa's last ill turn, saying that at his age and with his temperament apoplexy would be sure to follow over-indulgence of this sort."

"O mamma, what can I do?" whispered Portia, with a thrill, as the words of Pris returned to her with sudden force, "It killed my father, broke mother's heart, and left me all alone."

"Watch over him, dear, amuse him as you only can, and wean him from this unsuspected harm by all the innocent arts your daughterly love can devise. I have kept this to myself, because it is hard for a wife to see any fault in her husband; still harder for her to speak of it even to so good a child as mine. But my anxiety unfits me to do all I might, so I need help; and of whom can I ask it but of you? My darling, make a little league with mother, and let us watch and pray in secret for this dear man who is all in all to us."

What Portia answered, what comfort she gave, and what further confidences she received, may not be told, for this household covenant was too sacred for report. No visible badge was assumed, no audible vow taken, but in the wife's face, as it smiled on her husband that night, there was a tenderer light than ever, and the kiss that welcomed papa was the seal upon a purpose as strong as the daughter's love.

Usually the ladies left the Judge to read his paper and take his wine in the old-fashioned way, while they had coffee in the drawing-room. As they rose, Portia saw the shadow fall upon her mother's face, which she had often seen before, but never understood till now; for *this* was the dangerous hour, this the moment when the child must stand between temptation and her father, if she could.

That evening, very soon after the servant had cleared the table of all but the decanters, a fresh young voice singing blithely in the parlor made the Judge put down his glass to listen in pleased surprise.

Presently he stepped across the hall to set both doors open, saying, in a half reproachful tone, —

"Sing away, my lark, and let papa hear you, for he seldom gets a chance nowadays."

"Then he must stay and applaud me, else I shall think that speech only an empty compliment," answered Portia, as she beckoned with her most winsome smile.

The Judge never dreamed that his good angel spoke; but he saw his handsome girl beaming at him from the music stool, and strolled in, meaning to go back when the song ended.

But the blue charmer in the parlor proved more potent than the red one in the dining-room, and he sat on, placidly sipping the excellent coffee, artfully supplied by his wife, quite unconscious of the little plot to rob him of the harmful indulgence which too often made his evenings a blank, and his mornings a vain attempt to revive the spirits that once kept increasing years from seeming burdensome.

That was the beginning of Portia's home mission; and from that hour she devoted herself to it, thinking of no reward, for such "secret service" could receive neither public sympathy nor praise.

It was not an easy task, as she soon found, in spite of the stanch and skilful ally who planned the attacks she dutifully made upon the enemy threatening their domestic peace.

When music ceased to have charms, and the Judge declared he *must* get his "forty winks" after dinner, Portia boldly declared that she would stay and see that he had them comfortably. So papa laughed and submitted, took a brief nap, and woke in such good-humor that he made no complaint on finding the daughter replacing the decanter.

This answered for a while; and when its efficacy seemed about to fail, unexpected help appeared; for mamma's eyes began to trouble her, and Portia proposed that her father should entertain the invalid in the evening, while she served her through the day.

This plan worked capitally, for the Judge loved his good wife almost as much as she deserved, and devoted himself to her so faithfully that the effort proved a better stimulant than any his well-stocked cellar could supply.

Dr. Hall prescribed exercise and cheerful society for his new patient, and in seeing that these instructions were obeyed the Judge got the benefit of them, and found no time for solitary wine-bibbing.

“I do believe I’m growing young again, for the old dulness is quite gone, and all this work and play does not seem to tire me a bit,” he said, after an unusually lively evening with the congenial guests Portia took care to bring about him.

“But it must be very stupid for you, my dear, as we old folks have all the fun. Why don’t you invite the young people here oftener?” he added, as his eye fell on Portia, gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

“I wish I dared tell you why,” she answered wistfully.

“Afraid of your old papa?” and he looked both surprised and grieved.

“I won’t be, for you are the kindest father that ever a girl had, and I know you’ll help me, as you always do, papa. I don’t dare ask my young friends here because I’m not willing to expose some of them to temptation,” began Portia, bravely.

“What temptation? This?” asked her father, turning her half-averted face to the light, with a smile full of paternal pride.

“No, sir; a far more dangerous one than ever I can be.”

“Then I should like to see it!” and the old gentleman looked about him for this rival of his lovely daughter.

“It is these,” she said, pointing to the bottles and glasses on the side-board.

The Judge understood her then, and knit his brows but before he could reply Portia went steadily on, though her cheeks burned, and her eyes were bent upon the fire again.

“Father, I belong to a society of three, and we have promised to do all we can for temperance. As yet I can only show bravely the faith that is in me; therefore I can never offer any friend of mine a drop of wine, and so I do not ask them here, where it would seem most uncourteous to refuse.”

“I trust no gentleman ever had cause to reproach me for the hospitality I was taught to show my guests,” began the Judge, in his most stately manner.

But he got no further, for a soft hand touched his lips, and Portia answered sorrowfully, —

“One man has, sir; Charley Lord says the first time he took too much was in this house, and it has grieved me to the heart, for it is true. O papa, never let any one have the right to say that again of us! Forgive me if I seem undutiful, but I *must* speak out, for I want my dear father to stand on my side, and set an example which will make me even fonder and prouder of him than I am now."

As Portia paused, half frightened at her own frankness, she put her arms about his neck, and hid her face on his breast, still pleading her cause with the silent eloquence so hard to resist.

The Judge made no reply for several minutes, and in that pause many thoughts passed through his mind, and a vague suspicion that had haunted him of late became a firm conviction. For suddenly he seemed to see his own weakness in its true light, to understand the meaning of the watchful love, the patient care that had so silently and helpfully surrounded him; and in Portia's appeal for younger men, he read a tender warning to himself.

He was a proud man, but a very just one; and though a flush of anger swept across his face at first, he acknowledged the truth of the words that were so hard to speak.

With his hand laid fondly on the head that was half-hidden, lest a look should seem to reproach him, this brave old gentleman proved that he loved his neighbor better than himself, and honestly confessed his own shortcomings.

"No man shall ever say again that *I* tempted him."

Then as Portia lifted up a happy face, he looked straight into the grateful eyes that dimmed with sudden tears, and added tenderly, —

"My daughter, I am not too proud to own a fault, nor, please God, too old to mend it."

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT POLLY DID.

Since their mother’s death, Polly had tried to fill her place, and take good care of the boys. But the poor little damsel had a hard time of it sometimes; for Ned, being a year or two older, thought it his duty to emancipate himself from petticoat government as rapidly as possible, and do as he pleased, regardless of her warnings or advice.

Yet at heart he was very fond of his pretty sister. At times he felt strongly tempted to confide his troubles and perplexities to her, for since the loss of his mother he often longed for a tender, helpful creature to cheer and strengthen him.

Unfortunately he had reached the age when boys consider it “the thing” to repress every sign of regard for their own women-folk, sisters especially; so Ned barricaded himself behind the manly superiority of his twenty years, and snubbed Polly.

Will had not yet developed this unpleasant trait, but his sister expected it, and often exclaimed, despairingly, to her bosom friends, —

“When *he* follows Ned’s example, and begins to rampage, what *will* become of me?”

The father — a learned and busy man — was so occupied by the duties of his large parish, or so absorbed in the abstruse studies to which his brief leisure was devoted, that he had no time left for his children. Polly took good care of him and the house, and the boys seemed to be doing well, so he went his way in peace, quite unconscious that his eldest son needed all a father’s care to keep him from the temptations to which a social nature, not evil propensities, exposed him.

Polly saw the danger, and spoke of it; but Mr. Snow only answered absently, —

“Tut, tut, my dear; you are over-anxious, and forget that young men all have a few wild oats to sow.”

While Ned silenced her with that other familiar and harmful phrase, “I’m only seeing life a bit, so don’t you fret, child,” little dreaming that such “seeing life” too often ends in seeing death.

So Polly labored in vain, till something happened which taught them all a lesson. Ned went on a sleighing frolic with the comrades whom of all others his sister dreaded most.

“Do be careful and not come home as you did last time, for father will be in, and it would shock him dreadfully if I shouldn’t be able to keep you quiet,” she said anxiously.

“You little granny, I wasn’t tipsy, only cheerful, and that scared you out of your wits. I’ve got my key, so don’t sit up. I hate to have a woman glowering at me when I come in,” was Ned’s ungracious reply; for the memory of that occasion was not a pleasant one.

“If a woman had not been sitting up, you’d have frozen on the door-mat, you ungrateful boy,” cried Polly, angrily.

Ned began to whistle, and was going off without a word, when Polly’s loving heart got the better of her quick temper, and, catching up a splendid tippet she had made for him, she ran after her brother. She caught him just as he opened the front door, and, throwing both her arms and her gift about his neck, said, with a kiss that produced a sensation in the sleigh-full of gentlemen at the gate, —

“Ah, do be friends, for I can’t bear to part so.”

Now if no one had been by, Ned would have found that pleasant mingling of soft arms and worsted a genuine comforter; but masculine pride would not permit him to relent before witnesses, and the fear of being laughed at by “those fellows” made him put both sister and gift roughly aside, with a stern, —

“I won’t be molly-coddled! Let me alone and shut the door!”

Polly did let him alone, with a look that haunted him, and shut the door with a spirited bang, that much amused the gentlemen.

“I’ll never try to do any thing for Ned again! It’s no use, and he may go to the bad for all I care!” said Polly to herself, after a good cry.

But she bitterly repented that speech a few hours later, when her brother was brought back, apparently dead, by such of the “cheerful” party as escaped unhurt from a dangerous upset.

There was no concealing this sad home-coming from her father, though poor Ned was quiet enough now, being stunned by the fall, which had wounded his head and broken his right arm.

It *was* a shock, both to the man and the minister; and, when the worst was over, he left Polly to watch her brother, with eyes full of penitential tears, and went away, to reproach himself in private for devoting to ancient Fathers the time and thought he should have given to modern sons.

Ned was very ill, and when, at last, he began to mend, his helplessness taught him to see and love the sweetest side of Polly's character; for she was in truth his right hand, and waited on him with a zeal that touched his heart.

Not one reproach did she utter, not even by a look did she recall past warnings, or exult in the present humiliation, which proved how needful they had been. Every thing was forgotten except the fact that she had the happy privilege of caring for him almost as tenderly as a mother.

Not quite, though, and the memory of her whose place it was impossible to fill seemed to draw them closer together; as if the silent voice repeated its last injunctions to both son and daughter, "Take care of the boys, dear;" "Be good to your sister, Ned."

"I've been a regular brute to her, and the dear little soul is heaping coals of fire on my head by slaving over me like an angel," thought the remorseful invalid, one day, as he lay on the sofa, with a black patch adorning his brow, and his arm neatly done up in splints.

Polly thought he was asleep, and sat quietly rolling bandages till a head popped in at the door, and Will asked, in a sepulchral whisper, —

"I've got the book Ned wanted. Can I come and give it to you?"

Polly nodded, and he tiptoed in to her side, with a face so full of good-will and spirits that it was as refreshing as a breath of fresh air in that sick room.

"Nice boy! he never forgets to do a kindness and be a comfort to his Polly," she said, leaning her tired head on his buttony jacket, as he stood beside her.

Will wasn't ashamed to show affection for "his Polly," so he patted the pale cheeks with a hand as red as his mittens, and smiled down at her with his honest blue eyes full of the protecting affection it was so pleasant to receive.

"Yes, *I'm* going to be a tiptop boy, and never make you and father ashamed of me, as you were once of somebody we know. Now don't you laugh, and I'll show you something; it's the best I could do, and I wanted to prove that I mean what I say; truly, truly, wish I may die if I don't."

As he spoke, Will pulled out of his vest-pocket a little pewter cream-pot, tied to a shoe-string, and holding it up said, with a funny mixture of boyish dignity and defiance, —

"I bought it of Nelly Hunt, because her tea-set was half-smashed up. Folks may laugh at my badge, but I don't care; and if you won't have me in your society I'll set up all alone, for I'm going into the temperance business, any way!"

Polly hugged him on the spot, and made his youthful countenance glow with honest pride by saying solemnly, —

"William G. Snow, I consider our league honored by the addition of so valuable a member; for a boy who can bear to be laughed at, and yet stick to his principles, is a treasure."

"The fellows *do* laugh at me, and call me 'Little Pitcher;' but I'd rather be that than 'Champagne Charlie,' as Ned called Mr. Lord," said Will, stoutly.

"Bless the little pitchers!" cried Polly, enthusiastically surveying both the pewter pot and its wearer.

A great tear was lying on her cheek, checked in its fall by the dimple that came as she looked at her brother's droll badge. Will caught it dexterously in the tiny cup, saying, with a stifled laugh, —

"Now you've baptized it, Polly, and it's as good as silver; for your tear shines in there like a great big diamond. Wonder how many it would take to fill it?"

"You'll never make me cry enough to find out. Now go and get my little silver chain, for that dear pewter pot deserves a better one than an old shoe-string," said Polly, looking after him with a happy face, as the small youth gave one ecstatic skip and was off.

"I'm afraid we've waked you up," she added, as Ned stirred.

"I was only day-dreaming; but I mean this one shall come true," and Ned rose straight up, with an energy that surprised his sister.

"Come and have your lunch, for it's time. Which will you take, Mrs. Neal's wine-jelly or my custard?" asked Polly, settling him in his big chair.

To her astonishment, Ned pitched the little mould of amber jelly into the fire, and tried to eat the custard with his left hand.

"My dear boy, have you lost your senses?" she ejaculated.

"No; I've just found them," he answered, with a flash of the eye, that seemed to enlighten Polly without more words.

Taking her usual seat on the arm of the chair, she fed her big nursling in silence, till a sigh made her ask tenderly, —

"Isn't it right? I put in lots of sugar because you like it sweet."

"All the sugar in the world won't sweeten it to me, Polly; for there's a bitter drop at the bottom of all my cups. Will said your tear shone like a diamond in his little pitcher, and well it might. But you can't cry happy tears over me, though I've made you shed enough sad ones to fill the big punch-bowl."

Ned tried to laugh, but somehow the custard choked him; and Polly laid the poor, cropped head on her shoulder for a minute, saying softly, —

"Never mind, dear, I wouldn't think about the old troubles now."

She got no farther, for with a left-handed thump that made all the cups dance wildly on the table, Ned cried out, —

"But I *will* think about the old troubles, for I don't intend to have any new ones of that sort! Do you suppose I'll see that snip of a boy standing up for what is right, and not have the pluck to do the same? Do you suppose I'll make my own father ashamed of me more than once? Or let the dearest little girl in the world wear herself out over me, and I not try to thank her in the way she likes best? Polly, my dear, you can't be as proud of your elder brother as you are of the younger, but you shall never have cause to blush for him again; *never*, sir, *never*!"

Ned lifted his hand for another emphatic thump, but changed his mind, and embraced his sister as closely as one arm could do it.

"I ought to have a badge if I'm going to belong to your select society; but I don't know any lady who will give me an ear-ring or a cream-pot," said Ned, when the conversation got round again to the cheerful side of the question.

"I'll give you something better than either," answered Polly, as she transferred a plain locket from her watch-guard to the one lying on the table.

Ned knew that a beloved face and a lock of gray hair were inside; and when his sister added, with a look full of sweet significance, "For her sake, dear," he answered manfully, —

"I'll try, Polly!"

CHAPTER V.

WHAT PRIS DID.

Priscilla, meantime, was racking her brain to discover how she could help Philip; for since she had broken off her engagement no one spoke of him to her, and she could only judge of how things were going with him by what she saw and heard as she went about her daily task.

Pris kept school, and the road which she must take twice a day led directly by the office where Phil was studying medicine with old Dr. Buffum. Formerly she always smiled and nodded as she passed, or stopped to chat a moment with the student, who usually chanced to be taking a whiff of fresh air at that instant. Little notes flew in and out, and often her homeward walk was cheered by a companion, who taught the pretty teacher lessons she found it very easy to learn.

A happy time! But it was all over now, and brief glimpses of a brown head bent above a desk near that window was the only solace poor Pris had. The head never turned as she went by, but she felt sure that Phil knew her step, and found that moment, as she did, the hardest of the day.

She longed to relent, but dared not yet. He longed to show that he repented, but found it difficult without a sign of encouragement. So they went their separate ways, seldom meeting, for Phil stuck to his books with dogged resolution, and Pris had no heart for society.

Of course the affair was discussed with all the exasperating freedom of a country town, some blaming Pris for undue severity, some praising her spirit, and some, friends, — not gossips, — predicting that both would be the better for the trial, which would not separate them long. Of this latter class were Portia and Polly, who felt it their duty to lend a hand when matters reached a certain point.

“Pris, dear, may I tell you something that I think you’d be glad to know?” began Polly, joining her friend one afternoon, as she went home weary and alone.

“*You* may tell me any thing,” and Pris took her arm as if she felt the need of sympathy.

“You know Dr. Buffum let Phil help with Ned, so we have seen a good deal of him, and that is how I found out what I’ve got to tell you.”

"He spoke of me, then?" whispered Pris, eagerly.

"Not a word till Ned made him. My boy is fond of your boy, and they had confidences which seem to have done them both good. Of course Ned didn't tell me all about it, as *we* tell things (men never do, they are so proud and queer), but he said this, —

"'Look here, Polly, you must be very kind to Phil, and stand by him all you can, or he will go down. He is doing his best, and will hold on as long as he can, but a fellow *must* have comfort and encouragement of some sort, and if he don't get the right kind he'll try the wrong.'"

"O Polly! you will stand by him?"

"I have; for I just took Phil in a weakish moment, and found out all I wanted to know. Ned is right and you are wrong, Pris, — not in giving back the ring, but in seeming to cast him off entirely. He does not deserve that, for he was not to blame half so much as you think. But he won't excuse himself, for he feels that you are unjust; yet he loves you dearly, and you could do any thing with him, if you chose."

"I do choose, Polly; but how *can* I marry a man whom I cannot trust?" began Pris, sadly.

"Now, my child, I'm going to talk to you like a mother, for I've had experience with boys, and I know how to manage them," interrupted Polly, with such a charmingly maternal air that Pris laughed in spite of her trouble. "Be quiet and listen to the words of wisdom," continued her friend, seriously.

"Since I've taken care of Ned, I've learned a great deal, for the poor lad was so sick and sorry he couldn't shut his heart against me any more. So now I understand how to help and comfort him, for hearts are very much alike, Pris, and all need lots of love and patience to keep them good and happy. Ned told me his troubles, and I made up my mind that as *we* don't have so many temptations as boys, we should do all we can to help them, and make them the sort of men we can both love and trust."

"You are right, Polly. I've often thought how wrong it is for us to sit safe and silent while we know things are going wrong, just because it isn't considered proper for us to speak out. Then when the harm is done we are expected to turn virtuously away from the poor soul we might perhaps have saved if we had dared. God does not do so to us, and we ought not to do so to those over whom we have so much power," said Pris, with a heart full of sad and tender memories.

"We won't!" cried Polly, firmly. "We began in play, but we will go on in earnest, and use our youth, our beauty, our influence for something nobler than merely pleasing men's eyes, or playing with their hearts. We'll help them to be good, and brave, and true, and in doing this we shall become better women, and worthier to be loved, I know."

"Why, Polly, you are quite inspired!" and Pris stopped in the snowy road to look at her.

"It isn't all *my* wisdom. I've talked with father as well as Ned and Phil, and they have done me good. I've discovered that confidence is better than compliments, and friendship much nicer than flirting; so I'm going to turn over a new leaf, and use my good gifts for higher ends."

"Dear thing, what a comfort you are!" said Pris, pressing Polly's hands, and looking into her bright face with grateful eyes. "You have given me courage to do my duty, and I'll follow your example as fast as I can. Don't come any farther, please: I'd better be alone when I pass Phil's window, for I'm going to nod and smile, as I used to in the happy time. Then he will see that I don't cast him off and leave him to 'go down' for want of help, but am still his friend until I dare be more."

"Now, Pris, that's just lovely of you, and I know it will work wonders. Smile and nod away, dear, and try to do your part, as I'm trying to do mine."

For an instant the little gray hat and the jaunty one with the scarlet feather were bent close together; but what went on under the brims, who can say? Then Polly trotted off as fast as she could go, and Pris turned into a certain street with a quicker step and a brighter color than she had known for weeks.

She was late, for she had lingered with Polly, and she feared that patient watcher at the window would be gone. No; the brown head was there, but it lay wearily on the arms folded over a big book, and the eyes that stared out at the wintry sky had something tragic in them.

Poor Phil did need encouragement, and was in the mood to take the worst sort if the best failed him, for life looked very dark just then, and solitude was growing unbearable.

Suddenly, between him and the ruddy sunset a face appeared, — the dearest and the loveliest in the world to him. Not half averted now, nor set straightforward, cold and quiet as a marble countenance, but bent towards him, with a smile on the lips, and a wistful look in the tender eyes that made his heart leap up with sudden hope. Then it vanished; and when he sprung to the window nothing could be seen but the last wave of a well-known cloak, fluttering round the corner.

But Priscilla's first effort was a great success; for the magic of a kind look glorified the dingy office, and every bottle on the shelves might have been filled with the elixir of life, so radiant did Phil's face become. The almost uncontrollable desire to rush away and recklessly forget his loneliness in the first companionship that offered was gone now, for a happy hope peopled his solitude with helpful thoughts and resolutions; the tragic look left the eyes, that still saw a good angel instead of a tempting demon between them and the evening sky; and when Phil shut up the big book he had been vainly trying to study, he felt that he had discovered a new cure for one of the sharpest pains the heart can suffer.

Next morning Pris unconsciously started for school too soon, so when she passed that window the room was empty. Resolved that Phil should not share her disappointment, she lifted the sash and dropped a white azalea on his desk. She smiled as she did it, and then whisked away as if she had taken instead of left a treasure. But the smile remained with the flower, I think, and Phil found it there when he hurried in to discover this sweet good-morning waiting for him.

He put it in the wine-glass which he had sworn never should be filled again with any thing but water, and sitting down before it listened to the little sermon the flower preached; for the delicate white azalea was Pris to him, and the eloquence of a pure and tender heart flowed from it, working miracles. One of them was that when sunset came it shone on two faces at the window, and the little snow-birds heard two voices breaking a long silence.

“God bless you, Pris!”

“God help you, Phil!”

That was all, but from that hour the girl felt her power for good, and used it faithfully; and from that hour the young man worked bravely to earn the respect and confidence without which no love is safe and happy.

“We are friends now,” they said, when they were seen together again; and friends they remained, in spite of shrugs and smiles, ill-natured speeches, and more than one attempt to sow discord between them, for people did not understand the new order of things.

“I trust him,” was the only answer Pris gave to all warnings and criticisms.

“I *will* be worthy of her,” the vow that kept Phil steady in spite of the ridicule that is so hard to bear, and gave him courage to flee from the temptation he was not yet strong enough to meet face to face.

Portia and Polly stood by them stanchly; for having made her father’s house a safe refuge, Portia offered Phil all the helpful influences of a happy home. Polly, with Ned to lend a hand, gave his comrade many a friendly lift; and when it was understood that the Judge, the minister, and the “Sweet P’s” indorsed the young M. D., no one dared cast a stone at him.

All this took time, of course, but Phil got his reward at last, for one night a little thing happened which showed him his own progress, and made Pris feel that she might venture to wear the ring again.

At a party Phil was graciously invited to take wine with a lady, and refused. It was a very hard thing to do, for the lady was his hostess, a handsome woman, and the mother of a flock of little children, who all preferred the young doctor to the old one; and, greatest trial of all, several of his most dreaded comrades stood by to laugh at him, if he dared to let principle outweigh courtesy.

But he did it, though he grew pale with the effort to say steadily, —

“Will Mrs. Ward pardon me if I decline the honor? I am” —

There he stopped and turned scarlet, for a lie was on his lips, — a lie so much easier to tell than the honest truth that many would have forgiven its utterance at that minute.

His hostess naturally thought ill health was his excuse, and, pitying his embarrassment, said, smiling, —

“Ah! you doctors don’t prescribe wine for your own ailments as readily as for those of your patients.”

But Phil, angry at his own weakness, spoke out frankly, with a look that said more than his words, —

“I cannot even accept the kind excuse you offer me, for I am not ill. It may be my duty to order wine sometimes for my patients, but it is also my duty to prescribe water for myself.”

A dreadful little pause followed that speech; but Mrs. Ward understood now, and though she thought the scruple a foolish one, she accepted the apology like a well-bred woman, and, with a silent bow that ended the matter, turned to other guests, leaving poor Phil to his fate.

Not a pleasant one, but he bore it as well as he could, and when his mates left him stranded in a corner, he said, half aloud, with a long breath, as if the battle had been a hard one, —

“Yes, I suppose I *have* lost my best patient, but I’ve kept my own respect, and that ought to satisfy me.”

“Let me add mine, and wish you health and happiness, dear Phil,” said a voice behind him, and turning quickly he saw Pris standing there with two goblets of water, and a smile full of love and pride.

“You know what that toast means for me?” he whispered, with sudden sunshine in his face, as he took the offered glass.

“Yes; and I drink it with all my heart,” she answered, with her hand in his.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW IT ENDED.

The leaven dropped by three girls in that little town worked so slowly that they hardly expected to do more than “raise their own patty-cakes,” as Polly merrily expressed it. But no honest purpose is ever wasted, and by-and-by the fermentation began.

Several things helped it amazingly. The first of these was a temperance sermon, preached by Parson Snow, which produced a deep impression, because in doing this he had the courage, like Brutus, to condemn his own son. The brave sincerity, the tender earnestness of that sermon, touched the hearts of his people as no learned discourse had ever done, and bore fruit that well repaid him for the effort it cost.

It waked up the old people, set the young ones to thinking, and showed them all that they had a work to do. For those who were down felt that they might be lifted up again, those who were trifling ignorantly or recklessly with temptation saw their danger, and those who had longed to speak out now dared to do it because he led the way.

So, warned by the wolf in his own fold, this shepherd of souls tried to keep his flock from harm, and, in doing it, found that his Christianity was the stronger, wiser, and purer for his humanity.

Another thing was the fact that the Judge was the first to follow his pastor’s example, and prove by deeds that he indorsed his words. It was hard for the hospitable old gentleman to banish wine from his table, and forego the pleasant customs which long usage and many associations endeared to him; but he made his sacrifice handsomely, and his daughter helped him.

She kept the side-board from looking bare by filling the silver tankards with flowers, offered water to his guests with a grace that made a cordial of it, and showed such love and honor for her father that he was a very proud and happy man.

What the Judge did was considered “all right” by his neighbors, for he was not only the best-born, but the richest man in town, and with a certain class these facts had great weight. Portia knew this, and counted on it when she said she wanted him on her side; so she exulted when others followed the new fashion, some from principle, but many simply because he set it.

At first the young reformers were disappointed that every one was not as enthusiastic as themselves, and as ready to dare and do for the cause they had espoused. But wiser heads than those on their pretty shoulders curbed their impetuosity, and suggested various ways of gently insinuating the new idea, and making it so attractive that others would find it impossible to resist; for sunshine often wins when bluster makes us wrap our prejudices closer around us, like the traveller in the fable.

Portia baited *her* trap with Roman parties, — for she had been abroad, — and made them so delightful that no one complained when only cake and tea was served (that being the style in the Eternal City), but went and did likewise.

Artful Polly set up a comic newspaper, to amuse Ned, who was an invalid nearly all winter, and in it freed her mind on many subjects in such a witty way that the "Pollyanthus," as her brother named it, circulated through their set, merrily sowing good seed; for young folks will remember a joke longer than a sermon, and this editor made all hers tell.

Pris was not behindhand in her efforts, but worked in a different way, and got up a branch society among her little pupils, called "The Water Babies." That captivated the mothers at once, and even the fathers found it difficult to enjoy their wine with blue eyes watching them wistfully over the rims of silver mugs; while the few topers of the town hid themselves like night-birds flying from the sun, when, led by their gentle General, that little army of innocents marched through the streets with banners flying, blithe voices singing, rosy faces shining, and childish hearts full of the sweet delusion that *they* could save the world.

Of course the matrons discussed these events at the sewing-circle, and much talk went on of a more useful sort than the usual gossip about servants, sickness, dress, and scandal.

Mrs. Judge waxed eloquent upon the subject, and, being president, every one listened with due respect. Mrs. Ward seconded all her motions, for this lady had much surprised the town, not only by installing Phil as family physician, but by coming out strong for temperance. Somebody had told her all about the girls' labor of love, and she had felt ashamed to be outdone by them; so, like a conscientious woman, she decided to throw her influence into the right scale, take time by the forelock, and help to make the town a safer place for her five sons to grow up in than it was then.

These two leading ladies kept the ball rolling so briskly that others were soon converted and fell into rank, till a dozen or so were heartily in earnest. And then the job was half done; for in a great measure women make society what they choose to have it.

“We are told that home is our sphere, and advised to keep in it; so let us see that it is what it should be, and then we shall have proved our fitness for larger fields of labor, if we care to claim them,” said Mrs. Judge, cutting out red flannel with charitable energy, on one occasion.

“Most of us will find that quite as much as we can accomplish, I fancy,” answered Mrs. Ward, thinking of her own riotous lads, who were probably pulling the house about their ears, while she made hoods for Mrs. Flanagan’s bare-headed lasses.

“‘Pears to me we hain’t no call to interfere in other folks’s affairs. This never was a drinkin’ town, and things is kep’ in fustrate order, so *I* don’t see the use of sech a talk about temperance,” remarked Miss Simmons, an acid spinster, whose principal earthly wealth consisted of a choice collection of cats.

“If your tabbies took to drinking, you *would* see the use, I’m sure,” laughed Polly, from the corner, which was a perfect posy-bed of girls.

“Thank goodness, *I’ve* no men folks to pester myself about,” began Miss Simmons, with asperity.

“Ah, but you should; for if you refuse to make them happy, you ought at least to see that they console themselves in ways which can work them no further woe,” continued Polly, gravely, though her black eyes danced with fun.

“Well, that wouldn’t be no more than fair, I’m free to confess; but, sakes alive, I couldn’t attend to ‘em all!” said Miss Simmons, bridling with a simper that nearly upset the whole bevy of girls.

“Do make the effort, and help us poor things who haven’t had your experience,” added Pris, in her most persuasive voice.

“I declare I will! I’ll have Hiram Stebbins in to tea; and when he’s as good-natured as muffins and pie can make him, I’ll set to and see if I can’t talk him out of his attachment to that brandy bottle,” cried Miss Simmons, with a sudden yearning towards the early sweetheart, who had won, but never claimed her virgin affections.

“I think you’ll do it; and, if so, you will have accomplished what no one else could, and you shall have any prize you choose,” cried Portia, smiling so hopefully that the faded old face grew almost young again, as Miss Simmons went home with something better to do than tend her tabbies.

“We’ve bagged that bird,” said Polly, with real satisfaction.

“That’s the way we set people to work,” added Portia, smiling.

“She will do what we can’t, for her heart is in it,” said Pris, softly; and it was pleasant to see the blooming girls rejoice that poor old Hiram was in a fair way to be saved.

So the year went round, and Thanksgiving came again, with the home jollity that makes a festival throughout the land. The day would not be perfect if it did not finish with a frolic of some sort, and for reasons of their own the young gentlemen decided to have the first sociable of the year an unusually pleasant one.

“Everybody is going, and Ned says the supper is to be water-ice and ice-water,” said Polly, taking a last look at herself in the long mirror, when the three friends were ready on that happy evening.

“I needn’t sigh now over other girls’ pretty dresses, as I did last year;” and Portia plumed herself like a swan, as she settled Charley’s roses in her bosom.

“And I needn’t wonder who Phil will take,” added Pris, stopping, with her glove half on, to look at the little ring back again from its long banishment in somebody’s waistcoat pocket.

Never had the hall looked so elegant and gay, for it was charmingly decorated; couches were provided for the elders, mirrors for the beauties, and music of the best sounded from behind a thicket of shrubs and flowers. Every one seemed in unusually good spirits; the girls looked their loveliest, and the young men were models of propriety; though a close observer might have detected a suspicious twinkle in the eyes of the most audacious, as if they plotted some new joke.

The girls saw it, were on the watch, and thought the secret was out when they discovered that the gentlemen of their set all wore tiny pitchers, hanging like orders from the knots of sweet-peas in their button-holes. But, bless their innocent hearts! that was only a ruse, and they were taken entirely by surprise when, just before supper, the band struck up,

“Drink to me only with thine eyes;”

and every one looked smilingly at the three girls who were standing together near the middle of the hall.

They looked about them in pretty confusion, but in a moment beheld a spectacle that made them forget themselves; for the Judge, in an impressive white waistcoat, marched into the circle gathered about them, made a splendid bow, and said, with a smile that put the gas to shame, —

“Young ladies! I am desired by the gentlemen now present to beg your acceptance of a slight token of their gratitude, respect, and penitence. As the first man who joined the society which has proved a blessing to our town, Mr. William Snow will now have the honor of presenting the gift.”

Then appeared Mr. William Snow, looking as proud as a peacock; and well he might, for on the salver which he bore stood a stately silver pitcher. A graceful little Hebe danced upon the handle, three names shone along the fretted brim, and three white lilies rose from the slender vase, — fit emblems of the maiden founders of the league.

Arriving before them, Master Will nearly upset the equilibrium of his precious burden in attempting to make a bow equal to the Judge's; but recovered himself gallantly, and delivered the following remarkable poem, which the public was expected to believe an emanation of his own genius: —

"Hebe poured the nectar forth When gods of old were jolly, But graces three *our* goblets fill, Fair Portia, Pris and Polly. Their draughts make every man who tastes Happier, better, richer; So here we vow ourselves henceforth Knights of the Silver Pitcher."

ANNA'S WHIM.

"Now just look at that!" cried a young lady, pausing suddenly in her restless march to and fro on one of the wide piazzas of a seaside hotel.

"At what?" asked her companion, lazily swinging in a hammock.

"The difference in those two greetings. It's perfectly disgraceful!" was the petulant reply.

"I didn't see any thing. Do tell me about it," said Clara, opening her drowsy eyes with sudden interest.

"Why, young Barlow was lounging up the walk, and met pretty Miss Ellery. Off went his hat; he gave her a fine bow, a gracious smile, a worn-out compliment, and then dawdled on again. The next minute Joe King came along. Instantly Barlow woke up, laughed out like a pleased boy, gave him a hearty grip of the hand, a cordial 'How are you, old fellow? I'm no end glad to see you!' and, linking arms, the two tramped off, quite beaming with satisfaction."

"But, child, King is Barlow's best friend; Kitty Ellery only an acquaintance. Besides, it wouldn't do to greet a woman like a man."

"Yes, it would, especially in this case; for Barlow adores Kate, and might, at least, treat her to something better than the nonsense he gives other girls. But, no, it's proper to simper and compliment; and he'll do it till his love gets the better of 'prunes and prisms,' and makes him sincere and earnest."

"This is a new whim of yours. You surely wouldn't like to have any man call out 'How are you, Anna?' slap you on the shoulder, and nearly shake your hand off, as Barlow did King's, just now," said Clara, laughing at her friend.

"Yes, I would," answered Anna, perversely, "if he really meant it to express affection or pleasure. A good grip of the hand and a plain, hearty word would please me infinitely better than all the servile bowing down and sweet nonsense I've had lately. I'm not a fool; then, why am I treated like one?" she continued, knitting her handsome brows and pacing to and fro like an angry leopardess. "Why don't men treat me like a reasonable being? — talk sense to me, give me their best ideas, tell me their plans and ambitions, let me enjoy the real man in them, and know what they honestly are? I don't want to be a goddess stuck up on a pedestal. I want to be a woman down among them, to help and be helped by our acquaintance."

"It wouldn't do, I fancy. They wouldn't like it, and would tell you to keep to your own sex."

“But my own sex don’t interest or help me one bit. Women have no hope but to be married, and that is soon told; no ideas but dress and show, and I’m tired to death of both; no ambition but to outshine their neighbors, and I despise that.”

“Thank you, love,” blandly murmured Clara.

“It is true, and you know it. There *are* sensible women; but not in my set. And I don’t seem to find them. I’ve tried the life set down for girls like me, and for three years I’ve lived and enjoyed it. Now I’m tired of it. I want something better, and I mean to have it. Men *will* follow, admire, flatter, and love me; for I please them and they enjoy my society. Very well. Then it’s fair that I should enjoy theirs. And I should if they would let me. It’s perfectly maddening to have flocks of brave, bright fellows round me, full of every thing that is attractive, strong, and helpful, yet not be able to get at it, because society ordains twaddle between us, instead of sensible conversation and sincere manners.”

“What shall we do about it, love?” asked Clara, enjoying her friend’s tirade.

“*You* will submit to it, and get a mental dyspepsia, like all the other fashionable girls. I won’t submit, if I can help it; even if I shock Mrs. Grundy by my efforts to get plain bread and beef instead of confectionery.”

Anna walked in silence for a moment, and then burst out again, more energetically than ever.

“Oh! I do wish I could find one sensible man, who would treat me as he treats his male friends, — even roughly, if he is honest and true; who would think me worthy of his confidence, ask my advice, let me give him whatever I have that is wise and excellent, and be my friend in all good faith.”

“Ahem!” said Clara, with a significant laugh, that angered Anna.

“You need not try to abash me with your jeers. I know what I mean, and I stand by my guns, in spite of your ‘hems.’ I do *not* want lovers. I’ve had dozens, and am tired of them. I will not marry till I know the man thoroughly; and how *can* I know him with this veil between us? They don’t guess what I really am; and I want to prove to them and to myself that I possess brains and a heart, as well as ‘heavenly eyes,’ a ‘queenly figure,’ and a ‘mouth made for kissing.’“

The scorn with which Anna uttered the last words amused her friend immensely, for the petulant beauty had never looked handsomer than at that moment.

“If any man saw you now, he’d promise whatever you ask, no matter how absurd. But don’t excite yourself, dear child; it is too warm for heroics.”

Anna leaned on the wide baluster a moment, looking thoughtfully out upon the sea; and as she gazed a new expression stole over her charming face, changing its disdainful warmth to soft regret.

“This is not all a whim. I know what I covet, because I had it once,” she said, with a sigh. “I had a boy friend when I was a girl, and for several years we were like brother and sister. Ah! what happy times we had together, Frank and I. We played and studied, quarrelled and made up, dreamed splendid dreams, and loved one another in our simple child fashion, never thinking of sex, rivalry, or any of the forms and follies that spoil maturer friendships.”

“What became of him? Did he die angelically in his early bloom, or outgrow his Platonics with round jackets?” asked Clara.

“He went to college. I went abroad, to be ‘finished off;’ and when we met a year ago the old charm was all gone, for we were ‘in society’ and had our masks on.”

“So the boy and girl friendship did not ripen into love and end the romance properly?”

“No, thank Heaven! no flirtation spoilt the pretty story. Frank was too wise, and I too busy. Yet I remember how glad I was to see him; though I hid it properly, and pretended to be quite unconscious that I was any thing but a belle. I got paid for my deceit, though; for, in spite of his admiration, I saw he was disappointed in me. I should not have cared if I had been disappointed in him; but I was quick to see that he was growing one of the strong, superior men who command respect. I wanted to keep his regard, at least; and I seemed to have nothing but beauty to give in return. I think I never was so hurt in my life as I was by his not coming to see me after a week or two, and hearing him say to a friend, one night, when I thought I was at my very best, ‘She is spoilt, like all the rest.’“

“I do believe you loved him, and that is why you won’t love any one else,” cried Clara, who had seen her friend in her moods before; but never understood them, and thought she had found a clew now.

“No,” said Anna, with a quiet shake of the head. “No, I only wanted my boy friend back, and could not find him. The fence between us was too high; and I could not climb over, as I used to do when I leaped the garden-wall to sit in a tree and help Frank with his lessons.”

“Has the uncivil wretch never come back?” asked Clara, interested in the affair.

“Never. He is too busy shaping his life bravely and successfully to waste his time on a frivolous butterfly like Anna West.”

An eloquent little gesture of humility made the words almost pathetic. Kind-hearted Clara was touched by the sight of tears in the “heavenly eyes,” and tumbling out of the hammock she embraced the “queenly figure” and warmly pressed the “lips that were made for kissing,” thereby driving several approaching gentlemen to the verge of distraction.

“Now don’t be tragical, darling. You have nothing to cry for, I’m sure. Young, lovely, rich, and adored, what more *can* any girl want?” said Clara, gushingly.

“Something besides admiration to live for,” answered Anna, adding, with a shrug, as she saw several hats fly off and several manly countenances beam upon her, “Never mind, my fit is over now; let us go and dress for tea.”

Miss West usually took a brisk pull in her own boat before breakfast; a habit which lured many indolent young gentlemen out of their beds at unaccustomed hours, in the hope that they might have the honor of splashing their legs helping her off, the privilege of wishing her “*Bon voyage,*” or the crowning rapture of accompanying her.

On the morning after her “fit,” as she called the discontent of a really fine nature with the empty life she led, she was up and out unusually early; for she had kept her room with a headache all the evening, and now longed for fresh air and exercise.

As she prepared the “Gull” for a start, she was idly wondering what early bird would appear eager to secure the coveted worm, when a loud and cheerful voice was heard calling, —

“Hullo, Anna!” and a nautically attired gentleman hove in sight, waving his hat as he hailed her.

She started at the unceremonious salute and looked back. Then her whole face brightened beautifully as she sprang up the bank, saying, with a pretty mixture of hesitation and pleasure, —

“Why, Frank, is that you?”

“Do you doubt it?”

And the new-comer shook both her hands so vigorously that she winced a little as she said, laughing, —

“No, I don’t. That is the old squeeze with extra power in it.”

“How are you? Going for a pull? Take me along and show me the lions. There’s a good soul.”

“With pleasure. When did you come?” asked Anna, settling the black ribbon under the sailor collar which set off her white throat charmingly.

“Last night. I caught a glimpse of you at tea; but you were surrounded then and vanished immediately afterward. So when I saw you skipping over the rocks just now, I gave chase, and here I am. Shall I take an oar?” asked Frank, as she motioned him to get in.

“No, thank you. I prefer to row myself and don’t need any help,” she answered, with an imperious little wave of the hand; for she was glad to show him she could do something besides dance, dress, and flirt.

“All right. Then I’ll do the luxurious and enjoy myself.” And, without offering to help her in, Frank seated himself, folded his arms, stretched out his long legs, and placidly remarked, —

“Pull away, skipper.”

Anna was pleased with his frank and friendly greeting, and, feeling as if old times had come again, sprang in, prepared to astonish him with her skill.

“Might I suggest that you” — began Frank, as she pushed off.

“No suggestions or advice allowed aboard this ship. I know what I’m about, though I *am* a woman,” was the severe answer, as the boat glided from the wharf.

“Ay, ay, sir!” And Frank meekly subsided, with a twinkle of amusement in the eyes that rested approvingly on the slender figure in a blue boating suit and the charming face under the sailor hat.

Anna paddled her way dexterously out from among the fleet of boats riding at anchor in the little bay; then she seated herself, adjusted one oar, and looked about for the other rowlock. It was nowhere visible; and, after a silent search, she deigned to ask, —

“Have you seen the thing anywhere?”

“I saw it on the bank.”

“Why didn’t you tell me before?”

“I began to, but was quenched; so I obeyed orders.”

“You haven’t forgotten how to tease,” said Anna, petulantly.

“Nor you to be wilful.”

She gave him a look that would have desolated most men; but only made Frank smile affably as she paddled laboriously back, recovered the rowlock and then her temper, as, with a fine display of muscle, she pulled out to sea.

Getting into the current, she let the boat drift, and soon forgot time and space in the bewildering conversation that followed.

“What have you been doing since I saw you last?” she asked, looking as rosy as a milkmaid, as she stopped rowing and tied up her wind-tossed hair.

“Working like a beaver. You see” — and then, to her utter amazement, Frank entered into an elaborate statement of his affairs, quite as if she understood all about it and her opinion was valuable. It was all Greek to Anna, but she was immensely gratified; for it was just the way the boy used to tell her his small concerns in the days when each had firm faith in the other’s wisdom. She tried to look as if she understood all about “investments, percentage, and long credit;” but she was out of her depth in five minutes, and dared say nothing, lest she should betray her lamentable ignorance on all matters of business. She got out of the scrape by cleverly turning the conversation to old times, and youthful reminiscences soon absorbed them both.

The faint, far-off sound of a gong recalled her to the fact that breakfast was nearly ready; and, turning the boat, she was dismayed to see how far they had floated. She stopped talking and rowed her best; but wind and tide were against her, she was faint with hunger, and her stalwart passenger made her task doubly hard. He offered no help, however; but did the luxurious to the life, leaning back, with his hat off, and dabbling his hands in the way that most impedes the progress of a boat.

Pride kept Anna silent till her face was scarlet, her palms blistered, and her breath most gone. Then, and not till then, did she condescend to say, with a gasp, poorly concealed by an amiable smile, —

"Do you care to row? I ought to have asked you before."

"I'm very comfortable, thank you," answered Frank. Then, as an expression of despair flitted over poor Anna's face, he added bluntly, "I'm getting desperately hungry, so I don't care if I do shorten the voyage a bit."

With a sigh of relief, she rose to change seats, and, expecting him to help her, she involuntarily put out her hands, as she passed. But Frank was busy turning back his cuffs, and never stirred a finger; so that she would have lost her balance and gone overboard if she had not caught his arm.

"What's the matter, skipper?" he asked, standing the sudden grip as steadily as a mast.

"Why didn't you help me? You have no more manners than a turtle!" cried Anna, dropping into the seat with the frown of a spoiled beauty, accustomed to be gallantly served and supported at every step.

Frank only added to his offence by laughing, as he said carelessly, —

"You seemed so independent, I didn't like to interfere."

"So, if I had gone overboard, you would not have fished me out, unless I asked you to do it, I suppose?"

"In that case, I'm afraid I shouldn't have waited for orders. We can't spare you to the mermen yet."

Something in the look he gave her appeased Anna's resentment; and she sat silently admiring the strong swift strokes that sent the "Gull" skimming over the water.

"Not too late for breakfast, after all," she said graciously, as they reached the wharf, where several early strollers stood watching their approach.

"Poor thing! You look as if you needed it," answered Frank. But he let her get out alone, to the horror of Messrs. Barlow, King, & Co.; and, while she fastened the boat, Frank stood settling his hatband, with the most exasperating unconsciousness of his duty.

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning?" she asked, as she walked up the rocky path, with no arm to lean upon.

"Fish. Will you come along?"

"No, thank you. One gets so burnt. I shall go to my hammock under the pine," was the graciously suggestive reply of the lady who liked a slave to fan or swing her, and seldom lacked several to choose from.

"See you at dinner, then. My room is in the Cottage. So by-by for the present." And, with a nod, Frank strolled away, leaving the lovely Miss West to mount the steps and cross the hall unescorted.

"The dear fellow's manners need polish. I must take him in hand, I see. And yet he is very nice, in spite of his brusque ways," thought Anna, indulgently. And more than once that morning she recalled his bluff "Hullo, Anna!" as she swung languidly in her hammock, with a devoted being softly reading Tennyson to her inattentive ears.

At dinner she appeared in unusual spirits, and kept her end of the table in a ripple of merriment by her witty and satirical sallies, privately hoping that her opposite neighbor would discover that she could talk well when she chose to do so. But Frank was deep in politics, discussing some new measure with such earnestness and eloquence that Anna, pausing to listen for a moment, forgot her lively gossip in one of the great questions of the hour.

She was listening with silent interest, when Frank suddenly appealed to her to confirm some statement he had just made; and she was ignominiously obliged to confess she knew too little about the matter to give any opinion. No compliment ever paid her was more flattering than his way of turning to her now and then, as if including her in the discussion as a matter of course; and never had she regretted any thing more keenly than she did her ignorance on a subject that every man and woman should understand and espouse.

She did her best to look intelligent; racked her brain to remember facts which she had heard discussed for weeks, without paying any attention to them; and, thanks to her quick wit and womanly sympathy, she managed to hold her own, saying little, but looking much.

The instant dinner was over, she sent a servant to the reading-room for a file of late papers, and, retiring to a secluded corner, read up with a diligence that not only left her with clearer ideas on one subject, but also a sense of despair at her own deficiencies in the knowledge of many others.

"I really must have a course of solid reading. I do believe that is what I need; and I'll ask Frank where to begin. He always was an intelligent boy; but I was surprised to hear how well he talked. I was actually proud of him. I wonder where he is, by the way. Clara wants to be introduced, and I want to see how he strikes her."

Leaving her hiding-place, Anna walked forth in search of her friends, looking unusually bright and beautiful, for her secret studies had waked her up and lent her face the higher charm it needed. Clara appeared first. The new-comer had already been presented to her, and she professed herself "perfectly fascinated." "Such a personable man! Quite distinguished, you know, and so elegant in his manners! Devoted, graceful, and altogether charming."

"You like his manners, do you?" and Anna smiled at Clara's enthusiasm.

"Of course I do; for they have all the polish of foreign travel, with the indescribable something which a really fine character lends to every little act and word."

"Frank has never been abroad, and if I judged his character by his manners I should say he was rather a rough customer," said Anna, finding fault because Clara praised.

"You are so fastidious, nothing ever suits you, dear. I didn't expect to like this old friend of yours. But I frankly confess I do immensely; so, if you are tired of him, I'll take him off your hands."

"Thank you, love. You are welcome to poor Frank, if you can win him. Men are apt to be more loyal to friendship than women; and I rather fancy, from what I saw this morning, that he is in no haste to change old friends for new."

Anna spoke sweetly, but at heart was ill pleased with Clara's admiration of her private property, as she considered "poor Frank," and inwardly resolved to have no poaching on her preserves.

Just then the gentleman in question came up, saying to Anna, in his abrupt way, —

"Every one is going to ride, so I cannot get the best horses; but I've secured two, and now I want a companion. Will you come for a good old-time gallop?"

Anna thought of her blistered hands, and hesitated, till a look at Clara's hopeful face decided her to accept. She did so, and rode like an Amazon for several hours, in spite of heat, dust, and a hard-mouthed horse, who nearly pulled her arms out of the sockets.

She hoped to find a chance to consult Frank about her course of useful reading; but he seemed intent on the "old-time gallop," and she kept up gallantly till the ride was over, when she retired to her room, quite exhausted, but protesting with heroic smiles that she had had a delightful time.

She did not appear at tea; but later in the evening, when an informal dance was well under way, she sailed in on the arm of a distinguished old gentleman, "evidently prepared to slay her thousands," as young Barlow said, observing the unusual brilliancy of her eyes and the elaborate toilette she had made.

"She means mischief to-night. Who is to be the victim, I wonder?" said another man, putting up his glass for a survey of the charmer.

“Not the party who came last evening. He is only an old friend,” she says.

“He might be her brother or her husband, judging by the cavalier way in which he treats her. I could have punched his head this morning, when he let her pull up that boat alone,” cried a youthful adorer, glaring irefully at the delinquent, lounging in a distant doorway.

“If she said he was an old friend, you may be sure he is an accepted lover. The dear creatures all fib in these matters; so I’ll lay wagers to an enormous amount that all this splendor is for the lord and master, not for our destruction,” answered Barlow, who was wise in the ways of women and wary as a moth should be who had burnt his wings more than once at the same candle.

Clara happened to overhear these pleasing remarks, and five minutes after they were uttered she breathed them tenderly into Anna’s ear. A scornful smile was all the answer she received; but the beauty was both pleased and annoyed, and awaited with redoubled interest the approach of the old friend, who was regarded in the light of a successful lover. But he seemed in no haste to claim his privileges, and dance after dance went by, while he sat talking with the old general or absently watching the human teetotums that spun about before him.

“I can’t stand this another moment!” said Anna to herself, at last, and beckoned the recreant knight to approach, with a commanding gesture.

“Why don’t you dance, sir?”

“I’ve forgotten how, ma’am.”

“After all the pains I took with you when we had lessons together, years ago?”

“I’ve been too busy to attend to trifles of that sort.”

“Elegant accomplishments are not trifles, and no one should neglect them who cares to make himself agreeable.”

“Well, I don’t know that I do care, as a general thing.”

“You ought to care; and, as a penance for that rude speech, you must dance this dance with me. I cannot let you forget all your accomplishments for the sake of business; so I shall do my duty as a friend and take you in hand,” said Anna, severely.

“You are very kind; but is it worth the trouble?”

“Now, Frank, don’t be provoking and ungrateful. You know you like to give pleasure, to be cared for, and to do credit to your friends; so just rub up your manners a bit, and be as well-bred as you are sensible and brave and good.”

“Thank you, I’ll try. May I have the honor, Miss West?” and he bowed low before her, with a smile on his lips that both pleased and puzzled Anna.

They danced the dance, and Frank acquitted himself respectably, but relapsed into his objectionable ways as soon as the trial ended; for the first thing he said, with a sigh of relief, was, —

“Come out and talk; for upon my life I can’t stand this oven any longer.”

Anna obediently followed, and, seating herself in a breezy corner, waited to be entertained. But Frank seemed to have forgotten that pleasing duty; for, perching himself on the wide baluster of the piazza, he not only proceeded to light a cigarette, without even saying, “By your leave,” but coolly offered her one also.

“How dare you!” she said, much offended at this proceeding. “I am not one of the fast girls who do such things, and I dislike it exceedingly.”

“You used to smoke sweet-fern in corn-cob pipes, you remember; and these are not much stronger,” he said, placidly restoring the rejected offering to his pocket.

“I did many foolish things then which I desire to forget now.”

“And some very sweet and sensible ones, also. Ah, well! it can’t be helped, I suppose.”

Anna sat silent a moment, wondering what he meant; and when she looked up, she found him pensively staring at her, through a fragrant cloud of smoke.

“What is it?” she asked, for his eyes seemed seeking something.

“I was trying to see some trace of the little Anna I used to know. I thought I’d found her again this morning in the girl in the round hat; but I don’t find her anywhere to-night.”

“Indeed, Frank, I’m not so much changed as I seem. At least, to you I am the same, as far as I can be. Do believe it, and be friends, for I want one very much?” cried Anna, forgetting every thing but the desire to reestablish herself in his good opinion. As she spoke, she turned her face toward the light and half extended her hand, as if to claim and hold the old regard that seemed about to be withdrawn from her.

Frank bent a little and scanned the upturned face with a keen glance. It flushed in the moonlight and the lips trembled like an anxious child’s; but the eyes met his with a look both proud and wistful, candid and sweet, — a look few saw in those lovely eyes, or, once seeing, ever forgot. Frank gave a little nod, as if satisfied, and said, with that perplexing smile of his, —

“Most people would see only the beautiful Miss West, in a remarkably pretty gown; but I think I catch a glimpse of little Anna, and I am very glad of it. You want a friend? Very good. I’ll do my best for you; but you must take me as I am, thorns and all.”

“I will, and not mind if they wound sometimes. I’ve had roses till I’m tired of them, in spite of their sweetness.”

As he spoke, Frank had taken the hand she offered, and, having gravely shaken it, held the “white wonder” for an instant, glancing from the little blisters on the delicate palm to the rings that shone on several fingers.

"Are you reading my fortune?" asked Anna, wondering if he was going to be sentimental and kiss it.

"After a fashion; for I am looking to see if there is a suspicious diamond anywhere about. Isn't it time there was one?"

"That is not a question for you to ask;" and Anna caught away her hand, as if one of the thorns he spoke of had suddenly pricked.

"Why not? We always used to tell each other every thing; and, if we are to go on in the old friendly way, we must be confidential and comfortable, you know."

"You can begin yourself then, and I'll see how I like it," said Anna, aroused and interested, in spite of her maidenly scruples about the new arrangement.

"I will, with all my heart. To own the truth, I've been longing to tell you something; but I wasn't sure that you'd take any interest in it," began Frank, eating rose-leaves with interesting embarrassment.

"I can imagine what it is," said Anna, quickly, while her heart began to flutter curiously, for these confidences were becoming exciting. "You have found your fate, and are dying to let everybody know how happy you are."

"I think I have. But I'm not happy yet. I'm desperately anxious, for I cannot decide whether it is a wise or foolish choice."

"Who is it?"

"Never mind the name. I haven't spoken yet, and perhaps never shall; so I may as well keep that to myself, — for the present, at least."

"Tell me what you like then, and I will ask no more questions," said Anna, coldly; for this masculine discretion annoyed her.

"Well, you see, this dear girl is pretty, rich, accomplished, and admired. A little spoilt, in fact; but very captivating, in spite of it. Now, the doubt in my mind is whether it is wise to woo a wife of this sort; for I know I shall want a companion in all things, not only a pretty sweetheart or a graceful mistress for my house."

"I should say it was *not* wise," began Anna, decidedly; then hastened to add, more quietly: "But perhaps you only see one side of this girl's character. She may have much strength and sweetness hidden away under her gay manner, waiting to be called out when the right mate comes."

"I often think so myself, and long to learn if I am the man; but some frivolous act, thoughtless word, or fashionable folly on her part dampens my ardor, and makes me feel as if I had better go elsewhere before it is too late."

"You are not madly in love, then?"

"Not yet; but I should be if I saw much of her, for when I do I rather lose my head, and am tempted to fall upon my knees, regardless of time, place, and consequences.”

Frank spoke with sudden love and longing in his voice, and stretched out his arms so suggestively that Anna started. But he contented himself with gathering a rose from the clusters that hung all about, and Anna slapped an imaginary mosquito as energetically as if it had been the unknown lady, for whom she felt a sudden and inexplicable dislike.

“So you think I’d better not say to my love, like the mad gentleman to Mrs. Nickleby, ‘Be mine, be mine’?” was Frank’s next question, as he sat with his nose luxuriously buried in the fragrant heart of the rose.

“Decidedly not. I’m sure, from the way you speak of her, that she is not worthy of you; and your passion cannot be very deep if you can quote Dickens’s nonsense at such a moment,” said Anna, more cheerfully.

“It grows rapidly, I find; and I give you my word, if I should pass a week in the society of that lovely butterfly, it would be all over with me by Saturday night.”

“Then don’t do it.”

“Ah! but I want to desperately. Do say that I may, just for a last nibble at temptation, before I take your advice and go back to my bachelor life again,” he prayed beseechingly.

“Don’t go back, love somebody else, and be happy. There are plenty of superior women in the world who would be just the thing for you. I am sure you are going to be a man of mark, and you *must* have a good wife, — not a silly little creature, who will be a clog upon you all your life. So *do* take my advice, and let me help you, if I can.”

Anna spoke earnestly, and her face quite shone with friendly zeal; while her eyes were full of unspoken admiration and regard for this friend, who seemed tottering on the verge of a precipice. She expected a serious reply, — thanks, at least, for her interest; and great was her surprise to see Frank lean back against the vine-wreathed pillar behind him, and laugh till a shower of rose-leaves came fluttering down on both their heads.

“I don’t see any cause for such unseemly merriment,” was her dignified reproof of this new impropriety.

“I beg your pardon. I really couldn’t help it, for the comical contrast between your sage counsels and your blooming face upset me. Your manner was quite maternal and most impressive, till I looked at you in your French finery, and then it was all up with me,” said Frank, penitently, though his eyes still danced with mirth.

The compliment appeased Anna’s anger; and, folding her round white arms on the railing in front of her, she looked up at him with a laugh as blithe as his own.

"I dare say I was absurdly sober and important; but you see it is so long since I have had a really serious thought in my head or felt a really sincere interest in any one's affairs but my own that I overdid the matter. If you don't care for my advice, I'll take it all back; and you can go and marry your butterfly as soon as you like."

"I rather think I shall," said Frank, slowly. "For I fancy she *has* got a hidden self, as you suggested, and I'd rather like to find it out. One judges people so much by externals that it is not fair. Now, you, for instance, if you won't mind my saying it, don't show half your good points; and a casual observer would consider you merely a fashionable woman, — lovely, but shallow."

"As you did the last time we met," put in Anna, sharply.

If she expected him to deny it, she was mistaken for he answered, with provoking candor, —

"Exactly. And I quite grieved about it; for I used to be very fond of my little playmate and thought she'd make a fine woman. I'm glad I've seen you again; for I find I was unjust in my first judgment, and this discovery gives me hope that I may have been mistaken in the same way about my — well, we'll say sweetheart. It's a pretty old word and I like it."

"If he only *would* forget that creature a minute and talk about something more interesting!" sighed Anna to herself. But she answered, meekly enough: "I knew you were disappointed in me, and I did not wonder for I am not good for much, thanks to my foolish education and the life I have led these last few years. But I do sincerely wish to be more of a woman, only I have no one to tell me how. Everybody flatters me and" —

"I don't!" cried Frank, promptly.

"That's true." And Anna could not help laughing in the middle of her confessions at the tone of virtuous satisfaction with which he repelled the accusation. "No," she continued, "you are honest enough for any one; and I like it, though it startles me now and then, it is so new."

"I hope I'm not disrespectful," said Frank, busily removing the thorns from the stem of his flower.

"Oh, no! Not that exactly. But you treat me very much as if I was a sister or a — masculine friend." Anna meant to quote the expression Clara had reported; but somehow the word "wife" was hard to utter, and she finished the sentence differently.

"And you don't like it?" asked Frank, lifting the rose to hide the mischievous smile that lurked about his mouth.

"Yes, I do, — infinitely better than the sentimental homage other men pay me or the hackneyed rubbish they talk. It does me good to be a little neglected; and I don’t mind it from you, because you more than atone for it by talking to me as if I could understand a man’s mind and had one of my own.”

“Then you don’t quite detest me for my rough ways and egotistical confidences?” asked Frank, as if suddenly smitten with remorse for the small sins of the day.

“No, I rather fancy it, for it seems like old times, when you and I played together. Only then I could help you in many ways, as you helped me; but now I don’t seem to know any thing, and can be of no use to you or any one else. I should like to be; and I think, if you would kindly tell me what books to read, what people to know, and what faculties to cultivate, I might become something besides ‘a fashionable woman, lovely but shallow.’“

There was a little quiver of emotion in Anna’s voice as she uttered the last words that did not escape her companion’s quick ear. But he only smiled a look of heartfelt satisfaction to the rose, and answered soberly:

“Now that is a capital idea, and I’ll do it with pleasure. I have often wondered how you bright girls *could* be contented with such an empty sort of life. We fellows are just as foolish for a time, I know, — far worse in the crops of wild oats we sow; but we have to pull up and go to work, and that makes men of us. Marriage ought to do that for women, I suppose; but it doesn’t seem to nowadays, and I do pity you poor little things from the bottom of my heart.”

“I’m ready now to ‘pull up and go to work.’ Show me how, Frank, and I’ll change your pity into respect,” said Anna, casting off her lace shawl, as if preparing for immediate action; for his tone of masculine superiority rather nettled her.

“Come, I’ll make a bargain with you. I’ll give you something strong and solid to brace up your mind, and in return you shall polish my manners, see to my morals, and keep my heart from wasting itself on false idols. Shall we do this for one another, Anna?”

“Yes, Frank,” she answered heartily. Then, as Clara was seen approaching, she added playfully, “All this is *sub rosa*, you understand.”

He handed her the flower without a word, as if the emblem of silence was the best gage he could offer. Many flowers had been presented to the beauty; but none were kept so long and carefully as the thornless rose her old friend gave her, with a cordial smile that warmed her heart.

A great deal can happen in a week, and the seven days that followed that moonlight *tête-à-tête* seemed to Anna the fullest and the happiest she had ever known. She had never worked so hard in her life; for her new tutor gave her plenty to do, and she studied in secret to supply sundry deficiencies which she was too proud to confess. No more novels now; no more sentimental poetry, lounging in a hammock. She sat erect upon a hard rock and read Buckle, Mill, and Social Science Reports with a diligence that appalled the banished dawdlers who usually helped her kill time. There was early boating, vigorous horse exercise, and tramps over hill and dale, from which she returned dusty, brown, and tired, but as happy as if she had discovered something fairer and grander than wild flowers or the ocean in its changeful moods. There were afternoon concerts in the breezy drawing-rooms, when others were enjoying siestas, and Anna sang to her one listener as she had never sung before. But best of all were the moonlight *séances* among the roses; for there they interchanged interesting confidences and hovered about those dangerous but delightful topics that need the magic of a midsummer night to make the charm quite perfect.

Anna intended to do her part honorably; but soon forgot to correct her pupil’s manners, she was so busy taking care of his heart. She presently discovered that he treated other women in the usual way; and at first it annoyed her that she was the only one whom he allowed to pick up her own fan, walk without an arm, row, ride, and take care of herself as if she was a man. But she also discovered that she was the only woman to whom he talked as to an equal, in whom he seemed to find sympathy, inspiration, and help, and for whom he frankly showed not admiration alone, but respect, confidence, and affection.

This made the loss of a little surface courtesy too trifling for complaint or reproof; this stimulated and delighted her; and, in striving to deserve and secure it, she forgot every thing else, prouder to be one man’s true friend than the idol of a dozen lovers.

What the effect of this new league was upon the other party was less evident; for, being of the undemonstrative sex, he kept his observations, discoveries, and satisfaction to himself, with no sign of especial interest, except now and then a rapturous allusion to his sweetheart, as if absence was increasing his passion.

Anna tried to quench his ardor, feeling sure, she said that it was a mistake to lavish so much love upon a person who was so entirely unworthy of it. But Frank seemed blind on this one point; and Anna suffered many a pang, as day after day showed her some new virtue, grace, or talent in this perverse man, who seemed bent on throwing his valuable self away. She endeavored to forget it, avoided the subject as much as possible, and ignored the existence of this inconvenient being entirely. But as the week drew to an end a secret trouble looked out at her eyes, a secret unrest possessed her, and every moment seemed to grow more precious as it passed, each full of a bitter sweet delight never known before.

“I must be off to-morrow,” said Frank, on the Saturday evening, as they strolled together on the beach, while the sun set gloriously and the great waves broke musically on the sands.

"Such a short holiday, after all those months of work!" answered Anna, looking away, lest he should see how wistful her tell-tale eyes were.

"I may take a longer holiday, the happiest a man can have, if somebody will go with me. Anna, I've made up my mind to try my fate," he added impetuously.

"I have warned you, I can do no more." Which was quite true, for the poor girl's heart sunk at his words, and for a moment all the golden sky was a blur before her eyes.

"I won't be warned, thank you; for I'm quite sure now that I love her. Nothing like absence to settle that point. I've tried it, and I can't get on without her; so I'm going to 'put my fortune to the touch and win or lose it all.'"

"If you truly love her, I hope you will win, and find her the wife you deserve. But think well before you put your happiness into any woman's hands," said Anna, bravely trying to forget herself.

"Bless you! I've hardly thought of any thing else this week! I've enjoyed myself, though; and am very grateful to you for making my visit so pleasant," Frank added warmly.

"Have I? I'm so glad!" said Anna, as simply as a pleased child; for real love had banished all her small coquetries, vanities, and affectations, as sunshine absorbs the mists that hide a lovely landscape.

"Indeed, you have. All the teaching has not been on my side, I assure you; and I'm not too proud to own my obligation to a woman! We lonely fellows, who have neither mother, sister, nor wife, need some gentle soul to keep us from getting selfish, hard, and worldly; and few are so fortunate as I in having a friend like little Anna."

"Oh, Frank! what have I done for you? I haven't dared to teach one so much wiser and stronger than myself. I've only wanted to, and grieved because I was so ignorant, so weak, and silly," cried Anna, glowing beautifully with surprise and pleasure at this unexpected revelation.

"Your humility blinded you; yet your unconsciousness was half the charm. I'll tell you what you did, dear. A man's moral sense gets blunted knocking about this rough-and-tumble world, where the favorite maxim is, 'Every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.' It is so with me; and in many of our conversations on various subjects, while I seemed to be teaching you, your innocent integrity was rebuking my worldly wisdom, your subtle instincts were pointing out the right which is above all policy, your womanly charity softening my hard judgments, and your simple faith in the good, the beautiful, the truly brave was waking up the high and happy beliefs that lay, not dead, but sleeping, in my soul. All this you did for me, Anna, and even more; for, in showing me the hidden side of your nature, I found it so sweet and deep and worshipful that it restores my faith in womankind, and shows me all the lovely possibilities that may lie folded up under the frivolous exterior of a fashionable woman."

Anna's heart was so full she could not speak for a moment; then like a dash of cold water came the thought, "And all this that I have done has only put him further from me, since it has given him courage to love and trust that woman." She tried to show only pleasure at his praise; but for the life of her she could not keep a tone of bitterness out of her voice as she answered gratefully, —

"You are too kind, Frank. I can hardly believe that I have so many virtues; but if I have, and they, like yours, have been asleep, remember you helped wake them up, and so you owe me nothing. Keep your sweet speeches for the lady you go to woo. I am contented with honest words that do not flatter."

"You shall have them;" and a quick smile passed over Frank's face, as if he knew what thorn pricked her just then, and was not ill pleased at the discovery. "Only, if I lose my sweetheart, I may be sure that my old friend won't desert me?" he asked, with a sincere anxiety that was a balm to Anna's sore heart.

She did not speak, but offered him her hand with a look which said much. He took it as silently, and, holding it in a firm, warm grasp, led her up to a cleft in the rocks, where they often sat to watch the great breakers thunder in. As she took her seat, he folded his plaid about her so tenderly that it felt like a friendly arm shielding her from the fresh gale that blew up from the sea. It was an unusual attention on his part, and coming just then it affected her so curiously that, when he lounged down beside her, she felt a strong desire to lay her head on his shoulder and sob out, —

"Don't go and leave me! No one loves you half as well as I, or needs you half so much!"

Of course, she did nothing of the sort; but began to sing, as she covertly whisked away a rebellious tear. Frank soon interrupted her music, however, by a heavy sigh; and followed up that demonstration with the tragical announcement, —

"Anna, I've got something awful to tell you."

"What is it?" she asked, with the resignation of one who has already heard the worst.

"It is so bad that I can't look you in the face while I tell it. Listen calmly till I am done, and then pitch me overboard if you like, for I deserve it," was his cheerful beginning.

"Go on." And Anna prepared herself to receive some tremendous shock with masculine firmness.

Frank pulled his hat over his eyes, and, looking away from her, said rapidly, with an odd sound in his voice. —

"The night I came I was put in a room opening on the back piazza; and, lying there to rest and cool after my journey, I heard two ladies talking. I knocked my boots about to let them know I was near; but they took no notice, so I listened. Most women's gabble would have sent me to sleep in five minutes; but this was rather original, and interested me, especially when I found by the names mentioned that I knew one of the parties. I've been trying your experiment all the week. Anna, how do you like it?"

She did not answer for a moment, being absorbed in swift retrospection. Then she colored to her hat-brim, looked angry, hurt, amused, gratified, and ashamed, all in a minute, and said slowly, as she met his laughing eyes, —

"Better than I thought I should."

"That's good! Then you forgive me for my eavesdropping, my rudeness, and manifold iniquities? It was abominable; but I could not resist the temptation of testing your sincerity. It was great fun; but I'm not sure that I shall not get the worst of it, after all," said Frank, sobering suddenly.

"You have played so many jokes upon me in old times that I don't find it hard to forgive this one; though I think it rather base in you to deceive me so. Still, as I have enjoyed and got a good deal out of it, I don't complain, and won't send you overboard yet," said Anna, generously.

"You always were a forgiving angel." And Frank settled the plaid again more tenderly than before.

"It was this, then, that made you so brusque to me alone, so odd and careless? I could not understand it and it hurt me at first; but I thought it was because we had been children together and soon forgot it, you were so kind and confidential, so helpful and straightforward. It *was* 'great fun,' for I always knew you meant what you said; and that was an unspeakable comfort to me in this world of flattery and falsehood. Yes, you may laugh at me, Frank, and leave me to myself again. I can bear it, for I've proved that my whim was a possibility. I see my way now, and can go on alone to a truer, happier life than that in which you found me."

She spoke out bravely, and looked above the level sands and beyond the restless sea, as if she had found something worth living for and did not fear the future. Frank watched her an instant, for her face had never worn so noble an expression before. Sorrow as well as strength had come into the lovely features, and pain as well as patience touched them with new beauty. His own face changed as he looked, as if he let loose some deep and tender sentiment, long held in check, now ready to rise and claim its own.

"Anna," he said penitently, "I've got one other terrible confession to make, and then my conscience will be clear. I want to tell you who my sweetheart is. Here's her picture. Will you look at it?"

She gave a little shiver, turned steadily, and looked where he pointed. But all she saw was her own astonished face reflected in the shallow pool behind them. One glance at Frank made any explanation needless; indeed, there was no time for her to speak before something closer than the plaid enfolded her, something warmer than tears touched her cheek, and a voice sweeter to her than wind or wave whispered tenderly in her ear, —

"All this week I have been studying and enjoying far more than you; for I have read a woman's heart and learned to trust and honor what I have loved ever since I was a boy. Absence proved this to me: so I came to look for little Anna, and found her better and dearer than ever. May I ask her to keep on teaching me? Will she share my work as well as holiday, and be the truest friend a man can have?"

And Anna straightway answered, "Yes."

TRANSCENDENTAL WILD OATS.

A CHAPTER FROM AN UNWRITTEN ROMANCE.

On the first day of June, 184 — , a large wagon, drawn by a small horse and containing a motley load, went lumbering over certain New England hills, with the pleasing accompaniments of wind, rain, and hail. A serene man with a serene child upon his knee was driving, or rather being driven, for the small horse had it all his own way. A brown boy with a William Penn style of countenance sat beside him, firmly embracing a bust of Socrates. Behind them was an energetic-looking woman, with a benevolent brow, satirical mouth, and eyes brimful of hope and courage. A baby reposed upon her lap, a mirror leaned against her knee, and a basket of provisions danced about at her feet, as she struggled with a large, unruly umbrella. Two blue-eyed little girls, with hands full of childish treasures, sat under one old shawl, chatting happily together.

In front of this lively party stalked a tall, sharp-featured man, in a long blue cloak; and a fourth small girl trudged along beside him through the mud as if she rather enjoyed it.

The wind whistled over the bleak hills; the rain fell in a despondent drizzle, and twilight began to fall. But the calm man gazed as tranquilly into the fog as if he beheld a radiant bow of promise spanning the gray sky. The cheery woman tried to cover every one but herself with the big umbrella. The brown boy pillowed his head on the bald pate of Socrates and slumbered peacefully. The little girls sang lullabies to their dolls in soft, maternal murmurs. The sharp-nosed pedestrian marched steadily on, with the blue cloak streaming out behind him like a banner; and the lively infant splashed through the puddles with a duck-like satisfaction pleasant to behold.

Thus these modern pilgrims journeyed hopefully out of the old world, to found a new one in the wilderness.

The editors of “The Transcendental Tripod” had received from Messrs. Lion & Lamb (two of the aforesaid pilgrims) a communication from which the following statement is an extract: —

“We have made arrangements with the proprietor of an estate of about a hundred acres which liberates this tract from human ownership. Here we shall prosecute our effort to initiate a Family in harmony with the primitive instincts of man.

"Ordinary secular farming is not our object. Fruit, grain, pulse, herbs, flax, and other vegetable products, receiving assiduous attention, will afford ample manual occupation, and chaste supplies for the bodily needs. It is intended to adorn the pastures with orchards, and to supersede the labor of cattle by the spade and the pruning-knife.

"Consecrated to human freedom, the land awaits the sober culture of devoted men. Beginning with small pecuniary means, this enterprise must be rooted in a reliance on the succors of an ever-bounteous Providence, whose vital affinities being secured by this union with uncorrupted field and unworldly persons, the cares and injuries of a life of gain are avoided.

"The inner nature of each member of the Family is at no time neglected. Our plan contemplates all such disciplines, cultures, and habits as evidently conduce to the purifying of the inmates.

"Pledged to the spirit alone, the founders anticipate no hasty or numerous addition to their numbers. The kingdom of peace is entered only through the gates of self-denial; and felicity is the test and the reward of loyalty to the unswerving law of Love."

This prospective Eden at present consisted of an old red farm-house, a dilapidated barn, many acres of meadow-land, and a grove. Ten ancient apple-trees were all the "chaste supply" which the place offered as yet; but, in the firm belief that plenteous orchards were soon to be evoked from their inner consciousness, these sanguine founders had christened their domain Fruitlands.

Here Timon Lion intended to found a colony of Latter Day Saints, who, under his patriarchal sway, should regenerate the world and glorify his name for ever. Here Abel Lamb, with the devoutest faith in the high ideal which was to him a living truth, desired to plant a Paradise, where Beauty, Virtue, Justice, and Love might live happily together, without the possibility of a serpent entering in. And here his wife, unconverted but faithful to the end, hoped, after many wanderings over the face of the earth, to find rest for herself and a home for her children.

"There is our new abode," announced the enthusiast, smiling with a satisfaction quite undamped by the drops dripping from his hat-brim, as they turned at length into a cart-path that wound along a steep hillside into a barren-looking valley.

"A little difficult of access," observed his practical wife, as she endeavored to keep her various household gods from going overboard with every lurch of the laden ark.

"Like all good things. But those who earnestly desire and patiently seek will soon find us," placidly responded the philosopher from the mud, through which he was now endeavoring to pilot the much-enduring horse.

“Truth lies at the bottom of a well, Sister Hope,” said Brother Timon, pausing to detach his small comrade from a gate, whereon she was perched for a clearer gaze into futurity.

“That’s the reason we so seldom get at it, I suppose,” replied Mrs. Hope, making a vain clutch at the mirror, which a sudden jolt sent flying out of her hands.

“We want no false reflections here,” said Timon, with a grim smile, as he crunched the fragments under foot in his onward march.

Sister Hope held her peace, and looked wistfully through the mist at her promised home. The old red house with a hospitable glimmer at its windows cheered her eyes; and, considering the weather, was a fitter refuge than the sylvan bowers some of the more ardent souls might have preferred.

The new-comers were welcomed by one of the elect precious, — a regenerate farmer, whose idea of reform consisted chiefly in wearing white cotton raiment and shoes of untanned leather. This costume, with a snowy beard, gave him a venerable, and at the same time a somewhat bridal appearance.

The goods and chattels of the Society not having arrived, the weary family reposed before the fire on blocks of wood, while Brother Moses White regaled them with roasted potatoes, brown bread and water, in two plates, a tin pan, and one mug; his table service being limited. But, having cast the forms and vanities of a depraved world behind them, the elders welcomed hardship with the enthusiasm of new pioneers, and the children heartily enjoyed this foretaste of what they believed was to be a sort of perpetual picnic.

During the progress of this frugal meal, two more brothers appeared. One a dark, melancholy man, clad in homespun, whose peculiar mission was to turn his name hind part before and use as few words as possible. The other was a bland, bearded Englishman, who expected to be saved by eating uncooked food and going without clothes. He had not yet adopted the primitive costume, however; but contented himself with meditatively chewing dry beans out of a basket.

“Every meal should be a sacrament, and the vessels used should be beautiful and symbolical,” observed Brother Lamb, mildly, righting the tin pan slipping about on his knees. “I priced a silver service when in town, but it was too costly; so I got some graceful cups and vases of Britannia ware.”

“Hardest things in the world to keep bright. Will whiting be allowed in the community?” inquired Sister Hope, with a housewife’s interest in labor-saving institutions.

“Such trivial questions will be discussed at a more fitting time,” answered Brother Timon, sharply, as he burnt his fingers with a very hot potato. “Neither sugar, molasses, milk, butter, cheese, nor flesh are to be used among us, for nothing is to be admitted which has caused wrong or death to man or beast."

"Our garments are to be linen till we learn to raise our own cotton or some substitute for woollen fabrics," added Brother Abel, blissfully basking in an imaginary future as warm and brilliant as the generous fire before him.

"Haou abaout shoes?" asked Brother Moses, surveying his own with interest.

"We must yield that point till we can manufacture an innocent substitute for leather. Bark, wood, or some durable fabric will be invented in time. Meanwhile, those who desire to carry out our idea to the fullest extent can go barefooted," said Lion, who liked extreme measures.

"I never will, nor let my girls," murmured rebellious Sister Hope, under her breath.

"Haou do you cattle'ate to treat the ten-acre lot? Ef things ain't 'tended to right smart, we shan't hev no crops," observed the practical patriarch in cotton.

"We shall spade it," replied Abel, in such perfect good faith that Moses said no more, though he indulged in a shake of the head as he glanced at hands that had held nothing heavier than a pen for years. He was a paternal old soul and regarded the younger men as promising boys on a new sort of lark.

"What shall we do for lamps, if we cannot use any animal substance? I do hope light of some sort is to be thrown upon the enterprise," said Mrs. Lamb, with anxiety, for in those days kerosene and camphene were not, and gas unknown in the wilderness.

"We shall go without till we have discovered some vegetable oil or wax to serve us," replied Brother Timon, in a decided tone, which caused Sister Hope to resolve that her private lamp should be always trimmed, if not burning.

"Each member is to perform the work for which experience, strength, and taste best fit him," continued Dictator Lion. "Thus drudgery and disorder will be avoided and harmony prevail. We shall rise at dawn, begin the day by bathing, followed by music, and then a chaste repast of fruit and bread. Each one finds congenial occupation till the meridian meal; when some deep-searching conversation gives rest to the body and development to the mind. Healthful labor again engages us till the last meal, when we assemble in social communion, prolonged till sunset, when we retire to sweet repose, ready for the next day's activity."

"What part of the work do you incline to yourself?" asked Sister Hope, with a humorous glimmer in her keen eyes.

"I shall wait till it is made clear to me. Being in preference to doing is the great aim, and this comes to us rather by a resigned willingness than a wilful activity, which is a check to all divine growth," responded Brother Timon.

"I thought so." And Mrs. Lamb sighed audibly, for during the year he had spent in her family Brother Timon had so faithfully carried out his idea of “being, not doing,” that she had found his “divine growth” both an expensive and unsatisfactory process.

Here her husband struck into the conversation, his face shining with the light and joy of the splendid dreams and high ideals hovering before him.

“In these steps of reform, we do not rely so much on scientific reasoning or physiological skill as on the spirit’s dictates. The greater part of man’s duty consists in leaving alone much that he now does. Shall I stimulate with tea, coffee, or wine? No. Shall I consume flesh? Not if I value health. Shall I subjugate cattle? Shall I claim property in any created thing? Shall I trade? Shall I adopt a form of religion? Shall I interest myself in politics? To how many of these questions — could we ask them deeply enough and could they be heard as having relation to our eternal welfare — would the response be ‘Abstain’?”

A mild snore seemed to echo the last word of Abel’s rhapsody, for Brother Moses had succumbed to mundane slumber and sat nodding like a massive ghost. Forest Absalom, the silent man, and John Pease, the English member, now departed to the barn; and Mrs. Lamb led her flock to a temporary fold, leaving the founders of the “Consociate Family” to build castles in the air till the fire went out and the symposium ended in smoke.

The furniture arrived next day, and was soon bestowed; for the principal property of the community consisted in books. To this rare library was devoted the best room in the house, and the few busts and pictures that still survived many flittings were added to beautify the sanctuary, for here the family was to meet for amusement, instruction, and worship.

Any housewife can imagine the emotions of Sister Hope, when she took possession of a large, dilapidated kitchen, containing an old stove and the peculiar stores out of which food was to be evolved for her little family of eleven. Cakes of maple sugar, dried peas and beans, barley and hominy, meal of all sorts, potatoes, and dried fruit. No milk, butter, cheese, tea, or meat, appeared. Even salt was considered a useless luxury and spice entirely forbidden by these lovers of Spartan simplicity. A ten years’ experience of vegetarian vagaries had been good training for this new freak, and her sense of the ludicrous supported her through many trying scenes.

Unleavened bread, porridge, and water for breakfast; bread, vegetables, and water for dinner; bread, fruit, and water for supper was the bill of fare ordained by the elders. No tea-pot profaned that sacred stove, no gory steak cried aloud for vengeance from her chaste gridiron; and only a brave woman’s taste, time, and temper were sacrificed on that domestic altar.

The vexed question of light was settled by buying a quantity of bayberry wax for candles; and, on discovering that no one knew how to make them, pine-knots were introduced, to be used when absolutely necessary. Being summer, the evenings were not long, and the weary fraternity found it no great hardship to retire with the birds. The inner light was sufficient for most of them. But Mrs. Lamb rebelled. Evening was the only time she had to herself, and while the tired feet rested the skilful hands mended torn frocks and little stockings, or anxious heart forgot its burden in a book.

So “mother’s lamp” burned steadily, while the philosophers built a new heaven and earth by moonlight; and through all the metaphysical mists and philanthropic pyrotechnics of that period Sister Hope played her own little game of “throwing light,” and none but the moths were the worse for it.

Such farming probably was never seen before since Adam delved. The band of brothers began by spading garden and field; but a few days of it lessened their ardor amazingly. Blistered hands and aching backs suggested the expediency of permitting the use of cattle till the workers were better fitted for noble toil by a summer of the new life.

Brother Moses brought a yoke of oxen from his farm, — at least, the philosophers thought so till it was discovered that one of the animals was a cow; and Moses confessed that he “must be let down easy, for he couldn’t live on garden sarse entirely.”

Great was Dictator Lion’s indignation at this lapse from virtue. But time pressed, the work must be done; so the meek cow was permitted to wear the yoke and the recreant brother continued to enjoy forbidden draughts in the barn, which dark proceeding caused the children to regard him as one set apart for destruction.

The sowing was equally peculiar, for, owing to some mistake, the three brethren, who devoted themselves to this graceful task, found when about half through the job that each had been sowing a different sort of grain in the same field; a mistake which caused much perplexity, as it could not be remedied; but, after a long consultation and a good deal of laughter, it was decided to say nothing and see what would come of it.

The garden was planted with a generous supply of useful roots and herbs; but, as manure was not allowed to profane the virgin soil, few of these vegetable treasures ever came up. Purslane reigned supreme, and the disappointed planters ate it philosophically, deciding that Nature knew what was best for them, and would generously supply their needs, if they could only learn to digest her “sallets” and wild roots.

The orchard was laid out, a little grafting done, new trees and vines set, regardless of the unfit season and entire ignorance of the husbandmen, who honestly believed that in the autumn they would reap a bounteous harvest.

Slowly things got into order, and rapidly rumors of the new experiment went abroad, causing many strange spirits to flock thither, for in those days communities were the fashion and transcendentalism raged wildly. Some came to look on and laugh, some to be supported in poetic idleness, a few to believe sincerely and work heartily. Each member was allowed to mount his favorite hobby and ride it to his heart's content. Very queer were some of the riders, and very rampant some of the hobbies.

One youth, believing that language was of little consequence if the spirit was only right, startled new-comers by blandly greeting them with "good-morning, damn you," and other remarks of an equally mixed order. A second irrepressible being held that all the emotions of the soul should be freely expressed, and illustrated his theory by antics that would have sent him to a lunatic asylum, if, as an unregenerate wag said, he had not already been in one. When his spirit soared, he climbed trees and shouted; when doubt assailed him, he lay upon the floor and groaned lamentably. At joyful periods, he raced, leaped, and sang; when sad, he wept aloud; and when a great thought burst upon him in the watches of the night, he crowed like a jocund cockerel, to the great delight of the children and the great annoyance of the elders. One musical brother fiddled whenever so moved, sang sentimentally to the four little girls, and put a music-box on the wall when he hoed corn.

Brother Pease ground away at his uncooked food, or browsed over the farm on sorrel, mint, green fruit, and new vegetables. Occasionally he took his walks abroad, airily attired in an unbleached cotton *poncho*, which was the nearest approach to the primeval costume he was allowed to indulge in. At midsummer he retired to the wilderness, to try his plan where the woodchucks were without prejudices and huckleberry-bushes were hospitably full. A sunstroke unfortunately spoilt his plan, and he returned to semi-civilization a sadder and wiser man.

Forest Absalom preserved his Pythagorean silence, cultivated his fine dark locks, and worked like a beaver, setting an excellent example of brotherly love, justice, and fidelity by his upright life. He it was who helped overworked Sister Hope with her heavy washes, kneaded the endless succession of batches of bread, watched over the children, and did the many tasks left undone by the brethren, who were so busy discussing and defining great duties that they forgot to perform the small ones.

Moses White placidly plodded about, "chorin' raound," as he called it, looking like an old-time patriarch, with his silver hair and flowing beard, and saving the community from many a mishap by his thrift and Yankee shrewdness.

Brother Lion domineered over the whole concern; for, having put the most money into the speculation, he was resolved to make it pay, — as if any thing founded on an ideal basis could be expected to do so by any but enthusiasts.

Abel Lamb simply revelled in the Newness, firmly believing that his dream was to be beautifully realized, and in time not only little Fruitlands, but the whole earth, be turned into a Happy Valley. He worked with every muscle of his body, for *he* was in deadly earnest. He taught with his whole head and heart; planned and sacrificed, preached and prophesied, with a soul full of the purest aspirations, most unselfish purposes, and desires for a life devoted to God and man, too high and tender to bear the rough usage of this world.

It was a little remarkable that only one woman ever joined this community. Mrs. Lamb merely followed wheresoever her husband led, — ”as ballast for his balloon,” as she said, in her bright way.

Miss Jane Gage was a stout lady of mature years, sentimental, amiable, and lazy. She wrote verses copiously, and had vague yearnings and graspings after the unknown, which led her to believe herself fitted for a higher sphere than any she had yet adorned.

Having been a teacher, she was set to instructing the children in the common branches. Each adult member took a turn at the infants; and, as each taught in his own way, the result was a chronic state of chaos in the minds of these much-afflicted innocents.

Sleep, food, and poetic musings were the desires of dear Jane’s life, and she shirked all duties as clogs upon her spirit’s wings. Any thought of lending a hand with the domestic drudgery never occurred to her; and when to the question, “Are there any beasts of burden on the place?” Mrs. Lamb answered, with a face that told its own tale, “Only one woman!” the buxom Jane took no shame to herself, but laughed at the joke, and let the stout-hearted sister tug on alone.

Unfortunately, the poor lady hankered after the flesh-pots, and endeavored to stay herself with private sips of milk, crackers, and cheese, and on one dire occasion she partook of fish at a neighbor’s table.

One of the children reported this sad lapse from virtue, and poor Jane was publicly reprimanded by Timon.

“I only took a little bit of the tail,” sobbed the penitent poetess.

“Yes, but the whole fish had to be tortured and slain that you might tempt your carnal appetite with that one taste of the tail. Know ye not, consumers of flesh meat, that ye are nourishing the wolf and tiger in your bosoms?”

At this awful question and the peal of laughter which arose from some of the younger brethren, tickled by the ludicrous contrast between the stout sinner, the stern judge, and the naughty satisfaction of the young detective, poor Jane fled from the room to pack her trunk, and return to a world where fishes' tails were not forbidden fruit.

Transcendental wild oats were sown broadcast that year, and the fame thereof has not yet ceased in the land; for, futile as this crop seemed to outsiders, it bore an invisible harvest, worth much to those who planted in earnest. As none of the members of this particular community have ever recounted their experiences before, a few of them may not be amiss, since the interest in these attempts has never died out and Fruitlands was the most ideal of all these castles in Spain.

A new dress was invented, since cotton, silk, and wool were forbidden as the product of slave-labor, worm-slaughter, and sheep-robbery. Tunics and trowsers of brown linen were the only wear. The women's skirts were longer, and their straw hat-brims wider than the men's, and this was the only difference. Some persecution lent a charm to the costume, and the long-haired, linen-clad reformers quite enjoyed the mild martyrdom they endured when they left home.

Money was abjured, as the root of all evil. The produce of the land was to supply most of their wants, or be exchanged for the few things they could not grow. This idea had its inconveniences; but self-denial was the fashion, and it was surprising how many things one can do without. When they desired to travel, they walked, if possible, begged the loan of a vehicle, or boldly entered car or coach, and, stating their principles to the officials, took the consequences. Usually their dress, their earnest frankness, and gentle resolution won them a passage; but now and then they met with hard usage, and had the satisfaction of suffering for their principles.

On one of these penniless pilgrimages they took passage on a boat, and, when fare was demanded, artlessly offered to talk, instead of pay. As the boat was well under way and they actually had not a cent, there was no help for it. So Brothers Lion and Lamb held forth to the assembled passengers in their most eloquent style. There must have been something effective in this conversation, for the listeners were moved to take up a contribution for these inspired lunatics, who preached peace on earth and good-will to man so earnestly, with empty pockets. A goodly sum was collected; but when the captain presented it the reformers proved that they were consistent even in their madness, for not a penny would they accept, saying, with a look at the group about them, whose indifference or contempt had changed to interest and respect, "You see how well we get on without money;" and so went serenely on their way, with their linen blouses flapping airily in the cold October wind.

They preached vegetarianism everywhere and resisted all temptations of the flesh, contentedly eating apples and bread at well-spread tables, and much afflicting hospitable hostesses by denouncing their food and taking away their appetites, discussing the “horrors of shambles,” the “incorporation of the brute in man,” and “on elegant abstinence the sign of a pure soul.” But, when the perplexed or offended ladies asked what they should eat, they got in reply a bill of fare consisting of “bowls of sunrise for breakfast,” “solar seeds of the sphere,” “dishes from Plutarch’s chaste table,” and other viands equally hard to find in any modern market.

Reform conventions of all sorts were haunted by these brethren, who said many wise things and did many foolish ones. Unfortunately, these wanderings interfered with their harvest at home; but the rule was to do what the spirit moved, so they left their crops to Providence and went a-reaping in wider and, let us hope, more fruitful fields than their own.

Luckily, the earthly providence who watched over Abel Lamb was at hand to glean the scanty crop yielded by the “uncorrupted land,” which, “consecrated to human freedom,” had received “the sober culture of devout men.”

About the time the grain was ready to house, some call of the Oversoul wafted all the men away. An easterly storm was coming up and the yellow stacks were sure to be ruined. Then Sister Hope gathered her forces. Three little girls, one boy (Timon’s son), and herself, harnessed to clothes-baskets and Russia-linen sheets, were the only teams she could command; but with these poor appliances the indomitable woman got in the grain and saved food for her young, with the instinct and energy of a mother-bird with a brood of hungry nestlings to feed.

This attempt at regeneration had its tragic as well as comic side, though the world only saw the former.

With the first frosts, the butterflies, who had sunned themselves in the new light through the summer, took flight, leaving the few bees to see what honey they had stored for winter use. Precious little appeared beyond the satisfaction of a few months of holy living.

At first it seemed as if a chance to try holy dying also was to be offered them. Timon, much disgusted with the failure of the scheme, decided to retire to the Shakers, who seemed to be the only successful community going.

“What is to become of us?” asked Mrs. Hope, for Abel was heart-broken at the bursting of his lovely bubble.

“You can stay here, if you like, till a tenant is found. No more wood must be cut, however, and no more corn ground. All I have must be sold to pay the debts of the concern, as the responsibility rests with me,” was the cheering reply.

“Who is to pay us for what we have lost? I gave all I had, — furniture, time, strength, six months of my children’s lives, — and all are wasted. Abel gave himself body and soul, and is almost wrecked by hard work and disappointment. Are we to have no return for this, but leave to starve and freeze in an old house, with winter at hand, no money, and hardly a friend left, for this wild scheme has alienated nearly all we had. You talk much about justice. Let us have a little, since there is nothing else left.”

But the woman’s appeal met with no reply but the old one: “It was an experiment. We all risked something, and must bear our losses as we can.”

With this cold comfort, Timon departed with his son, and was absorbed into the Shaker brotherhood, where he soon found that the order of things was reversed, and it was all work and no play.

Then the tragedy began for the forsaken little family. Desolation and despair fell upon Abel. As his wife said, his new beliefs had alienated many friends. Some thought him mad, some unprincipled. Even the most kindly thought him a visionary, whom it was useless to help till he took more practical views of life. All stood aloof, saying: “Let him work out his own ideas, and see what they are worth.”

He had tried, but it was a failure. The world was not ready for Utopia yet, and those who attempted to found it only got laughed at for their pains. In other days, men could sell all and give to the poor, lead lives devoted to holiness and high thought, and, after the persecution was over, find themselves honored as saints or martyrs. But in modern times these things are out of fashion. To live for one’s principles, at all costs, is a dangerous speculation; and the failure of an ideal, no matter how humane and noble, is harder for the world to forgive and forget than bank robbery or the grand swindles of corrupt politicians.

Deep waters now for Abel, and for a time there seemed no passage through. Strength and spirits were exhausted by hard work and too much thought. Courage failed when, looking about for help, he saw no sympathizing face, no hand outstretched to help him, no voice to say cheerily, —

“We all make mistakes, and it takes many experiences to shape a life. Try again, and let us help you.”

Every door was closed, every eye averted, every heart cold, and no way open whereby he might earn bread for his children. His principles would not permit him to do many things that others did; and in the few fields where conscience would allow him to work, who would employ a man who had flown in the face of society, as he had done?

Then this dreamer, whose dream was the life of his life, resolved to carry out his idea to the bitter end. There seemed no place for him here, — no work, no friend. To go begging conditions was as ignoble as to go begging money. Better perish of want than sell one’s soul for the sustenance of his body. Silently he lay down upon his bed, turned his face to the wall, and waited with pathetic patience for death to cut the knot which he could not untie. Days and nights went by, and neither food nor water passed his lips. Soul and body were dumbly struggling together, and no word of complaint betrayed what either suffered.

His wife, when tears and prayers were unavailing, sat down to wait the end with a mysterious awe and submission; for in this entire resignation of all things there was an eloquent significance to her who knew him as no other human being did.

“Leave all to God,” was his belief; and in this crisis the loving soul clung to this faith, sure that the All-wise Father would not desert this child who tried to live so near to Him. Gathering her children about her, she waited the issue of the tragedy that was being enacted in that solitary room, while the first snow fell outside, untrodden by the footprints of a single friend.

But the strong angels who sustain and teach perplexed and troubled souls came and went, leaving no trace without, but working miracles within. For, when all other sentiments had faded into dimness, all other hopes died utterly; when the bitterness of death was nearly over, when body was past any pang of hunger or thirst, and soul stood ready to depart, the love that outlives all else refused to die. Head had bowed to defeat, hand had grown weary with too heavy tasks, but heart could not grow cold to those who lived in its tender depths, even when death touched it.

“My faithful wife, my little girls, — they have not forsaken me, they are mine by ties that none can break. What right have I to leave them alone? What right to escape from the burden and the sorrow I have helped to bring? This duty remains to me, and I must do it manfully. For their sakes, the world will forgive me in time; for their sakes, God will sustain me now.”

Too feeble to rise, Abel groped for the food that always lay within his reach, and in the darkness and solitude of that memorable night ate and drank what was to him the bread and wine of a new communion, a new dedication of heart and life to the duties that were left him when the dreams fled.

In the early dawn, when that sad wife crept fearfully to see what change had come to the patient face on the pillow, she found it smiling at her, saw a wasted hand outstretched to her, and heard a feeble voice cry bravely, “Hope!”

What passed in that little room is not to be recorded except in the hearts of those who suffered and endured much for love’s sake. Enough for us to know that soon the wan shadow of a man came forth, leaning on the arm that never failed him, to be welcomed and cherished by the children, who never forgot the experiences of that time.

“Hope” was the watchword now; and, while the last logs blazed on the hearth, the last bread and apples covered the table, the new commander, with recovered courage, said to her husband, —

"Leave all to God — and me. He has done his part; now I will do mine."

"But we have no money, dear."

"Yes, we have. I sold all we could spare, and have enough to take us away from this snow-bank."

"Where can we go?"

"I have engaged four rooms at our good neighbor, Lovejoy's. There we can live cheaply till spring. Then for new plans and a home of our own, please God."

"But, Hope, your little store won't last long, and we have no friends."

"I can sew and you can chop wood. Lovejoy offers you the same pay as he gives his other men; my old friend, Mrs. Truman, will send me all the work I want; and my blessed brother stands by us to the end. Cheer up, dear heart, for while there is work and love in the world we shall not suffer."

"And while I have my good angel Hope, I shall not despair, even if I wait another thirty years before I step beyond the circle of the sacred little world in which I still have a place to fill."

So one bleak December day, with their few possessions piled on an ox-sled, the rosy children perched atop, and the parents trudging arm in arm behind, the exiles left their Eden and faced the world again.

"Ah, me! my happy dream. How much I leave behind that never can be mine again," said Abel, looking back at the lost Paradise, lying white and chill in its shroud of snow.

"Yes, dear; but how much we bring away," answered brave-hearted Hope, glancing from husband to children.

"Poor Fruitlands! The name was as great a failure as the rest!" continued Abel, with a sigh, as a frostbitten apple fell from a leafless bough at his feet.

But the sigh changed to a smile as his wife added, in a half-tender, half-satirical tone, —

"Don't you think Apple Slump would be a better name for it, dear?"

THE ROMANCE OF A SUMMER DAY.

"What shall we do about Rose? We have tried Saratoga, and that failed to cheer her up; we tried the sea-shore, and that failed; now we have tried the mountains, and they are going to fail, like the rest. See if your woman's wit can't devise something to help the child, Milly."

"Time and tenderness will work the cure; and she will be all the better for this experience, I hope."

"So do I. But I don't pretend to understand these nervous ailments; so, if air, exercise, and change of scene don't cure the vapors, I give it up. Girls didn't have such worries in my day."

And the old gentleman shook his head, as if modern ills perplexed him very much.

But Milly smiled the slow, wise smile of one who had learned much from experience; among other things, the wisdom of leaving certain troubles to cure themselves.

"Has the child expressed a wish for any thing? If so, out with it, and she shall be gratified, if it can be done," began Uncle Ben, after a moment of silence, as they sat watching the moonlight, that glorified the summer night.

"The last wish is one that we can easily gratify, if you don't mind the fatigue. The restless spirit that possesses her keeps suggesting new things. Much exercise does her good, and is an excellent way to work off this unrest. She likes to tire herself out; for then she sleeps, poor dear."

"Well, well, what does the poor dear want to do?" asked Uncle Ben, quickly.

"She said to-day that, instead of going off on excursions, as we have been doing, she would like to stroll away some pleasant morning, and follow the road wherever it led, finding and enjoying any little adventures that might come along, — as Richter's heroes do."

"Yes, I see: white butterflies, morning red, disguised counts, philosophic plowmen, and all the rest of the romantic rubbish. Bless the child, does she expect to find things of that sort anywhere out of a German novel?"

"Plenty of butterflies and morning-glories, uncle, and a girl's imagination will supply the romance. Perhaps we can get up some little surprise to add flavor to our day's adventures," said Milly, who rather favored the plan, for much romance still lay hidden in that quiet heart of hers.

"Where shall we go? What shall we do? I don't know how this sort of thing is managed."

"Do nothing but follow us. Let her choose her road; and we will merely see that she has food and rest, protection, and as much pleasure as we can make for her out of such simple materials. Having her own way will gratify her, and a day in the open air do her good. Shall we try it, sir?"

"With all my heart, if the fancy lasts till morning. I'll have some lunch put up, and order Jim to dawdle after us with the wagon full of waterproofs, and so on, in case we break down. I rather like the idea, now I fairly take it in." And Uncle Ben quite beamed with interest and good-will; for a kinder-hearted man never breathed, and, in spite of his fifty years, he was as fond of adventures as any boy.

"Then, as we must be up and away very early, I'll say good-night, sir," and Milly rose to go, looking well satisfied with the success of her suggestion.

"Good-night, my dear," and Uncle Ben rose also, flung away his cigar, and offered his hand with the old-fashioned courtesy which he always showed his niece's friend; for Milly only called him uncle to please him.

"You are sure this wild whim won't be too much for *you*? You are such a self-sacrificing soul, I'm afraid my girl will wear you out," he said, looking down at her with a fatherly expression, very becoming to his comely countenance.

"Not a bit, sir. I like it, and would gladly do any thing to please and help Rose. I'm very fond of her, and love to pet and care for her. I'm so alone in the world I cling to my few friends, and feel as if I couldn't do enough for them."

Something in Milly's face made Uncle Ben hold her hand close in both of his a moment, and look as if he was going to stoop and kiss her. But he seemed to think better of it; for he only shook the soft hand warmly, and said, in his hearty tone, —

"I don't know what we should do without you, my dear. You are one of the women born to help and comfort others, and ask no reward but love."

As the first streaks of dawn touched the eastern sky, three faces appeared at three different windows of the great hotel. One was a masculine face, a ruddy, benevolent countenance, with kind eyes, grayish hair cheerfully erect upon the head, and a smile on the lips, that softly whistled the old air of

"A southerly wind and a cloudy sky Proclaim a hunting morning."

The second was one of those serene, sweet faces, possessing an attraction more subtle than beauty; eyes always full of silent sympathy, a little wistful sometimes, but never sad, and an expression of peace and patience that told of battles fought and victories won. A happy, helpful soul shone from that face and made it lovely, though its first bloom was past and a solitary future lay before it.

The third was rich in the charms that youth and health lend any countenance. But, in spite of the bloom on the rounded cheeks, the freshness of the lips, and the soft beauty of the eyes, the face that looked out from the bonny brown hair, blowing in the wind, was not a happy one. Discontent, unrest, and a secret hunger seemed to sadden and sharpen all its outlines, making it pathetic to those who could read the language of an unsatisfied heart.

Poor little Rose was waiting, as all women must wait, for the good gift that brightens life; and, while she waited, patience and passion were having a hard fight in the proud silence of her heart.

“It will be a capital day, girls,” called Uncle Ben, in his cheery voice.

“I thought it would be,” answered Milly, nodding back, with a smile.

“I know it will pour before night,” added Rose, who saw every thing just then through blue spectacles.

“Breakfast is ready for us. Come on, girls, or you’ll miss your morning red,” called Uncle Ben, retiring, with a laugh.

“I lost mine six months ago,” sighed Rose, as she listlessly gathered up the brown curls, that were once her pride.

“Hark! hark! the lark at Heaven’s gate sings,” sounded from Milly’s room, in her blithe voice.

“Tiresome little bird! Why don’t he stay in his nest and cheer his mate?” muttered Rose, refusing to be cheered.

“Now lead on, my dear, we’ll follow till we drop,” said Uncle Ben, stoutly, as they stood on the piazza, half an hour later, with no one but a sleepy waiter to watch and wonder at the early start.

“I have always wondered where that lonely road went to, and now I shall find out,” answered Rose, with an imperious little gesture, as she led the way. The others followed so slowly that she felt alone, and enjoyed it, in spite of herself.

It was the most eloquent hour of the day, for all was beautiful, all was fresh; nothing was out of order, nothing disturbed eye or ear, and the world seemed to welcome her with its morning face. The road wound between forests full of the green gloom no artist can ever paint. Pines whispered, birches quivered, maples dropped grateful shadows, and a little river foamed and sparkled by, carrying its melodious message from the mountains to the sea. Glimpses of hoary peaks broke on her now and then, dappled with shadows or half-veiled in mists, floating and fading like incense from altars fit for a cathedral not built with hands. Leafy vistas opened temptingly on either side, berries blushed ripely in the grass, cow-bells tinkled pleasantly along the hillsides, and that busy little farmer, the “Peabody bird,” cried from tree to tree, “Sow your wheat, Peabody! Peabody! Peabody!” with such musical energy one ceased to wonder that fields were wrested from the forest, to wave like green and golden breast-knots on the bosoms of the hills.

The fresh beauty and the healthful peace of the hour refreshed the girl like dew. The human rose lifted up her drooping head and smiled back at the blithe sunshine, as if she found the world a pleasant place, in spite of her own thorns. Presently a yellow butterfly came wandering by; and she watched it as she walked, pleasing herself with the girlish fancy that it was a symbol of herself.

At first it fluttered idly from side to side, now lighting on a purple thistle-top, then away to swing on a dewy fern; now vanishing among the low-hanging boughs overhead, then settling in the dust of the road, where a ray of light glorified its golden wings, unmindful of its lowly seat.

“Little Psyche is looking for her Cupid everywhere, as I have looked for mine. I wonder if she ever found and lost him, as I did? If she does find him again, I’ll accept it as a good omen.”

Full of this fancy, Rose walked quickly after her airy guide, leaving her comrades far behind. Some tenderhearted spirit surely led that butterfly, for it never wandered far away, but floated steadily before the girl, till it came at last to a wild rose-bush, full of delicate blossoms. Above it a cloud of yellow butterflies were dancing in the sun; and from among them one flew to meet and welcome the new-comer. Together they fluttered round the rosy flowers for a moment, then rose in graceful circles, till they vanished in the wood.

Rose followed them with eyes that slowly dimmed with happy tears, for the innocent soul accepted the omen and believed it gratefully.

“He will come,” she said softly to herself, as she fastened a knot of wild roses in her bosom and sat down to rest and wait.

“Tired out, little girl?” asked Uncle Ben, coming up at a great pace, rather amazed at this sudden burst of energy, but glad to see it.

“No, indeed! It was lovely!” and Rose looked up with a brighter face than she had worn for weeks.

“Upon my word, I think we have hit upon the right thing at last,” said Uncle Ben, aside, to Milly. “What have you been doing to get such a look as that?” he added aloud.

“Chasing butterflies,” was all the answer Rose gave; for she could not tell the foolish little fancy that had comforted her so much.

“Then, my dear, I beg you will devote yourself to that amusement. I never heard it recommended, but it seems to be immensely beneficial; so keep it up, Rosy, keep it up.”

“I will, sir,” and on went Rose, as if in search of another one.

For an hour or two she strolled along the woody road, gathering red raspberries, with the dew still on them, garlanding her hat with fragrant Linnæea wreaths, watching the brown brooks go singing away into the forest, and wishing the little wood creatures good-morrow, as they went fearlessly to and fro, busy with their sylvan housekeeping. At every turn of the road Rose's wistful eyes looked forward, as if hoping to see some much-desired figure approaching. At every sound of steps she lifted her head like a deer, listening and watching till the stranger had gone by; and down every green vista she sent longing looks, as if memory recalled happy hours in green nooks like those.

Presently the road wound over a bridge, below which flowed a wide, smooth river, flecked with alternate sun and shadow.

"How beautiful it is! I must float down this stream a little way. It is getting warm and I am tired, yet don't want to stop or turn back yet," said Rose; adding, as her quick eye roved to and fro: "I see a boat down there, and a lazy man reading. I'll hire or borrow it; so come on."

Away she went into the meadow, and, accosting the countryman, who lay in the shade, she made her request.

"I get my livin' in summer by rowin' folks down to the Falls. It ain't fur. Will you go, Miss?" he said, smiling all over his brown face, as he regarded the pretty vision that so suddenly appeared beside him.

Rose accepted the proposition at once; but half regretted it a minute after, for, as the man rose, she saw that he had a wooden leg.

"I'm afraid we shall be too heavy a load for you," she began, as he stumped about, preparing his boat.

The young fellow laughed and squared his broad shoulders, with a quick look, that thanked her for the pitiful glance she gave him, as he answered, in a bluff, good-natured tone, —

"Don't be afraid. I could row a dozen of you. I look rather the worse for wear; but my old mother thinks I'm about the strongest man in the State. Now, then, give us your hand, Miss, and there you are."

With that he helped her in. The others obediently followed their capricious leader, and in a moment they were floating down the river, with a fresh wind cooling their hot faces.

"You have been in the army, I take it?" began Uncle Ben, in his social way, as he watched the man pulling with long, easy strokes.

"Pretty nigh through the war, sir," with a nod and a glance at the wooden leg.

Uncle Ben lifted his hat, and Rose turned with a sudden interest from the far-off bend of the river to the honest face before her.

"Oh! tell us about it. I love to hear brave men fight their battles over," she cried, with a look half pleading, half commanding, and wholly charming.

"Sho! It ain't much to tell. No more than the rest of 'em; not so much as some. I done my best, lost my leg, got a few bullets here and there, and ain't much use any way now."

A shadow passed over the man's face as he spoke; and well it might, for it was hard to be disabled at twenty-five with a long life of partial helplessness before him. Uncle Ben, who was steering, forgot his duty in his sympathy, and regarded the wooden leg with silent interest.

Milly showed hers by keeping the mosquitoes off him by gently waving a green bough, as she sat behind him. But Rose's soft eyes shone upon him full of persuasive interest, and a new tone of respect was in her voice as she said, with a martial salute, —

"Please tell about your last battle. I had a cousin in the war, and feel as if every soldier was my friend and comrade since then."

"Thanky, Miss. I'll tell you that with pleasure, though it ain't much, any way." And, pushing back his hat, the young man rested on his oars, as he rapidly told his little tale.

"My last battle was — — ," naming one of the latest and bloodiest of the war. "We were doing our best, when there came a shell and scattered half-a-dozen of us pretty lively. I was knocked flat. But I didn't feel hurt, only mad, and jumped up to hit 'em agin; but just dropped, with an awful wrench, and the feeling that both my legs was gone."

"Did no one stop to help you?" cried Rose.

"Too busy for that, Miss. The boys can't stop to pick up their mates when there are Rebs ahead to be knocked down. I knew there was no more fighting for me; and just laid still, with the balls singing round me, and wondering where they'd hit next."

"How did you feel?" questioned the girl, eagerly.

"Dreadful busy at first; for every thing I'd ever said, seen, or done, seemed to go spinning through my head, till I got so dizzy trying to keep my wits stiddy that I lost 'em altogether. I didn't find 'em again till some one laid hold of me. Two of our boys were luggin' me along back; but they had to dodge behind walls and cut up and down, for the scrimmage was going on all round us. One of the fellers was hit in the shoulder and the other in the face, but not bad; and they managed to get me into a sort of a ravine, out of danger. There I begged 'em to leave me. I thought I was bleeding to death rapid, and just wanted to die in peace."

"But they didn't leave you?" And Rose's face was all alive with interest now.

"Guess they didn't," answered the man, giving a stroke or two, and looking as if he found it pleasant to tell his story to so winsome a listener. "Just as they were at their wit's end what to do with me, we come upon a young surgeon, lurking there to watch the fight or to hide, — don't know which. There he was any way, looking scared half to death. Tom Hunt, my mate, made him stop and look at me. My leg was smashed, and ought to come off right away, he said. ‘Do it, then!’ says Tom. He was one of your rough-and-readys, Tom was; but at heart as kind as a — well, as a woman.”

And the boatman gave a smile and a nod at the one opposite him.

“Thanks; but do tell on. It is so interesting.”

And Rose let all her flowers stray down into the bottom of the boat, as she clasped her hands and leaned forward to listen.

“Don’t know as I’d better tell this part. It ain’t pleasant,” began the man.

“You must. I want it all. Dreadful things do me good, and other people’s sufferings teach me how to bear my own,” said Rose, in her imperious way.

“You don’t look as if you ought to have any.”

And the man’s eyes rested on the delicate face opposite, full of a pleasant blending of admiration, pity, and protection.

“I have; but not like yours. Go on, please.”

“Well, if you say so, here goes. The surgeon was worried, and said he couldn’t do nothing, — hadn’t got his instruments, and so on. ‘Yes, you have. Out with em,’ says Tom, rapping on a case he sees in the chap’s breast-pocket. ‘Can’t do it without bandages,’ he says next. ‘Here they are, and more where they came from,’ says Tom; and off came his shirt-sleeves, and was stripped up in a jiffy. ‘I must have help,’ says that confounded surgeon, dawdling round, and me groaning my life out at his feet. ‘Here’s help, — lots of it,’ says Tom, taking my head on his arm; while Parkes tied up his wounded face and stood ready to lend a hand. Seeing no way out of it, the surgeon went to work. Good Lord, but that *was* awful!”

The mere memory of it made the speaker shut his eyes with a shiver, as if he felt again the sharp agony of shattered bones, rent flesh, and pitiless knife.

“Never mind that. Tell how you got comfortable again,” said Milly, shaking her head at Rose.

“I wasn’t comfortable for three months, ma’am. Don’t mind telling about it, ‘cause Tom done so well, and I’m proud of him,” said the rower, with kindling eyes. “Things of that sort are hard enough done well, with chloroform and every thing handy. But laying on the bare ground, with nothing right, and a scared boy of a surgeon hacking away at you, it’s torment and no mistake. I never could have stood it, if it hadn’t been for Tom. He held me close and as steady as a rock; but he cried like a baby the whole time, and that did me good. Don’t know why; but it did. As for Parkes, he gave out at once and went off for help. I’ll never forget that place, if I live to be a hundred. Seems as if I could see the very grass I tore up; the muddy brook they laid me by; the steep bank, with Parkes creeping up; Tom’s face, wet and white, but so full of pity; the surgeon, with his red hands; and all the while such a roar of guns I could hardly hear myself groaning for some one to shoot me and put me out of my misery.”

“How did you get to the hospital?” asked Uncle Ben, anxious to get over this part of the story, for Rose was now as pale as if she actually saw the scene described.

“Don’t know, sir. There come a time when I couldn’t bear any more, and what happened then I’ve never been very clear about. I didn’t know much for a day or two; then I was brought round by being put in a transport. I was packed with a lot of poor fellows, and was beginning to wish I’d stayed queer, till I heard Tom’s voice saying, ‘Never mind, boys; put me down anywheres, and tend to the others. I can wait.’ That set me up. I sung out, and they stowed him alongside. It was so dark down there I could hardly see his face; but his voice and ways were just as hearty and comforting as ever, and he kept up my spirits wonderful that day. I was pretty weak, and kept dozing off; but whenever I woke I felt for Tom, and he was always there. He told me, when Parkes came with help, he saw me off, and then went back for another go at the Rebs; but got a ball in the breast, and was in rather a bad way, he guessed. He couldn’t lay down; but sat by me, leaning back, with his hand on my pillow, where I could find it easy. He talked to me all he could, till his voice give out; for he got very weak, and there was a dreadful groaning all around us.”

“I know, I know. I went aboard one of those transports to help; but couldn’t stay, it was so terrible,” said Uncle Ben, with a groan at the mere memory of it.

“That was a long day, and I thought it was my last; for when night came I felt so gone I reckoned I was ‘most over Jordan. I gave my watch to Tom as a keepsake, and told him to say good-by to the boys for me. I hadn’t any folks of my own, so it wasn’t hard to go. Tom had a sweetheart, an old mother, and lots of friends; but he didn’t repine a word, — only said: ‘If you do pull through, Joel, just tell mother I done my best, and give Hetty my love.’ I promised, and dropped asleep, holding on to Tom as if he was my sheet-anchor. So he was; but I can’t tell all he done for me in different ways.”

For a minute Joel rowed in silence, and no one asked a question. Then he pushed up his old hat again, and went on, as if anxious to be done.

“Soon’s ever I woke, next morning, I looked round to thank Tom, for his blanket was over me. He was sitting as I left him, his hand on my pillow, his face toward me, so quiet and happy-looking I couldn’t believe he was gone. But he was, and I have had no mate since.”

“Where did he live?” asked Rose, as softly as if speaking of one she had known and loved.

“Over yonder.” And Joel pointed to a little brown house on the hillside.

“Are his mother and Hetty there?”

“Hetty married a number of years ago; but the old lady is there.”

“And you are visiting her?”

“I live with her. You see Tom was all she had; and, when Hetty left, it was only natural that I tried to take Tom’s place. Can’t never fill it of course; but I do what I can, and she’s comfortable.”

“So *she* is the ‘old mother’ who thinks so much of you? Well she may,” said Rose, giving him her brightest smile.

“Yes, she’s all I’ve got now. Couldn’t do no less, could I, seein’ how much Tom done for me?” answered the man, with a momentary quiver of emotion in his rough voice.

“You’re a trump!” said Uncle Ben, emphatically.

“Thanky, sir. Starboard, if you please. I don’t care to get into the rapids just here.”

Joel seemed to dislike telling this part of the story; but the three listeners beamed upon him with such approving faces that he took to his oars in self-defence, rowing with all his might, till the roar of the Fall was faintly heard.

“Now, where shall I land you, sir?”

“Let us lunch on the island,” proposed Rose.

“I see a tent, and fancy some one is camping there,” said Milly.

“A lot of young fellows have been there this three days,” said Joel.

“Then we will go on, and take to the grove above the Fall,” ordered Uncle Ben.

Alas! alas! for Rose. That decision delayed her happiness a whole half day; for on that island, luxuriously reading “The Lotus Eaters,” as he lay in the long grass, was the Gabriel this modern Evangeline was waiting for. She never dreamed he was so near. And the brown-bearded student never lifted up his head as the boat floated by, carrying the lady of his love.

“I want to give him more than his fare. So I shall slip my cigar-case into the pocket of this coat,” whispered Uncle Ben, as Joel was busy drawing up the boat and getting a stone or two to facilitate the ladies’ landing dryshod.

“I shall leave my book for him. He was poring over an old newspaper, as if hungry for reading. The dash and daring of ‘John Brent’ will charm him; and the sketch of Winthrop’s life in the beginning will add to its value, I know.” And, hastily scribbling his name in it, Rose slipped the book under the coat.

But Milly, seeing how old that coat was, guessed that Joel gave his earnings to the old woman to whom he dutifully played a son’s part. Writing on a card “For Tom’s mother and mate,” she folded a five-dollar bill round it, fastened it with a little pearl cross from her own throat, and laid it in the book.

Then all landed, and, with a cordial hand-shake and many thanks, left Joel to row away, quite unconscious that he was a hero in the pretty girl’s eyes, till he found the tokens of his passengers’ regard and respect.

“Now that is an adventure after my own heart,” said Rose, as they rustled along the grassy path toward the misty cloud that hung over the Fall.

“We have nothing but sandwiches and sherry for lunch, unless we find a house and add to our stores,” said Uncle Ben, beginning to feel hungry and wondering how far his provisions would go.

“There is a little girl picking berries. Call her and buy some,” suggested Milly, who had her doubts about the state of the sandwiches, as the knapsack had been sat upon.

A shout from Uncle Ben caused the little girl to approach, — timidly at first; but, being joined by a boy, her courage rose, and when the idea of a “trade” was impressed upon their minds fear was forgotten and the Yankee appeared.

“How much a quart?”

“Eight cents, sir.”

“But that birch-bark thing is not full.”

“Now it is,” and the barefooted, tow-headed lad filled the girl’s pannier from his own.

“Here’s chivalry for you,” said Rose, watching the children with interest; for the girl was pretty, and the boy evidently not her brother.

“You don’t pick as fast as she does,” said Milly, while Uncle Ben hunted up the money.

“He’s done his stent, and was helpin’ me. I’ll have to pick a lot before I git my quarter,” said the girl, defending her friend, in spite of her bashfulness.

“Must you each make a quarter?”

“Yes’m. We don’t have to; but we wanter, so we can go to the circus that’s comin’ to-morrer. He made his’n ketchin’ trout; so he’s helpin’ me,” explained the girl.

“Where do you get your trout?” asked Uncle Ben, sniffing the air, as if he already smelt them cooking.

“In the brook. I ain’t sold mine yet. Want to buy ‘em? Six big ones for a quarter,” said the boy, seeing hunger in the good man’s eye and many greenbacks in the corpulent purse.

“Yes, if you’ll clean them.”

“But, Uncle, we can’t cook them,” began Milly.

“*I* can. Let an old campaigner alone for getting up a gipsy lunch. You wanted a surprise; so I’ll give you one. Now, Billy, bring on your fish.”

“My name is Daniel Webster Butterfield Brown,” returned the boy, with dignity; adding, with a comical change of tone: “Them fish *is* cleaned, or you’d a got ‘em cheaper.”

“Very well. Hand them over.”

Off ran the boy to the brook; and the girl was shyly following, when Rose said, —

“Will you sell me that pretty bark pannier of yours? I want one for my flowers.”

“No’m. I guess I’d ruther not.”

“I’ll give you a quarter for it. Then you can go to the circus without working any more.”

“Dan made this for me, real careful; and I couldn’t sell it, no way. He wouldn’t go without me. And I’ll pick stiddy all day, and git my money. See if I don’t!” answered the child, hugging her treasure close.

“Here’s your romance in the bud,” said Uncle Ben, trying not to laugh.

“It’s beautiful!” said Rose, with energy. “What is your name, dear?”

“Gusty Medders, please’m.”

“Dan isn’t your brother?”

“No’m. He lives to the poor-house. But he’s real smart, and we play together. And him and me is going to the show. He always takes care o’ me; and my mother thinks a sight of him, and so do I,” returned the child, in a burst of confidence.

“Happy little Gusty!” said Rose, to herself.

“Thrice happy Dan,” added Uncle Ben, producing the fat pocket-book again, with the evident intention of bestowing a fortune on the small couple.

“Don’t spoil the pretty little romance. Don’t rob it of its self-sacrifice and simplicity. Let them earn their money. Then they will enjoy it more,” cried Milly, holding his hand.

Uncle Ben submitted, and paid Dan his price, without adding a penny.

“The lady wanted to buy my basket. But I didn’t sell it, Danny; ‘cause you give it as a keepsake,” they heard Gusty say, as the children turned away.

“Good for you, Gus; but I’ll sell mine.” And back came Dan, to dispose of his for the desired quarter. “Now we’re fixed complete, and you needn’t pick a darned berry. We’ve got fifty cents for the show, and eight, over for peanuts and candy. Won’t we have a good time, though?”

With which joyful remark Dan turned a somersault, and then the little pair vanished in the wood, with shining faces, to revel in visions of the splendors to come.

“Now you have got your elephant, what are you going to do with him?” asked

Rose, as they went on again, — she with her pretty basket of fruit, and he with a string of fish wrapped in leaves.

“Come on a bit, and you will see.”

Uncle Ben led them to the shade of a great maple, on a green slope, in sight of the noisy Fall, leaping from rock to rock, till the stream went singing away through wide, green meadows below.

“Now rest and cool yourselves, while I cook the dinner.” And away bustled the good man, on hospitable thoughts intent.

Plenty of dry drift-wood lay about the watercourse, and soon a brisk fire burned on the rocks not far away. Shingles for plates, with pointed sticks for forks, seemed quite in keeping with the rustic feast; and when the edibles were set forth on leaves the girls were charmed, and praised the trout, as it came hot from the coals, till even the flushed cook was satisfied.

“I’d like to live so always. It is so interesting to pick up your food as you go, and eat it when and where you like. I think I could be quite happy leading a wild life like this,” said Rose, as she lay in the grass, dropping berries one by one into her mouth.

“You would soon tire of it, Miss Caprice; but, if it amuses for a single day, I am satisfied,” answered Milly, with her motherly smile, as she stroked the bright head in her lap, feeling sure that happiness was in store for so much youth and beauty.

Lulled by the soft caress, and the song of the waterfall, Rose fell asleep, and for an hour dreamed blissfully, while the maple dropped its shadows on her placid face, and all the wholesome influences of the place worked their healing spell on soul and body.

“A thunder-shower is rolling up in the west, my dears. We must be getting toward some shelter, unless we are to take a drenching as part of the day’s pleasure,” said Uncle Ben, rising briskly after his own nap.

“I see no house anywhere; but a big barn down in the intervale, and a crowd of people getting in their hay. Let us make for that, and lie on the sweet haycocks till the shower comes,” proposed Milly.

As they went down the steep path, Rose began to sing; and at the unwonted sound her uncle and friend exchanged glances of satisfaction, for not a note had she sung for weeks. A happy mood seemed to have taken possession of her; and when they reached the intervale she won the old farmer’s heart by catching up a rake and working stoutly, till the first heavy drops began to fall. Then she rode up to the barn on a fragrant load, and was so charmed with the place that she declined his invitation to “Come up and see the old woman and set a spell,” and declared that she depended on enjoying the thunder-storm where she was.

The farmer and his men went their way, and Rose was just settling herself at the upper window, where the hay had been pitched in, when a long line of gay red vans came rattling down the road, followed by carriages and gilded cars, elephants and camels, fine horses and frisky ponies, all more or less excited by the coming storm.

"It's the circus! How I wish Gusty and Dan could see it!" cried Rose, clapping her hands like a child. "I do believe they are coming here. Now that will be charming, and the best adventure of all," she added, as a carriage and several vans turned into the grassy road leading to the barn.

A pair of elephants slowly lumbered after, with a camel or two, and the finest gilded car. The rest rattled on, hoping to reach the town in time. In a moment the quiet country scene was changed, and the big barn transformed into a theatrical Babel.

Our party retreated to a loft, and sat looking down on the show, enjoying it heartily; especially Rose, who felt as if suddenly translated into an Eastern tale. The storm came on dark and wild, rain poured, thunder rolled, and lightning gave lurid glimpses of the strange surroundings.

The elephants placidly ate hay; the tired camels lay down with gusty sighs and queer groanings; but the lion in his lonely van roared royally at intervals, and the tigers snarled and tore about their cage like restless demons.

The great golden car lit up the gloom; and in it sat, or lay, the occupants of the carriage, — a big, dark man, and a little blonde creature, with a pretty, tired, painted face. Rose soon found herself curiously attracted to this pair, for they were evidently lovers; and there was a certain frank, melodramatic air about them that took her fancy. The dark man lay on the red cushion, smoking tranquilly; while the girl hovered about him with all manner of small attentions. Presently he seemed to drop asleep, undisturbed by the thunder without or the clamor within. Then the small creature smoothed her gay yet shabby dress, and braided up her hair, as composedly as if in her own room. That done, she looked about her for amusement; and, spying Rose's interested face peering down at her from above, she nodded, and called out, in a saucy voice, —

"How do you like us? Shall I come up and make you a visit?"

"I beg you will," answered Rose, in spite of a warning touch from Milly.

Up sprang the little circus-rider; and, disdaining the ladder, skipped to the gilded dome of the car, and then took a daring leap on to the loft, landing near them with a laugh.

For a minute she eyed the others with a curious mixture of coolness and hesitation, as if it suddenly struck her that they were not country girls, to be dazzled by her audacity. Milly saw and understood the pause, liked the girl for it, and said, as courteously as if to a lady in her own parlor, —

“There is plenty of room for us all. Pray sit down and enjoy this fine view with us. The storm is passing over now, and it will soon be fair.”

“Thank you!” said the girl, dropping on to the hay, with her bold, bright eyes, full of admiration, fixed on Rose, who smiled, and said quickly, —

“You belong to the troop, I suppose?”

“First lady rider,” replied the girl, with a toss of the head.

“It must be very romantic to lead such a life, and go driving from place to place in this way.”

“It’s a hard life, any way; and not much romance, you’d better believe.”

“Not even for *you*.” And Rose glanced at the sleeper below.

The girl smiled. Her bold eyes turned to him with a softened look, and the natural color deepened on her painted cheeks, as she said, in a lower voice, —

“Yes, Joe does make a difference for me. We’ve only been married three weeks.”

“What does he do?”

“He’s the lion-tamer.” And the girl gave them a glance of wifely pride in her husband’s prowess.

“Oh! tell me about it!” cried Rose. “I admire courage so much.”

“You ought to see him do Daniel in the lion’s den, then. Or his great tiger act, where he piles four of ‘em up, and lays on top. It’s just splendid!”

“But very dangerous! Does he never fear them? And do they never hurt him?”

“He don’t fear any thing in the world,” said the girl, entirely forgetting herself, in enthusiastic praise of her husband.

“Cæsar, the lion, loves him like a dog; and Joe trusts him as he does me. But them tigers are deceitful beasts, and can’t be trusted a minute. Judas went at Joe once, and half killed him. He seems tame enough now; but I hate him, for they say that if a tiger once tastes a man’s blood he’s sure to kill him sooner or later. So I don’t have a minute’s peace when Joe is in that cage.” And the little woman shivered with very genuine anxiety at the thought of her husband’s danger.

“And, knowing this, he runs the risk every day! What a life!” said Uncle Ben, looking down at the unconscious Joe.

“A brave life, Uncle, and full of excitement. The minutes in that cage must be splendid. I wish I could see him once!” cried Rose, with the restless look in her eyes again.

“He’d do it, if he had his things here. He’ll do any thing *I* ask him,” said the girl, evidently proud of her power over the lion-tamer.

“We will come and see him to-morrow. Can’t you tell us how he manages to subdue these wild animals? I always wanted to know about it,” said Rose, wondering if she could not get some hints for the taming of men.

"Joe'll tell you." And, calling from her perch, the girl waked the sleeper and ordered him up to amuse the gentle-folk.

The big man came, with comical meekness; and, lounging on the hay, readily answered the questions showered upon him. Rose enjoyed that hour intensely; for the tales Joe told were full of wild adventure, hair-breadth escapes, and feats of strength or skill, that kept his listeners half breathless with interest. The presence of the little wife gave an added charm to these stories; for it was evident that the tamer of lions was completely subdued by the small woman. His brown, scarred face softened as it turned to her. While he talked, the strong hands that clutched lions by the throat were softly stroking the blonde head at his side; and, when he told of the fierce struggle with Judas, he grew so eloquent over the account of Kitty's nursing him that it was plain to see he was prouder of the conquest of her girl's heart than of his hard-won victory over the treacherous tiger.

The man's courage lent romance to his vulgar life, and his love ennobled his whole nature for a time. Kitty ate peanuts while he thrilled his hearers with his feats; but her face was so full of pride and affection all the while that no one minded what she did, and even Milly forgave the painted cheeks and cotton velvet dress for the sake of the womanly heart underneath.

The storm passed, the circus people bestirred themselves, and in a few minutes were on their way again. Joe and Kitty said "Good-by" as heartily as if that half-hour had made them friends; and, packing themselves into the little carriage drawn by the calico tandem, dashed away as gayly as if their queer honeymoon journey had just begun. Like parts of a stage pageant, the gilded car, the elephants and camels, frisky ponies, and gay red vans vanished along the winding road, leaving the old barn to silence and the scandalized swallows twittering among the rafters.

"I feel as if I'd been to an Arabian Night's entertainment," said Rose, as they descended and turned toward home.

"It was very interesting, and I do hope that brave Joe won't get eaten up by the tigers. What would poor Kitty do?" returned Milly, warmly.

"It would be sad and dreadful; but she would have the comfort of knowing how much he loved her. Some women don't even have that," added Rose, under her breath.

"A capital fellow and a nice little woman. We'll go and see them to-morrow; though I fancy I shall not like Mrs. Kitty half so well in gauze and spangles, jumping through hoops and over banners on horseback, as I did on the hayloft. And I shall be desperately anxious till Joe is safely out of the tiger's cage," said

Uncle Ben, who had been as interested as a boy in the wild tales told them.

For an hour they walked back along the river-side, enjoying the wood odors brought out by the shower, the glories of the sunset sky, and the lovely rainbow that arched overhead, — a bow of promise to those who seemed passing under it from the old life to a new one, full of tender promise.

"I see a nice old woman in that kitchen, and I want to stop and ask for some new milk. Perhaps she will give us our supper, and then we can go on by moonlight," said Rose, as they came to a weather-beaten farm-house, standing under an ancient elm, with its door hospitably open, and a grandmotherly figure going to and fro within.

Rose's request was most graciously received, for the old woman seemed to regard them as most welcome cheerers of her solitude, and bustled about with an infectious cordiality that set them at their ease directly.

"Do tell! Caught in the shower? It come so suddin', I mistrusted some folks would get a duckin'. You kin hev supper jest as wal as not. 'Tain't a mite o' trouble, ef you don't mind plain vittles. Enos and me lives alone, and he ain't no gret of an eater; but I allers catle'ate to hev a good store of pervision on hand this time a year, there's such a sight of strangers round the mountains. The table's all set; and I'll jest add a pinch of tea and a couple of pies, and there we be. Now draw right up, and do the best you kin."

The cheery old soul was so hospitable that her presence gave a grace to her homely table and added flavor to her plain fare. Uncle Ben's eyes twinkled when he saw dainty Rose eating brown-bread and milk out of a yellow bowl, with the appetite of a dairymaid; and Milly rejoiced over the happy face opposite; wishing that it might always wear that self-forgetful look.

Enos was a feeble, bed-ridden, old man, who lay in a small room opening from the kitchen. A fretful invalid he seemed to be, hard to suit and much given to complaint. But the tender old wife never lost patience with him; and it was beautiful to see how cheerfully she trotted to and fro, trying to gratify every whim, without a reproachful word or thought of weariness.

After tea, as Rose wanted to wait till moonrise, Uncle Ben went in to chat with the invalid, while Milly insisted on wiping the cups for the old lady; and Rose sat on the doorstep, listening to their chat, and watching twilight steal softly up the valley. Presently her attention was fixed by something the old lady said in answer to Milly's praises of the quaint kitchen.

"Yes, dear, I've lived here all my days. Was born in that bed-room; and don't ask no better than to die there when my time comes."

"Most people are not fortunate enough to keep their old home when they marry. It must be very dear to you, having spent both your maiden and married life here," said Milly, interested in her hostess.

"Wal, you see my maiden life lasted sixty year; and my married life ain't but jest begun," answered the old lady, with a laugh as gay as a girl's.

Seeing curiosity in the quick glance Rose involuntarily gave her, the chatty old soul went on, as if gossip was dear to her heart, and her late-coming happiness still so new that she loved to tell it.

"I s'pose that sounds sing'lar to you young things; but, you see, though me and Enos was engaged at twenty or so, we warn't married till two year ago. Things was dreadful con'try, and we kep a waitin' and a waitin', till I declare for't I really did think I should die an old maid." And she laughed again, as if her escape was the best joke in the world.

"And you waited forty years?" cried Rose, with her great eyes full of wonder.

"Yes, dear. I had other chances; but somehow they didn't none of them suit, and the more unfort'nate Enos was the more I kinder held on to him. He was one of them that's allers tryin' new things, and didn't never seem to make a fortin out of any on 'em. He kept a tryin' because he had nothin', and would'nt marry till he was wal off. My mother was dead, and left a family to be took care on. I was the oldest gal, and so I nat'rally kept house for father till he died, and the children grew up and married off. So I warn't idle all them years, and got on first-rate, allers hopin' Enos's luck would turn. But it didn't (them cups goes in the right-hand corner, dear); and so I waited and waited, and hoped and hoped."

"Oh! how could you?" sighed Rose, from the soft gloom of the doorway.

"'Pears to me strength is give us most wonderful to bear trials, if we take 'em meek. I used to think I couldn't bear it no way when I was left here alone, while Enos was in Californy; and I didn't know for seven year whether he was dead or alive. His folks give him up; but I never did, and kept on hopin' and prayin' for him till he come back."

"How happy you were then!" cried Rose, as if she could sympathize heartily with that joy.

"No, I warn't, dear. That was the hardest part on't; for Enos was married to a poor, shiftless thing, that was a burden to him for ten year."

"That *was* hard," and Rose gave a groan, as if a new trouble had suddenly come upon her.

"I done my best for 'em, in their ups and downs, till they went West. Then I settled down to end my days here alone. My folks was all dead or fur away, and it was uncommon lonesome. But I kinder clung to the old place, and had it borne in upon me strong that Enos would turn up agin in time. I wanted him to find me here, ready to give him a helpin' hand whenever and however he come."

"And he did, at last?" asked Rose, with a sympathetic quiver in her voice that went to the old woman’s heart.

“Yes, my deary; he did come at last,” she said, in a voice full of a satisfaction that was almost solemn in its intensity. “Ruther mor’n two years ago he knocked at that door, a poor, broken-down old man, without wife, or child, or money, or home, — nothin’ in the wide world but me. He didn’t think I’d take him in, he was so mis’able. But, Lord love him, what else had I been a waitin’ for them forty year? It warn’t the Enos that I loved fust; but that didn’t matter one mite. And when he sat sobbin’ in that chair, and sayin’ he had no friend but me, why I just answered back: ‘My home is your’n, Enos; and I give it jest as hearty as I did when you fust pupposed, under the laylock bushes, in the back gardin. Rest here, my poor dear, and let Becky take care on you till she dies.’“

“So he stayed?” said Milly, with tears in her voice, for Rose’s head was down on her knees, so eloquent had been the pathos of that old voice, telling its little tale of faithful love.

“Certin. And we was married, so no one need make no talk. Folks said it was a dreadful poor match, and took on about my doin’ on’t; for I’m wal off, and Enos hadn’t a cent. But we was satisfied, and I ain’t never repented of that day’s work; for he took to his bed soon after, and won’t quit it, the doctor says, till he’s took to his grave.”

“You dear soul, I must kiss you for that lovely deed of yours, and thank you from my heart for this lesson in fidelity.” And, obeying an irresistible impulse, Rose threw her arms round the old lady’s neck, kissing the wrinkled cheek with real reverence and tenderness.

“Sakes alive! Wal, I never did see sech a softhearted little creter. Why, child, what I done warn’t nothin’ but a pleasure. We women are such queer things, we don’t care how long we wait, ef we only hev our way at last.”

As she spoke, the old woman hugged the blooming girl with a motherly warmth, most sweet and comfortable to see; yet the longing look, the lingering touch, betrayed how much the tender old heart would have loved to pillow there a child of its own.

Just then Uncle Ben appeared, and the early moon peeped over the mountain-top, plainly hinting that it was time for the wanderers to turn homeward. Bidding their hospitable hostess good night, they came again into the woody road, now haunted with soft shadows and silvery with falling dew. The brown brooks were singing lullabies, the pines whispering musically in the wind, the mellow moonlight was falling everywhere, and the world was full of the magical beauty of a midsummer’s night.

“Go on, please, and let me follow alone. I want to think over my pleasant day, and finish it with waking dreams, as I go through this enchanted wood,” said

Rose, whose mind was full of sweet yet sober thoughts; for she had gathered herbs of grace while carelessly pulling wayside flowers, and from the simple adventures of the day had unconsciously received lessons that never were forgotten.

The other walked on, and the girl followed, living over again the happy winter during which she had learned to know and love the young neighbor who had become the hero of her dreams. She had felt sure he loved her, though the modest youth had never told her so, except with eloquent glances and tender devotion. She believed in him, loved him truly, and waited with maidenly patience to hear the words that would unseal her lips. They did not come, and he had left her with no hope but such as she could find in the lingering pressure of his hand and the warmly uttered “I shall see you again.”

Since then, no line, no word; and all through the lovely spring she had looked and waited for the brown-bearded student, — looked and waited in vain. Then unrest took possession of her, anxiety tormented her, and despair made her young face pathetic. Only the sad, simple old story, but as bitter to live through now as in poor Dido’s day; more bitter, perhaps, because we cannot erect funeral pyres and consume the body with a flame less fierce than that which burns away the soul unseen.

Now in the silence of that summer night a blessed peace seemed to fall on the girl’s unquiet heart, as she trod thoughtfully along the shadowy road. Courage and patience seemed to spring up within her. To wait and hope and love without return became a possibility; and, though a few hot tears rolled down the cheeks, that had lost their roses, the eyes that shed them were more tender for the tears, and the heart that echoed the old wife’s words — ”Strength is given us to bear our trials, if we take them meekly” — was worthier of life’s best blessing, love, because of its submission.

As she paused a moment to wipe away the tell-tale drops, before she joined the others, the sound of far-off music came on the wings of the wind, — a man’s voice, singing one of the love-lays that are never old. As if spell-bound, Rose stood motionless in the broad streak of light that fell athwart the road. She knew the voice, the sweet old song seemed answering her prayer, and now it needed no golden butterfly to guide her to her lover.

Nearer and nearer came the singer, pouring out his lay as if his heart was in it. Brighter and brighter glowed the human rose, as the featherless nightingale told his tale in music, unconsciously approaching the happy sequel with each step.

Out from the gloom he came, at last; saw her waiting for him in the light; seemed to read the glad truth in her face, and stretched both hands to her without a word. She took them; and what followed who shall say? For the moon, best friend of lovers, discreetly slipped behind a cloud, and the pines whispered their congratulations as they wrapped the twain in deepest shadow.

When, half an hour later, they joined the other pair (who, strange to say, had quite forgotten their charge), Uncle Ben exclaimed, as he welcomed the new-comer with unusual cordiality: “Why, Rose! You look quite glorified in this light and as well as ever. We must try this cure again.”

“No need, sir. I have done with the heartache, and here is my physician,” answered Rose, with a look at her lover which told the story better than the best chosen words.

“And here is mine,” echoed Milly, leaning on Uncle Ben’s arm as if it belonged to her; as it did, for the moonlight had been too much for the old bachelor, and, in spite of his fifty years, he had wooed and won Milly as ardently as any boy. So the lonely future she had accepted so cheerfully suddenly bloomed with happy hopes; and the older couple looked as blissfully content as the young pair, who greeted with the blithest laughter that ever woke the echoes of the wood, this fit ending to the romance of a summer day.

MY ROCOCO WATCH.

All three of us were inspired with an intense desire to possess one of these quaint watches, the moment we saw one hanging at the side of a certain lovely woman at a party where it created a great sensation.

Imitations we would not have, and the genuine article could not be found even in Geneva, the paradise of time-pieces. My sisters soon ceased to pine for the impossible, and contented themselves with other antique gauds. Fan rejoiced in a very ugly Cinque-Cento ring like a tiny coffin, and Mary was the proud possessor of a Roman necklace composed of gods and goddesses.

I, however, remained true to my first love and refused to be satisfied with any thing but a veritable rococo watch, for that, I maintained, united the useful and the beautiful. Resisting the temptations of Rome, Paris, and Geneva, I skilfully lured my unsuspecting party into all sorts of out-of-the-way places under pretence of studying up the old French cathedrals.

The girls did the churches faithfully, but I shirked them and spent my shining hours poking about dirty streets and staring in at the windows of ancient jewelry shops, patiently seeking for the watch of my dreams. I was rallied unmercifully upon my mania, and many jokes were played upon me by the frolicksome girls, who more than once sent me posting off by reports of some remarkable trinket in some almost unattainable place.

But, nothing daunted, I continued my vain search all through France, and never relinquished my hope till we left St. Malo on our way to Brest, whence we were to sail for home. Then I despaired, and, having nothing more to toil for, began to enjoy myself with a free mind, and then it was that capricious fortune chose to smile upon me and reward my long quest.

Finding that we had a day before us, we explored the queer old town, and, as our tastes varied, each went a different way. I roamed about the narrow streets, seeking some odd souvenir to carry away, and was peering into a dark lane, attracted by some fine shells, when suddenly I was arrested by a sight which caused me to pause in the middle of a puddle, exclaiming dramatically, “At last! at last!”

Yes, there, in the dusty window of a pawnbroker’s shop, hung the most enchanting watch, crystal ball, silver chains, enamelled medallions, and cluster of charms, all encrusted with pearls, garnets, and turquoises set in the genuine antique style. One long gaze, one rapturous exclamation, and I skipped from the puddle to the doorstep, bent on securing the prize at all costs.

Bouncing in upon a withered little man, who was taking coffee in a shadowy recess, I demanded the price of the watch. Of course the little man was on the alert at once, and began by protesting that it was not for sale; but I saw the fib in his eye, and sweetly insisted that I must have it. Then he improvised a mournful tale about a family of rank reduced by misfortune and forced to dispose of their cherished relics in some private manner. I affected to believe the touching romance, and offered a handsome sum for the watch, which, on closer inspection, struck me as rather more antique than even I desired.

Instantly the little man clasped his hands and protested that it was an insult to propose such a paltry price for so beautiful and perfect a treasure. Double the sum might be a temptation, but not a sou less.

This was so absurd that I tried to haggle a little; but I never succeeded in that line, so my attempt ended in both of us getting angry, when the little man tore the watch from my hands, and I left the shop as precipitately as I entered it.

Retiring to the square to cool my indignation, I was reposing on a bench, when I beheld the little man approaching with the blandest expression, and, bowing profoundly, he resumed the subject as if we had parted amicably.

“If madame would allow him to consult the owner of this so charming watch, the affair might yet be arranged in a satisfactory manner. If madame would leave her address, he would report to her in a few hours, and have the happiness of obliging the dear lady.”

I consented, but preferred to return to his shop later in the day, for I wished to astonish the girls by producing my prize at some opportune moment, and I much feared if I told them of my discovery that the bargain would never be made.

I suffered agonies of suspense for hours, but basely attributed my restlessness to the heat and weariness. Five o’clock and dinner, but I declined going down, and slipped away to my tryst with the little old man. He was ready for me with another romance of the noble owner’s reluctance to part with an heirloom for less than the price he had named. In vain I talked, wheedled, and protested; the crafty little man saw that I meant to have that watch, and was firm. At last I pretended to give it up, and, thanking him for his trouble, retired mournfully, hoping he would follow me again, for I had told him that I should leave in the steamer expected next day.

But the evening passed, and no little man appeared, although I sat on the balcony till the moon rose. Morning came, and with it the steamer, but still no watch arrived, as other coveted articles had often done, when we firmly refused to be imposed upon.

My secret agitation increased, and my temptation waxed stronger and stronger as the hour of departure approached. The girls thought me nervous about the voyage, but were too busy to heed my preoccupation, while I was too much ashamed of my infatuation to confess it and ask advice.

Fifteen minutes before we started for the wharf, I gave in, and muttering something about looking up the carriage, I flew round the corner, demanded the watch, paid an abominable price for it, and sneaked back, knowing I had been cheated by the sly old fellow, who had evidently expected me, and whom I left chuckling over his bargain, as well he might, the rascal!

The moment the deed was done my spirits returned, and I beamed upon my sisters as benignly as if I carried a boundless supply of good humor in my pocket instead of that costly watch packed up in a shabby little box.

We sailed, and for several days I forgot every thing but my own woe; then came a calm, and then choosing a moment when the girls were comparing their treasures with those of other returning voyagers, I proudly produced my watch. The effect was superb. Cries of admiration greeted it from all but my sisters, who looked at one another in comic dismay and burst into fits of laughter.

“We saw it and tried to get it, but it cost so much we gave it up, and never told lest Penelope should be tempted beyond her strength. We might have spared our pains, for it was to be, and it is vain to fight against fate, only do tell us if you paid that Shylock what he asked us?” said Mary, naming a smaller sum than my first handsome offer.

“I did not pay that, and I shall never tell what it cost, for you wouldn’t believe me if I did. It was a good bargain, I assure you — for Shylock,” I added to myself, and kept my secret jealously, knowing I never should hear the last of it if the awful truth was known.

My treasure was so much admired that I was afraid it would be ravished from me, and I hid it in all sorts of places, like a magpie with a stolen spoon. I never went on deck without taking it with me for safe keeping. I never woke in the morning without burrowing under my mattress to see if it was safe, and never turned in for the night without seeing that I was prepared for shipwreck by having my life-preserver handy and half-a-dozen ship biscuits, a bottle of water, and the precious box lashed firmly together, for with that dearly bought watch I was resolved to sink or swim, live or die.

Being permitted to reach land in safety, I prepared to eclipse Fan’s ring and Mary’s necklace with my rich and rare rococo watch. But I found it impossible to set it going, though I tried all the keys in the house, so I took it to an experienced watchmaker and left it to be regulated. Every one knows what that means, and can imagine my impatience as week after week went by and still that blessed thing was not done. It came at last, however, and with it a bill that startled me; but I could not dispute it, for the job was a difficult one, owing to the antiquity of the works and the skill required to set a watch going that probably had not been wound up for half a century.

It went for a week, and then stopped for ever; for the general verdict was that no modern tinkering would restore its tone, since the springs of life were broken and the venerable wheels at a dead lock.

“Well, it is ornamental if not useful, only I am sorry I gave away my good old watch, thinking this would be all I needed,” I said, making the best of what I alone knew to be a desperately bad bargain.

So I hung the silent thing to my girdle and went forth to awaken the envy and admiration of all beholders. But, alas! the second time I wore it, one of the medallions was lost, could not be found, and its place had to be filled with a modern one, entirely out of keeping with the others. Bill the second was paid with much lamentation, and again I tried to enjoy my watch. But the fates seemed to be against me, for presently it was stolen by a maid who admired mediæval jewelry as well as her mistress.

What a state of excitement we were in then, to be sure! Cousin Dick took the matter in hand, and searched for the lost watch with the patience, if not the skill, of a detective. Mysterious men came to examine the servants, dreadful questions as to its value were put to me, and, worst of all, I knew that this sort of hide-and-go-seek was a fearfully expensive game, and of course I wasn’t going to let Dick pay for it.

It was found at last, and restored to me somewhat the worse for the rough handling of curious admirers. Bill the third was paid with the calmness of despair, for I really began to think some evil spell was hidden in that crystal ball; a spell which attracted, then infatuated, and now controlled me, leading me slowly and surely, through tribulation after tribulation, to the poor-house in the end.

The accidents that befell that fatal watch would fill a CHAPTER, and the narrow escapes it had would make a thrilling tale. Babies half choked themselves with the charms, little Tommy was discovered trying to divest it of all incumbrances that he might use it as a “jolly big marble.” It was always falling off, catching in buttons, or bobbing wildly about when I danced, and more than once I was cut to the soul by hearing benighted people wonder at Miss Pen’s bad taste in wearing Salom jewelry. Salom, be it known to the ignorant, is an excellent man who deals in mock ornaments of great brilliancy and cheapness.

Soon the jewels began to fall out, and I scattered pearls about me like the young lady in the fairy tale. Then the chain broke, and the charms were lost. In one of the many falls, the crystal got cracked; the silver tarnished till it looked like dingy lead, and at last no beauty remained to reconcile me to its utter uselessness. My poor watch was the standing joke of the family, and kept every one merry but its owner. To me it was a disgrace, and I suffered endless disappointments and delays by having no trusty time-keeper at hand. Pride prevented my applying to others, and bitterly I mourned in secret for the true old friend I had deserted when the false new one came.

I ceased to wear the hollow mockery, and hoped people would forget it, but the girls still displayed their more successful ornaments; and I was forced to tell the sad tale of my mortifying failure in reply to the natural question, —

“And what charming old trinket did Pen get?”

But this was not the worst of it. Like little Rosamond in the moral tale, I had to wear my old shoes when the purple jar proved a delusion and a snare. I had overrun my allowance by that rash purchase, and had to economize just when I most wished to be fine. “Beauty unadorned,” and that sort of thing, is all nonsense when a woman burns to look her loveliest in the eyes of certain persons, and the anguish I endured when I looked at that rubbishy old watch, and thought what sweet things could have been bought with the money recklessly lavished upon it, can better be imagined than described.

Fain would I have sold my treasure for a quarter what I gave for it, but who would buy the ruined relic now? And the mere idea of having it even partially repaired made my blood run cold. So I laid it away as a warning example of woman’s folly, and began to save up, that I might replace it by a modern watch with all the improvements procurable for money.

I was effectually cured of my passion for antiquities, and hated the sound of the word *rococo*. Nothing could be too new for me now, and I privately studied up on watches, being bound never to buy another, which, though it might last to all eternity, yet had no connection with time.

Slowly the memory of that temptation and fall seemed to fade from all minds but my own; slowly my little hoard increased at the expense of many an ungratified whim, inviting bargain, or girlish vanity, and slowly I decided what sort of watch would most entirely combine the solid virtues and modest graces I desired to possess in the new one I intended to choose so wisely and well.

But just as my hundred dollars was nearly completed, I discovered that Dick’s younger brother, Geordie, had got himself into a boyish scrape, and was planning to run away to sea as the best means of settling the difficulty. I was immediately possessed with an intense desire to help the poor lad, and, having won his confidence in a desponding moment, I offered my little hoard as a loan, to be paid in time, if he would accept it on no other condition.

I really don't think I could have done it for any one but Dick's brother, and I did not desire any praise for it, since I made the boy take a solemn vow that it should be a secret between us for ever. It was reward enough to know that I had spared dear Dick another care, and done something to be more worthy of him, though it was only a little sacrifice like this.

So Geordie was a free man again, and my devoted slave from that day forth, causing much merry wonderment in the family, and actually making Dick jealous by his grateful gallantry.

My sacrifice cost me something more than the loss of my watch, however, for with a part of the money I had planned to get a fine Christmas gift for some one, and now I was obliged to content myself with such a poor little offering that the girls called me mean, and nearly broke my heart by insisting that I did not care for somebody who cared a great deal for me. I bore it all and kept Geordie's secret faithfully; but I will confess that, in a paroxysm of anger with myself, I clashed that hateful rococo watch upon the floor and trampled on it as the only adequate vent for the conflicting emotions which possessed me.

But the good fairies who fly about at Christmas time set every thing right, and broke the evil spell cast over me by the Breton magician in his gloomy cell. As we sat about the breakfast-table, talking over our gifts on the morning of that happy day, Dick and Geordie came in to see how we were after the fatigues of a grand family frolic the night before.

"Here's a new conundrum; guess it, girls," said Geordie, who had the Dundreary fever upon him just at that time. "I was sent to India and stopped there; I came back because I did not go there. Now what was it?"

We puzzled over it, but gave it up at last, and when Geordie answered, "A watch," there was a general laugh, for since my ruinous speculation that word always produced a sensation among us.

"The place mentioned should have been Brittany, not India, hey, Pen?" said Dick, with a wicked twinkle of the eye.

"Don't," I began, pathetically, as the girls giggled, and Mary added, with mock sympathy, "Hush, boys, and let that sacred sorrow be for ever hidden in Pen's own breast."

"Watch and pray, dear, watch and pray, for I'm sure you have need of both," cried Fan, seeing my rising wrath.

"Put your hands before your face but don't strike, I beg of you," cut in Geordie, trying to be witty.

"It is a sad case, but I think I have a key that will wind up the affair and set all going right," began Dick, still twinkling with fun.

To have him join the enemy was too much for me, because he had always been very careful to avoid that tender point.

"If you say another word, I'll throw the horrid thing into the fire, for I'm sick to death of hearing bad jokes made on it," I cried, feeling a strong desire to shake them all round.

"No doubt; give it to me, and you shall never see or hear of it again. I like old trinkets, and I'll never tell the story of that one, on my honor as a gentleman," said Dick, in a tone that appeased my wrath at once.

"Do you really want it?" I asked, pleased and surprised, yet still a little suspicious of some new joke.

"I do, because, although it will never go again, it will always remind me of some of the happiest hours and minutes of my life, Pen."

There was no fun in Dick's eyes as he said that, and I was glad to hide the sudden color in my cheeks by running away to get the poor old watch. But I found there *was* a surprise, and a very pleasant one, in store for me; for, as I thrust the shabby box into Dick's pocket, he handed me a little parcel prettily tied up with white ribbons, saying in his most captivating way, "Fair exchange is no robbery, you know, so you must take this, and then we shall be square."

"It looks like wedding cake," I said, surveying it with curiosity, and wondering why Geordie and the girls did not stop to see the mystery unfolded.

"No, that comes later, dear," answered Dick, in a tone that made me devote myself to the white ribbons with sudden zeal.

A blue velvet case appeared, and I could not resist saying, in a voice more tender than reproachful, "You extravagant man! I know it is something costly and beautiful in return for the disgracefully mean gift I gave you."

"Bless your innocent heart, did you think you could hide any thing from me? Geordie couldn't keep a secret, and I'm only paying his debt, Pen dear, with the sort of interest women like," Dick answered, with an audacious arm around my waist and a brown beard close to my cheek.

As I did not refuse the offered interest, he added, in a softer tone, "My own debt I never can settle unless with all my worldly goods I thee endow; my heart you have had for years. Say yes, dear, and be my little *châtelaine*."

Never mind what I said, but I assure you if it had not been for Dick's arm I should have gone under the table, when, a few minutes later, I lifted the blue velvet lid and saw a dainty watch luxuriously lying on its white satin bed.

BY THE RIVER.

A LEGEND OF THE ASSABET.

CHAPTER I.

In the shadow of the bridge a boy lay reading on the grass, — a slender lad, broad-browed and clear-eyed, barefooted and clad in homespun, yet happy as a king; for health sat on his sunburned cheeks, a magic book lay open before him, and sixteen years of innocence gave him a passport to the freshest pleasures life can offer.

“Nat! Nat! come here and see!” cried a shrill voice from among the alders by the river-side.

But Nat only shook his head as if a winged namesake had buzzed about his ears, and still read on. Presently a twelve-years child came scrambling up the bank, dragging a long rod behind her with a discontented air.

“I wish you’d come and help me. The fish won’t bite and my line is in a grievous snarl. Don’t read any more. I’m tired of playing all alone.”

“I forgot you, Ruthy, and it was ill done of me. Sit here and rest while I undo the tangle,” and Nat looked up good-naturedly at the small figure before him, with its quaint pinafore, checked linen gown, and buckled shoes; for this little maid lived nearly a hundred years ago and this lad had seen Washington face to face.

“Now tell me a story while I wait. Not out of that stupid play-book you are always reading, but about something that really happened, with naughty children and nice folks in it, and have it end good,” said Ruth, beginning a dandelion chain; for surely it is safe to believe that our honored grandmothers enjoyed that pretty pastime in their childhood.

Nat lay in the grass, dreamily regarding the small personage who ruled him like a queen and whom he served with the devotion of a loyal heart. Now the royal command was for a story, and, stifling a sigh, this rustic gentleman closed the book, whose magic had changed the spring morning to a Midsummer Night’s

Dream for an hour, and set himself to gratify the little damsel’s whim.

“You liked the last tale about the children who were lost. Shall I tell one about a child who was found? It really happened, and you never heard it before,” he asked.

“Yes; but first put your head in my lap, for there are ants in the grass and I like to see your eyes shine when you spin stories. Tell away.”

“Once upon a time there was a great snow-storm,” began Nat, obediently pillowing his head on the blue pinafore.

“Whereabouts?” demanded Ruth.

“Don’t spoil the story by interrupting. It was in this town, and I can show you the very house I’m going to tell about.”

“I like to know things straight along, and not bounce into a snow-storm all in a minute. I’ll be good. Go on.”

“Well, it snowed so hard that people stayed indoors till the storm had beat and blown itself away. Right in the worst of it, as a farmer and his wife sat by the fire that night, they heard a cry at the door. You see they were sitting very still, the man smoking his pipe and the woman knitting, both thinking sorrowfully of their only son, who had just died.”

“Don’t have it doleful, Nat,” briskly suggested Ruth, working busily while the narrator’s hands lay idle, and his eyes looked as if they actually saw the little scene his fancy conjured up.

“No, I won’t; only it really was like that,” apologized Nat, seeing that sentiment was not likely to suit his matter-of-fact auditor. “When the cry came a second time, both of these people ran to the door. No one was to be seen, but on the wide step they saw a little mound not there an hour before. Brushing off the snow, they found a basket; and, when they opened it, there lay a little baby, who put out its arms with a pitiful cry, that went to their hearts. The woman hugged it close, fed it, and hushed it to sleep as if it had been her own. Her husband let her do as she liked, while he tried to find where it came from; but no trace appeared, and there was no name or mark on the poor thing’s clothes.”

“Did they keep it?” asked Ruth, tickling Nat’s nose with a curly dandelion stem, to goad him on, as he lay silent for a moment.

“Yes, they kept it; for their hearts were sore and empty, and the forlorn baby seemed to fill them comfortably. The townsfolk gossiped awhile, but soon forgot it; and it grew up as if it had been born in the farmer’s house. I’ve often wondered if it wasn’t the soul of the little son who died, come back in another shape to comfort those good people.”

“Now don’t go wandering off, Nat; but tell me if he was a pretty, nice, smart child,” said Ruth, with an eye to the hero’s future capabilities.

"Not a bit pretty," laughed Nat, "for he grew up tall and thin, with big eyes and a queer brow. He wasn't 'nice,' either, if you mean good, for he got angry sometimes and was lazy; but he tried, — oh! yes, he truly tried to be a dutiful lad. He wasn't 'smart,' Ruth; for he hated to study, and only loved story books, ballads, and plays, and liked to wander round alone in the woods better than to be with other boys. People laughed at him because of his queersome ways; but he couldn't help it, — he was born so, and it would come out."

"He was what Aunt Becky calls shiftless, I guess. She says you are; but I don't mind as long as you take care of me and tell me stories."

The boy sighed and shook his head as if a whole swarm of gnats were annoying him now. "He was grateful, anyhow, this fellow I'm telling about; for he loved the good folks and worked on the farm with all his might to pay them for their pity. He never complained; but he hated it, for delving day after day in the dirt made him feel as if he was nothing but a worm."

"We are all worms," Deacon Hurd says; "so the boy needn't have minded," said Ruth, trying to assume a primly pious expression, that sat very ill upon her blooming little face.

"But some worms can turn into butterflies, if they get a chance; so the boy did mind, Ruthy." And Nat looked out into the summer world with a longing glance, which proved that he already felt conscious of the folded wings and was eager to try them.

"Was he a God-fearing boy?" asked Ruth, with a tweak of the ear; for her friend showed signs of "wandering off" again into a world where her prosaic little mind could not follow him.

"He didn't *fear* God; he loved Him. Perhaps it was wrong; but somehow he couldn't believe in a God of wrath when he saw how good and beautiful the world was and how kind folks were to him. He felt as if the Lord was his father, for he had no other; and when he was lonesomest that thought was right comfortable and helpful to him. Was it wrong?" asked Nat of the child.

"I'm afraid Aunt Becky would think so. She's awful pious, and boxed my ears with a psalm-book last Sabbath, when I said I wished the lions would bite Daniel in the den, I was so tired of seeing them stare and roar at him. She wouldn't let me look at the pictures in the big Bible another minute, and gave me a long hymn to learn, shut up in the back bed-room. She's a godly woman, Deacon Hurd says; but I think she's uncommon strict."

"Shall I tell any more, or are you tired of this stupid boy?" said Nat, modestly.

"Yes, you may as well finish. But do have something happen. Make him grow a great man, like Whittington, or some of the story-book folks, it's so nice to read about," answered Ruth, rather impatiently.

“I hope he did something better than trade cats and be lord mayor of London. But that part of the story hasn’t come yet; so I’ll tell you of two things that happened, one sad and one merry. When the boy was fourteen, the good woman died, and that nearly broke his heart; for she had made things easy for him, and he loved her dearly. The farmer sent for his sister to keep house, and then the boy found it harder than ever to bear his life; for the sister was a notable woman, well-meaning, but as strict as Aunt Becky, and she pestered the lad as Aunt pesters me. You see, Ruthy, it grew harder every year for him to work on the farm, for he longed to be away somewhere quiet among books and learned folk. He was not like those about him, and grew more unlike all the time, and people often said: ‘He’s come of gentle blood. That’s plain to see.’ He loved to think it was true, — not because he wanted to be rich and fine, but to find his own place and live the life the Lord meant him to. This feeling made him so unhappy that he was often tempted to run away, and would have done it but for the gratitude that kept him.

“Lack-a-daisy! What a bad boy, when he had good clothes and victuals and folks were clever to him! But did he ever find his grand relations?” asked Ruth, curiosity getting the better of the reproof she thought it her duty to administer.

“I don’t know yet. But he did find something that made him happier and more contented. Listen now; for you’ll like this part, I know. One night, as he came home with the cows, watching the pretty red in the sky, hearing the crickets chirp, and picking flowers along the way, because he liked to have ‘em in his room, he felt uncommon lonesome, and kept wishing he’d meet a fairy who’d give him all he wanted. When he got to the house, he thought the fairy had really come; for there on the door-stone stood a little lass, looking at him. A right splendid little lass, Ruth, with brown hair long upon her shoulders, blue eyes full of smiles, and a face like one of the pink roses in Madam Barrett’s garden.”

“Did she have good clothes?” demanded Ruth, eagerly, for this part of the tale did interest her, as Nat foretold.

“Let me see. Yes, nice clothes; but sad-colored, for the riding-cloak that hung over her white dimity frock was black. Yet she stood on a pair of the trimmest feet ever seen, wearing hose with fine clocks, and silver buckles in the little shoes. You may believe the boy stared well, for he had never seen so pretty a sight in all his days, and before he knew it he had given her his nosegay of sheepsbane, fern, and honeysuckle. She took it, looking pleased, and made him as fine a courtesy as any lady; whereat he turned red and foolish, being shy, and hurried off into the barn. But she came skipping after, and peeped at him as he milked, watched how he did it for a bit, and then said, like a little queen, ‘Boy, get up and let me try.’ That pleased him mightily; so, taking little madam on his knee, he let her try. But something went amiss, for all at once Brindle kicked over the pail, away went the three-legged stool, and both the milkers lay in the dirt."

"Why, Nat! why, Nat! that was you and I," cried Ruth, clapping her hands delightedly, as this catastrophe confirmed the suspicions which had been growing in her mind since the appearance of the child.

"Hush! or I'll never tell how they got up," said Nat, hurrying on with a mirthful face. "The boy thought the little maid would cry over her bruised arm or go off in a pet at sight of the spoilt frock. But no; she only laughed, patted old Brindle, and sat down, saying stoutly, 'I shall try again and do it right.' So she did, and while she milked she told how she was an orphan and had come to be Uncle Dan's girl all her life. That was a pleasant hearing for the lad, and he felt as if the fairy had done better by him than he had hoped. They were friends at once, and played cat's cradle on the kitchen settle all the evening. But, when the child was put to bed in a strange room, her little heart failed her, and she fell a-sobbing for her mother. Nothing would comfort her till the boy went up and sang her to sleep, with her pretty hand in his and all her tears quite gone. That was nigh upon two years ago; but from that night they were fast friends, and happier times began for the boy, because he had something to love and live for besides work. She was very good to him, and nowhere in all the world was there a dearer, sweeter lass than Nat Snow's little maid."

During the latter part of this tale "founded upon fact," Ruth had been hugging her playmate's head in both her chubby arms, and when he ended by drawing down the rosy face to kiss it softly on the lips it grew a very April countenance, as she exclaimed, with a childish burst of affection, curiosity, and wonder, —

"Dear Nat, how good you were to me that night and ever since! Did you really come in a basket, and don't you know any thing about your folks? Good lack! And to think you may turn out a lord's son, after all!"

"How could I help being good to you, dear? Yes, I'll show you the very basket, if Aunt Becky has not burnt it up as rubbish. I know nought about my folk, and have no name but Snow. Uncle Dan gave me that because I came in the storm, and the dear mother added Nathaniel, her own boy's name, since I was sent to take his place, she said. As for being a lord's son, I'd rather be a greater man than that."

And Nat rose up with sudden energy in his voice, a sudden kindling of the eyes, that pleased Ruth, and made her ask, with firm faith in the possibility of his being any thing he chose, —

"You mean a king?"

"No, a poet!"

"But that's not fine at all!" and Ruth looked much disappointed.

"It is the grandest thing in the world! Look now, the man who wrote this play was a poet, and, though long dead, he is still loved and honored, when the kings and queens he told about would be forgotten but for him. Who cares for them, with all their splendor? Who does not worship William Shakespeare, whose genius made him greater than the whole of them!" cried Nat, hugging the dingy book, his face all aglow with the beautiful enthusiasm of a true believer.

"Was Master Shakespeare rich and great?" asked Ruth, staring at him with round eyes.

"Never rich or great in the way you mean, or even famous, till after he was dead."

"Then I'd rather have you like Major Wild, for he owns much land, lives in a grand house, and wears the finest-laced coat in all the town. Will you be like him, please, Nat?"

"No, I won't!" answered the lad, with emphatic brevity, as the image of the red-faced, roystering Major passed before his mind's eye.

His bluntness ruffled his little sovereign's temper for a moment, and she asked with a frown, —

"What do you think Aunt Becky said yesterday, when we found ever so many of your verses hidden in the clothes-press, where we went to put lavender among the linen?"

"Something sharp, and burnt the papers, I'll warrant," replied Nat, with the resignation of one used to such trials.

"No, she kept 'em to cover jam-pots with, and she said you were either a fool or a genus. Is a genus very bad, Nat?" added Ruth, relenting as she saw his dreamy eyes light up with what she fancied was a spark of anger.

"Aunt Becky thinks so; but I don't, and, though I may not be one, sooner or later folks shall see that I'm no fool, for I feel, I know, I was not born to hoe corn and feed pigs all my life."

"What will you do?" cried Ruth, startled by the almost passionate energy with which he spoke.

"Till I'm twenty-one I'll stay to do my duty. When the time comes, I'll break away and try my own life, for I shall have a right to do it then."

"And leave me? Nay, I'll not let you go." And Ruth threw her dandelion chain about his neck, claiming her bondsman with the childish tyranny he found so sweet.

He laughed and let her hold him, seeing how frail the green links were; little dreaming how true a symbol it was of the stronger tie by which she would hold him when the time came to choose between liberty and love.

“Five years is a long time, Ruthy. You will get tired of my odd ways, and be glad to have me go. But never fret about it; for, whatever happens, I’ll not forget you.”

Quite satisfied with this promise, the little maid fell to sticking buttercups in the band of the straw hat her own nimble fingers had braided, as if bent on securing one crown for her friend. But Nat, leaning his head upon his hand, sat watching the sunshine glitter on the placid stream that rippled at his feet, with such intentness that Ruth presently disturbed him by demanding curiously, —

“What is it? A kingfisher or a turtle?”

“It’s the river, dear. It seems to sing to me as it goes by. I always hear it, yet I never understand what it says. Do you?”

Ruth fixed her blue eyes on the bluer water, listened for an instant, then laughed out blithely, and sprung up, saying, —

“It sings: ‘Come and fish, Nat. Come and fish!’“

The boy’s face fell, the dreamy look faded, and, with a patient sort of sigh, he rose and followed her, leaving his broken dream with his beloved book among the buttercups. But, though he sat by Ruth in the shadow of the alder-bushes, his rod hung idly from his hand, for he was drawing bright fancies from a stream she never saw, was dimly feeling that he had a harder knot to disentangle than his little friend’s, and faintly hearing a higher call than hers, in the ripple of the river.

CHAPTER II.

Five years later Ruth was in the dairy making up butter, surrounded by tier above tier of shining pans, whence proceeded a breath as fresh and fragrant as if the ghosts of departed king-cups and clover still haunted the spot. Standing before a window where morning-glories rung their colored bells in the balmy air, she was as pleasant a sight as any eye need wish to see upon a summer's day; for the merry child had bloomed into a sprightly girl, rich in rustic health and beauty. All practical virtues were hers; and, while they wore so comely a shape, they possessed a grace that hid the lack of those finer attributes which give to womanhood its highest charm. The present was all in all to Ruth. Its homely duties were her world, its petty griefs and joys her life, and her ambition was bounded by her desire to show her mates the finest yarn, the sweetest butter, the gayest cardinal, and the handsomest sweetheart, in the town. An essentially domestic character, cheery as the blaze upon the hearth, contented as the little kettle singing there, and so affectionate, discreet, and diligent that she was the model damsel of the town, the comfort of Uncle Daniel's age, the pride of Aunt Becky's heart, the joy of Nat's life, and the desire of his eyes.

Unlike as ever, the pair were still fast friends. Nay, more, for the past year had been imperceptibly transforming that mild sentiment into a much warmer one by the magic of beauty, youth, and time. Year after year Nat had patiently toiled on, for gratitude controlled ambition, and Ruth's presence made his life endurable. But Nature was stronger than duty or love, and as the boy ripened into the man he looked wistfully beyond the narrow present into the great future, which allures such as he with vague, sweet prophecies, hard to be resisted. Silently the struggle went on, steadily the inborn longing strengthened, and slowly the resolution was fixed to put his one gift to the test and learn if it was a vain delusion or a lovely possibility. Each year proved to himself and those about him that their world was not his world, their life his life; for, like Andersen's young swan, the barnyard was no home to him, and when the other fowls cackled, hissed, and scolded, he could only put his head under his wing and sigh for the time when he should join "the beautiful white birds among the rushes of the stream that flowed through the poet's garden, where the sun shone and the little children played."

Ruth knew his dreams and desires; but, as she could not understand them, she tried to cure them by every innocent art in her power, and nursed him through many a fit of the heart-sickness of hope deferred as patiently as she would have done through any less occult disease that flesh is heir to. She was thinking of him as she worked that day, and wishing she could mould his life as easily as she did the yellow lumps before her, stamping them with her own mark, and setting them away for her own use. She felt that some change was about to befall Nat, for she had listened to the murmur of voices as the old man and the young sat talking far into the night. What the result had been was as yet unknown; for Uncle Daniel was unusually taciturn that morning, and Nat had been shut up in his room since breakfast, though spring work waited for him all about the farm.

An unwonted sobriety sat on Ruth's usually cheerful face, and she was not singing as she worked, but listening intently for a well-known step to descend the creaking stairs. Presently it came, paused a moment in the big kitchen, where Aunt Becky was flying about like a domestic whirlwind, and Ruth heard Nat ask for her with a ring in his voice that made her heart begin to flutter.

"She's in the dairy. But for landsake where are you a-going, boy? I declare for't, you look so fine and chirk I scursely knew yer," answered the old lady, pausing in her work to stare at the astonishing spectacle of Nat in his Sunday best upon a week day.

"I'm going to seek my fortune, Aunty. Won't you wish me luck?" replied Nat, cheerily.

Aunt Becky had a proverb for every occasion, and could not lose this opportunity for enriching the malcontent with a few suited to his case.

"Yes, child, the best of lucks; but it's my opinion that, if we 'get spindle and distaff ready, the Lord will send the flax,' without our goin' to look for't. 'Every road has its puddle,' and 'he that prieth into a cloud may get struck by lightenin'.' God bless you, my dear, and remember that 'a handful of good life is wuth a bushel of learnin'.'"

"I will, Ma'am; and also bear in mind that 'he who would have eggs must bear the cackling of hens,'" with which return shot Nat vanished, leaving the old lady to expend her energies and proverbs upon the bread she was kneading with a vigor that set the trough rocking like a cradle.

Why Ruth began to sing just then, and why she became so absorbed in her oleaginous sculpture as to seem entirely unconscious of the appearance of a young man at the dairy door, are questions which every woman will find no difficulty in answering. Actuated by one of the whims which often rule the simplest of the sex, she worked and sang as if no anxiety had ruffled her quiet heart; while Nat stood and watched her with an expression which would have silenced her, had she chosen to look up and meet it.

The years that had done much for Ruth had been equally kind to Nat, in giving him a generous growth for the figure leaning in the doorway seemed full of the vigor of wholesome country life. But the head that crowned it was such as one seldom sees on a farmer’s shoulders; for the brown locks, gathered back into a ribbon, after the fashion of the time, showed a forehead of harmonious outline, overarching eyes full of the pathos and the passion that betray the presence of that gift which is divine when young. The mouth was sensitive as any woman’s, and the lips were often folded close, as if pride controlled the varying emotions that swayed a nature ardent and aspiring as a flame of fire. Few could read the language of this face, yet many felt the beauty that it owed to a finer source than any grace of shape or color, and wondered where the subtle secret lay.

“Ruth, may I tell you something?”

“Of course you may. Only don’t upset the salt-box or sit down upon the churn.”

Nat did neither, but still leaned in the doorway and still watched the trim figure before him, as if it was very pleasant to his eyes; while Ruth, after a brief glance over her shoulder, a nod and a smile, spatted away as busily as ever.

“You know I was one-and-twenty yesterday?”

“I’m not like to forget it, after sewing my eyes out to work a smart waistcoat as a keepsake.”

“Nor I; for there’s not such another in the town, and every rosebud is as perfect as if just pulled from our bush yonder. See, I’ve put it on as knights put on their armor when they went to fight for fortune and their ladies’ love.”

As he spoke, Nat smilingly thrust his hands into the pockets of a long-flapped garment, which was a master-piece of the needlework in vogue a century ago. Ruth glanced up at him with eyes full of hearty admiration for the waistcoat and its wearer. But something in those last words of his filled her with a trouble both sweet and bitter, as she asked anxiously, —

“Are you going away, Nat?”

“For a week only. Uncle has been very kind, and given me a chance to prove which road it’s best for me to take, since the time has come when I must choose. I ride to Boston this afternoon, Ruth, carrying my poems with me, that I may submit them to the criticism of certain learned gentlemen, who can tell me if I deceive myself or not. I have agreed to abide by their decision, and if it is in my favor — as God grant it be — Uncle leaves me free to live the life I love, among my books and all that makes this world glorious. Think, Ruth, — a poet in good truth, to sing when I will, and delve no more! Will you be pleased and proud if I come back and tell you this?”

“Indeed, I will, if it makes you happy. And yet” — She paused there, looking wistfully into his face, now all aglow with the hope and faith that are so blissful and so brief.

"What is it, lass? Speak out and tell me all that's in your heart, for I mean to show you mine," he said in a commanding tone seldom heard before, for he seemed already to have claimed the fair inheritance that makes the poet the equal of the prince.

Ruth felt the change with a thrill of pride, yet dared suggest the possibility of failure, as a finer nature would have shrunk from doing in such a happy, hopeful hour as that.

"If the learned gentlemen decide that the poems have no worth, what then?"

He looked at her an instant, like one fallen from the clouds, then squared his shoulders, as if resettling the burden put off for a day, and answered bravely, though a sudden shadow crossed his face, "Then I give up my dream and fall to work again, — no poet, but a man, who will do his best to be an honest one. I have promised Uncle to abide by this decision, and I'll keep my word."

"Will it be very hard, Nat?" and Ruth's eyes grew pitiful, for in his she read how much the sacrifice would cost him.

"Ay, lass, very hard," he said briefly; then added, with an eloquent change in voice and face, "unless you help me bear it. Sweetheart, whichever road I take, I had no thought to go alone. Will you walk with me, Ruth? God knows I'll make the way as smooth and pleasant as a faithful husband can."

The busy hands stopped working there, for Nat held them fast in his, and all her downcast eyes could see were the gay flowers her needle wrought, agitated by the beating of the man's heart underneath. Her color deepened beautifully and her lips trembled, in spite of the arch smile they wore, as she said half-tenderly, half-wilfully, —

"But I should be afeared to marry a poet, if they are such strange and delicate creatures as I've heard tell. 'Twould be like keeping house for a butterfly. I tried to cage one once; but the poor thing spoilt its pretty wings beating against the bars, and when I let it go it just dropped down and died among the roses there."

"But if I be no poet, only a plain farmer, with no ambition except how I may prosper and make my wife a happy woman, what answer then, Ruth?" he asked, feeling as the morning-glories might have felt if a cold wind had blown over them.

"Dear lad, it's this!" and, throwing both arms about his neck, the honest little creature kissed his brown cheek heartily.

After that no wonder if Ruth forgot her work, never saw an audacious sunbeam withering the yellow roses she had caused to bloom, never heard the buzz of an invading fly, nor thought to praise the labor of her hands, though her plump cheek was taking off impressions of the buttons on the noble waistcoat.

While to Nat the little dairy had suddenly become a Paradise, life for a moment was all poetry, and nothing in the wide world seemed impossible.

“Ruth! Ruth! The cat’s fell into the pork-kag, and my hands is in the dough. For massy sake, run down suller and fish her out!”

That shrill cry from Aunt Becky broke the spell, dissolved the blissful dream, for, true to her instincts, Ruth forgot the lover in the housewife, and vanished, leaving Nat alone with his love — and the butter-pats.

CHAPTER III.

He rode gallantly away to Boston that afternoon, and ten days later came riding slowly home again, with the precious manuscript still in his saddle-bag.

“What luck, boy?” asked Uncle Dan, with a keen glance from under his shaggy brows, as the young man came into the big kitchen, where they all sat together when the day’s work was done.

“Pretty much what you foretold, sir,” answered Nat, trying to smile bravely as he took his place beside Ruth on the settle, where she sat making up cherry-colored breast-knots by the light of one candle.

“Fools go out to shear and come home shorn,” muttered Aunt Becky from the chimney-corner, where she sat reeling yarn and brooding over some delectable mess that simmered on the coals.

Nat did not hear the flattering remark; for he was fingering a little packet that silently told the story of failure in its dog-eared leaves, torn wrappers, and carelessly knotted string.

“Yes,” he said rapidly, as if anxious to have a hard task over, “I showed my poems to sundry gentlemen, as I proposed. One liked them much, and said they showed good promise of better things; but added that it was no time for such matters now, and advised me to lay them by till I was older. A very courteous and friendly man this was, and I felt much beholden to him for his gracious speeches. The second criticized my work sharply, and showed me how I should mend it. But, when he was done, I found all the poetry had gone out of my poor lines, and nothing was left but fine words; so I thanked him and went away, thinking better of my poems than when I entered. The third wise man gave me his opinion very briefly, saying, as he handed back the book, ‘Put it in the fire.’“

“Nay! but that was too harsh. They are very pretty verses, Nat, though most of them are far beyond my poor wits,” said Ruth, trying to lighten the disappointment that she saw weighed heavily on her lover’s spirit.

“In the good gentleman’s study, I had a sight of some of the great poets of the world, and while he read my verses I got a taste of Milton, Spenser, and my own Shakespeare’s noble sonnets. I saw what mine lacked; yet some of them rang true, so I took heart and trimmed them up in the fashion my masters set me. Let me read you one or two, Ruth, while you tie your true lover’s knots.”

And, eagerly opening the beloved book, Nat began to read by the dim light of the tallow candle, blind to the resigned expression Ruth’s face assumed, deaf to

Aunt Becky's muttered opinion that "an idle brain is the devil's workshop," and quite unconscious that Uncle Dan spread a checked handkerchief over his bald pate, ready for a nap. Absorbed in his delightful task, the young poet went on reading his most perfect lines, with a face that brightened blissfully, till, just as he was giving a love-lay in his tenderest tone, a mild snore checked his heavenward flight, and brought him back to earth with a rude shock. He started, paused, and looked about him, like one suddenly wakened from a happy dream. Uncle Dan was sound asleep, Aunt Becky busily counting her tidy skeins, and Ruth, making a mirror of one of the well-scoured pewter platters on the dresser, was so absorbed in studying the effect of the gay breast-knots that she innocently betrayed her inattention by exclaiming, with a pretty air of regret, —

"And that's the end?"

"That is the end," he answered, gently closing the book which no one cared to hear, and, hiding his reproachful eyes behind his hand, he sat silent, till Uncle Dan, roused by the cessation of the melodious murmur that had soothed his ear, demanded with kindly bluntness, —

"Well, boy, which is it to be, moonshine or money? I want you to be spry about decidin', for things is gittin' behindhand, and I cattle'ate to hire if you mean to quit work."

"Sakes alive! No man in his senses would set long on the fence when there's a good farm and a smart wife a-waitin' on one side and nothin' but poetry and starvation on the other!" ejaculated Aunt Becky, briskly clattering the saucepan-lid, as if to add the savory temptations of the flesh to those of filthy lucre.

Ruth said nothing, but looked up at Nat with the one poetic sentiment of her nature shining in her eyes and touching her with its tender magic, till it seemed an easy thing to give up liberty for love. The dandelion chain the child wove round the boy had changed to a flowery garland now, but the man never saw the thorns among the roses, and let the woman fetter him again; for, as he looked at her, Nat flung the cherished book into the fire with one hand, and with the other took possession of the only bribe that could win him from that other love.

"I decide as you would have me, sir. Not for the sake of the farm you promise me, but for love of her who shall one day be its happy mistress, please God."

"Now that's sensible and hearty, and I'm waal pleased, my boy. You jest buckle to for a year stiddy and let your ink-horn dry, and we'll have as harnsome a weddin' as man could wish, — always providin' Ruth don't change her mind," said Uncle Dan, beaming benignantly at the young pair through a cloud of tobacco smoke; while Aunt Becky poked the condemned manuscript deeper into the coals, as if anxious to exorcise its witchcraft by fire, in the good old fashion.

But even in Ruth's arms Nat cast one longing, loving glance at his first-born darling on its funeral-pyre; then turned his head resolutely away, and whispered to the girl, —

"Never doubt that I love you, sweetheart, since for your sake I have given up the ambition of my life. I don't regret it, but be patient with me till I learn to live without my 'moonshine,' as you call it."

"Sunshine is better, and I'll make it for you, if I can. So cheer up, dear lad, fall to work like a man, and you'll soon forget your pretty nonsense," answered Ruth, with firm faith in the cure she proposed.

"I'll try."

And, folding his wings, Pegasus bent his neck to the yoke and fell to ploughing.

Nat kept his word and did try manfully, working early and late, with an energy that delighted Uncle Dan, made Aunt Becky bestir herself to bleach her finest webs for the wedding outfit, and caused Ruth to believe that he had forgotten the "pretty nonsense;" for the pen lay idle and he gave all his leisure to her, discussing house-gear and stock with as deep an interest as herself apparently. All summer long he toiled like one intent only on his crops; all winter he cut wood and tended cattle, as if he had no higher hope than to sell so many cords and raise likely calves for market.

Outwardly he was a promising young farmer, with a prosperous future and a notable wife awaiting him. But deep in the man's heart a spark of the divine fire still burned, unquenched by duty, love, or time. The spirit that made light in Milton's darkness, walked with Burns beside the plough, and lifted Shakespeare higher than the royal virgin's hand, sang to Nat in the airy whisper of the pines, as he labored in the wintry wood, smiled back at him in every ox-eyed daisy his scythe laid low along the summer fields, and solaced him with visions of a fairer future than any buxom Ruth could paint. It would not leave him, and he learned too late that it was the life of his life, a gift that could not be returned, a blessing turned into a curse; for, though he had burned the little book, from its ashes rose a flame that consumed him, since it could find no vent. Even the affection, for which he had made a costlier sacrifice than he knew, looked pale and poor beside the loftier loveliness that dawned upon him in the passionate struggle, ripening heart and soul to sudden manhood; and the life that lay before him seemed very bleak and barren when he returned from playing truant in the enchanted world Imagination opens to her gifted children.

Ruth vaguely felt the presence of this dumb despair, dimly saw its shadow in the eyes that sometimes wore a tragic look, and fancied that the hand working so faithfully for her was slipping from her hold, it grew so thin and hot with the inward fever, which no herb in all her garden could allay. She vainly tried to rise to his level; but the busy sparrow could not follow the aspiring lark, singing at heaven’s gate. It could only chirp its little lay and build its nest, with no thought beyond a straw, a worm, and the mate that was to come.

Nat never spoke of the past, and Ruth dared not, for she grew to feel that he did “regret it” bitterly, though too generous for a word of reproach or complaint.

“I’ll make it up to him when we are married; and he will learn to love the farm when he has little lads and lasses of his own to work for,” she often said to herself, as she watched her lover sit among them, after his day’s work, listening to their gossip with a pathetic sort of patience, or, pleading a weariness there was no need to feign, lie on the old settle, lost in thoughts that made his face shine like one who talked with angels.

So the year rolled round, and May came again. Uncle Dan was well satisfied, Aunt Becky’s preparations were completed, and Ruth had not “changed her mind.”

“Settle about the weddin’ as soon as you like, my girl, and I’ll see that it is a merry one,” said the old man, coming in from work, as Ruth blew the horn from the back porch one night at sunset.

“Nat must decide that. Where is he, Uncle?” asked the girl, looking out upon the quiet landscape, touched with spring’s tenderest green.

“Down in the medder, ploughin’. It’s a toughish bit, and he’ll be late, I reckon; for he took a long noon-spell, and I give him a piece of my mind about it, so I’ll venter to say he won’t touch a bit of victuals till the last furrow is laid,” answered Uncle Dan, plodding away to wash his hands at the horse-trough.

“Nay, Uncle, it is his birthday, and surely he had a right to a little rest, for he works like a slave, to please us, though far from well, I’m thinking.” And, waiting for no reply, Ruth hurried in, filled a tankard with cider, and tripped away to bring her lover home, singing as she went, for Nat loved to hear her voice.

Down the green lane toward the river the happy singer stepped, thinking in what sweet words she could give the old man’s message. But the song died on her lips and the smiling eyes grew wistful suddenly; for, passing by the willow-trees, she saw the patient oxen standing in the field alone.

“Nat is hunting violets for me,” she thought, with a throb of pleasure; for she was jealous of a viewless rival, and valued every token of fidelity her lover gave her.

But as she drew nearer Ruth frowned; for Nat lay beside the river, evidently quite forgetful of scolding, supper, and sweetheart. No, not of the latter; for a little nosegay of violets lay ready near the paper on which he seemed to be writing a song or sonnet to accompany the gift.

Seeing this, the frown faded, as the girl stole noiselessly across the grass, to peep over his shoulder, with a soft rebuke for his imprudence and delay.

Alas for Ruth! One glance at the placid face, pillowed on his arm, told her that this birthday was Nat's last; for the violets were less white than the cheek they touched, the pencil had fallen from nerveless fingers, and Death's hand had written "Finis" to both life and lay. With a bitter cry, she gathered the weary head into her arms, fearing she had come too late to say good-by. But the eyes that opened were so tranquil, and the pale lips that answered wore such a happy smile, she felt that tears would mar his peace, and hushed her sobs, to listen as he whispered brokenly, with a glance that brightened as it turned from the wide field where his last hard day's work lay finished, to the quiet river, whose lullaby was soothing him to sleep.

"Tell Uncle I did not stop till the job was done, nor break my promise; for the year is over now, and it was so sweet to write again that I forgot to go home till it was too late."

"O Nat, not too late. You shall work no more, but write all day, without a care. We have been too hard upon you, and you too patient with our blindness. Dear lad, forgive us, and come home to live a happier year than this has been," cried Ruth, trying with remorseful tenderness to keep the delicate spirit that was escaping from her hold, like the butterfly that died among her roses with broken wings.

But Nat had no desire to stay; for he *was* going home, to feel hunger, thirst, and weariness no more, to find a love Ruth could not give, and to change earth's prose to heaven's immortal poetry. Yet he lingered on the threshold to look back and whisper gently: "It is better so, sweetheart. There was no place for me here, and I was homesick for my own friends and country. I'm going to find them, and I'm quite content. Forget me and be happy; or remember me only in the springtime, when the world is loveliest and my birthday comes. See, this is all I had to give you; but my heart was in it."

He tried to lift the unfinished song and give it to her; but it fluttered down upon his breast, and the violets dropped after, lying there unstirred by any breath, for with the words a shadow deeper than that twilight laid upon the fields stole over the face on Ruth's bosom, and all the glory of the sunset sky could only touch it with a pathetic peace, as the poet lay asleep beside the river.

He lies there still, the legend says, under the low green mound, where violets bloom earliest, where the old willows drop their golden tassels in the spring, and blackbirds fill the air with their melodious ecstasy. No song of his lived after him; no trace of him remains, except that nameless grave; and few ever heard of one who came and went like the snow for which they christened him. Yet it seems as if his gentle ghost still haunted those sunny meadows, still listened to the enchanted river, and touched with some mysterious charm the places that knew him once. For strangers find a soft attraction in the quiet landscape; lovers seek those green solitudes to tell the story that is always new; and poets muse beside the shadowy stream, hearing, as he heard, a call to live the life that lifts them highest by unwavering fidelity to the gift Heaven sends.

LETTY’S TRAMP.

Letty sat on the doorstep one breezy summer day, looking down the road and wishing with all her heart that something pleasant would happen. She often did this; and one of her earliest delights when a lonely child was to sit there with a fairy book upon her knee, waiting and watching in all good faith for something wonderful to happen.

In those days, Cinderella’s golden coach dashing round the corner to carry her away was the favorite dream; but at eighteen one thinks more of the prince than either golden coach or splendid ball. But no prince as yet had cut his way through the grove of “laylocks” round the gate, and the little beauty still dreamed waking dreams on the doorstep, with her work forgotten in her lap.

Behind her in the quaint, quiet room Aunt Liddy dozed in her easy chair, the clock ticked, the bird chirped, old Bran snapped lazily at the flies, and nothing else broke the hush that brooded over the place. It was always so, and Letty often felt as if an earthquake would be a blessed relief to the dreadful monotony of her life.

To-day it was peculiarly trying, for a slight incident had ruffled the calm; and, though it lasted but a moment, it had given Letty a glimpse into that lovely “new world which is the old.” A carriage containing a gay young couple on their honeymoon trip had stopped at the gate, for the bride had a fancy for a draught from the mossy well, and the bridegroom blandly demanded that her whim be gratified.

Letty served them, and while one pretty girl slaked her thirst the other watched her with admiring eyes and a tender interest, touched by envy. It was all over in a minute. Then bonny bride and enamoured bridegroom rolled away on that enchanted journey which is taken but once in a lifetime, leaving a cloud of dust behind and a deeper discontent in Letty’s heart.

With a long sigh she had gone back to her seat, and, closing her eyes upon a world that could offer her so little, fell a-dreaming again, till a rough voice startled her wide awake.

“I say, miss, can you give a poor fellow a bite and a sup?”

Opening her eyes, she saw a sturdy tramp leaning over the low gate, so ragged, dusty, worn, and weary that she forgave the look of admiration in the bold black eyes which had been fixed on her longer than she knew. Before she could answer, however, Aunt Liddy, a hospitable old soul, called out from within, —

“Certin, certin. Set right down on the doorstep and rest a spell, while we see what we can do about vittles.”

Letty vanished into the pantry, and the man threw himself down in the shady porch, regardless of Bran’s suspicious growl. He pulled off his hat, stretched out his tired limbs, and leaned his rough head back among the woodbine leaves, with a long breath, as if nearly spent.

When Letty brought him a plate of bread and meat, he took it from her so eagerly and with such a ravenous look that she shrank back involuntarily. Seeing which he said, with a poor attempt at a laugh, —

“You needn’t be afraid. I look like a rough customer; but I won’t hurt you.

“Lawful sakes! We ain’t no call to be afraid of no one, though we be lone women; for Bran is better’n a dozen men. A lamb to them he knows; but let any one try to pester Letty, and I never see a fercer beast,” said Aunt Liddy, as the girl went back for more food, seeing the stranger’s need.

“He knows *I’m* all right, and makes friends at once, you see,” answered the tramp, with a satisfied nod, as Bran, after a brief investigation, sat down beside him, with a pacific wag of the tail.

“Well, I never! He don’t often do that to strangers. Guess you’re fond of dumb critters,” said Aunt Liddy, much impressed by Bran’s unusual condescension.

“They’ve been my best friends, and I don’t forget it,” returned the man, giving the dog a bone, though half-starved himself.

Something in the tone, the act, touched Letty’s tender heart, and made her own voice very sweet and cordial as she said, —

“Please have some milk. It’s nice and cold.”

The tramp put up both hands to take the bowl, and as he did so looked into a face so full of compassion that it seemed like an angel’s leaning down to comfort a lost and weary soul. Hard as life had been to the poor fellow, it had not spoiled him yet, as was plainly proved by the change that softened his whole face like magic, and trembled in the voice that said, as if it were a sort of grace, “God bless you, Miss,” as he bent his head and drank.

Only a look of human sympathy and human gratitude; yet, in the drawing of a breath, it cast out Letty’s fear, and made the stranger feel as if he had found friends, for it was the touch of Nature that makes the whole world kin. Every one seemed to feel its influence. Bran turned his benevolent eyes approvingly from his mistress to his new friend: the girl sat down confidingly; and the old lady began to talk, for, being fond of chat, she considered a stranger as a special providence.

“Where be you travellin’?”

"Nowhere in particular."

"Where did you come from, then?" continued Aunt Liddy, undaunted by the short answer.

"California."

"Do tell! Guess you've been one of the rovin' sort, ain't you?"

"Haven't done much else."

"It don't appear to have agreed with you remarkable well," said the blunt old lady, peering at him over her spectacles.

"If I hadn't had the devil's own luck, I'd have been a rich man, instead of a beggar," answered the tramp, with a grim look and an ireful knitting of his black brows.

"Been unfort'nate, have you? I'm sorry for that; but it 'pears to me them as stays to home and works stiddy does better than them that goes huntin' after luck," observed Aunt Liddy, feeling it her duty to give a word of advice.

"Shouldn't wonder if you were right, ma'am. But some folks haven't got any home to stay in; and fellows of my sort have to hunt after luck, for it won't come to 'em."

"Ain't you got no friends, young man?"

"Not one. Lost the last yesterday."

"Took suddin, I suppose?" and the old lady's face was full of interest as she put the question.

"Drowned."

"Merciful sakes! How did it happen?"

"Got hurt, couldn't be cured, so I drowned him, and" —

"What!" shrieked Aunt Liddy, upsetting her footstool with a horrified start.

"Only a dog, ma'am. I couldn't carry him, wouldn't leave him to suffer; so put him out of pain and came on alone."

The tramp had ceased eating, and sat with his head on his hand in a despondent attitude, that told his story better than words. His voice was gruffer than ever as he spoke of his dog; but the last word was husky, and he put his hand on Bran's head with a touch that won the good creature's heart entirely, and made him lick the downcast face, with a little whine of sympathy and satisfaction.

Letty's eyes were full, and Aunt Liddy took snuff and settled her footstool, feeling that something must be done for one who showed signs of being worth the saving.

"Poor creter! And you was fond of him?" she said in a motherly tone; for the man of five or six and twenty was but a boy to her.

"I'd have been a brute if I wasn't fond of him, for he stuck to me when all the other fellows cut me, and tried to drag himself along with a broken leg, rather than leave me. Talk about friends! Give me a dumb animal if you want one worth having.”

A bitter tone was in the man’s voice and a wrathful spark kindled in his eyes, as if wrong as well as want had made him what he was.

“Rest a little, and tell us about California. A neighbor went there, and we like to hear news of that great, splendid place.”

Letty spoke, and the half-eager, half-timid voice was very winning, especially to one who seldom heard such now. Seeing her kindly interest, and glad to pay for his meal in the only way he could, the man told some of his adventures in brief but graphic words, while the old woman plied him with questions and the young one listened with a face so full of pretty wonder that the story-teller was inspired to do his best.

Aunt Liddy’s cap-frills stood erect with horror at some of the hair-breadth escapes recounted; but to Letty it was better than any romance she had ever read to listen to tales full of danger and hardship, told by a living voice and face to face with the chief actor in them all, who unconsciously betrayed that he possessed many of the manly attributes women most admire.

“After adventures like these, I don’t wonder it seems hard to settle down, as other folks do,” she said warmly, when the man stopped short, as if ashamed of talking so much of his own affairs.

“I wouldn’t mind trying it, though,” he answered, as he glanced about the sunny little room, so home-like and reposeful, and so haunted by all the sweet influences that touch men’s hearts when most forlorn.

“You’d better,” said Aunt Liddy, decidedly. “Git work and stick to it; and, if luck don’t come, bread and butter will, and in a world of woe mebby that’s about as much as any one on us ought to expect.”

“I have tried to get it. But I’m such a hard-looking chap no one wants me; and I don’t blame ‘em. Look at that hat, now! Ain’t that enough to spoil a man’s chance, let alone his looks?” The young fellow held up a battered object with such a comical mixture of disgust and indignation that Letty could not help laughing; and the blithe sound was so contagious that the wanderer joined in it, cheered already by rest and food and kindly words.

“It’s singular what store men-folks do set by their hats. My Moses couldn’t never read his paper till he’d put on his’n, and as for drivin’ a nail bare-headed, in doors or out, he’d never think of such a thing,” said Aunt Liddy, with the air of one well versed in the mysterious ways of men-folks.

But Letty clapped her hands, as if a brilliant idea had flashed upon her, and, running to the back entry, returned with a straw hat, brown and dusty, but shady, whole, and far more appropriate to the season than the ragged felt the man was eying hopelessly.

"It isn't very good; but it might do for a time. We only keep it to scare folks, and I don't feel afraid now. Would you mind if I gave it to you?" stammered Letty, coloring up, as she tried to offer her poor gift courteously.

"Mind! I guess I'd be glad to get it, fit or no fit," and, dropping the old hat, the tramp clapped on the new one, making his mirror of the bright eyes before him.

"It does nicely, and you're very welcome," said the girl, getting rosier still, for there was something beside gratitude in the brown face that had lost the dogged, dangerous look it wore at first.

"Now, if you was to wash up and smooth that hair of yourn a trifle, you'd be a likely-looking young man; and, if you're civil-spoken and willin' to lend a hand anywheres, you'll git work, I ain't a doubt," observed Aunt Liddy, feeling a growing interest in the wayfarer, and, womanlike, acknowledging the necessity of putting the best foot foremost.

Letty ran for basin and towel, and, pointing to the well, modestly retired into the kitchen, while Aunt Liddy watched the vigorous scrubbing that went on in the yard; for the tramp splashed the water about like a Newfoundland dog, and Bran assisted at the brief toilet with hospitable zeal.

It seemed as if a different man came out from that simple baptism; for the haggard cheek had a glow upon it, the eyes had lost their hopelessness, and something like courage and self-respect shone in the face that looked in at the door as the stranger gave back basin and towel, saying, with a wave of the old straw hat, —

"I'm heartily obliged, ma'am. Would you kindly tell me how far it is to the next big town?"

"Twenty miles. The cars will take you right there, and the deepo ain't fur," answered Aunt Liddy, showing the way.

The man glanced at his ragged shoes, then squared his broad shoulders, as if bracing himself for the twenty long hot miles that his weary feet must carry him, since his pockets were empty, and he could not bring himself to ask for any thing but food enough to keep life in him.

"Good-by, ma'am, and God bless you." And, slouching the hat over his eyes, he limped away, escorted to the gate by Bran.

At the turn of the road he stopped and looked back as wistfully as ever Letty had done along the shadowy road, and as he looked it seemed as if he saw a younger self setting off with courage, hope, and energy upon the journey, which alas! had ended here. His eye went to the old well, as if there had been some healing in its water; then turned to the porch, where he had been fed and comforted, and lingered there as if some kindly memory warmed his solitary heart.

Just then a little figure in blue gingham ran out and came fluttering after him, accompanied by Bran, in a state of riotous delight. Rosy and breathless, Letty hurried to him, and, looking up with a face full of the innocent compassion that never can offend, she said, offering a parcel neatly folded up, —

“Aunt Liddy sends you some dinner; and this, so that you needn’t walk, unless you like, you are so lame.”

As if more touched than he cared to show, the man took the food, but gently put away the little roll of greenbacks, saying quickly, —

“Thank you for this; but I can’t take your money.”

“We ain’t rich, but we love to help folks. So you needn’t be proud about it.” And Letty looked ruffled at his refusal.

“I’ll take something else, if you don’t mind,” said the tramp, pulling off his hat, with a sudden smile that made his face look young and comely.

“What is it?” And Letty looked up so innocently that it was impossible to resist the impulse of a grateful heart.

His answer was to stoop and kiss the blooming cheek, that instantly grew scarlet with girlish shame and anger as she turned to fly. Catching her by the hand, he said penitently, —

“I couldn’t help it, you’re so good to me. Don’t begrudge me a kiss for luck. I need it, God knows!”

The man’s real destitution and despair broke out in these words, and he grasped the little hand as if it was the only thing that kept him from the manifold temptations of a desperate mood.

It thrilled the girl like a cry for help, and made her forget everything except that a fellow-creature suffered. She shook the big hand warmly, and said, with all her heart, —

“You’re welcome, if it helps you. Good-by and good luck to you!” and ran away as fast as she had come.

The man stood motionless, and watched her till she vanished, then turned and tramped sturdily on, muttering to himself, with a suspicious gruffness in his voice, —

“If I had a little mate like that alongside, I know my luck would turn.”

CHAPTER II.

A wild December night, with bitter wind and blinding snow, reigned outside the long, rude building, lighted only by furnace fires, that went roaring up the tall chimneys, whence poured clouds of smoke and showers of sparks, like beacons through the storm. No living thing appeared in that shadowy place except a matronly gray cat, sitting bolt upright upon an old rug spread over a heap of sand near one of the fires. A newspaper and a tin pail were beside her, and she seemed to have mounted guard, while the watchman of the Foundry went his rounds.

A door stood half-open upon the sheltered side of the building; and suddenly, as if blown thither like a storm-driven bird, a little figure came fluttering in, breathless, half-frozen, and quite bewildered by a long struggle with the pitiless gale. Feebly brushing away the snow that blinded her, the poor thing looked about her with frightened eyes; and, seeing no one but the cat, seemed to take courage and crept toward the fire, as if suffering for the moment conquered fear.

“Oh! Pussy, let me warm myself one minute, for I’m perished with the cold,” she whispered, stretching two benumbed hands to the blaze.

The cat opened her yellow eyes, and, evidently glad to meet one of her own sex, began to purr hospitably as she rustled across the newspaper to greet her guest. There was something inexpressibly comforting in the sound; and, reassured by it, the girl pushed back her drenched hat, shook her snowy garments, and drew a long breath, like one nearly spent. Yet, even while she basked in the warmth that was salvation, her timid eyes glanced about the great, gloomy place, and her attitude was that of one ready to fly at a moment’s warning.

Presently a step sounded on a flight of stairs leading to some loft above. The wanderer started like a hare, and, drawing nearer to the door, paused as if to catch a glimpse of the approaching face before she fled away into the storm, that howled just then with a violence which might well daunt a stouter heart.

A tall man, in a rough coat, with grizzled hair and beard under an old fur cap, came slowly down the steps, whistling softly to himself, as he swung his lantern to and fro.

“An old man, and the cat is fond of him. I guess I’ll dare to ask my way, or I’ll never get home,” thought the girl, as her eye scanned the new-comer with a woman’s quickness.

An involuntary rustle of her dress caught his ear, and, lifting the lantern, he saw her at once; but did not speak, as if afraid of frightening her still more, for her pale face and the appealing gesture of the outstretched hand told her fear and need better than her hurried words, —

"Oh! please, I've lost my way and am nearly frozen. Could I warm myself a bit and find out where I am?"

"Of course, you may. Why, bless your heart, I wouldn't turn a dog out such a night as this, much less a poor little soul like you," answered the man, in a hearty tone, that rang true on the listening ear of the girl.

Then he hung up the lantern, put a stool nearer the fire, and beckoned her to approach. But even the kindly words and act failed to win the timid creature; for she drew back as he advanced, gave a glance at the door, and said, as if appealing to the best instincts of the man, whom she longed yet feared to trust, —

"Thank you; but it's getting late, and I ought to be getting on, if I knew the way. Perhaps you've got some girls of your own, so you can understand how scared I am to be lost at night and in such a strange place as this."

The man stared, then laughed, and, shaking the snow from his curly hair and beard, showed himself to be a young and pleasant-looking fellow, with a merry eye, an honest brown face, and a hearty voice.

"You thought I was an old chap, did you? Wish I was, if it would be any comfort to you. I've got no little girls, neither, more's the pity; but you needn't be afraid of me, though it is late and lonely. Why, Lord love you, child, I'm not a brute! Sit down and thaw out, while you tell me where you want to go."

The half-indignant tone of the man made his guest feel as if she had insulted him; and she obeyed with a docility which appeased his anger at once. Seating herself upon the stool, she leaned toward the fire with an irrepressible shiver, and tried to keep her teeth from chattering as she told her little story.

"I want work badly, and went a long way, hoping to get some. But I didn't find it, and that discouraged me very much. I had no money, so had to walk, and the storm got so bad I lost my way. Then I was scared and half-frozen, and so bewildered I think I'd have died if I hadn't seen the light and come in here."

"I guess you would. And the best thing you can do now is to stop till the storm lifts. Shouldn't wonder if it did about midnight," said the man, stirring up the red embers, as if anxious to do something for her comfort.

"But that is so late, and I must be ever so far away from home; for I came over the wrong bridge. Oh, me! What shall I do?" And the poor thing wrung her hands in dismay.

"Won't your folks go to look for you?"

"I haven't any one in the world to care for me. The woman where I board won’t trouble herself; or she’ll think I’ve run away, because I owe her money. I might be dead in the river, and no one would mind!” sighed the girl, leaning her head on her hands, while some bright, dishevelled hair fell over her face, as if to hide its youth and innocence from a world that seemed to have no shelter for either.

“That’s hard! But don’t you be down-hearted, child. Things often mend when they seem worst. I know; for I’ve been through the mill, and had friends raised up to me when I’d about done with living, as a bad job. I can’t leave here till sunrise; but I’ll do the best I can for you till then. Sam will be along early, and he’ll see to you, if you can’t trust me; for he is as gray as a badger, and he’s got six girls of his own, if that’s a recommendation. I’ve got nothing but a cat; and she trusts me. Don’t you, old Sally?”

As he spoke, the man sat down upon the sand-heap, and Sally leaped to his knee, rubbing her head against his cheek, with a soft sound of confidence and contentment which seemed to afford her friend great satisfaction. The girl smiled faintly, and said, in an apologetic tone, for there had been something like reproach in the man’s voice, as he asked the dumb animal to vouch for his character, —

“I don’t believe I’d have dared to come in here if I hadn’t seen Pussy. But I thought anyone who was good to her would be good to me; and now I’m sure of it.”

“That’s right. You see, I’m a lonesome sort of a chap and like something to pet. So I took old Sally, and we get on capitally. She won’t let the other fellows touch her, but always comes and sits with me when I am alone here nights. And it’s surprising what good company she is.”

He laughed as he spoke, as if half-ashamed of the amiable weakness, yet anxious to put his guest at her ease. He evidently succeeded; for she stretched two shabby little boots toward the fire and leaned her head against a grimy beam, saying, with a sigh of weariness, —

“It is very comfortable; but the heat makes me feel queer and dizzy.”

“You’re just about used up; and I’m going to give you a cup of hot coffee. That’ll bring you round in a jiffy. It’s time for supper. Hey, Sally?”

As he spoke, the man set his pail in the hot ashes, unfolded a parcel of bread and meat, and, laying a rude sandwich on a clean bit of paper, offered it with a hospitable —

“Have a bit. Do, now. You’ve had a hard pull and need something to set you up.”

Leaning forward to give and take, two faces came into the clear red glow of the furnace-fire, and a look of recognition flashed into each so suddenly that it startled both man and maid into involuntary frankness of expression.

"Why, it's little Letty!"

"And you are my tramp!"

A change so rapid as to be almost ludicrous came over the pair in the drawing of a breath. She smoothed back her hair and hid the shabby boots, yet sat more erect upon the stool, as if she had a right there and felt no longer any fear. He pulled off his cap, with a pleasant mixture of respect, surprise, and satisfaction in his manner, as he said, in a half-proud, half-humble tone, —

"No, miss; for, thanks to you, I'm a decent man now."

"Then you did find work and get on?" she exclaimed, with a bright, wistful look, that touched him very much.

"Didn't you get my letter?" he asked eagerly. "I sent you the first dollar I earned, and told you and the old lady I was all right."

Letty shook her head, and all the light passed out of her face, leaving it pathetic in its patient sorrow.

"Aunt Liddy died a week after you were there, so suddenly that every thing was in confusion, and I never got the letter. I wish *she* had known of it, because it would have pleased her so. We often talked about you and hoped you'd do well. We led such quiet lives, you see, that any little thing interested us for a long time."

"It was a little thing to you, I dare say; but it was salvation to me. Not the money or the food only, but the kindness of the old lady, and — and the look in your sweet face, miss. I'd got so far down, through sickness and bad luck, that there didn't seem any thing left for me but deviltry or death. That day it was a toss-up between any bad job that came along first and drowning, like my dog. That seemed sort of mean, though; and I felt more like being revenged somehow on the world, that had been so hard on me."

He stopped short, breathing hard, with a sudden spark in his black eyes and a nervous clenching of the strong hands that made Letty shrink; for he seemed to speak in spite of himself, as if the memory of that time had left its impress on his life.

"But you didn't do any thing bad. I'm sure you didn't; for Aunt Liddy said there was the making of a man in you, because you were so quick to feel a little bit of kindness and take good advice."

The soft, eager voice of the girl seemed to work the miracle anew, for a smile broke over his face, the angry spark was quenched, and the clenched hand opened to offer again all it had to give, as he said, with a characteristic mingling of fun and feeling in his voice, —

"I don't know much about angels; but I felt as if I'd met a couple that day, for they saved me from destruction. You cast your bread upon the waters, and it's come back when, maybe, you need it 'most as much as I did then. 'Tisn't half as nice as yours; but perhaps a blessing will do as well as butter."

Letty took the brown bread, feeling that he had said the best grace over it; and while she ate he talked, evidently moved to open his heart by the memory of the past, and eager to show that he had manfully persisted in the well-doing his angels had advised.

"That was nearly two years ago, you know, and I've been hard at it ever since. I took any thing that come along, and was glad to get it. The hat did that, I firmly believe." And he laughed a short laugh, adding soberly, "But I didn't take to work at first, for I'd been a rover and liked it; so it took a long pull and a strong pull and a pull all together before I settled down steady. The hat and the" — he was going to say "kiss;" but a look at the lonely little creature sitting there so confidingly made him change the word to — "the money seemed to bring me luck; and I followed the advice of the good old lady, and stuck to my work till I got to liking it. I've been here more than a year now, and am getting on so well I shall be overseer before long. I'm only watchman for a short time. Old Sam has been sick, and they wanted some one they could trust, so they chose me."

It was good to see him square his broad shoulders and throw back his head as he said that; and pretty to see Letty nod and smile with sincerest pleasure in his success, as she said, —

"It looks dark and ugly now; but I've seen a foundry when they were casting, and it was splendid to watch the men manage the furnaces and do wonderful things with great hammers and moulds and buckets of red-hot melted iron. I like to know you do such things, and now I'm not afraid. It seems sort of romantic and grand to work in this place, where every one must be strong and brave and skilful to get on."

"That's it. That's why I like it; don't you see?" he answered, brightening with pleasure at her artless praise. "You just come some casting day, and I'll show you sights you won't forget in a hurry. If there wasn't danger and noise and good hard work wrastling with fire and iron, and keeping a rough set of fellows in order, I shouldn't stay; for the restless fit comes on sometimes, and I feel as if I must cut away somewhere. Born so, and can't help it. Maybe I could, if I had something to anchor me; but, as you say, 'Nobody would care much if I was in the river,' and that's bad for a chap like me."

"Sally would care," said the girl, quite soberly; for she sympathized now with the man's loneliness as she could not have done two years ago.

"So she would; but I'll take her with me when I leave — not for the river, mind you. I'm in no danger of that nonsense now. But, if I go on a tramp (and I may, if the fit gets too strong for me), she shall go too; and we'll be Dick Whittington and his cat over again."

He spoke in a devil-may-care tone, and patted the plump Tabby with a curious mixture of boyish recklessness and a man's sad knowledge of life in his face.

"Don't go," pleaded Letty, feeling that she had a certain responsibility in the matter. "I should mind, as well as Sally; for, if Aunt Liddy and I helped put you in a good way, it would be a disappointment to have you go wrong. Please stop here, and I'll try and come to see you work some day, if I can get time. I'm likely to have plenty of it, I'm afraid."

She began eagerly, but ended with a despondent droop of the whole figure, that made her new friend forget himself in interest for her.

"I'll stop, honor bright. And you come and look after me now and then. That'll keep me steady. See if it don't. But tell me how you are getting on? Little down on your luck just now, I guess? Come, I've told my story, you tell yours, and maybe I can lend a hand. I owe you a good turn, you know; and I'm one that likes to pay his debts, if he can."

"You did pay yours; but I never got the letter, for I came away after Aunty died. You see I wasn't her own niece, — only sort of a distant relation; and she took me because my own people were gone. Her son had all she left, — it wasn't much; and she told him to be good to me. But I soon saw that I was a burden, and couldn't bear to stay. So I went away, to take care of myself. I liked it at first; but this winter, times are so hard and work so scarce, I don't get on at all."

"What do you do, miss?" asked Whittington, with added respect; because in her shabby dress and altered face he read the story of a struggle Letty was too proud to tell.

"I sew," she answered briefly, smoothing out her wet shawl with a hand so thin and small it was pathetic to see, when one remembered that nothing but a needle in those slender fingers kept want and sin at bay.

The kindly fellow seemed to feel that; and, as his eye went from his own strong right arm to the sledge-hammer it often swung, the instinct of protection so keen in manly men made him long to stand between poor Letty and the hard world he knew so well. The magnetism of sympathy irresistibly attracted iron to steel, while little needle felt assured that big hammer would be able to beat down many of the obstacles which now seemed insurmountable, if she only dared to ask for aid. But help came without the asking.

"Been after work, you say? Why, we could give you heaps of it, if you don't mind it's being coarse and plain. This sort of thing, you know," touching his red shirt with a business-like air. "Our men use 'em altogether, and like 'em strong in the seams. Some ain't, and buttons fly off just looking at 'em. That makes a fellow mad, and swearing comes easy."

But Letty shook her head, though she couldn't help smiling at his sober way of explaining the case and its sad consequences.

"I've tried that work, and it doesn't pay. Six cents for a shirt, and sometimes only four, isn't enough to earn one's board and clothes and fire, even if one made half a dozen a day. *You* can't get them for that, and somebody grows rich while *we* starve.

"Hanged if I ever buy another! See here, you make me enough for a year, and we'll have a fair bargain between us. That is, if you can't do better and don't mind," he added, suddenly abating his warmth and looking almost bashful over the well-meant proposal.

"I'd love to do it. Only you mustn't pay too much," said Letty, glad of any thing to keep her hands and thoughts busy, for life was very bare and cold just then.

"All right. I'll see to it directly, and nobody be the wiser," returned her new employer, privately resolving to order a bale of red flannel on the morrow, and pay fabulous prices for the work of the little friend who had once kept him from worse than starvation.

It was not much to offer, and red flannel was not a romantic subject of conversation; but something in the prompt relief and the hearty good-will of the man went to Letty's heart, already full to overflowing with many cares and troubles. She tried to thank him, but could only cover up her face and sob. It was so sweet and comfortable to find any one who cared enough for her to lift her out of the slough of despond, which was to her as dangerous a mood as the desperate one he had known. There were hands enough to beckon the winsome creature to the wrong side of the quagmire, where so many miss the stepping-stones; but she felt that this was the right side, and the hand an honest one, though rough and grimy with hard work. So the tears were glad and grateful tears, and she let them flow, melting the fatal frost that had chilled her hope and faith in God and man.

But the causer of them could not bear the sight, for the contrast between this forlorn girl and the blithe, blooming Letty of that memorable day was piteous. Manlike, he tried to express his sympathy in deeds as well as words, and, hastily filling a tin cup from the coffee-can, pressed it upon her with a fatherly stroke of the bent head and a soothing, —

"Now, my dear, just take a sip of this, and don't cry any more. We'll straighten things out. So cheer up, and let me lend a hand anywhere, anyhow."

But hunger and fear, weariness and cold, had been too much for poor Letty; and, in the act of lifting up her wet face to thank him, the light left her eyes, and she would have slipped to the ground, if he had not caught her.

In a minute she was herself again, lying on the old rug, with snow upon her forehead and some one fanning her with a newspaper.

“I thought I was going to die,” she whispered, looking about her in a dazed sort of way.

“Not a bit of it! You’re going to sleep. That’s what you want, and old Sally’s going to sit by while you do it. It’s a hardish pillow; but I’ve put my handkerchief over it, and, being Monday, its spick-and-span clean.”

Letty smiled as she turned her cheek to the faded silk handkerchief laid over the rolled-up coat under her head, for Pussy was nestling close beside her, as if her presence was both a comfort and defence. Yet the girl’s eyes filled even while she smiled, for, when most desolate, a friend had been raised up to her; and, though the face bending over her was dark and shaggy, there was no fear in her own, as she said half-appealingly, half-confidingly, —

“I don’t believe I could go if I tried, I’m so worn out. But you’ll take care of me, and in the morning show me the way home?”

“Please God, I will!” he answered, as solemnly as if taking an oath, adding, as he stepped back to the stool she had left: “I shall stay here and read my paper. Nothing shall scare you; so make yourself comfortable, and drop off with an easy mind.”

Sitting there, he saw her lay her hands together, as if she said some little prayer; then, turning her face from the light, she fell asleep, lulled by the drowsy purr of the humble friend to whom she clung even in her dreams. He only looked a minute, for something that was neither the shimmer of firelight nor the glitter of snow-dust made the quiet group dance mistily before his eyes; and, forgetting his paper, he fell to drying Letty’s hat.

It was both comical and pleasant to see how tenderly he touched the battered thing, with what interest he surveyed it, perched on his big hand, and how carefully he smoothed out the ribbons, evidently much bewildered as to which was the front and which the back. Giving up the puzzle, he hung it on the handle of the great hammer, and, leaning his chin on his hand, began to build castles in the air and watch the red embers, as if he saw in them some vision of the future that was very pleasant.

Hour after hour struck from the city clocks across the river; the lantern burned itself out, untrimmed; the storm died away; and a soft, white silence followed the turmoil of the night. Still Letty slept like a tired child, still old Sally, faithful to her trust, lay in the circle of the girl’s arm; and still the watchman sat before the fire, dreaming waking dreams, as he had often done before; but never any half so earnest, sweet, and hopeful as those that seemed to weave a tender romance about the innocent sleeper, to whom he was loyally paying a debt of gratitude with such poor hospitality as he could show.

Dawn came up rosy and clear along the east; and the first level ray of wintry sunlight, as it struck across the foundry walls, fell on Letty's placid face, with the bright hair shining like a halo round it.

Feeling very much as if he had entertained an angel unaware, the man stood enjoying the pretty picture, hesitating to wake her, yet fearing that a gruff hallo from old Sam might do it too suddenly. Somehow he hated to have her go; for the gloomy foundry seemed an enchanted sort of place this morning, with a purer heaven and earth outside, and within the "little mate" whom he felt a strong desire to keep "always alongside," for something better than luck's sake.

He was smiling to himself over the thought, yet half ashamed to own how it had grown and strengthened in a night, when Letty opened wide a pair of eyes full of the peace sleep brings and the soft lustre that comes after tears. Involuntarily the man drew back, and waited silently for her to speak. She looked bewildered for a moment, then remembered, and sprang up, full of the relief and fresh gratitude that came with her first waking thought.

"How long I've slept! How very kind you were to me! I can go now, if you will start me right."

"You are heartily welcome! I can take you home at once, unless you'd rather wait for Sam," he answered, with a quick look toward the door, as if already jealous of the venerable Samuel.

"I'd rather go before any one comes. But perhaps you ought not to leave yet? I wouldn't like to take you from your duty," began Letty, looking about her for her hat.

"Duty be — hanged! I'm going to see you safe home, if you'll let me. Here's your hat. I dried it; but it don't look quite shipshape somehow." And taking the shabby little object from the nail where it hung, he presented it with such respectful care that a glimmer of the old mirthfulness came into Letty's face, as she said, surveying it with much disfavor, —

"It is almost as bad as the one I gave you; but it must do."

"I've got that old thing up at my place now. Keep it for luck. Wish I had one for you. Hold on! Here's a tippet — nice and warm. Have it for a hood. You'll find it cold outside."

He was so intent on making her comfortable that Letty could not refuse, and tied on the tippet, while he refilled the cup with hot coffee, carefully saved for her.

"Little Red Riding Hood! Blest if you ain't!" he exclaimed admiringly, as he turned to her again, and saw the sweet face in its new head-gear.

"But you are not the wolf," she answered, with a smile like sunshine, bending to drink from the cup he held.

As she lifted her head, the blue eyes and the black exchanged again the subtle glance of sympathy that made them friends before; only now the blue ones looked up full of gratitude, and the black ones looked down soft with pity. Neither spoke; but Letty stooped, and, gathering old Sally in her arms, kissed the friendly creature, then followed her guide to the door.

“How beautiful!” she cried, as the sun came dazzling down upon the snow, that hid all dark and ugly things with a veil of purity.

“Looks kind of bridal, don’t it?” said the man, taking a long breath of the frosty air, and straightening himself up, as if anxious to look his best by daylight.

He never had looked better, in spite of the old coat and red shirt; for the glow of the furnace-fire still seemed to touch his brown face, the happy visions of the night still shone in his eyes, and the protective kindliness of a generous nature gave dignity to the rough figure, as he strode into the snow and stretched his hand to Letty, saying cheerily, —

“Pretty deep, but hold on to me, and I’ll get you through. Better take my hand; I washed it a-purpose.”

Letty did take it in both her little ones; and they went away together through the deserted streets, feeling as if they were the only pair alive in the still white world that looked so lovely in the early sunshine.

The girl was surprised to find how short the way seemed; for, in spite of drifts, she got on bravely, with a strong arm to help and a friendly voice to encourage her. Yet when she reached the last corner she stopped, and said, with a sudden shyness which he understood and liked, —

“I’d best go on alone now. But I’m very grateful to you! Please tell me your name. I’d love to know who my friend is, though I never shall forget his kindness.”

“Nor I yours. Joe Stone is my name. But I’d rather you called me your tramp till we get something better,” he answered, with a laugh in his eyes, as he bent toward her for a hearty shake of the slender hand that had grown warm in his.

“I will! Good-by, good-by!” And, suddenly remembering how they parted before, Letty blushed like a rose, and ran away as fast as the drifts would let her.

“And I’ll call you my Letty some day, if I’m not much mistaken,” Joe said to himself, with a decided nod, as he went back to the foundry, feeling that the world looked more “sort of bridal” than ever.

He was not mistaken; for, when spring budded, his dream came true, and in the little sewing-girl, who bound him with a silken thread so soft and strong it never broke, he found an anchor that held him fast to happiness and home. To Letty something wonderful happened at last. The prince came when most she needed him; and, though even when the beggar’s rags fell off his only crown was the old hat, his royal robes red flannel and fustian, his sceptre a sledge-hammer, she knew and loved him, for

“The man was a man for a’ that.”

SCARLET STOCKINGS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THEY WALKED INTO LENNOX’S LIFE

“Come out for a drive, Harry?”

“Too cold.”

“Have a game of billiards?”

“Too tired.”

“Go and call on the Fairchilds?”

“Having an unfortunate prejudice against country girls, I respectfully decline.”

“What will you do, then?”

“Nothing, thank you.”

And, settling himself more luxuriously upon the couch, Lennox closed his eyes, and appeared to slumber tranquilly. Kate shook her head, and stood regarding her brother despondently, till a sudden idea made her turn toward the window, exclaiming abruptly, —

“Scarlet stockings, Harry!”

“Where?” and, as if the words were a spell to break the deepest day-dream, Lennox hurried to the window, with an unusual expression of interest in his listless face.

“I thought that would succeed! She isn’t there, but I’ve got you up, and you are not to go down again,” laughed Kate, taking possession of the sofa.

“Not a bad manœuvre. I don’t mind: it’s about time for the one interesting event of the day to occur, so I’ll watch for myself, thank you,” and Lennox took the easy chair by the window with a shrug and a yawn.

“I’m glad any thing does interest you,” said Kate, petulantly. “I don’t think it amounts to much, for, though you perch yourself at the window every day to see that girl pass, you don’t care enough about it to ask her name.”

“I’ve been waiting to be told.”

“It’s Belle Morgan, the doctor’s daughter, and my dearest friend.”

“Then, of course, she is a blue-belle?”

“Don’t try to be witty or sarcastic with her, for she will beat you at that.”

"Not a dumb-belle, then?"

"Quite the reverse: she talks a good deal, and very well, too, when she likes."

"She is very pretty: has anybody the right to call her 'Ma belle'?"

"Many would be glad to do so, but she won't have any thing to say to them."

"A Canterbury belle, in every sense of the word, then?"

"She might be, for all Canterbury loves her; but she isn't fashionable, and has more friends among the poor than among the rich."

"Ah, I see, a diving-bell, who knows how to go down into a sea of troubles, and bring up the pearls worth having."

"I'll tell her that, it will please her. You are really waking up, Harry," and Kate smiled approvingly upon him.

"This page of 'Belle's Life' is rather amusing, so read away," said Lennox, glancing up-the street, as if he awaited the appearance of the next edition with pleasure.

"There isn't much to tell; she is a nice, bright, energetic, warm-hearted dear; the pride of the doctor's heart, and a favorite with every one, though she is odd."

"How odd?"

"Does and says what she likes, is very blunt and honest, has ideas and principles of her own, goes to parties in high dresses, won't dance round dances, and wears red stockings, though Mrs. Plantagenet says it's fast."

"Rather a jolly little person, I fancy. Why haven't we met her at some of the tea-fights and muffin-worries we've been to lately?"

"It may make you angry, but it will do you good, so I'll tell. She didn't care enough about seeing the distinguished stranger to come; that's the truth."

"Sensible girl, to spare herself hours of mortal dulness, gossip, and dyspepsia," was the placid reply.

"She has seen you, though, at church, and dawdling about town, and she called you 'Sir Charles Coldstream,' on the spot. How does that suit?" asked Kate, maliciously.

"Not bad; I rather like that. Wish she'd call some day, and stir us up."

"She won't; I asked her, but she said she was very busy, and told Jessy Tudor she wasn't fond of peacocks."

"I don't exactly see the connection."

"Stupid boy! she meant you, of course."

"Oh, I'm peacocks, am I?"

"I don't wish to be rude, but I really do think you *are* vain of your good looks, elegant accomplishments, and the impression you make wherever you go. When it's worth while, you exert yourself, and are altogether fascinating; but the 'I come-see-and-conquer' air you put on spoils it all for sensible people."

“It strikes me that Miss Morgan has slightly infected you with her oddity, as far as bluntness goes. Fire away! it’s rather amusing to be abused when one is dying of ennui.”

“That’s grateful and complimentary to me, when I have devoted myself to you ever since you came. But every thing bores you, and the only sign of interest you’ve shown is in those absurd red hose. I *should* like to know what the charm is,” said Kate, sharply.

“Impossible to say; accept the fact calmly as I do, and be grateful that there is one glimpse of color, life, and spirit in this aristocratic tomb of a town.”

“You are not obliged to stay in it!” fiercely.

“Begging your pardon, my dove, but I am. I promised to give you my enlivening society for a month, and a Lennox keeps his word, even at the cost of his life.”

“I’m sorry I asked such a sacrifice; but I innocently thought that, after being away for five long years, you might care to see your orphan sister,” and the dove produced her handkerchief with a plaintive sniff.

“Now, my dear creature, don’t be melodramatic, I beg of you!” cried her brother, imploringly. “I wished to come, I pined to embrace you, and, I give you my word, I don’t blame you for the stupidity of this confounded place.”

“It never was so gay as since you came, for every one has tried to make it pleasant for you,” cried Kate, ruffled at his indifference to the hospitable efforts of herself and friends. “But you don’t care for any of our simple amusements, because you are spoilt by the flattery, gayety, and nonsense of foreign society. If I didn’t know it was half affectation, I should be in despair, you are so *blasé* and absurd. It’s always the way with men: if one happens to be handsome, accomplished, and talented, he puts on as many airs, and is as vain as any silly girl.”

“Don’t you think if you took breath you’d get on faster, my dear?” asked the imperturbable gentleman, as Kate paused with a gasp.

“I know it’s useless for me to talk, as you don’t care a straw what I say; but it’s true, and some day you’ll wish you had done something worth doing all these years. I was so proud of you, so fond of you, that I can’t help being disappointed to find you with no more ambition than to kill time comfortably, no interest in any thing but your own pleasures, and only energy enough to amuse yourself with a pair of scarlet stockings.”

Pathetic as poor Kate’s face and voice were, it was impossible to help laughing at the comical conclusion of her lament. Lennox tried to hide the smile on his lips by affecting to curl his moustache with care, and to gaze pensively out as if touched by her appeal. But he wasn’t, — oh, bless you, no! she was only his sister, and, though she might have talked with the wisdom of Solomon and the eloquence of Demosthenes, it wouldn't have done a particle of good. Sisters do very well to work for one, to pet one, and play confidante when one's love affairs need feminine wit to conduct them; but when they begin to reprove, or criticise, or moralize, it won't do, and can't be allowed, of course. Lennox never snubbed anybody, but blandly extinguished them by a polite acquiescence in all their affirmations, for the time being, and then went on in his own way as if nothing had been said.

"I dare say you are right; I'll go and think over your very sensible advice," and, as if roused to unwonted exertion by the stings of an accusing conscience, he left the room abruptly.

"I do believe I've made an impression at last! He's actually gone out to think over what I've said. Dear Harry, I was sure he had a heart, if one only knew how to get at it!" and with a sigh of satisfaction Kate went to the window to behold the "Dear Harry" going briskly down the street after a pair of scarlet stockings. A spark of anger kindled in her eyes as she watched him, and when he vanished she still stood knitting her brows in deep thought, for a grand idea was dawning upon her.

It *was* a dull town; no one could deny that, for everybody was so intensely proper and well-born that nobody dared to be jolly. All the houses were square, aristocratic mansions with Revolutionary elms in front and spacious coach-houses behind. The knockers had a supercilious perk to their bronze or brass noses, the dandelions on the lawns had a highly connected air, and the very pigs were evidently descended from "our first families." Stately dinner-parties, decorous dances, moral picnics, and much tea-pot gossiping were the social resources of the place. Of course, the young people flirted, for that diversion is apparently irradicable even in the "best society," but it was done with a propriety which was edifying to behold.

One can easily imagine that such a starched state of things would not be particularly attractive to a travelled young gentleman like Lennox, who, as Kate very truly said, *had* been spoilt by the flattery, luxury, and gayety of foreign society. He did his best, but by the end of the first week ennui claimed him for its own, and passive endurance was all that was left him. From perfect despair he was rescued by the scarlet stockings, which went tripping by one day as he stood at the window, planning some means of escape.

A brisk, blithe-faced girl passed in a gray walking suit with a distracting pair of high-heeled boots and glimpses of scarlet at the ankle. Modest, perfectly so, I assure you, were the glimpses; but the feet were so decidedly pretty that one forgot to look at the face appertaining thereunto. It wasn't a remarkably lovely face, but it was a happy, wholesome one, with all sorts of good little dimples in cheek and chin, sunshiny twinkles in the black eyes, and a decided yet lovable look about the mouth that was quite satisfactory. A busy, bustling little body she seemed to be, for sack-pockets and muff were full of bundles, and the trim boots tripped briskly over the ground, as if the girl's heart were as light as her heels. Somehow this active, pleasant figure seemed to wake up the whole street, and leave a streak of sunshine behind it, for every one nodded as it passed, and the primmest faces relaxed into smiles, which lingered when the girl had gone.

"Uncommonly pretty feet, — she walks well, which American girls seldom do, — all waddle or prance, — nice face, but the boots are French, and it does my heart good to see them."

Lennox made these observations to himself as the young lady approached, nodded to Kate at another window, gave a quick but comprehensive glance at himself and trotted round the corner, leaving the impression on his mind that a whiff of fresh spring air had blown through the street in spite of the December snow. He didn't trouble himself to ask who it was, but fell into the way of lounging in the bay-window at about three P.M., and watching the gray and scarlet figure pass with its blooming cheeks, bright eyes, and elastic step. Having nothing else to do, he took to petting this new whim, and quite depended on the daily stirring up which the sight of the energetic damsel gave him. Kate saw it all, but took no notice till the day of the little tiff above recorded; after that she was as soft as a summer sea, and by some clever stroke had Belle Morgan to tea that very week.

Lennox was one of the best-tempered fellows in the world, but the "peacocks" did rather nettle him, because there was some truth in the insinuation; so he took care to put on no airs or try to be fascinating in the presence of Miss Belle. In truth, he soon forgot himself entirely, and enjoyed her oddities with a relish, after the prim proprieties of the other young ladies who had simpered and sighed before him. For the first time in his life, the "Crusher," as his male friends called him, got crushed; for Belle, with the subtle skill of a quick-witted, keen-sighted girl, soon saw and condemned the elegant affectations which others called foreign polish. A look, a word, a gesture from a pretty woman, is often more eloquent and impressive than moral essays or semi-occasional twinges of conscience; and in the presence of one satirical little person Sir Charles Coldstream soon ceased to deserve the name.

Belle seemed to get over her hurry and to find time for occasional relaxation, but one never knew in what mood he might find her, for the weathercock was not more changeable than she. Lennox liked that, and found the muffin-worries quite endurable with this *sauce piquante* to relieve their insipidity. Presently he discovered that he was suffering for exercise, and formed the wholesome habit of promenading the town about three P.M.; Kate said, to follow the scarlet stockings.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE THEY LED HIM.

"Whither away, Miss Morgan?" asked Lennox, as he overtook her one bitter cold day.

"I'm taking my constitutional."

"So am I."

"With a difference," and Belle glanced at the blue-nosed, muffled-up gentleman strolling along beside her with an occasional shiver and shrug.

"After a winter in the south of France, one does not find arctic weather like this easy to bear," he said, with a disgusted air.

"I like it, and do my five or six miles a day, which keeps me in what fine ladies call 'rude health,'" answered Belle, walking him on at a pace which soon made his furs a burden.

She was a famous pedestrian, and a little proud of her-powers; but she outdid all former feats that day, and got over the ground in gallant style. Something in her manner put her escort on his mettle; and his usual lounge was turned into a brisk march, which set his blood dancing, face glowing, and spirits effervescing as they had not done for many a day.

"There! you look more like your real self now," said Belle, with the first sign of approval she had ever vouch-safed him, as he rejoined her after a race to recover her veil, which the wind whisked away over hedge and ditch.

"Are you sure you know what my real self is?" he asked, with a touch of the "conquering hero" air.

"Not a doubt of it. I always know a soldier when I see one," returned Belle, decidedly.

"A soldier! that's the last thing I should expect to be accused of," and Lennox looked both surprised and gratified.

"There's a flash in your eye and a ring to your voice, occasionally, which made me suspect that you had fire and energy enough if you only chose to show it, and the spirit with which you have just executed the 'Morgan Quickstep' proves that I was right," returned Belle, laughing.

"Then I am not altogether a 'peacock'?" said Lennox, significantly, for during the chat, which had been as brisk as the walk, Belle had given his besetting sins several sly hits, and he couldn't resist one return shot, much as her unexpected compliment pleased him.

Poor Belle blushed up to her forehead, tried to look as if she did not understand, and gladly hid her confusion behind the recovered veil without a word.

There was a decided display both of the "flash" and the "ring," as Lennox looked at the suddenly subdued young lady, and, quite satisfied with his retaliation, gave the order, "Forward, march!" which brought them to the garden-gate breathless, but better friends than before.

The next time the young people met, Belle was in such a hurry that she went round the corner with an abstracted expression which was quite a triumph of art. Just then, off tumbled the lid of the basket she carried; and Lennox, rescuing it from a puddle, obligingly helped readjust it over a funny collection of bottles, dishes, and tidy little rolls of all sorts.

"It's very heavy, mayn't I carry it for you?" he asked, in an insinuating manner.

"No, thank you," was on Belle's lips; but, observing that he was dressed with unusual elegance to pay calls, she couldn't resist the temptation of making a beast of burden of him, and took him at his word.

"You may, if you like. I've got more bundles to take from the store, and another pair of hands won't come amiss."

Lennox lifted his eyebrows, also the basket; and they went on again, Belle very much absorbed in her business, and her escort wondering where she was going with all that rubbish. Filling his unoccupied hand with sundry brown paper parcels, much to the detriment of the light glove that covered it, Belle paraded him down the main street before the windows of the most aristocratic mansions, and then dived into a dirty back-lane, where the want and misery of the town was decorously kept out of sight.

"You don't mind scarlet fever, I suppose?" observed Belle, as they approached the unsavory residence of Biddy O'Brien.

"Well, I'm not exactly partial to it," said Lennox, rather taken aback.

"You needn't go in if you are afraid, or speak to me afterwards, so no harm will be done — except to your gloves."

"Why do *you* come here, if I may ask? It isn't the sort of amusement I should recommend," he began, evidently disapproving of the step.

"Oh, I'm used to it, and like to play nurse where father plays doctor. I'm fond of children and Mrs. O'Brien's are little dears," returned Belle, briskly, threading her way between ash-heaps and mud-puddles as if bound to a festive scene.

"Judging from the row in there, I should infer that Mrs. O'Brien had quite a herd of little dears."

"Only nine."

"And all sick?"

"More or less."

"By Jove! it's perfectly heroic in you to visit this hole in spite of dirt, noise, fragrance, and infection," cried Lennox, who devoutly wished that the sense of smell if not of hearing were temporarily denied him.

"Bless you, it's the sort of thing I enjoy, for there's no nonsense here; the work you do is pleasant if you do it heartily, and the thanks you get are worth having, I assure you."

She put out her hand to relieve him of the basket, but he gave it an approving little shake, and said briefly, —

"Not yet, I'm coming in."

It's all very well to rhapsodize about the exquisite pleasure of doing good, to give carelessly of one's abundance, and enjoy the delusion of having remembered the poor. But it is a cheap charity, and never brings the genuine satisfaction which those know who give their mite with heart as well as hand, and truly love their neighbor as themselves. Lennox had seen much fashionable benevolence, and laughed at it even while he imitated it, giving generously when it wasn't inconvenient. But this was a new sort of thing entirely; and in spite of the dirt, the noise, and the smells, he forgot the fever, and was glad he came when poor Mrs. O'Brien turned from her sick babies, exclaiming, with Irish fervor at sight of Belle, —

"The Lord love ye, darlin, for remimberin us when ivery one, barrin' the doctor, and the praste, turns the cowld shouldther in our throuble!"

"Now if you really want to help, just keep this child quiet while I see to the sickest ones," said Belle, dumping a stout infant on to his knee, thrusting an orange into his hand, and leaving him aghast while she unpacked her little messes, and comforted the maternal bird.

With the calmness of desperation, her aid-de-camp put down his best beaver on the rich soil which covered the floor, pocketed his gloves, and, making a bib of his cambric handkerchief, gagged young Pat deliciously with bits of orange whenever he opened his mouth to roar. At her first leisure moment, Belle glanced at him to see how he was getting on, and found him so solemnly absorbed in his task that she went off into a burst of such infectious merriment that the O'Briens, sick and well, joined in it to a man.

"Good fun, isn't it?" she asked, turning down her cuffs when the last spoonful of gruel was administered.

“I’ve no doubt of it, when one is used to the thing. It comes a little hard at first, you know,” returned Lennox, wiping his forehead, with a long breath, and seizing his hat as if quite ready to tear himself away.

“You’ve done very well for a beginner; so kiss the baby and come home,” said Belle approvingly.

“No, thank you,” muttered Lennox, trying to detach the bedaubed innocent. But little Pat had a grateful heart, and, falling upon his new nurse’s neck with a rapturous crow, clung there like a burr.

“Take him off! Let me out of this! He’s one too many for me!” cried the wretched young man in comic despair.

Being freed with much laughter, he turned and fled, followed by a shower of blessings from Mrs. O’Brien.

As they came up again into the pleasant highways, Lennox said, awkwardly for him, —

“The thanks of the poor *are* excellent things to have, but I think I’d rather receive them by proxy. Will you kindly spend this for me in making that poor soul comfortable?”

But Belle wouldn’t take what he offered her; she put it back, saying earnestly, —

“Give it yourself; one can’t buy blessings, — they must be *earned* or they are not worth having. Try it, please, and, if you find it a failure, then I’ll gladly be your almoner.”

There was a significance in her words which he could not fail to understand. He neither shrugged, drawled, nor sauntered now, but gave her a look in which respect and self-reproach were mingled, and left her, simply saying, “I’ll try it, Miss Morgan.”

“Now isn’t she odd?” whispered Kate to her brother, as Belle appeared at a little dance at Mrs. Plantagenet’s in a high-necked dress, knitting away on an army-sock, as she greeted the friends who crowded round her.

“Charmingly so. Why don’t you do that sort of thing when you can?” answered her brother, glancing at her thin, bare shoulders, and hands rendered nearly useless by the tightness of the gloves.

“Gracious, no! It’s natural to her to do so, and she carries it off well; I couldn’t, therefore I don’t try, though I admire it in her. Go and ask her to dance, before she is engaged.”

“She doesn’t dance round dances, you know.”

“She is dreadfully prim about some things, and so free and easy about others: I can’t understand it, do you?”

“Well, yes, I think I do. Here’s Forbes coming for you, I’ll go and entertain

Belle by a quarrel."

He found her in a recess out of the way of the rushing and romping, busy with her work, yet evidently glad to be amused.

"I admire your adherence to principle, Miss Belle; but don't you find it a little hard to sit still while your friends are enjoying themselves?" he asked, sinking luxuriously into the lounging chair beside her.

"Yes, very," answered Belle with characteristic candor. "But father does not approve of that sort of exercise, so I console myself with something useful till my chance comes."

"Your work can't exactly be called ornamental," said Lennox, looking at the big sock.

"Don't laugh at it, sir; it is for the foot of the brave fellow who is going to fight for me and his country."

"Happy fellow! May I ask who he is?" and Lennox sat up with an air of interest.

"My substitute: I don't know his name, for father has not got him yet; but I'm making socks, and towels, and a comfort-bag for him, so that when found he may be off at once."

"You really mean it?" cried Lennox.

"Of course I do; I can't go myself, but I *can* buy a pair of strong arms to fight for me, and I intend to do it. I only hope he'll have the right sort of courage, and be a credit to me."

"What do you call the right sort of courage?" asked Lennox, soberly.

"That which makes a man ready and glad to live or die for a principle. There's a chance for heroes now, if there ever was. When do you join your regiment?" she added, abruptly.

"Haven't the least idea," and Lennox subsided again.

"But you intend to do so, of course?"

"Why should I?"

Belle dropped her work. "Why should you? What a question! Because you have health, and strength, and courage, and money to help on the good cause, and every man should give his best, and not *dare* to stay at home when he is needed."

"You forget that I am an Englishman, and we rather prefer to be strictly neutral just now."

"You are only half English; and for your mother's sake you should be proud and glad to fight for the North," cried Belle warmly.

"I don't remember my mother, — "

"That's evident!"

"But, I was about to add, I've no objection to lend a hand if it isn't too much trouble to get off," said Lennox indifferently, for he liked to see Belle's color rise, and her eyes kindle while he provoked her.

"Do you expect to go South in a bandbox? You'd better join one of the kid-glove regiments; they say the dandies fight well when the time comes."

"I've been away so long, the patriotic fever hasn't seized me yet; and, as the quarrel is none of mine, I think perhaps I'd better take care of Kate, and let you fight it out among yourselves. Here's the Lancers, may I have the honor?"

But Belle, being very angry at this lukewarmness, answered in her bluntest manner, —

"Having reminded me that you are a 'strictly neutral' Englishman, you must excuse me if I decline; *I* dance only with loyal Americans," and, rolling up her work with a defiant flourish, she walked away, leaving him to lament his loss and wonder how he could retrieve it. She did not speak to him again till he stood in the hall waiting for Kate; then Belle came down in a charming little red hood, and going straight up to him with her hand out, a repentant look and a friendly smile, said frankly, —

"I was very rude; I want to beg pardon of the English, and shake hands with the American, half."

So peace was declared, and lasted unbroken for the remaining week of his stay, when he proposed to take Kate to the city for a little gayety. Miss Morgan openly approved the plan, but secretly felt as if the town was about to be depopulated, and tried to hide her melancholy in her substitute's socks. They were not large enough, however, to absorb it all; and, when Lennox went to make his adieu, it was perfectly evident that the Doctor's Belle was out of tune. The young gentleman basely exulted over this, till she gave him something else to think about by saying gravely:

"Before you go, I feel as if I ought to tell you something, since Kate won't. If you are offended about it please don't blame her; she meant it kindly, and so did I." Belle paused as if it was not an easy thing to tell and then went on quickly, with her eyes upon her work.

"Three weeks ago Kate asked me to help her in a little plot; and I consented, for the fun of the thing She wanted something to amuse and stir you up, and, finding that my queer ways diverted you, she begged me to be neighborly and let you do what you liked. I didn't care particularly about amusing you, but I did think you needed rousing; so for her sake I tried to do it, and you very good-naturedly bore my lecturing. I don't like deceit of any kind, so I confess; but I can't say I'm sorry, for I really think you are none the worse for the teasing and teaching you've had."

Belle didn't see him flush and frown as she made her confession, and when she looked up he only said, half gratefully, half reproachfully, —

"I'm a good deal the better for it, I dare say, and ought to be very thankful for your friendly exertions. But two against one was hardly fair, now, was it?"

"No, it was sly and sinful in the highest degree, but we did it for your good; so I know you'll forgive us, and as a proof of it sing one or two of my favorites for the last time."

"You don't deserve any favor; but I'll do it, to show you how much more magnanimous men are than women."

Not at all loth to improve his advantages, Lennox warbled his most melting lays *con amore*, watching, as he sung, for any sign of sentiment in the girlish face opposite. But Belle wouldn't be sentimental; and sat rattling her knitting-needles industriously, though "The Harbor Bar was moaning" dolefully, though "Douglas" was touchingly "tender and true," and the "Wind of the Summer Night" sighed romantically through the sitting-room.

"Much obliged. Must you go?" she said, without a sign of soft confusion as he rose.

"I must; but I shall come again before I leave the country. May I?" he asked, holding her hand.

"If you come in a uniform."

"Good night, Belle," tenderly. — "Good-by, Sir Charles," with a wicked twinkle of the eye, which lasted till he closed the hall-door, growling irefully, —

"I thought I'd had some experience, but one never *can* understand these women!"

Canterbury did become a desert to Belle after her dear friend had gone (of course the dear friend's brother had nothing to do with the desolation); and as the weeks dragged slowly Belle took to reading poetry, practising plaintive ballads, and dawdling over her work at a certain window which commanded a view of the railway station and hotel.

"You're dull, my dear; run up to town with me to-morrow, and see your young man off," said the Doctor one evening, as Belle sat musing with a half-mended red stocking in her hand.

"My young man?" she ejaculated, turning with a start and a blush.

"Your substitute, child. Stephens attended to the business for me, and he's off to-morrow. I began to tell you about the fellow last week, but you were wool-gathering, so I stopped."

"Yes, I remember, it was all very nice. Goes to-morrow, does he? I'd like to see him; but do you think we can both leave home at once? Some one might come you know, and I fancy it's going to snow," said Belle, putting her face behind the curtain to inspect the weather.

“You’d better go, the trip will do you good; you can take your things to Tom Jones, and see Kate on the way: she’s got back from Philadelphia.”

“Has she? I’ll go, then; it will please her, and I do need change. You are a dear, to think of it;” and, giving her father a hasty glimpse of a suddenly excited countenance, Belle slipped out of the room to prepare her best array, with a most reckless disregard of the impending storm.

It did not snow on the morrow, and up they went to see the — th regiment off. Belle did not see “her young man,” however, for while her father went to carry him her comforts and a patriotic nosegay of red and white flowers, tied up with a smart blue ribbon, she called on Kate. But Miss Lennox was engaged, and sent an urgent request that her friend would call in the afternoon. Much disappointed and a little hurt, Belle then devoted herself to the departing regiment, wishing she was going with it, for she felt in a warlike mood. It was past noon when a burst of martial music, the measured tramp of many feet, and enthusiastic cheers announced that “the boys” were coming. From the balcony where she stood with her father, Belle looked down upon the living stream that flowed by like a broad river, with a steely glitter above the blue. All her petty troubles vanished at the sight; her heart beat high, her face glowed, her eyes filled, and she waved her handkerchief as zealously as if she had a dozen friends and lovers in the ranks below.

“Here comes your man; I told him to stick the posy where it would catch my eye, so I could point him out to you. Look, it’s the tall fellow at the end of the front line,” said the Doctor in an excited tone, as he pointed and beckoned.

Belle looked and gave a little cry, for there, in a private’s uniform, with her nosegay at his button-hole, and on his face a smile she never forgot, was Lennox! For an instant she stood staring at him as pale and startled as if he were a ghost; then the color rushed into her face, she kissed both hands to him, and cried bravely, “Good-by, good-by; God bless you, Harry!” and immediately laid her head on her father’s shoulder, sobbing as if her heart was broken.

When she looked up, her substitute was lost in the undulating mass below, and for her the spectacle was over.

“Was it really he? Why wasn’t I told? What does it all mean?” she demanded, looking bewildered, grieved, and ashamed.

“He’s really gone, my dear. It’s a surprise of his, and I was bound over to silence. Here, this will explain the joke, I suppose,” and the Doctor handed her a cocked-hat note, done up like a military order.

“A Roland for your Oliver, Mademoiselle! I came home for the express purpose of enlisting, and only delayed a month on Kate’s account. If I ever return, I will receive my bounty at your hands. Till then please comfort Kate, think as kindly as you can of 'Sir Charles,' and sometimes pray a little prayer for

"Your unworthy

"Substitute."

Belle looked very pale and meek when she put the note in her pocket, but she only said, "I must go and comfort Kate;" and the Doctor gladly obeyed, feeling that the joke was more serious than he had imagined.

The moment her friend appeared, Miss Lennox turned on her tears, and "played away," pouring forth lamentations, reproaches, and regrets in a steady stream.

"I hope you are satisfied now, you cruel girl!" she began, refusing to be kissed. "You've sent him off with a broken heart to rush into danger and be shot, or get his arms and legs spoiled. You know he loved you and wanted to tell you so, but you wouldn't let him; and now you've driven him away, and he's gone as an insignificant private with his head shaved, and a heavy knapsack breaking his back, and a horrid gun that will be sure to explode: and he *would* wear those immense blue socks you sent, for he adores you, and you only teased and laughed at him, my poor, deluded, deserted brother!" And, quite overwhelmed by the afflicting picture, Kate lifted up her voice and wept again.

"I *am* satisfied, for he's done what I hoped he would; and he's none the less a gentleman because he's a private and wears my socks. I pray they will keep him safe, and bring him home to us when he has done his duty like a man, as I know he will. I'm proud of my brave substitute, and I'll try to be worthy of him," cried Belle, kindling beautifully as she looked out into the wintry sunshine with a new softness in the eyes that still seemed watching that blue-coated figure marching away to danger, perhaps death.

"It's ill playing with edged tools; we meant to amuse him, and we may have sent him to destruction. I'll never forgive you for your part, never!" said Kate, with the charming inconsistency of her sex.

But Belle turned away her wrath by a soft answer, as she whispered, with a tender choke in her voice, —

"We both loved him, dear; let's comfort one another."

CHAPTER III.

WHAT BECAME OF THEM.

Private Lennox certainly *had* chosen pretty hard work, for the — th was not a “kid-glove” regiment by any means; fighting in mid-winter was not exactly festive, and camps do not abound in beds of roses even at the best of times. But Belle was right in saying she knew a soldier when she saw him, for, now that he was thoroughly waked up, he proved that there was plenty of courage, energy, and endurance in him.

It is my private opinion that he might now and then have slightly regretted the step he had taken, had it not been for certain recollections of a sarcastic tongue and a pair of keen eyes, not to mention the influence of one of the most potent rulers of the human heart; namely, the desire to prove himself worthy the respect, if nothing more, of somebody at home. Belle’s socks did seem to keep him safe, and lead him straight in the narrow path of duty. Belle’s comfort-bag was such in very truth, for not one of the stout needles on the tri-colored cushion but what seemed to wink its eye approvingly at him; not one of the tidy balls of thread that did not remind him of the little hand he coveted, and the impracticable scissors were cherished as a good omen, though he felt that the sharpest steel that ever came from Sheffield couldn’t cut his love in twain. And Belle’s lessons, short as they had been, were not forgotten, but seemed to have been taken up by a sterner mistress, whose rewards were greater, if not so sweet, as those the girl could give. There was plenty of exercise nowadays, and of hard work that left many a tired head asleep for ever under the snow. There were many opportunities for diving “into the depths and bringing up pearls worth having” by acts of kindness among the weak, the wicked, and the suffering all about him. He learned now how to earn, not buy, the thanks of the poor, and unconsciously proved in the truest way that a private *could* be a gentleman. But best of all was the steadfast purpose “to live and die for a principle,” which grew and strengthened with each month of bitter hardship, bloody strife, and dearly bought success. Life grew earnest to him, time seemed precious, self was forgotten, and all that was best and bravest rallied round the flag on which his heart inscribed the motto, “Love and Liberty.”

Praise and honor he could not fail to win, and had he never gone back to claim his bounty he would have earned the great “Well done,” for he kept his oath loyally, did his duty manfully, and loved his lady faithfully, like a knight of the chivalrous times. He knew nothing of her secret, but wore her blue ribbon like an order, never went into battle without first, like many another poor fellow, kissing something which he carried next his heart, and with each day of absence felt himself a better man, and braver soldier, for the fondly foolish romance he had woven about the scarlet stockings.

Belle and Kate did comfort one another, not only with tears and kisses, but with womanly work which kept hearts happy and hands busy. How Belle bribed her to silence will always remain the ninth wonder of the world; but, though reams of paper passed between brother and sister during those twelve months, not a hint was dropped on one side in reply to artful inquiries from the other. Belle never told her love in words; but she stowed away an unlimited quantity of the article in the big boxes that went to gladden the eyes and — alas for romance! — the stomach of Private Lennox. If pickles could typify passion, cigars prove constancy, and gingerbread reveal the longings of the soul, then would the above-mentioned gentleman have been the happiest of lovers. But camp-life had doubtless dulled his finer intuitions: for he failed to understand the new language of love, and gave away these tender tokens with lavish prodigality. Concealment preyed a trifle on Belle’s damask cheek, it must be confessed, and the keen eyes grew softer with the secret tears that sometimes dimmed them; the sharp tongue seldom did mischief now, but uttered kindly words to every one, as if doing penance for the past; and a sweet seriousness toned down the lively spirit, which was learning many things in the sleepless nights that followed when the “little prayer” for the beloved substitute was done.

“I’ll wait and see if he is all I hope he will be, before I let him know. I shall read the truth the instant I see him, and if he has stood the test I’ll run into his arms and tell him every thing,” she said to herself, with delicious thrills at the idea; but you may be sure she did nothing of the sort when the time came.

A rumor flew through the town one day that Lennox had arrived; upon receipt of which joyful tidings, Belle had a panic and hid herself in the garret. But when she had quaked, and cried, and peeped, and listened for an hour or two, finding that no one came to hunt her up, she composed her nerves and descended to pass the afternoon in the parlor and a high state of dignity. All sorts of reports reached her: he was mortally wounded; he had been made a major or a colonel or a general, no one knew exactly which; he was dead, was going to be married, and hadn’t come at all. Belle fully expiated all her small sins by the agonies of suspense she suffered that day, and when at last a note came from Kate, begging her "to drop over to see Harry," she put her pride in her pocket and went at once.

The drawing-room was empty and in confusion, there was a murmur of voices upstairs, a smell of camphor in the air, and an empty wine-glass on the table where a military cap was lying. Belle's heart sunk, and she covertly kissed the faded blue coat as she stood waiting breathlessly, wondering if Harry had any arms for her to run into. She heard the chuckling Biddy lumber up and announce her, then a laugh, and a half-fond, half-exulting, "Ah, ha, I thought she'd come!"

That spoilt it all; Belle took out her pride instanter, rubbed a quick color into her white cheeks, and, snatching up a newspaper, sat herself down with as expressionless a face as it was possible for an excited young woman to possess. Lennox came running down. "Thank Heaven, his legs are safe!" sighed Belle, with her eyes glued to the price of beef. He entered with both hands extended, which relieved her mind upon another point; and he beamed upon her, looking so vigorous, manly, and martial, that she cried within herself, "My beautiful brown soldier!" even while she greeted him with an unnecessarily brief, "How do you do, Mr. Lennox?"

The sudden eclipse which passed over his joyful countenance would have been ludicrous, if it hadn't been pathetic; but he was used to hard knocks now, and bore this, his hardest, like a man. He shook hands heartily; and, as Belle sat down again (not to betray that she was trembling a good deal), he stood at ease before her, talking in a way which soon satisfied her that he *had* borne the test, and that bliss was waiting for her round the corner. But she had made it such a very sharp corner she couldn't turn it gracefully, and while she pondered how to do so he helped her with a cough. She looked up quickly, discovering all at once that he was very thin, rather pale in spite of the nice tan, and breathed hurriedly as he stood with one hand in his breast.

"Are you ill, wounded, in pain?" she asked, forgetting herself entirely.

"Yes, all three," he answered, after a curious look at her changing color and anxious eyes.

"Sit down — tell me about it — can I do any thing?" and Belle began to plump up the pillows on the couch with nervous eagerness.

"Thank you, I'm past help," was the mournful reply accompanied by a hollow cough which made her shiver.

"Oh, don't say so! Let me bring father; he is very skilful. Shall I call Kate?"

"He can do nothing; Kate doesn't know this, and I beg you won't tell her. I got a shot in the breast and made light of it, but it will finish me sooner or later. I don't mind telling you, for you are one of the strong, cool sort, you know, and are not affected by such things. But Kate is so fond of me, I don't want to shock and trouble her yet awhile. Let her enjoy my little visit, and after I'm gone you can tell her the truth."

Belle had sat like a statue while he spoke with frequent pauses and an involuntary clutch or two at the suffering breast. As he stopped and passed his hand over his eyes, she said slowly, as if her white lips were stiff, —

"Gone! where?"

"Back to my place. I'd rather die fighting than fussed and wailed over by a parcel of women. I expected to stay a week or so, but a battle is coming off sooner than we imagined, so I'm away again to-morrow. As I'm not likely ever to come back, I just wanted to ask you to stand by poor Kate when I'm finished, and to say good-by to you, Belle, before I go." He put out his hand, but, holding it fast in both her own, she laid her tearful face down on it, whispering imploringly, —

"Oh, Harry, stay!"

Never mind what happened for the next ten minutes; suffice it to say that the enemy having surrendered, the victor took possession with great jubilation and showed no quarter.

"Bang the field-piece, toot the fife, and beat the rolling drum, for ruse number three has succeeded. Come down, Kate, and give us your blessing!" called Lennox, taking pity on his sister, who was anxiously awaiting the *dénouement* on the stairs.

In she rushed, and the young ladies laughed and cried, kissed and talked tumultuously, while their idol benignantly looked on, vainly endeavoring to repress all vestiges of unmanly emotion.

"And you are not dying, really, truly?" cried Belle, when fair weather set in after the flurry.

"Bless your dear heart, no! I'm as sound as a nut, and haven't a wound to boast of, except this ugly slash on the head."

"It's a splendid wound, and I'm proud of it," and Belle set a rosy little seal on the scar, which quite reconciled her lover to the disfigurement of his handsome forehead. "You've learned to fib in the army, and I'm disappointed in you," she added, trying to look reproachful and failing entirely.

"No, only the art of strategy. You quenched me by your frosty reception, and I thought it was all up till you put the idea of playing invalid into my head. It succeeded so well that I piled on the agony, resolving to fight it out on that line, and if I failed again to make a masterly retreat. You gave me a lesson in deceit once, so don't complain if I turned the tables and made your heart ache for a minute, as you've made mine for a year."

Belle's spirit was rapidly coming back, so she gave him a capital imitation of his French shrug, and drawled out in his old way, —

"I have my doubts about that, *mon ami*."

"What do you say to this — and this — and this?" he retorted, pulling out and laying before her with a triumphant flourish a faded blue ribbon, a fat pincushion with a hole through it, and a daintily painted little picture of a pretty girl in scarlet stockings.

"There, I've carried those treasures in my breast-pocket for a year, and I'm firmly convinced that they have all done their part toward keeping me safe. The blue ribbon bound me fast to you, Belle; the funny cushion caught the bullet that otherwise might have finished me; and the blessed little picture was my comfort during those dreadful marches, my companion on picket-duty with treachery and danger all about me, and my inspiration when the word 'Charge!' went down the line, for in the thickest of the fight I always saw the little gray figure beckoning me on to my duty."

"Oh, Harry, you won't go back to all those horrors, will you? I'm sure you've done enough, and may rest now and enjoy your reward," said Kate, trying not to feel that "two is company, and three is none."

"I've enlisted for the war, and shall not rest till either it or I come to an end. As for my reward, I had it when Belle kissed me."

"You are right, I'll wait for you, and love you all the better for the sacrifice," whispered Belle. "I only wish I could share your hardships, dear, for while you fight and suffer I can only love and pray."

"Waiting is harder than working to such as you; so be contented with your share, for the thought of you will glorify the world generally for me. I'll tell you what you *can* do while I'm away: it's both useful and amusing, so it will occupy and cheer you capitally. Just knit lots of red hose, because I don't intend you to wear any others hereafter, Mrs. Lennox."

"Mine are not worn out yet," laughed Belle, getting merry at the thought.

"No matter for that; those are sacred articles, and henceforth must be treasured as memorials of our love. Frame and hang them up; or, if the prejudices of society forbid that flight of romance, lay them carefully away where moths can't devour nor thieves steal them, so that years hence, when my descendants praise me for any virtues I may possess, any good I may have done, or any honor I may have earned, I can point to those precious relics and say proudly, —

"My children, for all that I am, or hope to be, you must thank your honored mother's scarlet stockings."

INDEPENDENCE: A CENTENNIAL LOVE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

MISS DOLLY.

"Stupid-looking old place! Dare say I shall have to waste half an hour listening to centennial twaddle before I get what I want! The whole thing is a bore, but I can't quarrel with my bread and butter, so here goes;" and, with an air of resignation, the young man applied himself to the rusty knocker.

"Rather a nice old bit; maybe useful, so I'll book it;" and, whipping out a sketch-book, the stranger took a hasty likeness of the griffin's head on the knocker.

"Deaf as posts; try, try, try again;" and, pocketing his work, the artist gave an energetic rat, tat, tat, that echoed through the house.

Having rashly concluded that the inhabitants of the ancient mansion were proportionately aged, he assumed a deferential expression as steps approached, and prepared to prefer with all due respect the request which he had come many miles to make. The door opened with unexpected rapidity, but the neatly arranged speech did not glide glibly off the young man's tongue, and the change which came over him was comically sudden; for, instead of an old woman, a blooming girl stood upon the threshold, with a petulant expression on her charming face, which only made it more charming still.

"What did you wish, sir?" asked the rosy mouth, involuntarily relaxing from a vain attempt to look severe, while the hazel eyes softened with a mirthful gleam as they rested on the comely, but embarrassed countenance before her.

"Beg pardon for making such a noise. I merely wished to inquire if the famous chair in which Washington sat when he visited the town is here," replied the stranger, clutching off his hat with a very different sort of respect from that which he had intended to show, and feeling as if he had received a shock of some new and delightful sort of electricity.

"Yes;" and the girl began to close the door, as if she knew what question was coming next.

"Could I be allowed to sketch it for 'The Weekly Portfolio'? All such relics are so valuable this year that we venture to ask many favors, and this is such a famous affair I've no doubt you are often troubled by requests of this sort," continued the artist, with the persuasive tone of one accustomed to make his way everywhere.

"This is the fifth time this week," replied the damsel, demurely; though her lips still struggled not to smile.

"It's very good of you, I'm sure, to let us fellows in, but the public demand is immense just now, and we only obey orders, you know," began the fifth intruder, fervently hoping the other four had been refused.

"But Mrs. Hill never does let artists or reporters in," was the gentle quencher which arrested him, as he was industriously wiping his feet on the door-mat.

"Never?" he asked, stopping short, while an expression of alarm changed suddenly to one of satisfaction.

"Never," answered the damsel, like a sweet-voiced echo.

"Then the other fellows lost their chance, and that makes the old thing doubly valuable. If I could see Mrs. Hill for a moment, I've no doubt she will allow *me* to sketch the chair."

"She is not at home."

"So much the better; for, when I tell you that I've come fifty miles to pick up antiquities in this town, I know you *won't* have the heart to send me away without the gem of the collection," replied the artist, nothing daunted; for his quick eye read the artless face before him, and saw a defiant expression come over it, which made him suspect that there had been a falling out between mistress and maid, if such they were. He was sure of it when the girl threw open the door with a decisive gesture, saying briefly, —

"Walk in, if you please; she won't be home for an hour."

"What a little beauty!" thought the young man, admiring her spirit, and feeling that the "stupid old place" contained unexpected treasures, as he followed her into the room where the ubiquitous Father of his Country was reported to have dried his august boots, and drunk a mug of cider some hundred years ago.

It seemed as if the ghosts of many of the homely household articles used then had come back to celebrate the anniversary of that thrilling event; for there was nothing modern in the little room but the girl and her guest, who stared about him at the tall andirons on the hearth, the bright, brass candlesticks above it, the spinning-wheel on one side, a dresser on the other strewn with pewter platters, porringers, and old china, while antique garments hung over the settle by the fire.

"Bless my soul, what a capital old place!" he ejaculated, taking it all in with an artist's keen appreciation. "I feel as if I'd gone back a century, and the

General might come in at any minute.”

“*That* is the chair he used, and *this* the tankard he drank from,” answered the girl, pointing out the sacred objects with a reverential air which warned her visitor that he must treat the ancient and honorable relics with due respect.

Then feeling that this was an unusual stroke of luck, he hastened to make the most of it, by falling to work at once, saying, as he took a seat, and pointed his pencils, —

“There is such a lot of treasures here that I don’t know where to begin. I hope I shall not be very much in your way.”

“Oh, no! if you don’t mind my going on with my work; for I can’t leave it very well. All these things are to be sent away to-morrow, that’s why the place is in such confusion,” replied the girl, as she fell to polishing up a brass snuffer-tray.

“Here’s richness!” thought the artist, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he dashed at his work, feeling wonderfully inspired by his picturesque surroundings.

The dull winter sky gloomed without, and a chilly wind sighed through the leafless elms; but within the little room fairly glowed with the ruddy firelight that shone in the bright brasses, glimmered over the tarnished silver of the quaint vests on the settle, and warmed the artist’s busy hand, as if it liked to help him in his task. But the jolly flames seemed to dance most lovingly about their little mistress; bathing the sweet face with a softer bloom, touching the waves of brown hair with gold, peeping under the long lashes at the downcast eyes that peeped back again half arch, half shy; glorifying the blue apron that seemed to clasp the trim waist as if conscious of its advantages, and showing up the dimples in the bare arms working so briskly that even the verdigris of ages yielded to their persuasive touch.

“Who can this pretty Priscilla be? I must make her talk and find out. Never shall get the eyes right, if she doesn’t look up,” thought the artist, who, instead of devoting himself to the historical chair, was basely sketching the girl whose youth and beauty were wonderfully enhanced by the antiquity around her.

“Mrs. Hill is a rich woman, if all these treasures have a history. Even if they haven’t, they would bring a good price; for things of this sort are all the rage now, and the older the better,” he said aloud in a sociable tone, as he affected to study the left arm of the famous chair.

“They are not hers to sell, for they belonged to the first Mrs. Hill, who was a Quincy, and had a right to be proud of them. The present Mrs. Hill doesn’t value them a bit; but *she* was a Smith, so *her* family relics are nothing to boast of,” answered the girl, using her bit of wash-leather as if the entire race of Smith ought to be rubbed out of existence.

"And she is going to sell all these fine old things, is she?" asked the artist, with an eye to bargains.

"No, indeed! they belong to — to the first Mrs. Hill's daughter, named after her, Dorothy Quincy," the girl began impetuously, but checked herself, and ended very quietly with a suddenly averted head.

"A fine name, and I shouldn't think she would be in haste to change it," said the artist, wondering if Miss Dorothy Quincy was before him.

"Not much hope of that, poor thing," with a shake of the head that made several brown curls tumble out of the net which tried to confine a riotous mass of them.

"Ah, I see, a spinster?" and the young man returned to his work with greatly abated interest in the subject.

The bright eyes glanced quickly up, and when they fell the snuffer-tray reflected a merry twinkle in them, as their owner answered gravely, —

"Yes, a spinster."

"Is she one of the amiable sort?"

"Oh, dear, no! very quick in her temper and sharp with her tongue. But then she has a good deal to try her, as I happen to know."

"Sorry for that. Spinsterhood *is* trying, I fancy, so we should be patient with the poor old ladies. Why I asked was because I thought I might induce Miss Dolly to let me have some of her relics. Do you think she would?" he asked, holding his sketch at arm's length, and studying it with his head on one side.

"I'm very sure she won't, for these old things are all she has in the world, and she loves them dearly. People used to laugh at her for it, but now they are glad to own her and her 'duds,' as they called them. The Smiths are looking up every thing they can find of that sort, even poor relations. All these things are going down to a fair to-morrow, and Miss Dolly with them."

"As one of the relics?" suggested the artist, glancing at a green calash and a plum-colored quilted petticoat lying on the settle.

"Exactly," laughed the girl, adding with a touch of bitterness in her voice, "Poor Miss Dolly never got an invitation before, and I'm afraid it's foolish of her to go now, since she is only wanted to show off the old-fashioned things, and give the Smiths something to boast of."

"You are fond of the old lady in spite of her temper, I see."

"She is the only friend I've got;" and the speaker bent over the tray as if to hide emotion of some sort.

"I shall probably have to 'do' that fair for our paper; if so, I'll certainly pay my respects to Miss Dolly. Why not? Is she so very awful?" he asked quickly, as the girl looked up with a curious mixture of mirth and malice in her face.

"Very!" with a lifting of the brows and a pursing up of the lips delightful to behold.

"You think I won't dare address the peppery virgin? I never saw the woman yet whom I was afraid of, or the man either for that matter, so I give you my word I'll not only speak to Miss Dolly, but win her old heart by my admiration for her and her ancestral treasures, said the artist, accepting the challenge he read in the laughing eyes.

"We shall see, for I'm going with her. I do the spinning, and it's great fun," said the girl, prudently changing the conversation, though she evidently enjoyed it.

"I never saw it done. Could you give me an idea of the thing, if it is not asking too much?" proposed the artist in his most persuasive tone, for somehow play of this sort was much more interesting than the study of old furniture.

With amiable alacrity the girl set the big wheel buzzing, and deftly drew out the yarn from the spindle, stepping briskly to and fro, twirling and twisting with an ease and grace which convinced the admiring observer that the best thing ever invented to show off a round arm, a pretty foot, a fine figure, and a charming face, was a spinning-wheel.

This opinion was so plainly expressed upon his own countenance that the color deepened in the girl's cheeks as she looked over her shoulder to see how he liked it, and dropping the thread she left the wheel still whirling, and went back to her work without a word.

"Thank you very much; it's beautiful! Don't see how in the world you do it," murmured the young man, affecting to examine the wheel, while his own head seemed to whirl in sympathy, for that backward glance had unconsciously done great execution.

A moon-faced clock behind the door striking eleven recalled the idler to his task, and resuming his seat he drew silently till the chair was done; then he turned a page, and looked about for the next good bit.

"Rather warm work," he said, smiling, as he shook the hair off his forehead, and pushed his chair back from the hearth.

"This is what makes the place so hot. I've been learning to make old-fashioned dishes for the fair, and this batch is going down to show what I can do."

As she spoke, the girl threw open the door of a cavernous oven, and with an air of housewifely pride displayed a goodly array of brown loaves round as cannon-balls, earthen crocks suggestive of baked beans and Indian pudding, and near the door a pan of spicy cakes delectable to smell and see. These she drew forth and set upon the table, turning from the oven after a careful inspection of its contents with the complexion of a damask rose.

“Delicious spectacle!” exclaimed the artist, with his eyes upon the pretty cook, while hers were on her handiwork.

“You shall taste them, for they are made from a very old receipt and are called sweethearts,” said the innocent creature, setting them forth on a large platter, while a smile went dimpling round her lips.

“Capital name! they’ll sell faster than you can make them. But it seems to me you are to have all the work, and Miss Dolly all the credit,” added this highly appreciative guest, subduing with difficulty the rash impulse to embrace Miss Dolly’s rosy handmaid on the spot.

She seemed to feel the impending danger, and saying hastily, “You must have some cider to go with your cake: that’s the correct thing, you know,” she tripped away with hospitable zeal.

“Upon my soul, I begin to feel like the Prince of the fairy tale in this quiet place where every thing seems to have been asleep for a hundred years. The little beauty ought to have been asleep too, and given me a chance to wake her. More of a Cinderella than a princess, I fancy, and leads a hard life of it between Miss Dolly and the second Mrs. Hill. Wonder what happy fellow will break the spell and set her free?” and the young man paced the kitchen, humming softly, —

“And on her lover’s arm she leant, And round her waist she felt it fold; And far across the hills they went, In that new world which is the old,”

till the sound of a light step made him dart into a chair, saying to himself with a sudden descent from poetry to prose, “Bless her little heart, I’ll drink her cider if it’s as sour as vinegar.”

In came the maid, bearing a tankard on a salver; and, adding several sweethearts, she offered the homely lunch with a curtsey and a smile that would have glorified even pork and beans.

“You are sitting in the General’s chair, and here is the tankard he used; you can drink his health, if you like.”

“I’d rather drink that of the maker of sweethearts;” and, rising, the artist did so, gallantly regardless of consequences.

But the cider was excellent, and subsiding into the immortal chair he enjoyed his lunch with the hearty appetite of a boy, while the damsel began to fold up the garments airing on the settle, and lay them into a chest standing near; the one quite unconscious that he was drinking draughts of a far more potent liquor than apple-juice, the other that she had begun to spin a golden thread instead of yarn when she turned the great wheel that day.

An eloquent sort of silence filled the room for a moment, and a ray of sunshine glanced from the silver tankard to the bright head bent over the chest, as if to gild the first page of the romance which is as fresh and sweet to-day as when the stately George wooed his beloved Martha. A shrill voice suddenly broke that delicious pause, exclaiming, as a door opened with a bang, —

"Not packed yet! I won't have this rubbish cluttering round another minute — " There the voice abruptly fell, and the stranger had time to see a withered, yellow face in a pumpkin hood stare sharply at him before it vanished with an exclamation of unmistakable disapproval.

"Miss Dolly seems more afraid of me than I of her, you see," began the young man, much amused at the retreat of the enemy; for such he regarded any one who disturbed this delightful *tête-à-tête*.

"She has only gone to put her cap on, and when she comes back you can pay your respects to — Mrs. Hill;" and the girl looked over the lid of the chest with dancing eyes.

"Then I'd better be off, since reporters and artists are not allowed on the premises," exclaimed the visitor, rising with more haste than dignity.

"Don't hurry; she is only a woman, and you are not afraid, you know."

"I'm afraid *you* will get a scolding," began the artist, pocketing his sketch-book, and grasping his hat.

"I'm used to that," answered the girl, evidently enjoying the rout with naughty satisfaction.

But the sharp, black eyes and the shrill voice had effectually broken the pleasant day-dream; and Mrs. Hill in a pumpkin hood was quite enough for his nerves, without a second appearance in one of the awe-inspiring caps such ladies affect.

"I couldn't think of repaying your kindness by intruding any longer, now that I've got my sketch. A thousand thanks; good-morning;" and, opening the first door he came to, the dismayed man was about to plunge into the buttery, when the girl arrested his flight and led him through the long hall.

On the steps he took breath, returned thanks again with grateful warmth, and pulling out a card presented it, as if anxious to leave some token behind which should prevent being forgotten by one person at least.

"John Hancock Harris" read the card, and glancing up from it, with sudden interest in her eyes, the girl exclaimed impulsively, —

"Why, then you must be a relation of — "

"No, I regret to say I'm not related to the famous Governor, only named for him to please my father. I've always been contented with a modest initial until now; but this year every one does their best to hang on to the past, so I've got proud of my middle name, and find it useful as well as ornamental," hastily explained the honest young fellow, though just then he would have liked to claim kinship with every member of the Continental Congress.

“I hope you will be worthy of it,” answered the damsel with a little bow, as if saluting the man for his name’s sake.

“I try to be,” he said soberly, adding with that engaging smile of his, “May I ask to whom I am indebted for this very profitable and agreeable call?”

Instantly the sweet sobriety vanished, and every feature of the pretty face shone with mirthful malice as the girl answered sweetly, —

“Miss Dolly. Good-morning,” and closed the door, leaving him to stare blankly at the griffin on the knocker, which appeared to stare back again with a derisive grin.

CHAPTER II.

A CINDER AND A SPARK.

One of the few snow-storms of the memorably mild winter of 1876 was coming quietly down, watched with lazy interest by the passengers in a certain train that rumbled leisurely toward the city. Without it was cold and wintry enough, but within as hot as an oven; for, with the usual American disregard of health, there was a roaring fire in the stove, every ventilator shut, and only one man in the crowded car had his window open.

Toward this reckless being many a warning or reproachful glance was cast by rheumatic old gentlemen or delicate women who led the lives of hot-house flowers. But the hearty young fellow sat buried in his newspapers, regardless alike of these expressive glances and the fresh wind that blew in an occasional snow-flake to melt upon his shoulder, hair, or beard.

If his face had not been obscured by the great sheet held before it, an observer might have watched with interest the varying expressions of amusement, contempt, indignation, and disgust which passed over it as he read; for it was a very expressive face, and too young yet to have put on the mask men so soon learn to wear. He was evidently one of the strong, cheery, sympathetic sort of fellows who make their way everywhere, finding friends as they go from the simple fact that they are so full of courage and good-will it is impossible to resist them. This had been proved already; for during that short journey three old ladies had claimed his services in one way or another, a shy little girl had sat upon his knee for half an hour and left him with a kiss, and an obstreperous Irish baby had been bribed to hold its tongue by the various allurements he devised, to the great amusement, as well as gratitude, of his neighbors.

Just now, however, he looked rather grim, knit his brows as he read, and finally kicked his paper under the seat with an expression which proved that he had as much energy as kindliness in his composition, and no taste for the sorrowful record of scandal, dishonesty, and folly daily offered the American public.

“Upon my word, if this sort of thing goes on much longer, the country won’t be fit for a decent man to live in,” he said to himself, taking a mouthful of fresh air, and letting his eyes wander over the faces of his fellow-travellers as if wondering which of the eminently respectable gentlemen about him would next startle the world by some explosion of iniquity. Even the women did not escape the scrutiny of the keen blue eyes, which softened, however, as they went from one possible Delilah to another; for John Harris had not yet lost his reverence for womankind.

Suddenly his wandering glance was arrested, a look of recognition brightened his whole countenance, and an involuntary "Hullo!" rose to his lips, instead of the romantic "Ha, 'tis she!" with which novel heroes are supposed to greet the advent of the charmer.

The object which wrought so swift and pleasant a change in the young man's mood and manner was a girl's face seen in profile some seats in front of him. A modest little hat with a sweeping feather rested easily on a mass of wavy hair, which was not spoilt by any fashionable device, but looped up in a loose sort of braid from which rebellious tendrils here and there escaped to touch her white throat or shade her temples. One particularly captivating little curl twined round her ear and seemed to be whispering some pleasant secret, for the blooming cheek dimpled now and then, the soft lips smiled, and the eyes were full of a dreamy thoughtfulness. A book lay in her lap, but her own fancies seemed more interesting, and she sat watching the snow-flakes flutter down, lost in one of the delightful reveries girls love, quite unconscious of the admiration of her neighbors, or the fixed stare of the young man behind her.

"Miss Dolly, by all that's good!" he said to himself, suddenly forgetting the sins of his native land, and finding it quite possible to stop a little longer in it. "She said she was going to town with the old things, and there she is, prettier than ever. If it hadn't been for those provoking papers, I should have seen her when she got in, and might have secured a seat by her. That stout party evidently doesn't appreciate his advantages. I can't order him out, but I'll watch my chance, for I really ought to apologize for my stupidity yesterday. Wonder if she has forgotten all about it?"

And John fell into a reverie likewise, for he was in just the mood to enjoy any thing so innocent and fresh and sweet as the memory of little Dolly at her spinning-wheel. It all came back to him with a redoubled charm, for there was a home-like warmth and simplicity about it that made the recollection very pleasant to a solitary fellow knocking about the world with no ties of any sort to keep him safe and steady. He felt the need of them, and was all ready to give away his honest heart, if he could find any amiable creature who could be satisfied with that alone, for he had nothing else to offer. He was rather fastidious, however, having an artist's refined taste in the matter of beauty, and a manly man's love of the womanliness which shows itself in character, not clothes. But he had few opportunities to discover his ideal woman, and no desire to worship a fashion plate, so here was an excellent heart to let, and no one knew it, unless they had the skill to read the notice in the window.

The reveries of both young people were rudely disturbed by the "stout party," who having finished his paper, and taken a comprehensive survey of his thoughtful little neighbor, suddenly began to talk as if he did "appreciate his advantages," and meant to make the most of them.

John watched this performance with deep interest, and it soon became rather exciting; for Miss Dolly's face was a tell-tale, and plainly betrayed the rapid transitions of feeling through which she passed. The respectful attention she at first gave in deference to the age of the speaker changed to surprise, then to annoyance, lastly to girlish confusion and distress; for the old gentleman was evidently of the Pecksniffian order, and took advantage of his gray hairs to harass the pretty damsel with his heavy gallantry.

Poor Miss Dolly looked vainly about her for any means of escape, but every seat was full, and she was quite unconscious that an irate young man behind her was burning to rush to the rescue if he had only known how. As no way appeared, John was forced to content himself with directing such fiery glances at the broad back of the ancient beau it was a wonder they did not act like burning-glasses and set that expanse of broadcloth in a blaze.

A crisis soon arrived, and woman's wit turned the tables capitally; for when the old gentleman confiscated her book under pretence of looking at it, and then, laying his arm over the back of the seat, went on talking with a fat smile that exasperated her beyond endurance, Dolly gave him one indignant glance and opened her window, letting in a blast of cold air that made her tormentor start and shiver as if she had boxed his ears.

"Good! if that does not rout the enemy, I'm much mistaken," said John to himself, enjoying it all with the relish of a young man who sees an old one usurping his privileges.

The enemy was not routed, but his guns were silenced; for, having expostulated with paternal solicitude, he turned up his coat-collar and retired behind his paper, evidently much disgusted at finding that two could play at the game of annoyance, though the girl had to call the elements to her aid.

"If I dared, I'd offer to change seats with him; not because he is suffering agonies at the idea of getting tic-douloureux or a stiff neck, that would only serve him right, but because *she* will get the worst of it. There, she has already! Confound that cinder! why didn't it go into his eye instead of hers?" added John, as he saw the girl shrink suddenly, and begin to wink and rub her eye with distressful haste, while the “stout party” took advantage of the mishap to close the window with an expression of vengeful satisfaction on his rubicund visage. He offered no help, for his first rebuff still rankled in his memory, but placidly twirled his thumbs, with a sidelong glance now and then at his companion, who, finding all her winking and rubbing in vain, shrouded her face in a veil, and sat a pathetic picture of beauty in distress, with an occasional tear rolling over her cheek and her dear little nose reddening rapidly with the general inflammation caused by that fatal cinder.

This affecting spectacle was too much for John, who not only felt the chivalrous desire of a man to help the gentle sex, but remembered that he owed the girl a good turn for her hospitality the day before, not to mention the apology he quite burned to make. Knowing that the train would soon stop a few minutes for the passengers to lunch, he resolved then and there to cast himself into the breach and deliver the doubly afflicted damsel at all costs.

Happily the station was reached before any great damage was done to the girl’s features, or the young man’s impatience became uncontrollable. The instant the stout gentleman rose to seek refreshment John dived for his valise, and, cleaving his way through the crowded aisle, presented himself beside the empty place, asking, with an attempt to look and speak like a stranger, which would not have deceived Dolly a bit, had she not been half-blind, “Is this seat engaged, madam?”

“No, sir,” she answered, unveiling to discover what new affliction fate had sent her.

It was delightful to see the one wistful eye light up with a look of recognition, the one visible cheek flush with pleasure, and the lips smile as they added, with the impulsive frankness of a tormented girl, “Oh, please take it quickly, or that dreadful man will come back!”

Quite satisfied with his welcome, John slipped into the coveted place, resolving to keep it in spite of a dozen stout gentlemen.

“Thanks, now what else can I do for you?” he asked, with such an evident desire to lend a hand somewhere that it was impossible to decline his services.

“*Could* you take this thing out of my eye? It hurts dreadfully, and I shall be a spectacle by the time I get to Aunt Maria’s,” answered Dolly, with a little moan that rent the hearer’s susceptible heart.

“That is just what I want to do, and you may trust me; for I’ve been a great traveller, and have had much experience in the extraction of cinders,” said John, adding, as he produced a pencil in a capable sort of way, “now open your eye wide, and we’ll have it out in a jiffy.”

Dolly obeyed with a courage and confidence most flattering, and John peered into the suffering eye with an intensity which it was impossible for the most artful cinder to escape.

"I see it!" he cried, and turning back the lid over his pencil he delicately removed the black atom with a corner of Dolly's veil.

It was all over in an instant, and both displayed great nerve and coolness during the operation; but, as soon as it was done, Dolly retired into her handkerchief, and John found himself as flushed and breathless as if he had faced some great danger, instead of merely looking into a girl's eye. Ah! but it was a very eloquent eye in spite of the cinder, — large and soft, tearful and imploring, and the instant during which he had bent to examine it had been a most exciting one; for the half-open lips were so near his own their hurried breath fanned his cheek, the inquisitive little curl tumbled over her ear to touch his wrist as he held up the eyelid, and a small hand had unconsciously clutched softly at his arm during the inspection. Bless you! the famous scene between Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman was entirely surpassed on this occasion, because the actors were both young and neither artful.

"Such relief!" sighed Dolly, emerging from a brief retirement, with a face so full of gratitude that it was like a burst of sunshine after an eclipse.

"Let me see if it is all right;" and John could not resist another look into the clear depths through which he seemed to catch delicious glimpses of an innocent young heart before maiden modesty drew the curtain and shut him out. As the long lashes fell, a sudden color in her cheeks seemed to be reflected upon his, and with a hasty, —

"It is a good deal inflamed, so I'm going to prescribe a wet bandage for a few minutes, if you can spare your handkerchief," — he hurried away to the water tank near by.

"That's very comforting. Thank you so much!" and Dolly patted her invalid eye assiduously; while John, feeling that he had earned his place, planted his valise on the seat with a defiant glance over his shoulder, then turned to Dolly, saying, "You must have some lunch," and waiting for no denial dashed out of the car as if on an errand of life and death.

He was gone but a moment or two; but in that time Dolly had smoothed her hair, retied her hat, whisked a nicer pair of gloves out of her pocket, and taken a rapid survey of herself in a tiny glass concealed from other eyes in the recesses of her bag. She had just time to close and cast the aforesaid bag recklessly upon the floor as her knight came up, bearing a cup of tea and a block of cake, saying in the pleasantly protecting way all women like, —

"Dr. Harris prescribes refreshment after the operation, and this is the best he can find. Your aged admirer was at the counter, eating against time and defying apoplexy,” he added with a laugh, as Dolly gratefully sipped the tea, which, by the way, was as weak as that made at the famous Boston tea-party, when, as every one knows, water was liberally used.

“You saw him, then, when he was plaguing me?”

“I did, and longed to throw him out of the window.”

“Thanks. Did you recognize me before you spoke?”

“Of course I did, and wanted to approach, but didn’t dare till the cinder gave me an excuse.”

“The idea of being afraid of *me*!”

“How could I help being afraid, when you told me Miss Dolly was ‘awful’?” asked John, twinkling with fun, as he sat on the arm of a seat sociably eating a sandwich, which under other circumstances would have struck him as being a remarkable combination of sawdust and sole-leather.

Before Dolly could reply except by a guilty blush, a bell rang, and John hurried away with the empty cup.

A moment or two later the stout gentleman appeared, wiping his mouth, evidently feeling in a better humor, and ready to make up with his pretty neighbor. Smiling blandly, he was about to remove the valise, when Miss Dolly laid her hand upon it, saying with great dignity, “This seat is engaged, sir. There are plenty of others now, and I wish this for my friend.”

Here John, who was just behind, seeing his prize in danger, gave a gentle shove to several intervening fellow-beings, who in turn propelled the “stout party” past the disputed place, which the young man took with an air of entire satisfaction, and a hearty “Thank you!” which told Dolly he had overheard her little speech.

She colored beautifully, but said with grateful frankness, —

“It wasn’t a fib: a friend in need is a friend indeed, and in return for the cinder I’m glad to give you a seat.”

“Blessed be the cinder, then!” murmured John, feeling at peace with all mankind. Then taking advantage of the propitious moment, he added in a penitential tone, —

“I want to apologize for my stupidity and unintentional rudeness yesterday.”

“About what?” asked Dolly, innocently, though her eyes began to sparkle with amusement.

“Why, taking it into my head that Miss Hill must be oldish, and going on in that absurd way about spinsters.”

“Well, I *am* a spinster, and not so young as I have been. *I* ought to apologize for not telling you who I was; but it was so very funny to hear you go on in that sober way to my face, I couldn’t spoil it,” said the girl, with a look that upset

John’s repentant gravity; and they laughed together as only the young and happy can.

“It is very good of you to take it so kindly, but I assure you it weighed upon my conscience, and it is a great relief to beg pardon,” he said, feeling as if they had been friends for years.

“Have you been sketching old things ever since?” asked Dolly, changing the conversation with womanly tact.

“Yes: I went to several places further on, but didn’t find any thing half so good as your chair and tankard. I suppose you are taking the relics to town now?”

“All but one.”

“Which is that?”

“The pumpkin hood. It is the only thing my step-mother admires among my treasures, and she would not give it up. You rather admired it, didn’t you?” asked Dolly, with her demurest air.

“I deserve to be laughed at for my panic,” answered John, owning up manfully; then pulled out his sketch-book, with an eye to business even in the middle of a joke.

“See here! I tried to get that venerable hood into my sketch, but couldn’t quite hit it. Perhaps you can help me.”

“Let me see them all,” said Dolly, taking possession of the book with a most flattering air of interest.

“Nothing there but queer or famous things, all a hundred years old at least,” began John, quite forgetting his stolen sketch of a pretty girl cleaning a snuffer-tray, which he had worked up with great care the night before. Perhaps this made the book open at that particular page, for, as the words left his lips, Dolly’s eyes fell on her own figure, too well done to be mistaken, even if the artist’s face had not betrayed him.

“What ‘queer’ or ‘famous’ *old* person of the last century is that, please?” she asked, holding it off, and looking at it through her hand, while her lips broke into a smile in spite of her efforts to look unconscious.

Knowing that a pretty woman will easily forgive a liberty of that sort, John got out of the scrape handsomely by answering with mock gravity, —

“Oh, that’s Madam Hancock, when a girl. Did you never see the famous portrait at Portsmouth?”

“No. The dress is rather modern, and not quite in keeping with the antique chair she is sitting in,” observed the girl, critically.

“That’s to be added later. I have to work up things, you know, — a face here, a costume there, and so on: all artists do.”

“So I see. There’s the hood; but it wants a cape,” and Dolly turned the leaf, as much amused at his quickness as flattered by his compliment.

There were not many sketches as yet, but she admired them all, and, when the book was shut, chatted on about antiquities, feeling quite friendly and comfortable; for there was respect, as well as admiration, in the honest blue eyes, and the young man did not offend as the old one had done.

"As you are interested in curiosities, perhaps you may like to see some that I have here in my bag. I am very fond and proud of them, because they are genuine, and have histories of old times attached to them," she said presently.

"I shall feel much honored by being allowed to look at them," replied the artist, remembering that "people used to laugh at poor Miss Dolly and her 'duds.'"

"This little pin, made of two hearts in diamonds and rubies, with a crown above, used to be worn by my mother's great aunt, Madam Hancock. She was a Quincy, you know. And this long garnet buckle fastened the Governor's stock," began Dolly, displaying her store with a gentle pride pleasant to see.

"Most interesting! but I can't help feeling grateful that this J. H. doesn't have to wear a stock requiring a foot-long buckle like that," answered John, picturing himself in the costume of the past century, and wondering if it would suit his manly face and figure.

"Now don't laugh at this relic, for it is very curious, though *you* won't appreciate it as a woman would;" and Dolly unfolded an old-fashioned housewife of red velvet, lined with faded yellow damask. "That was made by my dear mother out of a bit of the velvet lining of the Governor's state-coach, and the coverlet that a French Comte tore with his spurs."

"Come, that sounds well! I appreciate coaches and spurs, if I'm not up to brooches and needle-books. Tell the story, please," besought John, who found it the most delightful thing in the world to sit there, following the pretty motions of the small hands, the changeful expression of the winsome face, and enjoying the companionship of the confiding creature beside him.

"Well, you see, when Madam married Captain Scott many of the Governor's things were taken from her, among them the state-coach. By the way, it is said to be in existence now, stored away in somebody's barn down in Portland. You had better go and sketch it," began Dolly, smoothing out the old housewife, and evidently glad to tell the little story of the ancestress whom she was said to resemble, though she modestly refrained from mentioning a fact of which she was immensely proud.

"I will!" and John soberly made a memorandum to visit the ancient coach.

"When my great-great aunt was told she must give up the carriage, she ripped out the new velvet lining, which had been put in at her expense, and gave the bits to her various nieces. Mother made a spencer of hers, and when it was worn out kept enough for this needle-book. The lining is a scrap of the yellow damask counterpane that was on the bed in which the Frenchman should have slept when he came with Lafayette to visit Madam, only he was so tipsy he laid on the outside, and tore the fine cover with his spurs. There’s a nice Comte for you!”

“I’d like to see the spurs, nevertheless. Any more treasures?” and John peered into the bag, as if he thirsted for more antiquarian knowledge.

“Only one, and this is the most valuable of all. Stoop down and look: I’m afraid I may be robbed, if I display my things carelessly.”

John obediently bent till the sweeping feather of her hat touched his cheek, to the great annoyance of the banished peri, who viewed these pleasant passages from afar with much disfavor.

“This is said to be Madam’s wedding ring. I like to think so, and am very proud to be named for her, because she was a good woman as well as a” —

“Beauty,” put in John, as the speaker paused to open a faded case in which lay a little ring of reddish gold.

“I was going to say — as well as a brave one; for I need courage,” added the girl, surveying the old-fashioned trinket with such a sober face that the young man refrained from alluding to the remarkable coincidence of another John and Dolly looking at the wedding ring together.

She seemed to have forgotten all about her companion for a moment, and be busy with her own thoughts, as she put away her treasures with a care which made it a pleasure to watch her tie knots, adjust covers, repack her little bag, and finally fold her hands over it, saying gravely, —

“I love to think about those times; for it seems as if people were better then, — the men more honest, the women more womanly, and every thing simpler and truer than now. Does it ever seem so to you?”

“Indeed it does; for this very day, as I read the papers, I got quite low-spirited, thinking what a shameful state things have got into. Money seems to be the one idea, and men are ready to sell their souls for it,” answered John, as soberly as she.

“Money is a good thing to have, though;” and Dolly gave a little sigh, as she drew her scarf over the worn edges of her jacket.

“So it is!” echoed John, with the hearty acquiescence of a man who had felt the need of it.

“My name and these old treasures are all my fortune, and I used to be contented with it; but I’m not now, dependence is so hateful!” added the girl, impulsively; then bit her lip, as if the words had escaped in spite of her.

“And this is all mine,” said John, twirling the pencil which he still held; giving confidence for confidence, and glad to do it, if it made them better friends, for he pitied little Miss Dolly, suspecting what was true, that her home was not a happy one.

She thanked him mutely for the kind look he gave her, and said prettily, —

“Skill is money; and it must be a very pleasant life to go about drawing beautiful or curious things.”

“So it is sometimes, — yesterday, for instance,” he answered, laughing.

“*I* have no modern accomplishments to earn a living by. Mine are all old-fashioned; and no one cares for such nowadays, except in servants. I may be very glad of them, though; for playing lady doesn’t seem half so honest as going out to service, when one has nothing but an empty pair of hands,” she said with a wistful yet courageous look at the wintry world outside, which made her companion feel a strong desire to counsel and protect this confiding young Columbus, who knew so little of the perils which would beset her voyage in search of a woman’s El Dorado.

“Come to me for a recommendation before you try it. I can vouch for your cooking, you know. But I’d advise you to play lady till you discover a good safe place. I don’t believe you’ll find it hard, for the world is likely to be very kind to such as you,” he answered, so cheerily that she brightened like a flower to which a stray sunbeam is very welcome.

A shrill whistle announced that the journey was over, and everybody began at once to fuss and fumble. John got up to take his valise from the rack, and Dolly began to struggle into her rubbers. She was still bending down to do this, with as little damage as possible to her best gloves, when she heard a sounding slap and a hearty voice cry out, —

“Hullo, John!” then add in a lower tone, “So there *is* a Mrs. Harris, you sly dog, you?”

“Hush! there isn’t. How are you, George?” returned another voice, beginning in a hurried whisper and ending in an unnecessarily loud salutation.

What happened for a minute or two after that Dolly did not know; for the rubbers proved so refractory that she only rose from the encounter flushed and hurried, as the train entered the station.

“Let me make myself useful in looking after your baggage,” said her self-constituted escort, handing her out with great respect and care.

“Thank you: all my things come by express, so I’ve nothing to do but get into a carriage.”

“Then allow me to see you safely there, for the sake of the treasures, if nothing else;” and John led her away, utterly ignoring the presence of “George,” who stood looking after them, with a face full of good-humored interest and amusement.

“I’m very much obliged. Good-by,” said Dolly, from the coach window.

“Not good-by: I’m coming to the fair, you know,” answered John, lingering at the door as if loath to lose sight of his little friend.

“I forgot all about it!”

“I didn’t; for I depend on the cakes and ale and all the other good things promised me.”

“You will find them there,” with a smile, and then a sudden blush as she remembered that he had not only agreed to speak to “Miss Dolly,” but to “win her old heart.”

He remembered also, and laughed as he bowed with the same audacious look he had worn when he made that rash vow.

“I wonder if he *will* come?” thought the girl, as she drove away.

“As if *I* should forget!” said John to himself, as he trudged through the snow, quite regardless of his waiting friend; for from the little cinder had been kindled a spark of the divine fire that moves one of the great engines which transport mankind all the world over.

CHAPTER III.

CONFIDENTIAL.

John Harris promised to “do” the fair, and kept his word handsomely; for he was there every day for a week, lunching in the old-fashioned kitchen, and then, in his official capacity, sketching every relic he could lay his eyes on. Such punctuality caused the pretty waiters to smile affably upon this faithful devourer of primitive viands, and the matrons to predict great things from the young artist’s application to his work.

Little guessed the girls and the gossips that love was ravaging their generous patron’s heart more persistently than he did their tables, and that nature not art caused his devotion to modern beauty rather than ancient ugliness. For all John saw in the crowd that filled the place was Dolly, tripping to and fro tray in hand, spinning at her wheel, or resting beside Aunt Maria, twin sister of Mrs. Hill, in an imposing cap instead of the pumpkin hood. Pretty Dolly was the belle of the kitchen; for she alone of all the dozen damsels on duty looked her part, and was in truth a country girl, rich in the old-fashioned gifts and graces of health, modesty, housewifely skill, and the sweet maidenliness which girls who come out at sixteen soon lose for ever. Her dress, too, was wonderfully complete and becoming, though only a pink and white chintz, a mob-cap, and an uncompromising apron, with the pin-ball, scissors, keys, and linen pocket hanging at the side. The others looked like stage soubrettes, and acted like coquettish young ladies who knew nothing about their work. But Dolly was genuine throughout, so she proved a great success; and Aunt Maria took all the credit of it to herself, felt that she had done a good thing in bringing so much youth, energy, and loveliness to market, and expressed her satisfaction by talking a great deal about “our family,” which, as she was a Smith, was certainly large enough to furnish endless gossip.

Another person watched, admired, and hovered about the girl like a blue-bottle fly about a rose; and that was Mr. Aaron Parker, a dapper little man of fifty, who, having made a snug fortune, was now anxious to marry and settle. Aunt Maria was evidently his confidant and friend; and it was soon apparent that Aunt Maria intended to make a match between her niece and this amiable gentleman, who set about his wooing with old-fashioned formality and deliberation.

All this John saw, heard, or divined with the keenness of a lover, while he watched the events of that week; for he very soon made up his mind that he adored “Miss Dolly,” as he always called her to himself. The short time which had elapsed between the car episode and the opening of the fair seemed endless to him; and, when he came beaming into the kitchen the very first day, his heart sang for joy at sight of that bonny face once more. She welcomed him so kindly, served him so prettily, and showed such frank and friendly pleasure at meeting him again, that the lonely fellow felt as if he had suddenly found a large and attached family, and yielded to the charm without a struggle. She seemed to belong to him somehow, as if he had discovered her, and had the first right to admire, help, and love her; for he alone of all the men there had seen her at home, had looked deepest into the shy, bright eyes, and heard her call him “friend.”

This delightful state of things lasted for a few days, during which he felt as if quaffing nectar and tasting ambrosia, while he drank the promised cider and ate the spicy “sweethearts” which Dolly always brought him with a smile that went directly to his head, and produced a delicious sort of intoxication. He never could have but a word or two, she was so busy; but, as he sat apart, pretending to sketch, he was living over those brief, blissful moments, and concocting wonderfully witty, wise, or tender speeches for the morrow.

Well for him that no one looked over his shoulder at such times, for his portfolio would have betrayed him, since it was a wild jumble of andirons and mob-caps, antique pepper-pots and pretty profiles, spinning-wheels, and large eyes with a profusion of lash; while a dainty pair of feet in high-heeled slippers seemed to dance from page after page, as if the artist vainly sought to exorcise some persistent fancy by booking it over and over again.

Suddenly a change appeared both in the man and in his work; for Parker had arrived, and clouds began to gather on the horizon which was rosy with the dawn of love. Now John discovered that the cider was sour and the cake stale, for the calls of a voracious rival cruelly abbreviated his moments of bliss. Now he glared and brooded in corners where once he had revelled in dreams of a dim but delightful future. Now the pages of his sketch-book bore grotesque likenesses of a round, snub-nosed countenance in all sorts of queer places, such as a clock-face, under a famous cocked hat, or peeping out of a memorable warming-pan; while a dapper figure was seen in various trying attitudes, the most frequent being prone before the dancing feet, one of which was usually spurning a fat money-bag, with contempt in every line of the pretty slipper.

At this stage, the fair ended, and Aunt Maria bore the charmer away, leaving John to comfort himself with the memory of a parting look of regret from behind Governor Hancock's punch-bowl, which Dolly embraced with one arm, while the other guarded Madam's best china tea-pot.

Maddening was it to haunt the street before Aunt Maria's door, and hear a gay voice singing inside fit to melt a paving stone, to say nothing of a young man's heart. More maddening still to catch occasional glimpses of the girl shut up in a carriage with the dragon, or at concerts and theatres under the escort of Mr. Parker. But most maddening of all was the frequent spectacle of this enamoured gentleman trotting up the street, simpering to himself as he went, and freely entering at the door which shut the younger lover out of Paradise.

At such trying periods, John (now very far gone indeed, for love feeds on air) would feel a wild desire to knock the little man down, storm Aunt Maria's mansion, and carry his Dolly away from what he felt assured was an irksome bondage to the girl. But, alas! where could he carry the dear creature when he had got her? For all the home he possessed was one room in a dull boarding-house, and his only fortune the salary his pencil earned him. Then, as he groaned over these sad facts, a great temptation would assail him; for he remembered that with a word he could work the miracle which would give him half a million, and make all things possible but the keeping of his own self-respect.

Hard times just then for John Harris; and for some weeks he went about his daily duties with such a divided mind and troubled spirit that the stoniest heart might have pitied him. But comfort came when least expected, and in trying to help another he got help himself and hope beside.

One gusty March morning he arrayed himself in his best, put a posy in his button-hole, and went gallantly away to Aunt Maria's door, bound to make a call in spite of her frowns at the fair, and evident desire to ignore his existence since. Boldly ringing the forbidden bell, he inquired for the ladies. Both were engaged; and, as if nothing should be wanting to his chagrin, as he went down the steps Mr. Parker, bearing a suggestive bouquet, went up and was instantly admitted.

It was too much for poor John, who rushed away into the park, and pulling his hat over his eyes tramped wrathfully down the mall, muttering to himself, —

"It's no use; I *must* give in; for with a fortune in my pocket I could carry all before me, — bribe Aunt Maria, outbid Aaron, and win my Dolly, if I'm not much mistaken."

Just then a sharp yelp roused him from his excited reverie, and looking up he found that he had kicked a fat poodle, who was waddling slowly along, while some way before him went a little figure in a gray hat, at sight of which John's heart gave a leap. Here was bliss! Dolly alone at last, and he could defy the dragon and all her machinations. Parker and his fine bouquet were nowhere; Harris and his button-hole posy had the best of it now; and, leaving the fat poodle to whine and waddle at its own sweet will, the happy man hurried forward to make the most of this propitious moment.

As he drew near, he observed that a handkerchief went more than once to the face which drooped in a thoughtful way as the feet paced slowly on.

"Bless her heart! she is catching cold, and dreaming dreams, here all alone," thought John, as, stepping to her side, he said gently, that he might not startle her, "Good-morning, Miss Dolly."

He did startle her, nevertheless, and himself as well; for, as she turned quickly, he saw that her face was bathed in tears. Instantly all his own troubles took wing; and, with no thought but how to comfort her, he said impetuously, —

"I beg pardon, but do tell me what is the matter?" He came upon her so suddenly that there was no time to hide the tell-tale tears. He looked so eager, kind, and helpful, she could not be offended at his words; and just then she needed a friend so much, it was hard to resist confiding in him. Yet, womanlike, she tried to hide her little worries, to make light of her girlish grief, and turn a brave face to the world. So she brushed the drops from her eyes, put on a smile, and answered stoutly, —

"It was very foolish of me to cry, but it is so dull and lonely here I think I was a little homesick."

"Then perhaps you won't mind if I walk on a bit with you and apologize for kicking your little dog?" said John, artfully availing himself of this excuse.

"No, indeed. He is Aunt Maria's dog; but how came you to do it?" asked the girl, plainly showing that a human companion was very welcome.

"I was in a brown study, and did it by accident. He's so fat it didn't hurt him much," answered the young man, assuming his gayest manner for her sake. Then he added, with an excuse which did not deceive her a bit, —

"The fact is, I'd ventured to call on you to see if I could get a sketch of the punch-bowl; but you were engaged, the girl said, and I was rather disappointed."

"What a fib! I'm sorry I was out; but the house was gloomy and Aunt rather cross, so I ran away under pretence of giving old Tip an airing."

"Ah, you don't know what you lost! Mr. Parker went in as I came out, with such a nosegay! — for Aunt Maria, I suppose?" and John tried to look quite easy and gay as he spoke.

Dolly's face darkened ominously, and a worried look came into her eyes as she glanced behind her, then quickened her steps, saying, with a little groan that was both comic and pathetic, —

"It does seem as if it was my doom to be tormented by old gentlemen! I wish you'd get rid of this one as you did of the other."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," answered John, with such heartiness that a sudden color dried Dolly's wet cheeks, as she remembered that he had got rid of tormentor number one by taking his place.

Cheered by the knowledge that a champion was ready to defend her, she ventured to show him a safer way in which to serve her, saying very soberly, —

"I think I may be glad of the recommendation you once promised me. Should you mind giving it?"

"Are you tired of 'playing lady' so soon?" he asked anxiously.

"So tired that I felt to-day as if I'd like to run away and take service with the first person who would engage me."

"Don't!" exclaimed John, with such energy that the fat poodle barked shrilly and made a feeble charge at his boots, feeling that something was wrong somewhere. "Run away home, if you must run, but pray don't get discouraged and do any thing rash," he went on with great earnestness; for he saw by her face that she was in some real trouble.

"I haven't even a home to run to; for Mrs. Hill agrees with Aunt that it's time I ceased to be a burden. It's very hard, when I only ask a safe corner in the world, and am willing to work for it," cried the girl, with an irrepressible sob; for the trials of many weeks had grown unbearable, and a kind word made the full heart overflow.

Neither spoke for a minute, then John said with a respectful earnestness which touched her very much, —

"Miss Dolly, you once called me a friend, and I was very proud to be so honored. Forget that I am any thing else, and, if you have no one wiser and older to consult, trust me, and let me help you. I've knocked about the world enough to know how hard it is for a man to get an honest living, doubly hard for a woman, especially one as young and beautiful as you are. There are safe corners, I am sure; but it takes time to find them, so pray be patient and do nothing without care."

"I called you a friend in need, and so you are; for, strange as it may seem, there is no one to whom I can go for disinterested advice. I know so little of the world that I'm afraid to trust my own judgment, yet I am driven to decide between dependence of a sort I despise, or to stand alone and take care of myself. *Will* you advise me?" and she looked up with an appealing glance, which read such a reassuring answer in the honest eyes full of sincerest sympathy that she was comforted before he spoke.

"Indeed I will! for what are we all here for, if not to help one another? Do you know I think there is a sort of fate about these things, and it's no use to struggle against it. We seem to be two ‘lone, lorn’ creatures thrown together in queer ways, so let’s agree to be old friends and stand by each other. Come, is it a bargain?”

He seemed so firmly convinced of the inevitability of this fate that the girl felt relieved from farther scruples, and agreed in all good faith.

“Now about the troubles?” began John, trying to look old, reliable, and wise; for he guessed the one she was most reluctant to tell.

“I suppose marrying for an establishment or earning their bread is a question most poor girls have to settle sooner or later,” observed Dolly, in a general sort of way, as an opening; for, in spite of his praiseworthy efforts, her young counsellor did not succeed in looking like a sage.

“If pretty, yes; if plain, no. We needn’t discuss the latter class, but go on to the question,” returned John, keeping to the subject in hand with masculine pertinacity.

“I’d rather be an old man’s housekeeper than his wife; but people won’t believe it, and laugh at me for being what they call so foolish,” said the girl, petulantly; for she did not seem to be getting on well with her confidences.

“I thought from what I saw at the fair that Parker seemed ready to offer both situations for your acceptance.”

John could not help saying that, for a jealous pang assailed him at the mere idea. He feared that he had spoilt the *rôle* he was trying to play; but it happened to be the best thing he could have done, for the introduction of that name made things much easier for Dolly, as she proved by kindling up as suddenly as if the word had been a match to fire a long train of grievances.

“He did; and Aunt scolds me from morning till night, because I won’t accept the fine establishment he offers me. That’s what I was sent here for! My step-mother wants me out of the way, Aunt Maria hands me over to Mr. Parker, and he takes me because I know how to cook and nurse. I might as well be put up at auction and sold to the highest bidder!” she cried, with eyes flashing through indignant tears.

“It’s abominable!” echoed John, with equal indignation, though the words “highest bidder” rung in his ears, as he thought of the fortune waiting for him, and the youth which would tell so strongly in the race against “old Parker,” as he irreverently called the little man; for fifty seems a patriarchal age to four-and-twenty.

“I know that sort of thing is done every day, and thought quite right; but I am so old-fashioned it seems terrible to marry merely for a home. Yet I’m very tired of being poor, and I *should* like a taste of ease and pleasure while I can enjoy them,” added Dolly, with a very natural longing for the bright and happy side of life.

"And I could give her all she wants," thought John, with the temptation getting stronger every minute. But he only said a little bitterly, "You'd better give in, if you want ease and pleasure, for money can buy any thing."

"No, it can't buy love, and that is better than all the splendor in the world," answered the girl, in a tone that thrilled her hearer to the heart. "What *I* call love seems to have gone out of fashion; and that is what troubles me; because, if there *isn't* any such thing, I may as well take the next best, and try to be contented. No one seems to value love for itself alone, to feel the need of it as much as light and air, to miss it when it goes, or try to earn and keep it as the most precious thing in the world. Money and position are every thing, and men work and women marry for these, as if they had no other hope or end; and I'm frightened at the things I see and hear in what is called society."

"Poor child, I don't wonder; but I assure you there *is* an ocean of love in the world, only it gets put out of sight in the rush, wasted on those who don't deserve it, or dammed up by adverse circumstances. It exists though, the real genuine article, waiting for a market. *Do* believe it, and wait for it, and I'm sure it will come in time."

John was so divided between a rash impulse to prove his point by a declaration then and there, and the conviction that it would be altogether premature, his metaphors got rather mixed, and he had to pull himself up abruptly. But Dolly thought it a beautiful speech, was glad to believe every word of it, and accepted this piece of advice with admirable docility.

"I'll wait, and meantime be looking about for the safe corner to run to when Aunt Maria gets tired of me, because I don't mean to go home again to be a burden." Then, as if anxious to slip away from a too interesting topic, she asked with a very winning expression of interest and good-will, —

"Now what can I do for you? I'm sure you have worries as well as I, and, though not very wise, perhaps I might advise in my turn."

"You are very good, but I couldn't think of troubling you;" and the young man looked both pleased and flurried by the girl's offer.

"We agreed to help one another, you remember; and I must do my part, or the bargain won't be a fair one. Tell me what the brown study was about, and I'll forgive the kick poor Tip got," persisted Dolly; for her feminine instinct told her that a heavy cloud of some sort had been lifted to let sunshine through for her.

John did long to know her opinion on a certain matter, but a man's pride would not let him speak as freely as the girl had done, so he took refuge in a mild subterfuge, and got advice on false pretences.

"It was only a quandary I was in about a friend of mine. He wants my judgment in a case something like yours, and perhaps you *could* help me with an opinion; for women are very wise in such matters sometimes.”

“Please tell me, if you may. I should so love to pay my debts by being of some use;” and Dolly was all attention, as she pushed back her vail as if to get a clear and impartial view of the case about to be submitted.

Fixing his eyes on the sparrows who were disporting themselves among the budding elm-boughs, John plunged abruptly into his story, never once looking at his hearer and speaking so rapidly that he was rather red and breathless when he got through.

“You see, Jack was plodding along after a fashion all by himself, his people being dead, when an old friend of his father’s took it into his head to say, ‘Come and be a son to me, and I’ll leave you a handsome fortune when I die.’ A capital thing it seemed, and Jack accepted, of course. But he soon found that he had given up his liberty, and was a slave to a very tyrannical master, who claimed him soul and body, heart and mind. That didn’t suit Jack, and he would have broken away; but, as you say, he was ‘tired of being poor, and wanted a little ease and pleasure in his life.’ The old man was failing, and the money would soon be his, so he held on, till he suddenly discovered that this fortune for which he was waiting was not honest money, but, like many another great fortune, had been ground out of the poor, swindled out of honest men, or stolen from trusting friends, and hoarded up for a long lifetime, to be left to Jack with the curse of dishonesty upon it. Would you advise him to take it?”

“No,” answered the girl, without a moment’s hesitation.

“Well, he didn’t, but turned his back on the ill-gotten money, and went to work again with clean but empty hands,” added John, still looking away, though his face wore a curiously excited expression under its enforced composure.

“I’m glad, very glad he did! Wasn’t it noble of him?” asked Dolly, full of admiring interest in this unknown Jack.

“It was very hard; for you see he loved somebody, and stood a poor chance of winning her without a penny in his pocket.”

“All the nobler in him then; and, if she was worth winning, she’d love him the more for the sacrifice,” said Dolly, warmly; for the romance of the story took her fancy, though it was poorly told.

“Think so? I’ll mention that to Jack: it will cheer him up immensely, for he’s afraid to try his fate with nothing to offer but his earnings.”

“What’s his business?” asked Dolly suddenly.

“Connected with newspapers, — fair salary, good prospects, — not ashamed to work,” answered John, staring hard at the sparrows, and wiping his forehead, as if he found the bleak day getting too warm for him.

“Is the girl pretty?”

“The most captivating little creature I ever beheld!” cried John, rapturously.

“Oh, indeed,” and Dolly glanced at him sharply, while a shadow passed over her face, as she asked with redoubled interest, “Is she rich?”

“Has nothing but her sweet face and good name I believe.”

“Isn’t that enough?”

“Indeed it is! but Jack wants to make life beautiful and easy for her, and he can by saying a word. He is awfully tempted to say it; for the old man is dying, has sent for him to come back, and there is yet time to secure a part of the fortune. He won’t take it all, but has a fancy that, if he leaves half to charity, it would be a sort of purification to the other half; and he might enjoy it with his love. Don’t you think so?”

“No, it would spoil the whole thing. Why cannot they be contented to begin with nothing but love, and work up together, earning every clean and honest penny they spend. It would be a comfort to see such a pair in this mercenary world, and I do hope they will do it,” said the girl, heartily, though a slightly pensive tone had come into her voice, and she stifled a small sigh, as she put down her vail as if there was nothing worth seeing in the landscape.

“I think they *will* try it!” answered John, with decision, as he smiled sympathetically at a pair of sparrows chirping together at the door of one of the desirable family mansions provided for their use.

Here Tip ended the dangerous dialogue by sitting down before Dolly with a howl of despair, which recalled her to her duty.

“The poor old thing is tired, and must go in. Good-morning, and many thanks,” she said, turning toward the steps, which they would have passed unseen but for the prudent poodle’s hint.

“Good-by, and a thousand pardons for boring you with my affairs,” began John, with a penitent, yet very grateful glance.

“By the way, I’ve been so interested in Jack’s affairs that I’ve forgotten exactly what your advice was to me,” she added, pausing on the upper step for a last word.

With his hat in his hand and his heart in his eyes, John looked up and answered in a tone that made few words necessary, —

“Don’t sell yourself for a home.”

And Dolly answered back with a sweet, shrewd smile that made him flush guiltily, —

“Don’t smother your conscience with a fortune.”

CHAPTER IV.

APRIL FOOLS.

Tip’s constitutionals were taken with praiseworthy regularity about that time, and the poor asthmatic animal was nearly walked off his legs by the vigor with which his little mistress paraded the park at unfashionable hours. A robust young man, who did not look as if he needed early walks, was continually meeting Dolly by accident as it were, till on the fourth *rencontre* they both burst out laughing, gave up all further subterfuge, and felt that it was vain to struggle against fate. The next time they met, both looked very sober; and John said, watching her face as he spoke, —

“It is all over with me, Miss Dolly. The old man is dead, and my chance is lost for ever.”

“You look so solemn, I’m afraid he left you something, after all.”

“Not a penny. All went to various charities, and I have nothing but my salary and these two hands.”

“I’m glad of that! I’d like to shake those honest hands, and wish them all success. May I?” she said, putting out her own with such cordial approval in voice and eyes that John lost his head, and, holding both the small hands fast in his, answered all in one fervently incoherent burst, —

“May you? Let me keep them, and then I *shall* succeed! Dearest Dolly, you said you didn’t want any thing but love; and here’s a whole heart full, aching to be poured out. You said you’d like to see Jack and his wife working their way up together, contented to be poor. Here’s Jack and the wife he wants, if she cares enough for him to try that beautiful experiment. You said you hadn’t any home to run to when those cruel women called you a burden. Run to me, my darling, and be the pride and joy and comfort of my life!”

No one saw what Dolly did but Tip, who sat lolling out his tongue in an imbecile manner; and no one heard what she said but some bright-faced crocuses blooming early in that lonely corner of the park. But from what took place afterward, it was evident that her reply had not been entirely unpropitious; for her hand lay on John’s arm, her face was in an April state between smiles and tears, and to her eyes midsummer warmth and radiance seemed to have fallen suddenly upon the earth. It is hardly necessary to mention that the other party in this little transaction looked as if *he* owned the entire world, was yearning to embrace all mankind, and had nothing more to ask of Heaven in the way of happiness.

“You don’t regret saying yes, like an angel,” asked this unreasonable lover, five minutes after he had surprised her into uttering that momentous monosyllable.

“Not yet.”

“You know that it is very selfish of me to ask you, when I’ve nothing to give; and very unwise in you to take me, because you have much to lose.”

“Why, what?”

“The devoted Parker and his plump pocket-book.”

It was good to hear Dolly laugh at that, and to see John glance defiantly at an elderly gentleman in the distance, as if all that harmless portion of the race ought to be exterminated, to leave room for happy young fellows like himself.

“He will believe now that, when I say ‘No,’ I mean it,” answered Dolly, with an assumption of dignity, which changed with comic suddenness to one of dismay, as she added, “Oh, my heart, what *will* Aunt Maria say!”

“Don’t tell her just yet, or she will shut you up, whisk you away, or do some awful thing to part us. Keep this delicious secret for a little while, and we can enjoy many happy minutes in peace.”

“Yes, John,” with a docility that was altogether captivating to the new commander-in-chief.

“I must look about me, and be getting ready to take you into my home as well as my heart, when the storm breaks. There is sure to be one, I fancy; and, for my part, I rather relish the idea. The air will be clearer and things more settled after it.”

“I don’t know what they will say and do to me, but I shall not mind, now I have you to take care of me;” and Dolly’s other hand went to join the one on John’s arm, with a confiding gesture which glorified the old coat-sleeve, in his eyes, more than any badge it could have worn.

“I suppose we *must* live somewhere, and eat occasionally, since we are mortal. Love certainly *is* the best capital to start on, but a trifle of cash is necessary likewise; so we must take a little thought for the morrow. Wish the city would provide us with a house rent free, and board thrown in, as it does our feathery confidants here,” observed the husband elect, eying the sparrows with a vague sense of domestic cares already stealing over his masculine mind.

“Don’t think of all those worries yet. Just love and be happy for a time, and things will settle themselves somehow,” cried Dolly, whose womanly nature would not be so soon defrauded of the sweet romance which comes but once in a lifetime.

"Very well. We'll give a month to clear bliss, and then talk about the honeymoon."

But, with the charming inconsistency of her sex, no sooner had she forbidden a subject than she felt an intense desire to talk about it; and after a moment's pause, during which her lover had been looking down at her thoughtful face in silent rapture, Dolly emerged from a brief reverie, clapping her hands and exclaiming, —

"John, I've got the most delicious idea that ever was. Now don't laugh and say, 'It isn't practical,' for I know it is; and it would be so new and appropriate and economical, and altogether nice, that I hope you'll approve. We shall want a home by and by, shall we not?"

"I want it now, if you've no objection."

"Be serious. Well, a room or two must content us at first, and we want them to be decent, not to say pretty and comfortable, don't we?"

"They can't help being all three, if you are there, my Dolly."

"No, John, not in public! Now answer me this: won't you have to save up a long time, to get enough to buy furniture and things, no matter how simple?"

"I'm afraid I should; for at present my housekeeping stock is about as large and varied as that of Tommy Traddles. His consisted of a bird-cage and a toasting-fork, I believe; mine, of an easel and a boot-jack. Wouldn't they do to begin with?"

"Please don't joke, but listen; for *this* is the new idea. Take my dear old relics and furnish our nest with them! What *could* be more economical, picturesque, and appropriate for this centennial year?"

Dolly stopped short to see how this amazing proposal struck her lord and master. It seemed to take him off his legs; for he sat suddenly down upon a seat that fortunately was behind him, and looked up at the beaming little woman with an expression of admiration and contentment, which answered her question so emphatically that she nestled down beside him with all her doubts laid at rest.

"I thought you'd like it! Now let's plan it all out, and see what we've got. Every thing is as old as the hills, you know; but still so good and strong we can get years of wear out of it. We don't have such well-made furniture nowadays," she went on, happily blind to the deficiencies of the time-worn chairs, clumsy tables, and cracked china, which were all her store.

"My blessing on every stick of it! I wasn't thinking about the furniture, though. I was rejoicing over the fact that, if I needn't save up for that sort of thing, we could be married all the sooner. That's the beauty of the idea, don't you see?” and John regarded the originator thereof with unmitigated satisfaction.

“So we can; but *do* think about the furniture, because you ought to be interested in helping me make an artistic home,” said Dolly, knowing that the word “artistic” would arrest his attention, and keep him to the subject in hand; for as yet the other idea was too new to bear much discussion.

“I will. In fact, I see it now, all complete. Two or three rooms in an old house, if possible, — they are always the cheapest, my love; so don’t look as if you saw cobwebs and blue mould, and felt black beetles running over your feet. In one room we’ll have that spider-legged table on which you cleaned the snuffer tray, and the claw-footed chairs: there were three, I think, — one for each of us, and the third for a friend. Then on the dresser we’ll put all the porringers out of which we are to eat mush and milk, and the pewter platters for an occasional ‘biled dish,’ — that’s the proper name for the mess, isn’t it? Likewise the dear fat tea-pots, the red china cups, all cracked, the green-handled knives and forks, the wooden spoons, funny pepper-pots, and all the rest of the droll rattletraps.”

“Don’t forget *the* tankard,” cried Dolly, as John paused for breath in the middle of his rhapsody.

“That will be in our parlor, set forth in state on the little stand I used to have my lunch at during the fair. I’m afraid I scratched your initials all over it, that being a trick of mine about that time.”

“I thought you did it! Never mind, but go on, please.”

“We shall put flowers in the immortal mug, and I shall paint them, earn sums, and grow famous, such will be the inspiration of my surroundings. For, while I sit in the General’s chair at my delightful work, you in the pretty chintz gown and the fly-away cap, — promise me to wear it, or I won’t go on?”

“I’ll wear any thing you like, in the house, and can have a water-proof and a linen duster for the street. Artists’ wives usually do have to make guys of themselves, I believe.”

“Thank you, dear. Well, you will always be doing one of three things, making sweethearts, spinning, or looking over my shoulder. I prefer the latter occupation on the whole, and when I’m at home that will be your mission. During my absence, you can attend to the housework you love so well, and do so prettily. Never did I see such brilliant candlesticks in my life; and as for the copper tea-kettle, it was like a mirror. I saw you steal peeps at it more than once, Little Vanity, that day as I sat stealing a sketch of you.”

“Then you think it can be done, John?” ignoring the accusation.

“It not only *can*, but it *shall* be done, and I shouldn’t wonder if we set the fashion of furnishing bridal bowers with relics of all sorts, throwing in a glue-pot gratis, to mend up the old things when they tumble to pieces. I’m great at that, and can get my living as a cabinetmaker when art fails."

"I do believe you can do every thing, John!"

"No, I couldn't cure pneumonia, if you should get it by sitting in this chilly wind. Now I've got you, I intend to take great care of you, my little treasure."

It was so sweet to Dolly to be cared for, and so delightful to John to do it, that they forgot all about poor Tip till he tumbled into the pond, and was with difficulty fished out by his ears and tail, being too fat to do any thing but float. This catastrophe shortened an interview which might otherwise have been prolonged till nightfall, for

"Lightly falls the foot of time That only treads on flowers."

"Why, John, do you know that this is the first of April?" asked Dolly, as they went homeward, with Tip forlornly dripping in the rear. "A very fitting day for such an imprudent couple as we are to begin their journey," she added, enjoying the idea immensely.

"So it is! Never mind! we'll prove that we are no fools, though a mercenary world may call us so," returned John, as blithe as she.

Alas, poor things! they thought their troubles were all over, now they had found each other; whereas a cruel fate was laughing at them round the corner.

CHAPTER V.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

Unfortunately for these deluded young persons, their month of bliss turned out to be the most tempestuous one they had ever passed; for, before the first week was over, some malignant imp inspired Aunt Maria to spy, from a certain end window which commanded a corner of the park, the lingering adieux of the lovers, and then it was all up with them.

A single stormy debate, during which John manfully claimed his Dolly, she stoutly defended her right to love whom she chose, and Aunt Maria thundered and lightened unavailingly, resulted in the banishment of the claimant, the strict seclusion of the damsel, and the redoubled devotion of the decorous but determined Parker, who, cheered on by his ally, still besieged the rebellious heart, undaunted by the reinforcements lately received.

The prospect was certainly not a hopeful one; but the young people never lost courage, rather enjoyed it on the whole, and revolved endless schemes in their busy brains, which they confided to one another by means of notes slipped under Tip's collar when he took his solitary airings on the steps. For a time persecution lent its zest to their love; but presently separation grew unbearable, and they were ready for revolt.

"I *must* see you," wrote John, in note number 37.

"You *shall*," answered Dolly, and bade him meet her at one of the many Centennial Balls which afflicted the world in 1875-76.

To hear was to obey; and though said ball was to be eminently select, thanks to a skilful use of his middle name, John was able to keep the appointed tryst, well knowing that there is no solitude like that to be found in a crowd. Costumes were in order; and there was a general resurrection of ancient finery, which made the handsome hall look as if time had rolled back a hundred years. Every one who had a hair powdered it, and those who had not made up the deficiency by imposing wigs. Spindle-legged gentlemen affected top-boots and spurs; those blessed with a manly development of calf pranced in silk stockings and buckled shoes. British and Continental uniforms amicably marched shoulder to shoulder; dimity and brocade mingled prettily together; and patriotic ardor animated the hearts under the lace stomachers and embroidered waistcoats as warmly as of old, for the spirit of ‘76 was all alive again.

Aunt Maria looked like a parrot of the most brilliant plumage; for the good lady burned to distinguish herself, and had vainly tried to wear a suit of Madam Hancock’s belonging to Dolly. Fortunately, Madam was a small woman, and Aunt Maria quite the reverse; so she was forced to give it up, and content herself with being one of many Martha Washingtons who filled the dowagers’ corner.

So Dolly bloomed into the sweetest little old-time lady ever seen, and was in truth by nature as by name a Dorothy Quincy. Not as the matron, but as the maid, with all her curly locks turned over a roller before they fell on her white neck, where shone the jewelled hearts she prized so much. Lilies of the valley embroidered her white gown, and nestled among the lace that rose and fell upon her bosom. From under her quilted satin petticoat “her little feet stole in and out,” wearing Madam’s wedding-shoes, so high in the heels and so pointed at the toes that Dolly suffered martyrdom with a smiling face, and danced at the risk of her life. Long gloves, with Lafayette’s likeness stamped on the back, kept splitting at the time-worn seams, so plump were the arms inside. A quaint scent-bottle hung at her waist; and she hid her blushes behind a great fan, whose dim mirror had reflected faces history has made immortal.

“You are simply perfect, Miss Hill, and nothing could be added,” whispered the still hopeful Parker, who was on duty and much elated by the fact; for the girl was unusually friendly that evening for reasons of her own.

“Except the Governor,” she answered, peeping over her fan with eyes full of anxiety as well as merriment; for John had not yet appeared, and the little man beside her was very funny in a voluminous white neckcloth, furred coat-collar, and square-toed shoes, carefully kept in the “first position.” He had longed to personate the character she suggested. Stature forbade, however; and he had contented himself with personating Benjamin Franklin, flattering himself that his placid countenance and neat legs would be remarkably effective, also the fact that he had been connected with the printing interest in early life.

“If you had only told me, I would have attempted it for your sake: you have but to express a wish, and I am charmed to gratify it,” murmured the enamoured Benjamin, with a tenderly reproachful sigh, which stirred his rampant shirt-frill like a passing breeze.

At that moment, as if a wish *had* brought him, a veritable John Hancock stood before them, looking comelier than ever, in a velvet suit, as he laid his cocked hat upon his heart and asked, with a bow so deep that it afforded a fine view of the garnet buckle in his stock, —

“May I have the honor, Madam?”

Glad to hide a traitorously happy face, Dolly made him a splendid curtsey, and took his arm with a hasty —

“Excuse me, Mr. Parker. Please tell Aunt I’m going to dance.”

“But — but — but — my dear Miss, I promised not to lose sight of you,” stammered the defrauded Franklin, turning red with helpless rage, as the full audacity of the lovers burst upon him.

“Well, you needn’t. Wait for me here till my dance is over, then Aunt won’t know any thing about it,” laughed wilful Dolly over her shoulder, as she was swept away into the many-colored whirlpool that circled round the hall to the entrancing music of a waltz.

While it lasted, words were needless; for eyes did the talking, smiles proud or tender telegraphed volumes of poetry, the big hand held the little one so close that it burst quite out of the old glove rosy with the pressure, and the tall head was often so near the short one that the light locks powdered the dark ones.

“A heavenly waltz!” panted Dolly, when it ended, feeling that she could go on for ever, blind to the droll despair of poor Parker, as, heroically faithful to his trust, he struggled frantically to keep the happy pair in sight.

“Now we’ll have a still more heavenly promenade in the corridor. Ben is busy apologizing to half a dozen ladies whose trains he has walked up in his mad career after us, so we are safe for a time,” answered John, ready to brave the wrath of many Aunt Marias; for the revolutionary spirit was high within him, and he had quite made up his mind that resistance to tyrants *was* obedience to the little god he served just then.

“Oh, John, how glad I am to see you after all this worry, and how nice it was of you to come in such grand style to-night! I was so afraid you couldn’t manage it,” said Dolly, hanging on his arm and surveying her gallant Governor with pardonable pride.

“My blessed girl, there was nothing I couldn’t manage with the prospect of meeting you before me. Hasn’t it been hard times for both of us? You’ve had the hardest, I’m afraid, shut up with the dragon and no refuge from daily nagging and Parker’s persecution. If you hadn’t the bravest little heart in the world, you’d have given up by this;” and, taking advantage of a shadowy corner, John embraced his idol, under pretence of drawing her cloak about her.

“I’ll never give up the ship!” cried the girl, quoting Lawrence of the “Chesapeake,” with a flash of the eye good to see.

“Stand to your guns, and we’ll yet say, ‘We’ve met the enemy, and they are ours,’“ answered John, in the words of brave Perry, and with a ring to his voice which caused a passing waiter to pause, fancying he was called.

Beckoning to him, John gave Dolly a glass of lemonade, and, taking one himself, said with a look that made the toast a very eloquent one to both of them, —

"The love of liberty — and — the liberty of love."

They drank it silently, then paced on again, so intent upon their own emotions that neither saw a flushed and agitated countenance regard them from a doorway, and then vanish, smiling darkly.

"Governor!"

"Dearest Madam!"

"Things have come to a crisis, and I've taken a resolution," began Dolly, remembering that time was short.

"So have I."

"This is mine, — I'm going to Philadelphia."

"No!"

"Yes."

"How? when? why?"

"Be calm and listen. Aunt has given me just three days to choose between accepting P. and being sent home in disgrace. I don't intend to do either, but take matters into my own hands, and cease to be a burden."

"Hear! hear! but how?"

"At the fair the kitchen was a success, and there is to be a grand one at the Exposition. Girls are wanted to wait there as here; they are taken care of, and all expenses paid while they serve. I know some nice people who are going for fun, and I'm to join them for a month at least. That gives me a start, and afterward I certainly can find something to do in the city of Brotherly Love."

"The knowledge that *I'm* to be there on duty had nothing to do with this fine plan of yours, hey, my Dolly?" and John beamed at her with such a rapturous expression she had to turn him round, lest an advancing couple should fancy he had been imbibing something stronger than lemonade and love.

"Why, of course it had," she answered with adorable candor. "Don't you see how lovely it will be to meet every day and talk over our prospects in peace, while we are working away together till we have earned enough to try the experiment we planned in the park?"

Stopping short, John grasped the hand that lay on his arm, looking as if suddenly inspired, and exclaimed in a solemn yet excited tone, —

"*I've* got a plan, a superb plan, only it may startle you a bit at first. Why not marry and go together?"

Before Dolly could find breath to answer this momentous question, a bombshell, in the shape of Aunt Maria, exploded before them, and put an end to the privy conspiracy and rebellion.

"You will *not* go anywhere together, for my niece is in the care of this gentleman. I did think we should be free from annoyance here, but I see I was mistaken. Mr. Parker, will you oblige me by taking Dolly home at once?"

Every feather in the old lady's gray wig trembled with ire, as she plucked the girl from one lover and gave her to the charge of the other, in whom the conflicting emotions of triumph and trepidation were so visible that the contrast between his countenance and costume was more comical than ever.

"But, Aunt, it isn't time to go yet," protested Dolly, finding submission very hard after her taste of freedom.

"It is quite time for persons who don't know how to behave with propriety in public. Not a word! Take my wrap, and go at once. Mr. Parker, please leave her in Mrs. Cobb's care, and return to enjoy yourself. There is no reason why *your* evening should be spoilt;" and Aunt Maria bundled poor Dolly into an ugly shawl, which made her look like a lovely tea-rose done up in brown paper.

This sudden fall from the height of happiness to the depths of helpless indignation left John speechless for an instant, during which he with difficulty resisted a strong desire to shake Aunt Maria, and spit Benjamin Franklin on the sword that hung at his side. The sight of his Dolly reft from him, and ruthlessly led away from the gayety she loved, reminded him that discretion was the better part of valor, and for her sake he tried to soften the dragon by taking all the blame upon himself, and promising to go away at once. But, while he was expostulating, the wary Parker carried off the prize; and, when John turned to say good-night, she had vanished, and Aunt Maria stalked away, with a grim laugh at his defeat.

That laugh made him desperate; and, rushing downstairs, he was about to walk away in the rain, regardless of the damage to his costly suit, when the sound of a voice checked his reckless flight, and, looking back, he saw Dolly pausing on the stairs to say, with a glance from the ancestral shoes to the wet pavement outside, "I don't mind wetting my feet, but I cannot spoil these precious slippers. Please get my overshoes from the dressing-room: I'll wait for you here."

"Certainly, certainly; and my coat also: we must be prudent after such heat and excitement," replied Mr. Parker, glad to guard himself against the rheumatism twinges which already began to afflict his lightly clad extremities.

As he hurried back, a voice whispered, "Dolly!" and, regardless of the perilously high heels, she ran down to join a black velvet gentleman below, who said in her ear, as he led her toward the door, —

"I *must* have a word more. Let me take you home; any carriage will do, and it's our last chance."

"Yes, John, yes; but oh, my shoes!" and for one instant Dolly lingered, as reverence for her relics contended with love for her Governor.

But he was equal to the occasion, and, having no cloak to lay under his queen’s feet, just took her in his arms, and before she knew it both were in the coach, an order given, and they were off.

“Oh, John, how could you?” was all she said, casting away the big shawl, to put both hands on the powdery shoulders before her; for her escort was on his knees, quite in the style of the days when Sir Charles Willoughby carried Evelina off in his chariot.

How he did it John never knew; but there he was, as unconscious of his long limbs as if he had been a cherub, so intent was he on improving this precious moment.

“I’d like to do a great deal more than that, but not to-night, though I’m sorely tempted to run away with you, Dolly,” he answered, feeling as if it would be impossible to relinquish the little bundle of silk and swan’s down his arm enclosed.

“Oh, John, please don’t! How could I in this dress, and no place to go to, or any thing?”

“Don’t be frightened, dear: I won’t be rash. But, seriously, it must come to that, and the sooner the better; so make up your mind to it, and I’ll manage all the rest. This is my plan, and yours will make it all the easier. We *will* go to Philadelphia; but we’ll be married first, and that shall be our wedding journey.”

“But I’m not ready; we haven’t any money; and only three days! I couldn’t, John, I couldn’t!” and Dolly hid her face, glad, yet half-frightened, at this prospect of such a release from all her woes.

“I knew it would startle you at first; but getting married is the easiest thing in life when you set about it. You don’t want any wedding finery, I’ve got money enough, and can borrow more if I need it; and three days is plenty of time to pack your trunk, have a farewell fight with Aunt Maria, and run away to be the happiest little wife that ever was. Say yes, darling; trust every thing to me, and, please God, you never shall regret it.”

Dolly had doubted the existence of genuine love nowadays, and John had assured her that there were oceans of it. There certainly seemed to be that night; and it was impossible to doubt the truth of his assertion while listening to the tender prayers and plans and protestations he poured into her ear, as they rolled on, regardless of the avenging furies behind, and the untried fate before them. Storms raged without, but peace reigned within; for Dolly showed signs of yielding, though she had not consented when the run-away ride ended.

As John set her down in the hall, he added as a last appeal, —

“Remember, there were ‘Daughters of Liberty,’ as well as sons, in the old times you love so well. Be one, and prove yourself worthy of your name, as you bid me be of mine. Come, sweetheart, resist tyranny, face poverty, love liberty, and declare your independence as bravely as they did."

"I will!" and Dolly signed the declaration her Hancock headed, by giving him her hand and sealing the oath with a kiss.

"One word more," he said hurriedly, as the clatter of an approaching carriage sounded through the street: "I may not be able to see you again, but we can each be getting ready, and meet on Monday morning, when you leave for '*home*' in good truth. Put a lamp in the end window the last thing Sunday night as the bells ring nine, then I shall be sure that all is right, and have no delay in the morning."

"Yes, John."

"Good-night, and God bless you!"

There was no time for more; and as distracted Parker burst out of one carriage, and Aunt Maria "came tumbling after," happy John Harris stepped into the other, with a wave of the cocked hat, and drove away in triumph.

CHAPTER VI.

PEACE IS DECLARED.

The age of miracles is not over yet, and our young people wrought several during those three days; for in love’s vocabulary there is no such word as fail.

Dolly “stood to her guns” womanfully, and not only chose to go “home,” but prepared for her banishment with an outward meekness and an inward joy which made each hour memorable. Aunt Maria had her suspicions and kept a vigilant watch, she and her maid Cobb mounting guard by turns. Parker, finding that “no surrender” was the countersign, raised the siege and retreated in good order, though a trifle demoralized in dignity when he looked back during the evacuation and saw Tip bolt upright in the end window, with the rebel flag proudly displayed.

John meanwhile was circulating briskly through the city, and showing such ardent interest in the approaching Exposition that his mates christened him “Centennial Harris;” while the higher powers felt that they had done a good thing in giving him the job, and increased his salary to make sure of so excellent a servant. Other arrangements of a private but infinitely more interesting nature were successfully made; and he went about smiling to himself, as if the little parcel done up in silver paper, which he was constantly feeling for in his vest pocket, had been a talisman conferring all good gifts upon its happy owner.

When the third night came, he was at his post long before the time, so great was his impatience; for the four-footed traitor had been discovered and ordered into close confinement, where he suffered, not the fate of André, but the pangs of indigestion for lack of exercise after the feast of tidbits surreptitiously administered by one who never forgot all she owed to her “fat friend.”

It seemed as if nine o’clock would never come; and, if a policeman ever was where he should be, the guardian of that beat would have considered John a suspicious character as he paced to and fro in the April starlight. At last the bells began to chime, promptly the light appeared, and, remembering how the bell of the old State House rang out the glad tidings a hundred years ago, John waved his cherished parcel, joyfully exclaiming, “Independence is declared! ring! ring! ring!” then raced across the park like another Paul Revere when the signal light shone in the steeple of the old North Church.

Next morning at an early hour a carriage drove to Aunt Maria's door, and with a stern farewell from her nightcapped relative Dolly was sent forth to banishment, still guarded by the faithful Cobb. The mutinous damsel looked pale and anxious, but departed with a friendly adieu and waved her handkerchief to Tip, disconsolate upon the door-mat. The instant they turned the corner, however, a singular transformation took place in both the occupants of that carriage; for Dolly caught Cobb round the neck and kissed her, while smiles broke loose on either face, as she said gleefully, —

"You dear old thing, what *should* I have done without you? Am I all right? I do hope it's becoming. I had to give up every thing else, so I was resolved not to be married without a new bonnet."

"It's as sweet as sweet can be, and not a bit the worse for being smuggled home in a market-basket," returned the perjured Cobb, surveying with feminine pride and satisfaction the delicate little bonnet which emerged from the thick veil by which its glories had been prudently obscured.

"Here's a glass to see it in. Such a nice carriage, with white horses, and a tidy driver; so appropriate you know. It's a happy accident, and I'm so pleased," prattled the girl, looking about her with the delight of an escaped prisoner.

"Bless your heart, Miss, it's all Mr. Harris's doings: he's been dodging round the corner ever since daylight; and there he is now, I do declare. I may as well go for a walk till your train is off, so good-by, and the best of lucks, my dear."

There was barely time for this brief but very hearty congratulation, when a remarkably well-dressed highwayman stopped the carriage, without a sign of resistance from the grinning driver. Cobb got out, the ruffian, armed not with a pistol, but a great bouquet of white roses, got in, and the coach went on its way through the quiet streets.

"May day, and here are your flowers, my little queen."

"Oh, John!"

A short answer, but a very eloquent one, when accompanied with full eyes, trembling lips, and a face as sweet and lovely as the roses.

It was quite satisfactory to John; and, having slightly damaged the bridal bonnet without reproof, he, manlike, mingled bliss and business, by saying, in a tone that made poetry of his somewhat confused remarks, —

"Heaven bless my wife! We ought to have had the Governor's coach to-day. Isn't Cobb a trump to get us off so nicely? Never saw a woman yet who could resist the chance of her helping on a wedding. Remembered every thing I told her. That reminds me. Wasn't it lucky that your relics were boxed up in dear Aunt Maria's shed, so all Cobb had to do was to alter the directions and send them off to Philadelphia instead of home?"

"I've been in a tremble for three days, because it seemed as if it couldn't be possible that so much happiness was coming to me. Are you quite sure you want me, John?" asked Dolly, careless for once of her cherished treasures; for she had been busy with hopes and fears, while he was attending to more material affairs.

"So sure, that I've got something here to bind you with. Do you mind trying it on to see if it fits, for I had to guess at the size," answered John, producing his talisman with all a bridegroom's pride and eagerness.

"Please let me wear that as a guard, and use this one to be married with. I've a superstition about it, for it suits us and the year better than any other;" and Dolly laid the little ring of reddish gold beside the heavier one in John's palm.

"So it does, and you shall have it as you like. Do you know, when you showed it to me three months ago, I had a fancy that it would be the proper thing for me to put it on your finger; but I didn't dream I ever should. Are you very certain that you don't regret the advice you gave my friend Jack?" asked the young man, thinking with fond solicitude of the great experiment that lay before them; for he knew by experience how hard this world's ways sometimes are, and longed to smooth the rough places for the confiding little creature at his side.

"Do I look as if I did?" she answered simply, but with a face so full of a true woman's instinctive faith in the power of love to lighten labor, sweeten poverty, and make a heaven of the plainest home, that it was impossible to doubt her courage or fear her disloyalty.

Quite satisfied, John pocketed the rings and buttoned Dolly's gloves, saying, while she buttoned his, both marvellously enjoying this first service for each other, "Almost there now, and in less than half an hour we shall be so safe that all the Aunt Marias in Christendom can't part us any more. George has stood by me like a man and a brother, and promised that every thing should be all right. The church will look a trifle empty, I dare say, with only five of us to fill it; but I shall like it better than being made a spectacle of; so will you, I fancy."

"The church? I thought runaways were married in an office, by a justice, and without much ceremony to make it solemn. I'm very glad it isn't so, for I shall never have but one wedding, and I'd love to have it in a sacred place," faltered Dolly, as a sudden sense of all it meant came over her, filling her girlish heart with tender awe.

"I knew that, dear, and so I did my best to make you feel no lack of love, as I could not give you any splendor. I wish I had a mother to be with you to-day; but George has lent me his, so there will be a woman's arms to cry in, if you want to drop a tear; and fatherly old Dr. King will give you to the happiest man alive. Well, well, my Dolly, if you'd rather, cry here, and then let me dry your tears, as, please Heaven, I will do all your life."

"So kind, John, so very kind! I can't thank you in words, but I'll show by deeds how much I honor, trust, and love my husband;" and nobly Dolly kept her word.

No one saw them as they went in, but the early sunshine made a golden path for them to tread, and the May wind touched them with its balmy kiss. No congratulatory clamor greeted them as they came out; but the friendly sparrows twittered a wedding march, and the jovial George sent them merrily away, by saying, as he gave John's hand a parting grasp, —

"I was right, you see, and there *is* a Mrs. Harris?"

If any one doubts it, let him look well about him, and he may discover the best thing America could send to her Exposition: an old-fashioned home, and in it an ambitious man who could not be bought, a beautiful woman who would not be sold; a young couple happy in their love and labor, consecrating this centennial year, by practising the old-fashioned virtues, honesty and thrift, independence and content.

A GARLAND FOR GIRLS

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MAY FLOWERS

Being Boston girls, of course they got up a club for mental improvement, and, as they were all descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers, they called it the Mayflower Club. A very good name, and the six young girls who were members of it made a very pretty posy when they met together, once a week, to sew, and read well-chosen books. At the first meeting of the season, after being separated all summer, there was a good deal of gossip to be attended to before the question, “What shall we read?” came up for serious discussion.

Anna Winslow, as president, began by proposing “Happy Dodd;” but a chorus of “I’ve read it!” made her turn to her list for another title.

“‘Prisoners of Poverty’ is all about workingwomen, very true and very sad; but Mamma said it might do us good to know something of the hard times other girls have,” said Anna, soberly; for she was a thoughtful creature, very anxious to do her duty in all ways.

“I’d rather not know about sad things, since I can’t help to make them any better,” answered Ella Carver, softly patting the apple blossoms she was embroidering on a bit of blue satin.

“But we might help if we really tried, I suppose; you know how much Happy Dodd did when she once began, and she was only a poor little girl without half the means of doing good which we have,” said Anna, glad to discuss the matter, for she had a little plan in her head and wanted to prepare a way for proposing it.

“Yes, I’m always saying that I have more than my share of fun and comfort and pretty things, and that I ought and will share them with some one. But I don’t do it; and now and then, when I hear about real poverty, or dreadful sickness, I feel so wicked it quite upsets me. If I knew HOW to begin, I really would. But dirty little children don’t come in my way, nor tipsy women to be reformed, nor nice lame girls to sing and pray with, as it all happens in books,” cried Marion Warren, with such a remorseful expression on her merry round face that her mates laughed with one accord.

“I know something that I COULD do if I only had the courage to begin it. But Papa would shake his head unbelievingly, and Mamma worry about its being proper, and it would interfere with my music, and everything nice that I especially wanted to go to would be sure to come on whatever day I set for my good work, and I should get discouraged or ashamed, and not half do it, so I don’t begin, but I know I ought.” And Elizabeth Alden rolled her large eyes from one friend to another, as if appealing to them to goad her to this duty by counsel and encouragement of some sort.

"Well, I suppose it's right, but I do perfectly hate to go poking round among poor folks, smelling bad smells, seeing dreadful sights, hearing woful tales, and running the risk of catching fever, and diphtheria, and horrid things. I don't pretend to like charity, but say right out I'm a silly, selfish wretch, and want to enjoy every minute, and not worry about other people. Isn't it shameful?"

Maggie Bradford looked such a sweet little sinner as she boldly made this sad confession, that no one could scold her, though Ida Standish, her bosom friend, shook her head, and Anna said, with a sigh: "I'm afraid we all feel very much as Maggie does, though we don't own it so honestly. Last spring, when I was ill and thought I might die, I was so ashamed of my idle, frivolous winter, that I felt as if I'd give all I had to be able to live it over and do better. Much is not expected of a girl of eighteen, I know; but oh! there were heaps of kind little things I MIGHT have done if I hadn't thought only of myself. I resolved if I lived I'd try at least to be less selfish, and make some one happier for my being in the world. I tell you, girls, it's rather solemn when you lie expecting to die, and your sins come up before you, even though they are very small ones. I never shall forget it, and after my lovely summer I mean to be a better girl, and lead a better life if I can."

Anna was so much in earnest that her words, straight out of a very innocent and contrite heart, touched her hearers deeply, and put them into the right mood to embrace her proposition. No one spoke for a moment, then Maggie said quietly, —

"I know what it is. I felt very much so when the horses ran away, and for fifteen minutes I sat clinging to Mamma, expecting to be killed. Every unkind, undutiful word I'd ever said to her came back to me, and was worse to bear than the fear of sudden death. It scared a great deal of naughtiness out of me, and dear Mamma and I have been more to each other ever since."

"Let us begin with 'The Prisoners of Poverty,' and perhaps it will show us something to do," said Lizzie. "But I must say I never felt as if shop-girls needed much help; they generally seem so contented with themselves, and so pert or patronizing to us, that I don't pity them a bit, though it must be a hard life."

"I think we can't do MUCH in that direction, except set an example of good manners when we go shopping. I wanted to propose that we each choose some small charity for this winter, and do it faithfully. That will teach us how to do more by and by, and we can help one another with our experiences, perhaps, or amuse with our failures. What do you say?" asked Anna, surveying her five friends with a persuasive smile.

“What COULD we do?”

“People will call us goody-goody.”

“I haven’t the least idea how to go to work”

“Don’t believe Mamma will let me.”

“We’d better change our names from May Flowers to sisters of charity, and wear meek black bonnets and flapping cloaks.”

Anna received these replies with great composure, and waited for the meeting to come to order, well knowing that the girls would have their fun and outcry first, and then set to work in good earnest.

“I think it’s a lovely idea, and I’ll carry out my plan. But I won’t tell what it is yet; you’d all shout, and say I couldn’t do it, but if you were trying also, that would keep me up to the mark,” said Lizzie, with a decided snap of her scissors, as she trimmed the edges of a plush case for her beloved music.

“Suppose we all keep our attempts secret, and not let our right hand know what the left hand does? It’s such fun to mystify people, and then no one can laugh at us. If we fail, we can say nothing; if we succeed, we can tell of it and get our reward. I’d like that way, and will look round at once for some especially horrid boot-black, ungrateful old woman, or ugly child, and devote myself to him, her, or it with the patience of a saint,” cried Maggie, caught by the idea of doing good in secret and being found out by accident.

The other girls agreed, after some discussion, and then Anna took the floor again.

“I propose that we each work in our own way till next May, then, at our last meeting, report what we have done, truly and honestly, and plan something better for next year. Is it a vote?”

It evidently was a unanimous vote, for five gold thimbles went up, and five blooming faces smiled as the five girlish voices cried, “Aye!”

“Very well, now let us decide what to read, and begin at once. I think the ‘Prisoners’ a good book, and we shall doubtless get some hints from it.”

So they began, and for an hour one pleasant voice after the other read aloud those sad, true stories of workingwomen and their hard lives, showing these gay young creatures what their pretty clothes cost the real makers of them, and how much injustice, suffering, and wasted strength went into them. It was very sober reading, but most absorbing; for the crochet needles went slower and slower, the lace-work lay idle, and a great tear shone like a drop of dew on the apple blossoms as Ella listened to “Rose’s Story.” They skipped the statistics, and dipped here and there as each took her turn; but when the two hours were over, and it was time for the club to adjourn, all the members were deeply interested in that pathetic book, and more in earnest than before; for this glimpse into other lives showed them how much help was needed, and made them anxious to lend a hand,

"We can't do much, being 'only girls,'" said Anna; "but if each does one small chore somewhere it will pave the way for better work; so we will all try, at least, though it seems like so many ants trying to move a mountain."

"Well, ants build nests higher than a man's head in Africa; you remember the picture of them in our old geographies? And we can do as much, I'm sure, if each tugs her pebble or straw faithfully. I shall shoulder mine to-morrow if Mamma is willing," answered Lizzie, shutting up her work-bag as if she had her resolution inside and was afraid it might evaporate before she got home.

"I shall stand on the Common, and proclaim aloud, 'Here's a nice young missionary, in want of a job! Charity for sale cheap! Who'll buy? who'll buy?'" said Maggie, with a resigned expression, and a sanctimonious twang to her voice.

"I shall wait and see what comes to me, since I don't know what I'm fit for;" and Marion gazed out of the window as if expecting to see some interesting pauper waiting for her to appear.

"I shall ask Miss Bliss for advice; she knows all about the poor, and will give me a good start," added prudent Ida, who resolved to do nothing rashly lest she should fail.

"I shall probably have a class of dirty little girls, and teach them how to sew, as I can't do anything else. They won't learn much, but steal, and break, and mess, and be a dreadful trial, and I shall get laughed at and wish I hadn't done it. Still I shall try it, and sacrifice my fancy-work to the cause of virtue," said Ella, carefully putting away her satin glove-case with a fond glance at the delicate flowers she so loved to embroider.

"I have no plans, but want to do so much! I shall have to wait till I discover what is best. After to-day we won't speak of our work, or it won't be a secret any longer. In May we will report. Good luck to all, and good-by till next Saturday."

With these farewell words from their president the girls departed, with great plans and new ideas simmering in their young heads and hearts.

It seemed a vast undertaking; but where there is a will there is always a way, and soon it was evident that each had found "a little chore" to do for sweet charity's sake. Not a word was said at the weekly meetings, but the artless faces betrayed all shades of hope, discouragement, pride, and doubt, as their various attempts seemed likely to succeed or fail. Much curiosity was felt, and a few accidental words, hints, or meetings in queer places, were very exciting, though nothing was discovered.

Marion was often seen in a North End car, and Lizzie in a South End car, with a bag of books and papers. Ella haunted a certain shop where fancy articles were sold, and Ida always brought plain sewing to the club. Maggie seemed very busy at home, and Anna was found writing industriously several times when one of her friends called. All seemed very happy, and rather important when outsiders questioned them about their affairs. But they had their pleasures as usual, and seemed to enjoy them with an added relish, as if they realized as never before how many blessings they possessed, and were grateful for them.

So the winter passed, and slowly something new and pleasant seemed to come into the lives of these young girls. The listless, discontented look some of them used to wear passed away; a sweet earnestness and a cheerful activity made them charming, though they did not know it, and wondered when people said, “That set of girls are growing up beautifully; they will make fine women by and by.” The mayflowers were budding under the snow, and as spring came on the fresh perfume began to steal out, the rosy faces to brighten, and the last year’s dead leaves to fall away, leaving the young plants green and strong.

On the 15th of May the club met for the last time that season, as some left town early, and all were full of spring work and summer plans. Every member was in her place at an unusually early hour that day, and each wore an air of mingled anxiety, expectation, and satisfaction, pleasant to behold. Anna called them to order with three raps of her thimble and a beaming smile.

“We need not choose a book for our reading to-day, as each of us is to contribute an original history of her winter’s work. I know it will be very interesting, and I hope more instructive, than some of the novels we have read. Who shall begin?”

“You! you!” was the unanimous answer; for all loved and respected her very much, and felt that their presiding officer should open the ball.

Anna colored modestly, but surprised her friends by the composure with which she related her little story, quite as if used to public speaking.

“You know I told you last November that I should have to look about for something that I COULD do. I did look a long time, and was rather in despair, when my task came to me in the most unexpected way. Our winter work was being done, so I had a good deal of shopping on my hands, and found it less a bore than usual, because I liked to watch the shop-girls, and wish I dared ask some of them if I could help them. I went often to get trimmings and buttons at Cotton’s, and had a good deal to do with the two girls at that counter. They were very obliging and patient about matching some jet ornaments for Mamma, and I found out that their names were Mary and Maria Porter. I liked them, for they were very neat and plain in their dress, — not like some, who seem to think that if their waists are small, and their hair dressed in the fashion, it is no matter how soiled their collars are, nor how untidy their nails. Well, one day when I went for certain kinds of buttons which were to be made for us, Maria, the younger one, who took the order, was not there. I asked for her, and Mary said she was at home with a lame knee. I was so sorry, and ventured to put a few questions in a friendly way. Mary seemed glad to tell her troubles, and I found that ‘Ria,’ as she called her sister, had been suffering for a long time, but did not complain for fear of losing her place. No stools are allowed at Cotton’s, so the poor girls stand nearly all day, or rest a minute now and then on a half-opened drawer. I’d seen Maria doing it, and wondered why some one did not make a stir about seats in this place, as they have in other stores and got stools for the shop women. I didn’t dare to speak to the gentlemen, but I gave Mary the Jack roses I wore in my breast, and asked if I might take some books or flowers to poor Maria. It was lovely to see her sad face light up and hear her thank me when I went to see her, for she was very lonely without her sister, and discouraged about her place. She did not lose it entirely, but had to work at home, for her lame knee will be a long time in getting well. I begged Mamma and Mrs. Ailingham to speak to Mr. Cotton for her; so she got the mending of the jet and bead work to do, and buttons to cover, and things of that sort. Mary takes them to and fro, and Maria feels so happy not to be idle. We also got stools, for all the other girls in that shop. Mrs. Allingham is so rich and kind she can do anything, and now it’s such a comfort to see those tired things resting when off duty that I often go in and enjoy the sight.”

Anna paused as cries of “Good! good!” interrupted her tale; but she did not add the prettiest part of it, and tell how the faces of the young women behind the counters brightened when she came in, nor how gladly all served the young lady who showed them what a true gentlewoman was.

“I hope that isn’t all?” said Maggie, eagerly.

“Only a little more. I know you will laugh when I tell you that I’ve been reading papers to a class of shop-girls at the Union once a week all winter.”

A murmur of awe and admiration greeted this deeply interesting statement; for, true to the traditions of the modern Athens in which they lived, the girls all felt the highest respect for “papers” on any subject, it being the fashion for ladies, old and young, to read and discuss every subject, from pottery to Pantheism, at the various clubs all over the city.

“It came about very naturally,” continued Anna, as if anxious to explain her seeming audacity. “I used to go to see Molly and Ria, and heard all about their life and its few pleasures, and learned to like them more and more. They had only each other in the world, lived in two rooms, worked all day, and in the way of amusement or instruction had only what they found at the Union in the evening. I went with them a few times, and saw how useful and pleasant it was, and wanted to help, as other kind girls only a little older than I did. Eva Randal read a letter from a friend in Russia one time, and the girls enjoyed it very much. That reminded me of my brother George's lively journals, written when he was abroad. You remember how we used to laugh over them when he sent them home? Well, when I was begged to give them an evening, I resolved to try one of those amusing journal-letters, and chose the best, — all about how George and a friend went to the different places Dickens describes in some of his funny books. I wish you could have seen how those dear girls enjoyed it, and laughed till they cried over the dismay of the boys, when they knocked at a door in Kingsgate Street, and asked if Mrs. Gamp lived there. It was actually a barber's shop, and a little man, very like Poll Sweedlepipes, told them 'Mrs. Britton was the nuss as lived there now.' It upset those rascals to come so near the truth, and they ran away because they couldn't keep sober."

The members of the club indulged in a general smile as they recalled the immortal Sairey with "the bottle on the mankle-shelf," the "cowcuber," and the wooden pippins. Then Anna continued, with an air of calm satisfaction, quite sure now of her audience and herself, —

"It was a great success. So I went on, and when the journals were done, I used to read other things, and picked up books for their library, and helped in any way I could, while learning to know them better and give them confidence in me. They are proud and shy, just as we should be but if you REALLY want to be friends and don't mind rebuffs now and then, they come to trust and like you, and there is so much to do for them one never need sit idle any more. I won't give names, as they don't like it, nor tell how I tried to serve them, but it is very sweet and good for me to have found this work, and to know that each year I can do it better and better. So I feel encouraged and am very glad I began, as I hope you all are. Now, who comes next?"

As Anna ended, the needles dropped and ten soft hands gave her a hearty round of applause; for all felt that she had done well, and chosen a task especially fitted to her powers, as she had money, time, tact, and the winning manners that make friends everywhere.

Beaming with pleasure at their approval, but feeling that they made too much of her small success, Anna called the club to order by saying, "Ella looks as if she were anxious to tell her experiences, so perhaps we had better ask her to hold forth next."

"Hear! hear!" cried the girls; and, nothing loath, Ella promptly began, with twinkling eyes and a demure smile, for HER story ended romantically.

"If you are interested in shop-girls, Miss President and ladies, you will like to know that *I* am one, at least a silent partner and co-worker in a small fancy store at the West End.”

“No!” exclaimed the amazed club with one voice; and, satisfied with this sensational beginning Ella went on.

“I really am, and you have bought some of my fancy-work. Isn’t that a good joke? You needn’t stare so, for I actually made that needle-book, Anna, and my partner knit Lizzie’s new cloud. This is the way it all happened. I didn’t wish to waste any time, but one can’t rush into the street and collar shabby little girls, and say, ‘Come along and learn to sew,’ without a struggle, so I thought I’d go and ask Mrs. Brown how to begin. Her branch of the Associated Charities is in Laurel Street, not far from our house, you know; and the very day after our last meeting I posted off to get my ‘chore.’ I expected to have to fit work for poor needlewomen, or go to see some dreadful sick creature, or wash dirty little Pats, and was bracing up my mind for whatever might come, as I toiled up the hill in a gale of wind. Suddenly my hat flew off and went gayly skipping away, to the great delight of some black imps, who only grinned and cheered me on as I trotted after it with wild grabs and wrathful dodges. I got it at last out of a puddle, and there I was in a nice mess. The elastic was broken, feather wet, and the poor thing all mud and dirt. I didn’t care much, as it was my old one, — dressed for my work, you see. But I couldn’t go home bareheaded, and I didn’t know a soul in that neighborhood. I turned to step into a grocery store at the corner, to borrow a brush or buy a sheet of paper to wear, for I looked like a lunatic with my battered hat and my hair in a perfect mop. Luckily I spied a woman’s fancy shop on the other corner, and rushed in there to hide myself, for the brats hooted and people stared. It was a very small shop, and behind the counter sat a tall, thin, washed-out-looking woman, making a baby’s hood. She looked poor and blue and rather sour, but took pity on me; and while she sewed the cord, dried the feather, and brushed off the dirt, I warmed myself and looked about to see what I could buy in return for her trouble.

“A few children’s aprons hung in the little window, with some knit lace, balls, and old-fashioned garters, two or three dolls, and a very poor display of small wares. In a show-case, however, on the table that was the counter, I found some really pretty things, made of plush, silk, and ribbon, with a good deal of taste. So I said I’d buy a needle-book, and a gay ball, and a pair of distracting baby’s shoes, made to look like little open-work socks with pink ankle-ties, so cunning and dainty, I was glad to get them for Cousin Clara’s baby. The woman seemed pleased, though she had a grim way of talking, and never smiled once. I observed that she handled my hat as if used to such work, and evidently liked to do it. I thanked her for repairing damages so quickly and well, and she said, with my hat on her hand, as if she hated to part with it, ‘I’m used to millineryin’ and never should have give it up, if I didn’t have my folks to see to. I took this shop, hopin’ to make things go, as such a place was needed round here, but mother broke down, and is a sight of care; so I couldn’t leave her, and doctors is expensive, and times hard, and I had to drop my trade, and fall back on pins and needles, and so on.’“

Ella was a capital mimic, and imitated the nasal tones of the Vermont woman to the life, with a doleful pucker of her own blooming face, which gave such a truthful picture of poor Miss Almira Miller that those who had seen her recognized it at once, and laughed gayly.

“Just as I was murmuring a few words of regret at her bad luck,” continued Ella, “a sharp voice called out from a back room, ‘Almiry! Almiry! come here.’ It sounded very like a cross parrot, but it was the old lady, and while I put on my hat I heard her asking who was in the shop, and what we were ‘gabbin’ about.’ Her daughter told her, and the old soul demanded to ‘see the gal;’ so I went in, being ready for fun as usual. It was a little, dark, dismal place, but as neat as a pin, and in the bed sat a regular Grandma Smallweed smoking a pipe, with a big cap, a snuff-box, and a red cotton handkerchief. She was a tiny, dried-up thing, brown as a berry, with eyes like black beads, a nose and chin that nearly met, and hands like birds’ claws. But such a fierce, lively, curious, blunt old lady you never saw, and I didn’t know what would be the end of me when she began to question, then to scold, and finally to demand that ‘folks should come and trade to Almiry’s shop after promisin’ they would, and she havin’ took a lease of the place on account of them lies.’ I wanted to laugh, but dared not do it, so just let her croak, for the daughter had to go to her customers. The old lady’s tirade informed me that they came from Vermont, had ‘been wal on ‘t till father died and the farm was sold.’ Then it seems the women came to Boston and got on pretty well till ‘a stroke of numb-palsy,’ whatever that is, made the mother helpless and kept Almiry at home to care for her. I can’t tell you how funny and yet how sad it was to see the poor old soul, so full of energy and yet so helpless, and the daughter so discouraged with her pathetic little shop and no customers to speak of. I did not know what to say till ‘Grammer Miller,’ as the children call her, happened to say, when she took up her knitting after the lecture, ‘If folks who go spendin’ money reckless on redic’lus toys for Christmas only knew what nice things, useful and fancy, me and Almiry could make ef we had the goods, they’d jest come round this corner and buy ‘em, and keep me out of a Old Woman’s Home and that good, hard-workin’ gal of mine out of a ‘sylum; for go there she will ef she don’t get a boost somehow, with rent and firin’ and vittles all on her shoulders, and me only able to wag them knittin’-needles.’

"'I will buy things here, and tell all my friends about it, and I have a drawer full of pretty bits of silk and velvet and plush, that I will give Miss Miller for her work, if she will let me.' I added that, for I saw that Almiry was rather proud, and hid her troubles under a grim look.

"That pleased the old lady, and, lowering her voice, she said, with a motherly sort of look in her beady eyes: 'Seein' as you are so friendly, I'll tell you what frets me most, a layin' here, a burden to my darter. She kep' company with Nathan Baxter, a master carpenter up to Westminster where we lived, and ef father hadn't a died suddin' they'd a ben married. They waited a number o' years, workin' to their trades, and we was hopin' all would turn out wal, when troubles come, and here we be. Nathan's got his own folks to see to, and Almiry won't add to HIS load with hern, nor leave me; so she give him back his ring, and jest buckled to all alone. She don't say a word, but it's wearin' her to a shadder, and I can't do a thing to help, but make a few pinballs, knit garters, and kiver holders. Ef she got a start in business it would cheer her up a sight, and give her a kind of a hopeful prospeck, for old folks can't live forever, and Nathan is a waitin', faithful and true.'

"That just finished me, for I am romantic, and do enjoy love stories with all my heart, even if the lovers are only a skinny spinster and a master carpenter. So I just resolved to see what I could do for poor Almiry and the peppery old lady. I didn't promise anything but my bits, and, taking the things I bought, went home to talk it over with Mamma. I found she had often got pins and tape, and such small wares, at the little shop, and found it very convenient, though she knew nothing about the Millers. She was willing I should help if I could, but advised going slowly, and seeing what they could do first. We did not dare to treat them like beggars, and send them money and clothes, and tea and sugar, as we do the Irish, for they were evidently respectable people, and proud as poor. So I took my bundle of odds and ends, and Mamma added some nice large pieces of dresses we had done with, and gave a fine order for aprons and holders and balls for our church fair.

"It would have done your hearts good, girls, to see those poor old faces light up as I showed my scraps, and asked if the work would be ready by Christmas. Grammer fairly swam in the gay colors I strewed over her bed, and enjoyed them like a child, while Almiry tried to be grim, but had to give it up, as she began at once to cut out aprons, and dropped tears all over the muslin when her back was turned to me. I didn't know a washed-out old maid COULD be so pathetic."

Ella stopped to give a regretful sigh over her past blindness, while her hearers made a sympathetic murmur; for young hearts are very tender, and take an innocent interest in lovers' sorrows, no matter how humble.

"Well, that was the beginning of it. I got so absorbed in making things go well that I didn't look any further, but just 'buckled to' with Miss Miller and helped run that little shop. No one knew me in that street, so I slipped in and out, and did what I liked. The old lady and I got to be great friends; though she often pecked and croaked like a cross raven, and was very wearing. I kept her busy with her 'pin-balls and knittin'-work, and supplied Almiry with pretty materials for the various things I found she could make. You wouldn't believe what dainty bows those long fingers could tie, what ravishing doll's hats she would make out of a scrap of silk and lace, or the ingenious things she concocted with cones and shells and fans and baskets. I love such work, and used to go and help her often, for I wanted her window and shop to be full for Christmas, and lure in plenty of customers. Our new toys and the little cases of sewing silk sold well, and people began to come more, after I lent Almiry some money to lay in a stock of better goods. Papa enjoyed my business venture immensely, and was never tired of joking about it. He actually went and bought balls for four small black boys who were gluing their noses to the window one day, spellbound by the orange, red, and blue treasures displayed there. He liked my partner's looks, though he teased me by saying that we'd better add lemonade to our stock, as poor, dear Almiry's acid face would make lemons unnecessary, and sugar and water were cheap.

"Well, Christmas came, and we did a great business, for Mamma came and sent others, and our fancy things were as pretty and cheaper than those at the art stores, so they went well, and the Millers were cheered up, and I felt encouraged, and we took a fresh start after the holidays. One of my gifts at New Year was my own glove-case, — you remember the apple-blossom thing I began last autumn? I put it in our window to fill up, and Mamma bought it, and gave it to me full of elegant gloves, with a sweet note, and Papa sent a check to 'Miller, Warren & Co.' I was so pleased and proud I could hardly help telling you all. But the best joke was the day you girls came in and bought our goods, and I peeped at you through the crack of the door, being in the back room dying with laughter to see you look round, and praise our 'nice assortment of useful and pretty articles.'"

"That's all very well, and we can bear to be laughed at if you succeeded, Miss. But I don't believe you did, for no Millers are there now. Have you taken a palatial store on Boylston Street for this year, intending to run it alone? We'll all patronize it, and your name will look well on a sign," said Maggie, wondering what the end of Ella's experience had been.

"Ah! I still have the best of it, for my romance finished up delightfully, as you shall hear. We did well all winter, and no wonder. What was needed was a little 'boost' in the right direction, and I could give it; so my Millers were much comforted, and we were good friends. But in March Grammer died suddenly, and poor Almiry mourned as if she had been the sweetest mother in the world. The old lady’s last wishes were to be ‘laid out harnsome in a cap with a pale blue satin ribbin, white wasn’t becomin’, to hev at least three carriages to the funeral, and be sure a paper with her death in it was sent to N. Baxter, Westminster, Vermont.’

“I faithfully obeyed her commands, put on the ugly cap myself, gave a party of old ladies from the home a drive in the hacks, and carefully directed a marked paper to Nathan, hoping that he HAD proved ‘faithful and true.’ I didn’t expect he would, so was not surprised when no answer came. But I WAS rather amazed when Almiry told me she didn’t care to keep on with the store now she was free. She wanted to visit her friends a spell this spring, and in the fall would go back to her trade in some milliner’s store.

“I was sorry, for I really enjoyed my partnership. It seemed a little bit ungrateful after all my trouble in getting her customers, but I didn’t say anything, and we sold out to the Widow Bates, who is a good soul with six children, and will profit by our efforts.

“Almiry bid me good-by with all the grim look gone out of her face, many thanks, and a hearty promise to write soon. That was in April. A week ago I got a short letter saying, —

“‘DEAR FRIEND, — You will be pleased to hear that I am married to Mr. Baxter, and shall remain here. He was away when the paper came with mother’s death, but as soon as he got home he wrote. I couldn’t make up my mind till I got home and see him. Now it’s all right. and I am very happy. Many thanks for all you done for me and mother. I shall never forget it My husband sends respects, and I remain Yours gratefully, ALMIRA M. BAXTER.’“

“That’s splendid! You did well, and next winter you can look up another sour spinster and cranky old lady and make them happy,” said Anna, with the approving smile all loved to receive from her.

“My adventures are not a bit romantic, or even interesting, and yet I’ve been as busy as a bee all winter, and enjoyed my work very much,” began Elizabeth, as the President gave her a nod.

“The plan I had in mind was to go and carry books and papers to the people in hospitals, as one of Mamma’s friends has done for years. I went once to the City Hospital with her, and it was very interesting, but I didn’t dare to go to the grown people all alone, so I went to the Children’s Hospital, and soon loved to help amuse the poor little dears. I saved all the picture-books and papers I could find for them, dressed dolls, and mended toys, and got new ones, and made bibs and night-gowns, and felt like the mother of a large family.

"I had my pets, of course, and did my best for them, reading and singing and amusing them, for many suffered very much. One little girl was so dreadfully burned she could not use her hands, and would lie and look at a gay dolly tied to the bedpost by the hour together, and talk to it and love it, and died with it on her pillow when I 'sung lullaby' to her for the last time. I keep it among my treasures, for I learned a lesson in patience from little Norah that I never can forget.

"Then Jimmy Dolan with hip disease was a great delight to me, for he was as gay as a lark in spite of pain, and a real little hero in the way he bore the hard things that had to be done to him. He never can get well, and he is at home now; but I still see to him, and he is learning to make toy furniture very nicely, so that by and by, if he gets able to work at all, he may be able to learn a cabinet-maker's trade, or some easy work.

"But my pet of pets was Johnny, the blind boy. His poor eyes had to be taken out, and there he was left so helpless and pathetic, all his life before him, and no one to help him, for his people were poor and he had to go away from the hospital since he was incurable. He seemed almost given to me, for the first time I saw him I was singing to Jimmy, when the door opened and a small boy came fumbling in.

"'I hear a pretty voice, I want to find it,' he said, stopping as I stopped with both hands out as if begging for more.

"'Come on. Johnny, and the lady will sing to you like a bobolink,' called Jimmy, as proud as Barnum showing off Jumbo.

"The poor little thing came and stood at my knee, without stirring, while I sang all the nursery jingles I knew. Then he put such a thin little finger on my lips as if to feel where the music came from, and said, smiling all over his white face, 'More, please more, lots of 'em! I love it!'

"So I sang away till I was as hoarse as a crow, and Johnny drank it all in like water; kept time with his head, stamped when I gave him 'Marching through Georgia,' and hurrahed feebly in the chorus of 'Red, White, and Blue.' It was lovely to see how he enjoyed it, and I was so glad I had a voice to comfort those poor babies with. He cried when I had to go, and so touched my heart that I asked all about him, and resolved to get him into the Blind School as the only place where he could be taught and made happy."

"I thought you were bound there the day I met you, Lizzie; but you looked as solemn as if all your friends had lost their sight," cried Marion.

"I did feel solemn, for if Johnny could not go there he would be badly off. Fortunately he was ten, and dear Mrs. Russell helped me, and those good people took him in though they were crowded. 'We cannot turn one away,' said kind Mr.

Parpatharges.

“So there my boy is, as happy as a king with his little mates, learning all sorts of useful lessons and pretty plays. He models nicely in clay. Here is one of his little works. Could you do as well without eyes?” and Lizzie proudly produced a very one-sided pear with a long straw for a stem. “I don’t expect he will ever be a sculptor, but I hope he will do something with music he loves it so, and is already piping away on a fife very cleverly. Whatever his gift may prove, if he lives, he will be taught to be a useful, independent man, not a helpless burden, nor an unhappy creature sitting alone in the dark. I feel very happy about my lads, and am surprised to find how well I get on with them. I shall look up some more next year, for I really think I have quite a gift that way, though you wouldn’t expect it, as I have no brothers, and always had a fancy boys were little imps.”

The girls were much amused at Lizzie’s discovery of her own powers, for she was a stately damsel, who never indulged in romps, but lived for her music. Now it was evident that she had found the key to unlock childish hearts, and was learning to use it, quite unconscious that the sweet voice she valued so highly was much improved by the tender tones singing lullabies gave it. The fat pear was passed round like refreshments, receiving much praise and no harsh criticism; and when it was safely returned to its proud possessor, Ida began her tale in a lively tone.

“I waited for MY chore, and it came tumbling down our basement steps one rainy day in the shape of a large dilapidated umbrella with a pair of small boots below it. A mild howl made me run to open the door, for I was at lunch in the dining-room, all alone, and rather blue because I couldn’t go over to see Ella. A very small girl lay with her head in a puddle at the foot of the steps, the boots waving in the air, and the umbrella brooding over her like a draggled green bird.

“‘Are you hurt, child?’ said I.

“‘No, I thank you, ma’am,’ said the mite quite calmly, as she sat up and settled a woman’s shabby black hat on her head.

“‘Did you come begging?’ I asked.

“‘No, ma’am, I came for some things Mrs. Grover’s got for us. She told me to. I don’t beg.’ And up rose the sopping thing with great dignity.

“So I asked her to sit down, and ran up to call Mrs. Grover. She was busy with Grandpa just then, and when I went back to my lunch there sat my lady with her arms folded, water dripping out of the toes of her old boots as they hung down from the high chair, and the biggest blue eyes I ever saw fixed upon the cake and oranges on the table. I gave her a piece, and she sighed with rapture, but only picked at it till I asked if she didn’t like it.

"'Oh yes, 'm, it's elegant! Only I was wishin' I could take it to Caddy and Tot, if you didn't mind. They never had frostin' in all their lives, and I did once.'

"Of course I put up a little basket of cake and oranges and figs, and while Lotty feasted, we talked. I found that their mother washed dishes all day in a restaurant over by the Albany Station, leaving the three children alone in the room they have on Berry Street. Think of that poor thing going off before light these winter mornings to stand over horrid dishes all day long, and those three scraps of children alone till night! Sometimes they had a fire, and when they hadn't they stayed in bed. Broken food and four dollars a week was all the woman got, and on that they tried to live. Good Mrs. Grover happened to be nursing a poor soul near Berry Street last summer, and used to see the three little things trailing round the streets with no one to look after them.

"Lotty is nine, though she looks about six, but is as old as most girls of fourteen, and takes good care of 'the babies,' as she calls the younger ones. Mrs. Grover went to see them, and, though a hard-working creature, did all she could for them. This winter she has plenty of time to sew, for Grandpapa needs little done for him except at night and morning, and that kind woman spent her own money, and got warm flannel and cotton and stuff, and made each child a good suit. Lotty had come for hers, and when the bundle was in her arms she hugged it close, and put up her little face to kiss Grover so prettily, I felt that I wanted to do something too. So I hunted up Min's old waterproof and rubbers, and a hood, and sent Lotty home as happy as a queen, promising to go and see her. I did go, and there was my work all ready for me. Oh, girls! such a bare, cold room, without a spark of fire, and no food but a pan of bits of pie and bread and meat, not fit for any one to eat, and in the bed, with an old carpet for cover, lay the three children. Tot and Caddy cuddled in the warmest place, while Lotty, with her little blue hands, was trying to patch up some old stockings with bits of cotton. I didn't know how to begin, but Lotty did, and I just took her orders; for that wise little woman told me where to buy a bushel of coal and some kindlings, and milk and meal, and all I wanted. I worked like a beaver for an hour or two, and was so glad I'd been to a cooking-class, for I could make a fire, with Lotty to do the grubby part, and start a nice soup with the cold meat and potatoes, and an onion or so. Soon the room was warm, and full of a nice smell, and out of bed tumbled 'the babies,' to dance round the stove and sniff at the soup, and drink milk like hungry kittens, till I could get bread and butter ready.

"It was great fun! and when we had cleared things up a bit, and I'd put food for supper in the closet, and told Lotty to warm a bowl of soup for her mother and keep the fire going, I went home tired and dirty, but very glad I'd found something to do. It is perfectly amazing how little poor people's things cost, and yet they can’t get the small amount of money needed without working themselves to death. Why, all I bought didn’t cost more than I often spend for flowers, or theatre tickets, or lunches, and it made those poor babies so comfortable I could have cried to think I’d never done it before.”

Ida paused to shake her head remorsefully, then went on with her story, sewing busily all the while on an unbleached cotton night-gown which looked about fit for a large doll.

“I have no romantic things to tell, for poor Mrs. Kennedy was a shiftless, broken-down woman, who could only ‘sozzle round,’ as Mrs. Grover said, and rub along with help from any one who would lend a hand. She had lived out, married young, and had no faculty about anything; so when her husband died, and she was left with three little children, it was hard to get on, with no trade, feeble health, and a discouraged mind. She does her best, loves the girls, and works hard at the only thing she can find to do; but when she gives out, they will all have to part, — she to a hospital, and the babies to some home. She dreads that, and tugs away, trying to keep together and get ahead. Thanks to Mrs. Grover, who is very sensible, and knows how to help poor people, we have made things comfortable, and the winter has gone nicely.

“The mother has got work nearer home, Lotty and Caddy go to school, and Tot is safe and warm, with Miss Parsons to look after her. Miss Parsons is a young woman who was freezing and starving in a little room upstairs, too proud to beg and too shy and sick to get much work. I found her warming her hands one day in Mrs. Kennedy’s room, and hanging over the soup-pot as if she was eating the smell. It reminded me of the picture in Punch where the two beggar boys look in at a kitchen, sniffing at the nice dinner cooking there. One says, ‘I don’t care for the meat, Bill, but I don’t mind if I takes a smell at the pudd’n’ when it’s dished.’ I proposed a lunch at once, and we all sat down, and ate soup out of yellow bowls with pewter spoons with such a relish it was fun to see. I had on my old rig; so poor Parsons thought I was some dressmaker or work-girl, and opened her heart to me as she never would have done if I’d gone and demanded her confidence, and patronized her, as some people do when they want to help. I promised her some work, and proposed that she should do it in Mrs. K.’s room, as a favor, mind you, so that the older girls could go to school and Tot have some one to look after her. She agreed, and that saved her fire, and made the K.’s all right. Sarah (that’s Miss P.) tried to stiffen up when she learned where I lived; but she wanted the work, and soon found I didn’t put on airs, but lent her books, and brought her and Tot my bouquets and favors after a german, and told her pleasant things as she sat cooking her poor chilblainy feet in the oven, as if she never could get thawed out.

"This summer the whole batch are to go to Uncle Frank's farm and pick berries, and get strong. He hires dozens of women and children during the fruit season, and Mrs. Grover said it was just what they all needed. So off they go in June, as merry as grigs, and I shall be able to look after them now and then, as I always go to the farm in July. That's all, — not a bit interesting, but it came to me, and I did it, though only a small chore."

"I'm sure the helping of five poor souls is a fine work, and you may well be proud of it, Ida. Now I know why you wouldn't go to matinees with me, and buy every pretty thing we saw as you used to. The pocket money went for coal and food, and your fancy work was little clothes for these live dolls of yours. You dear thing! how good you were to cook, and grub, and prick your fingers rough, and give up fun, for this kind work!"

Maggie's hearty kiss, and the faces of her friends, made Ida feel that her humble task had its worth in their eyes, as well as in her own; and when the others had expressed their interest in her work, all composed themselves to hear what Marion had to tell.

"I have been taking care of a scarlet runner, — a poor old frost-bitten, neglected thing; it is transplanted now, and doing well, I'm happy to say."

"What do you mean?" asked Ella, while the rest looked very curious.

Marion picked up a dropped stitch in the large blue sock she was knitting, and continued, with a laugh in her eyes: "My dears, that is what we call the Soldiers' Messenger Corps, with their red caps and busy legs trotting all day. I've had one of them to care for, and a gorgeous time of it, I do assure you. But before I exult over my success, I must honestly confess my failures, for they were sad ones. I was so anxious to begin my work at once, that I did go out and collar the first pauper I saw. It was an old man, who sometimes stands at the corners of streets to sell bunches of ugly paper flowers. You've seen him, I dare say, and his magenta daisies and yellow peonies. Well, he was rather a forlorn object, with his poor old red nose, and bleary eyes, and white hair, standing at the windy corners silently holding out those horrid flowers. I bought all he had that day, and gave them to some colored children on my way home, and told him to come to our house and get an old coat Mamma was waiting to get rid of. He told a pitiful story of himself and his old wife, who made the paper horrors in her bed, and how they needed everything, but didn't wish to beg. I was much touched, and flew home to look up the coat and some shoes, and when my old Lear came creeping in the back way, I ordered cook to give him a warm dinner and something nice for the old woman.

"I was called upstairs while he was mumbling his food, and blessing me in the most lovely manner; and he went away much comforted, I flattered myself. But an hour later, up came the cook in a great panic to report that my venerable and pious beggar had carried off several of Papa’s shirts and pairs of socks out of the clothes-basket in the laundry, and the nice warm hood we keep for the girl to hang out clothes in.

“I was VERY angry, and, taking Harry with me, went at once to the address the old rascal gave me, a dirty court out of Hanover Street No such person had ever lived there, and my white-haired saint was a humbug. Harry laughed at me, and Mamma forbade me to bring any more thieves to the house, and the girls scolded awfully.

“Well, I recovered from the shock, and, nothing daunted, went off to the little Irishwoman who sells apples on the Common, — not the fat, tosey one with the stall near West Street, but the dried-up one who sits by the path, nodding over an old basket with six apples and four sticks of candy in it. No one ever seems to buy anything, but she sits there and trusts to kind souls dropping a dime now and then; she looks so feeble and forlorn, ‘on the cold, cold ground.’

“She told me another sad tale of being all alone and unable to work, and ‘as wake as wather-grewl, without a hap-worth av flesh upon me bones, and for the love of Heaven gimme a thrifle to kape the breath av loife in a poor soul, with a bitter hard winter over me, and niver a chick or child to do a hand’s turn.’ I hadn’t much faith in her, remembering my other humbug, but I did pity the old mummy; so I got some tea and sugar, and a shawl, and used to give her my odd pennies as I passed. I never told at home, they made such fun of my efforts to be charitable. I thought I really was getting on pretty well after a time, as my old Biddy seemed quite cheered up, and I was planning to give her some coal, when she disappeared all of a sudden. I feared she was ill, and asked Mrs. Maloney, the fat woman, about her.

“‘Lord love ye, Miss dear, it’s tuk up and sint to the Island for tree months she is; for a drunken ould craythur is Biddy Ryan, and niver a cint but goes for whiskey, — more shame to her, wid a fine bye av her own ready to kape her daycint.’

“Then I WAS discouraged, and went home to fold my hands, and see what fate would send me, my own efforts being such failures.”

“Poor thing, it WAS hard luck!” said Elizabeth, as they sobered down after the gale of merriment caused by Marion’s mishaps, and her clever imitation of the brogue.

“Now tell of your success, and the scarlet runner,” added Maggie.

“Ah! that was SENT, and so I prospered. I must begin ever so far back, in war times, or I can’t introduce my hero properly. You know Papa was in the army, and fought all through the war till Gettysburg, where he was wounded. He was engaged just before he went; so when his father hurried to him after that awful battle, Mamma went also, and helped nurse him till he could come home. He wouldn't go to an officer's hospital, but kept with his men in a poor sort of place, for many of his boys were hit, and he wouldn't leave them. Sergeant Joe Collins was one of the bravest, and lost his right arm saving the flag in one of the hottest struggles of that great fight. He had been a Maine lumberman, and was over six feet tall, but as gentle as a child, and as jolly as a boy, and very fond of his colonel.

"Papa left first, but made Joe promise to let him know how he got on, and Joe did so till he too went home. Then Papa lost sight of him, and in the excitement of his own illness, and the end of the war, and being married, Joe Collins was forgotten, till we children came along, and used to love to hear the story of Papa's battles, and how the brave sergeant caught the flag when the bearer was shot, and held it in the rush till one arm was blown off and the other wounded. We have fighting blood in us, you know, so we were never tired of that story, though twenty-five years or more make it all as far away to us as the old Revolution, where OUR ancestor was killed, at OUR Bunker Hill!

"Last December, just after my sad disappointments, Papa came home to dinner one day, exclaiming, in great glee: 'I've found old Joe! A messenger came with a letter to me, and when I looked up to give my answer, there stood a tall, grizzled fellow, as straight as a ramrod, grinning from ear to ear, with his hand to his temple, saluting me in regular style. "Don't you remember Joe Collins, Colonel? Awful glad to see you, sir," said he. And then it all came back, and we had a good talk, and I found out that the poor old boy was down on his luck, and almost friendless, but as proud and independent as ever, and bound to take care of himself while he had a leg to stand on. I've got his address, and mean to keep an eye on him, for he looks feeble and can't make much, I'm sure.'

"We were all very glad, and Joe came to see us, and Papa sent him on endless errands, and helped him in that way till he went to New York. Then, in the fun and flurry of the holidays, we forgot all about Joe, till Papa came home and missed him from his post. I said I'd go and find him; so Harry and I rummaged about till we did find him, in a little house at the North End, laid up with rheumatic fever in a stuffy back room, with no one to look after him but the washerwoman with whom he boarded.

"I was SO sorry we had forgotten him! but HE never complained, only said, with his cheerful grin,' I kinder mistrusted the Colonel was away, but I wasn't goin' to pester him.' He tried to be jolly, though in dreadful pain; called Harry 'Major,' and was so grateful for all we brought him, though he didn't want oranges and tea, and made us shout when I said, like a goose, thinking that was the proper thing to do, ‘Shall I bathe your brow, you are so feverish?’

“‘No, thanky, miss, it was swabbed pretty stiddy to the horsepittle, and I reckon a trifle of tobaccer would do more good and be a sight more relishin’, ef you’ll excuse my mentionin’ it.’

“Harry rushed off and got a great lump and a pipe, and Joe lay blissfully puffing, in a cloud of smoke, when we left him, promising to come again. We did go nearly every day, and had lovely times; for Joe told us his adventures, and we got so interested in the war that I began to read up evenings, and Papa was pleased, and fought all his battles over again for us, and Harry and I were great friends reading together, and Papa was charmed to see the old General’s spirit in us, as we got excited and discussed all our wars in a fever of patriotism that made Mamma laugh. Joe said I ‘brustled up’ at the word BATTLE like a war-horse at the smell of powder, and I’d ought to have been a drummer, the sound of martial music made me so ‘skittish.’

“It was all new and charming to us young ones, but poor old Joe had a hard time, and was very ill. Exposure and fatigue, and scanty food, and loneliness, and his wounds, were too much for him, and it was plain his working days were over. He hated the thought of the poor-house at home, which was all his own town could offer him, and he had no friends to live with, and he could not get a pension, something being wrong about his papers; so he would have been badly off, but for the Soldiers’ Home at Chelsea. As soon as he was able, Papa got him in there, and he was glad to go, for that seemed the proper place, and a charity the proudest man might accept, after risking his life for his country.

“There is where I used to be going when you saw me, and I was SO afraid you’d smell the cigars in my basket. The dear old boys always want them, and Papa says they MUST have them, though it isn’t half so romantic as flowers, and jelly, and wine, and the dainty messes we women always want to carry. I’ve learned about different kinds of tobacco and cigars, and you’d laugh to see me deal out my gifts, which are received as gratefully as the Victoria Cross, when the Queen decorates HER brave men. I’m quite a great gun over there, and the boys salute when I come, tell me their woes, and think that Papa and I can run the whole concern. I like it immensely, and am as proud and fond of my dear old wrecks as if I’d been a Rigoletto, and ridden on a cannon from my babyhood. That’s MY story, but I can’t begin to tell how interesting it all is, nor how glad I am that it led me to look into the history of American wars, in which brave men of our name did their parts so well.”

A hearty round of applause greeted Marion’s tale, for her glowing face and excited voice stirred the patriotic spirit of the Boston girls, and made them beam approvingly upon her.

“Now, Maggie, dear, last but not least, I’m sure,” said Anna, with an encouraging glance, for SHE had discovered the secret of this friend, and loved her more than ever for it.

Maggie blushed and hesitated, as she put down the delicate muslin cap-strings she was hemming with such care. Then, looking about her with a face in which both humility and pride contended, she said with an effort, “After the other lively experiences, mine will sound very flat. In fact, I have no story to tell, for MY charity began at home, and stopped there.”

“Tell it, dear. I know it is interesting, and will do us all good,” said Anna, quickly; and, thus supported, Maggie went on.

“I planned great things, and talked about what I meant to do, till Papa said one day, when things were in a mess, as they often are at our house, ‘If the little girls who want to help the world along would remember that charity be gins at home, they would soon find enough to do.’

“I was rather taken aback, and said no more, but after Papa had gone to the office, I began to think, and looked round to see what there was to be done at that particular moment. I found enough for that day, and took hold at once; for poor Mamma had one of her bad headaches, the children could not go out because it rained, and so were howling in the nursery, cook was on a rampage, and Maria had the toothache. Well, I began by making Mamma lie down for a good long sleep. I kept the children quiet by giving them my ribbon box and jewelry to dress up with, put a poultice on Maria’s face, and offered to wash the glass and silver for her, to appease cook, who was as cross as two sticks over extra work washing-day. It wasn’t much fun, as you may imagine, but I got through the afternoon, and kept the house still, and at dusk crept into Mamma’s room and softly built up the fire, so it should be cheery when she waked. Then I went trembling to the kitchen for some tea, and there found three girls calling, and high jinks going on; for one whisked a plate of cake into the table drawer, another put a cup under her shawl, and cook hid the teapot, as I stirred round in the china closet before opening the slide, through a crack of which I’d seen, heard, and smelt ‘the party,’ as the children call it.

“I was angry enough to scold the whole set, but I wisely held my tongue, shut my eyes, and politely asked for some hot water, nodded to the guests, and told cook Maria was better, and would do her work if she wanted to go out.

“So peace reigned, and as I settled the tray, I heard cook say in her balmiest tone, for I suspect the cake and tea lay heavy on her conscience, ‘The mistress is very poorly, and Miss takes nice care of her, the dear.’

“All blarney, but it pleased me and made me remember how feeble poor Mamma was, and how little I really did. So I wept a repentant weep as I toiled upstairs with my tea and toast, and found Mamma all ready for them, and so pleased to find things going well. I saw by that what a relief it would be to her if I did it oftener, as I ought, and as I resolved that I would.

"I didn't say anything, but I kept on doing whatever came along, and before I knew it ever so many duties slipped out of Mamma's hands into mine, and seemed to belong to me. I don't mean that I liked them, and didn't grumble to myself; I did, and felt regularly crushed and injured sometimes when I wanted to go and have my own fun. Duty is right, but it isn't easy, and the only comfort about it is a sort of quiet feeling you get after a while, and a strong feeling, as if you'd found something to hold on to and keep you steady. I can't express it, but you know?" And Maggie looked wistfully at the other faces, some of which answered her with a quick flash of sympathy, and some only wore a puzzled yet respectful expression, as if they felt they ought to know, but did not.

"I need not tire you with all my humdrum doings," continued Maggie. "I made no plans, but just said each day, 'I'll take what comes, and try to be cheerful and contented.' So I looked after the children, and that left Maria more time to sew and help round. I did errands, and went to market, and saw that Papa had his meals comfortably when Mamma was not able to come down. I made calls for her, and received visitors, and soon went on as if I were the lady of the house, not 'a chit of a girl,' as Cousin Tom used to call me.

"The best of all were the cosey talks we had in the twilight, Mamma and I, when she was rested, and all the day's worry was over, and we were waiting for Papa. Now, when he came, I didn't have to go away, for they wanted to ask and tell me things, and consult about affairs, and make me feel that I was really the eldest daughter. Oh, it was just lovely to sit between them and know that they needed me, and loved to have me with them! That made up for the hard and disagreeable things, and not long ago I got my reward. Mamma is better, and I was rejoicing over it, when she said,' Yes, I really am mending now, and hope soon to be able to relieve my good girl. But I want to tell you, dear, that when I was most discouraged my greatest comfort was, that if I had to leave my poor babies they would find such a faithful little mother in you.'

"I was SO pleased I wanted to cry, for the children DO love me, and run to me for everything now, and think the world of Sister, and they didn't use to care much for me. But that wasn't all. I ought not to tell these things, perhaps, but I'm so proud of them I can't help it. When I asked Papa privately, if Mamma was REALLY better and in no danger of falling ill again, he said, with his arms round me, and such a tender kiss, —

"'No danger now, for this brave little girl put her shoulder to the wheel so splendidly, that the dear woman got the relief from care she needed just at the right time, and now she really rests sure that we are not neglected. You couldn't have devoted yourself to a better charity, or done it more sweetly, my darling. God bless you!'"

Here Maggie's voice gave out, and she hid her face, with a happy sob, that finished her story eloquently. Marion flew to wipe her tears away with the blue sock, and the others gave a sympathetic murmur, looking much touched; forgotten duties of their own rose before them, and sudden resolutions were made to attend to them at once, seeing how great Maggie's reward had been.

"I didn't mean to be silly; but I wanted you to know that I hadn't been idle all winter, and that, though I haven't much to tell, I'm quite satisfied with my chore," she said, looking up with smiles shining through the tears till her face resembled a rose in a sun-shower.

"Many daughters have done well, but thou excellest them all," answered Anna, with a kiss that completed her satisfaction.

"Now, as it is after our usual time, and we must break up," continued the President, producing a basket of flowers from its hiding-place, "I will merely say that I think we have all learned a good deal, and will be able to work better next winter; for I am sure we shall want to try again, it adds so much sweetness to our own lives to put even a little comfort into the hard lives of the poor. As a farewell token, I sent for some real Plymouth mayflowers, and here they are, a posy apiece, with my love and many thanks for your help in carrying out my plan so beautifully."

So the nosegays were bestowed, the last lively chat enjoyed, new plans suggested, and goodbyes said; then the club separated, each member going gayly away with the rosy flowers on her bosom, and in it a clearer knowledge of the sad side of life, a fresh desire to see and help still more, and a sweet satisfaction in the thought that each had done what she could.

AN IVY SPRAY AND LADIES’ SLIPPERS

“IT can’t be done! So I may as well give it I up and get a new pair. I long for them, but I’m afraid my nice little plan for Laura will be spoilt,” said Jessie Delano to herself, as she shook her head over a pair of small, dilapidated slippers almost past mending. While she vainly pricked her fingers over them for the last time, her mind was full of girlish hopes and fears, as well as of anxieties far too serious for a light-hearted creature of sixteen.

A year ago the sisters had been the petted daughters of a rich man; but death and misfortune came suddenly, and now they were left to face poverty alone. They had few relations, and had offended the rich uncle who offered Jessie a home, because she refused to be separated from her sister. Poor Laura was an invalid, and no one wanted her; but Jessie would not leave her, so they clung together and lived on in the humble rooms where their father died, trying to earn their bread by the only accomplishments they possessed. Laura painted well, and after many disappointments was beginning to find a sale for her dainty designs and delicate flowers. Jessie had a natural gift for dancing; and her former teacher, a kind-hearted Frenchwoman, offered her favorite pupil the post of assistant teacher in her classes for children.

It cost the girl a struggle to accept a place of this sort and be a humble teacher, patiently twirling stupid little boys and girls round and round over the smooth floor where she used to dance so happily when she was the pride of the class and the queen of the closing balls. But for Laura’s sake she gratefully accepted the offer, glad to add her mite to their small store, and to feel that she could help keep the wolf from the door. They had seemed to hear the howl of this dreaded phantom more than once during that year, and looked forward to the long hard winter with an anxiety which neither would confess to the other. Laura feared to fall ill if she worked too hard, and then what would become of this pretty young sister who loved her so tenderly and would not be tempted to leave her? And Jessie could do very little except rebel against their hard fate and make impracticable plans. But each worked bravely, talked cheerfully, and waited hopefully for some good fortune to befall them, while doubt and pain and poverty and care made the young hearts so heavy that the poor girls often fell asleep on pillows wet with secret tears.

The smaller trials of life beset Jessie at this particular moment, and her bright wits were trying to solve the problem how to spend her treasured five dollars on slippers for herself and paints for Laura. Both were much needed, and she had gone in shabby shoes to save up money for the little surprise on which she had set her heart; but now dismay fell upon her when the holes refused to be cobbled, and the largest of bows would not hide the worn-out toes in spite of ink and blacking lavishly applied.

“These are the last of my dear French slippers, and I can’t afford any more. I hate cheap things! But I shall have to get them; for my boots are shabby, and every one has to look at my feet when I lead. Oh dear, what a horrid thing it is to be poor!” and Jessie surveyed the shabby little shoes affectionately, as her eyes filled with tears; for the road looked very rough and steep now. when she remembered how she used to dance through life as happy as a butterfly in a garden full of sunshine and flowers.

“Now, Jess, no nonsense, no red eyes to tell tales! Go and do your errands, and come in as gay as a lark, or Laura will be worried.” And springing up, the girl began to sing instead of sob, as she stirred about her dismal little room, cleaning her old gloves, mending her one white dress, and wishing with a sigh of intense longing that she could afford some flowers to wear, every ornament having been sold long ago. Then, with a kiss and a smile to her patient sister, she hurried away to get the necessary slippers and the much-desired paints, which Laura would not ask for, though her work waited for want of them.

Having been reared in luxury, poor little Jessie’s tastes were all of the daintiest sort; and her hardest trial, after Laura’s feeble health, was the daily sacrifice of the many comforts and elegances to which she had been accustomed. Faded gowns, cleaned gloves, and mended boots cost her many a pang, and the constant temptation of seeing pretty, useful, and unattainable things was a very hard one. Laura rarely went out, and so was spared this cross; then she was three years older, had always been delicate, and lived much in a happy world of her own. So Jessie bore her trials silently, but sometimes felt very covetous and resentful to see so much pleasure, money, and beauty in the world, and yet have so little of it fall to her lot.

“I feel as if I could pick a pocket to-day and not mind a bit, if it were a rich person’s. It’s a shame, when papa was always so generous, that no one remembers us. If ever I’m rich again, I’ll just hunt up all the poor girls I can find, and give them nice shoes, if nothing else,” she thought, as she went along the crowded streets, pausing involuntarily at the shop windows to look with longing eyes at the treasures within.

Resisting the allurements of French slippers with bows and buckles, she wisely bought a plain, serviceable pair, and trudged away, finding balm for her wounds in the fact that they were very cheap. More balm came when she met a young friend, who joined her as she stood wistfully eying the piles of grapes in a window and longing to buy some for Laura.

This warm-hearted schoolmate read the wish before Jessie saw her, and gratified it so adroitly that the girl could accept the pretty basketful sent to her sister without feeling like a spendthrift or a beggar. It comforted her very much, and the world began to look brighter after that little touch of kindness, as it always does when genuine sympathy makes sunshine in shady places.

At the art store she was told that more of Laura’s autumn-flowers were in demand; and her face was so full of innocent delight and gratitude it quite touched the old man who sold her the paints, and gave her more than her money’s worth, remembering his own hard times and pitying the pretty young girl whose father he had known.

So Jessie did not have to pretend very hard at being “as gay as a lark” when she got home and showed her treasures. Laura was so happy over the unexpected gifts that the dinner of bread and milk and grapes was quite a picnic; and Jessie found a smile on her face when she went to dress for her party.

It was only a child’s party at the house of one of Mademoiselle’s pupils, and Jessie was merely invited to help the little people through their dancing. She did not like to go in this way, as she was sure to meet familiar faces there, full of the pity, curiosity, or indifference so hard for a girl to bear. But Mademoiselle asked it as a favor, and Jessie was grateful; so she went, expecting no pleasure and certain of much weariness, if not annoyance.

When she was ready, — and it did not take long to slip on the white woollen dress, brush out the curly dark hair, and fold up slippers and gloves, — she stood before her glass looking at herself, quite conscious that she was very pretty, with her large eyes, blooming cheeks, and the lofty little air which nothing could change. She was also painfully conscious that her dress was neither fresh nor becoming without a bit of ribbon or a knot of flowers to give it the touch of color it needed. She had an artistic eye, and used to delight in ordering charming costumes for herself in the happy days when all her wishes were granted as if fairies still lived. She tossed over her very small store of ribbons in vain; everything had been worn till neither beauty nor freshness remained.

“Oh dear! where CAN I find something to make me look less like a nun, — and a very shabby one, too?” she said, longing for the pink corals she sold to pay Laura’s doctor’s bill.

The sound of a soft tap, tap, tap, startled her, and she ran to open the door. No one was there but Laura, fast asleep on the sofa. Tap, tap, tap! went the invisible hand; and as the sound seemed to come from the window, Jessie glanced that way, thinking her tame dove had corne to be fed. Neither hungry dove nor bold sparrow appeared, — only a spray of Japanese ivy waving in the wind. A very pretty spray it was, covered with tiny crimson leaves; and it tapped impatiently, as if it answered her question by saying, “Here is a garland for you; come and take it.”

Jessie’s quick eye was caught at once by the fine color, and running to the window she looked out as eagerly as if a new idea had come into her head. It was a dull November day, and the prospect of sheds, ash-barrels, and old brooms was a gloomy one; but the whole back of the house glowed with the red tendrils of the hardy vine that clung to and covered the dingy bricks with a royal mantle, as if eager to cheer the eyes and hearts of all who looked. It preached a little sermon of courage, aspiration, and content to those who had the skill to read it, and bade them see how, springing from the scanty soil of that back yard full of the commonest objects, the humblest work, it set its little creepers in the crannies of the stone, and struggled up to find the sun and air, till it grew strong and beautiful, — making the blank wall green in summer, glorious in autumn, and a refuge in winter, when it welcomed the sparrows to the shelter of its branches where the sun lay warmest.

Jessie loved this beautiful neighbor, and had enjoyed it all that summer, — the first she ever spent in the hot city. She felt the grace its greenness gave to all it touched, and half unconsciously imitated it in trying to be brave and bright, as she also climbed up from the dismal place where she seemed shut away from everything lovely, till she was beginning to discover that the blue sky was over all, the sun still shone for her, and heaven’s fresh air kissed her cheeks as kindly as ever. Many a night she had leaned from the high window when Laura was asleep, dreaming innocent dreams, living over her short past, or trying to look into the future bravely and trustfully. The little vine had felt warmer drops than rain or dew fall on it when things went badly, had heard whispered prayers when the lonely child asked the Father of the fatherless for help and comfort, had peeped in to see her sleeping peacefully when the hard hour was over, and been the first to greet her with a tap on the window-pane as she woke full of new hope in the morning. It seemed to know all her moods and troubles, to be her friend and confidante, and now came with help like a fairy godmother when our Cinderella wanted to be fine for the little ball.

“Just the thing! Why didn’t I think of it? So bright and delicate and becoming? It will last better than flowers; and no one can think I’m extravagant, since it costs nothing.”

As she spoke, Jessie was gathering long sprays of the rosy vine, with its glossy leaves so beattifully shaded that it was evident Jack Frost had done his best for it. Going to her glass, she fastened a wreath of the smallest leaves about her head, set a cluster of larger ones in her bosom, and then surveyed herself with girlish pleasure, as well she might; for the effect of the simple decoration was charming. Quite satisfied now, she tied on her cloud and slipped away without waking Laura, little dreaming what good fortune the ivy spray was to bring them both.

She found the children prancing with impatience to begin their ballet, much excited by the music, gaslight, and gay dresses, which made it seem like "a truly ball." All welcomed Jessie, and she soon forgot the cheap slippers, mended gloves, and old dress, as she gayly led her troop through the pretty dance with so much grace and skill that the admiring mammas who lined the walls declared it was the sweetest thing they ever saw.

"Who is that little person?" asked one of the few gentlemen who hovered about the doorways.

His hostess told Jessie's story in a few words, and was surprised to hear him say in a satisfied tone, —

"I'm glad she is poor. I want her head, and now there is some chance of getting it."

"My dear Mr. Vane, what DO you mean?" asked the lady, laughing.

"I came to study young faces; I want one for a picture, and that little girl with the red leaves is charming. Please present me."

"No use; you may ask for her hand by-and-by, if you like, but not for her head. She is very proud, and never would consent to sit as a model, I'm sure."

"I think I can manage it, if you will kindly give me a start."

"Very well. The children are just going down to supper, and Miss Delano will rest. You can make your bold proposal now, if you dare."

A moment later, as she stood watching the little ones troop away, Jessie found herself bowing to the tall gentleman, who begged to know what he could bring her with as much interest as if she had been the finest lady in the room. Of course she chose ice-cream, and slipped into a corner to rest her tired feet, preferring the deserted parlor to the noisy dining-room, — not being quite sure where she belonged now.

Mr. Vane brought her a salver full of the dainties girls best love, and drawing up a table began to eat and talk in such a simple, comfortable way that Jessie could not feel shy, but was soon quite at her ease. She knew that he was a famous artist, and longed to tell him about poor Laura, who admired his pictures so much and would have enjoyed every moment of this chance interview. He was not a very young man, nor a handsome one, but he had a genial face, and the friendly manners which are so charming; and in ten minutes Jessie was chatting freely, quite unconscious that the artist was studying her in a mirror all the while. They naturally talked of the children, and after praising the pretty dance Mr. Vane quietly added, —

“I’ve been trying — to find a face among them for a picture I’m doing; but the little dears are all too young, and I must look elsewhere for a model for my wood-nymph.”

“Are models hard to find?” asked Jessie, eating her ice with the relish of a girl who does not often taste it.

“What I want is very hard to find. I can get plenty of beggar-girls, but this must be a refined face, young and blooming, but with poetry in it; and that does not come without a different training from any my usual models get. It will be difficult to suit me, for I’m in a hurry and don’t know where to look,” — which last sentence was not quite true, for the long glass showed him exactly what he wanted.

“I help Mademoiselle with her classes, and she has pupils of all ages; perhaps you could find some one there.”

Jessie looked so interested that the artist felt that he had begun well, and ventured a step further as he passed the cake-basket for the third time.

“You are very kind; but the trouble there is, that I fear none of the young ladies would consent to sit to me if I dared to ask them. I will confide to you that I HAVE seen a head which quite suits me; but I fear I cannot get it. Give me your advice, please. Should you think this pretty creature would be offended, if I made the request most respectfully?”

“No, indeed; I should think she would be proud to help with one of your pictures, sir. My sister thinks they are very lovely; and we kept one of them when we had to sell all the rest,” said Jessie, in her eager, frank way.

“That was a beautiful compliment, and I am proud of it. Please tell her so, with my thanks. Which was it?”

“The woman’s head, — the sad, sweet one people call a Madonna. We call it Mother, and love it very much, for Laura says it is like our mother. I never saw her, but my sister remembers the dear face very well.”

Jessie’s eyes dropped, as if tears were near; and Mr. Vane said, in a voice which showed he understood and shared her feeling, —

“I am very glad that anything of mine has been a comfort to you. I thought of my own mother when I painted that picture years ago; so you see you read it truly, and gave it the right name. Now, about the other head; you think I may venture to propose the idea to its owner, do you?”

“Why not, sir? She would be very silly to refuse, I think.”

“Then YOU wouldn’t be offended if asked to sit in this way?”

“Oh, no. I’ve sat for Laura many a time, and she says I make a very good model. But then, she only paints simple little things that I am fit for.”

“That is just what I want to do. Would you mind asking the young lady for me? She is just behind you.”

Jessie turned with a start, wondering who had come in; but all she saw was her own curious face in the mirror, and Mr. Vane’s smiling one above it.

“Do you mean me?” she cried, so surprised and pleased and half ashamed that she could only blush and laugh and look prettier than ever.

“Indeed I do. Mrs. Murray thought the request would annoy you; but I fancied you would grant it, you wore such a graceful little garland, and seemed so interested in the pictures here.”

“It is only a bit of ivy, but so pretty I wanted to wear it, as I had nothing else,” said the girl, glad that her simple ornament found favor in such eyes.

“It is most artistic, and caught my eye at once. I said to myself,’ That is the head I want, and I MUST secure it if possible.’ Can I?” asked Mr. Vane, smiling persuasively as he saw what a frank and artless young person he had to deal with.

“With pleasure, if Laura doesn’t mind. I’ll ask her, and if she is willing I shall be very proud to have even my wreath in a famous picture,” answered Jessie, so full of innocent delight at being thus honored that it was a pretty sight to see.

“A thousand thanks! Now I can exult over Mrs. Murray, and get my palette ready. When can we begin? As your sister is an invalid and cannot come to my studio with you, perhaps you will allow me to make my sketch at your own house,” said Mr. Vane, as pleased with his success as only a perplexed artist could be.

“Did Mrs. Murray tell you about us?” asked Jessie quickly, as her smiles faded away and the proud look came into her face; for she was sure their misfortunes were known, since he spoke of poor Laura’s health.

“A little,” began the new friend, with a sympathetic glance.

“I know models are paid for sitting; did you wish to do it with me because I’m poor?” asked Jessie, with an irrepressible frown and a glance at the thrice-cleaned dress and the neatly mended gloves.

Mr. Vane knew what thorn pricked the sensitive little girl, and answered in his friendliest tone, —

“I never thought of such a thing. I wanted YOU to help ME, because I am poor in what artists so much need, — real grace and beauty. I hoped you would allow me to give your sister a copy of the sketch as a token of my gratitude for four great kindness.”

The frown vanished and the smile returned as the soft answer turned away Jessie’s wrath and made her hasten to say penitently, —

“I was very rude; but I haven’t learned to be humble yet, and often forget that I am poor. Please come to us any time. Laura will enjoy seeing you work, and be delighted with anything you give her. So shall I, though I don’t deserve it.”

“I won’t punish you by painting the frown that quite frightened me just now, but do my best to keep the happy face, and so heap coals of fire on your head. They won’t burn any more than the pretty red leaves that brought me this good fortune,” answered the artist, seeing that his peace was made.

“I’m SO glad I wore them!” and as if trying to make amends for her little flash of temper, Jessie told him about the ivy, and how she loved it, — unconsciously betraying more of her pathetic little story than she knew, and increasing her hearer’s interest in his new model.

The children came back in riotous spirits, and Jessie was called to lead the revels again. But now her heart was as light as her heels; for she had something pleasant to think of, — a hope of help for Laura, and the memory of kind words to make hard duties easier. Mr. Vane soon slipped away, promising to come the next day; and at eight o’clock Jessie ran home to tell her sister the good news, and to press the little wreath which had served her so well.

With the sanguine spirit of girlhood, she felt sure that something delightful would happen, and built fine castles in the air for her sister, with a small corner for herself, where she could watch Laura bloom into a healthy woman and a great artist. The desire of Jessie’s heart was to earn eneugh money to enable them to spend a month or two at the seashore when summer came, as that was the surest cure for Laura’s weak nerves and muscles. She had cherished the wild idea of being a ballet-girl, as dancing was her delight; but every one frowned upon that plan, and her own refined nature told her that it was not the life for a young girl. Mr. Vane’s request for her head suggested a splendid hope; and after getting angry with him for hinting at her being a model, she suddenly decided to try it, — with the charming inconsistency of her sex. The more she thought of it, the better she liked the idea, and resolved to ask her new friend all about it, fondly hoping that much money could be made in this way.

She said nothing to her sister, but while she sat patiently to Mr. Vane when he came next day, she asked many questions; and though somewhat discouraged by his replies, confided to him her hopes and begged his advice. Being a wise man as well as a good and kindly one, he saw at once that this life would not be safe for the pretty, impulsive, and tenderly reared girl, left so unprotected in a world full of trials and temptations. So he told her it would not do, except so far as she would allow him to make several studies of her head in various characters and pay for them.

She consented, and though much disappointed found some consolation in hoarding a part of the handsome sum so earned for the desire of her heart.

The artist seemed in no haste to finish his work, and for some weeks came often to the sittings in that quiet room; for it grew more and more attractive to him, and while he painted the younger sister's changeful face he studied the beautiful nature of the elder and learned to love it. But no one guessed that secret for a long time; and Jessie was so busy racking her brain for a way to earn more money that she was as blind and deaf to much that went on before her as if she had been a wooden dummy.

Suddenly, when she least expected it, help came, and in such a delightful way that she long remembered the little episode with girlish satisfaction. One day as she sat wearily waiting till the dressing-room was cleared of maids and children after the dancing-class was over, a former friend came sauntering up to her, saying In the tone which always nettled Jessie, —

"You poor thing! aren't you tired to death trying to teach these stupid babies?"

"No; I love to dance, and we had new figures to-day. See! isn't this pretty?" and Jessie, who knew her own skill and loved to display it, twirled away as lightly as if her feet were not aching with two hours of hard work.

"Lovely! I do wish I ever could learn to keep time and not jerk and bounce. Being plump is a dreadful trial," sighed Fanny Fletcher, as Jessie came back beaming and breathless.

"Perhaps I can teach you. I think of making this my profession since I must do something. Mademoiselle earns heaps of money by it," she said, sitting down to rest, resolved not to be ashamed of her work or to let Fanny pity her,

"I wish you COULD teach me, for I know I shall disgrace myself at the Kirmess. You've heard about it, of course? So sorry you can't take a part, for it's going to be great fun and very splendid. I am in the Hungarian dance, and it's one of the hardest; but the dress is lovely, and I would be in it. Mamma is the matron of it; so I had my way, though I know the girls don't want me, and the boys make fun of me. Just see if this isn't the queerest step you ever beheld!"

Fanny started bravely across the wide smooth floor, with a stamp, a slide, and a twirl which was certainly odd, but might have been lively and graceful if she had not unfortunately been a very plump, awkward girl, with no more elasticity than a feather-bed. Jessie found it impossible not to laugh when Fanny ended her display with a sprawl upon the floor, and sat rubbing her elbows in an attitude of despair.

"I know that dance! It is the tzardas, and I can show you how it should be done. Jump up and try it with me!" she said good-naturedly, running to help her friend up, glad to have a partner of her own size for once.

Away they went, but soon stopped; for Fanny could not keep step, and Jessie pulled and stamped and hummed in vain.

"Do it alone; then I can see how it goes, and manage better next time," panted the poor girl, dropping down upon the velvet seat which ran round the hall.

Mademoiselle had come in and watched them for a moment. She saw at once what was needed, and as Mrs. Fletcher was one of her best patrons, she was glad to oblige the oldest daughter; so she went to the piano and struck up the proper air just as Jessie, with one arm on her hip, the other on the shoulder of an invisible partner, went down the hall with a martial stamp, a quick slide, and a graceful turn, in perfect time to the stirring music that made her nerves tingle and her feet fly. To and fro, round and round, with all manner of graceful gestures, intricate steps, and active bounds went the happy girl, quite carried away by the music and motion of the pastime she loved so much.

Fanny clapped her hands with admiration, and Mademoiselle cried, "Bien, tres bien, charmante, ma cherie!" as she paused at last, rosy and smiling, with one hand on her heart and the other at her temple with the salute that closed the dance.

"I MUST learn it! Do come and give me lessons at our house. I called for Maud and must go now. Will you come, Jessie? I'll be glad to pay you if you don't mind. I hate to be laughed at; and I know if some one would just help me alone I should do as well as the rest, for Professor Ludwig raves at us all."

Fanny seemed in such a sad strait, and Jessie sympathized so heartily with her, that she could not refuse a request which flattered her vanity and tempted her with a prospect of some addition to the "Sister-fund," as she called her little savings. So she graciously consented, and after a few laborious lessons prospered so well that her grateful pupil proposed to several other unsuccessful dancers in the set to invite Jessie to the private rehearsals held in various parlors as the festival drew near.

Some of these young people knew Jessie Delano, had missed the bright girl, and gladly welcomed her back when, after much persuasion, she agreed to go and help them with the difficult figures of the tzardas. Once among them she felt in her element, and trained the awkward squad so well that Professor Ludwig complimented them on their improvement at the public rehearsals, and raved no more, to the great delight of the timid damsels, who lost their wits when the fiery little man shouted and wrung his hands over their mistakes.

The young gentlemen needed help also, as several of them looked very much like galvanized grasshoppers in their efforts to manage long legs or awkward elbows. Jessie willingly danced with them, and showed them how to move with grace and spirit, and handle their partners less like dolls and more like peasant maidens with whom the martial Hungarians were supposed to be disporting themselves at the fair. Merry meetings were these; and all enjoyed them, as young people do whatever is lively, dramatic, and social. Every one was full of the brilliant Kirmess, which was the talk of the city, and to which every one intended to go as actor or spectator. Jessie was sadly tempted to spend three of her cherished dollars for a ticket, and perhaps would have done so if there had been any one to take care of her. Laura could not go, and Mr. Vane was away; no other friend appeared, and no one remembered to invite her, so she bravely hid her girlish longing, and got all the pleasure out of the rehearsals that she could.

At the last of these, which was a full-dress affair at Fanny's house, something happened which not only tried Jessie's temper sorely, but brought her a reward for many small sacrifices. So much dancing was very hard upon her slippers, the new pair were worn out long ago, and a second pair were in a dangerous condition; but Jessie hoped that they would last that evening, and then she would indulge in better ones with what Fanny would pay her. She hated to take it, but her salary at Mademoiselle's was needed at home; all she could spare from other sources was sacredly kept for Laura's jaunt, and only now and then did the good little girl buy some very necessary article for herself. She was learning to be humble, to love work, and be grateful for her small wages for her sister's sake; and while she hid her trials, withstood her temptations, and bravely tugged away at her hard tasks, the kind Providence, who teaches us the sweetness of adversity, was preparing a more beautiful and helpful surprise than any she could plan or execute.

That night all were much excited, and great was the energy displayed as the scarlet, blue, and silver couples went through the rapid figures with unusual spirit and success. The brass-heeled boots stamped in perfect time, the furred caps waved, and the braided jackets glittered as the gay troop swung to and fro or marched to the barbaric music of an impromptu band. Jessie looked on with such longing in her eyes that Fanny, who was ill with a bad cold, kindly begged her to take her place, as motion made her cough, and putting on the red and silver cap sent her joyfully away to lead them all.

The fun grew rather fast and furious toward the end, and when the dance broke up there lay in the middle of the floor a shabby little slipper, burst at the side, trodden down at the heel, and utterly demoralized as to the bow with a broken buckle in it. Such a disreputable little shoe was it that no one claimed it when one of the young men held it up on the point of his sword, exclaiming gayly, —

"Where is Cinderella? Here's her shoe, and it's quite time she had a new pair. Glass evidently doesn't wear well now-a-days."

They all laughed and looked about to find the shoeless foot. The girls with small feet displayed them readily; those less blessed hid them at once, and no Cinderella appeared to claim the old slipper. Jessie turned as red as her cap, and glanced imploringly at Fanny as she slipped through a convenient door and flew up-stairs, knowing that in a moment all would see that it must be hers, since the other girls wore red boots as a part of their costume.

Fanny understood; and though awkward and slow with her feet, she was kind-hearted and quick to spare her friend the mortification which a poor and proud girl could not help feeling at such a moment. The unfortunate slipper was flying from hand to hand as the youths indulged in a boyish game of ball to tease the laughing girls, who hastened to disclaim all knowledge of "the horrid thing."

"Please give it to me!" cried Fanny, trying to catch it, and glad Jessie was safe.

"No; Cinderella must come and put it on. Here's the Prince all ready to help her," said the finder of the shoe, holding it up.

"And here are lots of proud sisters ready to cut off their toes and heels if they could only get on such a small slipper," added another young Mygar, enjoying the fun immensely.

"Listen, and let me tell you something. It's Jessie Delano's, and she has run away because she lost it. Don't laugh and make fun of it, because it was worn out in helping us. You all know what a hard time she has had, but you don't know how good and brave and patient she is, trying to help poor Laura and to earn her living. I asked her to teach me, and I shall pay her well for it, because I couldn't have gone on if she hadn't. If any of you feel as grateful as I do, and as sorry for her, you can show it in any kind way you please, for it must be dreadful to be so poor."

Fanny had spoken quickly, and at the last Words hid the tremble in her voice with a cough, being rather scared at what she had done on the impulse of the moment. But it was a true impulse, and the generous young hearts were quick to answer it. The old slipper was respectfully handed to her with many apologies and various penitent suggestions. None were adopted just then, however, for Fanny ran off to find Jessie with her things on waiting — for a chance to slip away unseen. No persuasions would keep her to supper; and at last, with many thanks, she was allowed to go, while Fanny returned to lay plans with her guests as they disturbed their digestions with lobster salad, ice-cream, and strong coffee.

Feeling more than ever like Cinderella as she hurried out into the winter night, leaving all the good times behind her, Jessie stood waiting for a car on the windy street-corner, with the ragged slippers under her arm, tears of weariness and vexation in her eyes, and a resentful feeling against an unjust fate lying heavy at her heart. The glimpses of her old gay, easy life, which these rehearsals had given her, made the real hardship and loneliness of her present life all the more irksome, and that night she felt as if she could not bear it much longer. She longed with all a girl’s love of gayety to go to the Kirmess, and no one thought to invite her. She could not go alone even if she yielded to temptation and spent her own money. Laura would have to hire a carriage if she ventured to try it; so it was impossible, for six or seven dollars was a fortune to the poor girls now. To have been one of the happy creatures who were to take part in it, to dance on the green in a dainty costume to the music of a full band, — to see and do and enjoy all the delights of those two enchanting evenings, would have filled Jessie’s cup to overflowing. But since she might as well cry for the moon she tried to get some comfort out of imagining it all as she rumbled home in a snowstorm, and cried herself to sleep after giving Laura a cheerful account of the rehearsal, omitting the catastrophe.

The sun shone next morning, hope woke again, and as she dressed Jessie sung to keep her heart up, still trusting that some one would remember her before the day was over. As she opened her windows the sparrows welcomed her with shrill chirpings, and the sun turned the snow-covered vine to a glittering network very beautiful to see as it hung like a veil of lace over the dingy wall. Jessie smiled as she saw it, while taking a long breath of the keen air, feeling cheered and refreshed by these familiar comforters; then with a brave, bright glance up at the clear blue sky she went away to the day’s duties, little guessing what pleasant surprises were on their way to reward her for the little sacrifices which were teaching her strength, patience, and courage for greater ones by-and-by.

All the morning she listened eagerly for the bell, but nothing came; and at two o’clock she went away to the dancing-class, saying to herself with a sigh, —

“Every one is so busy, it is no wonder I’m forgotten. I shall hear about the fun in the papers, and try to be contented with that.”

Though she never felt less like dancing, she was very patient with her little pupils, and when the lesson was over sat resting a moment, with her head still full of the glories of the Kirmess. Suddenly Mademoiselle came to her, and in a few kind words gave her the first of the pleasant surprises by offering her a larger salary, an older class, and many commendations for her skill and faithfulness. Of course she gratefully accepted the welcome offer, and hurried home to tell Laura, forgetting her heavy heart, tired feet, and disappointed hopes.

At her own door the second surprise stood waiting for her, in the person of Mrs. Fletcher's servant with a large box and a note from Miss Fanny. How she ever got herself and her parcel up the long stairs Jessie never knew, she was in such a frantic hurry to see what that vast box could contain. She startled her sister by bursting into the room breathless, flushed, and beaming, with the mysterious cry of, —

"Scissors! quick, the scissors!"

Off went cords and papers, up flew the cover, and with a shriek of rapture Jessie saw the well-known Hungarian costume lying there before her. What it all meant she could not guess, till she tore open the note and read these delightful words: —

DEAR JESS, — My cold is worse, and the doctor won't let me go to-night. Isn't it dreadful? Our dance will be ruined unless you will take my place. I know you will to oblige us, and have a lovely time. Every one will be glad, you do it so much better than I can. My dress will fit you, with tucks and reefs here and there; and the hoots won't be much too large, for though I'm fat I have small feet, thank goodness! Mamma will call for you at seven, and bring you safely home; and you must come early to-morrow and tell me all about it.

In the small box you will find a little token of our gratitude to you for your kindness in helping us all so much. Yours ever, As soon as Jessie could get her breath and recover from this first delightful shock, she opened the dainty parcel carefully tied up with pink ribbons. It proved to be a crystal slipper, apparently full of rosebuds; but under the flowers lay five-and-twenty shining gold dollars. A little card with these words was tucked in one corner, as if, with all their devices to make the offering as delicate and pretty as possible, the givers feared to offend: —

“We return to our dear Princess the glass slipper which she lost at the ball, full of thanks and good wishes.”

If the kind young persons who sent the fanciful gift could have seen how it was received, their doubts would soon have been set at rest; for Jessie laughed and cried as she told the story, counted the precious coins, and filled the pretty shoe with water that the buds might keep fresh for Laura. Then, while the needles flew and the gay garments were fitted, the happy voices talked and the sisters rejoiced together over this unexpected pleasure as only loving girls could do.

“The sweetest part of all the splendid surprise is that they remembered me just at the busiest time, and thanked me in such a lovely way. I shall keep that glass slipper all my life, if I can, to remind me not to despair; for just when everything seemed darkest, all this good luck came,” said Jessie, with ecstatic skips as she clanked the brass heels of her boots and thought of the proud moment when she would join in the tzardas before all Boston.

Gentle Laura rejoiced and sympathized heartily, sewed like a busy bee, and sent her happy sister away at seven o’clock with her sweetest smile, never letting her suspect what tender hopes and fears were hidden in her own heart, what longing and disappointment made her days doubly sad and lonely, or how very poor a consolation all the glories of the Kirmess would be for the loss of a friend who had grown very near and dear to her.

No need to tell the raptures of that evening to little Jessie, who enjoyed every moment, played her part well, and was brought home at midnight ready to begin all over again, so inexhaustible is youth’s appetite for pleasure.

To her great surprise, Laura was up and waiting to welcome her, with a face so full of a new and lovely happiness that Jessie guessed at once some good fortune had come to her also. Yes, Laura’s well-earned reward and beautiful surprise had arrived at last; and she told it all in a few words as she held out her arms exclaiming, —

“He has come back! He loves me, and I am so happy! Dear little sister, all your hard times are over now, and you shall have a home again.”

So the dreams came true, as they sometimes do even in this work-a-day world of ours, when the dreamers strive as well as hope, and earn their rewards.

Laura had a restful summer at the seaside, with a stronger arm than Jessie’s to lean upon, and more magical medicine to help her back to health than any mortal doctor could prescribe. Jessie danced again with a light heart, — for pleasure, not for pay, — and found the new life all the sweeter for the trials of the old one. In the autumn there was a quiet wedding, before three very happy people sailed away to Italy, the artist’s heaven on earth.

“No roses for me,” said Jessie, smiling at herself in the mirror as she fastened a spray of rosy ivy-leaves in the bosom of her fresh white gown that October morning. “I’ll be true to my old friend; for it helped me in my dark days, and now it shall rejoice with me in my bright ones, and go on teaching me to climb bravely and patiently toward the light”

PANSIES

They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts. — SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

"I'VE finished my book, and now what CAN I do till this tiresome rain is over?" exclaimed Carrie, as she lay back on the couch with a yawn of weariness.

"Take another and a better book; the house is full of them, and this is a rare chance for a feast on the best," answered Alice, looking over the pile of volumes in her lap, as she sat on the floor before one of the tall book-cases that lined the room.

"Not being a book-worm like you, I can't read forever, and you needn't sniff at 'Wanda,' for it's perfectly thrilling!" cried Carrie, regretfully turning the crumpled leaves of the Seaside Library copy of that interminable and impossible tale.

"We should read to improve our minds, and that rubbish is only a waste of time," began Alice, in a warning tone, as she looked up from "Romola," over which she had been poring with the delight one feels in meeting an old friend.

"I don't WISH to improve my mind, thank you: I read for amusement in vacation time, and don't want to see any moral works till next autumn. I get enough of them in school. This isn't 'rubbish'! It's full of fine descriptions of scenery — "

"Which you skip by the page, I've seen you do it," said Eva, the third young girl in the library, as she shut up the stout book on her knee and began to knit as if this sudden outburst of chat disturbed her enjoyment of "The Dove in the Eagle's Nest."

"I do at first, being carried away by my interest in the people, but I almost always go back and read them afterward," protested Carrie. "You know YOU like to hear about nice clothes, Eva, and Wanda's were simply gorgeous; white velvet and a rope of pearls is one costume; gray velvet and a silver girdle another; and Idalia was all a 'shower of perfumed laces,' and scarlet and gold satin mask dresses, or primrose silk with violets, so lovely! I do revel in 'em!"

Both girls laughed as Carrie reeled off this list of elegances, with the relish of a French modiste.

"Well, I'm poor and can't have as many pretty things as I want, so it IS delightful to read about women who wear white quilted satin dressing-gowns and olive velvet trains with Mechlin lace sweepers to them. Diamonds as large as nuts, and rivers of opals and sapphires, and rubies and pearls, are great fun to read of, if you never even get a look at real ones. I don't believe the love part does me a bit of harm, for we never see such languid swells in America, nor such lovely, naughty ladies; and Ouida scolds them all, so of course she doesn't approve of them, and that's moral, I'm sure."

But Alice shook her head again, as Carrie paused out of breath, and said in her serious way: "That's the harm of it all. False and foolish things are made interesting, and we read for that, not for any lesson there may be hidden under the velvet and jewels and fine words of your splendid men and women. Now, THIS book is a wonderful picture of Florence in old times, and the famous people who really lived are painted in it, and it has a true and clean moral that we can all see, and one feels wiser and better for reading it. I do wish you'd leave those trashy things and try something really good."

"I hate George Eliot, — so awfully wise and preachy and dismal! I really couldn't wade through 'Daniel Deronda,' though 'The Mill on the Floss' wasn't bad," answered Carrie, with another yawn, as she recalled the Jew Mordecai's long speeches, and Daniel's meditations.

"I know you'd like this," said Eva, patting her book with an air of calm content; for she was a modest, common-sense little body, full of innocent fancies and the mildest sort of romance. "I love dear Miss Yonge, with her nice, large families, and their trials, and their pious ways, and pleasant homes full of brothers and sisters, and good fathers and mothers. I'm never tired of them, and have read 'Daisy Chain' nine times at least."

"I used to like them, and still think them good for young girls, with our own 'Queechy' and 'Wide, Wide World,' and books of that kind. Now I'm eighteen I prefer stronger novels, and books by great men and women, because these are always talked about by cultivated people, and when I go into society next winter I wish to be able to listen intelligently, and know what to admire."

"That's all very well for you, Alice; you were always poking over books, and I dare say you will write them some day, or be a blue-stocking. But I've got another year to study and fuss over my education, and I'm going to enjoy myself all I can, and leave the wise books till I come out."

"But, Carrie, there won't be any time to read them; you'll be so busy with parties, and beaux, and travelling, and such things. I WOULD take Alice's advice and read up a little now; it's so nice to know useful things, and be able to find help and comfort in good books when trouble comes, as Ellen Montgomery and Fleda did, and Ethel, and the other girls in Miss Yonge's stories," said Eva, earnestly, remembering how much the efforts of those natural little heroines had helped her in her own struggles tor self-control and the cheerful bearing of the burden which come to all.

"I don't want to be a priggish Ellen, or a moral Fleda, and I do detest bothering about self-improvement all the time. I know I ought, but I'd rather wait another year or two, and enjoy my vanities in peace just a LITTLE longer." And Carrie tucked Wanda under the sofa pillow, as if a trifle ashamed of her society, with Eva's innocent eyes upon her own, and Alice sadly regarding her over the rampart of wise books, which kept growing higher as the eager girl found more and more treasures in this richly stored library.

A little silence followed, broken only by the patter of the rain without, the crackle of the wood fire within, and the scratch of a busy pen from a curtained recess at the end of the long room. In the sudden hush the girls heard it and remembered that they were not alone.

"She must have heard every word we said!" and Carrie sat up with a dismayed face as she spoke in a whisper.

Eva laughed, but Alice shrugged her shoulders, and said tranquilly,
"I don't mind. She wouldn't expect much wisdom from school-girls."

This was cold comfort to Carrie, who was painfully conscious of having been a particularly silly school-girl just then. So she gave a groan and lay down again, wishing she had not expressed her views quite so freely, and had kept Wanda for the privacy of her own room.

The three girls were the guests of a delightful old lady, who had know their mothers and was fond of renewing her acquaintance with them through their daughters. She loved young people, and each summer invited parties of them to enjoy the delights of her beautiful country house, where she lived alone now, being the childless widow of a somewhat celebrated man. She made it very pleasant for her guests, leaving them free to employ a part of the day as they liked, providing the best of company at dinner, gay revels in the evening, and a large house full of curious and interesting things to examine at their leisure.

The rain had spoiled a pleasant plan, and business letters had made it necessary for Mrs. Warburton to leave the three to their own devices after lunch. They had read quietly for several hours, and their hostess was just finishing her last letter when fragments of the conversation reached her ear. She listened with amusement, unconscious that they had forgotten her presence, finding the different views very characteristic, and easily explained by the difference of the homes out of which the three friends came.

Alice was the only daughter of a scholarly man and a brilliant woman; therefore her love of books and desire to cultivate her mind was very natural, but the danger in her case would be in the neglect of other things equally important, too varied reading, and a superficial knowledge of many authors rather than a true appreciation of a few of the best and greatest. Eva was one of many children in a happy home, with a busy father, a pious mother, and many domestic cares, as well as joys, already falling to the dutiful girl's lot. Her instincts were sweet and unspoiled, and she only needed to be shown where to find new and better helpers for the real trials of life, when the childish heroines she loved could no longer serve her in the years to come.

Carrie was one of the ambitious yet commonplace girls who wish to shine, without knowing the difference between the glitter of a candle which attracts moths, and the serene light of a star, or the cheery glow of a fire round which all love to gather. Her mother's aims were not high, and the two pretty daughters knew that she desired good matches for them, educated them for that end, and expected them to do their parts when the time came. The elder sister was now at a watering-place with her mother, and Carrie hoped that a letter would soon come telling her that Mary was settled. During her stay with Mrs. Warburton she had learned a good deal, and was unconsciously contrasting the life here with the frivolous one at home, made up of public show and private sacrifice of comfort, dignity, and peace. Here were people who dressed simply, enjoyed conversation, kept up their accomplishments even when old, and were so busy, lovable, and charming, that poor Carrie often felt vulgar, ignorant, and mortified among them, in spite of their fine breeding and kindliness. The society Mrs. Warburton drew about her was the best, and old and young, rich and poor, wise and simple, all seemed genuine, — -glad to give or receive, enjoy and rest, and then go out to their work refreshed by the influences of the place and the sweet old lady who made it what it was. The girls would soon begin life for themselves, and it was well that they had this little glimpse of really good society before they left the shelter of home to choose friends, pleasures, and pursuits for themselves, as all young women do when once launched.

The sudden silence and then the whispers suggested to the listener that she had perhaps heard something not meant for her ears; so she presently emerged with her letters, and said, as she came smiling toward the group about the fire, —

"How are you getting through this long, dull afternoon, my dears? Quiet as mice till just now. What woke you up? A battle of the books? Alice looks as if she had laid in plenty of ammunition, and you were preparing to besiege her."

The girls laughed, and all rose, for Madam Warburton was a stately old lady, and people involuntarily treated her with great respect, even in this mannerless age.

"We were only talking about books," began Carrie, deeply grateful that Wanda was safely out of sight.

"And we couldn't agree," added Eva, running to ring the bell for the man to take the letters, for she was used to these little offices at home, and loved to wait on Madam.

"Thanks, my love. Now let us talk a little, if you are tired of reading, and if you like to let me share the discussion. Comparing tastes in literature is always a pleasure, and I used to enjoy talking over books with my girl friends more than anything else."

As she spoke, Mrs. Warburton sat down in the chair which Alice rolled up, drew Eva to the cushion at her feet, and nodded to the others as they settled again, with interested faces, one at the table where the pile of chosen volumes now lay, the other erect upon the couch where she had been practising the poses "full of languid grace," so much affected by her favorite heroines.

"Carrie was laughing at me for liking wise books and wanting to improve my mind. Is it foolish and a waste of time?" asked Alice, eager to convince her friend and secure so powerful an ally.

"No, my dear, it is a very sensible desire, and I wish more girls had it. Only don't be greedy, and read too much; cramming and smattering is as bad as promiscuous novel-reading, or no reading at all. Choose carefully, read intelligently, and digest thoroughly each book, and then you make it your own," answered Mrs. Warburton, quite in her element now, for she loved to give advice, as most old ladies do.

"But how can we know WHAT to read if we mayn't follow our tastes?" said Carrie, trying to be interested and "intelligent" in spite of her fear that a "school-marmy" lecture was in store for her.

"Ask advice, and so cultivate a true and refined taste. I always judge people's characters a good deal by the books they like, as well as by the company they keep; so one should be careful, for this is a pretty good test. Another is, be sure that whatever will not bear reading aloud is not fit to read to one's self. Many young girls ignorantly or curiously take up books quite worthless, and really harmful, because under the fine writing and brilliant color lurks immorality or the false sentiment which gives wrong ideas of life and things which should be sacred. They think, perhaps, that no one knows this taste of theirs; but they are mistaken, for it shows itself in many ways, and betrays them. Attitudes, looks, careless words, and a morbid or foolishly romantic view of certain things, show plainly that the maidenly instincts are blunted, and harm done that perhaps can never be repaired."

Mrs. Warburton kept her eyes fixed upon the tall andirons as if gravely reproving them, which was a great relief to Carrie, whose cheeks glowed as she stirred uneasily and took up a screen as if to guard them from the fire. But conscience pricked her sharply, and memory, like a traitor, recalled many a passage or scene in her favorite books which she could not have read aloud even to that old lady, though she enjoyed them in private. Nothing very bad, but false and foolish, poor food for a lively fancy and young mind to feed on, as the weariness or excitement which always followed plainly proved, since one should feel refreshed, not cloyed, with an intellectual feast.

Alice, with both elbows on the table, listened with wide-awake eyes, and Eva watched the raindrops trickle clown the pane with an intent expression, as if asking herself if she had ever done this naughty thing.

“Then there is another fault,” continued Mrs. Warburton, well knowing that her first shot had hit its mark, and anxious to be just. “Some book-loving lassies have a mania for trying to read everything, and dip into works far beyond their powers, or try too many different kinds of self-improvement at once. So they get a muddle of useless things into their heads, instead of well-assorted ideas and real knowledge. They must learn to wait and select; for each age has its proper class of books, and what is Greek to us at eighteen may be just what we need at thirty. One can get mental dyspepsia on meat and wine as well as on ice-cream and frosted cake, you know.”

Alice smiled, and pushed away four of the eight books she had selected, as if afraid she had been greedy, and now felt that it was best to wait a little.

Eva looked up with some anxiety in her frank eyes as she said, “Now it is my turn. Must I give up my dear homely books, and take to Ruskin, Kant, or Plato?”

Mrs. Warburton laughed, as she stroked the pretty brown head at her knee.

“Not yet, my love, perhaps never, for those are not the masters you need, I fancy. Since you like stories about every-day people, try some of the fine biographies of real men and women about whom you should know something. You will find their lives full of stirring, helpful, and lovely experiences, and in reading of these you will get courage and hope and faith to bear your own trials as they come. True stories suit you, and are the best, for there we get real tragedy and comedy, and the lessons all must learn.”

“Thank you! I will begin at once if you will kindly give me a list of such as would be good for me,” cried Eva, with the sweet docility of one eager to be all that is lovable and wise in woman.

“Give us a list, and we will try to improve in the best way. You know what we need, and love to help foolish girls, or you wouldn’t be so kind and patient with us,” said Alice, going to sit beside Carrie, hoping for much discussion of this, to her, very interesting subject.

“I will, with pleasure; but I read few modern novels, so I may not be a good judge there. Most of them seem very poor stuff, and I cannot waste time even to skim them as some people do. I still like the old-fashioned ones I read as a girl, though you would laugh at them. Did any of you ever read ‘Thaddeus of Warsaw’?”

“I have, and thought it very funny; so were ‘Evelina’ and ‘Cecilia.’ I wanted to try Smollett and Fielding, after reading some fine essays about them, but Papa told me I must wait,” said Alice.

“Ah, my dears, in my day, Thaddeus was our hero, and we thought the scene where he and Miss Beaufort are in the Park a most thrilling one. Two fops ask Thaddeus where he got his boots, and he replies, with withering dignity, ‘Where I got my sword, gentlemen.’ I treasured the picture of that episode for a long time. Thaddeus wears a hat as full of black plumes as a hearse, Hessian boots with tassels, and leans over Mary, who languishes on the seat in a short- waisted gown, limp scarf, poke bonnet, and large bag, — the height of elegance then, but very funny now. Then William Wallace in ‘Scottish Chiefs.’ Bless me! we cried over him as much as you do over your ‘Heir of Clifton,’ or whatever the boy’s name is. You wouldn’t get through it, I fancy; and as for poor, dear, prosy Richardson, his letter-writing heroines would bore you to death. Just imagine a lover saying to a friend, ‘I begged my angel to stay and sip one dish of tea. She sipped one dish and flew.’“

“Now, I’m sure that’s sillier than anything the Duchess ever wrote with her five-o’clock teas and flirtations over plum-cake on lawns,” cried Carrie, as they all laughed at the immortal Lovelace.

“I never read Richardson, but he couldn’t be duller than Henry James, with his everlasting stories, full of people who talk a great deal and amount to nothing. *I* like the older novels best, and enjoy some of Scott’s and Miss Edgeworth’s better than Howells’s, or any of the modern realistic writers, with their elevators, and paint-pots, and every-day people,” said Alice, who wasted little time on light literature.

“I’m glad to hear you say so, for I have an old-fashioned fancy that I’d rather read about people as they were, for that is history, or as they might and should be, for that helps us in our own efforts; not as they are, for that we know, and are all sufficiently commonplace ourselves, to be the better for a nobler and wider view of life and men than any we are apt to get, so busy are we earning daily bread, or running after fortune, honor or some other bubble. But I mustn’t lecture, or I shall bore you, and forget that I am your hostess, whose duty it is to amuse.”

As Mrs. Warburton paused, Carrie, anxious to change the subject, said, with her eyes on a curious jewel which the old lady wore, “I also like true stories, and you promised to tell us about that lovely pin some day. This is just the time for it, — please do.”

“With pleasure, for the little romance is quite apropos to our present chat. It is a very simple tale, and rather sad, but it had a great influence on my life, and this brooch is very dear to me.”

As Mrs. Warburton sat silent a moment, the girls all looked with interest at the quaint pin which clasped the soft folds of muslin over the black silk dress which was as becoming to the still handsome woman as the cap on her white hair and the winter roses in her cheeks. The ornament was in the shape of a pansy; its purple leaves were of amethyst, the yellow of topaz, and in the middle lay a diamond drop of dew. Several letters were delicately cut on its golden stem, and a guard pin showed how much its wearer valued it.

“My sister Lucretia was a good deal older than I, for the three boys came between,” began Mrs. Warburton, still gazing at the fire, as if from its ashes the past rose up bright and warm again. “She was a very lovely and superior girl, and I looked up to her with wonder as well as adoration. Others did the same, and at eighteen she was engaged to a charming man, who would have made his mark had he lived. She was too young to marry then, and Frank Lyman had a fine opening to practise his profession at the South. So they parted for two years, and it was then that he gave her the brooch, saying to her, as she whispered how lonely she should be without him, ‘This PENSEE is a happy, faithful THOUGHT of me. Wear it, dearest girl, and don’t pine while we are separated. Read and study, write much to me, and remember, “They never are alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts.”‘“

“Wasn’t that sweet?” cried Eva, pleased with the beginning of the tale.

“So romantic!” added Carrie, recalling the “amber amulet” one of her pet heroes wore for years, and died kissing, after he had killed some fifty Arabs in the desert.

“Did she read and study?” asked Alice, with a soft color in her cheek, and eager eyes, for a budding romance was folded away in the depths of her maidenly heart, and she liked a love story.

“I’ll tell you what she did, for it was rather remarkable at that day, when girls had little schooling, and picked up accomplishments as they could. The first winter she read and studied at home, and wrote much to Mr. Lyman. I have their letters now, and very fine ones they are, though they would seem old-fashioned to you young things. Curious love letters, — full of advice, the discussion of books, report of progress, glad praise, modest gratitude, happy plans. and a faithful affection that never wavered, though Lucretia was beautiful and much admired, and the dear fellow a great favorite among the brilliant Southern women.

"The second spring, Lucretia, anxious to waste no time, and ambitious to surprise Lyman decided to go and study with old Dr. Gardener at Portland. He fitted young men for college, was a friend of our father's, and had a daughter who was a very wise and accomplished woman. That was a very happy summer, and Lu got on so well that she begged to stay all winter. It was a rare chance, for there were no colleges for girls then, and very few advantages to be had, and the dear creature burned to improve every faculty, that she might be more worthy of her lover. She fitted herself for college with the youths there, and did wonders; for love sharpened her wits, and the thought of that happy meeting spurred her on to untiring exertion. Lyman was expected in May, and the wedding was to be in June; but, alas for the poor girl! the yellow-fever came, and he was one of the first victims. They never met again, and nothing was left her of all that happy time but his letters, his library, and the pansy."

Mrs. Warburton paused to wipe a few quiet tears from her eyes, while the girls sat in sympathetic silence.

"We thought it would kill her, that sudden change from love, hope, and happiness to sorrow, death, and solitude. But hearts don't break, my dears, if they know where to go for strength. Lucretia did, and after the first shock was over found comfort in her books, saying, with a brave, bright look, and the sweetest resignation, 'I must go on trying to be more worthy of him, for we shall meet again in God's good time and he shall see that I do not forget.'

"That was better than tears and lamentation, and the long years that followed were beautiful and busy ones, full of dutiful care for us at home after our mother died, of interest in all the good works of her time, and a steady, quiet effort to improve every faculty of her fine mind, till she was felt to be one of the noblest women in our city. Her influence was wide-spread; all the intelligent people sought her, and when she travelled she was welcome everywhere, for cultivated persons have a free-masonry of their own, and are recognized at once."

"Did she ever marry?" asked Carrie, feeling that no life could be quite successful without that great event.

"Never. She felt herself a widow, and wore black to the day of her death. Many men asked her hand, but she refused them all, and was the sweetest 'old maid' ever seen, — cheerful and serene to the very last, for she was ill a long time, and found her solace and stay still in the beloved books. Even when she could no longer read them, her memory supplied her with the mental food that kept her soul strong while her body failed. It was wonderful to see and hear her repeating fine lines, heroic sayings, and comforting psalms through the weary nights when no sleep would come, making friends and helpers of the poets, philosophers, and saints whom she knew and loved so well. It made death beautiful, and taught me how victorious an immortal soul can be over the ills that vex our mortal flesh.

"She died at dawn on Easter Sunday, after a quiet night, when she had given me her little legacy of letters, books, and the one jewel she had always worn, repeating her lover's words to comfort me. I had read the Commendatory Prayer, and as I finished she whispered, with a look of perfect peace, 'Shut the book, dear, I need study no more; I have hoped and believed, now I shall know;' and so went happily away to meet her lover after patient waiting."

The sigh of the wind was the only sound that broke the silence till the quiet voice went on again, as if it loved to tell the story, for the thought of soon seeing the beloved sister took the sadness from the memory of the past.

"I also found my solace in books, for I was very lonely when she was gone, my father being dead, the brothers married, and home desolate. I took to study and reading as a congenial employment, feeling no inclination to marry, and for many years was quite contented among my books. But in trying to follow in dear Lucretia's footsteps, I unconsciously fitted myself for the great honor and happiness of my life, and curiously enough I owed it to a book."

Mrs. Warburton smiled as she took up a shabby little volume from the table where Alice had laid it, and, quick to divine another romance, Eva said, like a story-loving child, "Do tell about it! The other was so sad."

"This begins merrily, and has a wedding in it, as young girls think all tales should. Well, when I was about thirty-five, I was invited to join a party of friends on a trip to Canada, that being the favorite jaunt in my young days. I'd been studying hard for some years, and needed rest, so I was glad to go. As a good book for an excursion, I took this Wordsworth in my bag. It is full of fine passages, you know, and I loved it, for it was one of the books given to Lucretia by her lover. We had a charming time, and were on our way to Quebec when my little adventure happened. I was in raptures over the grand St. Lawrence as we steamed slowly from Montreal that lovely summer day. I could not read, but sat on the upper deck, feasting my eyes and dreaming dreams as even staid maiden ladies will when out on a holiday. Suddenly I caught the sound of voices in earnest discussion on the lower deck, and, glancing down, saw several gentlemen leaning against the rail as they talked over certain events of great public interest at that moment. I knew that a party of distinguished persons were on board, as my friend's husband, Dr. Tracy, knew some of them, and pointed out Mr. Warburton as one of the rising scientific men of the day. I remembered that my sister had met him years ago, and much admired him both for his own gifts and because he had known Lyman. As other people were listening, I felt no delicacy about doing the same, for the conversation was an eloquent one, and well worth catching. So interested did I become that I forgot the great rafts floating by, the picturesque shores, the splendid river, and leaned nearer and nearer that no word might be lost, till my book slid out of my lap and fell straight down upon the head of one of the gentlemen, giving him a smart blow, and knocking his hat overboard.”

“Oh, what DID you do?” cried the girls, much amused at this unromantic catastrophe.

Mrs. Warburton clasped her hands dramatically, as her eyes twinkled and a pretty color came into her cheeks at the memory of that exciting moment.

“My dears, I could have dropped with mortification! What COULD I do but dodge and peep as I waited to see the end of this most untoward accident? Fortunately I was alone on that side of the deck, so none of the ladies saw my mishap and, slipping along the seat to a distant corner, I hid my face behind a convenient newspaper, as I watched the little flurry of fishing up the hat by a man in a boat near by, and the merriment of the gentlemen over this assault of William Wordsworth upon Samuel Warburton. The poor book passed from hand to hand, and many jokes were made upon the ‘fair Helen’ whose name was written on the paper cover which projected it.

“‘I knew a Miss Harper once, — a lovely woman, but her name was not Helen, and she is dead, — God bless her!’ I heard Mr. Warburton say, as he flapped his straw hat to dry it, and rubbed his head, which fortunately was well covered with thick gray hair at that time.

“I longed to go down and tell him who I was, but I had not the courage to face all those men. It really was MOST embarrassing; so I waited for a more private moment to claim my book, as I knew we should not land till night, so there was no danger of losing it.

“‘This is rather unusual stuff for a woman to be reading. Some literary lady doubtless. Better look her up, Warburton. You’ll know her by the color of her stockings when she comes down to lunch,’ said a jolly old gentlenoan, in a tone that made me ‘rouge high,’ as Evelina says.

“‘I shall know her by her intelligent face and conversation, if this book belongs to a lady. It will be an honor and a pleasure to meet a woman who enjoys Wordsworth, for in my opinion he is one of our truest poets,’ answered Mr. Warburton, putting the book in his pocket, with a look and a tone that were most respectful and comforting to me just then.

“I hoped he would examine the volume, for Lucretia’s and Lyman’s names were on the fly leaf, and that would be a delightful introduction for me. So I said nothing and bided my time, feeling rather foolish when we all filed in to lunch, and I saw the other party glancing at the ladies at the table. Mr. Warburton's eye paused a moment as it passed from Mrs. Tracy to me, and I fear I blushed like a girl, my dears, for Samuel had very fine eyes, and I remembered the stout gentleman's unseemly joke about the stockings. Mine were white as snow, for I had a neat foot, and was fond of nice hose and well-made shoes. I am so still, as you see." Here the old lady displayed a small foot in a black silk stocking and delicate slipper, with the artless pride a woman feels, at any age, in one of her best points. The girls gratified her by a murmur of admiration, and, decorously readjusting the folds of her gown, she went on with the most romantic episode of her quiet life.

"I retired to my state-room after lunch to compose myself, and when I emerged, in the cool of the afternoon, my first glance showed me that the hour had come, for there on deck was Mr. Warburton, talking to Mrs. Tracy, with my book in his hand. I hesitated a moment, for in spite of my age I was rather shy, and really it was not an easy thing to apologize to a strange gentle-man for dropping books on his head and spoiling his hat. Men think so much of their hats you know. I was spared embarrassment, however, for he saw me and came to me at once, saying, in the most cordial manner, as he showed the names on the fly leaf of my Wordsworth, 'I am sure we need no other introduction but the names of these two dear friends of ours. I am very glad to find that Miss Helen Harper is the little girl I saw once or twice at your father's house some years ago, and to meet her so pleasantly again.'

"That made everything easy and delightful, and when I had apologized and been laughingly assured that he considered it rather an honor than otherwise to be assaulted by so great a man, we fell to talking of old times, and soon forgot that we were strangers. He was twenty years older than I, but a handsome man, and a most interesting and excellent one, as we all know. He had lost a young wife long ago, and had lived for science ever since, but it had not made him dry, or cold, or selfish. He was very young at heart for all his wisdom, and enjoyed that holiday like a boy out of school. So did I, and never dreamed that anything would come of it but a pleasant friendship founded on our love for those now dead and gone. Dear me! how strangely things turn out in this world of ours, and how the dropping of that book changed my life! Well, that was our introduction, and that first long conversation was followed by many more equally charming, during the three weeks our parties were much together, as both were taking the same trip, and Dr. Tracy was glad to meet his old friend.

"I need not tell you how delightful such society was to me, nor how surprised

I was when, on the last day before we parted, Mr. Warburton, who had answered many questions of mine during these long chats of ours, asked me a very serious one, and I found that I could answer it as he wished. It brought me great honor as well as happiness. I fear I was not worthy of it, but I tried to be, and felt a tender satisfaction in thinking that I owed it to dear Lucretia, in part at least; for my effort to imitate her made me fitter to become a wise man's wife, and thirty years of very sweet companionship was my reward."

As she spoke, Mrs. Warburton bowed her head before the portrait of a venerable old man which hung above the mantel-piece.

It was a pretty, old-fashioned expression of wifely pride and womanly tenderness in the fine old lady, who forgot her own gifts, and felt only humility and gratitude to the man who had found in her a comrade in intellectual pursuits, as well as a helpmeet at home and a gentle prop for his declining years.

The girls looked up with eyes full of something softer than mere curiosity, and felt in their young hearts how precious and honorable such a memory must be, how true and beautiful such a marriage was, and how sweet wisdom might become when it went hand in hand with love.

Alice spoke first, saying, as she touched the worn cover of the little book with a new sort of respect, "Thank you very much! Perhaps I ought not to have taken this from the corner shelves in your sanctum? I wanted to find the rest of the lines Mr. Thornton quoted last night, and didn't stop to ask leave."

"You are welcome, my love, for you know how to treat books. Yes, those in that little case are my precious relics. I keep them all, from my childish hymn-book to my great-grandfather's brass-bound Bible, for by and by when I sit 'Looking towards Sunset,' as dear Lydia Maria Child calls our last days, I shall lose my interest in other books, and take comfort in these. At the end as at the beginning of life we are all children again, and love the songs our mothers sung us, and find the one true Book our best teacher as we draw near to God."

As the reverent voice paused, a ray of sunshine broke through the parting clouds, and shone full on the serene old face turned to meet it, with a smile that welcomed the herald of a lovely sunset.

"The rain is over; there will be just time for a run in the garden before dinner, girls. I must go and change my cap, for literary ladies should not neglect to look well after the ways of their household and keep themseves tidy, no matter how old they may be." And with a nod Mrs. Warburton left them, wondering what the effect of the conversation would be on the minds of her young guests.

Alice went away to the garden, thinking of Lucretia and her lover, as she gathered flowers in the sunshine. Conscientious Eva took the Life of Mary Somerville to her room, and read diligently for half an hour, that no time might be lost in her new course of study, Carrie sent Wanda and her finery up the chimney in a lively blaze, and, as she watched the book burn, decided to take her blue and gold volume of Tennyson with her on her next trip to Nahant, in case any eligible learned or literary man's head should offer itself as a shining mark. Since a good marriage was the end of life, why not follow Mrs. Warburton's example, and make a really excellent one?

When they all met at dinner-time the old lady was pleased to see a nosegay of fresh pansies in the bosoms of her three youngest guests, and to hear Alice whisper, with grateful eyes, —

"We wear your flower to show you that we don't mean to forget the lesson you so kindly gave us, and to fortify ourselves with 'noble thoughts,' as you and she did."

WATER-LILIES

A PARTY of people, young and old, sat on the piazza of a seaside hotel one summer morning, discussing plans for the day as they waited for the mail.

“Hullo! here comes Christie Johnstone,” exclaimed one of the young men perched on the railing, who was poisoning the fresh air with the sickly scent of a cigarette.

“So ‘tis, with ‘Flucker, the baddish boy,’ in tow, as large as life,” added another, with a pleasant laugh as he turned to look.

The new-comers certainly looked somewhat like Charles Reade’s picturesque pair, and every one watched them with idle interest as they drew nearer. A tall, robust girl of seventeen, with dark eyes and hair, a fine color on her brown cheek, and vigor in every movement, came up the rocky path from the beach with a basket of lobsters on one arm, of fish on the other, and a wicker tray of water-lilies on her head. The scarlet and silver of the fish contrasted prettily with the dark blue of her rough dress, and the pile of water flowers made a fitting crown for this bonny young fish-wife. A sturdy lad of twelve came lurching after her in a pair of very large rubber boots, with a dilapidated straw hat on the back of his head and a pail on either arm.

Straight on went the girl, never turning head or eyes as she passed the group on the piazza and vanished round the corner, though it was evident that she heard the laugh the last speech produced, for the color deepened in her cheeks and her step quickened. The boy, however, returned the glances bent upon him, and answered the smiles with such a cheerful grin that the youth with the cigarette called out, —

“Good-morning, Skipper! Where do you hail from?”

“Island, yender,” answered the boy, with a gesture of his thumb over his shoulder.

“Oh, you are the lighthouse-keeper, are you?”

“No, I ain’t; me and Gramper’s fishermen now.”

“Your name is Flucker Johnstone, and your sister’s Christie, I think?” added the youth, enjoying the amusement of the young ladies about him.

“It’s Sammy Bowen, and hern’s Ruth.”

“Have you got a Boaz over there for her?”

“No, we’ve got a devil-fish, a real whacker.”

This unexpected reply produced a roar from the gentlemen, while the boy grinned good-naturedly, though without the least idea what the joke was. Pretty Miss Ellery, who had been told that she had “a rippling laugh,” rippled sweetly as she leaned over the railing to ask,

“Are those lilies in your pails? I want some if they are for sale.”

“Sister’ll fetch ‘em round when she’s left the lobs. I ain’t got none; this is bait for them fellers.” And, as if reminded of business by the yells of several boys who had just caught sight of him, Sammy abruptly weighed anchor and ran before the wind toward the stable.

“Funny lot, these natives! Act as if they owned the place and are as stupid as their own fish,” said the youth in the white yachting suit, as he flung away his cigarette end.

“Don’t agree with you, Fred. I’ve known people of this sort all my life and a finer set of honest, hardworking, independent men I never met, — brave as lions and tender as women in spite of their rough ways,” answered the other young man, who wore blue flannel and had a gold band on his cap.

“Sailors and soldiers always stand by one another; so of course you see the best side of these fellows, Captain. The girls are fine creatures, I grant you; but their good looks don’t last long, more’s the pity!”

“Few women’s would with the life they lead, so full of hard work, suspense, and sorrow. No one knows till one is tried, how much courage and faith it takes to keep young and happy when the men one loves are on the great sea,” said quiet, gray-haired lady, as she laid her hand on the knee of the young man in blue with a look that made him smile affectionately at her, with his own brown hand on hers.

“Shouldn’t wonder if Ben Bowen was laid up, since the girl brings the fish. He’s a fine old fellow. I’ve been to No Man’s Land many a time blue-fishing with him; must ask after him,” said an elderly gentleman who was pacing to and fro yearning for the morning papers.

“We might go over to the island and have a chowder-party or a fish-fry some moonlight night. I haven’t been here for several years, but it used to be great fun, and I suppose we can do it now,” suggested Miss Ellery with the laugh.

“By Jove, we will! And look up Christie; ask her when she comes round,” said Mr. Fred, the youthful dude, untwining his languid legs as if the prospect put a little life into him.

“Of course we pay for any trouble we give; these people will do anything for money,” began Miss Ellery; but Captain John, as they called the sailor, held up his hand with a warning, “Hush! she’s coming,” as Ruth’s weather-beaten brown hat turned the corner.

She paused a moment to drop the empty baskets, shake her skirts, and put up a black braid that had fallen down; then, with the air of one resolved to do a distasteful task as quickly as possible, she came up the steps, held out the rough basket cover, and said in a clear voice, —

“Would any of the ladies like some fresh lilies? Ten cents a bunch.”

A murmur from the ladies expressed their admiration of the beautiful flowers, and the gentlemen pressed forward to buy and present every bunch with gallant haste. Ruth’s eyes shone as the money fell into her hand, and several voices begged her to bring more lilies while they lasted.

“I didn’t know the darlings would grow in salt water,” said Miss Ellery, as she fondly gazed upon the cluster Mr. Fred had just offered her.

“They don’t. There’s a little fresh-water pond on our island, and they grow there, — only place for miles round;” and Ruth looked at the delicate girl in ruffled white lawn and a mull hat, with a glance of mingled pity for her ignorance and admiration for her beauty.

“How silly of me! I am SUCH a goose;” and Miss Ellery gurgled as she hid her face behind her red parasol.

“Ask about the fish-fry,” whispered Mr. Fred, putting his head behind the rosy screen to assure the pretty creature that he didn’t know any better himself.

“Oh yes, I will!” and, quite consoled, Miss Ellery called out, “Girl, will you tell me if we can have chower-parties on your rocks as we used to a few seasons ago?”

“If you bring your own fish. Grandpa is sick and can’t get ‘em for you.”

“We will provide them, but who will cook them for us? It’s such horrid work.”

“Any one can fry fish! I will if you want me to;” and Ruth half smiled, remembering that this girl who shuddered at the idea of pork and a hot frying-pan, used to eat as heartily as any one when the crisp brown cunners were served up.

“Very good; then we’ll engage you as cook, and come over to-night if it’s clear and our fishing prospers. Don’t forget a dozen of the finest lilies for this lady to-morrow morning. Pay you now, may not be up;” and Mr. Fred dropped a bright silver dollar into the basket with a patronizing air, intended to impress this rather too independent young person with a proper sense of inferiority.

Ruth quietly shook the money out upon the door-mat, and said with a sudden sparkle in her black eyes, —

“It’s doubtful if I bring any more. Better wait till I do.”

“I’m sorry your grandfather is sick. I’ll come over and see him by-and-by, and bring the papers if he would like some,” said the elderly gentleman as he came up with a friendly nod and real interest in his face.

“Very much, thank you, sir. He is very feeble now;” and Ruth turned with a bright smile to welcome kind Mr. Wallace, who had not forgotten the old man.

"Christie has got a nice little temper of her own, and don't know how to treat a fellow when he wants to do her a favor," growled Mr. Fred, pocketing his dollar with a disgusted air.

"She appears to know how to treat a gentleman when HE offers one," answered Blue Jacket, with a twinkle of the eye as if he enjoyed the other's discomfiture.

"Girls of that class always put on airs if they are the least bit pretty, — so absurd!" said Miss Ellery, pulling up her long gloves as she glanced at the brown arms of the fisher maiden.

"Girls of any class like to be treated with respect. Modesty in linsey-woolsey is as sweet as in muslin, my dear, and should be even more admired, according to my old-fashioned way of thinking," said the gray-haired lady.

"Hear! hear!" murmured her sailor nephew with an approving nod.

It was evident that Ruth had heard also, as she turned to go, for with a quick gesture she pulled three great lilies from her hat and laid them on the old lady's lap, saying with a grateful look, "Thank you, ma'am."

She had seen Miss Scott hand her bunch to a meek little governess who had been forgotten, and this was all she had to offer in return for the kindness which is so sweet to poor girls whose sensitive pride gets often wounded by trifles like these.

She was going without her baskets when Captain John swung himself over the railing, and ran after her with them. He touched his cap as he met her, and was thanked with as bright a smile as that the elder gentleman had received; for his respectful "Miss Bowen" pleased her much after the rude "Girl!" and the money tossed to her as if she were a beggar. When he came back the mail had arrived, and all scattered at once, — Mr. Fred to spend the dollar in more cigarettes, and Captain John to settle carefully in his button-hole the water-lily Aunt Mary gave him, before both young men went off to play tennis as if their bread depended on it.

As it bid fair to be a moonlight night, the party of a dozen young people, with Miss Scott and Mr. Wallace to act as matron and admiral of the fleet, set off to the Island about sunset. Fish in abundance had been caught, and a picnic supper provided to be eaten on the rocks when the proper time arrived. They found Sammy, in a clean blue shirt and a hat less like a Feejee headpiece, willing to do the honors of the Island, beaming like a freckled young merman as he paddled out to pull up the boats.

"Fire's all ready for kindlin', and Ruth's slicin' the pertaters. Hope them fish is cleaned?" he added with a face of deep anxiety; for that weary task would fall to him if not already done, and the thought desolated his boyish soul.

"All ready, Sam! Lend a hand with these baskets, and then steer for the lighthouse; the ladies want to see that first," answered Captain John, as he tossed a stray cookie into Sammy's mouth with a smile that caused that youth to cleave to him like a burr all the evening.

The young people scattered over the rocks, and hastened to visit the points of interest before dark. They climbed the lighthouse tower, and paid Aunt Nabby and Grandpa a call at the weather-beaten little house, where the old woman lent them a mammoth coffee-pot, and promised that Ruth would "dish up them fish in good shape at eight punctooal." Then they strolled away to see the fresh-water pond where the lilies grew.

"How curious that such a thing should be here right in the middle of the salt sea!" said one of the girls, as they stood looking at the quiet pool while the tide dashed high upon the rocks all about them.

"Not more curious than how it is possible for anything so beautiful and pure as one of those lilies to grow from the mud at the bottom of the pond. The ugly yellow ones are not so out of place; but no one cares for them, and they smell horridly," added another girl in a reflective tone.

"Instinct sends the white lily straight up to the sun and air, and the strong slender stem anchors it to the rich earth below, out of which it has power to draw the nourishment that makes it so lovely and keeps it spotless — unless slugs and flies and boys spoil it," added Miss Scott as she watched Mr, Fred poke and splash with his cane after a half-closed flower.

"The naughty things have all shut up and spoilt the pretty sight; I'm so disappointed," sighed Miss Ellery, surveying the green buds with great disfavor as she had planned to wear some in her hair and act Undine.

"You must come early in the morning if you want to see them at their best. I've read somewhere that when the sun first strikes them they open rapidly, and it is a lovely sight. I shall try to see it some day if I can get here in time," said Miss Scott.

"How romantic old maids are!" whispered one girl to another.

"So are young ones; hear what Floss Ellery is saying," answered the other; and both giggled under their big hats as they caught these words followed by the rippling laugh, —

"All flowers open and show their hearts when the sun shines on them at the right moment."

"I wish human flowers would," murmured Mr. Fred; and then, as if rather alarmed at his own remark, he added hastily, "I'll get that big lily out there and MAKE it bloom for you."

Trusting to an old log that lay in the pond, he went to the end and bent to pull in the half-shut flower; but this too ardent sun was not to make it blossom, for his foot slipped and down he went up to his knees in mud and water.

“Save him! oh, save him!” shrieked Miss Ellery, clutching Captain John, who was laughing like a boy, while the other lads shouted and the girls added their shrill merriment as poor Fred scrambled to the shore a wreck of the gallant craft that had set sail in spotless white.

“What the deuce shall I do?” he asked in a tone of despair as they flocked about him to condole even while they laughed.

“Roll up your trousers and borrow Sam’s boots. The old lady will dry your shoes and socks while you are at supper, and have them ready to wear home,” suggested Captain John, who was used to duckings and made light of them.

The word “supper” made one carnal-minded youth sniff the air and announce that he smelt “something good;” and at once every one turned toward the picnic ground, like chickens hurrying to the barn at feeding-time. Fred vanished into the cottage, and the rest gathered about the great fire of driftwood fast turning to clear coals, over which Ruth was beginning her long hot task. She wore a big apron, a red handkerchief over her head, had her sleeves rolled up, and was so intent on her work that she merely nodded and smiled as the new-comers greeted her with varying degrees of courtesy.

“She looks like a handsome gypsy, with her dark face and that red thing in the firelight. I wish I could paint her,” said Miss Scott, who was very young at heart in spite of her fifty years and gray head.

“So do I, but we can remember it. I do like to see a girl work with a will, even at frying fish. Most of ‘em dawdle so at the few things they try to do. There’s a piece of energy for you!” and Captain John leaned forward from his rocky seat to watch Ruth, who just then caught up the coffee-pot about to boil over, and with the other hand saved her frying-pan from capsizing on its unsteady bed of coals.

“She is a nice girl, and I’m much interested in her. Mr. Wallace says he will tell us her story by-and-by if we care to hear it. He has known the old man a long time.”

“Don’t forget to remind him, Aunty. I like a yarn after mess;” and Captain John went off to bring the first plate of fish to the dear old lady who had been a mother to him for many years.

It was a merry supper, and the moon was up before it ended; for everything “tasted so good” the hearty young appetites sharpened by sea air were hard to satisfy. When the last cunner had vanished and nothing but olives and oyster crackers remained, the party settled on a sloping rock out of range of the fire, and reposed for a brief period to recover from the exertions of the feast, having, like the heroes in the old story, “eaten mightily for the space of an hour.”

Mr. Fred in the capacious boots was a never-failing source of amusement, and consequently somewhat subdued. But Miss Ellery consoled him, and much food sustained him till his shoes were dry. Ruth remained to clear up, and Sammy to gorge himself on the remnants of “sweet cake” which he could not bear to see wasted. So, when some one proposed telling stories till they were ready to sing, Mr. Wallace was begged to begin.

“It is only something about this island, but you may like to hear it just now,” said the genial old gentleman, settling his handkerchief over his bald head for fear of cold, and glancing at the attentive young faces grouped about him in the moonlight.

“Some twenty years ago there was a wreck over there on those great rocks; you fellows have heard about it, so I’ll only say that a very brave sailor, a native of the Port here, swam out with a rope and saved a dozen men and women. I’ll call him Sam. Well, one of the women was an English governess, and when the lady she was with went on her way after the wreck, this pretty girl (who by the way was a good deal hurt trying to save the child she had in charge) was left behind to recover, and — ”

“Marry the brave sailor of course,” cried one of the girls.

“Exactly! and a very happy pair they were. She had no family who wanted her at home; her father had been a clergyman, I believe, and she was well born, but Sam was a fine fellow and earned his living honestly, fishing off the Banks, as half the men do here. Well, they were very happy, had two children, and were saving up a bit, when poor Sam and two brothers were lost in one of the great storms which now and then make widows and orphans by the dozen. It killed the wife; but Sam’s father, who kept the lighthouse here then, took the poor children and supported them for ten years. The boy was a mere baby; the girl a fine creature, brave like her father, handsome like her mother, and with a good deal of the lady about her, though every one didn’t find it out.”

“Ahem!” cried the sharp girl, who began to understand the point of the story now, but would not spoil it, as the others seemed still in the dark, though Miss Scott was smiling, and Captain John staring hard at the old gentleman in the blue silk nightcap.

“Got a fly in your throat?” asked a neighbor; but Kate only laughed and begged pardon for interrupting.

“There’s not much more; only that affair was rather romantic, and one can’t help wondering how the children turned out. Storms seem to have been their doom, for in the terrible one we had two winters ago, the old lighthouse keeper had a bad fall on the icy rocks, and if it had not been for the girl, the light would have gone out and more ships been lost on this dangerous point. The keeper's mate had gone ashore and couldn't get back for two days, the gale raged so fiercely; but he knew Ben could get on without him, as he had the girl and boy over for a visit. In winter they lived with a friend and went to school at the Port. It would have been all right if Ben hadn't broken his ribs. But he was a stout old salt; so he told the girl what to do, and she did it, while the boy waited on the sick man. For two days and nights that brave creature lived in the tower, that often rocked as if it would come down, while the sleet and snow dimmed the lantern, and sea-birds were beaten to death against the glass. But the light burned steadily, and people said, 'All is well,' as ships steered away in time, when the clear light warned them of danger, and grateful sailors blessed the hands that kept it burning faithfully."

"I hope she got rewarded," cried an eager voice, as the story-teller paused for breath.

"'I only did my duty; that is reward enough,' she said, when some of the rich men at the Port heard of it and sent her money and thanks. She took the money, however, for Ben had to give up the place, being too lame to do the work. He earns his living by fishing now, and puts away most of his pension for the children. He won't last long, and then they must take care of themselves; for the old woman is no relation, and the girl is too proud to hunt up the forgetful English friends, if they have any. But I don't fear for her; a brave lass like that will make her own way anywhere."

"Is that all?" asked several voices, as Mr. Wallace leaned back and fanned himself with his hat.

"That's all of the first and second parts; the third is yet to come. When I know it, I'll tell you; perhaps next summer, if we meet here again."

"Then you know the girl? What is she doing now?" asked Miss Ellery, who had lost a part of the story as she sat in a shadowy nook with the pensive Fred.

"We all know her. She is washing a coffee-pot at this moment, I believe;" and Mr. Wallace pointed to a figure on the beach, energetically shaking a large tin article that shone in the moonlight.

"Ruth? Really? How romantic and interesting!" exclaimed Miss Ellery, who was just of the age, as were most of the other girls, to enjoy tales of this sort and imagine sensational denouements.

"There is a great deal of untold romance in the lives of these toilers of the sea, and I am sure this good girl will find her reward for the care she takes of the old man and the boy. It costs her something, I've discovered, for she wants an education, and could get it if she left this poor place and lived for herself; but she won’t go, and works hard to get money for Grandpa’s comfort, instead of buying the books she longs for. I think, young ladies, that there is real heroism in cheerfully selling lilies and frying fish for duty’s sake when one longs to be studying, and enjoying a little of the youth that comes but once,” said Mr. Wallace.

“Oh dear, yes, so nice of her! We might take up a contribution for her when we get home. I’ll head the paper with pleasure and give all I can afford, for it must be so horrid to be ignorant at her age. I dare say the poor thing can’t even read; just fancy!” and Miss Ellery clasped her hands with a sigh of pity.

“Very few girls can read fit to be heard now-a-days,” murmured Miss Scott.

“Don’t let them affront her with their money; she will fling it in their faces as she did that donkey’s dollar. You see to her in your nice, delicate way, Aunty, and give her a lift if she will let you,” whispered Captain John in the old lady’s ear.

“Don’t waste your pity, Miss Florence. Ruth reads a newspaper better than any woman I ever knew. I’ve heard her doing it to the old man, getting through shipping news, money-market, and politics in fine style. I wouldn’t offer her money if I were you, though it is a kind thought. These people have an honest pride in earning things for themselves, and I respect them for it,” added Mr. Wallace.

“Dear me! I should as soon think of a sand skipper having pride as one of these fishy folks in this stupid little place,” observed Mr. Fred, moving his legs into the shadow as the creeping moonlight began to reveal the hideous boots.

“Why not? I think they have more to be proud of, these brave, honest, independent people, than many who never earn a cent and swell round on the money their fathers made out of pork, rum, or — any other rather unpleasant or disreputable business,” said Captain John, with the twinkle in his eye, as he changed the end of his sentence, for the word “pickles” was on his lips when Aunt Mary’s quick touch checked it. Some saucy girl laughed, and Mr. Fred squirmed, for it was well known that his respectable grandfather whom he never mentioned had made his large fortune in a pickle-factory.

“We all rise from the mud in one sense, and all may be handsome flowers if we choose before we go back, after blooming, to ripen our seeds at the bottom of the water where we began,” said Miss Scott’s refined voice, sounding softly after the masculine ones.

“I like that idea! Thank you, Aunt Mary, for giving me such a pretty fancy to add to my love for water-lilies. I shall remember it, and try to be a lovely one, not a bit ashamed to own that I came from honest farmer stock," exclaimed the thoughtful girl who had learned to know and love the sweet, wise woman who was so motherly to all girls.

"Hear! hear!" cried Captain John, heartily; for he was very proud of his own brave name kept clean and bright through a long line of sailor kin.

"Now let us sing or we shall have no time," suggested Miss Ellery, who warbled as well as rippled, and did not wish to lose this opportunity of singing certain sentimental songs appropriate to the hour.

So they tuned their pipes and made "music in the air" for an hour, to the great delight of Sammy, who joined in every song, and was easily persuaded to give sundry nautical melodies in a shrill small voice which convulsed his hearers with merriment.

"Ruth sings awful well, but she won't afore folks," he said, as he paused after a roaring ditty.

"She will for me;" and Mr. Wallace went slowly up to the rock not far away, where Ruth sat alone listening to the music as she rested after her long day's work.

"Such airs!" said Miss Ellery, in a sharp tone; for her "Wind of the Summer Night" had not gone well, owing to a too copious supper. "Posing for Lorelei," she added, as Ruth began to sing, glad to oblige the kind old gentleman. They expected some queer ballad or droning hymn, and were surprised when a clear sweet voice gave them "The Three Fishers" and "Mary on the Sands of Dee" with a simple pathos that made real music-lovers thrill with pleasure, and filled several pairs of eyes with tears.

"More, please, more!" called Captain John, as she paused; and as if encouraged by the hearty applause her one gift excited, she sang on as easily as a bird till her small store was exhausted.

"I call THAT music," said Miss Scott, as she wiped her eyes with a sigh of satisfaction. "It comes from the heart and goes to the heart, as it should. Now we don't want anything else, and had better go home while the spell lasts."

Most of the party followed her example, and went to thank and say good-night to Ruth, who felt as rich and happy as a queen with the money Mr. Wallace had slipped into her pocket, and the pleasure which even this short glimpse of a higher, happier life had brought her hungry nature.

As the boats floated away, leaving her alone on the shore, she sent her farewell ringing over the water in the words of the old song, "A Life on the Ocean Wave;" and every one joined in it with a will, especially Mr. Wallace and Captain John; and so the evening picnic ended tunefully and pleasantly for all, and was long remembered by several.

After that day many “good times” came to Ruth and Sammy; and even poor old Grandpa had his share, finding the last summer of his life very smooth sailing as he slowly drifted into port. It seemed quite natural that Captain John, being a sailor, should like to go and read and “yarn” with the old fisherman; so no one wondered when he fell into the way of rowing over to the Island very often with his pocket full of newspapers, and whiling away the long hours in the little house as full of sea smells and salt breezes as a shell on the shore.

Miss Scott also took a fancy to go with her nephew; for, being an ardent botanist, she discovered that the Island possessed many plants which she could not find on the rocky point of land where the hotel and cottages stood. The fresh-water pond was her especial delight, and it became a sort of joke to ask, when she came home brown and beaming with her treasures in tin boxes, bottles, and bunches, —

“Well, Aunt Mary, have you seen the water-lilies bloom yet?” and she always answered with that wise smile of hers, —

“Not yet, but I’m biding my time, and am watching a very fine one with especial interest. When the right moment comes, it will bloom and show its golden heart to me, I hope.”

Ruth never quite knew how it came about, but books seemed to find their way to the Island and stay there, to her great delight. A demand for lilies sprang up, and when their day was over marsh-rosemary became the rage. Sammy found a market for all the shells and gulls’ wings he could furnish, and certain old curiosities brought from many voyages were sold for sums which added many comforts to the old sailor’s last cruise.

Now the daily row to the Point was a pleasure, not a trial, to Ruth, — for Mr. Wallace was always ready with a kind word or gift, the ladies nodded as she passed, and asked how the old Skipper was to-day; Miss Scott often told her to stop at the cottage for some new book or a moment’s chat on her way to the boat, and Captain John helped Sammy with his fishing so much that the baskets were always full when they came home.

All this help and friendliness put a wonderful energy and sweetness into Ruth’s hard life, and made her work seem light, her patient waiting for freedom easier to bear cheerfully. She sang as she stood over her wash-tub, cheered the long nights of watching with the precious books, and found the few moments of rest that came to her when the day’s work was done very pleasant, as she sat on her rock, watching the lights from the Point, catching the sound of gay music as the young people danced, and thinking over the delightful talks she had with Miss Scott. Perhaps the presence of a blue jacket in Grandpa’s little bedroom, the sight of a friendly brown face smiling when she came in, and the sonorous murmur of a man’s voice reading aloud, added a charm to the girl’s humdrum life. She was too innocent and frank to deny that she enjoyed these new friends, and welcomed both with the same eagerness, saw both go with the same regret, and often wondered how she ever had got on without them.

But the modest fisher-maiden never dreamed of any warmer feeling than kindness on the one side and gratitude on the other; and this unconsciousness was her greatest charm, especially to Captain John, who hated coquettes, and shunned the silly girls who wasted time in idle flirtation when they had far better and wholesomer pastimes to enjoy. The handsome sailor was a favorite, being handy at all sorts of fun, and the oldest of the young men at the Point. He was very courteous in his hearty way to every woman he met, from the stateliest dowager to the dowdiest waiter-girl, but devoted himself entirely to Aunt Mary, and seemed to have no eyes for younger fairer faces.

“He must have a sweetheart over the sea somewhere,” the damsels said among themselves, as they watched him pace the long piazzas alone, or saw him swinging in his hammock with eyes dreamily fixed on the blue bay before him.

Miss Scott only smiled when curious questions were asked her, and said she hoped John would find his mate some time, for he deserved the best wife in the world, having been a good son and an honest boy for six-and-twenty years.

“What is it, Captain, — a steamer?” asked Mr. Fred, as he came by the cottage one August afternoon, with his usual escort of girls, all talking at once about some very interesting affair.

“Only a sail-boat; no steamers to-day,” answered Captain John, dropping the glass from his eye with a start.

“Can you see people on the Island with that thing? We want to know if Ruth is at home, because if she isn’t we can’t waste time going over,” said Miss Ellery, with her sweetest smile.

“I think not. That boat is Sammy’s, and as there is a speck of red aboard, I fancy Miss Ruth is with him. They are coming this way, so you can hail them if you like,” answered the sailor, with “a speck of red” on his own sunburnt cheek if any one had cared to look.

“Then we’ll wait here if we may. We ordered her to bring us a quantity of bulrushes and flowers for our tableaux to-night, and we want her to be Rebecca at the well. She is so dark, and with her hair down, and gold bangles and scarlet shawls, I think she would do nicely. It takes so long to arrange the ‘Lily Maid of Astolat’ we MUST have an easy one to come just before that, and the boys are wild to make a camel of themselves, so we planned this. Won’t you be Jacob or Abraham or whoever the man with the bracelets was?” asked Miss Ellery, as they all settled on the steps in the free-and-easy way which prevailed at the Point.

"No, thank you, I don't act. Used to dance hornpipes in my young days, but gave up that sort of thing some time ago."

"How unfortunate! Every one acts; it's all the fashion," began Miss Ellery, rolling up her blue eyes imploringly.

"So I see; but I never cared much for theatricals, I like natural things better."

"How unkind you are! I quite depended on you for that, since you wouldn't be a corsair."

"Fred's the man for such fun. He's going to startle the crowd with a regular Captain Kidd rig, pistols and cutlasses enough for a whole crew, and a terrific beard."

"I know Ruth won't do it, Floss, for she looked amazed when I showed her my Undine costume, and told her what I wanted the sea-weed for. 'Why, you won't stand before all those folks dressed that way, will you?' she said, "as much scandalized as if she'd never seen a low-necked dress and silk stockings before;" and Miss Perry tossed her head with an air of pity for a girl who could be surprised at the display of a pretty neck and arms and ankles.

"We'll HIRE her, then; she's a mercenary wretch and will do anything for money. I won't be scrambled into my boat in a hurry, and we MUST have Rebecca because I've borrowed a fine pitcher and promised the boys their camel," said Miss Ellery, who considered herself the queen of the place and ruled like one, in virtue of being the prettiest girl there and the richest.

"She has landed, I think, for the boat is off again to the wharf. Better run down and help her with the bulrushes, Fred, and the rest of the stuff you ordered," suggested Captain John, longing to go himself but kept by his duty as host, Aunt Mary being asleep upstairs.

"Too tired. Won't hurt her; she's used to work, and we mustn't pamper her up, as old ladies say," answered Mr. Fred, enjoying his favorite lounge on the grass.

"I wouldn't ask her to act, if you'll allow me to say so," said Captain John, in his quiet way. "That sort of thing might unsettle her and make her discontented. She steers that little craft over there and is happy now; let her shape her own course, and remember it isn't well to talk to the man at the wheel."

Miss Perry stared; Miss Ray, the sharp girl, nodded, and Miss Ellery said petulantly, —

"As if it mattered what SHE thought or said or did! It's her place to be useful if we want her, and we needn't worry about spoiling a girl like that. She can't be any prouder or more saucy than she is, and I shall ask her if only to see the airs she will put on.”

As she spoke Ruth came up the sandy path from the beach laden with rushes and weeds, sun-flowers and shells, looking warm and tired but more picturesque than ever, in her blue gown and the red handkerchief she wore since her old hat blew away. Seeing the party on the cottage steps, she stopped to ask if the things were right, and Miss Ellery at once made her request in a commanding tone which caused Ruth to grow very straight and cool and sober all at once, and answer decidedly, —

“I couldn’t anyway.”

“Why not?”

“Well, one reason is I don’t think it’s right to act things out of the Bible just to show off and amuse folks.”

“The idea of minding!” and Miss Ellery frowned, adding angrily, “We will pay you for it. I find people will do anything for money down here.”

“We are poor and need it, and this is our best time to make it. I’d do most anything to earn a little, but not that;” and Ruth looked as proud as the young lady herself.

“Then we’ll say no more if you are too elegant to do what WE don’t mind at all. I’ll pay you for this stuff now, as I ordered it, and you needn’t bring me any more. How much do I owe you?” asked the offended beauty, taking out her purse in a pet.

“Nothing. I’m gad to oblige the ladies if I can, for they have been very kind to me. Perhaps if you knew why I want to earn money, you’d understand me better. Grandpa can’t last long, and I don’t want the town to bury him. I’m working and saving so he can be buried decently, as he wants to be, not like a pauper.”

There was something in Ruth’s face and voice as she said this, standing there shabby, tired, and heavy-laden, yet honest, dutiful and patient for love’s sake, that touched the hearts of those who looked and listened; but she left no time for any answer, for with the last word she went on quickly, as if to hide the tears that dimmed her clear eyes and the quiver of her lips.

“Floss, how could you!” cried Miss Ray, and ran to take the sheaf of bulrushes from Ruth’s arms, followed by the rest, all ashamed and repentant now that a word had shown them the hard life going on beside their idle, care-free ones.

Captain John longed to follow, but walked into the house, growling to himself with a grim look, —

“That girl has no more heart than a butterfly, and I’d like to see her squirm on a pin! Poor Ruth! we’ll settle that matter, and bury old Ben like an admiral, hang me if we don’t!”

He was so busy talking the affair over with Aunt Mary that he did not see the girl flit by to wait for her boat on the beach, having steadily refused the money offered her, though she accepted the apologies in the kindest spirit.

The beach at this hour of the day was left to the nurses and maids who bathed and gossiped while the little people played in the sand or paddled in the sea. Several were splashing about, and one German governess was scolding violently because while she was in the bath-house her charge, a little girl of six, had rashly ventured out in a flat-bottomed tub, as they called the small boats used by the gentlemen to reach the yachts anchored in deep water.

Ruth saw the child's danger at a glance, for the tide was going out, carrying the frail cockleshell rapidly away, while the child risked an upset every moment by stretching her arms to the women on the shore and calling them to help her.

None dared to try, but all stood and wrung their hands, screaming like sea-gulls, till the girl, throwing off shoes and heavy skirt plunged in, calling cheerily, "Sit still! I'll come and get you, Milly!"

She could swim like a fish, but encumbered with her clothes and weary with an unusually hard day's work, she soon found that she did not gain as rapidly as she expected upon the receding boat. She did not lose courage, but a thrill of anxiety shot through her as she felt her breath grow short, her limbs heavy, and the tide sweep her farther and farther from the shore.

"If they would only stop screaming and go for help, I could keep up and push the boat in; but the child will be out presently and then we are lost, for I can't get back with her, I'm afraid."

As these thoughts passed through her mind Ruth was swimming stoutly, and trying by cheerful words to keep the frightened child from risking their main chance of safety. A few more strokes and she would reach the boat, rest a moment, then, clinging to it, push it leisurely to shore. Feeling that the danger was over, she hurried on and was just putting up her hands to seize the frail raft and get her breath when Milly, thinking she was to be taken in her arms, leaned forward. In rushed the water, down went the boat, and out splashed the screaming child to cling to Ruth with the desperate clutch she dreaded.

Both went under for a moment, but rose again; and with all her wits sharpened by the peril of the moment, Ruth cried, as she kept herself afloat, —

"On my back, quick! quick! Don't touch my arms; hold tight to my hair, and keep still."

Not realizing all the danger, and full of faith in Ruth's power to do anything, after the feats of diving and floating she had seen her perform, Milly scrambled up as often before, and clung spluttering and gasping to Ruth's strong shoulders. So burdened, and conscious of fast-failing strength, Ruth turned toward the shore, and bent every power of mind and body to her task. How far away it seemed! how still the women were, — not one even venturing out a little way to help her, and no man in sight! Her heart seemed to stop beating, her temples throbbed, her breath was checked by the clinging arms, and the child, seemed to grow heavier every moment.

"I'll do what I can, but, oh, why don't some one come?"

That was the last thought Ruth was conscious of, as she panted and ploughed slowly back, with such a set white face and wide eyes fixed on the flag that fluttered from the nearest cottage, that it was no wonder the women grew still as they watched her. One good Catholic nurse fell on her knees to pray; the maids cried, the governess murmured, "Mein Gott, I am lost if the child go drowned!" and clear and sweet came the sound of Captain John's whistle as he stood on his piazza waiting to row Ruth home.

They were nearly in, a few more strokes and she could touch the bottom, when suddenly all grew black before her eyes, and whispering, "I'll float. Call, Milly, and don't mind me," Ruth turned over, still holding the child fast, and with nothing but her face out of water, feebly struggled on.

"Come and get me! She's going down! Oh, come, quick!" called the child in a tone of such distress that the selfish German bestirred herself at last, and began to wade cautiously in. Seeing help at hand, brave little Milly soon let go, and struck out like an energetic young frog, while Ruth, quite spent, sank quietly down, with a dim sense that her last duty was done and rest had come.

The shrill cries of the women when they saw the steady white face disappear and rise no more, reached Captain John's ear, and sent him flying down the path, sure that some one was in danger.

"Ruth — gone down — out there!" was all he caught, as many voices tried to tell the tale; and waiting for no more, he threw off hat and coat, and dashed into the sea as if ready to search the Atlantic till he found her.

She was safe in a moment, and pausing only to send one girl flying for the doctor, he carried his streaming burden straight home to Aunt Mary, who had her between blankets before a soul arrived, and was rubbing for dear life while John fired up the spirit lamp for hot brandy and water, with hands that trembled as he splashed about like an agitated Newfoundland fresh from a swim.

Ruth was soon conscious, but too much exhausted to do or say anything, and lay quietly suffering the discomforts of resuscitation till she fell asleep.

"Is Milly safe?" was all she asked, and being assured that the child was in her mother's arms, and Sammy had gone to tell Grandpa all about it, she smiled and shut her eyes with a whispered, "Then it's all right, thank God!"

All that evening Captain John paced the piazza, and warned away the eager callers, who flocked down to ask about the heroine of the hour; for she was more interesting than Undine, the Lily Maid, or any of the pretty creatures attitudinizing behind the red curtains in the hot hotel parlor. All that night Aunt Mary watched the deep sleep that restored the girl, and now and then crept out to tell her nephew there was nothing to fear for one so strong and healthful. And all night Ruth dreamed strange dreams, some weird and dim, some full of pain and fear; but as the fever of reaction passed away, lovely visions of a happy place came to her, where faces she loved were near, and rest, and all she longed for was hers at last. So clear and beautiful was this dream that she waked in the early dawn to lie and think of it, with such a look of peace upon her face that Aunt Mary could not but kiss it tenderly when she came in to see if all was well.

“How are you, dear? Has this nice long sleep set you up again as I hoped?”

“Oh yes, I’m quite well, thank you, and I must go home. Grandpa will worry so till he sees me,” answered Ruth, sitting up with her wet hair on her shoulders, and a little shiver of pain as she stretched her tired arms.

“Not yet, my dear; rest another hour or two and have some breakfast. Then, if you like, John shall take you home before any one comes to plague you with idle questions. I’m not going to say a word, except that I’m proud of my brave girl, and mean to take care of her if she will let me.”

With that and a motherly embrace, the old lady bustled away to stir up her maid and wakt John from his first nap with the smell of coffee. a most unromantic but satisfying perfume to all the weary watchers in the house.

An hour later, dressed in Miss Scott’s gray wrapper and rose-colored shawl, Ruth came slowly to the beach leaning on Captain John’s arm, while Aunt Mary waved her napkin from the rocks above, and sent kind messages after them as they pushed off.

It was the loveliest hour of all the day. The sun had not yet risen, but sea and sky were rosy with the flush of dawn; the small waves rippled up the sand, the wind blew fresh and fragrant from hayfields far away, and in the grove the birds were singing, as they only sing at peep of day. A still, soft, happy time before the work and worry of the world began, the peaceful moment which is so precious to those who have learned to love its balm and consecrate its beauty with their prayers.

Ruth sat silent, looking about her as if she saw a new heaven and earth, and had no words in which to tell the feeling that made her eyes so soft, sent the fresh color back into her cheeks, and touched her lips with something sweeter than a smile.

Captain John rowed very slowly, watching her with a new expression in his face; and when she drew a long breath, a happy sort of sigh, he leaned forward to ask, as if he knew what brought it, —

“You are glad to be alive, Ruth?”

“Oh, so glad! I didn’t want to die; life’s very pleasant now,” she answered, with her frank eyes meeting his so gratefully.

“Even though it’s hard?”

“It’s easier lately; you and dear Miss Mary have helped so much, I see my way clear, and mean to go right on, real brave and cheerful, sure I’ll get my wish at last.”

“So do I!” and Captain John laughed a queer, happy laugh, as he bent to his oars again, with the look of a man who knew where he was going and longed to get there as soon as possible.

“I hope you will. I wish I could help anyway to pay for all you’ve done for me. I know you don’t want to be thanked for fishing me up, but I mean to do it all the same, if I can, some time;” and Ruth’s voice was full of tender energy as she looked down into the deep green water where her life would have ended but for him.

“What did you think of when you went down so quietly? Those women said you never called for help once.”

“I had no breath to call. I knew you were near, I hoped you’d come, and I thought of poor Grandpa and Sammy as I gave up and seemed to go to sleep.”

A very simple answer, but it made Captain John beam with delight; and the morning red seemed to glow all over his brown face as he rowed across the quiet bay, looking at Ruth sitting opposite, so changed by the soft becoming colors of her dress, the late danger, and the dreams that still lingered in her mind, making it hard to feel that she was the same girl who went that way only a day ago.

Presently the Captain spoke again in a tone that was both eager and anxious, —

“I’m glad my idle summer hasn’t been quite wasted. It’s over now, and I’m off in a few days for a year’s cruise, you know.”

“Yes, Miss Mary told me you were going soon. I’ll miss you both, but maybe you’ll come next year?”

“I will, please God!”

“So will I; for even if I get away this fall, I’d love to come again in summer and rest a little while, no matter what I find to do.”

“Come and stay with Aunt Mary if this home is gone. I shall want Sammy next time. I’ve settled that with the Skipper, you know, and I’ll take good care of the little chap. He’s not much younger than I was when I shipped for my first voyage. You’ll let him go?”

“Anywhere with you. He’s set his heart on being a sailor, and Grandpa likes it. All our men are, and I’d be one if I were a boy. I love the sea so, I couldn’t be happy long away from it.”

“Even though it nearly drowned you?”

“Yes, I’d rather die that way than any other. But it was my fault; I shouldn’t have failed if I hadn’t been so tired. I’ve often swum farther; but I’d been three hours in the marsh getting those things for the girls, and it was washing-day, and I’d been up nearly all night with Grandpa; so don’t blame the sea, please, Captain John.”

“You should have called me; I was waiting for you, Ruth.”

“I didn’t know it. I’m used to doing things myself. It might have been too late for Milly if I’d waited.”

“Thank God, I wasn’t too late for you.”

The boat was at the shore now; and as he spoke Captain John held out his hands to help Ruth down, for, encumbered with her long dress, and still weak from past suffering, she could not spring to land as she used to do in her short gown. For the first time the color deepened in her cheek as she looked into the face before her and read the meaning of the eyes that found her beautiful and dear, and the lips that thanked God for her salvation so fervently.

She did not speak, but let him lift her down, draw her hand through his arm, and lead her up the rocky slope to the little pool that lay waiting for the sun’s first rays to wake from its sleep. He paused there, and with his hand on hers said quietly, —

“Ruth, before I go I want to tell you something, and this is a good time and place. While Aunt Mary watched the flowers, I’ve watched you, and found the girl I’ve always wanted for my wife. Modest and brave, dutiful and true, that’s what I love; could you give me all this, dear, for the little I can offer, and next year sail with Sammy and a very happy man if you say yes?”

“I’m not half good and wise enough for that! Remember what I am,” began Ruth, bending her head as if the thought were more than she could bear.

“I do remember, and I’m proud of it! Why, dear heart, I’ve worked my way up from a common sailor, and am the better for it. Now I’ve got my ship, and I want a mate to make a home for me aboard and ashore. Look up and tell me that I didn’t read those true eyes wrong.”

Then Ruth lifted up her face, and the sunshine showed him all he asked to know, as she answered with her heart in her voice and the “true eyes” fixed on his, —

“I tried not to love you, knowing what a poor ignorant girl I am; but you were so kind to me, how could I help it, John?"

That satisfied him, and he sealed his happy thanks on the innocent lips none had kissed but the little brother, the old man, and the fresh winds of the sea.

One can imagine the welcome they met at the small brown house, and what went on inside as Grandpa blessed the lovers, and Sammy so overflowed with joy at his enchanting prospects, that he was obliged to vent his feelings in ecstatic jigs upon the beach, to the great amazement of the gulls and sandpipers at breakfast there.

No one at the Point, except a certain dear old lady, knew the pleasant secret, though many curious or friendly visitors went to the Island that day to see the heroine and express their wonder, thanks, and admiration. All agreed that partial drowning seemed to suit the girl, for a new Ruth had risen like Venus from the sea. A softer beauty was in her fresh face now, a gentler sort of pride possessed her, and a still more modest shrinking from praise and publicity became her well. No one guessed the cause, and she was soon forgotten; for the season was over, the summer guests departed, and the Point was left to the few cottagers who loved to linger into golden September.

Miss Mary was one of these, and Captain John another; for he remained as long as he dared, to make things comfortable for the old man, and to sit among the rocks with Ruth when her day's work was done, listening while his "Mermaid," as he called her, sang as she had never sung before, and let him read the heart he had made his own, for the lily was wide open now, and its gold all his.

With the first frosts Grandpa died, and was carried to his grave by his old comrades, owing no man a cent, thanks to his dutiful granddaughter and the new son she had given him. Then the little house was deserted, and all winter Ruth was happy with Aunt Mary, while Sammy studied bravely, and lived on dreams of the joys in store for him when the Captain came sailing home again.

Another summer brought the happy day when the little brown house was set in order for a sailor's honeymoon, when the flag floated gayly over Miss Mary's cottage, and Ruth in a white gown with her chosen flowers in her hair and bosom, shipped with her dear Captain for the long cruise which had its storms and calms, but never any shipwreck of the love that grew and blossomed with the water-lilies by the sea.

POPPIES AND WHEAT

AS the great steamer swung round into the stream the cloud of white handkerchiefs waving on the wharf melted away, the last good-byes grew fainter, and those who went and those who stayed felt that the parting was over, —

“It may be for years, and it may be forever,”

as the song says.

With only one of the many groups on the deck need we concern ourselves, and a few words will introduce our fellow-travellers. A brisk middle-aged lady leaned on the arm of a middle-aged gentleman in spectacles, both wearing the calmly cheerful air of people used to such scenes, and conscious only of the relief change of place brings to active minds and busy lives.

Before them stood two girls, evidently their charges, and as evidently not sisters, for in all respects they were a great contrast. The younger was a gay creature of seventeen, in an effective costume of navy-blue and white, with bright hair blowing in the wind, sparkling eyes roving everywhere, lively tongue going, and an air of girlish excitement pleasant to see. Both hands were full of farewell bouquets, which she surveyed with more pride than tenderness as she glanced at another group of girls less blessed with floral offerings.

Her companion was a small, quiet person, some years older than herself, very simply dressed, laden with wraps, and apparently conscious just then of nothing but three dark specks on the wharf, as she still waved her little white flag, and looked shoreward with eyes too dim for seeing. A sweet, modest face it was, with intelligent eyes, a firm mouth, and the look of one who had early learned self-reliance and self-control.

The lady and gentleman watched the pair with interest and amusement; for both liked young people, and were anxious to know these two better, since they were to be their guides and guardians for six months. Professor Homer was going abroad to look up certain important facts for his great historical work, and as usual took his wife with him; for they had no family, and the good lady was ready to march to any quarter of the globe at short notice. Fearing to be lonely while her husband pored over old papers in foreign libraries, Mrs. Homer had invited Ethel Amory, a friend’s daughter, to accompany her. Of course the invitation was gladly accepted, for it was a rare opportunity to travel in such company, and Ethel was wild with delight at the idea. One thorn, however, vexed her, among the roses with which her way seemed strewn. Mamma would not let her take a French maid, but preferred a young lady as companion; for, three being an awkward number, a fourth party would be not only convenient, but necessary on the girl's account, since she was not used to take care of herself and Mrs. Homer could only be expected to act as chaperone.

"Jane Bassett is just the person I want, and Jane shall go. She needs a change after teaching all these years; it will do her a world of good, for she will improve and enjoy every moment, and the salary I shall offer her will make it worth her while," said Mrs. Amory, as she discussed the plan with her daughter.

"She is only three years older than I am, and I hate to be taken care of, and watched, and fussed over. I can order a maid round, but a companion is worse than a governess; such people are always sensitive and proud, and hard to get on with. Every one takes a maid, and I'd set my heart on that nice Marie who wants to go home, and talks such lovely French. Do let me have her, Mamma!" begged Ethel, who was a spoiled child and usually got her own way.

But for once Mamma stood firm, having a strong desire to benefit her daughter by the society of better companions than the gay girls of her own set, also to give a great pleasure to good little Jane Bassett, who had been governessing ever since she was sixteen, with very few vacations in her hard, dutiful life.

"No, darling, I have asked Jane, and if her mother can spare her, Jane it shall be. She is just what you need, — sensible and kind, intelligent and capable; not ashamed to do anything for you, and able to teach you a great deal in a pleasant way. Mrs. Homer approves of her, and I am sure you will be glad by-and-by; for travelling is not all 'fun,' as you expect, and I don't want you to be a burden on our friends. You two young things can take care of each other while the Professor and his wife are busy with their own affairs; and Jane is a far better companion for you than that coquettish French woman, who will probably leave you in the lurch as soon as you reach Paris. I shouldn't have a moment's peace if you were left with her, but I have entire confidence in Jane Bassett because she is faithful, discreet, and a true lady in all things."

There was no more to be said, and Ethel pouted in vain. Jane accepted the place with joy; and after a month of delightful hurry they were off, one all eagerness for the new world, the other full of tender regret for the dear souls left behind. How they got on, and what they learned, remains to be told.

"Come, Miss Bassett, we can't see them any longer, so we may as well begin to enjoy ourselves. You might take those things down below, and settle the stateroom a bit; I'm going to walk about and get my bearings before lunch. You will find me somewhere round."

Ethel spoke with a little tone of command, having made up her mind to be mistress and keep Jane Bassett in her place, though she did know three languages and sketched much better than Miss Amory.

Jenny, as we who are going to be her bosom friends will call her, nodded cheerfully, and looked about for the stairway; for, never having been on a steamer before, she was rather bewildered.

"I'll show you the way, my dear. I always get my things settled at once, as one never knows when one may have to turn in. The Professor will go with you, Ethel; it is not proper for you to roam about alone;" and with that hint Mrs. Homer led the way below, privately wondering how these young persons were going to get on together.

Jane swallowed her "heimweh" in silence, and bestirred herself so well that soon the stateroom looked very cosy with the wrappers laid ready, the hanging bags tacked up, and all made ship-shape for the ten days' trip.

"But where are YOUR comforts? You have given Ethel all the room, the lower berth, and the best of everything," said Mrs. Homer, popping in her head to see how her quiet neighbor got on.

"Oh, I live in my trunk; I didn't bring half as many little luxuries as Ethel did, so I don't need as much room. I'm used to living in corners like a mouse, and I get on very well," answered Jane, looking very like a mouse just then, as she peeped out of the upper berth, with her gray gown, bright eyes, and quick nod of contentment.

"Well, my dear, I've just one word of advice to give you. Don't let that child tyrannize over you. She means well, but is wilful and thoughtless, and it is NOT your duty to be made a slave of. Assert yourself and she will obey and respect you, and you will help her a great deal. I know all about it; I was a companion in my youth, and had a hard time of it till I revolted and took my proper place. Now let us go up and enjoy the fine air while we can."

"Thank you, I will remember;" and Jane offered the good lady her arm, with a feeling of gratitude for such friendliness, all being new and strange to her, and many doubts of her own fitness for the position lying heavy at her heart.

But soon all was forgotten as she sat on deck watching the islands, lighthouses, ships, and shores glide by as she went swiftly out to sea that bright June day. Here was the long-cherished desire of her life come to pass at last, and now the parting with mother and sisters was over, nothing but pleasure remained, and a very earnest purpose to improve this unexpected opportunity to the uttermost. The cares of life had begun early for little Jane, she being the eldest of the three girls, and her mother a widow. First came hard study, then a timid beginning as nursery governess; and as year by year the teaching of others taught her, she ventured on till here she was companion to a fine young lady "going abroad," where every facility for acquiring languages, studying history, seeing the best pictures, and enjoying good society would all be hers. No wonder the quiet face under the modest gray hat beamed, as it turned wistfully toward the unknown world before her, and that her thoughts were so far away, she was quite unconscious of the kind eyes watching her, as Mrs. Homer sat placidly knitting beside her.

"I shall like the Mouse, I'm quite sure. Hope Lemuel will be as well satisfied. Ethel is charming when she chooses, but will need looking after, that's plain," thought the lady as she glanced down the deck to where her husband stood talking with several gentlemen, while his charge was already making friends with the gay girls who were to be her fellow-passengers.

"Daisy Millers, I fear," went on Mrs. Homer, who had a keen eye for character, and was as fond of studying the people about her as the Professor was of looking up dead statesmen, kings, and warriors. The young ladies certainly bore some resemblance to the type of American girl which one never fails to meet in travelling. They were dressed in the height of the fashion, pretty with the delicate evanescent beauty of too many of our girls, and all gifted with the loud voices, shrill laughter, and free-and-easy manners which so astonish decorous English matrons and maids. Ethel was evidently impressed with their style, as they had a man and maid at their beck and call, and every sign of ostentatious wealth about them. A stout papa, a thin mamma, evidently worn out with the cares of the past winter, three half-grown girls, and a lad of sixteen made up the party; and a very lively one it was, as the Professor soon found, for he presently bowed himself away, and left Ethel to her new friends, since she smilingly refused to leave them.

"Ought I to go to her?" asked Jenny, waking from her happy reverie to a sudden sense of duty as the gentleman sat down beside her.

"Oh dear, no, she is all right. Those are the Sibleys of New York. Her father knows them, and she will find them a congenial refuge when she tires of us quiet folk; and you too, perhaps?" added the Professor as he glanced at the girl.

"I think not. I should not be welcome to them, nor are they the sort of people I like. I shall be very happy with the 'quiet folk,' if they won't let me be in the way," answered Jenny, in the cheerful voice that reminded one of the chirp of a robin.

"We won't; we'll toss you overboard as soon as you begin to scream and bounce in that style," he answered, laughing at the idea of this demure young person's ever dreaming of such a thing. Jenny laughed also, and ran to pick up Mrs. Homer's ball, as it set out for a roll into the lee-scuppers. As she brought it back she found the Professor examining the book she left behind her.

"Like all young travellers you cling to your 'Baedeker,' I see, even in the first excitement of the start. He is a useful fellow, but I know my Europe so well now, I don't need him."

"I thought it would be wise to read up our route a little, then I needn't ask questions. They must be very tiresome to people who know all about it," said Jenny, regarding him with an expression of deep respect for she considered him a sort of walking encyclopaedia of universal knowledge.

It pleased the learned man, who was kindly as well as wise, and loved to let his knowledge overflow into any thirsty mind, however small the cup might be. He liked the intelligent face before him, and a timid question or two set him off on his favorite hobby at a pleasant amble, with Jenny on the pillion behind, as it were. She enjoyed it immensely, and was deep in French history, when the lunch gong recalled her from Francis I. and his sister Margaret to chops and English ale.

Ethel came prancing back to her own party, full of praises of the Sibleys, and the fun they meant to have together.

"They are going to the Langham; so we shall be able to go about with them, and they know all the best shops, and some lords and ladies, and expect to be in Paris when we are, and that will be a great help with our dresses and things."

"But we are not going to shop and have new dresses till we are on our way home, you know. Now we haven't time for such things, and can't trouble the Homers with more trunks," answered Jenny, as they followed their elders to the table.

"I shall buy what I like, and have ten trunks if it suits me. I'm not going to poke round over old books and ruins, and live in a travelling-dress all the time. You can do as you like; it's different with me, and *I* know what is proper."

With which naughty speech Ethel took her seat first at the table, and began to nod and smile at the Sibleys opposite. Jenny set her lips and made no answer, but ate her lunch with what appetite she could, trying to forget her troubles in listening to the chat going on around her.

All that afternoon Ethel left her to herself, and enjoyed the more congenial society of the new acquaintances. Jenny was tired, and glad to read and dream in the comfortable seat Mrs. Homer left her when she went for her nap.

By sunset the sea grew rough and people began to vanish below. There were many empty places at dinner-time, and those who appeared seemed to have lost their appetites suddenly. The Homers were, good sailors, but Jenny looked pale, and Ethel said her head ached, though both kept up bravely till nine o'clock, when the Sibleys precipitately retired after supper, and Ethel thought she might as well go to bed early to be ready for another pleasant day to-morrow.

Jenny had a bad night, but disturbed no one. Ethel slept soundly, and sprang up in the morning, eager to be the first on deck. But a sudden lurch sent her and her hair-brush into a corner: and when she rose, everything in the stateroom seemed to be turning somersaults, while a deathly faintness crept over her.

“Oh, wake up, Jane! We are sinking! What is it? Help me, help me!” and with a dismal wail Ethel tumbled into her berth in the first anguish of seasickness.

We will draw the curtain for three days, during which rough weather and general despair reigned. Mrs. Homer took care of the girls till Jenny was able to sit up and amuse Ethel; but the latter had a hard time of it, for a series of farewell lunches had left her in a bad state for a sea-voyage, and the poor girl could not lift her head for days. The new-made friends did not trouble themselves about her after a call of condolence, but faithful Jenny sat by her hour after hour, reading and talking by day, singing her to sleep at night, and often creeping from her bed on the sofa to light her little candle and see that her charge was warmly covered and quite comfortable. Ethel was used to being petted, so she was not very grateful; but she felt the watchful care about her, and thought Jane almost as handy a person as a maid, and told her so.

Jenny thanked her and said nothing of her own discomforts; but Mrs. Homer saw them, and wrote to Mrs. Amory that so far the companion was doing admirably and all that could be desired. A few days later she added more commendations to the journal-letters she kept for the anxious mothers at home, and this serio-comical event was the cause of her fresh praises.

The occupants of the deck staterooms were wakened in the middle of the night by a crash and a cry, and starting up found that the engines were still, and something was evidently the matter somewhere. A momentary panic took place; ladies screamed, children cried, and gentlemen in queer costumes burst out of their rooms, excitedly demanding, “What is the matter?”

As no lamps are allowed in the rooms at night, darkness added to the alarm, and it was some time before the real state of the case was known. Mrs. Homer went at once to the frightened girls, and found Ethel clinging to Jenny, who was trying to find the life-preservers lashed to the wall.

“We've struck! Don't leave me! Let us die together! Oh, why did I come? why did I come?” she wailed; while the other girl answered with a brave attempt at cheerfulness, as she put over Ethel's head the only life-preserver she could find,

— .

“I will! I will! Be calm, dear! I guess there is no immediate danger. Hold fast to this while I try to find something warm for you to put on.”

In a moment Jenny’s candle shone like a star of hope in the gloom, and by the time the three had got into wrappers and shawls, a peal of laughter from the Professor assured them that the danger could not be great. Other sounds of merriment, as well as Mrs. Sibley’s voice scolding violently, was heard; and presently Mr. Homer came to tell them to be calm, for the stoppage was only to cool the engines, and the noise was occasioned by Joe Sibley’s tumbling out of his berth in a fit of nightmare caused by Welsh rarebits and poached eggs at eleven at night.

Much relieved, and a little ashamed now of their fright, every one subsided; but Ethel could not sleep, and clung to Jenny in an hysterical state till a soft voice began to sing “Abide with me” so sweetly that more than one agitated listener blessed the singer and fell asleep before the comforting hymn ended.

Ethel was up next day, and lay on the Professor’s bearskin rug on deck, looking pale and interesting, while the Sibleys sat by her talking over the exciting event of the night, to poor Joe’s great disgust. Jenny crept to her usual corner. and sat with a book on her lap, quietly reviving in the fresh air till she was able to enjoy the pleasant chat of the Homers, who established themselves near by and took care of her, learning each day to love and respect the faithful little soul who kept her worries to herself, and looked brightly forward no matter how black the sky might be.

Only one other incident of the voyage need be told; but as that marked a change in the relations between the two girls it is worth recording.

As she prepared for bed late one evening, Mrs. Homer heard Jenny say in a tone never used before, —

“My dear, I must say something to you or I shall not feel as if I were doing my duty. I promised your mother that you should keep early hours, as you are not very strong and excitement is bad for you. Now, you WON’T come to bed at ten, as I ask you to every night, but stay up playing cards or sitting on deck till nearly every one but the Sibleys is gone. Mrs. Homer waits for us, and is tired, and it is very rude to keep her up. Will you PLEASE do as you ought, and not oblige me to say you must?”

Ethel was sleepy and cross, and answered pettishly, as she held out her foot to have her boot unbuttoned, — for Jenny, anxious to please, refused no service asked of her, —

“I shall do as I like, and you and Mrs. Homer needn’t trouble yourselves about me. Mamma wished me to have a good time, and I shall! There is no harm in staying up to enjoy the moonlight, and sing and tell stories. Mrs. Sibley knows what is proper better than you do."

"I don't think she does, for she goes to bed and leaves the girls to flirt with those officers in a way that I know is NOT proper," answered Jenny, firmly. "I should be very sorry to hear them say of you as they did of the Sibley girls, 'They are a wild lot, but great fun.'"

"Did they say that? How impertinent!" and Ethel bridled up like a ruffled chicken, for she was not out yet, and had not lost the modest instincts that so soon get blunted when a frivolous fashionable life begins.

"I heard them, and I know that the well-bred people on board do not like the Sibleys' noisy ways and bad manners. Now, you, my dear, are young and unused to this sort of life; so you cannot be too careful what you say and do, and with whom you go."

"Good gracious! any one would think YOU were as wise as Solomon and as old as the hills. YOU are young, and YOU haven't travelled, and don't know any more of the world than I do, — not so much of some things; so you needn't preach."

"I'm not wise nor old, but I DO know more of the world than you, for I began to take care of myself and earn my living at sixteen, and four years of hard work have taught me a great deal. I am to watch over you, and I intend to do it faithfully, no matter what you say, nor how hard you make it for me; because I promised, and I shall keep my word. We are not to trouble Mrs. Homer with our little worries, but try to help each other and have a really good time. I will do anything for you that I can, but I shall NOT let you do things which I wouldn't allow my own sisters to do, and if you refuse to mind me, I shall write to your mother and ask to go home. My conscience won't let me take money and pleasure unless I earn them and do my duty."

"Well, upon my word!" cried Ethel, much impressed by such a decided speech from gentle Jane, and dismayed at the idea of being taken home in disgrace.

"We won't talk any more now, because we may get angry and say what we should be sorry for. I am sure you will see that I am right when you think it over quietly. So good-night, dear."

"Good-night," was all the reply Ethel gave, and a long silence followed.

Mrs. Homer could not help hearing as the staterooms were close together, and the well-ventilated doors made all conversation beyond a whisper audible.

"I didn't think Jane had the spirit to talk like that. She has taken my hint and asserted herself, and I'm very glad, for Ethel must be set right at once or we shall have no peace. She will respect and obey Jane after this, or I shall be obliged to say MY word."

Mrs. Homer was right, and before her first nap set in she heard a meek voice say, —

"Are you asleep, Miss Bassett?"

"No, dear."

"Then I want to say, I've thought it over. Please DON'T write to mamma. I'll be good. I'm sorry I was rude to you; do forgive — "

The sentence was not ended, for a sudden rustle, a little sob, and several hearty kisses plainly told that Jenny had flown to pardon, comfort, and caress her naughty child, and that all was well.

After that Ethel's behavior was painfully decorous for the rest of the voyage, which, fortunately for her good resolutions, ended at Queenstown, much to her regret. The Homers thought a glimpse at Ireland and Scotland would be good for the girls; and as the Professor had business in Edinburgh this was the better route for all parties. But Ethel longed for London, and refused to see any beauty in the Lakes of Killarney, turned up her nose at jaunting-cars, and pronounced Dublin a stupid place.

Scotland suited her better, and she could not help enjoying the fine scenery with such companions as the Homers; for the Professor knew all about the relics and ruins, and his wife had a memory richly stored with the legends, poetry, and romance which make dull facts memorable and history enchanting.

But Jenny's quiet rapture was pleasant to behold. She had not scorned Scott's novels as old-fashioned, and she peopled the cottages and castles with his heroes and heroines; she crooned Burns's sweet songs to herself as she visited his haunts, and went about in a happy sort of dream, with her head full of Highland Mary, Tam o' Shanter, field-mice and daisies, or fought terrific battles with Fitz-James and Marmion, and tried if "the light harebell" would "raise its head, elastic from her airy tread," as it did from the Lady of the Lake's famous foot.

Ethel told her she was "clean daft;" but Jenny said, "Let me enjoy it while I can. I've dreamed of it so long I can hardly realize that it has come, and I cannot lose a minute of it;" so she absorbed Scotch poetry and romance with the mist and the keen air from the moors, and bloomed like the bonnie heather which she loved to wear.

"What shall we do this rainy day in this stupid place?" said Ethel, one morning when bad weather kept them from an excursion to Stirling Castle.

"Write our journals and read up for the visit; then we shall know all about the castle, and need not tire people with our questions," answered Jenny, already established in a deep window-seat of their parlor at the hotel with her books and portfolio.

"I don't keep a journal, and I hate to read guide-books; it's much easier to ask, though there is very little I care for about these mouldy old places," said Ethel with a yawn, as she looked out into the muddy street.

"How can you say so? Don't you care for poor Mary, and Prince Charlie, and all the other sad and romantic memories that haunt the country? Why, it seems as real to me as if it happened yesterday, and I never can forget anything about the place or the people now. Really, dear, I think you ought to take more interest and improve this fine chance. Just see how helpful and lovely Mrs. Homer is, with a quotation for every famous spot we see. It adds so much to our pleasure, and makes her so interesting. I'm going to learn some of the fine bits in this book of hers, and make them my own, since I cannot buy the beautiful little set this Burns belongs to. Don't you want to try it, and while away the dull day by hearing each other recite and talking over the beautiful places we have seen?"

"No, thank you; no study for me. It is to be all play now. Why tire my wits with that Scotch stuff when Mrs. Homer is here to do it for me?" and lazy Ethel turned to the papers on the table for amusement more to her taste.

"But we shouldn't think only of our own pleasure, you know. It is so sweet to be able to teach, amuse, or help others in any way. I'm glad to learn this new accomplishment, so that I may be to some one by-and-by what dear Mrs. Homer is to us now, if I ever can. Didn't you see how charmed those English people were at Holyrood when she was reciting those fine lines to us? The old gentleman bowed and thanked her, and the handsome lady called her 'a book of elegant extracts.' I thought it was such a pretty and pleasant thing that I described it all to mother and the girls."

"So it was; but did you know that the party was Lord Cumberland and his family? The guide told me afterward. I never guessed they were anybody, in such plain tweed gowns and thick boots; did you?"

"I knew they were ladies and gentlemen by their manners and conversation; did you expect they would travel in coronets and ermine mantles?" laughed Jenny.

"I'm not such a goose! But I'm glad we met them, because I can tell the Sibleys of it. They think so much of titles, and brag about Lady Watts Barclay, whose husband is only a brewer knighted. I shall buy a plaid like the one the lord's daughter wore, and wave it in the faces of those girls; they do put on SUCH airs because they have been in Europe before."

Jenny was soon absorbed in her books; so Ethel curled herself up in the window-seat with an illustrated London paper full of some royal event, and silence reigned for an hour. Neither had seen the Professor's glasses rise like two full moons above his paper now and then to peep at them as they chatted at the other end of the room; neither saw him smile as he made a memorandum in his note-book, nor guessed how pleased he was at Jenny's girlish admiration of his plain but accomplished and excellent wife. It was one of the trifles which went to form his opinion of the two lasses, and in time to suggest a plan which ended in great joy for one of them.

"Now the real fun begins, and I shall be perfectly contented," cried Ethel as they rolled through the London streets towards the dingy Langham Hotel, where Americans love to congregate.

Jenny's eyes were sparkling also, and she looked as if quite ready for the new scenes and excitements which the famous old city promised them, though she had private doubts as to whether anything could be more delightful than Scotland.

The Sibleys were at the hotel; and the ladies of both parties at once began a round of shopping and sightseeing, while the gentlemen went about their more important affairs. Joe was detailed for escort duty; and a fine time the poor lad had of it, trailing about with seven ladies by day and packing them into two cabs at night for the theatres and concerts they insisted on trying to enjoy in spite of heat and weariness.

Mrs. Homer and Jenny were soon tired of this "whirl of gayety," as they called it, and planned more quiet excursions with some hours each day for rest and the writing and reading which all wise tourists make a part of their duty and pleasure. Ethel rebelled, and much preferred the "rabble," as Joe irreverently called his troop of ladies, never losing her delight in Regent Street shops, the parks at the fashionable hour, and the evening shows in full blast everywhere during the season. She left the sober party whenever she could escape, and with Mrs. Sibley as chaperone, frolicked about with the gay girls to her heart's content. It troubled Jenny, and made her feel as if she were not doing her duty; but Mrs. Homer consoled her by the fact that a month was all they could give to London, and soon the parties would separate, for the Sibleys were bound for Paris, and the Professor for Switzerland and Germany, through August and September.

So little Jane gave herself up to the pleasures she loved, and with the new friends, whose kindness she tried to repay by every small service in her power, spent happy days among the famous haunts they knew so well, learning much and storing away all she saw and heard for future profit and pleasure. A few samples of the different ways in which our young travellers improved their opportunities will sufficiently illustrate this new version of the gay grasshopper and the thrifty ant.

When they visited Westminster Abbey, Ethel was soon tired of tombs and chapels, and declared that the startling tableau of the skeleton Death peeping out of the half-opened door of the tomb to throw his dart at Mrs. Nightingale, and the ludicrous has-relief of some great earl in full peer’s robes and coronet being borne to heaven in the arms of fat cherubs puffing under their load, were the only things worth seeing.

Jenny sat spellbound in the Poets’ Corner, listening while Mrs. Homer named the illustrious dead around them; followed the verger from chapel to chapel with intelligent interest as he told the story of each historical or royal tomb, and gave up Madam Tussaud’s wax-work to spend several happy hours sketching the beautiful cloisters in the Abbey to add to her collection of water-colors, taken as she went from place to place, to serve as studies for her pupils at home.

At the Tower she grew much excited over the tragic spots she visited and the heroic tales she heard of the kings and queens, the noble hearts and wise heads, that pined and perished there. Ethel “hated horrors,” she said, and cared only for the crown jewels, the faded effigies in the armor gallery, and the queer Highlanders skirling on the bagpipes in the courtyard.

At Kew Jenny revelled in the rare flowers, and was stricken with amazement at the Victoria Regia, the royal water-lily, so large that a child could sit on one of its vast leaves as on a green island. Her interest and delight so touched the heart of the crusty keeper that he gave her a nosegay of orchids, which excited the envy of Ethel and the Sibley girls, who were of the party, but had soon wearied of plants and gone off to order tea in Flora’s Bower, — one of the little cottages where visitors repose and refresh themselves with weak tea and Bath buns in such tiny rooms that they have to put their wraps in the fireplace or out of the window while they feast.

At the few parties to which they went, — for the Homers’ friends were of the grave, elderly sort, — Jenny sat in a corner taking notes of the gay scene, while Ethel yawned. But the Mouse got many a crumb of good conversation as she nestled close to Mrs. Homer, drinking in the wise and witty chat that went on between the friends who came to pay their respects to the Professor and his interesting wife. Each night Jenny had new and famous names to add to the list in her journal, and the artless pages were rich in anecdotes, descriptions, and comments on the day’s adventures.

But the gem of her London collection of experiences was found in a most unexpected way, and not only gave her great pleasure, but made the young gadabouts regard her with sudden respect as one come to honor.

“Let me stay and wait upon you; I’d much rather than go to the Crystal Palace, for I shouldn’t enjoy it at all with you lying here in pain and alone,” said Jenny one lovely morning when the girls came down ready for the promised excursion, to find Mrs. Homer laid up with a nervous headache.

"No, dear, you can do nothing for me, thanks. Quiet is all I need, and my only worry is that I am not able to write up my husband's notes for him. I promised to have them ready last night, but was so tired I could not do it," answered Mrs. Homer, as Jenny leaned over her full of affectionate anxiety.

"Let me do them! I'd be so proud to help; and I can, for I did copy some one day, and he said it was well done. Please let me; I should enjoy a quiet morning here much better than the noisy party we shall have, since the Sibleys are to go."

With some reluctance the invalid consented; and when the rest were gone with hasty regrets, Jenny fell to work so briskly that in an hour or two the task was done. She was looking wistfully out of the window wondering where she could go alone, since Mrs. Homer was asleep and no one needed her, when the Professor came in to see how his wife was before he went to the British Museum to consult certain famous books and parchments.

He was much pleased to find his notes in order, and after a glance at the sleeping lady, told Jenny she was to come with him for a visit to a place which SHE would enjoy, though most young people thought it rather dull.

Away they went; and being given in charge to a pleasant old man, Jenny roamed over the vast Museum where the wonders of the world are collected, enjoying every moment, till Mr. Homer called her away, as his day's work was done. It was late now, but she never thought of time, and came smiling up from the Egyptian Hall ready for the lunch the Professor proposed. They were just going out when a gentleman met them, and recognizing the American stopped to greet him cordially. Jenny's heart beat when she was presented to Mr. Gladstone, and she listened with all her ears to the silvery un-English voice, and stared with all her eyes at the weary yet wise and friendly face of the famous man.

"I'm so glad! I wanted to see him very much, and I feel so grand to think I've really had a bow and a smile all to myself from the Premier of England," said Jenny in a flutter of girlish delight when the brief interview was over.

"You shall go to the House of Commons with me and hear him speak some day; then your cup will be full, since you have already seen Browning, heard Irving, taken tea with Jean Ingelow, and caught a glimpse of the royal family," said the Professor, enjoying her keen interest in people and places.

"Oh, thanks! that will be splendid. I do love to see famous persons, because it gives me a true picture of them, and adds to my desire to know more of them, and admire their virtues or shun their faults."

"Yes, that sort of mental picture-gallery is a good thing to have, and we will add as many fine portraits as we can. Now you shall ride in a Hansom, and see how you like that."

Jenny was glad to do so, for ladies do not use these vehicles when alone, and Ethel had put on great airs after a spin in one with Joe. Jenny was girl enough to like to have her little adventures to boast of, and that day she was to have another which eclipsed all that her young companions ever knew.

A brisk drive, a cosy lunch at a famous chop-house where Johnson had drunk oceans of tea, was followed by a stroll in the Park; for the Professor liked his young comrade, and was grateful for the well-written notes which helped on his work.

As they leaned against the railing to watch the splendid equipages roll by, one that seemed well known, though only conspicuous by its quiet elegance, stopped near them, and the elder of the two ladies in it bowed and beckoned to Professor Homer. He hastened forward to be kindly greeted and invited to drive along the Ladies' Mile. Jenny's breath was nearly taken away when she was presented to the Duchess of S — , and found herself sitting in a luxurious carriage opposite her Grace and her companion, with a white-wigged coachman perched aloft and two powdered footmen erect behind. Secretly rejoicing that she had made herself especially nice for her trip with the Professor, and remembering that young English girls are expected to efface themselves in the company of their elders, she sat mute and modest, stealing shy glances from under her hat-brim at the great lady, who was talking in the simplest way with her guest about his work, in which, as a member of one of the historical houses of England, she took much interest. A few gracious words fell to Jenny's share before they were set down at the door of the hotel, to the great admiration of the porter, who recognized the liveries and spread the news.

"This is a good sample of the way things go in Vanity Fair. We trudge away to our daily work afoot, we treat ourselves to a humble cab through the mud, pause in the park to watch the rich and great, get whisked into a ducal carriage, and come home in state, feeling rather exalted, don't we?" asked the Professor as they went upstairs, and he observed the new air of dignity which Jane unconsciously assumed as an obsequious waiter flew before to open the door.

"I think we do," answered honest Jane, laughing as she caught the twinkle of his eyes behind the spectacles. "I like splendor, and I AM rather set up to think I've spoken to a live duchess; but I think I like her beautiful old face and charming manners more than her fine coach or great name. Why, she was much more simply dressed than Mrs. Sibley, and talked as pleasantly as if she did not feel a bit above us. Yet one couldn't forget that she was noble, and lived in a very different world from ours."

"That is just it, my dear; she IS a noble woman in every sense of the word, and has a right to her title. Her ancestors were kingmakers, and she is Lady-in-waiting to the Queen; yet she leads the charities of London, and is the friend of all who help the world along. I'm glad you have met her, and seen so good a sample of a true aristocrat. We Americans affect to scorn titles, but too many of us hanker for them in secret, and bow before very poor imitations of the real thing. Don't fill your journal with fine names, as some much wiser folk do, but set down only the best, and remember, 'All that glitters is not gold.'"

"I will, sir." And Jenny put away the little sermon side by side with the little adventure, saying nothing of either till Mrs. Homer spoke of it, having heard the story from her husband.

"How I wish I'd been there, instead of fagging round that great palace full of rubbish! A real Duchess! Won't the Sibleys stare? We shall hear no more of Lady Watts Barclay after this, I guess, and you will be treated with great respect; see if you are not!" said Ethel, much impressed with her companion's good fortune and eager to tell it.

"If things of that sort affect them, their respect is not worth having," answered Jane, quietly accepting the arm Ethel offered her as they went to dinner, — a very unusual courtesy, the cause of which she understood and smiled at.

Ethel looked as if she felt the reproof, but said nothing, only set an example of greater civility to her companion, which the other girls involuntarily followed, after they had heard of Jenny's excursion with the Professor.

The change was very grateful to patient Jane, who had borne many small slights in proud silence; but it was soon over, for the parties separated, and our friends left the city far behind them, as they crossed the channel, and sailed up the Rhine to Schwalbach, where Mrs. Homer was to try the steel springs for her rheumatism while the Professor rested after his London labors.

A charming journey, and several very happy weeks followed as the girls roamed about the Little Brunnen, gay with people from all parts of Europe, come to try the famous mineral waters, and rest under the lindens.

Jenny found plenty to sketch here, and was busy all day booking picturesque groups as they sat in the Allee Saal, doing pretty woodland bits as they strolled among the hills, carefully copying the arches and statues in St. Elizabeth's Chapel, or the queer old houses in the Jews' Quarter of the town. Even the pigs went into the portfolio, with the little swineherd blowing his horn in the morning to summon each lazy porker from its sty to join the troop that trotted away to eat acorns in the oak wood on the hill till sunset called them home again.

Ethel's chief amusement was buying trinkets at the booths near the Stahlbrunnen. A tempting display of pretty crystal, agate, and steel jewelry was there, with French bonbons, Swiss carvings, German embroidery and lace-work, and most delectable little portfolios of views of fine scenery or illustrations of famous books. Ethel spent much money here, and added so greatly to her store of souvenirs that a new trunk was needed to hold the brittle treasures she accumulated in spite of the advice given her to wait till she reached Paris, where all could be bought much cheaper and packed safely for transportation.

Jenny contented herself with a German book, Kaulbach’s Goethe Gallery, and a set of ornaments for each sister; the purple, pink, and white crystals being cheap and pretty trinkets for young girls. She felt very rich with her generous salary to draw upon when she liked; but having made a list of proper gifts, she resisted temptation and saved her money, remembering how much every penny was needed at home.

Driving from the ruins of Hohenstein one lovely afternoon, the girls got out to walk up a long hill, and amused themselves gathering flowers by the way. When they took their places again, Ethel had a great bouquet of scarlet poppies, Jenny a nosegay of blue corn-flowers for Mrs. Homer, and a handful of green wheat for herself.

“You look as if you had been gleaning,” said the Professor, as he watched the girls begin to trim their rough straw hats with the gay coquelicots and the bearded ears.

“I feel as if I were doing that every day, sir, and gathering in a great harvest of pleasure, if nothing else,” answered Jenny, turning her bright eyes full of gratitude from one kind face to the other.

“My poppies are much prettier than that stiff stuff. Why didn’t you get some?” asked Ethel, surveying her brilliant decoration with great satisfaction.

“They don’t last; but my wheat will, and only grow prettier as it ripens in my hat,” answered Jenny, contentedly settling the graceful spires in the straw cord that bound the pointed crown.

“Then the kernels will all drop out and leave the husks; that won’t be nice, I’m sure,” laughed Ethel.

“Well, some hungry bird will pick them up and be glad of them. The husks will last a long time and remind me of this happy day; your poppies are shedding their leaves already, and the odor is not pleasant. I like my honest breadmaking wheat better than your opium flowers,” said Jenny, with her thoughtful smile, as she watched the scarlet petals float away leaving the green seed-vessels bare.

“Oh, I shall get some artificial ones at my little milliner’s, and be fine as long as I like; so you are welcome to your useful, bristly old wheat,” said Ethel, rather nettled by the look that passed between the elders.

Nothing more was said; but both girls remembered that little talk long afterward, for those two wayside nosegays served to point the moral of this little tale, if not to adorn it.

We have no space to tell all the pleasant wanderings of our travellers as they went from one interesting place to another, till they paused for a good rest at Geneva.

Here Ethel quite lost her head among the glittering display of jewelry, and had to be watched lest she rashly spend her last penny. They were obliged almost forcibly to carry her out of the enchanting shops; and no one felt safe till she was either on the lake, or driving to Chamouni, or asleep in her bed.

Jenny bought a watch, a very necessary thing for a teacher, and this was the best place to get a good one. It was chosen with care and much serious consultation with the Professor; and Mrs. Homer added a little chain and seal, finding Jenny about to content herself with a black cord.

“It is only a return for many daughterly services, my dear; and my husband wishes me to offer these with thanks to the patient secretary who has often helped him so willingly,” she said, as she came to wake Jenny with a kiss on the morning of her twenty-first birthday.

A set of little volumes like those she had admired was the second gift, and Jenny was much touched to be so kindly remembered. Ethel gave her some thread lace which she had longed to buy for her mother at Brussels, but did not, finding it as costly as beautiful. It was a very happy day, though quietly spent sitting by the lake enjoying the well-chosen extracts from Shakspeare, Wordsworth, Byron, Burns, Scott, and other descriptive poets, and writing loving letters home, proudly stamped with the little seal.

After that, while Ethel haunted the brilliant shops, read novels in the hotel-garden, or listlessly followed the sight-seers, Jenny, with the help of her valuable little library, her industrious pencil, and her accomplished guides, laid up a store of precious souvenirs as they visited the celebrated spots that lie like a necklace of pearls around the lovely lake, with Mont Blanc as the splendid opal that fitly clasps the chain. Calvin and Geneva, Voltaire and Ferney, De Stael and Coppet, Gibbon’s garden at Lausanne, Byron’s Prisoner at Chillon, Rousseau’s chestnut grove at Clarens, and all the legends, relics, and memories of Switzerland’s heroes, romancers, poets, and philosophers, were carefully studied, recorded, and enjoyed; and when at last they steamed away toward Paris, Jenny felt as if her head and her heart and one little trunk held richer treasures than all the jewelry in Geneva.

At Lyons her second important purchase was made; for when they visited one of the great manufactories to execute several commissions given to Mrs. Homer, Jenny proudly bought a nice black silk for her mother. This, with the delicate lace, would make the dear woman presentable for many a day, and the good girl beamed with satisfaction as she pictured the delight of all at home when this splendid gift appeared to adorn the dear parent-bird, who never cared how shabby she was if her young were well feathered.

It was a trial to Jenny, when they reached Paris, to spend day after day shopping, talking to dressmakers, and driving in the Bois to watch the elegant world on parade, when she longed to be living through the French Revolution with Carlyle, copying the quaint relics at Hotel Cluny, or revelling in the treasures of the Louvre.

“Why DO you want to study and poke all the time?” asked Ethel, as they followed Mrs. Homer and a French acquaintance round the Palais Royal one day with its brilliant shops, cafes, and crowds.

“My dream is to be able to take a place as teacher of German and history in a girl’s school next year. It is a fine chance, and I am promised it if I am fitted; so I must work when I can to be ready. That is why I like Versailles better than Rue de Rivoli, and enjoy talking with Professor Homer about French kings and queens more than I do buying mock diamonds and eating ices here,” answered Jenny, looking very tired of the glitter, noise, and dust of the gay place when her heart was in the Conciergerie with poor Marie Antoinette, or the Invalides, where lay the great Napoleon still guarded by his faithful Frenchmen.

“What a dismal prospect! I should think you’d rather have a jolly time while you could, and trust to luck for a place by-and-by, if you must go on teaching,” said Ethel, stopping to admire a window full of distracting bonnets.

“No; it is a charming prospect to me, for I love to teach, and I can’t leave anything to luck. God helps those who help themselves, mother says, and I want to give the girls an easier time than I have had; so I shall get my tools ready, and fit myself to do good work when the job comes to me,” answered Jenny, with such a decided air that the French lady glanced back at her, wondering if a quarrel was going on between the demoiselles.

“What do you mean by tools?” asked Ethel, turning from the gay bonnets to a ravishing display of bonbons in the next window.

“Professor Homer said one day that a well-stored mind was a tool-chest with which one could carve one’s way. Now, my tools are knowledge, memory, taste, the power of imparting what I know, good manners, sense, and — patience,” added Jenny, with a sigh, as she thought of the weary years spent in teaching little children the alphabet.

Ethel took the sigh to herself, well knowing that she had been a trial, especially of late, when she had insisted on Jane’s company because her own French was so imperfect as to be nearly useless, though at home she had flattered herself that she knew a good deal. Her own ignorance of many things had been unpleasantly impressed upon her lately, for at Madame Dene's Pension there were several agreeable English and French ladies, and much interesting conversation went on at the table, which Jenny heartily enjoyed, though she modestly said very little. But Ethel, longing to distinguish herself before the quiet English girls, tried to talk and often made sad mistakes because her head was a jumble of new names and places, and her knowledge of all kinds very superficial. Only the day before she had said in a patronizing tone to a French lady, —

"Of course we remember our obligations to your Lamartine during our Revolution, and the other brave Frenchmen who helped us."

"You mean Lafayette, dear," whispered Jenny quickly, as the lady smiled and bowed bewildered by the queerly pronounced French, but catching the poet's name.

"I know what I mean; you needn't trouble yourself to correct and interrupt me when I'm talking," answered Ethel, in her pert way, annoyed by a smile on the face of the girl opposite, and Jenny's blush at her rudeness and ingratitude. She regretted both when Jane explained the matter afterward, and wished that she had at once corrected what would then have passed as a slip of the tongue. Now it was too late; but she kept quiet and gave Miss Cholmondeley no more chances to smile in that aggravatingly superior way, though it was very natural, as she was a highly educated girl.

Thinking of this, and many other mistakes of her own from which Jane tried to save her, Ethel felt a real remorse, and walked silently on, wondering how she could reward this kind creature who had served her so well and was so anxious to get on in her hard, humble way. The orders were all given now, the shopping nearly done, and Mademoiselle Campan, the elderly French lady who boarded at their Pension, was always ready to jaunt about and be useful; so why not give Jane a holiday, and let her grub and study for the little while left them in Paris? In a fortnight Uncle Sam was to pick up the girls and take them home, while the Homers went to Rome for the winter. It would be well to take Miss Bassett back in a good humor, so that her report would please Mamma, and appease Papa if he were angry at the amount of money spent by his extravagant little daughter. Ethel saw now, as one always does when it is too late to repair damages, many things left undone which she ought to have done, and regretted living for herself instead of putting more pleasure into the life of this good girl, whose future seemed so uninviting to our young lady with her first season very near.

It was a kind plan, and gratified Jenny very much when it was proposed and proved to her that no duty would be neglected if she went about with the Homers and left her charge to the excellent lady who enjoyed chiffons as much as Ethel did, and was glad to receive pretty gifts in return for her services.

But alas for Ethel's good resolutions and Jenny's well-earned holiday! Both came to nothing, for Ethel fell ill from too much pastry, and had a sharp bilious attack which laid her up till the uncle arrived.

Every one was very kind, and there was no danger; but the days were long, the invalid very fretful, and the nurse very tired, before the second week brought convalescence and a general cheering and clearing up took place. Uncle Sam was amusing himself very comfortably while he waited for his niece to be able to travel, and the girls were beginning to pack by degrees, for the accumulation of Ethel's purchases made her share a serious task.

"There! All are in now, and only the steamer trunk is left to pack at the last moment," said Jenny, folding her tired arms after a protracted struggle with half a dozen new gowns, and a perplexing medley of hats, boots, gloves, and perfumery. Two large trunks stood in the ante-room ready to go; the third was now done, and nothing remained but the small one and Jenny's shabby portmanteau.

"How nicely you have managed! I ought to have helped, only you wouldn't let me and I should have spoilt my wrapper. Come and rest and help me sort out this rubbish," said Ethel, who would have been dressed and out if the arrival of a new peignoir had not kept her in to enjoy the lovely pink and blue thing, all lace and ribbon and French taste.

"You will never get them into that box, dear," answered Jenny, gladly sitting down beside her on the sofa, which was strewn with trinkets of all sorts, more or less damaged by careless handling, and the vicissitudes of a wandering trunk.

"I don't believe they are worth fussing over. I'm tired of them, and they look very mean and silly after seeing real jewels here. I'd throw them away if I hadn't spent so much money on them," said Ethel, turning over the tarnished filigree, mock pearl, and imitation coral necklaces, bracelets, and brooches that were tumbling out of the frail boxes in which they came.

"They will look pretty to people at home who have not been seeing so many as we have. I'll sew up the broken cases, and rub up the silver, and string the beads, and make all as good as new, and you will find plenty of girls at home glad to get them, I am sure," answered Jenny, rapidly bringing order out of chaos with those skilful hands of hers.

Ethel leaned back and watched her silently for a few minutes. During this last week our young lady had been thinking a good deal, and was conscious of a strong desire to tell Jane Bassett how much she loved and thanked her for all her patient and faithful care during the six months now nearly over. But she was proud, and humility was hard to learn; self-will was sweet, and to own one's self in the wrong a most distasteful task. The penitent did not know how to begin, so waited for an opportunity, and presently it came.

"Shall you be glad to get home, Jenny?" she asked in her most caressing tone, as she hung her prettiest locket round her friend's neck; for during this illness all formality and coolness had melted away, and "Miss Bassett" was "Jenny dear" now.

"I shall be very, very glad to see my precious people again, and tell them all about my splendid holiday; but I can't help wishing that we were to stay till spring, now that we are here, and I have no teaching, and may never get such another chance. I'm afraid it seems ungrateful when I've had so much; but to go back without seeing Rome is a trial, I confess," answered honest Jane, rubbing away at a very dull paste bandeau.

"So it is; but I don't mind so much, because I shall come again by-and-by, and I mean to be better prepared to enjoy things properly than I am now. I'll really study this winter, and not be such a fool. Jenny, I've a plan in my head. I wonder if you'd like it? I should immensely, and I'm going to propose it to Mamma the minute I get home," said Ethel, glad to seize this opening.

"What is it, deary?"

"Would you like to be my governess and teach me all you know, quietly, at home this winter? I don't want to begin school again just for languages and a few finishing things, and I really think you would do more for me than any one else, because you know what I need, and are so patient with your bad, ungrateful, saucy girl. Could you? would you come?" and Ethel put her arms round Jenny's neck with a little sob and a kiss that was far more precious to Jane than the famous diamond necklace of Marie Antoinette, which she had been reading about.

"I could and I would with all my heart, if you want me, darling! I think we know and love each other now, and can be happy and helpful together, and I'll come so gladly if your mother asks me," answered Jenny, quick to understand what underlay this sudden tenderness, and glad to accept the atonement offered her for many trials which she would never have told even to her own mother.

Ethel was her best self now, and her friend felt well rewarded for the past by this promise of real love and mutual help in the future. So they talked over the new plan in great spirits till Mrs. Homer came to bring them their share of a packet of home letters just arrived. She saw that something unusual was going on, but only smiled, nodded, and went away saying, —

"I have good news in MY letters, and hope yours will make you equally happy, girls."

Silence reigned for a time, as they sat reading busily; then a sudden exclamation from Ethel seemed to produce a strange effect upon Jenny, for with a cry of joy she sprang up and danced all over the room, waving her letter wildly as she cried out, —

"I'm to go! I'm to go! I can't believe it — but here it is! How kind, how very kind, every one is to me!" and down she went upon her own little bed to hide her face and laugh and cry till Ethel ran to rejoice with her.

"Oh, Jenny, I'm so glad! You deserve it, and it's like Mrs. Homer to make all smooth before she said a word. Let me read what Mamma writes to you. Here's my letter; see how sweetly she speaks of you, and how grateful they are for all you've done for me."

The letters changed hands; and sitting side by side in an affectionate bunch, the girls read the happy news that granted the cherished wish of one and gave the other real unselfish pleasure in another's happiness.

Jane was to go to Rome with the Homers for the winter, and perhaps to Greece in the spring. A year of delight lay before her, offered in such a friendly way, and with such words of commendation, thanks, and welcome, that the girl's heart was full, and she felt that every small sacrifice of feeling, every lonely hour, and distasteful duty was richly repaid by this rare opportunity to enjoy still further draughts of the wisdom, beauty, and poetry of the wonderful world now open to her.

She flew off presently to try to thank her good friends, and came back dragging a light new trunk, in which she nearly buried her small self as she excitedly explained its appearance, while rattling out the trays and displaying its many conveniences.

"That dear woman says I'm to send my presents home in the old one by you, and take this to fill up in Rome. Think of it! A lovely new French trunk, and Rome full of pictures, statues, St. Peter's, and the Colosseum. It takes my breath away and makes my head spin."

"So I see. It's a capital box, but it won't hold even St. Peter's, dear; so you'd better calm down and pack your treasures. I'll help," cried Ethel, sweeping about in her gay gown, almost as wild as Jane, who was quite upset by this sudden delicious change in her prospects.

How happily she laid away in the old trunk the few gifts she had ventured to buy, and those given her, — the glossy silk, the dainty lace, the pretty crystals, the store of gloves, the flask of cologne, the pictures and books, and last of all the sketches which illustrated the journal kept so carefully for those at home.

"Now, when my letter is written and the check with all that is left of my salary put in, I am done. There’s room for more, and I wish I’d got something else, now I feel so rich. But it is foolish to buy gowns to pay duties on, when I don’t know what the girls need. I feel so rich now, I shall fly out and pick up some more little pretties for the dears. They have so few, anything will be charming to them,” said Jenny, proudly surveying her box, and looking about for some foreign trifle with which to fill up the corners.

“Then let me put these in, and so be rid of them. I shall go to see your people and tell them all about you, and explain how you came to send so much rubbish.”

As she spoke Ethel slipped in several Swiss carvings, the best of the trinkets, and a parcel of dainty Parisian ties and sashes which would gladden the hearts of the poor, pretty girls, just beginning to need such aids to their modest toilets. A big box of bonbons completed her contribution, and left but one empty corner.

“I’ll tuck in my old hat to keep all steady; the girls will like it when they dress up, and I’m fond of it, because it recalls some of my happiest days,” said Jenny, as she took up the well-worn hat and began to dust it. A shower of grain dropped into her hand, for the yellow wheat still kept its place and recalled the chat at Schwalbach. Ethel glanced at her own hat with its faded artificial flowers; and as her eye went from the small store of treasures so carefully and happily gathered to the strew of almost useless finery on her bed, she said soberly, —

“You were right, Jenny. My poppies are worthless, and my harvest a very poor one. Your wheat fell in good ground, and you will glean a whole stack before you go home. Well, I shall keep MY old hat to remind me of you: and when I come again, I hope I shall have a wiser head to put into a new one.”

LITTLE BUTTON-ROSE

"If you please, I've come," said a small girl, as she walked into a large room where three ladies sat at work.

One of the ladies was very thin, one very stout, and the youngest very pretty. The eldest put on her glasses, the stout one dropped her sewing, and the pretty one exclaimed, —

"Why, it must be little Rosamond!"

"Yes, I've come; the man is taking my trunk upstairs, and I've got a letter for Cousin Penelope," said the child, with the sweet composure of one always sure of a welcome.

The stout lady held out her hand for the letter; but the little girl, after a keen look at the three faces, went to the old lady, who received her with a kiss, saying, —

"That's right; but how did you know, dear?"

"Oh, Papa said Cousin Penny is old, Cousin Henny fat, and Cousin Cicely rather pretty; so I knew in one minute," replied Rosamond, in a tone of innocent satisfaction at her own cleverness, and quite unconscious of the effect of her speech.

Miss Penelope hastily retired behind the letter. Miss Henrietta frowned so heavily that the gold-rimmed eye-glasses flew off her nose with a clash, and Cicely laughed outright, as she exclaimed, —

"I'm afraid we have got an enfant terrible among us, though I can't complain of my share of the compliments."

"I never expected to find Clara's child well mannered, and I see I was quite right. Take your hat off, Rosamond, and sit down. It tires Sister to lean on her in that way," said Miss Henny in a severe tone, with no offer of any warmer welcome.

Seeing that something was amiss, the child quietly obeyed, and perching herself in an ancient arm-chair crossed her short legs, folded her plump hands over the diminutive travelling-bag she carried, and sat looking about the room with a pair of very large blue eyes, quite unabashed, though rather pensive, as if the memory of some tender parting were still fresh in her little heart.

While Miss Penny slowly reads the letter, Miss Henny works daisies on a bit of canvas with pettish jerks of her silk, and Miss Cicely leans in the sofa-corner, staring at the newcomer, we will briefly introduce our small heroine. Her father was cousin to the elder ladies, and being called suddenly across the water on business, took his wife with him, leaving the little girl to the care of these relatives, thinking her too young for so long a journey. Cicely, an orphan niece who lived with the old ladies, was to have the care of Rosy; and a summer in the quiet country town would do her good, while change of scene would console her for this first separation from her mother. How she fared remains to be seen; and we need only add that the child had been well trained, made the companion of a sweet and tender woman, and was very anxious to please the parents whom she passionately loved, by keeping the promises she had made them, and being "as brave as Papa, as patient and kind as dear Mamma."

"Well, what do you think of it, Missy?" asked Cicely, as the blue eyes came back to her, after roving round the spacious, old-fashioned, and rather gloomy room.

"It's a pretty large, dark place for a little girl to be all alone in;" and there was a suspicious quiver in the childish voice, as Rosy opened her bag to produce a very small handkerchief, evidently feeling that she might have sudden need of it if some one did not speak to her very soon.

"We keep it dark on account of Sister's eyes. When *I* was a little girl, it wasn't considered polite to say rude things about other people's houses, especially if they were very handsome ones," said Miss Henny, with a stern glance over the eye-glasses at the young offender, whose second remark was even more unfortunate than her first.

"I didn't mean to be rude, but I MUST tell the truth. Little girls like bright places. I'm sorry about Cousin Penny's eyes. I will read to her; I do to Mamma, and she says it is very well for a child only eight years old."

The gentle answer and the full eyes seemed to calm Miss Henny's wrath, for her size was her tender point, and the old house her especial pride; so she dropped the awe-inspiring glasses, and said more kindly, —

"There is a nice little room ready for you upstairs, and a garden to play in. Cicely will hear you read every day, and I will teach you to sew, for of course that MOST useful part of your education has been neglected."

"No, ma'am, I sew my four patches every day, and make little wee stitches, and I can hem Papa's hank'chifs, and I was learning to darn his socks with a big needle when — when they went away."

Rosy paused with a sudden choke; but too proud to break down, she only wiped two drops off her cheek with the long ends of her little gray silk glove, set her lips, and remained mistress of herself, privately planning to cry all she liked when she was safely in the "nice little room" promised her.

Cicely, though a lazy, selfish young lady, was touched by the child's pathetic face, and said in a friendly tone, as she patted the couch where she lay, —

"Come here, dear, and sit by me, and tell me what kind of a kitten you'd like best. I know of a sweet yellow one, and two grays. Our Tabby is too old to play with you; so you will want a kitty, I'm sure."

"Oh yes, if I may!" and Rosy skipped to the new seat with a smile which plainly proved that this sort of welcome was just what she liked.

"Now, Cicely, why will you put such an idea into Rosamond's head when you know we can't have kittens round the house for Sister to stumble over, not to mention the mischief the horrid things always do? Tabby is all the child needs, with her doll. Of course you have a doll?" and Miss Henny asked the question as solemnly as if she had said, "Have you a soul?"

"Oh yes, I have nine in my trunk, and two little ones in my bag, and Mamma is going to send me a big, big one from London, as soon as she gets there, to sleep with me and be my little comfort," cried Rosy, rapidly producing from her bag a tiny bride and groom, three seed- cakes, a smelling-bottle, and a purse out of which fell a shower of bright cents, also crumbs all over the immaculate carpet.

"Mercy on us, what a mess! Pick it all up, child, and don't unpack any more in the parlor. One doll is quite enough for me," said Miss Henny, with a sigh of resignation as if asking patience to bear this new calamity.

Rosy echoed the sigh as she crept about reclaiming her precious pennies, and eating the crumbs as the only way of disposing of them.

"Never mind, it's only her way; the heat makes her a little cross, you see," whispered Cicely, bending down to hold the bag, into which Rosy bundled her treasures in hot haste.

"I thought fat people were always pleasant. I'm glad YOU ain't fat," answered the little girl, in a tone which was perfectly audible.

What would have happened I tremble to think, if Miss Penny had not finished the letter at that moment and handed it to her sister, saying as she held out her arms to the child, —

"Now I know all about it, and you are to be my baby; so come and give me some sweet kisses, darling."

Down dropped the bag, and with a little sob of joy the child nestled close to the kind old heart that welcomed her so tenderly at last.

"Papa calls me his button-rose, 'cause I'm so small and pink and sweet, and thorny too sometimes," she said, looking up brightly, after a few moments of the fond and foolish cuddling all little creatures love and need so much when they leave the nest, and miss the brooding of motherly wings.

"We'll call you anything you like, darling; but Rosamond is a pretty old name, and I'm fond of it, for it was your grandmamma's, and a sweeter woman never lived," said Miss Penny, stroking the fresh cheeks, where the tears shone like dew on pink rose-leaves.

"I shall call you Chicken Little, because we have Henny and Penny; and the girls and Tab downstairs can be Goosey-Loosey, Turkey-Lurkey, and Cocky-Locky. I'll be Ducky-Lucky, and I'm sure Foxy-Loxy lives next door," said Cicely, laughing at her own wit, while Miss Henny looked up, saying, with the first smile Rosy had seen, —

"That's true enough! and I hope Chicken Little will keep out of his way, no matter if the sky does fall."

"Who is it? A truly fox? I never saw one. Could I peep at him sometimes?" cried the child, much interested at once.

"No, dear; it's only a neighbor of ours who has treated us badly, at least we think so, and we don't speak, though we used to be good friends some years ago. It's sad to live so, but we don't quite see how to help it yet. We are ready to do our part; but Mr. Dover should take the first step, as he was in the wrong."

"Please tell about it. I have horrid quarrels with Mamie Parsons sometimes, but we always kiss and make up, and feel all happy again. Can't you, Cousin Penny?" asked the child, softly touching the little white curls under the lace cap.

"Well, no, dear; grown people cannot settle differences in that pretty way. We must wait till he apologizes, and then we shall gladly be friends again. You see Mr. Dover was a missionary in India for many years, and we were very intimate with his mother. Our gardens join, and a gate in our fence led across their field to the back street, and was most convenient when we wanted to walk by the river or send the maids on errands in a hurry. The old lady was very neighborly, and we were quite comfortable till Thomas came home and made trouble. He'd lost his wife and children, poor man, and his liver was out of order, and living among the heathen so long had made him melancholy and queer; so he tried to amuse himself with gardening and keeping hens."

"I'm glad! I love flowers and biddies," murmured Rosy, listening with deep interest to this delightful mixture of quarrels and heathen, sorrow, poultry, mysterious diseases, and gardens.

"He had no right to shut up our gate and forbid our crossing that little field, and no GENTLEMAN would have DARED to do it after all our kindness to his mother," exclaimed Miss Henny, so suddenly and violently that Rosamond nearly fell off the old lady's lap with the start she gave.

"No, sister, I don't agree there. Mr. Thomas had a perfect RIGHT to do as he liked with his own land; but I think we should have had no trouble if you had been willing to sell him the corner of our garden where the old summer-house is, for his hens," began Miss Penny in a mild tone.

"Sister! you know the tender memories connected with that bower, and how terrible it would have been to ME to see it torn down, and noisy fowls clucking and pecking where I and my poor Calvin once sat together," cried Miss Henny, trying to look sentimental, which was an impossible feat for a stout lady in a flowery muslin gown, and a fly-away cap full of blue ribbons, on a head once flaxen and now gray.

"We won't discuss the point, Henrietta," said the elder lady with dignity; whereupon the other returned to the letter, bridling and tossing her head in a way which caused Rosy to stare, and resolve to imitate it when she played be a proud princess with her dolls.

"Well, dear, that was the beginning of the trouble," continued Miss Penny; "and now we don't speak, and the old lady misses us, I'm sure, and I often long to run in and see her, and I'm so sorry you can't enjoy the wonders of that house, for it's full of beautiful and curious things, most instructive for children to observe. Mr. Thomas has been a great traveller, and has a tiger skin in the parlor so natural it's quite startling to behold; also spears, and bows and arrows, and necklaces of shark's teeth, from the Cannibal Islands, and the loveliest stuffed birds, my dear, all over the place, and pretty shells and baskets, and ivory toys, and odd dresses, and no end of wonderful treasures. Such a sad pity you can't see them!" and Miss Penny looked quite distressed at the child's loss.

"Oh, but I guess I will see 'em! Every one is good to me, and old gentlemen like little girls. Papa says so, and HE always does what I want when I say 'Please' with my wheedulin smile, as he calls it," said Rosy, giving them a sample of the most engaging sort.

"You funny little thing, do try it, and soften the heart of that tiresome man! He has the finest roses in town and the most delicious fruit, and we never get any, though he sends quantities everywhere else. Such a fuss over an old ear-wiggy arbor! It is perfectly provoking, when we might enjoy so much over there; and who knows what might happen!"

As Cicely spoke, she smoothed her brown curls and glanced at the mirror, quite conscious that a very pretty young lady of twenty was wasting her sweetness in the great gloomy house, with two elderly spinsters.

"I'll get some for you," answered Rosy, with a nod of such calm conviction of her own power, that Cicely laughed again, and proposed that she should go at once and view the battle-field.

"Could I RUN in the garden? I'd love to, after riding so long," asked Rosy, eager to be off; for her active legs ached for exercise, and the close, shady room oppressed her.

“Yes, dear; but don’t get into mischief, or worry Tabby, or pick the flowers. Of course you wouldn’t touch green fruit, or climb trees, or soil your little frock. I’ll ring the bell for you to come in and be dressed for tea when it is time.”

With these directions and a kiss, Miss Penny, as Cicely did not stir, let the child out at the back door of the long hall, and watched her walk demurely down the main path of the prim old garden, where no child had played for years, and even the toads and fat robins behaved in the most decorous manner.

“It’s pretty dull, but it’s better than the parlor with all the staring pictures,” said Rosy to herself, after a voyage of discovery had shown her the few charms of the place. The sight of a large yellow cat reposing in the sun cheered her eyes at that moment, and she hastened to scrape acquaintance with the stately animal; for the snails were not social, and the toads stared even more fixedly at her than the painted eyes of her respected ancestors.

But Tabby disliked children as much as her mistress, and after submitting ungraciously to a few caresses from the eager little hands, she rose and retired majestically to a safer perch on the top of the high wall which enclosed the garden. Being too lazy to jump, she walked up the shelves of an old flower-stand moulding in a corner, and by so doing, gave Rosy a brilliant idea, which she at once put into action by following Tabby’s example. Up this new sort of ladder she went, and peeped over the wall, delighted at this unexpected chance to behold the enemy’s territory.

“Oh, what a pretty place!” she cried, clasping her grubby little hands with rapture, as the beauties of the forbidden land burst upon her view.

It was indeed a paradise to a child’s eyes, — for flowers bloomed along the winding paths; ripening fruit lay rosy and tempting in the beds below; behind the wire walls that confined them clucked and strutted various sorts of poultry; cages of gay birds hung on the piazza; and through the open windows of the house one caught glimpses of curious curtains, bright weapons, and mysterious objects in the rooms beyond.

A gray-headed gentleman in a queer nankeen coat lay asleep on a bamboo lounge under the great cherry-tree, with a purple silk handkerchief half over his face.

“That’s the missionary man, I s’pose. He doesn’t look cross at all. If I could only get down there, I’d go and wake him with a softly kiss, as I do Papa, and ask to see his pretty things.”

Being quite unconscious of fear, Rosy certainly would have carried out her daring plan, had it been possible; but no way of descending on the other side appeared, so she sighed and sat gazing wistfully, till Cousin Henny appeared for a breath of fresh air, and ordered her down at once.

“Come and see if my balsam-seeds have started yet. I keep planting them, but they WON’T come up,” she said, pointing out a mound of earth newly dug and watered.

Rosy obediently scrambled up, and was trying to decide whether some green sprouts were chickweed or the dilatory balsams when a sudden uproar in the next garden made her stop to listen, while Miss Henny said in a tone of great satisfaction, as the cackle of hens arose, —

“Some trouble with those horrid fowls of his. I detest them, crowing in the night, and waking us at dawn with their noise. I wish some thief would steal every one of them. Nobody has a right to annoy their neighbors with troublesome pets.”

Before Rosy could describe the beauties of the white bantams or the size of the big golden cock, a loud voice cried, —

“You rascal! I’ll hang you if I catch you here again. Go home quicker than you came, and tell your mistress to teach you better manners, if she values your life.”

“It’s that man! Such language! I wonder who he’s caught? That bad boy who steals our plums, perhaps.”

The words were hardly out of Miss Henny’s mouth when her question was answered in a sudden and dreadful way; for over the wall, hurled by a strong arm, flew Tabby, high in the air, to fall with a thump directly in the middle of the bed where they stood. Miss Henny uttered a shrill scream, caught up her stunned treasure, and rushed into the house as fast as her size and flounces permitted, leaving Rosy breathless with surprise and indignation.

Burning to resent this terrible outrage, she climbed quickly up the steps, and astonished the irate old gentleman on the other side by the sudden apparition of a golden head, a red childish face, and a dirty little finger pointed sternly at him, as this small avenging angel demanded, —

“Missionary man, how COULD you kill my cousin’s cat?”

“Bless my soul! who are you?” said the old gentleman, staring at this unexpected actor on the field of battle.

“I’m Button-Rose, and I hate cruel people! Tabby’s dead, and now there isn’t any one to play with over here.”

This sad prospect made the blue eyes fill with sudden tears; and the application of the dirty fingers added streaks of mud to the red cheeks, which much damaged the appearance of the angel, thought it added pathos to the child’s reproach.

“Cats have nine lives, and Tabby’s used to being chucked over the wall. I’ve done it several times, and it seems to agree with her, for she comes back to kill my chicks as bold as brass. See that!” and the old gentleman held up a downy dead chicken, as proof of Tabby's sin.

"Poor little chicky!" groaned Rosy, yearning to mourn over the dear departed and bury it with tender care. "It WAS very naughty of Tab; but, sir, you know cats are made to catch things, and they can't help it."

"They will have to help it, or I'll drown the lot. This is a rare breed, and I've but two left after all my trouble, thanks to that rascal of yours! What are you going to do about it?" demanded Mr. Dover, in a tone that made Rosy feel as if she had committed the murder herself.

"I'll talk to Tabby and try to make her good, and I'll shut her up in the old rabbit-house over here; then I hope she will be sorry and never do it any more," she said, in such a remorseful tone that the old gentleman relented at once, ashamed to afflict such a tender little soul.

"Try it," he said, with a smile that made his yellow face pleasant all at once. Then, as if ready to change the subject, he asked, looking curiously at the little figure perched on the wall, —

"Where did you come from? Never saw any children over there before.
They don't allow 'em."

Rosy introduced herself in a few words, and seeing that her new acquaintance seemed interested, she added with the wheedling smile Papa found so engaging, —

"It's pretty lonely here, I guess; so p'r'aps you'll let me peep at your nice garden sometimes if it doesn't trouble you, sir?"

"Poor little soul! it must be desperately dull with those three tabbies," he said to himself, as he stroked the dead chicken in his hand, and watched the little face bent toward him.

"Peep as much as you like, child; or, better still, come over and run about. *I* like little girls," he added aloud, with a nod and a wave of welcome.

"I told 'em I was sure you did! I'd love to come, but they wouldn't let me, I know. I'm so sorry about the fight. Couldn't you make it up, and be pleasant again?" asked Rosy, clasping her hands with a beseeching gesture as her bright face grew sad and serious remembering the feud.

"So they've told you that nonsense already, have they? Nice neighbors THEY are," said the old gentleman, frowning as if ill pleased at the news.

"I'm glad I know; p'r'aps I can be a peace-maker. Mamma says they are good to have in families, and I'd like to be one if I could. Would you mind if I tried to peace-make a little, so I could come over? I do want to see the red birds and the tiger skin awfully, if you please."

“What do you know about ‘em?” asked the old gentleman, sitting down on a garden chair, as if he didn’t mind continuing the chat with this new neighbor.

Nearly tumbling off the wall in her earnestness, Rosy repeated all that Cousin Penny had said; and something in the reasonable words, the flattering description of his treasures, and the sincere regret of the old lady seemed to have a good effect upon Mr. Dover, for when Rosy paused out of breath, he said in such an altered tone that it was evident the peacemaking had already begun, —

“Miss Carey is a gentlewoman! I always thought so. You tell her, with my compliments, that I’d be glad to see you any time if she has no objection. I’ll put my step-ladder there, and you can come over instead of the cat. But mind you don’t meddle, or I might give you a toss like Tabby.”

“I’m not afraid,” laughed Rosy. “I’ll go and ask right away, and I won’t touch a thing, and I know you’ll like me for a friend. Papa says I’m a dear little one. Thank you very much, sir. Good-by till I come again;” and with a kiss of the hand, the yellow head sunk out of sight like the sun going down, leaving a sense of darkness behind when the beaming little face disappeared, though fresh stains of green mould from the wall made it rather like the tattooed countenances Mr. Dover used to see among his cannibal friends in Africa.

He sat musing with the dead chicken in his hand, forgetful of time, till a ring of his own door-bell called him in to receive a note from Miss Penelope, thanking him for his invitation to little Rosamond, but declining it in the most polite and formal words.

“I expected it! Bless the silly old souls! why can’t they be reasonable, and accept the olive branch when I offer it? I’ll be hanged if I do again! The fat one is at the bottom of this. Miss Pen would give in if that absurd Henrietta didn’t hold her back. Well, I’m sorry for the child, but that’s not my fault;” and throwing down the note, he went out to water his roses.

For a week or two, Button-Rose hardly dared glance toward the forbidden spot from her window, as she was ordered to play in the front garden, and sent to take sober walks with Cicely, who loved to stop and gossip with her friends, while the poor child waited patiently till the long tales were told.

Nursing Tabby was her chief consolation; and so kind was she, that the heart of the old cat softened to her, and she actually purred her thanks at last, for all the saucers of cream, bits of chicken, soft pats, and tender words bestowed upon her by the little girl.

“Well, I declare! Tab won’t do that even for me,” said Miss Henny, one day when she came upon the child sitting alone in the hall with a picture-book and the cat comfortably asleep in her lap.

“Ammals always love me, if people don’t,” answered Button-Rose, soberly;

for she had not yet forgiven the stout lady for denying her the delights offered by the "missionary man."

"That's because AN-I-MALS can't see how naughty you are sometimes," said Miss Henny tartly, not having recovered her temper even after many days.

"I shall make EVERY one love me before I go away. Mamma told me to, and I shall. I know how;" and Button smiled with a wise little nod that was pretty to see, as she proudly cuddled her first conquest.

"We shall see;" and Miss Henny ponderously departed, wondering what odd fancy the little thing would take into her head next.

It was soon evident; for when she came down from her long nap, later in the afternoon, Miss Henny found Rosamond reading aloud to her sister in the great dim parlor. They made a curious contrast, — the pale, white-haired, feeble old lady, with her prim dress, high cap, knitting, and shaded eyes; and the child, rosy and round, quaint and sweet, a pretty little ornament for the old-fashioned room, as she sat among the tea-poys and samplers, ancient china and furniture, with the portraits of great grandfathers and grandmothers simpering and staring at her, as if pleased and surprised to see such a charming little descendant among them.

"Bless the baby! what is she at now?" asked Miss Henny, feeling more amiable after her sleep.

"I'm reading to Cousin Penny, 'cause no one else does, and her poor eyes hurt her, and she likes stories, and so do I," answered Button, with one chubby finger on the place in her book, and eyes full of pride at the grown-up employment she had found for herself.

"So kind of the little dear! She found me alone and wanted to amuse me; so I proposed a story to suit us both, and she does very well with a little help now and then. I haven't read 'Simple Susan' for years, and really enjoy it. Maria Edgeworth was always a favorite of mine, and I still think her far superior to any modern writer for the young," said Miss Penny, looking quite animated and happy in the new entertainment provided for her.

"Go on, child; let me hear how well you can read;" and Miss Henny settled herself in the sofa-corner with her embroidery.

So Button started bravely on, and tried so hard that she was soon out of breath. As she paused, she said with a gasp, —

"Isn't Susan a dear girl? She gives ALL the best things to other people, and is kind to the old harper. She didn't send him away, as you did the music-man to-day, and tell him to be still."

"Organs are a nuisance, and I never allow them here. Go on, and don't criticise your elders, Rosamond."

"Mamma and I always talk over stories, and pick out the morals of 'em. SHE likes it;" with which remark, made sweetly not pertly, Button went on to the end, with an occasional lift over a long word; and the old ladies were interested, in spite of themselves, in the simple tale read in that childish voice.

"Thank you, dear, it is very nice, and we will have one every day. Now, what can I do for you?" asked Miss Penny, as the little girl pushed the curls off her forehead, with a sigh of mingled weariness and satisfaction.

"Let me go in the back garden and peep through the knot-hole at the pretty roses. I do long to see if the moss ones are out, and the cherries ripe," said Rosy, clasping her hands imploringly.

"It can do no harm, Henrietta. Yes, dear, run away and get some catnip for Tabby, and see if the balsams are up yet."

That last suggestion won Miss Henny's consent; and Button was off at once, skipping like a young colt all over the garden, which now seemed delightful to her.

At the back of the summer-house was a narrow space between it and the fence where certain plump toads lived; peeping in to watch them, Rosy had spied a large knot-hole in the old boards, and through it found she could get a fine view of several rose-bushes, a tree, and one window of the "missionary man's" house. She had longed for another peep since the flower-stand was gone, and climbing trees forbidden; now with joy she slipped into the damp nook, regardless of the speckled gentlemen who stared at her with dismay, and took a good look at the forbidden paradise beyond.

Yes, the "moss ones" were in bloom, the cherries quite red, and at the window was the gray head of Mr. Dover, as he sat reading in his queer yellow dressing-gown.

Button yearned to get in, and leaned so hard against the hateful fence that the rotten board cracked, a long bit fell out, and she nearly went after it, as it dropped upon the green bank below. Now the full splendor of the roses burst upon her, and a delightful gooseberry bush stood close by with purplish berries temptingly bobbing within reach. This obliging bush hid the hole, but left fine openings to see through; so the child popped her curly head out, and gazed delightedly at the chickens, the flowers, the fruit, and the unconscious old gentleman not far away.

"I'll have it for my secret; or maybe I'll tell Cousin Penny, and beg her to let me peep if I truly promise never to go in," thought Button, knowing well who her best friend was.

At bedtime, when the dear old lady came to give the good-night kiss, which the others forgot, Rosy, as Miss Penny called her, made her request; and it was granted, for Miss Penny had a feeling that the little peacemaker would sooner or later heal the breach with her pretty magic, and so she was very ready to lend a hand in a quiet way.

Next day at play-time, Button was hurrying down her last bit of gingerbread, which she was obliged to eat properly in the dining-room, instead of enjoying out-of-doors, when she heard a sudden flurry in the garden, and running to the window saw Roxy the maid chasing a chicken to and fro, while Miss Henny stood flapping her skirts on the steps, and crying, “Shoo!” till she was red in the face.

“It’s the white banty, and it must have come in my hole! Oh dear, I hope they won’t catch it! Cousin Henny said she’d wring the neck of the first one that flied over the wall.”

Away went Rosy, to join in the hunt; for Miss Henny was too fat to run, and Roxy found the lively fowl too much for her. It was a long and hard chase; feathers flew, the maid lost her breath, Rosy tumbled down, and Miss Henny screamed and scolded till she was forced to sit down and watch in silence.

At last poor, hunted Banty ran into the arbor, for its clipped wings would not lift it over the wall. Button rushed after it, and dismal squalls plainly proclaimed that the naughty chicken was caught.

Miss Henny waddled down the path, declaring that she WOULD wring its neck; and Roxy went puffing after her, glad to rest. But the old summer-house was empty. No little girl, no ruffled bantam, appeared. Both had vanished like magic; and mistress and maid stared at each other in amazement, till they saw that the long-disused window was open, and a gleam of light came in from the narrow opening behind.

“My patience! if that child hasn’t crept out there, and bolted through that hole in the fence! Did you ever, Miss?” exclaimed Roxy, trying not to look pleased at being spared the distasteful task of killing the poor chicken.

“Naughty girl!” began Miss Henny, when the sound of voices made both listen. “Slip in there, and see what is going on,” said the mistress, well knowing that her stout person never could be squeezed into the small space between house and fence.

Roxy, being thin, easily obeyed, and in a whisper telephoned what went on beyond the hole, causing Miss Henny much vexation, surprise, and at last real pleasure, as the child performed her little part in the mission she had undertaken.

“Oh, please, it’s all my fault! I kept the hole open, Mr. Thomas, and so Banty flied in. But it isn’t hurt a bit, and I’ve brought it home all safe, ‘cause I know you love your chickies, and Tabby ate lots of ‘em,” said the childish voice in its most conciliatory tone.

“Why didn’t you fling it over the wall, as I did the cat?” asked Mr. Dover, smiling, as he shut up the truant fowl, and turned to look at the rosy, breathless child, whose pink frock bore the marks of many a tumble on grass and gravel.

"It would hurt Banty's feelings, and yours too, and not be polite. So I came myself, to make some pollygies, and say it was my fault. But, please, could I keep the hole to peep through, if I always put up a board when I go away? It is so dull in there, and SO sweet in here!"

"Don't you think a little gate would be nicer, — one just big enough for you, with a hook to fasten it? We'll call it a button-hole," laughed Mr. Dover. "Then you could peep; or perhaps the ladies will think better of it, and show that they pardon my ill treatment of Tabby by letting you come in and pick some cherries and roses now and then."

This charming proposal caused the little girl to clasp her hands and cry aloud, —

"That would be perfully sp'endid! I know Cousin Penny would like it, and let me. P'r'aps she'd come herself; she's so thin, she could, and she loves your mother and wants to see her. Only, Cousin Henny won't let us be nice and friendly. S'pose you send HER some cherries; she loves good things to eat, and maybe she will say yes, if you send lots."

Mr. Dover laughed at this artless proposal, and Miss Henny smiled at the prospect of a gift of the luscious black-heart cherries she had been longing for. Roxy wisely repeated only the agreeable parts of the conversation; so nothing ruffled the lady's temper. Now, whether Mr. Dover's sharp eye caught a glimpse of the face among the gooseberry bushes, and suspected eavesdroppers, or whether the child's earnest desire to make peace touched him, who shall say? Certain it is that his eyes twinkled like a boy's, as he said rather loudly, in his most affable tone, —

"I shall be most happy to send Miss Henrietta a basket of fruit. She used to be a charming young woman. It's a pity she shuts herself up so much; but that sad little romance of hers has darkened her life, I suppose. Ah, well, I can sympathize with her!"

Rosy stared at the sudden change in his manner, and was rather bewildered by his grown-up way of talking to her. But being intent on securing something nice to carry home, she stuck to the cherries, which she DID understand, and pointing to the piazza said with a business-like air, —

"There's a basket; so we might pick 'em right away. I love to go up in trees and throw 'em down; and I know Cousin Henny will like cherries ever so much, and not scold a bit when I take some to her."

"Then come on," cried Mr. Thomas, relapsing into the hearty manner she liked so much; and away he went, quite briskly, down the path, with his yellow skirts waving in the wind, and Button skipping after him in great glee.

"They actually ARE a-picking cherries, Miss, up in the tree like a couple of robins a-chirpin' and laughin' as gay as can be," reported Roxy, from her peep-hole.

"Rip off the rest of that board, then I can see," whispered Miss Henny, quivering with interest now; for she had heard Mr. Dover's words, and her wrath was appeased by that flattering allusion to herself.

Off came the rest of the board, and from the window, half hidden in woodbine, she could now see over the bushes into the next garden. The peep-hole commanded the tree, and she watched with eager eyes the filling of the basket to be sent her, planning the while a charming note of thanks.

"Do look, Miss; they are resting now, and she's on his knee. Ain't it a pretty picter?" whispered Roxy, unmindful of the earwigs, ants, and daddy-long-legs promenading over her as she crouched in her mouldy corner, intent on the view beyond.

"Very pretty! He lost several children in India and I suppose Rosy reminds him of them. Ah, poor man! I can sympathize with him, for *I* too have loved and lost," sighed Miss Henny, pensively surveying the group on the rustic seat.

They were playing cherry-bob; and the child's laughter made pleasant music in the usually quiet place, while the man's face lost its sad, stern look, and was both gay and tender, as he held the little creature close, and popped the ripe fruit into the red, laughing mouth.

As the last sweet morsel disappeared Rosy said, with a long breath of perfect content, —

"It's ALMOST as good as having Papa to play with. I do hope the cousins WILL let me come again! If they don't, I think my heart will break, 'cause I get so homesick over there, and have so many trials, and no one but Cousin Penny ever cuddles me."

"Bless her heart! We'll send her some flowers for that. You tell her that Mrs. Dover is poorly, and would like very much to see her; and so would Mr. Thomas, who enjoys her little niece immensely. Can you remember that?"

"Every word! SHE is very nice to me, and I love her, and I guess she will be glad to come. She likes MOSS-roses, and so do I," added the unblushing little beggar, as Mr. Dover took out his knife and began to make the bouquet which was to be Miss Penny's bribe. He could not bear to give up his little playmate, and was quite ready to try again, with this persistent and charming ally to help him heal the breach.

"Shall you send anything to Cis? You needn't mind about it, 'cause she can't keep me at home, but it might please her, and make her stop rapping my head with her thimble when I ask questions, and slapping my fingers when I touch any of her pretty things," suggested Button, as the flowers were added to the fruit, making a fine display.

"I never send presents to YOUNG ladies," said Mr. Thomas shortly, adding, with both hands out, and his most inviting smile, "But I ALWAYS kiss nice little girls if they will allow me?"

Button threw both arms about his neck and gave him a shower of grateful kisses, which were sweeter to the lonely old man than all the cherries that ever grew, or the finest flowers in his garden. Then Miss Rosamond proudly marched home, finding no trace of the watchers, for both had fled while the "cuddling" went on. Roxy was soberly setting the dinner-table, and Miss Henny in the parlor breathing hard behind a newspaper. Miss Penny and Cicely were spending the day out, so the roses had to wait; but the basket was most graciously received, also the carefully delivered message, and the child's heart was rejoiced by free permission to go and see "our kind neighbor now and then, if Sister does not object."

Rosy was in great spirits, and prattled away as they sat at dinner, emboldened by the lady's unusual amiability to ask all sorts of questions, some of which proved rather embarrassing to Miss Henny, and very amusing to Roxy, listening in the china-closet.

"I wish *I* had 'spepsia," was the abrupt remark of the small person as her plate of drum-sticks was removed and the pudding appeared, accompanied by the cherries.

"Why, dear?" asked Miss Henny, busily arranging the small dish of delicate tidbits, which left little but the skeleton of the roast fowl for the kitchen.

"Then I could have the nicest bits of chicken, and heaps of sauce on my pudding, and the butteryest slices of toast, and ALL the cream for my tea, as you do. It isn't a VERY bad pain, is it?" asked Rosy, in such perfect good faith that Miss Henny's sudden flush and Roxy's hasty dive into the closet never suggested to her that this innocent speech was bringing the old lady's besetting sin to light in the most open manner.

"Yes, child, it is VERY bad, and you may thank your stars that I try to keep you from it by feeding you on plain food. At my age, and suffering as I do, the best of everything is needed to keep up my strength," said Miss Henny, tartly. But the largest plate of pudding, with "heaps of sauce," went to the child this day, and when the fruit was served, an unusually small portion was put away for the invalid, who was obliged to sustain nature with frequent lunches through the day and evening.

"I'm s'prised that you suffer much, Cousin Henny. How brave you must be, not to cry about it, and go round in horrid pain, as you do, and dress so nicely, and see people, and work ‘broidering, and make calls! I hope I shall be brave if I ever DO have ‘spepsia; but I guess I shan’t, you take such care to give me small pieces every time.”

With which cheerful remark Rosy closed that part of the conversation and returned to the delights of her new friend’s garden. But from that day, among other changes which began about this time, the child’s cup and plate were well filled, and the dread of adding to her own sufferings seemed to curb the dyspeptic’s voracious appetite. “A cheild was amang them takin’ notes,” and every one involuntarily dreaded those clear eyes and that frank tongue, so innocently observing and criticising all that went on. Cicely had already been reminded of a neglected duty by Rosy’s reading to Miss Penny, and tried to be more faithful in that, as in other services which she owed the old lady. So the little missionary was evidently getting on, though quite unconscious of her work at home, so absorbed was she in her foreign mission; for, like many another missionary, the savage over the way was more interesting than the selfish, slothful, or neglected souls at home.

Miss Penny was charmed with her flowers and the friendly message sent her, and to Rosy’s great delight went next day, in best bonnet and gown, to make a call upon the old lady “who was poorly,” for that appeal could not be resisted. Rosy also, in honor of the great occasion, wore HER best hat, and a white frock so stiff that she looked like a little opera dancer as the long black legs skipped along the street; for it was far too grand a visit to be paid through a hole in the wall.

In the basket were certain delicacies for the old lady, and a card had been prepared, with the names of Miss Carey and Miss Rosamond Carey beautifully written on it by Cis, who was dying to go, but dared not after Rosy had told her Mr. Dover’s remark about young ladies.

As the procession of two paused at the door, both the young and the old heart fluttered a little, for this was the first decided step toward reconciliation, and any check might spoil it all. The maid stared, but civilly led these unexpected guests in and departed with the card. Miss Penny settled herself in a large chair and looked about with pensive interest at the familiar room. But Rosy made a bee-line for the great tiger-skin, and regardless of her clean frock lay down on it to examine the head, which glared at her with yellow eyes, showing all its sharp teeth in the most delightfully natural manner.

Mr. Dover came in with a formal bow, but Miss Penny put out both hands, and said in her sweet old voice, —

“Let us be friends again for the sake of your mother.”

That settled the matter at once, and Mr. Thomas was so eager to do his part that he not only shook the hands heartily, but kept them in his as he said like an honest man, —

“My dear neighbor, I beg your pardon! *I* was wrong, but I’m not too proud to own it and say I’m glad to let by-gones be by-gones for the sake of all. Now come and see my mother; she is longing for you.”

What went on in the next room Rosy never knew or cared, for Mr. Thomas soon returned, and amused her so well, showing his treasures, that she forgot where she was till the maid came to say tea was ready.

“Are we going to stay?” cried the little girl, beaming from under a Feejee crown of feathers, which produced as comical an effect upon her curly head as did the collar of shark’s teeth round her plump neck or the great Japanese war-fan in her hand.

“Yes, we have tea at five; come and turn it out. I’ve ordered the little cups especially for you,” said her host, as he changed the small Amazon to a pretty child again and led her away to preside at the table, where the quaint china and silver, and the dainty cake and bread and butter proved much more attractive than the little old lady in a big cap who patted her head and smiled at her.

Never had Rosy enjoyed such a delicious meal; for the rapture of pouring real tea out of a pot shaped like a silver melon, into cups as thin as egg-shells, and putting in sugar with tongs like claws, not to mention much thick cream, also spicy, plummy cakes that melted in one’s mouth, was too great for words.

The little maid was so absorbed in her new duties that she never minded what the elders talked about, till the plates were empty, the pot ran dry, and no one could be prevailed on to have any more tea. Then she leaned back in her chair and remarked with an air of calm satisfaction, as she looked from one to the other, and smiled that engaging smile of hers, —

“Isn’t being friends a great deal nicer than fighting and throwing cats over walls and calling bad names?”

It was impossible not to laugh, and that cheerful sound seemed to tune every one to the sweetest harmony, while the little peacemaker was passed round as if a last course of kisses was absolutely necessary.

Then the party broke up, and Mr. Dover escorted his guests to their own gate, to the great amazement of the neighbors and the very visible pride of Miss Button-Rose, who went up the walk with her head as high as if the wreath of daisies on her little hat had been a conqueror’s crown.

Now that the first step had been taken, all would have gone smoothly if Cicely, offended because Mr. Thomas took no notice of HER, had not put it into Miss Henny’s head that as the original quarrel began between her and their neighbor, it would not be dignified to give in till Mr. Dover had come and begged pardon of HER as well as of Miss Penny. This suited the foolish old lady, who never could forget certain plain words spoken in the heat of battle, though the kindly ones lately heard had much softened her heart toward the offender.

"No, I shall not forget my dignity nor humble myself by going over there to apologize as Penelope has. SHE can do as she likes; and now that he has asked to be forgiven, there is perhaps no harm in HER seeing the old lady. But with me it is different. *I* was insulted, and till Thomas Dover conies here and solemnly asks my pardon I will NOT cross his threshold, no matter what bribes he sends," said Miss Henny, with an air of heroic firmness.

But it did cost her a pang when her sister went every now and then to take tea with the old lady and came home full of pleasant news; while Rosy prattled of the fine things she saw, the nice things she had to eat, and never failed to bring some gift to share, or to display to the exiles from Paradise. They ate the "bribes," however, as they called the fruit, admired the pretty trinkets and toys, and longed to share in the mild festivities of the pleasant house over the way, but stood firm in spite of all Rosy's wiles, till something unexpected happened to touch their hearts, conquer their foolish pride, and crown the little peacemaker's efforts with success.

One August afternoon Cicely was discontentedly looking over her small store of ornaments as she made ready for a party. She loved gayety, and went about a great deal, leaving many duties undone, or asking the little girl to attend to them for her, neglecting, however, to show any gratitude for these small services so cheerfully done.

As she sat tossing over her boxes, Button-Rose came in looking tired and listless, for it was a hot day, and she had been out twice to do errands for Cicely, besides trotting busily up and down to wait on the old ladies while the young one put fresh ribbons on her dress and curled her hair for the evening.

"Could I lie on your sofa, please, Cis? My head aches, and my legs are SO tired," said little Button, when her tap had been answered by a sharp "What do you want, child?"

"No, I'm going to lie there myself and have a nap as soon as I'm done here. It's cooler than the bed, and I must be fresh for to-night," said Cicely, too intent on her own affairs to see how used up Rosy looked.

"Then could I look at your pretty things if I don't touch 'em?" asked the child, longing to peep into the interesting boxes scattered on the table.

"No, you can't! I'm busy, and don't want you asking questions and meddling. Go away and let me alone."

Cicely spoke crossly, and waved her hand with a warning gesture, thereby upsetting the tray which held the beads of the necklace she had decided to wear for want of something better.

"There, now see what you've done! Pick up every one, and be quick, for I'm in a hurry."

"But I didn't touch 'em," began poor Button, as she crept about hunting for the black and white beads that looked like very ugly marbles.

"Don't talk; pick them up and then scamper; you are always in mischief!" scolded Cis, vexed with herself, and the heat, and the accident, and the whole world just then.

Rosy said no more, but several great tears dropped on the carpet as she groped in corners, under the bed, and behind the chairs for the run-aways; and when the last was found she put it in her tyrant's hand, saying, with a wistful look, —

"I'm very sorry I troubled you. Seems to me if *I* had a little cousin, I'd love to have her play with my things, and I wouldn't be cross to her. Now I'll go and try to AMOOSE myself with Bella; SHE is always good to me."

"Run along then. Thank goodness that doll came when it did, for I'm tired of 'amoosing' small girls as well as old ladies," said Cis, busy with her beads, yet sorry she had been so petulant with patient little Button, who seldom reproached her, being a cheery child, and blessed with a sweet temper.

Rosy felt too languid to play; so when she had told Bella, the London doll, her trials, and comforted herself with some kisses on the waxen cheeks, she roamed away to the summer-house, which was cool and quiet, longing for some one to caress her; for the little heart was homesick and the little head ached badly.

The "button-hole" had been made, the alley swept out, to the great dismay of the spiders, earwigs, and toads, who had fled to quieter quarters, and Rosy had leave to go and come when she liked if Mr. Dover did not object. He never did; and it was her greatest delight to walk in the pretty garden at her own sweet will, always with the hope of meeting its kindly owner, for now they were firm friends. She had been too busy for a run there that day; and now, as she peeped in, it looked so shady and inviting, and it seemed so natural to turn to her dear "missionary man" for entertainment, that she went straight up to his study window and peeped in.

He too seemed out of sorts that hot afternoon, for he sat leaning his head on both hands at the desk strewn with piles of old letters. Button-Rose's tender heart yearned over him at once, and stepping quietly in at the long open window she went to him, saying in her tenderest tone, —

"Does your head ache, sir? Let me soft it as I do Papa's; he says that always makes it more better. Please let me? I'd love to dearly."

"Ah, my darling, I wish you could. But the pain is in my heart, and nothing will ever cure it," sighed Mr. Thomas, as he drew her close and put his wrinkled yellow cheek to her soft one, which looked more like a damask rose than usual.

"You have trials too, I s'pose. Mine trouble me to-day, so I came over to see you. Shall I go away?" asked Rosy with a sigh and the wistful look again.

"No, stay, and we will comfort each other. Tell me your troubles, Button, and perhaps I can help them," the kind old gentleman said as he took her on his knee and stroked the curly head with a paternal touch.

So Rosy told her latest grief, and never saw the smile that crept about the lips that asked in a tone of deep interest, —

"Well, what do you mean to do to that unkind Cicely?"

"For a minute I wanted to slap her back when she tried to spat my hands. Then I 'membered that Mamma said a kiss for a blow was a good thing, so I picked up the beads and planned to do it; but Cis looked SO cross I couldn't. If I had a pretty necklace I'd go and give it to her, and then maybe she'd love me better."

"My dear little missionary, you SHALL have beads to win the heart of YOUR heathen, if that is all you need. See here; take anything you like, and give it with the kiss."

As he spoke, Mr. Dover pulled open a drawer in the desk and displayed a delightful collection of pretty, quaint, and curious trinkets picked up in foreign lands, and kept for keepsakes, since no little daughters of his own lived to wear them.

"How perf'ly dorgeous!" cried Rosy, who often fell into baby talk when excited; and plunging in her hands, she revelled for some minutes in sandal-wood cases, carved ivory fans, silver bangles, barbaric brooches, and necklaces of coral, shells, amber, and golden coins, that jingled musically.

"What SHALL I take for her?" cried the little maid, bewildered by such a mine of wealth. "You pick out one, Mr. Thomas, that will please her so much, 'cause you never send her anything, and she don't like it," said Rosy, fearing that her own taste was not to be trusted, as she liked the shells and shark's teeth ornaments best.

"No, I'll give YOU one, and you shall do as you like about giving it to her. This, now, is really valuable and pretty, and any young lady would like to wear it. It makes me think of you, my Button, for it is like sunshine, and the word cut on the little heart means peace."

Mr. Dover held up a string of amber beads with its carved amulet, and swung it to and fro where the light shone through it till each bead looked like a drop of golden wine.

"Yes, that is lovely, and it smells nice, too. She will be so s'prised and pleased; I'll go and take it to her right away," cried Rosy, forgetting to ask anything for herself, in her delight at this fine gift for Cis.

But as she lifted her head after he had fastened the clasp about her neck, something in his face recalled the look it wore when she first came in, and putting both hands upon his shoulders, she said in her sweet little way, —

“You’ve made my troubles go away, can’t I make yours? You are SO kind to me, I’d love to help you if I could.”

“You do, my child, more than you know; for when I get you in my arms it seems as if one of my poor babies had come back to me, and for a minute I forget the three little graves far away in India.”

“Three!” cried Button, like a sad, soft echo; and she clung to the poor man as if trying to fill the empty arms with the love and pity that over-flowed the childish soul in her small body.

This was the comfort Mr. Thomas wanted, and for a few moments he just cradled her on his hungry heart, crooning a Hindostanee lullaby, while a few slow tears came dropping down upon the yellow head, so like those hidden for years under the Indian flowers. Presently he seemed to come back from the happy past to which the old letters had carried him. He wiped his eyes, and Rosy’s also, with the big purple silk handkerchief, and pressing some very grateful kisses on the hot cheeks, said cheerfully again, —

“God bless you, child, that’s done me good! But don’t let it sadden you, dear; forget all about it, and tell no one what a sentimental old fool I am.”

“I never truly will! Only when you feel sorry about the poor little babies, let me come and give you cuddlings. They always make people feel more better, and I love ‘em, and don’t get any now my dear people are away.”

So the two made a tender little plan to comfort each other when hearts were heavy with longings for the absent, and parted at the small gate, both much cheered, and faster friends than ever.

Rosy hastened in with her peace-offering, forgetful now of headache or loneliness as she sat patiently in the wide entry window-seat listening till some sound in Cicely’s room should show that she was awake. Before that happened, however, poor Button fell asleep herself, lulled by the quiet of the house, — for every one was napping, — and dreamed that Mr. Dover stood waving a rainbow over his head, while several Indian gods and three little girls were dancing round him, hand in hand, to the tune of “Ring around a rosy.”

A loud yawn roused her, and there was Cis peeping out of her door to see what time it was by the old-fashioned clock on the landing. Up scrambled the child, feeling dizzy and heavy-eyed, but so eager to give pleasure that she lost no time in saying, as she swung the necklace in the sunshine, —

“See! this is for you, if you like it more better than the thunder-and-lightning marbles, as Cousin Penny calls the one you were going to wear."

"How lovely! Where DID you get it, child?" cried Cis, wide awake at once, as she ran to the glass to try the effect of the new ornament on her white neck.

"My dear Mr. Thomas gave it to me; but he said I could give it away if I liked, and I want you to have it, 'cause it's ever so much prettier than any you've got."

"That's very kind of you, Chicken, but why not keep it yourself? You like nice things as well as I do," said Cicely, much impressed by the value of the gift, for it was real amber, and the clasp of gold.

"Well, I've talked with Mr. Thomas about missionarying a great deal, and he told me how he made the savinges good by giving them beads, and things to eat, and being patient and kind to them. So I thought I'd play be a missionary, and call this house Africa, and try to make the people here behave more better," answered Rosy, with such engaging earnestness, as well as frankness, that Cis laughed, and exclaimed, —

"You impertinent monkey, to call us heathen and try to convert us!
How do you expect to do it?"

"Oh, I'm getting on pretty well, only you don't CONVERT as quick as some of the savinges did. I'll tell you about it;" and Button went on eagerly. "Cousin Penny is the good old one, but rather fussy and slow, so I'm kind and patient, and now she loves me and lets me do things I like. She is my best one. Cousin Henny is my cannybel, 'cause she eats so much, and I please HER by bringing nice things and getting her cushions ready. You are my baddest one, who is cross to me, and fights, and raps my head, and slaps my hands; so I thought some beads would be nice for you, and I bringed these beauties. Mr. Thomas gave 'em to me when I told him my trials."

Cicely looked angry, amused, and ashamed, as she listened to the funny yet rather pathetic little play with which the lonely child had tried to cheer herself and win the hearts of those about her. She had the grace to blush, and offer back the necklace, saying in a self-reproachful tone, —

"Keep your beads, little missionary, I'll be converted without them, and try to be kinder to you. I AM a selfish wretch, but you shall play be my little sister, and not have to go to strangers for comfort in your trials any more. Come, kiss me, dear, and we'll begin now."

Rosy was in her arms at once, and clung there, saying with a face all smiles, —

"That's what I wanted! I thought I'd make a good savinge of you if I tried VERY hard. Please be kind to me just till Mamma comes back, and I'll be the best little sister that ever was.”

“Why didn’t you tell me all about it before?” asked Cicely, smoothing the tired head on her shoulder with a new gentleness; for this last innocent confession had touched her heart as well as her conscience.

“You never seemed to care about my plays, and always said, ‘Don’t chatter, child; run away and take care of yourself.’ So I did; but it was pretty dull, with only Tabby to tell secrets to and Bella to kiss. Mr. Thomas said people over here didn’t like children very well, and I found they didn’t. HE does, dearly, so I went to him; but I like you now, you are so soft and kind to me.”

“How hot your cheeks are! Come and let me cool them, and brush your hair for tea,” said Cis, as she touched the child’s feverish skin, and saw how heavy her eyes were.

“I’m all burning up, and my head is SO funny. I don’t want any tea. I want to lie on your sofa and go to sleep again. Can I?” asked Rosy, with a dizzy look about the room, and a shiver at the idea of eating.

“Yes, dear, I’ll put on your little wrapper, and make you all comfortable, and bring you some ice-water, for your lips are very dry.”

As she spoke, Cicely bustled about the room, and soon had Rosy nicely settled with her best cologne-bottle and a fan; then she hastened down to report that something was wrong, with a fear in her own heart that if any harm did come to the child it would be her fault. Some days before Cicely had sent Button-Rose with a note to a friend’s house where she knew some of the younger children were ill. Since then she had heard that it was scarlet fever; but though Rosy had waited some time for an answer to the note, and seen one of the invalids, Cis had never mentioned the fact, being ashamed to confess her carelessness, hoping no harm was done. Now she felt that it HAD come, and went to tell gentle Cousin Penny with tears of vain regret.

Great was the lamentation when the doctor, who was sent for in hot haste, pronounced it scarlet fever; and deep was the self-reproach of the two older women for their blindness in not before remarking the languid air and want of appetite in the child. But Cicely was full of remorse; for every quick word, every rap of the hateful thimble, every service accepted without thanks, weighed heavily on her conscience now, as such things have an inconvenient way of doing when it is too late to undo them. Every one was devoted to the child, even lazy Miss Henny gave up her naps to sit by her at all hours, Miss Penny hovered over the little bed like a grandmother, and Cicely refused to think of pleasure till the danger was over.

For soon Button-Rose was very ill, and the old house haunted by the dreadful fear that death would rob them of the little creature who grew so precious when the thought of losing her made their hearts stand still. How could they live without the sound of that sweet voice chirping about the house, the busy feet tripping up and down, the willing hands trying to help, the sunny face smiling at every one, and going away into corners to hide the tears that sometimes came to dim its brightness? What would comfort the absent mother for such a loss as this, and how could they answer to the father for the carelessness that risked the child's life for a girl's errand? No one dared to think, and all prayed heartily for Rosy's life, as they watched and waited by the little bed where she lay so patiently, till the fever grew high and she began to babble about many things. Her childish trials were all told, her longings for Mamma, whose place no one could fill, her quaint little criticisms upon those about her, and her plans for making peace. These innocent revelations caused many tears, and wrought some changes in those who heard; for Miss Penny quite forgot her infirmities to live in the sick-room as the most experienced nurse and tenderest watcher. Miss Henny cooked her daintiest gruel, brewed her coolest drinks, and lost many pounds in weight by her indefatigable trotting up and down to minister to the invalid's least caprice. Cicely was kept away for fear of infection, but HER penance was to wander about the great house, more silent than ever now, to answer the inquiries and listen to the sad forebodings of the neighbors, who came to offer help and sympathy; for all loved little Button-Rose, and grieved to think of any blight falling on the pretty blossom. To wile away the long hours, Cicely fell to dusting the empty rooms, setting closets and drawers to rights, and keeping all fresh and clean, to the great relief of the old cousins, who felt that everything would go to destruction in their absence. She read and sewed now, having no heart for jaunting about; and as she made the long neglected white pinafores, for Rosy, she thought much of the little girl who might never live to wear them.

Meantime the fever took its course, and came at last to the fateful day when a few hours would settle the question of life or death. The hot flush died out of the cheeks that had lost their soft roundness now, the lips were parched, the half-shut eyes looked like sick violets, and all the pretty curls were tangled on the pillow. Rosy no longer sung to Bella, talked of “three dear little girls” and Mr. Thomas, tigers and bangles, Cis and necklaces, hens and gates. She ceased to call for Mamma, asked no more why her “missionary man” never came, and took no notice of the anxious old faces bending over her. She lay in a stupor, and the doctor held the little wasted hand, and tried to see the face of his watch with dim eyes as he counted the faint pulse, whispering solemnly, —

“We can only hope and wait now. Sleep alone can save her.”

As the sisters sat, one on either side the narrow bed that day, and Cicely walked restlessly up and down the long hall below, where both doors stood open to let in the cool evening air, as the sun went down, a quick but quiet step came up the steps, and Mr. Dover walked in without ringing. He had been away, and coming home an hour ago, heard the sad news. Losing not a moment, he hurried to ask about his little Button, and his face showed how great his love and fear were, as he said in a broken whisper, —

“Will she live? My mother never told me how serious it was, or I should have returned at once.”

“We hope so, sir, but — ” And there Cicely’s voice failed, as she hid her face and sobbed.

“My dear girl, don’t give way. Keep up your heart, hope, pray, will that the darling SHALL live, and that may do some good. We can’t let her go! we won’t let her go! Let me see her; I know much of fevers far worse than this, and might be able to suggest something,” begged Mr. Dover, throwing down his hat, and waving an immense fan with such an air of resolution and cheery good-will that tired Cis felt comforted at once, and led the way upstairs entirely forgetting the great feud, as he did.

At the threshold of the door he paused, till the girl had whispered his name. Miss Penny, always a gentlewoman, rose at once and went to meet him, but Miss Henny did not even seem to see him, for just then, as if dimly feeling that her friend was near, Rosy stirred, and gave a long sigh.

Silently the three stood and looked at the beloved little creature lying there in the mysterious shadow of death, and they so helpless to keep her if the hour for departure had come.

“God help us!” sighed pious Miss Penny, folding her old hands, as if they did that often now.

“Drifting away, I fear;” and Miss Henny’s plump face looked almost beautiful, with the tears on it, as she leaned nearer to listen to the faint breath at the child’s lips.

“No; we will keep her, please the Lord! If we can make her sleep quietly for the next few hours she is safe. Let me try. Fan slowly with this, Miss Henrietta, and you, dear lady, pray that the precious little life may be given us.”

As he spoke, Mr. Dover gave the great fan to Miss Henny, took the small cold hands in his, and sitting on the bedside held them close in his large warm ones, as if trying to pour life and strength into the frail body, as his eyes, fixed on the half-opened ones, seemed to call back the innocent soul hovering on the threshold of its prison, like the butterfly poised upon the chrysalis before it soars away.

Miss Penny knelt down near by, and laying her white head on the other pillow, again besought God to spare this treasure to the father and mother over the sea. How long they remained so none of them ever knew, silent and motionless but for the slow waving of the noiseless fan, which went to and fro like the wing of a great white bird, as if Miss Henny's stout arm could never tire. Miss Penny was so still she seemed to be asleep. Mr. Dover never stirred, but grew paler as the minutes passed; and Cicely, creeping now and then to look in and steal away, saw strange power in the black eyes that seemed to hold the fluttering spirit of the little child by the love and longing that made them both tender and commanding.

A level ray of sunlight stole through the curtain at last and turned the tangles of bright hair to pure gold. Miss Henny rose to shut it out, and as if her movement broke the spell, Rosy took a long full breath, turned on the pillow, and putting one hand under her cheek, seemed to fall asleep as naturally as she used to do when well. Miss Penny looked up, touched the child's forehead, and whispered, with a look of gratitude as bright as if the sunshine had touched her also, —

"It is moist! this is real sleep! Oh, my baby! oh, my baby!" And the old head went down again with a stifled sob, for her experienced eye told her that the danger was passing by and Rosy would live.

"The prayers of the righteous avail much," murmured Mr. Dover, turning to the other lady, who stood beside her sister looking down at the little figure now lying so restfully between them.

"How can we thank you?" she whispered, offering her hand, with the smile which had once made her pretty, and still touched the old face with something better than beauty.

Mr. Dover took the hand and answered, with an eloquent look at the child, —

"Let not the sun go down upon our wrath. Forgive me and be friends again, for her sake."

"I will!" And the plump hands gave the thin ones a hearty shake as the great feud ended forever over the bed of the little peacemaker whose childish play had turned to happy earnest.

MOUNTAIN-LAUREL AND MAIDEN-HAIR

Here’s your breakfast, miss. I hope it’s right. Your mother showed me how to fix it, and said I’d find a cup up here.”

“Take that blue one. I have not much appetite, and can’t eat if things are not nice and pretty. I like the flowers. I’ve been longing for some ever since I saw them last night.”

The first speaker was a red-haired, freckle-faced girl, in a brown calico dress and white apron, with a tray in her hands and an air of timid hospitality in her manner; the second a pale, pretty creature, in a white wrapper and blue net, sitting in a large chair, looking about her with the languid interest of an invalid in a new place. Her eyes brightened as they fell upon a glass of rosy laurel and delicate maidenhair fern that stood among the toast and eggs, strawberries and cream, on the tray.

“Our laurel is jest in blow, and I’m real glad you come in time to see it. I’ll bring you a lot, as soon’s ever I get time to go for it.”

As she spoke, the plain girl replaced the ugly crockery cup and saucer with the pretty china ones pointed out to her, arranged the dishes, and waited to see if anything else was needed.

“What is your name, please?” asked the pretty girl, refreshing herself with a draught of new milk.

“Rebecca. Mother thought I’d better wait on you; the little girls are so noisy and apt to forget. Wouldn’t you like a piller to your back? you look so kind of feeble seems as if you wanted to be propped up a mite.”

There was so much compassion and good-will in the face and voice, that Emily accepted the offer, and let Rebecca arrange a cushion behind her; then, while the one ate daintily, and the other stirred about an inner room, the talk went on, — for two girls are seldom long silent when together.

“I think the air is going to suit me, for I slept all night and never woke till Mamma had been up ever so long and got things all nicely settled,” said Emily, graciously, when the fresh strawberries had been enjoyed, and the bread and butter began to vanish.

“I’m real glad you like it; most folks do, if they don’t mind it being plain and quiet up here. It’s gayer down at the hotel, but the air ain’t half so good, and delicate folks generally like our old place best,” answered Becky, as she tossed over a mattress and shook out the sheet with a brisk, capable air pleasant to see.

“I wanted to go to the hotel, but the doctor said it would be too noisy for me, so Mamma was glad to find rooms here. I didn’t think a farm-house COULD be so pleasant. That view is perfectly splendid!” and Emily sat up to gaze delightedly out of the window, below which spread the wide intervale, through which the river ran with hay-fields on either side, while along the green slopes of the hills lay farm-houses with garden plots, and big barns waiting for the harvest; and beyond, the rocky, wooded pastures dotted with cattle and musical with cow-bells, brooks, and birds.

A balmy wind kissed a little color into the pale cheeks, the listless eyes brightened as they looked, and the fretful lines vanished from lips that smiled involuntarily at the sweet welcome Nature gave the city child come to rest and play and grow gay and rosy in her green lap.

Becky watched her with interest, and was glad to see how soon the new-comer felt the charm of the place, for the girl loved her mountain home, and thought the old farm-house the loveliest spot in the world.

“When you get stronger I can show you lots of nice views round here. There’s a woodsy place behind the house that’s just lovely. Down by the laurel bushes is MY favorite spot, and among the rocks is a cave where I keep things handy when I get a resting-spell now and then, and want to be quiet. Can’t get much at home, when there’s boarders and five children round in vacation time.”

Becky laughed as she spoke, and there was a sweet motherly look in her plain face, as she glanced at the three little red heads bobbing about the door-yard below, where hens cackled, a pet lamb fed, and the old white dog lay blinking in the sun.

“I like children; we have none at home, and Mamma makes such a baby of me I’m almost ashamed sometimes. I want her to have a good rest now, for she has taken care of me all winter and needs it. You shall be my nurse, if I need one; but I hope to be so well soon that I can see to myself. It’s so tiresome to be ill!” and Emily sighed as she leaned back among her pillows, with a glance at the little glass which showed her a thin face and shorn head.

“It must be! I never was sick, but I have taken care of sick folks, and have a sight of sympathy for ‘em. Mother says I make a pretty good nurse, being strong and quiet,” answered Becky, plumping up pillows and folding towels with a gentle despatch which was very grateful to the invalid, who had dreaded a noisy, awkward serving-maid.

“Never ill! how nice that must be! I’m always having colds and headaches, and fusses of some kind. What do you do to keep well, Rebecca?” asked Emily, watching her with interest, as she came in to remove the tray.

“Nothing but work; I haven’t time to be sick, and when I’m tuckered out, I go and rest over yonder. Then I'm all right, and buckle to again, as smart as ever;" and every freckle in Becky's rosy face seemed to shine with cheerful strength and courage.

"I'm 'tuckered out' doing nothing," said Emily, amused with the new expression, and eager to try a remedy which showed such fine results in this case. "I shall visit your pet places and do a little work as soon as I am able, and see if it won't set me up. Now I can only dawdle, doze, and read a little. Will you please put those books here on the table? I shall want them by-and-by."

Emily pointed to a pile of blue and gold volumes lying on a trunk, and Becky dusted her hands as she took them up with an air of reverence, for she read on the backs of the volumes names which made her eyes sparkle.

"Do you care for poetry?" asked Emily, surprised at the girl's look and manner.

"Guess I do! don't get much except the pieces I cut out of papers, but I love 'em, and stick 'em in an old ledger, and keep it down in my cubby among the rocks. I do love THAT man's pieces. They seem to go right to the spot somehow;" and Becky smiled at the name of Whittier as if the sweetest of our poets was a dear old friend of hers.

"I like Tennyson better. Do you know him?" asked Emily, with a superior air, for the idea of this farmer's daughter knowing anything about poetry amused her.

"Oh yes, I've got a number of his pieces in my book, and I'm fond of 'em. But this man makes things so kind of true and natural I feel at home with HIM. And this one I've longed to read, though I guess I can't understand much of it. His 'Bumble Bee' was just lovely; with the grass and columbines and the yellow breeches of the bee. I'm never tired of that;" and Becky's face woke up into something like beauty as she glanced hungrily at the Emerson while she dusted the delicate cover that hid the treasures she coveted.

"I don't care much for him, but Mamma does. I like romantic poems, and ballads, and songs; don't like descriptions of clouds and fields, and bees, and farmers," said Emily, showing plainly that even Emerson's simplest poems were far above her comprehension as yet, because she loved sentiment more than Nature.

"I do, because I know 'em better than love and the romantic stuff most poetry tells about. But I don't pretend to judge, I'm glad of anything I can get. Now if you don't want me I'll pick up my dishes and go to work."

With that Becky went away, leaving Emily to rest and dream with her eyes on the landscape which was giving her better poetry than any her books held. She told her mother about the odd girl, and was sure she would be amusing if she did not forget her place and try to be friends.

“She is a good creature, my dear, her mother’s main stay, and works beyond her strength, I am sure. Be kind to the poor girl, and put a little pleasure into her life if you can,” answered Mrs. Spenser, as she moved about, settling comforts and luxuries for her invalid.

“I shall HAVE to talk to her, as there is no other person of my age in the house. How are the school marms? shall you get on with them, Mamma? It will be so lonely here for us both, if we don’t make friends with some one.”

“Most intelligent and amiable women all three, and we shall have pleasant times together, I am sure. You may safely cultivate Becky; Mrs. Taylor told me she was a remarkably bright girl, though she may not look it.”

“Well, I’ll see. But I do hate freckles and big red hands, and round shoulders. She can’t help it, I suppose, but ugly things fret me.”

“Remember that she has no time to be pretty, and be glad she is so neat and willing. Shall we read, dear? I’m ready now.”

Emily consented, and listened for an hour or two while the pleasant voice beside her conjured away all her vapors with some of Mrs. Ewing’s charming tales.

“The grass is dry now, and I want to stroll on that green lawn before lunch. You rest, Mamma dear, and let me make discoveries all alone,” proposed Emily, when the sun shone warmly, and the instinct of all young creatures for air and motion called her out.

So, with her hat and wrap, and book and parasol, she set forth to explore the new land in which she found herself.

Down the wide, creaking stairs and out upon the door-stone she went, pausing there for a moment to decide where first to go. The sound of some one singing in the rear of the house led her in that direction, and turning the corner she made her first pleasant discovery. A hill rose steeply behind the farm-house, and leaning from the bank was an old apple-tree, shading a spring that trickled out from the rocks and dropped into a mossy trough below. Up the tree had grown a wild grape-vine, making a green canopy over the great log which served as a seat, and some one had planted maidenhair ferns about both seat and spring to flourish beautifully in the damp, shady spot.

“Oh, how pretty! I’ll go and sit there. It looks clean, and I can see what is going on in that big kitchen, and hear the singing. I suppose it’s Becky’s little sisters by the racket.”

Emily established herself on the lichen-covered log with her feet upon a stone, and sat enjoying the musical tinkle of the water, with her eyes on the delicate ferns stirring in the wind, and the lively jingle of the multiplication-table chanted by childish voices in her ear.

Presently two little girls with a great pan of beans came to do their work on the back doorstep, a third was seen washing dishes at a window, and Becky's brown-spotted gown flew about the kitchen as if a very energetic girl wore it. A woman's voice was heard giving directions, as the speaker was evidently picking chickens somewhere out of sight.

A little of the talk reached Emily and both amused and annoyed her, for it proved that the country people were not as stupid as they looked.

"Oh, well, we mustn't mind if she IS notional and kind of wearing; she's been sick, and it will take time to get rid of her fretty ways. Jest be pleasant, and take no notice, and that nice mother of hers will make it all right," said the woman's voice.

"How anybody with every mortal thing to be happy with CAN be out-of-sorts passes me. She fussed about every piller, chair, trunk, and mite of food last night, and kept that poor tired lady trotting till I was provoked. She's right pleasant this morning though, and as pretty as a picture in her ruffled gown and that blue thing on her head," answered Becky from the pantry, as she rattled out the pie-board, little dreaming who sat hidden behind the grape-vine festoons that veiled the corner by the spring.

"Well, she's got redder hair 'n' we have, so she needn't be so grand and try to hide it with blue nets," added one little voice.

"Yes, and it's ever so much shorter 'n' ours, and curls all over her head like Daisy's wool. I should think such a big girl would feel real ashamed without no braids," said the other child, proudly surveying the tawny mane that hung over her shoulders, — for like most red-haired people all the children were blessed with luxuriant crops of every shade from golden auburn to regular carrots.

"I think it's lovely. Suppose it had to be cut off when she had the fever. Wish I could get rid of my mop, it's such a bother;" and Becky was seen tying a clean towel over the great knot that made her head look very like a copper kettle.

"Now fly round, deary, and get them pies ready. I'll have these fowls on in a minute, and then go to my butter. You run off and see if you can't find some wild strawberries for the poor girl, soon's ever you are through with them beans, children. We must kind of pamper her up for a spell till her appetite comes back," said the mother.

Here the chat ended, and soon the little girls were gone, leaving Becky alone rolling out pie-crust before the pantry window. As she worked her lips moved, and Emily, still peeping through the leaves, wondered what she was saying, for a low murmur rose and fell, emphasized now and then with a thump of the rolling-pin.

"I mean to go and find out. If I stand on that wash-bench I can look in and see her work. I'll show them all that *I*'m NOT 'fussy,' and can be 'right pleasant' if I like."

With this wise resolution Emily went down the little path, and after pausing to examine the churn set out to dry, and the row of pans shining on a neighboring shelf, made her way to the window, mounted the bench while Becky's back was turned, and pushing away the morning-glory vines and scarlet beans that ran up on either side peeped in with such a smiling face that the crossest cook could not have frowned on her as an intruder.

"May I see you work? I can't eat pies, but I like to watch people make them. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. I'd ask you to come in, but it's dreadful hot here, and not much room," answered Becky, crimping round the pastry before she poured in the custard. "I'm going to make a nice little pudding for you; your mother said you liked 'em; or would you rather have whipped cream with a mite of jelly in it?" asked Becky, anxious to suit her new boarder.

"Whichever is easiest to make. I don't care what I eat. Do tell me what you were saying. It sounded like poetry," said Emily, leaning both elbows on the wide ledge with a pale pink morning-glory kissing her cheek, and a savory odor reaching her nose.

"Oh, I was mumbling some verses. I often do when I work, it sort of helps me along; but it must sound dreadfully silly," and Becky blushed as if caught in some serious fault.

"I do it, and it's a great comfort when I lie awake. I should think you WOULD want something to help you along, you work so hard. Do you like it, Becky?"

The familiar name, the kind tone, made the plain face brighten with pleasure as its owner said, while she carefully filled a pretty bowl with a golden mixture rich with fresh eggs and country milk —

"No, I don't, but I ought to. Mother isn't as strong as she used to be, and there's a sight to do, and the children to be brought up, and the mortgage to be paid off; so if *I* don't fly round, who will? We are doing real well now, for Mr. Walker manages the farm and gives us our share, so our living is all right; then boarders in summer and my school in winter helps a deal, and every year the boys can do more, so I'd be a real sinner to complain if I do have to step lively all day."

Becky smiled as she spoke, and straightened her bent shoulders as if settling her burden for another trudge along the path of duty.

"Do you keep school? Why, how old are you, Becky?" asked Emily, much impressed by this new discovery.

"I'm eighteen. I took the place of a teacher who got sick last fall, and I kept school all winter. Folks seemed to like me, and I'm going to have the same place this year. I'm so glad, for I needn't go away and the pay is pretty good, as the school is large and the children do well. You can see the school-house down the valley, that red brick one where the roads meet;" and Becky pointed a floury finger, with an air of pride that was pleasant to see.

Emily glanced at the little red house where the sun shone hotly in summer, and all the winds of heaven must rage wildly in winter time, for it stood, as country schools usually do, in the barest, most uninviting spot for miles around.

"Isn't it awful down there in winter?" she asked, with a shiver at the idea of spending days shut up in that forlorn place, with a crowd of rough country children.

"Pretty cold, but we have plenty of wood, and we are used to snow and gales up here. We often coast down, the whole lot of us, and that is great fun. We take our dinners and have games noon-spells, and so we get on first rate; some of my boys are big fellows, older than I am; they clear the roads and make the fire and look after us, and we are real happy together."

Emily found it so impossible to imagine happiness under such circumstances that she changed the subject by asking in a tone which had unconsciously grown more respectful since this last revelation of Becky's abilities, —

"If you do so well here, why don't you try for a larger school in a better place?"

"Oh, I couldn't leave mother yet; I hope to some day, when the girls are older, and the boys able to get on alone. But I can't go now, for there's a sight of things to do, and mother is always laid up with rheumatism in cold weather. So much butter-making down cellar is bad for her; but she won't let me do that in summer, so I take care of her in winter. I can see to things night and morning, and through the day she's quiet, and sits piecing carpet-rags and resting up for next spring. We made and wove all the carpets in the house, except the parlor one. Mrs. Taylor gave us that, and the curtains, and the easy-chair. Mother takes a sight of comfort in that."

"Mrs. Taylor is the lady who first came to board here, and told us and others about it," said Emily.

"Yes, and she's the kindest lady in the world! I'll tell you all about her some day, it's real interesting; now I must see to my pies, and get the vegetables on," answered Becky, glancing at the gay clock in the kitchen with an anxious look.

"Then I won't waste any more of your precious time. May I sit in that pretty place; or is it your private bower?" asked Emily, as she dismounted from the wash-bench.

"Yes, indeed you may. That's mother's resting-place when work is done.

Father made the spring long ago, and I put the ferns there. She can't go rambling round, and she likes pretty things, so we fixed it up for her, and she takes comfort there nights."

Becky bustled off to the oven with her pies, and Emily roamed away to the big barn to lie on the hay, enjoying the view down the valley, as she thought over what she had seen and heard, and very naturally contrasted her own luxurious and tenderly guarded life with this other girl's, so hard and dull and narrow. Working all summer and teaching all winter in that dismal little school-house, with no change but home cares and carpet-weaving! It looked horrible to pleasure-loving Emily, who led the happy, care-free life of girls of her class, with pleasures of all sorts, and a future of still greater luxury, variety, and happiness, opening brightly before her.

It worried her to think of any one being contented with such a meagre share of the good things of life, when she was unsatisfied in spite of the rich store showered upon her. She could not understand it, and fell asleep wishing every one could be comfortable, — it was so annoying to see them grubbing in kitchens, teaching in bleak school-houses among snow-drifts, and wearing ugly calico gowns.

A week or two of quiet, country fare and the bracing mountain air worked wonders for the invalid, and every one rejoiced to see the pale cheeks begin to grow round and rosy, the languid eyes to brighten, and the feeble girl who used to lie on her sofa half the day now go walking about with her alpenstock, eager to explore all the pretty nooks among the hills. Her mother blessed Mrs. Taylor for suggesting this wholesome place. The tired "school marms," as Emily called the three young women who were their fellow-boarders, congratulated her as well as themselves on the daily improvement in strength and spirits all felt; and Becky exulted in the marvellous effects of her native air, aided by mother's good cookery and the cheerful society of the children, whom the good girl considered the most remarkable and lovable youngsters in the world.

Emily felt like the queen of this little kingdom, and was regarded as such by every one, for with returning health she lost her fretful ways, and living with simple people, soon forgot her girlish airs and vanities, becoming very sweet and friendly with all about her. The children considered her a sort of good fairy who could grant wishes with magical skill, as various gifts plainly proved. The boys were her devoted servants, ready to run errands, "hitch up" and take her to drive at any hour, or listen in mute delight when she sang to her guitar in the summer twilight.

But to Becky she was a special godsend and comfort, for before the first month had gone they were good friends, and Emily had made a discovery which filled her head with brilliant plans for Becky's future, in spite of her mother's warnings, and the sensible girl's own reluctance to be dazzled by enthusiastic prophecies and dreams.

It came about in this way. Some three weeks after the two girls met, Emily went one evening to their favorite trysting-place, — Becky's bower among the laurels. It was a pretty nook in the shadow of a great gray bowlder near the head of the green valley which ran down to spread into the wide intervale below. A brook went babbling among the stones and grass and sweet-ferns, while all the slope was rosy with laurel-flowers in their times, as the sturdy bushes grew thickly on the hill-side, down the valley, and among the woods that made a rich background for these pink and white bouquets arranged with Nature's own careless grace.

Emily liked this spot, and ever since she had been strong enough to reach it, loved to climb up and sit there with book and work, enjoying the lovely panorama before her. Floating mists often gave her a constant succession of pretty pictures; now a sunny glimpse of the distant lake, then the church spire peeping above the hill, or a flock of sheep feeding in the meadow, a gay procession of young pilgrims winding up the mountain, or a black cloud heavy with a coming storm, welcome because of the glorious rainbow and its shadow which would close the pageant.

Unconsciously the girl grew to feel not only the beauty but the value of these quiet hours, to find a new peace, refreshment, and happiness, bubbling up in her heart as naturally as the brook gushed out among the mossy rocks, and went singing away through hayfields and gardens, and by dusty roads, till it met the river and rolled on to the sea. Something dimly stirred in her, and the healing spirit that haunts such spots did its sweet ministering till the innocent soul began to see that life was not perfect without labor as well as love, duty as well as happiness, and that true contentment came from within, not from without.

On the evening we speak of, she went to wait for Becky, who would join her as soon as the after-supper chores were done. In the little cave which held a few books, a dipper, and a birch-bark basket for berries, Emily kept a sketching block and a box of pencils, and often amused herself by trying to catch some of the lovely scenes before her. These efforts usually ended in a humbler attempt, and a good study of an oak-tree, a bit of rock, or a clump of ferns was the result. This evening the sunset was so beautiful she could not draw, and remembering that somewhere in Becky's scrap-book there was a fine description of such an hour by some poet, she pulled out the shabby old volume, and began to turn over the leaves.

She had never cared to look at it but once, having read all the best of its contents in more attractive volumes, so Becky kept it tucked away in the farther corner of her rustic closet, and evidently thought it a safe place to conceal a certain little secret which Emily now discovered. As she turned the stiff pages filled with all sorts of verses, good, bad, and indifferent, a sheet of paper appeared on which was scribbled these lines in school-girl handwriting: —

MOUNTAIN — LAUREL

My bonnie flower, with truest joy
  Thy welcome face I see,
The world grows brighter to my eyes,
  And summer comes with thee.
My solitude now finds a friend,
  And after each hard day,
I in my mountain garden walk,
  To rest, or sing, or pray.

All down the rocky slope is spread
  Thy veil of rosy snow,
And in the valley by the brook,
  Thy deeper blossoms grow.
The barren wilderness grows fair,
  Such beauty dost thou give;
And human eyes and Nature's heart
  Rejoice that thou dost live.

Each year I wait thy coming, dear,
  Each year I love thee more,
For life grows hard, and much I need
  Thy honey for my store.
So, like a hungry bee, I sip
  Sweet lessons from thy cup,
And sitting at a flower's feet,
  My soul learns to look up.

No laurels shall I ever win,
   No splendid blossoms bear,
But gratefully receive and use
 God's blessed sun and air;
And, blooming where my lot is cast,
 Grow happy and content,
Making some barren spot more fair,
 For a humble life well spent.

"She wrote it herself! I can't believe it!" said Emily, as she put down the paper, looking rather startled, for she DID believe it, and felt as if she had suddenly looked into a fellow-creature's heart. "I thought her just an ordinary girl, and here she is a poet, writing verses that make me want to cry! I don’t suppose they ARE very good, but they seem to come right out of her heart, and touch me with the longing and the patience or the piety in them. Well, I AM surprised!” and Emily read the lines again, seeing the faults more plainly than before, but still feeling that the girl put herself into them, vainly trying to express what the wild flower was to her in the loneliness which comes to those who have a little spark of the divine fire burning in their souls.

“Shall I tell her I’ve found it out? I must! and see if I can’t get her verses printed. Of course she has more tucked away somewhere. That is what she hums to herself when she’s at work, and won’t tell me about when I ask. Sly thing! to be so bashful and hide her gift. I’ll tease her a bit and see what she says. Oh dear, I wish *I* could do it! Perhaps she’ll be famous some day, and then I’ll have the glory of discovering her.”

With that consolation Emily turned over the pages of the ledger and found several more bits of verse, some very good for an untaught girl, others very faulty, but all having a certain strength of feeling and simplicity of language unusual in the effusions of young maidens at the sentimental age.

Emily had a girlish admiration for talent of any kind, and being fond of poetry, was especially pleased to find that her humble friend possessed the power of writing it. Of course she exaggerated Becky’s talent, and as she waited for her, felt sure that she had discovered a feminine Burns among the New Hampshire hills, for all the verses were about natural and homely objects, touched into beauty by sweet words or tender sentiment. She had time to build a splendid castle in the air and settle Becky in it with a crown of glory on her head, before the quiet figure in a faded sunbonnet came slowly up the slope with the glow of sunset on a tired but tranquil face.

“Sit here and have a good rest, while I talk to you,” said Emily, eager to act the somewhat dramatic scene she had planned. Becky sunk upon the red cushion prepared for her, and sat looking down at the animated speaker, as Emily, perched on a mossy stone before her, began the performance.

“Becky, did you ever hear of the Goodale children? They lived in the country and wrote poetry and grew to be famous.”

“Oh yes, I’ve read their poems and like ‘em very much. Do you know ‘em?” and Becky looked interested at once.

“No, but I once met a girl who was something like them, only she didn’t have such an easy time as they did, with a father to help, and a nice Sky-farm, and good luck generally. I’ve tried to write verses myself, but I always get into a muddle, and give it up. This makes me interested in other girls who CAN do it, and I want to help my friend. I’m SURE she has talent, and I’d so like to give her a lift in some way. Let me read you a piece of hers and see what you think of it.”

“Do!” and Beck threw off the sunbonnet, folded her hands round her knees, and composed herself to listen with such perfect unconsciousness of what was coming that Emily both laughed at the joke and blushed at the liberty she felt she was taking with the poor girl’s carefully hidden secret.

Becky was sure now that Emily was going to read something of her own after this artful introduction, and began to smile as the paper was produced and the first four lines read in a tone that was half timid, half triumphant. Then with a cry she seized and crumpled up the paper, exclaiming almost fiercely, —

“It’s mine! Where did you get it? How dar’st you touch it?”

Emily fell upon her knees with a face and voice so full of penitence, pleasure, sympathy, and satisfaction, that Becky’s wrath was appeased before her friend’s explanation ended with these soothing and delightful words, —

“That’s all, dear, and I beg your pardon. But I’m sure you will be famous if you keep on, and I shall yet see a volume of poems by Rebecca Moore of Rocky Nook, New Hampshire.”

Becky hid her face as if shame, surprise, wonder, and joy filled her heart too full and made a few happy tears drop on the hands so worn with hard work, when they ached to be holding a pen and trying to record the fancies that sung in her brain as ceaselessly as the soft sough of the pines or the ripple of the brook murmured in her ear when she sat here alone. She could not express the vague longings that stirred in her soul; she could only feel and dimly strive to understand and utter them, with no thought of fame or fortune, — for she was a humble creature, and never knew that the hardships of her life were pressing out the virtues of her nature as the tread of careless feet crush the sweet perfume from wild herbs.

Presently she looked up, deeply touched by Emily’s words and caresses, and her blue eyes shone like stars as her face beamed with something finer than mere beauty, for the secrets of her innocent heart were known to this friend now, and it was very sweet to accept the first draught of confidence and praise.

“I don’t mind much, but I was scared for a minute. No one knows but Mother, and she laughs at me, though she don’t care if it makes me happy. I’m glad you like my scribbling, but really I never think or hope of being anybody. I couldn’t, you know! but it’s real nice to have you say I MIGHT and to make believe for a while.”

“But why not, Becky? The Goodale girls did, and half the poets in the world were poor, ignorant people at first, you know. It only needs time and help, and the gift will grow, and people see it; and then the glory and the money will come," cried Emily, quite carried away by her own enthusiasm and good-will.

"Could I get any money by these things?" asked Becky, looking at the crumpled paper lying under a laurel-bush.

"Of course you could, dear! Let me have some of them, and I'll show you that I know good poetry when I see it. You will believe if some bank-bills come with the paper the verses appear in, I hope?"

Blind to any harm she might do by exciting vain hopes in her eagerness to cheer and help, Emily made this rash proposal in all good faith. meaning to pay for the verses herself if no editor was found to accept them.

Becky looked half bewildered by this brilliant prospect, and took a long breath, as if some hand had lifted a heavy burden a little way from her weary back, for stronger than ambition for herself was love for her family, and the thought of help for them was sweeter than any dream of fame.

"Yes, I would! oh, if I only COULD, I'd be the happiest girl in the world! But I can't believe it, Emily. I heard Mrs. Taylor say that only the VERY BEST poetry paid, and mine is poor stuff, I know well enough."

"Of course it needs polishing and practice and all that; but I'm sure it is oceans better than half the sentimental twaddle we see in the papers, and I KNOW that some of those pieces ARE paid for, because I have a friend who is in a newspaper office, and he told me so. Yours are quaint and simple and some very original. I'm sure that ballad of the old house is lovely, and I want to send it to Whittier. Mamma knows him; it's the sort he likes, and he is so kind to every one, he will criticise it, and be interested when she tells him about you. Do let me!"

"I never could in the world! It would be so bold, Mother would think I was crazy. I love Mr. Whittier, but I wouldn't dar'st to show him my nonsense, though reading his beautiful poetry helps me ever so much."

Becky looked and spoke as if her breath had been taken away by this audacious proposal; and yet a sudden delicious hope sprung up in her heart that there might, perhaps, be a spark of real virtue in the little fire which burned within her, warming and brightening her dull life.

"Let us ask Mamma; she will tell us what is best to do first, for she knows all sorts of literary people, and won't say any more than you want her to. I'm bent on having my way, Becky, and the more modest you are, the surer I am that you are a genius. Real geniuses always ARE shy; so you just make up your mind to give me the best of your pieces, and let me prove that I'm right."

It was impossible to resist such persuasive words, and Becky soon yielded to the little siren who was luring her out of her safe, small pool into the deeper water that looks so blue and smooth till the venturesome paper boats get into the swift eddies, or run aground upon the rocks and sandbars.

The greatest secrecy was to be preserved, and no one but Mrs. Spenser was to know what a momentous enterprise was afoot. The girls sat absorbed in their brilliant plans till it was nearly dark, then groped their way home hand in hand, leaving another secret for the laurels to keep and dream over through their long sleep, for blossom time was past, and the rosy faces turning pale in the July sun.

Neither of the girls forgot the talk they had that night in Emily's room, for she led her captive straight to her mother, and told her all their plans and aspirations without a moment's delay.

Mrs. Spenser much regretted her daughter's well-meant enthusiasm, but fearing harm might be done, very wisely tried to calm the innocent excitement of both by the quiet matter-of-fact way in which she listened to the explanation Emily gave her, read the verses timidly offered by Becky, and then said, kindly but firmly: —

"This is not poetry, my dear girls, though the lines run smoothly enough, and the sentiment is sweet. It would bring neither fame nor money, and Rebecca puts more real truth, beauty, and poetry into her dutiful daily life than in any lines she has written."

"We had such a lovely plan for Becky to come to town with me, and see the world, and write, and be famous. How can you spoil it all?"

"My foolish little daughter, I must prevent you from spoiling this good girl's life by your rash projects. Becky will see that I am wise, though you do not, and SHE will understand this verse from my favorite poet, and lay it to heart: —

"So near is grandeur to our Dust,
So nigh is God to man,
When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must!'
The youth replies, 'I can!'"

"I do! I will! please go on," and Becky's troubled eyes grew clear and steadfast as she took the words home to herself, resolving to live up to them.

"Oh, mother!" cried Emily, thinking her very cruel to nip their budding hopes in this way.

"I know you won't believe it now, nor be able to see all that I mean perhaps, but time will teach you both to own that I am right, and to value the substance more than the shadow," continued Mrs. Spenser. "Many girls write verses and think they are poets; but it is only a passing mood, and fortunately for the world, and for them also, it soon dies out in some more genuine work or passion. Very few have the real gift, and those to whom it IS given wait and work and slowly reach the height of their powers. Many delude themselves, and try to persuade the world that they can sing; but it is waste of time, and ends in disappointment, as the mass of sentimental rubbish we all see plainly proves. Write your little verses, my dear, when the spirit moves, — it is a harmless pleasure, a real comfort, and a good lesson for you; but do not neglect higher duties or deceive yourself with false hopes and vain dreams. ‘First live, then write,’ is a good motto for ambitious young people. A still better for us all is, ‘Do the duty that lies nearest;’ and the faithful performance of that, no matter how humble it is, will be the best help for whatever talent may lie hidden in us, ready to bloom when the time comes. Remember this, and do not let my enthusiastic girl’s well-meant but unwise prophecies and plans unsettle you, and unfit you for the noble work you are doing.”

“Thank you, ma’am! I WILL remember; I know you are right, and I won’t be upset by foolish notions. I never imagined before that I COULD be a poet; but it sounded so sort of splendid, I thought maybe it MIGHT happen to me, by-and-by, as it does to other folks. I won’t lot on it, but settle right down and do my work cheerful.”

As she listened, Becky’s face had grown pale and serious, even a little sad; but as she answered, her eyes shone, her lips were firm, and her plain face almost beautiful with the courage and confidence that sprung up within her. She saw the wisdom of her friend’s advice, felt the kindness of showing her the mistake frankly, and was grateful for it, — conscious in her own strong, loving heart that it was better to live and work for others than to dream and strive for herself alone.

Mrs. Spenser was both surprised and touched by the girl’s look, words, and manner, and her respect much increased by the courage and good temper with which she saw her lovely castle in the air vanish like smoke, leaving the hard reality looking harder than ever, after this little flight into the fairy regions of romance.

She talked long with the girls, and gave them the counsel all eager young people need, yet are very slow to accept till experience teaches them its worth. As the friend of many successful literary people, Mrs. Spenser was constantly receiving the confidences of unfledged scribblers, each of whom was sure that he or she had something valuable to add to the world’s literature. Her advice was always the same, “Work and wait;” and only now and then was a young poet or author found enough in earnest to do both, and thereby prove to themselves and others that either they DID possess power, or did not, and so settle the question forever. “First live, then write,” proved a quietus for many, and “Do the duty that lies nearest” satisfied the more sincere that they could be happy without fame.

So, thanks to this wise and kindly woman, a large number of worthy youths and maidens ceased dreaming and fell to work, and the world was spared reams of feeble verse and third-rate romances.

After that night Becky spent fewer spare hours in her nest, and more in reading with Emily, who lent her books and helped her to understand them, — both much assisted by Mrs. Spenser, who marked passages, suggested authors, and explained whatever puzzled them. Very happy bits of time were these, and very precious to both, as Emily learned to see and appreciate the humbler, harder side of life, and Becky got delightful glimpses into the beautiful world of art, poetry, and truth, which gave her better food for heart and brain than sentimental musings or blind efforts to satisfy the hunger of her nature with verse-writing.

Their favorite places were in the big barn, on the front porch, or by the spring. This last was Emily's schoolroom, and she both taught and learned many useful lessons there.

One day as Becky came to rest a few minutes and shell peas, Emily put down her book to help; and as the pods flew, she said, nodding toward the delicate ferns that grew thickly all about the trough, the rock, and the grassy bank, —

"We have these in our greenhouse, but I never saw them growing wild before, and I don't find them anywhere up here. How did you get such beauties, and make them do so well?"

"Oh, they grow in nooks on the mountain hidden under the taller ferns, and in sly corners. But they don't grow like these, and die soon unless transplanted and taken good care of. They always make me think of you, — so graceful and delicate, and just fit to live with tea-roses in a hot-house, and go to balls in beautiful ladies' bokays," answered Becky, smiling at her new friend, always so dainty, and still so delicate in spite of the summer's rustication.

"Thank you! I suppose I shall never be very strong or able to do much; so I AM rather like a fern, and do live in a conservatory all winter, as I can't go out a great deal. An idle thing, Becky!" and Emily sighed, for she was born frail, and even her tenderly guarded life could not give her the vigor of other girls. But the sigh changed to a smile as she added, —

"If I am like the fern, you are like your own laurel, — strong, rosy, and able to grow anywhere. I want to carry a few roots home, and see if they won't grow in my garden. Then you will have me, and I you. I only hope YOUR plant will do as well as mine does here."

"It won't! ever so many folks have taken roots away, but they never thrive in gardens as they do on the hills where they belong. So I tell 'em to leave the dear bushes alone, and come up here and enjoy 'em in their own place. You might keep a plant of it in your hot-house, and it would blow I dare say; but it would never be half so lovely as my acres of them, and I guess it would only make you sad, seeing it so far from home, and pale and pining," answered Becky, with her eyes on the green slopes where the mountain-laurel braved the wintry snow, and came out fresh and early in the spring.

"Then I'll let it alone till I come next summer. But don't you take any of the fern into the house in the cold weather? I should think it would grow in your sunny windows," said Emily, pleased by the fancy that it resembled herself.

"I tried it, but it needs a damp place, and our cold nights kill it. No, it won't grow in our old house; but I cover it with leaves, and the little green sprouts come up as hearty as can be out here. The shade, the spring, the shelter of the rock, keep it alive, you see, so it's no use trying to move it."

Both sat silent for a few minutes, as their hands moved briskly and they thought of their different lots. An inquisitive ray of sunshine peeped in at them, touching Becky's hair till it shone like red gold. The same ray dazzled Emily's eyes; she put up her hand to pull her hat-brim lower, and touched the little curls on her forehead. This recalled her pet grievance, and made her say impatiently, as she pushed the thick short locks under her net, —

"My hair is SUCH a plague! I don't know what I am to do when I go into society by-and-by. This crop is so unbecoming, and I can't match my hair anywhere, it is such a peculiar shade of golden-auburn."

"It's a pretty color, and I think the curls much nicer than a boughten switch," said Becky, quite unconscious that her own luxuriant locks were of the true Titian red, and would be much admired by artistic eyes.

"I don't! I shall send to Paris to match it, and then wear a braid round my head as you do sometimes. I suppose it will cost a fortune, but I WON'T have a strong-minded crop. A friend of mine got a lovely golden switch for fifty dollars."

"My patience! do folks pay like that for false hair?" asked Becky, amazed.

"Yes, indeed. White hair costs a hundred, I believe, if it is long. Why, you could get ever so much for yours if you ever wanted to sell it. I'll take part of it, for in a little while mine will be as dark, and I'd like to wear your hair, Becky."

"Don't believe Mother would let me. She is very proud of our red heads. If I ever do cut it, you shall have some. I may be hard up and glad to sell it perhaps. My sakes! I smell the cake burning!" and off flew Becky to forget the chat in her work.

Emily did not forget it, and hoped Becky would be tempted, for she really coveted one of the fine braids, but felt shy about asking the poor girl for even a part of her one beauty.

So July and August passed pleasantly and profitably to both girls, and in

September they were to part. No more was said about poetry; and Emily soon became so interested in the busy, practical life about her that her own high-flown dreams were quite forgotten, and she learned to enjoy the sweet prose of daily labor.

One breezy afternoon as she and her mother sat resting from a stroll on the way-side bank among the golden-rod and asters, they saw Becky coming up the long hill with a basket on her arm. She walked slowly, as if lost in thought, yet never missed pushing aside with a decided gesture of her foot every stone that lay in her way. There were many in that rocky path, but Becky left it smoother as she climbed, and paused now and then to send some especially sharp or large one spinning into the grassy ditch beside the road.

“Isn’t she a curious girl, Mamma? so tired after her long walk to town, yet so anxious not to leave a stone in the way,” said Emily, as they watched her slow approach.

“A very interesting one to me, dear, because under that humble exterior lies a fine, strong character. It is like Becky to clear her way, even up a dusty hill where the first rain will wash out many more stones. Let us ask her why she does it. I’ve observed the habit before, and always meant to ask,” replied Mrs. Spenser.

“Here we are! Come and rest a minute, Becky, and tell us if you mend roads as well as ever so many other things;” called Emily, beckoning with a smile, as the girl looked up and saw them.

“Oh, it’s a trick of mine; I caught it of Father when I was a little thing, and do it without knowing it half the time,” said Becky, sinking down upon a mossy rock, as if rest were welcome.

“Why did he do it?” asked Emily, who knew that her friend loved to talk of her father.

“Well, it’s a family failing I guess, for his father did the same, only HE began with his farm and let the roads alone. The land used to be pretty much all rocks up here, you know, and farmers had to clear the ground if they wanted crops. It was a hard fight, and took a sight of time and patience to grub out roots and blast rocks and pick up stones that seemed to grow faster than anything else. But they kept on, and now see!”

As she spoke, Becky pointed proudly to the wide, smooth fields lying before them, newly shorn of grass or grain, waving with corn, or rich in garden crops ripening for winter stores. Here and there were rocky strips unreclaimed, as if to show what had been done; and massive stone walls surrounded pasture, field, and garden.

“A good lesson in patience and perseverance, my dear, and does great honor to the men who made the wilderness blossom like the rose," said Mrs. Spenser.

"Then you can't wonder that they loved it and we want to keep it. I guess it would break Mother's heart to sell this place, and we are all working as hard as ever we can to pay off the mortgage. Then we'll be just the happiest family in New Hampshire," said Becky, fondly surveying the old farm-house, the rocky hill, and the precious fields won from the forest.

"You never need fear to lose it; we will see to that if you will let us," began Mrs. Spenser, who was both a rich and a generous woman.

"Oh, thank you! but we won't need help I guess; and if we should, Mrs. Taylor made us promise to come to her," cried Becky. "She found us just in our hardest time, and wanted to fix things then; but we are proud in our way, and Mother said she'd rather work it off if she could. Then what did that dear lady do but talk to the folks round here, and show 'em how a branch railroad down to Peeksville would increase the value of the land, and how good this valley would be for strawberries and asparagus and garden truck if we could only get it to market. Some of the rich men took up the plan, and we hope it will be done this fall. It will be the making of us, for our land is first-rate for small crops, and the children can help at that, and with a deepot close by it would be such easy work. That's what I call helping folks to help themselves. Won't it be grand?"

Becky looked so enthusiastic that Emily could not remain uninterested, though market-gardening did not sound very romantic.

"I hope it will come, and next year we shall see you all hard at it.
What a good woman Mrs. Taylor is!"

"Ain't she? and the sad part of it is, she can't do and enjoy all she wants to, because her health is so poor. She was a country girl, you know, and went to work in the city as waiter in a boarding-house. A rich man fell in love with her and married her, and she took care of him for years, and he left her all his money. She was quite broken down, but she wanted to make his name loved and honored after his death, as he hadn't done any good while he lived; so she gives away heaps, and is never tired of helping poor folks and doing all sorts of grand things to make the world better. I call that splendid!"

"So do I, yet it is only what you are doing in a small way, Becky," said Mrs. Spenser, as the girl paused out of breath. "Mrs. Taylor clears the stones out of people's paths, making their road easier to climb than hers has been, and leaving behind her fruitful fields for others to reap. This is a better work than making verses, for it is the real poetry of life, and brings to those who give themselves to it, no matter in what humble ways, something sweeter than fame and more enduring than fortune."

"So it does! I see that now, and know why we love Father as we do, and want to keep what he worked so hard to give us. He used to say every stone cleared away was just so much help to the boys; and he used to tell me his plans as I trotted after him round the farm, helping all I could, being the oldest, and like him, he said."

Becky paused with full eyes, for not even to these good friends could she ever tell the shifts and struggles in which she had bravely borne her part during the long hard years that had wrested the little homestead from the stony-hearted hills.

The musical chime of a distant clock reminded her that supper time was near, and she sprang up as if much refreshed by this pleasant rest by the way-side. As she pulled out her handkerchief, a little roll of pale blue ribbon fell from her pocket, and Emily caught it up, exclaiming mischievously, "Are you going to make yourself fine next Sunday, when Moses Pennel calls, Becky?"

The girl laughed and blushed as she said, carefully folding up the ribbon, —

"I'm going to do something with it that I like a sight better than that. Poor Moses won't come any more, I guess. I'm not going to leave Mother till the girls can take my place, and only then to teach, if I can get a good school somewhere near."

"We shall see!" and Emily nodded wisely.

"We shall!" and Becky nodded decidedly, as she trudged on up the steep hill beside Mrs. Spenser, while Emily walked slowly behind, poking every stone she saw into the grass, unmindful of the detriment to her delicate shoes, being absorbed in a new and charming idea of trying to follow Mrs. Taylor's example in a small way.

A week later the last night came, and just as they were parting for bed, in rushed one of the boys with the exciting news that the railroad surveyors were in town, the folks talking about the grand enterprise, and the fortune of the place made forever.

Great was the rejoicing in the old farm-house; the boys cheered, the little girls danced, the two mothers dropped a happy tear as they shook each other's hands, and Emily embraced Becky, tenderly exclaiming, — "There, you dear thing, is a great stone shoved out of YOUR way, and a clear road to fortune at last; for I shall tell all my friends to buy your butter and eggs, and fruit and pigs, and everything you send to market on that blessed railroad."

"A keg of our best winter butter is going by stage express to-morrow anyway; and when our apples come, we shan't need a railroad to get 'em to you, my darling dear," answered Becky, holding the delicate girl in her arms with a look and gesture half sisterly, half motherly, wholly fond and grateful.

When Emily got to her room, she found that butter and apples were not all the humble souvenirs offered in return for many comfortable gifts to the whole family.

On the table, in a pretty birch-bark cover, lay several of Becky's best poems neatly copied, as Emily had expressed a wish to keep them; and round the rustic volume, like a ring of red gold, lay a great braid of Becky's hair, tied with the pale blue ribbon she had walked four miles to buy, that her present might look its best.

Of course there were more embraces and kisses, and thanks and loving words, before Emily at last lulled herself to sleep planning a Christmas box, which should supply every wish and want of the entire family if she could find them out.

Next morning they parted; but these were not mere summer friends, and they did not lose sight of one another, though their ways lay far apart. Emily had found a new luxury to bring more pleasure into life, a new medicine to strengthen soul and body; and in helping others, she helped herself wonderfully.

Becky went steadily on her dutiful way, till the homestead was free, the lads able to work the farm alone, the girls old enough to fill her place, and the good mother willing to rest at last among her children. Then Becky gave herself to teaching, — a noble task, for which she was well fitted, and in which she found both profit and pleasure, as she led her flock along the paths from which she removed the stumbling-blocks for their feet, as well as for her own. She put her poetry into her life, and made of it "a grand sweet song" in which beauty and duty rhymed so well that the country girl became a more useful, beloved, and honored woman than if she had tried to sing for fame which never satisfies.

So each symbolical plant stood in its own place, and lived its appointed life. The delicate fern grew in the conservatory among tea-roses and camelias, adding grace to every bouquet of which it formed a part, whether it faded in a ball-room, or was carefully cherished by some poor invalid's bed-side, — a frail thing, yet with tenacious roots and strong stem, nourished by memories of the rocky nook where it had learned its lesson so well. The mountain-laurel clung to the bleak hillside, careless of wintry wind and snow, as its sturdy branches spread year by year, with its evergreen leaves for Christmas cheer, its rosy flowers for spring-time, its fresh beauty free to all as it clothed the wild valley with a charm that made a little poem of the lovely spot where the pines whispered, woodbirds sang, and the hidden brook told the sweet message it brought from the mountain-top where it was born.

The End.

BEHIND A MASK

OR

A WOMAN’S POWER

This novella was first published in 1866 and is set in the Victorian era in Great Britain. The story features Jean Muir, governess for the wealthy Coventry family.

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CHAPTER I

JEAN MUIR

“Has she come?”

“No, Mamma, not yet.”

“I wish it were well over. The thought of it worries and excites me. A cushion for my back, Bella.”

And poor, peevish Mrs. Coventry sank into an easy chair with a nervous sigh and the air of a martyr, while her pretty daughter hovered about her with affectionate solicitude.

“Who are they talking of, Lucia?” asked the languid young man lounging on a couch near his cousin, who bent over her tapestry work with a happy smile on her usually haughty face.

“The new governess, Miss Muir. Shall I tell you about her?”

“No, thank you. I have an inveterate aversion to the whole tribe. I’ve often thanked heaven that I had but one sister, and she a spoiled child, so that I have escaped the infliction of a governess so long.”

“How will you bear it now?” asked Lucia.

“Leave the house while she is in it.”

“No, you won’t. You’re too lazy, Gerald,” called out a younger and more energetic man, from the recess where he stood teasing his dogs.

“I’ll give her a three days’ trial; if she proves endurable I shall not disturb myself; if, as I am sure, she is a bore, I’m off anywhere, anywhere out of her way.”

“I beg you won’t talk in that depressing manner, boys. I dread the coming of a stranger more than you possibly can, but Bella *must* not be neglected; so I have nerved myself to endure this woman, and Lucia is good enough to say she will attend to her after tonight.”

“Don’t be troubled, Mamma. She is a nice person, I dare say, and when once we are used to her, I’ve no doubt we shall be glad to have her, it’s so dull here just now. Lady Sydney said she was a quiet, accomplished, amiable girl, who needed a home, and would be a help to poor stupid me, so try to like her for my sake.”

“I will, dear, but isn’t it getting late? I do hope nothing has happened. Did you tell them to send a carriage to the station for her, Gerald?”

“I forgot it. But it’s not far, it won’t hurt her to walk” was the languid reply.

"It was indolence, not forgetfulness, I know. I'm very sorry; she will think it so rude to leave her to find her way so late. Do go and see to it, Ned."

"Too late, Bella, the train was in some time ago. Give your orders to me next time. Mother and I'll see that they are obeyed," said Edward.

"Ned is just at an age to make a fool of himself for any girl who comes in his way. Have a care of the governess, Lucia, or she will bewitch him."

Gerald spoke in a satirical whisper, but his brother heard him and answered with a good-humored laugh.

"I wish there was any hope of your making a fool of yourself in that way, old fellow. Set me a good example, and I promise to follow it. As for the governess, she is a woman, and should be treated with common civility. I should say a little extra kindness wouldn't be amiss, either, because she is poor, and a stranger."

"That is my dear, good-hearted Ned! We'll stand by poor little Muir, won't we?" And running to her brother, Bella stood on tiptoe to offer him a kiss which he could not refuse, for the rosy lips were pursed up invitingly, and the bright eyes full of sisterly affection.

"I do hope she has come, for, when I make an effort to see anyone, I hate to make it in vain. Punctuality is *such* a virtue, and I know this woman hasn't got it, for she promised to be here at seven, and now it is long after," began Mrs. Coventry, in an injured tone.

Before she could get breath for another complaint, the clock struck seven and the doorbell rang.

"There she is!" cried Bella, and turned toward the door as if to go and meet the newcomer.

But Lucia arrested her, saying authoritatively, "Stay here, child. It is her place to come to you, not yours to go to her."

"Miss Muir," announced a servant, and a little black-robed figure stood in the doorway. For an instant no one stirred, and the governess had time to see and be seen before a word was uttered. All looked at her, and she cast on the household group a keen glance that impressed them curiously; then her eyes fell, and bowing slightly she walked in. Edward came forward and received her with the frank cordiality which nothing could daunt or chill.

"Mother, this is the lady whom you expected. Miss Muir, allow me to apologize for our apparent neglect in not sending for you. There was a mistake about the carriage, or, rather, the lazy fellow to whom the order was given forgot it. Bella, come here."

"Thank you, no apology is needed. I did not expect to be sent for." And the governess meekly sat down without lifting her eyes.

"I am glad to see you. Let me take your things," said Bella, rather shyly, for

Gerald, still lounging, watched the fireside group with languid interest, and Lucia never stirred. Mrs. Coventry took a second survey and began:

"You were punctual, Miss Muir, which pleases me. I'm a sad invalid, as Lady Sydney told you, I hope; so that Miss Coventry's lessons will be directed by my niece, and you will go to her for directions, as she knows what I wish. You will excuse me if I ask you a few questions, for Lady Sydney's note was very brief, and I left everything to her judgment."

"Ask anything you like, madam," answered the soft, sad voice.

"You are Scotch, I believe."

"Yes, madam."

"Are your parents living?"

"I have not a relation in the world."

"Dear me, how sad! Do you mind telling me your age?"

"Nineteen." And a smile passed over Miss Muir's lips, as she folded her hands with an air of resignation, for the catechism was evidently to be a long one.

"So young! Lady Sydney mentioned five-and-twenty, I think, didn't she, Bella?"

"No, Mamma, she only said she thought so. Don't ask such questions. It's not pleasant before us all," whispered Bella.

A quick, grateful glance shone on her from the suddenly lifted eyes of Miss Muir, as she said quietly, "I wish I was thirty, but, as I am not, I do my best to look and seem old."

Of course, every one looked at her then, and all felt a touch of pity at the sight of the pale-faced girl in her plain black dress, with no ornament but a little silver cross at her throat. Small, thin, and colorless she was, with yellow hair, gray eyes, and sharply cut, irregular, but very expressive features. Poverty seemed to have set its bond stamp upon her, and life to have had for her more frost than sunshine. But something in the lines of the mouth betrayed strength, and the clear, low voice had a curious mixture of command and entreaty in its varying tones. Not an attractive woman, yet not an ordinary one; and, as she sat there with her delicate hands lying in her lap, her head bent, and a bitter look on her thin face, she was more interesting than many a blithe and blooming girl. Bella's heart warmed to her at once, and she drew her seat nearer, while Edward went back to his dogs that his presence might not embarrass her.

"You have been ill, I think," continued Mrs. Coventry, who considered this fact the most interesting of all she had heard concerning the governess.

"Yes, madam, I left the hospital only a week ago."

"Are you quite sure it is safe to begin teaching so soon?"

"I have no time to lose, and shall soon gain strength here in the country, if you care to keep me."

"And you are fitted to teach music, French, and drawing?"

"I shall endeavor to prove that I am."

"Be kind enough to go and play an air or two. I can judge by your touch;
I used to play finely when a girl."

Miss Muir rose, looked about her for the instrument, and seeing it at the other end of the room went toward it, passing Gerald and Lucia as if she did not see them. Bella followed, and in a moment forgot everything in admiration. Miss Muir played like one who loved music and was perfect mistress of her art. She charmed them all by the magic of this spell; even indolent Gerald sat up to listen, and Lucia put down her needle, while Ned watched the slender white fingers as they flew, and wondered at the strength and skill which they possessed.

"Please sing," pleaded Bella, as a brilliant overture ended.

With the same meek obedience Miss Muir complied, and began a little Scotch melody, so sweet, so sad, that the girl's eyes filled, and Mrs. Coventry looked for one of her many pocket-handkerchiefs. But suddenly the music ceased, for, with a vain attempt to support herself, the singer slid from her seat and lay before the startled listeners, as white and rigid as if struck with death. Edward caught her up, and, ordering his brother off the couch, laid her there, while Bella chafed her hands, and her mother rang for her maid. Lucia bathed the poor girl's temples, and Gerald, with unwonted energy, brought a glass of wine. Soon Miss Muir's lips trembled, she sighed, then murmured, tenderly, with a pretty Scotch accent, as if wandering in the past, "Bide wi' me, Mither, I'm sae sick an sad here all alone."

"Take a sip of this, and it will do you good, my dear," said Mrs.
Coventry, quite touched by the plaintive words.

The strange voice seemed to recall her. She sat up, looked about her, a little wildly, for a moment, then collected herself and said, with a pathetic look and tone, "Pardon me. I have been on my feet all day, and, in my eagerness to keep my appointment, I forgot to eat since morning. I'm better now; shall I finish the song?"

"By no means. Come and have some tea," said Bella, full of pity and remorse.

"Scene first, very well done," whispered Gerald to his cousin.

Miss Muir was just before them, apparently listening to Mrs. Coventry's remarks upon fainting fits; but she heard, and looked over her shoulders with a gesture like Rachel. Her eyes were gray, but at that instant they seemed black with some strong emotion of anger, pride, or defiance. A curious smile passed over her face as she bowed, and said in her penetrating voice, “Thanks. The last scene shall be still better.”

Young Coventry was a cool, indolent man, seldom conscious of any emotion, any passion, pleasurable or otherwise; but at the look, the tone of the governess, he experienced a new sensation, indefinable, yet strong. He colored and, for the first time in his life, looked abashed. Lucia saw it, and hated Miss Muir with a sudden hatred; for, in all the years she had passed with her cousin, no look or word of hers had possessed such power. Coventry was himself again in an instant, with no trace of that passing change, but a look of interest in his usually dreamy eyes, and a touch of anger in his sarcastic voice.

“What a melodramatic young lady! I shall go tomorrow.”

Lucia laughed, and was well pleased when he sauntered away to bring her a cup of tea from the table where a little scene was just taking place. Mrs. Coventry had sunk into her chair again, exhausted by the flurry of the fainting fit. Bella was busied about her; and Edward, eager to feed the pale governess, was awkwardly trying to make the tea, after a beseeching glance at his cousin which she did not choose to answer. As he upset the caddy and uttered a despairing exclamation, Miss Muir quietly took her place behind the urn, saying with a smile, and a shy glance at the young man, “Allow me to assume my duty at once, and serve you all. I understand the art of making people comfortable in this way. The scoop, please. I can gather this up quite well alone, if you will tell me how your mother likes her tea.”

Edward pulled a chair to the table and made merry over his mishaps, while Miss Muir performed her little task with a skill and grace that made it pleasant to watch her. Coventry lingered a moment after she had given him a steaming cup, to observe her more nearly, while he asked a question or two of his brother. She took no more notice of him than if he had been a statue, and in the middle of the one remark he addressed to her, she rose to take the sugar basin to Mrs. Coventry, who was quite won by the modest, domestic graces of the new governess.

“Really, my dear, you are a treasure; I haven’t tasted such tea since my poor maid Ellis died. Bella never makes it good, and Miss Lucia always forgets the cream. Whatever you do you seem to do well, and that is *such* a comfort.”

“Let me always do this for you, then. It will be a pleasure, madam.” And Miss Muir came back to her seat with a faint color in her cheek which improved her much.

"My brother asked if young Sydney was at home when you left," said Edward, for Gerald would not take the trouble to repeat the question.

Miss Muir fixed her eyes on Coventry, and answered with a slight tremor of the lips, "No, he left home some weeks ago."

The young man went back to his cousin, saying, as he threw himself down beside her, "I shall not go tomorrow, but wait till the three days are out."

"Why?" demanded Lucia.

Lowering his voice he said, with a significant nod toward the governess, "Because I have a fancy that she is at the bottom of Sydney's mystery. He's not been himself lately, and now he is gone without a word. I rather like romances in real life, if they are not too long, or difficult to read."

"Do you think her pretty?"

"Far from it, a most uncanny little specimen."

"Then why fancy Sydney loves her?"

"He is an oddity, and likes sensations and things of that sort."

"What do you mean, Gerald?"

"Get the Muir to look at you, as she did at me, and you will understand. Will you have another cup, Juno?"

"Yes, please." She liked to have him wait upon her, for he did it to no other woman except his mother.

Before he could slowly rise, Miss Muir glided to them with another cup on the salver; and, as Lucia took it with a cold nod, the girl said under her breath, "I think it honest to tell you that I possess a quick ear, and cannot help hearing what is said anywhere in the room. What you say of me is of no consequence, but you may speak of things which you prefer I should not hear; therefore, allow me to warn you." And she was gone again as noiselessly as she came.

"How do you like that?" whispered Coventry, as his cousin sat looking after the girl, with a disturbed expression.

"What an uncomfortable creature to have in the house! I am very sorry I urged her coming, for your mother has taken a fancy to her, and it will be hard to get rid of her," said Lucia, half angry, half amused.

"Hush, she hears every word you say. I know it by the expression of her face, for Ned is talking about horses, and she looks as haughty as ever you did, and that is saying much. Faith, this is getting interesting."

"Hark, she is speaking; I want to hear," and Lucia laid her hand on her cousin's lips. He kissed it, and then idly amused himself with turning the rings to and fro on the slender fingers.

“I have been in France several years, madam, but my friend died and I came back to be with Lady Sydney, till — ” Muir paused an instant, then added, slowly, “till I fell ill. It was a contagious fever, so I went of my own accord to the hospital, not wishing to endanger her.”

“Very right, but are you sure there is no danger of infection now?” asked Mrs. Coventry anxiously.

“None, I assure you. I have been well for some time, but did not leave because I preferred to stay there, than to return to Lady Sydney.”

“No quarrel, I hope? No trouble of any kind?”

“No quarrel, but — well, why not? You have a right to know, and I will not make a foolish mystery out of a very simple thing. As your family, only, is present, I may tell the truth. I did not go back on the young gentleman’s account. Please ask no more.”

“Ah, I see. Quite prudent and proper, Miss Muir. I shall never allude to it again. Thank you for your frankness. Bella, you will be careful not to mention this to young friends; girls gossip sadly, and it would annoy Lady Sydney beyond everything to have this talked of.”

“Very neighborly of Lady S. to send the dangerous young lady here, where there are *two* young gentlemen to be captivated. I wonder why she didn’t keep Sydney after she had caught him,” murmured Coventry to his cousin.

“Because she had the utmost contempt for a titled fool.” Miss Muir dropped the words almost into his ear, as she bent to take her shawl from the sofa corner.

“How the deuce did she get there?” ejaculated Coventry, looking as if he had received another sensation. “She has spirit, though, and upon my word I pity Sydney, if he did try to dazzle her, for he must have got a splendid dismissal.”

“Come and play billiards. You promised, and I hold you to your word,” said Lucia, rising with decision, for Gerald was showing too much interest in another to suit Miss Beaufort.

“I am, as ever, your most devoted. My mother is a charming woman, but I find our evening parties slightly dull, when only my own family are present. Good night, Mamma.” He shook hands with his mother, whose pride and idol he was, and, with a comprehensive nod to the others, strolled after his cousin.

“Now they are gone we can be quite cozy, and talk over things, for I don’t mind Ned any more than I do his dogs,” said Bella, settling herself on her mother’s footstool.

“I merely wish to say, Miss Muir, that my daughter has never had a governess and is sadly backward for a girl of sixteen. I want you to pass the mornings with her, and get her on as rapidly as possible. In the afternoon you will walk or drive with her, and in the evening sit with us here, if you like, or amuse yourself as you please. While in the country we are very quiet, for I cannot bear much company, and when my sons want gaiety, they go away for it. Miss Beaufort oversees the servants, and takes my place as far as possible. I am very delicate and keep my room till evening, except for an airing at noon. We will try each other for a month, and I hope we shall get on quite comfortably together."

"I shall do my best, madam."

One would not have believed that the meek, spiritless voice which uttered these words was the same that had startled Coventry a few minutes before, nor that the pale, patient face could ever have kindled with such sudden fire as that which looked over Miss Muir's shoulder when she answered her young host's speech.

Edward thought within himself, Poor little woman! She has had a hard life. We will try and make it easier while she is here; and began his charitable work by suggesting that she might be tired. She acknowledged she was, and Bella led her away to a bright, cozy room, where with a pretty little speech and a good-night kiss she left her.

When alone Miss Muir's conduct was decidedly peculiar. Her first act was to clench her hands and mutter between her teeth, with passionate force, "I'll not fail again if there is power in a woman's wit and will!" She stood a moment motionless, with an expression of almost fierce disdain on her face, then shook her clenched hand as if menacing some unseen enemy. Next she laughed, and shrugged her shoulders with a true French shrug, saying low to herself, "Yes, the last scene *shall* be better than the first. *Mon dieu*, how tired and hungry I am!"

Kneeling before the one small trunk which held her worldly possessions, she opened it, drew out a flask, and mixed a glass of some ardent cordial, which she seemed to enjoy extremely as she sat on the carpet, musing, while her quick eyes examined every corner of the room.

"Not bad! It will be a good field for me to work in, and the harder the task the better I shall like it. *Merci*, old friend. You put heart and courage into me when nothing else will. Come, the curtain is down, so I may be myself for a few hours, if actresses ever are themselves."

Still sitting on the floor she unbound and removed the long abundant braids from her head, wiped the pink from her face, took out several pearly teeth, and slipping off her dress appeared herself indeed, a haggard, worn, and moody woman of thirty at least. The metamorphosis was wonderful, but the disguise was more in the expression she assumed than in any art of costume or false adornment. Now she was alone, and her mobile features settled into their natural expression, weary, hard, bitter. She had been lovely once, happy, innocent, and tender; but nothing of all this remained to the gloomy woman who leaned there brooding over some wrong, or loss, or disappointment which had darkened all her life. For an hour she sat so, sometimes playing absently with the scanty locks that hung about her face, sometimes lifting the glass to her lips as if the fiery draught warmed her cold blood; and once she half uncovered her breast to eye with a terrible glance the scar of a newly healed wound. At last she rose and crept to bed, like one worn out with weariness and mental pain.

CHAPTER II

A GOOD BEGINNING

Only the housemaids were astir when Miss Muir left her room next morning and quietly found her way into the garden. As she walked, apparently intent upon the flowers, her quick eye scrutinized the fine old house and its picturesque surroundings.

"Not bad," she said to herself, adding, as she passed into the adjoining park, "but the other may be better, and I will have the best."

Walking rapidly, she came out at length upon the wide green lawn which lay before the ancient hall where Sir John Coventry lived in solitary splendor. A stately old place, rich in oaks, well-kept shrubberies, gay gardens, sunny terraces, carved gables, spacious rooms, liveried servants, and every luxury befitting the ancestral home of a rich and honorable race. Miss Muir's eyes brightened as she looked, her step grew firmer, her carriage prouder, and a smile broke over her face; the smile of one well pleased at the prospect of the success of some cherished hope. Suddenly her whole air changed, she pushed back her hat, clasped her hands loosely before her, and seemed absorbed in girlish admiration of the fair scene that could not fail to charm any beauty-loving eye. The cause of this rapid change soon appeared. A hale, handsome man, between fifty and sixty, came through the little gate leading to the park, and, seeing the young stranger, paused to examine her. He had only time for a glance, however; she seemed conscious of his presence in a moment, turned with a startled look, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and looked as if hesitating whether to speak or run away. Gallant Sir John took off his hat and said, with the old-fashioned courtesy which became him well, "I beg your pardon for disturbing you, young lady. Allow me to atone for it by inviting you to walk where you will, and gather what flowers you like. I see you love them, so pray make free with those about you."

With a charming air of maidenly timidity and artlessness, Miss Muir replied, "Oh, thank you, sir! But it is I who should ask pardon for trespassing. I never should have dared if I had not known that Sir John was absent. I always wanted to see this fine old place, and ran over the first thing, to satisfy myself."

"And *are* you satisfied?" he asked, with a smile.

"More than satisfied — I'm charmed; for it is the most beautiful spot I ever saw, and I've seen many famous seats, both at home and abroad," she answered enthusiastically.

"The Hall is much flattered, and so would its master be if he heard you," began the gentleman, with an odd expression.

"I should not praise it to him — at least, not as freely as I have to you, sir," said the girl, with eyes still turned away.

"Why not?" asked her companion, looking much amused.

"I should be afraid. Not that I dread Sir John; but I've heard so many beautiful and noble things about him, and respect him so highly, that I should not dare to say much, lest he should see how I admire and — "

"And what, young lady? Finish, if you please."

"I was going to say, love him. I will say it, for he is an old man, and one cannot help loving virtue and bravery."

Miss Muir looked very earnest and pretty as she spoke, standing there with the sunshine glinting on her yellow hair, delicate face, and downcast eyes. Sir John was not a vain man, but he found it pleasant to hear himself commended by this unknown girl, and felt redoubled curiosity to learn who she was. Too well-bred to ask, or to abash her by avowing what she seemed unconscious of, he left both discoveries to chance; and when she turned, as if to retrace her steps, he offered her the handful of hothouse flowers which he held, saying, with a gallant bow, "In Sir John's name let me give you my little nosegay, with thanks for your good opinion, which, I assure you, is not entirely deserved, for I know him well."

Miss Muir looked up quickly, eyed him an instant, then dropped her eyes, and, coloring deeply, stammered out, "I did not know — I beg your pardon — you are too kind, Sir John."

He laughed like a boy, asking, mischievously, "Why call me Sir John? How do you know that I am not the gardener or the butler?"

"I did not see your face before, and no one but yourself would say that any praise was undeserved," murmured Miss Muir, still overcome with girlish confusion.

"Well, well, we will let that pass, and the next time you come we will be properly introduced. Bella always brings her friends to the Hall, for I am fond of young people."

"I am not a friend. I am only Miss Coventry's governess." And Miss Muir dropped a meek curtsy. A slight change passed over Sir John's manner. Few would have perceived it, but Miss Muir felt it at once, and bit her lips with an angry feeling at her heart. With a curious air of pride, mingled with respect, she accepted the still offered bouquet, returned Sir John's parting bow, and tripped away, leaving the old gentleman to wonder where Mrs. Coventry found such a piquant little governess.

“That is done, and very well for a beginning,” she said to herself as she approached the house.

In a green paddock close by fed a fine horse, who lifted up his head and eyed her inquiringly, like one who expected a greeting. Following a sudden impulse, she entered the paddock and, pulling a handful of clover, invited the creature to come and eat. This was evidently a new proceeding on the part of a lady, and the horse careered about as if bent on frightening the newcomer away.

“I see,” she said aloud, laughing to herself. “I am not your master, and you rebel. Nevertheless, I’ll conquer you, my fine brute.”

Seating herself in the grass, she began to pull daisies, singing idly the while, as if unconscious of the spirited prancings of the horse. Presently he drew nearer, sniffing curiously and eyeing her with surprise. She took no notice, but plaited the daisies and sang on as if he was not there. This seemed to pique the petted creature, for, slowly approaching, he came at length so close that he could smell her little foot and nibble at her dress. Then she offered the clover, uttering caressing words and making soothing sounds, till by degrees and with much coquetting, the horse permitted her to stroke his glossy neck and smooth his mane.

It was a pretty sight — the slender figure in the grass, the high-spirited horse bending his proud head to her hand. Edward Coventry, who had watched the scene, found it impossible to restrain himself any longer and, leaping the wall, came to join the group, saying, with mingled admiration and wonder in countenance and voice, “Good morning, Miss Muir. If I had not seen your skill and courage proved before my eyes, I should be alarmed for your safety. Hector is a wild, wayward beast, and has damaged more than one groom who tried to conquer him.”

“Good morning, Mr. Coventry. Don’t tell tales of this noble creature, who has not deceived my faith in him. Your grooms did not know how to win his heart, and so subdue his spirit without breaking it.”

Miss Muir rose as she spoke, and stood with her hand on Hector’s neck while he ate the grass which she had gathered in the skirt of her dress.

“You have the secret, and Hector is your subject now, though heretofore he has rejected all friends but his master. Will you give him his morning feast? I always bring him bread and play with him before breakfast.”

“Then you are not jealous?” And she looked up at him with eyes so bright and beautiful in expression that the young man wondered he had not observed them before.

“Not I. Pet him as much as you will; it will do him good. He is a solitary fellow, for he scorns his own kind and lives alone, like his master,” he added, half to himself.

“Alone, with such a happy home, Mr. Coventry?” And a softly compassionate glance stole from the bright eyes.

“That was an ungrateful speech, and I retract it for Bella’s sake. Younger sons have no position but such as they can make for themselves, you know, and I’ve had no chance yet.”

“Younger sons! I thought — I beg pardon.” And Miss Muir paused, as if remembering that she had no right to question.

Edward smiled and answered frankly, “Nay, don’t mind me. You thought I was the heir, perhaps. Whom did you take my brother for last night?”

“For some guest who admired Miss Beaufort. I did not hear his name, nor observe him enough to discover who he was. I saw only your land mother, your charming little sister, and — ”

She stopped there, with a half-shy, half-grateful look at the young man which finished the sentence better than any words. He was still a boy, in spite of his one-and-twenty years, and a little color came into his brown cheek as the eloquent eyes met his and fell before them.

“Yes, Bella is a capital girl, and one can’t help loving her. I know you’ll get her on, for, really, she is the most delightful little dunce. My mother’s ill health and Bella’s devotion to her have prevented our attending to her education before. Next winter, when we go to town, she is to come out, and must be prepared for that great event, you know,” he said, choosing a safe subject.

“I shall do my best. And that reminds me that I should report myself to her, instead of enjoying myself here. When one has been ill and shut up a long time, the country is so lovely one is apt to forget duty for pleasure. Please remind me if I am negligent, Mr. Coventry.”

“That name belongs to Gerald. I’m only Mr. Ned here,” he said as they walked toward the house, while Hector followed to the wall and sent a sonorous farewell after them.

Bella came running to meet them, and greeted Miss Muir as if she had made up her mind to like her heartily. “What a lovely bouquet you have got! I never can arrange flowers prettily, which vexes me, for Mamma is so fond of them and cannot go out herself. You have charming taste,” she said, examining the graceful posy which Miss Muir had much improved by adding feathery grasses, delicate ferns, and fragrant wild flowers to Sir John’s exotics.

Putting them into Bella’s hand, she said, in a winning way, “Take them to your mother, then, and ask her if I may have the pleasure of making her a daily nosegay; for I should find real delight in doing it, if it would please her.”

“How kind you are! Of course it would please her. I’ll take them to her while the dew is still on them.” And away flew Bella, eager to give both the flowers and the pretty message to the poor invalid.

Edward stopped to speak to the gardener, and Miss Muir went up the steps alone. The long hall was lined with portraits, and pacing slowly down it she examined them with interest. One caught her eye, and, pausing before it, she scrutinized it carefully. A young, beautiful, but very haughty female face. Miss Muir suspected at once who it was, and gave a decided nod, as if she saw and caught at some unexpected chance. A soft rustle behind her made her look around, and, seeing Lucia, she bowed, half turned, as if for another glance at the picture, and said, as if involuntarily, “How beautiful it is! May I ask if it is an ancestor, Miss Beaufort?”

“It is the likeness of my mother” was the reply, given with a softened voice and eyes that looked up tenderly.

“Ah, I might have known, from the resemblance, but I scarcely saw you last night. Excuse my freedom, but Lady Sydney treated me as a friend, and I forget my position. Allow me.”

As she spoke, Miss Muir stooped to return the handkerchief which had fallen from Lucia’s hand, and did so with a humble mien which touched the other’s heart; for, though a proud, it was also a very generous one.

“Thank you. Are you better, this morning?” she said, graciously. And having received an affirmative reply, she added, as she walked on, “I will show you to the breakfast room, as Bella is not here. It is a very informal meal with us, for my aunt is never down and my cousins are very irregular in their hours. You can always have yours when you like, without waiting for us if you are an early riser.”

Bella and Edward appeared before the others were seated, and Miss Muir quietly ate her breakfast, feeling well satisfied with her hour’s work. Ned recounted her exploit with Hector, Bella delivered her mother’s thanks for the flowers, and Lucia more than once recalled, with pardonable vanity, that the governess had compared her to her lovely mother, expressing by a look as much admiration for the living likeness as for the painted one. All kindly did their best to make the pale girl feel at home, and their cordial manner seemed to warm and draw her out; for soon she put off her sad, meek air and entertained them with gay anecdotes of her life in Paris, her travels in Russia when governess in Prince Jermadoff’s family, and all manner of witty stories that kept them interested and merry long after the meal was over. In the middle of an absorbing adventure, Coventry came in, nodded lazily, lifted his brows, as if surprised at seeing the governess there, and began his breakfast as if the ennui of another day had already taken possession of him. Miss Muir stopped short, and no entreaties could induce her to go on.

“Another time I will finish it, if you like. Now Miss Bella and I should be at our books.” And she left the room, followed by her pupil, taking no notice of the young master of the house, beyond a graceful bow in answer to his careless nod.

“Merciful creature! she goes when I come, and does not make life unendurable by moping about before my eyes. Does she belong to the moral, the melancholy, the romantic, or the dashing class, Ned?” said Gerald, lounging over his coffee as he did over everything he attempted.

“To none of them; she is a capital little woman. I wish you had seen her tame Hector this morning.” And Edward repeated his story.

“Not a bad move on her part,” said Coventry in reply. “She must be an observing as well as an energetic young person, to discover your chief weakness and attack it so soon. First tame the horse, and then the master. It will be amusing to watch the game, only I shall be under the painful necessity of checkmating you both, if it gets serious.”

“You needn’t exert yourself, old fellow, on my account. If I was not above thinking ill of an inoffensive girl, I should say you were the prize best worth winning, and advise you to take care of your own heart, if you’ve got one, which I rather doubt.”

“I often doubt it, myself; but I fancy the little Scotchwoman will not be able to satisfy either of us upon that point. How does your highness like her?” asked Coventry of his cousin, who sat near him.

“Better than I thought I should. She is well-bred, unassuming, and very entertaining when she likes. She has told us some of the wittiest stories I’ve heard for a long time. Didn’t our laughter wake you?” replied Lucia.

“Yes. Now atone for it by amusing me with a repetition of these witty tales.”

“That is impossible; her accent and manner are half the charm,” said Ned. “I wish you had kept away ten minutes longer, for your appearance spoilt the best story of all.”

“Why didn’t she go on?” asked Coventry, with a ray of curiosity.

“You forget that she overheard us last night, and must feel that you consider her a bore. She has pride, and no woman forgets speeches like those you made,” answered Lucia.

“Or forgives them, either, I believe. Well, I must be resigned to languish under her displeasure then. On Sydney’s account I take a slight interest in her; not that I expect to learn anything from her, for a woman with a mouth like that never confides or confesses anything. But I have a fancy to see what captivated him; for captivated he was, beyond a doubt, and by no lady whom he met in society. Did you ever hear anything of it, Ned?” asked Gerald.

"I'm not fond of scandal or gossip, and never listen to either." With which remark Edward left the room.

Lucia was called out by the housekeeper a moment after, and Coventry left to the society most wearisome to him, namely his own. As he entered, he had caught a part of the story which Miss Muir had been telling, and it had excited his curiosity so much that he found himself wondering what the end could be and wishing that he might hear it.

What the deuce did she run away for, when I came in? he thought. If she *is* amusing, she must make herself useful; for it's intensely dull, I own, here, in spite of Lucia. Hey, what's that?

It was a rich, sweet voice, singing a brilliant Italian air, and singing it with an expression that made the music doubly delicious. Stepping out of the French window, Coventry strolled along the sunny terrace, enjoying the song with the relish of a connoisseur. Others followed, and still he walked and listened, forgetful of weariness or tune. As one exquisite air ended, he involuntarily applauded. Miss Muir's face appeared for an instant, then vanished, and no more music followed, though Coventry lingered, hoping to hear the voice again. For music was the one thing of which he never wearied, and neither Lucia nor Bella possessed skill enough to charm him. For an hour he loitered on the terrace or the lawn, basking in the sunshine, too indolent to seek occupation or society. At length Bella came out, hat in hand, and nearly stumbled over her brother, who lay on the grass.

"You lazy man, have you been dawdling here all this time?" she said, looking down at him.

"No, I've been very busy. Come and tell me how you've got on with the little dragon."

"Can't stop. She bade me take a run after my French, so that I might be ready for my drawing, and so I must."

"It's too warm to run. Sit down and amuse your deserted brother, who has had no society but bees and lizards for an hour."

He drew her down as he spoke, and Bella obeyed; for, in spite of his indolence, he was one to whom all submitted without dreaming of refusal.

"What have you been doing? Muddling your poor little brains with all manner of elegant rubbish?"

"No, I've been enjoying myself immensely. Jean is *so* interesting, so kind and clever. She didn't bore me with stupid grammar, but just talked to me in such pretty French that I got on capitally, and like it as I never expected to, after Lucia's dull way of teaching it."

"What did you talk about?"

"Oh, all manner of things. She asked questions, and I answered, and she corrected me."

"Questions about our affairs, I suppose?"

"Not one. She don't care two sous for us or our affairs. I thought she might like to know what sort of people we were, so I told her about Papa's sudden death, Uncle John, and you, and Ned; but in the midst of it she said, in her quiet way, 'You are getting too confidential, my dear. It is not best to talk too freely of one's affairs to strangers. Let us speak of something else.'"

"What were you talking of when she said that, Bell?"

"You."

"Ah, then no wonder she was bored."

"She was tired of my chatter, and didn't hear half I said; for she was busy sketching something for me to copy, and thinking of something more interesting than the Coventrys."

"How do you know?"

"By the expression of her face. Did you like her music, Gerald?"

"Yes. Was she angry when I clapped?"

"She looked surprised, then rather proud, and shut the piano at once, though I begged her to go on. Isn't Jean a pretty name?"

"Not bad; but why don't you call her Miss Muir?"

"She begged me not. She hates it, and loves to be called Jean, alone. I've imagined such a nice little romance about her, and someday I shall tell her, for I'm sure she has had a love trouble."

"Don't get such nonsense into your head, but follow Miss Muir's well-bred example and don't be curious about other people's affairs. Ask her to sing tonight; it amuses me."

"She won't come down, I think. We've planned to read and work in my boudoir, which is to be our study now. Mamma will stay in her room, so you and Lucia can have the drawing room all to yourselves."

"Thank you. What will Ned do?"

"He will amuse Mamma, he says. Dear old Ned! I wish you'd stir about and get him his commission. He is so impatient to be doing something and yet so proud he won't ask again, after you have neglected it so many times and refused Uncle's help."

"I'll attend to it very soon; don't worry me, child. He will do very well for a time, quietly here with us."

"You always say that, yet you know he chafes and is unhappy at being dependent on you. Mamma and I don't mind; but he is a man, and it frets him. He said he'd take matters into his own hands soon, and then you may be sorry you were so slow in helping him."

"Miss Muir is looking out of the window. You'd better go and take your run, else she will scold."

"Not she. I'm not a bit afraid of her, she's so gentle and sweet. I'm fond of her already. You'll get as brown as Ned, lying here in the sun. By the way, Miss Muir agrees with me in thinking him handsomer than you."

"I admire her taste and quite agree with her."

"She said he was manly, and that was more attractive than beauty in a man. She does express things so nicely. Now I'm off." And away danced Bella, humming the burden of Miss Muir's sweetest song.

"'Energy is more attractive than beauty in a man.' She is right, but how the deuce *can* a man be energetic, with nothing to expend his energies upon?" mused Coventry, with his hat over his eyes.

A few moments later, the sweep of a dress caught his ear. Without stirring, a sidelong glance showed him Miss Muir coming across the terrace, as if to join Bella. Two stone steps led down to the lawn. He lay near them, and Miss Muir did not see him till close upon him. She started and slipped on the last step, recovered herself, and glided on, with a glance of unmistakable contempt as she passed the recumbent figure of the apparent sleeper. Several things in Bella's report had nettled him, but this look made him angry, though he would not own it, even to himself.

"Gerald, come here, quick!" presently called Bella, from the rustic seat where she stood beside her governess, who sat with her hand over her face as if in pain.

Gathering himself up, Coventry slowly obeyed, but involuntarily quickened his pace as he heard Miss Muir say, "Don't call him; *he* can do nothing"; for the emphasis on the word "he" was very significant.

"What is it, Bella?" he asked, looking rather wider awake than usual.

"You startled Miss Muir and made her turn her ankle. Now help her to the house, for she is in great pain; and don't lie there anymore to frighten people like a snake in the grass," said his sister petulantly.

"I beg your pardon. Will you allow me?" And Coventry offered his arm.

Miss Muir looked up with the expression which annoyed him and answered coldly, "Thank you, Miss Bella will do as well."

"Permit me to doubt that." And with a gesture too decided to be resisted, Coventry drew her arm through his and led her into the house. She submitted quietly, said the pain would soon be over, and when settled on the couch in Bella's room dismissed him with the briefest thanks. Considering the unwonted exertion he had made, he thought she might have been a little more grateful, and went away to Lucia, who always brightened when he came.

No more was seen of Miss Muir till teatime; for now, while the family were in retirement, they dined early and saw no company. The governess had excused herself at dinner, but came down in the evening a little paler than usual and with a slight limp in her gait. Sir John was there, talking with his nephew, and they merely acknowledged her presence by the sort of bow which gentlemen bestow on governesses. As she slowly made her way to her place behind the urn, Coventry said to his brother, “Take her a footstool, and ask her how she is, Ned.” Then, as if necessary to account for his politeness to his uncle, he explained how he was the cause of the accident.

“Yes, yes. I understand. Rather a nice little person, I fancy. Not exactly a beauty, but accomplished and well-bred, which is better for one of her class.”

“Some tea, Sir John?” said a soft voice at his elbow, and there was Miss Muir, offering cups to the gentlemen.

“Thank you, thank you,” said Sir John, sincerely hoping she had overheard him.

As Coventry took his, he said graciously, “You are very forgiving, Miss Muir, to wait upon me, after I have caused you so much pain.”

“It is my duty, sir” was her reply, in a tone which plainly said, “but not my pleasure.” And she returned to her place, to smile, and chat, and be charming, with Bella and her brother.

Lucia, hovering near her uncle and Gerald, kept them to herself, but was disturbed to find that their eyes often wandered to the cheerful group about the table, and that their attention seemed distracted by the frequent bursts of laughter and fragments of animated conversation which reached them. In the midst of an account of a tragic affair which she endeavored to make as interesting and pathetic as possible, Sir John burst into a hearty laugh, which betrayed that he had been listening to a livelier story than her own. Much annoyed, she said hastily, “I knew it would be so! Bella has no idea of the proper manner in which to treat a governess. She and Ned will forget the difference of rank and spoil that person for her work. She is inclined to be presumptuous already, and if my aunt won’t trouble herself to give Miss Muir a hint in time, I shall.”

“Wait until she has finished that story, I beg of you,” said Coventry, for Sir John was already off.

“If you find that nonsense so entertaining, why don’t you follow Uncle’s example? I don’t need you.”

“Thank you. I will.” And Lucia was deserted.

But Miss Muir had ended and, beckoning to Bella, left the room, as if quite unconscious of the honor conferred upon her or the dullness she left behind her. Ned went up to his mother, Gerald returned to make his peace with Lucia, and, bidding them good-night, Sir John turned homeward. Strolling along the terrace, he came to the lighted window of Bella's study, and wishing to say a word to her, he half pushed aside the curtain and looked in. A pleasant little scene. Bella working busily, and near her in a low chair, with the light falling on her fair hair and delicate profile, sat Miss Muir reading aloud. "Novels!" thought Sir John, and smiled at them for a pair of romantic girls. But pausing to listen a moment before he spoke, he found it was no novel, but history, read with a fluency which made every fact interesting, every sketch of character memorable, by the dramatic effect given to it. Sir John was fond of history, and failing eyesight often curtailed his favorite amusement. He had tried readers, but none suited him, and he had given up the plan. Now as he listened, he thought how pleasantly the smoothly flowing voice would wile away his evenings, and he envied Bella her new acquisition.

A bell rang, and Bella sprang up, saying, "Wait for me a minute. I must run to Mamma, and then we will go on with this charming prince."

Away she went, and Sir John was about to retire as quietly as he came, when Miss Muir's peculiar behavior arrested him for an instant. Dropping the book, she threw her arms across the table, laid her head down upon them, and broke into a passion of tears, like one who could bear restraint no longer. Shocked and amazed, Sir John stole away; but all that night the kindhearted gentleman puzzled his brains with conjectures about his niece's interesting young governess, quite unconscious that she intended he should do so.

CHAPTER III

PASSION AND PIQUE

For several weeks the most monotonous tranquillity seemed to reign at Coventry House, and yet, unseen, unsuspected, a storm was gathering. The arrival of Miss Muir seemed to produce a change in everyone, though no one could have explained how or why. Nothing could be more unobtrusive and retiring than her manners. She was devoted to Bella, who soon adored her, and was only happy when in her society. She ministered in many ways to Mrs. Coventry's comfort, and that lady declared there never was such a nurse. She amused, interested and won Edward with her wit and womanly sympathy. She made Lucia respect and envy her for her accomplishments, and piqued indolent Gerald by her persistent avoidance of him, while Sir John was charmed with her respectful deference and the graceful little attentions she paid him in a frank and artless way, very winning to the lonely old man. The very servants liked her; and instead of being, what most governesses are, a forlorn creature hovering between superiors and inferiors, Jean Muir was the life of the house, and the friend of all but two.

Lucia disliked her, and Coventry distrusted her; neither could exactly say why, and neither owned the feeling, even to themselves. Both watched her covertly yet found no shortcoming anywhere. Meek, modest, faithful, and invariably sweet-tempered — they could complain of nothing and wondered at their own doubts, though they could not banish them.

It soon came to pass that the family was divided, or rather that two members were left very much to themselves. Pleading timidity, Jean Muir kept much in Bella's study and soon made it such a pleasant little nook that Ned and his mother, and often Sir John, came in to enjoy the music, reading, or cheerful chat which made the evenings so gay. Lucia at first was only too glad to have her cousin to herself, and he too lazy to care what went on about him. But presently he wearied of her society, for she was not a brilliant girl, and possessed few of those winning arts which charm a man and steal into his heart. Rumors of the merry-makings that went on reached him and made him curious to share them; echoes of fine music went sounding through the house, as he lounged about the empty drawing room; and peals of laughter reached him while listening to Lucia's grave discourse.

She soon discovered that her society had lost its charm, and the more eagerly she tried to please him, the more signally she failed. Before long Coventry fell into a habit of strolling out upon the terrace of an evening, and amusing himself by passing and repassing the window of Bella’s room, catching glimpses of what was going on and reporting the result of his observations to Lucia, who was too proud to ask admission to the happy circle or to seem to desire it.

“I shall go to London tomorrow, Lucia,” Gerald said one evening, as he came back from what he called “a survey,” looking very much annoyed.

“To London?” exclaimed his cousin, surprised.

“Yes, I must bestir myself and get Ned his commission, or it will be all over with him.”

“How do you mean?”

“He is falling in love as fast as it is possible for a boy to do it. That girl has bewitched him, and he will make a fool of himself very soon, unless I put a stop to it.”

“I was afraid she would attempt a flirtation. These persons always do, they are such a mischief-making race.”

“Ah, but there you are wrong, as far as little Muir is concerned. She does not flirt, and Ned has too much sense and spirit to be caught by a silly coquette. She treats him like an elder sister, and mingles the most attractive friendliness with a quiet dignity that captivates the boy. I’ve been watching them, and there he is, devouring her with his eyes, while she reads a fascinating novel in the most fascinating style. Bella and Mamma are absorbed in the tale, and see nothing; but Ned makes himself the hero, Miss Muir the heroine, and lives the love scene with all the ardor of a man whose heart has just waked up. Poor lad! Poor lad!”

Lucia looked at her cousin, amazed by the energy with which he spoke, the anxiety in his usually listless face. The change became him, for it showed what he might be, making one regret still more what he was. Before she could speak, he was gone again, to return presently, laughing, yet looking a little angry.

“What now?” she asked.

“‘Listeners never hear any good of themselves’ is the truest of proverbs. I stopped a moment to look at Ned, and heard the following flattering remarks. Mamma is gone, and Ned was asking little Muir to sing that delicious barcarole she gave us the other evening.

“‘Not now, not here,’ she said.

“‘Why not? You sang it in the drawing room readily enough,’ said Ned, imploringly.

“‘That is a very different thing,’ and she looked at him with a little shake of the head, for he was folding his hands and doing the passionate pathetic.

“‘Come and sing it there then,’ said innocent Bella. ‘Gerald likes your voice so much, and complains that you will never sing to him.’

"'He never asks me,' said Muir, with an odd smile.

"'He is too lazy, but he wants to hear you.'

"'When he asks me, I will sing — if I feel like it.' And she shrugged her shoulders with a provoking gesture of indifference.

"'But it amuses him, and he gets so bored down here,' began stupid little Bella. 'Don't be shy or proud, Jean, but come and entertain the poor old fellow.'

"'No, thank you. I engaged to teach Miss Coventry, not to amuse Mr. Coventry' was all the answer she got.

"'You amuse Ned, why not Gerald? Are you afraid of him?' asked Bella.

"Miss Muir laughed, such a scornful laugh, and said, in that peculiar tone of hers, 'I cannot fancy anyone being *afraid* of your elder brother.'

"'I am, very often, and so would you be, if you ever saw him angry,' And Bella looked as if I'd beaten her.

"'Does he ever wake up enough to be angry?' asked that girl, with an air of surprise. Here Ned broke into a fit of laughter, and they are at it now, I fancy, by the sound."

"Their foolish gossip is not worth getting excited about, but I certainly would send Ned away. It's no use trying to get rid of 'that girl,' as you say, for my aunt is as deluded about her as Ned and Bella, and she really does get the child along splendidly. Dispatch Ned, and then she can do no harm," said Lucia, watching Coventry's altered face as he stood in the moonlight, just outside the window where she sat.

"Have you no fears for me?" he asked smiling, as if ashamed of his momentary petulance.

"No, have you for yourself?" And a shade of anxiety passed over her face.

"I defy the Scotch witch to enchant me, except with her music," he added, moving down the terrace again, for Jean was singing like a nightingale.

As the song ended, he put aside the curtain, and said, abruptly, "Has anyone any commands for London? I am going there tomorrow."

"A pleasant trip to you," said Ned carelessly, though usually his brother's movements interested him extremely.

"I want quantities of things, but I must ask Mamma first." And Bella began to make a list.

"May I trouble you with a letter, Mr. Coventry?"

Jean Muir turned around on the music stool and looked at him with the cold keen glance which always puzzled him.

He bowed, saying, as if to them all, “I shall be off by the early train, so you must give me your orders tonight.”

“Then come away, Ned, and leave Jean to write her letter.”

And Bella took her reluctant brother from the room.

“I will give you the letter in the morning,” said Miss Muir, with a curious quiver in her voice, and the look of one who forcibly suppressed some strong emotion.

“As you please.” And Coventry went back to Lucia, wondering who Miss Muir was going to write to. He said nothing to his brother of the purpose which took him to town, lest a word should produce the catastrophe which he hoped to prevent; and Ned, who now lived in a sort of dream, seemed to forget Gerald’s existence altogether.

With unwonted energy Coventry was astir seven next morning. Lucia gave him his breakfast, and as he left the room to order the carriage, Miss Muir came gliding downstairs, very pale and heavy-eyed (with a sleepless, tearful night, he thought) and, putting a delicate little letter into his hand, said hurriedly, “Please leave this at Lady Sydney’s, and if you see her, say ‘I have remembered.’“

Her peculiar manner and peculiar message struck him. His eye involuntarily glanced at the address of the letter and read young Sydney’s name. Then, conscious of his mistake, he thrust it into his pocket with a hasty “Good morning,” and left Miss Muir standing with one hand pressed on her heart, the other half extended as if to recall the letter.

All the way to London, Coventry found it impossible to forget the almost tragical expression of the girl’s face, and it haunted him through the bustle of two busy days. Ned’s affair was put in the way of being speedily accomplished, Bella’s commissions were executed, his mother’s pet delicacies provided for her, and a gift for Lucia, whom the family had given him for his future mate, as he was too lazy to choose for himself.

Jean Muir’s letter he had not delivered, for Lady Sydney was in the country and her townhouse closed. Curious to see how she would receive his tidings, he went quietly in on his arrival at home. Everyone had dispersed to dress for dinner except Miss Muir, who was in the garden, the servant said.

“Very well, I have a message for her”; and, turning, the “young master,” as they called him, went to seek her. In a remote corner he saw her sitting alone, buried in thought. As his step roused her, a look of surprise, followed by one of satisfaction, passed over her face, and, rising, she beckoned to him with an almost eager gesture. Much amazed, he went to her and offered the letter, saying kindly, “I regret that I could not deliver it. Lady Sydney is in the country, and I did not like to post it without your leave. Did I do right?”

"Quite right, thank you very much — it is better so." And with an air of relief, she tore the letter to atoms, and scattered them to the wind.

More amazed than ever, the young man was about to leave her when she said, with a mixture of entreaty and command, "Please stay a moment. I want to speak to you."

He paused, eyeing her with visible surprise, for a sudden color dyed her cheeks, and her lips trembled. Only for a moment, then she was quite self-possessed again. Motioning him to the seat she had left, she remained standing while she said, in a low, rapid tone full of pain and of decision:

"Mr. Coventry, as the head of the house I want to speak to you, rather than to your mother, of a most unhappy affair which has occurred during your absence. My month of probation ends today; your mother wishes me to remain; I, too, wish it sincerely, for I am happy here, but I ought not. Read this, and you will see why."

She put a hastily written note into his hand and watched him intently while he read it. She saw him flush with anger, bite his lips, and knit his brows, then assume his haughtiest look, as he lifted his eyes and said in his most sarcastic tone, "Very well for a beginning. The boy has eloquence. Pity that it should be wasted. May I ask if you have replied to this rhapsody?"

"I have."

"And what follows? He begs you 'to fly with him, to share his fortunes, and be the good angel of his life.' Of course you consent?"

There was no answer, for, standing erect before him, Miss Muir regarded him with an expression of proud patience, like one who expected reproaches, yet was too generous to resent them. Her manner had its effect. Dropping his bitter tone, Coventry asked briefly, "Why do you show me this? What can I do?"

"I show it that you may see how much in earnest 'the boy' is, and how open I desire to be. You can control, advise, and comfort your brother, and help me to see what is my duty."

"You love him?" demanded Coventry bluntly.

"No!" was the quick, decided answer.

"Then why make him love you?"

"I never tried to do it. Your sister will testify that I have endeavored to avoid him as I — " And he finished the sentence with an unconscious tone of pique, "As you have avoided me."

She bowed silently, and he went on:

"I will do you the justice to say that nothing can be more blameless than your conduct toward myself; but why allow Ned to haunt you evening after evening? What could you expect of a romantic boy who had nothing to do but lose his heart to the first attractive woman he met?"

A momentary glisten shone in Jean Muir's steel-blue eyes as the last words left the young man's lips; but it was gone instantly, and her voice was full of reproach, as she said, steadily, impulsively, "If the 'romantic boy' had been allowed to lead the life of a man, as he longed to do, he would have had no time to lose his heart to the first sorrowful girl whom he pitied. Mr. Coventry, the fault is yours. Do not blame your brother, but generously own your mistake and retrieve it in the speediest, kindest manner."

For an instant Gerald sat dumb. Never since his father died had anyone reproved him; seldom in his life had he been blamed. It was a new experience, and the very novelty added to the effect. He saw his fault, regretted it, and admired the brave sincerity of the girl in telling him of it. But he did not know how to deal with the case, and was forced to confess not only past negligence but present incapacity. He was as honorable as he was proud, and with an effort he said frankly, "You are right, Miss Muir. I *am* to blame, yet as soon as I saw the danger, I tried to avert it. My visit to town was on Ned's account; he will have his commission very soon, and then he will be sent out of harm's way. Can I do more?"

"No, it is too late to send him away with a free and happy heart. He must bear his pain as he can, and it may help to make a man of him," she said sadly.

"He'll soon forget," began Coventry, who found the thought of gay Ned suffering an uncomfortable one.

"Yes, thank heaven, that is possible, for men."

Miss Muir pressed her hands together, with a dark expression on her half-averted face. Something in her tone, her manner, touched Coventry; he fancied that some old wound bled, some bitter memory awoke at the approach of a new lover. He was young, heart-whole, and romantic, under all his cool nonchalance of manner. This girl, who he fancied loved his friend and who was, beloved by his brother, became an object of interest to him. He pitied her, desired to help her, and regretted his past distrust, as a chivalrous man always regrets injustice to a woman. She was happy here, poor, homeless soul, and she should stay. Bella loved her, his mother took comfort in her, and when Ned was gone, no one's peace would be endangered by her winning ways, her rich accomplishments. These thoughts swept through his mind during a brief pause, and when he spoke, it was to say gently:

"Miss Muir, I thank you for the frankness which must have been painful to you, and I will do my best to be worthy of the confidence which you repose in me. You were both discreet and kind to speak only to me. This thing would have troubled my mother extremely, and have done no good. I shall see Ned, and try and repair my long neglect as promptly as possible. I know you will help me, and in return let me beg of you to remain, for he will soon be gone."

She looked at him with eyes full of tears, and there was no coolness in the voice that answered softly, "You are too kind, but I had better go; it is not wise to stay."

"Why not?"

She colored beautifully, hesitated, then spoke out in the clear, steady voice which was her greatest charm, "If I had known there were sons in this family, I never should have come. Lady Sydney spoke only of your sister, and when I found two gentlemen, I was troubled, because — I am so unfortunate — or rather, people are so kind as to like me more than I deserve. I thought I could stay a month, at least, as your brother spoke of going away, and you were already affianced, but — "

"I am not affianced."

Why he said that, Coventry could not tell, but the words passed his lips hastily and could not be recalled. Jean Muir took the announcement oddly enough. She shrugged her shoulders with an air of extreme annoyance, and said almost rudely, "Then you should be; you will be soon. But that is nothing to me. Miss Beaufort wishes me gone, and I am too proud to remain and become the cause of disunion in a happy family. No, I will go, and go at once."

She turned away impetuously, but Edward's arm detained her, and Edward's voice demanded, tenderly, "Where will you go, my Jean?"

The tender touch and name seemed to rob her of her courage and calmness, for, leaning on her lover, she hid her face and sobbed audibly.

"Now don't make a scene, for heaven's sake," began Coventry impatiently, as his brother eyed him fiercely, divining at once what had passed, for his letter was still in Gerald's hand and Jean's last words had reached her lover's ear.

"Who gave you the right to read that, and to interfere in my affairs?" demanded Edward hotly.

"Miss Muir" was the reply, as Coventry threw away the paper.

"And you add to the insult by ordering her out of the house," cried Ned with increasing wrath.

"On the contrary, I beg her to remain."

"The deuce you do! And why?"

"Because she is useful and happy here, and I am unwilling that your folly should rob her of a home which she likes."

"You are very thoughtful and devoted all at once, but I beg you will not trouble yourself. Jean's happiness and home will be my care now."

"My dear boy, do be reasonable. The thing is impossible. Miss Muir sees it herself; she came to tell me, to ask how best to arrange matters without troubling my mother. I’ve been to town to attend to your affairs, and you may be off now very soon.”

“I have no desire to go. Last month it was the wish of my heart. Now I’ll accept nothing from you.” And Edward turned moodily away from his brother.

“What folly! Ned, you *must* leave home. It is all arranged and cannot be given up now. A change is what you need, and it will make a man of you. We shall miss you, of course, but you will be where you’ll see something of life, and that is better for you than getting into mischief here.”

“Are you going away, Jean?” asked Edward, ignoring his brother entirely and bending over the girl, who still hid her face and wept. She did not speak, and Gerald answered for her.

“No, why should she if you are gone?”

“Do you mean to stay?” asked the lover eagerly of Jean.

“I wish to remain, but — ” She paused and looked up. Her eyes went from one face to the other, and she added, decidedly, “Yes, I must go, it is not wise to stay even when you are gone.”

Neither of the young men could have explained why that hurried glance affected them as it did, but each felt conscious of a willful desire to oppose the other. Edward suddenly felt that his brother loved Miss Muir, and was bent on removing her from his way. Gerald had a vague idea that Miss Muir feared to remain on his account, and he longed to show her that he was quite safe. Each felt angry, and each showed it in a different way, one being violent, the other satirical.

“You are right, Jean, this is not the place for you; and you must let me see you in a safer home before I go,” said Ned, significantly.

“It strikes me that this will be a particularly safe home when your dangerous self is removed,” began Coventry, with an aggravating smile of calm superiority.

“And *I* think that I leave a more dangerous person than myself behind me, as poor Lucia can testify.”

“Be careful what you say, Ned, or I shall be forced to remind you that I am master here. Leave Lucia’s name out of this disagreeable affair, if you please.”

“You *are* master here, but not of me, or my actions, and you have no right to expect obedience or respect, for you inspire neither. Jean, I asked you to go with me secretly; now I ask you openly to share my fortune. In my brother’s presence I ask, and *will* have an answer.”

He caught her hand impetuously, with a defiant look at Coventry, who still smiled, as if at boy’s play, though his eyes were kindling and his face changing with the still, white wrath which is more terrible than any sudden outburst. Miss

Muir looked frightened; she shrank away from her passionate young lover, cast an appealing glance at Gerald, and seemed as if she longed to claim his protection yet dared not.

"Speak!" cried Edward, desperately. "Don't look to him, tell me truly, with your own lips, do you, can you love me, Jean?"

"I have told you once. Why pain me by forcing another hard reply," she said pitifully, still shrinking from his grasp and seeming to appeal to his brother.

"You wrote a few lines, but I'll not be satisfied with that. You shall answer; I've seen love in your eyes, heard it in your voice, and I know it is hidden in your heart. You fear to own it; do not hesitate, no one can part us — speak, Jean, and satisfy me."

Drawing her hand decidedly away, she went a step nearer Coventry, and answered, slowly, distinctly, though her lips trembled, and she evidently dreaded the effect of her words, "I will speak, and speak truly. You have seen love in my face; it is in my heart, and I do not hesitate to own it, cruel as it is to force the truth from me, but this love is not for you. Are you satisfied?"

He looked at her with a despairing glance and stretched his hand toward her beseechingly. She seemed to fear a blow, for suddenly she clung to Gerald with a faint cry. The act, the look of fear, the protecting gesture Coventry involuntarily made were too much for Edward, already excited by conflicting passions. In a paroxysm of blind wrath, he caught up a large pruning knife left there by the gardener, and would have dealt his brother a fatal blow had he not warded it off with his arm. The stroke fell, and another might have followed had not Miss Muir with unexpected courage and strength wrested the knife from Edward and flung it into the little pond near by. Coventry dropped down upon the seat, for the blood poured from a deep wound in his arm, showing by its rapid flow that an artery had been severed. Edward stood aghast, for with the blow his fury passed, leaving him overwhelmed with remorse and shame.

Gerald looked up at him, smiled faintly, and said, with no sign of reproach or anger, "Never mind, Ned. Forgive and forget. Lend me a hand to the house, and don't disturb anyone. It's not much, I dare say." But his lips whitened as he spoke, and his strength failed him. Edward sprang to support him, and Miss Muir, forgetting her terrors, proved herself a girl of uncommon skill and courage.

"Quick! Lay him down. Give me your handkerchief, and bring some water," she said, in a tone of quiet command. Poor Ned obeyed and watched her with breathless suspense while she tied the handkerchief tightly around the arm, thrust the handle of his riding whip underneath, and pressed it firmly above the severed artery to stop the dangerous flow of blood.

“Dr. Scott is with your mother, I think. Go and bring him here” was the next order; and Edward darted away, thankful to do anything to ease the terror which possessed him. He was gone some minutes, and while they waited Coventry watched the girl as she knelt beside him, bathing his face with one hand while with the other she held the bandage firmly in its place. She was pale, but quite steady and self-possessed, and her eyes shone with a strange brilliancy as she looked down at him. Once, meeting his look of grateful wonder, she smiled a reassuring smile that made her lovely, and said, in a soft, sweet tone never used to him before, “Be quiet. There is no danger. I will stay by you till help comes.”

Help did come speedily, and the doctor’s first words were “Who improvised that tourniquet?”

“She did,” murmured Coventry.

“Then you may thank her for saving your life. By Jove! It was capitally done”; and the old doctor looked at the girl with as much admiration as curiosity in his face.

“Never mind that. See to the wound, please, while I ran for bandages, and salts, and wine.”

Miss Muir was gone as she spoke, so fleetly that it was in vain to call her back or catch her. During her brief absence, the story was told by repentant Ned and the wound examined.

“Fortunately I have my case of instruments with me,” said the doctor, spreading on the bench a long array of tiny, glittering implements of torture. “Now, Mr. Ned, come here, and hold the arm in that way, while I tie the artery. Hey! That will never do. Don’t tremble so, man, look away and hold it steadily.”

“I can’t!” And poor Ned turned faint and white, not at the sight but with the bitter thought that he had longed to kill his brother.

“I will hold it,” and a slender white hand lifted the bare and bloody arm so firmly, steadily, that Coventry sighed a sigh of relief, and Dr. Scott fell to work with an emphatic nod of approval.

It was soon over, and while Edward ran in to bid the servants beware of alarming their mistress, Dr. Scott put up his instruments and Miss Muir used salts, water, and wine so skillfully that Gerald was able to walk to his room, leaning on the old man, while the girl supported the wounded arm, as no sling could be made on the spot. As he entered the chamber, Coventry turned, put out his left hand, and with much feeling in his fine eyes said simply, “Miss Muir, I thank you.”

The color came up beautifully in her pale cheeks as she pressed the hand and without a word vanished from the room. Lucia and the housekeeper came bustling in, and there was no lack of attendance on the invalid. He soon wearied of it, and sent them all away but Ned, who remorsefully haunted the chamber, looking like a comely young Cain and feeling like an outcast.

"Come here, lad, and tell me all about it. I was wrong to be domineering. Forgive me, and believe that I care for your happiness more sincerely than for my own."

These frank and friendly words healed the breach between the two brothers and completely conquered Ned. Gladly did he relate his love passages, for no young lover ever tires of that amusement if he has a sympathizing auditor, and Gerald *was* sympathetic now. For an hour did he lie listening patiently to the history of the growth of his brother's passion. Emotion gave the narrator eloquence, and Jean Muir's character was painted in glowing colors. All her unsuspected kindness to those about her was dwelt upon; all her faithful care, her sisterly interest in Bella, her gentle attentions to their mother, her sweet forbearance with Lucia, who plainly showed her dislike, and most of all, her friendly counsel, sympathy, and regard for Ned himself.

"She would make a man of me. She puts strength and courage into me as no one else can. She is unlike any girl I ever saw; there's no sentimentality about her; she is wise, and kind, and sweet. She says what she means, looks you straight in the eye, and is as true as steel. I've tried her, I know her, and — ah, Gerald, I love her so!"

Here the poor lad leaned his face into his hands and sighed a sigh that made his brother's heart ache.

"Upon my soul, Ned, I feel for you; and if there was no obstacle on her part, I'd do my best for you. She loves Sydney, and so there is nothing for it but to bear your fate like a man."

"Are you sure about Sydney? May it not be some one else?" and Ned eyed his brother with a suspicious look.

Coventry told him all he knew and surmised concerning his friend, not forgetting the letter. Edward mused a moment, then seemed relieved, and said frankly, "I'm glad it's Sydney and not you. I can bear it better."

"Me!" ejaculated Gerald, with a laugh.

"Yes, you; I've been tormented lately with a fear that you cared for her, or rather, she for you."

"You jealous young fool! We never see or speak to one another scarcely, so how could we get up a tender interest?"

"What do you lounge about on that terrace for every evening? And why does she get fluttered when your shadow begins to come and go?" demanded Edward.

"I like the music and don't care for the society of the singer, that's why I walk there. The fluttering is all your imagination; Miss Muir isn't a woman to be fluttered by a man's shadow." And Coventry glanced at his useless arm.

"Thank you for that, and for not saying 'little Muir,' as you generally do. Perhaps it was my imagination. But she never makes fun of you now, and so I fancied she might have lost her heart to the 'young master.' Women often do, you know."

"She used to ridicule me, did she?" asked Coventry, taking no notice of the latter part of his brother's speech, which was quite true nevertheless.

"Not exactly, she was too well-bred for that. But sometimes when Bella and I joked about you, she'd say something so odd or witty that it was irresistible. You're used to being laughed at, so you don't mind, I know, just among ourselves."

"Not I. Laugh away as much as you like," said Gerald. But he did mind, and wanted exceedingly to know what Miss Muir had said, yet was too proud to ask. He turned restlessly and uttered a sigh of pain.

"I'm talking too much; it's bad for you. Dr. Scott said you must be quiet. Now go to sleep, if you can."

Edward left the bedside but not the room, for he would let no one take his place. Coventry tried to sleep, found it impossible, and after a restless hour called his brother back.

"If the bandage was loosened a bit, it would ease my arm and then I could sleep. Can you do it, Ned?"

"I dare not touch it. The doctor gave orders to leave it till he came in the morning, and I shall only do harm if I try."

"But I tell you it's too tight. My arm is swelling and the pain is intense. It can't be right to leave it so. Dr. Scott dressed it in a hurry and did it too tight. Common sense will tell you that," said Coventry impatiently.

"I'll call Mrs. Morris; she will understand what's best to be done." And Edward moved toward the door, looking anxious.

"Not she, she'll only make a stir and torment me with her chatter. I'll bear it as long as I can, and perhaps Dr. Scott will come tonight. He said he would if possible. Go to your dinner, Ned. I can ring for Neal if I need anything. I shall sleep if I'm alone, perhaps."

Edward reluctantly obeyed, and his brother was left to himself. Little rest did he find, however, for the pain of the wounded arm grew unbearable, and, taking a sudden resolution, he rang for his servant.

"Neal, go to Miss Coventry's study, and if Miss Muir is there, ask her to be kind enough to come to me. I'm in great pain, and she understand wounds better than anyone else in the house."

With much surprise in his face, the man departed and a few moments after the door noiselessly opened and Miss Muir came in. It had been a very warm day, and for the first time she had left off her plain black dress. All in white, with no ornament but her fair hair, and a fragrant posy of violets in her belt, she looked a different woman from the meek, nunlike creature one usually saw about the house. Her face was as altered as her dress, for now a soft color glowed in her cheeks, her eyes smiled shyly, and her lips no longer wore the firm look of one who forcibly repressed every emotion. A fresh, gentle, and charming woman she seemed, and Coventry found the dull room suddenly brightened by her presence. Going straight to him, she said simply, and with a happy, helpful look very comforting to see, "I'm glad you sent for me. What can I do for you?"

He told her, and before the complaint was ended, she began loosening the bandages with the decision of one who understood what was to be done and had faith in herself.

"Ah, that's relief, that's comfort!" ejaculated Coventry, as the last tight fold fell away. "Ned was afraid I should bleed to death if he touched me. What will the doctor say to us?"

"I neither know nor care. I shall say to him that he is a bad surgeon to bind it so closely, and not leave orders to have it untied if necessary. Now I shall make it easy and put you to sleep, for that is what you need. Shall I? May I?"

"I wish you would, if you can."

And while she deftly rearranged the bandages, the young man watched her curiously. Presently he asked, "How came you to know so much about these things?"

"In the hospital where I was ill, I saw much that interested me, and when I got better, I used to sing to the patients sometimes."

"Do you mean to sing to me?" he asked, in the submissive tone men unconsciously adopt when ill and in a woman's care.

"If you like it better than reading aloud in a dreamy tone," she answered, as she tied the last knot.

"I do, much better," he said decidedly.

"You are feverish. I shall wet your forehead, and then you will be quite comfortable." She moved about the room in the quiet way which made it a pleasure to watch her, and, having mingled a little cologne with water, bathed his face as unconcernedly as if he had been a child. Her proceedings not only comforted but amused Coventry, who mentally contrasted her with the stout, beer-drinking matron who had ruled over him in his last illness.

"A clever, kindly little woman," he thought, and felt quite at his ease, she was so perfectly easy herself.

"There, now you look more like yourself," she said with an approving nod as she finished, and smoothed the dark locks off his forehead with a cool, soft hand. Then seating herself in a large chair near by, she began to sing, while tidily rolling up the fresh bandages which had been left for the morning. Coventry lay watching her by the dim light that burned in the room, and she sang on as easily as a bird, a dreamy, low-toned lullaby, which soothed the listener like a spell. Presently, looking up to see the effect of her song, she found the young man wide awake, and regarding her with a curious mixture of pleasure, interest, and admiration.

"Shut your eyes, Mr. Coventry," she said, with a reproving shake of the head, and an odd little smile.

He laughed and obeyed, but could not resist an occasional covert glance from under his lashes at the slender white figure in the great velvet chair. She saw him and frowned.

"You are very disobedient; why won't you sleep?"

"I can't, I want to listen. I'm fond of nightingales."

"Then I shall sing no more, but try something that has never failed yet.
Give me your hand, please."

Much amazed, he gave it, and, taking it in both her small ones, she sat down behind the curtain and remained as mute and motionless as a statue. Coventry smiled to himself at first, and wondered which would tire first. But soon a subtle warmth seemed to steal from the soft palms that enclosed his own, his heart beat quicker, his breath grew unequal, and a thousand fancies danced through his brain. He sighed, and said dreamily, as he turned his face toward her, "I like this." And in the act of speaking, seemed to sink into a soft cloud which encompassed him about with an atmosphere of perfect repose. More than this he could not remember, for sleep, deep and dreamless, fell upon him, and when he woke, daylight was shining in between the curtains, his hand lay alone on the coverlet, and his fair-haired enchantress was gone.

CHAPTER IV

A DISCOVERY

For several days Coventry was confined to his room, much against his will, though everyone did their best to lighten his irksome captivity. His mother petted him, Bella sang, Lucia read, Edward was devoted, and all the household, with one exception, were eager to serve the young master. Jean Muir never came near him, and Jean Muir alone seemed to possess the power of amusing him. He soon tired of the others, wanted something new; recalled the piquant character of the girl and took a fancy into his head that she would lighten his ennui. After some hesitation, he carelessly spoke of her to Bella, but nothing came of it, for Bella only said Jean was well, and very busy doing something lovely to surprise Mamma with. Edward complained that he never saw her, and Lucia ignored her existence altogether. The only intelligence the invalid received was from the gossip of two housemaids over their work in the next room. From them he learned that the governess had been "scolded" by Miss Beaufort for going to Mr. Coventry's room; that she had taken it very sweetly and kept herself carefully out of the way of both young gentlemen, though it was plain to see that Mr. Ned was dying for her.

Mr. Gerald amused himself by thinking over this gossip, and quite annoyed his sister by his absence of mind.

"Gerald, do you know Ned's commission has come?"

"Very interesting. Read on, Bella."

"You stupid boy! You don't know a word I say," and she put down the book to repeat her news.

"I'm glad of it; now we must get him off as soon as possible — that is, I suppose he will want to be off as soon as possible." And Coventry woke up from his reverie.

"You needn't check yourself, I know all about it. I think Ned was very foolish, and that Miss Muir has behaved beautifully. It's quite impossible, of course, but I wish it wasn't, I do so like to watch lovers. You and Lucia are so cold you are not a bit interesting."

"You'll do me a favor if you'll stop all that nonsense about Lucia and me. We are not lovers, and never shall be, I fancy. At all events, I'm tired of the thing, and wish you and Mamma would let it drop, for the present at least."

"Oh Gerald, you know Mamma has set her heart upon it, that Papa desired it, and poor Lucia loves you so much. How can you speak of dropping what will make us all so happy?"

"It won't make me happy, and I take the liberty of thinking that this is of some importance. I'm not bound in any way, and don't intend to be till I am ready. Now we'll talk about Ned."

Much grieved and surprised, Bella obeyed, and devoted herself to Edward, who very wisely submitted to his fate and prepared to leave home for some months. For a week the house was in a state of excitement about his departure, and everyone but Jean was busied for him. She was scarcely seen; every morning she gave Bella her lessons, every afternoon drove out with Mrs. Coventry, and nearly every evening went up to the Hall to read to Sir John, who found his wish granted without exactly knowing how it had been done.

The day Edward left, he came down from bidding his mother good-bye, looking very pale, for he had lingered in his sister's little room with Miss Muir as long as he dared.

"Good-bye, dear. Be kind to Jean," he whispered as he kissed his sister.

"I will, I will," returned Bella, with tearful eyes.

"Take care of Mamma, and remember Lucia," he said again, as he touched his cousin's beautiful cheek.

"Fear nothing. I will keep them apart," she whispered back, and Coventry heard it.

Edward offered his hand to his brother, saying, significantly, as he looked him in the eye, "I trust you, Gerald."

"You may, Ned."

Then he went, and Coventry tired himself with wondering what Lucia meant. A few days later he understood.

Now Ned is gone, little Muir will appear, I fancy, he said to himself; but "little Muir" did not appear, and seemed to shun him more carefully than she had done her lover. If he went to the drawing room in the evening hoping for music, Lucia alone was there. If he tapped at Bella's door, there was always a pause before she opened it, and no sign of Jean appeared though her voice had been audible when he knocked. If he went to the library, a hasty rustle and the sound of flying feet betrayed that the room was deserted at his approach. In the garden Miss Muir never failed to avoid him, and if by chance they met in hall or breakfast room, she passed him with downcast eyes and the briefest, coldest greeting. All this annoyed him intensely, and the more she eluded him, the more he desired to see her — from a spirit of opposition, he said, nothing more. It fretted and yet it entertained him, and he found a lazy sort of pleasure in thwarting the girl's little maneuvers. His patience gave out at last, and he resolved to know what was the meaning of this peculiar conduct. Having locked and taken away the key of one door in the library, he waited till Miss Muir went in to get a book for his uncle. He had heard her speak to Bella of it, knew that she believed him with his mother, and smiled to himself as he stole after her. She was standing in a chair, reaching up, and he had time to see a slender waist, a pretty foot, before he spoke.

"Can I help you, Miss Muir?"

She started, dropped several books, and turned scarlet, as she said hurriedly, "Thank you, no; I can get the steps."

"My long arm will be less trouble. I've got but one, and that is tired of being idle, so it is very much at your service. What will you have?"

"I — I — you startled me so I've forgotten." And Jean laughed, nervously, as she looked about her as if planning to escape.

"I beg your pardon, wait till you remember, and let me thank you for the enchanted sleep you gave me ten days ago. I've had no chance yet, you've shunned me so pertinaciously."

"Indeed I try not to be rude, but — " She checked herself, and turned her face away, adding, with an accent of pain in her voice, "It is not my fault, Mr. Coventry. I only obey orders."

"Whose orders?" he demanded, still standing so that she could not escape.

"Don't ask; it is one who has a right to command where you are concerned. Be sure that it is kindly meant, though it may seem folly to us. Nay, don't be angry, laugh at it, as I do, and let me run away, please."

She turned, and looked down at him with tears in her eyes, a smile on her lips, and an expression half sad, half arch, which was altogether charming. The frown passed from his face, but he still looked grave and said decidedly, "No one has a right to command in this house but my mother or myself. Was it she who bade you avoid me as if I was a madman or a pest?"

"Ah, don't ask. I promised not to tell, and you would not have me break my word, I know." And still smiling, she regarded him with a look of merry malice which made any other reply unnecessary. It was Lucia, he thought, and disliked his cousin intensely just then. Miss Muir moved as if to step down; he detained her, saying earnestly, yet with a smile, "Do you consider me the master here?"

"Yes," and to the word she gave a sweet, submissive intonation which made it expressive of the respect, regard, and confidence which men find pleasantest when women feel and show it. Unconsciously his face softened, and he looked up at her with a different glance from any he had ever given her before.

“Well, then, will you consent to obey me if I am not tyrannical or unreasonable in my demands?”

“I’ll try.”

“Good! Now frankly, I want to say that all this sort of thing is very disagreeable to me. It annoys me to be a restraint upon anyone’s liberty or comfort, and I beg you will go and come as freely as you like, and not mind Lucia’s absurdities. She means well, but hasn’t a particle of penetration or tact. Will you promise this?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“It is better as it is, perhaps.”

“But you called it folly just now.”

“Yes, it seems so, and yet — ” She paused, looking both confused and distressed.

Coventry lost patience, and said hastily, “You women are such enigmas I never expect to understand you! Well, I’ve done my best to make you comfortable, but if you prefer to lead this sort of life, I beg you will do so.”

“I *don’t* prefer it; it is hateful to me. I like to be myself, to have my liberty, and the confidence of those about me. But I cannot think it kind to disturb the peace of anyone, and so I try to obey. I’ve promised Bella to remain, but I will go rather than have another scene with Miss Beaufort or with you.”

Miss Muir had burst out impetuously, and stood there with a sudden fire in her eyes, sudden warmth and spirit in her face and voice that amazed Coventry. She was angry, hurt, and haughty, and the change only made her more attractive, for not a trace of her former meek self remained. Coventry was electrified, and still more surprised when she added, imperiously, with a gesture as if to put him aside, “Hand me that book and move away. I wish to go.”

He obeyed, even offered his hand, but she refused it, stepped lightly down, and went to the door. There she turned, and with the same indignant voice, the same kindling eyes and glowing cheeks, she said rapidly, “I know I have no right to speak in this way. I restrain myself as long as I can, but when I can bear no more, my true self breaks loose, and I defy everything. I am tired of being a cold, calm machine; it is impossible with an ardent nature like mine, and I shall try no longer. I cannot help it if people love me. I don’t want their love. I only ask to be left in peace, and why I am tormented so I cannot see. I’ve neither beauty, money, nor rank, yet every foolish boy mistakes my frank interest for something warmer, and makes me miserable. It is my misfortune. Think of me what you will, but beware of me in time, for against my will I may do you harm.”

Almost fiercely she had spoken, and with a warning gesture she hurried from the room, leaving the young man feeling as if a sudden thunder-gust had swept through the house. For several minutes he sat in the chair she left, thinking deeply. Suddenly he rose, went to his sister, and said, in his usual tone of indolent good nature, “Bella, didn’t I hear Ned ask you to be kind to Miss Muir?”

“Yes, and I try to be, but she is so odd lately.”

“Odd! How do you mean?”

“Why, she is either as calm and cold as a statue, or restless and queer; she cries at night, I know, and sighs sadly when she thinks I don’t hear. Something is the matter.”

“She frets for Ned perhaps,” began Coventry.

“Oh dear, no; it’s a great relief to her that he is gone. I’m afraid that she likes someone very much, and someone don’t like her. Can it be Mr. Sydney?”

“She called him a ‘titled fool’ once, but perhaps that didn’t mean anything. Did you ever ask her about him?” said Coventry, feeling rather ashamed of his curiosity, yet unable to resist the temptation of questioning unsuspecting Bella.

“Yes, but she only looked at me in her tragical way, and said, so pitifully, ‘My little friend, I hope you will never have to pass through the scenes I’ve passed through, but keep your peace unbroken all your life.’ After that I dared say no more. I’m very fond of her, I want to make her happy, but I don’t know how. Can you propose anything?”

“I was going to propose that you make her come among us more, now Ned is gone. It must be dull for her, moping about alone. I’m sure it is for me. She is an entertaining little person, and I enjoy her music very much. It’s good for Mamma to have gay evenings; so you bestir yourself, and see what you can do for the general good of the family.”

“That’s all very charming, and I’ve proposed it more than once, but Lucia spoils all my plans. She is afraid you’ll follow Ned’s example, and that is so silly.”

“Lucia is a — no, I won’t say fool, because she has sense enough when she chooses; but I wish you’d just settle things with Mamma, and then Lucia can do nothing but submit,” said Gerald angrily.

“I’ll try, but she goes up to read to Uncle, you know, and since he has had the gout, she stays later, so I see little of her in the evening. There she goes now. I think she will captivate the old one as well as the young one, she is so devoted.”

Coventry looked after her slender black figure, just vanishing through the great gate, and an uncomfortable fancy took possession of him, born of Bella’s careless words. He sauntered away, and after eluding his cousin, who seemed looking for him, he turned toward the Hall, saying to himself, I will see what is going on up here. Such things have happened. Uncle is the simplest soul alive, and if the girl is ambitious, she can do what she will with him.

Here a servant came running after him and gave him a letter, which he thrust into his pocket without examining it. When he reached the Hall, he went quietly to his uncle's study. The door was ajar, and looking in, he saw a scene of tranquil comfort, very pleasant to watch. Sir John leaned in his easy chair with one foot on a cushion. He was dressed with his usual care and, in spite of the gout, looked like a handsome, well-preserved old gentleman. He was smiling as he listened, and his eyes rested complacently on Jean Muir, who sat near him reading in her musical voice, while the sunshine glittered on her hair and the soft rose of her cheek. She read well, yet Coventry thought her heart was not in her task, for once when she paused, while Sir John spoke, her eyes had an absent expression, and she leaned her head upon her hand, with an air of patient weariness.

Poor girl! I did her great injustice; she has no thought of captivating the old man, but amuses him from simple kindness. She is tired. I'll put an end to her task; and Coventry entered without knocking.

Sir John received him with an air of polite resignation, Miss Muir with a perfectly expressionless face.

"Mother's love, and how are you today, sir?"

"Comfortable, but dull, so I want you to bring the girls over this evening, to amuse the old gentleman. Mrs. King has got out the antique costumes and trumpery, as I promised Bella she should have them, and tonight we are to have a merrymaking, as we used to do when Ned was here."

"Very well, sir, I'll bring them. We've all been out of sorts since the lad left, and a little jollity will do us good. Are you going back, Miss Muir?" asked Coventry.

"No, I shall keep her to give me my tea and get things ready. Don't read anymore, my dear, but go and amuse yourself with the pictures, or whatever you like," said Sir John; and like a dutiful daughter she obeyed, as if glad to get away.

"That's a very charming girl, Gerald," began Sir John as she left the room. "I'm much interested in her, both on her own account and on her mother's."

"Her mother's! What do you know of her mother?" asked Coventry, much surprised.

"Her mother was Lady Grace Howard, who ran away with a poor Scotch minister twenty years ago. The family cast her off, and she lived and died so obscurely that very little is known of her except that she left an orphan girl at some small French pension. This is the girl, and a fine girl, too. I'm surprised that you did not know this."

"So am I, but it is like her not to tell. She is a strange, proud creature. Lady Howard's daughter! Upon my word, that is a discovery," and Coventry felt his interest in his sister's governess much increased by this fact; for, like all wellborn Englishmen, he valued rank and gentle blood even more than he cared to own.

"She has had a hard life of it, this poor little girl, but she has a brave spirit, and will make her way anywhere," said Sir John admiringly.

"Did Ned know this?" asked Gerald suddenly.

"No, she only told me yesterday. I was looking in the *Peerage* and chanced to speak of the Howards. She forgot herself and called Lady Grace her mother. Then I got the whole story, for the lonely little thing was glad to make a confidant of someone."

"That accounts for her rejection of Sydney and Ned: she knows she is their equal and will not snatch at the rank which is hers by right. No, she's not mercenary or ambitious."

"What do you say?" asked Sir John, for Coventry had spoken more to himself than to his uncle.

"I wonder if Lady Sydney was aware of this?" was all Gerald's answer.

"No, Jean said she did not wish to be pitied, and so told nothing to the mother. I think the son knew, but that was a delicate point, and I asked no questions."

"I shall write to him as soon as I discover his address. We have been so intimate I can venture to make a few inquiries about Miss Muir, and prove the truth of her story."

"Do you mean to say that you doubt it?" demanded Sir John angrily.

"I beg your pardon, Uncle, but I must confess I have an instinctive distrust of that young person. It is unjust, I dare say, yet I cannot banish it."

"Don't annoy me by expressing it, if you please. I have some penetration and experience, and I respect and pity Miss Muir heartily. This dislike of yours may be the cause of her late melancholy, hey, Gerald?" And Sir John looked suspiciously at his nephew.

Anxious to avert the rising storm, Coventry said hastily as he turned away, "I've neither time nor inclination to discuss the matter now, sir, but will be careful not to offend again. I'll take your message to Bella, so good-bye for an hour, Uncle."

And Coventry went his way through the park, thinking within himself, The dear old gentleman is getting fascinated, like poor Ned. How the deuce does the girl do it? Lady Howard's daughter, yet never told us; I don't understand that.

CHAPTER V

HOW THE GIRL DID IT

At home he found a party of young friends, who hailed with delight the prospect of a revel at the Hall. An hour later, the blithe company trooped into the great saloon, where preparations had already been made for a dramatic evening.

Good Sir John was in his element, for he was never so happy as when his house was full of young people. Several persons were chosen, and in a few moments the curtains were withdrawn from the first of these impromptu tableaux. A swarthy, darkly bearded man lay asleep on a tiger skin, in the shadow of a tent. Oriental arms and drapery surrounded him; an antique silver lamp burned dimly on a table where fruit lay heaped in costly dishes, and wine shone redly in half-emptied goblets. Bending over the sleeper was a woman robed with barbaric splendor. One hand turned back the embroidered sleeve from the arm which held a scimitar; one slender foot in a scarlet sandal was visible under the white tunic; her purple mantle swept down from snowy shoulders; fillets of gold bound her hair, and jewels shone on neck and arms. She was looking over her shoulder toward the entrance of the tent, with a steady yet stealthy look, so effective that for a moment the spectators held their breath, as if they also heard a passing footstep.

“Who is it?” whispered Lucia, for the face was new to her.

“Jean Muir,” answered Coventry, with an absorbed look.

“Impossible! She is small and fair,” began Lucia, but a hasty “Hush, let me look!” from her cousin silenced her.

Impossible as it seemed, he was right nevertheless; for Jean Muir it was. She had darkened her skin, painted her eyebrows, disposed some wild black locks over her fair hair, and thrown such an intensity of expression into her eyes that they darkened and dilated till they were as fierce as any southern eyes that ever flashed. Hatred, the deepest and bitterest, was written on her sternly beautiful face, courage glowed in her glance, power spoke in the nervous grip of the slender hand that held the weapon, and the indomitable will of the woman was expressed — even the firm pressure of the little foot half hidden in the tiger skin.

“Oh, isn’t she splendid?” cried Bella under her breath.

“She looks as if she’d use her sword well when the time comes,” said someone admiringly.

“Good night to Holofernes; his fate is certain,” added another.

“He is the image of Sydney, with that beard on.”

“Doesn’t she look as if she really hated him?”

“Perhaps she does.”

Coventry uttered the last exclamation, for the two which preceded it suggested an explanation of the marvelous change in Jean. It was not all art: the intense detestation mingled with a savage joy that the object of her hatred was in her power was too perfect to be feigned; and having the key to a part of her story, Coventry felt as if he caught a glimpse of the truth. It was but a glimpse, however, for the curtain dropped before he had half analyzed the significance of that strange face.

“Horrible! I’m glad it’s over,” said Lucia coldly.

“Magnificent! Encore! Encore!” cried Gerald enthusiastically.

But the scene was over, and no applause could recall the actress. Two or three graceful or gay pictures followed, but Jean was in none, and each lacked the charm which real talent lends to the simplest part.

“Coventry, you are wanted,” called a voice. And to everyone’s surprise, Coventry went, though heretofore he had always refused to exert himself when handsome actors were in demand.

“What part am I to spoil?” he asked, as he entered the green room, where several excited young gentlemen were costuming and attitudinizing.

“A fugitive cavalier. Put yourself into this suit, and lose no time asking questions. Miss Muir will tell you what to do. She is in the tableau, so no one will mind you,” said the manager pro tem, throwing a rich old suit toward Coventry and resuming the painting of a moustache on his own boyish face.

A gallant cavalier was the result of Gerald’s hasty toilet, and when he appeared before the ladies a general glance of admiration was bestowed upon him.

“Come along and be placed; Jean is ready on the stage.” And Bella ran before him, exclaiming to her governess, “Here he is, quite splendid. Wasn’t he good to do it?”

Miss Muir, in the charmingly prim and puritanical dress of a Roundhead damsel, was arranging some shrubs, but turned suddenly and dropped the green branch she held, as her eye met the glittering figure advancing toward her.

“You!” she said with a troubled look, adding low to Bella, “Why did you ask *him?* I begged you not.”

“He is the only handsome man here, and the best actor if he likes. He won’t play usually, so make the most of him.” And Bella was off to finish powdering her hair for “The Marriage à la Mode.”

“I was sent for and I came. Do you prefer some other person?” asked

Coventry, at a loss to understand the half-anxious, half-eager expression of the face under the little cap.

It changed to one of mingled annoyance and resignation as she said, “It is too late. Please kneel here, half behind the shrubs; put down your hat, and — allow me — you are too elegant for a fugitive.”

As he knelt before her, she disheveled his hair, pulled his lace collar awry, threw away his gloves and sword, and half untied the cloak that hung about his shoulders.

“That is better; your paleness is excellent — nay, don’t spoil it. We are to represent the picture which hangs in the Hall. I need tell you no more. Now, Roundheads, place yourselves, and then ring up the curtain.”

With a smile, Coventry obeyed her; for the picture was of two lovers, the young cavalier kneeling, with his arm around the waist of the girl, who tries to hide him with her little mantle, and presses his head to her bosom in an ecstasy of fear, as she glances back at the approaching pursuers. Jean hesitated an instant and shrank a little as his hand touched her; she blushed deeply, and her eyes fell before his. Then, as the bell rang, she threw herself into her part with sudden spirit. One arm half covered him with her cloak, the other pillowed his head on the muslin kerchief folded over her bosom, and she looked backward with such terror in her eyes that more than one chivalrous young spectator longed to hurry to the rescue. It lasted but a moment; yet in that moment Coventry experienced another new sensation. Many women had smiled on him, but he had remained heart-whole, cool, and careless, quite unconscious of the power which a woman possesses and knows how to use, for the weal or woe of man. Now, as he knelt there with a soft arm about him, a slender waist yielding to his touch, and a maiden heart throbbing against his cheek, for the first time in his life he felt the indescribable spell of womanhood, and looked the ardent lover to perfection. Just as his face assumed this new and most becoming aspect, the curtain dropped, and clamorous encores recalled him to the fact that Miss Muir was trying to escape from his hold, which had grown painful in its unconscious pressure. He sprang up, half bewildered, and looking as he had never looked before.

“Again! Again!” called Sir John. And the young men who played the Roundheads, eager to share in the applause begged for a repetition in new attitudes.

“A rustle has betrayed you, we have fired and shot the brave girl, and she lies dying, you know. That will be effective; try it, Miss Muir,” said one. And with a long breath, Jean complied.

The curtain went up, showing the lover still on his knees, unmindful of the captors who clutched him by the shoulder, for at his feet the girl lay dying. Her head was on his breast, now, her eyes looked full into his, no longer wild with fear, but eloquent with the love which even death could not conquer. The power of those tender eyes thrilled Coventry with a strange delight, and set his heart beating as rapidly as hers had done. She felt his hands tremble, saw the color flash into his cheek, knew that she had touched him at last, and when she rose it was with a sense of triumph which she found it hard to conceal. Others thought it fine acting; Coventry tried to believe so; but Lucia set her teeth, and, as the curtain fell on that second picture, she left her place to hurry behind the scenes, bent on putting an end to such dangerous play. Several actors were complimenting the mimic lovers. Jean took it merrily, but Coventry, in spite of himself, betrayed that he was excited by something deeper than mere gratified vanity.

As Lucia appeared, his manner changed to its usual indifference; but he could not quench the unwonted fire of his eyes, or keep all trace of emotion out of his face, and she saw this with a sharp pang.

"I have come to offer my help. You must be tired, Miss Muir. Can I relieve you?" said Lucia hastily.

"Yes, thank you. I shall be very glad to leave the rest to you, and enjoy them from the front."

So with a sweet smile Jean tripped away, and to Lucia's dismay
Coventry followed.

"I want you, Gerald; please stay," she cried.

"I've done my part — no more tragedy for me tonight." And he was gone before she could entreat or command.

There was no help for it; she must stay and do her duty, or expose her jealousy to the quick eyes about her. For a time she bore it; but the sight of her cousin leaning over the chair she had left and chatting with the governess, who now filled it, grew unbearable, and she dispatched a little girl with a message to Miss Muir.

"Please, Miss Beaufort wants you for Queen Bess, as you are the only lady with red hair. Will you come?" whispered the child, quite unconscious of any hidden sting in her words.

"Yes, dear, willingly though I'm not stately enough for Her Majesty, nor handsome enough," said Jean, rising with an untroubled face, though she resented the feminine insult.

"Do you want an Essex? I'm all dressed for it," said Coventry, following to the door with a wistful look.

“No, Miss Beaufort said *you* were not to come. She doesn’t want you both together,” said the child decidedly.

Jean gave him a significant look, shrugged her shoulders, and went away smiling her odd smile, while Coventry paced up and down the hall in a curious state of unrest, which made him forgetful of everything till the young people came gaily out to supper.

“Come, bonny Prince Charlie, take me down, and play the lover as charmingly as you did an hour ago. I never thought you had so much warmth in you,” said Bella, taking his arm and drawing him on against his will.

“Don’t be foolish, child. Where is — Lucia?”

Why he checked Jean’s name on his lips and substituted another’s, he could not tell; but a sudden shyness in speaking of her possessed him, and though he saw her nowhere, he would not ask for her. His cousin came down looking lovely in a classical costume; but Gerald scarcely saw her, and, when the merriment was at its height, he slipped away to discover what had become of Miss Muir.

Alone in the deserted drawing room he found her, and paused to watch her a moment before he spoke; for something in her attitude and face struck him. She was leaning wearily back in the great chair which had served for a throne. Her royal robes were still unchanged, though the crown was off and all her fair hair hung about her shoulders. Excitement and exertion made her brilliant, the rich dress became her wonderfully, and an air of luxurious indolence changed the meek governess into a charming woman. She leaned on the velvet cushions as if she were used to such support; she played with the jewels which had crowned her as carelessly as if she were born to wear them; her attitude was full of negligent grace, and the expression of her face half proud, half pensive, as if her thoughts were bittersweet.

One would know she was wellborn to see her now. Poor girl, what a burden a life of dependence must be to a spirit like hers! I wonder what she is thinking of so intently. And Coventry indulged in another look before he spoke.

“Shall I bring you some supper, Miss Muir?”

“Supper!” she ejaculated, with a start. “Who thinks of one’s body when one’s soul is — ” She stopped there, knit her brows, and laughed faintly as she added, “No, thank you. I want nothing but advice, and that I dare not ask of anyone.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have no right.”

“Everyone has a right to ask help, especially the weak of the strong.

Can I help you? Believe me, I most heartily offer my poor services."

"Ah, you forget! This dress, the borrowed splendor of these jewels, the freedom of this gay evening, the romance of the part you played, all blind you to the reality. For a moment I cease to be a servant, and for a moment you treat me as an equal."

It was true; he *had* forgotten. That soft, reproachful glance touched him, his distrust melted under the new charm, and he answered with real feeling in voice and face, "I treat you as an equal because you *are* one; and when I offered help, it is not to my sister's governess alone, but to Lady Howard's daughter."

"Who told you that?" she demanded, sitting erect.

"My uncle. Do not reproach him. It shall go no further, if you forbid it. Are you sorry that I know it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I will not be pitied!" And her eyes flashed as she made a half-defiant gesture.

"Then, if I may not pity the hard fate which has befallen an innocent life, may I admire the courage which meets adverse fortune so bravely, and conquers the world by winning the respect and regard of all who see and honor it?"

Miss Muir averted her face, put up her hand, and answered hastily, "No, no, not that! Do not be kind; it destroys the only barrier now left between us. Be cold to me as before, forget what I am, and let me go on my way, unknown, unpitied, and unloved!"

Her voice faltered and failed as the last word was uttered, and she bent her face upon her hand. Something jarred upon Coventry in this speech, and moved him to say, almost rudely, "You need have no fears for me. Lucia will tell you what an iceberg I am."

"Then Lucia would tell me wrong. I have the fatal power of reading character; I know you better than she does, and I see — " There she stopped abruptly.

"What? Tell me and prove your skill," he said eagerly.

Turning, she fixed her eyes on him with a penetrating power that made him shrink as she said slowly, "Under the ice I see fire, and warn you to beware lest it prove a volcano."

For a moment he sat dumb, wondering at the insight of the girl; for she was the first to discover the hidden warmth of a nature too proud to confess its tender impulses, or the ambitions that slept till some potent voice awoke them. The blunt, almost stern manner in which she warned him away from her only made her more attractive; for there was no conceit or arrogance in it, only a foreboding fear emboldened by past suffering to be frank. Suddenly he spoke impetuously:

"You are right! I am not what I seem, and my indolent indifference is but the mask under which I conceal my real self. I could be as passionate, as energetic and aspiring as Ned, if I had any aim in life. I have none, and so I am what you once called me, a thing to pity and despise."

"I never said that!" cried Jean indignantly.

"Not in those words, perhaps; but you looked it and thought it, though you phrased it more mildly. I deserved it, but I shall deserve it no longer. I am beginning to wake from my disgraceful idleness, and long for some work that shall make a man of me. Why do you go? I annoy you with my confessions. Pardon me. They are the first I ever made; they shall be the last."

"No, oh no! I am too much honored by your confidence; but is it wise, is it loyal to tell *me* your hopes and aims? Has not Miss Beaufort the first right to be your confidante?"

Coventry drew back, looking intensely annoyed, for the name recalled much that he would gladly have forgotten in the novel excitement of the hour. Lucia's love, Edward's parting words, his own reserve so strangely thrown aside, so difficult to resume. What he would have said was checked by the sight of a half-open letter which fell from Jean's dress as she moved away. Mechanically he took it up to return it, and, as he did so, he recognized Sydney's handwriting. Jean snatched it from him, turning pale to the lips as she cried, "Did you read it? What did you see? Tell me, tell me, on your honor!"

"On my honor, I saw nothing but this single sentence, 'By the love I bear you, believe what I say.' No more, as I am a gentleman. I know the hand, I guess the purport of the letter, and as a friend of Sydney, I earnestly desire to help you, if I can. Is this the matter upon which you want advice?"

"Yes."

"Then let me give it?"

"You cannot, without knowing all, and it is so hard to tell!"

"Let me guess it, and spare you the pain of telling. May I?" And Coventry waited eagerly for her reply, for the spell was still upon him.

Holding the letter fast, she beckoned him to follow, and glided before him to a secluded little nook, half boudoir, half conservatory. There she paused, stood an instant as if in doubt, then looked up at him with confiding eyes and said decidedly, "I will do it; for, strange as it may seem, you are the only person to whom I *can* speak. You know Sydney, you have discovered that I am an equal, you have offered your help. I accept it; but oh, do not think me unwomanly!

Remember how alone I am, how young, and how much I rely upon your sincerity, your sympathy!"

"Speak freely. I am indeed your friend." And Coventry sat down beside her, forgetful of everything but the soft-eyed girl who confided in him so entirely.

Speaking rapidly, Jean went on, "You know that Sydney loved me, that I refused him and went away. But you do not know that his importunities nearly drove me wild, that he threatened to rob me of my only treasure, my good name, and that, in desperation, I tried to kill myself. Yes, mad, wicked as it was, I did long to end the life which was, at best, a burden, and under his persecution had become a torment. You are shocked, yet what I say is the living truth. Lady Sydney will confirm it, the nurses at the hospital will confess that it was not a fever which brought me there; and here, though the external wound is healed, my heart still aches and burns with the shame and indignation which only a proud woman can feel."

She paused and sat with kindling eyes, glowing cheeks, and both hands pressed to her heaving bosom, as if the old insult roused her spirit anew. Coventry said not a word, for surprise, anger, incredulity, and admiration mingled so confusedly in his mind that he forgot to speak, and Jean went on, "That wild act of mine convinced him of my indomitable dislike. He went away, and I believed that this stormy love of his would be cured by absence. It is not, and I live in daily fear of fresh entreaties, renewed persecution. His mother promised not to betray where I had gone, but he found me out and wrote to me. The letter I asked you to take to Lady Sydney was a reply to his, imploring him to leave me in peace. You failed to deliver it, and I was glad, for I thought silence might quench hope. All in vain; this is a more passionate appeal than ever, and he vows he will never desist from his endeavors till I give another man the right to protect me. I *can* do this — I am sorely tempted to do it, but I rebel against the cruelty. I love my freedom, I have no wish to marry at this man's bidding. What can I do? How cart I free myself? Be my friend, and help me!"

Tears streamed down her cheeks, sobs choked her words, and she clasped her hands imploringly as she turned toward the young man in all the abandonment of sorrow, fear, and supplication. Coventry found it hard to meet those eloquent eyes and answer calmly, for he had no experience in such scenes and knew not how to play his part. It is this absurd dress and that romantic nonsense which makes me feel so unlike myself, he thought, quite unconscious of the dangerous power which the dusky room, the midsummer warmth and fragrance, the memory of the "romantic nonsense," and, most of all, the presence of a beautiful, afflicted woman had over him. His usual self-possession deserted him, and he could only echo the words which had made the strongest impression upon him:

"You *can* do this, you are tempted to do it. Is Ned the man who can protect you?"

"No" was the soft reply.

"Who then?"

"Do not ask me. A good and honorable man; one who loves me well, and would devote his life to me; one whom once it would have been happiness to marry, but now — "

There her voice ended in a sigh, and all her fair hair fell down about her face, hiding it in a shining veil.

"Why not now? This is a sure and speedy way of ending your distress. Is it impossible?"

In spite of himself, Gerald leaned nearer, took one of the little hands in his, and pressed it as he spoke, urgently, compassionately, nay, almost tenderly. From behind the veil came a heavy sigh, and the brief answer, "It is impossible."

"Why, Jean?"

She flung her hair back with a sudden gesture, drew away her hand, and answered, almost fiercely, "Because I do not love him! Why do you torment me with such questions? I tell you I am in a sore strait and cannot see my way. Shall I deceive the good man, and secure peace at the price of liberty and truth? Or shall I defy Sydney and lead a life of dread? If he menaced my life, I should not fear; but he menaces that which is dearer than life — my good name. A look, a word can tarnish it; a scornful smile, a significant shrug can do me more harm than any blow; for I am a woman — friendless, poor, and at the mercy of his tongue. Ah, better to have died, and so have been saved the bitter pain that has come now!"

She sprang up, clasped her hands over her head, and paced despairingly through the little room, not weeping, but wearing an expression more tragical than tears. Still feeling as if he had suddenly stepped into a romance, yet finding a keen pleasure in the part assigned him, Coventry threw himself into it with spirit, and heartily did his best to console the poor girl who needed help so much. Going to her, he said as impetuously as Ned ever did, "Miss Muir — nay, I will say Jean, if that will comfort you — listen, and rest assured that no harm shall touch you if I can ward it off. You are needlessly alarmed. Indignant you may well be, but, upon my life, I think you wrong Sydney. He is violent, I know, but he is too honorable a man to injure you by a light word, an unjust act. He did but threaten, hoping to soften you. Let me see him, or write to him. He is my friend; he will listen to me. Of that I am sure."

"Be sure of nothing. When a man like Sydney loves and is thwarted in his love, nothing can control his headstrong will. Promise me you will not see or write to him. Much as I fear and despise him, I will submit, rather than any harm should befall you — or your brother. You promise me, Mr. Coventry?”

He hesitated. She clung to his arm with unfeigned solicitude in her eager, pleading face, and he could not resist it.

“I promise; but in return you must promise to let me give what help I can; and, Jean, never say again that you are friendless.”

“You are so kind! God bless you for it. But I dare not accept your friendship; she will not permit it, and I have no right to mar her peace.”

“Who will not permit it?” he demanded hotly.

“Miss Beaufort.”

“Hang Miss Beaufort!” exclaimed Coventry, with such energy that Jean broke into a musical laugh, despite her trouble. He joined in it, and, for an instant they stood looking at one another as if the last barrier were down, and they were friends indeed. Jean paused suddenly, with the smile on her lips, the tears still on her cheek, and made a warning gesture. He listened: the sound of feet mingled with calls and laughter proved that they were missed and sought.

“That laugh betrayed us. Stay and meet them. I cannot.” And Jean darted out upon the lawn. Coventry followed; for the thought of confronting so many eyes, so many questions, daunted him, and he fled like a coward. The sound of Jean’s flying footsteps guided him, and he overtook her just as she paused behind a rose thicket to take breath.

“Fainthearted knight! You should have stayed and covered my retreat. Hark! they are coming! Hide! Hide!” she panted, half in fear, half in merriment, as the gay pursuers rapidly drew nearer.

“Kneel down; the moon is coming out and the glitter of your embroidery will betray you,” whispered Jean, as they cowered behind the roses.

“Your arms and hair will betray you. ‘Come under my plaiddie,’ as the song says.” And Coventry tried to make his velvet cloak cover the white shoulders and fair locks.

“We are acting our parts in reality now. How Bella will enjoy the thing when I tell her!” said Jean as the noises died away.

“Do not tell her,” whispered Coventry.

“And why not?” she asked, looking up into the face so near her own, with an artless glance.

“Can you not guess why?”

“Ah, you are so proud you cannot bear to be laughed at.”

“It is not that. It is because I do not want you to be annoyed by silly tongues; you have enough to pain you without that. I am your friend, now, and I do my best to prove it."

"So kind, so kind! How can I thank you?" murmured Jean. And she involuntarily nestled closer under the cloak that sheltered both.

Neither spoke for a moment, and in the silence the rapid beating of two hearts was heard. To drown the sound, Coventry said softly, "Are you frightened?"

"No, I like it," she answered, as softly, then added abruptly, "But why do we hide? There is nothing to fear. It is late. I must go. You are kneeling on my train. Please rise."

"Why in such haste? This flight and search only adds to the charm of the evening. I'll not get up yet. Will you have a rose, Jean?"

"No, I will not. Let me go, Mr. Coventry, I insist. There has been enough of this folly. You forget yourself."

She spoke imperiously, flung off the cloak, and put him from her. He rose at once, saying, like one waking suddenly from a pleasant dream, "I do indeed forget myself."

Here the sound of voices broke on them, nearer than before. Pointing to a covered walk that led to the house, he said, in his usually cool, calm tone, "Go in that way; I will cover your retreat." And turning, he went to meet the merry hunters.

Half an hour later, when the party broke up, Miss Muir joined them in her usual quiet dress, looking paler, meeker, and sadder than usual. Coventry saw this, though he neither looked at her nor addressed her. Lucia saw it also, and was glad that the dangerous girl had fallen back into her proper place again, for she had suffered much that night. She appropriated her cousin's arm as they went through the park, but he was in one of his taciturn moods, and all her attempts at conversation were in vain. Miss Muir walked alone, singing softly to herself as she followed in the dusk. Was Gerald so silent because he listened to that fitful song? Lucia thought so, and felt her dislike rapidly deepening to hatred.

When the young friends were gone, and the family were exchanging good-nights among themselves, Jean was surprised by Coventry's offering his hand, for he had never done it before, and whispering, as he held it, though Lucia watched him all the while, "I have not given my advice, yet."

"Thanks, I no longer need it. I have decided for myself."

"May I ask how?"

"To brave my enemy."

"Good! But what decided you so suddenly?"

"The finding of a friend." And with a grateful glance she was gone.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE WATCH

“If you please, Mr. Coventry, did you get the letter last night?” were the first words that greeted the “young master” as he left his room next morning.

“What letter, Dean? I don’t remember any,” he answered, pausing, for something in the maid’s manner struck him as peculiar.

“It came just as you left for the Hall, sir. Benson ran after you with it, as it was marked ‘Haste.’ Didn’t you get it, sir?” asked the woman, anxiously.

“Yes, but upon my life, I forgot all about it till this minute. It’s in my other coat, I suppose, if I’ve not lost it. That absurd masquerading put everything else out of my head.” And speaking more to himself than to the maid, Coventry turned back to look for the missing letter.

Dean remained where she was, apparently busy about the arrangement of the curtains at the hall window, but furtively watching meanwhile with a most unwonted air of curiosity.

“Not there, I thought so!” she muttered, as Coventry impatiently thrust his hand into one pocket after another. But as she spoke, an expression of amazement appeared in her face, for suddenly the letter was discovered.

“I’d have sworn it wasn’t there! I don’t understand it, but she’s a deep one, or I’m much deceived.” And Dean shook her head like one perplexed, but not convinced.

Coventry uttered an exclamation of satisfaction on glancing at the address and, standing where he was, tore open the letter.

Dear C:

I’m off to Baden. Come and join me, then you’ll be out of harm’s way; for if you fall in love with J.M. (and you can’t escape if you stay where she is), you will incur the trifling inconvenience of having your brains blown out by

Yours truly, F.R. Sydney

“The man is mad!” ejaculated Coventry, staring at the letter while an angry flush rose to his face. “What the deuce does he mean by writing to me in that style? Join him — not I! And as for the threat, I laugh at it. Poor Jean! This headstrong fool seems bent on tormenting her. Well, Dean, what are you waiting for?” he demanded, as if suddenly conscious of her presence.

“Nothing, sir; I only stopped to see if you found the letter. Beg pardon, sir.”

And she was moving on when Coventry asked, with a suspicious look, “What made you think it was lost? You seem to take an uncommon interest in my affairs today."

"Oh dear, no, sir. I felt a bit anxious, Benson is so forgetful, and it was me who sent him after you, for I happened to see you go out, so I felt responsible. Being marked that way, I thought it might be important so I asked about it."

"Very well, you can go, Dean. It's all right, you see."

"I'm not so sure of that," muttered the woman, as she curtsied respectfully and went away, looking as if the letter had *not* been found.

Dean was Miss Beaufort's maid, a grave, middle-aged woman with keen eyes and a somewhat grim air. Having been long in the family, she enjoyed all the privileges of a faithful and favorite servant. She loved her young mistress with an almost jealous affection. She watched over her with the vigilant care of a mother and resented any attempt at interference on the part of others. At first she had pitied and liked Jean Muir, then distrusted her, and now heartily hated her, as the cause of the increased indifference of Coventry toward his cousin. Dean knew the depth of Lucia's love, and though no man, in her eyes, was worthy of her mistress, still, having honored him with her regard, Dean felt bound to like him, and the late change in his manner disturbed the maid almost as much as it did the mistress. She watched Jean narrowly, causing that amiable creature much amusement but little annoyance, as yet, for Dean's slow English wit was no match for the subtle mind of the governess. On the preceding night, Dean had been sent up to the Hall with costumes and had there seen something which much disturbed her. She began to speak of it while undressing her mistress, but Lucia, being in an unhappy mood, had so sternly ordered her not to gossip that the tale remained untold, and she was forced to bide her tune.

Now I'll see how *she* looks after it; though there's not much to be got out of *her* face, the deceitful hussy, thought Dean, marching down the corridor and knitting her black brows as she went.

"Good morning, Mrs. Dean. I hope you are none the worse for last night's frolic. You had the work and we the play," said a blithe voice behind her; and turning sharply, she confronted Miss Muir. Fresh and smiling, the governess nodded with an air of cordiality which would have been irresistible with anyone but Dean.

"I'm quite well, thank you, miss," she returned coldly, as her keen eye fastened on the girl as if to watch the effect of her words. "I had a good rest when the young ladies and gentlemen were at supper, for while the maids cleared up, I sat in the 'little anteroom.'"

"Yes, I saw you, and feared you'd take cold. Very glad you didn't. How is Miss Beaufort? She seemed rather poorly last night" was the tranquil reply, as

Jean settled the little frills about her delicate wrists. The cool question was a return shot for Dean's hint that she had been where she could oversee the interview between Coventry and Miss Muir.

"She is a bit tired, as any *lady* would be after such an evening.
People who are *used* to *play-acting* wouldn't mind it, perhaps, but
Miss Beaufort don't enjoy *romps* as much as *some* do."

The emphasis upon certain words made Dean's speech as impertinent as she desired. But Jean only laughed, and as Coventry's step was heard behind them, she ran downstairs, saying blandly, but with a wicked look, "I won't stop to thank you now, lest Mr. Coventry should bid me good-morning, and so increase Miss Beaufort's indisposition."

Dean's eyes flashed as she looked after the girl with a wrathful face, and went her way, saying grimly, "I'll bide my time, but I'll get the better of her yet."

Fancying himself quite removed from "last night's absurdity," yet curious to see how Jean would meet him, Coventry lounged into the breakfast room with his usual air of listless indifference. A languid nod and murmur was all the reply he vouchsafed to the greetings of cousin, sister, and governess as he sat down and took up his paper.

"Have you had a letter from Ned?" asked Bella, looking at the note which her brother still held.

"No" was the brief answer.

"Who then? You look as if you had received bad news."

There was no reply, and, peeping over his arm, Bella caught sight of the seal and exclaimed, in a disappointed tone, "It is the Sydney crest. I don't care about the note now. Men's letters to each other are not interesting."

Miss Muir had been quietly feeding one of Edward's dogs, but at the name she looked up and met Coventry's eyes, coloring so distressfully that he pitied her. Why he should take the trouble to cover her confusion, he did not stop to ask himself, but seeing the curl of Lucia's lip, he suddenly addressed her with an air of displeasure, "Do you know that Dean is getting impertinent? She presumes too much on her age and your indulgence, and forgets her place."

"What has she done?" asked Lucia coldly.

"She troubles herself about my affairs and takes it upon herself to keep
Benson in order."

Here Coventry told about the letter and the woman's evident curiosity.

"Poor Dean, she gets no thanks for reminding you of what you had forgotten.

Next time she will leave your letters to their fate, and perhaps it will be as well, if they have such a bad effect upon your temper, Gerald."

Lucia spoke calmly, but there was an angry color in her cheek as she rose and left the room. Coventry looked much annoyed, for on Jean's face he detected a faint smile, half pitiful, half satirical, which disturbed him more than his cousin's insinuation. Bella broke the awkward silence by saying, with a sigh, "Poor Ned! I do so long to hear again from him. I thought a letter had come for some of us. Dean said she saw one bearing his writing on the hall table yesterday."

"She seems to have a mania for inspecting letters. I won't allow it. Who was the letter for, Bella?" said Coventry, putting down his paper.

"She wouldn't or couldn't tell, but looked very cross and told me to ask you."

"Very odd! I've had none," began Coventry.

"But I had one several days ago. Will you please read it, and my reply?"
And as she spoke, Jean laid two letters before him.

"Certainly not. It would be dishonorable to read what Ned intended for no eyes but your own. You are too scrupulous in one way, and not enough so in another, Miss Muir." And Coventry offered both the letters with an air of grave decision, which could not conceal the interest and surprise he felt.

"You are right. Mr. Edward's note *should* be kept sacred, for in it the poor boy has laid bare his heart to me. But mine I beg you will read, that you may see how well I try to keep my word to you. Oblige me in this, Mr. Coventry; I have a right to ask it of you."

So urgently she spoke, so wistfully she looked, that he could not refuse and, going to the window, read the letter. It was evidently an answer to a passionate appeal from the young lover, and was written with consummate skill. As he read, Gerald could not help thinking, If this girl writes in this way to a man whom she does *not* love, with what a world of power and passion would she write to one whom she *did* love. And this thought kept returning to him as his eye went over line after line of wise argument, gentle reproof, good counsel, and friendly regard. Here and there a word, a phrase, betrayed what she had already confessed, and Coventry forgot to return the letter, as he stood wondering who was the man whom Jean loved.

The sound of Bella's voice recalled him, for she was saying, half kindly, half petulantly, "Don't look so sad, Jean. Ned will outlive it, I dare say. You remember you said once men never died of love, though women might. In his one note to me, he spoke so beautifully of you, and begged me to be kind to you for his sake, that I try to be with all my heart, though if it was anyone but you, I really think I should hate them for making my dear boy so unhappy.”

“You are too kind, Bella, and I often think I’ll go away to relieve you of my presence; but unwise and dangerous as it is to stay, I haven’t the courage to go. I’ve been so happy here.” And as she spoke, Jean’s head dropped lower over the dog as it nestled to her affectionately.

Before Bella could utter half the loving words that sprang to her lips, Coventry came to them with all languor gone from face and mien, and laying Jean’s letter before her, he said, with an undertone of deep feeling in his usually emotionless voice, “A right womanly and eloquent letter, but I fear it will only increase the fire it was meant to quench. I pity my brother more than ever now.”

“Shall I send it?” asked Jean, looking straight up at him, like one who had entire reliance on his judgment.

“Yes, I have not the heart to rob him of such a sweet sermon upon self-sacrifice. Shall I post it for you?”

“Thank you; in a moment.” And with a grateful look, Jean dropped her eyes. Producing her little purse, she selected a penny, folded it in a bit of paper, and then offered both letter and coin to Coventry, with such a pretty air of business, that he could not control a laugh.

“So you won’t be indebted to me for a penny? What a proud woman you are, Miss Muir.”

“I am; it’s a family failing.” And she gave him a significant glance, which recalled to him the memory of who she was. He understood her feeling, and liked her the better for it, knowing that he would have done the same had he been in her place. It was a little thing, but if done for effect, it answered admirably, for it showed a quick insight into his character on her part, and betrayed to him the existence of a pride in which he sympathized heartily. He stood by Jean a moment, watching her as she burnt Edward’s letter in the blaze of the spirit lamp under the urn.

“Why do you do that?” he asked involuntarily.

“Because it is my duty to forget” was all her answer.

“Can you always forget when it becomes a duty?”

“I wish I could! I wish I could!”

She spoke passionately, as if the words broke from her against her will, and, rising hastily, she went into the garden, as if afraid to stay.

“Poor, dear Jean is very unhappy about something, but I can’t discover what it is. Last night I found her crying over a rose, and now she runs away, looking as if her heart was broken. I’m glad I’ve got no lessons.”

"What kind of a rose?" asked Coventry from behind his paper as Bella paused.

"A lovely white one. It must have come from the Hall; we have none like it. I wonder if Jean was ever going to be married, and lost her lover, and felt sad because the flower reminded her of bridal roses."

Coventry made no reply, but felt himself change countenance as he recalled the little scene behind the rose hedge, where he gave Jean the flower which she had refused yet taken. Presently, to Bella's surprise, he flung down the paper, tore Sydney's note to atoms, and rang for his horse with an energy which amazed her.

"Why, Gerald, what has come over you? One would think Ned's restless spirit had suddenly taken possession of you. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to work" was the unexpected answer, as Coventry turned toward her with an expression so rarely seen on his fine face.

"What has waked you up all at once?" asked Bella, looking more and more amazed.

"You did," he said, drawing her toward him.

"I! When? How?"

"Do you remember saying once that energy was better than beauty in a man, and that no one could respect an idler?"

"I never said anything half so sensible as that. Jean said something like it once, I believe, but I forgot. Are you tired of doing nothing, at last, Gerald?"

"Yes, I neglected my duty to Ned, till he got into trouble, and now I reproach myself for it. It's not too late to do other neglected tasks, so I'm going at them with a will. Don't say anything about it to anyone, and don't laugh at me, for I'm in earnest, Bell."

"I know you are, and I admire and love you for it, my dear old boy," cried Bella enthusiastically, as she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him heartily. "What will you do first?" she asked, as he stood thoughtfully smoothing the bright head that leaned upon his shoulder, with that new expression still clear and steady in his face.

"I'm going to ride over the whole estate, and attend to things as a master should; not leave it all to Bent, of whom I've heard many complaints, but have been too idle to inquire about them. I shall consult Uncle, and endeavor to be all that my father was in his time. Is that a worthy ambition, dear?"

"Oh, Gerald, let me tell Mamma. It will make her so happy. You are her idol, and to hear you say these things, to see you look so like dear Papa, would do more for her spirits than all the doctors in England."

"Wait till I prove what my resolution is worth. When I have really done something, then I'll surprise Mamma with a sample of my work."

"Of course you'll tell Lucia?"

"Not on any account. It is a little secret between us, so keep it till I give you leave to tell it."

"But Jean will see it at once; she knows everything that happens, she is so quick and wise. Do you mind her knowing?"

"I don't see that I can help it if she is so wonderfully gifted. Let her see what she can, I don't mind her. Now I'm off." And with a kiss to his sister, a sudden smile on his face, Coventry sprang upon his horse and rode away at a pace which caused the groom to stare after him in blank amazement.

Nothing more was seen of him till dinnertime, when he came in so exhilarated by his brisk ride and busy morning that he found some difficulty in assuming his customary manner, and more than once astonished the family by talking animatedly on various subjects which till now had always seemed utterly uninteresting to him. Lucia was amazed, his mother delighted, and Bella could hardly control her desire to explain the mystery; but Jean took it very calmly and regarded him with the air of one who said, "I understand, but you will soon tire of it." This nettled him more than he would confess, and he exerted himself to silently contradict that prophecy.

"Have you answered Mr. Sydney's letter?" asked Bella, when they were all scattered about the drawing room after dinner.

"No," answered her brother, who was pacing up and down with restless steps, instead of lounging near his beautiful cousin.

"I ask because I remembered that Ned sent a message for him in my last note, as he thought you would know Sydney's address. Here it is, something about a horse. Please put it in when you write," and Bella laid the note on the writing table nearby.

"I'll send it at once and have done with it," muttered Coventry and, seating himself, he dashed off a few lines, sealed and sent the letter, and then resumed his march, eyeing the three young ladies with three different expressions, as he passed and repassed. Lucia sat apart, feigning to be intent upon a book, and her handsome face looked almost stern in its haughty composure, for though her heart ached, she was too proud to own it. Bella now lay on the sofa, half asleep, a rosy little creature, as unconsciously pretty as a child. Miss Muir sat in the recess of a deep window, in a low lounging chair, working at an embroidery frame with a graceful industry pleasant to see. Of late she had worn colors, for Bella had been generous in gifts, and the pale blue muslin which flowed in soft waves about her was very becoming to her fair skin and golden hair. The close braids were gone, and loose curls dropped here and there from the heavy coil wound around her well-shaped head. The tip of one dainty foot was visible, and a petulant little gesture which now and then shook back the falling sleeve gave glimpses of a round white arm. Ned's great hound lay nearby, the sunshine flickered on her through the leaves, and as she sat smiling to herself, while the dexterous hands shaped leaf and flower, she made a charming picture of all that is most womanly and winning; a picture which few men's eyes would not have liked to rest upon.

Another chair stood near her, and as Coventry went up and down, a strong desire to take it possessed him. He was tired of his thoughts and wished to be amused by watching the changes of the girl's expressive face, listening to the varying tones of her voice, and trying to discover the spell which so strongly attracted him in spite of himself. More than once he swerved from his course to gratify his whim, but Lucia's presence always restrained him, and with a word to the dog, or a glance from the window, as pretext for a pause, he resumed his walk again. Something in his cousin's face reproached him, but her manner of late was so repellent that he felt no desire to resume their former familiarity, and, wishing to show that he did not consider himself bound, he kept aloof. It was a quiet test of the power of each woman over this man; they instinctively felt it, and both tried to conquer. Lucia spoke several times, and tried to speak frankly and affably; but her manner was constrained, and Coventry, having answered politely, relapsed into silence. Jean said nothing, but silently appealed to eye and ear by the pretty picture she made of herself, the snatches of song she softly sang, as if forgetting that she was not alone, and a shy glance now and then, half wistful, half merry, which was more alluring than graceful figure or sweet voice. When she had tormented Lucia and tempted Coventry long enough, she quietly asserted her supremacy in a way which astonished her rival, who knew nothing of the secret of her birth, which knowledge did much to attract and charm the young man. Letting a ball of silk escape from her lap, she watched it roll toward the promenader, who caught and returned it with an alacrity which added grace to the trifling service. As she took it, she said, in the frank way that never failed to win him, "I think you must be tired; but if exercise is necessary, employ your energies to some purpose and put your mother's basket of silks in order. They are in a tangle, and it will please her to know that you did it, as your brother used to do."

"Hercules at the distaff," said Coventry gaily, and down he sat in the long-desired seat. Jean put the basket on his knee, and as he surveyed it, as if daunted at his task, she leaned back, and indulged in a musical little peal of laughter charming to hear. Lucia sat dumb with surprise, to see her proud, indolent cousin obeying the commands of a governess, and looking as if he heartily enjoyed it. In ten minutes she was as entirely forgotten as if she had been miles away; for Jean seemed in her wittiest, gayest mood, and as she now treated the "young master" like an equal, there was none of the former meek timidity. Yet often her eyes fell, her color changed, and the piquant sallies faltered on her tongue, as Coventry involuntarily looked deep into the fine eyes which had once shone on him so tenderly in that mimic tragedy. He could not forget it, and though neither alluded to it, the memory of the previous evening seemed to haunt both and lend a secret charm to the present moment. Lucia bore this as long as she could, and then left the room with the air of an insulted princess; but Coventry did not, and Jean feigned not to see her go. Bella was fast asleep, and before he knew how it came to pass, the young man was listening to the story of his companion's life. A sad tale, told with wonderful skill, for soon he was absorbed in it. The basket slid unobserved from his knee, the dog was pushed away, and, leaning forward, he listened eagerly as the girl's low voice recounted all the hardships, loneliness, and grief of her short life. In the midst of a touching episode she started, stopped, and looked straight before her, with an intent expression which changed to one of intense contempt, and her eye turned to Coventry's, as she said, pointing to the window behind him, "We are watched."

"By whom?" he demanded, starting up angrily.

"Hush, say nothing, let it pass. I am used to it."

"But *I* am not, and I'll not submit to it. Who was it, Jean?" he answered hotly.

She smiled significantly at a knot of rose-colored ribbon, which a little gust was blowing toward them along the terrace. A black frown darkened the young man's face as he sprang out of the long window and went rapidly out of sight, scrutinizing each green nook as he passed. Jean laughed quietly as she watched him, and said softly to herself, with her eyes on the fluttering ribbon, "That was a fortunate accident, and a happy inspiration. Yes, my dear Mrs. Dean, you will find that playing the spy will only get your mistress as well as yourself into trouble. You would not be warned, and you must take the consequences, reluctant as I am to injure a worthy creature like yourself."

Soon Coventry was heard returning. Jean listened with suspended breath to catch his first words, for he was not alone.

"Since you insist that it was you and not your mistress, I let it pass, although I still have my suspicions. Tell Miss Beaufort I desire to see her for a few moments in the library. Now go, Dean, and be careful for the future, if you wish to stay in my house."

The maid retired, and the young man came in looking both ireful and stern.

"I wish I had said nothing, but I was startled, and spoke involuntarily. Now you are angry, and I have made fresh trouble for poor Miss Lucia. Forgive me as I forgive her, and let it pass. I have learned to bear this surveillance, and pity her causeless jealousy," said Jean, with a self-reproachful air.

"I will forgive the dishonorable act, but I cannot forget it, and I intend to put a stop to it. I am not betrothed to my cousin, as I told you once, but you, like all the rest, seem bent on believing that I am. Hitherto I have cared too little about the matter to settle it, but now I shall prove beyond all doubt that I am free."

As he uttered the last word, Coventry cast on Jean a look that affected her strangely. She grew pale, her work dropped on her lap, and her eyes rose to his, with an eager, questioning expression, which slowly changed to one of mingled pain and pity, as she turned her face away, murmuring in a tone of tender sorrow, "Poor Lucia, who will comfort her?"

For a moment Coventry stood silent, as if weighing some fateful purpose in his mind. As Jean's rapt sigh of compassion reached his ear, he had echoed it within himself, and half repented of his resolution; then his eye rested on the girl before him looking so lonely in her sweet sympathy for another that his heart yearned toward her. Sudden fire shot into his eye, sudden warmth replaced the cold sternness of his face, and his steady voice faltered suddenly, as he said, very low, yet very earnestly, "Jean, I have tried to love her, but I cannot. Ought I to deceive her, and make myself miserable to please my family?"

"She is beautiful and good, and loves you tenderly; is there no hope for her?" asked Jean, still pale, but very quiet, though she held one hand against her heart, as if to still or hide its rapid beating.

"None," answered Coventry.

"But can you not learn to love her? Your will is strong, and most men would not find it a hard task."

"I cannot, for something stronger than my own will controls me."

"What is that?" And Jean's dark eyes were fixed upon him, full of innocent wonder.

His fell, and he said hastily, "I dare not tell you yet."

"Pardon! I should not have asked. Do not consult me in this matter; I am not the person to advise you. I can only say that it seems to me as if any man with an empty heart would be glad to have so beautiful a woman as your cousin."

"My heart is not empty," began Coventry, drawing a step nearer, and speaking in a passionate voice. "Jean, I *must* speak; hear me. I cannot love my cousin, because I love you."

"Stop!" And Jean sprang up with a commanding gesture. "I will not hear you while any promise binds you to another. Remember your mother's wishes, Lucia's hopes, Edward's last words, your own pride, my humble lot. You forget yourself, Mr. Coventry. Think well before you speak, weigh the cost of this act, and recollect who I am before you insult me by any transient passion, any false vows."

"I have thought, I do weigh the cost, and I swear that I desire to woo you as humbly, honestly as I would any lady in the land. You speak of my pride. Do I stoop in loving my equal in rank? You speak of your lowly lot, but poverty is no disgrace, and the courage with which you bear it makes it beautiful. I should have broken with Lucia before I spoke, but I could not control myself. My mother loves you, and will be happy in my happiness. Edward must forgive me, for I have tried to do my best, but love is irresistible. Tell me, Jean, is there any hope for me?"

He had seized her hand and was speaking impetuously, with ardent face and tender tone, but no answer came, for as Jean turned her eloquent countenance toward him, full of maiden shame and timid love, Dean's prim figure appeared at the door, and her harsh voice broke the momentary silence, saying, sternly, "Miss Beaufort is waiting for you, sir."

"Go, go at once, and be kind, for my sake, Gerald," whispered Jean, far he stood as if deaf and blind to everything but her voice, her face.

As she drew his head down to whisper, her cheek touched his, and regardless of Dean, he kissed it, passionately, whispering back, "My little Jean! For your sake I can be anything."

"Miss Beaufort is waiting. Shall I say you will come, sir?" demanded Dean, pale and grim with indignation.

"Yes, yes, I'll come. Wait for me in the garden, Jean." And Coventry hurried away, in no mood for the interview but anxious to have it over.

As the door closed behind him, Dean walked up to Miss Muir, trembling with anger, and laying a heavy hand on her arm, she said below her breath, "I've been expecting this, you artful creature. I saw your game and did my best to spoil it, but you are too quick for me. You think you've got him. There you are mistaken; for as sure as my name is Hester Dean, I'll prevent it, or Sir John shall."

"Take your hand away and treat me with proper respect, or you will be dismissed from this house. Do you know who I am?" And Jean drew herself up with a haughty air, which impressed the woman more deeply than her words. "I am the daughter of Lady Howard and, if I choose it, can be the wife of Mr. Coventry."

Dean drew back amazed, yet not convinced. Being a well-trained servant, as well as a prudent woman, she feared to overstep the bounds of respect, to go too far, and get her mistress as well as herself into trouble. So, though she still doubted Jean, and hated her more than ever, she controlled herself. Dropping a curtsy, she assumed her usual air of deference, and said, meekly, “I beg pardon, miss. If I’d known, I should have conducted myself differently, of course, but ordinary governesses make so much mischief in a house, one can’t help mistrusting them. I don’t wish to meddle or be overbold, but being fond of my dear young lady, I naturally take her part, and must say that Mr. Coventry has not acted like a gentleman.”

“Think what you please, Dean, but I advise you to say as little as possible if you wish to remain. I have not accepted Mr. Coventry yet, and if he chooses to set aside the engagement his family made for him, I think he has a right to do so. Miss Beaufort would hardly care to marry him against his will, because he pities her for her unhappy love,” and with a tranquil smile, Miss Muir walked away.

CHAPTER VII

THE LAST CHANCE

"She will tell Sir John, will she? Then I must be before her, and hasten events. It will be as well to have all sure before there can be any danger. My poor Dean, you are no match for me, but you may prove annoying, nevertheless."

These thoughts passed through Miss Muir's mind as she went down the hall, pausing an instant at the library door, for the murmur of voices was heard. She caught no word, and had only time for an instant's pause as Dean's heavy step followed her. Turning, Jean drew a chair before the door, and, beckoning to the woman, she said, smiling still, "Sit here and play watchdog. I am going to Miss Bella, so you can nod if you will."

"Thank you, miss. I will wait for my young lady. She may need me when this hard time is over." And Dean seated herself with a resolute face.

Jean laughed and went on; but her eyes gleamed with sudden malice, and she glanced over her shoulder with an expression which boded ill for the faithful old servant.

"I've got a letter from Ned, and here is a tiny note for you," cried Bella as Jean entered the boudoir. "Mine is a very odd, hasty letter, with no news in it, but his meeting with Sydney. I hope yours is better, or it won't be very satisfactory."

As Sydney's name passed Bella's lips, all the color died out of Miss Muir's face, and the note shook with the tremor of her hand. Her very lips were white, but she said calmly, "Thank you. As you are busy, I'll go and read my letter on the lawn." And before Bella could speak, she was gone.

Hurrying to a quiet nook, Jean tore open the note and read the few blotted lines it contained.

I have seen Sydney; he has told me all; and, hard as I found it to believe, it was impossible to doubt, for he has discovered proofs which cannot be denied. I make no reproaches, shall demand no confession or atonement, for I cannot forget that I once loved you. I give you three days to find another home, before I return to tell the family who you are. Go at once, I beseech you, and spare me the pain of seeing your disgrace.

Slowly, steadily she read it twice over, then sat motionless, knitting her brows in deep thought. Presently she drew a long breath, tore up the note, and rising, went slowly toward the Hall, saying to herself, "Three days, only three days! Can it be accomplished in so short a time? It shall be, if wit and will can do it, for it is my last chance. If this fails, I'll not go back to my old life, but end all at once."

Setting her teeth and clenching her hands, as if some memory stung her, she went on through the twilight, to find Sir John waiting to give her a hearty welcome.

"You look tired, my dear. Never mind the reading tonight; rest yourself, and let the book go," he said kindly, observing her worn look.

"Thank you, sir. I am tired, but I'd rather read, else the book will not be finished before I go."

"Go, child! Where are you going?" demanded Sir John, looking anxiously at her as she sat down.

"I will tell you by-and-by, sir." And opening the book, Jean read for a little while.

But the usual charm was gone; there was no spirit in the voice of the reader, no interest in the face of the listener, and soon he said, abruptly, "My dear, pray stop! I cannot listen with a divided mind. What troubles you? Tell your friend, and let him comfort you."

As if the kind words overcame her, Jean dropped the book, covered up her face, and wept so bitterly that Sir John was much alarmed; for such a demonstration was doubly touching in one who usually was all gaiety and smiles. As he tried to soothe her, his words grew tender, his solicitude full of a more than paternal anxiety, and his kind heart overflowed with pity and affection for the weeping girl. As she grew calmer, he urged her to be frank, promising to help and counsel her, whatever the affliction or fault might be.

"Ah, you are too kind, too generous! How can I go away and leave my one friend?" sighed Jean, wiping the tears away and looking up at him with grateful eyes.

"Then you do care a little for the old man?" said Sir John with an eager look, an involuntary pressure of the hand he held.

Jean turned her face away, and answered, very low, "No one ever was so kind to me as you have been. Can I help caring for you more than I can express?"

Sir John was a little deaf at times, but he heard that, and looked well pleased. He had been rather thoughtful of late, had dressed with unusual care, been particularly gallant and gay when the young ladies visited him, and more than once, when Jean paused in the reading to ask a question, he had been forced to confess that he had not been listening; though, as she well knew, his eyes had been fixed upon her. Since the discovery of her birth, his manner had been peculiarly benignant, and many little acts had proved his interest and goodwill. Now, when Jean spoke of going, a panic seized him, and desolation seemed about to fall upon the old Hall. Something in her unusual agitation struck him as peculiar and excited his curiosity. Never had she seemed so interesting as now, when she sat beside him with tearful eyes, and some soft trouble in her heart which she dared not confess.

"Tell me everything, child, and let your friend help you if he can." Formerly he said "father" or "the old man," but lately he always spoke of himself as her "friend."

"I will tell you, for I have no one else to turn to. I must go away because Mr. Coventry has been weak enough to love me."

"What, Gerald?" cried Sir John, amazed.

"Yes; today he told me this, and left me to break with Lucia; so I ran to you to help me prevent him from disappointing his mother's hopes and plans."

Sir John had started up and paced down the room, but as Jean paused he turned toward her, saying, with an altered face, "Then you do not love him? Is it possible?"

"No, I do not love him," she answered promptly.

"Yet he is all that women usually find attractive. How is it that you have escaped, Jean?"

"I love someone else" was the scarcely audible reply.

Sir John resumed his seat with the air of a man bent on getting at a mystery, if possible.

"It will be unjust to let you suffer for the folly of these boys, my little girl. Ned is gone, and I was sure that Gerald was safe; but now that his turn has come, I am perplexed, for he cannot be sent away."

"No, it is I who must go; but it seems so hard to leave this safe and happy home, and wander away into the wide, cold world again. You have all been too kind to me, and now separation breaks my heart."

A sob ended the speech, and Jean's head went down upon her hands again. Sir John looked at her a moment, and his fine old face was full of genuine emotion, as he said slowly, "Jean, will you stay and be a daughter to the solitary old man?"

"No, sir" was the unexpected answer.

"And why not?" asked Sir John, looking surprised, but rather pleased than angry.

"Because I could not be a daughter to you; and even if I could, it would not be wise, for the gossips would say you were not old enough to be the adopted father of a girl like me. Sir John, young as I am, I know much of the world, and am sure that this kind plan is impractical; but I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Where will you go, Jean?" asked Sir John, after a pause.

"To London, and try to find another situation where I can do no harm."

"Will it be difficult to find another home?"

"Yes. I cannot ask Mrs. Coventry to recommend me, when I have innocently brought so much trouble into her family; and Lady Sydney is gone, so I have no friend."

"Except John Coventry. I will arrange all that. When will you go, Jean?"

"Tomorrow."

"So soon!" And the old man's voice betrayed the trouble he was trying to conceal.

Jean had grown very calm, but it was the calmness of desperation. She had hoped that the first tears would produce the avowal for which she waited. It had not, and she began to fear that her last chance was slipping from her. Did the old man love her? If so, why did he not speak? Eager to profit by each moment, she was on the alert for any hopeful hint, any propitious word, look, or act, and every nerve was strung to the utmost.

"Jean, may I ask one question?" said Sir John.

"Anything of me, sir."

"This man whom you love — can he not help you?"

"He could if he knew, but he must not."

"If he knew what? Your present trouble?"

"No. My love."

"He does not know this, then?"

"No, thank heaven! And he never will."

"Why not?"

"Because I am too proud to own it."

"He loves you, my child?"

"I do not know — I dare not hope it," murmured Jean.

"Can I not help you here? Believe me, I desire to see you safe and happy. Is there nothing I can do?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"May I know the name?"

"No! No! Let me go; I cannot bear this questioning!" And Jean's distressful face warned him to ask no more.

"Forgive me, and let me do what I may. Rest here quietly. I'll write a letter to a good friend of mine, who will find you a home, if you leave us."

As Sir John passed into his inner study, Jean watched him with despairing eyes and wrung her hands, saying to herself, Has all my skill deserted me when I need it most? How can I make him understand, yet not overstep the bounds of maiden modesty? He is so blind, so timid, or so dull he will not see, and time is going fast. What shall I do to open his eyes?

Her own eyes roved about the room, seeking for some aid from inanimate things, and soon she found it. Close behind the couch where she sat hung a fine miniature of Sir John. At first her eye rested on it as she contrasted its placid comeliness with the unusual pallor and disquiet of the living face seen through the open door, as the old man sat at his desk trying to write and casting covert glances at the girlish figure he had left behind him. Affecting unconsciousness of this, Jean gazed on as if forgetful of everything but the picture, and suddenly, as if obeying an irresistible impulse, she took it down, looked long and fondly at it, then, shaking her curls about her face, as if to hide the act, pressed it to her lips and seemed to weep over it in an uncontrollable paroxysm of tender grief. A sound startled her, and like a guilty thing, she turned to replace the picture; but it dropped from her hand as she uttered a faint cry and hid her face, for Sir John stood before her, with an expression which she could not mistake.

“Jean, why did you do that?” he asked, in an eager, agitated voice.

No answer, as the girl sank lower, like one overwhelmed with shame.
Laying his hand on the bent head, and bending his own, he whispered,
“Tell me, is the name John Coventry?”

Still no answer, but a stifled sound betrayed that his words had gone home.

“Jean, shall I go back and write the letter, or may I stay and tell you that the old man loves you better than a daughter?”

She did not speak, but a little hand stole out from under the falling hair, as if to keep him. With a broken exclamation he seized it, drew her up into his arms, and laid his gray head on her fan: one, too happy for words. For a moment Jean Muir enjoyed her success; then, fearing lest some sudden mishap should destroy it, she hastened to make all secure. Looking up with well-feigned timidity and half-confessed affection, she said softly, “Forgive me that I could not hide this better. I meant to go away and never tell it, but you were so kind it made the parting doubly hard. Why did you ask such dangerous questions? Why did you look, when you should have been writing my dismissal?”

“How could I dream that you loved me, Jean, when you refused the only offer I dared make? Could I be presumptuous enough to fancy you would reject young lovers for an old man like me?” asked Sir John, caressing her.

“You are not old, to me, but everything I love and honor!” interrupted Jean, with a touch of genuine remorse, as this generous, honorable gentleman gave her both heart and home, unconscious of deceit. “It is I who am presumptuous, to dare to love one so far above me. But I did not know how dear you were to me till I felt that I must go. I ought not to accept this happiness. I am not worthy of it; and you will regret your kindness when the world blames you for giving a home to one so poor, and plain, and humble as I.”

“Hush, my darling. I care nothing for the idle gossip of the world. If you are happy here, let tongues wag as they will. I shall be too busy enjoying the sunshine of your presence to heed anything that goes on about me. But, Jean, you are sure you love me? It seems incredible that I should win the heart that has been so cold to younger, better men than I.”

“Dear Sir John, be sure of this, I love you truly. I will do my best to be a good wife to you, and prove that, in spite of my many faults, I possess the virtue of gratitude.”

If he had known the strait she was in, he would have understood the cause of the sudden fervor of her words, the intense thankfulness that shone in her face, the real humility that made her stoop and kiss the generous hand that gave so much. For a few moments she enjoyed and let him enjoy the happy present, undisturbed. But the anxiety which devoured her, the danger which menaced her, soon recalled her, and forced her to wring yet more from the unsuspicious heart she had conquered.

“No need of letters now,” said Sir John, as they sat side by side, with the summer moonlight glorifying all the room. “You have found a home for life; may it prove a happy one.”

“It is not mine yet, and I have a strange foreboding that it never will be,” she answered sadly.

“Why, my child?”

“Because I have an enemy who will try to destroy my peace, to poison your mind against me, and to drive me out from my paradise, to suffer again all I have suffered this last year.”

“You mean that mad Sydney of whom you told me?”

“Yes. As soon as he hears of this good fortune to poor little Jean, he will hasten to mar it. He is my fate; I cannot escape him, and wherever he goes my friends desert me; for he has the power and uses it for my destruction. Let me go away and hide before he comes, for, having shared your confidence, it will break my heart to see you distrust and turn from me, instead of loving and protecting.”

“My poor child, you are superstitious. Be easy. No one can harm you now, no one would dare attempt it. And as for my deserting you, that will soon be out of my power, if I have my way.”

“How, dear Sir John?” asked Jean, with a flutter of intense relief at her heart, for the way seemed smoothing before her.

"I will make you my wife at once, if I may. This will free you from Gerald's love, protect you from Sydney's persecution, give you a safe home, and me the right to cherish and defend with heart and hand. Shall it be so, my child?"

"Yes; but oh, remember that I have no friend but you! Promise me to be faithful to the last — to believe in me, to trust me, protect and love me, in spite of all misfortunes, faults, and follies. I will be true as steel to you, and make your life as happy as it deserves to be. Let us promise these things now, and keep the promises unbroken to the end."

Her solemn air touched Sir John. Too honorable and upright himself to suspect falsehood in others, he saw only the natural impulse of a lovely girl in Jean's words, and, taking the hand she gave him in both of his, he promised all she asked, and kept that promise to the end. She paused an instant, with a pale, absent expression, as if she searched herself, then looked up clearly in the confiding face above her, and promised what she faithfully performed in afteryears.

"When shall it be, little sweetheart? I leave all to you, only let it be soon, else some gay young lover will appear, and take you from me," said Sir John, playfully, anxious to chase away the dark expression which had stolen over Jean's face.

"Can you keep a secret?" asked the girl, smiling up at him, all her charming self again.

"Try me."

"I will. Edward is coming home in three days. I must be gone before he comes. Tell no one of this; he wishes to surprise them. And if you love me, tell nobody of your approaching marriage. Do not betray that you care for me until I am really yours. There will be such a stir, such remonstrances, explanations, and reproaches that I shall be worn out, and run away from you all to escape the trial. If I could have my wish, I would go to some quiet place tomorrow and wait till you come for me. I know so little of such things, I cannot tell how soon we may be married; not for some weeks, I think."

"Tomorrow, if we like. A special license permits people to marry when and where they please. My plan is better than yours. Listen, and tell me if it can be carried out. I will go to town tomorrow, get the license, invite my friend, the Reverend Paul Fairfax, to return with me, and tomorrow evening you come at your usual time, and, in the presence of my discreet old servants, make me the happiest man in England. How does this suit you, my little Lady Coventry?"

The plan which seemed made to meet her ends, the name which was the height of her ambition, and the blessed sense of safety which came to her filled Jean Muir with such intense satisfaction that tears of real feeling stood in her eyes, and the glad assent she gave was the truest word that had passed her lips for months.

"We will go abroad or to Scotland for our honeymoon, till the storm blows over," said Sir John, well knowing that this hasty marriage would surprise or offend all his relations, and feeling as glad as Jean to escape the first excitement.

"To Scotland, please. I long to see my father's home," said Jean, who dreaded to meet Sydney on the continent.

They talked a little longer, arranging all things, Sir John so intent on hurrying the event that Jean had nothing to do but give a ready assent to all his suggestions. One fear alone disturbed her. If Sir John went to town, he might meet Edward, might hear and believe his statements. Then all would be lost. Yet this risk must be incurred, if the marriage was to be speedily and safely accomplished; and to guard against the meeting was Jean's sole care. As they went through the park — for Sir John insisted upon taking her home — she said, clinging to his arm:

"Dear friend, bear one thing in mind, else we shall be much annoyed, and all our plans disarranged. Avoid your nephews; you are so frank your face will betray you. They both love me, are both hot-tempered, and in the first excitement of the discovery might be violent. You must incur no danger, no disrespect for my sake; so shun them both till we are safe — particularly Edward. He will feel that his brother has wronged him, and that you have succeeded where he failed. This will irritate him, and I fear a stormy scene. Promise to avoid both for a day or two; do not listen to them, do not see them, do not write to or receive letters from them. It is foolish, I know; but you are all I have, and I am haunted by a strange foreboding that I am to lose you."

Touched and flattered by her tender solicitude, Sir John promised everything, even while he laughed at her fears. Love blinded the good gentleman to the peculiarity of the request; the novelty, romance, and secrecy of the affair rather bewildered though it charmed him; and the knowledge that he had outrivaled three young and ardent lovers gratified his vanity more than he would confess. Parting from the girl at the garden gate, he turned homeward, feeling like a boy again, and loitered back, humming a love lay, quite forgetful of evening damps, gout, and the five-and-fifty years which lay so lightly on his shoulders since Jean's arms had rested there. She hurried toward the house, anxious to escape Coventry; but he was waiting for her, and she was forced to meet him.

"How could you linger so long, and keep me in suspense?" he said reproachfully, as he took her hand and tried to catch a glimpse of her face in the shadow of her hat brim. "Come and rest in the grotto. I have so much to say, to hear and enjoy."

“Not now; I am too tired. Let me go in and sleep. Tomorrow we will talk. It is damp and chilly, and my head aches with all this worry.” Jean spoke wearily, yet with a touch of petulance, and Coventry, fancying that she was piqued at his not coming for her, hastened to explain with eager tenderness.

“My poor little Jean, you do need rest. We wear you out, among us, and you never complain. I should have come to bring you home, but Lucia detained me, and when I got away I saw my uncle had forestalled me. I shall be jealous of the old gentleman, if he is so devoted. Jean, tell me one thing before we part; I am free as air, now, and have a right to speak. Do you love me? Am I the happy man who has won your heart? I dare to think so, to believe that this telltale face of yours has betrayed you, and to hope that I have gained what poor Ned and wild Sydney have lost.”

“Before I answer, tell me of your interview with Lucia. I have a right to know,” said Jean.

Coventry hesitated, for pity and remorse were busy at his heart when he recalled poor Lucia’s grief. Jean was bent on hearing the humiliation of her rival. As the young man paused, she frowned, then lifted up her face wreathed in softest smiles, and laying her hand on his arm, she said, with most effective emphasis, half shy, half fond, upon his name, “Please tell me, Gerald!”

He could not resist the look, the touch, the tone, and taking the little hand in his, he said rapidly, as if the task was distasteful to him, “I told her that I did not, could not love her; that I had submitted to my mother’s wish, and, for a time, had felt tacitly bound to her, though no words had passed between us. But now I demanded my liberty, regretting that the separation was not mutually desired.”

“And she — what did she say? How did she bear it?” asked Jean, feeling in her own woman’s heart how deeply Lucia’s must have been wounded by that avowal.

“Poor girl! It was hard to bear, but her pride sustained her to the end. She owned that no pledge tied me, fully relinquished any claim my past behavior had seemed to have given her, and prayed that I might find another woman to love me as truly, tenderly as she had done. Jean, I felt like a villain; and yet I never plighted my word to her, never really loved her, and had a perfect right to leave her, if I would.”

“Did she speak of me?”

“Yes.”

“What did she say?”

“Must I tell you?”

“Yes, tell me everything. I know she hates me and I forgive her, knowing that I should hate any woman whom *you* loved.”

“Are you jealous, dear?”

“Of you, Gerald?” And the fine eyes glanced up at him, full of a brilliancy that looked like the light of love.

“You make a slave of me already. How do you do it? I never obeyed a woman before. Jean, I think you are a witch. Scotland is the home of weird, uncanny creatures, who take lovely shapes for the bedevilment of poor weak souls. Are you one of those fair deceivers?”

“You are complimentary,” laughed the girl. “I *am* a witch, and one day my disguise will drop away and you will see me as I am, old, ugly, bad and lost. Beware of me in time. I’ve warned you. Now love me at your peril.”

Coventry had paused as he spoke, and eyed her with an unquiet look, conscious of some fascination which conquered yet brought no happiness. A feverish yet pleasurable excitement possessed him; a reckless mood, making him eager to obliterate the past by any rash act, any new experience which his passion brought. Jean regarded him with a wistful, almost woeful face, for one short moment; then a strange smile broke over it, as she spoke in a tone of malicious mockery, under which lurked the bitterness of a sad truth. Coventry looked half bewildered, and his eye went from the girl’s mysterious face to a dimly lighted window, behind whose curtains poor Lucia hid her aching heart, praying for him the tender prayers that loving women give to those whose sins are all forgiven for love’s sake. His heart smote him, and a momentary feeling of repulsion came over him, as he looked at Jean. She saw it, felt angry, yet conscious of a sense of relief; for now that her own safety was so nearly secured, she felt no wish to do mischief, but rather a desire to undo what was already done, and be at peace with all the world. To recall him to his allegiance, she sighed and walked on, saying gently yet coldly, “Will you tell me what I ask before I answer your question, Mr. Coventry?”

“What Lucia said of you? Well, it was this. ‘Beware of Miss Muir. We instinctively distrusted her when we had no cause. I believe in instincts, and mine have never changed, for she has not tried to delude me. Her art is wonderful; I feel yet cannot explain or detect it, except in the working of events which her hand seems to guide. She has brought sorrow and dissension into this hitherto happy family. We are all changed, and this girl has done it. Me she can harm no further; you she will ruin, if she can. Beware of her in tune, or you win bitterly repent your blind infatuation!’“

“And what answer did you make?” asked Jean, as the last words came reluctantly from Coventry’s lips.

“I told her that I loved you in spite of myself, and would make you my wife in the face of all opposition. Now, Jean, your answer.”

“Give me three days to think of it. Good night.” And gliding from him, she vanished into the house, leaving him to roam about half the night, tormented with remorse, suspense, and the old distrust which would return when Jean was not there to banish it by her art.

CHAPTER VIII

SUSPENSE

All the next day, Jean was in a state of the most intense anxiety, as every hour brought the crisis nearer, and every hour might bring defeat, for the subtlest human skill is often thwarted by some unforeseen accident. She longed to assure herself that Sir John was gone, but no servants came or went that day, and she could devise no pretext for sending to glean intelligence. She dared not go herself, lest the unusual act should excite suspicion, for she never went till evening. Even had she determined to venture, there was no time, for Mrs. Coventry was in one of her nervous states, and no one but Miss Muir could amuse her; Lucia was ill, and Miss Muir must give orders; Bella had a studious fit, and Jean must help her. Coventry lingered about the house for several hours, but Jean dared not send him, lest some hint of the truth might reach him. He had ridden away to his new duties when Jean did not appear, and the day dragged on wearisomely. Night came at last, and as Jean dressed for the late dinner, she hardly knew herself when she stood before her mirror, excitement lent such color and brilliancy to her countenance. Remembering the wedding which was to take place that evening, she put on a simple white dress and added a cluster of white roses in bosom and hair. She often wore flowers, but in spite of her desire to look and seem as usual, Bella's first words as she entered the drawing room were "Why, Jean, how like a bride you look; a veil and gloves would make you quite complete!"

"You forget one other trifle, Bell," said Gerald, with eyes that brightened as they rested on Miss Muir.

"What is that?" asked his sister.

"A bridegroom."

Bella looked to see how Jean received this, but she seemed quite composed as she smiled one of her sudden smiles, and merely said, "That trifle will doubtless be found when the time comes. Is Miss Beaufort too ill for dinner?"

"She begs to be excused, and said you would be willing to take her place, she thought."

As innocent Bella delivered this message, Jean glanced at Coventry, who evaded her eye and looked ill at ease.

A little remorse will do him good, and prepare him for repentance after the grand *coup*, she said to herself, and was particularly gay at dinnertime, though

Coventry looked often at Lucia's empty seat, as if he missed her. As soon as they left the table, Miss Muir sent Bella to her mother; and, knowing that Coventry would not linger long at his wine, she hurried away to the Hall. A servant was lounging at the door, and of him she asked, in a tone which was eager in spite of all efforts to be calm, "Is Sir John at home?"

"No, miss, he's just gone to town."

"Just gone! When do you mean?" cried Jean, forgetting the relief she felt in hearing of his absence in surprise at his late departure.

"He went half an hour ago, in the last train, miss."

"I thought he was going early this morning; he told me he should be back this evening."

"I believe he did mean to go, but was delayed by company. The steward came up on business, and a load of gentlemen called, so Sir John could not get off till night, when he wasn't fit to go, being worn out, and far from well."

"Do you think he will be ill? Did he look so?" And as Jean spoke, a thrill of fear passed over her, lest death should rob her of her prize.

"Well, you know, miss, hurry of any kind is bad for elderly gentlemen inclined to apoplexy. Sir John was in a worry all day, and not like himself. I wanted him to take his man, but he wouldn't; and drove off looking flushed and excited like. I'm anxious about him, for I know something is amiss to hurry him off in this way."

"When will he be back, Ralph?"

"Tomorrow noon, if possible; at night, certainly, he bid me tell anyone that called."

"Did he leave no note or message for Miss Coventry, or someone of the family?"

"No, miss, nothing."

"Thank you." And Jean walked back to spend a restless night and rise to meet renewed suspense.

The morning seemed endless, but noon came at last, and under the pretense of seeking coolness in the grotto, Jean stole away to a slope whence the gate to the Hall park was visible. For two long hours she watched, and no one came. She was just turning away when a horseman dashed through the gate and came galloping toward the Hall. Heedless of everything but the uncontrollable longing to gain some tidings, she ran to meet him, feeling assured that he brought ill news. It was a young man from the station, and as he caught sight of her, he drew bridle, looking agitated and undecided.

"Has anything happened?" she cried breathlessly.

"A dreadful accident on the railroad, just the other side of Croydon. News telegraphed half an hour ago," answered the man, wiping his hot face.

"The noon train? Was Sir John in it? Quick, tell me all!"

"It was that train, miss, but whether Sir John was in it or not, we don't know; for the guard is killed, and everything is in such confusion that nothing can be certain. They are at work getting out the dead and wounded. We heard that Sir John was expected, and I came up to tell Mr. Coventry, thinking he would wish to go down. A train leaves in fifteen minutes; where shall I find him? I was told he was at the Hall."

"Ride on, ride on! And find him if he is there. I'll run home and look for him. Lose no time. Ride! Ride!" And turning, Jean sped back like a deer, while the man tore up the avenue to rouse the Hall.

Coventry was there, and went off at once, leaving both Hall and house in dismay. Fearing to betray the horrible anxiety that possessed her, Jean shut herself up in her room and suffered untold agonies as the day wore on and no news came. At dark a sudden cry rang through the house, and Jean rushed down to learn the cause. Bella was standing in the hall, holding a letter, while a group of excited servants hovered near her.

"What is it?" demanded Miss Muir, pale and steady, though her heart died within her as she recognized Gerald's handwriting. Bella gave her the note, and hushed her sobbing to hear again the heavy tidings that had come.

Dear Bella:

Uncle is safe; he did not go in the noon train. But several persons are sure that Ned was there. No trace of him as yet, but many bodies are in the river, under the ruins of the bridge, and I am doing my best to find the poor lad, if he is there. I have sent to all his haunts in town, and as he has not been seen, I hope it is a false report and he is safe with his regiment. Keep this from my mother till we are sure. I write you, because Lucia is ill. Miss Muir will comfort and sustain you. Hope for the best, dear.

Yours, G.C.

Those who watched Miss Muir as she read these words wondered at the strange expressions which passed over her face, for the joy which appeared there as Sir John's safety was made known did not change to grief or horror at poor Edward's possible fate. The smile died on her lips, but her voice did not falter, and in her downcast eyes shone an inexplicable look of something like triumph. No wonder, for if this was true, the danger which menaced her was averted for a time, and the marriage might be consummated without such desperate haste. This sad and sudden event seemed to her the mysterious fulfilment of a secret wish; and though startled she was not daunted but inspirited, for fate seemed to favor her designs. She did comfort Bella, control the excited household, and keep the rumors from Mrs. Coventry all that dreadful night.

At dawn Gerald came home exhausted, and bringing no tiding of the missing man. He had telegraphed to the headquarters of the regiment and received a reply, stating that Edward had left for London the previous day, meaning to go home before returning. The fact of his having been at the London station was also established, but whether he left by the train or not was still uncertain. The ruins were still being searched, and the body might yet appear.

“Is Sir John coming at noon?” asked Jean, as the three sat together in the rosy hush of dawn, trying to hope against hope.

“No, he had been ill, I learned from young Gower, who is just from town, and so had not completed his business. I sent him word to wait till night, for the bridge won’t be passable till then. Now I must try and rest an hour; I’ve worked all night and have no strength left. Call me the instant any messenger arrives.”

With that Coventry went to his room, Bella followed to wait on him, and Jean roamed through house and grounds, unable to rest. The morning was far spent when the messenger arrived. Jean went to receive his tidings, with the wicked hope still lurking at her heart.

“Is he found?” she asked calmly, as the man hesitated to speak.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“You are sure?”

“I am certain, ma’am, though some won’t say till Mr. Coventry comes to look.”

“Is he alive?” And Jean’s white lips trembled as she put the question.

“Oh no, ma’am, that warn’t possible, under all them stones and water. The poor young gentleman is so wet, and crushed, and torn, no one would know him, except for the uniform, and the white hand with the ring on it.”

Jean sat down, very pale, and the man described the finding of the poor shattered body. As he finished, Coventry appeared, and with one look of mingled remorse, shame, and sorrow, the elder brother went away, to find and bring the younger home. Jean crept into the garden like a guilty thing, trying to hide the satisfaction which struggled with a woman’s natural pity, for so sad an end for this brave young life.

“Why waste tears or feign sorrow when I must be glad?” she muttered, as she paced to and fro along the terrace. “The poor boy is out of pain, and I am out of danger.”

She got no further, for, turning as she spoke, she stood face to face with Edward! Bearing no mark of peril on dress or person, but stalwart and strong as ever, he stood there looking at her, with contempt and compassion struggling in his face. As if turned to stone, she remained motionless, with dilated eyes, arrested breath, and paling cheek. He did not speak but watched her silently till she put out a trembling hand, as if to assure herself by touch that it was really he. Then he drew back, and as if the act convinced as fully as words, she said slowly, “They told me you were dead.”

“And you were glad to believe it. No, it was my comrade, young Courtney, who unconsciously deceived you all, and lost his life, as I should have done, if I had not gone to Ascot after seeing him off yesterday.”

“To Ascot?” echoed Jean, shrinking back, for Edward’s eye was on her, and his voice was stern and cold.

“Yes; you know the place. I went there to make inquiries concerning you and was well satisfied. Why are you still here?”

“The three days are not over yet. I hold you to your promise. Before night I shall be gone; till then you will be silent, if you have honor enough to keep your word.”

“I have.” Edward took out his watch and, as he put it back, said with cool precision, “It is now two, the train leaves for London at half-past six; a carriage will wait for you at the side door. Allow me to advise you to go then, for the instant dinner is over I shall speak.” And with a bow he went into the house, leaving Jean nearly suffocated with a throng of contending emotions.

For a few minutes she seemed paralyzed; but the native energy of the woman forbade utter despair, till the last hope was gone. Frail as that now was, she still clung to it tenaciously, resolving to win the game in defiance of everything. Springing up, she went to her room, packed her few valuables, dressed herself with care, and then sat down to wait. She heard a joyful stir below, saw Coventry come hurrying back, and from a garrulous maid learned that the body was that of young Courtney. The uniform being the same as Edward’s and the ring, a gift from him, had caused the men to believe the disfigured corpse to be that of the younger Coventry. No one but the maid came near her; once Bella’s voice called her, but some one checked the girl, and the call was not repeated. At five an envelope was brought her, directed in Edward’s hand, and containing a check which more than paid a year’s salary. No word accompanied the gift, yet the generosity of it touched her, for Jean Muir had the relics of a once honest nature, and despite her falsehood could still admire nobleness and respect virtue. A tear of genuine shame dropped on the paper, and real gratitude filled her heart, as she thought that even if all else failed, she was not thrust out penniless into the world, which had no pity for poverty.

As the clock struck six, she heard a carriage drive around and went down to meet it. A servant put on her trunk, gave the order, “To the station, James,” and she drove away without meeting anyone, speaking to anyone, or apparently being seen by anyone. A sense of utter weariness came over her, and she longed to lie down and forget. But the last chance still remained, and till that failed, she would not give up. Dismissing the carriage, she seated herself to watch for the quarter-past-six train from London, for in that Sir John would come if he came at all that night. She was haunted by the fear that Edward had met and told him. The first glimpse of Sir John's frank face would betray the truth. If he knew all, there was no hope, and she would go her way alone. If he knew nothing, there was yet time for the marriage; and once his wife, she knew she was safe, because for the honor of his name he would screen and protect her.

Up rushed the train, out stepped Sir John, and Jean's heart died within her. Grave, and pale, and worn he looked, and leaned heavily on the arm of a portly gentleman in black. The Reverend Mr. Fairfax, why has he come, if the secret is out? thought Jean, slowly advancing to meet them and fearing to read her fate in Sir John's face. He saw her, dropped his friend's arm, and hurried forward with the ardor of a young man, exclaiming, as he seized her hand with a beaming face, a glad voice, "My little girl! Did you think I would never come?"

She could not answer, the reaction was too strong, but she clung to him, regardless of time or place, and felt that her last hope had not failed. Mr. Fairfax proved himself equal to the occasion. Asking no questions, he hurried Sir John and Jean into a carriage and stepped in after them with a bland apology. Jean was soon herself again, and, having told her fears at his delay, listened eagerly while he related the various mishaps which had detained him.

"Have you seen Edward?" was her first question.

"Not yet, but I know he has come, and have heard of his narrow escape. I should have been in that train, if I had not been delayed by the indisposition which I then cursed, but now bless. Are you ready, Jean? Do you repent your choice, my child?"

"No, no! I am ready, I am only too happy to become your wife, dear, generous Sir John," cried Jean, with a glad alacrity, which touched the old man to the heart, and charmed the Reverend Mr. Fairfax, who concealed the romance of a boy under his clerical suit.

They reached the Hall. Sir John gave orders to admit no one and after a hasty dinner sent for his old housekeeper and his steward, told them of his purpose, and desired them to witness his marriage. Obedience had been the law of their lives, and Master could do nothing wrong in their eyes, so they played their parts willingly, for Jean was a favorite at the Hall. Pale as her gown, but calm and steady, she stood beside Sir John, uttering her vows in a clear tone and taking upon herself the vows of a wife with more than a bride's usual docility. When the ring was fairly on, a smile broke over her face. When Sir John kissed and called her his “little wife,” she shed a tear or two of sincere happiness; and when Mr. Fairfax addressed her as “my lady,” she laughed her musical laugh, and glanced up at a picture of Gerald with eyes full of exultation. As the servants left the room, a message was brought from Mrs. Coventry, begging Sir John to come to her at once.

“You will not go and leave me so soon?” pleaded Jean, well knowing why he was sent for.

“My darling, I must.” And in spite of its tenderness, Sir John’s manner was too decided to be withstood.

“Then I shall go with you,” cried Jean, resolving that no earthly power should part them.

CHAPTER IX

LADY COVENTRY

When the first excitement of Edward's return had subsided, and before they could question him as to the cause of this unexpected visit, he told them that after dinner their curiosity should be gratified, and meantime he begged them to leave Miss Muir alone, for she had received bad news and must not be disturbed. The family with difficulty restrained their tongues and waited impatiently. Gerald confessed his love for Jean and asked his brother's pardon for betraying his trust. He had expected an outbreak, but Edward only looked at him with pitying eyes, and said sadly, "You too! I have no reproaches to make, for I know what you will suffer when the truth is known."

"What do you mean?" demanded Coventry.

"You will soon know, my poor Gerald, and we will comfort one another."

Nothing more could be drawn from Edward till dinner was over, the servants gone, and all the family alone together. Then pale and grave, but very self-possessed, for trouble had made a man of him, he produced a packet of letters, and said, addressing himself to his brother, "Jean Muir has deceived us all. I know her story; let me tell it before I read her letters."

"Stop! I'll not listen to any false tales against her. The poor girl has enemies who belie her!" cried Gerald, starting up.

"For the honor of the family, you must listen, and learn what fools she has made of us. I can prove what I say, and convince you that she has the art of a devil. Sit still ten minutes, then go, if you will."

Edward spoke with authority, and his brother obeyed him with a foreboding heart.

"I met Sydney, and he begged me to beware of her. Nay, listen, Gerald! I know she has told her story, and that you believe it; but her own letters convict her. She tried to charm Sydney as she did us, and nearly succeeded in inducing him to marry her. Rash and wild as he is, he is still a gentleman, and when an incautious word of hers roused his suspicions, he refused to make her his wife. A stormy scene ensued, and, hoping to intimidate him, she feigned to stab herself as if in despair. She did wound herself, but failed to gain her point and insisted upon going to a hospital to die. Lady Sydney, good, simple soul, believed the girl's version of the story, thought her son was in the wrong, and when he was gone, tried to atone for his fault by finding Jean Muir another home. She thought

Gerald was soon to marry Lucia, and that I was away, so sent her here as a safe and comfortable retreat."

"But, Ned, are you sure of all this? Is Sydney to be believed?" began Coventry, still incredulous.

"To convince you, I'll read Jean's letters before I say more. They were written to an accomplice and were purchased by Sydney. There was a compact between the two women, that each should keep the other informed of all adventures, plots and plans, and share whatever good fortune fell to the lot of either. Thus Jean wrote freely, as you shall judge. The letters concern us alone. The first was written a few days after she came.

"Dear Hortense:

"Another failure. Sydney was more wily than I thought. All was going well, when one day my old fault beset me, I took too much wine, and I carelessly owned that I had been an actress. He was shocked, and retreated. I got up a scene, and gave myself a safe little wound, to frighten him. The brute was not frightened, but coolly left me to my fate. I'd have died to spite him, if I dared, but as I didn't, I lived to torment him. As yet, I have had no chance, but I will not forget him. His mother is a poor, weak creature, whom I could use as I would, and through her I found an excellent place. A sick mother, silly daughter, and two eligible sons. One is engaged to a handsome iceberg, but that only renders him more interesting in my eyes, rivalry adds so much to the charm of one's conquests. Well, my dear, I went, got up in the meek style, intending to do the pathetic; but before I saw the family, I was so angry I could hardly control myself. Through the indolence of Monsieur the young master, no carriage was sent for me, and I intend he shall atone for that rudeness by-and-by. The younger son, the mother, and the girl received me patronizingly, and I understood the simple souls at once. Monsieur (as I shall call him, as names are unsafe) was unapproachable, and took no pains to conceal his dislike of governesses. The cousin was lovely, but detestable with her pride, her coldness, and her very visible adoration of Monsieur, who let her worship him, like an inanimate idol as he is. I hated them both, of course, and in return for their insolence shall torment her with jealousy, and teach him how to woo a woman by making his heart ache. They are an intensely proud family, but I can humble them all, I think, by captivating the sons, and when they have committed themselves, cast them off, and marry the old uncle, whose title takes my fancy."

"She never wrote that! It is impossible. A woman could not do it," cried Lucia indignantly, while Bella sat bewildered and Mrs. Coventry supported herself with salts and fan. Coventry went to his brother, examined the writing, and returned to his seat, saying, in a tone of suppressed wrath, “She did write it. I posted some of those letters myself. Go on, Ned.”

”I made myself useful and agreeable to the amiable ones, and overheard the chat of the lovers. It did not suit me, so I fainted away to stop it, and excite interest in the provoking pair. I thought I had succeeded, but Monsieur suspected me and showed me that he did. I forgot my meek role and gave him a stage look. It had a good effect, and I shall try it again. The man is well worth winning, but I prefer the title, and as the uncle is a hale, handsome gentleman, I can’t wait for him to die, though Monsieur is very charming, with his elegant languor, and his heart so fast asleep no woman has had power to wake it yet. I told my story, and they believed it, though I had the audacity to say I was but nineteen, to talk Scotch, and bashfully confess that Sydney wished to marry me. Monsieur knows S. and evidently suspects something. I must watch him and keep the truth from him, if possible.

“I was very miserable that night when I got alone. Something in the atmosphere of this happy home made me wish I was anything but what I am. As I sat there trying to pluck up my spirits, I thought of the days when I was lovely and young, good and gay. My glass showed me an old woman of thirty, for my false locks were off, my paint gone, and my face was without its mask. Bah! how I hate sentiment! I drank your health from your own little flask, and went to bed to dream that I was playing Lady Tartuffe — as I am. Adieu, more soon.”

No one spoke as Edward paused, and taking up another letter, he read on:

”My Dear Creature:

“All goes well. Next day I began my task, and having caught a hint of the character of each, tried my power over them. Early in the morning I ran over to see the Hall. Approved of it highly, and took the first step toward becoming its mistress, by piquing the curiosity and flattering the pride of its master. His estate is his idol; I praised it with a few artless compliments to himself, and he was charmed. The cadet of the family adores horses. I risked my neck to pet his beast, and he *was charmed. The little girl is romantic about flowers; I made a posy and was sentimental, and* she *was charmed. The fair icicle loves her departed mamma, I had raptures over an old picture, and she thawed. Monsieur is used to being worshipped. I took no notice of him, and by the natural perversity of human nature, he began to take notice of me. He likes music; I sang, and stopped when he’d listened long enough to want more. He is lazily fond of being amused; I showed him my skill, but refused to exert it in his behalf. In short, I gave him no peace till he began to wake up. In order to get rid of the boy, I fascinated him, and he was sent away. Poor lad, I rather liked him, and if* *the title had been nearer would have married him.*

“Many thanks for the honor.” And Edward’s lip curled with intense scorn. But Gerald sat like a statue, his teeth set, his eyes fiery, his brows bent, waiting for the end.

“The passionate boy nearly killed his brother, but I turned the affair to good account, and bewitched Monsieur by playing nurse, till Vashti (the icicle) interfered. Then I enacted injured virtue, and kept out of his way, knowing that he would miss me, I mystified him about S. by sending a letter where S. would not get it, and got up all manner of soft scenes to win this proud creature. I get on well and meanwhile privately fascinate Sir J. by being daughterly and devoted. He is a worthy old man, simple as a child, honest as the day, and generous as a prince. I shall be a happy woman if I win him, and you shall share my good fortune; so wish me success.

“This is the third, and contains something which will surprise you,”
Edward said, as he lifted another paper.

”Hortense:

“I’ve done what I once planned to do on another occasion. You know my handsome, dissipated father married a lady of rank for his second wife. I never saw Lady H — — d but once, for I was kept out of the way. Finding that this good Sir J. knew something of her when a girl, and being sure that he did not know of the death of her little daughter, I boldly said I was the child, and told a pitiful tale of my early life. It worked like a charm; he told Monsieur, and both felt the most chivalrous compassion for Lady Howard’s daughter, though before they had secretly looked down on me, and my real poverty and my lowliness. That boy pitied me with an honest warmth and never waited to learn my birth. I don’t forget that and shall repay it if I can. Wishing to bring Monsieur’s affair to a successful crisis, I got up a theatrical evening and was in my element. One little event I must tell you, because I committed an actionable offense and was nearly discovered. I did not go down to supper, knowing that the moth would return to flutter about the candle, and preferring that the fluttering should be done in private, as Vashti’s jealousy is getting uncontrollable. Passing throught the gentlemen’s dressing room, my quick eye caught sight of a letter lying among the costumes. It was no stage affair, and an odd sensation of fear ran through me as I recognized the hand of S. I had feared this, but I believe in chance; and having found the letter, I examined it. You know I can imitate almost any hand. When I read in this paper the whole story of my affair with S., truly told, and also that he had made inquiries into my past life and discovered the truth, I was in a fury. To be so near success and fail was terrible, and I resolved to risk everything. I opened the letter by means of a heated knife blade under the seal, therefore the envelope was perfect; imitating S.'s hand, I penned a few lines in his hasty style, saying he was at Baden, so that if Monsieur answered, the reply would not reach him, for he is in London, it seems. This letter I put into the pocket whence the other must have fallen, and was just congratulating myself on this narrow escape, when Dean, the maid of Vashti, appeared as if watching me. She had evidently seen the letter in my hand, and suspected something. I took no notice of her, but must be careful, for she is on the watch. After this the evening closed with strictly private theatricals, in which Monsieur and myself were the only actors. To make sure that he received my version of the story first, I told him a romantic story of S.'s persecution, and he believed it. This I followed up by a moonlight episode behind a rose hedge, and sent the young gentleman home in a half-dazed condition. What fools men are!"

"She is right!" muttered Coventry, who had flushed scarlet with shame and anger, as his folly became known and Lucia listened in astonished silence.

"Only one more, and my distasteful task will be nearly over," said Edward, unfolding the last of the papers. "This is not a letter, but a copy of one written three nights ago. Dean boldly ransacked Jean Muir's desk while she was at the Hall, and, fearing to betray the deed by keeping the letter, she made a hasty copy which she gave me today, begging me to save the family from disgrace. This makes the chain complete. Go now, if you will, Gerald. I would gladly spare you the pain of hearing this."

"I will not spare myself; I deserve it. Read on," replied Coventry, guessing what was to follow and nerving himself to hear it. Reluctantly his brother read these lines:

"The enemy has surrendered! Give me joy, Hortense; I can be the wife of this proud monsieur, if I will. Think what an honor for the divorced wife of a disreputable actor. I laugh at the farce and enjoy it, for I only wait till the prize I desire is fairly mine, to turn and reject this lover who has proved himself false to brother, mistress, and his own conscience. I resolved to be revenged on both, and I have kept my word. For my sake he cast off the beautiful woman who truly loved him; he forgot his promise to his brother, and put by his pride to beg of me the worn-out heart that is not worth a good man's love. Ah well, I am satisfied, for Vashti has suffered the sharpest pain a proud woman can endure, and will feel another pang when I tell her that I scorn her recreant lover, and give him back to her, to deal with as she will."

Coventry started from his seat with a fierce exclamation, but Lucia bowed her face upon her hands, weeping, as if the pang had been sharper than even Jean foresaw.

"Send for Sir John! I am mortally afraid of this creature. Take her away; do something to her. My poor Bella, what a companion for you! Send for Sir John at once!" cried Mrs. Coventry incoherently, and clasped her daughter in her arms, as if Jean Muir would burst in to annihilate the whole family. Edward alone was calm.

"I have already sent, and while we wait, let me finish this story. It is true that Jean is the daughter of Lady Howard's husband, the pretended clergyman, but really a worthless man who married her for her money. Her own child died, but this girl, having beauty, wit and a bold spirit, took her fate into her own hands, and became an actress. She married an actor, led a reckless life for some years; quarreled with her husband, was divorced, and went to Paris; left the stage, and tried to support herself as governess and companion. You know how she fared with the Sydneys, how she has duped us, and but for this discovery would have duped Sir John. I was in time to prevent this, thank heaven. She is gone; no one knows the truth but Sydney and ourselves; he will be silent, for his own sake; we will be for ours, and leave this dangerous woman to the fate which will surely overtake her."

"Thank you, it has overtaken her, and a very happy one she finds it."

A soft voice uttered the words, and an apparition appeared at the door, which made all start and recoil with amazement — Jean Muir leaning on the arm of Sir John.

"How dare you return?" began Edward, losing the self-control so long preserved. "How dare you insult us by coming back to enjoy the mischief you have done? Uncle, you do not know that woman!"

"Hush, boy, I will not listen to a word, unless you remember where you are," said Sir John with a commanding gesture.

"Remember your promise: love me, forgive me, protect me, and do not listen to their accusations," whispered Jean, whose quick eye had discovered the letters.

"I will; have no fears, my child," he answered, drawing her nearer as he took his accustomed place before the fire, always lighted when Mrs. Coventry was down.

Gerald, who had been pacing the room excitedly, paused behind Lucia's chair as if to shield her from insult; Bella clung to her mother; and Edward, calming himself by a strong effort, handed his uncle the letters, saying briefly, "Look at those, sir, and let them speak."

"I will look at nothing, hear nothing, believe nothing which can in any way lessen my respect and affection for this young lady. She has prepared me for this.

I know the enemy who is unmanly enough to belie and threaten her. I know that you both are unsuccessful lovers, and this explains your unjust, uncourteous treatment now. We all have committed faults and follies. I freely forgive Jean hers, and desire to know nothing of them from your lips. If she has innocently offended, pardon it for my sake, and forget the past."

"But, Uncle, we have proofs that this woman is not what she seems. Her own letters convict her. Read them, and do not blindly deceive yourself," cried Edward, indignant at his uncle's words.

A low laugh startled them all, and in an instant they saw the cause of it. While Sir John spoke, Jean had taken the letters from the hand which he had put behind him, a favorite gesture of his, and, unobserved, had dropped them on the fire. The mocking laugh, the sudden blaze, showed what had been done. Both young men sprang forward, but it was too late; the proofs were ashes, and Jean Muir's bold, bright eyes defied them, as she said, with a disdainful little gesture. "Hands off, gentlemen! You may degrade yourselves to the work of detectives, but I am not a prisoner yet. Poor Jean Muir you might harm, but Lady Coventry is beyond your reach."

"Lady Coventry!" echoed the dismayed family, in varying tones of incredulity, indignation, and amazement.

"Aye, my dear and honored wife," said Sir John, with a protecting arm about the slender figure at his side; and in the act, the words, there was a tender dignity that touched the listeners with pity and respect for the deceived man. "Receive her as such, and for my sake, forbear all further accusation," he continued steadily. "I know what I have done. I have no fear that I shall repent it. If I am blind, let me remain so till time opens my eyes. We are going away for a little while, and when we return, let the old life return again, unchanged, except that Jean makes sunshine for me as well as for you."

No one spoke, for no one knew what to say. Jean broke the silence, saying coolly, "May I ask how those letters came into your possession?"

"In tracing out your past life, Sydney found your friend Hortense. She was poor, money bribed her, and your letters were given up to him as soon as received. Traitors are always betrayed in the end," replied Edward sternly.

Jean shrugged her shoulders, and shot a glance at Gerald, saying with her significant smile, "Remember that, monsieur, and allow me to hope that in wedding you will be happier than in wooing. Receive my congratulations, Miss Beaufort, and let me beg of you to follow my example, if you would keep your lovers."

Here all the sarcasm passed from her voice, the defiance from her eye, and the one unspoiled attribute which still lingered in this woman's artful nature shone in her face, as she turned toward Edward and Bella at their mother’s side.

“You have been kind to me,” she said, with grateful warmth. “I thank you for it, and will repay it if I can. To you I will acknowledge that I am not worthy to be this good man’s wife, and to you I will solemnly promise to devote my life to his happiness. For his sake forgive me, and let there be peace between us.”

There was no reply, but Edward’s indignant eyes fell before hers. Bella half put out her hand, and Mrs. Coventry sobbed as if some regret mingled with her resentment. Jean seemed to expect no friendly demonstration, and to understand that they forbore for Sir John’s sake, not for hers, and to accept their contempt as her just punishment.

“Come home, love, and forget all this,” said her husband, ringing the bell, and eager to be gone. “Lady Coventry’s carriage.”

And as he gave the order, a smile broke over her face, for the sound assured her that the game was won. Pausing an instant on the threshold before she vanished from their sight, she looked backward, and fixing on Gerald the strange glance he remembered well, she said in her penetrating voice, “Is not the last scene better than the first?”

THE ABBOT'S GHOST

OR

MAURICE TREHERNE'S TEMPTATION

A Christmas Story

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Chapter I

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

"How goes it, Frank? Down first, as usual."

"The early bird gets the worm, Major."

"Deuced ungallant speech, considering that the lovely Octavia is the worm," and with a significant laugh the major assumed an Englishman's favorite attitude before the fire.

His companion shot a quick glance at him, and an expression of anxiety passed over his face as he replied, with a well-feigned air of indifference, "You are altogether too sharp, Major. I must be on my guard while you are in the house. Any new arrivals? I thought I heard a carriage drive up not long ago."

"It was General Snowdon and his charming wife. Maurice Treherne came while we were out, and I've not seen him yet, poor fellow!"

"Aye, you may well say that; his is a hard case, if what I heard is true. I'm not booked up in the matter, and I should be, lest I make some blunder here, so tell me how things stand, Major. We've a good half hour before dinner. Sir Jasper is never punctual."

"Yes, you've a right to know, if you are going to try your fortune with Octavia."

The major marched through the three drawing rooms to see that no inquisitive servant was eavesdropping, and, finding all deserted, he resumed his place, while young Annon lounged on a couch as he listened with intense interest to the major's story.

"You know it was supposed that old Sir Jasper, being a bachelor, would leave his fortune to his two nephews. But he was an oddity, and as the title *must* go to young Jasper by right, the old man said Maurice should have the money. He was poor, young Jasper rich, and it seemed but just, though Madame Mère was very angry when she learned how the will was made."

"But Maurice didn't get the fortune. How was that?"

"There was some mystery there which I shall discover in time. All went smoothly till that unlucky yachting trip, when the cousins were wrecked. Maurice saved Jasper's life, and almost lost his own in so doing. I fancy he wishes he had, rather than remain the poor cripple he is. Exposure, exertion, and neglect afterward brought on paralysis of the lower limbs, and there he is — a fine, talented, spirited fellow tied to that cursed chair like a decrepit old man."

"How does he bear it?" asked Annon, as the major shook his gray head, with a traitorous huskiness in his last words.

"Like a philosopher or a hero. He is too proud to show his despair at such a sudden end to all his hopes, too generous to complain, for Jasper is desperately cut up about it, and too brave to be daunted by a misfortune which would drive many a man mad."

"Is it true that Sir Jasper, knowing all this, made a new will and left every cent to his namesake?"

"Yes, and there lies the mystery. Not only did he leave it away from poor Maurice, but so tied it up that Jasper cannot transfer it, and at his death it goes to Octavia."

"The old man must have been demented. What in heaven's name did he mean by leaving Maurice helpless and penniless after all his devotion to Jasper? Had he done anything to offend the old party?"

"No one knows; Maurice hasn't the least idea of the cause of this sudden whim, and the old man would give no reason for it. He died soon after, and the instant Jasper came to the title and estate he brought his cousin home, and treats him like a brother. Jasper is a noble fellow, with all his faults, and this act of justice increases my respect for him," said the major heartily.

"What will Maurice do, now that he can't enter the army as he intended?" asked Annon, who now sat erect, so full of interest was he.

"Marry Octavia, and come to his own, I hope."

"An excellent little arrangement, but Miss Treherne may object," said Annon, rising with sudden kindling of the eye.

"I think not, if no one interferes. Pity, with women, is akin to love, and she pities her cousin in the tenderest fashion. No sister could be more devoted, and as Maurice is a handsome, talented fellow, one can easily foresee the end, if, as I said before, no one interferes to disappoint the poor lad again."

"You espouse his cause, I see, and tell me this that I may stand aside. Thanks for the warning, Major; but as Maurice Treherne is a man of unusual power in many ways, I think we are equally matched, in spite of his misfortune. Nay, if anything, he has the advantage of me, for Miss Treherne pities him, and that is a strong ally for my rival. I'll be as generous as I can, but I'll *not* stand aside and relinquish the woman I love without a trial first."

With an air of determination Annon faced the major, whose keen eyes had read the truth which he had but newly confessed to himself. Major

Royston smiled as he listened, and said briefly, as steps approached,
"Do your best. Maurice will win."

"We shall see," returned Annon between his teeth.

Here their host entered, and the subject of course was dropped. But the major's words rankled in the young man's mind, and would have been doubly bitter had he known that their confidential conversation had been overheard. On either side of the great fireplace was a door leading to a suite of rooms which had been old Sir Jasper's. These apartments had been given to Maurice Treherne, and he had just returned from London, whither he had been to consult a certain famous physician. Entering quietly, he had taken possession of his rooms, and having rested and dressed for dinner, rolled himself into the library, to which led the curtained door on the right. Sitting idly in his light, wheeled chair, ready to enter when his cousin appeared, he had heard the chat of Annon and the major. As he listened, over his usually impassive face passed varying expressions of anger, pain, bitterness, and defiance, and when the young man uttered his almost fierce "We shall see," Treherne smiled a scornful smile and clenched his pale hand with a gesture which proved that a year of suffering had not conquered the man's spirit, though it had crippled his strong body.

A singular face was Maurice Treherne's; well-cut and somewhat haughty features; a fine brow under the dark locks that carelessly streaked it; and remarkably piercing eyes. Slight in figure and wasted by pain, he still retained the grace as native to him as the stern fortitude which enabled him to hide the deep despair of an ambitious nature from every eye, and bear his affliction with a cheerful philosophy more pathetic than the most entire abandonment to grief. Carefully dressed, and with no hint at invalidism but the chair, he bore himself as easily and calmly as if the doom of lifelong helplessness did not hang over him. A single motion of the hand sent him rolling noiselessly to the curtained door, but as he did so, a voice exclaimed behind him, "Wait for me, cousin." And as he turned, a young girl approached, smiling a glad welcome as she took his hand, adding in a tone of soft reproach, "Home again, and not let me know it, till I heard the good news by accident."

"Was it good news, Octavia?" and Maurice looked up at the frank face with a new expression in those penetrating eyes of his. His cousin's open glance never changed as she stroked the hair off his forehead with the caress one often gives a child, and answered eagerly, "The best to me; the house is dull when you are away, for Jasper always becomes absorbed in horses and hounds, and leaves Mamma and me to mope by ourselves. But tell me, Maurice, what they said to you, since you would not write."

"A little hope, with time and patience. Help me to wait, dear, help me to wait."

His tone was infinitely sad, and as he spoke, he leaned his cheek against the kind hand he held, as if to find support and comfort there. The girl's face brightened beautifully, though her eyes filled, for to her alone did he betray his pain, and in her alone did he seek consolation.

"I will, I will with heart and hand! Thank heaven for the hope, and trust me it shall be fulfilled. You look very tired, Maurice. Why go in to dinner with all those people? Let me make you cozy here," she added anxiously.

"Thanks, I'd rather go in, it does me good; and if I stay away, Jasper feels that he must stay with me. I dressed in haste, am I right, little nurse?"

She gave him a comprehensive glance, daintily settled his cravat, brushed back a truant lock, and, with a maternal air that was charming, said, "My boy is always elegant, and I'm proud of him. Now we'll go in." But with her hand on the curtain she paused, saying quickly, as a voice reached her, "Who is that?"

"Frank Annon. Didn't you know he was coming?" Maurice eyed her keenly.

"No, Jasper never told me. Why did he ask him?"

"To please you."

"Me! When he knows I detest the man. No matter, I've got on the color he hates, so he won't annoy me, and Mrs. Snowdon can amuse herself with him. The general has come, you know?"

Treherne smiled, well pleased, for no sign of maiden shame or pleasure did the girl's face betray, and as he watched her while she peeped, he thought with satisfaction, Annon is right, *I* have the advantage, and I'll keep it at all costs.

"Here is Mamma. We must go in," said Octavia, as a stately old lady made her appearance in the drawing room.

The cousins entered together and Annon watched them covertly, while seemingly intent on paying his respects to Madame Mère, as his hostess was called by her family.

"Handsomer than ever," he muttered, as his eye rested on the blooming girl, looking more like a rose than ever in the peach-colored silk which he had once condemned because a rival admired it. She turned to reply to the major, and Annon glanced at Treherne with an irrepressible frown, for sickness had not marred the charm of that peculiar face, so colorless and thin that it seemed cut in marble; but the keen eyes shone with a wonderful brilliancy, and the whole countenance was alive with a power of intellect and will which made the observer involuntarily exclaim, "That man must suffer a daily martyrdom, so crippled and confined; if it last long he will go mad or die."

"General and Mrs. Snowden," announced the servant, and a sudden pause ensued as everyone looked up to greet the newcomers.

A feeble, white-haired old man entered, leaning on the arm of an indescribably beautiful woman. Not thirty yet, tall and nobly molded, with straight black brows over magnificent eyes; rippling dark hair gathered up in a great knot, and ornamented with a single band of gold. A sweeping dress of wine-colored velvet, set off with a dazzling neck and arms decorated like her stately head with ornaments of Roman gold. At the first glance she seemed a cold, haughty creature, born to dazzle but not to win. A deeper scrutiny detected lines of suffering in that lovely face, and behind the veil of reserve, which pride forced her to wear, appeared the anguish of a strong-willed woman burdened by a heavy cross. No one would dare express pity or offer sympathy, for her whole air repelled it, and in her gloomy eyes sat scorn of herself mingled with defiance of the scorn of others. A strange, almost tragical-looking woman, in spite of beauty, grace, and the cold sweetness of her manner. A faint smile parted her lips as she greeted those about her, and as her husband seated himself beside Lady Treherne, she lifted her head with a long breath, and a singular expression of relief, as if a burden was removed, and for the time being she was free. Sir Jasper was at her side, and as she listened, her eye glanced from face to face.

“Who is with you now?” she asked, in a low, mellow voice that was full of music.

“My sister and my cousin are yonder. You may remember Tavia as a child, she is little more now. Maurice is an invalid, but the finest fellow breathing.”

“I understand,” and Mrs. Snowdon’s eyes softened with a sudden glance of pity for one cousin and admiration for the other, for she knew the facts.

“Major Royston, my father’s friend, and Frank Annon, my own. Do you know him?” asked Sir Jasper.

“No.”

“Then allow me to make him happy by presenting him, may I?”

“Not now. I’d rather see your cousin.”

“Thanks, you are very kind. I’ll bring him over.”

“Stay, let me go to him,” began the lady, with more feeling in face and voice than one would believe her capable of showing.

“Pardon, it will offend him, he will not be pitied, or relinquish any of the duties or privileges of a gentleman which he can possibly perform. He is proud, we can understand the feeling, so let us humor the poor fellow.”

Mrs. Snowdon bowed silently, and Sir Jasper called out in his hearty, blunt way, as if nothing was amiss with his cousin, “Maurice, I’ve an honor for you. Come and receive it.”

Divining what it was, Treherne noiselessly crossed the room, and with no sign of self-consciousness or embarrassment, was presented to the handsome woman.

Thinking his presence might be a restraint, Sir Jasper went away. The instant his back was turned, a change came over both: an almost grim expression replaced the suavity of Treherne's face, and Mrs. Snowdon's smile faded suddenly, while a deep flush rose to her brow, as her eyes questioned his beseechingly.

"How dared you come?" he asked below his breath.

"The general insisted."

"And you could not change his purpose; poor woman!"

"You will not be pitied, neither will I," and her eyes flashed; then the fire was quenched in tears, and her voice lost all its pride in a pleading tone.

"Forgive me, I longed to see you since your illness, and so I 'dared' to come."

"You shall be gratified; look, quite helpless, crippled for life, perhaps."

The chair was turned from the groups about the fire, and as he spoke, with a bitter laugh Treherne threw back the skin which covered his knees, and showed her the useless limbs once so strong and fleet. She shrank and paled, put out her hand to arrest him, and cried in an indignant whisper, "No, no, not that! You know I never meant such cruel curiosity, such useless pain to both — "

"Be still, someone is coming," he returned inaudibly; adding aloud, as he adjusted the skin and smoothed the rich fur as if speaking of it, "Yes, it is a very fine one, Jasper gave it to me. He spoils me, like a dear, generous-hearted fellow as he is. Ah, Octavia, what can I do for you?"

"Nothing, thank you. I want to recall myself to Mrs. Snowdon's memory, if she will let me."

"No need of that; I never forget happy faces and pretty pictures. Two years ago I saw you at your first ball, and longed to be a girl again."

As she spoke, Mrs. Snowdon pressed the hand shyly offered, and smiled at the spirited face before her, though the shadow in her own eyes deepened as she met the bright glance of the girl.

"How kind you were that night! I remember you let me chatter away about my family, my cousin, and my foolish little affairs with the sweetest patience, and made me very happy by your interest. I was homesick, and Aunt could never bear to hear of those things. It was before your marriage, and all the kinder, for you were the queen of the night, yet had a word for poor little me."

Mrs. Snowdon was pale to the lips, and Maurice impatiently tapped the arm of his chair, while the girl innocently chatted on.

"I am sorry the general is such an invalid; yet I dare say you find great happiness in taking care of him. It is so pleasant to be of use to those we love." And as she spoke, Octavia leaned over her cousin to hand him the glove he had dropped.

The affectionate smile that accompanied the act made the color deepen again in Mrs. Snowdon’s cheek, and lit a spark in her softened eyes. Her lips curled and her voice was sweetly sarcastic as she answered, “Yes, it is charming to devote one’s life to these dear invalids, and find one’s reward in their gratitude. Youth, beauty, health, and happiness are small sacrifices if one wins a little comfort for the poor sufferers.”

The girl felt the sarcasm under the soft words and drew back with a troubled face.

Maurice smiled, and glanced from one to the other, saying significantly, “Well for me that my little nurse loves her labor, and finds no sacrifice in it. I am fortunate in my choice.”

“I trust it may prove so — ” Mrs. Snowdon got no further, for at that moment dinner was announced, and Sir Jasper took her away. Annon approached with him and offered his arm to Miss Treherne, but with an air of surprise, and a little gesture of refusal, she said coldly:

“My cousin always takes me in to dinner. Be good enough to escort the major.” And with her hand on the arm of the chair, she walked away with a mischievous glitter in her eyes.

Annon frowned and fell back, saying sharply, “Come, Major, what are you doing there?”

“Making discoveries.”

Chapter II

BYPLAY

A right splendid old dowager was Lady Treherne, in her black velvet and point lace, as she sat erect and stately on a couch by the drawing-room fire, a couch which no one dare occupy in her absence, or share uninvited. The gentlemen were still over their wine, and the three ladies were alone. My lady never dozed in public, Mrs. Snowdon never gossiped, and Octavia never troubled herself to entertain any guests but those of her own age, so long pauses fell, and conversation languished, till Mrs. Snowdon roamed away into the library. As she disappeared, Lady Treherne beckoned to her daughter, who was idly making chords at the grand piano. Seating herself on the ottoman at her mother's feet, the girl took the still handsome hand in her own and amused herself with examining the old-fashioned jewels that covered it, a pretext for occupying her telltale eyes, as she suspected what was coming.

"My dear, I'm not pleased with you, and I tell you so at once, that you may amend your fault," began Madame Mère in a tender tone, for though a haughty, imperious woman, she idolized her children.

"What have I done, Mamma?" asked the girl.

"Say rather, what have you left undone. You have been very rude to Mr. Annon. It must not occur again; not only because he is a guest, but because he is your — brother's friend."

My lady hesitated over the word "lover," and changed it, for to her Octavia still seemed a child, and though anxious for the alliance, she forbore to speak openly, lest the girl should turn willful, as she inherited her mother's high spirit.

"I'm sorry, Mamma. But how can I help it, when he teases me so that I detest him?" said Octavia, petulantly.

"How tease, my love?"

"Why, he follows me about like a dog, puts on a sentimental look when I appear; blushes, and beams, and bows at everything I say, if I am polite; frowns and sighs if I'm not; and glowers tragically at every man I speak to, even poor Maurice. Oh, Mamma, what foolish creatures men are!" And the girl laughed blithely, as she looked up for the first time into her mother's face.

My lady smiled, as she stroked the bright head at her knee, but asked quickly, "Why say 'even poor Maurice,' as if it were impossible for anyone to be jealous of him?”

“But isn’t it, Mamma? I thought strong, well men regarded him as one set apart and done with, since his sad misfortune.”

“Not entirely; while women pity and pet the poor fellow, his comrades will be jealous, absurd as it is.”

“No one pets him but me, and I have a right to do it, for he is my cousin,” said the girl, feeling a touch of jealousy herself.

“Rose and Blanche Talbot outdo you, my dear, and there is no cousinship to excuse them.”

“Then let Frank Annon be jealous of them, and leave me in peace. They promised to come today; I’m afraid something has happened to prevent them.” And Octavia gladly seized upon the new subject. But my lady was not to be eluded.

“They said they could not come till after dinner. They will soon arrive. Before they do so, I must say a few words, Tavia, and I beg you to give heed to them. I desire you to be courteous and amiable to Mr. Annon, and before strangers to be less attentive and affectionate to Maurice. You mean it kindly, but it looks ill, and causes disagreeable remarks.”

“Who blames me for being devoted to my cousin? Can I ever do enough to repay him for his devotion? Mamma, you forget he saved your son’s life.”

Indignant tears filled the girl’s eyes, and she spoke passionately, forgetting that Mrs. Snowdon was within earshot of her raised voice. With a frown my lady laid her hand on her daughter’s lips, saying coldly, “I do not forget, and I religiously discharge my every obligation by every care and comfort it is in my power to bestow. You are young, romantic, and tender-hearted. You think you must give your time and health, must sacrifice your future happiness to this duty. You are wrong, and unless you learn wisdom in season, you will find that you have done harm, not good.”

“God forbid! How can I do that? Tell me, and I will be wise in time.”

Turning the earnest face up to her own, Lady Treherne whispered anxiously, “Has Maurice ever looked or hinted anything of love during this year he has been with us, and you his constant companion?”

“Never, Mamma; he is too honorable and too unhappy to speak or think of that. I am his little nurse, sister, and friend, no more, nor ever shall be. Do not suspect us, or put such fears into my mind, else all our comfort will be spoiled.”

Flushed and eager was the girl, but her clear eyes betrayed no tender confusion as she spoke, and all her thought seemed to be to clear her cousin from the charge of loving her too well. Lady Treherne looked relieved, paused a moment, then said, seriously but gently, “This is well, but, child, I charge you tell me at once, if ever he forgets himself, for this thing cannot be. Once I hoped it might, now it is impossible; remember that he continue a friend and cousin, nothing more. I warn you in time, but if you neglect the warning, Maurice must go. No more of this; recollect my wish regarding Mr. Annon, and let your cousin amuse himself without you in public."

"Mamma, do you wish me to like Frank Annon?"

The abrupt question rather disturbed my lady, but knowing her daughter's frank, impetuous nature, she felt somewhat relieved by this candor, and answered decidedly, "I do. He is your equal in all respects; he loves you, Jasper desires it, I approve, and you, being heart-whole, can have no just objection to the alliance."

"Has he spoken to you?"

"No, to your brother."

"You wish this much, Mamma?"

"Very much, my child."

"I will try to please you, then." And stifling a sigh, the girl kissed her mother with unwonted meekness in tone and manner.

"Now I am well pleased. Be happy, my love. No one will urge or distress you. Let matters take their course, and if this hope of ours can be fulfilled, I shall be relieved of the chief care of my life."

A sound of girlish voices here broke on their ears, and springing up, Octavia hurried to meet her friends, exclaiming joyfully, "They have come! they have come!"

Two smiling, blooming girls met her at the door, and, being at an enthusiastic age, they gushed in girlish fashion for several minutes, making a pretty group as they stood in each other's arms, all talking at once, with frequent kisses and little bursts of laughter, as vents for their emotion. Madame Mère welcomed them and then went to join Mrs. Snowdon, leaving the trio to gossip unrestrained.

"My dearest creature, I thought we never should get here, for Papa had a tiresome dinner party, and we were obliged to stay, you know," cried Rose, the lively sister, shaking out the pretty dress and glancing at herself in the mirror as she fluttered about the room like a butterfly.

"We were dying to come, and so charmed when you asked us, for we haven't seen you this age, darling," added Blanche, the pensive one, smoothing her blond curls after a fresh embrace.

"I'm sorry the Ulsters couldn't come to keep Christmas with us, for we have no gentlemen but Jasper, Frank Annon, and the major. Sad, isn't it?" said Octavia, with a look of despair, which caused a fresh peal of laughter.

"One apiece, my dear, it might be worse." And Rose privately decided to appropriate Sir Jasper.

"Where is your cousin?" asked Blanche, with a sigh of sentimental interest.

"He is here, of course. I forget him, but he is not on the flirting list, you know. We must amuse him, and not expect him to amuse us, though really, all the capital suggestions and plans for merrymaking always come from him."

"He is better, I hope?" asked both sisters with real sympathy, making their young faces womanly and sweet.

"Yes, and has hopes of entire recovery. At least, they tell him so, though Dr. Ashley said there was no chance of it."

"Dear, dear, how sad! Shall we see him, Tavia?"

"Certainly; he is able to be with us now in the evening, and enjoys society as much as ever. But please take no notice of his infirmity, and make no inquiries beyond the usual 'How do you do.' He is sensitive, and hates to be considered an invalid more than ever."

"How charming it must be to take care of him, he is so accomplished and delightful. I quite envy you," said Blanche pensively.

"Sir Jasper told us that the General and Mrs. Snowdon were coming. I hope they will, for I've a most intense curiosity to see her — " began Rose.

"Hush, she is here with Mamma! Why curious? What is the mystery? For you look as if there was one," questioned Octavia under her breath.

The three charming heads bent toward one another as Rose replied in a whisper, "If I knew, I shouldn't be inquisitive. There was a rumor that she married the old general in a fit of pique, and now repents. I asked Mamma once, but she said such matters were not for young girls to hear, and not a word more would she say. *N'importe*, I have wits of my own, and I can satisfy myself. The gentlemen are coming! Am I all right, dear?" And the three glanced at one another with a swift scrutiny that nothing could escape, then grouped themselves prettily, and waited, with a little flutter of expectation in each young heart.

In came the gentlemen, and instantly a new atmosphere seemed to pervade the drawing room, for with the first words uttered, several romances began. Sir Jasper was taken possession of by Rose, Blanche intended to devote herself to Maurice Treherne, but Annon intercepted her, and Octavia was spared any effort at politeness by this unexpected move on the part of her lover.

"He is angry, and wishes to pique me by devoting himself to Blanche. I wish he would, with all my heart, and leave me in peace. Poor Maurice, he expects me, and I long to go to him, but must obey Mamma." And Octavia went to join the group formed by my lady, Mrs. Snowdon, the general, and the major.

The two young couples flirted in different parts of the room, and Treherne sat alone, watching them all with eyes that pierced below the surface, reading the hidden wishes, hopes, and fears that ruled them. A singular expression sat on his face as he turned from Octavia’s clear countenance to Mrs. Snowdon’s gloomy one. He leaned his head upon his hand and fell into deep thought, for he was passing through one of those fateful moments which come to us all, and which may make or mar a life. Such moments come when least looked for: an unexpected meeting, a peculiar mood, some trivial circumstance, or careless word produces it, and often it is gone before we realize its presence, leaving aftereffects to show us what we have gained or lost. Treherne was conscious that the present hour, and the acts that filled it, possessed unusual interest, and would exert an unusual influence on his life. Before him was the good and evil genius of his nature in the guise of those two women. Edith Snowdon had already tried her power, and accident only had saved him. Octavia, all unconscious as she was, never failed to rouse and stimulate the noblest attributes of mind and heart. A year spent in her society had done much for him, and he loved her with a strange mingling of passion, reverence, and gratitude. He knew why Edith Snowdon came, he felt that the old fascination had not lost its charm, and though fear was unknown to him, he was ill pleased at the sight of the beautiful, dangerous woman. On the other hand, he saw that Lady Treherne desired her daughter to shun him and smile on Annon; he acknowledged that he had no right to win the young creature, crippled and poor as he was, and a pang of jealous pain wrung his heart as he watched her.

Then a sense of power came to him, for helpless, poor, and seemingly an object of pity, he yet felt that he held the honor, peace, and happiness of nearly every person present in his hands. It was a strong temptation to this man, so full of repressed passion and power, so set apart and shut out from the more stirring duties and pleasures of life. A few words from his lips, and the pity all felt for him would be turned to fear, respect, and admiration. Why not utter them, and enjoy all that was possible? He owed the Trehernes nothing; why suffer injustice, dependence, and the compassion that wounds a proud man deepest? Wealth, love, pleasure might be his with a breath. Why not secure them now?

His pale face flushed, his eye kindled, and his thin hand lay clenched like a vise as these thoughts passed rapidly through his mind. A look, a word at that moment would sway him; he felt it, and leaned forward, waiting in secret suspense for the glance, the speech which should decide him for good or ill. Who shall say what subtle instinct caused Octavia to turn and smile at him with a wistful, friendly look that warmed his heart? He met it with an answering glance, which thrilled her strangely, for love, gratitude, and some mysterious intelligence met and mingled in the brilliant yet soft expression which swiftly shone and faded in her face. What it was she could not tell; she only felt that it filled her with an indescribable emotion never experienced before. In an instant it all passed, Lady Treherne spoke to her, and Blanche Talbot addressed Maurice, wondering, as she did so, if the enchanting smile he wore was meant for her.

“Mr. Annon having mercifully set me free, I came to try to cheer your solitude; but you look as if solitude made you happier than society does the rest of us,” she said without her usual affectation, for his manner impressed her.

“You are very kind and very welcome. I do find pleasures to beguile my loneliness, which gayer people would not enjoy, and it is well that I can, else I should turn morose and tyrannical, and doom some unfortunate to entertain me all day long.” He answered with a gentle courtesy which was his chief attraction to womankind.

“Pray tell me some of your devices, I’m often alone in spirit, if not so in the flesh, for Rose, though a dear girl, is not congenial, and I find no kindred soul.”

A humorous glimmer came to Treherne’s eyes, as the sentimental damsel beamed a soft sigh and drooped her long lashes effectively. Ignoring the topic of “kindred souls,” he answered coldly, “My favorite amusement is studying the people around me. It may be rude, but tied to my corner, I cannot help watching the figures around me, and discovering their little plots and plans. I’m getting very expert, and really surprise myself sometimes by the depth of my researches.”

“I can believe it; your eyes look as if they possessed that gift. Pray don’t study *me*.” And the girl shrank away with an air of genuine alarm.

Treherne smiled involuntarily, for he had read the secret of that shallow heart long ago, and was too generous to use the knowledge, however flattering it might be to him. In a reassuring tone he said, turning away the keen eyes she feared, “I give you my word I never will, charming as it might be to study the white pages of a maidenly heart. I find plenty of others to read, so rest tranquil, Miss Blanche.”

“Who interests you most just now?” asked the girl, coloring with pleasure at his words. “Mrs. Snowdon looks like one who has a romance to be read, if you have the skill.”

“I have read it. My lady is my study just now. I thought I knew her well, but of late she puzzles me. Human minds are more full of mysteries than any written book and more changeable than the cloud shapes in the air.”

“A fine old lady, but I fear her so intensely I should never dare to try to read her, as you say.” Blanche looked toward the object of discussion as she spoke, and added, “Poor Tavia, how forlorn she seems. Let me ask her to join us, may I?”

“With all my heart” was the quick reply.

Blanche glided away but did not return, for my lady kept her as well as her daughter.

"That test satisfies me; well, I submit for a time, but I think I can conquer my aunt yet." And with a patient sigh Treherne turned to observe Mrs. Snowdon.

She now stood by the fire talking with Sir Jasper, a handsome, reckless, generous-hearted young gentleman, who very plainly showed his great admiration for the lady. When he came, she suddenly woke up from her listless mood and became as brilliantly gay as she had been unmistakably melancholy before. As she chatted, she absently pushed to and fro a small antique urn of bronze on the chimneypiece, and in doing so she more than once gave Treherne a quick, significant glance, which he answered at last by a somewhat haughty nod. Then, as if satisfied, she ceased toying with the ornament and became absorbed in Sir Jasper's gallant badinage.

The instant her son approached Mrs. Snowdon, Madame Mère grew anxious, and leaving Octavia to her friends and lover, she watched Jasper. But her surveillance availed little, for she could neither see nor hear anything amiss, yet could not rid herself of the feeling that some mutual understanding existed between them. When the party broke up for the night, she lingered till all were gone but her son and nephew.

"Well, Madame Ma Mère, what troubles you?" asked Sir Jasper, as she looked anxiously into his face before bestowing her good-night kiss.

"I cannot tell, yet I feel ill at ease. Remember, my son, that you are the pride of my heart, and any sin or shame of yours would kill me. Good night, Maurice." And with a stately bow she swept away.

Lounging with both elbows on the low chimneypiece, Sir Jasper smiled at his mother's fears, and said to his cousin, the instant they were alone, "She is worried about E.S. Odd, isn't it, what instinctive antipathies women take to one another?"

"Why did you ask E.S. here?" demanded Treherne.

"My dear fellow, how could I help it? My mother wanted the general, my father's friend, and of course his wife must be asked also. I couldn't tell my mother that the lady had been a most arrant coquette, to put it mildly, and had married the old man in a pet, because my cousin and I declined to be ruined by her."

"You *could* have told her what mischief she makes wherever she goes, and for Octavia's sake have deferred the general's visit for a time. I warn you, Jasper, harm will come of it."

"To whom, you or me?"

"To both, perhaps, certainly to you. She was disappointed once when she lost us both by wavering between your title and my supposed fortune. She is miserable with the old man, and her only hope is in his death, for he is very feeble. You are free, and doubly attractive now, so beware, or she will entangle you before you know it."

"Thanks, Mentor. I've no fear, and shall merely amuse myself for a week — they stay no longer." And with a careless laugh, Sir Jasper strolled away.

"Much mischief may be done in a week, and this is the beginning of it," muttered Treherne, as he raised himself to look under the bronze vase for the note. It was gone!

Chapter III

WHO WAS IT?

Who had taken it? This question tormented Treherne all that sleepless night. He suspected three persons, for only these had approached the fire after the note was hidden. He had kept his eye on it, he thought, till the stir of breaking up. In that moment it must have been removed by the major, Frank Annon, or my lady; Sir Jasper was out of the question, for he never touched an ornament in the drawing room since he had awkwardly demolished a whole *étagère* of costly trifles, to his mother's and sister's great grief. The major evidently suspected something, Annon was jealous, and my lady would be glad of a pretext to remove her daughter from his reach. Trusting to his skill in reading faces, he waited impatiently for morning, resolving to say nothing to anyone but Mrs. Snowdon, and from her merely to inquire what the note contained.

Treherne usually was invisible till lunch, often till dinner; therefore, fearing to excite suspicion by unwonted activity, he did not appear till noon. The mailbag had just been opened, and everyone was busy over their letters, but all looked up to exchange a word with the newcomer, and Octavia impulsively turned to meet him, then checked herself and hid her suddenly crimsoned face behind a newspaper. Treherne's eye took in everything, and saw at once in the unusually late arrival of the mail a pretext for discovering the pilferer of the note.

"All have letters but me, yet I expected one last night. Major, have you got it among yours?" And as he spoke, Treherne fixed his penetrating eyes full on the person he addressed.

With no sign of consciousness, no trace of confusion, the major carefully turned over his pile, and replied in the most natural manner, "Not a trace of it; I wish there was, for nothing annoys me more than any delay or mistake about my letters."

He knows nothing of it, thought Treherne, and turned to Annon, who was deep in a long epistle from some intimate friend, with a talent for imparting news, to judge from the reader's interest.

"Annon, I appeal to you, for I *must* discover who has robbed me of my letter."

"I have but one, read it, if you will, and satisfy yourself" was the brief reply.

"No, thank you. I merely asked in joke; it is doubtless among my lady's. Jasper's letters and mine often get mixed, and my lady takes care of his for him.

I think you must have it, Aunt."

Lady Treherne looked up impatiently. "My dear Maurice, what a coil about a letter! We none of us have it, so do not punish us for the sins of your correspondent or the carelessness of the post."

She was not the thief, for she is always intensely polite when she intends to thwart me, thought Treherne, and, apologizing for his rudeness in disturbing them, he rolled himself to his nook in a sunny window and became apparently absorbed in a new magazine.

Mrs. Snowdon was opening the general's letters for him, and, having finished her little task, she roamed away into the library, as if in search of a book. Presently returning with one, she approached Treherne, and, putting it into his hand, said, in her musically distinct voice, "Be so kind as to find for me the passage you spoke of last night. I am curious to see it."

Instantly comprehending her stratagem, he opened it with apparent carelessness, secured the tiny note laid among the leaves, and, selecting a passage at hazard, returned her book and resumed his own. Behind the cover of it he unfolded and read these words:

I understand, but do not be anxious; the line I left was merely this — "I must see you alone, tell me when and where." No one can make much of it, and I will discover the thief before dinner. Do nothing, but watch to whom I speak first on entering, when we meet in the evening, and beware of that person.

Quietly transferring the note to the fire with the wrapper of the magazine, he dismissed the matter from his mind and left Mrs. Snowdon to play detective as she pleased, while he busied himself about his own affairs.

It was a clear, bright December day, and when the young people separated to prepare for a ride, while the general and the major sunned themselves on the terrace, Lady Treherne said to her nephew, "I am going for an airing in the pony carriage. Will you be my escort, Maurice?"

"With pleasure," replied the young man, well knowing what was in store for him.

My lady was unusually taciturn and grave, yet seemed anxious to say something which she found difficult to utter. Treherne saw this, and ended an awkward pause by dashing boldly into the subject which occupied both.

"I think you want to say something to me about Tavie, Aunt. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Then let me spare you the pain of beginning, and prove my sincerity by openly stating the truth, as far as I am concerned. I love her very dearly, but I am not mad enough to dream of telling her so. I know that it is impossible, and I relinquish my hopes. Trust me. I will keep silent and see her marry Annon without a word of complaint, if you will it. I see by her altered manner that you have spoken to her, and that my little friend and nurse is to be mine no longer. Perhaps you are wise, but if you do this on my account, it is in vain — the mischief is done, and while I live I shall love my cousin. If you do it to spare her, I am dumb, and will go away rather than cause her a care or pain."

"Do you really mean this, Maurice?" And Lady Treherne looked at him with a changed and softened face.

Turning upon her, Treherne showed her a countenance full of suffering and sincerity, of resignation and resolve, as he said earnestly, "I do mean it; prove me in any way you please. I am not a bad fellow, Aunt, and I desire to be better. Since my misfortune I've had time to test many things, myself among others, and in spite of many faults, I do cherish the wish to keep my soul honest and true, even though my body be a wreck. It is easy to say these things, but in spite of temptation, I think I can stand firm, if you trust me."

"My dear boy, I do trust you, and thank you gratefully for this frankness. I never forget that I owe Jasper's life to you, and never expect to repay that debt. Remember this when I seem cold or unkind, and remember also that I say now, had you been spared this affliction, I would gladly have given you my girl. But — "

"But, Aunt, hear one thing," broke in Treherne. "They tell me that any sudden and violent shock of surprise, joy, or sorrow may do for me what they hope time will achieve. I said nothing of this, for it is but a chance; yet, while there is any hope, need I utterly renounce Octavia?"

"It is hard to refuse, and yet I cannot think it wise to build upon a chance so slight. Once let her have you, and both are made unhappy, if the hope fail. No, Maurice, it is better to be generous, and leave her free to make her own happiness elsewhere. Annon loves her, she is heart-whole, and will soon learn to love him, if you are silent. My poor boy, it seems cruel, but I must say it."

"Shall I go away, Aunt?" was all his answer, very firmly uttered, though his lips were white.

"Not yet, only leave them to themselves, and hide your trouble if you can. Yet, if you prefer, you shall go to town, and Benson shall see that you are comfortable. Your health will be a reason, and I will come, or write often, if you are homesick. It shall depend on you, for I want to be just and kind in this hard case. You shall decide."

"Then I will stay. I can hide my love; and to see them together will soon cease to wound me, if Octavia is happy."

"So let it rest then, for a time. You shall miss your companion as little as possible, for I will try to fill her place. Forgive me, Maurice, and pity a mother's solicitude, for these two are the last of many children, and I am a widow now."

Lady Treherne's voice faltered, and if any selfish hope or plan lingered in her nephew's mind, that appeal banished it and touched his better nature. Pressing her hand he said gently, "Dear Aunt, do not lament over me. I am one set apart for afflictions, yet I will not be conquered by them. Let us forget my youth and be friendly counselors together for the good of the two whom we both love. I must say a word about Jasper, and you will not press me to explain more than I can without breaking my promise."

"Thank you, thank you! It is regarding that woman, I know. Tell me all you can; I will not be importunate, but I disliked her the instant I saw her, beautiful and charming as she seems."

"When my cousin and I were in Paris, just before my illness, we met her. She was with her father then, a gay old man who led a life of pleasure, and was no fit guardian for a lovely daughter. She knew our story and, having fascinated both, paused to decide which she would accept: Jasper, for his title, or me, for my fortune. This was before my uncle changed his will, and I believed myself his heir; but, before she made her choice, something (don't ask me what, if you please) occurred to send us from Paris. On our return voyage we were wrecked, and then came my illness, disinheritance, and helplessness. Edith Dubarry heard the story, but rumor reported it falsely, and she believed both of us had lost the fortune. Her father died penniless, and in a moment of despair she married the general, whose wealth surrounds her with the luxury she loves, and whose failing health will soon restore her liberty — "

"And then, Maurice?" interrupted my lady.

"She hopes to win Jasper, I think."

"Never! We must prevent that at all costs. I had rather see him dead before me, than the husband of such a woman. Why is she permitted to visit homes like mine? I should have been told this sooner," exclaimed my lady angrily.

"I should have told you had I known it, and I reproved Jasper for his neglect. Do not be needlessly troubled, Aunt. There is no blemish on Mrs. Snowdon's name, and, as the wife of a brave and honorable man, she is received without question; for beauty, grace, or tact like hers can make their way anywhere. She stays but a week, and I will devote myself to her; this will save Jasper, and, if necessary, convince Tavie of my indifference — " Then he paused to stifle a sigh.

"But yourself, have you no fears for your own peace, Maurice? You must not sacrifice happiness or honor, for me or mine."

"I am safe; I love my cousin, and that is my shield. Whatever happens remember that I tried to serve you, and sincerely endeavored to forget myself."

"God bless you, my son! Let me call you so, and feel that, though I deny you my daughter, I give you heartily a mother's care and affection."

Lady Treherne was as generous as she was proud, and her nephew had conquered her by confidence and submission. He acted no part, yet, even in relinquishing all, he cherished a hope that he might yet win the heart he coveted. Silently they parted, but from that hour a new and closer bond existed between the two, and exerted an unsuspected influence over the whole household.

* * * * *

Maurice waited with some impatience for Mrs. Snowdon's entrance, not only because of his curiosity to see if she had discovered the thief, but because of the part he had taken upon himself to play. He was equal to it, and felt a certain pleasure in it for a threefold reason. It would serve his aunt and cousin, would divert his mind from its own cares, and, perhaps by making Octavia jealous, waken love; for, though he had chosen the right, he was but a man, and moreover a lover.

Mrs. Snowdon was late. She always was, for her toilet was elaborate, and she liked to enjoy its effects upon others. The moment she entered Treherne's eye was on her, and to his intense surprise and annoyance she addressed Octavia, saying blandly, "My dear Miss Treherne, I've been admiring your peacocks. Pray let me see you feed them tomorrow. Miss Talbot says it is a charming sight."

"If you are on the terrace just after lunch, you will find them there, and may feed them yourself, if you like" was the cool, civil reply.

"She looks like a peacock herself in that splendid green and gold dress, doesn't she?" whispered Rose to Sir Jasper, with a wicked laugh.

"Faith, so she does. I wish Tavie's birds had voices like Mrs. Snowdon's; their squalling annoys me intensely."

"I rather like it, for it is honest, and no malice or mischief is hidden behind it. I always distrust those smooth, sweet voices; they are insincere. I like a full, clear tone; sharp, if you please, but decided and true."

"Well said, Octavia. I agree with you, and your own is a perfect sample of the kind you describe." And Treherne smiled as he rolled by to join Mrs. Snowdon, who evidently waited for him, while Octavia turned to her brother to defend her pets.

"Are you sure? How did you discover?" said Maurice, affecting to admire the lady's bouquet, as he paused beside her.

"I suspected it the moment I saw her this morning. She is no actress; and dislike, distrust, and contempt were visible in her face when we met. Till you so cleverly told me my note was lost, I fancied she was disturbed about her brother — or you."

A sudden pause and a keen glance followed the last softly uttered word, but Treherne met it with an inscrutable smile and a quiet "Well, what next?"

"The moment I learned that you did not get the note I was sure she had it, and, knowing that she must have seen me put it there, in spite of her apparent innocence, I quietly asked her for it. This surprised her, this robbed the affair of any mystery, and I finished her perplexity by sending it to the major the moment she returned it to me, as if it had been intended for him. She begged pardon, said her brother was thoughtless, and she watched over him lest he should get into mischief; professed to think I meant the line for him, and behaved like a charming simpleton, as she is."

"Quite a tumult about nothing. Poor little Tavie! You doubtlessly frightened her so that we may safely correspond hereafter."

"You may give me an answer, now and here."

"Very well, meet me on the terrace tomorrow morning; the peacocks will make the meeting natural enough. I usually loiter away an hour or two there, in the sunny part of the day."

"But the girl?"

"I'll send her away."

"You speak as if it would be an easy thing to do."

"It will, both easy and pleasant."

"Now you are mysterious or uncomplimentary. You either care nothing for a tête-à-tête with her, or you will gladly send her out of my way. Which is it?"

"You shall decide. Can I have this?"

She looked at him as he touched a rose with a warning glance, for the flower was both an emblem of love and of silence. Did he mean to hint that he recalled the past, or to warn her that someone was near? She leaned from the shadow of the curtain where she sat, and caught a glimpse of a shadow gliding away.

"Who was it?" she asked, below her breath.

"A Rose," he answered, laughing. Then, as if the danger was over, he said, "How will you account to the major for the message you sent him?"

"Easily, by fabricating some interesting perplexity in which I want sage counsel. He will be flattered, and by seeming to take him into my confidence, I can hoodwink the excellent man to my heart's content, for he annoys me by his odd way of mounting guard over me at all times. Now take me in to dinner, and be your former delightful self."

"That is impossible," he said, yet proved that it was not.

Chapter IV

FEEDING THE PEACOCKS

It was indeed a charming sight, the twelve stately birds perched on the broad stone balustrade, or prancing slowly along the terrace, with the sun gleaming on their green and golden necks and the glories of their gorgeous plumes, widespread, or sweeping like rich trains behind them. In pretty contrast to the splendid creatures was their young mistress, in her simple morning dress and fur-trimmed hood and mantle, as she stood feeding the tame pets from her hand, calling their fanciful names, laughing at their pranks, and heartily enjoying the winter sunshine, the fresh wind, and the girlish pastime. As Treherne slowly approached, he watched her with lover's eyes, and found her very sweet and blithe, and dearer in his sight than ever. She had shunned him carefully all the day before, had parted at night with a hasty handshake, and had not come as usual to bid him good-morning in the library. He had taken no notice of the change as yet, but now, remembering his promise to his aunt, he resolved to let the girl know that he fully understood the relation which henceforth was to exist between them.

"Good-morning, cousin. Shall I drive you away, if I take a turn or two here?" he said, in a cheerful tone, but with a half-reproachful glance.

She looked at him an instant, then went to him with extended hand and cheeks rosier than before, while her frank eyes filled, and her voice had a traitorous tremor in it, as she said, impetuously: "I *will* be myself for a moment, in spite of everything. Maurice, don't think me unkind, don't reproach me, or ask my leave to come where I am. There is a reason for the change you see in me; it's not caprice, it is obedience."

"My dear girl, I know it. I meant to speak of it, and show you that I understand. Annon is a good fellow, as worthy of you as any man can be, and I wish you all the happiness you deserve."

"Do you?" And her eyes searched his face keenly.

"Yes; do you doubt it?" And so well did he conceal his love, that neither face, voice, nor manner betrayed a hint of it.

Her eyes fell, a cloud passed over her clear countenance, and she withdrew her hand, as if to caress the hungry bird that gently pecked at the basket she held. As if to change the conversation, she said playfully, "Poor Argus, you have lost your fine feathers, and so all desert you, except kind little Juno, who never forgets her friends. There, take it all, and share between you."

Treherne smiled, and said quickly, "I am a human Argus, and you have been a kind little Juno to me since I lost my plumes. Continue to be so, and you will find me a very faithful friend."

"I will." And as she answered, her old smile came back and her eyes met his again.

"Thanks! Now we shall get on happily. I don't ask or expect the old life — that is impossible. I knew that when lovers came, the friend would fall into the background; and I am content to be second, where I have so long been first. Do not think you neglect me; be happy with your lover, dear, and when you have no pleasanter amusement, come and see old Maurice."

She turned her head away, that he might not see the angry color in her cheeks, the trouble in her eyes, and when she spoke, it was to say petulantly, "I wish Jasper and Mamma would leave me in peace. I hate lovers and want none. If Frank teases, I'll go into a convent and so be rid of him."

Maurice laughed, and turned her face toward himself, saying, in his persuasive voice, "Give him a trial first, to please your mother. It can do no harm and may amuse you. Frank is already lost, and, as you are heart-whole, why not see what you can do for him? I shall have a new study, then, and not miss you so much."

"You are very kind; I'll do my best. I wish Mrs. Snowdon would come, if she is coming; I've an engagement at two, and Frank will look tragical if I'm not ready. He is teaching me billiards, and I really like the game, though I never thought I should."

"That looks well. I hope you'll learn a double lesson, and Annon find a docile pupil in both."

"You are very pale this morning; are you in pain, Maurice?" suddenly asked Octavia, dropping the tone of assumed ease and gaiety under which she had tried to hide her trouble.

"Yes, but it will soon pass. Mrs. Snowdon is coming. I saw her at the hall door a moment ago. I will show her the peacocks, if you want to go. She won't mind the change, I dare say, as you don't like her, and I do."

"No, I am sure of that. It was an arrangement, perhaps? I understand. I will not play Mademoiselle De Trop."

Sudden fire shone in the girl's eyes, sudden contempt curled her lip, and a glance full of meaning went from her cousin to the door, where Mrs. Snowdon appeared, waiting for her maid to bring her some additional wrappings.

"You allude to the note you stole. How came you to play that prank, Tavie?” asked Treherne tranquilly.

“I saw her put it under the urn. I thought it was for Jasper, and I took it,” she said boldly.

“Why for Jasper?”

“I remembered his speaking of meeting her long ago, and describing her beauty enthusiastically — and so did you.”

“You have a good memory.”

“I have for everything concerning those I love. I observed her manner of meeting my brother, his devotion to her, and, when they stood laughing together before the fire, I felt sure that she wished to charm him again.”

“Again? Then she did charm him once?” asked Treherne, anxious to know how much Jasper had told his sister.

“He always denied it, and declared that you were the favorite.”

“Then why not think the note for me?” he asked.

“I do now” was the sharp answer.

“But she told you it was for the major, and sent it.”

“She deceived me; I am not surprised. I am glad Jasper is safe, and I wish you a pleasant tête-à-tête.”

Bowing with unwonted dignity, Octavia set down her basket, and walked away in one direction as Mrs. Snowdon approached in another.

“I have done it now,” sighed Treherne, turning from the girlish figure to watch the stately creature who came sweeping toward him with noiseless grace.

Brilliancy and splendor became Mrs. Snowdon; she enjoyed luxury, and her beauty made many things becoming which in a plainer woman would have been out of taste, and absurd. She had wrapped herself in a genuine Eastern burnous of scarlet, blue, and gold; the hood drawn over her head framed her fine face in rich hues, and the great gilt tassels shone against her rippling black hair. She wore it with grace, and the barbaric splendor of the garment became her well. The fresh air touched her cheeks with a delicate color; her usually gloomy eyes were brilliant now, and the smile that parted her lips was full of happiness.

“Welcome, Cleopatra!” cried Treherne, with difficulty repressing a laugh, as the peacocks screamed and fled before the rustling amplitude of her drapery.

“I might reply by calling you Thaddeus of Warsaw, for you look very romantic and Polish with your pale, pensive face, and your splendid furs,” she answered, as she paused beside him with admiration very visibly expressed in her eyes.

Treherne disliked the look, and rather abruptly said, as he offered her the basket of bread, “I have disposed of my cousin, and offered to do the honors of the peacocks. Here they are — will you feed them?”

"No, thank you — I care nothing for the fowls, as you know; I came to speak to you," she said impatiently.

"I am at your service."

"I wish to ask you a question or two — is it permitted?"

"What man ever refused Mrs. Snowdon a request?"

"Nay, no compliments; from you they are only satirical evasions. I was deceived when abroad, and rashly married that old man. Tell me truly how things stand."

"Jasper has all. I have nothing."

"I am glad of it."

"Many thanks for the hearty speech. You at least speak sincerely," he said bitterly.

"I do, Maurice — I do; let me prove it."

Treherne's chair was close beside the balustrade. Mrs. Snowdon leaned on the carved railing, with her back to the house and her face screened by a tall urn. Looking steadily at him, she said rapidly and low, "You thought I wavered between you and Jasper, when we parted two years ago. I did; but it was not between title and fortune that I hesitated. It was between duty and love. My father, a fond, foolish old man, had set his heart on seeing me a lady. I was his all; my beauty was his delight, and no untitled man was deemed worthy of me. I loved him tenderly. You may doubt this, knowing how selfish, reckless, and vain I am, but I have a heart, and with better training had been a better woman. No matter, it is too late now. Next my father, I loved you. Nay, hear me — I *will* clear myself in your eyes. I mean no wrong to the general. He is kind, indulgent, generous; I respect him — I am grateful, and while he lives, I shall be true to him."

"Then be silent now. Do not recall the past, Edith; let it sleep, for both our sakes," began Treherne; but she checked him imperiously.

"It shall, when I am done. I loved you, Maurice; for, of all the gay, idle, pleasure-seeking men I saw about me, you were the only one who seemed to have a thought beyond the folly of the hour. Under the seeming frivolity of your life lay something noble, heroic, and true. I felt that you had a purpose, that your present mood was but transitory — a young man's holiday, before the real work of his life began. This attracted, this won me; for even in the brief regard you then gave me, there was an earnestness no other man had shown. I wanted your respect; I longed to earn your love, to share your life, and prove that even in my neglected nature slept the power of canceling a frivolous past by a noble future. Oh, Maurice, had you lingered one week more, I never should have been the miserable thing I am!"

There her voice faltered and failed, for all the bitterness of lost love, peace, and happiness sounded in the pathetic passion of that exclamation. She did not weep, for tears seldom dimmed those tragical eyes of hers; but she wrung her hands in mute despair, and looked down into the frost-blighted gardens below, as if she saw there a true symbol of her own ruined life. Treherne uttered not a word, but set his teeth with an almost fierce glance toward the distant figure of Sir Jasper, who was riding gaily away, like one unburdened by a memory or a care.

Hurriedly Mrs. Snowdon went on, “My father begged and commanded me to choose your cousin. I could not break his heart, and asked for time, hoping to soften him. While I waited, that mysterious affair hurried you from Paris, and then came the wreck, the illness, and the rumor that old Sir Jasper had disinherited both nephews. They told me you were dying, and I became a passive instrument in my father’s hands. I promised to recall and accept your cousin, but the old man died before it was done, and then I cared not what became of me.

“General Snowdon was my father’s friend; he pitied me; he saw my desolate, destitute state, my despair and helplessness. He comforted, sustained, and saved me. I was grateful; and when he offered me his heart and home, I accepted them. He knew I had no love to give; but as a friend, a daughter, I would gladly serve him, and make his declining years as happy as I could. It was all over, when I heard that you were alive, afflicted, and poor. I longed to come and live for you. My new bonds became heavy fetters then, my wealth oppressed me, and I was doubly wretched — for I dared not tell my trouble, and it nearly drove me mad. I have seen you now; I know that you are happy; I read your cousin’s love and see a peaceful life in store for you. This must content me, and I must learn to bear it as I can.”

She paused, breathless and pale, and walked rapidly along the terrace, as if to hide or control the agitation that possessed her.

Treherne still sat silent, but his heart leaped within him, as he thought, “She sees that Octavia loves me! A woman’s eye is quick to detect love in another, and she asserts what I begin to hope. My cousin’s manner just now, her dislike of Annon, her new shyness with me; it may be true, and if it is — Heaven help me — what am I saying! I must not hope, nor wish, nor dream; I must renounce and forget.”

He leaned his head upon his hand, and sat so still Mrs. Snowdon rejoined him, pale, but calm and self-possessed. As she drew near, she marked his attitude, the bitter sadness of his face, and hope sprang up within her. Perhaps she was mistaken; perhaps he did not love his cousin; perhaps he still remembered the past, and still regretted the loss of the heart she had just laid bare before him. Her husband was failing, and might die any day. And then, free, rich, beautiful, and young, what might she not become to Treherne, helpless, poor, and ambitious? With all her faults, she was generous, and this picture charmed her fancy, warmed her heart, and comforted her pain.

"Maurice," she said softly, pausing again beside him, "if I mistake you and your hopes, it is because I dare ask nothing for myself; but if ever a time shall come when I have liberty to give or help, ask of me *anything*, and it is gladly yours."

He understood her, pitied her, and, seeing that she found consolation in a distant hope, he let her enjoy it while she might. Gravely, yet gratefully, he spoke, and pressed the hand extended to him with an impulsive gesture.

"Generous as ever, Edith, and impetuously frank. Thank you for your sincerity, your kindness, and the affection you once gave me. I say 'once,' for now duty, truth, and honor bar us from each other. My life must be solitary, yet I shall find work to do, and learn to be content. You owe all devotion to the good old man who loves you, and will not fail him, I am sure. Leave the future and the past, but let us make the present what it may be — a time to forgive and forget, to take heart and begin anew. Christmas is a fitting time for such resolves, and the birth of friendship such as ours may be."

Something in his tone and manner struck her, and, eyeing him with soft wonder, she exclaimed, "How changed you are!"

"Need you tell me that?" And he glanced at his helpless limbs with a bitter yet pathetic look of patience.

"No, no — not so! I mean in mind, not body. Once you were gay and careless, eager and fiery, like Jasper; now you are grave and quiet, or cheerful, and so very kind. Yet, in spite of illness and loss, you seem twice the man you were, and something wins respect, as well as admiration — and love."

Her dark eyes filled as the last word left her lips, and the beauty of a touched heart shone in her face. Maurice looked up quickly, asking with sudden earnestness, "Do you see it? Then it is true. Yes, I *am* changed, thank God! And she has done it."

"Who?" demanded his companion jealously.

"Octavia. Unconsciously, yet surely, she has done much for me, and this year of seeming loss and misery has been the happiest, most profitable of my life. I have often heard that afflictions were the best teachers, and I believe it now."

Mrs. Snowdon shook her head sadly.

"Not always; they are tormentors to some. But don't preach, Maurice. I am still a sinner, though you incline to sainthood, and I have one question more to ask. What was it that took you and Jasper so suddenly away from Paris?”

“That I can never tell you.”

“I shall discover it for myself, then.”

“It is impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible to a determined woman.”

“You can neither wring, surprise, nor bribe this secret from the two persons who hold it. I beg of you to let it rest,” said Treherne earnestly.

“I have a clue, and I shall follow it; for I am convinced that something is wrong, and you are — ”

“Dear Mrs. Snowdon, are you so charmed with the birds that you forget your fellow-beings, or so charmed with one fellow-being that you forget the birds?”

As the sudden question startled both, Rose Talbot came along the terrace, with hands full of holly and a face full of merry mischief, adding as she vanished, “I shall tell Tavie that feeding the peacocks is such congenial amusement for lovers, she and Mr. Annon had better try it.”

“Saucy gypsy!” muttered Treherne.

But Mrs. Snowdon said, with a smile of double meaning, “Many a true word is spoken in jest.”

Chapter V

UNDER THE MISTLETOE

Unusually gay and charming the three young friends looked, dressed alike in fleecy white with holly wreaths in their hair, as they slowly descended the wide oaken stairway arm in arm. A footman was lighting the hall lamps, for the winter dusk gathered early, and the girls were merrily chatting about the evening's festivity when suddenly a loud, long shriek echoed through the hall. A heavy glass shade fell from the man's hand with a crash, and the young ladies clung to one another aghast, for mortal terror was in the cry, and a dead silence followed it.

"What was it, John?" demanded Octavia, very pale, but steady in a moment.

"I'll go and see, miss." And the man hurried away.

"Where did the dreadful scream come from?" asked Rose, collecting her wits as rapidly as possible.

"Above us somewhere. Oh, let us go down among people; I am frightened to death," whispered Blanche, trembling and faint.

Hurrying into the parlor, they found only Annon and the major, both looking startled, and both staring out of the windows.

"Did you hear it? What could it be? Don't go and leave us!" cried the girls in a breath, as they rushed in.

The gentlemen had heard, couldn't explain the cry, and were quite ready to protect the pretty creatures who clustered about them like frightened fawns. John speedily appeared, looking rather wild, and as eager to tell his tale as they to listen.

"It's Patty, one of the maids, miss, in a fit. She went up to the north gallery to see that the fires was right, for it takes a power of wood to warm the gallery even enough for dancing, as you know, miss. Well, it was dark, for the fires was low and her candle went out as she whisked open the door, being flurried, as the maids always is when they go in there. Halfway down the gallery she says she heard a rustling, and stopped. She's the pluckiest of 'em all, and she called out, 'I see you!' thinking it was some of us trying to fright her. Nothing answered, and she went on a bit, when suddenly the fire flared up one flash, and there right before her was the ghost."

"Don't be foolish, John. Tell us what it was," said Octavia sharply, though her face whitened and her heart sank as the last word passed the man’s lips.

“It was a tall, black figger, miss, with a dead-white face and a black hood. She see it plain, and turned to go away, but she hadn’t gone a dozen steps when there it was again before her, the same tall, dark thing with the dead-white face looking out from the black hood. It lifted its arm as if to hold her, but she gave a spring and dreadful screech, and ran to Mrs. Benson’s room, where she dropped in a fit.”

“How absurd to be frightened by the shadows of the figures in armor that stand along the gallery!” said Rose, boldly enough, though she would have declined entering the gallery without a light.

“Nay, I don’t wonder, it’s a ghostly place at night. How is the poor thing?” asked Blanche, still hanging on the major’s arm in her best attitude.

“If Mamma knows nothing of it, tell Mrs. Benson to keep it from her, please. She is not well, and such things annoy her very much,” said Octavia, adding as the man turned away, “Did anyone look in the gallery after Patty told her tale?”

“No, miss. I’ll go and do it myself; I’m not afraid of man, ghost, or devil, saving your presence, ladies,” replied John.

“Where is Sir Jasper?” suddenly asked the major.

“Here I am. What a deuce of a noise someone has been making. It disturbed a capital dream. Why, Tavie, what is it?” And Sir Jasper came out of the library with a sleepy face and tumbled hair.

They told him the story, whereat he laughed heartily, and said the maids were a foolish set to be scared by a shadow. While he still laughed and joked, Mrs. Snowdon entered, looking alarmed, and anxious to know the cause of the confusion.

“How interesting! I never knew you kept a ghost. Tell me all about it, Sir Jasper, and soothe our nerves by satisfying our curiosity,” she said in her half-persuasive, half-commanding way, as she seated herself on Lady Treherne’s sacred sofa.

“There’s not much to tell, except that this place used to be an abbey, in fact as well as in name. An ancestor founded it, and for years the monks led a jolly life here, as one may see, for the cellar is twice as large as the chapel, and much better preserved. But another ancestor, a gay and gallant baron, took a fancy to the site for his castle, and, in spite of prayers, anathemas, and excommunication, he turned the poor fellows out, pulled down the abbey, and built this fine old place. Abbot Boniface, as he left his abbey, uttered a heavy curse on all who should live here, and vowed to haunt us till the last Treherne vanished from the face of the earth. With this amiable threat the old party left Baron Roland to his doom, and died as soon as he could in order to begin his cheerful mission."

"Did he haunt the place?" asked Blanche eagerly.

"Yes, most faithfully from that time to this. Some say many of the monks still glide about the older parts of the abbey, for Roland spared the chapel and the north gallery which joined it to the modern building. Poor fellows, they are welcome, and once a year they shall have a chance to warm their ghostly selves by the great fires always kindled at Christmas in the gallery."

"Mrs. Benson once told me that when the ghost walked, it was a sure sign of a coming death in the family. Is that true?" asked Rose, whose curiosity was excited by the expression of Octavia's face, and a certain uneasiness in Sir Jasper's manner in spite of his merry mood.

"There is a stupid superstition of that sort in the family, but no one except the servants believes it, of course. In times of illness some silly maid or croaking old woman can easily fancy they see a phantom, and, if death comes, they are sure of the ghostly warning. Benson saw it before my father died, and old Roger, the night my uncle was seized with apoplexy. Patty will never be made to believe that this warning does not forebode the death of Maurice or myself, for the gallant spirit leaves the ladies of our house to depart in peace. How does it strike you, Cousin?"

Turning as he spoke, Sir Jasper glanced at Treherne, who had entered while he spoke.

"I am quite skeptical and indifferent to the whole affair, but I agree with Octavia that it is best to say nothing to my aunt if she is ignorant of the matter. Her rooms are a long way off, and perhaps she did not hear the confusion."

"You seem to hear everything; you were not with us when I said that."
And Octavia looked up with an air of surprise.

Smiling significantly, Treherne answered, "I hear, see, and understand many things that escape others. Jasper, allow me to advise you to smooth the hair which your sleep has disarranged. Mrs. Snowdon, permit me. This rich velvet catches the least speck." And with his handkerchief he delicately brushed away several streaks of white dust which clung to the lady's skirt.

Sir Jasper turned hastily on his heel and went to remake his toilet; Mrs. Snowdon bit her lip, but thanked Treherne sweetly and begged him to fasten her glove. As he did so, she said softly, "Be more careful next time. Octavia has keen eyes, and the major may prove inconvenient."

"I have no fear that *you* will," he whispered back, with a malicious glance.

Here the entrance of my lady put an end to the ghostly episode, for it was evident that she knew nothing of it. Octavia slipped away to question John, and learn that no sign of a phantom was to be seen. Treherne devoted himself to Mrs. Snowdon, and the major entertained my lady, while Sir Jasper and the girls chatted apart.

It was Christmas Eve, and a dance in the great gallery was the yearly festival at the abbey. All had been eager for it, but the maid's story seemed to have lessened their enthusiasm, though no one would own it. This annoyed Sir Jasper, and he exerted himself to clear the atmosphere by affecting gaiety he did not feel. The moment the gentlemen came in after dinner he whispered to his mother, who rose, asked the general for his arm, and led the way to the north gallery, whence the sound of music now proceeded. The rest followed in a merry procession, even Treherne, for two footmen carried him up the great stairway, chair and all.

Nothing could look less ghostly now than the haunted gallery. Fires roared up a wide chimney at either end, long rows of figures clad in armor stood on each side, one mailed hand grasping a lance, the other bearing a lighted candle, a device of Sir Jasper's. Narrow windows pierced in the thick walls let in gleams of wintry moonlight; ivy, holly, and evergreen glistened in the ruddy glow of mingled firelight and candle shine. From the arched stone roof hung tattered banners, and in the midst depended a great bunch of mistletoe. Red-cushioned seats stood in recessed window nooks, and from behind a high-covered screen of oak sounded the blithe air of Sir Roger de Coverley.

With the utmost gravity and stateliness my lady and the general led off the dance, for, according to the good old fashion, the men and maids in their best array joined the gentlefolk and danced with their betters in a high state of pride and bashfulness. Sir Jasper twirled the old housekeeper till her head spun around and around and her decorous skirts rustled stormily; Mrs. Snowdon captivated the gray-haired butler by her condescension; and John was made a proud man by the hand of his young mistress. The major came out strong among the pretty maids, and Rose danced the footmen out of breath long before the music paused.

The merriment increased from that moment, and when the general surprised my lady by gallantly saluting her as she unconsciously stood under the mistletoe, the applause was immense. Everyone followed the old gentleman's example as fast as opportunities occurred, and the young ladies soon had as fine a color as the housemaids. More dancing, games, songs, and all manner of festival devices filled the evening, yet under cover of the gaiety more than one little scene was enacted that night, and in an hour of seeming frivolity the current of several lives was changed.

By a skillful maneuver Annon led Octavia to an isolated recess, as if to rest after a brisk game, and, taking advantage of the auspicious hour, pleaded his suit. She heard him patiently and, when he paused, said slowly, yet decidedly, and with no sign of maiden hesitation, “Thanks for the honor you do me, but I cannot accept it, for I do not love you. I think I never can.”

“Have you tried?” he asked eagerly.

“Yes, indeed I have. I like you as a friend, but no more. I know Mamma desires it, that Jasper hopes for it, and I try to please them, but love will not be forced, so what can I do?” And she smiled in spite of herself at her own blunt simplicity.

“No, but it can be cherished, strengthened, and in time won, with patience and devotion. Let me try, Octavia; it is but fair, unless you have already learned from another the lesson I hope to teach. Is it so?”

“No, I think not. I do not understand myself as yet, I am so young, and this so sudden. Give me time, Frank.”

She blushed and fluttered now, looked half angry, half beseeching, and altogether lovely.

“How much time shall I give? It cannot take long to read a heart like yours, dear.” And fancying her emotion a propitious omen, he assumed the lover in good earnest.

“Give me time till the New Year. I will answer then, and, meantime, leave me free to study both myself and you. We have known each other long, I own, but, still, this changes everything, and makes you seem another person. Be patient, Frank, and I will try to make my duty a pleasure.”

“I will. God bless you for the kind hope, Octavia. It has been mine for years, and if I lose it, it will go hardly with me.”

Later in the evening General Snowdon stood examining the antique screen. In many places carved oak was pierced quite through, so that voices were audible from behind it. The musicians had gone down to supper, the young folk were quietly busy at the other end of the hall, and as the old gentleman admired the quaint carving, the sound of his own name caught his ear. The housekeeper and butler still remained, though the other servants had gone, and sitting cosily behind the screen chatted in low tones believing themselves secure.

“It *was* Mrs. Snowdon, Adam, as I’m a living woman, though I wouldn’t say it to anyone but you. She and Sir Jasper were here wrapped in cloaks, and up to mischief, I’ll be bound. She is a beauty, but I don’t envy her, and there’ll be trouble in the house if she stays long.”

“But how do you know, Mrs. Benson, she was here? Where’s your proof, mum?” asked the pompous butler.

"Look at this, and then look at the outlandish trimming of the lady's dress. You men are so dull about such matters you'd never observe these little points. Well, I was here first after Patty, and my light shone on this jet ornament lying near where she saw the spirit. No one has any such tasty trifles but Mrs. Snowdon, and these are all over her gown. If that ain't proof, what is?"

"Well, admitting it, I then say what on earth should she and Master be up here for, at such a time?" asked the slow-witted butler.

"Adam, we are old servants of the family, and to you I'll say what tortures shouldn't draw from to another. Master has been wild, as you know, and it's my belief that he loved this lady abroad. There was a talk of some mystery, or misdeed, or misfortune, more than a year ago, and she was in it. I'm loath to say it, but I think Master loves her still, and she him. The general is an old man, she is but young, and so spirited and winsome she can't in reason care for him as for a fine, gallant gentleman like Sir Jasper. There's trouble brewing, Adam, mark my words. There's trouble brewing for the Trehernes."

So low had the voices fallen that the listener could not have caught the words had not his ear been strained to the utmost. He did hear all, and his wasted face flashed with the wrath of a young man, then grew pale and stern as he turned to watch his wife. She stood apart from the others talking to Sir Jasper, who looked unusually handsome and debonair as he fanned her with a devoted air.

Perhaps it is true, thought the old man bitterly. They are well matched, were lovers once, no doubt, and long to be so again. Poor Edith, I was very blind. And with his gray head bowed upon his breast the general stole away, carrying an arrow in his brave old heart.

* * * * *

"Blanche, come here and rest, you will be ill tomorrow; and I promised Mamma to take care of you." With which elder-sisterly command Rose led the girl to an immense old chair, which held them both. "Now listen to me and follow my advice, for I am wise in my generation, though not yet gray. They are all busy, so leave them alone and let me show you what is to be done."

Rose spoke softly, but with great resolution, and nodded her pretty head so energetically that the holly berries came rolling over her white shoulders.

"We are not as rich as we might be, and must establish ourselves as soon and as well as possible. I intend to be Lady Treherne. You can be the Honorable Mrs. Annon, if you give your mind to it."

"My dear child, are you mad?" whispered Blanche.

"Far from it, but you will be if you waste your time on Maurice. He is poor, and a cripple, though very charming, I admit. He loves Tavie, and she will marry him, I am sure. She can't endure Frank, but tries to because my lady commands it. Nothing will come of it, so try your fascinations and comfort the poor man; sympathy now will foster love hereafter.”

“Don’t talk so here, Rose, someone will hear us,” began her sister, but the other broke in briskly.

“No fear, a crowd is the best place for secrets. Now remember what I say, and make your game while the ball is rolling. Other people are careful not to put their plans into words, but I’m no hypocrite, and say plainly what I mean. Bear my sage counsel in mind and act wisely. Now come and begin.”

Treherne was sitting alone by one of the great fires, regarding the gay scene with serious air. For him there was neither dancing nor games; he could only roam about catching glimpses of forbidden pleasures, impossible delights, and youthful hopes forever lost to him. Sad but not morose was his face, and to Octavia it was a mute reproach which she could not long resist. Coming up as if to warm herself, she spoke to him in her usually frank and friendly way, and felt her heart beat fast when she saw how swift a change her cordial manner wrought in him.

“How pretty your holly is! Do you remember how we used to go and gather it for festivals like this, when we were happy children?” he asked, looking up at her with eyes full of tender admiration.

“Yes, I remember. Everyone wears it tonight as a badge, but you have none. Let me get you a bit, I like to have you one of us in all things.”

She leaned forward to break a green sprig from the branch over the chimneypiece; the strong draft drew in her fleecy skirt, and in an instant she was enveloped in flames.

“Maurice, save me, help me!” cried a voice of fear and agony, and before anyone could reach her, before he himself knew how the deed was done, Treherne had thrown himself from his chair, wrapped the tiger skin tightly about her, and knelt there clasping her in his arms heedless of fire, pain, or the incoherent expressions of love that broke from his lips.

Chapter VI

MIRACLES

Great was the confusion and alarm which reigned for many minutes, but when the panic subsided two miracles appeared. Octavia was entirely uninjured, and Treherne was standing on his feet, a thing which for months he had not done without crutches. In the excitement of the moment, no one observed the wonder; all were crowding about the girl, who, pale and breathless but now self-possessed, was the first to exclaim, pointing to her cousin, who had drawn himself up, with the help of his chair, and leaned there smiling, with a face full of intense delight.

"Look at Maurice! Oh, Jasper, help him or he'll fall!"

Sir Jasper sprung to his side and put a strong arm about him, while a chorus of wonder, sympathy, and congratulations rose about them.

"Why, lad, what does it mean? Have you been deceiving us all this time?" cried Jasper, as Treherne leaned on him, looking exhausted but truly happy.

"It means that I am not to be a cripple all my life; that they did not deceive me when they said a sudden shock might electrify me with a more potent magnetism than any they could apply. It *has,* and if I am cured I owe it all to you, Octavia."

He stretched his hands to her with a gesture of such passionate gratitude that the girl covered her face to hide its traitorous tenderness, and my lady went to him, saying brokenly, as she embraced him with maternal warmth, "God bless you for this act, Maurice, and reward you with a perfect cure. To you I owe the lives of both my children; how can I thank you as I ought?"

"I dare not tell you yet," he whispered eagerly, then added, "I am growing faint, Aunt. Get me away before I make a scene."

This hint recalled my lady to her usual state of dignified self-possession. Bidding Jasper and the major help Treherne to his room without delay, she begged Rose to comfort her sister, who was sobbing hysterically, and as they all obeyed her, she led her daughter away to her own apartment, for the festivities of the evening were at an end.

At the same time Mrs. Snowdon and Annon bade my lady good-night, as if they also were about to retire, but as they reached the door of the gallery Mrs. Snowdon paused and beckoned Annon back. They were alone now, and, standing before the fire which had so nearly made that Christmas Eve a tragical one, she turned to him with a face full of interest and sympathy as she said, nodding toward the blackened shreds of Octavia's dress, and the scorched tiger skin which still lay at their feet, "That was both a fortunate and an unfortunate little affair, but I fear Maurice's gain will be your loss. Pardon my frankness for Octavia's sake; she is a fine creature, and I long to see her given to one worthy of her. I am a woman to read faces quickly; I know that your suit does not prosper as you would have it, and I desire to help you. May I?"

"Indeed you may, and command any service of me in return. But to what do I owe this unexpected friendliness?" cried Annon, both grateful and surprised.

"To my regard for the young lady, my wish to save her from an unworthy man."

"Do you mean Treherne?" asked Annon, more and more amazed.

"I do. Octavia must not marry a gambler!"

"My dear lady, you labor under some mistake; Treherne is by no means a gambler. I owe him no goodwill, but I cannot hear him slandered."

"You are generous, but I am not mistaken. Can you, on your honor, assure me that Maurice never played?"

Mrs. Snowdon's keen eyes were on him, and he looked embarrassed for a moment, but answered with some hesitation, "Why, no, I cannot say that, but I can assure you that he is not an habitual gambler. All young men of his rank play more or less, especially abroad. It is merely an amusement with most, and among men is not considered dishonorable or dangerous. Ladies think differently, I believe, at least in England."

At the word "abroad," Mrs. Snowdon's face brightened, and she suddenly dropped her eyes, as if afraid of betraying some secret purpose.

"Indeed we do, and well we may, many of us having suffered from this pernicious habit. I have had special cause to dread and condemn it, and the fear that Octavia should in time suffer what I have suffered as a girl urges me to interfere where otherwise I should be dumb. Mr. Annon, there was a rumor that Maurice was forced to quit Paris, owing to some dishonorable practices at the gaming table. Is this true?"

"Nay, don't ask me; upon my soul I cannot tell you. I only know that something was amiss, but what I never learned. Various tales were whispered at the clubs, and Sir Jasper indignantly denied them all. The bravery with which Maurice saved his cousin, and the sad affliction which fell upon him, silenced the gossip, and it was soon forgotten."

Mrs. Snowdon remained silent for a moment, with brows knit in deep thought, while Annon uneasily watched her. Suddenly she glanced over her shoulder, drew nearer, and whispered cautiously, "Did the rumors of which you speak charge him with — ” and the last word was breathed into Annon’s ear almost inaudibily.

He started, as if some new light broke on him, and stared at the speaker with a troubled face for an instant, saying hastily, “No, but now you remind me that when an affair of that sort was discussed the other day Treherne looked very odd, and rolled himself away, as if it didn’t interest him. I can’t believe it, and yet it may be something of the kind. That would account for old Sir Jasper’s whim, and Treherne’s steady denial of any knowledge of the cause. How in heaven’s name did you learn this?”

“My woman’s wit suggested it, and my woman’s will shall confirm or destroy the suspicion. My lady and Octavia evidently know nothing, but they shall if there is any danger of the girl’s being won by him.”

“You would not tell her!” exclaimed Annon.

“I will, unless you do it” was the firm answer.

“Never! To betray a friend, even to gain the woman I love, is a thing I cannot do; my honor forbids it.”

Mrs. Snowdon smiled scornfully.

“Men’s code of honor is a strong one, and we poor women suffer from it. Leave this to me; do your best, and if all other means fail, you may be glad to try my device to prevent Maurice from marrying his cousin. Gratitude and pity are strong allies, and if he recovers, his strong will will move heaven and earth to gain her. Good night.” And leaving her last words to rankle in Annon’s mind, Mrs. Snowdon departed to endure sleepless hours full of tormenting memories, newborn hopes, and alternations of determination and despair.

Treherne’s prospect of recovery filled the whole house with delight, for his patient courage and unfailing cheerfulness had endeared him to all. It was no transient amendment, for day by day he steadily gained strength and power, passing rapidly from chair to crutches, from crutches to a cane and a friend’s arm, which was always ready for him. Pain returned with returning vitality, but he bore it with a fortitude that touched all who witnessed it. At times motion was torture, yet motion was necessary lest the torpidity should return, and Treherne took his daily exercise with unfailing perseverance, saying with a smile, though great drops stood upon his forehead, “I have something dearer even than health to win. Hold me up, Jasper, and let me stagger on, in spite of everything, till my twelve turns are made.”

He remembered Lady Treherne’s words, “If you were well, I’d gladly give my girl to you.” This inspired him with strength, endurance, and a happiness which could not be concealed. It overflowed in looks, words, and acts; it infected everyone, and made these holidays the blithest the old abbey had seen for many a day.

Annon devoted himself to Octavia, and in spite of her command to be left in peace till the New Year, she was very kind — so kind that hope flamed up in his heart, though he saw that something like compassion often shone on him from her frank eyes, and her compliance had no touch of the tender docility which lovers long to see. She still avoided Treherne, but so skillfully that few observed the change but Annon and himself. In public Sir Jasper appeared to worship at the sprightly Rose's shrine, and she fancied her game was prospering well.

But had any one peeped behind the scenes it would have been discovered that during the half hour before dinner, when everyone was in their dressing rooms and the general taking his nap, a pair of ghostly black figures flitted about the haunted gallery, where no servant ventured without orders. The major fancied himself the only one who had made this discovery, for Mrs. Snowdon affected Treherne's society in public, and was assiduous in serving and amusing the "dear convalescent," as she called him. But the general did not sleep; he too watched and waited, longing yet dreading to speak, and hoping that this was but a harmless freak of Edith's, for her caprices were many, and till now he had indulged them freely. This hesitation disgusted the major, who, being a bachelor, knew little of women's ways, and less of their powers of persuasion. The day before New Year he took a sudden resolution, and demanded a private interview with the general.

"I have come on an unpleasant errand, sir," he abruptly began, as the old man received him with an expression which rather daunted the major. "My friendship for Lady Treherne, and my guardianship of her children, makes me jealous of the honor of the family. I fear it is in danger, sir; pardon me for saying it, but your wife is the cause."

"May I trouble you to explain, Major Royston" was all the general's reply, as his old face grew stern and haughty.

"I will, sir, briefly. I happen to know from Jasper that there were love passages between Miss Dubarry and himself a year or more ago in Paris. A whim parted them, and she married. So far no reproach rests upon either, but since she came here it has been evident to others as well as myself that Jasper's affection has revived, and that Mrs. Snowdon does not reject and reprove it as she should. They often meet, and from Jasper's manner I am convinced that mischief is afloat. He is ardent, headstrong, and utterly regardless of the world's opinion in some cases. I have watched them, and what I tell you is true."

"Prove it."

"I will. They meet in the north gallery, wrapped in dark cloaks, and play ghost if anyone comes. I concealed myself behind the screen last evening at dusk, and satisfied myself that my suspicions were correct. I heard little of their conversation, but that little was enough.”

“Repeat it, if you please.”

“Sir Jasper seemed pleading for some promise which she reluctantly gave, saying, ‘While you live I will be true to my word with everyone but him. He will suspect, and it will be useless to keep it from him.’

“‘He will shoot me for this if he knows I am the traitor,’ expostulated Jasper.

“‘He shall not know that; I can hoodwink him easily, and serve my purpose also.’

“‘You are mysterious, but I leave all to you and wait for my reward. When shall I have it, Edith?’ She laughed, and answered so low I could not hear, for they left the gallery as they spoke. Forgive me, General, for the pain I inflict. You are the only person to whom I have spoken, and you are the only person who can properly and promptly prevent this affair from bringing open shame and scandal on an honorable house. To you I leave it, and will do my part with this infatuated young man if you will withdraw the temptation which will ruin him.”

“I will. Thank you, Major. Trust to me, and by tomorrow I will prove that I can act as becomes me.”

The grief and misery in the general’s face touched the major; he silently wrung his hand and went away, thanking heaven more fervently than ever that no cursed coquette of a woman had it in her power to break his heart.

While this scene was going on above, another was taking place in the library. Treherne sat there alone, thinking happy thoughts evidently, for his eyes shone and his lips smiled as he mused, while watching the splendors of a winter sunset. A soft rustle and the faint scent of violets warned him of Mrs. Snowdon’s approach, and a sudden foreboding told him that danger was near. The instant he saw her face his fear was confirmed, for exultation, resolve, and love met and mingled in the expression it wore. Leaning in the window recess, where the red light shone full on her lovely face and queenly figure, she said, softly yet with a ruthless accent below the softness, “Dreaming dreams, Maurice, which will never come to pass, unless I will it. I know your secret, and I shall use it to prevent the fulfillment of the foolish hope you cherish.”

“Who told you?” he demanded, with an almost fierce flash of the eye and an angry flush.

“I discovered it, as I warned you I should. My memory is good, I recall the gossip of long ago, I observe the faces, words, and acts of those whom I suspect, and unconscious hints from them give me the truth.”

“I doubt it,” and Treherne smiled securely.

She stooped and whispered one short sentence into his ear. Whatever it was it caused him to start up with a pale, panic-stricken face, and eye her as if she had pronounced his doom.

“Do you doubt it now?” she asked coldly.

“He told you! Even your skill and craft could not discover it alone,” he muttered.

“Nay, I told you nothing was impossible to a determined woman. I needed no help, for I knew more than you think.”

He sank down again in a despairing attitude and hid his face, saying mournfully, “I might have known you would hunt me down and dash my hopes when they were surest. How will you use this unhappy secret?”

“I will tell Octavia, and make her duty less hard. It will be kind to both of you, for even with her this memory would mar your happiness; and it saves her from the shame and grief of discovering, when too late, that she has given herself to a — ”

“Stop!” he cried, in a tone that made her start and pale, as he rose out of his chair white with a stern indignation which awed her for a moment. “You shall not utter that word — you know but half the truth, and if you wrong me or trouble the girl I will turn traitor also, and tell the general the game you are playing with my cousin. You feign to love me as you feigned before, but his title is the bait now as then, and you fancy that by threatening to mar my hopes you will secure my silence, and gain your end.”

“Wrong, quite wrong. Jasper is nothing to me; I use *him* as a tool, not you. If I threaten, it is to keep you from Octavia, who cannot forgive the past and love you for yourself, as I have done all these miserable months. You say I know but half the truth. Tell me the whole and I will spare you.”

If ever a man was tempted to betray a trust it was Treherne then. A word, and Octavia might be his; silence, and she might be lost; for this woman was in earnest, and possessed the power to ruin his good name forever. The truth leaped to his lips and would have passed them, had not his eye fallen on the portrait of Jasper’s father. This man had loved and sheltered the orphan all his life, had made of him a son, and, dying, urged him to guard and serve and save the rebellious youth he left, when most needing a father’s care.

“I promised, and I will keep my promise at all costs,” sighed Treherne, and with a gesture full of pathetic patience he waved the fair tempter from him, saying steadily, “I will never tell you, though you rob me of that which is dearer than my life. Go and work your will, but remember that when you might have won the deepest gratitude of the man you profess to love, you chose instead to earn his hatred and contempt.”

Waiting for no word of hers, he took refuge in his room, and Edith Snowdon sank down upon the couch, struggling with contending emotions of love and jealousy, remorse and despair. How long she sat there she could not tell; an approaching step recalled her to herself, and looking up she saw Octavia. As the girl approached down the long vista of the drawing rooms, her youth and beauty, innocence and candor touched that fairer and more gifted woman with an envy she had never known before. Something in the girl's face struck her instantly: a look of peace and purity, a sweet serenity more winning than loveliness, more impressive than dignity or grace. With a smile on her lips, yet a half-sad, half-tender light in her eyes, and a cluster of pale winter roses in her hand, she came on till she stood before her rival and, offering the flowers, said, in words as simple as sincere, "Dear Mrs. Snowdon, I cannot let the last sun of the old year set on any misdeeds of mine for which I may atone. I have disliked, distrusted, and misjudged you, and now I come to you in all humility to say forgive me."

With the girlish abandon of her impulsive nature Octavia knelt down before the woman who was plotting to destroy her happiness, laid the roses like a little peace offering on her lap, and with eloquently pleading eyes waited for pardon. For a moment Mrs. Snowdon watched her, fancying it a well-acted ruse to disarm a dangerous rival; but in that sweet face there was no art; one glance showed her that. The words smote her to the heart and won her in spite of pride or passion, as she suddenly took the girl into her arms, weeping repentant tears. Neither spoke, but in the silence each felt the barrier which had stood between them vanishing, and each learned to know the other better in that moment than in a year of common life. Octavia rejoiced that the instinct which had prompted her to make this appeal had not misled her, but assured her that behind the veil of coldness, pride, and levity which this woman wore there was a heart aching for sympathy and help and love. Mrs. Snowdon felt her worser self slip from her, leaving all that was true and noble to make her worthy of the test applied. Art she could meet with equal art, but nature conquered her. For spite of her misspent life and faulty character, the germ of virtue, which lives in the worst, was there, only waiting for the fostering sun and dew of love to strengthen it, even though the harvest be a late one.

"Forgive you!" she cried, brokenly. "It is I who should ask forgiveness of you — I who should atone, confess, and repent. Pardon *me*, pity me, love me, for I am more wretched than you know."

"Dear, I do with heart and soul. Believe it, and let me be your friend" was the soft answer.

"God knows I need one!" sighed the poor woman, still holding fast the only creature who had wholly won her. "Child, I am not good, but not so bad that I dare not look in your innocent face and call you friend. I never had one of my own sex. I never knew my mother; and no one ever saw in me the possibility of goodness, truth, and justice but you. Trust and love and help me, Octavia, and I will reward you with a better life, if I can do no more."

"I will, and the new year shall be happier than the old."

"God bless you for that prophecy; may I be worthy of it."

Then as a bell warned them away, the rivals kissed each other tenderly, and parted friends. As Mrs. Snowdon entered her room, she saw her husband sitting with his gray head in his hands, and heard him murmur despairingly to himself, "My life makes her miserable. But for the sin of it I'd die to free her."

"No, live for me, and teach me to be happy in your love." The clear voice startled him, but not so much as the beautiful changed face of the wife who laid the gray head on her bosom, saying tenderly, "My kind and patient husband, you have been deceived. From me you shall know all the truth, and when you have forgiven my faulty past, you shall see how happy I will try to make your future."

Chapter VII

A GHOSTLY REVEL

“Bless me, how dull we are tonight!” exclaimed Rose, as the younger portion of the party wandered listlessly about the drawing rooms that evening, while my lady and the major played an absorbing game of piquet, and the general dozed peacefully at last.

“It is because Maurice is not here; he always keeps us going, for he is a fellow of infinite resources,” replied Sir Jasper, suppressing a yawn.

“Have him out then,” said Annon.

“He won’t come. The poor lad is blue tonight, in spite of his improvement. Something is amiss, and there is no getting a word from him.”

“Sad memories afflict him, perhaps,” sighed Blanche.

“Don’t be absurd, dear, sad memories are all nonsense; melancholy is always indigestion, and nothing is so sure a cure as fun,” said Rose briskly. “I’m going to send in a polite invitation begging him to come and amuse us. He’ll accept, I haven’t a doubt.”

The message was sent, but to Rose’s chagrin a polite refusal was returned.

“He *shall* come. Sir Jasper, do you and Mr. Annon go as a deputation from us, and return without him at your peril” was her command.

They went, and while waiting their reappearance the sisters spoke of what all had observed.

“How lovely Mrs. Snowdon looks tonight. I always thought she owed half her charms to her skill in dress, but she never looked so beautiful as in that plain black silk, with those roses in her hair,” said Rose.

“What has she done to herself?” replied Blanche. “I see a change, but can’t account for it. She and Tavie have made some beautifying discovery, for both look altogether uplifted and angelic all of a sudden.”

“Here come the gentlemen, and, as I’m a Talbot, they haven’t got him!” cried Rose as the deputation appeared, looking very crestfallen. “Don’t come near me,” she added, irefully, “you are disloyal cowards, and I doom you to exile till I want you. *I* am infinite in resources as well as this recreant man, and come he shall. Mrs. Snowdon, would you mind asking Mr. Treherne to suggest something to wile away the rest of this evening? We are in despair, and can think of nothing, and you are all-powerful with him.”

"I must decline, since he refuses you" was the decided answer, as Mrs. Snowdon moved away.

"Tavie, dear, do go; we *must* have him; he always obeys you, and you would be such a public benefactor, you know."

Without a word Octavia wrote a line and sent it by a servant. Several minutes passed, and the gentlemen began to lay wagers on the success of her trial. "He will not come for me, you may be sure," said Octavia. As the words passed her lips he appeared.

A general laugh greeted him, but, taking no notice of the jests at his expense, he turned to Octavia, saying quietly, "What can I do for you, Cousin?"

His colorless face and weary eyes reproached her for disturbing him, but it was too late for regret, and she answered hastily, "We are in want of some new and amusing occupation to wile away the evening. Can you suggest something appropriate?"

"Why not sit round the hall fire and tell stories, while we wait to see the old year out, as we used to do long ago?" he asked, after a moment's thought.

"I told you so! There it is, just what we want." And Sir Jasper looked triumphant.

"It's capital — let us begin at once. It is after ten now, so we shall not have long to wait," cried Rose, and, taking Sir Jasper's arm, she led the way to the hall.

A great fire always burned there, and in wintertime thick carpets and curtains covered the stone floor and draped the tall windows. Plants blossomed in the warm atmosphere, and chairs and lounges stood about invitingly. The party was soon seated, and Treherne was desired to begin.

"We must have ghost stories, and in order to be properly thrilling and effective, the lights must be put out," said Rose, who sat next him, and spoke first, as usual.

This was soon done, and only a ruddy circle of firelight was left to oppose the rapt gloom that filled the hall, where shadows now seemed to lurk in every corner.

"Don't be very dreadful, or I shall faint away," pleaded Blanche, drawing nearer to Annon, for she had taken her sister's advice, and laid close siege to that gentleman's heart.

"I think your nerves will bear my little tale," replied Treherne. "When I was in India, four years ago, I had a very dear friend in my regiment — a Scotchman; I'm half Scotch myself, you know, and clannish, of course. Gordon was sent up the country on a scouting expedition, and never returned. His men reported that he left them one evening to take a survey, and his horse came home bloody and riderless. We searched, but could not find a trace of him, and I was desperate to discover and avenge his murder. About a month after his disappearance, as I sat in my tent one fearfully hot day, suddenly the canvas door flap was raised and there stood Gordon. I saw him as plainly as I see you, Jasper, and should have sprung to meet him, but something held me back. He was deathly pale, dripping with water, and in his bonny blue eyes was a wild, woeful look that made my blood run cold. I stared dumbly, for it was awful to see my friend so changed and so unearthly. Stretching his arm to me he took my hand, saying solemnly, 'Come!' The touch was like ice; an ominous thrill ran through me; I started up to obey, and he was gone."

"A horrid dream, of course. Is that all?" asked Rose.

With his eyes on the fire and his left hand half extended, Treherne went on as if he had not heard her.

"I thought it was a fancy, and soon recovered myself, for no one had seen or heard anything of Gordon, and my native servant lay just outside my tent. A strange sensation remained in the hand the phantom touched. It was cold, damp, and white. I found it vain to try to forget this apparition; it took strong hold of me; I told Yermid, my man, and he bade me consider it a sign that I was to seek my friend. That night I dreamed I was riding up the country in hot haste; what led me I know not, but I pressed on and on, longing to reach the end. A half-dried river crossed my path, and, riding down the steep bank to ford it, I saw Gordon's body lying in the shallow water looking exactly as the vision looked. I woke in a strange mood, told the story to my commanding officer, and, as nothing was doing just then, easily got leave of absence for a week. Taking Yermid, I set out on my sad quest. I thought it folly, but I could not resist the impulse that drew me on. For seven days I searched, and the strangest part of the story is that all that time I went on exactly as in the dream, seeing what I saw then, and led by the touch of a cold hand on mine. On the seventh day I reached the river, and found my friend's body."

"How horrible! Is it really true?" cried Mrs. Snowdon.

"As true as I am a living man. Nor is that all: this left hand of mine never has been warm since that time. See and feel for yourselves."

He opened both hands, and all satisfied themselves that the left was smaller, paler, and colder than the right.

"Pray someone tell another story to put this out of my mind; it makes me nervous," said Blanche.

"I'll tell one, and you may laugh to quiet your nerves. I want to have mine done with, so that I can enjoy the rest with a free mind." With these words Rose began her tale in the good old fashion.

"Once upon a time, when we were paying a visit to my blessed grandmamma, I saw a ghost in this wise: The dear old lady was ill with a cold and kept her room, leaving us to mope, for it was very dull in the great lonely house. Blanche and I were both homesick, but didn't like to leave till she was better, so we ransacked the library and solaced ourselves with all manner of queer books. One day I found Grandmamma very low and nervous, and evidently with something on her mind. She would say nothing, but the next day was worse, and I insisted on knowing the cause, for the trouble was evidently mental. Charging me to keep it from Blanche, who was, and is, a sad coward, she told me that a spirit had appeared to her two successive nights. 'If it comes a third time, I shall prepare to die,' said the foolish old lady.

"'No, you won't, for I'll come and stay with you and lay your ghost,' I said. With some difficulty I made her yield, and after Blanche was asleep I slipped away to Grandmamma, with a book and candle for a long watch, as the spirit didn't appear till after midnight. She usually slept with her door unlocked, in case of fire or fright, and her maid was close by. That night I locked the door, telling her that spirits could come through the oak if they chose, and I preferred to have a fair trial. Well, I read and chatted and dozed till dawn and nothing appeared, so I laughed at the whole affair, and the old lady pretended to be convinced that it was all a fancy.

"Next night I slept in my own room, and in the morning was told that not only Grandmamma but Janet had seen the spirit. All in white, with streaming hair, a pale face, and a red streak at the throat. It came and parted the bed-curtains, looking in a moment, and then vanished. Janet had slept with Grandmamma and kept a lamp burning on the chimney, so both saw it.

"I was puzzled, but not frightened; I never am, and I insisted on trying again. The door was left unlocked, as on the previous night, and I lay with Grandmamma, a light burning as before. About two she clutched me as I was dropping off. I looked, and there, peeping in between the dark curtains, was a pale face with long hair all about it, and a red streak at the throat. It was very dim, the light being low, but I saw it, and after one breathless minute sprang up, caught my foot, fell down with a crash, and by the time I was around the bed, not a vestige of the thing appeared. I was angry, and vowed I'd succeed at all hazards, though I'll confess I was just a bit daunted.

"Next time Janet and I sat up in easy chairs, with bright lights burning, and both wide awake with the strongest coffee we could make. As the hour drew near we got nervous, and when the white shape came gliding in Janet hid her face. I didn't, and after one look was on the point of laughing, for the spirit was

Blanche walking in her sleep. She wore a coral necklace in those days, and never took it off, and her long hair half hid her face, which had the unnatural, uncanny look somnambulists always wear. I had the sense to keep still and tell Janet what to do, so the poor child went back unwaked, and Grandmamma's spirit never walked again for I took care of that."

"Why did you haunt the old lady?" asked Annon, as the laughter ceased.

"I don't know, unless it was that I wanted to ask leave to go home, and was afraid to do it awake, so tried when asleep. I shall not tell any story, as I was the heroine of this, but will give my turn to you, Mr. Annon," said Blanche, with a soft glance, which was quite thrown away, for the gentleman's eyes were fixed on Octavia, who sat on a low ottoman at Mrs. Snowdon's feet in the full glow of the firelight.

"I've had very small experience in ghosts, and can only recall a little fright I once had when a boy at college. I'd been out to a party, got home tired, couldn't find my matches, and retired in the dark. Toward morning I woke, and glancing up to see if the dim light was dawn or moonshine I was horrified to see a coffin standing at the bed's foot. I rubbed my eyes to be sure I was awake, and looked with all my might. There it was, a long black coffin, and I saw the white plate in the dusk, for the moon was setting and my curtain was not drawn. 'It's some trick of the fellows,' I thought; 'I'll not betray myself, but keep cool.' Easy to say but hard to do, for it suddenly flashed into my mind that I might be in the wrong room. I glanced about, but there were the familiar objects as usual, as far as the indistinct light allowed me to see, and I made sure by feeling on the wall at the bed's head for my watchcase. It was there, and mine beyond a doubt, being peculiar in shape and fabric. Had I been to a college wine party I could have accounted for the vision, but a quiet evening in a grave professor's well-conducted family could produce no ill effects. 'It's an optical illusion, or a prank of my mates; I'll sleep and forget it,' I said, and for a time endeavored to do so, but curiosity overcame my resolve, and soon I peeped again. Judge of my horror when I saw the sharp white outline of a dead face, which seemed to be peeping up from the coffin. It gave me a terrible shock for I was but a lad and had been ill. I hid my face and quaked like a nervous girl, still thinking it some joke and too proud to betray fear lest I should be laughed at. How long I lay there I don't know, but when I looked again the face was farther out and the whole figure seemed rising slowly. The moon was nearly down, I had no lamp, and to be left in the dark with that awesome thing was more than I could bear. Joke or earnest, I must end the panic, and bolting out of my room I roused my neighbor. He told me I was mad or drunk, but lit a lamp and returned with me, to find my horror only a heap of clothes thrown on the table in such a way that, as the moon's pale light shot it, it struck upon my black student's gown, with a white card lying on it, and produced the effect of a coffin and plate. The face was a crumpled handkerchief, and what seemed hair a brown muffler. As the moon sank, these outlines changed and, incredible as it may seem, grew like a face. My friend not having had the fright enjoyed the joke, and 'Coffins' was my sobriquet for a long while."

"You get worse and worse. Sir Jasper, do vary the horrors by a touch of fun, or I shall run away," said Blanche, glancing over her shoulder nervously.

"I'll do my best, and tell a story my uncle used to relate of his young days. I forget the name of the place, but it was some little country town famous among anglers. My uncle often went to fish, and always regretted that a deserted house near the trout stream was not occupied, for the inn was inconveniently distant. Speaking of this one evening as he lounged in the landlady's parlor, he asked why no one took it and let the rooms to strangers in the fishing season. 'For fear of the ghostissess, your honor,' replied the woman, and proceeded to tell, him that three distinct spirits haunted the house. In the garret was heard the hum of a wheel and the tap of high-heeled shoes, as the ghostly spinner went to and fro. In a chamber sounded the sharpening of a knife, followed by groans and the drip of blood. The cellar was made awful by a skeleton sitting on a half-buried box and chuckling fiendishly. It seems a miser lived there once, and was believed to have starved his daughter in the garret, keeping her at work till she died. The second spirit was that of the girl's rejected lover, who cut his throat in the chamber, and the third of the miser who was found dead on the money chest he was too feeble to conceal. My uncle laughed at all this, and offered to lay the ghosts if anyone would take the house.

"This offer got abroad, and a crusty old fellow accepted it, hoping to turn a penny. He had a pretty girl, whose love had been thwarted by the old man, and whose lover was going to sea in despair. My uncle knew this and pitied the young people. He had made acquaintance with a wandering artist, and the two agreed to conquer the prejudices against the house by taking rooms there. They did so, and after satisfying themselves regarding the noises, consulted a wise old woman as to the best means of laying the ghosts. She told them if any young girl would pass a night in each haunted room, praying piously the while, that all would be well. Peggy was asked if she would do it, and being a stouthearted lass she consented, for a round sum, to try it. The first night was in the garret, and Peggy, in spite of the prophecies of the village gossips, came out alive, though listeners at the door heard the weird humming and tapping all night long. The next night all went well, and from that time no more sharpening, groaning, or dripping was heard. The third time she bade her friends good-bye and, wrapped in her red cloak, with a lamp and prayer book, went down into the cellar. Alas for pretty Peggy! When day came she was gone, and with her the miser's empty box, though his bones remained to prove how well she had done her work.

"The town was in an uproar, and the old man furious. Some said the devil had flown away with her, others that the bones were hers, and all agreed that henceforth another ghost would haunt the house. My uncle and the artist did their best to comfort the father, who sorely reproached himself for thwarting the girl's love, and declared that if Jack would find her he should have her. But Jack had sailed, and the old man 'was left lamenting.' The house was freed from its unearthly visitors, however, for no ghost appeared; and when my uncle left, old Martin found money and letter informing him that Peggy had spent her first two nights preparing for flight, and on the third had gone away to marry and sail with Jack. The noises had been produced by the artist, who was a ventriloquist, the skeleton had been smuggled from the surgeons, and the whole thing was a conspiracy to help Peggy and accommodate the fishermen."

"It is evident that roguery is hereditary," laughed Rose as the narrator paused.

"I strongly suspect that Sir Jasper the second was the true hero of that story," added Mrs. Snowdon.

"Think what you like, I've done my part, and leave the stage for you, madam."

"I will come last. It is your turn, dear." As Mrs. Snowdon softly uttered the last word, and Octavia leaned upon her knee with an affectionate glance, Treherne leaned forward to catch a glimpse of the two changed faces, and looked as if bewildered when both smiled at him, as they sat hand in hand while the girl told her story.

"Long ago a famous actress suddenly dropped dead at the close of a splendidly played tragedy. She was carried home, and preparations were made to bury her. The play had been gotten up with great care and expense, and a fine actor was the hero. The public demanded a repetition, and an inferior person was engaged to take the dead lady's part. A day's delay had been necessary, but when the night came the house was crowded. They waited both before and behind the curtain for the debut of the new actress, with much curiosity. She stood waiting for her cue, but as it was given, to the amazement of all, the great tragedienne glided upon the stage. Pale as marble, and with a strange fire in her eyes, strange pathos in her voice, strange power in her acting, she went through her part, and at the close vanished as mysteriously as she came. Great was the excitement that night, and intense the astonishment and horror next day when it was whispered abroad that the dead woman never had revived, but had lain in her coffin before the eyes of watchers all the evening, when hundreds fancied they were applauding her at the theater. The mystery never was cleared up, and Paris was divided by two opinions: one that some person marvelously like Madame Z. had personated her for the sake of a sensation; the other that the ghost of the dead actress, unable to free itself from the old duties so full of fascination to an ambitious and successful woman, had played for the last time the part which had made her famous."

"Where did you find that, Tavie? It's very French, and not bad if you invented it," said Sir Jasper.

"I read it in an old book, where it was much better told. Now, Edith, there is just time for your tale."

As the word "Edith" passed her lips, again Treherne started and eyed them both, and again they smiled, as Mrs. Snowdon caressed the smooth cheek leaning on her knee, and looking full at him began the last recital.

"You have been recounting the pranks of imaginary ghosts; let me show you the workings of some real spirits, evil and good, that haunt every heart and home, making its misery or joy. At Christmastime, in a country house, a party of friends met to keep the holidays, and very happily they might have done so had not one person marred the peace of several. Love, jealousy, deceit, and nobleness were the spirits that played their freaks with these people. The person of whom I speak was more haunted than the rest, and much tormented, being willful, proud, and jealous. Heaven help her, she had had no one to exorcise these ghosts for her, and they goaded her to do much harm. Among these friends there were more than one pair of lovers, and much tangling of plots and plans, for hearts are wayward and mysterious things, and cannot love as duty bids or prudence counsels. This woman held the key to all the secrets of the house, and, having a purpose to gain, she used her power selfishly, for a time. To satisfy a doubt, she feigned a fancy for a gentleman who once did her the honor of admiring her, and, to the great scandal of certain sage persons, permitted him to show his regard for her, knowing that it was but a transient amusement on his part as well as upon hers. In the hands of this woman lay a secret which could make or mar the happiness of the best and dearest of the party. The evil spirits which haunted her urged her to mar their peace and gratify a sinful hope. On the other side, honor, justice, and generosity prompted her to make them happy, and while she wavered there came to her a sweet enchantress who, with a word, banished the tormenting ghosts forever, and gave the haunted woman a talisman to keep her free henceforth."

There the earnest voice faltered, and with a sudden impulse Mrs. Snowdon bent her head and kissed the fair forehead which had bent lower and lower as she went on. Each listener understood the truth, lightly veiled in that hasty fable, and each found in it a different meaning. Sir Jasper frowned and bit his lips, Annon glanced anxiously from face to face, Octavia hid hers, and Treherne’s flashed with sudden intelligence, while Rose laughed low to herself, enjoying the scene. Blanche, who was getting sleepy, said, with a stifled gape, “That is a very nice, moral little story, but I wish there had been some real ghosts in it.”

“There was. Will you come and see them?”

As she put the question, Mrs. Snowdon rose abruptly, wishing to end the séance, and beckoning them to follow glided up the great stairway. All obeyed, wondering what whim possessed her, and quite ready for any jest in store for them.

Chapter VIII

JASPER

She led them to the north gallery and, pausing at the door, said merrily, “The ghost — or ghosts rather, for there were two — which frightened Patty were Sir Jasper and myself, meeting to discuss certain important matters which concerned Mr. Treherne. If you want to see spirits we will play phantom for you, and convince you of our power.”

“Good, let us go and have a ghostly dance, as a proper finale of our revel,” answered Rose as they flocked into the long hall.

At that moment the great clock struck twelve, and all paused to bid the old year adieu. Sir Jasper was the first to speak, for, angry with Mrs. Snowdon, yet thankful to her for making a jest to others of what had been earnest to him, he desired to hide his chagrin under a gay manner; and taking Rose around the waist was about to waltz away as she proposed, saying cheerily, “‘Come one and all, and dance the new year in,’“ when a cry from Octavia arrested him, and turning he saw her stand, pale and trembling, pointing to the far end of the hall.

Eight narrow Gothic windows pierced either wall of the north gallery. A full moon sent her silvery light strongly in upon the eastern side, making broad bars of brightness across the floor. No fires burned there now, and wherever the moonlight did not fall deep shadows lay. As Octavia cried out, all looked, and all distinctly saw a tall, dark figure moving noiselessly across the second bar of light far down the hall.

“Is it some jest of yours?” asked Sir Jasper of Mrs. Snowdon, as the form vanished in the shadow.

“No, upon my honor, I know nothing of it! I only meant to relieve Octavia’s superstitious fears by showing her our pranks” was the whispered reply as Mrs. Snowdon’s cheek paled, and she drew nearer to Jasper.

“Who is there?” called Treherne in a commanding tone.

No answer, but a faint, cold breath of air seemed to sigh along the arched roof and die away as the dark figure crossed the third streak of moonlight. A strange awe fell upon them all, and no one spoke, but stood watching for the appearance of the shape. Nearer and nearer it came, with soundless steps, and as it reached the sixth window its outlines were distinctly visible. A tall, wasted figure, all in black, with a rosary hanging from the girdle, and a dark beard half concealing the face.

“The Abbot’s ghost, and very well got up,” said Annon, trying to laugh but failing decidedly, for again the cold breath swept over them, causing a general shudder.

“Hush!” whispered Treherne, drawing Octavia to his side with a protecting gesture.

Once more the phantom appeared and disappeared, and as they waited for it to cross the last bar of light that lay between it and them, Mrs. Snowdon stepped forward to the edge of the shadow in which they stood, as if to confront the apparition alone. Out of the darkness it came, and in the full radiance of the light it paused. Mrs. Snowdon, being nearest, saw the face first, and uttering a faint cry dropped down upon the stone floor, covering up her eyes. Nothing human ever wore a look like that of the ghastly, hollow-eyed, pale-lipped countenance below the hood. All saw it and held their breath as it slowly raised a shadowy arm and pointed a shriveled finger at Sir Jasper.

“Speak, whatever you are, or I’ll quickly prove whether you are man or spirit!” cried Jasper fiercely, stepping forward as if to grasp the extended arm that seemed to menace him alone.

An icy gust swept through the hall, and the phantom slowly receded into the shadow. Jasper sprang after it, but nothing crossed the second stream of light, and nothing remained in the shade. Like one possessed by a sudden fancy he rushed down the gallery to find all fast and empty, and to return looking very strangely. Blanche had fainted away and Annon was bearing her out of the hall. Rose was clinging to Mrs. Snowdon, and Octavia leaned against her cousin, saying in a fervent whisper, “Thank God it did not point at you!”

“Am I then dearer than your brother?” he whispered back.

There was no audible reply, but one little hand involuntarily pressed his, though the other was outstretched toward Jasper, who came up white and startled but firm and quiet. Affecting to make light of it, he said, forcing a smile as he raised Mrs. Snowdon, “It is some stupid joke of the servants. Let us think no more of it. Come, Edith, this is not like your usual self.”

“It was nothing human, Jasper; you know it as well as I. Oh, why did I bring you here to meet the warning phantom that haunts your house!”

“Nay, if my time is near the spirit would have found me out wherever I might be. I have no faith in that absurd superstition — I laugh at and defy it. Come down and drink my health in wine from the Abbot’s own cellar.”

But no one had heart for further gaiety, and, finding Lady Treherne already alarmed by Annon, they were forced to tell her all, and find their own bewilderment deepened by her unalterable belief in the evil omen.

At her command the house was searched, the servants cross-questioned, and every effort made to discover the identity of the apparition. All in vain; the house was as usual, and not a man or maid but turned pale at the idea of entering the gallery at midnight. At my lady's request, all promised to say no more upon the mystery, and separated at last to such sleep as they could enjoy.

Very grave were the faces gathered about the breakfast table next morning, and very anxious the glances cast on Sir Jasper as he came in, late as usual, looking uncommonly blithe and well. Nothing serious ever made a deep impression on his mercurial nature. Treherne had more the air of a doomed man, being very pale and worn, in spite of an occasional gleam of happiness as he looked at Octavia. He haunted Jasper like a shadow all the morning, much to that young gentleman's annoyance, for both his mother and sister hung about him with faces of ill-dissembled anxiety. By afternoon his patience gave out, and he openly rebelled against the tender guard kept over him. Ringing for his horse he said decidedly, "I'm bored to death with the solemnity which pervades the house today, so I'm off for a brisk gallop, before I lose my temper and spirits altogether."

"Come with me in the pony carriage, Jasper. I've not had a drive with you for a long while, and should enjoy it so much," said my lady, detaining him.

"Mrs. Snowdon looks as if she needed air to revive her roses, and the pony carriage is just the thing for her, so I will cheerfully resign my seat to her," he answered laughing, as he forced himself from his mother's hand.

"Take the girls in the clarence. We all want a breath of air, and you are the best whip we know. Be gallant and say yes, dear."

"No, thank you, Tavie, that won't do. Rose and Blanche are both asleep, and you are dying to go and do likewise, after your vigils last night. As a man and a brother I beg you'll do so, and let me ride as I like."

"Suppose you ask Annon to join you — " began Treherne with well-assumed indifference; but Sir Jasper frowned and turned sharply on him, saying, half-petulantly, half-jocosely:

"Upon my life I should think I was a boy or a baby, by the manner in which you mount guard over me today. If you think I'm going to live in daily fear of some mishap, you are all much mistaken. Ghost or no ghost, I shall make merry while I can; a short life and a jolly one has always been my motto, you know, so fare you well till dinnertime."

They watched him gallop down the avenue, and then went their different ways, still burdened with a nameless foreboding. Octavia strolled into the conservatory, thinking to refresh herself with the balmy silence which pervaded the place, but Annon soon joined her, full of a lover's hopes and fears.

"Miss Treherne, I have ventured to come for my answer. Is my New Year to be a blissful or a sad one?" he asked eagerly.

"Forgive me if I give you an unwelcome reply, but I must be true, and so regretfully refuse the honor you do me," she said sorrowfully.

"May I ask why?"

"Because I do not love you."

"And you do love your cousin," he cried angrily, pausing to watch her half-averted face.

She turned it fully toward him and answered, with her native sincerity,
"Yes, I do, with all my heart, and now my mother will not thwart me, for
Maurice has saved my life, and I am free to devote it all to him."

"Happy man, I wish I had been a cripple!" sighed Annon. Then with a manful effort to be just and generous, he added heartily, "Say no more, he deserves you; I want no sacrifice to duty; I yield, and go away, praying heaven to bless you now and always."

He kissed her hand and left her to seek my lady and make his adieus, for no persuasion could keep him. Leaving a note for Sir Jasper, he hurried away, to the great relief of Treherne and the deep regret of Blanche, who, however, lived in hopes of another trial later in the season.

"Here comes Jasper, Mamma, safe and well," cried Octavia an hour or two later, as she joined her mother on the terrace, where my lady had been pacing restlessly to and fro nearly ever since her son rode away.

With a smile of intense relief she waved her handkerchief as he came clattering up the drive, and seeing her he answered with hat and hand. He usually dismounted at the great hall door, but a sudden whim made him ride along the wall that lay below the terrace, for he was a fine horseman, and Mrs. Snowdon was looking from her window. As he approached, the peacocks fled screaming, and one flew up just before the horse's eyes as his master was in the act of dismounting. The spirited creature was startled, sprang partway up the low, broad steps of the terrace, and, being sharply checked, slipped, fell, and man and horse rolled down together.

Never did those who heard it forget the cry that left Lady Treherne's lips as she saw the fall. It brought out both guests and servants, to find Octavia recklessly struggling with the frightened horse, and my lady down upon the stones with her son's bleeding head in her arms.

They bore in the senseless, shattered body, and for hours tried everything that skill and sciences could devise to save the young man's life. But every effort was in vain, and as the sun set Sir Jasper lay dying. Conscious at last, and able to speak, he looked about him with a troubled glance, and seemed struggling with some desire that overmastered pain and held death at bay.

"I want Maurice," he feebly said, at length.

"Dear lad, I'm here," answered his cousin's voice from a seat in the shadow of the half-drawn curtains.

"Always near when I need you. Many a scrape have you helped me out of, but this is beyond your power," and a faint smile passed over Jasper's lips as the past flitted before his mind. But the smile died, and a groan of pain escaped him as he cried suddenly, "Quick! Let me tell it before it is too late! Maurice never will, but bear the shame all his life that my dead name may be untarnished. Bring Edith; she must hear the truth."

She was soon there, and, lying in his mother's arms, one hand in his cousin's, and one on his sister's bent head, Jasper rapidly told the secret which had burdened him for a year.

"I did it; I forged my uncle's name when I had lost so heavily at play that I dared not tell my mother, or squander more of my own fortune. I deceived Maurice, and let him think the check a genuine one; I made him present it and get the money, and when all went well I fancied I was safe. But my uncle discovered it secretly, said nothing, and, believing Maurice the forger, disinherited him. I never knew this till the old man died, and then it was too late. I confessed to Maurice, and he forgave me. He said, 'I am helpless now, shut out from the world, with nothing to lose or gain, and soon to be forgotten by those who once knew me, so let the suspicion of shame, if any such there be, still cling to me, and do you go your way, rich, happy, honorable, and untouched by any shadow on your fame.' Mother, I let him do it, unconscious as he was that many knew the secret sin and fancied him the doer of it."

"Hush, Jasper, let it pass. I can bear it; I promised your dear father to be your staunch friend through life, and I have only kept my word."

"God knows you have, but now my life ends, and I cannot die till you are cleared. Edith, I told you half the truth, and you would have used it against him had not some angel sent this girl to touch your heart. You have done your part to atone for the past, now let me do mine. Mother, Tavie loves him, he has risked life and honor for me. Repay him generously and give him this."

With feeble touch Sir Jasper tried to lay his sister's hand in Treherne's as he spoke; Mrs. Snowdon helped him, and as my lady bowed her head in silent acquiescence, a joyful smile shone on the dying man's face.

"One more confession, and then I am ready," he said, looking up into the face of the woman whom he had loved with all the power of a shallow nature. "It was a jest to you, Edith, but it was bitter earnest to me, for I loved you, sinful as it was. Ask your husband to forgive me, and tell him it was better I should die than live to mar a good man's peace. Kiss me once, and make him happy for my sake."

She touched his cold lips with remorseful tenderness, and in the same breath registered a vow to obey that dying prayer.

"Tavie dear, Maurice, my brother, God bless you both. Good-bye, Mother. He will be a better son than I have been to you." Then, the reckless spirit of the man surviving to the last, Sir Jasper laughed faintly, as he seemed to beckon some invisible shape, and died saying gaily, "Now, Father Abbot, lead on, I'll follow you."

* * * * *

A year later three weddings were celebrated on the same day and in the same church. Maurice Treherne, a well man, led up his cousin. Frank Annon rewarded Blanche's patient siege by an unconditional surrender, and, to the infinite amusement of Mrs. Grundy, Major Royston publicly confessed himself outgeneraled by merry Rose. The triple wedding feast was celebrated at Treherne Abbey, and no uncanny visitor marred its festivities, for never again was the north gallery haunted by the ghostly Abbot.

THE CANDY COUNTRY

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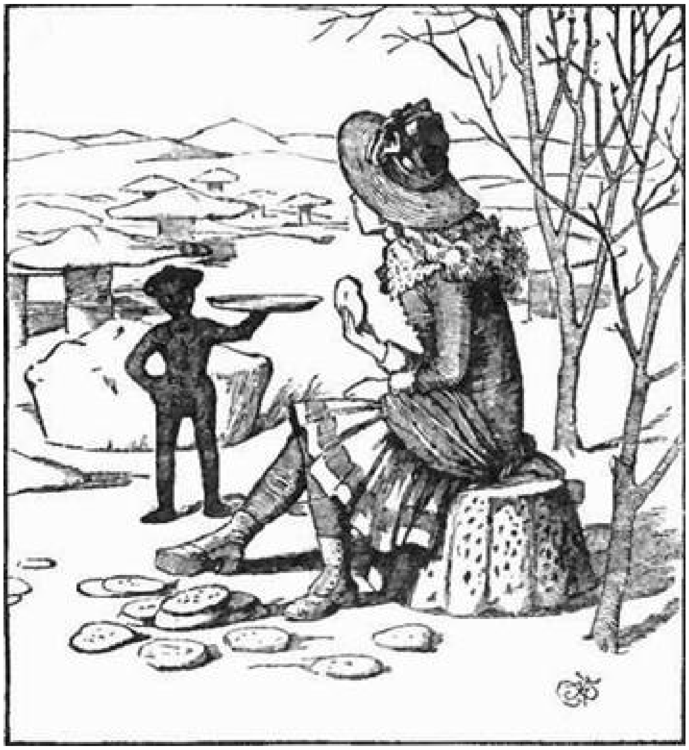
HOW THEY RAN AWAY



“Hollo, what do you want?” he asked, staring at her.

THE CANDY COUNTRY

“I shall take mamma’s red sun umbrella, it is so warm, and none of the children at school will have one like it,” said Lily, one day, as she went through the hall.

“The wind is very high; I’m afraid you’ll be blown away if you carry that big thing,” called Nurse from the window, as the red umbrella went bobbing down the garden walk with a small girl under it.

“I wish it would; I always wanted to go up in a balloon,” answered Lily, as she struggled out of the gate.

She got on very well till she came to the bridge and stopped to look over the railing at the water running by so fast, and the turtles sunning themselves on the rocks. Lily was fond of throwing stones at them; it was so funny to watch them tumble, heels over head, splash into the water. Now, when she saw three big fellows close by, she stooped for a stone, and just at that minute a gale of wind nearly took the umbrella out of her hand. She clutched it fast; and away she went like a thistle-down, right up in the air, over river and hill, houses and trees, faster and faster, till her head spun round, her breath was all gone, and she had to let go. The dear red umbrella flew away like a leaf; and Lily fell down, down, till she went crash into a tree which grew in such a curious place that she forgot her fright as she sat looking about her, wondering what part of the world it could be.

The tree looked as if made of glass or colored sugar; for she could see through the red cherries, the green leaves, and the brown branches. An agreeable smell met her nose; and she said at once, as any child would, “I smell candy!” She picked a cherry and ate it. Oh, how good it was! — all sugar and no stone. The next discovery was such a delightful one that she nearly fell off her perch; for by touching her tongue here and there, she found that the whole tree was made of candy. Think what fun to sit and break off twigs of barley sugar, candied cherries, and leaves that tasted like peppermint and sassafras!

Lily rocked and ate till she finished the top of the little tree; then she climbed down and strolled along, making more surprising and agreeable discoveries as she went.

What looked like snow under her feet was white sugar; the rocks were lumps of chocolate, the flowers of all colors and tastes; and every sort of fruit grew on these delightful trees. Little white houses soon appeared; and here lived the dainty candy-people, all made of the best sugar, and painted to look like real people. Dear little men and women, looking as if they had stepped off of wedding cakes and bonbons, went about in their gay sugar clothes, laughing and talking in the sweetest voices. Bits of babies rocked in open-work cradles, and sugar boys and girls played with sugar toys in the most natural way. Carriages rolled along the jujube streets, drawn by the red and yellow barley horses we all love so well; cows fed in the green fields, and sugar birds sang in the trees.

Lily listened, and in a moment she understood what the song said, —

“Sweet! Sweet!
Come, come and eat,
Dear little girls
With yellow curls;
For here you’ll find
Sweets to your mind.
On every tree
Sugar-plums you’ll see;
In every dell
Grows the caramel.
Over every wall
Gum-drops fall;
Molasses flows
Where our river goes.
Under your feet
Lies sugar sweet;
Over your head
Grow almonds red.
Our lily and rose
Are not for the nose;
Our flowers we pluck
To eat or suck.
And, oh! what bliss
When two friends kiss,
For they honey sip
From lip to lip!
And all you meet,
In house or street,
At work or play,
Sweethearts are they.
So, little dear,
Pray feel no fear;

Go where you will;
Eat, eat your fill.
Here is a feast
From west to east;
And you can say,
Ere you go away,
‘At last I stand
In dear Candy-land,
And no more can stuff;
For once I’ve enough.’
Sweet! Sweet!
Tweet! Tweet!
Tweedle-dee!
Tweedle-dee!”

“That is the most interesting song I ever heard,” said Lily, clapping her sticky hands and dancing along toward a fine palace of white cream candy, with pillars of striped peppermint stick, and a roof of frosting that made it look like the Milan Cathedral.

“I’ll live here, and eat candy all day long, with no tiresome school or patchwork to spoil my fun,” said Lily.

So she ran up the chocolate steps into the pretty rooms, where all the chairs and tables were of different colored candies, and the beds of spun sugar. A fountain of lemonade supplied drink; and floors of ice-cream that never melted kept people and things from sticking together, as they would have done had it been warm.

For a long while Lily was quite happy, going about tasting so many different kinds of sweeties, talking to the little people, who were very amiable, and finding out curious things about them and their country.

The babies were made of plain sugar, but the grown people had different flavors. The young ladies were flavored with violet, rose, and orange; the gentlemen were apt to have cordials of some sort inside of them, as she found when she ate one now and then slyly, and got her tongue bitten by the hot, strong taste as a punishment. The old people tasted of peppermint, clove, and such comfortable things, good for pain; but the old maids had lemon, hoar-hound, flag-root, and all sorts of sour, bitter things in them, and did not get eaten much. Lily soon learned to know the characters of her new friends by a single taste, and some she never touched but once. The dear babies melted in her mouth, and the delicately flavored young ladies she was very fond of. Dr. Ginger was called to her more than once when so much candy made her teeth ache, and she found him a very hot-tempered little man; but he stopped the pain, so she was glad to see him.

A lime-drop boy and a little pink checkerberry girl were her favorite playmates; and they had fine times making mud-pies by scraping the chocolate rocks and mixing this dust with honey from the wells near by. These they could eat; and Lily thought this much better than throwing away the pies, as she had to do at home. They had candy-pulls very often, and made swings of long loops of molasses candy, and bird’s-nests with almond eggs, out of which came birds who sang sweetly. They played foot-ball with big bull’s-eyes, sailed in sugar boats on lakes of syrup, fished in rivers of molasses, and rode the barley horses all over the country.

Lily discovered that it never rained, but snowed white sugar. There was no sun, as it would have been too hot; but a large yellow lozenge made a nice moon, and red and white comfits were the stars.

The people all lived on sugar, and never quarrelled. No one was ill; and if any got broken, as sometimes happened with such brittle creatures, they just stuck the parts together and were all right again. The way they grew old was to get thinner and thinner till there was danger of their vanishing. Then the friends of the old person put him in a neat coffin, and carried him to the great golden urn which stood in their largest temple, always full of a certain fine syrup; and here he was dipped and dipped till he was stout and strong again, and went home to enjoy himself for a long time as good as new.

This was very interesting to Lily, and she went to many funerals. But the weddings were better still; for the lovely white brides were so sweet Lily longed to eat them. The feasts were delicious; and everybody went in their best clothes, and danced at the ball till they got so warm half-a-dozen would stick together and have to be taken to the ice-cream room to cool off. Then the little pair would drive away in a fine carriage with white horses to a new palace in some other part of the country, and Lily would have another pleasant place to visit.

But by and by, when she had seen everything, and eaten so much sweet stuff that at last she longed for plain bread and butter, she began to get cross, as children always do when they live on candy; and the little people wished she would go away, for they were afraid of her. No wonder, when she would catch up a dear sugar baby and eat him, or break some respectable old grandmamma all into bits because she reproved her for naughty ways. Lily calmly sat down on the biggest church, crushing it flat, and even tried to poke the moon out of the sky in a pet one day. The king ordered her to go home; but she said, “I won’t!”

and bit his head off, crown and all.

Such a wail went up at this awful deed that she ran away out of the city, fearing some one would put poison in her candy, since she had no other food.

“I suppose I shall get somewhere if I keep walking; and I can’t starve, though I hate the sight of this horrid stuff,” she said to herself, as she hurried over the mountains of Gibraltar Rock that divided the city of Saccharissa from the great desert of brown sugar that lay beyond.

Lily marched bravely on for a long time, and saw at last a great smoke in the sky, smelt a spicy smell, and felt a hot wind blowing toward her.

“I wonder if there are sugar savages here, roasting and eating some poor traveller like me,” she said, thinking of Robinson Crusoe and other wanderers in strange lands.

She crept carefully along till she saw a settlement of little huts very like mushrooms, for they were made of cookies set on lumps of the brown sugar; and queer people, looking as if made of gingerbread, were working very busily round several stoves which seemed to bake at a great rate.

“I’ll creep nearer and see what sort of people they are before I show myself,” said Lily, going into a grove of spice-trees, and sitting down on a stone which proved to be the plummy sort of cake we used to call Brighton Rock.

Presently one of the tallest men came striding toward the trees with a pan, evidently after spice; and before she could run, he saw Lily.

“Hollo, what do you want?” he asked, staring at her with his black currant eyes, while he briskly picked the bark off a cinnamon-tree.

“I’m travelling, and would like to know what place this is, if you please,” answered Lily, very politely, being a little frightened.

“Cake-land. Where do you come from?” asked the gingerbread man, in a crisp tone of voice.

“I was blown into the Candy country, and have been there a long time; but I got tired of it, and ran away to find something better.”

“Sensible child!” and the man smiled till Lily thought his cheeks would crumble. “You’ll get on better here with us Brownies than with the lazy Bonbons, who never work and are all for show. They won’t own us, though we are all related through our grandparents Sugar and Molasses. We are busy folks; so they turn up their noses and don’t speak when we meet at parties. Poor creatures, silly and sweet and unsubstantial! I pity ‘em.”

“Could I make you a visit? I’d like to see how you live, and what you do. I’m sure it must be interesting,” said Lily, picking herself up after a tumble, having eaten nearly all the stone, she was so hungry.

“I know you will. Come on! I can talk while I work.” And the funny gingerbread man trotted off toward his kitchen, full of pans, rolling-pins, and molasses jugs.

“Sit down. I shall be at leisure as soon as this batch is baked. There are still some wise people down below who like gingerbread, and I have my hands full,” he said, dashing about, stirring, rolling out, and slapping the brown dough into pans, which he whisked into the oven and out again so fast that Lily knew there must be magic about it somewhere.

Every now and then he threw her a delicious cooky warm from the oven. She liked the queer fellow, and presently began to talk, being very curious about this country.

“What is your name, sir?”

“Ginger Snap.”

Lily thought it a good one; for he was very quick, and she fancied he could be short and sharp if he liked.

“Where does all this cake go to?” she asked, after watching the other kitchens full of workers, who were all of different kinds of cake, and each set of cooks made its own sort.

“I’ll show you by and by,” answered Snap, beginning to pile up the heaps of gingerbread on a little car that ran along a track leading to some unknown storeroom, Lily thought.

“Don’t you get tired of doing this all the time?”

“Yes; but I want to be promoted, and I never shall be till I’ve done my best, and won the prize here.”

“Oh, tell me about it! What is the prize, and how are you promoted? Is this a cooking-school?”

“Yes; the prize for best gingerbread is a cake of condensed yeast. That puts a soul into me, and I begin to rise till I am able to go over the hills yonder into the blessed land of bread, and be one of the happy creatures who are always wholesome, always needed, and without which the world below would be in a bad way.”

“Bless me! that is the queerest thing I’ve heard yet. But I don’t wonder you want to go; I’m tired of sweets myself, and long for a good piece of bread, though I used to want cake and candy at home.”

“Ah, my dear, you’ll learn a good deal here; and you are lucky not to have got into the clutches of Giant Dyspepsia, who always gets people if they eat too much of such rubbish and scorn wholesome bread. I leave my ginger behind when I go, and get white and round and beautiful, as you will see. The Gingerbread family have never been as foolish as some of the other cakes. Wedding is the worst; such extravagance in the way of wine and spice and fruit I never saw, and such a mess to eat when it's done! I don't wonder people get sick; serves 'em right." And Snap flung down a pan with such a bang that it made Lily jump.

"Sponge cake isn't bad, is it? Mamma lets me eat it, but I like frosted pound better," she said, looking over to the next kitchen, where piles of that sort of cake were being iced.

"Poor stuff. No substance. Ladies' fingers will do for babies, but pound has too much butter ever to be healthy. Let it alone, and eat cookies or seed-cakes, my dear. Now, come along; I'm ready." And Snap trundled away his car-load at a great pace.

Lily ran behind to pick up whatever fell, and looked about her as she went, for this was certainly a very queer country. Lakes of eggs all beaten up, and hot springs of saleratus foamed here and there ready for use. The earth was brown sugar or ground spice; and the only fruits were raisins, dried currants, citron, and lemon peel. It was a very busy place; for every one cooked all the time, and never failed and never seemed tired, though they got so hot that they only wore sheets of paper for clothes. There were piles of it to put over the cake, so that it shouldn't burn; and they made cook's white caps and aprons of it, and looked very nice. A large clock made of a flat pancake, with cloves to mark the hours and two toothpicks for hands, showed them how long to bake things; and in one place an ice wall was built round a lake of butter, which they cut in lumps as they wanted it.

"Here we are. Now, stand away while I pitch 'em down," said Snap, stopping at last before a hole in the ground where a dumb-waiter hung ready, with a name over it.

There were many holes all round, and many waiters, each with its name; and Lily was amazed when she read "Weber," "Copeland," "Dooling," and others, which she knew very well.

Over Snap's place was the name "Newmarch;" and Lily said, "Why, that's where mamma gets her hard gingerbread, and Weber's is where we go for ice-cream. Do *you* make cake for them?"

"Yes, but no one knows it. It's one of the secrets of the trade. We cook for all the confectioners, and people think the good things come out of the cellars under their saloons. Good joke, isn't it?" And Snap laughed till a crack came in his neck and made him cough.

Lily was so surprised she sat down on a warm queen's cake that happened to be near, and watched Snap send down load after load of gingerbread to be eaten by children, who would have liked it much better if they had only known where it came from, as she did.

As she sat, the clatter of many spoons, the smell of many dinners, and the sound of many voices calling, “One vanilla, two strawberries, and a Charlotte Russe,” “Three stews, cup coffee, dry toast,” “Roast chicken and apple without,” came up the next hole, which was marked “Copeland.”

“Dear me! it seems as if I was there,” said Lily, longing to hop down, but afraid of the bump at the other end.

“I’m done. Come along, I’ll ride you back,” called Snap, tossing the last cooky after the dumb-waiter as it went slowly out of sight with its spicy load.

“I wish you’d teach me to cook. It looks great fun, and mamma wants me to learn; only our cook hates to have me mess round, and is so cross that I don’t like to try at home,” said Lily, as she went trundling back.

“Better wait till you get to Bread-land, and learn to make that. It’s a great art, and worth knowing. Don’t waste your time on cake, though plain gingerbread isn’t bad to have in the house. I’ll teach you that in a jiffy, if the clock doesn’t strike my hour too soon,” answered Snap, helping her down.

“What hour?”

“Why, of my freedom. I never know when I’ve done my task till I’m called by the chimes and go to get my soul,” said Snap, turning his currant eyes anxiously to the clock.

“I hope you *will* have time.” And Lily fell to work with all her might, after Snap had put on her a paper apron and a cap like his.

It was not hard; for when she was going to make a mistake a spark flew out of the fire and burnt her in time to remind her to look at the receipt, which was a sheet of gingerbread in a frame of pie-crust hung up before her, with the directions written while it was soft and baked in. The third sheet she made came out of the oven spicy, light, and brown; and Snap, giving it one poke, said, “That’s all right. Now you know. Here’s your reward.”

He handed her a receipt-book made of thin sheets of sugar-gingerbread held together by a gelatine binding, with her name stamped on the back, and each leaf crimped with a cake-cutter in the most elegant manner.

Lily was charmed with it, but had no time to read all it contained; for just then the clock began to strike, and a chime of bells to ring, —

“Gingerbread,
Go to the head.
Your task is done;
A soul is won.
Take it and go
Where muffins grow,

Where sweet loaves rise
To the very skies,
And biscuits fair
Perfume the air.
Away, away!
Make no delay;
In the sea of flour
Plunge this hour.
Safe in your breast
Let the yeast-cake rest,
Till you rise in joy,
A white bread boy!"

"Ha, ha! I'm free! I'm free!" cried Snap, catching up the silver-covered square that seemed to fall from heaven; and running to a great white sea of flour, he went in head first, holding the yeast-cake clasped to his breast as if his life depended on it.

Lily watched breathlessly, while a curious working and bubbling went on, as if Snap was tumbling about down there, like a small earthquake. The other cake-folk stood round the shore with her; for it was a great event, and all were glad that the dear fellow was promoted so soon. Suddenly a cry was heard, and up rose a beautiful white figure on the farther side of the sea. It moved its hand, as if saying "Good-by," and ran over the hills so fast they had only time to see how plump and fair he was, with a little knob on the top of his head like a crown.

"He's gone to the happy land, and we shall miss him; but we'll follow his example and soon find him again," said a gentle Sponge Cake, with a sigh, as all went back to their work; while Lily hurried after Snap, eager to see the new country, which was the best of all.

A delicious odor of fresh bread blew up from the valley as she stood on the hill-top and looked down on the peaceful scene below. Fields of yellow grain waved in the breeze; hop-vines grew from tree to tree, and many windmills whirled their white sails as they ground the different grains into fresh, sweet meal, for the loaves of bread that built the houses like bricks and paved the streets, or in many shapes formed the people, furniture, and animals. A river of milk flowed through the peaceful land, and fountains of yeast rose and fell with a pleasant foam and fizz. The ground was a mixture of many meals, and the paths were golden Indian, which gave a very gay look to the scene. Buckwheat flowers bloomed on their rosy stems, and tall corn-stalks rustled their leaves in the warm air that came from the ovens hidden in the hillsides; for bread needs a slow fire, and an obliging volcano did the baking here.

"What a lovely place!" cried Lily, feeling the charm of the homelike landscape, in spite of the funny plump people moving about.

Two of these figures came running to meet her as she slowly walked down the yellow path from the hill. One was a golden boy, with a beaming face; the other a little girl in a shiny brown cloak, who looked as if she would taste very nice. They each put a warm hand into Lily's, and the boy said, —

"We are glad to see you. Muffin told us you were coming."

"Thank you. Who is Muffin?" asked Lily, feeling as if she had seen both these little people before, and liked them.

"He was Ginger Snap once, but he's a Muffin now. We begin in that way, and work up to the perfect loaf by degrees. My name is Johnny Cake, and she's Sally Lunn. You know us; so come on and have a race."

Lily burst out laughing at the idea of playing with these old friends of hers; and all three ran away as fast as they could tear, down the hill, over a bridge, into the middle of the village, where they stopped, panting, and sat down on some very soft rolls to rest.

"What do you all do *here*?" asked Lily, when she got her breath again.

"We farm, we study, we bake, we brew, and are as merry as grigs all day long. It's school-time now, and we must go; will you come?" said Sally, jumping up as if she liked it.

"Our schools are not like yours; we only study two things, — grain and yeast. I think you'll like it. We have yeast to-day, and the experiments are very jolly," added Johnny, trotting off to a tall brown tower of rye and Indian bread, where the school was kept.

Lily never liked to go to school, but she was ashamed to own it; so she went along with Sally, and was so amused with all she saw that she was glad she came. The brown loaf was hollow, and had no roof; and when she asked why they used a ruin, Sally told her to wait and see why they chose strong walls and plenty of room overhead. All round was a circle of very small biscuits like cushions, and on these the Bread-children sat. A square loaf in the middle was the teacher's desk, and on it lay an ear of wheat, with several bottles of yeast well corked up. The teacher was a pleasant, plump lady from Vienna, very wise, and so famous for her good bread that she was a Professor of Grainology.

When all were seated, she began with the wheat ear, and told them all about it in such an interesting way that Lily felt as if she had never known anything about the bread she ate before. The experiments with the yeast were quite exciting, — for Fräulein Pretzel showed them how it would work till it blew the cork out, and go fizzing up to the sky if it was kept too long; how it would turn sour or flat, and spoil the bread if care was not taken to use it just at the right moment; and how too much would cause the loaf to rise till there was no substance to it.

The children were very bright; for they were fed on the best kinds of oatmeal and Graham bread, with very little white bread or hot cakes to spoil their young stomachs. Hearty, happy boys and girls they were, and their yeasty souls were very lively in them; for they danced and sang, and seemed as bright and gay as if acidity, heaviness, and mould were quite unknown.

Lily was very happy with them, and when school was done went home with Sally and ate the best bread and milk for dinner that she ever tasted. In the afternoon Johnny took her to the cornfield, and showed her how they kept the growing ears free from mildew and worms. Then she went to the bakehouse; and here she found her old friend Muffin hard at work making Parker House rolls, for he was such a good cook he was set to work at once on the lighter kinds of bread.

“Well, isn’t this better than Candy-land or Saccharissa?” he asked, as he rolled and folded his bits of dough with a dab of butter tucked inside.

“Ever so much!” cried Lily. “I feel better already, and mean to learn all I can. Mamma will be so pleased if I can make good bread when I go home. She is rather old-fashioned, and likes me to be a nice housekeeper. I didn’t think bread interesting then, but I do now; and Johnny’s mother is going to teach me to make Indian cakes to-morrow.”

“Glad to hear it. Learn all you can, and tell other people how to make healthy bodies and happy souls by eating good plain food. Not like this, though these rolls are better than cake. I have to work my way up to the perfect loaf, you know; and then, oh, then, I’m a happy thing.”

“What happens then? Do you go on to some other wonderful place?” asked Lily, as Muffin paused with a smile on his face.

“Yes; I am eaten by some wise, good human being, and become a part of him or her. That is immortality and heaven; for I may nourish a poet and help him sing, or feed a good woman who makes the world better for being in it, or be crumbed into the golden porringer of a baby prince who is to rule a kingdom. Isn’t that a noble way to live, and an end worth working for?” asked Muffin, in a tone that made Lily feel as if some sort of fine yeast had got into her, and was setting her brain to work with new thoughts.

“Yes, it is. I suppose all common things are made for that purpose, if we only knew it; and people should be glad to do anything to help the world along, even making good bread in a kitchen,” answered Lily, in a sober way that showed that her little mind was already digesting the new food it had got.

She stayed in Bread-land a long time, and enjoyed and learned a great deal that she never forgot. But at last, when she had made the perfect loaf, she wanted to go home, that her mother might see and taste it.

“I’ve put a good deal of myself into it, and I’d love to think I had given her strength or pleasure by my work,” she said, as she and Sally stood looking at the handsome loaf.

“You can go whenever you like; just take the bread in your hands and wish three times, and you’ll be wherever you say. I’m sorry to have you go, but I don’t wonder you want to see your mother. Don’t forget what you have learned, and you will always be glad you came to us,” said Sally, kissing her good-by.

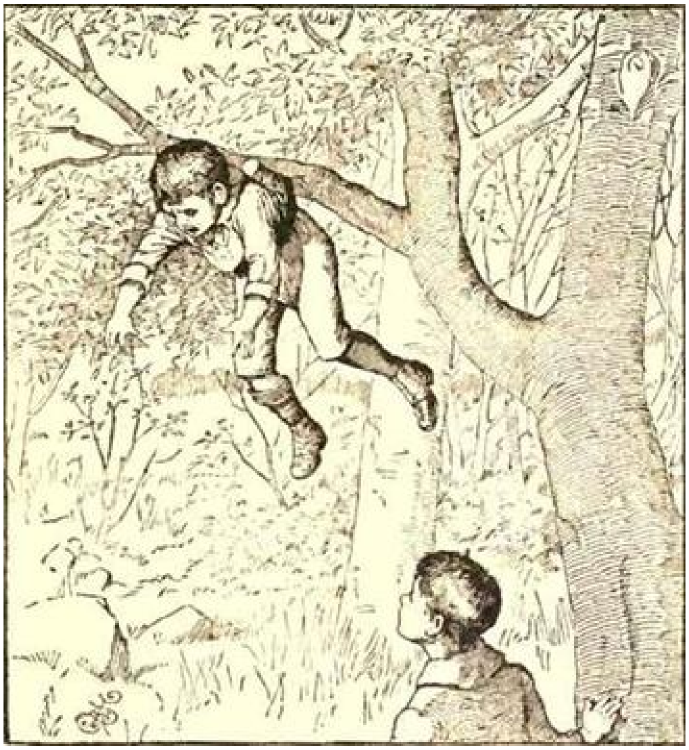
“Where is Muffin? I can’t go without seeing him, my dear old friend,” answered Lily, looking round for him.

“He is here,” said Sally, touching the loaf. “He was ready to go, and chose to pass into your bread rather than any other, for he said he loved you and would be glad to help feed so good a little girl.”

“How kind of him! I must be careful to grow wise and excellent, else he will be disappointed and have died in vain,” said Lily, touched by his devotion.

Then, bidding them all farewell, she hugged her loaf close, wished three times to be in her own home, and like a flash she was there.

Whether her friends believed the wonderful tale of her adventures I cannot tell; but I know that she was a nice little housekeeper from that day, and made such good bread that other girls came to learn of her. She also grew from a sickly, fretful child into a fine, strong woman, because she ate very little cake and candy, except at Christmas time, when the oldest and the wisest love to make a short visit to Candy-land.



Poor Billy dangling from a bough, high above the ground.

HOW THEY RAN AWAY

Two little boys sat on the fence whittling arrows one fine day. Said one little boy to the other little boy, —

“Let’s do something jolly.”

“All right. What will we do?”

“Run off to the woods and be hunters.”

“What can we hunt?”

“Bears and foxes.”

“Mullin says there ain’t any round here.”

“Well, we can shoot squirrels and snare woodchucks.”

“Haven’t got any guns and trap.”

“We’ve got our bows, and I found an old trap behind the barn.”

“What will we eat?”

“Here’s our lunch; and when that’s gone we can roast the squirrels and cook the fish on a stick. I know how.”

“Where will you get the fire?”

“Got matches in my pocket.”

“I’ve got a lot of things we could use. Let’s see.”

And as if satisfied at last, cautious Billy displayed his treasures, while bold Tommy did the same.

Besides the two knives there were strings, nails, matches, a piece of putty, fish-hooks, and two very dirty handkerchiefs.

“There, sir, that’s a first-rate fit-out for hunters; and with the jolly basket of lunch Mrs. Mullin gave us, we can get on tip-top for two or three days,” said Tommy, eager to be off.

“Where shall we sleep?” asked Billy, who liked to be comfortable both night and day.

“Oh, up in trees or on beds of leaves, like the fellows in our books. If you are afraid, stay at home; I’m going to have no end of a good time.” And Tommy crammed the things back into his pockets as if there were no time to lose.

“Pooh! I ain’t afraid. Come on!” And jumping down Billy caught up his rod, rather ashamed of his many questions.

No one was looking at them, and they might have walked quietly off; but that the “running away” might be all right, both raced down the road, tumbled over a wall, and dashed into the woods as if a whole tribe of wild Indians were after them.

“Do you know the way?” panted Billy, when at last they stopped for breath.

“Yes, it winds right up the mountain; but we’d better not keep to it, or some one will see us and take us back. We are going to be *real* hunters and have adventures; so we must get lost, and find our way by the sun and the stars,” answered Tommy, who had read so many Boys’ Books his little head was a jumble of Texan Rangers, African Explorers, and Buffalo Bills; and he burned to outdo them all.

“What will our mothers say if we really get lost?” asked Billy, always ready with a question.

“Mine won’t fuss. She lets me do what I like.”

That was true; for Tommy’s poor mamma was tired of trying to keep the lively little fellow in order, and had got used to seeing him come out of all his scrapes without much harm.

“Mine will be scared; she’s always afraid I’m going to get hurt, so I’m careful. But I guess I’ll risk it, and have some fun to tell about when we go home,” said Billy, trudging after Captain Tommy, who always took the lead.

These eleven-year-old boys were staying with their mothers at a farm-house up among the mountains; and having got tired of the tame bears, the big barn, the trout brook, the thirty colts at pasture, and the society of the few little girls and younger boys at the hotel near by, these fine fellows longed to break loose and “rough it in the bush,” as the hunters did in their favorite stories.

Away they went, deeper and deeper into the great forest that covered the side of the mountain. A pleasant place that August day; for it was cool and green, with many brooks splashing over the rocks, or lying in brown pools under the ferns. Squirrels chattered and raced in the tall pines; now and then a gray rabbit skipped out of sight among the brakes, or a strange bird flew by. Here and there blackberries grew in the open places, sassafras bushes were plentiful, and black-birch bark was ready for chewing.

“Don’t you call this nice?” asked Tommy, pausing at last in a little dell where a noisy brook came tumbling down the mountain side, and the pines sung overhead.

“Yes; but I’m awful hungry. Let’s rest and eat our lunch,” said Billy, sitting down on a cushion of moss.

“You always want to be stuffing and resting,” answered sturdy Tommy, who liked to be moving all the time.

He took the fishing-basket, which hung over his shoulder by a strap, and opened it carefully; for good Mrs. Mullin had packed a nice lunch of bread and butter, cake and peaches, with a bottle of milk, and two large pickles slipped in on the sly to please the boys.

Tommy’s face grew very sober as he looked in, for all he saw was a box of worms for bait and an old jacket.

“By George! we’ve got the wrong basket. This is Mullin’s, and he’s gone off with our prog. Won’t he be mad?”

“Not as mad as I am. Why didn’t you look? You are always in such a hurry to start. What *shall* we do now without anything to eat?” whined Billy; for losing his lunch was a dreadful blow to him.

“We shall have to catch some fish and eat blackberries. Which will you do, old cry-baby?” said Tommy, laughing at the other boy’s dismal face.

“I’ll fish; I’m so tired I can’t go scratching round after berries. I don’t love ‘em either.” And Billy began to fix his line and bait his hook.

“Lucky we got the worms; you can eat ‘em if you can’t wait for fish,” said Tommy, bustling about to empty the basket and pile up their few possessions in a heap. “There’s a quiet pool below here, you go and fish there. I’ll pick the berries, and then show you how to get dinner in the woods. This is our camp; so fly round and do your best.”

Then Tommy ran off to a place near by where he had seen the berries, while Billy found a comfortable nook by the pool, and sat scowling at the water so crossly, it was a wonder any trout came to his hook. But the fat worms tempted several small ones, and he cheered up at the prospect of food. Tommy whistled while he picked, and in half an hour came back with two quarts of nice berries and an armful of dry sticks for the fire.

“We’ll have a jolly dinner, after all,” he said, as the flames went crackling up, and the dry leaves made a pleasant smell.

“Got four, but don’t see how we’ll ever cook ‘em; no frying-pan,” grumbled Billy, throwing down the four little trout, which he had half cleaned.

“Don’t want any. Broil ‘em on the coals, or toast ‘em on a forked stick. I’ll show you how,” said cheerful Tommy, whittling away, and feeding his fire as much like a real hunter as a small boy could be.

While he worked, Billy ate berries and sighed for bread and butter. At last, after much trouble, two of the trout were half cooked and eagerly eaten by the hungry boys. But they were very different from the nice brown ones Mrs. Mullin gave them; for in spite of Tommy’s struggles they would fall in the ashes, and there was no salt to eat with them. By the time the last were toasted, the young hunters were so hungry they could have eaten anything, and not a berry was left.

“I set the trap down there, for I saw a hole among the vines, and I shouldn’t wonder if we got a rabbit or something,” said Tommy, when the last bone was polished. “You go and catch some more fish, and I’ll see if I have caught any old chap as he went home to dinner.”

Off ran Tommy; and the other boy went slowly back to the brook, wishing with all his might he was at home eating sweet corn and berry pie.

The trout had evidently gone to their dinners, for not one bite did poor Billy get; and he was just falling asleep when a loud shout gave him such a fright that he tumbled into the brook up to his knees.

“I’ve got him! Come and see! He’s a bouncer,” roared Tommy, from the berry bushes some way off.

Billy scrambled out, and went as fast as his wet boots would let him, to see what the prize was. He found Tommy dancing wildly round a fat gray animal, who was fighting to get his paws out of the trap, and making a queer noise as he struggled about.

“What is it?” asked Billy, getting behind a tree as fast as possible; for the thing looked fierce, and he was very timid.

“A raccoon, I guess, or a big woodchuck. Won’t his fur make a fine cap? I guess the other fellows will wish they’d come with us,” said Tommy, prancing to and fro, without the least idea what to do with the creature.

“He’ll bite. We’d better run away and wait till he’s dead,” said Billy.

“Wish he’d got his head in, then I could carry him off; but he does look savage, so we’ll have to leave him awhile, and get him when we come back. But he’s a real beauty.” And Tommy looked proudly at the bunch of gray fur scuffling in the sand.

“Can we ever eat him?” asked hungry Billy, ready for a fried crocodile if he could get it.

“If he’s a raccoon, we can; but I don’t know about woodchucks. The fellows in my books don’t seem to have caught any. He’s nice and fat; we might try him when he’s dead,” said Tommy, who cared more for the skin to show than the best meal ever cooked.

The sound of a gun echoing through the wood gave Tommy a good idea, —

“Let’s find the man and get him to shoot this chap; then we needn’t wait, but skin him right away, and eat him too.”

Off they went to the camp; and catching up their things, the two hunters hurried away in the direction of the sound, feeling glad to know that some one was near them, for two or three hours of wood life made them a little homesick.

They ran and scrambled, and listened and called; but not until they had gone a long way up the mountain did they find the man, resting in an old hut left by the lumbermen. The remains of his dinner were spread on the floor, and he lay smoking, and reading a newspaper, while his dog dozed at his feet, close to a well-filled game-bag.

He looked surprised when two dirty, wet little boys suddenly appeared before him, — one grinning cheerfully, the other looking very dismal and scared as the dog growled and glared at them as if they were two rabbits.

"Hollo!" said the man.

"Hollo!" answered Tommy.

"Who are you?" asked the man.

"Hunters," said Tommy.

"Had good luck?" And the man laughed.

"First-rate. Got a raccoon in our trap, and we want you to come and shoot him," answered Tommy, proudly.

"Sure?" said the man, looking interested as well as amused.

"No; but I think so."

"What's he like?"

Tommy described him, and was much disappointed when the man lay down again, saying, with another laugh, —

"It's a woodchuck; he's no good."

"But I want the skin."

"Then don't shoot him, let him die; that's better for the skin," said the man, who was tired and didn't want to stop for such poor game.

All this time Billy had been staring hard at the sandwiches and bread and cheese on the floor, and sniffing at them, as the dog sniffed at him.

"Want some grub?" asked the man, seeing the hungry look.

"I just do! We left our lunch, and I've only had two little trout and some old berries since breakfast," answered Billy, with tears in his eyes and a hand on his stomach.

"Eat away then; I'm done, and don't want the stuff." And the man took up his paper as if glad to be let alone.

It was lucky that the dog had been fed, for in ten minutes nothing was left but the napkin; and the boys sat picking up the crumbs, much refreshed, but ready for more.

"Better be going home, my lads; it's pretty cold on the mountain after sunset, and you are a long way from town," said the man, who had peeped at them over his paper now and then, and saw, in spite of the dirt and rips, that they were not farmer boys.

"We don't live in town; we are at Mullin's, in the valley. No hurry; we know the way, and we want to have some sport first. You seem to have done well," answered Tommy, looking enviously from the gun to the game-bag, out of which hung a rabbit's head and a squirrel's tail.

"Pretty fair; but I want a shot at the bear. People tell me there is one up here, and I'm after him; for he kills the sheep, and might hurt some of the young folks round here," said the man, loading his gun with a very sober air; for he wanted to get rid of the boys and send them home.

Billy looked alarmed; but Tommy's brown face beamed with joy as he said eagerly, —

"I hope you'll get him. I'd rather shoot a bear than any other animal but a lion. We don't have those here, and bears are scarce. Mullin said he hadn't heard of one for a long time; so this must be a young one, for they killed the big one two years ago."

That was true, and the man knew it. He did not really expect or want to meet a bear, but thought the idea of one would send the little fellows home at once. Finding one of them was unscared, he laughed, and said with a nod to Tommy, —

"If I had time I'd take *you* along, and show you how to hunt; but this fat friend of yours couldn't rough it with us, and we can't leave him alone; so go ahead your own way. Only I wouldn't climb any higher, for among the rocks you are sure to get hurt or lost."

"Oh, I say, let's go! Such fun, Billy! I know you'll like it. A real gun and dog and hunter! Come on, and don't be a molly-coddle," cried Tommy, wild to go.

"I won't! I'm tired, and I'm going home; you can go after your old bears if you want to. I don't think much of hunting anyway, and wish I hadn't come," growled Billy, very cross at being left out, yet with no desire to scramble any more.

"Can't stop. Good-by. Get along home, and some day I'll come and take you out with me, little Leatherstocking," said the man, striding off with the dear gun and dog and bag, leaving Billy to wonder what he meant by that queer name, and Tommy to console himself with the promise made him.

"Let's go and see how old Chucky gets on," he said good-naturedly, when the man vanished.

"Not till I'm rested. I can get a good nap on this pile of hay; then we'll go home before it's late," answered lazy Billy, settling himself on the rough bed the lumbermen had used.

"I just wish I had a boy with some go in him; you ain't much better than a girl," sighed Tommy, walking off to a pine-tree where some squirrels seemed to be having a party, they chattered and raced up and down at such a rate.

He tried his bow and shot all his arrows many times in vain, for the lively creatures gave him no chance. He had better luck with a brown bird who sat in a bush and was hit full in the breast with the sharpest arrow. The poor thing fluttered and fell, and its blood wet the green leaves as it lay dying on the grass. Tommy was much pleased at first; but as he stood watching its bright eye grow dim and its pretty brown wings stop fluttering, he felt sorry that its happy little life was so cruelly ended, and ashamed that his thoughtless fun had given so much pain.

"I'll never shoot another bird except hawks after chickens, and I won't brag about this one. It was so tame, and trusted me, I was very mean to kill it."

As he thought this, Tommy smoothed the ruffled feathers of the dead thrush, and, making a little grave under the pine, buried it wrapped in green leaves, and left it there where its mate could sing over it, and no rude hands disturb its rest.

"I'll tell mamma and she will understand; but I *won't* tell Billy. He is such a greedy old chap he'll say I ought to have kept the poor bird to eat," thought Tommy, as he went back to the hut, and sat there, restringing his bow, till Billy woke up, much more amiable for his sleep.

They tried to find the woodchuck, but lost their way, and wandered deeper into the great forest till they came to a rocky place and could go no farther. They climbed up and tumbled down, turned back and went round, looked at the sun and knew it was late, chewed sassafras bark and checkerberry leaves for supper, and grew more and more worried and tired as hour after hour went by and they saw no end to woods and rocks. Once or twice they heard the hunter's gun far away, and called and tried to find him.

Tommy scolded Billy for not going with the man, who knew his way and was probably safe in the valley when the last faint shot came up to them. Billy cried, and reproached Tommy for proposing to run away; and both felt very homesick for their mothers and their good safe beds at Farmer Mullin's.

The sun set, and found them in a dreary place full of rocks and blasted trees half-way up the mountain. They were so tired they could hardly walk, and longed to lie down anywhere to sleep; but, remembering the hunter's story of the bear, they were afraid to do it, till Tommy suggested climbing a tree, after making a fire at the foot of it to scare away the bear, lest he climb too and get them.

But, alas! the matches were left in their first camp; so they decided to take turns to sleep and watch, since it was plain that they must spend the night there. Billy went up first, and creeping into a good notch of the bare tree tried to sleep, while brave Tommy, armed with a big stick, marched to and fro below. Every few minutes a trembling voice would call from above, "Is anything coming?" and an anxious voice would answer from below, "Not yet. Hurry up and go to sleep! I want my turn."

At last Billy began to snore, and then Tommy felt so lonely he couldn't bear it; so he climbed to a lower branch, and sat nodding and trying to keep watch, till he too fell fast asleep, and the early moon saw the poor boys roosting there like two little owls.

A loud cry, a scrambling overhead, and then a great shaking and howling waked Tommy so suddenly that he lost his wits for a moment and did not know where he was.

“The bear! the bear! don’t let him get me! Tommy, Tommy, come and make him let go,” cried Billy, filling the quiet night with dismal howls.

Tommy looked up, expecting to behold a large bear eating his unhappy friend; but the moonlight showed him nothing but poor Billy dangling from a bough, high above the ground, caught by his belt when he fell. He had been dreaming of bears, and rolled off his perch; so there he hung, kicking and wailing, half awake, and so scared it was long before Tommy could make him believe that he was quite safe.

How to get him down was the next question. The branch was not strong enough to bear Tommy, though he climbed up and tried to unhook poor Billy. The belt was firmly twisted at the back, and Billy could not reach to undo it, nor could he get his legs round the branch to pull himself up. There seemed no way but to unbuckle the belt and drop. That he was afraid to try; for the ground was hard, and the fall a high one. Fortunately both belt and buckle were strong; so he hung safely, though very uncomfortably, while Tommy racked his boyish brain to find a way to help him.

Billy had just declared that he should be cut in two very soon if something was not done for him, and Tommy was in despair, when they thought they heard a far-off shout, and both answered it till their throats were nearly split with screaming.

“I seem to see a light moving round down that way,” cried Billy from his hook, pointing toward the valley.

“They are looking for us, but they won’t hear us. I’ll run and holler louder, and bring ‘em up here,” answered Tommy, glad to do anything that would put an end to this dreadful state of things.

“Don’t leave me! I may fall and be killed! The bear might come! Don’t go! don’t go!” wailed Billy, longing to drop, but afraid.

“I won’t go far, and I’ll come back as quick as I can. You are safe up there. Hold on, and we’ll soon get you down,” answered Tommy, rushing away helter-skelter, never minding where he went, and too much excited to care for any damage.

The moon was bright on the blasted trees; but when he came down among the green pines, it grew dark, and he often stumbled and fell. Never minding bumps and bruises, he scrambled over rocks, leaped fallen trunks, floundered through brooks, and climbed down steep places, till, with a reckless jump, he went heels over head into a deep hole, and lay there for a moment stunned by the fall. It was an old bear-trap, long unused, and fortunately well carpeted with dead leaves, or poor Tommy would have broken his bones.

When he came to himself he was so used up that he lay still for some time in a sort of daze, too tired to know or care about anything, only dimly conscious that somebody was lost in a tree or a well, and that, on the whole, running away was not all fun.

By and by the sound of a gun roused him; and remembering poor Billy, he tried to get out of the pit, — for the moon showed him where he was. But it was too deep, and he was too stiff with weariness and the fall to be very nimble. So he shouted, and whistled, and raged about very like a little bear caught in the pit.

It is very difficult to find a lost person on these great mountains, and many wander for hours not far from help, bewildered by the thick woods, the deep ravines, and precipices which shut them in. Some have lost their lives; and as Tommy lay on the leaves used up by his various struggles, he thought of all the stories he had lately heard at the farm, and began to wonder how it would feel to starve to death down there, and to wish poor Billy could come to share his prison, that they might die together, like the Babes in the Wood, or better still the Boy Scouts lost on the prairies in that thrilling story, “Bill Boomerang, the Wild Hunter of the West.”

“I guess mother is worried this time, because I never stayed out all night before, and I never will again without leave. It’s rather good fun, though, if they only find me. I ain’t afraid, and it isn’t very cold. I always wanted to sleep out, and now I’m doing it. Wish poor Billy was safely down and in this good bed with me. Won’t he be scared all alone there? Maybe the belt will break and he get hurt bumping down. Sorry now I left him, he’s such a ‘fraid-cat. There’s the gun again! Guess it’s that man after us. Hi! hollo! Here I am! Whoop! Hurrah! Hi! hi! hi!”

Tommy’s meditations ended in a series of yells as loud as his shrill little voice could make them, and he thought some one answered. But it must have been an echo, for no one came; and after another rampage round his prison, the poor boy nestled down among the leaves, and went fast asleep because there was nothing else to do.

So there they were, the two young hunters, lost at midnight on the mountain, — one hanging like an apple on the old tree, and the other sound asleep in a bear-pit. Their distracted mothers meantime were weeping and wringing their hands at the farm, while all the men in the neighborhood were out looking for the lost boys. The hunter on his return to the hotel had reported meeting the runaways and his effort to send them home in good season; so people knew where to look, and, led by the man and dog, up the mountain went Mr. Mullin with his troop. It was a mild night, and the moon shone high and clear; so the hunt was, on the whole, rather easy and pleasant at first, and lanterns flashed through the dark forest like fireflies, the lonely cliffs seemed alive with men, and voices echoed in places where usually only the brooks babbled and the hawks screamed. But as time went on, and no sign of the boys appeared, the men grew anxious, and began to fear some serious harm had come to the runaways.

"I can't go home without them little shavers no way, 'specially Tommy," said Mr. Mullin, as they stopped to rest after a hard climb through the blasted grove. "He's a boy after my own heart, spry as a chipmunk, smart as a young cockerel, and as full of mischief as a monkey. He ain't afraid of anything, and I shouldn't be a mite surprised to find him enjoyin' himself first-rate, and as cool as a coocumber."

"The fat boy won't take it so easily, I fancy. If it hadn't been for him I'd have kept the lively fellow with me, and shown him how to hunt. Sorry now I didn't take them both home," said the man with the gun, seeing his mistake too late, as people often do.

"Maybe they've fell down a precipice and got killed, like Moses Warner, when he was lost," suggested a tall fellow, who had shouted himself hoarse.

"Hush up, and come on! The dog is barkin' yonder, and he may have found 'em," said the farmer, hurrying toward the place where the hound was baying at something in a tree.

It was poor Billy, hanging there still, half unconscious with weariness and fear. The belt had slipped up under his arms, so he could breathe easily; and there he was, looking like a queer sort of cone on the blasted pine.

"Wal, I never!" exclaimed the farmer, as the tall lad climbed up, and, unhooking Billy, handed him down like a young bird, into the arms held up to catch him.

"He's all right, only scared out of his wits. Come along and look for the other one. I'll warrant he went for help, and may be half-way home by this time," said the hunter, who didn't take much interest in the fat boy.

Tommy's hat lay on the ground; and showing it to the dog, his master told him to find the boy. The good hound sniffed about, and then set off with his nose to the ground, following the zigzag track Tommy had taken in his hurry. The hunter and several of the men went after him, leaving the farmer with the others to take care of Billy.

Presently the dog came to the bear-pit, and began to bark again.

"He's got him!" cried the men, much relieved; and rushing on soon saw the good beast looking down at a little white object in one corner of the dark hole.

It was Tommy’s face in the moonlight, for the rest of him was covered up with leaves. The little round face seemed very quiet; and for a moment the men stood quite still, fearing that the fall might have done the boy some harm. Then the hunter leaped down, and gently touched the brown cheek. It was warm, and a soft snore from the pug nose made the man call out, much relieved, —

“He’s all right. Wake up here, little chap; you are wanted at home. Had hunting enough for this time?”

As he spoke, Tommy opened his eyes, gave a stretch, and said, “Hollo, Billy,” as calmly as if in his own bed at home. Then the rustle of the leaves, the moonlight in his face, and the sight of several men staring down at him startled him wide awake.

“Did you shoot the big bear?” he asked, looking up at the hunter with a grin.

“No; but I caught a little one, and here he is,” answered the man, giving Tommy a roll in the leaves, much pleased because he did not whine or make a fuss.

“Got lost, didn’t we? Oh, I say, where’s Billy? I left him up a tree like a coon, and he wouldn’t come down,” laughed Tommy, kicking off his brown bed-clothes, and quite ready to get up now.

They all laughed with him; and presently, when the story was told, they pulled the boy out of the pit, and went back to join the other wanderer, who was now sitting up eating the bread and butter Mrs. Mullin sent for their very late supper.

The men roared again, as the two boys told their various tribulations; and when they had been refreshed, the party started for home, blowing the tin horns, and firing shot after shot to let the scattered searchers know that the lost children were found. Billy was very quiet, and gladly rode on the various broad backs offered for his use; but Tommy stoutly refused to be carried, and with an occasional “boost” over a very rough place, walked all the way down on his own sturdy legs. He was the hero of the adventure, and was never tired of relating how he caught the woodchuck, cooked the fish, slid down the big rock, and went to bed in the old bear-pit. But in his own little mind he resolved to wait till he was older before he tried to be a hunter; and though he caught several woodchucks that summer, he never shot another harmless little bird.

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY AND WHAT IT OPENED

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Chapter I

THE PROPHECY

Trevlyn lands and Trevlyn gold,
Heir nor heiress e'er shall hold,
Undisturbed, till, spite of rust,
Truth is found in Trevlyn dust.

"This is the third time I've found you poring over that old rhyme. What is the charm, Richard? Not its poetry I fancy." And the young wife laid a slender hand on the yellow, time-worn page where, in Old English text, appeared the lines she laughed at.

Richard Trevlyn looked up with a smile and threw by the book, as if annoyed at being discovered reading it. Drawing his wife's hand through his own, he led her back to her couch, folded the soft shawls about her, and, sitting in a low chair beside her, said in a cheerful tone, though his eyes betrayed some hidden care, "My love, that book is a history of our family for centuries, and that old prophecy has never yet been fulfilled, except the 'heir and heiress' line. I am the last Trevlyn, and as the time draws near when my child shall be born, I naturally think of his future, and hope he will enjoy his heritage in peace."

"God grant it!" softly echoed Lady Trevlyn, adding, with a look askance at the old book, "I read that history once, and fancied it must be a romance, such dreadful things are recorded in it. Is it all true, Richard?"

"Yes, dear. I wish it was not. Ours has been a wild, unhappy race till the last generation or two. The stormy nature came in with old Sir Ralph, the fierce Norman knight, who killed his only son in a fit of wrath, by a blow with his steel gauntlet, because the boy's strong will would not yield to his."

"Yes, I remember, and his daughter Clotilde held the castle during a siege, and married her cousin, Count Hugo. 'Tis a warlike race, and I like it in spite of the mad deeds.”

“Married her cousin! That has been the bane of our family in times past. Being too proud to mate elsewhere, we have kept to ourselves till idiots and lunatics began to appear. My father was the first who broke the law among us, and I followed his example: choosing the freshest, sturdiest flower I could find to transplant into our exhausted soil.”

“I hope it will do you honor by blossoming bravely. I never forget that you took me from a very humble home, and have made me the happiest wife in England.”

“And I never forget that you, a girl of eighteen, consented to leave your hills and come to cheer the long-deserted house of an old man like me,” returned her husband fondly.

“Nay, don’t call yourself old, Richard; you are only forty-five, the boldest, handsomest man in Warwickshire. But lately you look worried; what is it? Tell me, and let me advise or comfort you.”

“It is nothing, Alice, except my natural anxiety for you — Well, Kingston, what do you want?”

Trevlyn’s tender tones grew sharp as he addressed the entering servant, and the smile on his lips vanished, leaving them dry and white as he glanced at the card he handed him. An instant he stood staring at it, then asked, “Is the man here?”

“In the library, sir.”

“I’ll come.”

Flinging the card into the fire, he watched it turn to ashes before he spoke, with averted eyes: “Only some annoying business, love; I shall soon be with you again. Lie and rest till I come.”

With a hasty caress he left her, but as he passed a mirror, his wife saw an expression of intense excitement in his face. She said nothing, and lay motionless for several minutes evidently struggling with some strong impulse.

“He is ill and anxious, but hides it from me; I have a right to know, and he’ll forgive me when I prove that it does no harm.”

As she spoke to herself she rose, glided noiselessly through the hall, entered a small closet built in the thickness of the wall, and, bending to the keyhole of a narrow door, listened with a half-smile on her lips at the trespass she was committing. A murmur of voices met her ear. Her husband spoke oftenest, and suddenly some word of his dashed the smile from her face as if with a blow. She started, shrank, and shivered, bending lower with set teeth, white cheeks, and panic-stricken heart. Paler and paler grew her lips, wilder and wilder her eyes, fainter and fainter her breath, till, with a long sigh, a vain effort to save herself, she sank prone upon the threshold of the door, as if struck down by death.

"Mercy on us, my lady, are you ill?" cried Hester, the maid, as her mistress glided into the room looking like a ghost, half an hour later.

"I am faint and cold. Help me to my bed, but do not disturb Sir Richard."

A shiver crept over her as she spoke, and, casting a wild, woeful look about her, she laid her head upon the pillow like one who never cared to lift it up again. Hester, a sharp-eyed, middle-aged woman, watched the pale creature for a moment, then left the room muttering, "Something is wrong, and Sir Richard must know it. That black-bearded man came for no good, I'll warrant."

At the door of the library she paused. No sound of voices came from within; a stifled groan was all she heard; and without waiting to knock she went in, fearing she knew not what. Sir Richard sat at his writing table pen in hand, but his face was hidden on his arm, and his whole attitude betrayed the presence of some overwhelming despair.

"Please, sir, my lady is ill. Shall I send for anyone?"

No answer. Hester repeated her words, but Sir Richard never stirred. Much alarmed, the woman raised his head, saw that he was unconscious, and rang for help. But Richard Trevlyn was past help, though he lingered for some hours. He spoke but once, murmuring faintly, "Will Alice come to say good-bye?"

"Bring her if she can come," said the physician.

Hester went, found her mistress lying as she left her, like a figure carved in stone. When she gave the message, Lady Trevlyn answered sternly, "Tell him I will not come," and turned her face to the wall, with an expression which daunted the woman too much for another word.

Hester whispered the hard answer to the physician, fearing to utter it aloud, but Sir Richard heard it, and died with a despairing prayer for pardon on his lips.

When day dawned Sir Richard lay in his shroud and his little daughter in her cradle, the one unwept, the other unwelcomed by the wife and mother, who, twelve hours before, had called herself the happiest woman in England. They thought her dying, and at her own command gave her the sealed letter bearing her address which her husband left behind him. She read it, laid it in her bosom, and, waking from the trance which seemed to have so strongly chilled and changed her, besought those about her with passionate earnestness to save her life.

For two days she hovered on the brink of the grave, and nothing but the indomitable will to live saved her, the doctors said. On the third day she rallied wonderfully, and some purpose seemed to gift her with unnatural strength. Evening came, and the house was very still, for all the sad bustle of preparation for Sir Richard's funeral was over, and he lay for the last night under his own roof. Hester sat in the darkened chamber of her mistress, and no sound broke the hush but the low lullaby the nurse was singing to the fatherless baby in the adjoining room. Lady Trevlyn seemed to sleep, but suddenly put back the curtain, saying abruptly, “Where does he lie?”

“In the state chamber, my lady,” replied Hester, anxiously watching the feverish glitter of her mistress’s eye, the flush on her cheek, and the unnatural calmness of her manner.

“Help me to go there; I must see him.”

“It would be your death, my lady. I beseech you, don’t think of it,” began the woman; but Lady Trevlyn seemed not to hear her, and something in the stern pallor of her face awed the woman into submission.

Wrapping the slight form of her mistress in a warm cloak, Hester half-led, half-carried her to the state room, and left her on the threshold.

“I must go in alone; fear nothing, but wait for me here,” she said, and closed the door behind her.

Five minutes had not elapsed when she reappeared with no sign of grief on her rigid face.

“Take me to my bed and bring my jewel box,” she said, with a shuddering sigh, as the faithful servant received her with an exclamation of thankfulness.

When her orders had been obeyed, she drew from her bosom the portrait of Sir Richard which she always wore, and, removing the ivory oval from the gold case, she locked the former in a tiny drawer of the casket, replaced the empty locket in her breast, and bade Hester give the jewels to Watson, her lawyer, who would see them put in a safe place till the child was grown.

“Dear heart, my lady, you’ll wear them yet, for you’re too young to grieve all your days, even for so good a man as my blessed master. Take comfort, and cheer up, for the dear child’s sake if no more.”

“I shall never wear them again” was all the answer as Lady Trevlyn drew the curtains, as if to shut out hope.

Sir Richard was buried and, the nine days’ gossip over, the mystery of his death died for want of food, for the only person who could have explained it was in a state which forbade all allusion to that tragic day.

For a year Lady Trevlyn’s reason was in danger. A long fever left her so weak in mind and body that there was little hope of recovery, and her days were passed in a state of apathy sad to witness. She seemed to have forgotten everything, even the shock which had so sorely stricken her. The sight of her child failed to rouse her, and month after month slipped by, leaving no trace of their passage on her mind, and but slightly renovating her feeble body.

Who the stranger was, what his aim in coming, or why he never reappeared, no one discovered. The contents of the letter left by Sir Richard were unknown, for the paper had been destroyed by Lady Trevlyn and no clue could be got from her. Sir Richard had died of heart disease, the physicians said, though he might have lived years had no sudden shock assailed him. There were few relatives to make investigations, and friends soon forgot the sad young widow; so the years rolled on, and Lillian the heiress grew from infancy to childhood in the shadow of this mystery.

Chapter II

PAUL

“Come, child, the dew is falling, and it is time we went in.”

“No, no, Mamma is not rested yet, so I may run down to the spring if I like.” And Lillian, as willful as winsome, vanished among the tall ferns where deer couched and rabbits hid.

Hester leisurely followed, looking as unchanged as if a day instead of twelve years had passed since her arms received the little mistress, who now ruled her like a tyrant. She had taken but a few steps when the child came flying back, exclaiming in an excited tone, “Oh, come quick! There’s a man there, a dead man. I saw him and I’m frightened!”

“Nonsense, child, it’s one of the keepers asleep, or some stroller who has no business here. Take my hand and we’ll see who it is.”

Somewhat reassured, Lillian led her nurse to one of the old oaks beside the path, and pointed to a figure lying half hidden in the fern. A slender, swarthy boy of sixteen, with curly black hair, dark brows, and thick lashes, a singularly stern mouth, and a general expression of strength and pride, which added character to his boyish face and dignified his poverty. His dress betrayed that, being dusty and threadbare, his shoes much worn, and his possessions contained in the little bundle on which he pillowed his head. He was sleeping like one quite spent with weariness, and never stirred, though Hester bent away the ferns and examined him closely.

“He’s not dead, my deary; he’s asleep, poor lad, worn out with his day’s tramp, I dare say.” “I’m glad he’s alive, and I wish he’d wake up. He’s a pretty boy, isn’t he? See what nice hands he’s got, and his hair is more curly than mine. Make him open his eyes, Hester,” commanded the little lady, whose fear had given place to interest.

“Hush, he’s stirring. I wonder how he got in, and what he wants,” whispered Hester.

“I’ll ask him,” and before her nurse could arrest her, Lillian drew a tall fern softly over the sleeper’s face, laughing aloud as she did so.

The boy woke at the sound, and without stirring lay looking up at the lovely little face bent over him, as if still in a dream.

“*Bella cara,*” he said, in a musical voice. Then, as the child drew back abashed at the glance of his large, bright eyes, he seemed to wake entirely and, springing to his feet, looked at Hester with a quick, searching glance. Something in his face and air caused the woman to soften her tone a little, as she said gravely, “Did you wish to see any one at the Hall?”

“Yes. Is Lady Trevlyn here?” was the boy’s answer, as he stood cap in hand, with the smile fading already from his face.

“She is, but unless your business is very urgent you had better see Parks, the keeper; we don’t trouble my lady with trifles.”

“I’ve a note for her from Colonel Daventry; and as it is *not* a trifle, I’ll deliver it myself, if you please.”

Hester hesitated an instant, but Lillian cried out, “Mamma is close by, come and see her,” and led the way, beckoning as she ran.

The lad followed with a composed air, and Hester brought up the rear, taking notes as she went with a woman’s keen eye.

Lady Trevlyn, a beautiful, pale woman, delicate in health and melancholy in spirit, sat on a rustic seat with a book in her hand; not reading, but musing with an absent mind. As the child approached, she held out her hand to welcome her, but neither smiled nor spoke.

“Mamma, here is a — a person to see you,” cried Lillian, rather at a loss how to designate the stranger, whose height and gravity now awed her.

“A note from Colonel Daventry, my lady,” and with a bow the boy delivered the missive.

Scarcely glancing at him, she opened it and read:

My Dear Friend,

The bearer of this, Paul Jex, has been with me some months and has served me well. I brought him from Paris, but he is English born, and, though friendless, prefers to remain here, even after we leave, as we do in a week. When I last saw you you mentioned wanting a lad to help in the garden; Paul is accustomed to that employment, though my wife used him as a sort of page in the house. Hoping you may be able to give him shelter, I venture to send him. He is honest, capable, and trustworthy in all respects. Pray try him, and oblige,

Yours sincerely,

J. R. Daventry

“The place is still vacant, and I shall be very glad to give it to you, if you incline to take it,” said Lady Trevlyn, lifting her eyes from the note and scanning the boy’s face.

“I do, madam,” he answered respectfully.

“The colonel says you are English,” added the lady, in a tone of surprise.

The boy smiled, showing a faultless set of teeth, as he replied, “I am, my lady, though just now I may not look it, being much tanned and very dusty. My father was an Englishman, but I’ve lived abroad a good deal since he died, and got foreign ways, perhaps.”

As he spoke without any accent, and looked full in her face with a pair of honest blue eyes under the dark lashes, Lady Trevlyn’s momentary doubt vanished.

“Your age, Paul?”

“Sixteen, my lady.”

“You understand gardening?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“And what else?”

“I can break horses, serve at table, do errands, read aloud, ride after a young lady as groom, illuminate on parchment, train flowers, and make myself useful in any way.”

The tone, half modest, half eager, in which the boy spoke, as well as the odd list of his accomplishments, brought a smile to Lady Trevlyn’s lips, and the general air of the lad prepossessed her.

“I want Lillian to ride soon, and Roger is rather old for an escort to such a little horsewoman. Don’t you think we might try Paul?” she said, turning to Hester.

The woman gravely eyed the lad from head to foot, and shook her head, but an imploring little gesture and a glance of the handsome eyes softened her heart in spite of herself.

“Yes, my lady, if he does well about the place, and Parks thinks he’s steady enough, we might try it by-and-by.”

Lillian clapped her hands and, drawing nearer, exclaimed confidingly, as she looked up at her new groom, “I know he’ll do, Mamma. I like him very much, and I hope you’ll let him train my pony for me. Will you, Paul?”

“Yes.”

As he spoke very low and hastily, the boy looked away from the eager little face before him, and a sudden flush of color crossed his dark cheek.

Hester saw it and said within herself, “That boy has good blood in his veins. He’s no clodhopper’s son, I can tell by his hands and feet, his air and walk. Poor lad, it’s hard for him, I’ll warrant, but he’s not too proud for honest work, and I like that.”

“You may stay, Paul, and we will try you for a month. Hester, take him to Parks and see that he is made comfortable. Tomorrow we will see what he can do. Come, darling, I am rested now.”

As she spoke, Lady Trevlyn dismissed the boy with a gracious gesture and led her little daughter away. Paul stood watching her, as if forgetful of his companion, till she said, rather tartly, “Young man, you’d better have thanked my lady while she was here than stare after her now it’s too late. If you want to see Parks, you’d best come, for I’m going.”

“Is that the family tomb yonder, where you found me asleep?” was the unexpected reply to her speech, as the boy quietly followed her, not at all daunted by her manner.

“Yes, and that reminds me to ask how you got in, and why you were napping there, instead of doing your errand properly?”

“I leaped the fence and stopped to rest before presenting myself, Miss Hester” was the cool answer, accompanied by a short laugh as he confessed his trespass.

“You look as if you’d had a long walk; where are you from?”

“London.”

“Bless the boy! It’s fifty miles away.”

“So my shoes show; but it’s a pleasant trip in summer time.”

“But why did you walk, child! Had you no money?”

“Plenty, but not for wasting on coaches, when my own stout legs could carry me. I took a two days’ holiday and saved my money for better things.”

“I like that,” said Hester, with an approving nod. “You’ll get on, my lad, if that’s your way, and I’ll lend a hand, for laziness is my abomination, and one sees plenty nowadays.”

“Thank you. That’s friendly, and I’ll prove that I am grateful. Please tell me, is my lady ill?”

“Always delicate since Sir Richard died.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Ten years or more.”

“Are there no young gentlemen in the family?”

“No, Miss Lillian is an only child, and a sweet one, bless her!”

“A proud little lady, I should say.”

“And well she may be, for there’s no better blood in England than the Trevlyns, and she’s heiress to a noble fortune.”

“Is that the Trevlyn coat of arms?” asked the boy abruptly, pointing to a stone falcon with the motto ME AND MINE carved over the gate through which they were passing.

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“Mere curiosity; I know something of heraldry and often paint these things for my own pleasure. One learns odd amusements abroad,” he added, seeing an expression of surprise on the woman’s face.

“You’ll have little time for such matters here. Come in and report yourself to the keeper, and if you’ll take my advice ask no questions of him, for you’ll get no answers.”

“I seldom ask questions of men, as they are not fond of gossip.” And the boy nodded with a smile of mischievous significance as he entered the keeper’s lodge.

A sharp lad and a saucy, if he likes. I’ll keep my eye on him, for my lady takes no more thought of such things than a child, and Lillian cares for nothing but her own will. He has a taking way with him, though, and knows how to flatter. It’s well he does, poor lad, for life’s a hard matter to a friendless soul like him.

As she thought these thoughts Hester went on to the house, leaving Paul to win the good graces of the keeper, which he speedily did by assuming an utterly different manner from that he had worn with the woman.

That night, when the boy was alone in his own room, he wrote a long letter in Italian describing the events of the day, enclosed a sketch of the falcon and motto, directed it to “Father Cosmo Carmela, Genoa,” and lay down to sleep, muttering, with a grim look and a heavy sigh, “So far so well; I’ll not let my heart be softened by pity, or my purpose change till my promise is kept. Pretty child, I wish I had never seen her!”

Chapter III

SECRET SERVICE

In a week Paul was a favorite with the household; even prudent Hester felt the charm of his presence, and owned that Lillian was happier for a young companion in her walks. Hitherto the child had led a solitary life, with no playmates of her own age, such being the will of my lady; therefore she welcomed Paul as a new and delightful amusement, considering him her private property and soon transferring his duties from the garden to the house. Satisfied of his merits, my lady yielded to Lillian's demands, and Paul was installed as page to the young lady. Always respectful and obedient, he never forgot his place, yet seemed unconsciously to influence all who approached him, and win the goodwill of everyone.

My lady showed unusual interest in the lad, and Lillian openly displayed her admiration for his accomplishments and her affection for her devoted young servitor. Hester was much flattered by the confidence he reposed in her, for to her alone did he tell his story, and of her alone asked advice and comfort in his various small straits. It was as she suspected: Paul was a gentleman's son, but misfortune had robbed him of home, friends, and parents, and thrown him upon the world to shift for himself. This sad story touched the woman's heart, and the boy's manly spirit won respect. She had lost a son years ago, and her empty heart yearned over the motherless lad. Ashamed to confess the tender feeling, she wore her usual severe manner to him in public, but in private softened wonderfully and enjoyed the boy's regard heartily.

"Paul, come in. I want to speak with you a moment," said my lady, from the long window of the library to the boy who was training vines outside.

Dropping his tools and pulling off his hat, Paul obeyed, looking a little anxious, for the month of trial expired that day. Lady Trevlyn saw and answered the look with a gracious smile.

"Have no fears. You are to stay if you will, for Lillian is happy and I am satisfied with you."

“Thank you, my lady.” And an odd glance of mingled pride and pain shone in the boy’s downcast eyes.

“That is settled, then. Now let me say what I called you in for. You spoke of being able to illuminate on parchment. Can you restore this old book for me?”

She put into his hand the ancient volume Sir Richard had been reading the day he died. It had lain neglected in a damp nook for years till my lady discovered it, and, sad as were the associations connected with it, she desired to preserve it for the sake of the weird prophecy if nothing else. Paul examined it, and as he turned it to and fro in his hands it opened at the page oftenest read by its late master. His eye kindled as he looked, and with a quick gesture he turned as if toward the light, in truth to hide the flash of triumph that passed across his face. Carefully controlling his voice, he answered in a moment, as he looked up, quite composed, “Yes, my lady, I can retouch the faded colors on these margins and darken the pale ink of the Old English text. I like the work, and will gladly do it if you like.”

“Do it, then, but be very careful of the book while in your hands. Provide what is needful, and name your own price for the work,” said his mistress.

“Nay, my lady, I am already paid — ”

“How so?” she asked, surprised.

Paul had spoken hastily, and for an instant looked embarrassed, but answered with a sudden flush on his dark cheeks, “You have been kind to me, and I am glad to show my, gratitude in any way, my lady.”

“Let that pass, my boy. Do this little service for me and we will see about the recompense afterward.” And with a smile Lady Trevlyn left him to begin his work.

The moment the door closed behind her a total change passed over Paul. He shook his clenched hand after her with a gesture of menace, then tossed up the old book and caught it with an exclamation of delight, as he reopened it at the worn page and reread the inexplicable verse.

“Another proof, another proof! The work goes bravely on, Father Cosmo; and boy as I am, I’ll keep my word in spite of everything,” he muttered.

“What is that you’ll keep, lad?” said a voice behind him.

“I’ll keep my word to my lady, and do my best to restore this book, Mrs. Hester,” he answered, quickly recovering himself.

“Ah, that’s the last book poor Master read. I hid it away, but my lady found it in spite of me,” said Hester, with a doleful sigh.

“Did he die suddenly, then?” asked the boy.

“Dear heart, yes; I found him dying in this room with the ink scarce dry on the letter he left for my lady. A mysterious business and a sad one.”

“Tell me about it. I like sad stories, and I already feel as if I belonged to the family, a loyal retainer as in the old times. While you dust the books and I rub the mold off this old cover, tell me the tale, please, Mrs. Hester.”

She shook her head, but yielded to the persuasive look and tone of the boy, telling the story more fully than she intended, for she loved talking and had come to regard Paul as her own, almost.

“And the letter? What was in it?” asked the boy, as she paused at the catastrophe.

“No one ever knew but my lady.”

“She destroyed it, then?”

“I thought so, till a long time afterward, one of the lawyers came pestering me with questions, and made me ask her. She was ill at the time, but answered with a look I shall never forget, ‘No, it’s not burnt, but no one shall ever see it.’ I dared ask no more, but I fancy she has it safe somewhere and if it’s ever needed she’ll bring it out. It was only some private matters, I fancy.”

“And the stranger?”

“Oh, he vanished as oddly as he came, and has never been found. A strange story, lad. Keep silent, and let it rest.”

“No fear of my tattling,” and the boy smiled curiously to himself as he bent over the book, polishing the brassbound cover.

“What are you doing with that pretty white wax?” asked Lillian the next day, as she came upon Paul in a quiet corner of the garden and found him absorbed in some mysterious occupation.

With a quick gesture he destroyed his work, and, banishing a momentary expression of annoyance, he answered in his accustomed tone as he began to work anew, “I am molding a little deer for you, Miss Lillian. See, here is a rabbit already done, and I’ll soon have a stag also.”

“It’s very pretty! How many nice things you can do, and how kind you are to think of my liking something new. Was this wax what you went to get this morning when you rode away so early?” asked the child.

“Yes, Miss Lillian. I was ordered to exercise your pony and I made him useful as well. Would you like to try this? It’s very easy.”

Lillian was charmed, and for several days wax modeling was her favorite play. Then she tired of it, and Paul invented a new amusement, smiling his inexplicable smile as he threw away the broken toys of wax.

“You are getting pale and thin, keeping such late hours, Paul. Go to bed, boy, go to bed, and get your sleep early,” said Hester a week afterward, with a motherly air, as Paul passed her one morning.

“And how do you know I don’t go to bed?” he asked, wheeling about.

“My lady has been restless lately, and I sit up with her till she sleeps. As I go to my room, I see your lamp burning, and last night I got as far as your door, meaning to speak to you, but didn’t, thinking you’d take it amiss. But really you are the worse for late hours, child.”

“I shall soon finish restoring the book, and then I’ll sleep. I hope I don’t disturb you. I have to grind my colors, and often make more noise than I mean to.”

Paul fixed his eyes sharply on the woman as he spoke, but she seemed unconscious of it, and turned to go on, saying indifferently, “Oh, that’s the odd sound, is it? No, it doesn’t trouble me, so grind away, and make an end of it as soon as may be.”

An anxious fold in the boy’s forehead smoothed itself away as he left her, saying to himself with a sigh of relief, “A narrow escape; it’s well I keep the door locked.”

The boy’s light burned no more after that, and Hester was content till a new worry came to trouble her. On her way to her room late one night, she saw a tall shadow flit down one of the side corridors that branched from the main one. For a moment she was startled, but, being a woman of courage, she followed noiselessly, till the shadow seemed to vanish in the gloom of the great hall.

“If the house ever owned a ghost I’d say that’s it, but it never did, so I suspect some deviltry. I’ll step to Paul. He’s not asleep, I dare say. He’s a brave and a sensible lad, and with him I’ll quietly search the house.”

Away she went, more nervous than she would own, and tapped at the boy’s door. No one answered, and, seeing that it was ajar, Hester whisked in so hurriedly that her candle went out. With an impatient exclamation at her carelessness she glided to the bed, drew the curtain, and put forth her hand to touch the sleeper. The bed was empty. A disagreeable thrill shot through her, as she assured herself of the fact by groping along the narrow bed. Standing in the shadow of the curtain, she stared about the dusky room, in which objects were visible by the light of a new moon.

“Lord bless me, what is the boy about! I do believe it was him I saw in the — ” She got no further in her mental exclamation for the sound of light approaching footsteps neared her. Slipping around the bed she waited in the shadow, and a moment after Paul appeared, looking pale and ghostly, with dark, disheveled hair, wide-open eyes, and a cloak thrown over his shoulders. Without a pause he flung it off, laid himself in bed, and seemed to sleep at once.

“Paul! Paul!” whispered Hester, shaking him, after a pause of astonishment at the whole proceeding.

“Hey, what is it?” And he sat up, looking drowsily about him.

“Come, come, no tricks, boy. What are you doing, trailing about the house at this hour and in such trim?”

“Why, Hester, is it you?” he exclaimed with a laugh, as he shook off her grip and looked up at her in surprise.

“Yes, and well it is me. If it had been any of those silly girls, the house would have been roused by this time. What mischief is afoot that you leave your bed and play ghost in this wild fashion?”

“Leave my bed! Why, my good soul, I haven’t stirred, but have been dreaming with all my might these two hours. What do you mean, Hester?”

She told him as she relit her lamp, and stood eyeing him sharply the while. When she finished he was silent a minute, then said, looking half vexed and half ashamed, “I see how it is, and I’m glad you alone have found me out. I walk in my sleep sometimes, Hester, that’s the truth. I thought I’d got over it, but it’s come back, you see, and I’m sorry for it. Don’t be troubled. I never do any mischief or come to any harm. I just take a quiet promenade and march back to bed again. Did I frighten you?”

“Just a trifle, but it’s nothing. Poor lad, you’ll have to have a bedfellow or be locked up; it’s dangerous to go roaming about in this way,” said Hester anxiously.

“It won’t last long, for I’ll get more tired and then I shall sleep sounder. Don’t tell anyone, please, else they’ll laugh at me, and that’s not pleasant. I don’t mind your knowing for you seem almost like a mother, and I thank you for it with all my heart.”

He held out his hand with the look that was irresistible to Hester. Remembering only that he was a motherless boy, she stroked the curly hair off his forehead, and kissed him, with the thought of her own son warm at her heart.

“Good night, dear. I’ll say nothing, but give you something that will ensure quiet sleep hereafter.”

With that she left him, but would have been annoyed could she have seen the convulsion of boyish merriment which took possession of him when alone, for he laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Chapter IV

VANISHED

“He’s a handsome lad, and one any woman might be proud to call her son,” said Hester to Bedford, the stately butler, as they lingered at the hall door one autumn morning to watch their young lady’s departure on her daily ride.

“You are right, Mrs. Hester, he’s a fine lad, and yet he seems above his place, though he does look the very picture of a lady’s groom,” replied Bedford approvingly.

So he did, as he stood holding the white pony of his little mistress, for the boy gave an air to whatever he wore and looked like a gentleman even in his livery. The dark-blue coat with silver buttons, the silver band about his hat, his white-topped boots and bright spurs, spotless gloves, and tightly drawn belt were all in perfect order, all becoming, and his handsome, dark face caused many a susceptible maid to blush and simper as they passed him. “Gentleman Paul,” as the servants called him, was rather lofty and reserved among his mates, but they liked him nonetheless, for Hester had dropped hints of his story and quite a little romance had sprung up about him. He stood leaning against the docile creature, sunk in thought, and quite unconscious of the watchers and whisperers close by. But as Lillian appeared he woke up, attended to his duties like a well-trained groom, and lingered over his task as if he liked it. Down the avenue he rode behind her, but as they turned into a shady lane Lillian beckoned, saying, in the imperious tone habitual to her, “Ride near me. I wish to talk.”

Paul obeyed, and amused her with the chat she liked till they reached a hazel copse; here he drew rein, and, leaping down, gathered a handful of ripe nuts for her.

“How nice. Let us rest a minute here, and while I eat a few, please pull some of those flowers for Mamma. She likes a wild nosegay better than any I can bring her from the garden.”

Lillian ate her nuts till Paul came to her with a hatful of late flowers and, standing by her, held the impromptu basket while she made up a bouquet to suit her taste.

“You shall have a posy, too; I like you to wear one in your buttonhole as the ladies’ grooms do in the Park,” said the child, settling a scarlet poppy in the blue coat.

“Thanks, Miss Lillian, I’ll wear your colors with all my heart, especially today, for it is my birthday.” And Paul looked up at the blooming little face with unusual softness in his keen blue eyes.

“Is it? Why, then, you’re seventeen; almost a man, aren’t you?”

“Yes, thank heaven,” muttered the boy, half to himself.

“I wish I was as old. I shan’t be in my teens till autumn. I must give you something, Paul, because I like you very much, and you are always doing kind things for me. What shall it be?” And the child held out her hand with a cordial look and gesture that touched the boy.

With one of the foreign fashions which sometimes appeared when he forgot himself, he kissed the small hand, saying impulsively, “My dear little mistress, I want nothing but your goodwill — and your forgiveness,” he added, under his breath.

“You have that already, Paul, and I shall find something to add to it. But what is that?” And she laid hold of a little locket which had slipped into sight as Paul bent forward in his salute.

He thrust it back, coloring so deeply that the child observed it, and exclaimed, with a mischievous laugh, “It is your sweetheart, Paul. I heard Bessy, my maid, tell Hester she was sure you had one because you took no notice of them. Let me see it. Is she pretty?”

“Very pretty,” answered the boy, without showing the picture.

“Do you like her very much?” questioned Lillian, getting interested in the little romance.

“Very much,” and Paul’s black eyelashes fell.

“Would you die for her, as they say in the old songs?” asked the girl, melodramatically.

“Yes, Miss Lillian, or live for her, which is harder.”

“Dear me, how very nice it must be to have anyone care for one so much,” said the child innocently. “I wonder if anybody ever will for me?”

“*Love comes to all soon or late,*
And maketh gay or sad;
For every bird will find its mate,
And every lass a lad,”

sang Paul, quoting one of Hester’s songs, and looking relieved that Lillian’s thoughts had strayed from him. But he was mistaken.

“Shall you marry this sweetheart of yours someday?” asked Lillian, turning to him with a curious yet wistful look.

“Perhaps.”

“You look as if there was no ‘perhaps’ about it,” said the child, quick to read the kindling of the eye and the change in the voice that accompanied the boy’s reply.

“She is very young and I must wait, and while I wait many things may happen to part us.”

“Is she a lady?”

“Yes, a wellborn, lovely little lady, and I’ll marry her if I live.” Paul spoke with a look of decision, and a proud lift of the head that contrasted curiously with the badge of servitude he wore.

Lillian felt this, and asked, with a sudden shyness coming over her, “But you are a gentleman, and so no one will mind even if you are not rich.”

“How do you know what I am?” he asked quickly.

“I heard Hester tell the housekeeper that you were not what you seemed, and one day she hoped you’d get your right place again. I asked Mamma about it, and she said she would not let me be with you so much if you were not a fit companion for me. I was not to speak of it, but she means to be your friend and help you by-and-by.”

“Does she?”

And the boy laughed an odd, short laugh that jarred on Lillian’s ear and made her say reprovingly, “You are proud, I know, but you’ll let us help you because we like to do it, and I have no brother to share my money with.”

“Would you like one, or a sister?” asked Paul, looking straight into her face with his piercing eyes.

“Yes, indeed! I long for someone to be with me and love me, as Mamma can’t.”

“Would you be willing to share everything with another person — perhaps have to give them a great many things you like and now have all to yourself?”

“I think I should. I’m selfish, I know, because everyone pets and spoils me, but if I loved a person dearly I’d give up anything to them. Indeed I would, Paul, pray believe me.”

She spoke earnestly, and leaned on his shoulder as if to enforce her words. The boy’s arm stole around the little figure in the saddle, and a beautiful bright smile broke over his face as he answered warmly, “I do believe it, dear, and it makes me happy to hear you say so. Don’t be afraid, I’m your equal, but I’ll not forget that you are my little mistress till I can change from groom to gentleman.”

He added the last sentence as he withdrew his arm, for Lillian had shrunk a little and blushed with surprise, not anger, at this first breach of respect on the part of her companion. Both were silent for a moment, Paul looking down and Lillian busy with her nosegay. She spoke first, assuming an air of satisfaction as she surveyed her work.

“That will please Mamma, I’m sure, and make her quite forget my naughty prank of yesterday. Do you know I offended her dreadfully by peeping into the gold case she wears on her neck? She was asleep and I was sitting by her. In her sleep she pulled it out and said something about a letter and Papa. I wanted to see Papa’s face, for I never did, because the big picture of him is gone from the gallery where the others are, so I peeped into the case when she let it drop and was so disappointed to find nothing but a key.”

“A key! What sort of a key?” cried Paul in an eager tone.

“Oh, a little silver one like the key of my piano, or the black cabinet. She woke and was very angry to find me meddling.”

“What did it belong to?” asked Paul.

“Her treasure box, she said, but I don’t know where or what that is, and I dare not ask any more, for she forbade my speaking to her about it. Poor Mamma! I’m always troubling her in some way or other.”

With a penitent sigh, Lillian tied up her flowers and handed them to Paul to carry. As she did so, the change in his face struck her.

“How grim and old you look,” she exclaimed. “Have I said anything that troubles you?”

“No, Miss Lillian. I’m only thinking.”

“Then I wish you wouldn’t think, for you get a great wrinkle in your forehead, your eyes grow almost black, and your mouth looks fierce. You are a very odd person, Paul; one minute as gay as any boy, and the next as grave and stern as a man with a deal of work to do.”

“I *have* got a deal of work to do, so no wonder I look old and grim.”

“What work, Paul?”

“To make my fortune and win my lady.”

When Paul spoke in that tone and wore that look, Lillian felt as if they had changed places, and he was the master and she the servant. She wondered over this in her childish mind, but proud and willful as she was, she liked it, and obeyed him with unusual meekness when he suggested that it was time to return. As he rode silently beside her, she stole covert glances at him from under her wide hat brim, and studied his unconscious face as she had never done before.

His lips moved now and then but uttered no audible sound, his black brows were knit, and once his hand went to his breast as if he thought of the little sweetheart whose picture lay there.

He’s got a trouble. I wish he’d tell me and let me help him if I can. I’ll make him show me that miniature someday, for I’m interested in that girl, thought Lillian with a pensive sigh.

As he held his hand for her little foot in dismounting her at the hall door, Paul seemed to have shaken off his grave mood, for he looked up and smiled at her with his blithest expression. But Lillian appeared to be the thoughtful one now and with an air of dignity, very pretty and becoming, thanked her young squire in a stately manner and swept into the house, looking tall and womanly in her flowing skirts.

Paul laughed as he glanced after her and, flinging himself onto his horse, rode away to the stables at a reckless pace, as if to work off some emotion for which he could find no other vent.

“Here’s a letter for you, lad, all the way from some place in Italy. Who do you know there?” said Bedford, as the boy came back.

With a hasty “Thank you,” Paul caught the letter and darted away to his own room, there to tear it open and, after reading a single line, to drop into a chair as if he had received a sudden blow. Growing paler and paler he read on, and when the letter fell from his hands he exclaimed, in a tone of despair, “How could he die at such a time!”

For an hour the boy sat thinking intently, with locked door, curtained window, and several papers strewn before him. Letters, memoranda, plans, drawings, and bits of parchment, all of which he took from a small locked portfolio always worn about him. Over these he pored with a face in which hope, despondency, resolve, and regret alternated rapidly. Taking the locket out he examined a ring which lay in one side, and the childish face which smiled on him from the other. His eyes filled as he locked and put it by, saying tenderly, “Dear little heart! I’ll not forget or desert her whatever happens. Time must help me, and to time I must leave my work. One more attempt and then I’m off.”

* * *

“I’ll go to bed now, Hester; but while you get my things ready I’ll take a turn in the corridor. The air will refresh me.”

As she spoke, Lady Trevlyn drew her wrapper about her and paced softly down the long hall lighted only by fitful gleams of moonlight and the ruddy glow of the fire. At the far end was the state chamber, never used now, and never visited except by Hester, who occasionally went in to dust and air it, and my lady, who always passed the anniversary of Sir Richard’s death alone there. The gallery was very dark, and she seldom went farther than the last window in her restless walks, but as she now approached she was startled to see a streak of yellow light under the door. She kept the key herself and neither she nor Hester had been there that day. A cold shiver passed over her for, as she looked, the shadow of a foot darkened the light for a moment and vanished as if someone had noiselessly passed. Obeying a sudden impulse, my lady sprang forward and tried to open the door. It was locked, but as her hand turned the silver knob a sound as if a drawer softly closed met her ear. She stooped to the keyhole but it was dark, a key evidently being in the lock. She drew back and flew to her room, snatched the key from her dressing table, and, bidding Hester follow, returned to the hall.

"What is it, my lady?" cried the woman, alarmed at the agitation of her mistress.

"A light, a sound, a shadow in the state chamber. Come quick!" cried Lady Trevlyn, adding, as she pointed to the door, "There, there, the light shines underneath. Do you see it?"

"No, my lady, it's dark," returned Hester.

It was, but never pausing my lady thrust in the key, and to her surprise it turned, the door flew open, and the dim, still room was before them. Hester boldly entered, and while her mistress slowly followed, she searched the room, looking behind the tall screen by the hearth, up the wide chimney, in the great wardrobe, and under the ebony cabinet, where all the relics of Sir Richard were kept. Nothing appeared, not even a mouse, and Hester turned to my lady with an air of relief. But her mistress pointed to the bed shrouded in dark velvet hangings, and whispered breathlessly, "You forgot to look there."

Hester had not forgotten, but in spite of her courage and good sense she shrank a little from looking at the spot where she had last seen her master's dead face. She believed the light and sound to be phantoms of my lady's distempered fancy, and searched merely to satisfy her. The mystery of Sir Richard's death still haunted the minds of all who remembered it, and even Hester felt a superstitious dread of that room. With a nervous laugh she looked under the bed and, drawing back the heavy curtains, said soothingly, "You see, my lady, there's nothing there."

But the words died on her lips, for, as the pale glimmer of the candle pierced the gloom of that funeral couch, both saw a face upon the pillow: a pale face framed in dark hair and beard, with closed eyes and the stony look the dead wear. A loud, long shriek that roused the house broke from Lady Trevlyn as she fell senseless at the bedside, and dropping both curtain and candle Hester caught up her mistress and fled from the haunted room, locking the door behind her.

In a moment a dozen servants were about them, and into their astonished ears Hester poured her story while vainly trying to restore her lady. Great was the dismay and intense the unwillingness of anyone to obey when Hester ordered the men to search the room again, for she was the first to regain her self-possession.

“Where’s Paul? He’s the heart of a man, boy though he is,” she said angrily as the men hung back.

“He’s not here. Lord! Maybe it was him a-playing tricks, though it ain’t like him,” cried Bessy, Lillian’s little maid.

“No, it can’t be him, for I locked him in myself. He walks in his sleep sometimes, and I was afraid he’d startle my lady. Let him sleep; this would only excite him and set him to marching again. Follow me, Bedford and James, I’m not afraid of ghosts or rogues.”

With a face that belied her words Hester led the way to the awful room, and flinging back the curtain resolutely looked in. The bed was empty, but on the pillow was plainly visible the mark of a head and a single scarlet stain, as of blood. At that sight Hester turned pale and caught the butler’s arm, whispering with a shudder, “Do you remember the night we put him in his coffin, the drop of blood that fell from his white lips? Sir Richard has been here.”

“Good Lord, ma’am, don’t say that! We can never rest in our beds if such things are to happen,” gasped Bedford, backing to the door.

“It’s no use to look, we’ve found all we shall find so go your ways and tell no one of this,” said the woman in a gloomy tone, and, having assured herself that the windows were fast, Hester locked the room and ordered everyone but Bedford and the housekeeper to bed. “Do you sit outside my lady’s door till morning,” she said to the butler, “and you, Mrs. Price, help me to tend my poor lady, for if I’m not mistaken this night’s work will bring on the old trouble.”

Morning came, and with it a new alarm; for, though his door was fast locked and no foothold for even a sparrow outside the window, Paul’s room was empty, and the boy nowhere to be found.

Chapter V

A HERO

Four years had passed, and Lillian was fast blooming into a lovely woman: proud and willful as ever, but very charming, and already a belle in the little world where she still reigned a queen. Owing to her mother's ill health, she was allowed more freedom than is usually permitted to an English girl of her age; and, during the season, often went into company with a friend of Lady Trevlyn's who was chaperoning two young daughters of her own. To the world Lillian seemed a gay, free-hearted girl; and no one, not even her mother, knew how well she remembered and how much she missed the lost Paul. No tidings of him had ever come, and no trace of him was found after his flight. Nothing was missed, he went without his wages, and no reason could be divined for his departure except the foreign letter. Bedford remembered it, but forgot what postmark it bore, for he had only been able to decipher "Italy." My lady made many inquiries and often spoke of him; but when month after month passed and no news came, she gave him up, and on Lillian's account feigned to forget him. Contrary to Hester's fear, she did not seem the worse for the nocturnal fright, but evidently connected the strange visitor with Paul, or, after a day or two of nervous exhaustion, returned to her usual state of health. Hester had her own misgivings, but, being forbidden to allude to the subject, she held her peace, after emphatically declaring that Paul would yet appear to set her mind at rest.

"Lillian, Lillian, I've such news for you! Come and hear a charming little romance, and prepare to see the hero of it!" cried Maud Churchill, rushing into her friend's pretty boudoir one day in the height of the season.

Lillian lay on a couch, rather languid after a ball, and listlessly begged Maud to tell her story, for she was dying to be amused.

"Well my, dear, just listen and you'll be as enthusiastic as I am," cried Maud. And throwing her bonnet on one chair, her parasol on another, and her gloves anywhere, she settled herself on the couch and began: "You remember reading in the papers, some time ago, that fine account of the young man who took part in the Italian revolution and did that heroic thing with the bombshell?”

“Yes, what of him?” asked Lillian, sitting up.

“He is my hero, and we are to see him tonight.”

“Go on, go on! Tell all, and tell it quickly,” she cried.

“You know the officers were sitting somewhere, holding a council, while the city (I forget the name) was being bombarded, and how a shell came into the midst of them, how they sat paralyzed, expecting it to burst, and how this young man caught it up and ran out with it, risking his own life to save theirs?”

“Yes, yes, I remember!” And Lillian’s listless face kindled at the recollection.

“Well, an Englishman who was there was so charmed by the act that, finding the young man was poor and an orphan, he adopted him. Mr. Talbot was old, and lonely, and rich, and when he died, a year after, he left his name and fortune to this Paolo.”

“I’m glad, I’m glad!” cried Lillian, clapping her hands with a joyful face. “How romantic and charming it is!”

“Isn’t it? But, my dear creature, the most romantic part is to come. Young Talbot served in the war, and then came to England to take possession of his property. It’s somewhere down in Kent, a fine place and good income, all his; and he deserves it. Mamma heard a deal about him from Mrs. Langdon, who knew old Talbot and has seen the young man. Of course all the girls are wild to behold him, for he is very handsome and accomplished, and a gentleman by birth. But the dreadful part is that he is already betrothed to a lovely Greek girl, who came over at the same time, and is living in London with a companion; quite elegantly, Mrs. Langdon says, for she called and was charmed. This girl has been seen by some of our gentlemen friends, and they already rave about the ‘fair Helene,’ for that’s her name.”

Here Maud was forced to stop for breath, and Lillian had a chance to question her.

“How old is she?”

“About eighteen or nineteen, they say.”

“Very pretty?”

“Ravishing, regularly Greek and divine, Fred Raleigh says.”

“When is she to be married?”

“Don’t know; when Talbot gets settled, I fancy.”

“And he? Is he as charming as she?”

“Quite, I’m told. He’s just of age, and is, in appearance as in everything else, a hero of romance.”

“How came your mother to secure him for tonight?”

“Mrs. Langdon is dying to make a lion of him, and begged to bring him. He is very indifferent on such things and seems intent on his own affairs. Is grave and old for his years, and doesn't seem to care much for pleasure and admiration, as most men would after a youth like his, for he has had a hard time, I believe. For a wonder, he consented to come when Mrs. Langdon asked him, and I flew off at once to tell you and secure you for tonight."

"A thousand thanks. I meant to rest, for Mamma frets about my being so gay; but she won't object to a quiet evening with you. What shall we wear?" And here the conversation branched off on the all-absorbing topic of dress.

When Lillian joined her friend that evening, the hero had already arrived, and, stepping into a recess, she waited to catch a glimpse of him. Maud was called away, and she was alone when the crowd about the inner room thinned and permitted young Talbot to be seen. Well for Lillian that no one observed her at that moment, for she grew pale and sank into a chair, exclaiming below her breath, "It is Paul — *my* Paul!"

She recognized him instantly, in spite of increased height, a dark moustache, and martial bearing. It was Paul, older, graver, handsomer, but still "her Paul," as she called him, with a flush of pride and delight as she watched him, and felt that of all there she knew him best and loved him most. For the childish affection still existed, and this discovery added a tinge of romance that made it doubly dangerous as well as doubly pleasant.

Will he know me? she thought, glancing at a mirror which reflected a slender figure with bright hair, white arms, and brilliant eyes; a graceful little head, proudly carried, and a sweet mouth, just then very charming, as it smiled till pearly teeth shone between the ruddy lips.

I'm glad I'm not ugly, and I hope he'll like me, she thought, as she smoothed the golden ripples on her forehead, settled her sash, and shook out the folds of her airy dress in a flutter of girlish excitement. "I'll pretend not to know him, when we meet, and see what he will do," she said, with a wicked sense of power; for being forewarned she was forearmed, and, fearing no betrayal of surprise on her own part, was eager to enjoy any of which he might be guilty.

Leaving her nook, she joined a group of young friends and held herself prepared for the meeting. Presently she saw Maud and Mrs. Langdon approaching, evidently intent on presenting the hero to the heiress.

"Mr. Talbot, Miss Trevlyn," said the lady. And looking up with a well-assumed air of indifference, Lillian returned the gentleman's bow with her eyes fixed full upon his face.

Not a feature of that face changed, and so severely unconscious of any recognition was it that the girl was bewildered. For a moment she fancied she had been mistaken in his identity, and a pang of disappointment troubled her; but as he moved a chair for Maud, she saw on the one ungloved hand a little scar which she remembered well, for he received it in saving her from a dangerous fall. At the sight all the happy past rose before her, and if her telltale eyes had not been averted they would have betrayed her. A sudden flush of maidenly shame dyed her cheek as she remembered that last ride, and the childish confidences then interchanged. This Helen was the little sweetheart whose picture he wore, and now, in spite of all obstacles, he had won both fortune and ladylove. The sound of his voice recalled her thoughts, and glancing up she met the deep eyes fixed on her with the same steady look they used to wear. He had addressed her, but what he said she knew not, beyond a vague idea that it was some slight allusion to the music going on in the next room. With a smile which would serve for an answer to almost any remark, she hastily plunged into conversation with a composure that did her credit in the eyes of her friends, who stood in awe of the young hero, for all were but just out.

"Mr. Talbot hardly needs an introduction here, for his name is well-known among us, though this is perhaps his first visit to England?" she said, flattering herself that this artful speech would entrap him into the reply she wanted.

With a slight frown, as if the allusion to his adventure rather annoyed him, and a smile that puzzled all but Lillian, he answered very simply, "It is not my first visit to this hospitable island. I was here a few years ago, for a short time, and left with regret."

"Then you have old friends here?" And Lillian watched him as she spoke.

"I had. They had doubtless forgotten me now," he said, with a sudden shadow marring the tranquillity of his face.

"Why doubt them? If they were true friends, they will not forget."

The words were uttered impulsively, almost warmly, but Talbot made no response, except a polite inclination and an abrupt change in the conversation.

"That remains to be proved. Do you sing, Miss Trevlyn?"

"A little." And Lillian's tone was both cold and proud.

"A great deal, and very charmingly," added Maud, who took pride in her friend's gifts both of voice and beauty. "Come, dear, there are so few of us you will sing, I know. Mamma desired me to ask you when Edith had done."

To her surprise Lillian complied, and allowed Talbot to lead her to the instrument. Still hoping to win some sign of recognition from him, the girl chose an air he taught her and sang it with a spirit and skill that surprised the listeners who possessed no key to her mood. At the last verse her voice suddenly faltered, but Talbot took up the song and carried her safely through it with his well-tuned voice.

"You know the air then?" she said in a low tone, as a hum of commendation followed the music.

“All Italians sing it, though few do it like yourself,” he answered quietly, restoring the fan he had held while standing beside her.

Provoking boy! why won’t he know me? thought Lillian. And her tone was almost petulant as she refused to sing again.

Talbot offered his arm and led her to a seat, behind which stood a little statuette of a child holding a fawn by a daisy chain.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” she said, as he paused to look at it instead of taking the chair before her. “I used to enjoy modeling tiny deer and hinds in wax, as well as making daisy chains. Is sculpture among the many accomplishments which rumor tells us you possess?”

“No. Those who, like me, have their own fortunes to mold find time for little else,” he answered gravely, still examining the marble group.

Lillian broke her fan with an angry flirt, for she was tired of her trial, and wished she had openly greeted him at the beginning; feeling now how pleasant it would have been to sit chatting of old times, while her friends dared hardly address him at all. She was on the point of calling him by his former name, when the remembrance of what he had been arrested the words on her lips. He was proud; would he not dread to have it known that, in his days of adversity, he had been a servant? For if she betrayed her knowledge of his past, she would be forced to tell where and how that knowledge was gained. No, better wait till they met alone, she thought; he would thank her for her delicacy, and she could easily explain her motive. He evidently wished to seem a stranger, for once she caught a gleam of the old, mirthful mischief in his eye, as she glanced up unexpectedly. He did remember her, she was sure, yet was trying her, perhaps, as she tried him. Well, she would stand the test and enjoy the joke by-and-by. With this fancy in her head she assumed a gracious air and chatted away in her most charming style, feeling both gay and excited, so anxious was she to please, and so glad to recover her early friend. A naughty whim seized her as her eye fell on a portfolio of classical engravings which someone had left in disorder on a table near her. Tossing them over she asked his opinion of several, and then handed him one in which Helen of Troy was represented as giving her hand to the irresistible Paris.

“Do you think her worth so much bloodshed, and deserving so much praise?” she asked, vainly trying to conceal the significant smile that would break loose on her lips and sparkle in her eyes.

Talbot laughed the short, boyish laugh so familiar to her ears, as he glanced from the picture to the arch questioner, and answered in a tone that made her heart beat with a nameless pain and pleasure, so full of suppressed ardor was it:

“Yes! ‘All for love or the world well lost’ is a saying I heartily agree to. La belle Helene is my favorite heroine, and I regard Paris as the most enviable of men."

"I should like to see her."

The wish broke from Lillian involuntarily, and she was too much confused to turn it off by any general expression of interest in the classical lady.

"You may sometime," answered Talbot, with an air of amusement; adding, as if to relieve her, "I have a poetical belief that all the lovely women of history or romance will meet, and know, and love each other in some charming hereafter."

"But I'm no heroine and no beauty, so I shall never enter your poetical paradise," said Lillian, with a pretty affectation of regret.

"Some women are beauties without knowing it, and the heroines of romances never given to the world. I think you and Helen will yet meet, Miss Trevlyn."

As he spoke, Mrs. Langdon beckoned, and he left her pondering over his last words, and conscious of a secret satisfaction in his implied promise that she should see his betrothed.

"How do you like him?" whispered Maud, slipping into the empty chair.

"Very well," was the composed reply; for Lillian enjoyed her little mystery too much to spoil it yet.

"What did you say to him? I longed to hear, for you seemed to enjoy yourselves very much, but I didn't like to be a marplot."

Lillian repeated a part of the conversation, and Maud professed to be consumed with jealousy at the impression her friend had evidently made.

"It is folly to try to win the hero, for he is already won, you know," answered Lillian, shutting the cover on the pictured Helen with a sudden motion as if glad to extinguish her.

"Oh dear, no; Mrs. Langdon just told Mamma that she was mistaken about their being engaged; for she asked him and he shook his head, saying Helen was his ward."

"But that is absurd, for he's only a boy himself. It's very odd, isn't it? Never mind, I shall soon know all about it."

"How?" cried Maud, amazed at Lillian's assured manner.

"Wait a day or two and, I'll tell you a romance in return for yours. Your mother beckons to me, so I know Hester has come. Good night. I've had a charming time."

And with this tantalizing adieu, Lillian slipped away. Hester was waiting in the carriage, but as Lillian appeared, Talbot put aside the footman and handed her in, saying very low, in the well-remembered tone:

"Good night, my little mistress."

Chapter VI

FAIR HELEN

To no one but her mother and Hester did Lillian confide the discovery she had made. None of the former servants but old Bedford remained with them, and till Paul chose to renew the old friendship it was best to remain silent. Great was the surprise and delight of our lady and Hester at the good fortune of their protege, and many the conjectures as to how he would explain his hasty flight.

“You will go and see him, won’t you, Mamma, or at least inquire about him?” said Lillian, eager to assure the wanderer of a welcome, for those few words of his had satisfied her entirely.

“No, dear, it is for him to seek us, and till he does, I shall make no sign. He knows where we are, and if he chooses he can renew the acquaintance so strangely broken off. Be patient, and above all things remember, Lillian, that you are no longer a child,” replied my lady, rather disturbed by her daughter’s enthusiastic praises of Paul.

“I wish I was, for then I might act as I feel, and not be afraid of shocking the proprieties.” And Lillian went to bed to dream of her hero.

For three days she stayed at home, expecting Paul, but he did not come, and she went out for her usual ride in the Park, hoping to meet him. An elderly groom now rode behind her, and she surveyed him with extreme disgust, as she remembered the handsome lad who had once filled that place. Nowhere did Paul appear, but in the Ladies’ Mile she passed an elegant brougham in which sat a very lovely girl and a mild old lady.

“That is Talbot’s fiancee,” said Maud Churchill, who had joined her. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

“Not at all — yes, very,” was Lillian’s somewhat peculiar reply, for jealousy and truth had a conflict just then. “He’s so perfectly absorbed and devoted that I am sure that story is true, so adieu to our hopes,” laughed Maud.

“Did you have any? Good-bye, I must go.” And Lillian rode home at a pace which caused the stout groom great distress.

"Mamma, I've seen Paul's betrothed!" she cried, running into her mother's boudoir.

"And I have seen Paul himself," replied my lady, with a warning look, for there he stood, with half-extended hand, as if waiting to be acknowledged.

Lillian forgot her embarrassment in her pleasure, and made him an elaborate curtsy, saying, with a half-merry, half-reproachful glance, "Mr. Talbot is welcome in whatever guise he appears."

"I choose to appear as Paul, then, and offer you a seat, Miss Lillian," he said, assuming as much of his boyish manner as he could.

Lillian took it and tried to feel at ease, but the difference between the lad she remembered and the man she now saw was too great to be forgotten.

"Now tell us your adventures, and why you vanished away so mysteriously four years ago," she said, with a touch of the childish imperiousness in her voice, though her frank eyes fell before his.

"I was about to do so when you appeared with news concerning my cousin," he began.

"Your cousin!" exclaimed Lillian.

"Yes, Helen's mother and my own were sisters. Both married Englishmen, both died young, leaving us to care for each other. We were like a brother and sister, and always together till I left her to serve Colonel Daventry. The death of the old priest to whom I entrusted her recalled me to Genoa, for I was then her only guardian. I meant to have taken leave of you, my lady, properly, but the consequences of that foolish trick of mine frightened me away in the most unmannerly fashion."

"Ah, it was you, then, in the state chamber; I always thought so," and Lady Trevlyn drew a long breath of relief.

"Yes, I heard it whispered among the servants that the room was haunted, and I felt a wish to prove the truth of the story and my own courage. Hester locked me in, for fear of my sleepwalking; but I lowered myself by a rope and then climbed in at the closet window of the state chamber. When you came, my lady, I thought it was Hester, and slipped into the bed, meaning to give her a fright in return for her turning the key on me. But when your cry showed me what I had done, I was filled with remorse, and escaped as quickly and quietly as possible. I should have asked pardon before; I do now, most humbly, my lady, for it was sacrilege to play pranks *there*."

During the first part of his story Paul's manner had been frank and composed, but in telling the latter part, his demeanor underwent a curious change. He fixed his eyes on the ground and spoke as if repeating a lesson, while his color varied, and a half-proud, half-submissive expression replaced the former candid one.

Lillian observed this, and it disturbed her, but my lady took it for shame at his boyish freak and received his confession kindly, granting a free pardon and expressing sincere pleasure at his amended fortunes. As he listened, Lillian saw him clench his hand hard and knit his brows, assuming the grim look she had often seen, as if trying to steel himself against some importunate emotion or rebellious thought.

"Yes, half my work is done, and I have a home, thanks to my generous benefactor, and I hope to enjoy it well and wisely," he said in a grave tone, as if the fortune had not yet brought him his heart's desire.

"And when is the other half of the work to be accomplished, Paul? That depends on your cousin, perhaps." And Lady Trevlyn regarded him with a gleam of womanly curiosity in her melancholy eyes.

"It does, but not in the way you fancy, my lady. Whatever Helen may be, she is not my fiancee yet, Miss Lillian." And the shadow lifted as he laughed, looking at the young lady, who was decidedly abashed, in spite of a sense of relief caused by his words.

"I merely accepted the world's report," she said, affecting a nonchalant air.

"The world is a liar, as you will find in time" was his abrupt reply.

"I hope to see this beautiful cousin, Paul. Will she receive us as old friends of yours?"

"Thanks, not yet, my lady. She is still too much a stranger here to enjoy new faces, even kind ones. I have promised perfect rest and freedom for a time, but you shall be the first whom she receives."

Again Lillian detected the secret disquiet which possessed him, and her curiosity was roused. It piqued her that this Helen felt no desire to meet her and chose to seclude herself, as if regardless of the interest and admiration she excited. "I *will* see her in spite of her refusal, for I only caught a glimpse in the Park. Something is wrong, and I'll discover it, for it evidently worries Paul, and perhaps I can help him."

As this purpose sprang up in the warm but willful heart of the girl, she regained her spirits and was her most charming self while the young man stayed. They talked of many things in a pleasant, confidential manner, though when Lillian recalled that hour, she was surprised to find how little Paul had really told them of his past life or future plans. It was agreed among them to say nothing of their former relations, except to old Bedford, who was discretion itself, but to appear to the world as new-made friends — thus avoiding unpleasant and unnecessary explanations which would only excite gossip. My lady asked him to dine, but he had business out of town and declined, taking his leave with a lingering look, which made Lillian steal away to study her face in the mirror and wonder if she looked her best, for in Paul’s eyes she had read undisguised admiration.

Lady Trevlyn went to her room to rest, leaving the girl free to ride, drive, or amuse herself as she liked. As if fearing her courage would fail if she delayed, Lillian ordered the carriage, and, bidding Hester mount guard over her, she drove away to St. John’s Wood.

“Now, Hester, don’t lecture or be prim when I tell you that we are going on a frolic,” she began, after getting the old woman into an amiable mood by every winning wile she could devise. “I think you’ll like it, and if it’s found out I’ll take the blame. There is some mystery about Paul’s cousin, and I’m going to find it out.”

“Bless you, child, how?”

“She lives alone here, is seldom seen, and won’t go anywhere or receive anyone. That’s not natural in a pretty girl. Paul won’t talk about her, and, though he’s fond of her, he always looks grave and grim when I ask questions. That’s provoking, and I won’t hear it. Maud is engaged to Raleigh, you know; well, he confided to her that he and a friend had found out where Helen was, had gone to the next villa, which is empty, and under pretense of looking at it got a peep at the girl in her garden. I’m going to do the same.”

“And what am *I* to do?” asked Hester, secretly relishing the prank, for she was dying with curiosity to behold Paul’s cousin.

“You are to do the talking with the old woman, and give me a chance to look. Now say you will, and I’ll behave myself like an angel in return.”

Hester yielded, after a few discreet scruples, and when they reached Laburnum Lodge played her part so well that Lillian soon managed to stray away into one of the upper rooms which overlooked the neighboring garden. Helen was there, and with eager eyes the girl scrutinized her. She was very beautiful, in the classical style; as fair and finely molded as a statue, with magnificent dark hair and eyes, and possessed of that perfect grace which is as effective as beauty. She was alone, and when first seen was bending over a flower which she caressed and seemed to examine with great interest as she stood a long time motionless before it. Then she began to pace slowly around and around the little grass plot, her hands hanging loosely clasped before her, and her eyes fixed on vacancy as if absorbed in thought. But as the first effect of her beauty passed away, Lillian found something peculiar about her. It was not the somewhat foreign dress and ornaments she wore; it was in her face, her movements, and the tone of her voice, for as she walked she sang a low, monotonous song, as if unconsciously. Lillian watched her keenly, marking the aimless motions of the little hands, the apathy of the lovely face, and the mirthless accent of the voice; but most of all the vacant fixture of the great dark eyes. Around and around she went, with an elastic step and a mechanical regularity wearisome to witness.

What is the matter with her? thought Lillian anxiously, as this painful impression increased with every scrutiny of the unconscious girl. So abashed was she that Hester's call was unheard, and Hester was unseen as she came and stood beside her. Both looked a moment, and as they looked an old lady came from the house and led Helen in, still murmuring her monotonous song and moving her hands as if to catch and hold the sunshine.

"Poor dear, poor dear. No wonder Paul turns sad and won't talk of her, and that she don't see anyone," sighed Hester pitifully.

"What is it? I see, but don't understand," whispered Lillian.

"She's an innocent, deary, an idiot, though that's a hard word for a pretty creature like her."

"How terrible! Come away, Hester, and never breathe to anyone what we have seen." And with a shudder and sense of pain and pity lying heavy at her heart, she hurried away, feeling doubly guilty in the discovery of this affliction. The thought of it haunted her continually; the memory of the lonely girl gave her no peace; and a consciousness of deceit burdened her unspeakably, especially in Paul's presence. This lasted for a week, then Lillian resolved to confess, hoping that when he found she knew the truth he would let her share his cross and help to lighten it. Waiting her opportunity, she seized a moment when her mother was absent, and with her usual frankness spoke out impetuously.

"Paul, I've done wrong, and I can have no peace till I am pardoned. I have seen Helen."

"Where, when, and how?" he asked, looking disturbed and yet relieved.

She told him rapidly, and as she ended she looked up at him with her sweet face, so full of pity, shame, and grief it would have been impossible to deny her anything.

"Can you forgive me for discovering this affliction?"

"I think I could forgive you a far greater fault, Lillian," he answered, in a tone that said many things.

"But deceit is so mean, so dishonorable and contemptible, how can you so easily pardon it in me?" she asked, quite overcome by this forgiveness, granted without any reproach.

"Then you would find it hard to pardon such a thing in another?" he said, with the expression that always puzzled her.

"Yes, it would be hard; but in those I loved, I could forgive much for love's sake."

With a sudden gesture he took her hand saying, impulsively, “How little changed you are! Do you remember that last ride of ours nearly five years ago?”

“Yes, Paul,” she answered, with averted eyes.

“And what we talked of?”

“A part of that childish gossip I remember well.”

“Which part?”

“The pretty little romance you told me.” And Lillian looked up now, longing to ask if Helen’s childhood had been blighted like her youth.

Paul dropped her hand as if he, read her thoughts, and his own hand went involuntarily toward his breast, betraying that the locket still hung there.

“What did I say?” he asked, smiling at her sudden shyness.

“You vowed you’d win and wed your fair little lady-love if you lived.”

“And so I will,” he cried, with sudden fire in his eyes.

“What, marry her?”

“Aye, that I will.”

“Oh Paul, will you tie yourself for life to a — ” The word died on her lips, but a gesture of repugnance finished the speech.

“A what?” he demanded, excitedly.

“An innocent, one bereft of reason,” stammered Lillian, entirely forgetting herself in her interest for him.

“Of whom do you speak?” asked Paul, looking utterly bewildered,

“Of poor Helen.”

“Good heavens, who told you that base lie?” And his voice deepened with indignant pain.

“I saw her, you did not deny her affliction; Hester said so, and I believed it. Have I wronged her, Paul?”

“Yes, cruelly. She is blind, but no idiot, thank God.”

There was such earnestness in his voice, such reproach in his words, and such ardor in his eye, that Lillian’s pride gave way, and with a broken entreaty for pardon, she covered up her face, weeping the bitterest tears she ever shed. For in that moment, and the sharp pang it brought her, she felt how much she loved Paul and how hard it was to lose him. The childish affection had blossomed into a woman’s passion, and in a few short weeks had passed through many phases of jealousy, hope, despair, and self-delusion. The joy she felt on seeing him again, the pride she took in him, the disgust Helen caused her, the relief she had not dared to own even to herself, when she fancied fate had put an insurmountable barrier between Paul and his cousin, the despair at finding it only a fancy, and the anguish of hearing him declare his unshaken purpose to marry his first love — all these conflicting emotions had led to this hard moment, and now self-control deserted her in her need. In spite of her efforts the passionate tears would have their way, though Paul soothed her with assurances of entire forgiveness, promises of Helen’s friendship, and every gentle device he could imagine. She commanded herself at last by a strong effort, murmuring eagerly as she shrank from the hand that put back her fallen hair, and the face so full of tender sympathy bending over her:

“I am so grieved and ashamed at what I have said and done. I shall never dare to see Helen. Forgive me, and forget this folly. I’m sad and heavyhearted just now; it’s the anniversary of Papa’s death, and Mamma always suffers so much at such times that I get nervous.”

“It is your birthday also. I remembered it, and ventured to bring a little token in return for the one you gave me long ago. This is a talisman, and tomorrow I will tell you the legend concerning it. Wear it for my sake, and God bless you, dear.”

The last words were whispered hurriedly; Lillian saw the glitter of an antique ring, felt the touch of bearded lips on her hand, and Paul was gone.

But as he left the house he set his teeth, exclaiming low to himself, “Yes, tomorrow there shall be an end of this! We must risk everything and abide the consequences now. I’ll have no more torment for any of us.”

Chapter VII

THE SECRET KEY

“Is Lady Trevlyn at home, Bedford?” asked Paul, as he presented himself at an early hour next day, wearing the keen, stern expression which made him look ten years older than he was.

“No, sir, my lady and Miss Lillian went down to the Hall last night.”

“No ill news, I hope?” And the young man’s eye kindled as if he felt a crisis at hand.

“Not that I heard, sir. Miss Lillian took one of her sudden whims and would have gone alone, if my lady hadn’t given in much against her will, this being a time when she is better away from the place.”

“Did they leave no message for me?”

“Yes, sir. Will you step in and read the note at your ease. We are in sad confusion, but this room is in order.”

Leading the way to Lillian’s boudoir, the man presented the note and retired. A few hasty lines from my lady, regretting the necessity of this abrupt departure, yet giving no reason for it, hoping they might meet next season, but making no allusion to seeing him at the Hall, desiring Lillian’s thanks and regards, but closing with no hint of Helen, except compliments. Paul smiled as he threw it into the fire, saying to himself, “Poor lady, she thinks she has escaped the danger by flying, and Lillian tries to hide her trouble from me. Tender little heart! I’ll comfort it without delay.”

He sat looking about the dainty room still full of tokens of her presence. The piano stood open with a song he liked upon the rack; a bit of embroidery, whose progress he had often watched, lay in her basket with the little thimble near it; there was a strew of papers on the writing table, torn notes, scraps of drawing, and ball cards; a pearl-colored glove lay on the floor; and in the grate the faded flowers he had brought two days before. As his eye roved to and fro, he seemed to enjoy some happy dream, broken too soon by the sound of servants shutting up the house. He arose but lingered near the table, as if longing to search for some forgotten hint of himself.

“No, there has been enough lock picking and stealthy work; I’ll do no more for her sake. This theft will harm no one and tell no tales.” And snatching up the glove, Paul departed.

“Helen, the time has come. Are you ready?” he asked, entering her room an hour later.

“I am ready.” And rising, she stretched her hand to him with a proud expression, contrasting painfully with her helpless gesture.

“They have gone to the Hall, and we must follow. It is useless to wait longer; we gain nothing by it, and the claim must stand on such proof as we have, or fall for want of that one link. I am tired of disguise. I want to be myself and enjoy what I have won, unless I lose it all.”

“Paul, whatever happens, remember we cling together and share good or evil fortune as we always have done. I am a burden, but I cannot live without you, for you are my world. Do not desert me.”

She groped her way to him and clung to his strong arm as if it was her only stay. Paul drew her close, saying wistfully, as he caressed the beautiful sightless face leaning on his shoulder, “*Mia cara*, would it break your heart, if at the last hour I gave up all and let the word remain unspoken? My courage fails me, and in spite of the hard past I would gladly leave them in peace.”

“No, no, you shall not give it up!” cried Helen almost fiercely, while the slumbering fire of her southern nature flashed into her face. “You have waited so long, worked so hard, suffered so much, you must not lose your reward. You promised, and you must keep the promise.”

“But it is so beautiful, so noble to forgive, and return a blessing for a curse. Let us bury the old feud, and right the old wrong in a new way. Those two are so blameless, it is cruel to visit the sins of the dead on their innocent heads. My lady has suffered enough already, and Lillian is so young, so happy, so unfit to meet a storm like this. Oh, Helen, mercy is more divine than justice.”

Something moved Paul deeply, and Helen seemed about to yield, when the name of Lillian wrought a subtle change in her. The color died out of her face, her black eyes burned with a gloomy fire, and her voice was relentless as she answered, while her frail hands held him fast, “I will not let you give it up. We are as innocent as they; we have suffered more; and we deserve our rights, for we have no sin to expiate. Go on, Paul, and forget the sentimental folly that unmans you.”

Something in her words seemed to sting or wound him. His face darkened, and he put her away, saying briefly, “Let it be so then. In an hour we must go.”

On the evening of the same day, Lady Trevlyn and her daughter sat together in the octagon room at the Hall. Twilight was falling and candles were not yet brought, but a cheery fire blazed in the wide chimney, filling the apartment with a ruddy glow, turning Lillian's bright hair to gold and lending a tinge of color to my lady's pallid cheeks. The girl sat on a low lounging chair before the fire, her head on her hand, her eyes on the red embers, her thoughts — where? My lady lay on her couch, a little in the shadow, regarding her daughter with an anxious air, for over the young face a somber change had passed which filled her with disquiet.

"You are out of spirits, love," she said at last, breaking the long silence, as Lillian gave an unconscious sigh and leaned wearily into the depths of her chair.

"Yes, Mamma, a little."

"What is it? Are you ill?"

"No, Mamma; I think London gaiety is rather too much for me. I'm too young for it, as you often say, and I've found it out."

"Then it is only weariness that makes you so pale and grave, and so bent on coming back here?"

Lillian was the soul of truth, and with a moment's hesitation answered slowly, "Not that alone, Mamma. I'm worried about other things. Don't ask me what, please."

"But I must ask. Tell me, child, what things? Have you seen any one? Had letters, or been annoyed in any way about — anything?"

My lady spoke with sudden energy and rose on her arm, eyeing the girl with unmistakable suspicion and excitement.

"No, Mamma, it's only a foolish trouble of my own," answered Lillian, with a glance of surprise and a shamefaced look as the words reluctantly left her lips.

"Ah, a love trouble, nothing more? Thank God for that!" And my lady sank back as if a load was off her mind. "Tell me all, my darling; there is no confidante like a mother."

"You are very kind, and perhaps you can cure my folly if I tell it, and yet I am ashamed," murmured the girl. Then yielding to an irresistible impulse to ask help and sympathy, she added, in an almost inaudible tone, "I came away to escape from Paul."

"Because he loves you, Lillian?" asked my lady, with a frown and a half smile.

"Because he does *not* love me, Mamma." And the poor girl hid her burning cheeks in her hands, as if overwhelmed with maidenly shame at the implied confession of her own affection.

"My child, how is this? I cannot but be glad that he does *not* love you; yet it fills me with grief to see that this pains you. He is not a mate for you, Lillian.

Remember this, and forget the transient regard that has sprung up from that early intimacy of yours."

"He is wellborn, and now my equal in fortune, and oh, so much my superior in all gifts of mind and heart," sighed the girl, still with hidden face, for tears were dropping through her slender fingers.

"It may be, but there is a mystery about him; and I have a vague dislike to him in spite of all that has passed. But, darling, are you sure he does not care for you? I fancied I read a different story in his face, and when you begged to leave town so suddenly, I believed that you had seen this also, and kindly wished to spare him any pain."

"It was to spare myself. Oh, Mamma, he loves Helen, and will marry her although she is blind. He told me this, with a look I could not doubt, and so I came away to hide my sorrow," sobbed poor Lillian in despair.

Lady Trevlyn went to her and, laying the bright head on her motherly bosom, said soothingly as she caressed it, "My little girl, it is too soon for you to know these troubles, and I am punished for yielding to your entreaties for a peep at the gay world. It is now too late to spare you this; you have had your wish and must pay its price, dear. But, Lillian, call pride to aid you, and conquer this fruitless love. It cannot be very deep as yet, for you have known Paul, the man, too short a time to be hopelessly enamored. Remember, there are others, better, braver, more worthy of you; that life is long, and full of pleasure yet untried."

"Have no fears for me, Mamma. I'll not disgrace you or myself by any sentimental folly. I do love Paul, but I can conquer it, and I will. Give me a little time, and you shall see me quite myself again."

Lillian lifted her head with an air of proud resolve that satisfied her mother, and with a grateful kiss stole away to ease her full heart alone. As she disappeared Lady Trevlyn drew a long breath and, clasping her hands with a gesture of thanksgiving, murmured to herself in an accent of relief, "Only a love sorrow! I feared it was some new terror like the old one. Seventeen years of silence, seventeen years of secret dread and remorse for me," she said, pacing the room with tightly locked hands and eyes full of unspeakable anguish. "Oh, Richard, Richard! I forgave you long ago, and surely I have expiated my innocent offense by these years of suffering! For her sake I did it, and for her sake I still keep dumb. God knows I ask nothing for myself but rest and oblivion by your side."

Half an hour later, Paul stood at the hall door. It was ajar, for the family had returned unexpectedly, as was evident from the open doors and empty halls. Entering unseen, he ascended to the room my lady usually occupied. The fire burned low, Lillian's chair was empty, and my lady lay asleep, as if lulled by the sighing winds without and the deep silence that reigned within. Paul stood regarding her with a great pity softening his face as he marked the sunken eyes, pallid cheeks, locks too early gray, and restless lips muttering in dreams.

"I wish I could spare her this," he sighed, stooping to wake her with a word. But he did not speak, for, suddenly clutching the chain about her neck, she seemed to struggle with some invisible foe and beat it off, muttering audibly as she clenched her thin hands on the golden case. Paul leaned and listened as if the first word had turned him to stone, till the paroxysm had passed, and with a heavy sigh my lady sank into a calmer sleep. Then, with a quick glance over his shoulder, Paul skillfully opened the locket, drew out the silver key, replaced it with one from the piano close by, and stole from the house noiselessly as he had entered it.

That night, in the darkest hour before the dawn, a figure went gliding through the shadowy Park to its most solitary corner. Here stood the tomb of the Trevlyns, and here the figure paused. A dull spark of light woke in its hand, there was a clank of bars, the creak of rusty hinges, then light and figure both seemed swallowed up.

Standing in the tomb where the air was close and heavy, the pale glimmer of the lantern showed piles of moldering coffins in the niches, and everywhere lay tokens of decay and death. The man drew his hat lower over his eyes, pulled the muffler closer about his mouth, and surveyed the spot with an undaunted aspect, though the beating of his heart was heard in the deep silence. Nearest the door stood a long casket covered with black velvet and richly decorated with silver ornaments, tarnished now. The Trevlyns had been a stalwart race, and the last sleeper brought there had evidently been of goodly stature, for the modern coffin was as ponderous as the great oaken beds where lay the bones of generations. Lifting the lantern, the intruder brushed the dust from the shield-shaped plate, read the name RICHARD TREVLYN and a date, and, as if satisfied, placed a key in the lock, half-raised the lid, and, averting his head that he might not see the ruin seventeen long years had made, he laid his hand on the dead breast and from the folded shroud drew a mildewed paper. One glance sufficed, the casket was relocked, the door rebarred, the light extinguished, and the man vanished like a ghost in the darkness of the wild October night.

Chapter VIII

WHICH?

"A Gentleman, my lady."

Taking a card from the silver salver on which the servant offered it, Lady Trevlyn read, "Paul Talbot," and below the name these penciled words, "I beseech you to see me." Lillian stood beside her and saw the line. Their eyes met, and in the girl's face was such a sudden glow of hope, and love, and longing, that the mother could not doubt or disappoint her wish.

"I will see him," she said.

"Oh, Mamma, how kind you are!" cried the girl with a passionate embrace, adding breathlessly, "He did not ask for me. I cannot see him yet. I'll hide in the alcove, and can appear or run away as I like when we know why he comes."

They were in the library, for, knowing Lillian's fondness for the room which held no dark memories for her, my lady conquered her dislike and often sat there. As she spoke, the girl glided into the deep recess of a bay window and drew the heavy curtains just as Paul's step sounded at the door.

Hiding her agitation with a woman's skill, my lady rose with outstretched hand to welcome him. He bowed but did not take the hand, saying, in a voice of grave respect in which was audible an undertone of strong emotion, "Pardon me, Lady Trevlyn. Hear what I have to say; and then if you offer me your hand, I shall gratefully receive it."

She glanced at him, and saw that he was very pale, that his eye glittered with suppressed excitement, and his whole manner was that of a man who had nerved himself up to the performance of a difficult but intensely interesting task. Fancying these signs of agitation only natural in a young lover coming to woo, my lady smiled, reseated herself, and calmly answered, "I will listen patiently. Speak freely, Paul, and remember I am an old friend."

"I wish I could forget it. Then my task would be easier," he murmured in a voice of mingled regret and resolution, as he leaned on a tall chair opposite and wiped his damp forehead, with a look of such deep compassion that her heart sank with a nameless fear.

"I must tell you a long story, and ask your forgiveness for the offenses I committed against you when a boy. A mistaken sense of duty guided me, and I obeyed it blindly. Now I see my error and regret it," he said earnestly.

"Go on," replied my lady, while the vague dread grew stronger, and she braced her nerves as for some approaching shock. She forgot Lillian, forgot everything but the strange aspect of the man before her, and the words to which she listened like a statue. Still standing pale and steady, Paul spoke rapidly, while his eyes were full of mingled sternness, pity, and remorse.

"Twenty years ago, an English gentleman met a friend in a little Italian town, where he had married a beautiful wife. The wife had a sister as lovely as herself, and the young man, during that brief stay, loved and married her — in a very private manner, lest his father should disinherit him. A few months passed, and the Englishman was called home to take possession of his title and estates, the father being dead. He went alone, promising to send for the wife when all was ready. He told no one of his marriage, meaning to surprise his English friends by producing the lovely woman unexpectedly. He had been in England but a short time when he received a letter from the old priest of the Italian town, saying the cholera had swept through it, carrying off half its inhabitants, his wife and friend among others. This blow prostrated the young man, and when he recovered he hid his grief, shut himself up in his country house, and tried to forget. Accident threw in his way another lovely woman, and he married again. Before the first year was out, the friend whom he supposed was dead appeared, and told him that his wife still lived, and had borne him a child. In the terror and confusion of the plague, the priest had mistaken one sister for the other, as the elder did die."

"Yes, yes, I know; go on!" gasped my lady, with white lips, and eyes that never left the narrator's face.

"This friend had met with misfortune after flying from the doomed village with the surviving sister. They had waited long for letters, had written, and, when no answer came, had been delayed by illness and poverty from reaching England. At this time the child was born, and the friend, urged by the wife and his own interest, came here, learned that Sir Richard was married, and hurried to him in much distress. We can imagine the grief and horror of the unhappy man. In that interview the friend promised to leave all to Sir Richard, to preserve the secret till some means of relief could be found; and with this promise he returned, to guard and comfort the forsaken wife. Sir Richard wrote the truth to Lady Trevlyn, meaning to kill himself, as the only way of escape from the terrible situation between two women, both so beloved, both so innocently wronged. The pistol lay ready, but death came without its aid, and Sir Richard was spared the sin of suicide."

Paul paused for breath, but Lady Trevlyn motioned him to go on, still sitting rigid and white as the marble image near her.

"The friend only lived to reach home and tell the story. It killed the wife, and she died, imploring the old priest to see her child righted and its father's name secured to it. He promised; but he was poor, the child was a frail baby, and he waited. Years passed, and when the child was old enough to ask for its parents and demand its due, the proofs of the marriage were lost, and nothing remained but a ring, a bit of writing, and the name. The priest was very old, had neither friends, money, nor proofs to help him; but I was strong and hopeful, and though a mere boy I resolved to do the work. I made my way to England, to Trevlyn Hall, and by various stratagems (among which, I am ashamed to say, were false keys and feigned sleepwalking) I collected many proofs, but nothing which would satisfy a court, for no one but you knew where Sir Richard's confession was. I searched every nook and corner of the Hall, but in vain, and began to despair, when news of the death of Father Cosmo recalled me to Italy; for Helen was left to my care then. The old man had faithfully recorded the facts and left witnesses to prove the truth of his story; but for four years I never used it, never made any effort to secure the title or estates."

"Why not?" breathed my lady in a faint whisper, as hope suddenly revived.

"Because I was grateful," and for the first time Paul's voice faltered. "I was a stranger, and you took me in. I never could forget that, nor tie many kindnesses bestowed upon the friendless boy. This afflicted me, even while I was acting a false part, and when I was away my heart failed me. But Helen gave me no peace; for my sake, she urged me to keep the vow made to that poor mother, and threatened to tell the story herself. Talbot's benefaction left me no excuse for delaying longer, and I came to finish the hardest task I can ever undertake. I feared that a long dispute would follow any appeal to law, and meant to appeal first to you, but fate befriended me, and the last proof was found."

"Found! Where?" cried Lady Trevlyn, springing up aghast.

"In Sir Richard's coffin, where you hid it, not daring to destroy, yet fearing to keep it."

"Who has betrayed me?" And her eye glanced wildly about the room, as if she feared to see some spectral accuser.

"Your own lips, my lady. Last night I came to speak of this. You lay asleep, and in some troubled dream spoke of the paper, safe in its writer's keeping, and your strange treasure here, the key of which you guarded day and night. I divined the truth. Remembering Hester's stories, I took the key from your helpless hand, found the paper on Sir Richard's dead breast, and now demand that you confess your part in this tragedy."

"I do, I do! I confess, I yield, I relinquish everything, and ask pity only for my child."

Lady Trevlyn fell upon her knees before him, with a submissive gesture, but imploring eyes, for, amid the wreck of womanly pride and worldly fortune, the mother's heart still clung to its idol.

"Who should pity her, if not I? God knows I would have spared her this blow if I could; but Helen would not keep silent, and I was driven to finish what I had begun. Tell Lillian this, and do not let her hate me."

As Paul spoke, tenderly, eagerly, the curtain parted, and Lillian appeared, trembling with the excitement of that interview, but conscious of only one emotion as she threw herself into his arms, crying in a tone of passionate delight, "Brother! Brother! Now I may love you!"

Paul held her close, and for a moment forgot everything but the joy of that moment. Lillian spoke first, looking up through tears of tenderness, her little hand laid caressingly against his cheek, as she whispered with sudden bloom in her own, "Now I know why I loved you so well, and now I can see you marry Helen without breaking my heart. Oh, Paul, you are still mine, and I care for nothing else."

"But, Lillian, I am not your brother."

"Then, in heaven's name, who are you?" she cried, tearing herself from his arms.

"Your lover, dear!"

"Who, then, is the heir?" demanded Lady Trevlyn, springing up, as Lillian turned to seek shelter with her mother.

"I am."

Helen spoke, and Helen stood on the threshold of the door, with a hard, haughty look upon her beautiful face.

"You told your story badly, Paul," she said, in a bitter tone. "You forgot me, forgot my affliction, my loneliness, my wrongs, and the natural desire of a child to clear her mother's honor and claim her father's name. I am Sir Richard's eldest daughter. I can prove my birth, and I demand my right with his own words to sustain me."

She paused, but no one spoke; and with a slight tremor in her proud voice, she added, "Paul has done the work; he shall have the reward. I only want my father's name. Title and fortune are nothing to one like me. I coveted and claimed them that I might give them to you, Paul, my one friend, always, so tender and so true."

"I'll have none of it," he answered, almost fiercely. "I have kept my promise, and am free. You chose to claim your own, although I offered all I had to buy your silence. It is yours by right — take it, and enjoy it if you can. I'll have no reward for work like this."

He turned from her with a look that would have stricken her to the heart could she have seen it. She felt it, and it seemed to augment some secret anguish, for she pressed her hands against her bosom with an expression of deep suffering, exclaiming passionately, "Yes, I *will* keep it, since I am to lose all else. I am tired of pity. Power is sweet, and I will use it. Go, Paul, and be happy if you can, with a nameless wife, and the world's compassion or contempt to sting your pride."

"Oh, Lillian, where shall we go? This is no longer our home, but who will receive us now?" cried Lady Trevlyn, in a tone of despair, for her spirit was utterly broken by the thought of the shame and sorrow in store for this beloved and innocent child.

"I will." And Paul's face shone with a love and loyalty they could not doubt. "My lady, you gave me a home when I was homeless; now let me pay my debt. Lillian, I have loved you from the time when, a romantic boy, I wore your little picture in my breast, and vowed to win you if I lived. I dared not speak before, but now, when other hearts may be shut against you, mine stands wide open to welcome you. Come, both. Let me protect and cherish you, and so atone for the sorrow I have brought you."

It was impossible to resist the sincere urgency of his voice, the tender reverence of his manner, as he took the two forlorn yet innocent creatures into the shelter of his strength and love. They clung to him instinctively, feeling that there still remained to them one staunch friend whom adversity could not estrange.

An eloquent silence fell upon the room, broken only by sobs, grateful whispers, and the voiceless vows that lovers plight with eyes, and hands, and tender lips. Helen was forgotten, till Lillian, whose elastic spirit threw off sorrow as a flower sheds the rain, looked up to thank Paul, with smiles as well as tears, and saw the lonely figure in the shadow. Her attitude was full of pathetic significance; she still stood on the threshold, for no one had welcomed her, and in the strange room she knew not where to go; her hands were clasped before her face, as if those sightless eyes had seen the joy she could not share, and at her feet lay the time-stained paper that gave her a barren title, but no love. Had Lillian known how sharp a conflict between passion and pride, jealousy and generosity, was going on in that young heart, she could not have spoken in a tone of truer pity or sincerer goodwill than that in which she softly said, "Poor girl! We must not forget her, for, with all her wealth, she is poor compared to us. We both had one father, and should love each other in spite of this misfortune.

Helen, may I call you sister?”

“Not yet. Wait till I deserve it.”

As if that sweet voice had kindled an answering spark of nobleness in her own heart, Helen’s face changed beautifully, as she tore the paper to shreds, saying in a glad, impetuous tone, while the white flakes fluttered from her hands, “I, too, can be generous. I, too, can forgive. I bury the sad past. See! I yield my claim, I destroy my proofs, I promise eternal silence, and keep ‘Paul’s cousin’ for my only title. Yes, you are happy, for you love one another!” she cried, with a sudden passion of tears. “Oh, forgive me, pity me, and take me in, for I am all alone and in the dark!”

There could be but one reply to an appeal like that, and they gave it, as they welcomed her with words that sealed a household league of mutual secrecy and sacrifice.

They *were* happy, for the world never knew the hidden tie that bound them so faithfully together, never learned how well the old prophecy had been fulfilled, or guessed what a tragedy of life and death the silver key unlocked.

PAULINE’S PASSION AND PUNISHMENT

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Chapter I

To and fro, like a wild creature in its cage, paced that handsome woman, with bent head, locked hands, and restless steps. Some mental storm, swift and sudden as a tempest of the tropics, had swept over her and left its marks behind. As if in anger at the beauty now proved powerless, all ornaments had been flung away, yet still it shone undimmed, and filled her with a passionate regret. A jewel glittered at her feet, leaving the lace rent to shreds on the indignant bosom that had worn it; the wreaths of hair that had crowned her with a woman's most womanly adornment fell disordered upon shoulders that gleamed the fairer for the scarlet of the pomegranate flowers clinging to the bright meshes that had imprisoned them an hour ago; and over the face, once so affluent in youthful bloom, a stern pallor had fallen like a blight, for pride was slowly conquering passion, and despair had murdered hope.

Pausing in her troubled march, she swept away the curtain swaying in the wind and looked out, as if imploring help from Nature, the great mother of us all. A summer moon rode high in a cloudless heaven, and far as eye could reach stretched the green wilderness of a Cuban *cafetal*. No forest, but a tropical orchard, rich in lime, banana, plantain, palm, and orange trees, under whose protective shade grew the evergreen coffee plant, whose dark-red berries are the fortune of their possessor, and the luxury of one-half the world. Wide avenues diverging from the mansion, with its belt of brilliant shrubs and flowers, formed shadowy vistas, along which, on the wings of the wind, came a breath of far-off music, like a wooing voice; for the magic of night and distance lulled the cadence of a Spanish *contradanza* to a trance of sound, soft, subdued, and infinitely sweet. It was a southern scene, but not a southern face that looked out upon it with such unerring glance; there was no southern languor in the figure, stately and erect; no southern swarthiness on fairest cheek and arm; no southern darkness in the shadowy gold of the neglected hair; the light frost of northern snows lurked in the features, delicately cut, yet vividly alive, betraying a temperament ardent, dominant, and subtle. For passion burned in the deep eyes, changing their violet to black. Pride sat on the forehead, with its dark brows; all a woman's sweetest spells touched the lips, whose shape was a smile; and in the spirited carriage of the head appeared the freedom of an intellect ripened under colder skies, the energy of a nature that could wring strength from suffering, and dare to act where feebler souls would only dare desire.

Standing thus, conscious only of the wound that bled in that high heart of hers, and the longing that gradually took shape and deepened to a purpose, an alien presence changed the tragic atmosphere of that still room and woke her from her dangerous mood. A wonderfully winning guise this apparition wore, for youth, hope, and love endowed it with the charm that gives beauty to the plainest, while their reign endures. A boy in any other climate, in this his nineteen years had given him the stature of a man; and Spain, the land of romance, seemed embodied in this figure, full of the lithe slenderness of the whispering palms overhead, the warm coloring of the deep-toned flowers sleeping in the room, the native grace of the tame antelope lifting its human eyes to his as he lingered on the threshold in an attitude eager yet timid, watching that other figure as it looked into the night and found no solace there.

"Pauline!"

She turned as if her thought had taken voice and answered her, regarded him a moment, as if hesitating to receive the granted wish, then beckoned with the one word.

"Come!"

Instantly the fear vanished, the ardor deepened, and with an imperious "Lie down!" to his docile attendant, the young man obeyed with equal docility, looking as wistfully toward his mistress as the brute toward her master, while he waited proudly humble for her commands.

"Manuel, why are you here?"

"Forgive me! I saw Dolores bring a letter; you vanished, an hour passed, I could wait no longer, and I came."

"I am glad, I needed my one friend. Read that."

She offered a letter, and with her steady eyes upon him, her purpose strengthening as she looked, stood watching the changes of that expressive countenance. This was the letter:

Pauline —

Six months ago I left you, promising to return and take you home my wife; I loved you, but I deceived you; for though my heart was wholly yours, my hand was not mine to give. This it was that haunted me through all that blissful summer, this that marred my happiness when you owned you loved me, and this drove me from you, hoping I could break the tie with which I had rashly bound myself. I could not, I am married, and there all ends. Hate me, forget me, solace your pride with the memory that none knew your wrong, assure your peace with the knowledge that mine is destroyed forever, and leave my punishment to remorse and time.

Gilbert

With a gesture of wrathful contempt, Manuel flung the paper from him as he flashed a look at his companion, muttering through his teeth, “Traitor! Shall I kill him?”

Pauline laughed low to herself, a dreary sound, but answered with a slow darkening of the face that gave her words an ominous significance. “Why should you? Such revenge is brief and paltry, fit only for mock tragedies or poor souls who have neither the will to devise nor the will to execute a better. There are fates more terrible than death; weapons more keen than poniards, more noiseless than pistols. Women use such, and work out a subtler vengeance than men can conceive. Leave Gilbert to remorse — and me.”

She paused an instant, and by some strong effort banished the black frown from her brow, quenched the baleful fire of her eyes, and left nothing visible but the pale determination that made her beautiful face more eloquent than her words.

“Manuel, in a week I leave the island.”

“Alone, Pauline?”

“No, not alone.”

A moment they looked into each other’s eyes, each endeavoring to read the other. Manuel saw some indomitable purpose, bent on conquering all obstacles. Pauline saw doubt, desire, and hope; knew that a word would bring the ally she needed; and, with a courage as native to her as her pride, resolved to utter it.

Seating herself, she beckoned her companion to assume the place beside her, but for the first time he hesitated. Something in the unnatural calmness of her manner troubled him, for his southern temperament was alive to influences whose presence would have been unfelt by one less sensitive. He took the cushion at her feet, saying, half tenderly, half reproachfully, “Let me keep my old place till I know in what character I am to fill the new. The man you trusted has deserted you; the boy you pitied will prove loyal. Try him, Pauline.”

“I will.”

And with the bitter smile unchanged upon her lips, the low voice unshaken in its tones, the deep eyes unwavering in their gaze, Pauline went on:

“You know my past, happy as a dream till eighteen. Then all was swept away, home, fortune, friends, and I was left, like an unfledged bird, without even the shelter of a cage. For five years I have made my life what I could, humble, honest, but never happy, till I came here, for here I saw Gilbert. In the poor companion of your guardian’s daughter he seemed to see the heiress I had been, and treated me as such. This flattered my pride and touched my heart. He was kind, I grateful; then he loved me, and God knows how utterly I loved him! A few months of happiness the purest, then he went to make home ready for me, and I believed him; for where I wholly love I wholly trust. While my own peace was undisturbed, I learned to read the language of your eyes, Manuel, to find the boy grown into the man, the friend warmed into a lover. Your youth had kept me blind too long. Your society had grown dear to me, and I loved you like a sister for your unvarying kindness to the solitary woman who earned her bread and found it bitter. I told you my secret to prevent the utterance of your own. You remember the promise you made me then, keep it still, and bury the knowledge of my lost happiness deep in your pitying heart, as I shall in my proud one. Now the storm is over, and I am ready for my work again, but it must be a new task in a new scene. I hate this house, this room, the faces I must meet, the duties I must perform, for the memory of that traitor haunts them all. I see a future full of interest, a stage whereon I could play a stirring part. I long for it intensely, yet cannot make it mine alone. Manuel, do you love me still?"

Bending suddenly, she brushed back the dark hair that streaked his forehead and searched the face that in an instant answered her. Like a swift rising light, the eloquent blood rushed over swarthy cheek and brow, the slumberous softness of the eyes kindled with a flash, and the lips, sensitive as any woman's, trembled yet broke into a rapturous smile as he cried, with fervent brevity, "I would die for you!"

A look of triumph swept across her face, for with this boy, as chivalrous as ardent, she knew that words were not mere breath. Still, with her stern purpose uppermost, she changed the bitter smile into one half-timid, half-tender, as she bent still nearer, "Manuel, in a week I leave the island. Shall I go alone?"

"No, Pauline."

He understood her now. She saw it in the sudden paleness that fell on him, heard it in the rapid beating of his heart, felt it in the strong grasp that fastened on her hand, and knew that the first step was won. A regretful pang smote her, but the dark mood which had taken possession of her stifled the generous warnings of her better self and drove her on.

"Listen, Manuel. A strange spirit rules me tonight, but I will have no reserves from you, all shall be told; then, if you will come, be it so; if not, I shall go my way as solitary as I came. If you think that this loss has broken my heart, undeceive yourself, for such as I live years in an hour and show no sign. I have shed no tears, uttered no cry, asked no comfort; yet, since I read that letter, I have suffered more than many suffer in a lifetime. I am not one to lament long over any hopeless sorrow. A single paroxysm, sharp and short, and it is over. Contempt has killed my love, I have buried it, and no power can make it live again, except as a pale ghost that will not rest till Gilbert shall pass through an hour as bitter as the last."

"Is that the task you give yourself, Pauline?"

The savage element that lurks in southern blood leaped up in the boy's heart as he listened, glittered in his eye, and involuntarily found expression in the nervous grip of the hands that folded a fairer one between them. Alas for Pauline that she had roused the sleeping devil, and was glad to see it!

"Yes, it is weak, wicked, and unwomanly; yet I persist as relentlessly as any Indian on a war trail. See me as I am, not the gay girl you have known, but a revengeful woman with but one tender spot now left in her heart, the place you fill. I have been wronged, and I long to right myself at once. Time is too slow; I cannot wait, for that man must be taught that two can play at the game of hearts, taught soon and sharply. I can do this, can wound as I have been wounded, can sting him with contempt, and prove that I too can forget."

"Go on, Pauline. Show me how I am to help you."

"Manuel, I want fortune, rank, splendor, and power; you can give me all these, and a faithful friend beside. I desire to show Gilbert the creature he deserted no longer poor, unknown, unloved, but lifted higher than himself, cherished, honored, applauded, her life one of royal pleasure, herself a happy queen. Beauty, grace, and talent you tell me I possess; wealth gives them luster, rank exalts them, power makes them irresistible. Place these worldly gifts in my hand and that hand is yours. See, I offer it."

She did so, but it was not taken. Manuel had left his seat and now stood before her, awed by the undertone of strong emotion in her calmly spoken words, bewildered by the proposal so abruptly made, longing to ask the natural question hovering on his lips, yet too generous to utter it. Pauline read his thought, and answered it with no touch of pain or pride in the magical voice that seldom spoke in vain.

"I know your wish; it is as just as your silence is generous, and I reply to it in all sincerity. You would ask, 'When I have given all that I possess, what do I receive in return?' This — a wife whose friendship is as warm as many a woman's love; a wife who will give you all the heart still left her, and cherish the hope that time may bring a harvest of real affection to repay you for the faithfulness of years; who, though she takes the retribution of a wrong into her hands and executes it in the face of heaven, never will forget the honorable name you give into her keeping or blemish it by any act of hers. I can promise no more. Will this content you, Manuel?"

Before she ended his face was hidden in his hands, and tears streamed through them as he listened, for like a true child of the south each emotion found free vent and spent itself as swiftly as it rose. The reaction was more than he could bear, for in a moment his life was changed, months of hopeless longing were banished with a word, a blissful yes canceled the hard no that had been accepted as inexorable, and Happiness, lifting her full cup to his lips, bade him drink. A moment he yielded to the natural relief, then dashed his tears away and threw himself at Pauline's feet in that attitude fit only for a race as graceful as impassioned.

"Forgive me! Take all I have — fortune, name, and my poor self; use us as you will, we are proud and happy to be spent for you! No service will be too hard, no trial too long if in the end you learn to love me with one tithe of the affection I have made my life. Do you mean it? Am I to go with you? To be near you always, to call you wife, and know we are each other's until death? What have I ever done to earn a fate like this?"

Fast and fervently he spoke, and very winsome was the glad abandonment of this young lover, half boy, half man, possessing the simplicity of the one, the fervor of the other. Pauline looked and listened with a soothing sense of consolation in the knowledge that this loyal heart was all her own, a sweet foretaste of the devotion which henceforth was to shelter her from poverty, neglect, and wrong, and turn life's sunniest side to one who had so long seen only its most bleak and barren. Still at her feet, his arms about her waist, his face flushed and proud, lifted to hers, Manuel saw the cold mask soften, the stern eyes melt with a sudden dew as Pauline watched him, saying, "Dear Manuel, love me less; I am not worth such ardent and entire faith. Pause and reflect before you take this step. I will not bind you to my fate too soon lest you repent too late. We both stand alone in the world, free to make or mar our future as we will. I have chosen my lot. Recall all it may cost you to share it and be sure the price is not too high a one. Remember I am poor, you the possessor of one princely fortune, the sole heir to another."

"The knowledge of this burdened me before; now I glory in it because I have the more for you."

"Remember, I am older than yourself, and may early lose the beauty you love so well, leaving an old wife to burden your youth."

"What are a few years to me? Women like you grow lovelier with age, and you shall have a strong young husband to lean on all your life."

"Remember, I am not of your faith, and the priests will shut me out from your heaven."

"Let them prate as they will. Where you go I will go; Santa Paula shall be my madonna!"

"Remember, I am a deserted woman, and in the world we are going to my name may become the sport of that man’s cruel tongue. Could you bear that patiently; and curb your fiery pride if I desired it?”

“Anything for you, Pauline!”

“One thing more. I give you my liberty; for a time give me forbearance in return, and though wed in haste woo me slowly, lest this sore heart of mine find even your light yoke heavy. Can you promise this, and wait till time has healed my wound, and taught me to be meek?”

“I swear to obey you in all things; make me what you will, for soul and body I am wholly yours henceforth.”

“Faithful and true! I knew you would not fail me. Now go, Manuel. Tomorrow do your part resolutely as I shall do mine, and in a week we will begin the new life together. Ours is a strange betrothal, but it shall not lack some touch of tenderness from me. Love, good night.”

Pauline bent till her bright hair mingled with the dark, kissed the boy on lips and forehead as a fond sister might have done, then put him gently from her; and like one in a blessed dream he went away to pace all night beneath her window, longing for the day.

As the echo of his steps died along the corridor, Pauline’s eye fell on the paper lying where her lover flung it. At this sight all the softness vanished, the stern woman reappeared, and, crushing it in her hand with slow significance, she said low to herself, “This is an old, old story, but it shall have a new ending.”

Chapter II

“What jewels will the señora wear tonight?”

“None, Dolores. Manuel has gone for flowers — he likes them best. You may go.”

“But the señora’s toilette is not finished; the sandals, the gloves, the garland yet remain.”

“Leave them all; I shall not go down. I am tired of this endless folly.
Give me that book and go.”

The pretty Creole obeyed; and careless of Dolores’ work, Pauline sank into the deep chair with a listless mien, turned the pages for a little, then lost herself in thoughts that seemed to bring no rest.

Silently the young husband entered and, pausing, regarded his wife with mingled pain and pleasure — pain to see her so spiritless, pleasure to see her so fair. She seemed unconscious of his presence till the fragrance of his floral burden betrayed him, and looking up to smile a welcome she met a glance that changed the sad dreamer into an excited actor, for it told her that the object of her search was found. Springing erect, she asked eagerly, “Manuel, is he here?”

“Yes.”

“Alone?”

“His wife is with him.”

“Is she beautiful?”

“Pretty, petite, and petulant.”

“And he?”

“Unchanged: the same imposing figure and treacherous face, the same restless eye and satanic mouth. Pauline, let me insult him!”

“Not yet. Were they together?”

“Yes. He seemed anxious to leave her, but she called him back imperiously, and he came like one who dared not disobey.”

“Did he see you?”

“The crowd was too dense, and I kept in the shadow.”

“The wife’s name? Did you learn it?”

“Barbara St. Just.”

“Ah! I knew her once and will again. Manuel, am I beautiful tonight?”

“How can you be otherwise to me?”

“That is not enough. I must look my fairest to others, brilliant and blithe, a happy-hearted bride whose honeymoon is not yet over.”

“For his sake, Pauline?”

“For yours. I want him to envy you your youth, your comeliness, your content; to see the man he once sneered at the husband of the woman he once loved; to recall impotent regret. I know his nature, and can stir him to his heart’s core with a look, revenge myself with a word, and read the secrets of his life with a skill he cannot fathom.”

“And when you have done all this, shall you be happier, Pauline?”

“Infinitely; our three weeks’ search is ended, and the real interest of the plot begins. I have played the lover for your sake, now play the man of the world for mine. This is the moment we have waited for. Help me to make it successful. Come! Crown me with your garland, give me the bracelets that were your wedding gift — none can be too brilliant for tonight. Now the gloves and fan. Stay, my sandals — you shall play Dolores and tie them on.”

With an air of smiling coquetry he had never seen before, Pauline stretched out a truly Spanish foot and offered him its dainty covering. Won by the animation of her manner, Manuel forgot his misgivings and played his part with boyish spirit, hovering about his stately wife as no assiduous maid had ever done; for every flower was fastened with a word sweeter than itself, the white arms kissed as the ornaments went on, and when the silken knots were deftly accomplished, the lighthearted bridegroom performed a little dance of triumph about his idol, till she arrested him, beckoning as she spoke.

"Manuel, I am waiting to assume the last best ornament you have given me, my handsome husband." Then, as he came to her laughing with frank pleasure at her praise, she added, "You, too, must look your best and bravest now, and remember you must enact the man tonight. Before Gilbert wear your stateliest aspect, your tenderest to me, your courtliest to his wife. You possess dramatic skill. Use it for my sake, and come for your reward when this night's work is done."

The great hotel was swarming with life, ablaze with light, resonant with the tread of feet, the hum of voices, the musical din of the band, and full of the sights and sounds which fill such human hives at a fashionable watering place in the height of the season. As Manuel led his wife along the grand hall thronged with promenaders, his quick ear caught the whispered comments of the passers-by, and the fragmentary rumors concerning themselves amused him infinitely.

"*Mon ami!* There are five bridal couples here tonight, and there is the handsomest, richest, and most enchanting of them all. The groom is not yet twenty, they tell me, and the bride still younger. Behold them!"

Manuel looked down at Pauline with a mirthful glance, but she had not heard.

"See, Belle! Cubans; own half the island between them. Splendid, aren't they? Look at the diamonds on her lovely arms, and his ravishing moustache. Isn't he your ideal of Prince Djalma, in The Wandering Jew?"

A pretty girl, forgetting propriety in interest, pointed as they passed. Manuel half-bowed to the audible compliment, and the blushing damsel vanished, but Pauline had not seen.

"Jack, there's the owner of the black span you fell into raptures over.
My lord and lady look as highbred as their stud. We'll patronize them!"

Manuel muttered a disdainful "*Impertinente!*" between his teeth as he surveyed a brace of dandies with an air that augured ill for the patronage of Young America, but Pauline was unconscious of both criticism and reproof. A countercurrent held them stationary for a moment, and close behind them sounded a voice saying, confidentially, to some silent listener, "The Redmonds are here tonight, and I am curious to see how he bears his disappointment. You know he married for money, and was outwitted in the bargain; for his wife's fortune not only proves to be much less than he was led to believe, but is so tied up that he is entirely dependent upon her, and the bachelor debts he sold himself to liquidate still harass him, with a wife's reproaches to augment the affliction. To be ruled by a spoiled child's whims is a fit punishment for a man whom neither pride nor principle could curb before. Let us go and look at the unfortunate."

Pauline heard now. Manuel felt her start, saw her flush and pale, then her eye lit, and the dark expression he dreaded to see settled on her face as she whispered, like a satanic echo, "Let us also go and look at this unfortunate."

A jealous pang smote the young man's heart as he recalled the past.

"You pity him, Pauline, and pity is akin to love."

"I only pity what I respect. Rest content, my husband."

Steadily her eyes met his, and the hand whose only ornament was a wedding ring went to meet the one folded on his arm with a confiding gesture that made the action a caress.

"I will try to be, yet mine is a hard part," Manuel answered with a sigh, then silently they both paced on.

Gilbert Redmond lounged behind his wife's chair, looking intensely bored.

"Have you had enough of this folly, Babie?"

"No, we have but just come. Let us dance."

"Too late; they have begun."

"Then go about with me. It's very tiresome sitting here."

"It is too warm to walk in all that crowd, child."

"You are so indolent! Tell me who people are as they pass. I know no one here."

"Nor I."

But his act belied the words, for as they passed his lips he rose erect, with a smothered exclamation and startled face, as if a ghost had suddenly confronted him. The throng had thinned, and as his wife followed the direction of his glance, she saw no uncanny apparition to cause such evident dismay, but a woman fair-haired, violet-eyed, blooming and serene, sweeping down the long hall with noiseless grace. An air of sumptuous life pervaded her, the shimmer of bridal snow surrounded her, bridal gifts shone on neck and arms, and bridal happiness seemed to touch her with its tender charm as she looked up at her companion, as if there were but one human being in the world to her. This companion, a man slender and tall, with a face delicately dark as a fine bronze, looked back at her with eyes as eloquent as her own, while both spoke rapidly and low in the melodious language which seems made for lover's lips.

"Gilbert, who are they?"

There was no answer, and before she could repeat the question the approaching pair paused before her, and the beautiful woman offered her hand, saying, with inquiring smiles, “Barbara, have you forgotten your early friend, Pauline?”

Recognition came with the familiar name, and Mrs. Redmond welcomed the newcomer with a delight as unrestrained as if she were still the schoolgirl, Babie. Then, recovering herself, she said, with a pretty attempt at dignity, “Let me present my husband. Gilbert, come and welcome my friend Pauline Valary.”

Scarlet with shame, dumb with conflicting emotions, and utterly deserted by self-possession, Redmond stood with downcast eyes and agitated mien, suffering a year’s remorse condensed into a moment. A mute gesture was all the greeting he could offer. Pauline slightly bent her haughty head as she answered, in a voice frostily sweet, “Your wife mistakes. Pauline Valary died three weeks ago, and Pauline Laroche rose from her ashes. Manuel, my schoolmate, Mrs. Redmond; Gilbert you already know.”

With the manly presence he could easily assume and which was henceforth to be his role in public, Manuel bowed courteously to the lady, coldly to the gentleman, and looked only at his wife. Mrs. Redmond, though childish, was observant; she glanced from face to face, divined a mystery, and spoke out at once.

“Then you have met before? Gilbert, you have never told me this.”

“It was long ago — in Cuba. I believed they had forgotten me.”

“I never forget.” And Pauline’s eye turned on him with a look he dared not meet.

Unsilenced by her husband’s frown, Mrs. Redmond, intent on pleasing herself, drew her friend to the seat beside her as she said petulantly, “Gilbert tells me nothing, and I am constantly discovering things which might have given me pleasure had he only chosen to be frank. I’ve spoken of you often, yet he never betrayed the least knowledge of you, and I take it very ill of him, because I am sure he has not forgotten you. Sit here, Pauline, and let me tease you with questions, as I used to do so long ago. You were always patient with me, and though far more beautiful, your face is still the same kind one that comforted the little child at school. Gilbert, enjoy your friend, and leave us to ourselves until the dance is over.”

Pauline obeyed; but as she chatted, skillfully leading the young wife’s conversation to her own affairs, she listened to the two voices behind her, watched the two figures reflected in the mirror before her, and felt a secret pride in Manuel’s address, for it was evident that the former positions were renewed.

The timid boy who had feared the sarcastic tongue of his guardian’s guest, and shrunk from his presence to conceal the jealousy that was his jest, now stood beside his formal rival, serene and self-possessed, by far the manliest man of the two, for no shame daunted him, no fear oppressed him, no dishonorable deed left him at the mercy of another's tongue.

Gilbert Redmond felt this keenly, and cursed the falsehood which had placed him in such an unenviable position. It was vain to assume the old superiority that was forfeited; but too much a man of the world to be long discomforted by any contretemps like this, he rapidly regained his habitual ease of manner, and avoiding the perilous past clung to the safer present, hoping, by some unguarded look or word, to fathom the purpose of his adversary, for such he knew the husband of Pauline must be at heart. But Manuel schooled his features, curbed his tongue, and when his hot blood tempted him to point his smooth speech with a taunt, or offer a silent insult with the eye, he remembered Pauline, looked down on the graceful head below, and forgot all other passions in that of love.

"Gilbert, my shawl. The sea air chills me."

"I forgot it, Babie."

"Allow me to supply the want."

Mindful of his wife's commands, Manuel seized this opportunity to win a glance of commendation from her. And taking the downy mantle that hung upon his arm, he wrapped the frail girl in it with a care that made the act as cordial as courteous. Mrs. Redmond felt the charm of his manner with the quickness of a woman, and sent a reproachful glance at Gilbert as she said plaintively, "Ah! It is evident that my honeymoon is over, and the assiduous lover replaced by the negligent husband. Enjoy your midsummer night's dream while you may, Pauline, and be ready for the awakening that must come."

"Not to her, madame, for our honeymoon shall last till the golden wedding day comes round. Shall it not, cariña?"

"There is no sign of waning yet, Manuel," and Pauline looked up into her husband's face with a genuine affection which made her own more beautiful and filled his with a visible content. Gilbert read the glance, and in that instant suffered the first pang of regret that Pauline had foretold. He spoke abruptly, longing to be away.

"Babie, we may dance now, if you will."

"I am going, but not with you — so give me my fan, and entertain Pauline till my return."

He unclosed his hand, but the delicately carved fan fell at his feet in a shower of ivory shreds — he had crushed it as he watched his first love with the bitter thought "It might have been!"

"Forgive me, Babie, it was too frail for use; you should choose a stronger."

"I will next time, and a gentler hand to hold it. Now, Monsieur Laroche, I am ready."

Mrs. Redmond rose in a small bustle of satisfaction, shook out her flounces, glanced at the mirror, then Manuel led her away; and the other pair were left alone. Both felt a secret agitation quicken their breath and thrill along their nerves, but the woman concealed it best. Gilbert's eye wandered restlessly to and fro, while Pauline fixed her own on his as quietly as if he were the statue in the niche behind him. For a moment he tried to seem unconscious of it, then essayed to meet and conquer it, but failed signally and, driven to his last resources by that steady gaze, resolved to speak out and have all over before his wife's return. Assuming the seat beside her, he said, impetuously, "Pauline, take off your mask as I do mine — we are alone now, and may see each other as we are."

Leaning deep into the crimson curve of the couch, with the indolent grace habitual to her, yet in strong contrast to the vigilant gleam of her eye, she swept her hand across her face as if obeying him, yet no change followed, as she said with a cold smile, "It is off; what next?"

"Let me understand you. Did my letter reach your hands?"

"A week before my marriage."

He drew a long breath of relief, yet a frown gathered as he asked, like one loath and eager to be satisfied, "Your love died a natural death, then, and its murder does not lie at my door?"

Pointing to the shattered toy upon the ground, she only echoed his own words. "It was too frail for use — I chose a stronger."

It wounded, as she meant it should; and the evil spirit to whose guidance she had yielded herself exulted to see his self-love bleed, and pride vainly struggle to conceal the stab. He caught the expression in her averted glance, bent suddenly a fixed and scrutinizing gaze upon her, asking, below his breath, "Then why are you here to tempt me with the face that tempted me a year ago?"

"I came to see the woman to whom you sold yourself. I have seen her, and am satisfied."

Such quiet contempt iced her tones, such pitiless satisfaction shone through the long lashes that swept slowly down, after her eye had met and caused his own to fall again, that Gilbert's cheek burned as if the words had been a blow, and mingled shame and anger trembled in his voice.

"Ah, you are quick to read our secret, for you possess the key. Have you no fear that I may read your own, and tell the world you sold your beauty for a name and fortune? Your bargain is a better one than mine, but I know you too well, though your fetters are diamonds and your master a fond boy."

She had been prepared for this, and knew she had a shield in the real regard she bore her husband, for though sisterly, it was sincere. She felt its value now, for it gave her courage to confront the spirit of retaliation she had roused, and calmness to answer the whispered taunt with an unruffled mien, as lifting her white arm she let its single decoration drop glittering to her lap.

"You see my 'fetters' are as loose as they are light, and nothing binds me but my will. Read my heart, if you can. You will find there contempt for a love so poor that it feared poverty; pity for a man who dared not face the world and conquer it, as a girl had done before him, and gratitude that I have found my 'master' in a truehearted boy, not a falsehearted man. If I am a slave, I never know it. Can you say as much?"

Her woman's tongue avenged her, and Gilbert owned his defeat. Pain quenched the ire of his glance, remorse subdued his pride, self- condemnation compelled him to ask, imploringly, "Pauline, when may I hope for pardon?"

"Never."

The stern utterance of the word dismayed him, and, like one shut out from hope, he rose, as if to leave her, but paused irresolutely, looked back, then sank down again, as if constrained against his will by a longing past control. If she had doubted her power this action set the doubt at rest, as the haughtiest nature she had known confessed it by a bittersweet complaint. Eyeing her wistfully, tenderly, Gilbert murmured, in the voice of long ago, "Why do I stay to wound and to be wounded by the hand that once caressed me? Why do I find more pleasure in your contempt than in another woman's praise, and feel myself transported into the delights of that irrecoverable past, now grown the sweetest, saddest memory of my life? Send me away, Pauline, before the old charm asserts its power, and I forget that I am not the happy lover of a year ago."

"Leave me then, Gilbert. Good night."

Half unconsciously, the former softness stole into her voice as it lingered on his name. The familiar gesture accompanied the words, the old charm did assert itself, and for an instant changed the cold woman into the ardent girl again. Gilbert did not go but, with a hasty glance down the deserted hall behind him, captured and kissed the hand he had lost, passionately whispering, "Pauline, I love you still, and that look assures me that you have forgiven, forgotten, and kept a place for me in that deep heart of yours. It is too late to deny it. I have seen the tender eyes again, and the sight has made me the proudest, happiest man that walks the world tonight, slave though I am."

Over cheek and forehead rushed the treacherous blood as the violet eyes filled and fell before his own, and in the glow of mingled pain and fear that stirred her blood, Pauline, for the first time, owned the peril of the task she had set herself, saw the dangerous power she possessed, and felt the buried passion faintly moving in its grave. Indignant at her own weakness, she took refuge in the memory of her wrong, controlled the rebel color, steeled the front she showed him, and with feminine skill mutely conveyed the rebuke she would not trust herself to utter, by stripping the glove from the hand he had touched and dropping it disdainfully as if unworthy of its place. Gilbert had not looked for such an answer, and while it baffled him it excited his man's spirit to rebel against her silent denial. With a bitter laugh he snatched up the glove.

"I read a defiance in your eye as you flung this down. I accept the challenge, and will keep gage until I prove myself the victor. I have asked for pardon. You refuse it. I have confessed my love. You scorn it. I have possessed myself of your secret, yet you deny it. Now we will try our strength together, and leave those children to their play."

"We are the children, and we play with edge tools. There has been enough of this, there must be no more." Pauline rose with her haughtiest mien, and the brief command, "Take me to Manuel."

Silently Gilbert offered his arm, and silently she rejected it.

"Will you accept nothing from me?"

"Nothing."

Side by side they passed through the returning throng till Mrs. Redmond joined them, looking blithe and bland with the exhilaration of gallantry and motion. Manuel's first glance was at Pauline, his second at her companion; there was a shadow upon the face of each, which seemed instantly to fall upon his own as he claimed his wife with a masterful satisfaction as novel as becoming, and which prompted her to whisper, "You enact your role to the life, and shall enjoy a foretaste of your reward at once. I want excitement; let us show these graceless, frozen people the true art of dancing, and electrify them with the life and fire of a Cuban valse."

Manuel kindled at once, and Pauline smiled stealthily as she glanced over her shoulder from the threshold of the dancing hall, for her slightest act, look, and word had their part to play in that night's drama.

"Gilbert, if you are tired I will go now."

"Thank you, I begin to find it interesting. Let us watch the dancers."

Mrs. Redmond accepted the tardy favor, wondering at his unwonted animation, for never had she seen such eagerness in his countenance, such energy in his manner as he pressed through the crowd and won a place where they could freely witness one of those exhibitions of fashionable figurante which are nightly to be seen at such resorts. Many couples were whirling around the white hall, but among them one pair circled with slowly increasing speed, in perfect time to the inspiring melody of trumpet, flute, and horn, that seemed to sound for them alone. Many paused to watch them, for they gave to the graceful pastime the enchantment which few have skill enough to lend it, and made it a spectacle of life-enjoying youth, to be remembered long after the music ceased and the agile feet were still.

Gilbert's arm was about his little wife to shield her from the pressure of the crowd, and as they stood his hold unconsciously tightened, till, marveling at this unwonted care, she looked up to thank him with a happy glance and discovered that his eye rested on a single pair, kindling as they approached, keenly scanning every gesture as they floated by, following them with untiring vigilance through the many-colored mazes they threaded with such winged steps, while his breath quickened, his hand kept time, and every sense seemed to own the intoxication of the scene. Sorrowfully she too watched this pair, saw their grace, admired their beauty, envied their happiness; for, short as her wedded life had been, the thorns already pierced her through the roses, and with each airy revolution of those figures, dark and bright, her discontent increased, her wonder deepened, her scrutiny grew keener, for she knew no common interest held her husband there, fascinated, flushed, and excited as if his heart beat responsive to the rhythmic rise and fall of that booted foot and satin slipper. The music ended with a crash, the crowd surged across the floor, and the spell was broken. Like one but half disenchanted, Gilbert stood a moment, then remembered his wife, and looking down met brown eyes, full of tears, fastened on his face.

"Tired so soon, Babie? Or in a pet because I cannot change myself into a thistledown and float about with you, like Manuel and Pauline?"

"Neither; I was only wishing that you loved me as he loves her, and hoping he would never tire of her, they are so fond and charming now. How long have you known them — and where?"

"I shall have no peace until I tell you. I passed a single summer with them in a tropical paradise, where we swung half the day in hammocks, under tamarind and almond trees; danced half the night to music, of which this seems but a faint echo; and led a life of luxurious delight in an enchanted climate, where all is so beautiful and brilliant that its memory haunts a life as pressed flowers sweeten the leaves of a dull book."

"Why did you leave it then?"

"To marry you, child."

"That was a regretful sigh, as if I were not worth the sacrifice. Let us go back and enjoy it together."

"If you were dying for it, I would not take you to Cuba. It would be purgatory, not paradise, now."

“How stern you look, how strangely you speak. Would you not go to save your own life, Gilbert?”

“I would not cross the room to do that, much less the sea.”

“Why do you both love and dread it? Don’t frown, but tell me. I have a right to know.”

“Because the bitterest blunder of my life was committed there — a blunder that I never can repair in this world, and may be damned for in the next. Rest satisfied with this, Babie, lest you prove like Bluebeard’s wife, and make another skeleton in my closet, which has enough already.”

Strange regret was in his voice, strange gloom fell upon his face; but though rendered doubly curious by the change, Mrs. Redmond dared not question further and, standing silent, furtively scanned the troubled countenance beside her. Gilbert spoke first, waking out of his sorrowful reverie with a start.

“Pauline is coming. Say adieu, not au revoir, for tomorrow we must leave this place.”

His words were a command, his aspect one of stern resolve, though the intensest longing mingled with the dark look he cast on the approaching pair. The tone, the glance displeased his willful wife, who loved to use her power and exact obedience where she had failed to win affection, often ruling imperiously when a tender word would have made her happy to submit.

“Gilbert, you take no thought for my pleasures though you pursue your own at my expense. Your neglect forces me to find solace and satisfaction where I can, and you have forfeited your right to command or complain. I love Pauline, I am happy with her, therefore I shall stay until we tire of one another. I am a burden to you; go if you will.”

“You know I cannot without you, Babie. I ask it as a favor. For my sake, for your own, I implore you to come away.”

“Gilbert, do you love her?”

She seized his arm and forced an answer by the energy of her sharply whispered question. He saw that it was vain to dissemble, yet replied with averted head, “I did and still remember it.”

“And she? Did she return your love?”

“I believed so; but she forgot me when I went. She married Manuel and is happy. Babie, let me go!”

“No! you shall stay and feel a little of the pain I feel when I look into your heart and find I have no place there. It is this which has stood between us and made all my efforts vain. I see it now and despise you for the falsehood you have shown me, vowing you loved no one but me until I married you, then letting me so soon discover that I was only an encumbrance to your enjoyment of the fortune I possessed. You treat me like a child, but I suffer like a woman, and you shall share my suffering, because you might have spared me, and you did not. Gilbert, you shall stay."

"Be it so, but remember I have warned you."

An exultant expression broke through the gloom of her husband's face as he answered with the grim satisfaction of one who gave restraint to the mind, and stood ready to follow whatever impulse should sway him next. His wife trembled inwardly at what she had done, but was too proud to recall her words and felt a certain bitter pleasure in the excitement of the new position she had taken, the new interest given to her listless life.

Pauline and Manuel found them standing silently together, for a moment had done the work of years and raised a barrier between them never to be swept away.

Mrs. Redmond spoke first, and with an air half resentful, half triumphant:

"Pauline, this morose husband of mine says we must leave tomorrow. But in some things I rule; this is one of them. Therefore we remain and go with you to the mountains when we are tired of the gay life here. So smile and submit, Gilbert, else these friends will count your society no favor. Would you not fancy, from the aspect he thinks proper to assume, that I had sentenced him to a punishment, not a pleasure?"

"Perhaps you have unwittingly, Babie. Marriage is said to cancel the follies of the past, but not those of the future, I believe; and, as there are many temptations to an idle man in a place like this, doubtless your husband is wise enough to own that he dares not stay but finds discretion the better part of valor."

Nothing could be softer than the tone in which these words were uttered, nothing sharper than the hidden taunt conveyed, but Gilbert only laughed a scornful laugh as he fixed his keen eyes full upon her and took her bouquet with the air of one assuming former rights.

"My dear Pauline, discretion is the last virtue I should expect to be accused of by you; but if valor consists in daring all things, I may lay claim to it without its 'better part,' for temptation is my delight — the stronger the better. Have no fears for me, my friend. I gladly accept Babie's decree and, ignoring the last ten years, intend to begin life anew, having discovered a sauce piquante which will give the stalest pleasures a redoubled zest. I am unfortunate tonight, and here is a second wreck; this I can rebuild happily. Allow me to do so, for I remember you once praised my skill in floral architecture."

With an air of eager gallantry in strange contrast to the malign expression of his countenance, Gilbert knelt to regather the flowers which a careless gesture of his own had scattered from their jeweled holder. His wife turned to speak to

Manuel, and, yielding to the unconquerable anxiety his reckless manner awoke, Pauline whispered below her breath as she bent as if to watch the work, “Gilbert, follow your first impulse, and go tomorrow.”

“Nothing shall induce me to.”

“I warn you harm will come of it.” “Let it come; I am past fear now.”

“Shun me for Babie’s sake, if not for your own.”

“Too late for that; she is headstrong — let her suffer.”

“Have you no power, Gilbert?”

“None over her, much over you.”

“We will prove that!”

“We will!” Rapidly as words could shape them, these questions and answers fell, and with their utterance the last generous feeling died in Pauline’s breast; for as she received the flowers, now changed from a love token to a battle gage, she saw the torn glove still crushed in Gilbert’s hand, and silently accepted his challenge to the tournament so often held between man and woman — a tournament where the keen tongue is the lance, pride the shield, passion the fiery steed, and the hardest heart the winner of the prize, which seldom fails to prove a barren honor, ending in remorse.

Chapter III

For several days the Cubans were almost invisible, appearing only for a daily drive, a twilight saunter on the beach, or a brief visit to the ballroom, there to enjoy the excitement of the pastime in which they both excelled. Their apartments were in the quietest wing of the hotel, and from the moment of their occupancy seemed to acquire all the charms of home. The few guests admitted felt the atmosphere of poetry and peace that pervaded the nest which Love, the worker of miracles, had built himself even under that tumultuous roof. Strollers in the halls or along the breezy verandas often paused to listen to the music of instrument or voice which came floating out from these sequestered rooms. Frequent laughter and the murmur of conversation proved that ennui was unknown, and a touch of romance inevitably enhanced the interest wakened by the beautiful young pair, always together, always happy, never weary of the dolce far niente of this summer life.

In a balcony like a hanging garden, sheltered from the sun by blossoming shrubs and vines that curtained the green nook with odorous shade, Pauline lay indolently swinging in a gaily fringed hammock as she had been wont to do in Cuba, then finding only pleasure in the luxury of motion which now failed to quiet her unrest. Manuel had put down the book to which she no longer listened and, leaning his head upon his hand, sat watching her as she swayed to and fro with thoughtful eyes intent upon the sea, whose murmurous voice possessed a charm more powerful than his own. Suddenly he spoke:

“Pauline, I cannot understand you! For three weeks we hurried east and west to find this man, yet when found you shun him and seem content to make my life a heaven upon earth. I sometimes fancy that you have resolved to let the past sleep, but the hope dies as soon as born, for in moments like this I see that, though you devote yourself to me, the old purpose is unchanged, and I marvel why you pause.”

Her eyes came back from their long gaze and settled on him full of an intelligence which deepened his perplexity. “You have not learned to know me yet; death is not more inexorable or time more tireless than I. This week has seemed one of indolent delight to you. To me it has been one of constant vigilance and labor, for scarcely a look, act, or word of mine has been without effect. At first I secluded myself that Gilbert might contrast our life with his and, believing us all and all to one another, find impotent regret his daily portion. Three days ago accident placed an unexpected weapon in my hand which I have used in silence, lest in spite of promises you should rebel and end his trial too soon. Have you no suspicion of my meaning?”

“None. You are more mysterious than ever, and I shall, in truth, believe you are the enchantress I have so often called you if your spells work invisibly.”

“They do not, and I use no supernatural arts, as I will prove to you. Take my lorgnette that lies behind you, part the leaves where the green grapes hang thickest, look up at the little window in the shadowy angle of the low roof opposite, and tell me what you see.”

“Nothing but a half-drawn curtain.”

“Ah! I must try the ruse that first convinced me. Do not show yourself, but watch, and if you speak, let it be in Spanish.”

Leaving her airy cradle, Pauline bent over the balcony as if to gather the climbing roses that waved their ruddy clusters in the wind. Before the third stem was broken Manuel whispered, “I see the curtain move; now comes the outline of a head, and now a hand, with some bright object in it. Santo Pablo! It is a man staring at you as coolly as if you were a lady in a balcony. What prying rascal is it?”

“Gilbert.”

“Impossible! He is a gentleman.”

“If gentlemen play the traitor and the spy, then he is one. I am not mistaken; for since the glitter of his glass first arrested me I have watched covertly, and several trials as successful as the present have confirmed the suspicion which

Babie’s innocent complaints of his long absences aroused. Now do you comprehend why I remained in these rooms with the curtains seldom drawn? Why I swung the hammock here and let you sing and read to me while I played with your hair or leaned upon your shoulder? Why I have been all devotion and made this balcony a little stage for the performance of our version of the honeymoon for one spectator?”

Still mindful of the eager eyes upon her, Pauline had been fastening the roses in her bosom as she spoke, and ended with a silvery laugh that made the silence musical with its heartsome sound. As she paused, Manuel flung down the lorgnette and was striding past her with ireful impetuosity, but the white arms took him captive, adding another figure to the picture framed by the green arch as she whispered decisively, “No farther! There must be no violence. You promised obedience and I exact it. Do you think detection to a man so lost to honor would wound as deeply as the sights which make his daily watch a torment? Or that a blow would be as hard to bear as the knowledge that his own act has placed you where you are and made him what he is? Silent contempt is the law now, so let this insult pass, unclench your hand and turn that defiant face to me, while I console you for submission with a kiss.”

He yielded to the command enforced by the caress but drew her jealously from sight, and still glanced rebelliously through the leaves, asking with a frown, “Why show me this if I may not resent it? How long must I bear with this man? Tell me your design, else I shall mar it in some moment when hatred of him conquers love of you.”

“I will, for it is tune, because though I have taken the first step you must take the second. I showed you this that you might find action pleasanter than rest, and you must bear with this man a little longer for my sake, but I will give you an amusement to beguile the time. Long ago you told me that Gilbert was a gambler. I would not believe it then, now I can believe anything, and you can convince the world of this vice of his as speedily as you will.”

“Do you wish me to become a gambler that I may prove him one? I also told you that he was suspected of dishonorable play — shall I load the dice and mark the cards to catch him in his own snares?”

Manuel spoke bitterly, for his high spirit chafed at the task assigned him; womanly wiles seemed more degrading than the masculine method of retaliation, in which strength replaces subtlety and speedier vengeance brings speedier satisfaction. But Pauline, fast learning to play upon that mysterious instrument, the human heart, knew when to stimulate and when to soothe.

“Do not reproach me that I point out a safer mode of operation than your own. You would go to Gilbert and by a hot word, a rash act, put your life and my happiness into his hands, for though dueling is forbidden here, he would not hesitate to break all laws, human or divine, if by so doing he could separate us. What would you gain by it? If you kill him he is beyond our reach forever, and a crime remains to be atoned for. If he kill you your blood will be upon my head, and where should I find consolation for the loss of the one heart always true and tender?"

With the inexplicable prescience which sometimes foreshadows coming ills, she clung to him as if a vision of the future dimly swept before her, but he only saw the solicitude it was a sweet surprise to find he had awakened, and in present pleasure forgot past pain.

"You shall not suffer from this man any grief that I can shield you from, rest assured of that, my heart. I will be patient, though your ways are not mine, for the wrong was yours, and the retribution shall be such as you decree."

"Then hear your task and see the shape into which circumstances have molded my design. I would have you exercise a self-restraint that shall leave Gilbert no hold upon you, accept all invitations like that which you refused when we passed him on the threshold of the billiard room an hour ago, and seem to find in such amusements the same fascination as himself. Your skill in games of chance excels his, as you proved at home where these pastimes lose their disreputable aspect by being openly enjoyed. Therefore I would have you whet this appetite of his by losing freely at first — he will take a grim delight in lessening the fortune he covets — then exert all your skill till he is deeply in your debt. He has nothing but what is doled out to him by Babie's father, I find; he dare not ask help there for such a purpose; other resources have failed else he would not have married; and if the sum be large enough, it lays him under an obligation which will be a thorn in his flesh, the sharper for your knowledge of his impotence to draw it out. When this is done, or even while it is in progress, I would have you add the pain of a new jealousy to the old. He neglects this young wife of his, and she is eager to recover the affections she believes she once possessed. Help her, and teach Gilbert the value of what he now despises. You are young, comely, accomplished, and possessed of many graces more attractive than you are conscious of; your southern birth and breeding gift you with a winning warmth of manners in strong contrast to the colder natures around you; and your love for me lends an almost tender deference to your intercourse with all womankind. Amuse, console this poor girl, and show her husband what he should be; I have no fear of losing your heart nor need you fear for hers; she is one of those spaniel-like creatures who love the hand that strikes them and fawn upon the foot that spurns them."

"Am I to be the sole actor in the drama of deceit? While I woo Babie, what will you do, Pauline?”

“Let Gilbert woo me — have patience till you understand my meaning; he still loves me and believes I still return that love. I shall not undeceive him yet, but let silence seem to confess what I do not own in words. He fed me with false promises, let me build my life’s happiness on baseless hopes, and rudely woke me when he could delude no longer, leaving me to find I had pursued a shadow. I will do the same. He shall follow me undaunted, undeterred by all obstacles, all ties; shall stake his last throw and lose it, for when the crowning moment comes I shall show him that through me he is made bankrupt in love, honor, liberty, and hope, tell him I am yours entirely and forever, then vanish like an ignis-fatuus, leaving him to the darkness of despair and defeat. Is not this a better retribution than the bullet that would give him peace at once?”

Boy, lover, husband though he was, Manuel saw and stood aghast at the baleful spirit which had enslaved this woman, crushing all generous impulses, withering all gentle charities, and making her the saddest spectacle this world can show — one human soul rebelling against Providence, to become the nemesis of another. Involuntarily he recoiled from her, exclaiming, “Pauline! Are you possessed of a devil?”

“Yes! One that will not be cast out till every sin, shame, and sorrow mental ingenuity can conceive and inflict has been heaped on that man’s head. I thought I should be satisfied with one accusing look, one bitter word; I am not, for the evil genii once let loose cannot be recaptured. Once I ruled it, now it rules me, and there is no turning back. I have come under the law of fate, and henceforth the powers I possess will ban, not bless, for I am driven to whet and wield them as weapons which may win me success at the price of my salvation. It is not yet too late for you to shun the spiritual contagion I bear about me. Choose now, and abide by that choice without a shadow of turning, as I abide by mine. Take me as I am; help me willingly and unwillingly; and in the end receive the promised gift — years like the days you have called heaven upon earth. Or retract the vows you plighted, receive again the heart and name you gave me, and live unvexed by the stormy nature time alone can tame. Here is the ring. Shall I restore or keep it, Manuel?”

Never had she looked more beautiful as she stood there, an image of will, daring, defiant, and indomitable, with eyes darkened by intensity of emotion, voice half sad, half stern, and outstretched hand on which the wedding ring no longer shone. She felt her power, yet was wary enough to assure it by one bold appeal to the strongest element of her husband’s character: passions, not principles, were the allies she desired, and before the answer came she knew that she had gained them at the cost of innocence and self-respect.

As Manuel listened, an expression like a dark reflection of her own settled on his face; a year of youth seemed to drop away; and with the air of one who puts fear behind him, he took the hand, replaced the ring, resolutely accepted the hard conditions, and gave all to love, only saying as he had said before, “Soul and body, I belong to you; do with me as you will.”

A fortnight later Pauline sat alone, waiting for her husband. Under the pretext of visiting a friend, she had absented herself a week, that Manuel might give himself entirely to the distasteful task she set him. He submitted to the separation, wrote daily, but sent no tidings of his progress, told her nothing when they met that night, and had left her an hour before asking her to have patience till he could show his finished work. Now, with her eye upon the door, her ear alert to catch the coming step, her mind disturbed by contending hopes and fears, she sat waiting with the vigilant immobility of an Indian on the watch. She had not long to look and listen. Manuel entered hastily, locked the door, closed the windows, dropped the curtains, then paused in the middle of the room and broke into a low, triumphant laugh as he eyed his wife with an expression she had never seen in those dear eyes before. It startled her, and, scarcely knowing what to desire or dread, she asked eagerly, “You are come to tell me you have prospered.”

“Beyond your hopes, for the powers of darkness seem to help us, and lead the man to his destruction faster than any wiles of ours can do. I am tired, let me lie here and rest. I have earned it, so when I have told all say, ‘Love, you have done well,’ and I am satisfied.”

He threw himself along the couch where she still sat and laid his head in her silken lap, her cool hand on his hot forehead, and continued in a muffled voice.

“You know how eagerly Gilbert took advantage of my willingness to play, and soon how recklessly he pursued it, seeming to find the satisfaction you foretold, till, obeying your commands, I ceased losing and won sums which surprised me. Then you went, but I was not idle, and in the effort to extricate himself, Gilbert plunged deeper into debt; for my desire to please you seemed to gift me with redoubled skill. Two days ago I refused to continue the unequal conflict, telling him to give himself no uneasiness, for I could wait. You were right in thinking it would oppress him to be under any obligation to me, but wrong in believing he would endure, and will hardly be prepared for the desperate step he took to free himself. That night he played falsely, was detected, and though his opponent generously promised silence for Babie’s sake, the affair stole out — he is shunned and this resource has failed. I thought he had no other, but yesterday he came to me with a strange expression of relief, discharged the debt to the last farthing, then hinted that my friendship with his wife was not approved by him and must cease. This proves that I have obeyed you in all things, though the comforting of Babie was an easy task, for, both loving you, our bond of sympathy and constant theme has been Pauline and her perfections."

"Hush! No praise — it is a mockery. I am what one man's perfidy has made; I may yet learn to be worthy of another man's devotion. What more, Manuel?"

"I thought I should have only a defeat to show you, but today has given me a strange success. At noon a gentleman arrived and asked for Gilbert. He was absent, but upon offering information relative to the time of his return, which proved my intimacy with him, this Seguin entered into conversation with me. His evident desire to avoid Mrs. Redmond and waylay her husband interested me, and when he questioned me somewhat closely concerning Gilbert's habits and movements of late, my suspicions were roused; and on mentioning the debt so promptly discharged, I received a confidence that startled me. In a moment of despair Gilbert had forged the name of his former friend, whom he believed abroad, had drawn the money and freed himself from my power, but not for long. The good fortune which has led him safely through many crooked ways seems to have deserted him in this strait. For the forgery was badly executed, inspection raised doubts, and Seguin, just returned, was at his banker's an hour after Gilbert, to prove the fraud; he came hither at once to accuse him of it and made me his confidant. What would you have had me do, Pauline? Time was short, and I could not wait for you."

"How can I tell at once? Why pause to ask? What did you do?"

"Took a leaf from your book and kept accusation, punishment, and power in my own hands, to be used in your behalf. I returned the money, secured the forged check, and prevailed on Seguin to leave the matter in my hands, while he departed as quietly as he had come. Babie's presence when we met tonight prevented my taking you into my counsels. I had prepared this surprise for you and felt a secret pride in working it out alone. An hour ago I went to watch for Gilbert. He came, I took him to his rooms, told him what I had done, added that compassion for his wife had actuated me. I left him saying the possession of the check was a full equivalent for the money, which I now declined to receive from such dishonorable hands. Are you satisfied, Pauline?"

With countenance and gestures full of exultation she sprang up to pace the room, exclaiming, as she seized the forged paper, "Yes, that stroke was superb! How strangely the plot thickens. Surely the powers of darkness are working with us and have put this weapon in our hands when that I forged proved useless. By means of this we have a hold upon him which nothing can destroy unless he escape by death. Will he, Manuel?”

“No; there was more wrath than shame in his demeanor when I accused him. He hates me too much to die yet, and had I been the only possessor of this fatal fact, I fancy it might have gone hard with me; for if ever there was murder in a man’s heart it was in his when I showed him that paper and then replaced it next the little poniard you smile at me for wearing. This is over. What next, my queen?”

There was energy in the speaker’s tone but none in attitude or aspect, as, still lying where she had left him, he pillowed his head upon his arm and turned toward her a face already worn and haggard with the feverish weariness that had usurped the blithe serenity which had been his chiefest charm a month ago. Pausing in her rapid walk, as if arrested by the change that seemed to strike her suddenly, she recalled her thoughts from the dominant idea of her life and, remembering the youth she was robbing of its innocent delights, answered the wistful look which betrayed the hunger of a heart she had never truly fed, as she knelt beside her husband and, laying her soft cheek to his, whispered in her tenderest accents, “I am not wholly selfish or ungrateful, Manuel. You shall rest now while I sing to you, and tomorrow we will go away among the hills and leave behind us for a time the dark temptation which harms you through me.”

“No! Finish what you have begun. I will have all or nothing, for if we pause now you will bring me a divided mind, and I shall possess only the shadow of a wife. Take Gilbert and Babie with us, and end this devil’s work without delay. Hark! What is that?”

Steps came flying down the long hall, a hand tried the lock, then beat impetuously upon the door, and a low voice whispered with shrill importunity, “Let me in! Oh, let me in!”

Manuel obeyed the urgent summons, and Mrs. Redmond, half dressed, with streaming hair and terror-stricken face, fled into Pauline’s arms, crying incoherently, “Save me! Keep me! I never can go back to him; he said I was a burden and a curse, and wished I never had been born!”

“What has happened, Babie? We are your friends. Tell us, and let us comfort and protect you if we can.”

But for a time speech was impossible, and the poor girl wept with a despairing vehemence sad to see, till their gentle efforts soothed her; and, sitting by Pauline, she told her trouble, looking oftenest at Manuel, who stood before them, as if sure of redress from him.

“When I left here an hour or more ago I found my rooms still empty, and, though I had not seen my husband since morning, I knew he would be displeased to find me waiting, so I cried myself to sleep and dreamed of the happy time when he was kind, till the sound of voices woke me. I heard Gilbert say, ‘Babie is with your wife, her maid tells me; therefore we are alone here. What is this mysterious affair, Laroche?’ That tempted me to listen, and then, Manuel, I learned all the shame and misery you so generously tried to spare me. How can I ever repay you, ever love and honor you enough for such care of one so helpless and forlorn as I?”

“I am repaid already. Let that pass, and tell what brings you here with such an air of fright and fear?”

“When you were gone he came straight to the inner room in search of something, saw me, and knew I must have heard all he had concealed from me so carefully. If you have ever seen him when that fierce temper of his grows ungovernable, you can guess what I endured. He said such cruel things I could not bear it, and cried out that I would come to you, for I was quite wild with terror, grief, and shame, that seemed like oil to fire. He swore I should not, and oh, Pauline, he struck me! See, if I do not tell the living truth!”

Trembling with excitement, Mrs. Redmond pushed back the wide sleeve of her wrapper and showed the red outline of a heavy hand. Manuel set his teeth and stamped his foot into the carpet with an indignant exclamation and the brief question, “Then you left him, Babie?”

“Yes, although he locked me in my room, saying the law gave him the right to teach obedience. I flung on these clothes, crept noiselessly along the balcony till the hall window let me in, and then I ran to you. He will come for me. Can he take me away? Must I go back to suffer any more?”

In the very act of uttering the words, Mrs. Redmond clung to Manuel with a cry of fear, for on the threshold stood her husband. A comprehensive glance seemed to stimulate his wrath and lend the hardihood wherewith to confront the three, saying sternly as he beckoned, “Babie, I am waiting for you.”

She did not speak, but still clung to Manuel as if he were her only hope. A glance from Pauline checked the fiery words trembling on his lips, and he too stood silent while she answered with a calmness that amazed him:

“Your wife has chosen us her guardians, and I think you will scarcely venture to use force again with two such witnesses as these to prove that you have forfeited your right to her obedience and justify the step she has taken.”

With one hand she uncovered the discolored arm, with the other held the forgery before him. For a moment Gilbert stood daunted by these mute accusations, but just then his ire burned hottest against Manuel; and believing that he could deal a double blow by wounding Pauline through her husband, he ignored her presence and, turning to the young man, asked significantly, “Am I to understand that you refuse me my wife, and prefer to abide by the consequences of such an act?”

Calmed by Pauline’s calmness, Manuel only drew the trembling creature closer, and answered with his haughtiest mien, “I do; spare yourself the labor of insulting me, for having placed yourself beyond the reach of a gentleman’s weapon, I shall accept no challenge from a — ”

A soft hand at his lips checked the opprobrious word, as Babie, true woman through it all, whispered with a broken sob, “Spare him, for I loved him once.”

Gilbert Redmond had a heart, and, sinful though it was, this generous forbearance wrung it with a momentary pang of genuine remorse, too swiftly followed by a selfish hope that all was not lost if through his wife he could retain a hold upon the pair which now possessed for him the strong attraction of both love and hate. In that brief pause this thought came, was accepted and obeyed, for, as if yielding to an uncontrollable impulse of penitent despair, he stretched his arms to his wife, saying humbly, imploringly, “Babie, come back to me, and teach me how I may retrieve the past. I freely confess I bitterly repent my manifold transgressions, and submit to your decree alone; but in executing justice, oh, remember mercy! Remember that I was too early left fatherless, motherless, and went astray for want of some kind heart to guide and cherish me. There is still time. Be compassionate and save me from myself. Am I not punished enough? Must death be my only comforter? Babie, when all others cast me off, will you too forsake me?”

“No, I will not! Only love me, and I can forgive, forget, and still be happy!”

Pauline was right. The spaniel-like nature still loved the hand that struck it, and Mrs. Redmond joyfully returned to the arms from which she had so lately fled. The tenderest welcome she had ever received from him welcomed the loving soul whose faith was not yet dead, for Gilbert felt the value this once neglected possession had suddenly acquired, and he held it close; yet as he soothed with gentle touch and tone, could not forbear a glance of triumph at the spectators of the scene.

Pauline met it with that inscrutable smile of hers, and a look of intelligence toward her husband, as she said, “Did I not prophesy truly, Manuel? Be kind to her, Gilbert, and when next we meet show us a happier wife than the one now sobbing on your shoulder. Babie, good night and farewell, for we are off to the mountains in the morning.”

“Oh, let us go with you as you promised! You know our secret, you pity me and will help Gilbert to be what he should. I cannot live at home, and places like this will seem so desolate when you and Manuel are gone. May we, can we be with you a little longer?”

"If Gilbert wishes it and Manuel consents, we will bear and forbear much for your sake, my poor child."

Pauline's eye said, "Dare you go?" and Gilbert's answered, "Yes," as the two met with a somber fire in each; but his lips replied, "Anywhere with you, Babie," and Manuel took Mrs. Redmond's hand with a graceful warmth that touched her deeper than his words.

"Your example teaches me the beauty of compassion, and Pauline's friends are mine."

"Always so kind to me! Dear Manuel, I never can forget it, though I have nothing to return but this," and, like a grateful child, she lifted up her innocent face so wistfully he could only bend his tall head to receive the kiss she offered.

Gilbert's black brows lowered ominously at the sight, but he never spoke; and, when her good-nights were over, bowed silently and carried his little wife away, nestling to him as if all griefs and pains were banished by returning love.

"Poor little heart! She should have a smoother path to tread. Heaven grant she may hereafter; and this sudden penitence prove no sham." Manuel paused suddenly, for as if obeying an unconquerable impulse, Pauline laid a hand on either shoulder and searched his face with an expression which baffled his comprehension, though he bore it steadily till her eyes fell before his own, when he asked smilingly:

"Is the doubt destroyed, cariña?"

"No; it is laid asleep."

Then as he drew her nearer, as if to make his peace for his unknown offense, she turned her cheek away and left him silently. Did she fear to find Babie's kiss upon his lips?

Chapter IV

The work of weeks is soon recorded, and when another month was gone these were the changes it had wrought. The four so strangely bound together by ties of suffering and sin went on their way, to the world's eye, blessed with every gracious gift, but below the tranquil surface rolled that undercurrent whose mysterious tides ebb and flow in human hearts unfettered by race or rank or time. Gilbert was a good actor, but, though he curbed his fitful temper, smoothed his mien, and sweetened his manner, his wife soon felt the vanity of hoping to recover that which never had been hers. Silently she accepted the fact and, uttering no complaint, turned to others for the fostering warmth without which she could not live. Conscious of a hunger like her own, Manuel could offer her sincerest sympathy, and soon learned to find a troubled pleasure in the knowledge that she loved him and her husband knew it, for his life of the emotions was rapidly maturing the boy into the man, as the fierce ardors of his native skies quicken the growth of wondrous plants that blossom in a night. Mrs. Redmond, as young in character as in years, felt the attraction of a nature generous and sweet, and yielded to it as involuntarily as an unsupported vine yields to the wind that blows it to the strong arms of a tree, still unconscious that a warmer sentiment than gratitude made his companionship the sunshine of her life. Pauline saw this, and sometimes owned within herself that she had evoked spirits which she could not rule, but her purpose drove her on, and in it she found a charm more perilously potent than before. Gilbert watched the three with a smile darker than a frown, yet no reproach warned his wife of the danger which she did not see; no jealous demonstration roused Manuel to rebel against the oppression of a presence so distasteful to him; no rash act or word gave Pauline power to banish him, though the one desire of his soul became the discovery of the key to the inscrutable expression of her eyes as they followed the young pair, whose growing friendship left their mates alone. Slowly her manner softened toward him, pity seemed to bridge across the gulf that lay between them, and in rare moments time appeared to have retraced its steps, leaving the tender woman of a year ago. Nourished by such unexpected hope, the early passion throve and strengthened until it became the mastering ambition of his life, and, only pausing to make assurance doubly sure, he waited the advent of the hour when he could "put his fortune to the touch and win or lose it all."

"Manuel, are you coming?"

He was lying on the sward at Mrs. Redmond's feet, and, waking from the reverie that held him, while his companion sang the love lay he was teaching her, he looked up to see his wife standing on the green slope before him. A black lace scarf lay over her blonde hair as Spanish women wear their veils, below it the violet eyes shone clear, the cheek glowed with the color fresh winds had blown upon their paleness, the lips parted with a wistful smile, and a knot of bright-hued leaves upon her bosom made a mingling of snow and fire in the dress, whose white folds swept the grass. Against a background of hoary cliffs and somber pines, this figure stood out like a picture of blooming womanhood, but Manuel saw three blemishes upon it — Gilbert had sketched her with that shadowy veil upon her head, Gilbert had swung himself across a precipice to reach the scarlet nosegay for her breast, Gilbert stood beside her with her hand upon his arm; and troubled by the fear that often haunted him since Pauline's manner to himself had grown so shy and sad, Manuel leaned and looked forgetful of reply, but Mrs. Redmond answered blithely:

"He is coming, but with me. You are too grave for us, so go your ways, talking wisely of heaven and earth, while we come after, enjoying both as we gather lichens, chase the goats, and meet you at the waterfall. Now señor, put away guitar and book, for I have learned my lesson; so help me with this unruly hair of mine and leave the Spanish for today.”

They looked a pair of lovers as Manuel held back the long locks blowing in the wind, while Babie tied her hat, still chanting the burthen of the tender song she had caught so soon. A voiceless sigh stirred the ruddy leaves on Pauline’s bosom as she turned away, but Gilbert embodied it in words, “They are happier without us. Let us go.”

Neither spoke till they reached the appointed tryst. The others were not there, and, waiting for them, Pauline sat on a mossy stone, Gilbert leaned against the granite boulder beside her, and both silently surveyed a scene that made the heart glow, the eye kindle with delight as it swept down from that airy height, across valleys dappled with shadow and dark with untrodden forests, up ranges of majestic mountains, through gap after gap, each hazier than the last, far out into that sea of blue which rolls around all the world. Behind them roared the waterfall swollen with autumn rains and hurrying to pour itself into the rocky basin that lay boiling below, there to leave its legacy of shattered trees, then to dash itself into a deeper chasm, soon to be haunted by a tragic legend and go glittering away through forest, field, and intervale to join the river rolling slowly to the sea. Won by the beauty and the grandeur of the scene, Pauline forgot she was not alone, till turning, she suddenly became aware that while she scanned the face of nature her companion had been scanning hers. What he saw there she could not tell, but all restraint had vanished from his manner, all reticence from his speech, for with the old ardor in his eye, the old impetuosity in his voice, he said, leaning down as if to read her heart, “This is the moment I have waited for so long. For now you see what I see, that both have made a bitter blunder, and may yet repair it. Those children love each other; let them love, youth mates them, fortune makes them equals, fate brings them together that we may be free. Accept this freedom as I do, and come out into the world with me to lead the life you were born to enjoy.”

With the first words he uttered Pauline felt that the time had come, and in the drawing of a breath was ready for it, with every sense alert, every power under full control, every feature obedient to the art which had become a second nature. Gilbert had seized her hand, and she did not draw it back; the sudden advent of the instant which must end her work sent an unwonted color to her cheek, and she did avert it; the exultation which flashed into her eyes made it unsafe to meet his own, and they drooped before him as if in shame or fear, her whole face woke and brightened with the excitement that stirred her blood. She did not seek to conceal it, but let him cheat himself with the belief that love touched it with such light and warmth, as she softly answered in a voice whose accents seemed to assure his hope.

"You ask me to relinquish much. What do you offer in return, Gilbert, that I may not for a second time find love's labor lost?"

It was a wily speech, though sweetly spoken, for it reminded him how much he had thrown away, how little now remained to give, but her mien inspired him, and nothing daunted, he replied more ardently than ever:

"I can offer you a heart always faithful in truth though not in seeming, for I never loved that child. I would give years of happy life to undo that act and be again the man you trusted. I can offer you a name which shall yet be an honorable one, despite the stain an hour's madness cast upon it. You once taunted me with cowardice because I dared not face the world and conquer it. I dare do that now; I long to escape from this disgraceful servitude, to throw myself into the press, to struggle and achieve for your dear sake. I can offer you strength, energy, devotion — three gifts worthy any woman's acceptance who possesses power to direct, reward, and enjoy them as you do, Pauline. Because with your presence for my inspiration, I feel that I can retrieve my faultful past, and with time become God's noblest work — an honest man. Babie never could exert this influence over me. You can, you will, for now my earthly hope is in your hands, my soul's salvation in your love."

If that love had not died a sudden death, it would have risen up to answer him as the one sincere desire of an erring life cried out to her for help, and this man, as proud as sinful, knelt down before her with a passionate humility never paid at any other shrine, human or divine. It seemed to melt and win her, for he saw the color ebb and flow, heard the rapid beating of her heart, felt the hand tremble in his own, and received no denial but a lingering doubt, whose removal was a keen satisfaction to himself.

"Tell me, before I answer, are you sure that Manuel loves Babie?"

"I am; for every day convinces me that he has outlived the brief delusion, and longs for liberty, but dares not ask it. Ah! that pricks pride! But it is so. I have watched with jealous vigilance and let no sign escape me; because in his infidelity to you lay my chief hope. Has he not grown melancholy, cold, and silent? Does he not seek Babie and, of late, shun you? Will he not always yield his place to me without a token of displeasure or regret? Has he ever uttered reproach, warning, or command to you, although he knows I was and am your lover? Can you deny these proofs, or pause to ask if he will refuse to break the tie that binds him to a woman, whose superiority in all things keeps him a subject where he would be a king? You do not know the heart of man if you believe he will not bless you for his freedom."

Like the cloud which just then swept across the valley, blotting out its sunshine with a gloomy shadow, a troubled look flitted over Pauline's face. But if the words woke any sleeping fear she cherished, it was peremptorily banished, for scarcely had the watcher seen it than it was gone. Her eyes still shone upon the ground, and still she prolonged the bittersweet delight at seeing this humiliation of both soul and body by asking the one question whose reply would complete her sad success.

"Gilbert, do you believe I love you still?"

"I know it! Can I not read the signs that proved it to me once? Can I forget that, though you followed me to pity and despise, you have remained to pardon and befriend? Am I not sure that no other power could work the change you have wrought in me? I was learning to be content with slavery, and slowly sinking into that indolence of will which makes submission easy. I was learning to forget you, and be resigned to hold the shadow when the substance was gone, but you came, and with a look undid my work, with a word destroyed my hard-won peace, with a touch roused the passion which was not dead but sleeping, and have made this month of growing certainty to be the sweetest in my life — for I believed all lost, and you showed me that all was won. Surely that smile is propitious! and I may hope to hear the happy confirmation of my faith from lips that were formed to say 'I love!'"

She looked up then, and her eyes burned on him, with an expression which made his heart leap with expectant joy, as over cheek and forehead spread a glow of womanly emotion too genuine to be feigned, and her voice thrilled with the fervor of that sentiment which blesses life and outlives death.

"Yes, I love; not as of old, with a girl's blind infatuation, but with the warmth and wisdom of heart, mind, and soul — love made up of honor, penitence and trust, nourished in secret by the better self which lingers in the most tried and tempted of us, and now ready to blossom and bear fruit, if God so wills. I have been once deceived, but faith still endures, and I believe that I may yet earn this crowning gift of a woman's life for the man who shall make my happiness as I make his — who shall find me the prouder for past coldness, the humbler for past pride — whose life shall pass serenely loving. And that beloved is — my husband." If she had lifted her white hand and stabbed him, with that smile upon her face, it would not have shocked him with a more pale dismay than did those two words as Pauline shook him off and rose up, beautiful and stern as an avenging angel. Dumb with an amazement too fathomless for words, he knelt there motionless and aghast. She did not speak. And, passing his hand across his eyes as if he felt himself the prey to some delusion, he rose slowly, asking, half incredulously, half imploringly, “Pauline, this is a jest?”

“To me it is; to you — a bitter earnest.”

A dim foreboding of the truth fell on him then, and with it a strange sense of fear; for in this apparition of human judgment he seemed to receive a premonition of the divine. With a sudden gesture of something like entreaty, he cried out, as if his fate lay in her hands, “How will it end? how will it end?”

“As it began — in sorrow, shame and loss.” Then, in words that fell hot and heavy on the sore heart made desolate, she poured out the dark history of the wrong and the atonement wrung from him with such pitiless patience and inexorable will. No hard fact remained unrecorded, no subtle act unveiled, no hint of her bright future unspared to deepen the gloom of his. And when the final word of doom died upon the lips that should have awarded pardon, not punishment, Pauline tore away the last gift he had given, and dropping it to the rocky path, set her foot upon it, as if it were the scarlet badge of her subjection to the evil spirit which had haunted her so long, now cast out and crushed forever.

Gilbert had listened with a slowly gathering despair, which deepened to the blind recklessness that comes to those whose passions are their masters, when some blow smites but cannot subdue. Pale to his very lips, with the still white wrath, so much more terrible to witness than the fiercest ebullition of the ire that flames and feeds like a sudden fire, he waited till she ended, then used the one retaliation she had left him. His hand went to his breast, a tattered glove flashed white against the cliff as he held it up before her, saying, in a voice that rose gradually till the last words sounded clear above the waterfall’s wild song:

“It was well and womanly done, Pauline, and I could wish Manuel a happy life with such a tender, frank, and noble wife; but the future which you paint so well never shall be his. For, by the Lord that hears me! I swear I will end this jest of yours in a more bitter earnest than you prophesied. Look; I have worn this since the night you began the conflict, which has ended in defeat to me, as it shall to you. I do not war with women, but you shall have one man’s blood upon your soul, for I will goad that tame boy to rebellion by flinging this in his face and taunting him with a perfidy blacker than my own. Will that rouse him to forget your commands and answer like a man?”

“Yes!”

The word rang through the air sharp and short as a pistol shot, a slender brown hand wrenched the glove away, and Manuel came between them. Wild with fear, Mrs. Redmond clung to him. Pauline sprang before him, and for a moment the two faced each other, with a year’s smoldering jealousy and hate blazing in fiery eyes, trembling in clenched hands, and surging through set teeth in defiant speech.

“This is the gentleman who gambles his friend to desperation, and skulks behind a woman, like the coward he is,” sneered Gilbert.

“Traitor and swindler, you lie!” shouted Manuel, and, flinging his wife behind him, he sent the glove, with a stinging blow, full in his opponent’s face.

Then the wild beast that lurks in every strong man’s blood leaped up in Gilbert Redmond’s, as, with a single gesture of his sinewy right arm he swept Manuel to the verge of the narrow ledge, saw him hang poised there one awful instant, struggling to save the living weight that weighed him down, heard a heavy plunge into the black pool below, and felt that thrill of horrible delight which comes to murderers alone.

So swift and sure had been the act it left no time for help. A rush, a plunge, a pause, and then two figures stood where four had been — a man and woman staring dumbly at each other, appalled at the dread silence that made high noon more ghostly than the deepest night. And with that moment of impotent horror, remorse, and woe, Pauline’s long punishment began.

The Plays

Alcott, aged 50

COMIC TRAGEDIES

A FOREWORD BY MEG.

In the good old times, when “Little Women” worked and played together, the big garret was the scene of many dramatic revels. After a long day of teaching, sewing, and “helping mother,” the greatest delight of the girls was to transform themselves into queens, knights, and cavaliers of high degree, and ascend into a world of fancy and romance. Cinderella’s godmother waved her wand, and the dismal room became a fairy-land. Flowers bloomed, forests arose, music sounded, and lovers exchanged their vows by moonlight. Nothing was too ambitious to attempt; armor, gondolas, harps, towers, and palaces grew as if by magic, and wonderful scenes of valor and devotion were enacted before admiring audiences.

Jo, of course, played the villains, ghosts, bandits, and disdainful queens; for her tragedy-loving soul delighted in the lurid parts, and no drama was perfect in her eyes without a touch of the demonic or supernatural. Meg loved the sentimental rôles, the tender maiden with the airy robes and flowing locks, who made impossible sacrifices for ideal lovers, or the cavalier, singing soft serenades and performing lofty acts of gallantry and prowess. Amy was the fairy sprite, while Beth enacted the page or messenger when the scene required their aid.

But the most surprising part of the performance was the length of the cast and the size of the company; for Jo and Meg usually acted the whole play, each often assuming five or six characters, and with rapid change of dress becoming, in one scene, a witch, a soldier, a beauteous lady, and a haughty noble. This peculiar arrangement accounts for many queer devices, and the somewhat singular fact that each scene offers but two actors, who vanish and reappear at most inopportune moments, and in a great variety of costume. Long speeches were introduced to allow a ruffian to become a priest, or a lovely damsel to disguise herself in the garb of a sorceress; while great skill was required to preserve the illusion, and astonish the audience by these wonderful transformations.

The young amateur of to-day, who can easily call to her aid all the arts of the costumer and scene-maker, will find it hard to understand the difficulties of this little company; for not only did they compose their plays, but they were also their own carpenters, scene-painters, property-men, dress-makers, and managers.

In place of a well-appointed stage, with the brilliant lights and inspiring accessories of a mimic theatre, the “Little Women” had a gloomy garret or empty barn, and were obliged to exercise all their ingenuity to present the scenes of their ambitious dramas.

But it is surprising what fine effects can be produced with old sheets, bright draperies, and a judicious arrangement of lights, garlands, and picturesque properties; and Jo’s dramatic taste made her an admirable stage-manager. Meg was especially handy with saw and hammer, and acted as stage-carpenter, —building balconies, thrones, boats, and towers after peculiar designs of her own. Bureaus, tables, and chairs, piled aloft and arched with dark shawls, made dungeon walls and witch’s cave, or formed a background for haunted forest and lonely glen. Screens of white cloth furnished canvas on which little Amy’s skilful hand depicted palace halls, or romantic scene for lovers’ tryst; and Beth’s deft fingers were most apt in constructing properties for stage adornment, and transforming the frailest material into dazzling raiment. For the costumes were a serious consideration. No money could be spared from the slender purse to supply the wardrobes of these aspiring actors, and many were the devices to clothe the little company.

Thus a robe in one scene became a cloak in the next, and the drapery of a couch in the third; while a bit of lace served as mantle, veil, or turban, as best suited the turn of the play. Hats covered with old velvet, and adorned with feathers plucked from the duster, made most effective headgear for gay cavalier or tragic villain. From colored cotton were manufactured fine Greek tunics and flowing trains; and remarkable court costumes were evolved from an old sofa-covering, which had seen better days, and boasted a little gold thread and embroidery.

Stars of tin, sewed upon dark cambric, made a suit of shining armor. Sandals were cut from old boots. Strips of wood and silver paper were fashioned into daggers, swords, and spears, while from cardboard were created helmets, harps, guitars, and antique lamps, that were considered masterpieces of stage art.

Everything available was pressed into service; colored paper, odds and ends of ribbon, even tin cans and their bright wrappings were treasures to the young actors, and all reappeared as splendid properties.

At first a store of red curtains, some faded brocades, and ancient shawls comprised the stage wardrobe; but as the fame of the performances spread abroad, contributions were made to the little stock, and the girls became the proud possessors of a velvet robe, a plumed hat adorned with silver, long yellow boots, and a quantity of mock pearls and tinsel ornaments.

Such wealth determined them to write a play which should surpass all former efforts, give Jo a chance to stalk haughtily upon the stage in the magnificent boots, and Meg to appear in gorgeous train and diadem of jewels.

"The Witch's Curse" was the result, and it was produced with astounding effect, quite paralyzing the audience by its splendid gloom. Jo called it the "lurid drama," and always considered it her masterpiece. But it cost hours of thought and labor; for to construct a dungeon, a haunted chamber, a cavern, and a lonely forest taxed to the uttermost the ingenuity of the actors. To introduce into one short scene a bandit, two cavaliers, a witch, and a fairy spirit — all enacted by two people — required some skill, and lightning change of costume. To call up the ghostly visions and mysterious voices which should appall the guilty Count Rodolpho, was a task of no small difficulty. But inspired by the desire to outshine themselves, the children accomplished a play full of revenge, jealousy, murder, and sorcery, of all which indeed they knew nothing but the name.

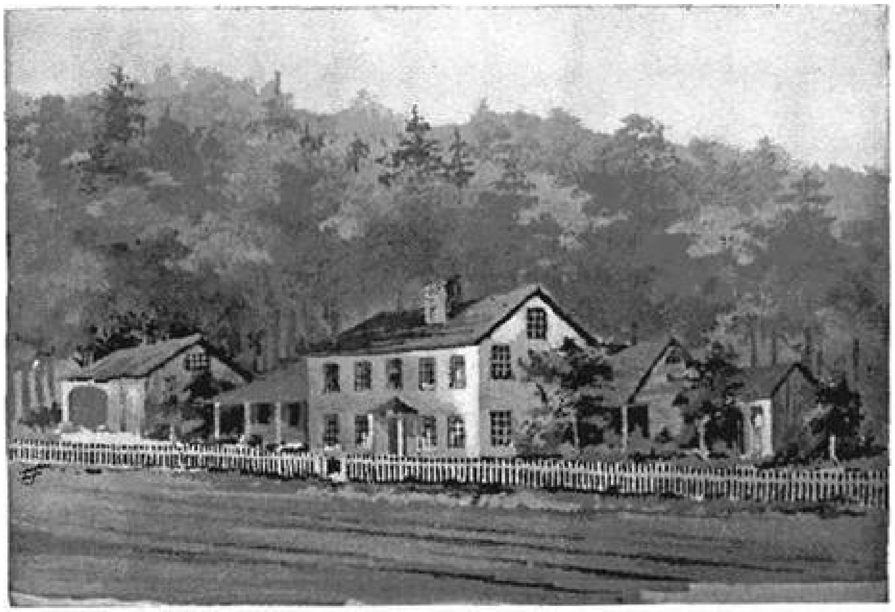
Hitherto their dramas had been of the most sentimental description, given to the portrayal of woman's devotion, filial affection, heroism, and self-sacrifice. Indeed, these "Comic Tragedies" with their highflown romance and fantastic ideas of love and honor, are most characteristic of the young girls whose lives were singularly free from the experiences of many maidens of their age.

Of the world they knew nothing; lovers were ideal beings, clothed with all the beauty of their innocent imaginations. Love was a blissful dream; constancy, truth, courage, and virtue quite every-day affairs of life. Their few novels furnished the romantic element; the favorite fairy-tales gave them material for the supernatural; and their strong dramatic taste enabled them to infuse both fire and pathos into their absurd situations.

Jo revelled in catastrophe, and the darker scenes were her delight; but she usually required Meg to "do the love-part," which she considered quite beneath her pen. Thus their productions were a queer mixture of sentiment and adventure, with entire disregard of such matters as grammar, history, and geography, — all of which were deemed of no importance by these aspiring dramatists.

From the little stage library, still extant, the following plays have been selected as fair examples of the work of these children of sixteen and seventeen. With some slight changes and omissions, they remain as written more than forty years ago by Meg and Jo, so dear to the hearts of many other "Little Women."

Concord, Mass., 1893.



THE THEATRE OF 1848.

“Those Concord days were the happiest of my life. Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement.”
L. M. Alcott.

NORNA; OR, THE WITCH’S CURSE.

CHARACTERS.

Count Rodolpho *A Haughty Noble.*

Count Louis *Lover of Leonore.*

Adrian *The Black Mask.*

Hugo *A Bandit.*

Gaspard *Captain of the Guard.*

Angelo *A Page.*

Theresa *Wife to Rodolpho.*

Leonore *In love with Louis.*

Norna *A Witch.*

SCENE FIRST.

[*A room in the castle of* Rodolpho. Theresa *discovered alone, and in tears.*]

Theresa. I cannot pray; my aching heart finds rest alone in tears. Ah, what a wretched fate is mine! Forced by a father's will to wed a stranger ere I learned to love, one short year hath taught me what a bitter thing it is to wear a chain that binds me unto one who hath proved himself both jealous and unkind. The fair hopes I once cherished are now gone, and here a captive in my splendid home I dwell forsaken, sorrowing and alone [*weeps*]. [*Three taps upon the wall are heard.*] Ha, my brother's signal! What can bring him hither at this hour? Louis, is it thou? Enter; "all's well."

[*Enter* Count Louis *through a secret panel in the wall, hidden by a curtain. He embraces* Theresa.

Theresa. Ah, Louis, what hath chanced? Why art thou here? Some danger must have brought thee; tell me, dear brother. Let me serve thee.

Louis. Sister dearest, thy kindly offered aid is useless now. Thou canst not help me; and I must add another sorrow to the many that are thine. I came to say farewell, Theresa.

Theresa. Farewell! Oh, brother, do not leave me! Thy love is all now left to cheer my lonely life. Wherefore must thou go? Tell me, I beseech thee!

Louis. Forgive me if I grieve thee. I will tell thee all. Thy husband hates me, for I charged him with neglect and cruelty to thee; and he hath vowed revenge for my bold words. He hath whispered false tales to the king, he hath blighted all my hopes of rank and honor. I am banished from the land, and must leave thee and Leonore, and wander forth an outcast and alone. But — let him beware! — I shall return to take a deep revenge for thy wrongs and my own. Nay, sister, grieve not thus. I have sworn to free thee from his power, and I will keep my vow. Hope on and bear a little longer, dear Theresa, and ere long I will bear thee to a happy home [*noise is heard without*]. Ha! what is that? Who comes?

Theresa. ‘Tis my lord returning from the court. Fly, Louis, fly! Thou art lost if he discover thee. Heaven bless and watch above thee. Remember poor Theresa, and farewell.

Louis. One last word of Leonore. I have never told my love, yet she hath smiled on me, and I should have won her hand. Ah, tell her this, and bid her to be true to him who in his exile will hope on, and yet return to claim the heart he hath loved so faithfully. Farewell, my sister. Despair not, — I shall return.

[*Exit* Louis *through the secret panel; drops his dagger.*

Theresa. Thank Heaven, he is safe! — but oh, my husband, this last deed of thine is hard to bear. Poor Louis, parted from Leonore, his fair hopes blighted, all by thy cruel hand. Ah, he comes! I must be calm.

[*Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. What, weeping still? Hast thou no welcome for thy lord save tears and sighs? I’ll send thee to a convent if thou art not more gay!

Theresa. I’ll gladly go, my lord. I am weary of the world. Its gayeties but make my heart more sad.

Rod. Nay, then I will take thee to the court, and there thou *must* be gay. But I am weary; bring me wine, and smile upon me as thou used to do. Dost hear me? Weep no more. [*Seats himself.* Theresa *brings wine and stands beside him. Suddenly he sees the dagger dropped by* Louis.] Ha! what is that? ‘Tis none of mine. How came it hither? Answer, I command thee!

Theresa. I cannot. I must not, dare not tell thee.

Rod. Darest thou refuse to answer? Speak! Who hath dared to venture hither? Is it thy brother? As thou lovest life, I bid thee speak.

Theresa. I am innocent, and will not betray the only one now left me on the earth to love. Oh, pardon me, my lord; I will obey in all but this.

Rod. Thou *shalt* obey. I'll take thy life but I will know. Thy brother must be near, — this dagger was not here an hour ago. Thy terror hath betrayed him. I leave thee now to bid them search the castle. But if I find him not, I shall return; and if thou wilt not then confess, I'll find a way to make thee. Remember, I have vowed, — thy secret or thy life!

[*Exit* Rodolpho.

Theresa. My life I freely yield thee, but my secret — never. Oh, Louis, I will gladly die to save thee. Life hath no joy for me; and in the grave this poor heart may forget the bitter sorrows it is burdened with [*sinks down weeping*].

[*Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. The search is vain. He hath escaped. Theresa, rise, and answer me. To whom belonged the dagger I have found? Thy tears avail not; I will be obeyed. Kneel not to me, I will not pardon. Answer, or I swear I'll make thee dumb forever.

Theresa. No, no! I will not betray. Oh, husband, spare me! Let not the hand that led me to the altar be stained with blood I would so gladly shed for thee. I cannot answer thee.

Rod. [*striking her*]. Then die: thy constancy is useless. I will find thy brother and take a fearful vengeance yet.

Theresa. I am faithful to the last. Husband, I forgive thee.

[Theresa *dies.*

Rod. ‘Tis done, and I am rid of her forever; but ‘tis an ugly deed. Poor fool, there was a time when I could pity thee, but thou hast stood ‘twixt me and Lady Leonore, and now I am free. I must conceal the form, and none shall ever know the crime.

[*Exit* Rodolpho.

[*The panel opens and* Norna *enters.*]

Norna. Heaven shield us! What is this? His cruel hand hath done the deed, and I am powerless to save. Poor, murdered lady, I had hoped to spare thee this, and lead thee to a happier home. Perchance, ‘tis better so. The dead find rest, and thy sad heart can ache no more. Rest to thy soul, sweet lady. But for *thee*, thou cruel villain, I have in store a deep revenge for all thy sinful deeds. If there be power in spell or charm, I’ll conjure fearful dreams upon thy head. I’ll follow thee wherever thou mayst go, and haunt thy sleep with evil visions. I’ll whisper strange words that shall appall thee; dark phantoms shall rise up before thee, and wild voices ringing in thine ear shall tell thee of thy sins. By all these will I make life like a hideous dream, and death more fearful still. Like a vengeful ghost I will haunt thee to thy grave, and so revenge thy wrongs, poor, murdered lady. Beware, Rodolpho! Old Norna’s curse is on thee.

[*She bears away* Theresa’s *body through the secret door, and vanishes.*

CURTAIN.

NOTE TO SCENE SECOND.

The mysterious cave was formed of old furniture, covered with dark draperies, an opening being left at the back wherein the spirits called up by Norna might appear. A kitchen kettle filled with steaming water made an effective caldron over which the sorceress should murmur her incantations; flaming pine-knots cast a lurid glare over the scene; and large boughs, artfully arranged about the stage, gave it the appearance of a “gloomy wood.”

When Louis “retires within,” he at once arrays himself in the white robes of the vision, and awaits the witch’s call to rise behind the aperture in true dramatic style. He vanishes, quickly resumes his own attire, while Norna continues to weave her spells, till she sees he is ready to appear once more as the disguised Count Louis.

SCENE SECOND.

[*A wood.* Norna’s *cave among the rocks. Enter* Louis *masked.*]

Louis. Yes; ‘tis the spot. How dark and still! She is not here. Ho, Norna, mighty sorceress! I seek thy aid.

Norna [*rising from the cave*]. I am here.

Louis. I seek thee, Norna, to learn tidings of one most dear to me. Dost thou know aught of Count Rodolpho’s wife? A strange tale hath reached me that not many nights ago she disappeared, and none know whither she hath gone. Oh, tell me, is this true?

Norna. It is most true.

Louis. And canst thou tell me whither she hath gone? I will reward thee well.

Norna. I can. She lies within her tomb, in the chapel of the castle.

Louis. Dead! — it cannot be! They told me she had fled away with some young lord who had won her love. Was it not true?

Norna. It is false as the villain’s heart who framed the tale. *I* bore the murdered lady to her tomb, and laid her there.

Louis. Murdered? How? When? By whom? Oh, tell me I beseech thee!

Norna. Her husband’s cruel hand took the life he had made a burden. I heard him swear it ere he dealt the blow.

Louis. Wherefore did he kill her? Oh, answer quickly or I shall go mad with grief and hate.

Norna. I can tell thee little. From my hiding-place I heard her vow never to confess whose dagger had been found in her apartment, and her jealous lord, in his wild anger, murdered her.

Louis. ‘Twas mine. Would it had been sheathed in mine own breast ere it had caused so dark a deed! Ah, Theresa, why did I leave thee to a fate like this?

Norna. Young man, grieve not; it is too late to save, but there is left to thee a better thing than grief.

Louis. Oh, what?

Norna. Revenge!

Louis. Thou art right. I’ll weep no more. Give me thine aid, O mighty wizard, and I will serve thee well.

Norna. Who art thou? The poor lady’s lover?

Louis. Ah, no; far nearer and far deeper was the love I bore her, for I am her brother.

Norna. Ha, that’s well! Thou wilt join me, for I have made a vow to rest not till that proud, sinful lord hath well atoned for this deep crime. Spirits shall haunt him, and the darkest phantoms that my art can raise shall scare his soul. Wilt thou join me in my work?

Louis. I will, — but stay! thou hast spoken of spirits. Dread sorceress, is it in thy power to call them up?

Norna. It is. Wilt see my skill. Stand back while I call up a phantom which thou canst not doubt.

[Louis *retires within the cave.* Norna *weaves a spell above her caldron.*

Norna. O spirit, from thy quiet tomb,
I bid thee hither through the gloom,
In winding-sheet, with bloody brow,
Rise up and hear our solemn vow.
I bid thee, with my magic power,
Tell the dark secret of that hour
When cruel hands, with blood and strife,
Closed the sad dream of thy young life.
Hither — appear before our eyes.
Pale spirit, I command thee *rise*.

[*Spirit of* Theresa *rises.*

Shadowy spirit, I charge thee well,
By my mystic art’s most potent spell,
To haunt throughout his sinful life,
The mortal who once called thee wife.
At midnight hour glide round his bed,
And lay thy pale hand on his head.
Whisper wild words in his sleeping ear,
And chill his heart with a deadly fear.
Rise at his side in his gayest hour,
And his guilty soul shall feel thy power.
Stand thou before him in day and night,
And cast o’er his life a darksome blight;
For with all his power and sin and pride,
He shall ne’er forget his murdered bride.
Pale, shadowy form, wilt thou obey?

[*The spirit bows its head.*

To thy ghostly work away — away!

[*The spirit vanishes.*

The spell is o’er, the vow is won,
And, sinful heart, *thy* curse begun.

[*Re-enter* Louis.

Louis. ‘Tis enough! I own thy power, and by the spirit of my murdered sister I have looked upon, I swear to aid thee in thy dark work.

Norna. ‘Tis well; and I will use my power to guard thee from the danger that surrounds thee. And now, farewell. Remember, — thou hast sworn.

[*Exit* Louis.

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRD.

[*Another part of the wood. Enter* Rodolpho.]

Rod. They told me that old Norna’s cave was ‘mong these rocks, and yet I find it not. By her I hope to learn where young Count Louis is concealed. Once in my power, he shall not escape to whisper tales of evil deeds against me. Stay! some one comes. I’ll ask my way.

[*Enter* Louis *masked.*

Ho, stand, good sir. Canst guide me to the cell of Norna, the old sorceress?

Louis. It were little use to tell thee; thou wouldst only win a deeper curse than that she hath already laid upon thee.

Rod. Hold! who art thou that dare to speak thus to Count Rodolpho?

Louis. That thou canst never know; but this I tell thee: I am thy deadliest foe, and, aided by the wizard Norna, seek to work thee evil, and bring down upon thy head the fearful doom thy sin deserves. Wouldst thou know more, — then seek the witch, and learn the hate she bears thee.

Rod. Fool! thinkst thou I fear thee or thy enchantments? Draw, and defend thyself! Thou shalt pay dearly for thine insolence to me! insolence to me!

[*Draws his sword.*

Louis. I will not stain my weapon with a murderer's blood. I leave thee to the fate that gathers round thee.

[*Exit* Louis.

Rod. "Murderer," said he. I am betrayed, — yet no one saw the deed. Yet, stay! perchance 'twas he who bore Theresa away. He has escaped me, and will spread the tale. Nay, why should I fear? Courage! One blow, and I am safe! [*Rushes forward. Spirit of* Theresa *rises.*] What's that? — her deathlike face, — the wound my hand hath made! Help! help! help!

[*Rushes out. The spirit vanishes.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTH.

[*Room in the castle of* Rodolpho. Rodolpho *alone.*]

Rod. I see no way save that. Were young Count Louis dead she would forget the love that had just begun, and by sweet words and gifts I may yet win her. The young lord must die [*a groan behind the curtain*]. Ha! what is that? 'Tis nothing;

fie upon my fear! I’ll banish all remembrance of the fearful shape my fancy conjured up within the forest. I’ll not do the deed myself, — I have had enough of blood. Hugo the bandit: he is just the man, — bold, sure of hand, and secret. I will bribe him well, and when the deed is done, find means to rid me of him lest he should play me false. I saw him in the courtyard as I entered. Perchance he is not yet gone. Ho, without there! Bid Hugo here if he be within the castle. — He is a rough knave, but gold will make all sure.

[*Enter* Hugo.

Hugo. What would my lord with me?

Rod. I ask a favor of thee. Nay, never fear, I’ll pay thee well. Wouldst earn a few gold pieces?

Hugo. Ay, my lord, most gladly would I.

Rod. Nay, sit, good Hugo. Here is wine; drink, and refresh thyself.

Hugo. Thanks, my lord. How can I serve you?

[Rodolpho *gives wine,* Hugo *sits and drinks.*]

Rod. Dost thou know Count Louis, whom the king lately banished?

Hugo. Nay, my lord; I never saw him.

Rod. [*aside*]. Ha! that is well. It matters not; ‘tis not of him I speak. Take more wine, good Hugo. Listen, there is a certain lord, — one whom I hate. I seek his life. Here is gold — thou hast a dagger, and can use it well. Dost understand me?

Hugo. Ay, my lord, most clearly. Name the place and hour; count out the gold, — I and my dagger then are thine.

Rod. ‘Tis well. Now harken. In the forest, near old Norna’s cave, there is a quiet spot. Do thou go there to-night at sunset. Watch well, and when thou seest a tall figure wrapped in a dark cloak, and masked, spring forth, and do the deed. Then fling the body down the rocks, or hide it in some secret place. Here is one half the gold; more shall be thine when thou shalt show some token that the deed is done.

Hugo. Thanks, Count; I’ll do thy bidding. At sunset in the forest, — I’ll be there, and see he leaves it not alive. Good-even, then, my lord.

Rod. Hugo, use well thy dagger, and gold awaits thee. Yet, stay! I’ll meet thee in the wood, and pay thee there. They might suspect if they should see thee here again so soon. I’ll meet thee there, and so farewell.

Hugo. Adieu, my lord.

[*Exit* Hugo].

Rod. Yes; all goes well. My rival dead, and Leonore is mine. With her I may forget the pale face that now seems ever looking into mine. I can almost think the deep wound shows in her picture yonder. But this is folly! Shame on thee, Rodolpho. I’ll think of it no more. [*Turns to drink.* Theresa’s *face appears within the picture, the wound upon her brow.*] Ha! what is that? Am I going mad? See the eyes move, — it is Theresa’s face! Nay, I will not look again. Yes, yes; ‘tis there! Will this sad face haunt me forever?

Theresa. Forever! Forever!

Rod. Fiends take me, — ’tis her voice! It is no dream. Ah, let me go away — away!

[Rodolpho *rushes wildly out.*]

CURTAIN.

NOTE TO SCENE FIFTH.

The apparently impossible transformations of this scene (when played by two actors only) may be thus explained: —

The costumes of Louis and Norna, being merely loose garments, afford opportunities for rapid change; and the indulgent audience overlooking such minor matters as boots and wigs, it became an easy matter for Jo to transform herself into either of the four characters which she assumed on this occasion.

Beneath the flowing robes of the sorceress Jo was fully dressed as Count Rodolpho. Laid conveniently near were the black cloak, hat, and mask of Louis, — also the white draperies required for the ghostly Theresa.

Thus, Norna appears in long, gray robe, to which are attached the hood and elf-locks of the witch. Seeing Hugo approach she conceals herself among the trees, thus gaining time to don the costume of Louis, and appear to Hugo who awaits him.

Hugo stabs and drags him from the stage. Louis then throws off his disguise and becomes Rodolpho, fully dressed for his entrance a moment later.

As Hugo does not again appear, it is an easy matter to assume the character of the spectre and produce the sights and sounds which terrify the guilty Count; then slipping on the witch's robe, be ready to glide forth and close the scene with dramatic effect.

SCENE FIFTH.

[*The wood near* Norna's *cave. Enter* Norna.]

Norna. It is the hour I bid him come with the letter for Lady Leonore. Poor youth, his sister slain, his life in danger, and the lady of his love far from him, 'tis a bitter fate. But, if old Norna loses not her power, he shall yet win his liberty, his love, and his revenge. Ah, he comes, — nay, 'tis the ruffian Hugo. I will conceal myself, — some evil is afoot [*hides among the trees*].

[*Enter* Hugo.

Hugo. This is the spot. Here will I hide, and bide my time [*conceals himself among the rocks*].

[*Enter* Louis.

Louis. She is not here. I'll wait awhile and think of Leonore. How will she receive this letter? Ah, could she know how, 'mid all my grief and danger, her dear face shines in my heart, and cheers me on. [Hugo *steals out, and as he turns, stabs him.*] Ha, villain, thou hast killed me! I am dying! God bless thee, Leonore! Norna, remember, vengeance on Rodolpho! [*Falls*]

Hugo. Nay, nay, thou wilt take no revenge; thy days are ended, thanks to this good steel. Now, for the token [*takes letter from* Louis's *hand*]. Ah, this he cannot doubt. I will take this ring too; 'tis a costly one. I'll hide the body in the thicket yonder, ere my lord arrives [*drags out the body*].

[*Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. Not here? Can he have failed? Here is blood — it may be his. I'll call. Hugo, good Hugo, art thou here?

Hugo [*stealing from the trees*]. Ay, my lord, I am here. All is safely done: the love-sick boy lies yonder in the thicket, dead as steel can make him. And here is the token if you doubt me, and the ring I just took from his hand [*gives letter*].

Rod. Nay, nay, I do not doubt thee; keep thou the ring. I am content with this. Tell me, did he struggle with thee when thou dealt the blow?

Hugo. Nay, my lord; he fell without a groan, and murmuring something of revenge on thee, he died. Hast thou the gold?

Rod. Yes, yes, I have it. Take it, and remember I can take thy life as easily as thou hast his, if thou shouldst whisper what hath been this day done. Now go; I've done with thee.

Hugo. And I with thee. Adieu, my lord.

[*Exit* Hugo.

Rod. Now am I safe, — no mortal knows of Theresa's death by my hand, and Leonore is mine.

Voice [*within the wood].* Never — never!

Rod. Curses on me! Am I bewitched? Surely, I heard a voice; perchance 'twas but an echo [*a wild laugh rings through the trees*]. Fiends take the wood! I'll stay no longer! [*Turns to fly.* Theresa's *spirit rises.*] 'Tis there, — help, help — [*Rushes wildly out.*]

[*Enter* Norna.

Norna. Ha, ha! fiends shall haunt thee, thou murderer! Another sin upon thy soul, — another life to be avenged! Poor, murdered youth, now gone to join thy sister. I will lay thee by her side and then to my work. He hath raised another ghost to haunt him. Let him beware!

[*Exit* Norna.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SIXTH.

[*Chamber in the castle of* Lady Leonore. *Enter* Leonore.]

Leonore. Ah, how wearily the days go by. No tidings of Count Louis, and Count Rodolpho urges on his suit so earnestly. I must accept his hand to-day, or refuse his love, and think no more of Louis. I know not how to choose. Rodolpho loves me: I am an orphan and alone, and in his lovely home I may be happy. I have heard it whispered that he is both stern and cruel, yet methinks it cannot be, — he is so tender when with me. Ah, would I could forget Count Louis! He hath never told his love, and doubtless thinks no more of her who treasures up his gentle words, and cannot banish them, even when another offers a heart and home few would refuse. How shall I answer Count Rodolpho when he comes? I do not love him as I should, and yet it were no hard task to learn with so fond a teacher. Shall I accept his love, or shall I reject?

[Norna *suddenly appears.*

Norna. Reject.

Leonore. Who art thou? Leave me, or I call for aid.

Norna. Nay, lady, fear not. I come not here to harm thee, but to save thee from a fate far worse than death. I am old Norna of the forest, and though they call me witch and sorceress, I am a woman yet, and with a heart to pity and to love. I would save thy youth and beauty from the blight I fear will fall upon thee.

Leonore. Save me! from what? How knowest thou I am in danger; and from what wouldst thou save me, Norna?

Norna. From Lord Rodolpho, lady.

Leonore. Ah! and why from him? Tell on, I'll listen to thee now. He hath offered me his heart and hand. Why should I not accept them, Norna?

Norna. That heart is filled with dark and evil passions, and that hand is stained with blood. Ay, lady, well mayst thou start. I will tell thee more. The splendid home he would lead thee to is darkened by a fearful crime, and his fair palace haunted by the spirit of a murdered wife.

[Leonore *starts up.*

Leonore. Wife, sayest thou? He told me he was never wed. Mysterious woman, tell me more! How dost thou know ‘tis true, and wherefore was it done? I have a right to know. Oh, speak, and tell me all!

Norna. For that have I come hither. He hath been wed to a lady, young and lovely as thyself. He kept her prisoner in his splendid home, and by neglect and cruelty he broke as warm and true a heart as ever beat in woman’s breast. Her brother stole unseen to cheer and comfort her, and this aroused her lord’s suspicions, and he bid her to confess who was her unknown friend. She would not yield her brother to his hate, and he in his wild anger murdered her. I heard his cruel words, her prayers for mercy, and I stood beside the lifeless form and marked the blow his evil hand had given her. And there I vowed I would avenge the deed, and for this have I come hither to warn thee of thy danger. He loves thee only for thy wealth, and when thou art his, will wrong thee as he hath the meek Theresa.

Leonore. How shall I ever thank thee for this escape from sorrow and despair? I did not love him, but I am alone, and his kind words were sweet and tender. I thought with him I might be happy yet, but — Ah, how little did I dream of sin like this! Thank Heaven, ‘tis not too late!

Norna. How wilt thou answer Lord Rodolpho now?

Leonore. I will answer him with all the scorn and loathing that I feel. I fear him not, and he shall learn how his false vows are despised, and his sins made known.

Norna. ‘Tis well; but stay, — be thou not too proud. Speak fairly, and reject him courteously; for he will stop at nought in his revenge if thou but rouse his hatred. And now, farewell. I’ll watch above thee, and in thy hour of danger old Norna will be nigh. Stay, give me some token, by which thou wilt know the messenger I may find cause to send thee. The fierce Count will seek to win thee, and repay thy scorn by all the evil his cruel heart can bring.

Leonore. Take this ring, and I will trust whoever thou mayst send with it. I owe thee much, and, believe me, I am grateful for thy care, and will repay thee by my confidence and truth. Farewell, old Norna; watch thou above the helpless, and thine old age shall be made happy by my care.

Norna. Heaven bless thee, gentle lady. Good angels guard thee. Norna will not forget.

[*Exit* Norna.

Leonore. ‘Tis like a dream, so strange, so terrible, — he whom I thought so gentle, and so true is stained with fearful crimes! Poor, murdered lady! Have I escaped a fate like thine? Ah, I hear his step! Now, heart, be firm and he shall enter here no more.

[*Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. Sweet lady, I am here to learn my fate. I have told my love, and thou hast listened; I have asked thy hand, and thou hast not refused it. I have offered all that I possess, — my home, my heart. Again I lay them at thy feet, beloved Leonore. Oh, wilt thou but accept them, poor tho’ they be, and in return let me but claim this fair hand as mine own?

[*Takes her hand and kneels before her.*

Leonore [*withdrawing her hand*]. My lord, forgive me, but I cannot grant it. When last we met thou didst bid me ask my heart if it could love thee. It hath answered, “Nay.” I grieve I cannot make a fit return for all you offer, but I have no love to give, and without it this poor hand were worthless. There are others far more fit to grace thy home than I. Go, win thyself a loving bride, and so forget Leonore.

Rod. What hath changed thee thus since last we met. Then wert thou kind, and listened gladly to my love. Now there is a scornful smile upon thy lips, and a proud light in thine eye. What means this? Why dost thou look so coldly on me, Leonore? Who has whispered false tales in thine ear? Believe them not. I am as true as Heaven to thee; then do not cast away the heart so truly thine. Smile on me, dearest; thou art my first, last, only love.

Leonore. ‘Tis false, my lord! Hast thou so soon forgot *Theresa*?

Rod. What! Who told thee that accursed tale? What dost thou mean, Leonore?

Leonore. I mean thy sinful deeds are known. Thou hast asked me why I will not wed thee, and I answer, I will not give my hand unto a murderer.

Rod. Murderer! No more of this! Thy tale is false; forget it, and I will forgive the idle words. Now listen; I came hither to receive thy answer to my suit. Think ere thou decide. Thou art an orphan, unprotected and alone. I am powerful and great. Wilt thou take my love, and with it honor, wealth, happiness, and ease, or my hate, which will surely follow thee and bring down desolation on thee and all thou lovest? Now choose, my hatred, or my love.

Leonore. My lord, I scorn thy love, and I defy thy hate. Work thy will, I fear thee not. I am not so unprotected as thou thinkest. There are unseen friends around me who will save in every peril, and who are sworn to take revenge on thee for thy great sins. This is my answer; henceforth we are strangers; now leave me. I would be alone.

Rod. Not yet, proud lady. If thou wilt not love, I’ll make thee learn to fear the heart thou hast so scornfully cast away. Let thy friends guard thee well; thou wilt need their care when I begin my work of vengeance. Thou mayst smile, but thou shalt rue the day when Count Rodolpho asked and was refused. But I will yet win thee, and then beware! And when thou dost pray for mercy on thy knees, remember the haughty words thou hast this day spoken.

Leonore. Do thy worst, murderer; spirits will watch above me, and thou canst not harm. Adieu, my lord.

[*Exit* Leonore.

Rod. Foiled again! Some demon works against me. Who could have told her of

Theresa? A little longer, and I should have won a rich young bride, and now this tale of murder mars it all. But I will win her yet, and wring her proud heart till she shall bend her haughty head and sue for mercy.

How shall it be done? Stay! Ha, I see a way! — the letter Louis would have sent her ere he died. She knows not of his death, and I will send this paper bidding her to meet her lover in the forest. She cannot doubt the lines his own hand traced. She will obey, — and I'll be there to lead her to my castle. I'll wed her, and she may scorn, weep, and pray in vain. Ha, ha! proud Leonore, spite of thy guardian spirits thou shalt be mine, and then for my revenge!

[*Exit* Rodolpho.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SEVENTH.

[Leonore's *room*. *Enter* Leonore *with a letter*.]

Leonore. 'Tis strange; an unknown page thrust this into my hand while kneeling in the chapel. Ah, surely, I should know this hand! 'Tis Louis's, and at last he hath returned, and still remembers Leonore [*opens letter and reads*].

Dearest Lady, — I am banished from the land by Count Rodolpho's false tales to the king; and thus I dare not venture near thee. But by the love my lips have never told, I do conjure thee to bestow one last look, last word, on him whose cruel fate it is to leave all that he most fondly loves. If thou wilt grant this prayer, meet me at twilight in the glen beside old Norna's cave. She will be there to guard thee. Dearest Leonore, before we part, perchance forever, grant this last boon to one who in banishment, in grief and peril, is forever thy devoted

Louis.

He loves me, and mid danger still remembers. Ah, Louis, there is nothing thou canst ask I will not gladly grant. I'll go; the sun is well-nigh set, and I can steal away unseen to whisper hope and comfort ere we part forever. Now, Count Rodolpho, thou hast given me another cause for hate. Louis, I can love thee tho' thou art banished and afar.

Hark! ‘tis the vesper-bell. Now, courage, heart, and thou shalt mourn no longer.

[*Exit* Leonore.

CURTAIN.

SCENE EIGHTH.

[*Glen near* Norna’s *cave. Enter* Leonore.]

Leonore. Norna is not here, nor Louis. Why comes he not? Surely ‘tis the place. Norna! Louis! art thou here?

[*Enter* Rodolpho, *masked*.

Rod. I am here, dear lady. Do not fear me; I may not unmask even to thee, for spies may still be near me. Wilt thou pardon, and still trust me tho’ thou canst not see how fondly I am looking on thee. See! here is my ring, my dagger. Oh, Leonore, do not doubt me!

Leonore. I do trust thee; canst thou doubt it now? Oh, Louis! I feared thou wert dead. Why didst thou not tell me all before. And where wilt thou go, and how can I best serve thee? Nought thou canst ask my love shall leave undone.

Rod. Wilt thou let me guide thee to yonder tower? I fear to tell thee here, and old Norna is there waiting for thee. Come, love, for thy Louis’s sake, dare yet a little more, and I will tell thee how thou canst serve me. Wilt thou not put thy faith in me, Leonore?

Leonore. I will. Forgive me, if I seem to fear thee; but thy voice sounds strangely hollow, and thine eyes look darkly on me from behind this mask. Thou wilt lay it by when we are safe, and then I shall forget this foolish fear that hangs upon me.

Rod. Thine own hands shall remove it, love. Come, it is not far. Would I might guide thee thus through life! Come, dearest!

[*Exit.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE NINTH.

[*Castle of* Rodolpho. *The haunted chamber. Enter* Rodolpho *leading* Leonore.]

Leonore. Where art thou leading me, dear Louis? Thy hiding-place is a pleasant one, but where is Norna? I thought she waited for us.

Rod. She will soon be here. Ah, how can I thank thee for this joyful hour, Leonore. I can forget all danger and all sorrow now.

Leonore. Nay, let me cast away this mournful mask! I long to look upon thy face once more. Wilt thou let me, Louis?

Rod. Ay, look upon me if thou wilt; — dost like it, lady? [*Drops his disguise.* Leonore *shrieks, and rushes to the door, but finds it locked*.] 'Tis useless; there are none to answer to thy call. All here are my slaves, and none dare disobey. Where are thy proud words now? hast thou no scornful smile for those white lips, no anger in those beseeching eyes? Where are thy friends? Why come they not to aid thee? Said I not truly my revenge was sure?

Leonore. Oh, pardon me, and pity! See, I will kneel to thee, pray, weep, if thou wilt only let me go. Forgive my careless words! Oh, Count Rodolpho, take me home, and I will forget this cruel jest [*kneels*].

Rod. Ha, ha! It is no jest, and thou hast no home but this. Didst thou not come willingly? I used no force; and all disguise is fair in love. Nay, kneel not to me. Did I not say thou wouldst bend thy proud head, and sue for mercy, and I would deny it? Where is thy defiance now?

Leonore [*rising*]. I'll kneel no more to thee. The first wild fear is past, and thou shalt find me at thy feet no more. As I told thee *then*, I tell thee *now*, — thine I will never be; and think not I will fail or falter at thy threats. Contempt of thee is too strong for fear.

Rod. Not conquered yet. Time will teach thee to speak more courteously to thy master. Ah, thou mayst well look upon these bawbles. They were thy lover's once. This ring was taken from his lifeless hand; this dagger from his bleeding breast, as he lay within the forest whence I led thee. This scroll I found next his heart when it had ceased to beat. I lured thee hither with it, and won my sweet revenge. [Leonore *sinks down weeping.*] Now rest thee; for when the castle clock strikes ten, I shall come to lead thee to the altar. The priest is there, — this ring shall wed thee. Farewell, fair bride; remember, — there is no escape, and thou art mine forever.

Leonore [*starting up*]. Never! I shall be free when thou mayst think help past forever. There is a friend to help me, and an arm to save, when earthly aid is lost. Thine I shall never be! Thou mayst seek me; I shall be gone.

Rod. Thou wilt need thy prayers. I shall return, — remember, when the clock strikes ten, I come to win my bride.

[*Exit.*

Leonore. He has gone, and now a few short hours of life are left to me; for if no other help shall come, death can save me from a fate I loathe. Ah, Louis, Louis, thou art gone forever! Norna, where is thy promise now to guard me? Is there no help? Nor tears nor prayers can melt that cruel heart, and I am in his power. Ha! what is that? — *his* dagger, taken from his dying breast. How gladly would he have drawn it forth to save his poor Leonore! Alas, that hand is cold forever! But I must be calm. He shall see how a weak woman's heart can still defy him, and win liberty by death [*takes the dagger; clock strikes ten*]. It is the hour, — the knell of my young life. Hark! they come. Louis, thy Leonore ere long will join thee, never more to part.

[*The secret panel opens.* Adrian *enters masked.*]

Adrian. Stay, lady! stay thy hand! I come to save thee. Norna sends me, — see, thy token; doubt not, nor delay; another moment, we are lost. Oh, fly, I do beseech thee!

Leonore. Heaven bless thee; I will come. Kind friend, I put a helpless maiden’s trust in thee.

Adrian. Stay not! away, away!

[*Exit through the secret panel, which disappears*. *Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. Is my fair bride ready? Ha! Leonore, where art thou?

Voice. Gone, — gone forever!

Rod. Girl, mock me not; come forth, I say. Thou shalt not escape me. Leonore, answer! Where is my bride?

Voice [*behind the curtains*]. Here —

Rod. Why do I fear? She is there concealed [*lifts the curtain; spirit of* Theresa *rises*]. The fiends! what is that? The spirit haunts me still!

Voice. Forever, forever —

Rod. [*rushes to the door but finds it locked*]. What ho! without there! Beat down the door! Pedro! Carlos! let me come forth! They do not come! Nay, ‘tis my fancy; I will forget it all. Still, the door is fast; Leonore is gone. *Who* groans so bitterly? Wild voices are sounding in the air, ghastly faces are looking on me as I turn, unseen hands bar the door, and dead men are groaning in mine ears. I’ll not look, not listen; ‘tis some spell set on me. Let it pass!

[*Throws himself down and covers his face.*

Voice. The spell will not cease,
The curse will not fly,
And spirits shall haunt
Till the murderer shall die.

Rod. Again, spirit or demon, wherefore dost thou haunt me, and what art thou? [Theresa’s *spirit rises.*] Ha! am I gone mad? Unbar the door! Help! help! [*Falls fainting to the floor.*]

[*Enter* Norna.

Norna. Lie there, thou sinful wretch! Old Norna’s curse ends but with thy life.

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE TENTH.

[*A room in the castle of* Rodolpho. *Enter* Rodolpho.]

Rod. Dangers seem thickening round me. Some secret spy is watching me unseen, — I fear ‘tis Hugo, spite the gold I gave him, and the vows he made. A higher bribe may win the secret from him, and then I am undone. Pedro hath told me that a stranger, cloaked and masked, was lurking near the castle on the night when Leonore so strangely vanished [*a laugh*]. Ha! — what’s that? — methought I heard that mocking laugh again! I am grown fearful as a child since that most awful night. Well, well, let it pass! If Hugo comes to-night, obedient to the message I have sent, I’ll see he goes not hence alive. This cup shalt be thy last, good Hugo! [*Puts poison in the wine-cup.*] He comes, — now for my revenge! [*Enter* Hugo.] Ah, Hugo, welcome! How hath it fared with thee since last we met? Thou lookest weary, — here is wine; sit and refresh thyself.

Hugo. I came not hither, Count Rodolpho, to seek wine, but gold. Hark ye! I am poor; thou art rich, but in my power, for proud and noble though thou art, the low-born Hugo can bring death and dishonor on thy head by whispering one word to the king. Ha! — now give me gold or I will betray thee.

Rod. Thou bold villain, what means this? I paid thee well, and thou didst vow to keep my secret. Threaten me not. Thou art in my power, and shall never leave this room alive. I fear thee not. My menials are at hand, — yield thyself; thou art fairly caught, and cannot now escape me.

Hugo. Nay, not so fast, my lord. One blast upon my horn, and my brave band, concealed below, will answer to my call. Ha! ha! thou art caught, my lord. Thy life is in my hands, and thou must purchase it by fifty good pistoles paid down to me; if not, I will charge thee with the crime thou didst bribe me to perform, and thus win a rich reward. Choose, — thy life is nought to me.

Rod. Do but listen, Hugo. I have no gold; smile if thou wilt, but I am poor. This castle only is mine own, and I am seeking now a rich young bride whose wealth will hide my poverty. Be just, good Hugo, and forgive the harsh words I have spoken. Wait till I am wed, and I will pay thee well.

Hugo. That will I not. I'll have no more of thee, false lord! The king will well reward me, and thou mayst keep thy gold. Farewell! Thou wilt see me once again.

Rod. Stay, Hugo, stay! Give me but time; I may obtain the gold. Wait a little, and it shall be thine. Wilt thou not drink? 'Tis the wine thou likest so well. See! I poured it ready for thee.

Hugo. Nay; I will serve myself. Wine of thy mixing would prove too strong for me [*sits down and drinks.* Rodolpho *paces up and down waiting a chance to stab him*]. Think quickly, my good lord; I must be gone [*turns his head.* R. *raises his dagger.* Hugo *rising*]. I'll wait no more; 'tis growing late, and I care not to meet the spirits which I hear now haunt thy castle. Well, hast thou the gold?

Rod. Not yet; but if thou wilt wait —

Hugo. I tell thee I will not. I'll be deceived no longer. Thou art mine, and I'll repay thy scornful words and sinful deeds by a prisoner’s cell. And so, adieu, my lord. Escape is useless, for thou wilt be watched. Hugo is the master now!

[*Exit* Hugo.

Rod. Thou cunning villain, I’ll outwit thee yet. I will disguise myself, and watch thee well, and when least thou thinkest it, my dagger shall be at thy breast. And now one thing remains to me, and that is flight. I must leave all and go forth poor, dishonored, and alone; sin on my head, and fear within my heart. Will the sun never set? How slow the hours pass! In the first gloom of night, concealed in yonder old monk’s robe, I’ll silently glide forth, and fly from Hugo and this haunted house. Courage, Rodolpho, thou shalt yet win a name and fortune for thyself. Now let me rest awhile; I shall need strength for the perils of the night [*lies down and sleeps*].

[*Enter* Norna.

Norna. Poor fool! thy greatest foe is here, — her thou shalt not escape. Hugo shall be warned, and thou alone shalt fall.

[*She makes signs from the window and vanishes.*

Rod. [*awakes and rises*]. Ah, what fearful dreams are mine! Theresa — Louis — still they haunt me! Whither shall I turn? Who comes? [*Enter* Gaspard.] Art thou another phantom sent to torture me?

Gasp. ‘Tis I, leader of the king’s brave guards, sent hither to arrest thee, my lord; for thou art charged with murder.

Rod. Who dares to cast so foul a stain on Count Rodolpho’s name.

Gasp. My lord, yield thyself. The king may show thee mercy yet —

Rod. I will yield, and prove my innocence, and clear mine honor to the king. Reach me my cloak yonder, and I am ready.

[Gaspard *turns to seek the cloak.* Rodolpho *leaps from the window and disappears.*

Gasp. Ha! he hath escaped, — curses on my carelessness! [*Rushes to the window.*] Ho, there! surround the castle, the prisoner hath fled! We'll have him yet, the blood-stained villain!

[*Exit* Gaspard. *Shouts and clashing of swords heard.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE ELEVENTH.

[Norna's *cave.* Leonore *and Adrian*.]

Adrian. Dear lady, can I do nought to while away the lonely hours? Shall I go forth and bring thee flowers, or seek thy home and bear away thy bird, thy lute, or aught that may beguile thy solitude? It grieves me that I can do so little for thee.

Leonore. Nay, 'tis I should grieve that I can find no way to show my gratitude to thee, my brave deliverer. But wilt thou not tell me who thou art? I would fain know to whom I owe my life and liberty.

Adrian. Nay, that I may not tell thee. I have sworn a solemn vow, and till that is fulfilled I may not cast aside this sorrowful disguise. Meanwhile, thou mayst call me Adrian. Wilt thou pardon and trust me still?

Leonore. Canst thou doubt my faith in thee? Thou and old Norna are the only friends now left to poor Leonore. I put my whole heart's trust in thee. But if thou canst not tell me of thyself, wilt tell me why thou hast done so much for me, a friendless maiden?

Adrian. I fear it will cause thee sorrow, lady; and thou hast grief enough to bear.

Leonore. Do not fear. I would so gladly know —

Adrian. Forgive me if I make thee weep: I had a friend, — most dear to me. He loved a gentle lady, but ere he could tell her this, he died, and bid me vow to watch above her whom he loved, and guard her with my life. I took the vow: that lady was thyself, that friend Count Louis.

Leonore. Ah, Louis! Louis! that heart thou feared to ask is buried with thee.

Adrian. Thou didst love him, lady?

Leonore. Love him? Most gladly would I lie down within my grave tonight, could I but call him back to life again.

Adrian. Grieve not; thou hast one friend who cannot change, — one who through joy and sorrow will find his truest happiness in serving thee. Hist! I hear a step: I will see who comes.

[*Exit* Adrian.

Leonore. Kind, watchful friend, how truly do I trust thee!

[*Re-enter* Adrian.

Adrian. Conceal thyself, dear lady, with all speed. ‘Tis Count Rodolpho. Let me lead thee to the inner cave, — there thou wilt be safe.

[*They retire within; noise heard without. Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. At last I am safe. Old Norna will conceal me till I can find means to leave the land. Ha! — voices within there. Ho, there! old wizard, hither! I have need of thee!

[*Enter* Adrian.

Adrian. What wouldst thou?

Rod. Nought. Get thee hence! I seek old Norna.

Adrian. Thou canst not see her; she is not here.

Rod. Not here? ‘Tis false, — I heard a woman’s voice within there. Let me pass!

Adrian. ‘Tis not old Norna, and thou canst not pass.

Rod. Ah, then, who might it be, my most mysterious sir?

Adrian. The Lady Leonore.

Rod. Ha! — how came she hither? By my soul, thou liest! Stand back and let me go. She is mine!

Adrian. Thou canst only enter here above my lifeless body. Leonore is here, and I am her protector and thy deadliest foe. ‘Tis for thee to yield and leave this cell.

Rod. No more of this, — thou hast escaped me once. Draw and defend thyself, if thou hast courage to meet a brave man’s sword!

Adrian. But for Leonore I would not stoop so low, or stain my sword; but for her sake I’ll dare all, and fight thee to the last.

[*They fight their way out. Enter* Rodolpho.

Rod. At length fate smiles upon me. I am the victor, — and now for Leonore! All danger is forgotten in the joy of winning my revenge on this proud girl! Thou art mine at last, Leonore, and mine forever! [*Rushes towards the inner cave. Spirit of* Theresa *rises.*] There ‘tis again! I will not fly, — I do defy it! [*Attempts to pass. Spirit touches him; he drops his sword and rushes wildly away.*] ‘Tis vain: I cannot — dare not pass. It comes, it follows me. Whither shall I fly?

[*Exit. Enter* Adrian *wounded.*

Adrian. I have saved her once again, — but oh, this deathlike faintness stealing o'er me robs me of my strength. Thou art safe, Leonore, and I am content. [*Falls fainting.*]

[*Enter* Leonore.

Leonore. They are gone. Ah, what has chanced? I heard his voice, and now 'tis still as death. Where is my friend? God grant he be not hurt! I'll venture forth and seek him [*sees* Adrian *unconscious before her*]. Oh, what is this? Adrian, kind friend, dost thou not hear me? There is blood upon his hand! Can he be dead? No, no! he breathes, he moves; this mask, I will remove it, — surely he will forgive.

[*Attempts to unmask him; he prevents her.*

Adrian [*reviving*]. Nay, nay; it must not be. I am better now. The blow but stunned me, — it will pass away. And thou art safe?

Leonore. I feared not for myself, but thee. Come, rest thee here, thy wound is bleeding; let me bind it with my kerchief, and bring thee wine. Let me serve thee who hath done so much for me. Art better now! Can I do aught else for thee?

Adrian. No more, dear lady. Think not of me, and listen while I tell thee of the dangers that surround thee. Count Rodolpho knows thou art here, and may return with men and arms to force thee hence. My single arm could then avail not, though I would gladly die for thee. Where then can I lead thee, — no place can be too distant, no task too hard for him whose joy it is to serve thee.

Leonore. Alas! I know not. I dare not seek my home while Count Rodolpho is my foe; my servants would be bribed, — they would betray me, and thou wouldst not be there to save. Adrian, I have no friend but thee. Oh, pity and protect me!

Adrian. Most gladly will I, dearest lady. Thou canst never know the joy thy confidence hath wakened in my heart. I will save and guard thee with my life. I will guide thee to a peaceful home where no danger can approach, and only friends surround thee. Thy Louis dwelt there once, and safely mayst thou rest till danger shall be past. Will this please thee?

Leonore. Oh, Adrian, thou kind, true friend, how can I tell my gratitude, and where find truer rest than in *his* home, where gentle memories of him will lighten grief. Then take me there, and I will prove my gratitude by woman’s fondest friendship, and my life-long trust.

Adrian. Thanks, dear lady. I need no other recompense than the joy ‘tis in my power to give thee. I will watch faithfully above thee, and when thou needest me no more, I’ll leave thee to the happiness thy gentle heart so well deserves. Now rest, while I seek out old Norna, and prepare all for our flight. The way we have to tread is long and weary. Rest thee, dear lady.

Leonore. Adieu, dear friend. I will await thee ready for our pilgrimage, and think not I shall fail or falter, though the path be long, and dangers gather round us. I shall not fear, for thou wilt be there. God bless thee, Adrian.

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE TWELFTH.

[*Room in the castle of* Louis. Leonore *singing to her lute.*]

The weary bird mid stormy skies,
Flies home to her quiet nest,
And ‘mid the faithful ones she loves,
Finds shelter and sweet rest.

And thou, my heart, like to tired bird,
Hath found a peaceful home,
Where love’s soft sunlight gently falls,
And sorrow cannot come.

Leonore. ‘Tis strange that I can sing, but in this peaceful home my sorrow seems to change to deep and quiet joy. Louis seems ever near, and Adrian’s silent acts of tenderness beguile my solitary hours, and daily grow more dear to me. He guards me day and night, seeking to meet my slightest wish, and gather round me all I hold most dear. [*Enter a* Page.] Angelo, what wouldst thou?

Page. My master bid me bring these flowers and crave thee to accept them lady.

Leonore. Bear him my thanks, and tell him that his gift is truly welcome. [*Exit* Page.] These are the blossoms he was gathering but now upon the balcony; he hath sent the sweetest and the fairest [*a letter falls from the nosegay*]. But what is here? He hath never sent me aught like this before [*opens and reads the letter*].

Dearest Lady, — Wilt thou pardon the bold words I here address to thee, and forgive me if I grieve one on whom I would bestow only the truest joy. In giving peace to thy heart I have lost mine own. I was thy guide and comforter, and soon, unknown to thee, thy lover. I love thee, Leonore, fondly and truly; and here I ask, wilt thou accept the offering of a heart that will forever cherish thee. If thou canst grant this blessed boon, fling from the casement the white rose I send thee; but if thou canst not accept my love, forgive me for avowing it, and drop the cypress bough I have twined about the rose. I will not pain thee to refuse in words, — the mournful token is enough. Ask thine own heart if thou, who hast loved Louis, can feel aught save friendship for the unknown, nameless stranger, who through life and death is ever

Thy loving Adrian.

Oh, how shall I reply to this, — how blight a love so tender and so true? I have longed to show my gratitude, to prove how I have revered this noble friend. The hour has come when I may make his happiness, and prove my trust. And yet my heart belongs to Louis, and I cannot love another. Adrian was his friend; he loved him, and confided me to him. Nobly hath he fulfilled that trust, and where could I find a truer friend than he who hath saved me from danger and from death, and now gives me the power to gladden and to bless his life. Adrian, if thou wilt accept a sister's love and friendship, they shall be thine. Louis, forgive me if I wrong thee; for though I yield my hand, my heart is thine forever. This rose, Adrian, to thee; this mournful cypress shall be mine in memory of my blighted hopes [*goes to the window and looks out*]. See! he is waiting yonder by the fountain for the token that shall bring him joy or sorrow. Thou noble friend, thy brave, true heart shall grieve no longer, for thus will Leonore repay the debt of gratitude she owes thee [*flings the rose from the window*]. He hath placed it in his bosom, and is coming hither to pour forth his thanks for the poor gift bestowed. I will tell him all, and if he will accept, then I am his.

[*Enter* Adrian *with the rose*.

Adrian. Dear lady, how can I tell thee the joy thou hast given me. This blessed flower from thy dear hand hath told thy pardon and consent. Oh, Leonore, canst thou love a nameless stranger who is so unworthy the great boon thou givest.

Leonore. Listen, Adrian, ere thou dost thank me for a divided heart. Thou hast been told my love for Louis; he was thy friend, and well thou knowest how true and tender was the heart he gave me. He hath gone, and with him rests my first deep love. Thou art my only friend and my protector; thou hast won my gratitude and warmest friendship. I can offer thee a sister's pure affection, — my hand is thine; and here I pledge thee that as thou hast watched o'er me, so now thy happiness shall be my care, thy love my pride and joy. Here is my hand, — wilt thou accept it, Adrian?

Adrian. I will. I would not seek to banish from thy heart the silent love thou bearest Louis. I am content if thou wilt trust me with thy happiness, and give me the sweet right to guide and guard thee through the pilgrimage of life. God bless thee, dearest.

Leonore. Dear Adrian, can I do nought for thee? I have now won the right to cheer thy sorrows. Have faith in thy Leonore.

Adrian. Thou hast a right to know all, and ere long thou shalt. My mysterious vow will now soon be fulfilled, and then no doubt shall part us. Thou hast placed thy trust in me, and I have not betrayed it, and now I ask a greater boon of thy confiding heart. Wilt thou consent to wed me ere I cast aside this mask forever? Believe me, thou wilt not regret it, — ’tis part of my vow; one last trial, and I will prove to thee thou didst not trust in vain. Forgive if I have asked too much. Nay, thou canst not grant so strange a boon.

Leonore. I can — I will. I did but pause, for it seemed strange thou couldst not let me look upon thy face. But think not that I fear to grant thy wish. Thy heart is pure and noble, and that thou canst not mask. As I trusted thee through my despair, so now I trust thee in my joy. Canst thou ask more, dear friend?

Adrian. Ever trust me thus! Ah, Leonore, how can I repay thee? My love, my life, are all I can give thee for the blessed gift thou hast bestowed. A time will come when all this mystery shall cease and we shall part no more. Now must I leave thee, dearest. Farewell! Soon will I return.

[*Exit* Adrian.

Leonore. I will strive to be a true and loving wife to thee, dear Adrian; for I have won a faithful friend in thee forever.

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRTEENTH.

[*Hall in the castle of* Count Louis. *Enter* Leonore, *in bridal robes*.]

Leonore. At length the hour hath come, when I shall look upon the face of him whom I this day have sworn to love and honor as a wife. I have, perchance, been rash in wedding one I know not, but will not cast a doubt on him who hath proved the noble heart that beats within his breast. I am his, and come what may, the vows I have this day made shall be unbroken. Ah, he comes; and now shall I gaze upon my husband’s face!

[*Enter* Adrian.

Adrian. Dearest, fear not. Thou wilt not trust me less when thou hast looked upon the face so long concealed. My vow is ended, thou art won. Thy hand is mine; Leonore, I claim thy heart.

[*Unmasks.* Leonore *screams and falls upon his breast.*

Leonore. Louis, Louis! ‘Tis a blessed dream!

Louis. No dream, my Leonore; it is thy living Louis who hath watched above thee, and now claims thee for his own. Ah, dearest, I have tried thee too hardly, — pardon me!

Leonore. Oh, Louis, husband, I have nought to pardon; my life, my liberty, my happiness, — all, all, I owe to thee. How shall I repay thee? [*Weeps upon his bosom.*]

Louis. By banishing these tears, dear love, and smiling on me as you used to do. Here, love, sit beside me while I tell thee my most strange tale, and then no longer shalt thou wonder. Art happy now thy Adrian hath flung by his mask?

Leonore. Happy! What deeper joy can I desire than that of seeing thy dear face once more? But tell me, Louis, how couldst thou dwell so long beside me and not cheer my bitter sorrow when I grieved for thee.

Louis. Ah, Leonore, thou wouldst not reproach me, didst thou know how hard I struggled with my heart, lest I should by some tender word, some fond caress, betray myself when thou didst grieve for me.

Leonore. Why didst thou fear to tell thy Leonore? She would have aided and consoled thee. Why didst thou let me pine in sorrow at thy side, when but a word had filled my heart with joy?

Louis. Dearest, I dared not. Thou knowest I was banished by the hate of that fiend Rodolpho. I had a fair and gentle sister, whom he wed, and after cruelty and coldness that I dread to think of now, he murdered her. I sought old Norna’s aid. She promised it, and well hath kept her word. When Count Rodolpho’s ruffian left me dying in the forest, she saved, and brought me back to life. She bade me take a solemn vow not to betray myself, and to aid her in her vengeance on the murderer of Theresa. Nor could I own my name and rank, lest it should reach the king who had banished me. The vow I took, and have fulfilled.

Leonore. And is there no danger now? Art thou safe, dear Louis, from the Count?

Louis. Fear not, my love. He will never harm us more; his crimes are known. The king hath pardoned me. I have won thee back. He is an outcast, and old Norna’s spells have well-nigh driven him mad. My sister, thou art well avenged! Alas! alas! would I could have saved, and led thee hither to this happy home.

Leonore. Ah, grieve not, Louis; she is happy now, and thy Leonore will strive to fill her place. Hast thou told me all?

Louis. Nay, love. Thou knowest how I watched above thee, but thou canst never know the joy thy faithful love for one thou mourned as dead hath brought me. I longed to cast aside the dark disguise I had vowed to wear, but dared not while Rodolpho was at liberty. Now all is safe. I have tried thy love, and found it true. Oh, may I prove most worthy of it, dearest.

Leonore. Louis, how can I love too faithfully the friend who, ‘mid his own grief and danger, loved and guarded me. I trusted thee as Adrian; as Louis I shall love thee until death.

Louis. And I shall prize most tenderly the faithful heart that trusted me through doubt and mystery. Now life is bright and beautiful before us, and may you never sorrow that thou gav’st thy heart to Louis, and thy hand to Adrian the “Black Mask.”

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTEENTH.

[*A dungeon cell.* Rodolpho *chained, asleep. Enter* Norna.]

Norna. Thy fate is sealed, thy course is run,
And Norna’s work is well-nigh done.

[*Vanishes. Enter* Hugo.

Rod. [*awaking*]. Mine eyes are bewildered by the forms I have looked upon in sleep. Methought old Norna stood beside me, whispering evil spells, calling fearful phantoms to bear me hence.

Hugo [*coming forward*]. Thy evil conscience gives thee little rest, my lord.

Rod. [*starting up*]. Who is there? Stand back! I’ll sell my life most dearly. Ah, ‘tis no dream, — I am fettered! Where is my sword?

Hugo. In my safe keeping, Count Rodolpho, lest in thy rage thou may’st be tempted to add another murder to thy list of sins. [Rodolpho *sinks down in despair.*] Didst think thou couldst escape? Ah, no; although most swift of foot and secret, Hugo hath watched and followed thee. I swore to win both gold and vengeance. The king hath offered high reward for thy poor head, and it is mine. Methinks it may cheer your solitude my lord, so I came hither on my way to bear thy death warrant to the captain of the guard. What wilt thou give for this? Hark ye! were this destroyed, thou might’st escape ere another were prepared. How dost thou like the plot?

Rod. And wilt thou save me, Hugo? Give me not up to the king! I’ll be thy slave. All I possess is thine. I’ll give thee countless gold. Ah, pity, and save me, Hugo!

Hugo. Ha, ha! I did but jest. Thinkest thou I could forego the joy of seeing thy proud head laid low? Where was thy countless gold when I did ask it of thee? No, no; thou canst not tempt me to forget my vengeance. ‘Tis Hugo’s turn to play the master now. Mayst thou rest well, and so, good even, my lord.

[*Exit* Hugo.

Rod. Thus end my hopes of freedom. My life is drawing to a close, and all my sins seem rising up before me. The forms of my murdered victims flit before me, and their dying words ring in mine ears, — Leonore praying for mercy at my feet; old Norna whispering curses on my soul. How am I haunted and betrayed! Oh, fool, fool that I have been! My pride, my passion, all end in this! Hated, friendless, and alone, the proud Count Rodolpho dies a felon’s death. ‘Tis just, ‘tis just! [*Enter* Louis *masked.*] What’s that? Who spoke? Ah, ‘tis mine unknown foe. What wouldst thou here?

Louis. Thou didst bribe one Hugo to murder the young Count Louis, whom thou didst hate. He did thy bidding, and thy victim fell; but Norna saved, and healed his wounds. She told him of his murdered sister’s fate, and he hath joined her in her work of vengeance, and foiled thee in thy sinful plots. I saved Leonore, and guarded her till I had won her heart and hand, and in her love find solace for the sorrow thou hast caused. Dost doubt the tale? Look on thine unknown foe, and find it true [*unmasks*].

Rod. Louis, whom I hated, and would kill, — thou here, thou husband of Leonore, happy and beloved! It is too much, too much! If thou lovest life, depart. I’m going mad: I see wild phantoms whirling round me, voices whispering fearful words within mine ears. Touch me not, — there is blood upon my hands! Will this dream last forever?

Louis. May Heaven pity thee! Theresa, thou art avenged.

[*Exit* Louis.

Rod. Ah, these are fearful memories for a dying hour! [*Casts himself upon the floor.*]

[*Enter* Norna.

Norna. Sinful man, didst think thy death-bed could be peaceful? As they have haunted thee in life, so shall spirits darken thy last hour. *I* bore thy murdered wife to a quiet grave, and raised a spirit to affright and haunt thee to thy death. *I* freed the Lady Leonore; *I* mocked and haunted thee in palace, wood, and cell; *I* warned Hugo, and betrayed thee to his power; and *I* brought down this awful doom upon thee. As thou didst refuse all mercy to thy victims, so shall mercy be denied to thee. Remorse and dark despair shall wring thy heart, and thou shalt die unblessed, unpitied, unforgiven. Thy victims are avenged, and Norna's work is done.

[Norna *vanishes.*

Rod. Ha! ha! 'tis gone, — yet stay, 'tis Louis' ghost! How darkly his eyes shine on me! See, see, — the demons gather round me! How fast they come! Old Norna is there, muttering her spells. Let me go free! Unbind these chains! Hugo, Louis, Leonore, Theresa, — thou art avenged!

[*Falls dead.* Norna *glides in and stands beside him.*

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

CAPTIVE OF CASTILE.

OR

THE MOORISH MAIDEN’S VOW

CHARACTERS.

Bernardo *Lord of Castile*.

Ernest L’Estrange *An English Lord.*

Hernando *A Priest*.

Selim *A Slave*.

Zara *Daughter to Bernardo*.

CAPTIVE OF CASTILE;

OR,

THE MOORISH MAIDEN’S VOW.

SCENE FIRST.

[*A thick wood. Storm coming on. Enter* Ernest.]

Ernest. This summer sky, darkened by storm, is a fit emblem of my life. O happy England, why did I leave thee; why let dreams of fame and honor win me from a home, to wander now a lonely and bewildered fugitive? But why do I repine? Life, health, and a brave heart yet are mine; and ‘mid all my peril, God may send some joy to cheer me on to happiness and honor. Hist! a footstep. ‘Tis a light one, but a Moorish foe steals like a serpent on his prey. I’ll hide me here, and if need be I’ll sell my life as a brave man should [*conceals himself among the trees*].

[*Enter* Zara, *weeping.*

Zara. Heaven shield me! Whither shall I turn? Alone in this wild forest, where may I find a friend to help. The dark storm gathers fast, and I am shelterless. The fierce Spaniard may be wandering nigh, and I dare not call for aid. Mistress of a hundred slaves, here must I perish for one to lead me. Father, the faint heart turns to thee when earthly help is past; hear and succor thy poor child now, who puts her trust in thee.

Ernest [*coming forward*]. Lady, thy prayer is heard. God hath not sent me here in vain. How may I best serve thee?

Zara. Gentle stranger, pity and protect a hapless maid who puts her faith in thee. Guide me from this wild wood, and all the thanks a grateful heart can give are thine.

Ernest. I ask no higher honor than to shield so fair a flower from the storm, or from rude hands that may harm it. But how chanced it, lady, that thou art wandering thus unattended? ‘Tis unsafe for youth and beauty while the Spanish army is so near.

Zara. It was a foolish fancy led me hither, and dearly am I punished. Journeying from a distant convent to my father’s home, while my attendants rested by a spring I wandered through the wood, unthinking of the danger, till turning to retrace my steps, I found myself lost and alone. I feared to call, and but for thee, kind stranger, might have never seen my home again. Ask not my name, but tell me thine, that in my prayers I may remember one who has so aided me.

Ernest. It were uncourteous to refuse thy bidding, lady. Ernest L’Estrange is the name now honored by the poor service I may do thee. In the Spanish army I came hither, and fear I have seen the last of home or friends. The Moors now seek my life, and ere I can rejoin my ranks, I may be a slave. But the storm draws nearer. Let me lead thee to some shelter, lady.

Zara. Methinks I see a glimmer yonder. Let us seek it, for with thee I fear no longer. I can only give thee thanks, most noble stranger; yet a day may come when she for whom thou dost now risk thy life may find a fit return, worthy thy courtesy to one so helpless and forlorn.

[*Exit* Ernest *and* Zara.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SECOND.

[*Room in the castle of* Bernardo. Zara *alone*].

Zara. ‘Tis strange how the thought haunts me still. Long months have passed since last I saw that noble face, and yet those gentle eyes look on me! Ernest! — ’tis a sweet English name, and ‘twas a noble English heart that felt such tender pity for a helpless maid. Hark! my father’s step! He comes to tell of victories gained, of kingdoms won. Oh, would he might bring some word of him I have so longed to see and thank once more!

[*Enter* Bernardo *with a casket.*

Ber. Joyful tidings, Zara! Grenada is free. Here, love, are gems for thee; they have shone on many a fair lady’s neck, but none more fair than thine. And here are things more precious far to me than all their gold and gems, — a goodly list of prisoners taken in the fight, and sent to cool their Spanish blood in our deepest cells. Ah, many a proud name is here, — Ferdinand Navarre, Carlos of Arragon, Lord L’Estrange, and Baron Lisle. But, child, what ails thee?

Zara [*starting up*]. L'Estrange! Is he a prisoner too? Hast thou read aright? Father, Father, it was he who saved me from a bitter death in yonder forest. I never told his name lest it should anger thee. For my sake spare him, and let the gratitude thou hast felt for that kind deed soften thy heart to the brave stranger.

Ber. Nay, Zara! He is thy country's foe, and must be sacrificed to save her honor. 'Twas a simple deed thou hast spoken of. What brave man but would save a fair girl from storms or danger? 'Tis a foolish thought, love; let it pass.

Zara. Oh, Father! I who never bent the knee to man before, implore thee thus [*kneels*]. Be merciful! Leave not the English lord to the dark and fearful doom that waits him. I know too well the life-long captivity, more terrible than death itself, that is his fate. Oh, speak! Say he is forgiven, Father!

Ber. Nay, what wild dream is this? Listen, child! I tell thee he must suffer the captivity he merits as thy country's foe. He hath borne arms against thy king, slain thy kindred, brought woe and desolation thro' the land our fathers gave us. And thou wouldst plead for him! Shame on thee! Thou art no true daughter of thy suffering country if thou canst waste one tear on those who were well lodged in our most dreary dungeons. Call thy pride to aid thee, Zara, and be worthy of thy noble name.

Zara. Father, thou hast often told me woman's lot was 'mid the quiet scenes of home, and that no thoughts of fame or glory should lie within a heart where only gentleness and love should dwell; but I have learned to honor bravery and noble deeds, and I would pledge my troth for the noble stranger. See the English knight, and if he win thee not to gratitude, thou art not the tender father who, through long years, hath so loved and cherished thy motherless child.

Ber. Nay, Zara, nay; honor is a sterner master than a father's love. I cannot free the captive till the king who hath sealed his doom shall pardon also. The prisoners are men of rank, and for thy country's sake must die. Forget thy foolish fancy, child, and set thy young heart on some fairer toys than these false English lords. Adieu, love; I must to the council.

[*Exit* Bernardo.

Zara. Ah, there was a time when Zara’s lightest wish was gladly granted. This cruel war hath sadly changed my father; he hath forgotten all his generous pity for suffering and sorrow. But my work is yet undone, and the stranger is a captive. He *shall* be free, and I will pay the debt of gratitude I owe him. I will brave my father’s anger; but whom can I trust to aid me? Ha! Selim! He is old and faithful, and will obey [*claps her hands*].

[*Enter* Selim.

Selim. Your bidding, lady.

Zara. Selim, thou hast known me from my birth, and served me well. I have done thee many a kindness. Wilt thou grant me one that shalt repay all that I have ever shown to thee?

Selim. Lady, thou hast made a slave’s life happy by thy care, and through the long years I have served thee, hast never bid me do aught that was not right. If my poor services can aid thee now, they are most gladly thine.

Zara. Listen, Selim, while I tell thee what I seek. Thou knowest an English soldier saved and led me from the forest yonder, and thou knowest how my father thanked and blessed the unknown friend who had so aided me. Yet now, when it is in his power to show the gratitude he felt, he will not, and has doomed the man he once longed to honor to a lonely cell to pine away a brave heart’s life in sorrow and captivity. I would show that gentle stranger that a woman never can forget. I would free him. Thou hast the keys. This is the service I now crave of thee.

Selim. Lady, canst thou ask me to betray the trust my lord, thy father, hath been pleased to place in me? Ask anything but this, and gladly will I obey thee.

Zara. Ah, must I ever ask and be refused? Selim, listen! Thou hast a daughter; she is fair and young, and thou hast often sighed that she should be a slave. If thou wilt aid me now, the hour the chains fall from the English captive’s limbs, that hour shalt see thy daughter free, and never more a slave. If thou wilt win this joy for her, then grant my prayer, and she is free.

Selim. Oh, lady, lady, tempt me not! much as I love my child, I love mine honor more. I cannot aid thee to deceive thy father.

Zara. Nay, Selim, I do not ask it of thee. The proud name my father bears shall ne’er be stained by one false deed of mine. I ask thee but to lead me to the prisoner’s cell, that I may offer freedom, and tell him woman’s gratitude can never fail, nor woman’s heart forget. And if my father ask thee aught of this, thou shalt answer freely. Tell him all, and trust his kindness to forgive; and if evil come *I* will bear it bravely, — thou shalt not suffer. Thou shalt win thy fair child’s freedom, and my fadeless thanks.

Selim. Thou hast conquered, lady; and for the blessed gift that is my reward, I will brave all but treachery and dishonor. Thou shalt find thy truest slaves in the old man and his daughter [*kneels and gives the keys*].

Zara. Thanks, good Selim, thanks; thou shalt find a grateful friend in her thou hast served so well. I will disguise me as a female slave, and thou shalt lead me to the cell. Now go; I will join thee anon. [*Exit* Selim.] Oh, Ernest, Ernest! thy brave heart shall pine no longer. Another hour, and thou art free. Chains cannot bind, nor dungeons hold when woman’s love and gratitude are thine.

[*Exit.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRD.

[*Dungeon in the castle of* Bernardo. Ernest L’Estrange, *chained.*]

Ernest. So end my dreams of fame and honor! A life-long captive, or a sultan’s slave are all that fate has left me now. Yet, ‘mid disgrace and sorrow, one thought can cheer me yet, and one sweet vision brighten e’en my dreary lot. I have served my country well, and won the thanks of Spain’s most lovely daughter. Sweet lady, little does she dream amid her happiness that memories of her are all now left to cheer a captive’s heart. But hist! — a footstep on the stair.

Perchance they come to lead me forth to new captivity or death. [*Enter* Zara, *disguised as a slave*] Ah, who comes here to cheer the cell of the poor captive?

Zara. Captive no longer, if life and liberty be dear to thee. Say but the word, and ere the sun sets thou shalt be free amid the hills of Spain.

Ernest. Who art thou, coming like a spirit to my lonely cell, bringing hopes of freedom? Tell me, what hath moved thee to such pity for an unknown stranger?

Zara. Not unknown to her I serve. She hath not forgot thee, noble stranger. When thou didst lead her from the dim wood, she said a day might come when she, so weak and helpless then, might find some fit reward for one who risked his life for her. That hour hath come, and she hath sent her poor slave hither, and with her thanks and blessing to speed thee on thy way.

Ernest. And is she near, and did she send thee to repay my simple deed with one like this? Ah, tell her name! Where doth she dwell, and whence the power to set me free?

Zara. I may not tell thee more than this. Her father is Bernardo of Castile. She heard thy name among the captives doomed, and seeks to save thee; for if thou dost not fly, a most cruel death awaits thee. Listen to her prayer, and cast these chains away.

Ernest. It cannot be. Much as I love my freedom, I love my honor more; and I am bound until my conqueror shall give back my plighted word, to seek no freedom till he shall bid me go. Nay, do not sigh, kind friend; I am no longer sad. From this day forth captivity is sweet. Tell thy fair mistress all my thanks are hers; but I may not take the gift she offers, for with freedom comes dishonor, and I cannot break my word to her stern father. Tell her she hath made my fetters light, this cell a happy home, by the sweet thought that she is near and still remembers one who looks upon the hour when first we met as the happiest he hath known.

Zara. If there be power in woman’s gratitude, thou shalt yet be free, and with thine honor yet unstained. She will not rest till all the debt she owes thee is repaid. Farewell, and think not Zara will forget [*turns to go; her veil falls*].

Ernest [*starting*]. Lady! — and is it thou? Ah, leave me not! Let me thank thee for the generous kindness which has made a lone heart happy by the thought that even in this wild land there is still one to remember the poor stranger.

Zara. Pardon what may seem to thee unmaidenly and bold; but thou wert in danger; there were none whom I could trust. Gratitude hath bid me come, and I am here. Again I ask, nay, I implore thee, let me have the joy of giving freedom to one brave English heart. England is thy home: wouldst thou not tread its green shores once again? Are there no fond hearts awaiting thy return? Ah, can I not tempt thee by all that man most loves, to fly?

Ernest. Lady, my own heart pleads more earnestly than even thy sweet voice; but those kind eyes were better dimmed with tears for my sad death than be turned coldly from me as one who had stained the high name he bore. And liberty were dearly purchased if I left mine honor here behind. Ask me no more; for till thy father sets me free, I am his prisoner here. Ah, dearest lady, thou hast made this lone cell bright, and other chains than these now hold me here.

Zara. Then it must be. Much as I grieve for thy captivity, I shall honor thee the more for thy unfailing truth, more prized than freedom, home, or friends. And though I cannot save thee now, thou shalt find a Moorish maiden true and fearless as thyself. Farewell! May happy thoughts of home cheer this dark cell till I have won the power to set thee free.

[*Exit* Zara.

Ernest. Liberty hath lost its charms since thou art near me, lovely Zara. These chains are nothing now, for the fetters that thy beauty, tenderness, and grace have cast about my heart are stronger far.

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTH.

[Zara’s *chamber*. *Enter* Bernardo.]

Ber. [*unfolding a scroll*]. At length ‘t is done, and here I hold the doom of those proud lords who have so scorned my race. The hour has come, and Bernardo is revenged. What, ho! Zara, where art thou?

[*Enter* Zara.

Zara. Dear father, what hath troubled thee, and how can Zara cheer and comfort thee?

Ber. ‘Tis joy, not sorrow, Zara, gives this fierce light to mine eye. I have hated, and am avenged. This one frail scroll is dearer far to me than all the wealth of Spain, for ‘tis the death-knell of the English lords.

Zara. Must they all die, my father?

Ber. Ay, Zara, — all; ere to-morrow’s sun shall set they will sleep forever, and a good deed will be well done. I hate them, and their paltry lives can ill repay the sorrow they have wrought.

Zara. Let me see the fatal paper. [*Takes the scroll; aside.*] Yes, *his* name is here. Ah, how strange that these few lines can doom brave hearts to such a death! [*Aloud.*] Father, ‘tis a fearful thing to hold such power over human life. Ah, bid me tear the scroll, and win for thee the thanks of those thy generous pity saves.

Ber. [*seizing the paper*]. Not for thy life, child! Revenge is sweet, and I have waited long for mine. The king hath granted this; were it destroyed, the captives might escape ere I could win another. Nay, Zara, this is dearer to me than thy most priceless gems. To-night it shall be well guarded ‘neath my pillow. Go to thy flowers, child. These things are not for thee, — thou art growing pale and sad. Remember, Zara, thou art nobly born, and let no foolish pity win thee to forget it.

[*Exit* Bernardo.

Zara. Oh, Father, Father, whom I have so loved and honored, now so cold, so pitiless. The spirit of revenge hath entered thy kind heart, and spread an evil blight o'er all the flowers that blossomed there. I cannot win him back to tenderness, and Ernest, thou must perish. I cannot save thee, — perhaps 'tis better so; but oh, 'twill be a bitter parting! [*Weeps.*] Nay, nay, it shall *not* be! When this wild hate hath passed, my father will repent. Alas! 't will be too late. *I* will save him from that sorrow when he shall find he hath wronged a noble heart, and slain the friend he should have saved. But stay! how shall I best weave my plot? That fatal paper, once destroyed, I will implore and plead so tenderly, my father will repent; and ere another scroll can reach his hands, I will have won thy freedom, Ernest! This night beneath his pillow it will be; and I, like a midnight thief, must steal to that couch, and take it hence. Yet, it shall be done, for it will save thee, Father, from a cruel deed, and gain a brave heart's freedom. Ernest, 'tis for thee! for thee!

CURTAIN.

SCENE FIFTH.

[*Chamber in the castle.* Bernardo *sleeping. Enter* Zara.]

Zara. He sleeps calmly as a child. Why do I tremble? 'T is a deed of mercy I would do, and thou wilt thank me that I dared to disobey, and spare thee from life-long regret. The paper, — yes, 'tis here! Forgive me, Father; 'tis to save thee from an evil deed thy child comes stealing thus at dead of night to take what thou hast toiled so long to win. Sleep on! no dark dream can break thy slumber now; the spirit of revenge shall pass away, and I will win thee back to pity and to love once more. Now, Ernest, thou art saved, and ere to-morrow's sun shall rise this warrant for thy death shall be but ashes, and my task be done.

[*Exit* Zara.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SIXTH.

[Zara's *chamber*. Zara *alone*].

Zara. The long, sleepless night at length hath passed. The paper is destroyed, and now nought remains but to confess the deed, and brave my father’s anger.

[*Enter* Bernardo.

Ber. Zara!

Zara [*starts*]. Why so stern, my father? Hath thy poor Zara angered thee?

Ber. I have trusted thee as few would trust a child. Thou art fair and gentle, and I had thought true. Never, Zara, till now hast thou deceived me; and if thou wouldst keep thy father’s love and trust, I bid thee answer truly. Didst thou, in the dead of night steal to my pillow, and bear hence the paper I had told thee would be there? Thy slave girl, Zillah, missed thee from thy couch, and saw thee enter there. She feared to follow, but none other came within my chamber, and this morn the scroll is gone. Now answer, Zara! Didst thou take the warrant, and where is it now?

Zara. Burnt to ashes, and scattered to the winds. I have never stained my soul with falsehood, and I will not now. Oh, Father! I have loved and honored thee through the long years thou hast watched above me. How could I love on when thou hadst stained with blood that hand that blessed me when a child, how honor when thou hadst repaid noble deeds with death? Forgive me that I plead for those thou hast doomed! I alone am guilty, — let thine anger fall on me; but, Father, I implore thee, leave this evil deed undone. [*Kneels.*]

Ber. Thou canst plead well for thy father’s and thy country’s foe. What strange fancy hath possessed thee, Zara? Thou hast never wept, tho’ many a Christian knight hath pined and died within these walls; and even now, methinks, thou speakest more of gratitude than mercy, and seem strangely earnest for the English lord who did thee some small service long ago. Speak, Zara! wouldst thou save them *all*? Were I to grant thee all their lives save his, wouldst thou be content to let *him* die?

Zara. Nay, Father; but for his tender care thou wouldst have no daughter now to stand before thee, pleading for the life he bravely risked in saving mine. Oh, would I had died amid the forest leaves ere I had brought such woe to him, and lived to lose my father’s love! [*Weeps.*]

Ber. Listen, Zara! Little as I know of woman’s heart, I have learned to read thine own; and if I err not, thou hast dared to love this stranger. Ha! is it so? Girl, I command thee to forget that love, and leave him to his fate!

Zara. Never! I will not forget the love that like a bright star hath come to cheer my lonely heart. I will *not* forget the noble friend who, ‘mid his fiercest foes, could brave all dangers to restore an unknown maiden to her home. And when I offered liberty (for I have disobeyed and dared to seek his cell), he would not break the word he had plighted, Father, unto thee. He bade me tempt him not, for death were better than dishonor. Ah, canst thou doom him to a felon’s death? Then do it; and the hour that sees that true heart cease to beat, that hour thou hast lost the child who would have loved and clung to thee through life.

Ber. Child, thou hast moved me strangely. I would grant thy prayer, but thou shalt never wed one of that accursed race. I bear no hate to the young lord, save that he is thy country’s foe; and if he gains his freedom, he will win thee too. By Allah! it shall never be. Yet, listen, Zara! If I grant his life wilt thou ask no more?

Zara. ‘T is all I ask; grant me but this, and I will give thee all the gratitude and love this poor heart can bestow.

Ber. Then ‘tis done. Yet hold! the price that thou must pay for this dear boon is large. Thou must swear never to see him more; must banish love, nay, even memory of that fatal hour when first he saw and saved thee. If thou wilt vow to wed none but one of thine own race, his life and liberty are thine to give. Speak, Zara! Wilt thou do all this?

Zara. Oh, Father, Father, anything but this! Pity, gratitude, and love have bound me to him, and the fetters thou hast cast around him are not stronger than the deep affection he hath wakened in my heart. Ah, why wilt thou not give life and liberty to him, and joy to thy child? I will not take the vow.

Ber. Then his fate is sealed. Thy girl’s heart is too selfish to forego its own joy for his sake. Thou dost not love enough to sacrifice thy happiness to win his freedom. I had thought more nobly of thee, Zara.

Zara. I *will* be worthy all thou mayst have thought me; but thou canst little know the desolation thou hast brought me. Thou shalt see how deeply thou hast wronged me, and my love. I will bear all, suffer all, if it will win the life and liberty of him I love so deeply and so well.

Ber. Would to Heaven thou hadst never seen this English stranger! Again, and for the last time, Zara, I ask thee, Wilt thou leave the captive to his fate, and seek another heart to love?

Zara. Never! I could mourn his death with bitter tears; but oh, my love is worthy a deeper sacrifice! He shall never suffer one sad hour if I may spare him, and never know that liberty to him will bring such life-long sorrow unto me.

Ber. Then thou wilt take the vow I bid thee?

Zara. I will.

Ber. Then swear by all thou dost hold most dear, and by thy mother’s spirit, to wed one only of thy father’s race; and through joy and sorrow, thro’ youth and age, to keep thy vow unbroken until death.

Zara. I swear; and may the spirit of that mother look in pity on the child whose love hath made her life so dark a path to tread.

Ber. May thou find comfort, Zara! I would have spared thee this, but now it cannot be. Yet thy reward shall well repay thee for thy sacrifice. The English knight is free, and thou shalt restore him unto life and liberty. May Allah bless thee, child!

[*Exit* Bernardo.

Zara. ‘Tis over! The bright dream is past. Oh, Ernest! few will love thee as I have done; few suffer for thee all that I so gladly bear; and none can honor thy true, noble heart more tenderly than she whose hard lot it is to part from thee forever. Still amid my blighted hopes one thought can brighten my deep sorrow, — this sacrifice but renders me more worthy of thee, Ernest. Now farewell, love; my poor heart may grieve for its lost joy, and look for comfort but in Heaven.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SEVENTH.

[*The cell.* Ernest *chained*. *Enter* Zara.]

Zara. My lord, I seek thee with glad tidings.

Ernest. Why so pale, dear lady? Let no care for me dim thine eye, or chase the roses from thy cheek. I would not barter this dark cell while thou art here for a monarch’s fairest home.

Zara. Thou wilt gladly leave it when I tell thee thy captivity is o’er, and I am here to set thee free. I have won thy liberty, and thou mayst fly with honor all unstained; for here my father grants thy pardon, and now bids thee go.

Ernest. How can I thank thee for thy tenderness and pity; how may I best show the gratitude I owe thee for the priceless boon of freedom thou hast this day given?

Zara. Nay, spare thy thanks! I have but paid the debt I owed thee, and ‘tis but life for life. Now haste; for ere the sunset hour thou must be beyond the city gates, and on thy way to home and happiness [*takes off his chains*]. And now, brave heart, thou art free, and Zara’s task is done [*turns to go*].

Ernest. Stay, lady! thou hast loosed the chains that bound these hands, but oh, thou hast cast a stronger one around my heart; and with my liberty comes love, and thoughts of thee, thy beauty, tenderness, and all thou hast done for me. Lady, thou hast cast away my fetters, but I am captive still [*he kneels*]. Ah, listen, Zara, while I tell thee of the love that like a sweet flower hath blossomed in this dreary cell, and made e’en liberty less precious than one word, one smile from thee.

Zara. I may not listen, — ’tis too late, and ‘tis a sin for me to hear thee. Ah, ask me not why, but hasten hence, and leave me to the fate thou canst not lighten.

Ernest. Never! I will not leave thee till I have won the right to cheer and comfort her who has watched so fearlessly o’er me. Tell me all, and let me share thy sorrow, Zara.

Zara. Ah, no! It cannot be! Thou canst not break my solemn vow. Go! leave me! Heaven bless thee, and farewell!

Ernest. A solemn vow! Hast thou bound thyself to win my freedom? Then never will I leave this cell till thou hast told me all. I swear it, and I will keep the oath.

Zara. Ernest, I implore thee, fly, or it may be too late. Thou canst not help me, and I will not tell thee. Ah, leave me! I cannot save thee if thou tarry now.

Ernest. Never, till thou hast told me by what noble sacrifice thou hast saved this worthless life of mine. Let me free thee from thy sorrow, Zara, or help thee bear it. Thou hast won my pardon, and I will not go till thou hast told me how.

Zara. And wilt thou promise to go hence when I have told thee all, and let me have the joy of knowing thou art safe?

Ernest. I *will* leave thee, Zara, if thou canst bid me go. Now tell me all thy sorrow, love, and let me share it with thee.

Zara. Ernest, I sought to save thee; for I had learned to love the noble stranger who had done so kind a deed for me. I sought to win my father back to gratitude. I wept and sued in vain, — he would not grant thy life, the boon for which I prayed. Alone I watched above thee, and when the warrant for thy death was sent, I took it from his pillow and destroyed it. Thou wast safe. My father charged me with the deed; and when I told him all, he bid me love no more, and leave thee to thy fate. He bid me show how strong my woman’s heart could be, and told me if I yet desired thy freedom, I might win it if I took a solemn vow to wed none but of my father’s race. I took the vow, and thou art free. Ah, no more! — and let us part while yet I have the strength to say farewell.

Ernest. And is it yet too late? Canst thou not take back the vow, and yet be mine? I cannot leave thee, — rather be a captive here till thou shalt set me free. Come, Zara, fly with me, and leave the father who would blight thy life to satisfy a fierce revenge. Ah, come and let me win thee back to love and happiness.

Zara. Ernest, tempt me not. By that sad vow I swore by all my future hopes, and by my dead mother’s spirit, I would never listen to thy words of love. And stern and cruel tho’ my father be, I cannot leave him now. Deep and bitter though this sorrow be, ‘tis nobler far to bear the burden than to cast it down and seek in idle joys to banish penitence; for thorns would lie amid the flowers. Farewell! Forget me, and in happy England find some other heart to gladden with thy love. Oh, may she prove as fond and faithful as thy Moorish Zara.

Ernest. I will plead no more, nor add to that sad heart another sorrow. I will be worthy such true love, and though we meet no more on earth, in all my wanderings sweet tender thoughts of thee shall dwell within my heart. I will bear my sorrow as a brave man should. The life thou hast saved and brightened by thy love shall yet be worthy thee. Farewell! May all the blessings a devoted heart can give rest on thee, dearest. Heaven bless thee, and grant that we shall meet again.

[*Exit.*

Zara. Gone, gone, forever! Oh, Father, couldst thou know the deep grief and despair thy cruelty has brought two loving hearts, thou wouldst relent, and call them back to happiness. Where can I look for comfort now? [*Weeps.*] I will seek the good priest who hath so long watched above the motherless child. I must find rest in some kind heart, and he will cheer, and teach me how to suffer silently. I will seek old Hernando’s cell.

[*Exit* Zara.

CURTAIN.

SCENE EIGHTH.

[*Cell of the priest.* Hernando *reading. Enter* Zara.]

Zara. Father, I have come for help and counsel. Wilt thou give it now as thou hast ever done to her who comes to learn of thee how best to bear a sorrow cheerfully and well?

Her. Speak on, dear child. I know thy sorrow. Thou hast loved, and sacrificed thy own life’s joy to win a brave heart’s freedom. Thou hast done nobly and well; thy sorrow will but render thee more worthy of the happiness thou hast so truly won.

Zara. No, no; we shall never meet again on earth. Ah, holy father, they who told thee of my love for one who well might win the noblest heart, have told thee but the lightest part of the deep grief that bears me down. Listen to me, Father, and then give me comfort if thou canst. To win my lover’s freedom, I have sworn a solemn oath to wed none but of my father’s race. Ernest came from sunny England, and I am the daughter of a Moorish lord. Alas, ‘tis vain to hope! The vow is given, and must be kept.

Her. Ay, Zara, and it may be kept; but these sad tears will change to sighs of joy when I have told thee all. Then thou wilt bless the vow which brings thee sorrow now.

Zara. Oh, speak! Tell me what joy canst thou give to lighten grief like mine! Give me not too much hope; for if it fail, despair thou canst not banish will cast a deeper gloom o’er this poor heart. Now, tell me all.

Her. Calm thyself, poor child; it will be well with thee, and thou shalt yet blossom in thy loveliness beside the heart thou hast won. I will tell thee the true tale of thy fair mother’s life. She loved and wed a stranger, and thus won the hatred of her Moorish kindred, who sought to win her for their prince’s bride. And when she fled away with him to whom her true heart’s love was given, they vowed a fierce revenge. Years passed away; she drooped and died. Thy father perished bravely on the field of battle, and left his child to me. I stood beside thy mother’s dying bed, and vowed to guard her babe till thou wert safe among thy Moorish kindred. I have watched thee well, and thou art worthy all the happiness thy true heart hath won. Bernardo of Castile is but thy mother’s friend; thy father was an English lord, and thou canst keep thy vow, and yet wed the brave young Englishman who hath won thy love.

Zara. Heaven pardon this wild, wilful heart that should mourn the sorrow sent, when such deep joy as this is given. Ah, Father, how can I best thank thee for the blessed comfort thou hast given?

Her. Thy joy, dear child, is my reward. When thou art safe with him thou lovest, my task on earth is done, and I shall pass away with happy thoughts of the sweet flower that bloomed beside the old man’s path through life, and cheered it with her love. Bless thee, my Zara, and may the spirit of thy mother watch above thee in the happy home thou hast gained by thy noble sacrifice.

Zara. Oh, Father, may the joy thy words have brought me brighten thine own life as they have mine. The blessings of a happy heart be on thee. Farewell, Father!

[*Kneels, kisses his hand. Exit.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE NINTH.

[*Hall in the castle. Enter* Zara.]

Zara. Selim said the packet would be here [*takes the paper*]. Ah, ‘tis from Ernest! He is near me, — we may meet again [*opens letter and reads*].

Lady, — Thy father will this night betray the city to the Spanish king, who hath promised his life and liberty for this treachery. He will not keep his oath, and thy father will be slain. Then bid him fly, and save all he most loves, for no mercy will be shown to those within the walls when once the Spanish army enters there. Save thyself. Heaven bless thee.

Ernest.

Brave and true unto the last! O heart! thou mayst well beat proudly, for thou hast won a noble prize in the love of Ernest L’Estrange. Time flies; this night the city is betrayed, and we must fly. Bernardo, lord of fair Castile, is a traitor. Ah, thank Heaven he is *not* my father! Yet for the love I bore him as a child, he shall be saved; and I will cheer and comfort him now that the dark hour of his life has come.

[*Enter* Bernardo.

Ber. Zara, why dost thou look thus on me? I come to bid thee gather all thou dost most prize, for the army is before the city, and we may be conquered ere to-morrow’s sun shall set.

Zara. Seek not to deceive me. I know all; and the love I bore thee as my father is now turned to pity and contempt for the traitor who will this night betray Castile.

Ber. Girl, beware, lest thy wild folly anger me too far! What meanest thou? Who has dared to tell thee this?

Zara. Thou wouldst betray, and art thyself betrayed; and were it not for him whom thou hast wronged and hunted, ere to-morrow’s dawn thou wouldst be no more, and I a homeless wanderer. Here! read the scroll, and see how well the false king keeps his word he plighted thee for thy deed of treachery.

Ber. [*reads, and drops the paper*]. Lost! lost! Fool that I was to trust the promise of a king! Disgraced, dishonored, and betrayed! Where find a friend to help me now? [*Weeps.*]

Zara. Here, — in the child who clings to thee through danger, treachery, and death. Trust to the love of one whom once thou loved, and who still longs to win thee back to happiness and honor.

Ber. Nay, child, I trust thee not. I have deceived thee and blighted all thy hopes of love. Thou canst not care for the dishonored traitor. Go! tell my guilt to those I would this night deliver up to death, and win a deep revenge for all the wrong I have done thee. I am in thy power now.

Zara [*tearing the paper*]. And thus do I use it! No eye shall ever read these words that do betray thee; no tongue call down dishonor on thy head. Thy plot is not yet known, and ere to-night the gates may be well guarded. Thou mayst fly in safety, and none ever know the stain upon thy name. Thou whom I once called father, this is my revenge. I know all the wrong thou hast done me, — the false vow I made to save the life of him I loved. Zara's pity and forgiveness are thine, freely given; and her prayer is that thou mayst find happiness in some fair land where only gentle thoughts and loving memories may be thine.

Ber. Thou hast conquered, Zara; my proud heart is won by thy tender pity and most generous pardon to one who hath so deeply wronged thee. But I will repay the debt I owe thee. Thou shalt find again the loving father and the faithful friend of thy young life. Thou shalt know how well Bernardo can atone for all the sorrow he hath brought thee.

Zara. And I will be again thy faithful child.

Ber. 'Tis well; and now, my Zara, ere the dawn of another day we must be far beyond the city gates. Selim shall guide us, and once free, together we will seek another and a happier home. Courage, my child, and haste thee. I will prepare all for our flight. Remember, when the turret bell strikes seven, we meet again.

[*Embraces* Zara, *and exit*.

Zara. Farewell! I will not fail thee. Love, joy, and hope may fade, but duty still remains. Oh, Ernest, couldst thou but see thy own true Zara now! Wouldst thou could aid me! [*Enter* Ernest *disguised*.] Ah, who comes? A stranger. Speak! thine errand!

Ernest [*kneeling, presents a scroll*]. An English knight without the gates did bid me seek thee with this scroll. May it please thee, read.

Zara [*opens and reads*].

Lady, — Thou mayst trust the messenger. He will lead thee in safety to one who waits for thee. Delay not; danger is around thee.

Thine, Ernest.

Ah, here! so near me! Hope springs anew within my heart. Yes, I will go. Homeless, friendless no more! Happy Zara! joy now awaits thee. Yet stay! — my promise to Bernardo! I cannot leave him thus in danger, and alone. What shall I do? Oh, Ernest, where art thou now?

Ernest [*throwing off disguise, and kneeling before her*]. Here, dearest Zara! here at thy feet, to offer thee a true heart's fond devotion. To thee I owe life, liberty, and happiness. Ah, let me thus repay the debt of gratitude. Thy love shalt be my bright reward; my heart thy refuge from all danger now. Wilt thou not trust me?

Zara. Ernest, thou knowest my heart is thine, and that to thee I trust with joy my life and happiness. No vow stands now between us. I am thine.

Ernest. Then let us hence. All is prepared; thy father shall be saved. This night shall see us on our way to liberty; and in a fairer land we may forget the danger, sorrow, and captivity that have been ours. Come, dearest, let me lead thee.

Zara. I come; and, Ernest, 'mid the joy and bright hopes of the future, let us not forget the sorrow and the sacrifice that hath won for us this happiness; and mayst thou ne'er regret the hour that gave to thee the love of the Moorish maiden, Zara.

CURTAIN.

THE GREEK SLAVE.

CHARACTERS.

Constantine *Prince betrothed to Irene.*

Queen Zelneth *His Mother.*

Irene *The Greek Princess.*

Ione *The Greek Slave.*

Helon *A Priest.*

Rienzi *A Traitor.*

THE GREEK SLAVE.

SCENE FIRST.

[*Apartment in the palace of* Irene. Irene, *reclining upon a divan.*]

Irene. How strange a fate is mine! Young, fair, and highborn, I may not choose on whom I will bestow my love! Betrothed to a prince whom I have never seen; compelled to honor and obey one whom my heart perchance can never love, alas! alas!

And yet, they tell me that Constantine is noble, brave, and good. What more can I desire? Ah, if he do but love me I shall be content [*noise without; she rises*].

Hark! ‘tis his messenger approaching with letters from the queen, his mother. I will question this ambassador, and learn yet more of this young prince, my future husband [*seats herself with dignity*].

[*Enter* Rienzi. *Kneels, presenting a letter.*

Rienzi. The queen, my mistress, sends thee greeting, lady, and this scroll. May it please thee, read. I await your pleasure.

Irene [*takes the letter and reads*]. My lord, with a woman’s curiosity, I fain would ask thee of thy prince, whose fate the gods have linked with mine. Tell me, is he tender, true, and noble? Answer truly, I do command thee.

Rienzi. Lady, he is tender as a woman, gentle as thy heart could wish, just and brave as a king should ever be. The proudest lady in all Greece were well matched with our noble Constantine.

Irene. And is he fair to look upon? Paint me his likeness, if thou canst.

Rienzi. I can but ill perform that office. Thou must see if thou wouldst rightly know him. The gods have blessed him with a fair and stately form, a noble face, dark locks, and a king-like brow that well befits the crown that rests upon it. This is he, our brave young prince; one to honor, lady; one to trust and — love.

Irene. ‘Tis a noble man thou hast painted. One more question and thou mayst retire. Hath he ever spoken of her who is to be his wife? Nay, why do I fear to ask thee? Does he love her?

Rienzi. Lady, I beg thee ask me not. Who could fail to love when once he had looked upon thee?

Irene. Thou canst not thus deceive me. Answer truly: What doth he think of this betrothal and approaching marriage?

Rienzi. He hath not seen thee, princess, knows of thee nothing save that thou art beautiful, and one day to become his wife. But he is young, and hath no wish to wed, and even his mother’s prayers have failed to win his free consent to this most cherished plan, that by uniting thy fair kingdom unto his, he can gain power over other lands and beautify our own.

Irene. Perchance his heart is given to another. Has no fair Grecian maiden won the love he cannot offer me?

Rienzi. Nay, lady. He loves nought but his mother, his subjects, and his native land. But soon we trust, when thou art by his side, a deeper love will wake within him, and thou wilt be dearer than country, home, or friends.

Irene. ‘Tis well; thou mayst retire. I will send answer by thee to thy queen, and seek some gift that may be worthy her acceptance. And now, adieu! [Rienzi *bows and retires.*] He does not love me, then, and I must wed a cold and careless lord. And yet — so tender to all others, he could not be unkind to me alone.

Oh, that I could win his love unknown, and then when truly mine, to cast away the mask, and be myself again. Stay! let me think. Ah, yes; I see a way. Surely the gods have sent the thought! I will disguise me as a slave, and as a gift sent to his mother, I can see and learn to know him well. I will return with the ambassador, Rienzi. I spake to him of a gift. He little thinks in the veiled slave he shall bear away, the princess is concealed. Yes, Constantine, as a nameless girl will Irene win thy heart; and when as a wife she stands beside thee, thou shalt love her for herself alone.

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE SECOND.

[*A room in the palace of* The Queen. The Queen *alone.*]

Queen. Why comes he not? They told me that our ambassador to the Princess Irene had returned, and bore a gift for me. Would that it were a picture of herself! They say she is wondrous fair; and could my wayward son but gaze upon her, his heart might yet be won. [*Enter* Irene, *disguised as the slave,* Ione.] Ah, a stranger! Who art thou?

[Ione *kneels and presents a letter.*

Queen [*reads the letter*]. Ah, welcome! Thy mistress tells me she hath chosen from among her train the fairest and most faithful of her slaves, as a gift for me. With thanks do I accept thee. Lift thy veil, child, that I may see how our maidens do compare with thee. [Ione *lifts her veil.* The Queen *gazes in surprise at her beauty.*] Thou art too beautiful to be a slave. What is thy name?

Ione. Ione; may it please thee, lady.

Queen. ‘Tis a fit name for one so fair; and thy country, maiden?

Ione. With the princess, my kind mistress, have I dwelt for many happy years; and honored by her choice now offer my poor services to thee.

Queen. What canst thou do, Ione? Thou art too fair and delicate to bear the heavy water-urn or gather fruit.

Ione. I can weave garlands, lady; touch the harp, and sing sweet songs; can bear thee wine, and tend thy flowers. I can be true and faithful, and no task will be too hard for thy grateful slave, Ione.

Queen. Thou shalt find a happy home with me, and never grieve for thy kind mistress. And now, listen while I tell thee what thy hardest task shall be. I will confide in thee, Ione, for thou art no common slave, but a true and gentle woman whom I can trust and love. Thou hath heard thy lady is betrothed to my most noble son; and yet, I grieve to say, he loves her not. Nay, in the struggle ‘gainst his heart, hath lost all gayety and strength, and even the name Irene will chase the smile away. He loves no other, yet will not offer her his hand when the heart that should go with it feels no love for her who is to be his wife. I honor this most noble feeling; yet could he know the beauty and the worth of thy fair lady, he yet might love. Thou shalt tell him this: all the kind deeds she hath done, the gentle words she hath spoken; all her loveliness and truth thou shalt repeat; sing thou the songs she loved; weave round his cups the flowers she wears; and strive most steadfastly to gain a place within his heart for love and Lady Irene. Canst thou, wilt thou do this, Ione?

Ione. Dear lady, all that my poor skill can do shall yet be tried. I will not rest till he shall love my mistress as she longs to be beloved.

Queen. If thou canst win my son to health and happiness again, thou shalt be forever my most loved, most trusted friend. The gods bless thee, child, and give thy work success! Now rest thee here. I will come ere long to lead thee to the prince.

[*Exit* The Queen.

Ione. All goes well; and what an easy task is mine! To minister to him whom I already love; to sing to him, weave garlands for his brow, and tell him of the thoughts stirring within my heart. Yes, I most truly long to see him whom all love and honor. The gods be with me, and my task will soon be done.

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRD.

[*Another room in the palace.* Constantine, *sad and alone.*]

Con. Another day is well-nigh passed, and nearer draws the fate I dread. Why must I give up all the bright dreams of my youth, and wed a woman whom I cannot love?

They tell me she is young and fair, but I seek more than that in her who is to pass her life beside me. Youth and beauty fade, but a noble woman’s love can never die. Oh, Irene, if thou couldst know how hard a thing it is to take thee, princess though thou art! [*Enter* Ione.] Ah, lady, thou hast mistaken thy way! Let me lead thee to the queen’s apartments.

Ione. Nay, my lord; I have come from her. She bid me say it was her will that I, her slave, should strive with my poor skill to while away the time till she could join thee.

Con. Thou, a slave? By the gods! methought it was some highborn lady, — nay, even the Princess Irene herself, seeking the queen, my mother.

Ione. She was my mistress, and bestowed me as a gift upon the queen. This scroll is from her hand. May it please thee, read it [*kneels and presents letter*].

Con. Rise, fair maiden! I would rather listen to thy voice. May I ask thee to touch yon harp? I am weary, and a gentle strain will sooth my troubled spirit. Stay! let me place it for thee.

[*Prince moves the harp and gazes upon* Ione *as she sings and plays.*

The wild birds sing in the orange groves,
And brightly bloom the flowers;
The fair earth smiles ‘neath a summer sky
Through the joyous fleeting hours.
But oh! in the slave girl’s lonely heart,
Sad thoughts and memories dwell,
And tears fall fast as she mournfully sings,
Home, dear home, farewell!

Though the chains they bind be all of flowers,
Where no hidden thorn may be,
Still the free heart sighs ‘neath its fragrant bonds,
And pines for its liberty.
And sweet, sad thoughts of the joy now gone,
In the slave girl’s heart shall dwell,
As she mournfully sings to her sighing harp,
Native land, native land, farewell!

Con. ‘Tis a plaintive song. Is it thine own lot thou art mourning? If so, thou art a slave no longer.

Ione. Nay, my lord. It was one my Lady Irene loved, and thus I thought would please thee.

Con. Then never sing it more, — speak not her name! Nay, forgive me if I pain thee. She was thy mistress, and thou didst love her. Was she kind to thee? By what name shall I call thee?

Ione. Ione, your Highness. Ah, yes; she was too kind. She never spake a cruel word, nor chid me for my many faults. Never can I love another as I loved my gentle mistress.

Con. And is she very fair? Has she no pride, no passion or disdain to mar her loveliness? She is a princess; is she a true and tender woman too?

Ione. Though a princess, ‘neath her royal robes there beats a warm, true heart, faithful and fond, longing to be beloved and seeking to be worthy such great joy when it shall come. Thou ask’st me of her beauty. Painters place her face among their fairest works, and sculptors carve her form in marble. Yes, she is beautiful; but ‘tis not that thou wouldst most care for. Couldst thou only know her! — pardon, but I think thou couldst not bear so cold a heart within thy breast as now.

Con. Ah, do not cease! say on! There is that in the music of thy voice that soothes and comforts me. Come, sit beside me, fair Ione, and I will tell thee why I do not love thy princess.

Ione. You do forget, my lord, I am a slave; I will kneel here.

[*Prince reclines upon a couch.* Ione *kneels beside him.*

Con. Listen! From a boy I have been alone; no loving sister had I, no gentle friend, — only cold councillors or humble slaves. My mother was a queen, and ‘mid the cares of State, tho’ fondly loving me, her only son, could find no time to win me from my lonely life.

Thus, tho’ dwelling ‘neath a palace roof with every wish supplied, I longed most fondly for a friend. And now, ere long, a crown will rest upon my head, a nation bend before me as their king. And now more earnestly than ever do I seek one who can share with me the joys and cares of my high lot, — a woman true and noble, to bless me with her love.

Ione. And could not the Princess Irene be to thee all thou hast dreamed?

Con. I fear I cannot love her. They told me she was beautiful and highborn; and when I sought to learn yet more, ‘twas but to find she was a cold, proud woman, fit to be a queen, but not a loving wife. Thus I learned to dread the hour when I must wed. Yet ‘tis my mother’s will; my country’s welfare calls for the sacrifice, and I must yield myself.

Ione. They who told thee she was proud and cold do all speak falsely. Proud she is to those who bow before her but to gain some honor for themselves, and cold to such as love her for her royalty alone. But if a fond and faithful heart, and a soul that finds its happiness in noble deeds can make a queen, Irene is worthy of the crown she will wear. And now, if it please thee, I will seek the garden; for thy mother bid me gather flowers for the feast. Adieu, my lord! [*She bows, her veil falls*; Constantine *hands it to her.*] Nay, kings should not bend to serve a slave, my lord.

Con. I do forget myself most strangely. There, take thy veil, and leave me [*turns aside*]. Nay, forgive me if I seem unkind, but I cannot treat thee as a slave. Come, I will go with thee to the garden; thou art too fair to wander unprotected and alone. Come, Ione [*leads her out*].

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTH.

[*The gardens of the palace.* Ione *weaving a garland.*]

Ione. The rose is Love’s own flower, and I will place it in the wreath I weave for thee, O Constantine! Would I could bring it to thy heart as easily! And yet, methinks, if all goes on as now, the slave Ione will ere long win a prince’s love. He smiles when I approach, and sighs when I would leave him; listens to my songs, and saves the withered flowers I gave him days ago. How gentle and how kind! Ah, noble Constantine, thou little thinkest the slave thou art smiling on is the “proud, cold” Princess Irene, who will one day show thee what a fond, true wife she will be to thee [*sings*].

[*Enter* Helon; *kneels to* Ione.

Ione. Helon, my father’s friend! thou here! Ah, hush! Betray me not! I am no princess now. Rise, I do beseech thee! Kneel not to me.

Helon. Dear lady, why this secrecy? What dost thou here, disguised, in the palace where thou art soon to reign a queen?

Ione. Hark! is all still? Yes; none are nigh! Speak low. I’ll tell thee all. Thou knowest the young prince loves me not, — nay, do not sigh; I mean the princess, not the slave Ione, as I now call myself. Well, I learned this, and vowed to win the heart he could not give; and so in this slave’s dress I journeyed hither with Rienzi, the ambassador, as a gift unto the queen.

Thus, as a poor and nameless slave, I seek to win the noble Constantine to life and love. Dost understand my plot, and wilt thou aid me, Father Helon?

Helon. ‘Tis a strange thought! None but a woman would have planned it. Yes, my child, I will aid thee, and thou yet shall gain the happiness thy true heart well deserves. We will talk of this yet more anon. I came hither to see the prince. They told me he was pale and ill, in sorrow for his hated lot. Say, is this so?

Ione. Ah, yes, most true; and I am cause of all this sorrow. Father, tell me, cannot I by some great deed give back his health, and never have the grief of knowing that he suffered because I was his bride? How can I avert this fate? I will do all, bear all, if he may be saved.

Helon. Grieve not, my child; he will live, and learn to love thee fondly. The cares of a kingdom are too much for one so young; but he would have happiness throughout his native land, and toiling for the good of others he hath hidden his sorrow in his own heart, and pined for tenderness and love. Thou hast asked if thou couldst save him. There is one hope, if thou canst find a brave friend that fears no danger when a good work leads him on. Listen, my daughter! In a deep and lonely glen, far beyond the palace gates, there grows an herb whose magic power ‘tis said brings new life and strength to those who wreathe it round their head in slumber. Yet none dare seek the spot, for spirits are said to haunt the glen, and not a slave in all the palace but grows pale at mention of the place. I am old and feeble, or I had been there long ere this. And now, my child, who canst thou send?

Ione. I will send one who fears not spirit or demon; one who will gladly risk e’en life itself for the brave young prince.

Helon. Blessed be the hand that gathers, thrice blessed be he who dares the dangers of the way. Bring hither him thou speakest of. I would see him.

Ione. She stands before thee. Nay, start not, Father. *I* will seek the dreaded glen and gather there the magic flowers that may bring health to Constantine and happiness to me. I will away; bless, and let me go.

Helon. Thou, a woman delicate and fair! Nay, nay, it must not be, my child! Better he should die than thou shouldst come to harm. I cannot let thee go.

Ione. Thou canst not keep me now. Thou hast forgot I am a slave, and none may guess beneath this veil a princess is concealed. I will take my water-urn, and with the other slaves pass to the spring beyond the city gates; then glide unseen into the haunted glen. Now, tell me how looks the herb, that I may know it.

Helon. ‘Tis a small, green plant that blossoms only by the broad, dark stream, dashing among the rocks that fill the glen. But let me once again implore thee not to go. Ah, fatal hour when first I told thee! ‘Tis sending thee to thy death! Stay, stay, my child, or let me go with thee.

Ione. It cannot be; do thou remain, and if I come not back ere set of sun, do thou come forth to seek me. Tell Constantine I loved him, and so farewell. I return successful, or I return no more.

[Ione *rushes out.*

Helon. Thou brave and noble one to dare so much for one who loves thee not! I’ll go and pray the gods to watch above thee, and bring thee safely back.

[*Exit* Helon.

CURTAIN.

SCENE FIFTH.

[*A terrace beside the palace. Enter* Constantine.]

Con. Why comes she not? I watched her slender form when with the other slaves she went forth to the fountain yonder. I knew her by the rosy veil and snow-white arm that bore the water-urn. The morning sun shone brightly on the golden hair, and seemed more beautiful for resting there; and now ‘tis nearly set, and yet she comes not. Why should I grieve because my mother’s slave forgets me? Shame on thee, Constantine! How weak and childish have I grown! This fever gives no rest when Ione is not here to sing sweet songs, and cheer the weary hours. Ah, she comes! [*Enter* Ione *with basket of flowers.*] Where hast thou been, Ione? The long day passed so slowly, and I missed thee sadly from my side. But thou art pale; thy locks are damp! What has chanced to thee? Speak, I beseech thee!

Ione. ‘Tis nothing; calm thyself, my lord. I am well, and bring thee from the haunted glen the magic flowers whose power I trust will win thee health and happiness. May it please thee to accept them [*kneels, and gives the flowers*].

Con. Thou, thou, Ione? Hast thou been to that fearful spot, where mortal foot hath feared to tread? The gods be blessed, thou art safe again! How can I thank thee? Ah, why didst thou risk so much for my poor life? It were not worth the saving if thine were lost.

Ione. My lord, a loving nation looks to thee for safety and protection. I am but a feeble woman, and none would grieve if I were gone; none weep for the friendless slave, Ione.

Con. Oh, say not thus! Tears would be shed for thee, and one heart would grieve for her who risked so much for him. Speak not of death or separation, for I cannot let thee go.

Ione. I will not leave thee yet, till I have won thy lost health back. The old priest, Helon, bid me seek the herbs, and bind them in a garland for thy brow. If thou wilt place it there, and rest awhile, I am repaid.

Con. If thy hand gave it, were it deadly poison I would place it there. Now sing, Ione; thy low sweet voice will bring me pleasant dreams, and the healing sleep will be the deeper with thy music sounding in mine ears.

[*The prince reclines upon the terrace.* Ione *weaves a garland and sings.*

Flowers, sweet flowers, I charge thee well,
O’er the brow where ye bloom cast a healing spell;
From the shadowy glen where spirits dwell,
I have borne thee here, thy power to tell.
 Flowers, pale flowers, o’er the brow where ye lie,
Cast thy sweetest breath ere ye fade and die.

[Ione *places the garland on the head of the prince, who falls asleep. She sits beside him softly singing.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE SIXTH.

[The Queen’s *apartment.* The Queen *alone.*]

Queen. ‘Tis strange what power this slave hath gained o’er Constantine. She hath won him back to health again, and never have I seen so gay a smile upon his lips as when she stood beside him in the moonlight singing to her harp. And yet, tho’ well and strong again, he takes no interest in his native land. He comes no more to council hall or feast, but wanders ‘mong his flowers with Ione. How can I rouse him to the danger that is near! The Turkish sultan and his troops are on their way to conquer Greece, and he, my Constantine, who should be arming for the fight, sits weaving garlands with the lovely slave girl! Ah, a thought hath seized me! Why cannot she who hath such power o’er him rouse up with noble words the brave heart slumbering in his breast? I hear her light step in the hall. Ione, Ione, — come hither! I would speak with thee.

[*Enter* Ione.

Ione. Your pleasure, dearest lady.

Queen. Ione, thou knowest how I love thee for the brave deeds thou hast done. Thou hast given health unto my son, hath won him back to happiness. Thou hast conquered his aversion to the princess, and he will gladly wed her when the hour shall come. Is it not so?

Ione. Dear lady, that I cannot tell thee. He never breathes her name, and if I speak of her as thou hast bid me, he but sighs, and grows more sad; and yet I trust, nay, I well know that when he sees her he will gladly give his hand to one who loves him as the princess will. Then do not grieve, but tell thy slave how she may serve thee.

Queen. Oh, Ione, if thou couldst wake him from the quiet dream that seems to lie upon his heart. His country is in danger, and he should be here to counsel and command. Go, tell him this in thine own gentle words; rouse him to his duty, and thou shalt see how brave a heart is there. Thou hast a wondrous power to sadden or to cheer. Oh, use it well, and win me back my noble Constantine! Canst thou do this, Ione?

Ione. I will; and strive most earnestly to do thy bidding. But of what danger didst thou speak? No harm to him, I trust?

Queen. The Turkish troops are now on their way to carry woe and desolation into Greece, and he, the prince, hath taken no part in the councils. His nobles mourn at his strange indifference, and yet he heeds them not.

I know not why, but some new happiness hath come to him, and all else is forgot. But time is passing. I will leave thee to thy work, and if thou art successful, thou wilt have won a queen’s most fervent gratitude. Adieu, my child!

[*Exit* The Queen.

Ione. Yes, Constantine, thy brave heart shall awake; and when thy country is once safe again, I’ll come to claim the love that now I feel is mine.

[*Exit* Ione.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SEVENTH.

[*Apartment in the palace. Enter* Ione *with sword and banner.*]

Ione. Now may the gods bless and watch above thee, Constantine; give strength to thine arm, courage to thy heart, and victory to the cause for which thou wilt venture all. Ah, could I but go with thee, thy shield would then be useless, for with mine own breast would I shelter thee, and welcome there the arrows meant for thee.

He comes; now let me rouse him from this dream, and try my power o’er his heart.

[*Enter* Constantine.

Con. What high thoughts stirring in thy heart hath brought the clear light to thine eye, Ione, the bright glow to thy cheek? What mean these arms? Wouldst thou go forth to meet the Turks? Thy beauty would subdue them sooner than the sword thou art gazing on so earnestly.

Ione. Thou hast bade me speak, my lord, and I obey; but pardon thy slave if in her wish to serve she seem too bold. Thy mother and thy subjects wonder at thy seeming indifference when enemies are nigh. Thine army waits for thee to lead them forth; thy councillors sit silent, for their prince is gone. While grief and terror reign around, he is wandering ‘mong his flowers, or listening to the music of his harp. Ah, why is this? What hath befallen thee? Thou art no longer pale and feeble, yet there seems a spell set on thee. Ah, cast it off, and show them that thou hast no fear.

Con. I am no coward, Ione; but there is a spell upon me. ‘Tis a holy one, and the chain that holds me here I cannot break, — for it is *love*. I have lost the joy I once took in my subjects and my native land, and am content to sit beside thee, and listen to the music of thy voice.

Ione. Then let that voice arouse thee. Oh, fling away the chain that keeps thee from thy duty, and be again the noble prince who thought but of his people. Oh, let me plead for those who sorrow for thy care, and here let me implore thee to awaken from thy dream and be thyself again [*she kneels*].

Con. Oh, not to me! Rise, I beseech thee, rise! Thou hast led me to my duty; I will obey thee.

Ione. I would have thee gird on thy sword, and with shield upon thine arm, and banner in thy hand, go forth and conquer like a king. Show those who doubt thee that their fears are false, — that thou art worthy of their love. Lead forth thy troops, and save thy country from the woe that now draws nigh. Victory surely will be theirs when thou shalt lead them on.

Con. Give me my sword, unfurl my banner, and say farewell. I will return victorious, or no more. Thy voice hath roused me from my idle but most lovely dream, and thy brave words shall cheer me on till I have won the honor of my people back. Pity and forgive my fault; and ah, remember in thy prayers one who so passionately loves thee. Farewell! farewell!

[*Kisses her robe and rushes out.* Ione *sinks down.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE EIGHTH.

[*On the battlements.* Ione, *watching the battle.*]

Ione. The battle rages fiercely at the city gates, and the messengers are fearful of defeat. I cannot rest while Constantine is in such peril. Let me watch here and pray for him. Ah, I can see his white plume waving in the thickest of the fight, where the blows fall heaviest and the danger is most great. The gods guard him in this fearful hour! See how small the brave band grows; they falter and retreat. One blow now bravely struck may turn the tide of battle. It shall be done! I will arm the slaves now in the palace, and lead them on to victory or death. We may win — and if *not*, I shall die in saving thee, Constantine!

[Ione *rushes out.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE NINTH.

[*The castle terrace. Enter* Constantine.]

Con. The victory is ours, and Greece again is free, thanks to the gods, and to the brave unknown who led on my slaves, and saved us when all hope seemed gone. Who could have been the fearless stranger? Like an avenging spirit came the mysterious leader, carrying terror and destruction to the Turkish ranks. My brave troops rallied and we won the day. Yet when I sought him, he was gone, and none could tell me where. He hath won my deepest gratitude, and the honor of all Greece for this brave deed.

But where is Ione? Why comes she not to bid me welcome home? Ah, could she know that thoughts of her gave courage to my heart, and strength to my weak arm, and led me on that I might be more worthy her! Ah, yonder comes the stranger; he may not think to see me here. I will step aside.

[Constantine *retires. Enter* Ione *in armor, bearing sword.*

Ione. The gods be thanked! the brave young prince hath conquered. From the flying Turk I won his banner back, and now my task is done. I must fling by this strange disguise and be myself again. I must bind up my wound and seek to rest, for I am faint and weary. Ah, what means this sudden dimness of mine eyes, this faintness — can it be death? ‘T is welcome, — Constantine, it is for thee!

[Ione *faints*; Constantine *rushes in.*

Con. Ione, Ione, look up and listen to the blessings of my grateful heart for all thou hast dared and done for me. So pale, so still! Ah, must she die now I have learned to love so fervently and well? Ione, awake!

[Ione *rouses.*

Ione. Pardon this weakness; I will retire, my lord.

Con. Ah, do not leave me till I have poured out my gratitude. My country owes its liberty to thee: then let me here before thee offer up my country’s thanks, and tell thee what my heart hath striven to hide. Dear Ione, listen, I do beseech thee! [*Kneels.*]

Ione. My lord, remember Lady Irene.

Con. [*starting up*]. Why comes she thus between my happiness and me? Why did she send thee hither? Thou hast made the chain that binds her to me heavier to be borne; the sorrow of my heart more bitter still. Nay, do not weep. I will be calm. Thou art pale and faint, Ione, — lean thus on me.

Ione. Nay, leave me; I cannot listen to thee. Go, I pray thee, go!

Con. Not till thou hast pardoned me. I have made thee weep, and every tear that falls reproaches me for my rash words. Forget them, and forgive me.

Ione. Ask not forgiveness of thy slave, my lord. ‘Tis I who have offended. And think not thus of Lady Irene, who in her distant home hath cherished tender thoughts of one whom all so honored. Think of her grief when she shall find thee cold and careless, and shall learn that he who should most love and cherish, deems her but a burden, and hates the wife whom he hath vowed to wed. Ah, think of this, and smile no more upon the slave who may not listen to her lord.

Con. Thou art right, Ione. I will obey thee, and seek to hide my sorrow within my lonely breast. Teach me to love thy mistress as I ought, and I will sacrifice each selfish wish, and be more worthy thy forgiveness, and a little place within thy heart. Trust me, I will speak no more of my unhappy love, and will seek thee only when thine own voice bids me come.

The sunlight of thy presence is my truest joy, and banishment from thee the punishment my wilful heart deserves. Rest here, Ione, and weep for me no more. I am happy if thou wilt but smile again. Farewell, and may the gods forever bless thee! [*Kisses her robe, and rushes out.*]

CURTAIN.

SCENE TENTH.

[*A gallery in the palace. Enter* Ione *with flowers.*]

Ione. How desolate and dreary all hath grown! The garden once so bright hath lost its beauty now, for Constantine no longer walks beside me. The palace rooms seem sad and lonely, for his voice no longer echoes there, and the music of his harp is never heard. His pale face haunts me through all my waking hours, and his mournful eyes look on me in my dreams. But soon his sorrow all shall cease, for nearer draws the day when Princess Irene comes to claim the heart so hardly won, and will by constancy and love so faithfully reward. Hark! I hear a step. It is Rienzi. How shall I escape, — my veil is in the garden! He knows me and will discover all. Stay! this curtain shall conceal me [*hides within the drapery*].

[*Enter* Rienzi *stealthily.*

Rienzi. How! not here? I told the messenger to meet me in the gallery that leads from the garden. Curses on him! he hath delayed, and were I discovered in this part of the palace, all might be betrayed. I'll wait, and if he comes not, I'll bear the message to the friends myself, and tell the bold conspirators we meet to-night near the haunted glen, to lay yet farther plans. We must rid the kingdom of the prince, who will be made ere long our king, for his bridal with the Princess Irene draws more near. But ere the royal crown shall rest upon his brow, that head shall be laid low. The queen will soon follow her young son, and then we'll seize the kingdom and rule it as we will. Hark! methought I heard a sound. I may be watched. I'll stay no longer, but seek the place myself [*steals out and disappears in the garden*].

[Ione *comes from her hiding-place.*

Ione. Surely the gods have sent me to watch above thee, Constantine, and save thee from the danger that surrounds thee. I will haste to tell him all I have discovered. Yet, no! Rienzi may escape, and I can charge none other with the crime. They meet near the haunted glen, and not a slave would follow even his brave prince to that dark spot. How can I aid him to discover those who seek to do him harm? Stay! I will go alone. Once have I dared the dangers of the way to save thy life, Constantine; again I'll tread the fearful path, and watch the traitors at their evil work. It shall be done! I will dare all, and fail not, falter not, till thou who art dearer to me than life itself art safe again.

[*Exit.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE ELEVENTH.

[*A wood near the haunted glen.* Ione *shrouded in white glides in and conceals herself among the trees. Enter* Rienzi.]

Rienzi [*looking fearfully about*]. 'Tis a wild and lonely spot, and 'tis said strange spirits have been seen to wander here. Why come they not? 'Tis past the hour, and I who stand undaunted when the fiercest battle rages round me, now tremble with strange fear in this dim spot. Shame on thee, Rienzi, there is nought to fear [*opens a scroll and reads*]. Here are their names, all pledged to see the deed accomplished. 'Tis a goodly list and Constantine must fall when foes like these are round him. [Ione *appears within the glen.*

Ha! methought I heard a sound! Nay, ‘twas my foolish fancy. Spirits, I defy thee!

Ione. Beware! Beware!

Rienzi. Ye gods, what’s that? It was a voice. [*Rushes wildly towards the glen, sees* Ione, *drops scroll and dagger.*] ‘Tis a spirit! The gods preserve me, I will not stay! [*Exit in terror.*]

[*Enter* Ione.

Ione. Saved! saved! Here are the traitors’ names, and here Rienzi’s dagger to prove my story true. Now hence with all my speed, no time is to be lost! These to thee, Constantine, and joy unfailing to my own fond heart.

[*Exit* Ione.

CURTAIN.

SCENE TWELFTH.

[*Apartment in the palace. Enter* Constantine.]

Con. This little garland of pale, withered flowers is all now left me of Ione, faded like my own bright hopes, broken like my own sad heart. Yet still I cherish it, for her dear hand wove the wreath, and her soft eyes smiled above the flowers as she twined them for my brow. Those happy days are passed; she comes no more, but leaves me sorrowing and alone. And yet ‘tis better so. The princess comes to claim my hand, and then ‘twill be a sin to watch Ione, to follow her unseen, and listen to her voice when least she thinks me near. The gods give me strength to bear my trial worthily, and suffer silently the greatest sorrow life can give, — that of losing her [*leans sadly upon the harp*].

[*Enter* Ione.

Ione. My lord — He does not hear me, how bitter and how deep must be his grief, when the voice that most he loves falls thus unheeded on his ear. My lord —

Con. [*starting*]. And thou art really here? Ah, Ione, I have longed for thee most earnestly. Ah, forgive me! In my joy I have disobeyed, and told the happiness thy presence brings. What wouldst thou with me?

Ione. My lord, I have strange tidings for thine ear.

Con. Oh, tell me not the Princess Irene hath arrived!

Ione. Nay, ‘tis not that. I have learned the secret of a fearful plot against thy life. Rienzi, and a band of other traitors, seek to win thy throne and take the life of their kind prince.

Con. It cannot be, Ione! They could not raise their hands ‘gainst one who hath striven for their good. They cannot wish the life I would so gladly have lain down to save them. Who told thee this, Ione? I cannot — no, I will not think they could prove so ungrateful unto their prince.

Ione. I cannot doubt the truth of this, my lord, for one whose word I trust learned it, and followed to the haunted glen, there saw Rienzi, whose guilty conscience drove him from the place, leaving behind this scroll whereon are all the traitors’ names. And this dagger, — ’tis his own, as thou mayst see [*shows dagger and scroll*].

Con. I can no longer doubt; but I had rather have felt the dagger in my heart than such a wound as this. The names are few; I fear them not, and will ere long show them a king may pardon all save treachery like this. But tell the name of thy brave friend who hath discovered this deep treason, and let me offer some reward to one who hath watched above me with such faithful care.

Ione. Nay, my lord, no gift, no thanks are needed. ‘Tis a true and loving subject, who is well rewarded if his king be safe.

Con. Thou canst not thus deceive me. It was thine own true heart that dared so much to save my life. Oh, Ione, why wilt thou make me love thee more by deeds like these, — why make the sorrow heavier to bear, the parting sadder still?

Ione. Thou dost forget, my lord, I have but done my duty. May it please thee, listen to a message I bear thee from the queen.

Con. Say on. I will gladly listen to thy voice while yet I may.

Ione. She bid me tell thee that to-morrow, ere the sun shall set, the Princess Irene will be here. [Constantine *starts and turns aside.*] Forgive me that I pain thee, but I must obey. Yet, farther: thy bride hath sent her statue as a gift to thee, and thou wilt find it in the queen’s pavilion. She bid me say she prayed thee to go look upon it, and remember there thy solemn vow.

Con. Oh, Ione, could she send none but thee to tell me this? To hear it from thy lips but makes the tidings heavier to bear. Canst thou bid me go, and vow to love one whom I have learned to hate? Canst thou bid me leave thee for a fate like this?

Ione. My lord, thou art soon to be a king; then for thy country’s sake, remember thy hand is plighted to the princess, and let no kindly thoughts of a humble slave keep thy heart from its solemn duty.

Con. I am no king, — ’tis I who am the slave, and thou, Ione, are more to me than country, home, or friends. Nay, do not turn away, — think only of the love I bear thee, and listen to my prayer.

Ione. I must not listen. Hast thou so soon forgot the vow thou made that no word of love should pass thy lips? Remember, ‘tis a slave who stands before thee.

Con. Once more thou shalt listen to me, Ione, and then I will be still forever. Thou shalt be my judge, thy lips *shall* speak my fate. I cannot love the princess. Wouldst thou bid me vow to cherish her while my heart is wholly thine? Wouldst thou ask me to pass through life beside her with a false vow on my lips, and, with words of love I do not feel, conceal from her the grief of my divided heart?

Must I give up all the bright dreams of a happier lot, and feel that life is but a bitter struggle, a ceaseless longing but for thee? Rather bid me to forget the princess and bind with Love’s sweet chains the slave unto my side, — my bride forever.

Ione. The *slave* Ione can never be thy bride, and thou art bound by solemn vows to wed the Princess Irene. My duty and thine honor are more precious than a poor slave’s love. Banish all thoughts of her, and prove thyself a faithful lord unto the wife who comes now trustingly to thee. Ask thine own heart if life could be a bitter pilgrimage, when a sacrifice like this had been so nobly made. A tender wife beside thee, a mother’s blessing on thy head, — oh, were not this a happier fate than to enjoy a short, bright dream of love, but to awake and find thy heart’s peace gone, thy happiness forever fled; to see the eyes that once looked reverently upon thee now turned aside, and lips that spoke but tender words now whisper scornfully of broken vows thou wert not brave enough to keep. Forgive me, but I cannot see the prince so false to his own noble heart. Cast off this spell; forget me, and Irene shall win thee back to happiness.

Con. Never! All her loveliness can never banish the pure, undying love I bear to thee. Oh, Ione, canst thou doubt its truth, when I obey thee now and prove how great thy power o’er my heart hath grown? Oh, let the sacrifice win from *thee* one gentle thought, one kind remembrance of him whose life thou hast made so beautiful for a short hour. And in my loneliness, sweet memories of thee shall cheer and gladden, and I will bear all for thy dear sake. And now farewell. Forgive if I have grieved thee, and at parting grant me one token to the silent love that henceforth must lie unseen within my heart. Farewell, Ione! [*He kisses her.*]

Ione [*falling at his feet*]. Ah, forgive me, — here let me seek thy pardon for the grief I have brought thee. May all the happiness that earth can bring be ever thine. But, if all others should forsake thee, in thine hour of sorrow remember there is one true heart that cannot change. Oh, may the gods bless thee! ‘Tis my last wish, last prayer [*weeps*]. Farewell!

Con. Stay! I would claim from thee one little word which hath the power to brighten e’en my sorrow. I have never asked thee, for I thought my heart had read it in thine eyes that looked so kindly on me; in the lips that spoke such gentle words of hope. But ah! tell me now at parting dost thou *love* me, dear Ione?

Ione. I do, most fondly, truly love thee.

Con. Ione, thy voice hath been a holy spell to win me to my duty. Thy love shall keep me pure and faithful, till we meet above. Farewell!

Ione. Farewell! — and oh, remember how I have loved thee; and may the memory of all I have borne for thee win thy pardon for any wrong I may have done thee. The princess will repay the grief the slave hath caused thy noble heart. Remember Ione, and be true.

[*Exit.*

Con. Gone, gone, now lost to me forever! Remember thee! Ah, how can I ever banish thy dear image from this heart that now hath grown so desolate? I will be true. None shall ever know how hard a struggle hath been mine, that I might still be worthy thee. Yes, Irene, I will strive to love thee, and may the gods give me strength; but Ione, Ione, how can I give thee up! [*Picks up a flower* Ione *has dropped, and puts it in his bosom and goes sadly out.*]

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRTEENTH.

[The Queen’s *pavilion. A dark curtain hangs before an alcove. Enter* Constantine.]

Con. The hour hath come when I shall gaze upon the form of her who hath cast so dark a shadow o’er my life. Beautiful and young, and blessed with all that makes her worthy to be loved, and yet I fear I have not taught my wilful heart the tenderness I ought.

I fear to draw aside the veil that hides her from me, for I cannot banish the sweet image that forever floats before mine eyes. Ione’s soft gaze is on me, and the lips are whispering, “I love thee!” But I have promised to be true, — no thoughts of her must lead me now astray. My fate is here [*approaches the curtain*]. Let me gaze upon it, and think gently of the wife so soon to be mine own. Why do I fear? Courage, my heart! [*He draws aside the curtain, and* Ione, *veiled, appears as a statue upon its pedestal.*] Another veil to raise! How hard the simple deed hath grown. One last sweet thought of thee, Ione, and then I will no longer falter. [*He turns away and bows his head.*]

Ione. Constantine! [*He starts, and gazes in wonder as the statue, casting aside the veil, comes down and kneels.*] Here at thy feet kneels thy hated bride, — the “proud, cold princess,” asking thee to pardon all the sorrow she hath given thee. Ah, smile upon me, and forget Ione, who as a slave hath won thy love, but as the princess will repay it, — forgive, and love me still!

Con. Thou, thou Irene, — she whom I so feared to look upon? Ah, no! — thou art Ione, the gentle slave. Say am I dreaming? Why art thou here to make another parting the harder to be borne? Fling by thy crown and be Ione again.

Irene [*rising*]. Listen, Constantine, and I will tell thee all. I am Irene. In my distant home I learned thou didst not love me, and I vowed to win thy heart before I claimed it. Thus, unknown, the proud princess served thee as a slave, and learned to love thee with a woman’s fondest faith. I watched above thee that no harm should fall; I cheered and gladdened life for thee, and won the heart I longed for. I knew the sorrow thou wouldst feel, but tried thy faith by asking thee to sacrifice thy love and keep thine honor stainless. Here let me offer up a woman’s fondest trust and most undying love. Wilt thou believe, and pardon mine offence? [*Kneels again before him.*]

Con. Not at my feet, Irene! — ’tis I who should bend low before thee, asking thy forgiveness. For all thou hast dared for me; for every fearless deed; for every loving thought, all I can lay before thee is a fond and faithful heart, whose reverence and love can never die, but through the pilgrimage of life shall be as true and tender as when I gave it to the slave Ione [*embraces* Irene].

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

ION.

NOTE TO ION.

This play was found too uninteresting for presentation, and was left unfinished, but is here given as a specimen of what the young authors considered *very fine* writing.

The drama was, of course, to end well. Cleon, being free, at once assembles a noble army, returns to conquer Mohammed and release Ion, who weds the lovely Zuleika, becomes king, and “lives happily forever after.”

CHARACTERS.

Mohammed *The Turk.*

Cleon *Prince of Greece.*

Ion *Son of Cleon.*

Adrastus *A Priest.*

Hafiz *Turkish Envoy.*

Hassan *A Slave.*

Murad *A Slave.*

Abdallah *A Slave.*

Iantha *Wife of Cleon.*

Zuleika *Daughter of Mohammed.*

Medon *A Slave.*

Selim *A Slave.*

ION.

SCENE FIRST.

[*Room in the palace of Cleon. Iantha and* Adrastus.]

Iantha. How wearily the days wear on, and the heavy hours so fraught with doubt press like death upon my aching heart. To the young, the fair, the happy, life is a blissful dream, filled with bright joys; for hope like a star beams on their pathway. But to the grief-worn heart, worn with weary watching, vexed with sad cares, whose hours are filled with fear, and ever thronging sorrows, whose star burns with a dim uncertain light, — oh, weary, weary is the pilgrimage; joyless the present, dark the future; and the sooner all is o’er, the better.

Adrastus. Daughter, thou hast forgot. The radiant star may pale and fade, but He who giveth it its light still liveth. Turn unto Him thy worn and bleeding heart, and comfortless thou shalt not be.

Iantha. Father, I cannot. When I would pray for resignation, words fail me, and my soul is filled with murmuring, while round me throng visions of battle-fields and death. Ever comes before me the form of Cleon, — no longer bright and beautiful as when, burning with hope and confidence in his high calling, he went forth to conquer or to die; but fallen, bleeding, perhaps dead, or a captive in the dungeon of the pagan, doomed to waste in hopeless misery the long years of his manhood. And my boy, — what will be his fate? Father, can I think on this and pray?

Adrastus. ‘Tis hard, Iantha; but to His aid alone canst thou look up to save thy husband from the horrors of a bloody war. Call on Him, and He, the merciful, will in thy great need be near thee.

[*Enter* Medon.

Medon. A stranger craveth audience.

Iantha [*rushing forward*]. A stranger! Cometh he from my lord?

Medon. I know not, lady; but as a messenger is he clad, and with great haste demandeth speech of thee, saying he bore tidings of great import.

Iantha. Admit him instantly. [*Exit* Medon.] Father, do thou follow, and speed him hither.

Adrastus. I hasten to obey thee. Bear a brave heart, my daughter. I feel that hope is near.

[*Exit* Adrastus.

Iantha [*joyfully*]. Hope, — thrice blessed word! — wilt thou indeed visit this doubting heart once more, and sweeten the cup thou hast so long forsaken? [*Enter* Hafiz.] Welcome! comest thou from my lord? Thy tidings speedily!

Hafiz. To the wife of Cleon, late commander of the rebel Greeks, am I sent to bear tidings of their defeat by Mohammed, now master of all Greece.

Adrastus. And my lord, — the noble Cleon?

Hafiz. Betrayed, defeated, and now lying under sentence of immediate death in the dungeon of the Sultan.

Iantha. Lost! lost! lost! [*Falls fainting on a couch.*]

[*Enter* Adrastus.

Adrastus. Daughter, look up! — there is yet hope. There is no time for rest. Up! rouse thy brave, till now, unconquered heart and cast off this spell. And thou, slave, hence, — away!

[*Exit* Hafiz.

Iantha [*rousing*]. Defeated, imprisoned, condemned, — words unto one heart fraught with such dire despair. Tell me, Father, oh, tell me truly, do I dream?

[*Enter* Ion, *who stands listening.*

Adrastus. ‘Tis no dream. The rough soldier did but tell thee in rude speech, what I was hastening in more guarded words to bear thee. ‘Tis true; thy lord is in Mohammed’s power, a victim to the perfidy of pagans, and doomed unto a speedy death. Nay, Iantha, shrink not, but as a soldier’s wife, glory in the death of thy brave knight, dying for his country; and in his martyrdom take to thy soul sweet comfort.

Iantha. Comfort! Oh, man, thou little knowest woman’s heart! What to her is glory, when him she loveth is torn from her forever? What to the orphan is the crown of martyrdom, the hero’s fame, the praise of nations, the homage of the great? Will they give back the noble dead, heal the broken heart, tear bitter memories from the wounded soul to whom earth is desolate? Nay, Father, nay. Oh, Cleon, would I could die with thee!

Adrastus. This mighty sorrow o’erpowers her reason and will destroy all hope. Iantha, daughter, rouse thyself; let the love thou dost bear thy lord now aid in his deliverance. From the wealth of thy heart’s true affection, devise thou some way to save him.

Iantha. Aid me, Father; I have no power of thought. I will trust all to *thee*.

[Ion *approaches.*

Adrastus. I know not what to counsel thee; my life hath ill fitted me to deal with soldiers and with kings. But if some messenger —

Iantha. Nay, it will not serve. None will dare brave the anger of the pagan, and death were the doom of such as approach him other than as a slave. And yet, —

perchance he might relent. Oh, were there some true heart, fearless and loving, to aid me now in mine hour of distress! Where can I look for help?

Ion [*coming forward*]. Here, Mother, — *I* will seek the camp of Mohammed.

Iantha. Thou! — my Ion, my only one. No, no; it may not be, — thy tender youth, thy gentle, untried spirit. ‘Tis madness e’en to think on!

Ion. Mother, am I not a soldier’s son, cradled ‘mid warriors? Runs not the blood of heroes in these veins? Are not my father’s deeds, his bright, untarnished name, my proud inheritance? What though this tender form is yet untried; what though these arms have never borne the knightly armor? No victor’s laurels rest on this youthful brow, and I bear no honored name among the great and glorious of our land; yet, Mother, have I not a father, for whose dear sake I may yet purchase that knighthood for which this young heart glows? Am I not the son of Cleon?

Adrastus. Verily doth a spirit move the boy. Look on him now, Iantha, and let no weak, unworthy doubt of thine curb the proud spirit that proves him worthy of his sire.

Iantha. My son, my fair, young Ion, thou art all now left my widowed heart. How can I bid thee go! The barbarous pagan will doom thee to a cruel death. How canst thou, an unknown youth, move the fierce heart that hath slain thy sire?

Ion. Fear not, Mother; he who calls me to this glorious mission will protect me. Shall I stand weeping while my father still breathes the air of pagan dungeons; while the base fetters of the infidel rest on his limbs, and his brave followers lie unavenged in their cold, bloody graves; while my country’s banner, torn, dishonored, is trampled in the dust, — and he the proud, the brave, till now unconquered defender of that country’s honor, lies doomed to an ignominious death? Oh, Mother, bid me go!

Adrastus. Iantha, speak to the boy! Let him not say his *mother* taught him fear.

Iantha. My Ion, go, — strong in thine innocence and faith, go forth upon thy holy mission; and surely He who looketh ever with a loving face on those who put their trust in Him, will in His mercy guard and guide thee [*girds on his sword*]. Farewell! Go, — with thy mother's blessing on thee!

Ion. Now is my heart filled all anew with hope and courage, and I go forth trustingly. Father, thy blessing [*kneels before* Adrastus].

Adrastus. Go, thou self-anointed victim on the altar of thy love. Bless thy pure, faithful heart!

Ion [*rising*]. Farewell! Embrace me, Mother.

Iantha [*pressing* Ion *to her breast*]. Farewell, my Ion. And if the great Father wills it that I look not again on thee in life, into His care do I commit thee. Farewell!

Ion. Mother, farewell! And if I fall, mourn not, but glory that I died as best became the son of Cleon [*draws his sword*]. And now leap forth, my sword! — henceforth is there no rest nor honor till we have conquered. Father, I come, I come! [Ion *rushes out;* Iantha *rushes to the window, tears off her veil and waves it to* Ion.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE SECOND.

[*Tent of* Mohammed; *maps and arms lying about.* Mohammed *and* Hafiz.]

Moh'd. And spake they no word of ransom or of hostage?

Hafiz. None, sire. The lady lay as one struck dead; and the priest, foul Christian dog, bade me go hence, and tarry not.

Moh'd. And held you no speech with those about the princess. Sure, there were some to listen to thy master's word.

Hafiz. Great master, I sought in vain to set before them the royal will. At first it were as though a spell had fallen on them. Nay, some did turn aside and weep, rending their hair, as though all hope were lost. Then, when I strove to win them to some counsel, they woke to such an uproar, cursing thy perfidy, and vowing most dire and speedy vengeance on thee, clashing their weapons and crying, “Down with the pagan dogs!” Then, drawing forth their lances with fierce oaths, they drove me from the gates in such warlike manner, I could but strive with haste to make good mine escape, and without rest have I journeyed hither to bring thee tidings.

Moh’d. By the prophet! and is it thus they serve the royal messenger. But they shall rue it dearly. Cleon shall die. To-morrow’s sun shall never shine for him. The proud Greeks shall learn to dread Mohammed’s ire, and bend their haughty heads before him in the dust. I offer ransom, and they will not harken. I send them honorable terms, and they thrust my messenger rudely from their gates. They have dared to brave me, — they shall feel my power!

Hafiz. Mighty Mohammed, if thy poor slave might offer counsel, were it not wise to tarry till the Greeks on cooler thought shall seek thee with some treaty which may avail thee better than such hasty vengeance. How much more worthy were a heavy ransom than the life of a single miserable prince.

Moh’d. Peace, slave! I have said Cleon shall die, and, by Allah! so I have not word from these rebel dogs ere three days shall wear away, his body swung from the battlements shall bear them tidings of Mohammed’s power. [*Enter* Selim.] What hath befallen, Selim, that thou comest in such haste?

Selim. Most mighty king, there waits without a youth, demanding speech of thee.

Moh’d. A youth! Who may he be, and what seeks he with us?

Selim. Most gracious sire, I know not. Our guard surprised him wandering without the camp, — alone, unarmed, save with a single sword; young, and I think a Greek. Abdallah seized him as a spy, and led him hither to await thy royal will. He doth refuse all question, demanding to be led before thee, where he will unfold his errand.

Moh’d. A Greek! Bring him before us, an he prove a spy he shall hang before the day waxeth older by an hour. Hence, — bring him hither! [*Exit* Selim.] By Allah! my proud foes have deigned to send us messengers, and seek to win the favor so rudely scorned. They know not Mohammed, and, so they humble not themselves, will sue in vain.

[*Enter* Selim, *dragging* Ion.

Selim. Your Mightiness doth behold the youth. [*To* Ion, *who stands proudly.*] Kneel, slave!

Ion. I kneel not unto tyrants.

Moh’d. How, bold stripling! Weigh with more care thy speech, and forget not before whom thou dost stand. [*To* Selim.] Go, slave, and stand without; see that none enter here unbidden. [*Exit* Selim.] Speak, boy! Who art thou, and why dost thou seek thus fearlessly the presence of thy foe? — and beware thou speakest truly if it is as a friend to treat in honorable fashion, or as a spy, thou now standest before us.

Ion. I am a Greek, son to the noble Cleon, now thy captive; I seek his rescue.

Moh’d. Son to Cleon! Now, by the Prophet, ‘tis wondrous strange! And thou hast ventured alone into the camp amid thy deadly foes? Speak, boy, — thine errand!

Ion. To offer hostage; to treat with Mohammed for a father’s life; to move to pity or to justice the heart that hath doomed a noble soldier unto an unjust death.

Moh’d. And where, my bold prince, are thy followers, thy slaves, thy royal train?

Ion. On yonder plain, cold in their graves.

Moh’d. Hast thou brought ransom? Where is thy gold?

Ion. In the coffers of the Turkish Mohammed, plundered from his slaughtered foes.

Moh’d. Thou spakest of hostage, — I see it not.

Ion. ‘Tis here, — the son of Cleon.

Moh’d. Thou! and thinkest thou thy young, worthless life were a fit hostage for the leader of a rebel band, the enemy of all true followers, whose capture hath cost blood and slaves and gold? By Allah! boy, thou must name a higher price to win the life thou doth seek.

Ion. I have nought else to offer. Thy hand hath rent from me friends, followers, gold, a sire. But if this young life hath any worth to thee, if these arms may toil for thee, this form bear burdens to thy royalty, take them, — take all, O king, but render unto me that life without which Greece is lost.

Moh’d. Peace! Thy speech is vain; thy life is nought to me.

Ion. I will serve thee as a slave; in all things do thy bidding, — faithful, unwearied, unrepining. Grant but my boon, and monarch shall never have a truer vassal than I will be to thee. Great Mohammed, let me not plead in vain.

Moh’d. Peace, I say; anger me not.

Ion. O king, hast thou no heart? Think of the ruined home, the mourning people, the land made desolate by thee; of her who now counts the weary hours for tidings of those dear to her, — tidings fraught with life or death as thou shalt decree; of the son by thee doomed to see his honored sire, hero of a hundred battles dragged like a slave unto a shameful death. As thou wilt have mercy shown to thee, that mercy show thou unto me. Oh, say to me, “Thy father lives!”

Moh’d. Away! I will not listen.

Ion. Nay, I *will* kneel to thee. I who never knelt to man before, now implore thee with earnest supplication. ‘Tis for a father’s life.

Moh’d. Kneel not to me, — it is in vain. Thy father is my captive, my deadliest foe, whom I hate, and curse, — ay, and will slay. Boy, dost thou know to whom thou dost bow?

Ion [*rising proudly*]. To the pagan Mohammed, — he who with murderous hand hath bathed in blood the smiling plains of Greece; profaned her altars, enslaved her people, and filled the land with widows’ tears and orphans’ cries; he who by perfidy makes captives of his foes, refusing hostage and scorning honorable treaty; turns from all supplicants, closes his heart to mercy, and tramples under foot all pity and all justice, — the murderer, and the tyrant. Yes, king, I know to whom I plead.

Moh’d. [*in great anger*]. Ho, without there, guards! — Selim! [*Enter* Selim *and soldiers.*] Away with the prisoner! Bind him fast; see he escape not. Mohammed stands not to be braved by a beardless boy! Hence! [*Guards approach with chains.*]

Ion. Lay not hands upon me, — I am no slave! One more appeal: May a son look once more upon his father ere death parts them forever? May I but for an hour speak with Cleon?

Moh’d. Once more thou mayst look upon the rebel Greek. When he hangs from yonder battlement thou mayst gaze unbidden as thou will. Away! With to-morrow’s sun, he dies.

Ion. So soon, O king! — nay, the son of Cleon kneels not to thee again [*turns to go*].

Moh’d. Stay, — yield up thy sword! Bend thy proud knee, and surrender unto me the arms thou art unworthy now to bear.

Ion [*drawing his sword*]. This, my sword, girded on by a mother’s hand, pledged to the deliverance of a captive sire, dedicated to the service of my country, unstained, unconquered, — *thus* do I surrender thee. [*He breaks the sword, and flings it down.*]

Moh’d. Again dost thou brave me! Away with the rebel! Bind him hand and foot. He shall learn what it is to be Mohammed’s slave. Hence, I say!

Ion. I am thy captive, but thy slave — never! Thou mayst chain my limbs, thou canst *not* bind my freeborn soul! Lead on, — I follow.

[*Exit* Ion *and guards*.

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRD.

[*Tent of* Zuleika; *guitar, ottoman, etc.*]

Zuleika [*pacing up and down*]. Night draweth on apace, and ever nearer comes the fatal hour. With to-morrow’s dawn all hope is o’er, for Mohammed hath sworn the Greek shall die, and when was *he* ere known to fail in his dread purpose? In vain have I wept before him, imploring him to have some mercy; in vain have I sought with golden promises to move the stony-hearted Hafiz, — all, all hath failed, and I am in despair. And that brave youth, his true heart filled with love’s pure devotion, seeking by the sacrifice of his own life to save a father! And now each moment bringeth nearer the death-hour of that father, and he is mourning in solitude that he may not say farewell. Where can I turn for help? Ah, Hassan! my faithful slave. He is true, and loveth me like his own. He must aid me [*claps her hands*; *enter* Hassan]. Hassan, thou lovest me, and would not see me grieve?

Hassan. Allah, forbid! Thou art dear to old Hassan as the breath of life, and while life lingers he will serve thee.

Zuleika. Then must thou aid me in a deed of mercy. Who doth keep watch to-night before the tent of the young Greek?

Hassan. Mine is the watch. Wherefore dost thou seek to know?

Zuleika. Hassan, thou hast sworn to serve me. I have a boon to ask of thee.

Hassan. Speak, lady! thy slave doth listen.

Zuleika. Thou knowest that with the morning sun Mohammed hath sworn Cleon shall die. Such is the fierce anger he doth bear his foe he hath refused all mercy and scorned to listen to the prayers of the young prince who hath journeyed hither at peril of his own life to place himself in the power of the king as hostage for his father.

Hassan. It is indeed most true. Poor youth!

Zuleika. ‘Tis of him I would speak to thee. Mohammed, angered at his boldness, hath, as thou knowest, guarded him in yonder tent, denying him his last sad prayer to speak once more in life with his father. Oh, Hassan, what must be the agony of that young heart to see the hours swift speeding by, and know no hope.

Hassan. What wouldst thou have me do?

Zuleika. Lead him to his father; give him the consolation of folding to his breast the beloved one to save whose life he hath sacrificed his own.

Hassan. Dear mistress, thou art dreaming, and cannot know the danger of so rash a deed. Bethink thee of Mohammed’s anger, the almost certain doom of such as dare to brave his mighty will. I pray thee let not thy noble heart lead thee astray. Thou canst not save him, and will but harm thyself.

Zuleika. Hassan, thy love and true devotion, I well know, doth prompt thee to thus counsel, and in thy fear for me thou dost forget to think of mercy or of pity. I thank thee; but thou canst not move me from my firm resolve. Again I ask thee, Wilt thou aid me?

Hassan [*falling at her feet*]. Pardon, but I cannot. Heed, I implore thee, the counsel of thy faithful servant, and trust to the wisdom these gray hairs have brought. Thou art young and brave, but believe me, maiden, dangers of which thou dost not dream beset the path, and I were no true friend did I not warn thee to beware. Do not tempt me; I cannot aid thee to thy ruin.

Zuleika. Then will I go alone. I will brave the peril, and carry comfort to a suffering soul [*turns to go*; Hassan *catches her robe*].

Hassan. Maiden! once more let thy slave entreat. Thy father places faith in me. I am the captive's guard.

Zuleika. Peace, Hassan, peace; if life be then so dear to thee, and thy duty to thy king greater than that thou dost owe to thy fellow-man, Allah forbid that I should tempt thee to forget it. But did death look me in the face, I would not tarry now.

Hassan. And thou wouldst seek the captive's cell?

Zuleika. This very hour. Soon it will be too late.

Hassan. Thou knowest not the way, — soldiers guard every turn. Oh, tarry till the dawn, I do implore thee.

Zuleika. The darkness shall be my guide, Allah my guard; shrouded in yon dark mantle none will deem me other than a slave. Again I ask thee, Wilt thou go?

Hassan. I go. I were no true man to tremble when a woman fears not. I will guide thee, and may Allah in his mercy shield us both. Say thy prayers, Hassan, for thy head no longer rests in safety.

Zuleika. Come, let us on! The moments speed. The darkening gloom befriends us. First to the tent of the young prince, and while I in brief speech do acquaint him with mine errand, thou shalt keep guard without. Then will we guide him to his father, and unto Allah leave the rest [*shrouds herself in dark mantle and veil*]. Lead on, good Hassan. Let us away!

Hassan. Fold thy veil closer, that none may know the daughter of Mohammed walks thus late abroad. Come, and Allah grant we sleep not in paradise to-morrow!

[*Exit, leading* Zuleika.

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTH.

[Ion’s *tent.* Ion *chained, in an attitude of deep despair, upon a miserable couch. He does not see the entrance of* Zuleika *and* Hassan.]

Zuleika. Stand thou without as watch, good Hassan, and warn me if any shall approach. [*Exit* Hassan.] Young Greek, despair not; hope is nigh.

Ion [*starting up*]. Bright vision, whence comest thou? Art thou the phantom of a dream, or some blest visitant from that better land, come to bear me hence? What art thou?

Zuleika. I am no vision, but a mortal maiden, come to bring thee consolation.

Ion. Consolation! ah, then indeed thou art no mortal; for unto grief like mine there is no consolation, save that which cometh from above.

Zuleika. Nay, believe it not. Human hearts are at this moment hoping, and human hands are striving earnestly to spare thee the agony thou dost dread.

Ion. Are there then hearts to feel for the poor Greek? I had thought I was alone, — alone ‘mid mine enemies. Sure, those fetters are no dream, this dark cell, the words “Thy father dies!” No, no! it is a dread reality. The words are burned into my brain.

Zuleika. Is death, then, so dread a thing unto a warrior? I had thought it brought him fame and glory.

Ion. Death! Oh, maiden! To the soldier on the battle-field, fighting for his fatherland ‘mid the clash of arms, the fierce blows of foemen, the shouts of victory; ‘neath the banner of his country, the gratitude of a nation, the glory of a hero round his brow, — death were a happy, ay, a welcome friend. But alone, ‘mid foes, disgraced by fetters, dragged to a dishonored grave, with none to whisper of hope or comfort, death is a cruel, a most bitter foe.

Zuleika. Mine errand is to take from that death the bitterness thou dost mourn, to give a parting joy to the life now passing.

Ion. Oh, hast thou the power to save my father’s life! Oh, use it now, and Greece shall bless thee for thy mercy!

Zuleika. Oh, that the power *were* mine, how gladly would I use it in a cause so glorious! I am but a woman, and tho’ the heart is strong, the arm is very weak. I cannot save thy father, but trust I may still cheer the parting hours with a brief happiness.

Ion. Lady, thy words of kindly sympathy fall like sweet music on my troubled heart, and at thy magic call hope springeth up anew. Thou art unknown, and yet there is that within that doth whisper I may trust thee.

Zuleika. Thou mayst indeed. Heaven were not more true than I will be unto my word. [Hassan *pauses before the door*.]

Hassan. Lady, the hours are fleeting. It were best to make good speed.

Zuleika. Hassan, thou dost counsel aright; morn must not find me here. [*To* Ion.] Young Greek, thou knowest with the coming dawn thy father dies.

Ion. Ay, ere another moon doth rise that life, so dear to Greece, shall be no more; the heart that beat so nobly at his country’s call be still forever, — I know it well!

Zuleika. And hast thou no last word for him, no parting wish?

Ion. O maiden, my life were a glad sacrifice, so that I might for a single hour look on him, — for the last time say, “My father, bless thy Ion.”

Zuleika. That hour shall be thine. Fold thyself in yonder cloak, and follow me.

Ion. Follow thee, — and whither?

Zuleika. To thy father’s presence. Thou shalt spend with him the last hours of his earthly life. Stay not; this friendly gloom will ere long pass away.

Ion [*falling on his knees and catching her robe*]. Art thou my guardian angel? Oh, may the consolation thou hath poured into a suffering soul, fall like heaven’s dew upon thine own; and if the prayers of a grateful heart bring hope and joy and peace, thy life shall bloom with choicest blessings. O maiden, how do I bless thee! [*Kisses her robe.*]

Zuleika. Speak not of that, — kneel not to me, a mortal maiden. Thy gratitude is my best reward. Hassan, lead on!

Hassan. Lady, I do thy bidding. First let me lead thee to a place of safety.

Zuleika. Nay, Hassan, I tarry here, — thou canst return; I will await thee. Now make all speed, — away!

Ion. Let us hence; my heart can ill contain its joy. Oh, my father, shall I see thee, hear thy voice, feel thine arms once more about me, and die with thy blessing on my head. Heaven hath blessed my mission.

Zuleika. Shall we depart? The hour wanes.

Ion. I will follow whither thou shalt lead. But, stay! is there no danger unto thee?

Will thy deed of mercy bring suffering to thee, my kind deliverer?

Zuleika. Fear not for me. Yet one pledge must I ask of thee on which my safety doth depend. ‘Tis this: Swear that from the moment thou dost leave me until thou art again a prisoner here, though the path lie plain before thee thou wilt not fly.

Ion. I swear. Thou mayst trust me.

Zuleika. Yet once again. Breathe not to mortal ear the *means* by which thou sought’st thy sire, and let the memory of this hour fade from thy heart forever. [Ion *bows assent*.] What pledge have I of thy secrecy, and of thy truth?

Ion. The word of a Greek is sacred, and were not my gratitude my surest pledge to *thee*?

Zuleika. Pardon, I do trust. Now haste thee.

Ion [*pointing to his fetters*]. Thou dost forget I am a prisoner still.

Zuleika. Hassan, unloose these fetters, and give the Greek his freedom. [Hassan *takes off the chains*; Ion *springs joyfully forward*.]

Ion. Now am I free again, and with the Turk’s base fetters have I cast off my fears and my despair. Hope smiles upon me, and my father calls. Oh, let us tarry not.

Zuleika [*folding a dark mantle round him*]. Thus shrouded, in safety thou mayst reach his cell; this ring will spare thee question. Hassan will guide thee, and I — will pray for thy success. Farewell! May Allah aid thee!

Ion. Lady, though I may never know thee, never look on thee again, the memory of this brief hour will never fade. The blessed gift of mercy thou dost bestow will I ever treasure with the deepest gratitude, and my fervent prayer that all Heaven’s blessings may rest upon thee cease but with my life [*falls on his knee* *and kisses her hand*]. Pardon, — ’tis my only thanks. Spirit of mercy, farewell! farewell! [*Follows* Hassan; Zuleika *gazes after him, then sinks down weeping*.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE FIFTH.

[*Tent of* Cleon *the Greek*. Cleon, *chained, pacing to and fro*.]

Cleon. A few short hours and all is o’er, — Cleon sleeps with his fathers. I could have wished to die like a hero in my harness, and have known my grave were watered by my loved one’s tears; to take my wife once more unto my bosom; once more bless my noble Ion; and pass hence with the blest consciousness of victory won. ‘Tis bitter thus to die, ingloriously and alone. [*Proudly raising his head.*] But the name of Cleon is too dear unto his people e’er to be forgotten. The memory that he strove ever for his country’s welfare shall strew with tearful blessings his unhonored grave. [*Steps approach; voices are heard.*] Ah, they come! They shall find me ready. [*Enter* Ion.] Has mine hour come? I am here.

[Ion *casts off his cloak, and springs forward*.]

Ion. Father! O my father!

Cleon [*starting back wildly*]. Thou? Here!

Ion. Yes, thy Ion; bless me, Father [*kneels*].

Cleon [*raising and clasping* Ion *to his breast*]. Here, on my heart, dear one. I turn to meet my executioners, and see thee, my boy. Great Heaven, I bless thee! [*They embrace tenderly and weep.*] Thou camest thither — how?

Ion. Alone, with my good sword.

Cleon. Thy guide through the perils of the way, my child?

Ion. The good Father who doth guide all who trust in him.

Cleon. And thine errand?

Ion. To behold thee, my father, and with my life to strive for thy release.

Cleon. My noble boy, thou hast come unto thy death. Oh, who could bid thee thus brave the doom that must await thee?

Ion. My mother bid me forth; and as she girded on my sword, she bid me seek my father, with her blessing on my mission.

Cleon. My brave Iantha, thus for thy country's sake to doom thine own heart to so deep a sorrow [*looks sadly upon* Ion]. Tell me, my son, did thy mother bear bravely up against the fatal tidings? I had feared her tender heart might but ill meet a blow so fearful. Speak to me of her.

Ion. When the rude Turk did in rough speech acquaint her with thy fell defeat, she sank as one o'erpowered by her grief, praying the friendly hand of death might take her hence; but soon the spirit of the Greek rose high within her, and, banishing her fears, with brave and trusting heart she sent me forth to seek, and if it might be, save thee. Ah, my father, that I might die for thee!

Cleon. And thou hath come to see me die! Dost thou not know that with the night thy father passeth hence, and when the stars again look forth it will be upon his grave?

Ion. Father, 'tis because thou art doomed that I am here. And if my heart speak truly, those same bright stars shall serve to guide thee back to freedom.

Cleon. Thou doth speak wildly. What wilt thou do? Wilt *thou* brave the king?

Ion [*proudly*]. Nay, I have knelt for the last time unto Mohammed. I have offered him my liberty, my service, ay, my life itself, and he hath scorned me. I have deigned to bow before him as a suppliant, and he hath spurned me; I have sought by all the power love and despair could teach to move him, and his ear was closed to me. I seek him not again.

Cleon. Child, what hath led thee to the presence of the king? How didst thou brave the frown of him before whom even armed men do tremble? Didst thou dream thy feeble voice could reach a heart so cruel, that thy prayers could soften one who knoweth not the name of mercy?

Ion. Love can brave all dangers. It giveth wisdom to the untaught, strength to the weak, hope to the despairing, comfort to the mourner. Love hath been my guide, my guard.

Cleon. My boy! my Ion! Truly doth God place in the pure heart of such as thou his truest wisdom, his deepest faith [*embraces him with deep emotion*]. But — art not thou in danger? Did not thy bold speech anger the proud king? Art thou still free?

Ion. Let not thy heart be vexed with fears for me, — I am unharmed.

Cleon. Ion, deceive me not, but as thou hopest for thy father's love, speak truly. Art thou in danger from the Turk, and in thy devotion to thy father dost thou seek to be thyself the sacrifice? Answer me, Ion.

Ion. Father, I sought to spare thy too o'erburdened heart another grief. I *am* a prisoner in Mohammed's power, and know not if my fate be life or death.

Cleon. 'Tis as I feared; and thou, the last hope of thy country, must fall, — all, all, for me! Oh, mine own disgrace were bitter, but to see thee die! Oh, woe is me!

Ion. Father, were it not better thus to die, than in disgraceful peace to pass away with no thought for our fatherland, no proud consciousness of having at the call of duty sacrificed all we held most dear, and leave a name held sacred as one who yielded life and liberty on the altar of his country?

Cleon. But that thou in thine innocence and bloom should meet death at the hands of heartless foemen; and for *my* sake! ‘Tis this that tears my heart.

Ion. The purer the victim the more acceptable the sacrifice. But fear not, dear father. The Turk is yet a man; ‘tis ‘gainst thee he wars, and he will not wreak his vengeance on a child. He may relent, and for my love’s sake, pardon mine offence.

Cleon. Child, thou knowest not Mohammed. He pardons none; all fall before him, with relentless hand, — all strew his pathway unto victory. Will he then spare and pity thee? Nay, sire and son must fall! [*Stands sorrowfully.* Ion *suddenly sees* Zuleika’s *ring upon his hand, and springs forward*.]

Ion. Father, thou shalt yet breathe the air of freedom, shall clasp my mother to thy heart; once more shall lead thy gallant band onward to victory.

Cleon. Raise not bright hopes to crush them at their birth; wake not to dreams of triumph the heart that hath striven to drive hence all save the solemn thoughts meet for one so soon to pass away.

Ion [*pointing to the door*]. See, the gray morning ‘gins to glimmer in the east. ‘Tis no time for despair. Haste, Father, freedom is near!

Cleon. What doth thus move thee, Ion? Dost thou forget these chains, the guards, the perils at each step? Thou art dreaming!

Ion. I tell thee ‘tis no dream. Thou shalt be free. This mantle will disguise thee; this ring open a pathway through the guards; these stars shall be thy silent guide. Wilt thou go?

Cleon. ‘Tis strange! Whence then that ring? How dost thou, a captive, wander thus freely, and offer liberty with such a bounteous hand?

Ion. A solemn oath doth forbid me to reveal to living man the secret of this hour; but if ever angels do leave their homes to minister to suffering souls, ‘twas one most bright and beautiful who hath this night led me unto thee, and placed in mine hand the power to set thee free.

Cleon. Truth speaketh in thine earnest eye and pleading voice, and yet I dare not listen to thy tale.

Ion. Oh, Father, heed not thy fears, thy doubts! Take thy liberty, believing it heaven-sent. No oath binds thee to Mohammed; thou art no rightful prisoner of war, — neither duty nor honor doth demand thy stay. Thy country calls, and Heaven doth point the way.

Cleon. ‘Tis true; no oath doth bind me to the Turk, and yet to fly — My soldier’s spirit doth ill brook such retreat.

Ion. Then stay not, my father, but whilst thou may, depart.

Cleon. Bright hopes call me hence. Life, love, fame, beckon me away.

[Hassan *looks in*.]

Hassan. The promised hour hath well-nigh gone. Prepare, young Greek; we must away.

Ion. A moment more. [*Exit* Hassan.] Father, time wanes. Once more I do entreat thee, — go!

Cleon. Heaven grant I choose aright! Come Ion, we will forth together. [Ion *folds the cloak about* Cleon; *gives him the ring*.] Come, let us go.

Ion. Nay, but one can pass forth. Thou goest. I await the morning here.

Cleon. Then do I tarry also. Nay, Ion, I will not go hence without thee.

Ion. Then all is lost. Father, thy stay can nought avail me. It cannot save, and thou wilt but sacrifice thine own priceless life.

Cleon. Then fly with me; let me bear thee to thy mother. Alone, I will not go.

Ion. I cannot go; a vow doth bid me stay, — a vow that nought shall tempt me from the camp to-night; and when did a Greek e'er break his plighted word?

Cleon. If thine honor bid thee stay, thy father will not tempt thee hence; but he may stay and suffer with thee the fate of the faithful [*throws off the mantle*].

Ion. Oh, my father, do not cast from thee the priceless boon of liberty. Think of thy broken-hearted wife, thy faithful followers, thy unconquered foes; think, Father, of thy country calling on thee for deliverance. What were my worthless life weighed 'gainst her freedom. And what happier fate for a hero's son than for a hero's sake to fall!

Cleon. Thou true son of Greece! Mayst thou yet live to wield a sword for thine oppressed land, and gird with laurels that brow so worthy them.

[Hassan *enters*.

Hassan. No longer may I stay: thine hour is past.

Ion. I come, — yet one moment more, good Hassan; it is my last. [*Exit* Hassan.] Once more, my father, do I entreat thee, — go. Thou dost forget a guardian spirit watcheth over me, and the power that led me hither may yet accomplish my deliverance. If nought else can move thee, for my sake go, and win for me that freedom mine honor doth now forbid me to seek. Break not my heart, nor let me plead in vain.

Cleon. My boy, for thy dear sake do I consent. I *will* earn thy deliverance bravely, as a soldier should; and thy dear image shall be to me the star that leads me on to victory.

Ion [*joyfully*]. Away! Hassan will guide thee past the guards. Then fly, — and

Heaven guide thee, O my father! [Ion *again shrouds* Cleon *in the mantle, concealing his chains in the thick folds*.] Thus muffle thy tell-tale fetters, that no sound may whisper to the Turks there walks a Greek under the free heavens forth to freedom.

Cleon. My Ion, one last embrace! God grant ‘tis not our last on earth! Bless thee, thou true young heart! Heaven guard thee!

[Hassan *enters in haste*.

Hassan. Art ready? We must depart. [Cleon *bows his head and follows*. Ion *rushes after, looking from the tent*.]

Ion. Saved! saved! The morning sun that was to shine upon his grave, will smile upon him far, far from foemen’s power. And Mohammed, thinking to look upon a dying slave, shall waken to the sound of his victorious war-trump. Ion, thy mission is accomplished. Thou hast given a saviour to thy fatherland, and mayst fall thyself without a murmur [*looks up thankfully; a loud noise without*].

[*Enter* Abdallah *and* Murad.

Abd. Where is the prisoner? Come forth!

Ion. I am here [*comes forward*].

Abd. Ha! — here is treason! Without there! — the prisoner hath escaped!

Murad. Who flieth yonder, past the camp?

Abd. ‘Tis he! Forth, call for aid! Search without delay! Here is foul work abroad. First, seize yon boy; fetter the base spy; bear him before the king. Speed hence!

Murad [*to* Ion]. Infidel dog, thou shalt learn what it is to brave Mohammed’s ire!

[*They seize* Ion, *and drag him away*.]

CURTAIN.

BIANCA.

OPERATIC TRAGEDY.

NOTE TO BIANCA.

The peculiarity of this opera was that while the words were committed to memory, the music was *composed* and *sung* as the scene proceeded.

In spite of its absurdity, this play was a great favorite; for Jo was truly superb as the hapless Bianca, while her trills and tragic agonies were considered worthy of the famous Grisi herself.

CHARACTERS.

Adelbert *Betrothed to Bianca.*

Huon *His Rival.*

Juan *A Page.*

Bianca *A Spanish Lady.*

Hilda *A Witch.*

BIANCA.

OPERATIC TRAGEDY.

SCENE FIRST.

[*A wood. Enter* Huon.]

Huon. Hist! All is still. They are not yet here. On this spot will the happy lovers meet. O wretched Huon! she whom thou so passionately doth love will here speak tender words to thy thrice hated rival. Yet I, unseen, will watch them, and ere long my fierce revenge shall change their joy to deepest woe. Hark! they come! Now, jealous heart, be still! [*Hides among the trees.*]

[*Enter* Bianca *and* Adelbert.

Adel. Nay, dearest love, fear not; no mortal eye beholds us now, and yon bright moon looks kindly down upon our love.

[*They seat themselves beneath the trees.*

Bianca. Ah, dearest Adelbert, with thee I feel no fear, but thy fierce rival Huon did vow vengeance on thee, for I did reject his suit for thine. Beware! for his wild heart can feel no pity, tenderness, or love.

Adel. I fear him not. Ere long thou wilt be mine, and then in our fair home we will forget all but our love. Think not, dearest, of that dark, revengeful man; he does not truly love thee.

Bianca. Near thee I cannot fear; but when thou art far from me, my fond heart will ever dread some danger for thee. Ah, see the moon is waning; dear love, thou must away.

Adel. Ah, sweet moments, why so quickly fled? ‘Tis hard to leave thee, thou bright star in my life’s sky, and yet I must, or all may be betrayed. Fare thee well, dear love. One sweet kiss ere we part! [*They embrace.*]

Bianca. Farewell! Ah, when shall I again behold thee? Oh, be not long away, for like a caged bird I pine for thee.

Adel. When next yon moon doth rise beneath thy lattice, thou shalt hear my light guitar.

Bianca. Fail not to come. I shall watch for thee the live-long night, and if thou comest not, this fond heart will grieve.

Both. Farewell, till yon bright moon doth rise,
Farewell, dear love, farewell!
Farewell, farewell, farewell!
Farewell, dear love, farewell!

[*Exit* Adelbert.

Bianca. Ah, love, thou magic power, thus ever make my breast thy home. Adieu, dear spot! I fly to happiness and —

Huon. *Me* — [Bianca *shrieks, and seeks to fly*. Huon *detains her*.]

Bianca. Unmanly villain, touch me not. What dost thou here concealed?

Huon. I listen to thy lover’s fond and heartless vows. What is his love to mine? Ah, lady, he loves thee for thy wealth alone. Again I ask, nay, I implore thee to be mine! Oh, grant me now my prayer!

Bianca. Never! never! I will not listen to thee more. My heart is all another’s; my hatred and contempt are thine.

[*Exit* Bianca.

Huon. Now, by yon moon ‘neath which thy tender vows were plighted, do I swear to win thee, proud and haughty lady, to these arms. Thou shalt curse the day when thou didst cast away my love, and wake my deep revenge.

[*Exit* Huon.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SECOND.

[*A cave in the forest.* Hilda *leaning over a boiling caldron. Enter* Huon.]

Hilda. Ha! who art thou, and what wouldst thou with old Hilda? Speak, and be obeyed.

Huon. O mighty wizard, I have sought thee for a charm to win a proud and scornful woman’s love, — some mystic potion that shall make her cold heart burn for me. Ah, give me this, and gold uncounted shall be thine.

Hilda. I will give to thee a draught that shall chase her coldness and her pride away, and make the heart now beating for another all thine own. Hold! ‘tis here, — three crimson drops when mingled in her wine, will bring the boon thou askest [*gives* Huon *a tiny phial*].

Huon. Oh, blessed draught that wins for me the love I seek. Proud Bianca, now art thou in my power, and shalt ere long return the love of the once hated and despised Huon. Great sorceress, say how can I repay thee? Fear not to claim thy just reward.

Hilda. I ask no gold. But when thy prize is won, remember thou old Hilda’s warning. Woman’s heart is a fragile thing, and they who trifle with it should beware. Now go; I would be alone.

Huon. Farewell! When my love and my revenge are won, I’ll bless this hour and Hilda’s charm.

[*Exit* Huon.

Hilda. Poor fool! thou little thinkest thy love-charm is a deadly draught, and they who quaff it die. When thou shalt seek thy lady, hoping for her love, a dead bride thou wilt win. Ha! ha! old Hilda’s spells work silently and well.

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRD.

[*Room in the castle of* Bianca. *Evening. Enter* Huon.]

Huon. How can I best give the draught that none may see the deed? Ha! yonder comes her page, bearing wine. Now in her cup will I mingle these enchanted drops, and she shall smile on me when next I plead my suit. Ho, Juan, my boy! come hither; I would speak with thee. [*Enter* Juan *with wine.*] Where is thy lady now?

Juan. At her lattice, watching for Lord Adelbert, and gazing on the flowers he hath sent.

Huon [*aside*]. She shall never watch and wait for him again. [*Aloud.*] Whence bearest thou the wine, Juan? Is it to thy lady?

Juan. Yes, my lord. She bid me haste. I must away.

Huon. Stay! clasp my sandal, boy; I will repay thee if thy mistress chide. [Juan *stoops;* Huon *drops the potion into the wine cup.*] Thanks; here is gold for thee. Away, and tell thy lady I will be here anon.

[*Exit* Juan.

Ha, ha! ‘tis done! ‘tis done!
My vengeance now is won,
And ere to-morrow’s sun shall set,
Thou, haughty lady, shalt forget
The lover who now hastes to thee,
And smile alone, alone on me.

[*Exit* Huon.

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTH.

[Bianca’s *castle. A moonlit balcony. Enter* Bianca.]

Bianca. He comes not. Yon bright moon will ere long set, and still I hear not the dear voice ‘neath my lattice singing. Adelbert! Ah, come! Hist! I hear his light boat on the lake. ‘Tis he! ‘tis he! [*Leans over the balcony.*]

[Adelbert *sings in the garden below.*

The moon is up, wake, lady, wake!
My bark is moored on yonder lake.
The stars’ soft eyes alone can see
My meeting, dear one, here with thee.

Wake, dearest, wake! lean from thy bower,
The moonlight gleams on tree and flower.
The summer sky smiles soft above;
Look down on me, thou star of love!

Bianca. Adelbert, dear love, now haste thee quickly up to me.

[*Enter* Adelbert *upon the balcony.*

Adel. Sweet love, why fearest thou? None dare stay me when I fly to thee. Ah, sit thee here, and I will rest beside thee. [Bianca *seats herself;* Adelbert *lies at her feet.*]

Bianca. Thou art weary, love. I’ll bring thee wine, and thou shalt rest while I do sing to thee. [*She gives him wine; he drinks.*]

Adel. Thanks to thee, dearest love, I am weary now no longer. When here beside thee, pain, sorrow, time are all forgot. Ah! what is this? — a deadly pang hath seized me. All grows dark before mine eyes. I cannot see thee. Yon cup, — ’twas poisoned! I am dying, dying!

Bianca. Ah, nay, thou art faint! Speak not of dying, love. [Adelbert *falls.*] Adelbert, Adelbert, speak! — speak! It is thine own Bianca calls thee! [*Throws herself beside him.*]

Adel. Farewell, dear love, farewell! Huon hath won his vengeance now. God bless thee, dearest. Oh, farewell! [*Dies.*]

Bianca. Awake! awake! All, cold and still! Thou true, brave heart, thou art hushed forever. Huon! yes! ‘twas he; and he hath sought to win me thus. But ‘tis in vain! Where is the poisoned cup that I may join thee, Adelbert? [*Takes the cup.*] Ah, ‘tis gone: there is no more. Yet I will be with thee, my murdered love. For me life hath no joy, and I will find thee even in death [*falls fainting to the ground*].

CURTAIN.

SCENE FIFTH.

[Bianca’s *castle. The garden.* Bianca *singing.*]

Faded flowers, faded flowers,
They are all now left to cherish;
For the hopes and joys of my young life’s spring
I have seen so darkly perish.

Cold, ah, cold, in the lone, dark grave,
My murdered love lies low,
And death alone can bring sure rest
To this broken heart’s deep woe.

Faded flowers, faded flowers,
They are all now left to cherish;
For ah, his dear hand gathered them,

And my love can never perish.

[*Weeps.*

[*Enter* Huon *and kneels at her feet.*

Bianca [*starting up*]. Fiend! demon! touch me not with hands that murdered him! Hence! out of my sight, — away!

Huon. Nay, lady, nay! I swear by Heaven it was not I. The spell I mingled in thy cup was but to win thy love. The old witch hath deceived me, and given that deadly poison. Forgive me, I implore thee, and here let me offer thee my love once more.

Bianca [*repulsing him*]. *Love!* darest thou to speak of love to me, whose bright dream of life thou hast destroyed? *Love!* I who loathe, scorn, hate thee with a deep and burning hate that death alone can still! Oh, Heaven, have mercy on my tortured heart, and let it break.

Huon [*aside*]. His death hath well-nigh driven her mad. Dear lady, grieve not thus. Let me console thee. Forget thy love, and seek in mine the joy thou hast lost.

Bianca. Forget! Ah, never, never, till in death I join him! Forgive thee? Not till I have told thy crime. Yes, think not I will rest till thou, my murdered Adelbert, art well avenged. And thou! — ah, sinful man, tremble, for thou art in my power, and my wronged heart can feel no pity now.

Huon [*fiercely*]. Wouldst thou betray me? Never! Yield thou to my love, or I will sheathe my dagger in thy heart, and silence thee forever!

Bianca. I will not yield. The world shall know thy guilt, and then sweet death shall be a blessing.

Huon. Then die, and free me from the love and fear that hang like clouds above me [*stabs her*].

Bianca. Thy sin will yet be known, and may God pardon thee! O earth, farewell! My Adelbert, I come, I come! [*Dies.*]

Huon. Dead! dead! Oh, wretched Huon! Where now seek rest from bitter memories and remorse. Ha, a step! I must fly. Angel, fare thee well!

[*Exit* Huon.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SIXTH.

[Huon’s *room.* Huon *asleep upon a couch. Enter* Bianca’s *spirit. She lays her hand upon him.*]

Huon [*starting in affright*]. Ha! spirit of the dead, what wouldst thou now? For long, long nights why hast thou haunted me? Cannot my agony, remorse, and tears win thee to forget? Ah, touch me not! Away! away! See how the vision follows. It holds me fast. Bianca, save me! save me! [*Falls and dies.*]

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

THE UNLOVED WIFE;

OR,

WOMAN’S FAITH.

CHARACTERS.

Count Adrian *Nina’s Husband.*

Don Felix *His Secret Rival*.

Nina *The Unloved Wife*.

Hagar *A Fortune Teller.*

THE UNLOVED WIFE

OR

WOMAN’S FAITH.

SCENE FIRST.

[*Room in the palace of* Count Adrian. *Enter* Nina.]

Nina. ‘Tis a fair and lovely home and well befits a gay young bride; but ah, not if she bear a sad and weary heart like mine beneath her bridal robes. All smile on me and call me happy, blessed with such a home and husband; and yet ‘mid all my splendor I could envy the poor cottage maiden at her spinning-wheel. For ah, ‘mid all her poverty one sweet thought comes ever like a sunny sky to brighten e’en her darkest hours, for she is loved; while I yet sigh in vain for one kind word, one tender glance, from him I love so fondly. Ah, he comes, no sad tears now, sorrow is for my lonely hours and I will smile on *him* e’en though my heart is breaking.

[*Enter* Count Adrian.

Adrian [*coldly*]. Good-even, madam, I trust all things are placed befitting a fair lady’s bower and thou hast found thy home a pleasant one.

Nina. Adrian, husband, speak not thus to me. I could find more joy in some poor cell with thee, than all the wealth that kings could give if thou wert gone. Look kindly on me and I ask no more. One smile from thee can brighten all the world to these fond eyes. Oh, turn not away, but tell me how have I angered thee, and grant thy pardon for thy young wife’s first offence.

Adrian. The pardon I could give were worthless for the time is past. ‘Tis too late to ask forgiveness now. It matters not, then say no more [*turns away*].

Nina. My lord, I charge thee tell me of what dark crime thou dost think me guilty! Fear not to tell me; innocence is strong to bear and happy to forgive. Ah, leave me not, I cannot rest till I know all, and if the deep devotion of a woman’s heart can still repair the wrong, it shall be thine — but answer me.

Adrian. Canst thou unsay the solemn words that bound us at the altar three short days ago? Canst thou give back the freedom thou hast taken, break the vows thou hast plighted, cast away that ring and tell me I am free? Do it, and my full forgiveness shall be thine.

Nina. Give thee back thy freedom; am I a chain to bind thee to what thou dost not love? Take back the vows I made to honor thee; what dost thou mean? I am thy wife and dost thou hate me?

Adrian. I do.

Nina. God help me now. Tell me, Adrian, I implore thee, tell me what have I done to tempt such cruel words from thee? I loved thee and left all to be thy wife, and now when my poor heart is longing for one tender word to cheer its sorrow, thou, the husband who hath vowed to love and cherish me, hath said thou dost hate me. Ah, am I sleeping? Wake me or the dream will drive me mad.

Adrian. ‘Tis a dream I cannot banish. We must part.

Nina. Part — go on, the blow hath fallen, I can feel no more. Go on.

Adrian. Thou knowest I wooed thee. Thou wert fair and wondrous rich; I sought thy gold, not *thee*, for with thy wealth I would carve out a path through life that all should honor. Well, we were wed, and when I sought to take thy fortune it was gone, and not to me, but to thy father’s friend, Don Felix. It was all left to him, and thou wert penniless; and thus I won a wife I loved not, and lost the gold I would have died to gain. Thinkest thou not I am well angered? But for thee I might yet win a noble bride whose golden fetters I would gladly wear.

Nina. And this is he to whom I gave my heart so filled with boundless love and trust. Oh, Adrian, art thou so false? What is gold to a woman’s deathless love? Can it buy thee peace and all the holy feelings human hearts can give? Can it cheer and comfort thee in sorrow, or weep fond, happy tears when thou hast won the joy and honor thou dost seek? No, none of these, the golden chains will bind thee fast till no sweet thought, no tender hope can come to thee. I plead not now for my poor self, but for thine own heart thou doth wrong so cruelly by such vain dreams.

Adrian. Enough. Thou hast a noble name and men will honor thee, thou wilt suffer neither pain nor want. I will leave thee and wander forth to seek mine own sad lot. Farewell, and when they ask thee for thy husband, tell them thou hast none, and so be happy [*turns to go*].

Nina. Oh, Adrian, I implore thee stay. I will bear all thy coldness, ay even thy contempt. I will toil for thee and seek to win the gold for which thou dost sigh, I will serve thee well and truly, for with all my heart I love thee still. Leave me not now or I shall die! [*Kneels and clasps his hand.*]

Adrian. I am a slave till death shall set me free. We shall not meet again. Nay, kneel not to me. I do forgive thee, but I cannot love thee [*rushes out*].

Nina. This is more than I can bear. Oh, Father, take thy poor child home, and still the sorrow of this broken heart.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SECOND.

[*Home of* Hagar, *the gypsy. Enter* Hagar *and* Nina.]

Hagar. What brings thee hither, gentle lady, and how can the wanderer serve the high-born and the fair?

Nina [*sadly*]. There is often deeper sorrow in the palace than the cot, good

Hagar, and I seek thee for some counsel that will cure the pain of a lonely heart. I have tried all others' skill in vain, and come to thee so learned in mystic lore to give me help. I am rich and can repay thee well.

Hagar. I can read a sad tale in thy pale and gentle face, dear lady. Thou art young and loving, but the hope of youth is gone; and thou art sorrowing with no fond heart whereon to lean, no tender voice to comfort and to cheer. Ah, have I read aright? Then the only charm to still thy pain is death.

Nina. 'Tis death I long for. That still, dreamless sleep would bring me peace. But 'tis a fearful thing to take the life God gave, and I dare not. Canst thou not give me help?

Hagar. Within this tiny casket there is that which brings a quiet sleep filled with happy dreams, and they who drink the draught lie down and slumber, and if not awakened it will end in death. But thou, sweet lady, wouldst not leave this fair world yet. Tell me more, for this old heart is warm and tender still, and perchance I can help thee.

Nina. 'Tis strange that I can feel such faith in thee, kind friend, but I am young and lonely and I seek some heart for counsel. Thou art from my own fair land and I will tell thee of my sorrow. 'Tis a short, sad tale. I loved, was wed, and then — oh, darksome day — I learned my husband felt no love, and sought me only for my gold. I was penniless, and thus he cast me off; and now for long, long weeks I have not seen him, for he would not dwell with her who loved him more than life itself. Now give me some sweet charm to win that lost heart back. Ah, Hagar, help me.

Hagar. I can give thee no truer charm than that fair face and noble soul, dear lady. Be thou but firm and faithful in thy love and it will win thy husband back. God bless and grant all happiness to one who doth so truly need it.

Nina. Give me the casket; and when life hath grown too bitter to be borne then will I gladly lay the burden down, and blessing him I love so well sleep that calm slumber that knows no awaking. Farewell, Hagar, thou hast given me comfort and I thank thee.

[*Exit* Nina.

CURTAIN.

SCENE THIRD.

[*One year is supposed to have elapsed. A room in the palace of* Nina. *Enter* Adrian *disguised*.]

Adrian. Here last I saw her one long year ago. How the wild, sweet voice still rings in my ear imploring me to stay. I can find no rest save here; and thus do I seek my home, worn out by my long wandering, and trusting to learn tidings of poor Nina. If she be true and love me still I will cast away my pride, my coldness, and all vain hopes of wealth, and let the sunlight of that pure, young life brighten my life henceforth. I hear a step, and will hide here, perchance I may thus see her [*hides behind curtain*].

[*Enter* Nina.

Nina. No rest for thee poor heart, ever whispering that dear name, ever sorrowing for those hard words that gave so deep a wound. All is dark and lonely, for he is gone. Only these withered flowers, dearer by far than my most costly gems, for his hand hath touched them, and he smiled on me when they were given. Oh, Adrian, wilt thou never give one tender thought to her who still loves and prays for thee? Death will soon free thee from thy hated wife.

[*Exit* Nina.

Adrian [*stealing forth*]. And this is she, whose pure young love I have cast away, the fond, trusting bride I left alone and friendless. She still loves on, and offers up her prayers for one who sought to break that tender heart so cruelly. I will watch well and guard thee, Nina; and if thou art truly mine thou shalt find a happy home with him thy patient love hath won.

[*Exit* Adrian *and re-enter* Nina.

Nina [*with* Adrian’s *picture*]. Ah, these cold eyes smile kindly on me here, and the lips seem speaking tender words. Other faces are perchance more fair, but none so dear to me. Oh, husband, thou hast cast me off; and yet, though lonely and forsaken, I still can cherish loving thoughts of thee, and round thy image gather all the tender feelings that a woman’s heart can know. Thy cruel words I can forgive, and the trusting love I gave thee glows as warmly now as when thou didst cast it by and left me broken-hearted [*weeps*; *enter* Don Felix]. My lord, what seekest thou with me? Thou dost smile. Ah, hast thou tidings of my husband? Tell me quickly, I beseech thee.

Don Felix. Nay, dear lady — But sit thee down and let me tell thee why I came. [*He leads her to a sofa.*] Thou knowest I have been with thee from a child. I stood beside thee at the altar, and was the first to cheer and comfort thee when thou wast left deserted and alone. Let me now ask thee, Wouldst thou not gladly change thy sad lot here for a gay and joyous life with one who loves thee fondly?

Nina. It were indeed a happy lot to be so loved and cherished; but where, alas, is he who could thus feel for one so lonely and forsaken?

Don Felix [*kneeling*]. Here at thy feet, dear Nina. Nay, do not turn away, but let me tell thee of the love that hath grown within my heart. [*Nina starts up.*] Thy wedded lord hath cast thee off. The law can free thee. Ah, then be mine, and let me win and wear the lovely flower which he hath cast away.

Nina. Lord Felix, as the wife of him thou dost so wrong, I answer thee. Dost thou not know the more a woman’s heart is crushed and wounded the more tenderly it clings where first it loved; and though deserted, ay, though hated, I had rather be the slighted wife of him, than the honored bride of the false Costella. Now leave me — I would be alone.

Don Felix. A time will come, proud woman, when thou shalt bend the knee to him whom now thou dost so scorn. Beware, for I will have a fierce revenge for the proud words thou hast spoken.

Nina. I am strong in mine own heart and fear thee not. Work thy will and thou shalt find the wife of Adrian de Mortemar needs no protector save her own fearless hand.

[*Exit* Nina.

Don Felix. Now, by my faith, thou shalt bow that haughty head, and sue to me for mercy, and I will deny it. I’ll win her yet, she shall not idly brave my anger. Now to my work, — revenge.

[*Exit* Don Felix.

CURTAIN.

SCENE FOURTH.

[*Apartment in palace of* Nina. Nina *alone*.]

Nina. Ever thus alone, mourning for him who loves me not; was ever heart so sad as mine. Oh, Adrian, couldst thou but return even for one short hour to thy poor Nina. [*Enter* Adrian, *disguised*.] Ha, who art thou that dares to enter here in such mysterious guise? Thine errand, quickly, — speak.

Adrian. Forgive me, lady, if I cause thee fear; I would have thee know me as a friend, one who will watch above thee, and seek to spare thee every sorrow. Dear lady, think me not too bold, for I have known thee long and have a right to all thy confidence. Thy husband was my nearest friend; and, when he left thee friendless and alone, I vowed to guard and save thee in all peril. Wilt thou trust me? See, I bear his ring, — thou knowest it?

Nina. ‘Tis indeed his ring. Whence came it? Ah, hast thou seen him? Tell me, and I will give thee all my confidence and thanks [*takes the ring and gazes beseechingly upon* Adrian, *who turns aside*].

Adrian. He is well, lady, and happy as one can be who bears a cold, proud heart within his breast. He has cast away an angel who could have cheered and blessed his life, and sought to find in gold the happiness thy love alone could bring. He has suffered, as he well deserves to do. Spend not thy pity upon him.

Nina [*proudly*]. And who art thou to speak thus of him? Thou canst not judge till thou also hast been tried and like him deceived. He sought for wealth to bring him fame and honor; and when he found it not, what wonder that he cast aside the love that could not bring him happiness. Thou art no true friend to speak thus of one so worthy to be loved. And think not I reproach him for my lonely lot. Ah, no, I still love on; and if he wins the wealth he covets I can give my heart's best blessing, and so pass away that he shall never know whose hand hath crushed the flower that would have clung about his life and shed its perfume there [*turns away weeping*].

Adrian [*aside*]. She loves me still. I'll try her further [*aloud*]. Lady, idle tongues have whispered that when thy lord deserted thee thou didst find a solace for thy grief in a new lover's smiles. Perchance yon picture may be some gay lord who hath cheered thy solitude and won thy heart. I fain would ask thee.

Nina. Sir stranger, little dost thou know a woman's heart. I have found a comfort for my lonely hours in weeping o'er the face whose smiles could brighten life for me, or dim it by disdain and coldness. The face is there; my first, last, only love is given to him who thinks it worthless and hath cast it by.

Adrian [*taking the picture*]. 'Tis the Count, thy husband. Lady, he is unworthy such true love; leave him to his fate, and let not thy life be darkened by his cruelty and hate.

Nina. Thou canst not tempt me to forget. No other love can win me from the only one who hath a place within my heart. Let me cherish all the memories of him, and till life shall cease be true unto my husband. Now leave me, unknown friend; I trust thee for his sake, and will accept thy friendship and protection. I offer thee my gratitude and thanks for thy kind service, and will gladly seek how best I may repay it.

Adrian. Thanks, lady. Thou shalt find me true and faithful, and my best reward will be the joy I labor to restore to thee [*kneels and kisses her hand*].

Nina. Farewell, again I thank thee.

[*Exit* Nina.

Adrian. So young, so lovely, so forsaken, who would not pity and protect. I will guard her well, and ere long claim the treasure I so madly cast away ere I had learned its priceless value. Nina, thou shalt yet be happy on the bosom of thy erring and repentant husband.

[*Exit* Adrian.

CURTAIN.

SCENE FIFTH.

[*Hall in the palace of* Nina. *Enter* Nina *and* Don Felix.]

Nina. I tell thee, my lord, I will not listen, naught thou canst say will change my firm resolve. I cannot wed thee.

Don Felix. Nay, then listen. Thy cruel husband left thee and for one long year thou hast sorrowed in thy lonely home, and would not be comforted. He hath returned.

Nina. Ah — [*Rushes forward.*]

Don Felix. Thou may’st well start, but think not he will come to thee, chains hold him fast and — mark ye — ’twas *I* who bound those chains.

Nina. Do I dream, my husband here and in captivity; nay, I believe thee not. ‘Tis a false tale to anger me. I heed thee not [*turns away haughtily*].

Don Felix. Thou wilt heed me ere I am done. What thinkest thou of this thy husband’s dagger? See, here his name. ‘Twas taken from his hands ere the cold chains bound them. Ah, thou dost believe me now!

Nina. Oh, tell on. I *will* listen now. Why hast thou done this cruel deed? Why make this his welcome home? Thou hast fettered and imprisoned him and now art here to tell me of it? Ah, dost thou hate him? Then give all thy hate to me; but oh, I pray thee, comfort him.

Don Felix. When thou didst reject my suit, I told thee I would be revenged; I said a day would come when thou, so cold and haughty then, would kneel to me imploring mercy and I would deny thee. That time hath come, and I am deaf to all thy prayers.

Nina. For his sake will I kneel to thee beseeching liberty for *him*. I had no love to give thee. Ah, pardon if I spake with scorn, and pity me. What can I do to win thee back to mercy? Ah, listen and be generous.

Don Felix. ‘Tis now too late. He is in my power; and a dagger can soon rid thee of a cruel husband, me of a hated rival.

Nina. God have pity on me now. Don Felix, let me plead once more. Set Adrian free, and I will take his place in yon dark cell and welcome there the dagger that shall set me free.

Don Felix. And wilt *thou* wear the chains? Wilt enter that lone cell and perish there? Canst thou do this?

Nina. Ay, gladly will I suffer pain, captivity, and death, for thee, Adrian, for thee.

Don Felix. Then woman’s love is stronger than man’s hate, and I envy him you would die for, Nina.

Nina. Ah, love alone can make home blest, and here it dwells not. I can free him from his fetters and his hated wife. Tell him I loved him to the last, and blessed him ere I died. Lead on, my lord, I am ready.

Don Felix [*aside*]. I thought I had steeled my heart with hatred and revenge; but oh, they pass away before such holy love as this. Would I could win her to myself, for she would lead me on to virtue and to happiness. Yet one more trial and she may be mine at last.

[*Tableaux.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE SIXTH.

[*Street near* Adrian’s *palace*. *Enter* Adrian.]

Adrian. ‘Tis all discovered, my mysterious captivity and my release. Don Felix, whom I trusted, wove the dark plot and sought by false words to win Nina from me. He has dared to love her; and he shall dearly pay for his presumption. He knows not that I watched above her in disguise; and now while I was in captivity he hath taken her from her home. Let him beware. If aught of harm hath come to her, woe betide him who hath caused one tear to fall, or one sad fear to trouble her. I must seek and save her. No peril will be too great to win her back to this heart that longs so fondly for her now.

[*Exit* Adrian.

CURTAIN.

SCENE SEVENTH.

[*A cell in the palace of* Don Felix. Nina *chained*.]

Nina. ‘T is strange; here in this dark cell, tho’ fettered and alone, I feel a deeper joy than when a proud and envied bride I dwelt in my deserted home. For here his foot hath trod; these walls have echoed to the voice I love; these chains so cold and heavy I more gladly wear than e’en the costly gems once clasped upon these arms, for they were his. Here his sad tears fell perchance for his captivity; but I can smile and bless the hour when I could win thy freedom, Adrian, with my poor liberty. Hark — they come. Is it to claim the vow I made to yield my bosom to the dagger meant for his? I am ready. [*Enter* Don Felix.] Alone, my lord; methought it were too sad a task for thee to take my life. Well, be it so; you claim my vow. I can die still blessing thee, my Adrian [*kneels before* Don Felix].

Don Felix. Rise, Nina; ah, kneel not to me, nor think this hand could take the life it prizes more than happiness or honor. I came not here to harm thee; Heaven forbid! I came once more to offer thee my heart, my home, and all the boundless love you have so scorned. Thy husband hath deserted thee; no ties too fast to sever bind thee to him. Thou art alone, a captive, and I alone can free thee. Think of the love I bear thee, Nina, and be mine [*takes her hand*].

Nina. Where is thy boasted honor now? Where the solemn vow thou didst make me that my lonely cell should be as sacred to thee as my palace halls? Where is thy pity for the helpless wife of him whom thou didst call thy friend? I never loved thee, now I scorn thee. A true and pure affection never binds such chains as these, nor causes bitter tears like mine to flow. Rather suffer death than cherish in my heart one tender thought of thee. Thou hast my answer, now leave me.

Don Felix. Not yet, proud captive. I have sought to win thee gently; but now, beware. Think not to escape me, thou shalt feel how deep a vengeance I can bring on thee and him thou lovest. Thou shalt suffer all the sorrow I can inflict, — shalt know thy proud lord forsaken and in danger when a word from me can save, and *that* word I will not speak. All the grief and pain and hatred that my jealous heart can give will I heap upon his head, and thus through him I will revenge myself on thee.

Nina. Thou canst not harm him, he is safe and free. Do thy worst, I care not what fate thou hast for me, a fearless hand soon finds a way to free a soul from sorrow and captivity. This heart thou canst not reach. It fears thee not.

Don Felix. Can I not make thee tremble, haughty woman? I love thee still, and I will win thee. I go to work thee sorrow; and when next we meet I will bring thee token of thy husband’s death or, what may touch thee nearer, his hate of thee.

[*Exit* Don Felix.

Nina. ‘Tis a dark and fearful dream, — Adrian in danger, and I cannot save him.

Oh, that I were free again, naught should stay me; and I would win him back by the power of woman’s love and faith. Lord Felix will return, he hath vowed revenge; where then can I look for a true heart to comfort and protect me [*sinks down in despair*].

[*Enter* Adrian, *still in disguise*.

Adrian. Here is a friend to aid thee.

Nina [*starting up*]. Who — who art thou?

Adrian. Thy guardian. Lady, thou hast said thou wouldst trust me, and I am here to save.

Nina. Forgive me that I doubt thee; yet I do fear to trust, for I am well-nigh crazed with sorrow. Art thou my husband’s friend?

Adrian. I am true as Heaven to thee, poor lady. I have watched above thee and can save. Here, here is the ring thou knowest; ah, do not doubt me.

Nina. I know thee now and put all my faith in thee. Take me hence. Ah, save me! Lead me to my home, and the thanks of a broken heart are thine. Lead on, kind friend, I will follow thee.

Adrian [*aside*]. Oh, this is a bitter punishment for me. It breaks my heart. [Aloud.] This way, dear lady, a secret door doth let us forth; step thou lightly. Thus let me shroud thee.

[*He wraps* Nina *in a dark robe, and they disappear thro’ the secret door*.

CURTAIN.

SCENE EIGHTH.

[Nina’s *chamber*. *Enter* Nina *and* Hagar.]

Nina. Welcome to thee, Hagar; sit thee down and tell me why hast thou come to seek me in my lonely home?

Hagar. Sweet lady, fear not; no evil tidings do I bring, but a wondrous tale of happiness in store for thee. When thy father died, few doubted but his wealth would come to thee; and it would, indeed, have all been thine had not that false Don Felix stolen the will away. He took the paper that left all to thee, and thus he won the orphan’s gold. But three short days ago, a dreadful crime which he had done was brought to light, and he hath fled. He told me all and bid me give thee, this, thy father’s will. [Hagar *gives paper to* Nina.]

Nina. ‘Tis strange, most strange. But tell me, Hagar, how didst thou come to know that evil man?

Hagar. I knew him when he came from Italy with thee and thy father years ago. And as I watched thy path through life so I watched his, and thus he learned to trust me. ‘Tis thus I gained for thee that wealth so long withheld; and now my work is done. Thou wilt win thy husband’s love, and so be happy. God bless thee, gentle lady, and farewell.

Nina. Ah, stay and tell me how can I best show the gratitude I deeply feel. Thou hast brought me wealth and happiness, how can I repay thee?

Hagar. I ask no other joy than that I see in thy fair face. I go now to my own dear land, and we shall not meet again; but old Hagar will remember thee, and pray that life may be one long, bright dream of love with the husband thou hast won. Farewell.

[*Exit* Hagar.

Nina. The clouds have passed away and I am happy now; and the wealth *he* longed for it is mine to give. Oh, Adrian, come back to her thou hast cast aside. [*An arrow bearing a letter is thrown in at the window and falls at her feet.*] What means this letter? Stay, let me see what it may tell me. ‘Tis from Adrian. Ah, does an angel watch above me that such joy is mine? [*Opens the letter and* *reads.*]

Think not to win me back with thy new wealth; I cannot love thee. Be happy with thy gold; it cannot buy the heart of the unhappy

Adrian.

Nina. This from him! No, no, it cannot be; he would not speak such words to me; his wife. Yet, ‘t is his hand — I must believe — and a deeper darkness gathers round me. No joy, no hope, is left to bind me unto life. If I were gone he might be happy with another. I can never win his love, then why live on to dim his pathway. I will leave my gold to him, for it is worthless now; and when, with her he loves in some fair home, he sends perchance one thought of her who died to free him, I shall be repaid for this last sacrifice. Ah, Hagar, little didst thou think the joy foretold would end so soon, and this thy gift would win for me the rest I long for now [*takes from her bosom the phial and drinks*]. It will soon be past. Now, till sleep steals o’er me, I will send one last word, Adrian, to thee. [*She writes, then sinks upon the couch.*] My heart grows faint, and my eyes are heavy with the last slumber they shall ever know. The poison does its work too soon; but I am done with life, and the soft, sweet sleep of death is holding me. Oh, my husband, may this last deed of mine give thee all the joy it could not bring to her who could only die for thee. Farewell life, farewell love; my latest prayer is for thee, Adrian. [*She lies down and falls gently asleep.*]

CURTAIN.

SCENE NINTH.

[*Terrace in* Nina’s *garden*. *Enter* Adrian *with letter*.]

Adrian. What means this letter from her hand? ‘Twas given me by her servant while she slept. Does she call me home again? Ah, little can she know how fondly now her cold, proud husband longs to fold her in his arms and bless the hour when he lost wealth and won her noble love. [*Opens the letter and reads.*]

I send thee back the cruel words that have banished all the hopes of happiness with thee. I cannot win thy heart; and this sad truth hath broken mine. And now, upon my dying bed, I leave thee all the wealth that could not win one tender smile for her who pined for it in vain. Thou hast scorned my love, take thou the gold which is worthless to me now. Farewell, my husband; I am faithful to the last, and my lips blessed thee ere they drank the draught that soon will free me from my sorrow, and thee from thy unloved but loving

Nina.

Adrian. My cruel words? What means this? Stay, there is another paper, and it may tell me more. [*Reads* Felix's *forged letter and dashes it down*.] 'Tis false, false as the villain's heart who forged the lie and brought agony like this to that pure, loving heart. Oh, Nina, Nina, now when I so fondly love thee, thou hast been deceived, and died still blessing him thou deemed so cruel and so cold. Oh, that I could but win thee back for one short hour, that I might tell my penitence and my deep sorrow for the grief I have brought thee. Yet, blessed thought, it may not be too late. She slept but one short hour ago, when this was taken from her hand. She may yet linger at the gates of death, and I may call her back to happiness and life once more. Oh, if I may but win this blessing to my heart, my life shall be one prayer of thankfulness for the great boon [*rushes out*].

CURTAIN.

SCENE TENTH.

[Nina's *chamber*. Nina *lies in a deep trance upon her couch*. Adrian *rushes in*.]

Adrian. Nina! Nina! wake, love, it is I thy husband who doth call thee. Oh, can I not win thee back to life now when I have learned to love with all my heart's faith and fondness. [*He kisses her hands and weeps.*] Calm and still she lies, all my tender words cannot awake her, and these bitter tears but fall unheeded and in vain. Was it for this I won that warm young heart, — for this short sorrowing life, this lonely death? Ah, couldst thou see this proud heart humbled now, and these repentant tears that wet thy quiet brow. Nina, wife, oh, wake and tell me I am forgiven! [*Kneels beside her.*]

Nina [*rousing*]. Adrian!

Adrian [*starting up*]. She breathes, she lives, my prayer is heard. ‘Tis not too late.

Nina [*still dreaming*]. Methought I was in heaven, for Adrian bent o’er me; the face I loved smiled lovingly upon me, sweet tender words were spoken, and the joy of that short moment well repaid the sorrow I had borne ere that last sleep came. I am happy now for Adrian hath said he loves me.

Adrian. Thy deathlike sleep still hangs about thee, thou art still on earth, and I am here to bring thee joy. Ah, waken and learn thy dream is true. Thy husband loves thee.

Nina. So the sweet vision said, but it hath passed, and this will vanish too. Ah, why hast thou called me back? Life is but a chain that binds me unto sorrow, then let me sleep again and dream that Adrian is true.

Adrian. Nina! Nina! rouse thyself, it is no dream; he hath bent above thee weeping bitter tears and pouring forth his whole heart’s love, remorse, and sorrow. His voice hath called thee back to life, and he is here. [Nina *rises and looks wildly about her*.] Here, love, at thy feet seeking thy pardon for the deep wrong he hath done thee, praying thy forgiveness! [*Throws himself at her feet.* Nina *stretches forth her arms, and they embrace with tears of joy*.]

Nina. Adrian, husband, I have naught to pardon. Thou hast won me from the sleep of death, I am thine, thy heart is my home, and I am only happy there.

Adrian. I am unworthy such great happiness. Oh, Nina, thou art the true angel of my life; and thou hast led me on to win a deeper joy than all the wealth of earth could give. I cast thy pure affection by, and sought in selfish sorrow to forget thee; but I could not. Thy dear face shone in all my dreams, and thy voice still lingered in mine ear, imploring me to love thee. Then I returned to find thee drooping like a blighted flower. All loved and honored thee; and I vowed to watch, and, if I found thee true and loving still, to tell thee all, and give my heart to thee forever. I have now won thee, and I love thee, dearest.

Nina. Oh, I am too blest! Life is a flower-strewn path henceforth, where I will gladly journey if thou wilt be my guide; and here upon thy breast, dear love, now smiles the happy wife, — no longer the lonely and unloved one.

[*Tableau.*

CURTAIN.

The Poetry

LIST OF POETRY

A.B.A
AN AUTUMN SONG.
CLOVER-BLOSSOM.
DESPONDENCY.
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FAIRY FIRE-FLY
FAIRY SONG.
FAITH.
THE FLOWER’S LESSON.
GOLDFIN AND SILVERTAIL
THE HAWTHORNE
IN THE GARRET
THE LAY OF THE GOLDEN GOOSE
A LITTLE GREY CURL
LITTLE NELL
LITTLE PAUL
LULLABY
MERRY CHRISTMAS
THE MOTHER MOON
MY DOVES
MY KINGDOM
MY PRAYER
THE NAUTILUS
OUR ANGEL IN THE HOUSE
MY BETH
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OUR MADONNA
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A SONG FOR LITTLE FREDDIE ON HIS THIRD BIRTHDAY
A SONG FROM THE SUDS
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TO ANNA.
TO FATHER.
TO MOTHER

TO MY FATHER ON HIS 86TH BIRTHDAY
TO PAPA
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UNTITLED 7
A WAIL UTTERED IN THE WOMAN’S CLUB
WHAT POLLY FOUND IN HER STOCKING
WHERE IS BENNIE?
WINTER
WITH A ROSE

A.B.A

Lines Written by Alcott to Her Father

Like Bunyan’s pilgrim with his pack,
Forth went the dreaming youth
To seek, to find, and make his own
Wisdom, virtue, and truth.
Life was his book, and patiently
He studied each hard page;
By turns reformer, outcast, priest,
Philosopher and sage.

Christ was his Master, and he made
His life a gospel sweet;
Plato and Pythagoras in him
Found a disciple meet.
The noblest and best his friends,
Faithful and fond, though few;
Eager to listen, learn, and pay
The love and honor due.

Power and place, silver and gold,
He neither asked nor sought;
Only to serve his fellowmen,
With heart and word and thought.
A pilgrim still, but in his pack
No sins to frighten or oppress;
But wisdom, morals, piety,
To teach, to warn and bless.

The world passed by, nor cared to take
The treasure he could give;
Apart he sat, content to wait
And beautifully live;
Unsaddened by long, lonely years

Of want, neglect, and wrong,
His soul to him a kingdom was,
Steadfast, serene, and strong.

Magnanimous and pure his life,
Tranquil its happy end;
Patience and peace his handmaids were,
Death an immortal friend.
For him no monuments need rise,
No laurels make his pall;
The mem’ry of the good and wise
Outshines, outlives them all.

AN AUTUMN SONG.

Are the leaves falling round about
The churchyard on the hill?
Is the glow of autumn going out?
Is that the winter chill?
And yet through winter’s noise, no doubt
The graves are very still!

Are the woods empty, voiceless, bare?
On sodden leaves do you tread?
Is nothing left of all those fair?
Is the whole summer fled?
Well, so from this unwholesome air
Have gone away these dead!

The seasons pierce me; like a leaf
I feel the autumn blow,
And tremble between nature’s grief
And the silent death below.
O Summer, thou art very brief!
Where do these exiles go?

CLOVER-BLOSSOM.

IN a quiet, pleasant meadow,
Beneath a summer sky,
Where green old trees their branches waved,
And winds went singing by;
Where a little brook went rippling
So musically low,
And passing clouds cast shadows
On the waving grass below;
Where low, sweet notes of brooding birds
Stole out on the fragrant air,
And golden sunlight shone undimmed
On all most fresh and fair; —
There bloomed a lovely sisterhood
Of happy little flowers,
Together in this pleasant home,
Through quiet summer hours.
No rude hand came to gather them,
No chilling winds to blight;
Warm sunbeams smiled on them by day,
And soft dews fell at night.
So here, along the brook-side,
Beneath the green old trees,
The flowers dwelt among their friends,
The sunbeams and the breeze.
One morning, as the flowers awoke,
Fragrant, and fresh, and fair,
A little worm came creeping by,
And begged a shelter there.
“Ah! pity and love me,” sighed the worm,
“I am lonely, poor, and weak;
A little spot for a resting-place,

Dear flowers, is all I seek.
I am not fair, and have dwelt unloved
By butterfly, bird, and bee.
They little knew that in this dark form
Lay the beauty they yet may see.
Then let me lie in the deep green moss,
And weave my little tomb,
And sleep my long, unbroken sleep
Till Spring’s first flowers come.
Then will I come in a fairer dress,
And your gentle care repay
By the grateful love of the humble worm;
Kind flowers, O let me stay!”
But the wild rose showed her little thorns,
While her soft face glowed with pride;
The violet hid beneath the drooping ferns,
And the daisy turned aside.
Little Houstonia scornfully laughed,
As she danced on her slender stem;
While the cowslip bent to the rippling waves,
And whispered the tale to them.
A blue-eyed grass looked down on the worm,
As it silently turned away,
And cried, “Thou wilt harm our delicate leaves,
And therefore thou canst not stay.”
Then a sweet, soft voice, called out from far,
“Come hither, poor worm, to me;
The sun lies warm in this quiet spot,
And I’ll share my home with thee.”
The wondering flowers looked up to see
Who had offered the worm a home:
‘T was a clover-blossom, whose fluttering leaves
Seemed beckoning him to come;
It dwelt in a sunny little nook,
Where cool winds rustled by,
And murmuring bees and butterflies came,
On the flower’s breast to lie.
Down through the leaves the sunlight stole,
And seemed to linger there,

As if it loved to brighten the home
Of one so sweet and fair.
Its rosy face smiled kindly down,
As the friendless worm drew near;
And its low voice, softly whispering, said
“Poor thing, thou art welcome here;
Close at my side, in the soft green moss,
Thou wilt find a quiet bed,
Where thou canst softly sleep till Spring,
With my leaves above thee spread.
I pity and love thee, friendless worm,
Though thou art not graceful or fair;
For many a dark, unlovely form,
Hath a kind heart dwelling there;
No more o’er the green and pleasant earth,
Lonely and poor, shalt thou roam,
For a loving friend hast thou found in me,
And rest in my little home.”
Then, deep in its quiet mossy bed,
Sheltered from sun and shower,
The grateful worm spun its winter tomb,
In the shadow of the flower.
And Clover guarded well its rest,
Till Autumn’s leaves were sere,
Till all her sister flowers were gone,
And her winter sleep drew near.
Then her withered leaves were softly spread
O’er the sleeping worm below,
Ere the faithful little flower lay
Beneath the winter snow.
Spring came again, and the flowers rose
From their quiet winter graves,
And gayly danced on their slender stems,
And sang with the rippling waves.
Softly the warm winds kissed their cheeks;
Brightly the sunbeams fell,
As, one by one, they came again
In their summer homes to dwell.
And little Clover bloomed once more,

Rosy, and sweet, and fair,
And patiently watched by the mossy bed,
For the worm still slumbered there.
Then her sister flowers scornfully cried,
As they waved in the summer air,
“The ugly worm was friendless and poor;
Little Clover, why shouldst thou care?
Then watch no more, nor dwell alone,
Away from thy sister flowers;
Come, dance and feast, and spend with us
These pleasant summer hours.
We pity thee, foolish little flower,
To trust what the false worm said;
He will not come in a fairer dress,
For he lies in the green moss dead.”
But little Clover still watched on,
Alone in her sunny home;
She did not doubt the poor worm’s truth,
And trusted he would come.
At last the small cell opened wide,
And a glittering butterfly,
From out the moss, on golden wings,
Soared up to the sunny sky.
Then the wondering flowers cried aloud,
“Clover, thy watch was vain;
He only sought a shelter here,
And never will come again.”
And the unkind flowers danced for joy,
When they saw him thus depart;
For the love of a beautiful butterfly
Is dear to a flower’s heart.
They feared he would stay in Clover’s home,
And her tender care repay;
So they danced for joy, when at last he rose
And silently flew away.
Then little Clover bowed her head,
While her soft tears fell like dew;
For her gentle heart was grieved, to find
That her sisters’ words were true,

And the insect she had watched so long
When helpless, poor, and lone,
Thankless for all her faithful care,
On his golden wings had flown.
But as she drooped, in silent grief,
She heard little Daisy cry,
“O sisters, look! I see him now,
Afar in the sunny sky;
He is floating back from Cloud-Land now,
Borne by the fragrant air.
Spread wide your leaves, that he may choose
The flower he deems most fair.”
Then the wild rose glowed with a deeper blush,
As she proudly waved on her stem;
The Cowslip bent to the clear blue waves,
And made her mirror of them.
Little Houstonia merrily danced,
And spread her white leaves wide;
While Daisy whispered her joy and hope,
As she stood by her gay friends’ side.
Violet peeped from the tall green ferns,
And lifted her soft blue eye
To watch the glittering form, that shone
Afar in the summer sky.
They thought no more of the ugly worm,
Who once had wakened their scorn;
But looked and longed for the butterfly now,
As the soft wind bore him on.
Nearer and nearer the bright form came,
And fairer the blossoms grew;
Each welcomed him, in her sweetest tones;
Each offered her honey and dew.
But in vain did they beckon, and smile, and call,
And wider their leaves unclose;
The glittering form still floated on,
By Violet, Daisy, and Rose.
Lightly it flew to the pleasant home
Of the flower most truly fair,
On Clover’s breast he softly lit,

And folded his bright wings there.
“Dear flower,” the butterfly whispered low,
“Long hast thou waited for me;
Now I am come, and my grateful love
Shall brighten thy home for thee;
Thou hast loved and cared for me, when alone,
Hast watched o’er me long and well;
And now will I strive to show the thanks
The poor worm could not tell.
Sunbeam and breeze shall come to thee,
And the coolest dews that fall;
Whate’er a flower can wish is thine,
For thou art worthy all.
And the home thou shared with the friendless worm
The butterfly’s home shall be;
And thou shalt find, dear, faithful flower,
A loving friend in me.”
Then, through the long, bright summer hours
Through sunshine and through shower,
Together in their happy home
Dwelt butterfly and flower.

DESPONDENCY.

Silent and sad,
When all are glad,
And the earth is dressed in flowers ;
When the gay birds sing
Till the forests ring,
As they rest in woodland bowers.

Oh, why these tears,
And these idle fears
For what may come to-morrow ?
The birds find food
From God so good,
And the flowers know no sorrow.

If He clothes these
And the leafy trees,
Will He not cherish thee ?
Why doubt His care ;
It is everywhere,
Though the way we may not see.

Then why be sad
When all are glad,
And the world is full of flowers ?

With the gay birds sing,
Make life all Spring,
And smile through the darkest hours.

F. A. P.

Who likes to read a fairy tale,
Or stories told of sword and sail,
Until his little optics fail?
Our boy.
Who loves his father’s watch to wear
And often draw it out with care
Upon its round white face to stare?
Our boy.
Who rather proud of his small feet
When wearing slippers new and neat,
And stockings red as any beet?
Our boy.
Who in his pocket keeps his hands
As round the house he “mooning” stands
Or reads the paper like the mans?
Our boy.
Who likes to “boss” it over Jack,
And sometimes gives a naughty whack,
But gets it heartily paid back?
Our boy.
Who likes to have a birthday frolic
And eats until he has a colic,
That for the time is diabolic?
Our boy.
Who is the dearest little lad,
That aunt or mother ever had,
To love when gay and cheer when sad?
Our boy.
May angels guard him with their wings,
And all brave, good and happy things,
Make nobler thou than crowned kings.
Our boy.
March 28th, 1875.

FAIRY FIRE-FLY

O Firefly! I have caught you fast:
Don’t flutter in a rage;
But shine for me a little while
Here in this dainty Cage.
Why are you wandering so late,
With your small lamp alight,
When bird and bee and butterfly
Are sleeping through the night?
Come, tell to me a fairy tale;
Amuse me while you stay;
And, when it’s time to go to bed,
You shall safely fly away.
firefly,
I’ll tell my own sad story, child.
Here shining in your net;
And, though I fly away so soon,
I pray you, don’t forget • —
I was a lovely fairy once,
Blithe as an early lark;
And in my little bosom shone
A beautiful, bright spark :
That was my elfin spirit, dear;
And, while I lived aright,
It wis to me a guiding star.
To lead me to the light.

I should have loved the blessfed sun,
And tried to follow him;
But, no, I turned my face away,
And my bright spark grew dim.
My daily duties were not done;
I did not tend the flowers;
I d’d not help the honcy-l.ec*

Improve their shining hours;
No baby butterfly I taught
To spread its tender wing;
No young bird ever learned of mo
The airy songs we sing.
I left my playmates, one and all.
So innocent, so gay, —
I would not listen to their words,
But coldly turned away.
All day I slept, with folded wings,
Lulled by the singing brook,
Where tall ferns made a shady tent,
And guarded my still nook.
But, when the stars came out, I woke;
I loved the meadows damp;
I liked to hear the cricket sing;
To watch the glow-worm’s lamp,
The round-eyed owl, and beetle fierce,
The hungry, buzzing gnat,
The giddy moth, the croaking frog,
And stealthy-winged bat.
These were the friends I freely chos*
These, and the primrose pale;
I did not even seek to know
A star or nightingale.
I turned away from lovely things,
I revelled in the dark,
And day by day more faintly shone
My precious bosom-spark,
Until, at last, it came to be
This feeble, fitful light,
And my dim eyes no power had
To see, except by night.
My fairy form passed quite away;
Alas! I’d gladly die,
For ‘tis my punishment to be
A wandering firefly.
Ah! now I long for all I’ve lost:
My mates arc flown away;

The birds and bees I pine to sec,
But cannot seek by day.
I haunt the flowers all the night,
Hoping a home to win, —
The doors are shut: all arc asleep :
I knock; none let me in.
I’m tired of the friends I made;
I hate the teasing gnat,
The hooting owl, the cricket shrill,
The beetle, and the bat.
My only mates axe the poor moth3;
They seek and love the light,
Though they, like me, sleep all day long,
And only fly by nighL
Once they were butterflies, you know,
And floated in the sun;
But they are doomed to expiate
The wrongs which they have done,
By madty longing for the shine
That blinds their feeble eye.
Yet draws them, like a dreadful spell,
To flutter, burn, and die.
O little child I be warned in time;
Guard well your bosom spark.
Else it will slowly fade away,
And leave you in the dark.
Feed it with all things fair and good i
Then gloomy clouds may roll,
But cannot shadow in your life,
Tis sunshine of the soul.

FAIRY SONG.

The moonlight fades from flower and tree,
And the stars dim one by one;
The tale is told, the song is sung,
And the Fairy feast is done.
The night-wind rocks the sleeping flowers,
And sings to them, soft and low.
The early birds erelong will wake:
‘T is time for the Elves to go.

O’er the sleeping earth we silently pass,
Unseen by mortal eye,
And send sweet dreams, as we lightly float
Through the quiet moonlit sky; —
For the stars’ soft eyes alone may see,
And the flowers alone may know,
The feasts we hold, the tales we tell:
So ‘t is time for the Elves to go.

From bird, and blossom, and bee,
We learn the lessons they teach;
And seek, by kindly deeds, to win
A loving friend in each.
And though unseen on earth we dwell,
Sweet voices whisper low,
And gentle hearts most joyously greet
The Elves where’er they go.

When next we meet in the Fairy dell,
May the silver moon’s soft light
Shine then on faces gay as now,
And Elfin hearts as light.
Now spread each wing, for the eastern sky

With sunlight soon will glow.
The morning star shall light us home:
Farewell! for the Elves must go.

FAITH.

Oh, when the heart is full of fears
And the way seems dim to heaven,
When the sorrow and the care of years
Peace from the heart has driven, -
Then, through the mist of falling tears,
Look up and be forgiven.

Forgiven for the lack of faith
That made all dark to thee,
Let conscience o’er thy wayward soul
Have fullest mastery :
Hope on, fight on, and thou shalt win
A noble victory.

Though thou art weary and forlorn,
Let not thy heart’s peace go ;
Though the riches of this world are gone,
And thy lot is care and woe,
Faint not, but journey hourly on :

True wealth is not below.
Through all the darkness still look up :
Let virtue be thy guide ;
Take thy draught from sorrow’s cup,
Yet trustfully abide ;
Let not temptation vanquish thee,
And the Father will provide.

THE FLOWER'S LESSON.

THERE grew a fragrant rose-tree where the brook flows,
With two little tender buds, and one full rose;
When the sun went down to his bed in the west,
The little buds leaned on the rose-mother's breast,
While the bright eyed stars their long watch kept,
And the flowers of the valley in their green cradles slept;
Then silently in odors they communed with each other,
The two little buds on the bosom of their mother.
"O sister," said the little one, as she gazed at the sky,
"I wish that the Dew Elves, as they wander lightly by,
Would bring me a star; for they never grow dim,
And the Father does not need them to burn round him.
The shining drops of dew the Elves bring each day
And place in my bosom, so soon pass away;
But a star would glitter brightly through the long summer hours,
And I should be fairer than all my sister flowers.
That were better far than the dew-drops that fall
On the high and the low, and come alike to all.
I would be fair and stately, with a bright star to shine
And give a queenly air to this crimson robe of mine."
And proudly she cried, "These fire-flies shall be
My jewels, since the stars can never come to me."
Just then a tiny dew-drop that hung o'er the dell
On the breast of the bud like a soft star fell;
But impatiently she flung it away from her leaf,
And it fell on her mother like a tear of grief,
While she folded to her breast, with wilful pride,
A glittering fire-fly that hung by her side.
"Heed," said the mother rose, "daughter mine,
Why shouldst thou seek for beauty not thine?
The Father hath made thee what thou now art;
And what he most loveth is a sweet, pure heart.
Then why dost thou take with such discontent

The loving gift which he to thee hath sent?
For the cool fresh dew will render thee far
More lovely and sweet than the brightest star;
They were made for Heaven, and can never come to shine
Like the fire-fly thou hast in that foolish breast of thine.
O my foolish little bud, do listen to thy mother;
Care only for true beauty, and seek for no other.
There will be grief and trouble in that wilful little heart;
Unfold thy leaves, my daughter, and let the fly depart."
But the proud little bud would have her own will,
And folded the fire-fly more closely still;
Till the struggling insect tore open the vest
Of purple and green, that covered her breast.
When the sun came up, she saw with grief
The blooming of her sister bud leaf by leaf.
While she, once as fair and bright as the rest,
Hung her weary head down on her wounded breast.
Bright grew the sunshine, and the soft summer air
Was filled with the music of flowers singing there;
But faint grew the little bud with thirst and pain,
And longed for the cool dew; but now 't was in vain.
Then bitterly she wept for her folly and pride,
As drooping she stood by her fair sister's side.
Then the rose mother leaned the weary little head
On her bosom to rest, and tenderly she said:
"Thou hast learned, my little bud, that, whatever may betide,
Thou canst win thyself no joy by passion or by pride.
The loving Father sends the sunshine and the shower,
That thou mayst become a perfect little flower; —
The sweet dews to feed thee, the soft wind to cheer,
And the earth as a pleasant home, while thou art dwelling here.
Then shouldst thou not be grateful for all this kindly care,
And strive to keep thyself most innocent and fair?
Then seek, my little blossom, to win humility;
Be fair without, be pure within, and thou wilt happy be.
So when the quiet Autumn of thy fragrant life shall come,
Thou mayst pass away, to bloom in the Flower Spirits' home."
Then from the mother's breast, where it still lay hid,
Into the fading bud the dew-drop gently slid;

Stronger grew the little form, and happy tears fell,
As the dew did its silent work, and the bud grew well,
While the gentle rose leaned, with motherly pride,
O’er the fair little ones that bloomed at her side.

Night came again, and the fire-flies flew;
But the bud let them pass, and drank of the dew;
While the soft stars shone, from the still summer heaven,
On the happy little flower that had learned the lesson given.

GOLDFIN AND SILVERTAIL

Little Bessie lay in a rocky nook,
Alone, beside the sea,
Where the sound of ever-rolling waves
To her ear came pleasantly.
Her face was dark with a gloomy frown,
  Tears on her hot cheek lay;
  For a willful, unkind little girl
  She had been that livelong day;
  And had stolen here, to the quiet shore,
  To sigh and sob alone,
  And to wonder how and why and where
  Her happiness all had flown.
  As thus she lay, with half-closed eyes,
  Low voices reached her ear,
  And laughter gay that seemed to flow
  Like ripples sweet and clear.
  She looked above, she looked below
  And saw with wondering glee
  Two little mermaids on the rocks,
  Both singing merrily.
  One combed her long and shining hair,
  All wreathed with sea-weed bright;
  The other caught the falling spray
  That leaped into the light.
  Friendly and fair both faces seemed,
  With smiling lips and eyes,
  And little arms and bosoms white
  As sea-foam when it flies.
  But Bessie wondered more and more,
  And Bessie’s cheek grew pale;
  For both the mermaids bore below
  A graceful little tail, —
  One, bright with silver scales, that shone

In every fin and fold;
The other, brighter, stranger still,
All glittering with gold.
“Come hither, little mermaids, pray,”
Cried Bessie, from her nook,
“I will not touch or trouble you, —
I only want to look.”
The startled mermaids glanced at her,
And whispered long and low;
At last, one to the other said,
“Dear Goldfin, let us go.”
Then, gliding from their rocky seat,
And floating through the sea,
They reached the nook where Bessie lay,
And looked up smilingly:
“Now, ask of us whate’er you will,
We’ll surely grant it thee,”
Bright Goldfin said unto the child,
Who watched them silently.
And Bessie answered with delight,
“You seem so blithe and gay,
And I’m so sad and lonely here,
Make me a mermaid, pray.”
“Ah! Choose again: that is not wise,”
Cried Goldfin, earnestly;
“I have no spell to change your heart,
And sadder it may be.
Our home is strange and wild to you;
Think what you leave behind, —
Sunshine and home, and, best of all,
A mother, dear and kind.”
But Bessie only frowned and cried,
“You gave the choice to me.
I’m tired of sun and home and all,
So a mermaid I will be.”
Then bitter, salt sea-drops they gave,
From out a hollow shell;
And garlands fair upon her head,
They laid, with song and spell.

A cloud arose, like sudden mist;
And, when it passed, the child
Found herself, by drop and garland
Changed to a mermaid wild.
With timid haste she glided down
Into the cold, cold, sea;
And bid her playmates show here where
Her future home would be.
Down deep into the ocean went
The mermaids, one and all,
O’er many a wondrous hill and dale,
Through may a coral hall.
The child’s heart in the mermaid’s form
Beat fast with sudden fear;
For all was gloomy, strange, and dim
Beneath the waters clear.
She missed the blessed air of heaven;
She missed the cheerful light,
She feared the monsters weird, who looked
From caverns dark as night;
Her food was now sea-apples cold,
And bitter spray she drank;
Her bed was made on barren rocks,
Of sea-mist, rough and dank;
Strange creatures floated far and near,
Or crawled upon the sand;
And soon she longed with all her heart
For the green, summery land.
Here Bessie lived; but daily grew
More restless than before,
And sighed to be a child again, —
Safe on the pleasant shore.
She often rose up to the light,
A human voice to hear;
And look upon her happy home, —
That now seemed very dear.
And children, wandering on the sands,
Saw, rising from the sea,
A little hand that beckoned them,

As if imploringly.
They often saw a wistful face
Look through the spray and foam;
And heard a sobbing voice that cried,
“O mother! take me home.”
So, drearily, poor Bessie lived,
Till to a merman old,
She one day went, when most forlorn,
And all her sorrow told.
“If you would find your happiness,’
The merman answering said,
“Forget yourself, and patiently
Cheer others’ grief instead.
Watch well the lives of your two friends,
The simple difference see;
And you will need no other help, —
No other spell from me.”
Then Bessie watched with heedful eyes,
Wondering more and more,
That she had never cared to mark
That difference before;
For Silvertail, though fair to see,
Was willful, rude, and wild.
“Ah! yes,” sighed Bessie, while she looked,
“As I was, when a child.”
She led an idle, selfish life,
Darkened by discontent;
And left a shadow or a tear
Behind, where’er she went.
But Goldfin, with her loving heart,
So cheerful and serene,
Left smiles, kind words, and happy thoughts
Where she had been.
No little fish but came to her
To heal its wounded fin;
No monster grim but opened wide
His cave to let her in.
The rough waves grew more mild to her,
Through cruel to great ships;

The sea-gulls stooped in their wild flights,
To kiss her smiling lips.
She helped the coral builders small
To shape their little cells,
And in the diver’s dangerous path
Laid heaps of pearly shells;
She guided well the fisher boats
Through many a stormy gale,
And lured away the angry winds
From many a tattered sail;
She scattered pebbles on the beach,
And sea-weed on the sands,
To gladden children’s longing eyes,
And fill their little hands.
These things she did with patient care,
Forgetful of herself,
Till in the sea she was more loved
Than mermaid, sprite, or elf;
While all the joy to others given
Came back unconsciously,
To cheer and brighten her own life,
Wherever she might be.
“Ah! now I know why I am sad,”
Cried Bessie at the sight,
“When I am good, as Goldfin is,
My heart will be as light.”
And henceforth Bessie daily grew
More cheerful and content:
In generous acts and friendly words
Her happy days were spent.
No longer lonely seemed the sea,
So full of friends it grew;
Nor longer gloomy, for the sun
Shone through the waters blue.
No more she wept beside the shore,
But floated daily there;
And hung gay garlands on the rocks,
That once were brown and bare,
Softly singing, as she looked

With dim eyes through the foam:
“When I have learned my lesson well,
I may be taken home.
Till I can rule my heart aright,
And conquer my own will,
I’ll wait and work and hope and try.
Dear mother, love me still.”
As thus the little mermaid cried,
There came a sudden gleam;
A cold drop fell upon her cheek,
And chased away the dream.
With wondering eyes did Bessie gaze
About on every side, —
The rocks whereon the mermaids sat
Were covered by the tide;
The great waves, with a solemn sound,
Came rolling slowly on;
The fresh winds played among her hair;
And all the dream was gone.
But Bessie long remembered it:
The lesson did not fail;
And all her life she followed well
Goldfin, not Silvertail.

THE HAWTHORNE

“The Hawthorne is a gracious tree
From latest twig to parent root,
For when all others leafless stand
It gayly blossoms and bears fruit.
On certain days a friendly wind
Wafts from its spreading boughs a store
Of canny gifts that flutter in
Like snowflakes at a neighbor’s door.

“The spinster who has just been blessed
Finds solemn thirty much improved,
By proofs that such a crabbed soul
Is still remembered and beloved.
Kind wishes ‘ancient Lu’ has stored
In the ‘best chamber’ of her heart,
And every gift on Fancy’s stage
Already plays its little part.

IN THE GARRET

FROM LITTLE WOMEN, CHAPTER 46

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust, and worn by time,
All fashioned and filled, long ago,
By children now in their prime.
Four little keys hung side by side,
With faded ribbons, brave and gay
When fastened there, with childish pride,
Long ago, on a rainy day.
Four little names, one on each lid,
Carved out by a boyish hand,
And underneath there lieth hid
Histories of the happpy band
Once playing here, and pausing oft
To hear the sweet refrain,
That came and went on the roof aloft,
In the falling summer rain.

Meg on the first lid, smooth and fair.
I look in with loving eyes,
For folded here, with well-known care,
A goodly gathering lies,
The record of a peaceful life
Gifts to gentle child and girl,
A bridal gown, lines to a wife,
A tiny shoe, a baby curl.
No toys in this first chest remain,
For all are carried away,
In their old age, to join again
In another small Meg’s play.
Ah, happy mother! Well I know
You hear, like a sweet refrain,

Lullabies ever soft and low
In the falling summer rain.

Jo on the next lid, scratched and worn,
And within a motley store
Of headless, dolls, of schoolbooks torn,
Birds and beasts that speak no more,
Spoils brought home from the fairy ground
Only trod by youthful feet,
Dreams of a future never found,
Memories of a past still sweet,
Half-writ poems, stories wild,
April letters, warm and cold,
Diaries of a wilful child,
Hints of a woman early old,
A woman in a lonely home,
Hearing, like a sad refrain
Be worthy, love, and love will come,
In the falling summer rain.

My Beth! the dust is always swept
From the lid that bears your name,
As if by loving eyes that wept,
By careful hands that often came.
Death cannonized for us one saint,
Ever less human than divine,
And still we lay, with tender plaint,
Relics in this household shrine
The silver bell, so seldom rung,
The little cap which last she wore,
The fair, dead Catherine that hung
By angels borne above her door.
The songs she sang, without lament,
In her prison-house of pain,
Forever are they sweetly blent
With the falling summer rain.

Upon the last lid’s polished field
Legend now both fair and true

A gallant knight bears on his shield,
Amy in letters gold and blue.
Within lie snoods that bound her hair,
Slippers that have danced their last,
Faded flowers laid by with care,
Fans whose airy toils are past,
Gay valentines, all ardent flames,
Trifles that have borne their part
In girlish hopes and fears and shames,
The record of a maiden heart
Now learning fairer, truer spells,
Hearing, like a blithe refrain,
The silver sound of bridal bells
In the falling summer rain.

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust, and worn by time,
Four women, taught by weal and woe
To love and labor in their prime.
Four sisters, parted for an hour,
None lost, one only gone before,
Made by love's immortal power,
Nearest and dearest evermore.
Oh, when these hidden stores of ours
Lie open to the Father's sight,
May they be rich in golden hours,
Deeds that show fairer for the light,
Lives whose brave music long shall ring,
Like a spirit-stirring strain,
Souls that shall gladly soar and sing
In the long sunshine after rain.

THE LAY OF THE GOLDEN GOOSE

Long ago in a poultry yard
One dull November morn,
Beneath a motherly soft wing
A little goose was born.

Who straightway peeped out of the shell
To view the world beyond,
Longing at once to sally forth
And paddle on the pond.

‘Oh! be not rash,’ her father said,
A mild Socratic bird;
Her mother begged her not to stray
With many a warning word.

But little goosey was perverse,
And eagerly did cry,
I’ve got a lovely pair of wings,
Of course I ought to fly.’

In vain parental cacklings,
In vain the cold sky’s frown,
Ambitious goosey tried to soar,
But always tumbled down.

The farm-yard jeered at her attempts,
The peacocks screamed, ‘Oh fie!
You’re only a domestic goose,
So don’t pretend to fly.’

Great cock-a-doodle from his perch

Crowed daily loud and clear,
‘Stay in the puddle, foolish bird,
That is your proper sphere.’

The ducks and hens said, one and all,
In gossip by the pool,
‘Our children never play such pranks;
My dear, that fowl’s a fool.’

The owls came out and flew about,
Hooting above the rest,
‘No useful egg was ever hatched
From trancendental nest.’

Good little goslings at their play
And well-conducted chicks
Were taught to think poor goosey’s flights
Were naughty, ill-bred tricks.

They were content to swim and scratch,
And not at all inclinded
For any wild-goose chase in search
Of something undefined.

Hard times she had as one may guess,
That young aspiring bird,
Who still from every fall arose
Saddened but undeterred.

She knew she was not nightingale,
Yet spite of much abuse,
She longed to help and cheer the world,
Although a plain gray goose.

She could not sing, she could not fly,
Nor even walk with grace,
And all the farm-yard had declared
A puddle was her place.

But something stronger than herself
Would cry, ‘Go on, go on!’
Remember, though an humble fowl,
You’re cousin to a swan.’

So up and down poor goosey went,
A busy, hopeful bird.
Searched many wide unfruitful fields,
And many waters stirred.

At length she came unto a stream
Most fertile of all Niles,
Where tuneful birds might soar and sing
Among the leafy isles.

Here did she build a little nest
Beside the waters still,
Where the parental goose could rest
Unvexed by any bill.

And here she paused to smooth her plumes,
Ruffled by many plagues;
When suddenly arose the cry,
‘This goose lays golden eggs.’

At once the farm-yard was agog;
The ducks began to quack;
Prim Guinea fowls relenting called,
‘Come back, come back, come back.’

Great chanticleer was pleased to give
A patronizing crow,
And the contemptuous biddies chuckled,
‘I wish my chicks did so.’

The peacocks spread their shining tails,
And cried in accents soft,
‘We want to know you, gifted one,
Come up and sit aloft.’

Wise owls awoke and gravely said,
With proudly swelling breasts,
‘Rare birds have always been evoked
From transcendental nests!’

News-hunting turkeys from afar
Now ran with all thin legs
To gobble facts and fictions of
The goose with golden eggs.

But best of all the little fowls
Still playing on the shore,
Soft downy chicks and goslings gay,
Chirped out, ‘Dear Goose, lay more.’

But goosey all these weary years
Had toiled like any ant,
And wearied out she now replied,
‘My little dears, I can’t.

‘When I was starving, half this corn
Had been of vital use,
Now I am surfeited with food
Like any Strasbourg goose.’

So to escape too many friends,
Without uncivil strife,
She ran to the Atlantic pond
And paddled for her life.

Soon up among the grand old Alps
She found two blessed things:
The health she had so nearly lost,
And rest for weary limbs.

But still across the briny deep
Couched in most friendly words,
Came prayers for letters, tales, or verse,

From literary birds.

Whereat the renovated fowl
With grateful thanks profuse,
Took from her wing a quill and wrote
This lay of a Golden Goose.

A LITTLE GREY CURL

A little grey curl from my father’s head
I find unburned on the hearth,
And give it a place in my diary here,
With a feeling half sadness, half mirth.
For the long white locks are our special pride,
  Though he smiles at his daughter’s praise;
  But, oh, they have grown each year more thin,
  Till they are now but a silvery haze.

  That wise old head! (though it does grow bald
  With the knocks hard fortune may give)
  Has a store of faith and hope and trust,
  Which have taught him how to live.
  Though the hat be old, there’s a face below
  Which telleth to those who look
  The history of a good man’s life,
  And it cheers like a blessed book.

  [A]A peddler of jewels, of clocks, and of books,
  Many a year of his wandering youth;
  A peddler still, with a far richer pack,
  His wares are wisdom and love and truth.
  But now, as then, few purchase or pause,
  For he cannot learn the tricks of trade;
  Little silver he wins, but that which time
  Is sprinkling thick on his meek old head.

  But there’ll come a day when the busy world,
  Grown sick with its folly and pride,
  Will remember the mild-faced peddler then
  Whom it rudely had set aside;
  Will remember the wares he offered it once
  And will seek to find him again,

Eager to purchase truth, wisdom, and love,
But, oh, it will seek him in vain.

It will find but his footsteps left behind
Along the byways of life,
Where he patiently walked, striving the while
To quiet its tumult and strife.
But the peddling pilgrim has laid down his pack
And gone with his earnings away;
How small will they seem, remembering the debt
Which the world too late would repay.

God bless the dear head! and crown it with years
Untroubled and calmly serene;
That the autumn of life more golden may be
For the heats and the storms that have been.
My heritage none can ever dispute,
My fortune will bring neither strife nor care;
‘Tis an honest name, ‘tis a beautiful life,
And the silver lock of my father’s hair.

LITTLE NELL

This poem is based on Nell, the tragic girl who dies in Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop.*

LEAMING through the silent church-yard,
Winter sunlight seemed to shed
Golden shadows like soft blessings
O'er a quiet little bed,

Where a pale face lay unheeding
Tender tears that o'er it fell;
No sorrow now could touch the heart
Of gentle little Nell.

Ah, with what silent patient strength
The frail form lying there
Had borne its heavy load of grief,
Of loneliness and care.

Now, earthly burdens were laid down,
And on the meek young face
There shone a holier loveliness
Than childhood's simple grace.

Beset with sorrow, pain and fear,
Tempted by want and sin,
With none to guide or counsel her
But the brave child-heart within.

Strong in her fearless, faithful love,
Devoted to the last,
Unfaltering through gloom and gleam
The little wanderer passed.

Hand in hand they journeyed on
Through pathways strange and wild,
The gray-haired, feeble, sin-bowed man
Led by the noble child.

So through the world’s dark ways she passed,
Till o’er the church-yard sod,
To the quiet spot where they found rest,
Those little feet had trod.

To that last resting-place on earth
Kind voices bid her come,
There her long wanderings found an end,
And weary Nell a home.

A home whose light and joy she was,
Though on her spirit lay
A solemn sense of coming change,
That deepened day by day.

There in the church-yard, tenderly,
Through quiet summer hours,
Above the poor neglected graves
She planted fragrant flowers.

The dim aisles of the ruined church
Echoed the child’s light tread,
And flickering sunbeams thro’ the leaves
Shone on her as she read.

And here where a holy silence dwelt,
And golden shadows fell,
When Death’s mild face had looked on her,
They laid dear happy Nell.

Long had she wandered o’er the earth,
One hand to the old man given,
By the other angels led her on

Up a sunlit path to Heaven.

Oh! “patient, loving, noble Nell,”
Like light from sunset skies,
The beauty of thy sinless life
Upon the dark world lies.

On thy sad story, gentle child,
Dim eyes will often dwell,
And loving hearts will cherish long
The memory of Nell.

LITTLE PAUL

This poem is based on Paul Dombey, the tragic boy who dies in Dickens' *Dombey and Son.*

HEERFUL voices by the sea-side
Echoed through the summer air,
Happy children, fresh and rosy,
Sang and sported freely there,
Often turning friendly glances,
Where, neglectful of them all,
On his bed among the gray rocks,
Mused the pale child, little Paul.

For he never joined their pastimes,
Never danced upon the sand,
Only smiled upon them kindly,
Only waved his wasted hand.
Many a treasured gift they bore him,
Best beloved among them all.
Many a childish heart grieved sadly,
Thinking of poor little Paul.

But while Florence was beside him,
While her face above him bent,
While her dear voice sounded near him,
He was happy and content;
Watching ever the great billows,
Listening to their ceaseless fall,
For they brought a pleasant music
To the ear of little Paul.

“Sister Floy,” the pale child whispered,
“What is that the blue waves say?
What strange message are they bringing

From that shore so far away?
Who is dwelling in that country
Whence a low voice seems to call
Softly, through the dash of waters,
‘Come away, my little Paul’?”

But sad Florence could not answer,
Though her dim eyes tenderly
Watched the wistful face, that ever
Gazed across the restless sea,
While the sunshine like a blessing
On his bright hair seemed to fall,
And the winds grew more caressing,
As they kissed frail little Paul.

Ere long, paler and more wasted,
On another bed he lay,
Where the city’s din and discord
Echoed round him day by day;
While the voice that to his spirit
By the sea-side seemed to call,
Sounded with its tender music
Very near to little Paul.

As the deep tones of the ocean
Linger in the frailest shell,
So the lonely sea-side musings
In his memory seemed to dwell.
And he talked of golden waters
Rippling on his chamber wall,
While their melody in fancy
Cheered the heart of little Paul.

Clinging fast to faithful Florence,
Murmuring faintly night and day,
Of the swift and darksome river
Bearing him so far away,
Toward a shore whose blessed sunshine
Seemed most radiantly to fall

On a beautiful mild spirit,
Waiting there for little Paul.

So the tide of life ebbed slowly,
Till the last wave died away,
And nothing but the fragile wreck
On the sister’s bosom lay.
And from out death’s solemn waters,
Lifted high above them all,
In her arms the spirit mother
Bore the soul of little Paul.

LULLABY

Now the day is done,
Now the shepherd sun
Drives his white flocks from the sky;
Now the flowers rest
On their mother’s breast,
Hushed by her low lullaby.

Now the glowworms glance,
Now the fireflies dance,
Under fern-boughs green and high;
And the western breeze
To the forest trees
Chants a tuneful lullaby.

Now ‘mid shadows deep
Falls blessed sleep,
Like dew from the summer sky;
And the whole earth dreams,
In the moon’s soft beams,
While night breathes a lullaby.

Now, birdlings, rest,
In your wind-rocked nest,
Unscared by the owl’s shrill cry;
For with folded wings
Little Brier swings,
And singeth your lullaby.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

In the rush of early morning,
When the red burns through the gray,
And the wintry world lies waiting
For the glory of the day,
Then we hear a fitful rustling
Just without upon the stair,
See two small white phantoms coming,
Catch the gleam of sunny hair.

Are they Christmas fairies stealing
Rows of little socks to fill?
Are they angels floating hither
With their message of good-will?
What sweet spell are these elves weaving,
As like larks they chirp and sing?
Are these palms of peace from heaven
That these lovely spirits bring?

Rosy feet upon the threshold,
Eager faces peeping through,
With the first red ray of sunshine,
Chanting cherubs come in view:
Mistletoe and gleaming holly,
Symbols of a blessed day,
In their chubby hands they carry,
Streaming all along the way.

Well we know them, never weary
Of this innocent surprise;
Waiting, watching, listening always
With full hearts and tender eyes,
While our little household angels,
White and golden in the sun,

Greet us with the sweet old welcome, —
    “Merry Christmas, every one!”

THE MOTHER MOON

THE moon upon the wide sea
Placidly looks down,
Smiling with her mild face,
Though the ocean frown.
Clouds may dim her brightness,
  But soon they pass away,
  And she shines out, unaltered,
  O’er the little waves at play.
  So ‘mid the storm or sunshine,
  Wherever she may go,
  Led on by her hidden power
  The wild see must plow.

  As the tranquil evening moon
  Looks on that restless sea,
  So a mother’s gentle face,
  Little child, is watching thee.
  Then banish every tempest,
  Chase all your clouds away,
  That smoothly and brightly
  Your quiet heart may play.
  Let cheerful looks and actions
  Like shining ripples flow,
  Following the mother’s voice,
  Singing as they go.

MY DOVES

OPPOSITE my chamber window,
On the sunny roof, at play,
High above the city’s tumult,
Flocks of doves sit day by day.
Shining necks and snowy bosoms,
  Little rosy, tripping feet,
  Twinkling eyes and fluttering wings,
  Cooing voices, low and sweet, —

  Graceful games and friendly meetings,
  Do I daily watch and see.
  For these happy little neighbors
  Always seem at peace to be.
  On my window-ledge, to lure them,
  Crumbs of bread I often strew,
  And, behind the curtain hiding,
  Watch them flutter to and fro.

  Soon they cease to fear the giver,
  Quick are they to feel my love,
  And my alms are freely taken
  By the shyest little dove.
  In soft flight, they circle downward,
  Peep in through the window-pane;
  Stretch their gleaming necks to greet me,
  Peck and coo, and come again.

  Faithful little friends and neighbors,
  For no wintry wind or rain,
  Household cares or airy pastimes,
  Can my loving birds restrain.
  Other friends forget, or linger,
  But each day I surely know

That my doves will come and leave here
Little footprints in the snow.

So, they teach me the sweet lesson,
That the humblest may give
Help and hope, and in so doing,
Learn the truth by which we live;
For the heart that freely scatters
Simple charities and loves,
Lures home content, and joy, and peace,
Like a soft-winged flock of doves.

MY KINGDOM

A little kingdom I possess,
Where thoughts and feelings dwell,
And very hard I find the task
Of governing it well;
For passion tempts and troubles me,
A wayward will misleads,
And selfishness its shadow casts,
On all my will and deeds.

How can I learn to rule myself,
To be the child I should,
Honest and brave, nor ever tire
Of trying to be good?
How can I keep a sunny soul
To shine along life’s way?
How can I tune my little heart,
To sweetly sing all day?

Dear Father, help me with the love
That castest out my fear!
Teach me to lean on Thee and feel
That thou art very near.
That no temptation is unseen,
No childish grief too small,
Since Thou, with patience infinite,
Dost soothe and comfort all.

I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win;
Nor try to conquer any world
Except the one within.
Be Thou my Guide until I find,
Led by a tender hand,

Thy happy kingdom in myself
And dare to take command.

MY PRAYER

Courage and Patience, these I ask,
Dear Lord, in this my latest strait;
For hard I find my ten years' task,
Learning to suffer and to wait.

Life seems so rich and grand a thing,
So full of work for heart and brain,
It is a cross that I can bring
No help, no offering, but pain.

The hard-earned harvest of these years
I long to generously share;
The lessons learned with bitter tears
To teach again with tender care;

To smooth the rough and thorny way
Where other feet begin to tread;
To feed some hungry soul each day
With sympathy's sustaining bread.

So beautiful such pleasures show,
I long to make them mine;
To love and labor and to know
The joy such living makes divine.

But if I may not, I will only ask
Courage and patience for my fate,
And learn, dear Lord, thy latest task —
To suffer patiently and wait.

THE NAUTILUS

A FAIRY B0AT-SONG.

LAUNCH our bout from the yellow sand,
Say farewell to the blooming Unci,
l’url airy wings, fold the mantles blue,
Drink one last cup of honey dew;
For we must leave our fairy home
On a moonlight voyage through the foam.
Spread the silken sail
 To the summer gale,
 Low singing across the sea;
 Float away, float awav,
 Through foam and spray,
 As if o’er a flowery lea!
 Oh! fear no storm nor cloudy frown,
 Though mightier ships than ours go down:
 Our helmsman laughs at the wildest gale,
 As he drops anchor and furls his sail;
 For I-Ic who guides the sparrow’s wing,
 Whose love upholds the frailest thing,
 Has given a spell.
 To protect the shell
 Through the waves’ tumultuous flow.
 When temp est-tost,
 Unwrecked, unlost,
 It sinks to calmer depths below.

 Watch, dear males, by the fading light,
 The mariner small who steers aright,
 Hy compass and chart unseen, yet true.
 And ferries over an elfin crew,
 With tiny rudder and sail and oar,

Voyaging safely from shore to shore;
While the mermaids fair,
With their shining hair.
Glide up from their ocean home.
“Come away, come away! “
The sea-sprites say,
As they beckon through the foam.

O evening star! serene and still,
Guard us with magic care from ill!
O summer moon! like herald bright.
Guide us alone; thy path of liht!
O friendiy waves! bear on your breast
Ellin wanderers to their rest!
See, how low and dim,
On the ocean’s rim,
Lies the shore we left behind;
Farewell! Farewell!
Let the echo swell,
Bear it home on your wings, sweet wind!

OUR ANGEL IN THE HOUSE

OR

MY BETH

FROM LITTLE WOMEN, CHAPTER 40

Sitting patient in the shadow
Till the blessed light shall come,
A serene and saintly presence
Sanctifies our troubled home.
Earthly joys and hopes and sorrows
Break like ripples on the strand
Of the deep and solemn river
Where her willing feet now stand.

O my sister, passing from me,
Out of human care and strife,
Leave me, as a gift, those virtues
Which have beautified your life.
Dear, bequeath me that great patience
Which has power to sustain
A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit
In its prison-house of pain.

Give me, for I need it sorely,
Of that courage, wise and sweet,
Which has made the path of duty
Green beneath your willing feet.
Give me that unselfish nature,
That with charity devine
Can pardon wrong for love’s dear sake —
Meek heart, forgive me mine!

Thus our parting daily loseth
   Something of its bitter pain,
And while learning this hard lesson,
   My great loss becomes my gain.
For the touch of grief will render
   My wild nature more serene,
Give to life new aspirations,
   A new trust in the unseen.

Henceforth, safe across the river,
   I shall see forevermore
A beloved, household spirit
   Waiting for me on the shore.
Hope and faith, born of my sorrow,
   Guardian angels shall become,
And the sister gone before me
   By their hands shall lead me home.

OUR LITTLE GHOST

Oft in the silence of the night,
When the lonely moon rides high,
When wintry winds are whistling,
And we hear the owl’s shrill cry,
In the quiet, dusky chamber,
By the flickering firelight,
Rising up between two sleepers,
Comes a spirit all in white.

A winsome little ghost it is,
Rosy-cheeked, and bright of eye;
With yellow curls all breaking loose
From the small cap pushed awry.
Up it climbs among the pillows,
For the “big dark” brings no dread,
And a baby’s boundless fancy
Makes a kingdom of a bed.

A fearless little ghost it is;
Safe the night seems as the day;
The moon is but a gentle face,
And the sighing winds are gay.
The solitude is full of friends,
And the hour brings no regrets;
For, in this happy little soul,
Shines a sun that never sets.

A merry little ghost it is,
Dancing gayly by itself,
On the flowery counterpane,
Like a tricksy household elf;
Nodding to the fitful shadows,
As they flicker on the wall;

Talking to familiar pictures,
Mimicking the owl’s shrill call.

A thoughtful little ghost if is;
And, when lonely gambols tire,
With chubby hands on chubby knees,
It sits winking at the fire.
Fancies innocent and lovely
Shine before those baby-eyes,
Endless fields of dandelions,
Brooks, and birds, and butterflies.

A loving little ghost it is:
When crept into its nest,
Its hand on father’s shoulder laid,
Its head on mother’s breast,
It watches each familiar face,
With a tranquil, trusting eye;
And, like a sleepy little bird,
Sings its own soft lullaby.

Then those who feigned to sleep before,
Lest baby play till dawn,
Wake and watch their folded flower
Little rose without a thorn.
And, in the silence of the night,
The hearts that love it most
Pray tenderly above its sleep,
“God bless our little ghost!”

OUR MADONNA

“A child her wayward pencil drew
On margins of her book;
Garlands of flower, dancing elves,
Bud, butterfly, and brook,
Lessons undone, and plum forgot,
Seeking with hand and heart
The teacher whom she learned to love
Before she knew t’was Art. “

A SONG FOR A CHRISTMAS TREE

Cold and wintry is the sky,
Bitter winds go whistling by,
Orchard boughs are bare and dry,
Yet here stands a faithful tree.
Household fairies kind and dear,
With loving magic none need fear,
Bade it rise and blossom here,
Little friends, for you and me.

Come and gather as they fall,
Shining gifts for great and small;
Santa Claus remembers all
When he comes with goodies piled.
Corn and candy, apples red,
Sugar horses, gingerbread,
Babies who are never fed,
Are handing here for every child.

Shake the boughs and down they come,
Better fruit than peach or plum,
‘T is our little harvest home;
For though frosts the flowers kill,
Though birds depart and squirrels sleep,
Though snows may gather cold and deep,
Little folks their sunshine keep,
And mother-love makes summer still.

Gathered in a smiling ring,
Lightly dance and gayly sing,
Still at heart remembering
The sweet story all should know,
Of the little Child whose birth

  Has made this day throughout the earth
  A festival for childish mirth,
Since the first Christmas long ago.

A SONG FOR LITTLE FREDDIE ON HIS THIRD BIRTHDAY

A song for little Freddie
On his third Birthday.

Down in the field
Where the brook goes,
Lives a white lammie
With a little black nose.

He eats the grass so green,
He drinks the “la la” sweet,
“Buttertups” and daisies,
Grow all about his feet.

The “birdies” they sing to him,
The big sun in the sky,
Warms his little “Toe-toes,”
And peeps into his eye.

He’s a very gentle lammie,
He never makes a fuss,
He never “saps his marmar,”
He never says “I muss.”

He hops and he runs,
“Wound and wound” all day,
And when the night comes,
He goes “bye low” on the hay.

In a nice little barn,
Where the “moo-moos” are;
Freddie says “Good night,”
But the lammie he says “Baa!”

A SONG FROM THE SUDS

Queen of my tub, I merrily sing,
While the white foam rises high,
And sturdily wash and rinse and wring,
And fasten the clothes to dry.
Then out in the free fresh air they swing,
    Under the sunny sky.
    I wish we could wash from our hearts and souls
    The stains of the week away,
    And let water and air by their magic make
    Ourselves as pure as they.
    Then on the earth there would be indeed,
    A glorious washing day!
    Along the path of a useful life,
    Will heartsease ever bloom.
    The busy mind has no time to think
    Of sorrow or care or gloom.
    And anxious thoughts may be swept away,
    As we bravely wield a broom.
    I am glad a task to me is given,
    To labor at day by day,
    For it brings me health and strength and hope,
    And I cheerfully learn to say,
    “Head, you may think, Heart, you may feel,
    But, Hand, you shall work alway!”

THOREAU’S FLUTE

We sighing said, “Our Pan is dead;
His pipe hangs mute beside the river
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
But Music’s airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost;
    The bluebird chants a requiem;
    The willow-blossom waits for him;
    The Genius of the wood is lost.”

    Then from the flute, untouched by hands,
    There came a low, harmonious breath:
    “For such as he there is no death;
    His life the eternal life commands;
    Above man’s aims his nature rose.
    The wisdom of a just content
    Made one small spot a continent
    And turned to poetry life’s prose.

    “Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,
    Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
    To him grew human or divine,
    Fit mates for this large-hearted child.
    Such homage Nature ne’er forgets,
    And yearly on the coverlid
    ‘Neath which her darling lieth hid
    Will write his name in violets.

    “To him no vain regrets belong
    Whose soul, that finer instrument,
    Gave to the world no poor lament,
    But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
    O lonely friend! he still will be
    A potent presence, though unseen,

Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;
Seek not for him — he is with thee.”

TO ANNA.

Sister, dear, when you are lonely,
Longing for your distant home,
And the images of loved ones
Warmly to your heart shall come,
Then, mid tender thoughts and fancies,
Let one fond voice say to thee,
“Ever when your heart is heavy,
Anna, dear, then think of me.”

Think how we two have together
    Journeyed onward day by day,
    Joys and sorrows ever sharing,
    While the swift years roll away.
    Then may all the sunny hours
    Of our youth rise up to thee,
    And when your heart is light and happy,
    Anna, dear, then think of me.

TO FATHER.

A cloth on the table where dear Plato sits
By one of the Graces was spread
With the single request that he would not design
New patterns with black ink or red.
And when he is soaring away in the clouds
    I beg he’ll remember and think
    Though the “blackbirds” are fair his cloth will be fairer
    For not being deluged with ink.
    May plenty of paper of pens and of quiet
    To my dear pa forever be given
    Till he has written such piles that when on the top
    He can walk calmly on into Heaven.

TO MOTHER

I hope that soon dear mother, you & I may be
In the quiet room my fancy has so often made for thee,
The pleasant sunny chamber, the cushioned easy chair,
The books laid for your reading, the vase of flowers fair.
The desk beside the window where the sun shines warm and bright,
    And there in ease and quiet, the promised book you write,
    While I sit close beside you, content at last to see,
    That you can rest dear mother, & I can cherish thee.

TO MY FATHER ON HIS 86TH BIRTHDAY

Dear Pilgrim, waiting patiently,
The long, long journey nearly done,
Beside the sacred stream that flows
Clear shining in the western sun;
Look backward on the varied road
Your steadfast feet have trod,
From youth to age, through weal and woe,
Climbing forever nearer God.

Mountain and valley lie behind;
The slough is crossed, the wicket passed;
Doubt and despair, sorrow and sin,
Giant and fiend, conquered at last.
Neglect is changed to honor now;
The heavy cross may be laid down;
The white head wins and wears at length
The prophet’s, not the martyr’s crown.

Greatheart and Faithful gone before,
Brave Christiana, Mercy sweet,
Are Shining Ones who stand and wait
The weary wanderer to greet.
Patience and Love his handmaids are,
And till time brings release,
Christian may rest in that bright room
Whose windows open to the east.

The staff set by, the sandals off,
Still pondering the precious scroll,
Serene and strong, he waits the call
That frees and wings a happy soul.
Then, beautiful as when it lured
The boy’s aspiring eyes,

Before the pilgrim’s longing sight
Shall the Celestial City rise.

TO PAPA

In high Olympus' sacred shade
A gift Minerva wrought
For her beloved philosopher
Immersed in deepest thought.

A shield to guard his aged breast
    With its enchanted mesh
    When he his nectar and ambrosia took
    To strengthen and refresh.

    Long may he live to use the life
    The hidden goddess gave,
    To keep unspotted to the end
    The gentle, just, and brave.

TRANSFIGURATION

Mysterious death! who in a single hour
Life’s gold can so refine
And by thy art divine
Change mortal weakness to immortal power!

Bending beneath the weight of eighty years
Spent with the noble strife
of a victorious life
We watched her fading heavenward, through our tears.

But ere the sense of loss our hearts had wrung
A miracle was wrought;
And swift as happy thought
She lived again — brave, beautiful, and young.

Age, pain, and sorrow dropped the veils they wore
And showed the tender eyes
Of angels in disguise,
Whose discipline so patiently she bore.

The past years brought their harvest rich and fair;
While memory and love,
Together, fondly wove
A golden garland for the silver hair.

How could we mourn like those who are bereft,
When every pang of grief
found balm for its relief
In counting up the treasures she had left? —

Faith that withstood the shocks of toil and time;
Hope that defied despair;
Patience that conquered care;

And loyalty, whose courage was sublime;

The great deep heart that was a home for all —
Just, eloquent, and strong
In protest against wrong;
Wide charity, that knew no sin, no fall;

The spartan spirit that made life so grand,
Mating poor daily needs
With high, heroic deeds,
That wrested happiness from Fate’s hard hand.

We thought to weep, but sing for joy instead,
Full of the grateful peace
That follows her release;
For nothing but the weary dust lies dead.

Oh, noble woman! never more a queen
Than in the laying down
Of sceptre and of crown
To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen;

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal,
To earn the true success —
To live, to love, to bless —
And make death proud to take a royal soul.

UNTITLED 1

Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations.
I may not reach them,
    but I can look up & see their beauty,
    believe in them & follow where they lead.

UNTITLED 2

“God comfort thee dear mother,
For sorrow sad and deep
Is lying heavy on thy heart
And this hath made thee weep.

“There is a Father o’er us, mother,
Who orders for the best
And peace shall come ere long, mother,
And dwell within thy breast.

“Then let us journey onward, mother,
And trustfully abide,
The coming forth of good or ill
Whatever may betide.”

UNTITLED 3

The great deep heart that was a home for all —
Just, eloquent, and strong
In protest against wrong;
Wide charity, that knew no sin, no fall;

The spartan spirit that made life so grand,
Mating poor daily needs
With high, heroic deeds,
That wrested happiness from Fate's hard hand.

We thought to weep, but sing for joy instead,
Full of the grateful peace
That follows her release;
For nothing but the weary dust lies dead.

Oh, noble woman! never more a queen
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Of sceptre and of crown
To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen;

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal,
To earn the true success —
To live, to love, to bless —
And make death proud to take a royal soul.

UNTITLED 4

“Philosophers sit in their sylvan hall
And talk of the duties of man,
Of Chaos and Cosmos, Hegel and Kant,
With the Oversoul well in the van;
All on their hobbies they amble away
And a terrible dust they make;
Disciples devout both gaze and adore,
As daily they listen and bake.”

UNTITLED 5

Softly doth the sun descend
    To his couch behind the hill,
    Then, oh, then, I love to sit
    On mossy banks beside the rill.
    Anna thought it was very fine;
but I did n’t like it very well.

UNTITLED 6

There is a town of high repute,
Where saints and sages dwell,
Who in these latter days are forced
To bid sweet peace farewell ;
For all their men are demigods, —
So rumor doth declare, —
And all the women are De Staels,
And genius fills the air.
So eager pilgrims penetrate
    To their most private nooks.
    Storm their back doors in search of news
    And interview their cooks,
    Worship at every victim’s shrine.
    See halos round their hats,
    Embalm the chickweed from their yards.
    And photograph their cats.
    There’s Emerson, the poet wise.
    That much-enduring man.
    Sees Jenkinses from every clime,
    But dodges when he can.
    Chaos and Cosmos down below
    Their waves of trouble roll,
    While safely in his attic locked.
    He woos the Oversoul.
    And Hawthorne, shy ais any maid.
    From these invaders fled
    Out of the window like a wraith.
    Or to his tower sped —
    Till vanishing from this rude world,
    He left behind no clue,
    Except along the hillside path
    The violet’s tender blue.
    Channing scarce dares at eventide
    To leave his lonely lair ;

Reporters lurk on every side
And hunt him like a bear.
Quaint Thoreau sought the wilderness,
But callers by the score
Scared the poor hermit from his cell.
The woodchuck from his door.

UNTITLED 7

Two pair of blue hose,
For Johnny’s white toes,
So Jack Frost can’t freeze em,
Nor darned stockings tease em,
So pretty and neat
I hope the small feet
Will never go wrong,
But walk straight and strong,
The way father went.
We shall all be content,
    If the dear little son
    Be a second good John.

A WAIL UTTERED IN THE WOMAN’S CLUB

God bless you, merry ladies,
Get out your pocket-handkerchiefs.
May nothing you dismay.
    Give o’er your jokes and songs,

    As you sit here at ease and hark
    Forget awhile your Woman’s Rights,
    Unto my dismal lay. And pity author’s wrongs.

WHAT POLLY FOUND IN HER STOCKING

WITH the first pale glimmer,
Of the morning red,
Polly woke delighted
And flew out of bed.
To the door she hurried,
    Never stopped for clothes,
    Though Jack Frost’s cold fingers
    Nipt her little toes.
    There it hung! the stocking,
    Long and blue and full;
    Down it quickly tumbled
    With a hasty pull.
    Back she capered, laughing,
    Happy little Polly;
    For from out the stocking
    Stared a splendid dolly!
    Next, what most she wanted,
    In a golden nut,
    With a shining thimble,
    Scissors that would cut;
    Then a book all pictures,
    “Children in the Wood.”
    And some scarlet mittens
    Like her scarlet hood.
    Next a charming jump-rope,
    New and white and strong;
    (Little Polly’s stocking
    Though small was very long,)
    In the heel she fumbled,
    “Something soft and warm,”
    A rainbow ball of worsted
    Which could do no harm.
    In the foot came bon-bons,

In the toe a ring,
And some seeds of mignonette
Ready for the spring.
There she sat at daylight
Hugging close dear dolly;
Eating, looking, laughing,
Happy little Polly!

WHERE IS BENNIE?

THE cowslips in the morning sua
Unfold each yellow cup,
And watch and wait and whisper low,
“Why isn’t Bennie up ?
The robins hop along the path,
Peep in, then fly away,
Others think they come for crumbs.
I hear them chirping say,
“Where is Bennie ? “
We see no more about the house
The little checkered tire ;
Four chairs around the table stand,
And none need be made higher.
The hatchet hangs against the wall,
The whittlings are swept away ;
The little barrow rolls no more,
And the old house seems to say,
“Where is Bennie?”
Down by the willows, green and cool,
The little brook flows on ;
But seems to murmur sadly now,
For all the boats are gone.
Miss Puss sits blinking in the sun,
Ready for games of play,
Or roams about from room to room,
While her soft mew seems to say,
“Where is Bennie?”
Under the lindens, far away,
In a cradle warm and wide,
A baby laughs and kicks and crows,
With a small boy at her side.
They frolic there in that soft nest,
Two happy little birds ;

And when we call, the youngest sings,
In a sweet song without words,
“ Here is Bennie.”

Aunt Louise.

WINTER

The stormy Winter’s come at last,
With snow and rain and hitter blast;
Ponds and brooks are frozen o’er, —
We cannot sail there any more.

The little birds are flown away
To warmer climes than ours;
They’ll come no more till gentle May
Calls them back with flowers.

Then the darling birds will sing
From their neat nests in the trees;
All creatures wake to welcome Spring,
And flowers dance in the breeze.

With patience wait till Winter’s o’er,
And all lovely things return;
Of every season try the more
Some knowledge or virtue to learn.

WITH A ROSE

In the long silence of the night,
Nature's benignant power
Woke aspirations for the light
Within the folded flower.
Its presence and the gracious day
Made summer in the room.
But woman's eyes shed tender dew
On the little rose in bloom.

Then blossomed forth a grander flower,
In the wilderness of wrong.
Untouched by Slavery's bitter frost,
A soul devout and strong.
God-watched, that century plant uprose,
Far shining through the gloom.
Filling a nation with the breath
Of a noble life in bloom.

A life so powerful in its truth,
A nature so complete;
It conquered ruler, judge and priest,
And held them at its feet.
Death seemed proud to take a soul
So beautifully given,
And the gallows only proved to him
A stepping-stone to heaven.

Each cheerful word, each valiant act,
So simple, so sublime,
Spoke to us through the reverent hush
Which sanctified that time.
That moment when the brave old man
Went so serenely forth

With footsteps whose unfaltering tread
Reechoed through the North.

The sword he wielded for the right
Turns to a victor’s palm;
His memory sounds forever more,
A spirit-stirring psalm.
No breath of shame can touch his shield,
Nor ages dim its shine;
Living, he made life beautiful,
Dying, made death divine.

No monument of quarried stone,
No eloquence of speech
Can grave the lessons on the land
His martyrdom will teach.
No eulogy like his own words,
With hero-spirit rife,
“I truly serve the cause I love,
By yielding up my life.”

The Non-Fiction

HOW I WENT OUT TO SERVICE

When I was eighteen I wanted something to do. I had tried teaching for two years, and hated it; I had tried sewing, and could not earn my bread in that way, at the cost of health; I tried story-writing and got five dollars for stories which now bring a hundred; I had thought seriously of going upon the stage, but certain highly respectable relatives were so shocked at the mere idea that I relinquished my dramatic aspirations.

"What shall I do?" was still the question that perplexed me. I was ready to work, eager to be independent, and too proud to endure patronage. But the right task seemed hard to find, and my bottled energies were fermenting in a way that threatened an explosion before long.

My honored mother was a city missionary that winter, and not only served the clamorous poor, but often found it in her power to help the decayed gentlefolk by quietly placing them where they could earn their bread without the entire sacrifice of taste and talent which makes poverty so hard for such to bear. Knowing her tact and skill, people often came to her for companions, housekeepers, and that class of the needy who do not make their wants known through an intelligence office.

One day, as I sat dreaming splendid dreams, while I made a series of little petticoats out of odds and ends sent in for the poor, a tall, ministerial gentleman appeared, in search of a companion for his sister. He possessed an impressive nose, a fine flow of language, and a pair of large hands, encased in black kid gloves. With much waving of those somber members, Mr. R. set forth the delights awaiting the happy soul who should secure this home. He described it as a sort of heaven on earth. "There are books, pictures, flowers, a piano, and the best of society," he said. "This person will be one of the family in all respects, and only required to help about the lighter work, which my sister has done herself hitherto, but is now a martyr to neuralgia and needs a gentle hand to assist her."

My mother, who never lost her faith in human nature, in spite of many impostures, believed every word, and quite beamed with benevolent interest as she listened and tried to recall some needy young woman to whom the charming home would be a blessing. I also innocently thought:

"That sounds inviting. I like housework and can do it well. I should have time to enjoy the books and things I love, and D — - is not far away from home. Suppose I try it."

So, when my mother turned to me, asking if I could suggest any one, I became red as a poppy and said abruptly:

"Only myself."

"Do you really mean it?" cried my astonished parent.

"I really do if Mr. R. thinks I should suit" was my steady reply, as I partially obscured my crimson countenance behind a little flannel skirt, still redder.

The Reverend Josephus gazed upon me with the benign regard which a bachelor of five and thirty may accord a bashful damsel of eighteen. A smile dawned upon his countenance, "sicklied o`er with the pale cast of thought," or dyspepsia; and he softly folded the black gloves, as if about to bestow a blessing as he replied, with emphasis:

"I am sure you would, and we should think ourselves most fortunate if we could secure your society and — ahem — services for my poor sister."

"Then I`ll try it," responded the impetuous maid.

"We will talk it over a little first, and let you know tomorrow, sir," put in my prudent parent, adding, as Mr. R. arose: "What wages do you pay?"

"My dear madam, in a case like this let me not use such words as those. Anything you may think proper we shall gladly give. The labor is very light, for there are but three of us and our habits are of the simplest sort. I am a frail reed and may break at any moment; so is my sister, and my aged father cannot long remain; therefore, money is little to us, and any one who comes to lend her youth and strength to our feeble household will not be forgotten in the end, I assure you." And, with another pensive smile, a farewell wave of the impressive gloves, the Reverend Josephus bowed like a well-sweep and departed.

"My dear, are you in earnest?" asked my mother.

"Of course I am. Why not try the experiment? It can but fail, like all the others."

"I have no objection; only I fancied you were rather too proud for this sort of thing."

"I am too proud to be idle and dependent, ma`am. I`ll scrub floors and take in washing first. I do housework at home for love; why not do it abroad for money? I like it better than teaching. It is healthier than sewing and surer than writing. So why not try it?"

"It is going out to service, you know, though you are called a companion. How does that suit?"

"I don`t care. Every sort of work that is paid for is service; and I don`t mind being a companion, if I can do it well. I may find it is my mission to take care of neuralgic old ladies and lackadaisical clergymen. It does not sound exciting, but it`s better than nothing," I answered, with a sigh; for it was rather a sudden downfall to give up being a Siddons and become a Betcinder.

How my sisters laughed when they heard the new plan! But they soon resigned themselves, sure of fun, for Lu`s adventures were the standing joke of the family. Of course, the highly respectable relatives held up their hands in holy horror at the idea of one of the clan degrading herself by going out to service. Teaching a private school was the proper thing for an indigent gentlewoman. Sewing even, if done in the seclusion of home and not mentioned in public, could be tolerated. Story-writing was a genteel accomplishment and reflected credit upon the name. But leaving the paternal roof to was other people`s teacups, nurse other people`s ails, and obey other people`s orders for hire — this, this was degradation; and headstrong Louisa would disgrace her name forever if she did it.

Opposition only fired the revolutionary blood in my veins, and I crowned my iniquity by the rebellious declaration:

"If doing this work hurts my respectability, I wouldn`t give much for it. My aristocratic ancestors don`t feed or clothe me and my democratic ideas of honesty and honor won`t let me be idle or dependent. You need not know me if you are ashamed of me, and I won`t ask you for a penny; so, if I never do succeed in anything, I shall have the immense satisfaction of knowing I am under no obligation to any one."

In spite of the laughter and the lamentation, I got ready my small wardrobe, consisting of two calico dresses and one delaine, made by myself, also several large and uncompromising blue aprons and tree tidy little sweeping-caps; for I had some English notions about housework and felt that my muslin hair-protectors would be useful in some of the "light labors" I was to undertake. It is needless to say they were very becoming. Then, firmly embracing my family, I set forth, one cold January day, with my little trunk, a stout heart, and a five-dollar bill for my fortune.

"She will be back in a week" was my sister`s prophecy, as she wiped her weeping eye.

"No, she won`t, for she has promised to stay the month out and she will keep her word," answered my mother, who always defended the black sheep of her flock.

I heard both speeches, and registered a tremendous vow to keep that promise, if I died in the attempt — little dreaming, poor innocent, what lay before me.

Josephus meantime had written me several remarkable letters, describing the different members of the family I was about to enter. His account was peculiar, but I believed every word of it and my romantic fancy was much excited by the details he gave. The principal ones are as follows, condensed from the voluminous epistles which he evidently enjoyed writing:

“You will find a stately mansion, fast falling to decay, for my father will have nothing repaired, preferring that the old house and its master should crumble away together. I have, however, been permitted to rescue a few rooms from ruin; and here I pass my recluse life, surrounded by the things I love. This will naturally be more attractive to you than the gloomy apartments my father inhabits, and I hope you will here allow me to minister to your young and cheerful nature when your daily cares are over. I need such companionship and shall always welcome you to my abode.

“Eliza, my sister, is a child at forty, for she has lived alone with my father and an old servant all her life. She is a good creature, but not lively, and needs stirring up, as you will soon see. Also I hope by your means to rescue her from the evil influence of Puah, who, in my estimation, is a wretch. She has gained entire control over Eliza, and warps her mind with great skill, prejudicing her against me and thereby desolating my home. Puah hates me and always has. Why I know not, except I will not yield to her control. She ruled here for years while I was away, and my return upset all her nefarious plans. It will always be my firm opinion that she has tried to poison me, and may again. But even this dark suspicion will not deter me from my duty. I cannot send her away, for both my deluded father and my sister have entire faith in her, and I cannot shake it. She is faithful and kind to them, so I submit and remain to guard them, even at the risk of my life.

“I tell you these things because I wish you to know all and be warned, for this old hag has a specious tongue, and I should grieve to see you deceived by her lies. Say nothing, but watch her silently, and help me to thwart her evil plots; but do not trust her, or beware.”

Now all this was altogether romantic and sensational, and I felt as if about to enter one of those delightfully dangerous houses we read of in novels, where perils, mysteries, and sins freely disport themselves, till the newcomer sets all to rights, after unheard of trials and escapes.

I arrived at twilight, just the proper time for the heroine to appear; and, as no one answered my modest solo on the rusty knocker, I walked in and looked about me. Yes, here was the long, shadowy hall, where the ghosts doubtless walked at midnight. Peering in at an open door on the right, I saw a parlor full of ancient furniture, faded, dusty, and dilapidated. Old portraits stared at me from the walls and a damp chill froze the marrow of my bones in the most approved style.

“The romance opens well,” I thought, and peeping in at an opposite door, beheld a luxurious apartment, full of the warm glow of firelight, the balmy breath of hyacinths and roses, the white glimmer of piano keys, and tempting rows of books along the walls.

The contrast between the two rooms was striking, and, after an admiring survey, I continued my explorations, thinking that I should not mind being “ministered to” in that inviting place when my work was done.

A third door showed me a plain, dull sitting room, with an old man napping in his easy-chair. I heard voices in the kitchen beyond, and entering there, beheld Puah the fiend. Unfortunately, for the dramatic effect of the tableaux, all I saw was a mild-faced old woman, buttering toast, while she conversed with her familiar, a comfortable gray cat.

The old lady greeted me kindly, but I fancied her faded blue eye had a weird expression and her amiable words were all a snare, though I own I was rather disappointed at the commonplace appearance of this humble Borgia.

She showed me to a tiny room, where I felt more like a young giantess than ever, and was obliged to stow away my possessions as snugly as in a ship`s cabin. When I presently descended, armed with a blue apron and “a heart for any fate,” I found the old man awake and received from him a welcome full of ancient courtesy and kindliness. Miss Eliza crept in like a timid mouse, looking so afraid of her buxom companion that I forgot my own shyness in trying to relieve hers. She was so enveloped in shawls that all I could discover was that my mistress was a very nervous little woman, with a small button of pale hair on the outside of her head and the vaguest notions of work inside. A few spasmodic remarks and many awkward pauses brought me to teatime, when Josephus appeared, as tall, thin, and cadaverous as ever. After his arrival there was no more silence, for he preached all suppertime something in this agreeable style.

“My young friend, our habits, as you see, are of the simplest. We eat in the kitchen, and all together, in the primitive fashion; for it suits my father and saves labor. I could wish more order and elegance; but my wishes are not consulted and I submit I live above these petty crosses, and, though my health suffers from bad cookery, I do not murmur. Only, I must say, in passing, that if you will make your battercakes green with saleratus, Puah, I shall feel it my duty to throw them out of the window. I am used to poison; but I cannot see the coals of this blooming girl`s stomach destroyed, as mine have been. And, speaking of duties, I may as well mention to you, Louisa, (I call you so in a truly fraternal spirit), that I like to find my study in order when I come down in the morning; for I often need a few moments of solitude before I face the daily annoyances of my life. I shall permit you to perform this light task, for you have some idea of order

(I see it in the formation of your brow), and feel sure that you will respect the sanctuary of thought. Eliza is so blind she does not see dust, and Puah enjoys devastating the one poor refuge I can call my own this side of the grave. We are all waiting for you, sir. My father keeps up the old formalities, you observe; and I endure them, though my views are more advanced."

The old gentleman hastily finished his tea and returned thanks, when his son stalked gloomily away, evidently oppressed with the burden of his wrongs, also, as I irreverently fancied, with the seven "green" flapjacks he had devoured during the sermon.

I helped wash up the cups, and during that domestic rite Puah chatted in what I should have considered a cheery, social way had I not been darkly warned against her wiles.

"You needn`t mind half Josephus says, my dear. He likes to hear himself talk and always goes on so before folks. I sometimes thinks his books and new ideas have sort of muddled his wits, for he is as full of notions as a paper is of pins; and he gets dreadfully put out if we don`t give in to `em. But, gracious me! they are so redicklus sometimes and so selfish I can`t allow him to make a fool of himself or plague Lizy. She don`t dare to say her soul is her own; so I have to stand up for her. His pa don`t know half his odd doings; for I try to keep the old gentleman comfortable and have to manage `em all, which is not an easy job I do assure you."

I had a secret conviction that she was right, but did not commit myself in any way, and we joined the social circle in the sitting room. The prospect was not a lively one, for the old gentleman nodded behind his newspaper. Eliza, with her head pinned up in a little blanket, slumbered on the sofa, Puah fell to knitting silently; and the plump cat dozed under the stove. Josephus was visible, artistically posed in the luxurious recesses of his cell, with the light beaming on his thoughtful brow, as he pored over a large volume or mused with upturned eye.

Having nothing else to do, I sat and stared at him, till, emerging from a deep reverie, with an effective start, he became conscious of my existence and beckoned me to approach the "sanctuary of thought" with a dramatic waft of his large hand.

I went, took possession of an easy chair, and prepared myself for elegant conversation. I was disappointed, however; for Josephus showed me a list of his favorite dishes, sole fruit of all that absorbing thought, and, with an earnestness that flushed his saffron countenance, gave me hints as to the proper preparation of these delicacies.

I mildly mentioned that I was not a cook; but was effectually silenced by being reminded that I came to be generally useful, to take his sister`s place, and see that the flame of life which burned so feebly in this earthly tabernacle was fed with proper fuel. Mince pies, Welsh rarebits, sausages, and strong coffee did not strike me as strictly spiritual fare; but I listened meekly and privately resolved to shift this awful responsibility to Puah`s shoulders.

Detecting me in gape, after an hour of this high converse, he presented me with an overblown rose, which fell to pieces before I got out of the room, pressed my hand, and dismissed me with a fervent “God bless you, child. Don`t forget the dropped eggs for breakfast.”

I was up betimes next morning and had the study in perfect order before the recluse appeared, enjoying a good prowl among the books as I worked and becoming so absorbed that I forgot the eggs, until a gusty sigh startled me, and I beheld Josephus, in dressing gown and slippers, languidly surveying the scene.

“Nay, do not fly,” he said, as I grasped my duster in guilty haste. “It pleases me to see you here and lends a sweet, domestic charm to my solitary room. I like that graceful cap, that housewifely apron, and I beg you to wear them often; for it refreshes my eye to see something tasteful, young, and womanly about me. Eliza makes a bundle of herself and Puah is simply detestable.”

He sank languidly into a chair and closed his eyes, as if the mere thought of his enemy was too much for him. I took advantage of this momentary prostration to slip away, convulsed with laughter at the looks and words of this bald-headed sentimentalist.

After breakfast I fell to work with a will, eager to show my powers and glad to put things to rights, for many hard jobs had evidently been waiting for a stronger arm than Puah`s and a more methodical head than Eliza`s.

Everything was dusty, moldy, shiftless, and neglected, except the domain of Josephus. Up-stairs the paper was dropping from the walls, the ancient furniture was all more or less dilapidated, and every hold and corner was full of relics tucked away by Puah, who was a regular old magpie. Rats and mice reveled in the empty rooms and spiders wove their tapestry undisturbed, for the old man would have nothing altered or repaired, and his part of the house was fast going to ruin.

I longed to have a grand “clearing up”; but was forbidden to do more than keep things in livable order. On the whole, it was fortunate, for I soon found that my hands would be kept busy with the realms of Josephus, whose ethereal being shrank from dust, shivered at a cold breath, and needed much cosseting with dainty food, hot fires, soft beds, and endless service, else, as he expressed it, the frail reed would break.

I regret to say that a time soon came when I felt supremely indifferent as to the breakage, and very skeptical as to the fragility of a reed that ate, slept, dawdled, and scolded so energetically. The rose that fell to pieces so suddenly was a good symbol of the rapid disappearance of all the romantic delusions I had indulged in for a time. A week`s acquaintance with the inmates of this old house quite settled my opinion, and further developments only confirmed it.

Miss Eliza was a nonentity and made no more impression upon me than a fly. The old gentleman passed his days in a placid sort of doze and took no notice of what went on about him. Puah had been a faithful drudge for years, and, instead of being a “wretch,” was, as I soon satisfied myself, a motherly old soul, with no malice in her. The secret of Josephus` dislike was that the reverend tyrant ruled the house, and all obeyed him but Puah, who had nursed him as a baby, boxed his ears as a boy, and was not afraid of him even when he became a man and a minister. I soon repented of my first suspicions, and grew fond of her, for without my old gossip I should have fared ill when my day of tribulation came.

At first I innocently accepted the fraternal invitations to visit the study, feeling that when my days` work was done I earned a right to rest and read. But I soon found that this was not the idea. I was not to read; but to be read to. I was not to enjoy the flowers, pictures, fire, and books; but to keep them in order for my lord to enjoy. I was also to be a passive bucket, into which he was to pour all manner of philosophic, metaphysical, and sentimental rubbish. I was to serve his needs, soothe his sufferings, and sympathize with all his sorrows — be a galley slave, in fact.

As soon as I clearly understood this, I tried to put an end to it by shunning the study and never lingering there an instant after my work was done. But it availed little, for Josephus demanded much sympathy and was bound to have it. So he came and read poems while I washed dishes, discussed his pet problems all meal-times, and put reproachful notes under my door, in which were comically mingled complaints of neglect and orders for dinner.

I bore it as long as I could, and then freed my mind in a declaration of independence, delivered in the kitchen, where he found me scrubbing the hearth. It was not an impressive attitude for an orator, nor was the occupation one a girl would choose when receiving calls; but I have always felt grateful for the intense discomfort of that moment, since it gave me the courage to rebel outright. Stranded on a small island of mat, in a sea of soapsuds, I brandished a scrubbing brush, as I indignantly informed him that I came to be a companion to his sister, not to him, and I should keep that post or none. This I followed up by reproaching him with the delusive reports he had given me of the place and its duties, and assuring him that I should not stay long unless matters mended.

“But I offer you lighter tasks, and you refuse them,” he began, still hovering in the doorway, whither he had hastily retired when I opened my batteries.

“But I don`t like the tasks, and consider them much worse than hard work” was my ungrateful answer, as I sat upon my island, with the softsoap conveniently near.

“Do you mean to say you prefer to scrub the hearth to sitting in my charming room while I read Hegel to you?” he demanded, glaring down upon me.

“Infinitely,” I responded promptly, and emphasized my words by beginning to scrub with a zeal that made the bricks white with foam.

“Is it possible!” and, with a groan at my depravity, Josephus retired, full of ungodly wrath.

I remember that I immediately burst into jocund song, so that no doubt might remain in his mind, and continued to warble cheerfully until the task was done. I also remember that I cried heartily when I got to my room, I was so vexed, disappointed, and tired. But my bower was so small I should soon have swamped the furniture if I had indulged copiously in tears; therefore I speedily dried them up, wrote a comic letter home, and waited with interest to see what would happen next.

Far be it from me to accuse one of the nobler sex of spite or the small revenge of underhanded annoyances and slights to one who could not escape and would not retaliate; but after that day a curious change came over the spirit of that very unpleasant dream. Gradually all the work of the house had been slipping into my hands; for Eliza was too poorly to help and direct, and Puah too old to do much besides the cooking. About this time I found that even the roughest work was added to my share, for Josephus was unusually feeble and no one was hired to do his chores. Having made up my mind to go when the month was out, I said nothing, but dug paths, brought water from the well, split kindlings, and sifted ashes, like a true Cinderella.

There never had been any pretense of companionship with Eliza, who spend her days muffling over the fire, and seldom exerted herself except to find odd jobs for me to do — rusty knives to clean, sheets to turn, old stockings to mend, and, when all else failed, some paradise of moths and mice to be cleared up; for the house was full of such “glory holds.”

If I remonstrated, Eliza at once dissolved into tears and said she must do as she was told; Puah begged me to hold on until spring, when things would be much better; and pity pleaded for the poor souls. But I don`t think I could have stood it if my promise had not bound me, for when the fiend said “Budge” honor said “Budge not” and I stayed.

But, being a mortal worm, I turned now and then when ireful Josephus trod upon me too hard, especially in the matter of boot-blacking. I really don`t know why that is considered such humiliating work for a woman; but so it is, and there I drew the line. I would have cleaned the old man`s shoes without a murmur; but he preferred to keep their native rustiness intact. Eliza never went out, and Puah affected carpet-slippers of the Chinese-junk pattern. Josephus, however, plumed himself upon his feet, which, like his nose, were large, and never took his walks abroad without his boots in a high state of polish. He had brushed them himself at first; but soon after the explosion I discovered a pair of muddy boots in the shed, set suggestively near the blacking-box. I did not take the hint; feeling instinctively that this amiable being was trying how much I would bear for the sake of peace.

The boots remained untouched; and another pair soon came to keep them company, whereat I smiled wickedly as I chopped just kindlings enough for my own use. Day after day the collection grew, and neither party gave in. Boots were succeeded by shoes, then rubbers gave a pleasing variety to the long line, and then I knew the end was near.

“Why are not my boots attended to?” demanded Josephus, one evening, when obliged to go out.

“I`m sure I don`t know,” was Eliza`s helpless answer.

“I told Louizy I guessed you`d want some of `em before long,” observed Puah with an exasperating twinkle in her old eye.

“And what did she say?” asked my lord with an ireful whack of his velvet slippers as he cast them down.

“Oh! she said she was so busy doing your other work you`d have to do that yourself; and I thought she was about right.”

“Louizy” heard it all through the slid, and could have embraced the old woman for her words, but kept still till Josephus had resumed his slippers with a growl and retired to the shed, leaving Eliza in tears, Puah chuckling, and the rebellious handmaid exulting in the china-closet.

Alas! for romance and the Christian virtues, several pairs of boots were cleaned that night, and my sinful soul enjoyed the spectacle of the reverend bootblack at his task. I even found my “fancy work,” as I called the evening job of paring a bucketful of hard russets with a dull knife, much cheered by the shoe brush accompaniment played in the shed.

Thunder-clouds rested upon the martyr`s brow at breakfast, and I was as much ignored as the cat. And what a relief that was! The piano was locked up, so were the bookcases, the newspapers mysteriously disappeared, and a solemn silence reigned at table, for no one dared to talk when that gifted tongue was mute. Eliza fled from the gathering storm and had a comfortable fit of neuralgia in her own room, where Puah nursed her, leaving me to skirmish with the enemy.

It was not a fair fight, and that experience lessened my respect for mankind immensely. I did my best however — grubbed about all day and amused by dreary evenings as well as I could; too proud even to borrow a book, lest it should seem like surrender. What a long month it was, and how eagerly I counted the hours of that last week, for my time was up Saturday and I hoped to be off at once. But when I announced my intention such dismay fell upon Eliza that my heart was touched, and Puah so urgently begged me to stay till they could get some one that I consented to remain a few days longer, and wrote post-haste to my mother, telling her to send a substitute quickly or I should do something desperate.

That blessed woman, little dreaming of all the woes I had endured, advised me to be patient, to do the generous thing, and be sure I should not regret it in the end. I groaned, submitted, and did regret it all the days of my life.

Three mortal weeks I wanted; for, though two other victims came, I was implored to set them going, and tried to do it. But both fled after a day or two, condemning the place as a very hard one and calling me a fool to stand it another hour. I entirely agreed with them on both points, and, when I had cleared up after the second incapable lady, I tarried not for the coming of a third, but clutched my property and announced my departure by the next train.

Of course, Eliza wept, Puah moaned, the old man politely regretted, and the younger one washed his hands of the whole affair by shutting himself up in his room and forbidding me to say farewell because “he could not bear it.” I laughed, and fancied it done for effect then; but I soon understood it better and did not laugh.

At the last moment, Eliza nervously tucked a sixpenny pocketbook into my hand and shrouded herself in the little blanket with a sob. But Puah kissed me kindly and whispered, with an odd look: “Don`t blame us for anything. Some folks is liberal and some ain`t.” I thanked the poor old soul for her kindness to me and trudged gayly away to the station, whither my property had preceded me on a wheelbarrow, hired at my own expense.

I never shall forget that day. A bleak March afternoon, a sloppy, lonely road, and one hoarse crow stalking about a field, so like Josephus that I could not resist throwing a snowball at him. Behind me stood the dull old house, no longer either mysterious or romantic in my disenchanted eyes; before me rumbled the barrow, bearing my dilapidated wardrobe; and in my pocket reposed what I fondly hoped was, if not a liberal, at least an honest return for seven weeks of the hardest work I ever did.

Unable to resist the desire to see what my earnings were, I opened the purse and beheld four dollars.

I have had a good many bitter minutes in my life; but one of the bitterest came to me as I stood there in the windy road, with the sixpenny pocket-book open before me, and looked from my poor chapped, grimy, chilblained hands to the paltry sum that was considered reward for all the hard and humble labor they had done.

A girl`s heart is a sensitive thing. And mine had been very full lately; for it had suffered many of the trials that wound deeply yet cannot be told; so I think it was but natural that my first impulse was to go straight back to that sacred study and fling this insulting money at the feet of him who sent it. But I was so boiling over with indignation that I could not trust myself in his presence, lest I should be unable to resist the temptation to shake him, in spite of his cloth.

No. I would go home, show my honorable wounds, tell my pathetic tale, and leave my parents to avenge my wrongs. I did so; but over that harrowing scene I drop a veil, for my feeble pen refuses to depict the emotions of my outraged family. I will merely mention that the four dollars went back and the reverend Josephus never heard the last of it in that neighborhood.

My experiment seemed a dire failure and I mourned it as such for years; but more than once in my life I have been grateful for that serio-comico experience, since it has taught me many lessons. One of the most useful of these has been the power of successfully making a companion, not a servant, of those whose aid I need, and helping to gild their honest wages with the sympathy and justice which can sweeten the humblest and lighten the hardest task.

LITTLE WOMEN LETTERS FROM THE HOUSE OF ALCOTT

This collection of biographical letters and notes was first published in 1915.

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CHAPTER I

The “Really, Truly” True

WHEN “Little Women,” the play, reopened to many readers the pages of “Little Women,” the book, that delightful chronicle of family life, dramatist and producer learned from many unconscious sources the depth of Louisa M. Alcott’s human appeal. Standing one night at the back of the theater as the audience was dispersing, they listened to its comments on the play.

“A wonderful picture of home life, only we don’t have such homes,” said a big, prosperous-looking man to his wife, with a touch of regret in his voice.

“Yes,” agreed his young daughter, a tall, slender, graceful girl, as she snuggled down cosily into her fur coat and tucked a bunch of violets away from the touch of the frosty night, “it is beautiful; but, daddy, it isn’t real. There never was such a family.”

But it is real; there was such a family, and in letters, journals, and illustration this little book gives the history of the four Little Women, the Alcott girls, whom Louisa immortalized in her greatest story: Anna, who is Meg in “Little Women”; Louisa, the irrepressible and ambitious Jo; Elizabeth, the little Beth of the book; and Abba May, the graceful and statuesque Amy.

Rare influences were at work in this ideal American home, where the intellectual and brilliant father was gifted in all ways except those that led to material success, and the wise and gentle mother combined with her loyalty and devotion to her husband a stanch, practical common sense, which more than once served to guide the frail Alcott bark through troubled seas.

Following her remarkable success as a writer of short stories, Louisa M. Alcott was asked for a book. She said at first it was impossible, but repeated requests from her publishers brought from her the announcement that the only long story she could write would be about her own family. “Little Women” resulted, and, in erecting this House of Delight for young and old, Louisa Alcott builded better than she knew. Her Jo has been the inspiration of countless girls, and the many-sidedness of her character is indicated by the widely diverging lines of endeavor which Jo’s example has suggested to the girl readers of the story.

In the case of the two editors, both from early childhood found their inspiration in Jo. One, patterning after her idol, sought success in a stage career, beginning to “act” before a mirror, with a kitchen apron for a train and a buttonhook for a dagger. The other, always with a pencil in hand, first copied Jo by writing “lurid tales” for the weekly sensation papers, and later emerged into Newspaper Row.

It was more than a year after the success of “Little Women” as a play had become a part of theatrical history that they visited the scenes hallowed by the memories of the Little Women. They wished to see Concord together, so they made a Sentimental Journey to the House of Alcott.

The sun was shining, and the air was crisp — just such a day as Miss Alcott described in the Plumfield harvest home, the last chapter in “Little Women.” They spent hours in Orchard House, touching reverently the small personal effects of Louisa M. Alcott, seeing the shelf between the windows in that little upper room, where she wrote and dreamed. They even climbed to the garret and wondered which window was her favorite scribbling seat, with a tin kitchen for her manuscripts, a pile of apples for her refreshment, and Scrabble, the bewhiskered rat, for her playfellow.

Through the woods back of Orchard House they followed the winding pathway to the Hall of Philosophy, half hidden among the trees, where Bronson Alcott had his Conversations, where Emerson and Thoreau were often heard, and the most intellectual debates of the century took place.

At sunset they visited Sleepy Hollow, the resting place of the Alcotts, with Emerson, Thoreau, and Hawthorne close by — a goodly company, neighbors still as they were for so many years when they made Concord America’s literary shrine.

Evening came, and the two pilgrims read together the Alcott journals and letters. The ink was faded, the quaint, old-fashioned writing was hard to decipher, but, beginning with a letter to Louisa written by Bronson Alcott when his daughter was seven years old, they read on until the dawn.

Only one result could be expected from such an experience. They asked permission to publish the letters and such portions of the journals as would most completely reveal the rare spiritual companionship existing between the Alcott parents and children. And, asking, they were refused, because of a feeling that the letters and journals were intimate family records, to be read, not by the many, but by the few. This same sentiment withheld the dramatization of “Little Women” for many years.

“You forget,” they argued, holding fast to the dimly written pages, “that Bronson Alcott and Louisa Alcott are a part of America’s literary heritage. They belong to the nation, to the world, not alone to you.”

This course of reasoning finally prevailed, but not without many months of waiting. And thus, with the consent of the Alcott heirs, the book of “Little Women Letters from the House of Alcott” came to be.

CHAPTER II

I

The Alcott Boy

ONCE upon a time in the little town of Wolcott, Connecticut, was born a boy destined to offer to the world new and beautiful thoughts. He was laughed at and misunderstood; but the thoughts were truth, and they have lived, although the boy grew weary and old and passed on.

The boy was Amos Bronson Alcott. He was a country lad, used from infancy to the rugged life of the farm, with its self-denial and makeshifts. The seeming disadvantage, however, proved quite the opposite. His close communion with Nature brought him nearer to the truths of life. For him God ceased to be a mythical object to be studied and read about on Sunday; but, as he roamed the fields and climbed the hills, the lad found Him in the rocks and the woodlands, and in the sparkling streams. He became a reality. The boy and God were friends.

Of schooling he had little. When work at the farm permitted, he attended the country school near his father's house. "Our copies," he told his little daughters, "were set by the schoolmaster in books made of a few sheets of foolscap, stitched together and ruled with a leather plummet. We used ink made of maple and oak bark, which we manufactured ourselves. With this I began keeping a diary of my doings."

This was when the boy was twelve. His hours at school were few, but as he went about his daily tasks on the farm, his thoughts grew and grew until his mental stature far exceeded his physical. He read as he guided the plow along the furrow, sometimes unmindful of his work until a sudden punch from a neglected handle, as the plow struck a stone, would bring him back to earth with a thump. He sowed seeds in the moist, sweet earth, but his face was turned to the skies, and he knew the clouds and the stars. When he gathered firewood, his eyes were keen for the soft, dainty mosses, the clinging lichens. As he picked berries for the home table, he never missed the whirr of a bird wing or passed unnoticed the modest flowers half hidden in the soil. Nature was his library, and she spread out her choicest treasures to this growing boy.

A love for all of God's creations characterized him. He was fond, not only of the growing things in the wood, but of all life. His love for animals amounted almost to a passion, one reason for his being a strict vegetarian and insisting upon bringing up his little family on a vegetable diet. But in boyhood it was not always clear whether humanity or the craving for knowledge made him so considerate of the plodding team in the field. Never was team more carefully tended. Many were its hours of grazing, when the noonday sun rode high in the heavens, and the Alcott boy, book in hand, curled up under the shade of a gigantic elm and read until the shadows began to lengthen. But these lapses were only occasional, for the lad was faithful to his tasks, except when he yielded to the lure of the printed page.

When scarcely more than a child he began to keep a record of his books and his reading, showing the first traces of the reflective, introspective quality of mind which later led him to set down in letters and unpublished manuscripts his inmost thoughts. He cultivated the same habits of thought in his children, one reason, doubtless, for Louisa's accurate and realistic descriptions of the lives of the four Little Women of the Alcott family.

His favorite books in boyhood, and, for that matter, in manhood, were the Bible and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," which he read and reread and commented upon. Years later he mentions in his journal that he made it a practice to read "Pilgrim's Progress" every year, which is a remarkable record to the modern boy and girl who find it difficult to struggle through that wonderful allegory even once.

Bronson Alcott took his chance and made a stepping-stone of every difficulty. Each obstacle he encountered in getting an education created in him an even stronger determination to gain one. The modern boy has the world of books opened wide to him through the library and the free school. The treasures of art are spread out before him in the museums. He is surrounded by helps. The boy of to-day is studied as an entity. The boy of the last century could tell quite a different story.

So the Alcott boy, passing long hours in the woods, reading, thinking, getting close to Nature and to God, walked as one apart, seeing the invisible. While still a boy, he began casting off the garment of a conventional creed and to think for himself of God, the creation, of life, unconsciously putting from him the trammeling, cumbersome conventions with which man has often hidden truth.

Out of this the man Alcott emerged — a great soul.

II

The Alcott Man

With Bronson Alcott the craving for knowledge was scarcely stronger than the craving for adventure, so it is not surprising that in the first flush of young manhood he did not settle down to life on the farm. He longed for the great world lying beyond the hills and valleys of peaceful New England. He wanted experience, and experience he had.

He went South, hoping to teach school, as he had original ideas on the training of children. Unsuccessful in this, he decided to be a peddler, naïvely remarking that "honesty of purpose could dignify any profession."

Think of the courage of this boy, for he was scarcely more than a boy, a philosopher at heart, living in a world of dreams and books, his ambitions all for intellectual rather than material achievement, tramping the southern countryside, undauntedly peddling buttons, elastic, pins and needles, and supplying all the small wants of the country housewife! Often he encountered rebuffs, sometimes he had a hearty welcome, for the visit of the country peddler was eagerly awaited by the children. At times, when night came and he was far from the shelter of an inn, he had to beg a lodging from some planter. On one such occasion, as he entered the grounds, he saw a huge sign, "Beware the dog." A shout from the house also warned him, and he saw dashing toward him a savage-looking dog, powerful enough to have torn to pieces the slender young peddler-student. But his love for animals triumphed. Alcott stretched out his hand. The huge creature stopped short; then, recognizing a friend and a fearless one, he bounded on, tail wagging, barking joyously, snuggling his nose into the young man's palm, which he licked as he escorted his new-found friend to the house. Animals always recognized in Alcott an understanding comrade.

From most of these trips Alcott brought back money to add to the scanty funds at home, but on one memorable occasion the love of finery proved stronger than the necessity for saving, and he returned to the farm penniless, but dressed in the latest fashion, having used his savings for a wardrobe that was the wonder of the countryside. That one debauch of clothes satisfied him for life; after that his tastes were markedly simple. With him the "dandy period" was short-lived indeed. That he repented bitterly of this one excess of folly is shown in his journals, where he sets down minutely what to him was a mistake that amounted almost to a sin. As a rule, he was singularly free from folly. His thoughts were too high, his ideals too lofty, for him to be long concerned with trifles such as clothes, and the next expenditure mentioned in his journal is for the "Vicar of Wakefield" and Johnson's "Rasselas." Ever impractical, one likes him the better for the little human moment when the vanities of the world overcame him.

At last he secured a school, and then began the realization of his ideals regarding the teaching of children. His methods were original and highly successful, especially with the very young. He established a mental kindergarten, and the fame of his teaching spread abroad. Through his work as a teacher he achieved his greatest happiness, for it led to his meeting with the woman who was destined to become his wife.

As the result of correspondence between himself and Mr. May of Brooklyn, Connecticut, whose attention had been attracted to the work of the young teacher, Alcott, then twenty-eight years old, drove from the Wolcott home to Brooklyn, where he met Abigail May of Boston, who was visiting her brother. With both it was love at first sight, a love that grew into a perfect spiritual union.

It seemed almost providential that Bronson Alcott should have come into Abigail May's life at just this time, when her heart had been touched by its first great sorrow — the loss of her mother. Hitherto she had been a light-hearted girl, fond of dancing and of the material side of life. The young philosopher, with his dreams and his ideals, brought a new interest into her now lonely life, and all that was spiritual in her nature responded as he freely discussed his plans and ambitions with her. In her he found both sympathy and understanding.

A year of letter-writing, a frank and honest exchange of thought, brought out the harmony of their natures and developed in both a sense of oneness, laying a firm foundation for the comradeship which was not broken through all the years, even when the wife and mother passed into the Great Beyond.

The Alcott-May courtship was ideal. Retaining the heaven that lay about him in his infancy, keeping his close companionship with God and God's great laboratory, Nature, Bronson Alcott demanded something more than mere physical attraction in choosing his wife. A certain quaint circumspection characterized their love-making. Abigail May once wrote: "Mr. Alcott's views on education were very attractive, and I was charmed by his modesty," and long after their engagement she spoke of her lover as "her friend." He was, and so he continued to be in the highest sense of the word.

So satisfying were those friendship-courtship days, that apparently both were loath to end them, for another twelvemonth passed before the announcement of their betrothal, and it was nearly three years from the date of their first meeting before their marriage in King's Chapel, Boston, where the brother who had been the means of bringing them together performed the ceremony.

As their marriage day approached, there was little festivity and none of the rush that usually precedes a modern wedding. Everything was simple, quiet, and sure.

This is Bronson Alcott's letter, asking a friend to act as best man at his wedding.

Dear Sir:

Permit me to ask the favor of your calling at Col. May’s at 4 o’clock precisely on Sunday afternoon next, to accompany me and my friend Miss May to King’s Chapel.

With esteem,
A. B. Alcott

Thursday, May 20,
112 Franklin St. 1830.

So began the Alcott pilgrimage, their fortune consisting of love and faith and brains. In these they were rich indeed, and thus closed another chapter in the life of the gentle philosopher, of whom Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: “Our Alcott has only just missed being a seraph.”

CHAPTER III

The Alcott Children

FOR some months after their marriage the Alcotts lived in Boston, where the young enthusiast taught a school for infants. Again his fame as a teacher traveled, and he received an offer from the Quakers of Philadelphia to start a school there, an offer so tempting that the Alcotts moved to Germantown, Pennsylvania, where Anna and Louisa were born.

Eugenics and prenatal influence were not discussed then as they are to-day, but in the Alcott family nearly a century ago they were being thought and lived. Bronson Alcott and his wife considered children an expression, not of themselves, but of divinity, and as such to be accepted as a trust, rather than as a gratification of their own human longing for fatherhood and motherhood. They felt it their parental privilege rather than their duty to aid the human development of the child and thus further the fulfillment of its destiny. Each little soul was humbly asked for and reverently prepared for. From the moment they knew their prayer had been granted, the individuality and rights of that soul were respected. It was considered as a little guest that must be made happy and comfortable, carefully cherished, mentally and physically, while its fleshly garment was being prepared and the little personality made ready for its earthly appearance. How careful they were of every thought and influence, for to both parents this period was the most sacred and wonderful in their lives and in the lives of their children.

The depth of his joy and the simplicity of his faith are exquisitely expressed in the lines which Bronson Alcott wrote before the birth of his first child, Anna:

To An Expectant Mother

The long advancing hour draws nigh — the hour
When life’s young pulse begins its mystic play,
And deep affection’s dreams of Form or Joy
Shall be unveiled, a bodily presence
To thy yearning heart and fond maternal eye,
The primal Soul, a semblance of thine own,
Its high abode shall leave and dwell in day,

Thyself its forming Parent. A miracle, indeed,
Shall nature work. Thou shalt become
The bearing mother of an Infant Soul —
Its guardian spirit to its home above.
But yet erewhile the lagging moments come
That layeth the living, conscious, burden down,
Firm faith may rest in hope. Accordant toils
Shall leave no time for fear, nor doubt, nor gloom.
Love, peace, and virtue, are all born of Pain,
And He who rules o’er these is ever good.
The joyous promise is to her who trusts,
Who trusting, gains the vital boon she asks,
And meekly asking, learns to trust aright.

Louisa, the second child, born on her father’s birthday, was the most intellectual and the most resourceful of the Alcott children, reflecting in her own buoyant personality the happy conditions existing before and at the time of her birth, when her father had attained his greatest material prosperity and was also realizing his mental ambitions in his little school, and her mother was temporarily relieved from the cares that so often weighed heavily upon her.

Shortly before the birth of Elizabeth the father makes this entry in his journal:

The Advent Cometh

Daily am I in expectation of beholding with the eye of sense, the spirit that now lingers on the threshold of this terrestrial life, and only awaits the bidding of the Reaper within, to usher itself into the presence of mortals. It standeth at the door and waiteth for admission to the exterior scene of things.... Let the time come. Two little ones in advance await its coming; and greetings of joy shall herald its approach.

The birth of Elizabeth is followed by this entry in his journal:

At sunset this day a daughter was born to us.

One of the most trying of the Alcott family’s experiences came after the birth of Elizabeth, when Bronson Alcott, again in Boston, aroused a storm of protest with his radical teachings and his advanced interpretations of the Bible. Shocked that the city where he expected to find sympathy and encouragement should have repudiated him, his school disrupted and abject poverty his lot, broken mentally and physically, he met with another cruel disappointment in the death of his infant son. Yet even then there was no word of bitterness, and no mention is made in his journal of the father’s grief. Indirectly it is expressed in a subsequent entry announcing the birth of the fourth daughter, Abba May.

She was born under sunny skies. The storm had passed, and the Alcott family had removed to Concord, where they enjoyed many of their happiest years. A presage of May Alcott's artistic gifts, her queenly bearing, elegance, and charm, all familiar to readers of "Little Women," is found in this entry in the father's journal:

July, 1840.

A new life has arrived to us (July 26th). She was born with the dawn, and is a proud little Queen, not deigning to give us the light of her royal presence, but persists in sleeping all the time, without notice of the broad world or ourselves. Providence, it seems, decrees that we shall provide selectest ministries alone, and so sends us successive daughters of Love to quicken the Sons of Life. We joyfully acquiesce in the Divine behest and are content to rear women for the future world. As yet the ministry is unknown in the culture of the nations, but the hour draws near when love shall be felt as a chosen Bride of Wisdom, and the celestial pair preside over all the household of mankind.

Bronson Alcott did not feel his responsibility as a father alone; he appreciated his own debt to his children, the mental and spiritual help that came to him through them, an appreciation that found expression in this poem, entered in his journal before the birth of Elizabeth:

June, 1835

Invocation to a Child

She comes from Heaven, she dawns upon my sight,
O'er earth's dark scenes to pour her holy light!
In sense and blest the Infinite to see
And feel the heavenly mystery — *To Be.*

She comes — in Nature's tenderest, fondest name —
Daughter of God — 'tis she — the same — the same
Mine is she too — my own — my latest child,
Myself, wrapt in Divinity, yet unbeguiled!

Blest Infant! God's and mine! yet to me given,
That I might feel anew my Being's Heaven —
In love and faith to urge my human way,
Till conscious time be lost in Immortality!

Love thee I will; for thou didst first love me —
My faith shall quicken as I dwell on thee,
Thy Spirit lift me from this “Grave of Things,”
And bear me homeward, to the King of Kings.

CHAPTER IV

The Alcott Baby Book

BRONSON ALCOTT wrote the first Baby Book, a book which throws new light on the character of the lovable philosopher, showing one of New England’s intellectual leaders as a very human and lovable man as well as “a fond and foolish father.”

His Baby Book, however, contains no minute record of the first tooth, or when the baby began to say “Goo” and “Pitty light”; rather it is the father’s earnest effort to learn how early in life the infant mind begins to awaken, to indicate comprehension, thought, or logic. As Maeterlinck studied the bee, so Alcott studied his children, and his findings are a revelation, even to-day, when the study of the child has become a science.

Mr. Alcott considered vital the development of the child’s individuality and mind; the body seemed to him of secondary importance, for this disregard of the material care of his family he has been severely censured; but, not recognizing in his own life the claims of the body, devoting all his energies to mental growth, it is not surprising that he found his fatherly duty in the guidance of his children’s minds. His firm faith in the admonition, “Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven, and all these things shall be added unto you,” was to him excuse enough for considering the intellect more than the body.

His practical shortcomings reaped a rich and unexpected reward in the next generation, for Louisa M. Alcott would probably not have developed her original and highly entertaining literary gift without the vicissitudes caused by her father’s impractical nature and his sublime faith that at all times and in all emergencies the Lord would provide. He did provide; but Louisa was usually the channel, and many of her stories were written under the whip of stern necessity.

Doing without has its advantages. The Alcott children, never overfed, overentertained, overburdened to baby boredom with dolls and toys and games, developed appreciation, observation, and ingenuity. The creative faculty was aroused. They found resources within themselves. What a handbook Louisa might have written on How to be Happy though Poor!

Mrs. Alcott’s keen sense of humor, a characteristic inherited by Louisa, often came to her rescue and allowed her to get fun out of a harassing situation. In a letter to her brother, Colonel May, praising her husband’s intellect, she laughingly comments upon his disregard of physical necessities: “I am not sure that we shall not blush into obscurity and contemplate into starvation.”

But, to get back to the baby book, or, as Mr. Alcott called it, “the psychological history,” it was started with a high and unselfish motive; it was developed to an astonishing degree. Its purpose and scope are best expressed in this extract from Mr. Alcott’s journal:

The history of a human mind during its progressive stages of earthly experience has never as yet, I believe, been attempted. Faithfully compiled, from verified data, it would be a treasure of wisdom to all mankind, replete with light to the metaphysical and ethical inquirer. Comparative philosophy deduced from an observation of man during all circumstances and stages of his existence is a thing yet unthought of among us. From such a work the unity of Humanity might be revealed.

When Anna was born, the father began keeping a record of her “physical and intellectual progress.” When she was seven weeks old, her mother wrote: “It seems as if she were conscious of his observations and desirous of furnishing him daily with an item for this record.”

The following excerpt from the father’s diary shows how well Anna succeeded in her baby attempt:

I am much interested in the progress of my little girl, now five months old, which I have recorded from the day of her birth. This record has swollen to a hundred pages. I have attempted to discover, as far as this could be done by external indication, the successive steps of her physical, mental and moral advancement.

Moral advancement of a baby five months old!

Birth of Louisa

On November 29, 1832, his thirty-third birthday and also the natal day of his friend, Ellery Channing, the poet, Mr. Alcott chronicles an “interesting event,” how interesting the father little dreamed, nor how important, not alone to the house of Alcott, but to the world. Under the heading of Circumstances, the father thus records the birth of Louisa May Alcott:

A daughter born, on the 29th. ulto., my birthday, being 33 years of age. This is a most interesting event. Unless those ties which connect it with others are formed, the wants of the soul become morbid and all its fresh and primal affections become dim and perverted.... Few can be happy shut out of the nursery of the soul.

While the New England philosopher was studying the development of his little daughters and deducing therefrom facts for his psychological history, these same little daughters were developing him, for, as the child nature unfolded, the father’s understanding of childhood expanded.

Thus the baby book grew:

The influence of children I regard as important to my own improvement and happiness. It is also necessary to the prosecution of my studies. Dwelling in the primal regions which I wish to explore, they are the purest manifestations of its phenomena, and the only subjects from which humanity is to be interpreted in its purity.

When Anna was three years old and Louisa eighteen months, the father writes in his journal:

I passed some time with the children, fitting up their playthings, conversing with them and learning as far as I could through the subtle meaning of looks, accents and gestures, their thoughts and feelings. The avenues to the spirit are all open, but how dim are our perceptions, how cold our sympathies, to appreciate the pure and bright things which glitter in the arena of the young mind! How little of this fairy land do we know — we, whose early associations have all been swept from the heart — over whose spirits have passed the cold winds, the pelting storms, withering and destroying the heart’s young verdure! What is there to unite us with the spirit of a child? What have we in common with its joyous yearning for the beautiful, its trust in human sayings, its deep love for those on whom it relies for attention and support, its vivid picturing of ideal life, its simplicity, its freedom from prejudice and false sentiment? Where are these to be seen in our dim nature?

He might have answered the question by looking within himself. Child companionship kept alive the spirit of the Alcott boy, which constantly shone through the man’s philosophy. As the boy saw in every rock and tree and flower an expression of the Infinite, is it any wonder that the man should have recognized God’s higher manifestation in the child, and should have written in his journal these lines, which are the very glorification of fatherhood and reveal the sacredness with which he looked upon his stewardship?

He who deals with the child deals — did he know it — with the Infinite. Within the young spirit committed to his care are infinite capacities to be filled, infinite energies to be developed, and on him devolves the amazing responsibility — sacred, personal, all his own — of filling these capacities, unfolding these energies, from the stores and life of his own spirit. This is his office as a parent. But how can he who knows nothing of the Infinite within himself call it forth and direct its forces in others?

From the first, Louisa must have shown strong individuality and unusual tendencies, for Mr. Alcott’s notes on Louisa are entitled “Observations on the Vital Phenomena of My Second Child.” A more vital, lovable, contradictory specimen of childhood cannot be imagined. Blessed with her father’s brilliancy of mind, her mother’s quick wit and love of fun, Louisa furnished a problem for endless study. She was less than two years old when her individuality had so asserted itself that her father found himself puzzled and admitted that elements were finding their way into his observations of whose origin he could give no account. “My analysis, however accurate and elaborate, was still imperfect, and I was left in doubt. I had made no provision for the admission of innate influences from the mind itself.”

Here is a quaint little record of the Alcott babies’ school days, when Anna was four years old and Louisa a little more than two:

At school Anna reads, marks and listens to conversations and stories. Louisa works with her in all except the reading and marking. They have a playroom, where they enjoy their own amusements, uninterrupted by the presence of adults — often a bar to the genuine happiness of childhood. Anna reads simple sentences from Leffanoch’s Primer, writes intelligibly on tablets and slates, and is improving in work and manners.

(This of a baby of four.)

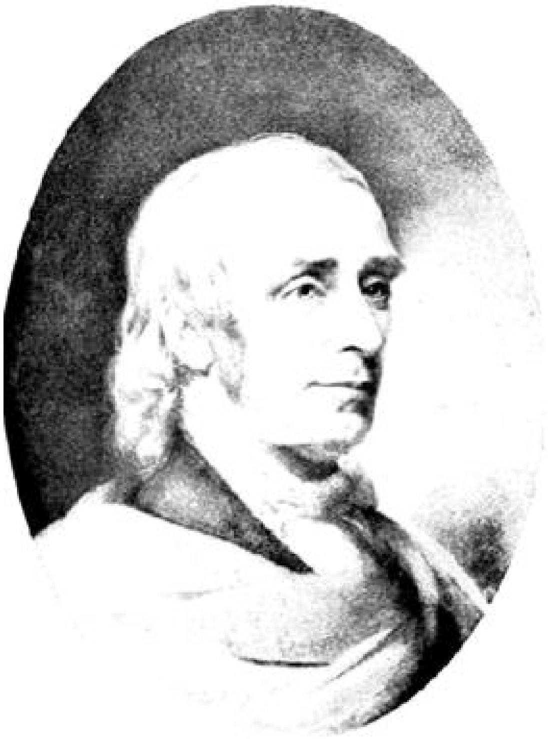
A spiritual and moral inventory of the progress of Anna and Louisa is set down by the father when his daughters had reached the dignified ages of six and four:

The children have improved under my training. Anna, who has been with me more of the time than Louisa, has been greatly benefited. She is happier, more capable of self control, more docile and obeys from love and faith. She has fine elements for excellence, moral and intellectual. If she does not evince a pure and exalted character, it will be our failure, not hers, in the improvement of her natural endowments.

Louisa is yet too young for the formation of just views of her character. She manifests uncommon activity and force of mind at present, and is much in advance of her sister at the same age; example has done much to call forth her nature. She is more active and practical than Anna. Anna is ideal, sentimental. Louisa is practical, energetic. The first imagines much more than she can realize; the second, by force of will and practical talent, realizes all that she conceives — but conceives less; understanding, rather than imagination — the gift of her sister — seems to be her prominent faculty. She finds no difficulty in developing ways and means to obtain her purpose; while her sister, aiming at much, imagining ideal forms of good, and shaping them out so vividly in her mind that they become actual enjoyments, fails, when she attempts to realize them in nature — she has been dwelling on the higher and more speculative relations of things.

Both represent interesting forms of character, both have wide and useful spheres of action indicated in their conformation and will doubtless if continued to us, be real blessings.

That they did prove real blessings the history of the Alcott family has shown.



A. Bronson Alcott at the Age of 53.
From the portrait by Mrs. Hildreth.

How many fathers ever acknowledge their spiritual debt to the gift of fatherhood as has Bronson Alcott:

I know not how much more spiritual I am from the parental relation (he writes), how much I have been indebted to them for the light that hath dawned upon my own mind from the radiance of their simple spirits. Certain it is that the more I associate with them in the simple ways they love, the more do I seem to revere. Verily had I not been called to associate with children, had I not devoted myself to the study of human nature in its period of infancy and childhood, I should never have found the tranquil repose, the steady faith, the vivid hope that now sheds a glory and a dignity around the humble path of my life. Childhood hath saved me.

Out of his theories, his studies, and meditations came a sublime ambition, a desire to become a laborer in the “Field of the Soul.”

Infancy I shall invest with a glory — a spirituality which the disciples of Jesus, deeply as they entered into His spirit and caught the life of His mind, have failed to bring forth in their records of His sayings and life. I shall redeem infancy and childhood, and, if a Saviour of Adults was given in the person of Jesus, let me, without impiety or arrogance, regard myself as the Children’s Saviour. Divine are both missions. Both seek out and endeavor to redeem the Infinite in man, which, by reason of the clogs of sense and custom, is in perpetual danger of being lost. The chief obstacle in the way of human regeneration is the want of a due appreciation of human nature, and particularly of the nature of children.

Home and its influence upon children meant much to Mr. Alcott, and in all his writing the nearest approach to a protest against the poverty he was called upon to endure was when, for a time, he was obliged to give up that home. Deep is the pathos that lies between the lines of this entry in his journal:

Home for Children

I deem it very important to the well being of my children to insure them a home. At least their means of improvement are limited, their pleasures are abridged, the domestic relations, so vital to virtue — to all that lives in the heart and imagination, are robbed of their essential glory, and the effect is felt throughout the character in after life. I feel that my duty as a father cannot be fully carried out when I am thus restricted. Whether we can yet improve this condition remains to be determined.

The home was reestablished — and such a home! An influence felt throughout the world, the inspiration of every book Louisa Alcott wrote.

CHAPTER V

Letters and Conversations with Children

HAPPINESS reigned in the Alcott home, and poverty seldom brought with it a shadow. The girls had toys and a variety of them, — rag dolls, kittens, gingerbread men, and barnyard animals (the latter skillfully cut out of cake dough by the mother, who had a genius for inventing surprises). As they grew older, they delighted in private theatricals. Some of their plays, written by Anna and Louisa, have been published under the title of “Comic Tragedies.” They are thrillingly melodramatic, thickly sprinkled with villains and heroes, witches and ruffians, lovely ladies in distress, gallant knights to the rescue, evil spirits and good fairies, gnomes and giants. All are direfully tragic and splendidly spectacular. Louisa as a child showed the dramatic quality which later found artistic expression in her stories. On a rainy afternoon the children were never at a loss for entertainment. They “acted” in the attic or played dolls in their own playroom, and such dolls! Old Joanna, of whom Louisa has drawn a lifelike picture in “Little Women,” is to-day in existence, battered, scarred, but none the less precious, one foot carefully bandaged, after the army-nurse method.

Poverty was made interesting. At Christmas a tree was hung with apples, nuts, and popped corn, and small trifles made by the children were fastened to the branches. Father and mother made much of the spirit of the Christ birthday, which was celebrated in simple, wholesome fashion, in vivid contrast to the modern Christmas festival.

The Alcott letters and journals show tremendous intellectual activity on the part of the small atoms of humanity who came to grace the Alcott home. Anna and her father held moral and intellectual discussions when Anna was four. Louisa was writing a daily journal before she could more than print. As soon as a child could read, family reproofs were administered by notes from father and mother to the erring one, not only pointing out the fault, but how to correct it.

The father encouraged his daughters to study themselves and to write down their thoughts. Their journals, in consequence, reflect the characteristics of each one and are storehouses of information. Louisa, poor little soul, in her happy, hoydenish childhood, found time one day in a fit of mentality to set down in black and white her chief faults. One of her most serious, according to the self-imposed confession, was “love of cats,” a sin which easily beset her all her days, for she inherited her father's love of animals and of children.

Widely varied in character and temperament were the four Alcott girls. Anna, the first, reflected the beauty, the happiness, and the romance of the Alcotts' first year of married life. Louisa, born some eighteen months later, when father and mother had grown even closer together through the new bond formed by the love of their little daughter, embodied a deeper, stronger, surer character. She was decisive, with a determination and surety of self and brilliancy of mind that reflected the best in both parents. Elizabeth, the third child, was, in some respects, the most beautiful character of all. About her, from the hour of her conception, seemed to hover a spiritual, protecting love. Seemingly from earliest infancy she stood on the borderland of the spiritual world, in flesh all too fragile to retain the spirit which remembered and longed, notwithstanding the love with which she was surrounded, to return to the mystical beauty from which she had come. A child of dreams and fancies, loving all that was harmonious, she entered this life at twilight, she left it at the dawn, a coming and going typical of this dream child, who was lent for a little time to make the world more glad.

The birth of Amy is also symbolical, the one sunny-haired, sunny-hearted girl of the family, who came with the rising of the sun. She seemed made for love, sunshine, and happiness, and had them all, but she was brave to face hardships and equally ready to accept comfort and luxury. A queen, the father called her the morning of her birth, and so they brought her up, the Little Snow Queen.

The wise, fostering love of the father, the helpful, understanding watchfulness of the mother, are reflected in their letters to their children. Time was not considered wasted that was devoted to these letters of gentle admonition and kindly counsel. There was no discussion of faults or mistakes in the Alcott household; reproofs remained little secrets between father and daughter, or mother and daughter, and the effect of this wise and constant watchfulness grows more apparent as the children advance from childhood to girlhood and on to womanhood. They were taught to know themselves. They were taught, too, the relation of the Christ child with their own childhood, beautifully expressed in some of the letters from Bronson Alcott to his eldest daughter.

It was the father's habit to write each child on her birthday anniversary and at Christmas. Anna was six years old when he gave her this beautiful description of the coming of the Christ:

For Anna
1837

To my Daughter Anna.

A longer time ago than you can understand, a beautiful Babe was born. Angels sang at his birth. And stars shone brightly. Shepherds watched their flocks by their light. The Babe was laid in his Manger-cradle. And harmless oxen fed by his side. There was no room for him nor his mother in the Inn, as she journeyed from her own home.

This Babe was born at this time of the year. His name was Jesus. And he is also called Christ. This is his birth night. And we call it Christ-mas, after him.

I write you this little note as a Christmas Gift, and hope my little girl will remember the birth night of Jesus. Think how beautiful he was, and try to shine in lovely actions as he did. God never had a child that pleased him so well. Be like a kind sister of his, and so please your Father, who loves you very much.

Christmas Eve,
December 24th, 1837.
From your
Father.

Again on Christmas Eve, two years later, he describes to his little daughter of eight years her own coming into the world of material things.

The belief in prenatal influence is strongly indicated, for the father tells his little girl that they thought just how she would look and pictures to her the joy and the love with which she was surrounded before her coming into the land of the material and first seeing with her baby eyes the light of a world day.

For Anna
1839

You were once pleased, my daughter, with a little note which I wrote you on Christmas Eve, concerning the birth of Jesus. I am now going to write a few words about your own Birth. Mother and I had no child. We wanted one — a little girl just like you; and we thought how you would look, and waited a good while for you to come, so that we might see you and have you for our own. At last you came. We felt so happy that joy stood in our eyes. You looked just as we wanted to have you. You were draped in a pretty little white frock, and father took you in his arms every day, and we loved you very much. Your large bright eyes looked lovingly into ours, and you soon learned to love and know us. When you were a few weeks old, you smiled on us. We lived then in Germantown. It is now more than eight years since this happened, but I sometimes see the same look and the same smile on your face, and feel that my daughter is yet good and pure. O keep it there, my daughter, and never lose it.

Your Father,

Christmas Eve,
Beach Street,
Dec. 24, 1839.

On her birthday some three months later, he continues the thought in this exquisite letter:

March 16, 1840.

My dear Daughter,

With this morning's dawn opens a new year of your Life on Earth. Nine years ago you were sent, a sweet Babe into this world, a joy and hope to your father and mother. After a while, through many smiles and some few tears, you learned to lisp the names of father and mother, and to make them feel once more how near and dear you were to their hearts whenever you named their names. Now you are a still dearer object of Love and hope to them as your love buds and blossoms under their eye. They watch this flower as it grows in the Garden of Life, and scents the air with its fragrance, and delights the eye by its colours. Soon they will look not for Beauty and fragrance alone, but for the ripening and ripe fruit. May it be the Spirit of Goodness; may its leaves never wither, its flowers never fade; its fragrance never cease; but may it flourish in perpetual youth and beauty, and be transplanted in its time, into the Garden of God, whose plants are ever green, ever fresh, and bloom alway, the amaranth of Heaven, the pride and joy of angels. Thus writes your Father to you on this your birth morn.

Monday, 16 March, 1840.
Beach Street,
Boston

For
Anna,
in the Garden of Life.

This letter and his allusion to "your life on earth" show plainly his belief in life eternal, for Bronson Alcott considered earthly existence merely a period in the evolution of the soul.

On Christmas Eve, 1840; when Anna was nearly ten, Louisa just past her eighth birthday, May, the golden-haired baby of the Alcott household, and Elizabeth the little shadow child of four, he wrote Christmas letters to his daughters, which show his appreciation of their special needs, and his respect for their individualities. The letter to Elizabeth is missing; to Anna he wrote:

For Anna
1840

beauty or duty
which
loves Anna best?
a
Question
from her
father
Christmas Eve
Dec. 1840
Concordia.

For Louisa, the father's message was this:

For Louisa
1840

Louisa loves —
What?
(Softly)
fun
Have some then,
Father
says.
Christmas Eve, Dec. 1840
Concordia.

For the baby of the household, the father's love message took poetic form:

For Abba
1840

For Abba
Babe fair,

Pretty hair,
Bright eye,
Deep sigh,
Sweet lip,
Feet slip,
Handsome hand,
Stout grand,
Happy smile,
Time beguile,
All I ween,
Concordia's Queen.

Almost without the dates, one could keep track of the development of the Alcott girls through their father's letters. This one demonstrates his gift of teaching by the use of suggestion:

For Anna
1842
A Father's Gift
to his
Daughter
on her
Eleventh Birthday.
Concordia
16th March
1842

My dear daughter,

This is your eleventh birthday, and as I have heretofore addressed a few words to you on these interesting occasions, I will not depart from my former custom now.

And my daughter, what shall I say to you? Shall I say something to please or to instruct you — to flatter or benefit you? I know you dislike being pleased unless the pleasure make you better, and you dislike all flattery. And you know too, that your father never gave you a word of flattery in his life. So there remains for you the true and purest pleasure of being instructed and benefited by words of love and the deepest regard for your improvement in all that shall make you more happy in yourself and beautiful to others. And so I shall speak plainly to you of yourself, and of my desire for your improvement in several important things.

First — Your Manners. Try to be more gentle. You like gentle people and every one is more agreeable as he cultivates this habit. None can be agreeable who are destitute of it and how shall you become more gentle? Only by governing your passions, and cherishing your love to everyone who is near you. Love is gentle: Hate is violent. Love is well-mannered; Selfishness is rude, vulgar. Love gives sweet tone to the voice, and makes the countenance lovely. Love then, and grow fair and agreeable.

Second: Be Patient. This is one of the most difficult things to everyone, old or young. But it is also one of the greatest things. And this comes of Love too. Love is Patient: it bears; it suffers long; it is kind; it is beautiful; it makes us like angels. Patience is, indeed, angelic; it is the Gate that opens into the House of Happiness. Open it, my daughter, and enter in and take all your sisters in with you.

Third: Be Resolute. Shake off all Sluggishness, and follow your Confidence as fast as your feelings, your thoughts, your eye, your hand, your foot, will carry you. Hate all excuses: almost always, these are lies. Be quick in your obedience: delay is a laggard, who never gets up with himself, and loses the company of confidence always. Resolution is the ladder to Happiness. Resolve and be a wise and happy girl.

Fourth: Be Diligent. Put your heart into all you do: and fix your thoughts on your doings. Halfness is almost as bad as nothing: be whole then in all you do and say.

But I am saying a great deal and will stop now with the hope of meeting you on the 16th March, 1843 (the good God sparing us till then) a gentler, a meeker, more determined and obligent girl.

Your friend
and
Father

Concordia
16 March
1842
For
Anna Bronson Alcott.

Such a gift to an eleven-year-old girl on her birthday! One would expect not kindly counsel, but a toy, a picture book, something pretty for her body, not much for her mind. The spirituality and the wisdom of the poet-philosopher are shown in this letter with its “excuses, almost always lies,” and “delay is a laggard.”

When Louisa was seven years old, her mother was ill, and the child was sent away from home for a time. To his little absent daughter the father sends this letter, printed so that she might read it for herself:

For Louisa.
1839
My dear Little Girl.

Father hopes you are well and happy. Mother will soon be well enough we hope for you to come home. You want to see us all I know. And we want to see you very much. Be a good girl and try to do as they tell you. You shall see us all in a few days.

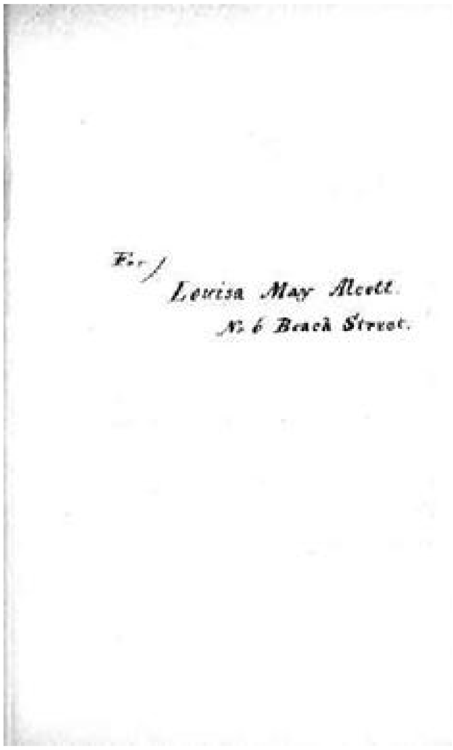
You were never away from home so long before. It has given you some new feelings.

I have printed this note. I hope you can read it all yourself.

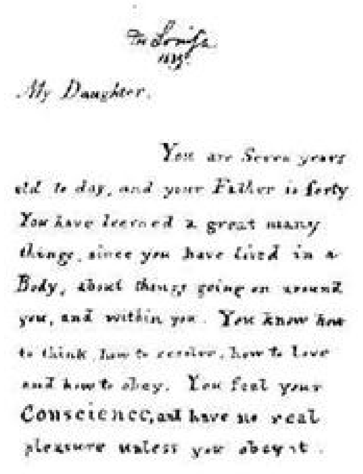
Good Bye
From Father.

Saturday
11 o’clock in the School Room.
1839

On her seventh birthday he writes her one of the most wonderful letters of the many that have been preserved in the volumes of the Alcott manuscripts:



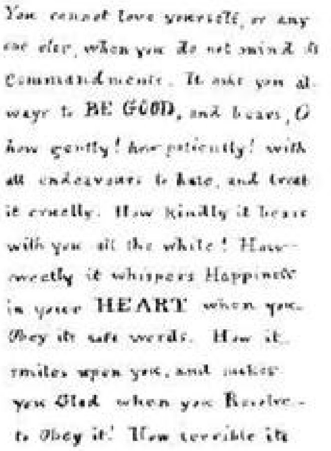
For /
Louisa May Alcott.
No 6 Beach Street.



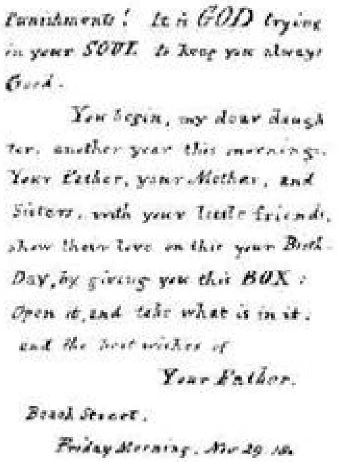
To Louisa
1839

My Daughter,

You are Seven years old to day, and your Father is forty. You have learned a great many things, since you have lived in a Body, about things going on around you, and within you. You know how to think, how to resolve, how to love and how to obey. You feel your Conscience, and have no real pleasure unless you obey it.



You cannot love yourself, or any one else, when you do not mind its Commandments. It asks you always to BE GOOD, and bears, O how gently! how patiently! with all endeavours to hate, and treat it cruelly. How kindly it bears with you all the while! How sweetly it whispers Happiness in your HEART when you Obey its safe words. How it smiles upon you, and makes you Glad when you Resolve to Obey it! How terrible its



Punishments! It is GOD trying in your SOUL to keep you always Good.

You begin, my dear daughter, another year this morning. Your Father, your Mother, and Sisters, with your little friends, show their love on this your Birth-Day, by giving you this BOX: Open it, and take what is in it, and the best wishes of

Your Father.

Beach Street.

Friday Morning. Nov 29 18.

For Louisa
1839

My Daughter,

You are Seven years old to-day and your Father is forty. You have learned a great many things, since you have lived in a Body, about things going on around you and within you. You know how to think, how to resolve, how to love, and how to obey. You feel your Conscience, and have no real pleasure unless you obey it. You cannot love yourself, or anyone else, when you do not mind its commandments. It asks you always to BE GOOD, and bears, O how gently! how patiently! with all endeavors to hate, and treat it cruelly. How kindly it bears with you all the while. How sweetly it whispers Happiness in your HEART when you Obey its soft words. How it smiles upon you, and makes you Glad when you Resolve to Obey it! How terrible its punishments. It is GOD trying in your soul to keep you always Good.

You begin, my dear daughter, another year this morning. Your Father, your Mother, and Sisters, with your little friends, show their love on this your Birthday, by giving you this BOX. Open it, and take what is in it, and the best wishes of

Your Father.

Beach Street,
Friday morning, Nov. 29, 1839.

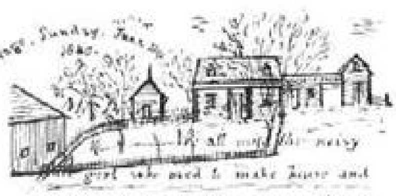
His explanation to a seven-year-old girl that conscience is “God in your soul,” and the lines, “since you have lived in a body,” are eloquent manifestations of his belief. It is not surprising that, given such thoughts at seven, Louisa at ten or eleven wrote that she was sure in some previous life she must have been a horse, — she loved so to run. A month before May Alcott was born, little Louisa, then eight, again away from home, received this letter from her father:

For

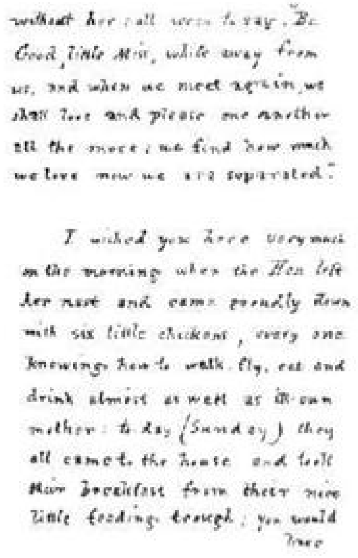
Louisa May Alcott
at her Grandfathers
in Boston.

From
Father.

Cottage. Sunday. June 21st
1840.

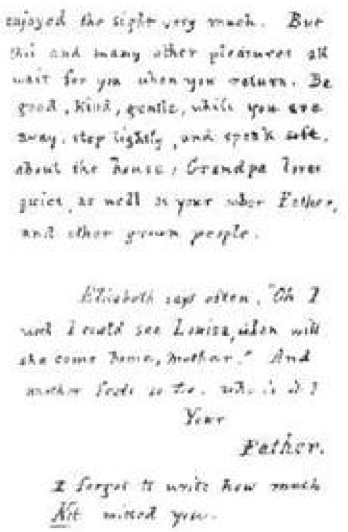


We all miss the noisy little girl who used to make house and garden, barn and field ring with her footsteps, and even the hens and chickens seem to miss her too. Right glad would Father and Mother, Anna and Elizabeth, and all the little mates at School, and Miſs Ruſsell, the House Play-room, Dolls, Hoop, Garden, Flowers, Fields, Woods and Brooks, all be to see and answer the voice and footsteps, the eye and hand, of their little companion. But yet all make themselves happy and beautiful



without her; all seem to say, "Be Good, little Miss, while away from us, and when we meet again, we shall love and please one another all the more; we find how much we love now we are separated."

I wished you here very much on the morning when the Hen left her nest and came proudly down with six little chickens, every one knowing how to walk, fly, eat and drink almost as well as its own mother: to day (Sunday) they all came to the house and took their breakfast from their nice little feeding trough; you would have



enjoyed the sight very much. But this and many other pleasures all wait for you when you return. Be good, kind, gentle, while you are away, step lightly, and speak soft, about the house; Grandpa loves quiet, as well as your other Father, and other grown people.

Elizabeth says often, "Oh I wish I could see Louisa, when will she come home, mother." And mother feels so too, and so do I

Your
Father.

I forgot to write how much Kit missed you.

Cottage, Sunday June 21st, 1840.

We all miss the noisy little girl who used to make house and garden, barn and field, ring with her footsteps, and even the hens and chickens seem to miss her too. Right glad would father and mother, Anna and Elizabeth, and all the little mates at School, and Miss Russell, the House Playroom, Dolls, Hoop, Garden, Flowers, Fields, Woods and Brooks, all be to see and answer the voice and footsteps, the eye and hand of their little companion. But yet all make themselves happy and beautiful without her; all seem to say, "Be Good, little Miss, while away from us, and when we meet again we shall love and please one another all the more; we find how much we love now we are separated."

I wished you here very much on the morning when the Hen left her nest and came proudly down with six little chickens, everyone knowing how to walk, fly, eat and drink almost as well as its own mother; to-day (Sunday) they all came to see the house and took their breakfast from their nice little feeding trough; you would have enjoyed the sight very much. But this and many other pleasures all wait for you when you return. Be good, kind, gentle, while you are away, step lightly, and speak soft about the house;

Grandpa loves quiet, as well as your sober father and other grown people.

Elizabeth says often, "Oh I wish I could see Louisa, when will she come home, Mother?" And another feels so too; who is it?

Your
Father.

I forgot to write how much Kit missed you.

On her eighth birthday, her father writes:

For Louisa
1840

Two Passions strong divide our Life,
Meek gentle Love, or boisterous Strife.

Love — Music Anger — Arrow
Concord Discord
From her Father

On her eighth birthday Nov. 29th.

At ten, her birthday greeting from her father is this:

For Louisa
1842

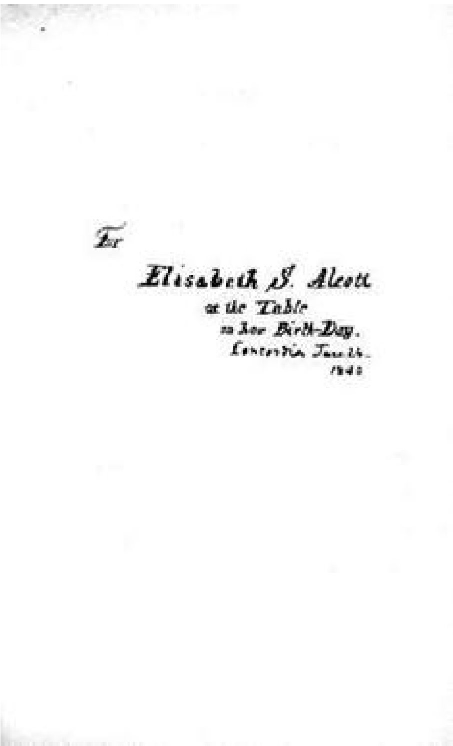
My Daughter,

This is your birthday: you are ten years of age to-day. I sought amidst my papers for some pretty picture to place at the top of this note, but I did not find anything that seemed at all expressive of my interest in your well-being, or well-doing, and so this note comes to you without any such emblem. Let me say, my honest little girl, that I have had you often in my mind during my separation from you and your devoted mother, and well-meaning sisters, while on the sea or the land, and now that I have returned to be with you and them again, meeting you daily at fireside, at table, at study, and in your walk, and amusements, in conversation and in silence, being daily with you, I would have you feel my presence and be the happier, and better that I am here. I want, most of all things, to be a kindly influence on you, helping you to guide and govern your heart, keeping it in a state of sweet and loving peacefulness, so that you may feel how good and kind is that Love which lives always in our breasts, and which we may always feel, if we will keep the passions all in stillness and give up ourselves entirely to its soft desires. I live, my dear daughter, to be good and to do good to all, and especially to you and your mother and sisters. Will you not let me do you all the good that I would? And do you not know that I can do you little or none, unless you give me your affections, incline your ears, and earnestly desire to become daily better and wiser, more kind, gentle, loving, diligent, heedful, serene. The good Spirit comes into the Breast of the meek and loveful to abide long; anger, discontent, impatience, evil appetites, greedy wants, complainings, ill-speakings, idlenesses, heedlessness, rude behaviour and all such, these drive it away, or grieve it so that it leaves the poor misguided soul to live in its own obstinate, perverse, proud discomfort, which is the very Pain of Sin, and is in the Bible called the worm that never dies, the gnawing worm, the sting of conscience: while the pleasures of love and goodness are beyond all description — a peacefulness that passes all understanding. I pray that my daughter may know much of the last, and little of the first of these feelings. I shall try every day to help her to the knowledge and love of this good Spirit. I shall be with her, and as she and her sisters come more and more into the presence of this Spirit, shall we become a family more closely united in loves that can never sunder us from each other.

This your
Father
in Hope and Love
on your
Birthday

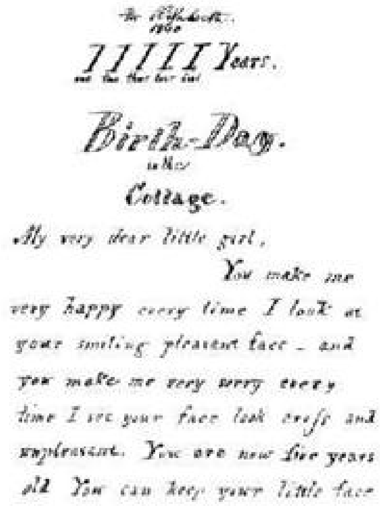
Concordia,
Nov. 29, 1842.

To little Elizabeth the letters were few. The child was so constantly the companion of father and mother, that by speech rather than written word, their messages were given. But on her fifth birthday, her father carefully printed this letter:



For

Elisabeth S. Alcott
at the Table
on her Birth-Day.
Concordia June 24.
1840



[illegible]
1860

IIIII Years.

[illegible]

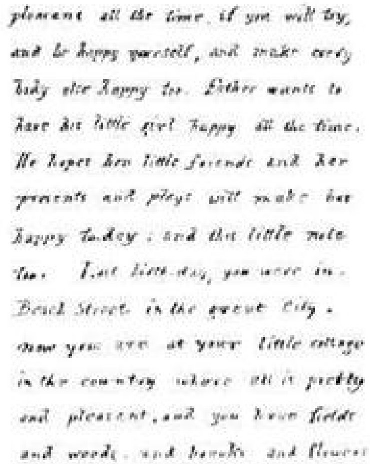
Birth-Day.

in the

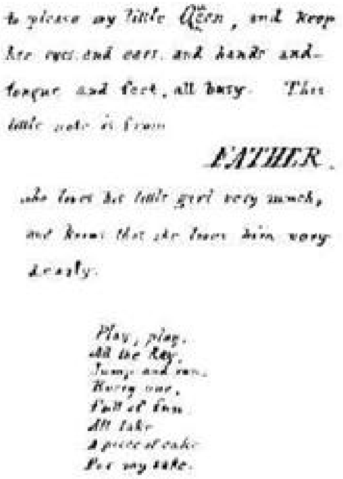
Cottage.

My very dear little girl,

You make me very happy every time I look at your smiling pleasent face – and you make me very sorry every time I see your face look croſs and unpleasent. You are now five years old. You can keep your little face



pleasant all the time, if you will try, and be happy yourself, and make every body else happy too. Father wants to have his little girl happy all the time. He hopes her little friends and her presents and plays will make her happy to-day; and this little note too. Last birth-day, you were in Beach Street in the great City. Now you are at your little cottage in the country where all is pretty and pleasant, and you have fields and woods, and brooks and flowers



to please my little Queen, and keep
her eyes, and ears, and hands and
tongue and feet, all busy. This
little note is from

FATHER.

who loves his little girl very much,
and knows that she loves him very
dearly.

Play, play,
All the day,
Jump and run,
Every one,
Full of fun,
All take
A piece of cake
For my sake.

For Elizabeth
1840

I I I I I Years
one two three four five
birth-day
in the
cottage

My very dear little girl,

You make me very happy every time I look at your smiling pleasant face — and you make me very sorry every time I see your face look cross and unpleasant. You are now five years old. You can keep your little face pleasant all the time, if you will try, and be happy yourself, and make everybody else happy too. Father wants to have his little girl happy all the time. He hopes her little friends and her presents and plays will make her happy to-day; and this little note too. Last birthday you were in Beach Street, in the great City, now you are at your little cottage in the country where all is pretty and pleasant, and you have fields and woods, and brooks and flowers to please my little Queen, and keep her eyes, and ears, and hands and tongue and feet, all busy. This little note is from

FATHER,
who loves his little girl very much, and knows that she loves him very dearly.

Play, play,
All the day,
Jump and run
Every one,
Full of fun,
All take
A piece of cake,
For my sake.

His wish to encourage the little girl in her efforts to be good, kind, gentle, and patient, and his appreciation of her accomplishment, is set forth in this characteristic little note:

Concord, Cottage,
February 2nd, 1842.

My dear Elizabeth,

You give me much pleasure by your still, quiet manners, and your desire to do things, without asking impatiently and selfishly for others to help you without trying first to help yourself. Trying is doing; doing is but trying; try then always and you will do; and every one loves to help those who try. I will print a little sentence for you in large letters and you who have already found it so easy to do things for yourself will, I dare say, remember it, and follow it too — This is it —

try first: and
then ask: and
patiently till
you have tried
your best: and
you will not need
to ask at all.
Trying is the only
Schoolmaster
whose
Scholars
always

Succeed.
Your Father.

Cottage,
Feb. 2nd.

Little May, the youngest, was the pet, not only of the Alcott household, but of all the Alcott kin. This quaint little dolly letter, written to her by her Uncle Junius, has been framed and hangs to-day in the library of May Alcott's nephew, John:

Gift of Junius S. Alcott

to
Abby.

A
Little Face
once smiling
woke
to
greet, the day,
with sport and play,
Hands) on her Birthday, in shaking (Hands
with her sisters,
and, her visitors,
that, came, to, chime,
a, happy, time, with, Lizzy,
To, give, you, pleasure, uncle,
gives, this, treasure, to you, so, sweet,
So, keep, it, neat, and please, my,
Brother, & your Mother, by always,
finding that, by, minding, you
are, the kindest, little girl, that,
that, ever
stood d, in,
(Shoes) (Shoes)

CHAPTER VI

The Mother’s Influence

UPON the lives of all four of her daughters the mother’s influence rested like a benediction. It is felt in her letters; it is reflected in the journals of her girls and in the musings of Bronson Alcott, as set down in his voluminous journals. And the mother spirit hovers over Orchard House, where “Little Women” was written and lived.

While letters to Anna from her mother are missing, Anna’s journal shows how vital was Mrs. Alcott’s power in the upbuilding of her noble character. Louisa in “Little Women” has said that the girls gave their hearts into their mother’s keeping, their souls into their father’s. Anna’s letters bear eloquent testimony to the strong, helpful, cheery influence of the mother upon the child. Among the first was this letter, written by Anna when she was five years old and visiting Mr. Alcott’s family at Wolcott:

Letter to Mrs. Alcott.
Wolcott Aug. 12th, 1836.
Friday Morning.

My dear Mother,

I have to go away by myself and cry because I want to see you so much, and little sister Lizy and Louisa. Doctor Fuller is coming to cure Grandmother. i shall see you in a few days. You have a splendid husband

Anna
V years of age —

(On this she had drawn her hand.)

She was six years old when she wrote this:

Dear Mother,

I have not had a note from you for a great while. You wanted some wafers yesterday will you accept of them from me There is not many but it is all that I have got. I am very glad my birthday is so near for as I grow older, I hope I shall grow better and more useful to you, I hope soon we shall be settled down in some comfortable little home of our own and then shall be contented and happy

I hope. I must go to my sums now, so goodbye dearest mother

Your loving Anna

A letter eloquent of the tender relation between mother and child is this written during the Fruitlands period:

For

Dearest mother
fruitlands.

Dear mother.

I wish that you would come to the table again. I enjoy my meals much better when you are at the table. Was not “Heraclitus” that father read about to-day, a dear good man, it seems as though I wanted to hug him up and kiss him. I wish men had understood his thoughts better than they did he would have been happier I think. I have enjoyed this morning readings and conversations better than I have before for a good while, I suppose, because I talked and I understood it so well. I do not write to you very often dear mother but I love to dearly when I feel like it, and I love to have letters from you. I have not been as good as I wish I had this week. I send a little bunch of flowers to you they are not very pretty but they are beautifully made and I thought you would like them. I had a beautiful time walking this morning with Louisa. Good bye dearest mother from your loving

Anna.

Many copies of her mother’s letters are found in Louisa’s journals, showing the daughter’s intense, almost idolatrous affection. Louisa admired, respected, and loved her father, but to her mother her tenderest thought was given. Marmee understood the wayward, tempestuous, lovable child as no one else did, not even loyal Anna, or admiring Elizabeth. On her birthday the mother writes to Louisa:

My dear little girl,

Will you accept this doll from me on your 7th birthday. She will be a quiet play mate for my active Louisa for seven years more. Be a kind mamma and love her for my sake.

Your mother.

Beach St., Boston, 1839.

Louisa was ten when this birthday letter was sent:

Cottage in Concord.

Dear Daughter,

Your 10th birthday has arrived, may it be a happy one, & on each returning birthday may you feel new strength and resolution to be gentle with sisters, obedient to parents, loving to everyone & happy in yourself.

I give you the pencil case I promised, for I have observed that you are fond of writing & wish to encourage the habit.

Go on trying, dear, & each day it will be easier to be & do good. You must help yourself, for the cause of your little troubles is in yourself, & patience & courage only will make you what mother prays to see you her good and happy girl.

During the Fruitlands period, when Louisa was eleven, she found this little note tucked carefully away in a spot where only she would find and read it:

Fruitlands.

My dear,

Thank you for your sweet note and sweeter poetry. The second verse is very good. Your love of nature is pure and true. It is a lovely school in which good lessons may be learned. The happy industry of birds, the beautiful lives of flowers, the music of brooks all help —

“The little fountain flows
So noiseless thro the wood,
The wanderer tastes repose,
And from the silent flood
Learns meekly to do good.”

In the following letter, a pretty little deference to the child’s own personality is shown by the mother, in that way bringing out in the child respect and deference for others:

Dear Daughter,

I hope you will not consider me an intruder for stopping a moment in your “poet’s corner” to admire the neatness of your desk, the sweetness of your poetry, the beauty of the prospect from your window. Cherish this love of nature, dear, enjoy all it gives you, for God made these helps to charm contemplation, and they strengthen the noble desire to be or to do all that is sent for our training & our good. Heaven be about you my child, is mother’s Sunday prayer.

Louisa Alcott filled her diary with letters from her mother, occasionally adding in later life annotations of her own. This letter from her mother when Louisa was eleven is an example:

(From Louisa Alcott’s Diary.)
Concord, 1843.

Dear Louy,

I enclose a picture for you which I always liked very much, for I have imagined that you might be just such an industrious daughter & I such a feeble but loving mother, looking to your labor for my daily bread. Keep it for my sake, & your own, for you and I always like to be grouped together.

Mother.

Abigail May, Mrs. A. Bronson Alcott.
From a daguerreotype.

Then follows the picture and the lines written by Louisa in her journal:

To Mother.

I hope that soon dear mother, you & I may be
In the quiet room my fancy has so often made for thee,
The pleasant sunny chamber, the cushioned easy chair,
The books laid for your reading, the vase of flowers fair.
The desk beside the window where the sun shines warm and bright,
And there in ease and quiet, the promised book you write,
While I sit close beside you, content at last to see,
That you can rest dear mother, & I can cherish thee.

Louisa lived to see her hope realized and the dream of many years a beautiful reality.

Like most writers, Louisa was moody, and in her hours of depression and despondency she looked upon her work as a failure and herself as a useless drag upon the family. At such times Marmee invariably came to the rescue and persuaded her discouraged daughter to use the pen she was ready to lay down. Even in Louisa’s childhood, when her only promise of future literary achievement were her tragedies and melodramas of lurid style, little gifts show the mother’s faith and pride in her daughter’s work. So did her letters, of which this is an example:

Dear Louisa:

I sometimes stray about the house and take a peep into the journal. Your pages lately are blank. I am sure your life has many fine passages well worth recording, and to me they are always precious. Anything like intellectual progress in my children seems to compensate for much disappointment & perplexity in my own life. Do write a little each day, dear, if but a line, to show me how bravely you begin the battle, how patiently you wait for the rewards sure to come when the victory is nobly won.

Ever yrs.
Mother.

On her fourteenth birthday the mother accompanies the gift of a pen with this little poem:

Oh, may this pen your muse inspire,
When wrapt in pure poetic fire,
To write some sweet, some thrilling verse;
A song of love or sorrow’s lay,
Or duty’s clear but tedious way
In brighter hope rehearse.
Oh, let your strain be soft and high,
Of crosses here, of crowns beyond the sky;
Truth guide your pen, inspire your theme,
And from each note joy’s music stream.

Louisa Alcott owed much to her mother’s example and perhaps even more to her mother’s influence. This letter, carefully preserved in the daughter’s journal, reveals a wealth of mother-love and of God-given wisdom:

15th Birthday,
Hillside.

Dearest,

Accept this pen from your mother and for her sake use it freely & worthily that each day of this your fifteenth year may testify to some good word or thought or work.

I know there will be born into your spirit new hopes, new gifts, for God helps the loving, trusting heart that turns to Him. Lift up your soul to meet the highest, for that alone will satisfy your yearning, aspiring nature.

Your temperament is a peculiar one, & there are few who can really help you. Set about the formation of character & believe me you are capable of obtaining a noble one. Industry, patience, love, creates, endures, gives all things, for these are the attributes of the Almighty, & they make us mighty in all things. May eternal love sustain you, infinite wisdom guide you, & the peace which passeth understanding reward you, my daughter.

Mother.

Nov. 29th, 1846.

Deeds, not words, characterized Elizabeth Alcott, as readers of "Little Women" will recall. She was about seven when she sent this letter, one of the very few she wrote, to her mother:

May, Friday 29.

Dear Mother,

I thank you very much for your note. I will try to write better than I have done. I have not always had a good pen. I hope I shall improve in all my studies this summer. I hope I can read German & French very well, and know a great deal about the countries. I must write my journal now so I will bid you good bye.

From your loving
Elizabeth.

Birthdays were always celebrated with much rejoicing in the Alcott household, the gift made secondary to the spirit of the day. From the time they were old enough to print, the Alcott children on the mother's birthday made her some little gift, accompanying it with a note. Abba May or May, as she was always called, at nine years old, began in prose but lapsed into poetry:

Dear Mother,

I wish you a very happy birthday. I hope you will find my present Useful, and when you wear it think of me. I have taken a great-deal of Pleasure in making it for you. Please take this Present mother on your 49 birthday

With the dearest Love and wishes
of your little daughter A.

With Mrs. Alcott, hardship, poverty, the grief of seeing her husband misunderstood and often scoffed at, never lessened her love for him, or her contentment in the marriage relation. The year following her marriage in a letter to her brother she wrote: “My father has never married a daughter or son more completely happy than I am. I have cares, and soon they will be arduous ones, but with the mild, constant, and affectionate sympathy and aid of my husband, with the increasing health and loveliness of my quiet and bright little Anna, with good health, clear head, grateful heart and ready hand, — what can I not do when surrounded by influences like this?”

Ideals were never shattered; illusions, if so they may be called, were never lost by Mrs. Alcott through the stormy years that laid between the first happy months of her married life and the sunset days when all her burdens were laid down. To her, the husband who was so long denied material success and intellectual sympathy ever remained the lover and friend. Her admiration for him was unbounded, her faith in him complete. So high she held him in heart and mind, that it was difficult even for those who loved him most to appreciate her estimate of him as Poet, Philosopher, and Sage.

Concerning the most famous portrait ever made of Bronson Alcott, done in crayons by Mrs. Richard Hildredth, wife of the historian and aunt of the portrait painter, George Fuller, which, beautiful as it was, did not satisfy the wife’s ideal, Mrs. Alcott writes:

A tinge of the incomprehensible lies softly around it, a field of atmosphere, as if she had worked with down from an angel’s wing rather than with a crayon, — as if the moonlight had cast a shadow on the lights of her picture, and a divinity had touched with a soft shade, the dark portion of the figure. Mrs. Hildredth has changed the costume from a dress suit to a mantle draped about the shoulders. This, I do not like. The chaste simplicity of Mr. Alcott’s dress is more in character and keeping with the severe simplicity and rectitude of his life. Louisa admirably describes her father’s appearance as she met him at the cars. “His dress was neat and poor. He looked cold and thin as an icicle, but serene as God.” After such a testimony, from such a daughter, he can afford to dress shabbily.

Contentment, whatever her lot, was an attribute of Marmee; she underestimated herself always. Unquestionably, Louisa inherited her literary gift quite as much from mother as from father, and flashes of the quaint humor so delightful in the daughter’s books are found in the mother’s letters. To a friend she writes: “My gifts are few. I live, love and learn, and find myself more content every day of my life with humble conditions.”

Louisa Alcott never laid claim to poetic gift, but on a few occasions her verses take to themselves true poetic beauty. One of the most exquisite of these poems was written by her on the death of her mother, and was first published anonymously in the “Masque of Poets” of 1878:

Transfiguration
In Memoriam

Mysterious death; who in a single hour
Life’s gold can so refine,
And by thy art divine
Change mortal weakness to immortal power:

Bending beneath the weight of eighty years,
Spent with the noble strife
Of a victorious life,
We watched her fading heavenward, through our tears.

But ere the sense of loss our hearts had wrung,
A miracle was wrought:
And swift as happy thought
She lived again — brave, beautiful and young.

Age, pain and sorrow dropped the veils they wore,
And showed the tender eyes
Of angels in disguise,
Whose discipline so patiently she bore.

The past years brought their harvest rich and fair;
While memory and love,
Together fondly wove
A golden garland for the silver hair.

CHAPTER VII

Children’s Diaries

THE Alcott children were brought up to think for themselves, to reflect, and to give expression to their thoughts. Never laughed at, they were not afraid to speak or write of what was in their minds. Each kept a diary, and no incident that concerned the little girls was too trivial for mention in the record of the day. These incidents, collected, give a more comprehensive view of the Alcotts as a family than do the father’s voluminous journals.

Anna Bronson Alcott.
From a daguerreotype.

When Anna was ten, she gravely explains under date of April 13, 1841:

Father was too unwell to come down stairs and mother ironed, Louisa and I helped a little while. I wrote my journal and a journal for Louisa as she thought she could not write well enough. I had no other lessons than that. We watched a little spider and gave it some water to drink. In the afternoon mother read loud the story of the good aunt or part of it while we sewed on the clean clothes I mended up the holes and Louisa and Lizzy sewed on a sheet. In the evening we played mother lets us play in the evening. We went to bed soon.

This sewing bee recalls the long evenings in the March home, described in "Little Women," when the four girls and the mother sewed dutifully on sheets for Aunt March, dividing seams into countries, discussing Europe, Asia, Africa, and America as they stitched.

When she was twelve, Anna's literary aspirations sought a vent in attempted poetry. Later she collaborated with Louisa in writing the "Comic Tragedies." Anna's confidante and comrade, Louisa, was frequently the victim of these poetic effusions, her reception of which gives quite a line on her ardent temperament. This entry in Anna's journal for April 23, 1843, is eloquent:

This morning I rose pretty early — After breakfast I read and wrote stories. In the afternoon I wrote some letters and the following one to Louisa:

Louisa dear
With love sincere
Accept this little gift from me
It is with pleasure
I send this treasure
And with it send much love to thee.

Sister dear
Never fear
God will help you if you try.
Do not despair
But always care
To be good and love to try.

In the evening I read in a book called 'Stories on the Lord's-prayer.' I talked with Louisa after I went to bed and she pinched me on my leg.

Two or three years later Anna writes:

Monday.

Mother went to Boston and Louisa and I cleaned house all day. I love order above all things and I take great pleasure in seeing all neat about the house.

Tuesday.

I worked hard till 2 o'clock when we all met to sew while mother read aloud from “Miss Bremers Brothers and Sister’s.” It is most beautiful such a happy family. I think Miss Bremer would make a lovely mother the mothers in her books are so sweet and she has beautiful idear’s about family’s. I love to read natural stories.

Wednesday 30th.

We rose very early and eat breakfast. I think it is a dreadful thing to grow old and not be able to fly about, but then I suppose I shall not care about flying when I grow older, still it is horrid to think about being an old woman all wrinkled and blind. I wish I could keep young forever. I should love to live among all those I love and be with them all the time.

Reading was a part of the daily routine in the Alcott household, and Anna’s taste for German recalls vividly certain episodes between Meg and John Brooks in “Little Women.”

Friday 18th.

I read one of Krummacher’s parables in German. I think they are very beautiful, the language is so elegant. I love to hear beautiful words and these stories are told so simply and are full of such sweet thought. I found a great many which have never been translated and I intend to try myself to translate them. I think it is the pleasantest thing I do to read German. It is such a splendid language. I mean Elizabeth shall learn to read it, she will enjoy it so much.

Saturday 19th.

In the afternoon I sewed and Louisa read me a very silly story called ‘The Golden Cup.’ I think there is a great deal of nonsense written now a days, the papers are full of silly stories.

Sunday 20th.

I have been reading lately a very beautiful book given me by my mother. It is “Characteristics of Women” by Mrs. Jameson. I like it very much. It is a description of Shakespear’s Heroines, Portia is my favorite, she was so noble and I liked the Trial scene better than any of Shakespears that I ever read. I think this part is beautiful.

‘Let music sound while he doth make his choice;
Then if he love he make a swan like end
Fading in music.’

I think this was a beautiful idea.

I passed a pleasant morning in school, translating one of Krummacher’s beautiful parables. I find great pleasure in this. I like German better than I do French. I want much to study Italian. I have tried myself several times but cannot manage it without help. I think I should be very happy if I could go to school. I think about it most all the time and when I am in bed I imagine myself in Boston going to Miss Peabody's school with other girls and know that I am learning something. And I think I lead rather too solitary a life. I love to see people. Mother read in the afternoon from Miss Sedgwick's Letters. It was about the Germans. She says they are a very cheerful people and though poor yet they always have a happy smile and cheerful face. That their manners are beautiful. They are so kind and simple. I know I should love them, for I like everything German, except their food, which I think must be horrid, greasy cabbage and sour bread. That seems bad. I should think they are so fond of beautiful things; music, poetry and flowers, that they would not like such stuff.

September, 1845.
Friday 1st.

I walked before breakfast, the sun was bright and there was a cool wind. The lane was full of beautiful flowers and the grass was green and fresh. I had a lovely walk and gathered a bunch of goldenrod, spirian and gerandia. Everything was so beautiful that all my unhappy thoughts of last night flew away. I sometimes have strange feelings, a sort of longing after something I don't know what it is. I have a great many wishes. I spent the day in the usual manner, sewing and studying. In the evening Louisa and I walked through the lane and talked about how we should like to live and dress and imagined all kinds of beautiful things.

Sunday 3rd.

I sewed all day and mother read from "Miss Sedgwick's Letters." I will write a piece of poetry, as I have nothing very pleasant to write about:

"Oh when thy heart is full of fears
And the way is dim to Heaven
When the sorrow and the sin of years
Peace from thy soul has driven
Then through the mist of falling tears
Look up and be forgiven.

"And then rise up and sin no more
And from thy dark ways flee
Let Virtue o'er thy appetites

Have full and perfect mastery
And the kindly ones that hover o’er
Will ever strengthen thee.

“And though thou art helpless and forlorn
Let not thy heart’s peace go
And though the riches of this world are gone
And thy lot is care and woe
Faint not, but journey ever on
True wealth is not below.

“Oh, falter not but still look up
Let Patience be thy guide
Bless the rod and take the cup
And trustfully abide
Let not temptation vanquish thee
And the Father will provide.”

Louisa composed these lines, which I think are beautiful. She is a beautiful girl and writes as good poetry as Lucretia Davidson, about whom so much has been written. I think she will write something great one of these days. As for me I am perfect in nothing. I have no genius. I know a little of music, a little of French, German and Drawing, but none of them well. I have a foolish wish to be something great and I shall probably spend my life in a kitchen and die in the poor-house. I want to be Jenny Lind or Mrs. Seguin and I can’t and so I cry. Here is another of Louisa’s pieces to mother.

“God comfort thee dear mother,
For sorrow sad and deep
Is lying heavy on thy heart
And this hath made thee weep.

“There is a Father o’er us, mother,
Who orders for the best
And peace shall come ere long, mother,
And dwell within thy breast.

“Then let us journey onward, mother,
And trustfully abide,
The coming forth of good or ill
Whatever may betide.”

Helpfulness was encouraged in the Alcott household; habits of industry were carefully fostered. The Alcott children worked when they worked, played when they played, but wasted hours were unknown. They were taught to make the most of every day. When Anna was seventeen she wrote in her diary:

August, 1848.
Thursday 17th.

Lizzy and I are making plans for spending our days usefully. Here is mine.
Plan.
Rise at half past 4, bathe, dress and walk till half past 5.
Dress and bathe the children.
Breakfast at 7. Work till 9. School till 12. Work till 2.
Sew till 4. Practice till 5.

Hear Lizzy recite German and French till 6. Supper.

This will keep me pretty busy, but I find I accomplish so much more when I have a plan and certain times for certain things. I never can do things without order. I like to have something planned for every moment of the day, so that when I get up in the morning I may know what to do. I wish I could be learned.

An entry in Louisa’s diary during the Fruitlands period gives this insight into one of her average days, when a child of eleven:

I rose at five, and after breakfast washed the dishes and then helped mother work. I took care of May in the afternoon. In the evening I made some pretty things for my dolly. Father and Mr. Lane had a talk and father asked us if we saw any reason for us to separate. Mother wanted to, she is so tired. I like it, but not the school part or Mr. L.

Note, too, that when it came to a conference concerning family affairs, the father asked the advice of his eleven-year-old daughter, instead of following the more customary method of withholding from her the family confidence and deferring discussion of plans until the children had gone to bed.

“Know Thyself,” was ever the aim of Bronson Alcott in the training of his children, and Mr. Lane at Fruitlands followed this same line of mental development. This is one of his sample lessons which Louisa Alcott has copied into her journal:

Sample of our Lessons

“What virtues do you wish more of,” asked Mr. L. I answer:

Patience Obedience Industry
Love Generosity Respect
Silence Perseverance Self-denial

“What vices less of?”

Idleness Impatience Selfishness
Wilfulness Impudence Activity
Vanity Pride Love of cats

In this same lesson comes the twelve-year-old Louisa’s explanation of the difference between faith and hope:

Faith can believe without seeing; hope is not sure, but tries to have faith when it desires.

Louisa’s love of nature, her trained habits of thought, her poetic imagination, and her keen appreciation of beauty are indicated in this entry in her journal, written at Fruitlands in 1843 or 1844, when she was a child of ten or eleven:

I wrote in my imagination book, and enjoyed it very much. Life is pleasanter than it used to be, and I don’t care about dying any more. Had a splendid run, and got a box of cones to burn. Sat and heard the pines sing a long time. Had good dreams, and woke now and then to think, and watch the moon. I had a pleasant time with my mind, for it was happy.

CHAPTER VIII

Girlhood and Womanhood

FAMILIAR to every reader of “Little Women” is the March family’s quaint brown house with its many windows, its old-fashioned garden, its homely, homelike air, its unfailing hospitality. This home, as described by Louisa M. Alcott, is a picture of the Alcott home at Concord, the scene of the girlhood and young womanhood of the Alcott children. Many of Louisa’s books were written there; “Little Women” was lived there. In Concord, Anna met John Pratt, and the first love story in “Little Women” is Anna’s life romance. There little Beth passed from the material to the spiritual life, and Amy first developed the artistic talents which later caused her work to be sought for by art museums and private collectors.

Anna’s marriage was a great trial to Louisa, for from early childhood the two girls had been inseparable companions, and after Anna’s marriage Louisa learned to look upon John as her brother.

Louisa’s diary in the April following the passing of Elizabeth touches upon the change of homes in Concord, the absence of May, who was studying art in Boston, of Elizabeth and of Anna:

April.

Came to occupy one wing of Hawthorne’s house (once ours) while the new one was being repaired. Father, mother and I kept house together, May being in Boston, Anna at Pratt farm, & for the first time Lizzy absent. I don’t miss her as I expected to do, for she seems nearer & dearer than before, & I am glad to know she is safe from pain & age in some world where her innocent soul must be happy.

Death never seemed terrible to me, & now is beautiful, so I cannot fear it, but find it friendly and wonderful.

Abba May Alcott.
From a photograph.

Amy’s artistic efforts and her failures in “Little Women” are taken from May’s actual experiences in Concord. Turning the career of the youngest of the Alcott girls into a romance earlier in “Little Women” than it actually occurred in life, doubtless prevented Louisa Alcott from chronicling the artistic success of her youngest sister, a success to which she largely contributed and in which she took great pride.

May Alcott’s pictures are found to-day in art museums and in leading private collections in this country and abroad. Her copies of Turner are remarkable. In the Kensington Gallery in London students are given them to study in preference to the originals. Several fine examples are in American museums, and a few are owned by members of the Alcott family.

When the Alcotts moved into Orchard House, the girls painted and papered the interior themselves. May filled the nooks and corners with panels, on which she painted birds and flowers. Over the fireplaces she inscribed mottoes in Old English characters.

The study in Orchard House was the real center of the household. For the chimney piece Ellery Channing wrote an epigram, which May Alcott painted upon it, and which has been used in the stage reproduction of “Little Women”:

“The Hills are reared, the Valleys scooped in vain,
If Learning’s Altars vanish from the Plain.”

In Orchard House to-day, walls, doors, and window casings are etched with May Alcott’s drawings, many preserved under glass, including a miniature portrait of a little girl, naïvely and modestly inscribed “The Artist.”

High thoughts and cheerful minds triumphed over poverty in those Concord days. Shortly after the family’s return from Fruitlands, Louisa wrote for Ellen Emerson the fairy stories, “Flower Fables.” She was at the time only sixteen. This was her earliest published work, and it was many years before she achieved literary fame, although, as did Jo in “Little Women,” she materially helped in the support of the family by writing lurid tales.

Literature rather than commerce freed the Alcotts from the burden of debt. Louisa’s fame was the result, neither of accident, nor of a single achievement, but had for its background the whole generous past of her family. Her “Hospital Sketches” were her letters home, when she was serving as hospital nurse during the Civil War. “Little Women” is a chronicle of her family. Louisa certainly made good use of the vicissitudes of the Alcotts. She always saw the funny side and was not afraid to make book material of the home experiences, elevating or humiliating. Her books number between twenty-five and thirty. Nearly every one takes its basic idea from some real experience. The books written by the Alcott family, including some eight or ten published by Mr. Alcott, Louisa’s output, and one or two written by May, fill two shelves of an alcove devoted to Concord authors in the Alcott town library.

Anna’s little sons, familiarly known in the Alcott household as Freddie and Johnnie, or Jack, gave to Bronson Alcott in his later days fresh opportunity for his favorite study — childhood. To both boys came frequent messages and gifts from Grandpa, Grandma, and Aunt Louisa.

Louisa Alcott sent to Freddie this poem on his third birthday:

A song for little Freddie
On his third Birthday.

Down in the field
Where the brook goes,
Lives a white lammie
With a little black nose.

He eats the grass so green,
He drinks the “la la” sweet,
“Buttertups” and daisies,
Grow all about his feet.

The “birdies” they sing to him,
The big sun in the sky,
Warms his little “Toe-toes,”
And peeps into his eye.

He’s a very gentle lammie,
He never makes a fuss,
He never “saps his marmar,”
He never says “I muss.”

He hops and he runs,
“Wound and wound” all day,
And when the night comes,
He goes “bye low” on the hay.

In a nice little barn,
Where the “moo-moos” are;
Freddie says “Good night,”
But the lammie he says “Baa!”

To be sung by Marmar with appropriate accompaniment of gesture, etc.

On the outside of the letter appears:

A little song for Freddie,
On his third birthday,
With “lots” of loving kisses,
From his Wee-wee far away.

On his sixth birthday Grandpa contributes:

Concord, Freddie’s
6th Birthday,
1869.

Dear Freddy,

I give you for your Birth Day Present this new Picture Book. It has plain words for you to pick out and read. The stories are short and about things that you know. Now, my little scholar, look among the leaves every day, and see how many words you can tell, — Very soon you will find you can read whole pages, spell the whole book through, and write the stories, word for word on your slate or in your little writing book. Then you will not be a little Dunce, and when Grandpa comes to see you, you will be glad to show him how well you can read.

Grandma gives the top to Johnny.

From Grandpa.

Grandma, not to be outdone, sent this:

Dear Freddy,

If worms give us the silk thread — can't we find time enough to find out how the Fabric is made which dresses are formed of — minutes and days — ours. Days and Years are passing away — let us be busy — and I guess we will get to the Vienna Exposition —

"How doth the little busy Bee"

Improve each shining hour — Be a Bee — and your hours will be too few for the Flowers of Science and the Wheels of Use. Grandma will help you with her one dim eye and Grandpa will explain a great deal to you with his Shining Light — Mama with your help will make you a true, good man. —

1873.

On his twelfth birthday Aunt Louisa again lapsed into poetry:

F. A. P.

Who likes to read a fairy tale,
Or stories told of sword and sail,
Until his little optics fail?
Our boy.

Who loves his father's watch to wear
And often draw it out with care
Upon its round white face to stare?
Our boy.

Who rather proud of his small feet
When wearing slippers new and neat,

And stockings red as any beet?
Our boy.

Who in his pocket keeps his hands
As round the house he “mooning” stands
Or reads the paper like the mans?
Our boy.

Who likes to “boss” it over Jack,
And sometimes gives a naughty whack,
But gets it heartily paid back?
Our boy.

Who likes to have a birthday frolic
And eats until he has a colic,
That for the time is diabolic?
Our boy.

Who is the dearest little lad,
That aunt or mother ever had,
To love when gay and cheer when sad?
Our boy.

May angels guard him with their wings,
And all brave, good and happy things,
Make nobler thou than crowned kings.
Our boy.

March 28th, 1875.

John, the original of Daisy in “Little Women,” received in his babyhood days from Aunt Louisa, some tiny blue stockings with this verse:

Two pair of blue hose,
For Johnny’s white toes,
So Jack Frost can’t freeze em,
Nor darned stockings tease em,
So pretty and neat

I hope the small feet
Will never go wrong,
But walk straight and strong,
The way father went.
We shall all be content,
If the dear little son
Be a second good John.

On his tenth birthday, both Grandpa and Grandma Alcott sent these characteristic greetings to their younger grandson:

Grandma Alcott to Johnny.
10th birthday. June 24th. 1875.

Giving song, all day long,
Under the elm or willow;
With sunshine shed
On the little head
That rests on Grandma's pillow.
To and fro,
Let it go,
While inside piping cheery,
As he takes his rest
In his hang-bird's nest
Lies Grandma's little deary.

Grandpa Alcott to Johnny.
June 24th. 1875.

A fine little sword
For gallant Capt. Jack,
As he marches down the hill
His army at his back.

No giants will it kill
Since its only made for show,
And the best way to fight,
Is a kiss for a blow.

In these days of private secretaries, labor-saving devices, and specialization, it is difficult to comprehend the obstacles that Louisa Alcott encountered in writing. Her day was filled with other tasks, housework, sewing, teaching, nursing — yet the pen was never idle, the busy brain was never still. Her power of concentration made it possible for her to write under harassing conditions. This is her own description of her methods of work:

My methods of work are very simple and soon told. My head is my study, and there I keep the various plans of stories for years sometimes, letting them grow as they will till I am ready to put them on paper. Then it is quick work, as chapters go down word for word as they stand in my mind, and need no alteration. I never copy, since I find by experience that the work I spend the least time upon is best liked by critics and speakers.

Any paper, any pen, any place that is quiet suit me, and I used to write from morning till night without fatigue when "the steam was up." Now, however, I am paying the penalty of twenty years of over work, and can write but two hours a day, doing about twenty pages, sometimes more, though my right thumb is useless from writer's cramp.

While a story is under way I live in it, see the people more plainly than real ones around me, hear them talk, and am much interested, surprised and provoked at their actions, for I seem to have no power to rule them, and can simply record their experiences and performances.

Materials for the children's tales I find in the lives of the little people about me, for no one can invent anything so droll, pretty or pathetic as the sayings and doings of these small actors, poets and martyrs. In the older books, the events are mostly from real life, the strongest the truest, and I yet hope to write a few of the novels which have been simmering in my brain while necessity and unexpected success have confined me to juvenile literature.

I gave Mrs. Moulton many facts for her article in "Famous Women," and there are many other sketches which will add more if they are wanted. The first edition of "Jo's Boys" was twenty thousand I believe, and over fifty thousand were soon gone. Since January I know little about the sales. People usually ask "How much have you made?" I am contented with a hundred thousand, and find my best success in the comfort my family enjoy; also a naughty satisfaction in proving that it was better *not* to "stick to teaching" as advised, but to write.

Louisa May Alcott.
From a daguerreotype.

With all her love for her father, irreverent Louisa delighted in making fun of him. The complacent philosopher, with his voluminous journals, his several books in manuscript, his liking, despite the brilliancy of his conversations, for the written rather than the spoken word, was a wasteful user of paper and a careless dispenser of ink. That her father enjoyed her good-natured banter is shown by the fact that in his journal he has entered the following poem, written by Louisa at nineteen:

From Louisa on my 52nd birthday.
Nov. 29th, 1851.
To Father.

A cloth on the table where dear Plato sits
By one of the Graces was spread
With the single request that he would not design
New patterns with black ink or red.
And when he is soaring away in the clouds
I beg he'll remember and think

Though the “blackbirds” are fair his cloth will be fairer
For not being deluged with ink.
May plenty of paper of pens and of quiet
To my dear pa forever be given
Till he has written such piles that when on the top
He can walk calmly on into Heaven.

CHAPTER IX

Friendships and Beliefs

RARE friendships existed among the great minds of that period, when Transcendentalism in America was first talked and lived, a close bond of sympathy uniting Bronson Alcott, Emerson, Thoreau, Ellery Channing, Margaret Fuller, and Elizabeth Peabody. Such association made its impress upon the Alcott daughters. Anna's diary is filled with references to visits with the Emersons. Louisa's deal less with the family and more with the intellectual life of the great philosopher, whom she made her idol. Through life he was her stanch and understanding friend.

"The Apostles of the Newness" was the scoffing term applied to these literary giants of New England by those who lacked the mental and spiritual insight to recognize greatness in others.

This attitude of ridicule was largely responsible for the continued attacks upon the *Dial*, a quarterly issued by the Transcendentalists, edited from 1840 to 1844 by Emerson, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, and Thoreau. Between its modest covers were many of the intellectual masterpieces of the time: its rare volumes are still treasure-houses of literature which to-day command any price. Mr. Alcott selected its title and was to a large extent responsible for its policy. His Orphic Sayings in the *Dial*, now looked upon as classics, were the butt of the press at the time, and the derision of Boston society.

In these Orphic Sayings, he gave this remarkable definition of Reform: "Reforms are the noblest of facts. Extant in time, they work for eternity: dwelling with men, they are with God."

Conversation among these friends was neither trivial nor useless, and in the Alcott circle, which included Emerson, Thoreau, Theodore Parker, William Henry Channing, James Freeman Clarke, Elizabeth Peabody, Mrs. Cheney, and other of the early Transcendentalists, later on augmented by James Russell Lowell and Nathaniel Hawthorne, a series of drawing-room symposiums was established, with Alcott, whom Emerson called "serious and superior," as a leader. Much of the substance of these conversations is found in the Alcott journals, and in the unpublished manuscripts of the poet-philosopher.

In Concord, the Alcotts once more enjoyed the literary companionship they craved. Emerson was a near neighbor. Thoreau had his cabin at Walden, where he had established “a community of one.” To and from Boston came others of the Transcendental group, and Concord became the center of thought for New England.

Thinking, however, was not the only occupation of Bronson Alcott. Dreamer he was, but he delighted in toil and ever upheld the dignity of labor, not ashamed nor afraid to work for hire as a laborer in his neighbor’s field, while nightly conducting drawing-room conversations with a company of peers and students.

When Thoreau built his cabin, Alcott helped him. They cut the trees from Emerson’s grove. While Emerson was abroad, they built a summer-house for him on his grounds. It stood for many years, a picturesque temple of friendship. William Henry Channing mentions a morning spent there, reading Margaret Fuller’s Italian letters. May Alcott has made drawings of it, which were published in a volume of “Concord Sketches” that also contained her drawing of Hawthorne’s house.

Mr. Alcott practically rebuilt Orchard House for his own family. Mrs. Child, a friend of Mrs. Alcott, thus describes this home, which is now preserved as a memorial to Louisa M. Alcott and is visited by thousands every year:

When they bought the place the house was so very old that it was thrown into the bargain, with the supposition that it was fit for nothing but firewood. But Mr. Alcott had an architectural taste, more intelligible than his Orphic Sayings. He let every old rafter and beam stay in its place, changed old ovens and ash holes into Saxon arched alcoves, and added a washerwoman’s old shanty to the rear. The result is a house full of queer nooks and corners, with all manner of juttings in and out. It seems as if the spirit of some old architect had dropped it down in Concord.

Thoreau, master builder himself, has paid to Bronson Alcott this tribute:

One of the last of the philosophers, Connecticut gave him to the world. He peddled first her wares, afterwards, as he declares, his brains. These he peddles still, bearing for fruit, only his brain, like the nut its kernel. His words and attitude always suppose a better state of things than other men are aquainted with, and he will be the last man to be disappointed when the ages revolve. He has no venture in the present. But though comparatively disregarded now, when his day comes, laws unsuspected by most will take effect, and rulers will come to him for advice.

Emerson, who saw the boy mind beneath the philosopher’s dignity, said tenderly of Bronson Alcott: “He is certainly the youngest man of his age we have seen. When I looked at his gray hairs, his conversation sounded pathetic; but I looked again and they reminded me of the gray dawn.”

Even his friends, to say nothing of Louisa, occasionally poked fun at him for chronicling so minutely all his thoughts. Ellery Channing called his library, “Encyclopediea de Moi-meme, en cents volumes.” Yet these journals and records are now worth more than the fine library he collected and in which he delighted.

Emerson has thus described the origin of the Fruitlands community:

On the invitation of James P. Greaves of London, the friend and fellow-laborer of Pestalozzi in Switzerland, Mr. Alcott went to England in 1842. Mr. Greaves died before his arrival, but Mr. Alcott was received cordially by his friends, who had given his name to their school, Alcott House, Ham, near London. He spent several months in making acquaintance with various classes of reformers. On his return to America, he brought with him two of his English friends, Chas. Lane and H. C. Wright; and Mr. Lane having bought a farm which he called Fruitlands, at Harvard, Mass., they all went there to found a new community.

The Fruitlands experiment and its failure have been immortalized by Louisa Alcott in her “Transcendental Wild Oats.” The detail of it is thus described by a friend of the Alcott family, who had the story from Bronson Alcott himself:

The crop failures necessitated the community living on a barley diet, as anything animal was not allowed, not even milk and eggs. Now and then they gave a thought as to what they should do for shoes when those they had were gone; for depriving the cow of her skin was a crime not to be tolerated. The barley crop was injured in harvesting, and before long want was staring them in the face. The Alcotts remained at Fruitlands till mid-winter in dire poverty, all the guests having taken their departure as provisions vanished. Friends came to the rescue, and, Mr. Alcott concluded with pathos in his voice, “We put our little women on an ox-sled and made our way to Concord! So faded one of the dreams of my youth. I have given you the facts as they were; Louisa has given the comic side in ‘Transcendental Wild Oats’; but Mrs. Alcott could give you the tragic side.”

Indeed, it was always Mrs. Alcott who could have given the tragic side, skillfully as she kept her worries hidden. Her own family, indignant because Bronson Alcott could not better provide the material needs for his family, on more than one occasion besought the faithful wife to leave him.

A letter from her brother, urging this step, drew forth from her a defense of Bronson Alcott which the husband enters in his journal as follows:

November
1840

Passages of a letter from my wife to one who misapprehends and perverts my life and purposes.

"If I do not mistake the spirit as well as letter of your remark you would have us believe that a righteous retribution has overtaken us, (or my husband, and we are one,) and that the world is justly punishing him for not having conciliated it, by conforming to its wills and ways. — You say that my husband was told ten years ago, that the world could not understand him. It perhaps fell dead on his ears and ever will. There is no human voice can convince him that the path he has chosen to tread, thorny, bleak, solitary, as it is, is not the right one for him. Just so did that man of Nazareth whom all the world profess to admire and adore, but few to imitate; and these few are the laughing-stock of the Christian Community. They are branded as visionaries and fools. But this little band when alone and disencumbered of idle observation, enjoy the recital of their privations; they have been reviled, but they revile not again; they know sorrow and are acquainted with grief; and yet there is joy in that group of sinless men, such as angels might desire to partake of. I am not writing poetry, but I have tried to place before your mind, in as brief, but clear a manner as I am able, our real condition, and Mr. Alcott's merit as a man, who, though punished and neglected by a wicked world, has much to console and encourage him in the confidence and cooperation of some of the wisest and best men living. Ten such, were they permitted in their several vocations to act as teachers, preachers, and printers, would save our wicked city from the ruin that awaits it. But they are turned, like the Nazarene, into solitary places to lament the blindness and folly of mankind, who are following the vain and fleeting shadow for the real and abiding substance. But to return to Mr. Alcott, is he to sell his soul, or what is the same thing, his principles, for the bread that perisheth? No one will employ him in his way; he cannot work in theirs, if he thereby involve his conscience. He is so resolved in this matter that I believe he will starve and freeze before he will sacrifice principle to comfort. In this, I and my children are necessarily implicated: we make and mean to make all the sacrifices we can to sustain him, but we have less to sustain us in the spirit, and therefore, are more liable to be overcome of the flesh. He has, for a long time gone without everything which he could not produce by labor, from his own place, that no one could in truth reproach him with wantonly eating of the fruits of another's labor.

He was sent for by friends in Hingham to talk with them; which he did two evenings; his expenses were paid and $23. put into his hands as a slight compensation for the benefit they felt he had conferred upon them by his conversations. I should like to copy the note accompanying it, but you never care to see how his fellow fanatics rave on these holy themes, life, duty, destiny of man. Thus he occasionally finds a market for his thoughts and experiences, which, though inadequate to our support, is richly prized as the honest gains of an innocent and righteous labor. You spoke of his “poetical wardrobe” whether in satire or in a worthier spirit, I cannot tell. However spiritual he may have become, there is still enough of the carnal to feel the chills of winter, and the chiller blasts of satire. His tatters are the rags of righteousness and keep him warmer than they would anyone whose spirit was less cheered and warmed by the fires of eternal love and truth.

An appreciative account of Mr. Alcott’s famous school in the Masonic Temple, Boston, is found in the “Record of a School,” edited by Elizabeth Peabody, published in 1835, republished in 1874. The “Conversations with Children on the Gospels,” edited by Mr. Alcott in two volumes, appearing in 1836-1837, caused such a commotion in Boston as to result in the downfall of the Temple School. Reading these conversations to-day, one is impressed with the modern quality of their thought. They were forerunners of that higher criticism, which with the Bible student now supplants the old blind acceptance without reflection of even obscure Biblical passages.

On philosophy and religion Mr. Alcott and Miss Peabody delighted to talk and write. Their discussion of the existence of evil is startlingly modern.

“I do not think that evil should be clothed in form by the imagination,” writes Miss Peabody to Mr. Alcott; “I think every effort should be made to strip it of all individuality, all shaping and all coloring. And the reason is, that Evil has in truth no substantial existence, that it acquires all the existence it has from want of faith and soul cultivation, and that this is sufficient reason why all cultivation should be directed to give positiveness, coloring, shaping, to all kinds of good — Good only being eternal truth.”

In reply, the philosopher thus comments in his diary: “Evil has no positive existence, I agree with Miss Peabody, but it has usurped a positive place and being in the popular imagination, and by the imagination must it be made to flee away into its negative life. How shall this be done? By shadowing forth in vivid colors the absolute beauty and phenomena of good, by assuming evil not as positive, but as negative.”

“I shall always love you for loving Alcott,” writes Emerson to his schoolmate and lifelong friend, the Reverend W. H. Furness. “He is a great man, the god with the herdsman of Admetus. His conversation is sublime; yet when I see how he is underestimated by cultivated people, I fancy none but I have heard him talk.”

In the midst of slander and petty persecutions, Alcott writes in his diary for April, 1837:

I have been striving to apprehend the real in the seeming, to strip ideas of their adventitious phrases and behold them in their order and powers. I have sought to penetrate the showy terrestrial to find the heavenly things. I have tried to translate into ideas the language and images of spirit, and thus to read God in his works. The outward I have seen as the visage and type of the inward. Ever doth this same nature double its design and stand forth — now before the inner, now before the outer sense of man, at once substance and form, image and idea, so that God shall never slip wholly from the consciousness of the soul.

Emerson, weary of seeing his friend misunderstood, urges him to give up teaching and become an author, picturing as his golden view for Alcott that one day he will leave the impracticable world to wag its own way, sit apart, and write his oracles for its behoof.

“Write! let them hear or let them forbear,” he thunders. “The written word abides until, slowly and unexpectedly, and in widely sundered places, it has created its own church.”

The unreality of evil, as taught and believed by Alcott nearly a century ago, laughed and scoffed at then, was twenty-five years later practically the foundation of a belief which gained its first foothold in New England, and, with headquarters in Boston, has spread, until to-day its followers and churches circle the civilized globe — a new-old religion, based on the literal acceptance of the teachings of Christ. What to-day is called metaphysical teaching was in the Alcott period scoffed at as Transcendentalism.

Mr. Alcott’s strict adherence to a vegetarian diet was also the topic of ridicule from public and press, although the Alcott children seemed to thrive on it, and certainly, as four-year-old Louisa once remarked, “Did pitty well for a wegetable diet.”

Louisa, in her journal, gives this sample of the vegetarian wafers they had at Fruitlands:

Vegetable
diet and
sweet repose
Animal food
and nightmare.

Pluck your
body from
the orchard;
do not snatch
it from the
shamble.

Without flesh
diet there
could be no
blood-shedding
war.

Appollo eats no
flesh and has no
beard; his voice is

Snuff is no less snuff
though accepted
from a gold box.

melody itself.

Bronson Alcott constantly sought self-improvement, and the shortcomings of his early education were more than offset by his untiring study. Realizing at one time his lack of a vocabulary, he comments in his journal, that to rectify this he has just bought two books, “A Symposium of Melancholy,” and “Hunter on the Blood.”

In their memoirs of Bronson Alcott, F. B. Sanborn and W. T. Harris have thus summed up his character: “He was the most filial son, the most faithful lover, the most attached friend, the most generous philanthropist of his time. And when he died, he left fewer enemies than any man of equal age can have provoked or encountered in so long a career.”

In his study of childhood, Mr. Alcott sought first to reach the mind, recognizing that as “the God within us.” He encouraged individuality in his children, trying in their earliest years to make them think for themselves. All through his teaching runs the boy’s friendship with God, and his sense of oneness with his Maker was a part of the divine heritage he passed on to his daughters.

He records in his diary a conversation with Anna, who was four, and Louisa, who was two, after reading to them the story of Jesus, which he made so vital that, given their choice, they asked for it in preference to a fairy tale. Anna remarked that Jesus did not really die. “They killed his body, but not his soul.” Her father asked: “What is the soul, Anna?” The little four-year-old replied: “It’s this inside of me that makes me feel and think and love.” “And,” said the father, “what became of Jesus’ soul?” Anna replied: “It went back to God.” Whereat little two-year-old Louisa asked: “Why, isn’t Dod inside of me?”

A note in the father’s diary at the birth of Elizabeth records “Anna’s first interview with her sister” (Elizabeth a few hours old), and a day later comes this record: “Anna and Louisa interview their sister.” Louisa, two years old, wishes to have the baby sister put in her arms, when four-year-old Anna says warningly: “Treat her very carefully, Louisa, she comes from God.” What a beautiful thought to give a child of the divine mystery of birth!

Instead of asserting what he intended to make of his children, Alcott encouraged the child to make itself, beginning when it was a small baby, treating it as an individual, giving it opportunity to use its mentality, instilling principles of right and wrong by suggestion. Alcott never commanded. “You don’t wish to do that,” was his way, not exacting blind obedience, but expressing his conviction that the child wished to do right.

To him, God was love. He had no fear of God, for perfect love had cast out fear. This same spirit was manifested in all his children. To them the change called Death was not to be dreaded; it was a stepping forward and upward.

This thought that death is not the end, but the beginning, is expressed in one of Louisa’s most beautiful poems:

Thoreau’s Flute

We sighing said, “Our Pan is dead;
His pipe hangs mute beside the river.
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
And Music’s airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost;
The bluebird chants a requiem;
The willow-blossom waits for him; —
The Genius of the wood is lost.”

Then from the flute, untouched by hands,
There came a low, harmonious breath;
“For such as he there is no death —
His life the eternal life commands;
Above man’s aims his nature rose,
The wisdom of a just content
Made one small spot a continent
And tuned to poetry life’s prose.

“Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
To him grew human or divine, —
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.
Such homage Nature ne’er forgets,
And yearly on the coverlid
‘Neath which her darling lieth hid
Will write his name in violets.

“To him no vain regrets belong,
Whose soul, that finer instrument,
Gave to the world no poor lament,

But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend! he still will be
A potent presence, though unseen; —
Steadfast, sagacious and serene;

Seek not for him — he is with thee.”

A visit to Sleepy Hollow suggests life, not death. Giant trees stretch their branches over marble and granite monuments, as if in benediction. “There is no death, for God is life,” they seem to say. For them there is no death. Emerson lives to-day, the great philosopher; so do Thoreau, Hawthorne, Bronson Alcott, and others of that mighty company. And who shall say that Louisa Alcott is dead? She lives in the hearts of thousands, and will go on living through the love they bear her.

Bronson Alcott was a true disciple of Jesus Christ. He lived the example set by his Master not alone in words and thoughts, but in deeds. He lived through and beyond misunderstanding, ridicule, poverty, to see his teachings respected, his name honored, to see the first glimmer of the new light which was beginning to break over the world, the sunrise at his own sunset.

This thought is embodied in the last poem Louisa Alcott ever wrote:

To my Father.
On his Eighty-Sixth Birthday.

Dear Pilgrim, waiting patiently,
The long, long journey nearly done,
Beside the sacred stream that flows
Clear shining in the western sun;
Look backward on the varied road
Your steadfast feet have trod,
From youth to age, through weal and woe,
Climbing forever nearer God.

Mountain and valley lie behind;
The slough is crossed, the wicket passed;
Doubt and despair, sorrow and sin,

Giant and fiend, conquered at last.
Neglect is changed to honor now,
The heavy cross may be laid down;
The white head wins and wears at length
The prophet’s, not the martyr’s crown.

Greatheart and Faithful gone before,
Brave Christiana, Mercy sweet,
Are shining ones who stand and wait
The weary wanderer to greet.
Patience and Love his handmaids are,
And till time brings release,
Christian may rest in that bright room
Whose windows open to the east.

The staff set by, the sandals off,
Still pondering the precious scroll,
Serene and strong he waits the call
That frees and wings a happy soul.
Then beautiful as when it lured,
The boy’s aspiring eyes,
Before the pilgrim’s longing sight,
Shall the Celestial City rise.

The Biography

Orchard House, Alcott's long-time home

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT: HER LIFE, LETTERS, AND JOURNALS by Ednah D. Cheney.

Ednah Dow Littlehale Cheney (1824 –1904) was a Bostonian writer, reformer, and philanthropist, as well as an admirer of Alcott’s work. In 1888 she published this informative collection of letters and notes, celebrating the great writer’s life and works.

Ednah Dow Littlehale Cheney

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INTRODUCTION.

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT is universally recognized as the greatest and most popular story-teller for children in her generation. She has known the way to the hearts of young people, not only in her own class, or even country, but in every condition of life, and in many foreign lands. Plato says, “ Beware of those who teach fables to children; “ and it is impossible to estimate the influence which the popular writer of fiction has over the audience he wins to listen to his tales. The preacher, the teacher, the didactic writer find their audience in hours of strength, with critical faculties all alive, to question their propositions and refute their arguments. The novelist comes to us in the intervals of recreation and relaxation, and by his seductive powers of imagination and sentiment takes possession of the fancy and the heart before judgment and reason are aroused to defend the citadel. It well becomes us, then, who would guard young minds from subtle temptations, to study the character of those works which charm and delight the children.

Of no author can it be more truly said than of Louisa Alcott that her works are a revelation of herself. She rarely sought for the material of her stories in old chronicles, or foreign adventures. Her capital was her own life and experiences and those of others directly about her; and her own well-remembered girlish frolics and fancies were sure to find responsive enjoyment in the minds of other girls.

It is therefore impossible to understand Miss Alcott’s works fully without a knowledge of her own life and experienfces. By inheritance and education she had rich and peculiar gifts; and her life was one of rare advantages, as well as of trying difficulties. Herself of the most true and frank nature, she has given us the opportunity of knowing her without disguise; and it is thus that I shall try to portray her, showing what influences acted upon her through life, and how faithfully and fully she performed whatever duties circumstances laid upon her. Fortunately I can let her speak mainly for herself.

Miss Alcott revised her journals at different times during her later life, striking out what was too personal for other eyes than her own, and destroying a great deal which would doubtless have proved very interesting.

The small number of letters given will undoubtedly be a disappointment. Miss Alcott wished to have most of her letters destroyed, and her sister respected her wishes. She was not a voluminous correspondent; she did not encourage many intimacies, and she seldom wrote letters except to her family, unless in reference to some purpose she had strongly at heart. Writing was her constant occupation, and she was not tempted to indulge in it as a recreation. Her letters are brief, and strictly to the point, but always characteristic in feeling and expression; and, even at the risk of the repetition of matter contained in her journals or her books, I shall give copious extracts from such as have come into my hands.

Jamaica Plain, Mass., 1889.

E. D. C.

Cheney, Alcott’s biographer

CHAPTER I.

GENEALOGY AND PARENTAGE.

TO LOUISA MAY ALCOTT.

BY HER FATHER.

When I remember with what buoyant heart,
Midst war’s alarms and woes of civil strife,
In youthful eagerness thou didst depart,
At peril of thy safety, peace, and life,
To nurse the wounded soldier, swathe the dead, —
How pierced soon by fever’s poisoned dart,
And brought unconscious home, with wildered head,
Thou ever since ‘mid langour and dull pain.
To conquer fortune, cherish kindred dear,
Hast with grave studies vexed a sprightly brain,
In myriad households kindled love and cheer,
Ne’er from thyself by Fame’s loud trump beguiled,
Sounding in this and the farther hemisphere, —
I press thee to my heart as Duty’s faithful child.

LOUISA ALCOTT was the second child of Amos Bronson and Abba May Alcott. This name was spelled Alcocke in English history. About 1616 a coat-of-arms was granted to Thomas Alcocke of Silbertosf, in the county of Leicester. The device represents three cocks, emblematic of watchfulness; and the motto is Semper Vigilans.

The first of the name appearing in English history is John Alcocke of Beverley, Yorkshire, of whom Fuller gives an account in his Worthies of England.

Thomas and George Alcocke were the first of the name among the settlers in New England. The name is frequently found in the records of Dorchester and Roxbury, and has passed through successive changes to its present form.

The name of Bronson came from Mr. Alcott’s maternal grandfather, the sturdy Capt. Amos Bronson of Plymouth, Conn. “ His ancestors on both sides had been substantial people of respectable position in England, and were connected with the founders and governors of the chief New England colonies. At the time of Mr. Alcott’s birth they had become simple farmers, reaping a scanty living from their small farms in Connecticut."

Amos Bronson Alcott, the father of Louisa, was born Nov. 29, 1799, at the foot of Spindle Hill, in the region called New Connecticut. He has himself given in simple verse the story of his quaint rustic life in his boyhood, and Louisa has reproduced it in her story of " Eli's Education " (in the Spinning-Wheel Stories), which gives a very true account of his youthful life and adventures. He derived his refined, gentle nature from his mother, who had faith in her son, and who lived to see him the accomplished scholar he had vowed to become in his boyhood. Although brought up in these rustic surroundings, his manners were always those of a true gentleman. The name of the little mountain town afterward became Wolcott, and Louisa records in her journal a pilgrimage made thither in after years.1

Louisa Alcott's mother was a daughter of Col. Joseph May of Boston. This family is so well known that it is hardly necessary to repeat its genealogy here.2 She was a sister of Samuel J. May, for many years pastor of the Unitarian church at Syracuse, who was so tenderly beloved by men of all religious persuasions in his home, and so widely known and respected for his courage and zeal in the Antislavery cause, as well as for his many philanthropic labors.

Mrs. Alcott's mother was Dorothy Sewall, a descendant of that family already distinguished in the annals of the Massachusetts colony, and which has lost nothing of its reputation for ability and virtue in its latest representatives.3

Mrs. Alcott inherited in large measure the traits which distinguished her family. She was a woman of large stature, fine physique, and overflowing life. Her temper was as quick and warm as her affections, but she was full of broad unselfish generosity. Her untiring energies were constantly employed, not only for the benefit of her family, but for all.

1. For further particulars of the Alcott genealogy, see " New Connecticut," a poem by A. B. Alcott, privately printed in 1881. I am also indebted to Mr. F. B. Sanborn's valuable paper read at the memorial service at Concord in 1888.

2. For particulars of the genealogy of the May families, see " A Genealogy of the Descendants of John May," who came from England to Roxbury in America, 1640.

3. For the Sewall family, see " Drake's History of Boston," or fuller accounts in the Sewall Papers published by the Massachusetts Historical Society. '

around her. She had a fine mind, and if she did not have large opportunities for scholastic instruction, she always enjoyed the benefit of intellectual society and converse with noble minds. She loved expression in writing, and her letters are full of wit and humor, keen criticism, and noble moral sentiments. Marriage with an idealist, who had no means of support, brought her many trials and privations.

She bore them heroically, never wavering in affection for her husband or in devotion to her children. If the quick, impatient temper sometimes relieved itself in hasty speech, the action was always large and unselfish.

It will be apparent from Louisa’s life that she inherited the traits of both her parents, and that the uncommon powers of mind and heart that distinguished her were not accidental, but the accumulated result of the lives of generations of strong and noble men and women.

She was well born.

Mr. Alcott to Colonel May.

Germantown, Nov. 29, 1832.

Dear Sir, — It is with great pleasure that I announce to you the biiih of a second daughter. She was born at half-past 12 this morning, on my birthday (33), and is a very fine healthful child, much more so than Anna was at birth, — has a fine foundation for health and energy of character. Abba is very comfortable, and will soon be restored to the discharge of those domestic and maternal duties in which she takes so much delight, and in the performance of which she furnishes so excellent a model for imitation. Those only who have seen her in those relations, much as there is in her general character to admire and esteem, can form a true estimate of her personal worth and uncommon devotion of heart. She was formed for domestic sentiment rather than the gaze and heartlessness of what is falsely called “ society.” Abba inclines to call the babe Louisa May, — a name to her full of every association connected with amiable benevolence and exalted worth. I hope its present possessor may rise to equal attainment, and deserve a place in the estimation of society.

With Abba’s and Anna’s and Louisa’s regards, allow me to assure you of the sincerity with which I am Yours, A. Bronson Alcott.

The children who lived to maturity were —

Anna Bronson Alcott, Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott, Abba May Alcott.

CHAPTER II.

CHILDHOOD.

TO THE FIRST ROBIN, (Written at eight years of age.)

Welcome, welcome, little stranger,
Fear no harm, and fear no danger;
We are glad to see you here,
For you sing “ Sweet Spring is near.”
Now the white snow melts away;
Now the flowers blossom gay:
Come dear bird and build your nest,
For we love our robin best.

Louisa May Alcott.
Concord.

MR. ALCOTT had removed to Germantown, Penn, to take charge of a school, and here Louisa was born, Nov. 29, 1832. She was the second daughter, and was welcomed with the same pride and affection as her elder sister had been. We have this pleasant little glimpse of her when she was hardly a month old, from the pen of one of her mother’s friends. Even at that extremely early age love saw the signs of more than usual intelligence, and friends as well as fond parents looked forward to a promising career.

Extract from a Letter by Miss Donaldson.
Germantown, Penn., Dec. 16, 1832.

I have a dear little pet in Mrs. Alcott’s little Louisa. It is the prettiest, best little thing in the world. You will wonder to hear me call anything so young pretty, but it is really so in an uncommon degree; it has a fair complexion, dark bright eyes, long dark hair, a high forehead, and altogether a countenance of more than usual intelligence.

The mother is such a delightful woman that it is a cordial to my heart whenever I go to see her. I went in to see her for a few moments the evening we received your letter, and I think I never saw her in better spirits; and truly, if goodness and integrity can insure felicity, she deserves to be happy.

The earliest anecdote remembered of Louisa is this: When the family went from Philadelphia to Boston by steamer, the two little girls were nicely dressed in clean nankeen frocks for the voyage; but they had not been long on board before the lively Louisa was missing, and after a long search she was brought up from the engine-room, where her eager curiosity had carried her, and where she was having a beautiful time, with " plenty of dirt."

The family removed to Boston in 1834, and Mr. Alcott opened his famous school in Masonic Temple. Louisa was too young to attend the school except as an occasional visitor; but she found plenty of interest and amusement for herself in playing on the Common, making friends with every child she met, and on one occasion falling into the Frog Pond. She has given a very lively picture of this period of her life in " Poppy's Pranks," that vivacious young person being a picture of herself, not at all exaggerated.

The family lived successively in Front Street, Cottage Place, and Beach Street during the six succeeding years in Boston. They occasionally passed some weeks at Scituate during the summer, which the children heartily enjoyed.

Mrs. Hawthorne gives a little anecdote which shows how the child's heart was blossoming in this family sunshine: " One morning in Front Street, at the breakfast table, Louisa suddenly broke silence, with a sunny smile saying, ' I love everybody in dis whole world.'"

Two children were born during this residence in Boston. Elizabeth was named for Mr. Alcott's assistant in his school, — Miss E. P. Peabody, since so widely known and beloved by all friends of education. A boy was born only to die. The little body was laid reverently away in the lot of Colonel May in the old burial-ground on the Common, and the children were taught to speak with tenderness of their " baby brother."

When Louisa was about seven years old she made a visit to friends in Providence. Miss C. writes of her: " She is a beautiful little girl to look upon, and I love her affectionate manners. I think she is more like her mother than either of the others." As is usually the case, Louisa's journal, which she began at this early age, speaks more fully of her struggles and difficulties than of the bright, sunny moods which made her attractive. A little letter carefully printed and sent home during this visit is preserved. In it she says she is not happy; and she did have one trying experience there, to which she refers in " My Boys." Seeing some poor children who she thought were hungry, she took food from the house without asking permission, and carried it to them, and was afterward very much astonished and grieved at being reprimanded instead of praised for the deed. Miss C. says: " She has had several spells of feeling sad; but a walk or a talk soon dispels all gloom. She was half moody when she wrote her letter; but now she is gay as a lark. She loves to play out of doors, and sometimes she is not inclined to stay in when it is unpleasant.” In her sketches of “ My Boys “ she describes two of her companions here, not forgetting the kindness of the one and the mischievousness of the other.

Although the family were quite comfortable during the time of Mr. Alcott’s teaching in Boston, yet the children wearied of their extremely simple diet of plain boiled rice without sugar, and graham meal without butter or molasses. An old friend who could not eat the bountiful rations provided for her at the United States Hotel, used to save her piece of pie or cake for the Alcott children. Louisa often took it home to the others in a bandbox which she brought for the purpose.

This friend was absent in Europe many years, and returned to find the name of Louisa Alcott famous. When she met the authoress on the street she was eagerly greeted. “ Why, I did not think you would remember me! “ said the old lady.

“Do you think I shall ever forget that bandbox? “ was the instant reply.

In 1840, Mr. Alcott’s school having proved unsuccessful, the family removed to Concord, Mass., and took a cottage which is described in “ Little Women” as “ Meg’s first home,” although Anna never lived there after her marriage. It was a pleasant house, with a garden full of trees, and best of all a large barn, in which the children could have free range and act out all the plays with which their little heads were teeming. Of course it was a delightful change from the city for the children, and here they passed two very happy years, for they were too young to understand the cares which pressed upon the hearts of their parents. Life was full of interest. One cold morning they found in the garden a little half-starved bird; and having warmed and fed it, Louisa was inspired to write a pretty poem to “The Robin.” The fond mother was so delighted that she said to her, “ You will grow up a Shakspeare! “ From the lessons of her father she had formed the habit of writing freely, but this is the first recorded instance of her attempting to express her feelings in verse.

From the influences of such parentage as I have described, the family life in which Louisa was brought up became wholly unique.

If the father had to give up his cherished projects of a school modelled after his ideas, he could at least conduct the education of his own children; and he did so with the most tender devotion. Even when they were infants he took a great deal of personal care of them, and loved to put the little ones to bed and use the “ children’s hour “ to instil into their hearts lessons of love and wisdom. He was full of fun too, and would lie on the floor and frolic with them, making compasses of his long legs with which to draw letters and diagrams. No shade of fear mingled with the children’s reverent recognition of his superior spiritual life. So their hearts lay open to him, and he was able to help them in their troubles.

He taught them much by writing; and we have many specimens of their lists of words to be spelled, written, and understood. The lessons at Scituate were often in the garden, and their father always drew their attention to Nature and her beautiful forms and meanings. Little symbolical pictures helped to illustrate his lessons, and he sometimes made drawings himself. Here is an example of lessons. A quaint little picture represents one child playing on a harp, another drawing an arrow. It is inscribed —

FOR LOUISA.
1840.

Two passions strong divide our life, —
Meek, gentle love, or boisterous strife.
Below the child playing the harp is —
Love, Music, Concord.
Below the shooter is —
Anger, Arrow, Discord.
Another leaflet is —

FOR LOUISA 1840.

Louisa loves —
What? Softly.) Fm
Have some then, Father
says.
Christmas Eve, December, 1840.
Concordia.

FOR ANNA.
1840.
Beauty or Duty, — which loves Anna best?

A
Question
from her Father.
Christmas Eve,
December, 1840.
Concordia.

A letter beautifully printed by her father for Louisa (1839) speaks to her of conscience, and she adds to it this note: “ L. began early, it seems, to wrestle with her conscience.” The children were always required to keep their journals regularly, and although these were open to the inspection of father and mother, they were very frank, and really recorded their struggles and desires. The mother had the habit of writing little notes to the children when she wished to call their attention to any fault or peculiarity. Louisa preserved many of them, headed, —

[.Extracts from letters from Mother, received during these early years. I preserve them to show the ever tender, watchful help she gave to the child who caused her the most anxiety, yet seemed to be the nearest to her heart till the end. —

L.M.A.]

No. 1. — My Dear Little Girl, — Will you accept this doll from me on your seventh birthday? She will be a quiet playmate for my active Louisa for seven years more. Be a kind mamma, and love her for my sake.

Your Mother.

Beach Street, Boston, 1839.

From her Mother.

Cottage in Concord.

Dear Daughter, — Your tenth birthday has arrived. May it be a happy one, and on each returning birthday may you feel new strength and resolution to be gentle with sisters, obedient to parents, loving to every one, and happy in yourself.

I give you the pencil-case I promised, for I have observed that you are fond of writing, and wish to encourage the habit.

Go on trying, dear, and each day it will be easier to be and do good. You must help yourself, for the cause of your little troubles is in yourself; and patience and courage only will make you what mother prays to see you, — her good and happy girl.

Concord, 1843.

Dear Louy, — I enclose a picture for you which I always liked very much, for I imagined that you might be just such an industrious daughter and I such a feeble but loving mother, looking to your labor for my daily bread.

Keep it for my sake and your own, for you and I always liked to be grouped together.

Mother.

The lines I wrote under the picture in my journal: —

TO MOTHER.

I hope that soon, dear mother,
You and I may be In the quiet room my fancy
Has so often made for thee, —
The pleasant, sunny chamber,
The cushioned easy-chair,
The book laid for your reading,
The vase of flowers fair;
The desk beside the window
Where the sun shines warm and bright:

And there in ease and quiet
The promised book you write;
While I sit close beside you,
Content at last to see
That you can rest, dear mother,
And I can cherish thee.

[The dream came true, and for the last ten years of her life Marmee sat in peace, with every wish granted, even to the “grouping together;” for she died in my arms. — L.M.A.]

A passage in Louisa’s story of “ Little Men” (p. 268) describes one of their childish plays. They “ made believe” their minds were little round rooms in which the soul lived, and in which good or bad things were preserved. This play was never forgotten in after life, and the girls often looked into their little rooms for comfort or guidance in trial or temptation.

Louisa was very fond of animals, as is abundantly shown in her stories. She never had the happiness of owning many pets, except cats, and these were the delight of the household. The children played all manner of plays with them, tended them in sickness, buried them with funeral honors, and Louisa has embalmed their memory in the story of “ The Seven Black Cats “ in “ Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag.”

Dolls were an equal source of pleasure. The imaginative children hardly recognized them as manufactured articles, but endowed them with life and feeling. Louisa put her dolls through every experience of life; they were fed, educated, punished, rewarded, nursed, and even hung and buried, and then resurrected in her stories. The account of the “ Sacrifice of the Dolls “ to the exacting Kitty Mouse in “ Little Men” delights all children by its mixture of pathetic earnestness and playfulness. It is taken from the experience of another family of children.

Miss Alcott twice says that she never went to any school but her father’s; but there were some slight exceptions to this rule. She went a few months to a little district school in Still River Village. This was a genuine old-fashioned school, from which she took the hint of the frolics in “ Under the Lilacs.” Miss Ford also kept a little school in Mr. Emerson’s barn, to which the children went; and Mary Russell had a school, which Louisa attended when eight or nine years old. These circumstances, however, had small influence in her education.

During this period of life in Concord, which was so happy to the children, the mother’s heart was full of anxious care. She however entered into all their childish pleasures, and her watchful care over their moral growth is shown by her letters and by Louisa’s journals.

The youngest child, Abba May, who was born in this house, became the pet of the family and the special care of the oldest sister, Anna.

Louisa’s childish journal gives us many hints of this happy life. She revised these journals in later years, adding significant comments which are full of interest. She designed them to have place in her autobiography, which she hoped to write.

From three different sources — her journals, an article written for publication, and a manuscript prepared for a friend, — we give her own account of these childish years. She has not followed the order of events strictly, and it has not been possible, therefore, to avoid all repetition; but they give the spirit of her early life, and clearly show the kind of education she received from her father and from the circumstances around her.

Sketch of Childhood, by herself.

One of my earliest recollections is of playing with books in my father’s study, — building houses and bridges of the big dictionaries and diaries, looking at pictures, pretending to read, and scribbling on blank pages whenever pen or pencil could be found. Many of these first attempts at authorship still remain in Bacon’s Essays, Plutarch’s Lives, and other works of a serious nature, my infant taste being for solid literature, apparently.

On one occasion we built a high tower round baby Lizzie as she sat playing with her toys on the floor, and being attracted by something out-of-doors, forgot our little prisoner. A search was made, and patient baby at last discovered curled up and fast asleep in her dungeon cell, out of which she emerged so rosy and smiling after her nap that we were forgiven for our carelessness.

Another memory is of my fourth birthday, which was celebrated at my father’s school-room in Masonic Temple. All the children were there. I wore a crown of flowers, and stood upon a table to dispense cakes to each child as the procession marched past. By some oversight the cakes fell short, and I saw that if I gave away the last one / should have none. As I was queen of the revel, I felt that I ought to have it, and held on to it tightly till my mother said, —

“It is always better to give away than to keep the nice things; so I know my Louy will not let the little friend go without.”

The little friend received the dear plummy cake, and I a kiss and my first lesson in the sweetness of self-denial, — a lesson which my dear mother beautifully illustrated all her long and noble life.

Running away was one of the delights of my early days; and I still enjoy sudden flights out of the nest to look about this very interesting world, and then go back to report.

On one of these occasions I passed a varied day with some Irish children, who hospitably shared their cold potatoes, salt-fish, and crusts with me as we revelled in the ash-heaps which then adorned the waste lands where the Albany Depot now stands. A trip to the Common cheered the afternoon, but as dusk set in and my friends deserted me, I felt that home was a nice place after all, and tried to find it. I dimly remember watching a lamplighter as I sat to rest on some doorsteps in Bedford Street, where a big dog welcomed me so kindly that I fell asleep with my head pillowed on his curly back, and was found there by the town-crier, whom my distracted parents had sent in search of me. His bell and proclamation of the loss of “ a little girl, six years old, in a pink frock, white hat, and new green shoes,” woke me up, and a small voice answered out of the darkness, —

“Why, dat’s me!”

Being with difficulty torn from my four-footed friend, 1 was carried to the crier’s house, and there feasted sumptuously on bread-and-molasses in a tin plate with the alphabet round it. But my fun ended next day when I was tied to the arm of the sofa to repent at leisure.

I became an Abolitionist at a very early age, but have never been able to decide whether I was made so by seeing the portrait of George Thompson hidden under a bed in our house during the Garrison riot, and going to comfort “ the poor man who had been good to the slaves,” or because I was saved from drowning in the Frog Pond some years later by a colored boy. However that may be, the conversion was genuine; and my greatest pride is in the fact that I lived to know the brave men and women who did so much for the cause, and that I had a very small share in the war which put an end to a great wrong.

Another recollection of her childhood was of a “contraband” hidden in the oven, which must have made her sense of the horrors of slavery very keen.

I never went to school except to my father or such governesses as from time to time came into the family. Schools then were not what they are now; so we had lessons each morning in the study. And very happy hours they were to us, for my father taught in the wise way which unfolds what lies in the child's nature, as a flower blooms, rather than crammed it, like a Strasburg goose, with more than it could digest. I never liked arithmetic nor grammar, and dodged those branches on all occasions; but reading, writing, composition, history, and geography I enjoyed, as well as the stories read to us with a skill peculiarly his own.

"Pilgrim's Progress," Krummacher's "Parables," Miss Edgeworth, and the best of the dear old fairy tales made the reading hour the pleasantest of our day. On Sundays we had a simple service of Bible stories, hymns, and conversation about the state of our little consciences and the conduct of our childish lives which never will be forgotten.

Walks each morning round the Common while in the city, and long tramps over hill and dale when our home was in the country, were a part of our education, as well as every sort of housework, — for which I have always been very grateful, since such knowledge makes one indepen

dent in these days of domestic tribulation with the " help " who are too often only hindrances.

Needle-work began early, and at ten my skilful sister made a linen shirt beautifully; while at twelve I set up as a doll's dressmaker, with my sign out and wonderful models in my window. All the children employed me, and my turbans were the rage at one time, to the great dismay of the neighbors' hens, who were hotly hunted down, that I might tweak out their downiest feathers to adorn the dolls' headgear.

Active exercise was my delight, from the time when a child of six I drove my hoop round the Common without stopping, to the days when I did my twenty miles in five hours and went to a party in the evening.

I always thought I must have been a deer or a horse in some former state, because it was such a joy to run. No boy could be my friend till I had beaten him in a race, and no girl if she refused to climb trees, leap fences, and be a tomboy.

My wise mother, anxious to give me a strong body to support a lively brain, turned me loose in the country and let me run wild, learning of Nature what no books can teach, and being led, — as those who truly love her seldom fail to be, —

"Through Nature up to Nature's God."

I remember running over the hills just at dawn one summer morning, and pausing to rest in the silent woods, saw, through an arch of trees, the sun rise over river, hill, and wide green meadows as I never saw it before.

Something born of the lovely hour, a happy mood, and the unfolding aspirations of a child's soul seemed to bring me very near to God; and in the hush of that morning hour I always felt that I "got religion," as the phrase goes.

A new and vital sense of His presence, tender and sustaining as a father’s arms, came to me then, never to change through forty years of life’s vicissitudes, but to grow stronger for the sharp discipline of poverty and pain, sorrow and success.

Those Concord days were the happiest of my life, for we had charming playmates in the little Emersons, Chan- nings, Hawthornes, and Goodwins, with the illustrious parents and their friends to enjoy our pranks and share our excursions.

Plays in the barn were a favorite amusement, and we dramatized the fairy tales in great style. Our giant came tumbling off a loft when Jack cut down the squash-vine running up a ladder to represent the immortal bean. Cinderella rolled away in a vast pumpkin, and a long black pudding was lowered by invisible hands to fasten itself on the nose of the woman who wasted her three wishes.

Pilgrims journeyed over the hill with scrip and staff and cockle-shells in their hats; fairies held their pretty revels among the whispering birches, and strawberry parties in the rustic arbor were honored by poets and philosophers, who fed us on their wit and wisdom while the little maids served more mortal food.

CHAPTER III.

FRUITLANDS.

MY KINGDOM.

A little kingdom I possess,
Where thoughts and feelings dwell,
And very hard I find the task
Of governing it well;
For passion tempts and troubles me,
A wayward will misleads,
And selfishness its shadow casts
On all my words and deeds.

How can I learn to rule myself,
To be the child I should,
Honest and brave, nor ever tire
Of trying to be good?
How can I keep a sunny soul
To shine along life’s way?
How can I tune my little heart
To sweetly sing all day?

Dear Father, help me with the love
That casteth out my fear;
Teach me to lean on thee, and feel
That thou art very near,
That no temptation is unseen,
No childish grief too small,
Since thou, with patience infinite,
Doth soothe and comfort all.

I do not ask for any crown
But that which all may win,
Nor seek to conquer any world
Except the one within.
Be thou my guide until I find,
Led by a tender hand,
Thy happy kingdom in myself,
And dare to take command.

IN 1842 Mr. Alcott went to England. His mind was very much exercised at this time with plans for organized social life on a higher plane, and he found like-minded friends in England who gave him sympathy and encouragement. He had for some years advocated a strictly vegetarian diet, to which his family consented from deference to him; consequently the children never tasted meat till they came to maturity. On his return from England he was accompanied by friends who were ready to unite with him in the practical realization of their social theories. Mr. Lane resided for some months in the Alcott family at Concord, and gave instruction to the children. Although he does not appear to have won their hearts, they yet reaped much intellectual advantage from his lessons, as he was an accomplished scholar.

In 1843 this company of enthusiasts secured a farm in the town of Harvard, near Concord, which with trusting hope they named Fruitlands. Mrs. Alcott did not share in all the peculiar ideas of her husband and his friends, but she was so utterly devoted to him that she was ready to help him in carrying out his plans, however little they commended themselves to her better judgment.

She alludes very briefly to the experiment in her diary, for the experience was too bitter to dwell upon. She could not relieve her feelings by bringing out the comic side, as her daughter did. Louisa’s account of this colony, as given in her story called “ Transcendental Wild Oats,” is very close to the facts; and the mingling of pathos and humor, the reverence and ridicule with which she alternately treats the personages and the notions of those engaged in the scheme, make a rich and delightful tale. It was written many years later, and gives the picture as she looked back upon it, the absurdities coming out in strong relief, while she sees also the grand, misty outlines of the high thoughts so poorly realized. This story was published in the “Independent,” Dec. 8, 1873, and may now be found in her collected works (“ Silver Pitchers,” p. 79).

Fortunately we have also her journal written at the time, which shows what education the experience of this strange life brought to the child of ten or eleven years old.

The following extract from Mr. Emerson proves that this plan of life looked fair and pleasing to his eye, although he was never tempted to join in it. He was evidently not unconscious of the inadequacy of the means adopted to the end proposed, but he rejoiced in any endeavor after high ideal life.

July, 8, 1843.

Journal. — The sun and the evening sky do not look calmer than Alcott and his family at Fruitlands. They seemed to have arrived at the fact, — to have got rid of the show, and so to be serene. Their manners and behavior in the house and in the field were those of superior men, — of men at rest. What had they to conceal? What had they to exhibit? And it seemed so high an attainment that I thought — as often before, so now more, because they had a fit home, or the picture was fitly framed — that these men ought to be maintained in their place by the country “ for its culture.

Young men and young maidens, old men and women, should visit them and be inspired. I think there is as much merit in beautiful manners as in hard work. I will not prejudge them successful. They look well in July; we will see them in December. I know they are better for themselves than as partners. One can easily see that they have yet to settle several things. Their saying that things are clear, and they sane, does not make them so. If they will in very deed be lovers, and not selfish; if they will serve the town of Harvard, and make their neighbors feel them as benefactors wherever they touch them, — they are as safe as the sun. (Emerson in Concord. By Edward Waldo Emerson.0

Early Diary kept at Fruitlands, 1843.

Ten Years Old.

September 1st. — I rose at five and had my bath. I love cold water! Then we had our singing-lesson with Mr. Lane. After breakfast I washed dishes, and ran on the hill till nine, and had some thoughts, — it was so beautiful up there. Did my lessons, — wrote and spelt and did sums; and Mr. Lane read a story, “ The Judicious Father “: How a rich girl told a poor girl not to look over the fence at the flowers, and was cross to her because she was unhappy. The father heard her do it, and made the girls change clothes. The poor one was glad to do it, and he told her to keep them. But the rich one was very sad; for she had to wear the old ones a week, and after that she was good to shabby girls. I liked it very much, and I shall be kind to poor people.

Father asked us what was God’s noblest work. Anna said men, but I said babies. Men are often bad; babies

never are. We had a long talk, and I felt better after it, and cleared up.

We had bread and fruit for dinner. I read and walked and played till supper-time. We sung in the evening. As I went to bed the moon came up very brightly and looked at me. I felt sad because I have been cross today, and did not mind Mother. I cried, and then I felt better, and said that piece from Mrs. Sigourney, “ I must not tease my mother.” I get to sleep saying poetry, — I know a great deal.

Thursday, nth. — Mr. Parker Pillsbury came, and we talked about the poor slaves. I had a music lesson with Miss P. I hate her, she is so fussy. I ran in the wind . and played be a horse, and had a lovely time in the woods with Anna and Lizzie. We were fairies, and made gowns and paper wings. I “ flied “ the highest of all. In the evening they talked about travelling. I thought about Father going to England, and said this piece of poetry I found in Byron’s poems: —

“When I left thy shores, O Naxos,
Not a tear in sorrow fell;
Not a sigh or faltered accent
Told my bosom’s struggling swell.”

It rained when I went to bed, and made a pretty noise on the roof.

Sunday, 2 ist. — Father and Mr. Lane have gone to N. H. to preach. It was very lovely. . . . Anna and I got supper. In the eve I read “ Vicar of Wakefield.” I was cross to-day, and I cried when I went to bed. I made good resolutions, and felt better in my heart. If I only kept all I make, I should be the best girl in the world. But I don’t, and so am very bad.

[Poor little sinner! She says the same at fifty. — L.M.A.]

October 8th. — When I woke up, the first thought I got was, “ It’s Mother’s birthday: I must be very good.” I ran and wished her a happy birthday, and gave her my kiss. After breakfast we gave her our presents. I had a moss cross and a piece of poetry for her.

We did not have any school, and played in the woods and got red leaves. In the evening we danced and sung, and I read a story about “ Contentment.” I wish I was rich, I was good, and we were all a happy family this day.

Tuesday, 12th. — After lessons I ironed. We all went to the barn and husked corn. It was good fun. We worked till eight o’clock and had lamps. Mr. Russell came. Mother and Lizzie are going to Boston. I shall be very lonely without dear little Betty, and no one will be as good to me as mother. I read in Plutarch. I made a verse about sunset: —

Softly doth the sun descend
To his couch behind the hill,
Then, oh, then, I love to sit
On mossy banks beside the rill.

Anna thought it was very fine; but I did n’t like it very well.

Friday, Nov. 2 nd. — Anna and I did the work. In the evening Mr. Lane asked us, “What is man?” These were our answers: A human being; an animal with a mind; a creature; a body; a soul and a mind. After a long talk we went to bed very tired.

[No wonder, after doing the work and worrying their little wits with such lessons. — L.M.A.]

A sample of the vegetarian wafers we used at Fruitlands: —

Tuesday, 20 th. — I rose at five, and after breakfast washed the dishes, and then helped mother work. Miss P. is gone, and Anna in Boston with Cousin

Louisa. I took care of Abby (May) in the afternoon. In the evening I made some pretty things for my dolly. Father and Mr. L. had a talk, and father asked us if we saw any reason for us to separate. Mother wanted to, she is so tired. I like it, but not the school part or Mr. L.

Eleven years old. Thursday, 29th. — It was Father's and my birthday. We had some nice presents. We played in the snow before school. Mother read " Rosamond" when we sewed. Father asked us in the eve what fault troubled us most. I said my bad temper.

I told mother I liked to have her write in my book. She said she would put in more, and she wrote this to help me: —

Dear Louy, — Your handwriting improves very fast. Take pains and do not be in a hurry. I like to have you make observations about our conversations and your own thoughts. It helps you to express them and to understand your little self. Remember, dear girl, that a diary should be an epitome of your life. May it be a record of pure thought and good actions, then you will indeed be the precious child of your loving mother.

December 10th. — I did my lessons, and walked in the afternoon. Father read to us in dear Pilgrim's Progress.

Mr. L. was in Boston, and we were glad. In the eve father and mother and Anna and I had a long talk. I was very unhappy, and we all cried. Anna and I cried in bed, and I prayed God to keep us all together.

[Little Lu began early to feel the family cares and peculiar trials. — L.M.A.]

I liked the verses Christian sung and will put them in: —

"This place has been our second stage, Here we have heard and seen Those good things that from age to age To others hid have been.

"They move me for to watch and pray, To strive to be sincere, To take my cross up day by day, And serve the Lord with fear."

[The appropriateness of the song at this time was much greater than the child saw. She never forgot this experience, and her little cross began to grow heavier from this hour. — L.M.A.]

Sicnday. — We all went into the woods to get moss for the arbor father is making for Mr. Emerson. I miss Anna so much. I made two verses for her: —

TO ANNA.

Sister, dear, when you are lonely,
Longing for your distant home,
And the images of loved ones
Warmly to your heart shall come,
Then, mid tender thoughts and fancies,

Let one fond voice say to thee,
“Ever when your heart is heavy,
Anna, dear, then think of me.”
Think how we two have together
Journeyed onward day by day,
Joys and sorrows ever sharing,
While the swift years roll away.
Then may all the sunny hours
Of our youth rise up to thee,
And when your heart is light and happy,
Anna, dear, then think of me.

[Poetry began to flow about this time in a thin but copious stream. — L.M.A.]

Wednesday. — Read Martin Luther. A long letter from Anna. She sends me a picture of Jenny Lind, the great singer. She must be a happy girl. I should like to be famous as she is. Anna is very happy; and I don’t miss her as much as I shall by and by in the winter.

I wrote in my Imagination Book, and enjoyed it very much. Life is pleasanter than it used to be, and I don’t care about dying any more. Had a splendid run, and got a box of cones to burn. Sat and heard the pines sing a long time. Read Miss Bremer’s “ Home “ in the eve. Had good dreams, and woke now and then to think, and watch the moon. I had a pleasant time with my mind, for it was happy.

[Moods began early. — L.M.A.]

January, 1845, Friday. — Did my lessons, and in the p. m. mother read “ Kenilworth “ to us while we sewed. It is splendid! I got angry and called Anna mean. Father told me to look out the word in the Die., and it meant “base,” “contemptible.” I was so ashamed to have called my dear sister that, and I cried over my bad tongue and temper.

We have had a lovely day. All the trees were covered with ice, and it shone like diamonds or fairy palaces. I made a piece of poetry about winter: —

The stormy winter’s come at last,
With snow and rain and bitter blast;
Ponds and brooks are frozen o’er,

We cannot sail there any more.
The little birds are flown away
To warmer climes than ours;
They’ll come no more till gentle
May Calls them back with flowers.

Oh, then the darling birds will sing
From their neat nests in the trees.
All creatures wake to welcome
Spring, And flowers dance in the breeze.

With patience wait till winter is o’er,
And all lovely things return;
Of every season try the more
Some knowledge or virtue to learn.

[A moral is tacked on even to the early poems. — L. M. A.]

I read “ Philothea,” 1 by Mrs. Child. I found this that I liked in it. Plato said: —

“When I hear a note of music I can at once strike its chord. Even as surely is there everlasting harmony between the soul of man and the invisible forms of creation. If there were no innocent hearts there would be no white lilies. ... I often think flowers are the angel’s alphabet 1 “Philothea” was the delight of girls. The young Alcotts made a dramatic version of it, which they acted under the trees. Louisa made a magnificent Aspasia, which was a part much to her fancy. Mrs. Child was a very dear friend of Mrs. Alcott, and her daughters knew her well.

whereby they write on hills and fields mysterious and beautiful lessons for us to feel and learn.”

[Well done, twelve-year-old! Plato, the father’s delight, had a charm for the little girl also. — L.M.A.]

Wednesday. — I am so cross I wish I had never been born.

Thursday. — Read the “Heart of Mid-Lothian,” and had a very happy day. Miss Ford gave us a botany lesson in the woods. I am always good there. In the evening Miss Ford told us about the bones in our bodies, and how they get out of order. I must be careful of mine, I climb and jump and run so much.

I found this note from dear mother in my journal: —

My dearest Louy, — I often peep into your diary, hoping to see some record of more happy days. “ Hope, and keep busy,” dear daughter, and in all perplexity or trouble come freely to your Mother.

Dear Mother, — You shall see more happy days, and I will come to you with my worries, for you are the best woman in the world. L.M.A.

Mr. L.	L.
Socrates.	Alcibiades.

How can you get what you need? By trying.

How do you try? By resolution and perseverance.

How gain love? By gentleness.

What is gentleness? Kindness, patience, and care for other people’s feelings.

Who has it? Father and Anna.

Who means to have it? Louisa, if she can.

[She never got it. — L.M.A.]

Write a sentence about anything. “ I hope it will rain; the garden needs it.”

What are the elements of hope? Expectation, desire, faith.

What are the elements in wish? Desire.

What is the difference between faith and hope? “ Faith can believe without seeing; hope is not sure, but tries to have faith when it desires.”

No. 3.

What are the most valuable kinds of self-denial? Appetite, temper.

How is self-denial of temper known? If I control my temper, I am respectful and gentle, and every one sees it.

What is the result of this self-denial? Every one loves me, and I am happy.

Why use self-denial? For the good of myself and others.

How shall we learn this self-denial? By resolving, and then trying hard.

What then do you mean to do? To resolve and try.

[Here the record of these lessons ends, and poor little Alcibiades went to work and tried till fifty, but without any very great success, in spite of all the help Socrates and Plato gave her. — L.M.A.]

Tuesday. — More people coming to live with us; I wish we could be together, and no one else. I don’t see who is to clothe and feed us all, when we are so poor now. I was very dismal, and then went to walk and made a poem.

DESPONDENCY.

Silent and sad,
When all are glad,
And the earth is dressed in flowers;
When the gay birds sing
Till the forests ring,
As they rest in woodland bovvers.

Oh, why these tears,
And these idle fears
For what may come to-morrow?
The birds find food From God so good,
And the flowers know no sorrow.

If He clothes these And the leafy trees,
Will He not cherish thee?

Why doubt His care;
It is everywhere,
Though the way we may not see.

Then why be sad When all are glad,
And the world is full of flowers?
With the gay birds sing,
Make life all Spring,
And smile through the darkest hours.

Twelve Years Old.

Sunday, Oct. 9, 1845. — I have been reading to-day Bettine's correspondence with Goethe.

She calls herself a child, and writes about the lovely things she saw and heard, and felt and did. I liked it much.

[First taste of Goethe. Three years later R. W. E. gave me " Wilhelm Meister," and from that day Goethe has been my chief idol. — L.M.A., 1885.]

Thtirsday, 30th. — I had an early run in the woods before the dew was off the grass. The moss was like velvet, and as I ran under the arches of yellow and red leaves I sang for joy, my heart was so bright and the world so beautiful. I stopped at the end of the walk and saw the sunshine out over the wide " Virginia meadows."

It seemed like going through a dark life or grave into heaven beyond. A very strange and solemn feeling came over me as I stood there, with no sound but the rustle of the pines, no one near me, and the sun so glorious, as for me alone. It seemed as if I felt God as I never did before, and I prayed in my heart that I might keep that happy sense of nearness all my life.

[I have, for I most sincerely think that the little girl "got religion " that day in the wood when dear mother Nature led her to God. — L.M.A., 1885.]

Louisa Alcott grew up so naturally in a healthy religious atmosphere that she breathed and worked in it without analysis or question. She had not suffered from ecclesiastical tyranny or sectarian bigotry, and needed not to expend any time or strength in combating them. She does not appear to have suffered from doubt or questioning, but to have gone on her way fighting all the real evils that were presented to her, trusting in a sure power of right, and confident of victory.

One of Louisa's strongest desires at this time was for a room of her own, where she might have the solitude she craved to dream her dreams and work out her fancies. These sweet little notes and an extract from her journal show how this desire was felt and gratified.

Dearest Mother, — I have tried to be more contented, and I think I have been more so. I have been thinking about my little room, which I suppose I never shall have. I should want to be there about all the time, and I should go there and sing and think.

But I'll be contented
With what I have got;
Of folly repented,
Then sweet is my lot.
From your trying daughter,
Louy.

My dear Louisa, — Your note gave me so much delight that I cannot close my eyes without first thanking you, dear, for making me so happy, and blessing God who gave you this tender love for your mother.

I have observed all day your patience with baby, your obedience to me, and your kindness to all.

Go on " trying," my child; God will give you strength and courage, and help you fill each day with words and deeds of love. I shall lay this on your pillow, put a warm kiss on your lips, and say a little prayer over you in your sleep.

Mother.

My Louy, — I was grieved at your selfish behavior this morning, but also greatly pleased to find you bore so meekly Father's reproof for it. That is the way, dear; if you find you are wrong, take the discipline sweetly, and do so no more. It is not to be expected that children should always do right; but oh, how lovely to see a child penitent and patient when the passion is over.

I thought a little prayer as I looked at you, and said in my heart, " Dear God, sustain my child in this moment of trial, that no hasty word, no cruel look, no angry action may add to her fault." And you were helped. I know that, you will have a happy day after the storm and the gentle shower; keep quiet, read, walk, but do not talk much till all is peace again.

Mother.

Hillside, Concord.

Dear, — I am glad you put your heart in the right place; for I am sure all true strength comes from above. Continue to feel that God is near you, dear child, and He never will forsake you in a weak moment. Write me always when you feel that I can help you; for, though God is near, Mother never forgets you, and your refuge is her arms.

Patience, dear, will give us content, if nothing else. Be assured the little room you long for will come, if it is necessary to your peace and well-being. Till then try to be happy with the good things you have. They are many, — more perhaps than we deserve, after our frequent complaints and discontent.

Be cheerful, my Louy, and all will be gayer for your laugh, and all good and lovely things will be given to you when you deserve them.

I am a busy woman, but never can forget the calls of my children.

Mother.

Dearest, — I am sure you have lived very near to God to-day, you have been so good and happy. Let each day be like this, and life will become a sweet song for you and all who love you, — none so much as your Mother.

Thirteen Years Old.

Fruitlands.

March, 1846, — I have at last got the little room I have wanted so long, and am very happy about it. It does me good to be alone, and mother has made it very pretty and neat for me. My work-basket and desk are by the window, and my closet is full of dried herbs that smell very nice. The door that opens into the garden will be very pretty in summer, and I can run off to the woods when I like.

I have made a plan for my life, as I am in my teens, and no more a child. I am old for my age, and don't care much for girl's things. People think I'm wild and queer; but mother understands and helps me. I have not told any one about my plan; but I'm going to be good. I've made so many resolutions, and written sad notes, and cried over my sins, and it does n't seem to do any good! Now I'm going to work really, for I feel a true desire to improve, and be a help and comfort, not a care and sorrow, to my dear mother.

The experiment at Fruitlands was (outwardly) an utter failure, and had exhausted Mr. Alcott's resources of mind, body, and estate. Louisa has not exaggerated the collapse which followed. But the brave, loving mother could not give way to despondency, for she had her young to care for. After a few days Mr. Alcott rose from his despair, and listened to her counsel. They lived a short time at Still River, and then returned to Concord; but not to the happy little cottage.

Mr. Alcott sought such work as he could find to do with his hands; but it was scanty and insufficient. Mrs. Alcott subdued her proud heart to the necessity of seeking help from friends. They had a few rooms in the house of a kind neighbor, who welcomed them to her house, in addition to her own large family; and there they struggled with the poverty which Louisa for the first time fully realized.

Yet her journal says little of the hardships they endured, but is full of her mental and moral struggles. It was characteristic of this family that they never were conquered by their surroundings. Mr. Alcott might retire into sad and silent musing, Mrs.’ Alcott’s warm, quick temper, might burst out into flame, the children might be quarrelsome or noisy; but their ideal of life always remained high, fresh, and ennobling. Their souls always “ knew their destiny divine,” and believed that they would find fitting expression in life some time. “ Chill penury “ could not repress “ their noble rage,” nor freeze “ the genial current” of their souls.

The children escaped from the privations of daily life into a world of romance, and in the plays in the old barn revelled in luxury and splendor. This dramatic tendency was very strong in Louisa, and she never outgrew it. It took various shapes and colors, and at one time threatened to dominate her life.

The education of the children was certainly des- ultory and insufficient; but it was inspiring, and brought out their powers. They learned to feel and to think justly, and to express their thoughts and feelings freely and forcibly, if they did not know well the rules of grammar and rhetoric. Mr. Alcott always loved the study of language, and became a master of it; while Mrs. Alcott had a rich and well-chosen vocabulary, gained from the intelligent companions of her youth and the best literature, which she read freely. Mr. Alcott made great use of the study of language in his teaching, and often employed the definition of a word to convey a lesson or a rebuke. The children were encouraged, and even required, to keep their journals regularly, and to write letters. Their efforts at poetry or the drama were not laughed at, but treasured by their parents-as indications of progress. Mr. Alcott’s records of his own theory and practice in the education of children are full of valuable suggestion, and much yet remains buried in his journals. The girls had full freedom to act out their natures, with little fear of ridicule or criticism. An innate sense of dignity and modesty kept them from abusing this liberty; and perhaps nowhere in the world could it have been more safely indulged than in the simple life of Concord, whose very atmosphere seemed then filled with a spiritual presence which made life free, pure, and serene.

Louisa gives this interesting anecdote of their life at that time: —

People wondered at our frolics, but enjoyed them, and droll stories are still told of the adventures of those days.

Mr. Emerson and Margaret Fuller were visiting my parents one afternoon, and the conversation having turned to the ever interesting subject of education, Miss Fuller said: —

“Well, Mr. Alcott, you have been able to carry out your methods in your own family, and I should like to see your model children."

She did in a few moments, for as the guests stood on the door-steps a wild uproar approached, and round the corner of the house came a wheelbarrow holding baby May arrayed as a queen; I was the horse, bitted and bridled, and driven by my elder sister Anna; while Lizzie played dog, and barked as loud as her gentle voice permitted.

All were shouting and wild with fun, which, however, came to a sudden end as we espied the stately group before us; for my foot tripped, and down we all went in a laughing heap; while my mother put a climax to the joke by saying, with a dramatic wave of the hand, —

"Here are the model children, Miss Fuller."

They were undoubtedly very satisfactory to Miss Fuller, who partook largely of the educational views of that time, and who loved to tell anecdotes of this family. One of the sisters writes in her diary: " She said prayers; but I think my resolutions to be good are prayers."

In 1841 Colonel May, Mrs. Alcott's father, died and left her a small amount of property. Mrs. Alcott decided to purchase with this a house in Concord, and the addition of five hundred dollars from Mr. Emerson, who was always the good Providence of the family, enabled her in 1845 to buy the place in Concord known as Hillside. This house is on the road to Lexington, about one third of a mile from Mr. Emerson's home. It was afterward occupied by Mr. Hawthorne.

In this house the girlish life of Louisa was passed, which she has represented so fully in " Little Women," and of which she speaks in her journal as the happiest time of her life. Yet she was not unmindful of the anxiety of her parents; and the determined purpose to retrieve the fortunes of the family and to give to her mother the comfort and ease which she had never known in her married life became the constant motive of her conduct. It is in the light of this purpose alone that her character and her subsequent career can be fully, understood. She naturally thought of teaching as her work, and had for a short time a little school in the barn for Mr. Emerson's children and others.

It was indeed a great comfort to be sure of the house over their heads, but there were still six mouths to be fed, six bodies to be clothed, and four young, eager minds to be educated. Concord offered very little opportunity for such work as either Mr. or Mrs. Alcott could do, and at last even the mother's brave heart broke down. She was painfully anxious about the support of her household. A friend passing through Concord called upon her, and Mrs. Alcott could not hide the traces of tears on her face. " Abby Alcott, what does this mean?" said the visitor, with determined kindness. The poor mother opened her heart to her friend, and told the story of their privations and sufferings.

“Come to Boston, and I will find you employment,” said the friend.

The family removed to Boston in 1848, and Mrs. Alcott became a visitor to the poor in the employ of one or more benevolent societies, and finally kept an intelligence office. Her whole heart went into her work; and the children, as well as the mother, learned many valuable lessons from it. Her reports of her work are said to have been very interesting, and full of valuable suggestion.

Mr. Alcott began to hold conversations in West Street. He attracted a small circle of thoughtful men and women about him, who delighted in the height of his aspirations and the originality of his thoughts. It was congenial occupation for him, and thus added to the happiness of the family, though very little to its pecuniary resources. His price of admission was small, and he freely invited any one who would enjoy the meetings although unable to pay for them. He was a great and helpful influence to young minds. Besides the morally pure and spiritually elevated atmosphere of thought to which they were introduced by him, they found a great intellectual advantage in the acquaintance with ancient poets and philosophers, into whose life he had entered sympathetically. His peculiar theories of temperament and diet never failed to call out discussion and opposition. One of my earliest recollections of Louisa is on one of these occasions, when he was emphasizing his doctrine that a vegetable diet would produce unruffled sweetness of temper and disposition. I heard a voice behind me saying to her neighbor: “I don’t know about that. I’ve never eaten any meat, and I ‘m awful cross and irritable very often.”

On her fourteenth birthday her mother wrote her the following poem, with a present of a pen. It was a prophetic gift, and well used by the receiver.

Oh, may this pen your muse inspire, When wrapt in pure poetic fire, To write some sweet, some thrilling verse; A song of love or sorrow’s lay, Or duty’s clear but tedious way In brighter hope rehearse. Oh, let your strain be soft and high, Of crosses here, of crowns beyond the sky; Truth guide your pen, inspire your theme, And from each note joy’s music stream.

[Original, I think. I have tried to obey. — L.M.A., 1885.]

In a sketch written for a friend, Louisa gives this account of the parents’ influence on the children: —

When cautious friends asked mother how she dared to have such outcasts among her girls, she always answered, with an expression of confidence which did much to keep us safe, “ I can trust my daughters, and this is the best way to teach them how to shun these sins and comfort these sorrows. They cannot escape the knowledge of them; better gain this under their father’s roof and their mother’s care, and so be protected by these experiences when their turn comes to face the world and its temptations.” Once we carried our breakfast to a starving family; once lent our whole dinner to a neighbor suddenly taken unprepared by distinguished guests. Another time, one snowy Saturday night, when our wood was very low, a poor child came to beg a little, as the baby was sick and the father on a spree with all his wages. My mother hesitated at first, as we also had a baby. Very cold weather was upon us, and a Sunday to be got through before more wood could be had. My father said, “ Give half our stock, and trust in Providence; the weather will moderate, or wood will come.” Mother laughed, and answered in her cheery way, “ Well, their need is greater than ours, and if our half gives out we can go to bed and tell stories.” So a generous half went to the poor neighbor, and a little later in the eve, while the storm still raged and we were about to cover our fire to keep it, a knock came, and a farmer who usually supplied us appeared, saying anxiously, “ I started for Boston with a load of wood, but it drifts so I want to go home. Would n’t you like to have me drop the wood here; it would accommodate me, and you need n’t hurry about paying for it.” “ Yes,” said Father; and as the man went off he turned to Mother with a look that much impressed us children with his gifts as a seer, “ Did n’t I tell you wood would come if the weather did not moderate?” Mother’s motto was “Hope, and keep busy,” and one of her sayings, “Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it will come back buttered.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE SENTIMENTAL PERIOD.

A SONG FROM THE SUDS.

Queen of my tub, I merrily sing,
While the white foam rises high,
And sturdily wash, and rinse, and wring,
And fasten the clothes to dry;
Then out in the free fresh air they swing,
Under the sunny sky.

I wish we could wash from our hearts and our souls
The stains of the week away,
And let water and air by their magic make
Ourselves as pure as they;
Then on the earth there would be indeed
A glorious washing-day!

Along the path of a useful life
Will heart's-ease ever bloom;
The busy mind has no time to think
Of sorrow, or care, or gloom;
And anxious thoughts may be swept away
As we busily wield a broom.

I am glad a task to me is given
To labor at day by day;
For it brings me health, and strength, and hope,
And I cheerfully learn to say, —
"Head, you may think; heart, you may feel;
But hand, you shall work alway!"

THE period of free, happy childhood was necessarily short, and at about the age of fifteen Louisa Alcott began to feel the pressure of thoughts and duties which made life a more solemn matter.

In spite of the overflowing fun which appears in her books, her nature was very serious, and she could not cast aside care lightly. So many varying tendencies existed in her character that she must have struggled with many doubts and questions before finding the true path. But she always kept the pole-star of right strictly in view, and never failed in truth to that duty which seemed to her nearest and most imperative. If she erred in judgment, she did not err in conscientious fidelity.

Her mother’s rules for her guidance were —

Rule yourself.
Love your neighbor.
Do the duty which lies nearest you.

She never lost sight of these instructions.

I will introduce this period in her own words, as written later for the use of a friend.

My romantic period began at fifteen, when I fell to writing poetry, keeping a heart-journal, and wandering by moonlight instead of sleeping quietly. About that time, in browsing over Mr. Emerson’s library, I found Goethe’s “ Correspondence with a Child,” and at once was fired with a desire to be a Bettine, making my father’s friend my Goethe. So I wrote letters to him, but never sent them; sat in a tall cherry-tree at midnight, singing to the moon till the owls scared me to bed; left wild flowers on the doorstep of my “Master,” and sung Mignon’s song under his window in very bad German.

Not till many years later did I tell my Goethe of this early romance and the part he played in it. He was much amused, and begged for his letters, kindly saying he felt honored to be so worshipped. The letters were burnt long ago, but Emerson remained my “ Master “ while he lived, doing more for me, — as for many another, — than he knew, by the simple beauty of his life, the truth and wisdom of his books, the example of a great, good man, untempted and unspoiled by the world which he made better while in it, and left richer and nobler when he went.

The trials of life began about this time, and happy childhood ended. One of the most memorable days of my life is a certain gloomy November afternoon, when we had been holding a family council as to ways and means. In summer we lived much as the birds did, on our fruit and bread and milk; the sun was our fire, the sky our roof, and Nature’s plenty made us forget that such a thing as poverty existed.

In 1850 she heads her diary “ The Sentimental Period.” She was then seventeen years old, but her diary gives no hint of the sentimental notions that often fill the heads of young girls at that period. The experiences of Jo with her charming young neighbor in “ Little Women” do not represent hers at all.

One bit of romance was suggested by Goethe’s “ Correspondence with a Child.” It may be difficult for readers of to-day to understand the fascination which this book exercised upon young minds of the last generation, yet it is certain that it led more than one young girl to form an ideal attachment to a man far older than herself, but full of nobility and intellectual greatness. Theodore Parker said of letters addressed to him by a young New Hampshire girl, “ They are as good as Bet- tine’s without the lies.” This mingling of idealism and hero-worship was strongly characteristic of that transcendental period when women, having little solid education and less industrial employment, were full of noble aspirations and longings for fuller and freer life, which must find expression in some way.

The young woman of to-day, wearing waterproof and india-rubber boots, skating, driving, and bicycling, studying chemistry in the laboratory, exhibiting her pictures in open competition, adopting a profession without opposition, and living single without fear of reproach, has less time for fancies and more regard for facts.

Miss Alcott was safe in choosing her idol. Worship of Emerson could only refine and elevate her thoughts, and her intimate acquaintance with his beautiful home chastened her idolatry into pure reverent friendship which never failed her. She kept her worship to herself, and never sent him the letters in which she poured out the longings and raptures which filled her girlish heart.

Her diary, which was revised by herself in later years, tells the story of this period quite fully. The details may seem trifling, but they help to illustrate this important formative period of her life.

Journal.

Boston, May, 1850. — So long a time has passed since I kept a journal that I hardly know how to begin. Since coming to the city I don’t seem to have thought much, for the bustle and dirt and change send all lovely images and restful feelings away. Among my hills and woods I had fine free times alone, and though my thoughts were silly, I daresay, they helped to keep me happy and good. I see now what Nature did for me, and my “ romantic tastes,” as people called that love of solitude and out-of- door life, taught me much.

This summer, like the last, we shall spend in a large house (Uncle May’s, Atkinson Street), with many comforts about us which we shall enjoy, and in the autumn I hope I shall have something to show that the time has not been wasted. Seventeen years have I lived, and yet so little do I know, and so much remains to be done before I begin to be what I desire, — a truly good and useful woman.

In looking over our journals, Father says, “Anna’s is about other people, Louisa’s about herself.” That is true, for I don’t talk about myself; yet must always think of the wilful, moody girl I try to manage, and in my journal I write of her to see how she gets on. Anna is so good she need not take care of herself, and can enjoy other people. If I look in my glass, I try to keep down vanity about my long hair, my well-shaped head, and my good nose. In the street I try not to covet fine things. My quick tongue is always getting me into trouble, and my moodiness makes it hard to be cheerful when I think how poor we are, how much worry it is to live, and how many things I long to do I never can.

So every day is a battle, and I'm so tired I don't want to live; only it's cowardly to die till you have done something.

I can't talk to any one but Mother about my troubles, and she has so many now to bear I try not to add any more. I know God is always ready to hear, but heaven's so far away in the city, and I so heavy I can't fly up to find Him.

FAITH.

Written in the diary.

Oh, when the heart is full of fears
And the way seems dim to heaven,
When the sorrow and the care of years
Peace from the heart has driven, —
Then, through the mist of falling tears,
Look up and be forgiven.
Forgiven for the lack of faith
That made all dark to thee,
Let conscience o'er thy wayward soul
Have fullest mastery:
Hope on, fight on, and thou shalt win
A noble victory.
Though thou art weary and forlorn,
Let not thy heart's peace go;

Though the riches of this world are gone,
And thy lot is care and woe,
Faint not, but journey hourly on
True wealth is not below.
Through all the darkness still look up:
Let virtue be thy guide;
Take thy draught from sorrow's cup,
Yet trustfully abide;
Let not temptation vanquish thee,
And the Father will provide.

[We had small-pox in the family this summer, caught from some poor immigrants whom mother took into our garden and fed one day. We girls had it lightly, but Father and Mother were very ill, and we had a curious time of exile, danger, and trouble. No doctors, and all got well. — L.M.A.]

July, 1850. — Anna is gone to L. after the varioloid.

She is to help Mrs. with her baby. I had to take A.'s school of twenty in Canton Street. I like it better than I thought, though it's very hard to be patient with the children sometimes. They seem happy, and learn fast; so I am encouraged, though at first it was very hard, and I missed Anna so much I used to cry over my dinner and be very blue. I guess this is the teaching I need; for as a school-marm I must behave myself and guard my tongue and temper carefully, and set an example of sweet manners.

I found one of mother's notes in my journal, so like those she used to write me when she had more time. It always encourages me; and I wish some one would write as helpfully to her, for she needs cheering up with all the care she has. I often think what a hard life she has had since she married, — so full of wandering and all sorts of worry! so different from her early easy days, the youngest and most petted of her family. I think she is a very brave, good woman; and my dream is to have a lovely, quiet home for her, with no debts or troubles to burden her. But I 'm afraid she will be in heaven before I can do it. Anna, too, she is feeble and homesick, and I miss her dreadfully; for she is my conscience, always true and just and good. She must have a good time in a nice little home of her own some day, as we often plan. But waiting is so hard!

August, 1850. — School is hard work, and I feel as though I should like to run away from it. But my children get on; so I travel up every day, and do my best.

I get very little time to write or think; for my working days have begun, and when school is over Anna wants me; so I have no quiet. I think a little solitude every day is good for me. In the quiet I see my faults, and try to mend them; but, deary me, I don't get on at all.

I used to imagine my mind a room in confusion, and I was to put it in order; so I swept out useless thoughts and dusted foolish fancies away, and furnished it with good resolutions and began again. But cobwebs get in. I 'm not a good housekeeper, and never get my room in nice order. I once wrote a poem about it "when I was fourteen, and called it " My Little Kingdom." It is still hard to rale it, and always will be I think.

Reading Miss Bremer and Hawthorne. The " Scarlet Letter" is my favorite. Mother likes Miss B. better, as more wholesome. I fancy " lurid " things, if true and strong also.

Anna wants to be an actress, and so do I. We could make plenty of money perhaps, and it is a very gay life. Mother says we are too young, and must wait. A. acts often splendidly. I like tragic plays, and shall be a Sid- dons if I can. We get up fine ones, and make harps, castles, armor, dresses, water-falls, and thunder, and have great fun.

It was at this period of her life that she was violently attacked by a mania for the stage, and the greater part of her leisure time was given to writing and enacting dramas. Her older sister, Anna, had the same taste, and assisted her in carrying out all her plans. A family of great talent with whom they were intimate joined with them, and their mother always allowed them to have all the private theatricals they wished to perform.

Some of these early plays are preserved in manuscripts as she wrote them. They are written in stilted, melodramatic style, full of highstrung sentiments of loyalty, honor and devotion, with the most improbable incidents and violent devices, and without a touch of common life or the slightest flavor of humor. The idea of self-sacrifice always comes into them; but they are thoroughly girlish. It is so that girls dream and feel before they know life at all. Their hearts are full of vague, restless longings, and they seek some vent for the repressed energies of their natures away from the prosaic realities of the present. While Louisa sat sewing the tedious seams of her daily task what a relief it was to let her imagination run riot among the wildest and most exciting scenes. Of course she had a “ Bandit’s Bride “ among her plays. “ The Captive of Castile; or, The Moorish Maiden’s Vow,” is preserved entire, and is a good specimen of these girlish efforts. It is full of surprises and concealments, and the denouement is as unnatural as could well be imagined. The dialogue is often bright and forcible, and the sentiments always lofty, and we have no doubt it seemed very grand to the youthful audience. It is taken from her reading, with no touch of her own life in it. This is not the same play described with such a ludicrous finale in “ Little Women,” although the heroine bears the same favorite name of Zara. Her own early amusement was, however, fully in her mind when she wrote that scene, which is true to fact.

A friend and relative of the family living in Rox- bury, Dr. Windship, was much interested in the development of Louisa’s dramatic talent. The girls always enjoyed delightful visits at his house.

He tried to help the young dramatist to public sue cess, and writes to her mother: —

I have offered to Mr. Barry of the Boston Theatre Louisa’s “ Prima Donnas.” He is very much pleased with it just as it is, and will bring it out this season in good style. He thinks it will have a fine run.

Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Wood consented to take the principal characters. But from some difficulty in the arrangements “The Rival Prima Donnas” was not produced. One great pleasure was gained, however, as Mr. Barry gave her a free pass to the theatre, which proved a source of constant refreshment and delight.

Of course Louisa was eager to go on to the stage herself. She had indeed extraordinary dramatic power, and could at any time quickly transform herself into Hamlet, and recite a scene with tragic effect. But the careful mother knew better than the girl the trials and dangers of the profession, and dissuaded her from it. She also knew how little such youthful facility of expression indicates the power which will make a great actress. Louisa has reproduced her dramatic experience in “ Work,” which gives a picture faithful in spirit and in many of its details to this phase of her life. She here indicates a knowledge of her own limitation of talent. “ Christie’s gala” was a part quite after her own heart.

A farce, called “ Nat Batchelor’s Pleasure Trip; or, The Trials of a Good-natured Man,” was brought out at the Howard Athenaeum. The papers of the day said of it: “ It is a creditable first attempt at dramatic composition, and received frequent applause.” Another critic says: “ It proved a full success.” This performance, however, took place in 1860, — a later period than that of which I am now speaking.

An incident which occurred at this representation probably suggested scenes which recur in “Work” and other of Miss Alcott’s stories.

Quite a hit was made by a little girl, a Miss Jones, who, haying to speak but a few lines, spoke them so well that upon her exit she received the rare compliment of an enthusiastic recall from the audience, despite the fact that “ some necessary question of the play was then to be considered.” For the time being she certainly was the sensation of the piece.

Miss Alcott had in Dr. Windship a kind and judicious helper in her dramatic undertakings, with whom she kept up a correspondence under the names of Beaumont and Fletcher.

In 1851 Louisa had an experience which she has reproduced in her story called “ How I Went Out to Service.” Her mother’s work among the poor of Boston led to her being applied to for employment, and at one time she kept a regular intelligence office. A gentleman came to her seeking a companion for his aged father and sister, who was to do only light work, and to be treated with the greatest respect and kindness. As Mrs. Alcott did not readily think of any who would fill the place, the impulsive Louisa suggested, “ Why could n’t I go, Mother? “ She went, and had two months of disappointment and painful experience which she never forgot. She wrote out the story which was published later, called “ How I Went Out to Service.”

The story has an important lesson for those who condemn severely young girls who prefer the more independent life of the factory or shop to what is considered the safety and comfort of service in families. If a girl like Louisa Alcott, belonging to a well-known, highly esteemed family, and herself commanding respect by her abilities and character, could be treated with such indignity by a family in which no one would have feared to place her, how much may not a poor unfriended girl be called upon to endure!

Journal.

1851. — We went to a meeting, and heard splendid speaking from Phillips, Channing, and others. People were much excited, and cheered " Shadrack and liberty," groaned for "Webster and slavery," and made a great noise. I felt ready to do anything, — fight or work, hoot or cry, — and laid plans to free Simms. I shall be horribly ashamed of my country if this thing happens and the slave is taken back.

[He was. — L.M.A.]

1852. — High Street, Boston. — After the small-pox summer, we went to a house in High Street. Mother opened an intelligence office, which grew out of her city missionary work and a desire to find places for good girls. It was not fit work for her, but it paid; and she always did what came to her in the way of duty or charity, and let pride, taste, and comfort suffer for love's sake.

Anna and I taught; Lizzie was our little housekeeper, — our angel in a cellar kitchen; May went to school; father wrote and talked when he could get classes or conversations. Our poor little home had much love and happiness in it, and was a shelter for lost girls, abused wives, friendless children, and weak or wicked men. Father and Mother had no money to give, but gave them time, sympathy, help; and if blessings would make them rich, they would be millionnaires. This is practical Christianity.

My first story was printed, and $5 paid for it. It was written in Concord when I was sixteen. Great rubbish! Read it aloud to sisters, and when they praised it, not knowing the author, I proudly announced her name.

Made a resolution to read fewer novels, and those only of the best. List of books I like: —

Carlyle's French Revolution and Miscellanies.
Hero and Hero-Worship.
Goethe's poems, plays, and novels.
Plutarch's Lives.
Madame Guion.
Paradise Lost and Comus.
Schiller's Plays.

Madame de Stael.
Bettine.
Louis XIV.
Jane Eyre.
Hypatia.
Philothea.
Uncle Sam.
Emerson’s Poems.

In “ Little Women “ (p. 174), she has told a story which has usually been supposed to represent her first success in literature; but she has transferred the incident from her sister to her own representative, Jo. It was the quiet Anna who had secretly written a story and fastened it inside of a newspaper. She read it to her mother and sisters, as described in the book, and was very much delighted with their approbation and astonishment.

1853. — In January I started a little school, — E. W., W. A., two L’s, two H’s, — about a dozen in our parlor. In May, when my school closed, I went to L. as second girl. I needed the change, could do the wash, and was glad to earn my $2 a week. Home in October with $34 for my wages. After two days’ rest, began school again with ten children. Anna went to Syracuse to teach; Father to the West to try his luck, — so poor, so hopeful, so serene. God be with him! Mother had several boarders, and May got on well at school. Betty was still the home bird, and had a little romance with C.

Pleasant letters from Father and Anna. A hard year. Summer distasteful and lonely; winter tiresome with school and people I did n’t like. I miss Anna, my one bosom friend and comforter.

1854. — Pinckney Street. — I have neglected my journal for months, so must write it up. School for me month after month. Mother busy with boarders and sewing. Father doing as well as a philosopher can in a money-loving world. Anna at S.

I earned a good deal by sewing in the evening when my day’s work was done.

In February Father came home. Paid his way, but no more. A dramatic scene when he arrived in the night. We were waked by hearing the bell. Mother flew down, crying “ My husband! “ We rushed after, and five white figures embraced the half-frozen wanderer who came in hungry, tired, cold, and disappointed, but smiling bravely and as serene as ever. We fed and warmed and brooded over him, longing to ask if he had made any money; but no one did till little May said, after he had told all the pleasant things, “ Well, did people pay you? “ Then, with a queer look, he opened his pocket-book and showed one dollar, saying with a smile that made our eyes fill, “ Only that! My overcoat was stolen, and I had to buy a shawl. Many promises were not kept, and travelling is costly; but I have opened the way, and another year shall do better."

I shall never forget how beautifully Mother answered him, though the dear, hopeful soul had built much on his success; but with a beaming face she kissed him, saying, " I call that doing very well. Since you are safely home, dear, we don't ask anything more."

Anna and I choked down our tears, and took a little lesson in real love which we never forgot, nor the look that the tired man and the tender woman gave one another. It was half tragic and comic, for Father was very dirty and sleepy, and Mother in a big nightcap and funny old jacket.

[I began to see the strong contrasts and the fun and follies in every-day life about this time. — L.M.A.]

Anna came home in March. Kept our school all summer. I got "Flower Fables" ready to print.

Louisa also tried service with a relative in the country for a short time, but teaching, sewing, and writing were her principal occupations during this residence in Boston.

These seven years, from Louisa's sixteenth to her twenty-third year, might be called an apprenticeship to life. She tried various paths, and learned to know herself and the world about her, although she was not even yet certain of success in the way which finally opened before her and led her so successfully to the accomplishment of her life- purpose. She tried teaching, without satisfaction to herself or perhaps to others. The kind of education she had herself received fitted her admirably to understand and influence children, but not to carry on the routine of a school. Sewing was her resource when nothing else offered, but it is almost pitiful to think of her as confined to such work when great powers were lying dormant in her mind. Still, Margaret Fuller said that a year of enforced quiet in the country devoted mainly to sewing was very useful to her, since she reviewed and examined the treasures laid up in her memory; and doubtless Louisa Alcott thought out many a story which afterward delighted the world while her fingers busily plied the needle. Yet it was a great deliverance when she first found that the products of her brain would bring in the needed money for family support.

L. in Boston to A. in Syracuse.

Thursday, 27th.

Dearest Nan, — I was so glad to hear from you, and hear that all were well.

I am grubbing away as usual, trying to get money enough to buy Mother a nice warm shawl. I have eleven dollars, all my own earnings, — five for a story, and four for the pile of sewing I did for the ladies of Dr. Gray’s society, to give him as a present.

... I got a crimson ribbon for a bonnet for May, and I took my straw and fixed it nicely with some little duds I had. Her old one has haunted me all winter, and I want her to look neat. She is so graceful and pretty and loves beauty so much, it is hard for her to be poor and wear other people’s ugly things. You and I have learned not to mind much; but when I think of her I long to dash out and buy the finest hat the limited sum of ten dollars can procure. She says so sweetly in one of her letters: “ It is hard sometimes to see other people have so many nice things and I so few; but I try not to be envious, but contented with my poor clothes, and cheerful about it.” I hope the little dear will like the bonnet and the frills I made her and some bows I fixed over from bright ribbons L. W. threw away. I get half my rarities from her rag-bag, and she does n’t know her own rags when fixed over. I hope I shall live to see the dear child in silk and lace, with plenty of pictures and “ bottles of cream,” Europe, and all she longs for.

For our good little Betty, who is wearing all the old gowns we left, I shall soon be able to buy a new one, and send it with my blessing to the cheerful saint. She writes me the funniest notes, and tries to keep the old folks warm and make the lonely house in the snowbanks cosey and bright.

To Father I shall send new neckties and some paper; then he will be happy, and can keep on with the beloved diaries though the heavens fall.

Don’t laugh at my plans; I’LL carry them out, if I go to service to do it. Seeing so much money flying about, I long to honestly get a little and make my dear family more comfortable. I feel weak-minded when I think of all they need and the little I can do.

Now about you: Keep the money you have earned by so many tears and sacrifices, and clothe yourself; for it makes me mad to know that my good little lass is going round in shabby things, and being looked down upon by people who are not worthy to touch her patched shoes or the hem of her ragged old gowns. Make yourself tidy, and if any is left over send it to Mother; for there are always many things needed at home, though they won’t tell us. I only wish I too by any amount of weeping and homesickness could earn as much. But my mite won’t come amiss and if tears can add to its value, I’ve shed my quart, — first, over the book not coming out; for that was a sad blow, and I waited so long it was dreadful when my castle in the air came tumbling about my ears. Pride made me laugh in public; but I wailed in private, and no one knew it. The folks at home think I rather enjoyed it, for I wrote a jolly letter. But my visit was spoiled; and now I ‘m digging away for dear life, that I may not have come entirely in vain. I did n’t mean to groan about it; but my lass and I must tell some one our trials, and so it becomes easy to confide in one another. I never let Mother know how unhappy you were in S. till Uncle wrote.

My doings are not much this week. I sent a little tale to the “ Gazette,” and Clapp asked H. W. if five dollars would be enough. Cousin H. said yes, and gave it to me, with kind words and a nice parcel of paper, saying in his funny way, “ Now, Lu, the door is open, go in and win.” So I shall try to do it. Then cousin L. W. said Mr. B. had got my play, and told her that if Mrs. B. liked it as well, it must be clever, and if it did n’t cost too much, he would bring it out by and by. Say nothing about it yet. Dr. W. tells me Mr. F. is very sick; so the farce cannot be acted yet. But the Doctor is set on its coming out, and we have fun about it. H. W. takes me often to the theatre when L. is done with me. I read to her all the p. m. often, as she is poorly, and in that way I pay my debt to them.

I’m writing another story for Clapp. I want more fives, and mean to have them too.

Uncle wrote that you were Dr. W.’s pet teacher, and every one loved you dearly. But if you are not well, don’t stay. Come home, and be cuddled by your old Lu.

CHAPTER V.

AUTHORSHIP.

OUR ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

Sitting patient in the shadow
Till the blessed light shall come,
A serene and saintly presence
Sanctifies our troubled home.
Earthly joys and hopes and sorrows
Break like ripples on the strand
Of the deep and solemn river,
Where her willing feet now stand.

O my sister, passing from me
Out of human care and strife,
Leave me as a gift those virtues
Which have beautified your life.
Dear, bequeath me that great patience
Which has power to sustain
A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit
In its prison-house of pain.

Give me — for I need it sorely —
Of that courage, wise and sweet,
Which has made the path of duty
Green beneath your willing feet.
Give me that unselfish nature
That with charity divine
Can pardon wrong for love’s dear sake, —
Meek heart, forgive me mine!

Thus our parting daily loseth
Something of its bitter pain,
And while learning this hard lesson
My great loss becomes my gain;
For the touch of grief will render
My wild nature more serene,
Give to life new aspirations,
A new trust in the unseen.

Henceforth safe across the river
I shall see forevermore

A beloved household spirit
Waiting for me on the shore;
Hope and faith, born of my sorrow,
Guardian angels shall become;
And the sister gone before me
By their hands shall lead me home.

WHEN only twenty-two years old Miss Alcott began her career of authorship by launching a little flower bark, which floated gaily on the stream. She had always written poems, plays, and stories for her own and her friends’ pleasure, and now she gathered up some tales she had written for Mr. Emerson’s daughter, and published them under the name of “ Flower Fables.” She received the small amount of thirty-two dollars for the book; but it gave her the great satisfaction of having earned it by work that she loved, and which she could do well. She began to have applications for stories from the papers; but as yet sewing and teaching paid better than writing. While she sewed her brain was busy with plans of poems, plays, and tales, which she made use of at a later period.

The following letter to her mother shows how closely she associated her with this early success: —

20 Pinckney Street, Boston, Dec. 25, 1854.
(With “ Flower Fables.”)

Dear Mother, — Into your Christmas stocking I have put my “ first-born,” knowing that you will accept it with all its faults (for grandmothers are always kind), and look upon it merely as an earnest of what I may yet do; for, with so much to cheer me on, I hope to pass in time from fairies and fables to men and realities.

Whatever beauty or poetry is to be found in my little book is owing to your interest in and encouragement of all my efforts from the first to the last; and if ever I do anything to be proud of, my greatest happiness will be that I can thank you for that, as I may do for all the good there is in me; and I shall be content to write if it gives you pleasure.

Jo is fussing about; My lamp is going out.

To dear mother, with many kind wishes for a happy New Year and merry Christmas.

I am ever your loving daughter Louy.

This letter shows that she had already begun to see that she must study not only fairies and fancies, but men and realities; and she now began to observe life, not in books, but as it went on around her. In the intense excitement of the anti-slavery struggles of that period she might well learn how full of dramatic situations and the elements of both tragedy and comedy real human life is. She says: " I began to see the strong contrasts and fun and frolic in every day life about this time." She also considered her reading, and tried to make it more thorough and profitable; and she did not "waste even ink on poems and fancies," but planned stories, that everything might help toward her great object of earning support for her family.

In June, 1855, Miss Alcott went to Walpole, N. H., where she had a free life among the hills for a few months. It must have been a great refreshment to her after the winter's work in the city. In July the family followed her thither, and occupied a small house. The country life and joy soon began to find expression, and she wrote a little story called " King Goldenrod," which she says " ought to be fresh and true," as written at that beautiful time and place. But this pleasant country life was for a short season only; and in chill November she set out for the city, with brave heart and scanty outfit, to seek her fortune once more. While still continuing to sew as a means of livelihood, she began to try a great variety of literary ventures. She wrote notices of books for the papers, and at one time got five dollars for a story, besides twelve dollars for sewing. The following year the publishers began to find out the value of her work, and to call for more stories. Even her poems were accepted. Little Nell was then the favorite heroine of Dickens, and Louisa's poem on that subject was published in the " Courier." Although she at first enjoyed the beautiful scenery of Walpole, she found the dull little town did not offer her the opportunities for work that she needed; and leaving her family there, she came down to Boston to seek her fortune, and went to the well-known boarding- house of Mrs. David Reed on Chauncey Street. The happy home which she had here during the winter is represented as Mrs. Kirke's house in " Little Women," and Jo's garret is the sky-parlor in which she lived and wrote. She had a rich winter, hearing many of the finest lectures, and enjoying her free pass to the theatre. One of her greatest helps, however, was the friendship of Theodore Parker, who took great interest in her struggles, and wisely strengthened and encouraged her. She loved to go to his Sunday evening receptions, and sit quietly watching the varied company who collected there; and a word or pressure of the hand from her host was enough to cheer her for the whole week. She has gratefully recorded this influence in her sketch of Mr. Power in " Work; " but she has not given to that delineation the striking personality of her subject which we should have expected of her. She then perhaps looked up to him too much to take note of the rich elements of wit and humor in his nature, and has painted him wholly seriously, and with a colorless brush.

Journal.

Twenty-two Years Old.

Pinckney Street, Boston, Jan. i, 1855. — The principal event of the winter is the appearance of my book “ Flower Fables.” An edition of sixteen hundred. It has sold very well, and people seem to like it. I feel quite proud that the little tales that I wrote for Ellen E. when I was sixteen should now bring money and fame.

I will put in some of the notices as “ varieties.” Mothers are always foolish over their first-born.

Miss Wealthy Stevens paid for the book, and I received $32.

[A pleasing contrast to the receipts of six months only in 1886, being $8000 for the sale of books, and no new one; but I was prouder over the $32 than the $8000. — L.M.A., 1886.]

April 1855. — I am in the garret with my papers round me, and a pile of apples to eat while I write my journal, plan stories, and enjoy the patter of rain on the roof, in peace and quiet.

[Jo in the garret. — L.M.A.]

Being behindhand, as usual, I’LL make note of the main events up to date, for I don’t waste ink in poetry and pages of rubbish now. I’ve begun to live, and have no time for sentimental musing.

In October I began my school; Father talked, Mother looked after her boarders, and tried to help everybody. Anna was in Syracuse teaching Mrs. S ‘s children.

My book came out; and people began to think that topsey-turvey Louisa would amount to something after all, since she could do so well as housemaid, teacher, seamstress, and story-teller. Perhaps she may.

In February I wrote a story for which C. paid $5, and asked for more.

In March I wrote a farce for W. Warren, and Dr. W. offered it to him; but W. W. was too busy.

Also began another tale, but found little time to work on it, with school, sewing, and house-work. My winter’s earnings are, —

School, one quarter	$50
Sewing	$50

Stories	$20

if I am ever paid.

A busy and a pleasant winter, because, though hard at times, I do seem to be getting on a little; and that encourages me.

Have heard Lowell and Hedge lecture, acted in plays, and thanks to our rag-money and good cousin H., have been to the theatre several times, — always my great joy.

Summer, plans are yet unsettled. Father wants to go to England: not a wise idea, I think. We shall probably stay here, and A. and I go into the country as governesses. It's a queer way to live, but dramatic, and I rather like it; for we never know what is to come next. We are real " Micawbers," and always " ready for a spring."

I have planned another Christmas book, and hope to be able to write it.

1855. — Cousin L. W. asks me to pass the summer at Walpole with her. If I can get no teaching, I shall go; for I long for the hills, and can write my fairy tales there.

I delivered my burlesque lecture on " Woman, and Her Position; by Oronthy Bluggage," last evening at Deacon G.'s. Had a merry time, and was asked by Mr. W. to do it at H. for money. Read " Hamlet" at our club, — my favorite play. Saw Mrs. W. H. Smith about the farce; says she will do it at her benefit.

May. — Father went to C. to talk with Mr. Emerson about the England trip. I am to go to Walpole. I have made my own gowns, and had money enough to fit up the girls. So glad to be independent.

[I wonder if $40 fitted up the whole family. Perhaps so, as my wardrobe was made up of old clothes from cousins and friends. — L.M.A.]

Walpole, N. HJune, 1855. — Pleasant journey and a kind welcome. Lovely place, high among the hills. So glad to run and skip in the woods and up the splendid ravine. Shall write here, I know.

Helped cousin L. in her garden; and the smell of the fresh earth and the touch of green leaves did me good.

Mr. T. came and praised my first book, so I felt much inspired to go and do another. I remember him at Scituate years ago, when he was a young ship-builder and I a curly-haired hoyden of five or six.

Up at five, and had a lovely run in the ravine, seeing the woods wake. Planned a little tale which ought to be fresh and true, as it came at that'hour and place, — " King Goldenrod." Have lively days, — writing in a. m., driving in p. m., and fun in eve. My visit is doing me much good.

July, 1855. — Read "Hyperion." On the 16th the family came to live in Mr. W.'s house rent free. No better plan offered, and we were all tired of the city.

Here Father can have a garden; Mother can rest and be near her good niece; the children have freedom and fine air; and A. and I can go from here to our teaching, wherever it may be.

Busy and happy times as we settle in the little house in the lane near by my dear ravine, — plays, picnics, pleasant people, and good neighbors. Fanny Kemble came up, Mrs. Kirkland and others, and Dr. Bellows is the gayest of the gay. We acted the "Jacobite," " Rivals," and " Bonnycastles," to an audience of a hundred, and were noticed in the Boston papers. H. T. was our manager, and Dr. B., D. D., our dramatic director. Anna was the star, her acting being really very fine. I did "Mrs. Malaprop," "Widow Pottle," and the old ladies.

Finished fairy book in September. Anna had an offer from Dr. Wilbur of Syracuse to teach at the great idiot asylum. She disliked it, but decided to go. Poor dear! so beauty-loving, timid, and tender. It is a hard trial; but she is so self-sacrificing she tries to like it because it is duty.

October. — A. to Syracuse. May illustrated my book, and tales called " Christmas Elves." Better than " Flower Fables." Now I must try to sell it.

[Innocent Louisa, to think that a Christmas book could be sold in October. — L.M.A.]

November. — Defcided to seek my fortune; so, with my little trunk of home-made clothes, $20 earned by stories sent to the "Gazette," and my MSS., I set forth with Mother's blessing one rainy day in the dullest month in the year.

[My birth-month; always to be a memorable one. — L.M.A.]

Found it too late to do anything with the book, so put it away and tried for teaching, sewing, or any honest work. Won't go home to sit idle while I have a head and pair of hands.

Decetnber. — H. and L. W. very kind, and my dear cousins the Sewalls take me in. I sew for Mollie and others, and write stories. C. gave me books to notice. Heard Thackeray. Anxious times; Anna very home-sick. Walpole very cold and dull now the summer butterflies have gone. Got $5 for a tale and $12 for sewing; sent home a Christmas-box to cheer the dear souls in the snow-banks.

January, 1856. — C. paid $6 for "A Sister's Trial," gave me more books to notice, and wants more tales.

[Should think he would at that price. — L.M.A.]

Sewed for L. W. Sewall and others. Mr. J. M. Field took my farce to Mobile to bring out; Mr. Barry of the Boston Theatre has the play.

Heard Curtis lecture. Began a book for summer, — " Beach Bubbles." Mr. F. of the " Courier " printed a poem of mine on " Little Nell." Got $10 for " Bertha," and saw great yellow placards stuck up announcing it. Acted at the W.'s.

March. — Got $10 for “Genevieve.” Prices go up, as people like the tales and ask who wrote them. Finished “Twelve Bubbles.” Sewed a great deal, and got very tired; one job for Mr. G. of a dozen pillow-cases, one dozen sheets, six fine cambric neckties, and two dozen handkerchiefs, at which I had to work all one night to get them done, as they were a gift to him. I got only $4.

Sewing won’t make my fortune; but I can plan my stories while I work, and then scribble ‘em down on Sundays.

Poem on “ Little Paul; “ Curtis’s lecture on “ Dickens “ made it go well. Hear Emerson on “ England.”

May. — Anna came on her way home, sick and worn out; the work was too much for her. We had some happy days visiting about. Could not dispose of B. B. in book form, but C. took them for his paper. Mr. Field died, so the farce fell through there. Altered the play for Mrs. Barrow to bring out next winter.

June, 1856. — Home, to find dear Betty very ill with scarlet-fever caught from some poor children Mother nursed when they fell sick, living over a cellar where pigs had been kept. The landlord (a deacon) would not clean the place till Mother threatened to sue him for allowing a nuisance. Too late to save two of the poor babies or Lizzie and May from the fever.

[L. never recovered, but died of it two years later. — L.M.A.]

An anxious time. I nursed, did house-work, and wrote a story a month through the summer.

Dr. Bellows and Father had Sunday eve conversations.

October. — Pleasant letters from Father, who went on a tour to N. Y., Philadelphia, and Boston.

Made plans to go to Boston for the winter, as there is nothing to do here, and there I can support myself and help the family. C. offers 10 dollars a month, and perhaps more. L. W., M. S., and others, have plenty of sewing; the play may come out, and Mrs. R. will give me a sky- parlor for $3 a week, with fire and board. I sew for her also.

If I can get A. L. to governess I shall be all right.

I was born with a boy’s spirit under my bib and tucker. I can’t wait when I can work; so I took my little talent in my hand and forced the world again, braver than before and wiser for my failures.

[Jo in N. Y. — L.M.A.]

I don’t often pray in words; but when I set out that day with all my worldly goods in the little old trunk, my own earnings ($25) in my pocket, and much hope and resolution in my soul, my heart was very full, and I said to the Lord, “ Help us all, and keep us for one another,” as I never said it before, while I looked back at the dear faces watching me, so full of love and hope and faith.

Journal.

Boston, November, 1856. Mrs. David Reed's. — I find my little room up in the attic very cosey, and a house full of boarders very amusing to study. Mrs. Reed very kind. Fly round and take C. his stories. Go to see Mrs. L. about A. Don't want me. A blow, but I cheer up and hunt for sewing. Go to hear Parker, and he does me good. Asks me to come Sunday evenings to his house. I did go there, and met Phillips, Garrison, Hedge, and other great men, and sit in my corner weekly, staring and enjoying myself.

When I went Mr. Parker said, " God bless you, Louisa; come again; " and the grasp of his hand gave me courage to face another anxious week.

November -3d. — Wrote all the morning. In the p.m. went to see the Sumner reception as he comes home after the Brooks affair. I saw him pass up Beacon Street, pale and feeble, but smiling and bowing. I rushed to Hancock Street, and was in time to see him bring his proud old mother to the window when the crowd gave three cheers for her. I cheered too, and was very much excited. Mr. Parker met him somewhere before the ceremony began, and the above P. cheered like a boy; and Sumner laughed and nodded as his friend pranced and shouted, bareheaded and beaming.

My kind cousin, L. W., got tickets for a course of lectures on "Italian Literature," and seeing my old cloak sent me a new one, with other needful and pretty things such as girls love to have. I shall never forget how kind she has always been to me.

November 5th. — Went with H. W. to see Manager Barry about the everlasting play which is always coming out but never comes. We went all over the great new theatre, and I danced a jig on the immense stage. Mr. B. was very kind, and gave me a pass to come whenever I liked. This was such richness I didn't care if the play was burnt on the spot, and went home full of joy. In the eve I saw La Grange as Norma, and felt as if I knew all about that place. Quite stage-struck, and imagined myself in her place, with white robes and oak-leaf crown.

November 6th. — Sewed happily on my job of twelve sheets for H. W., and put lots of good will into the work after his kindness to me.

Walked to Roxbury to see cousin Dr. W. about the play and tell the fine news. Rode home in the new cars, and found them very nice.

In the eve went to teach at Warren Street Chapel Charity School. I'LL help as I am helped, if I can. Mother says no one so poor he can't do a little for some one poorer yet.

Sunday. — Heard Parker on " Individuality of Character," and liked it much. In the eve I went to his house. Mrs. Howe was there, and Sumner and others. I sat in my usual corner, but Mr. P. came up and said, in that cordial way of his, “Well, child, how goes it?” “ Pretty well, sir.” “ That’s brave; “ and with his warm hand-shake he went on, leaving me both proud and happy, though I have my trials. He is like a great fire where all can come and be warmed and comforted. Bless him!

Had a talk at tea about him, and fought for him when W. R. said he was not a Christian. He is my sort; for though he may lack reverence for other people’s God, he works bravely for his own, and turns his back on no one who needs help, as some of the pious do.

Monday, 14th. — May came full of expectation and joy to visit good aunt B. and study drawing. We walked about and had a good home talk, then my girl went off to Auntie’s to begin what. I hdpe will be a pleasant and profitable winter. She needs help to develop her talent, and I can’t give it to her.

Went to see Forrest as Othello. It is funny to see how attentive all the once cool gentlemen are to Miss Alcott now she has a pass to the new theatre.

November 29 th. — My birthday. Felt forlorn so far from home. Wrote all day. Seem to be getting on slowly, so should be contented. To a little party at the B.’s in the eve. May looked very pretty, and seemed to be a favorite. The boys teased me about being an authoress, and I said I’d be famous yet. Will if I can, but something else may be better for me.

Found a pretty pin from Father and a nice letter when I got home. Mr. H. brought them with letters from Mother and Betty, so I went to bed happy.

December. — Busy with Christmas and New Year’s tales. Heard a good lecture by E. P. Whipple on “ Courage.” Thought I needed it, being rather tired of living like a spider, — spinning my brains out for money.

Wrote a story, “The Cross on the Church Tower,” suggested by the tower before my window.

Called on Mrs. L., and she asked me to come and teach A. for three hours each day. Just what I wanted; and the children’s welcome was very pretty and comforting to “ Our Oily,” as they call me.

Now board is all safe, and something over for home, if stories and sewing fail. I don’t do much, but can send little comforts to Mother and Betty, and keep May neat.

December i Sth. — Begin with A. L., in Beacon Street. I taught C. when we lived in High Street, A. in Pinckney Street, and now Al.; so I seem to be an institution and a success, since I can start the boy, teach one girl, and take care of the little invalid. It is hard work, but I can do it; and am glad to sit in a large, fine room part of each day, after my sky-parlor, which has nothing pretty in it, and only the gray tower and blue sky outside as I sit at the window writing. I love luxury, but freedom and independence better.

To her Father, written from Mrs. Reed's.

Boston, Nov. 29, 1856.

Dearest Father, — Your little parcel was very welcome to me as I sat alone in my room, with snow falling

fast outside, and a few tears in (for birthdays are dismal times to me); and the fine letter, the pretty gift, and, most of all, the loving thought, so kindly taken for your old absent daughter, made the cold, dark day as warm and bright as summer to me.

And now, with the birthday pin upon my bosom, many thanks on my lips, and a whole heart full of love for its giver, I will tell you a little about my doings, stupid as they will seem after your own grand proceedings. How I wish I could be with you, enjoying what I have always longed for, — fine people, fine amusements, and fine books. But as I can't, I am glad you are; for I love to see your name first among the lecturers, to hear it kindly spoken of in papers and inquired about by good people here, — to say nothing of the delight and pride I take in seeing you at last filling the place you are so fitted for, and which you have waited for so long and patiently. If the New Yorkers raise a statue to the modern Plato, it will be a wise and highly creditable action.

I am very well and very happy. Things go smoothly, and I think I shall come out right, and prove that though an Alcott I can support myself. I like the independent feeling; and though not an easy life, it is a free one, and I enjoy it. I can't do much with my hands; so I will make a battering-ram of my head and make a way through this rough-and-tumble world. I have very pleasant lectures to amuse my evenings, — Professor Gajani on " Italian Reformers," the Mercantile Library course, Whipple, Beecher, and others, and, best of all, a free pass at the Boston Theatre. I saw Mr. Barry, and he gave it to me with many kind speeches, and promises to bring out the play very soon. I hope he will.

My farce is in the hands of Mrs. W. H. Smith, who acts at Laura Keene's theatre in New York. She took it, saying she would bring it out there. If you see or hear anything about it, let me know. I want something doing. My mornings are spent in writing. C. takes one a month, and I am to see Mr. B., who may take some of my wares.

In the afternoons I walk and visit my hundred relations, who are all kind and friendly, and seem interested in our various successes.

Sunday evenings I go to Parker's parlor, and there meet Phillips, Garrison, Scherb, Sanborn, and many other pleasant people. All talk, and I sit in a corner listening, and wishing a certain placid gray-haired gentleman was there talking too. Mrs. Parker calls on me, reads my stories, and is very good to me. Theodore asks Louisa “ how her worthy parents do,” and is otherwise very friendly to the large, bashful girl who adorns his parlor steadily.

Abby is preparing for a busy and, I hope, a profitable winter. She has music lessons already, French and drawing in store, and, if her eyes hold out, will keep her word and become what none of us can be, “ an accomplished Alcott.” Now, dear Father, I shall hope to hear from you occasionally, and will gladly answer all epistles from the Plato whose parlor parish is becoming quite famous. I got the “Tribune,” but not the letter, and shall look it up. I have been meaning to write, but did not know where you were.

Good-by, and a happy birthday from your ever loving child, Louisa.

Journal.

Twenty-four Years Old.

January, 1857. — Had my first new silk dress from good little L. W., — very fine; and I felt as if all the

Hancocks and Quincys beheld me as I went to two parties in it on New Year’s eve.

A busy, happy month, — taught, wrote, sewed, read aloud to the “ little mother,” and went often to the theatre; heard good lectures; and enjoyed my Parker evenings very much.

Father came to see me on his way home; little money; had had a good time, and was asked to come again. Why don’t rich people who enjoy his talk pay for it? Philosophers are always poor, and too modest to pass round their own hats.

Sent by him a good bundle to the poor Forlornites among the ten-foot drifts in W.

February. — Ran home as a valentine on the 14th.

March. — Have several irons in the fire now, and try to keep ‘em all hot.

April. — May did a crayon head of Mother with Mrs. Murdock; very good likeness. All of us as proud as peacocks of our “ little Raphael.”

Heard Mrs. Butler read; very fine.

May. — Left the L.’s with my thirty-three dollars; glad to rest. May went home with her picture, happy in her winter’s work and success.

Father had three talks at W. F. Channing’s. Good company, — Emerson, Mrs. Howe, and the rest.

Saw young Booth in Brutus, and liked him better than his father; went about and rested after my labors; glad to be with Father, who enjoyed Boston and friends.

Home on the 10th, passing Sunday at the Emerson’s. I have done what I planned, — supported myself, written eight stories, taught four months, earned a hundred dollars, and sent money home.

June. — All happy together. My dear Nan was with me, and we had good times. Betty was feeble, but seemed to cheer up for a time. The long, cold, lonely winter has been too hard for the frail creature, and we are all anxious about her. I fear she may slip away; for she never seemed to care much for this world beyond home.

So gradually the day seemed to be coming to which Louisa had long looked forward. She found that she could be independent, could help her family, and even indulge some of her own tastes.

About this time Miss Alcott mentions a young friend who died in her arms, and speaks of going to console the sister in her loneliness. This shows how warmly her heart beat for others while her head was so busy with her ambitious plans. She speaks also of the hint of a new story called “ The Cost of an Idea.” She never lost sight of this plan, but did not carry it out. Her father’s life and character were in her mind, and she longed to portray the conflict between his high ideal and the practical difficulties of his life; but it was an impossible subject. The Fruitlands episode was told in “ Transcendental Wild Oats,” and his early life in “ Elis’s Education.” But although her admiration and affection for him are abundantly shown • in her journals, she never perhaps understood him so thoroughly that she could adequately portray his personality; neither could she do justice to all related to him without trenching upon the privacy due to sacred feelings.

A great shadow fell over Louisa’s heart and life from the increasing illness of her dear younger sister Elizabeth. This young girl was tenderly beloved by all the family, and was indeed as pure, refined,

and holy as she is represented as Beth in “ Little Women.” Her decay was very gradual, and she was so patient and sweet that the sad time of anxiety was a very precious one in remembrance.

This sickness added to the pecuniary burdens of the family, and eight years afterward Louisa paid the bill of the physician who attended her sister.

In October, 1857, the family removed again to Concord, and Louisa remained at home to assist in the care of the beloved invalid. They lived a few months in a part of a house which they hired until the Orchard House, which they had bought, was ready for them. Here the dear sister’s life came to a close.

This was the first break in the household, and the mother’s heart never fully recovered from it. Louisa accepted death with strong, sweet wisdom. It never seemed to have any terror for her.

In July they took possession of the Orchard House, which was hereafter the permanent residence of the family. This was a picturesque old house on the side of a hill, with an orchard of apple-trees. It was not far from Mr. Emerson's, and within walking distance of the village, yet very quiet and rural. Mr. Alcott had his library, and was always very happy there; but Louisa's heart never clung to it.

The engagement of the elder sister was a very exciting event to Louisa, who did not like having the old sisterly relation broken in upon; but everything was so genuine and true in the love of the newly betrothed pair that she could not help accepting the change as a blessing to her sister and taking the new brother into her heart. The entries in her journal show that the picture she has drawn in " Little Women " of this noble man is from life, and not exaggerated.

Louisa went to Boston for a visit, and again had hopes of going on to the stage; but an accident prevented it; and she returned to Concord and her writing, working off her disappointment in a story called " Only an Actress."

Among her experiences at this time was an offer of marriage, about which she consulted her mother, telling her that she did not care for the lover very much. The wise mother saved her from the impulse to self-sacrifice, which might have led her to accept a position which would have given help to the family.

Although this was not the only instance of offers of marriage, more or less advantageous, made to her, Louisa had no inclination toward matrimony. Her heart was bound up in her family, and she could hardly contemplate her own interests as separate from theirs. She loved activity, freedom, and independence. She could not cherish illusions tenderly; and she always said that she got tired of everybody, and felt sure that she should of her husband if she married. She never wished to make her heroines marry, and the love story is the part of her books for which she cared least. She yielded to the desire of the public, who will not accept life without a recognition of this great joy in it. Still it must be acknowledged that she has sometimes painted very sweet and natural love scenes, although more often in quaint and homely guise than in the fashion of ancient romance.

"King of Clubs and Queen of Hearts" is very prettily told; and " Mrs. Todger's Teapot " is true to that quiet, earnest affection which does not pass away with youth.

The writing went on, and she received five, six, or ten dollars apiece for her stories; but she did not yet venture to give up the sewing and teaching, which was still the sure reliance.

Her younger sister now began to exercise her talent, and illustrated a little book of Louisa's called " Christmas Elves," which she says is better than " Flower Fables."

Journal.

Read Charlotte Bronte’s life. A very interesting, but sad one. So full of talent; and after working long, just as success, love, and happiness come, she dies.

Wonder if I shall ever be famous enough for people to care to read my story and struggles. I can’t be a C. B., but I may do a little something yet.

July. — Grandma Alcott came to visit us. A sweet old lady; and I am glad to know her, and see where Father got his nature. Eighty-four; yet very smart, industrious, and wise. A house needs a grandma in it.

As we sat talking over Father’s boyhood, I never realized so plainly before how much he has done for himself. His early life sounded like a pretty old romance, and Mother added the love passages.

I got a hint for a story; and some day will do it, and call it “The Cost of an Idea.” Spindle Hill, Temple School, Fruitlands, Boston, and Concord, would make fine chapters. The trials and triumphs of the Pathetic Family would make a capital book; may I live to do it.

August. — A sad, anxious month. Betty worse; Mother takes her to the seashore. Father decides to go back to Concord; he is never happy far from Emerson, the one true friend who loves and understands and helps him.

September. — An old house near R. W. E.’s is bought with Mother’s money, and we propose to move. Mother in Boston with poor Betty, who is failing fast. Anna and I have a hard time breaking up.

October. — Move to Concord. Take half a house in town till spring, when the old one is to be made ready.

Find dear Betty a shadow, but sweet and patient always. Fit up a nice room for her, and hope home and love and care may keep her.

People kind and friendly, and the old place looks pleasant, though I never want to live in it.

November. — Father goes West, taking Grandma home. We settle down to our winter, whatever it is to be. Lizzie seems better, and we have some plays. Sanborn’s school makes things lively, and we act a good deal.

Twenty-five this month. I feel my quarter of a century rather heavy on my shoulders just now. I lead two lives. One seems gay with plays, etc., the other very sad, — in Betty’s room; for though she wishes us to act, and loves to see us get ready, the shadow is there, and Mother and I see it. Betty loves to have me with her; and I am with her at night, for Mother needs rest. Betty says she feels “strong” when I am near. So glad to be of use.

December. — Some fine plays for charity.

January, 1858. — Lizzie much worse; Dr. G. says there is no hope. A hard thing to hear; but if she is only to suffer, I pray she may go soon. She was glad to know she was to " get well," as she called it, and we tried to bear it bravely for her sake. We gave up plays; Father came home; and Anna took the housekeeping, so that Mother and I could devote ourselves to her. Sad, quiet days in her room, and strange nights keeping up the fire and watching the dear little shadow try to wile away the long sleepless hours without troubling me. She sews, reads, sings softly, and lies looking at the fire, — so sweet and patient and so worn, my heart is broken to see the change. I wrote some lines one night on " Our Angel in the House."

[Jo and Beth. — L.M.A.]

February. — A mild month; Betty very comfortable, and we hope a little.

Dear Betty is slipping away, and every hour is too precious to waste, so I'LL keep my lamentations over Nan's [affairs] till this duty is over.

Lizzie makes little things, and drops them out of windows to the school-children, smiling to see their surprise. In the night she tells me to'be Mrs. Gamp, when I give her her lunch, and tries to be gay that I may keep up. Dear little saint! I shall be better all my life for these sad hours with you.

March 14th. — My dear Beth died at three this morning, after two years of patient pain. Last week she put her work away, saying the needle was " too heavy," and having given us her few possessions, made ready for the parting in her own simple, quiet way. For two days she suffered much, begging for ether, though its effect was gone. Tuesday she lay in Father's arms, and called us round her, smiling contentedly as she said, "All here!" I think she bid us good-by then, as she held our hands and kissed us tenderly. Saturday she slept, and at midnight became unconscious, quietly breathing her life away till three; then, with one last look of the beautiful eyes, she was gone.

A curious thing happened, and I mil tell it here, for Dr. G. said it was a fact. A few moments after the last breath came, as Mother and I sat silently watching the shadow fall on the dear little face, I saw a light mist rise from the body, and float up and vanish in the air. Mother's eyes followed mine, and when I said, "What did you see?" she described the same light mist. Dr. G. said it was the life departing visibly.

For the last time we dressed her in her usual cap and' gown, and laid her on her bed, — at rest at last. What she had suffered was seen in the face; for at twenty-three she looked like a woman of forty, so worn was she, and all her pretty hair gone.

On Monday Dr. Huntington read the Chapel service, and we sang her favorite hymn. Mr. Emerson, Henry Thoreau, Sanborn, and John Pratt, carried her out of the old home to the new one at Sleepy Hollow chosen by herself. So the first break comes, and I know what death means, — a liberator for her, a teacher for us.

April. — Came to occupy one wing of Hawthorne's house (once ours) while the new one was being repaired. Father, Mother, and I kept house together; May being in Boston, Anna at Pratt Farm, and, for the first time, Lizzie absent. I don't miss her as I expected to do, for she seems nearer and dearer than before; and I am glad to know she is safe from pain and age in some world where her innocent soul must be happy.

Death never seemed terrible to me, and now is beautiful; so I cannot fear it, but find it friendly and wonderful.

May. — A lonely month with all the girls gone, and Father and Mother absorbed in the old house, which I don't care about, not liking Concord.

On the 7 th of April, Anna came walking in to tell us she was engaged to John Pratt; so another sister is gone.

J. is a model son and brother, — a true man, — full of fine possibilities, but so modest one does not see it at once. He is handsome, healthy, and happy; just home from the West, and so full of love he is pleasant to look at.

I moaned in private over my great loss, and said I'd never forgive J. for taking Anna from me; but I shall if he makes her happy, and turn to little May for my comfort.

[Now that John is dead, I can truly say we all had cause to bless the day he came into the family; for we gained a son and brother, and Anna the best husband ever known.

For ten years he made her home a little heaven of love and peace; and when he died he left her the legacy of a beautiful life, and an honest name to his little sons. — L.M.A., 1873.]

June. — The girls came home, and I went to visit L. W. m Boston. Saw Charlotte Cushman, and had a stage- struck fit. Dr. W. asked Barry to let me act at his theatre, and he agreed. I was to do Widow Pottle, as the dress was a good disguise and I knew the part well. It was all a secret, and I had hopes of trying a new life; the old one being so changed now, I felt as if I must find interest in something absorbing. But Mr. B. broke his leg, so I had to give it up; and when it was known, the dear, respectable relations were horrified at the idea. I'LL try again by-and-by, and see if I have the gift. Perhaps it is acting, not writing, I 'm meant for. Nature must have a vent somehow.

July. — Went into the new house and began to settle. Father is happy; Mother glad to be at rest; Anna is in bliss with her gentle John; and May busy over her pictures. I have plans simmering, but must sweep and dust and wash my dish-pans a while longer till I see my way.

Worked off my stage fever in writing a story, and felt better; also a moral tale, and got twenty-five dollars, which pieced up our summer gowns and bonnets all round. The inside of my head can at least cover the outside.

August. — Much company to see the new house. All seem to be glad that the wandering family is anchored at last. We won't move again for twenty years if I can help it. The old people need an abiding place; and now that death and love have taken two of us away, I can, I hope, soon manage to care for the remaining four.

The weeklies will all take stories; and I can simmer novels while I do my housework, so see my way to a little money, and perhaps more by-and-by if I ever make a hit.

Probably owing to the excitement of grief for her sister's death, and sympathy in Anna's happy betrothal, Louisa became in October more discouraged than she had ever been, and went to Boston in search of work. As she walked over the mill- dam the running stream brought the thought of the River of Death, which would end all troubles. It was but a momentary impulse, and the brave young heart rallied to the thought, "There is work for me, and I'LL have it! " Her journal narrates how Mr. Parker helped her through this period of anxiety. She was all ready to go to Winchester, to hard drudgery at sewing, when her old place as governess was again offered to her, and her own support was assured.

October. — Went to Boston on my usual hunt for employment, as I am not needed at home and seem to be the only bread-winner just now.

My fit of despair was soon over, for it seemed so cowardly to run away before the battle was over I

couldn't do it. So I said firmly, "There is work for me, and I'LL have it," and went home resolved to take Fate by the throat and shake a living out of her.

Sunday Mr. Parker preached a sermon on " Laborious Young Women." Just what I needed; for it said: " Trust your fellow-beings, and let them help you. Don't be too proud to ask, and accept the humblest work till you can find the task you want."

"I will," said I, and went to Mr. P.'s. He was out; but I told Mrs. P. my wants, and she kindly said Theodore and Hannah would be sure to have something for me. As I went home I met Mrs. L., who had not wanted me, as Alice went to school. She asked if I was engaged, and said A. did not do well, and she thought perhaps they would like me back. I was rejoiced, and went home feeling that the tide had begun to turn. Next day came Miss H. S. to offer me a place at the Girls' Reform School at Winchester, to sew ten hours a day, make and mend. I said I'd go, as I could do anything with a needle; but added, if Mrs. L. wants me I'd rather do that.

“Of course you had. Take it if it comes, and if not, try my work.” I promised and waited. That eve, when my bag was packed and all was ready for Winchester, came a note from Mrs. L. offering the old salary and the old place. I sang for joy, and next day early posted off to Miss S. She was glad and shook hands, saying, “ It was a test, my dear, and you stood it. When I told Mr. P. that you would go, he said, ‘ That is a true girl; Louisa will succeed.’“

I was very proud and happy; for these things are tests of character as well as courage, and I covet the respect of such true people as Mr. P. and Miss S.

So away to my little girl with a bright heart! for with tales, and sewing for Mary, which pays my board, there I am fixed for the winter and my cares over. Thank the Lord!

She now found publishers eager for her stories, and went on writing for them. She was encouraged by E. P. Whipple’s praise of “ Mark Field’s Mistake,” and by earning thirty dollars, most of which she sent home.

Journal.

Earned thirty dollars; sent twenty home. Heard Curtis, Parker, Higginson, and Mrs. Dall lecture. See Booth’s Hamlet, and my ideal done at last.

My twentv-sixth birthday on the 29th. Some sweet letters from home, and a ring of A.’s and J.’s hair as a peace-offering. A quiet day, with many thoughts and memories.

The past year has brought us the first death and betrothal, — two events that change my life. I can see that these experiences have taken a deep hold, and changed or developed me. Lizzie helps me spiritually, and a little success makes me more self-reliant. Now that Mother is too tired to be wearied with my moods, I have to manage them alone, and am learning that work of head and hand is my salvation when disappointment or weariness burden and darken my soul.

In my sorrow I think I instinctively came nearer to God, and found comfort in the knowledge that he was sure to help when nothing else could.

A great grief has taught me more than any minister, and when feeling most alone I find refuge in the Almighty Friend. If this is experiencing religion I have done it; but I think it is only the lesson one must learn as it comes, and I am glad to know it.

After my fit of despair I seem to be braver and more cheerful, and grub away with a good heart. Hope it will last, for I need all the courage and comfort I can get.

I feel as if I could write better now, — more truly of things I have felt and therefore know. I hope I shall yet do my great book, for that seems to be my work, and I am growing up to it. I even think of trying the “ Atlantic.” There’s ambition for you! I’m sure some of the stories are very flat. If Mr. L. takes the one Father carried to him, I shall think I can do something.

December. — Father started on his tour West full of hope. Dear man How happy he will be if people will only listen to and pay for his wisdom.

May came to B. and stayed with me while she took drawing lessons. Christmas at home. Write an Indian story.

January, 1859. — Send a parcel home to Marmee and Nan.

Mother very ill. Home to nurse her for a week. Wonder if I ought not to be a nurse, as I seem to have a gift for it. Lizzie, L. W., and Mother all say so; and I like it. If I could n’t write or act I’d try it. May yet. $21 from L.; $15 home.

Some day I’LL do my best, and get well paid for it.

[$3,000 for a short serial in 1876. True prophet. — L.M.A.]

Wrote a sequel to “ Mark Field.” Had a queer time over it, getting up at night to write it, being too full to sleep.

March. — “Mark” was a success, and much praised. So I found the divine afflatus did descend. Busy life teaching, writing, sewing, getting all I can from lectures, books, and good people. Life is my college. May I graduate well, and earn some honors!

April. — May went home after a happy winter at the School of Design, where she did finely, and was pronounced full of promise. Mr. T. said good things of her, and we were very proud. No doubt now what she is to be, if we can only keep her along.

I went home also, being done with A., who went out of town early. Won’t teach any more if I can help it; don’t like it; and if I can get writing enough can do much better.

I have done more than I hoped. Supported myself, helped May, and sent something home. Not borrowed a penny, and had only five dollars given me. So my third campaign ends well.

May. — Took care of L. W., who was ill. Walked from C. to B. one day, twenty miles, in five hours, and went to a party in the evening. Not very tired. Well done for a vegetable production!

June. — Took two children to board and teach. A busy month, as Anna was in B.

September. — Great State Encampment here. Town full of soldiers, with military fuss and feathers. I like a camp, and long for a war, to see how it all seems. 1 can’t fight, but I can nurse.

[Prophetic again. — L.M.A.]

October, 1859. — May did a fine copy of Emerson’s Endymion1 for me.

Mother sixty. God bless the dear, brave woman!

Good news of Parker in Florence, — my beloved minister and friend. To him and R. W. E. I owe much of my education. May I be a worthy pupil of such men!

November. — Hurrah! My story was accepted; and Lowell asked if it was not a translation from the German, 1 A fine bas-relief owned by Mr. Emerson.

it was so unlike most tales. I felt much set up, and my fifty dollars will be very happy money. People seem to think it a great thing to get into the "Atlantic;" but I've not been pegging away all these years in vain, and may yet have books and publishers and a fortune of my own. Success has gone to my head, and I wander a little. Twenty-seven years old, and very happy.

The Harper's Ferry tragedy makes this a memorable month. Glad I have lived to see the Antislavery movement and this last heroic act in it. Wish I could do my part in it.

December, 1859. — The execution of Saint John the Just took place on the second. A meeting at the hall, and all Concord was there. Emerson, Thoreau, Father, and Sanborn spoke, and all were full of reverence and admiration for the martyr.

I made some verses on it, and sent them to the " Liberator."

A sickness of Mrs. Alcott through which she nursed her makes Louisa question whether nursing is not her true vocation. She had an opportunity to try it later.

Much interest attaches to this period of Louisa's work, when she dashed off sensational stories as fast as they were wanted, from the account which she has given of it in " Little Women." She has concentrated into one short period there the work and the feelings of a much longer time. She certainly did let her fancy run riot in these tales, and they were as sensational as the penny papers desired. She had a passion for wild, adventurous life, and even for lurid passion and melodramatic action, which she could indulge to the utmost in these stories. Louisa was always a creature of moods; and it was a great relief to work off certain feelings by the safe vent of imaginary persons and scenes in a story. She had no one to guide or criticise her; and the fact that these gambols of fancy brought the much-needed money, and were, as she truly called them, " pot boilers," certainly did not discourage her from indulging in them. She is probably right in calling most of them " trash and rubbish," for she was yet an unformed girl, and had not studied herself or life very deeply; but her own severe condemnation of them in "Little Women " might give a false idea. The stories are never coarse or immoral. They give .a lurid, unnatural picture of life, but sin is not made captivating or immorality attractive. There is often a severe moral enforced. They did not give poison to her readers, only over-seasoned unnatural food, which might destroy the relish for wholesome mental nourishment.

We are inclined to ask, What did Louisa herself get out of this wild, Walpurgis-Night ride among ghosts and goblins, letting her fancy run riot, and indulging every mood as it rose? Did it not give her the dash and freedom in writing which we find in all her books, a command of language, and a recognition of the glow and force of life? She finds life no mere commonplace drudgery, but full of great possibilities. Did it not also give her an interest in all the wild fancies and dreams of girls, all the longing for adventure of boys, and make her hopeful even of the veriest young scamps that they would work off the turbulent energies of youth safely if activities were wisely provided for them?

No writer for children ever was so fully recognized as understanding them. They never felt that she stood on a pinnacle of wisdom to censure them, but came right down into their midst to work and play with them, and at the same time to show them the path out of the tangled thickets, and to help them to see light in their gloomiest despair.

Yet she unquestionably recognized that she was not doing the best work of which she was capable; and she looked forward still to the books she was to write, as well as the fortune she was to make. She did not like any reference to these sensational stories in after life, although she sometimes re-used plots or incidents in them; and she was very unwilling to have them republished.

Boston Bulletin, — Ninth Issue.

Sunday Eve, November, 1858.

My blessed Nan, — Having finished my story, I can refresh my soul by a scribble to you, though I have nothing to tell of much interest.

Mrs. L. is to pay me my” celery “ each month, as she likes to settle all bills in that way; so yesterday she put $20.85 int0 my willing hands, and gave me Saturday p.m. for a holiday. This unexpected $20, with the $10 for my story (if I get it) and for sewing, will give me the immense sum of $35. I shall get a secondhand carpet for the little parlor, a bonnet for you, and some shoes and stockings for myself, as three times round the Common in cold weather conduces to chilblains, owing to stockings with a profusion of toe, but no heel, and shoes with plenty of heel, but a paucity of toe. The prejudices of society demand that my feet be covered in the houses of the rich and great; so I shall hose and shoe myself, and if any of my fortune is left, will invest it in the Alcott Sinking Fund, the Micawber R. R., and the Skim- pole three per cents.

Tell me how much carpet you need, and T. S. will find me a good one. In December I shall have another $20; so let me know what is wanting, and don’t live on “ five pounds of rice and a couple of quarts of split peas “ all winter, I beg.

How did you like “ Mark Field’s Mistake “? I don’t know whether it is good or bad; but it will keep the pot boiling, and I ask no more. I wanted to go and see if “ Hope’s Treasures “ was accepted, but was afeared. M. and H. both appeared; but one fell asleep, and the other forgot to remember; so 1 still wait like Patience on a hard chair, smiling at an inkstand. Miss K. asked me to go to see Booth for the last time on Saturday. Upon that ravishing thought I brooded all the week very merrily, and I danced, sang, and clashed my cymbals daily. Saturday a. m. Miss K. sent word she could n’t go, and from my pinnacle of joy I was precipitated into an abyss of woe. While in said abyss Mrs. L. put the $20 into my hands. That was a moment of awful trial. Every one of those dollars cried aloud, “ What, ho! Come hither, and be happy! “ But eight cold feet on a straw carpet marched to and fro so pathetically that I locked up the tempting fiend, and fell to sewing, as a Saturday treat!

But, lo! virtue was rewarded. Mrs. H. came flying in, and took me to the Museum to see “ Gold” and “ Lend Me Five Shillings.” Warren, in an orange tie, red coat, white satin vest, and scarlet ribbons on his ankles, was the funniest creature you ever saw; and I laughed till I cried, — which was better for me than the melancholy Dane, I dare say.

I ‘m disgusted with this letter; for I always begin trying to be proper and neat; but my pen will not keep in order, and ink has a tendency to splash when used copiously and with rapidity. I have to be so moral and so dignified nowadays that the jocosity of my nature will gush out when it gets a chance, and the consequences are, as you see, rubbish. But you like it; so let’s be merry while we may, for to-morrow is Monday, and the weekly grind begins again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE YEAR OF GOOD LUCK.

THE CHILDREN’S SONG.
Tune. — “ Wait for the Wagon.”

The world lies fair about us, and a friendly sky above;
Our lives are full of sunshine, our homes are full of love;
Few cares or sorrows sadden the beauty of our day;
We gather simple pleasures like daisies by the way.

Chorus. — Oh! sing with cheery voices, Like robins on the tree;
For little lads and lasses As blithe of heart should be.

The village is our fairyland: its good men are our kings;
And wandering through its by-ways our busy minds find wings.
The school-room is our garden, and we the flowers there,
And kind hands tend and water us that we may blossom fair.

Chorus. — Oh! dance in airy circles,
Like fairies on the lee;
For little lads and lasses
As light of foot should be.
There’s the Shepherd of the sheepfold;
the Father of the vines;
The Hermit of blue Walden; the Poet of the pines;

And a Friend who comes among us, with counsels wise and mild
With snow upon his forehead, yet at heart a very child.

Chorus. — Oh! smile as smiles the river,
Slow rippling to the sea;
For little lads and lasses
As full of peace should be.

There’s not a cloud in heaven but drops its silent dew;
No violet in the meadow but blesses with its blue;
No happy child in Concord who may not do its part
To make the great world better by innocence of heart.

Chorus. — Oh! blossom in the sunshine
Beneath the village tree;
For little lads and lasses

Are the fairest flowers we see.

AFTER such long and hard struggles, it is pleasant to find the diary for 1860 headed “ A Year of Good Luck.” The appointment of Mr. Alcott as Superintendent of Schools in Concord was a great happiness to the family. It was a recognition of his character and ability, and gave him congenial occupation and some small pecuniary compensation.

Louisa was writing for the “ Atlantic,” and receiving better pay for her work; Anna was happy; and May absorbed in her art.

In the summer Miss Alcott had an experience in caring for a young friend during a temporary fit of insanity, which she has partially reproduced in the touching picture of Helen in the story of “ Work.” It is a powerful lesson; but it is almost cruelly enforced, and is an artistic blemish in the book. While the great problem of heredity should be studied and its lessons enforced, it is yet a mystery, whose laws are not understood; and it is not wise to paint its possible effects in the lurid light of excited imagination, which may too often bring about the very evils which a wise and temperate caution might prevent. For the physician and teacher such investigations are important; but they are dangerous to the young and sensitive.

The following unusually long letter gives a pleasing picture of the family life at this time: —

To Mrs. Bond.
Apple Slump, Sept. 17, 1860.

Dear Auntie, — I consider this a practical illustration of one of Mother’s naughty amended sayings, “ Cast your bread upon the waters, and after many days it will return buttered; “ and this “ rale of three “ don’t “puzzle me,” as the other did; for my venerable raiment went away with one if not two feet in the grave, and came back in the guise of three stout angels, having been resurrection- ized by the spirit who lives on the other side of a Charles River Jordan. Thank you very much, and be sure the dreams I dream in them will be pleasant ones; for, whether you sewed them or not, I know they bring some of the Auntie influence in their strength, softness, and warmth; and, though a Vandal, I think any prayers I may say in them will be the better for the affectionate recollections that will clothe me with the putting on of these friendly gowns, while my belief in both heavenly and earthly providences will be amazingly strengthened by the knowledge of some lives here, whose beauty renders it impossible to doubt the existence of the life hereafter.

We were very glad to hear that the Papa was better; for when paternal " Richards " ain't " themselves," everybody knows the anxious state of the domestic realms.

I hope Georgie (last name disremembered) has recovered from the anguish of discontented teeth and berry- seeds, and that " the Mama " was as much benefited by the trip as the other parties were, barring the horse perhaps.

This amiable town is convulsed just now with a gymnastic fever, which shows itself with great violence in all the schools, and young societies generally. Dr. Lewis has " inoculated us for the disease," and it has " taken finely;" for every one has become a perambulating windmill, with all its four sails going as if a wind had set in; and the most virulent cases present the phenomena of black eyes and excoriation of the knobby parts of the frame, to say nothing of sprains and breakage of vessels looming in the future.

The City Fathers approve of it; and the city sons and daughters intend to show that Concord has as much muscle as brain, and be ready for another Concord fight, if Louis Napoleon sees fit to covet this famous land of Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Alcott, & Co. Abby and I are among the pioneers; and the delicate vegetable productions clash their cymbals in private, when the beef-eating young ladies faint away and become superfluous dmnb belles.

Saturday we had J. G. Whittier, Charlotte Cushman, Miss Stebbins the sculptress, and Mr. Stuart, conductor of the underground railroad of this charming free country. So you see our humble place of abode is perking up; and when the " great authoress and artist " are fairly out of the shell, we shall be an honor to our country and terror to the foe, — provided good fortune don't addle or bad fortune smash us.

Father continues to stir up the schools like a mild pudding-stick, Mother to sing Hebron among her pots and pans, Anna and the Prince Consort to bill and coo in the little dove-cot, Oranthy Bluggage to launch chips on the Atlantic and make a gigantic blot of herself in working the vessel, Abby to teach the fine arts and play propriety for the family, and the old house to put its best foot foremost and hoot at the idea of ever returning to the chaos from which it came.

This is a condensed history of " the pathetic family," which is also a "happy family," owing to the prevalence of friends and lots of kindness in the original packages, "which are always arriving" when the "Widow Cruise's oil-bottle " begins to give out.

You know I never could do anything in a neat and proper manner; so you will receive this topsy-turvy note as you do its writer, and with love to all from all, believe her, dear auntie, Ever lovingly yours, L. M. A.

This characteristic letter not only shows Louisa's affectionate feelings and gives a picture of her life, but indicates that “ The Pathetic Family,” which was the foundation of “ Little Women,” was already shaping itself in her mind.

Mr. Alcott’s career as Superintendent of Schools was a gratifying success, and is still remembered by friends of education in the town. The year closed with a school festival, for which Louisa wrote a poem, and in which she took hearty delight.

In 1861 war was declared with the South. The Alcotts were all alive with patriotic enthusiasm, and Louisa took an active part in fitting off the boys for the army. But she also found time for much reading. Mr. Alcott, in his sonnet, uses the expression about Louisa —

“Hast with grave studies vexed a lively brain.”

He may possibly have referred to this period, though she could never properly be called a student.

She was a rapid, intelligent reader, and her taste was severe and keen. From her childhood she had browsed in her father’s library, full of the works of ancient philosophers and quaint English poets, and had imbibed from them great thoughts and noble sentiments; but her reading, like all her education, was immethodical. Occasionally she would lay out courses of reading, which she pursued for a time; but in general she followed the cravings of a healthy appetite for knowledge, reading what came in her way. Later in life she often read light literature in abundance, to drown the sensations of pain, and to pass away the hours of invalidism.

She read French easily, and learned to speak it when abroad; she also studied German, but did not acquire equal facility in that tongue. Of ancient languages she had no knowledge. History could not fail to interest such a student of life, and she loved Nature too well not to enjoy the revelations of science when brought to her notice; but she had never time to give to a thorough study of either.

In her journal at this time she speaks of her religious feelings, which the experiences of grief and despair and reviving hope had deepened. Louisa Alcott’s was a truly religious soul; she always lived in the consciousness of a Higher Power sustaining and blessing her, whose presence was revealed to her through Nature, through the inspired words of great thinkers and the deep experiences of her own heart. She never held her life as an isolated possession which she was free to use for her own enjoyment or glory. Her father truly called her “ Duty’s faithful child,” and her life was consecrated to the duty she recognized as specially hers. But for outward forms and rites of religion she cared little; her home was sacred to her, and she found her best life there. She loved Theodore Parker, and found great strength and help from his preaching, and afterward liked to listen to Dr. Bartol; but she never joined any church. The Bible was not her favorite reading, though her father had read it much to her in her childhood, with his own peculiar charm of interpretation. Pilgrim's Progress was one of the few religious books which became dear to her in the same way.

Her sister Anna was married in May; this was of course a great event in the family. While fully rejoicing in her sister's happiness, Louisa felt her loss as a constant companion and confidant. The journal gives a sufficient description of the event. Her strong affection for her brother-in-law appears in " Little Women" and in "Jo's Boys." About this time her farce was brought out at the Howard Athenseum.

The story-writing continued, as it helped to pay the expenses of the family; but the continuous, hurried work had begun to affect her health, and she occasionally suffered from illness.

In the summer of 1861 Miss Alcott began to write her first novel, entitled " Moods; " this proved to be the least successful of her books, and yet like many an unfortunate child, it was the dearest to the mother's heart. It was not written for money, but for its own sake, and she was possessed by the plot and the characters. Warwick represented her ideal of a hero, while her sister preferred the type of the amiable Moor; yet there is far less of her outward self revealed in this than in her other stories. It is full of her thoughts and fancies, but not of her life. The wilful, moody, charming Sylvia does not affect us like the stormy Jo, who is a real presence to us, and whom we take to our hearts in spite of her faults. The men are such as she found in books, but had never known herself, andN carefully as she has drawn them, have not the individuality of Laurie and Professor Bhaer. The action takes place in an unreal world; and though there are many pretty scenes, they have not the real flavor of New England life. The principal incident, of a young girl going up the river on a picnic-voyage for some days with her brother and two other young men, was so contrary to common ideas of decorum, that the motive hardly seems sufficient for the staid sister's consent; but in the simple, innocent life which the Alcotts lived in Concord such scruples were little felt.

Miss Alcott did not lay stress upon the marriage question as the principal feature of the book; she cared more to describe the wilful moods of a young girl, full of good feelings, and longing for a rich and noble life, but not established in convictions and principles. She meant to represent much of her own nature in Sylvia, for she was always a creature of moods, which her family learned to recognize and respect. But how unlike was the discipline of family work and love, which saved Louisa from fatal caprices and fitful gusts of fancy called passion, to the lot of the wealthy and admired Sylvia. Miss Alcott says that the incidents of the marriage, although not drawn from life, were so close to an actual case that the wife asked her how she had known her secret; but such realism is a poor justification in art. It is that which becomes true to the imagination and heart through its vivid personation of character which is accepted, not the bare facts. The great question of the transcendental period was truth to the inward life instead of the outward law. But in “ Moods” the marriage question is not stated strongly; it does not reach down to this central principle. It is only in tragedy that such a double relation could be endured, when the situation is compelled by fate, — the fate of character and overpowering circumstances, — and when there is no happy solution possible. But Sylvia’s position is made only by her own weakness, and the love which stands in opposition to outward duty has no right of existence. If her love for Warwick could be overcome, there was no question of her duty; and when she accepts Faith’s criticism of him, it is clear that it is a much lighter spell than love which has fascinated her. We do not accept the catastrophe which sacrifices a splendid life to make a comfortable solution of the practical difficulty, and to allow Sylvia to accept a happy home without a thorough regeneration of heart and mind. But these were the natural mistakes of youth and inexperience; Louisa had known but little of such struggles. Love and marriage were rather uninteresting themes to her, and she had not yet found her true power.

Still the book has great literary merit. It is well written, in a more finished style than any of her other work, except “Modern Mephistopheles,” and the dialogue is vigorous and sprightly. In spite of her careful revision and pruning, there is something left of youthful gush in it, and this perhaps touched the heart of young girls, who found in Sylvia’s troubles with herself a reflection of their own.

The “golden wedding” scenes have some of her usual freedom and vivacity. She is at home with a troop of mothers and babies and noisy boys. But the “golden wedding” was a new importation from Germany, and not at home in the New England farmhouse. Why might it not have been a true wedding or a harvest feast?

Louisa never lost her interest in this early work, though it was the most unlucky of books, and subjected to severe handling. It was sent to and fro from publisher to author, each one suggesting some change. Redpath sent it back as being too long. Ticknor found it very interesting, but could not use it then. Loring liked it, but wanted it shorter. She condensed and altered until her author’s spirit rebelled, and she declared she would change it no more.

After her other books had made her famous, “ Moods” was again brought forward and republished as it was originally written. It met with warmer welcome than before, and a cheap edition was published in England to supply the popular demand.

Miss Alcott learned the first painful lesson of over-work on this book. She was possessed by it, and for three weeks labored so constantly that she felt the physical effects keenly. Fortunately new household tasks (for the daughters of John Brown came to board with them), and the enthusiasm of the time, changed the current of her thoughts.

Journal.

February, 1860. — Mr. won't have “ M. L.,” as it is antislavery, and the dear South must not be offended. Got a carpet with my $50, and wild Louisa's head kept the feet of the family warm.

March. — Wrote “A Modern Cinderella,” with Nan for the heroine and John for the hero.

Made my first ball dress for May, and she was the finest girl at the party. My tall, blond, graceful girl! I was proud of her.

Wrote a song for the school festival, and heard it sung by four hundred happy children. Father got up the affair, and such a pretty affair was never seen in Concord before. He said, “ We spend much on our cattle and flower shows; let us each spring have a show of our children, and begrudge nothing for their culture.” All liked it but the old fogies who want things as they were in the ark.

April. — Made two riding habits, and May and I had some fine rides. Both needed exercise, and this was good for Us. So one of our dreams came true, and we really did “ dash away on horseback.”

Sanborn was nearly kidnapped for being a friend of John Brown; but his sister and A. W. rescued him when he was handcuffed, and the scamps drove off. Great ferment in town. A meeting and general flurry.

Had a funny lover who met me in the cars, and said he lost his heart at once. Handsome man of forty. A Southerner, and very demonstrative and gushing, called and wished to pay his addresses; and being told I did n't wish to see him, retired, to write letters and haunt the road with his hat off, while the girls laughed and had great fun over Jo's lover. He went at last, and peace reigned. My adorers are all queer.

Sent “Cinderella” to the “Atlantic,” and it was accepted. Began “ By the River,” and thought that this was certainly to be a lucky year; for after ten years hard climbing I had reached a good perch on the ladder, and could look more hopefully into the future, while my paper boats sailed gaily over the Atlantic.

May. — Meg's wedding.

My farce was acted, and I went to see it. Not very well done; but I sat in a box, and the good Doctor handed up a bouquet to the author, and made as much as he could of a small affair.

Saw Anna’s honeymoon home at Chelsea, — a little cottage in a blooming apple-orchard. Pretty place, simple and sweet. God bless it!

The dear girl was married on the 23d, the same day as Mother’s wedding. A lovely day; the house full of sunshine, flowers, friends, and happiness. Uncle S. J. May married them, with no fuss, but much love; and we all stood round her. She in her silver-gray silk, with lilies of the valley (John’s flower) in her bosom and hair. We in gray thin stuff and roses, — sackcloth, I called it, and ashes of roses; for I mourn the loss of my Nan, and am not comforted. We have had a little feast, sent by good Mrs. Judge Shaw; then the old folks danced round the bridal pair on the lawn in the German fashion, making a pretty picture to remember, under our Revolutionary elm.

Then, with tears and kisses, our dear girl, in her little white bonnet, went happily away with her good John; and we ended our first wedding. Mr. Emerson kissed her; and I thought that honor would make even matrimony endurable, for he is the god of my idolatry, and has been for years.

June. — To Boston to the memorial meeting for Mr. Parker, which was very beautiful, and proved how much he was beloved. Music Hall was full of flowers and sunshine, and hundreds of faces, both sad and proud, as the various speakers told the life of love and labor which makes Theodore Parker’s memory so rich a legacy to Boston. I was very glad to have known so good a man, and been called “ friend “ by him.

Saw Nan in her nest, where she and her mate live like a pair of turtle doves. Very sweet and pretty, but I’d rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe.

August. — “Moods.” Genius burned so fiercely that for four weeks I wrote all day and planned nearly all night, being quite possessed by my work. I was perfectly happy, and seemed to have no wants. Finished the book, or a rough draught of it, and put it away to settle. Mr. Emerson offered to read it when Mother told him it was “Moods” and had one of his sayings for motto.

Daresay nothing will ever come of it; but it had to be done, and I’m the richer for a new experience.

September. — Received $75 of Ticknor for “Cinderella,” and feel very rich. Emerson praised it, and people wrote to me about it and patted me on the head. Paid bills, and began to simmer another.

October. — I went to B. and saw the Prince of Wales trot over the Common with his train at a review. A yellow-haired laddie very like his mother. Fanny W. and I nodded and waved as he passed, and he openly winked his boyish eye at us; for Fanny, with her yellow curls and wild waving, looked rather rowdy, and the poor little prince wanted some fun. We laughed, and thought that we had been more distinguished by the saucy wink than by a stately bow. Boys are always jolly, — even princes.

Read Richter, and enjoyed him very much.

Mother went to see Uncle S. J. May, and I was housekeeper. Gave my mind to it so energetically that I dreamed dip-toast, talked apple-sauce, thought pies, and wept drop-cakes. Read my book to Nan, who came up to cheer me in my struggles; and she laughed and cried over it and said it was "good." So I felt encouraged, and will touch it up when duty no longer orders me to make a burnt-offering of myself.

November. — Father sixty-one; L. aged twenty-eight. Our birthday. Gave Father a ream of paper, and he gave me Emerson's picture; so both were happy.

Wrote little, being busy with visitors. The John Brown Association asked me for a poem, which I wrote.

Kind Miss R. sent May $30 for lessons, so she went to B. to take some of Johnstone. She is one of the fortunate ones, and gets what she wants easily. I have to grub for my help, or go without it. Good for me, doubtless, or it would n't be so; so cheer up, Louisa, and grind away!

December. — More luck for May. She wanted to go to Syracuse and teach, and Dr. W. sends for her, thanks to Uncle S. J. May. I sew like a steam-engine for a week, and get her ready. On the 17th go to B. and see our youngest start on her first little flight alone into the world, full of hope and courage. May all go well with her!

Mr. Emerson invited me to his class when they meet to talk on Genius; a great honor, as all the learned ladies go.

Sent "Debby's Debit" to the "Atlantic," and they took it. Asked to the John Brown meeting, but had no "good gown," so didn't go; but my "pome" did, and came out in the paper. Not good. I'm a better patriot than poet, and could n't say what I felt.

A quiet Christmas; no presents but apples and flowers. No merry-making; for Nan and May were gone, and Betty under the snow. But we are used to hard times, and, as Mother says, " while there is a famine in Kansas we mustn't ask for sugar-plums."

All the philosophy iji our house is not in the study; a good deal is in the kitchen, where a fine old lady thinks high thoughts and does kind deeds while she cooks and scrubs.

January, 1861. — Twenty-eight; received thirteen New Year's gifts. A most uncommon fit of generosity seemed to seize people on my behalf, and I was blessed with all manner of nice things, from a gold and ivory pen to a mince-pie and a bonnet.

Wrote on a new book — “ Success “ [“ Work “] — till Mother fell ill, when I corked up my inkstand and turned nurse. The dear woman was very ill, but rose up like a phoenix from her ashes after what she gayly called “ the irrepressible conflict between sickness and the May constitution.”

Father had four talks at Emerson’s; good people came, and he enjoyed them much; made $30. R. W. E. » probably put in $20. He has a sweet way of bestowing gifts on the table under a book or behind a candle-stick, when he thinks Father wants a little money, and no one will help him earn. A true friend is this tender and illustrious man.

Wrote a tale and put it away, — to be sent when “Debby “ comes out. “F. T.” appeared, and I got a dress, having mended my six-year old silk till it is more patch and tear than gown. Made the claret merino myself, and enjoyed it, as I do anything bought with my “ head-money.”

February. — Another turn at “ Moods,” which I remodelled. From the 2d to the 25th I sat writing, with a run at dusk; could not sleep, and for three days was so full of it I could not stop to get up. Mother made me a green silk cap with a red bow, to match the old green and red party wrap, which I wore as a “ glory cloak.” Thus arrayed I sat in groves of manuscripts, “ living for immortality,” as May said. Mother wandered in and out with cordial cups of tea, worried because I could n’t eat. Father thought it fine, and brought his reddest apples and hardest cider for my Pegasus to feed upon. All sorts of fun was going on; but I did n’t care if the world returned to chaos if I and my inkstand only “lit” in the same place.

It was very pleasant and queer while it lasted; but after three weeks of it I found that my mind was too rampant for my body, as my head was dizzy, legs shaky, and no sleep would come. So I dropped the pen, and took long walks, cold baths, and had Nan up to frolic with me. Read all I had done to my family; and Father said: “ Emerson must see this. Where did you get your metaphysics?” Mother pronounced it wonderful, and Anna laughed and cried, as she always does, over my works, saying, “ My dear, I ‘m proud of you.”

So I had a good time, even if it never comes to any

thing; for it was worth something to have my three dearest sit up till midnight listening with wide-open eyes to Lu’s first novel.

I planned it some time ago, and have had it in my mind ever so long; but now it begins to take shape.

Father had his usual school festival, and Emerson asked me to write a song, which I did. On the 16th the schools all met in the hall (four hundred), — a pretty posy bed, with a border of proud parents and friends. Some of the fogies objected to the names Phillips and John Brown. But Emerson said: “ Give it up? No, no; / will read it.” Which he did, to my great contentment; for when the great man of the town saysDo it,” the thing is done. So the choir warbled, and the Alcotts were uplifted in their vain minds.

Father was in glory, like a happy shepherd with a large flock of sportive lambs; for all did something. Each school had its badge, — one pink ribbons, one green shoulder-knots, and one wreaths of pop-corn on the curly pates. One school to whom Father had read Pilgrim’s Progress told the story, one child after the other popping up to say his or her part; and at the end a little tot walked forward, saying with a pretty air of wonder, — “ And behold it was all a dream.”

When all was over, and Father about to dismiss them, F. H., a tall, handsome lad came to him, and looking up confidingly to the benign old face, asked “ our dear friend Mr. Alcott to accept of Pilgrim’s Progress and George Herbert’s Poems from the children of Concord, as a token of their love and respect.”

Father was much touched and surprised, and blushed and stammered like a boy, hugging the fine books while the children cheered till the roof rung.

His report was much admired, and a thousand copies printed to supply the demand; for it was a new thing to have a report, neither dry nor dull; and teachers were glad of the hints given, making education a part of religion, not a mere bread-making grind for teacher and an irksome cram for children.

April. — War declared with the South, and our Concord company went to Washington. A busy time getting them ready, and a sad day seeing them off; for in a little town like this we all seem like one family in times like these. At the station the scene was very dramatic, as the brave boys went away perhaps never to come back again.

I’ve often longed to see a war, and now I have my wish. I long to be a man; but as I can’t fight, I will content myself with working for those who can.

Sewed a good deal getting May’s summer things in order, as she sent for me to make and mend and buy and send her outfit.

Stories simmered in my brain, demanding to be writ; but I let them simmer, knowing that the longer the divine afflatus was bottled up the better it would be.

John Brown’s daughters came to board, and upset my plans of rest and writing when the report and the sewing were done. I had my fit of woe up garret on the fat rag-bag, and then put my papers away, and fell to work at housekeeping. I think disappointment must be good for me, I get so much of it; and the constant thumping Fate gives me may be a mellowing process; so I shall be a ripe and sweet old pippin before I die.

May. — Spent our May-day working for our men, — three hundred women all sewing together at the hall for two days.

May will not return to S. after her vacation in July; and being a lucky puss, just as she wants something to do, F. B. S. needs a drawing teacher in his school and offers her the place.

Nan found that I was wearing all the old clothes she and May left; so the two dear souls clubbed together and got me some new ones; and the great parcel, with a loving letter, came to me as a beautiful surprise.

Nan and John walked up from Cambridge for a day, and we all walked back. Took a sail to the forts, and saw our men on guard there. Felt very martial and Joan-of-Arc-y as I stood on the walls with the flag flying over me and cannon all about.

June. — Read a good deal; grubbed in my garden, and made the old house pretty for May. Enjoyed Carlyle's French Revolution very much. His earthquaky style suits me.

"Charles Auchester " is charming, — a sort of fairy tale for grown people. Dear old " Evelina," as a change, was pleasant. Emerson recommended Hodson's India, and I got it, and liked it; also read Sir Thomas More's Life. I read Fielding's " Amelia," and thought it coarse and queer. The heroine having " her lovely nose smashed all to bits falling from a post shay" was a new idea. What some one says of Richardson applies to Fielding, " The virtues of his heroes are the vices of decent men."

July. — Spent a month at the White Mountains with L. W., — a lovely time, and it did me much good. Mountains are restful and uplifting to my mind. Lived in the woods, and revelled in brooks, birds, pines, and peace.

August. — May came home very tired, but satisfied with her first attempt, which has been very successful in every way. She is quite a belle now, and much improved, — a tall blond lass, full of grace and spirit.

September. — Ticknor sent $50. Wrote a story for C., as Plato needs new shirts, and Minerva a pair of boots, and Hebe a fall hat.

October. — All together on Marmee's birthday. Sewing and knitting for " our boys " all the time. It seems as if a few energetic women could carry on the war better than the men do it so far.

A week with Nan in the dove-cot. As happy as ever.

November and December. — Wrote, read, sewed, and wanted something to do.

In 1862, at the suggestion of Miss Peabody, Miss Alcott opened a Kindergarten school"; but it was not successful, and she took a final leave of the teacher's profession, and returned to her writing, which she found to be her true calling. She wrote much; for " brain was lively, and work paid for readily."

Besides the occasional stories in papers and magazines, her most important labor was the preparation of the story called “ Work,” or, as she originally named it, “ Success.” This story however was not published until ten years later. Here she took the road that was later to lead to fame and fortune, by writing from her own experience of life. Christie is Louisa herself under very thin disguise; and all her own experiences, as servant, governess, companion, seamstress, and actress are brought in to give vividness to the picture; while many other persons may be recognized as models for her skilful portraiture. The book has always been deservedly popular.

January, 1862. — E. P. Peabody wanted me to open a Kindergarten, and Mr. Barnard gave a room at the Warren Street Chapel. Don’t like to teach, but take what comes; so when Mr. F. offered $40 to fit up with, twelve pupils, and his patronage, I began.

Saw many great people, and found them no bigger than the rest of the world, — often not half so good as some humble soul who made no noise. I learned a good deal in my way, and am not half so much impressed by society as before I got a peep at it. Having known Emerson, Parker, Phillips, and that set of really great and good men and women living for the world’s work and service of God, the mere show people seem rather small and silly, though they shine well, and feel that they are stars.

February. — Visited about, as my school did not bring enough to pay board and the assistant I was made to have, though I didn’t want her.

Went to lectures; saw Booth at the Goulds’, — a handsome, .shy man, glooming in a corner.

Very tired of this wandering life and distasteful work; but kept my word and tugged on.

Hate to visit people who only ask me to help amuse others, and often longed for a crust in a garret with freedom and a pen. I never knew before what insolent things a hostess can do, nor what false positions poverty can push one into.

April. — Went to and from C. every day that I might be at home. Forty miles a day is dull work; but I have my dear people at night, and am not a beggar.

Wrote “ King of Clubs,” — $30. The school having no real foundation (as the people who sent didn’t care for Kindergartens, and Miss P. wanted me to take pupils for nothing, to try the new system), I gave it up, as I

could do much better at something else. May took my place for a month, that I might keep my part of the bargain; and I cleaned house, and wrote a story which made more than all my months of teaching. They ended in a wasted winter and a debt of $40, — to be paid if I sell my hair to do it.

May. — School finished for me, and I paid Miss N. by giving her all the furniture, and leaving her to do as she liked; while I went back to my writing, which pays much better, though Mr. F. did say, “ Stick to your teaching; you can’t write.” Being wilful, I said, “I won’t teach; and I can write, and I’LL prove it.”

Saw Miss Rebecca Harding, author of “ Margret Howth,” which has made a stir, and is very good. A handsome, fresh, quiet woman, who says she never had any troubles, though she writes about woes. I told her I had had lots of troubles; so I write jolly tales; and we wondered why we each did so.

June, fu/y, August. — Wrote a tale for B., and he lost it, and would n’t pay.

Wrote two tales for L. I enjoy romancing to suit myself; and though my tales are silly, they are not bad; and my sinners always have a good spot somewhere. I hope it is good drill for fancy and language, for I can do it fast; and Mr. L. says my tales are so “ dramatic, vivid, and full of plot, “ they are just what he wants.

September, October. — Sewing Bees and Lint Picks for “ our boys “ kept us busy, and the prospect of the first grandchild rejoiced the hearts of the family.

Wrote much; for brain was lively, and work paid for readily. Rewrote the last story, and sent it to L., who wants more than I can send him. So, between blue flannel jackets for “ our boys “ and dainty slips for Louisa Caroline or John B., Jr., as the case may be, I reel off my “thrilling” tales, and mess up my work in a queer but interesting way.

War news bad. Anxious faces, beating hearts, and busy minds.

I like the stir in the air, and long for battle like a war- horse when he smells powder. The blood of the Mays is up!

After Anna’s Marriage.

Sunday Morn, 1860.

Mrs. Pratt:

My Dear Madam, — The news of the town is as follows, and I present it in the usual journalesque style of correspondence. After the bridal train had departed, the mourners withdrew to their respective homes; and the bereaved family solaced their woe by washing dishes for two hours and bolting the remains of the funeral baked meats. At four, having got settled down, we were all routed up by the appearance of a long procession of children filing down our lane, headed by the Misses H. and R. Father rushed into the cellar, and appeared with a large basket of apples, which went the rounds with much effect. The light infantry formed in a semi-circle, and was watered by the matron and maids. It was really a pretty sight, these seventy children loaded with wreaths and flowers, standing under the elm in the sunshine, singing in full chorus the song I wrote for them. It was a neat little compliment to the superintendent and his daughter, who was glad to find that her “ pome “ was a favorite among the “ lads and lasses “ who sang it “ with cheery voices, like robins on the tree.”

Father put the finishing stroke to the spectacle by going off” at full speed, hoppity-skip, and all the babes followed in a whirl of rapture at the idea. He led them up and down and round and round till they were tired; then they fell into order, and with a farewell song marched away, seventy of the happiest little ones I ever wish to see. We subsided, and fell into our beds with the new thought “ Annie is married and gone “ for a lullaby, which was not very effective in its results with all parties.

Thursday we set our house in order, and at two the rush began. It had gone abroad that Mr. M. and Mrs. Captain Brown were to adorn the scene, so many people coolly came who were not invited, and who had no business here. People sewed and jabbered till Mrs. Brown, with Watson Brown’s widow and baby came; then a levee took place. The two pale women sat silent and serene through the clatter; and the bright-eyed, handsome baby received the homage of the multitude like a little king, bearing the kisses and praises with the utmost dignity. He is named Frederick Watson Brown, after his murdered uncle and father, and is a fair, heroic-looking baby, with a fine head, and serious eyes that look about him as if saying, “ I am a Brown! Are these friends or enemies? “ I wanted to cry once at the little scene the unconscious baby made. Some one caught and kissed him rudely; he didn’t cry, but looked troubled, and rolled his great eyes anxiously about for some familiar face to reassure him with its smile. His mother was not there; but though many hands were stretched to him, he turned to Grandma Bridge, and putting out his little arms to her as if she was a refuge, laughed and crowed as he had not done before when she danced him on her knee. The old lady looked delighted; and Freddy patted the kind face, and cooed like a lawful descendant of that pair of ancient turtle doves.

When he was safe back in the study, playing alone at his mother’s feet, C. and I went and worshipped in our own way at the shrine of John Brown’s grandson, kissing him as if he were a little saint, and feeling highly honored when he sucked our fingers, or walked on us with his honest little red shoes, much the worse for wear.

Well, the baby fascinated me so that I forgot a raging headache and forty gabbling women all in full clack. Mrs. Brown, Sen., is a tall, stout woman, plain, but with a strong, good face, and a natural dignity that showed she was something better than a “ lady,” though she did drink out of her saucer and used the plainest speech.

The younger woman had such a patient, heart-broken face, it was a whole Harper’s Ferry tragedy in a look. When we got your letter, Mother and I ran into the study to read it. Mother read aloud; for there were only C., A., I, and Mrs.

Brown, Jr., in the room. As she read the words that were a poem in their simplicity and happiness, the poor young widow sat with tears rolling down her face; for I suppose it brought back her own wedding- day, not two years ago, and all the while she cried the baby laughed and crowed at her feet as if there was no trouble in the world.

The preparations had been made for twenty at the utmost; so when forty souls with the usual complement of bodies appeared, we grew desperate, and our neat little supper turned out a regular " tea fight." A., C., B., and I rushed like comets to and fro trying to fill the multitude that would eat fast and drink like sponges. I filled a big plate with all I could lay hands on, and with two cups of tea, strong enough for a dozen, charged upon Mr. E. and Uncle S., telling them to eat, drink, and be merry, for a famine was at hand. They cuddled into a corner; and then, feeling that my mission was accomplished, I let the hungry wait and the thirsty moan for tea, while I picked out and helped the regular Antislavery set.

We got through it; but it was an awful hour; and Mother wandered in her mind, utterly lost in a grove of teapots; while B. pervaded the neighborhood demanding hot water, and we girls sowed cake broadcast through the land.

When the plates were empty and the teapots dry, people wiped their mouths and confessed at last that they had done. A conversation followed, in which Grandpa B. and E. P. P. held forth, and Uncle and Father mildly upset the world, and made a new one in which every one desired to take a place. Dr. B., Mr. B., T., etc., appeared, and the rattle continued till nine, when some Solomon suggested that the Alcotts must be tired, and every one departed but C. and S. We had a polka by Mother and Uncle, the lancers by C. and B., and an etude by S., after which scrabblings of feast appeared, and we "drained the dregs of every cup," all cakes and pies we gobbled up, etc.; then peace fell upon us, and our remains were interred decently.

CHAPTER VII.

HOSPITAL SKETCHES.

THOREAU’S FLUTE.

We sighing said, “ Our Pan is dead;
His pipe hangs mute beside the river;
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
But Music’s airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost;
The bluebird chants a requiem;
The willow-blossom waits for him; —
The Genius of the wood is lost.”

Then from the flute, unteuched by hands,
There came a low, harmonious breath: “
For such as he there is no death; —
His life the eternal life commands;
Above man’s aims his nature rose.
The wisdom of a just content
Made one small spot a continent,
And tuned to poetry life’s prose.

“Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
To him grew human or divine, —
Fit mates for this large-hearted child.
Such homage Nature ne’er forgets,
And yearly on the coverlid ‘Neath which her darling lieth hid
Will write his name in violets.

“To him no vain regrets belong
Whose soul, that finer instrument,
Gave to the world no poor lament,
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend! he still will be
A potent presence, though unseen, —
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene;
Seek not for him — he is with thee.”

MISS ALCOTT could not help feeling deeply the excitement of the hour when the war broke out. Her father had been one of the earliest Abolitionists, having joined the Antislavery Society with Garrison, and she well remembered the fugitive slave whom her mother had hidden in the oven. Now this feeling could be united with her patriotic zeal and her strong love of active life, and it was inevitable that she should long to share personally in the dangers and excitement of the war.

Louisa had always been the nurse in the family, and had by nature the magnetic power which encourages and helps the feeble and suffering; therefore, since no other way of serving the cause opened to her, it was most like her to take her own life in her hands and join the corps of devoted nurses. She was accepted, and went to Washington. Her journal gives an account of her situation in the Union Hospital at Georgetown. It was a small hospital, much inferior in its appointments to those which were afterward arranged. Although Louisa had never been very ill up to that time, and thought herself exceptionally strong, yet she had not the rugged constitution fit to bear the labors and exposures of such a position; and the healthful habits of outdoor life and simple food to which she had always been accustomed made the conditions of the crowded, ill-ventilated hospital peculiarly perilous to her. She says, “ I was never ill before this time, and never well afterward.”

But with all its hardships, Miss Alcott found in the hospital the varied and intense human life she had longed to know. Her great heart went out to all the men, black or white, the Virginia blacksmith and the rough Michigander. She even tried to befriend the one solitary rebel who had got left behind, and who was taken into the hospital to the disgust of some of the men; but he was impervious to all kindness, and she could find nothing in him for sympathy or romance to fasten upon.

Miss Alcott remained in the hospital only about six weeks. Yet this short period had a very strong influence, both for good and evil, on her future life. The severe attack of fever which drove her from her post left her with shattered nerves and weakened constitution, and she never again knew the fulness of life and health which she had before. The chamber in her quiet home at Concord was evermore haunted by the fearful visions of delirium, and she could not regain there the peace she needed for work. But the experience of life, the observation of men under the excitement of war, the way in which they met the great conqueror Death, the revelations of heroism and love, and sometimes of bitterness and hate, brought her a deeper insight into human life than she ever had before, and gave to her writings greater reality.

Louisa constantly wrote to the family of her experiences, and these letters were so interesting that she was persuaded to publish them in the “Commonwealth” newspaper. They attracted great attention, and first made her widely and favorably known to a higher public than that which had read her stories.

These letters were published by James Redpath in book form, and Miss Alcott received $200 for the book, — a welcome sum to her at that time. The sketches are almost a literal reproduction of her letters to her family; but as they have been so extensively read, and are accessible to every one, I shall give in preference to them extracts from her journal kept at the hospital. Other stories growing out of her experience in the hospital, or more remotely connected with it, have been published in the same volume in later editions. “ My Contraband “ is one of the most dramatic and powerful stories she ever wrote. She portrays the intensity of hatred in a noble nature, — hatred justified by the provocation, and yet restrained from fatal execution by the highest suggestions of religion. This story called forth a letter of commendation and frank criticism from Col. T. YV. Higginson, which was very encouraging to the young writer.

The beautiful lines on Thoreau’s flute, the most perfect of her poems, excepting the exquisite tribute to her mother, were first composed in the watches of the night in the hospital, and afterwards recalled during the tedious days of convalescence at Concord. This poem was printed in the “Atlantic,” and brought her a welcome ten- dollar bill.

“Hospital Sketches “ were hastily written, and with little regard to literary execution, but they are fresh and original, and, still more, they are true, and they appeared at just the time the public wanted them. Every heart was longing to hear not only from field and camp, but from the hospitals, where sons and brothers were tenderly cared for. The generous, hopeful spirit with which Miss Alcott entered into the work was recognized as that which animated the brave corps of women who answered so promptly to their country’s call, and every loyal and loving heart vibrated in unison with the strings she touched so skilfully.

Journal kept at the Hospital, Georgetown, D. C., 1862.

November. — Thirty years old. Decided to go to Washington as nurse if I could find a place. Help needed, and I love nursing, and must let out my pent-up energy in some new way. Winter is always a hard and a dull time, and if I am away there is one less to feed and warm and worry over.

I want new experiences, and am sure to get ‘em if I go. So I’ve sent in my name, and bide my time writing tales, to leave all snug behind me, and mending up my old clothes, — for nurses don’t need nice things, thank Heaven!

Dece77iber. — On the 11 th I received a note from Miss H. M. Stevenson telling me to start for Georgetown next day to fill a place in the Union Hotel Hospital. Mrs. Ropes of Boston was matron, and Miss Kendall of Plymouth was a nurse there, and though a hard place, help was needed. I was ready, and when my commander said “ March! “ I marched. Packed my trunk, and reported in B. that same evening.

We had all been full of courage till the last moment came; then we all broke down. I realized that I had taken my life in my hand, and might never see them all again. I said, “Shall I stay, Mother?” as I hugged her close. “ No, go! and the Lord be with you! “ answered the Spartan woman; and till I turned the corner she bravely smiled and waved her wet handkerchief on the door-step. Shall I ever see that dear old face again?

So I set forth in the December twilight, with May and Julian Hawthorne as escort, feeling as if I was the son of the house going to war.

Friday, the 12 th, was a very memorable day, spent in running all over Boston to get my pass, etc., calling for parcels, getting a tooth filled, and buying a veil, — my only purchase. A. C. gave me some old clothes; the dear Sewalls money for myself and boys, lots of love and help; and at 5 p. m., saying “ good-by “ to a group of tearful faces at the station, I started on my long journey, full of hope and sorrow, courage and plans.

A most interesting journey into a new world full of stirring sights and sounds, new adventures, and an evergrowing sense of the great task I had undertaken.

I said my prayers as I went rushing through the country white with tents, all alive with patriotism, and already red with blood.

A solemn time, but I’m glad to live in it; and am sure it will do me good whether I come out alive or dead.

All went well, and I got to Georgetown one evening very tired. Was kindly welcomed, slept in my narrow bed with two other room-mates, and on the morrow began my new life by seeing a poor man die at dawn, and sitting all day between a boy with pneumonia and a man shot through the lungs. A strange day, but I did my best; and when I put mother’s little black shawl round the boy while he sat up panting for breath, he smiled and said, “ You are real motherly, ma’am.” I felt as if I was getting on. The man only lay and stared with his big black eyes, and made me very nervous. But all were well behaved; and I sat looking at the twenty strong faces as they looked back at me, — the only new thing they had to amuse them, — hoping that I looked “motherly” to them; for my thirty years made me feel old, and the suffering round me made me long to comfort every one.

January, 1863. Union Hotel Hospital, Georgetown, D. C. — I never began the year in a stranger place than this: five hundred miles from home, alone, among strangers, doing painful duties all day long, and leading a life of constant excitement in this great house, surrounded by three or four hundred men in all stages of suffering, disease, and death. Though often homesick, heartsick, and worn out, I like it, find real pleasure in comforting, tending, and cheering these poor souls who seem to love me, to feel my sympathy though unspoken, and acknowledge my hearty good-will, in spite of the ignorance, awkwardness, and bashfulness which I cannot help showing in so new and trying a situation. The men are docile, respectful, and affectionate, with but few exceptions; truly lovable and manly many of them. John Sulie, a Virginia blacksmith, is the prince of patients; and though what we call a common man in education and condition, to me is all I could expect or ask from the first gentleman in the land. Under his plain speech and unpolished manner I seem to see a noble character, a heart as warm and tender as a woman's, a nature fresh and frank as any child's. He is about thirty, I think, tall and handsome, mortally wounded, and dying royally without reproach, repining, or remorse. Mrs. Ropes and myself love him, and feel indignant that such a man should be so early lost; for though he might never distinguish himself before the world, his influence and example cannot be without effect, for real goodness is never wasted.

Monday, 4th. — I shall record the events of a day as a sample of the days I spend: —

Up at six, dress by gaslight, run through my ward and throw up the windows, though the men grumble and shiver; but the air is bad enough to breed a pestilence; and as no notice is taken of our frequent appeals for better ventilation, I must do what I can. Poke up the fire, add blankets, joke, coax, and command; but continue to open doors and windows as if life depended upon it. Mine does, and doubtless many another, for a more perfect pestilence-box than this house I never saw, — cold, damp, dirty, full of vile odors from wounds, kitchens, wash-rooms, and stables. No competent head, male or female, to right matters, and a jumble of good, bad, and indifferent nurses, surgeons, and attendants, to complicate the chaos still more.

After this unwelcome progress through my stifling ward, I go to breakfast with what appetite I may; find the uninvitable fried beef, salt butter, husky bread, and washy coffee; listen to the clack of eight women and a dozen men, — the first silly, stupid, or possessed of one idea; the last absorbed with their breakfast and themselves to a degree that is both ludicrous and provoking, for all the dishes are ordered down the table full and returned empty; the conversation is entirely among themselves, and each announces his opinion with an air of importance that frequently causes me to choke in my cup, or bolt my meals with undignified speed lest a laugh betray to these famous beings that a " chiel's amang them takin' notes."

Till noon I trot, trot, giving out rations, cutting up food for helpless "boys," washing faces, teaching my attendants how beds are made or floors are swept, dressing wounds, taking Dr. F. P.'s orders (privately wishing all the time that he would be more gentle with my big babies), dusting tables, sewing bandages, keeping my tray tidy, rushing up and down after pillows, bed-linen, sponges, books, and directions, till it seems as if I would joyfully pay down all I possess for fifteen minutes' rest. At twelve the big bell rings, and up comes dinner for the boys, who are always ready for it and never entirely satisfied. Soup, meat, potatoes, and bread is the bill of fare. Charley Thayer, the attendant, travels up and down the room serving out the rations, saving little for himself, yet always thoughtful of his mates, and patient as a woman with their helplessness. When dinner is over, some sleep, many read, and others want letters written. This I like to do, for they put in such odd things, and express their ideas so comically, I have great fun interiorally, while as grave as possible exteriorally. A few of the men word their paragraphs well and make excellent letters. John's was the best of all I wrote. The answering of letters from friends after some one had died is the saddest and hardest duty a nurse has to do.

Supper at five sets every one to running that can run; and when that flurry is over, all settle down for the evening amusements, which consist of newspapers, gossip, the doctor's last round, and, for such as need them, the final doses for the night. At nine the bell rings, gas is turned down, and day nurses go to bed. Night nurses go on duty, and sleep and death have the house to themselves.

My work is changed to night watching, or half night and half day, — from twelve to twelve. I like it, as it leaves me time for a morning run, which is what I need to keep well; for bad air, food, and water, work and watching, are getting to be too much for me. I trot up and down the streets in all directions, sometimes to the Heights, then half way to Washington, again to the hill, over which the long trains of army wagons are constantly vanishing and ambulances appearing. That way the fighting lies, and I long to follow.

Ordered to keep my room, being threatened with pneumonia. Sharp pain in the side, cough, fever, and dizziness. A pleasant prospect for a lonely soul five hundred miles from home! Sit and sew on the boys' clothes, write letters, sleep, and read; try to talk and keep merry, but fail decidedly, as day after day goes, and I feel no better. Dream awfully, and wake unrefreshed, think of home, and wonder if I am to die here, as Mrs. R., the matron, is likely to do. Feel too miserable to care much what becomes of me. Dr. S. creaks up twice a day to feel my pulse, give me doses, and ask if I am at all consumptive, or some other cheering question. Dr. O. examines my lungs and looks sober. Dr. J. haunts the room, coming by day and night with wood, cologne, books, and messes, like a motherly little man as he is. Nurses fussy and anxious, matron dying, and everything very gloomy. They want me to go home, but I won’t yet.

January 16th. — Was amazed to see Father enter the room that morning, having been telegraphed to by order of Mrs. R. without asking leave. I was very angry at first, though glad to see him, because I knew I should have to go. Mrs. D. and Miss Dix came, and pretty Miss W., to take me to Willard’s to be cared for by them. I would n’t go, preferring to keep still, being pretty ill by that time.

On the 21 st I suddenly decided to go home, feeling very strangely, and dreading to be worse. Mrs. R. died, and that frightened the doctors about me; for my trouble was the same, — typhoid pneumonia. Father, Miss K., and Lizzie T. went with me. Miss Dix brought a basket full of bottles of wine, tea, medicine, and cologne, besides a little blanket and pillow, a fan, and a testament. She is a kind old soul, but very queer and arbitrary.

Was very sorry to go, and “ my boys “ seemed sorry to have me. Quite a flock came to see me off; but I was too sick to have but a dim idea of what was going on.

Had a strange, excited journey of a day and night, — half asleep, half wandering, just conscious that I was going home; and, when I got to Boston, of being taken out of the car, with people looking on as if I was a sight. I daresay I was all blowzed, crazy, and weak. Was too sick to reach Concord that night, though we tried to do so. Spent it at Mr. Sewall’s; had a sort of fit; they sent for Dr. H., and I had a dreadful time of it.

Next morning felt better, and at four went home. Just remember seeing May’s shocked face at. the depot, Mother’s bewildered one at home, and getting to bed in the firm belief that the house was roofless, and no one wanted to see me.

As I never shall forget the strange fancies that haunted me, I shall amuse myself with recording some of them.

The most vivid and enduring was the conviction that I had married a stout, handsome Spaniard, dressed in black velvet, with very soft hands, and a voice that was continually saying, “ Lie still, my dear! “ This was Mother, I suspect; but with all the comfort I often found in her presence, there was blended an awful fear of the Spanish spouse who was always coming after me, appearing out of closets, in at windows, or threatening me dreadfully all night long. I appealed to the Pope, and really got up and made a touching plea in something meant for Latin, they tell me. Once I went to heaven, and found it a twilight place, with people darting through the air in a queer way, — all very busy, and dismal, and ordinary. Miss Dix, W. H. Channing, and other people were there; but I thought it dark and “ slow,” and wished I had n’t come.

A mob at Baltimore breaking down the door to get me, being hung for a witch, burned, stoned, and otherwise maltreated, were some of my fancies. Also being tempted to join Dr. W. and two of the nurses in worshipping the Devil. Also tending millions of rich men who never died or got well.

February. — Recovered my senses after three weeks of delirium, and was told I had had a very bad typhoid fever, had nearly died, and was still very sick. All of which seemed rather curious, for I remembered nothing of it. Found a queer, thin, big-eyed face when I looked in the glass; did n't know myself at all; and when I tried to walk discovered that I could n't, and cried because my legs wouldn't go.

Never having been sick before, it was all new and very interesting when I got quiet enough to understand matters. Such long, long nights; such feeble, idle days; dozing, fretting about nothing; longing to eat, and no mouth to do it with, — mine being so sore, and full of all manner of queer sensations, it was nothing but a plague. The old fancies still lingered, seeming so real I believed in them, and deluded Mother and May with the most absurd stories, so soberly told that they thought them true.

Dr. B. came every day, and was very kind. Father and Mother were with me night and day, and May sang " Birks of Aberfeldie," or read to me, to wile away the tiresome hours. People sent letters, money, kind inquiries, and goodies for the old "Nuss." I tried to sew, read, and write, and found I had to begin all over again. Received $10 for my labors in Washington. Had all my hair, a yard and a half long, cut off, and went into caps like a grandma. Felt badly about losing my one beauty. Never mind, it might have been my head, and a wig outside is better than a loss of wits inside.

March. — Began to get about a little, sitting up nearly all day, eating more regularly, and falling back into my old ways. My first job was characteristic: I cleared out my piece-bags and dusted my books, feeling as tired as if I had cleaned the whole house. Sat up till nine one night, and took no lunch at three a. m., — two facts which I find carefully recorded in my pocket diary in my own shaky handwriting.

Father had two courses of conversations: one at Mr. Quincy's, very select and fine; the other at a hall not so good. He was tired out with taking care of me, poor old gentleman; and typhus was not inspiring.

Read a great deal, being too feeble to do much else. No end of rubbish, with a few good things as ballast. " Titan " was the one I enjoyed the most, though it tired my weak wits to read much at a time. Recalled, and wrote some lines on "Thoreau's Flute," which I composed one night on my watch by little Shaw at the hospital.

On the 28th Father came home from Boston, bringing word that Nan had a fine boy. We all screamed out when he burst in, snowy and beaming; then

Mother began to cry, May to laugh, and I to say, like B. Trot- wood, “There, I knew it would n’t be a girl! “ We were all so glad it was safely over, and a jolly little lad was added to the feminine family.

Mother went straight down to be sure that “mother and child were doing well,” and I fell to cleaning house, as good work for an invalid and a vent for a happy aunt.

First Birth in the Alcott and Pratt Branch, 1863.

Monday Eve.

Dearest Little Mother, — Allow me to ask who was a true prophet.

Also to demand, “Where is my niece, Louisa Caroline?”

No matter, I will forgive you, and propose three cheers for my nephew. Hurrah! hurrah! Hurray!

I wish you could have seen the performance on Saturday evening.

We were all sitting deep in a novel, not expecting Father home owing to the snowstorm, when the door burst open, and in he came, all wet and. white, waving his bag, and calling out, “ Good news! good news! Anna has a fine boy!”

With one accord we opened our mouths and screamed for about two minutes. Then Mother began to cry; I began to laugh; and May to pour out questions; while Papa beamed upon us all, — red, damp, and shiny, the picture of a proud old Grandpa. Such a funny evening as we had! Mother kept breaking down, and each time emerged from her handkerchief saying solemnly, “ I must go right down and see that baby! “ Father had told every one he met, from Mr. Emerson to the coach driver, and went about the house saying, “ Anna’s boy! yes, yes, Anna’s boy! “ in a mild state of satisfaction.

May and I at once taxed our brains for a name, and decided upon “ Amos Minot Bridge Bronson May Sewall Alcott Pratt,” so that all the families would be suited.

I was so anxious to hear more that I went up to town this a. m. and found John’s note.

Grandma and Grandpa Pratt came to hear the great news; but we could only inform them of the one tremendous fact, that Pratt, Jr., had condescended to arrive. Now tell us his weight, inches, color, etc.

I know I shall fall down and adore when I see that mite; yet my soul is rent when I think of the L. C. on the pincushion, and all the plans I had made for “ my niece.”

Now get up quickly, and be a happy mamma. Of course John does not consider his son as the most amazing product of the nineteenth century.

Bless the baby!

Ever your admiring Lu.

April. — Had some pleasant walks and drives, and felt as if born again, everything seemed so beautiful and new. I hope I was, and that the Washington experience may do me lasting good. To go very near to death teaches one to value life, and this winter will always be a very memorable one to me.

Sewed on little shirts and gowns for my blessed nephew, who increased rapidly in stature and godliness.

Sanborn asked me to do what Conway suggested before he left for Europe; viz., to arrange my letters in a printable shape, and put them in the "Commonwealth." They thought them witty and pathetic. I did n't; but I wanted money; so I made three hospital sketches. Much to my surprise, they made a great hit; and people bought the papers faster than they could be supplied. The second, "A Night" was much liked, and I was glad; for my beautiful "John Sulie " was the hero, and the praise belonged to him. More were wanted; and I added a postscript in the form of a letter, which finished it up, as I then thought.

Received $100 from F. L. for a tale which won the prize last January; paid debts, and was glad that my winter bore visible fruit. Sent L. another tale. Went to Boston, and saw " our baby; " thought him ugly, but promising. Got a set of furniture for my room, — a long- talked-of dream of ours.

May. — Spent the first week or two in putting the house in order. May painted and papered the parlors. I got a new carpet and rug besides the paper, and put things to rights in a thorough manner. Mother was away with Nan, so we had full sweep; and she came home to a clean, fresh house.

Nan and the Royal Infanta came as bright as a whole gross of buttons, and as good as a hairless brown angel. Went to Readville, and saw the 54th Colored Regiment, both there and next day in town as they left for the South. Enjoyed it very much; also the Antislavery meetings.

Had a fresh feather in my cap; for Mrs. Hawthorne showed Fields "Thoreau's Flute," and he desired it for the "Atlantic." Of course I didn't say no. It was printed, copied, praised, and glorified; also paid for, and being a mercenary creature, I liked the $10 nearly as well as the honor of being " a new star " and " a literary celebrity."

June. — Began to write again on "Moods," feeling encouraged by the commendation bestowed on " Hospital Sketches," which were noticed, talked of, and inquired about, much to my surprise and delight. Had a fine letter from Henry James, also one from Wasson, and a request from Redpath to be allowed to print the sketches in a book. Roberts Bros, also asked, but I preferred the Redpath, and said yes; so he fell to work with all his might.

Went to Class Day for the first time; had a pleasant day seeing new sights and old friends.

G. H. came to the H.'s. Did n't like her as well as Miss H.; too sharp and full of herself; insisted on talking about religion with Emerson, who glided away from the subject so sweetly, yet resolutely, that the energetic lady gave it up at last.

[1877. — Short-sighted Louisa! Little did you dream that this same Roberts Bros, were to help you to make your fortune a few years later. The " Sketches " never made much money, but showed me " my style," and taking the hint, I went where glory waited me. — L.M.A.]

July. — Sanborn asked for more contributions, and I gave him some of my old Mountain Letters vamped up. They were not good, and though they sold the paper, I was heartily ashamed of them, and stopped in the middle, resolving never again to try to be funny, lest I should be rowdy and nothing more. I'm glad of the lesson, and hope it will do me good.

Had some pleasant letters from Sergeant Bain, — one of my boys who has not forgotten me, though safely at home far away in Michigan. It gratified me very much, and brought back the hospital days again. He was a merry, brave little fellow, and I liked him very much. His right arm was amputated after Fredericksburg, and he took it very cheerfully, trying at once to train his left hand to do duty for both, and never complained of his loss. " Baby B."

August. — Redpath carried on the publishing of the " Sketches " vigorously, sending letters, proof, and notices daily, and making all manner of offers, suggestions, and prophecies concerning the success of the book and its author.

Wrote a story, " My Contraband," and sent it to Fields, who accepted and paid $50 for it, with much approbation for it and the " Sketches." L. sent $40 for a story, and wanted another.

Major M. invited me to Gloucester; but I refused, being too busy and too bashful to be made a lion of, even in a very small way. Letters from Dr. Hyde, Wilkin (home with a wound from Wagner), Charles Sumner, Mr. Hale, and others, — all about the little "Sketches," which keep on making friends for me, though I don't get used to the thing at all, and think it must be all a mistake.

On the 25 th my first morning-glory bloomed in my room, — a hopeful blue, — and at night up came my book in its new dress. I had added several chapters to it, and it was quite a neat little affair. An edition of one thousand, and I to have five cents on each copy.

September. — Redpath anxious for another book. Send him a volume of stories and part of a book to look at. He likes both; but I decide on waiting a little, as I'm not satisfied with the stories, and the novel needs time. " Sketches " sell well, and a new edition is called for.

Dear old Grandma died at Aunt Betsey's in her eighty- ninth year, — a good woman, and much beloved by her children. I sent money to help lay her away; for Aunt B. is poor, and it was all I could do for the kind little old lady.

Nan and Freddy made us a visit, and we decided that of all splendid babies he was the king. Such a hearty, happy, funny boy, I could only play with and adore him all the while he stayed, and long for him when he went. Nan and John are very fond of “ our son,” and well they may be. Grandma and Grandpa think him perfect, and even artistic Aunty May condescends to say he is “a very nice thing.”

“My Contraband; or, The Brothers,” my story in the “Atlantic,” came out, and was liked. Received $40 from Redpath for “Sketches,” — first edition; wanted me to be editor of a paper; was afraid to try, and let it go.

Poor old “ Moods “ came out for another touching up.

October. — Thought much about going to Port Royal to teach contrabands. Fields wanted the letters I should write, and asked if I had no book. Father spoke of “ Moods,” and he desired to see it. So I fell to work, and finished it off, thinking the world must be coming to an end, and all my dreams getting fulfilled in a most amazing way. If there was ever an astonished young woman, it is myself; for things have gone on so swimmingly of late I don’t know who I am. A year ago I had no publisher, and went begging with my wares; now three have asked me for something, several papers are ready to print my contributions, and F. B. S. says “ any publisher this side of Baltimore would be glad to get a book.” There is a sudden hoist for a meek and lowly scribbler, who was told to “ stick to her teaching,” and never had a literary friend to lend a helping hand! Fifteen years of hard grubbing may be coming to something after all; and I may yet “ pay all the debts, fix the house, send May to Italy, and keep the old folks cosey,” as I’ve said I would so long, yet so hopelessly.

May began to take anatomical drawing lessons of Rim- mer. I was very glad to be able to pay her expenses up and down and clothe her neatly. Twenty dollars more from Redpath on account.

December. — Earnings 1863, $380.

The principal event of this otherwise quiet month was the Sanitary Fair in Boston, and our part in it. At G. G. B.’s request, I dramatized six scenes from Dickens, and went to town on the 14th to play. Things did not go well for want of a good manager and more time. Our night was not at all satisfactory to us, owing to the falling through of several scenes for want of actors. People seemed to like what there was of it, and after a wearisome week I very gladly came home again. Our six entertainments made twenty-five hundred dollars for the Fair.

Rewrote the fairy tales, one of which was published; but owing to delays it was late for the holidays, and badly bound in the hurry; so the poor “ Rose Family “ fared badly.

Had a letter from the publisher of a new magazine, called the “ Civil Service Magazine,” asking for a long tale. Had no time to write one; but will by and by, if the thing is good.

While in town received $10 of T. R. S. and $20 of Redpath, with which I bought May hat, boots, gloves, ribbons, and other little matters, besides furnishing money for her fares up and down to Rimmer.

January, 1864. — New Year’s Day was a very quiet one. Nan and Freddy were here, and in the evening we went to a dance at the hall. A merry time; for all the town was there, as it was for the Soldiers’ Aid Society, and every one wanted to help. Nan and I sat in the gallery, and watched the young people dance the old year out, the new year in as the clock struck twelve.

On looking over my accounts, I find I have earned by my writing alone nearly six hundred dollars since last January, and spent less than a hundred for myself, which I am glad to know. May has had $70 for herself, and the rest has paid debts or bought necessary things for the family.

Received from the “Commonwealth” $18 for “A Hospital Christmas.” Wrote a fairy tale, “ Fairy Pinafores.” “ Picket Duty “ and other tales came out, — first of Redpath’s series of books for the “ Camp Fires.” Richardson sent again for a long story for the “ Civil Service Magazine.” Tried a war story, but could n’t make it go.

February. — Nan quite sick again. Mother passed most of the month with her; so I had to be housekeeper, and let my writing go, — as well perhaps, as my wits are tired, and the “ divine afflatus “ don’t descend as readily as it used to do. Must wait and fill up my idea-box before I begin again. There is nothing like work to set fancy a-going.

Redpath came flying up on the 4th to get “ Moods,” promising to have it out by May. Gave it to him with many fears, and he departed content. The next day received a telegram to come down at once and see the printers. Went, and was told the story was too long for a single volume, and a two-volume novel was bad to begin with. Would I cut the book down about half? No, I would n’t, having already shortened it all it would bear. So I took my “ opus “ and posted home again, promising to try and finish my shorter book in a month.

A dull, heavy month, grubbing in the kitchen, sewing, cleaning house, and trying to like my duty.

Mrs. S. takes a great fancy to May; sends her flowers, offers to pay for her to go to the new Art School, and arranges everything delightfully for her. She is a fortunate girl, and always finds some one to help her as she wants to be helped.

Wish I could do the same, but suppose as I never do that it is best for me to work and wait and do all for myself.

Mr. Storrs, D.D., wrote for a sketch for his little paper, “ The Drum Beat,” to be printed during the Brooklyn Sanitary Fair. A very cordial, pleasant letter, which I answered by a little sketch called “A Hospital Lamp.” He sent me another friendly letter, and all the daily papers as they came out. A very gentlemanly D.D. is Dr. Storrs.

The “ Hospital Sketches “ were fully entitled to their wide and rapid popularity; and for the first time perhaps Miss Alcott felt sure of her vocation, and knew that it would bring at last the success which would enable her to carry out her plans for the family. And yet the battle was not over. She gained in reputation, was received with great attention in society, and lionized more than she cared for. But she still continued writing stories for the various papers at very low prices. Some of them were refused by the publishers, as she thinks, on account of the Antislavery sentiments expressed in them. Her “ blood and thunder “ stories continued in demand, and she wrote them rapidly, and was glad of the money they brought. But she had not yet found her true path, and she suffered at times from keen depression of spirits; for the way seemed long and dark, and she did not see the end. In more than one sense she struggled with Moods; for that unhappy book was still tossed from publisher to publisher, who gave her much praise, but no satisfaction.

Journal.

A busy month getting settled. Freddy’s birthday on the 28th, one year old. He had a dozen nice little presents laid out in a row when he came down to breakfast, and seemed quite overpowered with his riches. On being told to take what he liked best, he chose the picture of little Samuel which Father gave him, and the good pope was much delighted at that.

Was asked for a poem for the great album at the St. Louis Fair, and sent “ Thoreau’s Flute” as my best. Also received a letter from the Philadelphia managers asking contributions for the paper to be printed at their Fair.

Wrote nothing this month.

April. — At Father’s request I sent “Moods” to T., and got a very friendly note from him, saying they had so many books on hand that they could do nothing about it now. So I put it back on the shelf, and set about my other work. Don’t despair, “ Moods,” we ‘11 try again by and by!

[Alas! we did try again. — L.M.A.]

Wrote the first part of a story for Professor C. called “Love and Loyalty,” — flat, patriotic, and done to order. Wrote a new fairy tale, “ Nelly’s Hospital.”

May. — Had a letter from Mrs. Gildersleeve, asking for my photograph and a sketch of my life, for a book called “ Heroic Women” which she was getting up. Respectfully refused. Also a letter and flattering notice from “Ruth Hall,” and a notice from a Chicago critic with a long extract from “Rose Family.” My tale “Enigmas” came out, and was much liked by readers of sensation rubbish. Having got my $50, I was resigned.

June. — To town with Father on the 3d to a Fraternity Festival to which we were invited. Had a fine time, and was amazed to find my “ ‘umble “ self made a lion of, set up among the great ones, stared at, waited upon, complimented, and made to hold a “layvee” whether I would or no; for Mr. S. kept bringing up people to be introduced till I was tired of shaking hands and hearing the words “Hospital Sketches” uttered in every tone of interest, admiration, and respect. Mr. Wasson, Whipple, Alger, Clarke, Calthrop, and Chad- wick came to speak to me, and many more whose names I forget. It was a very pleasant surprise and a new experience. I liked it, but think a small dose quite as much as is good for me; for after sitting in a corner and grubbing a la Cinderella, it rather turns one’s head to be taken out and be treated like a princess all of a sudden.

August. — Went to Gloucester for a fortnight with May at the M.’s. Found a family of six pretty daughters, a pleasant mother, and a father who was an image of one of the Cheeryble brothers. Had a jolly time boating, driving, charading, dancing, and picnicking. One mild moonlight night a party of us camped out on Norman’s Woe, and had a splendid time, lying on the rocks singing, talking, sleeping, and rioting up and down. Had a fine time, and took coffee at all hours. The moon rose and set beautifully, and the sunrise was a picture I never shall forget.

Wrote another fairy tale, “Jamie’s Wonder Book,” and sent the “Christmas Stories” to W. & W., with some lovely illustrations by Miss Greene. They liked the book very much, and said they would consult about publishing it, though their hands were full.

September. — Mrs. D. made a visit, and getting hold of my old book of stories liked them, and insisted on taking “ Moods “ home to read. As she had had experience with publishers, was a good business woman, and an excellent critic, I let her have it, hoping she might be able to give the poor old book the lift it has been waiting for all these years. She took it, read it, and admired it heartily, saying that “no American author had showed so much promise; that the plan was admirable; the execution unequal, but often magnificent; that I had a great field before me, and my book must be got out."

Mrs. D. sent it to L., who liked it exceedingly, and asked me to shorten it if I could, else it would be too large to sell well. Was much disappointed, said I'd never touch it again, and tossed it into the spidery little cupboard where it had so often returned after fruitless trips.

At last, in the excited hours of a wakeful night, Miss Alcott thought of a way to curtail the objectionable length of the book, and she spent a fortnight in remodelling it, — as she then thought improving it greatly, — although she afterwards returned to her original version as decidedly the best. The book was brought out, and she had the pleasure of presenting the first copy to her mother on her sixty-fourth birthday. She had various projects in her mind, one of which was a novel, with two characters in it like Jean Paul Richter and Goethe. It is needless to say this was never carried out. Miss Alcott had great powers of observation, and a keen insight into character as it fell within her own range of life, but she had not the creative imagination which could paint to the life the subtlest workings of thought and feeling in natures foreign to her own experience. She could not have portrayed such men: but who could?

Journal.

October. — Wrote several chapters of "Work," and was getting on finely, when, as I lay awake one night, a way to shorten and arrange " Moods " came into my head. The whole plan laid itself smoothly out before me, and I slept no more that night, but worked on it as busily as if mind and body had nothing to do with one another. Up early, and began to write it all over again. The fit was on strong, and for a fortnight I hardly ate, slept, or stirred, but wrote, wrote, like a thinking machine in full operation. When it was all rewritten without copying, I found it much improved, though I'd taken out ten chapters, and sacrificed many of my favorite things; but being resolved to make it simple, strong, and short, I let everything else go, and hoped the book would be better for it.

[It was n't. 1867.]

Sent it to L.; and a week after, as I sat hammering away at the parlor carpet, — dusty, dismal, and tired, — a letter came from L. praising the story more enthusiastically than ever, thanking me for the improvements, and proposing to bring out the book at once. Of course we all had a rapture, and I finished my work " double quick," regardless of weariness, toothache, or blue devils.

Next day I went to Boston and saw L. A brisk, business-like man who seemed in earnest and said many 11 complimentary things about " Hospital Sketches " and its author. It was agreed to bring out the book immediately, and Mrs. D. offered to read the proof with me.

Was glad to have the old thing under way again, but did n't quite believe it would ever come out after so many delays and disappointments.

Sewed for Nan and Mary, heard Anna Dickinson and liked her. Read " Emily Chester " and thought it an unnatural story, yet just enough like " Moods " in a few things to make me sorry that it came out now.

On Mother's sixty-fourth birthday I gave her " Moods " with this inscription, — " To Mother, my earliest patron, kindest critic, dearest reader, I gratefully and affectionately inscribe my first romance."

A letter from T. asking me to write for the new magazine "Our Young Folks," and saying that "An Hour" was in the hands of the editors.

November. — Proof began to come, and the chapters seemed small, stupid, and no more my own in print. I felt very much afraid that I'd ventured too much and should be sorry for it. But Emerson says "that what is true for your own private heart is true for others." So I wrote from my own consciousness and observation and hope it may suit some one and at least do no harm.

I sent "An Hour" to the "Commonwealth" and it was considered excellent. Also wrote a Christmas Story, " Mrs. Todger's Teapot." T. asked to see the other fairy tales and designs and poems, as he liked " Nelly's Hospital" so much.

On my thirty-second birthday received Richter's Life from Nan and enjoyed it so much that I planned a story of two men something like Jean Paul and Goethe, only more every-day people. Don't know what will come of it, but if " Moods " goes well " Success " shall follow.

Sewed for Wheeler's colored company and sent them comfort-bags, towels, books, and bed-sacks. Mr. W. sent me some relics from Point Look Out and a pleasant letter.

December. — Earnings, 1864, — $476.

On Christmas Eve received ten copies of "Moods" and a friendly note from L. The book was hastily got out, but on the whole suited me, and as the inside was considered good I let the outside go. For a week where- ever I went I saw, heard, and talked " Moods; " found people laughing or crying over it, and was continually told how well it was going, how much it was liked, how fine a thing I 'd done. I was glad but not proud, I think, for it has always seemed as if " Moods " grew in spite of me, and that I had little to do with it except to put into words the thoughts that would not let me rest until I had. Don't know why.

By Saturday the first edition was gone and the second ready. Several booksellers ordered a second hundred, the first went so fast, and friends could not get it but had to wait till more were ready.

Spent a fortnight in town at Mary’s, shopping, helping Nan, and having plays. Heard Emerson once. Gave C. “ Mrs. Todger’s Teapot,” which was much liked. Sent L. the rest of his story and got $50. S. paid $35 for “An Hour.” R. promised $100 for “Love and Loyalty,” so my year closes with a novel well-launched and about $300 to pay debts and make the family happy and comfortable till spring. Thank God for the success of the old year, the promise of the new!

The sale of “ Moods “ was at first very rapid; for “ Hospital Sketches “ had created an interest in the author, and welcome recognition came to her from many sources. She received a handsome sum from the copyright, and “ the year closed with enough to make her feel free of debt and the family comfortable.” She ends the year’s journal triumphantly.

The following year was spent mostly in Boston. Miss Alcott went into society and enjoyed the friendly attentions of men and women of ability. She continued to write stories for money, but now received fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred dollars for them. She frequently took part in theatrical performances for charities. She was always brilliant and successful and enjoyed them with something of her early zest.

Her long story of” Success,” or “Work,” as she afterwards named it, was still in her mind, but she did not finish it at this time.

Journal.

January, 1865. — The month began with some plays at the town hall to raise funds for the Lyceum. We did very well and some Scenes from Dickens were excellent. Father lectured and preached a good deal, being asked like a regular minister and paid like one. He enjoyed it very much and said good things on the new religion which we ought to and shall have. May had orders from Canada and England for her pretty pen-and-ink work and did well in that line.

Notices of “ Moods” came from all directions, and though people did n’t understand my ideas owing to my shortening the book so much, the notices were mostly favorable and gave quite as much praise as was good for me. I had letters from Mrs. Parker, Chadwick, Sanborn, E. B. Greene, the artist, T. W. Higginson and some others. All friendly and flattering.

Saw more notices of “Moods” and received more letters, several from strangers and some very funny. People seemed to think the book finely written, very promising, wise, and interesting; but some fear it is n’t moral, because it speaks freely of marriage.

Wrote a little on poor old “Work” but being tired of novels, I soon dropped it and fell back on rubbishy tales, for they pay best, and I can’t afford to starve on praise, when sensation stories are written in half the time and keep the family cosey.

Earned $75 this month.

I went to Boston and heard Father lecture before the Fraternity. Met Henry James, Sr., there, and he asked me to come and dine, also called upon me with Mrs. James. I went, and was treated like the Queen of Sheba. Henry Jr. wrote a notice of " Moods " for the " North American," and was very friendly. Being a literary youth he gave me advice, as if he had been eighty and I a girl. My curly crop made me look young, though thirty-one.

Acted in some public plays for the N. E. Women's Hospital and had a pleasant time.

L. asked me to be a regular contributor to his new paper, and I agreed if he'd pay beforehand; he said he would, and bespoke two tales at once, $50 each, longer ones as often as I could, and whatever else I liked to send. So here's another source of income and Alcott brains seem in demand, whereat I sing "Hallyluyer" and fill up my inkstand.

April. — Richmond taken on the 2d. Hurrah! Went to Boston and enjoyed the grand jollification. Saw Booth again in Hamlet and thought him finer than ever. Had a pleasant walk and talk with Phillips.

On the 15th in the midst of the rejoicing came the sad news of the President's assassination, and the city went into mourning. I am glad to have seen such a strange and sudden change in a nation's feelings. Saw the great procession, and though few colored men were in it, one was walking arm in arm with a white gentleman, and I exulted thereat.

Nan went to housekeeping in a pleasant house at Jamaica Plain, and I went to help her move. It was beautiful to see how Freddy enjoyed the freedom, after being cooped up all winter, and how every morning, whether it rained or shone, he looked out and said, with a smile of perfect satisfaction, " Oh, pretty day!" — for all days were pretty to him, dear little soul!

Had a fine letter from Conway, and a notice in the "Reader," — an English paper. He advised sending copies to several of the best London papers. English people don't understand " transcendental literature," as they call "Moods." My next book shall have no ideas in it, only facts, and the people shall be as ordinary as possible; then critics will say it's all right. I seem to have been playing with edge tools without knowing it. The relations between Warwick, Moor, and Sylvia are pronounced impossible; yet a case of the sort exists, and the woman came and asked me how I knew it. I did not know or guess, but perhaps felt it, without any other guide, and unconsciously put the thing into my book, for I changed the ending about that time. It was meant to show a life affected by moods, not a discussion of marriage, which I knew little about, except observing that very few were happy ones.

June. — Busy writing, keeping house, and sewing. Company often; and strangers begin to come, demanding to see the authoress, who does not like it, and is porcupiny.

Admire the books, but let the woman alone, if you please, dear public!

On the 24th Anna's second boy was born, at half-past three in the morning, — Lizzie's birthday. A fine, stout, little lad, who took to life kindly, and seemed to find the world all right. Freddy could not understand it at first, and told his mother that " the babee " had got his place. But he soon loved the "tunning sing," and would stand watching it with a grave face, till some funny little idea found vent in still funnier words or caresses.

Nan was very happy with her two boys, so was John, though both had wished for a daughter.

July. — While at Nan's Mrs. B. asked me if I would go abroad with her sister. I said " yes; " but as I spoke neither French nor German, she did n't think I'd do. I was sorry; but being used to disappointment, went to work for Nan, and bided my time, which came very soon.

To Anna.

[Date uncertain.]

My Lass, — This must be a frivolous and dressy letter, because you always want to know about our clothes, and we have been at it lately. May's bonnet is a sight for gods and men. Black and white outside, with a great cockade boiling over the front to meet a red ditto surging from the interior, where a red rainbow darts across the brow, and a surf of white lace foams up on each side. I expect to hear that you and John fell flat in the dust with horror on beholding it.

My bonnet has nearly been the death of me; for, thinking some angel might make it possible for me to go to the mountains, I felt a wish for a tidy hat, after wearing an old one till it fell in tatters from my brow. Mrs. P. promised a bit of gray silk, and I built on that; but when I went for it I found my hat was founded on sand; for she let me down with a crash, saying she wanted the silk herself, and kindly offering me a flannel petticoat instead. I was in woe for a spell, having one dollar in the world, and scorning debt even for that prop of life, a "bonnet." Then I roused myself, flew to Dodge, demanded her cheapest bonnet, found one for a dollar, took it, and went home wondering if the sky would open and drop me a trimming. I am simple in my tastes, but a naked straw bonnet is a little too severely chaste even for me. Sky did not open; so I went to the " Widow Cruise's oil bottle" — my ribbon box — which, by the way, is the eighth wonder of the world, for nothing is ever put in, yet I always find some old dud when all other hopes fail. From this salvation bin I extracted the remains of the old white ribbon (used up, as I thought, two years ago), and the bits of black lace that have adorned a long line of departed hats. Of the lace I made a dish, on which I thriftily served up bows of ribbon, like meat on toast. Inside put the lace bow, which adorns my form anywhere when needed. A white flower A. H. gave me sat airily on the brim, — fearfully unbecoming, but pretty in itself, and in keeping. Strings are yet to be evolved from chaos. I feel that they await me somewhere in the dim future. Green ones pro tcm. hold this wonder of the age upon my gifted brow, and I survey my hat with respectful awe. I trust you will also, and see in it another great example of the power of mind over matter, and the convenience of a colossal brain in the primeval wrestle with the unruly atoms which have harassed the feminine soul ever since Eve clapped on a modest fig-leaf and did up her hair with a thorn for a hairpin.

I feel very moral to-day, having done a big wash alone, baked, swept the house, picked the hops, got dinner, and written a chapter in “ Moods.” May gets exhausted with work, though she walks six miles without a murmur.

It is dreadfully dull, and I work so that I may not “ brood.” Nothing stirring but the wind; nothing to see but dust; no one comes but rose-bugs; so I grub and scold at the “ A.” because it takes a poor fellow’s tales and keeps ‘em years without paying for ‘em. If I think of my woes I fall into a vortex of debts, dishpans, and despondency awful to see. So I say, “every path has its puddle,” and try to play gayly with the tadpoles in my puddle, while I wait for the Lord to give me a lift, or some gallant Raleigh to spread his velvet cloak and fetch me over dry shod.

L. W. adds to my woe by writing of the splendors of Gorham, and says, “ When tired, run right up here and find rest among these everlasting hills.” All very aggravating to a young woman with one dollar, no bonnet, half a gown, and a discontented mind. It’s a mercy the mountains are everlasting, for it will be a century before I get there. Oh, me, such is life!

Now I’ve done my Jeremiad, and I will go on twanging my harp in the “ willow tree.”

You ask what I am writing. Well, two books half done, nine stories simmering, and stacks of fairy stories moulding on the shelf. I can’t do much, as I have no time to get into a real good vortex. It unfits me for work, worries Ma to see me look pale, eat nothing, and ply by night. These extinguishers keep genius from burning as I could wish, and I give up ever hoping to do anything unless luck turns for your Lu.

CHAPTER VIII.

EUROPE AND LITTLE WOMEN.

LITTLE WOMEN.

Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust and worn by time,
All fashioned and filled long ago
By children now in their prime.
Four little keys hung side by side,
With faded ribbons, brave and gay
When fastened there with childish pride
Long ago on a rainy day.
Four little names, one on each lid,
Carved out by a boyish hand;
And underneath there lieth hid
Histories of the happy band
Once playing here, and pausing oft
To hear the sweet refrain
That came and went on the roof aloft
In the falling summer rain.
Four little chests all in a row,
Dim with dust and worn by time:
Four women, taught by weal and woe
To love and labor in their prime;
Four sisters parted for an hour, —
None lost, one only gone before,
Made by love's immortal power
Nearest and dearest evermore.
Oh! when these hidden stores of ours
Lie open to the Father's sight,
May they be rich in golden hours, —
Deeds that show fairer for the light,
Deeds whose brave music long shall ring
Like a spirit-stirring strain,
Souls that shall gladly soar and sing
In the long sunshine, after rain.

THE years which followed the war and Miss Alcott's experience as a hospital nurse were rather sad and anxious from many causes. Louisa felt deeply the loss of one sister by death and the separation from another by marriage. The success of " Hospital Sketches " and a few other stories published about the same time had given her confidence in her powers and hopes of a successful future. But for nearly five years she accomplished nothing which met with equal favor. The reception of the novel “ Moods,” in which she thought she had expressed her best life, was not cheering to her; and she had become wholly dissatisfied with the sensational stories, which formed the most ready resource for earning money. Her health was seriously injured by the fever from which she suffered in the hospital, and she had no longer the physical energy to sustain the unceasing activity of her brain.

Under these difficulties she naturally desired a change of circumstances; and the old longing for a journey to Europe — which she had felt strongly in her youth, and which, like all Americans of culture, she felt more and more as time passed on — became her ruling desire. She was very fond of new scenes and variety of people, and she often expressed a wish to live many years in Europe.

The circumstances of the family were not yet such as to justify Louisa, in her own eyes, in taking her earnings for the desired trip. But in 1865 an opportunity was offered her to go to Europe as companion to an invalid lady. From her experience in nursing — for which she had a natural gift — she and her friends thought her suited to the position, and advised her acceptance of the offer.

Although devotedly kind, unselfish, and generous, Louisa had not the temperament suited to the needs of a nervous invalid. She was impetuous and impatient, and her own life was too strong within her and too earnest in its cravings, for her to restrain her moods and actions within the narrow limits of a companion’s service. She found even what she recognized as fair services wearisome and distasteful, and sometimes chafed severely under what seemed unnecessary demands on her time, strength, and patience. Looking back on this experience in later years, she recognized these facts, and wrote in 1885: “ Now, being a nervous invalid myself, I understand what seemed whims, selfishness, and folly in others.”

Louisa finally decided to leave her companions and go on alone to Paris and England, where she would find many of her own and her father’s friends. At Vevay she had made the acquaintance of a young Polish lad, whom she found very interesting, and who was the original of the charming Laurie in “ Little Women.” He met her again in Paris, and contributed greatly to the pleasure of her stay there. He afterwards came to America, and visited her; but finally returned to his own country.

The journal gives a sufficient account of her life while on this journey. I have no letters written at this time, as she wished all her family letters destroyed. Her few weeks in London passed very happily. Her wide reading in English history and in contemporary fiction, especially the works of Dickens and Thackeray, filled London with interesting associations, and she enjoyed thoroughly her free rambles through the old city, as well as the interesting people, who received her with great kindness.

That Louisa might have these few weeks of entire relaxation and enjoyment, her mother had been obliged to borrow means for the support of the family; and Louisa was very anxious to clear off this debt like all others. She was very exact in pecuniary matters. Money to her was not an end, but a most necessary means. She paid every debt that her father had incurred, even though outlawed by time. It is often asked whether she ever sold her beautiful hair, as represented in " Little Women." The deed was never really done; but she and her sisters always held this treasure as a possible resource in case of need; and Louisa once says in her journal, " I will pay my debts, if I have to sell my hair to do it." She even went so far as to inquire of a barber as to'its money value.

Journal.

1865. — Mr. W., hearing that I was something of a nurse and wanted to travel, proposed my going with his invalid daughter. I agreed, though I had my doubts. But every one said "Go;" so after a week of worry I did go. On the 19th we sailed in the " China." I could not realize that my long-desired dream was coming true; and fears that I might not see all the dear home faces when I came back made my heart very full as we steamed down the harbor and Boston vanished.

Was not very sick, but uncomfortable all the way, and found the Ladies' Saloon my only refuge till we were nearly across; enjoyed intervals of quiet, and had many fine glimpses of the sea in its various moods, sunsets and sunrises, fogs, icebergs, rain-storms, and summer calms. No very pleasant people on board; so I read, took notes, and wiled away the long days as I best could.

We had a very quiet and quick passage of nine days, and on Saturday, the 29th, steamed up the Mersey at dawn, and got to Liverpool at nine. I was heartily glad to set my feet on the solid earth, and thought I'd never go to sea again; rested, and looked about a little.

August — Went up to London, and there spent four dull, drizzly days. I amused myself in my usual way, looking well about me, and writing down all I saw in my pocket-diary or letters. Went to the parks, Westminster Abbey, and some of the famous streets. I felt as if I'd got into a novel while going about in the places I'd read so much of; saw no one I knew, and thought English weather abominable.

On the 5th to Dover through a lovely green country; took steamer there to

Ostende; but was ill all the way, and saw nothing but a basin; spent two days at a queer hotel near the fine promenade, which was a very foreign and brilliant scene. To Brussels on the 7th. Here I enjoyed much, for the quaint old city was full of interesting things. The ancient square, where the statues of Egmont and Horn stand, was my delight; for the old Dutch houses were still standing, and everything was so new and strange I wanted to stay a month.

To Cologne on the 9 th, and the country we passed through was like a big picture-book. The city was very hot, dirty, and evil-smelling. We saw the Cathedral, got eau de Cologne, and very gladly left after three days.

On the 12th began a lovely voyage up the Rhine. It was too beautiful to describe, so I shall not try; but I feel richer and better for that memorable day. We reached Coblenz at sunset, and I was up half the night enjoying the splendid view of the fortress opposite the town, the moonlit river with its bridges of boats, and troops crossing at midnight.

A second day, still more charming, took us through the famous parts of the Rhine, and filled my head with pictures that will last all my life.

Before we reached Bieberich we stopped at a queer little Dutch town, and had a queer time; for no one spoke English, and we only a little bad French. Passed the night there, and next day reached Schwalbach after many trials and tribulations.

The place is a narrow valley shut in by high hills, the town being divided into two parts: the lowest is the original town — queer ale-houses, churches, and narrow streets; the upper part, near the springs, is full of fine hotels, pleasure-grounds, and bath-houses.

We took lodgings with Madame Genth, wife of the Forestmeister (forest master), — two rooms, — and began the water under Dr. Genth’s care.

We walked a little, talked a little, bathed and rode a little, worried a good deal, and I grubbed away at French, with no master and small success.

September. — Still at Schwalbach, A. doing her best to get well, and I doing mine to help her. Rather dull days, — bathing, walking, and quiddling about.

A letter from home on the 20th. All well and happy, thank God. It touched and pleased me very much to see how they missed me, thought of me, and longed to have me back. Every little thing I ever did for them is now so tenderly and gratefully remembered; and my absence seems to have left so large a gap that I begin to realize how much I am to them in spite of all my faults. The letters made me very happy, and everything brightened immensely. A. got stronger, and when G. came on the 28th was able to start off next day on the way to Yevay, where we are to pass some weeks before we are to go to Nice.

Went to Wiesbaden first, a pleasant, gay place, full of people. Saw the gambling hall and people playing, the fine grounds and drives, and then went on to Frankfort. Here I saw and enjoyed a good deal. The statues of Goethe, Schiller, Faust, Gutenberg, and Schaeffer are in the squares. Goethe’s house is a tall, plain building, with each story projecting over the lower, and a Dutch roof; a marble slab over the front door recording the date of Goethe’s birth. I took a look at it and wanted to go in, as it was empty, but there was no time. Some Americans said, “ Who was Goethe, to fuss about?”

Frankfort is a pleasant old city on the river, and I’m glad to have been there.

October. — On to Heidelberg, a charming old place surrounded by mountains. We went to the Castle and had a fine time roving about the ruins, looking at the view from the great terrace, admiring the quaint stone images of knights, saints, monsters, and angels, and visiting the big tun in the cellar by torchlight.

The moon rose while we were there and completed the enchantment of the scene.

The drive home was like looking at a picture-book, for the street was narrow, the carriage high, and we looked in at the windows, seeing pretty scenes. Here, men drinking beer in a Dutch-looking room; there, little children going to bed; a pair of lovers with a pot of flowers between them; an old woman brooding over the fire like a witch; and in one room some one lay dead surrounded by candles.

From H. we went to Baden-Baden, a very fashionable place. The old chateau was my delight, and we passed a morning going up and down to visit it. Next to Freiburg, where the Cathedral delighted me extremely, being full of old carved images and grotesque designs; the market-place with the fountains, statues, water running beside the streets, and queer costumes.

Basle came next, and a firemen’s fete made the city very gay. The hotel was on the river, and moonlight made a Venetian scene for me with the lighted bridge, covered with gondola-like boats and music from both shores. I walk while A. rests, and enjoy sights from my window when she is asleep, as I cannot leave her at night.

On our way to Berne I caught my first glimpse of the Alps, October 8th, mother’s birthday. Tall, white, spectral-looking shapes they were, towering above the green hills and valleys that lay between. Clouds half hid them, and the sun glittered on the everlasting snow that lay upon their tops. Sharp, strange outlines against the sky they became as night came on, and in the morning I had a fine view of the Jungfrau, the Blumlis, the Wetterhorn, and Monch from the terrace at Berne.

B. was a queer old city, but I saw little of it except the bears and shops. No time.

Freiburg No. 2 was the most romantic place we have been in. The town is built in a wide crevice or valley between two steep hills, so that suspension bridges are hung from height to height over a winding river and the streets of the town. Watch-towers stand all about on the hills, and give a very romantic air to the place. The hotel overhung the valley, and from our rooms we went out along a balcony to a wide, paved platform with a fountain in the middle, an aviary, and flowers all about. The view down the valley was charming, — the airy bridges, green or rocky slopes, busy squares below, cows and goats feeding on the hills, the towers, the old church, and a lovely blue sky overhead- I longed to sketch it.

At Lausanne we stopped at the Hotel Gibbon and saw the garden where the great historian wrote his history. The view of the lake was lovely, with rocky mountains opposite, little towns at their feet, vineyards along the hillsides, and pretty boats on the lake, the water of which was the loveliest blue.

To Vevay at last, — a pleasant hour’s sail to a very pleasant place. We took rooms at the Pension Victoria.

Our landlady was an English woman who had married a French courier. Very kind sort of people: rooms comfortable, meals good, and surroundings agreeable. Our fellow-boarders varied from time to time, — an English doctor and wife, a fine old lady with them who looked like Marie Antoinette; two Scotch ladies named Glennie, very pleasant, well-bred ladies who told me about Beattie who was their grandfather, and Walter Scott whom they knew; Colonel   and family, rebels, and very bitter and rude to us. Had queer times with them.

I did not enjoy the life nor the society after the first novelty wore off, for I missed my freedom and grew very tired of the daily worry which I had to go through with.

November. — (Laurie) Took some French lessons with Mademoiselle Germain and learned a little, but found it much harder than I thought, and often got discouraged, I was so stupid. A. got much better, and some new people came. The doctor and his set left, and in their place came a Russian family, an Irish lady and daughter, and a young Pole with whom we struck up a friendship.

Ladislas Wisinewski (Laurie) was very gay and agreeable, and being ill and much younger we petted him. He played beautifully, and was very anxious to learn English, so we taught him that and he taught us French.

On my birthday A. gave me a pretty painting of Chillon. Ladislas promised me the notes of the Polish National Hymn, and played me his sweetest airs as a present after wishing me “ All good and happiness on earth, and a high place in Heaven as my reward.” It was a mild, windy day, very like me in its fitful changes of sunshine and shade. Usually I am sad on my birthday, but not this time; for though nothing very pleasant happened, I was happy and hopeful and enjoyed everything with unusual relish. I feel rather old with my thirty-three years, but have much to keep me young, and hope I shall not grow older in heart as the time goes on. I thought much of dear father on this his sixty-sixth birthday, and missed the little ceremony that always takes place on these occasions. Hope I shall be safely at home before another November comes.

December. — Laurie very interesting and good. Pleasant walks and talks with him in the chateau garden and about Vevay. A lovely sail on the lake, and much fun giving English and receiving French lessons. Every one very kind, and the house quite home-like. Much indecision about going to Nice owing to the cholera. At last we decided to go, and started on the 6th to meet G. at Geneva. L. went with us to Lausanne, kissed our hands at parting, and went back to V. disconsolate. Sad times for all, but we journeyed away to Nice and tried to forget our troubles. A flat uninteresting country till we approached the sea.

Nice very pleasant, climate lovely, and sea beautiful. We lived in our own rooms, and saw no one but the doctor and Consul and a few American callers. A pleasant drive every day on the Promenade, — a wide curving wall along the bay with hotels and Pensions on one side and a flowery walk on the other. Gay carriages and people always to be seen; shops full of fine and curious things; picturesque castles, towers, and walls on one hill; a lighthouse on each point of the moon- shaped bay; boats and our fleet on the water; gardens, olive and orange-trees, queer cacti, and palms all about on the land; monks, priests, soldiers, peasants, etc.

A dull Christmas within doors, though a lovely day without. Windows open, roses blooming, air mild, and city gay. With friends, health, and a little money how jolly one might be in this perpetual summer.

January, 1866. — Nice. Rained all New Year’s day, and I spent it sewing, writing, and reading an American newspaper which came in the morning, my only present. I hoped for letters but got none, and was much disappointed. A. was ill, so I had to receive in American style. Mr. Perkins, Cooper, and the Consul called. At dinner we drank the healths of all at home, and also Laddie’s, in our bottle of champagne.

A quiet, dull time generally, driving sometimes, walking little, and writing letters. Now and then I got a pleasant walk by myself away among the vineyards and olive-trees or down into the queer old city. I soon tired of the fashionable Promenade, for every one was on exhibition. Sometimes before or after the fashionable hour I walked there and enjoyed the sea and sky.

A ball was given at our Pension and we went. A queer set, — Russians, Spaniards, French, English, Americans, Italians, Jews, and Sandwich Islanders. They danced wildly, dressed gayly, and sounded as if the “confusion of tongues” was come again. A few pleasant Americans called on us, but we were very lonely and uncomfortable.

Decided to take an apartment No. 10 Rue Geoffredo, paying six hundred francs for ten weeks, six rooms, all large and handsome. Dr. P. got us a good maid, and on the 17th we went to our new quarters. Madame Rolande was French governess for six years to Victoria's children, and was a funny old party.

Could n't sleep at all for some nights, and felt very poorly, for my life did n't suit me and the air was too exciting.

February. — Got on excellently with our housekeeping, for Julie proved a treasure and we were very comfortable. Had many lovely drives, and saw something of Nice and its beauties. To Cimies, an old Franciscan monastery near the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre. The convent stands where a temple of Diana once stood, and is surrounded by ancient ilex trees. A monk in his cowl, brown robe, sandals, and rope girdle did the honors of the church, which was dark and full of bad pictures. San Andre with its chateau and grotto, Villa Franca in a lovely little bay, the wood of Var where the daisies grew, Valrosa, a villa in a rose garden, and the Porte were all interesting. Also Castle Hill, which overlooks the town.

I decided to go home in May, though A. wants me to stay. I 'm tired of it, and as she is not going to travel, my time is too valuable to be wasted.

The carnival occurred. Funny, but not so fine a sight as I expected. Also went to the theatre to see " Lady Tartuffe." Had a pleasant time, though I could n't understand much. The acting was so natural and good that I caught the plot, and with a little telling from Hosmer knew what was going on.

Wrote a little on three stories which would come into my head and worry me till I gave them a "vent."

Good letters from home. All well and busy, and longing for me in the spring.

March. — A tedious month, which might have been quite the reverse had I been free to enjoy it in my own way. Read French, walked to my favorite places, and wrote letters when I found time.

Went often to Valrosa, a lovely villa buried in roses. Got a wheeled chair and a man to draw it, then with books, lunch, and work, I tempted A. out into the woods, and we had some pleasant hours.

April. — Went to the Cathedral to see the Easter ceremonies. Fine music, the Gloria was sung, a Franciscan monk preached, the Bishop blessed every one, and was fussed over like a great doll. A very splendid scene.

Saw Ristori twice, once in "Medea " and once in "Elizabeth." Never saw such acting; especially in Queen Bess, it was splendid, as she changes from the young, violent, coquettish woman to the peevish old crone dying with her crown on, vain, ambitious, and remorseful.

May. — On the first day of the month left A. and Nice and started alone for Paris, feeling as happy as a freed bird.

. A pleasant journey, Laddie waiting for me in Paris to take me to my room at Madame Dyne's. A very charming fortnight here; the days spent in seeing sights with my Laddie, the evenings in reading, writing, hearing " my boy " play, or resting. Saw all that I wished to see in a very pleasant way, and on the 17 th reluctantly went to London.

Passed a fortnight at a lovely old place on Wimbledon Common with the Conways, going to town with them to see the lions, Royal Exhibition, Hampton Court, Kensing

ton and British Museums, Crystal Palace, and many other pleasant places. But none were lovelier to me than the old farm-house with the thatched roof, the common of yellow gorse, larks going up in the morning, nightingales flying at night, hawthorne everywhere, and Richmond Park full of deer close by. Also Robin Hood's barn.

June. — Passed the first ten days of the month at Aubrey House with the Peter Taylors. A lovely English home with kind, pure, and friendly people. Saw many interesting persons, — Miss Cobbe, Jean Ingelow, Dr. Garrett, Madame Bodichon, Matilde Blinde, Mill, Bright, Gladstone, Hughes, and the rest at the House of Commons where Mr. T. took me.

Went to a dinner-party or two, theatres, to hear Dickens read, a concert, conversazione and receptions, seeing English society, or rather one class of it, and liking what I saw.

On the nth went to board with Mrs. Travers in West- bourne Grove Terrace. A pleasant little room, plain living, and for society Mrs. T. and daughter, two sisters from Dublin, and ten young men, — barristers, clerks, ministers, and students. A guinea a week.

Very free and jolly, roaming about London all day, dining late and resting, chatting, music, or fun in the evening.

Saw the Tower, Windsor, Parks, Gardens, and all manner of haunts of famous men and women, — Milton's house, Johnson's in Ball Court, Lamb's, Sairy Gamp's, Saracen's Head, the Charter House where Thackeray was when a lad, Furnival's Inn where Dickens wrote Pickwick, Bacon's Walk, and endless memorable sights. St. Paul's I liked better than Notre Dame.

July. — At Mrs. Travers's till the 7th. Saw Routledge about " Moods." He took it, would like another book, and was very iriendly. Said good-by all round, and at six a. m. on the 7th left for Liverpool with Mr. W., who saw to my luggage and went part way. Reached the "Africa" safely.

A trip of fourteen stormy, dull, long, sick days, but at last at eleven at night we sailed up the harbor in the moonlight, and I saw dear John waiting for me on the wharf. Slept on board, and next day reached home at noon to find Father at the station, Nan and babies at the gate, May flying wildly round the lawn, and Marmee crying at the door. Into her arms I went, and was at home at last.

Happy days, talking and enjoying one another. Many people came to see me, and all said I was much improved; of which I was glad, as there was, is, and always will be room for it.

Found Mother looking old, sick, and tired; Father as placid as ever; Nan poorly, but blest in her babies; May full of plans, as usual: Freddy very stout and loving; and my Jack the dearest, prettiest, merriest baby boy that ever kissed and loved everybody.

August. — Soon fell to work on some stories, for things were, as I expected, behindhand when the money-maker was away. Found plenty to do, as orders from E., L., “ Independent,” “ U. S. C. S. Magazine,” and several other offers waited for me. Wrote two long tales for L. and got $200 for them. One for E. for which he paid $75, also a bit of poetry for $5. He wanted a long story in twenty-four chapters, and I wrote it in a fortnight, — one hundred and eighty-five pages, — besides work, sewing, nursing, and company.

Sent S. E. S. the first $100 on my account; could have sent $300, but it was needed, so I gave it up unwillingly, and must work away for the rest. Mother borrowed the money that I might stay longer and see England, as I had missed much while condemned to “ hard work and solitary confinement for nine months,” as she expressed it.

September. — Mother sick, did little with my pen. Got a girl, and devoted myself to Mother, writing after she was abed. In this way finished a long tale. But E. would not have it, saying it was too long and too sensational!

November. — Mother slowly mending. A sensible Western woman “ rubbed “ her, and did her a great deal of good. She left her room and seemed more like herself. I never expect to see the strong, energetic Marmee of old times, but, thank the Lord! she is still here, though pale and weak, quiet and sad; all her fine hair gone, and face full of wrinkles, bowed back, and every sign of age. Life has been so hard for her, and she so brave, so glad to spend herself for others. Now we must live for her.

On Miss Alcott’s return from Europe in July, 1866, she devoted herself as earnestly as ever to the personal care of her mother and to story-writing for the support of the family. She agreed to write a fifty-dollar tale once a month, and besides this wrote many short stories for other publishers. Her father’s return from the West with two hundred dollars, earned on his western trip, gave her some relief; and she was cheered by hearing that “ Moods” was selling well in Europe. But she was not well, and she felt anxious and troubled about many things. Her journal of these months is very meagre; and January, 1867, opens with the statement that she is “ sick from too hard work.” Yet the account of stories furnished to publishers continues till August, when she went to Clark’s Island for a few weeks of recreation. Here her spirits returned, and she spent, as she says, “ a harem-scarem fortnight,” which must have given her great refreshment. She says: “ Got to work again after my long vacation, for bills accumulate and worry me. I dread debt more than anything.”

In the journal occurs this slight notice of the first step in one of the most important achievements of her life, of which I shall speak more fully hereafter: —

Journal.

September, 1867. — Niles, partner of Roberts, asked me to write a girls’ book. Said I’d try.

F. asked me to be the editor of “ Merry’s Museum.” Said I’d try.

Began at once on both new jobs; but did n’t like either.

The Radical Club met at Sargent’s. Fine time. Bartol inspired; Emerson chairman; Alcott on his legs; strong-minded ladies out in full force; aesthetic tea for refreshment.

October. — Agreed Avith F. to be editor for $500 a year. Read manuscripts, write one story each month and an editorial. On the strength of this engagement went to Boston, took a room — No. 6 Hay ward Place — furnished it, and set up housekeeping for myself. Cannot keep well in C., so must try Boston, and not work too hard.

On the 28th rode to B. on my load of furniture with Fred, feeling as if I was going to camp out in a new country; hoped it would prove a hospitable and healthy land.

This incident appears in “ The Old-fashioned Girl “ (p. 153), where the country girl goes into the city in a farmer’s cart, with a squash pie in her hand given her at parting by an old friend. Her sister May had a drawing class at her room every day, which gave Louisa the pleasure of companionship.

Miss Alcott was an enthusiastic admirer of Dickens, and she entered into the humor of his homely characters most heartily. She acted “ Mrs. Jarley displaying her waxwork” nine times this winter, and was always successful in giving life and variety to the representation. She was constantly called upon to act for charity. She enjoyed the fun. and as she could not give money, it satisfied her generous nature to be able to help in any way.

She wrote an article for Mr. B., called " Happy Women," in which she gratified her love of single life by describing the delightful spinsters of her acquaintance. Her sketches are all taken from life, and are not too highly colored. The Physician, the Artist, the Philanthropist, the Actress, the Lawyer, are easily recognizable. They were a " glorious phalanx of old maids," as Theodore Parker called the single women of his Society, who aided him so much in his work.

To her Mother.

January, 1868.

Things look promising for the new year. F. $20 for the little tales, and wrote two every month; G. $25 for the " Bells; " L. $100 for the two "Proverb" stories. L. takes all I'LL send; and F. seems satisfied.

So my plan will work well, and I shall make my $1,000

this year in spite of sickness and worry. Praise, the Lord and keep busy, say I.

I am pretty well, and keep so busy I have n't time to be sick. Every one is very clever to me; and I often think as I go larking round, independent, with more work than I can do, and half-a-dozen publishers asking for tales, of the old times when I went meekly from door to door peddling my first poor little stories, and feeling so rich with $10.

It's clear that Minerva Moody is getting on, in spite of many downfalls, and by the time she is a used up old lady of seventy or so she may finish her job, and see her family well off. A little late to enjoy much may be; but I guess I shall turn in for my last long sleep with more content, in spite of the mortal weariness, than if I had folded my hands and been supported in elegant idleness, or gone to the devil in fits of despair because things moved so slowly.

Keep all the money I send; pay up every bill; get comforts and enjoy yourselves. Let's be merry while we may, and lay up a bit for a rainy day.

With which gem from Aristotle, I am, honored Madam, your dutiful and affectionate L. M. Alcott.

Regards to Plato. Don't he want new socks? Are his clothes getting shiny?

Although, as I have said, little direct European influence is observable in Miss Alcott's writings from her journeys in Europe, yet this first visit had a marked effect upon her life and writings. She was unfavorably situated to gain the refreshment she sorely needed; and yet she did get a great deal from the entire change of surroundings, from the larger horizon into which she entered, from her rich enjoyment of scenery, and from the variety of companions she met. Probably she looked through new spectacles at her own work, as she describes herself as looking through those of Professor Bhaer, and she saw all the defects of the pot-boiling stories which she had been pouring out one after another, without strong purpose, or regard for artistic excellence. She had also the chance to look upon her own early life and home from a distance; and as she thought of the incidents of those years they grouped into more harmonious lines, and she saw how much they contained of real life, of true poetry and humor, as well as moral significance. So the old idea of " The Pathetic Family" took shape anew in her mind.

In July, 1863, the enterprising firm of Roberts Brothers asked her for the publication in book form of " Hospital Sketches," which were then appearing in the " Commonwealth " newspaper, being struck by their intense reality and originality. At the time, as she states in her journal, she preferred to allow Mr. Redpath to publish them. Later, in September, 1867, Roberts Brothers asked her to write a girls' book for them, and in May, 1868, they repeated the request through her father, who had brought to them a collection of short stories for publication.

Miss Alcott's fancy had always been for depicting the life of boys rather than girls; but she fortunately took the suggestion of the publisher, and said, like Ethan Allen, " I'LL try, sir." The old idea of " The Pathetic Family " recurred to her mind; and she set herself to describe the early life of her home. The book was finished in July, named " Little Women," and sent to the publishers, who promptly accepted it, making Miss Alcott an outright offer for the copyright, but at the same time advising her not to part with it. It was published in October, and the result is well known. She was quite unconscious of the unusual merit of the book, thinking, as she says, the first chapters dull, and so was quite surprised at her success. " It reads better than I expected," she says; and she truly adds, " We really lived most of it, and if it succeeds, that will be the reason of it."

But that is not the whole secret of its success. Through many trials and many failures Louisa had learned her literary art. By her experience in melodrama she had proved the emptiness of sensational writing, and knew how to present the simple and true, — seemingly without art, but really with the nicest art of discrimination and emphasis. All her previous training and experience were needed to fit her for the production of her masterpiece; for in spite of all the good work she did later, this remains her masterpiece, by which she will be remembered and loved. Already twenty-one years have passed, and another generation has come up since she published this book, yet it still commands a steady sale; and the mothers who read it in their childhood renew their enjoyment as they watch the faces of their little girls brighten with smiles over the theatricals in the barn, or moisten with tears at the death of the beloved sister. One of the greatest charms of the book is its perfect truth to New England life. But it is not merely local; it touches the universal heart deeply.

The excitement of the children was intense; they claimed the author as their own property, and felt as if she were interpreting their very lives and thoughts. The second series was anticipated with the eagerness of a bulletin from the war and the stock market. But unlike Miss Alcott herself, the children took especial interest in the love-story, and when poor Laurie was so obstinately refused by Jo, “ they wept aloud, and refused to be comforted,” and in some instances were actually made ill by grief and excitement.

Miss Alcott had now secured publishers in whom she placed perfect confidence, and who henceforth relieved her of the worry of business matters, dealing directly and fairly by her, and consulting her interests as well as their own. This is abundantly shown by her private journals and letters.

The success of “ Little Women” was so well assured that Miss Alcott at once set about preparing the second part, which was eagerly demanded by the little women outside, who wanted all the girls to marry, and rather troubled her by wishing to settle matters their own way. She finished writing the sequel, which had been rapid work, Jan. 1, 1869.

The success of “Little Women” was not confined to this country. The book was translated into French, German, and Dutch, and has become familiarly known in England and on the Continent. In Holland the first series was published under the title “ Under the Mother’s Wings,” and the second part as “ On Their Own Wings; “ and these two books with “ Work “ established her fame among the children, who still continue to read her stories with fresh delight.

It is hardly necessary to analyze or criticise this happy production. It is a realistic transcript of life, but idealized by the tenderness of real feeling. It teaches the lessons of every-day conduct and inculcates the simplest virtues of truth, earnest effort, and loving affection. There is abundant humor, but no caricature, and tender, deep feeling without sentimentality.

Miss Alcott herself did not wish her representative, Jo, to marry; but the demand of the publisher and the public was so imperative that she created her German professor, of whom no prototype existed. While some of her romantic young readers were not satisfied at Jo’s preferring him to the charming Laurie, he is certainly a genuine, warmhearted man, who would probably have held her affections by his strong moral and intellectual traits. That he became a very living personality to the author is evident from his reappearance in “ Jo’s Boys,” where he has the same strong, cheery influence in the school and home that she found from him in her girlhood. The style of the book is thoroughly easy and colloquial; and the girls talk and act like girls, and not like prim little women. The influence of the book has been wide and deep, and has helped to make a whole generation of girls feel a deeper sense of family love and the blessings to be gained from lives of earnest effort, mutual sacrifice, and high aims.

Much interest has been expressed in regard to the originals of the characters in “ Little Women.” This is the author’s own statement: —

Facts in the stories that are true, though often changed as to time and place: —

“Little Women “ — The early plays and experiences; Beth’s death; Jo’s literary and Amy’s artistic experiences; Meg’s happy home; John Brooke and his death; Demi’s character. Mr. March did not go to the war, but Jo did. Mrs. March is all true, only not half good enough. Laurie is not an American boy, though every lad I ever knew claims the character. He was a Polish boy, met abroad in 1865. Mr. Lawrence is my grandfather, Colonel Joseph May. Aunt March is no one.

Journal.

January, 1868. Gamp’s Garret, Hayward Place, Boston. — The year begins well and cheerfully for us all. Father and Mother comfortable at home; Anna and family settled in Chelsea; May busy with her drawing classes, of which she has five or six, and the prospect of earning $150 a quarter; also she is well and in good spirits.

I am in my little room, spending busy, happy days, because I have quiet, freedom, work enough, and strength to do it. F. pays me $500 a year for my name and some editorial work on Merry’s Museum; “The Youth’s Companion “ pays $20 for two short tales each month; L. $50 and $100 for all I will send him; and others take anything I have. My way seems clear for the year if I can only keep well. I want to realize my dream of supporting the family and being perfectly independent. Heavenly hope!

I have written twenty-five stories the past year, besides the fairy book containing twelve. Have earned $1,000, paid my own way, sent home some, paid up debts, and helped May.

For many years we have not been so comfortable: May and I both earning, Annie with her good John to lean on, and the old people in a cosey home of our own.

After last winter’s hard experience, we cannot be too grateful.

To-day my first hyacinth bloomed, white and sweet, — a good omen, — a little flag of truce, perhaps, from the enemies whom we have been fighting all these years. Perhaps we are to win after all, and conquer poverty, neglect, pain, and debt, and march on with flags flying into the new world with the new year.

Thursday, 7th. — A queer day. Up early, and had my bread and milk and baked apples. Fed my doves. Made May a bonnet, and cut out a flannel wrapper for Marmee, who feels the cold in the Concord snowbanks. Did my editorial work in the p. m., and fixed my dresses for the plays. L. sent $50, and F. $40, for tales. A. and boys came.

To Dorchester in evening, and acted Mrs. Pontifex, in “Naval Engagements,” to a good house. A gay time, had flowers, etc. Talked half the night with H. A. about the fast ways of young people nowadays, and gave the child much older-sisterly advice, as no one seems to see how much she needs help at this time of her young life.

Dreamed that I was an opera dancer, and waked up prancing.

Wednesday, 15 th. — Wrote all day. Did two short tales for F. In the evening with A. M. to hear Fanny Kemble read “The Merchant of Venice.” She was a whole stock company in herself. Looked younger and handsomer than ever before, and happy, as she is to be with her daughters now. We went to supper afterwards at Mrs. Parkman’s, and saw the lioness feed. It was a study to watch her face, so full of varying expression was it, — always strong, always sweet, then proud and fierce as she sniffed at nobodies who passed about her. Being one, I kept away, and enjoyed the great creature afar off, wondering how a short, stout, red woman could look so like a queen in her purple velvet and point lace.

Slipped behind a door, but Dr. Holmes found me out, and affably asked, “ How many of you children are there?” As I was looking down on the top of his illustrious head, the question was funny. But I answered the little man with deep respect, “Four, sir.” He seemed to catch my naughty thought, and asked, with a twinkle in his eye, looking up as if I were a steeple, “And all as tall as you?” Ha! ha!

18//z. — Played again at D., and had a jolly time. Home early, and putting off my fine feathers, fell to work on my stories. F. seems to expect me to write the whole magazine, which I did not bargain for.

To Nan’s in p. m., to take care of her while the Papa and Freddie went to C. The dear little man, so happy and important with his bit of a bag, six pennies, and a cake for refreshment during the long journey of an hour.

We brooded over Johnny as if he were a heavenly sort of fire to warm and comfort us with his sunny little face and loving ways. She is a happy woman! I sell my children; and though they feed me, they don’t love me as hers do.

Little Tranquillity played alone all day, and made a pretty picture sitting in “marmar’s” lap in his night-gown, talking through the trumpet to her. She never heard his sweet little voice in any other way. Poor Nan!

Wednesday, 22nd. — To the Club with Father. A good paper on the “Historical

View of Jesus.” Father spoke finely. It amuses me to see how people listen and applaud now what was hooted at twenty years ago.

The talk lasted until two, and then the hungry philosophers remembered they had bodies and rushed away, still talking.

[Hard to feed. — L.M.A.]

Got a snow-slide on my bonnet, so made another in the p. m., and in the evening to the Antislavery Festival. All the old faces and many new ones. Glad I have lived in the time of this great movement, and known its heroes so well. War times suit me, as I am a fighting May.

24th. — My second hyacinth bloomed pale blue, like a timid hope, and I took the omen for a good one, as I am getting on, and have more than I can do of the work that I once went begging for. Enjoyed the little spring my little flower made for me, and Buzzy, my pet fly, moved into the sweet mansion from his hanging garden in the ivy pot.

Acted in Cambridge, Lucretia Buzzard and Mrs. Jarley.

Sunday, $ist. — Last day of the month, but I’m not satisfied with my four weeks’ work. Acting for charity upsets my work. The change is good for me, and so I do it, and because I have no money to give.

Four tales this month. Received $70; sent $30 home. No debts.

February ist. — Arranged “Hospital Sketches and War Stories” for a book. By taking out all Biblical allusions, and softening all allusions to rebs., the book may be made “quite perfect,” I am told. Anything to suit customers.

Friday, 14//?. — My third hyacinth bloomed this a.m., a lovely pink. So I found things snug, and had a busy day chasing who dodged. Then I wrote my tales.

Made some shirts for my boys, and went out to buy a squash pie for my lonely supper. It snowed; was very cold. No one paid, and I wanted to send some money home. Felt cross and tired as I trudged back at dusk. My pie turned a somersault, a boy laughed, so did I, and felt better. On my doorstep I found a gentleman who asked if Miss A. lived here. I took him up my winding stair and found him a very delightful fly, for he handed me a letter out of which fell a $100 bill. With this bait Mr. B. lured me to write “one column of Advice to Young Women,” as Mrs. Shaw and others were doing. If he had asked me for a Greek oration I would have said “ yes.” So I gave a receipt, and the very elegant agent bowed himself away, leaving my “ ‘umble “ bower full of perfume, and my soul of peace.

Thriftily taking advantage of the enthusiastic moment, I planned my article while I ate my dilapidated pie, and then proceeded to write it with the bill before me. It was about old maids. “ Happy Women “ was the title, and I put in my list all the busy, useful, independent spinsters I know, for liberty is a better husband than love to many of us. This was a nice little episode in my trials of an authoress, so I record it.

So the pink hyacinth was a true prophet, and I went to bed a happy millionaire, to dream of flannel petticoats for my blessed Mother, paper for Father, a new dress for May, and sleds for my boys.

Monday, 17th. — Father came full of plans about his book. Went with him to the Club. P. read a paper, and the Rabbi Nathan talked. A curious jumble of fools and philosophers. The Club should be kept more select, and not be run by one person.

Tuesday, 25 th. — Note from Lady Amberly as I sat sewing on my ninepenny dress. She wanted to come and see me, and I told her to do so, and I'd show her how I lived in my sky-parlor, — spinning yarns like a spider. Met her at the Club, and liked her, so simple and natural.

Acted for Mr. Clarke's Church Fair in the evening. Did Mrs. Jarley three times. Very hoarse with a cold, but kept my promise.

"Proverb Stories" suggested, and " Kitty's Class-Day" written.

Friday, 28th. — Packed for home, as I am needed there, and acted Jarley for the third evening. Have done it nine times this week, and my voice is gone.

I am sorry to leave my quiet room, for I 've enjoyed it very much.

Written eight long tales, ten short ones, read stacks of manuscripts, and done editorial work. Acted for charity twelve times.

Not a bad two months' work. I can imagine an easier life, but with love, health, and work I can be happy; for these three help one to do, to be, and to endure all things.

March, April, and May. — Had the pleasure of providing Marmee with many comforts, and keeping the hounds of care and debt from worrying her. She sits at rest in her sunny room, and that is better than any amount of fame to me.

May, 1868. — Father saw Mr. Niles about a fairy book. Mr. N. wants a girls' story, and I begin " Little Women." Marmee, Anna, and May all approve my plan. So I plod away, though I don't enjoy this sort of thing. Never liked girls or knew many, except my sisters; but our queer plays and experiences may prove interesting, though I doubt it.

[Good joke. — L.M.A.]

June. — Sent twelve chapters of " L. W." to Mr. N. He thought it dull; so do I. But work away and mean to try the experiment; for lively, simple books are very much needed for girls, and perhaps I can supply the need.

Wrote two tales for Ford, and one for F. L. clamors for more, but must wait.

July 15th. — Have finished "Little Women," and sent it off, — 402 pages.

May is designing some pictures for it. Hope it will go, for I shall probably get nothing for “ Morning Glories.”

Very tired, head full of pain from overwork, and heart heavy about Marmee, who is growing feeble.

[Too much work for one young woman. No wonder she broke down. 1876. — L.M.A.]

August. — Roberts Bros, made an offer for the story, but at the same time advised me to keep the copyright; so I shall.

[An honest publisher and a lucky author, for the copyright made her fortune, and the “ dull book” was the first golden egg of the ugly duckling. 1885. — L.M.A.]

August 26th. — Proof of whole book came. It reads better than I expected. Not a bit sensational, but simple and true, for we really lived most of it; and if it succeeds that will be the reason of it. Mr. N. likes it better now, and says some girls who have read the manuscripts say it is “ splendid!” As it is for them, they are the best critics, so I should be satisfied.

September. — Father’s book [“Tablets”] came out. Very simple outside, wise and beautiful within. Hope it will bring him praise and profit, for he has waited long.

No girl, Mother poorly, May busy with pupils, Nan with her boys, and much work to be done. We don’t like the kitchen department, and our tastes and gifts lie in other directions, so it is hard to make the various Pegasuses pull the plan steadily.

October 8th. — Marmee’s birthday; sixty-eight. After breakfast she found her gifts on a table in the study. Father escorted her to the big red chair, the boys prancing before blowing their trumpets, while we “girls” marched behind, glad to see the dear old Mother better and able to enjoy our little fete. The boys proudly handed her the little parcels, and she laughed and cried over our gifts and verses.

I feel as if the decline had begun for her; and each year will add to the change which is going on, as time alters the energetic, enthusiastic home-mother into a gentle, feeble old woman, to be cherished and helped tenderly down the long hill she has climbed so bravely with her many burdens.

October 2 6th. — Came to Boston, and took a quiet room in Brookline Street. Heard Emerson in the evening. Sent a report of it to A. P. for the “Standard “ at his desire.

Anna is nicely settled in her new house, and Marmee is with her. Helped put down carpets and settle things.

30th. — Saw Mr. N. of Roberts Brothers, and he gave me good news of the book. An order from London for an edition came in. First edition gone and more called for. Expects to sell three or four thousand before the New Year.

Mr. N. wants a second volume for spring. Pleasant notices and letters arrive, and much interest in my little women, who seem to find friends by their truth to life, as I hoped.

November ist. — Began the second part of “ Little Women.” I can do a chapter a day, and in a month I mean to be done. A little success is so inspiring that I now find my “ Marches” sober, nice people, and as I can launch into the future, my fancy has more play. Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that was the only end and aim of a woman’s life. I won’t marry Jo to Laurie to please any one.

Monday, 16th. — To the Club for a change, as I have written like a steam engine since the ist. Weiss read a fine paper on “Woman Suffrage.” Good talk afterward. Lunched with Kate Field, Celia Thaxter, and Mr. Linton. Woman’s Club in p. m.

17th. — Finished my thirteenth chapter. I am so full of my work, I can’t stop to eat or sleep, or for anything but a daily run.

29th. — My birthday; thirty-six. Spent alone, writing hard. No presents but Father’s “Tablets.”

I never seem to have many presents, as some do, though I give a good many. That is best perhaps, and makes a gift very precious when it does come.

December. — Home to shut up the house, as Father goes West and Mother to Anna’s. A cold, hard, dirty time; but was so glad to be off out of C. that I worked like a beaver, and turned the key on Apple Slump with joy.

May and I went to the new Bellevue Hotel in Beacon Street. She does n’t enjoy quiet corners as I do, so we took a sky-parlor, and had a queer time whisking up and down in the elevator, eating in a marble cafe, and sleeping on a sofa bed, that we might be genteel. It did not suit me at all. A great gale nearly blew the roof off. Steam pipes exploded, and we were hungry. I was very tired with my hard summer, with no rest for the brains that earn the money.

January, 1869. — Left our lofty room at Bellevue and went to Chauncey Street. Sent the sequel of “ L. W.” to Roberts on New Year’s Day. Hope it will do as well as the first, which is selling finely, and receives good notices. F. and F. both want me to continue working for them, and I shall do so if I am able; but my headaches, cough, and weariness keep me from working as I once could, fourteen hours a day.

In March we went home, as Mother was restless at Nan’s, and Father wanted his library. Cold and dull; not able to write; so took care of Marmee and tried to rest.

Paid up all the debts, thank the Lord! — every penny that money can pay, — and now I feel as if I could die in peace. My dream is beginning to come true; and if my head holds out I'LL do all I once hoped to do.

April. — Very poorly. Feel quite used up. Don't care much for myself, as rest is heavenly even with pain; but the family seem so panic-stricken and helpless when I break down, that I try to keep the mill going. Two short tales for L., $50; two for Ford, $20; and did my editorial work, though two months are unpaid for. Roberts wants a new book, but am afraid to get into a vortex lest I fall ill.

To her Publishers.

Boston, Dec. 28, 1869.

Many thanks for the check which made my Christmas an unusually merry one.

After toiling so many years along the uphill road, —

always a hard one to women writers, — it is peculiarly grateful to me to find the way growing easier at last, with pleasant little surprises blossoming on either side, and the rough places made smooth by the courtesy and kindness of those who have proved themselves friends as well as publishers.

With best wishes for the coming year, I am yours truly, L. M. Alcott.

August, 1871.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Many thanks for the fortune and the kind note accompanying it. Please hand the money to S. E. S., and he will put it somewhere for me. . . .

You are very kind to find a minute out of your hurried day to attend to this affair. . . . I'm not sure but I shall try Dr. B. if my present and ninth doctor fails to cure my aching bones. I have n't a bit of faith in any of them; but my friends won't let me gently slip away where bones cease from troubling, so I must keep trying.

Very gratefully your friend, L. M. A.

Written in 1871, just after the publication of " Little Men ": —

August 5th.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Thanks for the parcel and notes.

. . . The letters were very gushing from Nellie and Dollie and Sallie Somebody asking for pictures, autographs, family history, and several new books right away.

I must give Dr. R. a fair trial, and if he fails I'LL try Dr. B., just to make up the number of doctors to a round ten.

"Happy Thoughts " is very funny, especially the trip to Antwerp.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

CHAPTER IX.

EUROPE.

THE LAY OF A GOLDEN GOOSE.

Long ago in a poultry yard
One dull November morn,
Beneath a motherly soft wing
A little goose was born.

Who straightway peeped out of the shell
To view the world beyond,
Longing at once to sally forth
And paddle in the pond.

“Oh! be not rash,” her father said,
A mild Socratic bird;
Her mother begged her not to stray
With many a warning word.

But little goosey was perverse,
And eagerly did cry,
“I ‘ve got a lovely pair of wings,
Of course I ought to fly.”

In vain parental cacklings,
In vain the cold sky’s frown,
Ambitious goosey tried to soar,
But always tumbled down.

The farm-yard jeered at her attempts,
The peacocks screamed, “ Oh fie!
You ‘re only a domestic goose,
So don’t pretend to fly.”

Great cock-a-doodle from his perch
Crowed daily loud and clear,
“Stay in the puddle, foolish bird,
That is your proper sphere.”
The ducks and hens said, one and all,
In gossip by the pool, “
Our children never play such pranks;
My dear, that fowl’s a fool.”

The owls came out and flew about,
Hooting above the rest, “
No useful egg was ever hatched
From transcendental nest.”

Good little goslings at their play
And well-conducted chicks
Were taught to think poor goosey’s flights
Were naughty, ill-bred tricks.

They were content to swim and scratch,
And not at all inclined
For any wild-goose chase in search
Of something undefined.

Hard times she had as one may guess,
That young aspiring bird,
Who still from every fall arose
Saddened but undeterred.

She knew she was no nightingale,
Yet spite of much abuse,
She longed to help and cheer the world,
Although a plain gray goose.
She could not sing, she could not fly,
Nor even walk with grace,
And all the farm-yard had declared
A puddle was her place.

But something stronger than herself
Would cry, “ Go on, go on!
Remember, though an humble fowl,
You ‘re cousin to a swan.”

So up and down poor goosey went,
A busy, hopeful bird.
Searched many wide unfruitful fields,
And many waters stirred.

At length she came unto a stream
Most fertile of all Niles,
Where tuneful birds might soar and sing
Among the leafy isles.
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Here did she build a little nest
Beside the waters still,
Where the parental goose could rest
Unvexed by any bill.

And here she paused to smooth her plumes,
Ruffled by many plagues;
When suddenly arose the cry,
“This goose lays golden eggs.”

At once the farm-yard was agog;
The ducks began to quack;
Prim Guinea fowls relenting called,
“Come back, come back, come back.’’

Great chanticleer was pleased to give
A patronizing crow,
And the contemptuous biddies clucked,
“I wish my chicks did so.”

The peacocks spread their shining tails,
And cried in accents soft,
“We want to know you, gifted one,
Come up and sit aloft.”

Wise owls awoke and gravely said,
With proudly swelling breasts,
“Rare birds have always been evoked
From transcendental nests!”

News-hunting turkeys from afar
Now ran with all thin legs
To gobble facts and fictions of
The goose with golden eggs.

But best of all the little fowls
Still playing on the shore,
Soft downy chicks and goslings gay,
Chirped out, “ Dear Goose, lay more.”

But goosey all these weary years
Had toiled like any ant,
And wearied out she now replied,
“My little dears, I can’t.

“When I was starving, half this corn
Had been of vital use,
Now I am surfeited with food
Like any Strasbourg goose.”
So to escape too many friends,
Without uncivil strife,
She ran to the Atlantic pond
And paddled for her life.

Soon up among the grand old Alps

She found two blessed things,
The health she had so nearly lost,
And rest for weary limbs.

But still across the briny deep
Couched in most friendly words,
Came prayers for letters, tales, or verse,
From literary birds.

Whereat the renovated fowl
With grateful thanks profuse,
Took from her wing a quill and wrote
This lay of a Golden Goose.
Bex, Switzerland, August, 1870.

THE year 1869 was less fruitful in work than the preceding one. Miss Alcott spent the winter in Boston and the summer in Concord. She was ill and very tired, and felt little inclined for mental effort. “ Hospital Sketches,” which had been first published by Redpath, was now republished by Roberts Brothers, with the addition of six shorter “ Camp and Fireside Stories.” The interest of the public in either the author or the work had not lessened; for two thousand copies of the book in its new form were sold the first week. In her weary condition she finds her celebrity rather a burden than a pleasure, and says in her journal: —

People begin to come and stare at the Alcotts. Reporters haunt the place to look at the authoress, who dodges into the woods a la Hawthorne, and won’t be even a very small lion.

Refreshed my soul with Goethe, ever strong and fine and alive. Gave S..E. S. $200 to invest. What richness to have a little not needed!

Miss Alcott had some pleasant refreshment in travelling during the summer.

July. — . . . Spent in Canada with my cousins, the Frothinghams, at their house at Riviere du Loup, — a little village on the St. Lawrence, full of queer people. Drove, read, and walked with the little ones. A pleasant, quiet time.

August. — ... A month with May at Mt. Desert. A gay time, and a little rest and pleasure before the old pain and worry began again.

Made up $1,000 for S. E. S. to invest. Now I have $1,200 for a rainy day, and no debts. With that thought I can bear neuralgia gayly.

In the autumn the whole family went to Boston, the father and mother staying with Mrs. Pratt; while Louisa and her sister May, “ the workers,” occupied rooms in Pinckney Street. Not being well enough to do much new work, Louisa began using up her old stories, and found that the little women “ helped their rejected sisters to good places where once they went a-begging.” In January, 1870, she suffered from loss of voice, for which she tried “ heroic treatment” under a distinguished physician. She got well enough to write a little, and in February wrote the conclusion to “ The Old-fashioned Girl,” which was published in March. She says: —

I wrote it with left hand in a sling, one foot up, head aching, and no voice. Yet, as the book is funny, people will say, “ Did n’t you enjoy doing it? “ I often think of poor Tom Hood as I scribble, rather than lie and groan. I certainly earn my living by the sweat of my brow.

The book does not reveal this condition; for nothing could be fresher, brighter, and more wholesome than the heroine Polly, many of whose adventures are drawn from the author’s own experience. She steps out of her usual surroundings into the fashionable life of the city, but betrays her own want of sympathy with it. The book has always been very popular.

In 1870, the success of “Hospital Sketches” and the continued receipts from “ Little Women “ put their author in a pecuniary position which enabled her to go abroad for the rest and refreshment which she sorely needed. The younger sister was invited to go by her friend A. B. on condition that Louisa would accompany them. This journey was very free and independent. She has given an account — somewhat travestied certainly, but very true to the general facts — in “ Shawl Straps,” although the reader would hardly suppose the old lady described in that book had not yet reached her fortieth year. These sketches were arranged after her return, at the request of Mrs. Stowe, for the “ Christian Union,” and were published in a book forming one volume of “ Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag “ in 1872.

Fortunately we have many of Louisa’s original letters preserved in her father’s copies, which have 14

escaped the destruction of her correspondence. With some extracts from her journals, they give a sufficient account of this journey. In many respects the contrast to her former visit to Europe is most pleasant. She has now become pecuniarily independent by her own exertions, and has a popular reputation which brings her welcome and recognition wherever she goes. But she has paid a heavy price for these gains. Her health has become seriously shattered. The long application to writing, sometimes even for fourteen hours a day, — a pressure of excitement which kept her from eating and sleeping, — added to sorrow and anxiety, have told upon her nerves and strength, and she is often unfitted to enjoy the pleasures which are open to her. Yet her journal and letters are as full of wit and humor as ever; and she laid up stores of pleasant memories which lasted her through life. Readers of “ Shawl Straps “ will recognize the originals of those bright sketches in the series of letters from Dinan.

Second Trip to Europe.

April. — ... On the first day of the month (fit day for my undertaking I thought) May and I went to N. Y. to meet A. B., with John for escort. Every one very kind. Thirty gifts, a parting ball among our house-mates, and a great cake. Half-a-dozen devoted beings at the station to see us off. But I remember only Father and Mother as they went away the day before, leaving the two ambitious daughters to sail away, perhaps forever.

Marmee kept up bravely, and nodded and smiled; but at the corner I saw the white handkerchief go up to the eyes, after being gayly waved to us. May and I broke down, and said, “ We won’t go;” but next day we set forth, as young birds will, and left the nest empty for a year.

Sailed on the 2d in a gale of wind in the French steamer “ Lafayette “ for Brest. Our adventures are told in “ Shawl Straps.”

“O. F. G.” came out in March, and sold well. Train- boy going to N. Y. put it into my lap; and when I said I did n’t care for it, exclaimed with surprise, —

“Bully book, ma’am! Sell a lot; better have it.”

John told him I wrote it; and his chuckle, stare, and astonished “ No! “ was great fun. On the steamer little girls had it, and came in a party to call on me, very seasick in my berth, done up like a mummy.

Spent some charming weeks in Brittany.

June and July. — “ O. F. G.” was published in London by Sampson Low & Co. We left Dinan on the 15 th, and had a lovely trip through France to Vevay and Bex.

Talk of war between France and Prussia.

Much excitement at Vevay. Refugees from Lyons come in. Isabella and Don Carlos were there, with queer followers.

September. — ... On the 3d came news of the Emperor’s surrender. Great wailing among the French here. All well at home. Books going finely; no debts.

We decide to go to Rome for the winter, as May pines for the artist’s Paradise; and war will not trouble us I hope.

Ship “ Lafayette,” April 9, 1870.

Dearest Marmee, — To-morrow we come to our long journey’s end [Brest, France], thank the Lord. It has been a good one on the whole, and I have got along as well as I expected. But it is tiresome to be day after day doing nothing; for my head will not let me read. May has done well, and has been very kind to me and good, and is the life of the table, I guess. I never go up to meals, for

Marie takes such good care of me; I lie and peck all sorts of funny messes, and receive calls in my den. People seem to think we are “ guns,” and want to know us; but as they are not interesting, we are on the reserve, and it has a fine effect. About three thousand miles away does not seem possible in so little while. How do you all get along, — Marmee, Father, the laddies, my lass, and dear old John? He was so good and kind all the way I had no care or worry, but just lopped round and let him do all the work. Bless the dear!

I shall despatch a good long letter as soon as we arrive and have something to tell. We send this to ease your mind. Letters here are not prepaid, so pay for mine out of my money. Don’t forget to tell the postmaster in Boston about my letters.

Bless you all, says your Lu.

Morlaix, April 14, 1870.

Dearest Marmee, — Having got our “ poise “ a bit by a day and night on land, I begin at’ once to scribble to you, as I mean to keep a letter on hand all the time, and send them off as fast as they are done. We had a twelve days’ passage, owing to a double screw which they were trying and which delayed us, though it is safer than one. The weather was cold and rainy, and the sea rough, so I only went up once or twice, and kept warm in my den most of the time. After the first two days I did n’t feel sick, except my head as usual. I slept, ate, ruminated, and counted the hours. May poked about more, and was liked by all.

We got to Brest about noon Wednesday. A. and I got our trunks through the custom-house, and after some squabbling with the men, got all aboard for Morlaix, which is a curious old place worth seeing. It was a lovely day, warm as our June, and we had a charming trip of three hours through a country already green and flowery. We reached our hotel all right, and after a nice dinner had baths and went to bed. May’s room being some way from mine, she came and bunked in with me in my little bed, and we slept.

To-day is lovely, warm, and I am sitting at an open window looking at the square, enjoying the queer sights and sounds; for the air resounds with the rattle of wooden shoes on the stones.

Market-women sit all about selling queer things, among which are snails; they buy them by the pint, pick them out with a pin like nuts, and seem to relish them mightily. We went out this a. m. after breakfast, and took a stroll about the queer old town. May was in heaven, and kept having raptures over the gables, the turrets with storks on them, the fountains, people, and churches. She is now sketching the tower of St. Melanie, with a crowd of small boys round.her enjoying the sight and criticising the work. ‘ It don’t seem very new to me, but I enjoy it, and feel pretty well. We are to study French every day when we settle, and I am to do the mending, etc., for A., who is to talk for us, and make our bargains. So far we go well together.

To-morrow we go on to Lamballe, where we take the diligence to Dinan, fourteen miles farther, and there settle for some weeks. I wish the boys could see the funny children here in little wooden shoes like boats, the girls in blue cloth caps, aprons, and shawls, just like the women, and the boys in funny hats and sheepskin jackets. Now I must go and get May, who can't speak a word of French, and has a panic if any one speaks to her. The beggars afflict her, and she wants to give them money on all occasions. This p. m. we go for a drive to see all there is, as neither A. nor I are good walkers; "adoo" till by and by. I wish I could send you this balmy day.

Dinan, Sunday, April 17, 1870.

Here we are, all settled at our first neat stopping-place, and are in clover, as you will see when I tell you how plummy and lovely it is. We left Morlaix Friday at 8 a. m., and were so amazed at the small bill presented us that we could n't praise the town enough. You can judge of the cheapness of things, when I say that my share of the expenses from Brest here, including two days at a hotel, car, 'bus, and diligence fare, fees, and everything, was $8. The day was divine, and we had a fine little journey to Lamballe, where the fun began; for instead of a big diligence, we found only a queer ramshackle thing like an insane carryall, with a wooden boot and queer porch for the driver.

Our four trunks were piled up behind and tied on with old ropes, our bags stowed in a wooden box on top, and ourselves inside with a fat Frenchman. The humpbacked driver " ya hooped " to the horses, and away we clattered at a wild pace, all feeling dead sure that something would happen, for the old thing bounded and swayed awfully, the trunks were in danger of tumbling off, and to our dismay we soon discovered that the big Frenchman was tipsy. He gabbled to A. as only a tipsy person could, quoted poetry; said he was Victor Hugo's best friend, and a child of Nature; that English ladies were all divine, but too cold, — for when he pressed A.'s hand she told him it was not allowed in England, and he was overwhelmed with remorse; bowed, sighed, rolled his eyes, and told her that he drank much ale, because it flew to his head and gave him "commercial ideas."

I never saw anything so perfectly absurd as it was, and after we got used to it we laughed ourselves sick over the lark. You ought to have seen us and our turnout, tearing over the road at a breakneck pace, pitching, creaking, and rattling, the funny driver hooting at the horses, who had their tails done up in chignons, blue harness, and strings of bells, the drunken man warbling, exhorting, and languishing at us all by turns, while A. headed him off with great skill. I sat, a mass of English dignity and coolness, suffering alternate agonies of anxiety and amusement, and May, who tied her head up in a bundle, looked like a wooden image.

It was rich; and when we took up first a peasant woman in wooden shoes and fly-away cap, and then a red-nosed priest smoking a long pipe, we were a superb spectacle. In this style we banged into Dinan, stopped at the gate, and were dumped bag and baggage in the square. Finding Madame Coste's man was not here for us, we hired a man to bring our trunks up. To our great amazement, an oldish woman, who was greasing the wheels of a diligence, came, and catching up our big trunks, whipped them into two broad carts, and taking one trotted down the street at a fine pace, followed by the man with the other. That was the finishing touch; and we went laughing after them through the great arched gate into the quaintest, prettiest, most romantic town I ever saw. Narrow streets with overhanging gables, distracting roofs, windows, and porches, carved beams, and every sort of richness. The strong old lady beat the man, and finally landed us close by another old gate at a charming house fronting the south, overlooking a lovely green valley, full of gardens, blooming plum and peach trees, windmills, and a ruined castle, at sight of which we all skipped. Madame Coste received us with rapture, for A. brought a letter from Mrs. L., who stayed here and was the joy of the old lady's soul. We were in great luck, for being early in the season she had three rooms left, and we nabbed them at once, — a salon with old oak walls and wardrobes, blue damask furniture, a fireplace, funny windows, and quaint furniture. A little room out of it for A., and upstairs a larger room for May and me, with two beds draped in green chintz, and carved big wardrobe, etc., and best of all, a sunny window toward the valley. For these rooms and our board we each pay $i a day, and I call that cheap. It would be worth that to get the fun and air alone, for it is like June, and we sit about with open windows, flowers in the fields, birds singing, and everything spring-like.

We took possession at once, and dressed for a dinner at six. We were then presented to our fellow-boarders, — Madame Forney, a buxom widow, her son Gaston, a handsome Frenchy youth of twenty-three, and her daughter, a homely girl of twenty, who is to be married here on the 3d of May. After a great bowing and scraping we had a funny fish dinner, it being Good Friday. When they found we did n't speak French they were " desolated," and begged us to learn at once, which we solemnly vowed to do. Gaston " knew English," so May at once began to teach him more, and the ice being broken we got gay and friendly at once. I could understand them pretty well, but can't talk, and A. told them that I was forbidden to say much on account of my throat. This will give me a chance to get a fair start. May pegs away at her grammar, and with that and the elegant

Gaston, she will soon begin to “ parlez-vous.”

After dinner we were borne to the great salon, where a fire, lights, and a piano appeared. Every one sat round and gabbled except the Alcotts, who looked and laughed. Mademoiselle Forney played, and then May convulsed them by singing some Chants Ameriques, which they thought very lively and droll. They were all attention and devotion to Madame Coste, — a tall old lady with whiskers, who kept embracing A. and beaming at us in her great content at being friends of chere Madame L. A. told them that I was a celebrated authoress, and May a very fine artist, and we were beamed at more than ever. Being tired, we turned in early, after a jolly time in our own little salon, eating chocolate and laying plans.

Dinan, April 20, 1870.

... A. and I went shopping. A. got a little bird to enliven our parlor, a sort of sparrow, gray with a red head and a lively song. We named him Bernard du Guesclin (the hero of the town), and call him Bernie. I got some nice gloves for three francs (sixty cents), and a white sun- umbrella for May (forty cents). She needs it when she sketches, and there is always a crowd of children round her to watch and admire; she gives one of them a sou to hold the umbrella, and so gets on nicely.

In the p. m. A. and I went to the little village of Lahou, in the valley where the ruined castle is, to a fair. It was a very picturesque sight, for the white-capped women, sitting about on the green hillside, looked like flowers, and the blue blouses of the men and wide-brimmed hats added to the effect. The little street was lined with booths, where they sold nuts, queer cakes, hot sausages, and pancakes, toys, etc. I got a funny cake, just the size and shape of a deep pie-dish, and a jack-knife, for a sou. We also indulged in nuts, and sat on our camp- stools in a shady place and ate them boldly in the public mart, while enjoying the lively scene. French and English people went by in droll parties, and we coolly sat and stared at them. May is going to sketch the castle, so I won’t waste paper describing the pretty place with the ruined church full of rooks, the old mill with the water- wheel housed in vines, or the winding river, and meadows full of blue hyacinths and rosy daisies.

Yesterday, A. and I had to return the call of Mademoiselle M., and as she speaks English I got on very well. The stairs to her apartment were so steep that we held on by a velvet-covered rope as we climbed up. In the p. m. we had fun, for we took two donkey carriages and rode to the mineral spring. Gaston was sick and could n’t go, as we had planned, so May drove herself in one, and A. and I in the other. I wish the boys could have seen us, it was so funny. The carriages were bath- chairs with a wee donkey harnessed to each, so small, so neat, and looking so venerable with thin long ears and bits of feet that I felt as if I was driving my grandmother. May was a very imposing sight, alone in her chair under her new umbrella, in her gray suit, with bright gloves and a big whip, driving a gray rat who would n't trot unless pounded and banged and howled at in the maddest way. Our steed was bigger, but the most pig-headed old scamp you ever saw, for it took two big women to make him go. I drove, and A. thrashed away with all her might, — our joint efforts only producing occasional short trots which enraged us dreadfully.

We laughed till we were sick, it was so very absurd; while May trundled serenely along, enjoying the fine views regardless of her rat, who paced along at his ease, wagging his ears and meditating.

We had a nice trip, but did n't drink the water, as iron

don't suit us. Coming home, we passed the home of the donkeys, and they at once turned in, and were with much difficulty persuaded to go on by two short girls in caps and short gowns, who ran and shouted " E! E! va oui! " and punched sticks into the poor asses, rattling us over the stones till our eyes danced in our heads. We found it rather hard work, and A. means to buy a horse and straw pony-chaise, so we can drive ourselves in peace where we like. . . .

A. is bargaining for a horse which an Englishman wishes to sell for $50, including harness and cart. We can't hire horses for less than $2 a drive, and donkeys are vile, so it is cheaper to buy, and sell when we go away, and so drive as much as we like. A. knows about such things, and takes all the responsibility. . . . To-morrow we go on a little excursion in the steamboat down the river, and return a la donkey with the English ladies, who have returned our call and are very friendly.

Please forward this little note in an envelope to its address. The child wrote me a pretty letter, which N. sent, and the pa said I would n't answer. The child said, " I know she will, she is so nice." So I do. Best love to every one. Don't go home too soon. I shall write to Fred and Jack next time. Good-by.

Lu.

To M. S.

. . . They call each other pet names that convulse us, — "my little pig," "my sweet hen," "my cabbage," and " my tom-cat." A French lady with her son and daughter board here, and their ways amuse us mightily. The girl is to be married next week to a man whom she has seen twice, and never talked to but an hour in her life. She writes to him what her mother dictates, and says she should be ashamed to love him before they were married.

Her wedding clothes absorb her entire mind, and her Jules will get a pretty doll when he takes Mademoiselle A. F. to wife. Gaston, the son, puts on blase airs, though only twenty-two, and languishes at May, for they can’t talk, as he does not know English nor she French.

April 27.

I left my letter to drive to a ruined chateau, which we went all over, as a part is inhabited by a farmer who keeps his hog in the great banqueting hall, his grain in the chapel, and his hens in the lady’s chamber. It was very picturesque; the old rooms, with ivy coming in at the windows, choking up the well, and climbing up the broken towers. The lady of the chateau was starved to death by her cruel brothers, and buried in the moat, where her bones were found long afterward, and her ghost still haunts the place they say. Here we had cider, tell Pa.

Coming home we saw a Dolmen, one of the Druidical remains. It stood in a grove of old pines, — a great post of gray stone, some twenty-five feet high, and very big round. It leaned as if falling, and had queer holes in it. Brittany is full of these relics, which no one can explain, and I was glad to see the mysterious things.

Yesterday we took a little trip down the river in a tiny steamer, going through a lock and skimming along between the green banks of the narrow river to Miss M.’s country-house, where we had new milk, and lay on the grass for an hour or so. Then May and Miss M. walked home, and A. and I went in a donkey cart.

To-day the girls have gone to La Garaye with Gaston on donkeys. The weather has been cold for a day or two with easterly winds. So I feel it at once and keep warm. It is very unusual at this time, but comes, I suppose, because I’ve travelled hundreds of miles to get rid of them. It won’t last long, and then we shall be hot enough.

We lead such quiet, lazy lives I really have nothing to tell.

Oh, yes, the fiance of Mademoiselle has arrived, and amuses us very much. He is a tiny man in uniform, with a red face, big moustache, and blue eyes. He thinks he talks English, and makes such very funny mistakes. He asked us if we had been to “ promenade on monkeys “ meaning donkeys, and called the Casino “ the establishment of dance.” He addresses all his attentions to the ma, and only bows to his future wife, who admires her diamonds and is contented. We are going away on the day of the wedding, as it is private.

The girls have just returned in great spirits, for A.’s donkey kept lying down, and it took all three to get him up again. They sat in a sort of chair, and looked very funny with the four little legs under them and long ears flopping before. I shall go to Garaye some fine day, and will tell you about it.

Adieu, love to all. Yours, Lu.

Dinan, May 6, 1870.

Dear People, — I have just got a fat letter full of notices from N., — all good, and news generally pleasant.

The great event of the season is over, and Miss F. is Mrs. C. It was a funny scene, for they had a breakfast the day before, then on Tuesday the wedding. We did not go, as the church is like a tomb, but we saw the bride, in white satin, pearls, orange flowers, and lace, very pretty, and like other brides. Her ma, in purple moire and black lace, was fine to see; and the little groom, in full regimentals, with a sabre as large as himself, was very funny. A lot of people came in carriages to escort them to church; and our little square was full of queer turnouts, smartly dressed people, and a great bustle. There was some mistake about the bride's carriage, and it did not drive up in time, so she stood on the steps till it came as near as it could, and then she trotted out to it on Gaston's arm, with her maid holding up her satin train. Uncle, ma, bride, and brother drove off, but the groom's carriage was delayed by the breaking of a trace, and there he sat, with his fat pa and ma, after every one had gone, fuming, and poking his little cocked hat out of the window, while the man mended the harness, and every one looked on with breathless interest.

We went to D   with Coste in the p. m., and had a fine view of the sea and San Malo. We didn't like D   , and won't go there. When we got home about eight o'clock the wedding dinner was in full blast, and I caught a glimpse of a happy pair at the head of the table, surrounded by a lot of rigged-up ladies and fine men, all gabbing and gabbling as only French folk can. The couple are still here, resting and getting acquainted before they go to Lamballe for a week of festivity. A church wedding is a very funny thing, and I wish you could have seen it.

The dry season continues, and the people have processions and masses to pray for rain. One short flurry of hail is all we have had, and the cold winds still blow. When our month is out we shall go somewhere near the sea if it is at all warm. Nothing could be kinder than dear old Coste, and I could n't be in a better place to be poorly in than this; she coddles me like a mother, and is so grieved that I don't get better.

Send Ma a bit of the gorse flower with which the fields are now yellow.

Yours,   Lu.

Dinan, May 13, 1870.

Dearest Folks, — We drove to Guildo yesterday to see if we should like it for July. It is a queer little town on the seashore, with ruins near by, bright houses, and lots of boats. Rooms a franc a day, and food very cheap. The man of the house — a big, brown, Peggotty sailor — has a sloop, and promised the girls as much sailing as they liked. We may go, but our plans are very vague, and one day we say we will go to one place and the next to another, and shall probably end by staying where we are.

Yours, Lu.

Dinan, May 17, 1870.

Dearest People, — We run out and do errands in the cool before breakfast at ten, then we write, sew, and read, and look round, till four, when we go to drive. May and I in the cherry bounce with M. Harmon to drive us, and A. on horseback; for, after endless fuss, she has at last evoked a horse out of chaos, and comes galloping gayly after us as we drive about the lovely roads with the gallant hotel-keeper, Adolph Harmon. We are getting satiated with ruins and chateaux, and plan a trip by water to Nantes; for the way they do it is to hire a big boat and be towed by a horse in the most luxurious manner.

To Anna.

Dinan, May 25, 1870.

Dear Betsey,[1] — All well. We have also had fun about the queer food, as we don’t like brains, liver, etc. A. does; and when we eat some mess, not knowing what it is, and find it is sheep’s tails or eels, she exults over us, and writes poems.

I wander dreadfully, but the girls are racketing, birdie singing like mad, and nine horses neighing to one another in the place, so my ideas do not flow as clearly as they should. Besides, I expect Gaston to come in every minute to show us his rig; for he is going to a picnic in Breton costume, — a very French affair, for the party are to march two and two, with fiddlers in front, and donkeys bearing the feast in the rear. Such larks!

Yesterday we had a funny time. We went to drive in a basket chair, very fine, with a perch behind and a smart harness; but most of the horses here are stallions, and act like time. Ours went very well at first, but in the town took to cutting up, and suddenly pounced on to a pile of brush, and stuck his head into a bake-shop. We tried to get him out, but he only danced and neighed, and all the horses in town seemed to reply. A man came and led him on a bit, but he did n’t mean to go, and whisked over to the other side, where he tangled us and himself up with a long string of team horses. I flew out and May soon followed. A. was driving, and kept in while the man led the “critter” back to the stable. I declined my drive with the insane beast, and so we left him and bundled home in the most ignominious manner. All the animals are very queer here, and, unlike ours, excessively big.

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[1] Betsey Prig was a pet name for her sister, as she herself was Sairey Gamp.

We went to a ruin one day, and were about to explore the castle, when a sow, with her family of twelve, charged through the gateway at us so fiercely that we fled in dismay; for pigs are not nice when they attack, as we don't know where to bone 'em, and I saw a woman one day whose nose had been bitten off by an angry pig. I

flew over a hedge; May tried to follow. I pulled her over head first, and we tumbled into the tower like a routed garrison. It wasn't a nice ruin, but we were bound to see it, having suffered so much. And we did see it, in spite of the pigs, who waylaid us on all sides, and squealed in triumph when we left, — dirty, torn, and tired. The ugly things wander at their own sweet will, and are tall, round-backed, thin wretches, who run like race horses, and are no respecters of persons.

Sunday was a great day here, for the children were confirmed. It was a pretty sight to see the long procession of little girls, in white gowns and veils, winding through the flowery garden and the antique square, into the old church, with their happy mothers following, and the boys in their church robes singing as they went. The old priest was too ill to perform the service, but the young one who did announced afterward that if the children would pass the house the old man would bless them from his bed. So all marched away down the street, with crosses and candles, and it was very touching to see the feeble old man stretch out his hands above them as the little white birds passed by with bended heads, while the fresh, boyish voices chanted the responses. This old priest is a very interesting man, for he is a regular saint, helping every one, keeping his house as a refuge for poor and old priests, settling quarrels among the people, and watching over the young people as if they were his own. I shall put him in a story.

Voila! Gaston has just come in, rigged in a white embroidered jacket, with the Dinan coat-of-arms worked in scarlet and yellow silk on it fore and aft; a funny hat, with streamers, and a belt, with a knife, horn, etc. He is handsome, and as fond of finery as a girl.' I'll send you his picture next time, and one of Dinan.

You will see that Marmee has all she needs, and a girl, and as much money as she wants for being cosey and comfortable. S. E. S. will let her have all she wants, and make her take it. I'm sorry the chapel $100 did n't come, for she likes to feel that she has some of her very own.

I have written to Conway and Mrs. Taylor, so that if we decide to take a run to England before we go to Italy, the way will be open. . . .

But Dinan is so healthy and cosey, that we shall linger till the heat makes us long for the sea. Roses, cherries, strawberries, and early vegetables are come, and we are in clover. Dear old Coste broods over us like a motherly hen, and just now desired me to give her affectionate and respectful compliments to my bonne mere.

Now I'm spun out; so adieu, my darling Nan. Write often, and I will keep sending, — trusting that you will get them in time.

Kisses all round.

Yours, Lu.

Dinan, May 30, 1870.

Dear Folks, — May has made up such a big letter that I will only add a line to give you the last news of the health of her Highness Princess Louisa. She is such a public character nowadays that even her bones are not her own, and her wails of woe cannot be kept from the long ears of the world, — old donkey as it is!

Dr. Kane, who was army surgeon in India, and doctor in England for forty years, says my leg trouble and many,of my other woes come from the calomel they gave me in Washington. He has been through the same thing with an Indian jungle fever, and has never got the calomel out of him. ... I don't know anything about it, only my leg is the curse of my life. But I think Dr. K.'s iodine of potash will cure it in the end, as it did his arms, after taking it for three months. It is simple, pleasant, and seems to do something to the bones that gives them ease; so I shall sip away and give it a good trial.

We are now revelling in big strawberries, green peas, early potatoes, and other nice things, on which we shall grow fat as pigs.

We are beginning to think of a trip into Normandy, where the H.'s are.

Love to all. By-by! Your loving Lu.

No news except through N., who yesterday sent me a nice letter with July account of $6,212, — a neat little sum for " the Alcotts, who can't make money!" With $10,000 well invested, and more coming in all the time, I think we may venture to enjoy ourselves, after the hard times we have all had.

The cream of the joke is, that we made our own money ourselves, and no one gave us a blessed penny. That does soothe my rumpled soul so much that the glory is not Worth thinking of.

To Anna.

Dinan, June 4, 1870.

The present excitement is the. wood which Coste is having put in. Loads keep coming in queer, heavy carts drawn by four horses each, and two men to work the machine. Two men chop the great oak stumps, and a woman puts it in down cellar by the armful. The men get two francs a day, — forty cents! (Would n't our $3 a day workmen howl at that sort of wages!) When several carts arrive at once the place is a lively scene. Just now there were three carts and twelve horses, and eight were all up in a snarl, while half-a- dozen ladies stood at their doors and gave advice. One had a half-dressed baby in her arms; one a lettuce she was washing; another her distaff; and a fourth her little bowl of soup, which she ate at on the sidewalk, in the intervals gesticulating so frantically that her sabots rattled on the stones. The horses had a free fight, and the man could n't seem to manage one big one, who romped about like a wild elephant, till the lady with the baby suddenly set the half-naked cherub on the doorsteps, charged in among the rampant beasts, and, by some magic howl or jerk, brought the bad horse to order, when she quietly returned to her baby, who had sat placidly eating dirt, and with a calm Voila, messieurs, she skipped little Jean into his shirt, and the men sat down to smoke.

We are now in great excitement over Gaston, who has lately become so very amiable that we don't know him. We began by letting the spoiled child severely alone. This treatment worked well, and now he offers us things at table, bows when we enter, and to-day presented us with green tulips, violet shrubs, and queer medals all round. We have let little bits of news leak out about us, and they think we are dukes and duchesses in Amer- ique, and pronounce us tres spirituelles; tres char- mantes; tres seductives femmes. We laugh in private, and are used to having the entire company rise when we enter, and embrace us with ardor, listen with uplifted hands and shrieks of?non Dieu! grand ciel 1 etc., to all remarks, and point us out in public as les dames Americaines. Such is fame!

An English lady arrived to-day — a Miss B. — dressed, with English taste, in a little green skirt, pink calico waist, a large crumpled frill, her hair in a tight knot, one front tooth sticking straight out, and a golden oriole in a large cage. She is about forty, very meek and pursy, and the old ladies have been sitting in a heap since breakfast, talking like mad.

May has “sack” on the brain just now, uid A. has “ hose “ on the brain; and at this moment they are both gabbling wildly, one saying, “ I shall trim it with blue and have it pinked!” the other shrieking, “ My hose must be red, with little dragons in black all over it, like small-pox! “ and the bird flies to her upper perch in dismay at the riot, while I sit and laugh, with an occasional duennaish, “Young ladies, less noise if you please!”

It rained last eve, and we are waiting for it to dry before going out in the donkey chaise to buy a warm bun and some strawberries for lunch, to be eaten as we parade the town and drink ale at intervals.

Do tell me how things are about my pictures. I see they are advertised, and if they sell I want my share of the profits. Send me one of those that are in the market, after taking off the heavy card.

Love to all, and the best of luck.

Ever your Lu.

Hotel d'Universe, Tours, June 17, 1870.

Dearest People, — Our wanderings have begun again, and here we are in this fine old city in a cosey hotel, as independent and happy as three old girls can be. We left Dinan Wednesday at 7 a. m. Gaston got up to see us off, — a most unusual and unexpected honor; also Mrs. B. and all the old ladies, whom we left dissolved in tears.

We had a lovely sail down the river to St. Malo, where we breakfasted at Hotel Franklin, a quaint old house in a flowery corner. At twelve we went by rail to Le Mans, — a long trip, — and arrived at 6 p. m. so tired that we went to bed in the moonlight while a band played in the square before the hotel, and the sidewalks before the cafe were full of people taking ices and coffee round little tables.

Next morning we went to see the famous cathedral and had raptures, for it is like a dream in stone. Pure Gothic of the twelfth century, with the tomb of Berenga- ria, wife of Coeur de Leon, stained glass of the richest kind, dim old chapels with lamps burning, a gorgeous high altar all crimson and gold and carmine, and several organs. Anything more lovely and divine I never saw, for the .arches, so light and graceful, seemed to soar up one above the other like the natural curves of trees or the spray of a great fountain. We spent a long time here and I sat above in the quaint old chapel with my eyes and heart full, and prayed a little prayer for my family. Old women and men knelt about in corners telling their beads, and the priest was quietly saying his prayers at the altar. Outside it was a pile of gray stone, with towers and airy pinnacles full of carved saints and busy rooks. I don't think we shall see anything finer anywhere. It was very hot for there had been no rain for four months, so we desired to start for town at 5 and get in about 8 as it is light then.

We had a pleasant trip in the cool of the day, and found Tours a great city, like Paris on a small scale. Our hotel is on the boulevard, and the trees, fountains, and fine carriages make our windows very tempting. We popped into bed early; and my bones are so much better that I slept without any opium or anything, — a feat I have not performed for some time.

This morning we had coffee and rolls in bed, then as it was a fine cool day we dressed up clean and nice and went out for a walk. At the post-office we found your letters of May 31, one from Nan and Ma, and one from L. We were exalted, and went into the garden and read them in bliss, with the grand cathedral right before us. Cathedral St. Martin, twelfth century, with tomb of Charles XIII.'s children, the armor of Saint Louis, fine pictures of Saint Martin, his cloak, etc. May will tell you about it and I shall put in a photograph, if I can find one. We are now — 12 o'clock — in our pleasant room all round the table writing letters and resting for another trip by and by.

The Fete Dieu is on Monday, — very splendid, — and we shall then see the cathedral in its glory. To-day a few hundred children were having their first communion there, girls all in white, with scarlet boys, crosses, candles, music, priests, etc. Get a Murray, and on the map of France follow us to Geneva, via St. Malo, Le Mans, Tours, Amboise and Blois, Orleans, Nevers, Antrim. We may go to the Vosges instead of the Jura if Mrs. H. can go, as A. wants to see her again. But we head for the Alps of some sort and will report progress as we go.

My money holds out well so far, as we go second class.

To her Father.

Tours, June 20, 1870.

Dear Papa, — Before we go on to fresh "chateaux and churches new," I must tell you about the sights here in this pleasant, clean, handsome old city. May has done the church for you, and I send a photograph to give some idea of it. The inside is very beautiful; and we go at sunset to see the red light make the gray walls lovely outside and the shadows steal from chapel to chapel inside, filling the great church with what is really " a dim religious gloom." We wandered about it the other evening till moonrise, and it was very interesting to see the people scattered here and there at their prayers; some kneeling before Saint Martin's shrine, some in a flowery little nook dedicated to the infant Christ, and one, a dark corner with a single candle lighting up a fine picture of the Mater Dolorosa, where a widow all in her weeds sat alone, crying and praying. In another a sick old man sat, while his old wife knelt by him praying with all her might to Saint Gratien (the patron saint of the church) for her dear old invalid. Nuns and priests glided about, and it was all very poetical and fine, till I came to an imposing priest in a first class chapel who was taking snuff and gaping, instead of piously praying.

The Fete Dieu was yesterday, and I went out to see the procession. The streets were hung with old tapestry, and sheets covered with flowers. Crosses, crowns, and bouquets were suspended from house to house, and as the procession approached, women ran out and scattered green boughs and rose-leaves before the train. A fine band and a lot of red soldiers came first, then the different saints on banners, carried by girls, and followed by long trains of girls bearing the different emblems. Saint Agnes and her lamb was followed by a flock of pretty young children all in white, carrying tall white lilies that filled the air with their fragrance.

“Mary our Mother” was followed by orphans with black ribbons crossed on their breasts. Saint Martin led the charity boys in their gray suits, etc, The Host under a golden canopy was borne by priests in gorgeous rig, and every one knelt as it passed with censors swinging, candles burning, boys chanting, and flowers dropping from the windows. A pretty young lady ran out and set her baby in a pile of green leaves in the middle of the street before the Host, and it passed over the little thing who sat placidly staring at the show and admiring its blue shoes. I suppose it is a saved and sacred baby henceforth.

It was a fine pageant and quite touching, some of it; but as usual, I saw something funny to spoil the solemnity. A very fat and fine priest, who walked with his eyes upon his book and sung like a pious bumblebee, suddenly destroyed the effect by rapping a boy over the head with his gold prayer-book, as the black sheep strayed a little from the flock. I thought the old saint swore also.

The procession went from the cathedral to Charlemagne’s Tower, an old, old relic, all that is left of the famous church which once covered a great square. We went to see it, and the stones looked as if they were able to tell wonderful tales of the scenes they had witnessed all these hundreds of years. I think the “ Reminiscences of a Rook” would be a good story, for these old towers are full of them, and they are long- lived birds.

Amboise, The Golden Lion, Tuesday, June 21, 1S70.

Here we go again! now in an utterly different scene from Tours. We left at 5 p. m., and in half an hour were here on the banks of the Loire in a queer little inn where we are considered duchesses at least, owing to our big trunks and A.’s good French. I am the Madame, May Mam’selle, and A. the companion.

Last evening being lovely, we went after dinner up to the castle where Charles VIII. was born in 1470. The Arab chief, Abd-el-Kader, and family were kept prisoners here, and in the old garden is a tomb with the crescent over it where some of them were buried. May was told about the terrace where the Huguenots hung thick and the court enjoyed the sight till the Loire, choked up with dead bodies, forced them to leave. We saw the little low door where Anne of Brittany’s first husband Charles VIII. “ bumped his head “ and killed himself, as he was running through to play bowls with his wife.

It has been modernized and is now being restored as in old times, so the interior was all in a toss. But we went down the winding road inside the tower, up which the knights and ladies used to ride. Father would have enjoyed the pleached walks, for they are cut so that looking down on them, it is like a green floor, and looking up it is a thick green wall. There also Margaret of Anjou and her son were reconciled to Warwick. Read Murray, I beg, and see all about it. We sat in the twilight on the terrace and saw what Fred would have liked, a little naked boy ride into the river on one horse after another, and swim them round in the deep water till they were all clean and cool.

This morning at 7 o'clock we drove to Chenonceaux, the chateau given by Henry II. to Diane de Poictiers. It was a lovely day, and we went rolling along through the most fruitful country I ever saw. Acre on acre of yellow grain, vineyards miles long, gardens and orchards full of roses and cherries. The Cher is a fine river winding through the meadows, where haymakers were at work and fat cattle feeding. It was a very happy hour, and the best thing I saw was May's rapturous face opposite, as she sat silently enjoying everything, too happy to talk.

The chateau built over the water is very interesting; Catherine de Medicis took it away from Diane when the king died, and her room is still seen as she left it; also a picture of Diane, a tall simpering woman in a tunic, with hounds, stag, cupids, and other rubbish round her. The gallery of pictures was fine; for here were old, old portraits and bas-reliefs, Agnes Sorel, Montaigne, Rabelais, many kings and queens, and among them Lafayette and dear old Ben Franklin.

There is a little theatre where Rousseau's plays were acted. This place at the time of the Revolution belonged to the grandmother of George Sand, and she was so much respected that no harm was done to it. So three cheers for Madame Dupin! Among the pictures were Ninon D'Enclos, and Madame Sevigne holding a picture of her beloved daughter. The Guidos, etc. I don't care for so much as they were all grimy and convulsive, and I prefer pictures of people who really lived, to these impossible Venuses and repulsive saints, — bad taste, but I can't help it. The walls were hung with stamped leather and tapestry, carved chairs in which queens had sat, tables at which kings had eaten, books they had read, and glasses that had reflected their faces were all about, and I just revelled. The old kitchen had a fireplace quaint enough to suit Pa, with immense turn-spits, cranes, andirons, etc. The chapel, balcony, avenue, draw-bridge, and all the other pleasing bits were enjoyed, and I stole a sprig of jasmine from the terrace which I shall press for Mamma. Pray take extra care of the photographs, for if lost, we cannot replace them, and I want to make a fine album of pictures with flowers and descriptions after I get home. . . . But all goes well and we enjoy much every day. Love to all, Lu.

To her Mother.

Blois, June 24, 1870.

Dear Marmee, — On this, Lizzie’s and Johnny’s birthday, I’LL begin a letter to you. We found at the Poste Restante here two “ Moods” and a paper for me, one book from L., and one from N. I think the pictures horrid, and sent them floating down the Loire as soon as possible, and put one book at the bottom of my trunk and left the other where no one will find it. I could n’t read the story, and try to forget that I ever wrote it.

Blois is a noisy, dusty, soldierly city with nothing to admire but the river, nearly dry now with this four months’ drought, and the old castle where Francis I., Louis XII., Catherine de Medicis, and other great folks lived. It has been very splendidly restored by the Government, and the ceilings are made with beams blazoned with coats-of-arms, the walls hung with cameos, painted with the same design as the stamped leather in old times, and the floors inlaid with colored tiles. Brown and gold, scarlet, blue, and silver, quaint dragons and flowers, porcupines and salamanders, crowns and letters, glittered everywhere. We saw the guard-room and the very chimney where the Due de Guise was leaning when the king Henry III. sent for him; the little door where the king’s gentlemen fell upon and stabbed him with forty wounds; the cabinet where the king and his mother plotted the deed; the chapel where the monks prayed for success; and the great hall where the body lay covered with a cloak till the king came and looked at it and kicked his dead enemy, saying, “ I did not think he was so tall.” We also saw the cell where the brother of the duke was murdered the next day, and the attic entire where their bodies were burnt, after which the ashes were thrown into the Loire by order of the king; the window out of which Marie de Medicis lowered herself when her son Louis XIII. imprisoned her there; the recess where Catherine de Medicis died; and many other interesting places. What a set of rascals these old kings and queens were!

The Salle des Etats was very gorgeous, and here in a week or so are to be tried the men who lately fired at the Emperor. It will be a grand, a fine sight when the great arched hall is full. I got a picture of the castle, and one of a fireplace for Pa. It is a mass of gold and color, with the porcupine of Louis XIII. and the ermine of his wife Anne of Brittany, their arms, in medallion over it.

At 5 p. m. we go on to Orleans for a day, where I shall get some relics of Joan of Arc for Nan. We shall pass Sunday at Bourges where the great church is, and then either to Geneva or the Jura, for a few weeks of rest.

Geneva, June 29, 1870.

It seems almost like getting home again to be here where I never thought to come again when I went away five years ago. We are at the Metropole Hotel right on the lake with a glimpse of Mount Blanc from our windows. It is rather fine after the grimy little inns of Brittany, and we enjoy a sip of luxury and put on our best gowns with feminine satisfaction after living in old travelling suits for a fortnight.

I began my letter at Blois, where we spent a day or two. At Orleans we only passed a night, but we had time to see the famous statue of the Maid, put up in gratitude by the people of the city she saved. It is a fine statue of Joan in her armor on horseback, with her sword drawn. Round the base of the statue are bronzed bas- reliefs of her life from the girl with her sheep, to the martyr at the stake. They were very fine, but don't show much in the photograph which I got for Nan, remembering the time when she translated Schiller's play for me.

At Bourges we saw the great cathedral, but did n't like it as well as that in Tours. We only spent a night there, and A. bought an antique ring of the time of

Francis I., — an emerald set in diamonds. It cost $9, and is very quaint and handsome.

Moulins we reached Sunday noon, and at 3 o'clock went to vespers in the old church, where we saw a good deal of mumbo-jumbo by red, purple, and yellow priests, and heard a boy with a lovely voice sing in the hidden choir like a little angel among the clouds. A. had a fancy to stay a week, if we could find rooms out of town in some farm-house; for the handsome white cattle have captivated her, and we were rather tired. So the old lady at the hotel said she had a little farm-house out in the fields, and we should go see it with her in basket chay. After dinner we all piled in and went along a dusty road to a little dirty garden-house with two rooms and a few cabbages and rose-bushes round it. She said we could sleep and eat at the hotel and come down here for the day. That did n't suit at all, so we declined; and on Monday morning we set out for Lyons. It was a very interesting trip under, over, and through the mountains with two engines and much tunnelling and up-and- down grading. May was greatly excited at the queer things we did, and never knew that cars could turn such sharp corners. We wound about so that we could see the engine whisking out of sight round one corner while we were turning another, and the long train looked like a snake winding through the hills. The tunnels were so long that lamps were lighted, and so cold we put on our sacks while passing in the darkness. The scenery was very fine; and after we left Lyons, where we merely slept, the Alps began to appear, and May and I stared in blissful silence; for we had two tall old men opposite, and a little priest, so young that we called him the Rev. boy. He slept and said his prayers most of the time, stealing sly looks at May's hair, A.'s pretty hands, and my buckled shoes, which were like his own and seemed to strike him as a liberty on my part. The old boys were very jolly, especially the one with three chins, who smiled paternally upon us and tried to talk. But we were very English and mum, and he thought we didn't understand French, and confided to his friend that he did n't see " how the English could travel and know not the French tongue." They sang, gabbled, slept, and slapped one another at intervals, and were very amusing till they left, and another very handsome Booth-like priest took their places.

To her Father.

Bex, July 14, 1870.

Dear Pa, — As I have not written to you yet, I will send you a picture-letter and tell you about the very interesting old Count Sz — who is here. This morning he asked us to go to the hills and see some curious trees which he says were planted from acorns and nuts brought from Mexico by Atala. We found some very ancient oaks and chestnuts, and the enthusiastic old man told us the story about the Druids who once had a church, amphitheatre, and sacrifical altar up there. No one knows much about it, and he imagines a good deal to suit his own pet theory. You would have liked to hear him hold forth about the races and Zoroaster, Plato, etc. He is a Hungarian of a very old family, descended from Semiramide and Zenobia. He believes that the body can be cured often by influencing the soul, and that doctors should be priests, and priests doctors, as the two affect the body and soul which depend on one another. He is doing a great deal for Miss W., who has tried many doctors and got no help. I never saw such a kindly, simple, enthusiastic, old soul, for at sixty-seven he is as full of hope and faith and good-will as a young man. I told him I

should like my father to see a little book he has written, and he is going to give me one.

We like this quiet little place among the mountains, and pass lazy days; for it is very warm, and we sit about on our balconies enjoying the soft air, the moonlight, and the changing aspect of the hills.

May had a fine exciting time going up St. Bernard, and is now ready for another. . . .

The Polish Countess and her daughter have been reading my books and are charmed with them. Madame says she is not obliged to turn down any pages so that the girls may not read them, as she does in many books, " All is so true, so sweet, so pious, she may read every word."

I send by this mail the count's little pamphlet. I don't know as it amounts to much, but I thought you might like to see it.

Love to every one, and write often to your Affectionate daughter L. M. A.

Bex, July 18, 1870.

Dear People, — The breaking out of this silly little war between France and Prussia will play the deuce with our letters. I have had none from you for a long time; and Alexandre, the English waiter here, says that the mails will be left to come as they can, for the railroads are all devoted to carrying troops to the seat of war. The French have already crossed the Rhine, and rumors of a battle came last eve; but the papers have not arrived, and no letters for any one, so all are fuming for news, public and private, and I am howling for my home letter, which is more important than all the papers on the continent

Don't be worried if you don't hear regularly, or think us in danger. Switzerland is out of the mess, and if she gets in, we can skip over into Italy, and be as cosey as possible. It will make some difference in money, perhaps, as Munroe in Paris is our banker, and we shall be plagued about our letters, otherwise the war won't effect us a bit; I dare say you know as much about it as we do, and Marmee is predicting "a civil war" all over the world. We hear accounts of the frightful heat with you. Don't wilt away before we come. . . .

Lady Amberley is a trump, and I am glad she says a word for her poor sex though she is a peeress. . . .

I should like to have said of me what Hedge says of Dickens; and when I die, I should prefer such a memory rather than a tomb in Westminster Abbey.

I hope to have a good letter from Nan soon. May does the descriptions so well that I don't try it, being lazy.

Lu.

To Anna.

Sunday, July 24, 1870.

. . . The war along the Rhine is sending troops of travellers to Switzerland for refuge; and all the large towns are brimful of people flying from Germany. It won't trouble us, for we have done France and don't mean to do Germany. So when August is over, we shall trot forward to Italy, and find a warm place for our winter-quarters. At any time twenty-four hours carries us over the Simplon, so we sit at ease and don't care a straw for old France and Prussia. Russia, it is reported, has joined in the fight, but Italy and England are not going to meddle, so we can fly to either " in case of fire." 1

1 This was a family joke as Mrs. Alcott always ended her instructions to her children " in case of fire."

Bex, July 27, 1870.

We heard of Dickens's death some weeks ago and have been reading notices, etc., in all the papers since. One by G. Greenwood in the Tribune was very nice.

I shall miss my old Charlie, but he is not the old idol he once was. . . .

Did you know that Higginson and a little girl friend had written out the Operatic Tragedy in “ Little Women “ and set the songs to music and it was all to be put in “ Our Young Folks.” What are we coming to in our old age? Also I hope to see the next designs N. has got for “ Little Women.” I know nothing about them.

To her Mother.

3 p.m., Bex, July 31, 1870.

Papers are suppressed by the Government so we know nothing about the war, except the rumors that float about. But people seem to think that Europe is in for a general fight, and there is no guessing when it will end.

The trouble about getting into Italy is, that civil war always breaks out there and things are so mixed up that strangers get into scrapes among the different squabblers. When the P.’s were abroad during the last Italian fuss, they got shut up in some little city and would have been killed by Austrians, who were rampaging round the place drunk and mad, if a woman had not hid them in a closet for a day and night, and smuggled them out at last, when they ran for their lives. I don’t mean to get into any mess, and between Switzerland and England we can manage for a winter. London is so near home and so home-like that we shall be quite handy and can run up to Boston at any time. Perhaps Pa will step across to see us.

All these plans may be knocked in the head tomorrow and my next letter may be dated from the Pope’s best parlor or Windsor Castle; but I like to spin about on ups and downs so you can have something to talk about at Apple Slump. Uncertainty gives a relish to things, so we chase about and have a dozen plans a day. It is an Alcott failing you know. . . .

Love to all and bless you, Ever yours, Lu.

Bex, Aug. 7, 1870.

Dear Mr. Niles, — I keep receiving requests from editors to write for their papers and magazines. I am truly grateful, but having come abroad for rest I am not inclined to try the treadmill till my year’s vacation is over. So to appease these worthy gentlemen and excuse my seeming idleness I send you a trifle in rhyme,1 which you can (if you think it worth the trouble) set going as a general answer to everybody; for I can’t pay postage in replies to each separately, — “ it’s very costly.” Mr. F. said he would pay me $10, $15, $20 for any little things I would send him; so perhaps you will let him have it first.

The war makes the bankers take double toll on our money, so we feel very poor and as if we ought to be earning, not spending; only we are so lazy we can't bear to think of it in earnest. . . .

We shall probably go to London next month if the war forbids Italy for the winter; and if we can't get one dollar without paying five for it, we shall come home disgusted.

Perhaps if I can do nothing else this year I could have a book of short stories, old and new, for Christmas. F. and F. have some good ones, and I have the right to use them. We could call them "Jo March's Necessity 1 This is the poem prefixed to the chapter.

Stories." Would it go with new ones added and good illustrations?

I am rising from my ashes in a most phoenix-like manner. L. M. A.

To her Mother.

Vevay, Pension Paradis, Aug. n, 1870.

Dear Marmee, — ... This house is very cosey, and the food excellent. I thought it would be when I heard gentlemen liked it, — they always want good fodder. There are only three now, — an old Spaniard and his son, and a young Frenchman. We see them at meals, and the girls play croquet with them. . . .

This is the gay season here, and in spite of the war Vevay is full. The ex-Queen of Spain and her family are here at the Grand Hotel; also Don Carlos, the rightful heir to the Spanish throne. Our landlady says that her house used to be full of Spaniards, who every day went in crowds to call on the two kings, Alphonse and Carlos. We see brown men and women with black eyes driving round in fine coaches, with servants in livery, who I suppose are the Court people.

The papers tell us that the French have lost two big battles; the Prussians are in Strasbourg, and Paris in a state of siege. The papers are also full of theatrical messages from the French to the people, asking them to come up and be slaughtered for la patrie, and sober, cool reports from the Prussians. I side with the Prussians, for they sympathized with us in our war. Hooray for old Pruss! . . .

France is having a bad time. Princess Clotilde passed through Geneva the other day with loads of baggage, flying to Italy; and last week a closed car with the imperial arms on it went by here in the night, — supposed to be Matilde and other royal folks flying away from Paris. The Prince Imperial has been sent home from the seat of war; and poor Eugenie is doing her best to keep things quiet in Paris. The French here say that a republic is already talked of; and the Emperor is on his last legs in every way. He is sick, and his doctor won't let him ride, and so nervous he can't command the army as he wanted to. Poor old man! one can't help pitying him when all his plans fail.

We still dawdle along, getting fat and hearty. The food is excellent. A breakfast of coffee and tip-top bread, fresh butter, with eggs or fried potatoes, at 8; a real French dinner at 1.30, of soup, fish, meat, game, salad, sweet messes, and fruit, with wine; and at 7 cold meat, salad, sauce, tea, and bread and butter. It is grape time now, and for a few cents we get pounds, on which we feast all day at intervals. We walk and play as well as any one, and feel so well I ought to do something. . . .

Fred and Jack would like to look out of my window now and see the little boys playing in the lake. They are there all day long like little pigs, and lie around on the warm stones to dry, splashing one another for exercise. One boy, having washed himself, is now washing his clothes, and all lying out to dry together. . . .

Ever yours, Lu.

To Anna.

Vevay, Aug. 21, 1870.

I had such a droll dream last night I must tell you. I thought I was returning to Concord after my trip, and was alone. As I walked from the station I missed Mr. Moore's house, and turning the corner, found the scene so changed that I did not know where I was. Our house was gone, and in its place stood a great gray stone castle, with towers and arches and lawns and bridges, very fine and antique. Somehow I got into it without meeting any one of you, and wandered about trying to find my family. At last I came across Mr. Moore, papering a room, and asked him where his house was. He did n't know me, and said, —

"Oh! I sold it to Mr. Alcott for his school, and we live in Acton now."

"Where did Mr. Alcott get the means to build this great concern?" I asked.

"Well, he gave his own land, and took the great pasture his daughter left him, — the one that died some ten years ago."

"So I am dead, am I?" says I to myself, feeling so queerly.

"Government helped build this place, and Mr. A. has a fine college here," said Mr. Moore, papering away again.

I went on, wondering at the news, and looked into a glass to see how I looked dead. I found myself a fat old lady, with gray hair and specs, — very like E. P. P. I laughed, and coming to a Gothic window, looked out and saw hundreds of young men and boys in a queer flowing dress, roaming about the parks and lawns; and among them was Pa, looking as he looked thirty years ago, with brown hair and a big white neckcloth, as in the old times. He looked so plump and placid and young and happy I was charmed to see him, and nodded; but he did n't know me; and I was so grieved and troubled at being a Rip Van Winkle, I cried, and said I had better go away and not disturb any one, — and in the midst of my woe, I woke up. It was all so clear and funny, I can't help thinking that it may be a foreshadowing of something real. I used to dream of being famous, and it has partly become true; so why not Pa's college blossom, and he get young and happy with his disciples? I only hope he won't quite forget me when I come back, fat and gray and old. Perhaps his dream is to come in another world, where everything is fresh and calm, and the reason why he did n't recognize me was because I was still in this work-a-day world, and so felt old and strange in this lovely castle in the air. Well, he is welcome to my fortune; but the daughter who did die ten years ago is more likely to be the one who helped him build his School of Concord up aloft.

I can see how the dream came; for I had been looking at Silling's boys in their fine garden, and wishing I could go in and know the dear little lads walking about there, in the forenoon. I had got a topknot at the barber's, and talked about my gray hairs, and looking in the glass thought how fat and old I was getting, and had shown the B.'s Pa's picture, which they thought saintly, etc. I believe in dreams, though I am free to confess that " cowcumbers " for tea may have been the basis of this " ally-gorry-cal wision." . . .

As we know the Consul at Spezzia, — that is, we have letters to him, as well as to many folks in Rome, etc., — I guess we shall go; for the danger of Europe getting into the fight is over now, and we can sail to England or home any time from Italy. . . . Love to every one.

Kiss my cousin for me.

Ever your Lu.

To Mr. Niles.

August 23, 1870.

Your note of August 2 has just come, with a fine budget of magazines and a paper, for all of which many thanks.

Don't give my address to any one. I don't want the young ladies' notes. They can send them to Concord, and I shall get them next year.

The boys at Silling's school are a perpetual source of delight to me; and I stand at the gate, like the Peri, longing to go in and play with the lads. The young ladies who want to find live Lauries can be supplied here, for Silling has a large assortment always on hand.

My B. says she is constantly trying to incite me to literary effort, but I hang fire. So I do, — but only that I may go off with a bang by and by, a la mitrailleuse.

L. M. A.

To her Family.

Vevay, Aug. 29, 1870.

Dear People, — . . . M. Nicaud, the owner of this house, — a funny old man, with a face so like a parrot that we call him M. Perrot, — asked us to come and visit him at his chalet up among the hills. He is building a barn there, and stays to see that all goes well; so we only see him on Sundays, when he convulses us by his funny ways. Last week seven of us went up in a big landau, and the old dear entertained us like a prince. We left the carriage at the foot of a little steep path, and climbed up to the dearest old chalet we ever saw. Here Pa Nicaud met us, took us up the outside steps into his queer little salon, and regaled us with his sixty-year old wine and nice little cakes. We then set forth, in spite of clouds and wind, to view the farm and wood. It showered at intervals, but no one seemed to care; so we trotted about under umbrellas, getting mushrooms, flowers, and colds, viewing the Tarpeian Rock, and sitting on rustic seats to enjoy the belle vue, which consisted of fog. It was such a droll lark that we laughed and ran, and enjoyed the damp picnic very much. Then we had a tip-top Swiss dinner, followed by coffee, three sorts of wine, and cigars. Every one smoked, and as it poured guns, the old Perrot had a blazing fire made, round which we sat, talking many languages, singing, and revelling. We had hardly got through dinner and seen another foggy view when tea was announced, and we stuffed again, having pitchers of cream, fruit, and a queer but very nice dish of slices of light bread dipped in egg and fried, and eaten with sugar. The buxom Swiss maid flew and grinned, and kept serving up some new mess from her tiny dark kitchen. It cleared off, and we walked home in spite of our immense exploits in the eating line. Old Perrot escorted us part way down, and we gave three cheers for him as we parted. Then we showed Madame and the French governess and Don Juan (the Spanish boy) some tall walking, though the roads were very steep and rough and muddy. We tramped some five miles; and our party (May, A., the governess, and I) got home long before Madame and Don Juan, who took a short cut, and would n’t believe that we did n’t get a lift somehow. I felt quite proud of my old pins; for they were not tired, and none the worse for the long walk. I think they are really all right now, for the late cold weather has not troubled them in the least; and I sleep — O ye gods, how I do sleep! — ten or twelve hours sound, and get up so drunk with dizziness it is lovely to see. Aint I grateful? Oh, yes! oh, yes!

We began French lessons to-day, May and I, of the French governess, — a kind old girl who only asks two francs a lesson. We must speak the language, for it is disgraceful to be so stupid; so we have got to work, and mean to be able to parlez-vous or die. The war is still a nuisance, and we may be here some time, and really need some work; for we are so lazy we shall be spoilt, if we don't fall to. . . .

I gave Count C. Pa's message, and he was pleased. He reads no English, and is going to Hungary soon; so Pa had better not send the book. . . . Lu.

Vevay, Sept. 10, 1870.

Dear People, — As all Europe seems to be going to destruction, I hasten to drop a line before the grand smash arrives. We mean to skip over the Alps next week, if weather and war permit; for we are bound to see Milan and the lakes, even if we have to turn and come back without a glimpse of Rome. The Pope is beginning to perk up; and Italy and England and Russia seem ready to join in the war, now that France is down. Think of Paris being bombarded and smashed up like Strasbourg. We never shall see the grand old cathedral at Strasbourg now, it is so spoilt.

Vevay is crammed with refugees from Paris and Strasbourg. Ten families applied here yesterday. . . .

Our house is brimful, and we have funny times. The sick Russian lady and her old Ma make a great fuss if a breath of air comes in at meal times, and expect twenty people to sit shut tight in a smallish room for an hour on a hot day. We protested, and Madame put them in the parlor, where they glower as we pass, and lock the door when they can. The German Professor is learning English, and is a quiet, pleasant man. The Polish General, a little cracked, is very droll, and bursts out in the middle of the general chat with stories about transparent apples and golden horses. . . . Benda, the crack book-and- picture man, has asked May if she was the Miss Alcott who wrote the popular books; for he said he had many calls for them, and wished to know where they could be found. We told him "at London," and felt pulfed up. . . .

May and I delve away at French; but it makes my head ache, and I don't learn enough to pay for the trouble. I never could study, you know, and suffer such agony when I try that it is piteous to behold. The little brains I have left I want to keep for future works, and not exhaust them on grammar, — vile invention of Satan! May gets on slowly, and don't have fits after it \ so she had better go on (the lessons only cost two francs). ... L. M. A.

To her Mother.

Lago di Como, Oct. 8, 1870.

Dearest Marmee, — A happy birthday, and many of 'em! Here we actually are in the long-desired Italy, and find it as lovely as we hoped. Our journey was a perfect success, — sunlight, moonlight, magnificent scenery, pleasant company, no mishaps, and one long series of beautiful pictures all the way.

Crossing the Simplon is an experience worth having; for without any real danger, fatigue, or hardship, one sees some of the finest as well as most awful parts of these wonderful Alps.

The road, — a miracle in itself! for all Nature seems to protest against it, and the elements never tire of trying to destroy it. Only a Napoleon would have dreamed of making a path through such a place; and he only cared for it as a way to get his men and cannon into an enemy's country by this truly royal road.

May has told you about our trip; so I will only add a few bits that she forgot.

Our start in the dawn from Brieg, with two diligences, a carriage, and a cart, was something between a funeral and a caravan: first an immense diligence with seven horses, then a smaller one with four, then our caleche with two, and finally the carrier's cart with one. It was very exciting, — the general gathering of sleepy travellers in the dark square, the tramping of horses, the packing in, the grand stir of getting off; then the slow winding up, up, up out of the valley toward the sun, which came slowly over the great hills, rising as we never saw it rise before. The still, damp pine-forests kept us in shadow a long time after the white mountain-tops began to shine. Little by little we wound through a great gorge, and then the sun came dazzling between these grand hills, showing us a new world. Peak after peak of the Bernese Ober- land rose behind us, and great white glaciers lay before us; while the road crept like a narrow line, in and out, over chasms that made us dizzy to look at, under tunnels, and through stone galleries with windows over which dashed waterfalls from the glaciers above. Here and there were refuges, a hospice, and a few chalets, where shepherds live their wild, lonely lives. In the p. m. we drove rapidly down toward Italy through the great Valley of Gondo, — a deep rift in rock thousands of feet deep, and just wide enough for the road and a wild stream that was our guide; a never-to-be-forgotten place, and a fit gateway to Italy, which soon lay smiling below us. The change is very striking; and when we came to Lago Maggiore lying in the moonlight we could only sigh for happiness, and love and look and look. After a good night's rest at Stresa, we went in a charming gondola-sort of boat to see Isola Bella, — the island you see in the chromo over the fireplace at home, — a lovely island, with famous castle, garden, and town on it. The day was as balmy as summer, and we felt like butterflies after a frost, and fluttered about, enjoying the sunshine all day.

A sail by steamer brought us to Luino, where we went on the diligence to Lugano. Moonlight all the way, and a gay driver, who wound his horn as we clattered into market-places and over bridges in the most gallant style. The girls were on top, and in a state of rapture all the way. After supper in a vaulted, frescoed hall, with marble floors, pillars, and galleries, we went to a room which had green doors, red carpet, blue walls, and yellow bed-covers, — all so gay! It was like sleeping in a rainbow.

As if a heavenly lake under our windows with moonlight ad libitiwi was n't enough, we had music next door; and on leaning out of a little back window, we made the splendid discovery that we could look on to the stage of the opera-house across a little alley. My Nan can imagine with what rapture I stared at the scenes going on below me, and how I longed for her as I stood there wrapped in my yellow bed-quilt, and saw gallant knights in armor warble sweetly to plump ladies in masks, or pretty peasants fly wildly from ardent lovers in red tights; also a dishevelled maid who tore her hair in a forest, while a man aloft made thunder and lightning, — and I saw him do it!

It was the climax to a splendid day; for few travellers can go to the opera luxuriously in their night-gowns, and take naps between the acts as I did.

A lovely sail next morning down the lake; then a carriage to Menaggio; and then a droll boat, like a big covered market-wagon with a table and red-cushioned seats, took us and our trunks to Cadenabbia, for there is only a donkey road to the little town. At the hotel on the edge of the lake we found Nelly L., a sweet girl as lovely as Minnie, and so glad to see us; for since her mother died in Venice last year she has lived alone with her maid. She had waited for us, and next day went to Milan, where we join her on Monday. She paints; and May and she made plans at once to study together, and enjoy some of the free art-schools at Milan and Naples or Florence, if we can all be together. It is a great chance for May, and I mean she shall have a good time, and not wait for tools and teachers; for all is in the way of her profession, and of use to her.

Cadenabbia is only two hotels and a few villas opposite Bellagio, which is a town, and fashionable. We were rowed over to see it by our boatman, who spends his time at the front of the stone steps before the hotel, and whenever we go out he tells us, “ The lake is tranquil; the hour is come for a walk on the water,” and is as coaxing as only an Italian can be. He is amiably tipsy most of the time.

To-day it rains so we cannot go out, and I rest and write to my Marmee in a funny room with a stone floor inlaid till it looks like castile soap, a ceiling in fat cupids and trumpeting fairies, a window on the lake, with balcony, etc. Hand-organs with jolly singing boys jingle all day, and two big bears go by led by a man with a drum. The boys would laugh to see them dance on their hind legs, and shoulder sticks like soldiers.

... All looks well, and if the winter goes on rapidly and pleasantly as the summer we shall soon be thinking of home, unless one of us decides to stay. I shall post this at Milan to-morrow, and hope to find letters there from you. By-by till then.

Journal.

October, 1870. — A memorable month. . . . Off for Italy on the 2d. A splendid journey over the Alps and Maggiore by moonlight.

Heavenly days at the lakes, and so to Milan, Parma, Pisa, Bologna, and Florence. Disappointed in some things, but found Nature always lovely and wonderful; so did n't mind faded pictures, damp rooms, and the cold winds of " sunny Italy." Bought furs at Florence, and arrived in Rome one rainy night.

November 10th. — In Rome, and felt as if I had been there before and knew all about it. Always oppressed with a sense of sin, dirt, and general decay of all things. Not well; so saw things through blue glasses. May in bliss with lessons, sketching, and her dreams. A. had society, her house, and old friends. The artists were the best company; counts and princes very dull, what we saw of them. May and I went off on the Cam- pagna, and criticised all the world like two audacious Yankees.

Our apartment in Piazza Barbarini was warm and cosey; and I thanked Heaven for it, as it rained for two months, and my first view most of the time was the poor Triton with an icicle on his nose.

We pay $60 a month for six good rooms, and $6 a month for a girl, who cooks and takes care of us.

29th. — My thirty-eighth birthday. May gave me a pretty sketch, and A. a fine nosegay.

In Rome Miss Alcott was shocked and grieved by the news of the death of her well-beloved brother- in-law, Mr. Pratt. She has drawn so beautiful a picture of him in " Little Women " and in " Little Men," that it is hardly needful to dwell upon his character or the grief which his death caused her. With her usual care for others, her thoughts at once turned to the support of the surviving family, and she found comfort in writing " Little Men"

with the thought of the dear sister and nephews constantly in her heart.

In spite of this great sorrow and anxiety for the dear ones at home, the year of travel was very refreshing to her. Her companions were congenial, she took great delight in her sister's work, and she was independent in her plans, and could go whither and when she would.

The voyage home was a hard one; there was smallpox on board, but Miss Alcott fortunately escaped the infection. " Little Men " was out the day she arrived, as a bright red placard in the carriage announced, and besides all the loving welcomes from family and friends, she received the pleasing news that fifty thousand of the books were already sold.

But the old pains and weariness came home with her also. She could not stay in Concord, and went again to Boston, hoping to rest and work. Her young sister came home to brighten up the family with her hopeful, helpful spirit.

At forty years of age Louisa had accomplished the task she set for herself in youth. By unceasing toil she had made herself and her family independent; debts were all paid, and enough was invested to preserve them from want. And yet wants seemed to increase with their satisfaction, and she felt impelled to work enough to give to all the enjoyments and luxuries which were fitted to them after the necessaries were provided for. It may be that her own exhausted nervous condition made it impossible for her to rest, and the demand which she fancied came from without was the projection of her own thought.

Journal.

1871. — Rome. — Great inundation. Streets flooded, churches with four feet of water in them, and queer times for those who were in the overflowed quarters. Meals hoisted up at the window; people carried across the river-like streets to make calls; and all manner of funny doings. We were high and dry at Piazza Barbarini, and enjoyed the flurry.

To the Capitol often, to spend the a. m. with the Roman emperors and other great men. M. Aurelius as a boy was fine; Cicero looked very like W. Phillips; Agrip- pina in her chair was charming; but the other ladies, with hair a la sp07ige, were ugly; Nero & Co. a set of brutes and bad men. But a better sight to me was the crowd of poor people going to get the bread and money sent by the king; and the splendid snow-covered hills were finer than the marble beauty inside. Art tires; Nature never.

Professor Pierce and his party just from Sicily, where they had been to see the eclipse, — all beaming with delight, and well repaid for the long journey by a two 7M7iutes> squint at the sun when darkest.

Began to write a new book, “Little Men,” that John’s death may not leave A. and the dear little boys in want. John took care that they should have enough while the boys are young, and worked very hard to have a little sum to leave, without a debt anywhere.

In writing and thinking of the little lads, to whom I must be a father now, I found comfort for my sorrow. May went on with her lessons, “ learning,” as she wisely said, how little she knew and how to go on.

February. — A gay month in Rome, with the carnival, artists’ fancy ball, many parties, and much calling.

Decided to leave May for another year, as L. sends $700 on “ Moods,” and the new book will provide $1,000 for the dear girl; so she may be happy and free to follow her talent.

March. — Spent at Albano. A lovely place. Walk, write, and rest. A troop of handsome officers from Turin, who clatter by, casting soft glances at my two blonde signorinas, who enjoy it very much.[1] Baron and Baroness Rothschild were there, and the W.’s from Philadelphia, Dr. O. W. and wife, and S. B. Mrs. W. and A. B. talk all day, May sketches, I write, and so we go on. Went to look at rooms at the Bonapartes.

April. — Venice. Floated about for two weeks seeing sights. A lovely city for a short visit. Not enough going on to suit brisk Americans. May painted, A. hunted up old jewelry and friends, and I dawdled after them.

A very interesting trip to London, — over the Brenner Pass to Munich, Cologne, Antwerp, and by boat to London.

May. — A busy month. Settled in lodgings, Brompton Road, and went sight-seeing. Mrs. P. Taylor, Conway, and others very kind. Enjoyed showing May my favorite places and people.

A. B. went home on the nth, after a pleasant year with us. I am glad to know her, for she is true and very interesting. May took lessons of Rowbotham and was happy. “ Little Men “ came out in London.

I decided to go home on the 25th, as I am needed. A very pleasant year in spite of constant pain, John’s death, and home anxieties. Very glad I came, for May’s sake. It has been a very useful year for her.

June. — After an anxious passage of twelve days, got safely home. Small-pox on board, and my room-mate, Miss D., very ill. I escaped, but had a sober time lying next door to her, waiting to see if my turn was to come. She was left at the island, and I went up the harbor with Judge Russell, who took some of us off in his tug.

Father and T. N. came to meet me with a great red placard of “ Little Men” pinned up in the carriage. After due precautions, hurried home and found all well. My room refurnished and much adorned by Father’s earnings.

Nan well and calm, but under her sweet serenity is a very sad soul, and she mourns for her mate like a tender turtle-dove.

The boys were tall, bright lads, devoted to Marmee, and the life of the house.

Mother feeble and much aged by this year of trouble. I shall never go far away from her again. Much company, and loads of letters, all full of good wishes and welcome.

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[1] See Shawl Straps, p. 179.

"Little Men " was out the day I arrived. Fifty thousand sold before it was out.

A happy month, for I felt well for the first time in two years. I knew it would n't last, but enjoyed it heartily while it did, and was grateful for rest from pain and a touch of the old cheerfulness. It was much needed at home.

July, August, September. — Sick. Holiday soon over. Too much company and care and change of climate upset the poor nerves again. Dear Uncle S. J. May died; our best friend for years. Peace to his ashes. He leaves a sweeter memory behind him than any man I know. Poor Marmee is the last of her family now.

October. — Decided to go to B.; Concord is so hard for me, with its dampness and worry. Get two girls to do the work, and leave plenty of money and go to Beacon Street to rest and try to get well that I may work. A lazy life, but it seemed to suit; and anything is better than the invalidism I hate worse than death.

Bones ached less, and I gave up morphine, as sunshine, air, and quiet made sleep possible without it. Saw people, pictures, plays, and read all I could, but did not enjoy much, for the dreadful weariness of nerves makes even pleasure hard.

November. — May sent pleasant letters and some fine copies of Turner. She decides to come home, as she feels she is needed as I give out. Marmee is feeble, Nan has her boys and her sorrow, and one strong head and hand is wanted at home. A year and a half of holiday is a good deal, and duty comes first always. Sorry to call her back, but her eyes are troublesome, and housework will rest them and set her up. Then she can go again when I am better, for I don't want her to be thwarted in her work more than just enough to make her want it very much.

On the 19th she came. Well, happy, and full of sensible plans. A lively time enjoying the cheerful element she always brings into the house. Piles of pictures, merry adventures, and interesting tales of the fine London lovers.

Kept my thirty-ninth ' and Father's seventy-second birthday in the old way.

Thanksgiving dinner at Pratt Farm. All well and all together. Much to give thanks for.

December. — Enjoyed my quiet, sunny room very much; and this lazy life seems to suit me, for I am better, mind and body. All goes well at home, with May to run the machine in her cheery, energetic style, and amuse Marmee and Nan with gay histories. Had a

furnace put in, and all enjoyed the new climate. No more rheumatic fevers and colds, with picturesque open fires. Mother is to be cosey if money can do it. She seems to be now, and my long-cherished dream has come true; for she sits in a pleasant room, with no work, no care, no poverty to worry, but peace and comfort all about her, and children glad and able to stand between trouble and her. Thank the Lord! I like to stop and “ remember my mercies.” Working and waiting for them makes them very welcome.

Went to the ball for the Grand Duke Alexis. A fine sight, and the big blonde boy the best of all. Would dance with the pretty girls, and leave the Boston dowagers and their diamonds in the lurch.

To the Radical Club, where the philosophers mount their hobbies and prance away into time and space, while we gaze after them and try to look wise.

A merry Christmas at home. Tree for the boys, family dinner, and frolic in the evening.

A varied, but on the whole a good year, in spite of pain. Last Christmas we were in Rome, mourning for John. What will next Christmas bring forth? I have no ambition now but to keep the family comfortable and not ache any more. Pain has taught me patience, I hope, if nothing more.

January, 1872. — Roberts Brothers paid $4,400 as six months’ receipts for the books. A fine New Year’s gift. S. E. S. invested $3,000, and the rest I put in the bank for family needs. Paid for the furnace and all the bills. What bliss it is to be able to do that and ask no help!

Mysterious bouquets came from some unknown admirer or friend. Enjoyed them very much, and felt quite grateful and romantic as day after day the lovely great nosegays were handed in by the servant of the unknown.

February and March. — At Mrs. Stowe’s desire, wrote for the “ Christian Union “ an account of our journey through France, and called it “ Shawl Straps.” . . . Many calls and letters and invitations, but I kept quiet, health being too precious to risk, and sleep still hard to get for the brain that would work instead of rest.

Heard lectures, — Higginson, Bartol, Frothingham, and Rabbi Lilienthal. Much talk about religion. I’d like to see a little more really lived.

April and May. — Wrote another sketch for the “Independent,” — “A French Wedding;” and the events of my travels paid my winter’s expenses. All is fish that comes to the literary net. Goethe puts his joys and sorrows into poems; I turn my adventures into bread and butter.

June, 1872. — Home, and begin a new task. Twenty years ago I resolved to make the family independent if I could. At forty that is done. Debts all paid, even the outlawed ones, and we have enough to be comfortable. It has cost me my health, perhaps; but as I still live, there is more for me to do, I suppose.

CHAPTER X.

FAMILY CHANGES.

TRANSFIGURATION.

(This poem was first published anonymously in “The Masque of Poets,” in 1878)

IN MEMORIAM.

Lines written by Louisa M. Alcott on the death of her mother.

Mysterious death! who in a single hour
Life’s gold can so refine,
And by thy art divine
Change mortal weakness to immortal power!

Bending beneath the weight of eighty years,
Spent with the noble strife
Of a victorious life,
We watched her fading heavenward, through our tears.

But ere the sense of loss our hearts had wrung,
A miracle was wrought;
And swift as happy thought
She lived again, — brave, beautiful, and young.

Age, pain, and sorrow dropped the veils they wore
And showed the tender eyes Of angels in disguise,
Whose discipline so patiently she bore.

The past years brought their harvest rich and fair;
While memory and love,
Together, fondly wove A golden garland for the silver hair.

How could we mourn like those who are bereft,
When every pang of grief Found balm for its relief
In counting up the treasures she had left? —

Faith that withstood the shocks of toil and time;
Hope that defied despair; Patience that conquered care;
And loyalty, whose courage was sublime;

The great deep heart that was a home for all, —
Just, eloquent, and strong
In protest 'gainst wrong;
Wide charity, that knew no sin, no fall;

The spartan spirit that made life so grand,
Mating poor daily needs
With high, heroic deeds,
That wrested happiness from
Fate's hard hand.

We thought to weep, but sing for joy instead,
Full of the grateful peace That follows her release;
For nothing but the weary dust lies dead.

Oh, noble woman! never more a queen
Than in the laying down
Of sceptre and of crown
To win a greater kingdom, yet unseen:

Teaching us how to seek the highest goal,
To earn the true success, —
To live, to love, to bless, —
And make death proud to take a royal soul.

THE history of the next six years offers little variety of incident in Miss Alcott's busy life. She could not work at home in Concord as well as in some quiet lodging in Boston, where she was more free from interruption from visitors; but she spent her summers with her mother, often taking charge of the housekeeping. In 1872 she wrote " Work," one of her most successful books. She had begun it some time before, and originally called it " Success." It represents her own personal experience more than any other book. She says to a friend: " Christie's adventures are many of them my own; Mr. Power is Mr. Parker; Mrs. Wilkins is imaginary, and all the rest. This was begun at eighteen, and never finished till H. W. Beecher wrote to me for a serial for the ' Christian Union' in 1872, and paid $3,000 for it."

Miss Alcott again sent May to Europe in 1873 to finish her studies, and herself continued writing stories to pay the expenses of the family. The mother's serious illness weighed heavily on Louisa's heart, and through the summer of 1873 she was devoted to the invalid, rejoicing in her partial recovery, though sadly feeling that she would never be her bright energetic self again. Mrs. Alcott was able, however, to keep her birthday (October 8) pleasantly, and out of this experience came a story called " A Happy Birthday." This little tale paid for carriages for the invalid. It is included in “ Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag.”

Louisa and her mother decided to spend the winter in Boston, while Mr. Alcott was at the West. Her thoughts dwell much upon her father’s life, and she is not content that he has not all the recognition and enjoyment that she would gladly give him. She helps her mother to perform the sacred duty of placing a tablet on Colonel May’s grave, and the dear old lady recognizes that her life has gone down into the past, and says, “ This is n’t my Boston, and I never want to see it any more.”

Louisa was at this time engaged in writing for “ St. Nicholas “ and “ The Independent.”

The return of the young artist, happy in her success, brings brightness to the home-circle. In the winter of 1875 Miss Alcott takes her old place at the Bellevue, where May can have her drawing- classes. She was herself ill, and the words, “ No sleep without morphine! “ tell the story of nervous suffering.

Journal.

July, 1872. — May makes a lovely hostess, and I fly round behind the scenes, or skip out of the back window when ordered out for inspection by the inquisitive public. Hard work to keep things running smoothly, for this sight-seeing fiend is a new torment to us.

August. — May goes to Clark’s Island for rest, having kept hotel long enough. I say “ No,” and shut the door. People must learn that authors have some rights; I can’t entertain a dozen a day, and write the tales they demand also. I’m but a human worm, and when walked on must turn in self-defence.

Reporters sit on the wall and take notes; artists sketch me as I pick pears in the garden; and strange women interview Johnny as he plays in the orchard.

It looks like impertinent curiosity to me; but it is called “ fame,” and considered a blessing to be grateful for, I find. Let ‘em try it.

September. — To Walcott, with Father and Fred. A quaint, lovely old place is the little house on Spindle Hill, where the boy Amos dreamed the dreams that have come true at last.

Got hints for my novel, “ The Cost of an Idea,” if I ever find time to write it.

Don’t wonder the boy longed to climb those hills, and see what lay beyond.

October. — Went to a room in Allston Street, in a quiet, old-fashioned house. I can’t work at home, and need to be alone to spin, like a spider.

Rested; walked; to the theatre now and then. Home once a week with books, etc., for Marmee and Nan. Prepared “Shawl Straps” for Roberts.

November. — Forty on the 29th. Got Father off for the West, all neat and comfortable. I enjoyed every penny spent, and had a happy time packing his new trunk with warm flannels, neat shirts, gloves, etc., and seeing the dear man go off in a new suit, overcoat, hat, and all, like a gentleman. We both laughed over the pathetic old times with tears in our eyes, and I reminded him of the “ poor as poverty, but serene as heaven “ saying.

Something to do came just as I was trying to see what to take up, for work is my salvation. H. W. Beecher sent one of the editors of the “ Christian Union “ to ask for a serial story. They have asked before, and offered $2,000, which I refused; now they offered $3,000, and I accepted.

Got out the old manuscript of “ Success,” and called it “ Work.” Fired up the engine, and plunged into a vortex, with many doubts about getting out. Can’t work slowly; the thing possesses me, and I must obey till it’s done. One thousand dollars was sent as a seal on the bargain, so I was bound, and sat at the oar like a galley-slave.

F. wanted eight little tales, and offered $35 apiece; used to pay $10. Such is fame! At odd minutes I wrote the short ones, and so paid my own expenses. “ Shawl Straps,” Scrap-Bag, No. 2, came out, and went well.

Great Boston fire; up all night. Very splendid and terrible sight.

December. — Busy with “ Work.” Write three pages at once on impression paper, as Beecher, Roberts, and Low of London all want copy at once.

[This was the cause of the paralysis of my thumb, which disabled me for the rest of my life. — L.M.A.]

Nan and the boys came to visit me, and break up the winter. Rested a little, and played with them.

Father very busy and happy. On his birthday had a gold-headed cane given him. He is appreciated out there.

During these western trips, Mr. Alcott found that his daughter’s fame added much to the warmth of his reception. On his return he loved to tell how he was welcomed as the “ grandfather of’ Little Women.’ “ When he visited schools, he delighted the young audiences by satisfying their curiosity as to the author of their favorite book, and the truth of the characters and circumstances described in it.

Boston, 1872.

Dear Marmee, — Had a very transcendental day yesterday, and at night my head was “ swelling wisibly “ with the ideas cast into it.

The club was a funny mixture of rabbis and weedy old ladies, the “ oversoul “ and oysters. Papa and B. flew clean out of sight like a pair of Platonic balloons, and we tried to follow, but couldn’t.

In the p.m. went to R. W. E.’s reading. All the literary birds were out in full feather. This “ ‘umble “ worm was treated with distinguished condescension. Dr. B. gave me his noble hand to press, and murmured compliments with the air of a bishop bestowing a benediction. Dear B. beamed upon me from the depths of his funny little cloak and said, “We are getting on well, ain’t we?” W. bowed his Jewish head, and rolled his fine eye at me. Several dreadful women purred about me, and I fled.

M. said what I liked, — that he ‘d sent my works to his mother, and the good old lady told him to tell me that she could n’t do a stroke of work, but just sat and read ‘em right through; she wished she was young so as to have a long life in which to keep on enjoying such books. The peacock liked that.

I have paid all my own expenses out of the money earned by my little tales; so I have not touched the family income.

Did n’t mean to write; but it has been an expensive winter, and my five hundred has made me all right. The $500 I lent K. makes a difference in the income; but I could not refuse her, she was so kind in the old hard times At the reading a man in front of me sat listening and knitting his brows for a time, but had to give it up and go to sleep. After it was over some one said to him, “ Well, what do you think of it? “ “ It’s all very fine I have no doubt; but I’m blessed if I can understand a word of it,” was the reply. . . .

The believers glow when the oracle is stuck, rustle and beam when he is audible, and nod and smile as if they understood perfectly when he murmurs under the desk! We are a foolish set!

Journal.

January, 1873. — Getting on well with “ Work; “ have to go slowly now for fear of a break-down. All well at home.

A week at Newport with Miss Jane Stewart. Dinners, balls, calls, etc. Saw Higginson and “ H. H.” Soon tired of gayety, and glad to get home to my quiet den and pen.

Roberts Brothers paid me $2,022 for books. S. E. S. invested most of it, with the $1,000 F. sent. Gave C. M. $100, — a thank-offering for my success. I like to help the class of “ silent poor “ to which we belonged for so many years, — needy, but respectable, and forgotten because too proud to beg. Work difficult to find for such people, and life made very hard for want of a little money to ease the necessary needs.

February andMarch. — Anna very ill with pneumonia; home to nurse her. Father telegraphed to come home, as we thought her dying. She gave me her boys; but the dear saint got well, and kept the lads for herself. Thank God!

Back to my work with what wits nursing left me.

Had Johnny for a week, to keep all quiet at home. Enjoyed the sweet little soul very much, and sent him back much better.

Finished " Work," — twenty chapters. Not what it should be, — too many interruptions. Should like to do one book in peace, and see if it would n't be good.

April — The job being done I went home to take May's place. Gave her $1,000, and sent her to London for a year of study. She sailed on the 26th, brave and happy and hopeful. I felt that she needed it, and was glad to be able to help her.

I spent seven months in Boston; wrote a book and ten tales; earned $3,250 by my pen, and am satisfied with my winter's work.

May. — D. F. wanted a dozen little tales, and agreed to pay $50 apiece, if I give up other things for this.

Said I would, as I can do two a day, and keep house between times. Cleaned and grubbed, and didn't mind the change. Let head rest, and heels and feet do the work.

Cold and dull; but the thought of May free and happy was my comfort as I messed about.

June and July. — Settled the servant question by getting a neat American woman to cook and help me with the housework.

Peace fell upon our troubled souls, and all went well. Good meals, tidy house, cheerful service, and in the p. m. an intelligent young person to read and sew with us.

It was curious how she came to us. She had taught and sewed, and was tired, and wanted something else; decided to try for a housekeeper's place, but happened to read "Work," and thought she'd do as Christie did, — take anything that came.

I was the first who answered her advertisement, and when she found I wrote the book, she said, " I'LL go and see if Miss A. practises as she preaches."

She found I did, and we had a good time together. My new helper did so well I took pale Johnny to the seaside for a week; but was sent for in haste, as poor Marmee was very ill. Mental bewilderment came after one of her heart troubles (the dropsy affected the brain), and for three weeks we had a sad time. Father and I took care of her, and my good A. S. kept house nicely and faithfully for me.

Marmee slowly came back to herself, but sadly feeble, — never to be our brave, energetic leader any more. She felt it, and it was hard to convince her that there was no need of her doing anything but rest.

August, September, October. — Mother improved steadily. Father went to the Alcott festival in Walcott, A.

and boys to Conway for a month; and it did them all much good.

I had quiet days with Marmee; drove with her, and had the great pleasure of supplying all her needs and fancies.

May busy and happy in London. A merry time on Mother's birthday, October 8. All so glad to have her still here; for it seemed as if we were to lose her.

Made a little story of it for F., — "A Happy Birthday," — and spent the $50 in carriages for her.

November and December. — Decided that it was best not to try a cold, lonely winter in C., but go to B. with Mother, Nan, and boys, and leave Father free for the West.

Took sunny rooms at the South End, near the Park, so the lads could play out and Marmee walk. She enjoyed the change, and sat at her window watching people, horse-cars, and sparrows with great interest. Old friends came to see her, and she was happy. Found a nice school for the boys; and Nan enjoyed her quiet days.

January, 1874. — Mother quite ill this month. Dr. Wesselhoeft does his best for the poor old body, now such a burden to her. The slow decline has begun, and she knows it, having nursed her mother to the same end.

Father disappointed and rather sad, to be left out of so much that he would enjoy and should be asked to help and adorn. A little more money, a pleasant house and time to attend to it, and I'd bring all the best people to see and entertain him. When I see so much twaddle going on I wonder those who can don't get up something better, and have really good things.

When I had the youth I had no money; now I have the money I have no time; and when I get the time, if I ever do, I shall have no health to enjoy life. I suppose it's the discipline I need; but it's rather hard to love the things I do and see them go by because duty chains me to my galley. If I come into port at Last with all sail set that will be reward perhaps.

Life always was a puzzle to me, and gets more mysterious as I go on. I shall find it out by and by and see that it's all right, if I can only keep brave and patient to the end.

May still in London painting Turners, and doing pretty panels as " pot-boilers." They sell well, and she is a thrifty child. Good luck to our mid-summer girl.

February. — Father has several conversations at the Clubs and Societies and Divinity School. No one pays anything; but they seem glad to listen. There ought to be a place for him.

Nan busy with her boys, and they doing well at school, — good, gay, and intelligent; a happy mother and most loving little sons.

I wrote two tales, and got $200. Saw Charles Kings- ley, — a pleasant man. His wife has Alcott relations, and likes my books. Asked us to come and see him in England; is to bring his daughters to Concord by and by.

March. — May came home with a portfolio full of fine work. Must have worked like a busy bee to have done so much.

Very happy in her success; for she has proved her talent, having copied Turner so well that Ruskin (meeting her in the National Gallery at work) told her that she had “ caught Turner’s spirit wonderfully.” She has begun to copy Nature, and done well. Lovely sketches of the cloisters in Westminster Abbey, and other charming things.

I write a story for all my men, and make up the $1,000 I planned to earn by my “ pot-boilers “ before we go back to C.

A tablet to Grandfather May is put in Stone Chapel, and one Sunday a.m. we take Mother to see it. A pathetic sight to see Father walk up the broad aisle with the feeble old wife on his arm as they went to be married nearly fifty years ago. Mother sat alone in the old pew a little while and sung softly the old hymns; for it was early, and only the sexton there. He asked who she was, and said his father was sexton in Grandfather’s time.

Several old ladies came in and knew Mother. She broke down thinking of the time when she and her mother and sisters and father and brothers all went to church together, and we took her home saying, “This isn’t my Boston; all my friends are gone; I never want to see it any more.”

[She never did. — L.M.A.]

April and May. — Back to Concord, after May and I had put all in fine order and made the old house lovely with her pictures. When all were settled, with May to keep house, I went to B. for rest, and took a room in Joy Street.

The Elgin Watch Company offered me a gold watch or $100 for a tale. Chose the money, and wrote the story “ My Rococo Watch “ 1 for them.

October. — Took two nice rooms at the Hotel Bellevue for the winter; May to use one for her classes. Tried to work on my book, but was in such pain could not do much. Got no sleep without morphine. Tried old Dr. Hewett, who was sure he could cure the woe. . . .

November. — Funny time with the publishers about the 1 In Spinning-Wheel Stories.

tale; for all wanted it at once, and each tried to outbid the other for an unwritten story. I rather enjoyed it, and felt important with Roberts, Low, and Scribner all clamoring for my “ ‘umble “ works. No peddling poor little manuscripts now, and feeling rich with $10. The golden goose can sell her eggs for a good price, if she is n’t killed by too much driving.

December. — Better and busier than last month.

All well at home, and Father happy among his kind Westerners. Finish “ Eight Cousins,” and get ready to do the temperance tale, for F. offers $700 for six chapters, — “ Silver Pitchers.”

January, 1875. — . . . Father flourishing about the Western cities, “riding in Louisa’s chariot, and adored as the grandfather of 4 Little Women,’ “ he says.

February. — Finish my tale and go to Vassar College on a visit. See M. M., talk with four hundred girls, write in stacks of albums and school-books, and kiss every one who asks me. Go to New York; am rather lionized, and run away; but things look rather jolly, and I may try a winter there some time, as I need a change and new ideas.

March. — Home again, getting ready for the centennial fuss.

April. — On the 19th a grand celebration. General break-down, owing to an unwise desire to outdo all the other towns; too many people. . . .

Miss Alcott was very much interested in the question of Woman Suffrage, and exerted herself to get up a meeting in Concord. The subject was then very unpopular, and there was an ill-bred effort to destroy the meeting by noise and riot. Although not fond of speaking in public, she always put herself bravely on the side of the unpopular cause, and lent to it all the argument of her heroic life. When Mrs. Livermore lectured at Concord, Miss Alcott sat up all night talking with her on the great question. She had an opportunity of trying which was most exhausting, abuse or admiration, when she went to a meeting of the Women’s Congress at Syracuse, in October. She was introduced to the audience by Mrs. Liver- more, and the young people crowded about her like bees about a honeycomb. She was waylaid in the streets, petitioned for autographs, kissed by gushing young maidens, and made emphatically the lion of the hour. It was all so genial and spontaneous, that she enjoyed the fun. No amount of adulation ever affected the natural simplicity of her manners. She neither despised nor overrated her fame; but was glad of it as a proof of success in what she was ever aiming to do. She spent a few weeks in New York enjoying the gay and literary society which was freely opened to her; but finding most satisfaction in visiting the Tombs, Newsboys’ Home, and Randall’s Island, for she liked these things better than parties and dinners.

Journal.

June, July, August, 1875. — Kept house at home, with two Irish incapables to trot after, and ninety-two guests in one month to entertain. Fame is an expensive luxury. I can do without it. This is my worst scrape, I think. I asked for bread, and got a stone, — in the shape of a pedestal.

September and October, 1875. — I go to Woman's Congress in Syracuse, and see Niagara. Funny time with the girls.

Write loads of autographs, dodge at the theatre, and am kissed to death by gushing damsels. One energetic lady grasped my hand in the crowd, exclaiming, " If you ever come to Oshkosh, your feet will not be allowed to touch the ground: you will be borne in the arms of the people! Will you come? " "Never," responded Miss A., trying to look affable, and dying to laugh as the good soul worked my arm like a pump-handle, and from the gallery generations of girls were looking on. "This, this, is fame!"

November, December. — Take a room at Bath Hotel, New York, and look about me. Miss Sally Holly is here, and we go about together. She tells me much of her life among the freedmen, and Mother is soon deep in barrels of clothes, food, books, etc., for Miss A. to take back with her.

See many people, and am very gay for a country-mouse. Society unlike either London or Boston.

Go to Sorosis, and to Mrs. Botta's, O. B. Frothing- ham's, Miss Booth's, and Mrs. Croly's receptions.

Visit the Tombs, Newsboys' Home, and Randall's Island on Christmas Day with Mrs. Gibbons. A memorable day. Make a story of it. Enjoy these things more than the parties and dinners.

To Mrs. Dodge.

New York, Oct. 5, 1875.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — So far, New York seems inviting, though I have not seen or done much but "gawk round " as the country folks do. I have seen Niagara, and enjoyed my vacation very much, especially the Woman's Congress in Syracuse. I was made a member, so have the honor to sign myself, Yours truly, L. M. Alcott, M. C.

To her Father.

New York, Nov. 26, 1875.

Dear Seventy-six, — As I have nothing else to send you on our joint birthday, I 'll despatch a letter about some of the people I have lately seen in whom you take an interest.

Tuesday we heard Gough on " Blunders," and it was very good, — both witty and wise, earnest and sensible. Wednesday eve to Mr. Frothingham's for his Fraternity Club meeting. Pleasant people. Ellen F.; Abby Sage Richardson, a very lovely woman; young Putnam and wife; Mrs. Stedman; Mattie G. and her spouse, Dr. B., who read a lively story of Mormon life; Mrs. Dodge; O. Johnson and wife, and many more whose names I forget.

After the story the given subject for discussion was brought up, — " Conformity and Noncomformity." Mr. B., a promising young lawyer, led one side, Miss B. the other, and Mr. F. was in the chair. It was very lively; and being called upon, I piped up, and went in for nonconformity when principle was concerned. Got patted on the head for my remarks, and didn't disgrace myself except by getting very red and talking fast.

Ellen F. was very pleasant, and asked much about May. Proudly I told of our girl's achievements, and E. hoped she would come to New York. Mrs. Richardson was presented, and we had some agreeable chat. She is a great friend of O. B. F., and is lecturing here on "Literature." Shall go and hear her, as she is coming to see me.

O. B. F. was as polished and clear and cool and witty as usual; most gracious to the " 'umble " Concord worm; and Mrs. F. asked me to come and see them.

Yesterday took a drive with Sally H. in Central Park as it was fine, and she had no fun on her Thanksgiving. I dined at Mrs. Botta's, for she kindly came and asked me. Had a delightful time, and felt as if I'd been to Washington; for Professor Byng, a German ex-consul, was there, full of Capitol gossip about Sumner and all the great beings that there do congregate. Mr. Botta you know, — a handsome, long-haired Italian, very cultivated and affable.

Also about Lord H., whom B. thought "an amiable old woman," glad to say pretty things, and fond of being lionized. Byng knew Rose and Una, and asked about them; also told funny tales of Victor Emmanuel and his Court, and queer adventures in Greece, where he, B., was a consul, or something official. It was a glimpse into a new sort of world; and as the man was very accomplished, elegant, and witty, I enjoyed it much.

We had music later, and saw some fine pictures. Durant knew Miss Thackeray, J. Ingelow, and other English people whom I did, so we had a good dish of gossip with Mrs. Botta, while the others talked three or four languages at once.

It is a delightful house, and I shall go as often as I may, for it is the sort of thing I like much better than B. H. and champagne.

To-night we go to hear Bradlaugh; to-morrow, a new play; Sunday, Frothingham and Bellows; and Monday, Mrs. Richardson and Shakespeare.

But it is n't all play, I assure you. I'm a thrifty but

terfly, and have written three stories. The " G." has paid for the little Christmas tale; the " I." has " Letty's Tramp;" and my "girl paper" for "St. Nick" is about ready. Several other papers are waiting for tales, so I have a ballast of work to keep me steady in spite of much fun.

Mr. Powell has been twice to see me, and we go to visit the charities of New York next week. I like to see both sides, and generally find the busy people most interesting.

So far I like New York very much, and feel so well I shall stay on till I 'm tired of it. People begin to tell me how much better I look than when I came, and I have not an ache to fret over. This, after such a long lesson in bodily ails, is a blessing for which I am duly grateful.

Hope all goes well with you, and that I shall get a line now and then. I'LL keep them for you to bind up by and by instead of mine. . . .

We can buy a carriage some other time, and a barn likewise, and a few other necessities of life. Rosa has proved such a good speculation we shall dare to let May venture another when the ship comes in. I am glad the dear " rack-a-bones " is a comfort to her mistress, only don't let her break my boy's bones by any antics when she feels her oats.

I suppose you are thinking of Wilson just now, and his quiet slipping away to the heavenly council chambers where the good senators go. Rather like Sumner's end, was n't it? No wife or children, only men and servants. Wilson was such a genial, friendly soul I should have thought he would have felt the loneliness very much. Hope if he left any last wishes his mates will carry them out faithfully. . . .

Now, dear Plato, the Lord bless you, and keep you serene and happy for as many years as He sees fit, and me likewise, to be a comfort as well as a pride to you.

Ever your loving Forty-three.

To her Nephews.

New York, Dec. 4, 1875.

Dear Fred and Donny, — We went to see the newsboys, and I wish you'd been with us, it was so interesting. A nice big house has been built for them, with dining-room and kitchen on the first floor, bath-rooms and school-room next, two big sleeping-places, — third and fourth stories, — and at the top a laundry and gymnasium. We saw all the tables set for breakfast, — a plate and bowl for each, — and in the kitchen great kettles, four times as big as our copper boiler, for tea and coffee, soup, and meat. They have bread and meat and coffee for breakfast, and bread and cheese and tea for supper, and get their own dinners out. School was just over when we got there, and one hundred and eighty boys were in the immense room with desks down the middle, and all around the walls were little cupboards numbered. Each boy on coming in gives his name, pays six cents, gets a key, and puts away his hat, books, and jacket (if he has ‘em) in his own cubby for the night. They pay five cents for supper, and schooling, baths, etc., are free. They were a smart-looking set, larking round in shirts and trousers, barefooted, but the faces were clean, and the heads smooth, and clothes pretty decent; yet they support themselves, for not one of them has any parents or home but this. One little chap, only six, was trotting round as busy as a bee, locking* up his small shoes and ragged jacket as if they were great treasures. I asked about little Pete, and the man told us his brother, only nine, supported him and took care of him entirely; and would n’t let Pete be sent away to any home, because he wished to have “ his family “ with him.

Think of that, Fred! How would it seem to be all alone in a big city, with no mamma to cuddle you; no two grandpa’s houses to take you in; not a penny but what you earned, and Donny to take care of? Could you do it? Nine-year-old Patsey does it capitally; buys Pete’s clothes, pays for his bed and supper, and puts pennies in the savings-bank. There’s a brave little man for you! I wanted to see him; but he is a newsboy, and sells late papers, because, though harder work, it pays better, and the coast is clear for those who do it.

The savings-bank was a great table all full of slits, each one leading to a little place below and numbered outside, so each boy knew his own. Once a month the bank is opened, and the lads take out what they like, or have it invested in a big bank for them to have when they find homes out West, as many do, and make good farmers. One boy was putting in some pennies as we looked, and I asked how much he had saved this month. “ Fourteen dollars, ma’am,” says the thirteen-year-older, proudly slipping in the last cent. A prize of $3 is offered to the lad who saves the most in a month.

The beds upstairs were in two immense rooms, ever so much larger than our town hall, — one hundred in one, and one hundred and eighty in another, — all narrow beds with a blue quilt, neat pillow, and clean sheet. They are built in long rows, one over another, and the upper boy has to climb up as on board ship. I ‘d have liked to see one hundred and eighty all in their “ by-lows “ at once, and I asked the man if they did n’t train when all were in. “ Lord, ma’am, they ‘re up at five, poor little chaps, and are so tired at night that they drop off right away. Now and then some boy kicks up a little row, but we have a watchman, and he soon settles ‘em.”

He also told me how that very day a neat, smart young man came in, and said he was one of their boys who went West with a farmer only a little while ago; and now he owned eighty acres of land, had a good house, and was doing well, and had come to New York to find his sister, and to take her away to live with him. Was n't that nice? Lots of boys do as well. Instead of loafing round the streets and getting into mischief, they are taught to be tidy, industrious, and honest, and then sent away into the wholesome country to support themselves.

It was funny to see 'em scrub in the bath-room, — feet and faces, — comb their hair, fold up their old clothes in the dear cubbies, which make them so happy because they feel that they own something.

The man said every boy wanted one, even though he had neither shoes nor jacket to put in it; but would lay away an old rag of a cap or a dirty tippet with an air of satisfaction fine to see. Some lads sat reading, and the man said they loved it so they'd read all night, if allowed. At nine he gave the word, " Bed! " and away went the lads, trooping up to sleep in shirts and trousers, as nightgowns are not provided. How would a boy I know like that, — a boy who likes to have "trommin" on his nighties? Of course, I don't mean dandy Don! Oh, dear no!

After nine [if late in coming in] they are fined five cents; after ten, ten cents; and after eleven they can't come in at all. This makes them steady, keeps them out of harm, and gives them time for study. Some go to the theatre, and sleep anywhere; some sleep at the Home, but go out for a better breakfast than they get there, as the swell ones are fond of goodies, and live well in their funny way. Coffee and cakes at Fulton Market is " the tip-top grub," and they often spend all their day's earnings in a play and a supper, and sleep in boxes or cellars after it.

Lots of pussies were round the kitchen; and one black one I called a bootblack, and a gray kit that yowled loud was a newsboy. That made some chaps laugh, and they nodded at me as I went out. Nice boys! but I know some nicer ones. Write and tell me something about my poor Squabby.

By-by, your Weedy.

To her Family.

Saturday Evening, Dec. 25, 1875.

Dear Family, — ... I had only time for a word this a. m., as the fourth letter was from Mrs. P. to say they could not go; so I trotted off in the fog at ten to the boat, and there found Mr. and Mrs. G. and piles of goodies for the poor children. She is a dear little old lady in a close, Quakerish bonnet and plain suit, but wide-awake and full of energy. It was grand to see her tackle the big mayor and a still bigger commissioner, and tell them what ought to be done for the poor things on the Island, as they are to be routed; for the city wants the land for some dodge or other. Both men fled soon, for the brave little woman was down on 'em in a way that would have made Marmee cry " Ankore! " and clap her dress-gloves to rags.

When the rotundities had retired, she fell upon a demure priest, and read him a sermon; and then won the heart of a boyish reporter so entirely that he stuck to us all day, and helped serve out dolls and candy like a man and a brother. Long life to him!

Mr. G. and I discussed pauperism and crime like two old wiseacres; and it was sweet to hear the gray-headed couple say “ thee “ and “ thou,” “Abby “ and “ James,” to one another, he following with the bundles wherever the little poke-bonnet led the way. I’ve had a pretty good variety of Christmases in my day, but never one like this before. First we drove in an old ramshackle hack to the chapel, whither a boy had raced before us, crying joyfully to all he met, “ She’s come! Miss G. — she’s come!” And all faces beamed, as well they might, since for thirty years she has gone to make set after set of little forlornities happy on this day.

The chapel was full. On one side, in front, girls in blue gowns and white pinafores; on the other, small chaps in pinafores likewise; and behind them, bigger boys in gray suits with cropped heads, and larger girls with ribbons in their hair and pink calico gowns. They sang alternately; the girls gave “ Juanita” very well, the little chaps a pretty song about poor children asking a “ little white angel “ to leave the gates of heaven ajar, so they could peep in, if no more. Quite pathetic, coming from poor babies who had no home but this.

The big boys spoke pieces, and I was amused when one bright lad in gray, with a red band on his arm, spoke the lines I gave G., — ” Merry Christmas.” No one knew me, so I had the joke to myself; and I found afterward that I was taken for the mayoress, who was expected. Then we drove to the hospital, and there the heart-ache began, for me at least, so sad it was to see these poor babies, born of want and sin, suffering every sort of deformity, disease, and pain. Cripples half blind, scarred with scrofula, burns, and abuse, — it was simply awful and indescribable!

As we went in, I with a great box of dolls and the young reporter with a bigger box of candy, a general cry of delight greeted us. Some children tried to run, half-blind ones stretched out their groping hands, little ones crawled, and big ones grinned, while several poor babies sat up in their bed, beckoning us to “ come quick.”

One poor mite, so eaten up with sores that its whole face was painted with some white salve, — its head covered with an oilskin cap; one eye gone, and the other half filmed over; hands bandaged, and ears bleeding, — could only moan and move its feet till I put a gay red dolly in one hand and a pink candy in the other; then the dim eye brightened, the hoarse voice said feebly, “ Tanky, lady! “ and I left it contentedly sucking the sweetie, and trying to see its dear new toy. It can’t see another Christmas, and I like to think I helped make this one happy, even for a minute.

It was pleasant to watch the young reporter trot round with the candy-box, and come up to me all interest to say, “ One girl has n’t got a doll, ma’am, and looks so disappointed.”

After the hospital, we went to the idiot house; and there I had a chance to see faces and figures that will haunt me a long time. A hundred or so of half-grown boys and girls ranged down a long hall, a table of toys in the middle, and an empty one for Mrs. G.’s gifts. A cheer broke out as the little lady hurried in waving her handkerchief and a handful of gay bead necklaces, and “ Oh! Ohs! “ followed the appearance of the doll-lady and the candy man.

A pile of gay pictures was a new idea, and Mrs. G. told me to hold up some bright ones and see if the poor innocents would understand and enjoy them. I held up one of two kittens lapping spilt milk, and the girls began to mew and say “Cat! ah, pretty.” Then a fine horse, and the boys bounced on their benches with pleasure; while a ship in full sail produced a cheer of rapture from them all.

Some were given out to the good ones, and the rest are to be pinned round the room; so the pictures were a great success. All wanted dolls, even boys of nineteen; for all were children in mind. But the girls had them, and young women of eighteen cuddled their babies and were happy. The boys chose from the toy-table, and it was pathetic to see great fellows pick out a squeaking dog without even the wit to pinch it when it was theirs. One dwarf of thirty-five chose a little Noah’s ark, and brooded over it in silent bliss.

Some with beards sucked their candy, and stared at a toy cow or box of blocks as if their cup was full. One French girl sang the Marseillaise in a feeble voice, and was so overcome by her new doll that she had an epileptic fit on the spot, which made two others go off likewise; and a slight pause took place while they were kindly removed to sleep it off.

A little tot of four, who had n’t sense to put candy in its mouth, was so fond of music that when the girls sang the poor vacant face woke up, and a pair of lovely soft hazel eyes stopped staring dully at nothing, and went wandering to and fro with light in them, as if to find the only sound that can reach its poor mind.

I guess I gave away two hundred dolls, and a soap-box of candy was empty when we left. But rows of sticky faces beamed at us, and an array of gay toys wildly waved after us, as if we were angels who had showered goodies on the poor souls.

Pauper women are nurses; and Mrs. G. says the babies die like sheep, many being deserted so young nothing can be hoped or done for them. One of the teachers in the idiot home was a Miss C., who remembered Nan at Dr. Wilbur’s. Very lady-like, and all devotion to me. But such a life! Oh, me! Who can lead it, and not go mad?

At four, we left and came home, Mrs. G. giving a box of toys and sweeties on board the boat for the children of the men who run it. So leaving a stream of blessings and pleasures behind her, the dear old lady drove away, simply saying, “There now, I shall feel better for the next year! “ Well she may; bless her!

She made a speech to the chapel children after the Commissioner had prosed in the usual way, and she told ‘em that she should come as long as she could, and when she was gone her children would still keep it up in memory of her; so for thirty years more she hoped this, their one holiday, would be made happy for them. I could have hugged her on the spot, the motherly old dear!

Next Wednesday we go to the Tombs, and some day I am to visit the hospital with her, for I like this better than parties, etc.

I got home at five, and then remembered that I’d had no lunch; so I took an apple till six, when I discovered that all had dined at one so the helpers could go early this evening. Thus my Christmas day was without dinner or presents, for the first time since I can remember. Yet it has been a very memorable day, and I feel as if I’d had a splendid feast seeing the poor babies wallow in turkey soup, and that every gift I put into their hands had come back to me in the dumb delight of their unchild-like faces trying to smile.

After the pleasant visit in New York, Miss Alcott returned to Boston, where she went into society more than usual, often attending clubs, theatres, and receptions. She was more lionized than ever, and had a natural pleasure in the attention she received.

The summer of 1876 she spent at Concord, nursing her mother, who was very ill. She here wrote “ Rose in Bloom,” the sequel to “ Eight Cousins,” in three weeks. It was published in November.

Louisa was anxious that her sister should have a home for her young family. Mrs. Pratt invested what she could of her husband’s money in the purchase, and Louisa contributed the rest. This was the so-called Thoreau House on the main street in Concord, which became Mrs. Pratt’s home, and finally that of her father.

Louisa spent the summer of 1877 in Concord. Her mother’s illness increased, and she was herself very ill in August. Yet she wrote this summer one of her brightest and sweetest stories, “ Under the Lilacs.” Her love of animals is specially apparent in this book, and she records going to the circus to make studies for the performing dog Sanch.

During the winter of 1877, Miss Alcott went to the Bellevue for some weeks, and having secured the necessary quiet, devoted herself to the writing of a novel for the famous No Name Series published by Roberts Brothers. This book had been in her mind for some time, as is seen by the journal. As it was to appear anonymously, and was not intended for children, she was able to depart from her usual manner, and indulge the weird and lurid fancies which took possession of her in her dramatic days, and when writing sensational stories. She was much interested, and must have written it very rapidly, as it was published in April. She enjoyed the excitement of her incognito, and was much amused at the guesses of critics and friends, who attributed the book to others, and were sure Louisa Alcott did not write it, because its style was so unlike hers.

It certainly is very unlike the books Miss Alcott had lately written. It has nothing of the homelike simplicity and charm of “ Little Women,” “ Old-Fashioned Girl,” and the other stories with which she was delighting the children, and, with “ Moods,” must always be named as exceptional when speaking of her works. Still, a closer study of her life and nature will reveal much of her own tastes and habits of thought in the book; and it is evident that she wrote con amove, and was fascinated by the familiars she evoked, however little charm they may seem to possess to others. She was fond of Hawthorne’s books. The influence of his subtle and weird romances is undoubtedly perceptible in the book, and it is not strange that it was attributed to his son. She says it had been simmering in her brain ever since she read “ Faust” the year before; and she clearly wished to work according to Goethe’s thought, — that the Prince of Darkness was a gentleman, and must be represented as belonging to the best society.

The plot is powerful and original. A young poet, with more ambition than genius or self-knowledge, finds himself, at nineteen, friendless, penniless, and hopeless, and is on the point of committing suicide.

He is saved by Helwyze, a middle-aged man, who has been severely crippled by a terrible fall, and his heart seared by the desertion of the woman he loved. A man of intellect, power, imagination, and wealth, but incapable of conscientious feeling or true love, he is a dangerous savior for the impulsive poet; but he takes him to his home, warms, feeds, and shelters him, and promises to bring out his book. The brilliant, passionate woman who gave up her lover when his health and beauty were gone, returned to him when youth had passed, and would gladly have devoted herself to soothing his pain and enriching his life. Her feeling is painted with delicacy and tenderness.

But Helwyze’s heart knew nothing of the divine quality of forgiveness; for his love there was no resurrection; and he only valued the power he could exercise over a brilliant woman, and the intellectual entertainment she could bring him. A sweet young girl, Olivia’s protegee, completes the very limited dramatis personce.

The young poet, Felix Canaris, under the guidance of his new friend, wins fame, success, and the young girl’s heart; but his wayward fancy turns rather to the magnificent Olivia. The demoniac Helwyze works upon this feeling, and claims of Olivia her fair young friend Gladys as a wife for Felix, who is forced to accept her at the hands of his master. She is entirely responsive to the love which she fancies she has won, and is grateful for her fortunate lot, and devotes herself to the comfort and happiness of the poor invalid who delights in her beauty and grace. For a time Felix enjoys a society success, to which his charming wife, as well as his book, contribute. But at last this excitement flags. He writes another book, which he threatens to burn because he is dissatisfied with it. Gladys entreats him to spare it, and Helwyze offers to read it to her. She is overcome and melted with emotion at the passion and pathos of the story; and when Helwyze asks, “ Shall I burn it? “ Felix answers, “ No! “ Again the book brings success and admiration, but the tender wife sees that it does not insure happiness, and that her husband is plunging into the excitement of gambling.

The demon Helwyze has complete control over the poet, which he exercises with such subtle tyranny that the young man is driven to the dreadful thought of murder to escape from him; but he is saved from the deed by the gentle influence of his wife, who has won his heart at last, unconscious that it had not always been hers.

Helwyze finds his own punishment. One being resists his power, — Gladys breathes his poisoned atmosphere unharmed. He sends for Olivia as his ally to separate the wife from her husband’s love. A passion of curiosity possesses him to read her very heart; and at last he resorts to a strange means to accomplish his purpose. He gives her an exciting drug without her knowledge, and under its influence she speaks and acts with a rare genius which calls forth the admiration of all the group. Left alone with her, Helwyze exercises his magnetic power to draw forth the secrets of her heart; but he reads there only a pure and true love for her husband, and fear of the unhallowed passion which he is cherishing. The secret of his power over the husband is at last revealed. Canaris has published as his own the work of Helwyze, and all the fame and glory he has received has been won by deceit, and is a miserable mockery.

The tragic result is inevitable. Gladys dies under the pressure of a burden too heavy for her, — the knowledge of deceit in him she had loved and trusted; while the stricken Helwyze is paralyzed, and lives henceforth only a death in life.

With all the elements of power and beauty in this singular book, it fails to charm and win the heart of the reader. The circumstances are in a romantic setting, but still they are prosaic; and tragedy is only endurable when taken up into the region of the ideal, where the thought of the universal rounds out all traits of the individual. In Goethe’s Faust, Margaret is the sweetest and simplest of maidens; but in her is the life of all wronged and suffering womanhood.

The realism which is delightful in the pictures of little women and merry boys is painful when connected with passions so morbid and lives so far removed from joy and sanity. As in her early dramas and sensational stories, we do not find Louisa Alcott's own broad, generous, healthy life, or that which lay around her, in this book, but the reminiscences of her reading, which she had striven to make her own by invention and fancy.

This note refers to "A Modern Mephistopheles ": —

Dear Mr. Niles, — I had to keep the proof longer than I meant because a funeral came in the way.

The book as last sent is lovely, and much bigger than I expected.

Poor " Marmee," ill in bed, hugged it, and said, " It is perfect! only I do wish your name could be on it." She is very proud of it; and tender-hearted Anna weeps and broods over it, calling Gladys the best and sweetest character I ever did. So much for home opinion; now let's see what the public will say.

May clamors for it; but I don't want to send this till she has had one or two of the others. Have you sent her "Is That All?" If not, please do; then it won't look suspicious to send only "M. M."

I am so glad the job is done, and hope it won't disgrace the series. Is not another to come before this? I hope so; for many people suspect what is up, and I could tell my fibs about No. 6 better if it was not mine.

Thanks for the trouble you have taken to keep the secret. Now the fun will begin.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

P. S. — Bean's expressman grins when he hands in the daily parcel. He is a Concord man.

By Louisa's help the younger sister again went abroad in 1876; and her bright affectionate letters cheered the little household, much saddened by the mother's illness.

Journal.

January, 1876. — Helped Mrs. Croly receive two hundred gentlemen.

A letter from Baron Tauchnitz asking leave to put my book in his foreign library, and sending 600 marks to pay for it. Said, " Yes, thank you, Baron."

Went to Philadelphia to see Cousin J. May installed in Dr. Furness's pulpit.

Dull place is Philadelphia. Heard Beecher preach; did not like him. . . .

Went home on the 21st, finding I could not work here. Soon tire of being a fine lady.

February and March. — Took a room in B., and fell to work on short tales for F. T. N. wanted a centennial story; but my frivolous New York life left me no ideas. Went to Centennial Ball at Music Hall, and got an idea.

Wrote a tale of " '76," which with others will make a catchpenny book. Mother poorly, so I go home to nurse her.

April, May, and June. — Mother better. Nan and boys go to P. farm. May and I clean the old house. It seems as if the dust of two centuries haunted the ancient mansion, nd came out spring and fall in a ghostly way for us to clear up.

Great freshets and trouble.

Exposition in Philadelphia; don't care to go. America ought to pay her debts before she gives parties. " Silver Pitchers," etc., comes out, and goes well. Poor stuff; but the mill must keep on grinding even chaff.

June. — Lovely month! Keep hotel and wait on Marmee.

Try to get up steam for a new serial, as Mrs. Dodge wants one, and Scribner offers $3,000 for it. Roberts Brothers want a novel; and the various newspapers and magazines clamor for tales. My brain is squeezed dry, and I can only wait for help.

July, August. — Get an idea and start " Rose in Bloom," though I hate sequels.

September. — On the 9th my dear girl sails in the " China " for a year in London or Paris. God be with her! She has done her distasteful duty faithfully, and deserved a reward. She cannot find the help she needs here, and is happy and busy in her own world over there.

[She never came home. — L.M.A.] Finish "Rose."

November. — " Rose " comes out; sells well.

. . . Forty-four years old. My new task gets on slowly; but I keep at it, and can be a prop, if not an angel, in the house, as Nan is.

December. — Miss P. sends us a pretty oil sketch of May, — so like the dear soul in her violet wrapper, with yellow curls piled up, and the long hand at work. Mother delights in it.

She (M.) is doing finely, and says, " I am getting on, and I feel as if it was not all a mistake; for I have some talent, and will prove it." Modesty is a sign of genius, and I think our girl has both. The money I invest in her pays the sort of interest I like. I am proud to have her show what she can do, and have her depend upon no one but me. Success to little Raphael! My dull winter is much cheered by her happiness and success.

January, February, 1877. — The year begins well. Nan keeps house; boys fine, tall lads, good and gay; Father busy with his new book; Mother cosey with her sewing, letters, Johnson, and success of her “ girls.”

Went for some weeks to the Bellevue, and wrote “ A Modern Mephistopheles “ for the No Name Series. It has been simmering ever since I read Faust last year. Enjoyed doing it, being tired of providing moral pap for the young. Long to write a novel, but cannot get time enough.

May’s letters our delight. She is so in earnest she will not stop for pleasure, rest, or society, but works away like a Trojan. Her work admired by masters and mates for its vigor and character.

March. — Begin to think of buying the Thoreau place for Nan. The $4,000 received from the Vt. and Eastern R. Rs. must be invested, and she wants a home of her own, now the lads are growing up.

Mother can be with her in the winter for a change, and leave me free to write in B. Concord has no inspiration for me.

April. — May, at the request of her teacher, M. Muller, sends a study of still life to the Salon. The little picture is accepted, well hung, and praised by the judges. No friend at court, and the modest work stood on its own merits. She is very proud to see her six months’ hard work bear fruit. A happy girl, and all say she deserves the honor.

“M. M.” appears and causes much guessing. It is praised and criticised, and I enjoy the fun, especially when friends say, “ I know you did n’t write it, for you can’t hide your peculiar style.”

Help to buy the house for Nan, — $4,500. So she has her wish, and is happy. When shall I have mine? Ought to be contented with knowing I help both sisters by my brains. But I’m selfish, and want to go away and rest in Europe. Never shall.

May, June. — Quiet days keeping house and attending to Marmee, who grows more and more feeble. Helped Nan get ready for her new home.

Felt very well, and began to hope I had outlived the neuralgic worries and nervous woes born of the hospital fever and the hard years following.

May living alone in Paris, while her mates go jaunting, — a solitary life; but she is so busy she is happy and .safe. A good angel watches over her. Take pleasant drives early in the a. m. with Marmee. She takes her comfort in a basket wagon, and we drive to the woods, picking flowers and stopping where we like. It keeps her young, and rests her weary nerves.

July. — Got too tired, and was laid up for some weeks. A curious time, lying quite happily at rest, wondering what was to come next.

August. — As soon as able began “Under the Lilacs,” but could not do much.

Mrs. Alcott grew rapidly worse, and her devoted daughter recognized that the final parting was near. As Louisa watched by the bedside she wrote “ My Girls,” and finished “ Under the Lilacs.”

The journal tells the story of the last days of watching, and of the peaceful close of the mother’s self-sacrificing yet blessed life. Louisa was very brave in the presence of death. She had no dark thoughts connected with it; and in her mother’s case, after her long, hard life, she recognized how “ growing age longed for its peaceful sleep.”

The tie between this mother and daughter was exceptionally strong and tender. The mother saw all her own fine powers reproduced and developed in her daughter; and if she also recognized the passionate energy which had been the strength and the bane of her own life, it gave her only a more constant watchfulness to save her child from the struggles and regrets from which she had suffered herself.

Journal.

September, 1877. — On the 7th Marmee had a very ill turn, and the doctor told me it was the beginning of the end. [Water on the chest.] She was so ill we sent for Father from Walcott; and I forgot myself in taking care of poor Marmee, who suffered much and longed to go.

As I watched with her I wrote “ My Girls,” to go with other tales in a new “ Scrap Bag,” and finished “ Under the Lilacs.” I foresaw a busy or a sick winter, and wanted to finish while I could, so keeping my promise and earning my $3,000.

Brain very lively and pen flew. It always takes an exigency to spur me up and wring out a book. Never have time to go slowly and do my best.

October. — Fearing I might give out, got a nurse and rested a little, so that when the last hard days come I might not fail Marmee, who says, “ Stay by, Louy, and help me if I suffer too much.” I promised, and watched her sit panting life away day after day. We thought she would not outlive her seventy-seventh birthday, but, thanks to Dr. W. and homoeopathy, she got relief, and we had a sad little celebration, well knowing it would be the last. Aunt B. and L. W. came up, and with fruit, flowers, smiling faces, and full hearts, we sat round the brave soul who faced death so calmly and was ready to go.

I overdid and was very ill, — in danger of my life for a week, — and feared to go before Marmee. But pulled through, and got up slowly to help her die. A strange month.

November. — Still feeble, and Mother failing fast. On the 14th we were both moved to Anna’s at Mother’s earnest wish.

A week in the new home, and then she ceased to care for anything. Kept her bed for three days, lying down after weeks in a chair, and on the 25 th, at dusk, that rainy Sunday, fell quietly asleep in my arms.

She was very happy all day, thinking herself a girl again, with parents and sisters round her. Said her Sunday hymn to me, whom she called “ Mother,” and smiled at us, saying, “A smile is as good as a prayer.” Looked often at the little picture of May, and waved her hand to it, “Good-by, little May, good-by!”

Her last words to Father were, “ You are laying a very soft pillow for me to go to sleep on.”

We feared great suffering, but she was spared that, and slipped peacefully away. I was so glad when the last weary breath was drawn, and silence came, with its rest and peace.

On the 27th it was necessary to bury her, and we took her quietly away to Sleepy Hollow. A hard day, but the last duty we could do for her; and there we left her at sunset beside dear Lizzie’s dust, — alone so long.

On the 28th a memorial service, and all the friends at Anna’s, — Dr. Bartol and Mr. Foote of Stone Chapel. A simple, cheerful service, as she would have liked it.

Quiet days afterward resting in her rest.

My duty is done, and now I shall be glad to follow her.

December. — Many kind letters from all who best knew and loved the noble woman.

I never wish her back, but a great warmth seems gone out of life, and there is no motive to go on now.

My only comfort is that I could make her last years comfortable, and lift off the burden she had carried so bravely all these years. She was so loyal, tender, and true; life was hard for her, and no one understood all she had to bear but we, her children. I think I shall soon follow her, and am quite ready to go now she no longer needs me.

January, 1878. — An idle month at Nan’s, for I can only suffer.

Father goes about, being restless with his anchor gone. Dear Nan is house-mother now, — so patient, so thoughtful and tender; I need nothing but that cherishing which only mothers can give.

May busy in London. Very sad about Marmee; but it was best not to send for her, and Marmee forbade it, and she has some very tender friends near her.

February. — ... Wrote some lines on Marmee.

To Mrs. Dodge.

Concord, June 3 .

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — The tale1 goes slowly owing to interruptions, for summer is a busy time, and I get few quiet days. Twelve chapters are done, but are short ones, and so will make about six or seven numbers in “ St. Nicholas.”

I will leave them divided in this way that you may put in as many as you please each month; for trying to suit the magazine hurts the story in its book form, though this way does no harm to the monthly parts, I think.

I will send you the first few chapters during the week for Mrs. Foote, and with them the schedule you suggest, so that my infants may not be drawn with whiskers, and my big boys and girls in pinafores, as in “ Eight Cousins.”

I hope the new baby won’t be set aside too soon for my illustrations; but I do feel a natural wish to have one story prettily adorned with good pictures, as hitherto artists have much afflicted me.

1 Under the Lilacs.

I am daily waiting with anxiety for an illumination of some sort, as my plot is very vague so far; and though I don’t approve of “ sensations “ in children’s books, one must have a certain thread on which to string the small events which make up the true sort of child-life.

I intend to go and simmer an afternoon at Van Am- burg’s great show, that I may get hints for the further embellishment of Ben and his dog. I have also put in a poem by F. B. S.’s small son,1 and that hit will give Mrs. Foote a good scene with the six-year-old poet reciting his verses under the lilacs.

I shall expect the small tots to be unusually good, since the artist has a live model to study from. Please present my congratulations to the happy mamma and Mr. Foote, Jr.

Yours warmly, L. M. A.

August 21, 1879.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I have not been able to do anything on the serial. . . . But after a week at the seaside, to get braced up for work, I intend to begin. The Revolutionary tale does not seem to possess me. I have casually asked many of my young folks, when they demand a new story, which they would like, one of that sort or the old “ Eight Cousin “ style, and they all say the latter. It would be much the easier to do, as I have a beginning and a plan all ready, — a village, and the affairs of a party of children. We have many little romances going on among the Concord boys and girls, and all sorts of queer things, which will work into “ Jack and Jill” nicely. Mrs. Croly has been anxious for a story, and I am trying to do a short one, as I told her 1 Under the Lilacs, page 78.

you had the refusal of my next serial. I hope you will not be very much disappointed about the old-time tale. It would take study to do it well, and leisure is just what I have not got, and I shall never have, I fear, when writing is to be done. I will send you a few chapters of “Jack and Jill” when in order, if you like, and you can decide if they will suit. I shall try to have it unlike the others if possible, but the dears will cling to the “ Little Women “ style.

I have had a very busy summer, but have been pretty well, and able to do my part in entertaining the four hundred philosophers.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

September 17 .

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — ... Don’t let me prose. If I seem to be declining and falling into it, pull me up, and I’ll try to prance as of old. Years tame down one’s spirit and fancy, though they only deepen one’s love for the little people, and strengthen the desire to serve them wisely as well as cheerfully. Fathers and mothers tell me they use my books as helps for themselves; so now and then I like to slip in a page for them, fresh from the experience of some other parent, for education seems to me to be the problem in our times.

Jack and Jill are right out of our own little circle, and the boys and girls are in a twitter to know what is going in; so it will be a “ truly story “ in the main.

Such a long note for a busy woman to read! but your cheery word was my best “ starter; “ and I ‘m, more than ever,

MAY ALCOTT NIERIKER.

Born at Concord, July, 1840. Died in Paris, December, 1879.

This younger sister became so dear to Louisa, and through the legacy which she left to her of an infant child, exercised so great an influence over the last ten years of her life, that it will not be uninteresting to trace out the course of her life and the development of her character. May was born before the experiments at Fruitlands, and her childhood passed during the period when the fortunes of the family were at the lowest ebb; but she was too young to feel in all their fulness the cares which weighed upon the older sisters. Her oldest sister — the affectionate, practical Anna — almost adopted May as her own baby, and gave her a great deal of the attention and care which the mother had not time for amid her numerous avocations. The child clung to Anna with trust and affection; but with her quick fancy and lively spirit, she admired the brilliant qualities of

Louisa. Hasty in temperament, quick and impulsive in action, she quarrelled with Louisa while she adored her, and was impatient with her rebukes, which yet had great influence over her. She had a more facile nature than the other sisters, and a natural, girlish love of attention, and a romantic fondness for beauty in person and style in living. Graceful in figure and manners, with a fine complexion, blue eyes, and a profusion of light wavy hair, she was attractive in appearance; and a childish frankness, and acceptance of sympathy or criticism, disarmed those who were disposed to find fault with her.

May is very truly described in “ Little Women,” and her character is painted with a discerning but loving hand: “ A regular snow maiden, with blue eyes, and yellow hair curling on her shoulders, pale and slender, and always carrying herself like a young lady mindful of her manners.” Many little touches of description show the consciousness of appearance and love of admiration which she innocently betrayed, and illustrate the relation of the sisters: “ ‘ Don’t stop to quirk your little finger and prink over your plate, Amy,’ cried Jo.” Her mother says of this daughter in her diary: “ She does all things well; her capabilities are much in her eyes and fingers. When a child, I observed with what ease and grace she did little things.”

According to Louisa, “ If anybody had asked Amy what the greatest trial of her life was, she would have answered at once, ‘ My nose.’ No one minded it but herself, and it was doing its best to grow; but Amy felt deeply the want of a Grecian nose, and drew whole sheets of handsome ones to console herself.” “ Little Raphael,” as the sisters called her, very early developed a love and talent for drawing which became the delight of her life. She covered her books with sketches, but managed to escape reprimand by being a model of deportment. Always having in her mind an ideal of elegant life, the many little trials of their times of poverty were of course severe mortifications to her; and the necessity of wearing dresses which came to her from others, and which were ugly in themselves or out of harmony with her own appearance, caused her much affliction. She was always generous and easily reconciled after a quarrel, and was a favorite with her companions, and the heroine of those innocent little love episodes which, as Tennyson says, —

“Are but embassies of love To tamper with the feelings, ere he found Empire for life.” (Gardener’s Daughter)

While May was too young to take the part in the support of the family which fell to Anna and Louisa, she was yet a blessing and comfort by her kind, bright nature. After the death of Elizabeth in 1858, her mother speaks of “turning to the little May for comfort," and her father's letters show how dear she was to him, although she never entered into his intellectual life.

May shared in the blessing of Louisa's first success, for she went to the School of Design in 1859 for the lessons in her art, for which she longed so eagerly. In 1860 an old friend sent her thirty dollars for lessons in drawing, and she had the best instruction she could then receive in Boston.

In 1863, Louisa procured for her the great advantage of study with Dr. Rimmer, who was then giving his precious lessons in art anatomy in Boston. Under his instructions, May gave some attention to modelling, and completed an ideal bust. Although she did not pursue this branch of art, it was undoubtedly of great service in giving her more thorough knowledge of the head, and a bolder and firmer style of drawing than she would have gained in any other way.

As will be seen from Louisa's journal, May was frequently with her in Boston, engaged in studying or teaching. By the kindness of a friend, she went to Europe in 1870, when Louisa accompanied her. Louisa sent her to Europe for a year of study in 1873, and again in 1877. In London and Paris she had good opportunities for study, and improved rapidly in her art. She made some admirable copies from Turner which attracted the attention of Ruskin; and a picture from still life was accepted at the Paris Salon, which event gave great happiness to the family circle and friends at home.

May was very generous in giving to others help in the art she loved. While at home, in the intervals of her studies in Europe, she tried to form an art centre in Concord, and freely gave her time, her instruction, and the use of her studio to young artists. She wrote a little book to aid them in prosecuting their studies abroad, called " Studying Art Abroad, and How to do it Cheaply."

Like the rest of the family, May composed with great ease, and sometimes wrote little stories. Her letters are very sprightly and agreeable.

While residing in London, May had become acquainted with a young Swiss gentleman, whose refined and artistic tastes were closely in unison with her own. During the sad days of bereavement caused by her mother's death he was a kind and sympathetic friend, soothing her grief and cheering her solitude by his music. Thus, frequently together, their friendship became love, and they were betrothed. The course of this true love, which for a time ran swiftly and smoothly, is most exquisitely depicted in May's letters to her family. The charming pictures of herself and her young lover are so like Amy and her Laurie in his happiest moods, that we almost feel as if Miss Alcott had been prophetic in her treatment of these characters in " Little Women."

I wish I could give her own natural, frank account of this event. May had the secret of perpetual youth, at least in spirit; and in reading her letters, one has no consciousness that more than thirty years had passed over her head, for they had taken no drop of freshness from her heart.

The union of this happy pair was not a surprise to the friends at home, who had read May’s heart, revealed in her frank, innocent letters, more clearly than she had supposed. When the claims of business called Mr. Nieriker from London, the hearts of the young couple quailed before the idea of separation, and they decided to be married at once, and go together. The simple ceremony was performed in London, March 22, 1878; and May started on her journey, no longer alone, but with a loving friend by her side.

May’s letters are full of the most artless joy in her new life. The old days of struggle and penury are gone; the heart-loneliness is no more; the world is beautiful, and everybody loving and kind. Life in the modest French home is an idyllic dream, and she writes to her sisters of every detail of her household. The return of her husband at sunset is a feast, and the evening is delightful with poetry and music. Her blue dress, her crimson furniture, satisfy her artistic sense. She does not neglect her art, but paints with fresh inspiration, and waits for his criticism and praise. She says, “ He is very ambitious for my artistic success, and is my most severe critic.” In the morning she finds her easel set out for her, a fire burning ready for her comfort, and her husband in the big armchair waiting to read to her, or to take his violin and pose for his picture in gray velvet paletot and red slippers.1

For the time conjugal love is all sufficient, and May wonders at herself that the happiness of the moment can so drown every remembrance of sorrow. Yet a pathetic note is occasionally heard, as she mourns for the mother who is gone, or yearns for the sister who has been such a strength to her through life. The picturesqueness and ease of French life make America look stupid and forlorn, and she has no wish to go home, but only to have her dear ones share in her happiness. Her work in art was successful; and the money she received for it was not unacceptable, although her husband’s income sufficed for their modest wants. She was justified in her grateful feeling that she was singularly blessed. Her husband’s family were German- Swiss of high standing, artistic temperament, and warm affections. His mother and sister came to visit them, and took May to their hearts with cordial love.

Among the pictures painted by May at this time the most remarkable is the portrait of a negro girl, 1 This interesting picture is in the possession of her sister.

which is a very faithful study from life, and gives the color and characteristic traits of a beautiful negro without exaggeration. The expression of the eyes is tender and pathetic, well-suited to the fate of a slave girl. Such earnest study would have borne richer fruit if longer life had been hers.

May’s own nature seems to have blossomed out like a flower in this sunny climate. In her youth at home she was impulsive, affectionate, and generous, but quick in temper and sometimes exacting; but the whole impression she made upon her husband and his family was of grace and sweetness, and she herself declares that her sisters at home would not recognize her, she has “ become so sweet in this atmosphere of happiness.”

We would gladly linger over these records of a paradisiacal home where Adam and Eve renewed their innocent loves and happy labors. When musing over the sorrows of humanity it refreshes us to know that such joy is possible, and needs only love and simple hearts to make it real.

May’s note of happiness is touchingly echoed from the heart of her bereaved father, who recalls the days of his own courtship. He cherished every tender word from her; and the respectful and loving words of his new son, to whom he responds affectionately, were like balm to his stricken heart.

May’s joy was heightened by the expectation of motherhood. Her health was excellent, and she had the loving care of her new mother and sister. The anxious family at home received the news of the birth of a daughter with heartfelt delight. It was a great disappointment to Louisa that she could not be with her sister at this time; but her health was not equal to the voyage, and she felt that May had most loving and sufficient care. An American friend in Paris kindly wrote to Louisa full details of the little niece and of the mother s condition. “ It is difficult,” she says, “ to say which of that happy household is the proudest over that squirming bit of humanity.”

For about two weeks all seemed well; but alarming symptoms began to appear, and the mother’s strength failed rapidly. The brain was the seat of disease; and she was generally unconscious, although she had intervals of apparent improvement, when she recognized her friends. She passed away peacefully December 29, 1879.

An American clergyman in Paris took charge of the funeral service, which according to May’s expressed desire was very simple, and she was laid in the tranquil cemetery of Montrouge outside of the fortifications.

Foreseeing the possibility of a fatal termination to her illness, May had made every preparation for the event, and obtained a promise from her sister- in-law that she would carry the baby to Louisa to receive the devoted care that she knew would be given it. The child became a source of great comfort to Miss Alcott as will be seen from the journals. After her death Mr. Nieriker visited his little girl in America, and in June, 1889, her aunt took her to his home in Zurich, Switzerland.

Before the sad letters describing May's illness could reach America, came the cable message of her death. It was sent to Mr. Emerson, the never failing friend of the family, who bore it to Louisa, her father being temporarily absent His thought- fulness softened the blow as much as human tenderness could, but still it fell with crushing weight upon them all.

The father and sister could not sleep, and in the watches of the night he wrote that touching ode, the cry of paternal love and grief entitled " Love's Morrow."

To Mrs. Bond.
Concord, Jan. i, 1880.

Dear Auntie, — It is hard to add one more sorrow to your already full heart, particularly one of this sort, but I did not want you to hear it from any one but us. Dear May is dead. Gone to begin the new year with Mother, in a world where I hope there is no grief like this. Gone just when she seemed safest and happiest, after nearly two years of such sweet satisfaction and love that she wrote us, " If I die when baby comes, remember I have been so unspeakably happy for a year that I ought to be content ..."

And it is all over. The good mother and sister have done everything in the most devoted way. We can never repay them. My May gave me her little Lulu, and in the spring I hope to get my sweet legacy. Meantime the dear grandma takes her to a home full of loving friends and she is safe. I will write more when we know, but the cruel sea divides us and we must wait.

Bless you dear Auntie for all your love for May; she never forgot it, nor do we.

January 4.

Dear Auntie, — I have little further news to tell, but it seems to comfort me to answer the shower of tender sympathetic letters that each mail brings us. . . .

So we must wait to learn how the end came at last, where the dear dust is to lie, and how soon the desolate little home is to be broken up. It only remains for May's baby to be taken away to fill our cup to overflowing. But perhaps it would be best so, for even in Heaven with Mother, I know May will yearn for the darling so ardently desired, so tenderly welcomed, bought at such a price.

In all the troubles of my life I never had one so hard to bear, for the sudden fall from such high happiness to such a depth of sorrow finds me unprepared to accept or bear it as I ought.

Sometime I shall know why such things are; till then I must try to trust and wait and hope as you do. . . . Sorrow has its lonely side, and sympathy is so sweet it takes half its bitterness away.

Yours ever, L.

After May’s marriage and death Louisa remained awhile in Concord, trying to forget her grief in care for others. She went to the prison in Concord, and told a story to the prisoners which touched their hearts, and was long remembered by some of them.

She wrote some short stories for “ St. Nicholas,” among them “Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore,” called out by the acting of the popular opera of that name by a juvenile troupe.

She spent some weeks at Willow Cottage, Magnolia, which she has described in her popular story of “ Jack and Jill.” The scene of the story is mostly laid in Concord, or “ Harmony” as she calls it, and she has introduced many familiar scenes and persons into the book.

This summer, too, the long-dreamed of School of Philosophy was established. The opening of the School was a great event to Mr. Alcott, as it was the realization of the dream of years. Louisa enjoyed his gratification, and took pains to help him to reap full satisfaction from it. She carried flowers to grace the opening meeting, and was friendly to his guests. She occasionally attended lectures given by her friends, — Dr. Bartol, Mrs. Howe, and others, — and she could not fail to enjoy meeting many of the bright people who congregated there; but she did not care for the speculative philosophy. Her keen sense of humor led her to see all that was incongruous or funny or simply novel in the bearing of the philosophers. She felt that her father had too much of the trying details, and perhaps did not appreciate how much joy of recognition it brought him. She had not much faith in the practical success of the experiment. Philosophy was much associated in her mind with early poverty and suffering, and she did not feel its charms. She was usually at the seashore at this season, as she suffered from the heat at Concord. Frequent allusions to the school appear in her journal. The following anecdote is given by a friend.

“It was at Concord on Emerson day. After a morning with Bartol and Alcott and Mrs. Howe, I lunched with the Alcotts’, who had for guest the venerable Dr. McCosh. Naturally the conversation turned on the events of the morning. ‘ I was thinking,’ said the Doctor, ‘ as I looked among your audience, that there were no young men; and that with none but old men your school would soon die with them. By the way, madam,’ he continued, addressing Miss Alcott, ‘will you tell me what is your definition of a philosopher?’

“The reply came instantly, ‘ My definition is of a man up in a balloon, with his family and friends holding the ropes which confine him to earth and trying to haul him down.’

“The laugh which followed this reply was heartily joined in by the philosopher himself.”

Journal.

March, 1878. — A happy event, — May’s marriage to Ernest Nieriker, the “ tender friend “ who has consoled her for Marmee’s loss, as John consoled Nan for Beth’s. He is a Swiss, handsome, cultivated, and good; an excellent family living in Baden, and E. has a good business. May is old enough to choose for herself, and seems so happy in the new relation that we have nothing to say against it.

They were privately married on the 2 2d, and went to Havre for the honeymoon, as E. had business in France; so they hurried the wedding. Send her $1,000 as a gift, and all good wishes for the new life.

April. — Happy letters from May, who is enjoying life as one can but once. E. writes finely to Father, and is a son to welcome I am sure. May sketches and E. attends to his business by day, and both revel in music in the evening, as E. is a fine violin player.

How different our lives are just now! — I so lonely, sad, and sick; she so happy, well, and blest. She always had the cream of things, and deserved it. My time is yet to come somewhere else, when I am ready for it.

Anna clears out the old house; for we shall never go back to it; it ceased to be “ home “ when Marmee left it.

I dawdle about, and wait to see if I am to live or die. If I live, it is for some new work. I wonder what?

May. — Begin to drive a little, and enjoy the spring. Nature is always good to me.

May settles in her own house at Meudon, — a pretty apartment, with balcony, garden, etc. ... I plan and hope to go to them, if I am ever well enough, and find new inspiration in a new life. May and E. urge it, and I long to go, but cannot risk the voyage yet. I doubt if I ever find time to lead my own life, or health to try it.

June and July. — Improving fast, in spite of dark predictions and forebodings. The Lord has more work for me, so I am spared.

Tried to write a memoir of Marmee; but it is too soon, and I am not well enough.

May has had the new mother and brother-in-law with her, and finds them most interesting and lovable. They seem very proud of her, and happy in her happiness. Bright times for our youngest! May they last! [They did. — L.M.A.]

Got nicely ready to go to May in September; but at the last moment gave it up, fearing to undo all the good this weary year of ease has done for me, and be a burden on her. A great disappointment; but I've learned to wait. I long to see her happy in her own home.

Nan breaks her leg; so it is well I stayed, as there was no one to take her place but me. Always a little chore to be done.

October, November. — Nan improved. Rode, nursed, kept house, and tried to be contented, but was not. Make no plans for myself now; do what I can, and should be glad not to have to sit idle any longer.

On the 8th, Marmee's birthday, Father and I went to Sleepy Hollow with red leaves and flowers for her. A cold, dull day, and I was glad there was no winter for her any more.

November 25th. — A year since our beloved Marmee died. A very eventful year. May marries, I live instead of dying, Father comes to honor in his old age, and Nan makes her home our refuge when we need one.

December. — A busy time. Nan gets about again. I am so well I wonder at myself, and ask no more.

Write a tale for the “ Independent,” and begin on an art novel, with May's romance for its thread. Went to B. for some weeks, and looked about to see what I could venture to do. . . .

So ends 1878, — a great contrast to last December. Then I thought I was done with life; now I can enjoy a good deal, and wait to see what I am spared to do Thank God for both the sorrow and the joy.

January, 1879. — At the Bellevue in my little room writing.

Got two books well started, but had too many interruptions to do much, and dared not get into a vortex for fear of a break-down.

Went about and saw people, and tried to be jolly. Did Jarley for a fair, also for Authors' Carnival at Music Hall. A queer time; too old for such pranks. A sad heart and a used-up body make play hard work, I find.

Read “Mary Wollstonecraft,” “ Dosia,” “ Danieli,” “ Helene,” etc. I like Gr£ville's books.

Invest $ 1,000 for Fred's schooling, etc. Johnny has his $1,000 also safely in the bank for his education and any emergency.

February. — Home to Concord rather used up. Find a very quiet life is best; for in B. people beset me to do things, and I try, and get so tired I cannot work. Dr. C. says rest is my salvation; so I rest. Hope for Paris in the spring, as May begs me to come. She is leading what she calls “ an ideal life,” — painting, music, love, and the world shut out. People wonder and gossip; but M. and E. laugh and are happy. Wise people to enjoy this lovely time!

Went to a dinner, at the Revere House, of the Papyrus Club. Mrs. Burnett and Miss A. were guests of honor. Dr. Holmes took me in, and to my surprise I found myself at the president’s right hand, with Mrs. B., Holmes, Stedman, and the great ones of the land. Had a gay time. Dr. H. very gallant. “ Little Women “ often toasted with more praise than was good for me.

Saw Mrs. B. at a lunch, and took her and Mrs. M. M. Dodge to Concord for a lunch. Most agreeable women.

A visit at H. W.’s. Mission time at Church of the Advent. Father Knox-Little preached, and waked up the sinners. H. hoped to convert me, and took me to see Father K.-L., a very interesting man, and we had a pleasant talk; but I found that we meant the same thing, though called by different names; and his religion had too much ceremony about it to suit me. So he gave me his blessing, and promised to send me some books.

[Never did. — L.M.A.]

Pleasant times with my “ rainy-day friend,” as I call Dr. W. She is a great comfort to me, with her healthy common-sense and tender patience, aside from skill as a doctor and beauty as a woman. I love her much, and she does me good.

Happy letters from May. Her hopes of a little son or daughter in the autumn give us new plans to talk over. I must be well enough to go to her then.

April. — Very poorly and cross; so tired of being a prisoner to pain. Long for the old strength when I could do what I liked, and never knew I had a body. Life not worth living in this way; but having overworked the wonderful machine, I must pay for it, and should not growl, I suppose, as it is just.

To B. to see Dr. S. Told me I was better than she ever dreamed I could be, and need not worry. So took heart, and tried to be cheerful, in spite of aches and nerves. Warm weather comforted me, and green grass did me good.

Put a fence round A.’s garden. Bought a phaeton, so I might drive, as I cannot walk much, and Father loves to take his guests about.

May and June. — Go to B. for a week, but don’t enjoy seeing people. Do errands, and go home again. Saw “ Pinafore; “ a pretty play.

Much company.

E.’s looked at the Orchard House and liked it; will hire it, probably. Hope so, as it is forlorn standing empty. I never go by without looking up at Marmee’s. window, where the dear face used to be, and May’s, with the picturesque vines round it. No golden-haired, blue- gowned Diana ever appears now; she sits happily sewing baby-clothes in Paris. Enjoyed fitting out a box of dainty things to send her. Even lonely old spinsters take an interest in babies.

June. — A poor month. Try to forget my own worries, and enjoy the fine weather, my little carriage, and good friends. Souls are such slaves to bodies it is hard to keep up out of the slough of despond when nerves jangle and flesh aches.

Went with Father on Sunday to the prison, and told the men a story. Thought I could not face four hundred at first; but after looking at them during the sermon, I felt that I could at least amuse them, and they evidently needed something new. So I told a hospital story with a little moral to it, and was so interested in watching the faces of some young men near me, who drank in every word, that I forgot myself, and talked away "like a mother." One put his head down, and another winked hard, so I felt that I had caught them; for even one tear in that dry, hard place would do them good. Miss McC. and Father said it was well done, and I felt quite proud of my first speech. [Sequel later.]

July. — Wrote a little tale called " Jimmy's Cruise in the Pinafore," for " St. Nicholas; " $100.

14th. — The philosophers begin to swarm, and the buzz starts to-morrow. How much honey will be made is still doubtful, but the hive is ready and drones also.

On the 15 th, the School of Philosophy began in the study at Orchard House, — thirty students; Father, the dean. He has his dream realized at last, and is in glory, with plenty of talk to swim in. People laugh, but will enjoy something new in this dull old town; and the fresh Westerners will show them that all the culture of the world is not in Concord. I had a private laugh when Mrs. asked one of the new-comers, with her superior air, if she had ever looked into Plato. And the modest lady from Jacksonville answered, with a twinkle

at me, "We have been reading Plato in Greek for the past six years." Mrs. subsided after that.

[Oh, wicked L. M. A., who hates sham and loves a joke.

— L.M.A.]

Was the first woman to register my name as a voter.

August. — To B. with a new " Scrap Bag." " Jimmy " to the fore. Wrote a little tale.

The town swarms with budding philosophers, and they roost on our steps like hens waiting for corn. Father revels in it, so we keep the hotel going, and try to look as if we liked it. If they were philanthropists, I should enjoy it; but speculation seems a waste of time when there is so much real work crying to be done. Why discuss the "unknowable " till our poor are fed and the wicked saved?

A young poet from New York came; nice boy.

Sixteen callers to-day. Trying to stir up the women about suffrage; so timid and slow.

Happy letters from May. Sophie N. is with her now. All well in the Paris nest.

Passed a week in Magnolia with Mrs. H. School ended for this year. Hallelujah!

September. — Home from the seaside refreshed, and go to work on a new serial for “ St. Nicholas,” — “ Jack and Jill.” Have no plan yet but a boy, a girl, and a sled, with an upset to start with. Vague idea of working in Concord young folks and their doings. After two years of rest, I am going to try again; it is so easy to make money now, and so pleasant to have it to give. A chapter a day is my task, and not that if I feel tired. No more fourteen hours a day; make haste slowly now.

Drove about and drummed up women to my suffrage meeting. So hard to move people out of the old ruts.

I have n’t patience enough; if they won’t see and work, I let ‘em alone, and steam along my own way.

May sent some nice little letters of an “ Artist’s Holiday,” and I had them printed; also a book for artists abroad, — very useful, and well done.

Eight chapters done. Too much company for work.

October 8th. — Dear Marmee’s birthday. Never forgotten. Lovely day. Go to Sleepy Hollow with flowers. Her grave is green; blackberry vines with red leaves trail over it. A little white stone with her initials is at the head, and among the tall grass over her breast a little bird had made a nest; empty now, but a pretty symbol of the refuge that tender bosom always was for all feeble and sweet things. Her favorite asters bloomed all about, and the pines sang overhead. So she and dear Beth are quietly asleep in God’s acre, and we remember them more tenderly with each year that brings us nearer them and home.

Went with Dr. W. to the Woman’s Prison, at Sherburne. A lovely drive, and very remarkable day and night. Read a story to the four hundred women, and heard many interesting tales. A much better place than Concord Prison, with its armed wardens, and “knock down and drag out” methods. Only women here, and they work wonders by patience, love, common-sense, and the belief in salvation for all.

First proof from Scribner of “ Jack and Jill.” Mrs. D. likes the story, so I peg away very slowly. Put in Elly D. as one of my boys. The nearer I keep to nature, the better the work is. Young people much interested in the story, and all want to “go in.” I shall have a hornet’s nest about me if all are not angels.

Father goes West.

I mourn much because all say I must not go to May; not safe; and I cannot add to Mamma Nieriker's cares at this time by another invalid, as the voyage would upset me, I am so sea-sick.

Give up my hope and long-cherished plan with grief. May sadly disappointed. I know I shall wish I had gone; it is my luck.

November. — Went to Boston for a month, as some solace for my great disappointment. Take my room at the Bellevue, and go about a little. Write on "J. and J." Anxious about May.

8th. — Little Louisa May Nieriker arrived in Paris at 9 p. m., after a short journey. All doing well. Much rejoicing. Nice little lass, and May very happy. Ah, if I had only been there! Too much happiness for me.

25 th. — Two years since Marmee went. How she would have enjoyed the little granddaughter, and all May's romance! Perhaps she does.

Went home on my birthday (forty-seven). Tried to have a little party for Nan and the boys, but it was rather hard work.

Not well enough to write much, so give up my room. Can li$ round at home, and it's cheaper.

December. — May not doing well. The weight on my heart is not all imagination. She was too happy to have it last, and I fear the end is coming. Hope it is my nerves; but this peculiar feeling has never misled me before.

Invited to the breakfast to O. W. H. No heart to go.

8th. — Little Lu one month old. Small, but lively. Oh, if I could only be there to see, — to help! This is a penance for all my sins. Such a tugging at my heart to be by poor May, alone, so far away. The N.'s are devoted, and all is done that can be; but not one of her " very own " is there.

Father came home.

29th. — May died at 8 a. m., after three weeks of fever and stupor. Happy and painless most of the time. At Mr. W.'s funeral on the 30th, I felt the truth before the news came.

Wednesday, 31st. — A dark day for us. A telegram from Ernest to Mr. Emerson tells us "May is dead." Anna was gone to B.; Father to the post-office, anxious for letters, the last being overdue. I was alone when Mr. E. came. E. sent to him, knowing I was feeble, and hoping Mr. E. would soften the blow. I found him looking at May's portrait, pale and tearful, with the paper in his hand. " My child, I wish I could prepare you; but alas, alas! " There his voice failed, and he gave me the telegram.

I was not surprised, and read the hard words as if I knew it all before. " I am prepared," I said, and thanked him. He was much moved and very tender. I shall remember gratefully the look, the grasp, the tears he gave me; and I am sure that hard moment was made bearable by the presence of this our best and tenderest friend. He went to find Father but missed him, and I had to tell both him and Anna when they came. A very bitter sorrow for all.

The dear baby may comfort E., but what can comfort us? It is the distance that is so hard, and the thought of so much happiness ended so soon. “Two years of perfect happiness “ May called these married years, and said, “ If I die when baby comes, don’t mourn, for I have had as much happiness in this short time as many in twenty years.” She wished me to have her baby and her pictures. A very precious legacy! Rich payment for the little I could do for her. I see now why I lived, — to care for May’s child and not leave Anna all alone.

January 1 st, 1880. — A sad day mourning for May. Of all the trials in my life I never felt any so keenly as this, perhaps because I am so feeble in -health that I cannot bear it well. It seems so hard to break up that happy little home and take May just when life was richest, and to leave me who had done my task and could well be spared. Shall I ever know why such things happen?

Letters came telling us all the sad story. May was unconscious during the last weeks, and seemed not to suffer. Spoke now and then of “getting ready for Louy,” and asked if she had come. All was done that love and skill could do, but in vain. E. is brokenhearted, and good Madame N. and Sophie find their only solace in the poor baby.

May felt a foreboding, and left all ready in case she died. Some trunks packed for us, some for the N. sisters. Her diary written up, all in order. Even chose the graveyard where she wished to be, out of the city. E. obeys all her wishes sacredly.

Tried to write on “J. and J.” to distract my mind; but the wave of sorrow kept rolling over me, and I could only weep and wait till the tide ebbed again.

February. — More letters from E. and Madame N. Like us, they find comfort in writing of the dear soul gone, now there is nothing more to do for her. I cannot make it true that our May is dead, lying far away in a strange grave, leaving a husband and child whom we have never seen. It all reads like a pretty romance, now death hath set its seal on these two happy years; and we shall never know all that she alone could tell us.

Many letters from friends in France, England, and America, full of sympathy for us, and love and pride and gratitude for May, who was always glad to help, forgive, and love every one. It is our only consolation now.

Father and I cannot sleep, but he and I make verses as we did when Marmee died. Our grief seems to flow into words. He writes “Love’s Morrow” and “Our Madonna.”

Lulu has gone to Baden with Grandmamma.

Finish “J. and J.” The world goes on in spite of sorrow, and I must do my work. Both these last serials were written with a heavy heart, — “Under the Lilacs” when Marmee was failing, and “ Jack and Jill” while May was dying. Hope the grief did not get into them.

Hear R. W. E. lecture for his one hundredth time. Mary Clemmer writes for a sketch of my life for a book of “ Famous Women.” Don’t belong there.

Read “ Memoirs of Madame de R6musat.” Not very interesting. Beauties seldom amount to much. Plain Margaret Fuller was worth a dozen of them. “ Kings in Exile,” a most interesting book, a very vivid and terrible picture of Parisian life and royal weakness and sorrow.

Put papers, etc., in order. I feel as if one should be ready to go at any moment. . . .

March. — A box came from May, with pictures, clothes, vases, her ornaments, a little work-basket, and, in one of her own sepia boxes, her pretty hair tied with blue ribbon, — all that is now left us of this bright soul but the baby, soon to come. Treasures all.

A sad day, and many tears dropped on the dear dress, the blue slippers she last wore, the bit of work she laid down when the call came the evening Lulu was born. The fur-lined sack feels like May’s arms round me, and I shall wear it with pleasure. The pictures show us her great progress these last years.

To Boston for a few days on business, and to try to forget. Got gifts for Anna’s birthday on the 16th, — forty- nine years old. My only sister now, and the best God ever made. Repaired her house for her.

Lulu is not to come till autumn. Great disappointment; but it is wiser to wait, as summer is bad for a young baby to begin here.

29th. — Town meeting. Twenty women there, and voted first, thanks to Father. Polls closed, — in joke, we thought, as Judge Hoar proposed it; proved to be in earnest, and we elected a good school committee. Quiet time; no fuss.

January 20, 1880.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I have been so bowed down with grief at the loss of my dear sister just when our anxiety was over that I have not had a thought or care for anything else.

The story is done; but the last chapters are not copied, and I thought it best to let them lie till I could give my mind to the work.

I never get a good chance to do a story without interruption of some sort. “ Under the Lilacs “ was finished by my mother’s bedside in her last illness, and this one when my heart was full of care and hope and then grief over poor May.

I trust the misery did not get into the story; but ± ‘m afraid it is not as gay as I meant most of it to be.

I forgot to number the pages of the last two chapters, and so cannot number these. I usually keep the run, but this time sent off the parcel in a hurry. Can you send me the right number to go on with in chapter seventeen? I can send you four more as soon as I hear.

I don’t believe I shall come to New York this winter.

May left me her little daughter for my own; and if she comes over soon, I shall be too busy singing lullabies to one child to write tales for others, or go anywhere, even to see my kind friends.

A sweeter little romance has just ended in Paris than any I can ever make; and the sad facts of life leave me no heart for cheerful fiction.

Yours truly, L. M. Alcott.

CHAPTER XI.

LAST YEARS.

MY PRAYER.

(Written October, 1886.)

Courage and patience, these I ask,
Dear Lord, in this my latest strait;
For hard I find my ten years’ task,
Learning to suffer and to wait.

Life seems so rich and grand a thing,
So full of work for heart and brain,
It is a cross that I can bring
No help, no offering, but pain.

The hard-earned harvest of these years
I long to generously share;
The lessons learned with bitter tears
To teach again with tender care;

To smooth the rough and thorny way
Where other feet begin to tread;
To feed some hungry soul each day
With sympathy’s sustaining bread.

So beautiful such pleasures show,
I long to make them mine;
To love and labor and to know
The joy such living rteakes divine.

But if I may not, I will only ask
Courage and patience for my fate,
And learn, dear Lord, thy latest task, —
To suffer patiently and wait.

THE early part of the year 1880 was in the deep shadow of sadness, from the death of Louisa’s sister. Boxes full of May’s pictures, clothes, and books came home to call up anew all the memories of the bright spirit who had blossomed into such beautiful life so quickly to fade away.

Miss Alcott tried to rise above her grief and busy herself with new interests. She took an active part in the voting of the women in Concord, and ‘rejoiced in the election of a good school committee. In April she returned to her old rooms at the Bellevue, where she busied herself with dramatizing " Michael Strogoff," which she never completed. She kept up her interest in young girls, and received with pleasure a visit from thirty pupils of the Boston University, and she helped to give the children of the North End Mission a happy day at Walden Pond. She went to York for rest and refreshment during the summer. Her heart was filled with longing for the child, and everything was done with reference to its coming.

As September brought cooler weather, over the sea came the little babe to the warm hearts that were longing to welcome her. No woman as true and loving as Louisa Alcott but has the mother-nature strong in her heart; and she could not help feeling a new spring of love and life when the child of one so dear was put into her arms to be her very own. Rosy and healthy, full of life and energy, — not a model of sainthood, but a real human nature, with a will to be regulated, not broken, with impulses to be trained, talents and tendencies to be studied, and a true, loving heart to be filled with joy, — Louisa found the child a constant source of interest and pleasure. She brought her up as she herself had been trained, — more by influences than by rules, — and sought to follow the leadings which she found in the young nature rather than to make it over after a plan of her own. This new care and joy helped to fill up the void in her life from the loss of the mother for whom she had worked so faithfully and the pet sister to whom she had ever been a good providence.

The principal interest of the next few years was the care of this child. It was a pleasant occupation to Louisa, occupying her heart, and binding her with new ties to younger generations. The journal tells all the simple story of the "voyage across the seas."

Miss Alcott was very attractive to children, especially to the little ones, who thronged about her and pleaded for stories; but this was the first one who ever really filled the mother-longing in her heart. She was now truly a " marmee; " and remembering the blessing which her own mother had been to her, her standard of motherhood must have been very high. Much care was now also given to her father, and she speaks with pride of her handsome old philosopher in his new suit of clothes.

Miss Alcott was gratified by a visit from one of the men to whom she had spoken at Concord Prison. He told her his story, and she assisted him to find work, and had the satisfaction of hearing of his well-doing.

There is little record of writing done at this period, Louisa's time and thoughts being absorbed by the child. In the autumn of 1881 she wrote a preface to a new edition of the "Prayers of Theodore Parker," and also one to the new edition of " Moods."

Louisa kept the birthdays of November, though with saddened heart. She wrote a tale for the Soldiers' Home, — " My Red Cap," in " Proverb Stories," — and another for the New England Hospital fair, — "A Baby's Birthday; " and also one for her old publisher. Such was the feeling toward her as a universal benefactor, that a poor woman wrote her begging her to send some Christmas gifts to her children, as they had asked her to write to Santa Claus for some. With Lulu's help she got up a box for the poor family, and then made a story out of the incident, for which she received a hundred dollars.

A new project was that of a temperance society, which was felt to be needeci in Concord.

Louisa occupied herself much in looking over her mother's papers, and unfortunately destroyed them, instead of preparing a memoir of her as she had intended to do. It is a matter of great regret that she did not feel able to do this work, for Mrs. Alcott's letters would have been a most valuable record of the life of her time, as well as a treasury of bright thought and earnest feeling. Louisa was not willing to commit the task to any other hand, and the opportunity is gone.

To Mrs. Dodge.

Concord, May 29.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I was away from home, so your letter did not reach me till I got back yesterday.

Thanks for your kind thought of me, and recollections of the pleasant week when the L. L.'s had a lark. I should like another; but in this work-a-day world busy folk don't get many, as we know.

If I write a serial, you shall have it; but I have my doubts as to the leisure and quiet needed for such tasks being possible with a year-old baby. Of course little Lu is a very remarkable child, but I fancy I shall feel as full of responsibility as a hen with one chick, and cluck and scratch industriously for the sole benefit of my daughter.

She may, however, have a literary turn, and be my assistant, by offering hints and giving studies of character for my work. She comes in September, if well.

If I do begin a new story, how would " An Old-Fashioned Boy " and his life do? I meant that for the title of a book, but another woman took it. You proposed a revolutionary tale once, but I was not up to it; for this I have quaint material in my father's journals, letters, and recollections. He was born with the century, and had an uncle in the war of 1812; and his life was very pretty and pastoral in the early days. I think a new sort of story would n't be amiss, with fun in it, and the queer old names and habits. I began it long ago, and if I have a chance will finish off a few chapters and send them to you, if you like.

Yours cordially, L. M. Alcott.

To Mr. Niles, about the new illustrated edition of “Little Women

York, July 20, 1880.

The drawings are all capital, and we had great fun over them down here this rainy day. . . . Mr. Merrill certainly deserves a good penny for his work. Such a fertile fancy and quick hand as his should be well paid, and I shall not begrudge him his well-earned compensation, nor the praise I am sure these illustrations will earn. It is very pleasant to think that the lucky little story has been of use to a fellow-worker, and I am much obliged to him for so improving on my hasty pen-and-ink sketches. . What a dear rowdy boy Teddy is with the felt basin on!

The papers are great gossips, and never get anything quite straight, and I do mean to set up my own establishment in Boston (D. V.). Now I have an excuse for a home of my own, and as the other artistic and literary spinsters have a house, I am going to try the plan, for a winter at least.

Come and see how cosey we are next October at 81 Pinckney Street. Miss N. will receive.

Yours truly,   L. M. A.

To Mrs. Dodge.

81 Pinckney Street, 1880.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — The editor of “ Harper’s Young People “ asked for a serial, and I declined; then they wanted a short story for Christmas, and I sent one. But it was not long enough, though longer than most of my short $100 tales.

So I said, “ If you don’t want it, send it to ‘Saint Nicholas.’“

Therefore if “ How It Happened” comes straying along, you will know what it means. If you don’t want it, please send it to me in Boston, 81 Pinckney Street; for Christmas tales are always in demand, and I have no time to write more.

You will like to know that my baby is safely here, — a healthy, happy little soul, who comes like sunshine to our sad hearts, and takes us all captive by her winning ways and lovely traits.

I shall soon be settled for the winter, and I hope have good times after the hard ones.

Affectionately yours, L. M. A.

Journal.

April, 1880. — So sad and poorly; went to B. for a change. Old room at the Bellevue.

Amused myself dramatizing “ Michael Strogoff; “ read, walked, and rested. Reporters called for story of my life; did not get much. Made my will, dividing all I have between Nan and the boys, with Father as a legacy to Nan, and to Lulu her mother’s pictures and small fortune of $500.

May. — Thirty girls from Boston University called; told stories, showed pictures, wrote autographs. Pleasant to see so much innocent enthusiasm, even about so poor a thing as a used-up old woman. Bright girls! simple in dress, sensible ideas of life, and love of education. I wish them all good luck.

Ordered a stone for May’s grave like Marmee’s and Beth’s, for some day I hope to bring her dust home.

Twenty-third is the anniversary of Mother’s wedding. If she had lived, it would have been the golden wedding.

Went to see St. Botolph’s Club rooms. Very prim and neat, with easy chairs everywhere; stained glass, and a pious little bar, with nothing visible but a moral ice- pitcher and a butler like a bishop. The reverend gentlemen will be comfortable and merry, I fancy, as there is a smoking-room and card-tables, as well as a library and picture-gallery. Divines nowadays are not as godly as in old times, it seems.

Mrs. Dodge wants a new serial, but I doubt if I can do it; boys, babies, illness, and business of all sorts leave no time for story-telling.

June. — We all enjoy the new rooms very much, and Father finds his study delightful. Prepare the Orchard House for W. T. Harris, who is to rent it.

North End Mission children at Walden Pond. Help give them a happy day, — eleven hundred of them. Get Anna and John off to Walpole. Cleaned house.

Madame N. sends a picture of Lulu, — a funny, fat little thing in her carriage. Don’t realize that it is May’s child, and that she is far away in a French cemetery, never to come home to us again.

It is decided that Baby is to come to us in September.

24//?. — Lizzie’s birthday and Johnny’s. He is fifteen, — a lovely, good boy, whom every one loves. Got the Dean a new suit of clothes, as he must be nice for his duties at the School. Plato’s toga was not so costly, but even he did not look better than my handsome old philosopher.

July and August. — To York with boys. Rest and enjoy the fine air. Home in August, and let Anna go down. Four hundred callers since the School began. Philosophy is a bore to outsiders.

Got things ready for my baby, — warm wrapper, and all the dear can need on her long journey. On the 21st saw Mrs. Giles (who went for baby) off; the last time I went, it was to see May go. She was sober and sad, not gay as before; seemed to feel it might be a longer voyage than we knew. The last view I had of her, was standing alone in the long blue cloak waving her hand to us, smiling with wet eyes till out of sight. How little we dreamed what an experience of love, joy, pain, and death she was going to!

A lonely time with all away. My grief meets me when I come home, and the house is full of ghosts.

September. — Put papers in order, and arrange things generally, to be in order when our Lulu comes. Make a cosey nursery for the darling, and say my prayers over the little white crib that waits for her, if she ever comes. God watch over her!

Paid my first poll-tax. As my head is my most valuable piece of property, I thought $2 a cheap tax on it. Saw my townswomen about voting, etc. Hard work to stir them up; cake and servants are more interesting.

18th. — In Boston, waiting for the steamer that brings my treasure. The ocean seems very wide and terrible when I think of the motherless little creature coming so far to us.

1 gth. — Lulu and Sophie N. arrived with poor G., worn out by anxiety. A stormy passage, and much care, being turned out of the stateroom I had engaged for them and paid for, by a rude New York dressmaker. No help for it, so poor G. went to a rat-hole below, and did her best.

As I waited on the wharf while the people came off the ship, I saw several babies, and wondered each time if that was mine. At last the captain appeared, and in his arms a little yellow-haired thing in white, with its hat half off as it looked about with lively blue eyes and babbled prettily. Mrs. G. came along by it, and I knew it was Lulu. Behind, walked a lovely brown-eyed girl with an anxious face, all being new and strange to Sophie.

I held out my arms to Lulu, only being able to say her name. She looked at me for a moment, then came to me, saying “ Marmar “ in a wistful way, and resting close as if she had found her own people and home at last, — as she had, thank Heaven! I could only listen while I held her, and the others told their tale. Then we got home as soon as we could, and dear baby behaved very well, though hungry and tired.

The little princess was received with tears and smiles, and being washed and fed went quietly to sleep in her new bed, while we brooded over her and were never tired of looking at the little face of “May’s baby.”

She is a very active, bright child, not pretty yet, being browned by sea air, and having a yellow down on her head, and a pug nose. Her little body is beautifully formed, broad shoulders, fine chest, and lovely arms. A happy thing, laughing and waving her hands, confiding and bold, with a keen look in the eyes so like May, who hated shams and saw through them at once. She always comes to me, and seems to have decided that I am really “ Marmar.” My heart is full of pride and joy, and the touch of the dear little hands seems to take away the bitterness of grief. I often go at night to see if she is really Jiere, and the sight of the little head is like sunshine to me. Father adores her, and she loves to sit in his strong arms. They make a pretty picture as he walks in the garden with her to “see birdies.” Anna tends her as she did May, who was her baby once, being ten years younger, and we all find life easier to live now the baby has come. Sophie is a sweet girl, with much character and beauty. A charming sister in love as in law.

October. — Happy days with Lulu and Sophie; getting acquainted with them. Lulu is rosy and fair now, and grows pretty in her native air, — a merry little lass, who seems to feel at home and blooms in an atmosphere of adoration. People come to see “ Miss Alcott’s baby,” and strangers waylay her little carriage in the street to look at her; but she does not allow herself to be kissed.

As Father wants to go West I decide to hire Cousin L. W.’s house furnished for the winter, so that Sophie and the boys can have a pleasant time. S. misses the gayety of her home-life in stupid Concord, where the gossip and want of manners strike her very disagreeably. Impertinent questions are asked her, and she is amazed at the queer, rude things people say.

Novettiber 8th. — Lulu’s birthday. One year old. Her gifts were set out on a table for her to see when she came down in the afternoon, — a little cake with one candle, a rose crown for the queen, a silver mug, dolly, picture-books, gay ball, toys, flowers, and many kisses. She sat smiling at her treasures just under her mother’s picture. Suddenly, attracted by the sunshine on the face of the portrait which she knows is “ Marmar,” she held up a white rose to it calling “ Mum! Mum! “ and smiling at it in a way that made us all cry. A happy day for her, a sad one to us.

Thanksgiving. — Family dinner.

Father at Syracuse, having conversations at Bishop Huntington’s and a fine time everywhere.

December. — Too busy to keep much of a journal. My life is absorbed in my baby. On the twenty-third she got up and walked alone; had never crept at all, but when ready ran across the room and plumped down, laughing triumphantly at her feat.

Christmas. — Tried to make it gay for the young folks, but a heavy day for Nan and me. Sixty gifts were set out on different tables, and all were much pleased. Sophie had many pretty things, and gave to all generously.

A hard year for all, but when I hold my Lulu I feel as if even death had its compensations. A new world for me.

Called down one day to see a young man. Found it one of those to whom I spoke at the prison in Concord last June. Came to thank me for the good my little story did him, since it kept him straight and reminded him that it is never too late to mend. Told me about himself, and how he was going to begin anew and wipe out the past. He had been a miner, and coming East met some fellows who made him drink; while tipsy he stole something in a doctor's office, and having no friends here was sentenced to three years in prison. Did well, and was now out. Had a prospect of going on an expedition to South America with a geological surveying party. An interesting young man. Fond of books, anxious to do well, intelligent, and seemed eager to atone for his one fault. Gave him a letter to S. G. at Chicago. Wrote to the warden, who confirmed D.'s story and spoke well of him. Miss Willard wrote me later of him, and he seemed doing well. Asked if he might write to me, and did so several times, then went to S. A. and I hear no more. Glad to have said a word to help the poor boy.

March, 1881. — Voted for school committee.

October. — Wrote a preface for Parker's Prayers, just got out by F. B. Sanborn.

November. — Forty-nine on 29th. Wrote a preface to the new edition of " Moods."

8th. — Gave my baby two kisses when she woke, and escorted her down to find a new chair. decked with ribbons, and a doll's carriage tied with pink; toys, pictures, flowers, and a cake, with a red and a blue candle burning gayly.

Wrote a tale for the Soldiers' Home, — " My Red Cap," — and one for the Woman's Hospital fair, — "A Baby's Birthday." Also a tale for F.

December. — A poor woman in Illinois writes me to send her children some Christmas gifts, being too poor and ill to get any. They asked her to write to Santa Claus and she wrote to i?ie. Sent a box, and made a story about it, — $100. Lulu much interested, and kept bringing all her best toys and clothes " for poor little boys." A generous baby.

To Mr. Niles.
February 12, 1881.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Wendell Phillips wrote me a letter begging me to write a preface for Mrs. Robinson's " History of the Suffrage Movement; " but I refused him, as I did Mrs. R., because I don't write prefaces well, and if I begin to do it there will be no end. . . .

Cannot you do a small edition for her? All the believers will buy the book, and I think the sketches of L. M. Child, Abby May, Alcott, and others will add much to the interest of the book.

Has she seen you about it? Will you look at the manuscripts by and by, or do you scorn the whole thing? Better not; for we are going to win in time, and the friend of literary ladies ought to be also the friend of women generally.

We are going to meet the Governor, council, and legislature at Mrs. Tudor's next Wednesday eve and have a grand set-to. I hope he will come out of the struggle alive.

Do give Mrs. R. a lift if you can, and your petitioners will ever pray.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

February 19, 1881.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Thank you very much for so kindly offering to look at Mrs. R.'s book. It is always pleasant to find a person who can conquer his prejudices to oblige a friend, if no more.

I think we shall be glad by and by of every little help we may have been able to give to this reform in its hard times, for those who take the tug now will deserve the praise when the work is done.

I can remember when Antislavery was in just the same state that Suffrage is now, and take more pride in the very small help we Alcotts could give than in all the books I ever wrote or ever shall write.

"Earth's fanatics often make heaven's saints," you know, and it is as well to try for that sort of promotion in time.

If Mrs. R. does send her manuscripts I will help all I can in reading or in any other way. If it only records the just and wise changes Suffrage has made in the laws for women, it will be worth printing; and it is time to keep account of these first steps, since they count most.

I, for one, don't want to be ranked among idiots, felons, and minors any longer, for I am none of the three, but very gratefully yours,

To Mrs. Steams.

February 21, 1881.

Dear Mrs. Stearns, — Many thanks for the tender thoughtfulness which sends us the precious little notes from the dear dead hands.

They are so characteristic that they bring both Mother and May clearly up before me, alive and full of patient courage and happy hopes. I am resigned to my blessed mother's departure, since life was a burden, and the heroic past made a helpless future very hard to think of. But May's loss, just when life was fullest and sweetest, seems very bitter to me still, in spite of the sweet baby who is an unspeakable comfort. I wish you could see the pretty creature who already shows many of her mother's traits and tastes. Her love of pictures is a passion, but she will not look at the common gay ones most babies enjoy. She chooses the delicate, well-drawn, and painted figures of Caldecott and Miss Greenaway; over these she broods with rapture, pointing her little fingers at the cows or cats, and kissing the children with funny prattlings to these dumb playmates. She is a fine, tall girl, full of energy, intelligence, and health; blonde and blue-eyed like her mother, but with her father's features, for which I am glad, for he is a handsome man. Louisa May bids fair to be a noble woman; and I hope I may live to see May's child as brave and bright and talented as she was and, much happier in her fate.

Father is at the West, busy and well. Anna joins me in thanks and affectionate regards.

Ever yours, L. M. Alcott.

Journal.

March, 1882. — Helped start a temperance society; much needed in C. A great deal of drinking, not among the Irish, but young American gentlemen, as well as farmers and mill hands. Women anxious to do something, but find no interest beyond a few. Have meetings, and try to learn how to work. I was secretary, and wrote records, letters, and sent pledges, etc.; also articles in "Concord Freeman" and "Woman's Journal" about the union and town meetings.

April. — Read over and destroyed Mother's diaries, as she wished me to do so. A wonderfully interesting record of her life, from her delicate, cherished girlhood through her long, hard, romantic married years, old age, and death. Some time I will write a story or a memoir of it.

Lulu's teeth trouble her; but in my arms she seems to find comfort, for I tell stories by the dozen; and lambs, piggies, and " tats " soothe her little woes. Wish I were stronger, so that I might take all the care of her. We seem to understand each other, but my nerves make me impatient, and noise wears upon me.

Mr. Emerson ill. Father goes to see him. E. held his hand, looking up at the tall, sorry old man, and saying, with that smile of love that has been Father's sunshine for so many years, " You are very well, — keep so, keep so." After Father left, he called him back and grasped his hand again, as if he knew it was for the last time, and the kind eyes said, " Good-by, my friend!"

April 27, 1882, Louisa speaks most tenderly of the death of Mr. Emerson. He had been to her and to her family the truest and best of friends; and her own profound reverence for him had been a strong influence, from the time when she played games with his children in the barn until she followed him to his honored grave. Let critics and philosophers judge him by his intellect; in the hearts of this family, and in many an humble home besides, he will always be remembered as the ten- derest, most sympathetic, most loyal of all friends, whose bounty fell on them silently as the dew from heaven, and whose presence could brighten the highest joy and soothe the keenest sorrow they could ever know.

Journal.

Thursday, 27th. — Mr. Emerson died at 9 p.m. suddenly. Our best and greatest American gone. The nearest and dearest friend Father has ever had, and the man who has helped me most by his life, his books, his society. I can never tell all he has been to me, — from the time I sang Mignon's song under his window (a little girl) and wrote letters a la Bettine to him, my Goethe, at fifteen, up through my hard years, when his essays on Self-Reliance, Character, Compensation, Love, and Friendship helped me to understand myself and life, and God and Nature. Illustrious and beloved friend, good-by!

Sunday, 30th. — Emerson's funeral. I made a yellow lyre of jonquils for the church, and helped trim it up. Private services at the house, and a great crowd at the church. Father read his sonnet, and Judge Hoar and others spoke. Now he lies in Sleepy Hollow among his brothers, under the pines he loved.

I sat up till midnight to write an article on R. W. E. for the "Youth's Companion," that the children may know something of him. A labor of love.

May. — Twenty-seven boys signed pledge. Temperance work. Meetings. I give books to schools. Wrote an article for Mrs< Croly on. R. W. E.

June. — I visited A. B. in Mattapoisset for a week. A queer time, driving about or talking over our year in Europe. School children called upon me with flowers, etc.

24th. — John's seventeenth birthday. A dear boy, good and gay, full of love, manliness, and all honest and lovely traits, like his father and mother. Long life to my boy!

July. — School of Philosophy opens on the 17 th in full force. I arrange flowers, oak branches, etc., and then fly before the reporters come. Father very happy. Westerners arrive, and the town is full with ideal speculators. Penny has a new barge; we call it the " Blue Plato" (not the "Black Maria"), and watch it rumble by with Margaret Fullers in white muslin and Hegels in straw hats, while stout Penny grins at the joke as he puts money in his purse. The first year Concord people stood aloof, and the strangers found it hard to get rooms. Now every one is eager to take them, and the School is pronounced a success because it brings money to the town. Even philosphers can't do without food, beds, and washing; so all rejoice, and the new craze flourishes. If all our guests paid we should be well off; several hundred a month is rather wearing. Father asked why we never went, and Anna showed him a long list of four hundred names of callers, and he said no more.

October. — To Hotel Bellevue with John.

Missed my dear baby, but need quiet. Brain began to work, and plans for tales to simmer. Began "Jo's Boys," as Mrs. Dodge wants a serial.

In the autumn of 1882 Mr. Alcott was attacked by a severe stroke of paralysis, from which he never fully recovered; and for the rest of his life his daughters shared in the duty of tending and caring for him in his enfeebled state. It had been the great reward of Louisa's years of hard work that she could surround her mother with every comfort that could make her happy in her last declining years. Not less had she delighted to gratify every wish of her father. His library was fitted up with exquisite taste, his books and manuscripts bound, and he was throned in philosophic ease " for the rest of his days. What a relief it was now that she could have the faithful nurse ready at his call; that she could give him the pleasant drives which he enjoyed so much; and lighten her sister's labors with every assistance that money could procure!

The Orchard House, which had been the family home for twenty-five years, was sold to Mr. Harris, and Mrs. Pratt's house was the home of all. Louisa spent part of the summer at the seashore, and finally bought a small house at Nonquit, where the children could all spend the summer, while she and her sister alternated in the care of her father.

In the autumn of 1885, Miss Alcott decided to take a furnished house in Louisburg Square. Her nephews were established in Boston, and their mother wished to be with them. Mr. Alcott bore the moving well, and they found many comforts in the arrangement. Louisa's health was very feeble. She had great trouble in the throat, and her old dyspeptic symptoms returned to annoy her. Still she cannot give up work, and busies herself in preparing "Lulu's Library" for publication, and hopes to be able to work on "Jo's Boys."

"Lulu's Library" was a collection of stories which had been the delight of the child. The first series was published in 1885, the second in 1887, and the third in 1889. They are full of Louisa's charming qualities, and have a special interest from the tender feeling with which she gatherec them up for her niece. The touching preface to " Jo's Boys " tells of the seven years of occasional work on this book, and reveals the depth of feeling which would not allow her to write as formerly of Marmee and Amy, who were no longer here to accept their own likenesses. During the latter part of her work on this book, she could only write from half an hour to one or two hours a day. This was published in September, 1886. It contains an engraving of her from a bas-relief by Mr. Ricketson.

This book was written under hard circumstances, and cost its author more effort perhaps than any other. It is evidently not the overflow of her delight and fun in life like " Little Women," but it is full of biographical interest. Her account of her own career, and of the annoyances to which her celebrity exposed her, is full of her old spirit and humor. She has expressed many valuable thoughts on education, and her spirit is as hopeful for her boys as in her days of youth and health. She has too many characters to manage; but we feel a keen interest in the fortunes of Dan and Emil, and in the courtship by the warm-hearted Tom of his medical sweetheart.

Having been written at long intervals during the past seven years, this story is more faulty than any of its very imperfect predecessors; but the desire to atone for an unavoidable disappointment, and to please my patient little friends, has urged me to let it go without further delay.

To account for the seeming neglect of Amy, let me add, that, since the original of that character died, it has been impossible for me to write of her as when she was here to suggest, criticise, and laugh over her namesake. The same excuse applies to Marmee. But the folded leaves are not blank to those who knew and loved them and can find memorials of them in whatever is cheerful, true, or helpful in these pages.

L. M. Alcott.

Concord, July 4, 1886.

To Mr. Horace Chandler.

Dear Mr. Chandler, — The corrections are certainly rather peculiar, and I fear my struggles to set them right have only produced greater confusion.

Fortunately punctuation is a free institution, and all can pepper to suit the taste. I don't care much, and always leave proof-readers to quibble if they like.

Thanks for the tickets. I fear I cannot come till Thursday, but will try, and won't forget the office, since I am not that much-tried soul the editor.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

To Mrs. Williams (Betsey Prig).

Nonquit, August 25.

Dear Betsey, — I am so sorry the darling Doll is ill! Brood over him, and will him well; for mother-love works wonders.

My poppet is a picture of health, vigor, and delightful naughtiness. She runs wild in this fine place with some twenty other children to play with, — nice babies, well- bred, and with pleasant mammas for me to gossip with.

It would be a good place for your little people, as the air is delicious, bathing safe and warm, and cottages to be quiet in if one cares to keep house. Do try it next year. Let me know early. I can get a nice little cot for you (near mine) for $100, or perhaps less, from June to October, — if you care to stay; I do. . . .

We have been here since July, and are all hearty, brown, and gay as larks.

“John Inglesant “ was too political for me. I am too lazy here to read much; mean to find a den in Boston and work for a month or two; then fly off to New York, and perhaps run over and see my Betsey. I shall be at home in October, and perhaps we may see you then, if the precious little shadow gets nice and well again, and I pray he may.

Lulu has some trifling ail now and then, — just enough to show me how dear she is to us all, and what a great void the loss of our little girl would make in hearts and home. She is very intelligent and droll. When I told her the other day that the crickets were hopping and singing in the grass with their mammas, she said at once, “ No; their Aunt Weedys.” Aunty is nearer than mother to the poor baby; and it is very sweet to have it so, since it must be.

Now, my blessed Betsey, keep a brave heart, and I am sure all will be well in the nest. Love and kisses to the little birds, and all good wishes to the turtle-dove and her mate.

Yours ever, L. M. A.

The older birthdays are 29th of November, Lulu’s the 8th; so we celebrate for Grandpa, Auntie, and Lulu all at once, in great style, — eighty-three, fifty, and three years old.

When I get on my pins I’m going (D. V.) to devote myself to settling poor souls who need a gentle boost in hard times.

To Mr. Niles.
June 23,1883.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Thanks for the Goethe book. I want everything that comes out about him. “ Princess Amelia” is charming, and the surprise at the end well done. Did the author of “ My Wife’s Sister “ write it?

I told L. C. M. she might put “A Modern Mephis- topheles “ in my list of books. Several people had found it out, and there was no use in trying to keep it secret after that.

Mrs. Dodge begged me to consider myself mortgaged to her for tales, etc., and as I see no prospect of any time for writing books, I may be able to send her some short stories from time to time, and so be getting material for a new set of books like “ Scrap-bag,” but with a new name. You excel in names, and can be evolving one meantime. . . .

Yours truly,   L. M. A.

July 15, 1884.

I wish I might be inspired to do those dreadful boys [“ Jo’s Boys “]; but rest is more needed than money.

Perhaps during August, my month at home, I may take a grind at the old mill.

Journal.

October 24, 1882. — Telegram that Father had had a paralytic stroke. Home at once, and found him stricken down. Anxious days; little hope.

November. — Gave up our rooms, and I went home to help with the new care. My Lulu ran to meet me, rosy and gay, and I felt as if I could bear anything with this little sunbeam to light up the world for me.

Poor Father dumb and helpless; feeble mind slowly coming back. He knows us; but he’s asleep most of the time. Get a nurse, and wait to see if he will rally. It is sad to see the change one moment makes, turning the hale, handsome old man into this pathetic wreck. The forty sonnets last winter and the fifty lectures at the School last summer were too much for a man of eighty- three. He was warned by Dr. W., but thought it folly to stop; and now poor Father pays the penalty of breaking the laws of health. I have done the same: may I be spared this end!

January, 1883. — Too busy to keep a diary. Can only jot down a fact now and then.

Father improving. Much trouble with nurses; have no idea of health; won’t walk; sit over the fire, and drink tea three times a day; ought to be an intelligent, hearty set of women. Could do better myself; have to fill up all the deficiencies and do double duty.

People come to see Father; but it excites him, and we have to deny him.

February. — To B. for a week of rest, having got Mrs. H. settled with Father, and all comfortable for November.

Began a book called “ Genius.” Shall never finish it, I dare say, but must keep a vent for my fancies to escape at. This double life is trying, and my head will work as well as my hands.

March. — To give A. rest I took Lulu and maid to the Bellevue for a month. Lulu very happy with her new world. Enjoys her walks, the canary I got her, and the petting she gets from all. Showed her to friends; want them to know May’s child. Had her picture taken by Notman; very good.

April 2(1. — Town meeting. Seven women vote. I am one of them, and A. another. A poor show for a town that prides itself on its culture and independence.

6th. — Go home to stay; Father needs me. New nurse; many callers; Lulu fretful, Anna tired, Father feeble, — hard times for all.

Wrote a story for “ St. Nicholas “ at odd moments. Nurses and doctors take a deal of money.

May. — Take care of Lulu, as we can find no good woman to walk and dress and play with her. The ladies are incapable or proud; the girls vulgar or rough; so my poor baby has a bad time with her little temper and active mind and body. Could do it myself if I had the nerves and strength, but am needed elsewhere, and must leave the child to some one. Long to go away with her and do as I like. Shall never lead my own life.

July. — Go to Nonquit with Miss H. and Lulu for the summer. A quiet, healthy place, with pleasant people and fine air. Turn Lulu loose, with H. to run after her, and try to rest.

Lulu takes her first bath in the sea. Very bold; walks off toward Europe up to her neck, and is much afflicted that I won’t let her go to the bottom and see the “ little trabs; “ makes a cupid of herself, and is very pretty and gay.

The boys revel in the simple pleasures of Nonquit, — a fine place for them to be in.

Wrote a tale for “ St. Nicholas,” — “ Sophie’s Secret,” — $100.

August. — Home to C., and let A. come for her holiday. Much company.

P. C. Mozoomdar preached, and had a conversation at Mrs. Emerson’s; a most interesting man. Curious to hear a Hindu tell how the life of Christ impressed him.

November 27 th. — Decide to lessen care and worry at home; so take rooms in Boylston Street, and with Lulu set forth to make a home of our own. The whole parlor floor gives my lady room to run in doors, and the Public Garden opposite is the out-door play-ground. Miss C. comes as governess, and we settle down. Fred boards with us. Heard Mathew Arnold.

29th. — Birthday, — fifty-one. Home with gifts to poor Father, — eighty-four. Found a table full for myself.

December ith. — Home with gifts for all; sad day. See H. Martineau's statue; very fine.

January, 1884. — New Year's Day is made memorable by my solemnly spanking my child. Miss C. and others assure me it is the only way to cure her wilfulness. I doubt it; but knowing that mothers are usually too tender and blind, I correct my dear in the old- fashioned way. She proudly says, " Do it, do it! " and when it is done is heartbroken at the idea of Aunt Wee- wee's giving her pain. Her bewilderment was pathetic, and the effect, as I expected, a failure. Love is better; but also endless patience.

February 2d. — Wendell Phillips died. I shall mourn for him next to R. W. E. and Parker.

6th. — Funeral at Hollis Street Church. Sat between Fred Douglas and his wife. A goodly gathering of all left of the old workers. Glad and proud to be among them.

june, — Sell the Orchard House to W. T. Harris. Glad to be done with it, though after living in it twenty- five years, it is full of memories; but places have not much hold on me when the dear persons who made them dear are gone. . . .

Bought a cottage at Nonquit, with house and furniture. All like it, and it is a good investment I am told.

24th. — To Nonquit with Lulu and K. and John. Fixed my house, and enjoyed the rest and quiet immensely. Lulu wild with joy at the freedom. . . .

July and August. — Restful days in my little house, which is cool and quiet, and without the curse of a kitchen to spoil it.

Lulu happy and well, and every one full of summer fun.

On the 7th of August I went home, and let A. go for her holiday.

Took care of Father and house, and idled away the hot days with books and letters. Drove with Father, as he enjoyed it very much. . . .

October. — To Boston with John, and take rooms at the Bellevue. Very tired of home-worry, and fly for rest to my old refuge, with J. and L. to look after and make a home for.

Saw Irving. Always enjoy him, though he is very queer. Ellen Terry always the same, though charming in her way.

Novejnber. — Find Bellevue uncomfortable and expensive, so take rooms in Chestnut Street for self and boys.

8th. — My Lulu's birthday. Go home with flowers, gifts, and a grateful heart that the clear little girl is so well and happy and good. A merry day with the little queen of the house.

29th. — Our birthday, — Father eighty-five; L. M. A. fifty-two. Quiet day; always sad for thinking of Mother and John and May, who all left us at this season.

Decembei’. — Began again on “Jo’s Boys,” as T. N. wants a new book very much, and I am tired of being idle. Wrote two hours for three days, then had a violent attack of vertigo, and was ill for a week. Head won’t bear work yet. Put away papers, and tried to dawdle and go about as other people do.

Pleasant Christmas with Lulu and Nan and poor Father, who loves to see us about him. A narrow world now, but a happy one for him.

Last day of the year. All well at home except myself; body feeble, but soul improving.

Jaunary 1, 1885. — Pleasant greeting from brother Ernest by telegram, — never forgets us. Opera in the evening, — Emma Nevada. Sent box home. Very cold.

John had his first dress-suit. Happy boy! Several pleasant Sunday evenings at E. P. W.’s. See Mrs. Burnett, and like her.

Visit Blind Asylum and North End Mission. Lulu passed a week with me for a change.

19th. — An old-fashioned party in an old-time house. All in antique costume; Lulu very pretty in hers. Country kitchen and country fare; spinning and weaving; old songs and dances; tally-ho coach with P. as an ancient Weller, — very funny.

June. — Read Life of Saint Elizabeth by D’Alembert, — quaint and sweet; also French novels. Write out the little tales I tell Lulu for a new Christmas book, having nothing else. Send one, “The Candy Country,” to “St. Nicholas.”

August 8th. — Go home, and A. goes to N. Take care of Father, arrange the little tales, and look at houses in B. Have a plan to take a furnished house for the winter, and all be together. A. is lonely in C.; boys must be near business. I want Lulu, and Father will enjoy a change.

Sorted old letters, and burned many. Not wise to keep for curious eyes to read and gossip-lovers to print by and by.

Lived in the past for days, and felt very old, recalling all I have been through. Experiences go deep with me, and I begin to think it might be well to keep some record of my life, if it will help others to read it when I ‘m gone. People seem to think our lives interesting and peculiar.

September. — After a lively time with house-brokers, I take a house in Louisburg Square for two years. It is a large house, furnished, and well suited to our needs, — sunny, trees in front, good air, and friends near by. All are pleased, and we prepare to move October ist. . . .

Father drove down very nicely. Pleased with his new room; Lulu charmed with her big, sunny nursery and the play-house left for her; boys in clover; and

Nan ready for the new sort of housekeeping.

I shall miss my quiet, care-free life in B.; but it is best for all, so I shall try to bear the friction and the worry many persons always bring me.

It will be an expensive winter; but T. N. tells me the books never sold better, so a good run in January will make all safe.

"Lulu's Library" as a "pot-boiler" will appease the children, and I may be able to work on "Jo's Boys."

March, 1886. — To Mrs. H.'s to hear Mr. Snyder read the " Iliad; " enjoyed it.

Sixteen little girls call, and the autograph fiend is abroad.

27th. — Another attack of vertigo, — ill for a week; sleepless nights. Head worked like a steam-engine; would not stop. Planned "Jo's Boys" to the end, and longed to get up and write it. Told Dr. W. that he had better let me get the ideas out, then I could rest. He very wisely agreed, and said, " As soon as you can, write half an hour a day, and see if it does you good. Rebellious brains want to be attended to, or trouble comes." So I began as soon as able, and was satisfied that we were right; for my head felt better very soon, and with much care about not overdoing, I had some pleasant hours when I forgot my body and lived in my mind.

April. — Went on writing one or two hours a day, and felt no ill effects.

May. — Began to think of Concord, and prepare to go back for the summer. Father wants his books; Lulu, her garden; Anna, her small house; and the boys, their friends. I want to go away and rest.

Anna goes up the last of the month and gets the house ready. We send Lulu and Father later, and the boys and I shut up No. 10. . . .

June. — Home in C., — sunny, clean, and pleasant. Put Lulu in order, and get ready for a month in Princeton with Mrs. H. Very tired.

A quiet three weeks on the hillside, — a valley pink with laurel in front, Mount Wachusett behind us, and green hills all round. A few pleasant people. I read, sleep, walk, and write, — get fifteen chapters done. Instinct was right; after seven years of rest, the old brain was ready for work and tired of feeding on itself, since work it must at something. Enjoyed Hedge's " Hours with German Classics," and "Baldwin," by Vernon Lee.

Home in time to get Anna and Lulu off to N. for the summer. A. needs the rest very much, and Lulu the freedom. I shall revel in the quiet, and finish my book.

July. — The seashore party get off, and peace reigns. I rest a day, and then to work. Finish "Jo's Boys," and take it to T. N. Much rejoicing over a new book. Fifty thousand to be the first edition; orders coming in fast. Not good, — too great intervals between the parts, as it was begun long ago; but the children will be happy, and my promise kept. Two new chapters were needed, so I wrote them, and gladly corked my inkstand.

What next? Mrs. Dodge wants a serial, and T. N. a novel. I have a dozen plots in my head, but think the serial better come first. Want a great deal of money for many things; every poor soul I ever knew comes for help, and expenses increase. I am the only moneymaker, and must turn the mill for others, though my own grist is ground and in the barn.

The School begins. Father feeble, but goes, — for the last time, I think.

A series of letters to her father's friend, Mrs. Stearns, show how tenderly and carefully Louisa watched over the slow decline of the stricken man, but they are too full of details of the sickroom for publication. A few extracts will give her feeling.

May 23 .

Dear Mrs. Stearns, — Many thanks for the sweet nosegay you sent me. It came in good time, for today is the anniversary of Father's wedding-day and my sister's silver wedding. Rather sad for both mateless ones \ but we have done our best to cheer them up, and the soft rain is very emblematic of the memories their own quiet tears keep green.

Father remembered you, and smelled his flowers with pleasure. He is very tired of living, and wants to " go up," as he expresses it. A little more or little less light would make him happier; but the still active mind beats against the prison bars, and rebels against the weakness of body that prevents the old independent life. I am afraid the end is not to be peaceful unless it is sudden, as I hope it may be for all our sakes; it is so wearing to see this slow decline, and be able to do little but preach and practise patience.

Affectionately yours, L. M. A.

Sunday.

It is only a temporary change, perhaps; but I still hope that it will last, and his mind grow still clearer. These painless, peaceful days have a certain sweetness, sad as it is to see the dear, hale old man so feeble. If he can know us, and enjoy something of the old life, it is worth having, though the end may come at any moment. . . .

Now and then a word comes without effort. " Up! " was the first one, and seems very characteristic of this beautiful, aspiring soul, almost on the wing for heaven.

To Mr. Niles.

Nonquit, July 13, 1885.

Dear Mr. Niles, — I want to know if it is too late to do it and if it is worth doing; namely, to collect some of the little tales I tell Lulu and put them with the two I

shall have printed the last year and the “ Mermaid Tale “ to match the pictures we bought, and call it “ Lulu’s Library”? I have several tiny books written down for L.; and as I can do no great work, it occurred to me that I might venture to copy these if it would do for a Christmas book for the younger set.

I ache to fall on some of the ideas that are simmering in my head, but dare not, as my one attempt since the last “Jo’s Boys” break-down cost me a week or two of woe and $30 for the doctor. I have lovely long days here, and can copy these and see ‘em along if you want them. One has gone to “ Harper’s Young People,” and one is for “ St. Nicholas “ when it is done, — about the Kindergarten for the blind. These with Lulu’s would make a little book, and might begin a series for small folks. Old ladies come to this twaddle when they can do nothing else. What say you? . . .

Yours truly, L. M. A.

September 18, 1885.

Dear Mr. Niles, — I send you some funny sketches by Mrs. L. She seems to be getting on. How would it do to ask her to illustrate the fairy book? She has a pretty taste in elves, and her little girl was good. I hope to touch up the other stories this winter, and she can illustrate, and next Christmas (or whenever it is ready) we can have a little book out. This sort of work being all I dare do now, I may as well be clearing the decks for action when the order comes to “ Up, and at ‘em! “ again, if it ever does.

I’d like to help Mrs. L. if I could, as we know something of her, and I fancy she needs a lift. Perhaps we could use these pictures in some way if she liked to have us. Maybe I could work them into a story of our “cullud bredren.”

Thanks for the books. Dear Miss is rather prim in her story, but it is pretty and quite correct. So different from Miss Alcott’s slap-dash style.

The “ H. H.” book [“ Ramona “] is a noble record of the great wrongs of her chosen people, and ought to wake up the sinners to repentance and justice before it is too late. It recalls the old slavery days, only these victims are red instead of black. It will be a disgrace if “ H. H.” gave her work and pity all in vain.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

[1885-1

Dear Mr. Niles, — Thanks for the book which I shall like to read.

Please tell Miss N. that she will find in Sanborn's article in " St. Nicholas " or Mrs. Moulton's in the " Eminent Women " book all that I wish to have said about myself. You can add such facts about editions, etc., as you think best. I don't like these everlasting notices \ one is enough, else we poor people feel like squeezed oranges, and nothing is left sacred.

George Eliot's new life and letters is well done, and we are not sorry we have read them. Mr. Cross has been a wise man, and leaves us all our love and respect instead of spoiling them as Froude did for Carlyle, Yours truly, L. M. A.

January 2, 1886.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Thanks for the good wishes and news. Now that I cannot work, it is very agreeable to hear that the books go so well, and that the lazy woman need not worry about things.

I appreciate my blessings, I assure you. I heartily wish I could " swamp the book-room with 'Jo's Boys,' " as Fred says, and hope to do it by and by when head and hand can safely obey the desire of the heart, which will never be too tired or too old to remember and be grateful.

Your friend, L. M. Alcott.

Monday, a.m.

Dear Mr. Niles, — My doctor forbids me to begin a long book or anything that will need much thought this summer. So I must give up " Tragedy of To-day," as it will need a good deal of thinking to be what it ought.

I can give you a girls' book however, and I think that will be better than a novel. I have several stories done, and can easily do more and make a companion volume for " Spinning-Wheel Stories " at Christmas if you want it.

This, with the Lulu stories, will be better than the set of novels I am sure. . . . Wait till I can do a novel, and then get out the set in style, if Alcott is not forgotten by that time.

I was going to send Mrs. Dodge one of the tales for girls, and if there is time she might have more. But nearly all new ones would make a book go well in the holiday season. You can have those already done now if you want them. "Sophie's Secret" is one, "An Ivy- Spray: or Cinderella's Slippers " another, and "Mountain Laurel" is partly done. " A Garland for Girls " might do for a title perhaps, as they are all for girls.

Yours truly, L. M. A.

In the spring of 1886, Dr. Rhoda Lawrence took charge of Miss Alcott's health, and gave her treat- meiit by massage and other appropriate means, from which she received benefit. The summer was spent at Concord with her father, and was varied by a pleasant trip to the mountains. Miss Alcott finished "Jo's Boys," which was published in September. She occupied herself also in looking over old journals and letters, and destroyed many things which she did not wish to have come under the public eye. She had enjoyed her life at Princeton, and said that she felt better than for fifteen years; but in August she was severely attacked with rheumatism and troubled with vertigo. She suffered very much, and was in a very nervous condition.

Miss Alcott always looked bravely and calmly upon all the possibilities of life, and she now made full preparations for the event of her own death. Her youngest nephew had always been especially beloved, and she decided to take out papers of adoption, to make him legally her son and heir. She wished him to assume the name of Alcott, and to be her representative.

Louisa's journal closes July, 1886, with the old feeling, — that she must grind away at the mill and make money to supply the many claims that press upon her from all sides. She feels the burden of every suffering human life upon her own soul. She knew that she could write what was eagerly desired by others and would bring her the means of helping those in need, and her heart and head united in urging her to work. Whether it would have been possible for her to have rested more fully, and whether she might then have worked longer and better, is one of those questions which no one is wise enough to answer. Yet the warning of her life should not be neglected, and the eager brain should learn to obey the laws of life and health while it is yet time.

In September, 1886, Miss Alcott returned to Louisburg Square, and spent the winter in the care of her father, and in the society of her sister and nephews and the darling child. She suffered much from hoarseness, from nervousness and debility, and from indigestion and sleeplessness, but still exerted herself for the comfort of all around her. She had a happy Christmas, and sympathized with the joy of her oldest nephew in his betrothal. In December she was so weary and worn that she went out to Dr. Lawrence's home in Roxbury for rest and care. She found such relief to her overtasked brain and nerves from the seclusion and quiet of Dunreath Place, that she found her home and rest there for the remainder of her life.

It was a great trial to Louisa to be apart from her family, to whom she had devoted her life. She clung to her dying father, and to the dear sister still left to her, with increasing fondness, and she longed for her boys and her child; but her tired nerves could not bear even the companionship of her family, and sometimes for days she wanted to be all alone. " I feel so safe out here!" she said once.

Mr. Alcott spent the summer at Melrose, and Louisa went there to visit him in

June. In June and July, 1887, she went to Concord and looked over papers and completed the plan for adopting her nephew. She afterward went to Princeton, accompanied by Dr. Lawrence. She spent eight weeks there, and enjoyed the mountain air and scenery with something of her old delight. She was able to walk a mile or more, and took a solitary walk in the morning, which she greatly enjoyed. Her evening walk was less agreeable, because she was then exposed to the eager curiosity of sightseers, who constantly pursued her.

Miss Alcott had a great intellectual pleasure here in the society of Mr. James Murdock and his family. The distinguished elocutionist took great pains to gratify her taste for dramatic reading by selecting her favorite scenes for representation, and she even attended one of his public readings given in the hall of the hotel. The old pain in her limbs from which she suffered during her European journey again troubled her, and she returned to Dr. Lawrence’s home in the autumn, where she was tenderly cared for.

Miss Alcott was still continually planning stories. Dr. Lawrence read to her a great deal, and the reading often suggested subjects to her. She thought of a series to be called “ Stories of All Nations,” and had already written “ Trudel’s Siege,” which was published in “ St. Nicholas,” April, 1888, the scene of which was laid at the siege of Leyden. The English story was to be called “ Madge Wildfire,” and she had thought of plots for others. She could write very little, and kept herself occupied and amused with fancy work, making flowers and penwipers of various colors, in the form of pinks, to send to her friends.

On her last birthday Louisa received a great many flowers and pleasant remembrances, which touched her deeply, and she said, “ I did not mean to cry to-day, but I can’t help it, everybody is so good.” She went in to see her father every few days, and was conscious that he was drawing toward the end.

While riding with her friend, Louisa would tell her of the stories she had planned, one of which was to be called “ The Philosopher’s Wooing,” referring to Thoreau. She also had a musical novel in her mind. She could not be idle, and having a respect for sewing, she busied herself with it, making garments for poor children, or helping the Doctor in her work. She insisted upon setting up a work-basket for the Doctor, amply supplied with necessary materials, and was pleased when she saw them used. A flannel garment for a poor child was the last work of her hands. Her health improved in February, especially in the comfort of her nights, as the baths she took brbught her the long-desired sleep. “Nothing so good as sleep,” she said. But a little too much excitement brought on violent headaches.

During these months Miss Alcott wrote part of the “ Garland for Girls,” one of the most fanciful and pleasing of her books. These stories were suggested by the flowers sent to her by different friends, which she fully enjoyed. She rode a great deal, but did not see any one.

Her friends were much encouraged; and although they dared not expect full recovery, they hoped that she might be “ a comfortable invalid, able to enjoy life, and give help and pleasure to others.” She did not suffer great pain, but she was very weak; her nervous system seemed to be utterly prostrated by the years of work and struggle through which she had passed. She said, “ I don’t want to live if I can’t be of use.” She had always met the thought of death bravely; and even the separation from her dearest friends was serenely borne. She believed in their continued presence and influence, and felt that the parting was for a little time. She had no fear of God, and no doubt of the future. Her only sadness was in leaving the friends whom she loved and who might yet need her.

A young man wrote asking Miss Alcott if she would advise him to devote himself to authorship; she answered, “ Not if you can do anything else. Even dig ditches.” He followed her advice, and took a situation where he could support himself, but he still continued to write stories. A little boy sent twenty-five cents to buy her books. She returned the money, telling him it was not enough to buy books, but sent him “ Little Men.” Scores of letters remained unanswered for want of strength to write or even to read.

Early in March Mr. Alcott failed very rapidly. Louisa drove in to see him, and was conscious that it was for the last time. Tempted by the warm spring-like day, she had made some change in her dress, and absorbed in the thought of the parting, when she got into the carriage she forgot to put on the warm fur cloak she had worn.

The next morning she complained of violent pain in her head, amounting to agony. The physician who had attended her for the last weeks was called. He felt that the situation was very serious. She herself asked, “Is it not meningitis?” The trouble on the brain increased rapidly. She recognized her dear young nephew for a moment and her friendly hostess, but was unconscious of everything else. So, at 3.30 P.M., March 6, 1888, she passed quietly on to the rest which she so much needed. She did not know that her father had already preceded her.

The friends of the family who gathered to pay their last tribute of respect and love to the aged father were met at the threshold by the startling intelligence, “ Louisa Alcott is dead,” and a deeper sadness fell upon every heart. The old patriarch had gone to his rest in the fulness of time, “ corn ripe for the sickle,” but few realized how entirely his daughter had worn out her earthly frame. Her friends had hoped for renewed health and strength, and for even greater and nobler work from her with her ripened powers and greater ease and leisure.

Miss Alcott had made every arrangement for her death; and by her own wish the funeral service was very simple, in her father’s rooms at Louisburg Square, and attended only by a few of her family and nearest friends. They read her exquisite poem to her mother, her father’s noble tribute to her, and spoke of the earnestness and truth of her life. She was remembered as she would have wished to be. Her body was carried to Concord and placed in the beautiful cemetery of Sleepy Hollow where her dearest ones were already laid to rest. “ Her boys “ went beside her as “ a guard of honor,” and stood around as she was placed across the feet of father, mother, and sister, that she might “ take care of them as she had done all her life.”

Of the silent grief of the bereaved family I will not speak, but the sound of mourning filled all the land, and was re-echoed from foreign shores. The children everywhere had lost their friend. Miss Alcott had entered into their hearts and revealed them to themselves. In her childish journal her oldest sister said, “ I have not a secret from Louisa; I tell her everything, and am not afraid she will think me silly.” It was this respect for the thought and life of children that gave Louisa Alcott her great power of winning their respect and affection. Nothing which was real and earnest to them seemed unimportant to her.

LAST LETTERS.

To Mr. Niles.

Sunday, 1886.

Dear Mr. Niles, — The goodly supply of books was most welcome; for when my two hours pen-work are over I need something to comfort me, and I long to go on and finish “Jo’s Boys “ by July ist.

My doctor frowns on that hope, and is so sure it will do mischief to get up the steam that I am afraid to try, and keep Prudence sitting on the valve lest the old engine run away and have another smash-up.

I send you by Fred several chapters, I wish they were neater, as some were written long ago,and have knocked about for years; but I can’t spare time to copy, so hope the printers won’t be in despair.

I planned twenty chapters and am on the fifteenth. Some are long, some short, and as we are pressed for time we had better not try to do too much.

... I have little doubt it will be done early in July, but things are so contrary with me I can never be sure of carrying out a plan, and I don’t want to fail again; so far I feel as if I could, without harm, finish off these dreadful boys.

Why have any illustrations? The book is not a child’s book, as the lads are nearly all over twenty, and pretty pictures are not needed. Have the bas-relief if you like, or one good thing for frontispiece.

I can have twenty-one chapters and make it the size of “ Little Men.” Sixteen chapters make two hundred and sixteen pages, and I may add a page here and there later, — or if need be, a chapter somewhere to fill up.

I shall be at home in a week or two, much better for the rest and fine air; and during my quiet days in C. I can touch up proofs and confer about the book. Sha’n’t we be glad when it is done?

Yours truly, L. M. A.

To Mrs. Dodge.

June 29.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I will evolve something for December (D. V.) and let you have it as soon as it is done.

Lu and I go to Nonquit next week; and after a few days of rest, I will fire up the old engine and see if it will run a short distance without a break-down.

There are usually about forty young people at N., and I think I can get a hint from some of them.

Had a call from Mr. Burroughs and Mr. Gilder last eve. Mr. G. asked if you were in B., but I did n't know.

Father remains comfortable and happy among his books. Our lads are making their first visit to New York, and may call on " St. Nick," whom they have made their patron saint.

I should like to own the last two bound volumes of " St. Nicholas," for Lulu. She adores the others, and they are nearly worn out with her loving but careless luggings up and down for " more towries, Aunt Wee-wee." Charge to Yours affectionately, L. M. A.

P. S. — Wasn't I glad to see you in my howling wilderness of wearisome domestic worrits! Come again.

Concord, August 15.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I like the idea of " Spinning- Wheel Stories," and can do several for a series which can come out in a book later. Old-time tales, with a thread running through all from the wheel that enters in the first one.

A Christmas party of children might be at an old farm-house and hunt up the wheel, and grandma spins and tells the first story; and being snow-bound, others amuse the young folks each evening with more tales. Would that do? The mother and child picture would come in nicely for the first tale, — " Grandma and her Mother."

Being at home and quiet for a week or so (as Father is nicely and has a capable nurse), I have begun the serial, and done two chapters; but the spinning-tales come tumbling into my mind so fast I'd better pin a few while " genius burns." Perhaps you would like to start the set Christmas. The picture being ready and the first story can be done in a week, " Sophie's Secret" can come later. Let me know if you would like that, and about how many pages of the paper " S. S." was written on you think would make the required length of tale (or tail?). If you don't want No. i yet, I will take my time and do several.

The serial was to be "Mrs. Gay's Summer School," and have some city girls and boys go to an old farmhouse, and for fun dress and live as in old times, and learn the good, thrifty old ways, with adventures and fun thrown in. That might come in the spring, as it takes me longer to grind out yarns now than of old.

Glad you are better. Thanks for kind wishes for the little house; come and see it, and gladden the eyes of forty young admirers by a sight of M. M. D. next year.

Yours affectionately, L. M. A.

31 Chestnut St., December 31.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — A little cousin, thirteen years old, has written a story and longs to see it in print. It is a well-written bit and pretty good for a beginner, so I send it to you hoping it may find a place in the children's corner. She is a grandchild of S. J. May, and a bright lass who paints nicely and is a domestic little person in spite of her budding accomplishments. Good luck to her!

I hoped to have had a Christmas story for some one, but am forbidden to write for six months, after a bad turn of vertigo. So I give it up and take warning. All good wishes for the New Year.

From yours affectionately, To Mr. Niles.

1886.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Sorry you don't like the bas-relief [of herself]; I do. A portrait, if bright and comely, would n't be me, and if like me would disappoint the children; so we had better let them imagine " Aunt Jo young and beautiful, with her hair in two tails down her back," as the little girl said.

In haste, L. M. A.

To Mrs. Bond.

Concord, Tuesday, 1886.

Dear Auntie, — I want to find Auntie Gwinn, and don't know whom to ask but you, as your big motherly heart yearns over all the poor babies, and can tell them where to go when the nest is bare. A poor little woman has just died, leaving four children to a drunken father. Two hard-working aunts do all they can, and one will take the oldest girl. We want to put the two small girls and boy into a home till we can see what comes next. Lulu clothes one, and we may be able to put one with a cousin. But since the mother died last Wednesday they are very forlorn, and must be helped. If we were not so full I'd take one; but Lu is all we can manage now.

There is a home at Auburndale, but it is full; and I know of no other but good Auntie Gwinn's. What is her address, please? I shall be in town on Saturday, and can go and see her if I know where.

Don't let it be a bother; but one turns at once in such cases to the saints for direction, and the poor aunts don't known what to do; so this aunt comes to the auntie, of all.

I had a pleasant chat with the Papa in the cars, and was very glad to hear that W. is better. My love to both and S.

Thanks for the news of portraits. I'LL bear them in mind if G. H. calls. Lulu and Anna send love, and I am as always, Your Louisa Alcott.

To Mrs. Dodge.

April 13, 1886.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I am glad you are going to have such a fine outing. May it be a very happy one.

I cannot promise anything, but hope to be allowed to write a little, as my doctor has decided that it is as well to let me put on paper the tales " knocking at the saucepan lid and demanding to be taken out " (like Mrs. Cratchit's potatoes), as to have them go on worrying me inside. So I'm scribbling at "Jo's Boys," long promised 'to Mr. Niles and clamored for by the children. I may write but one hour a day, so cannot get on very fast; but if it is ever done, I can think of a serial for " St. Nicholas." I began one, and can easily start it for '88, if head and hand allow. I will simmer on it this summer, and see if it can be done. Hope so, for I don't want to give up work so soon.

I have read "Mrs. Null," but don't like it very well, — too slow and colorless after Tolstoi's " Anna Karanina."

I met Mr. and Mrs. S. at Mrs. A.'s this winter. Mr. Stockton's child-stories I like very much. The older ones are odd but artificial.

Now, good-by, and God be with you, dear woman, and bring you safely home to us all.

Affectionately yours, L. M. Alcott.

To Mrs. Bond.

Dunreath Place, Roxbury, March 15. 1887.

Dear Auntie, — I have been hoping to get out and see you all winter, but have been so ill I could only live on hope as a relish to my gruel, — that being my only food, and not of a nature to give me strength. Now I am beginning to live a little, and feel less like a sick oyster at low tide. The spring days will set me- up I trust, and my first pilgrimage shall be to you; for I want you to see how prettily my May-flower is blossoming into a fine off-shoot of the old plant.

Lizzy Wells has probably told you our news of Fred and his little bride, and Anna written you about it as only a proud mamma can.

Father is very comfortable, but says sadly as he looks up from his paper, " Beecher has gone now; all go but me." Please thank Mr. Bond for the poems, which are interesting, even to a poor, ignorant worm who • does not know Latin. Mother would have enjoyed them very much. I should have acknowledged his kindness sooner; but as I am here in Roxbury my letters are forwarded, and often delayed.

I was sorry to hear that you were poorly again. Is n't it hard to sit serenely in one's soul when one's body is in a dilapidated state? I find it a great bore, but try to do it patiently, and hope to see the why by and by, when this mysterious life is made clear to me. I had a lovely dream about that, and want to tell it you some day.

Love to all.

Ever yours, L. M. A.

Her publisher wished to issue a new edition of " A Modern Mephistopheles," and to add to it her story " A Whisper in the Dark," to which she consented.

May 6, 1887.

Dear Mr. Niles. — This is about what I want to say. You may be able to amend or suggest something. I only want it understood that the highfalutin style was for a disguise, though the story had another purpose • for I 'm not ashamed of it, and like it better than "Work" or " Moods."

Yours in haste, L. M. A.

P. S. — Do you want more fairy tales?

Preface.

"A Modern Mephistopheles " was written among the earlier volumes of the No Name Series, when the chief idea of the authors was to puzzle their readers by disguising their style as much as possible, that they might enjoy the guessing and criticism as each novel appeared. This book was very successful in preserving its incognito; and many persons still insist that it could not have been written by the author of " Little Women." As I much enjoyed trying to embody a shadow of my favorite poem in a story, as well as the amusement it has afforded those in the secret for some years, it is considered well to add this volume to the few romances which are offered, not as finished work by any means, but merely attempts at something graver than magazine stories or juvenile literature.

L. M. Alcott.

Saturday a. m., May 7, 18S7.

Dear Mr. Niles, — Yours just come. "A Whisper" is rather a lurid tale, but might do if I add a few lines to the preface of " Modern Mephistopheles," saying that this is put in to fill the volume, or to give a sample of Jo March's necessity stories, which many girls have asked for. Would that do?

It seems to me that it would be better to wait till I can add a new novel, and then get out the set. Meantime let " Modern Mephistopheles " go alone, with my name, as a summer book before Irving comes [Irving as Faust].

I hope to do “A Tragedy of To-day” this summer, and it can come out in the fall or next spring, with “ Modern Mephistopheles,” “ Work,” and “ Moods.”

A spunky new one would make the old ones go. “ Hospital Sketches “ is not cared for now, and is filled up with other tales you know. . . .

Can that plan be carried out? I have begun my tragedy, and think it will be good; also a shorter thing called “ Anna: An Episode,” in which I do up Boston in a jolly way, with a nice little surprise at the end. It would do to fill up “ Modern Mephistopheles,” as it is not long, unless I want it to be.

I will come in next week and see what can be done. Yours truly, L. M. A.

To Mrs. Bond.

Sunday, Oct. 16, .

Dear Auntie, — As you and I belong to the “ Shut-in Society,” we may now and then cheer each other by a line. Your note and verse are very good to me to-day, as I sit trying to feel all right in spite of the stiffness that won’t wajk, the rebel stomach that won’t work, and the tired head that won’t rest.

My verse lately has been from the little poem found under a good soldier’s pillow in the hospital.

I am no longer eager, bold, and strong, — All that is past; I am ready not to do At last — at last.

My half-day’s work is done, And this is all my part.

I give a patient God My patient heart.

The learning not to do is so hard after being the hub to the family wheel so long. But it is good for the energetic ones to find that the world can get on without them, and to learn to be still, to give up, and wait cheerfully.

As we have “ fell into poetry,” as Silas Wegg says, I add a bit of my own; for since you are Marmee now, I feel that you won’t laugh at my poor attempts any more than she did, even when I burst forth at the ripe age of eight.

Love to all the dear people, and light to the kind eyes that have made sunshine for others so many years.

Always your Lu.

To Mrs. Bond, zvith first copy of “Lulu’s Library second volume.

October, 1887.

Dear Auntie, — I always gave Mother the first author’s copy of a new book. As her representative on earth, may I send you, with my love, the little book to come out in November?

The tales were told at sixteen to May and her playmates; then are related to May's daughter at five; and for the sake of these two you may care to have them for the little people.

I am still held by the leg, but seem to gain a little, and hope to be up by and by. Slow work, but part of the discipline I need, doubtless; so I take it as well as I can.

You and I won't be able to go to the golden wedding of S. J. May. I have been alone so long I feel as if I'd like to see any one, and be in the good times again. L.W. reports you as "nicely, and sweet as an angel;" so I rejoice, and wish I could say the same of Your loving Lu.

To Mrs. Dodge.

December 22, 1887.

Dear Mrs. Dodge, — I send you the story your assistant editor asked for. As it is needed at once I do not delay to copy it, for I can only write an hour a day and do very little. You are used to my wild manuscript, and will be able to read it. I meant to have sent the Chinese tale, but this was nearly done, and so it goes, as. it does not matter where we begin. ... I hope you are well, and full of the peace which work well done gives the happy doer.

I mend slowly, but surely, and my good Doctor says my best work is yet to come; so I will be content with health if I can get it. With all good wishes, Yours affectionately, L. M. A.

To Mrs. Bond.

February 7 .

Dear Auntie, — My blessed Anna is so busy, and I can do so little to help her, I feel as if I might take upon me the pleasant duty of writing to you.

Father is better, and we are all so grateful, for just now we want all to be bright for our boy.

The end is not far off, but Father rallies wonderfully from each feeble spell, and keeps serene and happy through everything.

I don't ask to keep him now that life, is a burden, and am glad to have him go before it becomes a pain. We shall miss the dear old white head and the feeble saint so long our care; but as Anna says, " He will be with Mother." So we shall be happy in the hope of that meeting.

Sunday he seemed very low, and I was allowed to drive in and say " good-by." He knew me and smiled, and kissed "Weedy," as he calls me, and I thought the drowsiness and difficulty of breathing could not last long. But he revived, got up, and seemed so much as usual, I may be able to see him again. It is a great grief that I am not there as I was with Lizzie and Mother, but though much better, the shattered nerves won't bear much yet, and quiet is my only cure.

I sit alone and bless the little pair like a fond old grandmother. You show me how to do it. With love to all, Yours ever, Lu.

Her last note. To Mrs. Bond.

February 8, 1888.

Air, — " Haste to the Wedding."

Dear Auntie, — I little knew what a sweet surprise was in store for me when I wrote to you yesterday.

As I worked this morning my good Doctor L. came in with the lovely azalea, her round face beaming through the leaves like a full moon.

It was very dear of you to remember me, and cheer up my lonely clay with such a beautiful guest.

It stands beside me on Marmee's work-table, and reminds me tenderly of her favorite flowers; and among those used at her funeral was a spray of this, which lasted for two weeks afterward, opening bud after bud in the glass on her table, where lay the dear old "Jos. May" hymn book, and her diary with the pen shut in as she left it when she last wrote there, three days before the end, " The twilight is closing about me, and I am going to rest in the arms of my children."

So you see I love the delicate flower, and enjoy it very much.

I can write now, and soon hope to come out and see you for a few minutes, as I drive out every fine day, and go to kiss my people once a week for fifteen minutes.

Slow climbing, but I don't slip back; so think up my mercies, and sing cheerfully, as dear Marmee used to do, " Thus far the Lord has led me on!"

Your loving Lu.

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

TO MY FATHER, ON HIS EIGHTY-SIXTH BIRTHDAY.

Dear Pilgrim, waiting patiently,
The long, long journey nearly done,
Beside the sacred stream that flows
Clear shining in the western sun;
Look backward on the varied road
Your steadfast feet have trod,
From youth to age, through weal and woe,
Climbing forever nearer God.

Mountain and valley lie behind;
The slough is crossed, the wicket passed;
Doubt and despair, sorrow and sin,
Giant and fiend, conquered at last.
Neglect is changed to honor now;
The heavy cross may be laid down;
The white head wins and wears at length
The prophet’s, not the martyr’s, crown.

Greatheart and Faithful gone before,
Brave Christiana, Mercy sweet,
Are Shining Ones who stand and wait
The weary wanderer to greet.
Patience and Love his handmaids are,
And till time brings release,
Christian may rest in that bright room
Whose windows open to the east.

The staff set by, the sandals off,
Still pondering the precious scroll,
Serene and strong, he waits the call
That frees and wings a happy soul.
Then, beautiful as when it lured
The boy’s aspiring eyes,
Before the pilgrim’s longing sight
Shall the Celestial City rise.
November 29, 1SS5.   L. M. A.

MISS ALCOTT’S appearance was striking and impressive rather than beautiful. Her figure was tall and well-proportioned, indicating strength and activity, and she walked with freedom and majesty. Her head was large, and her rich brown hair was long and luxuriant, giving a sense of fulness and richness of life to her massive features. While thoroughly unconventional, and even free and easy in her manner, she had a dignity of deportment which prevented undue liberties, and made intruders stand in awe of her. Generous in the extreme in serving others, she knew her own rights, and did not allow them to be trampled on. She repelled "the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes," and had much of the Burns spirit that sings " A man's a man for a' that" in the presence of insolent grandeur.

Miss Alcott always took her stand not for herself, but for her family, her class, her sex. The humblest writer should not be imposed upon in her person; every woman should be braver and stronger from her attitude. She was careless of outward distinctions; but she enjoyed the attentions which her fame brought her with simple pleasure, and was delighted to meet bright, intelligent, distinguished people, who added to her stores of observation and thought. She had the rare good fortune, which an heir of millions might envy, of living all her life in the society of the noblest men and women. The Emersons, the Thoreaus, the Hawthornes, and Miss Elizabeth Peabody were the constant companions of her childhood and youth. It was from them that her standard of character was formed, and she could never enter any circle higher than that in which she had breathed freely from a child. She was quite capable of hero-worship, but her heroes were few.

With all her imagination and romance, Miss Alcott was a tremendous destroyer of illusions; she remorselessly tore them away from herself, persisting in holding a lens before every fault and folly of her own, and she did the same for those she loved best. Only what was intrinsically noble and true could stand the searching test of her intellectual scrutiny and keen perception of the incongruous and ridiculous.

This disposition was apparent in Louisa's relation to her father, whom she did not always fully understand. Perhaps he had a perception of this when he wrote —

"I press thee to my heart, as Duty's faithful child."

She had little sympathy with his speculative fancy, and saw plainly the impracticability of his schemes, and did not hesitate to touch with light and kindly satire his little peculiarities; yet in her deepest heart she gave him not only affection, but deep reverence. She felt the nobility and grandeur of his mind and heart. In “ Little Women “ the portrait of the father is less vivid and less literal than that of any other member of the family, and is scarcely recognizable; but it was impossible to make the student and idealist a part of the family life as she painted it, — full of fun, frolic, and adventure. In the second part she has taken pains to make up for this seeming neglect, and pays homage to the quiet man at the end of the house, whose influence was so potent and so sweet over all within it.

Mrs. Alcott was a rich and noble nature, full of zeal and impulse, daily struggling with a temper threatening to burst out into fire, ready to fight like a lioness for her young, or to toil for them till Nature broke down under the burden. She had a rich appreciation of heroism and beauty in all noble living, a true love of literature, and an overflowing sympathy with all suffering humanity, but was also capable of righteous indignation and withering contempt. To this mother, royal in her motherhood, Louisa was bound by the closest ties of filial love and mutual understanding. She early believed herself to be her mother’s favorite child, knew she was close to her heart, her every struggle watched, her every fault rebuked, every aspiration encouraged, every effort after good recognized. I think Louisa felt no pride in this preference. She knew that she was dear to her mother, because her stormy, wayward heart was best understood by her; and hence the mother, wiser for her child than for herself, watched her unfolding life with anxious care. Throughout the childish journal this relation is evident: the child’s heart lies open to the mother, and the mother can help her because she understands her, and holds sacred every cry of her heart.

Such a loving relation to a mother — so rich, so full, so enduring — was the greatest possible blessing to her life. And richly did Louisa repay the care. From her earliest years she was her mother’s confidante, friend, and comforter. Her dream of success was not of fame and glory, but of the time when she could bring this weary pilgrim into “ that chamber whose name is Peace,” and there bid her sit with folded hands, listening to the loving voices of her children, and drinking in the fulness of life without care or anxiety.

And it all came true, like the conclusion of a fairy story; for good fairies had been busy at work for many years preparing the way. Who that saw that mother resting from her labors, proud in her children’s success, happy in her husband’s contentment, and in the love that had never faltered in the darkest days, can ever forget the peace of her countenance, the loving joy of her heart?

The relation of Miss Alcott to her older sister was of entire trust and confidence. Anna inherited the serene, unexacting temper of her father, with much of the loving warmth of her mother. She loved to hide behind her gifted sister, and to keep the ingle-side warm for her to retreat to when she was cold and weary. Anna’s fine intellectual powers were shown more in the appreciation of others than in the expression of herself; her dramatic skill and her lively fancy, combined with her affection for Louisa, made her always ready to second all the plans for entertainment or benevolence. She appears in her true light in the sweet, lovable Meg of “ Little Women;” and if she never had the fame and pecuniary success of her sister, she had the less rare, but equally satisfying, happiness of wifehood and motherhood. And thus she repaid to Louisa what she had so generously done for the family, by giving her new objects of affection, and connecting her with a younger generation.

Louisa was always very fond of boys, and the difference of nature gave her an insight into their trials and difficulties without giving her a painful sense of her own hard struggles. In her nephews she found objects for all her wise and tender care, which they repaid with devoted affection. When boys became men, “ they were less interesting to her; she could not understand them.”

Elizabeth was unlike the other sisters. Retiring in disposition, she would gladly have ever lived in the privacy of home, her only desire being for the music that she loved. The father’s ideality was in her a tender religious feeling; the mother’s passionate impulse, a self-abnegating affection. She was in the family circle what she is in the book, — a strain of sweet, sad music we long and love to hear, and yet which almost breaks the heart with its forecasting of separation. She was very dear to both the father and mother, and the picture of the father watching all night by the marble remains of his child is very touching. He might well say, —

“Ah, me! life is not life deprived of thee.”

Of the youngest of all, — bright, sparkling, capricious May, — quick in temper, quick in repentance, affectionate and generous, but full of her own plans, and quite inclined to have the world go on according to her fancies, — I have spoken elsewhere. Less profound in her intellectual and religious nature than either of her sisters, she was like a nymph of Nature, full of friendly sportiveness, and disposed to live out her own life, since it might be only a brief summer day. She was Anna’s special child, and Louisa was not always so patient with her as the older sister; yet how well Louisa understood her generous nature is shown by the beautiful sketch she has made of her in “ Little Women.” She was called the lucky one of the family, and she reaped the benefit of her generous sister’s labors in her opportunities of education.

Miss Alcott’s literary work is so closely interwoven with her personal life that it needs little separate mention. Literature was undoubtedly her true pursuit, and she loved and honored it. That she had her ambitious longings for higher forms of art than the pleasant stories for children is evident from her journals, and she twice attempted to paint the life of mature men and women struggling with great difficulties. In " Moods" and "A Modern Mephistopheles " we have proof of her interest in difficult subjects. I have spoken of them in connection with her life; but while they evince great power, and if standing alone would have stamped her as an author of original observation and keen thought, they can hardly be considered as thoroughly successful, and certainly have not won the sanction of the public like " Hospital Sketches " and " Little Women." Could she ever have commanded quiet leisure, with a tolerable degree of health, she might have wrought her fancies into a finer fabric, and achieved the success she aimed at Much as Miss Alcott loved literature, it was not an end in itself to her, but a means. Her heart was so bound up in her family, — she felt it so fully to be her sacred mission to provide for their wants, — that she sacrificed to it all ambitious dreams, health, leisure, — everything but her integrity of soul. But as " he that loseth his life shall find it," she has undoubtedly achieved a really greater work than if she had not had this constant stimulus to exertion. In her own line of work she is unsurpassed. While she paints in broad, free strokes the life of her own day, represented mostly by children and young people, she has always a high moral purpose, which gives strength and sweetness to the delineation; yet one never hears children complain of her moralizing, — it is events that reveal the lesson she would enforce. Her own deep nature shines through all the experiences of her characters, and impresses upon the children's hearts a sense of reality and truth. She charms them, wisely, to love the common virtues of truth, unselfishness, kindness, industry, and honesty. Dr. Johnson said children did not want to hear about themselves, but about giants and fairies; but while Miss Alcott could weave fairy fancies for them, they are quite as pleased with her real boys and girls in the plainest of costumes.

An especial merit of these books for young boys and girls is their purity of feeling. The family affection which was so predominant in the author's own life, always appears as the holiest and sweetest phase of human nature. She does not refuse to paint the innocent love and the happy marriage which it is natural for every young heart to be interested in, but it is in tender, modest colors. She does not make it the master and tyrant of the soul, nor does she ever connect it with sensual imagery; but it appears as one of " God's holy ordinances," — natural and beautiful, — and is not separated from the thought of work and duty and self- sacrifice for others. No mother fears that her books will brush the bloom of modesty from the faces of her young men or maidens.

Even in the stories of her early period of work for money, which she wisely renounced as trash, while there is much that is thoroughly worthless as art, and little that has any value, Miss Alcott never falls into grossness of thought or baseness of feeling. She is sentimental, melodramatic, exaggerated, and unreal in her descriptions, but the stories leave no taint of evil behind them. Two of these stories, “The Baron’s Gloves” and “A Whisper in the Dark,” have been included in her published works, with her permission. Her friends are disposed to regret this, as they do not add to her reputation; but at least they serve to show the quality of work which she condemned so severely, and to satisfy the curiosity of readers in regard to it. It would be easy to point out defects in her style, and in some of her books there is evidence of the enforced drudgery of production, instead of the spontaneous flow of thought. The most serious defect is in her style of expression, which certainly passes the fine line between colloquial ease and slang; it is her own natural, peculiar style, which appears in her journals and letters. That it is attractive to children is certain, but it offends the taste of those who love purity and elegance of speech. It does not appear in Louisa’s more ambitious novels; here she sometimes falls into the opposite extreme of labored and stilted expression. But much of these books is written in a pure and beautiful style, showing that she could have united ease with elegance if she had not so constantly worked at high speed and with little revision. She was a great admirer of Dickens’s writings; and although she has never imitated him, she was perhaps strengthened in her habit of using dashing, expressive language by so fascinating a model.

I have placed at the head of each chapter one of Miss Alcott’s own poems, usually written at the period of which the chapter treats, and characteristic of her life at that time. Her first literary essay was the “ Little Robin.” But although her fond mother saw the future of a great poet in these simple verses, Louisa never claimed the title for herself. Her thoughts ran often into rhyme, and she sent many birthday and Christmas verses to her friends and especially to her father. They are usually playful. She always wrote to express some feeling of the hour, and I find no objective or descriptive poetry. But a few of her sacred poems, for we may certainly call them so, are very tender and beautiful, and deserve a permanent place among the poems of feeling, — those few poems which a true heart writes for itself. “Thoreau’s Flute” was originally published in the “Atlantic Monthly.” It is the least personal of her poems. The lines to her father on his eighty-sixth birthday, the verses dedicated to her mother, and “ My Prayer,” the last poem that she wrote, breathe her deepest religious feeling in sweet and fitting strains. They will speak to the hearts of many in the hours of trial which are common to humanity. The long playful poem called “ The Lay of the Golden Goose” was sent home from Europe as an answer to many questions from her admirers and demands for new stories. It has never been published, and is an interesting specimen of her playful rhyming.

While to Miss Alcott cannot be accorded a high rank as a poet, — which, indeed, she never claimed for herself, — it would be hard to deny a place in our most select anthology to “Thoreau’s Flute” or “ Transfiguration,” the “ Lines to my Father on his Eighty-sixth Birthday” and “ My Prayer.” Thave therefore thought it well to preserve her best poems in connection with her life, where they properly belong; for they are all truly autobiographical, revealing the inner meaning of her life.

The pecuniary success of Miss Alcott’s books enabled her to carry out her great purpose of providing for the comfort and happiness of her family. After the publication of “ Little Women,” she not only received a handsome sum for every new story, but there was a steady income from the old ones. Her American publishers estimate that they “ have sold of her various works a million volumes, and that she realized from them more than two hun

dred thousand dollars.” While her own tastes were very simple, her expenses were large, for she longed to gratify every wish of those she loved, and she gave generously to every one in need. She had a true sense of the value of money. Her early poverty did not make her close in expending it, nor her later success lavish. She never was enslaved by debt or corrupted by wealth. She always held herself superior to her fortune, and made her means serve her highest purposes.

Of Miss Alcott’s own reading she says: —

“Never a student, but a great reader. R. W. E. gave me Goethe’s works at fifteen, and they have been my delight ever since. My library consists of Goethe, Emerson, Shakespeare, Carlyle, Margaret Fuller, and George Sand. George Eliot I don’t care for, nor any of the modern poets but Whittier; the old ones — Herbert, Crashaw, Keats, Coleridge, Dante, and a few others — I like.”

She gives this account of the beginning of her literary career: —

“This gem [‘ The Robin ‘] my proud mother preserved with care, assuring me that if I kept on in this way I might be a second Shakespeare in time. Fired with this modest ambition, I continued to write poems upon dead butterflies, lost kittens, the baby’s eyes, and other simple subjects till the story-telling mania set in; and after frightening my sisters out of their wits by awful tales whispered in bed, I began to write down these histories of giants, ogres, dauntless girls, and magic transformations till we had a library of small paper-covered volumes illustrated by the author. Later the poems grew gloomy and sentimental, and the tales more fanciful and less tragic, lovely elves and spirits taking the places of the former monsters."

Of her method of work she says: —

"I never had a study. Any pen and paper do, and an old atlas on my knee is all I want. Carry a dozen plots in my head, and think them over when in the mood. Sometimes keep one for years, and suddenly find it all ready to write. Often lie awake and plan whole chapters word for word, then merely scribble them down as if copying.

"Used to sit fourteen hours a day at one time, eating little, and unable to stir till a certain amount was done.

"Very few stories written in Concord; no inspiration in that dull place. Go to Boston, hire a quiet room and shut myself up in it."

The following letter gives her advice to young writers: —

To Mr. J. P. True.

Concord, October 24.

Dear Sir, — I never copy or " polish," so I have no old manuscripts to send you; and if I had it would be of little use, for one person's method is no rule for another. Each must work in his own way; and the only drill needed is to keep writing and profit by criticism. Mind grammar, spelling, and punctuation, use short words, and express as briefly as you can your meaning. Young people use too many adjectives and try to " write fine." The strongest, simplest words are best, and no foreign ones if it can be helped.

Write, and print if you can; if not, still write, and improve as you go on. Read the best books, and they will improve your style. See and hear good speakers and wise people, and learn of them. Work for twenty years, and then you may some day find that you have a style and place of your own, and can command good pay for the same things no one would take when you were unknown.

I know little of poetry, as I never read modern attempts, but advise any young person to keep to prose, as only once in a century is there a true poet; and verses are so easy to do that it is not much help to write them. I have so many letters like your own that I can say no more, but wish you success, and give you for a motto Michael Angelo's wise words: " Genius is infinite patience."

Your friend, L. M. Alcott.

P. S. — The lines you send are better than many I see; but boys of nineteen cannot know much about hearts, and had better write of things they understand.

Sentiment is apt to become sentimentality; and sense is always safer, as well as better drill, for young fancies and feelings.

Read Ralph Waldo Emerson, and see what good prose is, and some of the best poetry we have. I much prefer him to Longfellow.

“Years afterward,” says Mr. True, “ when I had achieved some slight success, I once more wrote, thanking her for her advice; and the following letter shows the kindliness of heart with which she extended ready recognition and encouragement to lesser workers in her chosen field: “

Concord, Sept. 7, 1883.

My Dear Mr. True, — Thanks for the pretty book, which I read at once and with pleasure; for I still enjoy boys’ pranks as much as ever.

I don’t remember the advice I gave you, and should judge from this your first story that you did not need much. Your boys are real boys; and the girls can run, — which is a rare accomplishment nowadays I find. They are not sentimental either; and that is a good example to set both your brother writers and the lasses who read the book.

I heartily wish you success in your chosen work, and shall always be glad to know how fast and how far you climb on the steep road that leads to fame and fortune.

Yours truly, L. M. Alcott.

Roberts Brothers, Miss Alcott’s publishers for nearly twenty years, have collected all her stories in a uniform edition of twenty-five volumes. They are grouped into different series according to size and character, from her novels to “ Lulu’s Library “ for very small children, and may be enumerated as follows: —

Novels (four volumes). — Work, Moods, A Modern Mephistopheles, Hospital Sketches.

Little Women Series (eight volumes). — Little Women, An Old-Fashioned Girl, Little Men, Eight Cousins, Rose in Bloom, Under the Lilacs, Jack and Jill, Jo’s Boys.

Spinning- Wheel Stories Series (four volumes). — Silver Pitchers, Proverb Stories, Spinning-Wheel Stories, A Garland for Girls.

Aunt Jo’s Scrap-Bag (six volumes). — My Boys, Shawl- 26

Straps, Cupid and Chow-Chow, My Girls, Jimmy’s Cruise in the Pinafore, An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving.

Lulu’s Library (three volumes).

Many of these stories were originally published in various magazines, — the popular “St. Nicholas,” for which Miss Alcott wrote some of her best things in her later years, the “ Youth’s Companion,” and others. Her works have been republished in England; and through her English publishers, Messrs. Sampson Low and Company, of London, she has reaped the benefit of copyright there, and they have been translated into many languages. Her name is familiar and dear to the children of Europe, and they still read her books with the same eagerness as the children of her own land.

This extract from a letter written by the translator of Miss Alcott’s books into Dutch Will show how she is esteemed in Holland: —

“Miss Alcott was and is so much beloved here by her books, that you could scarce find a girl that had not read one or more of them. Last autumn I gave a translation of ‘Lulu’s Library’ that appeared in November, 1887; the year before, a collection of tales and Christmas stories that appeared under the name of ‘ Gandsbloempje’ (‘Dandelion’). Yesterday a young niece of mine was here, and said, < Oh, Aunt, how I enjoyed those stories! but the former of “Meh Meh” I still preferred.’ A friend wrote: < My children are confined to the sickroom, but find comfort in Alcott’s “Under the Lilacs.”‘ Her fame here was chiefly caused by her ‘ Little Women’

and ‘ Little Women Wedded,’ which in Dutch were called ‘ Under Moedervleugels ‘ (‘ Under Mother’s Wings ‘) and ‘Op Eigen Wieken’ (‘With Their Own Wings’). Her ‘Work’ was translated as ‘ De Hand van den Ploey’ (‘The Hand on the Plough’).”

How enduring the fame of Louisa M. Alcott will be, time only can show; but if to endear oneself to two generations of children, and to mould their minds by wise counsel in attractive form entitle an author to the lasting gratitude of her country, that praise and reward belong to LOUISA May Alcott.

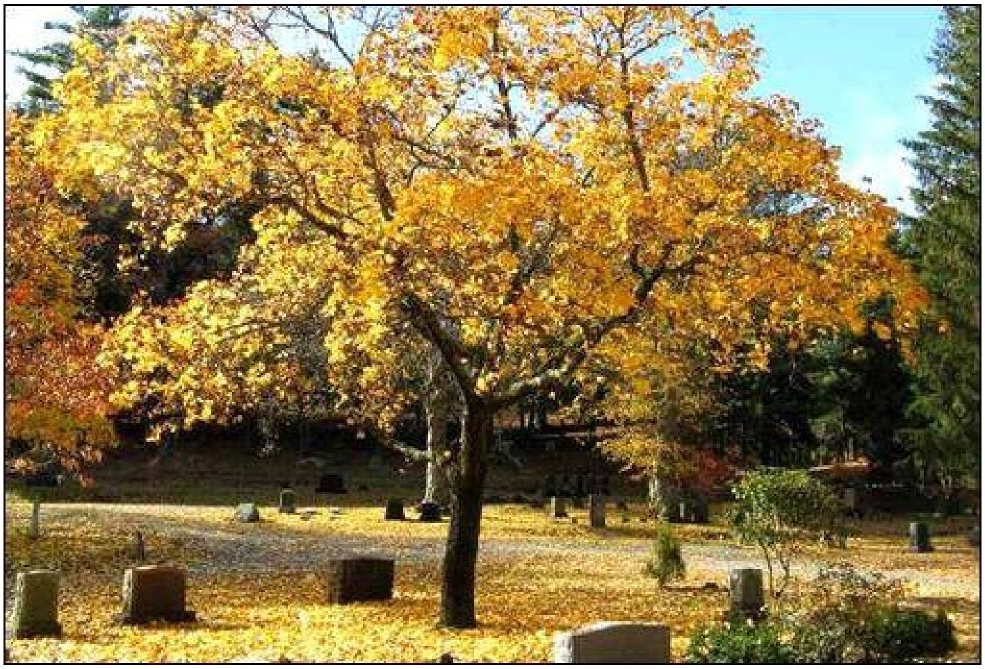
TERMINUS.

It is time to be old, To take in sail:
The god of bounds,
Who sets to seas a shore,
Came to me in his fatal rounds,
And said, “ No more!
No farther shoot
Thy broad ambitious branches, and thy root;
Fancy departs: no more invent,
Contract thy firmament

To compass of a tent.
There’s not enough for this and that,
Make thy option which of two;
Economize the failing river,
Not the less revere the Giver;
Leave the many, and hold the few.
Timely wise, accept the terms;
Soften the fall with wary foot:
A little while
Still plan and smile,
And, fault of novel germs,
Mature the unfallen fruit.”

As the bird trims her to the gale,
I trim myself to the storm of time;
I man the rudder, reef the sail,
Obey the voice at eve obeyed at prime:
Lowly faithful, banish fear,
Right onward drive unharmed;
The port, well worth the cruise, is near,
And every wave is charmed.

Emerson.



Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord - Alcott’s final resting place

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

Alcott’s grave in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts